

State schools chief Randy Dorn sues 7 school districts over ‘illegal’ use of levy money

Originally published July 19, 2016 at 11:09 am Updated July 19, 2016 at 12:17 pm



Randy Dorn, Washington state Superintendent of Public Instruction (Ellen M. Banner/The Seattle Times)

State Superintendent Randy Dorn filed a complaint Tuesday in King County Superior Court against Seattle Public Schools and six other districts.

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State Superintendent Randy Dorn has [filed a lawsuit](#) in King County Superior Court against seven school districts, alleging that they illegally rely on local levies to fund basic education, including teacher salaries.

The seven school districts, which the lawsuit says are named as examples, are Seattle, Everett, Bellevue, Spokane, Tacoma, Evergreen and Puyallup. The suit also lists the state of Washington as a defendant.

Dorn said last week that he doesn't fault the school districts but believes they don't have the authority to use levy dollars to pay for basic needs.

“This is not a step I want to take,” Dorn said Tuesday.

Under the 2012 Supreme Court ruling known as the McCleary decision, the [state must fully fund basic education](#) by 2018. Because the local school districts are not named as defendants in McCleary, they are able to rely on levies to pay for supplemental teacher salaries and other costs, the complaint states.

Seattle is reviewing the complaint and will work to coordinate with other districts named in the suit, district Superintendent Larry Nyland said in a statement.

“Our district negotiates fair, competitive wages to attract and retain quality educational professionals,” Nyland said. “We will continue to locally support and promote student achievement while we wait for the Legislature to fully fund education and fulfill their duty.”

Tacoma School Board President and Superintendent Carla Santorno said in a joint statement that they understand the goal behind the lawsuit, but disagree with the approach.

The districts “have been left with no other choice” than to use the levy dollars, they said.

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