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**From:** [Tom, Sen. Rodney](#)

**To:**

**Sent:** Thursday, April 23, 2009 8:43 AM

**Subject:** RE: 2261 Congrats & Thanks!

I want to thank you for writing me with your support for House Bill 2261, legislation that deals with our state's education system. As you know, this legislation is not the end goal, only the beginning. It reflects months of hard work and negotiation with all education stakeholders.

It is time to move forward and this legislation is our road map to the world-class educational system. Our students and educators deserve more than an educational system that was defined 30 years ago. Our state's definition of basic education has failed to pace with the evolving expectations of society and has failed our teachers. HB 2261 gives us the tools to know how we must change to better reflect the growing expectations and challenges our schools face.

As we come out of this recession, and the economy grows, our educational system must remain as a top priority for restoration of cuts and future investments.

That said, I would like to take the opportunity to clarify some misconceptions about the legislation.

The misconceptions are as follows:

***The legislation suggests that "teachers are the problem" and is an insult to teachers. It blames teachers and does not focus on the real problems.***

- This bill is in no way suggesting that teachers are the problem. This bill is a recognition that our teachers deserve better. It is a recognition that our state's current definition of basic education has failed to keep pace with the evolving expectations of society and has failed our teachers. The last time we've taken this step was more than 30 years ago – when people were using computers that today's most basic cell phone can outperform. Think of what that means for our schools.

- The Legislature understands that teachers need additional time to continue to do their job well, and under the new funding distribution formula, the minimum allocation for each level of prototypical school shall be based on the number of classroom teachers needed to provide instruction and provide at least one teacher planning period per school day.

***The legislation includes drastic changes to the certification, evaluation and compensation systems that do not help teachers.***

- There is no intent to do any harm to teachers with drastic new changes to certification, evaluation and compensation. In fact, it is just the opposite. We have heard from teachers for years that that the certification process is broken, that salaries are inadequate and that the salary system does not align with or support what the certification process is requiring. Teachers that spend the time and energy gaining their professional certification should be compensated accordingly, but currently that does not happen.

- This legislation is a continuation of the direction the Legislature began in 2007 when it directed the Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) to set performance standards and develop, pilot, and implement an external professional-level certification assessment based on demonstrated teaching skill. This legislation builds on the current work of the PESB by establishing target dates for the new standards and asking for additional updates on other ongoing work while also directing a new technical working group to begin the development of a new and enhanced salary schedule that will "align compensation with certification." This legislation is the logical next step in order to ensure all the systems are coordinated and that we are compensating teachers fairly and adequately for their dedication and hard work.
- The evaluation that is addressed in the bill is the evaluation of teacher candidates during the student-teaching experience. It is not of teachers already in a teaching position.
- The legislation clearly states that no teacher will be required to move into a new salary schedule. No teacher will face the prospect of having past work-experiences and training become meaningless. The intent of this legislation is to simply provide a new and improved salary system that teachers may opt into. The legislation clearly states that this must be a system that is "collaboratively designed" with teachers, administrators and classified employees. The work does not even start until 2011 in order to give the PESB time to develop final proposals for the certification system. Part of the development of the enhanced salary model is a comparative labor market analysis, as requested by WEA. In this way the state can truly understand what is a fair and competitive salary for our teachers and adjust the current system accordingly. We know that Washington is in the bottom tier of states in teacher pay and we know that many teachers struggle to live on their salary. The labor market analysis required under this legislation will allow us to get the data necessary to fix this problem.

***How can you pass this bill while cutting funding for education in the budget? Adequate funding of our schools is the priority and the crisis – this bill does not address that problem in any meaningful way. This bill is just another empty promise.***

- The true empty promise is to do nothing. We must ensure that our commitment to education is clearly defined now. Only by establishing our constitutional duties now can we hold the state accountable in the future.
- There are many demands on our limited state resources: health care, family leave, hospitals and nursing homes to name only a few. As we come out of this recession and as the economy grows, our educational system needs to be first in line for restoring the cuts made this year and we must ensure education is at the top of the priority list for future investments.
- Changing an educational system for almost 1 million students and over 2,000 schools takes time. It cannot happen in one legislative session. We cannot allow the inability to make immediate whole-scale change now impede us from making any progress. In order to enable the educational system to have the capacity to accommodate future investments, the planning and phase-in must start now.
- While it is true we have made cuts to areas that are currently not considered basic education, the level of cuts has not been as severe as in any other area of the budget.

We are in an economic downturn that requires deep cuts in all areas of governmental spending unfortunately. Education, health care, prisons and programs for our most vulnerable citizens are all cut. While education has received 3.5% of the cuts, others have received cuts as high as 30%. Additionally, by enhancing what is considered basic education now, more of the state's education budget will be protected in future times of economic downturn.

***Isn't this bill just imposing new requirements without new funding?***

- The requirements in this bill are phased in over the next ten years in recognition that it will take time to identify and secure the funding that our system needs. Many of the enhancements to basic education included in this legislation are already being done entirely or partially by many of our schools. This legislation is just recognition that those enhancements should now be considered "basic" education and should be part of the state's obligation to fund. The legislation specifically states 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." Many of the changes do not begin until 2011, at the earliest, and most will be phased in over 10 years. Next session the legislature will be back to monitor the progress of the development of the details of the new funding formula and create a realistic implementation schedule that ensures that no school districts face any new unfunded mandates.

- The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction is also required under this legislation to make biennial determinations of the capacity of the educational system to accommodate new resources and new mandates and to inform the legislature when there are significant capacity limitations and recommend how to address those limitations.

***Does this legislation implement a new accountability system that allows state take-over of schools?***

- No. This legislation directs the State Board of Education (SBE) to continue its existing work on the development of an accountability framework and gives further clarification that the framework must be one that creates a unified system of increasing levels of support for schools, that is based on fair, transparent and consistent criteria, that identifies both schools that need additional help because of specific challenges as well as those schools that are exemplary, and that takes into account the level of state resources a school receives in support of the program of basic education.

- The SBE is directed under this legislation to develop both a voluntary system of support and assistance as well as a more formalized comprehensive system of improvement for schools that continue to struggle even under the voluntary system. However, this more formalized comprehensive system of improvement cannot take effect until the SBE develops a proposal and an implementation timeline and gets specific approval from the legislature to implement the proposal. Additionally, the legislation specifically directs the SBE to develop a proposal for this comprehensive system that leaves the local school board as the entity responsible for developing and implementing a plan for improvement. There is no state take-over contemplated under this bill.

This bill actually could allow the legislature to cut basic education funding in 2011/13 because the current basic education staffing ratios are repealed in 2011 when the new prototypical funding formula takes effect.

- The suggestion that the Legislature would reduce funding for basic education simply because the statutory references to staffing ratios are deleted ignores the legal and constitutional obligations that the state is under. Per the courts, the Legislature cannot cut basic education at any time. It is true that the staffing ratios would be repealed in 2011 when the new prototypical funding formula takes effect. However, under the legislation the new formula is to be implemented "to the extent the technical details of the formula have been established." The legislation specifically requires the technical work group to report back to the Legislature on the details of the prototypical funding formula in December 2009 in order to allow the 2010 legislature to adopt those technical details, such as staffing ratios, and place them back into session prior to the 2011 repeal.

- The courts have been very clear that once the Legislature has defined and funded basic education, the legislature may not reduce funding at will and without an educational purpose.

***Does the legislation obligate the state to implement a Washington Head Start program as a part of basic education? What about existing ECEAP programs?***

- The legislation creates a work group to begin the process of examining and developing a proposal for establishing a program of early learning for at-risk children that can be included within the overall program of basic education. As part of this process, the work group is directed to continue the preliminary work that the Department of Early Learning has already begun in developing a proposal for a statewide Washington Head Start program. Providers from both federal Head Start program and the state's own Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP) will be represented on the work group. Ultimately it is up to the Legislature to adopt and define what will be considered the program of early learning that is basic education.

Again, thank you for voicing your support and getting involved in the democratic process. As always, I appreciate and value your thoughts and opinions.

Please contact my office if you have any further thoughts or ideas. I look forward to our continued dialog.

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