

WA State Legislature Makes Progress on OSPI Priorities Including Special Education, School Meals

OLYMPIA, WA, USA, April 25, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Last summer and fall, Washington State Superintendent Chris Reykdal put forward a series of proposals for the Legislature that called for investments in a variety of transformative changes to help each and every Washington student thrive.

"Coming out of the pandemic, the needs of our students and schools have been spotlighted not just for our schools, but for our communities as a whole," Reykdal said. "We put forward a legislative agenda this year that centered unapologetically on ensuring Washington's public K-12 education system is prepared to support each student on their individual journey."



On Sunday, the Washington State Legislature passed their final budgets and adjourned the 2023 Legislative Session, making progress on several of Reykdal's priorities and more. Among other items, the Legislature invested in special education, school meals, access to school construction funding, school seismic safety, dual language programming, access to dual credit opportunities, and competitive school employee salaries.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

The funding provided to school districts by the state and federal governments to support the learning of students with disabilities is not aligned with the actual costs of providing those special education services. Last school year, school districts across Washington state covered the \$400 million gap in funds using local dollars.

This year, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) put forward a request to the Legislature to ensure the state fully funds the services provided by schools. Through [House Bill 1436](#), the Legislature made significant changes to the funding model for special education,

bringing the state closer to full funding. They also invested to continue the evidence-based work of the Inclusionary Practices Project, which aims to increase meaningful inclusion and outcomes for students with disabilities through a multi-tiered system of supports framework.

SCHOOL MEALS

Recognizing the impacts of hunger on student learning, multiple states have supplemented federal school meal programs with state funding to ensure all students have access to a nutritious breakfast and lunch each day at school. Moving in the same direction, OSPI requested funding this year to provide all Washington students with meals at school each day at no out-of-pocket cost to the student or their family.

Through [House Bill 1238](#), the Legislature made progress on OSPI's request by phasing-in universal meals at public schools who serve students in grades K–4 with certain percentages of students who are identified as low-income (in eligible schools, all students would have access to free meals, not only students in grades K–4). With this legislation, over 200 additional Washington schools will be able to provide universal meals for their students over the next two school years.

SCHOOL BUILDINGS AND FACILITIES

In Washington, school construction is funded largely through local levies and bonds, with the state providing a matching share through the School Construction Assistance Program. With this model, school districts who are unable to pass levies and bonds or who aren't able to raise a sufficient amount of funding through their levies and bonds are often unable to pay for work their buildings desperately need.

The Small District Modernization Program helps school districts with fewer than 1,000 students and state-tribal education compact schools fund significant building system replacements and repairs. In the Capital Budget, the Legislature funds most of the next round of projects that OSPI identified for this program.

Also in the Capital Budget, the Legislature provided continued funding for school seismic safety retrofits, building improvements to support physical health and nutrition, career and technical education program equipment, and more.

OTHER ITEMS

Superintendent Reykdal's priorities for this legislative session also included expanding dual language programming, allowing high school students to earn elective credit toward graduation through paid work experience, strengthening our state's Transitional Kindergarten program, increasing access to dual credit, expanding access to early literacy through the Imagination Library of Washington program, implementing a statewide High School and Beyond Planning tool, investing in competitive salaries for educators and reducing disparities among neighboring school districts, creating a state-level teacher residency program, and cementing more state oversight of and accountability for non-public agencies serving students with disabilities. The

Legislature made progress on each of these items and more.

CONTINUED ADVOCACY

This session, the Legislature made forward-facing investments that built a stronger foundation for many of Superintendent Reykdal's priorities for Washington's students. There is more work to be done, however, and OSPI will continue to advocate for these critical needs.

"This legislative session, we saw schools, stakeholder groups, families, community members, and OSPI unite over several shared priorities for our students," Reykdal said. "I am grateful to the Legislature for their efforts to make important and timely progress on many of our transformational priorities, which will have immediate positive impacts on our students and schools."

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