

## **For Immediate Release**

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## **Citizens' Report Card on Education: We Have Work to Do** *Early learning, K-12 and higher education receive* **'Needs Improvement' and 'Unsatisfactory' grades in report card**

### ***Washington school districts demonstrate promise; Illustrate that the State's education challenges can be solved***

**Olympia, Wash. – Jan. 9, 2006** – As legislators convene for Day One of the 2006 Legislative Session, the League of Education Voters (LEV) Foundation today unveiled its first Citizens' Report Card for all levels of Washington State education.

The prevailing assessment: We've got work to do.

The Report Card's findings can be summarized in what is perhaps its most sobering statistic -- *for every 100 Washington State ninth grade students, only 18 will graduate* with either an associate's degree within three years or bachelor's degree within six years.

"This report card is a reflection of where our state's education system is today," said Lisa Macfarlane, president of the LEV Foundation. "The bottom line – we're not even close to preparing our children and young people to compete in today's world. But we can turn this around. This can be fixed."

The LEV Foundation is a grassroots, non-partisan, non-profit citizen's organization dedicated to making Washington's preschools, public schools and colleges the best in the nation.

"We've made tremendous gains in K-12 education over the last decade," said Washington State Superintendent of Public Instruction Terry Bergeson. "But to truly make our schools reflect our world-class goals, we must take some new steps. Our youngest learners deserve adequate support to prepare them for kindergarten, and students need to see strong connections between their high school education and the opportunities that await them. We can do this, but it will require a renewed commitment and determination."

### **REPORT CARD SUMMARY**

The following is a brief summary of the Citizens' Report Card on Education's findings. A complete version of the report card can be found online at [www.levfoundation.org](http://www.levfoundation.org).

#### **Early Learning: A High Return on Investment**

Major, new investments in early learning are essential. The achievement gap in K-12 schools largely result from a preparation gap when children enter kindergarten. Children who start behind stay behind. LEV Foundation's research reflects some great progress in school districts and communities across the state. But the work has just begun.

#### **Overall Early Learning Grade: Unsatisfactory**

- Less than half of the state's incoming kindergarteners are adequately prepared to succeed and students in lower-income communities tend to be even less prepared.
- In Washington, only 4.2 percent of all birth to three-year-old eligible children are served by Early Head Start (zero to age three).
- Current early learning programs only serve about 50 percent of eligible three and four year olds statewide.

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“On the first day of kindergarten, the range between students at the bottom and the top is six years in reading skills and four years in math,” said Kennewick School Board member Lynn Fielding.

### **State K-12 Spending Well Below the National Average**

Washington State ranks well below the national average for K-12 spending and among the worst states nationwide in real per-student total funding for education.

#### Overall K-12 Grade: Needs Improvement

- 72 percent of students graduated on time in 2002 (best state: New Jersey: 89 percent).
- Washington ranks second worse in average elementary school class size with 23.9 students per class (best state: Nebraska, 17.5).
- Washington State ranks well below the national average for K-12 spending and among the worst states nationwide in real per-student total funding for education.

“We can no longer accept the unacceptable,” said Gene Schmidt, superintendent of Bridgeport Public Schools. “We must lead by example and invest in our students. Providing a high-quality education is the best way to give them the bright future they deserve.”

### **Higher Education Barriers in Washington State: Access and Affordability**

An educated workforce is more important than ever for our state’s economic stability and competitiveness. Requirements for high school graduation do not match what is required to get into college. The result: a majority of the state’s young people leave high school unprepared for college-level work. Those that are prepared often can’t afford it.

#### Overall Higher Education Report Card Grade: Needs Improvement

- Nearly 70 percent of Washington employers reported difficulty hiring workers with a BA, master’s, doctoral or professional degree.
- Washington ranks 44<sup>th</sup> in the nation (just above Oklahoma and Louisiana) for total higher education revenues per student.

“Without access to an affordable college education, Washington State’s students are at an education dead-end,” said Earl Hale, executive director of the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges. “We must ensure that any qualified student can pursue a college education – regardless of his or her household income level.”

### **THE SOLUTION: SMART INVESTMENTS, PROVEN REFORMS**

U.S. Census data suggests that Washington State has the financial means - but not the will - to spend adequately on education.

“While the state’s personal income is higher than the national average, Washington’s per-student education spending ranks 46<sup>th</sup> in the country,” said Macfarlane.

Washington State’s future hangs on much more successful students.

- **Invest at the state level:** Legislators must choose to make early learning, K-12 and higher education funding a top priority for the next 10 years.
- **Invest at the local level:** Innovative school district leadership, principals and teachers show the way with successful reform models. Adapt and adopt them in all four corners of Washington.
- **Invest at home:** Parents and communities must move from the sidelines to the playing field. Attend PTA or school board meetings, ask hard questions, educate your elected officials and vote in local levy elections and school board races.

#### About the LEV Foundation

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