



Washington Office of Superintendent of  
**PUBLIC INSTRUCTION**

## **REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE**

# **UPDATE: Building Bridges: Dropout Prevention, Intervention and Reengagement 2025**

**Authorizing Legislation: RCW 28A.175.075**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary .....	3
Introduction.....	5
Background .....	6
Recommendations.....	8
OSPI Building Bridges Program Updates.....	14
Conclusion & Next Steps .....	17
Legal Notice .....	18

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines the 2024–25 legislative recommendations and system updates from the Graduation: A Team Effort (GATE) Advisory, as required by RCW 28A.175.075, including contributions from the Re-envisioning Truancy Subcommittee. It also summarizes the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)’s ongoing efforts to strengthen Washington’s statewide dropout prevention, intervention, and reengagement systems under the Building Bridges statutes.

Established by the Legislature in 2007, the Building Bridges Workgroup—now the GATE Advisory—coordinates state and local efforts to reduce student dropout rates through early warning systems and integrated student supports. Washington’s approach centers on the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) and the Washington Integrated Student Supports Protocol (WISSP), aligning academic, behavioral, and engagement interventions with data-driven decision-making. Since 2018, these efforts have been reinforced through the Washington School Improvement Framework (WSIF) under ESSA.

## **1. Infrastructure for Timely Supports**

- Regional Student Support Navigators to map local resources and coordinate cross-sector referrals.
- Shared Data Referral Systems and Early Warning Dashboards to improve access to attendance, behavior, and course performance data.
- Professional Development and Improvement Networks focused on culturally responsive family engagement, MTSS implementation, and data literacy.

## **2. Cradle-to-Career Supports**

- Establish a statewide initiative on the Science of Hope to build resilience and optimism in students.
- Fund community-based mentoring and youth development programs that provide culturally appropriate supports and mentoring systems.

## **3. Sustainable Student Supports**

- Expand Medicaid access for schools to fund additional student support services.
- Sustain and expand student support personnel, including Attendance and Reengagement Specialists.
- Fully fund Open Doors Youth Reengagement programs to ensure year-round access and barrier reduction.

The Re-envisioning Truancy Project engaged youth, families, and educators statewide to modernize attendance and engagement policy. Key recommendations include:

- Shifting from punitive truancy-based systems to approaches addressing all absences, removing the “unexcused absence” definition from law.
- Strengthening District Attendance Liaison roles and Community Engagement Boards (CEBs) with training, consistency, and funding.

- Maintaining a limited, restorative court role for severe absenteeism cases.
- Launching a statewide attendance awareness campaign and mapping regional resources to improve coordination.

OSPI continues to advance the Building Bridges mandate through multiple initiatives:

- Open Doors Reengagement Program: Supports youth aged 16–21 who have disengaged from traditional education, emphasizing personalized, community-based learning. The 2023–25 Summer Pilot Project demonstrated positive impacts on academic progress and reengagement.
- Building Bridges Grant Program: Provides resources to local districts for dropout prevention and early intervention.
- Ninth Grade Success Initiative: Improves on-track rates for graduation through data-informed MTSS interventions.
- Attendance & Truancy Initiatives: Promote attendance best practices, CEB training, and peer learning networks across districts.

Despite fiscal constraints, OSPI and the GATE Advisory remain committed to advancing a coherent statewide K–12 dropout prevention, intervention, and reengagement system. Future priorities include sustaining core programs, enhancing cross-agency collaboration, and advocating for investments that ensure equitable student engagement and success across Washington State.

# INTRODUCTION

This report provides the legislative recommendations developed by the Graduation: A Team Effort (GATE) Advisory authorized and required by [RCW 28A.175.075](#), including the recommendations from the Re-envisioning Truancy subcommittee. This report also contains brief summaries of OSPI work related and authorized through the Building Bridges statutes including the Building Bridges grant program and the Open Doors Reengagement Program.

# BACKGROUND

In 2007, the Legislature established the Building Bridges Workgroup, now known as the Graduation: A Team Effort (GATE) Advisory. This advisory, comprised of state legislators and state agency partners, is charged with assisting and enhancing the work of the building bridges grant program (RCW [28A.175.025](#)). Specifically, they are to:

- (a) Identify and make recommendations to the legislature for the reduction of fiscal, legal, and regulatory barriers that prevent coordination of program resources across agencies at the state and local level;
- (b) Develop and track performance measures and benchmarks for each partner agency or organization across the state including performance measures and benchmarks based on student characteristics and outcomes specified in RCW [28A.175.035](#)(1)(e); and
- (c) Identify research-based and emerging best practices regarding prevention, intervention, and retrieval programs.
- (d) Report to the appropriate committees of the legislature and the governor on an annual basis beginning December 1, 2007, with proposed strategies for building K-12 dropout prevention, intervention, and reengagement systems in local communities throughout the state including, but not limited to, recommendations for implementing emerging best practices, needed additional resources, and eliminating barriers.

From the inception of Building Bridges in 2007, the concept of Early Warning Systems and the key indicators of Attendance, Behavior and Course Performance became central to Washington's dropout prevention, intervention and reengagement efforts. Early studies used student data from public schools across the country to identify students who would later dropout and examine warning signs and steps that could have been taken to change the trajectory of these students' lives. For more historical context see the [Building Bridges 2008 Legislative Report](#).

Building Bridges has been intentional about creating coherence across recognized student support frameworks. The Washington model of [multi-tiered system of supports \(MTSS\)](#) integrates team-driven shared leadership, data-informed decision making, family, student, and community engagement, a continuum of coordinated supports, and evidence-based practices. The [Washington Integrated Student Supports Protocol \(WISSP\)](#) echoes these categories in their core components including: needs and strengths assessments, community partnerships, coordination of supports, integration of supports, and data-driven practices. Implementation and improvement science help to ground this work using teaming structures within a data informed framework.

In 2018, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) began to leverage the newly adopted [Washington School Improvement Framework](#), authorized under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act, and the successes of the Building Bridges Workgroup to further accelerate graduation rates for all

students. In support of academic success, dropout prevention and identification practices have been strengthened by the Improvement Framework's focus on school quality and student success indicators, such as regular attendance, ninth graders on-track for graduation, and dual credit course completion.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

The GATE Advisory met four times over the 2024-25 school year. The following recommendations were developed over that time and were informed by the work of the Re-envisioning Truancy subcommittee. The recommendations are comprehensive and aimed at creating a robust support system for students.

## Recommendation #1: Infrastructure for Timely Supports

### 1A. Regional Resource Access

- **Regional Student Support Navigator Positions:** Create regional positions to identify/map regional resources and connect with regional partners across various sectors (education, health, judicial, etc.) to streamline referrals and support systems, in coordination with regional behavioral health navigators.

Identify resources for Community Engagement Boards and wrap-around supports for attendance/engagement interventions. If funded appropriately, this function could be combined with other duties of a regional ESD Attendance Engagement Coordinator (if also funded), including professional development and coaching on best practices and CEBs (Recommendation #1c).

- **Shared Data Referral System:** Develop or fund an existing data portal for resource mapping and tracking referrals to improve efficiency and coordination of supports to students and families across districts, partners and providers.

### 1B. Expand Data Access

- **Early Warning Indicator Data System, Reports & Dashboards:** Provide access for districts to data systems or reports/dashboards that provide accessible, visual dashboards that help schools analyze, monitor and intervene early to address issues based on evidence-based early warning indicators for student success (attendance, behavior, course performance).
- **Data Sharing Agreements:** Promote data sharing between agencies to enhance support and coordination.

### 1C. Support Professional Development & Networks

- **Improvement Networks & Coaching:** Support improvement networks for school districts that focus on scaling successful student support & engagement systems & strategies, especially during key transition periods like elementary to middle and middle to high school.

- **Professional Development on Key Engagement Topics:** Support education partners to provide professional development on the following topics:
  - Family engagement/youth voice that is culturally responsive and trauma-informed; engaging students and families to understand why students aren't attending.
  - MTSS implementation (teaming, using data, interventions, referral to community supports).
  - Data Literacy: Using data to understand which students aren't attending and succeeding academically.
  - Best practices to support student attendance, positive behavior and academic success.
  - Community Engagement Board implementation.

## Recommendation #2 - Cradle to Career Supports

### 2A. Create a Statewide Initiative for The Science of Hope

- **Adoption and Training:** Expand the use of the [Science of Hope](#) framework and provide training and coaching to various state and local entities.

### 2B. Fund Culturally Appropriate Youth Development & Mentoring Supports

- **Mentoring and Development:** Provide resources for community organizations focused on mentoring and youth development and create a statewide system for these supports.

## Recommendation #3 - Create Sustainable Student Supports

### 3A. Expand Access to Medicaid for Schools

- **Medicaid Services:** Support OSPI's commitment and existing efforts to re-envision school-based Medicaid services to include additional supports and offer technical assistance to schools to access Medicaid funding.

### 3B. Create Sustainable Student Support Personnel

- **Personnel Funding:** Ensure every district has dedicated support personnel to connect with families and track student needs.
- **Attendance, Engagement & Reengagement Outreach & Intervention Specialists:** Fund intervention specialists in school buildings & in community (build on other successful examples e.g. ESSER attendance & reengagement specialists, Student assistance professionals). Their role is to provide:
  - Direct service support to caseloads of students that struggle with attendance, connect them to culturally responsive resources, mentorship, and skill building.

- Community outreach by credible messengers to students and families who are not enrolled.

Build in methods of quality assurance to ensure that funding recipients are providing high quality case management and intervention support.

## 3C. Fully Fund Open Doors Youth Reengagement

- **Funding Expansion:** Increase funding for Open Doors programs to support year-round continuous academic, career skill development and reduce barriers to access.

## Re-envisioning Truancy Project & Recommendations

Over the course of SY 2023 & 2024, OSPI set out to understand the impact of truancy policies in Washington state on students, families and educators. The [Re-envisioning Truancy Policies and Practices Project](#), in partnership with American Institutes for Research (AIR), Puget Sound ESD (PSESD) and a volunteer workgroup, conducted listening sessions and interviews of impacted youth and families across Washington state; as well as partners across and with the education system. The workgroup was created to inform the GATE Advisory of attendance and truancy specific gaps and possible recommendations for exploration. The GATE Advisory recommendations above incorporate some of these recommendations. The final and full set of recommendations from this project are below:

### Recommendation #1

#### **Attendance, Engagement & Reengagement Outreach & Intervention Specialists** (*integrated into GATE Advisory recommendations above*)

Fund intervention specialists in school buildings & in community (build on other successful examples e.g. ESSER attendance & reengagement specialists, Student assistance professionals). Their role is to provide:

- Direct service support to caseloads of students that struggle with attendance, connect them to culturally responsive resources, mentorship, and skill building.
- Community outreach by credible messengers to students and families who are not enrolled.

Build in methods of quality assurance to ensure that funding recipients are providing high quality case management and intervention support.

### Recommendation #2

#### **Professional Development on Key Engagement Topics** (*integrated into GATE Advisory recommendations above*)

Fund education partners to provide professional development on the following topics:

- Family engagement/youth voice that is culturally responsive and trauma-informed.
  - Engaging students and families to understand why students aren't attending.
- MTSS implementation (teaming, using data, interventions, referral to community supports).
  - Using data to understand which students aren't attending.
  - Best practices to support student attendance.
- Community Engagement Board implementation.

## **Recommendation #3**

### **Shift system from truancy to addressing all absences**

- Change thresholds in law (or direct OSPI to develop rules) on when and how to intervene when students are absent regardless if the absence is excused or unexcused.
- Eliminate the definition and concept of unexcused absence from law, WAC, and CEDARS data reporting.
- Require WSSDA to develop a model policy that addresses all absences; aligned with MTSS and is research-based.
- Require & fund OSPI to develop guidance to support the implementation of the model policy.
- Require School Improvement Teams to review attendance data as part of their school improvement planning process, including by student group and program.

## **Recommendation #4**

### **Strengthen the Role of the District Excessive Absenteeism & Truancy Liaison**

- Clarify roles and responsibilities.
- Align with any changes to the statute regarding focusing on all absences, not just truancy.
- Provide in-district training:
  - Community Engagement Board training- starting, maintaining, volunteer recruitment, and building attendance plans.
  - Data recording, coding, and reports.
  - MTSS Implementation (teaming, data, interventions, referrals to community supports, and coaching).
  - District Attendance Policy & Procedure, OSPI Guidance, Compulsory Attendance Laws, and Enrollment/Withdrawal Policies.
- Provide funding to districts to support this role; could be part of CEB funding.

## **Recommendation #5**

### **Strengthen the Model and the Implementation of Community Engagement Boards**

- OSPI refines the model and CEB guidance to create consistency across state.
- Require District Liaisons to attend annual CEB training provided by OSPI.

- Funding to OSPI for staffing to accomplish the above.
- More training opportunities, consistent across the state, including regional ESD trainings. (see Recommendation #2)
- Map regional resources (in partnership with ESD).
- Funding for school districts to staff and implement.
- Funding for community-based organizations to provide support and interventions. (see Recommendation #1)
- Require CEBs before filing a petition (statute change).

## **Recommendation #6**

### **Maintain a Role for Courts in Addressing Student Engagement in Education**

- Courts as a last resort and last stop, acknowledging there are situations that are outside of the scope of school districts.
- Develop a model (civil) court program for students with excessive absenteeism to create consistency in court services/roles.
- Funding can be tied to fidelity to implementation of the model. If courts don't implement it, they don't get funding.
- Model includes training and certification standards for staff, engages community partners, takes a restorative approach, based on social service/social work - builds on the existing models developed by exemplary local courts.

If Courts are eliminated, students and families will still need a neutral third party that is not the District, when the efforts of the district and community partners are unable to address the needs of the student and family.

## **Recommendation #7**

### **Early Warning (Attendance, Behavior, Course Performance) Data Dashboards** (*integrated into GATE Advisory recommendations above*)

Fund access to real time data dashboards that reduce the amount of time and effort needed to see trends, student groups, and other critical system-level data, a critical particularly for small and rural districts.

## **Recommendation #8**

### **State-wide Attendance Awareness Campaign**

- Low lift: Sign on as a state collaborator to Attendance Works annual campaign, use their materials, and share them out. Would still need staffing or funding for a lead agency to manage the project.

- Bigger lift: Develop own materials, toolkit, resources. This would require commitment from the Legislature, Governor, other State Agencies and/or OSPI Leadership. Would need leaders with influence to step into this space and set it as a priority.

## **Recommendation #9**

### **Map Regional Resources** (*integrated into GATE Advisory recommendations above*)

Funding to ESDs & Districts to map regional resources, in coordination with regional behavioral health navigators.

- Identify resources for both the CEBs and wrap around supports for attendance interventions. If funded appropriately, this function could be combined with other duties of a regional ESD Attendance Engagement Coordinator, including professional development and coaching on best practices and CEBs (Recommendation #2).

# OSPI BUILDING BRIDGES PROGRAM UPDATES

OSPI leads multiple efforts that align with and support the intent of the building bridges legislation to build a state-wide dropout prevention, intervention and reengagement continuum. The two primary bodies of work required by the Legislature are the Open Doors Reengagement Program and the Building Bridges Grant Program ([RCW 28A.175.010](#)).

## Open Doors Reengagement

Open Doors Youth Reengagement (WAC 392-700) is the statewide system that was created under the original recommendations of the Building Bridges Workgroup. The program is designed to support older youth, ages 16–21, who have disengaged from traditional education or are not on track to graduate by age 21 or age 22 if receiving special education. The program provides individualized, performance-based educational services through community partnerships and multiple pathways to success, with a focus on reengaging students and preparing them for post-secondary achievement. Open Doors offers tailored supports that foster school engagement and persistence.

The legislature funded a Summer Pilot Project for the 2023-2025 biennium, to test emerging practices and expand access to education during the typically unfunded summer months. The pilot directly supported ten Open Doors programs to operate in July and August, with attention to prioritizing post-resident youth: students who were previously ever in institutional education.

Data show that pilot strategies such as summer learning, local education agency coordination, partnerships with community-based organizations, and barrier reduction funding had positive impact on student academic progress. An evaluation of the pilot is complete and materials can be found on [Open Doors Reports](#) under "Summer Pilot Project".

## Building Bridges Grant Program

As part of the continuation of this project from the last fiscal year, seven school districts continued to receive grants to assess their local understanding of Early Warning Systems (EWS), uncover implementation challenges, and inform OSPI's future support strategies. Grantees also continued to implement and support systems work based on last year's findings.

As a recap, during the 2023-24 school year, Education Northwest (EdNW) conducted interviews, focus groups, and community conversations across selected schools and regions to gather perspectives from educators, students, families, and regional support staff. Initial findings revealed that while some schools successfully leveraged EWS to strengthen student-educator relationships and increase community engagement, others faced barriers such as inconsistent awareness, limited resources, leadership turnover, and insufficient family involvement. To enhance and sustain EWS statewide, recommendations included emphasizing relationship-building, fostering collaboration between middle and high schools, and shifting the focus from individual student behaviors to systemic

solutions. Stakeholders also called for increased guidance, professional development, sustained funding, and broader statewide collaboration led by OSPI.

This past school year (2024-25), grantees used funds to maintain awareness of EWS and to continue hosting and/or supporting EWS related work. Grantees had the opportunity to use these funds to support strategies such as community conversations that bring together community partners and elevate family voice with EWS.

## Updates on Other Related Programming

OSPI manages several other related initiatives that, while not directly required under the Building Bridges statute, are integrally related to building a state-wide dropout prevention, intervention and reengagement continuum. These programs in particular are essential components of early warning systems that integrate attendance, behavior and course performance through a Multi-tiered System of Support.

### Ninth Grade Success

Ninth grade is a pivotal year for dropout prevention, is a critical early warning indicator and students who are on-track are four times more likely to graduate. As such, ninth grade success is one of OSPI's key system indicators and one of three Student Quality and Student Success (SQSS) school accountability measures. The [Ninth Grade Success program](#) helps Washington high schools improve freshman success and graduation rates by focusing on early intervention and data-informed practices through a Multi-tiered System of Support framework.

Since 2018, OSPI has partnered with Stand for Children's Center for High School Success (CHSS) to support schools in implementing this model. Participating schools receive coaching, training, data tools, and opportunities for peer learning to implement effective, tiered interventions. For more information about the ninth grade success initiative including key results, see OSPI's [Ninth Grade Success Highlights](#).

### Attendance & Truancy

Attendance is a critical early warning indicator of K-12 student success, where students who attend 90% or more of their school days are significantly more likely to read at grade level by third grade and to graduate from high school. As such, attendance is also one of OSPI's key system indicators and another of the three Student Quality and Student Success (SQSS) school accountability measures.

OSPI provides support to districts and schools to implement best practices and interventions as outlined in the compulsory attendance law ([Chapter 28A.225 RCW](#)) and research. Programmatic supports include the development of guidance, opportunities for districts to connect in peer learning communities, and regular communication of resources and guidance.

OSPI's key 2024-25 highlights include:

- [Community Engagement Board Modules](#)
- [When to Keep your Child Home Sick](#)
- [Updated web resources](#)

During the 2024-25 school year, OSPI supported three Educational Service Districts to run Attendance Improvement Networks. The participating schools, similarly to the ninth grade success network, received coaching, training, data tools and opportunities for peer learning to implement effective, tiered interventions, with a focus on attendance. For more information and key results, see the [Attendance Improvement Networks Pilot 2024-25](#). The funding used to support this was eliminated from the 2025-27 state budget.

# **CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS**

OSPI will continue to engage with partners across the system to understand the current reality of state budget cuts and federal policy and funding cuts. The GATE Advisory Workgroup will continue to meet, learn, and assess system gaps and opportunities with the goal of building a state-wide K-12 dropout prevention, intervention, and reengagement system.

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