

From: [Superintendent](#)
To: eps.MailList@everettsd.org
Subject: Legislative news
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... Message from Dr. Cohn

Dec. 15, 2010

Dear colleagues:

Once again, we are entering a new year with financial news that is a mismatch to the spirit of the season. Please know this is not my holiday greeting to you. This is a message about our legislature.

On Saturday, Dec. 11, the Washington state Legislature approved a plan that will reduce the state's \$1.1 billion deficit. K-12 funding was cut severely in Saturday's special session. The work on Saturday, combined with what Governor Gregoire had already announced in November, cuts approximately \$700 million in the 2010 state supplemental budget. This will impact our funding for this school year. This unusual move to hold a special session and to focus that session on cutting budgets midyear is an indication of just how dire the state's economic situation is.

More cuts are possible when the regular legislative session begins in January. Our elected officials will then face the remaining \$400 million shortfall in the 2010 supplemental budget. And this is all before they can even begin to wrestle with writing a budget for the 2011-13 biennium.

Where does this leave state school districts? Where does this leave Everett Public Schools students? The answer is essentially, "Our ability to protect the classroom is compromised when the legislature takes direct aim on the classroom." I believe that not to address this with you now would be irresponsible.

Two major K-12 cuts were made on Saturday:

1. Federal EduJobs funding – Last summer, the U.S. Congress passed legislation that granted Washington state \$208 million to retain K-12 education jobs. With broad, bipartisan support, the Washington State Legislature has now reduced the state's K-12 budget by \$208 million, swiping federal dollars intended to help maintain our K-12 programs in school year 2011-12.
2. K-4 class size funding – Another \$40 million was stripped from the K-4 education budget, an enhancement intended to reduce class size at those lower grade levels. By labeling this long-standing, K-4 class size allocation as "outside basic education," the legislature indicates this cut is outside of the requirement of our state's constitution to fully fund basic education.

Each school district will feel these cuts differently. The common effect will be detrimental consequences for children everywhere.

What this means for Everett Public Schools:

1. First, some good news – Last August our voters approved a *Temporary Supplemental Educational Program and Operations Levy*. We are one of the few districts in the state to have been given that approval by residents, and for this we are grateful.

Funding from that August levy becomes available to the district in April, which means that legislature's midyear cuts can be offset in this district for this spring with some supplemental levy funds.

However, the bad news is that we cannot count on collecting all of the four years of supplemental levy income our voters approved. Our ability to collect what our voters approved is entirely dependent on decisions our legislators will make this session. Decisions about funding formula changes that could reduce voter approved levy support by more than \$2 million are on the table in Olympia.

Our message to the legislature? "Safeguard local funding already granted by school communities!"

2. Federal EduJobs funding would have brought approximately \$3.9 million to Everett. Our district planned carefully to use this federally promised money to offset expected state cuts to K-12 education and, very importantly, to offset the expiration of \$3.3 million of federal stimulus funds relied upon in both this year and the last.

While we have been doing our best to create a cushion against expected deep state cuts in the 2011-13 biennial budget, the state is undercutting a major funding source that was designed to serve as a buffer for our schools.

Our message to the legislature? "Maintain the EduJob funds as the U.S. Congress intended!"

3. The legislature has slashed K-4 class size funding in a *One, Two Punch*.

ONE – In the January 2010 legislative session, the legislature cut \$700,000 of this district's K-4 class size funding, a loss we are feeling across the district this year.

TWO – On Saturday the legislature again slashed ALL of the remaining K-4 class-size funding, and made that cut effective as of *Feb. 1, 2011!*

That *Number Two Punch* takes back over \$1 million from the budget for this school year. That is money set aside to pay teachers under contract this school year. It is money that must now come from general fund reserves or other sources.

Because of the supplemental levy funds our voters approved in August, and because those funds become available to us in April, we will not face classroom cuts this school year. However, because those supplemental levy funds must be used for what remains of this year, and because the state is supplanting our federal EduJob funds, we are again facing deep budget reductions for 2011-12 and beyond; the “funding cliff” we discussed last year.

Our message to the legislature? “No more K-12 budget cuts!”

We are indeed fortunate for voter support of the August supplemental levy which protects our financial stability for the short term. We must be aware that the state’s economic situation and potential state leadership decisions mean that for the foreseeable future schools will have even fewer resources, putting the squeeze on students in even more ways.

1. Class sizes, case loads and service responsibilities will increase as districts are unable to hire adequate number of teachers and support staff.
2. The school year may be shortened as funding for 180 days is reduced.
3. Struggling students will not get the extra help they need to be successful.
4. Drop-out rates will remain the same or increase. This could have a negative impact on the exceptional graduation rate our Everett team has achieved over the last eight years.
5. The achievement gap between poor and wealthy students will increase.

When investing in our kids and the future of Washington State, *every* dollar counts.

School board and district leadership advocacy

Monday night our school board, district leadership, and high school ASB presidents met with Senate education leaders. Another meeting with state representatives is planned for Today, and we will have many face-to-face meetings with legislators in the next few months and opportunities to provide evidence of how every dollar counts in Everett Public Schools.

In addition to the points above, our messages to the legislators are:

- A. *Preserve access to local funding*
- B. *Safeguard against further K-12 cuts*
- C. *Delay new unfunded requirements*
- D. *Ensure local control of cost effective operations*

We face a clear and critical challenge: to protect what we value in the face of an onslaught of legislative reductions that undercut the core of education in our community and shortchange the futures of today’s and tomorrow’s students. The [PowerPoint presentation used to start legislative discussions is online](#). You may also review our school board’s legislative agenda for this year online in [BoardDocs](#).

Delivering this dark news as part of a holiday message is discouraging, so I'm not. I believe that it is best to understand the challenges before us rather than be surprised by them, so I share this legislative news in the spirit of preparing us all to think creatively and to remember our mission.

Dr. Albert Schweitzer once said, "Wherever a man turns he can find someone who needs him."

As Dr. Schweitzer reminds us, all around us are people we can support – in so many ways.

As I meet with students, staff, parents and community, I am thankful and appreciative of those acting with respect toward others and those treating others with dignity and compassion. Most in our communities are fully aware of the unique challenges we face in education, and in our lives apart from work. They are appreciative of the caring and thoughtful ways we keep our schools safe and nurturing places in which students learn and grow. We are all doing our best in these times.

Thank you for the caring and inspired work you do with students and families. My best to you and yours in the last few weeks of this year.

Sincerely,

Dr. Gary Cohn