

Expanding School Construction Funding Options 2025-26 Legislative Priority

WSPTA recognizes that Washington state needs to increase its responsibility for and financial share in school construction projects to support equity in student learning environments across the state.

Background

- School construction funding is critical for purchasing property, building new schools, modernizing and expanding existing schools, and increasing school safety and the environmental health of school buildings.
- The McCleary case on basic education funding did not address school construction funding. In its opinion issued September 7, 2023 in a case to determine the extent of the state’s responsibility for funding school construction, the Washington State Supreme Court ruled that the state’s constitution requires the State and local school districts to share the responsibility for those school capital construction costs.⁽¹⁾ While a state construction assistance program provides some funding, school districts must pass school bonds or capital levies to construct and maintain school facilities and to access state matching funds.
- Some school districts can pass capital bonds and levies while others cannot, resulting in inequitable learning environments for students. Many districts around the state are unable to support school construction bonds or capital levy measures due to exceptionally small debt capacity, the size of their overall budget, or lower assessed property values with a small commercial base, resulting in higher tax increases when compared to urban areas with larger commercial tax bases.⁽²⁾
- Washington is one of only 11 states that require more than a 50% vote to pass school bonds.⁽³⁾ 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a simple majority for bonds threshold, but their district’s students were denied new or renovated schools due to the outdated 60% threshold.⁽⁴⁾

Year	Total Bonds Run	Passed	% Passed	Failed	% Failed	Reached 55%	Reached Simple Majority	Failed Below 50%	Passed - Did Not Validate
2017	40	23	57.50%	17	42.50%	8	5	4	0
2018	46	18	39.13%	28	60.87%	13	10	5	0
2019	20	12	60.00%	8	40.00%	2	4	1	1
2020	24	8	33.33%	16	66.67%	7	4	5	0
2021	0	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	0	0	0	0
2022	19	4	21.05%	15	78.95%	6	3	6	0
2023	20	2	10.00%	18	90.00%	6	8	4	0
2024	39	11	28.21%	28	71.79%	11	11	6	0
2017-2024 TOTAL	208	78	37.50%	130	62.50%	53	45	31	1

Proposed Solutions

Washington State PTA shall advocate for legislation or policies that:

- 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.
- 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.

Citations

- (1) Supreme Court of Washington decision in Wahkiakum School District vs The State of Washington
<https://www.courts.wa.gov/opinions/pdf/1010524.pdf>
- (2) Shapiro, N. (2021, December 30). Small Washington district sues state for relying on local property taxes for school construction. *Seattle Times*
<https://www.seattletimes.com/education-lab/small-washington-district-sues-state-for-relying-on-local-property-taxes-for-school-construction/>
- (3) State by state school bond voter accountability measures, *Ballotpedia*
[https://ballotpedia.org/State by state school bond voter accountability measures](https://ballotpedia.org/State_by_state_school_bond_voter_accountability_measures)
- (4) Bond and levy spreadsheet from DA Davidson - contact WSPTA Advocacy Director for citation (PTAadvocacydir@wastatepta.org)

For More Information

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