

2023

LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM



FIELD REPORT



Students at South Shore PreK-8

In 2021, the Field Team interviewed 85 unique individuals and organizations throughout Washington state in order to form our [2022 Legislative Platform](#).

For our 2022 Field Team interviews, which guided our [2023 Legislative Platform](#), we decided to engage students, parents, educators, advocates, and school administrators in group interview formats.

We conducted 10 group interviews, with 60 participants in Western, Central, and Eastern Washington.

The interviews were a concentrated effort by the Field Team to develop a clear vision or roadmap of what education experts and participants are experiencing in the Evergreen State.

After three years of significant challenges to the public education system of our state due to COVID-19, many communities are focusing on how we recover and come back stronger.

The pandemic highlighted the inequities in our public education system, and that is where the Field Team focused our discussions.

See the interview format, list of participants, and answers. »

FORMAT

Participants engaged around four legislative priority buckets — **school climate, mental health, special education funding, and the banning of forced isolation in schools**. Generally, school climate and mental health, or special education funding and isolation ban were paired together for group interviews. With some exceptions, interviewees engaged on all subjects.

Interviews followed the following format: ten minutes of ground setting and introductions, ten minutes to review LEV's policy platforms and positions on the respective subjects, thirty minutes to provide interactive feedback on the issue and interviewees' unique experience and expertise, and then concluded with a ten-minute recap of interviewees' feedback and answers.

SCHOOL CLIMATE / MENTAL HEALTH

During the review of policy platforms and LEV's positions on school climate and mental health, the Field Team discussed [House Bill 1664](#), LEV's desire to have a legislative workgroup of students discussing mental health with legislators, and defined school climate and school climate surveys along with their purpose.

During the interactive feedback portion on school climate and mental health, we posed the following questions:

- Last legislative session, Washington state passed a major staffing bill (HB 1664) to provide schools with greater funds to hire positions like nurses, counselors, school psychologists, etc. Beyond staffing, what do you feel schools need to do to address the mental health of students? What are the root causes that we need to address?
- The State Board of Education will be providing recommendations to the Legislature this year around the implementation of statewide school climate surveys. Have you had experience with a school climate survey? Do you think this is a useful tool? How would you like to see them implemented/used in your district and/or statewide?
- Are there other items you would like to discuss around student mental health and school climate/surveys?

SPECIAL EDUCATION FUNDING / ISOLATION BAN

During the review of policy platforms and LEV's positions on special education funding and the ban on forced isolation in schools, the Field Team discussed the special education funding enrollment cap (currently set at 13.5% of total student enrollment) and the impact it has on charter public schools and rural districts, what action LEV expects on the cap, the fiscal impact of lifting the cap, and other special education funding measures LEV is advocating for in Olympia. We also provided a clear definition on what isolation means in the school context, as well as an ongoing report and recommendations being conducted on the subject by the ACLU of Washington and Disability Rights Washington, as well as a report from an Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)-led legislative workgroup.

“Isolation” means restricting the student alone within a room or any other form of enclosure, from which the student may not leave. It does not include a student’s voluntary use of a quiet space for self-calming, or temporary removal of a student from his or her regular instructional area to an unlocked area for purposes of carrying out an appropriate positive behavior intervention plan.

During the interactive feedback portion on special education funding and the isolation ban, we posed the following questions:

- With an increase in special education funding where should resources be used? What do you see as the biggest needs?
- Outside of funding and what that entails, what supports do you or those you know need in special education? What are deeper systemic issues? For example, programs that better prepare families to advocate for their children’s Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs).
- What is your view around the banning of isolation? Do you think there’s any reason it shouldn’t be banned?
- Are there other items you would like to discuss around special education funding or the elimination of isolation?

PARTICIPANTS

The interviewed groups were comprised of the following:

- A high school student advocacy group in Pasco
- An educators advocacy group in the Yakima Valley

PARTICIPANTS, CONTINUED

- A Black-led advocacy group in the Yakima Valley
- A special education support group in Benton-Franklin counties
- A parent advocacy group in Spokane
- A high school student advocacy group in east King County
- A school resources community-based organization in south King County
- An early education advocacy group in Pasco
- Educators in an Olympic Peninsula school district
- A high school student advocacy group in Spokane

The names of the groups and their participants are anonymous in order to allow participants to give unfettered responses to our prompts and legislative issues.

THEMES, FEEDBACK, AND ANSWERS

In this section, the common themes of the interviews are grouped together along with paraphrased feedback and answers from the group interview participants.

Mental health of students and educators

- Lack of staffing and long wait times to access social services
- The system doesn't promote healthy choices (food and mental health)
 - * Need to address mental health more holistically: isolation, high expectations, problems at home, bullying, lack of sleep, student/teacher relationships
- Overreliance on teachers for mental health needs (need for individualized student support)
- More community engagement
- Extreme difficulty recruiting and hiring appropriate levels of mental health staff
- Teachers are leaving the workforce because of lack of support staff/too many responsibilities/secondary trauma from students' trauma
- Need flexibility in funding (HB 1664) to help with case management

THEMES, FEEDBACK, AND ANSWERS, CONTINUED

- Students described how some of their teachers cried in class; they need more mental health supports
- More proactive approaches to prevent bullying; formal complaint procedure for reporting bullying is inadequate
- Needed follow-up to [House Bill 1363](#) — secondary traumatic stress in staff; this is a preventable issue
- Resources must address circumstances and trauma in the home
- Would like to see an expansion of the University of Washington SMART training and curriculum

“We can’t find people to fill nursing, mental health, and counselor positions in our district. We need flexibility in funding these positions. And we need more attention paid to the profession pipelines of these positions.”

- Parent advocate

Climate Surveys

- Good tool but there exists a lack of follow up/engagement with students around results
- Student: we used Panorama - there is no feedback loop with students
- More support is needed on how to implement data
- There must be accountability on solutions to the results from surveys

“Panorama [school climate survey] helped inform my district’s approach to school safety changes; it is important to district’s strategic plan. Student advisors were used to inform survey approach.”

- Local school board member in Eastern Washington

Student Experience

- Student - negative experience, racial profiling
- Funding (HB 1664) should go towards addressing root causes
- Student and parent - funding for school resource officers (SROs) would disproportionately impact students of color
- Spokane coalition would support removing SRO funding in HB 1664

“Latino students in my district are routinely racially profiled. We are heavily scrutinized for the specific type of clothing we wear and are disproportionately searched.”

- Latino student in Central Washington

THEMES, FEEDBACK, AND ANSWERS, CONTINUED

Isolation

- Student - isolation was banned at our school because of a case of sexual assault between an educator and student
- Ban isolation but ensure that proper training is provided to staff (Social-Emotional Learning training, self-calming training for students, appropriate de-escalation spaces)
- Isolation is an inhumane and cruel form of punishment
- Restraint should be used in the rarest of cases
- Need to address potential unintended consequences of a ban, i.e. higher rates of suspension/expulsion

“25% of legislation focus should go towards banning isolation, 75% of the focus should go towards needed supports for educators and students.”

- Special education advocate in Eastern Washington

Special Education

- More investments should be made to address supports like sensory needs and extracurricular activities
- Additional funds could be used to increase educator to student ratio
- More individualized services
- Staff need additional training
- More funding for advocacy organizations to provide families navigation services/break down barriers to improved services and education

“Under-identification of special education students is our biggest issue, not over-identification.”

- Parent of a student who receives special education services in Eastern Washington

Charter Public Schools

- Needed clarity on how special education funding cap removal would impact charters, particularly those that access small school funding
- Need for levy equalization

“The toughest budgetary matter for charters is the amount that building costs take from our budget — 15%.”

- Charter public school principal

THEMES, FEEDBACK, AND ANSWERS, CONTINUED

Educator Diversification

- Greater investments needed to build pipelines and recruit and retain educators of color
- Students want more educators that look like them and that share their experiences

School Board Diversification

- There is general support for legislation to pay school board members \$500 per month with health insurance
- More scrutiny needs to be paid to the Washington State School Directors Association (WSSDA) efforts to diversify candidates/boards

The answers and feedback above provided the north star to our legislative setting process and are reflected in the completed [2023 Legislative Platform](#).

CONCLUSION

The process for developing our Legislative Platform and agenda exemplifies LEV's commitment to grassroots advocacy and to having community voice guide our priorities. Those who serve and are directly impacted by the public education system are the experts, and we should uplift their experiences and knowledge.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The 2023 Legislative Platform was a production of our 2021 individual Field interviews, 2022 legislative advocacy efforts, the latest developments in the PK-12 education landscape, and the 2022 group Field interviews. LEV and the Field Team would like to give the deepest thanks to all the participants who have taken part in the legislative agenda setting interviews over the past two years, our legislative champions and allies, and the LEV supporters who make our work possible.