



Washington State
School Directors' Association

Legislative Update

July 24, 2015

By [Deb Merle](#)

A is for Ample

It's hard to grade the legislature this year. On one hand, they earned an "A" for amply funding education without creaming other parts of the budget. On the other hand, they deserve an "incomplete," for failing to comply with the Supreme Court's demand for a plan to *fully* fund education by 2019.

No one knows how the Court will respond, but they laid out several options in their original order. The two most common guesses are that they will reject the recently passed state budget and call the legislature back into session sometime soon, or they will appoint a special master (usually a retired judge) to sort things out.

While we wait for the court's next move, let's see how the legislature did fulfilling WSSDA's legislative priorities in the 2015 session.

Amplify fund K-12 education

The 2015-17 operating budget includes \$1.3 billion in new money for K-12 education. The governor and legislature adhered to the funding schedule in HB 2776, and then some. Having dealt with transportation funding in 2013-15, they only *had* to come up with about \$750 million for materials, supplies and operating costs this biennium. But they went much further, paying also for all-day kindergarten and K-3 class size reduction, both scheduled for funding in 2017-19. That leaves only the elephant in the room; compensation and levy reform to ensure that local taxes are not spent on basic education programs or salary enhancements.

Facilitate facilities

The legislature acknowledged that all-day kindergarten and smaller K-3 classes can only be realized with additional classroom space in most districts, and new schools in some. *Some* progress was made with the passage of Senate Bill 6080, establishing a K-3

construction grant pilot program, seeded with \$200 million from the state operating budget. SB 6080 increased funding per square foot to more accurately reflect actual costs of construction and to allow more space per student. However, those changes were not made in the School Construction Assistance Program formula used to calculate funding for projects in the capital budget.

Two WSSDA priorities that have been simmering on back-burners for a long time heated up this year and are likely to boil over in coming sessions given the class size reductions and all-day kindergarten mandates. Bills were dropped and hearings held on bond approval with a simple majority during November general elections and on changes to the Growth Management Act (GMA) to allow building outside Urban Growth Areas. While neither bill passed this year, they will be back; and an interim taskforce was established to keep the GMA discussion going.

Enable great teaching and learning

Full funding of materials, supplies and operations costs was a long time coming. This investment should enhance the learning environment and classroom experience for every student in Washington when they return to school this fall. And, while the legislature did not include 80 hours of teacher professional development per year as WSSDA called for, the topic will be squarely before them as they contemplate levy reform and the definition of “basic education” in the coming months.

Fully fund programs and services that are required by law

Huge, long-standing, unfunded mandates for Special Education and Becca (truancy law) compliance were left unchecked again this session.

No new mandates

The impossible dream. Legislators legislate. However, in spite of a torrent of education bills early in the session, few actually passed, and those that did are light on new duties for schools and districts.

Also rans...

While not among the top priorities for WSSDA during the 2015 session, some of the Association’s Standing Legislative Positions were acted upon this year.

- WSSDA’s call to change the staff non-renewal notification deadline to May 15 or 30 days after the budget becomes law, was heard this year with passage of a bill that does just that.
- WSSDA’s multi-year campaign to prevent the state from taking federal timber land

funds from 200 school districts was rewarded this year with a budget proviso prohibiting the “claw back” for the next two years.

- WSSDA’s long-standing standing opposition to linking high graduation and statewide testing requirements wasn’t fully addressed, however a last-minute deal allowed seniors who had not passed the biology exam to graduate this year. A bill to accomplish the full delinking of testing and graduation will be front and center again next year.

The details

WSSDA staff is working on a more extensive end of session summary that will go out in August. In the meantime:

- Visit leap.leg.wa.gov or fiscal.wa.gov to see the final 2015-17 operating, capital and transportation budgets, with summaries.
- Visit leg.wa.gov/House/Committees/Documents/SineDie2015.pdf for a summary of all bills passed during the 2015 Regular session (education bills start on page 23).
- Visit <http://leg.wa.gov/House/Committees/Documents/SineDie2015SpS.pdf> for bills passed during the three special sessions (education bills begin on page 10).

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