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March 26, 2009

The Honorable Frank Chopp  
Speaker of the House  
Post Office Box 40600  
Olympia, WA 98504-0600

The Honorable Lisa Brown  
Washington State Senate  
Post Office Box 40403  
Olympia, WA 98504-0403

Dear Speaker  and Senator Brown:

I complement the House and Senate legislators for their work with educators and interested parent and community groups in developing their recommendations for our education system. The size of this undertaking is monumental, partly due to the lack of attention paid to the topic historically, partly due to the complexity of our system today, and partly due to the welcome goal to make our system more understandable and focused.

Elements of the legislation I support:

- Using the model school prototype to allocate funds to school districts and for districts to report back on their expenditure decisions. This creates clarity and understanding for not only the state, but local tax payers, regarding what the state means when it provides support for **basic** education.
- Incorporating the meaningful high school diploma language that prepares all students, including those in poverty and those for whom English is not their first language, for postsecondary education, gainful employment and citizenship by phasing-in twenty-four credits for graduation.
- Strengthening the role of data to inform the decisions made in a dynamic education system.
- Acknowledging and building upon the work of the Professional Educator Standards Board in developing a state-of-the-art teacher preparation and certification system.

Recommendations for change in the legislation:

A statement needs to be made in statute, not just in an intent section, that the definition of **basic** education is evolving. And, that the legal definition does not change from what it is today to something else until there is the fiscal capacity to implement the change. This means that the system has to be able to operate under a new definition successfully – having the resources and other supports to meet programmatic requirements. Regarding the timing and implementation of the redefinition of basic education, I support the Senate language with modifications. See the enclosed language.



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Further, as we have observed and now recognize, this evolving definition of **basic** education has a dynamic component to it. We cannot repeat what has occurred over the last thirty years – create a definition and assume the task is completed. As you have heard me say before, we are in a period of exponential change. More unique information will be created this year than in the previous 5,000 years. And the top ten in-demand jobs for 2010 didn't exist in 2004. We must provide an avenue to make our definition adaptable to advancements in education that would require new determinations of what is **basic**.

Additionally:

- The first thing we must do when the economy turns around is to fill the education funding holes that will be created in the 2009-11 operating budget. While **basic** education funding must, and will be protected, the infrastructure in which this takes place will be severely limited. For a short while we will have the benefit of federal resources to shore up our system, however that will not last. And while some programs may not return given the depth of our financial situation, there will be many that must be reinstated. For these reasons, 2011-12 cannot be identified in the proposed legislation as the year improvements in **basic** education will begin. As much as I would like it to happen, it will not be possible to do so.
- **BASIC** education is a foundation for our world-class education system; it is not the entire array of programs or complete set of possible learning experiences for students. Therefore, the highly capable program, enriched career and technical education programs, and smaller class sizes for Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs are not foundation programs and should not be included in the definition of **basic** education.
- Early learning cannot be included in a new definition of **basic** education. I have a passionate belief in the importance of early childhood education. However, I cannot, in good conscience, add early learning to the definition of **basic** education now when we already have an unrealized need and duty to do more to support our K-12 students.
- All-day kindergarten should continue to be phased-in with the highest poverty schools receiving these funds first. It should be clear that parents, who can afford it, may be asked by school districts to participate in supporting their student in all-day kindergarten programs.

Stakeholder recommendations:

I have been meeting with stakeholders, as I know you have been. As a group they represent diverse and varied interests. I asked them to meet and determine where they could agree. They have come forward with a set of recommendations. I think all of us are in accord with these overarching ideas: commitment to a meaningful high school diploma and meeting our constitutional responsibilities, no unfunded mandates, the need to backfill 2009-11 biennium reductions, transparent budgeting, an evolving definition of **basic** education.

We are also in agreement with the following details: 1) **Basic** education should provide extra learning time for struggling students and English language learners, full-day kindergarten, 24 credits for high school graduation; 2) Prototype school models should be used as a means for allocating resources; 3) Further development is needed for formula components and planning for implementation.

There are areas of disagreement – either I with stakeholders, or among the stakeholder groups.

- Not all could agree on the way to proceed with accountability. As a start, I support the House language, without the Baldrige component.
- They recommended the inclusion of the highly capable program within the definition of **basic** education. I have always supported highly capable programs. But I don't believe it is a part of **basic** education.
- They recommended the inclusion of specific numeric values in statute for each element in the recommended new definition of **basic** education. I believe this strategy constrains adaptability to our fast changing times.
- They recommended setting a specific six-year time frame for implementation, beginning in the 2011-12 school year. This is simply not doable in the economic crisis we face. Again, we will need to restore cuts as our first priority.
- They have come up with some ideas for revenue to support K-12. I am appreciative of this. As I have said all along, funding is fundamental to implementation of our new definition. More work is needed here.
- Not all could agree on the inclusion of early learning within a new definition of **basic** education. I cannot agree to do this until we implement fundamental changes to our K-12 system.
- Not all could agree on the goals for policy change in teacher compensation.

While there are areas of agreement and disagreement, these stakeholders and other groups are to be congratulated for their good work.

Finally, I believe we all know that much more needs to be done to further define and improve our education system. In the proposed legislation a number of tasks are assigned to be completed.

In regard to financial formulas, I recommend we consider an on-going process, yet to be defined, to produce recommendations biennially for consideration by the Legislature and Governor. I am not advocating another state agency, but something more akin to the forecast council as some stakeholders have discussed.

In regard to accountability for all involved in our education system and the creation and development of a new teacher compensation structure as well as teacher evaluation improvements, I am committed to personally work with you, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, educators and others involved in our system to bring specific recommendations to the Legislature. These issues are inextricably linked; they must be built carefully, and they must be supported with confidence and respected by the education system and our state's citizens.

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I support the goal of leaving this legislative session with a path forward, a means to keep the ball rolling to a better K-12 system for our students. This system must provide opportunities for our students and must not be seen as just adding more burdens for students and teachers. I want to show through quality teaching, good pay, transparent spending, principal leadership and accountability for all, that we are on the road to a twenty-first century education system. This is good for our students. This is good for our state. This helps us be a good partner with the new direction of the Obama administration and the U.S. Department of Education and is good for our nation. However, as painful as it is, it would be irresponsible of us to ignore the current challenges our economic reality presents and to end this session with a disconnect between that reality and our plans for the future.

Sincerely,



Christine O. Gregoire  
Governor

Enclosure

cc: Senator Oemig  
Senator McAuliffe  
Representative Sullivan  
Representative Haigh  
Representative Quall  
Legislators on the Basic Education Funding Task Force  
Superintendent of Public Instruction Randy Dorn

Attachment

ESB 6048: Change Section 2 as follows:

NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** INTENT TO MAKE NECESSARY CORRECTIONS. It is the intent of the legislature that the policies and allocation formulas adopted under this act will constitute the legislature's definition of basic education under Article IX of the state Constitution once fully implemented. The legislature intends, however, to continue to review and revise the formulas and schedules and may make additional revisions, including revisions for technical purposes and consistency in the event of mathematical or other technical errors.

ESB 6048: Change Section 111(1) as follows:

FUNDING WORKING GROUP. (1) The legislature intends to redefine the instructional program of education under RCW 28A.150.220 that fulfills the obligations and requirements of Article IX of the state Constitution. The funding formulas under RCW 28A.150.260 to support the instructional program shall be implemented beginning in the 2011-12 school year to the extent the technical details of the formula have been established and according to an implementation schedule to be adopted by the legislature. The object of the schedule is to assure that increases in funding allocations are timely, predictable, and occur concurrently with any increases in program or instructional requirements. The redefinition of the program of basic education under sections 101 through 108 of this act shall become effective upon completion of the implementation schedule adopted by the legislature pursuant to this subsection (1). It is the intent of the legislature that no increased programmatic or instructional expectations be imposed upon schools or school districts without an accompanying increase in resources as necessary to support those increased expectations.

ESB 6048 Add a new subsection to Section 112: Capacity and Phase in of Basic Education Enhancements:

"(3) In enacting this legislation, the legislature intends to continue to review, evaluate and revise the definition and funding of basic education in order to continue to fulfill the state obligation under Article IX of the state Constitution to define and fund a program of basic education."