



## **Ample School Funding Project November 2004 Progress Report**

### **Background**

Over 200 superintendents attending the Superintendent Component Group meeting in November 2003, voted overwhelmingly to support the recommendation of WASA's K-12 Finance Workgroup to undertake the Ample School Funding Project. This action was reaffirmed in May 2004. The project emerged as a response to the increased pressure and frustration expressed by school administrators and board members across Washington state to the challenges of trying to close the school district revenue-expenditure gap. Program cuts, employee demands for higher salaries and benefits, escalating operating costs, new, higher student achievement standards mandated by the state and federal governments and fewer resources for professional development and extended student learning opportunities plague school districts on a daily basis.

The Basic Education Act was enacted in the late 1970s. Since that time, Washington's public schools have undergone numerous changes including those brought about by technology and those required by HB 1209 and subsequent education reform legislation, IDEA and ESEA/NCLB. The amount of state resources provided to school districts under the present K-12 finance system is not – and has never been – based on an analysis of student educational needs and the amount of funding that is necessary to meet those needs. In addition, the legislature has not responded to repeated requests to carry out a comprehensive K-12 funding study.

### **Project's Goal and Design**

To “make the case” that an ample, equitable and sustainable funding system is needed for our schools, WASA proposed undertaking the Ample School Funding Project. The project is designed to take a comprehensive look at the K-12 finance system in two phases.

The first phase is a technical analysis of the current system's adequacy to fully fund basic education as defined by the Doran court decisions. The second phase is an analysis of the adequacy of the current funding system to determine if it provides the resources needed to bring all students to the new, higher achievement standards.

### **Project Progress**

The Doran court decisions defined basic education as: transportation; special education; regular apportionment including vocational education; learning

assistance; and, bilingual education and required the state to fully fund these programs in the context of the state's constitutionally required paramount duty.

In November 2003, Consultant Bill Freund began the research and documentation for the technical analysis phase of the project. The final reports documenting the current funding formula, the history of the formula, the distribution pattern, the school operations, and the funding lag for special education and transportation are available on WASA's Web site: [www.wasa-oly.org](http://www.wasa-oly.org). The research paper on apportionment is underway and is projected to be completed by December 2004.

A technical analysis team with representatives from WASA, WSSDA, ESDs, WEA, PSE, OSPI, WASBO and school districts reviewed drafts of the research documents as they were being written. The team provided feedback on the content and the presentation of material in the papers. Smaller groups of school district administrators were – and will continue to be – convened as the need arises to review the research or gather additional data.

In August 2004, WASA contacted John Myers, a national expert and consultant on school funding. Myers (formally with Augenblick, Palaich and Associates) has agreed to review the various funding studies previously completed in Washington – Realities of Education Funding (LEV), What Will It Take? (Rainier Institute), the School Finance Study (WSPTA) – and the Ample School Funding Project and meet in March of 2004 with WASA members (and others) across the state to provide feedback on these studies.

### **The Legislature**

OSPI, WASA, WSSDA and the WEA asked the 2004 Legislature to fund the Ample School Funding Project – or a similar comprehensive review of K-12 finance. Twenty-six senators sponsored SB 6449. The bill would have provided \$500,000 to address:

- (1) The constitutional and legal requirements underlying the current finance system and how those requirements are affected by the goal under education reform to provide all students with the opportunity to achieve the state standards;
- (2) The strengths and weaknesses of the current state and local finance formulas and how those formulas are used by local school districts to meet state requirements and student learning goals;
- (3) Potential changes to the current finance system including the methods of allocating funds and the levels of funding and how student achievement is affected; and,
- (4) A review of the funding systems in at least five other states.

Senate Bill 6449 was not given a hearing in the Senate. A much more detailed K-12 finance bill, House Bill 2955, passed the House but was not taken up by the

Senate. The House Appropriations and Education Committees formed a joint K-12 finance study workgroup during the 2004 interim. The stated purpose of the workgroup was to "...address the question of whether the K-12 finance structure is consistent with the state's education policies, including the goals of education reform." Adequacy was specifically NOT to be addressed.

### **Oversight**

WASA's K-12 Finance Work Group and the Superintendent Component Group were convened in 2003 and 2004 to provide insight and direction for the project. During the 2004-2005 school year, WASA will convene a broad-based group to provide oversight, support and advice to the Ample School Funding Project. The group will include members representing education associations, business groups, higher education, state government and the legislature. The project's work plan for 2004-05 is attached.

### **Project Budget**

The technical analysis phase of the budget is projected to cost from \$100,000 to \$200,000. The adequacy or professional judgment phase will require consultants familiar with this kind of work and is projected to cost between \$500,000 to \$1 million.

WASA, SIRS, WSSDA, WEA and OSPI have contributed \$80,000 to the project to date. Additional funding is being requested from all potential sources.

### **Expected Uses of First Phase**

- As information is gathered, the research reports will be shared with superintendents, legislators, other associations, school districts and any other interested parties.
- The research may be used to solve one program at a time or may become part of a comprehensive solution.
- The research may be used to recommend increases in funding in different ways as part of a larger solution.

Barbara L. Mertens, Ed.D.  
Assistant Executive Director  
Washington Association of School Administrators  
[www.wasa-oly.org](http://www.wasa-oly.org)  
[bmertens@wasa-oly.org](mailto:bmertens@wasa-oly.org)  
Phone: 360.943.5717

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