

Dear Senator...

On April 10, the Partnership for Learning and others e-mailed legislators with misinformation about the Federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) stabilization funds. As you make important budget and education policy issues, we at the Washington Education Association want to make sure you have accurate information about ARRA funds.

The Partnership e-mail incorrectly asserts that new education policy is necessary to qualify for additional federal funding. Governor Gregoire already can demonstrate progress on the “four essential areas of reform” highlighted by Secretary Arne Duncan in a letter to governors. The four points below explain why:

1. **Making improvement in teacher effectiveness and ensuring that all schools have highly qualified teachers.** Washington has been required to report annually on our highly qualified teacher numbers. We must also report the number of highly qualified teachers in our low- and high-poverty classes. Our 2008 numbers show a modest difference in elementary; the number of classes taught by highly qualified teachers in high-poverty classes is 99.48 percent versus 99.59 percent in low-poverty classes. The numbers for secondary are 99.19 percent in low-poverty and 97.43 percent in high-poverty classes. In addition, Washington has implemented a salary bonus for National Board Certified Teachers to teach in the poorest schools. Our state is already making gains in teacher effectiveness.
2. **Making progress toward college and career-ready standards and rigorous assessments that will improve both teaching and learning.** Our new State Superintendent is making changes to improve the state assessment system, including online assessments, quicker results, the use of formative assessments and other improvements.
3. **Improving achievement in low-performing schools by providing intensive support and effective interventions in schools that need them the most.** In our state we have been using school improvement facilitators and district improvement facilitators to assist schools and districts with reform efforts. We have also had Math Helping Corps and reading programs. Washington is using federal school improvement dollars in a program called Summit District Improvement. There are five school districts completing the first year of a three-year program with three new districts coming on next year. This project develops district knowledge, skills and capacity to lead and support consistent, sustained and dramatic increases in student achievement in all district schools.
4. **Gathering information to improve student learning, teacher performance, and college and career-readiness through enhanced data systems that track progress.** In 2007, the Legislature passed E2SSB 5843, regarding education data and data systems. Expanding on the Core Student Record System began by OSPI in 2002 and a 2006 grant from the Gates Foundation, Washington has already been working on a longitudinal student-teacher data system.

Washington does not need to pass legislation this session to assure receipt of the ARRA stabilization funds. We are already working in all of these essential areas of reform.

Unfortunately, other issues could jeopardize the ARRA funds in Washington. Both the Senate and House budgets use the ARRA funds to supplant current I-728 funds, **not** for saving educator jobs as required by the federal rules. By using the funds this way, the Legislature is freeing up state funds to balance the budget for the 2008-09 fiscal year. Quoting from Education Secretary Arne Duncan’s letter to state governors, “... this sweeping economic recovery package provides the largest one-time Federal investment in education in our nation’s history, more than \$100 billion to help **save and create jobs**, preserve needed learning programs, and increase college access.”

As for other federal funding, the “Race to the Top Fund” is a competitive grant system. No change in current law is necessary to enable Washington to compete for these grants.

Finally, it is unfortunate that misinformation remains concerning the National Math and Science Institute's withdrawal from our state. NMSI program, funded by private grants, abandoned our state because the group refused to work collaboratively with the school districts it had targeted. NMSI representatives insisted on imposing their system without taking the realities of each school district (including Seattle) into account. We must be clear, Washington schools did not turn NMSI away; the group made the decision to withdraw its support despite its original commitment.

Thank you for considering these important issues. Today we continue to ask the Legislature not to pass unnecessary legislation filled with false promises of future funding, SB 6048/HB 2261. We ask the Legislature to begin to address the approximately \$1.5 billion in cuts to the current K-12 budget. In two years there will be no stimulus money, just a deep funding hole to be filled.

We look forward to working with you on the education funding challenges that will continue to face our state for the foreseeable future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mary Lindquist". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

WEA President