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Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
Chris Reykdal, Superintendent

September 24, 2025

The Honorable Bob Ferguson
Governor of Washington
PO Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Dear Governor Ferguson:

It is my charge as Washington's Superintendent of Public Instruction to identify each year the highest priority needs of Washington's K-12 education system within the context of our complex budget environment, and to elevate them to you for consideration in your upcoming state budget proposal. The health of our public school system benefits greatly from alignment and cooperation between the branches of government, and this year's Supplemental Operating Budget is an important opportunity for us to come together as state leaders to champion public education.

We enter this upcoming legislative session amid turbulence. We are facing continued fiscal challenges and constraints at the state level as well as an increasingly fraught relationship between our state and the federal government. While the most recent budget worked to preserve and prioritize many key elements of basic education, K-12 education still faces multiple, urgent crises that not only threaten the educational experiences of our current students and future leaders, but erode the very foundation of our state's economic and civic health.

The state's founders enshrined public education as our paramount duty because enduring, forward-thinking, agile, and prosperous systems, communities, and governments are built and maintained by well-educated people. Education is more than just the accumulation of knowledge and skills; it is our primary connection to the world. From birth, learning drives development, sparks curiosity, nurtures creativity, and teaches resilience. We are always learning, but only through our public education systems can we direct that driving force toward the benefit of the individual and the community, and harness the power and potential of our diverse people for our collective good.

Today we expect much more of our K-12 system. Whenever a thread in the social safety net begins to fray, we turn to schools to patch it. Our society expects schools to feed children who don't have reliable access to meals at home, to provide stability for students living in foster

care or experiencing homelessness, and to address the mental and behavioral health needs of youth facing unprecedented challenges and threats to their sense of safety and belonging in our world—all while continuing to nurture their intellectual and personal growth and guide them towards successful and fulfilling adulthoods.

With everything from diversity and inclusion to healthcare under attack at the federal level, this is not the time to ask whether schools *should* continue to provide such a vast range of critical services but *how* we best support them in doing it.

I recognize that Washington remains in a difficult situation financially, and that current and looming potential cuts at the federal level only add to the pressure. I have carefully considered our public education system's most urgent areas of need and put forward a streamlined and targeted list of investments that benefit all school districts and address unavoidable routine and required costs while still elevating critical areas of need.

First and foremost, we must prioritize funding that keeps schools open and running so that our 1.1 million public school students have safe and adequate places to learn. Recognizing the rising costs of materials, supplies, and operating costs (MSOC) and responding with sufficient state investment will allow our schools to maintain current levels of service. Failing to provide this funding will result in further reductions to staffing, curriculum, and programming, and potentially school closures. At the same time, the 2023 Legislature passed Senate Bill 5243, which requires districts to adopt a universal statewide High School and Beyond Plan platform that will better support students planning for and transitioning into postsecondary success. Lawmakers asked my office to identify the costs of statewide implementation, but did not follow through with the funding needed to complete the work, leaving school districts without the resources needed to purchase continued access to the platform that the Legislature is requiring they use.

To stay competitive, Washington must continue to support high-quality instruction and student learning at every age. Access to books and development of early literacy skills primes our youngest learners and prepares them for their K–12 journeys. The Imagination Library of Washington program puts books into the hands of young Washingtonians across the state at no cost to their families. I ask that the Legislature honor its intent in creating this program and the local partners who have raised their share by continuing to fund the state match.

I also request your partnership in focusing on late-elementary and middle school math instruction. Looking at the Nation's Report Card (National Assessment of Educational Progress), Washington students are strong in 4th grade reading in comparison to the rest of the nation and maintain this strength in 8th grade. The story is different with math. Washington's 4th graders perform well in mathematics compared to other states, similar to how they perform in reading, with only four states statistically outperforming Washington. By 8th grade, however, 14 states are statistically outperforming Washington.

We know from these results that while our students outperform the national average, students in other states are closing that gap in mathematics and lessening our students' advantage.

Compared to the rest of the nation, Washington is home to the second-highest share of STEM professionals and the second-highest share of jobs in high-tech industries. A small, targeted investment will help Washington recapture its place as a top-performing state in math, set up our state's economy for continued innovation and growth with home-grown STEM professionals, and position our students for success in an increasingly technology-driven world.

Finally, I request the return of a critical \$7 million investment in supports and services for students living in foster care that was cut from the 2025–27 biennial budget. These students face some of the steepest challenges and largest achievement and opportunity gaps in our state, a fact long recognized by lawmakers. When funding is scarce, it is even more important that we continue to support the students most in need and most at risk of falling through the cracks.

I come to you seeking partnership and eager to work with and support you as you balance the complex needs of the state we love and the people we serve. These requests for new investments, in addition to the assumed caseload driven maintenance level funding, are critical to the continued success of Washington's K–12 system.

Washington students and families need us. They need you and our lawmakers to step forward and step up, both despite and because of the challenges we currently face.

Schools sit at the heart of every community across the state—big and small, rural and urban, hugging the Pacific coast and woven throughout the Columbia basin. I urge you to use your power as executive leader to champion these few, essential investments in public education.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chris Reykdal". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Chris" and last name "Reykdal" clearly legible.

Chris Reykdal
Superintendent of
Public Instruction