

# BIG ISSUES AT THE CORE OF STATE FUNDING FOR WA SCHOOLS



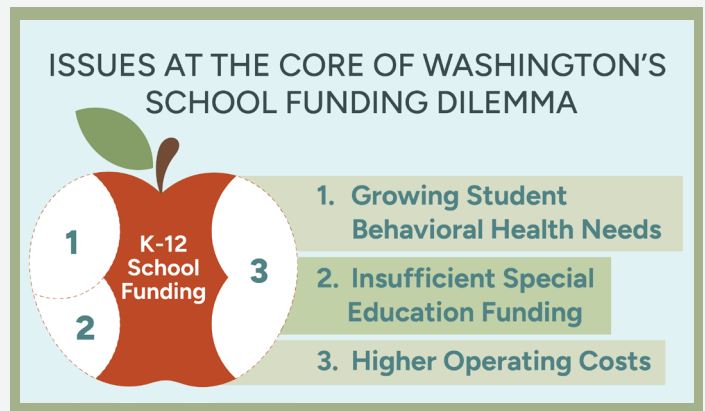
Countless schools across Washington are in financial crisis, dipping deep into their reserves, and slashing staff, programs, and services to stay afloat. Countless schools across Washington are in financial crisis, dipping deep into their reserves, and cutting staff, programs, and services to stay afloat. This is the fallout from the state’s education funding overhaul (the 2017 McCleary “Solution”).

## WHAT IS NEEDED?

Restore the state’s investment in K–12 education and align state resources with the actual needs and expenses of school districts.

### IN THE SHORT TERM, THIS MEANS:

- 🍏 Fully fund student support programs and staff.
- 🍏 Fully fund the actual costs of special education.
- 🍏 Increase funding allocations for transportation, supplies, insurance, and other school operating expenses to match actual and rising costs.



## IN THE LONG TERM

- 🍏 Reexamine the McCleary “Solution” to fix structural issues with the outdated formula and develop a school funding mechanism that recognizes the unique needs and differences of Washington’s 295 school districts. One size does not fit all.
- 🍏 The underfunding of education through an insufficient funding model is hurting our schools, our students, our communities, and ultimately our state’s future.
- 🍏 Fully funding K–12 education for all children in Washington is a state constitutional duty. The State’s [Supreme Court](#) reaffirmed this conclusion, yet even after a [funding system overhaul](#), reforms, and some investment in the 2024 Legislative Session, the state’s efforts still fall short, leaving countless school districts in financial crisis.

# THESE ARE THE CORE ISSUES

## K-12 EDUCATION ISN'T A STATE PRIORITY

Immediately following the state's funding system overhaul with the "McCleary Solution," more than 52 percent of the state's operating budget was dedicated to K-12 education. Today, K-12 is supported by only 43% of the operating budget, and Washington ranks well below the national average for investment in K-12 education as a percentage of Gross State Product.

## GROWING STUDENT SUPPORT NEEDS AND AN END TO SUPPORT FUNDING






School districts have been using temporary federal pandemic relief funding to fill the gap between student needs and state funds for counselors, school nurses and psychologists, academic recovery and prevention programs, etc. The temporary federal funding ends in the 2023-24 school year and school districts can no longer rely on this funding source.

## INADEQUATE STATE SPECIAL EDUCATION FUNDING

Although it is a state and federal requirement, the state limits the percentage of students in a district covered by state and federal special education funding. The Legislature [raised the funding limit](#) in 2024, which amounts to an investment of [\\$19.6 million for 2024-25](#). But in the 2022-23 school year alone, special education expenses were **unfunded by \$529.8 million**.

## INFLATED OPERATING COSTS

The price of the things that schools need to support students has skyrocketed, but the money schools get from the state isn't even close to keeping up.

-  **Food Service**  
The prices of food have increased dramatically in recent years. Milk alone has gone up more than 33% in the Western United States since 2018.
-  **Salaries**  
There is a significant gap between what the state funds and the actual cost of staff salaries. The average salary for certificated teachers has increased by 61% since 2017-18, yet state funding has only increased by less than 18%.
-  **Transportation**  
The price of fuel has gone up 39% in the Western United States since 2018. That's a steep increase for schools that are required to provide bus transportation for students. In the 2022-23 school year alone, \$80.7 million in state-wide school transportation expenses were left unfunded by the state.
-  **Utilities**  
Since 2018, the average cost of electricity in the Western United States increased by 37%. The price of natural gas for heating increased by 62%.
-  **Insurance**  
Just like a homeowner or a business, local school districts must carry insurance. Since 2020, the cost of insurance for Washington's school districts has increased by nearly 60 percent (through 23-24). Costs continue to increase. The state only pays for a portion of the total cost, leaving the school district to foot the bill for more than \$73.7 million in 2023-24 alone.