



Reconvening Superintendents to Sustain a Shared Vision of Ample and Equitable K-12 Funding in Washington (Part 3)

Kendall Fujioka | David Knight
Anthony Craig | Mia Tuan
University of Washington

Kelly Aramaki | William Jackson
Bellevue Public Schools

Trevor Greene
Yakima School District

May 2025



Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy

The Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy (CTP) investigates efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning from pre-school through graduate education. CTP engages in analysis of educational interventions, educator and administrator labor markets, and finance and policy structures that influence the allocation of and accountability for school resources. To that end, CTP researchers identify ways that policy actions, leadership, and reform efforts guide, direct, and support teaching and learning, thereby informing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities in U.S. elementary and secondary schools.

Education Policy Analytics Lab @ The Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy

Education Policy Analytics Lab (EPAL) uses interdisciplinary perspectives and research methods to provide cutting-edge educational policy research. We seek to provide meaningful, innovative, and rigorous analysis of data, both in-depth and at scale, to address pressing educational issues at federal, state, and local levels. Our work is conducted in close partnership with practitioners and policymakers to bring real solutions to real issues. Our lab unites scholars, graduate, and undergraduate students from educational policy, statistics, computer science, economics, sociology, and law.



Acknowledgements

This document represents “Part 3” of a series of reports describing a set of in-person convenings that brought together University of Washington researchers and administrators, Washington school district superintendents, and leaders in the Washington education community. The first report was published in August 2024, titled “Convening Superintendents to Envision Ample and Equitable School Funding for Every Washington Child” (Fujioka et al., 2024) and is available on the following website: https://www.education.uw.edu/epal/?page_id=792. The second report, titled “Sustaining a Shared Vision of Ample and Equitable K-12 Funding in Washington: A Convening of Superintendents to Support School Finance Reform (Part 2)” is located on the following website: https://www.education.uw.edu/epal/?page_id=839.

The authors would like to thank the following individuals whose inputs contributed to the content of this report: Rebecca Sebillia, EdFund Executive Director, Mary Fertakis, Elected member and Vice-chair of the Washington State Board of Education, and Pooya Almasi, Assistant Research Professor, University of Washington.



Executive Summary

On March 10, 2025, the University of Washington’s College of Education Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy reconvened superintendents from districts across Washington for the third in a series of meetings focused on advancing a shared vision for ample and equitable K-12 funding. Co- led by Dean Mia Tuan and Professors Anthony Craig and David Knight, and facilitated by Drs. Kelly Aramaki and Trevor Greene, the convening built upon foundational knowledge developed in previous sessions held in July and October 2024.

The day-long session featured presentations from state and national experts in education policy and school finance. Dr. David Knight provided a review of Washington’s current funding adequacy and the regressive effects of the state’s reliance on local property taxes. Dan Steele from the Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA) provided a mid-session legislative update on key funding proposals and broader budgetary constraints facing the 69th Washington State Legislature. Dr. David Knight returned to speak, this time building upon Steele’s presentation presenting an analysis of two bills, H.B. 1356 and S.B. 5593, demonstrating their projected impacts on district-level finances. Mary Fertakis traced the historical evolution of Washington’s school finance policies and identified systemic factors that perpetuate funding inequities. Rebecca Sibilia, Executive Director of EdFund, closed the session by outlining conditions and strategies that have proven effective for funding reform in other states.

This report synthesizes key insights from each presentation and concludes with a discussion of actionable next steps for the superintendents as they continue to organize around equitable and student-centered funding reform in Washington state.

Reconvening Superintendents to Sustain a Shared Vision of Ample and Equitable K-12 Funding in Washington (Part 3)

On March 10, 2025, the University of Washington College of Education Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy reconvened superintendents from across the state to continue the group's advocacy towards ample and equitable funding for Washington's students. Co-led by Dean Mia Tuan and Professors Anthony Craig and David Knight, the group built upon knowledge from the previous convenings held on July 1 and 2, 2024 (Fujioka et al., 2024a) and October 21, 2024 (Fujioka et al., 2024b). Drs. Kelly Aramaki and Trevor Green, Superintendents of Bellevue School District and Yakima School District, respectively, organized and facilitated the meeting.

The superintendent participants heard from state and national leaders in education policy and school finance. Dr. David Knight, Associate Professor, opened the learning sessions with a presentation to review key points from prior convenings, review the superintendents' goals to advocate for ample and equitable funding, and examine the adequacy of Washington's school funding, with attention to how the state's property tax revenues contribute to inequalities for students. Dan Steele, Assistant Executive Director of Government Relations for the Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA) provided a mid-session legislative update summarizing key educational policies under consideration in the 69th Session of the Washington State Legislature. Dr. David Knight followed by presenting a recently published analysis of two proposed bills, H.B. 1356 and S.B. 5593, and the impacts of those policies on school districts (Knight et al., 2025). Mary Fertakis, Consultant for the Washington State School Directors' Association (WSSDA) and Elected member and Vice-chair of the Washington State Board of Education, provided historical background of the state's education

funding system to aid in the superintendent's contextual understanding of how school finance operates today. Rebecca Sibilia, Executive Director of EdFund, presented a case study of successful school finance reforms in other states, offering suggestions and strategies for the superintendents to ensure their success in advocating for equitable funding for Washington's students. This report will summarize key points from each of these learning sessions and conclude with discussion of the superintendent's future directions and next steps.

Learning Sessions

Reviewing Key Concepts of Ample & Equitable Funding and Understanding Levies and Property Tax Incidence

Dr. David Knight opened his presentation by reviewing key points from prior convenings. One key takeaway from his prior sessions with the superintendents has been that increasing funding for Washington's schools is necessary to improve outcomes for students, and these effects are most pronounced when resources are targeted towards students with the highest needs (Jackson et al., 2016; Rauscher & Shen, 2022; Jackson & Mackevicius, 2024). While there was a significant increase in school funding following *McCleary*, these revenues disproportionately benefited school districts that serve more advantaged student populations. A substantial share of the new funds was allocated to teacher salaries, which had a positive impact (Sun et al., 2024), but salary increases were overly concentrated among later-career teachers for many districts.

The second part of Knight's presentation described an analysis of the distribution of property tax rates and local tax revenues across school districts and student

populations. That analysis showed that districts with higher property values are able to tax their constituents at relatively lower rates while generating ample revenues, whereas districts with lower property values must tax their constituents proportionately higher to produce lower levels of local funding.

Mid-Session Updates on the 69th Washington State Legislature

Dan Steele of WASA presented a mid-session update focused on the education funding bills under consideration by the 69th Washington State Legislature. Steele opened by contextualizing the state's K-12 spending as a proportion of the overall budget over time, highlighting how overall spending has increased by 113.9% from 2013-15 to 2023-25 while K-12 spending has grown 105.2% over the same period. The presentation focused on the WASA "Big Three" legislative platform prioritizing special education, materials supplies and operating costs (MSOCs), and pupil transportation, which are estimated to be underfunded by \$1.26 billion across the state in the 2024-25 fiscal year. The presentation reviewed ongoing legislative efforts to address these issues in both the House and the Senate and summarized key bills still under consideration.

The presentation also examined broader state budget considerations, including the projected shortfall and competing priorities within the legislature. Steele concluded with a call to action for superintendents to continue advocating for lawmakers to prioritize education funding in upcoming budget negotiations, reinforcing the message that "No Revenue = No K-12 Funding".

Understanding the Impacts of Property Tax Limits and Tax Base Equalization

Dr. David Knight returned to expand on Mr. Steele's presentation with a bill analysis of two proposals under consideration by the Washington State Legislature, H.B. 1356 and S.B. 5593; the analysis was published as a policy brief by the UW Education Policy Analytics Lab (EPAL) (Knight et al., 2025). Both bills would affect local education funding through changes to property tax limits and tax base equalization, but they differ in their approaches and implications for local districts.

H.B. 1356 proposes gradually increasing the per-student local revenue cap by \$500 in 2026 and an additional 3.33% annually beginning in 2027. It also expands Local Effort Assistance (LEA) by raising the maximum state equalization support by \$300 in 2026 and \$200 more in subsequent years, aiming to boost overall funding while maintaining the current levy structure. S.B. 5593 proposes changing Washington's levy system to allow districts to raise up to 30% of their state and categorical funding (the "levy base") through local property taxes. It would also increase Local Effort Assistance by ensuring all districts can generate up to 18% of their levy base. Both proposals are designed to reduce disparities between districts with high and low property values in order to ensure more equitable distribution of resources across all schools. While both bills reflect positive intentions of the legislature to reduce inequalities for students, more ambitious reforms are necessary to fulfill the constitutional promise of ample funding for all Washington students.

Washington's Broken K-12 Funding System and How We Got Here

Mary Fertakis, an education consultant, former school board member for Tukwila School District, and 2012 president of the Washington State School Directors Association (WSSDA), presented historical context of the state's education funding

formulas and how past laws and policies have contributed to the inequities embedded within the system today. Fertakis notes that major policy milestones such as *Seattle School District v. State* (1978) (“the Doran decision”), the introduction of the Prototypical School Funding Formula in 2008, *McCleary v. State* (2012), and the “*McCleary* fix” in 2018 focused on formulas and property values rather than student needs. Fertakis noted how current funding structures favor more affluent communities, particularly through mechanisms such as regionalization factors and experience factors, which direct more resources towards districts with higher property values and more senior teaching staff.

Fertakis highlighted the consequences of these inequities, including lower state funding allocation to support school staffing and programs at schools in districts with lower property values, and persistent and widening achievement gaps for students (particularly among students of color and students with disabilities). Fertakis concluded with a call to action through the Fund our Future Washington Coalition, which advocates for student-centered and transparent education funding system; she urges superintendents and education leaders to join this movement to advocate for comprehensive, equity-driven policy reform in Washington state.

Effective School Funding Reform Conditions and Strategies

Rebecca Sibia of EdFund offered a strategic framework for the superintendents to drive impactful and politically viable school funding reform. Sibia highlighted how the current situation in Washington is unique with a group of superintendents leading advocacy work for education funding, rather than more traditional grassroots approaches. Drawing on lessons learned from school finance reforms in other states,

Sibilia emphasized the importance of long-term commitment to drive legislative changes, and recommended coalition-building, legislative briefings, and press engagement to reframe narratives around school funding and to highlight possible advantages of alternative models.

Sibilia identified several critical components that are necessary to change policy. She recommended using flexible modeling tools that allow stakeholders to simulate fiscal impacts for the state and individual districts. Sibilia also suggested leveraging relationships with advocates, leaders, and policymakers in order to push for legislative change. Sibilia also noted economic conditions that tend to promote success such as a strong financial outlook to allow states to phase-in changes, as well as multi-year savings accounts to assist with the first-year transition. Sibilia's presentation left the audience with considerations to make bold funding reforms more politically and practically feasible.

Discussion and Conclusion

The third convening affirmed the complexity and urgency of the work necessary to achieve ample and equitable funding for students in Washington state. Presenters emphasized that Washington's state history has led to persistent and systemic inequities, and prior reforms, including those prompted by *McCleary*, have failed to dismantle the underlying structures that contribute to inequalities. The current funding formulas, amplified by local levy lids, regionalization factors, and teacher experience-based funding, advantage districts with higher property values and more experienced staff, while limiting opportunities for students in under-resourced communities.

Superintendents left the convening with a clearer picture of how these inequities originated, how proposed bills could shift the funding landscape, and what conditions will support the political viability of funding reform. The path forward will require clear messaging, strategic coordination, and sustained advocacy, grounded in both student need and fiscal realism. Dr. Knight's bill analysis and Sibilia's strategic roadmap point to the importance of data-driven narratives and long-term coalition building, while Fertakis's historical framing reinforces the need to redesign systems around students, rather than property values or staffing profiles.

The next steps for the superintendent participants include continued collaboration, including planned meetings for summer 2025, as well as participation in broader advocacy coalitions and targeted engagement with policymakers. As legislative negotiations continue, the superintendents are uniquely positioned to serve as both witnesses to the consequences of inequity as well as advocates for a more just and sustainable funding system for all of Washington's students.

References

- Baker, B. D., Di Carlo, M., & Weber, M. (2024). The adequacy and fairness of state school finance systems: School year 2020-21. Albert Shanker Institute.
https://www.schoolfinancedata.org/wpcontent/uploads/2024/02/SFID2024_annualreport.pdf
- Fujioka, K., & Knight, D. S. (2024). *McCleary* at twelve: Examining policy designs following court-mandated school finance reform in Washington state. *West's Education Law Reporter*, 423(1), 1-25
- Fujioka, K., Knight, D. S., Craig, A., Tuan, M., Aramaki, K., Jackson, W., & Greene, T. (2024a). Convening Superintendents to Envision Ample and Equitable School Funding for Every Washington Child. University of Washington Education Policy Analytics Lab (EPAL). https://www.education.uw.edu/epal/?page_id=792
- Fujioka, K., Knight, D. S., Craig, A., Tuan, M., Aramaki, K., Jackson, W., & Greene, T. (2024b). Sustaining A Shared Vision of Ample and Equitable K-12 Funding in Washington: A convening of Superintendents to Support School Finance Reform (Part 2). University of Washington Education Policy Analytics Lab (EPAL). https://www.education.uw.edu/epal/?page_id=839
- Jackson, C. K., Johnson, R. C., & Persico, C. (2016). The effects of school spending on educational and economic outcomes: Evidence from school finance reforms. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 131(1), 157-218.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjv036>
- Jackson, C. K., & Mackevicius, C. L. (2024). What Impacts Can We Expect from School Spending Policy? Evidence from Evaluations in the United States. *American*

Economic Journal: Applied Economics, 16(1), 412-446.

<https://doi.org/10.1257/app.20220279>

Knight, D. S., Almasi, P., & Fujioka, K. (2025). Understanding the Impacts of property tax limits and tax base equalization: How K-12 policies considered during the 2025 Washington state legislative session affect students and school systems. University of Washington Education Policy Analytics Lab (EPAL).

https://www.education.uw.edu/epal/?page_id=851

McCleary v. State, 269 P.3d 227, 173 Wash.2d 477 (2012).

Rauscher, E., & Shen, Y. (2022). Variation in the relationship between school spending and achievement: Progressive spending is efficient. *American Journal of Sociology*, 128(1), 189-223.

Seattle School District No. 1 v. State, 585 P.2d 71, 90 Wash.2d 476 (1978).

Sun, M., Candelaria, C. A., Knight, D. S., LeClair, Z., Kabourek, S. E., & Chang, K. (2024). The effects and local implementation of school finance reforms on teacher salary, hiring, and turnover. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*.
<https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737231213880>

APPENDIX TABLE A1

Superintendent participants at the March 10, 2025 UW superintendent convening

Name	School District
Justin Irish	Anacortes
Amii Thompson	Bainbridge Island
Kelly Aramaki	Bellevue
Chris Pearson	Burlington-Edison
John Parker	Central Valley
Dani Pfeiffer ^a	Federal Way
Kristi Dominguez	Ferndale
Brian Hart	Granger
Heather Tow-Yick	Issaquah
Israel Vela	Kent
James Everett	Meridian
Michelle Kuss-Cybula	Oak Harbor
Damien Pattenauade ^a	Renton
Shelley Redinger	Richland
Brent Jones	Seattle
Adam Swinyard ^b	Spokane
Concie Pedroza	Tukwila
Jeff Snell	Vancouver
Trevor Greene	Yakima

^a Superintendents Pattenauade and Pfeiffer attended the October 2024 convening but were not available to attend the March meeting in person.

^b Superintendent Swinyard is an informal participant who was invited to attend, but could not be present for the July, October, or March convenings.

Other attendees included William Jackson, Director of Teaching and Learning at Bellevue School District; Dr. Bish Paul, Senior Program Officer, Policy at the Gates Foundation; Claudia Rowe, Columnist at The Seattle Times.

APPENDIX TABLE A2

Superintendent participants at the October 21, 2024 UW superintendent convening

Name	School District
Justin Irish	Anacortes
Amii Thompson	Bainbridge Island
Kelly Aramaki	Bellevue
Chris Pearson	Burlington-Edison
John Parker	Central Valley
Dani Pfeiffer	Federal Way
Kristi Dominguez	Ferndale
Heather Tow-Yick	Issaquah
Israel Vela	Kent
James Everett	Meridian
Michelle Kuss-Cybula	Oak Harbor
Damien Pattenau	Renton
Kurt Buttleman	Seattle (Asst. Supt. Finance)
Concie Pedroza	Tukwila
Jeff Snell	Vancouver
Trevor Greene	Yakima

Note. Superintendent Thompson attended the July 2024 convening but not the October convening. Seattle School District Assistant Superintendent for Finance represented Superintendent Brent Jones by proxy. Dr. Ishmael Vivanco, Superintendent of Northwest Educational Service District 189, also attended, representing school districts in that Educational Service District.

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

