

# Education Leaders Call for Investments in Special Education, Meals, Transportation, and School Staff

OLYMPIA, WASHINGTON, USA, February 7, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The leaders of Washington's statewide organizations representing parents and families, teachers, principals, classified school employees, superintendents, school board members, and our state superintendent have four top priorities for supporting Washington's students this legislative session. Below is their joint statement.



A student poses in front of a bus

As the leaders of Washington's K-12 education organizations representing our public school students, educators, school staff, and families, we are deeply connected to the needs of our students and schools in every community across our state.

We know our schools play an integral role in supporting their students' learning and mental health recovery. Recovery in one community does not look identical to recovery in another community; however, there are some critical needs that are consistent across the state, and we are seeking action and investment by the Legislature this session to address them.

Support for all four of these priorities will allow for local voter-approved levies to focus on the unique needs of their community instead of providing for services that are the state's responsibility to fund.

First, we are asking the Legislature to fully fund special education services for our students with disabilities.

Public school districts have a moral and legal obligation to provide each of their students with access to a free and appropriate public education where they are supported to progress in grade-level learning standards. Through special education, schools provide students with

disabilities with specially designed instruction that addresses the unique needs of eligible students at no cost to families.

Though progress has been made, last school year, school districts across the state still spent \$400 million in local funds to cover the gap in state funding that is necessary to support students with disabilities.

We are also asking the Legislature to ensure each of Washington's students has access to nutritious meals at school at no out-of-pocket costs to the student or their family.

When students' basic needs—like the need to eat—aren't taken care of, their learning is impacted. Even when they are eligible for free and reduced-price meals, many students, especially in the older grades, do not participate due to stigma.

Combining some incredible legislative investments last year with the federal meal supports, over 65% of our students have access to free school meals this year. We need the Legislature to finish the progress we've already made and ensure all of Washington's students have access to nutritious, free meals as part of the school day.

In addition, we are asking the Legislature to finally fix the outdated and broken funding model for student transportation. Like special education services, many districts are still using local voter-approved levies to fund transportation even though it is a basic education function that should be fully funded by the state. Student safety is the number one priority for our schools and that should not be a function of the wealth of the community.

Finally, we are asking the Legislature to support our students by ensuring school districts have the resources to recruit and retain highly effective educators and staff.

Our state has made important progress in school employee salaries, but the current funding formula often does not fund school districts equitably. The Legislature can support our school employees and prevent turnover of talented staff by

1. Equitably funding neighboring school districts in a region;
2. Ensuring that the full impacts of inflation are addressed in employee compensation, especially for our lowest paid employees who are most impacted by rising costs of living; and
3. Providing additional staffing supports that focus on student mental health, family engagement, and learning acceleration.

Our schools put their students' needs at the center of all their decision-making. As the Legislature contemplates policy changes and additional investments, we ask them to follow the lead of the educators in their communities by also centering their work on student success and well-being.

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