

April 11, 2021

Act Now: write your legislators and preserve K-12 funding

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This is the week that budget negotiators will begin working what is called the “differences list,” which is exactly what it sounds like – a list of differences between the House and Senate budget proposals. Negotiators will start with the easy stuff first and move to the areas where there is more disagreement or lack of alignment.

The proposed Senate and House budgets both contain critical strategies so that our K-12 system can fully support academic success and address the mental health needs of our students as they return fully to in-person instruction. These shared priorities are:

- Provide budget stability across enrollment and transportation for the 2020-21 school year.
- Ensure learning recovery funding allows targeted supports for students most in need of academic and social-emotional support in each district.
- Increase the number of school counselors for high-poverty schools (vetoed in 2020).

By combining state and federal funds in the supplemental and biennial budgets, the Legislature can fund these priorities and put students in a position to thrive. Last week’s report asked Washington State PTA members to write to their legislators to avoid mid-year cuts to this school year and stabilize funding for the 2021-22 school year. Pick one, two or all of these funding priorities, and share with your legislators:

1. 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 5 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.
2. Preserve ESSER 1 and ESSER 3 federal funding for purposes related to the pandemic, not as backfill to enrollment or transportation decline.
 - ESSER 1 funds were the first round of grants to school districts last September. These funds have been spent on PPE; devices and online curriculum; hiring additional instructional staff to address remote learning and health staff to support in-building screening, contact tracing, quarantine protocols, and additional sanitizing in buildings.
 - ESSER 3 funds can be spent through September 2023 and must be focused on the most pressing needs of a district’s students. To combine or force districts to use these funds before making state investments deprives students of valuable and needed staff and services.

3. Stabilize all categories of enrollment decline with combined state and federal (ESSER 2) funds so that all school districts benefit, and mid-year cuts are softened or avoided. This includes levy equalization to protect local levy collections in at least calendar year 2022.
 - The original HB 1476 stabilized all enrollment categories of students for this school year, ensuring no district would get less funding due to enrollment decline. It also allowed districts to use 2019-20 enrollment numbers for next school year to avoid reductions in funding for 2021-22. This is critical because funding formulas weren't built for a pandemic and can have unintended consequences.
 - The Learning Assistance Program (LAP) must be stabilized. This school year, the federal government has covered the cost of meals for students. Families have not turned in their "free and reduced price lunch" eligibility forms, and LAP is based on the district's FRPL percentages. Without the forms, the percentages for the 2021-22 school year will cut districts short and students may not get the services they have come to expect in other school years.
4. 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 level of high-poverty 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.
 - While we would support a more robust effort – mental health issues are not just in our high-poverty schools – we see this as a necessary first step for the 2022-23 school year.

In addition to these priorities common to both budgets – just at different levels and emphasis – Washington State PTA has these specific policy-level priorities that are based on our [2021 legislative platform](#):

- Include additional funding supports for innovative approaches to address the mental and physical health needs of our students through access to direct and telehealth services and an expanded Nurses Corps program for the next two school years.
- Match the House levels of appropriations for computers and devices to close the digital divide for all students, increasing MSOC allocations rather than creating a grant program.
- Support the House investment of \$12 million for inclusionary practices training for educators.
- Provide the funding and policy to conduct an anonymous suicide prevention/youth tip line pilot program, as envisioned in Representative Tom Dent's striking amendment for 2SSB 5327.

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.

Send emails to:

Senate

Christine.rolfes@leg.wa.gov; lisa.wellman@leg.wa.gov; mark.mullet@leg.wa.gov;
heather.lewis-lechner@leg.wa.gov

House

tim.ormsby@leg.wa.gov; pat.sullivan@leg.wa.gov; steve.bergquist@leg.wa.gov;
monica.stonier@leg.wa.gov; laurie.dolan@leg.wa.gov; lisa.callan@leg.wa.gov;
rashi.gupta@leg.wa.gov; alice.maclean@leg.wa.gov

Remember to send an email to your legislators so they know what is important to you.

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.

Here are the Senators you would write to, asking them to support House levels of funding:

Senate emails:

David.frockt@leg.wa.gov; mark.mullet@leg.wa.gov; jim.honeyford@leg.wa.gov;
mark.schoesler@leg.wa.gov; steven.ellis@leg.wa.gov; james.crandall@leg.wa.gov

Since the House Capital Budget was strong, encourage these House members to hold firm and retain their levels of investment in these two serious appropriations:

steve.tharinger@leg.wa.gov; lisa.calan@leg.wa.gov; David.hackney@leg.wa.gov;
mike.steele@leg.wa.gov; peter.abbarno@leg.wa.gov; joel.mcentire@leg.wa.gov
alec.osenbach@leg.wa.gov; stephanie.barnett@leg.wa.gov

Death by deadline

The only bill that has failed to pass the opposite chamber by the April 11 deadline was ESSB 5327, which would have established a youth tip line designed to prevent youth suicide. Funding was included in the Senate operating budget for the tip line and a striking amendment was drafted by Rep. Tom Dent, R-Moses Lake, at WSPTA's request. Unfortunately, the bill died in the House Rules committee. There still might be an opportunity to address part of the issue in the budget – we'll keep an eye out in the budget.

Down to the wire

E2SHB 1139, acting on lead in drinking water, was passed unanimously by the Senate, but only after an amendment was offered by Senator Lisa Wellman that modified the bill slightly. The 5

parts per billion threshold remains, but other changes were made to the bill as it passed the House. The bill will return to the House for concurrence with the amendment.

Also passed within the last hour before the 5 PM, April 11 deadline were the two retail sales broadband bills: the House passed ESSB 5383, Senator Wellman’s bill, with an amendment designed to satisfy some concerns and bring the two bills together, while ESHB 1336, Representative Hansen’s bill, was the last bill taken up in the Senate and also had clarifying amendments.

- On SB 5383, here are the two big amendments: [Wellman](#). [Dhingra](#).
- On HB 1336, here is the Hansen amendment: [Hansen](#)

Finally, ESSB 5044, relating to professional development standards in cultural competency, equity, inclusive and diversity, was the last bill considered by the House. Nearly every House Democrat spoke on an amendment offered by Rep. Jim Walsh that would have prohibited certain elements of cultural competency training, and the “debate” on that amendment lasted more than one hour. After 95 minutes of discussion, the bill passed 57-40 on a party line vote. The bill was significantly modified in the [House Appropriations Committee](#), so it will return to the Senate for concurrence.

Advocacy in Action

Washington State PTA President Janice Kutzera and Advocacy Director Sherry Rudolph sent letters this past week supporting our budget messages above and passage of “Closing the Digital Divide” bills: HB 1336, HB 1365, SB 5383.

- [Budget Priorities letter](#)
- [Supporting broadband infrastructure and devices letter](#)