

18.46 K-12 Education Funding

Resolution passed 2023

Whereas, Washington State PTA has been advocating to redefine and amply fund public education since at least 1982, in addition to a longstanding history of support for health and welfare legislation and programs for our children and youth; and

Whereas, the Washington State Constitution provides that “it is the paramount duty of the state to make ample provision for the education of all children residing within its borders...” (Article IX, Section 1); and

Whereas, in a case originally filed in 2007, the Washington State Supreme Court ruled the state was not amply funding the costs of basic education for public-school students as part of the McCleary decision in 2012. In response, the legislature began phasing in additional funding for transportation and smaller class sizes and, in 2017, revamped various statutes and funding associated with the state public K-12 school system to provide additional funds for districts and staff, including increasing the share of state property taxes and changing how local levy revenues are calculated and their allowed uses; and

Whereas, the legislature adopted a new basic education funding formula in 2009 that created a prototypical school model (PSM). Under the PSM, funding is based not on actual costs, but on a complicated allocation formula based on staffing ratios using a prototypical size elementary, middle, and high school, and class size ratios. In addition, there is a separate formula for transportation; separate funding for materials, supplies, and operating costs (MSOC); and categorical funding (which has its own set of formulas) for special education, transitional bilingual instruction programs, learning assistance programs (LAP), and programs for highly capable students; and

Whereas, despite updates to the PSM formula and positive legislative intent, significant gaps in what it costs to operate schools and the level of state funding still exist. Districts continue to face funding shortfalls due to inequitable funding around the state; funding fluctuations due to changing student enrollment; and state and federal funding not matching the actual costs of staffing, transportation and funding for programs such as special education, which continues to fall short of what it costs to provide the services; and

Whereas, Local Effort Assistance (LEA) funding and local voter approved levies are important supplements to Washington state funding and are intended to provide districts the means to enrich their school programs and staffing ratios beyond the state-defined minimum of basic education; and

Whereas, levy dollars are not to be used to pay for basic education, but are for enrichment, staffing and programs beyond basic education. However, a high percentage of levy dollars continues to be spent on compensation for staffing above basic education allocations, and for programs including special education, transportation, and other basic education programs. The current levy formula is capped, is inequitable, and results in widely varying levy funds per student across the state. Further funding inequities result when voters in some districts do not approve local levies; and

Whereas, property-poor districts would need to levy very high property tax rates in order to raise significant local revenues, but are statutorily capped or cannot afford a higher property tax. LEA is funded by the state, however the total of LEA plus levies in property-poor districts is still much lower than the local revenues other, property-rich districts can raise, resulting in inequitable levels of dollars among school districts available for enrichment; and

Whereas, Washington state is recognized as having one of the most regressive tax systems in the United States.

Therefore, be it

Resolved, that Washington State PTA and its local PTAs and councils will advocate to ensure all school districts have ample federal and state funding to support 21st century skills and learning, and to meet the needs of all students, including, but not limited to funding for:

- Appropriate staffing levels that meet the operational costs of providing services to students in our public schools, including an equitable staff salary that considers regional differences in cost of living and the education and years of experience of educators
- Actual costs of providing student transportation
- Actual costs of educational services and tools for all students with disabilities, including Special Education and accommodations as described in 504 plans, as well as the cost of identifying disabilities
- A meaningful high school diploma, including sufficient class periods for students to meet the 24-credit requirement, while maintaining student ability to participate in desired electives
- Categorical funding to support highly mobile student populations (students in foster care, students facing homelessness or housing instability, incarcerated students, students in migrant families, and students in military families)
- Funding to remove the financial barriers to access dual credit programs such as Running Start, College in the High School, and Advanced Placement (AP)/International Baccalaureate (IB)/Cambridge International (CI)
- 10 state-funded staff professional learning days (professional development), providing a balance between state-directed and district-directed topics
- Resources for students needing additional academic, physical, and social emotional supports
- Learning Assistance Program (LAP) supplemental instruction and services for students who are not yet meeting academic standards in basic skills areas
- Transitional Bilingual Instructional Education (TBIP) program for multi-language learners
- Equitable access to highly capable programs
- Sufficient funding for MSOC costs to include age-appropriate technology, textbooks, library books, curriculum, and other supplies
- Title I funds to provide financial assistance to schools with high numbers or percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure all students meet challenging state academic standards
- Full-day kindergarten and quality early learning programs
- Class sizes that support student academic and social-emotional success
- Family engagement funding that addresses costs related to accessible engagement with all our families, including the cost of high-quality interpretation and translation

- School construction funding that meets the needs of 21st century schools and learners; and be it further

Resolved, that Washington State PTA and its local PTAs and councils will advocate for a levy and LEA funding system that:

- Provides all districts the means to enrich their programs and meet the unique needs of their students
- Equitably addresses district needs no matter their size, demographics, or location in the state
- Assures school districts do not need to fund basic education services using enrichment levy dollars; and be it further

Resolved, that Washington State PTA and its local PTAs and councils will advocate for legislation or policies that amply fund K-12 public education to close gaps and address inequities with predictable, progressive, and sustainable revenue sources, while avoiding unfunded mandates or negatively impacting other programs that support children, youth, family and community well-being; and be it further

Resolved, that Washington State PTA and its local PTAs and councils will work to ensure there is transparency, oversight, and meaningful family and community engagement in education funding and budgets so that:

- Schools or districts are not asking for, or allowing, PTAs to pay for basic education programs, including staff
- Education programs and funding formulas are transparent and revised regularly
- When funding formulas are revised, they include a “do-no-harm” provision to ensure districts do not receive less funding than previously provided
- Families and the local community have a voice in school district and school-site budgets and are meaningfully engaged in budget discussions at the state and local level
- Elected officials at all levels are held accountable for all public education spending and funding.