

'Basic education' includes some college

Sound Perspectives

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Our state Legislature convened this month what many of us hope will be an epic session for public education in our state.



For the first time in seven years, Washington voters told pollster [Stuart Elway](#) that education, not the economy, is our state's most important public policy issue. Our elected leaders have an incredible opportunity AND responsibility to get it right.

For nearly four decades, Washington's policymakers have spent much time, money and intellectual capital trying to overhaul our state's education funding system — task forces, studies, work groups, legislative efforts — and yet we lack a plan for ample, equitable and stable funding.

In addition, our definition of "basic education" — what the state is supposed to pay for — doesn't go far enough to prepare our kids for college or career.

In 2012, the Washington Supreme Court found that the state was violating its constitutional obligation to amply fund basic education in *McCleary v. State of Washington*. Lawmakers were given a 2018 deadline to fix how we fund education in our state. The recent passage of Initiative 1351, to lower K-12 class sizes statewide, magnifies the intense pressure on the Legislature to determine a viable funding plan for public education.

The court found the Legislature in contempt of court last fall, giving it until the end of the 2015 legislative session to make significant progress on a funding plan.

This accelerated time frame provides a unique opportunity to reflect on what our kids really need from our public education system to succeed.

A student's education should be a continuum with seamless transitions. Our vision, *A Way Forward*, requires a new definition of basic education, which includes early learning, strategic investments in K–12 education and at least two years of postsecondary education.

While some may suggest that this definition is more than we can afford, I believe that we can't afford not to make this investment.

Too many kids, particularly low-income kids, arrive at kindergarten already behind. At the other end of the education spectrum, all data point to the need for a postsecondary degree or certificate in preparation for the jobs of today and tomorrow.

A high-quality public education system from early learning through higher education is critical to ensuring a strong home-grown workforce and state economy.

Washington state has the people, resources, and innovative spirit to create the best public education system in the world, but it's going to take tough decisions from each of us to make it a reality.

Chris Korsmo is CEO of the League of Education Voters, a statewide nonprofit organization working to improve public education from cradle to career.