



Board of Directors Business Meeting  
Agenda Action Item

**Item Title**

ADOPTION OF THE 2026 TACOMA PUBLIC SCHOOLS LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

**Department**

Board of Directors/Superintendent's Office

**Board Meeting Date**

November 13, 2025

**Background**

Late each calendar year, the Board of Directors adopts the list of priorities and compiles them in a Legislative Agenda that Tacoma Public Schools will distribute, monitor, and advocate for during the next session of the Washington State Legislature. The priorities cover a wide range of issues that could affect the financial, curricular, and operational direction of the school district.

**Current Consideration**

Under the leadership of the Board of Directors and the Superintendent's Office, an internal legislative team proposed a new list of priorities compiled in a proposed 2026 Legislative Agenda. The Critical District Issues include: UPDATE

**Fiscal Implication**

None. Adoption of the 2026 Legislative Agenda itself carries no immediate fiscal impact to the district. However, individual items included in the agenda—depending on actions taken or not taken by the State Legislature—could have significant positive or negative financial and operational impacts to Tacoma Public Schools.

**Recommendation**

The Superintendent recommends that the Board adopt the proposed 2026 Legislative Agenda.

**Strategic Benchmark**

Academic Achievement  
Partnership & Participation  
Safe & Supported

**Approved By**

Superintendent Joshua Garcia

# Tacoma Public Schools 2026 Legislative Agenda

## Critical District Issues

### South Sound Robotics Center

Robotics and high-tech manufacturing are quickly becoming a high demand skills field. Manufacturing and commercial businesses are quickly adapting their operations to stay competitive in a global economy and address workforce trends showing critical human resource shortages on the horizon. The need to prepare students in this high-tech field sustain Washington's competitive edge requires an integrated approach of high school and college-level curriculum that results in student attainment of relevant industry recognized credentials, certifications and job experience leading to in-demand family-wage careers.

- **Proposed Action:** The legislature should provide \$10 million in capital budget funding to construct a South Sound Robotics Center adjacent to LeMay: America's Car Museum. The facility will host student programming and robotics competitions from around the region and nation. The project would be a joint community effort with the City of Tacoma, LeMay: America's Car Museum, and South Sound School Districts.

*Strategic Plan Alignment: Academic Excellence*

### Basic Education Funding Adjustments: MSOC and Transportation

Every school district subsidizes basic education funding costs with enrichment (local) levy funding to cover funding shortfalls in fixed building operations costs including utilities, insurance and curriculum costs. The lack of adequate state funding leaves districts with serious budget shortfalls. Immediate action is needed in two areas:

#### ***Materials, Supplies and Operating Costs***

- **Proposed Action:** Re-base the funding factor to match current statewide average costs as projected by school districts in the 2025-26 school year – approximately \$500 per student.

#### ***Transportation***

- **Proposed Action:** Establish a safety net transportation funding source to account for actual student transportation costs, especially for McKinney-Vento and special needs student costs.

*Strategic Plan Alignment: Academic Excellence, Operations*

## **Sales Tax on Services Exemption**

The legislature established new sales taxes on a wide array of service businesses, including temporary staffing, internet technology and security services. Almost all school districts will experience higher costs as a result of the broad array of businesses impacted by the new sales tax on services, especially temporary staffing required to meet special education student needs.

- **Proposed Action:** Modify the sales tax on services legislation by exempting those services provided to school districts in the course of delivering student educational support, internet technology and student safety.

## **Issues of High Concern**

### **Prototypical School Model Funding Update**

The prototypical school model does not cover the full cost of providing a safe and robust learning environment for students. Every school district subsidizes state funding with enrichment (local) levy funding to provide the necessary number of support staff to address changing local student population needs, including wraparound support required to help all students succeed, as well as building maintenance enhancements now required by the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **Proposed Action:** Increase the funding for school support staff such as, McKinney-Vento (homeless) liaisons/social workers, para-educators, psychologists (mental health), nurses (IEP supports), technology staff, custodians, security personnel, transportation services and parent involvement coordinators.
- **Proposed Action:** Establish minimum operational maintenance (custodial, grounds, facilities) standards and fund staffing accordingly.

*Strategic Plan Alignment: Safety, Academic Excellence, Partnership, Early Learning, Operations*

### **Sustainable Energy Assistance for Buildings and School Buses**

The legislature has directed owners of large buildings to implement energy efficiency projects to reduce the carbon intensity of the built environment. School districts are included in the mandate, but do not have a ready source of funding to do so. In addition, school districts operate large school bus vehicle fleets powered primarily by diesel fuel. To make the transition to a more sustainable energy profile, school districts will need dedicated funding from the state.

- **Proposed Action:** Establish dedicated funding sources in both the capital budget and the transportation budget to assist school districts in meeting carbon reduction requirements under the clean buildings laws and make a rapid transition to electric school buses utilizing both state and federal funding streams.

*Strategic Plan Alignment: Academic Excellence, Operations*

### **Regionalization Funding Reform**

The legislature created a regionalization funding formula providing additional revenues for school districts in urban areas where costs of living are above the statewide average. The current formula is established around school district boundaries and leads to inequitable funding levels among school districts in the same metropolitan areas. For example, there are disparate regionalization funding levels offered to districts in the greater Pierce County area. This leads to district funding disparities that ultimately creates staffing and compensation inequities in our broader community.

- **Proposed Action:** Establish a labor-market regionalization funding mechanism statewide and eliminate the funding disparities among the districts in similar metropolitan areas.

*Strategic Plan Alignment: Academic Excellence, Operations*

### **Board Member Compensation**

The state restricts school board compensation to a per diem rate that does not fully acknowledge the demands of serving as a school board member. School board members regularly work dozens of hours per week to oversee and provide policy guidance to school districts. This work should be compensated through an updated school board compensation policy.

- **Proposed Action:** The legislature should allow school districts to establish board member compensation rates that reflect the demands of serving in board role. The statutory parameters for funding should be flexible enough to address services rendered to districts of all sizes and should therefore provide guidance for districts to use when setting compensation rates.

*Strategic Plan Alignment: Academic Excellence*

### **School Employee Benefits Board**

The legislature created the school employee benefits board (SEBB) to bring all school district employees into one statewide pool for health insurance and other employer benefits beginning with the 2019-20 school year. The state does not fully fund the incremental costs of the benefits for full- or part-time locally funded employees, which

means school districts must allocate enrichment (local) levy funding to cover the mandated costs.

- **Proposed Action:** Increase state funding for school employee benefits to fully cover the incremental additional costs of this state-mandated employee benefit plan for all school district employees, including, in Tacoma Public Schools, nearly 400 employees beyond the prototypical school model that districts fund through enrichment (local) levies.

*Strategic Plan Alignment: Academic Excellence, Operations*

### **Community Partners Support**

Tacoma School District, the City of Tacoma, Parks Tacoma, the Port of Tacoma, and other regional partners work together on a regular basis to support the community. The school district is stronger when the whole community is thriving.

- **Proposed Action:** Work with regional partners on high priority legislative issues.

*Strategic Plan Alignment: Safety, Partnership*

### **Simple Majority for Construction Bonds**

School construction bond votes currently require a 60% supermajority to pass. This constitutional provision puts districts in jeopardy of being able to adequately provide updated and safe instructional space for students.

- **Proposed Action:** Approve a constitutional amendment to be sent to the people allowing for a simple majority vote for school construction bonds.

*Strategic Plan Alignment: Safety, Academic Excellence*

### **School Construction Formula Modifications**

The current school construction cost allocation program does not adequately reflect the true costs of school construction—with no meaningful increase in the funding formula since 2005 despite dramatic increases in construction costs.

- **Proposed Action:** Increase state funding for both the area-cost allowance and the square-foot-per-student allocation for school construction.

*Strategic Plan Alignment: Safety, Academic Excellence*