



## REALITIES OF EDUCATION FUNDING IN WASHINGTON

### Key Points

#### A Decade of Decline in State's Funding Commitment

Study of education funding over the decade since 1993 Education Reform

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### BREAKING WASHINGTON'S PROMISE TO OUR CHILDREN

Washington is on a financial collision course with higher standards, academic achievement, and delivering quality K-12 education for our children. The State is **FAILING** to meet the educational needs, based upon the promise of Education Reform - made a decade ago - and the clear language of the state constitution.

- **The Promise of Education Reform, 1993.** Every child achieving at high levels, a quality teacher in every classroom, and a *"public school funding system that is ample, flexible, stable, equitable, straightforward and accountable."*
- **Washington State Constitution.** "It is the paramount duty of the state to make ample provision for the education of all children."

### DECADE OF DECLINE IN STATE'S COMMITMENT

This first study on education funding since education reform in 1993, dramatically reveals the steady erosion of funding that directly impacts children in the classroom -- at the same time we have higher expectations, higher stakes, increased costs, and more students with greater needs.

- **More students, greater needs, higher stakes.** Student enrollment has increased by 100,000 students. Special education enrollment is up by 24,500 students. The number of children on free/reduced lunch has jumped to fully one-third of all students. And by 2008, high school graduation will require each student's performance be proven and measured against rigorous statewide standards.
- **Direct Impact on Children in the Classroom.** Class sizes have become the 4<sup>th</sup> largest in the country, based on student-teacher ratios. Despite a growing teacher shortage, Washington fell behind on fair and more competitive salaries to attract and keep the best educators for our children. Washington salaries are now the worst on the West Coast and the state faces aggressive teacher recruitment by other states.
- **Per student spending** *reduced* by \$535, over the last decade (adjusted for inflation). Over the last two decades, Washington has fallen dramatically compared to the national average for per pupil spending from 113% in 79-80 to 91% 00-01.
- **Steady Erosion of State Funding.** Over a decade that has seen more students, greater needs and higher stakes, the K-12 portion of all state funds has dropped from 29% in 1991-93 (passage of Ed. Reform) down to 25.6% in 2001-02. And the K-12 portion of the State's general fund has also steadily eroded from 47.6% in 1993-95 to 43.5% in 2001-03.

## DISCONNECTED FROM PUBLIC PRIORITY

Despite real progress in student achievement, policymakers in Olympia have not fulfilled their responsibility to provide “ample, equitable and stable funding” since passage of the education reform act in 1993. Largely out of frustration with inaction, voters took it upon themselves to keep the promise to Washington’s children.

- **Overwhelming Passage of I-728 and I-732.** Initiative 728, the class-size reduction measure passed by 72% and Initiative 732, the teacher cost-of-living measure passed by 63% -- both overwhelming margins including a majority of voters in every region and legislative district in the state. More voters said yes to I-728 than ANY other initiative in state history. Once again, voters made their priorities clear.
- **Unraveling intent of the voters.** For I-728, policymakers used budget gimmicks, immediately supplanting education funding – cutting from important existing student programs to pay for I-728. For I-732, they ignored the clear initiative language that said ALL educators in Washington shall receive an annual cost-of-living adjustment. They failed to fund the COLA for nearly one-third of Washington educators and instead passed the costs on to local school districts.
- **Thwarting the will of voters.** In perhaps the greatest example of violating the state’s promise to “ample, equitable and stable” funding, recent budget proposals for this biennium call for cutting \$112 million from K-12 education and repeals of Initiatives 728 and 732 would cut an additional \$580 million over the biennium – thwarting the will of Washington voters.
- **Public’s Commitment has NOT wavered.** In June, a public opinion survey by Elway Research for the *Seattle Times* found that spending for public schools was growing too slowly. Plus 54% of respondents gave their local schools a grade of “A” or “B” for overall performance. And a December poll by Survey USA for *King 5* showed 66% disagreed with the Governor’s decision to overturn the voter approved initiatives, compared to only 27% who agreed.

## KEEP THE PROMISE TO OUR CHILDREN

It’s time for lawmakers to keep their promise of adequate, equitable and stable funding to help all of our kids meet higher standards. Students, teachers, and administrators are keeping their promise with real signs of academic improvement and achievement. Voters kept their promise, overwhelmingly passing education Initiatives and local school levies and bonds. Now is the time to take steps to ensure that all students have access to a high quality education.

- **Adequate, Equitable and Stable.** Educators promised higher standards so that every child could achieve to his or her full potential. Lawmakers must reverse the funding decline and find the courage to make K-12 funding the same priority that the public has made it over the last decade.
- **Match Political Rhetoric with Funding Realities.** Politicians and policy-makers who run on education platforms must match their rhetoric with the funding realities and challenges that come with meeting higher standards.
- **Don’t Turn Back on the Progress We’ve Made.** Many students across the state are reaching higher and achieving more than ever, but others are struggling. Washington’s promise was to *all* children and we can’t stop now. Educators and schools have already been doing much more with less, but continued growth is in jeopardy. We must reward the success and provide the resources necessary for every child to succeed in Washington.
- **Time to Act is NOW.** We have reached a collision with promises of higher standards for all students and the funding realities of education funding in Washington. The stakes are higher than ever for our kids. **We must keep our promise to Washington’s children.**