



The Full Funding Coalition Plan For K-12 School Finance



➤ WHAT IS THE FULL FUNDING COALITION?

Five of Washington's most influential education organizations—teachers, counselors, librarians, classified staff, principals, superintendents and school boards—came together to present a united front to change the state's K-12 school finance system. Coalition members include the **Association of Washington School Principals, Public School Employees of Washington, Washington Association of School Administrators, Washington Education Association** and **Washington State School Directors' Association**.

➤ WHY DID THESE ORGANIZATIONS FEEL COMPELLED TO COME TOGETHER NOW?

The Coalition believes that all Washington students deserve an education system that allows them to be successful, to be well prepared for college or work, to live and compete in an international economy, and to be future leaders of our society. To that end, we support the high learning standards established by the state in 1993. However, many school districts today are struggling financially, trying their best to provide students with a world-class education, but hamstrung by a school finance system that does not provide them with the resources and flexibility they need to meet today's performance expectations.

➤ WHAT HAS THE COALITION PROPOSED REGARDING K-12 FINANCE?

The Coalition has proposed a new funding system that significantly increases state funding and shifts the focus of state resources and accountability to what it *actually* costs to meet Washington's high performance expectations for student learning. The proposal has been presented to the *Joint Task Force on Basic Education Finance*, a body appointed by the Legislature to "develop options for a new funding structure and all the necessary formulas, and propose a new definition of basic education."

➤ WHY DO WE NEED A NEW SCHOOL FINANCE SYSTEM?

First and foremost, we want students to succeed. But today, schools are being asked to achieve things they are not capable of achieving with the resources allocated to them. The state's antiquated school finance system relies on complicated formulas developed in the early 1970s which fail to address what it really takes to provide a 21st century education for students. These core problems were exacerbated after Washington established new, higher student performance expectations in 1993, but failed to restructure the school finance system to determine what it would cost to achieve them. The Full Funding Coalition created its proposal to resolve fundamental problems with this outdated funding system that cannot be permanently resolved by simply pumping more state money into local schools without also changing the focus of funding toward student outcomes.

➤ HOW DOES THE COALITION'S PROPOSAL DIFFER FROM THE CURRENT SCHOOL FUNDING SYSTEM?

The current system is based on *inputs*. The state allocates funding to school districts based on complex formulas that specify in detail how schools should spend their dollars on students, staff and programs. The proposed new funding system would be based on *outcomes* – what it takes to reach state standards in each school. It would allocate necessary funds, allow schools to decide how best to address local needs and challenges, and then hold schools accountable for achieving student performance expectations.

➤ BUT WHAT IF THE STATE FAILS TO PROVIDE ALL THE NECESSARY FUNDS?

Accountability is a two-way street under the Coalition proposal. Should the state fail to provide sufficient funds, performance expectations for schools would be adjusted in proportion to the allocated funding. This system of dual accountability holds both local school districts and the state responsible for ensuring that students meet academic standards.

➤ WHAT PREVENTS THE STATE FROM FORCING SCHOOL DISTRICTS TO RELY ON LOCAL LEVIES TO PAY FOR THE BASIC COSTS OF EDUCATING STUDENTS—LIKE SO MANY SCHOOL DISTRICTS ARE DOING NOW?

The proposal realigns basic education funding to encompass *everything* it takes to give *all* students the opportunity to master state learning standards. It is based on the state constitutional principle that funding for basic education is the state's responsibility and that local school districts should not be expected to fund basic education out of local levies.

➤ WHY IS THE DETERMINATION OF BASIC EDUCATION SO IMPORTANT?

Washington's State Constitution declares, "*It is the paramount duty of the state to make ample provision for the education of all children residing within its borders...*" No other state in the nation has a more strongly worded mandate for funding basic education for all children. The Coalition proposal – based on a detailed finance study of what it takes to meet state performance expectations – realigns the K-12 finance system to those standards and ensures that ample funds are allotted to achieve student outcomes.





⇒ HOW WOULD FUNDING BE ALLOCATED TO INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS UNDER THE COALITION'S PROPOSED SYSTEM?

It is based on prototype elementary, middle and high schools to determine average costs for staffing, textbooks, utilities, technology, security, etc.—*everything* it takes to educate students—and then adjusts those costs to meet the unique demographics of each school such as student poverty and special and bilingual education needs. To ensure that the definition of basic education and the funding to support it remain current, dynamic and adaptive over time, the Coalition proposal calls for the creation of a new nonpartisan Commission on Quality Education in Washington. The Commission would be tasked with determining the state funding needed to meet state educational standards and establishing performance expectations for schools in proportion to the state funding provided.

⇒ HOW DOES THE PROPOSAL ADDRESS FUNDING FOR SMALL SCHOOL DISTRICTS?

The Coalition's proposal includes a separate finance formula to ensure adequate and fair funding for districts serving small numbers of students.

⇒ HOW WOULD SALARIES BE CALCULATED?

State funding for teacher, administrator and classified staff salaries would be determined by comparing average salaries of an education-related profession with those of similar private sector professions, incorporating regional differences in cost of living.

⇒ HOW MUCH WILL THIS NEW FINANCE SYSTEM COST THE STATE?

The proposed new finance system would be implemented gradually over the course of six successive school years. In the 2009-2011 biennium, current levels of K-12 state funding would increase by \$1.2 billion. This would phase in funding for full-day kindergarten, reduced class sizes, enhanced classified staffing ratios, improved compensation and better funding for books, supplies, utilities and technology.

⇒ HOW WILL THE STATE PAY FOR IT?

To help pay for the increased funding, the Coalition proposes that the Legislature allocate half of all general fund state revenue increases in excess of 5 percent and recapture lost revenue from state property taxes.

⇒ HOW IS THE COALITION'S PROPOSAL DIFFERENT FROM OTHER PROPOSALS TO RESTRUCTURE SCHOOL FINANCE?

The Coalition believes its proposal takes the most accountable, dynamic and effective approach to ensuring that students get the kind of world class education they need to be successful. It ensures dual accountability: The state is accountable for providing funding and school districts are accountable for meeting performance standards. Another key difference is the establishment of the *Commission on Quality Education in Washington*, which would determine the annual amount of money needed to make ample provision for the education of all Washington students.

⇒ HOW DOES THE COALITION'S PROPOSAL RELATE TO THE LAWSUIT THAT'S BEEN FILED AGAINST THE STATE BY THE NETWORK FOR EXCELLENCE IN WASHINGTON SCHOOLS?

NEWS is a statewide coalition of more than 50 community organizations, school districts, education associations, teachers and parents that has filed a lawsuit to force the state to realistically determine the actual dollar cost of providing all Washington children with a 21st century education and to determine a stable and reliable state funding system to pay that actual dollar cost. NEWS believes it will take court action to force the state to step up to its paramount duty to schools. Should the NEWS lawsuit (set for trial on June 1, 2009) succeed in forcing the state to act, the Full Funding Coalition proposal would provide the Legislature with a blueprint for action.

⇒ WHAT IS THE NEXT STEP FOR THE COALITION?

The Coalition has drafted a bill to implement our proposal and will seek a legislative sponsor in the 2009 session.

⇒ WHAT CAN MEMBERS OF THE FIVE COALITION ORGANIZATIONS DO TO HELP?

Learn more about school finance and the Coalition proposal. Ask questions of your association leaders. Talk to others in your schools and administration offices about the need for change. Visit the Full Funding Coalition Web site at www.fullfundingcoalition.org to read the full Coalition proposal and get more tips for getting involved.

