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WASA: Time for Lawmakers to Jumpstart Down Payment on K-12 Education

School administrators release 2022 legislative priorities

OLYMPIA — July 1, 2021 — Increased state revenue means lawmakers are well-positioned to enhance K-12 education next session with greater investments in student supports for social emotional learning (SEL), pupil transportation, learning recovery, and advancing equity for all students. Those are among [the top priorities](#) for the Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA) as they look to the 2022 legislative session next January.

WASA Executive Director Joel Aune said the state and all 295 school districts will benefit significantly from more than \$2.9 billion in federal ESSER dollars provided to help offset COVID-19 expenses, but those one-time funds will not sustain districts' efforts in the long-term as they grapple with ongoing challenges such as the state's staffing allocation model, which is inadequate to fully meet the needs of the 1.2 million students enrolled in this state's schools.

"We are talking about the need for a substantial increase in sustainable funding for K-12 education. Schools need more resources to meet the needs of today's students as we prepare them for success in tomorrow's world. This is something legislators have acknowledged and talked about since the McCleary solution in 2017. Now is the time to jumpstart the process with a significant down payment to fulfill that commitment, given the state's higher-than-anticipated revenue forecast," said Aune.

"School districts continue to face deeply embedded societal inequities that need to be addressed now. These discrepancies affect everything from pupil transportation to special

education and connectivity, which were clearly exposed during the pandemic,” added Aune. “Districts are addressing things like learning recovery with federal ESSER funds. What we need is for lawmakers to address the deeper problems related to funding for K-12 education, starting with the way school staffing is resourced. Students are coming to us with significantly different needs — mental health, emotional, and behavioral needs that require specific training and staffing levels that are not currently being provided for by state funding,” he continued.

“The pandemic has exposed many of the harsh realities for today’s public school students. There are physical, emotional, and behavioral needs that play a significant role in their academic achievement and success in school,” Aune added.

“Lawmakers must capitalize on this opportunity to make substantial and systemic investments that will, in a timely fashion, phase in increased levels of staffing that are truly responsive to student needs across the entire state. At this time, our schools are not resourced to achieve the aspirations we have for the students in our schools. They deserve better.”

Among the WASA 2022 legislative priorities:

Update Staff Allocations

In the 2011 transition to the Prototypical School Funding Model, original staffing allocations were funded at artificially low ratios based on historic staffing levels that had been in place since the late 1980’s to ensure the conversion was cost-neutral. Since then, the need for student supports in local school districts has grown exponentially, yet the funding ratios for most staff positions have remained the same since the model was first implemented. WASA urges the Legislature to begin fulfilling its commitment by phasing in updated ratios to achieve more realistic state-funded staffing levels in all schools, beginning first with investments to meet students’ needs for: mental health, social health, emotional health, and behavioral health; and safety.

Provide Consistent, Equitable, and Ample Education Resources

Several components of K–12’s funding structure are underfunded or have embedded inequities between districts that urgently need to be addressed. WASA urges the Legislature to promptly act on the following components:

- **Fix Pupil Transportation.** Under the current Pupil Transportation funding model (STARS), many districts experience significant funding gaps; in the last four years many districts received an allocation below their costs. OFM recently found in most situations, the STARS model will not provide adequate resources to school districts and recommends, at the very least, that more funding be provided to the system. It is time to fix this formula.
- **Fully Fund Special Education.** Prior to the 2019 session, OSPI identified a special education underfunded need of at least \$300 million. In 2019, the excess cost multiplier was increased; in 2020, additional funding was provided for safety net awards; in 2021,

funding was provided for additional transition services, for professional development, and for family liaisons. While these incremental steps to reduce the special education funding gap are appreciated, the 2022 Legislature must take more deliberate action to eliminate the current underfunding.

- **Adjust Regionalization/Experience Factors.** Regionalization and Experience Factors are intended to ensure school districts can provide fair and equitable salaries to staff, allowing districts to hire the best teachers available. Regionalization Factors, however, have intensified rather than lessened inequities between districts. Similarly, Experience Factors were intended to lessen inequities; however, as currently implemented, additional funding only assists one-fifth of the state's school districts because the calculation is overly limiting. The calculation and application of both factors need to be evaluated and adjusted.

- **Provide State-of-the-Art Technology and Connectivity.** The COVID-19 outbreak exposed the current technology gap, including availability and affordability of devices and broadband connectivity. The Legislature must ensure there is equitable access to technology resources.

Advance Equity

Closing opportunity gaps for students is critical. WASA urges the Legislature to provide school districts the resources, tools, and flexibility to: ensure equitable learning opportunities, and fair treatment for each student; and recruit, support, and retain effective classroom, building, and district staff who reflect the diversity of our student populations, including ethnicity, and gender.

View the complete 2022 WASA Legislative Platform [here](#).

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.