

# In Our View: Days of Reckoning

## As schools prepare to start, Legislature is forced to fiddle

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We can all debate the messy fight going on between the state Supreme Court and the Legislature over school funding, but two things are for certain: Students, get ready, the first day of school is coming. And legislators, get ready, your work isn't done.



Gov. Jay Inslee says he will meet with legislative leaders today to discuss the next steps in the state's quest to fully fund basic education. Citing the state Constitution, justices once again have ordered the Legislature to do its "paramount duty," and on Thursday held the state in contempt of court until it happens. There's a \$100,000 per day fine, which seems like a lot, but is a token amount to a state that will spend nearly \$38 billion in the next two years.

While Inslee and legislators squirm, parents are buying school supplies. At Burnt Bridge Creek Elementary School, kindergartners are asked to bring nine items, including a four-pack of low odor dry erase markers, two bottles of white glue, a box of tissues and resealable plastic bags.

With much more change to come in the way public education is financed and delivered, full-day kindergarten is one of the first big improvements. This year, nearly 72 percent of all kindergartners statewide are in programs eligible for full-day kindergarten funding. By 2016-17, 100 percent will be.

The additional money allows schools to offer 1,000 hours of kindergarten to children, compared with 450 hours in a half-day program. By the end of the year, successful kindergartners will be able not only to know the alphabet, but to write stories with a beginning, middle and end. They'll acquire the same fundamental math skills that a first-grader used to demonstrate by Presidents Day. And, perhaps most importantly, they'll have the stamina and attention span required to succeed in the first grade and beyond.

Local schools have been offering full-day programs for several years. Evergreen Public Schools was a leader, using local school levy money to implement free all-day kindergarten in all schools five years ago. Vancouver began implementing all-day, tuition-free kindergarten in its 21 elementary schools in the fall of 2013. Some other public schools offered the program on a paid basis.

Though educators see the value in the full-day programs, it's been hard to set them up, even when state funding is available. Locally, Battle Ground has struggled the most. It ended up being only one of six statewide to turn down full-day kindergarten funding for this school year.

Battle Ground's major problem is lack of classroom space. Despite a recent construction campaign, booming growth has left the district with few empty classrooms. Space was found at Maple Grove Elementary School for 51 full-day kindergartners this year, according to the state. But almost 700 more children in six other buildings will have to stick to the traditional half-day schedule for now.

It seems certain that legislators must find a great deal of money to solve Battle Ground's facilities problem and others like it. The problem is exacerbated by voter-approved Initiative 1351, which would reduce class sizes. Legislators earlier this year postponed its implementation, using the same stall tactics that they tried with basic education funding. It's a big ol' mess that needs to be cleaned up.

Which reminds us: Parents, don't forget to pick up a package or two of wipes while you are out buying those school supplies. Like funding of public education, kindergarten tends to be messy.