

2021

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES



Students at South Shore PreK-8

This year has been unlike any other for the families and students of Washington state. New challenges and opportunities as a result of months of the COVID-19 pandemic and greater racial reckoning have laid bare the inequities in our society.

We see in even starker relief the need to build **equitable education systems** in which **students come first** — systems that are designed to serve every student based on their strengths, support their needs, and provide the resources they need to be successful. The needs and solutions reflected here have long been identified by students, parents, educators, community-based organizations, and school administrators — and the current crises only reinforce just how critical these priorities continue to be for Washington families.

We must change the very foundation of our education systems and build the infrastructure to implement student-centered, equitable solutions. We must focus on community-driven solutions to support students and families who have been historically and systemically underserved — including students of color, students in poverty, students qualifying for special education services, students learning English, students experiencing homelessness, and students impacted by trauma. We must ensure that in this moment of crisis and opportunity, we create meaningful and lasting change. **Together we can build better systems for the future of Washington students and families.**

The following priorities will help move us towards a more equitable and just education system. »

HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION FOR EVERY EARLY LEARNER

Early learning in and out of the home ensures students arrive at kindergarten ready to learn and thrive. State investments in early learning close opportunity gaps and promote greater equity by focusing on students who otherwise have limited access to high-quality, early learning opportunities. Early learning investments also work to meet the needs of every child and family through early intervention services, like home visiting, Early Support for Infants and Toddlers, and inclusive pre-K programs. Equally as important is ensuring that every student has a successful transition into kindergarten as well as the support they need throughout K-3 in order to sustain learning gains from high-quality pre-K and address needs that have gone unmet. LEV is committed to building a cohesive early learning and child care system, and the COVID-19 crisis has only exacerbated issues of access and equity, leaving thousands of our earliest learners without a chance for a fair start. **In 2021, LEV will prioritize:**

- Preserving and expanding access to high-quality, affordable, culturally and linguistically relevant early learning — including early intervention services, child care, and preschool programs, like the Early Childhood Education Assistance Program (ECEAP) — that meets family needs and supports a well-compensated, highly-trained workforce.

SUPPORTIVE, SAFE, AND ACCESSIBLE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR EVERY STUDENT IN K-12 SCHOOLS

In order to learn, students need to feel like school is a place where they belong, are respected, are kept safe, and can thrive. Now more than ever, supporting students' mental health and social-emotional needs is critical as children continue to experience the impacts of the ongoing global health crisis and systemic racism. Moreover, creating positive school climates for every student is instrumental to closing opportunity gaps in our system, improving student outcomes, and disrupting practices that further the school-to-prison pipeline. Transforming schools into inclusive and positive spaces for learning will require new frameworks for how we identify and resource student strengths and needs, such as Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and partnering with community-based organizations to provide services. It will require reimagining how we serve students academically, such as Universal Design for Learning. It will require repurposing and reforming current resources and practices to best meet student needs, such as the Learning Assistance Program or restorative practices in lieu of exclusionary discipline. **In 2021, LEV will prioritize:**

- Encouraging and enabling districts to create positive, supportive school climates by implementing a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) framework to identify and meet students' academic and social-emotional strengths and needs.
- Supporting educators, districts, and schools in adopting and implementing universal design for learning (UDL) and other inclusive practices to make learning accessible to all students
- Providing reliable and consistent access to mental health services for students, through either staff or third party providers in every school setting.
- Ensuring the Learning Assistance Program (LAP) is used to provide the services that meet the needs of eligible students by increasing flexibility in use of funds and partnership with community-based organizations – while maintaining transparency and monitoring of use of funds and student outcomes.
- Transitioning from punitive measures that disproportionately affect students of color, including the use of School Resource Officers (SROs) in school buildings and suspensions for students in grades K-2 to supportive measures, such as positive behavior interventions, restorative practices, and access to support staff and services.

ESTABLISHING EQUITABLE RESOURCING STRUCTURES CENTERED ON STUDENT NEED

The remote learning environment has magnified existing inequities and inadequacies in how we resource our schools. The challenges being experienced by students and families during remote learning have amplified the urgent need for a funding system that better supports under-served students, especially students of color, students with disabilities, students gaining English proficiency, and students from low-income families. We need to adopt an approach to funding education that accounts for the diversity of student need and provides the resources, staff, and programming necessary to support students. An essential step of eliminating inequity in how students experience their education is creating a funding system rooted in equity. **In 2021, LEV will prioritize:**

- Ensuring students and families have access to the services they need to be successful during remote and in-person learning—such as resources to support the academic progress and social-emotional well-being of students — and preserving and expanding access to social services to meet the basic needs of families, such as childcare.
- Updating the local effort assistance program to account for student and community needs, rather than just property values.
- Establishing new revenue sources to advance educational equity and provide access to quality education and social services for all Washington students and families.

SUFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE RESOURCES FOR EVERY STUDENT RECEIVING SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

Learning should be designed and provided so that all students can access their education. Our current approach to funding special education and providing special education services is not delivering the educational experience the more than 170,000 students with disabilities need to meaningfully participate in their learning. We must both build off the progress made around creating more inclusive learning environments in recent years and make systemic changes to create the conditions for an educational system that values students with disabilities. **In 2021, LEV will prioritize:**

- Supporting continued work to expand the adoption of inclusive practices through school-level capacity building.
- Creating a funding structure that will equitably support the systems and services needed for students with disabilities to meaningfully access their education, including lifting the 13.5% cap on funded enrollment.



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