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School Administrators Urge Lawmakers to Maintain K-12 Investments

Hardships of COVID-19 underscore inequities in state's public schools

OLYMPIA —With the 2021 legislative session fast approaching, school administrators today called on lawmakers to maintain their investments in K-12 education and focus on urgent technology needs, as schools continue to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Representatives from the Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA) acknowledge the fiscal impact of the coronavirus outbreak on the state budget but are urging lawmakers to hold the line on existing investments in public education.

“If there is one lesson to be learned from the pandemic, it’s that public schools play a vital role in every community statewide. They are a lifeline for many families and provide a service that is integral to our state’s economy,” said WASA Executive Director Joel Aune. “Right now, public schools are doing their best to deliver services to all students, but COVID-19 has exposed—and in some cases intensified—the inequities entrenched in communities across the entire state. Our most vulnerable students are really hurting. They need more direct support and assistance as schools attempt to meet the needs of all students under their care. That is why legislators must continue to invest in public education when they return to Olympia this January, and at minimum not further exacerbate the suffering and negative impact on our students by making cuts this session,” he said.

“School administrators continue to take into account the guidance of county health departments as related to the return of students to the schoolhouse. WASA members recognize the importance and urgency of getting students back in the schools, while taking steps to ensure the safety of students and staff. As that time emerges, our superintendents and district office officials will continue to serve students and families as best they can, in a responsible and safe fashion. Looking to the future, that will require a stable funding model, free from cuts, new mandates, or other reductions.”

Simply stated, our students are hurting, said Aune, noting there are a couple of areas where legislators must provide help immediately. Addressing the technology and connectivity issues that have been magnified during COVID-19, often affecting those students most in need, is a significant problem that must be addressed. Districts are also in need of resources to support students’ social-emotional learning and mental health needs, both of which impact their well-being and readiness to learn.

“Public schools are committed to providing equitable access and individualized support for each and every student,” Aune added. “It is critical that legislators continue their provision for K-12 education and deliver the resources schools need to ensure the learning needs of all children are met now and into the future.”

Highlights of the WASA 2021 Legislative Platform’s short-term needs include:

- **K-12 Budget:** Education plays a critical role in building and maintaining a strong economy, supporting a well-educated workforce necessary to attract more stable and higher wage jobs; education is a great equalizer, providing all students access and opportunity to thrive in our communities and workforce; and a strong education system lessens reliance on social services, saving money in the long run. The Legislature must hold the line on K-12 funding and continue to honor its constitutional commitment.
- **Mid-Year Reductions:** In the event K-12 funding is included in the Legislature’s budget reductions, no cuts should be made mid-year. School districts have employment contracts and other obligations that cannot be avoided; mid-year reductions would further complicate local budget matters and impact labor issues.
- **Mandates:** As the state addresses the coronavirus outbreak and its economic impacts, the Legislature should avoid imposing additional mandates—funded or not—on school districts. School leaders are already overwhelmed with the implementation of an entirely new funding structure, including an overhaul of staff compensation and local funding with levies and Local Effort Assistance.
- **Flexibility:** If education funding must be cut, one way to mitigate the impact is to provide local districts greater flexibility in how they spend their dollars. School district leaders better understand their needs and their community desires. Allowing districts flexibility would ensure limited dollars are used where there is the greatest need.
- **Technology and Connectivity:** The COVID-19 outbreak, and the resultant school closures, exposed the current technology gap, including availability of devices and broadband connectivity. The Legislature must ensure there is equitable access to technology resources.
- **Bargaining:** COVID-19 and school closures disrupted the education system, forcing modifications in the delivery of education, the school calendar, and employee responsibilities. These issues impact local bargaining. Given drastically altered circumstances and expected revenue difficulties, school

districts seek strong sideboards on bargaining, including clearly defining the minimum professional duties and expectations for teachers in statute.

Aune said WASA members recognize that several of the state's most pressing K-12 funding needs may have to be postponed. They must remain a part of the ongoing legislative conversation, though, for reconsideration when the state is in a position to invest. These long-term needs include:

- **Staffing Allocations:** The Prototypical School Funding Model is a core, fundamental part of the education funding structure. The funding ratios for most staff positions, however, have remained the same since the model was first implemented, resulting in outdated and unrealistic state-funded staffing levels.
- **Consistent, Equitable and Ample Education Resources:** Several components of K-12's new funding structure have exacerbated inequities between districts and urgently need to be revised. These components include: Special Education; State Salary Allocations and Experience Factors; the School Employees' Benefits Board insurance program; and Regionalization.
- **Capital Facilities:** School facilities remain a core need and the Legislature provides a considerable investment in the School Construction Assistant Program. Grants that are provided, however, use outdated funding formulas that fail to recognize the true cost of building or educational space needs.

To view the entire 2021 WASA Legislative Platform, [visit the WASA website](#).

About the Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA)

WASA (www.wasa-oly.org) is a non-profit organization committed to the development of quality education through professional leadership. Members benefit from a supportive community of professional leaders working to provide insightful, valuable training support, and resources. WASA also strives to sustain a positive impact on legislative and community leaders. Membership is open to education administrators in Washington state.

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