

Board of Directors
200 North Bernard Street
Spokane, WA 99201-0282
phone (509) 354-7364
fax (509) 354-5965
www.spokaneschools.org

Rocco N. Treppiedi, *President*
Susan S. Chapin, *Vice President*
Dr. Jeffrey D. Bierman
Garret J. Daggett
Robert H. Douthitt
Nancy J. Stowell, Ph.D., *Superintendent*



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**STATEMENT BY SPOKANE PUBLIC SCHOOLS TO BASIC EDUCATION FUNDING
TASK FORCE.
DECEMBER 8, 2008**

Spokane Public Schools has been following the work of this Task Force very closely since the time of its first meeting. We have had a representative at virtually all Task Force meetings, and have had either employees or board members at a significant number of them.

We applaud the depth of your research, the commitment of each individual member of the Task Force, the research and consolidation of data by WSIPP, the effort that went into creating each of the proposals submitted to you, and the fairness of your process in attempting to arrive at a consensus of the entire Task Force. Our statement and this testimony contain three parts:

- The importance of speaking with a single voice;
- Topics which may be controversial where we specifically support the Dec. 3, 2008, Draft Final Report;
- Topics in the Draft Final Report for which we would suggest a modification.

I. IMPORTANCE OF SPEAKING WITH A SINGLE VOICE

We have an historic opportunity to create a true world class educational system in Washington on the one hand, and to avoid a painful lawsuit on the other. To maximize the opportunity for success with both the public and the legislature, we think it is critical that both this Task Force and the entities that submitted proposals to the Task Force complete these deliberations speaking with one voice. This is particularly important in view of the size and complexity of the proposed legislation.

Therefore, we suggest that the Final Report does not contain Minority Reports appended to it. We further urge the Full Funding Coalition, and any others who may have suggested that they will submit their proposal directly to the legislature if they are not adopted by this Task Force, to rethink their position, refrain from doing so, and, instead, give their whole-hearted endorsement to the product that emerges from this Task Force.

**II. TOPICS WHICH MAY BE CONTROVERSIAL WHERE WE SPECIFICALLY
SUPPORT THE 12/3/2008 DRAFT FINAL REPORT**

With respect to issues on which the details have yet to be resolved, or may still be subject to some contention even if they are contained in the 12/3/2008 Draft Final Report, we have these comments:

1. Section 1, Basic Education Definition. We endorse:
 - a. Defining Basic Education in terms of the opportunity to obtain certain skills within the parameters of a defined instructional program; and
 - b. The inclusion of a standardized program of early learning for eligible students at risk of not meeting state learning standards, as well as voluntary full-day kindergarten.

2. Section 2, Instructional Program of Basic Education. We endorse:

- a. The requirement of additional instructional hours; and
- b. The flexibility of each district to determine the number of days within which to provide the number of hours.

Note: We express some concerns in Item III of this paper regarding the impact of Core 24 on high school graduation rates by requiring more credits, and the amount of support contained in this proposal for those students who become credit deficient.

3. Section 3, Core Allocations for the Instructional Program. We endorse:

- a. The concept of having the distribution formula be for allocation purposes only, and not a specified position-funding with a requirement to have each type of position in the numbers for which funds were allocated; and
- b. Basing enrollment drivers on a year-to-year basis, rather than a 3-year rolling average, as was suggested in the subsection labeled “Core Teachers” (although the 3 –year rolling average was not included in the draft legislation in the Appendix). While we have experienced declining enrollment for a number of years and would have benefited from a 3-year rolling average, we also recognize that it can hurt a district in years when enrollment is increasing. We think a year-to-year basis is preferable for two reasons. First, it is more accurate. Second, over the long-term, we expect our state’s population and its school-age population to increase, rather than decrease.

4. Section 4, School Employee Compensation. We endorse:

- a. All elements of this section, several of which could be generate some resistance, subject to one caveat contained in Item III of this paper. We think they are fundamental to obtaining necessary improvement in student performance.
- b. We do not take a position on the issue (which was not specified in this report) of whether the Salary Survey should use a 10-month or 12-month year for purposes of comparison. We recognize there are arguments for either position.
- c. We support the concept of statewide collective bargaining, and think that it is a good idea for all staff compensation. However, we think districts should retain the right to bargain terms and conditions of employment if they wish. The Draft was not clear how state “approval” to do so would be determined.

5. Section 5, Teacher Certification; and Section 6 Funding and Oversight. We endorse in its entirety, with one exception related to Accountability (discussed under Item III of this paper).

III. TOPICS IN THE DRAFT FINAL REPORT FOR WHICH WE WOULD SUGGEST A MODIFICATION

1. Section 2, Instructional Program of Basic Education. Our district has some concerns with Core 24, and believe that the Task Force's intent can be expressed in the legislation in a more flexible manner by referring to "high school graduation requirements as established by the State Board of Education", or similar language, rather than by referring specifically to Core 24. Our concerns with Core 24 include:
 - a. Impact on high school graduation rates. Because most dropouts occur due to credit deficiencies, the addition of more credit requirements will only exacerbate this problem;
 - b. The unclear amount of supplemental instruction and services provided in this bill for under-achieving or credit deficient students. In Section 3(2)(e) of the draft legislation it is unclear to us if students eligible for free/reduced price lunch are being used as a direct 1:1 proxy for underachieving students, or if a school must attain a certain minimum percentage of such students to be eligible for any supplemental instruction and services. We hope it is the former, because all of our schools have underachieving students, even if they have a relatively low percentage of students eligible for free/reduced price lunches. The other ambiguity is the mechanism to be used to adjust for under-reporting of free/reduced price lunches in high school.
 - c. Lack of flexibility which it permits with respect to electives.
2. Section 3, Core Allocations for the Instructional Program.
 - a. Librarians/Media Specialists, Nurse/Social Workers, Counselors, and Office Support/Non-instructional Aides. The original proposal of the legislators contained 2 in each of the 1st 3 categories, and 6 for the last category for a prototypical high school, whereas those numbers appear to be cut in half now. We hope the original allocations could be restored
 - b. NERCs. The proposed amount is now \$986/student, compared with \$1,344/student in the original proposal, if we understood it correctly. The differences are \$100 less in Central Administration, and \$258 less in the combined categories of Student Technology and Instructional Technology. Of course, we would like to see these numbers restored.
3. Section 4, School Employee Compensation. Regional Wage Adjustments. One of the reasons that some geographic regions have a higher population and are more expensive is that there are simply more amenities in those regions, and most people

would find them to be a more attractive place to live, if the increased cost of living could be eliminated. So, a simple Regional Wage Adjustment would eliminate any such disadvantage of living in such a high-cost area while leaving all the advantages. As a result, prospective teachers would tend to locate there, rather than consider more rural areas. Therefore, we believe that regional wage adjustments to a salary schedule will negatively impact our ability, and the ability of all districts on the East side of the state, to attract and retain high-quality candidates.

While it would be in our interest to strongly oppose any salary schedule that differentiates by region, we can also recognize the equity in having some type of adjustment. However, we think it needs to be carefully designed, with two factors in mind.

- a. First, it should not totally eliminate the differential in cost of living, and perhaps should be limited only to specific high-cost areas. Instead, it should attempt to eliminate a portion of the differential, such as 0.5-0.75, perhaps. That would keep the playing field more level between rural and East side districts on the one hand, and urban and Puget Sound area districts on the other;
 - b. Second, we recommend it be allocated as a stipend rather than as a different salary schedule. That is because the salary schedule affects items such as retirement pay, and a teacher could choose to live anywhere after retirement. If they could amass larger retirement by teaching in a high-cost area, there would be even less incentive to ever choose a lower cost area.
4. Section 5, Teacher Certification; and Section 6, Funding and Oversight. Our only concern in this section relates to SBE's proposed accountability system. Currently we don't know what their proposal is, because they postponed its adoption until January. We wrote SBE on Oct. 30 with 4 concerns, and SBE responded by letter on Nov. 10 to say it was reconsidering its proposal.