

Capitol News

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WSLHA Priorities

[HB 1001](#), the **audiologist/speech language pathologist licensure compact** bill, has passed the House unanimously! It now goes to the Senate for consideration, but likely no action there until after March 8th.

[HB 1222](#), legislation that **mandates large group insurance plan coverage** (employers with more than 50 employees) **for hearing instruments and the services necessary to fit them**. It was voted out of the House Appropriations Committee on Wednesday. It now goes to the Rules Committee.

The Legislature is considering several bills dealing with **special education funding**.

- [HB 1436](#) is OSPI-request legislation. It removes the 13.5% cap on how many students a school district can receive state funding for and increases the special education multiplier. It was heard in the House Appropriations Committee last Thursday.
- [SB 5311](#) is Governor-request legislation. It increases special education cost multipliers over a 4-year period and increases the funding cap from 13.5% to 15%. It was heard in the Senate Ways & Means Committee last Thursday.
- [HB 1109](#) increases the reimbursement for initial evaluations and IEPs during the summers of 2023, 2023, and 2025. It was heard in the House Appropriations Committee last Thursday.

WSLHA is also watching [HB 1305](#). Among other provisions, this bill makes several timeline changes to **requirements related to initial student evaluations for special education and to development and implementation of individualized education programs**.

WSLHA has concerns that the increased timelines may not be achievable given the current caseloads of school-based providers. HB 1305 passed the House Education Committee on Thursday. The following amendments were adopted:

- Requires school districts to decide whether to conduct an initial special education evaluation and notify the parent of the student of its decision within 22 calendar days (rather than 15 business days) after receipt of a special education referral request;
- Removes provisions presuming parental consent for conducting a special education evaluation when the parent of the student requested the evaluation;
- Directs school districts to provide the student's parent with a document that informs the parent about the evaluation activities the district plans to conduct at the

same time as the notification of the district's decision to evaluate the student is provided to the parent;

- Requires school districts to conduct an evaluation within 40 calendar days (rather than 25 business days) of receiving parental consent to evaluate;
- Specifies that, when the evaluation activities include student observations, the 40 calendar day time limit may be suspended during school holidays of a week or longer;
- Directs the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction to adopt a rule permitting a school district to exceed these evaluation time limits when conducting a quality evaluation warrants additional time;
- Requires school districts to respond to a parent requesting an individualized education program team meeting within seven calendar days (rather than five business days).

General News

With the February 17th policy committee cutoff approaching, much of the committee time is now devoted to executive action rather than public hearings. The fiscal committee cutoff is around the corner, too, on February 24th. These deadlines serve as a filter to reduce the number of bills under consideration. Many bills die because of lack of time, rather than opposition to the bill's policy. It's the nature of the legislative session.

On Wednesday, the Senate Energy, Environment & Technology Committee heard [SB 5577](#), a bill that would increase broadband access in underserved communities. It establishes the Capital Broadband Investment Acceleration program, a grant program under the Statewide Broadband Office. Under the bill, \$200 million in state capital funds will be used to finance the program in rural and distressed counties. Supporters of the bill say upcoming federal dollars are not enough to put broadband in the most remote places in Washington.

On Thursday, the Senate Transportation Committee heard a bill aimed at fixing the dwindling workforce and chronic staffing issues at the Washington State Ferries. Insufficient staff contribute to most of the unprecedented number of cancellations on the system's routes in recent years. The bill, [SB 5550](#), requires the WSF to develop programs and policies for employees to gain maritime credentials and pilotage while on the job, evaluate management practices and staffing models, and adopt a DEI implementation strategy and employee surveys to perform an in-depth cultural assessment and remediation plan. The bill is expected to cost \$20 million per biennium.

While members of the House and Senate are submitting their individual budget requests to their respective budget writing teams, the budget writers are being briefed on the operating, capital, and transportation budgets in preparation for drafting their own budgets. Their mood is decidedly more cautious about spending than it was in the last two years when there was federal funding coming to the state.