

GUEST EDITORIAL

There's enough money to fund Auburn schools without increasing property taxes

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Liv Finne

By Liv Finne, *Washington Policy Center, for the Auburn Reporter*

For years, through politics, teacher strikes and court cases, we heard that state lawmakers were underfunding schools. Then, with great fanfare, state leaders came together in 2017 and passed an historic bill that is providing schools the greatest funding increase in Washington state history. This bill was

the legislature's final resolution of the state Supreme Court's 2012 McCleary decision, and the latest in a series of six years of enhanced funding to schools. The courts approved the measure and ended the McCleary case.

This historic bill made two important changes in school funding. First, it raised the state property tax, greatly increasing state funding for all schools. Second, it reduced local dependence on levies to ease the burden on taxpayers, to increase fairness and to reduce inequity between property-rich districts and property-poor ones.

Lawmakers and the state supreme court rightly thought it was not fair that a child in Seattle received thousands of dollars more for her education than a child in Kettle Falls.

As a result, funding in the Auburn School District jumped from \$10,300 per student a few years ago to \$14,700 per student in 2018-19, more than tuition at most private schools. Total spending went from \$143 million in 2012 to \$248 million today, an increase of 73 percent.

Auburn's taxpayers saw an average 17 percent increase in their taxes to provide this added money.

Yet now Kim Mead, WEA union president, says the district should get even more money. She is pressing lawmakers to raise property taxes again, this time at the local level. She wants lawmakers to break the promises they made to taxpayers and to undermine the constitutional requirement that the state provide ample and equitable funding for the education of every child.

The state Supreme Court ruled that past school funding was unfair because rich districts got thousands of dollars more to educate their students than poor ones. Lawmakers fixed the problem by making sure every student got fair and equal funding at the statewide level.

Not surprisingly, some rich school districts, like Seattle, want to get more money for themselves and leave poor communities behind. They are pushing SB 5313, to allow higher local taxes to be imposed on top of the state property tax that was just enacted.

It's little wonder the unions are so interested – there is big money to be made. Unions in rich districts support the bill, and the local union backs it too, knowing it will lead to higher property taxes on families living in Auburn.

The Auburn School District, like all districts throughout the state, now has ample money to provide every student a top-notch education, without increasing property taxes for the second time in two years. Responsible school boards throughout the state are providing great programs for kids using record-high state funding and well-managed budgets.

Sure, some school officials, and of course unions, always want more money. But they should consider how the burden of higher property taxes falls hardest on the elderly living on fixed incomes, young couples seeking to buy their first homes and working families living from paycheck to paycheck.

Lawmakers should resist the union and those school districts that have made bad budget decisions. They should uphold the principle of uniformity

and equity in school funding. Promises made to taxpayers should be kept. Lawmakers and the governor should stick with the school-funding plan they passed; a fair limit on the burden of local taxes, a big increase in the state property tax, and equitable funding for all children living in Washington.

Liv Finne is director of the Center for Education at the [Washington Policy Center](#) (WPC), an independent, nonprofit think tank that promotes sound public policy based on free-market solutions. Through its research centers, WPC focuses on core areas of public policy, including education.



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Bremerton School District is spending \$16,000 per student, yet the union wants higher property taxes

By LIV FINNE | Apr 19, 2019

BLOG



For years, through politics, teacher strikes and court cases, we have heard that state lawmakers were underfunding schools. Then, with great fanfare, state leaders came together in 2017 and passed an historic bill that is providing schools the greatest funding increase in Washington state history. This bill was the legislature's final resolution of the

state Supreme Court's 2012 McCleary decision, and the latest in a series of six years of enhanced funding to schools. The courts approved the measure and ended the McCleary case.

This historic bill made two important changes in school funding. First, it raised the state property tax, greatly increasing state funding for all schools. Second, it reduced local dependence on levies to ease the burden on taxpayers, to increase fairness and reduced inequity between property-rich districts and property-poor ones.

Lawmakers and the State supreme court rightly thought it was not fair that a child in Seattle received thousands of dollars more for her education than a child in Kettle Falls.

As a result, funding in the Bremerton School District jumped from \$11,200 per student a few years ago to \$16,000 per student in 2018-19, more than tuition at most private schools. Total spending went from \$54 million in 2012 to \$81 million today, an increase of 49 percent.

Bremerton taxpayers just saw their property taxes increase, paying on average 12 percent more to provide this added money.

Yet now Kim Mead, WEA union president, says the district should get even more money. She is pressing lawmakers to raise property taxes again, this time at the local level. She wants lawmakers to break the promises they made to taxpayers and to undermine the constitutional requirement that the state provide ample and equitable funding for the education of every child.

The state Supreme Court ruled that past school funding was unfair because rich districts got thousands of dollars more to educate their students than poor ones. Lawmakers fixed the problem by making sure every student got fair and equal funding at the statewide level.

Not surprisingly, some rich school districts, like Seattle, want to get more money for themselves and leave poor communities behind. They are pushing SB 5313, to allow higher local taxes to be imposed on top of the state property tax that was just enacted.

It's little wonder the unions are so interested — there is big money to be made. Unions in rich districts support the bill, and the local union backs it too, knowing it will lead to higher property taxes on families living in Bremerton.

The Bremerton School District, like all districts across the state, now has ample money to provide every student a top-notch education, without increasing property taxes for the second time in two years. Responsible school boards across the state are providing great

programs for kids using record-high state funding and well-managed budgets.

Sure, some school officials, and of course unions, always want more money. But they should consider how the burden of higher property taxes falls hardest on the elderly living on fixed incomes, young couples seeking to buy their first homes, and working families living from paycheck to paycheck.

Lawmakers should resist the union and those school districts that have made bad budget decisions. They should uphold the principle of uniformity and equity in school funding. Promises made to taxpayers should be kept. Lawmakers and the Governor should stick with the school-funding plan they passed; a fair limit on the burden of local taxes, a big increase in the state property tax, and equitable funding for all children living in Washington

state Supreme Court's 2012 McCleary decision, and the latest in a series of six years of enhanced funding to schools. The courts approved the measure and ended the McCleary case.

This historic bill made two important changes in school funding. First, it raised the state property tax, greatly increasing state funding for all schools. Second, it increased fairness and reduced inequity between property-rich districts and property-poor ones by reducing local dependence on levies to fund schools.

Lawmakers and the state Supreme Court rightly thought it was not fair that a child in Seattle received thousands of dollars more for her education than a child in Kettle Falls.

As a result, funding in Spokane Public Schools jumped from \$10,900 per student a few years ago to \$15,000 per student in 2018-19, more than most private schools. Total spending went from \$316 million in 2012 to \$465 million today, an increase of 47 percent.

Spokane's taxpayers just saw an average 10 percent increase in their property taxes to provide this added money.

Yet now Vicky Jensen, WEA union leader, says the district should get even more money. She is pressing lawmakers to raise property taxes again, this time at the local level. She wants lawmakers to break the promise they made to taxpayers and to undermine the constitutional requirement that the state provide ample and equitable funding for the education of every child.

The state Supreme Court ruled that past school funding was unfair because rich districts got thousands of dollars more to educate their students than poor ones. Lawmakers fixed the problem by making sure every student got fair and equal funding at the statewide level.

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Spokane Public Schools, like all districts across the state, now has ample money to provide every student a top-notch education, without increasing property taxes for the second time in two years. Responsible school boards across the state are providing great

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KREM2 TV News fact-checks WPC research on Spokane school spending and union's push for higher taxes

By LIV FINNE | BLOG | Apr 23, 2019

Last night KREM2 TV News in Spokane fact-checked my research on per-student spending in Spokane public schools. Reporter Alexa Block checked with official government sources and talked to a representative of the WEA union. Her finding is straightforward, "Yes, Spokane Public Schools plans to spend nearly \$15K per student next year and the teacher's union does want to raise local property taxes."

Her well-researched report is here: https://www.krem.com/article/news/local/verify/verify-will-sps-spend-15k-per-student-does-the-teachers-union-want-more-tax-dollars/293-5deed3c0-062b-44dc-a411-cb20b65c917c?fbclid=IwAR1khpmwiD-zoqDFkRjiWPFrCa5pIDrDc_fb1AOQEcd_xmFoOfDMePFotc

Olympia School District is spending \$13,700 per student, yet the union wants higher property taxes

By LIV FINNE | Apr 19, 2019

BLOG



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lawmakers were underfunding schools. Then, with great fanfare, state leaders came together in 2017 and passed an historic bill that is providing schools the greatest funding increase in Washington state history. This bill was the legislature's final resolution of the state Supreme Court's 2012 McCleary decision, and the latest in a series of six years of enhanced funding to schools. The courts approved the measure and ended the McCleary case.

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Lawmakers and the State supreme court rightly thought it was not fair that a child in Seattle received thousands of dollars more for her education than a child in Kettle Falls.

As a result, funding in the Olympia School District jumped from \$10,000 per student a few years ago to \$13,700 per student in 2018-19, more than tuition at most private schools. Total spending went from \$87 million in 2012 to \$137 million today, an increase of 57 percent.

Olympia taxpayers saw their property taxes increase, paying on average 15 percent more to provide this added money.

Yet now Kim Mead, WEA union president, says the district should get even more money. She is pressing lawmakers to raise property taxes again, this time at the local level. She wants lawmakers to break the promises they made to taxpayers and to undermine the constitutional requirement that the state provide ample and equitable funding for the education of every child.

The state Supreme Court ruled that past school funding was unfair because rich districts got thousands of dollars more to educate their students than poor ones. Lawmakers fixed the problem by making sure every student got fair and equal funding at the statewide level.

Not surprisingly, some rich school districts, like Seattle, want to get more money for themselves and leave poor communities behind. They are pushing SB 5313, to allow higher local taxes to be imposed on top of the state property tax that was just enacted.

It's little wonder the unions are so interested — there is big money to be made. Unions in rich districts support the bill, and the local union backs it too, knowing it will lead to higher property taxes on families living in Olympia.

The Olympia School District, like all districts across the state, now has ample money to provide every student a top-notch education, without increasing property taxes for the second time in two years. Responsible school boards across the state are providing great programs for kids using record-high state funding and well-managed budgets.

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WEA union pay raises mean layoffs for younger teachers, librarians and support staff

By LIV FINNE | Apr 19, 2019



Late yesterday afternoon the WEA union posted a defensive reaction to news headlines reporting, “Teacher union’s greed causing massive deficits, layoffs across the state,” and “Big raises for teachers led to pending cuts.”

The negative news reporting is making union executives worried that their top political goal for the year is in trouble; getting lawmakers to break their no-more-taxes promise and impose high local taxes on top of the recent state property tax increase.

The union defensively claims that their top priority is children:

“As professional educators, we put our students at the center of everything we do...”

Well...not really. Their top priority is getting more money out of taxpayers, by any means necessary. Consider the following:

Last fall the WEA union used strikes to close public schools in 15 districts, shutting out over 164,000 children from access to educational services.

The WEA used the secretive collective bargaining process to secure pay raises for teachers based on seniority, leaving younger teachers behind, and putting many district budgets into deficit.

Now many young teachers, librarians, school nurses and support staff face layoffs, because the money from the state property tax increase went to double-digit raises and other priorities.

WEA executives have cut local levy money for charter public schools, refusing to allow these families, many living in poor communities, to participate in local voter-approved funding.

The WEA wants HB 2140, to overturn the McCleary education funding fix and bring back funding inequities in education funding, which would reward wealthy school districts at the expense of property-poor districts.

The WEA is using considerable behind-the-scenes influence to kill the Palumbo Amendment in SB 5313. Senator Palumbo, a Democrat, simply wants funding fairness for charter schools, so these families can participate on an equal basis in the levy support voters have approved for local schools.

In the meantime, the WEA union’s private yearly budget, taken from teacher paychecks, has ballooned by 38%, up from \$29 million a few years ago to over \$40 million today.

The WEA union backs seniority-based raises that hurt skilled younger teachers, tenure rules that force districts to keep the worst-performing teachers, multiple lawsuits to close charter schools, denying ORCA bus cards to charter school children, and an effort last

year to defund the popular Running Start program.

In lobbying for HB 2140 WEA union executives are working overtime to secure maximum public dollars and power for themselves, while shutting down popular learning opportunities for children and families.

Does that sound like an organization that is putting students “at the center of everything we do”?