

WSPTA recognizes that we must support students, preserve education funding and protect the health, education and welfare of children and youth both during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Background

- When districts resumed in-person learning, the lack needed academic, staffing, administrative, and social emotional supports caused gaps in opportunities for students and created an unstable and chaotic learning environment. Schools have imposed temporary closures due to staffing shortages¹, run out of food for breakfast and lunch, and canceled bus routes due to bus driver shortages^{2,3}. Our youth face academic challenges and unprecedented increases in mental health issues.
- Washington's projected revenue collections for the 2021–23 state budget increased by nearly \$898 million, according to November 2021 forecasts by the Washington State Economic and Revenue Forecast Council.⁴
- Federal ESSER funds brought some relief to school districts. But distribution of these funds was not even, with low poverty school districts receiving less funds per student, even though they face the same challenges around COVID protocols, staffing and student mental health.
- State budgetary enrollment projections assumed and funded an increase in enrollment for the 2021-22 school year. However, modest (3.5% state average⁵) enrollment declines have left school districts with the real possibility of dramatic mid-year decreases in state funding when students need more support than ever. Staff for school year 2021-22 have already been hired and are in place to help with learning loss and the aftermath of remote learning. Whether classes have 25 or 22 students they still require the same number of teachers. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction has requested that state funding remain stable for the rest of the school year, as originally budgeted by the legislature, in order to assure an equitable recovery for all students⁶.
- As many programs that serve children and youth are not protected under the state constitution, it is the very DNA of PTA to advocate and protect funding that ensures the health, education and welfare of all students and youth in Washington state, especially those in underserved communities, those in the achievement and opportunity gaps, and those without a voice.

Proposed Solutions

Washington State PTA shall advocate for legislation or policies that support students during and after COVID-19 to:

- Protect early-learning school, K-12, post-secondary, and child-related programs especially:
 - o resources for students needing additional supports (academic, physical, or emotional)
 - o local effort assistance funding

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For More Information

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For more information on the WSPTA advocacy program, please visit our website (www.wastatepta.org).

- Authorize flexibility within transportation and categorical allocations to allow districts to meet students' needs, retroactive to 3/1/2020 through 8/31/2022.
- Address the state budget challenges without creating or increasing funding inequities:
 - o with progressive, sufficient, sustainable, and equitable revenue sources
 - o avoid mid-year budget cuts and/or redistribution of existing education funds by preserving currently allocated enrollment funding
- Consider additional and extended “pandemic relief” to ensure all students have an opportunity to truly achieve their potential, both academically and emotionally.
- Allocation of new state or federal funding to support:
 - o students who receive special education services or are furthest from educational justice
 - o meals for children and youth facing food insecurity
 - o COVID-19-related childcare and school-age-student care needs
 - o social and emotional health of students and staff

Citations

1. <https://www.seattletimes.com/education/lab/substitute-shortages-staff-burnout-lead-to-seattle-area-school-cancellations/>
2. https://www.yakimaherald.com/news/education/school-bus-driver-shortage-continues-in-yakima-valley-districts-work-on-recruitment/article_3ed54083-3662-58fe-b1f0-1873fa8468b8.html
3. <https://thehill.com/homenews/state-watch/577022-seattle-public-schools-suspending-nearly-150-bus-routes-due-to-driver>
4. <https://ofm.wa.gov/about/news/2021/11/state-revenue-projection-2021-23-increased-898-million>
5. <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/education/as-washington-state-public-schools-lost-students-during-pandemic-home-schooling-population-has-boomed/>
6. <https://www.k12.wa.us/about-ospi/press-releases/novel-coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-resources/state-federal-funding>