

Education is paramount duty and key to our future | Rep. Pat Sullivan

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Educating Washington's children is not just our state's paramount duty, it's the most important thing we can do for our state's economy. Equipping students with the skills they'll need to qualify for the jobs of tomorrow is key to their success and our thriving future.

Two years ago this month, the Washington State Supreme Court found the state has not met its constitutional duty to fully fund basic education. Known as the McCleary decision, this ruling has brought to the forefront what most of us already knew — we need to dedicate more state resources to our public schools.

In that ruling, the Court also recognized that the legislature had already passed a plan — which I sponsored back in 2009 and 2010 — that would remedy these funding deficiencies. That plan has yet to be fully funded, although the legislature did add nearly \$1 billion in new school funding last June.

Last week, however, the Supreme Court said that not enough progress has been made to keep us on track toward meeting our 2018 goal of providing “adequate” funding for schools. That means we must make additional investments in education during this supplemental budget year.

In his State of the State address last week, Governor Inslee called for \$200 million more in school funding. These funds could help pay for areas the state is currently underfunding::

- Full-day kindergarten for every 5-year-old in the state.
- Smaller classes — fewer children in each kindergarten through third grade classroom.
- Safe transportation to and from school.
- Up-to-date books and other learning materials; many kids have school books that are years out-of-date right now, and parents and teachers are supplying more and more of the other materials students need.
- More instructional hours, giving students more learning time.
- Additional guidance counselors and parent outreach coordinators.

Of course, additional funding isn't the only education-related issue the legislature is dealing with. Our drop out rate remains far too high. The opportunity gap threatens a generation. Top-rate teachers are leaving the profession every year, and we know that the best books and the most modern equipment don't mean much without a well-trained, motivated teacher in every classroom.

We've passed a long list of changes to our public education system the last few years intended to address these challenges. Key among them is the Teacher and Principal Evaluation Program, which puts in place new evaluation criteria for teachers and principals, and a four-level rating system.

When fully implemented, the TPEP will help identify educators that are excelling and provide support and training for those who are not.

What do you think are the most important education issues? Where should we invest the new funding required by the state Supreme Court? Should we take a little time to see how the recently approved reforms improve outcomes before instituting more changes?

Please join me this Saturday for a community conversation about education. We'll be at the Kent School District Administration Building in the boardroom from 10:30 am until noon. The address is 12033 S.E. 256th Street in Kent.

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