



WASHINGTON
POLICY CENTER

Education
REFORM
Plan

**8 PRACTICAL
WAYS**

TO REVERSE THE DECLINE
OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS
by Liv Finne

*"Public education officials are producing a generation
of students less educated than their parents."*

-WASHINGTON LEARNS

“For the first time, public education officials are producing a generation of students less educated than their parents.”

Washington Learns
Washington State Higher Education Coordinating Board

“My wife, Melinda, and I have heard the tragic stories time and again. In Washington and other states, we learn about talented high-school students who don’t fulfill their promise—not because they fail at school, but because our schools fail them. They study hard, do well and get into college. But in college, instead of the good grades they’re used to, they get D’s and F’s. They take remedial classes, but still they can’t keep up—so they quit.”

Bill Gates, Chairman of Microsoft

“Getting our children ready for school, college and work,” by Bill Gates, *The Seattle Times*, November 16, 2006.

“We lead the country in science and engineering jobs, but we are one of the states at the bottom in the production of scientists and engineers,” he said, warning that “the sons and daughters of Washington will be washing the cars for the people who come here for the best jobs.”

Mark Emmert, President of the University of Washington

“Seattle, Take Heed: Rosy Times Won’t Last,” by Jon Talton, *The Seattle Times*, January 20, 2008.



The Washington Policy Center Education Reform Plan

Eight practical ways to reverse the decline of public schools

by Liv Finne
Director, Center for Education
December 2008

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The Washington Policy Center Education Reform Plan

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I. Introduction

Public education is in decline. Nearly one-third of Washington public school students fail to graduate, and another third graduate without the knowledge and skills necessary for college or the workplace.¹ Over half (52%) of public school students entering community or technical colleges must take remedial courses in math, English or reading to catch up.² Eighty-four percent of employers say public schools are not doing a good job of preparing students to succeed in the workplace.³

Today, Washington ranks 37th in the nation in graduation rates.⁴ Student failure rates are so high the legislature and the governor have cancelled the math portion of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning test (WASL) for the next five years.

Thirty-seven percent of freshmen attending a four-year university or two-year community college must take high school-level remedial math or reading courses, substantially decreasing the numbers of students able to overcome this handicap and complete the requirement for earning a college degree.⁵ Fewer young adults are making it through college than in the past.

Educational attainment by older working adults (ages 45-64) now exceeds that of younger adults (ages 25-34).⁶ Public educators' failure to provide children with a level of learning that is as good or better than their parents is the worrisome finding of two recent government research reports:

“Our older population is better educated than our younger population, a trend that is clearly moving in the wrong direction.”⁷

“Washington’s baby boomers (people born between 1946 and 1964) are the most highly educated generation in our history. Younger adults

Recommendations

1. Put the principal in charge
2. Give parents choice among public schools
3. Let teachers teach
4. Double teacher pay
5. Replace the WASL with another standard
6. Create no-excuses schools
7. Transparency - put school budgets and teacher qualifications online
8. Make the Superintendent of Public Instruction an appointed office

Today, Washington ranks 37th in the nation in graduation rates.

¹ “State Information,” Alliance for Excellent Education, citing Editorial Projects in Education Research Center 2007 for 67% high school graduation figure, October 2007.

² “Role of Pre-College (Developmental and Remedial) Education for Recent High School Graduates Attending Washington Community and Technical Colleges,” Research Report No. 07-2, Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, December 2007.

³ “2005 Skills Gap Report – A Survey of the American Workforce,” by Phyllis Eisen, Jerry J. Jasinowski and Richard Kleinert, Deloitte, National Association of Manufacturers, The Manufacturing Institute, Spring 2005, pages 16 and 17.

⁴ “Ready for What? Preparing Students for College, Careers, and Life After High School,” Diplomas Count, The Graduation Project 2007, *Education Week*, page 4, at www.edweek.org/media/ew/dc/2007/wa_SGB07.pdf.

⁵ “Key facts about higher education in Washington, 2007,” Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board, page 38, at www.hecb.wa.gov/news/newsfacts/documents/Part3forWeb.pdf.

⁶ “Washington Learns, World Class, Learner-Focused, Seamless Education,” Governor Christine Gregoire, Chair, Final Report, November 2006, page 13, at www.washingtonlearns.wa.gov/report/FinalReport.pdf.

⁷ Ibid.

Writing bigger checks simply allows public education officials to maintain the status quo and resist change.

in our state have, on average, *less* education than boomers.”⁸ [Emphasis in original.]

For the first time in history, public school officials are producing a generation of students who have less formal education than their parents.

a. School funding is higher than ever

Despite claims by political advocates that public schools have been “cut,” the state legislature has increased education funding steadily over time, even as the number of school-age children has fallen as a proportion of the total population.⁹ In fact, per-pupil spending is higher than ever, and school officials have more resources than in the past to educate a given number of students. In addition, there are more taxpayers paying into the system than ever before.

By every reasonable measure, Washington public schools receive ample funding, and the amount spent on education increases each year. In addressing persistent low student achievement, Washington lawmakers cannot spend their way out of the problem. Writing bigger checks simply allows public education officials to maintain the status quo and resist change.

b. School administrators are not accountable

The problems that plague the public education system require fundamental changes to the way schools are organized and how public money is spent. Today, schools are not set up in a way that holds teachers, principals or superintendents accountable for student achievement. Directing more dollars into the current entrenched and dysfunctional system, no matter how carefully targeted or lavishly spent, will not improve student learning.¹⁰

c. Practical ways to improve student learning

Since spending more money will not raise student achievement, Washington Policy Center in this study presents eight practical ways policymakers can improve schools within the current rate of spending increase. The next section gives a brief overview of public school funding, showing the rising trend in total spending and per-pupil funding, followed by sections describing how to improve student learning while working within the existing education budget.

II. Overview of Public School Funding

In Washington there are just over a million (1,026,000) kindergarten through 12th grade students in public school, attending 2,275 schools in 295

⁸ “Moving the Blue Arrow, Pathways to Educational Opportunities,” 2008 Strategic Master Plan for Higher Education in Washington, Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board, December 2007, page 1, at <http://www.hecb.wa.gov/Research/masterplans/documents/2008MasterPlan-fromPRT.pdf>.

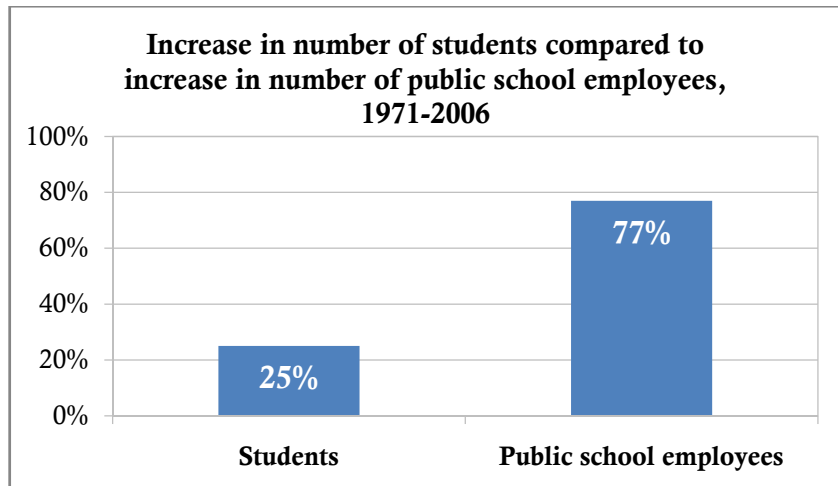
⁹ “An Overview of Public School Funding in Washington,” by Liv Finne, Policy Brief, Washington Policy Center, August 2006, at www.washingtonpolicy.org/Centers/education/policybrief/06_finne_schoolfunding.pdf.

¹⁰ This conclusion is based on findings from 17 university and research group studies, including those from RAND Corporation, Stanford University, the Urban Institute and the American Institutes for Research. These studies consistently found that increasing education spending did not correlate with improving academic outcomes for students. See for example, “Getting Down to Facts: School Finance and Governance in California,” by Susanna Loeb, Anthony Bryk and Eric Hanushek, Stanford University, March 2007, at www.repp.stanford.edu/documents/GDF/GDF-Overview-Paper.pdf. Other examples are available on request.

districts across the state.¹¹ A further 101,700 students attend private schools or are homeschooled.¹²

The state's total population has grown at a much faster pace than the number of children, creating a larger tax base to pay for educating a proportionately smaller number of students. Between 1971 and 2006, the state population increased by almost three million people (82 percent),¹³ while K-12 public school enrollment increased by only little over 200,000 students (25 percent).¹⁴

Over the same period, the number of public education employees has risen more over three times as fast, as shown in the chart below.¹⁵



Since 1971, the number of public education employees has increased three times faster than the number of students

Today there is one public school employee for every ten students, and only 46% of the people working in public education are classroom teachers.¹⁶

K-12 education is the largest single item in the state budget, accounting for 41% of all general fund spending. For 2007-09, the total budget for public schools is \$17.9 billion, including state, local and federal grant funding.¹⁷

The bulk of K-12 education spending, over \$13.5 billion, comes from

¹¹ "Student Demographics, Enrollment, October 2006," Washington State Report Card, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, at www.reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/summary.aspx?year=2006-07.

¹² "2006-2007 Enrollment Report for Private Schools," by Laura Moore, Administrator for Private and Home-Based Education/Navigation 101, Office of the Superintendent for Public Instruction, January 8, 2008.

¹³ In 1971, the population in Washington was 3,436,300. By 2006, the population had increased to 6,395,798, "Fact Sheet, Washington," American Community Survey, United States Census Bureau, 2006.

¹⁴ "K-12 Enrollment," Office of Financial Management, at www.ofm.wa.gov/trends/tables/fig402.asp and "2007 Washington State Higher Education Trends and Highlights," Office of Financial Management, February 2007, at www.ofm.wa.gov/hied/highlights/section1.pdf.

¹⁵ "Preliminary School District Summary Reports 2007-08 School Year, Historical Comparison of Statewide School District Personnel," Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, January 17, 2008, Table 2.

¹⁶ "Personnel by Major Position and Racial/Ethnic For School Year 2007-2008," Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, at www.k12.wa.us/DataAdmin/pubdocs/personnel/StaffEthnicReport07-08.pdf.

¹⁷ "Omnibus Operating Budget Comparisons, 2007 – 2009, Total Budgeted Funds," 2007 Washington State Legislative Budget Notes, Legislative Evaluation and Accountability Program Committee (LEAP), page 284, at www.leap.wa.gov/leap/budget/lbns/2007toc.asp. Also see "Section Two: State Summary School District Financial Reports," OSPI School Apportionment and Financial Services, accessed at www.k12.wa.us/safs/PUB/FIN/0607/fs.asp.

Experience has shown that the policy of directing funding to select education programs does not work.

Local principals have almost no input in assembling their teacher team, or in matching a particular teacher's skills and experience with the needs of students.

the state.¹⁸ About \$1.6 billion comes from federal grants, and about \$2.8 billion is provided by local funding, primarily taken through property taxes.¹⁹

Of the money for public schools, only 59% is spent on classroom instruction. The rest is spent on administrators, maintenance personnel, special education, transportation, food services and interest on debt. An additional \$1.33 billion is being spent in the current budget cycle on school construction.

Between 1980 and 2007, spending on public schools has almost tripled, while the number of students increased by only about a third. Today, average spending per student in Washington public schools is about \$9,500 per nine-month academic year, not including capital spending.

Experience has shown that the policy of directing funding to select education programs does not work. Since 1993 lawmakers have spent over \$5 billion on more than 80 education reform programs such as: smaller class sizes, increasing teacher pay, Math Helping Corps, Math Initiative, Reading Grants, Promoting Academic Success, and many others. (For more examples see Appendix A). Lawmakers funded these targeted programs in the hope they would help students learn; none of them has succeeded in significantly raising student academic achievement.

Simply spending more money does not improve educational outcomes for students. What is needed are innovative changes, made within the current rate of budget increase, to improve the performance of public schools.

III. Eight Ways to Improve Public Schools

I. Put the principal in charge

Under the current system, principals have almost no influence over the budget, staffing or daily management of their own schools. Central office administrators and pre-set regulations exercise full control over local spending, hiring and staff assignments.

Lawmakers have imposed a rigid staffing-ratio model on school districts, which requires administrators to allocate funds based on a certain number of school employees per student. The current mandatory ratio is 63 teachers, 38 staff and four administrators for every 1,000 students. These arbitrary ratios are about providing good-paying jobs; they have no relation to the academic needs of students.

Staffing schools through automatic ratios means central administrators, not principals, control the assignment of personnel to individual schools. Principals have little flexibility to alter the mix of staff and faculty in a way that benefit students. As a result, local principals have almost no influence over their own budgets or their personnel. Principals control less than five percent of the money allocated to their schools.²⁰

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ "A Citizen's Guide to Washington State K-12 Finance 2008," Senate Ways and Means Committee, Washington State Legislature, January 2008, page 15, at www.leg.wa.gov/documents/Senate/SCS/wml/swmwebsite/publications/budget_guides/2008/K12Guide2008FINAL.pdf.

²⁰ "K-12 School Spending and Performance Review, A Preliminary Report," State of Washington Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC), September 14, 2005.

A report by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) found:

“In most cases, central administrators determine the number of certificated and classified staff assigned to individual schools. Almost 96 percent of districts responding to JLARC’s survey said that central administrators determine whether to hire additional teachers and 89 percent said central administrators determine the number and type of classified staff employed at each school.”²¹

JLARC researchers found that in almost all cases central administrators and labor union officials decide when and where teachers will work. Local principals have almost no input in assembling their teacher team, or in matching a particular teacher’s skills and experience with the needs of students. Because of salary and work restrictions negotiated through binding collective bargaining, it is very difficult for a principal to reward a good teacher, or to fire a bad one.

Following are specific policies lawmakers should adopt that would put principals in charge and allow them to be education leaders in their communities.

a. Put principals in charge of their school’s budget

Local principals should be freed to act as instructional leaders, rather than just building managers.

Principals should be granted control over funds for purchasing curricula, so that individual principals and teachers, not central administrators, are allowed to evaluate and select the best possible curricula available. Currently efforts are being made to further centralize curriculum decision-making in the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. Education is subject to many fads which later turn out to be failures for our children. Whole Language Reading and Reform Math are examples of such fads forced on teachers by central administrators.

Efforts to learn from mistakes and rapidly improve the classroom curriculum are nearly impossible under a highly centralized bureaucratic system.

b. Funding should follow the child, not pre-set staffing ratios

Education dollars should follow a child to the public school of the family’s choice (see next section for details on parental choice among public schools). Failure to gain the approval of parents and to attract their children would signal to principals that something is wrong at their school, and give them the opportunity to correct it. The result would be a system that funds schools based on the educational needs of families, not on politics and budget in-fighting. Funding the child would also allow principals and parents to know how much of education spending actually reaches the classroom.

Education dollars should follow a child to the public school of the family’s choice.

²¹ Ibid., page 17.

“Although few administrators wish to dismiss large numbers of teachers, making it easier to dismiss the weakest teachers may well change the dynamics of local school reform.”

c. Allow principals to assemble their teaching teams

Principals should be able to hire the best person to teach in the classroom, even if the most qualified person does not happen to have a teaching certificate or has not been assigned by the central office. Principals should be allowed to promote excellence in the classroom by retaining teachers who demonstrate ability to teach.

Principals should also be allowed to remove teachers who are unwilling or unfit to do the important work of educating children. It is unfair and demoralizing to other teachers when poor-performing teachers are kept on staff, often with the same or higher level of pay and benefits.

In order to assemble and maintain a high-quality, highly-motivated educational team, principals should be able to fire or suspend weak teachers. To insure accountability, school districts should hold principals answerable for teacher performance and yearly student progress at their schools. Teachers should also have access to an impartial review and appeals process, including union representation, if they feel they have been treated unfairly by the principal.

The importance of removing weak teachers from the classroom is one of the central findings of review of the research literature conducted at Stanford University:

“Moreover, a theme that emerges over and over again in the studies is the excessive difficulty in dismissing weak teachers. Although few administrators wish to dismiss large numbers of teachers, making it easier to dismiss the weakest teachers may well change the dynamics of local school reform.”²²

d. Remove legal barriers that micro-manage schools

Top-down mandates – such as restrictive class size requirements, work rules, staffing formulas and limits on school hours – prevent flexibility and innovation in spending education dollars. To become education leaders, local principals should be allowed to implement the learning program that works best for their students.

If a principal feels longer school days, home visits or Saturday sessions are needed to help educate children, state mandates and union work rules should not be allowed to prevent students from learning. Principals should be able to pay teachers more for working longer hours to help struggling students. Principals should also be allowed to hire one-on-one tutors to help students at risk of falling behind.

e. Open up principal positions to all qualified applicants

The position of principal should not be limited to applicants who hold a teaching certificate. Principals must be skilled at leading and motivating adults and students. Anyone with demonstrated skills in managing gained from businesses, non-profits or military experience should be allowed to enter a principal training program. For example, former Army general John Stanford had no background in education

²² “Getting down to Facts: School Finance and Governance in California,” by Susanna Loeb, Anthony Bryk and Eric Hanushek, Stanford University, March 2007.

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For parents to be involved in a real way, they must be given control over how and when their children receive an education.

when he was hired to head the largest school district in the state.²³

Teachers widely report they feel unsupported by ineffective school administrators. Broadening the talent pool for principals would improve the quality of school leadership and provide teachers the back-up they need in the classroom.

Because putting principals in charge is so different from current practice, some principals will be unprepared for this new role. Many current principals were selected because of their skill in navigating the education bureaucracy, rather than for their executive ability.

All principals should receive additional training to prepare them to be education leaders, not passive administrators. Principals who cannot manage a budget and oversee a staff of teaching professionals should be replaced with ones who can.

2. Give parents choice among public schools

Parental involvement is critical to the success of children in schools, yet it often receives little more than passing notice within a massive and complex education bureaucracy.

New public school parents often discover their opinions are not really respected by school district administrators. Many times parents find the really important decisions regarding their child's education, such as what teacher he gets or what school he attends, are all made by set policies and pre-determined formulas.

However, public school parents invariably find they are asked to get involved whenever the local school levy is up for a vote, or when the school district's budget is politically threatened in Olympia. The result is that parental involvement often means being asked to support policy decisions made by others, rather than truly directing the day-to-day education of their children.

For parents to be involved in a real way, they must be given control over how and when their children receive an education. After all, society expects, and the law requires, parents to make real decisions about all other aspects of their children's lives – by providing the shelter, food, clothing, medical care, safe play areas and emotional support that children need to grow and thrive.

To achieve authentic parental involvement, Washington policymakers should adopt a policy of open enrollment among public schools. Parents would choose the public school that best fits the needs of their children, and the money taxpayers provide would follow the child, approximately \$9,500 per student, to the school of the parents' choice.

Getting parents involved through public school choice would make principals responsive to parents. Schools that educate children effectively would attract students and dollars. Schools that fail to educate would lose students and dollars until they show improvement.

²³ "John Stanford: A True Educator on a Life Mission," by Jerry Large, *The Seattle Times*, December 1, 1998.

To secure the approval of parents, and the funding that would follow, school officials would engage in healthy competition for student enrollment. Satisfying parents would then become the central value of every teacher, principal and school district administrator, thus fostering a culture of excellence in public education.

Accountability is built in. Low enrollment would provide an early warning to the superintendent, the school board and the community that the principal of the failing school needs to change direction or be replaced.

In choosing a school, parents should be assisted by a range of new information tools, particularly the internet. Parents should evaluate the performance of their children's classroom teachers and provide this information to the school principal. Parents should also evaluate the principal, and provide this information to the district superintendent. In the private sector, top-performing businesses constantly solicit customer feedback, so managers can improve performance and spot errors early.

The operation of schools should become much more transparent. State government posts all public spending online. Local public schools should do the same. The experience, qualifications and evaluations of teachers and principals should also be posted online, so parents have the facts they need to make informed decisions.

Funding for each child should include a dollar multiplier to account for children who are more difficult to teach, such as disabled children, children with limited English proficiency and poor children. A disabled child, for example, could receive \$25,000 to meet his unique education needs. Principals would use these extra dollars to provide services for special needs children.

Public school choice has proved successful in Hawaii, Nevada, New Jersey and the cities of Cincinnati, San Francisco, Houston, St. Paul, Seattle (in part) and Oakland, and there are pilot programs in Boston, Chicago and New York City. Philadelphia is the latest major city to adopt open enrollment among public schools.

In San Francisco, allowing parents to choose among public schools has unleashed the creative and innovative energies of parents and of the surrounding community, resulting in improved public schools and better outcomes for children. Student achievement and parent satisfaction rates in the city are soaring.²⁴

3. Let teachers teach

Research consistently shows that placing an effective teacher in the classroom is more important than any other single factor, including smaller class size, in raising student academic achievement.²⁵ A good teacher, as opposed to a weak one, can make as much as a full year's difference in the

²⁴ "The Agony of American Education, How per-student funding can revolutionize public schools," by Lisa Snell, *Reason Magazine*, April 2006.

²⁵ "Teacher Pay, The Political Implications of Recent Research," by Dan Goldhaber, University of Washington and Urban Institute, The Center for American Progress, December 2006, at www.americanprogress.org/issues/2006/12/teacher_pay.html.

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learning growth of students.²⁶ Students taught by a high-quality teacher three years in a row score 50 percentile points higher on standardized tests than students of ineffective teachers.²⁷

The research also shows that students taught by a weak teacher two years in a row may never catch up. Two decades of research show that the qualities of an effective teacher are:

- Mastery of the subject matter
- Five years or more of teaching experience
- Training that emphasizes content knowledge and high standards of classroom competency
- Strong academic skills, intellectual curiosity and an excitement about learning for its own sake²⁸

Research shows that holding a teaching certificate is not a reliable indication of whether a person will make a good teacher. There is a marked difference between having a state-issued teacher certificate and being a good teacher. Getting a teaching certificate indicates a person has fulfilled certain requirements, but may not be effective in the classroom.

Simply having a sympathetic love of children does not always make a person a strong teacher. Often the best teachers are people who display a passion for their subject, demand the most from students and take a dedicated professional attitude toward their work. In later years former students often express the most appreciation, and even fondness, for their toughest teachers, realizing these were the people from whom they learned the most.

A Harvard Graduate School of Education study shows that a teaching credential “matters little” in raising student achievement.²⁹ This extensive study of 10,000 teachers in grades four through eight found that student learning in math and reading correlated closely with mastery of the subject by the teacher, but was poorly related to whether the teacher held a state-issued certificate.

Teacher tenure laws, which automatically grant lifetime employment to instructors after three years, make it nearly impossible for administrators to remove an ineffective teacher from a classroom. These two policies – requiring a teaching certificate and life-time tenure – plus the weak authority of the principal, result in many ineffective teachers consuming the learning time of their students.

The proportion of good to bad teachers in a school is critical. Schools reach a tipping point when the number of under-qualified teachers reaches 20% of the faculty. At this level, a school loses its ability to improve student

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ “Cumulative and Residual Effects of Teachers on Future Student Academic Achievement,” by William L. Sanders and June C. Rivers, Value-Added Research and Assessment Center, University of Tennessee, November 1996, at www.mccsc.edu/~curriculum/cumulative%20and%20residual%20effects%20of%20teachers.pdf.

²⁸ “Teacher quality and student achievement research review,” by Policy Studies Associates for the Center for Public Education, November 2005, at www.centerforpubliceducation.org/site/c.kjJXJ5MPIwE/b.1510983/.

²⁹ “Photo Finish: Teacher certification doesn’t guarantee a winner,” by Thomas J. Kane, Jonah E. Rockoff and Douglas O. Staiger, *Education Next*, The Hoover Institution, 2008, at www.hoover.org/publications/ednext/4612527.html.

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Alternatives exist for getting high-quality teachers in front of students. For example, training programs run by Teach for America and The New Teacher Project focus on academic skills and mastery of the subject, not certification. Both programs supply highly-qualified teachers to schools in 23 states and the District of Columbia. But under current law these teachers are banned from Washington classrooms.

School principals should be permitted to hire and promote teachers who show they can actually raise student achievement, especially for hard-to-teach populations. Teachers should be hired based on a deep knowledge and sense of excitement about the subject they will present to students.

Teachers who show results, regardless of certification status, should be rewarded and encouraged. Teachers who do not should be asked to pursue another profession, regardless of artificial certification and tenure rules. Poor-performing teachers should not be allowed to harm students' chances of learning, simply to provide someone with comfortable public employment.

Over time, each school would develop a dedicated team of motivated professionals who take pride in helping students. Teachers who know that educational achievement will be recognized and rewarded will eagerly take on the most difficult students. When these students show a spark of understanding and develop an eagerness to learn, the teacher's feeling of accomplishment is that much greater.

a. How state law benefits private schools

State legislators have created an exemption that allows education leaders at private schools to hire any teacher they like, giving them a distinct advantage over their public school counterparts.³¹ Many private school teachers are hired based on knowledge of the subject they will teach. They end up in the classroom because they are experts in math, physics, biology, computer science, engineering, history or English, not because they hold an education degree or managed to pass the certification test.

Private school teachers routinely receive classroom training and guidance from mentor teachers. Those who show skill in educating children are retained. Those who do not are asked to seek work opportunities elsewhere. Private schools seldom allow a non-performing teacher to remain in the classroom.

This common-sense practice allows private school administrators to achieve constant improvement in their teaching staff. It also allows them to tap a vast pool of professional talent. For example, 240,000 people in Washington have college degrees or higher in math or science. State policymakers permit any of them to teach in private schools, but bar them from entering a public school classroom without a special certificate.

³⁰ “The status of the teaching profession: Research findings and policy recommendation. A report to the Teaching and California’s Future Task Force,” by Patrick M. Shields, Camille E. Esch, Daniel C. Humphrey, Viki M. Young, Margaret Gaston and Harvey Hunt, The Center for the Future of Teaching and Learning, Santa Cruz, California, 1999, at www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/record-Details/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=ED440051&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=ED440051.

³¹ Revised Code of Washington 28A.195.010, “Private Schools.”

The research shows that the academic skills a teacher brings to a classroom confer ten times the educational advantage compared to that conferred by a teaching credential.

b. A teaching certificate is not essential

Defenders of the mandatory-certificate system say someone may know a subject, but have no skills or ability to teach it to others. The research shows, however, that the academic skills a teacher brings to a classroom confer ten times the educational advantage compared to that conferred by a teaching credential.³²

Experienced professionals, like an engineer who wants to teach high school math, can often learn classroom procedures. His mastery of mathematics, work experience and excitement about numbers are the most important factors in whether his students will learn. A former journalist's passion for writing will mean much more in teaching high schoolers English composition than just his lecturing technique.

However, subject mastery itself does not make a good teacher. Giving principals authority over hiring teachers means people with no aptitude in the classroom can be weeded out. The brilliant but befuddled mathematician may fit in well at a university, but he has no place in an elementary school classroom.

4. Double teacher pay

Public school teachers do not earn enough money, considering the importance of the work society asks them to do.

Currently, the average teacher salary in Washington for a nine-month year is \$48,000.³³ This should be doubled to \$96,000. The starting salary for a teacher in Washington is only \$32,700. This should be increased to \$65,000, to attract the best talent from all fields. As members of a well-paid, full-time profession, teachers should be available year-round, not just for nine months, to educate students.

The best teachers, and principals, should earn well over \$100,000 per year. In return, teachers and principals would be expected to perform like highly-motivated people in other well-compensated professions – doing whatever it takes to get the job done. In the case of teachers and principals, the job is providing every child with an education that will serve for a lifetime.

All teacher salaries should be set without restriction by the on-site manager: the principal. The principal knows every teacher by name and personally knows each teacher's strengths and weaknesses. Principals know what incentives, training and guidance each teacher needs in order to improve in the classroom. In turn, the principal's salary should be set by the district superintendent, based solely on how well student learning is progressing at each school.

Currently, public school teachers are paid based on a rigid wage ladder, calculated on an inflexible time and credits grid, while their colleagues in better-performing private schools are paid based only on ability to educate

³² "Photo Finish: Teacher certification doesn't guarantee a winner," by Thomas J. Kane, Jonah E. Rockoff and Douglas O. Staiger, *Education Next*, The Hoover Institution, 2008, at www.hoover.org/publications/ednext/4612527.html.

³³ "A Citizen's Guide to Washington State K-12 Finance 2008," Senate Ways and Means Committee, Washington Legislature, January 2008, page 19, at www.leg.wa.gov/documents/Senate/SCS/WM/SwmWebsite/Publications/2007/K12Guide2007.pdf.

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children.

a. Performance pay

Leaders of Washington’s teachers’ unions strongly oppose paying teachers based on ability, but this approach is now common in many parts of the country. Public schools in Douglas County, Colorado have had such a system since 1994. There, the system is designed to “reward teachers for outstanding student performance, enhance collegiality, and encourage positive school and community relations.”³⁴

In this case, unions do not oppose merit pay. The president of the area’s teacher federation says that under performance pay, “Teachers must demonstrate how their work is being used to drive instruction, and they are rewarded for employing new skills.”³⁵

Public schools in several states, including Tennessee, Arizona, Colorado, Iowa, Ohio, Florida and North Carolina, have adopted similar performance-based pay systems for teachers.

The advantage of performance pay is that it encourages teachers to develop their talents and acquire new skills. Performance pay also allows principals and parents to recognize quality educators and encourage them to excel. Performance pay improves the quality of the teaching profession by encouraging underperforming teachers to seek a different line of work.

b. The salary grid harms math and science education

The current salary grid discourages teachers with math and science knowledge from entering the classroom. Teachers with strong backgrounds in math and science sacrifice far more financially under the single-salary schedule than their college peers who do not go into teaching.³⁶ For example, four years after college, graduates with technical training who are not teachers earn almost \$13,500 more than their peers who entered the teaching profession. After ten years the pay gap grows to almost \$28,000.³⁷

One result of the single salary pay scale is that job conditions become a substitute for performance pay, with detrimental effects for our neediest students. University of Washington researcher Dan Goldhaber notes that better-qualified teachers use their clout to avoid working in high-poverty schools:

“Teachers with more labor-market bargaining power – those who are highly experienced, credentialed, or judged to be better – will therefore tend to be teaching in nicer settings with lighter work-loads. As a consequence, the most-needy students tend to be paired with the least-qualified teachers.”³⁸

³⁴ “Pay for Performance: It Can Work – Here’s How,” by Ellen R. Delisio, *Education World*, January 29, 2003, at www.educationworld.com/a_issues/issues/issues374c.shtml.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ “Teacher Pay, The Political Implications of Recent Research,” by Dr. Dan Goldhaber, University of Washington and Urban Institute, The Center for American Progress, December 2006, pages 7 and 8, at www.american-progress.org/issues/2006/12/teacher_pay.html.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, page 8.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, page 11.

A teacher pay grid that is supposed to provide “fair and equal treatment for all” creates schools in which the least effective teachers are assigned to the neediest students.

Shifting more resources from low-priority tasks to the core mission of the school district would free up ample money for doubling teacher pay.

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c. Ample funds are available to double teacher pay

A common objection to doubling teacher pay is that there is not enough money to pay for it. This is not true. As noted, public schools receive ample funding, but much of it is tied up in administration and low-priority programs.

For example, for 2008-09 taxpayers are providing Seattle public schools with \$556.2 million to educate 43,132 students, or \$12,895 per student.³⁹ A typical classroom with 25 students is receiving \$332,300. Paying the teacher \$100,000 would leave the principal with a sizable budget of \$232,300 per classroom to cover other expenses, including services for special needs students.

This example is hypothetical. A look at how the Seattle school officials actually spend their budget will show why so little funding reaches the classroom, and is unavailable to double teacher salaries.

A total of 5,018 people work full-time for Seattle public schools. In Seattle, less than half of public education employees are actually carrying out the schools’ central mission – instructing children.⁴⁰ The majority of education employees are assigned to other activities, such as “teaching support,” “other support,” and “other administration.”

Shifting more resources from low-priority tasks to the core mission of the school district would free up ample money for doubling teacher pay.

d. Safeguards against abuse

Every compensation system is subject to manipulation by dishonest managers, and school districts should adopt procedures to guard against abuse. District officials should build on the current appeals process to insure teachers receive a truly independent review of their performance. Principals who abuse the performance pay system to benefit themselves or to enrich their friends should be disciplined or dismissed.

Other safeguards should include regular financial audits, union representation, scrutiny by the press, greater school transparency and the involvement of parents through choice among public schools.

e. Ending teacher strikes

An added advantage of increasing teacher pay and giving principals control over hiring would be a reduction in labor disputes, which sometimes shut down schools. In 2003, striking teachers in Marysville ultimately complied with a court’s back-to-work order, after a seven-week walkout that

³⁹ “Seattle Public Schools, The Superintendent’s Recommended Operating Budgets for Fiscal Year 2008-09,” pages 4 and 5 at www.seattleschools.org/area/finance/operatingbudget09/pdf.

⁴⁰ Summary of FTE Certificated and Classified Staff Counts by Activity for FY 2007-08,” OSPI Form I-195, Seattle School District, accessed at www.k12.wa.us/safs/rep/fin/0708/17001195.pdf.

had delayed classroom instruction for 11,200 students.⁴¹

In August 2008, bearing signs saying “No Contract? No School!” officials at the Bellevue teachers’ union called a strike because district administrators did not agree to larger pay raises, saying the 6.6% salary increase offered by the district was too small.⁴² For two weeks the labor action prevented 16,000 students from attending class. Similarly, in 2008 union officials threatened teacher strikes in the Snoqualmie Valley and Northshore districts, before area school officials yielded to salary demands.⁴³

5. Replace the WASL with another standard

Washington education leaders should replace the WASL with a test based on high-quality academic standards, like those developed by other states. Students should be judged fairly based on an objective test which does not change from year to year. The legislature and state education leaders should pick a high academic standard for graduation and stick to it. Lawmakers should refrain from repealing sections of the standard chosen, as they did by canceling the math section of the WASL, and instead maintain a consistent standard of learning. This approach would give students a valuable educational asset, a Washington state diploma, as they go on to college or enter the workforce.

The school system should offer more practical career and technical education classes for graduating high school students who choose to enter the workforce instead of going to college. Public education leaders should encourage all students to graduate, but not all graduates need or want to go on to college. A basic Washington high school education itself should open a wide variety of career opportunities and prepare graduating students for success in the work place, if that is the path they choose.

State leaders can make a Washington state diploma a nationally-recognized sign of a good education by basing it on mastery of a respected, national test, like the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Over the years, lawmakers and the Superintendent of Public Instruction have weakened the WASL academic standard, placing Washington students at a disadvantage in relation to their peers across the country and around the world. A better test aligned to a standard like NAEP would ensure that Washington children are receiving the level of education they need and deserve.

6. Create no-excuses schools

The state constitution says the “paramount duty” of public officials is to provide for the education of every child within the borders of state, but when the government fails to educate a child, who is at fault? Is it the teacher, the principal, the supervisor, the school board, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the governor, the legislature? The current public education system provides no answer to this basic question of accountability.

⁴¹ “Marysville teachers head back to work, record strike comes to an end,” by Gregory Roberts, *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, October 21, 2003.

⁴² “Bellevue teachers prepare to strike, classes may not start as scheduled Tuesday,” by Lynn Thompson, *The Seattle Times*, August 28, 2008.

⁴³ Ibid.

The school system should offer more practical career and technical education classes for graduating high school students who choose to enter the workforce instead of going to college.

Lines of responsibility are so muddled it is impossible for parents and taxpayers to know who is responsible for failures in public education, and who should get credit for its successes. When the drop-out rate reaches nearly one-third of all students, no one is held accountable.

The complex organization of public education, with its many levels, programs and office holders, creates a strong incentive to keep lines of responsibility blurred, since it is part of human nature to avoid blame when things go wrong. When a school fails or a student drops out, it is virtually unheard of for anyone in an official position to stand up and say, “It was my fault.”

To solve this problem policymakers should improve school governance and education leadership by establishing a clear hierarchy of responsibility. Officials at each level should be accountable to the level above, in the following descending order:

1. Governor and legislature
2. School boards
3. Superintendents
4. Principals
5. Teachers

Clear lines of responsibility should work like this:

- Voters select local school board members
- School boards hire superintendents
- Superintendents hire principals
- Principals hire teachers
- Teachers educate students.

Voters also elect, and can fire, the governor and the legislature, who are responsible for providing the public money needed to run the schools.

When a school has a bad teacher, parents would know the principal is responsible, since he hired the teacher. When a school is failing, parents would know the superintendent is responsible, since he hired the principal. When student performance across an entire district is poor, parents would know school board members are responsible, since they hired the superintendent.

When a school or a district is unable to hire talented teachers, principals and superintendents, parents would know the governor and the legislature are responsible, since they are not funding salary budgets, combined with local levies, at a level high enough to attract the best people.

Tenure and seniority rules should be changed so non-performing teachers, principals and superintendents can be removed by the officials with responsibility over them. Principals and teachers should not be granted guaranteed lifetime employment, with ever-increasing salaries and benefits. The “paramount duty” described in the constitution is directed toward educating children, not providing comfortable livings for people with public-sector jobs.

When parents and taxpayers are unhappy with someone in public

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education, they should know exactly who is responsible, and be able to have that person replaced with someone better. Currently, parents and taxpayers can do neither.

7. Transparency - put school budgets and teacher qualifications online

Currently it is impossible for policymakers or the public to make informed decisions about education spending because the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction does not report how spending relates to student learning, or even how education dollars are spent.

A recent JLARC study identified the kind of information that is needed, but is lacking, in order to inform the public and policymakers:⁴⁴

- School expenditure data
- Staff and teacher descriptive data
- Student descriptive and outcomes data
- School and community descriptive data.

For example, school-level spending is not reported to the state, so important information, such as actual spending per teacher, is not available. Better information about teacher and staff costs is needed, including their academic degrees and majors, and routes to certification. Aggregate funding for each public school should be reported online, so parents and education leaders can see whether a particular school is attracting students and funding over time.

The Superintendent of Public Instruction does not keep track of whether high school students are ready for college, even though most people assume possessing a Washington public high school diploma should mean a young person is prepared for college-level work.

8. Make the Superintendent of Public Instruction an appointed office

Every four years Washington voters are asked to elect a Superintendent of Public Instruction, which is just one of nine statewide offices voters must fill.

Since voters can only realistically focus on a few high-level offices, there is a debate about whether this is the most effective way to structure our state government.

Reducing the number of state-wide elected offices, the so-called “short ballot” approach, would work better because the people would choose a limited number of top officials. These top officials would then be uniquely responsible for the proper functioning of government. The highest elected officials would be subject to greater public scrutiny because there would be fewer of them.

⁴⁴ “K-12 Data Study, Report 07-6,” Report Digest, Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC), February 21, 2007.

The state constitution should be amended to change the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction from an elected to an appointed position.

The work of the Superintendent of Public Instruction is similar to that of any other state agency, and there is no reason this department should be headed by an elected official. In fact, the governor's appointed cabinet already includes many key positions, most of which are as important as Superintendent of Public Instruction. State officials appointed by the governor include:

- Secretary of Social and Health Services
- Director of Ecology
- Director of Labor and Industries
- Director of Agriculture
- Director of Financial Management
- Secretary of Transportation
- Director of Licensing
- Director of General Administration
- Director of Community Trade & Economic Development
- Director of Veterans Affairs
- Director of Revenue
- Secretary of Corrections
- Secretary of Health
- Director of Financial Institutions
- Chief of the State Patrol

Direct election of the office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction does not create greater public accountability, because most Washingtonians are not even aware of the name of the official holding that office. In practice, electing the Superintendent of Public Instruction creates *less* accountability, because the office attracts so little public attention it is easily influenced by organized special interests that directly benefit from education spending.

The state constitution should be amended to change the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction from an elected to an appointed position. If problems arise with public education, voters would know that the solution lies with the governor, who could change the top managers of public education at any time.

The governor would then be in a position to implement needed education reforms over the objections of entrenched special interests. If the governor fails to improve the quality of public schools, voters could take that failure into account at election time. In either case, the people would know that when it comes to educating the children of Washington, the buck stops at the governor's office.

Every child's education is handcrafted. The learning process cannot be mechanized, industrialized or centralized.

IV. Conclusion

Every child's education is handcrafted. The learning process cannot be mechanized, industrialized or centralized. A child learns when a caring adult speaks to him directly, calls him by name, and conveys knowledge from one mind to another.

Knowledge is best conveyed to children by a good teacher. The most effective way to secure good teachers is to allow an education leader, the principal, who has personally reviewed their qualifications, to hire them.

The reason Washington Policy Center recommends every principal be

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put in charge and then be held accountable for academic outcomes is because he will hire teachers who can fulfill the educational vision he has for the children attending his school. Similarly, a principal who is an education leader will dismiss teachers who are wasting the learning time of his students.

Allowing parents to choose among public schools is the only effective way to provide principals with the parental involvement they need to create “no excuses” schools; schools where the education of children is placed above every other consideration. A principal who finds parents are not choosing his public school knows he is doing something wrong and must change. When the principal sees parents are again choosing his school, he will know he is on the right track.

Educating children is the paramount constitutional duty of lawmakers. While the legislature has provided ample funds and a multitude of programs for this purpose, it should now transfer key decisions over spending, hiring and classroom instruction from centralized bureaucracies to the local principal. Adopting this policy would revolutionize and dramatically improve our public schools.

Only principals are close enough to students and teachers to insure that effective learning is actually taking place. Olympia cannot educate each child from afar through ever-increasing programs, initiatives and regulations. Only principals know the needs of their students and can tailor instructional programs to meet their needs. Lawmakers should give qualified principals the authority they need to manage and improve local schools. Putting principals in charge is the key to providing the one element the research shows is essential to student learning: placing an effective teacher in every classroom.

V. Appendix

Targeted Education Reform Programs Funded by the Legislature - 1993–2008

Program	Year
School Librarian Allocation	2008
Student Learning Opportunities	2008
Local Farms and Healthy Kids	2008
WASL Workgroup	2008
Achievement Gap Project	2008
Indigenous Learning Pilot Project	2008
Math Standards Review	2008
PESB Study on teaching ELL students	2008
Math Teacher Supply and Demand study	2008
World Language Pilot Study	2008
LEAP Bilingual Educator Program	2008
Apportionment and Financial Systems	2008
Gifted Education Enhancement	2007
Elementary Math/Science Professional Development	2007
Secondary Math/Science Professional Development	2007
After School Math Programs	2007
All Day Kindergarten Phase In	2007
Math and Science Instructional Coaches	2007
K-3 Demonstration Projects	2007
Middle/High School Applied Math/Science/Engin.	2007
English Language Learners	2007
College Readiness Test for 11th Graders	2007
Leadership Academy	2007
Math/Science Regional Support	2007
Bremerton “Lighthouse” K Program	2007
Math/Science Standards and Curriculum	2007
Technology Upgrades	2007
Middle School Career and Technical Education	2007
After-School Grants	2007
2007 WASL Changes	2007
WASL Funding to OFM	2007
End of Course Tests	2007
WASL Changes	2007
Building Bridges for Drop-outs	2007
Skills Center Enrollment Expansion	2007
Vocational Equipment Replacement	2007
Increase Number of Math and Science Teachers through Alternative Routes	2007
High School Completion Program	2007
Navigation 101	2006
Promoting Academic Success (Math Remediation)	2006
Science WASL	2005
Washington Learns	2005

Washington Achieves Scholars	2003
Digital Learning Commons	2003
Principal Support Program	2003
Assessment System Improvements	2003
Early Reading Grant Program	2003
Reading and Math Software	2003
Focused Assistance	2002
Mentor Teacher Fund	2002
Initiative 728 Student Achievement Fund	2002
Principal Assessment and Mentorship	2002
School Recognition	2002
Performance Improvement Plans	2002
Curriculum and Assessment Teacher Assistance	2001
Web-based Instructional Network	2001
Better Schools and Professional Development	2001
LASER Science Education	2001
K-4 Enhanced Staffing Ratio (Better Schools Class Size)	2001
National Board Teacher Certification Bonus	2000
Summer Accountability Institutes	2000
Learning Improvement Days	2000
Second Grade Reading	2000
Initiative 732 Teacher Pay Raises and Increased Benefits	2000
Academic Achievement and Accountability Commission	2000
Reading Corps	1999
Math Helping Corps	1999
Learning Assistance Program	1999
Reading Grants	1998
Reading Program	1997
January Conference	1996
Student Learning Improvement Grants	1995
Commission on Student Learning	1994
Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL)	1994
Center for Improvement of Student Learning	1994
Improved Technology Infrastructure	1994
School to Work	1994
Curriculum Specialists	1994
Breakfast Subsidy	1994
Meals for Kids	1994
Summer Food Program	1994
Retaining Beginning Teachers Assistance	1994
Math Initiative	1993
Superintendent/Principal Internship	1993
Para-Professional Training	1993
21st Century Schools	1993
Transitional Bilingual Instruction	1993

Source: Superintendent of Public Instruction, Education Reform, Agency 350, Program 055, Program 061, Biennial Budget, 1993-95 through 2007-09.

About the Author

Liv Finne is director of the Center for Education at Washington Policy Center. She is the author of numerous studies on education reform, including “An Overview of Public School Funding in Washington,” “Early Learning Proposals in Washington State,” and “Reviewing the Research on Universal Preschool and All-Day Kindergarten.” She holds a law degree from Boston University School of Law and a Bachelor of Arts degree from Wellesley College. She retired from civil litigation practice to raise two children and work as the business partner for Finne Architects, a small business she owns with her husband.



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