

Dropout Prevention

Statutory and/or Budget Language

- (i) \$280,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2024, \$530,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2025, \$593,000 of the dedicated cannabis account—state appropriation for fiscal year 2024, and \$618,000 of the dedicated cannabis account—state appropriation for fiscal year 2025 are provided solely for dropout prevention, intervention, and reengagement programs, dropout prevention programs that provide student mentoring, and the building bridges statewide program. The office of the superintendent of public instruction shall convene staff representatives from high schools to meet and share best practices for dropout prevention. Of these amounts, the entire dedicated cannabis account—state appropriation is provided solely for the building bridges statewide program and for grants to districts for life skills training for children and youth in K-12.
- (ii) (See Proviso Report for MZ, Comprehensive Planning)
- (iii) \$178,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2024 and \$178,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2025 are provided solely for implementation of chapter 291, Laws of 2017 (truancy reduction efforts).

Purpose

CX and SB: Funding is provided for statewide Building Bridges programming. Building Bridges programming is defined in RCW 28A.175.025 as supporting local partnerships between schools, families, and communities to create a system to identify students at risk of dropping out and provide timely prevention, intervention, and reengagement programming for such students.

GX: This proviso is intended to provide state level capacity at OSPI to support school districts to employ strategies and build systems to prevent and reduce absences, including truancy (unexcused absences) and chronic absence (excused and unexcused absences).

Description of Services Provided

CX and SB: Staffing paid out of this proviso raises awareness of evidence-based practices and processes, including identification of exemplar efforts to serve as local models, supporting comprehensive dropout prevention, intervention, and reengagement system development. They develop and update systems and tools for district/school use for improving student outcomes.

OSPI's internal planning team worked with a consultant, Halliday & Associates to help shepherd the grant program forward based on experience with the state of Montana's initiative, Montana Graduates. Which led to a new iteration of Building Bridges Grants to support holding community conversations on **Early Warning Systems** barriers and opportunities between April 2024-June 2025 and will inform next steps of grant supports.



Reengagement programming, referred to as retrieval in legislation, provides statewide management, technical assistance, program review and approval, data reporting, and implementation supports to districts offering, or considering offering, reengagement programs and schools as part of the Open Doors “1418” Youth Reengagement Program. Based on recommendations from the Building Bridges workgroup, dropout retrieval evolved into the Open Doors Youth Reengagement Program as described in 28A.175.100-115. The administration and management of the Open Doors Youth Reengagement Program is reliant on the proviso for funding OSPI staff.

The **GATE Advisory** group is made up of cross-agency membership from youth serving organizations across the state. The group met three times. Building Bridges released a committee member survey to our committee partners in fall 2024 and used this information to identify potential topics. The GATE Advisory group gathered feedback from members to help eliminate barriers to serving students.

Staff have worked in partnership with Gonzaga University staff on the **P2P project** to create a Canvas course where schools could share artifacts and collaboration resources. A leadership network with ten districts met three times in person to bring together building and district leadership to collaborate and share ideas on systems opportunities and best practices. Continuous improvement partners from OSPI School Improvement were involved to cross pollinate ideas throughout their networks. Ideas were also presented at the AWSP WASA Conference. Data partners worked to support school information systems data collection aligned to leadership practices and school climate ideas explored in the P2P framework with schools. State Tribal Education Compact schools participated in training with a book study on the book *Powerless to Powerful*.

Implement **Graduation: A Team Effort (GATE) programming**, including monthly webinars, newsletters, and quarterly advisory committee meetings focused on dropout prevention, intervention, and reengagement practices and policies.

Building Bridges staff produced monthly **webinars** that drew 250+ viewers each month on topics around graduation equity and strategies for increasing equity in schools through attendance, career and college readiness, and more. These sessions were recorded and have been viewed widely on YouTube.

GX: This proviso solely funds OSPI staff. OSPI staff under this proviso support the reduction of truancy with the following bodies of work:

- oversee the development of guidance, technical assistance and professional development,
- engage with stakeholders to continue to understand the impacts of state laws and rules,
- develop, oversee and guide the communication to schools and districts to disseminate best practices,
- support grant programs and initiatives (e.g. ESSER Attendance & Reengagement Initiative) to support implementation of best practices,

- inform data reporting requirements and interpretation,
- collaborate across agency and cross system partners to improve our state's approach to attendance, truancy and students that have disengaged from the education system,
- identify gaps, and shape strategy and policy recommendations,
- represent and engage with national experts and peers from others states on state agency strategies for addressing chronic absenteeism.

Criteria for Receiving Services and/or Grants

CX and SB: Building Bridges and GATE resources can be accessed by all schools but were specifically directed toward schools identified for supports through Washington's accountability framework (Washington School Improvement Framework). Grants are also targeted at schools involved in the Ninth Grade Success Program to identify opportunities to improve services for student support services implementation and to serve students furthest from educational justice and assist in engagement efforts. Powerless to Powerful grantees were chosen in partnership with Gonzaga University staff.

GX: N/A

Beneficiaries in the 2023-24 School Year

Number of School Districts	187
Number of Schools	170
Number of Students	13,074
Number of Educators	7,957
Other	15 state youth serving agency and community partners

Are Federal or Other Funds Contingent on State Funding?

No

State Funding History

SB – Dropout Prevention/Intervention

Fiscal Year	Amount Funded	Actual Expenditures
2024	\$280,000	\$280,000
2023	\$280,000	\$171,440
2022	\$280,000	\$126,515
2021	\$280,000	\$233,250
2020	\$280,000	\$236,210

CW – Dedicated Cannabis Account - Dropout Prevention, Intervention

2024	\$593,000	\$580,574
2023	\$550,000	\$540,267
2022	\$520,000	\$317,377
2021	\$530,000	\$529,920
2020	\$522,000	\$455,972

GX – Truancy Reduction

Fiscal Year	Amount Funded	Actual Expenditures
2024	\$178,000	\$178,000
2023	\$178,000	\$178,000
2022	\$178,000	\$178,000
2021	\$178,000	\$141,781
2020	\$178,000	\$169,616

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

SB – Dropout Prevention/Intervention

Fiscal Year	Number of Beneficiaries
2024	187 districts, 170 schools, 13,074 students, 7,957 educators, 15 state youth serving agency and community partners, and 170 Open Doors Youth Reengagement programs that had 13,074 student enrollments.
2023	30 community partners 34 districts 78 schools 2,851 students, plus 12,551 Open Doors Youth Reengagement student enrollments
2022	30 community partners, 34 districts, 78 schools, 2,851 students, plus 11,342 Open Doors Youth Reengagement student enrollments
2021	295 districts (5 directly) and 114 Open Doors Youth Reengagement programs that had 10,770 student enrollments.
2020	295 (26 directly), plus 11,902 Open Doors Youth Reengagement student enrollments

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GX – Truancy Reduction

Fiscal Year	Number of Beneficiaries
2024	295
2023	295

Programmatic Changes Since Inception (If Any)

CX and SB: The funding and grants, and their purposes, for this grant have changed over time. We've offered grants for a variety of innovation projects. Building Bridges has had grants to study and support highlight districts, to provide leadership training, to provide funding for youth-serving community-based organizations, and to schools involved in ninth grade success. Each grant has offered innovations in systems change and built off of previous grants. OSPI utilizes portions of the proviso to fund staff to manage dropout prevention, intervention, and reengagement programming.

GX: In January of 2022, the OSPI Attendance & Truancy program launched a comprehensive state-wide initiative, the ESSER Attendance and Reengagement Project. This project funds staffing in districts, STECs and ESDs to address attendance, engagement, truancy and reengagement greatly impacted by the pandemic. Read more about the [ESSER Attendance & Reengagement Project](#). OSPI Attendance program staff dedicated a significant portion of their time developing, managing, coordinating, and supporting this project, particularly the regional ESD Attendance & Reengagement Coordinators who in turn are providing intentional, tactical

support of districts in their region. Regional coordinators have supported and conducted various trainings and co-developed resources with OSPI including a [Truancy 101 webinar](#) (over 750 registered), Community Engagement Board trainings and [web resources](#), and a [training series](#) for schools and districts to improve attendance. The learnings of the ESSER project continue to inform professional development and peer learning strategies through partnership with the ESDs.

In September of 2021, the OSPI Attendance & Truancy launched the OSPI Re-envisioning Truancy Project, in partnership with American Institutes for Research (AIR), Puget Sound Educational Service District (PSESD) and the Center for Children & Youth Justice (CCYJ). This project is engaging and listening to youth and families with lived experience with the truancy process, as well as our partners in and with the education system, to understand more about the process, the gaps, and the reality of implementation. The findings of this work will inform the workgroup's development of recommendations in the 2024-25 school year. This workgroup will be a subcommittee to the GATE Advisory, informing and supporting attendance, truancy and reengagement related discussions and recommendations made by that group.

During the pandemic and after, OSPI Attendance program has worked consistently to produce guidance and webinars on the topic of withdrawing students, in order to dispel the myth that districts are required to withdraw students after 20 days. The OSPI team continues to work internally and externally to raise awareness and address the system barriers and policy gaps that underpin this harmful practice. The attendance team hosted a webinar in Spring of 2023 that had over 1,300 participants register and another in the spring of 2024 with 200 participants. Students that are withdrawn are often overlooked when we consider truancy, because primarily students that are withdrawn do not have a truancy petition filed and are therefore missed by the system of possible supports.

Program Evaluation or Evaluation of Major Findings

CX and SB: There are several Building Bridges Programs that offered evaluation findings:

Designate funding to specifically support the Open Doors Youth Reengagement Program staffing needs.

- Revise apportionment rates to support Open Doors programs. An average fiscal rate is used for all districts' Open Doors programs. In some areas, districts generate more apportionment per student than the allotted average in Open Doors, leaving programs to serve students with \$200-\$5,000 less per Open Doors AAFTE than the district rate for prototypical students.

Early Warning Systems Grants: School community members identified several bright spots related to EWS. Participants agreed that 9th grade success teams are making an impact. Some educators reported that relationships between students and educators are improving and students are receiving timely support. In addition, schools are increasingly aware of the need to

partner with families and the community. Although not a widespread practice, certain schools and regional efforts are engaging the community as EWS decision-makers.

School community members also identified several challenges related to EWS. Lack of funding is a barrier and the timing of some grants does not support planning. Overworked educators and school leaders, as well as turnover, lead some schools to struggle to implement a robust EWS. Districts do not always prioritize this work and there is confusion about how EWS, multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS), and 9th grade success interact. Some schools are struggling to implement lessons from 9th grade success teams in a schoolwide EWS. Overall, EWS implementation is inconsistent across the state. Students, families, and community partners emphasized the importance and possibility of more robust partnership and inclusion to support students.

Recommendations for Schools

- Prioritize relationship-building among educators, families, students, and the community
- Differentiate outreach and include students, families, and the community in decision-making
- Assemble a team of educators, administrators, and community partners to lead EWS
- Increase collaboration between middle and high schools
- Fix systems and adult practices rather than attempting to change students

Recommendations for OSPI

- Participants suggest OSPI support ongoing conversations and other equitable family engagement practices
- Sustainably fund EWS on a timeline that supports implementation
- Provide guidance for schools on EWS-related professional development, systems, and tools
- Clarify how various initiatives (e.g., MTSS, EWS, etc.) fit together and support collaboration
- Champion EWS to increase public support

GX: School districts consistently file truancy petitions on a small percentage of students that meet the unexcused absence criteria. During the three school years prior to the pandemic (SY 2017, 2018, 2019), of the students that met the criteria for a truancy petition, only 11.3%, 12.6%, and 11.1% ever had a truancy petition filed on them. More data regarding truancy can be found on the [OSPI Attendance Policies, Guidance and Data Reporting webpage](#). There continue to be too many students that meet these criteria for the education system and partners to sufficiently address with one on one tier 3 intensive interventions and supports. The system needs more preventative systems and processes, such as teams that are using data and including student voice in their strategies to increase attendance and engagement. This preventative and system minded approach informs our work and strategies moving forward, including one of OSPI's decision packages for the 2025 Legislative Session to increase regional coaching capacity to support school teams to build early warning systems (that address attendance, behaviors, and course performance).

Major Challenges Faced by the Program

CX and SB: The major challenge facing Building Bridges programming is lack of adequate funding. Grant funds have been used to establish school-community partnerships and deliver targeted services, however there is no funding to sustain efforts over time. Funding for barrier reduction, 12 month AAFTE for Open Doors, and staffing for student supports persist in being issues that need to be addressed in our school system funding.

GX: Districts cite unprecedented attendance and engagement challenges post-pandemic, with students experiencing high rates of anxiety and depression, physical health barriers, feeling disconnected socially, falling behind in classes and believing they can't catch up, not having the support they need at school and more. Schools and districts are also experiencing budget cuts due to the end of ESSER dollars as well as reduced enrollment, and state that there are not enough staff to do the work necessary to follow through on the truancy process or do intensive reengagement work. In MTSS language, their triangles are upside down and there are many more students with extreme high rates of absences and poor academic performance that case management and one on one supports are just not possible for all the students that need it. This highlights the need for more system building and tier 1 strategies, to go upstream, and to reduce the number of students who need tier 2 and 3 supports. Relevant to both truancy and chronic absence, districts and schools are reporting they struggle to access the data necessary to organize effectively around attendance and engagement.

Traditional approaches to truancy which rely on a punitive approach, are still widely used. The elimination of the valid court order which allowed courts to place students in juvenile detention has resulted even less intervention from courts in some areas and contributed to a more hands off approach in some districts. Improving and enhancing school and districts' tiered approaches and early warning systems is critical, as we have learned even schools with strong systems prior to the pandemic were overwhelmed during the last two years, and now are picking up the pieces. The state, and its partners, have a key role in supporting schools, districts, and courts to rethink this approach to one of support and addressing barriers to learning, either student or system caused. The District Truancy & Excessive Absenteeism liaison position, required by law, is not funded and is often one small part of someone's job, and often without positional authority to influence school or district practice. School districts continue to see truancy as an unfunded mandate.

Future Opportunities

CX and SB: The Building Bridges Project is concerned with serving students that are furthest away from educational justice. With insights from the Early Warning Systems Grant project, we believe we will see additional opportunities to fine tune student supports systems and reduce barriers to graduation and will need additional grant funds and support staff funding to offer meaningful system support. Data from the Open Doors Youth Reengagement Program reveals that the program is growing in terms of both number of programs and students served. The

expansion is cause for an increased need for staff funding to support the ever-growing reengagement system.

GX: Future opportunities include building on the pilot implementation of a temporarily ESSER funded regional capacity to support schools and districts address absences and truancy. ESDs have a key role to play to provide a needed layer of support and reengagement services, so that courts can truly be a last resort in truancy cases. They also play a key role in supporting training and coaching of districts to embed attendance and early warning systems in their multi-tiered system of supports through teaming, data, tiered interventions, and community partnerships as well as support districts with developing their Community Engagement Boards.

Other Relevant Information

CX and SB: Student enrollments for the Open Doors Youth Reengagement Program have increased and reached pre-COVID-19 levels. In the 2023-2024 school year, 13,074 students were enrolled in Open Doors Youth Reengagement, a level not reached since 2019. OSPI anticipates that the need for robust student dropout reengagement services will remain high for several years due to the impacts of the pandemic.

GX: OSPI provides a library of resources to address attendance and truancy on the [Attendance webpages](#) and through the [Attendance Newsletter](#).

Related programming through Open Doors Summer Pilot included these recommendations:

- Recommendations outlined in the post-resident services report include:
- Strengthen the capacity of education advocates to collaborate with Open Doors case managers and follow post-resident youth into the Open Doors program, ensuring the students are supported and engaged. This would require additional funding for the education advocate program and should include additional time and training for both Open Doors case managers and education advocates.
- Fund Open Doors programs at a 1.2 Annual Average Full-Time Equivalent (AAFTE) so all students in Open Doors programs have access to year-round programming and programming is fully available to post-resident youth.
- Allocate barrier reduction funding for Open Doors programs. Barrier reduction funding presently exists in skill centers and allows resources to flow directly to meeting student needs, such as transportation and fees.

Additional recommendations from the Open Doors Steering Committee:

- Revise apportionment rates to support Open Doors programs. An average fiscal rate is used for all districts' Open Doors programs. In some areas, districts generate more apportionment per student than the allotted average in Open Doors, leaving programs to serve students with \$200-\$5,000 less per Open Doors AAFTE than the district rate for prototypical students.

Schools/Districts Receiving Assistance

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

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