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### High court to lawmakers: Why are schools still underfunded?

Lawmakers have been ordered to explain to the state Supreme Court why they haven't complied with its orders under the 2012 McCleary decision to adequately fund basic education.

By DONNA GORDON BLANKINSHIP

The Associated Press

The Washington Supreme Court on Thursday ordered lawmakers to explain why they haven't followed its orders to fix the way Washington pays for public education.

The court has ordered the state to appear before it on Sept. 3 and show the court how it has followed its orders in the 2012 McCleary decision or face contempt.

The attorney for the coalition that sued the state over education funding was happy to see the court order issued on Thursday.

"I'm very excited because it shows that they are taking the state's violations seriously," said Thomas Ahearne.

The McCleary decision said lawmakers are not meeting their constitutional responsibility to fully pay for basic education and they are relying too much on local tax-levy dollars to balance the education budget.

They were given until 2017-18 school year to fix the problem.

The Legislature has been making yearly progress reports on its efforts to fulfill the McCleary decision, and every year the court has said in response that lawmakers aren't doing enough.

"I don't know of anyone who likes to be called into court," said House Majority Leader Pat Sullivan, D-Covington. "I'm disappointed that we are where we are."

The most recent report to the court, filed at the end of April, acknowledged that the Legislature didn't make a lot of progress in 2014, but said it had ideas for fixing that situation during the 2015 legislative session.

A total of \$982 million will be added to state education spending over the next two years, with most of the money going to classroom supplies, student transportation and the Learning Assistance Program for struggling students. The Legislature also made down payments toward all-day kindergarten and smaller classes in the early grades.

Sullivan said lawmakers have fully anticipated they would need to solve the problem once the next legislative session begins in January.

"Regardless of what action the court does or doesn't take, it doesn't change what we have to do," he said.

As much as \$2.5 billion, by legislative estimates, will need to be added to the education budget to meet the obligations lawmakers have already identified for improving basic education and paying for it.

“I think the court is being very, very patient here, giving the state multiple opportunities to comply with the court orders, which frankly is more than most defendants get,” Ahearne said.

The state’s response strategy will become clear on July 11, when its opening brief to the court is due.



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