

## How school districts are using millions in new funds

<< Prev Next >>



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Kindergarten teacher Christie Henrie counts how many beads a student was able to thread on a string at Madison Elementary School earlier this month.



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Children in Christie Henrie's kindergarten class practice counting at Madison Elementary School earlier this month.



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Kindergartners in Beth Ristig's class play with Mr. Potato Head dolls at Madison Elementary School earlier this month.



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Kindergarten teacher Beth Ristig speaks to her students at Madison Elementary School earlier this month.



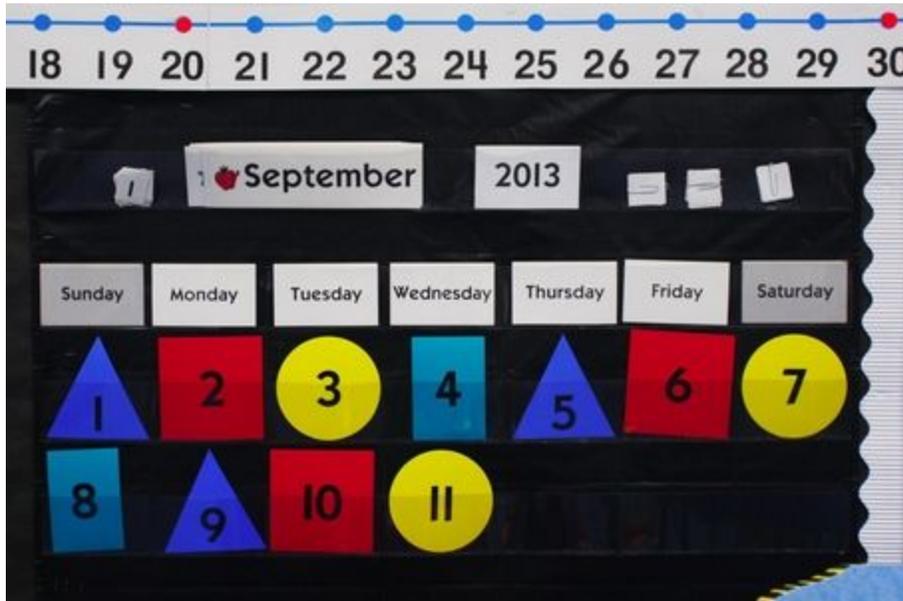
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Kindergarten teacher Christie Henrie leads her class to recess at Madison Elementary School earlier this month.



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Backpacks fill the students' cubbies in Christie Henrie's kindergarten class at Madison Elementary School earlier this month.



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A colorful calendar displays the days for Christie Henrie's kindergarten class at Madison Elementary School earlier this month.

By [Sharon Salyer](#) and [Jerry Cornfield](#), Herald Writers

Christie Henrie, a kindergarten teacher at Everett's Madison Elementary School, said the difference is dramatic.

Expanding her young pupils' school day from a half day to a full day of learning allows more time to learn basic classroom skills: listening in a group, raising their hands before speaking or answering a question, and following directions.

Mastery of these steps is key to allowing 25 high-energy 5-year-olds to learn.

Having students from 8:30 a.m. to 2:45 p.m. each day allows her to spend a large block of time teaching reading and writing. "In the half-time program, we had it every other day," she said.

This year, an additional 220 Everett youngsters are participating in full-day classes, doubling their daily instruction time. Similar increases in full-day kindergarten enrollment are being reported in school districts throughout Snohomish County and across the state.

Mukilteo was one of just 34 districts in the state that didn't take state money for all-day kindergarten. The district simply didn't have the classroom space, said spokesman Andy Muntz.

Expansion of full-day kindergarten and other improvements were possible due to a welcome infusion of state money. Nearly \$1 billion more is being deposited in Washington school districts' coffers over the next two years -- almost \$1,000 for every student in public schools.

Following four years of budgetary drought -- cutbacks that forced scattered layoffs, mandatory furloughs and constant paring of academic offerings -- it's been a refreshing change for school districts.

The money will be spent in a variety of ways: for supplies, buses, tutors and teacher salaries as well as smaller classes in some grades and a doubling of enrollment of all-day kindergarten statewide.

The decision by state lawmakers to spread about \$1 billion among school districts throughout the state followed a sharp legal elbow in the ribs last year from the Washington Supreme Court, which found the state was not adequately funding public education.

"While the additional money from the state still does not bring us to the funding level we had in 2009, it does allow us to begin to add back staff in areas and programs in which we had previously made reductions," said Lake Stevens School District Superintendent Amy Beth Cook.

The billion dollars from the state is about a quarter of what is needed to satisfy the 2012 court order requiring the state to pay the full cost of basic education for roughly 1.1 million students enrolled in kindergarten through 12th grades.

Justices gave the Legislature until the 2017-18 school year to comply. They also required annual progress reports, which they intend to critique. Lawmakers turned in their latest at the end of August.

Snohomish schools Superintendent William Mester is among a crowd of educators urging the Supreme Court to keep the pressure on.

"While we had hoped the additional funds we received from the state would give us leeway to restore some previously cut items, in many cases they did not," he wrote in an open letter to the community. "We had also expected that the Legislature would make significant strides toward lowering class size.

They did not.

"It is my hope and expectation that after reviewing these reports, the Supreme Court will provide stronger direction to the Legislature to fulfill its obligation as expected by the court," he wrote.

Superintendent Dan Chaplik of the Sultan School District talked about the silver lining.

"Whether they were perfect in the Legislature or not, we didn't go backwards," he said. "I feel pretty good about that."

School districts are receiving different amounts of money and are spending it in different ways.

Each gets funds to restore pay cuts imposed on teachers and classified employees in the last budget. And each will be receiving more money per student for materials, supplies and operating expenses, as well as additional dollars for pupil transportation based on a formula approved by lawmakers. Districts can count on extra funds for their Learning Assistance Programs based on the number of students needing extra academic help.

Some districts, but not all, were eligible for funding of full-day kindergarten classes and fewer students in targeted grades. That eligibility is based on the percentage of students signed up for the federal Free and Reduced Lunch program.

Here's a sample of what's happening in some districts.

#### **Everett School District**

State money totals nearly \$11 million out of the district's \$203 million budget. About \$922,000 is being used to expand full-day kindergarten, including five additional kindergarten teachers. That means about 58 percent of kindergartners are attending full-day classes, nearly six hours of instruction instead of just under three, said Cynthia Jones, who oversees federal and state programs for the district.

The district expects to spend some \$3 million on supplies and operating costs, \$2.6 million on salary increases, and \$1.2 million for the Learning Assistance Program to help low-achieving students and \$825,000 for special education.

#### **Edmonds School District**

The district's \$212 million budget includes \$11 million in state funding. Of that, about \$4 million is being spent to add 40 teachers, half of whom are working in elementary schools, said Stewart Mhyre, executive director for business and operations.

About \$1 million is allocated to a program that helps students who are struggling academically.

College Place, Chase Lake and Spruce elementary schools are expanding all-day kindergarten with \$650,000 in state money.

About \$1.2 million will go toward paying salaries for teachers and administrators, another \$1.5 million for benefits.

Roughly \$1 million will be used to hire additional staff to help principals with the state's new teacher

evaluation system.

Special education funding will increase by \$650,000, and slightly more than \$500,000 will go to hire additional staff in the district's English Language Learner program.

### **Lake Stevens School District**

The district's \$79.5 million budget includes \$3.9 million in additional state dollars.

It received \$1.3 million for supplies and operating expenses and \$400,000 each for transportation and help for low-achieving students, but it did not qualify for funding for smaller class sizes in targeted grades.

Lake Stevens did not receive money for all-day kindergarten classes, though it offers a full-day program at each of the district's six elementary schools in which the state pays for half a day and parents cover the rest through tuition.

With the boost in state funding, the district is hiring eight teachers and 16 classified employees along with the equivalent of one and a half full-time counselors, according to Teresa Main, assistant superintendent of business services.

"We are fortunate that the state has increased funding," she said. "It has put us in a position to be really proactive in using our resources in the classroom."

### **Marysville School District**

The district's \$120.5 million budget includes nearly \$7 million of additional state dollars, of which \$1.9 million is for materials and operating expenses, \$792,000 to provide extra help to low-achieving students, and \$490,000 for pupil transportation.

It also is receiving \$1.2 million to increase the number of schools with full-day kindergarten program from two to five and to reduce the number of students in some classes in grades kindergarten through third. These changes are resulting in the hiring of 10 teachers.

A portion of the incoming money will go into training and evaluation of teachers and to strengthen the district's reserves.

"After years of annual budget reductions in education from the state for districts across Washington, including Marysville, we will see a slight turnaround in dollars allocated from the state this year," said Jim Baker, the district's executive director of finance and operations. "While this is good news, it is not enough to make up for the nearly \$20 million in reductions made over the past six years."

### **Mukilteo School District**

The district's \$156 million budget includes \$7.9 million from the state, with \$6.8 million going for salary and benefit increases for its 1,600 employees, said Andy Muntz, the school district's spokesman. "Our biggest expenditure is salaries," he said. "It's 80 percent of our costs."

An additional \$1.1 million will go for items such as adding two assistant principals who will split time between four elementary schools; a staff member at Mariner High School to help track student progress on graduation requirements; and adding a class at Odyssey Elementary School for special education students with severe behavioral problems.

Mukilteo qualified for \$1.6 million from the state to expand all-day kindergarten, but the district never accepted it, Muntz said.

"Unfortunately, when you go from half-day to full-day kindergarten, it takes twice as many classrooms. We simply do not have those classrooms."

The district is considering plans to add an early learning center, which would house kindergarten classrooms and also relieve some of the crowding in elementary schools, Muntz said. A decision on this and other building projects is expected by early November.

### **Snohomish School District**

The district's \$97.1 million budget includes \$4.6 million in additional state dollars.

The single biggest piece, \$1.6 million, is for supplies and operating expenses, with \$640,000 for transportation and \$300,000 to help low-achieving students. The district received no money for state-funded full-day kindergarten classes but did receive \$60,000 toward smaller class sizes.

Mester, in his letter to the community, said those dollars enable the district to add the equivalent of five and a half teachers plus give educational assistants more time in classrooms district-wide to help students.

Money is also getting used to make up for the loss of federal funds in special education and other programs due to sequestration.

### **Sultan School District**

The district's \$20.4 million budget includes nearly \$1 million in additional state dollars.

It received \$300,000 for supplies and operating expenses, \$225,000 for learning assistance programs, and \$155,000 for pupil transportation.

Sultan also pocketed \$164,000 to dramatically expand its full-day kindergarten offerings at Gold Bar and Sultan elementaries.

This year, there are six all-day programs – two at Gold Bar and four at Sultan. Last year, there were only two -- one at each campus for which the state paid half the cost and parents covered the remainder. There also were state-funded half-day programs at each campus.

Another area of spending is in student safety; the district will buy and install one or more security cameras inside each school bus, Superintendent Chaplik said.

And the district also will be focusing dollars into making sure third-graders are reading at grade level, he said. That will result in hiring an instructor.

"We've tried to do this more in the past but did not have personnel and funds to do it," he said.

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