



2022 LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE HOT TOPICS

STAFFING ALLOCATIONS

WASA/WSSDA/WASBO support increasing the current, outdated staffing allocations in the Prototypical School Funding Model to at least reach the level adopted by the voters in Initiative 1351 (2014) and recommended by the Staffing Enrichment Workgroup (2019). As a first step, we support phasing in updated staffing allocations, beginning with investments in physical, social, and emotional support staff to meet students' needs for: mental health, social health, emotional health, behavioral health, and safety. Funding this initial phase will allow school districts to better meet safety and social-emotional needs of students.

SB 5595 (Wellman) / **HB 1985** (Dolan) / Governor Inslee request would enhance staffing allocations in a new category called "Physical, Social, and Emotional Support Staff." The following positions are included in the new grouping: school nurses, social workers, psychologists, guidance counselors, classified staff providing student and staff safety, and parent involvement coordinators.

HB 1664 (Rule) / Superintendent Reykdal request as originally introduced would have provided full funding (over three years) only for school nurses, along with a specific policy revision allowing school districts to use those funds for other staff within a new category in the Prototypical School Funding Model called "Physical, Social, and Emotional Support Staff." The positions included are identical to the positions described in SB 5595/HB 1985. As amended by the House Education Committee, language in HB 1664 now mirrors SB 5595, enhancing staffing allocations for all positions under the category of Physical, Social, and Emotional Support Staff.

Talking Points:

- Staffing ratios in the Prototypical School Funding Model are largely unchanged since the Model was first implemented, even though the need for student supports in local school districts has grown exponentially.
- When implementing the Prototypical School Funding Model in 2010, there was a stated intent to phase-in and provide for adequate staffing levels; however, beyond a few slight changes the Legislature has yet to make good on its commitment.

- Due to unrealistic staffing ratios, school districts are forced to expend local levy dollars to fund an appropriate level of staffing.
- While the staffing ratios in the entire Prototypical School Funding Model need to be updated to realistic levels, we support a phase-in of values, beginning with staffing to meet students' needs for safety as well as mental, social, emotional, and behavioral health.
- Providing enhanced staffing allocations for Physical, Social, Emotional support staff should be viewed as just the first step to updating staffing allocations in the full Prototypical School Funding Model.

BUDGET STABILITY

The general apportionment formula provides foundational state funding to school districts for basic education. The amount received by each school district varies based on certain characteristics of the district, with enrollment being the largest factor. Generally, enrollment drives the number of certificated, administrative, and classified staff, and the associated salaries and benefits, allocated to the district, as well as the allocation of funds for other non-employee related costs.

For a variety of reasons, many school districts experienced enrollment declines in the 2021-22 school year. If enrollment stability is not provided for these districts, their allocations will start to reflect the decrease this month. Districts hired staff based on the committed dollars from the 2021 legislative session and those staff have been working exhaustively to respond to the varied and growing needs of their students in the midst of two very challenging years. During this time, students and staff have endured many changes. We are advocating for consistency in existing staff and programs which will better serve and support our students during an already unpredictable time.

Additionally, federal relief dollars were allocated differently for each district and for specific purposes. Not all districts received these dollars. As schools have returned to in-person learning, they have spent additional dollars on implementing learning recovery strategies and health protocols. Stabilization dollars are needed for many districts to continue existing programs and implement new programs to promote learning recovery and accelerated learning.

HB 1590 (Dolan) / **SB 5563** (Wellman) would provide proportional enrollment stabilization amounts in the 2021-22 school year if a school district's combined state revenue generated in the 2021-22 school year is less than what its combined state revenue would be using 2019-20 enrollment amounts. These companion bills authorize the use of 2019-20 enrollment values to calculate enrichment levy limits in the 2023 and 2024 calendar years and to calculate local effort assistance in the 2022 and 2023 calendar years.

Talking Points:

- Districts hired staff based on the committed dollars from the 2021 legislative session and those staff have been working exhaustively to respond to the varied and growing needs of our students in the midst of two very challenging years.
- Our students and staff have endured many changes in the last two years; consistency of staff and programs will better serve and support the academic, social and emotional needs of our students during an already unpredictable time.
- We are not asking for new money or a new model. We are asking the Legislature to maintain the funding they have already approved in the 2021-23 Operating Budget for the 2021-22 school year, so that the staff hired do not need to be let out of their existing contracts and the programs designed to support our students do not need to be cut.
- It costs the same to keep a teacher in front of 25 or 22 students.
- The federal relief dollars were allocated differently for each district and are designated for specific purposes. We should not use temporary dollars to hire permanent staff.
- If we have the stabilization dollars, we can continue to serve students through learning recovery efforts and social and emotional support systems that have been deliberately set up to respond to their needs in the midst of a pandemic.

PUPIL TRANSPORTATION

Under the current Pupil Transportation funding model (STARS), many districts experience significant funding gaps; in the last four years many districts received an allocation below their costs. The Office of Financial Management (OFM) recently found in most situations, the STARS model will not provide adequate resources to school districts and recommends, at the very least, that more funding be provided to the system. It is time to fix this formula.

HB 1808 (Stonier) / **SB 5581** (Wellman) starts this effort by reimbursing districts for the actual costs of transporting students with transportation written into their IEPs, students experiencing homelessness, and students in foster care. This is a step in the right direction for determining how much the STARS formula needs to be adjusted.

Talking Points:

- We are thankful for the legislature's commitment to beginning the process for solving a complex policy issue.
- We hope for a pupil transportation formula that is predictable, transparent, and adequately funded.
- This year's bill is a positive first step in the right direction by supporting our most vulnerable students (students experiencing homelessness, special education students and students in foster care). Adopting this transportation update will make it easier to take the next step to updating the base formula.