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## Dorn frustrated with lack on progress on education

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Herald Columnist

Minutes before Gov. Jay Inslee gave his [State of the State address](#) Tuesday, the leader of Washington's public school system delivered a message of his own.

Superintendent of Public Instruction Randy Dorn joined the procession of state elected officials to seats in the front of the chamber of the House of Representatives.

Moments later, Dorn stood up, placed a note on his chair that read "Reserved for kids and students" and walked out.

The silent public protest was Dorn's way of expressing his frustration with the governor and lawmakers for being nothing shy of derelict in their constitutional duty to amply fund Washington's education system.

"I'm disappointed that our elected officials aren't taking this whole solution thing seriously," he said. Students "should have a seat to hear what's going on,"

The state Supreme Court ruled in 2012 in the McCleary case that the means by which Washington pays for its public schools is unconstitutional.

Justices said the state needed to step up and cover the full cost of a basic education of elementary and secondary students, including the salaries of teachers. They also said the state needed to end school districts' overreliance on local levies to operate.

Justices set a 2018 deadline to comply and later demanded lawmakers turn in a plan for how they intended to get it all done. They haven't turned one in, inciting the court to find lawmakers in contempt and [impose a \\$100,000-a-day fine](#) until a plan is delivered.

A bipartisan group of lawmakers has [crafted a bill](#) aimed at satisfying the court's demand and positioning the Legislature to act in 2017 on the sticky — and expensive — issue of replacing local tax levies with state tax dollars.

It's the last big piece of the McCleary puzzle. But such a swap will cost billions of dollars every budget cycle and lawmakers are divided on how best to raise that money.

"They don't know how to pay for it. They will do a Michael Jackson moon walk to get away from that," Dorn said. "There's nothing I've seen so far that is going to get them out of contempt and meet

the court deadline.”

Inslee, who convened that [McCleary work group](#), is endorsing the legislation. He expressed confidence in his address Tuesday that lawmakers will follow through in 2017.

“We are on track,” Inslee said. “We’re not going to just fix a few potholes — we’re going to finish the job. That means actually financing these critical investments so our kids and grandkids get the education they deserve.”

But Dorn is concerned Inslee’s [push to give teachers a pay hike this year](#) will boost the state’s costs, making it more difficult next year to reach agreement.

“What I’ve seen so far is the governor put out a budget that makes districts more dependent on levies which is what the Supreme Court said you should not do,” he said. “It makes the problem bigger.”

Dorn is not seeking re-election but he’s so frustrated he’s contemplating an independent run for governor. Not, he insists, because it’s the political seat he’s long coveted.

Rather, he said, a campaign would provide a vehicle to present voters with a detailed approach to paying for public schools. And it might force Inslee and his Republican opponent, Bill Bryant, to respond with something more than nice rhetoric, he said.

“I’d prefer the governor be a leader and lead,” Dorn said. “But I think I’m in a unique position to help the state do right by kids. If I don’t do this, I don’t think anything is going to change. In fact it might get much worse.”

If Dorn is governor, he’d not only have to show up at next year’s State of the State address, he’d be the one delivering it.

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