

Editorials

Originally published August 5, 2014 at 5:05 PM | Page modified August 6, 2014 at 8:19 AM

Editorial: Heed former governors on McCleary education case

The five living former governors of Washington sent a timely, wise message to the state Supreme Court to back off the state Legislature in the McCleary education case.

Seattle Times Editorial



THE five living former governors of Washington squeezed their substantial political and civic gravitas into a slim legal brief this week, with a simple message to the state Supreme Court: back off.

The high court is threatening to hold the state in contempt for failing to make more progress toward full funding of education by 2018, as the justices ordered in the 2012 *McCleary v. State of Washington* decision. Lawmakers and the executive branch have been summoned to the Temple of Justice on Sept. 3.

The ex-governors' message was timely and wise. The Supreme Court's aggressive approach is veering toward a constitutional separation-of-powers crisis, with justices potentially usurping the Legislature's budget-writing authority. That would make

for high drama in a law-school course, but the ex-governors rightly hope to avoid it for the sake of coherent governance.

More important, the ex-governors believe the court's threat to hold state government in contempt has the potential to derail any productive work on budget negotiations. In short, slow down, back off, and let lawmakers work toward improving education in the 2015-2017 state budget.

Any such negotiations should return to a focus on education outcomes. The Supreme Court's McCleary decision rests on a pair of bills the Legislature passed to define basic education and sought to improve student achievement.

Washington spends \$7,646 per pupil, yet continues to get inadequate results. One in four high school students does not graduate in four years. The graduation rate for black and Hispanic students is 65 percent; foster kids graduate at an appalling 37 percent rate. For those who do graduate, just 18 percent are college- or work-ready; far too many high-school graduates must take remedial classes once they get to community college.

Negotiations to meet the McCleary mandate also must not beggar other state obligations to higher education, early education, corrections, foster care or the mental-health system. A coalition of education and human-services providers filed a brief to the Supreme Court this week expressing that fear.

The Supreme Court should acknowledge the ex-governors' statesmanship, back off the threat of contempt and give lawmakers time to refocus negotiations on improving outcomes in education.

Editorial board members are editorial page editor Kate Riley, Frank A. Blethen, Ryan Blethen, Sharon Pian Chan, Jonathan Martin, Erik Smith, Thanh Tan, William K. Blethen (emeritus) and Robert C. Blethen (emeritus).



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