

**Op-Ed** AUGUST 28, 2015

# Let's get back to work on bipartisan school-funding plan



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School is about to start after a long, hot summer. My two daughters are ready to begin junior high and high school.

What isn't ready? A plan to fund our public schools.

Six years ago, lawmakers recognized how badly broken education funding was in this state, so they passed two important reform measures to fix a highly flawed system.

A few years later, the state Supreme Court handed down a landmark decision in the McCleary case, declaring the state isn't meeting its paramount duty under the constitution: fully funding our public schools.

It's true we found more funding for schools during this year's endless session. The court isn't satisfied with a half-done job. So it's fining the Legislature \$100,000 a day until lawmakers comply with its order to pass a plan to fund public schools.

House Republicans, Senate Democrats, House Democrats and Gov. Jay Inslee have agreed to work together to find a solution – because every one of our kids deserves a good education and a shot at the American Dream.

Members of the Senate majority have taken a different approach, focusing their concerns on the power of the courts instead of the well-being of our kids. They signed a letter claiming the Supreme Court's latest decision is tantamount to "hijacking" the constitution.

Some of these senators have previously told the Supreme Court to "pound sand," and talked about impeaching justices, reducing the size of the court or eliminating court funding altogether.

It's a waste of time and energy to pick political fights with the state Supreme Court; the real fight is in finding creative, bipartisan solutions for our kids.

I want to thank the seven Senate Republicans who didn't sign that letter, including my seatmate in the 28th District, Sen. Steve O'Ban. There are lawmakers from both parties and both chambers who've worked hard to talk about serious solutions for our education crisis.

Sen. Bruce Dammeier of Puyallup worked with fellow Republicans and Democrats on an ambitious plan to tackle levy reform. A major reason our schools are unfairly funded is because rich zip codes can afford higher local property taxes to help fund teacher salaries. I may disagree with the exact solution in that Senate bill, but at least Dammeier and his colleagues dared to try something big to solve a big problem.

It's easy to stand back and take potshots at the court or at the other party. I think our citizens want more than that. They want strong, bipartisan solutions.

That takes courage.

The challenge is clear: The drafters of the Washington Constitution crafted a unique and powerful obligation. We are the only state in the nation establishing a "paramount duty" to provide each and every child a public education and a guarantee that we will "amply" fund schools.

The families who brought this lawsuit sought justice for their children. And the Supreme Court has spoken. Back in September 2014, it found lawmakers in contempt of court. Now it's issuing the \$100,000 per day fine.

Back in June, we actually had a plan that would have satisfied the court's legitimate concerns. The justices want more than vague promises about fixing our education problem. They want an actual plan with dates and deadlines.

The House passed legislation, HB 2239, which did exactly that.

What happened to that blueprint? It never made it out of the Senate gate. Instead, it sat and sat in the Senate education committee and went nowhere.

What a massive missed opportunity. If the Senate had passed the plan – or worked with lawmakers in the House on a compromise – the state wouldn't be getting fined.

If we're going to finish the job of fully funding our public schools, we must end political food fights and start working together. It won't be easy. Brave and collaborative decision making never is.

Our kids and teachers are headed back to the classroom and ready to get to work. I hope our citizen lawmakers, from both parties and both chambers, can agree to get back to the table to find bold, creative solutions for our public schools.

One million students are counting on us to get this right.

*State Rep. Christine Kilduff, D-University Place, is vice-chair of the House Judiciary Committee and serves on the House Education Committee. She was a two-time president of the University Place School Board.*



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