Mount Baker SCHOOL DISTRICT

PO Box 95, 4956 Deming Road, Deming, WA 98244

January 9, 2025

To our State Legislators:

As you return to legislative session, we know that you will be balancing various priorities across the State. We appreciate your work in improving the lives of Washingtonians and for supporting legislation that benefits public school students.

On January 9, 2025 the Mount Baker School Board of Directors passed a formal resolution urging our Legislature to fully fund education and address the upcoming budget crisis. Like many other districts across Washington State, Mount Baker is facing consequential funding challenges as we plan for the 25-26 school year and beyond. Although we made significant reductions in the 22-23 and 23-24 school years and our budget is balanced, our reserves are not at a sustainable level which has had an adverse impact on the student experience.

These challenges are not simply numbers on a spreadsheet; they translate to staff who have dedicated their lives to public education and students who come to our schools everyday. From declining youth mental health to increasing class sizes, we are concerned about the negative impacts on the youngest people in our community. They are not only our students, they are also our future leaders, parents, and workforce; in this way, an education budget crisis has long-ranging effects.

Recent budget shortfalls are being driven by several factors, most notable significantly increased costs due to inflation and cost-of-living changes.

In 2017, McCleary legislation was passed to improve the State's funding model for public education. These investments have been helpful, while also remaining insufficient in meeting student needs. As a result, our District pays for many more staff than the State funds, largely through local levies. At the same time, McCleary legislation reduced the amount that districts can raise through local levies, leaving Mount Baker with few options as we face this budget crisis.

While enrollment, reduced federal funding, and inflation are impacting many districts, **our funding challenges are further exacerbated by two aspects of the State's public school funding formula: "regionalization" and "experience factor".**

Regionalization was designed to support school districts in high-cost-of-living areas. By offering additional funds for salaries in more expensive areas, regionalization was intended to help attract and retain staff. Mount Baker's regionalization factor continues to decline, beginning at 12% and now at 6%. This reduction is causing a loss of nearly $450,000 each year. The reason for this decrease is neither transparent nor reflective of the cost-of-living in our region.

Board of Directors

Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt, President
Jason Bloodgood
Edward Fox
Danielle Gray
Brenna Reaugh

Interim Superintendent

Nick Perigo

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In recognition of the value that seasoned educators bring our schools, the experience factor provides additional funding for staff with more experience and education than the State average. However, the State uses out-of-date, delayed data to calculate the experience factor. Because the experience factor was based solely on data taken in 2017 and 2023, Mount Baker did not, and will not under current law, qualify for the 4% experience factor for 10 straight school years (2017-2027). If, however, the experience factor analysis was applied in 2024, Bellingham would qualify for the 2024-25 school year and would have received $270,000 more in salary funding in that year.

We encourage you to focus your education investments in three areas that will help students across the State: **special education, student transportation, and materials, supplies, and operating costs.** We also request that the State **address the flawed regionalization model** to avoid creating further inequities in education. Lastly, we urge the State to **use current data to determine funding for our most experienced teachers,** whose expertise greatly benefits our students.

The Mount Baker School District mission statement compels us to, "...provide all students with a strong educational foundation...." We ask that you help to provide such a foundation by addressing these urgent educational needs. The time to act is now.

Respectfully,

Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt, President

Brenna Reaugh, Vice President

Jason Bloodgood, Director

Edward Fox, Director

Danielle Gray, Director

Nicholas Perigo, Secretary to the Board

Acknowledgement: some of the content of this letter was sourced from a similar document authored by the Bellingham School Board of Directors.

Board of Directors

Russ Pfeiffer-Hoyt, President | Jason Bloodgood | Edward Fox | Danielle Gray | Brenna Reaugh

Interim Superintendent

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