

SCHOOL DISTRICT COST & SIZE STUDY

SCOPE AND OBJECTIVES

DECEMBER 1, 2009



STATE OF WASHINGTON
JOINT LEGISLATIVE AUDIT
AND REVIEW COMMITTEE

STUDY TEAM

Mark Fleming

PROJECT SUPERVISOR

Keenan Konopaski

LEGISLATIVE AUDITOR

Ruta Fanning

Joint Legislative Audit &
Review Committee
1300 Quince St SE
Olympia, WA 98504-0910
(360) 786-5171
(360) 786-5180 Fax

Website:

www.jlarc.leg.wa.gov

e-mail:

neff.barbara@leg.wa.gov

Why a JLARC Study of the Cost of School Districts and Their Enrollment Size?

The 2009-11 Operating Budget (ESHB 1244) directs the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) to conduct a study of the relationship between the cost of school districts and their enrollment size. The mandate directs JLARC to analyze how enrollment size affects costs for activities such as instruction, administration, transportation, and facility operations. The legislation further directs JLARC to review other factors that may impact costs, to examine changes in cost patterns resulting from district consolidation or state oversight, and to review available research on nonfinancial benefits and impacts associated with school district size.

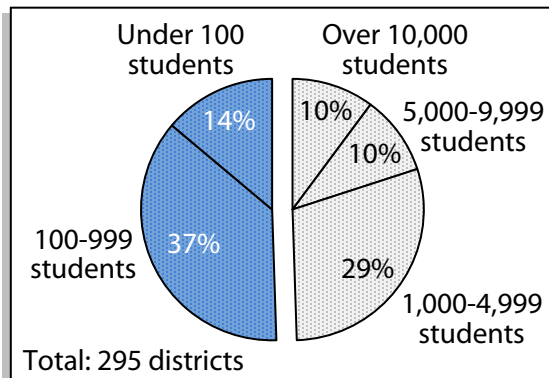
Public Education is a Major State Responsibility

Washington's Constitution establishes education as the state's "paramount duty" and requires the Legislature to "provide for a general and uniform system of public schools." The 2009-11 Operating Budget provides \$15.6 billion for K-12 education, or 27 percent of the total statewide Operating Budget. State funds accounted for approximately 70 percent of school district budgets for the 2008-09 school year. Local funds contributed 20 percent. Federal monies and other sources accounted for the remaining 10 percent.

School District Enrollment Varies Greatly

Although the state provides most of the funding for public education in Washington, 295 local school districts actually carry out this responsibility.

Half of Washington School Districts Enroll Fewer than 1,000 Students



Source: JLARC analysis of 2008-09 OSPI enrollment data.

Washington's school districts vary in size from six students to over 43,000 students. Half of the state's school districts enroll 1,000 or fewer students, including 41 districts with fewer than 100 students. Thirty large districts have enrollments exceeding 10,000 students.

Study Scope

JLARC will examine the relationship between district costs and enrollment across Washington's school districts. The analysis will develop per-pupil expenditure data for major categories of educational service delivery and will identify other factors that may affect costs. In addition, JLARC will review available research on the benefits and impact associated with school district size.

Objectives

This JLARC review will analyze the relationship between school district cost and enrollment size by answering the following questions:

- 1) How does the cost of providing instructional services vary by the number of students served by a school district?
- 2) How do administrative, transportation, and facility costs vary by the size of the school district?
- 3) How do other factors, such as local funding, geography, student demographics, or services from educational service districts relate to the cost of providing instruction and ancillary services?
- 4) Do district expenditure patterns change as a result of consolidation or state oversight conditions required by RCW 28A.505.110?
- 5) What nonfinancial benefits and costs are associated with school district size?

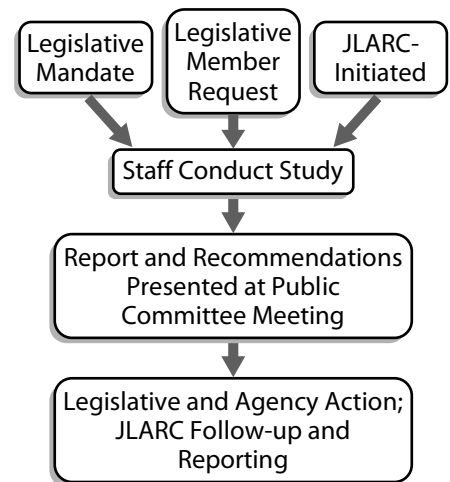
Timeframe for the Study

Staff will present the preliminary and final reports at the May and June 2010 JLARC meetings.

JLARC Staff Contact for the Study

Mark Fleming (360) 786-5181 fleming.mark@leg.wa.gov

JLARC Study Process



Criteria for Establishing JLARC Work Program Priorities

- Is study consistent with JLARC mission? Is it mandated?
- Is this an area of significant fiscal or program impact, a major policy issue facing the state, or otherwise of compelling public interest?
- Will there likely be substantive findings and recommendations?
- Is this the best use of JLARC resources? For example:
 - Is JLARC the most appropriate agency to perform the work?
 - Would the study be nonduplicating?
 - Would this study be cost-effective compared to other projects (e.g., larger, more substantive studies take longer and cost more, but might also yield more useful results)?
- Is funding available to carry out the project?