

we2.0

Washington Education Association
Vol. 47, Number 1 – Winter 2009

A perilous balance



Invest in education or risk
worsening the financial crisis

Kris Miskimene

Contents

3 The Big Picture School funding issues

4 Our Voice Why education is the solution

7 The Facts Stop House Bill 1410 and Senate Bill 5444

A case for education

Scott Hale already completed a fisheries program eight years ago, but he concluded after seasonal jobs and a layoff that he needed more training to get work.

So, he found his way back to Bellingham Technical College which, like other community and technical colleges across the state, are seeing unprecedented enrollment increases, driven by students from traditional colleges seeking more bang for their buck, and by laid-off older workers looking to upgrade their skills or train for a new career.

Hale, 33, found work weatherizing homes for a Bellingham nonprofit but got laid off. He now hopes to work in home health care.

"I'm just looking at the potential of not many jobs in the future," says Hale, who's thankful he learned about the Worker Retraining program while filling out his unemployment paperwork. "That's kind of where my mindset is right now."

Enrollment at Washington's 34 community and technical colleges is at a historic high. College officials say fall enrollment reached nearly 134,000 quarterly full-time equivalent students. That's an increase of more than 9,000 over the previous year.

A bulk of the increase is from the Worker Retraining program, which helps pay for tuition, books and fees for people who have lost their jobs. Worker-retraining enrollment is up 20 percent.

As the economy continues to falter, college officials say they are bracing for thousands of students above the number supported by the state budget.

At Bellingham Technical College there are currently 152 worker-retraining applicants — versus 65 in 2007-08 — and funding ran out at the end of October. BTC officials say they have an additional 115 potential students that would qualify for worker-retraining funding. The Bellingham-area WorkSource locations have been packed to capacity. In the last few months the number of people attending has increased to a point where there is standing room only and many have had to reschedule by coming back on another day.

But that doesn't mean it's been a boon for community and technical colleges. Tuition doesn't come close to covering costs and state funds are drying up.

Community and technical colleges are built on access, says college spokeswoman Marni Saling Mayer, "so it is disheartening to have our BTC Worker Retraining coordinators have to tell students that there is no financial assistance from Worker Retraining. BTC then helps the student begin looking for alternate sources of support that might be available. There are so many people that need this education, which in turn provides them with a job to support their families and themselves, and helps stabilize the community by supplying a strong, educated workforce."

Investing in the intellectual infrastructure only makes sense.

"Even in a recession, you need to support yourself," Mayer says, "and when we come out of it you still need a strong educated skill set."

"Education makes our communities stronger and more viable — and it supports local businesses because you're giving the industry a competitive workforce."



It's a complex world out there, and not just in the classroom.

Here are the major school funding issues in play.

House Bill 1410/Senate Bill 5444

False promises, and no money. These misguided bills change certification, compensation, accountability, evaluation and many other aspects of our work, but they contain NO funding at a time our schools are facing \$1 billion or more in cuts. They actually eliminate I-728 class-size money and levy equalization that helps fund many districts.

NEWS lawsuit

The Network for Excellence in Washington Schools is suing the state over its failure to adequately fund public schools as required by the Washington Constitution. WEA, the state PTA, school districts and many local associations are plaintiffs. The case is scheduled to be heard June 1.

State budget crisis

Thanks to the global economic crisis, Washington is facing a \$6 billion budget shortfall, and it's likely to get worse. Initial budget plans cut K-12 schools by nearly \$1 billion and higher education by \$300 million. We can't balance the budget on cuts alone. New revenue is needed.

RIFs

It's been years since teachers and education support professionals faced wide-scale reductions in force (RIFs), which is jargon for layoffs. But proposed state budget cuts could mean thousands of educators may lose their jobs. RIF procedures are outlined in your local contract, and they are negotiated between the association and the district. WEA is committed to helping minimize layoffs.

Local bargaining

A larger-than-normal number of local contracts are open this year — about 190 out of 375 statewide. Despite tough economic times, fair compensation and good working conditions remain important issues that are addressed at the bargaining table. Bargaining is a WEA priority.

Full Funding Coalition

Professional organizations representing school boards, superintendents, principals and classified school employees have joined WEA in the Full Funding Coalition. The coalition is backing legislation that increases school funding and requires the state to acknowledge the impact that inadequate funding has on our students' education.

Economic stimulus plans

The federal government's economic stimulus plans include millions of dollars for state school construction and existing programs. Washington lawmakers are considering a state economic stimulus plan, and WEA is working to ensure it includes pre-K-12 and higher education.





Vashon Island High School teacher Stephen Floyd loves teaching American Studies, English and drama. He says he is well aware that drama and other similar courses are what get some teenagers to school every day.

Why do you value what you teach and what you do with students to help prepare them for life? Think about how you help students create their development as good citizens, engaged activists ... as whole human beings. What would happen if those programs or classes you've crafted are suddenly cut? Imagine.



The theatre arts program at our small high school offers three different courses, with anywhere from 80 to 120 students registered for at least one of those classes each year.

"At graduation last year, a struggling student I had taught in multiple theatre and English classes came over to tell me that if it hadn't been for the drama classes he took, he would have dropped out of high school. He had even discussed it with his parents, who advised against it, but told him it was his choice, since he was 18. When thinking it over he made a long list of the things he hated

about school. On the positive side of the ledger — what he liked about school — he listed only two things: seeing his friends and drama class. But he enjoyed those things so much he decided to stay in school. This year he is enrolled at a local community college, and is still taking theatre arts classes.

"Art classes give many students reason to come and stay in school. It's not an exaggeration to say, in some cases, art saves lives."

— Stephen Floyd, English and drama teacher
Vashon Island High School

"I was in a local grocery store picking up last minute forgotten items last Thanksgiving day," Kennewick music teacher Caryn Mears says. "This one young girl passed me and I smiled and thought, 'she looks so familiar,' but I kept going."

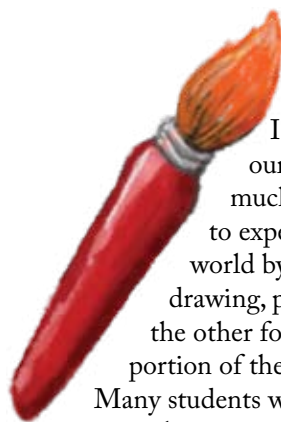
"My mom saw her first, and when we realized who she was she told me to go up and talk to her," Othello High School junior Lisa Miranda says. "What am I going to say?" I thought. I told her thanks for all she had done for me way back in fifth grade."

"She told me that giving her that solo in fifth grade gave her so much self confidence," Mears says.

"I was shy when I was little and all I did was sing in church. I never thought about singing outside, but she really opened this new door to me," Miranda says. "When I moved to Othello, I decided to try out for the school play so I could meet new friends. I got chorus parts in school plays and in community theatre, but then I got the lead role in *The Chronicles of Suburbia*."

"She told me that she will be going on to college next fall to be a music teacher to someday provide the same type of opportunities for other children," Mears says. "Lisa Miranda can now pursue a dream she never knew she had until one music teacher gave her the confidence to succeed."

"I honestly think that these kinds of experiences at school open up our eyes. I mean, you never know what you're going to end up doing and if you don't have that chance at school, where will you go?" Miranda says.



"What would happen if we did not offer art on Bainbridge Island? If there was no art, then our kids' world would become that much smaller. They would not be able to experience how they personally see the world by expressing themselves through drawing, painting, sculpting, jewelry and all of the other forms of visual expression. An entire portion of their development would be stilted.

Many students would lose a handhold on what inspires them to stay in school.

"I have had kids stay in school because they have a safe place that allows them to feel highly capable, truly themselves. A place that allows them to create what they are learning about rather than just learning about what others have created. This is a dynamic part of creating art.

"Bainbridge Island is unique because it has a strong K-12 art program. There is a high percentage of our kids that go into the arts because they have been inspired to do so within our school system. Our students would become two dimensional and black and white rather than 3-D and colorful. What a sad day that would be."

— Darcy Herrett, art teacher
Woodward Middle School, Bainbridge Island



Lisa Miranda started with a solo in fifth grade. Her plans include giving students the same opportunity she had to find her love of learning through the arts.

Mary Kathryn Myers' prescription for healthy students hasn't changed in her 27 years as a school nurse: "I'm passionate about my profession and helping kids stay healthy so they can be better learners."



"With the absolute explosion of overweight kids in our schools, the last change needed is cutting/shortening PE programs! Kids learn social skills, team skills, fair play skills in PE classes, along with getting the much needed exercise to stay healthy. At every hint of shortening PE classes, school nurses speak up against this plan. Healthy kids make better learners, and exercise and good nutrition are part of a well-rounded school program.

"Kids can't learn if they aren't healthy, so let's keep them active and learning."

— Mary Kathryn Myers, school nurse
McMicken Heights Elementary, SeaTac



"If you cut the funding the kids lose out. You don't have the funding for the playground equipment, and when that happens, they get bored and that's where the trouble starts, the fighting, the bickering. I guess we'd have to go back to when we were younger, when there were no computers, no games.

"In the lunchroom, they used to allow kids who forgot their lunch to get a sandwich. They've already cut back there. I don't even know what that next step would be.

"I guess I try to instill in them how bullying really hurts people. I try to switch things around and put negatives to positives. I always bring my family stories and tell them real-life stories so the kids can learn from those. Sometimes you learn better from examples rather than the Charlie Brown wah wahh wah."

— Michelle Marten, paraeducator
Evergreen Primary, University Place

"Counselors support not only students, but the staff who teach them and the parents who raise them. We are the teachers of emotional intelligence, a research-documented key to success both at school and in later life. We assist teachers and parents with behavior plans and referrals to outside resources, smooth the way for the fearful parent whose child may need assessment, (and) explain what those standardized test scores mean. We offer support to students who deal with life challenges which, if not resolved, get in the way of learning and later achievement.

"We teach children strategies for self-calming, for handling feelings, for making friends and dealing with bullies. In times of school community crisis, we know how to help adults and children cope and survive. Elementary counselors are essential partners in successful education teams!"

— Maryann DeSimone, counselor
Blakely Elementary School, Bainbridge Island

HB 1410 and SB 5444:

The wrong bills at the wrong time.

People in Washington are worried and feel very uncertain about the economy, their jobs and their families' futures.

They care about education and they understand it is the key to their children's future. Education is their priority.

Yet House Bill 1410 and its companion, Senate Bill 5444, do nothing to address the most basic needs of kids and schools. These bills lose sight of the real priority — adequate school funding in a tough budget. HB 1410/SB 5444 is the wrong bill at the wrong time, and for the sake of kids and education we should focus on the priority — adequately funding schools so we don't lose ground.

HB 1410/SB 5444 is a divisive distraction.

HB 1410/SB 5444 is a 111-page bill that dramatically alters all aspects of K-12 public education, including certification, compensation and collective bargaining — and it ignores the funding crisis facing our public schools.

- ◆ HB 1410/SB 5444 is a divisive distraction at a time we should be coming together to protect the basics: good teachers, reasonable class sizes and well-rounded education.
- ◆ HB 1410/SB 5444 is not the solution to inadequate school funding.
- ◆ HB 1410/SB 5444 is out of touch with the realities facing our schools and students.

HB 1410/SB 5444 will jeopardize school funding and quality education.

HB 1410/SB 5444 is partially based on the Basic Education Finance Task Force's recommendations, but offers no concrete education finance solutions. Instead, the 111-page bill radically revamps most aspects of K-12 education.

- ◆ HB 1410/SB 5444 subjects students to new, onerous state-level school accountability systems, similar to the so-called No Child Left Behind Act. These particular changes were never discussed by the Basic Education Finance Task Force, nor approved by the State Board of Education.
- ◆ HB 1410/SB 5444 replaces the current teacher certification system with a complicated, three-tier system and it dramatically changes teacher evaluation policies.
- ◆ HB 1410/SB 5444 eliminates the current salary allocation model.
- ◆ HB 1410/SB 5444 severely limits the ability of school boards and associations to negotiate local salaries (TRI) to meet the needs of their students.
- ◆ HB 1419/SB 5444 authorizes school "performance contracts," which could turn existing public schools into privately run charter schools — even though Washington voters have rejected charter schools three times and there's no proof they improve student achievement.
- ◆ HB 1410/SB 5444 immediately eliminates I-728 class-size funding (the Student Achievement Fund) and state levy equalization funding, with no guarantee that it will be replaced. This will result in fewer teachers and larger class sizes for our students.

Well-funded public schools are the solution.

We expect our elected leaders to protect public education. Investing in quality public education is the key to our economic strength and our kids' future. Our top priority should be protecting our students' ability to get a quality education in these tough economic times. We encourage legislators to support the Full Funding Coalition's school funding proposal.



WEA members from across the state are meeting with elected leaders in Olympia to emphasize the importance of investing in public education.

we2.0

Washington Education Association

Governance and Administration:

Mary Lindquist, WEA President

Mike Ragan, WEA Vice President

John Okamoto, WEA Executive Director

WEA Communications Staff: Dale Folkerts, Brooke Mattox, Dottie Watson, Eddie Westerman, Linda Woo and Rich Wood

We are interested in your feedback and ideas. Reach Editor Linda Woo at lwoo@washingtonea.org, by mail at P.O. Box 9100, Federal Way, WA 98063-9100, or 253-765-7027.

We 2.0 (ISSN 1544-5283) is published quarterly by the Washington Education Association, 32032 Weyerhaeuser Way S., Federal Way, WA 98001-9687. Subscription cost of \$1.47 is included in annual membership dues. Separate subscription price: \$15.50 annually.

Copyright 2009 by the Washington Education Association.

Periodical nonprofit postage paid at Auburn, WA, and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *We 2.0*, P.O. Box 9100, Federal Way, WA 98063-9100.

“Education is the backbone of any free nation. Without education, democracy and society fail. American education consists of more than just academics. This is where a student’s basic set of values, responsibility, respect, and even the ability to network socially begins. Often teachers and paraeducators are role models as well as life support for scores of children from broken homes. Education inspires self-confidence. It is a fire to fuel further curiosity and just the tool to develop whatever your ambitions might become.”

—Julie Finnegan, paraeducator
Curtis Junior High, University Place



Change of address? Mail this label and your new address to: WEA, Membership Dept./Address Changes, P.O. Box 9100, Federal Way, WA, 98063-9100, or e-mail the information to member.records@washingtonea.org.

UNION BUG FPO