



Statement on 2018-2019 School District Budgets and Collective Bargaining

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Since 2016, Tim Garchow has served as the eighth person to lead WSSDA during its 60-year history as a state agency. He has experience as a teacher, principal and superintendent.

Ever since the gavel struck to close the 2018 legislative session, educators, administrators and organizations like WSSDA have been continuously working to assess the impact and implications of the Legislature's response to the McCleary decision. As we look across the state, it is evident that one of the impacts is an unprecedented amount of collective bargaining. I'm sure both sides of the table would rather be focused on back-to-school preparations because the children are why all of us work in education, to begin with.

Because of our shared focus on students, I'm confident that all parties involved will continue to bargain in good faith, and that agreements will be reached that respect the professional dedication of all school district employees while ensuring the continued solvency of our school districts.

While that is happening, there are three things that must be taken into account.

First, the amount of money that districts have to bargain with is not the same. School districts will not receive the same amount of funding for the same amount of teachers. This means that one district's ability to provide a salary increase may be dramatically less than another district located right next door. That's why comparing one district to another can be like comparing apples to oranges. While all school districts are set to receive a standard amount of funding per teacher, some districts are set to receive additional funding based on the new formula set up by the Legislature. Within that formula, there are a variety of factors causing a variation in funding available to districts, but one, in particular, is something referred to as the "regionalization factor," which is intended to provide more funding to districts with higher housing costs. Because of regionalization, the amount of money districts receive for teacher salary can vary by up to 24%. Thus, we are seeing confusion at the local level when some districts are able to provide larger salary increases than others.

Second, state funding is set to increase, but local funding is set to decrease. Over a third of Washington’s school districts are going to lose 50% or more of their local levy funding. In many cases, districts and communities have prioritized these levy funds to provide enrichment programs for students or to meet other objectives of their strategic plan. Timing is also an issue. New state funding starts at the beginning of this school year. The limitations on local funding don’t occur until later. In many cases, that means an increase in funding now will be followed by a reduction of funding in the near future. This can add to the confusion around how much money districts actually have to bargain with.

Third, districts have been working hard to determine what they can afford.

To help school districts navigate changes brought about by the new legislation and to ensure sustainability, the Legislature added a requirement for districts to create a four-year budget plan. For months now, districts have been working with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and their Educational Service Districts to determine the level of salary increase that they can afford on a long-term basis. This work has been difficult, complex and ongoing. Each district must continue to make a thorough examination of what they can afford based on their own unique situation, regardless of the agreements being reached in other districts.

The important thing to remember in all of this is that teachers, administrators and school boards want the same thing. We want the best possible education for our students. We all appreciate and respect the role that each other plays in making that happen and we realize that none of us could do it alone. We acknowledge the professionalism, expertise, and caring that each other brings to our districts and we will continue to give our all for the 1.1 million students of Washington state.

Formed in 1922, WSSDA has grown to include 1,477 locally elected school board directors from across Washington. As a state agency, per chapter 28A.345 RCW, WSSDA supports its members with research-based leadership development resources, policy and legal guidance, and legislative advocacy. This work is of critical importance because school board directors build the future of public education by setting the policy, governance, and budgetary priorities for all of Washington's 295 school districts, serving approximately 1.1 million students.