

Foster Youth Outcomes

Budget Language

ESSB 5187 Sec. 501(1)(f): \$123,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2024 and \$123,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2025 are provided solely for implementation of chapter 163, Laws of 2012 (foster care outcomes). The office of the superintendent of public instruction shall annually report each 31 December on the implementation of the state's plan of cross-system collaboration to promote educational stability and improve education outcomes of foster youth.

Proviso Purpose

With the recognition of the critical role education plays in improving outcomes for youth in and alumni of foster care, the purpose of SHB 2254 (Foster Care—Education Success, 2012 Session) is to:

- a. Improve the high school graduation and postsecondary outcomes of foster youth through coordinated P–20 and child welfare outreach, intervention, and planning.
- b. Facilitate the on-time grade level progression and graduation of students who are the subject of a dependency proceeding pursuant to chapter 13.34 RCW.
- c. Provide Washington students in foster care wraparound educational advocacy services.
- d. Maintain students in foster care in their school of origin and minimize the number of school changes.
- e. Improve access to postsecondary scholarship opportunities and participation in post-secondary education.
- f. Mandate the timely transmission of educational records.
- g. Improve cross-system collaboration between OSPI, the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF), and the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC).

Services Provided

In the 2024–25 fiscal year, the Foster Care Education Program Supervisor at OSPI accomplished the following tasks:

- a. Collaborated closely with DCYF on:
 - i. Weekly collaboration meetings with the Education Program Administrator to identify program needs, joint guidance, and areas of programmatic growth.
 - ii. Partnership with Regional Education Leads on trainings, regional monthly meetings, and student case assessments.
 - iii. Targeted support for DCYF regional offices such as training on educational stability provisions, providing technical assistance, and facilitating communication with school districts.



- iv. Consultation on guidance for foster care liaisons and building points of contact.
- v. Transportation reimbursement for school districts.
- vi. Joint guidance on "Who is the "parent" under the individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)?"
- a. Inventory of the OSPI Foster Care webpages to identify outdated and/or no longer relevant information and resources.
- b. With the November 2024 U.S. Department of Education (ED) release of Non-Regulatory Guidance for Ensuring Educational Stability and Success for Students in Foster Care, changes to OSPI guidance were necessary. These guidance documents were updated and posted on the website. Changes were made to:
 - i. Best Interest Determination Toolkit
 - ii. Foster Care Liaison Toolkit
 - iii. Building Point of Contact Toolkit
 - iv. State and Federal Foster Care Requirements
- a. Managed the 2023–25 Treehouse Graduation Success Demonstration Sites and Education Advocacy contracts.
- b. Drafted, procured approval for, and implemented the 2025–26 Treehouse Education Advocacy contract.
- c. Lead the Foster Care Subcommittee of Project Education Impact (PEI).
- d. Held monthly Foster Care Office Hours for school district staff.
- e. Held bi-monthly Regional Meetings for each DCYF region for school and district staff, DCYF Regional Education Leads, DCYF caseworkers, and community partners.
- f. Program review of eight Local Education Agencies (LEAs).
- g. Improved access to educational information regarding students in foster care by establishing clear and consistent communication with the field through GovDelivery, guidance, and providing training to school districts, social workers, advocacy organizations, foster parent organizations, and contractors.
- h. Supported a statewide system of foster care liaisons and building points of contact to ensure that their individual districts are collaborating with DCYF, service providers, and contractors and that students receive the services they are entitled to by law.
- i. Served on the Washington Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) Child and Youth Trafficking Workgroup creating benchcards for judicial officers.
- j. Continued implementation of the identification system for school-based building points of contact and updates to the contact list on the OSPI Foster Care webpage.
- k. Education and training for school districts and system partners to clarify the definition of foster care and ensuring alignment with the federal definition in HB 1955 (2022).
- l. Participation in national projects and platforms, including:
 - i. American Bar Association Community of Practice.
 - ii. ED state education agencies (SEA) foster points of contact.
- a. Membership in the following workgroups to ensure the needs of students in foster care and the schools they attend are represented in higher level collaboration efforts:

- i. Passport to College Scholarship Leadership Team.
 - ii. Supreme Court Commission on Children in Foster Care.
 - iii. Family Well-Being Community Collaborative, AOC overseen by the Supreme Court's Commission of Children in Foster Care.
 - iv. Interagency department coordination with Homeless, Institutional Education, Special Education, Financial Education Public-Private Partnership (FEPPP), Attendance, and Student Support teams.
 - v. OSPI, DCYF, Developmental Disability Administration (DDA) quarterly meetings to address educational impacts on foster care students also identified as special education students.
 - vi. University of Washington's Alliance Caregiver Retention, Education, and Support Program (CaRES) training creation and offerings for caregivers, Court Appointed Special Advocates, and school staff on educational needs and programs for students in foster care.
- a. Presented at the following conferences on the federal and state educational stability provisions for students in foster care:
- i. National Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Conference.
 - ii. Washington School Counselor Association Spring Conference.
 - iii. Alliance CaRES Care Giver Conference.
 - iv. Integrated Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Conference.
 - i. Provided the following trainings:
 - ii. Foster Care Liaison and Building Points of Contact Training (six trainings) for school district Foster Care Liaisons and school-based Building Points of Contact.
 - iii. Youthnet.
 - iv. Refugees Northwest.
 - v. McKinney Vento and Foster Care—How Are They Similar and Different? (two trainings).
 - vi. Best Interest Determination meetings.
 - vii. Transportation for Students in Foster Care—Feedback Session.
 - viii. Compelled to Care.
 - ix. ED Non-Regulatory Guidance Overview Session.
 - x. McKinney-Vento and Foster Care Building Points of Contact.
- a. Coordinated the following trainings for school staff:
- i. Educational Training Vouchers (ETV) by DCYF.
 - ii. DCYF Program Overview by DCYF.
 - iii. Treehouse Programs Overview.
 - iv. Post-Secondary Resources by the Washington Student Achievement Council.
 - v. Unaccompanied Refugee Minors by Washington State Department of Social and Health Services.
 - vi. Keeping Families Together by Washington Administrative Office of the Courts.

Criteria for Receiving Services/Grants

SHB 2254 does not include grants or other direct funding to local districts.

Beneficiaries in the 2024-25 School Year

Number of School Districts:	295
Number of Schools:	0
Number of Students:	0
Number of Educators:	0

Are Federal or Other Funds Contingent on State Funding?

No.

State Funding History

Fiscal Year	Amount Funded	Actual Expenditures
2025	\$123,000	\$105,217
2024	\$123,000	\$99,030
2023	\$123,000	\$80,862
2022	\$123,000	\$123,000
2021	\$123,000	\$123,000

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

Fiscal Year	Number of Beneficiaries
2025	295
2024	295
2023	295

Programmatic Changes Since Inception (If Any)

In the 2024–25 fiscal year the following changes have occurred:

- Bi-monthly regional meetings (based on DCYF region) were added for additional collaboration opportunities between LEAs, DCYF, and OSPI.
- Training and topics offered based on feedback from the Spring Needs Assessment sent to Foster Care Liaisons and Building Points of Contact.
- Increased collaboration with DCYF, Treehouse, and foster parent organizations.

Program(s) Evaluation or Major Findings

Each spring, the OSPI Foster Care Education team distributes a Needs Assessment survey to Foster Care Liaisons. This survey helps pinpoint areas where additional guidance or support may be needed across school districts. The feedback gathered allows the team to assess how effectively the program is meeting district needs and identify opportunities to enhance their support.

In the 2024-2025 school year notable identified areas of the needs assessment included:

- a. Out of 106 responses in the survey 27% indicated students in foster care were identified by the receipt of the School Notification Form from DCYF. The School Notification Form is a necessary indicator for school district Foster Care Liaisons to begin educational stability services and support. These results show that further collaboration and training with DCYF is needed for case workers on filling out and distributing the School Notification Form.
- b. 64.4% of respondents indicated that they participated in Best Interest Determination Meetings. This is an indication that additional training, information, and guidance is needed and will be a target area in the 2025-2026 school year.
- c. Respondents identified training topics that would better support their professional development such as the child welfare dependency process, special education rights and services, tribal child welfare dependencies, other agencies and non-profits that support students in foster care, and how the CEDARS Foster Care Report is created. All of these will be trainings offered to school district employees in the 2025-2026 school year in collaboration with internal and outside agencies.

Major Challenges Faced by Program(s)

Persistent challenges continue to affect both the education and child welfare sectors annually. Although these systems differ fundamentally in their structure and objectives, they are expected to work together. When alignment between them is lacking, miscommunication and misunderstandings arise, creating difficulties for both agencies. School districts face a myriad of challenges including high turnover rates in both foster care liaisons and building points of contact, reduction in staff, and fewer funding resources. Many school district Foster Care Liaisons carry additional district roles that impact their ability to dedicate the necessary time to the responsibilities of supporting the educational stability of students in foster care. Additionally, foster care liaisons and building points of contact are not provided with the necessary professional development around youth in dependency such as trainings on impacts of trauma, child welfare process, educational and life-long school attendance and engagement, and access to special education services. Without this knowledge, students in foster care cannot be fully supported in their school and in their educational career.

Within DCYF, caseworkers often lack awareness of their legal obligations under state and federal law regarding the education of students in foster care. Districts report that students are frequently moved to new foster care placements with no communication to schools, often resulting in students missing school and falling behind academically. Additionally, caregivers and social workers are withdrawing students and moving them to new schools without Best Interest Determinations or informing school staff. The demanding workloads along with high turnover of DCYF caseworkers don't allow for sufficient time to dedicate to education.

Transportation has become a challenge for both the education and child welfare system. A persistent lack of bus drivers and independent providers coupled with the high mobility of students to out-of-district placements has led to the inability of students in foster care to access transportation to their school of origin or their Best Interest Determination school thereby denying them their right to educational stability.

Students in foster care continue to face adversities that include:

- a. Higher mobility than their peers. Most students in foster care attend more than one district in a five-year period, and on average at least one more school and district than their peers.
- b. Higher discipline rates than all other student population groups.
- c. Starting off high school without being on track for graduation.
- d. Higher absences than their peers.
- e. Lower proficiency rates and academic progress than their peers.
- f. Having a middle and high school experience that includes formalized disciplinary actions.
- g. Many students in foster care also experience homelessness at some point.
- h. Students in foster care are overrepresented among students receiving special education services as early as elementary school.

The OSPI Foster Education team continues to encounter ongoing challenges. Recent legislation mandating the designation of building points of contact—on top of the already required foster care liaisons—has significantly increased complexity and frequency of requests for support with service delivery and training. With only two staff members, our team operates with limited capacity compared to other OSPI programs supporting marginalized student populations. These constraints hinder our ability to expand and evolve the program.

Future Opportunities

Opportunities for the foster care education program to be more impactful on student success include:

- a. Continued implementation of [RCW 28A.320.145](#) (Building Points of Contact). In the 2024–25 school year, OSPI was able to train approximately 450 of these school-based staff. The OSPI Foster Care Team will continue to work with LEA's and building points of

contact to create a supportive structure for foster care students through training and technical guidance.

- b. Ongoing outreach, coordinated with DCYF, to foster families and case workers to build knowledge around educational stability provisions for students in foster to decrease school mobility, create better student academic outcomes, and increase graduation rates.
- c. With the introduction of updated student discipline policies, the OSPI Foster Care Team is available to guide and support school districts in addressing disciplinary issues for students in foster care through trauma-informed and culturally responsive approaches.
- d. Creating joint guidance with DCYF on the educational stability provisions for students in foster care that can be utilized by child welfare, school staff, and foster parents.

Other Relevant Information

N/A

Schools/Districts Receiving Assistance

[Click here to see a list of all OSPI grant recipients in the 2025 Fiscal Year.](#)

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