



## Help Achieve Our Vision for Better Schools

The League of Education Voters is working to achieve a public education system that gets every child *Ready for Life*:

- Ensure every child reads by the third grade;
- An excellent teacher in every classroom;
- Diplomas that get kids ready for college, work and life;
- Math and science that help our kids lead the way in a changing, high-tech economy; and
- More investment in our kids' education, and more accountability to ensure success.

Every year, we have the opportunity to improve education through legislative action. This year, the Washington State Legislature will convene January 12, 2009 and meet for 105-days to determine our state's priorities in education. We can change our schools from early learning through higher education by testifying at hearings, lobbying legislators and rallying on the Capitol steps.

Our work continues even after the Legislature adjourns. Through grassroots action, we can organize parents and communities, build coalitions and make a difference for every child.

**Our children are counting on all of us to get them *Ready for Life*.**

## **OUR VISION: Ensure every child reads by the third grade.**

Learning begins at birth. Research demonstrates high-quality early learning programs promote positive outcomes for children in school and in life. Starting earlier has also proven to have a significant return on investment, delivering at least \$3 for every \$1 invested.

Unfortunately, our state does not have an early learning system that assists parents or supports educators. The result: less than half of children in Washington arrive at kindergarten ready to succeed.

Investing in early learning programs means investing in the success of each child, and also in the future of our communities. Supporting these early learning priorities is the first step to building a quality early learning system for all kids:

- **Include early learning in basic education:** Members of the Basic Education Finance Task Force recommended a broadened definition of basic education to include early learning for low-income preschool children, who are disproportionately at risk of not meeting state learning standards. Providing early learning wisely invests public dollars to help young children with the greatest needs begin their school careers on the right track.
- **Support high-quality early learning by implementing a Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS), professional development and parent support programs:** Continuing to invest in QRIS will increase the quality of care and early learning for children in child care centers, school-age programs, and family child care homes. QRIS would establish a ratings system to provide parents better information about the quality of care for their children based on these four criteria: management, parental involvement, professional development and learning environment.

Professional development programs (STARS, Washington Scholarships, Career and Wage Ladder, and apprenticeships) must be aligned and held accountable to create a strong network of early learning options for parents and children. Parent support services offered through Child Care Resource and Referral helps parents find the quality child care they need.

- **Maintain home visitation services:** About 1,600 families depend on home visiting programs to ensure the health and educational well-being of their children during the pivotal early years. These programs should be maintained to help our most at-risk children get ready for school.
- **Allow equitable and efficient collective bargaining for child care centers.** By allowing providers statewide the opportunity to obtain appropriate compensation, benefits and professional opportunities with the state, we'll create a stronger, more stable workforce.
- **Reform components of child care subsidies to increase the number of families and providers participating in high-quality early learning opportunities.** Increasing the range of top-quality child care, family care and preschool choices affordable to low-income families can significantly narrow the kindergarten readiness gap.

## **OUR VISION: An excellent teacher in every classroom.**

Teachers matter. Improving teacher quality is the single most effective way to improve student outcomes. Washington's existing salary structure—like most across the country—relies almost exclusively on teachers' tenure and education levels.

To ensure an excellent teacher in every classroom, we need a new compensation system that rewards improvements in teaching skills and increased levels of responsibility. And we need to pay professional-level salaries that attract and keep the best teachers in our schools. Success in the classroom requires all of us—principals, teachers, parents and citizens—doing our part to support our students.

We need to adopt the following reforms to compete effectively for skilled teaching talent as today's teachers retire in accelerating numbers:

- **Reform educator compensation:** Adopt the Basic Education Finance Task Force's recommendations to implement a new compensation system for the next generation of teachers that provide incentives for improving skills and assuming greater responsibilities. The new system would be informed by regularly conducted salary surveys, which could incorporate regional cost-of-living factors. Current teachers could opt-in to the new system.
- **Reinvigorating our teaching corps:** Partner with innovative programs to recruit new teachers; provide alternative routes to teacher certification for mid-career professionals and establish mentoring programs for new teachers.
- **Close the achievement gap:** In 2007-08, more than 92 percent of teachers were white while 40 percent of students were of color. To help close the achievement gap, schools should implement culturally competent curriculum and recruit people of color to diversify the teaching corps. In addition, provide personalized learning opportunities, such as tutoring, after-school programs and summer classes.

## **OUR VISION: Diplomas that get kids ready for college, work and life.**

Earning a high school diploma should mean students are prepared for life after graduation, whether they choose a college or university, career or technical school or work. As a society we can no longer afford a system that leaves many students behind with a poor or mediocre education.

Rigorous graduation standards, a strong foundation in math and science and quality career and technical education opportunities, taken together, will ensure every student graduates ready for life. To maximize opportunities for all, our state must increase access to both college and career or technical education programs.

- **Raise the academic bar:** Students who graduate with a 4.0 GPA are not guaranteed to meet the minimum requirements to apply to a four-year university in Washington State. We should fully fund and implement the State Board of Education's new CORE 24 graduation requirements to give students the choice of pursuing college, job training or work after high school. Visit [educationvoters.org/core24](http://educationvoters.org/core24) to learn more.
- **Ensure college remains affordable for all:** During tough economic times, more people turn to higher education to increase opportunity for employment in high-demand fields. However, the doors of higher education could be closed for many students if our state's colleges and universities increase tuition costs to offset the reduction in state support. State lawmakers should increase financial assistance to maintain affordability for lower-income students.
- **Increase opportunities to earn a degree:** Washington's extensive network of 34 community and technical colleges provide accessibility for students to earn a post-secondary degree. However, some areas of our state are not adequately served by four-year institutions. Community and technical colleges can help fill this gap by offering applied bachelor's degrees in communities with high student and employer demand.

**OUR VISION: Math and science that help our kids lead the way in a changing, high-tech economy.**

Our economy demands higher levels of knowledge and skills than ever before. Yet, 45 percent of recent high school graduates who enrolled at community and technical colleges were required to take remedial math courses.

Our State Board of Education is on the right track by raising math and science graduation requirements. Now, the Legislature needs to fund new math and science curricula, additional classroom periods and the qualified teachers that will be required. Our state must continue to expand higher education enrollments in math and science degrees to fuel the growth of our increasingly technology-driven economy.

- **Expand the school day:** The State Board of Education's new CORE 24 graduation requirements will increase the minimum number of credits needed to graduate from 19 to 24. To fully implement CORE 24, the state should provide funding for at least a six-period school day so students have room to take additional required courses in math and science.
- **Fund the adoption of math and science curricula:** Washington State recently revised its math standards to better prepare young people for college and the workforce and is updating science standards with the same goal. The Legislature should provide funding for textbooks and professional development for teachers to implement the new math standards and science standards when ready.
- **Recruit highly qualified math and science teachers:** In 2005-06, Washington ranked 38<sup>th</sup> in the nation with 65 percent of 7th-12th graders taught by teachers with a major in their subject. We should revise and strengthen the state's definition of Highly Qualified Teacher to require an academic major in the subject area being taught. To increase the number of well-qualified math and science teachers, we should expand higher education enrollments for students seeking math and science degrees.

**OUR VISION: More investment in our kids' education, and more accountability to ensure success.**

Washington's future depends on citizens, educators and policymakers demanding the excellent schools our children deserve. Our state continues to run schools based on outdated expectations with below average resources.

The Basic Education Finance Task Force, comprised of legislators and education leaders, submitted a report to the governor and Washington State Legislature about how to create the education system our kids deserve in today's economy. For the first time, we have a comprehensive plan for building a K-12 system that better prepares our children for college, work and life.

**We support the Task Force's bold education reform recommendations:**

- **Include early learning in basic education:** Task Force members broadened the definition of basic education to include early learning for low-income preschool children, who are disproportionately at risk of not meeting state learning standards. Providing early learning wisely invests public dollars to help young children with the greatest needs begin their school careers on the right track.
- **A new compensation system:** For the next generation of teachers, a new compensation system would be based on their skills and responsibilities in the classroom, and won't require teachers to earn master's degrees and Ph.Ds simply to earn a professional-level salary. The new system would be informed by regularly conducted salary surveys, which could incorporate regional cost of living factors. Current teachers could opt-in to the new system.
- **Raise the bar and lengthen the school day:** The Task Force supports [CORE 24](#), which would raise high school graduation requirements so all children are prepared for life after high school, whether that is a university, college, vocational school or career. The state would also pay for six periods per day, instead of five.
- **A more transparent way of budgeting:** A new "model schools" approach would all but require the state to fund the true cost of Basic Education. The Legislature would create four prototype schools—primary, elementary, middle and high schools—and build the state budget to fully fund actual class sizes, teachers and support staff and operating costs. This new system would greatly improve the ability of legislators, educators and parents to understand and make the best budgeting decisions to improve learning.
- **Demand higher expectations and accountability:** Build a new student data management and achievement system to drive investments based on effectiveness. Adopt the State Board of Education's proposal to intervene in schools that are consistently underperforming.
- **Phase-in of recommendations over six years:** The Task Force did not identify additional funding sources necessary to implement these recommendations. However, in light of the looming state budget shortfall, Task Force members committed to a six-year plan to fully phase-in their recommendations.