

Washington

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Attorney general gives glowing report to court on education

BY DONNA GORDON BLANKINSHIP
Associated Press

SEATTLE — The Washington attorney general's office said Monday the state has made so much progress toward fully paying the cost of basic education that the state Supreme Court should dissolve its contempt order on education funding.

In a report turned in to the court, Senior Assistant Attorney General David Stolier lists all the ways the Legislature has fulfilled the high court's 2012 McCleary decision on the funding.

It says the state is on schedule to meet all the requirements of the court and no longer needs a contempt order hanging over its work. He says imposing sanctions would slow lawmakers' progress toward fixing the way the state pays for education.

"Any sanction would be counterproductive," Stolier wrote.

The documents were turned in with a report from the Legislature outlining its progress toward responding to the court's McCleary decision. That report outlines the \$4.8 billion added to the state education budget since the 2012 ruling and details work that remains and how lawmakers intend to do it.

The lawmakers represented by the attorney general's office and the plaintiffs in the McCleary case are not as enthusiastic about the Legislature's progress as the attorney general's report.

Lawmakers have acknowledged they have not finished their work, mostly because they have not come to an agreement on school compensation reform and ending the state overreliance on local levies to pay the state's education responsibilities.

Attorney Thomas Ahearne wrote for the plaintiffs that it's time for the court to either impose sanctions on the Legislature or acknowledge it wasn't serious about enforcing the rights of school children.

"The time has come for this court to make what some would call a 'fish or cut bait' decision," said Ahearne, who represents a coalition of teachers, parents and community groups that sued the state over education funding.

He said it would be cheaper and easier to continue to violate the constitutional rights of the 1 million school children in the state. But he asks the Supreme Court to instead choose to be a separate and independent branch of state government.

Superintendent of Public Instruction Randy Dorn also sent a brief to the state Supreme Court on Monday, calling on the court to take firm action on behalf of school children.

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