

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 aide, Julia, can help make the arrangements.

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2016 END OF SESSION REPORT

37th LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

Dear Neighbor:

Education dominated the 2016 legislative session. From the McCleary ruling to teacher shortages and from removing opportunity gaps to truancy reform, the Legislature tackled – and made incremental progress on – some of the most intransigent challenges that affect our paramount duty “to make ample provision for the education of all children residing within [our] borders, without distinction or preference on account of race, color, caste, or sex.” This newsletter highlights some of the major education policies we adopted along with other key issues we confronted this year.

Two factors shaped both the outset and the outcome of the 2016 legislative session. First, by constitutional fiat, the Legislature meets for only sixty days in even-numbered years. Consequently, so-called “short” sessions do not typically involve weighty policy decisions but, rather, deal with minor adjustments to the operating budget based on changes to the most recent economic and caseload forecasts. Second, this legislative session began with the news that our projected four-year revenue estimate would be \$500 million less than anticipated when we adopted the state operating budget last year. These two factors combined to dampen the expectations and the opportunities for comprehensive legislative action. Still, despite these constraints, the Legislature invested an additional \$7 million to address the teacher shortage crisis, \$15 million for homeless services, and \$40 million for mental health treatment in the supplemental operating budget.

Thank you for taking the time to read this newsletter and 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 blue ink handwritten signature of Sharon Tomiko Santos.

Sharon Tomiko Santos
State Representative
37th Legislative District



Breakfast After the Bell

Students have one job when they enter the classroom: to learn. Yet, too many Washington students are distracted from classwork by hunger. According to Washington Appleseed, more than two-thirds of all students eligible for free or reduced price breakfast at school do not receive one.

House Bill 1295 creates a “Breakfast after the Bell” program to increase the number of students receiving adequate nutrition in the morning. Common sense suggests that students who are fed are ready learn, and national studies confirm that school breakfast is associated with improved attendance, lower disciplinary actions, and higher academic achievement. Deplorably, once again, the Senate did not approve this sensible measure in the 2016 session.



Rep. Sharon Tomiko Santos

What is “McCleary”?

“McCleary” refers to a 2012 Washington State Supreme Court decision affirming the failure of the state to meet its constitutional duty to make ample provision for education of all students in our state. The Court recognized, however, that the Legislature enacted important reforms in 2009 and 2010, which will correct the inadequacies in the education funding system to provide for a quality program of basic education by 2018. While agreeing with this new approach, the Supreme Court continues to monitor our state’s steady, real, and measurable progress toward fully funding education.

As a result of the funding reforms advanced by House Democrats, the current biennial budget includes \$4.8 billion in new basic education spending – pupil transportation, statewide all-day kindergarten, K-3 class size reduction, and materials, supplies, and operating costs – above the 2011-2013 budget levels. We have made great progress in the last four years and, in fact, we are on track or ahead of schedule to achieve full funding for nearly all of the programmatic enhancements to basic education. Still, one important problem remains: the Legislature provides only about 75% of the funds required to pay teachers. Most school districts must use local levy dollars to make up the difference.

This over-reliance on local levies to support teacher salaries is unconstitutional and a fix must be in place by the 2018-2019 school year. Senate Bill 6195 assigned the Education Funding Task Force to examine options and make recommendations for adoption next year. However, the problem is more complicated than meets the eye and lawmakers do not yet have an accurate idea of the full cost of compensation. Initial estimates about the amount of revenue needed to wean the Legislature from relying on local levies to pay for basic education costs are as high as \$4 billion. Existing resources are simply insufficient to absorb this essential obligation without enacting devastating cuts to other critical services such as mental health, affordable housing, or children’s health. This is not an option.

Local levy dependence shines a light, once more, on the need to overhaul our badly broken and regressive tax system. Ample funding for schools requires adequate tax revenues that are not available without meaningful tax reform. This must be a top priority for the Legislature in 2017.

Closing the Opportunity Gap

Located in the heart of the most diverse district in our state, Aki Kurose Middle School was a fitting venue for Governor Inslee as he signed landmark legislation to eliminate the educational opportunity gap that disproportionately affects children of color. Aki Kurose, a beloved Seattle Public Schools teacher and a staunch advocate for peace and justice as well as a life-long resident of the 37th District, was a pioneer in early childhood education, social-emotional learning, and multicultural pedagogy.

House Bill 1541 adopts the recommendations of the Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee (EOGOAC) that the Legislature created in 2009 to develop proposals and plans to eliminate demographic differences in achievement

among students. The EOGOAC recommendations* address three main areas:

- The cultural disconnect between educators and students of color;
- The disconnect between schools and the families of students of color; and,
- The lack of quality data on student demographics that enable policymakers to make better informed decisions.

One major policy reform included in HB 1541 focuses on student discipline. Few school districts provide educational services to students whose disciplinary sanctions involve long-term suspension or expulsion from school. As a result, these students often fall behind in their academic studies and, losing hope of catching up with their peers, many permanently drop out of school. HB 1541 will limit long-term suspensions, require schools to provide educational services to students in a disciplinary status, and require schools to develop student reengagement plans cooperatively with families.

These reforms aim to keep students engaged in learning, even when discipline is necessary. Aki Kurose, who never sent students to the principal for disciplinary action, once noted, “Making a mistake is the most natural thing to do. Everybody makes mistakes. The thing to do is to learn from our mistakes. The more mistakes you make, the more you’re learning.”



Aki Kurose

Photo credit: Densho

HB 1541 represents the visions and voices of people like Aki in communities of color and other marginalized communities. With the active participation of students, parents and families, educators, and grassroots leaders from these communities, the EOGOAC invested hundreds of hours throughout many years to develop this comprehensive piece of legislation that will help close the opportunity gap and fulfill our constitutional obligation to provide an excellent and equitable education for each and every student in our state. I am grateful to everyone who contributed to and supported this milestone achievement.

**The complete recommendations are contained in the EOGOAC annual report that is accessible on the OSPI website: <http://goo.gl/09kd4V>*

Teacher Shortage Crisis

America is encountering a widespread teacher shortage and Washington is not immune from this crisis. In January, two school districts in our state reported that more than half of the teachers on staff required emergency certificates. While the root causes of the teacher shortage are many and complex, our state fails to deliver a quality system of education when we fail to recruit and retain great teachers for our students.

Teacher Shortage Crisis *(cont. from pg. 2)*

With this in mind, I led the effort to forge the compromise policy included in Senate Bill 6455. This bill implements strategies to expand the future educator workforce or to ameliorate the current shortage of professional educators by:

- recruiting high-achieving and underrepresented students to join the professional educator workforce,
- providing financial assistance for retooling teachers in shortage areas and for individuals entering the teaching profession,
- streamlining the in-state certification process for teachers with out-of-state credentials,
- expanding the opportunities for retired teachers to serve as substitute teachers without incurring personal financial hardship,
- strengthening the role and the quality of mentors for new teachers, and
- improving access to alternatives route programs in hard to serve areas of the state.

These steps - and the funding to implement these steps - represent small advancements in addressing the significant and looming challenges of a dwindling professional educator workforce. A more meaningful, albeit more complicated, remedy is to compensate teachers at a level commensurate to the demands and expectations of the job. To this end, I sponsored a bill to improve the salaries of beginning teachers, but this legislation failed to move in the short 2016 session.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

With our own Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) leading the way, Congress rewrote the widely detested No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act after more than a decade of failure under this top-down education policy. The stated purpose of NCLB was to raise academic standards for all students and to hold schools accountable for educational progress as a central strategy for promoting excel-



President Obama signing the Every Student Succeeds Act.
Photo credit: U.S. Dept. of Education

lence and equity in schools across the nation. But NCLB relied too heavily on student failure, school punishment, and non-stop testing for “accountability.” It proved to be a one-size-fits-all approach to education, an approach that fails to recognize our students come to school in many “sizes” with diverse backgrounds and needs and with different aptitudes and aspirations. As the Congressman John Kline (R-MN) stated, despite the good intentions of lawmakers, millions of children were left behind.

The new bipartisan policy is the Every Student Succeeds Act, or ESSA, described by the Wall Street Journal as “the largest devolution of federal control to the states in a quarter-century.” ESSA gives states and local school districts flexibility to create accountability systems that meet the high expectations of our unique communities and that provide rigorous opportunities to learn for all students. ESSA continues to demand, rightly, that state and local authorities monitor student performance and intervene when subgroups of students are floundering academically. However, in contrast to the rigid directives and sanctions meted out by NCLB, ESSA affords greater opportunity and funding to braid together locally determined supports and services linked to the academic needs of students.

ESSA restores the balanced partnership for education between federal, state, and local governments and I was proud to witness President Obama sign this act into law. U. S. Senator Patty Murray deserves particular praise for taking on this daunting challenge. Her dedication to our children and their future was essential to building the bipartisan Every Student Succeeds Act.

Charters Schools

In 2012, voters statewide narrowly approved Initiative 1240, authorizing public charter schools in Washington state. Inevitably, this measure was challenged in court and, last fall, our State Supreme Court ruled that charter schools are unconstitutional. The Senate responded by passing Senate Bill 6194 to retain charter schools in Washington. And while I opposed the bill, there was enough support in the House to send it to the governor for his signature.

My record on charter schools is clear: I do not support the diversion of public funds to privately managed education companies that are not accountable to the taxpayers through locally elected school boards. As I had three times previously, I voted against charter schools at the ballot box in 2012 along with 58% of the voters in the 37th District. Ultimately, though, the question of charter schools is a legal one. No matter what lawmakers do, this issue must be decided by the courts. At the very least, the action taken by the Legislature this year will help get this issue resolved sooner rather than later.

Affordable Housing

The excessively high cost of housing in Seattle and King County is exacerbating the destitution of people who live in poverty and is driving more women, children and youth, and families into homelessness. Throughout the 37th District, each day I see more tents on the streets and bonfires under the freeways. This is an appalling and reprehensible spectacle in one of the most affluent cities in America.

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2016 END OF SESSION REPORT 37TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

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Affordable Housing *(cont. from pg. 3)*

House Democrats initially proposed \$60 million in new investments to help homeless students, families, and veterans get into safe and secure housing. In the end, after negotiations with the Senate, we were able to secure only \$17 million for homeless services. This new funding will support:

- additional HOPE beds statewide,
- more crisis residential center beds for at-risk youth,
- restored funding for Street Youth Services, and
- shelter beds for young adults.

We approved House Bill 1682, which aims to improve educational outcomes for the 35,000 homeless students in Washington state by increasing in-school guidance supports, housing stability, and identification services. In addition, the state is inaugurating competitive grants to encourage schools with high populations of homeless students to partner with housing agencies in an effort to coordinate these essential student supports and services.

Civil Rights

Equitable educational opportunity for every student is the civil rights issue of this generation. Washington took a major step forward on this when we enacted legislation to close the educational opportunity gap. Nevertheless, we have more work to do.

I helped champion several bills that focused on improving equity in Washington state, including:

House Bill 1745, Voting Rights Act - Another year has come and gone without passage of the Washington State Voting Rights Act (VRA) by the Legislature. The VRA would ensure all persons have an equal opportunity to run for office to represent their communities. Shamefully, the Senate stalled this legislation yet again.

House Bill 2822, Repealing Initiative 200 - In 1998, when I first ran for State Representative, proponents of Initiative 200 argued for the elimination of preferential treatment in public employment, public contracting, and in admission to public institutions of higher education as a means to improve economic and educational opportunities for underrepresented groups. The promise turned up empty and, today, women and minorities continue to encounter limited access to jobs, contracts, and educational opportunities. HB 2822 would restore affirmative action policies to level the playing field for all. This legislation was not scheduled for executive action in the House.

House Bill 2933, Small works roster - State agencies and local governments can help grow our economy by supporting small businesses in developing public contracting experience. This measure expands the thresholds for small public works rosters that government entities may use to improve the ability of these businesses to compete successfully for public contracts. This bill died in the Senate Commerce and Labor Committee.