

April 4, 2021

Tell legislators to preserve K-12 funding this session

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Now that both chambers have released and passed their versions of a two-year operating budget, here are some suggestions of where to spend your advocacy efforts – please tell your legislators and budget writers to:

- Fund the actual costs of transportation funding for the 2020-21 school year.
 - As we've said all session: it costs the same amount to transport five students as it does 50.
 - District buses have been busy delivering school to students: meals, homework, hotspots, home visits and engagement checkups, and so much more under the Governor's proclamation related to allowable transportation activities.
 - Make sure budget language accounts for actual costs and costs allowed under the Governor's Proclamation.
- Allow school districts to use all of the three rounds of federal funding they have received or will receive for purposes related to the pandemic, not as backfill to enrollment decline.
- Stabilize all categories of enrollment decline with state support for school districts, providing a per-pupil amount so that all school districts benefit, and mid-year cuts are softened. This includes levy equalization and passing [ESHB 1476](#) to protect local enrichment levy collections in at least the calendar year 2022.
- Make a down payment on increasing staff to support student mental health and academic success, with the House investment in 0.5 school counselors for every prototypical school.
 - This was a promise made more than 10 years ago, and never has the time been more important to start phasing in the adults needed to support the varied needs of our students.
- Match the House levels of appropriations for computers and devices to close the digital divide.

If you are willing to send an email with this messaging, remember to personalize it to you and your student(s) experience and state that you are a member of Washington State PTA, the state's largest child advocacy organization.

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On the capital budget, WSPTA is encouraging Senate budget writers to:

- Support the House funding level of \$65 million for seismic safety retrofit projects.
- Support the House funding level of \$3 million for replacing drinking water fixtures contaminated with lead.

Three-week countdown to the end begins

The focus of the Legislature shifts this week to floor action every day and likely through next Sunday, as lawmakers work to pass bills out of the opposite chamber before the April 11, 5 pm deadline. The other major activity will be for budget writers to align their competing operating, capital, and transportation budgets before (virtually) leaving town on April 25. That's the last day of the 105-day 2021 session.

It's been a busy week. On March 27, the Senate Ways & Means Committee considered amendments to Chair Christine Rolfes' two-year spending plan, and then on April 1 passed ESSB 5092 by a margin of 27-22. The House "caught the budget on the fly," meaning it placed the budget bill immediately on the House floor. On April 3, the House struck the Senate budget language and replaced it with the House budget as passed Appropriations March 29 and as amended on the floor Saturday, by a vote of 57-41. The two negotiating teams will now try to meet over the next two and a half weeks in an effort to produce a single biennial budget.

While some might think the last round of federal funding (American Recovery Plan Act) with all of its unknowns might hinder budget leaders from finding a path forward, the challenge is more local. In late February, the Washington Supreme Court voided most drug possession cases in the state. The implications are huge. This [Crosscut article](#) is a good summary of the issue and the challenges facing the Legislature as the state's criminal justice system tries to figure out a path forward. The Senate Ways & Means Committee will meet Monday, April 5, to discuss the impact on the biennial budget.

In addition to all the budget excitement, [E2SHB 1139](#), acting on lead in drinking water, passed the Senate Ways & Means Committee by a strong bipartisan vote of 23-2. After the public hearing on April 1, it was announced that more than 640 people had signed in on the bill (only two were not signed in Pro). While not a record, the list was filled with about 600 WSPTA members responding to the “Call to Action” last week. Great job!!!

House operating budgets change slightly after release

Last week, this report had a list of the high-level K-12 education funding expenditures. The Senate made no significant changes, while the House backed away from its approach to add five instructional days to the 2021-22 school calendar. Instead, the House Appropriations Committee adopted a more flexible approach, which would allow school districts to use the funds for additional school days; additional school contracts for educators who will provide tiered academic and social-emotional supports to students; professional learning; assessment or data systems to review student progress throughout the year; and direct supports to students to improve school engagement and learning recovery. The funding level is \$278 million.

“Bridge Year” bill re-focuses to help students recapture lost opportunities for academic success

[2SSB 5265](#), the bridge year bill, received a serious makeover in the House Appropriations Committee last week. The bill would establish a temporary two-year program to provide an opportunity for students in the graduating classes of 2021 and 2022 to complete up to one additional school year to pursue academic and experiential opportunities that were diminished or eliminated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The clearly stated objective is to remedy learning loss; unmet graduation requirements, including those not available during the 2020-21 school year; fewer opportunities to access and earn 24 credits; fewer opportunities to access courses traditionally offered to students, including CTE and dual credit courses; fewer opportunities for mastering academic skills, including learning experiences related to music and drama and services provided to students with IEPs; and fewer or modified opportunities for social-emotional learning, and extracurricular and co-curricular activities.

Advocacy in Action

In addition to the amazing response to WSPTA members signing in to support ESHB 1139, acting on lead in drinking water, WSPTA testified on two critical bills:

- Gwen Loosmore encouraged members of the Senate Ways & Means Committee to pass ESHB 1139 out of committee and to provide the funding necessary to help school districts replace fixtures with lead contamination. Hear Gwen’s testimony [here](#).
- Registered professional engineer and WSPTA parent advocate DaleAnn Baker thanked House Capital Budget Committee members for their \$65 million investment in the school seismic safety retrofit program. The Senate was not as generous, with a proposal of only \$3.1 million. Seismic safety is one element of the legislative platform adopted last fall by members at Legislative Assembly. Hear DaleAnn’s testimony March 29 [here](#).