

# Basic Education Finance Joint Task Force

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### Members

Dan Grimm, Chair  
Glenn Anderson  
House of Representatives  
Terry Bergeson  
Superintendent of Public  
Instruction  
Lisa Brown  
Washington State Senate  
Cheryl Chow  
President, Seattle School Board  
Laurie Dolan  
Director, Governor's Executive  
Policy Office  
Mike Hewitt  
Washington State Senate  
Janea Holmquist  
Washington State Senate  
Ross Hunter  
House of Representatives  
Bette Hyde  
Superintendent,  
Bremerton School District  
Jim Kowalkowski  
Superintendent,  
Davenport School District  
Skip Priest  
House of Representatives  
Pat Sullivan  
House of Representatives  
Rodney Tom  
Washington State Senate

### Alternates

Kathy Haigh  
House of Representatives  
Fred Jarrett  
House of Representatives

### Staff to the Task Force

Roxanne Lieb, Director  
Steve Aos, Associate Director  
Annie Pennucci, Sr. Research Assoc.  
Washington State Institute  
for Public Policy  
110 Fifth Ave. SE  
PO Box 40999  
Olympia, WA 98504-0999  
Phone: (360) 586-2677  
Fax: (360) 586-2793

## M E M O R A N D U M

DATE: March 21, 2008  
TO: Members, Task Force  
FROM: Dan Grimm  
SUBJECT: March 24 Meeting — Questions & Answers

Attached is a list of selected compensation and other questions with my *preliminary* answers, offered as a catalyst for discussion at our March 24 meeting.

As mentioned previously, no one will be required to answer any specific question and all answers will be *preliminary*. The goal is to identify issues of interest to Task Force members and give staff time to conduct research and prepare options. Everyone will be able to revise their positions based on subsequent findings and discussion. Further consideration of any specific issue will not be precluded by any preliminary decision.

A special thank you to Representative Priest and Dr. Hyde for the papers they prepared and to Representative Haigh for her answers to the budget and related questions.

Please let Roxanne or me know if you have any questions.

## Questions & Preliminary Answers

Dan Grimm

March 21, 2008

# School Employee Compensation

**1. Should the state retain the existing compensation system for teachers?**

**No.** The existing state salary system is based on the assumption that experience and post-graduate education credits improve teaching skills and student performance. Evidence submitted to the Task Force indicates master's degrees do not improve performance — with the exception of degrees directly related to subjects being taught. Evidence indicates the benefit of experience is concentrated in the first few years of a teacher's career.

**2. Should the compensation system include differential pay for teachers certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards or similar associations?**

**Yes,** unless a more rational compensation system can be implemented.

**3. Should school employee compensation be based on a survey of salaries paid in other occupations requiring comparable education, training, experience, terms and conditions?**

**Yes.** A survey should include all matters a reasonable person would consider when comparing career opportunities and should recognize the different skills, competitive markets, and educational requirements for different assignments.

**4. Should the compensation system include differential pay for teachers with high-demand skills (e.g., math and science)?**

**Yes,** if practical. A salary survey is likely to reveal that not all teaching assignments require the same skills and that some skills are subject to greater marketplace competition. It is reasonable to assume it will cost more to retain and attract qualified math and science teachers than will be true for most teaching assignments. Implementation will not be simple. Standards will need to be established to determine what constitutes qualified math or science teachers at different grade levels and in different programs. Standards also will need to be established to make sure qualified teachers are teaching classes that justify the higher pay.

**5. Should the state's compensation system include regional differences in cost-of-living or amenities?**

**Yes,** if a salary survey is able to identify and isolate the differences.

**6. Should the Task Force pursue development of a compensation system for teachers that includes performance pay?**

**Yes.** The best indicator of teacher quality is student performance. The evolution of standardized testing makes it possible to assess student performance with reasonable and increasing accuracy. Performance pay would improve the current system by providing teachers with an incentive to excel. Similar systems are well established in other occupations and several states and school districts have implemented performance pay programs, sufficient to merit Task Force review.

**7. Should the Task Force pursue development of a compensation system for principals and superintendents that includes performance pay?**

**Yes,** although financial incentives would need to be sufficient to overcome the tendency to avoid controversial personnel management decisions. Hiring decisions often emphasize 'good relationships with stakeholders,' which is another way of saying applicants will impair their prospects if they have angered staff in previous positions.

**8. Should any performance pay system developed by the Task Force include incentives to reduce the number of students who drop out of school?**

**Yes.** It is difficult to improve the academic performance of students who drop out of school. A compensation system limited to incentives for improved student performance could divert attention from those who have significant and diverse educational needs.

## **Budget and Other Issues**

**9. Should the state revise the definition of Basic Education?**

**Yes.** All statutes that control state education funding decisions should be integrated into a single act, as proposed by Representative Glenn Anderson in House Bill 2832, and then reviewed for potential revisions as stipulated by Senate Bill 5627. Clearly stated policies are essential to the development of adequate and stable funding formulas.

The Basic Education Act should include a commitment to minimizing the number of students who drop out of school by recognizing that not all students develop physically or intellectually in the same way at the same time. Educational opportunities and incentives should be developed that meet the diverse needs and aspirations of all students.

**10. Should the Basic Education Act be amended to include K-4 ratio enhancements, levy equalization, Learning Improvement Days (LID), the Student Achievement Program (I-728), and programs for highly capable students or students at risk of failing the WASL graduation test?**

**Yes,** certainly programs for students at risk of failing to pass the WASL graduation test.