Leadership Academy

Budget Language

$810,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2026 and $405,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2027 are provided solely for the development of a leadership academy for school principals and administrators. The superintendent of public instruction shall contract with an independent organization to operate a state-of-the-art education leadership academy that will be accessible throughout the state. Semiannually, the independent organization shall report on amounts committed by foundations and others to support the development and implementation of this program. Leadership academy partners shall include the state level organizations for school administrators and principals, the superintendent of public instruction, the professional educator standards board, and others as the independent organization shall identify.

Proviso Purpose

The Washington State Leadership Academy (WSLA), initially funded by the Legislature in 2007, was designed to build transformative leadership capacity among school administrators through a public-private partnership. In August 2023, WSLA evolved into Next level Leaders (NLL) in response to the shifting educational leadership landscape post-COVID. NLL is a collaborative initiative between AWSP and WASA and has expanded to serve role-agnostic leaders with a focus on equity, instructional leadership, and systemic improvement.

Key Goals:

- Cultivate high-impact leadership through personalized, inquiry-based learning.
- Elevate collective efficacy across leadership teams and educators.
- Prioritize student learning outcomes through leadership actions.
- Build sustainable networks of leadership practice across the state.
- Address educational equity with a systemic lens.

Services Provided

District teams made up of superintendents, principals, and central office administrators participate in this multi-year program that provides:

- Two-year leadership development program with hybrid delivery.
- Two in-person sessions per year.
- 10-13 virtual sessions annually, supplemented by coaching and AI-integration strategies.
- Access to Learning Lab with resources, recordings, and collaborative tools.
- Optional coaching support.

Criteria for Receiving Services/Grants

Participating leaders must create a Problem of Practice based on current student data and choose effective, research-based strategies to develop and implement a Theory of Action designed to increase learning. Recruitment efforts focused on leaders of color, high populations of multilingual learners and students with disabilities, as well as regions with historically lower participation rates in leader professional development.

Beneficiaries in the 2025-26 School Year

Number of School Districts: 50
Number of Students: 415,222
Number of Educators: 101

Are Federal or Other Funds Contingent on State Funding?

No.

State Funding History

Fiscal Year	Amount Funded	Actual Expenditures
2026	$810,000	$795,613
2025	$810,000	$809,375
2024	$810,000	$809,525
2023	$810,000	$803,301
2022	$810,000	$810,000

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

Fiscal Year	Number of Beneficiaries
2026	50
2025	62
2024	60
2023	13
2022	15

Programmatic Changes Since Inception (If Any)

- Collective teacher and leader efficacy
- AI-integration into leadership
- Role-specific networking
- Systemic coaching support
- Emphasis on equity, inquiry, and efficacy now drives session content and structure.

Program Evaluation or Major Findings

Over the course of the 2025-26 Next Level Leaders experience, participants and facilitators engaged in a shared journey of collaborative inquiry, reflection, and intentional leadership. The reflections captured throughout the year provide more than feedback about a professional learning experience; they offer a window into how leaders and collectives developed through sustained engagement in the Instructional Leadership Collective process.

Viewed independently, the participant and facilitator reflections each tell an important story.

- Participants described becoming more intentional, reflective, and evidence-informed leaders.
- Facilitators described collectives becoming increasingly trusting, collaborative, and capable of engaging in deep professional inquiry.

Viewed together, however, these perspectives reveal something even more significant.

- Leadership growth did not occur in isolation. As individual leaders developed greater clarity, confidence, and intentionality, the collective itself became stronger. In turn, the strength of the collective accelerated the growth of each leader. Rather than moving from individual learning to collective learning, participants experienced both simultaneously.

This reciprocal relationship reflects the central premise of the Instructional Leadership Collective process. When leaders engage in purposeful collective inquiry, individual leadership capacity and collective leadership efficacy grow together. The result is more than professional learning; it is the development of sustainable systems of leadership capable of continuously improving teaching, learning, and outcomes for students.

Major Challenges Faced by Program(s)

The challenges identified throughout the year focused almost exclusively on implementations rather than the value or relevance of the model itself. Participants and facilitators consistently described wanting more time together, earlier opportunities to build relationships, and greater continuity of participation as the school year became increasingly demanding.

The most frequently mentioned challenge was maintaining consistent participation throughout the spring. As the school year progressed, competing responsibilities including staffing, budgeting, state testing, graduation activities, and year-end responsibilities made regular participation increasingly difficult for some leaders.

Another challenge involved learning to narrow and refine a Problem of Practice. Many participants initially identified issues that were too broad, making it difficult to determine meaningful leadership actions or collect evidence of progress.

Future Opportunities

Due to a reduction in legislative funding, some adjustments will be made to the program for the 2026-27 school year. Program changes for Year 2 include:

- Leadership Collectives will be reorganized with Year 2 participants.
- Virtual sessions will be expanded to 90 minutes per sessions.
- Overnight accommodations will only be provided to those traveling over 40 miles from the venue.

Given the reduced programming, Year 1 participants were provided with an opportunity to opt out of the second year. 63 participants have committed to returning next year.

Other Relevant Information

N/A

Schools/Districts Receiving Assistance

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

Program Contact Information

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