Special Education Funding (C368L25)

Budget Language

$6,400,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2026 and $6,400,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2027 are provided solely for implementation of Engrossed Second Substitute Senate Bill No. 5263 (special education funding). The funding provided in this subsection is sufficient for 20 pilot schools to establish school-wide centers of excellence for inclusionary practices.

Proviso Purpose

The purpose of this funding is to establish and support school-wide centers of excellence for inclusionary practices that improve access, participation, and educational outcomes for students with disabilities. Through a four-year pilot initiative, participating schools receive additional special education funding and coordinated professional learning and technical assistance to strengthen inclusive instructional practices, build staff capacity, and implement sustainable systems of support. The initiative emphasizes school-wide transformation, collaboration between general and special education, and reducing disproportionate exclusion of students with disabilities from general education learning environments.

Services Provided

During the 2025–26 school year, OSPI supported the Accessible Education Collective (AEC), a four-year initiative designed to establish school-wide centers of excellence for inclusionary practices. In partnership with educational service districts, the AEC provided coordinated professional learning, coaching, and technical assistance to 17 pilot schools, reaching approximately 125 educators and school leaders.

Services included a two-day, in-person learning institute; two additional half-day professional learning sessions; and monthly, individualized coaching from October through May. Professional learning focused on inclusive school leadership, universal design for learning, collaborative instructional practices, data-informed continuous improvement, and meaningful engagement of students and families.

Participating school teams used the Living Change Framework to examine systemic barriers to inclusion, identify root causes of disproportionality, and develop school-specific action plans aligned with existing school improvement efforts.

In addition to professional learning and technical assistance, participating schools received supplemental funding for qualifying special education expenditures to support implementation of sustainable inclusionary practices.

Criteria for Receiving Services/Grants

In accordance with Section 4 of E2SSB 5263 (2025), school districts applied for funding on behalf of individual schools. Pilot schools were selected to ensure geographic diversity and variation in school enrollment. Applicants were required to demonstrate:

- Engaged and committed school leadership and staff supporting inclusionary practices, including a willingness to adjust school structures, schedules, and instructional approaches to support inclusion.
- Appropriate training in inclusionary practices for all staff, including classified staff, or a plan to provide such training by the end of the following school year.
- Evidence of existing success or recent improvement in inclusionary practices.
- A plan to sustain staff training and support in inclusionary practices beyond initial implementation.

Selected schools received additional funding calculated to bring their special education allocation to the equivalent of a 1.5 funding multiplier for students eligible for and receiving special education at the school. Funds were restricted to qualifying special education expenditures.

Beneficiaries in the 2025-26 School Year

Number of School Districts:	9 districts
Number of Schools:	17
Number of Students:	This school-level grant is designed to strengthen inclusionary practices and build sustainable school-wide systems of support, rather than provide direct services to individual students. While students with disabilities are the primary intended beneficiaries of improved instructional practices and access to general education, the initiative is designed to improve educational experiences and outcomes for all enrolled students, with and without disabilities. Accordingly, individual student beneficiary counts are not separately reported.
Number of Educators:	125 educators and school leaders

Are Federal or Other Funds Contingent on State Funding?

No.

State Funding History

Fiscal Year	Amount Funded	Actual Expenditures
2026	$6,400,000	$6,399,994

Number of Beneficiaries Per Fiscal Year (e.g. School Districts, Schools, Students, Educators, Other)

Fiscal Year	Number of Beneficiaries
2026	17 pilot schools (FP 767)

Programmatic Changes Since Inception (If Any)

The 2025–26 school year represented the first year of implementation of the four-year Accessible Education Collective (AEC) initiative. Initial activities focused on establishing shared frameworks for inclusive systems change, strengthening school leadership capacity, and supporting participating schools in identifying barriers to inclusion and developing school-specific improvement plans.

Based on first-year implementation and participant feedback, several refinements were made to the Year 2 support model. These include expanding core professional learning to 5.5 days, adding a dedicated administrator action-planning track, and establishing differentiated learning pathways based on school readiness and implementation progress.

The initiative also increased resources for individualized coaching in response to greater-than-anticipated demand during Year 1. Puget Sound Educational Service District (PSESD) assumed centralized responsibility for coordinating and assigning coaches to improve consistency and responsiveness across participating schools.

These adjustments reflect lessons learned during initial implementation and are intended to strengthen the effectiveness and sustainability of the four-year initiative.

Program(s) Evaluation or Major Findings

First-year implementation findings indicate meaningful progress in building school capacity for inclusive systems change. Participating schools reported stronger collaboration between general and special education staff, increased use of universal design for learning (UDL), greater shared responsibility for students with disabilities, and more intentional use of data and student and family perspectives in school improvement planning.

Schools also reported early changes in instructional practices, including co-teaching, collaborative planning, learning labs, small-group supports, and adjustments to schedules and instructional approaches. Emerging indicators of student impact included increased participation in general education settings, improved engagement and belonging, positive trends in

attendance and course completion, and reductions in disproportionate outcomes for specific student groups.

The first year also demonstrated that sustainable improvements in inclusionary practices require more than discrete professional development activities. Ongoing coaching, committed school leadership, relational trust, and alignment with existing school improvement systems emerged as important conditions for successful implementation.

These first-year findings provide a strong foundation for continued implementation. Building on this progress, OSPI and its partners have established more specific measures of school-level implementation and impact for Year 2, including increased access to general education, reduced disproportionality in referral and identification, expanded staff capacity to implement universal design for learning, and stronger integration of student and family perspectives. Early Year 2 activities have demonstrated continued high levels of educator engagement and participation, providing momentum for deeper implementation and measurable improvements in student experiences and outcomes.

Major Challenges Faced by Program(s)

First-year implementation identified several challenges associated with supporting complex, school-wide systems change across diverse school contexts. Participating schools varied in their readiness, leadership capacity, and experience implementing inclusionary practices, requiring differentiated professional learning and technical assistance responsive to local needs.

The funding structure established in legislation also presented challenges. Although the initiative authorized grants for up to 20 pilot schools, the appropriated funding was insufficient to fully support that number under the prescribed funding formula. OSPI leveraged other available funding sources to expand opportunities for school participation. Additionally, the funding model did not separately account for the substantial coordination, professional learning, coaching, and technical assistance necessary to support school-wide systems change across multiple sites.

The level of individualized coaching needed to support meaningful implementation exceeded initial projections. Educational service district partners supplemented available resources to meet coaching needs, and differences in coach experience and familiarity with the Living Change Framework contributed to variability in the support provided across schools.

Participating schools also identified the importance of aligning grant requirements, professional learning, school improvement plans, and day-to-day instructional practices. These lessons informed improvements to the second-year implementation model, including increased coaching resources, centralized coordination and support for coaches, expanded professional learning opportunities, and a dedicated administrator action-planning track.

These adjustments reflect the initiative's commitment to continuous improvement and responsiveness to the needs of participating schools as they advance sustainable inclusionary practices.

A continuing consideration is how to sustain and expand effective school-wide practices beyond the four-year grant period, particularly as participating schools transition from intensive external coaching toward independently maintained systems of continuous improvement.

Future Opportunities

The remaining years of the Accessible Education Collective (AEC) provide opportunities to deepen implementation, strengthen evidence of improved student outcomes, and identify effective inclusionary practices that can be sustained and replicated beyond participating schools.

Building on first-year findings, Year 2 implementation includes expanded professional learning, differentiated coaching, and targeted support for school administrators. Participating schools are engaging in learning pathways designed to deepen implementation or sustain and scale promising practices, depending on their progress and readiness. The initiative also includes more specific measures of progress related to inclusive instructional practices, access to general education, staff collaboration, family engagement, and alignment between school improvement plans and grant investments.

The four-year implementation model emphasizes building internal leadership and staff capacity, with a gradual reduction in reliance on external coaching as schools develop the systems and expertise needed to sustain inclusive practices independently.

Looking ahead, the initiative offers an important opportunity to document effective approaches to school-wide transformation, evaluate changes in student access and educational outcomes, and share promising practices with schools and districts statewide. Lessons learned through AEC can inform future state investments in inclusionary practices, including consideration of funding structures that more fully support both school-level implementation and the coordinated technical assistance necessary to achieve sustainable systems change.

Other Relevant Information

The Accessible Education Collective (AEC) complements Washington's broader Inclusionary Practices Technical Assistance Network (IPTN), which supports statewide efforts to improve access, participation, and educational outcomes for students with disabilities. Both initiatives emphasize improving educational experiences for students disproportionately impacted by exclusionary practices, particularly Black students with disabilities and students with intellectual and developmental disabilities, while supporting locally responsive approaches to addressing inequities.

AEC is implemented through a partnership involving OSPI, the Association of Educational Service Districts (AESD), and regional educational service districts. The initiative provides an opportunity to develop, test, and refine school-wide approaches to inclusion that can inform broader statewide technical assistance and professional learning efforts.

Additional information about the initiative's second year of implementation is available in Puget Sound Educational Service District's October 2026 announcement: *Accessible Education Collective Kicks Off Year 2 with Two-Day Institute*.

Schools/Districts Receiving Assistance

Click here to see a list of all OSPI grant recipients in the 2026 Fiscal Year.

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