

Regarding HB 1410 / SB 5444 Legislation and the WEA

This is a response from supporters of bills HB 1410 and SB 5444 to statements by the WEA, the Washington Education Association teachers union representing approximately 82,000 members in Washington State.

www.washingtonea.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1288

Following are quotes from WEA as posted on their WEA website in this document, http://www.ourvoicewashingtonea.org/legislative/09WEA_HB1410.pdf. Each quote is accompanied by a response from supporters of HB 1410 and SB 5444.

WEA statement: "The wrong bills at the wrong time"

Supporter's rebuttal: "The right bills at the right time!"

Response prepared by John Stokes, Bellevue, Washington.

February 7, 2009

WEA: "People in Washington are worried and feel very uncertain about the economy, their jobs and their families' futures."

Response: We agree.

WEA: "They care about education and they understand it is the key to their children's future. Education is their priority."

Response: We agree.

WEA: "Yet House Bill 1410 and Senate Bill 5444 do nothing to address the most basic needs of kids and schools."

Response: To the contrary, HB 1410 and SB 5444 address all aspects of what kids and schools need to be college or trade ready when they graduate and to be competitive in a global economy.

What would HB1410 and SB 5444 actually do?

In short, these bills would provide many things that parents, teachers, school board members, superintendents, school administrators and the business community have been advocating for many years, such as

- Smaller class sizes (this means more teachers), especially at grades 1-3,
- More librarians, counselors, and nurses,
- More help for struggling students, ELL students, and students in special education,
- All-day kindergarten,

- A 6-period class day instead of a 5-period day to provide more instructional time for required classes and electives to equip graduates to compete in the global economy, and
- More comprehensive graduation requirements that are better aligned with both college and work-place settings in line with the State Board of Education findings and recommendations.

What else would HB 1410 and SB 5444 do?

- Redefine Basic Education to include early learning programs for students from low-income families and more rigorous high school course and graduation requirements,
- Establish an Instructional Program of Basic Education with a wide array of staff and resources,
- Establish easy-to-understand allocation models for funding a typical Elementary School, Middle School, and High School under the new system,
- Establish a New Teacher Compensation System and a New Career Ladder; with optional change over beginning in 2012-13 , and for all teachers in 2022,
- Provides for the development of a regional wage adjustment schedule,
- Enhance Teacher Preparation & Development,
- Eliminate inequities in existing Local Levies and the Teacher Pay System,
- Develop a Common Fiscal and Student Data System,
- Develop an Accountability System based on a number of different Outcome Measures such as test scores and graduation rates,
- Give school districts the Flexibility to Spend State Allocations; but holds them Accountable for Outcomes,
- Phase in the Plan Over a 6-Year Period beginning in 2011,
- Provide for a Basic Education Steering Committee to monitor and oversee implementation of the program through 2017, with five technical working groups to continue development of policies under the bills.

WEA: “These bills lose sight of the real priority — adequate school funding in a tough budget. HB 1410/SB 5444 is the wrong bill at the wrong time, and for the sake kids and education we should focus on the priority — adequately funding schools so we don’t lose ground.”

Response: The premise stated here is wrong. The real priority we should be striving for is providing the best possible education for our children. That is what HB 1410 and SB5444 are about, not fixing the current funding crisis today, but creating a new and stronger system of public education programs, finance and accountability for the future. It is not an either/or proposition. We can work against budget cuts and for maintaining current levels in this biennium and also work to make the substantive and innovative changes needed to avoid these budget problems in the future and build a solid platform for the education system we need for the health of our society and the economy. A focus solely on pouring more money into the current system means that for the long run, we will never have the adequate funding necessary to provide all children in the state with a high quality education, which would include improving the quality of our teachers and paying them more. The Full Funding Coalition bills will not do that.

WEA: *“HB 1410/SB 5444 is a divisive distraction.”*

Response: HB 1410 and SB 5444 are neither divisive nor a distraction. The divisiveness is coming from those who resist positive change. Bills that are bipartisan and offer substantive improvement in the educational system for all children cannot be honestly labeled as divisive. The tactics of misinformation and innuendo against the legislators, parents and other community members who favor HB 1410 and SB 5444 are divisive.

It is a distraction only if one treats it that way. Dealing with the current budget crisis is a present need, and we can all work together to resolve the problem. At the same time, precisely because we are facing yet another education funding crisis, now is the time to address future needs and change the system so it works better for all who are involved, especially the children. As has been asked by others, if not now, when? When will be the right time to deal with the needs of education for the future? During flush economic times, the demand is to pour more money into the current system, and pay no heed to the demands of the future for a higher level of education. In low budget times the only game is thought to be to protect current funding and not focus on anything else. The end result is that nothing progressive and promising for the future ever happens. The future is pushed ahead and never dealt with. We can walk and chew gum at the same time, and deal with the current funding needs until we get a new system in place. To do that we have to start working on the new system now, while we also deal with the present.

WEA: *“HB 1410/SB 5444 is a 111-page bill that dramatically alters all aspects of K-12 public education, including certification, compensation and collective bargaining.”*

Response: That is true, and for good reason. The current system for the three items noted is inadequate and antiquated. In addition, there is much more to K-12 public education than certification, compensation and collective bargaining. Those are legitimate concerns of the union and teachers, but parents, taxpayers and children also have needs and concerns, such as higher educational standards, stronger accountability within the system, and more cost and efficiency effective accounting and student tracking systems.

Moreover, HB 1410 and SB 5444 include improvements that children need for an excellent education, such as full funding of the real costs of a modern definition of what constitutes basic education, more common sense school board control and responsibility, improved and more effective teachers, administrators and staff, equity and flexibility that truly meets the needs of all children and school districts, targeted and effective early intervention for struggling students with high needs, higher standards for graduation so that all children are ready for higher education in all its forms and to be successful in life, and transparency in the implementation of the legislation, among other things.

WEA: *“...and it ignores the funding crisis facing our public schools.”*

Response: The crises is here in part because we never make the effort to fix the problems that have created inadequate funding, and the Full Funding Coalition bills continue that incomplete approach. We all agree that ample funding is necessary for the accomplishment of a better system for the delivery of a higher standard of education to meet the needs of all children. Such funding will more surely flow from the taxpayers and voters if there is greater confidence in the ability of the school system to deliver a high quality, well administered education to all students. Only HB 1410 and SB 5444 bring

this factor to the table. As noted previously, at the same time as the new system is being implemented over several years in a rational manner, we will continue to fight to preserve current funding and protect the interest of our teachers and our children.

WEA: “HB 1410/SB 5444 is a divisive distraction at a time we should be coming together to protect the basics: good teachers, reasonable class sizes and well-rounded education.”

Response: Once again, this is a false proposition, a smoke screen to keep us from dealing with the long term and absolutely necessary fundamental changes in the delivery of education and its funding in this state. No one has said that we cannot all work together to preserve the current funding in this biennium, but the WEA has not worked to reach out beyond the professional education groups who have a special interest in the current system to parents, the business community, all teachers, all superintendents, and individual school boards and communities to join in a common cause on the current crises. Instead it has worked hard to alienate those very groups that it needs to get the funding now, and for the future.

We want great teachers, not just good teachers, smaller class sizes, and more than a well-rounded education but one that prepares our children for the 21st Century. Our current system, fails to graduate almost one-third of the students, and fails a larger number who drop out, while also failing to prepare many for success in college or trade programs. We need change and it must start now.

WEA: “HB 1410/SB 5444 is not the solution to inadequate school funding.”

Response: To the contrary, for the reasons touched on above, HB 1410 and SB 5444 are exactly the best solution yet proposed to both inadequate school funding and providing a higher level of education for all students.

WEA: “HB 1410/SB 5444 is out-of-touch with the realities facing our schools and students.”

Response: What does that unsubstantiated assertion mean? The realities facing our schools and students is that they are not being well served with the current system. They do not have the system of ample funding built on a new definition of basic education necessary to provide a 21st Century education. They do not now have enough class time nor do they have sufficient periods in the day or enough higher level classes necessary to be accepted in State universities. They do not have enough subject-matter-proficient teachers for math and science. The quality of teachers overall appears to be declining based on teacher college applicants’ steadily dropping SAT scores. And we don’t have enough of them for all classes so that we can provide smaller class size and adequately serve special needs children.

Students today cannot get good jobs with the average high school education. The remedial rate in college is very high. The need for outside tutoring is growing by leaps and bounds. Schools are not given sufficient transportation funding. Pay raises and other increased costs are not provided by the current system for all employees so that the increased costs must come from local funds, and that is very uneven and unstable. The list goes on, and unless we break out of the old mold and start building the schools of the future now, the system will just get worse. 1410 and 5444 are in touch with the needs of

schools and students for the future, do not impede immediate temporary fixes to the current system, and are the most relevant of any current proposal for the needs of society for better and more productive and accountable schools.

WEA: *“HB 1410/SB 5444 will jeopardize school funding and quality education.”*

Response: Another illogical statement of opinion. HB 1410 and SB 5444 will not interfere with resolving current funding needs, and in the long run will have a dramatically positive effect on both greater school funding when the new program is implemented and will have a positive and salutatory effect on quality education. It replaces a mediocre level of current education with one that will provide true quality and enhanced performance of teachers, administrators, staff and, most importantly, students.

WEA: *“HB 1410/SB 5444 is partially based on the Basic Education Finance Task Force’s recommendations, but offers no concrete education finance solutions. Instead, the 111-page bill radically revamps most aspects of K-12 education.”*

Response: HB 1410 and SB 5444 transformationally change major aspects of K-12 education for the better, because the status quo is not good enough for our children and our society. Without this innovative and visionary approach our children will fall further behind and the needs of our society and this State for a well educated citizenry will continue to suffer. The Basic Education Finance Task Force was not charged with also determining a new finance and tax system in addition to the new formula for deciding the way our schools should be funded. The bills clearly set out a reasoned and deliberate plan for the actual funding mechanisms and total amounts with phased-in implementation of the requirements and financing formulas beginning in the 2011-12 school year, with full implementation by 2016-17. This is to be developed by the Office of Financial Management through a technical work group, reporting to the Steering Committee in late 2009, and in late 2010, with the new funding formulas to be used by the Governor in developing the 2011-13 biennial budget.

Without this reasoned, disciplined and direct approach to determining the actual costs of the new system and building a sound budget based on the findings, there will be no incentive for the public to put significantly more money into the public schools. With this framework for a new and stronger public school system, there is a much stronger likelihood that voters will support the ample funding the Constitution demands.

WEA: *“HB 1410/SB 5444 subjects students to new, onerous state-level school accountability systems, similar to the so-called No Child Left Behind Act. These particular changes were never discussed by the Basic Education Finance Task Force.”*

Response: This statement is not true, and is rhetorical rather than informative. The accountability built into the bills addresses the expectations for student and system progress on the basis of multiple measures of outcomes and indicators to be used to identify schools and districts for recognition, support, assistance and intervention. When all else fails the state must assure that children will ultimately be well educated regardless of their location. This is not the same approach taken by the No Child Left Behind Act, with its use of a high stakes test to determine compliance. To the extent that the NCLB

Act has helped focus states on the need for a higher level of education and accountability to the public which supplies the funds, there is no shame in being compared to that Act, but these bills are demonstrably not the same. This is again a red herring used in an attempt to be inflammatory and evade the facts.

To the extent that schools and schools districts are struggling to provide the education expected of all students, and there is a demonstrable lack of achievement or improvement, the bills provide for intensive support and assistance. Participation in this program is voluntary, and the schools and districts work with the State Board of Education to implement systemic reforms. After struggling for two years, schools and district can be placed on a plan containing binding conditions, along with adequate resources to accomplish the plan. If there are no funds available, the plan is not implemented. Any existing bargaining agreements are not abrogated. This level of accountability and intervention and assistance is a reasonable response to the public's demands that schools teach all children in a successful manner.

Student assessment will be accomplished by a system of formative assessments designed to monitor student performance, effectiveness of instruction and teaching and school and district performance. The design of the system will be built around the provision of adequate funding to accomplish these goals. These provisions are not the same as those contained in the NCLB Act.

WEA: "HB 1410/SB 5444 replaces the current teacher certification system with a complicated, three-tier system and it dramatically changes teacher evaluation policies."

Response: These bills do replace the current teacher certification system with a different model designed to be more supportive of teachers and to lead to higher teacher quality and performance than is now the current standard. Evaluation is changed to introduce more consistent and useful methods of teacher assessment than the current haphazard and inadequate system. It will result in higher performance and recognition of teachers, and will be phased in over a long period to allow for gradual change and adaptability.

WEA: "HB 1410/SB 5444 eliminates the current salary allocation model."

Response: Yes, but only to replace it in a phased in manner with a new and progressive system that will result in higher pay for all teachers and eliminate inequities in the current flawed and cumbersome system, and to also recognize the true costs differentials between regions of the state. This is all to the benefit of the teachers of the future, while not reducing in any way the compensation of current teachers. It is important to recognize that no current teacher is required to opt-in to the proposed system until 2022. **No current or future teacher will suffer, in any way, from the proposals in HB 1410 or SB 5444.** Teachers all across the state suffer under the current system and throwing more money into this unfair system without addressing needed systemic changes will not solve those problems.

WEA: "HB 1410/SB 5444 severely limits the ability of school boards and associations to negotiate local salaries (TRI) to meet the needs of their students."

Response: That is true, except for the last phrase. The bills provide other more rational and better ways to give teachers more compensation, and eliminate the need for using

these days to cover payments for basic education costs that are not made by the state. Higher teacher compensation directly for teachers will more than make up for the replacement of the gamed system that now exists. This has nothing to do with the needs of students. Those will be addressed directly by the new funding formulas, and the objection is all about an incorrect perception of a loss of teacher compensation. We want higher pay for our teachers, and increased performance in return. This is what HB 1410 and SB 5444 will provide.

WEA: “HB 1419/SB 5444 authorizes school “performance contracts,” which could turn existing public schools into privately run charter-like schools — even though Washington voters have rejected charter schools three times and there’s no proof they improve student achievement.”

Response: The actual provision, for performance contracts to give assistance to struggling schools under a limited circumstances and time frame, is not a charter school provision. It is an innovative way to allow a district to make needed changes at a school and better serve the needs of the students and parents under a binding performance agreement. The district will still have ultimate control of the school, and the idea is to get intensive help and get the schools back to regular operation as soon as possible.

WEA: “HB 1410/SB 5444 immediately eliminates I-728 class-size funding (the Student Achievement Fund) and state levy equalization funding, with no guarantee that it will be replaced. This will result in fewer teachers and larger class sizes for our students.”

Response: This is an untrue and inflammatory statement. The bills substitute a new way of funding the needs identified in I-728 (SAF), and bringing the funding now made available through I-728 into the total that is part of the definition of basic education. Currently, the legislature can, and has, suspended I-728 funds and could eliminate them altogether. It now only takes a majority vote to end the initiative-based funding under the law. Placing the I-728 funding purposes into basic education will better protect those programs for the future.

WEA: “Well-funded public schools are the solution.”

Response: The Basic Education Funding Task Force bills offer a much improved formula and system for the delivery of the ample funds the Constitution requires. Our schools will be much more well-funded under these bills than the status quo alternatives of the Full Funded Coalition.

WEA: “We expect our elected leaders to protect public education. Investing in quality public education is the key to our economic strength and our kids’ future. Our top priority should be protecting our students’ ability to get a quality education in these tough economic times.”

Response: As noted earlier, the people of this state are capable of both protecting the existing education system during this economic crises and also providing for a new system that will deliver a much higher and actual quality education for all students under these bills. HB 1410 and SB 5444 are the best way to make substantially higher and stronger investments in quality education for the sake of our economic strength and our

kids' future, as opposed to only supporting the outdated and inadequate system of the present. With HB 1410 and SB 544 in place, the legislature will have a mandate and a new financing formula for full funding of a higher level of education to meet the needs of all children. The public will have an increased level of confidence in the ability of the schools to provide this education in a responsible manner and to support the funding necessary to accomplish these goals.

WEA: "We encourage legislators to support the Full Funding Coalition's school funding proposal."

Response: That is a recipe for continuing mediocrity of the education system in Washington State. Instead we encourage legislators to support the Basic Education Task Force bills. HB 1410 and SB 5444 offer strong proposals for a redefinition of basic education accompanied by a new funding formula, and will insure that the children of the future will receive a high level education that will enable them to compete globally and be successful and contributing citizens. It is time for the adults to take bold and long needed steps so that we no longer fail our children by continuing to underfund our schools and under educate far too many of our children. We can do better.

John Stokes, Bellevue, Washington.

February 7, 2009

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