



Below are sample letters to the editor that can be used as a template for ESN advocacy. These samples came from the League of Education Voters.

Here are a few quick reminders:

- 1) Find out the word count and submission deadlines before writing your letter. Your letter to the editor is more likely to be published if it's short (250 words or less) and relevant to recent news stories.
- 2) You can find the right address or email address for submissions on your local newspapers' website.
- 3) You can also register on the newspapers' website and leave comments on stories directly.

As voters continue to support their local schools, the state must step up and share responsibility.

Fifty-three local school boards went to voters asking for more than \$1.7 billion in levies for their schools in this February's special election. Communities responded with overwhelming support to these requests, passing all but one levy, and most by a large margin. In a time of rhetoric about how voters are unwilling to support education through revenue, this election stands in stark contrast.

In fact, voters approved more than 98 percent of local levies across the state, committing \$1.7 billion in taxes to their schools. When voters pass these levies, they know their money is going directly to helping children, providing necessary services to help students get an excellent education.

In many school districts, local levies make up 25 percent or more of the total operating costs of a district. In my North Thurston district, it's 21 percent. These local dollars often pay for necessary school costs like staff salaries, textbooks, or a sixth period in school—a far cry from the “extras” they were originally intended to provide.

In more affluent districts, voters are often able to support both the essentials and the extras with their local levies, while districts with fewer or less affluent residents often cannot. This means many students in our state are not getting the basic education they are entitled to simply because of where they live.

Further, reliance on these local levies keeps school funding far from being a sure thing. When schools must ask voters to approve new funding every few years, planning becomes difficult and stability is threatened.

In 2007, we voted to make sure schools can get the funds they need by approving an initiative that allows levies to pass with a simple majority, rather than a supermajority, of the vote. This initiative made it possible for more than a quarter of the levies to pass our recent election.

While voters continue to support their local schools, the state's support has eroded significantly. In January 2012, the Washington state Supreme Court found the way we fund our schools to be unconstitutional, and upheld the ruling in *McCleary v. Washington*, saying the state was not meeting its constitutionally mandated "paramount duty" to fully fund basic education. The court ordered the Legislature to overhaul how education is funded in the state by 2018.

Local communities have responded to the waning support from the state by providing more and more of their own local support. However, we cannot, and should not, expect local communities to continue to shoulder ever-increasing tax burdens for a job the state is required to do.

I have been a strong public education advocate for many years, having served my community and the state, and I appreciate the great effort it takes to ensure the success of these levies. I congratulate districts and voters across the state for realizing how much these investments mean to our students and passing these measures.

But, while this work is important, the money we raise should go to enriching our students' education, not to providing the essentials.

This session, our state legislators are tasked with finding and implementing a solution that meets the state's constitutional duty to fully and equitably fund education across the state. Some politicians repeatedly tell us that voters are not willing to support new revenue to fund education.

However, this round of local levy passages shows that when voters can see their money well-spent, they come out strongly in favor of providing for their schools.

I hope that our legislators take this lesson to heart, so that all of our state's students have the opportunity to attend a school that is amply, equitably and stably funded.

Why we must keep our college-savings plan

Washington state's colleges and universities are among the most successful and efficient in educating students and awarding degrees. Unfortunately, our state is among the worst when it comes to taking advantage of the tremendous opportunities of going to college and pursuing those degrees.

Two vitally important ingredients in increasing college attendance and degree attainment are reliable savings plans and tuition that is affordable for those who have saved for college.

Our state Legislature made a wise decision when, in 1997, it created the Guaranteed Education Tuition (GET) program. Today GET is the second-largest guaranteed tuition college savings plan in the country. GET allows families in Washington to save for college, ideally, starting when their future college student is a young child, and know with 100 percent certainty what they must do to save enough — no matter how much tuition might increase.

Oddly, some members of our Legislature are suggesting that this very valuable college-saving program be closed. This is exactly the opposite of what should be done. Right now is the time to make GET even more attractive to Washington's middle-class families so that even more of us save ambitiously for the college education of our children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews.

When families save through GET, they purchase individual "units" that each represent a fraction of a full year's tuition. When the time comes, 100 units saved pays for one full year of college tuition. The Washington State Investment Board pools and invests the funds in order to earn a high return on the investment (keeping the cost of the units as low as reasonably possible), while minimizing the risk that the state will ever have to help cover the guarantee.

During the Great Recession, the state Legislature backed away from its obligation to substantially fund our public colleges and universities. In order to preserve access to the excellent education our state's students deserve, they left the colleges and universities no reasonable alternative but to raise tuition.