

State fines over education funding reach \$5.2 million; money not paid



Students in class

By [Linzi Sheldon](#)

Kiro 7

October 5, 2015

OLYMPIA, Wash. —

Washington lawmakers continue to rack up \$100,000 a day in fines that were assessed against them by the Washington Supreme Court.

The court, which is already holding the Legislature in contempt, said the fines will continue until lawmakers can work together to reach a plan to fully fund education.

The total is now at \$5.2 million, which lawmakers said will likely come from state reserves.

But the fines, which the court specifically designated for education, are not even being collected or distributed to schools.

The state's Office of Financial Management is keeping track of the fines. But even this money depends on lawmakers acting: They have to draft legislation directing where the money will come from and what in education it will fund.

In other words, even though the court imposed the fines, the legislature holds the purse strings and no money has been paid out.

"It could be done in a supplemental budget of January 2016, or it could be in the next biennial budget of 2017," House Majority Leader Pat Sullivan said.

Sullivan, his fellow lawmakers across the aisle, and Governor Jay Inslee all point out that the fines aren't much when it comes to the amount needed for full funding of basic education.

But the current total is, for example, enough to pay for more than four years' worth of books in Kent, nearly a year and a half's worth of transportation operations in Shoreline, or the entire annual budget of Thurgood Marshall Elementary in Seattle, with plenty left over.

"If we delay until the end of the regular session, that's \$21 million in fines," Rep. Chad Magendanz, the ranking Republican on the House Education Committee, said.

Magendanz points out that overall, state funding to schools has increased.

The battle is about the source, trying to shift basic funding from local levies to the state.

"We really want to make sure that the most important appropriation is the \$1.7 billion," he said. "Whether or not we do the \$100,000 a day thing is really secondary."

Sullivan doesn't believe a solution will come from the McCleary workgroup before next year.

Magendanz thinks it could take even longer.

But last month, Inslee urged action, saying those much-publicized fines "cost us in our standing with Washingtonians who expect we will support public education and live by the rule of law."

So now, it all rests with lawmakers.

Until they act on a plan to fully fund basic education, the total amount of fines will continue to rise, and until they act on a plan for those fines, no one will collect or distribute that money, either.