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Budgets released, different approaches for K-12

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Last week the Senate and House Democrats released transportation, operating and capital budgets, starting with transportation on Monday; the House capital budget Wednesday evening; the Senate operating and capital budgets on Thursday; and the House operating budget on Friday. The Senate Ways & Means Committee began holding hearings immediately on both the capital and operating budgets, while the House Appropriations Committee held a public hearing Saturday. Both fiscal committees plan to vote their respective budgets out of committee this week and will possibly pass them off the floor by next weekend.

Senate and House operating and capital budgets rely heavily on the three rounds of federal funds to shore up big ticket items like housing and mental health assistance; investments in broadband infrastructure and connectivity; and, for K-12, in learning loss recovery and summer re-engagement activities; stabilizing the current school year budgets; and ensuring that all school districts have a base level of federal funding to support students after this crazy year of remote, hybrid, and in-person instruction.

Both budgets would add \$24 million to extend transition supports for students with disabilities that turned 21 in the 2019-20 or 2020-21 school years and did not graduate with a regular diploma. They also both include \$14.8 million for two days of ongoing paraeducator training reimbursement grants to school districts.

- Here is the [Senate staff overview](#) of Chair Christine Rolfes' operating budget proposal.
- Here is the [House staff overview](#) of Chair Timm Ormsby's operating budget proposal.

Senate approach

In some of the biggest budget news, the Senate Chair [Proposed Substitute Senate Bill 5092](#) would fully restore transportation funding for school districts experiencing reduced ridership and who used buses to bring "school to students" during the pandemic. For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2021, it includes \$299 million, and another \$58.9 million in the 2021-23 operating budget. That's great news for school districts, most of which started taking budget hits in their February payment.

The Senate also includes \$190.7 million in "school funding stabilization." The budget narrative states the "*funds would be used to supplement federal funding to assist school districts with learning loss recovery and stabilize school district funding negatively impacted by COVID-related enrollment declines.*" Digging into the details a little, funding would be provided to ensure all school districts receive a minimum of \$1,500 per student, using a combination of all federal CARES and ESSER funding and state funding when needed.

Finally, the Senate adds \$200 million for Accelerated Learning Opportunities. The former is described as *“one-time funding for school district grants for the purpose of learning recovery and acceleration and to address learning loss.”* Allowable activities are described in the budget proviso.

In addition, other big investments include:

- \$48 million in additional special education safety net funding.
- \$32.7 million for more school counselors in high-poverty elementary schools.
- \$18 million for outdoor education.
- \$17.7 million for summer re-engagement.
- \$14.2 million for child nutrition under COVID.
- \$12 million for professional development in inclusionary practices.
- \$8 million Internet connectivity enhancement.

House approach

[Proposed Substitute House Bill 1094](#) takes a different approach to K-12, spending \$142.9 million to address learning loss and support summer enrichment and afterschool programs.

Another \$53 million is provided to school districts that will not receive funding through the ESSER subgrants sufficient to offset the revenue reductions due to lower enrollment and transportation ridership decline during COVID-19. Under this proposal, *“districts would be stabilized to 2019-20 enrollments across multiple programs if 2021-21 or 2021-22 enrollments are lower. For transportation, stabilization amounts are provided in 2020-21 up to 80 percent of annual allocations prior to February 2021, and 2021-22 allocations are stabilized to be equal to 2019-20 allocations.”*

Using state funds, the House would add five instructional days to the 2021-22 school year.

Other investments that blend federal and state funding include:

- \$71.8 million for grants to community-based organizations, dual language programs, balanced calendars, career and technical education, small school assistance, high school success pilots, OSPI administration and other items. (federal)
- \$56.9 million in educational technology, including grants for devices, training, and procurement. In addition, MSOC is increased by \$35 per student, beginning in the 2022-23 school year, to support broadband connectivity. (state)
- \$52.5 million to add 0.5 FTE guidance counselors per high-poverty school for each prototypical school level (i.e., elementary, middle and high school), beginning in the 2022-23 school year. (state)
- \$47.9 million to remove the 1.2 FTE enrollment limit for Running Start students, beginning in the 2020-21 school year. (state)

- \$16.0 million to add nursing staff to support one day a week of support for all school districts with less than 2,000 students enrolled. Staffing at regional school safety centers is increased to 2.5 FTEs per ESD. Also, \$16 million is added in fiscal year 2021 to address COVID-19 impacts. (state)
- \$14.2 million in emergency costs in child nutrition programs. (federal)
- \$8.9 million to eliminate school lunch co-pays for students in prekindergarten through 12th grade who are eligible for reduced-price lunches, expanding beyond the current coverage for grades K-3.

What about the transportation and enrollment stabilization bills?

[E2SSB 5128](#) passed out of committee as a [policy-only bill](#) and has been sent to the House Rules Committee. The policy bill is needed because it clarifies additional allowable activities for bus transportation in times of emergencies.

Last week the Senate Ways & Means Committee took public testimony in favor of [ESHB 1476](#). As a reminder, the bill has been stripped of most of its original language, and references only enrichment levy stabilization for calendar years 2022 and 2023. The Senate has scheduled the bill for a vote on March 30.

Death by deadline

Friday, March 26, was the final day for policy bills that passed one chamber to be heard and passed out of committee by the opposite chamber. This Friday, April 2, is the deadline for bills with a fiscal impact to have a hearing and pass the fiscal committees. Starting April 3, and through April 11, the action will return to the House and Senate floor.

Perhaps the most disappointing bill to suffer the cutoff was SHB 1162, which would have reduced the graduation credit requirement to 20 credits, as long as the 17 core credits and three personalized pathway credits had been earned. The bill also would have created a new graduation pathway – the performance exhibition. The bill is dead for the session.

Comparing capital budgets

Unlike the operating budget, the two-year spending plan for construction projects is developed in a bipartisan way, with Democrat and Republican capital budget leaders meeting frequently to discuss a budget that usually passes with few “No” votes. Here’s a quick overview of the House and Senate approaches:

Title/Activity	House: PSHB 1080	Senate: PSSB 5093	Comments
School Construction Assistance Program	\$718.7 million	\$781.7 million	
School District Modernization Grants	\$19.5 million	\$38.9 million	Senate level higher, includes \$1.1 planning grants. House has \$950,000 for planning grants

2021-23 School District Health & Safety	\$7.193 million	\$10 million	House: \$1.3 million for emergency repair (addresses unexpected and imminent health and safety hazards; \$4.193 million for urgent small repair projects (not to exceed \$200K per project); \$1 million for ADA compliance. Senate: \$3 million for emergency; \$7 million for urgent small repair and ADA compliance.
2021-23 Seismic Retrofit grants	\$65 million	\$3.1 million	House: \$63 million for projects; \$2.0 million for planning grants. \$128,000 of the appropriation is to study, estimate and provide future lead-contaminated drinking water remediation and mitigation costs associated with complying with codified lead remediation standards for schools.
2021-23 Lead Remediation	\$3.4 million	\$0	

The Week Ahead

See the Week 12 events and bill tracker.

Advocacy in Action

Washington State PTA parent advocates testified on the following issues:

- Last fall members adopted a position in support of preserving K-12 education funding under the pandemic. At issue was a possible \$9 billion budget deficit that could lead to reduced state funding and mid-year cuts. Fortunately, the state’s economy is recovering, and a third infusion of federal stimulus funds is forthcoming. Lizzy Sebring asked Senate Ways & Means Committee members to pass ESHB 1476, stabilizing enrollment funding, and to use state funds to make districts whole, not federal funds. Listen [here](#).
- President Janice Kutzera [testified](#) before the Senate Ways & Means Committee in support of most of the Senate Democrats’ operating budget proposals. The budget addressed five of WSPTA’s top operating budget priorities: stabilizing transportation funding, additional school counselors, increasing connectivity for families, ongoing training for paraeducators, and establishing a youth tip line. A major priority not completely funded was the enrollment decline. The Senate proposal would fund \$1,500 per student through a combination of state and federal funding to smooth out the federal funding. We think this is likely short of what districts have experienced this school year with enrollment decline and will continue to seek additional understanding on implementation of this element.