

Yes, Legislature fulfilled court order on schools

[The plan isn't perfect, but lawmakers did what the Supreme Court demanded.](#)

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While the state Legislature did not necessarily get an A-plus for its effort to fully fund basic education as mandated by the state Supreme Court, it nevertheless got the job done.

As a result, Attorney General Bob Ferguson properly filed papers in court asking the high court to drop its contempt order against the state.

“It is time for this case to end,” Ferguson wrote.

Indeed. The Legislature, in a bipartisan agreement, approved a plan to increase spending on K-12 public schools by \$7.3 billion over the next four years.

The Republican-controlled Senate and Democrat-controlled House OK'd increasing the statewide property tax by 82 cents next year. However, local property tax levies will be capped in 2019.

Some places will see taxes go up but others, rural areas such as the Walla Walla Valley, will see overall taxes go down.

In the Walla Walla School District, the current local levy rate of \$3.51 will be reduced by just over \$2. The net decrease for taxpayers in 2019 would then be \$1.19 per \$1,000 or \$208 per year on a home valued at \$175,000.

Tom Ahearne, the attorney for the plaintiffs in the McCleary lawsuit against the state, told The Associated Press that reducing the amount collected by the local levy system and handing it back through the statewide property tax is not the way to amply fund the schools.

“They're reshuffling deck chairs,” he said.

Really, how then is the state adding another \$7.3 billion in education funding over the next four years if it's just reshuffling?

The owners of the \$1 million-plus homes that are prevalent in the Puget Sound region hardly see this as reshuffling. Those folks are paying more in taxes.

The higher taxes statewide has been done equally. The rate per \$1,000 of the assessed value of property is the same in Seattle and Bellingham as it is in Walla Walla and Dayton.

Currently, the statewide tax is too low to fully fund basic education, which is why Walla Walla and nearly every other district in the state had a local levy that filled the hole.

But since the Supreme Court said using a local levy to fund basic programs is not appropriate, the Legislature wisely capped the amount districts could seek from their taxpayers. The money raised from local levies is supposed to cover music, athletics and other similar programs.

“The 2017 legislation will not end debate over educational policy. Nor does it ‘complete’ ongoing adjustments to improve the system — indeed it specifically contemplates and provides for ongoing review to allow policy adjustments and ensure continuing funding adequacy,” the attorney general wrote. “But the 2017 Legislature has done what the Court required in its 2012 decision: it has acted to complete the implementation of full state funding for the state program of basic education, eliminating unconstitutional reliance on local levies to fund basic education.”

The high court ordered the state to equally and fully fund basic education. That has been done.

Editorials are the opinion of the Union-Bulletin's Editorial Board. The board is composed of Brian Hunt, Rick Eskil, James Blethen and Alasdair Stewart