

January 27, 2019

Senate discusses levies, special education, health benefits, assessments

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The Senate Ways & Means Committee kicked off the week with a work session on K-12 finance, changes to local levies, and special education funding. Segments are worth watching, and include [OSPI](#), a [school district panel](#) of Seattle, Davenport and West Valley school districts, and [Tacoma school district](#). Committee Chair Christine Rolfes, D-Bainbridge Island, told members that there was much discussion to be had, but they wanted to get the conversations on these important issues started. On January 24, the House Appropriations Committee also received [briefings](#) on K-12 Finance and the proposed School Employee Benefits program, again in a work session format.

On Wednesday, the Senate Early Learning & K-12 Committee took [testimony](#) from OSPI and from superintendents, school directors, WEA, parents, and others on the three levy proposals and two special education bills. Then, on Friday, the committee also heard from a [variety of speakers](#) on the three assessment/ graduation requirement bills (SB 5014 (full delink), SB 5146 (SBE graduation requirements), and SB 5548 (OSPI proposal that delinks from the tests but requires a completed pathway as defined in statute).

In the House Education Committee, members heard about the teacher shortage and barriers to becoming a teacher and heard public testimony later in the week on bills that would address the teacher shortage and make changes to the teacher and principal evaluation system.

Also last week, the House and Senate higher education committees held public hearings on Governor Inslee's Promise Scholarship (a reframing and expansion of the State Need Grant) and Career-Connected Learning. Nearly 50 people were signed in to testify in both chambers on both bills. WSPTA supports the concepts in these bills but will be sharing some possible amendments or suggestions for consideration. The bills include SB 5393/HB 1340 and SB 5327 and HB 1336.

Meanwhile, budget negotiators in the House and Senate are meeting on a regular basis and discussing what they can afford this year. Typically, budgets will be released in mid- to late-March in long sessions. Adopting a two-year spending plan for operations, capital and construction projects, and transportation is really the only thing legislators need to do in a 105-day session. Senate budget writers have indicated they are hopeful an agreed-upon operations budget can be adopted in advance of the April 28th final day of regular session.

Status of Top 5 Legislative Priorities (all bills may be accessed [here](#))

- Social and Emotional Learning:
 - SB 5082 would create an SEL committee to promote and expand SEL.
 - The bill was amended in the Senate education committee to include, among other changes, WSPTA's request for OSPI to adopt the framework and indicators.
- School Construction and Simple Majority for Bonds:
 - WSPTA Legislative Consultant met with House Capital Budget Chair Steve Tharinger, Ranking Republican Richard DeBolt, and other members of the committee to discuss the priorities around increasing student space allocation and square foot allowance costs, and doing another round of K-3 classroom grants to help districts comply with the 2019-20 deadline of smaller ratios (17:1).
 - Bills have been introduced in the House to support simple majority, and in the Senate to support simple majority and a 55% pass threshold.
- Preventing Gun Violence:
 - Several bills addressing assault weapons, concealed pistol license requirements, and more continue to be introduced (see the bill list).
- Strategies to Address the Teacher Shortage:
 - HB 1139 had a public hearing last week and is scheduled for a vote this week in the House Education committee.
- Strategic K-12 Investments to Close Gaps:
 - As mentioned above, the Senate education committee took testimony on three levy bills last week, including:
 - SB 5313 would set school district maximum levy authority at 28% of a district's state and federal funding, and LEA as percentage in comparison to the state average 14% levy. (Governor Inslee proposal)
 - SB 5316 would authorize school districts to choose between the \$1.50/\$1000 AV or \$2,500. Senator Wellman said that the reason the bill didn't address LEA is because they couldn't figure out how to model LEA under this type of proposal.
 - SB 5466 would set school district maximum levy authority at 22% of a district's state and federal funding. When a tax rate would exceed \$3.75/\$1000 to reach 22%, LEA would kick in. (OSPI's proposal)
 - Close Special Education funding gaps – also had a hearing the same day as levies. Senator Wellman said the purpose of the hearing was to get out all the concerns and ideas so they can identify a path forward. The discussed bills were:
 - SB 5091 would make changes to the state Safety Net program.
 - SB 5312 would create a multi-tiered approach to special education funding, set in the omnibus operating budget every two years, with the percentage of funding tied to the percentage of time a student with special needs spends in a general education class.
 - Introduced last week by Senator John Braun, R-Chehalis, SB 5532 would increase the safety net to five percent of state special expenditures; fund actual cost of special education in school districts of 1,000 or fewer students; add a special education advocate at each ESD and create special education advisory councils, among other requirements.

- Increase prototypical school funding to Initiative 1351 levels to improve student well-being:
 - SB 5315 is Governor Inslee’s proposal to increase education positions that support enhanced ratios for school counselors, nurses, social workers, and psychologists.
 - HB 1265 would increase the ratios of school counselors to decrease caseloads to the national average, phasing in the increases over several fiscal years and starting with schools most in need of improvement as identified by OSPI.
 - HB 1221 would focus on suicide prevention, but also would allow certain funds to be used to expand programs to include school nurses, school social workers, school psychologists, and school counselors, and encourage those school staff to reach out to mental health providers when they are concerned about a student’s mental health and do not know to whom to refer the students.
 - HB 1479 would address professional development for teachers and paraeducators to improve understanding and identification for student well-being.
 - SB 5465 is OSPI’s request which would increase staffing ratios for school nurses, guidance counselors, and family & community engagement coordinators.
 - SB 5685 wouldn’t increase staffing but would require each school to have a point of contact to recognize, screen, and respond to emotional or behavioral student distress.
- Lower the High-Poverty LAP threshold to the state annual average of free- or reduced-price meal-eligible students to provide services to more students:
 - HB 1384 would lower the 50% threshold to the state average. The bill is scheduled for a public hearing Monday, January 28th at 1:30 PM.
- Include a categorical allocation for high-mobility students.
 - While useful, it does not appear a new categorical program is likely this year. This may be an issue WSPTA works with OSPI and others over the interim to gain traction.

Look for bills and committee hearings that relate to WSPTA’s “Also Supported Positions” adopted at Legislative Assembly and WSPTA resolutions below and in the Bill Tracking List.

WSPTA’s Week in Review

Members of Washington State PTA testified on the following bills this past week:

- President Michelle Nims testified on the three assessment bills. WSPTA was in favor of SB 5014 and testified with support but also concerns about SB 5146 and with concerns about SB 5548. The latter delinks assessments as a graduation requirement but creates an additional laundry list of “pathways” that students, starting in graduating class of 2022, would need to complete to earn a diploma. Nims pointed out that a student merely going to work right after high school is recognized as a qualified path and therefore would need to meet one of the other requirements to graduation.
- Advocacy Director Nancy Chamberlain saw her time to testify whittled down to 60 seconds on school levies and special education.
- Mercer Island parent Jennifer Guerrero Flood [testified](#) in favor of HB 1139, the teacher shortage bill, using personal experiences to underscore her support.

The Week Ahead (Schedule subject to change)

Monday, January 28

1:30 p.m., House Education, HHR A

Public hearing:

5. [HB 1265](#) - Increasing student access to school counselors.
6. [HB 1384](#) - Reducing the high poverty learning assistance program threshold to the state average percentage for free or reduced-price meals student eligibility.

Tuesday, January 29

10 a.m., House Civil Rights & Judiciary, HHR B

Public Hearing:

5. [HB 1315](#) - Concerning concealed pistol license training requirements.

1:30 p.m., Senate Higher Education & Workforce Development, SHR 2

Public Hearing:

1. [SB 5410](#) - Establishing a systemwide credit policy regarding advanced placement, international baccalaureate, and Cambridge international exams.
2. [SB 5477](#) - Requiring institutions of higher education to waive application fees for low-income students.

1:30 p.m., House Human Services & Early Learning, HHR C

Public Hearing:

2. [HB 1351](#) - Expanding eligibility to the early childhood education and assistance program.

3:30 p.m., House Education, HHR A

Work session: School safety and Student Well-Being

Wednesday, January 30

1:30 p.m., Senate Early Learning & K-12 Education, SHR 1

Public Hearing:

1. [SB 5052](#) - Concerning school resource officers.
2. [SB 5141](#) - Concerning school resource officer mandatory training and policies.
3. [SB 5216](#) - Developing multistage threat assessments to increase safety in K-12 schools and institutions of higher education.
4. [SB 5315](#) - Increasing student support staff in the prototypical school funding model.
5. [SB 5317](#) - Concerning nonfirearm measures to increase school safety and student well-being.
6. [SB 5514](#) - Concerning first responder agency notifications to schools regarding potential threats.

Thursday, January 31

8 a.m., House Education, HHR A

Executive action, no public hearing

Friday, February 1

8 a.m., Senate Early Learning & K-12 Education, SHR 1

No schedule announced yet

Olympia [Capitol Campus Map](#)

HHR refers to hearing rooms in the John L. O'Brien Building

SHR refers to hearing rooms in the John A. Cherberg Building