

## How Efficient Is School Administration?

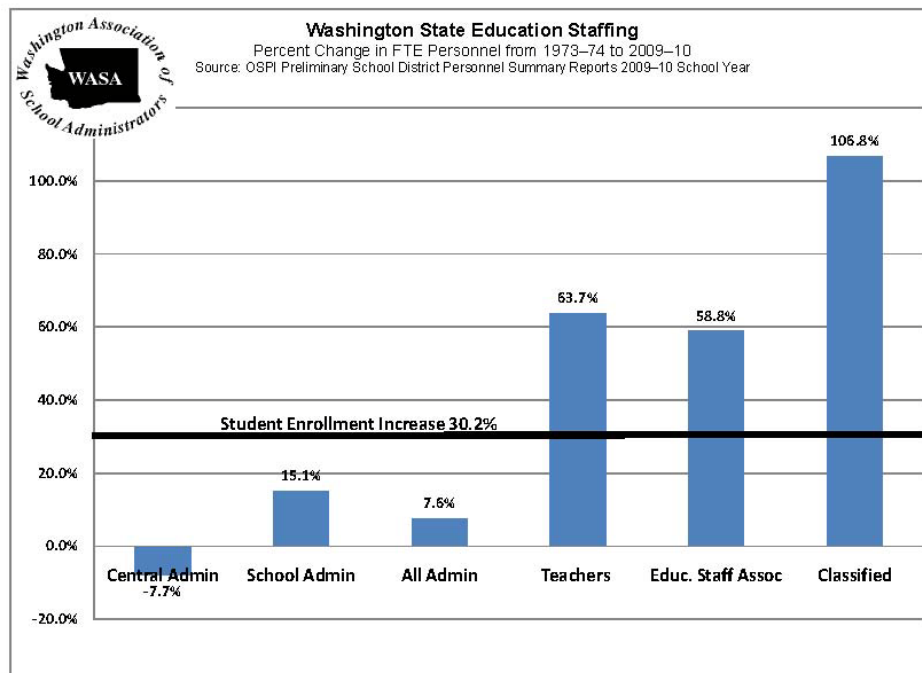
Misperceptions, left alone, quickly become accepted as fact. When it comes to the public's perception of administrative efficiency in our public schools, we have the data needed to set the record straight.

**Misperception:** The cost of school district administration is increasing, putting a financial strain on the system.

**Fact:** The most recent financial reports indicate that the total costs for district-wide administration is 6.7 percent of the general fund expenditures. That figure includes the superintendent, business office, human resources and supervision of instruction, pupil transportation, food service, and facilities maintenance. A review of district-wide administrative costs reveals that percentage is decreasing.

**Misperception:** We have too many administrators. We need to return to the priorities held in bygone days when we put more resources into the classroom.

**Fact:** We do need more resources in the classroom. But the blame is not that we have too many administrators. If you compare personnel data available in 1973–74 with current data (some 36 years later), we learn some interesting facts. Despite the fact that the student population grew by 30 percent over that time period, we have fewer central office administrators today than we did in the 70s. And, teacher staffing increased nearly 64 percent that same time frame.



**Misperception:** In Washington, we have 295 school districts. It seems inefficient to have 295 superintendents.

**Fact:** The number of school districts has been reduced from 2700 in the 1940s to 295 in 2010. We do not have 295 full-time superintendents. According to the OSPI Personnel Report for 2008–09, there were approximately 250 full-time superintendents in the state. Smaller districts reduce their administrative costs through shared and part-time superintendents. The smallest of districts hire a head teacher and contract with ESDs through shared service arrangements.

**Closing Comment:** The state’s lack of commitment in adequately funding public schools is a matter of record and was recently affirmed in the decision issued by Superior Court Judge Erlick in *McCleary vs. State of Washington*. Public school systems have been tightening their belts over the past 30 years by reducing administrative costs to levels that threaten the effective and safe operation. All the while, state and federal legislators have passed along hundreds of unfunded mandates with layers of compliance reporting and greater expectations for schools to solve a myriad of societal challenges. This avalanche of legislation piled upon public schools is illustrated by the Common School Manual (a collection of



Washington laws and regulations for public schools). The manual and the requirements it chronicles have more than doubled from 1983 to 2009 as illustrated to the left.

As the nation’s leaders seek to reform health care, where administration accounts for 31 percent of expenditures, they may want to use public school administration (6.7 percent) as a model for keeping costs to a minimum while managing complex organizations with demanding clientele.

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