

## School District Collective Bargaining in Washington State Some Points to Consider

- ***What are the weaknesses of the current system?*** Washington State's funding system is not aligned with the bargaining system:
  - Local associations are compelled to lobby for state salary and benefit allocations and then negotiate at the local level. Few districts are able to deliver consistent increases.
  - The state doesn't cover market-competitive salaries and benefits for state funded staff and has no mechanism for recognizing local and regional differences.
  - Districts can't be certain of getting agreements in a timely manner that avoid work disruption or fiscal disruption.
  - Associations can't ensure employees get fair compensation and benefits since many variables are outside their control [state funding, levy passage, levy rates, the cost of pensions, etc.]
  - The state is having difficulty limiting its financial exposure, as seen by recent lawsuits.

Comment: Bargaining is the appropriate place to resolve compensation issues. At present, local bargaining is the only mechanism for resolving tension between state shortfalls to fund the whole cost of running schools and the legitimate pressures of teachers and staff for increases in benefits over time. In Monroe's case, approximately 90-95% of our local levy goes for the basics such as competitive wages, additional classified staff to accomplish the objectives in our new performance based system, transportation, utilities and basic supplies. This leaves only 5-10% for the extras that were envisioned for local levies. [Note: no one visiting Monroe would consider any of our programs, services or facilities to be anything but basic.] I can't see how this situation can keep continuing without major labor strife and degradation of the educational programs we offer our children.

- ***We need to align the funding system with the bargaining system.*** There are two possible approaches, not mutually exclusive:
  - Provide a more active role in bargaining for the state.
  - Set limits on what is bargained locally.
- ***Possible solutions:*** Changing bargaining will not be easy.
  - The state joins with districts to negotiate total salaries, benefits and working conditions (this could be done at state level, regional level or district level).
  - The state negotiates for the state-funded amount of salaries and benefits (same potential levels as the previous item), then local districts complete bargaining at the local level for a limited menu of bargaining items (coaching stipends, extracurricular stipends, overload pay, etc.) with a cap on the amount districts can spend.
  - The state allows local districts to bargain salaries, benefits and working conditions and then reimburses them for its fair share of the costs. Big Question: Who decides?
  - Create a Uniserv bargaining process, with greater limits on bargaining such as:
    - If bargaining is not completed by 90 days before the new contract is set to begin, it goes to binding arbitration to settle.
    - Set a required financial reserve for school districts to maintain (varies based on size) that must be considered during binding arbitration.
    - Identifies state and local shares of costs.