



“All Washington students will be prepared to succeed in the 21st century world of work, learning and global citizenship.”

Governor Gregoire

EDUCATION TO MEET THE CHALLENGES OF THE 21ST CENTURY

Over the past several years, Washington has made tremendous strides in reforming our education system to serve our students better so they are prepared to enter college or the workplace. From the establishment of the Department of Early Learning in 2006, to more resources directed to math and science instruction, to greater emphasis on teacher training and preparation, Governor Chris Gregoire has led the charge to ensure our children will be successful in careers and in life.

Just as learning is a lifelong endeavor, so is the process to improve our education system. This session, the Legislature passed several key measures important to the Governor, including measures in her education package. Chief among them are the following:

Basic education funding. Funding models that served us well decades ago have, in many cases, outlived their usefulness. Under this legislation, baseline values are set for the prototypical school basic education funding models for class sizes, building-level staff, supplemental instruction programs, central office administration, maintenance, supplies, operating costs, transportation and other areas. A timeline for phasing in additional resources is included. These improvements will bring budgets into line with real costs. (House Bill 2776)

Early learning, infants and toddlers. The education of our youngest learners continues to be a top priority of the Governor. The Department of Early Learning is directed to develop a comprehensive birth-to-3 plan to provide education and support through a continuum of options, including early literacy and home visits. This deliberate planning will ensure that our youngest children get the best start. (HB 2867)

Early learning, 3- and 4-year-olds. We recognize that our students begin learning long before they reach kindergarten. The state’s program for low-income children and their families — Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program — serves 3- and 4-year-old children. This bill establishes an early learning program beginning Sept. 1, 2011, to provide preschool opportunities starting with the program standards and eligibility criteria in ECEAP, and requires all eligible children to be served by 2018. The bill also allows parents who can pay for ECEAP to send their children to the program if space is available. (HB 2731)

School levies. During this period of great financial uncertainty, this bill is responsive to the concerns of our school districts. For calendar years 2011–17, school districts may raise levy lids by four percentage points. During calendar years 2011–17, in school districts where voters have previously authorized a multi-year levy, the districts are allowed to seek voter authorization for an additional maintenance and operations levy if the current levy was approved prior to or during 2010. Levy equalization is also increased from 12 percent to 14 percent during 2011–17 for qualifying school districts. The lid lift and equalization increase are time limited while a study is under way on long-term approaches to the role of local levies and other K-12 funding changes. (HB 2893)

RACE TO THE TOP

Eager to embrace new opportunities, the state of Washington is applying for funding made available through Race to the Top. Race to the Top is a federal competitive grant program funded through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. It encourages and rewards states that are implementing significant reforms in four education areas:

- » Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students for success;
- » Preparing, recruiting, supporting and retaining effective teachers and principals;
- » Improving the use of data to inform and improve practices; and
- » Turning around the lowest-performing schools.

Washington is competing in Phase 2 of the grant. Its application is due June 1, 2010, and will seek \$250 million. Awards will be made by Sept. 30, 2010. A Partnership Agreement, which outlines components of Washington's state education reform plan for the future, includes activities in which the state and local school districts agree to participate during the four-year grant. It also includes optional/competitive components in which districts could become state leaders by focusing on helping Washington students:

- » Enter kindergarten prepared for success;
- » Be competitive in math and science nationally and internationally;
- » Attain high academic standards regardless of race, ethnicity, income or gender; and
- » Graduate college and career ready.

At least one-half of the state grant will be divided among participating districts that sign Partnership Agreements. The Governor is confident our education reform platform is strong and getting stronger every day. A competitive application is being developed that connects to our long-term education reform agenda. In total, Washington's proposal is comprehensive, builds on the strong foundation of reform efforts that are in place now, and moves forward with innovative plans for the state's future.

Among the legislation passed this session to strengthen our education system and boost our chances for winning federal funding is the following:

Education reform. Washington has great schools. We can make them better. This legislation proposed by the Governor authorizes the state to intervene in our lowest-performing schools by requiring an improvement plan following an academic audit. In addition, it creates new evaluation criteria for teachers and principals, including a four-tier rating system for describing performance. Districts will provide more information to parents about district policies and practices about school and classroom staffing, and collect parent input on school experiences. It also lengthens the two-year provisional period to three years for new teachers to demonstrate their skills. To take advantage of other sources of expertise, the measure allows qualified providers outside of higher education to help prepare classroom teachers and principals. A structure is also created to better plan educator work-force needs. (Senate Bill 6696)