

# House Democrats plan to renege on their promise to limit local taxes; move would bring unfair inequities back to school funding

By LIV FINNE | BLOG | Mar 26, 2019

Yesterday House Democrats released their proposed budget plan. In a little-noticed provision, their bill would repeal the limit on local tax they passed just two years ago, and break their promise to reduce funding inequities in school funding.

In 2017 Democrats and Republicans passed a bi-partisan school funding bill, raising the state property tax an average of 17% and adding billions to state-funded education. The law sought to reduce inequities by limiting local taxes, so wealthy areas would not have an unfair advantage, by providing equitable state funding to all schools on a per-student basis.

In other words, the higher state tax burden was designed to reduce inequities between property-rich districts and property-poor ones. All parties, including Governor Inslee, celebrated the agreement.

Now, only two years later, House Democrats want to double the burden they imposed on families by repealing the limit on local taxes. They want urban rich areas, like Seattle and Bellevue, to get more funding, while poor communities are left behind.

The bill would increase local taxes by about \$3.7 billion, on top of the state property tax increases homeowners are seeing right now. A quick estimate shows local taxes could increase by an average \$1,370 a year per household.

Yesterday afternoon in public testimony, WEA union president Kim Mead said to her House Democrat allies:

“Thank you for restoring local school district levy flexibility by returning to a percentage-based formula, which allows voters to address specific student needs.”

She expressed enthusiastic approval of the House Democrat budget plan to raise taxes on Washington's citizens, claiming it would meet "student needs," but this is not true. The WEA union has a boundless appetite for higher taxes. The more staff the public schools hire, the richer and more powerful the union gets.

Kim Mead uses the "it's for the children" line to justify increasing taxes, but this is false. Schools in Washington state now get an average \$14,900 funding per student, more than most private schools.

This is the most education spending in state history, at a time when the imposed tax burden on families is the highest ever.

Finally, reneging on their promise creates problems with public trust. The bi-partisan celebration in 2017 was clear, higher state taxes and record spending on schools, along with a limit on local taxes that reduces unfair inequities between rich and poor.

Now the proposed House Democratic budget breaks that understanding – keeping the state property tax increase (of course!), and pulling back on the limit local tax limit. People are not stupid – they'll quickly see they've been played.

By violating the norms of public trust, and increasing property taxes twice in two years, the House budget risks weakening public support for schools. After all, who would want to be fooled again.