



Supporting School District Health and Safety

2027-29 Biennial Capital Budget Decision Package

Agency: 3500 Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

Budget period: 2027-29 Biennial Budget

Budget level: PL

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) requests \$40 million to continue school health and safety programs funded in prior biennial capital budgets. These grants support districts statewide that lack the financial resources to address long-standing and urgent facility needs, ensuring students have safe, healthy, and comfortable learning environments. The continuing program will offer two competitive grant opportunities focused on: (1) health, safety, and equal access improvements, and (2) emergency repairs.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

School districts rely on capital levies and debt-service levies (bond measures), which require voter approval to pay for minor repairs and major renovations; a district's assessed property values affect its ability to pass these measures because lower assessed values require a higher tax rate to raise the same revenue. Capital levies need 51% voter approval, while bond measures require 60% plus one vote. Through August 2026, twenty-one school districts offered 15 bond issuances to voters; only 6 (40%) of those issuances passed and 9 (60%) failed.

This request would continue the funding of grants to support school districts to make needed health and safety repairs which impact student learning.

Total Funding Request for School District Health and Safety: \$40 Million.

Health, Safety and Equal Access Grants: \$25 Million

The Legislature funded the Urgent Repair Grant Program in the 2025-27 Biennial Capital Budget with an appropriation of \$20 million to assist school districts in paying for non-recurring costs associated with school facility repairs and renovations necessary for health, safety, and equal access. The program included the following restrictions: 1) limiting recipient district applications to \$600,000 every other biennium; 2) prioritizing applications based on limited school district financial resources for the project; and 3) requiring any district receiving funding to demonstrate a consistent commitment to address school facility needs. In addition, the Legislature provided \$5 million to Equal Access Grants to improve compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

In the 2025-27 biennium, OSPI received application requests totaling \$52 million from 103 school districts for Urgent Repair Grant funding. OSPI was able to fund 34 school districts applicants with funds from the 2025-27 enacted capital budget. Projects funded include repairs such as upgraded fire alarm systems, replacement of failed heating and cooling systems, and removal. The proposed grant program will continue to provide funding to school districts to address deferred maintenance projects focusing on health and safety issues which impact learning. Grants will be awarded at the beginning of the biennium, and school districts will be expected to complete the projects before the end of biennium in which the funds are awarded.

Besides bond or levy failures, the following grant criteria are also used to determine priority for funding: overall age and condition of facility systems and subsystem; assessed property valuation per student as compared to state averages; assurance by all school districts receiving funding to demonstrate a commitment to maintain any major improvements funded; financial capacity and resources; and other criteria developed by a project review committee comprised of school district facility managers and other stakeholders.

OSPI requests \$20 million in funding for the Urgent Repair Grant Program to continue with helping school districts with facility repairs and renovations needed for health and safety of the students and staff.

The Legislature provided \$5 million in funding in the 2025-27 Biennial Capital Budget, for Equal Access Grants for school districts to improve compliance with the ADA and IDEA. School districts were limited to one grant, not to exceed \$150,000 in a three-year period, and were required to demonstrate a consistent commitment to addressing school facility needs. In the 2025-27 biennium, OSPI received application requests totaling \$10 million from 77 school districts. OSPI was able to fund only 44 of these applicants, with projects ranging from making agricultural facilities wheelchair accessible to purchase of accessible playground equipment.

OSPI requests \$5 million in funding for Equal Access Grants to continue with aiding school districts with facility repairs and renovations needed for equal access of students and staff. In addition, the current grant application limit needs to be increased from \$150,000 to \$200,000 to help keep up with the rising costs of inflation.

This request proposes to merge the Urgent Repair Grant and Equal Access Grant Programs into one grant program to gain administrative efficiencies. Our experience working with district grant applicants shows that some projects qualify for both grant programs. The combined grant program has merged the criteria of the two programs and adjusts the prioritization process to provide funding to the school districts trying to access both the grant programs.

Emergency Repair Pool: \$15 Million

The Legislature first appropriated K-12 Emergency Repair Pool funding beginning in the 2011-13 Biennial Capital Budget to address unexpected and imminent health and safety hazards at K-

12 public schools, including skill centers, which have an impact on the day-to-day operations of the school facility.

Emergency Repair Pool Grants are for school districts that do not have the financial resources to fix and repair building systems which impact health, safety, and student learning.

The Legislature provided \$11 million in funding in the 2025-27 Biennial Capital Budget for the emergency repair pool and by the end of fiscal year 2026, 22 school districts have been awarded \$5.8 million, leaving \$5.2 million available in fiscal year 2027 to assist school districts to recover from 2026 wildfires and other school district projects as the new school year starts. Historically, OSPI receives requests from school districts early in the new school year when building systems become active after being idle during the summer months. Examples of projects funded are many HVAC and roof replacements to onsite sewage system repairs.

OSPI requests \$15 million in funding to continue this successful program and will continue using the Legislature's established criteria below when granting funding: an emergency declaration must be signed by the school district board of directors; the emergency declaration must include a description of the imminent health and safety hazard, the possible cause, the proposed scope of emergency repair work and related cost estimate, and identification of local funding to be applied to the project; and grants of emergency repair monies must be conditioned upon the written commitment and plan of the school district board of directors to repay the grant with any insurance payments or other judgments that may be awarded.

What will the request produce or construct? Who or what will be impacted by the budget request and how will they be impacted?

School districts rely on capital levies and bonds, which require voter approval, to pay for major and minor repairs at school facilities. Many school districts have been unsuccessful in passing capital levies or bonds and do not have the financial resources to address safety, health, and equal access issues that have a direct impact on student learning.

Identify the problem or opportunity addressed by this request. Why is the request a priority? What would be the result of not acting?

Local school districts will receive funding to make needed major and minor repairs to schools to provide a safe and healthy learning environment for students.

For new funding requests for programs or projects that have received previous appropriations (either a phase of construction or previous grant rounds), how much has been spent or put under contract?

All funding appropriated for the Urgent Repair and Equal Access grants has been awarded to school districts. OSPI anticipates the full emergency repair pool will be obligated before the end of the 2025–27 biennium. As of the end of fiscal year 2026 (June 30, 2026), 22 school districts

have been awarded \$5.8 million from the emergency repair pool, leaving \$5.2 million available in fiscal year 2027 for future projects.

Does this project or program leverage non-state funding? If yes, how much by source?

Local school district funds will not be required to apply for the competitive grant programs or request funding from the Emergency Repair Pool.

For major construction projects, describe the viable alternative solutions you considered. Why was this alternative chosen?

Bond elections and issuing levies require a lot of time in planning and would not serve the school districts well in case of imminent health and safety and equal access issues. This grant program is the only feasible option available for districts with very limited financial resources to address emergency building system repairs.

For major construction projects, what project delivery method has been or will be selected and why?

N/A

Location

- Address: N/A
- Zip Code: N/A
- County: Statewide
- City: Olympia
- Legislative District: 098

Funding Requested

- 2027-29 \$40,000,000
- 2029-31 \$40,000,000
- 2031-33 \$40,000,000
- 2033-35 \$40,000,000
- 2035-37 \$40,000,000

STRATEGIC AND PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES

Provide context on how this request fits into the agency's work. Describe how this project supports the agency's strategic plan or would improve agency performance.

This project supports Superintendent Reykdal's K-12 Education Vision of his goal for Washington's public education system to prepare every student who walks through our school doors for post-secondary aspirations, careers, and life.

How is your proposal impacting equity in the state? Which communities are impacted by this proposal? What are the measurable outcomes that would result from the project?

The projects requesting and receiving funding serve significant populations of students of color and students from lower-income households; they are statewide in scope, and many are located in areas designated as distressed by the Department of Employment Security.

OTHER SUPPORTING MATERIALS

If this project is linked to the Puget Sound Action Agenda and/or the Governor's Salmon Strategy, please follow the instructions in Chapter 14 of the operating budget instructions and Chapter 3 of the capital budget instructions.

This project does not impact the Puget Sound Action Agenda or the Governor's Salmon Strategy.

Is there additional information you would like decision makers to know when evaluating this request?

No.