

## How to use these talking points

Here are talking points for each of WSPTA's Top 5 priorities for the 2025 legislative session. These talking points are not to be read word for word, they are to help you prepare for - and execute - successful meetings with legislators. The talking points for each priority include:

- Brief background on the issue (Why is this a problem? What are we trying to solve?)
- WSPTA proposed solutions (adopted by delegates at WSPTA Legislative Assembly)
- Questions to ask your district or school to help form your personal facts or story (if time allows - responses from your district could take time)
- "Asks" to make of legislators
- Link to the issue one-pager that has more detail about the topic

## Recommended Meeting Flow

Every meeting with a legislator should include a quick overview of [WSPTA's Top 5 legislative priorities](#). Meetings are usually around 15 minutes, so you should pick one of the priorities you would like to focus on during your meeting.

1. **Introductions** - Quick introductions
2. **Overview** - Share a brief overview of WSPTA's Top 5 issues
3. **Highlighted Priority** - Describe the issue your local PTA or council is most passionate about, be concise and to the point.
4. **Fact or Statistic** – Share a noteworthy fact or statistic that relates to this issue. You can find these in the background section of this document and in the issue one-pager.
5. **Personal Story** – Share a personal story that goes with the issue. Who on your team has a relevant story to share? We're giving you facts – you supply the personal story from your student, your school, your district to make a strong impact.
6. **The Ask** – Be specific about what you want them to do (for example, vote yes on a specific bill.)
7. **The Close** – Share three to five words for the person you are meeting with to remember.

Note: Legislators ask for no papers, please. Follow up meetings with an email thank you and share any additional information digitally.

## Washington State PTA Top 5 Legislative Priorities - 2025

1. Closing the Funding Gaps
2. Addressing the Student Mental Health Crisis
3. Addressing Funding, Inclusion, and Supports in Special Education
4. Preventing and Reducing Gun Violence
5. Expanding School Construction Funding Options

## Additional Legislator Meeting Planning Resources

- [How to Have a Successful Meeting with Legislators](#)
- [Build Your Pitch](#)

# Closing the Funding Gaps

## Background

- An increasing number of school districts are currently in financial crisis, due to a variety of factors out of their control, including COVID-related decline in enrollment, ESSER dollars that have run out, and persistent gaps in state apportionment.
- Per state and federal law, schools have legal obligations to serve students with disabilities, regardless of the cost. A recent legislative report showed that district expenditures for services related to special education exceed the special education funding by about \$435 million.
- The allocation for school operating costs (informally called MSOC) is not indexed for inflation and has not kept pace with the actual costs for things like required insurance, utilities, technology, and curriculum adoption.
- Many districts are consistently underfunded for student transportation under the current formula and have to make up this shortfall using district general funds, special levies or enrichment levy dollars.

## Proposed Solutions (legislation, policies, and funding)

- Prioritize K-12 education in the state's operating budget.
- Close existing funding gaps in basic education for MSOC (Materials, Supplies and Operating Costs), special education services, and student transportation, so that state funding reflects and keeps pace with actual costs and support bills that are addressing these issues:
  - HB 1310, HB 1357 and SB 5263 (special education)
  - HB 1338 and SB 5192 (MSOC)
  - HB 1579 and SB 5187 (student transportation)
- We know this is expensive, but the gaps will only widen if this is pushed into the future and more districts will close neighborhood schools, layoff staff, and cut programs that help kids stay engaged in school.

## Questions to ask your district or school (if time allows)

- How much of a gap does your district still face related to special education funding? Is it over the enrollment cap of 16%? Do they use local enrichment levy dollars to make up this gap?
- How many highly mobile students (students in foster care, students facing homelessness or housing instability, incarcerated students, migrant students, and students in military families) are in your district? What additional funding would help better serve highly mobile students?
- What is the difference between what the state pays for MSOC and the district's actual costs?
- Is the state on track to meet your transportation expenses? If not, do you use enrichment levy dollars to make up this gap?

## "Asks" of your legislators

- Do you support removing the arbitrary enrollment cap for special education funding?
- Will you support bills to bridge the gap to fully fund student transportation?
- Will you support funding the actual cost of basic education costs, including insurance, utilities and technology – and closing those gaps this biennium?
- Can we count on your support for bills addressing these critical funding issues? (Listed above)

## Issue One-Pager

# Addressing the Student Mental Health Crisis

## Background

- Nearly half of all adolescents have experienced some sort of mental health issue, and 1 in 5 of these is labeled as serious (per the National Institute of Mental Health).
- In 2023 in Washington state, 15% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders considered suicide and 13% made a plan to commit suicide, with 9% attempting suicide in that one year alone.
- There are not enough people in the pipeline applying for relevant training and graduate level programs.
- Lack of funding for mental health staff forces some districts to use educators and administrators who are not adequately trained to deliver these services.

## Proposed Solutions (legislation, policies, and funding)

- The legislature increased staff ratios for school nurses, psychologists, social workers and counselors, and that is very much appreciated, but more is needed to fill the gaps to ensure all students have access to the resources they need.
- Please support programs and incentives to recruit, train, and retain mental health professionals.
- There is also a need to improve resources to assist families.
- Encourage the legislature to add an additional day of professional development for ALL school staff, so that every employee has the training to support students experiencing mental health issues.

## Questions to ask your district or school (if time allows)

- How many nurses, counselors, social workers or psychologists are in your student's school or district? How many are paid by the state and how many from local levy funds?
- Where do they think the greatest need is for increasing staffing ratios?

## “Asks” of your legislators

- Is student mental health support a priority for your caucus?
- Can we count on your support for bills addressing this critical issue? (Find current bill numbers on the [WSPTA blog](#) or in the Focus on Advocacy newsletters and look on the bill list for “Addressing the Student Mental Health Crisis.”)
- What kind of incentives can we provide to people who want to go into the mental health profession?

## [Issue One-Pager](#)

# Addressing Funding, Inclusion, and Supports in Special Education

## Background

- In 2024-25, 171,000 students in Washington state's K-12 student population received special education services.
- In 2023-2024, school districts spent more than \$435 million than was received in special education funding.
- Washington state is 1 of only 5 states that limit special education funding through arbitrary caps on enrollment.
- Our state faces a significant special education teacher and staff shortage.
- Washington state ranks 37<sup>th</sup> out of 50 states for inclusionary practices. Additional training is needed in high leverage teaching practices to ensure quality outcomes for students with disabilities.
- Students with disabilities made up 92.5% of those subjected to restraint and over 96% of students subject to isolation, even though they comprise a state average of about 15% of student enrollment.

## Proposed Solutions (legislation, policies, and funding) (pick 2-3 to raise)

- Fully funding special education services with no caps on funding enrollment and increasing the multiplier
- Simplifying the safety net reimbursement process to school districts
- Developing solutions to address a statewide special education staffing shortage
- Implementing inclusionary practices while continuing specially designed instruction and accommodation when beneficial
- Addressing disproportional identification, referrals, and discipline
- Providing training in best practices for students and classroom support
- Banning isolation and reduce restraint of all students

## Questions to ask your district or school (if time allows)

- What is the underfunding between the state and federal funding and actual costs to support educational programs for students with disabilities? How does your district make up this difference?
- What is the percentage of students with disabilities in the district? Is your district above or below the 16% cap?
- Does your district face a shortage of special education teachers and staff? If so, how long have those positions been unfilled?
- What are your district's policies on isolation and restraint?

## "Asks" of your legislators

- Is addressing the gap in special education funding a priority for your caucus this session?
- Do you support removing the arbitrary cap and increasing the multiplier to better meet student needs?
- Do you support banning student isolation and reducing restraint in schools?
- Can we count on your support for bills addressing this critical issue, such as HB 1310, HB 1357 and SB 5263? (Find current bill numbers on the [WSPTA blog](#) or in the Focus on Advocacy newsletters and look on the bill list for "Addressing Special Education Funding, Inclusion & Supports in Special Education.")

## [Issue One-Pager](#)

# Preventing and Reducing Gun Violence and Suicide

## Background

- Firearms are the leading cause of death for American children.
- More than 370,000 American students have experienced gun violence at school since Columbine in April 1999 (Washington Post).
- 4.6 million children live in a home with at least one unlocked and loaded firearm - and access to unlocked firearms increases youth suicide risk almost tenfold.
- In Washington, suicide (primarily by firearm) is now the leading cause of death for youths 1-24, killing more than 150 children per year (Washington Department of Health).
- Living in a home with a firearm increases youth suicide risk four-fold.
- Black American youth are dying at 10 times the rate of white American youth.
- LGBTQ+ youth are 5 times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual peers.

## Proposed Solutions (legislation, policies, and funding)

- Fund school-based mental health services
- Require permits for firearm purchases
- Incentivize safe storage of firearms and medications
- Restrict bulk weapons purchases
- Prohibit firearms in sensitive places including parks and public buildings
- Fund community-based prevention and intervention programs

## Questions to ask your district or school (if time allows)

- How many gun-related “incidents” has your district had in the past year?
- Has your district had students die by gun violence or suicide in the past year? If yes, how many?
- What is your district doing to support mental health or students contemplating suicide?

## “Asks” of your legislators

- Is preventing and reducing gun violence and suicide a priority for your caucus?
- Do you support community-based prevention and intervention?
- What expansion of our existing laws would you support to reduce the impact of gun violence on youth and families?
- Can we count on your support for bills addressing this critical issue? (Find current bill numbers on the [WSPTA blog](#) or in the Focus on Advocacy newsletters and look on the bill list for “Preventing and Reducing Gun Violence and Suicide.”)

## Issue One-Pager

# Expanding School Construction Funding Options

## Background

- School construction funding is critical to pay for the purchase of property, building new schools, modernizing and expanding existing schools, and increasing school safety.
- Some school districts can pass capital bonds and levies while others cannot, resulting in inequitable learning environments for students.
- Washington is one of only 11 states that require more than a 50% vote to pass school bonds.
- Between 2017 and 2024, 62.5% of all school bonds failed to meet the required 60% affirmative vote threshold. There were 53 that would have passed with a 55% requirement, and another 45 that would have passed at a simple majority of 50%. That means a total of 98 school bonds met a simple majority for bonds threshold, but their district's students were denied new or renovated schools due to the outdated 60% threshold.

## Proposed Solutions (legislation, policies, and funding)

- Increase overall state funding and funding options for school construction projects and improvements.
- Provide equitable funding options so all school districts across the state can complete capital projects and improvements.
- Allow the voters to decide to lower the 60 percent super-majority to pass bonds to no more than 55 percent with a strong preference for a simple majority of 50 percent.

## Questions to ask your district or school (if time allows)

- Has the district failed a bond measure? Did it meet the simple majority threshold and how close did it get to the 60 percent needed to pass?
- Has the district needed to delay maintenance, safety upgrades or new buildings due to lack of bond funding or lack of state school construction or planning resources?

## “Asks” of your legislators

- Are you in favor of reducing the bond threshold to simple majority or 55 percent?
- Do you support letting the voters consider a constitutional amendment to reduce the bond threshold?
- What are obstacles for your support in voting to allow voters to decide about lowering the threshold or seeking a simple majority for school construction funding?
- In what ways would you modernize school construction funding to make it more streamlined- to deal with inflation costs, and to make it more equitable, to account for schools in areas with less tax base?
- Can we count on your support for bills addressing this critical issue, such as HB 1032 and HJR 4201 (50%+1) and SB 5186 and SJR 8200 (55%)? (Find current bill numbers on the [WSPTA blog](#) or in the Focus on Advocacy newsletters and look on the bill list for “Expanding School Construction Options.”)

## Issue One-Pager