

# WASHINGTON LEARNS STEERING COMMITTEE

Draft Report – Sept. 12, 2006

Washington State Parent Teacher Association  
Supported Strategies and Further Recommendations

---

## **WSPTA Supported Strategies**

The highest priority for Washington Learns must be a recommendation for a formal re-definition of basic education. Per our state constitution and court case law, what is defined as basic education must be funded. Founding fathers of Washington State understood that the stability and quality of education would ensure the success of our entire state. Our current definition of basic education was created before technology and the emergence of the global economy. Additionally, today's students arrive at school with greater needs than ever before. Be bold – define basic education in a way that reflects today's world and today's students.

It is WSPTA's position that the strategies listed below should be considered the first steps, or down payment on the plan to overhaul school finance in Washington State.

### Learner Focused Education

A learner-focused system is the goal of every parent/care-giver. Certainly, the learner should be the focus. As a first step in this direction we ask that strategies include:

- a. Class size reduction: how can the system be learner focused if there are too many learners in the educational setting? Even the most dedicated educator/administrator will not be successful if do not have the time to know each student.
- b. Professional development that specifically supports differentiated instruction for students. Active learners will require an approach much different than a traditional learner. Teachers must be able to respond to each style of learner, rather than simply teaching to the middle of the class.
- c. Creativity and innovation will propel our students into the global world, and will only be achieved by allowing exposure to the art, social sciences, and other areas not tested on current state assessments. These second tier subjects capture the passion and spirit of students and keep them engaged in their learning.
- d. Choices and opportunities for students are essential to meeting their needs, such as career and technical education programs, pre-apprenticeship programs, and running start for the trades.

### World Class System

A world class education system is certainly what all parents want for their child. First step strategies to consider include:

- e. Focus on math and science that will ensure Washington graduates are ready for the 21<sup>st</sup> century world. Math curriculum should focus on the skills students will need in the future and should be strengthened from early learning to higher education.
- f. Technology as a content area is critical. The strategies in the draft report use technology for data gathering. PTA supports the funding for technology capacity in all schools -- including hardware, software, professional development and application curriculum.
- g. World languages have been disappearing from our schools; at the same time we learn that the world is flat. Students need exposure to a wide variety of world language in order to be ready to work in a global world.

### Parent Involvement and Community Engagement

Parent Involvement is mentioned in the report but appears to be focused on the early years. All students need their parents to be involved in their learning experiences. First tier strategies include:

- h. Navigation 101 and similar guidance curriculum that involve parents in the educational experience in a meaningful way. Volunteering is not the only important element of parent involvement. Shared decision making, strong communication, and collaboration are parent involvement activities that make a difference for students.

### Equity and Access

Inequities in school funding must be eliminated as a first step. Transportation, special education, and levy equalization, to name a few must be eliminated. Additionally, levy and teacher salary grandfathering must be replaced with a more common sense funding mechanism.

Every student deserves a great teacher – well compensated, well trained, and supported throughout their career. In addition to providing competitive wages for teachers, regional cost of living factor should be further studied and potentially implemented on a pilot basis. Additionally, a skills and knowledge based compensation system should be further examined and pilots implemented.

By implementing quality rating systems and expanding the current state pre-kindergarten program (ECEAP) to fill unmet need, young children will have better opportunities to arrive at kindergarten ready to learn and thrive.

Higher education strategies must begin with alignment of K-12 graduation requirements to higher education entrance requirements. Most parents would be surprised to learn that when they proudly graduate their child from the K-12 system that they are not necessarily ready to enter post-secondary education. Our high schools must graduate our students with all doors open – higher education, workforce, service, and citizenship.

### **Further Recommendations**

Important elements missing from the strategies in the draft report include:

1. School safety: In a post 911 world school can and will likely be first responders. Currently schools focus on minimal safety and even at that, safety funding is inadequate. School safety funding can address everything from bullying prevention, to school violence, to preparation for catastrophic events.
2. Drop out prevention and intervention programs: It is not enough to assume that if schools are better funded that students will stay in school. Most risk factors that lead to students dropping out of school are non-school related. Schools must employ specific strategies to prevent and intervene in drop out situations. These activities take time, money, and collaboration.

Additional strategies of interest to parents and community members included in the report:

1. Global Challenge States: the concept of anchoring our goals and successes to the GCS may ensure our students will be competitive in the global economy. Our

children may live, work, learn, and play outside of Washington, and as parents we want them prepared to succeed no matter where they end up.

2. P-20 Council: This strategy has the potential to create that seamless education system that is important to our state. It will be important to ensure that this council does not create an additional layer of governance. The K-12 system has worked hard the last few years to streamline the K-12 system, and we are looking for continued improvement in this area.

### **Concluding Comments**

The plan entailed in the presentation, “Transparency and a Vision for Resources” is fully supported by the PTA, and has the potential to remedy many of the equity, quality, and access issues listed above.

The proposal to increase staffing areas to 14 and to identify the 8 NERC areas will direct funds where most needed – while still allowing districts the flexibility to make choices best for their student populations. Parents will have greater understanding of how their child’s school is funded, and how those funds are being used. This will lead to greater confidence and engagement in our schools.

Washington State PTA stands ready to work with all education stakeholders -- from early learning, to K-12, to higher education, in order to improve the entire education system in Washington State. Parents and care-givers must navigate their most valuable asset - - their children – through these three distinct sectors.

***About Washington State PTA:*** *The Washington State Parent Teacher Association (WSPTA) was founded in 1905. The Washington State PTA is a nonprofit, membership association which brings together the home, school and community on behalf of all children and youth. It is comprised of over 150,000 members in over 900 local PTA units throughout the state. WSPTA is present in almost half of all public schools in Washington State. For more information about Washington State PTA, visit the website, [www.wastatepta.org](http://www.wastatepta.org).*