

Closing the Funding Gaps 2025-26 Legislative Priority

WSPTA recognizes that K-12 education is not fully funded, and an increasing number of school districts are currently in financial crisis. Critical funding gaps persist in basic education related to services for students with disabilities, Materials, Supplies, and Operating Costs (MSOC), and student transportation. These must be addressed to ensure fiscal stability of districts and avoid budget cuts that negatively impact student outcomes.

Background

- Following the historic McCleary lawsuit, state investment in K-12 education peaked at 52% of the operating budget (2019-21). For the last three biennia, the percentage of the state operating budget invested in K-12 schools has been flat at 43-44%, and inflation-adjusted funding has gone DOWN.^(1,2)
- An increasing number of school districts are currently in financial crisis⁽³⁾, due to a variety of factors out of their control, including the COVID-related decline in enrollment that has not bounced back and declining birth rates; ESSER dollars that were used to support student learning have ended; and persistent gaps in state apportionment. These gaps require school districts to use voter-approved enrichment levies or reserves to cover the excess costs.
- Schools have legal obligations to serve students with disabilities, regardless of the cost. District expenditures for services related to special education exceeded special education funding by about \$435 million in 2024-25.⁽¹⁾ The 2025 legislature closed about 70% of this gap, adding \$310 million to the 2025-27 operating budget.⁽⁴⁾ School districts will still be dependent on local enrichment levy dollars or reserves to provide required services.
- The MSOC allocation is not indexed for inflation and has not kept pace with the actual costs required for basic requirements like insurance, utilities, technology, and curriculum adoption.⁽⁵⁾ The difference between what the state funded for MSOC in 2023-24 and the actual cost was over \$456 million or over \$400 per student.⁽¹⁾ For the 2025-27 biennium, the legislature only increased MSOC by \$78.89 million, leaving significant gaps that districts must close.⁽⁶⁾
- The student transportation funding formula is complicated, and many districts' actual costs for student transportation are consistently underfunded.^(1,5,7) Any costs above those reimbursed by the state must come from district general funds, special levies or enrichment levies. There were no new investments made for 2025-27.

State Investment in K-12 Then and Now

- While total dollars invested in K-12 has increased over the last decade, the K-12 share of investment has declined since the 2019-21 biennium.

	2019-21	2021-23	2023-25	2025-27
Total Spend (billions)	\$26.6	\$27.5	\$31.2	\$33.7
K-12 Percentage	51.6%	44.5%	43.4%	43.2%

- If the state invested 51.6% of its operating budget for the 2025-27 biennium, it would mean an additional \$6.5 billion for schools.

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Proposed Solutions

Washington State PTA shall advocate for legislation or policies, and budgets that ensure the financial stability of all school districts, by prioritizing K-12 education in the state's operating budget, and by closing existing gaps in basic education funding for MSOC (Materials, Supplies and Operating Costs), special education services, and student transportation, so that state funding reflects and keeps pace with actual costs.

For More Information

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

Citations

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4. E2SSB 5263 Chapter 368, Laws of 2025. <https://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2025-26/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/Senate/5263-S2.SL.pdf#page=1>
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