

2023 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES



Schools across Washington State continue to make pandemic recovery progress as students and educators learn to live with the endemic reality of the COVID-19 virus. Schools have refined COVID testing and disease mitigation strategies over the past several years and continue to work diligently to respond to ongoing pandemic recovery challenges and the tremendous amount of student support needed. The 30 ESD 112 region school district superintendents appreciate the investments our elected officials have made in education; however, we continue to experience significant challenges and require your assistance to ensure students have equitable access to essential educational programs and services. Funding for our most vulnerable students continues to fall short, essential staff positions remain difficult to fill and retain, and a super-majority requirement continues to prevent schools (especially small rural ones) from modernizing their facilities. As superintendents, we urge the 2023 Legislature to address the persistent and critical K-12 needs outlined below.

PRIORITY ACTION ITEMS



1. Special Education Funding

Despite investments over the last four years, Special Education remains woefully underfunded. Staff shortages plague the program as essential paraprofessionals and specialists remain difficult to hire and retain. Funding shortfalls do not allow for an increase in wages to help fill these critical positions. Once again, local levies are tapped to make up for state and federal deficits.

ACTION REQUEST: Special education is a basic education responsibility and thus we implore lawmakers to fully fund the cost of education for our most vulnerable students, remove the artificial funding cap of 13.5%, increase the per-student multiplier, and provide ample safety net funding.



2. Transportation Funding

The STARS transportation funding formula is underfunded, outdated, lacks transparency and consistency, and needs to be replaced. Transportation costs are not sufficiently funded by the state and districts cannot easily determine how their funding is calculated. As a result, inadequate funding continues to be provided and local levies are tapped to cover funding shortages.

ACTION REQUEST: Comprehensively fix and fully fund a simpler and more transparent transportation funding formula.



3. Student Mental and Behavioral Health Services

The mental and behavioral health needs of students are greater now than ever before, and schools remain a lifeline to support and resources for young people. Sadly, equitable access to mental health services at the local school and regional level remains inconsistent, inequitable, and underfunded.

ACTION REQUEST: Expand and maintain behavioral/mental health services at the regional and school levels, and expand the number of schools receiving direct funding support for student mental health services through their ESDs.

ADDRESSING CHALLENGES FACED BY SCHOOLS



1. Address staffing shortages

Over the past year, many school positions have gone unfilled, including certified specialists, bus drivers, food service workers, and paraprofessionals. Substitutes for all positions, including teachers, are also very scarce. With staffing shortages across all parts of our economy, the private sector is offering hiring bonuses and increased pay as incentives to attract new employees. In order to alleviate overburdened remaining school staff and fill unfilled positions, we request Legislators consider the following:

- ✓ Increase funding for hard-to-fill positions in the prototypical schools model.
- ✓ Increase substitute teacher pay as well as increase the number of days for which substitutes are funded.



2. Increase funding for rural modernization grants

Rural modernization grants allow school districts to update failing infrastructure and extend the life of a school facility by decades. This model has already been successfully utilized to support the modernization of school

buildings in many smaller districts across the state that cannot pass a bond, which requires a super-majority.

ACTION REQUEST: Increase funding for OSPI's rural modernization grant program so that schools can leverage it to make necessary infrastructure, and safety and security updates.



3. Support a simple majority for school district capital projects

The requirement of a super majority to pass bonds for capital projects makes it nearly impossible for districts to modernize, update or build new facilities to support 21st-century education. Very few bonds have passed since the pandemic began. Smaller communities cannot afford, nor do they have the tax base, to support the cost of new facilities. The 60% threshold is an enormous obstacle to modernizing school facilities and students are suffering the consequences of dilapidated and out-of-date structures.

ACTION REQUEST: Support a simple majority requirement for the passing of school district capital projects and remove the supermajority requirement.

THE 30 SCHOOL DISTRICTS OF SOUTHWEST WASHINGTON



THE EDUCATIONAL SERVICE DISTRICT 112 REGION SUPERINTENDENTS REPRESENT:

Battle Ground
Camas
Castle Rock
Centerville
Evergreen
Glenwood
Green Mountain
Hockinson
Kalama
Kelso
Klickitat

La Center
Longview
Lyle
Mill A
Mount Pleasant
Naselle-Grays River Valley
Ocean Beach
Ridgefield
Roosevelt
Skamania
Stevenson-Carson

Toutle Lake
Trout Lake
Vancouver
Wahkiakum
Washington School for the Deaf
Washington State School for the Blind
Washougal
White Salmon Valley
Wishram
Woodland

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