

Seattle Public Schools are spending \$18,000 per student, yet the union wants higher property taxes

By LIV FINNE | Apr 26, 2019

BLOG



For years, through politics, teacher strikes and court cases, we have heard that state lawmakers were underfunding schools. Then, with great fanfare, state leaders came together in 2017 and passed an historic bill that is providing schools the greatest funding

increase in Washington state history. This bill was the legislature's final resolution of the state supreme court's 2012 McCleary decision, and the latest in a series of six years of enhanced funding to schools. The courts approved the measure and ended the McCleary case.

This historic bill made two important changes in school funding. First, it raised the state property tax, greatly increasing state funding for all schools. Second, it increased fairness and reduced inequity between property-rich districts and property-poor ones by reducing local dependence on levies to fund schools.

Lawmakers and the state supreme court rightly thought it was not fair that a child in Seattle received thousands of dollars more for her education than a child in Kettle Falls.

As a result, funding in Seattle Public Schools jumped from \$12,000 per student a few years ago to \$18,000 per student in 2018-19, more than most private schools. Total spending went from \$591 million in 2012 to \$955 million today, an increase of 62 percent.

Seattle's taxpayers saw an average 17 percent increase in their property taxes to provide this added money.

Yet now Kim Mead, WEA union president, says the district should get even more money. She is pressing lawmakers to raise property taxes again, this time at the local level. She wants lawmakers to break the promises they made to taxpayers and to undermine the constitutional requirement that the state provide ample and equitable funding for the education of every child.

The state supreme court ruled that past school funding was unfair because rich districts got thousands of dollars more to educate their students than poor ones. Lawmakers fixed the problem by making sure every student got fair and equal funding at the statewide level.

Not surprisingly, some rich school districts, like Seattle, want to get more money for themselves and leave poor communities behind. They are pushing SB 5313, to allow higher local taxes to be imposed on top of the state property tax that was just enacted.

It's little wonder the unions are so interested — there is big money to be made. Unions in rich districts support the bill, and the local union backs it too, knowing it will lead to higher property taxes on families living in Seattle.

Seattle Public Schools, like all districts across the state, now has ample money to provide every student a top-notch education, without increasing property taxes for the second

time in two years. Responsible school boards across the state are providing great programs for kids using record-high state funding and well-managed budgets.

Sure, some school officials, and of course unions, always want more money. But they should consider how the burden of higher property taxes falls hardest on the elderly living on fixed incomes, young couples seeking to buy their first homes, and working families living from paycheck to paycheck.

Lawmakers should resist the union and those school districts that have made bad budget decisions. They should uphold the principle of uniformity and equity in school funding. Promises made to taxpayers should be kept. Lawmakers and the Governor should stick with the school-funding plan they passed; a fair limit on the burden of local taxes, a big increase in the state property tax, and equitable funding for all children living in Washington.