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Dem, GOP lawmakers say full K-12 funding upgrade must be done by 2017-18 school year

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Sen. David Frockt

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By Brad Shannon — Olympian

Key House and Senate Democrats [put out a statement Monday](#) saying their reading of the law is that full funding of basic education – in response to a state Supreme Court ruling – must be completed in the 2017-18 school year.

The question came up last week during a discussion by the Legislature's Joint Select Committee on Article IX Litigation. The [Associated Press story on the meeting](#) suggested some lawmakers might seek to add an extra year to the timeline.

But the joint statement by Democrats – including Sen. David Frockt of Seattle, Sen. Christine Rolfe of Bainbridge Island, House Majority Leader Pat Sullivan of Covington, and Rep. Jamie Pedersen of Seattle – makes clear that they think 2018 means the school year that begins in September 2017 and ends in June 2018.

Rep. Gary Alexander, the House Republican lead on budget matters, said Monday he also agrees 2017-18 is the target date lawmakers must hit.

"I'm fine with that," Alexander said. What it means for budget writers is that the 2017-19 budget must include the funding upgrades in the first year of the biennium.

The Democrats cited a school reform bill from 2010, House Bill 2776, as pegging the date that the state Supreme Court would look to in enforcing its McCleary decision that said the state was failing to meet its constitutional duty to fully fund K-12 schools:

"We believe that the Legislature's top priority over the next four years must be implementing the Supreme Court's McCleary decision and fulfilling our constitutional and moral obligation to fully fund basic education.

"The Court pointed to HB 2261 and HB 2776 as reforms that, if implemented and funded, would fulfill that obligation. While some may argue that the language from the original HB 2261 passed in 2009 was ambiguous in terms of the exact full implementation date, it was clearly stated in HB 2776 (in RCWs 28A.150.260 & 28A.150.315), passed the next year and clarifying the timing of some enhancements to basic education, that the intended completion date for implementation was the 2017-18 school year.

"Democrats are committed to fulfilling our constitutional and moral obligation to fully fund basic education, and believe doing so on the schedule called for by the Supreme Court allows for differential phase-in of some enhancements but ultimately requires full implementation of all components of the program of basic education by the 2017-18 school year."

Alexander said Republicans took the lead this year in making sure \$1 billion in new funds went to K-12 without general tax increases.

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