



2024 Legislator Town Halls - Suggested Talking Points

rev. February 13, 2024

Suggested questions

- Do you support increasing funding for school support staff to ensure they make a respectful, professional wage?
- Can we count on you to vote to fund supports to meet our students' needs, like increasing paraeducator staffing and raising the Special Education funding cap?
- It's clear our students have significant unmet needs. Can we count on you to vote in favor of increasing funding for our public schools and colleges?

Talking points

Paraprofessional pay and staffing

- **STAFFING SHORTAGES:** Wages for school aides, bus drivers, and other support staff do not cover the cost of living, leading experienced staff to leave our schools with serious staffing shortages.
- **ESPs' JOBS ARE DIFFICULT:** Educational support professionals serve some of the students with the highest need, in roles that are physically and emotionally difficult, and their compensation should reflect that.
- **SCHOOL JOBS SHOULD BE LIVABLE:** We need to raise pay for education support professionals to ensure everyone with the critical job of caring for children earns enough to support themselves and their families.
- **STATE FUNDING DOES NOT SUPPORT ENOUGH STAFF:** The state funding formulas have historically underfunded paraeducators, office staff, and other education support professionals who keep our schools running smoothly and help deliver specialized services to students who need extra support. These positions are not enrichment and should not be left to local levy funding.

Special Education funding cap

- **IT'S ABOUT VALUES:** Washingtonians value high-quality public education for every student, not just some students but the arbitrary funding cap and low funding mean students with disabilities aren't guaranteed the same access to education as others.
- **GIVE EACH STUDENT WHAT THEY NEED:** To ensure every student succeeds, we must meet their individual learning needs. The legislature needs to fund adequate Special Education services to give students with disabilities the freedom to succeed.
- **INCLUSION IS KEY:** Students learn best when they feel safe and welcomed in every classroom. But to create inclusive settings, students need adequate staff to care about their individual success and well-being.

Education funding

- **FUND EDUCATION, NOT JUST LEARNING:** State funding covers bare bones learning but leaves so many other student needs unmet, from Special Education to capital investments to reasonable class sizes. The legislature needs to step up and do more.
- **EQUITABLE FUNDING:** As long as districts are forced to rely so heavily on levies, students will have different experiences of their schools depending on the wealth of their communities.



Town Hall Tips

1. Know how questions will work

Each event has its own format for questions. Do you need to submit them in advance? Is there a specific form or card you need to fill out? Do you need to sign up to ask a question after you arrive? If the event is on zoom, do you need to submit questions in the Q&A function or do you raise your hand? Get as much information about the process as you can *before* the event begins.

2. Make your presence visible

Wear your local union shirt, a WEA hat or scarf, a pin or sticker, or something that makes it so the legislator and their staff see that educators are in the room.

3. Get in line immediately

If you need to line up or get in a queue to ask a question, don't be shy – get in that line as soon as you can. Some times there's only time for a few questions and you want to make sure yours is among them. At most events, once the first person or two is in line, the floodgates open. Be one of those first people!

4. Tell your story

Stories are more memorable than stats, and the more illustrative the better. When it's your turn to ask a question, introduce yourself with your name, your city, and your local union. Say what your role is in the school, then share your story of what you're seeing and what the solution is.

5. Ask for a yes/no answer

End your story with something like, "Can we count on you to..." or "Will you..." Try to avoid "soft" questions that would allow legislators to skirt the question.

6. Record and share!

The more people hear about the lawmaker's answer, the more solid the commitment becomes. Share with your local union, with WEA, and on your social media!