



April 24, 2017

Members of the Washington State Legislature:

In recent days, you have received various recommendations from state-level and regional education groups, including a letter signed by our ESD 189 superintendents about how to address the needs of the state's education system. I am writing directly to you as a follow up to that communication to offer you a fuller sense of the needs I perceive to be present in our community in Bellingham. In the bullets that follow, I outline some key points that I believe need to be addressed as you work toward decisions that wholly resolve the mandate of the McCleary case. Included are the following needs:

- We need a clear path to sustainable revenue sources that amply provide state resources for the educational needs of the children and young people in our schools– the paramount duty of the state.
- We need to make measurable progress toward professional salaries and benefits for educators that are comparable with other professions that require similar expertise, education and training. This includes continuing salary increments for advanced degrees and years of experience. It includes accounting for regular cost of living adjustments. It also includes substantially raising the starting salary of beginning teachers. A shortage in teachers is not just an imagined possibility; we are facing these issues now in Bellingham in 2017. We need this change in salary levels to happen now so that we can attract the educators we need.
- We need to provide full funding for a comprehensive basic education program that meets the needs of all students and includes manageable class sizes and workloads for our staff members. We need this to happen now to help ensure that we can attract a teacher workforce in our district that will do the work of meeting the needs of all students. The impending teacher shortage noted above only increases this urgency.
- We need to invest in ongoing support for teachers' professional learning at levels commensurate with the complexity of the endeavor of teaching. Teaching is a multifaceted, challenging, wonderful process, and teachers who stay sharp with this work do so by continuing to learn throughout their careers. Providing for this learning has inherent costs that must be addressed as part of funding basic education. We need this increased investment to happen now to support the needs of the education professionals in our district.
- We need ways to work closely with our labor associations to problem solve and improve our systems, structures and processes. The relationships and understandings forged in the collective bargaining process create mutual trust, respect and open communication. In our district, this process helps to ensure a foundation for the work of educating our children and young people. The work done with our associations through the collective bargaining process has produced outcomes that ensure improvements in teacher learning and teaching practice, which ultimately lead to improvements in student learning.

Sincerely,

Greg Baker, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools