



# THE WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

*"Every student receives a quality education that prepares for career, college, and life."*

January 12, 2015

The Honorable Jay Inslee  
Governor of Washington  
PO Box 40002  
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Dear Governor Inslee:

It is clear that the 2015 legislative session represents a watershed moment for public education in Washington state. Given the Supreme Court's order of contempt to the state in light of its failure to make ample provision for public schools, the 2015 session represents an opportunity to offer bold leadership. We can forge a new direction for our schools that generates momentum around improving specific outcomes for kids, and brings our state into compliance with the constitution. Toward this end, we are pleased to offer our comments on your 2015-17 budget proposal to the Legislature.

First and foremost, the State Board is thankful that you have made education a focus of your budget, that you have made implementation of SHB 2776 (2010) and its promised K-12 enhancements (funding for K-3 class size, full-day kindergarten programs, and maintenance, supplies and operating costs) a priority, and that you managed to make these strong investments in education without compromising the integrity of the other vital government services government provides to citizens. This budget represents difficult choices, and we commend you for placing a clear focus on children and schools. Your budget sends a message that the state's duty to amply provide for basic education will not compromise the ability of government to provide other essential services to its citizens.

We also want to thank you for the strong focus in this budget on strengthening student guidance and support, and improving graduation rates. It is essential that every student in our system develop a personalized pathway for life after high school, and we know they need strong guidance and support to do this. Your proposal to strengthen funding for guidance counselors in middle school, and strengthen Learning Assistance Program funding toward improved graduation rates, is directly in line with these priorities. We commend you for reinforcing this policy focus for the system, and we would encourage you to make strengthening guidance counseling in secondary schools a key priority as you work with the Legislature during the upcoming session.

At the September meeting of the State Board of Education, members voted unanimously to establish guiding principles for the 2015 budget. We believe these principles offer opportunities for you to strengthen your position even further as you deliberate with the

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Legislature this session.

#### Local levy reform

Included in our guiding principles was a call for greater clarity in intended limits on local school districts levies. The Court has been clear that “reliance on levy funding to finance basic education was unconstitutional 30 years ago... and it is unconstitutional now.” Several state workgroups have analyzed the role that local levies have historically played in providing adequate pay to K-12 employees, and have proposed solutions.

This session represents a limited window of time in which to place sensible limits on the role that local levies play in supplementing basic education salaries, and our view is that the size and uses of local levies remains a central concern of the Supreme Court. We would urge you to work with the Legislature to make sure that the recommendations of the Basic Education Task Force and the Quality Education Council are reflected in local levy policy moving forward.

#### Professional development

In our November communication to you, the Board discussed the importance of professional development for teachers. We would like to emphasize how critical professional development is for the success of our teachers, our students and, ultimately, our state.

We need to offer our teachers the opportunity to learn and grow to enable them to successfully embark in the new direction we are setting for Washington education. The Board affirms that professional development is essential to basic education and should be funded as basic education. We also believe that no district should have to choose between professional development time and instructional time. Creating a dedicated funding source will allow districts and teachers to engage in high quality professional development activities that are job embedded and serve all educators.

#### Assessment policy

The Board also appreciates your continued acknowledgement that exit exams should have an essential role in ensuring that our high school diploma is meaningful. We also appreciate your incorporation of transition bridge courses into the alternative pathways students may utilize if not successful on those exams. We continue to believe, however, that the State should discontinue requiring the Biology end-of-course exam as a graduation requirement while retaining it for federal accountability purposes. Instead, we should devote our full attention to implementing Next Generation Science Standards, which replaces a narrow focus on biology with an emphasis on the integration of the practices, cross-cutting concepts and disciplinary core ideas of science and engineering. Now that we require three credits of science in Washington, using test results from the first course students often take as 9th graders—Biology—to determine their eligibility for a diploma as seniors, seems misplaced.

#### I-1351 – Class Size

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Finally, the Board seeks additional clarity on the Governor's policy for implementation of Initiative Measure No. 1351. The Board has not taken a position on the Initiative. Now that it constitutes current law, however, the Board is seeking to understand the impact of this new law on school districts, and the Board's role in ensuring compliance with basic education law, particularly RCW 28A.150.260. The impacts take effect as early as next school year. As you work with the Legislature during the upcoming session, we ask that you establish clearer policy guidance on the role of I-1351 in your budget and implementation of basic education law.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on your budget proposal for the 2015-17 biennium.

Sincerely,



Isabel Muñoz-Colón  
Chair

bdr

cc: Members of the Washington State Board of Education  
Representative Ross Hunter  
Representative Bruce Chandler  
Senator Andy Hill  
Senator James Hargrove  
Ms. Marcie Maxwell  
Chairs and Ranking Members of legislative education committees