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More funding needed for state education, report says

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Read the report

Read the [58-page report](http://www.spokesman.com/blogs/spincontrol/) (<http://www.spokesman.com/blogs/spincontrol/>) on the Spin Control blog.

OLYMPIA – The Legislature needs to pick up the pace at directing more money to improve the state’s schools, a special committee is telling the state Supreme Court in a report due today.

Although it may not have done as much for schools in the past session as some may have wanted, a joint legislative committee said the Legislature did pass some improvements during the short session such as increasing the number of credits needed for high school graduation in 2019. That shows consensus is possible, the committee said.

The real test will come next year, the panel concluded. It asked the court to give “deep consideration” to those improvements and “recognize that 2015 is the next and most critical year for the Legislature to reach the grand agreement needed.”

That agreement could mean as much as \$3.5 billion more for public schools between 2015 and 2019.

The Legislature is under a 2012 order from the court to improve schools and essentially fund its past promises for education reform. Last year, the court ordered the Legislature to provide it with a report by April 30 on how it will meet those goals. On Tuesday, with one day to spare, the Joint Select Committee on Article IX Litigation adopted [a 58-page report](http://www.leg.wa.gov/JointCommittees/AIXLJSC/Documents/April29_2014/DraftArticleIX_LitigationCmte29-14.pdf) (http://www.leg.wa.gov/JointCommittees/AIXLJSC/Documents/April29_2014/DraftArticleIX_LitigationCmte29-14.pdf) that’s primarily a summary of actions taken since 2009 and a recap of education bills that did or didn’t pass in the 2014 session. It includes extensive appendices for the court that explain the state’s two-year budget process and how it pays for basic education.

Article IX is the section of the state Constitution that says it is “the paramount duty of the state to make ample provision for the education of all children residing within its borders.”

The report offers little insight into what the Legislature might do next year. As Rep. Chad Magendanz, R-Issaquah, said after the meeting, the committee can’t commit a future Legislature to any particular action.

“Coming up with the plan is not within the jurisdiction of this committee,” said Sen. David Frockt, D-Seattle.

The question of how to pay for better schools likely will be a source of contention in 2015, as it has been for years. Magendanz said the state should cover the cost of school improvements, as its paramount duty, before spending money on anything else, and only consider tax increases for other programs if what's left of the existing revenue isn't enough.

"We also have taxpayers to think about," said Rep. Susan Fagan, R-Pullman.

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