
CHAPTER FIVE

EDUCATION POLICY

1. K-12 Education Spending

Recommendations

1. Return the education system to its core function by focusing resources on classroom instruction by teachers.
2. Put local school principals in charge of their own budgets. Allow principals to control hiring, firing and the curriculum, then hold them accountable for student learning.
3. Education spending should be distributed based on individual basic student grants. The grant should follow the student to the public school of the family's choice.
4. End rigid categorical programs to eliminate wasteful administrative oversight. Allow principals to direct education dollars to the classroom.
5. Remove restrictive class size requirements to allow innovation and flexibility in spending education dollars.
6. Create a transparent accounting system, accessible online, to inform policymakers, parents and taxpayers about how education dollars are spent.

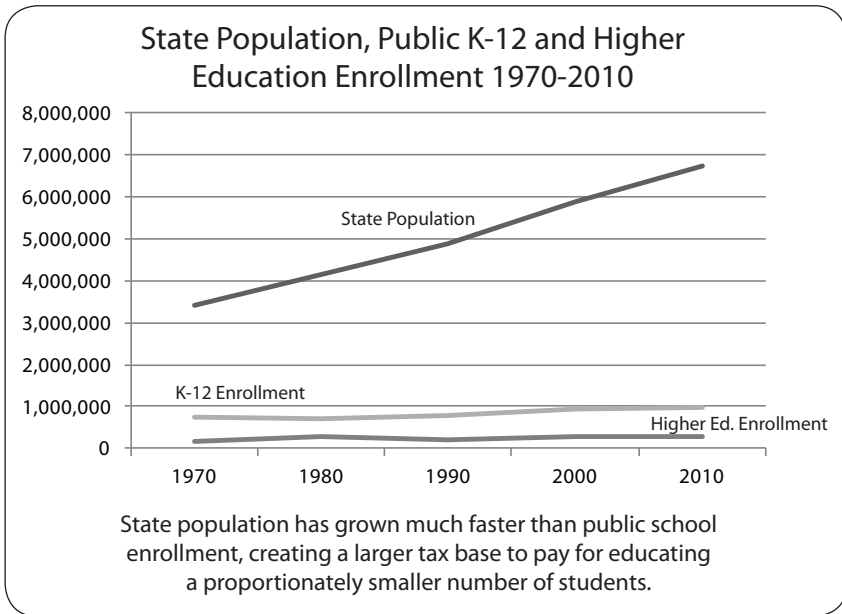
Background

Public schools were established in Washington in 1854 by the first territorial legislature. The system started with 53 schools and about 2,000 students.¹ A century and a half later, there are just under a million (988,283) K-12 public school students attending 2,011 schools in 295 districts across the state.²

Chapter 5: Education Policy

The state's total population has grown much faster than the number of students, creating a larger tax base to pay for educating a proportionately smaller number of students. Between 1970 and 2010, the state population nearly doubled, growing by 97%,³ while K-12 public school enrollment increased by only 30% (about 230,000 students).⁴ At the same time, the number of public school employees increased by 72%.⁵

Population and student growth trends are shown below:⁶



The Rise in K-12 Spending

K-12 education is the largest single expenditure in the state budget. For 2011–13, the total operating funds for Washington public schools is nearly \$16 billion, which includes state and federal funding. The bulk of K-12 education spending, about \$13.7 billion, comes from the state General Fund budget.⁷ About \$1.9 billion comes from federal grants.⁸ In addition, a further \$4 billion is provided through local property tax levies.⁹

Details on how the state portion of education funding is spent are shown in the following table.¹⁰

2011–13 State Basic Education Programs (in millions of \$)		
General Apportionment	10,459.7	75.8%
Special Education	1,350.1	9.8%
Transportation	649.8	4.7%
Learning Assistance Program	252.2	1.8%
Bilingual Education	172.5	1.2%
Highly Capable Students	17.5	0.1%
Institutions	32.6	0.2%
Subtotal: Basic Education Programs	\$12,933.4	93.5%
2009–11 Non-basic Education Programs (in millions of \$)		
Levy Equalization	611.7	2.2%
Education Reform	158.1	1.1%
State Office Administration	48.6	0.3%
Educational Service Districts	15.8	0.1%
Food Service	14.2	0.1%
Subtotal: Non-Basic Education Programs	\$848.4	
Total – State Funds*	\$13,781.8	100.0%

*“State Funds” include the General Fund-State and the Education Legacy Trust Account, together known as Near General Fund-State.

Altogether, average spending per student in Washington public schools is about \$10,300 a year, not including capital spending.¹¹

Of the money allocated to public education, only about 59% is devoted to classroom instruction. The rest is spent on administrators, maintenance personnel, special education, counseling, transportation, food services and interest on debt. In addition to the operating budget, an additional \$1 billion is spent on school construction. The state spends a further \$11.1 billion on higher education and other education programs.¹²

Yet, even with more funding, dropout rates are high. State officials report only 73% of students typically graduate from high school,¹³ and an independent estimate shows that only 65.6% of the class of 2008 graduated from Washington’s high schools.¹⁴ In contrast, the graduation rate in private schools is often 90% or higher.

Chapter 5: Education Policy

Washington ranks ninth worst in the nation in dropout rates, with only eight states having a lower graduation rate. Washington is one of only 13 states that did not improve public-school graduation rates between 1998 and 2008.¹⁵

Washington students who do complete public high school courses often find the education they received is incomplete. Administrators report that 37% of freshmen attending a four-year university or two-year community college must take remedial courses in math or reading before they are ready for college-level work.¹⁶

The state provides a basic education grant for every enrolled K-12 student through the general apportionment formula to school districts across the state. The average state basic grant was \$5,192 per student in school year 2010–11.¹⁷ However, the amount of funding school districts actually receive varies according to arbitrary staffing ratios and teacher seniority rules imposed by Olympia.

The Prototype School Reform and School Finance

In 2009, the legislature enacted a law intended to dramatically reduce classroom sizes in grades K-3, expand the definition of basic education, expand early learning, change the evaluation and pay of teachers, and change how local schools are funded.¹⁸

The new law created twenty work categories, such as “media specialist,” “social worker,” and “technology staff,” and provided that every school district had to hire a set number of employees in each category per 1,000 students. The ratios chosen were those thought needed to staff a so called “prototype school,” a theoretical concept created by two university professors, Dr. Allen Picus and Dr. Lawrence O. Odden.¹⁹

The prototype school theory calls for funding of full-day kindergarten, class sizes of 15 students or fewer in kindergarten, first, second and third grades, increased one-on-one tutoring, more technology in the classroom, classrooms with children of different ages, summer school, and a full program for gifted students.

The prototype school concept is unproven and expensive. As applied in Washington, it calls for adding about \$3.4 billion a year to

the cost of public education and the hiring of 5,500 more public-sector employees.²⁰

Policy Analysis

Despite the legislature's efforts to create an expansive prototype school funding model, education officials consistently say they need more money. Yet by any reasonable measure, taxpayers in Washington are providing ample funding for public education.

Rising Trend in Spending

K-12 education funding in Washington has increased significantly in recent decades, even after adjustment for inflation. Between 1980 and 2011, state and local spending on K-12 schools more than doubled, from just under \$4.8 billion to over \$13 billion.²¹

Washington Public Schools are Well-Funded

Advocates for increased spending argue education is underfunded because it makes up a smaller share of the state budget than in the past, or that schools should spend a larger share of people's personal income. Their choice of statistics is selective, however, and it is only by looking at broad measures that an accurate picture emerges.

As the state expands spending on non-education programs, the *proportion* of the budget going to public education falls, even as the *amount* spent on education is increasing. Public schools in Washington are receiving more public money than in the past, even as state spending on other programs expands. Despite claims that schools have been "cut," state education funding in real terms has steadily increased over time.

In fact, today per-student spending is higher than ever, and, therefore, school district administrators have more resources than in the past to educate a given number of students. In addition, more taxpayers are paying into the system than ever before.

More Spending Does Not Lead to Better Learning

While education spending in Washington has increased sharply in recent decades, there has been little or no increase in student

Chapter 5: Education Policy

performance. Nationally, the money spent on K-12 schools has also been dramatically increasing, even after figures are adjusted for inflation. Although per-student spending continues to rise, state and national test scores show no significant improvement in student performance.²²

Shifting from Funding Staff Ratios to Funding Children

Currently, Washington allocates funding to the schools by funding a certain number of classroom teachers to meet defined classroom sizes, plus staff ratio formulas. This funding is allocated according to a preset salary grid and blindly pays teachers based on seniority and training credits, not on their ability to teach students.

In this system, no account is taken of actual student needs at the local level, nor in recognizing and rewarding particularly talented teachers. It also does not account for ineffective teachers. If parents complain, bad teachers are simply transferred to another classroom, or to another school.

Staffing schools by allocating ratios allows central school district bureaucracies to control the assignment of personnel to individual schools. Schools have little flexibility to alter the mix of resources in a way that would most benefit students. As a result, today in Washington state, principals are hamstrung by lack of control over their budgets and staff hiring. Local principals in Washington state control less than five percent of the money allocated to their schools.²³

Washington's Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) reports that:

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.²⁴

Local principals have almost no control over which teachers are assigned to their schools, or whether a particular teacher's skills and experience match with the needs of students.

Individual Education Grants

A better method of school finance, called individual education grants or “fund the child,” has revitalized schools across the country. This approach has proved successful in Cincinnati, Baltimore, San Francisco, Houston, St. Paul and Oakland, and there are pilot programs in Boston, Chicago and New York City.

Under this system, education funding follows the child to the public school of the family’s choice. Schools that are successful attract students. Schools that do not teach students and do not satisfy parents see declining enrollment. This signals to the district superintendent that the leadership of that school needs to be replaced.

Funding for each child can include a dollar multiplier to assist children who require more resources, such as disabled children, children with limited English proficiency and poor children. Devoting these dollars to local schools allows principals to decide how to best educate these children. Accountability is built in. Schools that do not educate children are reorganized and their failed leadership is replaced.

Categorical Spending Programs and Administrative Waste

In addition to basic education programs, the state funds numerous categorical non-basic education programs. One of those categories, “Education Reform,” covers thirty-three different programs.²⁵

Funding a large number of categorical spending programs is a central bureaucrat’s dream come true. In one study, UCLA Professor of Management Bill Ouchi found that:

After the legislature allocates the new money [to education], that cash doesn’t go directly to individual schools—it goes to the district central office. There, the bureaucrats don’t send dollars to the schools. Instead, they hire people to perform new tasks in the schools. The problem with doing it this way is that the decisions on exactly what kind of staff each school needs aren’t made at the local school, they’re made far away in the central office.²⁶

Combining categorical programs into a single revenue stream would allow school superintendents to reduce central staff and free

Chapter 5: Education Policy

money for student instruction. It would also relieve local principals of having to apply and report on a range of different funding sources for their schools. Instead, education funding should be provided to principals on a straight per-student basis, without categorical limits, so principals can direct resources as needed to the classroom.

Create a Transparent Accounting System

Currently it is difficult for policymakers or the public to understand how public education money is spent, because the Office of Superintendent of Instruction does not report how spending relates to student learning. A JLARC study identified the kinds of data that should be made easily available to policymakers and the public:²⁷

- School expenditure data
- Staff/teacher descriptive data
- Student descriptive data and outcome
- School/community descriptive data

Some progress has been made in providing the public with more information about the public school system. Detailed and comprehensive student achievement data for every school in Washington is now available through the State Board of Education's Public School Accountability Index.

Building-level school expenditure data will now be provided by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, but school districts still do not have to show how their spending relates to student learning, so further efforts at public transparency are needed.

Recommendations

- 1. Return the education system to its core function by focusing resources on classroom instruction by teachers.** Independent research shows that placing a good teacher in the classroom is the single most effective way to educate children, especially if that teacher has mastery of the subject matter. Over the years, the school system has been given more and more tasks unrelated to educating children. Education leaders should direct the public's money toward academics, and not be asked to solve the broad range of problems facing society.

- 2. Put local school principals in charge of their own budgets. Allow principals to control hiring, firing and the curriculum, then hold them accountable for student learning.** The proven experience of private schools and charter public schools shows children are best served when the onsite leader, the principal, assembles an effective teaching team. Principals know the needs of their own schools, and they know which students need additional help. Principals should be held accountable for student learning, and those who prove ineffective should be replaced.
- 3. Education spending should be based on individual basic student grants. The grant should follow the student to the public school of the family's choice.** Policymakers should allow parental choice among public schools, not staffing ratios, to guide funding allocations. Parents who voluntarily choose their child's public school become more involved and have a shared interest in improving the education of all children at the school.
- 4. End rigid categorical programs to eliminate wasteful administrative oversight. Allow principals to direct education dollars to the classroom.** This policy change would allow more efficiency and local innovation in spending education dollars at all levels of decision-making.
- 5. Remove restrictive class size requirements to allow innovation and flexibility in spending education dollars.** Reducing class sizes has not resulted in improvements in student learning, as advocates promised. Instead, policymakers should remove legal restrictions that micro-manage schools, and let principals implement the kinds of learning programs that work best for their students.
- 6. Create a transparent accounting system, accessible online, to inform policymakers, parents and taxpayers about how education dollars are spent.** The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction should improve the collecting of relevant information about the funding and performance of local schools, especially about how spending on personnel relates to student learning, and make this information easily available online to policymakers, parents and the general public.

Chapter 5: Education Policy

2. Putting the Principal in Charge

Recommendations

1. Allow school principals to be true education leaders.
2. Allow any qualified professional to apply to be a public school principal and train principals to assume a leadership role.
3. Hold principals accountable by grading schools on an A, B, C, D, F performance scale, using the State Board of Education Accountability Index.
4. End principal tenure so non-performing principals can be dismissed and replaced with effective education leaders.

Background

Years of research show that the second most important influence on student learning, after teacher effectiveness, is the quality of the school principal.²⁸ Effective principals are able to set clear goals, establish high expectations and provide necessary support and training, so teachers can succeed and students can learn.

Under the current system, school principals in Washington do not control teacher hiring, the curriculum, the budget or day-to-day management in their own schools. In almost all cases, central administrators and labor union officials decide when and where teachers will work. Local principals cannot assemble a teaching team or match teacher skills with the needs of students. Mandatory salary and work restrictions make it very difficult for a principal to reward a good teacher or fire a bad one.

Policy Analysis

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 an ability to teach.

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

To ensure 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 a study by 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.²⁹

Remove Legal Barriers that Micro-Manage Schools

Top-down mandates—such as union 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.

Chapter 5: Education Policy

Open 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, nonprofits or military experience should be allowed to enter a principal-training program. For example, former United States Army general, John Stanford, had no background in education when he was hired to head the largest school district in the state.³⁰

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.

Give Schools A through F grades, Based on Accountability Index Performance

The new State Board of Education Accountability Index ranks schools on a scale based on five outcomes. The outcomes measure student learning in reading, writing, math and science, plus each school's graduation rate.³¹ Using these measures, schools were placed in one of five categories: Exemplary, Very Good, Good, Fair or Struggling. The great majority of schools, 1,208, rank as only Fair or Struggling, while just 212 schools, barely 10%, rank as either Very Good or Exemplary.³²

Public schools should receive letter grades each year based on their performance on the state Accountability Index. In this way, parents would better understand how well or how poorly their schools are performing. Administrators of schools receiving a C, D or F would have a strong incentive to work hard to raise their schools grade ranking, to the benefit of their students.

Grading schools on an objective A to F grading scale is one of the reforms that dramatically raised the quality of public schools in Florida.³³ Attention from the media was intense, and districts across the state started working hard to encourage schools to improve their grades. Many Florida schools formerly earning Ds and Fs now earn As, Bs and Cs, and

some school districts set a goal that all local schools receive a B ranking or better.

Recommendations

- 1. Allow school principals to be true education leaders.** The experience of private schools and charter public schools have shown that an effective school principal can inspire and lead schools to achieve extraordinary gains in student learning. Principals should have control over the actual dollars in their budgets, choose teachers and staff, and design the educational program for their students.
- 2. Allow any qualified professional to apply to be a public school principal and train principals to assume a leadership role.** Principals are usually required to have a teaching credential, even though there is no research showing teaching credentials are necessary to be an effective leader. Broadening the leadership talent pool will bring fresh new approaches to solve the problems facing modern public schools.
- 3. Hold principals accountable by grading schools on an A, B, C, D, F performance scale, using the State Board of Education Accountability Index.** Assigning letter grades to public schools based on clear, objective measures would better inform policymakers, parents and taxpayers about the real quality of local education.
- 4. End principal tenure so non-performing principals can be dismissed and replaced with effective education leaders.** Principals with control over budgets, staff and programs have demonstrated they are able to raise student achievement. Principals who fail to serve students should not be insulated by job-protection rules that serve the career interests of adults, while depriving children of the education they have been promised.

Chapter 5: Education Policy

3. Improving Teacher Quality

Recommendations

1. Raise teacher quality by reforming teacher pay.
2. Hire teachers based on proven experience and mastery of academic subject matter, particularly in math and science, rather than on the number of teaching certificates earned or education requirements met.
3. Allow principals to hire the best qualified teachers based on the learning needs of their students.
4. Allow local principals to fire bad teachers.

Background

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

Two decades of research show the qualities of an effective teacher are:

- Mastery of the subject matter being taught.
- Five or more years of teaching experience.
- Teacher training that emphasizes content knowledge and high standards of classroom competency.
- Strong academic skills, intellectual curiosity and an excitement about learning for its own sake.³⁷

Policy Analysis

In Washington, only 62% of students passed the math End-of-Course exam.³⁸ This is in part because public school teachers often do not have mastery of the subjects they teach. In Washington, only 40% of math teachers hold a college degree in math, and only 77% of science teachers hold a college degree in science.³⁹ School officials regularly report they are unable to find people who are qualified to teach high school math and science who also hold a teaching certificate.

Many Washington professionals are highly qualified to teach these subjects, but, because they do not have a formal certificate, it is illegal for public school officials to offer them teaching positions. Getting a teaching credential requires months of additional classroom work, something many qualified professionals have neither the time, money nor inclination to do.

School of education administrators defend the current system by saying someone who knows a subject may not be able to teach the subject. However, experienced professionals, like an engineer who wants to teach high school math, can quickly be taught classroom procedures. His enthusiasm and mastery of mathematics is the most important factor in whether his students will learn.

Putting the local principal in charge of evaluating the teaching staff would allow the principal to easily remove any teacher who is not working out. Principals know which teachers are doing a good job, and can fairly and efficiently evaluate them. Principals should then be held accountable for teacher performance and student learning.

If a district superintendent finds a local school is consistently failing to teach students, he should dismiss the principal and hire a new one. The lines of responsibility should be clear to public school employees and to the public. Teachers and principals who are unable to educate children to the standard required by the state should be removed from the system, and their places taken by people who can be effective educators.

Recommendations

- 1. Raise teacher quality by reforming teacher pay.** The single-salary “time and credits” pay grid the legislature requires school districts to

Chapter 5: Education Policy

use should be repealed. Instead, teacher pay should be set at the local level, depending on the performance of the teacher and the needs of the students, not determined by arbitrary pay scales dictated by Olympia.

2. **Hire teachers based on their proven experience and mastery of academic subject matter, particularly in math and science, rather than on the number of teaching certificates earned or education requirements met.** Current law makes it illegal to hire many highly qualified people to teach in a public school. Mid-career professionals, former military members, retired business owners and others are all potential teachers, if they show mastery of their subject and acquire the necessary classroom skills. Professionals bring life experiences to the classroom and help students understand the complex world they will enter after graduation.
3. **Allow principals to hire the best qualified teachers based on the learning needs of their students.** Principals should be able to hire the best person to teach in the classroom, and be able to hold all faculty members accountable for whether students are learning.
4. **Allow local principals to fire bad teachers.** In order to assemble and maintain a high-quality, highly motivated educational team, principals must be allowed to weed out teachers who are not effective at educating children. Keeping bad teachers in the classroom is demoralizing to good teachers and unfair to students.

4. Performance Pay for Teachers

Recommendations

1. Change the automatic single-salary pay grid so that teacher pay is based on performance and the ability to educate children, not on arbitrary degree requirements or years of employment.
2. Establish school oversight at the district level and an appeals process to ensure fair treatment of teachers. Allow superintendents to fire ineffective principals.

Background

More than half of the people employed by public school districts in Washington are not classroom teachers. In 2010–11, there were approximately 48,398 teachers working in elementary and high school classrooms, only 47% of the 102,094 workers employed in public school education.⁴⁰ The average base salary of public K-12 teachers for a nine-month work year is just over \$53,323 (2009–10).⁴¹

School districts supplement teacher pay for additional time, responsibilities and incentives (known as “TRI”), most of which is paid from local levy revenue. The average additional salary paid to teachers under this arrangement is \$10,580, bringing the total average salary for a nine-month work year to \$63,903, plus benefits.⁴²

Policy Analysis

The current pay structure for Washington public school teachers was established in the 1920s to “ensure fair and equal treatment for all.” The system stresses employee equality over professional excellence.

This salary structure has changed little over the last 85 years. During that time, the world has changed, becoming more innovative and competitive, yet teacher pay today is based on seniority and training level, not actual effectiveness in educating children.

Chapter 5: Education Policy

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.⁴³ 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 \$28,000.⁴⁴

University of Washington researcher Dan Goldhaber notes how non-teacher professionals are rewarded based on ability:

Not surprisingly, the non-teacher labor market rewards ability at a much higher rate than the teacher labor market, with the teacher labor market actually giving a slight premium to those with the lowest SAT scores in 2003.⁴⁵

He also notes that better qualified teachers use their clout to avoid having to work 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 workloads. As a consequence, the most-needy students tend to be paired with the least-qualified teachers.⁴⁶

A teacher-pay system designed to ensure “fair and equal treatment for all” has resulted in placing the least effective teachers in the classrooms of the neediest students.

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. Douglas County, Colorado, has 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.”⁴⁷

In Douglas County, unions do not oppose merit pay. The president of the area’s teachers 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.”⁴⁸

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 school administrators and parents to recognize quality educators and encourage them to excel in the classroom. At the same time, performance pay improves the quality of the teaching profession by encouraging underperforming teachers to seek a different line of work.

There are four different approaches to creating an effective performance pay system:⁴⁹

1. **Merit pay:** Individual teachers are evaluated and given bonuses based on improvements in their effectiveness in the classroom.
2. **Knowledge- and skills-based pay:** Teachers receive a salary increase when they acquire new levels of education and training.
3. **Performance pay:** Teachers are rewarded when their students show measurable improvement on standardized academic tests.
4. **School-based performance pay:** All the administrators, teachers, and staff at a particular school receive a bonus if their students meet certain academic standards.

To determine performance fairly, teachers should be assessed frequently on student achievement, teaching skills, subject knowledge, classroom management and lesson planning. An appeals process should be put in place so teachers receive an independent review if they feel they have been unfairly treated. Principals who abuse the performance-pay system to benefit themselves or to unfairly enrich their friends should be disciplined or dismissed.

Policymakers who support equitable performance-pay systems show respect for students, parents and taxpayers who have a right to expect that public schools will consistently and effectively educate children.

Chapter 5: Education Policy

Recommendations

- 1. Change the automatic single-salary pay grid so that teacher pay is based on performance and the ability to educate children, not on arbitrary degree requirements or years of employment.** The pay schedule should be changed to reward and retain top-performing teachers and attract talented teachers to high-need schools.
- 2. Establish school oversight at the district level and an appeals process to ensure fair treatment of teachers. Allow superintendents to fire ineffective principals.** Teachers and other school employees should have the right to contest unfair treatment. Independent oversight by superintendents and school boards is needed to avoid favoritism, unmerited raises and management harassment of individual teachers. Principals who abuse the merit pay system should be disciplined or dismissed.

5. The Burdens and Cost of Accepting Federal Funding

Recommendations

1. Reduce burdensome reporting requirements of federal education programs.
2. Opt out of ineffective federal education programs to help liberate Washington schools from federal control.

Background

Over the years, Congress has passed eight major expansions of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, today known as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), and has significantly increased federal control over state education policy.

For the 2012 fiscal year, the federal Department of Education has requested a budget of \$77.4 billion, a \$7.5 billion increase over the 2011 budget.⁵⁰ In the 2012 budget, \$48.8 billion would be spent on over 60 competitive grant programs and some 20 formula grant programs.⁵¹ In 2012, the Department of Education plans to increase its permanent staff by 70 new employees, for a total of 4,422 employees and total Departmental Management costs per year of \$1.75 billion.⁵²

For the 2011–13 biennium, Washington state lawmakers expect to receive \$1.97 billion in education funds from the federal government, which represents approximately 10% of total state spending in K-12 education.

Washington's Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) administers 23 separate federal programs to receive this funding. The general categories covering these programs in Washington schools in 2011–13⁵³ are:

2011–13 Categories of Federal Funding	Federal Funds
OSPI and Statewide Programs	\$ 81,065,000
School Food Services	\$ 437,988,000

Chapter 5: Education Policy

Special Education	\$ 691,796,000
Elementary/Secondary School Improvement	\$ 7,352,000
Education Reform	\$ 103,161,000
Transitional Bilingual Program	\$ 71,001,000
Title I, Part A, Learning Assistance Program	\$ 581,207,000
Total	\$ 1,974,863,000

The No Child Left Behind Act

States receiving Title I funds must comply with the extensive reporting and testing requirements of the 2001 NCLB Act. This act requires states to assess students on a statewide test in math and reading in grades three through eight and once in high school. NCLB requires that by 2014 all students will be proficient in math and reading.

Student test scores show that NCLB has not improved student achievement in Washington state. The preliminary school list released by the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction shows that 63% of Washington's schools failed in the 2010–11 school year to make adequate yearly progress under NCLB achievement targets.⁵⁴

Reporting Requirements of Federal Grants

NCLB is not the only federal mandate imposing heavy reporting burdens on school districts.

Other federal programs include aid to special needs (disabled) children, migrant children, neglected and delinquent children, and for vocational education, Head Start, math and science professional development for teachers, bilingual education, the education of Indian children, youth training, day care, school food services and transportation.⁵⁵

Each of these programs imposes detailed and complex reporting requirements on state and local administrators. For example, Title I, Part A is composed of four major funding streams: the Basic Grant, the Concentration Grant, the Targeted Grants and the Education Finance Incentive Grants. State administrators must calculate the four grant

categories for each school district and add them together to determine Washington's Title I, Part A, allocation.

The process is so opaque that no one can predict a state's funding based on population of low-income children. In fact, states like Kentucky, Mississippi and Missouri, with relatively high levels of child poverty, receive less Title I funding per student than other states.⁵⁶

Federal special education funding also imposes heavy reporting burdens on school districts. Here is just some of the information school districts must collect: Special Education Personnel Employed and Needed; Federal Special Education Child count and Least Restrictive Environment; Special Education Students Suspended/Expelled; Timeline for Initial Evaluation of Special Education and Transition from Part C to Part B by Child's 3rd Birthday; Child Outcomes Summary Form—district-wide entry and exit data.⁵⁷

In addition, state education officials must monitor and comply with a constant stream of unpredictable rules and changes issued by U.S. Department of Education regulators. The department has issued mandatory instructions to state K-12 educators more 100 times since NCLB was enacted in 2001.⁵⁸

There is no limit to how far Department of Education officials can involve themselves in local schools. Federal officials recently ordered school administrators to develop parts of a national parental involvement plan—regardless of a school's existing relationship with parents in its community—or else lose all Title I, Part A, funding.⁵⁹

According to Representative John Kline (R-Minn.), chairman of the House Education and the Workforce Committee:

States and school districts work 7.8 million hours each year collecting and disseminating information required under Title I of federal education law. Those hours cost more than \$235 million. The burden is tremendous, and this is just one of many federal laws weighing down our schools.⁶⁰

Trying to fund local schools by first sending federal taxes to Washington, D.C., then waiting for federal officials to return some of those dollars to Washington state officials, who then distribute them to

Chapter 5: Education Policy

school district officials, who then allocate the funds to local schools, is very inefficient.

Each step along the way reduces the portion of every dollar that actually reaches children in the classroom. It is impossible to measure accurately how much money is wasted through federal education funding, but a 1998 estimate found that just 65 to 70 cents of every education dollar leaving Washington makes it to local classrooms.⁶¹

Policy Analysis

Professor Herbert J. Walberg made this statement in 1997 to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education:

Federal categorical programs contribute to these productivity problems and create others. The programs are strongly influenced by teacher unions and other education lobbying groups to advance their interests rather than those of students, taxpayers, and the nation. They create red tape and huge bureaucracies that make U.S. administrative costs twice the average of other OECD [Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development] countries.

They obfuscate accountability for learning results. Imperious, detailed rules and regulations make it difficult for state and local educational authorities to bring about constructive changes. They distract educators from their clients-students, both categorical and non-categorical.⁶²

Federal influence over local education assumes lawmakers and regulators in Washington, D.C., know more about what is good for children than educators in the community.

The No Child Left Behind Act and other federal programs compel state officials, local principals and classroom teachers to spend their time complying with federal rules, which diverts resources away from educating children. Federal mandates also encourage school officials to avoid accountability for failed schools by saying they were only doing what the federal government requires.

Recommendations

- 1. Reduce burdensome reporting requirements of federal education programs.** Washington's representatives in Congress should work for education rule changes that reduce and streamline the costly reporting requirements of receiving federal assistance.
- 2. Opt out of ineffective federal education programs to help liberate Washington schools from federal control.** State officials should identify and withdraw from federal education programs that impose more cost on local schools than they benefit Washington school children. The loss of funding would be balanced by more efficient use of state and local dollars.

6. Increasing Parental Involvement through Education Choice

Recommendations

1. Allow parents, rather than government officials, to decide which public school their children will attend.
2. Increase parental involvement by ending Washington's ban on charter public schools.
3. Enact tuition tax-credit scholarships to allow families to attend a private school with privately donated funds.

Background

In 2010, local administrators assigned 60% of Washington's students to schools ranked in the two lowest-performing categories, as rated by state officials, and they assigned 74,000 students to "struggling" schools, the state's lowest academic ranking.⁶³

Students in Washington state have very few choices to avoid being assigned to an underperforming public school. Current law limits students to the following five educational options:

1. Students can ask to transfer to another school district, if officials give their permission and the desired district has room to accommodate them.⁶⁴
2. Students can enroll in a full-time online school.
3. Parents can buy a home and establish residency in another school district, if they can afford it.
4. Students can leave public school and be homeschooled.
5. Students can attend a private school of their choice, again, if the parents can afford it.

Because of the cost and level of commitment required, only a small number of students are able to benefit from these choices.

Policy Analysis

One solution adopted in other states is to promote parental involvement by allowing more choice among public schools. A recent study by North Carolina officials at the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District shows that among students attending low-quality public schools, winners of a lottery to attend a charter public school are more likely than their peers to graduate from high school, attend a four-year college and earn a bachelor's degree.⁶⁵

Public Charter Schools

Forty-one states and the District of Columbia allow their students to attend charter public schools.⁶⁶ Charter schools are popular with parents. Across the nation, over 1.7 million children attend 5,453 charter public schools. This number increased by nine percent in 2010 alone.⁶⁷ Many charter schools have more parents who want to be involved than they can accommodate, and are forced to place students on a waiting list.

The experience of other states shows charter public schools consistently provide a better, decentralized model for providing a quality public education than traditional public schools. Some charter public schools have eliminated the achievement gap between black and white students. Charter public schools commonly achieve these remarkable results for less money than traditional public schools.⁶⁸ Even in the rare instances when charter schools fail, they can be closed, something that is nearly impossible with traditional public schools.

Washington is one of the few states that bans charter public schools. In 2004, Democratic Governor Gary Locke signed a charter public school bill that had passed the legislature with bipartisan support.⁶⁹ However, the statewide teachers union, the Washington Education Association, strongly opposes public charter schools. The union mounted a successful ballot referendum campaign that blocked the law from going into effect.⁷⁰

Another way to promote parental involvement is to allow tax credits for donations made to educational scholarships. These programs

Chapter 5: Education Policy

allow corporations and individuals to receive a tax benefit for the contributions they give to scholarship-granting organizations, which then provide funding to children who wish to attend a private school. As of 2011, nine states have enacted tax-credit scholarship laws. These are Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island.⁷¹

Nine states and the District of Columbia enhance parental involvement by allowing educational voucher programs. These states are: Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Ohio, Oklahoma, Utah and Wisconsin.⁷² Many of these voucher programs benefit children with special learning needs. Ohio has an educational voucher program for children with autism.

Vouchers, like food stamps or housing aid, allow the recipient of public assistance to decide how the benefit should be spent. Voucher funds go directly to the service provider—the recipient does not receive cash directly. Public education vouchers enable parents to get directly involved in their children’s education by letting them select the school program that best meets each child’s particular learning needs. Once the parent chooses the school, education funds are sent to the school to cover tuition, fees and other costs on behalf of the student.

Policymakers in Washington state tightly limit how much parents may become involved in directing their children’s education. Public school officials automatically receive funding, usually with significant increases, year in and year out, regardless of their performance in improving student learning. School officials have little incentive to improve, because they have a “captive audience.” They know many parents are forced by economic circumstances to enroll their children, even if the school consistently fails to provide students with a quality education.

Promoting parental involvement through broader choices breaks the problem of the “captive audience” and creates an incentive for all public school officials to improve. When officials at low-performing public schools are faced with the possibility of losing students, and the funding that comes with them, they will make improvements in order to keep parents involved.

Student-centered finance promotes parental involvement because it requires that individual funding follow the child to the school of the parents' choice.

Greater parental involvement in choosing schools would create a powerful incentive for public school officials to be nimble and responsive to the changing educational needs of students and families. School administrators would realize they have to compete for students and that securing public education funding depends on serving children, not conforming to political pressures or bureaucratic rules.

Tying funding to the educational needs of individual students, rather than to rules dictated by Olympia, would induce school officials to develop programs that help students reach their fullest potential.

Recommendations

- 1. Allow parents, rather than government officials, to decide which public school their children will attend.** The most effective way to get parents involved in supporting public education is to allow them to choose their children's school. Once parents are voluntarily involved, they have an incentive to improve the quality of education for all students attending their community public school.
- 2. Increase parental involvement by ending Washington's ban on charter public schools.** Charter schools are a proven way to improve public education. Parents know they must support the school or it will close. Students attending traditional schools benefit as well, since alternatives are available if their own school is failing to provide them with the high-quality education they were promised.
- 3. Enact tax-credit scholarships to allow families to attend a private school with privately donated funds.** Tax-credit scholarships serve the public interest by encouraging individuals and corporations to support increased educational opportunities options, especially for students from low-income families.

Chapter 5: Education Policy

7. Online Learning

Recommendations

1. Ensure all students have access to online learning courses.
2. Repeal the 15% education funding cut the state imposes on every student who enrolls in full-time online learning.
3. Allow students to earn course credits by demonstrating mastery of a subject, instead of imposing arbitrary seat-time requirements.
4. Allow students who attend traditional schools to use part of their basic education funding to enroll in online learning courses.

Background

Over the past ten years, legislators have passed a number of laws to increase student access to online learning. In 2002, Governor Gary Locke initiated the Digital Learning Commons, which provides students access through their local school district to over 600 individual online courses developed by respected education companies like Apex Learning, Aventa Learning and Advanced Academics.

Students can take courses in the following study areas: core academic subjects, credit recovery classes, elective classes, Advanced Placement subjects, foreign language, technical and vocational skills, and English as a Second Language. Fees range from \$250–\$350 per course.

When an online course is part of a student's basic education, as defined by law, the local school district pays the course fee. Fees for courses that are not part of a basic public education are paid by the student.

In 2005, the legislature authorized school districts to offer full-time online programs to public school students.⁷³ These students are entitled to receive the full basic education grant provided by the state for every student in Washington.⁷⁴

Online learning programs are popular. In 2009–10, 12,554 Washington students enrolled in full-time online programs.⁷⁵ This is nearly double the 6,600 students who were enrolled the previous school year.⁷⁶ Continued funding is contingent on the student making adequate monthly progress, as measured by public school officials. A student's online funding can be withdrawn if the student is not successfully passing his or her online courses.

Currently, there are 40 full-time online programs offered by school districts that have contracted with private companies or designed their own programs.⁷⁷ These full-time online programs are regulated under Washington's Alternative Learning Experiences law. In addition, in 2009, the legislature required that online learning programs be approved by the Digital Learning Department in the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.⁷⁸ The state superintendent provides school districts with a procedure guide and a model online learning policy.

School districts have since developed and reported their online policies and procedures. According to their own reports, not all 295 school districts in Washington are providing students with access to online learning. Of the 223 districts who reported, 203 districts are offering online learning courses, but 20 are not.⁷⁹

The 2011 Legislative Session

In 2011, lawmakers updated the state learning standards (the Essential Academic Learning Requirements) to include literacy in the use of technology. Schools are now required to teach students how to “integrate technology literacy and fluency.”⁸⁰ The legislature also required school districts to give students high school credit for completing approved online courses.⁸¹

At the same time, the legislature imposed a 15% funding cut on every student who enrolls in a full-time online learning course. The cut applies to the 2011–12 and 2012–13 school years. Until the legislature imposed this cut, online students received the same funding as students attending traditional public schools.

Chapter 5: Education Policy

Policy Analysis

Over ten years, Washington lawmakers have steadily expanded student access to online learning and, until recently, have provided full funding for students who choose to learn online. While online courses remain an important option, the vast majority of students attend traditional public schools. Only about 16,000, less than 2%, of Washington's nearly one million public school students were enrolled in online courses in 2009–10.⁸²

The legislature's policy of cutting online students' funding by 15% may be unconstitutional, because it discriminates against students based on their public education choices. The Constitution provides for equal access to a public education for all student who seek one. Online courses are not special categorical programs, separate earmarks or supplements to basic education. For thousands of students, participation in online learning is their full-time public education.

The research shows that full-time online programs are particularly well-suited for certain public school students, and for many of them it is the only practical alternative to dropping out. Online courses provide a second chance to students who have failed in traditional schools.

Online courses provide students pursuing specialized sports or arts training to craft a learning program that fits a demanding daily schedule.⁸³ They help disabled students who face physical barriers in a traditional school building, and they provide consistent educational access for students whose families travel or live in isolated areas.

Although online learners make up a small share of all public school students, the ability of students to choose an online public education is an important part of fulfilling the state's paramount duty to educate every child residing within its borders.

Recommendations

- 1. Ensure all students have access to online learning courses.** Some school districts continue to place roadblocks in front of students who wish to pursue an online education. State policymakers should guarantee all students voluntary access to online courses, and should

ensure that adequate online resources are available to meet student demand.

- 2. Repeal the 15% education funding cut the state imposes on every student who enrolls in full-time online learning.** It is unfair, and possibly unconstitutional, to deny funding to public school students because of their education choices. All students enrolled in approved public education courses, whether online or in a traditional classroom, should receive equal funding.
- 3. Allow students to earn course credits by demonstrating mastery of a subject, instead of imposing arbitrary seat-time requirements.** Online learning allows students to learn on their own time at their own pace. Rules about student time spent sitting in a classroom, which date to the 19th century, have no relevance in the digital age. Students should earn credits toward graduation based on what they have learned, not on how they learned it.
- 4. Allow students who attend traditional schools to use part of their basic education funding to enroll in online learning courses.** State officials should not discriminate against students based on the students' education choices. Students should be able to devote their basic education funding equally to completing traditional school courses or online courses, or any combination of the two, at their discretion.

Chapter 5: Education Policy

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⁸³ “Learning Online: An Assessment of Online Public Education Programs,” by Liv Finne, Washington Policy Center, March 2008, at www.washingtonpolicy.org/sites/default/files/08_finne_onlineschools.pdf.