

MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 9, 2008

TO: Task Force Members

FROM: Representative Skip Priest

SUBJECT: Basic Education Finance Action Plan

In March, Chair Grimm invited Task Force members to provide input on major policy questions for the Task Force to consider. Superintendent Bette Hyde and I each offered a working paper with key assumptions, objectives, and essential questions regarding the definition and funding formulas for Basic Education. The purpose of these working papers was not to suggest right or wrong answers to the complex topics before the Task Force, but to provide a focal point for discussion among Task Force members. We had a wide-ranging discussion at that meeting on many of the topics in the working papers.

Our next challenge is to move to consideration of specific policies. Representative Hunter suggested at the last meeting that the Task Force should have before it a “straw man” option to help focus our deliberations. Rather than considering such issues as early learning, class size, compensation, professional development, or instructional support services as separate points of discussion, we should debate the strengths and weaknesses of a comprehensive and specific proposal. The process of debating a straw man option will reveal areas of consensus, priorities, lack of emphasis, need for additional information, etc. We will be able to move forward and meet our timelines for decision-making.

Attached is such an option for the Task Force’s consideration: a proposed Basic Education Finance Action Plan, based on the key assumptions and objectives outlined in my working paper. This Action Plan outlines how the conceptual goals in the working paper can be explored through specific analyses and crafted into concrete proposals. It offers a roadmap for the Task Force to develop a rational basis for our recommendations, which is a critical aspect of our responsibility.

This Action Plan is not a finished product. However, it can provide a focal point for debate and discussion, as well as offer guidance for staff to develop the details and cost estimates that will be needed for any final recommendation from the Task Force.

I look forward to our continued dialog and progress.

**Basic Education Finance Action Plan – Proposal
Representative Skip Priest**

Compensation for Teachers¹

Create a rational basis for compensating teachers and other certificated instructional staff that provides incentives for quality and addresses issues of supply and demand.

- 1) For the present, maintain the basic form of the salary allocation schedule as the distribution method for state funds, with the following adjustments:
 - a. Increase the starting salary for beginning teachers with the goal of improving recruitment of the highest caliber candidates. Examine how educator compensation, particularly in the early years, might be aligned with occupations of comparable desired prestige in Washington labor markets.
 - b. Examine compensation for senior teachers (at the top steps of the salary grid) in selected other states.
 - c. Recraft a salary schedule to reflect the above findings, as well as reflect the research that both improvements in effectiveness and problems with retention tend to occur early in a teacher's career.
 - d. Require that degrees and courses credited on the salary schedule be directly related to a teacher's certification or endorsement.
- 2) Include a simple geographic cost adjustment factor.
- 3) Estimate the costs of the above policies by district and compare the results to current allocations to determine whether additional temporary adjustments are needed to phase out all grandfathering.
- 4) Maintain current NBPTS bonus policies.
- 5) Create a one-time bonus of a set amount to defray the cost of obtaining professional certification (without providing an incentive for higher education institutions to increase program costs).
- 6) Explore use of Conditional High Demand Recruitment Bonuses that allow school districts to offer one-time hiring bonuses for defined high demand positions if the individuals agree to serve for at least five years.
- 7) Conduct an analysis of current spending on TRI and craft a firm policy that TRI is to be used only for additional responsibilities and not as a proxy for cost-of-living or other issues.
- 8) Develop options for a more effective system, at both the local and state level, for quality assurance and accountability for teacher performance.
- 9) Create limited, voluntary pilot projects to design and implement salary schedules based on knowledge, skills, and performance. For example, see House Bill 2095 (Jarrett - 2007).

¹ Includes other Certificated Instructional Staff – Counselors, Librarians, Nurses, etc.

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Compensation for Administrators and Classified Staff

Create a rational basis, relying primarily on labor market information, for salary allocations for administrators and classified staff.

- 1) Examine current average salaries for administrators and classified staff, on the assumption that districts are currently responding to labor market demands in their compensation practices. Revise the state allocation using these findings.
- 2) Include a simple geographic cost adjustment factor.
- 3) Estimate the costs of the above policies by district and compare the results to current allocations to determine whether additional temporary adjustments are needed to phase out all grandfathering.

Staffing Ratios

Create a simple set of instructional, administrative, and classified staff categories for allocation purposes. Increase classified staffing ratios to better approximate district needs.

- 1) Develop a simple but rational basis for allocating various types of staff. For instructional staff, provide separate allocations at least for Teachers, Librarians, Counselors, and Nurses and other health services staff. For other staff, consider the categories proposed by House Bill 3117 (Hunter - 2008).
- 2) Examine current staffing patterns for classified staff, both at the school and district level. Consider other sources of information, such as Picus-Odden or professional judgment studies. Make a reasonable assumption about state versus locally-funded programs and responsibilities, and develop a revised staffing ratio.

Instruction: Class-Size and Students Needing Extra Assistance

Identify a target class size for Basic Education, with a focus on class size reduction in K-3. Reexamine remedial programs. Coordinate with the School Construction Task Force.

- 1) Following the available research and the Doran Court's logic, identify an appropriate class size for "average" (non-disadvantaged) students in grades K-3 as well as other grade levels. Include assumptions about district use of available resources such as I-728 to achieve the target.
- 2) Develop a methodology for providing remedial resources for students needing extra assistance (currently LAP and Bilingual) in terms of services provided (including reduced class size) rather than dollars per student, considering the work of Picus-Odden, professional judgment studies, current district staffing practices, and other methods.
- 3) For the present, continue current special education funding methodology and maintain recent enhancements to the special education safety net.
- 4) Identify the degree to which existing facilities can accommodate the target class sizes. Coordinate proposals and possible solutions with the School Construction Task Force.

Early Learning and Full-Day Kindergarten

Identify those aspects of early learning to be included as Basic Education. Create a seamless education system from early learning into the primary grades.

- 1) Follow the Doran Court's logic that some students, without supplemental services, will not be able to attain any reasonable level of achievement under the regular education program. Identify a target population of students and early learning services to be included as Basic Education, available on a voluntary basis. Examine New Jersey's approach to funding early learning and consider how current Washington programs such as ECEAP might be expanded or modified to meet the target policy. Coordinate proposals with the Department of Early Learning's development of a QRIS system.
- 2) Continue phasing in state funding for full-day kindergarten. Develop policies for ensuring links between early learning, kindergarten, and primary grades so that students are ready to learn and do not lose learning gains in subsequent years.
- 3) Identify the degree to which existing facilities can accommodate full-day kindergarten. Coordinate proposals and possible solutions with the School Construction Task Force.

Other Key Items

- 1) **NERC.** Examine current average expenditures on major categories of nonemployee related costs. Develop a simple set of allocation categories, including technology and using House Bill 3117 as a starting point. Revise the NERC allocations to more accurately reflect costs, using a reasonable assumption about state versus locally-funded responsibilities and incorporating efficiency assumptions to avoid creating a cost reimbursement model.
- 2) **Professional Development.** Ask the WSIPP to summarize the research on effective models of professional development. Consider the work of Picus-Odden, professional judgment studies, and current practices, and develop a methodology for consistent funding of quality professional development.
- 3) **"Six Period Day."** Examine the possible funding implications of the State Board of Education's proposal to require 24 credits (6 courses per year) for high school graduation.
- 4) **Career and Technical Education.** Fully fund the recently enacted Career and Technical Education legislation (2SSB 6377).
- 5) **Pupil Transportation.** Receive an update from the Consultant and consider proposals for a new funding methodology.
- 6) **Levies and Levy Equalization.** Since by definition levies are not part of Basic Education, defer Task Force discussion of levies and levy equalization until after the core tasks of defining and estimating the costs of fully funding Basic Education have been completed.