RESOLUTION NO. 02-26

A RESOLUTION URGING THE WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATURE TO HONOR ITS CONSTITUTIONAL DUTY TO FULLY FUND PUBLIC EDUCATION

Whereas, the Washington State Constitution states that "It is the **paramount duty** of the state to make **ample provision** for the education of **all children**"; and

Whereas, Article IX, Section 2 requires the Legislature to provide a "**general and uniform system** of public schools" and directs that revenue derived for the support of common schools be applied **exclusively** to those schools, underscoring that constitutionally-designated education funding cannot be diverted to non-education purposes; and

Whereas, the percentage of the state operating budget devoted to K-12 education has declined from 52% in 2019 to 43% in 2025, reflecting a shift away from treating public education as the state's paramount duty; and

Whereas, Bellingham Public Schools faces significant funding shortfalls as it prepares for the 2026-2027 school year, despite exceptional local levy support and substantial reductions already implemented for 2025-2026; and

MSOCS

Whereas, the Legislature funds operating costs through a per-student Materials, Supplies, and Operating Costs (MSOC) allocation, yet MSOC funding has not kept pace with actual, documented increases in essential operating costs; and

Whereas, utility costs for Bellingham Public Schools have increased by more than 40% over the last five years, and liability insurance premiums have increased by more than 100% during that same period, while MSOC allocations have risen only marginally; and

Whereas, this mismatch leaves Bellingham Public Schools with an annual shortfall of $3.5 million for utilities and insurance in the 2025-2026 school year, requiring the district to use local levies to cover costs that are part of the State-defined program of basic education; and

Whereas, these operating costs are not discretionary — they determine whether classrooms are heated, buildings remain insured, technology functions, schools stay open, and safe learning environments are maintained for children; and

Whereas, underfunded MSOC allocations force districts to redirect classroom and staffing resources to cover basic operational expenses, directly affecting the quality, safety, and consistency of children's learning environments; and

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Whereas, more than 17 percent of Bellingham Public Schools' students qualify for special education services; above the previous state mandated funding caps that have restricted funding, spending down fund balance for years before legislative changes; and

Whereas, despite the Legislature's recent action to remove the enrollment cap, the State's current special education funding model still does not cover the actual cost of providing federally and state-mandated services to the full number of students served, leaving Bellingham Public Schools to redirect approximately $6 million in state basic-education funding each year—dollars that are intended for staffing and MSOCs—simply to meet legal requirements for children with disabilities; and

Whereas, this diversion of basic-education funds affects all students by increasing class sizes, reducing program options, limiting staffing, and undermining the State's constitutional obligation to provide a "general and uniform system of public schools" under Article IX, Section 2; and

REGIONALIZATION

Whereas, the State's current regionalization methodology does not align with actual community cost-of-living conditions, resulting in Bellingham Public Schools receiving a 6 percent regionalization factor—the same as districts such as Concrete, Ferndale, Mt. Baker, and Nooksack—despite Bellingham having the highest median home value and highest cost of living in Whatcom County; and

Whereas, nearby districts with similar cost-of-living indicators, such as Anacortes and Conway, receive a 16 percent regionalization factor, while other neighboring districts with *lower* cost indicators (such as Blaine, Burlington-Edison, La Conner, Lynden, Meridian, Mt. Vernon, and Sedro-Woolley) receive 12 percent; and

Whereas, Bellingham previously received a 12 percent regionalization factor, and the State's reduction to 6 percent has resulted in funding that does not reflect the district's actual labor market, living costs, or competitive staffing needs; and

Whereas, restoring Bellingham to its previous 12 percent regionalization level would generate approximately $5.7 million in additional annual funding necessary to hire and retain qualified educators and staff for children; and

Whereas, this misalignment contradicts Article IX, Section 2's constitutional requirement for a "general and uniform system of public schools," as uniformity cannot be achieved when districts with higher costs receive lower funding than nearby districts with lower costs; and

EXPERIENCE FACTOR

Whereas, the State's "experience factor" allocation is defined as additional funding for districts whose staff have higher-than-average years of experience and higher levels of advanced degrees; and

Whereas, one-third of Bellingham Public Schools' certificated staff are at the highest step in both experience and qualifications, making Bellingham precisely the type of district this allocation was designed to support; and

Whereas, the State's current experience factor rates were calculated using outdated staffing data that no longer reflects actual staff qualifications in many districts and are not scheduled to be updated until the 2027–2028 school year; and

Whereas, because of this outdated data, Bellingham Public Schools receives $3.8 million less than it would if the State applied current staffing information, directly affecting the continuity and stability of children's educational environments; and

Whereas, the state required certificated substitute costs are unfunded through the state model and result in a $1.3 million impact to Bellingham Public Schools; and

ENROLLMENT FLUCTUATIONS AND CONSTITUTIONAL IMPACT

Whereas, fixed costs — including staffing, transportation, utilities, maintenance, and federally mandated services — do not meaningfully decrease when enrollment fluctuates, and reducing budgeted state funds due to enrollment changes undermines the district's constitutional ability to provide a program of basic education to the children who remain; and

Whereas, withholding or redirecting budgeted education funds due to enrollment fluctuations is inconsistent with the State's duty to make ample provision for all children

and destabilizes the uniformity and sufficiency of public education guaranteed under Article IX; and

Whereas, the Washington State Legislature has failed to act on a variety of options presented to address the systemically underfunded public education system in Washington State;

Now, therefore, be it resolved that the Board of Directors of Bellingham School District No. 501 formally urges the Washington State Legislature to fulfill its constitutional obligations under Article IX, Sections 1 and 2 by maintaining budgeted investments in public education regardless of enrollment fluctuations, ensuring that children receive the stable and ample funding the Constitution requires.

Be it further resolved that the Bellingham School District No. 501 Board of Directors formally urges the Washington State Legislature to update funding formulas — including MSOC, regionalization, and the experience factor — using current and complete data that reflects real costs and labor markets, ensuring accuracy, stability, and equity for children.

Be it further resolved that the Bellingham School District No. 501 Board of Directors formally urges the Washington State Legislature to fully fund all state-mandated services, including special education, MSOC, and certificated substitute costs, so all children's needs are met without reliance on local levies.

Be it further resolved that the Bellingham School District No. 501 Board of Directors formally urges the Legislature to establish a comprehensive, stable, and sustainable revenue framework that ensures ample, equitable, and constitutionally compliant funding for all children in Washington State.

Adopted at a regular meeting of the Bellingham School District No. 501 School District Board of Directors this 15th day of January 2026.

Board of Directors
Bellingham School District No. 501
Whatcom County, Washington