STATE REPRESENTATIVE
5th DISTRICT
GLENN ANDERSON

State of
Washington
House of
Representatives

EDUCATION
APPROPRIATIONS
RULES

June 28, 2006

Members, Steering Committee
Washington Learns Study
Legislative Building
416 14th Avenue SW
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Steering Committee Colleague:

We have completed nearly a year's work on Washington Learns and that work has been highly informative. Congratulations are in order to all the advisory committee members, our exceptional staff and the many other interested parties who have contributed to the body of knowledge that will frame our Steering Committee final recommendations.

As we approach our August Steering Committee meeting to determine what our possible draft recommendations to the Legislature will be, we will be challenged with evaluating the large body of information produced. As both a lawmaker and a member of the steering committee, I am concerned that Washington Learns provide the most useful guidance we can to citizens and policymakers as we all consider a significant, long-term commitment to finance and policy reforms.

To assure that Washington Learns meets the legislative intent and specific mandates of HB 5441, I request of staff that the recommendations of each advisory committee (including supporting documentation within consulting reports and from advisory bodies) be specifically indexed and referenced to the specific sections of the law to which they apply. This will allow us to more easily identify, access and evaluate data to be considered for possible final recommendations.

Having personally reviewed much of the professional literature on school finance over the last year, however, I recognize that there is a wide range of assumptions and methodologies among those who have studied questions related to funding adequacy. The reported K-12 recommendations of Odden, Picus Goetz, et. al. is just one such approach.

It has become clear to me that school finance adequacy is a highly controversial field of research, with strongly differing opinions held by experts on the most appropriate ways of addressing the question of what resources are needed to meet desired educational outcomes.

The implications of the final report of the Washington Learns Steering Committee are going to be enormous. The findings and recommendations of our study will have a defining impact on the citizens, taxpayers and most importantly the children of the state of Washington. The decisions we make, based on the quality of the information presented to us and the quality of our deliberations on it, will be felt for generations.

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We must also remember the potential for our findings and recommendations to be referenced in litigation against the people of Washington. That prospect must make our determination all the greater that our work be of the highest quality within our power.

Given the controversial nature of the present research on school funding and the extraordinarily high stakes involved in our work, I believe it is incumbent on the Washington Learns Steering Committee to seek a peer review of the report on K-12 school finance adequacy prepared for us by our contractors. Such peer reviews are, first, a standard instrument of quality research. Second, we owe it to the Legislature, the Governor, and the citizens of Washington to conduct our work in the most conscientious manner we can, availing ourselves of all the expert opinion reasonably available to us. Third, a peer review of this key instrument of our study will promote greater public confidence in our findings and recommendations when we submit them to the Governor, the Legislature and the public in December. Last, this added step helps ensure that we are fully responsive to the specific mandates given us in the enabling legislation.

Such a peer review should be conducted by qualified analysts and should examine, at a minimum:

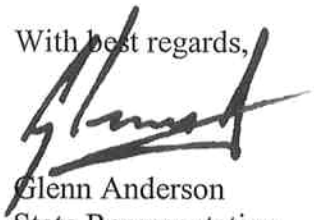
- The merit of the proposed definition of "basic education."
- The strength of the evaluation of Washington–specific practices.
- The variables responsible for predicted student achievement.
- The assumptions about implementation strategies.

I believe it is not only desirable but imperative that the Washington Learns Steering Committee commission professionals to conduct an appropriate peer review before our contractors' report is taken under final consideration by the Steering Committee.

The "win-or-lose" stakes of assuring a well-educated citizenry in a hypercompetitive global economy, and the deep public distrust of new government spending, require that we apply an exceptional degree of diligence to our work. We must move beyond expectations of Olympia "business-as-usual" to secure public confidence in our ability to invest wisely in our common future.

I look forward to taking up this challenge before the Steering Committee.

With best regards,



Glenn Anderson
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