
CHAPTER FIVE

IMPROVING PUBLIC SCHOOLS

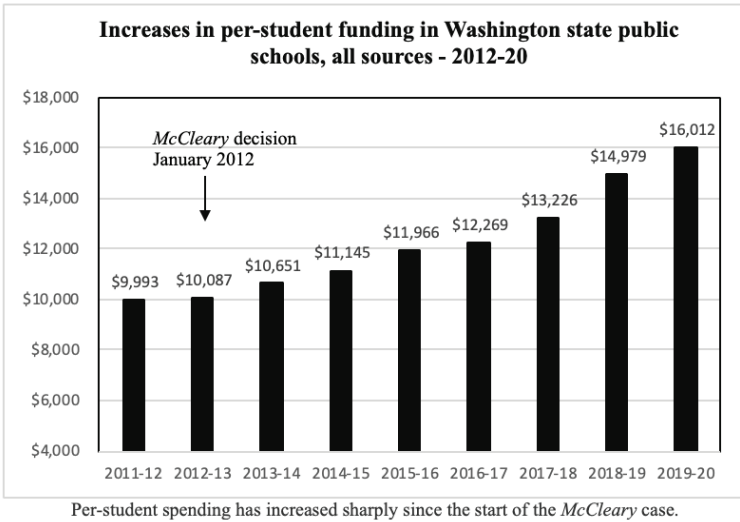
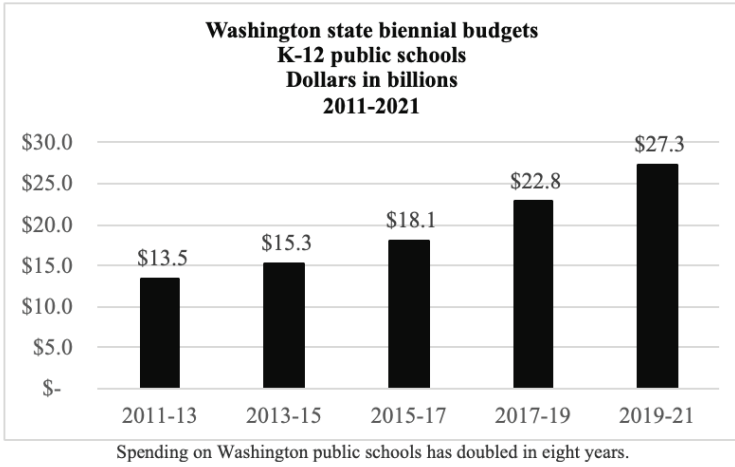
1. Policy recommendation: Recognize that Washington schools receive ample funding

In 2017 state lawmakers of both parties joined together and passed an historic bill to provide schools with the greatest funding increase in Washington state history. This bill, HB 2242, was the legislature’s final resolution of the state supreme court’s 2012 *McCleary* decision, and the latest in a series of six years of higher taxes and more funding to schools.

In June 2018 the court signaled approval of the bill and ended the *McCleary* case. The Washington state legislature has thus met the constitutional standard of “ample funding” for education, and today every public school across the state receives more money than ever before.

Public school spending has doubled in eight years

The 2019-21 state budget added \$4.5 billion to school funding, from \$22.8 billion to \$27.3 billion, an increase of 20 percent in one budget cycle. Overall, spending on public education in Washington has doubled in eight years, rising from \$13.5 billion in 2013 to \$27.3 billion for the budget ending in 2021.



Public schools now receive more funding than private schools

Officials at Washington’s public schools now receive \$16,000 on average for the education of each student, a dramatic increase over the pre-McCleary level of \$10,000 per student. Public school employees are now among the highest-paid workers in the state. By comparison, average private school tuition in Washington state

is \$9,680 for elementary schools and \$12,560 for high schools.¹ Teachers' salaries and benefit levels at private schools are consistently lower than those of their peers in public schools.

The comparable numbers for Seattle are even higher. The 2019-20 budget for Seattle Public Schools is \$1.04 billion, or \$19,740 per student for 52,930 students.² Seattle Public Schools operates 101 public schools, to which children are assigned based on zip code.

Policymakers should publicly recognize that Washington schools now receive ample funding, should express gratitude to the hard-working taxpayers of the state, and shift their focus to providing greater education choice to children and families.

2. Policy Recommendation: Since increasing school spending has not improved student learning, structural reforms are needed

State officials have weakened the tests for measuring student learning a number of times.

Meanwhile, an objective federal standard, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), referred to as the "Nation's Report Card," has been administered consistently to a statistically representative sample of Washington fourth and eighth grade students in reading, math, and science.

The same test is administered to fourth and eighth graders in other states. The NAEP is considered the most respected, reliable

1 "Private School Review," Washington Private Schools, accessed May 10, 2019, at <https://www.privateschoolreview.com/washington>.

2 "Seattle Public Schools, 2019-2020 Recommended Budget," by Denise Juneau, Superintendent and School Board, at https://www.seattleschools.org/UserFiles/Servers/Server_543/File/District/Departments/Budget/2020%20Budget%20Development/recommended20.pdf.

and consistent measure of academic progress in every state.

In Washington, trends in academic learning by public school students, as measured by NAEP, have not improved over the past ten years. In spite of large spending increases, student learning levels remain largely flat.³

The poor results for children raises an important question: “Why haven’t the large increases in funding produced the improvements in student learning that its promoters promised?”

One answer is that adding large increases in public funding to a bureaucratic and unwieldy education system prevents innovation, flexibility and professional creativity in the way students are taught. This finding is supported by experience, which shows that when the legislature increases funding for public schools, powerful political interests in the system focus first on policies that benefit themselves and then downgrade the goal of improving learning for children.

Since public education functions as a monopoly, there is little accountability and no career consequences for administrators or union executives due to failing test scores, a widening achievement gap and low graduation rates. As a result, the education system easily absorbs money to the benefit of established interests, while ineffective instructional programs continue unchanged.

Examples of the rigid policy limits that prevent school districts from using money effectively include:

- Mis-allocated personnel – only about half of school district employees are classroom teachers;

3 “Trends in spending and learning in Washington’s schools, 2006-2016,” by Liv Finne, Legislative Memo, Washington Policy Center, January 2017, at <http://www.washingtonpolicy.org/library/doclib/FINAL-PDF-Trends-in-Spending-and-LearningLiv-v2.pdf>.

- Low professional incentives – school administrators are barred by unions from offering bonuses or retention awards to the best teachers;
- Abuse and non-performance – union-imposed restrictions make it difficult to fire ineffective and abusive teachers;
- Restricting teacher recruitment – public schools may only hire applicants who have a special license, while private schools may hire any qualified applicant;
- Restricting teacher quality – schools of education hold monopoly power and are not held accountable for failing to train good teachers;
- Union financing – Unions make public school teachers pay dues, while union membership for private and public charter school teachers is completely voluntary;
- Ban on school choice – students are generally assigned to public schools on an involuntary basis based on zip code, while private school attendance is not restricted by geographical residence.
- Mis-allocated funding – Due to mandates, regulations and union requirements, only about 60 cents of every education dollar reaches the classroom in Washington.

For these reasons, lawmakers should enact structural reforms in public education that increase choice for parents and treat teachers like respected professionals, while recognizing that adding more money to an unreformed system won't help children.

3. Policy Recommendation: Expand access to charter schools

Charter schools are public schools that operate free from many of the restrictions placed on other public schools. With this local autonomy, teachers and principals in charter schools are able to create customized educational programs that better meet the learning needs of children, especially those living in underserved

communities.

Another key difference between charter schools and traditional public schools is that children are not assigned to charter schools based on zip code. Parents voluntarily enroll their children in a charter school, while most public school children are assigned to a school by the central school district office, with little choice or input from parents.

Charter schools are popular with parents

The innovative and high-performing programs offered by public charter schools make them popular with parents. Charter schools are the most rapidly-expanding school choice innovation in public education since a public school teacher proposed the idea in the 1990s. Today, there are 7,000 charter schools across the country.⁴ Over the past ten years, charter school enrollment has increased from 1.3 million in 2007-08 to nearly 3.2 million students in 2017-18.⁵

Research shows children attending charter schools are more likely to graduate from high school and to enroll in college.⁶ Stanford University researchers found that learning gains in urban charter schools are dramatic. Urban charter schools add the equivalent of 28 days of additional learning in reading and 40 days of additional learning in math every year.

4 “Charter School Datasets; Data Dashboard, 2019,” National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, at <https://data.publiccharters.org/>.

5 “A Growing Movement; America’s Largest Charter Public School Communities, Thirteenth Annual Edition,” January 2019, by Kevin Hesla, Jamison White, and Adam Gerstenfeld, National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, at https://www.publiccharters.org/sites/default/files/documents/2019-03/rd1_napcs_enrollment_share_report%2003112019.pdf.

6 “Guide to Major Charter School Studies,” by Liv Finne, Policy Brief, Washington Policy Center, July 23, 2012, at www.washingtonpolicy.org/publications/detail/guide-to-major-charter-school-studies.

For low-income and minority students the gains are 44 extra days of learning in reading and 59 extra days in math.⁷ A recent Vanderbilt University study shows students attending charter high schools are more likely to stay in college and to experience higher earnings in the workforce.⁸

Washington voters approve charter schools

In 2012, Washington became the first state to legalize charter schools by passing a popular citizens' measure, Initiative 1240.⁹ Unions immediately attacked the new law, gaining a ruling from the state Supreme Court that sought to shut down every charter school in the state.¹⁰

However, the legislature passed a bi-partisan bill in 2016 which funds charter schools from the Opportunity Pathways Account.¹¹ Governor Jay Inslee, who opposes charter schools, reluctantly agreed to let the popular bill become law without his signature.

7 “A Rebuttal of Weingarten on the Facts,” by Margaret Raymond, Director of the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University, Huffpost Education, April 15, 2016, at www.huffingtonpost.com/margaret-raymond/a-rebuttal-of-weingarten-_b_9701622.html.

8 “Charter High Schools’ Effects on Long-Term Attainment and Earnings,” by Tim R. Sass, Ron W. Zimmer, Brian P. Gill and T. Kevin Booker, Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management, Vanderbilt University, 2016, at news.vanderbilt.edu/files/pam_21913_Rev-FINAL-4416.pdf.

9 Initiative Measure No. 1240, “Concerns creation of a public charter school system,” Office of the Secretary of State, General Election results, November 6, 2012, at results.vote.wa.gov/results/20121106/Initiative-Measure-No-1240-Concerns-creation-of-a-public-charter-school-system.html.

10 League of Women Voters of Washington, El Centro de la Raza, Washington Association of School Administrators, Washington Education Association, Wayne Au, Pat Braman, Donna Boyer, and Sarah Lucas v. State of Washington, en banc opinion, Supreme Court of the State of Washington, September 4, 2015, No. 89714-0, at www.courts.wa.gov/opinions/pdf/897140.pdf.

11 ESSSB 6194, “Concerning public schools that are not common schools,” enacted April 3, 2016, without Governor Inslee’s signature, at app.leg.wa.gov/billinfo/summary.aspx?bill=6194&year=2015.

Washington has ten charter schools, located in Seattle, Kent, Spokane, Tukwila, Tacoma and Walla Walla. The schools are oversubscribed and maintain waiting lists of families seeking to enroll. Sixty percent of the 3,500 students attending these schools come from low-income, minority families. Many parents in Washington, particularly in underserved communities, regard charter schools as a better option for learning than their local public school.

Five new charter schools will soon open in Bellingham, Bremerton, Federal Way, South Seattle, Skyway, and Spokane.

State law limits the number of charter schools to 40, in a public system of more than 2,000 schools. Forty charter schools are clearly insufficient to meet the current needs of families, let alone the increasing needs of underserved families in the future.

Repeal the cap on charter schools

Lawmakers should repeal the artificial limit on the number of public charter schools that can serve children in the state. Given their popularity with parents, and the bipartisan support of the charter school law, lifting the limit is well within the ability of the legislature. Expanding family access to charter schools is part of fulfilling the state's paramount constitutional duty to make ample provision for the education of all children living within the state.¹²

Provide charter schools local levy and capital funding

Charter schools receive state and federal funding, but they are denied local levy funding. Local levy funding amounts to about \$2,300 per student on average, about 17% of operating revenue for

12 "Article IX, Section 1, Education," Constitution of the State of Washington, enacted 1889, at leg.wa.gov/LawsAndAgencyRules/Pages/constitution.aspx.

most public schools.

In Seattle, local taxpayers supplement the public schools with \$3,000 in local levy funds per student, money charter schools do not get. Charter school families in Seattle must pay local school taxes like everyone else, but their children are not allowed to benefit from the resulting levy revenue.

Officials have also cut funding for classrooms, buildings and other facilities, so that charter public schools actually have to pay rent.

Fairness and equity require giving Washington charter schools the same local levy and capital funding other public schools receive. No one wants a system that gives minority children less money for their education than other children receive.

4. Policy Recommendation: Expand access to family choice in education

Over the past 20 years, officials in most states have recognized that parents need greater family choice in public education, because it improves learning outcomes for children.

Helping parents get involved in making education decisions is the purpose of school choice programs. These programs provide a variety of ways, including scholarships, vouchers, tax-credit programs, Education Savings Accounts, charter schools and online learning, that give parents the means to decide how their children are educated.

Family choice in education is common in other states

Family choice programs are now common across the country. Thirty states and the District of Columbia operate 65 family choice

learning programs that fund the education of more than 480,000 students.¹³ Under these programs families direct the public education funding to which they are entitled to the private school of their choice.

Family choice programs include directing funding to public schools as well – the key is that parents, not central office bureaucrats, direct resources in the best interest of children. Parent choice in education improves public schools by giving administrators a strong incentive to serve families first, ahead of entrenched political interests in the system.

The education monopoly provides less service at higher costs

Without incentives, school districts often provide less service at higher costs, and suffer recurring union strikes, because the career professionals know the education monopoly will protect them, even when schools fail to educate students.

Efforts to hold schools accountable have not worked. Accountability measures are routinely manipulated to create the appearance of improvement, when in reality the rigor of academic learning standards is being reduced.

For example, in August 2015, the Washington State Board of Education lowered the standard for passing state tests in English and math from a 3 to a 2.5, breaking its promise to make all students “college and career ready.”¹⁴ Another example is how the state Superintendent of Public Instruction permits districts artificially to inflate graduation statistics by excluding those students most likely to drop out, that is, students enrolled in a drop-

13 “The ABC’s of School Choice, 2019 Edition,” by Robert C. Enlow, *Ed Choice*, at <https://www.edchoice.org/research/the-abcs-of-school-choice/>.

14 “State Board of Education sets lower bar on Common Core tests,” by Donna Blankenship, Associated Press, August 5, 2015, at komonews.com/news/local/state-board-of-education-sets-lower-bar-on-common-core-tests.

out reengagement program.¹⁵

Family choice creates accountability

Family choice in education creates real accountability. Parents care about the needs of their children, and cannot be gamed, threatened or silenced. School choice allows parents assigned to low-performing schools the option of sending their children to an alternative school or online program that meets their needs and, most importantly, to direct their children’s public education funding to where it will do the most good.

At the same time, choice programs create powerful incentives for traditional systems to improve. School choice gives central district administrators a reason to reform their schools, so they do not lose families to the available alternatives. An academic review of 33 empirical education studies found that 32 of them concluded school choice policies have a beneficial effect on traditional schools.¹⁶

The highest-quality research shows students gain from having school choice, and that traditional school systems respond to school choice by improving their services for children.¹⁷

15 “State policy artificially boosts district-level grad rates by leaving out some at-risk students,” by Ashley Gross, KNKX Radio, April 23, 2019, at <https://www.knkx.org/post/state-policy-artificially-boosts-district-level-grad-rates-leaving-out-some-risk-students>.

16 “A Win-Win Solution; The Empirical Evidence on School Choice,” by Greg Forster, EDChoice, May 2016, at <https://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/2016-5- Win-Win-Solution-WEB.pdf>.

17 “Choosing to Learn,” by Joseph Bast, Jason Bedrick, Lindsey Burke, Andrew J. Coulson, Robert C. Enlow, Kara Kerwin, and Herbert J. Walberg, CATO Institute Commentary, March 12, 2014, at <https://www.cato.org/publications/commentary/choosing-learn>.

School choice is popular with all groups

Seventy-three percent of voters surveyed in a June 2019 nationwide poll said they support school choice programs that give “parents the right to use tax dollars designated for their child’s education to send their child to the public or private school which best serves their needs.”¹⁸

The pro-school choice coalition is bipartisan and diverse, with majority support from Latinos (73 percent) African-Americans (67 percent), and Millennials (75 percent).¹⁹ Support for private school scholarships grows to 83 percent for families with special needs children.²⁰

5. Policy Recommendation: Allow special needs children access to state-funded Education Savings Accounts

Lawmakers should provide \$15,000 a year in direct aid to families with special needs children to pay for private education services. Parents would receive a deposit of public funds into a government-issued Education Savings Account (ESA) with restricted, learning-focused uses.

Families and caseworkers could use the money to pay for

18 “2019 National School Choice Poll,” American Federation for Children, June 2019, at <https://www.federationforchildren.org/2019-national-school-choice-poll/>. See also “Joseph Lieberman: School Choice is a winning policy, so why don’t Democrats support it?” by Senator Joseph Lieberman, Fox News Channel, July 22, 2019, at <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/joe-lieberman-school-choice-democrats-2020-election>.

19 Ibid.

20 “2017 National School Choice Poll,” American Federation for Children, January 2017 at <https://www.federationforchildren.org/poll-public-support-school-choice-remains-strong-supportive-federal-movement-increase-school-choice/>.

specialized services from private tutors and private schools for the children. The state treasurer would audit ESAs to ensure the money is used for education. Participating students would take a nationally-recognized test in math and English to demonstrate progress in learning.

The states of Arizona, Florida, Mississippi, Tennessee and North Carolina already provide an ESA to their special needs families. Twelve states give special needs families direct assistance to attend private schools, and South Carolina provides both a tax credit scholarship and a direct tax credit to help special needs families.

By contrast, Washington's special education system is highly centralized, wasteful and bureaucratic.

Parents often complain about district reluctance to evaluate a child for an Individual Education Plan (IEP), and about the mediocre quality of evaluations that are conducted. If a child is granted an IEP, parents say it often contains vague goals and objectives, and that their children don't receive an appropriate public education.

Administrators of the public schools always say the solution is more money. But adding more money won't help children stymied by outdated teaching methods, insensitive bureaucracies, and restrictive union rules. More money will not solve the problem of imposing a standardized system on the unique learning needs of these vulnerable children.

Lawmakers should provide fully-funded Education Savings Accounts so that families with special needs receive the best services immediately. This would not only benefit children, it would show that lawmakers care more about helping special needs children than about funding a bureaucratic legacy system.

6. Policy Recommendation: Provide a \$10,000 tax credit to fund a private school option for foster children

Children are placed in the care of the state because a judge has decided a particular home setting is dangerous and that separating the child from parents is in the child's best interest. Such homes are characterized by parents involved in crime, drug or alcohol abuse, low rates of marriage, disruptive or chaotic daily routine, and abuse of children through direct harm or neglect.²¹

In 2017, Washington had 10,068 children in foster care. Some 2,167 of these children have no home to return to and are awaiting adoption into a stable permanent family.²² About 4,500 of Washington foster children are of school age and, as required by state law, they have been placed by case workers in local public schools.²³

Children in foster care often fail in public schools

Foster children face many problems in obtaining an education from the current system of public education. Common systematic failures experienced by foster children include:

- Changing schools during the school year;
- Late enrollment after a change of residence;
- Lost, missing, or incomplete school records;
- Assigned to a low-performing school;
- Lack of stable adult advisors;

21 "Guide to Supporting Students in Foster Care," by Washington State Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and Treehouse, 2018, page 12, at <https://www.treehouseforkids.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/treehouse2017final2ndedinteractive.pdf>.

22 "Washington foster care and adoption guidelines," AdoptUSKids, accessed October 16, 2018, at <https://www.adoptuskids.org/adoption-and-foster-care/how-toadopt-and-foster/state-information/washington>.

23 Ibid.

- Learning delays in reading, math, and writing;
- Increased social and emotional stress;
- High drop-out rate.²⁴

As a result, less than half of students in foster care in Washington state graduate from high school on time, resulting in increased social disruption and reduced chances for success in life.²⁵

Barriers created by state law

Currently, state lawmakers generally bar foster children and foster youth from accessing educational services provided by private schools, even in cases when state case managers know such services would be in the best interests of the child.

Creating a school choice scholarship program for foster children

HB 1969, a bill introduced in 2019 by Representative Chris Corry (R-Yakima), would improve access to quality educational services for foster children by creating a school choice scholarship program.²⁶ HB 1969 would generate private funds through a tax credit to provide children and youth in foster care the option of

24 “Barriers to Improving Educational Outcomes for Foster Youth,” Foster Children and Youth Educational Technical Assistance Mental Health Advocacy Services, Inc., 2003, funded by the Stuart Foundation, at <http://users.neo.registeredsite.com/3/8/9/12669983/assets/Barriers-FYEd2003.pdf>.

25 “Educational Outcomes for Foster Youth—Benchmarks,” Washington State Institute for Public Policy, December 2012, at http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/ReportFile/1115/Wsipp_Educational-Outcomes-of-Foster-YouthBenchmarks_Full-Report.pdf.

26 HB 1969, An Act relating to creating and funding a school choice scholarship program for foster students, Section 1, Subsection 2(d)(ii), at: <http://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2019-20/Pdf/Bills/House%20Bills/1969.pdf>. Co-sponsors of HB 1969 are Representatives Dan Griffey, Michelle Calder, Brandon Vick, Larry Hoff, Bob McCaslin and Andrew Barkis. The bill was introduced February 8, 2019.

attending a public or private school that is in the best interest of the child.

Foster child scholarships would be funded by providing a Business and Occupation tax credit of equal value to those who make a voluntary contribution to the program. Scholarships would provide the lesser of \$10,000 or the annual cost of attending an approved, participating school.²⁷

The value of an individual tax credit would be limited to \$200,000, and the total value of the program would be limited to \$20 million a year.²⁸

Eighteen states now provide 22 different tax credit scholarship programs. These programs allow children who are low-income, special needs, and assigned to low-performing schools the opportunity to attend a private school.²⁹ One of Arizona's three tax credit scholarship programs, Lexi's Law, is for disabled students and students placed in foster care.³⁰

7. Policy Recommendation: Avoid repeating failed reforms that have not improved schools

The *McCleary* case – more money, prototypical model, and small class sizes provided little lasting benefit

For the past decade the state of Washington has pursued the policy of increasing funding to the schools. Included in

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 The eighteen states are Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, and Virginia.

30 "The ABCs of School Choice; The comprehensive guide to every private school choice program in America, 2018 Edition," by *EdChoice*, page 89, at <https://www.edchoice.org/research/the-abcs-of-school-choice/>.

the reforms pushed by the 2012 McCleary decision of the state supreme court is the Prototypical School Model. This model mandates restrictive staffing ratios and creating twenty work categories, like “media specialist,” “social worker,” and “technology staff.” This funding model also required Washington state to pay for smaller class sizes.

This funding model serves the interests of the union because it requires the hiring of a certain number of staff, regardless of whether this spending helps students. Student learning has remained flat, even as district payrolls have swelled with increased staff, specialists and paid union executives.

WEA union diverted class size reduction money to higher pay for staff

Lawmakers approved more than \$500 million in the 2017-19 state budget for reduced class sizes.³¹ They promised class sizes of 17 students in grades K-3, 27 students in grades 4-6, and 28 students in grades 7-12.³²

Then, in the fall of 2018, the WEA union lobbyists targeted class size reduction funding to be transferred to provide additional, double-digit pay increases to staff.

This pattern is repeated over and over again. The WEA union loudly promotes a popular program that is supposed to help students to demand more money for schools. A few months after more money is approved, WEA executives threaten illegal strikes to close schools if the money is not diverted to provide

31 “Is Seattle Public Schools bargaining away class size reduction money?” by Liv Finne, Washington Policy Center, August 16, 2018, at <https://www.washingtonpolicy.org/publications/detail/is-seattle-public-schools-bargaining-away-class-size-reduction-money>.

32 “Operating Budget, 2019-21,” Engrossed Substitute House Bill 1109, passed April 28, 2019 and signed by Governor Inslee on May 21, 2019, at: <https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary?BillNumber=1109&Year=2019&Initiative=false>.

pay raises. Out of fear of continued controversy and bullying, school administrators usually give in, and children are deprived of promised services.

The failure of high-stakes testing

In 1993 policymakers passed legislation to require students to take the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL), in the belief that high-stakes testing would create incentives for the schools to improve. Testing was supposed to be the state's public education accountability measure.

Twenty years later Governor Gregoire repealed the WASL requirement. Then in 2014, Governor Inslee adopted the weaker Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium test, and in 2019 he ended all requirements that students pass a high-stakes test to earn a high school diploma.

Routine testing is an important tool for educators, to assess where students stand and to identify areas where they need extra help. Mandated high-stakes testing, however, failed to create accountability for teachers and administrators in the system. The WEA union vigorously resisted public accountability, and urged parents to boycott the tests.

The political experience in Olympia shows that top-down, mandated high-stakes testing does not work, and that real accountability is only achieved when parents have access to broad school choice, so that children can be moved to where they receive the best-quality learning.

8. Policy Recommendation: Repeal life-time tenure rules and certification limits that keep the best teachers out of public schools

Washington state law bars anyone from teaching in a public school who does not have an approved certificate. This ban does not apply, however, to private schools. This is one reason private schools are consistently better than public ones. A Harvard Graduate School of Education study found that a formal teaching certificate “matters little” in raising student classroom achievement.³³

Teaching certificates do not assure teacher quality

Harvard researchers found that a teacher’s mastery of subject matter is far more important to student learning than a state-issued certificate. In theory, an official certificate is supposed to assure teacher quality. In the real world of classrooms and children, however, there is a marked difference between paper certificate requirements and being a good teacher.

The legislature has granted private schools the advantage of hiring based on quality and experience rather than paper credentials. Many private schools hire quality faculty who hold doctorate degrees or are experienced business professionals, but do not hold formal teaching certificates.

These are not elite private schools; they are often located in low-income neighborhoods and their teachers take on the noble work of educating the hardest-to-teach students. Lawmakers should allow public schools to recruit the best classroom talent available on an equal basis as their private sector counterparts.

33 “Photo Finish: Teacher certification doesn’t guarantee a winner,” by Thomas J. Kane, Jonah E. Rockoff and Douglas O. Staiger, *Education Next*, 2008, at educationnext.org/photo-finish/.

Effective teachers raise student achievement

Teacher tenure laws grant automatic lifetime employment to public school teachers after three years, making it nearly impossible to fire a bad teacher in a public school. Private schools, in contrast, may hire and fire teachers at will, allowing private schools to dismiss poor performers and continuously improve teacher quality.

Research shows that an effective teacher in the classroom is more important than any other factor, including smaller class size, in raising student achievement.³⁴ A good teacher can make as much as a full year's difference in the learning growth of students.³⁵ Students taught by a high-quality teacher three years in a row score 50 percentile points higher on standardized tests than students of weak teachers.³⁶ The research also shows that students taught by a weak teacher two years in a row may never catch up.

The research indicates the best teachers have the following qualities:³⁷

- Mastery of the subject matter;
- Five years or more of teaching experience;

34 "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.

35 Ibid.

36 "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.

37 "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/.

- Training in content knowledge and high levels of classroom competency;
- Strong academic skills, curiosity and excitement about learning for its own sake.

Improving teacher quality is far more cost-effective than reducing class size

Research shows that, compared to having an effective teacher, smaller class-size benefits are minor. A strong teacher can deliver a year more of learning to students than a weak teacher. Lawmakers should enact policies that improve teacher quality, which is a far more cost-effective strategy than reducing class sizes, and is much better for students.³⁸

Creating renewed respect for teachers

Teachers should be hired based on a knowledge and a 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 dismissed, regardless of artificial certification and tenure rules.

Lawmakers can level the playing field by repealing lifetime tenure rules and ending the limits on teacher hiring to allow public schools to hire the best teachers, while drawing new talent into the profession. The result would be renewed respect for teachers and, most importantly, a better learning environment for public school students.

38 “Students First – Why an effective teachers matters: A Q & A with Eric Hanushek,” by Eric Hanushek, Stanford University, Hoover Institution, February 2011, at <http://hanushek.stanford.edu/opinions/students-first-why-effective-teacher-matters-q-eric-hanushek>.

Additional Resources

“Update on charter schools---Legislature continues funding discrimination against charter school families,” by Liv Finne, Policy Brief, Washington Policy Center, September 2019

“School Funding in the 2019 Legislative Session: Washington state public schools now receive more money than most private schools,” by Liv Finne, Policy Notes, Washington Policy Center, July 2019

“HB 1969, to create and fund a tax credit scholarship for foster care children,” by Liv Finne, Legislative Memo, Washington Policy Center, March 2019

“A relic of anti-religious bigotry, Washington’s Blaine Amendment should no longer block school choice for families,” by Liv Finne, Legislative Memo, Washington Policy Center, February 2019

“Public funding of private schools in Washington state,” by Liv Finne, Policy Brief, Washington Policy Center, November 2018

“New government report shows massive \$9.7 billion increase in education spending provided no improvement for Washington students,” by Liv Finne, Policy Notes, Washington Policy Center, April 2018

“Overview of public school choice programs: How national and state-level public school choice improves learning opportunities for families and children,” by Liv Finne, Policy Brief, Washington Policy Center, October 2017

“Education Money for Families: How Education Savings Accounts can help children learn in Washington state,” by Liv Finne, Policy Brief, Washington Policy Center, January 2016

