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AP

Superintendent: Time to consider closing public schools

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OLYMPIA, Wash. (AP) — Washington's Superintendent of Public Instruction says it may be time to consider shutting down the state's K-12 public schools until the Legislature makes progress toward fully paying for education.

Randy Dorn argued in a court brief filed Wednesday that the state Supreme Court needs to find a way to enforce its 2012 ruling that K-12 schools are unconstitutionally underfunded, The Seattle Times reported (<http://bit.ly/1rf8Pap>).

Dorn said the court could close the schools as a way to compel the state to comply with its ruling, known as the McCleary decision.

Dorn, who is not seeking re-election, also suggested the court stop some special state tax exemptions or divert non-school funds to spend on education as a way to put pressure on the Legislature and others. The court could also punish individual lawmakers, he argued.

"The remedial penalty imposed by the Court is completely ineffective," according to Dorn's brief. "To motivate the Legislature to seriously address the problem, the court must impose tougher sanctions."

The Legislature isn't doing enough despite the Supreme Court's contempt order against the state and the \$100,000 a day the court is billing the Legislature until it satisfies the justice's demands, he said.

The superintendent previously opposed closing schools as a remedy, the brief said. But citing the apparent success of the tactic of closing schools, once used in New Jersey, it said "closing the schools cannot be ruled out as a possible final remedy."

In August, the court began fining the state \$100,000 a day, which is to be allocated to a special education account. The bill for that fine totaled more than \$27 million in May, according to the state Office of Financial Management.

The court is expected to review the case again soon. It could lift the contempt order, impose more sanctions or take some other action.

Information from: The Seattle Times, <http://www.seattletimes.com>