

The Network for Excellence in Washington Schools (NEWS)



Keeping our Promise to All Children.

Who we are: NEWS is a coalition of more than 360 school districts, statewide organizations, education associations and community groups who believe Washington kids deserve a first class K-12 education. (Go to www.waschooexcellence.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What we do: Faced with a long-outdated state funding system that fails to fully fund even the basic elements of a high quality 21st century education, NEWS filed a lawsuit in 2007 asking the courts 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 was held between August 31 and October 21, 2009, before Judge John Erlick in King County Superior Court in Seattle. Judge Erlick issued the court's final ruling in February 2010, holding that NEWS had proven its case on virtually every point and declaring that the State of Washington was in violation of its constitutional mandate. The court ordered the state to determine the actual costs of providing all children with the knowledge and skills set forth in state academic standards and to fully fund that actual cost with stable and dependable state sources.

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. Drastic budget cuts over the past two years have exacerbated state underfunding.

Today, 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 we want: The Washington State Supreme Court should affirm the lower court ruling and the Legislature should act to realistically determine the actual dollar cost of meeting its constitutional paramount duty and then to determine a stable and reliable state funding system to pay for it.

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