

As superintendents of the Puget Sound region representing nearly 40% of students across Washington state, 55% of whom are students of color, our unwavering focus is on student learning. Our legislative priorities are aimed to create opportunities and mitigate barriers for each and every student to succeed in school and in life. We ask the Legislature to support our efforts to eliminate opportunity gaps based on race, income and other factors that have become even more urgent and acute during the COVID-19 pandemic, and that have historically disadvantaged young people. Our positions are in service of putting systems and structures in place to get students back in school for in-person learning, while mitigating risks.

Access to Learning

Most schools in the Puget Sound region started the 2020-21 school year remotely. Teachers have needed to scale their remote instruction competency quickly to meet student needs. Student access to digital devices and broadband Internet - which should be a basic right - still varies inequitably. Students need and deserve resources and investments to overcome enduring and new opportunity gaps.

Proposed Solutions:

- Provide equitable access to technology resources including devices and broadband connectivity
- Ensure resources for individualized needs of all students
- Provide resources for professional development for staff so they can effectively engage students in online learning
- Allow flexibility and resources for extended school day and/or year, K-12, to make up for learning loss and accelerate learning

Student & Staff Safety, Wellness & Health

Students have and will continue to experience trauma through the pandemic. The impacts of COVID-19 are greatest among communities of color, who are facing the highest risks as essential workers, highest infection rates, and highest food and housing insecurity. With increased isolation and potential abuse occurring at the same time, social and emotional learning and mental health supports and programs are a more important part of school infrastructure than ever before.

Proposed Solutions:

- Support funding for staffing and materials to ensure schools and busses are clean and sanitary
- Increase mental health and counseling supports for students
- Train staff in providing trauma-informed instruction that is embedded in the social emotional framework
- Create statutory authorization for School-Based Health Centers

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Stable Support

In recent years, the Legislature has provided significant investments to K-12 education. The Legislature must maintain the integrity of the public education system, including current funding formulas, to ensure students can return to high-quality schools. In fact, school districts are incurring additional costs associated with COVID-19 response to ensure the health and safety of students and staff. These new costs are on top of an existing special education funding gap of approximately \$300 million that was not fully addressed in the 2020 session. Our students need support and resources now, more than ever.

Proposed Solutions:

- Maintain stable support for enrollment and pupil transportation
- Maintain K-12 funding to match the learning modality needed, and prevent mid-year budget reductions
- Reimburse for unfunded costs associated with COVID-19, beyond what is reimbursed by federal funds, such as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for students and staff, food service, transportation, and online learning
- Promptly pass through federal funding dedicated for schools without supplanting state funding
- Provide for the full cost of special education

Well-Equipped Staff

SB 6168 requires one of the three state-funded professional learning days in the 2020-21 school year to be used to train staff on racial literacy, cultural responsiveness and stereotype threat for purposes of closing persistent opportunity gaps. This funding is greatly appreciated and needed, and yet, one day of training will not be sufficient. Adults need to develop their racial literacy skills so they feel confident navigating important and difficult conversations with students and families, and so that students feel seen and heard.

Proposed Solution:

- Provide additional professional development for staff about racial literacy, cultural responsiveness, and stereotype threat for purposes of closing persistent opportunity gaps

School Facilities

Many districts continue to have difficulty passing local requests for building and maintaining modern school facilities. The need is even more urgent now to upgrade ventilation and HVAC systems to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Proposed Solutions:

- Advance a constitutional amendment to the people authorizing school district bond issues to be approved with a simple majority vote
- Update the construction and space formulas to ensure funding more closely reflects actual costs and educational space needs