

Peer Support Grant

Statutory and/or Budget Language

\$216,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2024 and \$600,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2025 are provided solely for the office to administer a peer support competitive grant program in Washington public schools. The office must award grants to eligible school districts starting in the 2023-24 school year. Programs should be designed to be primarily youth-led and aim to increase youth school engagement and support personal/cultural identities, and reduce risks associated with depression, school violence, and bullying. Successful grantees may consult with Washington teen link and the natural helper program in the development of the grant criteria, and the development of training material support. Program components should include:

- (A) Identification of trusted peers and staff who other students confide in;
- (B) Development or adaption of training materials;
- (C) Intensive training for peer and staff supporters;
- (D) Avenues to advertise peer support communication strategies; and
- (E) Participant and program evaluations.

Purpose

The funding in this proviso provided grants to school districts who were selected from a competitive application to gather data to assist in developing a curriculum and program that includes identification of trusted peers and staff that students confide in, development or adaption of training materials, intensive training for peer and staff supporters, avenues to advertise peer support communication strategies, and participant and program evaluations. Schools that were selected for the grant were required to either have or previously had a Natural Helpers program or similar or identified a need for a Natural Helpers program through survey data feedback, student, or staff and parent feedback.

Description of Services Provided

Grantees were separated into two groups: schools with a peer support/Natural Helpers program and schools that do not have a program but have identified a need (survey data, student family/community feedback). The services provided depended on what group the schools belong in.

Schools with a peer support/Natural Helpers/Hope Squad school:

- OSPI met with these schools to learn how they operate their peer support program in school. This includes student survey and selection, retreat training, ongoing training and



check-in, and program evaluation. This information was used to create a Natural Helpers Reimagined toolkit for Year 2 pilot schools.

- Funds from this grant allowed schools to hold a Spring retreat for their peer helpers – typically away from school in an outdoor setting. The retreat was used to strengthen helping and referral skills, when to identify someone in a mental health crisis, and who to students and peers to when having a problem.
- Schools accommodated a one-time site visit to meet their peer helpers.
- Schools without a peer support program:
- Funding from this proviso allowed schools to start a peer support program in their district. This includes monthly check-ins, training resources, and technical assistance.

Criteria for Receiving Services and/or Grants

Schools with Natural Helpers or a Similar Program:

- Have or previously had a Natural Helpers program or similar that is primarily youth-led and aims to increase school engagement and support personal/cultural identities, and reduce risks associated with depression, school violence, and bullying.
- The program has a minimum of 3 components as listed below:
- Identification of trusted peers and staff who other students confide in;
- Development or adaption of training materials;
- Intensive training for peer and staff supporters;
- Avenues to advertise peer support communication strategies; and
- Participant and program evaluations.
- Participate in a monthly check-in meetings.
- Share the total number of students and their enrolled grade that were selected as a Natural Helper at the end of the school year.
- Accommodate a one-time visit.
- Submit monthly progress reports following Natural Helpers or similar check-in with students and lead advisors.
- Complete the end-of-grant report by June 30, 2024.

Schools that do not have a Natural Helpers or similar program:

- An identified for a need for a Natural Helpers program or similar program through survey data feedback, student, and staff or parent feedback has been determined.
- Participate in a monthly check-in meetings.
- Accommodate a one-time visit.
- Complete the end-of-grant report by June 30, 2024.

Beneficiaries in the 2023-24 School Year

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Number of School Districts | 6 |
| Number of Schools | 11 |
| Number of Students | 4,067 (total student population in each school) |
| Number of Educators | N/A |
| Other | N/A |

Are Federal or Other Funds Contingent on State Funding?

No

State Funding History

| Fiscal Year | Amount Funded | Actual Expenditures |
|-------------|---------------|---------------------|
| 2024 | \$216,000 | \$216,000 |

Number of Beneficiaries Per Fiscal Year (e.g. School Districts, Schools, Students, Educators, Other)

| Fiscal Year | Number of Beneficiaries |
|-------------|-------------------------|
| 2024 | 11 |

Programmatic Changes Since Inception (If Any)

Year 2 provides higher funding to implement a Natural Helpers program. Schools will follow a draft toolkit, created based off feedback from Year 1 grantees.

Program Evaluation or Evaluation of Major Findings

Though measuring effectiveness with quantitative data has proved to be difficult, schools with a peer support program shared that 100% of their students knew how to identify a trusted adult in their lives. It was also shared that the schools with a peer support program gave students the confidence and tools needed to provide support to a student feeling sad or hopeless through either listening skills or referral to mental health resources.

Major Challenges Faced by the Program

There was no consensus on how a peer support program evaluation should be conducted. Each school measured effectiveness differently. Most agreed that qualitative data was easier to gauge. However, schools did suggest school climate survey, school counselor referrals, as well as a survey like Character Strong (pre and post program) could provide quantitative data.

Future Opportunities

Based on feedback from Year 1 grantees, schools will be given an opportunity to pilot a Natural Helpers Reimagined program in their school. A toolkit was drafted for schools to use as a guide for the major components of a peer support program: student survey and selection, retreat training, ongoing training, and program evaluation.

Other Relevant Information

N/A

Schools/Districts Receiving Assistance

[Click here to see a list of all OSPI grant recipients in the 2024 Fiscal Year.](#)

Program Contact Information

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