

# HOT TOPICS

## Information for Legislators



### PRESENTED BY

The Washington Association of School Administrators  
The Washington State School Directors' Association  
and The Washington Association of School Business Officials

### FISCAL ISSUES

As school districts navigate through the COVID-19 pandemic, they have seen expenses increase, while stable funding is in jeopardy, due to declining enrollments and reduced bus ridership. School district budgets and staffing decisions for 2020–21 were built assuming full enrollment. Without prompt action to stabilize funding, districts face reductions in general apportionment and pupil transportation funding.

- **WASA/WSSDA/WASBO support [HB 1476](#)**, which provides temporary stabilization funds to school districts if their funding loss due to enrollment declines is greater than the federal funds appropriated to school districts in ESHB 1368 (Pandemic Relief). Additionally, the bill requires the use of 2019–20 enrollments to calculate maximum levy authority and allocations for Local Effort Assistance, if greater than 2020–21 and 2021–22 enrollments.
- **WASA/WSSDA/WASBO support [SB 5128](#)**, which provides for an alternative student transportation allocation formula and allows expanded transportation services to be provided beyond pupil transportation when a school district is providing remote instruction. The bill also temporarily provides a fixed level of funding to school districts based on student service data to ensure that districts have the resources they need to continue serving students.
- ESHB 1368 (Pandemic Relief) allocated \$668 million in federal ESSER II funds to K–12 education. That funding is appreciated; however, **WASA/WSSDA/WASBO now urge the Legislature to:**
  - **Promptly release the remaining \$74 million of ESSER II funds** to school districts and provide the \$82 million dedicated to OSPI; and
  - Appropriate sufficient state funds in the Operating Budget to **ensure all school districts are made whole.**

### GRADUATION FLEXIBILITY AND CAREER OPTIONS

The one-size-fits-all standard for graduation has become obsolete. To provide effective, basic education to our system is evolving and considerations for flexibility and innovation are becoming central to the education system. Washington students want and need to graduate with diverse skills related more closely to their interests and aptitudes. While many students are still thriving with the traditional 24-credit course schedule, others need alternatives within that framework to pursue their academic, personal, and professional aspirations.

- **WASA/WSSDA/WASBO support [HB 1121](#)**, which proposes the graduation waiver program be continued by allowing SBE to authorize schools to grant individual student waivers from graduation requirements due to an emergency.
- **WASA/WSSDA/WASBO support [HB 1162](#)**, which requires districts to continue offering the 24 credits for high school graduation but would allow students to graduate by earning at least twenty to provide greater personalization for individual students while maintaining rigor. In addition, the bill would enable students to earn credit by demonstrating knowledge and skills through a performance exhibition.
- **WASA/WSSDA/WASBO support [SB 5249](#)**, which requires the Mastery-Based Learning Work Group (established through HB 1599) to develop a Washington State profile of a high school graduate, in consultation with students, families, educators, and other stake holders and places additional representatives from various education groups on the work group. This proposed policy supports the direction of career pathways and alternatives for student learning and demonstration of mastery/competency.

## STUDENT WELL-BEING

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted not only physical health but also social and emotional wellness. Depression and suicide are on the rise. Before COVID-19, suicide was already the second leading cause of death for teens 15 to 19 years old in Washington state. The uncertainty, isolation, loneliness, and chaos of the pandemic only exacerbates these issues for our students and their families. School counselors and social service staff are the most well-prepared to provide support to students but are grossly underrepresented in our schools because the current prototypical school funding model (PSFM) does not recognize this need. Staff allocations in the model are outdated and unrealistic; allocations need to be increased to include more school counselors, school nurses, social workers, psychologists, family engagement coordinators, and student and staff safety.

- **WASA/WSSDA/WASBO support OSPI's budget request to build staffing capacity to support student well-being.** OSPI's 2021–23 Operating Budget request includes \$346 million, in the second year of

the biennium, to implement the first of two evidence-based phases recommended by the 2019 Staffing Enrichment Workgroup. Funding this initial phase will allow school districts to better meet safety and social-emotional needs of students, provide more professional development for school staff, increase allocations for school principals, and add continuous learning coaches to the prototypical model.

- **WASA/WSSDA/WASBO support the [Staffing Enrichment Workgroup recommendations \(2019\)](#).** Phase 1 proposes an increase to the prototypical school funding model to provide for school counselors, school nurses, social workers, psychologists, family engagement coordinators, and student and staff safety. The Workgroup recommends that school districts have the resources to hire the social and emotional health staff best positioned to serve their students by calculating compliance across the broad category of social and emotional health staff.