

February 13, 2021

### **Ding, ding, ding – that’s the sign of the first cutoff!**

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Monday, February 15, marks the first cutoff of the session, signaling the Legislature is one-third of the way through this 105-day session. Most committees finished up their work by Friday, February 12, while a few will use Monday to move bills out of the policy committee to stay alive this session. The next cutoff to watch is February 22 when bills need to pass out of the House and Senate fiscal committees.

#### *Stimulus bill on the way to Governor’s desk*

The Senate debated and passed [ESHB 1368](#), the federal stimulus appropriations act, on Wednesday, February 10. Like their counterparts in the House, Senate Republicans offered several amendments to expand the size of the appropriation and tap the state’s Budget Stabilization Account (BSA) (i.e., Rainy-Day Fund) for things like small business/landlord assistance and reopening schools. However, unlike in the House (the vote was 61-36), all but two Senate Republicans voted in favor of moving the measure forward to the Governor’s desk for signature. Governor Jay Inslee is expected to sign it sometime in the next week but no later than February 19. As a reminder, school districts will receive about \$688 million under ESSER II; to get the funds flowing, districts will need to submit an updated reopening plan by March 1 and a student learning loss recovery plan by June 1.

#### *Senate Republicans offer 2021-23 operating budget*

While unlikely to receive serious consideration by the majority Democrats, Senate Republicans released their two-year spending plan Thursday, February 11. [Watch the press conference here](#). Much like some of the amendments offered the previous day, [SB 5451](#) would transfer funds from the BSA and make significant investments in businesses, families, and schools to get the economy moving and schools reopened. The proposed \$55.5 billion budget details can be found [here](#); a PowerPoint used by the Senate Republicans during their budget announcement can be found [here](#) (download required), and budget highlights are [here](#).

Why offer a budget that won’t get any play? It is one way to suggest that a spending plan can be developed without relying on new taxes. Various capital gains and “wealth” tax proposals have been introduced by Senate and House Democrats, so the proposals by House Appropriations Ranking Republican Drew Stokesbary and Senate Ways & Means Ranking Republican Lynda Wilson are showing there is a path forward for the 2021-23 biennium that takes advantage of federal stimulus funds (included in HB 1368) and doesn’t rely on new taxes to meet state operating expenses.

## *What's on your mind?*

In addition to snow and Valentine's Day, lawmakers have been focused on reopening the economy, providing additional assistance to people who are struggling financially and emotionally, and reopening schools. Add one more issue that's getting a lot of airplay – expanding the state's broadband infrastructure.

Acknowledging that the pandemic has shone a bright light on the infrastructure inadequacies of broadband across the state, particularly in rural areas, legislators are debating the best way to bridge Internet deserts. The proposals include considering authorizing retail services to public utilities; mandating rights of way on state highways; and boosting the amount of funding available to state programs, as grants, loans and match to secure federal funds. Also in the mix are: "right to repair" legislation so that non-manufacturers can repair devices without voiding warranties, a mandate on school districts to provide 1:1 devices to all students and staff by the 2022-23 school year, and creating new accounts funded through fees on devices or cellular phone charges.

This past week, the Senate Ways & Means Committee held a public hearing on [SB 5357](#), a bill that would appropriate \$200 million in capital budget funds as a match to federal broadband program dollars. When asked what a realistic amount was that the state Broadband Office could actually take advantage of, Director Russ Elliott said \$30 million to \$50 million each year would be a good start. The bill is scheduled for executive action next week, so expect the bill to continue but at a reduced amount. That said, capital budget writers have shared that this biennium's broadband investments will be more robust than in previous years. Part of the catfight brewing is whether to use the Community Economic Revitalization Board (mainly an economic development infrastructure board) or the Public Works Board (mainly a community development infrastructure board) as the primary recipient of the funds. CERB was given some broadband loan/grant authority in the 2018 session, while the PWB first entered the broadband loan/grant market in 2019. Eligible entities in both cases are local governments and federally recognized tribes.

## *Stabilizing education funding*

As we all know, the majority of school districts have experienced some form of enrollment decline during the 2020-21 school year, which is resulting in a drop in state funding to districts. (The largest amount of state funding districts receive is based on how many students are enrolled in a district; fewer students enrolled results in less money apportioned to the district.) In addition to this decline, districts that aren't transporting students, that are transporting fewer students, or using their buses to bring school to students are also experiencing a decline in transportation funding dollars largely because the funding is based on ridership. School districts just received their first reduced apportionment payment; unfortunately, at the same time they are reopening schools more fully.

Initially considered as “early action bills,” two bills would attempt to stabilize this funding: [HB 1476](#) would address the enrollment decline, while [SSB 5128](#) would address the transportation funding shortfall. Both bills are still in play. SB 5128 passed out of the Senate Ways & Means Committee last week with only one No vote (Senator John Braun, R-Centralia, voted Nay without recommendation). With ESSER II funds on their way, lawmakers are expected to make these two bills part of the overall budget conversation later this session.

## WSPTA Legislative Priorities

*(all bills may be accessed [here](#))*

Washington State PTA adopts a [two-year platform](#). Delegates at the 2020 Legislative Assembly adopted five issues as the highest priority issues, and three as “Also Supported.” [Videos](#) and handouts for members’ use in advocacy efforts this session are posted on the WSPTA Advocacy [page](#) under each position statement.

After the policy cutoff, this report will offer an overview of bills still in play as they relate to the 2021 legislative platform. However, here are a few bills in (and out of) the education committees we are tracking:

- HB 1139 would require districts to take action to address lead in drinking water. The bill passed out of committee as [amended](#).
- [HB 1162](#) would create an additional pathway to high school graduation and lower the total number of credits required to graduate from 24 to 20. The bill still would require students to earn credit in the 17 core credits, which are aligned with pursuing postsecondary higher education. The bill passed out of the House Education Committee and is in the Rules committee. The bill needs a boost and is not favorably received (in general) by Republicans.
- [HB 1153](#) would make many changes for spoken and sign language interpreters. The bill passed the Education committee on a vote of 10-3.
- [HB 1302](#) would make changes to the College in the High School program. Using suggestions from WSPTA, the bill was [amended](#) and passed out of committee on February 12.
- HB 1214 would require school districts to offer expanded training for school resource officers and safety and security staff within six months of their start in a school. The amendment made other changes that can be viewed [here](#), including one advanced by WSPTA in testimony.
- HB 1356 would prohibit the use of Native American names, images, mascots or logos in school districts except under certain circumstances. The prohibition would not apply to a school district or school name. An amendment adopted in House Education [expanded](#) the exception.
- [SB 5299](#) would allow students to use computer science credits in lieu of the third math or science credit. The bill passed unanimously and was sent to the Rules Committee.

Here’s a look at Advocacy in Action for WSPTA:

- Gwen Loosmore [spoke in strong support](#) of [HB 1139](#), taking action to address lead in drinking water, in the House Education Committee January 26. The bill passed the House Education Committee and likely will move to the House Appropriations Committee for further debate.

- Washington State PTA continues to testify in favor of solutions that bridge the digital divide and lead to improved and equitable access to broadband infrastructure. [Hear](#) Nancy Chamberlain testify on [HB 1460](#) in the House Finance Committee.
- The Senate Early Learning & K-12 Education committee heard [SB 5386](#) and [SJR 8204](#), a policy bill and constitutional amendment request that would lower the threshold to pass bond measures to 55 percent. Michelle Nims, former WSPTA president, testified in support of a simple majority for bonds, sharing a personal story on the Everett School District that garnered 58.8% support in a global pandemic but failed to meet the 60% requirement. Listen [here](#).
- Given only one minute to testify, WSPTA member Brian Duncan asked House Education Committee members to carefully consider [HB 1396](#), which would limit student choice regarding social studies courses. Written testimony was also submitted. Hear Brian's remarks [here](#). Parent members who had signed in to speak on [HB 1404](#) (highly capable students) and [HB 1444](#) (access to mental health staff) were queued up but didn't get an opportunity to speak to the committee when it ran out of time in the public hearing. Written comments were also submitted. HB 1404 has a vote on Monday.
- President Janice Kutzera weighed in Tuesday, February 9, in support of [HB 1476](#), the bill to stabilize K-12 funding gaps due to enrollment decline in the majority of the state's school districts. Listen [here](#) to President Kutzera. In addition, [here](#) is the short House Appropriations staff briefing on the bill.

## The Week Ahead

*(Schedule subject to change, all bills can be founded through this [link](#))*

WSPTA will be focusing the next week on bills in fiscal committees. See the related bill tracking and events list for more information (schedule subject to change).