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Inslee presses lawmakers on ed funding plan in light of new sanctions

By [Jerry Cornfield](#)

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SEATAC — Gov. Jay Inslee on Monday called on legislative leaders to begin working vigorously on a school funding plan that will end [a \\$100,000-a-day fine imposed by the state Supreme Court](#).

He said hopes lawmakers can “tee up a solution” to pass quickly in a special session but made clear he won’t bring them back unless there is something to be voted on.

“There’s some hard work to be done and we should expect the lawmakers to put in that hard work,” Inslee said. “It is my hope lawmakers can fashion a plan that can pass in both chambers.”

Inslee’s comments to reporters came after he met for an hour with Democratic and Republican leaders of the House and Senate and Attorney General Bob Ferguson. The meeting took place at SeaTac City Hall.

The purpose of the gathering was to begin diagramming a response to the sanctions imposed by the court Aug. 13.

Justices imposed the fine because lawmakers had failed to submit a plan on how the state would meet its obligations to amply funding public schools by the 2018 deadline in the court’s McCleary decision.

That ruling, issued in 2012, found lawmakers were failing to carry out the state’s paramount and constitutional duty to cover the cost of a basic education for 1 million elementary and secondary schools.

The Legislature has pumped money into public schools in each of the last two budgets. But the court noted there is still no plan that will reduce local school districts reliance on property tax levies to pay for such things as teacher salaries — which will cost as much \$3.5 billion per budget cycle.

The court ordered the Legislature to re-balance the system by the 2017-18 school year and committed to monitoring lawmakers’ progress. As part of the monitoring, in January 2014, justices demanded lawmakers show them a plan and last September found the state in contempt when nothing had been turned in.

They gave lawmakers until the 2015 session to complete the task and when they didn’t they levied the fine. Justices want the money put in a separate account and spent on education.

Inslee said Monday the court may only be seeking a plan on what will be paid for and when and not

how. That would allow lawmakers to avoid debating how to raise that \$3.5 billion.

In his view, the court is “asking for a plan for a solution not total implementation by yesterday.”

House Minority Leader Dan Kristiansen, R- Snohomish, said he got the impression in the meeting that legislative leaders are not about to be pressured into moving too swiftly.

“I’m more concerned about doing this right rather than doing it expeditiously,” he said.

Lawmakers will be in Olympia on Nov. 19 and 20 for their annual committee days. If there’s something to vote on, that might be the time to do it, he said.

“All of us in the room believe we are making good headway in the education funding issue,” he said. “We know what needs to be done. It’s not the calendar. It’s not the court. It’s which route do we follow to try to solve the problem.”

If Inslee calls a special session, lawmakers will have up to 30 days to act.

If nothing happens until the next scheduled legislative session starts Jan. 11, the state would rack up roughly \$15 million in fines. That’s a fraction of the roughly \$9.1 billion the state will spend on public schools in each of the next two fiscal years.

Meanwhile, there are questions about how to deal with the fine.

Kristiansen said attorneys for the four caucuses, the governor’s office and the attorney general’s office met together Monday morning to wrestle with that process.

It’s generally believed lawmakers will need to take action to appropriate the money to pay the fine and to direct it to be spent on schools required by the court.

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