

The Network for Excellence in Washington Schools (NEWS)



Who we are: NEWS is a coalition of more than 70 school districts, statewide organizations and community groups, education associations, parents and teachers who believe Washington kids deserve a first class K-12 education. (*Go to www.waschoolexcellence.org to see a list of all NEWS members.*)

What we do: Faced with a long-outdated State funding system that fails to fully fund even the basic elements of a high quality 21st century education, NEWS has been compelled to file a lawsuit asking the court to order the State of Washington to live up to its *paramount* constitutional duty to make *ample* provision for the education of *all* Washington children. The trial took place between August 31 and October 21, 2009, before Judge John Erlick in King County Superior Court in Seattle. A decision is expected in mid-January 2010.

Why we do it: No other state in the nation has a more strongly-worded constitutional mandate that puts public education *first* before everything else. For decades, legislators and governors have danced around the issue instead of solving it. They have formed countless task forces, attempted piecemeal projects, made band-aid patches and failed to fulfill many promises to fully fund K-12 education. The time has come for real change to ensure a stable and dependable State funding system for our public schools.

Why things have gotten worse: In 1993, the State passed the Education Reform Act, which created rigorous performance-based standards for the basic education that every child in Washington is to be provided. These standards establish the knowledge and skills that Washington students need to live and work in a 21st century democratic society. But while the State mandated these new high standards, the Legislature failed to restructure the State funding system to pay the increased cost of providing students with the education necessary to meet them.

The gap is huge between current State funding and what it really costs to provide all Washington children with the knowledge and skills mandated in our State learning standards. And this gap is widening in school districts across Washington. Local communities simply cannot raise enough money to fill this deficit – nor should they have to since the Constitution charges the State with the responsibility of amply funding education for all children. Until the State determines how much it actually costs to educate all Washington children and provides a stable source of funding, the unfortunate truth is that many children – especially poor and minority children – will be allowed to fail. NEWS believes that inequity isn't just wrong – it's unconstitutional.

What's at stake: Without the constitutionally required full State funding, many school districts in Washington are now being forced to take drastic actions that will significantly impact our kids and our future. For example, shortfalls in State funding are forcing school districts to:

- Scale back or eliminate arts, music, social studies and physical education programs... and even libraries
- Lay off teachers, further overcrowding classes and reducing time teachers can devote to individual students, and eliminate essential positions such as school nurses and librarians
- Close neighborhood schools, while many of those that remain open fall into disrepair
- Add or raise fees for elective classes, sports and extracurricular activities or eliminate them altogether, jeopardizing programs that help prevent at-risk kids from dropping out
- Most importantly, despite their best efforts, fail to ensure that our State's children gain the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in the 21st century.

What we want: NEWS has asked the court to (1) reaffirm that our State Constitution makes it the paramount duty of the state to amply fund basic education for all children; (2) declare that “basic education” is not whatever funding formula lawmakers may choose to adopt during each legislative session, but the knowledge and skills that students need to live and work in today's world and to participate meaningfully in our democracy; (3) rule that the State is not complying with this constitutional mandate, and; (4) order the State to realistically determine the actual dollar cost of meeting this constitutional standard and determine a stable and reliable State funding system to pay for it.

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