



Supporting Graduation Success for Students in Foster Care

2027-29 Biennium Operating Budget Decision Package

Agency: 350 Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

Budget period: 2028-31

Budget level: PL

RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY

Students experiencing foster care face many barriers to educational success which require additional, specialized services and support if they are to thrive in school. Recent work with community organizations with specific expertise has shown a significant impact in improving graduation rates and reducing dropout rates for students in foster care. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) requests that the Legislature maintain the investment for foster care student support in the 2027–29 biennial budget.

FISCAL DETAIL

Operating Expenditures	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031
Fund 001	\$3,500,000	\$3,500,000	\$3,500,000	\$3,500,000
Program 05X				
Total Expenditures	\$3,500,000	\$3,500,000	\$3,500,000	\$3,500,000
Biennial Totals	\$7,000,000		\$7,000,000	
Staffing	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031
FTEs	.15	.15	.15	.15
Average Annual	.15		.15	
Object of Expenditure	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031
Obj. A	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000	\$15,000
Obj. B	\$8,000	\$8,000	\$8,000	\$8,000
Obj. E	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000
Obj. G	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000	\$1,000

Obj. J	\$2,000	\$0	\$0	\$0
Obj. N	\$3,473,000	\$3,475,000	\$3,475,000	\$3,475,000
Revenue	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031
Total Revenue	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Biennial Totals		\$0.00		\$0.00

PACKAGE DESCRIPTION

Students in foster care are those for whom the state has stepped in to become legal guardians. The [federal Fostering Connections Act \(2008\)](#) and [Every Student Succeeds Act \(2015\)](#) require education and child welfare agencies to share responsibility for ensuring educational stability and progress while students are in foster care, but these systems struggle to partner effectively to implement this mandate. Local education and child welfare agencies do not have the training or capacity to meet the unique academic and social-emotional needs of students in foster care or comply with federal and state educational stability laws and processes while in care.

In Washington state throughout the 2025–26 school year, 3,718 students across all grade levels experienced foster care (Washington State Report Card, August 3, 2026). Students in foster care often have experiences that create persistent and significant barriers to educational success compared to their peers, including decreased school stability, increased chronic absenteeism, a higher rate of identification for special education and exclusionary discipline, and lower graduation rates (Legal Center for Foster Care and Education, 2022).

The Washington State Report Card shows that in school year 2024–25, only 58.7% of students in foster care attended school regularly (i.e., missed 18 days of school or fewer), compared to 72.9% of their peers. Students in foster care experienced disciplinary actions like suspension and expulsion at four times the rate of their peers. Fewer than half of students in foster care were on track to graduate on time at the end of their 9th grade year compared to 71.9% of their peers. Just over half (51.3%) of students in foster care graduated in four years compared to 82.6% of their peers, and students in foster care also have the highest dropout rate of any student group (28.6%).

When youth in foster care do not graduate from high school, they are disproportionately more likely to experience unemployment, poverty, homelessness, and incarceration. Washington has long recognized the unique needs of students in foster care and funded services to which they are entitled under federal and state law. The state has made consistent and targeted investments in the K–12 system to support students in foster care for many years, including an annual investment in community-based partners that provide direct service to students in foster care.

Through a statewide contract with a community partner who specializes in addressing the needs of students in foster care, the Graduation Success Program funds education specialists who work with eligible youth to create student-centered plans for their education and their future. These plans are made in consultation with caseworkers from the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF). The program tracks the following academic indicators: attendance, out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, and course performance. Throughout the high school career of a student in foster care, education specialists advocate for youth at school to eliminate barriers to education access and success. Program interventions focus on educational progress, skill development and connection to resources, and strengthening each student's problem solving and self-advocacy skills as they prepare for high school graduation and their post-high school pathway. In addition, education specialists regularly assist students and caregivers to navigate barriers related to enrollment, attendance, discipline, access to services, and educational progress.

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

Students in foster care experience some of the largest opportunity and achievement gaps of any student group in Washington state. Schools are often not equipped to support students in foster care and many of the challenges that youth in foster care face are outside of the school, such as family and social disruptions and trouble accessing social services (Evans, A. & McCann, M., 2020). Washington prioritized improving the academic achievement of students in foster care by recognizing that the needs of this student group extend beyond the reach of school staff and dedicated funding to community-based organizations.

However, among the many and deep cuts to the K–12 programs that funded the work of community-based organizations providing direct services to students, millions earmarked for targeted support for students in foster care was cut in the 2025-27 biennial budget. These dollars funded services and academic supports for at least 1,400 students in foster care. Half of this funding was restored in the 2026 supplemental budget.

What is your proposal?

State data shows that students in foster care experience far lower graduation rates than their peers, a fact that has held steady for over two decades. Meanwhile, outcomes for these students served by the graduation success program show a rate of high school graduation 1.75 times higher than those not served (classes of 2014-2022), and a far lower likelihood of dropping out of high school within four years (classes of 2016-2025).

Reduction or elimination of state funding for community-based organizations that provide consistent long-term support for students in foster care risks loss of progress in outcomes for this cohort seen in recent years. To mitigate this risk, this request would honor the state's longstanding commitment to the educational success of students in foster care and continue to

meet requirements under state law (RCW 28A.300.592). OSPI proposes that the Legislature continue their investment in educational support for students in foster care by continuing to fund this work at an ongoing level of \$3.5M a year.

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 request focuses on students living in foster care, a population that faces unique and persistent challenges and barriers to academic success, as outlined above in the Package Description section.

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

At the forefront of every program, policy, and decision, OSPI actively focuses on ensuring all students have access to the instruction and support they need to succeed in our schools. This proposal is focused on the needs of our most vulnerable students, particularly students in foster care. These students are also disproportionately likely to be students of color and American Indian/Alaska Native students (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2023). Because this request focuses specifically on the academic needs of students in foster care, OSPI worked closely with a reliable and knowledgeable partner organization with expertise in meeting these needs statewide to inform this request.

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

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

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

This request continues funding for long-term educational coaching and support for high school students who have experienced foster care during their high school years, integrated

individualized academic support with postsecondary planning to facilitate students' educational progress, high school completion, and post-high school plan initiation. Through a contract with an experienced community organization specialized in reaching and serving these students, this proposal supports.

Direct Services

Education specialists provide intensive 1:1 support to high school students in foster care, including up to one year of post-high school coaching after graduation. These specialists serve as consistent caring adults who advocate for educational access, monitor academic progress, facilitate barrier removal, and coordinate services across child welfare and education systems—directly addressing the relationship and stability deficits that contribute to the graduation gap.

Program Leadership and Infrastructure

Staff who provide program leadership, supervision, training, and administrative support will ensure service fidelity, data collection, and coordination with OSPI, DCYF, and school districts.

Evidence-Based Interventions

The implementation of research-based strategies proven to increase the likelihood of high school persistence and graduation. These strategies include attendance monitoring, behavioral supports, credit recovery assistance, special education advocacy, and post-high school planning. Additionally, short-term post-high school coaching is provided to reduce barriers related to transitioning successfully into postsecondary life. This integrated service model delivers comprehensive and coordinated support and also generates both qualitative and quantitative data to assess effectiveness and guide continuous program improvement.

Data and Evaluation Systems

Robust data collection, analysis, reporting, and OSPI-data sharing capabilities will measure the service delivery and educational outcomes of the students who receive these individualized education services, monitoring, and support toward the completion of educational milestones, remediation needs, and special education needs.

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

Securing a contract with an organization that has expertise in meeting the academic needs of students in foster care and established relationships with school districts and communities is a far more efficient and cost-effective way of purchasing improved outcomes for these students than administering a similar program centrally through OSPI. The costs of OSPI developing a similar infrastructure in communities across the state and training and deploying the necessary staff would require considerable investment and a multi-year timeline, during which the gains seen under the current strategy risk being lost.

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

Outside funds appropriated in the 2026 Supplemental Operating Budget, Senate Bill 5998, Sec. 521(9), OSPI has no funding dedicated to this work. These dollars are one-time funding, meaning that without support in the upcoming budget cycle, this program will disappear.

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 \$5,895,000 and in FY 2025, OSPI received \$7,000,000.

2025-27 Operating Budget:

In FY 2026, OSPI received \$0.00 and in FY 2027, OSPI received \$3,500,000.

Detailed assumptions and calculations:

To continue this direct educational support to students in foster care, OSPI assumes the following is needed:

Contract to provide long-term educational coaching and support for high school students who have experienced foster care during their high school years, integrated individualized academic support with postsecondary planning to facilitate students' educational progress, high school completion, and post-high school plan initiation. This includes all elements of RCW 28A.300.592(6):

- Advocacy for foster youth to eliminate barriers to educational access and success.
- Consultation with schools and DCYF to develop educational plans for and with participating youth.
- Monitoring education progress and providing interventions to improve attendance, behavior, and course performance of participating youth.
- Facilitating age-specific developmental and logistical tasks to be accomplished for high school and post-secondary success.
- Facilitating the participation of youth with school and local resources that may assist in educational access and success.
- Coordinating youth, caregivers, schools, and social workers to advocate to support youth progress in the educational system.

The estimated cost of the contract is \$3,473,000 in fiscal year (FY) 2028 and \$3,475,000 annually

thereafter.

0.15 FTE (full-time equivalent) Program Supervisor to collaborate with the contracted non-governmental entity and DCYF regarding specialized services and targeted support for students in foster care, manage the contract, and provide technical assistance to schools and school districts. OSPI estimates the cost to be \$27,000 in FY 2028 and \$25,000 annually thereafter.

Workforce assumptions:

Include FTE information by job classification, including salary and benefits, startup costs and any additional staff related ongoing costs.

Fiscal Year 2028 (Total: \$27,000)

Program Supervisor: 0.15 FTE

- Salary: \$15,000
- Benefits: \$8,000
- Goods & Services: \$1,000
- Travel: \$1,000
- Capital Outlay: \$2,000

Fiscal Year 2029 and Ongoing (Total: \$25,000 Annually)

Program Supervisor: 0.15 FTE

- Salary: \$15,000
- Benefits: \$8,000
- Goods & Services: \$1,000
- Travel: \$1,000
- Capital Outlay: \$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 two 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 2: Rigorous Learner-Centered Options in Every Community

The proposal directly advances this goal by ensuring foster youth have "access to meaningful high school and beyond planning" and "pathways to graduation and beyond that meet their unique interests." Graduation Success facilitates individualized graduation pathways, academic supports and barrier removal, post-high school planning, and dual credit access that address the unique challenges that foster youth face.

Goal 4: A Committed, Unified, and Customer-Focused OSPI

This investment demonstrates OSPI's commitment to "consistent, timely, and meaningful funding and supports that center the needs of students" who are furthest from educational justice. Restoring funding for [RCW 28A.300.592](#) fulfills legal mandates while coordinating services across child welfare and education systems.

Prior Legislative Commitments

2016 House Bill 1999, RCW 28A.300.592

This proposal supports Washington's 2016 commitment in [House Bill 1999](#) to lead the nation in educational outcomes for students in foster care.

Performance outcomes:

Educational Persistence Indicators

- Improved graduation and reduced dropout rates in the first four years of high school.
- Increased school attendance rates.
- Sustained engagement with education despite placement transitions.

- Stronger connections to caring adults and educational support systems.
- Reduced disciplinary actions and school suspensions.

Academic Progress Measures

- Improved course completion and credit attainment.
- Increased access to special education services when needed.
- Higher rates of postsecondary plan development, monitoring, and initiation as measured through engagement with the High School and Beyond Plan.

Long-term Completion Outcomes

- Graduation rates measured over extended timeframes (up to seven years after initial entry into ninth grade) that reflect the realities that youth in foster care face.
- Postsecondary enrollment and persistence.

System Coordination Outcomes

- Enhanced communication and coordination between schools and state partners.
- Improved foster parent/caregiver engagement in educational planning.
- Reinforced special education compliance and appropriate service provision.

OTHER COLLATERAL CONNECTIONS

Intergovernmental:

This work connects to and involves the work of DCYF, regional educational service districts (ESDs), and school districts.

Stakeholder impacts:

None outside the improved outcome and consistent support for high school students in foster care.

Legal or administrative mandates:

This request supports Washington compliance with federal law under Every Student Succeeds Act and Fostering Connections and state law under RCW 28A.300.592, alongside consistent investment through the past six state biennial operating budgets.

Changes from current law:

None beyond an adjustment for this line item to incorporate it into future state budget projections as an ongoing line item.

State workforce impacts:

None.

State facilities impacts:

None.

Puget Sound recovery:

N/A

Governor's salmon strategy:

N/A

OTHER SUPPORTING MATERIALS

1. Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (2025, August 22). *Report Card*. Olympia, WA. <https://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/Home/Index>
2. Legal Center for Foster Care and Education. (2022, January). *Fast Facts: Foster Care & Education Data at a Glance*. Los Angeles, CA; American Bar Association. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/63dcf65b8d0c56709027332e/t/6454f88fa66ab34124a03df4/1683290255678/Foster+Care+and+Education+Fast+Facts+final.pdf>
3. U.S Department of Education and U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2024, November). *Ensuring educational stability and success for students in foster care: Non-regulatory guidance*. Washington, DC. <https://www.ed.gov/media/document/non-regulatory-guidance-ensuring-educational-stability-and-success-students-foster-care-november-15-2024-108448.pdf>
4. Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (2025, August 22). *Report Card*. Olympia, WA. <https://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/Home/Index>
5. Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (2025, August 22). *Report Card*. Olympia, WA. <https://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/Home/Index>
6. Evans, A. & McCann, M. (2020, September). *Support for students in foster care*. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States. [https://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/Support for Students in Foster Care-1.pdf](https://www.ecs.org/wp-content/uploads/Support%20for%20Students%20in%20Foster%20Care-1.pdf)
7. Washington State Institute for Public Policy. (2012, December). *Educational outcome for foster youth—benchmarks*. Olympia, Washington. [https://www.wsipp.wa.gov/ReportFile/1115/Wsipp Educational-Outcomes-of-Foster-Youth-Benchmarks Full-Report.pdf](https://www.wsipp.wa.gov/ReportFile/1115/Wsipp%20Educational-Outcomes-of-Foster-Youth-Benchmarks-Full-Report.pdf)
8. RCW 28A.300.592.
9. The Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2023, May 14). *Foster care race statistics*. Baltimore, MD. <https://www.aecf.org/blog/us-foster-care-population-by-race-and-ethnicity#:~:text=These%20figures%20come%20from%20Child,latest%20news%2C%20data%20and%20reports.>

Information technology (IT):

N/A