



News Release

Washington State School Directors' Association
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For Immediate Release.

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State asks feds to set aside letter on 'failing' schools

State education officials have asked the U.S. Department of Education to exempt the state from a requirement that nearly all school districts in Washington send letters to parents stating their schools are failing.

“That 14-day letter does nothing to further any education goals. In fact, it does quite the opposite,” said David Iseminger, a Lake Stevens school director and member of the Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA) Board of Directors. “We appreciate State Superintendent Randy Dorn supporting our position, and objecting to this requirement.”

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) asked for the exemption last week after WSSDA cited several major concerns with the required letter.

- No state and only a fraction of schools in the country will meet 100 percent of its Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) requirements, the goal set for Washington State.
- The original intent of the legislation was to give parents an option to send their children to non-failing schools, but that option will exist in only a handful of districts.
- The only impact of the letters will be punitive. Good schools will be painted with the same brush as less successful ones.
- The result will be an erosion of public confidence, making it harder to pass local levy and bond measures needed to continue school improvement.

“This federal directive is a wholesale mislabeling of our schools,” said Iseminger. “Many of these schools have been recognized for improved graduation rates, closing achievement gaps, high scores on national tests like the ACT and SAT and other signs of excellence.”

Eight members of Washington's congressional delegation expressed strong support for Washington's request in their [own letter](#) to the U.S. Department of Education.

In its request, OSPI said districts would be hard pressed to send the letter out on time. They would be required to send the letter out at least 14 days before the start of school. Finalization of the year's AYP measures for districts will last well into August. The process involves both calculation and a review by districts. At the same time, some schools are scheduled to open their doors to students before the end of the month.

As part of its request, OSPI said it would promise to notify parents of the progress on AYP using normal communications when school has started. By the end of October, it would report on AYP compliance and the districts that provided the notice of school choice. In a brief comment period, school districts overwhelmingly supported OSPI's request.

The U.S. Department of Education imposed the letter requirement when it cancelled the state's relatively broad waiver that exempted it from funding penalties for not meeting the stringent requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act passed in 2002. Forty-three states and the District of Columbia have been granted waivers under the law and none are expected to meet the AYP requirements.

Washington state is the first to have its waiver revoked. The Department of Education has notified a number of other states that they are in danger of having their waivers pulled.

WSSDA is pressing Congress and the administration to amend and reauthorize the federal law, originally passed as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. More than 70 school boards across Washington have passed resolutions supporting changes to the law.

"These punitive sanctions are a direct result of Congress' failure to amend and reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act," said WSSDA President Mari Taylor. "Until recently, the law was reauthorized every five years to ensure that our most vulnerable children get a quality, free public education. The law hasn't been touched since 2001 and that's inexcusable."

[More information and a list of boards that have passed resolutions](#)

[Copy of OSPI request](#)

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About WSSDA — Founded in 1922, the Washington State School Directors' Association is comprised of all 1,477 school board members from Washington's 295 school districts. The districts they lead serve more than one million students, have a combined annual budget of \$6 billion, and employ nearly 100,000 people. WSSDA's core mission is focused on ensuring that school board members have the knowledge, tools and services they need to effectively govern their districts and improve student learning.