

K-12 Education

Budget builds on state's landmark school funding achievements

During the past five years, Gov. Inslee and the Legislature dramatically boosted state funding for public K-12 schools and 1 million students. In response to the 2012 McCleary court decision, the state has phased in public school funding of \$4.7 billion. Last year, the final piece of the funding response to the McCleary case was enacted with a \$1 billion state increase in education employee compensation.

As new McCleary funding is maintained in the coming years, the focus of state budgets and policies for the public schools will be on enhancing services for all students, especially for those with the greatest needs for help in achieving their bright potential.

The 2019–21 budget will be the first in which all McCleary funding improvements will be fully funded for an entire biennium: The additional cost of meeting McCleary and other K-12 obligations is nearly \$4.1 billion above the current budget.

Inslee understands that meeting the state's basic education funding obligation was just a start. His budget for the next biennium calls for several major enhancements to the state's public school system.

Local levy authority

Funding the McCleary decision was essential to providing appropriate funding for basic education. Yet Inslee believes that mandatory base funding for schools should be a floor for support and not a ceiling, or limit, on local communities' ability to enhance school services through voter-approved local levies. The governor has heard from schools and families across the state that levy reforms implemented in 2017 simply went too far in reducing local control of school district programming and operations.

With his budget, the governor proposes returning to Washington's traditional levy structure beginning

in calendar year 2020. His levy proposal eliminates old complications such as grandfathering and ghost revenue calculations for a more simplified approach. It allows all districts to levy up to 28 percent of their combined state and federal revenues and reinstates state equalization of local levies at 14 percent of the same. His budget calls for a \$214 million biennial increase in Local Effort Assistance.

Student supports

The governor proposes increasing staffing levels — as called for under Initiative 1351 — for nurses, social workers, psychologists and guidance counselors in elementary and middle schools. These staff provide a system of support for students' physical, mental and emotional well-being in addition to serving as potential points of contact for students who may be seeking adults to trust. The budget includes \$155 million for districts in which more than half of students are eligible for free and reduced price meals. This kicks off a six-year phase-in beginning with Washington's lowest-income districts. Eventually, all districts will be served.

Special education

Investments in the 2018 legislative session, including the final compensation increase under McCleary, raised special education program funding by \$340 million from the 2017–18 to the 2018–19 school years.

In his 2019–21 budget, the governor takes the next steps to funding the special education needs of Washington students:

- \$51 million to fully fund the safety net, a program that reimburses districts for extraordinary expenditures on services to students with the highest-cost special education needs.

- \$94 million to begin phasing in the targeted and enhanced special education funding structure proposed by Superintendent of Public Instruction Chris Reykdal. As the state explores its goals and options for special education, the superintendent's plan will align state resources more closely with student needs.
- \$1 million for the Washington State Institute of Public Policy to study special education goals, services and outcomes — nationally and internationally — to help inform Washington's future options for special education.

Science education

The budget includes \$4 million to double the current investment in climate science education in our schools. This will promote more teacher development in science education and bolster support for community-based organizations to partner with schools and educational service districts to develop training and curriculum supports.

Another \$4 million is for computer science grants, bringing funding for this program to a total of \$6 million. This new investment includes a \$1 million increase for a grant program that requires private matching funds for disbursement. The other \$3 million is for grants to districts in which more than 60 percent of students are eligible for free and reduced price meals.

Student mental health and safety

The budget includes \$7.5 million for a regional support structure for districts to offer a coordinated approach to prevention, early identification and intervention for student behavioral health and safety needs. Coordinated by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and with supports delivered by the nine educational service districts, the proposed funding will provide school districts with capacity to:

- Develop and implement comprehensive safe schools plans.

- Recognize and respond to emotional and behavioral distress in students.
- Expand student access to publicly funded behavioral health services.

Addressing the opportunity gap

The governor proposes additional investments to improve educational outcomes for all students and to address opportunity gaps. These include expansion of dual language opportunities and recruitment of educators from diverse populations and with the ability to teach in multiple languages:

- \$2.7 million to expand and strengthen the state's dual language grant program and statewide supports.
- \$500,000 to cover exam fees for low-income students seeking to earn the Seal of Bilingual Proficiency.
- \$300,000 to widen recruitment of bilingual educators across the state.
- \$50,000 to develop K-12 Spanish language arts learning standards.
- \$3.6 million for scholarships to recruit and retain teachers and address teacher shortages with the condition that the recipients work in Washington public schools for two years (or one year if working in a shortage area).

Paraeducator training

Our public schools rely heavily on paraeducators to serve students in many capacities. A 2017 law requires that all paraeducators receive four days of training in the fundamental course of study within their first year of employment and another 10 days of training during the following three years to obtain a paraeducator certificate. To achieve the goal of a fully trained paraeducator workforce, the governor's budget includes \$24.6 million for four days of training in the 2019–20 school year.