

Washington Education Association School Funding Recommendations to the Washington Legislature

“It is the paramount duty of the state to make ample provision for the education of all children residing within its borders, without distinction or preference on account of race, color, caste, or sex.” – Washington Constitution, 1889

Washington’s 1.1 million public school students have a constitutional right to an amply funded quality public education.

Our state Constitution is the only one in the United States of America that specifically covers all children, regardless of race, color, caste or sex. The constitution makes it clear the state’s obligation to our students is the same whether they live in Toppenish or Mercer Island, and whether they come from a family of software engineers or migrant farm workers.

In Washington state, public education is a civil right. A quality public education gives all children the opportunity to be successful. Yet every day the state fails to fully fund basic education, we are violating our children’s civil rights. Now, nearly 10 years after the McCleary school funding case began, it is time to deliver on the promise our Constitution makes to our children.

Recognizing that public education is both the state’s paramount duty *and* every child’s constitutional civil right, the Supreme Court, in its McCleary decision, ordered the state to increase state funding for basic education.

Some, however, want to make McCleary about *anything* other than increasing state funding for basic education. Washington Education Association members remind legislators that:

McCleary *is not* about levy reform.

McCleary *is not* about increasing state control over public schools or reducing local flexibility and decision-making.

McCleary *is not* about restricting how teachers are paid.

McCleary *is* about the Legislature keeping its constitutional promise to our children and fully funding the basic education program it – the Legislature itself – wrote into law.

The Legislature established high expectations and a broad vision when defining the goals of basic education in Washington, found in RCW 28A.150.210:

- (1) Read with comprehension, write effectively, and communicate successfully in a variety of ways and settings and with a variety of audiences;
- (2) Know and apply the core concepts and principles of mathematics; social, physical, and life sciences; civics and history, including different cultures and participation in representative government; geography; arts; and health and fitness;

(3) Think analytically, logically, and creatively, and to integrate technology literacy and fluency as well as different experiences and knowledge to form reasoned judgments and solve problems; and

(4) Understand the importance of work and finance and how performance, effort, and decisions directly affect future career and educational opportunities.

The Washington Constitution requires the state to amply fund a public education that gives every student an opportunity to meet the goals and expectations the legislature has set into law. Ample does not mean the bare minimum or just enough to get by. The dictionary definition of ample is “more than enough.”

Yet, based on the most recent data available:

- Washington students remain in some of the most crowded classrooms in the country. Washington is 46th out of 50 states for class sizes.
- Washington is dead last in average teacher compensation among West Coast states.
- Washington ranks 39th in education spending per student, well below the national average.

These statistics do not describe the amply funded education system our Constitution requires.

As educators, WEA members put students at the center of everything we do. An amply funded public school should provide every child with individual attention and support from committed, qualified, caring adults in the classroom, the library, the cafeteria, the playground, the school office and on the school bus.

We believe the state should focus on making investments in K-12 public schools that directly benefit students. Our experience and professional judgment as educators leads us to make the following recommendations regarding state funding for public schools:

Recommendation: *Fully fund the prototypical school model as envisioned by the state’s Quality Education Council and enacted by voters in Initiative 1351, including additional support staff and smaller class sizes in every grade level.*

All students deserve small class sizes and professional support that provide the individual one-on-one attention they need to be successful. Students thrive in classrooms that are not overcrowded and where educators have the time to meet each student’s unique learning needs. The state’s Quality Education Council, formed in response to the McCleary lawsuit, understood the value of smaller class sizes and recommended that the state reduce class sizes at all levels.

The voters made smaller K-12 class sizes part of basic education through Initiative 1351, which they approved in 2014.

Small class sizes and individualized support are even more vital in schools with higher concentrations of students who are struggling or at risk of falling further behind. That is why the state’s Quality Education Council recommended, and voters approved, even lower class sizes in the schools that have the highest concentrations of students living in poverty.

Here are the student ratios required by existing law (I-1351 plus current funding of Lab Sciences):

Grade	Non-High Poverty	High Poverty
K-3	17	15
4	25	22
5-12	25	23
Lab Science Grades 9-12	19.98	19.98
Career and Technical Education	19	19
Skills Centers	16	16

While the role of the teacher is vital to students' success, students also need to receive additional instruction, guidance, and support from other caring, committed, and qualified adults in the school such as principals, librarians, paraeducators, nurses, counselors, social workers, psychologists, secretaries, and parent involvement coordinators. Safe and healthy schools are maintained by custodians, food service workers, and maintenance workers. Here are the staff ratios required by existing law (I-1351):

Staffing of Prototypical School (Ratios based per "X" enrollment)	Elementary of 400 students	Middle School of 432 students	High School of 600 Students
Principals/Building Administrators	1.3	1.4	1.9
Teacher Librarians	1	1	1
School Nurses	0.585	0.888	0.824
Social Workers	0.311	0.088	0.127
Psychologists	0.104	0.024	0.049
Guidance Counselors	0.5	2	3.5
Teaching Assistance - Classified	2	1	1
Office Support and Non-Instructional Aides	3	3.5	3.5
Custodians	1.7	2	3
Classified Staff for Student & Staff Safety	0	0.7	1.3
Parent Involvement Coordinators	1	1	1

District Staff	Per 1000 Students
Technology	2.8
Facilities/Maintenance/Grounds	4
Warehouse/Laborers/Mechanics	1.9

Initiative 1351 holds the state to its own recommendations for class sizes and school staffing. Yet the 2015 Legislature voted to delay implementation of I-1351 until 2022. At that pace, another generation of Washington students will be educated in an unconstitutional, underfunded system since the time the Supreme Court first issued its McCleary decision.

The 2016 Legislature approved controversial charter school legislation that affects 1,000 students in eight schools. The same Legislature failed to make any significant progress toward amply funding public schools for 1.1 million students as ordered by the Supreme Court. It is time to live up to the words and values of our constitution and to make basic education for all of our students the paramount duty of our state. The implementation of the prototypical school model enacted with Initiative 1351 should be expedited.

Recommendation: *Fully fund competitive, professional base pay and benefits for all K-12 school employees, and maintain flexibility for school districts to supplement educators' pay beyond the base state salary.*

All students deserve caring, committed and qualified teachers and education support professionals. The state must provide funding that allows districts to pay competitive, market-based wages as outlined in the Compensation Technical Working Group report from 2012, and adjusted for inflation since that report was developed:

- Beginning pay for certificated educators should be over \$54,000 in the 2017-18 school year, which is significantly higher than the state's beginning salary allocation of \$35,700 for 2016-17.
- Classified staff salaries should be allocated at averages that range from about \$41,000 to almost \$94,000 depending on the type of position. Those competitive classified salaries are all higher than the 2016-17 school year state average salary allocation for classified staff, which is \$33,412 for most districts.
- Once competitive wages are funded by the state, the state should fund annual cost-of-living adjustments and periodic updates to a comparable wage analysis to ensure that state funding remains competitive or ample over time.

The following table shows the recommended K-12 staff salaries based on the Compensation Technical Working Group's 2012 report.

2017-18 School Year	
BEGINNING SALARY	
Beginning Teachers and other Cetificated Instructional Staff	\$54,718
AVERAGE SALARIES	
Instructional Aide / Paraprofessionals	51,006
Office Support	46,021
Custodians	44,340
Classified Staff - Safety	49,494
Family Involvement Coordinator	51,006
Technology	93,565
Facilities, Maintenance, Grounds	56,257
Warehouse, Laborers, Mechanics	41,045
Central Office - Classified	63,356
(Compensation Technical Working Group Recommendations - Adjusted for Inflation since 2012 report)	

Competitive compensation includes health benefits. As with salaries, state funding has not kept pace with the increased cost of health benefits:

- The state allocation for K-12 health benefits increased by less than 2% total (only \$12 per month) since the 2010-11 school year, while national trends have put health benefit inflation much higher.
- Funding for K-12 health benefits is significantly below legislator and state employee benefits. In 2017, the state will allocate \$780 per K-12 FTE staff per month while funding \$888 per eligible state employee (half-time or more).
- The state has underfunded the cost of health benefits in two ways. The rate has not kept pace with inflation. In addition, the state funds K-12 employees on an FTE basis, prorating any health benefit support when someone works less than full-time. For state employees, every employee that works half-time or more generates the full health benefit funding. As a result, it will take hundreds of millions of dollars just to create funding parity with the state system.

This underfunding of K-12 health benefits generally has been borne by K-12 employees, not by school districts, because many districts tied their contributions to the state allocation. When state rates are flat, any inflationary costs are passed along to employees.

At a minimum, the state should allocate funding to districts for K-12 health benefits on par with what it is providing for legislators and state employees. School districts should retain the ability to decide which insurance plans to offer their employees; there is no evidence that creating a new state health care bureaucracy will save money nor improve the quality of healthcare.

The McCleary order is clear that fully funding educators' base salaries and benefits is the state's responsibility as part of basic education. However, there is no legal requirement for limiting local school districts' freedom to pay teachers for additional time, responsibility and incentives beyond their state-

funded basic education responsibilities. We recommend maintaining the current flexibility school districts have to negotiate pay and benefits with their employees to address local needs. By definition, collective bargaining is between employees and their employers. K-12 school employees are employed by their school districts, not the state of Washington.

Recommendation: *Fund 10 days of professional development for certificated instructional staff and job-specific training for other educational support professionals.*

Students need qualified teachers and support staff who are well-trained, yet the state currently does not fund any professional development days for most educators. The state should fund 10 days of professional development for certificated instructional staff as outlined in the state's Compensation Technical Working Group report from 2012 and fund professional development opportunities for all classified staff based on their work assignment. Professional development for paraeducators must be funded and should be based on the recommended employment standards from the Paraeducator Work Group Report submitted to the Legislature in 2016.

Recommendation: *Fully fund curriculum, utilities and school supplies.*

Students need well-maintained schools, current curriculum and adequate school supplies. The state must fully fund the cost of updated curriculum, adequate supplies and heat, lights and other Maintenance, Supplies, and Operating Costs (MSOCs).

The state developed MSOC allocation formulas at a time when districts were operating in an unconstitutionally underfunded system. Many corners were cut – especially in textbook and curriculum costs. In addition, changing technology offerings and subscriptions may change the cost structure over time. The state should review current spending on essentials such as heat and lights, and should develop a model cost for areas where districts often scrimp and save – such as technology, curriculum, and library materials.

Funding for Career and Technical Education (CTE) MSOCs should be raised to reflect the adjustments that have been made in the regular MSOC allocation. CTE programs have higher operating costs on average due to equipment and materials that are needed for many of these programs. Historically, this has been recognized in higher MSOC allocations for CTE programs. But, as the state has increased allocations for MSOC in general education, it has not provided corresponding increases for CTE.

Recommendation: *Fully fund modern technology for all students.*

The state must ensure that students have access to 21st century technology – including sufficient numbers of computers or technology tools and reliable connectivity. Washington's school system should allow every student the opportunity to develop computer and technology skills; it should not reinforce the digital divide.

A recent *Crosscut* article titled “Why Washington Kids Aren’t Getting Our Best Jobs” highlighted the status of STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) education and computer science education in particular since software engineering is considered the state’s most common profession.

<http://crosscut.com/2016/06/washington-kids-stem-economy/>

- “As of last school year, just 7 percent of high schools offer a computer science class, according to Washington STEM,” and
- “Demographic gaps in computer science participation are particularly striking: In 2014, just 23 of the 1,048 Washington students who took Advanced Placement Computer Science were African American, 25 were Hispanic, and 260 were girls, according to Code.org.”

A student’s zip code should not dictate their educational opportunities. All students, regardless of their zip code, should have access to a full spectrum of course offerings, including technology courses.

Recommendation: *Fund specific student needs.*

The state must fully fund basic education formulas for students with specific educational needs. Special education, gifted, learning assistance program, and transitional bilingual education for English language learners are all essential for providing an opportunity to achieve the basic education goals for all students. As staffing and compensation are addressed in the underlying funding for all students, these programs too must be adjusted to reflect compensation changes and should generate funds to be fully staffed based on the instructional time or service levels assumed in statute.

Recommendation: *Fully fund school construction to modernize existing schools, build new schools and expand classroom capacity.*

All students deserve to learn in clean and safe school facilities, including ample classroom spaces equipped with modern technology. The state must modernize the school construction funding program to reflect the lower class sizes funded by the state, and reexamine space and construction cost assumptions to reflect current construction climate, and ensure that schools are safe and healthy for staff and students.

Recommendation: *Fully fund to/from transportation costs in all districts*

While the state funding formulas have been improved for transportation, the new formula does not fully fund the cost of transporting students to/from school. The formula is based on year-old data with estimates of how costs change from year to year. Those estimates may not keep pace with reality. In addition, some districts face greater challenges in meeting the state’s definition of efficient transportation because of topography, urban congestion, and other factors. When transportation is not fully funded, districts must find other funding sources to meet transportation costs or make cuts or changes to academic programs in order to become more “efficient” in their transportation system. We have lost our focus on meeting the civil rights of students if we make educational decisions based on the most efficient operations of a transportation program. That is not an amply funded system. The state

must fully fund the actual costs of transportation so that districts and their communities can focus on their core mission: providing a basic education for every Washington student.

Recommendation: *Reform the tax code to support basic education*

Washington's tax code hurts our students in two ways: It is unfair to the families of the students who need the most support, and it doesn't generate enough revenue to fully fund basic education and other critical needs.

Washington's public schools are the state's paramount duty, but they are not the state's only funding obligation.

As educators, we see the challenges that many of our students and their families face every day. We do not support funding education at the expense of needed safety net programs that these children and their families need. Cutting health and social services such as early learning opportunities, foster care, TANF, mental health or chemical dependency treatments would only cause more of those needs to appear in our schools and make the challenge of providing opportunities for all students to meet our state learning expectations harder and more costly to achieve in K-12. In addition, cutting off students' future opportunities, such as higher education, would not serve our students nor our state. Access to higher education brings opportunities to individuals and economic benefits to our state.

It is widely known that Washington has the most unfair tax code in the nation – placing the greatest burden on our lowest-income families while asking less of our most affluent citizens. We support efforts to reexamine Washington's tax code and to identify changes that would make it more equitable, more consistent and more sufficient.

There are many options to consider and many places to look - from changes within the current code, such as closing tax loopholes, to more broad based change to the overall tax code, including comparisons to structures in other states. For example, recent reports of Washington Department of Revenue data indicate that adopting a tax code like Idaho would raise significant revenues to address McCleary.

Story from Oregon Public Broadcasting:

<http://www.opb.org/news/article/washington-oregon-sales-income-tax-comparison/>

“An unofficial calculation prepared by Washington's Department of Revenue indicates that if Washington had Oregon's income-tax system, it would collect \$9.6 billion more per fiscal period than it does now.”

“The calculation also says that if Washington had Idaho's tax system – a combination of income and sales tax – the state would be \$10 billion richer.”

<https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/2715904-Tax-Rate-Comparison.html>

Recommendation: *Protect levy funding and preserve local control of public schools.*

Washington has 295 local school districts, each one governed by a locally elected school board accountable to its voters. Local school boards are in the best position to decide how funding and resources should be spent to support local needs.

Elected school boards are accountable to their local communities to provide a basic education for all students and to implement the parent, educator, and community vision for their school district, which may be above and beyond what the state has defined as basic education.

Our 295 districts are quite different, with different enrollment sizes, differences in the numbers of languages spoken, or varying geographic sizes. There is not a one-size approach to Washington schools.

Local, community control is a longstanding bedrock value across Washington. Local communities are invested in their schools and school districts as part of their local identity. During the Senate listening tour in the fall of 2015, parents were vocal in their support for local levies – with the connections that they bring between districts and their communities and for the accountability that comes with passing local levies.

Local levies fund student enrichment as determined by district administrators and their communities, and levies give them the flexibility to meet the unique needs of their students, including the need to pay educators beyond the state-funded base salary. The Supreme Court has not required levy reform as a component of the McCleary implementation, and the court has expressly stated that it is offering no opinion on the issue of levy reform.

The core McCleary issue is the ample funding of public schools, not reforming the levy system.

Conclusion

All students have a constitutional right to a quality education, regardless of where they live in our state and regardless of their family background.

Our students cannot wait any longer. Washington Education Association members call on the 2017 Legislature to adopt these recommendations and to fully fund K-12 public schools so all children have equal opportunity to succeed.