

Legislative Talking Points

Students deserve great public schools

All students deserve schools with the resources, programs, and curriculum to nurture their curiosity, imagination, spirit, talents, and desire to learn. Especially during this COVID-19 pandemic. Stand with us and together we can provide the resources and opportunities our students and educators need to be successful.

The pandemic shows the value of public education. Local schools have always been centers of communities. During the pandemic, our local public schools organized hybrid or on-line instruction and provided wellness checks, internet access, and more for their community. WVEA members have found creative ways to reach and teach our students. It meant we worked longer hours and in ways we've never worked before. We came together to help each other to provide quality instruction.

Help educators' voices be heard. Historically, WVEA members have been successful in standing together and advocating for public schools. There are those in decision-making positions who would weaken our power and try to break the union. Stand together with us and advocate for public schools. How? Become a WVEA public school advocate by developing positive relationships with your legislators. Talking to legislators isn't hard – it can be fun. You don't have to be an expert on school finance or anything else. You ARE the expert on how legislation will affect our students, our teaching practices, and our schools.

Public Schools: Now more than ever!

Funding for Public Education – #FundOurSchools

- The issues that our schools deal with mirror the challenges confronting our students and families. Schools house heroes: school employees who have worked above and beyond to teach students and make sure everyone is safe.
- If we're serious about every child's future, let's get serious about doing what works. This means resourcing our public schools so that students have inviting classrooms and class sizes conducive for quality instruction, a well-rounded curriculum and support services for students who need them.
- Decreasing enrollment due to the pandemic and legislative initiatives means a loss of resources and a loss of jobs. Public schools deserve to be held harmless financially.
- We oppose current proposals that will take money away from our public schools. Legislation passed to allow charter schools, vouchers, and education savings accounts (ESAs) will already take money from our already financially strapped local school systems. We do not need to take additional revenue from the state's budget, ultimately harming our schools.

Pensions – #FundOurPension

- Maintaining the funding of our pensions and the current plan of paying off the unfunded liabilities is important for active employees and current retirees to have a guaranteed pension.
- We are opposed to refinancing the remaining liability in the pension plan. The current plan is to be paid off in 2034.
- WVEA opposes any effort to move employees to a defined contribution plan.

Salary increases needed for education employees – #MuchNeeded #InThisTogether

- As the cost of living continues to rise, West Virginia educators have not had a raise in two years to reflect these changes. Our teachers and service personnel deserve a salary that ranks on a competitive level and every educator should be receiving a salary that places them within the national average of pay for those in the same employment categories.
- Employment shortages remain a major concern and we simply cannot retain or recruit certified and highly qualified teachers and service personnel at the current salary. Having professional, skilled educators in our schools is crucial for the continual improvement of student learning and the educational environment in our classrooms.
- With a salary that averages below our contiguous states, it makes it easy for teachers to cross the borders to work rather than staying in West Virginia. This is not only a blow to our work force but negatively impacts the school systems in our state.
- The issues education employees have faced during the past 2 years have been monumental. The extra work, concern for their students and concerns over their own well-being have been overwhelming. Educators are first line responders and should be treated/compensated for the valuable role they play.
- We praise elected leaders who have tossed around the idea of salary increases this session. Those increases are sorely needed. However, those pay increases should be allowed to stand alone on their merits and not be tied to other parts of a legislative agenda or takebacks.

Income Tax – #CutsDon'tHeal

- Why, during a pandemic and an economic recession, would the governor and lawmakers consider cutting the income tax?
- The income tax is fair. Proposals to cut the income simply continues to unfairly shift the burden of paying taxes from the wealthy and from corporations to the backs of working people.
- The income tax is the largest source of revenue in our state, bringing in \$2.16 billion. That's 43% of the state's budget. How will those funds be replaced and by whom?
- Using the sales tax, for example, to replace income tax revenues is unfair because that means the \$15 per hour worker is paying the same tax as corporate executives making \$100,000 or more per year.
- Kansas slashed income taxes in an effort to stimulate the economy, but those policies resulted in ballooning budget deficits that caused cuts to public schools and lost jobs. Attempts to replace revenue with sales and "sin" taxes (on tobacco and alcohol) failed and ultimately income taxes were reinstated. The state is still trying to recover.

PEIA – #PEIA #KeepThePromise #HealthCare

- The compensation package is a huge factor in employment decisions. Without stable/affordable health care, an individual's compensation level falls as they bear the burden of increased out-of-pocket expenses. Such expenses factor into the recruitment and retention of employees.
- This COVID-19 pandemic highlights the importance of healthcare and funding PEIA.
- The Task Force pushed for funding PEIA through the general fund, which allows for various funding sources. The state obligation to fund PEIA is a smart solution that will not be financed on the backs of employees.

- Cutting state revenues will make it more difficult to fund PEIA. A long-term funding solution must be found for PEIA.
- Promises were made to find a long-term funding solution for PEIA. Promises must be kept.

Retirees – #WVEARetired

- West Virginia must continue to follow the needed funding requirements in order to fully fund the Teachers Retirement System (TRS). By doing so participants can see guaranteed optimum benefits including a cost of living adjustment (COLA) in the future.
- Since TRS participants have not received cost of living adjustments (COLA) to their pensions, we must find ways for them to get pension relief.
- Increase the state income tax exemption for retired school employees to at least the first \$20,000 in teacher retirement benefits.
- Increase the monthly minimum pension for retirees with more than twenty years of service to an amount above the federal poverty level.
- Control PEIA prescription drug and health care costs.
- Support cost-saving and common sense PEIA health care measures for our retired participants.
- Determine PEIA premiums by a fixed percentage of the retiree's education-related retirement pension.

West Virginia Code 18 and 18A – #EmployeeRights

- WV Code 18 and 18A contains not only the rules our school systems must go by, but the rights afforded to our education employees. The argument of “we only want to remove archaic language” ultimately means opening this section of code and would allow any legislator the opportunity to recommend changes.
- As we have seen from past experience, opening the code results in changes that are to the detriment of our education employees.
- While WV educators do not have collective bargaining, our educators have been successful in getting rights into code that other states must bargain for.
- Included in 18 and 18A are:
 - Calendar
 - Class Size
 - Consolidation Rules
 - Duty Free Lunch
 - Early Notification of Retirement/ Resignation (\$500)
 - Equity Pay
 - Extra Curricular Assignments
 - Faculty Senates
 - Hiring Procedure
 - Holidays/Closings
 - Lesson Plans
 - National Board Certification
 - Personal Leave
 - Planning Periods
 - RIFs/Transfers
 - Safe Schools Act
 - Salary Supplements (Professional/Service)
 - School Aid Formula
 - Seniority Calculations (Professional/Service)
 - Teacher/Pupil Ration
 - Transfer
 - No mid-year moves allowed
 - Aide Transfer