**Seattle PTA and PTO position on Seattle Public Schools' budget crisis**

We recognize SPS has a significant, unsustainable budget deficit that must be addressed, and hard decisions must be made to balance the budget.

As parents, caregivers, teachers and students from PTAs and PTOs across Seattle Public Schools, we urge the SPS board and administration to focus on solutions that:

- Prioritize excellence in education for every student
- Address the root causes of our budget challenges
- Draw from effective approaches other districts have used to close budget gaps
- Avoid failed policies of the past, in Seattle and elsewhere

While we know some buildings in SPS are below capacity today, we also know from past closures here and in other states that closing schools does not solve budget challenges - in fact, it can exacerbate enrollment and budget crises and cost more over time.

Seattle is a diverse community, full of children with diverse needs. We do not want one-size-fits-all schooling, with all schools forced into the same model.

While district leadership withdrew their initial plan to close 17-21 schools, it is not clear how they plan to address the budget deficit for next year or beyond. The proposals to close elementary schools (whether 5 or 21) do not honor family preferences, do not close the budget gap, and do not prioritize excellence in education. The current proposals threaten to move us backwards, as seen in Chicago, San Antonio, and even in Seattle not so long ago.

Instead, we propose an alternative approach to finding budget savings:

1) **Reverse enrollment declines by offering what families seek.** Listen to what SPS communities want, prioritizing outreach to historically difficult-to-reach communities. Ask families what would draw them **into** the public schools and away from private schools or other districts, and offer popular programs that attract families. Today, many feel they can't enroll in SPS - they don't feel heard and worry their children's needs will not be served. Not only will engagement help achieve the district's mission and vision, but boosting enrollment brings in $18,000-26,000 per student from the state plus $3,000 per student from the local levy to SPS's operating budget, supporting the district's fixed-cost facilities and existing staff infrastructure. Enrollment matters, and making families feel valued matters, both for the health of the system and for the budget.

2) **Present multiple options for addressing the budget deficit.** We understand they may all be difficult options. Do not target programs that have a successful record of supporting students and families furthest from educational justice. Address inefficiencies first. Ideas include:
    a) Be transparent about large budget lines, and consider reductions that reduce inefficiency and do not detract from educational excellence.

b) Consider changes to district financial policies that could help close the budget gap in the short term, allowing time for the state legislature to boost funding:
   i) Hold non-essential positions vacant
   ii) Use interest earned on capital funds for the operating budget
   iii) Do not allow schools to carry forward unspent funds.

c) Given the severity of this crisis, consider reducing salary and benefits for Central Administration and other select positions by 1-5%.

d) Learn from other districts' efforts to address budget deficits, and draw from effective strategies including administrative cuts, phased-in changes over time, listening to priorities of the community, and making difficult tradeoffs based on each community's unique needs and priorities.

e) When there are proposed cuts, identify the specific impacts to all families, including continuing assignment commitments that address both elementary and middle school enrollment, and resulting changes to class sizes, specialist allocations, bell times and more, to give parents time to plan for the year ahead. Demonstrate outcomes for students through an independent equity analysis.

3) **After finding efficiencies in the current $1.25B expenditure budget, advocate strenuously to the state for the additional funds needed.** We are not the only district facing this challenge. Hold the state accountable for fully funding special education services, transportation for students experiencing unstable housing or receiving special education services, and most notably, hold the state accountable for spending at least 50% of its budget on education as per historical spend. (Currently the state's contribution stands at ~43%). Reference the State Auditor report from June 2024 that shows Washington State shortchanged public schools by $2.1B in recent years.

We are all in this together. And we all share a common vision and mission:

| **Vision** | **Mission** |
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| Every Seattle Public Schools' student receives a high-quality, world-class education and graduates prepared for college, career, and community. | Seattle Public Schools is committed to eliminating opportunity gaps to ensure access and provide excellence in education for every student. |

Please engage with the Seattle Public Schools community in a dialogue and consider more scenarios than just school closures, so we can solve these challenges together. Our children's future, and the future of our city, depend upon it.

"You cannot have a great public school system without having the entire community involved. Without community, any school system is lost. You show me a city where the community is not involved, and I'll show you a city whose public school system is in trouble." - John Stanford

School PTA/PTO boards that have signed on (as of 11/1/24)

1. Bryant Elementary PTA board
2. Cascadia Elementary PTA board
3. Cedar Park Elementary PTA board
4. Dunlap Elementary PTA board
5. Greenwood Elementary PTA board
6. John Hay Elementary PTA board
7. Leschi Elementary PTA board
8. McGilvra Elementary PTA board
9. North Beach Elementary PTA board
10. Queen Anne Elementary PTA board
11. Sacajawea Elementary PTA board
12. Salmon Bay K-8 PTO board
13. Stevens Elementary PTA board
14. Thornton Creek PTO board
15. Whittier Elementary PTA board