

WSPTA Testimony on SB 5313, 5316 and 5466 on Enrichment Levies

Jan 23, 2019 1:30 p.m., Sen EL &K12, SHR 1

Good afternoon, Chair Wellman and members of the committee. I am Dr. Nancy Chamberlain, Advocacy Director of Washington State PTA, representing more than 133,000 members statewide. We have signed in Other on all three bills and appreciate the opportunity for this discussion today.

WSPTA thanks the legislature for the historic investments in basic education over the last several biennia. While the state increased its constitutionally-required funding, it also made the policy decision to decrease local levy authority.

This policy change constrained school districts' abilities to fill existing funding gaps – like those remaining in special education – and to provide true enrichment opportunities to students that meet parent and community priorities, such as safe schools, programs to close the opportunity gaps and enhanced staffing for nurses, counselors, social workers, for example.

WSPTA members adopted an approach to levies that is consistent with SB 5316 – to allow school districts the choice between the two current limits. Using OSPI data, we believe this would add about \$1B to local levy capacity.

However, this bill does not protect or make changes to increase LEA beyond the \$1,500 per student. Our position is that LEA should not decline under any levy fix the Legislature approves and should be increased to more equitable levels than the \$1500/student limit.

While we don't have specific positions yet on the percentage approaches taken by OSPI in SB 5466 or the Governor in SB 5313, the bills do increase local levy capacity and LEA. [Frankly, we aren't sure how districts would respond to either of these options and] our Advocacy Committee has not fully debated the pros and cons of the proposals so I'm not able to offer much insight into either bill.]

However, parents are uniquely positioned to comment on school levies because it's typically active parents who run the school levy campaigns. After 2017, there was a lot of confusion and concern about the drastic cuts in levy authority, but many of our parents championed levies under the new rules in 2018 campaigns. Changing the rules back to a percentage could add to that confusion for taxpayers.

In closing, we would ask the Legislature to do the following:

1. Give school districts back the authority to ask voters for additional levy funds to support student-centered enrichment programs.
2. Lift the \$1,500 ceiling on LEA so that all districts can offer a more equitable access to enrichment programs, regardless of Zip Code.
3. Review and update the "hold harmless" formulas of 2017 and 2018 to ensure that with any change, school districts receive funding to maintain programs, that help every student achieve their potential.

WSPTA Testimony on SB 5091 and SB 5312

Jan 23, 2019 1:30 p.m., Sen EL &K12, SHR 1

Hello again. For the record I am Dr. Nancy Chamberlain, Advocacy Director of Washington State PTA.

The Washington State PTA's vision is for every student to reach their potential, and this includes students with disabilities. We support policies that ensure higher academic expectations for all students, including our students with special needs. We support policies where students with disabilities are educated in the Least Restrictive Environment. And we support ongoing systemwide professional development that adapts instruction to meet the needs of students with disabilities and includes these students in the general education classroom.

These bills seek to address the shortfall in state funding by changing the special education multiplier and making changes to the safety net.

SB 5312 has the potential to incentivize inclusion, but we have several concerns about implementation.

As parents, we expect that children with disabilities receive all the services that are proscribed in their IEPs. School districts are reporting the shortfall in special education funding is about \$300 million to cover those services. SB 5312 does not cover that gap fully but phases the funding in over several years based on schools in need of improvement – not on the percentage of students who qualify for special education.

Washington is the only state in the nation with an artificial limit on Special Education student population (13.5%) and neither the existing funding for special education or this bill meets federal IDEA requirements for students with disabilities.

If you've seen the recent headlines from Oregon, the state has been hit with a class action lawsuit by parents who are frustrated over the lack of hours in a school day their students with special needs receive. I'm not aware that Washington school districts have used an approach of shortened days for students with disabilities, but school districts must meet the educational elements of an IEP. And that requires the state to step up and close that gap in funding.

Shifting gears to the safety net, we are pleased that Washington offers a safety net for school districts with students who have disabilities that exceed what the multiplier offers. SB 5091 makes changes to the safety net, removing federal IDEA dollars and giving the legislature flexibility to decrease the threshold for safety net reimbursements, which we support. We also support improved professional development for staff but have some reservations about including the federal dollars in those appropriations. This seems like a shift of federal money from reimbursements for services for students to professional development.

In a unanimous 2017 US Supreme Court decision known as *Endrew*, the bar was raised for what public school benefits special education students are entitled to. The Court ruled that students deserve "meaningful" education, that a child's "educational program must be appropriately ambitious in light of his circumstances" and that "every child should have the chance to meet

challenging objectives.” We agree and encourage the state to bridge the gap in special education funding and help all children reach their potential.