



Cultivating School Leaders by Restoring, Maintaining, and Piloting Mentorship Programs

2027-29 Biennium Operating Budget Decision Package

Agency: 350 Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

Budget period: 2027-29

Budget level: PL

RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY

New principals in Washington receive inconsistent and inequitable structured support once they step into the job, and each year nearly one in four leaves the role. Underprepared principals may be more frequently placed in high-poverty schools. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) requests \$16 million over the 2027-29 biennium to create a Dean of Students pilot program that pairs aspiring principals with trained mentors, sets shared standards for how districts support new leaders, and studies results to guide scaling it statewide. OSPI also requests funding to restore statewide leadership training for school and district leaders and maintain existing funding for the principal internship grant.

FISCAL DETAIL

Operating Expenditures	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031
Fund 001-1	\$8,037,000	\$8,281,000	\$11,981,000	\$11,731,000
Total Expenditures	\$8,037,000	\$8,281,000	\$11,981,000	\$11,731,000
Biennial Totals	\$16,318,000		\$23,712,000	
Staffing	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031
FTEs	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
Average Annual	0.5		0.5	
Object of Expenditure	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031
Obj. A	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000

Obj. B	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$25,000	\$25,000
Obj. C	\$550,000	\$800,000	\$800,000	\$550,000
Obj. E	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$3,000
Obj. G	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$3,000	\$3,000
Obj. J	\$6,000	\$0	\$0	\$0
Obj. N	\$7,400,000	\$7,400,000	\$11,100,000	\$11,100,000
Revenue	FY 2028	FY 2029	FY 2030	FY 2031
Total Revenue	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Biennial Totals	\$0		\$0	

PACKAGE DESCRIPTION

Principals serve a unique and critical role as building-level leaders responsible for the safety, well-being, and learning of every student in Washington’s schools. Like classroom teachers and education staff associates (ESAs), principals are required to hold a state certification. They supervise students and staff, shape school culture, and are ultimately responsible for creating safe, healthy, and effective learning environments that support the academic and behavioral success of all students.

[Recent research from the Learning Policy Institute](#) speaks to the importance of investing in school leaders. According to the report, principals are the single most influential factor shaping student learning, teacher retention, and school climate. Principal turnover is associated with declines in achievement and higher teacher turnover, and high-poverty schools see the highest rates of principal churn, meaning the heaviest impacts are falling on the schools that can least afford it. Principals are involved in and influence nearly every challenge facing public schools today, and a system that prepares and equips school leaders to handle these challenges is a system that better serves its schools and students.

The need for stronger principal development systems is also grounded in Washington’s constitutional and policy commitments. In its 2015 McCleary order, the Washington State Supreme Court affirmed the state’s obligation to fully support the actual costs of recruiting and retaining competent educators, including principals. Similarly, the Legislature recognized in [House Bill 2261 \(2009\)](#) that attracting and retaining high-quality educators requires sustained investment.

The strength of Washington’s educator workforce directly impacts the health of the state’s K–12 education system, as well as the academic outcomes and opportunities available to students. Because principals have such significant impacts on every aspect of learning at the building-

level, investing in school leadership is one of the highest-leverage strategies available to policymakers looking to improve student outcomes. Strong leaders steward strong schools, and strong schools contribute to strong communities that support a vibrant and productive economy across Washington state.

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

Washington state urgently needs a consistent and guaranteed system of leadership development for school leaders to meet the increasingly complex demands facing our K–12 system. While the state has long maintained a structured induction and mentoring program for new teachers, support for principals has remained fragmented and inconsistent. Washington’s current approach to supporting new principals is based on a model developed more than three decades ago and has not evolved to match the realities of what today’s schools require of their leadership. Too often the 540-hour internship required for principal certification is conflated with formal induction and mentoring for new principals, and the ongoing professional learning necessary to develop highly effective school leaders. One purpose of this proposal is to better define and align these components into a comprehensive educational leadership continuum that Washington’s students, schools, and communities need and deserve.

The principalship faces three primary challenges: high barriers to entry, leadership turnover, and advancing equity.

Requirements and Costs

The principal certificate is the only administrator certificate explicitly required by Washington state law ([RCW 28A.400.100](#)). As a result, the principalship serves as the foundational leadership role for the broader educational leadership system, including district office administrators and superintendents. Because principal certification is required—and because the responsibilities and demands of the principalship have changed significantly over the past 15 years—it is critical for state and district education partners to review and modernize current principal certification and evaluation systems in Washington state.

Over the past nine months, OSPI, in partnership with associations representing school and building leaders and teachers, the Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB), and practicing principals and district leaders, has gathered feedback and identified next steps to strengthen support for aspiring and current principals. This collaborative work is focused on ensuring school leaders are prepared to make the greatest possible impact on students, schools, and communities across Washington state.

It is well established in educational research that, alongside certificated teachers, certificated principals are among the most important school-based factors influencing student learning and school improvement. Research synthesized by education scholar John Hattie demonstrates that effective school leadership has a significant positive impact on student achievement, particularly

when principals focus on instructional leadership, professional learning, and creating conditions for collective teacher efficacy. Hattie's Visible Learning research identifies school leadership as a key influence on student outcomes, reinforcing the critical role principals play in establishing the culture, systems, and supports necessary for high levels of student success.

Additional research synthesized by John Hattie and others also demonstrates that educators experience some of their most significant professional growth during the early years of practice, particularly when supported through intentional mentoring, feedback, and induction systems. This research reinforces the importance of providing structured leadership development and coaching for beginning principals, much like the systems already established for beginning teachers.

Principal Internship Data

Each year, the association representing school leaders coordinates the Principal Internship grant that is funded by the Legislature. It's estimated that there are about 320 people who go through principal preparation programs in Washington. Their membership data shows how many brand-new principals and assistant principals are hired each year – declining each year from 453 in SY 2022-23 to only 219 in SY 2025-26.

A review of the Principal Internship Grant data highlights both the growing demand for leadership development opportunities and the limitations of current funding levels. Each year, significantly more applicants seek support than can be funded through the program. In SY 2025-26, a little more than 50% of applicants were funded. The grant provides financial assistance to districts to offset substitute teacher costs, allowing teacher-leaders in the process of completing their principal internships to serve in administrative internship roles during the school day.

The program was established in 1993 through [HB 1209](#) and funded 45 substitute days for 175 principal interns. The cost at this time was \$4,500 per intern. The same amount of substitute days in today's dollars would be over \$10,000. This program allows aspiring principals to engage in authentic, job-embedded leadership experiences while they are completing their required principal internship. However, as program funding has declined and substitute costs have increased, the association is now only able to support approximately 10–12 substitute days per intern. In response, the grant committee made the difficult decision several years ago to reduce the number of awards to provide recipients with a more meaningful and robust internship experience during the school day.

Turnover

One of the most consistent findings is the level and nature of principal turnover itself. Principal turnover in Washington has been steadily higher than teacher turnover over the past decade, and in recent years has increased sharply, reaching nearly one in four principals changing roles or leaving their position in a single year ([Knight et al., 2023](#)). Importantly, the largest share of this turnover is not driven by principals moving between schools, but by individuals leaving the

principalship altogether—either for other roles within the K–12 system or exiting the profession entirely (Knight et al., 2023). This pattern underlines concerns with the overall attractiveness and sustainability of the role, rather than simple issues of placement or fit.

The importance of strengthening Washington’s leadership pipeline becomes even clearer when considering the role principals play in shaping student outcomes. Research consistently shows that principals are one of the most influential factors in a school’s success, second only to classroom instruction. Their impact is not abstract. Principals shape the instructional culture, set expectations for teaching and learning, and create the conditions under which educators can thrive. When principals are well-prepared and supported, schools experience stronger instructional coherence, more effective professional learning, and more stable teaching staff — all of which translate into higher student achievement.

The inverse is also true. When principals are underprepared or unsupported, the effects ripple outward. Teachers receive inconsistent feedback. School improvement efforts stall. Families experience less trust and continuity. And students — especially those in high-need communities — bear the consequences. Principal turnover is particularly destabilizing, and it is not evenly distributed. High poverty schools, rural schools, and schools serving large numbers of multilingual learners experience higher rates of leadership churn, creating cycles of instability that undermine long-term improvement. Strengthening the statewide system is therefore not simply a matter of professional development; it is a matter of educational opportunity.

Equity

Equity is central to the challenges facing the state in recruiting and retaining school leaders. Washington’s student population is increasingly diverse, yet the principal workforce does not reflect that diversity. Research shows that students of color benefit academically and socially when their school leaders share or understand their lived experiences. Teachers of color are more likely to be recruited, supported, and retained in schools led by principals of color.

An example of a significant gap in leadership representation in Washington state is the disparity between the percentage of Hispanic students and Hispanic school leaders. According to data from OSPI, only 4.22% of building-level administrators identify as Hispanic, while 26.6% of Washington’s K–12 students identify as Hispanic. The state has taken significant strides in meeting the needs of Hispanic students. Approximately 75% of all English language learners in Washington speak Spanish and Washington has embraced dual language education as the best instructional model for all students, a recognition driven in large part by the desire to better serve multilingual students. However, at the same time, recruitment and retention of Hispanic and multilingual school leaders lags significantly, meaning that the system lags behind the classroom and instructional models in reflecting the students it serves.

A stronger statewide system can intentionally cultivate and sustain a more diverse leadership pipeline by aligning recruitment strategies, financial supports, and mentoring structures that

reduce barriers for aspiring leaders of color. These efforts not only support talented and driven individuals seeking leadership roles, they help to close the gap between the lived experiences of Washington students and those of the adults that guide and oversee their K-12 journeys. Addressing this misalignment is proven to strengthen student outcomes for student groups facing a long-standing and persistent educational opportunity gap.

What is your proposal?

A comprehensive education leadership continuum centers around authentic, job-embedded learning experiences to immerse aspiring principals in the daily realities of school leadership. Internships, induction, and mentoring provide opportunities for candidates to apply theory to practice, strengthen instructional leadership skills, and build confidence through supervised, non-evaluative leadership responsibilities. These experiences create a critical bridge between university coursework and the practical demands of leading a school, ensuring that candidates are prepared to lead effectively from their first day as a principal. By grounding leadership development in authentic school settings, this comprehensive and hands-on approach cultivates leaders who are resilient, equity-focused, and responsive to the complex needs of students, staff, and communities.

OSPI's proposal focuses on three interdependent approaches to address Washington's difficulty securing strong, consistent school leadership: growing new strategies for recruitment and development of school principals; supporting mentorship and induction of school principals; and sustaining school and district leadership training and support.

Grow

Partnership with Principal Preparation Programs

OSPI will work with associations representing school and district leaders to create a leadership development system for Washington's school administrators that better align the different components necessary to prepare and onboard school leaders. Principal preparation programs will play a critical role in this work by aligning coursework internships, and coaching experiences with the Association of Washington School Principals' (ASWP) [School Leader Paradigm](#) and [Leadership Framework](#). This alignment creates common language and expectations between preparation programs and school districts, helping aspiring administrators transition more effectively into leadership roles through consistent, non-evaluative support and development.

Through ongoing collaboration between key partners, the K-12 system will establish common language, shared expectations, and consistent onboarding supports for school principals that connect university preparation programs, district induction systems, and AWSP's established Leadership Framework.

Support

Revision of Principal Mentor Standards

OSPI will partner with an association representing school leaders to develop statewide principal

induction standards for principal mentors. These standards will include language from AWSP's School Leader Paradigm and Leadership Framework in order to provide consistency and connection across the state. Mentors will receive training on these induction standards and practices, as well as a stipend for their time as a mentor.

Dean Pilot Program

OSPI will collaborate with key partners to create a Dean of Students pilot program for which teacher leaders who are enrolled in an approved principal preparation program and working toward their Principal Certification through a required internship of 540 hours will be eligible to apply. Participating districts will receive the average Certificated Instructional Salary allocation plus benefits for each recipient. This allocation will create dynamic cost savings for local school districts to allow them the flexibility to repurpose existing funding back into the schools to address students' needs.

Research affirms that keeping principals in the profession reduces principal churn on schools, which saves money. Principal turnover costs school districts significantly: Research estimates a cost of about \$75,000 each time a new principal is hired in direct costs for recruitment, hiring, and onboarding. Beyond direct expenses, turnover causes major disruptions to student achievement, reduces staff morale, and increases teacher turnover, particularly in high-poverty schools.

Because this program will recruit from individuals who already work in schools and show a passion for educating children and a desire to lead, the Dean of Students pilot anticipates lower overall costs for participating districts related to recruitment and retention of school leaders.

Study and Workgroup

The cohorts of Deans of Students who are funded each year with this pilot will meet at least twice during the school year to provide feedback on the process and experience. Together, OSPI and partners will track the cohorts and their feedback to create a report on the effectiveness of this program.

Sustain

School and District Leadership Training and Support

Associations representing school and district leaders will continue to provide coordinated, statewide professional learning and leadership development for both district and school-level leaders through the Washington State Leadership Academy (WSLA). This work helps districts build leadership systems that are adaptable to local contexts while maintaining consistent expectations and support for instructional leadership, school improvement, and organizational culture across Washington.

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 proposal is directly connected to equitable access to educational opportunities for Washington students. See above for more details.

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 with disabilities, students of color, American Indian/Alaska Native students, and highly mobile students, including migrant students, those in foster care, and those experiencing homelessness. These student groups face unique systemic barriers to completing their K–12 education, barriers that perpetuate larger systemic inequities that persist along racial and socioeconomic lines.

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

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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?

Dean of Students Principal Preparation Pilot Program

OSPI requests funding for cohorts of Deans of Students. The cohorts will take place in the 2028, 2029, 2030, and 2031 fiscal years. Cohorts consist of:

1. A maximum of 60 principal interns enrolled in an approved principal preparation program and seeking a principal certification that will be organized in cohorts in fiscal years 2028 and 2029. This would grow to 90 principal interns in fiscal years 2030 and 2031.
2. A dedicated leadership mentor matched to each Dean to co-lead with and guide the process (20 mentors per cohort in 2028 and 2029, 30 mentors in 2030 and 2031).
3. A statewide facilitator to build partnerships between districts, the principal preparation programs, and community partners. The facilitator will leverage relationship-building to make progress on diversifying the district's educator workforce and to attract potential educators from the community. The facilitator will support the interns in navigating the Dean of Students Pilot program, as well as school district processes and structures.

Wages and Benefits for Dean of Students Principal Preparation Cohorts

OSPI requests funding for grants to school districts employing Deans and Leadership Mentors. These funds will cover the annual salary and benefits for each Dean (60 in 2028 and 2029, and 90 in 2030 and 2031). Use the average CIS salary allocation plus benefits. Provide a program stipend of \$10,000 for each Leadership Mentor (20 mentors in the first two years, 30 in the next two years).

Program Administration

OSPI requests funding to contract with associations of school and district administrators to cover the administrative costs of preparing cohorts, including developing a process for allocating funds for deans and mentors to school districts. OSPI believes it's important to focus these initial efforts in three ESD regions due to their student populations and readiness to benefit: PSESD 121, ESD 189, and ESD 105.

Costs cover onboarding for interns and training for mentors, and coaches for each cohort, materials and supplies, and ongoing investment in mentor and induction curriculum development. This will include two in-person meetings each year. A study is also requested to examine the impact of these cohorts as well as how to scale this program up in the future to meet the full demand of Washington's principal workforce.

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

For OSPI to create and run programs like those that currently exist and those proposed in this request, the state would need to make a significant investment of both financial resources and time. This approach described in this request is much more efficient and cost-effective, relying on systemic partners with specialized expertise and connections within local communities that will drive its success and impact across the state.

If this proposal is not funded, Washington will continue to rely on the current principal recruitment and retention system, which has proven insufficient in preparing confident and enduring school building leadership. OSPI has repeatedly requested additional mentor and induction funding for principals over the past decade, but instead lawmakers included this program among the funding cuts that have impacted every aspect of the K-12 system, and the current internship grant amounts is now less than what was provided historically.

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

OSPI does not have permanent, consistent funding for new principals.

ASSUMPTIONS AND CALCULATIONS

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

One element of this decision package requests restoration of full funding to the Washington State Leadership Academy, which is currently funded at \$405,000.

Washington State Leadership Academy

- FY24-\$810,000
- FY25-\$810,000
- FY26-\$810,000
- FY27-\$405,000

Detailed assumptions and calculations:

Dean of Students Principal Preparation Pilot Program

There are four cost components described below.

Wages and Benefits for Dean of Students' Cohorts

OSPI assumes a cost of \$120,000 as an annual salary, including benefits, for each Dean of Students position. OSPI assumes a stipend of \$10,000 for each leadership mentor.

Object A:

The total investment to support 60 Deans in fiscal year 2028 and 2029 would be \$7.2 million.

The total investment to support 90 Deans in fiscal year 2030 and 2031 would be \$10.8 million.

Object B:

The cost of 20 leadership mentors would be \$200,000 in fiscal year 2028 and 2029 and the cost of 30 leadership mentors would be \$300,000 in fiscal year 2030 and 2031.

Program Administration

OSPI projects the need for a contract with providers to cover the administration costs of preparing the cohorts.

Object C:

OSPI will contract with an association representing school leaders to organize and facilitate a statewide ELIA workgroup, develop mentor and induction standards for principals, and prepare and facilitate the placement of the cohorts of Deans of Students. (\$300,000/year)

Object D:

OSPI will contract with an association representing district leaders to partner in the statewide ELIA workgroup, develop induction standards, and support the placement of Deans of Students in districts. (\$150,000/year)

Object E:

Two in-person meetings will be held each year with the ELIA workgroup. (\$100,000/year)

Agency Administrative Support

Staffing impacts are captured in the Workforce Assumptions Section. A .5 FTE for OSPI is requested to support districts, partners, and internal grants and contracts processing.

Educational Leadership Workforce Study

Object F:

Funds would be used to contract with an outside provider or university to conduct a study of this pilot program in order to determine its effectiveness and how to bring this to scale for Washington state. (\$250,000 for two years in fiscal years 2029 and 2030)

Workforce assumptions:

Fiscal Year 2028 (Total: \$87,000)

Program Supervisor: 0.5 FTE

- Salary: \$50,000
- Benefits: \$25,000
- Goods/Services: \$3,000
- Travel: \$3,000
- Equipment: \$6,000 (one time)

Fiscal Year 2029 and Ongoing (Total: \$81,000 Annually)

Program Supervisor: 0.5 FTE

- Salary: \$50,000
- Benefits: \$25,000

- Goods/Services: \$3,000
- Travel: \$3,000

Historical funding:

Fiscal Year 2028

- FTE = 0 FTE
- Total Funds = \$0.405 million
- Near General Fund = \$0.405 million
- Other Funds = \$0 million

Fiscal Year 2029

- FTE = 0 FTE
- Total Funds = \$0.405 million
- Near General Fund = \$0.405 million
- Other Funds = \$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 the third 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 3: A Diverse, Inclusive, and Highly Skilled Workforce

Recruitment and retention of well-prepared, diverse, and experienced school leaders is essential to driving overall recruitment and retention of a diverse, inclusive, and highly skilled workforce.

Prior Legislative Commitments

1993 House Bill 1209, RCW 28A.415.270

This proposal supports the principal internship program established in 1993 by House Bill 1209.

2009 House Bill 2261

This proposal supports legislative intent and action implemented through passage of 2009 HB 2261.

Performance outcomes:

By funding this request, Washington state will prepare four cohorts of principal interns via a Dean of Students role over the next four years. The goal is to prepare 60-90 interns each year and to support them with robust induction standards and mentoring support. Washington state hires approximately 250 new principals every year.

This funding will: establish a set of Principal Mentor and Induction Standards available to all districts statewide; ensure that at least one-third of new principals have a multi-year non-evaluative mentor and induction process bridging the principal certification standards and the Washington state Leadership Framework; and fund a study to look at the impact of this program as well as to provide recommendations on how to scale this to meet the needs of all new principals.

OTHER COLLATERAL CONNECTIONS

Intergovernmental:

None.

Stakeholder impacts:

The Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP) as well as the Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA) is in strong support of this proposal.

Legal or administrative mandates:

No direct mandates, but see prior legislative action cited above.

Changes from current law:

None.

State workforce impacts:

None.

State facilities impacts:

None.

Puget Sound recovery:

N/A

Governor's salmon strategy:

N/A

OTHER SUPPORTING MATERIALS

1. [The Principal Effect: How Investing in School Leaders Is Key to Solving Education's Challenges | Learning Policy Institute](https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/principal-effect-investing-school-leaders-report)
(<https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/principal-effect-investing-school-leaders-report>)
2. [Principal Retention and Turnover During the COVID-19 Era: Do Students Have Equitable Access to Stable School Leadership?](https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/items/3265e8ab-8991-42a2-94b8-5ca0cb972776)
(<https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/items/3265e8ab-8991-42a2-94b8-5ca0cb972776>)
3. [Visible Learning Research | Visible Learning.com](https://www.visiblelearning.com/research)
(<https://www.visiblelearning.com/research>)
4. [AWSP Leadership Framework](https://awsp.org/resources/awsp-leadership-framework/) (<https://awsp.org/resources/awsp-leadership-framework/>)
5. [AWSP School Leader Paradigm](https://awsp.org/resources/school-leader-paradigm/) (<https://awsp.org/resources/school-leader-paradigm/>)

Information technology (IT):

N/A