NEWS RELEASE
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Superintendent Denise Juneau Applauds New State Budget

But Cautions There is Still Work to be Done

SEATTLE – The Legislative session in Olympia ended on Sunday, April 28. Due to the Legislature’s actions, Seattle Public Schools will be able to collect $3,000 per student from local, voter-approved funds beginning in 2020.

This will restore $12.2 million directly to classrooms in the 2019-20 school year, with an estimated total increase in revenue of $16 million and will provide an estimated additional $28 million to the district beginning with the 2020-21 school year.

This restored revenue, along with increased flexibility to use capital funds for maintenance costs, will help SPS address some of the $40 million budget shortfall for the 2019-20 school year. It supports restoration of the most critical supports for our students – our school-based staff.

We want to thank the Seattle Legislative Delegation for its leadership on restoring this much needed Levy authority, particularly Senate Ways and Means Committee Vice Chair David Frockt, Senator Jamie Pedersen, Senator Reuven Carlyle, and Representative Gael Tarleton. We also want to thank Senate Ways and Means Committee Chair Christine Rolfes for her efforts on behalf of school districts.

Update: We also want to express our thanks to Representative Gerry Pollet for his hard work, in particular his advocacy and leadership in the area of Special Education.

Based on the SPS budget shortfall anticipated prior to the Legislature’s final action on the state budget, 2019-20 school-based cuts -- which included librarians, counselors, and assistant principals -- will be restored. Other budget reductions, including those to central office, will move forward.
“With sweeping changes to K-12 funding, fine tuning was needed and will need to continue. A huge thanks to the Legislature, especially our local delegation, for recognizing the challenges and increasing Seattle’s levy collection authority,” said Superintendent Juneau. “Our local legislative delegation has been fighting hard for our students and staff across the entire state. I also want to thank the families, educators, district staff, and students who raised their voice and shared their concerns with decision-makers in Olympia. This win for Seattle students is because of you.”

While SPS can access additional funding for next school year, many districts cannot. There are many districts across the state that will manage large budget shortfalls next year and into future years. SPS has and will continue to advocate for ample K-12 funding for all of Washington State’s children, including those that receive specialized services.

Superintendent Juneau expressed her deep gratitude to Senator Frockt, Representative Pollet, and our legislative delegation for their work on the capital budget, with Seattle Public Schools receiving $18 million for additional classroom construction at Leschi Elementary and Madison Middle Schools, and funding for the HVAC system at North Beach Elementary School.

The state’s Special Education budget increase is a down payment on a much-needed long term solution. Next year, Seattle Public Schools will receive an additional $2 million for Special Education. Annually, the district spends $70 million of local levy funds to provide the services our students need. We appreciate the increase for Special Education, but continue to have grave concerns about the state’s slow pace in fully funding Special Education as is required by law.

“The fight for full funding of public education is not over,” said SPS School Board President Leslie Harris. “While we are very grateful for the new infusion of money, Special Education continues to be underfunded statewide, including in Seattle. Special Education funds outlined in the state’s two-year budget continue to fall short of what our students need and deserve. We are committed to working with our representatives and others in Olympia to get this resolved,” shared School Board President Leslie Harris.

**Additional Background Information**

Seattle Public Schools had a $40 million shortfall for school year 2019-20, primarily due to the state’s new funding formula. While the state made progress in many K-12 funding areas, including all-day Kindergarten, class size reduction, and educator compensation, it fell short for Special Education, English Language Learners, nurses, counselors, and support staff such as assistant principals.

The new funding formula didn’t provide enough revenue to Seattle and restricted our ability to make up the budget shortfall with local levy funds.

For example, SPS spends $70 million in local levy funds to support students receiving Special Education services. These are basic services that should be fully funded by the state. The state’s
funding formula also provides nine nurses for 53,000 students. In 2018-19, the district hired an additional 54 nurses to support student academics and reduce barriers to success. In February 2019, local voters overwhelming approved the EP&O levy and a higher collection authority than approved by the state. SPS could only collect additional funding from the EP&O levy if the state acted and changed the law. The original levy collection amount was $2500 per student.

The increase to $3000 per student and the ability to restore an estimated $28 million to our district each year beginning in 2020-21 is significant and we are very grateful.

With sweeping changes to Washington’s K-12 funding model, it should be expected that ongoing refinement and improvements will need to be made. The Legislature’s levy collection increase for Seattle is a good step in the right direction.

Work is still needed in areas like Special Education. District staff and our School Board will continue to advocate for all of Washington State’s publicly educated students. All students should have the opportunity to have a great education that sets them up for future success.

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