

WSPTA recognizes that Washington state needs to increase its responsibility for and financial share in school construction projects as part of Washington's paramount duty to amply fund basic education.

Background

- When the McCleary case on basic education funding was decided in 2012, it did not address school construction funding. While a state construction assistance program provides some funding, for the most part school districts must pass school bonds or capital levies to construct and maintain school facilities.⁽¹⁾
- School construction funding is critical to pay for school construction projects including the purchase of property, building new schools, modernizing, and expanding existing schools, and increasing safety measures.
- Some school districts can pass capital bonds and levies while others cannot, resulting in inequitable learning environments for students. Many districts around the state are unable to support school construction bonds or capital levy measures due to lower assessed property values with a small commercial base, resulting in higher tax increases when compared to urban areas with larger commercial tax bases.⁽²⁾
- Washington is one of only 11 states that require more than a 50% vote to pass school bonds. Between 2017 and 2020, 130 school bonds were on the ballot. Of these, 62 passed at 60%, while 15 failed to reach 50%. That means 53 districts met a simple majority for bonds threshold, but those students were denied new or renovated schools due to the outdated 60% threshold.⁽³⁾

Proposed Solutions

Washington State PTA shall advocate for legislation or policies that:

- Increase overall state funding and funding options for school construction projects and improvements.
- Provide equitable funding options so all school districts across the state can complete capital projects and improvements.
- Lower the 60 percent super-majority to pass bonds to no more than 55 percent with a strong preference for a simple majority of 50 percent.

Citations

- (1) <https://waschoolexcellence.org/the-mccleary-case/>
- (2) <https://www.seattletimes.com/education-lab/small-washington-district-sues-state-for-relying-on-local-property-taxes-for-school-construction/>
- (3) Bond and levy spreadsheet from DA Davidson - contact WSPTA Advocacy Director for citation (PTAadvocacydir@wastatepta.org)

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For more information on the WSPTA advocacy program, please visit our website.