

WASA's Q and A for Superintendents and Administrators On Washington State's Full Funding Coalition

What is the Full Funding Coalition?

Five of Washington's largest education associations – representing classified staff, teachers, principals, administrators, superintendents and school directors – have joined together to propose a new, comprehensive system of financing and fully funding our state's K-12 schools. The Full Funding Coalition members is comprised of: the Washington State School Directors' Association, the Washington Association of School Administrators, the Association of Washington School Principals, the Washington Education Association and the Public School Employees of Washington.

Why did these organizations feel compelled to come together now?

School districts across the state are facing a financial crisis because the state is not fully funding basic education. Washington is 45th in the nation in per pupil expenditures, 46th in largest class size and the state's salary allocation does not reflect actual costs for any category of K-12 employees. Local levies, which have been stretched to the limit, must be used to cover the costs of basic education programs. We need a new system **NOW** because we want students to succeed and the state's funding has not kept pace with our increased expectations and standards for student learning.

What will the Full Funding Coalition's proposal do?

The Coalition's proposal reinvents the current K-12 system. The new system is fair, equitable and fully funded. It provides enough resources for all students to have the opportunity to be successful in the twenty-first century. It reflects what it *actually* costs to meet Washington's high performance expectations for student learning. It distributes the funding based on research findings for successful schools. It requires dual accountability for both the state and school districts. It provides for the ongoing review of resources and a rational system of accountability for schools that is based on standards of continuous progress.

What is wrong with the current school finance system?

Besides being woefully underfunded, the current system relies on complicated and inequitable funding formulas largely developed in the early 1970s that have no rational connection to what it takes to bring all students up to today's standards.

How is the Coalition's proposal different from the current funding system?

The current finance system is based on *inputs*. The state allocates funding to school districts through complex formulas based on numbers of days and students and staff ratios. With the advent of education reform laws in 1993, we began to focus on outcomes--what students were learning--not how many days they were in a classroom. The Coalition's proposal sends funding to schools based on what research says it takes to have all students in a school reach higher standards. School districts are given the flexibility they need to design and implement programs to meet the needs of all students. When fully implemented, it would allow schools to decide how best to address local needs and challenges, hold schools accountable for achieving student performance expectations and hold the state accountable for providing ample resources.

But what if the state fails to provide all the necessary funds?

Accountability is a two-way street under the Coalition proposal. To ensure that the definition of basic education and its funding remain current, dynamic and adaptive, a new nonpartisan Commission on Quality Education in Washington would be established. It will determine annually what level of state funding is needed to for schools to achieve the state's educational standards for students. Schools would be expected to meet continuous progress standards based on multi-dimensional benchmarking for student performance *in proportion* to the level of state funding provided in each school.

What prevents the state from forcing school districts to rely on local levies to pay for the basic costs of educating students – like so many school districts are doing now?

Local funds would be used only to enhance basic education and would be accounted for separate from state funds. The Coalition's proposal defines basic education as *everything* it takes to give *all* students the opportunity to master state learning standards. Washington's constitution requires ample funding for basic education. That state responsibility was affirmed by the courts in 1977.

Why is the definition of basic education so important?

Washington's State Constitution declares, "It is the paramount duty of the state to make ample provision for the education of all children residing within its borders..." No other state in the nation has a more strongly worded mandate for education to which all children are entitled and for which the state is obligated to pay. The Coalition's proposal for full funding for basic education is based on David Conley's research on the financing of successful schools and what it takes for students and schools to meet

the state's performance expectations. The proposal aligns the school finance system to those basic education standards and ensures that ample funding is phased-in over a six-year period .

How would funding be allocated to individual school districts under the Coalition's proposed system?

The new allocation formula is based on the research that has been done on successful prototype elementary, middle and high schools. Each school is provided the resources for *everything*---including staffing, textbooks, utilities, technology, security, etc.--- that is needed to bring all students up to our state standards. The formula accounts for the unique demographic characteristics like student poverty factors, special and bilingual education needs and small school district factors, *for each school*.

How would salaries be calculated?

It is expected that state funding of salaries for teachers, administrators, and classified staff would be determined by comparing average salaries of education-related professions with those of similar professions in the private sector, incorporating regional cost of living differences.

How much will the first phase of the new finance system cost?

The proposed new finance system would be implemented over the course of six successive school years. In the 2009-2011 biennium K-12 state funding would increase by \$1.2 billion. This would increase funding in current formulas for full-day kindergarten, reduced class size, improved classified staffing ratios, improved compensation, books, supplies, utilities and technology---as the new prototype formula is developed and phased-in.

How will the state pay for it?

To help pay for the increased funding, the Coalition proposes that the Legislature allocate half of all general fund state revenue increases in excess of 5 percent to K-12 and use the revenue capacity available from state property taxes.

How is the Coalition's proposal different from other proposals to restructure school finance?

The Coalition's proposal is a comprehensive, system wide, long term approach to solving the decades old problem of underfunding basic education with allocation formulas that have no rational basis to support them. The proposed system is an accountable, dynamic and effective approach to ensuring that students get the kind of world class education they need to be successful. The state is accountable for providing funding and school districts are accountable for meeting performance standards. The Commission on Quality Education in Washington would determine the annual amount of money needed to make ample provision for basic education and identify the continuous progress standards that each school and district must meet.

How does the lawsuit filed by the Network for Excellence in Washington Schools (NEWS) impact the Coalition's proposal?

NEWS is a statewide coalition of more than 50 community organizations, school districts, education associations, teachers and parents that has filed a lawsuit asking the courts to order the State of Washington to carry out its paramount constitutional duty to make ample provision for the education of all children residing within its borders. The litigants believe that the state must realistically determine the actual dollar cost of providing all Washington children with a 21st century education and establish a stable and reliable state funding system to pay that actual dollar cost. The NEWS lawsuit is set to go to trial on June 1, 2009. The Full Funding Coalition's proposal provides the legislature with a blueprint for action.

What is the next step for the Coalition?

The Coalition presented its proposal to the Basic Education Finance Task Force on June 10, 2008. Should the Task Force choose not use the Coalition's proposal in their final recommendations to the Legislature in December 2008, the coalition will approach leadership and other legislators in the 2009 session to sponsor the bill the coalition has drafted to implement the proposal.

What can members of the five Coalition organizations do to help?

Learn more about school finance and the Coalition's proposal. Work with the coalition's associations to get the word out. Talk to others in your school communities about the need for change. Visit the Full Funding Coalition Web site www.fullfundingcoalition.org to view the Coalition's PowerPoint and to read the Coalition's full report "Attaining a World-Class K-12 System-Aligning Washington's Funding Structure with 21st Educational Expectations".