

A WAY FORWARD

We can and must do better
for Washington's students.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



LEAGUE OF
**EDUCATION
VOTERS**™

A WAY FORWARD

We can and must do better
for Washington's students.

Washington's policymakers have spent much time, money, and intellectual capital trying to overhaul our state's education funding systems and yet, we lack a plan for ample, equitable, and stable funding. In addition, our definition of "basic education"—what this funding system is supposed to pay for—does not go far enough to prepare our kids for college or career.

The Washington State Supreme Court found that the state was violating its constitutional obligation to amply fund basic education in *McCleary v. State of Washington*. Lawmakers were given a 2018 deadline to fix how we fund basic education. The passage of Initiative 1351, to lower K–12 class sizes statewide, magnifies the intense pressure on the Legislature to determine a viable funding plan for public education.

Though the 2018 *McCleary* deadline looms, the Court found the Legislature in "contempt of court" last fall, giving them until the end of the 2015 legislative session to make significant progress on a funding plan. While the funding issues are paramount to the Court, this time frame provides a unique opportunity to reflect on what our kids really need from our public education system to succeed.

While we have made progress in improving the K–12 system, we have not changed the way we think about what a basic education entails. Our state's approach to providing that education is hamstrung by silos, bureaucratic fights, politics, and battles pitting different parts of that child's education against each other.

A child's education should be a continuum with seamless transitions.

We know there is no single policy solution that will close the opportunity and achievement gaps for Washington students. We believe the pathway to providing a high-quality public education for all students begins with identifying and funding what works.

If we are to prepare all kids for success, it is critical that our investment priorities are proven effective at closing systemic opportunity and achievement gaps. Funding for public education must include substantial resources focused on addressing and ultimately eliminating these gaps in academic outcomes. We can and must do better for Washington's students.

OUR VISION for an expanded definition of basic education is aspirational, yet achievable, and will spark change in our state's investment in the public education system. This vision ensures all students in Washington have access to a high-quality public education required by our state's Constitution. In order to achieve that vision, Washington's basic education system must:

- **Prioritize** students and their learning
- **Invest** in proven strategies to close the opportunity and achievement gaps
- **Recognize** that students who need more support to reach high standards should get more support
- **Establish** a stable salary system and program of professional learning that helps attract and retain the best teachers and administrators while providing opportunities for growth and improvement
- **Embrace** rigorous and relevant learning opportunities for all
- **Acknowledge** the importance, and necessity, of involving parents and caregivers
- **Guarantee** that the quality of a student's education is not determined by his or her ZIP code

EARLY LEARNING

Children in high-quality early learning programs are more prepared for kindergarten, more likely to graduate high school, healthier, more likely to be employed, and report higher income. Early learning priorities include:

Early Start Act

Increase the quality of childcare and preschool programs for low-income families in Washington through a combination of incentives and requirements. The Early Start Act creates tiered reimbursements, enhanced coaching and mentoring, and improves financial stability for early learning providers.

Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP)

Fully fund ECEAP by the 2018 deadline and expand it in order to extend high-quality preschool to the 30,000 low-income Washington students not yet served.

K–12 EDUCATION

Teachers make the biggest school-based difference in a child's education. Effective school leadership plays a significant role in the academic results of students building-wide. Strategic investments in K–12 teacher compensation and professional learning are necessary to close gaps and improve outcomes for all kids. K–12 education priorities include:

Compensation

Support the state taking full responsibility for teacher pay. This will make salary increases more uniform statewide, facilitating more equitable compensation for teachers from district to district and freeing up local levy funding for supplemental program costs.

Professional learning

Expand high-quality, job-aligned professional learning, team collaboration, and planning.

Increase starting teacher salaries

Changes to our state's compensation system are necessary to attract and retain high-quality educators.

Implementation Fund

Ensure that systemic policy changes are implemented with fidelity and that teachers and principals receive adequate support.

POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Two-thirds of Washington jobs in four years will require some sort of postsecondary degree. To preserve and promote access to higher education for all Washington students, we must continue to support the state's investments in financial aid and scholarships, while keeping college tuition affordable. Postsecondary priorities include:

State Need Grant

Fully fund this financial aid program to aid 34,000 eligible low-income Washington residents seeking postsecondary education or training.

College Bound

Continue to support this successful scholarship program for low-income 7th and 8th grade students.

Postsecondary education or training for every low-income Washington student

Build on the success of the College Bound Program and provide two years of postsecondary education or training, tuition-free, for each low-income student.

Our vision is that every student in Washington state has access to an excellent public education that provides the opportunity for success.

League of Education Voters

2734 Westlake Ave N

Seattle, WA 98109

206.728.6448

info@educationvoters.org

educationvoters.org

The League of Education Voters was founded in 2001 by Washingtonians to support a public education system that provides all students an equal opportunity for success from cradle to career.