

Washington state legislature passes \$44B budget; here's what it means for taxpayers

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After months of struggling to find a compromise, the Washington state Senate and House passed a \$43.7 billion budget that satisfies a state Supreme Court mandate on education funding.

Gov. Jay Inslee signed the budget after 11 p.m., averting a partial state government shutdown. His office told KIRO 7 News that there will be no shutdown for services funded by the operating budget.

The budget, which will work for the next two years, increases spending for public schools, mental health and state worker contracts. [Read details about that here.](#)

But the budget is getting criticism from King County financial analysts who believe it largely comes at the expense of Puget Sound residents who will see large tax hikes and limited increases in local school funding.

Here's what we know now about what the budget would achieve and how much taxpayers would spend.

Why is education such a big part of the budget?

The state has been in contempt of court since 2014 for lack of progress on satisfying a 2012 high court ruling that found that school funding was not adequate.

That's why the plan adds \$1.8 billion for K-12 public schools, which is part of a multi-billion hike over four years designed to satisfy the state Supreme Court ruling.

How would the property tax increase generate funds?

Under the plan, the statewide property tax per \$1,000 of assessed value increases from \$1.89 to \$2.70, with the increase being earmarked for education. That rate is expected to bring in \$6.6 billion over the next four years, with \$1.6 billion of that coming in the next two years.

How much would taxpayers in King County could pay?

Financial analysts who work for King County Executive Dow Constantine determined 73 percent of the people in King County reside in a school district that will see a tax increase; 63 percent of King County residents will see a property tax increase of \$400 or more annually.

Here's how that would break down, according to analysts.

- **Auburn:** -\$20/year for median residential property
- **Bellevue:** +\$830/year
- **Enumclaw:** -\$10/year
- **Federal Way:** -\$160/year
- **Issaquah:** +\$970/year
- **Kent:** -\$10/year
- **Lake Washington:** +\$790/year
- **Mercer Island:** +\$1,280/year
- **Renton:** +\$340/year
- **Seattle:** +\$550/year
- **Shoreline:** +\$460/year
- **Snoqualmie Valley:** +\$570/year

- **Vashon Island:** +\$630/year

Constantine's office said state lawmakers rely on property taxes, which also funds county services like public health and criminal justice.

“Great that they finally funded education, concerned about the way they are doing it,” Constantine said. “Lawmakers had countless revenue options to consider. They chose to use property taxes, the primary funding source for critical local government services like public safety and public health. This will make it even harder for King County to provide vital services for a rapidly growing urban region.”

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Why did state lawmakers decide this?

"Constitutionally, the property tax is what funds our public education system," said Republican Sen. John Braun, one of the key budget negotiators. "We worked very hard to make sure it's balanced so that there's not a huge weight on one part of the state."

House Democratic budget negotiators said that while the increase in some districts, including Seattle, is causing some of their caucus angst, it was the best solution they could agree to

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"We all know that in the end we have to pay for schools somehow," said Democratic Rep. June Robinson. "This is what we can agree on in a divided government."

What exactly is in the education plan?

The outline of the education plan provided Thursday sets a minimum starting salary for teachers at \$40,000, with adjustment for inflation and regional differences.

Under the plan, the average minimum salary for instructional staff will be \$64,000, and adding in regionalization, it will range from \$66,194 to \$82,081. School districts can pay a salary over the maximum of \$90,000 by up to 10 percent for educational staff associates or teachers who teach science, technology, engineering, math or in bilingual or special education programs.

Also under the measure:

- There's a mandatory 10 percent increase after 5 years of employment.
- Starting in 2020-21, the minimum state allocations for salaries must be adjusted annually for inflation.
- Starting with the 2023 session, and every six years after that, the Legislature must review compensation to make sure they are adequate based

on the market and economic differences between school districts.

Why did the budget deal take so long?

While Washington state has never had a partial government shutdown, the Legislature has taken its budget talks to the brink before, in 2013 and 2015, with budgets not signed by the governor until June 30 both years.

As for why this is the third time lawmakers' budget talks nearly prompted a shutdown, Democratic Rep. Timm Ormsby — one of the main budget negotiators for the House — told the Associated Press: "this is what divided government looks like."

"We're just representing disparate political philosophies and trying to understand what those are," he said before the final agreement. "Trying to overcome them has been the work, but the tone has always been good and remains good," he said.

Is the local government shutting down?

While lawmakers have expressed confidence that they will pass the budget in time, contingency plans for a potential shutdown were still in place. Notices went out last week to about 32,000 state workers warning them they will be temporarily laid off if a budget is not in place by midnight Friday.

A partial shutdown would affect everything from community supervision of offenders on probation, to meal services to the elderly to reservations made at state parks.

[>> Governor asks state parks to stay open Friday, despite budget not yet signed](#)

State parks were initially set to close early on Friday because of extra time

needed to prepare in case of a shutdown, but Inslee asked them to stay open.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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