

SB 5882, to cut the ratio of teachers in public schools

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Key Findings

1. **Washington state has an education emergency which SB 5882 ignores.**
2. **Spring of 2023 test scores show that 61 percent of Washington’s students failed the state Smarter Balance test in mathematics, and 49 percent failed the English test.**
3. **SB 5882 would increase non-teaching staff in public schools.**
4. **Adding staff to public school payrolls increases the budgets of school unions.**
5. **SB 5882 would strengthen the union and would not improve student learning.**
6. **Current staffing numbers show 49 percent of school staff are non-teachers.**
7. **Public schools have enough non-teaching staff to meet student needs.**

Introduction

Lawmakers are considering SB 5882, a bill to cut the ratio of certified teachers in public schools by increasing the number of non-teaching employees. Under the bill teachers ratios in private schools and charter public schools would not be affected.

The bill is sponsored by Senators Stanford (D-Shoreline), Wellman (D-Mercer Island), Hunt (D-Olympia), Pedersen (D-Seattle) and C. Wilson (D-Federal Way). The sponsors say they introduced the bill because additional staff are needed to “better meet student needs,” as indicated by its title.¹

1 “SB 5882 An Act Relating to increasing prototypical school staffing to better meet student needs,” introduced December 19, 2023, sponsored by Senators Stanford (D-Shoreline), Wellman (D-Mercer Island), Hunt (D-Olympia), Pedersen (D-Seattle) and C. Wilson (D-Federal Way), at <https://app.leg.wa.gov/billssummary?BillNumber=5882&Initiative=false&Year=2023>.

Text of bill

Current law requires that public schools receive enough funding to provide one certified teacher for every 17 students in grades kindergarten to fourth, 27 students in grades four through six, and 28 students in grades seven through 12. To make sure that class sizes are limited and that students have daily access to qualified teachers, current law provides a funding restriction on the ratio of non-teaching staff and administrative positions allowed in every school district.

This funding restriction is designed to maintain trust with the public, by ensuring public school budgets are directed to providing qualified instructors for the education of students, not simply filling the school payroll with people who want high-paying public jobs.

SB 5882 would cut the ratio of qualified teachers in every public school in the state, potentially leading to larger class sizes and reduced student access to learning.

The text of SB 5882 describes the non-teacher positions that would be funded:

“Educational staff professionals [non-teachers] drive students safely to school, provide one-on-one individualized instruction for special education students, run small group instruction for English language learners and for students struggling with certain academic concepts, supervise and monitor students before and after school, at lunch, and during recess, provide physical and behavioral health services in schools, serve lunches, keep buildings clean and maintained, and many other support services that are essential to school operations and student learning.”

SB 5882 would cut the proportion of teachers at public schools based on the following ratios. Note that the ratio for non-teaching staff would double by the 2025-26 school year.

16 (i) For the 2024-25 school year, the following additional
 17 staffing units:

	<u>Elementary</u>	<u>Middle</u>	<u>High</u>
	<u>School</u>	<u>School</u>	<u>School</u>
20 <u>Teaching assistance, including any aspect of educational instructional services</u>			
21 <u>provided by classified employees.....</u>	0.356	0.100	0.116
22 <u>Office support and other noninstructional aides.....</u>	0.330	0.391	0.770

23 (ii) For the 2025-26 school year, the following additional
 24 staffing units:

	<u>Elementary</u>	<u>Middle</u>	<u>High</u>
	<u>School</u>	<u>School</u>	<u>School</u>
27 <u>Teaching assistance, including any aspect of educational instructional services</u>			
28 <u>provided by classified employees.....</u>	0.712	0.200	0.232
29 <u>Office support and other noninstructional aides.....</u>	0.660	0.782	1.540

SB 5882 would cut funding for teachers

SB 5882 provides that the ratio of non-teaching staff in public schools would double by the 2025-26 school year. This new ratio would authorize the hiring of 1,370 non-teaching staff. Under a conservative estimate of salary and benefit cost of \$70,000 per employee (many school employees make over \$100,000 a year), SB 5882 would cost school budgets \$95,900,000 a year.

As the teacher ratio is cut and the proportion of non-teacher staff is increased, the education funding available for hiring teachers would be reduced, shifting resources out of the classroom to well-paid but non-instructional positions.

Policy Analysis

Schools already have a high proportion of non-teaching staff

In 2022-23, the most recent data available, Washington’s public schools employed 125,077 full-time staff.² (See Appendix for detail.) However, the number of teachers was barely half that number, only 63,211. Therefore teachers comprise only 50.5 percent of total staff in the public schools, with non-teachers comprising 49.5 percent of all staff positions. The high proportion of non-teaching staff pulls funding away from teacher funding and providing in-class instructional resources. Here are examples.

As non-teaching staff, Washington public schools employed 16,409 “Aides,” 2,273 “Other Support Personnel,” 8,219 “Office/Clerks,” and 9,205 “Service Workers.” These three categories add up to 36,106 people, or 28 percent of the total.³

In addition, public schools employ 2,992 “Counselors,” 2,273 “Other Support Personnel,” 1,072 “Psychologists,” and more. These numbers show school administrators already have a high ratio of non-teacher employees to provide support services for school operations and non-instructional student services.

Decades of experience in school funding shows that adding non-teaching staff to public school payrolls does not deliver promised gains in student learning. National studies, and the real-world experience of private schools and charter public schools demonstrates that adding teachers with demonstrated subject competence – for example in math, English, geography, history, science, and other classroom subjects – is the only way to improve learning outcomes for students. Every education dollar that is diverted from teacher funding does little to advance learning benefits for students.

SB 5882 would provide profits for the WEA union

Adding staff to public school payrolls increases profits for public school-based unions, because public workers must pay union dues in order to keep their jobs. The most recent

2 “2022-23 Statewide Personnel Assignment Summary Profiles, Table 7: All School Personnel By Duty,” Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, at: <https://ospi.k12.wa.us/policy-funding/school-apportionment/school-publications/personnel-summary-reports>.

3 “2022-23 Statewide Personnel Assignment Summary Profiles, Table 7: All School Personnel By Duty,” Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, at: <https://ospi.k12.wa.us/policy-funding/school-apportionment/school-publications/personnel-summary-reports>.

data shows that the WEA union receives \$50.4 million a year in dues deducted from public worker incomes.⁴ Adding more staff to public school payrolls results in increased profits for the WEA union and more powerful influence on politics and the formation of education policy. In contrast, employees at private schools and charter public schools are not required to pay union dues as a condition of employment.

Increasing union power is not beneficial for students

Events in recent years show the WEA union often works against the learning interests of students. In 2020, 2021 and 2022 the union used concerns over COVID to argue strongly, and successfully, for closing public schools. In 2020 private schools and public charter schools closed as well, but had fully re-opened by the start of the 2020-21 school year.

The president of the WEA, Larry Delaney (Salary: \$194,000) said in September of 2020 that “we shouldn’t worry about how closed schools are harming children, because they are all falling behind together.”⁵ This harsh sentiment only applied to public school students. Private and charter school students had already returned to the classroom. In many states, public schools never closed at all.

In February 2021 Governor Inslee urged the union to agree to reopen the schools with health safeguards, but the union ignored him.⁶ On March 15th Governor Inslee issued an Emergency Order on March 15 declaring

students were suffering a mental health crisis in order to get the union back to work.⁷

SB 5882 would undermine efforts to improve student test scores

The long closure of public schools from March 2020 to September 2021 have created a learning crisis in Washington. Governor Inslee and the union kept the public schools closed longer than the schools in 46 other states.⁸ The damage to the life prospects of the 1.1 million students due to shut-down learning loss is considerable.

A study by McKinsey and Co. found at the time that extending the school shutdowns would “be a hurt that could last a lifetime.”⁹ The evidence shows the McKinsey study’s estimate of long-term student learning loss was accurate.

Spring 2023 test scores show that 61 percent of Washington’s students failed the state Smarter Balance test in mathematics, and 49 percent failed the English test.¹⁰ Washington’s students are not meeting minimum state standards, and public schools have not succeeded in helping students recover from school shut-down learning losses. Meanwhile, much higher numbers of private school and charter school students are meeting educational standards and graduating on time prepared to succeed in life. This indicates that a focus on qualified teachers and keeping schools open can educate

4 “IRS Form 990, Washington Education Association, 2021,” at <https://pdf.guidestar.org/PDF/Images/2022/910/460/2022-910460645-202301869349300530-90.pdf>.

5 “WEA union president says we shouldn’t worry about how closed schools are harming children, because they are all falling behind together,” Liv Finne, Washington Policy Center Blog, September 9, 2021, at <https://www.washingtonpolicy.org/publications/detail/wea-union-president-says-we-shouldnt-worry-about-how-closed-schools-are-harming-children-because-they-are-all-falling-behind-together>.

6 “Inslee: Schools should reopen for in-person learning,” Associated Press, Oregon Public Broadcasting, February 16, 2021, at <https://www.opb.org/article/2021/02/16/washington-covid-19-schools-reopening/>.

7 “The effect of emergency-ordered school closings, learning loss and mask mandates on children,” by Liv Finne, Washington Policy Center, August 2022, at <https://www.washingtonpolicy.org/library/docLib/Finne-The-effect-of-emergency-ordered-school-closings-learning-loss-and-mask-mandates-on-children-FINAL-.pdf>.

8 “Larger Washington Districts Struggle to Reopen Classrooms; About a third of students statewide have some form of in-person learning, which is behind many other states,” by Chris Daniels, KING 5 TV, February 26, 2021, at <https://www.king5.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/washington-schools-reopening-classrooms-struggle/281-d05fa36b-cff1-482d-8c59-414b905823d5>.

9 “COVID-19 and student learning in the United States: The Hurt that Could Last a Lifetime,” by Emma Dorn et al., McKinsey and Company, June 1, 2020, at <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/education/our-insights/covid-19-and-student-learning-in-the-united-states-the-hurt-could-last-a-lifetime>.

10 “Washington State School Report Card, Spring 2023,” Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, at <https://washingtonstaterreportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/ReportCard/ViewSchoolOrDistrict/103300>.

students despite the health concerns that were experienced by all schools.

Conclusion

SB 5882 would cut the ratio of qualified teachers in public schools. Currently nearly half of school district employees represent non-teaching positions. Under SB 5882's ratio cuts, the public would likely soon see that most people working at their local school district are not teachers, raising questions that would undermine community support for schools.

Decades of experience in school funding show that adding non-teaching staff to public school payrolls does not deliver promised gains in student learning.

SB 5882 would strengthen school unions. Experience shows that enhancing union power within the system is not good for students. SB 5882 would not contribute to correcting the considerable damage to student academic knowledge inflicted during the extended school shutdowns.

Commentator Daniel Henninger has noted that ongoing problems in public education are leading parents to seek alternatives:

“The school-choice surge is the result in large part of parents across the political spectrum discovering during the pandemic that public-school unions are basically industrial unions, whose product is themselves, not students.”¹¹

SB 5882 may be viewed by the public as padding the payrolls of local school districts for the benefit of unions and other entrenched interests, rather than devoting resources to maintaining teacher ratios. Cutting teacher ratios would not only harm learning resources for students, it would likely lead to an even greater loss in confidence in the public education system.

11 “Even 2023’s Clouds Had a Silver Lining: This year deserves the dustbin of history. With two exceptions,” by Daniel Henninger, Wall Street Journal, December 27, 2023, at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/even-2023s-clouds-had-a-silver-lining-education-school-choice-6f8d4e4c>.

Appendix

Table 7: All School Personnel by Duty¹²

			Avg Add'l	~~~~~ Average per 1.0 FTE ~~~~~					
			Salary	Total	Base	Total	Insur.	Mand.	Days in
Duty Assignment	Individuals	per Indiv.	FTE	Salary	Salary	Ben.	Ben.	1.0 FTE	
11 Superintendent	306	9,810	268.53	181,560	203,113	13,078	37,938	247.9	
12 Deputy/Assist. Supt.	155	7,335	134.3	196,938	217,125	12,914	40,474	257.2	
13 Other District Admin.	1,480	3,582	1,161.91	158,687	167,151	12,579	35,068	250.1	
21 Elementary Principal	1,452	3,168	1,236.47	154,103	162,160	12,492	34,805	243.8	
22 Elem. Vice Principal	714	2,761	577.81	138,771	145,206	12,609	32,095	245.9	
23 Secondary Principal	968	3,163	774.2	159,613	168,850	12,479	35,444	240.5	
24 Secondary Vice Principal	1,092	3,533	933.42	149,885	159,197	12,456	34,496	245.5	
25 Other School Admin.	600	2,758	246.9	130,941	139,990	12,476	30,589	228.9	
31 Elem. Homeroom Teacher	33,745	6,127	26,721.78	85,520	95,773	12,605	21,571	180.9	
32 Secondary Teacher	31,134	8,538	23,964.94	88,280	102,798	12,713	22,719	181	
33 Other Teacher	12,766	7,141	8,440.46	86,600	99,976	12,744	22,319	180.9	
34 Elem. Specialist Teacher	5,155	6,793	4,084.32	89,378	101,916	12,819	22,373	180.9	
39 Orientat'n. & Mobl. Spec	16	11,666	14.2	95,550	105,244	12,407	24,183	180.4	
40 Other Support Personnel	5,463	6,792	2,273.40	97,260	115,614	12,626	25,574	182.4	
41 Library Media Specialist	1,087	8,839	755.36	99,150	115,817	12,809	25,694	180.9	
42 Counselor	3,288	9,714	2,992.69	88,386	103,059	12,755	22,869	180.9	
43 Occupational Therapist	665	10,666	562.76	89,664	104,919	13,268	22,206	181.2	
44 Social Worker	306	9,078	267.58	85,350	97,094	12,290	21,809	181	
45 Spch.-Lang. Path./Audio.	1,681	10,070	1,497.47	90,803	105,344	13,073	22,454	181.1	
46 Psychologist	1,214	12,502	1,072.91	92,652	110,742	12,827	23,685	181.1	
47 Nurse	737	7,373	648.32	79,405	90,473	13,364	19,807	180.8	
48 Physical Therapist	259	10,722	203.18	94,799	111,408	13,684	22,633	180.9	
49 Behavior Analyst	62	6,047	56.45	74,702	82,690	13,043	18,507	181.7	
51 Extracurricular	793	5,307	120.07	105,527	126,295	12,095	27,787	199.7	
52 Substitute Teacher	251	3,250	193.39	64,799	69,053	12,292	13,821	180.9	
61 Certificated on Leave	2,668	2,994	79.71	100,964	111,912	13,514	24,920	181.5	
63 Contractor Teacher	255	0	240.46	59,373	27,249	563	733	187.4	
64 Contractor ESA	191	0	169.37	87,002	11,489	5,655	7,281	181.8	
90 Classified on Leave	1,255	2,036	3.55	65,133	53,032	17,493	11,893	260	
91 Aide	30,096	474	16,409.61	52,091	54,344	20,898	11,066	260	
92 Crafts/Trades	1,762	311	1,620.60	76,363	76,478	12,537	17,006	260	
93 Laborer	270	116	217.89	66,343	66,074	12,659	14,931	260	
94 Office/Clerical	10,848	759	8,219.80	63,436	65,642	15,102	13,340	260	
95 Operator	6,279	406	3,196.44	60,753	71,064	21,929	14,558	260	
96 Professional	18,009	3,562	2,746.91	84,475	95,137	16,099	19,270	260	
97 Service Worker	12,623	283	9,205.83	53,996	56,158	15,147	12,879	260	
98 Technical	2,394	546	1,833.89	82,974	84,500	13,430	17,164	260	
99 Director/Supervisor	2,193	1,673	1,930.81	124,239	129,075	12,942	24,818	260	
State Summary	194,232	4,462	125,077.60	81,236	90,282	14,399	19,643	212.4	

Liv Finne is the Director of the Center for Education.

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12 “2022-23 Statewide Personnel Assignment Summary Profiles, Table 7: All School Personnel By Duty,” Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, at: <https://ospi.k12.wa.us/policy-funding/school-apportionment/school-publications/personnel-summary-reports>.