

Washington Legislature approves \$417 million special education package

It will allow schools to allocated up to 15% of budget toward special ed

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Washington lawmakers passed a bill Sunday that's expected to provide an additional \$417 million for special education in the coming years.

[House Bill 1436](#), which was passed at the final hour Sunday, will allow schools to allocate as much as 15 percent of their annual budget toward special education, an increase from the previous cap of 13.5 percent.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, educators have implored leaders to reexamine funding models to better support a growing number of students requiring special services. Without increased state support, districts have looked to fill the gaps with local levy funding, but still struggle to do so.

The bill would also lower the threshold of eligibility for districts seeking to acquire additional "safety net" funding for students with advanced needs at schools where the amount dedicated to special education funding exceeds the 15 percent cap.

"Beginning in the 2023-24 school year, a high-need student is eligible for safety net awards from state funding ... if the student's individualized education program costs exceed: (i) 2 times the average per-pupil expenditure, for school districts with fewer than 1,000 full-time equivalent students; (ii) 2.2 times the average per-pupil expenditure, for school districts with 1,000 or more full-time equivalent students."

Previously, safety net funding could only be accessed for students with 2.3 times the average per-pupil expenditure.

The bill also promises that over the next two years, the Legislature will create a series of committees to examine how Washington's special education funding model compares with other states through a series of audits to determine what next steps need to be made.

Among the factors expected to be considered are the amount to which local levies currently support special education, ways in which the state can appropriately hire and retain paraeducators and professionals serving students with disabilities and the rate at which students with disabilities may be under-counted or under-served. The bill was delivered to the governor Sunday evening.