

April 24, 2025

Dear Honorable Members of the Washington State Senate,

On behalf of our membership organizations and members from across the state, we are expressing our disappointment and frustration with what looks like the Legislature's lack of significant investments in your public schools and the state's 1.1 million students this session.

This is the most challenging budget environment we have seen or even could have expected, and it has been made more difficult by the uncertainty of what is happening and may happen at the federal level. Simultaneously, school districts large and small, rural, urban, and suburban are struggling financially, and the projected spending by the Legislature on the most basic educational costs will do very little to alleviate that fiscal instability.

This year, the education community came together – united behind the Big 3: MSOC, Special Education, and Transportation. These are not “new” investments but are the foundational costs to running schools and supporting our students with disabilities. The session began with strong bills and historic investments in both chambers on the Big 3. And as the months ticked by, we saw those efforts narrowed and the dollars invested become less and less.

Special education: We appreciate removing the artificial limit on the number of students with disabilities who received services due to a cap on funding. But the lack of a real increase to the excess cost multiplier means little will change in terms of delivering the services that are needed to help these students flourish. The Legislature's JLARC study confirmed what we already knew – the state is underfunding special education by more than \$500 million a year. The 2025-27 budget won't come close to that amount.

MSOC: \$35 above the inflationary increase will barely cover district utility bill increases or close the gap for insurance costs that continue to rise. This is a far cry from the \$300 per student proposed in the original HB 1338, which was about half of what was needed to close the gap between what it costs for routine expenses and what the state funds.

Transportation: Unlike the other two, the underfunding of transportation came off the table early but remains woefully underfunded for most school districts. And unlike previous years, this budget doesn't even offer a small grant program to help defray transportation costs for special passengers – considered students experiencing homelessness, students in our foster care system, and students with disabilities who are counted as basic ridership.

Budget gimmicks and inequity: We would be remiss if we didn't point out the impact of reducing apportionment payments in some months and then giving it back in August (HB 2050) so that the state can balance its budget. This will have a negative impact on school district cash flow in some of the months when local funding is in short supply. The same bill reduces Local Effort Assistance (LEA) for eight school districts that have high percentages of students enrolled in online or remote learning experiences. That “savings” won't balance the budget and will result in cuts to services needed for most students who have flourished in an alternative learning setting.

HB 2049 exacerbates the inequities between school districts based on ZIP code. By increasing the per student enrichment levy by \$500 for some districts but removing LEA from the bill, the Legislature

is widening the inequity between districts with higher and lower assessed property values. To further the inequities between districts, this bill would change the inflation factor from CPI to IPD, while leaving CPI as the per student inflationary adjusted percentage.

We know you are exhausted, and we are grateful to those of you who have been champions for public education this session. It has been one of the hardest sessions in history. But this will not be the year to declare victory. It is not the year to promote “historic investments” in K12 education funding in your newsletters back home while your districts are determining which additional cuts they will make without the basic education dollars they were counting on.

As you close the books on this painful legislative session, know that we will be back with the expectation that the Legislature will embrace and fulfill its paramount duty to fund public schools amply and equitably. We stand ready to work with you to ensure that every student has the tools, services, and support to thrive and that our school districts achieve financial stability.

Sincerely,

