



PRESERVING WRAPAROUND SUPPORTS FOR STUDENTS LIVING IN FOSTER CARE

2026 Supplemental Operating Budget Decision Package

Agency: 3500 Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

Budget period: 2026 Supplemental Budget

Budget level: PL

RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY

Students experiencing foster care face many barriers to educational success which require additional, specialized services and support if they are to thrive in school. Recent work with community organizations with specific expertise has shown great promise in meeting the additional needs of these students and the ability to follow them through all their transitions. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) requests that the Legislature restore the \$7,000,000 investment for foster care student support that was cut in the 2025–27 biennial budget. The agency also requests the funding be maintained going forward.

FISCAL DETAIL

Operating Expenditures	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Fund 001-1	\$770,000	\$7,000,000	\$7,000,000	\$7,000,000
Total Expenditures	\$770,000	\$7,000,000	\$7,000,000	\$7,000,000
Biennial Totals	\$7,770,000		\$14,000,000	
Staffing	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
FTEs	0.0	0.15	0.15	0.15
Average Annual	0.08		0.15	
Object of Expenditure	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Obj. A	\$0.00	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000
Obj. B	\$0.00	\$8,000	\$8,000	\$8,000
Obj. E	\$0.00	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000
Obj. G	\$0.00	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000
Obj. J	\$0.00	\$2,000	\$0.00	\$0.00
Obj. N	\$770,000	\$6,973,000	\$6,975,000	\$6,975,000
Revenue	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Fund AAA-X	\$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

Students in foster care are those for whom the state has stepped in to become legal guardians. The federal Fostering Connections Act (2008) and Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) require education and child welfare agencies to share responsibility for ensuring educational stability and progress while students are in foster care, but these systems struggle to partner effectively to implement this mandate. Local education and child welfare agencies do not have the training or capacity to meet the unique academic and social-emotional needs of students in foster care or comply with federal and state educational stability laws and processes while in care.

In Washington state throughout the 2024–25 school year, 3,560 students across all grade levels experienced foster care (Washington State Report Card, OSPI, 2025). Students in foster care often have experiences that create persistent and significant barriers to educational success compared to their peers, including decreased school stability, increased chronic absenteeism, a higher rate of identification for special education, and lower graduation rates (Legal Center for Foster Care and Education, 2022).

The Washington State Report Card shows that in school year 2023–24, only 58.6% of students in foster care attended school regularly (i.e., missed 18 days of school or fewer), compared to 72.7% of their peers. Students in foster care experienced disciplinary actions like suspension and expulsion at four times the rate of their peers. Fewer than half of students in foster care were on track to graduate on time at the end of their 9th grade year compared to 70.7% of their peers. Just over half (51.2%) of students in foster care graduated in four years compared to 82.9% of their peers, and students in foster care also have the highest dropout rate of any student group (30%).

When youth in foster care do not graduate from high school, they are disproportionately more likely to experience unemployment, poverty, homelessness, and incarceration. Washington has long recognized the unique needs of students in foster care and funded services to which they are entitled under federal and state law. The state has made consistent and targeted investments in the K–12 system to support students in foster care for many years, including an annual investment in community-based partners that provide direct service to students in foster care.

Through a statewide contract with a community partner who specializes in addressing the needs of students in foster care, the Graduation Success Program funds education specialists who work with eligible youth to create student-centered plans for their education and their future. These plans are made in consultation with caseworkers from the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF). The program tracks the following academic indicators: attendance, out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, and course performance. Throughout the high school career of a student in foster care, education specialists advocate for youth at school to eliminate

barriers to education access and success. Program interventions focus on barrier removal and are divided into four categories: enrollment, discipline related issues, access to services, and educational progress.

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

Students in foster care experience some of the largest opportunity and achievement gaps of any student group in Washington state. Schools are often not equipped to support students in foster care and many of the challenges that youth in foster care face are outside of the school, such as family and social disruptions and trouble accessing social services (Evans, A. & McCann, M., 2020). Washington state prioritized improving the academic achievement of students in foster care by recognizing the needs of this student group extend beyond the reach of school staff and dedicated funding to community-based organizations.

However, among the many and deep cuts to the K–12 programs that funded the work of community-based organizations providing direct services to students, eliminating the \$7 million for targeted support for students in foster care impacts some of the state’s most vulnerable young people. These dollars funded services and academic supports for at least 1,400 students in foster care.

What is your proposal?

Washington state’s historical data show that, since 2005, students in foster care had graduation rates lower than other student groups. Moreover, consistent long-term engagement in educational support programs can increase graduation rates (Washington State Institute for Public Policy, 2012). The removal of state funding for community-based organizations that provide consistent long-term support for students in foster care risks further negative impact on these students’ academic and postsecondary outcomes. To mitigate this risk, this request would honor the state’s longstanding commitment to the educational success of students in foster care, and continue to meet requirements under state law (RCW 28A.300.592). OSPI proposes that the Legislature continue their investment in educational support for students in foster care by funding this work at the level in which it was funded in the 2025 fiscal year and reimburse OSPI for the discretionary state funding the agency used to bridge these services in the 2025–26 school year.

How is your proposal impacting equity in the state?

Please describe in detail how this proposal is likely to benefit communities and populations who have historically been excluded by governmental decisions. Include both demographic and geographic information about communities.

This request focuses on students living in foster care, a population that faces unique and persistent challenges and barriers to academic success, as outlined above in the Package Description section.

Describe how your agency engaged with communities and populations, particularly those who have been historically excluded and marginalized by governmental decisions?

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 in foster care. These students are also disproportionately likely to be students of color and American Indian/Alaska Native students (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2023). Because this request focuses specifically on the academic needs of students in foster care, OSPI worked closely with a reliable and knowledgeable partner organization with expertise in meeting these needs statewide to inform this request.

What input did your agency receive and how was it incorporated into your proposal?

OSPI worked closely with a reliable and knowledgeable partner organization with expertise in meeting these needs statewide to inform this request.

Explain why and how these equity impacts will be addressed, i.e., consider communities or populations excluded or disproportionately impacted by the proposal.

See above.

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

This request would fund a contract to provide long-term educational coaching and support for high school students who have experienced foster care during their high school years, integrated individualized academic support with postsecondary planning to facilitate students' educational progress, high school completion, and post-high school plan initiation.

Direct Services

Education specialists and coaches that provide intensive 1:1 support to high school students in foster care, including up to one year of post-high school coaching after graduation. These specialists serve as consistent caring adults who advocate for educational access, monitor academic progress, facilitate barrier removal, and coordinate services across child welfare and education systems—directly addressing the relationship and stability deficits that contribute to the graduation gap.

Program Leadership and Infrastructure

Staff who provide program leadership, supervision, training, and administrative support will ensure service fidelity, data collection, and coordination with OSPI, DCYF, and school districts.

Evidence-Based Interventions

The implementation of research-based strategies proven to increase the likelihood of high school persistence and graduation. These strategies include attendance monitoring, behavioral supports, credit recovery assistance, special education advocacy, and post-high school planning. Additionally, short-term post-high school coaching is provided to reduce barriers related to transitioning successfully into postsecondary life. This integrated service model delivers

comprehensive and coordinated support and also generates both qualitative and quantitative data to assess effectiveness and guide continuous program improvement.

Data and Evaluation Systems

Robust data collection, analysis, reporting, and OSPI-data sharing capabilities will measure the service delivery and educational outcomes of the students who receive these individualized education services, monitoring, and support toward the completion of educational milestones, remediation needs, and special education needs.

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

Contracting with an organization that has expertise in meeting the academic needs of students in foster care and established relationships with school districts and communities saves the state a considerable amount of money. It would be very costly in both fiscal resources in start-up time for OSPI to recruit, employ, train, and oversee the staff needed to provide the same level of service.

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

Following the administrative and programming cuts to K–12 education in the 2025 Operating Budget, OSPI has no resources dedicated to this purpose.

ASSUMPTIONS AND CALCULATIONS

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

This proposal is a return and continuation of state funding for a program at the level that it was most recently funded. In the 2021–23 biennium \$11,790,000 in state funding was appropriated for this specific purpose. In the 2023–25 biennium, \$12,895,000 in state funding was appropriated for this work.

Detailed assumptions and calculations:

To continue this direct educational support to students in foster care, OSPI assumes the following is needed:

- Contract to provide long-term educational coaching and support for high school students who have experienced foster care during their high school years, integrated individualized academic support with postsecondary planning to facilitate students' educational progress, high school completion, and post-high school plan initiation. This includes all elements of RCW 28A.300.592(6):
 - (a) Advocacy for foster youth to eliminate barriers to educational access and success.
 - (b) Consultation with schools and DCYF to develop educational plans for and with participating youth.
 - (c) Monitoring education progress and providing interventions to improve attendance, behavior, and course performance of participating youth.
 - (d) Facilitating age-specific developmental and logistical tasks to be accomplished for high school and post-secondary success.

- (e) Facilitating the participation of youth with school and local resources that may assist in educational access and success.
- (f) Coordinating youth, caregivers, schools, and social workers to advocate to support youth progress in the educational system.

The estimated cost of the contract is \$770,000 in fiscal year (FY) 2026, \$6,973,000 in FY 2027, and \$6,975,000 annually thereafter.

- 0.15 FTE (full-time equivalent) Program Supervisor to collaborate with the contracted nongovernmental entity and DCYF regarding specialized services and targeted support for students in foster care, manage the contract, and provide technical assistance to schools and school districts. OSPI estimates the cost to be \$27,000 in FY 2027 and \$25,000 in annually thereafter.

Workforce assumptions:

Fiscal Year 2027 (Total = \$27,000)

Program Supervisor: 0.15 FTE

- Salary: \$15,000
- Benefits: \$8,000
- Goods & Services: \$1,000
- Travel: \$1,000
- Capital Outlays: \$2,000

Fiscal Year 2028 and Ongoing (Total: \$25,000 Annually)

Program Supervisor: 0.15 FTE

- Salary: \$15,000
- Benefits: \$8,000
- Goods & Services: \$1,000
- Travel: \$1,000

Historical funding:

Fiscal Year 2026

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

Fiscal Year 2027

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

STRATEGIC AND PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES

Strategic framework:

This proposal directly supports multiple OSPI strategic goals, with primary alignment to the agency's commitment to "eliminating opportunity gaps and supporting students furthest from educational justice."

OSPI Goal 2: Rigorous Learner-Centered Options in Every Community: The proposal directly advances this goal by ensuring foster youth have "access to meaningful high school and beyond planning" and "pathways to graduation and beyond that meet their unique interests." Graduation Success facilitates individualized graduation pathways, academic supports and barrier removal, post-high school planning, and dual credit access that address the unique challenges that foster youth face.

OSPI Goal 4: A Committed, Unified, and Customer-Focused OSPI: This investment demonstrates OSPI's commitment to "consistent, timely, and meaningful funding and supports that center the needs of students" who are furthest from educational justice. Restoring funding for RCW 28A.300.592 fulfills legal mandates while coordinating services across child welfare and education systems.

Results Washington: Supports the statewide goal of world-class education by addressing one of the most significant achievement gaps in public education, moving Washington toward its 2016 commitment in House Bill 1999 to lead the nation in educational outcomes for students in foster care.

Performance outcomes:

Primary Evidence-Based Outcome

Increased educational persistence and engagement among foster youth. This persistence directly supports the RCW 28A.300.592 mandate of improving graduation rates, recognizing that youth in foster care often require extended timelines due to educational disruption and trauma. The following performance outcomes should be annually calculated by OSPI using a sound statistical model that evaluates the outcomes of students in foster care served by the Graduation Success program compared to those who are eligible for services but who do not receive them. Such an analysis will require a data share agreement with the contractor to allow OSPI to account for services provided, duration of service, and other relevant factors.

Educational Persistence Indicators

- Improved graduation and reduced dropout rates in the first four years of high school.
- Increased school attendance rates.
- Sustained engagement with education despite placement transitions.
- Stronger connections to caring adults and educational support systems.
- Reduced disciplinary actions and school suspensions.

Academic Progress Measures

- Improved course completion and credit attainment.
- Increased access to special education services when needed.
- Higher rates of postsecondary plan development, monitoring, and initiation as measured through engagement with the High School and Beyond Plan.

Long-term Completion Outcomes

- Graduation rates measured over extended timeframes (up to seven years after initial entry into ninth grade) that reflect the realities that youth in foster care face.
- Postsecondary enrollment and persistence.

System Coordination Outcomes

- Enhanced communication and coordination between schools and state partners.
- Improved foster parent/caregiver engagement in educational planning.
- Reinforced special education compliance and appropriate service provision.

OTHER COLLATERAL CONNECTIONS

Intergovernmental:

This work connects to and involves the work of DCYF, regional educational service districts (ESDs), and school districts.

Stakeholder impacts:

None outside the improved outcome and consistent support for high school students in foster care.

Legal or administrative mandates:

This request supports Washington compliance with federal law and state law under [RCW 28A.300.592](#), alongside consistent investment through the past three state biennial operating budgets.

Changes from current law:

None

State workforce impacts:

None

State facilities impacts:

None

Puget Sound recovery:

N/A

Governor's salmon strategy:

N/A

OTHER SUPPORTING MATERIALS

References

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3. U.S. Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2024, November). *Ensuring educational stability and success for students in foster care: Non-regulatory guidance*. Washington, DC. <https://www.ed.gov/media/document/non-regulatory-guidance-ensuring-educational-stability-and-success-students-foster-care-november-15-2024-108448.pdf>
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7. Washington State Institute for Public Policy. (2012, December). *Educational outcome for foster youth—benchmarks*. Olympia, Washington. [https://www.wsipp.wa.gov/ReportFile/1115/Wsipp Educational-Outcomes-of-Foster-Youth-Benchmarks Full-Report.pdf](https://www.wsipp.wa.gov/ReportFile/1115/Wsipp%20Educational-Outcomes-of-Foster-Youth-Benchmarks%20Full-Report.pdf)
8. [RCW 28A.300.592](#).
9. The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2023, May 14). *Foster care race statistics*. Baltimore, MD. [https://www.aecf.org/blog/us-foster-care-population-by-race-and-ethnicity#:~:text=These%20figures%20come%20from%20Child,latest%20news%2C%20ata%20and%20reports](https://www.aecf.org/blog/us-foster-care-population-by-race-and-ethnicity#:~:text=These%20figures%20come%20from%20Child,latest%20news%2C%20data%20and%20reports).

Information technology (IT):

N/A