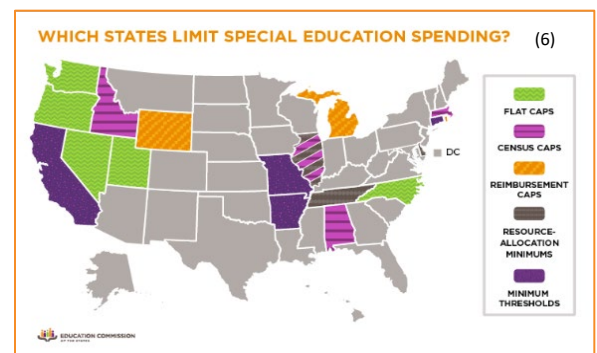


**WSPTA recognizes that the state must improve delivery of services to students with disabilities and close the gap between what it costs to provide services and what the state and federal governments fund for these services.**

## Background

- More than 171,000 K-12 students in Washington receive services under the state’s Special Education program.<sup>(1)</sup>
- School districts have the legal obligation to provide eligible students with instruction designed to meet their needs and services that help them access their education in the least restrictive environment (LRE).<sup>(2)</sup> Federal and state governments provide additional funding for these services. However, on average, school districts in Washington spend at least 26% more per student than they receive from state and federal sources.<sup>(3)</sup> For 2023-24, this gap was \$435 million.<sup>(4)</sup> Many districts use local enrichment levy funds to pay for special education services.<sup>(3)</sup>
- State law caps school districts at 16% enrollment for funding special education students.<sup>(5)</sup> For 2024-25, there are 135 districts over the 16% cap.<sup>(1)</sup> Washington is one of only five states that limits special education funding through flat caps.<sup>(6)</sup>
- There is a Special Education Safety Net that reimburses districts for exceptional costs but must be applied for annually. A recent audit found that the application process is complicated and labor intensive, and safety net funding is impossible to budget for because there is no guarantee their student will be funded, there’s a gap between state funding and the current threshold that must be covered by school districts, and a successful application is reimbursed in the year following delivery of services – all of which lead some districts to not apply for the additional funding.<sup>(3)</sup>
- School districts in Washington also face additional challenges in the delivery of special education services:
  - There are persistent shortages of teachers and paraeducators with special education endorsements.<sup>(7)</sup> Strategies have been identified to help school districts improve recruitment and retention of special education staff.<sup>(8)</sup>
  - A recent audit found that Washington ranked 37<sup>th</sup> nationally in inclusion, with 66% of students receiving special education services at least 80% of their time in general education classrooms (LRE1). LRE placement is intended to reflect the student's unique needs, and LRE 1 may not be the most appropriate placement for some students. Students should continue to receive the accommodations and supports specified in their IEP, regardless of setting.<sup>(2)</sup>
  - Additional training is needed in high-leverage teaching practices to ensure quality outcomes for students with disabilities. Special education teachers should provide evidence-based instruction that is highly responsive to students’ complex and varied needs. Examples include Universal Design for Learning, Specially Designed Instruction, and Culturally Responsive Training.<sup>(2)(9)</sup>
  - Recent studies identified several groups of students that are overrepresented in special education, including students who are males, Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, eligible for free-or reduced meals, or have limited English proficiency.<sup>(2)</sup> Post-school outcomes for these same groups are worse than for their peers.<sup>(10)</sup>
  - Students with disabilities made up 92.5% of those subject to restraint and over 96% of students subject to isolation, even though they comprise a statewide average of about 15% of total student enrollment. Black, multi-racial, homeless, elementary, and foster care students are disproportionately affected by these practices.<sup>(11)</sup> There are several recommendations to reduce restraint and end isolation.<sup>(11,12)</sup>



*(please continue to next page)*

## Proposed Solutions

Washington State PTA shall advocate for legislation or policies that:

- Fully funding special education services including eliminating the cap
- Simplify the safety net reimbursement process
- Address the statewide special education staffing shortage
- Implement inclusionary practices while continuing specially designed instruction and accommodations when beneficial
- Address disproportional identification, referrals, and discipline
- Provide training in best practices for student and classroom support
- Ban isolation and reduce restraint of all students

### For More Information

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*For more information on the WSPTA advocacy program, please visit our [website](#).*

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