



April 13, 2013

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

Dear Senators Hill and Hargrove and Representatives Alexander and Hunter:

On behalf of school directors across the state, thank you for the substantial new investments both the House and Senate make in K-12 education. Both budgets make a significant down payment in meeting the McCleary decision, and we are grateful that both budgets prioritize education funding.

For the past three years, school directors have adopted a position at their September Legislative Assembly in support of full implementation of **all aspects** of Washington's redefined program of basic education (ESHB 2261/SHB 2776) through a comprehensive funding system using stable and sustainable revenue. WSSDA's 2013 Legislative Priorities also call out the need for funding in this biennium for education reform and accountability requirements imposed by the Legislature in previous sessions. And our priorities state that no district should receive less funding than they received previously until the program of basic education is fully funded.

In addition to adopting this priorities last fall, more than 120 school boards of directors have adopted resolutions that embrace and describe these priorities. A list of districts can be found at www.wssda.org. We ask that the Legislature fund these priorities on the schedule as defined in current law, and that the Legislature adopt a clear and specific phase-in plan and schedule for components not in statute but with an end date of 2018.

We encourage you to adopt a final budget that includes funding for:

- Pupil transportation, implemented by FY15;
- Materials, Supplies & Operating Costs (MSOC), implemented by FY16;
- Full-day kindergarten, phased in by 2017-18 school year;
- Smaller K-3 class sizes, phased in by 2017-18 school year;
- 80 additional state-funded instructional hours for grades 7-12;
- A down payment on compensation, starting with classified and administrative staff, and continuing in subsequent years for teachers;
- A 24-credit diploma, although not necessarily the credits as adopted by the SBE;
- Professional development to implement the new evaluation system, phased in at up to 80 hours of professional development beyond the 180-day school year; and
- Schools identified under the Required Action District (RAD) process through the State's Accountability Index.

In addition, WSSDA members support funding for:

- Up to five days to implement WaKIDS without districts having to seek a waiver from the State Board of Education;

- Expanding the state’s program of preschool through early learning assistance programs; and
- Students who exit the Transitional Bilingual Instruction Program and need two years of additional assistance to be career and college ready.

On the revenue side of the balance sheet, WSSDA’s position and messages have been clear and consistent throughout session – we support using a stable and sustainable approach to funding Washington’s system of public schools. And while we don’t have a specific adopted set of recommendations on what constitutes “stable and sustainable,” 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.

Specifically, the association does not support shifting trust land revenues from school construction to school operations, or relying on unproven “savings” from transitioning part-time K-12 employees to the state’s health benefit exchange. So that we are not back at the table every two years, it is critical that the Legislature take a comprehensive approach to funding our public schools through stable and sustainable revenue, which includes evaluating our tax structure and system for best use and value of state revenues.

A few final comments:

- 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.
- Districts have identified serious issues with the MSOC formula for CTE and skills center allocations. We would ask that the House approach be adopted this biennium. Again, underfunding of state educational obligations in the past few years, when districts have shifted funds around to keep as much money going to the classroom, has skewed the baseline.
- 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 begin your negotiations on the final budget, we hope you will keep these school director comments and priorities in mind. We know the road ahead will be challenging but we are here to help. Thank you again for your commitment to education and the students of Washington State.

Sincerely,



President, WSSDA Board of Directors



Executive Director, WSSDA

cc: The Honorable Jay Inslee, Governor
WSSDA Board of Directors, WSSDA Legislative Committee