

Statement from Superintendent Art Jarvis, Tacoma Public Schools on impacts to education from the Legislature's 2011-2013 budget proposal

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The Legislature's budget offers no real surprises. Overall, it's sad that the only viable option seemed to be to slash education for children. There is almost a casual sense of suspending two voter initiatives (I-732, I-728) that did more for the schools than any legislative effort in years. That action eliminated extended learning programs, class size enhancements and the only funds provided to schools to improve education. The majority of our own budget reductions came from this action.

The Legislature appeared reluctant to truly take up the task of finding ways to fund education and spent a great deal of effort sliding around the edges to make sure that they could reduce things that they could argue were not basic education. All of us can understand difficult times. It is harder to understand the unwillingness to acknowledge constitutional duty – to say nothing to a moral obligation to children.

On behalf of Tacoma, I can point to an overall impetus behind the reductions that hit higher poverty districts and schools consistently harder. They seem to take pride in pointing to the things they proposed cutting that did not get cut after major outcry. One example would be that they did not slash levy equalization. Most people understand how inequitable and unfair that would have been to poor districts while leaving wealthy communities untouched, so it is hard to feel grateful. Over and over we have seen proposals like that and/or "average daily attendance," which adversely impact communities like ours.

Lastly, they carried through their abandonment of long-standing commitments to improve teachers' salaries, and they ended with an actual cut. The final blow was that they then handed it back to the local districts to bargain how to make the cuts. Again there was a seemingly cavalier approach to "those districts with any money can choose not to pass the cuts on to their employees." That invites friction at the local bargaining table, and to do that to local school districts is an action for which I can find nothing good to say.

We certainly could see it coming through the legislative sessions, and we are able to proceed with balancing our budget at the local level. We will not need to make deeper cuts this spring than the ones already implemented. I will predict the effects of their work will negatively impact the education system for years and years.

Thursday evening, I am recommending the Tacoma Board join in the school funding lawsuit against the state. The state has already lost that case! It is now proceeding to the state Supreme Court this next month. The legislature hopes to get relief on appeal so they can continue to avoid their constitutional duty. Personally, I hope they continue to be held accountable to the children, and I believe that this legislative performance will be used to

demonstrate they do not have the political will to carry out their paramount duty without court intervention.