

State Representative

Sharon Tomiko Santos



Contact me

As always, I'd love to hear from you. Please call, write, or schedule a visit with me. My legislative assistant, Julia, can help make the arrangements.

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2014 END OF SESSION REPORT

37th LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

Spring 2014

Dear Neighbor:

Happy Spring! I am very happy to be back at home in the 37th District now that the 2014 Legislative session is over. This newsletter highlights some of the key issues that the Legislature addressed this year.

Unlike the last six years, the Economic Forecast Council did not deliver devastating projections about our state's economy. Rather, the economy continues to recover slowly and the Legislature worked with a relatively stable budget for the first time since the Great Recession. This allowed us to adjourn on time without major cuts to critical state services. In fact, the improved revenue forecast allowed us to make modest investments in education, health care, mental health, and programs for people with developmental disabilities.

This was a short 60-day session so, as expected, the Legislature did not address many major issues like tax reform. That issue, however, is bound to be a focal point next year as we must develop a plan to fully fund our education system. Adequate tax revenues are necessary to support successful public schools, to promote strong and healthy communities, and to preserve the natural beauty of our great Pacific Northwest. We will not achieve these goals without real and meaningful tax reform.

My work continues to ensure all students receive the opportunity to learn and succeed, promote economic development that benefits everyone, and protect our universal civil rights.

Thank you, once again, for the opportunity to represent you in Olympia. Please stay in touch by calling or writing to me about the issues that concern you. I welcome hearing from you and appreciate your continued participation in our democratic process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sharon Tomiko Santos".

Sharon Tomiko Santos
State Representative
37th District



Education Funding

In its 2012 *McCleary* decision, the Washington State Supreme Court affirmed the state has failed its constitutional duty to provide ample funding for the education for all students who reside within our borders. In an unprecedented move to assure continued progress toward the full implementation of basic education funding, the Court retained jurisdiction over this case.

The Legislature appropriated nearly \$1 billion last year in "new" funding for the education reforms monitored by the Court and an additional \$58 million this year. This overdue investment largely came from the checkbooks of our state's teachers who have not received cost-of-living increases for six years in a row despite the voter-

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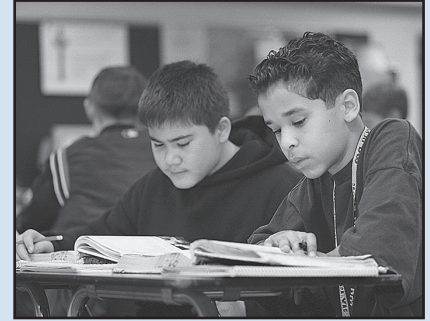
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(Education continued)

approved provisions of Initiative 732. Gas prices and food prices have increased but teacher paychecks have become smaller. In January 2014, the state Supreme Court took issue with this maneuver by noting that “Quality educators and administrators are the heart of Washington’s education system” and that “nothing could be more basic than adequate pay.” This Court order further admonished the state for falling well short of significant progress towards fulfilling its constitutional mandate and demanded, by April 30th, a detailed plan and timetable for funding basic education.

The cost estimates for meeting our *McCleary* obligation ranges from \$3.5 to more than \$6 billion per year. Thus far, the new investments directed towards our consti-

tutional duty have come from existing tax resources. But the fact is, we cannot make our public education system whole without bringing harm to our peoples, our environment, or our economy by cutting critical public services, unless we engage in a thoughtful conversation about identifying new revenue options and reforming our broken tax system. It is a conversation we can no longer delay.



Education Policy

While full funding for the education of all students is a top priority, it is really a means to an end. Money, alone, cannot ensure success for every student without smart education policies in place. This year, the Legislature enacted several measures that strengthen the foundation for learning so every student has a better opportunity to achieve academic success.



HB 1709: Interpreter services – Nearly 1 of every 10 Washington students is an English language learner (ELL), collectively speaking more than 200 languages. These students must meet the same level of academic proficiency in core subjects as native English speakers. Few teachers, however, are ELL endorsed and the quality of language interpretation varies tremendously across the state. HB 1709 will lead to a statewide model policy on language access for students and their families so that English language learners will not fall behind academically and immigrant families will be better able to support the success of their students.

SB 5958: Transition services – Students with developmental disabilities, like those whom my mother taught, often require ongoing support and services after high school graduation to lead self-sufficient lives. Multiple state

agencies may be involved in providing assistance as these students transition toward a more independent adulthood. SB 5958 requires the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to collaborate with appropriate agencies at the start of transition planning so students with developmental disabilities have a solid plan for a successful future.

SB 6074: Homeless students – The estimated number of homeless students in Washington exceeded 30,000 this year, an increase of 12% over the previous school year according to Columbia Legal Services. Nearly half (49%) of these students are in grades 1 through 5. *All* of these students present a high-risk for academic failure. SB 6074 directs the OSPI to collect information that will help identify best practices to improve educational services to and outcomes for homeless students.

SB 6129: Paraeducator development – Non-certificated employees, or paraeducators, provide more than half of the instructional hours provided to special education students, English language learners, and other students needing intensive educational support. Although paraeducators play a key role in the classroom, they receive little professional development training. SB 6129 requires the Professional Educator Standards Board to examine employment standards, professional growth, and certification opportunities for paraeducators. This ground-breaking legislation will increase the quality of teaching and learning for students who need it most.

SB 6163: Expanded learning opportunities (ELO) – Research clearly indicates that summer learning loss hurts students in poverty and struggling students especially hard, but not every child has access to the extracurricular programs or enrichment experiences that can help stem this setback. SB 6163 establishes a statewide system to expand learning opportunities beyond the traditional school day or school year through school-based programs or through partnerships with community-based organizations.

(Education policy continued)

SB 6552: 24 credit graduation requirement – This measure raises the minimum high school graduation credit requirement from 20 to 24 for the Class of 2019. As introduced, SB 6552 lacked flexibility for students to earn math and science credits in rigorous career and technical education (CTE) courses or for local school districts to recognize extraordinary circumstances that may interfere with a student’s ability to complete a course. After substantial negotiation and compromise, the enacted legislation represents a reasonable balance between high expectations and realistic concerns. Not only will students complete additional courses in science, arts, and world languages, they will have access to more guidance counselors who can help them navigate the path to graduation and beyond.

Budget

In Washington, we adopt two-year, or *biennial*, budgets in odd-numbered years when the Legislature meets in the long 105 day session. During the short sessions of even-numbered years, the Legislature typically makes minor adjustments in a supplemental budget to account for actual spending, revised revenue and caseload forecasts, and a few new legislative proposals. Some of the notable budget enhancements adopted in 2014 include:

- More than \$32 million for mental health treatment to address the need for additional capacity in our communities;
- 5,000 new service slots for people with developmental disabilities who are eligible for but placed on a waiting list to receive public services;
- An additional \$5 million for the state need grant in conjunction with the passage of the DREAM Act;
- \$25 million for the Opportunity Scholarship program to expand the number of college scholarships available to students pursuing high-demand fields of study; and
- More than \$12 million to fulfill a promise to College Bound scholars who pledged to stay in school beginning in the 7th grade and to graduate from high school with a minimum GPA.



A major disappointment of this session, however, is that the Senate did not act upon the supplemental capital budget adopted by the House. The capital budget pays for construction projects in every corner of the state from classrooms to conservation projects to community facilities that provide everything from healthcare, employment training, and the enjoyment of the arts. These capital projects would have created thousands of jobs today while building a better future for all Washingtonians.

Unfinished Business: Civil Rights

HB 1680: Eliminating the opportunity gap – May 17th marks the 60th anniversary of the U. S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (KS)*. In this landmark case, the Court denied the applicability of the “separate but equal” doctrine in public education and affirmed that the “opportunity” for a public education is a basic civil right. Sadly, sixty years after this watershed pronouncement, the educational opportunity gap among different groups of students has both deepened and widened.

In 2009, the Legislature established the *Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee* to develop recommendations to eliminate this pernicious problem. The Committee urged immediate action on reform of student discipline practices, cultural competency training for educators, academic accountability for English Language Learners, and improved data collection methods. I proudly sponsored HB 1680, but legislative leaders argued that the bill was too costly to enact so the measure died.

In fact, the long-term cost to our state and our society is far greater as long as distinct groups — students of color, special education students, or English Language learners, to name a few — continue to struggle academically because our education system fails to provide the adaptive learning opportunities that enable each student to achieve scholastic success. These students fall behind, lose interest in and drop out or — worse — feel “pushed out” of school, and enter adulthood without many basic skills necessary to be self-supporting and contributing members of our community. This educational opportunity gap is the civil rights challenge of our generation and I pledge to continue the fight for this fundamental Constitutional right for every child.

HB 1674: Fair Contracting Opportunities – Too many hard-working small businesses that play by the rules cannot win public contracting jobs because a few bad actors game the system. These cheaters set up front companies to comply with federal Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) requirements, competing unfairly with legitimate women or minority owned companies that employ local workers. That is why I sponsored legislation to give investigative authority and oversight responsibility for rooting out fraud and abuse to the Office of Minority and Women’s Business Enterprises (OMWBE). This bill will ensure that our neighbors have a fair chance at public contracting opportunities and keep our communities working. Although HB 1674 did not pass the Senate, I plan to re-introduce the bill in the next legislative session.



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Kip Tokuda

Last summer, Washington state unexpectedly lost one of our beloved native sons: my former seatmate and cherished friend, State Representative Kip Tokuda.



His steadfast commitment to social justice defined his legislative career and his lasting legacy to our community. Because he understood the power of education to strengthen our society and our democratic institutions, Kip created a public education program to teach about the Constitution and our civil liberties through the history and lessons of the forcible removal and mass incarceration of people with Japanese ancestry during World War II.

I sponsored a bill this session to rename the program in honor of Kip and, revealing the affection and respect he still holds in the Washington State Legislature, House Bill 2776 passed unanimously in both chambers. From now on, the Kip Tokuda Memorial Washington Civil Liberties Public Education Fund program will carry on his vision for liberty and justice for all. We will always remember you, Kip!

DREAM Act

I believe that every child, without exception, is endowed with individual aspirations and ambitions. The purpose of education is to prepare them to realize these hopes and dreams as productive and contributing members of our society. Yet, many Washington state students found that the opportunity to pursue their aspirations doesn't extend beyond high school simply because, as undocumented students, they cannot receive financial aid for college.



The DREAM Act is now a reality with the help of hard-working student advocates such as these.

The Washington State DREAM Act removes this barrier so that every one of our high school graduates can qualify on an equal basis for state financial assistance to seek higher education opportunities. But this measure does more than support the hopes and aspirations of individuals, the DREAM Act upholds a basic belief that our nation is strengthened when our diversity is reflected throughout our classrooms, our companies, and our communities and when every person is allowed to participate and contribute to the health and well-being of us all. This is our American Dream and I am extremely proud that the Washington State Legislature brought us one step closer to its realization this session.