

Public Letter: A Call to Fully Fund Public Education in Washington State

To Whom it May Concern,

Washington's Constitution is crystal clear about one thing: educating our children isn't just a budget line — it is the State's *paramount* duty. Our public schools are supposed to be funded fully, amply, and equitably so that every child, in every community, has access to a high-quality education.

That's not happening, and the consequences reach far beyond school walls.

School districts across Washington — including Bellingham — are being asked to serve more complex student needs with less and less support. Inflation has pushed the cost of heat, insurance, transportation, basic staffing, and special education far beyond what the State funds. Districts are cutting back, draining reserves, and relying on local levies to fill gaps that, by law, the State is supposed to fund. As a result, school districts like Bellingham are cutting programs, draining reserves, and forced to consider options that are likely to increase class size, reduce student choice, and add to educator and staff workloads.

This doesn't just hurt children — though it most certainly does. This legislative failure harms our entire community, our workforce, and the long-term health of Washington's economy.

Here is what this looks like in real terms:

- **Essential operating costs** have skyrocketed — insurance up more than 100%, utilities up over 40% — while state funding has barely moved.
- **Special education is dramatically underfunded**, forcing districts to shift millions away from general education and leaving all students and teachers with fewer supports.
- **Outdated state formulas** — including regionalization and experience factors — fail to reflect current housing costs and labor markets, and they fail to honor our teachers commitments and experience.
- **Regionalization adjustments — meant to account for local housing and labor markets — no longer match reality**, leaving Bellingham with the lowest adjustment in the county despite having the highest median housing cost.

- And when enrollment fluctuates, the State has considered pulling back already-budgeted dollars — even though schools’ fixed costs don’t shrink when student numbers dip.

When we underfund public schools, we all pay the price.

Students lose opportunities.

Families lose stability.

Employers lose a prepared workforce.

Communities lose the very institutions that hold us together.

And the state loses the long-term economic strength that only a well-educated population can provide.

We can do better. And the Constitution requires us to do better.

We, the undersigned labor, community, education, and advocacy organizations, call on the Washington State Legislature to:

1. Honor the Constitution and fully fund public education
2. Stop tying essential funding to enrollment fluctuations
3. Fix outdated formulas — including MSOCs, regionalization, and experience factors — using current data
4. Fully fund special education and other state-mandated services
5. Create a stable, equitable, sustainable revenue framework for the long term that strengthens not only schools, but our entire state.

Fully funded public schools are not just an investment in children; they’re the foundation of a strong workforce, a healthy democracy, and vibrant local economies. Every child, in every community, deserves a school system that prepares them for a thriving future. Their well-being—and our state’s—depend on it.

We call on the Legislature to meet this moment and keep the promise our Constitution makes: that Washington’s children, families, and communities will never be asked to succeed without the tools they need to thrive.