



Adjusting Classified Staff Salary Allocations for Retention and Competition within the Workforce *2025–27 Operating Budget Decision Package*

RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY

Classified school staff are the foundation of a functioning K–12 education system, supporting student health and safety, and maintaining school facilities that operate efficiently. Despite their crucial role, classified staff across Washington State are not fairly compensated for their services. Turnover rates remain high among these positions making it difficult for school districts to hire and retain talented classified staff. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) proposes an increase to the prototypical model’s allocation for these staff to account for both inflation and localized costs of living, allowing Washington to better recruit and retain these essential staff.

FISCAL DETAIL

Operating Expenditures	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
General Fund- 001 (program 010)	\$0.00	\$50,000	\$0.00	\$0.00
General Fund- 001 (program 021)	\$251,589,000	\$439,280,000	\$695,495,000	\$931,564,000
Wa Opp. Path- 17F (program 068)	\$1,530,000	\$2,682,000	\$4,190,000	\$5,610,000
Total Expenditures	\$253,119,000	\$442,012,000	\$699,685,000	\$937,174,000
Biennial Totals		\$695,131,000		\$1,636,859,000
Staffing	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
FTEs	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Average Annual		0.0		0.0
Object of Expenditure	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Obj. C	\$0.00	\$50,000	\$0.00	\$0.00
Obj. N	\$253,119,000	\$441,962,000	\$699,685,000	\$937,174,000
Revenue	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Total Revenue	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Biennial Totals		\$0.00		\$0.00

PACKAGE DESCRIPTION

Classified staff are crucial to the state's ability to meet its obligation to provide a basic education to all K–12 students in our public schools. These staff provide various direct and indirect services to students, some in classrooms as paraeducators and teaching aides; some helping to support and maintain student social, emotional, and behavioral health like school sanitation workers and school health service workers, and others such as IT technicians and clerical professionals keep the schools themselves functioning.

What is the problem, opportunity, or priority you are addressing with the request?

Despite being essential to the fundamental elements of a healthy K–12 system, classified staff across Washington are not fairly or equitably compensated. Low pay contributes to high staff turnover rates as these staff often do not receive a living wage despite the critical role they play in schools. This enduring pay inequity makes it difficult for school districts to hire and retain talented classified staff, which ultimately results in a loss of quality student services and healthy, functioning school facilities. To remedy these inequities, OSPI proposes increasing the prototypical school funding model allocation for state-funded classified staff so districts are more equipped to recruit and retain these critical professionals in support of their students.

What is your proposal?

OSPI proposes a multi-step approach to increasing the allocation within the prototypical school funding model for classified staff salaries. The first step in this proposal increases the classified staff salary allocation for the 2024–25 school year and then adjusts that value by inflation for the 2025–26 school year. The second step splits the allocation for classified staff salaries into two groups, with a value for administrative classified staff and a separate value for school based classified staff beginning with the 2026–27 school year. These separate staffing group values will be increased by inflation in the 2027–28 school year and beyond.

How is your proposal impacting equity in the state?

1. Local voter-approved levies—when permitted—are the only mechanism that school districts can use to increase revenue to cover unfunded costs related to hiring classified staff more than those allocated through the prototypical school funding model or providing enrichment contracts to classified staff.
2. OSPI regularly meets with a variety of stakeholders to identify and elevate issues that improve student outcomes and respond to the needs of public schools throughout Washington. This proposal has the support of school district leaders statewide who are struggling to retain a consistent workforce of classified workers. Specifically for the school based classified group, districts need additional resources to ensure consistent employment of classified staff, especially those providing instructional services to students.
3. Funding this proposal will prevent further cost-driven inequities by providing schools with sufficient funds provided by the state, rather than relying on locally sourced funds for classified staff providing basic needs to students or supports to the district that should be covered by the state.

4. If this need is not addressed, inequities between school districts will continue and likely worsen. The lowest wage workers in Washington’s schools often provide the most critical services to students, especially in communities of high poverty. All Washington students deserve an equitable, high-quality public K–12 education, and the Legislature is required to fund it.

What are you purchasing and how does it solve the problem?

This request funds a salary allocation for classified staff at a level that will more closely align with the funding needed to recruit and retain those employees. In determining what a new salary allocation should be, OSPI considered the statewide average wages paid to current classified staff alongside additional inflationary factors. The increased allocation included in this request provides school districts with more resources toward competitive wages for classified positions, allowing districts to hire additional staff or retain existing staff at higher rates, ensuring students and schools continue to have access to professionals, such as paraeducators, that provide critical instructional services to students.

What alternatives did you explore and why was this option chosen?

The intent of the additional funding within this request is to assist school districts with hiring additional support staff or retaining the critical staff they already have. OSPI remains concerned about the actual number of classified staff allocated through the prototypical school funding model as well as the actual salaries of these professionals across the state. Alternative options for supporting classified positions include focusing on increasing the actual staff units or being more prescriptive about minimum salary expectations to address a living wage. This request, however, balances these goals by focusing on the per-staff allocation values used to drive resources to school districts, an approach that allows for a more transparent funding model that account for the broad range of roles and responsibilities that fall within the classified staffing category while leaving actual hiring and salary determinations at the local level.

What resources does the agency already have that are dedicated to this purpose?

Classified staff salaries are funded through the prototypical school funding model. OSPI does not have resources that can contribute to offsetting the total cost of this request.

ASSUMPTIONS AND CALCULATIONS

OSPI used the maintenance level funding baseline for these calculations. Student enrollment is as approved by the Caseload Forecast Council and the current inflationary values in state law that are assumed for future fiscal years. The enrollment assumptions are the basis for determining how many classified staff are allocated in the prototypical school funding model. Those staffing levels and the current law assumed classified staff salary allocations are the basis for the request.

For the 2025–27 biennium, the classified staff salary allocation before the regionalization factor (if applicable), will be increased to the following:

School Year 2025–26: \$67,325

School year 2026–27: \$73,384

For the 2027–29 biennium, the classified staff salary allocation will be provided separately for classified administrative staff and classified school based staff. The salary allocations for each, before the regionalization factor (if applicable), are shown below:

School Year 2027–28

- Classified Administrative Staff: \$99,164
- Classified School Based Staff: \$79,988

School Year 2028–29

- Classified Administrative Staff: \$108,089
- Classified School Based Staff: \$87,187

OSPI also requests \$50,000 of IT contract cost to program the applicable financial systems for the change in fiscal year 2027 prior to the start of the 2027–28 school year.

Expansion, reduction, elimination or alteration of a current program or service:

This increase will provide school districts with more state revenue to cover costs associated with expenditures related to employing classified workers in school districts across the state. This is not an expansion, reduction, elimination, or alternation of the current program or service.

Detailed assumptions and calculations:

OSPI used the maintenance level funding baseline for these calculations. Student enrollment is as approved by the Caseload Forecast Council and the current inflationary values in state law that are assumed for future fiscal years. The enrollment assumptions are the basis for determining how many classified staff are allocated in the prototypical school funding model. Those staffing levels and the current law assumed classified staff salary allocations are the basis for the request.

Workforce assumptions:

None.

Historical funding:

Funding has been provided to school districts in the prototypical school funding model since the 2010–11 school year. Classified staff allocations cannot easily be isolated through the prior year’s apportionment payments.

Fiscal Year 2026

- Total K–12 Student FTE (driving the cost of staff FTE) = 1,058,185.20 FTE
- Total Funds = Not separately identifiable
- Near General Fund = Not separately identifiable

- Other Funds = \$0

Fiscal Year 2027

- Total K–12 Student FTE (driving the cost of staff FTE) = 1,053,499.50 FTE
- Total Funds = Not separately identifiable
- Near General Fund = Not separately identifiable
- Other Funds = \$0

STRATEGIC AND PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES

Strategic framework:

Adequate funding is necessary to provide state-funded competitive wages within the program of basic education. This proposal supports OSPI’s Strategic Goals #1, #2, and #4 by providing all of Washington’s K–12 students with strong educational foundations; ensuring access to rigorous, learner-centered options in all communities; and supporting school districts through consistent, timely, and meaningful funding and supports that center the needs of students.

Performance outcomes:

Classified staff are crucial to the state’s ability to provide a basic education. Classified staff provide various services to students, serving as paraeducators, teaching aides, school sanitation workers, IT technicians, clerical professionals, and school health service workers. Student learning can be negatively impacted by the departure of an instructor such as a paraeducator, and the school community suffers when classified staff leave the profession. Low salaries are the primary reason that classified staff leave the profession, and we anticipate that more paraeducators and other classified staff would stay in their profession if they were better compensated.

OTHER COLLATERAL CONNECTIONS

Intergovernmental:

School districts and education associations support this proposal.

Stakeholder impacts:

Education associations and stakeholders support this proposal.

Legal or administrative mandates:

None.

Changes from current law:

This would change a factor in the existing funding formula in the 2025–27 biennium. The proposal would need a bill to support the split of the classified staff salary allocation between school based classified staff and classified administrative staff in the 2027–29 biennium.

State workforce impacts:

This proposal may result in additional staff hired through local school districts to serve as

classified staff professionals.

State facilities impacts:

None.

Puget Sound recovery:

N/A

Governor's salmon strategy:

N/A