



Developing Deeper Media Literacy Through Student Access to High School Librarians

2027-29 Biennium Operating Budget Decision Package

Agency: 350 Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

Budget period: 2027-29

Budget level: PL

RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY

Access to qualified school librarians is an essential component to strong educational outcomes for students, particularly in high school. Current staffing ratios funded by the prototypical school funding model do not provide for sufficient library programming, and existing school board discretion in spending these dollars further compounds the issue. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) requests additional investment in high school librarians and tighter controls on the spending of those dollars to support high school library programs.

FISCAL DETAIL

Operating Expenditures	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031
Fund 001-1 (Multiple Programs)	\$30,400,000	\$40,000,000	\$41,000,000	\$41,900,000
Total Expenditures	\$30,400,000	\$40,000,000	\$41,000,000	\$41,900,000
Biennial Totals	\$70,400,000		\$82,900,000	
Staffing	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031
FTEs	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Average Annual	0.0		0.0	
Object of Expenditure	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031
Obj. N	\$30,400,000	\$40,000,000	\$41,000,000	\$41,900,000
Revenue	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031
Fund AAA-X	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total Revenue	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Biennial Totals	\$0		\$0	

PACKAGE DESCRIPTION

While instructional hours and highly trained and knowledgeable teachers are well-known essentials of a quality K-12 education system, supports and resources for student learning outside the classroom can be just as critical, perhaps none more so than a strong school library program. School librarians specialize in media literacy and management, research, and independent study, guiding students using library resources to supplement their in-class learning, complete assignments, and explore areas of academic interest. The importance of strong school library programs and access to qualified librarians to students' academic outcomes is consistently supported by research. Studies link high-quality school library programs with higher student achievement, stronger reading performance, and increased graduation rates.

As technology continues to evolve and new learning tools on digital information systems, particularly those driven by developments in Artificial Intelligence (AI) become ever more prevalent in students' lives both inside and outside the classroom, access to a school librarian who is themselves a digital citizenship and medial literacy expert is more important than ever. The high school years in particular see students interacting with a vast digital world as they pursue and apply their learning in more sophisticated ways than younger students, and for that reason Washington should prioritize supporting library programs in its public high schools.

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

A high school librarian helps students become independent, critical consumers and creators of information, the underpinning of success in school, post-secondary education, work, and life. High school librarians take a lead role in supporting a district's efforts to teach safe, ethical, and effective use of digital tools, databases, and other resources. However, Washington's prototypical funding model does not guarantee that every high school student has equitable access to a qualified school librarian.

The current staff-to-student ratio for high school librarians in Washington state is 0.523 full-time-equivalent (FTE) staff per 600 students, a ratio insufficient to provide high schoolers with access to the guidance and expertise of a qualified librarian. The state currently provides state funding for an 180-day school year. The 0.523 FTE allocation means that the state only provides the funding equivalent to 94 days of high school library services – or one semester. This inadequate funding level requires districts to either fund the additional library services through local resources or by cutting other necessary school services. Alternatively, a district may choose to limit services to students or identify less effective and less research-based methods to provide lower quality services to students. All these options fail to meet the needs of students in the current learning environment.

Compounding this shortfall in funding, current statute grants school boards discretion in directing this funding allocation, allowing boards to direct spending of these dollars as they “[deem] necessary for the proper education of the district's students or as otherwise required by law or rule of the superintendent of public instruction” ([RCW 28A.320.240](#)). This flexibility means that the actual staff-to-student ratio may be even lower in some districts depending on school boards’ use of their discretion. Without this flexibility being removed, it will be difficult for lawmakers to ensure that additional investments in school librarian allocations go directly to supporting school library programs.

What is your proposal?

OSPI proposes increasing the allocation for school librarians to 1.0 FTE per 600 students at the high school level and establishing a statutory requirement that districts invest those dollars in direct library services to students.

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.

Increased access to high school librarians supported by a statutory change to ensure that funding supports library programs only benefits all students, including those from marginalized communities. Districts in struggling communities tend to have fewer resources to offer students, including high-quality school library programs, and this proposal offers an equitable solution to this particular problem.

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

OSPI receives feedback and community input through a variety of ways each year. Specifically, this request is in the context of multiple attempts throughout the past years to require stronger librarian programs in K-12 schools, along with discussions about the unmet need in staffing from our prototypical school funding model within the K-12 Funding Equity Workgroup established in House Bill 2049 (2025).

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

OSPI has heard from many stakeholders that access to a school librarian is crucial to meeting our states' goals around literacy and that our current funding model does not generate enough state funded staff. This proposal starts to address that concern by generating a 1.0 FTE in each high school and requiring that this funding be spent on hiring school librarians.

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

Districts in under-resourced communities are the least able to supplement inadequate state library funding with local dollars, meaning students there are disproportionately likely to go without a qualified librarian or consistent library access. By raising the base allocation and requiring districts to spend it on direct library services, this proposal removes the local-funding gap that currently determines whether a high schooler has access to a librarian. The impact will be greatest in districts that have historically been unable to backfill this gap, ensuring library access is guaranteed statewide rather than dependent on a district's local tax base or budget priorities.

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

OSPI proposes increasing the prototypical allocation for high school librarians to 1.0 FTE per each prototypical high school or 600 students. The current allocation within the prototypical school model is 0.523 FTE per 600 students. Under OSPI's proposed statutory changes, school districts will be required to use the funding provided through this allocation for direct library services to high school students. While districts would have some flexibility for determining how to allocate the funds based on student needs, available staff, local staffing costs, and other factors, the entire allocation provided for high school librarians in the prototypical model would be required to be spent on library services.

By increasing the number of high school librarians in the prototypical school model to 1.0 per 600 high school students, the state will fund an additional 237 full-time high school librarians. In addition, by requiring the new and existing funding for high school librarians to be used for high school library services, the state will be codifying the priority for these necessary services to ensure every student in the state has access to a high-quality library program. The prototypical model would also provide through formula additional classified and administrative support, as well as increasing the per pupil funding rate which would benefit special education programs.

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

Funding additional high school librarians through the existing prototypical model is the most efficient and effective mechanism for addressing a shortage in high school student access to high-quality school library programs and qualified school librarians. Adding funding for this purpose through another mechanism such as a separate budget proviso would be a limited and time-bound fix rather than a permanent solution and adding language to other areas existing statute introduces potential confusion for districts used to implementing staffing requirements under the ratios provided through the prototypical school funding model.

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

Current agency resources are equal to the current staff-to-student ratio for high school librarians in the prototypical school funding model.

ASSUMPTIONS AND CALCULATIONS

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

This proposal represents an expansion of the current prototypical funding model specifically around the staff-to-student ratio funded for high school librarians. Current and past funding is imbedded in the prototypical funding model.

Detailed assumptions and calculations:

The total cost of this proposal by state fiscal year is as follows:

Fiscal Year 2028 – (Total: \$30,400,000)

- Program 021 General Apportionment \$22.4 Million
- Program 026 Special Education \$5.5 Million
- Program 035 Institutions \$7,000
- Program 714 Compensation Increases \$2.5 Million

Fiscal Year 2029 – (Total: \$40,000,000)

- Program 021 General Apportionment \$28.9 Million
- Program 026 Special Education \$7.2 Million
- Program 035 Institutions \$7,000
- Program 714 Compensation Increases \$3.9 Million

Fiscal Year 2030 – (Total: \$41,000,000)

- Program 021 General Apportionment \$29.6 Million
- Program 026 Special Education \$7.4 Million
- Program 035 Institutions \$7,000
- Program 714 Compensation Increases \$4.0 Million

Fiscal Year 2031 – (Total: \$41,900,000)

- Program 021 General Apportionment \$30.3 Million
- Program 026 Special Education \$7.6 Million
- Program 035 Institutions \$7,000
- Program 714 Compensation Increases \$4.0 Million

Workforce assumptions:

There is no state workforce impact related to this request.

Historical funding:

Current prototypical funding allocations for high school librarians is based on a model of 0.523 FTE per 600 students.

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

Access to librarians is a critical foundational resource for high schoolers wrapping up their K-12 educational journeys and preparing to function as successful citizens and adults.

Goal 2: Rigorous Learner-Centered Options in Every Community

Increasing the appropriation for high school librarians in the prototypical school funding model ensures that this opportunity and the positive outcomes it supports are available in every school district across the state.

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

High school librarians are highly-skilled, experts in both the create and appropriate use of print and digital media, supporting student research and exploration during their high school years.

Performance outcomes:

Funding this request is sufficient to result in the hiring of 237 additional high school librarians in communities across the state, leading to a significant increase in access of high school students to highly-skills high school librarians.

OTHER COLLATERAL CONNECTIONS

Intergovernmental:

None.

Stakeholder impacts:

OSPI anticipates strong support from the Washington Library Association, and medial literacy and digital citizenship advocates.

Legal or administrative mandates:

RCW 28A.320.240 outlines state requirements for school library programs. It is OSPI's position that this proposal is more aligned with the intent of this statute than current staff-to-student ratios for high school librarians.

Changes from current law:

This proposal requires a change to the prototypical school funding model housed in [RCW 28A.150.260](#), and to language granting school board discretion in [RCW 28A.320.240](#).

State workforce impacts:

This proposal funds the hiring of an additional 237 high school librarians who would be covered by local district bargaining agreements.

State facilities impacts:

None.

Puget Sound recovery:

N/A

Governor's salmon strategy:

N/A

OTHER SUPPORTING MATERIALS

None.

Information technology (IT):

N/A