

CALENDAR

September 15th - Deadline
Benefit Enrollment Forms Due

September 21st - SEA Executive Board
4:00 p.m. - SEA Office

September 28th - SEA Rep Council
4:15 p.m. - Pilchuck UniServ Office in Everett

October 1st - Deadline
Credits Deadline for Salary Schedule Placement

NEWS Lawsuit Goes to Court

Network for Excellence in Washington Schools

On the 31st of August, a network of local associations and districts representing 400,000 students, along with the state PTA, the WEA, and a diverse collection of concerned public organizations began arguing a lawsuit which asserts that the state has failed in its constitutionally mandated "paramount duty" to make "ample" for "all" students in the state. The goal of the lawsuit is simple: it asks King County Judge Erlick to require the state to agree that the words "paramount", "ample" and "all" mean exactly what everyone thinks they mean. Paramount means most important, before everything else. Ample means more than minimal or barely adequate. And all, well, it really does mean all, not just a few, or some, or even most.

In Snohomish we are "all in" on this lawsuit, as we have been part of the group since its creation and both the Association and the District were original members, along with one of our outstanding parents, Patti Venema. We joined early in the process because we understood that funding for Washington state public schools has been in crisis for the last 30 years and that the state, despite multiple court findings, comprehensive reform studies and voter-initiatives, still hasn't grappled with the fundamental reality that it is the state that is failing its children, families and businesses - not its schools.

For six weeks, the legal team will be asserting that when it comes to funding education, the state has consistently, grossly, negligently failed in its paramount duty to provide amply for all the children in Washington.

This is a landmark and I am proud we are part of it. While it is difficult to gauge the likelihood of success, it is certain that we will continue to fight for education regardless of the outcome. For daily updates on the trial, as well as a comprehensive history of education funding in our state, I strongly encourage that folks check out the site provided by NEWS:

www.waschoolexcellence.org

The Impact of Budget Cuts

While it may feel as if the budget process of last year is now completed, we now must live with the budget that came out of that process. This happened at two levels - at the state and in our local district - and there are impacts from both.

At the state level, our COLA has been suspended for the next two years. While inflation is currently flat, we all lost the 4.1% of our salary against inflation that we should have received this year. While insurance premiums are going up by 7% or more, the state contributions have increased by less than half that amount. We do not yet know, nor can we yet know, exactly how much insurance costs will go up because a significant factor in that calculation is the way in which usage (which plans folks choose) affects pooling (how the money covers those plans). The loss of income and increased out-of-pocket for insurance will be felt far into the future.

Even though voters overwhelmingly passed I-728 for lower class sizes and professional development for staff, the state cut I-728 funding by 71%, resulting in a day being cut from our calendar (along with 0.5% of our pay) and a reduction in our professional development from \$400 to \$257.

We worked hard to get our professional development to a level at which a member could register for a conference AND pay for a substitute with no out-of-pocket expenses. **This year, if a member spends up to his/her \$100 limit on supplies, there will not be enough remaining to fully cover a sub.** Next year, I-728 funds are cut even further (78% reduction), thus reducing our professional development by just that much more.

While the number of certificated staff in Snohomish will be only slighter lower than last year, we will see cuts in almost every other area: significantly reduced para-educator hours, fewer custodial and maintenance services, reduced services at the district office, reduced transportation for students, fewer opportunities for students involved in extra-curricular activities and athletics. Class sizes will be about the same as last year, but classload assistance ran out last year well before the end of the year - and those extra kids didn't go away when the money ran out. This year everyone will be doing the same job they did last year, but with fewer resources even though there aren't any fewer students.

However, it is important to also look at what else is happening in Snohomish. We were one of the few Associations in the county who didn't experience a RIF last year. Further, many of our non-continuing folks from last year have been hired back; not all, not yet, but most. There are still job postings in Snohomish and there may continue be new jobs as the year progresses. Our TRI schedule, already one of the best in the state, will be improved this year. Snohomish School District is continuing to build new schools, to renovate and retrofit old schools with new technology, and to generally improve our infrastructure. Additionally, this is going to be an interesting year as the district will be putting forth a new levy and we will have a new contract to negotiate. I look forward to working closely with you on both of these.

SEA/SSD WAAS Committee

Many outside of special education are not familiar with the Washington Alternate Assessment System (WAAS), the portfolio process used to assess our students who, because of developmental delays or physical disabilities, are not appropriately assessed with the WASL. The WAAS has been a burden on our members. It is difficult to administer and it is capriciously scored by OSPI. The expectations for the WAAS have changed multiple times and those changes have been communicated late and poorly. At the same time the expectations for the WAAS have increased. It is literally possible that a student might have failed the WAAS because page numbers were inaccurate or because the student name was not identical on all pages. If a student was listed as Mike on one page and Michael on another, that student's WAAS might be deemed failing and this, of course, has an impact on a school's overall progress towards AYP.

Even though the state has convened a work group, we felt it was important to track those changes and to determine what we might do in Snohomish to address the workload issues for teachers who administer the WAAS. This committee is co-chaired by Justin Fox-Bailey and Jennifer Norton and will be comprised of Emma Packard, Suzanne Fitzgerald and Maryanne Jones. The intention is to meet this fall to track changes in the WAAS, identify "best practices" in administering the WAAS, and identify ways to mitigate the workload issues associated with it.

In our last negotiations, the Association agreed to look at special education caseload issues on a separate basis. The joint committee met for over two years before coming up with a series of recommendations. Those recommendations were to have come out late last spring, but the announcement was delayed pending finalizations of budget reductions. The full list of recommendations will come out later this month so that folks can see what progress has already been made and what issues are still outstanding.

SNOHOMISH EDUCATION ASSOCIATION EXECUTIVE BOARD 2009-2010

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