



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WASA Unveils 2021 Legislative Priorities

School superintendents urge legislators to hold the line on K-12 funding

OLYMPIA — Administrators from Washington’s 295 public school districts are urging lawmakers to maintain their commitment to K-12 funding as they prepare for a possible special legislative session to address the impact of COVID-19 and the 2021 regular legislative session.

In unveiling their 2021 legislative priorities, representatives from the Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA) acknowledged the fiscal impact of the coronavirus outbreak on the Legislature, but urged lawmakers to hold the line on its existing investments in public education.

“The uncertainty of the coronavirus, coupled with a dynamic environment that seems to change by the hour, presents challenges of unparalleled proportions. This has tested schools and school districts in new and unfamiliar ways, and we also recognize the challenge currently before the Legislature,” said Joel Aune, WASA executive director. “We anticipate some may consider cuts to funding for K-12 education. However, Washington schools and districts continue to have urgent and emerging needs that require assistance to ensure all students have equitable access to continuous learning opportunities and programming. Opening schools this fall, amidst unprecedented circumstances, will likely generate the need for even more funding,” he said.

“In recent years, the Legislature has made great strides in funding K-12 education. We ask that lawmakers first do no harm in making any cuts, with special consideration for equity among school districts. It is critically important that any decisions made by legislators not create or further exacerbate inequities between districts,” said Aune.

Aune added that addressing some of the state’s long-term K-12 funding needs will likely have to wait, but others — like addressing technology and connectivity issues — have been fully exposed by the pandemic.

“Schools and districts have been working to bridge a digital divide that has been amplified by COVID-19. The Legislature must ensure equitable access to technology resources, both in terms of devices and broadband connectivity,” added Aune.

Highlights of the WASA 2021 Legislative Platform’s short-term needs include:

- **K-12 Budget:** Education plays a critical role in building and maintaining a strong economy, supporting a well-educated workforce necessary to attract more stable and higher wage jobs; education is a great equalizer, providing all students access and opportunity to thrive in our communities and workforce; and a strong education system lessens reliance on social services, saving money in the long run. The Legislature must hold the line on K-12 funding and continue to honor its constitutional commitment.
- **Mid-Year Reductions:** In the event K-12 funding is included in the Legislature’s budget reductions, no cuts should be made mid-year. School districts have employment contracts and other obligations that cannot be avoided; mid-year reductions would further complicate local budget matters and impact labor issues.
- **Mandates:** As the state addresses the coronavirus outbreak and its economic impacts, the Legislature should avoid imposing additional mandates — funded or not — on school districts. School leaders are already overwhelmed with the implementation of an entirely new funding structure, including an overhaul of staff compensation and local funding with levies and Local Effort Assistance.
- **Flexibility:** If education funding must be cut, one way to mitigate the impact is to provide local districts greater flexibility in how they spend their dollars. School district leaders better understand their needs and their community desires. Allowing districts flexibility would ensure limited dollars are used where there is the greatest need.
- **Technology and Connectivity:** The COVID-19 outbreak, and the resultant school closures, exposed the current technology gap, including availability of devices and broadband connectivity. The Legislature must ensure there is equitable access to technology resources.
- **Bargaining:** COVID-19 and school closures disrupted the education system, forcing modifications in the delivery of education, the school calendar and employee responsibilities. These issues impact local bargaining. Given drastically altered circumstances and expected revenue difficulties, school districts seek strong sideboards on bargaining, including clearly defining the minimum professional duties and expectations for teachers in statute.

Given the state’s current fiscal situation, WASA recognizes that several of the state’s most pressing K-12 funding needs may have to be postponed, said Aune. They must remain a part of the ongoing legislative conversation, though, for reconsideration when the state is in a position to invest. These long-term needs include:

- **Staffing Allocations:** The Prototypical School Funding Model is a core, fundamental part of the education funding structure. The funding ratios for most staff positions, however,

have remained the same since the model was first implemented, resulting in outdated and unrealistic state-funded staffing levels.

- **Consistent, Equitable and Ample Education Resources:** Several components of K-12's new funding structure have exacerbated inequities between districts and urgently need to be revised. These components include: Special Education; State Salary Allocations and Experience Factors; the School Employees' Benefits Board insurance program; and Regionalization.
- **Capital Facilities:** School facilities remain a core need and the Legislature provides a considerable investment in the School Construction Assistant Program. Grants that are provided, however, use outdated funding formulas that fail to recognize the true cost of building or educational space needs.

"Lawmakers have a daunting task before them, and we appreciate the difficult choices that may lie ahead. COVID-19 has pushed many families and communities to the brink, as have the conflicts and events surrounding inequity in our state and country," concluded Aune.

"Through it all, WASA members remain steadfast in the belief that public education is the perfect vehicle for driving the kind of change necessary to transform the lives of all children and people everywhere as we seek ways to move forward, together."

To view the entire 2021 WASA Legislative Platform, [visit the WASA website.](#)

About the Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA)

WASA (www.wasa-oly.org) is a non-profit organization committed to the development of quality education through professional leadership. Members benefit from a supportive community of professional leaders working to provide insightful, valuable training support, and resources. WASA also strives to sustain a positive impact on legislative and community leaders. Membership is open to education administrators in Washington state.

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