

2024

LEGISLATIVE PLATFORM



FIELD REPORT



Students at South Shore PreK-8

In the 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.

In 2023, we took a different approach and used three different formats to conduct our field interviews — individual, group, and town halls. Individual interviews were conducted with policy experts in order to provide ample time for technical policy discussions. The group interviews were conducted with preexisting coalitions and parent and student groups. For our town halls, we gathered individuals from different sectors to promote cross-sector discussions.

Our Field office in Spokane, which convenes the Spokane Future Educators of Color Consortium (SFECC), also engaged the consortium in policies and investments that will improve the recruitment and retention of educators of color in the district. The consortium consists of Spokane Public Schools, individual educators, Educational Service District 101, and Eastern Washington higher education institutions.

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 Washington state. In total we interviewed 70 individuals through our three formats.

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

FORMAT

Participants engaged around their experience with three issues: education funding and equity, isolation and restraint practices, and social-emotional learning and the mental health of students and educators.

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 concluded with a ten-minute recap of interviewees' feedback and answers.

LOCAL / STATE FUNDING STRUCTURES AND EQUITABLE EDUCATION SYSTEMS

In this section we reviewed LEV's positions on local and state funding structures that lay the foundation for an equitable education. We focused our discussions on the budget challenges facing districts and how this pressing challenge could be an opportunity to reevaluate our system and propose equitable reforms to K-12 public education funding.

In our section on funding, we posed the following questions:

- How are budget cuts affecting your school / district?
- Over the last five years do you feel that the educational experience of students has changed? In what ways? Have you observed any changes that make you hopeful?

ISOLATION AND RESTRAINT

In this portion, the Field team reviewed LEV's position on the ban of isolation and mechanical and chemical restraint, provided a clear definition on what isolation and restraint means in the school context, as well as [a report on the practices](#) from our partners at The ACLU of Washington and Disability Rights Washington, as well as [a report](#) from an Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) legislative workgroup.

During the interactive feedback portion on isolation and restraint, we provided updates on [House Bill 1479](#) and asked participants their opinions on the legislative updates and how they would like to engage in our ongoing advocacy efforts to pass the bill.

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL) AND MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

Mental health issues were heightened during the pandemic and continue to be a needed support expressed by students and educators throughout the state. LEV has continued to advocate for continued learning by legislators of the needs and appropriate supports. Over the last few years LEV has advocated for a legislative workgroup of students discussing mental health and for SEL to be an increased aspect of basic education.

As we discussed SEL and mental health supports with interviews we posed the following questions:

- How do you think school affects student mental health? Do you think that has changed in the past five years?
- How do we know when our students are well? What do you think are the most important indicators, and what do we need to do differently to support that.
- What investments would you like to see in SEL?

THEMES, FEEDBACK, AND ANSWERS

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

Local / State Funding Structures and Equitable Education Systems

- Counseling services cut.
- Counselors have always been the first on the chopping block. Regarding support from the district central office, support is almost nonexistent. Central office has basically said don't ask.
 - Middle school counselor
- We can talk about culturally responsive teaching, but not a single curriculum is culturally responsible. We have to pay for the training to have teachers frame things in a different lens. The whole system has to change from teacher training to professional development (PD) to admin.
 - Middle school teacher
- Issues with the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER) funding this past legislative session and the effect on school programming (including after school programming).

THEMES, FEEDBACK, AND ANSWERS, CONTINUED

Local / State Funding Structures and Equitable Education Systems, continued

- The Bellevue school closures of Wilburton and Eastgate disproportionately affect the less affluent families. If you look at the data, those schools serve a higher percentage of low-income families who tend to be African American or Spanish/Latino students.
- There have been recent cuts to the nursing staff and library staff in the North Shore School District.
- Larger class sizes, not enough counselors to see students who are dealing with issues at schools. The average class size has been 30-40 students per class. More funding is needed for nurses and counselors.
- The recent school closures of Wilburton and Eastgate are going to affect BIPOC and Asian / Pacific Islander (API) students more than their white counterparts. The wealthier families in Bellevue are not going to be affected as much as the two schools consolidating. Low-income families have less access to resources than wealthy families. There is this narrative that Bellevue is mostly affluent and wealthy, but the black and brown families are struggling the most.
- More Career Technical Education (CTE) type classes.
- Elementary music programs cut.
- School districts are considering consolidating elementary schools with lower enrollment. Could cause students to have to commute for 30+ minutes for elementary school.
 - Rural district advocate

Isolation and Restraint

- As a school who used to use it, couldn't see how kids were being equipped with coping skills. When you have kids who can't regulate themselves, it is a missing need. Restraint may be felt as less work than actually trying to figure out what is wrong. Kids want to know how to manage these feelings and situations. Tier one in the classroom. Do they feel safe, do they feel loved?
 - School counselor
- Isolation, it is a pipeline to prison.
 - Elementary school teacher

THEMES, FEEDBACK, AND ANSWERS, CONTINUED

Isolation and Restraint, continued

- Isolation and restraint do not teach kids how to manage stressful situations, behaviors, emotions. Need teaching and using practices that create skills for long term skills.
 - School social worker
- Per the Washington Education Association (WEA), training must be in place for other strategies other than isolation and restraint before they will support it.
 - Special education teacher
- Our school has implemented Restorative Justice and I think this should be a standard practice across the state.
 - High school student

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Mental Health Supports

- People power, counselors, social workers, incentive for SEL, additional money for counselors tied to SEL programs running.
- Essential to have counselors in early grades
- Schools can be a tool for every student to improve their SEL and their mental health. Must be tied to teacher training.
- There needs to be more funding for afterschool programs that promote social and emotional learning for students.
- Social emotional learning is one of the most important skills a student will learn. Mental health advocacy groups would like to see social emotional learning include more equity and culturally responsive teaching.
- More investment into equity-focused social emotional learning in schools.
- School is an environmental factor that affects mental health, school, community, system, peers, teachers. Big driver of mental health. Seen an increase in community violence since COVID. There has been a gap to try to adapt and meet the needs of students. Those stressors have definitely affected students' ability to regulate. Ongoing dynamic that is school but is a bigger community factor. School is just one factor, not a driver.
 - Engagement specialist

THEMES, FEEDBACK, AND ANSWERS, CONTINUED

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) and Mental Health Supports continued

- The city is providing funding for mental health support but not to the level that the school district is providing. Already providing more than they can get. The city needs to give more.
 - School social worker
- COVID had a really big impact on us. When school went virtual, students lost all social connection. All the virtual learning made school feel more like a chore than a thing we could go to, to connect with peers. We also need more mental health professionals in schools and students need more access to counselors.
 - High school students
- Make SEL a part of basic education.
 - High school student group
- Ensure students receiving special education services have access to the resources and services needed to meaningfully access their education.
- Individualized Educational Program (IEP) understaffing at district offices. Addressing this shortage needs to be the priority for education funding.
 - Spokane parent group

Spokane Future Educators of Color Consortium (SFECC) Priorities

- Career navigation and advising.
- Robust counseling and related support for students, especially for aspiring teachers, that allow students to engage with their chosen profession from an early age and create a pathway from school to employment.
- Mentorship and advising supports for adults looking to change profession and immigrants with credentials to find the most direct path to employment.
- Pathways for paraeducators to certified positions.
- “Grow your own” programs that have an emphasis on showing BIPOC students that they have a place to teach as adults in their home district

The answers and feedback above provided the north star to our legislative setting process and are reflected in the completed [2024 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 2024 Legislative Platform was a production of our 2023 Field interviews, 2023 legislative advocacy efforts, and the latest developments in the PK-12 and higher education landscape. 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 three years, our legislative champions and allies, and the supporters who make our work possible.

PARTICIPANTS

Interviewees were comprised of the following:

- Middle school counselor (Puget Sound)
- Middle school reading teacher (Puget Sound)
- Contracted school social worker (Puget Sound)
- County juvenile justice specialist (Puget Sound)
- District community partners specialist (Puget Sound)
- Assistant elementary school principal (Puget Sound)
- School district board representative (Puget Sound)
- K-8 special education teacher (Puget Sound)
- After school programming specialists (Puget Sound)
- School district parent groups (Puget Sound)

PARTICIPANTS, CONTINUED

- Juvenile justice organization (Puget Sound)
- School district student group (Puget Sound)
- Paraeducator group (Puget Sound)
- School district Director of Teaching and Learning (Olympic Peninsula)
- SEL lobbyist (Statewide)
- Backbone school district organization (Puget Sound)
- School district program director (Tri-Cities)
- Trades instructor (Tri-Cities)
- Parent resource coordinator (Puget Sound)
- Superintendent (Tri-Cities)
- Assistant superintendent (Tri-Cities)
- Community center director (Tri-Cities)
- Neighborhood development specialist (Tri-Cities)
- Superintendent (Yakima Valley)
- School programming organization (Tri-Cities)
- Social services consortium (Yakima Valley)
- Asian American Pacific Islander advocate (Yakima Valley)
- Recreation center coordinator (Tri-Cities)
- Foster care organization (Yakima Valley)

PARTICIPANTS, CONTINUED

- Special education advocacy organization (Yakima Valley)
- School district family engagement specialist (Yakima Valley)
- High school junior (Spokane)
- Special education advocacy organization (Spokane)
- College student (Spokane)
- High school student (Spokane)
- Charter public school advocate (Spokane)
- Parent group (Spokane)
- Community college engagement specialist (Spokane)
- High school student (Spokane)
- High school faculty group (Spokane)

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