

Bipartisan task force stalled, unlikely to recommend fixes soon for McCleary school-funding case

Originally published January 4, 2017 at 1:30 pm Updated January 4, 2017 at 8:00 pm



1 of 2

Local Washington Education Association members at the state Supreme Court after a McCleary case hearing in September. The state highest court has ruled that Washington is violating its constitution by failing to... (Erika Schultz/The Seattle Times) More

A state task force charged with figuring out how the state can meet the requirements of the McCleary school-funding case isn't likely to submit a list of recommendations before the Legislature convenes in Olympia next week.

By [Neal Morton](#)

Seattle Times staff reporter

A state task force charged with figuring out how the state can meet the requirements of the landmark McCleary school-funding case isn't likely to submit any recommendations to the Legislature before lawmakers convene next week.

For the past seven months, the Education Funding Task Force has attempted to reach agreement on [how lawmakers should satisfy a state Supreme Court order](#) to fully fund a basic education for the state's schoolchildren.

Democrats on the task force want to start by spending \$1.6 billion during the next two years to provide competitive wages for teachers and other school workers.

Related:

- [Education should be No. 1 priority for Legislature, state poll says](#)
- [McCleary fix? Gov. Inslee proposes billions in new taxes to pay teachers](#)

[Their proposal](#), released just as the task force was to meet Wednesday, also calls for reducing class sizes, increasing beginning salaries for new teachers and providing relief for districts that rely on local property taxes to recruit and retain educators.

Republicans, meanwhile, shared no specific details of their recommendations during Wednesday's hearing and anticipated releasing their plan by February.

"We don't want to be appearing to make a promises that we can't keep," said Sen. Ann Rivers, R-La Center, who co-chairs the task force.

She said the four Republicans on the task force want to work with their party members in the full Legislature before presenting a McCleary fix.

Rivers also noted legislative staff needed time to research how different proposals would impact urban versus rural school districts.

"We need to measure twice and cut once," Rivers said.

However, Republicans did provide a list of "guiding principals" that hint at [their priorities for an eventual solution to McCleary](#).

Republicans and Democrats appear ready to support a boost in salaries for teachers and other school staff based on local market adjustments.

They want to expand recruitment and retention programs for educators while allowing districts to use property taxes to pay for arts, athletics and other locally popular programs.

Unlike Democrats, Republicans want to change the rules of collective bargaining and perhaps create a statewide system of health benefits, so those would not be negotiated district by district.

"We're still defining the box as Republicans, and I believe we will come to consensus on that here soon," said Rep. Paul Harris, R-Vancouver.

“And I don’t know if (the numbers) will be that much different than the Democrats,” he added.

The entire Democratic proposal would cost [nearly \\$7.3 billion to fully implement through 2021](#). It lists changes to the state property tax, a capital-gains tax and carbon pricing as potential revenue sources.

After the task force’s negotiations stalled, Democrats doubted whether it would meet its Monday deadline for final recommendations.

“This is a major bump in the road for the task force not to have a comprehensive plan, but we’re going to continue moving forward,” said Rep. Kristine Lytton, D-Anacortes.

In the 2012 McCleary decision, the Supreme Court ruled that Washington is violating its constitution by failing to cover the full cost of a basic public education.

Lawmakers have since added billions of additional dollars to the K-12 system but haven’t gone far enough for the Supreme Court, which in 2015 found the state in contempt of its original ruling and ordered fines of \$100,000 a day.

The justices also have ruled the state must enact a full education plan by 2018.

Inslee last month [unveiled his own plan to comply with McCleary](#) in the 2017-19 state operating budget.

Funded by more than \$4 billion in proposed new taxes, the governor’s budget includes about [\\$2.75 billion to cover teacher and other educator salaries](#).

That’s about \$1.1 billion more than the task-force Democrats proposed over the next biennium.

The task force is scheduled to meet one last time Monday for a potential vote on final recommendations.

Neal Morton: nmorton@seattletimes.com or 206-464-3145. On Twitter [@nealmorton](#)