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Subject: Protect Small Schools and Honor Our Paramount Duty to Washington’s Children

Dear State Legislators and Budget Negotiators,

I am writing to urge you to reconsider several proposed education funding reductions currently under discussion and to strongly advocate for the protection of small and rural school districts, especially **Tuttle Lake School District**. Washington’s Constitution makes it clear: it is our *paramount duty* to amply fund the education of all children. The proposed cuts move us away from that obligation and place students at risk.

While the current budget environment is challenging, the scope and structure of these reductions fall hardest on districts with the fewest resources and the least capacity to absorb them. Small districts like Tuttle Lake already operate lean budgets, yet provide essential, high-impact programs that ensure students are prepared for long-term success.

Several proposed changes are particularly concerning:

Transition to Kindergarten (TTK):

Proposals to cut TTK funding by 25 percent or more would significantly reduce access to early learning opportunities. TTK is not an “efficiency”; it is a proven investment that helps young learners enter kindergarten ready to succeed. Reducing thousands of slots statewide or restricting eligibility undermines equity and disproportionately affects rural communities where early learning options are limited or nonexistent.

Running Start:

Reducing the enhanced Running Start FTE cap from 1.4 to 1.2 effectively strips students of the equivalent of a full college course load each year. For many Tuttle Lake students, Running Start is the most realistic pathway to postsecondary education, workforce credentials, and affordability. These cuts close doors for students who are working hard to get ahead.

Local Effort Assistance (LEA):

Reductions to LEA enhancements further disadvantage property-poor districts. For districts like Tuttle Lake, LEA is not supplemental; it is foundational. Cutting per-student support widens the gap between wealthy and rural districts and erodes the promise of equitable education funding.

Transportation and Operational Impacts:

Extending bus depreciation schedules and reducing associated funding may look neutral on paper, but in practice, it places additional strain on rural districts that rely heavily on long bus routes and aging fleets to get students safely to and from school.

Loss of Discretionary and Enrichment Programs:

The elimination or severe reduction of academic enrichment grants, particularly in areas like STEM, civics, and career-connected learning, removes opportunities that are often the only exposure rural students have to these fields.

In addition, **MSOC funding has not kept pace with inflation**, leaving districts struggling to cover the basic costs of operating schools. Utilities, fuel, insurance, instructional materials, technology, food services, and contracted services have all increased significantly, yet MSOC allocations remain largely flat. For small and rural districts like Toutle Lake, there is no ability to absorb these rising costs through economies of scale. When MSOC funding falls behind inflation, districts are forced to divert dollars from classrooms and student supports just to keep the lights on and buses running. Fully funding and inflating MSOC is essential to maintaining safe, functional schools and protecting educational programs from further erosion.

Collectively, these cuts are too drastic. They do not reflect efficiencies; they represent a retreat from our shared responsibility to students. When funding is reduced across multiple programs simultaneously, small districts are left with impossible choices: cut services, reduce staff, or eliminate opportunities that students depend on.

Toutle Lake School District is committed to doing everything possible to serve its students well, but commitment alone cannot replace adequate and stable funding. I respectfully ask you to reconsider these reductions, protect programs that are working, and ensure that budget decisions do not disproportionately harm small and rural schools.

Our students deserve more than survival-level funding. They deserve opportunity, stability, and a system that honors Washington's paramount duty to education.

Thank you for your time, your service, and your careful consideration of the real-world impact these decisions have on children and communities across our state.

Sincerely,



Chris Schumaker
Superintendent
Toutle Lake School District