

A Superintendent's Note – 2009 State of Education Funding

From: Kimball, Chip
Sent: Monday, February 23, 2009 8:57 AM
To: All LWSD Staff
Subject: Legislative Update

Team,

This legislative session is shaping up to be an intense one. In addition to the very troubling budget picture, the legislature has been considering a number of important bills resulting from the Basic Education Finance Task Force that completed their work in December. The work of this task force may be the most important work for education in the past 30 years, provided it actually results in some action from the legislature.

A pair of bills were introduced ([HB1410/SB5444](#)) that were sponsored by the legislators that served on the task force, and 40 legislators signed on. The bills reflected most, but not all of the recommendations of the task force. The Full Funding Coalition, made up of the WEA (teachers), WSSDA (school boards), and WASA (administrators) submitted an alternative set of bills ([HB1817/SB5607](#)) that reflected some of the Task Force recommendations, and rejected others. There is a great deal in common between the bills, and there is some important divergence as well.

Since the introduction of the bills, there has been heated debate. All 35 Superintendents in Pierce and King Counties signed a letter supporting HB1410/SB5444, with reservations and recommended changes. I was one of 3 superintendents who were asked to testify in support of the bills on behalf of the 35 superintendents. It was our belief that HB1410/SB5444 best supported the work of the task force, had some outstanding elements, had political support, and had the best opportunity to get public support for additional funding. Some of the key items in HB1410/SB5444 that I saw as beneficial for our school system included:

- Class size in K-3 of 15:1
- Class size in 4-12 of 25:1
- Increased staffing for instructional support staff
- State funding mentoring programs for new teachers
- Eight additional State funded LID days
- Funding of additional instructional time for students
- Funding for maintenance, supplies and operational costs more aligned with districts' actual expenditures
- Inclusion of Learning Assistance and ELL programs within the definition of Basic Ed
- Funding for and inclusion of Early Learning for at-risk preschool students as part of Basic Ed
- Consideration of regional cost of living differences in salaries

The bills represent a substantial increase in funding for Lake Washington School District after phased in funding. In all, the LWSD budget would increase by **\$38 million (25% increase)** and call for an **additional 450 teachers** funded by the state. With this kind of new investment, new systems are required to ensure that the public's investment will result in high levels of performance.

While we had some concerns regarding the bills, our greatest fear was that if there was an intense internal disagreement among the education community, we would lose the political momentum to actually get something passed. We knew that it would be an uphill battle even with full education support, especially in light of the budget pressures in the state.

By the end of this past week, there has been tremendous pressure placed upon HB1410 / SB5444, and a clear lack of support for SB5607 from the legislature. It now appears that both sets of bills are

dead. A new set of bills were introduced last week ([SB6048/HB2261](#) and [HB2244](#)) hope to keep the work alive, but all of the structural elements in the previous bills that were at the heart of the controversy have been pulled out.

It is my understanding that the current strategy is to use these new bills as a base, and add to them through the legislative process throughout the rest of the session, and beyond. There will likely be a great deal of work that will be done behind the scenes to insert elements that can be agreed upon between constituencies. This approach will take longer, and will be difficult, but my hope is that there can be solidarity and willingness to compromise amongst the education community as this work evolves. Without it, there is little chance for us to see the kind of real change for education funding that the Basic Ed Task Force work calls for.

Moving forward, I am going to continue working for those things I see as critical to our success: a new definition of basic education; a system that provides ample resources and support so that all students can become future-ready; a system that is fair, flexible, and rewards performance; a system that recognizes the diversity of our learners and their needs; a system that will attract the best and brightest education professionals; a system that supports continuous learning and improvement by every professional in the system; and a system that clearly and reasonably defines accountability, providing the tools and resources for our schools to meet the expectations of our community. I am going to emphasize the need for thoughtful investment of resources into our children, our best hope for continued vitality of our nation.

Work of this magnitude is expensive, requires courage, and becomes political. I have received a number of questions about the original bills, the differences, and why I support the tenants of HB1410. As I've talked with people, I found considerable misinformation, and nobody who had actually read the bills. So as we head into "round two" of this work with the legislature, I felt it was important that you had information at your disposal should you want to educate yourself about the issues and the debate. I would encourage you to do so, rather than rely on the views of others. And certainly you should feel free to contact me if you have questions about the work in Olympia.

I do have a resolve. I am going to fight for full funding. I am going to fight for kids. I am going to fight for education professionals.

I know it is going to be a tough fight, but it is worth it!

Chip

Links for your consideration:

[Open Letter to Teachers from Ross Hunter](#)

[Open Letters to the Legislature from 35 Superintendents \(two letters\)](#)

[Comparison of HB1410/SB5444 and HB1817/SB5607 \(two versions\)](#)

[Basic Education Finance Task Force Report](#)

Original Bill [HB1410/SB5444](#)

Original Bill [HB1817/SB5607](#)

New Bill [SB6048/HB2261](#)

New Bill [HB2244](#)

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