

Joint Taskforce on Basic Education Finance Key Elements of the Draft Recommendations

(As of January 5, 2009 – Ross Hunter)

The Task Force has completed more than a year of intensive deliberations about how to **redefine “basic education”** and **develop a funding system** to pay for it. The group has submitted their recommendations to the Legislature.

Redefinition of “basic education”

- Define basic education as the opportunity for all students to meet the new, more rigorous high school graduation requirements proposed by the State Board of Education. This new requirement includes increasing the current number of required credits from 19 to 24.
- Include pre-school for children from low-income families, specialized instruction for English language learners and students with disabilities, and extra time and teaching for struggling students.
- Include the means to achieve these goals (i.e., the associated funding formulas).

Early Learning

- Include pre-school for all children from low-income families in the definition of basic education. The proposed pre-school program would be based on the federal Head Start model.

A model instructional program of basic education

- Specify requirements for the number of hours and days of public school instruction
- Allocate sufficient funding for additional time and resources for pre-school programs, struggling students, students who need to learn English, students with disabilities, and students who live in state residential facilities.

Core allocations to school districts*

- Provide smaller class sizes of both academic and career and technical education programs, and additional days for teacher professional development.
- Increase funding for school counselors, teacher-librarians and other specialist professionals, and funding for classified staff, school administration and other costs.
- Base allocations on the number of students to be served.
- Base allocations for additional time and instruction for struggling students on the percentage of students in a school who come from low-income families. However, use these funds to serve all students who need extra help, regardless of family income.
- Provide funding for special education, instruction for English language learners, and highly capable students.

* These funding allocations are more specific and more easily understood than current funding formulas. This clarity will help citizens and the Legislature understand what is being paid for and measure results.

A new system of teacher preparation and a new career ladder

Investing in quality teachers is the best investment we can make in our education system.

- Provide resources for intensive mentoring of new teacher by expert teachers coupled with an ongoing peer review system of teachers’ classroom practice.
- Create a career ladder for teachers that include three levels: residency, professional, and master teacher. Moving up this career ladder will require successively higher scores on the objective, structured peer review.

- The Professional Education Standards Board will create the peer review process and set scores for entry into the teaching profession and advancement on the career ladder. The master level will be equivalent in skill and effectiveness to teachers who have earned National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification.
- Peer reviews will be performed by master teachers from school districts other than the teachers who are being reviewed.

A new compensation system

The new salary allocation model provides for:

- Mentoring of new teachers by master teachers,
- A mechanism for comparing educator salaries to similar non-education salaries in regional labor markets,
- School-wide bonuses for improving student learning, and
- Special incentives to attract teachers in shortage areas such as math, science, bilingual education and special education.

Funding and oversight

- Retain the provisions of Initiative 732 (cost-of-living increases for educators and school staff).
- Remove Initiative 728 (classroom size reduction) and fold that funding into the core allocations.
- Continue small school district funding enhancement.
- Require all schools to use a common fiscal accountability and budgeting data system.
- Support implementation of the State Board of Education's accountability principles, which outline a system for intervention and improvement in schools where student achievement is insufficient.

Local school levies and levy equalization

- Local levies provide flexibility for local communities to go beyond the basics and should remain part of the funding system in Washington State.
- Local levies should be limited and equalized, with consistent formulas and no grandfathering of variable rates. Unlike the current system the new levy system should be based on how much local support is permitted per student, rather than being based on either local property values or the revenues generated by the district.
- These are complex and technical questions. The legislature should create a technical team to develop a new local levy and equalization system for implementation in the 2011-2013 biennium and later.

Costs and phase-in of the new system

- The goal is to phase in these changes over six years.
- Reductions in class size will also create additional demand for teachers and other school staff, and these positions cannot be filled quickly.
- The phase-in plan should be flexible, but the state's commitment to creating the new systems and providing full funding for basic education should be incontrovertible.

Next steps:

- Task Force members have until January 2nd to review the draft proposal.
- Estimated cost of the proposal will be finalized after all changes to the draft document are made.
- A final report to the Legislature will be forthcoming, and will include several minority reports/opinions.