



TWIO

This Week In Olympia

Special Edition: Opening Day

January 13, 2025



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About TWIO

This Week in Olympia (TWIO) is published by WASA in support of our members and members of our partners in WASBO, WSPA, and AEA.

TWIO is emailed each Friday during the Legislative Session and archived on WASA’s website at <https://wasa-oly.org/WASA/TWIO>.



2025 Session Preview

This afternoon, January 13, 2025, the Legislature convened its first year of the 69th Biennial Session. During this “long” session, limited to 105 days, the major job facing legislators will be to adopt a 2025–27 Operating Budget (and presumably a 2025 Supplemental Operating Budget to update the current 2023–25 Operating Budget, which closes out June 30). Additionally, they will adopt a new two-year Capital Construction Budget and a new two-year Transportation Budget.

To set the stage for this session, it is important to review the impact of the 2024 election and also understand the complicated budget scenario that has been building over the last several months.

First, the aftermath of the General Election. Nationally, former President Trump was elected, and Republicans secured a majority in the Senate while also retaining the House (albeit with a slim advantage). This shift to the right across the country stopped at the Washington border. Democrats in the Senate and House, who have held strong majorities for several years (29-20 and 58-40, respectively, in 2023 and 2024), retained—and expanded—their majorities. One Republican seat in each Chamber was flipped by Democrats. As the 2025 Session begins, Democrats in the Senate hold the majority with 30 seats to 19 Republican seats, and Democrats now control the House with 59 seats to 39 Republican seats.

In addition to the expansion of Democrat majorities, the face of the Legislature will be substantially remade. There are 33 new members in the Legislature: 12 new Senators and 21 new Representatives, although 9 of the 12 new Senators come from the House. Technically, they are not “new” members; however, they will move to a new Caucus.

Thirty-three new members of a total of 147 legislators at first blush might not seem like much—even though it forces elections/appointments of Leadership positions, Committee Chairmanships, and Committee assignments—however, the compounding effect of the number of new members has a major impact on the Legislature. Since 2019, 112 new members have joined the Legislature (although similar to this year, some of those “new” members shifted from the House to the Senate). This means a significant number of current legislators were not in office in 2017–18 when the Legislature revised the K–12 funding system as a part of the *McCleary* “solution.” And the number of current legislators that were not in

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office when the *McCleary Decision* came down from the Supreme Court (2012) is even greater.

This just makes our job that much more difficult. We cannot assume legislators know or understand the landmark *McCleary Decision*. Further, we cannot assume legislators understand why we are so frustrated with the current finance system, given that they may be unaware our current finance structure was overhauled in 2009 and 2010, as a precursor to the *McCleary Decision*, and again in 2017 and 2018 as a result of the *McCleary Decision*. Because your legislators may just not know this history—and the impacts to your school districts—often you have to start from scratch, assuming your legislators may be a blank slate when it comes to education, and more specifically education finance.

The second major issue that causes a wrinkle as we set the stage for the 2025 Session is the current state of the budget. As legislators begin to craft a new 2025–27 Operating Budget, they will have to grapple with a revenue shortfall. In the last several months, there has been an ongoing debate about the actual size of the shortfall, with estimations generally between \$10-\$14 Billion. Regardless of the specific amount, it is clear there will be a shortfall, which will significantly impact budget discussions and decisions among legislators. Outgoing Governor Inslee has proposed a set of new revenue options (an Olympia euphemism for “taxes”) to help close the gap and Governor-Elect Ferguson has proposed eliminations and/or reductions of current programs, including an across-the-board reduction in state agencies to address the shortfall. (Further discussion of Inslee’s and Ferguson’s proposals are below).

The discussion of the shortfall often runs right into our efforts to secure sufficient funding to amply fund the Big Three: Special Education, Materials, Supplies, and Operating Costs (MSOC), and Pupil Transportation (a review of WASA’s 2025 Legislative Platform is below). Many legislators have told us they want to provide necessary investments in the Big Three, then they explain the current shortfall will preclude their efforts. Some have stated bluntly, “Unless we can secure new revenue, we will be unable to support additional K–12 funding.”

This response is maddening. The legislators who use this line of thinking are either ignorant of the state’s constitution, or more likely, they are ignoring the constitution (which situation is worse?). Article 9, Section 1 of Washington’s constitution unequivocally declares K–12 education as the state’s “paramount duty.” To erase any misunderstanding about what this meant, Superior Court Judge John Erlick in his 2010 decision in the trial court in the *McCleary* education funding lawsuit stated that “paramount” means “having the highest rank that is superior to all others, having the rank that is preeminent, supreme, and more important to all others.” The Supreme Court reaffirmed this in its 2012 *McCleary Decision*, and also echoed the Court from the 1978 Seattle School District funding lawsuit (the *Doran Decision*), clarifying “the constitution created a duty that is supreme, preeminent, or dominant.”

We stand on firm ground in advocating for three underfunded basic education programs and should not shy away from reminding legislators that underfunding of basic education is not a matter of insufficient state revenue (due to the shortfall) or the need for additional revenues; the issue is the Legislature’s lack of prioritization of the state’s paramount duty.

WASA’s 2025 Legislative Platform

We have rolled out information about [WASA’s 2025 Legislative Platform](#) to members multiple times in multiple ways since it was first adopted by the Board of Directors in late March; however, as the Legislative Session gets underway, it seems appropriate to highlight the Platform again.

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First, some background. It is clear that many school districts are, and have been, struggling financially. To be certain, the fiscal challenges currently facing districts is not an isolated situation in a few areas. School districts across the state—big and small, east and west, urban and rural—have dealt with financial difficulties. The underlying reason so many districts are struggling is directly related to funding—or the lack of funding—due to legislative decisions. As noted above, it is abundantly clear that K–12 education is the state’s constitutional paramount duty, yet for the past few years, the Legislature has focused on other priorities and neglected to provide the required ample funding to school districts. Without legislative action in 2025, continued budget cuts will be required, which will start to erode our children’s educational opportunities.

In the 2025 Legislative Session, WASA is determined to take a strong stand (stronger and more aggressive than ever) to support our Platform—in the support of our members and students. While WASA has always advocated for ample and equitable funding for our schools, our pleas in recent years have fallen on deaf ears. The first step in this effort was to adopt a Legislative Platform that is very narrowly focused on necessary education funding. WASA’s 2025 Legislative Platform urges the Legislature to step up and amply fund Special Education, Materials, Supplies & Operating Costs (MSOC), and Pupil Transportation:

- **Special Education.** School districts have a legal obligation to serve all students with disabilities in Washington, regardless of cost of services, yet they do not have the necessary resources to provide those services. Even with recent funding enhancements, the gap between school district expenditures for special education and related services substantially exceeds funding—and continues to grow. This gap requires districts to continue to use local funding sources, including local levies, to cover necessary costs. To ensure school districts are provided with funding that reflects the actual costs of service delivery, the Legislature must increase special education tiered multipliers. **The 2025 Legislature must fully fund the cost of special education services.**
- **Materials, Supplies, and Operating Costs (MSOC).** While staffing represents the largest expense for school districts, there are many costs to running a school district which are non-staff related. The Legislature provides an allocation to cover these costs by providing for Materials, Supplies, and Operating Costs (MSOC) at a specific rate per student; however, state funding for MSOC has not kept pace with actual school district costs. Liability insurance alone has increased over 100 percent in the last five years, while utility costs have increased more than 40 percent. Other costs, such as food and fuel, have also increased dramatically. Current per pupil rates for Materials, Supplies, and Operating Costs simply do not come close to matching costs of running a school district. These costs are increasing through no fault of school districts, superintendents or school boards and their decisions. When required costs of running a school district exceed state funding, local revenues, mostly levies, must be used to fill the gap, reducing local resources for school district and community expectations. **The 2025 Legislature must immediately address the significant underfunding of allocations for Materials, Supplies, and Operating Costs (MSOC).**
- **Pupil Transportation.** The intent of the current Student Transportation Allocation Reporting System (STARS) is to allow the Legislature to allocate funding to districts that aligns with actual costs of providing school transportation services. Regardless of the intent, the STARS formula has consistently underfunded districts’ actual pupil transportation expenditures. The STARS formula cannot forecast allocations with credible accuracy, calculates a final allocation in February which complicates budget decisions for school districts and the Legislature, and uses an efficiency rating that

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is detrimental to efficient districts because they are at risk of less funding in the model. **The 2025 Legislature must promptly fulfill its obligation to comprehensively fix the pupil transportation formula to ensure it is more transparent, predictable, and adequately funded.**

The so-called “Big Three” were chosen as our singular focus for two specific, compelling reasons. One, any success on these issues we achieve in 2025 will positively impact ALL 295 school districts and automatically serves to unify WASA members. Two, each of these issues is a Basic Education Program, constitutionally required to be amply funded; however, there is clear, documented evidence that none are fully funded.

If you would like more details about WASA’s Platform, including information about the background and rationale of the Platform, additional information regarding the Big Three Priorities, and other available resources, we encourage you to review our webinar: “Examining WASA’s Legislative Platform.” Available is the webinar [PowerPoint](#), as well as the [recording](#) of the presentation.

While WASA stands ready to advance these priorities, school administrators need to engage in the fight. In fact, we believe other educators—and parents and other community members—also need to engage. WASA has partnered with the Association of Educational Service Districts (AESD) and have the support of a large coalition:

- Washington State School Directors’ Association (WSSDA)
- Washington Association of School Business Officials (WASBO)
- Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP)
- Alliance of Educational Associations (AEA):
 - Washington Association of Maintenance and Operations Administrators (WAMOA)
 - Washington School Nutrition Association (WSNA)
- Rural Education Center (REC)
- Washington Association of Career and Technical Administrators (WACTA)
- Washington State Parent Teacher Association (WSPTA)

In order to achieve success, we need school administrators (and our colleagues in the associations above) to fully engage. To assist your efforts, WASA will continue to provide tools and resources. First, WASA (with support from ESD 112) created an education funding website, located at: www.waschoolfunding.org. The website provides useful—and easy to understand—information on the current funding dilemma so many school districts currently face. This website is intended to be “informational” tool, not a specific advocacy tool, so we encourage you to share this with your school board, parents, and community members.

In addition to the funding website, we have also built a [Tool Kit](#)—with talking points, videos, social media content, and other communication resources—to assist and align our members as you engage with your own legislators. I want to highlight two specific resources recently added to the Toolkit. The first is a set of [sample templates](#) for you to use in aligning with your colleagues regarding the funding question. We encourage you to use one of the templates to display your district’s funding shortfalls (state funding vs. district expenditures) of the Big Three. (NOTE: the Bainbridge Island template is an editable Canva template, eliminating the need to build your own template from scratch.) The second new resource is a set of [Policy Briefs](#) that provide a simple description of the funding problem; how the program is currently funded; and our proposed solution—or “ask.” There are separate briefs for each program: [Special Education](#), [MSOC](#), and [Pupil Transportation](#). We released these at the WASA/WSSDA/WASBO Legislative Conference this past weekend; however, we wanted you to have the

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electronic document, and we want to ensure members who were unable to attend the Conference had access to these important tools.

Our effort is to ensure WASA—and our partners—speak with one voice as much as possible. We encourage you to use the resources in the Tool Kit to join your colleagues and members of the other education associations in advocating for WASA’s 2025 Platform.

Engaging in the 2025 Session

WASA continues to encourage an increased involvement of our members in advocacy—specifically, our non-superintendent members. Superintendents generally are in the lead for most, if not all, of your district’s advocacy efforts—and they should continue to be the lead in terms of direction, voice, and priorities. We strongly encourage non-superintendents, however, to join with their superintendents to enhance your district’s voice—and WASA’s impact—by getting more involved in telling your district’s “Story.”

The 2025 Legislature will continue with in-person activities; however, you will continue to have virtual access to the Legislature, providing you the ability to engage remotely. While meeting in-person, with legislators individually or to provide testimony in Committees, is the most effective approach, coming to Olympia can be a burden. This is especially true for administrators representing school districts which are far from the Capitol. Rather than taking a full day for travel (sometimes in bad winter weather) to meet with your legislators or provide testimony on a bill, you can participate from your office or home.

Both the House and Senate will continue its pandemic-established system to allow for remote participation in legislative Committee hearings. As they have been for several years, all hearings (and floor sessions) will be streamed on TVW. Most of the activities will be live and all legislative activities will be archived to watch later. You can access live or recorded events directly from the [TVW website](#), although links to individual hearings are also available from the Legislature’s Committee schedule website (discussed below).

Additionally, all Committee hearings will continue with in-person and virtual options, allowing remote testimony, written testimony, and an option to simply note for the record your position (support or oppose) on legislation. In order to participate in a particular hearing, you must first register for the meeting.

If you wish to participate in either a House or Senate hearing, navigate to the [Committee Sign In website](#). At this point, click “House” for House Committee hearings, or “Senate” for Senate Committee hearings. Whether you are looking to participate in either a House or Senate Committee, the next page is the same for each:

Use the drop-down menu to choose the appropriate Committee and meeting time, then click on a button for the bill you would like to act upon. (NOTE: If you want to act on multiple bills, you must repeat this process for each bill.)

- At this point, you have the option to provide live testimony, submit written comments, or state your position for the record (options below the list of bills).
- On the next page, you must note your position on the bill and provide your name and contact information.
- Finally, click the “Submit Registration” button at the bottom.

The “House” and “Senate” links (same as above) have detailed instructions on how to connect to the meetings. In addition to the process discussed above or available on the weblinks, there are some guidelines that you should be aware of.

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To provide live testimony, you must register at least one hour before the hearing begins. You will then be e-mailed a Zoom link with instructions on how to connect to the meeting. It is important to remember that your testimony time will likely be very limited (potentially as little as one or two minutes)—and registering does not guarantee that you will be allowed to testify. To simply state a position on a bill, you must register at least one hour before the hearing begins. There are also time limits for written testimony; the window for written testimony will close 24 hours after the start time of the hearing.

In addition to the direct links above, you can also visit the Legislature’s “[How to Participate in the Lawmaking Process](#)” page. This page includes links to the registration sites noted above, as well as additional information and links, including multiple ways to contact a legislator, and helpful tips on participating. If you do not know who your legislators are, the Legislature’s website provides a “[district finder](#).” When you fill in your address, the site will display your three legislators, with links to their webpage. If you use the district finder, you will have to determine if you should use your home address or the address of your school district. Remember that your school district may be represented by multiple legislative districts; however, the district finder will only display legislators that represent the specific address you provide.

To keep track of when bills of interest will be heard, you can follow the Legislature’s Committee schedule page. To access you can visit the Legislature’s “[Bills, Meeting, and Session](#)” page (upcoming meetings listed on the bottom), or can go directly to the [Committee Schedule](#) page. You can check schedules each day, a week, or longer. (Note, however, that Committee weekly hearing schedules become available on the previous Thursday. In other words, if you look too far ahead, you will likely receive a notice saying, “No Meetings Found.”) These *TWIO* newsletters will also provide scheduling information for many of the key bills that need to be addressed by administrators.

Note that the [Committee Schedule](#) page also includes agendas and Committee documents (including bill language, bill reports, amendments, and staff or agency presentations) which may be of interest. The posted documents, however, are usually not available to the public until the hearing has started.

Finally, Representative Peter Abbarno, House Republican Caucus Chair, recently provided a very [brief overview](#) of the Legislature’s webpage, and how to participate in the process. The [video](#) “How to make a difference in the legislative process,” is less than two minutes long and does a good job of quickly providing much of the information provided above. It is worth taking a couple of minutes to watch, especially if you have difficulty navigating the process electronically.

Virtual participation is a simple process and the [Legislature’s webpage](#) provides easy to follow instructions. Of course, if you run into trouble or cannot find a particular bill, please contact us and we can provide assistance.

OSPI 2025–27 Operating Budget Request

In order for the governor to draft and release his budget proposal, he first reviews requests from all state agency directors and separately elected officials—including State Superintendent of Public Instruction Chris Reykdal. On September 16, Superintendent Reykdal submitted, and publicly released his [budget request](#) for OSPI. His total request is nearly \$4.0 Billion, with just under \$3.0 Billion of the total for Policy Level increases. He has been criticized by many for submitting such a substantial request. In providing an explanation (or defense, depending on your perspective) for the request, Supt. Reykdal, in a [letter](#) to Governor Inslee noted, “No matter how you look at the numbers, Washington currently underfunds K–12 education by around \$4 Billion per year.”

Supt. Reykdal's requests are provided in four separate groupings:

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Washington's Constitutional Basic Education Obligation—\$1.5 Billion

This request echoes the Big Three and would provide ample funding for Special Education (\$1.0 Billion); Materials, Supplies, and Operating Costs (\$350.7 Million); and Pupil Transportation (\$152.9 Million). While the details and the funding do not completely align with WASA's Big Three Coalition requests, they are substantially similar—and, more importantly, the State Superintendent is on record as supporting ample funding for these three key basic education programs.

Transforming Student Learning & Well-Being—\$1.3 Billion

Funding under this request would provide funding to support: Student Mental and Behavioral Health (\$51.9 Million); expanding the Learning Assistance Program (\$277.4 Million); Monitoring and Investigating Equity and Civil Rights Discrimination in public schools (\$1.3 Million); Strengthening Early Literacy (\$110.1 Million); and removing barriers to student engagement (\$100.7 Million). Several other smaller programs would be funding in this area.

The largest request in this funding group would provide for substantial increases in Classified Staff compensation. The Superintendent requests \$695.1 Million (increasing to \$1.64 Billion in 2027–29) to fund higher Classified Staff salary allocations. If adopted, Classified Staff salaries would increase almost 20 percent in 2025–26 and another 9 percent in each school year from 2026–27 to 2028–29. In 2028–29, Classified Staff salary allocations would be \$87,187. To put this in context, it should be noted that if Certificated Instructional Staff salaries continued to increase annually by IPD (as is the case under current law), Certificated Instructional Staff salary allocations are projected to be \$85,320 (\$1,867 less than Classified allocations) in 2028–29. Think about the bargaining implications of this situation.

The agency request bill to implement these salary allocation changes is [HB 1120](#).

Legislatively Directed Enhancements—\$36 Million

This request would provide funding to: implement a new statewide High School & Beyond Plan platform (\$13.2 Million); continue to make progress on the state's plan to oversee educational delivery of justice-involved youth (\$10.7 Million); and secure and streamline OSPI's school apportionment system (\$10.9 Million)

Targeted Partner and Community Investments—\$93.3 Million

Funding requested would support students and their learning inside and outside of the classroom utilizing state, regional, and local partnerships.

Governor Inslee 2025–27 Operating Budget Proposal

Each December, the governor is required to submit an Operating Budget proposal to the Legislature. Even though Governor Inslee will be leaving office on Wednesday, this requirement fell to him as the current governor. On December 17, Governor Inslee released his last [budget proposal](#) for the Legislature's consideration.

In total, the governor's plan would increase 2025–27 spending by \$7.51 Billion above the current 2023–25 Operating Budget. \$5.42 Billion of this spending is for required Maintenance Level costs; \$2.09 Billion would be for Policy Level adds. Understanding there is significant shortfall in hand, Governor Inslee also proposed \$4.39 Billion in new revenue (that is, new or increased taxes). Over four years, the new taxes are projected to provide \$12.9 Billion in new revenue.

For K–12 education, the governor's proposal would provide a total of \$2.13 Billion. \$2.35 Billion of the proposal is for required Maintenance Level costs. That is not

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a typo; Maintenance Level funding is more than the proposed total allocation. That is because Governor Inslee’s Policy Level increases for K–12 education is actually a net reduction of \$220.7 Million. The K–12 percentage of the overall budget continues to drop from a high-point of more than 52 percent in 2019 to about 43 percent currently. If Governor Inslee’s plan was adopted, the K–12 budget percentage would drop to 41.9 percent.

Even though Governor Inslee’s K–12 funding proposal is a net reduction, there are a few increases:

- Compensatory Education—\$4.0 Million
- Student Mental & Behavioral Health—\$3.8 Million
- School District Financial Health—\$2.3 Million
- Mastery Based Learning—\$2.0 Million
- Transition to Kindergarten (Blended)—\$2.0 Million

Governor-Elect Ferguson 2025–27 Budget Priorities

As noted, the outgoing governor is required to submit an Operating Budget proposal to the Legislature. There is no requirement that the incoming governor provide any proposal—and given the timing, transitions of staff, and the tremendous amount of work in transitioning into the governor’s office, there is rarely the capacity to introduce their own Budget. Nevertheless, Governor-Elect Ferguson released, what he termed, “[Budget Priorities](#)” last week.

Ferguson’s plan prioritizes “budget savings and efficiencies.” His plan calls for across-the-board reductions of six percent in most state agencies, as well as a series of other reductions and “savings.” In total, he believes his plan would save \$4.4 Billion. He clarifies the cuts will not impact basic education; however, basic education is constitutionally protected and cannot be cut. The question is whether he will cut non-basic education programs. While this is not clear, the incoming governor, throughout the campaign, and in his new budget package, clearly stated, “I intend to increase the percentage of the budget going to support our K–12 students.”

Ferguson also included increased funding for a series of his priorities, including additional police officers, crew recruitment for our ferry system, housing supports (although this funding would be from the Capital Budget), and “affordability,” which would include enhanced support for childcare. There is one funded item in K–12 education: expanding access to free meals for all kids (that is, “universal meals”), funded at \$240 Million per biennium. In total, new “investments” in Governor-Elect Ferguson’s plan would be approximately \$800 million.

The new governor will be sworn-in on Wednesday and then provide his Inaugural Address on Wednesday afternoon. This will be his first opportunity as governor to provide more information about what he will do as governor—including addressing the budget. The hope is he will discuss additional funding support for K–12 and provide some details. As a candidate, Ferguson was generally supportive of education funding, including special education specifically (he discussed often that his mother was a special education teacher). We will be closely watching his initial address and additional proposals that may be forthcoming to see if he follows through on his professed support for K–12, as being a “candidate” for governor offers more flexibility than actually being the governor. At this point, we will have to trust him and give him the benefit of the doubt, but we will be watching closely.

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