



Budget Priorities Across the Education Ecosystem: From Early Learning to Higher Ed

April 10, 2025 AI Summary

Introduction: In a compelling webinar hosted by the League of Education Voters (LEV), a diverse group of advocates, educators, and students came together to discuss the critical budget priorities across Washington's education ecosystem. The event, titled "Budget Priorities Across the Education Ecosystem: From Early Learning to Higher Ed," highlighted the urgent need for equitable funding to support students at all levels of education.

Setting the Stage: Arik Korman, CEO of LEV, opened the webinar by emphasizing the importance of education as a tool for justice. He underscored the organization's commitment to creating learning environments where every student feels safe, supported, and has a positive sense of belonging. Korman's introduction set the tone for a discussion focused on equity, justice, and the radical changes needed in the school systems to honor the humanity of every student.

Voices of Advocacy: The webinar featured a panel of passionate advocates, each bringing unique perspectives and experiences to the table. The panelists included students, educators, and representatives from various organizations, all united in their mission to improve education funding and policies.

Student Perspectives: Pari Raval and Sabina Kolovyansky, members of the Washington Legislative Youth Advisory Council, shared their firsthand experiences with budget cuts in their school district. They highlighted the detrimental impact of reduced funding on mental health services, enrichment programs, and special education. Raval and Kolovyansky called for increased advocacy to ensure that student voices are heard and prioritized in legislative decisions.

Higher Education Challenges: Sergio Acuna, a student at Highline College, spoke about the barriers faced by marginalized populations in higher education. He emphasized the importance of maintaining affordable tuition and the Washington College Grant to prevent students from having to choose between their education and basic needs. Acuna's heartfelt plea underscored the need for continued support for immigrant and refugee students.

Early Learning Advocacy: Kerra Bower, owner of Little Scholars Development Center, discussed the critical need for mental and behavioral health supports for early learning professionals and students. Bower's advocacy efforts led to funding for a pilot program that provides on-site mental health services in childcare centers. She stressed the importance of protecting early learning teachers and disrupting the preschool-to-prison pipeline.

Progressive Tax Policy: Lilly Deerwater from Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility and the Balance Our Tax Code Coalition presented a compelling case for progressive tax policies to address the state's budget deficit. Deerwater outlined several proposals, including expanding the business and occupation tax and adding a high earners payroll tax, to generate revenue for essential services like education. She urged attendees to participate in advocacy efforts to support these policies.

Charter Public Schools: Barbara Gilchrist from the Washington State Charter Schools Association highlighted the need for enrichment funding for charter public schools. Gilchrist explained the funding gap faced by charter schools and the importance of providing resources for students to access extracurricular activities and support services.

Youth Justice Reform: Roxana Gomez from Legal Counsel for Youth and Children discussed the intersection of education and juvenile justice. Gomez advocated for community-based solutions and diversion programs to prevent youth from entering the carceral system. She called for a shift in funding priorities to support proactive measures rather than expanding youth prisons.

K-12 Education: Nikki Otero Lockwood, Board President for Spokane Public Schools, emphasized the importance of funding special education; materials, supplies, and operating costs (MSOC); and student transportation. Lockwood shared success stories from her district, including increased inclusion rates and reduced incidents of restraint and isolation. She highlighted the need for continued investment in professional development for educators.

Reducing Restraint and Eliminating Isolation: David Mendez from the True Measure Collaborative presented data on the impact of professional development in reducing restraint and isolation in schools. Mendez called for continued funding to support alternative practices and build educator capacity to address the needs of students with disabilities and multilingual learners.

Foster Care Education: Dawn Rains, CEO of Treehouse, discussed the challenges faced by students in foster care and the importance of education-related services. Rains

highlighted the success of Treehouse's programs in improving graduation rates for foster youth and called for sustained funding to continue supporting these vulnerable students.

Conclusion: The webinar concluded with a call to action for attendees to engage in advocacy efforts and support equitable education funding. The panelists emphasized the importance of community involvement and legislative action to ensure that every student in Washington state has access to a quality education and equitable opportunities for success.

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