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June 11, 2013

The Honorable Andy Hill, Senate Ways & Means Chairman
The Honorable Ross Hunter, House Appropriations Chairman
The Honorable Gary Alexander, House Appropriations Ranking Member
The Honorable Jim Hargrove, Senate Ways & Means Ranking Member

Dear Senators Hill and Hargrove and Representatives Hunter and Alexander:

As the clock winds down on this special session, on behalf of school directors across the state, we ask you to take action to adopt a 2013-15 operating budget that makes substantial new investments in K-12 education.

Two months ago we thanked you for the proposed enhancements in your respective budgets, and shared that school directors have adopted a position for the past three years in support of full implementation of **all aspects** of Washington's redefined program of basic education (ESHB 2261/SHB 2776). This includes the "big four" of transportation, MSOC, full-day kindergarten, and smaller class sizes – the latter phased in starting with our highest poverty schools first – and investments in programs that will help close the achievement gap (e.g., increased instructional hours, a 24-credit diploma, TBIP expansion, LAP, etc.).

Two significant education reform bills were adopted this session – SB 5329 for persistently low-achieving schools, and SB 5491 which sets benchmarks to measure the state's education system. These bills, coupled with a new evaluation system that rolls out statewide in 2013-14, will make a difference in student learning, but only if the Legislature acts with a significant down payment on *McCleary* this session.

While we appreciate the Legislature's interest in various policy bills on topics such as mutual consent, it is the consensus of the WSSDA Board of Directors that the focus of this special session (and any subsequent special session) should be on passing a budget and adopting a schedule to ramp up funding by 2018, not on enacting new policy.

In particular, the WSSDA Board voted May 16 to oppose a mutual consent bill and not offer an alternative this special session. As we have maintained since it was introduced, this bill has unintended consequences and we are too late in the session to fix them. The WSSDA Legislative Committee is considering several "employee dismissal" proposals for the 2014 session, and we would welcome the opportunity to work on those concepts with legislators over the interim.

The Board also adopted a position in support of early interventions for students struggling in reading, *provided* that additional funding is included in the omnibus operating budget. While both House and Senate budgets add funding to LAP, it is important any legislation related to an emphasis on reading makes it clear that existing LAP funding will not be supplanted or reprioritized to reading assistance or behavioral

issues. Finally, the Board does not support grade retention based on a single statewide test. Additional interventions over the summer required by the state must be accompanied by additional funding.

On the revenue side of the balance sheet, WSSDA's position and messages have been clear and consistent throughout session and beyond – we support a stable and sustainable approach to funding Washington's system of public schools. For nearly 25 years WSSDA has held a position in support of restructuring the state tax system to establish a stable, broad-based, flexible source of revenue which is equitable and adequate, in order to ensure better education funding as well as provide for other essential state services.

A few final comments:

- The clock is ticking on when school districts must adopt their 2013-14 school year budgets. All districts must submit a budget to their ESD and make copies available to the public no later than July 10th. In addition, districts with fewer than 2,000 student FTE must adopt their budgets by August 1st, while districts with more than 2,000 student FTE must adopt by August 31st. School districts must post notice of the budget adoption meeting at least two weeks in advance of the vote.
- Levy authority and local effort assistance should not be reduced or eliminated during the process of phasing in funding for basic education. This is our Number 2 priority. While school directors recognize that additional state funding will lead to subsequent reductions in local levies, the state's underfunding for years has left many districts in a precarious position. To begin changing levy lids and scaling back LEA prior to 2018 would break trust with school districts. This is a conversation we should have, but not in 2013.
- WSSDA supports restoring funding for the 1.9 percent and 3.0 percent salary reductions imposed on districts and the cut to Alternative Learning Experience programs in the 2011-13 operating budget.
- WSSDA's Number 3 priority is to encourage and fund innovation in our schools. School districts must have the authority and flexibility to meet the diverse needs of their students. Please continue to support our current funding allocation model and the use of innovative approaches to help all of our students achieve success.

As you enter what hopefully will be the final stages of budget negotiation, we hope you will keep these school director comments and priorities in mind. The children and school districts of Washington state are counting on you. Please let us know if we can provide additional information or answer any questions.

Sincerely,



President, WSSDA Board of Directors



Executive Director, WSSDA

cc: The Honorable Jay Inslee, Governor
The Honorable Frank Chopp, Speaker of the House
The Honorable Pat Sullivan, House Majority Leader
The Honorable Dan Kristiansen, House Minority Leader
The Honorable Rodney Tom, Senate Majority Leader
The Honorable Mark Schoesler, Senate Republican Leader
The Honorable Ed Murray, Senate Minority Leader
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