

Q&A: About the McCleary ruling

POSTED ON AUGUST 31, 2014

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The Seattle Times

Q: Who are Stephanie and Matthew McCleary?

A: The McClearys had two children in public school in a small rural school district near Port Townsend when the lawsuit was filed in 2007. One child has since graduated; the other is in high school

Q: What's happened in the case so far?

A: The McClearys, along with 30 school districts, 30 local teachers unions and a host of others, won their case in trial court and then, in 2012, in the Washington Supreme Court. The Supreme Court ordered the state to raise education spending enough to fulfill the Washington state Legislature's own definition of what it would take to provide a basic education to all Washington children, which is what the state constitution requires. The court set a 2018 deadline, which also matched what the Legislature had promised.

The Legislature has raised education spending since then, but not enough to satisfy the court.

Q: What is this hearing about?

A: In January, the Supreme Court warned the Legislature that it wasn't making enough progress toward the 2018 deadline, and ordered the Legislature to submit a complete plan by April for how it was going to get there. The Legislature did not write the plan, and the Court is now considering holding the lawmakers in contempt.

Q: What's at stake?

A: The hearing is the latest episode in a showdown between the Supreme Court and the Legislature. Some lawmakers believe the court is overstepping its bounds by trying to usurp the Legislature's duty for deciding how to raise and spend the state's money.

The case is an unusual one because the court, beyond issuing its ruling, has maintained jurisdiction over the case, monitoring the Legislature's compliance. There are no similar cases to provide clues about what the court might do.

Q: What will happen next?

A: After the hearing, the justices will decide whether to impose sanctions on the Legislature for failing to write a full education-funding plan earlier this year, give the Legislature more time to fulfill the court's order, or perhaps some combination of the two. If the justices issue sanctions, the state says it may be the first time that any Supreme Court in any state has sanctioned a state legislature for inaction.

— *The Seattle Times*



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