

K-12 EDUCATION FUNDING

The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation or policies that establish an updated definition of basic education and a basic education funding formula that reflects current education practices and requirements.

The redefinition and funding formula must fulfill the State's obligation to fully fund education as its paramount duty by providing ample opportunities for all students to achieve higher learning levels consistent with standards-based education reform.

The funding system must ensure accountability by generating consistent and transparent accounting processes.

Background: Washington State has funded education below the national average for over a decade. At the same time, it has instituted one of the most stringent exit exams. Students are being stretched between the increased academic standards and decreasing state funding. Beginning with the class of 2008, students will be held accountable to achieve higher academic standards in order to graduate from high school whether their schools are adequately funded or not. The basic education allocation formula has not changed substantially since 1977 and does not completely fund the Learning Assistance Program, school transportation, Special Education, and English Language Learners, nor does it cover technology proficiency.

Facts/Impacts:

The legislature "is required to continually review, evaluate, and revise, if necessary, the educational system of the state and the program of education and its funding to meet the current needs of the children of the state." School Funding II, Thurston County 81-2-1713-1, 63.

The 1993 Education Reform Act (HB 1209) created a Joint Legislative Fiscal Committee to study the common school funding system and to submit a report in 1995 on its findings and any recommendations for a new funding model. The committee's report recognized that it was difficult for a legislature to alter a public school finance system significantly in a short time span and recommended that the finance system be reviewed on a regular basis. No comprehensive study was undertaken at that time by the legislature.

Since the passage of HB 1209, implementing a performance-based education system for all K-12 students, schools have made tremendous changes and student achievement has substantially improved. Additional resources are required to sustain student achievement and "leave no child behind." Referring back to the court's language, the education system is evolving and changing. The Legislature has a responsibility to align the school funding formula with this new model of education.

Even prior to the 1993 reform act, demands on public education have steadily increased. All students can learn, but the cost of educating students increases with their individual needs. Additionally, quality staff, a rich array of programs, and all support or incidental services must be funded properly to fully realize the goals of education reform.

Our current state K-12 finance system is an allocation system based on various funding formulas and local levies for "enrichment purposes." These state funding formulas provide funds in broad categories such as staffing ratios per student, assumed salary costs, and allocations for non-salary costs. This approach makes it difficult to establish what is missing to accomplish the education mission where every student will meet standard in the core subjects.

Summary: Making ample provision for the education of all students is our state's paramount duty and it is time for Washington State to fully fund education reform. The fully funded K-12 Education system would preclude reallocating of funds from other programs to meet basic education needs for students, as well as allow better alignment of high school graduation with post-secondary education requirements.

MATHEMATICS & SCIENCE EDUCATION

The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation and/or policies that strengthen scientific and mathematical education in Washington State, including but not limited to:

- 1) Enhanced pre-K through college education in mathematics and the sciences;
- 2) Advance professional development and ongoing assistance for math and science teachers;
- 3) Community involvement in the selection of math and science curricula;
- 4) Family collaboration in teaching math and science.

Background: Currently children in our state are not receiving the best possible education in mathematics and the sciences. The economy of the United States, present and future, and that of Washington State, depends greatly upon our ability to sustain innovation in science and technology.

Facts/Impacts:

Current levels of WASL pass rates for Washington students are particularly low for mathematics and science – only 47.1% of 2005 10th graders met the math standard on the Washington Assessment of Student Learning. When the data is disaggregated by race, poverty, and student need, the numbers are lower – 37.7% for African American students; 35.8% for Hispanic students; and 25.5% for English Language learners.

The 2003 PISA study results compared the Science, Math, and Reading performance of over 250,000 students from the United States and the other 28 countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), representing the world's richest countries. The United States students ranked 24th in mathematics skills, and 19th in scientific literacy.

More than 50% of high school graduates who enter Washington's community and technical colleges directly after high school need to take remedial math before they can take math courses for credit.

Washington State continues to face serious teacher shortages in math and science (along with special education).

Summary:

A number of policy changes have been proposed to help resolve the current crisis in math and science. Washington State PTA will advocate for policy changes that:

1. Provide a balanced mathematical instructional program for students.
2. Implement internationally competitive math and science standards, aligned curricula and assessments.
3. Create Math & Science Advisory Councils to provide independent oversight of standards adoption, curricula recommendations and professional development for educators.
4. Support curricula that allows for family collaboration.
5. Provide solutions for our math/science teacher shortage.
6. Provide additional professional development opportunities for educators.

SIMPLE MAJORITY FOR LEVIES AND BONDS

The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation or policies that allow the people to vote on Simple Majority for school levies and bonds run in Special Elections thereby not compromising the needs of school districts and communities by restricting Simple Majority to school measures run in November General Elections.

School districts are increasingly dependent on levy dollars because the Basic Education funded by the state does not completely fund the needs of an effective public education system.

Our state Constitution declares the states' "paramount duty... to be the provision for public schools." However, several state laws have been enacted over the years that allow other local governments the ability to raise revenues by less onerous methods than those required of the schools.

Background: Our children are negatively impacted by over-crowded, under-maintained schools, and the loss of resources that results from failed school levy and bond measures. School districts are forced to rely on local levy dollars to provide services not funded by Basic Education and are dependent on local bonds to raise funds for building construction as well as routine maintenance

Facts/Impacts:

Since 1944, the voters of Washington State have not been afforded the opportunity to decide if they wish to change their constitution on the issue of simple majority passage for excess local levies.

The Washington State Constitution requires that authorization for "excess" property taxes, for any purpose, must receive 60% voter approval whenever the aggregate of state and local "regular" property taxes exceeds 1% of the assessed value of the property in that county. This equates to \$10.00 per one thousand dollars of assessed property valuations.

The 60% supermajority was placed into the Constitution by a vote of the people in 1944. For 12 years prior to that, similar stipulations were part of temporary laws in Washington until the decision was made to make this a constitutional provision.

The Constitution can only be amended by the people, but any proposed amendments must first be approved by the State Legislature – by a two-thirds vote of both the House and the Senate; and then by the voters.

Washington voters authorize nearly a billion dollars per year for local excess school levies. Only \$15 million in levies were finally defeated for that same collection period. Most, if not all, of that \$15 million would have been approved had the standard been 50% rather than 60%. This would have been a 2% increase above what was actually approved.

The taxpayers would not have to pay for the costs of running a second election if school levies and bonds were to pass on the first election attempt (at 50%). Those additional election costs would allow taxpayers' money to be spent on their local school, rather than on the costs of another election. These second elections can cost as much as \$75,000 per district.

When bonds fail a second time school districts are unable to maintain aging buildings and the drastic increased cost of deferred maintenance also comes out of the operating budget.

Summary: It is time to allow the voters of Washington State to determine if they wish to amend the state constitution to provide for school levy and bond measures to pass with a simple majority vote. It has been almost 60 years since the "super majority" was first constitutionally mandated. Much has changed since then. Allowing school levies and bonds to pass with a simple majority vote would give more stability to our schools – and our children.

REDUCE CLASS SIZE

The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation or policies that support funding and policies that secure smaller class sizes for students.

Tennessee's longitudinal class-size study — Student Teacher Achievement Ratio (STAR) project — showed that those enrolled in small classes as youngsters were more likely to:

Graduate on time — 72 percent of students, versus 66 percent from regular classes and 65 percent from classes with a paraprofessional;

Complete more advanced math and English courses;

Complete high school — 19 percent dropped out, versus 23 percent from regular classes and 26 percent from classes with a paraprofessional;

And graduate with honors.

Background: Compelling evidence demonstrates that reducing class size, particularly for younger children, has a positive effect on student achievement overall and an especially significant impact on the education of disadvantaged children. The PTA has been a long-time advocate for reducing class size to help raise student achievement, especially in high-poverty, at-risk schools. In addition to increasing student achievement, smaller classes improve classroom atmosphere, students receive more individualized attention, and teachers have flexibility to use different instructional approaches/assignments.

Facts/Impacts:

Having fewer children in a class is attractive to both parents and teachers. One recent national poll found that 70% of adults believe that reducing class size would result in big improvements in public schools. Fewer than 10% believed that it would make no improvement at all. A 1997 Education Week survey found that 83% of teachers and 60% of principals agree that class size in elementary schools should not exceed 17 students, compared with a national average of 25 students per class.

Complex factors positively and negatively affect class size in Washington State: general apportionment, planning periods, librarians, coaches, nurses, local levies, federal funding, I-728 (class size reduction initiative), excess program costs (such as salary, transportation, teacher TRI pay --time, responsibility, and initiative; special education, struggling students, and more.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, "A growing body of research demonstrates that students attending small classes in the early grades make more rapid educational progress than students in larger classes, and that these achievement gains persist well after students move on to larger classes in later grades."

Class size reduction is most effective when classes are between 15 and 19 students; particular schools are targeted, especially those with low-achieving and low-income students; there is an adequate supply of qualified teachers; and there is adequate classroom space.

Teachers with small classes can spend time and energy helping each child succeed. Smaller classes also enhance safety, discipline and order in the classroom. When qualified teachers teach smaller classes in modern schools, kids learn more. It's common sense, and the research proves it works to increase student achievement.

Summary: Class size reduction is a policy that can increase educational effectiveness. Small class size and better staff-student ratios offer health and safety benefits. Reductions in class size can be phased in gradually and should be accompanied by adequate financial support. Policies that support teachers in adapting their teaching to smaller class sizes may maximize the benefits of class size reduction.

RECESS

The Washington State PTA shall initiate and/or support legislation and/or policies that support policies which require regular recess periods, supervised unstructured breaks, throughout the school day; and ensure and support additional research on the effects of recess on the developmental domains (social, emotional, physical, and cognitive), and on the effect of recess on academic achievement; develop policies and resources necessary to support an awareness of the importance of recess and of active, free play in the development of children; and support research and professional development that facilitate every educator's and school staff member's skills in observation and assessment of the developmental growth of children through the play process.

Background: As economic competitiveness becomes a central concern in schools, we should not give up our core beliefs about childhood or lose sight of the types of adults we want our children to become. Time is the missing element in our national debate about learning and the need for higher standards for all students. Schools are captive of the clock and calendar. Statewide, the trend is growing to maximize instruction time at the expense of recess. However, Washington state law requires the number of instructional hours that school must provide, and defines that recess qualifies as part of those instructional hours.

Facts/Impacts:

During the last 20 years, there have been major changes in the economic, political and social environments in which children are being raised. Beginning in kindergarten, increasing emphasis is put on programming children for global competitiveness in order to propel them into an economically viable future.

Research shows that children who are physically active during the school day are more likely to be active after school while children who are inactive during the school hours are less likely to be active.

In order to improve student performance on statewide and national tests and to meet the expectations of NCLB, school districts are looking for ways to increase time spent in the classroom. In order to reduce time away from the classroom, districts may choose to reduce or eliminate recess without fully understanding how research reveals that the decision may actually hinder their efforts.

Recess encourages social and emotional development of children which is slowly becoming extinct in communities. Social development including cooperation, sharing, language, and conflict resolution can be actively practiced, interpreted, and learned during recess – to test their social skills.

Through active, free play and peer interaction, children have the opportunity to develop respect for rules, gain self-discipline and construct an appreciation for other children's cultures and beliefs – to practice sportsmanship, negotiation skills, tolerance and inclusion.

The most obvious characteristic of recess is that it constitutes a break from the day's routine. For people of all ages breaks are considered essential for satisfaction and alertness. Experimental research on memory and attention (e.g., Toppino, Kasserman, & Mracek, 1991) found that recall is improved when learning is spaced rather than presented all at once.

Another experimental study (Jarrett et al., 1998) found that fourth-graders were more on-task and less fidgety in the classroom on days when they had had recess, with hyperactive children among those who benefited the most.

Summary: Legislation should require that districts create policies with community input to safeguard recess for elementary school children to ensure breaks for free play and physical activity. State labor laws require at least 10 minute breaks every two hours for every 4 hours worked by 14 and 15 year olds – younger children should receive comparable breaks from classroom work.