



# Removing Barriers to Student Engagement and Learning: Attendance, Behavior, Credits

## 2025–27 Operating Budget Decision Package

### RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY

Students who are not able to be physically, mentally, or emotionally present in the classroom face severe impacts on their learning. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) requests funding for data-driven wraparound supports strategies involving both school districts and key community partner organizations to meet the needs of students struggling to overcome three main barriers to learning: attendance, behavior, and credit attainment.

### FISCAL DETAIL

Operating Expenditures	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Fund 001-1 (program 021)	\$9,514,000	\$60,644,000	\$115,141,000	\$126,582,000
Fund 001-1 (program 010)	\$56,000	\$0	\$0	\$0
Fund 001-1 (program 05X)	\$15,053,000	\$15,005,000	\$15,005,000	\$15,005,000
Fund 17F-1 (program 068)	\$57,000	\$353,000	\$665,000	\$732,000
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$24,680,000</b>	<b>\$76,002,000</b>	<b>\$130,811,000</b>	<b>\$142,319,000</b>
<b>Biennial Totals</b>	<b>\$100,682,000</b>		<b>\$273,130,000</b>	
Staffing	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
FTEs	4.4	4.4	4.4	4.4
<b>Average Annual</b>	<b>4.4</b>		<b>4.4</b>	
Object of Expenditure	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Obj. A	\$363,000	\$363,000	\$363,000	\$363,000
Obj. B	\$183,000	\$184,000	\$184,000	\$184,000
Obj. C	5,406,000	\$5,350,000	\$5,350,000	\$5,350,000
Obj. E	\$29,000	\$29,000	\$29,000	\$29,000
Obj. G	\$29,000	\$29,000	\$29,000	\$29,000
Obj. J	\$49,000	\$0	\$0	\$0
Obj. N	\$18,621,000	\$70,047,000	\$124,856,000	\$136,364,000

Revenue	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>
<b>Biennial Totals</b>	<b>\$0</b>		<b>\$0</b>	

## PACKAGE DESCRIPTION

Students who are not present and engaged in school cannot learn. OSPI’s mission is for all students to be prepared for postsecondary success, whether that is higher education or direct entrance into the job market or the military.

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

The Washington State Report Card shows that the on-time high school graduation rate for Washington students has been steadily increasing over the past decade, from 76% in the 2012–13 school year to 83.6% in the 2022–23 school year. This means, however, that over 16% of today’s students are not graduating on time, with 10% reported as dropping out of K–12 altogether. Students who do not graduate from high school face lifelong barriers to socioeconomic success, with fewer career opportunities and consistently lower wages<sup>1</sup>. Dropout rates are highest among historically underserved groups, with American Indian/Alaska Native and Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students dropping out at rates higher than the state average, at 18.1% and 15.6% respectively<sup>2</sup>.

For the students who graduate high school, a significant gap still exists between the postsecondary credentials those students go on to acquire and the needs of the state’s employers, particularly those offering stable, high-paying jobs. While 70% of employers require some type of formal education or training past high school<sup>3</sup>, only 56% of Washington students secure postsecondary credentials within eight years of graduation<sup>4</sup>. Students’ continued engagement in learning beyond K–12 is essential to their postsecondary success.

Students disengage from their education for a variety of reasons. Family struggles and unstable home environments result in a lack of reliable shelter, transportation, and food, which in turn can lead to inconsistent attendance and difficulty focusing on learning as their attention is

<sup>1</sup> National Dropout Prevention Center. (2022). *Economic Impacts of Dropouts*. Successful Practices Network. <https://dropoutprevention.org/resources/statistics/quick-facts/economic-impacts-of-dropouts/>

<sup>2</sup> Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. Washington State Report Card. (2024, August 13). OSPI. <https://washingtonstatereportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/reportcard/viewschoolordistrict/103300>

<sup>3</sup> Washington Student Achievement Council. (2024). Higher Education and the Labor Market. <https://wsac.wa.gov/higher-education-and-the-labor-market#:~:text=In%20Washington%2C%20nearly%2070%20percent,%2C%associate%20degree%2C%20or%20higher.>

<sup>4</sup> Education Research and Data Center. (2024). *High School Graduate Outcomes*. <https://erdc.wa.gov/data-dashboards/high-school-graduate-outcomes>

overridden by more fundamental needs. Insufficient behavioral health interventions and supports leave students and teachers struggling to maintain a stable learning environment in the classroom. The inability to be physically or mentally present in school means these students' learning is impacted and they may fall behind their peers. These factors compound over the years and, by high school, result in at-risk students meeting a third barrier to graduation and post-graduation success: lack of sufficient completed credits, and loss of momentum when entering the postsecondary phase of their education journeys.

Without timely wraparound supports and interventions focused on attendance, behavior, and credits, these systemic barriers will continue to impede student success and perpetuate inequitable outcomes for K–12 students and for all Washingtonians.

## **What is your proposal?**

Timely wraparound supports and interventions require investment in both the data that identifies at-risk students and needed interventions at the individual level, and the means to provide those interventions and supports. Tapping into both state and community partnerships allows for both systemic and individualized approaches to meet diverse and changing student needs across the state. As outlined above, OSPI requests an investment in data and interventions targeted at three key barriers to student learning: attendance, behavior, and credits.

### **Attendance**

While the vast majority of Washington students are consistently present in the classroom each day, and most experience rare and isolated absences that have limited impact on their learning, 30% experience chronic absenteeism, meaning that they are absent for 10% or more of their total school days in a given year. The negative impacts of absenteeism exist whether these absences are excused or unexcused. School districts that utilize a system of early-warning indicators are able to identify students that are or are at risk of becoming chronically absent and deploy targeted interventions to mitigate or prevent disengagement due to absenteeism. Supporting districts in both the tracking of student attendance and academic data, and in analyzing it against key indicators and milestones empowers districts to identify students in need of interventions. When this real-time, objective data is coupled with investments in district partnerships with local and statewide organizations embedded within the communities they serve, districts are able to provide strategic interventions that reach beyond school buildings and address barriers facing students' ability to make it to school in the first place. These types of interventions include clear, proactive communication with families about student attendance; staff walking students to school or to the bus; staff building relationships with students through greetings and engaging with them upon arrival; and schoolwide awareness campaigns and incentives for regular attendance.

### **Behavior**

A student physically present in the classroom will still struggle to engage if their behavior or that of those around them creates a disruptive learning environment. Current disciplinary responses to students experiencing behavioral challenges often include temporary or permanent exclusion

of students from classrooms. The loss of learning time and space for these students and their classroom peers negatively impacts their ability to learn. Rates of discipline are disproportionately higher for students of color at every grade level, with disproportionate exclusionary discipline peaking during the middle school years.

As with absenteeism, factors that contribute to individual behavior challenges are driven by circumstances beyond the student's control, and require compassionate, trauma-informed, and healing-centered interventions. Again, investment in district partnerships with community-based organizations is key to creating and sustaining culturally responsive, strategic behavioral interventions and supports both inside and outside the classroom. These types of interventions include: teaching, re-teaching, and reinforcing behavior expectations to students; social-emotional learning-focused and informed instructional practices; staff trained to be positive social-emotional examples for students; school climate surveying, analysis, and response; processes for returning and reintegrating students removed from classrooms for behavioral reasons; mentors who consistently check in and connect with students; peer supports; and functional behavioral analysis and response.

Within the K–12 system itself, nothing does more to address barriers connected to student behavioral challenges like funding additional administrative support and positions such as a Dean of Students. With principals tasked with everything from teacher evaluations to student academic performance, they are unable to dedicate their full attention to student behavioral intervention and discipline. A Dean of Students, focused on student behavioral supports and interventions, provides the necessary building- and district-level leadership necessary to meet both individual student needs and address larger issues of classroom and school culture and climate. It also functions as a way for aspiring school leaders to gain hands-on leadership experience under direct guidance of the principal, serving as a pipeline for highly qualified new principals ready to hit the ground running from day one.

## Credits

Strategies for driving and supporting credit completion must tackle both student disengagement with classroom content and basic needs barriers that face high school students shouldering adult burdens such as caring and providing for family members or children, providing their own food and shelter, and becoming responsible for their own transportation to and from school.

Engaging coursework is coursework that is both high-quality and that challenges students with consistently high expectations of their intellectual abilities (course intensity). Course intensity varies in schools across the state. Sometimes this gap is driven by lack of resource, but another major contributor is lack of knowledge on the part of administrators and school leaders around the intensity of the courses they offer and the impact that intensity has on student outcomes in and beyond high school. Investment in Critical Scheduling Coaching (CSC) supports districts' use of predictive analytics to better understand the intensity of course offerings. Districts scrutinize aggregate student data, prioritizing historically underserved groups, to identify trends in educational opportunity connected to course intensity. School and district leaders are then able to develop course scheduling action plans that are aligned with research-backed strategic

scheduling strategies.

For students whose credit deficiency is due to specific and complex barriers that face youth ages 16–21 specifically, re-engagement in and completion of high school can be achieved through investment in district partnerships with community-based organizations that engage in direct barrier reductions for these students. Interventions for these students include assistance securing housing, food, transportation, childcare, school supplies, and meeting other needs that interfere with students' ability to re-engage in and prioritize finishing high school.

## How is your proposal impacting equity in the state?

1. This proposal is directly connected to equitable access to educational opportunities for Washington students. See above for more details.
2. At the forefront of every program, policy, and decision, OSPI actively focuses on ensuring all students have access to the instruction and support they need to succeed in our schools. This proposal is focused on the needs of our most vulnerable students, particularly students of color, American Indian/Alaska Native students, and highly mobile students including migrant students, those in foster care, and those experiencing homelessness. These student groups face unique systemic barriers to completing their K–12 education, barriers which perpetuate larger systemic inequities that persist along racial and socioeconomic lines.
3. See above.
4. See above.

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

OSPI proposes the following investments in supports and interventions centered around attendance, behavior, and credits:

### Grants to School Districts

OSPI requests grant funding available to school districts to fund teams of staff engaged in the gathering and analyzing of relevant attendance, behavior, and credit data. This includes funds for teacher compensation for time worked outside of regularly scheduled hours; to purchase substitute time for work taking place during teaching hours; direct student supports such as tutoring, mentoring, behavior supports, and basic needs; and to purchase curricula, license, and technology, and transportation for students accessing out-of-school programming. OSPI also requests grants to districts to fund barrier reduction strategies for credit-deficient 16–21-year-old students.

### Grants to Community-Based Organizations

OSPI requests grant funding for community-based organizations with experience supporting students with interventions to support their attendance, behavior, and credit attainment. The funds will purchase staff time within the organizations to coach and mentor school district staff.

Using a grant program structure, community organizations will be funded to support youth through mentoring, cultural connections, leadership, and career exploration. The focus of their

programmatic work will be tied to impacting school attendance, engagement, positive behavior, and academic success. Grantees will be organized into a learning network to offer community grantee opportunities to share efforts and learn effective strategies to work with schools.

The intended outcomes include:

- Increase youth engagement in school.
- Support positive behavior and academic goals.
- Systematize practices for sustainability and scalability in support of authentic school and community partnerships.
- Build capacity in community-based organizations supporting youth furthest from educational justice in alignment with the local educational system.

### **Increased School District Staffing to Support Building Level Leadership**

OSPI requests funding for a Dean of Students position at elementary, K–8, and middle schools to oversee intervention teams and lead attendance, behavior, discipline, and response strategies at these schools. By focusing this support on kindergarten through 8th grade, these targeted funds will serve schools and students at the highest risk of experiencing disproportionate exclusionary discipline, which further undermines those same students’ opportunities to learn.

OSPI requests funding to phase in over three years:

#### ***Elementary***

- 0.0 full-time equivalent (FTE) in the 2026 fiscal year, 0.25 FTE in the 2027 fiscal year, and 0.5 FTE in the 2028 fiscal year and beyond; and

#### ***K–8 and Middle***

- 0.25 FTE in the 2026 fiscal year and 0.5 FTE in the 2027 fiscal year and beyond.

### **Regional Support Staff**

OSPI requests funds for nine regional coordinators to support schools in strategic data collection and analysis and provide coaching and professional development to building-level teams working to support student attendance, behavior, and credit attainment.

### **Contract Critical Scheduling Expertise**

OSPI requests funding to contract with an organization with national expertise in critical scheduling to provide data analysis and coaching to 75 school districts statewide.

### **Program Administration and Evaluation**

OSPI requests funding for administrative support within the agency to oversee the grants and contracts outlined above, to provide technical assistance to grant recipients, and to contract with a program evaluator to work with OSPI to gather, analyze, and report on program performance and outcomes.

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

While there are numerous factors that challenge students’ ability to learn, a focus on attendance, behavior, and credits targets the three largest contributors that can be countered by direct and

timely interventions at the individual student level. While a fully state-level or community-directed strategy are both options, combining a state- and community-level approach allows these programs to reach far across Washington while also reaching deep within the individual communities in which they operate.

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

OSPI has no permanent resources dedicated to this work, nor does the agency have the ability to absorb this work within existing resources. The agency invested in district and community-based organization partnerships to support attendance, behavior, and credit data collection, analysis, and intervention following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic using federal emergency relief funds. While some of the coaching and intervention work specific to 9th grade students was continued into the current fiscal year using state dollars in the 2024 Supplemental Operating Budget (Senate Bil 5950, Sec. 522[2][t]), the other aspects of the work were not funded and will not be able to continue without state investment.

OSPI's share of emergency relief funds has supported the 9th Grade Success pilot launched by OSPI in the 2019–20 school year and operated in five high schools. Over the following two school years, the program expanded to include 51 schools across 40 school districts, and state funding secured through the 2024 Supplemental Operating Budget (Senate Bil 5950, Sec. 522[2][t]) will fund further expansion to 63 schools in the upcoming 2024–25 school year.

While supporting student success in their 9th grade year specifically is critically important, OSPI believes that the coaching, supports, and interventions modeled by the 9th Grade Success pilot are valuable to staff and students at every grade level. In schools that do operate 9th Grade Success programs, the policies and practices set in place for 9th grade students begin to inform overall policies and practices for supporting students at every level, reinforcing and expanding the benefits of these investments and programs. OSPI has a separate budget request to continue and expand the 9th Grade Success Program specifically; however, this decision package will fund much broader coaching, supports, and interventions.

## **ASSUMPTIONS AND CALCULATIONS**

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

In fiscal year 2025, OSPI received one-time funding of \$3,000,000 for the 9th Grade Success program in Sec. 522(2)(t) of the 2024 Supplemental Operating Budget.

### **Detailed assumptions and calculations:**

#### **OSPI Administrative Costs**

OSPI requests \$320,000 in fiscal year 2026 and \$298,000 in fiscal year 2027 ongoing to support 2.0 FTE Administrative Program Specialists. Fiscal year 2026 includes \$22,000 in one-time costs to prepare for the creation of the 2.0 FTEs. These positions would oversee, coordinate, and

provide technical assistance on grant distribution to school districts, grant management, grant training, and grant monitoring.

OSPI requests \$210,000 in fiscal year 2026 and \$196,000 in fiscal year 2027 ongoing to support 1.25 FTE Program Supervisors. Fiscal year 2026 includes \$14,000 in one-time costs to prepare for the creation of the 1.25 FTEs. One FTE would supervise early warning data systems and student success system integration and manage statewide and regional efforts. A 0.25 FTE would establish and manage a contract related to ABL (Action Based Learning), manage program reviews, complete master scheduling work, participate in monthly contractor check-ins, process and oversee invoices, and complete one site visit per year.

OSPI requests \$123,000 in fiscal year 2026 and \$111,000 in fiscal year 2027 ongoing to support 1.1 FTE Administrative Assistant 3. Fiscal year 2026 includes \$12,000 in one-time costs to prepare for the creation of the 1.1 FTEs. One FTE would provide support for the early warning data systems and student success system integration and in support of statewide and regional efforts. A 0.1 FTE would provide support for the contract related to ABL (Action Based Learning) and the corresponding work in support of the contract.

## Contracts

OSPI requests \$2,455,000 annually for regional Attendance, Behavior, Credits (ABC)/Early Warning System (EWS) Coordinators. This is \$272,778 for each of the nine regional educational service districts (ESDs). The ESD Coordinators will provide regional support to schools on building their data access, literacy, and teaming around attendance, behavior, and academic indicators and responsive programming. Supports will include running Improvement Science Breakthrough networks, coaching, and training.

ESD coaching and professional development will focus on the following:

- Building teams that analyze and respond to early warning data.
- Enhancing Tier 1 support for all students and enhancing Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions for targeted students to address barriers.
- Revising and updating support policies, procedures, and communication.
- Partnering with community partners and Tribes.
- How to learn from students and families to improve early warning identification, programming, and engagement (student voice).

OSPI requests \$279,000 annually for evaluation services. The contract would be responsible for progress monitoring, data collection, analysis, and evaluation.

OSPI requests \$2,616,000 annually for contracts for school districts for 79 schools, \$33,114 per school. Of the schools participating, 23 would be College Success Foundation schools and 56 would be Action Based Learning schools. The contract would fund staff to support data analytics, coaching for school teams to understand the data, select targeted action, progress monitor relative to educational opportunity analysis and strategic scheduling.

## Grants

OSPI requests \$2,500,000 annually to establish ABC/Early Warning and Intervention Systems grants. This request would be for 50 schools at \$50,000 per school and would be used to cover building expenses to support ABC programming including attendance incentives, behavior supports, and academic supports.

OSPI requests \$1,750,000 annually to establish ABC Engagement/Reengagement grants. This request would be for 35 community-based organizations (CBOs) at \$50,000 per CBO and would be used for staffing to provide mentoring (attendance, behavior, and academic support) with an emphasis on goal setting, pathway identification and agency enhancement, and family support and engagement services.

OSPI requests \$4,800,000 annually to establish Open Doors Barrier Reduction grants to school districts. This request would be for about 16,000 enrolled youth at \$300 per student. The funding request is based on enrollment trends in Open Doors Youth Reengagement. In 2023–24, the program served 6,605 annual average full-time enrollments (AAFTE), resulting in about 13,000 enrolled youth. The highest months of the school year reflected the program serving over 14,000 students. This request anticipates program growth projections for servicing the optimal ratio of barrier reduction of \$300 per FTE for up to 16,000 students. Enrollments are anticipated to increase annually, which will result in a slightly diminishing per-student allocation for Open Doors programs based on the lump sum request. Local programs will be provided with an allocation that they will need to distribute based on need and enrollments. The total requested lump sum of \$4,800,000 will remain steady across years, despite increasing enrollments and inflation.

OSPI requests \$9,571,000 in fiscal year 2026, \$60,997,000 in fiscal year 2027, \$115,806,000 in fiscal year 2028, and \$127,314,000 in fiscal year 2029 and ongoing to fund a Dean of Students allocation to elementary and middle schools. The Dean of Students adds a new certificated instructional staff (CIS) to the prototypical funding model. OSPI used the maintenance level funding baseline for these calculations. The student enrollment used for calculations is as approved by the Caseload Forecast Council and the current law inflationary values that are assumed for future fiscal years. The new CIS staff allocation for 0.25 FTE allocation per middle school in the school year 2025–26 is estimated to be \$12.5 million. In the school year 2026–27, adding 0.25 FTE allocation to all prototypical elementary schools and 0.5 FTE to prototypical middle schools is estimated at \$75.1 million. For the third year of implementation, the Dean of Students allocation would add 0.5 CIS FTE allocation to all prototypical elementary schools and 0.5 CIS FTE allocation to all prototypical middle schools for an estimated school year cost of \$127.6 million.

Additionally, OSPI requests an additional \$56,000 one-time cost in fiscal year 2026 for additional maintenance contractor costs to program the new instructional staff type into the apportionment system for the prototypical funding formula and apportionment funding reports.

## Workforce assumptions:

### Fiscal Year 2026 (Total = \$653,000)

#### *Administrative Program Specialist 2, Step M: 2.0 FTE*

- Salary: \$182,136
- Benefits: \$88,892
- Goods/Services: \$13,356
- Travel: \$13,356
- Equipment: \$22,260 (one time)

#### *Program Supervisor: 1.25 FTE*

- Salary: \$121,237
- Benefits: \$58,155
- Goods/Services: \$8,348
- Travel: \$8,348
- Equipment: \$13,912 (one time)

#### *Administrative Assistant 3, Step M: 1.1 FTE*

- Salary: \$59,624
- Benefits: \$36,441
- Goods/Services: \$7,346
- Travel: \$7,346
- Equipment: \$12,243 (one time)

### Fiscal Year 2027 and ongoing (Total = \$605,000 Annually)

#### *Administrative Program Specialist 2, Step M: 2.0 FTE*

- Salary: \$182,136
- Benefits: \$89,152
- Goods/Services: \$13,356
- Travel: \$13,356

#### *Program Supervisor: 1.25 FTE*

- Salary: \$121,237
- Benefits: \$58,067
- Goods/Services: \$8,348
- Travel: \$8,348

#### *Administrative Assistant 3, Step M: 1.1 FTE*

- Salary: \$59,624
- Benefits: \$36,684
- Goods/Services: \$7,346
- Travel: \$7,346

## Historical funding:

### Fiscal Year 2026

- FTE = 0.0 FTE
- Total Funds = \$0
- Near General Fund = \$0
- Other Funds = \$0

### Fiscal Year 2027

- FTE = 0.0 FTE
- Total Funds = \$0
- Near General Fund = \$0
- Other Funds = \$0

## STRATEGIC AND PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES

### Strategic framework:

This proposal supports the heart of OSPI's mission and vision to prepare all students for postsecondary success and civic engagement, with an emphasis on all students. It helps drive Superintendent Reykdal's Strategic Goal #1, to ensure all students have equitable access to strong foundations, and Strategic Goal #2, providing every student with rigorous, learner-centered academic options in their community. Preparing each and every student for postsecondary success is evidence of a world class education, and drives a prosperous economy, the first two goals of the Governor's Results Washington.<sup>5</sup>

### Performance outcomes:

Through this request, Washington state will fund:

- Early warning attendance tracking and intervention teams at 100 schools;
- CBO support staff time from 35 community-based partner organizations;
- Direct barrier reductions for 16,000 credit-deficient 16–21-year-old students;
- Dedicated regional and building-level leadership across the state; and
- Critical Scheduling analysis, coaching, and support at 75 school districts.

## OTHER COLLATERAL CONNECTIONS

### Intergovernmental:

None.

### Stakeholder impacts:

This proposal will find support among numerous community-based organizations that provide

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<sup>5</sup> Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (September 2023). *Overcoming Barriers to Student Success Through Integrated Supports*. <https://ospi.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/2023-10/2024-p8-overcoming-barriers-student-success-through-integrated-supports.pdf> <https://ospi.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/2023-10/2024-p8-overcoming-barriers-student-success-through-integrated-supports.pdf>

direct supports to students, including Stand for Children, Open Doors, and Always Be Learning.

**Legal or administrative mandates:**

None.

**Changes from current law:**

None.

**State workforce impacts:**

None.

**State facilities impacts:**

None.

**Puget Sound recovery:**

N/A

**Governor's salmon strategy:**

N/A