



## THE WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

*A high-quality education system that prepares all students for college, career, and life.*

September 8, 2016

Dear Members of the Education Funding Task Force:

We appreciate your request for input from stakeholder communities on how the Education Funding Task Force can utilize its platform to better our education system in Washington State. Specifically, you ask for “a description of what you feel would define a successful Washington K-12 public school system.”

The State Board of Education has a unique role in this process. By statute, the Board is charged with “advocacy and strategic oversight of public education,” as well as a responsibility to “promote achievement of the goals” of the program of basic education ([RCW 28A.305.130](#)). We also have a unique responsibility in setting standards for high school graduation for individual students, and setting goals for our public education system on a range of student achievement indicators ([RCW.28A.150.550](#)).

Given our role, we are regularly confronted with the relationship between the standards set for our schools, and the resources deployed to help reach those standards. Our collective view is that performance and funding are connected. While minimum proficiency standards may not require difficult resource decisions, truly high college and career-ready standards for all students – such as those adopted by Washington - require commensurately high resources.

We believe that the role standards play in funding decisions is key to your work. We understand that analyzing the accounting detail of how districts spend their local levy funding is potentially useful to policymakers. We are concerned, however, that it becomes the basis for determining what ‘ample’ funding is. It seems more desirable that “full funding” be based not simply on what was included in HB 2276, or what is currently expended out of excess levies, but rather on a specially designed basic education program that broadly fulfills the ambitious statutory goal of preparing all high school graduates “for success in postsecondary education, gainful employment, and citizenship.” ([RCW 28A.230.090](#)). That is what we believe the [Quality Education Council](#) attempted to do, and what we ask you to consider as part of your recommendations going forward.

Despite our ambitious goals, it is worth noting that today approximately 3 out of every 10 low-income students do not graduate in 4 years, while only slightly more than half of limited English proficient students do so. Without the needed resources, these gaps will persist and may even widen as we transition to a K-12 system that is fully aligned to college and career-ready standards. While funding levels are certainly not the only reason for these unacceptable outcomes, we believe they are a meaningful contributing factor. Accordingly, we would ask the Task Force to consider the following recommendations for inclusion in its final report.

*Isabel Muñoz-Colón, Chair • Ben Rarick, Executive Director*

*Janis Avery • Mona Bailey • MJ Bolt • Jeff Estes • Connie Fletcher • Baxter Hershman • Bob Hughes • Judy Jennings • Holly Koon  
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## **Compensation:**

The current district compensation expenditure levels reflected in local excess levies may or may not have a meaningful connection to the rates necessary to attract and retain high quality teachers in a given community. We recommend relying upon competitive market rate data, either that provided to the [Compensation Technical Working Group](#) by Dr. Lori Taylor, or that which is produced through your engagement with the Institute for Public Policy. We would also ask that the Committee consider regional cost variations in the context of what it takes to actually attract teachers to the outer regions of rural Washington State. The State Board heard from a [panel of rural superintendents](#) on the issue at its May meeting. The compelling point they make is that while housing and other services may be more expensive in the Puget Sound, the cost of attracting qualified candidates to a remote location can override any “savings” a district could theoretically realize in wages (i.e. lower housing costs are not a benefit if nobody relocates to live there).

The way that the state allocates compensation also matters. The state should heed the recommendations of the Professional Educator Standards Board and others by shifting away from the state’s current salary allocation model that heavily subsidizes years of experience and graduate school credits, in favor of a [career ladder structure](#) that has a more meaningful connection to advancement in professional practice, and ultimately, student outcomes. As the Legislature addresses compensation reform sparingly, it would be unfortunate to come out of the 2017 legislative session without [meaningful movement on this topic](#).

## **Professional Development:**

The Board has long held that [professional development should be part of the program of basic education](#). Currently, systematic professional development for teachers is treated by our funding system as a local enhancement; a non-essential add-on that practitioners must live without if their district lacks a local levy, or has a levy constrained by other costs. Yet, this is at odds with what the research tells us, and practitioners know to be true: it is impossible to deliver a high quality program of basic education without opportunities for reflection, collaboration, inquiry, and planning for teachers. As professional development funding is so interwoven with compensation policy and TRI pay, it seems appropriate for the Task Force to address this issue in its report.

## **Equity & Closing Opportunity Gaps:**

The Board has tried to bring attention to the gaps in opportunity that exist across the state for students of color. For example, it is clear from your preliminary report that districts are having difficulty applying a uniform definition of what constitutes basic education programming, versus what constitutes compensation for “local enhancements”. My concern is that this lack of clarity leads to considerable local variation in what program of basic education is guaranteed locally. Ultimately, I believe this lack of clarity may work to short-change our traditionally underserved populations of students in poorer communities. Local levies by design provide local variety in programming, but the guaranteed program of basic education should be robust and enforceable for all students across the state.

In conclusion, while the *McCleary* court case hangs over these deliberations, we wish to reinforce that our primary goals are not to satisfy the Court’s requirements. Rather, they are to enact changes

that will advance educational opportunities for students in Washington State. For this reason, we have taken a [strong stand against a 'levy swap' plan](#), in which the state would assume some portion of what districts already pay in compensation, only to commensurately lower and cap local levies, leaving districts with approximately the same funding, but with less regulatory flexibility. Our view is that this is unlikely to improve student outcomes, and will not establish the sort of enduring alignment we seek, where funding levels are driven by the expectations we set for students, and the schools that serve them.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment, and I look forward to working with you on these important matters.

On behalf of the Board,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Isabel Muñoz-Colón". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "I".

Isabel Muñoz-Colón, Chair

State Board of Education