

Legislature

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change the way teachers and principals are evaluated. And she's pretty excited about innovative schools and how Washington can partner with businesses to support special programs like Aviation High School.

She's not sure the governor's proposal to shorten the school year, but not cut the hours kids spend in school, will save much money, but she's willing to discuss the idea.

Also on the education policy agenda for this legislative session is Sen. Rodney Tom's proposal to change the way Washington performs teacher layoffs. The Medina Democrat wants to put teachers

to pay for education first, before any other state program or financial obligation.

About 43 percent of the state's general fund — about \$15 billion in each two-year budget cycle — is spent on K-12 education.

In 2009, the Legislature passed a blueprint for reforming the way the state pays for education, but has yet to put any significant dollars toward adopting that plan. Although no one knows for sure, some education finance experts have put as much as a \$4 billion price tag on the two-year cost of that reform plan.

Rep. Ross Hunter, D-Medina, has a proposal that wouldn't save any money but it might answer some of the concerns of the Supreme Court over the state's overreliance on local levy dollars to pay for education.

The chair of the House Ways and

Means Committee, who has been involved in every recent education reform effort in the Legislature, wants the state to replace some local levy dollars with more statewide property tax collections.

Instead of the school districts with the highest property values being able to collect the most school levy dollars, taxpayers across the state would be contributing more to the overall state education system. Hunter says the system would be more fair, but likely not more popular statewide.

Taxpayers in high value districts may not like seeing their dollars shifted to other places, for example. And in places where taxpayers are paying relatively low school levies — like Seattle where a large population shares the tax burden — they would likely see their taxes go up.

"Everyone agrees that the system is not

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who score lowest on performance evaluations first in line to lose their jobs during an economic downturn.

His proposal was a near miss in 2011 and has already been resubmitted for the current session. Although teacher contracts are written at the local level, they all currently make seniority the main consideration during teacher layoffs. Tom said the bill would keep high-performing young teachers in disadvantaged schools that need them.

The Washington Supreme Court ruled Thursday that the state isn't meeting its constitutional obligation to amply pay for basic public education, and that the judiciary would keep an eye on lawmakers to ensure they fully implement education reforms by 2018. An attorney for the school districts, parents and others who sued the state says the ruling means the Legislature will have

Pray for Justice



PHOTO BY SUSAN FRIED

Sparked by the recent Justice Department report on the Seattle Police department's use of excessive force, the United Black Christian Clergy held a prayer service for jobs, justice, and police accountability Jan. 4 at Greater Mount Baker Baptist Church.

very fair," Hunter said. He added that Seattle taxpayers would also pay a larger percentage of the governor's proposed sales tax increase, while many taxpayers in other parts of state, who were paying more of the cost of local education, would see their taxes go down.

"This is fairer, and it grows faster," he said.

Hunter's proposal would replace levy equalization with a new system and he says it would move about \$1 billion around and eventually help fix some of the inequity in the way school dollars are distributed around the state.

It could also become a more stable source

of school funding and answer another criticism of the Supreme Court.

The proposal is extremely complex, so much so that he would rather attempt a two-thirds vote in the Legislature than try to explain it to everyday people before it appears on the state ballot.

McAuliffe said she found Hunter's idea intriguing, but she wouldn't want to rush an important reform during a short legislative session. Hunter said the idea is getting a pretty good reception from lawmakers and others.

"I haven't found anyone who has said absolutely not," he said.

Guard

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grave risk to corrections officers, particularly women.

Officers also are being outfitted with personal alarms designed to better alert colleagues to problems. The overall inmate population at the reformatory was reduced to 630, from around 750.

Another officer who was fired is accused of failing to verify with Biendl that the chapel was clear of all inmates. He was fired for allegedly making a false entry in a log book indicating the chapel had been checked by Biendl and was empty. After the killing, the officer presented an initial incident report, indicating he saw Biendl close the gate outside the chapel. He later told

investigators he wasn't sure.

"Despite what you entered in the logbook,

The third fired officer submitted an incident report saying he inspected and secured

He was fired for allegedly making a false entry in a log book indicating the chapel had been checked by Biendl and was empty

Officer Biendl did not close the gate, did not make notification that the chapel was clear," Frakes wrote in the documents.

the chapel after Scherf turned up missing in an inmate count.

The officer found Scherf sitting in a chair

within feet of the chapel's front doors at 9:19 p.m., Frakes said, adding that Biendl's body was not discovered until 10:26 p.m., after others in the prison realized she had not left work after her shift ended that evening.

After being confronted with video surveillance during a June interview with investigators, the officer acknowledged he did not inspect the chapel, the documents state.

"I wrote down what was expected of me, not what I did," he said.

Four other corrections officers also faced discipline that included demotion or reprimands.

Death

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2010 was about 78 years and 8 months, up about a little more than one month from life expectancy for 2009.

-Heart disease and cancer remain the top killers, accounting for nearly half the nation's more than 2.4 million deaths in 2010. But the death rates from them continued to decline.

-Death rates for five other leading causes of death also dropped in 2010, including stroke, chronic lower respiratory diseases, accidents, flu/pneumonia and blood infections.

But death rates increased for Alzheimer's disease, which is the nation's sixth-leading

killer, kidney disease (No. 8), chronic liver disease and cirrhosis (No. 12), Parkinson's disease (No. 14) and pneumonitis.

The report is drawn from a review of at least 98 percent of the death certificates filed in the U.S. in 2010.

The government has been keeping a list of the top causes of death since 1949. Homicide has historically ranked fairly low. It was as high as 10th in 1989 and in 1991 through 1993, when the nation saw a surge in youth homicides related to the crack epidemic.

In the past decade, homicide's highest ranking was 13th. That was in 2001 and was

due in part to the 9/11 attacks.

Murders have been declining nationally since 2006, according to FBI statistics. Falling homicide rates have been celebrated in several major cities, including New York City, Detroit and Washington.

Criminologists have debated the reasons but believe several factors may be at work. Among them: Abusive relationships don't end in murder as often as they once did, thanks to increased incarcerations and better, earlier support for victims.

"We've taken the home out of homicide," said James Alan Fox, a Northeastern University criminologist who studies mur-

der data.

Some also credit better police work and public health programs aimed at reducing violence.

Demographics are an important factor, too, as the largest segment of the population is now 50 and older. Younger people - who are most likely to commit or fall victim to murder - are making up a smaller share of the population.

That ties in to the changes in the CDC's list of causes of death.

"The risk of homicide declines with age, and the risk of death by disease increases," Fox said.