



Increasing On-Time Graduation Rates by Supporting Ninth Grade Success

2027-29 Biennium Operating Budget Decision Package

Agency: 350 Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

Budget period: 2027-29

Budget level: PL

RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY

A students' academic success in their ninth-grade year is a strong predictor of their success through graduation. Washington state has invested in targeted supports for 9th Grade Success for several biennia and the state has seen positive results and lasting outcomes for participating schools and students. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) requests \$3 million to continue this program through the next biennium and beyond.

FISCAL DETAIL

Operating Expenditures	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031
Fund 001-1 (Program 05X)	\$1,500,000	\$1,500,000	\$1,500,000	\$1,500,000
Total Expenditures	\$1,500,000	\$1,500,000	\$1,500,000	\$1,500,000
Biennial Totals	\$3,000,000		\$3,000,000	
Staffing	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031
FTEs	1.30	1.30	1.30	1.30
Average Annual	1.30		1.30	
Object of Expenditure	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031
Obj. A	\$127,000	\$127,000	\$127,000	\$127,000
Obj. B	\$65,000	\$66,000	\$66,000	\$66,000
Obj. C	\$1,008,000	\$1,008,000	\$1,008,000	\$1,008,000
Obj. E	\$9,000	\$9,000	\$9,000	\$9,000
Obj. G	\$9,000	\$9,000	\$9,000	\$9,000
Obj. J	\$15,000	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Obj. N	\$267,000	\$281,000	\$281,000	\$281,000
Revenue	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031

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

Washington's economy depends on a high-performing, highly-skilled workforce built on the foundation of a strong K–12 education system and its mission to prepare all students for postsecondary success. It is critical then that Washington students meet the measures and milestones throughout their K–12 journeys, one of which is a check-in on student progress during their 9th-grade year to ensure that they are on-track to graduate. This evaluation is informed by robust research that shows that a successful 9th-grade year is a strong indicator of a student's overall academic success in high school, with those that finish 9th-grade on-track being four times as likely to graduate (University of Chicago, 2023). While Washington's four-year graduation rate has held strong in recent years with a record-high of 83.6% in the 2022–23 school year, and a rate of 82.6% in the 2024–25 school year, the most recent cohort for which data is currently available, persistent gaps remain for some student groups, meaning that the State's return on investment in K–12 is not quite reaching its full potential (Washington State Report Card, August 3, 2026).

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

The most current data available in the Washington State Report Card, broken out by student groups and key characteristics, highlights persistent opportunity gaps experienced by students who belong to already marginalized groups and identities. Looking at racial categories, data shows 9th grade on-track rates as low as 49.3% for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students, 52.3% for American Indian and Alaska Native students, 49.3% for Hispanic and Latino students, and 65.6% for Black and African American students. Similar trends are seen in student groups that experience instability at home, including on-track rates of 42.7% for students experiencing homelessness, 44.2% for students living in foster care, 49% for students from migrant families, and 49.1% for students identified as English language-learners. 58.4% of students living in low-income families are on-track in 9th grade, and 58.9% of students with disabilities measure as on-track.

Washington has invested for nearly a decade in a Ninth Grade Success program, launched as a pilot in the 2019–20 school year in five high schools. By the 2025–26 school year, the program served 54 schools across 35 school districts, an expansion funded by consistent state investment that has continued through the 2026 fiscal year despite significant budget cuts to K–12, showing

lawmakers' faith in the program and its proven results. The program focuses not only on immediate supports but on embedded practice and a shift in school culture, allowing it to operate on a phase-in phase-out model, wherein schools receive significant support over a number of years that includes training staff to be able to carry on the programming as state funding is tapered off and shifted to serve new schools.

To date, three high schools in the Evergreen School District have transitioned to this alumni-status, meaning that these schools no longer receive state financial support, instead continuing to operate 9th grade success initiatives on their own following the training and infrastructure developed over the years in which they received intensive support from the program. Based on strong, lasting outcomes, one of these schools, Union High School, has served as a national demonstration site for other schools and districts interested in implementing this program.

What is your proposal?

OSPI proposes that the Legislature continue to fund 9th grade success, currently found in the 2026 Supplemental Operating Budget Senate Bill 5998, Section 521(7), as an ongoing item funded at a rate of \$1.5M per fiscal year. This investment will ensure continuance of a successful program operated on a model that, following full implementation across the state, will no longer require much, if any state funding to sustain significant positive results.

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 investment directly supports graduation rates for all Washington students, particularly student groups who experience persistent opportunity gaps. For example, current graduation rates for groups that are less likely to measure as on-track in 9th grade are lower than the state average by up to 10 percentage points.

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

OSPI regularly engages with stakeholders in 9th grade on track, including the community partner providing these services.

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

Participating districts report that sustained, multi-year coaching, rather than one-time supports, was what allowed schools to close 9th grade on-track gaps for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander, American Indian and Alaska Native, Hispanic and Latino, and Black students, as well as students experiencing homelessness, foster care, or migrancy. This input shaped the proposal's continued investment

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

Because 9th grade on-track rates are lowest for Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (49.3%), American Indian and Alaska Native (52.3%), and Hispanic and Latino (49.3%) students, as well as students experiencing homelessness (42.7%) or in foster care (44.2%), continued funding sustains coaching in the schools serving these students until in-district expertise is self-sustaining, directly targeting the gaps driving lower graduation outcomes for these groups.

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

This proposal purchases programmatic support and funding for direct services through a community partner organization to 50 high schools in Washington State, with 9 schools in or transitioning into alumni-status. This targeted investment in the Center for High School Success's 9th Grade Success Initiative will drive academic performance in participating high schools and help close the opportunity gap for key student groups in those schools. This investment does not represent a permanent enhancement to financial support for partner districts; rather, the program is designed around coaching and developing in-district expertise that is incorporated into larger district practice. This change in overall school culture allows the districts to eventually phase out 9th grade grant support in favor of a self-sustaining, long-term model.

Broadly speaking, once districts have had 9th grade success teams in place for an average of four to five years, receiving consistent and regular coaching, districts have shown themselves able to sustain high ninth grade on-track rates across all student groups. Once they achieve this level of sustainability, districts need for external support and funding focuses on participation in the network and collaborative gatherings with other participating districts. At this point they no longer need intensive coaching, and many elements of the program are largely self-sustaining. Grant amounts for alumni-status districts are smaller than those in their first few years. This allows network growth with relatively stable state investment.

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

For OSPI to operate a comparable 9th grade success initiative, it would need to secure a significant investment from the state to build up and sustain the program, likely losing current progress in participating schools during that process. This proposal represents a much smaller investment with immediate, ongoing, and proven results.

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

Outside the operating budget line item cited above, there is no funding dedicated to this work. Current funding expires at the end of the 2027 fiscal year.

ASSUMPTIONS AND CALCULATIONS

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

This proposal requests continuation of the current program into the next biennium. Current program funding is expected to end after fiscal year 2027.

2023-25 Operating Budget

In FY 2024, OSPI received \$0.00 and in FY 2025, OSPI received \$3,500,000.

2025-27 Operating Budget

In FY 2026, OSPI received \$1,500,000 and in FY 2027, OSPI received \$1,500,000.

Detailed assumptions and calculations:

To continue OSPI's existing Ninth-Grade Success grant program, OSPI assumes the following is needed:

Contract

A contract with a nonprofit organization to provide 50 foundational schools in the network data support, coaching, professional development, and technical assistance to Ninth Grade Success teams in research-backed approaches to increase ninth grade on-track rates and eliminate opportunity gaps. The estimated cost for each school is \$20,000. OSPI estimates the total cost of the contract to be \$1,008,000 per year (50 schools x \$20,000, plus indirect), beginning in FY 2028.

Grants to Schools

Grant funds to foundational and alumni schools in the network will be used to support set-up costs for establishing a Ninth-Grade Success team as well as maintaining it throughout the year. Costs include additional teacher compensation, substitute time, materials and supplies for tutoring and other interventions, software licenses, curricula, etc.

In FY 2028, OSPI estimates a total of 50 foundational school grants at \$5,000 each and 8 alumni school grants at \$2,125 each will be awarded. The total amount is estimated at \$267,000.

In FY 2029 and thereafter, OSPI estimates a total of 50 foundational school grants at \$5,000 each and 10 alumni school grants at \$3,100 each will be awarded. The total amount is estimated at \$281,000.

Staffing

1.0 FTE Program Supervisor to manage the contract and grant program, collaborate with data/program coaches and schools, support contractors and community-based partners

engaged in this work, and provide program monitoring and reporting.

0.10 FTE Director to collaborate with contractors and community-based partners engaged in this work and to provide support to the Program Supervisor on grant program and contract responsibilities.

0.20 Administrative Assistant 3 to provide support to the Program Supervisor and Director on the grant program, the contract responsibilities, and support the data and reporting requirements.

The cost for staffing is estimated at \$225,000 in fiscal year 2028 and \$211,000 in years thereafter.

Workforce assumptions:

Fiscal Year 2028 (Total: \$225,000)

Program Supervisor: 1.0 FTE | Director: 0.15 FTE | Administrative Assistant 3: 0.20 FTE

- Salary: \$127,000
- Benefits: \$65,000
- Goods & Services: \$9,000
- Travel: \$9,000
- Capital Outlays: \$15,000

Fiscal Year 2029 and Ongoing (Total: \$211,000 Annually)

Program Supervisor: 1.0 FTE | Director: 0.15 FTE | Administrative Assistant 3: 0.20 FTE

- Salary: \$127,000
- Benefits: \$66,000
- Goods & Services: \$9,000
- Travel: \$9,000
- Capital Outlays: \$0.00

Historical funding:

There is no funding in the carry-forward budget to continue this project into 2027-29.

Fiscal Year 2028

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

Fiscal Year 2029

- FTE = 0.0 FTE
- Total Funds = \$0.0 million

- Near General Fund = \$0.0 million
- Other Funds = \$0.0 million

STRATEGIC AND PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES

Strategic framework:

Governor Ferguson's Priorities

This request supports one of Governor Ferguson's strategic goals.

Goal 1 – Education

Strengthening K-12 education in the state of Washington, which includes plans to invest a higher percentage of the total budget in K-12 education to ensure a strong start for Washington's younger residents. This priority references the Washington State Constitution, which declares that "It is the paramount duty of the state to make ample provision for the education of all children residing within its borders, without distinction or preference on account of race, colors, caste, or sex."

OSPI Strategic Goals

This proposal directly supports three of [OSPI's four strategic goals](#), with primary alignment to the agency's commitment to "eliminating opportunity gaps and supporting students furthest from educational justice."

Goal 1: Equitable Access to Strong Foundations

The ninth-grade year is the foundational year of high school, and this request supports student success during this essential period.

Goal 2: Rigorous Learner-Centered Options in Every Community

Ninth grade success strengthens and supports student learning, and is deployed in different communities across the state, expanding to include new school districts as already participating schools become alumni schools no longer in need of that funding.

Goal 3: A Diverse, Inclusive, and Highly Skilled Workforce

Ninth grade success is not just direct services and interventions for students; it invests heavily in professional development for educators and staff that allows them to better support Ninth grade student success long after the program itself and the state funding is directed elsewhere.

Performance outcomes:

Funding this program will allow 9th grade success initiatives to continue and expand to 50 foundation schools and 20 alumni schools by 2029 schools across the state, serving a total of 22,000 students (25% of all ninth graders in Washington). Rigorous, academic program evaluation of impact since 2019-2020 shows Ninth Grade On-Track rates that are 6.01

percentage points higher than comparison schools, with stronger gains for low-income students (+6.75 percentage points) and multi-lingual learners (+10.96 percentage points)

OTHER COLLATERAL CONNECTIONS

Intergovernmental:

None.

Stakeholder impacts:

OSPI anticipates support from districts that participate or hope to participate in this program. The proposal is also supported by STAND for Children, the organization that has overseen and operated the program from its inception in 2019.

Legal or administrative mandates:

None.

Changes from current law:

None beyond building the line item into the state's ongoing budget projections as opposed to on-time funding secured biennia-by-biennia.

State workforce impacts:

None.

State facilities impacts:

None.

Puget Sound recovery:

N/A

Governor's salmon strategy:

N/A

OTHER SUPPORTING MATERIALS

1. *The To & Through Project*. (2023). University of Chicago.
<https://toandthrough.uchicago.edu>
2. Washington State Report Card, accessed August 3, 3036,
<https://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/ReportCard/ViewSchoolOrDistrict/103300>

Information technology (IT):

N/A

