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## Public school improvements listed in report to court

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OLYMPIA – The Legislature made progress toward the court mandate to improve public schools, but it didn't set aside money for the fine the court imposed for past failures to meet that mandate, a special committee said Wednesday.

Whether that will be enough to stave off further punishment from the state Supreme Court or lift the \$100,000 a day penalty imposed last year remains to be seen.

In a report that will be submitted to the court next week, the Joint Select Committee on Article IX Litigation listed improvements to smaller class sizes and increases in all-day kindergarten, extra money for school supplies and bus rides. Article IX is the section in the Washington Constitution that makes adequate funding of public schools the state's paramount duty, and the court has ordered the Legislature to do more to meet that duty.

The 26-page document was likened by one committee member to a "book report" on the past session. It includes legislative promises to come up with a plan next year to make teacher pay more competitive, and to revise the property tax levy system so the state pays a greater share of school salaries.

Senate Democrats on the committee pushed to include a mention that the fine imposed last year by the court, which by now tops \$27 million, is not being set aside because some factions – by which they mean the predominantly Republican coalition that controls the chamber – wouldn't agree to that.

"The fact that we didn't address the fine in our budget was the weakest moment we had," Sen. Christine Rolfes, of Bainbridge Island, said.

Ignoring the fine may have "boxed the court in," said Sen. David Frockt, of Seattle, and left the Legislature in a weaker position if it has to appear before the court later this month.

The budget does leave more than \$700 million in its main reserve accounts, Sen. Joe Fain, R-Auburn, said. He wouldn't predict whether that would satisfy the court but said he was more concerned with solving the problems with public schools, which he believes the Legislature is doing, than predicting how the court will react to the report.