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Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
Chris Reykdal, Superintendent

March 12, 2025

Dear Honorable Legislators:

As you contemplate hard choices for your budget proposals, I want to share some critical context about the current state of funding for K–12 public schools.

Despite the cuts that many school districts have already made to the programs and staff that support our students every day, districts across the state are facing extreme financial distress. Funding per student simply has not kept up with inflation since 2019. It is imperative that the Legislature act now and provide sufficient funding for public schools.

Fully Funding Basic Education

This fall, I submitted a budget request to fund Washington's constitutional basic education obligation, phasing-in investments over multiple years. The request totals \$501 million in fiscal year 2026 and \$1.5 billion for the 2025–27 biennium. As we approach the halfway point of Session, it is clear the two chambers are very far apart in their approaches to funding the state's basic education obligation. For example, regarding the daily costs to run our schools (materials, supplies, and operating costs), the Senate proposes nearly \$190 million for the biennium, while the House proposes just under \$50 million. This level of investment is not sufficient to adequately close deep funding gaps that have persisted under extreme inflation over the past five years.

Even more concerning is that while the two chambers started with similar policy solutions to address special education funding gaps, the proposal moving forward in the House leaves the legally questionable enrollment cap in place, and its modest increases to the special education funding multipliers will generate only slightly more than \$150 million over the next biennium. This is a significant difference from the Senate proposal which removes the enrollment cap and provides nearly \$1 billion for the biennium.

Without full funding for basic education, many of Washington's school districts are weighing serious decisions to reduce student programming, lay off staff, and increase class sizes to balance their budgets. **If we don't make significant investments now in special education and materials and supplies, we will see a larger number of school districts in binding conditions (financial oversight), with additional cuts to programming and staff in nearly all districts statewide.**

Returning Local Levy Authority and Local Effort Assistance (LEA) to 2018 Levels

Across the state, communities continue to approve levies in support of their local schools at very high rates. In the February election, 81% of operating and capital levies passed, representing 91% of the funds being sought. The 2018 Legislature reduced local levy authority and LEA—despite this never being a requirement of the State Supreme Court in the *McCleary* decision.

The impact of that reduction was immediate and staggering. From 2018 to 2019, Washington school districts collected \$1.2 billion less in local levy dollars and LEA funding, an immediate decrease of 39%. If the law had not changed, then adjusted for inflation, Washington's public schools would have received \$900 million more in 2024 in combined levy collections and LEA.

Mending our Regressive Tax Structure to Support Children and Families

It has been heartening to see multiple communications from the Legislature on the need for increased revenue. If the Legislature chooses to move forward with an austerity budget that only includes cuts and no new sources of revenue—especially as the federal government is slashing funding for Head Start, meals programs, and more—the impacts on our young people and their families will be devastating.

Investments in our public schools should not be sustained on the back of the social safety net that protects our most vulnerable children and families. Education and the social safety net are two systems that are designed to work together to support student learning and well-being. Student learning is affected when students are hungry, when they are facing housing instability, and when they do not have access to health care. Making cuts in one area **will** affect the other area and now is not the time for us to go backward when it comes to supporting our most vulnerable families and communities.

Underscoring all of this is the new risk from the federal government around federal funding. Across our school districts, federal funds comprise an average of 7% of budgets. However, the range varies widely from district-to-district, with our districts in rural Washington seeing a substantially greater reliance on federal funding than Puget Sound area districts ([see an interactive map of federal funding by school district on our website](#)).

I do not sound the alarm lightly. I know you are facing incredibly complex decisions as you weigh the vast needs of our state. Despite our substantial wealth, Washington state has the second-most regressive tax structure in the nation. I implore you to choose new revenue options that maintain our competitiveness and ensure that all Washington children, no matter their background, have the necessary resources and supports to become the leaders of the future that we need.

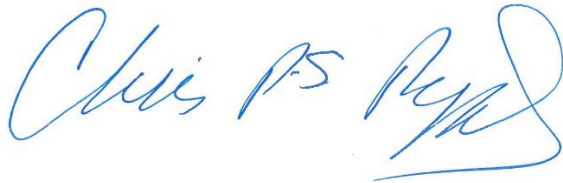
Protecting Earned Pay for Our Highly Trained Educators

I cannot fathom a cut to salaries in a 70%+ female profession where salaries already lag the private sector for similar education levels. National Board bonuses reward teachers who are committed to their professional growth, many teach in high-poverty schools, and this state has made a promise to them. If there are cuts to be made, they should come from spending that is not required by current law.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to me for any additional information that you may need, including about student performance, which continues to show that Washington's students outperform the national average in reading and math.

Thank you for your hard work and for your commitment to making tough decisions in the best interests of our shared future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Chris P.S. Reykdal". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "R" at the end.

Chris Reykdal
Superintendent of
Public Instruction