Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

K–12 Funding Equity Workgroup 2026

Authorizing Legislation: House Bill 2049 (2025)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The K–12 Funding Equity Workgroup was established by the 2025 Legislature to analyze K–12 funding formulas and revenue sources and explore options for revisions to the funding formula that are responsive to student needs, including economic, demographic, and geographic differences in student and community populations (2025 Chapter 404 s.3).

The Superintendent of Public Instruction is charged with using the Workgroup's analysis to consider options for revising state and local school funding formulas. By November of 2027, State Superintendent Chris Reykdal is required to report the Workgroup's progress and any proposed options to the education and fiscal committees of the Legislature.

During the second phase, the full Workgroup met three times and established a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) of school funding experts to review and refine ideas from the larger group; the TAC met seven times to examine specific items.

Key Findings and Recommendations

Findings and discussions are categorized into key principles of a strong funding model: Adequacy, Equity, Accountability, Efficiency, Transparency, and Stability.

- Adequacy: Ensure the state fully funds the basic education program, so districts aren't forced to exceed prototypical staffing and maintenance, supplies, and operating costs (MSOC) allocations to meet special education, language, and other student needs.
- Equity: Provide a sufficient statewide foundation, invest in resources where needs and costs are greater, and continually evaluate whether funding produces genuinely comparable educational opportunities and outcomes.
- Accountability: Create clear fiscal guardrails, transparent reporting, and outcome-linked metrics so targeted funds reliably reach intended students and reduce volatility.
- Efficiency: Align and concentrate resources where they produce the largest student outcomes, streamlining services, reducing duplication, and tying MSOC allocations to cost drivers (e.g., facility square footage, regional price indices).
- Transparency: Simplify public explanations of the funding model so families and policymakers can compare district funding and outcomes.
- Stability: Provide hold-harmless/glide-path protections, transition grants, non-enrollment MSOC funding based on cost drivers (utilities, insurance, square footage), and targeted supplemental grants to prevent funding cliffs and stabilize recruitment/retention.

The workgroup found broad agreement on several core points:

1) Fully funding the program of basic education is an urgent and necessary first step;

2) Targeted, needs-based investments (including expanded Learning Assistance Program (LAP) and strengthened Local Effort Assistance (LEA) mechanisms) are required to direct resources to high-need students and economically disadvantaged communities;
3) Student weights and concentration factors (poverty, multilingual learners, disability, homelessness, mobility, number of languages, urban/rural context) would better align funding with costs; and
4) Stronger fiscal guardrails, transparent reporting, and outcome-focused monitoring are essential to ensure that additional resources reach intended students and produce measurable improvements.

INTRODUCTION

Legislative Charge

The 2025 Legislature passed House Bill 2049, which directs the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to gather and administer a workgroup around K–12 funding in Washington. The goal is to explore and suggest options for revising K–12 funding to more equitably and efficiently serve student needs. The workgroup was tasked with analyzing several key issues:

- Impacts of recent changes to the state's per-pupil funding model and local revenue;
- Compensation factors outlined in RCW 28A.150.412;
- The impact of the prototypical school funding formula on K–12 funding distribution;
- How economic disparities affect communities' access to K–12 funding and resources; and
- Funding directed toward supporting the needs of specific student groups including the learning assistance program (LAP), local effort assistance (LEA), and funding for small schools.

OSPI is required to use the workgroup's analysis conducted to consider options for revising state and local school funding formulas. Reports are due annually to the Legislature through 2027. The reports must include, but are not limited to, the following topics:

A. Options for revisions to the funding formula that address system and resource inequities;
B. Options that address state, local, and regional needs;
C. The potential adoption of student weights to direct additional funding to students most in need;
D. Modifications to state and local tax authority for schools; and
E. Metrics for monitoring and accountability related to equitable access to resources.

OSPI published the first Funding Equity Workgroup report in November of 2025: K–12 Funding Equity Workgroup Interim Report.

Structure of Washington's K–12 Funding Model

In Washington, the state uses a funding allocation model called the prototypical school funding model (PSFM) to provide each student in grades K–12 is with a 'basic education.' The PSFM is a distribution formula to provide the minimum funding required by the state's definition of basic education. This formula provides an allocation to local school districts and other local education agencies in support of the operations and minimum instructional program of basic education. This formula is not intended to direct a school district to implement a particular instructional approach or service or to maintain specific student-to-staff ratios. With limited exception, school districts can determine how to best utilize their state funding to meet the unique needs of their students and community. Mainly, this model allocates funding in two ways: 1) full-time equivalent (FTE) staffing values determined by student-to-staff ratios, and 2) non-staff operating costs.

Prototypical schools are identified by grade level and are broken out into three school types: 1) elementary, 2) middle, and 3) high. Each school type has an assumed enrollment of students for purposes of standardizing the staffing ratios. School districts report their actual student FTE enrollments each month to OSPI, which generates a funded staff-to-student allocation for staffing purposes. These funding formulas can be found with district-specific detail by accessing the school apportionment reports on OSPI's website.

School districts are provided with additional basic education funding in other categories beyond the PSFM, including special education, Learning Assistance Program (LAP), Transitional Bilingual Instructional Program (TBIP), Highly Capable, institutional education, and student transportation. These supplemental funding formulas work with the PSFM to provide additional funding support based on student characteristics and needs.

WORKGROUP PROCESS

Full Group Meetings

For the 2026 workplan, OSPI maintained the original K–12 Funding Equity Workgroup and hosted three full group meetings between April – August of 2026. The purpose of the full group meetings was to review the recommendations that emerged from the subcommittees convened in Fall of 2025, receive updates on OSPI's work to date, and engage in discussion to help shape the report and recommendations. Workgroup membership included representatives from various roles within the K–12 system and the larger K–12 community including groups representing educators, school and district administrators, labor unions, families, students, community partners, the Department of Revenue, and legislators. See Appendix A for a full list of workgroup membership. Facilitation for the workgroup was provided by OSPI staff.

Technical Advisory Committee

OSPI also convened a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) whose purpose was to review potential strategies that had been elevated from the larger group and provide feedback on implementation and viability. The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) is a subgroup of K–12 finance experts that provided technical analysis, validated data and modeling, identified implementation challenges, and gave evidence-based feedback to OSPI to ensure policy options being considered are financially sound and implementable. The TAC met seven times to examine topics raised by the larger group, including:

- Materials, supplies, and operating costs (MSOC)
- District-specific funding elements
- Gaps in the program of basic education
- The Learning Assistance Program
- Resources for economically disadvantaged communities
- K–12 funding sources and revenue streams

See Appendix B for a list of TAC membership.

Call for Ideas

The workgroup included diverse education and community partners from across regions and demographics. To broaden input, OSPI issued a call for ideas in May 2026. Each member, students, parents, teachers, community members, administrators, or lawmakers, was asked to consult their communities, collect feedback on the topics under review, and submit clear, practical recommendations for the Funding Equity Workgroup and OSPI to consider. Specifically, OSPI asked members to share:

1. How they define equity as it relates to school funding;
2. Specific elements of the funding model they'd like to see changed;

3. Detailed proposals for amending the current funding structure; and
4. Accountability measures to ensure proposed changes achieve intended outcomes.

There were 13 submissions to the original request, and one proposal was submitted later in July. See Appendix C for a summary of submissions.

Funding Priorities Survey

To continue to provide opportunities for members to focus the work, identify concrete strategies, and elevate ideas for OSPI's consideration, workgroup members were surveyed a second time, pulling larger themes from phase I of the workgroup and shaping the next phase of the work. These 33 responses were analyzed by OSPI, summarized, and shared back with the full group to inform discussion. See Appendix D for survey results.

Individual and Small Group Meetings

The workgroup included representation from education and community partners that are demographically and geographically diverse. To maximize the voices and ideas being elevated for discussion, OSPI met individually and in small groups with various state and community partners, including workgroup members and organizations/individuals not formally participating in the workgroup.

These strategies were used to inform both OSPI's 2027–29 biennial budget request to the Governor and the Legislature as well as the recommendations included in this report.

WORKGROUP INTERESTS AND GUIDING VALUES

To ground discussions, OSPI continued to revisit the definition of equity through surveys and group discussion prompts. What does an equitable funding model mean? Responses to this question varied, but the throughline continued to be this:

> *An equitable K–12 funding model provides a sufficient statewide foundation, adds resources where needs and costs are greater, and continually evaluates whether funding produces genuinely comparable educational opportunities and outcomes.*

As specific ideas emerged throughout the various surveys and discussions, the group continued to come back to some common principles of a strong and equitable funding model: Adequacy, Equity, Accountability, Efficiency, Transparency, and Stability.

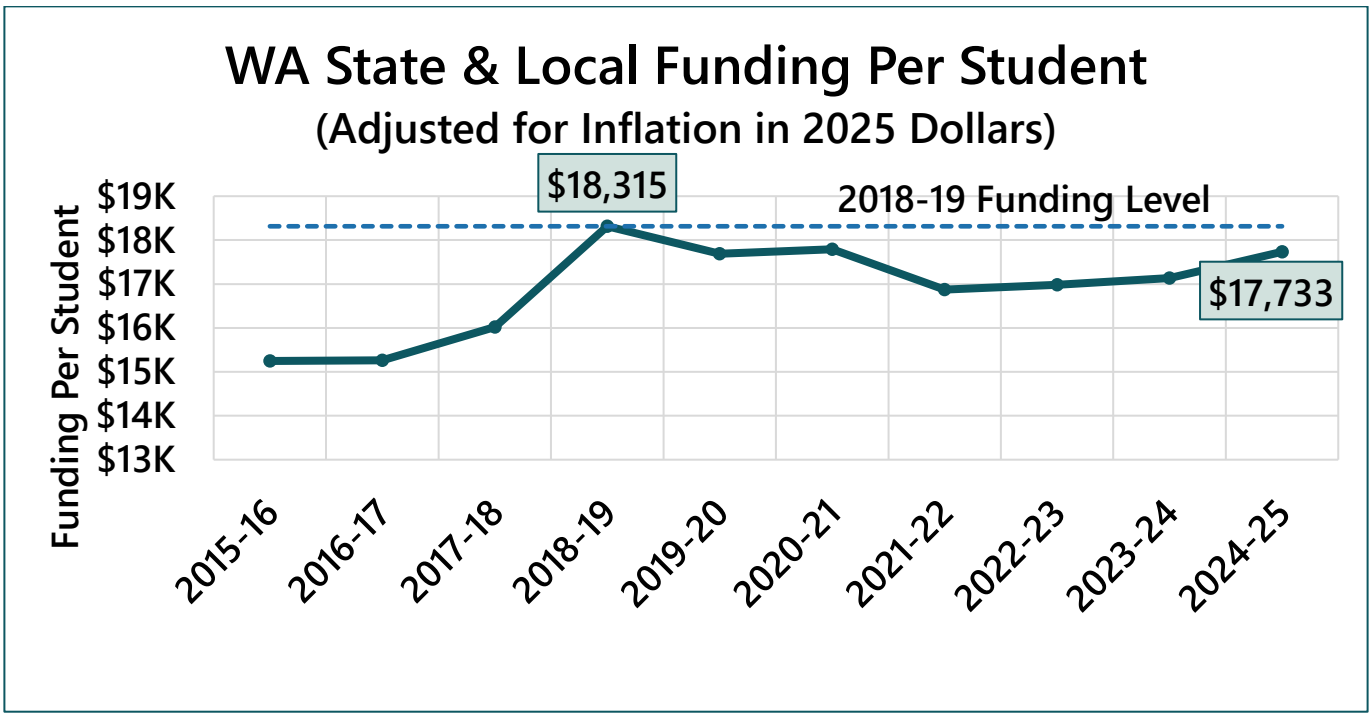
Adequacy

Adequacy generally means there is enough funding in the system to cover required costs and enable every student, regardless of background, to achieve a high-quality education. At the center of that principle was the current financial crisis facing school districts across the state. We are seeing historical numbers of districts entering binding conditions, and communities across the state are having difficult conversations about school closures and cuts to critical programs and services directly impacting students. There are two ways to approach the topic of adequacy in Washington's school funding formula: First, adequacy from a **legal basis**: Meeting state constitutional or legal obligations for education. Second is adequacy from an **educational basis**: Supporting the needs of all students and enabling them to achieve state standards, contributing to broader goals for societal and economic well-being.

Legal obligations for basic education funding

A common theme across all discussions was the historical underfunding of basic education and the failure to sustain progress in keeping up with the evolving needs of the public education system. While the overall funding for K12 public schools has increased over the past 10 years, when adjusted for inflation, funding per student has dropped by about $250 compared to the peak in 2019. (Source: OSPI Understanding Public School Funding). In Washington, recent investments have supported closing existing funding gaps in special education, a non-negotiable requirement that districts have been using other fund sources to cover for years. Expansion towards universal meals has also invested more money into schools, feeding children, but those funds have not resulted in additional direct academic supports or helped with growing fiscal concerns and staffing shortages.

Figure 1. K–12 Revenue Over Time (2014-2025)



For many, the urgency to act now to support districts who are making massive layoffs and seeking help from the state through the binding conditions process overrides the need for a new funding formula, which could take years to plan, create, and implement. Some workgroup members noted that it would result in different labels on the same funding streams and without comprehensive policy changes – would not impact student outcomes. On the other hand, some noted that priorities are reflected in how the state budgets are allocated and a model that reflects the state's commitment to ensuring every student is seen and resourced adequately – is the first step to meaningful change.

Challenges in the current funding formula are causing non-negotiable costs like insurance, utilities, and transportation to eat away critical funding for staffing and resources for students.

Special education is a legally required component of basic education. The state has an obligation to ensure that students with disabilities receive the services and supports required to access their education, and its funding model should adequately support districts in meeting that obligation. When state allocations do not reflect the actual costs of providing required services, districts may face pressure to redirect resources from other educational priorities or rely on local levy funding to meet their obligations.

Recent legislative changes, including increases to the special education funding multiplier, improvements in the safety net process, and the removal of the special education enrollment cap through Senate Bill (SB) 5263, represent important steps toward addressing funding adequacy. However, SB 5263 also made changes to the allocation and cost accounting methodology for special education funding, changes that were first put into place for the 2026-27 school year. To accurately define the current gaps in funding for purposes of special education, OSPI recommends that the legislature revisit in the near future when

updated accounting data is available. In addition, because the special education funding works as a multiplier to the district's Basic Education Allocation (BEA) rate, other investments into basic education that impact a district's BEA rate will continue to drive more money into the program of special education. The group upheld special education as a priority for the state and for the legislature and while immediate recommendations are not being elevated at this time, Washington must continue to evaluate whether its special education funding model sufficiently reflects student needs, service costs, and differences in district and student circumstances.

Educational adequacy: meeting student needs

Approximately 80% of the K–12 Operating Budget is for compensation. A big part of the educational system is the people who provide educational support to all students. For decades, the legislature, OSPI, and the public have grappled with the staffing ratios currently defined and whether they are sufficient to meet the changing needs of students. When the prototypical school funding formula was established, the ratios were based upon the actual staffing ratios of a survey of a subset of districts in school year 1974–75. It was never intended to be what *should* be funded, rather, it was a cost-neutral transfer to the new model which allowed for more transparency that could be used to inform future funding decisions. In 2010, the Quality Education Council (QEC) recommended an increase for all staffing categories to be phased in by 2018. The Legislature adopted this baseline model in House Bill 2776 (2010) with the goal to enhance two parts by 2018; a reduction in kindergarten through third grade class size from a teacher to student ratio of 25.32 to 17.00 and to increase the non-staff operating costs provided in the MSOC allocation from $551 to $1,082. At that time, additional PSFM recommendations beyond the K–3 class size reduction and increased MSOC allocation were not adopted by the Legislature. In 2014, Washington's voters approved Initiative 1351 (I-1351) which amended the state's basic education funding formulas through the PSFM by increasing the minimum staffing ratios that drive state basic education funding to local school districts.

The legislature has made incremental progress over the years by increasing physical, social, and emotional support staff (PSES) though values are still under what has been recommended for the past decade. Districts are making local decisions to support the needs of their communities, hiring above what the funding allocation provides, which puts significant strain and pressure on other parts of the funding system. See Table 1 for a statewide comparison of FTE allocated under the prototypical model versus the FTE districts are hiring to meet student needs.

Table 1: 2024-25 School Year Prototype Allocations vs. Actuals, Statewide

Staff Type	Allocated FTE	Actual FTE
School Nurses	1,088	1,740
Technology	550	1,528

Custodians	3,841	5,371
Student Safety	189	642

Sources: Allocations from apportionment calculations defined in RCW 28A.150.260. Actual FTE from the S-275 staffing report submitted by school districts.

More alarming is a look at how many students it takes to generate a 1.0 FTE in each of the prototypical staff categories:

Table 2: Students needed to generate a 1.0 Staff FTE

Staff Type	Elementary (K-6)	Middle (7-8)	High (9-12)
Principals	319	319	319
Teacher Librarian	603	832	1,147
Guidance Counselor	403	252	197
School Nurse	962	706	1,031
Social Worker	1,802	7,200	6,742
Psychologist	5,333	27,000	17,143
Teaching Assistance	427	617	920
Office Support	199	186	184
Custodians	241	222	202
Student and Staff Safety	5,063	4,696	4,255
Parent Involvement Coordinators	4,858	0	0

Source: Calculated from values in 28A.150.260.

The recommended ratios from the 2010 Quality Education Council and the 2014 voter-approved I-1351 are the bare minimum adjustments required to support student needs. The workgroup showed interest in an updated analysis that would look at adequacy in the system and the funding model to meet the needs of today's young people and the workforce of tomorrow.

Equity

Equity in a funding model means the system allocates greater resources toward students with greater needs. It factors in local funding capacity in ways that enable the efficient use of limited state dollars to target the greatest needs. While Washington's school funding formula begins using a prototypical school as the basis for funding, the per pupil amount that is generated across the state varies significantly from district to district, based on multiple factors. Public schools generate funding through state, federal, and local factors. Table 3 illustrates how funding from different sources varies across regions of the state.

Table 3: Example of Total Per Pupil Funding by District. 2024-25

District	Enrollment FTE	FRPL	State Revenue	Local Revenue	Federal Revenue	Total funding per pupil
Mercer Island	3,976	6.2%	$54,877,956	$17,773,864	$1,300,861	$19,981
Seattle	50,542	30.1%	$801,666,193	$217,987,579	$67,549,636	$23,191
Colton	155	29.9%	$3,231,636	$807,980	$147,700	$27,199
Olympia	9,674	33%	$132,022,623	$32,273,446	$7,548,744	$17,983
Dixie	14	35.7%	$602,066	$103,637	$144,019	$59,421
Washtucna	61	56.5%	$2,519,570	$239,342	$101,206	$48,879
Spokane	29,229	57.4%	$422,244,526	$100,479,918	$50,909,111	$19,829
Oroville	527	59.2%	$7,555,550	$1,675,174	$1,477,829	$20,315
Garfield	117	60.7%	$3,169,570	$261,125	$255,159	$31,845
Yakima	15,593	84.7%	$233,213,616	$24,335,766	$30,287,210	$18,776
Granger	1,402	90.9%	$23,027,071	$1,088,075	$3,884,092	$20,068

Source: Year-end financial reports (F-196) as submitted to OSPI in fall of 2025.

It is not fair, nor accurate, to say that Washington's funding model is a one-size-fits-all approach. There are varying drivers that intersect based on geographic location, district size, and student population to drive resources to school districts to fully serve their unique student population. For a district like Seattle with a large levy base, this could mean voter-approved small neighborhood elementary schools and smaller class sizes. In very small districts, it may mean higher state funding to guarantee a baseline level of staff regardless of enrollment. Districts with higher poverty rates receive more federal funds to expand student supports. Higher cost-of-living areas may get extra resources to attract and retain qualified staff.

Many group members supported revising the funding formula to address systemic inequities, while others felt our time would be better spent pinpointing the biggest gaps in the current system and developing targeted solutions.

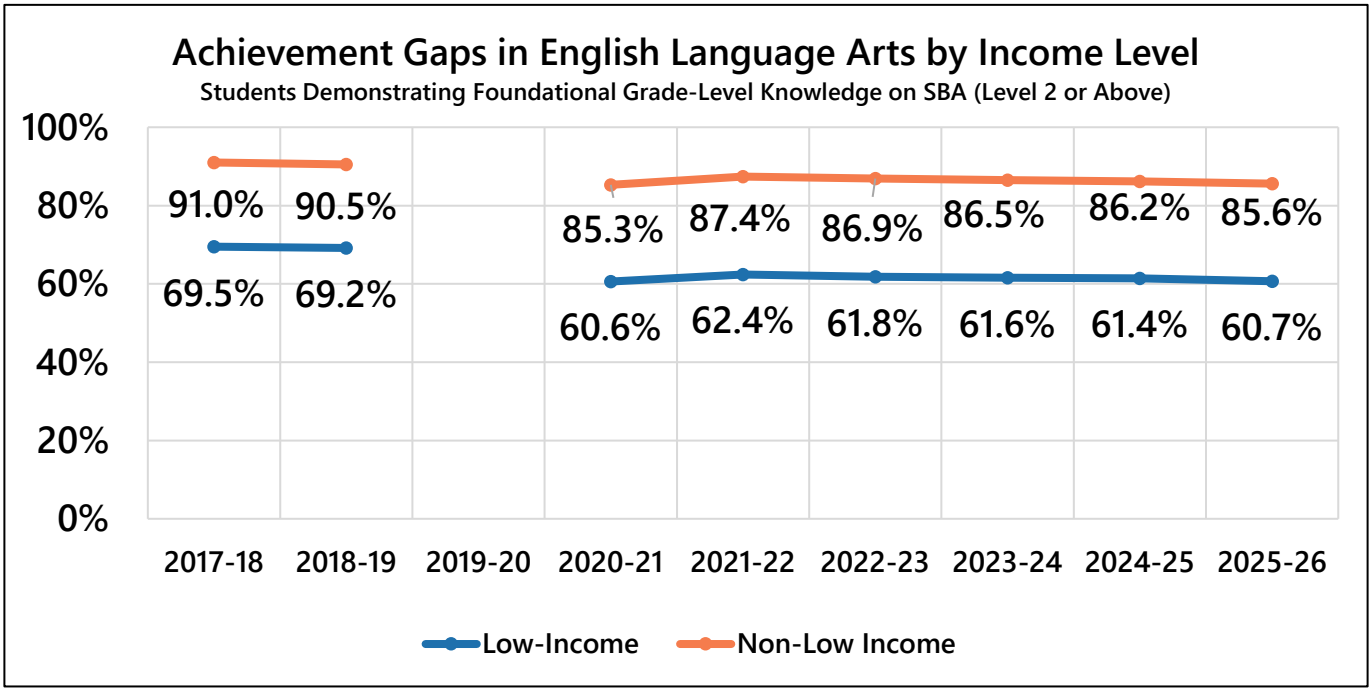
Needs-based funding

There was consensus across the group that, especially with limited resources, Washington must design any changes to the funding formula using a needs-based approach. Washington students come from a diverse range of backgrounds with varying assets and challenges, and we have an important role in ensuring equitable access to the resources, skilled educators, and learning opportunities that foster academic success for each student.

Closing opportunity gaps

Student academic achievement is influenced by numerous factors, but the economic strength of an individual community has a massive and multifaceted impact on the educational opportunities available to students in that community and their outcomes. Members noted that compared to other states, Washington's K–12 funding model does not allocate considerably more funding to school districts that serve higher percentages of students impacted by poverty. For generations, and across the nation, students from lower-income families have consistently scored lower than their peers from non-low-income families (see Figure 2). This is true across racial and programmatic characteristics of youth.

Figure 2. Achievement Gaps in English Language Arts Between Low Income and Non-Low Income Youth



Source: Washington State Report Card Assessment Data from 2017-2026.

A large and growing body of evidence[1] shows that money, when spent equitably and effectively on key school resources, improves student outcomes, and closes achievement and opportunity gaps. Evidence-based intervention strategies can be effective in mitigating the impacts of poverty on student learning. The Learning Assistance Program (LAP) is Washington's state-funded supplemental instruction program for K–12 students who score lower than their peers in English language arts or math. LAP funding is distributed through two components: LAP Base, which is a district-wide allocation generated by a district's overall K–12 enrollment and the percentage of students eligible for Free and Reduced-Price meals (F/RP); and a separate high-poverty allocation available only to individual schools within a district that meet a specific poverty threshold.

District reliance on LAP's high poverty enhancement faces its own challenges as the mechanism currently operates using an all-or-nothing threshold: a school qualifies only if its three-year rolling average F/RP percentage is at or above 50%. Once a district qualifies, it receives a flat amount of additional funding based on enrollment, regardless of whether a school's poverty rate is 51% or 95%, meaning that even qualifying districts do not receive funding calibrated to actual levels of student need. Students in a district where poverty is real but not concentrated enough to meet that 50% mark receive no LAP High Poverty support at all, even if their individual level of need is identical to a peer in a qualifying school. Schools in the highest poverty areas generate the same LAP High Poverty funding as schools with much smaller percentages of F/RP students, meaning that the per-student allocation is lower in those districts, even as the overall economic environment signals higher per-student needs. These binary assumptions leave schools across the state unable to afford the services and interventions that generate stronger outcomes for F/RP students.

Education serves as a powerful tool for economic mobility, with higher educational attainment strongly correlated with increased lifetime earnings and stability. To make the greatest impact with Washington's limited resources, the group recommended significantly increasing the level of support for students in the highest-poverty communities, who continue to face the most concentrated and compounding effects of historically inequitable funding.

Additional student weights

Some students have unique learning needs that require individualized approaches and additional resources to support their full potential. Many students face multiple or intersecting barriers to learning, such as being highly mobile, living in a low-income household, and experiencing foster care. Washington's current funding formula adds additional weighted funding for some groups of learners, such as students with disabilities, students who are Highly Capable, English learners, and various funding and policy adjustments to account for students who are considered low-income.

[1] Baker, B. D. (2018). How money matters for schools (research brief). Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

The group discussed the current student-based funding elements and outlined structural and fundamental gaps in ensuring each child has what they need to learn and thrive. One example is funding that supports students who are highly capable. Group members recognized that current allocations are calculated based on a percentage of the district's population. A more appropriate approach would be to include base funding, which could be calculated using a percentage and used to support universal screening combined with individual student weights so that every student identified as highly capable would generate additional resources that could be used to support their individualized instructional needs. In addition, there was general support for the addition of additional student weighted funding drivers for students who are experiencing homelessness, students in the foster care system, and students who are highly mobile. While there are minimal supports dedicated currently to providing specific programming or supports for these populations – a student-based funding driver would ensure that districts receive funding to support the needs of each student impacted by these life circumstances.

Group members also submitted a recommendation to replace the special education funding model with one that is more directly tied to student and community characteristics and expanding the Inclusionary Practices Technical Assistance Network as a strategy for improving equity, adequacy, and transparency. Moving from a primarily enrollment-based funding model to a weighted funding model would involve significant policy change, implementation, and accountability considerations. Any new funding model should align resources with student needs while minimizing incentives that influence eligibility, placement, staffing, or other IEP decisions. For a summary of important reflections and considerations related to a weighted special education funding model, please see Appendix E.

Finally, members highlighted the need for a funding driver to support youth with incarcerated parents. Because K–12 systems currently lack data on which students are affected, implementing this would require new data collection and partnership with the Department of Corrections.

The group stressed that supplemental spending is the first resource displaced when adequacy pressures mount. Any formula approach must also include the infrastructure to ensure that equity-directed resources reach the students they are meant to serve.

Concentration factors

In addition to individual student weighted elements, concentration factors would allow districts who serve high population of certain student groups, and multiple intersecting groups, to receive additional funding to develop a system-wide comprehensive response. For example, students generate additional funding for being an English Learner, but there is additional complexity in serving a more diverse population of language speakers. In one district, most English learners might be Spanish speakers; in another, English learners could represent 30 different home languages. Providing high-quality instruction and language supports looks different in those two examples, but both are equally important. The group identified several areas that could benefit from concentration factors including:

- The number of languages spoken

- The percentage of English language learners
- The percentage of students and families living in low-income households
- Percentage of students experiencing homelessness
- Percentage of students who are considered highly mobile
- Percentage of students with disabilities
- Social determinants of health and environmental indicators show increased need and likelihood of increased adverse childhood experiences.

Members also discussed the need for investments in multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) and trauma-informed practices to support the whole child and ensure not only are student needs identified, but that they are connected to timely and appropriate services to support their overall health and wellbeing. These strategies could be funded through additional staffing units or some type of categorical funding allocation; however, it is unclear how students would be counted or how districts would qualify for more or less funding specifically to respond to individual student needs. A more stable approach would be to fully fund MTSS in each school, increase funding to support the Learning Assistance Program (LAP) which provides both academic and non-academic supports. School districts are required to use the Washington Integrated Student Supports Protocol (WISSP) when budgeting for LAP. The WISSP is designed to support a school-based approach to promoting the success of all students by coordinating academic and nonacademic supports to reduce barriers to academic achievement and educational attainment.

The group discussed how any new allocation model should be co-designed with community partners including students, families, and educators with a commitment to making thoughtful structural changes.

Local Effort Assistance

Local Effort Assistance (LEA) is direct and flexible state funding provided to eligible districts to match voter-approved enrichment levies. These payments help school districts that have above-average tax rates due to low property valuations and therefore do not typically pass levies at the maximum levy authority. These districts are sometimes referred to as "property poor" communities. Local communities that qualify for LEA must pass a local levy of at least $1.50/$1,000 of assessed valuation to be eligible for the full amount of assistance. Communities that pass less than $1.50/$1,000 receive prorated funding.

The LEA funding data display shows total LEA funding per FTE student, estimated for the 2026 calendar year. The map is colored from lighter shades to darker shades, showing a smaller amount of funding per FTE student to a larger amount, respectively. Hovering over each school district will show the district's estimated FTE enrollment, estimated total LEA funding, and estimated LEA funding per FTE student.

Due to the above-mentioned shortfalls of the prototypical school funding formula (lower staffing allocations than what is needed to support a program of basic education) and the importance of enrichment opportunities such as clubs, athletics, and more, districts continue to elevate the need for a state funded "equalizer" for districts who are unable to generate local revenue sufficient to closing those gaps. The group discussed building property value (current LEA formula) into the program of basic education to generate state funding for districts with above-average tax rates specifically designed to

serve students most in need. OSPI recommends adding a component to the Learning Assistance Program base funding model to account for this. The group also discussed the importance of revisiting the need of LEA for enrichment purposes.

Accountability

Accountability in funding is about linking resources to results. It includes both state and local level decision making and continuously reexamining to understand how financial decisions are impacting outcomes. Discussions around accountability centered on two distinct aspects.

- **Fiscal accountability:** Is funding allocated in line with state goals? Is funding spent on the purposes for which it was allocated?
- **Outcome accountability:** Does funding improve results for students? How do we know?

Through the call for ideas process, there was a request to protect categorical funds, so they reach intended programs and students, and to set targets and monitor progress on student outcomes. This is an interesting distinction – the difference between fiscal accountability at the state level, and the accountability at the district level. K–12 funding is primarily funded as an allocation-only system. Money is generated through different formulas and sent to districts, which have broad local authority to decide how funding should be spent in their specific school district. This has a lot of benefits – local school districts can make decisions based on their unique students, structure, and community. For example, if the prototypical model drives funding for 1.4 FTE of a school principal, the district receiving the funding may decide that it wants to hire one full-time principal and use the other funding for another type of staffing or other purpose.

There are some areas in the school funding model that have less flexibility. One example is the Physical, Social, and Emotional Support (PSES) staffing ratio increase included compliance to ensure that school districts were, at a minimum, staffing up to or beyond the levels set by the legislature. Underscoring all of this though is the fact that basic education as a whole continued to be underfunded. Requiring overly specific accountability while the system is strained would limit districts' ability to balance budgets and respond to local needs.

There was discussion around how we measure student outcomes, with some workgroup members encouraging the state use student learning *growth* rather than test scores and looking at longer timeframes and regional peer-accountability models. School climate and family engagement were also discussed as potential measures of student outcomes.

Members also discussed what should happen when targeted funding does not show results. One proposal was a structured corrective process for districts: a diagnostic review, an implementation plan with milestones, and escalating steps up to funding adjustments.

Efficiency

Efficiency centers around resources which are aligned to maximize outcomes, with flexibility for local decision-making. In a resource-limited environment, it is critical that changes to the funding model strive to make the most with the resources we have. Members discussed the need for early interventions, robust implementation of Multi-Tiered Systems of support, and clear policy objectives. Members referenced the need for operational efficiencies which can come from leveraging existing district roles and expanding shared services through things like Educational Service District partnerships.

Transparency

Transparency means the public, legislators, and district leaders can see how funding is calculated, where it goes, and what it pays for. In a technical sense, Washington's system is transparent. The statutes and budget documents behind the formulas are public. OSPI publishes district-level apportionment reports showing how each allocation is generated, and district budgets are posted publicly.

In practice, the system can be hard to follow. A district's allocation comes from several pieces, each with its own rules and timelines:

- The prototypical school funding model
- Multiple categorical programs
- Regionalization and staff mix factors
- Local levy and LEA calculations
- Federal sources, including formula-driven funds and potentially grants

Members noted that it takes considerable understanding to be able to explain why two districts receive different per-pupil amounts. This complexity makes it harder for families, educators, and policymakers to judge whether the system is fair or working as intended. Members expressed a desire for a model that is simpler and easier for the public to understand.

Members also identified a gap between how funds are allocated and how they are spent. Because the system is allocation-based, funding generated for one purpose can be used for another. This flexibility allows local communities to tailor resources to their own unique needs. State reporting shows what districts receive and, at a summary level, what they spend. It does not always show how resources reach individual schools or student groups.

The workgroup's review of a weighted special education funding proposal raised a related point (see Appendix E). Funding formulas often mix three kinds of factors:

- Factors that reflect student need

- Factors that reflect district or community characteristics
- Factors that reflect local cost structures, such as regional salaries and benefits

Members discussed some strategies for a more transparent funding system:

- Continued exploration of a student weighted funding model as a structural option to direct resources toward students with greater need. Any move toward weights should be guided by rigorous cost modeling, robust data validation, explicit guardrails to prevent unintended incentives, and phased pilots with independent evaluation.
- Publish contract level procurement and vendor payments for major services (utilities, transportation, temp staffing) to identify cost drivers and savings opportunities.
- Clearly document and publish the funding drivers and external data that inform the funding model, including regionalization indices, inflation adjustments, and non-enrollment cost drivers (facility size, insurance, utilities, local labor markets).
- Increase resources to support statewide fiscal data systems that analyze funding allocations, student and educator data, and district spending to produce more usable reports for school districts and for the public.

Stability

Stability means districts can predict their funding from year to year. They can then plan staffing and programs without abrupt drops caused by economic swings, enrollment changes, or policy shifts.

Stability matters because most district costs are fixed in the short term. For example, compensation makes up roughly 80% of the K–12 operating budget, and staff are hired under annual or multi-year agreements. Another example: buildings, utilities, insurance, and transportation routes do not shrink when enrollment does.

State funding, however, is driven largely by enrollment. When enrollment declines, revenue falls faster than districts can reduce costs. Districts also rely on voter-approved levies, and Local Effort Assistance (LEA) eligibility depends on levy passage, so local revenue can change from one election to the next. Washington's K–12 enrollment has declined 4.39% since the pandemic and due to primary birth-rate declines, is set to continue decreasing to the tune of 30,000 fewer K–12 students in the next five years. These pressures contribute to the rise in districts entering binding conditions described earlier in this report.

Caseload Forecast Council Forecast Narratives, June 11, 2026

Members discussed the following overall strategies to increase stability:

- Clearly document and publish the funding drivers and external data that inform the funding model, including regionalization indices, inflation adjustments, and non-enrollment cost drivers (facility size, insurance, utilities, local labor markets).

- Replace simple per-pupil drivers where appropriate: for MSOC-like drivers (facility size, insurance, utilities) calculate allocations from cost drivers (square footage, actuarial premiums, regional price indices) rather than pure enrollment counts.
- Targeted supplemental grants should be considered for concentrated high need schools or districts that lose funding, provide targeted supplements conditional on preserving services.

Recruitment and retention of a highly effective workforce: Regionalization

To ensure Washington's school districts receive sufficient state funding to recruit and retain diverse and highly effective educators to support our students, the Legislature requires a regular review and revision of school employee salary allocations to accurately reflect market-rate salaries and economic differences between districts. In the 2021–23 biennial budget, the Legislature required the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to convene a K–12 Basic Education Compensation Advisory Committee to develop recommendations to OSPI that support recruiting and retaining a multicultural and multilingual educator workforce. OSPI reviewed those recommendations and submitted a statewide request to the Governor and the Legislature: Retaining Highly Effective Staff Through an Equitable and Competitive Educator Compensation Model: 2023-25 Biennial Operating Budget Request. As a priority, members identified the current regionalization structure as a barrier to attracting and retaining high-quality staff. The Technical Advisory Committee reviewed different approaches to regionalization and felt that absent a larger scale review of the state's labor market, the proposal submitted by OSPI in 2023 would support districts by:

1. Moving away from district-by-district factors, creating regions that have a smoothing effect district to district.
2. Tighten the range between the minimum and maximum regionalization factors.
3. Create less "borders of differential" where neighboring districts have different regionalization factors.
4. Phase in revised regionalization factors with a hold-harmless provision, so no district receives a lower state salary allocation than under the current factors during the transition.

The proposal, along with other suggestions for supporting a competitive educator compensation model can be found here: Retaining Highly Effective Staff Through an Equitable and Competitive Educator Compensation Model

These foundational themes were embedded and revisited across all conversations and should be considered as the legislature pursues future changes to the funding model.

School Finance & Tax Authority

Washington's current reliance on regressive local property taxes to fund K–12 education exacerbates inequity and places disproportionate burden on low- and moderate-income households. This proposal calls for shifting school funding toward more progressive, capacity-based state revenue sources while pairing any state levy increases with an income-linked property tax "circuit breaker" that caps household liability and covers both homeowners and renters.

1. Washington's current tax structure is highly regressive; consider tax reforms that shift school funding toward more progressive, capacity based revenue sources to reduce reliance on regressive local property taxes.
2. Pair any increase in state school levies with a taxpayer "circuit breaker" to protect households: cap property tax liability at a fixed percentage of household income (for example, X% — to be set by policy makers).
3. Design the circuit breaker to cover both homeowners and renters, following the practice in many states that extend protections beyond property owners.
4. Ensure the circuit breaker explicitly includes working age households (not just seniors or disabled residents), as found in the more comprehensive state models.
5. Phase implementation with targeted protections for low- and moderate-income households and a transition fund for districts to avoid abrupt revenue losses during reform.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Implement immediate revisions to the funding formula that address system and resource inequities.

It is imperative that the legislature take immediate action to close the funding gaps in Washington's public schools. While there is opportunity and interest for redesigning a funding model, our schools and our students cannot wait years for a new formula design while districts struggle to afford the most basic and essential functions of providing a well-rounded basic education.

1) Fully fund the program of basic education as currently defined by the legislature by strengthening the funding formula used to support materials, supplies, and operating costs, fully funding non-discretionary costs such as insurance and utilities, and ensuring districts have sufficient resources for educating students. (OSPI's 2027-29 Biennial Decision Package: Meeting the State's Constitutional Obligation to Fund Basic Education for Every Student)
2) Drive additional resources to economically disadvantaged communities across the state, including support for students in high-poverty schools who are not meeting academic standards, and adjust the funding formula to account for local property values and balance state and local resources. (OSPI's 2027-29 Biennial Decision Package: Investing in Students and Communities through Equitable Learning Assistance Funding Mechanisms)

B. Support revisions that address state, local, and regional needs.

Washington is home to over 300 local education agencies, which include a diverse range of district size, geographic location, demographic makeup, labor market factors, and other unique characteristics that impact the district's ability to meet the needs of their communities. The group elevated 3 targeted strategies that would help balance some of these differences, creating more equitable funding options in high needs areas:

1) Smooth the regionalization factors that districts receive and create fewer boundaries between those factors, to provide districts with a more equitable opportunity to recruit and retain highly effective staff within a larger geographic region. (One of the recommended strategies in OSPI's 2023-25 Biennial Decision Package: Retaining Highly Effective Staff Through an Equitable and Competitive Educator Compensation Model)
2) Continue to assess the importance of local revenue in supporting public schools in serving their unique communities, including the impact of Local Effort Assistance (LEA).

3) Implement smaller class sizes for high poverty schools – as limited resources are allocated, explore leveraging smaller class sizes as a strategy to target investments in a meaningful way that will support both educators and students directly.

C. Consider the potential adoption of student weights to direct additional funding to students most in need.

Budgets and state funding models are the first indicators of what the state prioritizes. Members described the current system as "an adult-based funding model for a student-based system." In order to begin transforming Washington's school funding model to one that is responsive to student needs, the group recommended three critical next steps:

1) Continue to explore moving to a fully student-weighted funding model that replaces the existing prototypical school funding formula.
2) Explore additional or enhanced student-weighted funding drivers to account for student needs including but not limited to: additional resources for students living in low-income households, Highly Capable and other programmatic funding that adjusts as students are identified rather than a percentage, new factors to generate funds specifically for youth experiencing homelessness, youth in foster care, and youth who are highly mobile, as a starting point.
3) Implement concentration factors that recognize the unique needs of serving Washington's student population. Possible factors include:
    a) The number of languages spoken
    b) The percentage of English language learners
    c) The percentage of families living in a high-poverty household
    d) The percentage of students experiencing homelessness
    e) The percentage of students who are considered highly mobile
    f) Social determinants of health and environmental indicators that identify increased risk factors for students.

D. Implement modifications to state and local tax authority for schools:

There was near consensus that regardless of fund source (local, state, or federal), the Legislature must develop and ensure a stable and dedicated fund source to support the evolving needs of Washington's program of basic education.

1) Invest progressive and stable revenue in K–12. Use additional state revenue sources to support, not supplant existing K–12 funding.

E. Support increased metrics for monitoring and

accountability related to equitable access to resources.

It is essential that with limited resources, the Legislature look for ways to ensure that new money added to the system is reaching the areas, the schools, and the students who need it most. Any new metrics used to support monitoring and accountability must be paired with a clear plan of action for how those data will be used to support increased outcomes for students.

1) Provide guardrails around new funding to target interventions and ensure resources are reaching desired students or programs.
2) Consider implementation of a funding stream tied to district performance in growth, specifically looking at student gains over time and holding the system accountable to meeting student needs, or adjusting if investments are not moving the needle.

CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

The K–12 Funding Equity Workgroup's 2026 review confirms that Washington's current funding system is not meeting the state's legal and educational obligations for the program of basic education. Persistent gaps in MSOC, special education, transportation, and competitive staffing, combined with shrinking purchasing power, have left districts hiring above prototypical allocations, cutting programs, and, in some cases, entering binding conditions. These circumstances underscore an immediate need to both bolster the baseline and redesign distribution mechanisms, so resources follow each student's need.

The Workgroup found broad agreement on several core points: (1) fully funding the program of basic education is an urgent and necessary first step; (2) targeted, needs-based investments (including expanded LAP and strengthened LEA mechanisms) are required to direct resources to high need students and economically disadvantaged communities; (3) student weights and concentration factors (poverty, multilingual learners, disability, homelessness, mobility, number of languages, urban/rural context) would better align funding with costs; and (4) stronger fiscal guardrails, transparent reporting, and outcome focused monitoring are essential to ensure that additional resources reach intended students and produce measurable improvements.

The Workgroup recognizes that funding model reform is not a substitute for immediate investments. Both are necessary: immediate stabilization to meet constitutional and educational obligations, and careful, participatory reform to ensure the system distributes resources fairly and effectively over time.

OSPI will continue to engage with the legislature, school districts, and other education partners on next steps related to advancing the priorities and ideas elevated in this report.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Workgroup Membership

Workgroup membership must include representatives from various roles within the K–12 system and the larger K–12 community including groups representing educators, school and district administrators, labor unions, families, students, community partners, the Department of Revenue, and legislators.

Name	Role	Representing
Aaron Yared	Director of Policy & Advocacy	Building Changes
Adam Aguilera	PESB Board Chair	Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB)
Alexa Allmen	Superintendent, Deer Park School District	School district administrators
Amii Thompson	Superintendent, Bainbridge Island School District	School district administrators
Andrea Kadlec	Attorney	Disability Rights Washington
Anna Corinne Huffman	External Affairs Manager	Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB)
Austina De Bonte	President	Washington Coalition for Gifted Education
Berice Bétyna	SRA	Building Changes
Brandon Schwecke	Paraeducator/Shop Steward, Lake Washington School District	School Employees
Brian Jeffries	Policy Director	Washington Roundtable
Buzz Porter	Attorney, Porter Foster Rorick LLP	School attorneys
Carolyn Logue	Legislative Consultant	K12 (online school provider)
Charlie Brown	President	Cascade Government Affairs, LLC
Choi Halladay	Deputy Executive Director, Business Operations	State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC)

Name	Role	Representing
Clifford Traisman	Principal and State Lobbyist	Clifford Traisman & Associates, LLC
Concie Pedroza	Superintendent, Tukwila School District	School district administrators
David Knight	Associate Professor	University of Washington
Deborah Callahan	Executive Director/CEO	Washington Schools Risk Management Pool
Derick Harris	Executive Director	Black Education Strategy Roundtable
Elizabeth Roberts	Chair - School Library Division (Cherry Crest Elementary Librarian)	Washington Library Association
Erin Frasier	Deputy Secretary	Washington State Building and Construction Trades Council
Frieda Takamura	Co-Chair	Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee (EOGOAC)
Gordon James	Training and Special Projects Manager	Governor's Office of Indian Affairs (GOIA)
Heather Christianson	President	Public School Employees of WA/SEIU Local 1948
Heather Tow-Yick	Superintendent, Issaquah School District	School district administrators
Ingrid Colvard	Superintendent, Stevenson-Carson School District	School district administrators
Jacob Vela	Chief Policy Officer	League of Education Voters
Jamie Traugott	Director of Student Services & K12 Alignment	State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC)
Jason Rhoads	Assistant Superintendent of Finance & Operations, Olympia Educational Service District 114	Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP)

Name	Role	Representing
Jayme Shoun	Director of Policy & Government Affairs	Washington STEM
Jeff Snell	Executive Director	Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA)
Jenny Choi	Policy Advisor	Governor's Office
Jenny Morgan	Legislative Advocate	Washington School Counselor Association
Jim Kowalkowski	Executive Director	Rural Education Center
Joseph Castilleja	Executive Director of Fiscal Services, Pasco School District	School district administrators
Julie Salvi	Lobbyist	Washington Education Association (WEA)
Kathy Mulkerin	Electoral Pipeline Manager	OneAmerica
Kelly Aramaki	Superintendent, Bellevue School District	School district administrators
Kiana Fuega	Community Member	Washington State Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs (CAPAA)
Kristi Dominguez	Superintendent, Ferndale School District	School district administrators
Kyle Rydell	Superintendent, West Valley School District	School district administrators
Logan Noel-Endres	Director of Strategic Advocacy	Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA)
Marcus Harden	Executive Director	Washington State Charter School Commission
Marcus Pimpleton	Board Chair	League of Education Voters
Maria Arellano-Smith	Organizer	SEIU 925

Name	Role	Representing
Maria Siguenza	Executive Director	Washington State Commission on Hispanic Affairs (CHA)
Marie Bravo	Director of Resource Development & Program Director	Latino Civic Alliance
Marie Sullivan	Legislative Consultant	Washington State Parent Teachers Association (WSPTA)
Marissa Rathbone	Assistant Executive Director of Government Relations	Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA)
Mary Fertakis	SBE Board Chair	Washington State Board of Education (SBE)
Melissa Beard	Director of Legislative Affairs	Council of Presidents (COP)
Mesrak Nega	Vice Chair	Legislative Youth Advisory Council (LYAC)
Michelle Price	Superintendent, North Central Educational Service District	North Central Educational Service District 171
Michelle Spenser	Executive Director	WA-ACTE
Nancy Chamberlain	Advocacy Committee member (past Advocacy Director)	Washington State Parent Teachers Association (WSPTA)
Randy Spaulding	Executive Director	Washington State Board of Education (SBE)
Regan Nickels	Superintendent, Sequim School District	School district administrators
Rep. Alicia Rule	State Representative	Washington State Legislature
Rep. April Berg	State Representative	Washington State Legislature
Rep. Carolyn Eslick	State Representative	Washington State Legislature
Rep. Janice Zahn	State Representative	Washington State Legislature
Rep. Joel McEnire	State Representative	Washington State Legislature
Rep. Lisa Callan	State Representative	Washington State Legislature

Name	Role	Representing
Rep. Mia Gregerson	State Representative	Washington State Legislature
Rep. Michael Keaton	State Representative	Washington State Legislature
Rep. Skyler Rude	State Representative	Washington State Legislature
Rep. Steve Bergquist	State Representative	Washington State Legislature
Rich Moore	Program Administrator	Schools Insurance Association of Washington (SIAW)
Rick Chisa	Government Relations Director	Public School Employees of Washington (PSE)
Rick Doehle	Insurance Pool Administrator	United Schools Insurance Program (USIP)
Roz Thompson	Director of Government Relations	Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP)
Sara Zier	Director of Legal Services	TeamChild
Sarah Butcher	Co-Executive Director	Roots of Inclusion
Scott Lehrman	Commissioner	Washington State Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs (CAPAA)
Sen. Claire Wilson	Washington Senator	Washington State Legislature
Sen. Drew Hansen	Washington Senator	Washington State Legislature
Sen. Lisa Wellman	Washington Senator	Washington State Legislature
Sen. Noel Frame	Washington Senator	Washington State Legislature
Sen. Paul Harris	Washington Senator	Washington State Legislature
Sen. Steve Conway	Washington Senator	Washington State Legislature
Sen. T'wina Nobles	Washington Senator	Washington State Legislature
Sharonne Navas	Cofounder and Executive Director	Equity in Education Center

Name	Role	Representing
Shaun Carey	Superintendent, Enumclaw School District	School district administrators
Shawna Moore	Student Success Dean, Highline Public Schools	Washington Education Association (WEA)
Sili Savusa	Community Member	Washington State Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs (CAPAA)
Stacey Estes	Commissioner	Washington State Commission on African American Affairs (CAAA)
Stacy Dym	Executive Director	The Arc of WA
Tabatha Mires	Superintendent, Manson School District	School district administrators
Tammy Ayers	Business Agent	Teamsters Local 763
Tim Merlino	Superintendent, Educational Service District 112	Association of Educational Service Districts (AESD)
Tina Greene	Legislative Communications Coordinator	Washington State Department of Revenue (DOR)
Toron Wooldridge	Superintendent, Toppenish School District	School district administrators
Tricia Lubach	Executive Director	Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA)
Trisha Schock	Assistant Superintendent of Administrative Services, North Central Educational Service District	Washington Association of School Business Officials (WASBO)
Troy Nichols	Owner	The Nichols Group Government Relations, LLC
Woody Howard	Principal, Vancouver Public Schools	Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP)

Appendix B: Technical Advisory Committee Membership

The Technical Advisory Committee is made up of technical experts from school districts, statewide associations and other staff with direct experience in K–12 education policy and finance.

Name	Representing
Abra Belke	Caucus staff, Washington House Republicans
JoLynn Berge	Chief Financial Officer, Northshore School District
Rick Chisa	Public School Employees of Washington
Danya Clevenger	Budget Advisor for K–12 Education, Office of Financial Management
Rayanna Evans	Budget Advisor to the Governor, Office of Financial Management
Dr. Trevor Greene	Superintendent, Yakima School District
Dr. David Knight	University of Washington
Jim Kowalkowski	Rural Education Center
Dave Larson	Washington State School Directors' Association (School Director, Tukwila School District)
Stephen Lord	Puget Sound Educational Service District 121
Tabatha Mires	Superintendent, Manson School District
Logan Noel-Endres	Washington State School Directors' Association
Nasue Nishida	Washington Education Association
Jennifer Priddy	Associate Superintendent, Business and Operations, Capital Region Educational Service District 113
Marissa Rathbone	Washington Association of School Administrators
Julie Salvi	Washington Education Association
Scott Seaman	Association of Washington School Principals

Trisha Schock	North Central Educational Service District 171
Jeff Snell	Washington Association of School Administrators
Roz Thompson	Association of Washington School Principals

Appendix C: Summary of 'Call for Idea' Proposals

Summary of proposals. 13 submissions received May 4–12, 2026, plus one July 2026 submission.

Author	Summary of proposal	Definition of equity
Stacy Dym, The Arc of Washington State	Fund education based on each student's actual needs and costs, especially for students with disabilities. Make supported placement in general education the default; remove systemic barriers; provide differentiated services; and monitor disaggregated outcomes, with attention to compounded racial and disability disparities.	Every student—particularly students with intellectual and developmental disabilities—receives the differentiated resources and inclusive supports needed to access education and achieve comparable outcomes, rather than funding based on an average student.
David Knight, University of Washington	Strengthen tax-base equalization and reduce wealth-based district disparities; pair an adequate statewide foundation with student weights that reflect need using a measure stronger than free/reduced-price lunch alone. Coordinate school-finance reform with broader supports that affect educational opportunity.	Districts receive adequate per-pupil funding to provide equal opportunity to reach common outcomes, with allocations adjusted for differing costs and student needs and not constrained by local wealth.
Sarah Butcher, Roots of Inclusion	Redesign basic education before adjusting categorical formulas. Define the full conditions for learning—access, academics, social-emotional support, and inclusion—and co-design the funding system with students, families, and communities most affected by existing inequities.	Equity is adequate, differentiated support based on actual student need—not equal dollars per pupil—and a funding system deliberately redesigned around students historically marginalized or excluded.

Author	Summary of proposal	Definition of equity
Andrea Kadlec, Disability Rights Washington	Use IPTN/RREI demonstration sites to collect data and develop replicable models for early, intensive supports. Center Black and Brown students, students with disabilities, and students experiencing homelessness, foster care, poverty, or trauma in defining and testing the model.	Equity is defined by those most affected and provides early, intensive support that prevents later crisis; a system capable of serving students with the greatest needs can better serve all students.
Marissa Rathbone, Washington Association of School Administrators	First close the gap between state allocations and actual local costs. Then add weighted enhancements for student need and for communities with fewer resources, including through LEA, LAP, and high-poverty funding.	Students can access basic education comparably regardless of race, gender, disability, ZIP code, or socioeconomic status.
Dr. Toron Wooldridge, Toppenish School District	Evaluate proposed levy-lid changes for unintended harm to rural districts and revise policy to protect funding capacity in regions with limited local tax bases.	Funding is distributed equitably according to student and district need, with regional circumstances and disparate local impacts explicitly considered.
Julie Salvi, Washington Education Association	Provide new funding to increase LAP and multilingual-learner allocations; add targeted staffing and operating support; raise classified wages; implement recommended prototypical staffing and smaller classes in high-poverty schools; stabilize regionalization; fully review MSOC; and use multiple, nonpunitive outcome measures with state accountability for ample, stable funding.	Resources vary with learning need. Schools serving more students experiencing poverty or homelessness, multilingual learners, and other high need groups receive more support, while workforce diversity and retention improve rather than track community wealth.

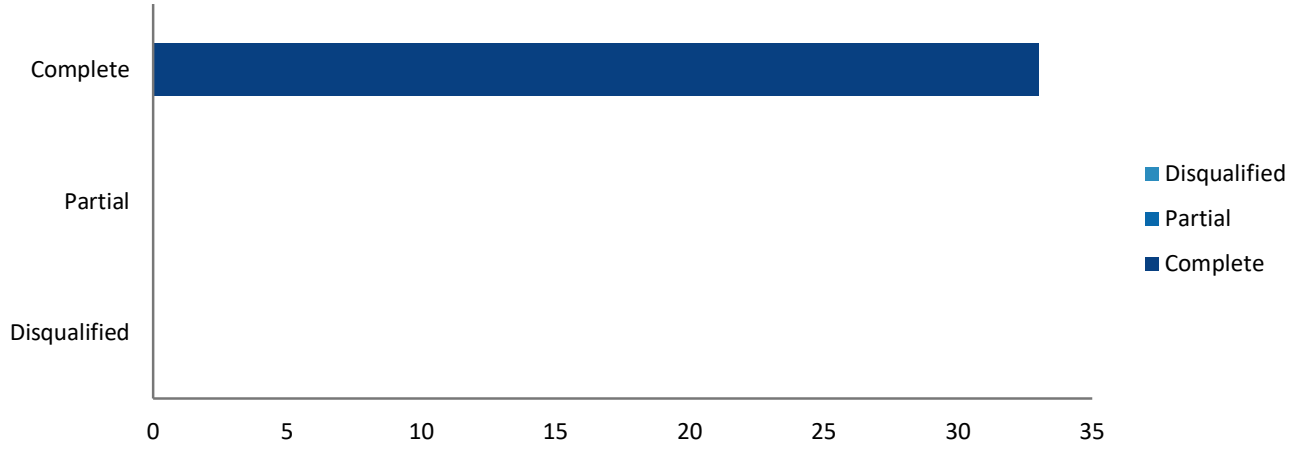
Author	Summary of proposal	Definition of equity
Nancy Chamberlain, Washington State PTA	Update the prototypical school model and basic-education funding to cover actual mandatory costs and the qualified teachers, support staff, programs, and services students need. Account for regional cost differences and provide additional funding for poverty, disability, English-learner status, trauma, highly capable students, and mobility.	Every child has the staff, services, and resources needed to meet state standards and graduate ready for citizenship, postsecondary education, and work, supported by a sufficient baseline plus need-based enhancements.
Carolyn Logue, Stride/K12, Inc.	Adopt an Oregon-style equalized foundation combining state and local funding, with the state filling gaps in low-property-wealth districts and adding weights for high need students. Restore levy equalization for alternative learning experience students and eliminate lower funding caused by program type.	A student receives comparable funding regardless of district, school, or alternative program, with added resources for educational and social-emotional needs and consistent accountability.
Jenny Morgan, Washington School Counselor Association	Develop corporate–district partnerships to expand funding for innovative career and technical education, supplementing public resources and broadening student pathways.	Every student has access to quality academic, social-emotional, and college/career supports; students with greater needs receive more resources, and opportunity is not determined by community property wealth.
Jim Kowalkowski, Rural Education Center (LEA/LAP)	Absorb Local Effort Assistance into the Learning Assistance Program and make it part of basic education, creating stable support for property-poor districts as current LEA funding declines.	Every student receives the opportunities and resources needed for success; the funding system does not widen gaps between property-rich and property-poor districts.

Author	Summary of proposal	Definition of equity
Jim Kowalkowski, Rural Education Center (regionalization)	Allocate regionalization funding to geographic regions—proposed as Educational Service District boundaries—rather than to individual school districts, reducing inequities created by district-by-district adjustments.	Every student receives the opportunities and resources needed for success, and property-poor districts are not disadvantaged by the funding structure.
Jim Kowalkowski, Rural Education Center (salary model)	Reestablish a statewide certificated salary allocation model and staff-mix formula. State-fund a consistent base salary reflecting experience while preserving local bargaining for additional duties, so property wealth does not determine staffing competitiveness or pressure districts to hire less-experienced staff.	Every student receives the opportunities and resources needed for success, supported by equitable staffing capacity across property-rich and property-poor districts.
Jacob Vela, Chief Policy Officer, League of Education Voters Foundation; Gray Sterling, M.Ed., Principal Consultant, Mindmap Strategies; Sarah Butcher, Chief Programs and Policy Officer, Roots of Inclusion; David Mendez, Deputy Director, True Measure Collaborative; Melissa Bowen, Consultant	Replace the equity-blind prototypical school model with an equity-centered base formula that embeds differentiated student weights for economic disadvantage, concentrated poverty, multilingual learners, disability, and highly mobile, homeless, and foster youth. Ensure weighted resources reach intended schools and students through school-level spending transparency; align local revenue with the equity framework; and develop implementation through broader engagement with students, families, and educators.	Equity is Washington's constitutional and statutory obligation to provide every child the differentiated investment necessary to reach the state's Basic Education outcome standard; equal opportunity requires different funding levels when student needs and costs differ.

Author	Summary of proposal	Definition of equity
Dave Larson, Washington State School Directors' Association and School Director, Tukwila School District	Implement targeted, tiered staffing increases at high-need schools, smaller class sizes plus additional FTEs for social workers, family-involvement coordinators, and family liaisons tied to poverty and ELL thresholds; deploy as a two-year, phased pilot with specified funding, and commission an independent evaluation using income-based SBA gaps, chronic absenteeism, graduation rates, and family-engagement indicators.	

Appendix D: K–12 Funding Equity Survey Responses

Response Statistics



	Count	Percent
Complete	33	100
Partial	0	0
Disqualified	0	0
Totals	33	

1.Basic education funding is intended to cover core educational services. Based on your experience, where are the most significant gaps between what's funded and what's needed? Please rate the severity of each funding gap:

	Critical Gap		Significant Gap		Moderate Gap		Minor Gap		No Gap	
	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %
Materials, supplies, and operating costs	17	53.1%	10	31.3%	4	12.5%	0	%	1	3.1%
Special education services and supports	16	50.0%	12	37.5%	4	12.5%	0	%	0	%
Compensation levels	5	15.6%	9	28.1%	15	46.9%	3	9.4%	0	%
Resources for economically disadvantaged students and communities	14	43.8%	11	34.4%	7	21.9%	0	%	0	%
District characteristic adjustments (size, location, sparsity, etc.)	2	6.3%	15	46.9%	12	37.5%	3	9.4%	0	%
Transportation services	3	9.7%	10	32.3%	9	29.0%	7	22.6%	2	6.5%
Student program supports (highly capable, multilingual learners, etc.)	6	18.8%	10	31.3%	12	37.5%	4	12.5%	0	%
Staffing levels	14	42.4%	14	42.4%	4	12.1%	1	3.0%	0	%
Career and Technical Education (CTE)	4	12.5%	7	21.9%	10	31.3%	9	28.1%	2	6.3%
Dual credit/postsecondary pathways	4	13.8%	3	10.3%	11	37.9%	8	27.6%	3	10.3%
Early learning and kindergarten transition	8	24.2%	13	39.4%	7	21.2%	3	9.1%	2	6.1%
Professional development and working conditions	2	6.5%	7	22.6%	16	51.6%	5	16.1%	1	3.2%

Top 6 Funding Gaps — Weighted Priority Ranking

Weighted Score = (Critical × 10) + (Significant × 5) + (Moderate × 2) + (Minor × 1) + (No Gap × 0)

Rank	Funding Gap Category	Weighted Score	Respondents	% Critical	% Signif.	% Crit + Signif
1	**Materials, Supplies, and Operating Costs**	**228**	32	53.1%	31.3%	**84.4%**
2	**Special Education Services and Supports**	**228**	32	50.0%	37.5%	**87.5%**
3	**Staffing Levels**	**219**	33	42.4%	42.4%	**84.8%**
4	**Resources for Economically Disadvantaged Students/Communities**	**209**	32	43.8%	34.4%	**78.1%**
5	**Early Learning and Kindergarten Transition**	**162**	33	24.2%	39.4%	**63.6%**
6	**Student Program Supports (Highly Capable, Multilingual Learners, etc.)**	**138**	32	18.8%	31.3%	**50.0%**

1.Basic education funding is intended to cover core educational services. Based on your experience, where are the most significant gaps between what's funded and what's needed?
Please rate the severity of each funding gap: **Write in Reponses**

	Critical Gap		Significant Gap		Moderate Gap		Minor Gap		No Gap	
	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %
Academic students supports- Tutoring	0	%	1	100.0%	0	%	0	%	0	%
Critical to staff levels is the funding model for staff. Staff cost more than they are funded and collective bargaining will continue to increase these costs. It's costing us people as districts reduce staff.	1	100.0%	0	%	0	%	0	%	0	%
Funding specifically directed to provide more school counselors and other ESA	1	100.0%	0	%	0	%	0	%	0	%
LEA funding	0	%	0	%	0	%	0	%	0	%
Libraries -- both staffing and equitable student access.	1	100.0%	0	%	0	%	0	%	0	%
Public Charter School Equal Funding	1	100.0%	0	%	0	%	0	%	0	%
State funding for salary progression costs	1	100.0%	0	%	0	%	0	%	0	%
Substitute Pay	0	%	1	100.0%	0	%	0	%	0	%

2.If you rated Compensation or Staffing as Critical/Significant, please specify position types:

Response
Classified positions for both staffing and compensation; also other staffing position shortages in teaching and ESA roles
classified staffing levels
Classified staff like paraeducators. Unsustainable low wages is driving up vacancies and retention issues
Classified Staff - Secretaries, Custodian, District Office, Paraprofessionals, Maintenance, Grounds, IT are all funded at very low FTE.
staffing levels to support sudent access and social emotional needs
I would say critical for classified but not for the rest. also with Special ed - only a gap b/c underfunding of the base. If base fully funded I believe gap would be minor if at all.
The PSM staffing levels are too low in almost every category, requiring districts to use levy funds, particularly in nonclassroom staff. Classified salary is too low,
Compensation gaps for certified experienced teachers and administrative positions are critical. Experience factors are a key driver of the gap for both. Staffing levels for custodial, grounds, para professionals, clerical are a significant gap. They do not reflect reality of serving our students today. In addition staff leave as a component of staffing is a critical gap - sick leave, PFML are a critical gap.
Compensation: classified staff-paraeducators, bus drivers, maintenance staff; Staffing:Mental health supports, postsecondary guidance,
Compensation for the support staff and services is problematic, and it begins with the prototypical model being so poor in identifying the level of need. For example in a district of 4700 students, the state only funds for seven basic education paraprofessionals. It takes seven per 400 student school alone.
Paraeducators

Response
There are specific examples in the protoypical, but more importantly the gap between cost of staff member, unfunded staff needs (ie sub costs); if you don't have high regionalization you can't keep up so you're forced to RIF even if you have levy.
Many SPED and counselor positions are very difficult to fill and access to specialists like psychologists , nurses, etc. is completely inequitable across districts. Additionally, the staffing costs to districts are unsustainable. We want staff to be well-paid, but cutting student programs and younger staff members just entering the profession to appease labor demands and strikes is unsustainable and focused on adults, not students.
Lack of funds means not enough classroom teachers are hired and class sizes are WAY to big.
Funding and appropriate fte levels for classified employees.
Compensation: need to have a cap or state salary schedule for teachers, understaffing positions such as maintenance/facilities, technology, etc., would like more $ for classified staff
ESAs (counselors, nurses, etc.)
Principals and Central Office salaries lag teacher salaries
Administrators, certified and classified
School counselor funding not compensation
Principals, Asst. Principals, Instructional Coaches (Phase 1 & 2 of staffing enrichment workgroup recommendations)
Diff between teacher and building administrators
Para's

3.Which THREE gaps should the state prioritize addressing first? Select up to 3 from the list.

	Materials, supplies, and operating costs		Special education services and supports		Compensation levels		Resources for economically disadvantaged students/communities		District characteristic adjustment (size, location, sparsity, etc.)		Transportation services		Student program supports (highly capable, multilingual learners, etc.)		Staffing levels		Career and Technical Education (CTE)		Dual credit/postsecondary pathways		Early learning and kindergarten transition		Professional development and working conditions		Other		Responses
	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	
1st	33.3%	11	18.2%	6	3.0%	1	12.1%	4	6.1%	2	0.0%	0	3.0%	1	12.1%	4	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	3.0%	1	0.0%	0	9.1%	3	33
2nd	18.2%	6	15.2%	5	9.1%	3	12.1%	4	0.0%	0	6.1%	2	15.2%	5	15.2%	5	3.0%	1	0.0%	0	3.0%	1	0.0%	0	3.0%	1	33
3rd	12.1%	4	24.2%	8	3.0%	1	12.1%	4	3.0%	1	6.1%	2	3.0%	1	9.1%	3	9.1%	3	0.0%	0	6.1%	2	0.0%	0	12.1%	4	33

4.If you chose "other" as a top three category, please describe here:

ResponseID	Response
11	Substitute Cost
18	These options restrict us to choosing to fund the system as is rather than envisioning a coordinated and responsive system centered on student need and investing in that system. We have to understand the gaps in basic education before we start prioritizing areas to focus on.
41	Underfunded staffing model both from an FTE standpoint and funding v. actual staffing costs
42	A more balanced relationship with labor unions. The state provides district funding, but then the district has to bargain on their own with limited funding from the state.
54	State funding for salary progression and Substitute Allocations
59	We need to focus on the students who encounter the most bariers to accessing their education

5.Which critical programs or services—currently NOT included in basic education—most need additional state funding? Select up to 3 from the list.

	Materials, supplies, and operating costs		Special education services and supports		Compensation levels		Resources for economically disadvantaged students/communities		District characteristic adjustment (size, location, sparsity, etc.)		Transportation services		Student program supports (highly capable, multilingual learners, etc.)		Staffing levels		Career and Technical Education (CTE)		Dual credit/postsecondary pathways		Early learning and kindergarten transition		Professional development and working conditions		Other		Responses
	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	
1st	15.2%	5	15.2%	5	0.0%	0	15.2%	5	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	6.1%	2	9.1%	3	3.0%	1	30.3%	10	0.0%	0	6.1%	2	33
2nd	6.1%	2	15.2%	5	3.0%	1	12.1%	4	12.1%	4	3.0%	1	6.1%	2	3.0%	1	6.1%	2	3.0%	1	15.2%	5	9.1%	3	6.1%	2	33
3rd	9.1%	3	6.1%	2	3.0%	1	9.1%	3	6.1%	2	9.1%	3	3.0%	1	12.1%	4	6.1%	2	9.1%	3	9.1%	3	15.2%	5	3.0%	1	33

6.If you chose "other" as a top three category, please describe here:

ResponseID	Response
12	Public Charter Schools
17	School library staffing and equitable access for students
59	This framing makes this into a math/accounting problem instead of what we need to do to ensure students are able to access their education

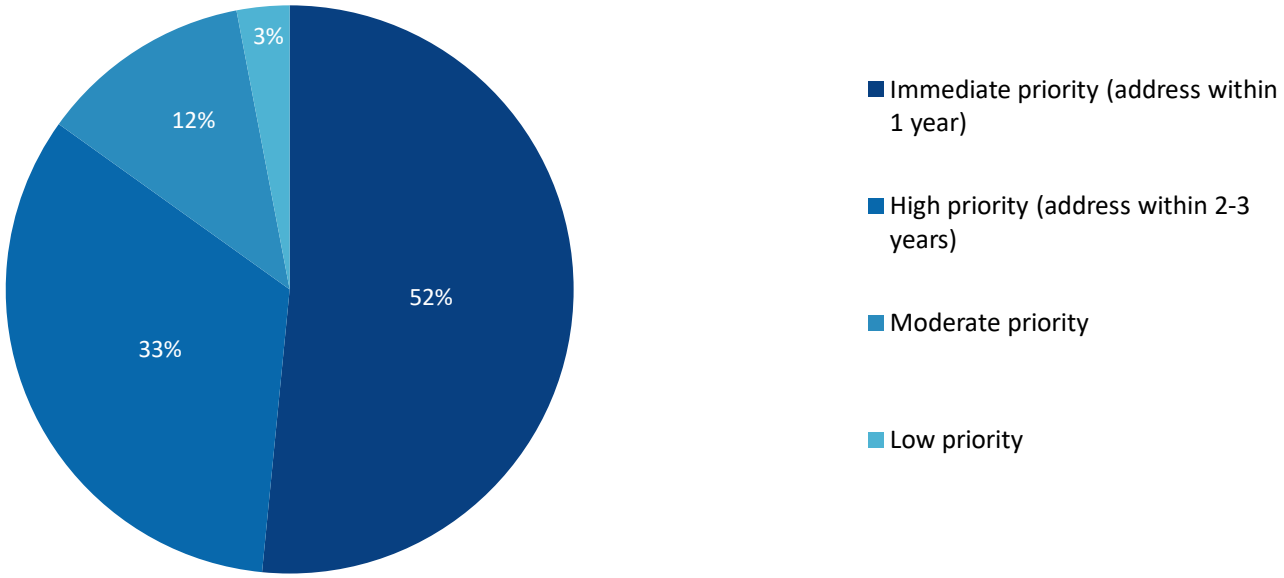
7.Which critical programs or services are not currently considered basic education, but should be?

	Materials, supplies, and operating costs		Special education services and supports		Compensation levels		Resources for economically disadvantaged students/communities		District characteristic adjustment (size, location, sparsity, etc.)		Transportation services		Student program supports (highly capable, multilingual learners, etc.)		Staffing levels		Career and Technical Education (CTE)		Dual credit/postsecondary pathways		Early learning and kindergarten transition		Professional development and working conditions		Other		Responses
	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	
1st	6.1%	2	12.1%	4	0.0%	0	6.1%	2	0.0%	0	3.0%	1	0.0%	0	3.0%	1	15.2%	5	3.0%	1	36.4%	12	6.1%	2	9.1%	3	33
2nd	6.1%	2	6.1%	2	3.0%	1	24.2%	8	3.0%	1	0.0%	0	9.1%	3	9.1%	3	3.0%	1	9.1%	3	9.1%	3	6.1%	2	12.1%	4	33
3rd	12.1%	4	12.1%	4	3.0%	1	12.1%	4	6.1%	2	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	12.1%	4	0.0%	0	9.1%	3	3.0%	1	18.2%	6	12.1%	4	33

8.If you chose "other" as a top three category, please describe here:

ResponseID	Response
17	Options for accessing basic ed (alternative programs, online, etc...) should clearly be part of state's delivery of basic education
18	MTSS and social emotional supports
21	I would not include anything else in basic ed.
54	There is so much underfunding in Basic Education, that should remain the priority in the near future.
58	Overhaul of the whole funding formula
59	Support for students experiencing homelessness and foster youth

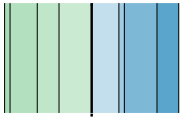
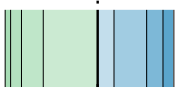
9.How urgent is it to revise our funding model to better address student needs?



9.How urgent is it to revise our funding model to better address student needs?

Value		Percent	Count
Immediate priority (address within 1 year)		51.5%	17
High priority (address within 2-3 years)		33.3%	11
Moderate priority		12.1%	4
Low priority		3.0%	1
Totals			33

10.Which student populations have the most urgent unmet needs? Rank in order from most to least urgent

Item	Overall Rank	Rank Distribution	Score	Number of Rankings
Economically disadvantaged students	1		229	33
Students in high-poverty communities	2		224	32
Students with disabilities	3		210	32
Students in foster care or experiencing homelessness	4		184	32
Students in under-resourced districts	5		176	31
Students in rural/remote areas	6		172	33
Multilingual/transitional bilingual learners	7		162	33
Students participating in the Highly Capable program	8		63	29
Other	9		18	8

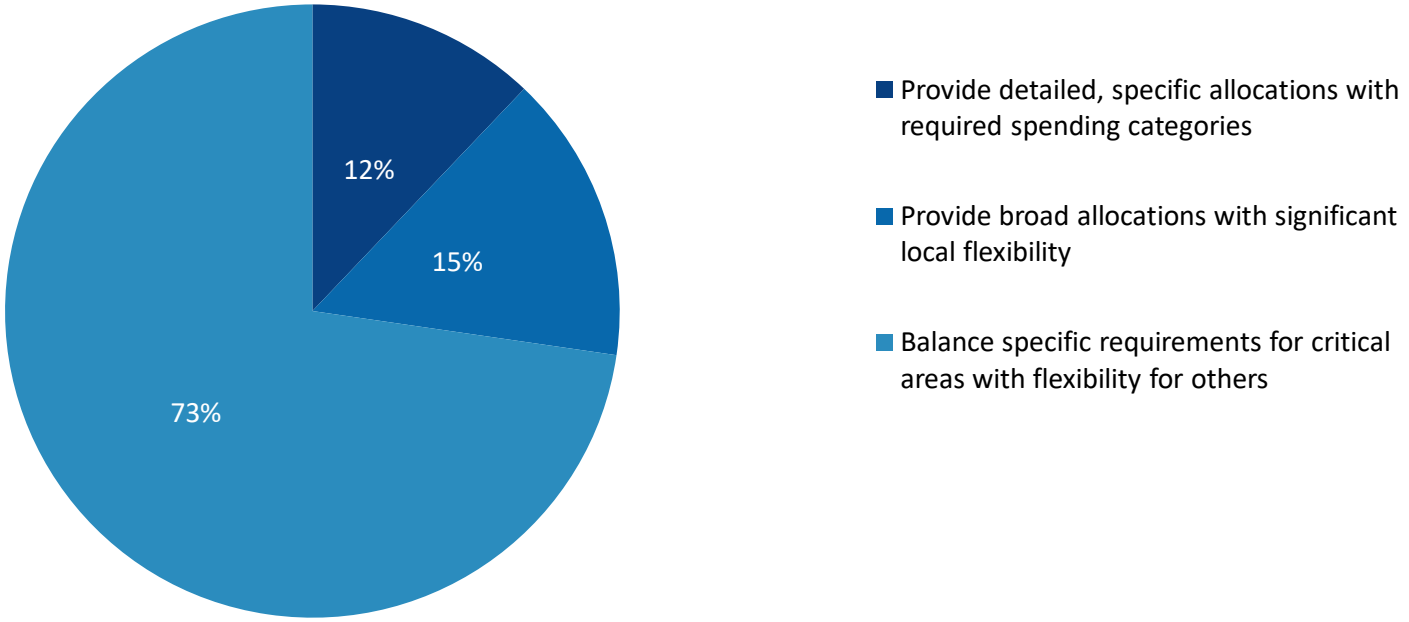
11.If you chose "other" as a student population with unmet needs, please describe here:

ResponseID	Response
23	There are students with intersectionality of needs for higher resources, and any changes to the PSM or any other model must take that into account.
26	Family engagement
35	Your students who qualify for TK
54	Students experiencing a mental health crisis
57	N/A
64	Safety

12.Rate the importance of each characteristic

	Essential		Very Important		Somewhat Important		Not Important		Responses
	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count	Row %	Count
Transparency (easy to understand how funds are allocated)	17	51.5%	14	42.4%	2	6.1%	0	%	33
Simplicity (streamlined categories and calculations)	14	42.4%	7	21.2%	9	27.3%	3	9.1%	33
Specificity (detailed allocations for particular needs)	14	42.4%	10	30.3%	9	27.3%	0	%	33
Flexibility (local control over how funds are spent)	9	27.3%	11	33.3%	11	33.3%	2	6.1%	33
Accountability (clear requirements for how funds are used)	16	48.5%	10	30.3%	5	15.2%	2	6.1%	33
Equity (resources match student/community needs)	24	72.7%	9	27.3%	0	%	0	%	33

13.The funding model should: (Select one)



13.The funding model should: (Select one)

Value		Percent	Count
Provide detailed, specific allocations with required spending categories		12.1%	4
Provide broad allocations with significant local flexibility		15.2%	5
Balance specific requirements for critical areas with flexibility for others		72.7%	24
Totals			33

14.What is your biggest concern about changing the funding model?

ResponseID	Response
6	One concern is that we spend too much time perfecting the structure without addressing the underlying inadequacy of the funding. In addition, I am interested in continuing to focus discussions on student needs and ensuring that changes make our system more equitable.
7	collective bargaining implications
9	Funding for real operational costs for districts is essential. The model needs change.
10	There needs to be inflators priced into the funding model instead of a fixed rate that doesn't change over time with inflation. This is part of the problem now with the funding model. Basic ed funding must have inflators priced in annually.
11	The biggest concern is that changes to the funding model may focus primarily on aligning resources to student needs without fully addressing the structural financial constraints districts operate within. Districts are already navigating a misalignment between state-funded staffing assumptions and actual staffing levels required to meet student needs, often relying on local levies and Local Effort Assistance to bridge the gap. Recent reductions in LEA, combined with required staffing ratios and class size mandates, limit districts' ability to adjust their largest cost driver—staffing—while still maintaining compliance. Any increase in funding should focus on aligning the prototypical funding model with actual staffing and service requirements, rather than increasing compensation levels alone. Without addressing these structural misalignments, a revised funding model risks creating additional expectations without providing the adequacy or flexibility needed for sustainable implementation.
12	True equitable distribution of it and transperancy.
15	It is not equally distributed throughout the schools
17	Redirection of funds based on current political attitudes and needs rather than what students need. Also funds going to education without any accountability for where the funds are going and how those funds are going to help students 20-30 years from now.
18	That it will be done without understanding how our systems are moving around students who we continue to fail. We risk further entrenching inequities, if we do not design a model that centers student needs and focuses on investments needed not simply funding the current cost of our system. Status quo is unacceptable for this work.
21	That a shifting of the formula is not really the issue - that the underfunding is the issue. If we simply decide to rework the formula we will be basiclly be delaying the problem again as we rework the details of the formula. Tweaking the formula is likely necessary to make adjustments to what we have found does not work but whole-scale throwing out and starting a new formula is not going to fix the problem.

ResponseID	Response
44	Lack of accountability in our system. Too much local control is a real issues. I understand that every district is different, but when districts can use "local control" as an excuse to not provide a service, we are failing students!
45	Continuing to tie the hands of the local district on how to use their allocations. If more resources are added will there be more strings attached. I am all for accountability but it needs to be identified through audit work not allocation work.
48	Must have defined parameters for salary v. other costs. That the state is violating their own law -- paramount duty!
51	Funding should follow an agreed-upon vision for our expectations of an equitable, inclusive, and high-quality public education system. Focusing on funding now is re-arranging deck chairs without a sense of what will improve.
52	Moving deck chairs without clear vision of purpose.
54	The survey does not address how we inflate a new or improved funding model. Adequate funding can quickly be undermined if the inflation mechanism is inadequate.
56	I am most concerned that those involved in changing the model will not include a broad and diverse enough group of educators/experts in the final stages of the process.
57	My biggest concern is making sure our state has increased revenue so that it can fully fund student needs.
58	The central challenge in changing Washington's education funding formula is not technical—it's the political reality of redistribution. Under the framework established after the McCleary decision, the state operates under the premise that it already provides "ample" funding for public education. Any effort to shift toward a more equitable, student-centered model inherently challenges that assumption by exposing persistent disparities in how resources are actually experienced by students. Because the current system relies heavily on staffing allocations rather than true per-student funding, it masks differences in cost, student need, and regional variation. Moving to a more transparent, weighted model would make those disparities visible—and inevitably create districts that perceive themselves as losing resources, even if the overall system becomes more just. That tension is compounded by Washington's continued reliance on local levies and the absence of a shared definition of what "equity" in funding truly means. Wealthier districts can still supplement state funding, reinforcing inequities that a revised formula alone cannot fully resolve. At the same time, policymakers face difficult choices: redistribute existing funds and risk political backlash, or invest significant new resources to ease the transition. Efforts to mitigate harm—such as phased implementation or hold-harmless provisions—can soften opposition but often delay or dilute the intended impact. Ultimately, the biggest concern is whether the state is willing to confront these trade-offs directly and align its funding model with a clear, outcomes-driven vision of equity that prioritizes students with the greatest needs.
59	That the new model wouldn't appropriately account for the diversify of student need or the concentration of student need in higher need districts. OR that the new model would not be centered on the needs of students and designed with the intent of addressing persistent opportunity gaps for students. We are not trying to solve a budget problem. We need to approach this with clear goals in mind that center on doing better for students. That should shape the questions we ask and how this entire process is designed.

15.From your professional perspective, what indicators would demonstrate the success of a new funding model?

ResponseID	Response
6	Districts could pay for core services from state revenues (measure might be that spending in MSOC categories was more closely aligned with state MSOC funding); student opportunities (for CTE, dual credit, arts, music, etc) and outcomes (grad rates, completion of dual credit or CTE) would equalize with zip code, race, ethnicity, and income having less of a determining factor;
7	student outcomes
9	Financially healthy school districts Model is easy to understand Operational costs are funded at authentic levels Specific areas of funding are protected from collective bargaining
10	Attendance rates, student mobility rates, district budgets that don't initiate RIFs
11	Success of a new funding model should be demonstrated through both improved student outcomes and increased financial sustainability for districts. Key indicators would include measurable reductions in achievement gaps for students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, and students experiencing homelessness, along with improved graduation and postsecondary outcomes. From a financial perspective, success would include improved alignment between state-funded staffing allocations and actual staffing levels required to meet student needs, as well as reduced reliance on local levies and Local Effort Assistance to fund basic education. This is not simply a question of increasing compensation, but of ensuring that the funding model accurately reflects the staffing structures and services districts are expected to provide. A successful model would also allow districts to maintain balanced budgets without deferring critical investments such as maintenance or support staff, while providing flexibility to respond to local needs and maintaining accountability for outcomes rather than compliance alone.
12	Acess Indicators, Student Experience indicators.
15	I am not sure.....
17	Better general public knowledge of how schools are funded and how to work with districts on that funding to ensure it is happening in the right places. A focus on funding programs, activities, etc... that help ALL students learn how to learn rather than trying to focus on specific subject matters -- more emphasis on how to find things out, research, etc....
18	Anchoring in a shared definition of equity and identifying corresponding actions we want to see in the process. Examining basic education and gaps that exist for multiply marginalized students in our current system. Recognizing the resourcing of the infrastructure needed to support the system change work we are asking of districts. We are a system in flux, working to

ResponseID	Response
44	Clear funding model with accountability so that everyone knows where the money is going and who gets to decide how to spend the money. I also think it's important that districts are held accountable for NOT using money as it was intended and our legislature should be held accountable for not providing enough funds to use money where it is intended to go.
45	Appropriate resources to continue to grow each year when needed instead of moving money around from year to year to balance a budget.
48	Go back to a statewide teacher salary schedule. Increase allocations for classified staff. Give parameters for staffing and $, but leave some flexibility, especially for smaller districts. It is not feasible to hire partial FTE for specific positions, so we do have to get creative with the human capital we have.
51	Eradication of educational disparities among different student populations.
52	Eradication of disproportionality among students
54	Adequacy, specificity, transparency, and equity. (I am not sure I understand this question.)
56	Success would be indicated by districts of all sizes and configurations having the resources they need to provide adequate staffing and supports for all students.
57	Students are able to have access to an equitable K-12 educational experience in a safe and healthy learning environment, and that each and every student receives support services that advance their academic, social/emotional, and college/career development.
58	From your perspective, success isn't just that a new formula exists—it's that it meaningfully shifts power, resources, and outcomes toward students and communities who have been historically underfunded. The clearest indicator would be whether dollars are actually flowing differently: a transparent, student-centered formula that directs increased, flexible funding to districts serving higher concentrations of poverty, multilingual learners, Native students, and students with disabilities—and does so in a way that is visible, trackable, and sustained over time. If the model still obscures resource allocation through staffing ratios or fails to correct for local levy disparities, it hasn't succeeded, no matter how well-designed it is on paper. Equally important are the system-level and community-level signals. Success would look like reduced reliance on local levies to backfill basic education, stronger alignment between funding and student need, and measurable improvements in opportunity indicators—access to experienced educators, culturally responsive supports, and comprehensive student services. Just as critically, communities most impacted by inequities would have a meaningful role in shaping how funds are used, not just receiving them. In other words, the model works if it not only redistributes dollars, but also builds trust, transparency, and accountability, resulting in tangible improvements in student experience and long-term outcomes.
59	Students and families have the educational experience within the K-12 system that enables them to access their education, students feel supported and like they belong. Families feel schools are meeting the needs of their students. We are able to close opportunity gaps and have an education system that works for students. More funding for education is not an end in itself, but a tool to support doing better for students and how we approach these challenges needs to be centered on that reality.
62	Districts are not using local levy dollars to cover basic education expenses. Levy dollars are used for enrichment.

Appendix E: Considerations of a Weighted Special Education Funding Model

Purpose and Response to Funding Proposal

The proposal titled *Equity in Education for Students with Disabilities* raises important questions regarding how Washington state funds special education and whether a funding model more directly tied to student and community characteristics could improve equity, adequacy, and transparency. Several elements of the proposal align with ongoing policy conversations in Washington, including the desire to better recognize concentrated student need, reduce reliance on local levy funding, support inclusive practices, and improve outcomes for underserved student populations.

The proposal also appropriately acknowledges recent legislative actions, including the removal of Washington's special education enrollment cap through SSB 5263 and the state's continued investment in inclusionary practices and technical assistance.

At the same time, moving from a primarily enrollment-based funding model to a weighted funding model would involve significant policy, implementation, and accountability considerations. The observations below are intended to support further discussion of those considerations.

Policy Opportunities and Potential Benefits

Addresses Questions:

- *Pros/cons of this kind of funding model?*
- *What considerations do you have?*

Potential benefits of a weighted funding model may include:

- Better recognition that student needs vary across districts and communities.
- Additional resources for districts serving higher concentrations of students with disabilities or other populations experiencing barriers to educational access.
- Greater ability to recognize intersecting needs, such as disability, poverty, multilingual status, foster care, homelessness, or rurality.
- Improved predictability compared to reimbursement-based approaches alone.
- Potential reduction in reliance on local levy resources if weights are appropriately calibrated.

Particularly noteworthy are elements of the proposal related to concentration factors and intersecting student needs. Other states have explored funding adjustments related to poverty, district concentration, and community characteristics in addition to disability-related funding.

Washington may wish to explore whether additional multipliers tied to community characteristics, poverty, multilingual status, rurality, or concentrations of student need could further improve funding equity without relying primarily on disability category or special education service intensity.

Key Policy Considerations and Potential Risks

Addresses Questions:

- *Pros/cons of this kind of funding model?*
- *What considerations do you have?*
- *What potential or unintended consequences should we be aware of?*

Disability Category Does Not Necessarily Reflect Service Need

A foundational consideration is that disability category is not a reliable proxy for educational need or cost.

Students within the same eligibility category may require significantly different levels of support. Likewise, students in different disability eligibility categories may require similar levels of service despite differences in disability.

This reflects a foundational principle of IDEA: educational services are determined through an *individualized* process based on student need, beyond the disability category named for eligibility purposes.

Washington's current funding model largely avoids linking funding directly to disability category. Some students generate more funding relative to their level of need, while others generate less. Safety Net reimbursement exists, in part, to address situations where actual costs significantly exceed available funding.

Aligning Funding with Special Education Requirements

IDEA requires that eligibility, services, and placement decisions be determined individually based on student need. As policymakers consider weighted funding approaches, an important consideration is whether proposed funding drivers align with these requirements and support consistent implementation across districts.

Funding models should be evaluated to ensure they support individualized decision-making, including:

- Disability identification practices;
- Disability eligibility category determinations;
- IEP service levels;
- Staffing decisions;
- Educational placement decisions.

Washington has previously utilized funding approaches that differentiated funding based on disability category. Long-standing partners in education, advocacy, and policymaking have shared concerns that prior categorical funding structures may have contributed to higher rates of identification in categories associated with greater funding. Washington's current funding model reflects a deliberate policy shift away from disability-based funding classifications and toward an enrollment-based approach that is more closely aligned with IDEA's emphasis on individualized determination of services and supports.

While disability categories serve important purposes under IDEA, they were not designed as funding classifications. Any model that incorporates disability category as a funding driver should include strong safeguards, transparency measures, and ongoing monitoring.

Supporting Inclusive Practices

Washington's inclusion efforts through the Inclusionary Practices Technical Assistance Network (IPTN) have focused on increasing access to general education settings through system redesign, educator capacity building, and instructional improvement.

Importantly, inclusion is not synonymous with increased paraeducator staffing.

Many demonstration sites have intentionally shifted some resources away from reliance on paraeducator support and toward additional certificated instructional staff embedded within general education settings. In some cases, districts have repurposed multiple paraeducator positions to support co-teaching and inclusive instructional models.

Any weighted formula should be evaluated to ensure it supports inclusive practices and does not inadvertently incentivize more restrictive placements or staffing models.

Distinguishing Student Need from Service Cost

A key policy consideration is whether a funding formula is intended to reflect student need, service cost, or a combination of both.

Student need and service cost are not always synonymous.

For example, a student receiving speech-language services in Seattle or Mercer Island may cost significantly more to serve than a student with identical needs in Yakima due to differences in regional labor markets, salary schedules, collective bargaining agreements, staffing models, and benefit structures.

In these situations, the difference in cost does not necessarily reflect a difference in student need.

As policymakers consider weighted funding approaches, they may wish to distinguish:

- Factors that reflect student need;
- Factors that reflect district or community characteristics; and
- Factors that reflect local cost structures.

Treating these factors separately may improve transparency and reduce the likelihood that funding allocations are driven by local expenditure patterns rather than student needs.

Data Considerations

Addresses Questions:

- *What data would you recommend be used in Washington?*
- *What elements could be easily collected, verified, and used to drive a funding formula?*

A central challenge in any weighted funding model is determining which data elements best reflect the policy objectives the state is seeking to achieve.

Before selecting funding drivers, policymakers may wish to first identify the specific need or outcome the formula is intended to address. Different data elements may be appropriate depending on whether the goal is to recognize student need, community characteristics, service delivery costs, educational opportunity, or some combination of these factors.

States that utilize weighted funding approaches vary considerably in the data they use to drive funding allocations. Some rely primarily on disability category, others utilize service-intensity tiers, and still others incorporate factors such as poverty, district size, geographic isolation, or concentrations of student need. No single approach has emerged as a national standard.

As policymakers consider potential funding formula changes in Washington, an important question is not simply what data are available, but whether the selected data are closely aligned with the purpose of the funding model.

Student Factors

Student factors can support with resourcing that recognizes differences in student need or barriers to educational access.

Examples:

- Special education enrollment
- Poverty indicators
- Multilingual learner status
- Foster care status
- Housing status

District and Community Factors

It may be most appropriate to consider district and community factors when the objective is to recognize patterns in local context, service delivery challenges, or concentrations of need.

Examples:

- District size
- Rurality
- Geographic isolation
- Concentration of student need

Educational Program Factors

Examples of educational program factors include disability category, placement, staffing assignments and costs, service intensity, and IEP content.

Policymakers may wish to carefully consider whether such data are the most appropriate drivers for funding allocations, given their primary role in educational planning, service delivery, and compliance with IDEA requirements.

Taken together, these considerations suggest that student, community, and concentration factors may offer a more stable and consistent foundation for funding decisions than measures tied directly to disability category, placement, staffing assignments and costs, or individualized service decisions.

Statewide IEP Considerations

Addresses Question:

- *Does the statewide IEP lend itself to additional possibilities for data collection?*

In a word, yes.

The statewide IEP platform is being designed to provide improved:

- Consistency of data collection;
- Statewide reporting;
- Visibility into service patterns; and
- Long-term program evaluation.

However, the availability of data does not necessarily mean those data could or should be used as funding drivers.

A statewide IEP platform will provide opportunities to better understand statewide service patterns, staffing trends, and implementation of inclusive practices, regardless of whether those data are ultimately used for funding purposes. As policymakers consider possible funding approaches, an important question will be the extent to which particular data elements align with the purpose and objectives of the funding model.

Relationship to Safety Net Funding

Addresses Question:

- *How would this impact Safety Net funding?*

Washington already maintains a mechanism specifically designed to address unusually high-cost student needs through Safety Net reimbursement.

In considering weighted funding approaches, an important question is whether:

- Weights would supplement Safety Net;
- Replace portions of Safety Net; or
- Duplicate functions already served by Safety Net?

Because Safety Net exists specifically to address extraordinary costs that may not be reflected in a general funding formula, careful consideration should be given to maintaining clear distinctions between:

- Base funding;
- Weighted funding; and
- High-cost reimbursement.

Any future proposal would benefit from a clear articulation of how these systems interact.

Areas for Further Exploration

Several concepts raised in the proposal may merit additional analysis, including:

- Concentration-based funding adjustments;
- Poverty and multilingual learner multipliers;

- Rural and geographic access considerations;
- Mechanisms to recognize districts serving higher proportions of students with disabilities;
- Approaches that strengthen funding adequacy while preserving individualized decision-making under IDEA.

These concepts may offer opportunities to improve alignment between student need and funding without relying primarily on disability category, placement, or IEP service intensity as funding drivers.

Conclusion

The central policy question is not whether the costs of serving individual students vary—they clearly do.

Rather, the question is how a funding formula can meaningfully address differences in need, community context, and service costs while remaining aligned with IDEA, individualized decision-making, and Washington's educational priorities.

Washington may wish to explore additional funding mechanisms related to concentration of need, poverty, multilingual status, rurality, or other community factors. However, policymakers should carefully evaluate any model that links funding directly to disability category, service intensity, IEP content, or placement decisions in order to minimize unintended incentives and preserve individualized decision-making.

A well-designed funding system should align resources with student need while minimizing incentives that influence eligibility, placement, service delivery, staffing, or other educational decisions. That principle may provide a useful framework for evaluating future funding proposals.

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