

How to use these talking points

Here are WSPTA's Top 5 priorities for the 2022 legislative session. Every meeting should include a quick overview of the Top 5 priorities. Please pick one of the priorities that you would like to discuss in your meeting with the legislator.

- Each priority has talking points with WSPTA messaging.
- Please find a personal story or hook that you can use for your selected issue – we're giving you points and facts – you supply the personal story from your student, your school, your district.
- Remember to read the one-pagers and watch the videos on the issues you're selecting. These will give you added comments/messaging.

Washington State PTA Top 5 Legislative Priorities

1. [Increase Access to Nursing, Mental Health, and Social Emotional Learning Staff](#)
2. [Support Students and Preserve Education Funding](#)
3. [Increase Educational Equity by Closing the Digital Divide](#)
4. [Supports and Funding for Students with Disabilities and Their Families](#)
5. [Prevent and Reduce Gun Violence and Suicide](#)

Increase Access to Nursing, Mental Health, and Social Emotional Learning Staff

If the pandemic has shown us nothing else, it's that our students' mental health is fragile and we need additional non-instructional staff in our schools to support student physical and mental health.

Even though the Legislature has made great strides in funding K-12 education – and we thank you for that – positions for school nurses, counselors, psychologists, social workers are woefully underfunded and most districts use levy funding – which is supposed to be used for enrichment activities – for the basics of having more than a small percentage of a school nurse.

For example, to generate one school nurse, an elementary school would need more than 5000 students attending that school! That means for a typical 400-student elementary school, the state pays for about one-eighth of a nurse. We know most urban schools will have at least one school nurse, which means local taxpayers are covering that cost.

Personal stories, facts from your school or district here

Last session the Legislature added funding for a 0.5 school counselor in high-poverty schools. (High-poverty schools are those with more than 50% students eligible for free and reduced price lunch.) The Governor's proposed supplemental operating budget included \$184 million to support additional staff in these types of positions in all schools.

Number of high-poverty schools and children impacted in your district here.

We're asking you to make this year the year for additional investments in these staff to create more access to services for our students. At a minimum, we support the Governor's proposed \$184 million for improved staffing.

We need to support the medical and mental health – our students are depending on us.

In addition, it is important to recognize that we have severe staffing shortages in these professions and our more rural school districts may struggle even harder to find qualified staff or contractors.

Please consider policies that will create opportunities to be innovative and use telehealth access for medical and mental health in schools of districts that cannot provide in-person services or don't have access to professionals.

[Link to one-pager for this issue](#)

[Link to video for this issue](#)

If you have time, please ask your district or school:

- How many nurses, counselors, social workers or psychologists are in your student's school or district? How many are paid by the state and how many from local levy funds?
- Where do they think the greatest need is for increasing staffing ratios?

Support Our Students by Preserving and Stabilizing K-12 Funding – no mid-year cuts

State funding formulas for schools weren't meant for a pandemic.

Last year the Legislature recognized that the pandemic had seriously impacted school district funding, with the majority of students learning remotely for the first half+ of the school year. In the 2021 session legislators stabilized enrollment and transportation funding, avoiding mid-year cuts.

Even though the majority of students have returned to in-person learning, enrollment and transportation are still behind the pre-pandemic levels of participation.

We're asking you to maintain funding at pre-pandemic levels to allow the system to stabilize and recover.

- Enrollment has declined for the 2021-22 school year, but costs were budgeted and staff hired based on projections and appropriations prior to the school-year start.
- The federal funds districts received are being used to address pandemic issues like contact tracing, quarantining, hiring additional instructional staff, and student learning recovery.
- The federal funds were NOT for state obligations that support the operation and function of a regular school year.
- Districts need the funds that were budgeted for the 2021-22 school year to meet existing costs for educators, bus drivers, lunch staff, and others who keep the school operational. This is really a "continuity of service" issue.
- Fewer students are riding buses even though we've returned to in-person learning, but it costs the same to transport 5 kids as 50.

Personal story from your school or district here

We are asking you to support bills or budget investments that stabilize enrollment and transportation funding at pre-pandemic levels to allow the system to recover.

- Kids will be back. But if we lose valuable staff to mid-year cuts, they may be gone forever.

[Link to one-pager for this issue](#)

[Link to video for this issue](#)

If you have time, to help with your personal information/facts, please ask your district or school:

- What is the percentage enrollment decline at your district?
- How much funding does that represent? (e.g., a general education student generates about \$10,000. If the district is down 100 students, it would be down \$1 million in state funding.
- How is transportation working this year and is the state on track to meet transportation expenses?

Increasing Educational Equity by Closing the Digital Divide

Washington State PTA believes that access to robust broadband infrastructure is essential and should be universal and reliable, like access to clean electricity and running water.

Last session the legislature invested a lot of federal money to expand broadband access across the state. You also created opportunities for competition to make sure that unserved areas will be connected. And you recognized the need for every student to have access to developmentally appropriate and Internet-enabled devices.

But the issue isn't resolved – it will take time, money and efforts to connect our communities, our students, and our families.

The benefit isn't just with schools. We know that strong and robust broadband infrastructure is critical for telehealth, commerce and economic development, an informed citizenry, and just about every aspect of our daily life.

Personal stories here (e.g., what was last school year like, how many students and parents were using the system? Did you even have a device or connectivity?)

Last session the Legislature made great strides to improve connectivity and increase digital equity. But more needs to be done to fill in the gaps, particularly in areas without affordable Internet or access to Internet.

The federal Infrastructure & Jobs Act sets aside additional funding for state broadband efforts. Invest the funds, using the programs in place; prioritizing areas that are unserved and continuing to support an affordable cost for connectivity.

Our ask to you is that as more federal funding comes to the state, please invest those funds in programs that will continue to connect neighborhoods and communities.

- Schools need the ability to pivot to online learning when there's an emergency or disaster – whether it's fire, earthquake, extended snow, or other disaster that can't be avoided.
- The economy is recovering as people get back to work, even if that work is remote. Stable and affordable Internet is critical to continued recovery.
- In addition to the investments, we need accountability – reports on progress to make sure we are meeting the goal of increasing educational equity by closing the digital divide.

[Link to one-pager for this issue](#)

[Link to video for this issue](#)

If you have time, to help with your personal information/facts, please ask your district or school:

- Does your district have 1:1 devices?
- How is the district working in the community on broadband connectivity? What do they need to be successful?

Increase Supports and Funding for Students with Disabilities and Their Families

When districts had to shift to online learning in spring 2020, it's our students with disabilities who suffered the most. Not only did they not have access to PT, OT, and other therapies that support their access to learning, a remote environment wasn't conducive to all students' success. In the 2020-21 school year, districts made some progress, but students with disabilities were still at a disadvantage (*you can share how in personal stories section*).

This school year, districts are doing better, but the pandemic has only exacerbated the challenges facing students with disabilities and their parents and families.

Students with disabilities deserve access to educational services and opportunities that will support their learning and success in our public schools.

While the Legislature has added funding for the Special Education program since 2017, there is still a gap between what the federal and state government funds and what is actually needed to educate students with disabilities.

OSPI has estimated the gap is \$300 million a year. This becomes an equity issue, when districts must rely on their enrichment levy or local effort assistance to deliver federally required educational services.

As the state seeks to improve inclusion in general education classrooms, it also must increase the level of funding to support the staff, technology, and services that will lead to academic success.

Personal story here

Our ask to you is for the Legislature to step up and fully fund the true cost of education for students with disabilities. That includes removing the artificial cap of 13.5% on special education funding.

- *(This cap means that the state will only fund a district up to 13.5% of its total enrollment designated as special education. If a district's students with disabilities percentage is 15% of its total student enrollment, there's an automatic gap).*
- The artificial cap only increases the gap between what students need and what the state funds.

In addition, parents, guardians and families of students with disabilities need access to resources to know how to best support their student to achieve a healthy and productive life.

- We encourage the legislature to increase local family engagement centers across the state and implement a statewide online portal with training.

[Link to one-pager for this issue](#)

[Link to video for this issue](#)

If you have time, to help with your personal information/facts, please ask your district or school:

- What is the underfunding between the state funding and actual costs to support educational programs for students with disabilities?
- What's the percentage of students with disabilities at the district?

Prevent & Reduce Gun Violence and Youth Suicide

We know that our children struggled with mental and behavioral health issues before the pandemic, and that has been exacerbated with COVID and the isolation/fear/illness that it has created.

- COVID-19 has caused increased anxiety, depression, and isolation in our youth. COVID-19 has caused increased thoughts of suicide and self-harm in youth and young adults ages 11-24.
- Firearms are the second leading cause of death for American children.
- In Washington, death by suicide (primarily by firearm) is now the leading cause of death for youths 10-24, killing over 150 children per year.
- 4.6 million children live in a home with at least one unlocked and loaded firearm.
- Access to unlocked firearms increases youth suicide risk almost ten-fold.
- Roughly 80% of youth suicides use a family member's gun.
- Death by suicide is 5× less likely when neither guns nor ammunition is available.
- LGBTQ+ youth are 5 times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers.
- Top reasons why youth report safety concerns are due to suicidal ideation, bullying and drug use.

Personal story here

Our ask to you is to increase the number of staff in school buildings who can focus on student mental, social and physical health. We support the Governor's proposal of \$184 million to support additional school counselors, nurses, psychologists and social workers.

We also would ask you to support policy and funding to:

- Invest in community-based prevention strategies.
- Prohibit the sale or transfer of military-style assault weapons and limit rounds. And finally,
- Promote safe firearm and medication storage to reduce youth suicide.

[Link to one-pager for this issue](#)

[Link to video for this issue](#)