

Redefine basic education

& fund what children really need

Why these bills, why now?

Our funding model for basic education is broken. The state doesn't pay actual costs, and the financial burden of providing for our children's education is shifting onto local school districts, which have neither the resources to fund our schools, nor the legal ability to raise adequate funds.

Our definition of basic education has to reflect what children need, and our funding model for it has to better predict the state's financial obligation.

It's pretty basic: The state can't foot the bill if we can't tell legislators what needs to be paid. HB 1410 and SB 5444 make **smart, targeted investments** – especially in early childhood education and smaller class sizes – and set up “sample schools” so that funding reflects reality.

Who's behind this?

The Basic Education Finance Task Force is bipartisan and includes legislators, school board members and school superintendents. The Washington State PTA, the Washington State Board of Education and 39 superintendents in the Puget Sound area have endorsed the task force's proposal and the bills (HB 1410, SB 5444) that would implement it.

A new definition

There's nothing in the state's definition of basic education regarding college or work-ready graduation requirements. The consequences?

- Only 17 percent of Seattle Public School graduates meet university entrance requirements.
- Of all Washington graduates who started community or technical college in 2007, **45 percent had to take remedial math.**

Schools and districts are raising standards on their own, but these are locally funded enhancements. The opportunity to step into a nursing or tech training program, or to attend a four-year college, should be basic and available to every child in Washington. These bills fix that by defining basic education as the opportunity to meet new, **more rigorous high school requirements**, the proposed CORE 24. This not only obligates the state to pay for that sixth period in high school, it obligates it to pay for the instructional hours and staffing resources that children need all the way through, grades K-12.

A team to build on

In the average district today, 22 percent of staffing is supplemental – that is paid for by local levy funds so our kids meet standards. **Meeting standards should not be an enhancement.**

We have real problems surrounding teacher pay and regional cost of living, and there's no state mechanism in place to evaluate whether salaries are competitive. We have high turnover of new teachers and difficulty attracting



What do you want for your children? Points to consider:

- **Ending fund balances for most districts are at an all-time low** – the state average is 3.7 percent (down from an average of about 6 percent.) Seattle is not alone in its decision to close schools and districts statewide face severe cuts.
- **Essential school funding comes from I-732, I-728 and LEA monies;** none is protected as basic ed funding and cuts to them have been proposed.
- The state doesn't even come close to funding overhead costs. In 2006-07, districts spent \$500 million more on utilities, maintenance, technology and other “non-employee related costs.” **Text books are funded on an 18-year cycle.**
- About a third of our children are dropping out of school.

staff to schools with the most at-risk kids.

Districts have turned to locally funded “TRI pay” to augment teacher salaries, further exacerbating the pressure on local levies to fund basic ed costs. We need a funding model that adequately staffs our schools, **pays our teachers a competitive wage** and fosters a supportive, collaborative work environment. Staffing costs must be anticipated and budgeted for at the state level. These bills fix that by addressing the underlying issues within our current system.

These bills also fix the problems with the staff-student ratio we have. Our model fails to distinguish between classroom teachers and, say, librarians. Schools need a team, and the “sample schools” the bills create will enable our legislators to budget for the professional mix our kids need.

So – again – why HB 1410 and SB 5444?

The current funding model has neither an accurate, nor rational, way to predict school costs. It relies on unstable and vulnerable money from taxpayer initiatives, and it siphons away local levy money that is intended for enhancements.

Our model doesn't work. Not for the teachers, not for the taxpayers and not for our children. Statewide, we have about a 30 percent drop out rate. On time graduation in Seattle Public Schools is 63 percent; in Yakima, it's 64 percent; in Spokane, it's 58 percent.

HB 1410 and SB 5444 fund **our children's most basic needs**.

- They give children a **long-term financial commitment, K-12**, to keep them on track and cut costs of remedial classes later.
- They make smart, targeted **investments in early learning** and primary school education, like access to preschool for our most at-risk kids, continued roll out of all-day K and **seriously smaller class sizes in grades K-2** (15 kids!)
- They provide for **2-year mentoring of new teachers** to give them the support they need to flourish.
- These bills acknowledge that our kids' basic needs include more credits in **math, science and foreign language** – and that the ability of high schools to offer these classes should NOT be an enhancement but a component of every child's basic education.
- These bills **support the work already underway in classrooms** across Washington. They codify on a state level reforms that advocates have fought for going on 20 years but which still remain outside our definition of basic education.

So, why NOW?

In the last biennium budget, the Legislature pumped more money into the system. And here we are facing cuts. Slashing I-728 funding will cripple key programs and throw at-risk kids even more off track. In Seattle, I-728 funds the sixth period in high school, and thus the credits kids need for college entrance.

The legislature needs to be able to budget and plan for what kids really need. If we can better define basic education and stabilize our funding, then we can get to work crafting the **world class system** we all want.

- SPS has ambitious goals in its Strategic Plan. Two years ago only 17 percent of Seattle Public Schools graduates met entrance requirements for four-year college; **SPS wants to increase that to 40 percent by 2012-13** but it will need adequate resources and stable state funding to do so.
- It's the law: The state pays for basic education, local levies can be tapped for enhancements. The amount districts can raise from levies is capped, and Seattle, like districts statewide, is at its limit.
- The state can't know whether it is raising enough revenue, or making the best uses of its revenue, until it has an accurate assessment of its costs. **It's basic budget practice.**
- **Read the proposal; let your representatives know what you think works.** If you have constructive criticism, let them know that, too. We want to get this right. <http://www.leg.wa.gov/documents/joint/bef/FinalReport.pdf>

This handout was compiled by Ramona Hattendorf, e-news editor of the Seattle Council PTSA and member of the Washington PTA's education committee for basic ed finance. Ramona1030@clearwire.net. Graduation rates are 2007/08 figures posted by OSPI; Seattle's college-preparation statistic provided by SPS; remedial math percentage provided by the State Board of Education. Budget figures from OPSI.