
BASIC ED FUNDING

A MODEL SCHOOLS APPROACH

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Described here is a proposed new model for financing what the Legislature and the Courts describe as “Basic Education” – the opportunity provided by Washington’s public schools for all students to meet the established student learning goals, and the obligation of the State under Article IX, Section 1 of the State Constitution to make ample provision for that educational opportunity.

The proposal starts with the expectation that our children receive an education that prepares them to succeed in the 21st century. The State Board of Education recently proposed a new set of graduation requirements (Core 24) that, if met by Washington students, will ensure they are so prepared.

Core 24 provides multiple pathways for all students, whether that leads them to a four-year college, community or technical college, apprenticeship program, or directly onto the first step of a career ladder in the workforce. The State Board recognized that schools cannot provide the necessary credits without adequate funding for the additional time required. This Model Schools proposal provides that funding by determining the cost of a prototype school where there is enough time on task to meet the credit expectations.

The core of our proposal is a new definition of *Basic Education*, the legal concept that determines our constitutional requirement for funding. The new definition links graduation requirements with the program of education necessary for our children to have a viable opportunity to meet those requirements, and gain an education that helps them be college or work ready.

This proposal includes five interdependent components. First, a “**program of education**” based on a model school with adequate resources to meet student’s educational goals. Second, **changes in the compensation system** to help ensure a supply of high quality teachers. Third, renewed focus on providing **equity for historically disadvantaged children** and fixes for the arbitrary differences in the current funding design. Fourth, building in **accountability through transparency**. Finally, a **phasing and resource plan**.

Within these five components, **flexibility for school districts to address the unique needs of their students is respected**. The “model schools” approach computes the level of funding a district needs to provide the services necessary to implement a basic education, but does not require the district to implement that exact program.

While districts can allocate resources to best accommodate local conditions, new **accountability and accounting system requirements will ensure both implementation and results are transparent to local voters**. If students do not make progress towards graduation comparable to other districts, districts will face increasing levels of intervention from the state as well as increasing censure from local voters.

It’s important to note that the charge of the Task Force was to design a financing system, not to make all policy decisions about education. School boards should set local goals reflecting their communities, and educators should exercise their professional judgment, but both should be accountable to parents, taxpayers, and the Legislature.

The Washington State Constitution is clear

Article IX, Section I: “It is the paramount duty of the state to make ample provision for the education of all students...”

Article IX, Section II: “The legislature shall provide for a general and uniform system of public schools.”

Addressing the Achievement Gap

One of the most pernicious failings in education is the divergence in educational attainment between children of modest means and those with more money. Poor kids tend to lag behind children of more advantaged parents. A key element of the Model Schools proposal is significant additional instructional time for disadvantaged students to allow them to catch up. This will not result in equal funding for every child due to differences in need, but we strongly believe (as do the courts) that there should be a rational basis for any differences in funding between districts.

Historical disparities are not limited to poverty. There are statistically predictable outcomes for children from racial minorities. Research from Washington Learns leads us to believe that using poverty as a predictor works well in predicting the level of resources a school will need, though the design of programs can and should vary to appropriately respond to cultural norms and expectations.

Program of Education

This proposal is structured around the services we provide to students with a model that enables us to compute and fund those services. There should be a direct link between the level of service provided and the budget. **The structure of this funding model is more important than the exact level of funding initially provided.** By funding services rather than providing a block of funds, the Legislature is forced to make decisions about service levels, not just funding levels.

Quality Teaching

Educational research provides a clear indication that teaching quality is the most critical element of student success. Our current system of educator preparation and compensation does not support continual improvement in teaching quality.

The proposed new compensation system for new teachers includes several key changes.

To attract top-quality recruits to the teaching profession, we **boost starting salaries.**

To keep these top-quality recruits in the teaching profession, an **intensive mentoring** and induction program is created for all new teachers. Teacher mentors would receive additional compensation and would be National Board certified.

New teachers will also be **required to earn their professional certification** within two to five years of receiving their residency certificate.

To keep top-quality teachers in the classroom, we will **reward quality teaching** and conduct **ongoing peer evaluations** of our teachers. Today, we compensate teachers for earning degrees and that would no longer be the case. Instead, teachers would receive an increase in compensation when they receive certification or demonstrate competence through peer evaluations.

Peer evaluations would involve multiple measures of performance, including in-class visits and reviews of lesson plans, student work, and possibly video of actual teaching. The Professional Educator Standards Board would oversee this system.

Additional pieces of the new compensation structure includes incentives for teaching in hard-to-staff areas or schools, and a building-based reward program to recognize growth in academic achievement in the school. This would be based on a multi-factor evaluation.

Existing teachers would be able to opt-in to the new system should they so desire.

Fixing Stupid Problems

The constitutional requirement for a general and uniform system of public education leads us to focus on providing equivalent educational opportunity to all children. This proposal removes the most obvious differences in our current system including:

- Grandfathered salary differences. Some districts receive up to 5% more salary, or thousands of dollars per teacher, than other districts.
- Different levy lids. Some districts have almost 50 percent greater levy capacity than other districts.
- Differential reimbursement for administrative and classified staff based on practice over a quarter century ago.

Accountability

This proposal calls for accountability improvements to ensure we are making positive changes, not just funding the existing system more richly. Since most of the new resources go into compensation for personnel, the accountability changes are most significant in that area, with a major re-alignment of the compensation system to be linked to the performance and skills of teachers.

Our basic expectation is that all students will make at least one year of progress toward being prepared to graduate on time in every calendar year. Some students will need to make more than one year of progress to catch up to their peers. To ensure students, parents, teachers, and administrators all have the same information and can monitor progress toward graduation for every student regardless of mobility in changing schools, we propose the state funds a statewide diagnostic assessment system provided to all schools.

The proposal also requires common financial accounting and student information systems to provide a clear, consistent view of how schools are funded. Parents and voters will be able to see the differences between the model and actual practice in a school.

The proposed legislation also re-codifies most of the basic education statutes so they are structured reasonably and in a single place.

Resources

This proposal will require significant new resources. The Constitutional mandate for ample provision should drive the debate on the level of resources provided.

New resources will be phased in over six years. This allows the necessary adjustments to the rest of the budget and time for districts to plan for effective use of the funds. Phasing in the funding allows the system to make quality decisions about how to optimize the new resources. **We pay for a significant portion of the additional cost by taking a larger share of the natural growth of the state budget over the six-year time frame.** Ideally we would return K-12 funding to its historical 50 percent of the state general fund, rather than the current 35-40 percent.

Members of the Basic Education Funding Task Force

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The Model: Summary Spreadsheet of Per-Student and School Allocations

The spreadsheet below illustrates the type of decisions that drive resources under the proposed funding model. The numbers themselves are strongly influenced by the Picus-Odden report but are shown here as examples for discussion purposes. Again, it is the structure of the model and the nature of the decisions that must be made by the Legislature that are the key points of our proposal.

PROTOTYPE HIGH SCHOOL		600			
Student Periods	6				
Teacher Inst Periods	5				
Teacher Prep Periods	1				
Class Size	FRPL <=50%	FRPL >50%			
Normal	25	22			
CTE	16	16			
Lab Science	16	16			
AP/IB	16	16			
Remediation Adjustment					
tutoring hours/wk	2	grp size	5		
summer hours/wk	10	grp size	10	weeks	4
ELL Adjustment					
intensive class/day	1	grp size	8		
Special Education					
% of Population	12.70%	Safety net in state-level allocation			
Base Multiplier	93.09%				
Professional Dev					
# Days	10				
Other Building Level Staff					
Principals/Admin	1.8	per	600	students	
Librarians/Info Svc	1	per	600	students	
Counselors	1.5	per	600	students	
Nurse/Social Worker	1	per	600	students	
Secretary/Office Aid	3	per	600	students	
Custodian/Maintenance	4	per	600	students	
Student & Staff Safety	1	per	600	students	
Materials, Supplies & Operating Costs					
Student Technology	\$ 200	Prof. Development	\$ 103		
Curriculum/Materials	\$ 155	Central Office	\$ 310		
Energy & Utilities	\$ 216	Other	\$ 102		