

Peer Mentoring

Budget Language

- (i) \$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.
- (ii) School districts may also use funds to develop a sister school rapid trauma response strategy. Under this component, successful applicants reach out to other schools also receiving a peer support grant to develop a trauma response plan that quickly organizes students and staff to contact peers within those schools during times of school trauma and offer support.
- (iii) The office shall evaluate the program to share best practices and for consideration by other school districts.

Proviso Purpose

The funding in this proviso provided grants to school districts that 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 feedback, student, or staff and parent feedback.

Services Provided

Grantees were separated into two groups: schools with a peer support/Natural Helpers program and schools that did not have a program but had 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 identifying someone in a mental health crisis, and who to students and peers when having a problem.
- Schools accommodate 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/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 monthly check-in meetings.
- Share the total number of students and their enrolled grades 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 need for a Natural Helpers or similar program through survey data feedback, student, and staff or parent feedback has been determined.
- Participate in monthly check-in meetings.
- Accommodate a one-time visit.
- Complete the end-of-grant report by June 30, 2024.

Beneficiaries in the 2024-25 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

Are Federal or Other Funds Contingent on State Funding?

No.

State Funding History

Fiscal Year	Amount Funded	Actual Expenditures
2025	\$600,000	\$303,609
2024	\$216,000	\$216,000

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

Fiscal Year	Number of Beneficiaries
2025	11
2024	11

Programmatic Changes Since Inception (If Any)

This body of work has been discontinued by the legislature. Beginning July 1, 2025, OSPI is no longer implementing this grant/program/partnership/contract.

Program(s) Evaluation or 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 Program(s)

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

This body of work has been discontinued by the legislature. Future opportunities will depend on future legislative direction and resources dedicated to the work.

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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