

**WSPTA**

# **LEGISLATIVE SESSION REPORT**

**MAY 11, 2021**

# **BRIEF LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY**

Although we were mostly unsuccessful in getting the state to pay for enrollment stabilization and to fully fund this year's transportation costs, there were many other legislative wins on the WSPTA platform. Bills that passed will expand broadband access across the state, eliminate lunch co-pays for reduced price lunch students, increase investments in early childhood education through the Fair Start Act, and provide access to local mental health resources through a new national 988 number, among many other wins. The pages that follow provide more detail in regards to each legislative priority.

## **WSPTA PLATFORM**

The Washington State PTA legislative platform is a two-year platform to mirror the Washington state legislative cycle. On the even-numbered years, the new platform is voted on by members at the legislative assembly in the fall. The top five issues become our short-term platform and consist of our priority issues when advocating throughout the year. Other issues are placed on an "also supported" list. During the odd-numbered years, members vote to amend current issues or to add new, emerging issues to the also supported list.

## **TOP 5 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES FOR 2020-2021**

1. Support Students and Preserve Education Funding
2. Increase Access to Nursing, Mental Health and Social Emotional Learning Staff
3. Increase Education Equity by Closing the Digital Divide
4. Support and Funding for Students with Disabilities and their Families
5. Prevent and Reduce Gun Violence and Suicide

# 1. SUPPORT STUDENTS AND PRESERVE EDUCATION FUNDING

## BACKGROUND

When districts transitioned to online learning, the lack of preparation and needed supports caused gaps in opportunities for students and youth – both from in academic and social emotional health.

Washington state legislators are faced with some very tough budget decisions as they wrestle to close a projected \$4.2 billion state budget shortfall. About half of that hits the operations budget which funds state parks, prisons, K-12 schools, mental health, foster care and other programs.

## PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

Washington State PTA shall advocate for legislation or policies that support students during and after COVID-19 to:

1. Protect early-learning school, K-12, post-secondary, and child-related programs especially:
  - resources for students needing additional supports (academic, physical, or emotional)
  - local effort assistance funding
2. Authorize flexibility within transportation and categorical allocations to allow districts to meet students' needs, retroactive to 3/1/2020 through 8/31/2022.
3. Address the state budget deficit without creating or increasing funding inequities:
  - with progressive, sufficient, sustainable, and equitable revenue sources
  - avoid mid-year budget cuts and/or redistribution of existing education funds
4. Allocation of new state or federal funding to support
  - students who receive special education services or are furthest from educational justice
  - meals for children and youth facing food insecurity
  - COVID-19-related childcare and school-age-student care needs
  - social and emotional health of students and staff

## 2021 LEGISLATIVE SUCCESSES:

- Some state funds for transportation backfill for this school year
- State funds for 2 days of Paraeducator training
- \$40 million for seismic safety retrofit
- Extra \$25/student in MSOC (materials, supplies and operating costs)

# 2. INCREASE ACCESS TO NURSING, MENTAL HEALTH, AND SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING STAFF

## BACKGROUND

- Washington state's Prototypical Staffing Model funds school nurses at a rate less than 15% the recommended nurse to student ratio.
- School counselors and social workers in Washington state are funded by a rate of 1:811 compared to the recommended counselor/social worker to student ratio of 1:250
- Increased health and safety concerns due to COVID-19 require health monitoring such as temperature checks and protocols for students who may become ill while at school. The CDC identifies school nurses as essential in every aspect, including acute care, emergency care, care coordination, chronic disease management, and family engagement.
- The critical role of mental health professionals in schools has already been officially recognized by an overwhelming majority of the Washington House, Senate, and Governor, in House Bill 1377
- In a Washington student-developed survey conducted in the spring of 2020, one student replied, "Everything feels like things are piling up, and there's not mental help support available."

## PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

1. Increase Access To Nursing, Mental Health And Social Emotional Staff
2. Support Suicide Prevention And A Statewide Anonymous Reporting System
3. Improve Access To Multi-Tiered Systems Of Support

## 2021 LEGISLATIVE SUCCESSES

- [E2SHB 1477](#) - implementing the national 988 system to enhance and expand behavioral health crisis response and prevention services
- [E2SHB 1139](#) - addressing lead in school drinking water, \$3.6 million
- [SHB 1373](#) - requires schools to post contact information for behavioral health organizations on websites and social media sites
- [ESHB 1273](#) - requiring menstrual products in middle and high schools
- [EHB 1342](#) - eliminating lunch copays for students who qualify for reduced-price lunches, \$8.9 million
- [ESHB 1214](#) - changing training requirements for SROs
- \$2.4 million for the Attorney General's office to develop an anonymous youth safety/suicide tip line
- Funds for extra 0.5 counselor for all high poverty schools

# 3. INCREASING EDUCATIONAL EQUITY BY CLOSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

## BACKGROUND

Even before COVID-19, there was a digital divide in Washington: more than 280,000 children in Washington had no broadband at home, and more than 117,000 had no computers. This digital divide is widespread, affecting 15% of metropolitan and 26% of rural households. Overall, 68% of districts report that at least some of their students had no access to broadband or smartphone data.

- Native American, Black, and Latinx students are twice as likely to lack access to computers and broadband at home.
- A survey conducted in spring 2020 revealed that engagement of students and families with schools during remote learning could be enhanced by increasing access to technology, including online translation tools to reduce linguistic barriers; leveraging community partnerships to facilitate technology networks; and training for both teachers and families on the technology being used in remote learning classrooms.

## PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

1. Expand Connectivity: Infrastructure, Affordable Broadband Services And Developmentally Appropriate Devices.
2. Remove Barriers And Increase Flexibility With Categorical Funds To Serve Students With The Greatest Needs.
3. Achieve Equitable Access To Highly Capable Programs Through Universal Screening.
4. Pursue Progressive, Sufficient, Sustainable, Equitable Revenue Sources.

## 2021 LEGISLATIVE SUCCESSES:

- ESHB 1336 – creating and expanding unrestricted authority for public entities to provide telecommunications services to end users.
- 2SSB 5383 – Authorizing a public utility district to provide retail telecommunications services in unserved areas under certain conditions.
- E2SHB 1365 – procuring and supporting appropriate computers and devices for public school students and instructional staff. \$24 million

# 4. SUPPORTS AND FUNDING FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR FAMILIES

## BACKGROUND:

While the Legislature has added funding for the Special Education program since 2017, a significant shortfall remains between what it costs to support educational services for students with disabilities and what the state and federal government funds. OSPI has estimated the gap is \$300 million a year. This becomes an equity issue, when districts must rely on their enrichment levy to deliver federally required educational services.

## PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

1. Make resources, program services, parent education, and training accessible including:
  - Local resource centers
  - Implementation of a statewide online portal.
2. Ensure that a range of appropriate devices and assistive technology is available.
3. Provide access to multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS).
4. Remove barriers and increase flexibility within categorical funds to meet the greatest needs.
5. Remove the 13.5% cap on funded enrollment for districts.
6. Fully fund and implement the federal government's obligations under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

## 2021 LEGISLATIVE SUCCESSES:

- State funds for 2 days of Paraeducator training
- Federal funds for IDEA

# 5. PREVENT AND REDUCE GUN VIOLENCE AND SUICIDE

## BACKGROUND

- Firearms are the second leading cause of death for American children.
- 4.6 million children live in a home with at least one unlocked and loaded firearm.
- In Washington, suicide (primarily by firearm) is now the leading cause of death for youths 10-24, killing over 150 children per year.
- Black American children and teens are dying at 10 times the rate of white American children and teens. Washington's black demographic comprises 4% of the population but 20% of the homicide victims. Similar proportions exist for Indigenous and Latinx communities.
- LGBTQ+ youth are 5 times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers.
- Access to unlocked firearms increases youth suicide risk almost 10-fold.
- Roughly 80% of youth suicides use a family member's gun.
- Suicides are 5× less likely when neither guns nor ammunition is available.

## PROPOSED SOLUTIONS:

1. Identify, address, and mitigate the disproportionate impact on communities of color, LGBTQ+, and other affected groups.
2. Fund community-based prevention strategies.
3. Fund school mental health supports and a statewide anonymous reporting system.
4. Encourage school districts to partner with gun safety experts to educate their communities and promote safe firearm storage.
5. Prohibit the sale or transfer of military-style assault weapons

## 2021 LEGISLATIVE SUCCESSES:

- E2SHB 1477 – implementing the national 988 system to enhance and expand behavioral health crisis response and prevention services
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# OTHER SUCCESSES

## DISMANTILING SYSTEMIC RACISM

- Many new restrictions on policing, including use of force and data collection
- [SHB 1356](#) – prohibiting the inappropriate use of Native American names, symbols, or images as public-school mascots, logos or team names, \$1.6 million
- [SHB 1016](#) – making Juneteenth a legal holiday
- [ESHB 1426](#) – requiring 25% of training for certificate renewal to be in cultural competency, diversity, equity, and inclusion
- [ESSB 5044](#) – requiring professional learning in equity, cultural competency, and dismantling institutional racism in schools
- [E2SSB 5227](#) – requiring diversity, equity, inclusion, anti-racism training and assessments in institutions of higher education
- [ESSB 5405](#) – instructing the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee to perform racial equity analyses

## GENERAL EDUCATION

- Emergency waiver of graduation requirements for class of 2020 and 2021
- [ESHB 1176](#) – prohibiting withholding of a diploma for certain fines/fees
- [SHB 1302](#) – allowing 9th graders to receive College in the High School credit
- [SB 5299](#) – allowing the use of computer science for the purpose of graduation requirements
- [SB 5184](#) – establishing a building point of contact in all K-12 public schools for students in foster care

## EARLY LEARNING

- [E2SSB 5237](#) – expanding accessible affordable childcare and early childhood development programs, i.e., Fair Start Act
- [ESSB 5096](#) – excise tax on capital gains (revenue supports the Fair Start Act)
- Early Childhood Education & Assistance Program slots are increased by 500 in FY22 and 750 in FY23, \$24.9 million