

MUKILTEO SCHOOLS

School District asking legislators to support public education

Mukilteo one of 18 school districts in the state saying more funding is needed

Editor's note: Edmonds School District board President Nancy Katims, along with Edmonds Education Association President Andi Nofziger, sent the following letter to the state legislators Dec. 9. Among those signing the letter was Judy Schwab, president of the Mukilteo School District board.

Dear esteemed Washington state legislators:

We appreciate your ongoing support of PK-12 public education and your efforts to address the needs of our students, staff, and schools. We know there are competing priorities across the state, and we are grateful for legislation that has been passed over the last several years to support public education.

Unfortunately, despite these efforts, school districts across the state are facing a huge financial crisis that requires urgent attention.

Some examples of budget deficits faced by school districts this past spring include estimates for Seattle, \$131 million; Northshore, \$21 million; Spokane, \$16 million; Edmonds, \$15 million; and Tacoma, \$10 million, to name a few.

Districts have worked hard to balance budgets for this year, and as a result, class sizes have increased, courses and programs cut, jobs at all levels lost, and schools closed.

We aim to continue to work within our means, but we need help to ensure the students of Washington state have access to a quality public education, no matter where they live.

We are leaders of school boards and educator associations from 18 Washington districts, very small to very large, serving over 30% of state students.

However, we write to you in support of all Washington state students, to describe the adverse impacts of the current school funding situation as simply as possible, and to suggest two solutions – one long-term and one short-term.

Background

Several factors are driving recent budget shortfalls, including:

- decreased student enrollment;
- the sunset of federal and state pandemic-era funding, despite the lingering impacts;
- unfunded state and federal mandates, most notably in special education; and
- significantly increased operational costs, and more.

Without state legislation designed to meet today's needs, these shortfalls will continue. Even after districts have adjusted their budgets for the 2023-24 school year, most of us are facing continuing shortfalls in future years, such as 2024-25 estimates for Seattle at \$104 million, Spokane at \$27 million, and Edmonds at \$11 million, based on early projections.

And more districts will be going into Binding Conditions, a status akin to bankruptcy for school districts.

Many people think the 2018 McCleary decision "fixed" state funding. It did increase teachers' salaries, which was sorely needed.

But the legislation also created new budget challenges. For example, the new law limits local levy tax revenues. In many of our districts, this means that our taxpayers have approved us to collect more taxes than we are allowed to by the state.

Our constituents are understandably upset when we have difficulty meeting all our students' needs, but our hands are tied by state law.

And, even if student enrollment increases, we will continue to face budget challenges due to the funding formulas currently used to apportion money to districts, increased costs of services, and higher needs of students recovering from impacts of the pandemic.

The current funding formula, known as the "prototypical school model," defines the number of students in a district needed for the state to fund one full-time equivalent (FTE) staff person.

While this model has been tweaked over the years since it was first introduced in 1995, it in no way represents students' current needs. For example, the model allows state funding for one FTE paraeducator (teaching assistant) for 427 of our general education elementary students.

This is less than one paraeducator to serve an entire average elementary school! Given the increasing class sizes we currently face, in addition to the importance of supporting individual and small-group learning, this staffing ratio is absurdly unrealistic.

The numbers for secondary schools, and for other staff across the grade bands, are similarly out of touch with our students' current needs.

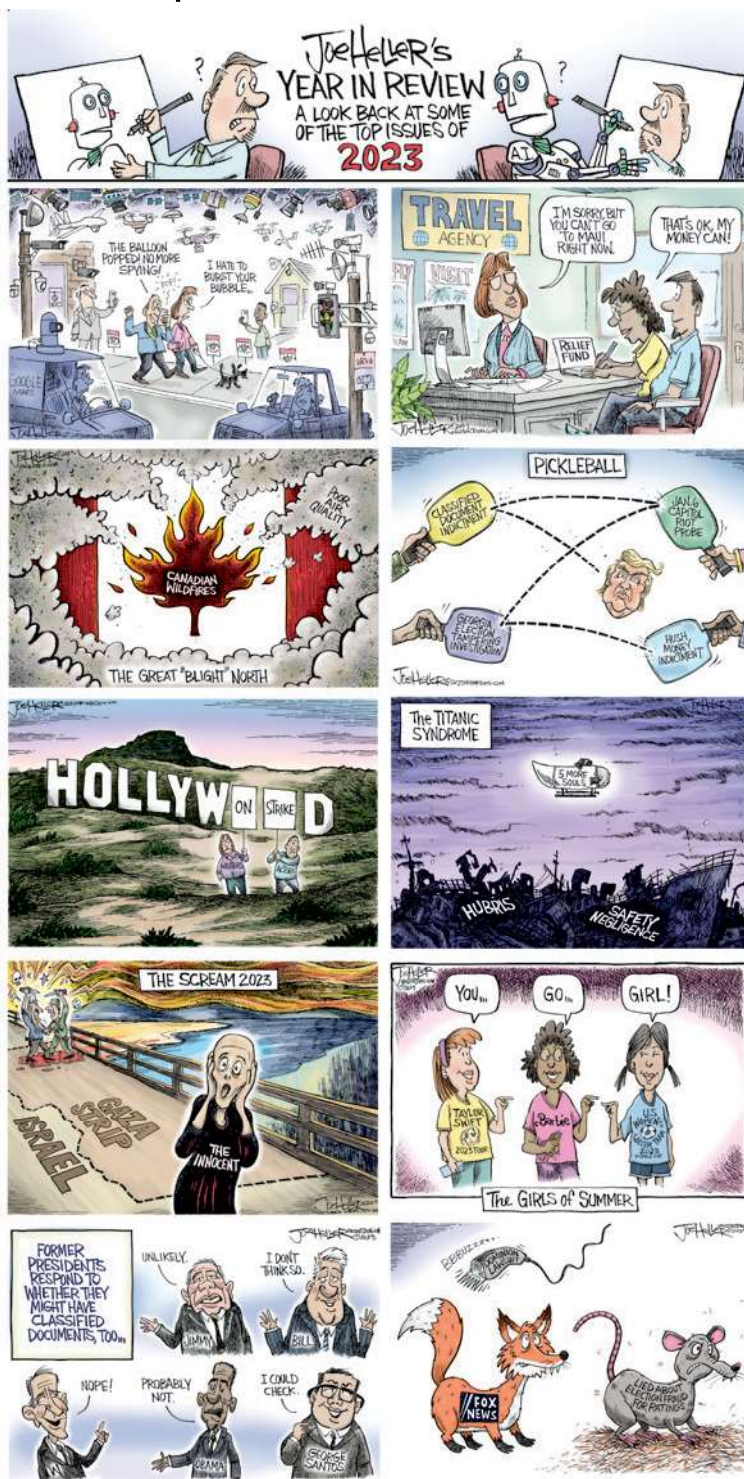
Impact

How does this situation affect a district's ability to meet student needs? We all pay more for certificated, classified, and administrative staff than the state provides.

Last year in the Edmonds School District alone, serving about 19,000 students, we funded 120 more classified staff (e.g., paraeducators) than the state funds.

We covered the cost of twice as many certificated Education Staff Associates (e.g., counselors, physical and occupational therapists, speech/language pathologists, nurses) than the state provides. The list goes on and on.

Our state is clearly not meeting its paramount duty to amply fund basic education. And as reported in a 2022 study by the Education Law Center,



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Resident agrees that Old Town has a parking problem

Thanks to David Cook for his Dec. 13 letter (bit.ly/41tYBGn) regarding parking in Old Town. I live on the same street in Old Town. We have a situation here on our street I don't see on Second, Third, or Fifth streets – huge box trucks, vans, multiple cars, parked on both sides of the street by one household because their driveway and yard are also full of more cars.

A dump truck has been parked on Fourth for most of this year. Another resident on our street has written letters to everyone here with codes. We're told to call police. Really? I read three different times in the Beacon that there's not enough police. All police have to do is drive down the end of our street by Loveland.

We shouldn't have to call. This has been going on for years now. Our street is now an eyesore.

I was happy to see that speed cameras will be

installed on the Speedway, and they also need to be on Fifth Street, as there are not enough police. Another solution would be to install four-way stops, with flashing lights, at the intersections on Fifth Street and perhaps work with City of Everett to make a roundabout at Fifth Street, Mukilteo Lane, and Lamar Road.

Janice Moorhead
Mukilteo

We want to know what **YOU** think.
The BEACON welcomes letters to the Editor

Please send your letters to Mukilteo Beacon Editor,
728 3rd Street, Suite D, Mukilteo, WA 98275
or email us at mukilteeditor@yourbeacon.net

REALITYCHECK

WSDOT/WSF should help with waterfront improvements

City needs to push state to help fix problems

This month marks the third anniversary of the opening of the new Mukilteo Ferry Terminal. And in case you haven't noticed, the combination of staff shortages, maintenance problems associated with an aging fleet, and a host of other problems have finally deteriorated ferry service to a point where we're all paying the price of the accumulated neglect, not just ferry riders.

From Mukilteo's perspective, one would think three years after the opening of the new ferry terminal we'd have most of the bugs worked out so we could be working on other issues until the new ferries come online. But the bugs aren't worked out and we're not even remotely headed in that direction.

Thinking back to the original hearing when WSDOT/WSF presented their plan for the new Mukilteo Ferry Terminal to the hearing examiner he eventually asked "You're all part of WSDOT right? Don't you even talk to each other?" Mukilteo had been promised that once the ferry terminal moved, the new holding lanes and exit lanes would allow enough queuing that Mukilteo traffic and pedestrian access to the waterfront would be prioritized because more ferry traffic could be held WITHOUT impacting ferry unloading.

City officials should be working with WSDOT to change the signalization timing at the three signalized intersections to give Mukilteo traffic and pedestrians priority as promised.

Similarly, even with the newly widened sidewalk across the SR-525 bridge, the intersection at First Street still is problematic with some anxious ferry commuters running the no-right turn on the red light when pedestrians are present (it's an on-demand walk signal). The City should install a red light camera here to help the pedestrian safety issue, but should also work with WSDOT to make this an all-walk intersection (it's already signalized that way).

Although the new ADA ramp connecting to the widened sidewalk on the north side of Second Street is perfect, the ADA ramp on the south side is terrible and needs to be redesigned. It's narrower, has a design incidental trip hazard with the square curb design, and is angled towards the ferry lane more than the crosswalk. The City should be working with WSDOT to fix this. We've been here before but this time the problem can be solved just by looking across the street. Of course, the decades-old goal of encouraging more riders to walk on the ferry instead of driving their cars could be a good stopgap while we're waiting for WSF to get back to normal in the next several years. But we're not there yet.

For example, consider the transit route for a walk-on ferry commuter at the Clinton terminal whose destination is the Seattle Paine Field International Airport (i.e. Paine Field). There's not a direct route from the Mukilteo Ferry Terminal to the airport terminal as both Community Transit and Everett Transit routes require a transfer to another bus which results in a trip time of an hour or more. Only Everett Transit drops off in front of the airport terminal. Community Transit's drop-off location requires a 0.4

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"I don't think that I'm going to be too far removed from what's going on in the city." "I'll stay in touch. I'll stay in tune with what's going on in the city. It'll be hard for me not to."

"At the same time, I can use my experience to help others understand how their local government works. I think, as a society, we don't have an understanding of that, and it's really important."

The four years on the council have been eye-opening for Crawford in understanding how city government operates. In some of her interactions with her constituents, Crawford has been able to explain the complexities Mukilteo faces. For example, some residents tell her the City should be spending more money in certain areas.

"There are a lot of operating costs to running a city, and we don't have the discretionary funds to go and spend on these other things," she said.

Her initial involvement in the City was as a Parks & Arts Commission member. About a year into her term, she decided to run for City Council. In contemplating her first run for public office, she noted she had the capacity and the time.

More importantly, Crawford was passionate about making a difference in people's lives.

"That was what was really propelling me."

In 2019, Mukilteo politics was at a low point with the City Council passing a vote of no confidence against former Mayor Jennifer Gregerson. The City had a negative reputation with some cities because there was such a disconnect between the executive and legislative branches, Crawford said.

"For me, it's always been about improving the quality of life for residents. ... I ran (my campaign) on a positive note of what I really wanted to do."

Crawford dealt with many important issues during her four years on the council, but one stands above all the rest.

"When I look back, I feel like I was at the right place during the pandemic."

Crawford has a bachelor's degree in environmental and occupational health and safety from the University of Washington. At the time, she was a member of Snohomish Health District, now the

Snohomish County Board of Health.

Crawford and some other councilmembers were attending a National League of Cities conference when the World Health Organization declared a pandemic.

"I was afraid that I was not going to get back to Seattle," Crawford said. "Ultimately, I was able to contribute, not only at the city level, but at the county level as a Board of Health member during the pandemic, and then as a state Board of Health member from 2021 to 2022."

Elected as council president for 2023 after serving as vice president the previous year, Crawford said she wanted to start fresh and build a good working relationship with Mayor Joe Marine and the executive department. From the beginning, she said they all had the same goals.

"We want to make the city the best place for people to live in. So very early on, we got on the same page."

Crawford and Marine worked well together, along with City Administrator Steve Powers and Vice President Louis Harris.

"I've been proud of the work that we've done," she said.

Crawford points to the use of the City's ARPA (American Rescue Plan Act) funds to invest in a variety of projects that directly benefit the community - City gateway and park signs, a large portion of the construction costs of the South Mukilteo Park, a website redesign, and potentially the update of the City's financial software.

The City also had made progress in waterfront development with the expected partnership with the Port of Everett.

"I think residents are ready. I think it's been a long time coming. It's just a matter of being able to come to an agreement on what both parties see as the future of the waterfront."

Though the 2023 budget came together smoothly, many conversations among the councilmembers revolved around the idea that the City needs to embrace long-range financial planning.

"We talked about that earlier this year at the council retreat as one of our priorities," Crawford said. "So I hope as the year starts that is something that the City takes up now."

mile (9 minutes) walk to the terminal!

Community Transit has also implemented a micro transit pilot program with the Lynnwood "Zip" Alderwood Shuttle recently transitioning to a permanent service after about a year. All things considered (ferry terminal, Sounder terminal, airport, NO park and ride) one would think Mukilteo would be a good candidate for a Zip pilot program. But instead, the next three pilot programs will be in Lake Stevens, Arlington, and Darrington. I might be a little cynical but considering Community Transit killed the funded Mukilteo Park and Ride project in 2016, and one of the prerequisites is "Community Partnership & Community Focus" maybe it should come as no surprise.

Yet another ferry walk-on opportunity comes with

the Port of Everett's parking lot (across from Ivar's).

This 99-stall lot provides the only non-reserved overnight parking option at Mukilteo's waterfront area which is the one feature necessary to provide the option for ferry commuters to leave a vehicle in Mukilteo at times when ferry service is questionable. The Port has the resources necessary to work directly with WSF to make this walk-on strategy work now if it so chooses.

The question that needs to be asked now is, "You all can work together, right?"

For more information, feedback, or if you'd like to take a waterfront walk with me to better understand the issues raised in Reality Check, drop me a note at hstoltz@citynet-work.com.

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compared to other states' funding, Washington state earned a grade of C for funding level, a D for funding distribution, and an F for funding effort.

Proposed solutions

How can the state solve this mess? We offer two reasonable solutions.

- **Long-term:** The long-term solution is for the state to step back from the current funding model, study how other states approach funding schools, and build a funding formula that meets the needs of today's students, recognizing that one size does not fit all.

- **We request that the Legislature create a two-year task force to determine current needs in public schools across the state,** in conjunction with costs, revenue options, and funding strategies, and develop recommendations for a revised funding model to amply meet the needs of our schools and students, now and into the future.

- **Short-term:** The short-term solution is based on two important data points:

Currently, 44% of the state budget goes to public education.

The 2024 budget forecast for the state indicates an estimated surplus of \$1.2B.

Given these two data points, we respectfully ask that at least 44% of the \$1.2B surplus go directly to school districts to help us bridge the gap to amply, sustainably, fund public education and continue with this level of investment until the recommendations of the Task Force have been implemented.

How should this be distributed to districts? We all have different needs, just as students have different needs in our classrooms. The distribution should be done as simply and equitably as possible, centered on meeting students' needs as determined by each district.

Currently, the state uses student enrollment as the funding driver through the prototypical school model. With that in mind, we propose using student enrollment for this short-term solution.

With 44% of \$1.2 billion equating about \$528 million, and with about 1.074 million public school students in the state, the \$528 million equates to about \$500 per student. The simple solution is to distribute these funds to each district based on district student enrollment.

For the Edmonds School District as an example, that equates to about \$9.5 million, an amount close to our estimated shortfall for next year.

While this short-term solution

doesn't yet get us where we need to be, it goes a long way to get us back on track. And with continued positive forecasts, this supplemental revenue each year until the state fixes the current apportionment formula could help us all begin to build back effective support for our students.

We respectfully ask for your support to:

Sponsor and/or support a bill in the upcoming session to **implement a Task Force** addressing the long-term solution.

Support **distributing at least 44% of the state surplus to public school districts** across the state as part of the state supplemental budget.

The time is now for Washington state to become a beacon for exemplary public education. Our future depends on it.

In solidarity supporting the students of WA state:

Organizers

Nancy Katims, Ph.D., Edmonds School Board President

Andi Nofziger, Edmonds Education Association President

Co-Signers -
Presidents/Chairs
of their Organizations

Jamie Anderson, Vancouver Education Association

Howard Mawhinney, Lake Washington Education Assoc.

Jeb Binns, Highline Education Association

Jacqueline McGourty, Ph.D., Northshore School Board

Elizabeth Bonbright, Tacoma School Board

Lisa Peterson, Bellingham Education Association

Janet Caldwell, Bethel Education Association

Eric Pickens, Sequim School Board

Leah Choi, Lake Washington School Board

Saralyn Pozernick, Sequim Education Association

Penny Cramer, Tacoma Education Association

Robbi Reed, Northshore Education Association

Julianna Dauble and Shyla Butler, Renton Education Association & Support Professionals

Matt Reiman, Shoreline Education Association

Judy Schwab, Mukilteo School Board

Larry Garcia, Mt. Adams School Board

Jeremy Shay, Spokane Education Association

John Henry, Port Angeles Education Association

Derona Uzzle, Issaquah Education Association

Elaine Hogg, Auburn Education Association

Sandra Zavala-Ortega, Vancouver School Board

Jennifer Matter, Seattle Education Association

**Our apologies.
The Puzzle Maker
was at a loss for words
and numbers this week.**

**Crossword & Sudoku
may return next week.
The Beacon is sorry for
any inconvenience.**

News Tips

The Beacon invites readers to share story tips and ideas. If you see or know of some news deserving of coverage, email Editor David Pan at mukilteeditor@yourbeacon.net or call the newsroom at 425-347-5634 ext. 238.