

NEWS

Senate's school funding forum is this Thursday in Bremerton

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Members of the Senate Early Learning and K-12 Education Committee will host a two-hour forum at the Bremerton High School Performing Arts Center this week to hear from parents, students, teachers and taxpayers about public school funding.

The meeting is part of the Washington State Senate's seven-city K-12 "listening tour," which kicked off in Vancouver Sept. 30 and ends Oct. 27 in Yakima.

The Kitsap meeting will be held from 5 to 7 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 8, in the Bremerton High School Performing Arts Center (1500 13th St.).

The event is part of an ongoing effort to comply with the state Supreme Court's McCleary lawsuit.

Attending the meeting will be Sen. Christine Rolfes (Bainbridge Island), Sen. Bruce Dammeier (Puyallup), Sen. Ann Rivers (Vancouver) and Sen. James Hargrove (Hoquiam). The four lawmakers co-sponsored levy-reform legislation during the 2015 Legislative Session — Senate Bill 6130 — that addressed funding basic education without overly depending on local property tax levies.

Officials said the purpose of the listening tour is to communicate information about funding proposals under consideration in the Legislature and to hear what citizens are thinking.

"I really hope Bainbridge Islanders will attend the forum and share their thoughts about strategies to fully fund K-12 education," said Bainbridge School Superintendent Faith Chapel.

"The Bremerton High School Performing Arts Center holds about 1,200 people, and I think it would be a great opportunity to show legislators how important this issue is to Washington state citizens," she said.

The network for Excellence in Washington Schools filed the McCleary lawsuit in 2007 on behalf of Matthew and Stephanie McCleary and their families.

In its McCleary decision, the Washington Supreme Court ruled that the state isn't meeting its paramount duty under the state constitution because it is not fully funding K-12 education.

Because the state isn't providing enough money for basic education, school districts have increasingly relied on local levies. School officials note, however, that levies are not equitable or stable sources of funding.

The Supreme Court is now fining the state \$100,000 a day until it comes up with solid plans for complying with the McCleary decision.

The forum in Bremerton will start with a short presentation from the legislators, followed by comments from local public education representatives. The remaining time is slated for public input. Attendees are encouraged to prepare written statements to be submitted on the record should time not allow everyone an opportunity to weigh in.

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