

2025 Legislative Priorities

TOP THREE STATEWIDE PRIORITIES



Special Education

The 2025 Legislature must fully fund the cost of special education services. School districts have a legal obligation to serve all students with disabilities in Washington, regardless of cost of services, yet they do not have the necessary resources to provide those services. Even with recent funding enhancements, the gap between school district expenditures for special education and related services substantially exceeds funding—and continues to grow. This gap requires districts to continue to use local funding sources, including local levies, to cover necessary costs. To ensure school districts are provided with funding that reflects the actual costs of service delivery, the Legislature must increase special education tiered multipliers and remove the arbitrary enrollment funding cap.

BPS impact

Over 16% of our student population qualify to receive Special Education services and without adequate funding we use \$7M of local levy funds - funds that are supposed to be used for enrichment.

Pupil Transportation

The 2025 Legislature must promptly fulfill its obligation to comprehensively fix the pupil transportation formula to ensure it is more transparent, predictable, and adequately funded. The intent of the current Student Transportation Allocation Reporting System (STARS) is to allow the Legislature to allocate funding to districts that aligns with actual costs of providing school transportation services. Regardless of the intent, the STARS formula has consistently underfunded districts' actual pupil transportation expenditures. The STARS formula cannot forecast allocations with credible accuracy, calculates a final allocation in February which complicates budget decisions for school districts and the Legislature, and uses an efficiency rating that is detrimental to efficient districts because they are at risk of less funding in the model.

BPS impact

We are eligible for funding of \$6.8M in 2023-24 but as the actual funding is based on prior year's expenditures of \$5.4M, it resulted in a shortfall of \$1.4M.

Materials, Supplies, and Operating Costs (MSOC)

The 2025 Legislature must immediately address the significant underfunding of allocations for MSOC. While staffing represents the largest expense for school districts, there are many costs to running a school district which are non-staff related. The Legislature provides an allocation to cover these costs by providing for MSOC at a specific rate per student; however, state funding for MSOC has not kept pace with actual school district costs. Liability insurance alone has increased over 100 percent in the last five years, while utility costs have increased more than 40 percent. Other costs, such as food and fuel, have also increased dramatically. Current per pupil rates for MSOC simply do not come close to matching costs of running a school district. These costs are increasing through no fault of School Districts, superintendents or school boards and their decisions. When required costs of running a school district exceed state funding, local revenues, mostly levies, must be used to fill the gap, reducing local resources for school district and community expectations.

BPS impact

In 2024-25, we are budgeting to spend \$6.8M on utilities and insurance, \$3M more than the amount the state funds us.

Utility costs have increased 41 percent since 2018-19. Insurance costs have more than tripled in that time.

Bellingham Public Schools 2025 Legislative Priorities, *continued*

CRITICAL NEEDS FOR OUR DISTRICT

Fix Regionalization

The current regionalization methodology does not align with actual, recognized community economies as evidenced by Bellingham receiving less regionalization funding than nearby districts. Despite having the highest median house value among our neighbors, Bellingham has the lowest regionalization factor, and our funding is being cut short as a result.

Bellingham used to be at 12%. The state has reduced us down to 6%.

Here are some of our neighbors:

6%	Ferndale, Mt Baker and Nooksack
12%	Lynden, Meridian, Sedro Woolley, Mt Vernon, Burlington-Edison
13%	Blaine, La Conner
16%	Anacortes

If we were to get back to our previous level of 12%, it would be an increase of ~ \$5.47 million dollars. One suggestion is to have regionalization by county.

Fix Experience Factor

Experience factor is “for districts with staff that have a higher-than-average experience and a higher ratio of advanced to master’s degrees than the statewide ratio”.

The state recalculates every three years, instead of every year. Last year legislation was proposed to change this. It did not make it through. **If up-to-date data was used, we would be receiving \$3.6M additional dollars.**

BIG PICTURE FIXES

Increase Percentage of State Funding to Education Back to Where it Used to Be: K-12 Education is not being prioritized by the Legislature and we are losing ground in the share of the State Operating Budget. In 2019-21 biennium K-12 held 52% of the budget; by this last session we were at 44%.

Adequately Fund Compensation: Regionalization factors have diminished, and experience factors are not applied despite one third of our staff being at the highest step in both experience and qualification. Bellingham has the highest cost of living, based on house median value, in Whatcom County and all our staff deserve to be adequately paid. Our average certificated salary has increased from \$89,052 in 2018-19 to \$123,518 in 24-25. During the same period the state funded salary has maintained an average of \$77,378.

Lift Local Levy Lids: Levies are capped at \$2,500 per student, adjusted by inflation. If our voter approved levy exceeds the levy lid, we must reduce the amount we can collect.

If not adequately funded, then allow for a modified school year: RCW 28A.150.222 restricts the use of waivers to reduce the 180-day school year. Without significant investment from the state in 2025 we will be forced to make significant reductions. By reducing the number of days in the school year, for example, we could better maintain programming and staffing for a modified school year.

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