

NKSD narrows down legislative priorities

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Thursday, September 26, 2019 12:41pm | [NEWS](#) [LEGISLATIVE SESSION](#)

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On the business end of the North Kitsap School District's (NKSD) Sept. 12 meeting, the school board narrowed down legislative priorities it would like to focus on with help from the Washington State

School Directors Association (WSSDA).

According to WSSDA Executive Director Tim Garchow, WSSDA collects and compiles a guide of legislative priorities that the 360 districts across the state would like to see discussed and voted on during the state legislative session.

"Each year the guide is updated to reflect new proposals and amendments to existing ones that the districts would like to see WSSDA support during the session," Garchow said.

Many of these legislative positions are brought forward by the districts themselves over the years.

"The districts will often come together regionally and vote on priorities based on what's most important to their districts collectively," Garchow said.

Garchow also noted that not all of the districts submit proposals or vote on them either.

Each year the districts are asked to rank their top priorities, which WSSDA

then boils down to a one-page document identifying what they will support or not support in the legislature that year.

“We will also support things that are not on that document if they come up on a bill. But the things on the document are what we focus on,” Garchow said.

NKSD identified the following as 15 of its legislative priorities in ranked order:

- De-linking assessments from graduation requirements
- School employee salaries
- State tribal education
- Academic rigor and equity in public education
- Full funding for SEBB
- A more clearly defined online high school and beyond plan for every student
- Comprehensive school safety
- End of course exams
- School construction revenue
- Passage on school finance issues
- Transportation
- Career and college ready diploma
- CTE funding
- K-8 world language instruction
- SPED students

Many of these legislative priorities are standing priorities that have been amended over the years, while others are new.

At a recent meeting, North Kitsap School District’s Board of Directors went around the table and identified their top choices individually and then began to rank them all together, developing the above list.

“One thing I noticed about myself was I tended to focus on the things that impact high school students,” board member Cindy Webster-Martinson said.

Beth Worthington, the board’s legislative representative, noted that she

focused on priorities she believes the district needs to advocate for most strongly, mainly funding based priorities, such as school employee benefits, and pensions.

“The biggest shortfalls in funding is the SEBB, its a big unknown for our business officers. Also, salaries are a big issue, while they (Legislature) made progress in getting teacher salaries to market rates, they have not done that for the rest of school employees,” Worthington said.

Rick Eckert drew attention to transportation as a subject that may not have as many advocates because it is a unique issue to certain districts.

“I don’t think a lot of people understand the issues that come with both, I know we have issues with transportation and greater Kitsap does, but I don’t think a lot of districts are going to advocate for it,” Eckert said.

Many of NKSD’s priorities are directed at the end of high school assessments and ensuring that students have multiple options for careers and education after high school.

De-linking of assessments from graduation requirements is the top priority of NKSD.

The idea was first proposed to the legislature in 2010 and adopted in 2014 in response to the unintended consequences of the state-mandated assessment requirements for graduation, which over-emphasized test prep.

In 2014 WSSDA supported legislation that removed state-mandated assessments as graduation requirements. This session WSSDA will oppose any legislation that would look to reinstate the practice.

Another top priority for NKSD is school employee salaries.

WSSDA first began supporting this position in 1988, the last time it was amended was in 1990.

“WSSDA shall initiate/ support legislation that requires parity for all educational employee groups whenever state salary increases are provided and which would assure the state of Washington of having salaries for

education personnel that would allow them to remain competitive with other states and commensurate with comparable professions,” reads the original position statement.

This year WSSDA is proposing to support the same legislation, with the additional provision that the salaries equate to the district’s annual cost of living and provides for periodic wage increases.

As Worthington noted, there were increases for teachers during the last legislative session, but not for other members of educational staff. Recognizing that the schools and students don’t succeed without all of the staff, NKSD wants to make sure its staff can continue to afford to live where they work.

One of the other priorities for NKSD through WSSDA’s legislative advocacy is full funding for School Employee’s Benefits and Pensions.

Basically WSSDA commits to supporting legislative and budgetary provisions requiring the state to fully fund pension programs and benefits for all eligible school districts both full and part-time.

The Washington State legislative session will begin on Jan. 12, 2020. But WSSDA will host its legislative assembly on Sept. 27 in Spokane.



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