

# Lawmakers look at picking up more of teachers' salaries



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Seattle Crosscut  
June 10, 2015



***Bruce Dammeier***

A new bill to overhaul how much the state government pays for basic education goes to a public hearing Thursday.

[The bill](#) by Sen. Bruce Dammeier, R-Puyallup, will go to the Senate Ways & Means Committee in Olympia at 1:30 p.m. Thursday. The cosponsors are Sens. Christine Rolfes, D-Bainbridge Island, James Hargrove, D-Hoquiam, and Ann Rivers, R-La Center. All have leadership positions in their caucuses.

Dammeier, Hargrove and Rolfes unveiled competing education funding plans in mid-April. So, this bill is a compromise piece of legislation.

Its purpose is to revamp how the state provides money for basic education under a 2012 Washington Supreme Court decision — the so-called “McCleary” ruling — that called for a drastic improvement in teacher-student ratios in Grades K-3. The ruling also called for the Legislature to revamp how education funding is handled and ensure that an overhaul’s effects are permanent and provide equity of funding for students statewide.

The Legislature has been slow in complying with the McCleary ruling. The Supreme Court has threatened yet-to-be-determined sanctions against the Legislature if it does not have a solid fix-it plan in place by the end of this month.

The bill has a major hurdle within it. It only goes into effect if an adequate funding source or sources begin to provide revenue for the new system by Jan. 1, 2018. That could be a major pitfall as Democrats have been pushing for new tax revenues to fund the McCleary work, while Republicans counter that the money can be found among the state's existing funds.

In broad strokes, Dammeier's bill would create a special committee to set the new state-funded basic education salary structure for teachers and educational staff members beginning with the 2018-2019 fiscal year. The state's share would cover all "basic education" aspects of the jobs. Then individual school districts would be able to collectively bargain with their unions on any pay for work beyond the basic education needs.

Calculating teachers' salaries involves complicated formulas addressing qualifications, experience and different costs-of-living in different parts of Washington. In simplified terms, the state currently pays an average of \$53,252 per teacher, while local districts pay an average of \$12,787 per teacher on top of the state's share. So, the mythical "average" teacher earns \$66,039 a year.

The special committee created by Dammeier's bill would determine how much above the \$53,252 figure an average teacher should receive from state funding to meet the Supreme Court's requirements.

The legislation calls for the state's funding of salaries to be based on market analyses of teachers' pay. It is predicted that possibly \$3.5 billion in local school districts' salary obligations would be gradually shifted to the state over four years beginning in 2018-2019.

"The Supreme Court called our attention to the big inequities in our school financing system," Dammeier said in a news release. "But to me this isn't about complying with a court order. It is about ensuring an equal education for all our children in every school district of Washington. The local variations in salary will become an even greater problem in the near future, when you consider we will be hiring 7,000 teachers to reduce class sizes in grades K-3."

In the same news release, Rolfes said, "We're laying our ideas on the table with full knowledge that this is a starting point for constructive discussions. ... Identifying new revenue to support this \$3.5 billion constitutional obligation remains the biggest outstanding challenge, and we now have a bipartisan commitment to meet this challenge.

Gov. Jay Inslee said Wednesday that he had not seen the bill yet, and had no comment on it.