



POLICY BRIEF

Are Unions a Benefit or Obstacle to the Education of Children?

by Liv Finne
Director, WPC's Center for Education

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Introduction

This Policy Brief is an adaptation of a presentation Liv Finne delivered at Western Washington University's Woodring College of Education on April 20, 2011. She was part of a panel discussion titled "Are Unions a Benefit or an Obstacle to the Education of Children?" Joining her on this panel were Mary Lindquist, president of the Washington Education Association (the state teachers' union) and Professor William Lyne, President of the United Faculty of Washington. Over 100 people attended the forum, including College of Education students, union leaders, teachers, school administrators and interested members of the public.

Liv began her presentation with the observation that today the main obstacle to improving public education is the power of the union in the system. This power is symbolized by the Common School Manual, the five pound, four-inch thick book that contains all the laws, rules and regulations that smother the ability of teachers and principals to provide the best education for children. Her main points were:

- Schools do not need more money. Education spending in Washington is up 38% since 2003, but test scores remain flat.
- Only 59 cents of every education dollar reaches the classroom in our state.
- The majority of school employees are not teachers.
- 87 school reforms enacted in our state since 1993 have failed, at an added cost of \$5 billion.
- Nearly 60% of K-12 students in Washington attend low-performing schools.
- 32% of public school students drop out.
- 37% of students who do graduate are not prepared for college-level work.
- The state teachers' union receives about \$70 million a year in education funding as mandatory member dues.
- The union opposed Obama Administration reforms, costing Washington \$250 million in Race to the Top funds.
- The union has blocked all major school reforms in Olympia, such as charter schools, merit pay, firing low-performing teachers, and putting principals in charge of their schools.

Washington Public Schools - The Inputs

- School population: One million students educated in public schools; 100,000 in private schools or homeschooled
- Public school annual spending: \$10 billion from state, local and federal sources
- Only 59 cents of every education dollar reaches the classroom
- Washington Public Schools
 - Number of school districts: 295
 - Number of schools: 2,345
 - Number of charter schools: 0
 - Per-student spending in 2010: \$10,200 (doubled since 1980 in inflation-adjusted dollars)
 - Student/teacher ratio: 19 to one
 - Number of teachers: 48,299 classroom teachers, or 47% of 101,379, all school employees

Student Outcomes in Washington

- 10th grade 2009-10 state test results:
 - 79% are proficient in reading
 - 86% are proficient in writing
 - 41% are proficient in math
 - 44% are proficient in science
- 8th grade on 2009 federal National Assessment of Student Progress (NAEP):
 - Washington's students score slightly above national average, with only 39% proficient or better in math, and only 36% proficient or better in reading

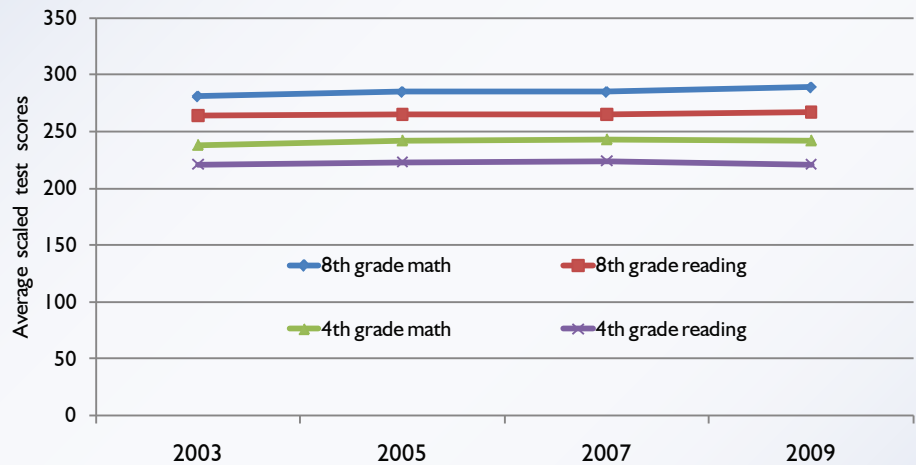
Student Achievement Gap in Washington

- 10th grade 2009-10 state test results:
 - 84% white students pass reading test, 47% pass math
 - 66% black students pass reading, 19% pass math
 - 63% Hispanic students pass reading, 20% pass math

NAEP Test Scores

Since 2003, education spending is up 38%, yet test scores remain flat.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Test Results - Washington State



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More Student Results in Washington

- Washington ranks 43rd in nation in college graduation rates.
- Public education officials are producing a generation of students less educated than their parents.¹
- In a single generation, America has fallen from 2nd place to 11th place in the portion of students completing college.
- One-third of students drop out of high school, another third graduate without skills they need to succeed in college or the workplace.
- 52% of 2006 high school graduates who entered two-year community colleges or technical schools had to enroll in remedial math, English or reading courses.
- 37% of students entering two-year and four-year colleges have to enroll in remedial math or English courses.
- Only 53% graduate from college.
- Washington State spends \$17.2 million per year on remediation in community and technical colleges.

¹ Washington Learns and Higher Education Coordinating Board.

State Board of Education Assessment of Washington Schools²

- More than 59% of students attend ‘Fair’ or ‘Struggling’ schools.
- Less than 3% of students attend ‘Excellent’ schools.

Category	Score Range	Number of Schools	Percentage of All Schools	Number of Students	Percentage of All Students
Exemplary	5.50-7.00	81	4%	28,650	2.9%
Very Good	5.00-5.49	131	6.5%	64,500	6.4%
Good	4.00-4.99	591	29.4%	314,700	31.3%
Fair	2.50-3.99	980	48.7%	523,000	52%
Struggling	1.00-2.49	228	11.3%	74,000	7.4%

Past Efforts at Education Reform

1993 Education Reform Act:

1. Created statewide standards for what students should know and do in six subjects.
2. Created test (WASL) to evaluate student knowledge and progress toward standards.
3. School accountability:
 - Giving every school a “grade” for performance
 - Holding schools accountable for student achievement

Education Reform Programs Since 1993

- 87 failed education reform programs—the band-aid approach.
- Cost: over \$5 billion, with no overall improvement in student test scores or graduation rates.

Targeted Education Reform Programs Funded by the Legislature 1993-2008³

School Librarian Allocation	2008
Student Learning Opportunities	2008
Local Farms and Healthy Kids	2008
WASL Workgroup	2008

² Public School Accountability Index, available at www.washingtonpolicy.org/research/education/public-school-accountability-index.

³ Superintendent of Public Instruction, Education Reform, Agency 350, Program 055, Program 061, Biennial Budget, 1993-95 through 2007-09.

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

2009 Education Reform Bill - HB 2261

- New definition of basic education.
- New funding model based on “prototype schools,” defining staffing ratios for administrators, secretaries, teachers, librarians, counselors and classified staff.
- Would reduce class sizes in K-3 to 17 students per class, and between 27 and 28 students in higher grades.
- Working groups studying changes to school finance, teacher certification, teacher compensation and student data collection.

Projected Costs of Implementing HB 2261

- Funding HB 2261 would add \$3 billion to the \$10 billion per year we spend on public education.
- Many are saying that Washington cannot afford HB 2261, and that reducing class sizes is not as important as improving the effectiveness of teachers and principals.

Washington Loses \$250 Million in Race to the Top Funds

- In 2009, President Obama asked states to apply for Race to the Top funds to promote state reform of public schools.
- March 2010, the Legislature passed SB 6696, the governor's Race to the Top bill.
- Governor Gregoire allowed the state teachers union, the WEA, veto power over the bill; education reformers seeking to strengthen the bill were ignored.
- The bill did not allow for charter or innovation schools, or allow teacher pay to be changed to reward outstanding teachers.
- Washington's application did not meet Obama Administration criteria because of the WEA limitations in SB 6696.
- Last summer, the U.S. Department of Education compared Washington's application to the Race to the Top criteria, and rejected it. This meant a loss of \$250 million in federal dollars for K-12 education.
- Washington's application was ranked 32nd out of 36 applicants.

Reforms Opposed by the State Teachers' Union in 2011

- HB 1546, SB 5792 – to allow innovation schools.
- HB 1609, SB 5914, HB 1443 – to end seniority as the basis for deciding teacher layoffs, and to allow administrators to consider performance. (Collective bargaining rules require youngest teachers to be laid off first, even if they are the best teachers in their schools.)
- HB 1443 – to allow performance pay for teachers, and to allow school principals in Struggling schools to decide which teachers will teach at the school.
- HB 1593 – to allow an alternate certification route for principals to encourage individuals with leadership qualities to lead our schools

Reforms Blocked in Olympia because of Teachers' Union Power

- Charter schools.
- Repealing mandatory deduction of teachers' union dues RCW 41.59.100. Through this provision, state and local unions collect \$900 a year from 82,000 members, collecting around \$70 million per year.
- Repealing RCW 28A.405.100, which makes it unreasonably difficult to remove underperforming teachers.

Well-documented Resources to Improve Washington's Public Schools

- "Eight Practical Ways to Reverse the Decline of Public Education," Washington Policy Center, December 2008.
- *Outrageous Learning: Foundational Thoughts on Reforming our Public Schools*, by Scott Oki (Washington Policy Center, 2009).
- *The Secret of TSL (Total Student Load): The Revolutionary Discovery that Raises School Performance*, by William Ouchi (Simon and Schuster, 2009).
- "An Option for Learning: An Assessment of Student Achievement in Charter Public Schools," Washington Policy Center, January 2011.

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 “Washington Policy Center’s Education Reform Plan: Eight Practical Ways to Reverse the Decline of Public Schools,” “An Option for Learning: An Assessment of Student Achievement in Charter Public Schools,” “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.” Liv 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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