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State funding for K-12 public schools ends today – symbolically, at least

A coalition of public school supporters is demanding the Washington Legislature fully fund a 180-day school year as required by law. Currently, the Legislature funds only two-thirds of a public K-12 education in Washington.

Washington -- Today is the "last day" of state funding for Washington's K-12 public schools. Symbolically, at least.¹

A coalition of public school supporters is demanding the Washington Legislature fully fund a 180-day school year as required by law. Currently, the Legislature funds only two-thirds of a public K-12 education in Washington.

"Although the Washington Constitution says K-12 schools are the state's No. 1 priority, the Legislature funds only two-thirds of a child's K-12 public education in our state," said Mary Lindquist, president of the Washington Education Association. "That's one of the reasons we have the fourth-most-overcrowded class sizes in the country."

While the amounts paid by local school districts vary, on average, up to one-third of school funding in Washington is funded almost entirely through local taxpayer-approved levies.

"What does 2/3 state funding get you?" asked Chris Korsmo, CEO of the League of Education Voters. "A 75 percent high school graduation rate. We must do better. We invite Washington's citizens to join us and urge lawmakers to step up and fully fund K-12 education. The time is now and the need is urgent."

While schools will continue to receive state funding through the end of the school year, it is not enough to cover basic operations or to ensure every student graduates with the skills needed to succeed in life.

A coalition of parents, teachers, voters, school boards, and school administrators joined forces to mark the last day of state funding. The coalition took out a full-page ad in today's Olympian newspaper to raise awareness about the state's 2/3 funding of basic education.

"The State Supreme Court was clear: the state cannot use local levies for basic education functions, such as busing students, providing full-day kindergarten to all students and heating and cooling school buildings," said Randy Dorn, Superintendent of Public Instruction.

¹ Calculations are based on the statewide funding average of approximately 66 percent. The coalition used September 4 as the first day of the required 180-day school year, which means that today, March 18, is the 119th school day. If Washington public schools relied solely on state funding for basic education, today would be the last day of school.

“Instead of closing the state’s funding gaps, local levies should be used flexibly for special and unique local educational needs and priorities,” added Paul Sturm, Superintendent of the Pullman Public Schools and President of the Washington Association of School Administrators.

“Schools across the state have done a remarkable job in the face of the Legislature’s persistent underfunding of education,” said Debbie Long, President of the Washington State School Directors’ Association. “Our students deserve more than a cut-rate education. Full funding of K-12 basic education is our first priority. Nothing else comes close.”

“For years, our volunteers have seen an overwhelming need to re-invest in and re-commit to our public schools,” said Washington State PTA president Novella Fraser. “These days our members are fund-raising for science materials, PE equipment, reading and math specialists – even professional development for staff. And the need keeps growing. “

In January 2012, the Washington Supreme Court ruled in *McCleary v. Washington* that the state was not meeting its constitutionally mandated duty to fully fund basic education. The Court stated that even if the state paid for 100 percent of what is currently spent on K-12 education, it would still fail to meet its paramount duty. The court ordered the Legislature to overhaul how education is funded in the state by 2018.

Following the latest education budget proposals from Governor Inslee and the House Republican Caucus, the Legislature will be focused on education funding in coming weeks.

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