In the past four years, state legislators have added funding for all-day kindergarten, increased funding for school transportation and classroom supplies, and lowered class sizes in early grades — all to the tune of $4.8 billion.
It’s the largest investment in education by the Legislature since the 1970s, said state Rep. Norma Smith, R-Clinton.

“Over these last three decades, that commitment had eroded,” Smith said. “We have to say ‘no more.’ We have to do what’s right.”

Still, there is more to do.

The state continues to grapple with the 2012 McCleary decision, in which the state Supreme Court ruled the state was not living up to its constitutional obligation to fully fund basic education.

How much more needs to be done for the state to meet the 2018 deadline set by the Supreme Court is open to interpretation.
State readies for next step toward fully funding basic education | News | goskagit.com

A group of school districts, unions and families sue the state, saying it is not fulfilling its constitutional obligation to fully fund education.

**The McCleary family** becomes the name and face of the lawsuit that argues that forcing the districts to rely on levy dollars for funding is inequitable.

**January 2007**

**February 2010**

King County Superior Court Judge John Erlick rules in favor of the plaintiffs, saying "State funding is not ample, it is not stable, and it is not dependable."

**September 2013**

The state increases funding for basic education by $955 million, including about $50 million for all-day kindergarten. Schools with the highest poverty levels receive funding first.

**January 2012**

The state Supreme Court upholds the King County ruling and orders the state to pump at least $8 billion more into the education system by 2018.

**January 2014**

The court gives the state until **April 2014** to come up with a plan to fully fund education.

**November 2014**

Voters approved Initiative 1351, aimed at lowering class sizes in grades K-12. The estimated price-tag adds about $4.7 billion over the next four years to the state's education budget — in addition to the funding outlined in the McCleary decision. However, the initiative provides no funding.

**Early 2015**

Legislative session makes progress, including increasing state-provided funds for transportation and supplies, but puts on hold any decisions regarding Initiative 1351, citing the need to focus on McCleary. Legislators also mandate a **3 percent salary increase** for teachers, but does not provide funding to districts to pay for the increase.

**August 2015**

As a result of its 2014 contempt finding, the state Supreme Court orders fines of **$100,000 a day** against the state until the Legislature comes up with a funding plan. Those fines, which are still accruing, are ordered to be used solely for education funding.

**Early 2016**

State Superintendent of Public Instruction Randy Dorn asks the legislature to appropriate **$173 million** into education funding. The Legislature doesn't appropriate any funds, but it does make some headway on teacher recruitment and retention.

**Early 2016**

Gov. Jay Inslee assigns a bipartisan education task force to tackle teacher salaries by collecting data on how much a teacher should make and what kind of training is needed.
While some in Olympia claim about $3.5 billion more is needed, state Superintendent Randy Dorn says the number is higher than that. In this legislative session alone, Dorn called for an additional $173 million in funding.

While the Legislature didn’t give Dorn what he wanted, nor did it approve additional funds toward living up to McCleary, it did begin to address the issues of teacher recruitment and retention in the face of a statewide teacher shortage.

It also created a task force that will address the remaining funding issue — teacher compensation.

“Here’s the missing piece of information if we are going to assume our duty as a state to fully fund education,” Smith said.

The bipartisan Education Funding Task Force is made up of four state senators, four state representatives and a member of Gov. Jay Inslee’s staff. Two of the members represent Skagit County: Smith and Rep. Kristine Lytton, D-Anacortes.

“This is going to be the big step,” Lytton said. “In terms of McCleary, we’ve done everything, except the compensation piece.”

For school districts, where the majority of each annual budget goes toward paying employees, settling the compensation issue is no small task.

And what it’s going to cost the state to assume its responsibility under McCleary for paying teachers isn’t known, Lytton said.

“What we’re seeing is a pretty wide range of guesstimates on what that dollar amount is,” she said.

Estimates have been between $1.5 billion and $5 billion, Lytton said.
“The price tag is missing,” Smith said. “If we are going to assume the responsibility for total compensation for basic education, we have to know that piece.”

The first step for the task force is to hire a consultant to collect and analyze data on how much districts are spending out of their own pockets to pay teachers.

As it is now, the state provides funding for teacher salaries based on a formula that doesn’t take into account individual districts’ staffing needs, agreements with teachers unions or education associations, or what districts decide they need to pay teachers in order to remain competitive.

“The bottom line is that each district in the state bargains with their teachers’ associations and other bargaining groups individually,” Mount Vernon School District Superintendent Carl Bruner said. “Given the state’s inability to provide adequate salaries over a number of years, those union groups have looked to school districts to make up the difference.”

About 75 percent of Mount Vernon’s annual budget goes toward employee compensation, Bruner said.

“That’s where (the Legislature) is stuck right now,” Bruner said. “That’s the last hill to climb. And it’s going to be a steep climb.”

In its 2015 session, the Legislature approved a 3 percent cost of living adjustment for teachers, but did not give the school districts the money to pay for those increases.

Instead, districts have had to rely on local levy dollars to pay for those increases and to continue to cover whatever the state isn’t providing.

That is the basis of the McCleary lawsuit.
“Levies were intended to be supplements to education,” Lytton, a former Anacortes School Board member, said. “Our job as the state is: ‘How do we set a system up that creates equity across our state, so that you get the same education regardless of your zip code?’”

The task force will determine how much of a teacher’s salary should be paid by the state, and how much by levy dollars, Smith said.

“The state knows how much total compensation is paid,” Smith said. “The state and the local districts can also tell you what total amount of compensation is paid out of local levies. However, the missing piece is how much of that compensation that is paid from the local levy is basic education compensation and how much of it is enhancements to education.”

When Smith talks about enhancements, she’s talking about programs such as music or art, athletics or technology.

Some, like Dorn, criticized the creation of the task force — and failure to approve more funding — as not being proactive enough to meet the 2018 deadline.

“The best thing that can be said about this budget is that it puts students on hold this year,” Dorn said in a news release.

Still, Smith and Lytton call the creation of the task force a necessary step.

“If (funding for teachers) is not (determined), we’ll be back in the same situation,” Smith said.

All parties remain dedicated to meeting the 2018 deadline, Lytton said.

“We take it serious,” Lytton said. “(Compensation) is just a big, monstrous piece.”

The next step for the Legislature will be finding the money to pay its share of teacher compensation so that it can make good on McCleary.
That also will not be easy to do.

“With 147 of us, there are 147 different ideas,” Lytton said. “The Legislature moves at a snail’s pace because we have 147 people to bring along.”

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