Beginning Educator Support

Budget Language

$11,500,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2026 and $9,200,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2027 are provided solely for a beginning educator support program (BEST). The program shall prioritize first year educators in the mentoring program in the 2025-26 school year. During the 2026-27 school year, funding for the program may only support first year educators in the mentoring program. School districts and/or regional consortia may apply for grant funding. The program provided by a district and/or regional consortia shall include: A paid orientation; assignment of a qualified mentor; development of a professional growth plan for each beginning educator aligned with professional certification; release time for mentors and new educators to work together; and educator observation time with accomplished peers. Funding may be used to provide statewide professional development opportunities for mentors and beginning educators. Of the amounts provided in this subsection, $1,000,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2026 is provided solely to support first year educators in the mentoring program.

Proviso Purpose

The purpose of the Beginning Educator Support Team (BEST) program is to:

- Attract, train, and retain skillful novice teachers in Washington's public schools who promote educational equity to positively impact student learning;
- Support novice educators to promote equitable learning in the classrooms and schools;
- Develop mentors who can foster student-centered, equitable classroom practices;
- Build systems of support within school districts to hold a collective sense of responsibility for the success of beginning educators and the students they serve.

Services Provided

BEST supports and promotes strategies for improving districts' efforts to attract, train, and retain highly skilled novice educators who promote equitable learning that positively impacts their student learning.

In 2025-2026, BEST funded 219 districts, serving 3067 Year 1 and Year 2 teachers and ESAs. Grantees included 8 ESD consortia and 1 district consortia. These districts and regional consortia were tasked with implementing the following research-based program components to support each novice educator:

- Assignment of a carefully selected, well-trained mentor.
- Instructional orientation prior to the start of teaching.
- Professional development is designed specifically for beginning teachers.
- Opportunities for beginning teachers to be observed and receive non-evaluative feedback on instruction.
- Support with the teacher evaluation system and use of the district's instructional framework.

- Special attention to the needs of novice teachers in under-performing schools; and
- Creation of a stakeholders' team.

In addition, BEST asked districts to attend to specific areas that impact student learning when neglected by providing:

- Enhanced, coordinated support for teachers of special education that addressed their complex role as teacher, case manager for students, and lead for other adults in their buildings.
- Intensive support for teachers with limited certificates who have not yet completed a teacher preparation program.
- Mitigation of the impact of extra-challenging placements on first-year teachers and their students.

BEST also utilized funds to provide funding to support novice Educational Staff Associates (ESAs- counselors, nurses, occupational therapists, physical therapists, psychologists, etc.). Of this smaller group of grantees, BEST supported 500+ Year 1 and Year 2 ESAs. Grantees expanded their stakeholder teams to include a representative ESA, began identifying and training role-specific mentors for novice ESAs, differentiated fall orientations for ESAs, and continue building other supports using this grant.

Mentor Academies provided high-quality professional development for instructional mentors, coaches, and other teacher leaders focused on the specific knowledge and skills necessary to accelerate new teachers' instructional effectiveness in their classrooms. Approximately 1000+ educators participated in 30+ academies during the year in at least one of the following areas:

- Mentor Academy 101 – Foundations for Mentoring
- Mentor Academy 201 – Mentoring for Equity
- Mentoring Teachers of Special Education
- Mentoring ESAs

NAKIA Academy offers four cohorts of mentors identifying as educators of color to learn Mentor Academy 101 content together, facilitated by BEST Mentor Faculty who also identify as educators of color. This is a unique model in the state and possibly the nation.

Regional Mentor Roundtables continued monthly support of mentors and instructional coaches with opportunities to learn, practice their skills, explore problems of practice, and network with other mentors. The 19 roundtables offered on different days and at different times online allowed for increased participation and flexibility for participants.

Induction Coaching for each BEST grantee provides technical assistance and personalized support for districts to continue refining their comprehensive induction programs and address the unique needs presented by the ongoing pandemic. Coaches use the Standards for Beginning Educator Induction and Grantee Assurances as guides to support problem solving,

push practices, and assess on-going needs and gaps. Coaches met with grantees at least twice, in the fall and spring.

Monthly Induction Leader Collaborations, open to all districts to build understanding of comprehensive induction, provides opportunities for collaboration, sharing induction practices, and networking. Offering these online increased accessibility and participation.

Criteria for Receiving Services/Grants

The competitive BEST Grants are awarded to districts and consortia who demonstrate a need, particularly in under-performing schools; on-going commitment to developing comprehensive induction; and leadership to accomplish the work. To qualify for continuing with BEST grant funding, districts and regional consortia committed to providing the following program components, guided by the Standards for Beginning Educator Induction:

- **Hiring**
  - Stakeholder team considers placement of beginning educators to promote maximum success of beginning educators and their students, avoiding challenging placements when possible, and when not possible: knowing and mitigating those challenges for beginning educators.
- **Orientation**
  - An instructional orientation and/or individualized assistance prior to the start of school or the start of the new educator's assignment to acquaint them with district and school expectations and culture; orient them to preferred instructional practices and curriculum; and help them plan for their first day, weeks, and month with students. First-year educators must be compensated for their time.
  - A classroom set-up visit prior to the start of school or the start of the new educator assignment in which a mentor meets with the new educator to assist with classroom set-up and plans for the first days with students.
- **Mentoring**
  - Well-trained, carefully selected mentors to enhance the instructional effectiveness of first-year educators. Mentors should be assigned at, or shortly after new educators are hired, and prior to them beginning their assignments. Mentors of first-year educators should have an average of 1-2 hours per week per mentee for planning, reflection, and problem-solving conversations; conducting observations; and providing feedback.
  - Mentors with strong ties to underrepresented populations should be provided for novice educators from underrepresented populations.
  - Appropriate mentor caseloads. A released mentor working full-time should support no more than 20 teachers and colleague mentors (full-time educators who also mentor) should not mentor more than 2 first-year teachers. (See definitions below in of this grant for more details.)

- A commitment to building a cadre of trained mentors who develop expertise over time, rather than using a one-year "buddy system," especially in districts using a colleague mentor model.
- Ongoing professional learning for mentors to build capacity in components of the WA State Standards for Mentoring. Mentors should participate regularly in mentoring roundtables hosted by OSPI, regional consortia, and/or school districts.
- Job description and compensation for mentors of early career educators for required activities that fall outside the mentor's regular job responsibilities such as attending mentor roundtables, after-school meetings, and summer trainings.
- Initial professional learning for mentors, including completion of the OSPI Mentor Academy 101 (preferably before the initial year of mentoring and no later than December of that year) with an emphasis on mentoring for equity.

- **Professional Learning**
  - Ongoing professional learning for beginning educators designed to meet their unique needs throughout the first year. Professional learning should be aligned to the Washington State Teacher Evaluation Criteria (or other professional standards when relevant), the district's adopted instructional framework, and district initiatives.
- **Feedback and Formative Assessment**
  - Formative observations with written feedback for mentees provided at least monthly by released mentors and a minimum of quarterly by colleague mentors.
  - Release time for observations by mentees of accomplished teaching while accompanied by their mentor or other instructional leader.
- **Induction Program Assessment**
  - The Stakeholder Team meets at least three (3) times per year to examine the current state of comprehensive new educator induction, gather and analyze data, problem-solve, set goals, and pursue sustainability.
  - To build a sense of collective responsibility, members should be drawn from a variety of groups from across the district.

Beneficiaries in the 2025-26 School Year

Number of School Districts:	219
Number of Schools:	N/A
Number of Students:	N/A
Number of Educators:	3067 teachers (Y1 and Y2); 468 ESAs (Y1 and Y2)
Other:	9 – Educational Service District and District Consortia

Are Federal or Other Funds Contingent on State Funding?

No.

State Funding History

Fiscal Year	Amount Funded	Actual Expenditures
2026	$11,500,000	$11,335,843
2025	$11,500,000	$11,221,715
2024	$11,500,000	$11,290,519
2023	$10,500,000	$10,266,031
2022	$10,500,000	$10,182,208

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

Fiscal Year	Number of Beneficiaries
2026	219
2025	217
2024	212
2023	191
2022	182

Programmatic Changes Since Inception (If Any)

Yearly, BEST adapts and revises content of professional learning, support structures for grantees, and funding models to meet the changing needs of grantees.

Historically, the number of new teachers in Washington increased steadily after 1987. The appropriation for their support remained constant, resulting in the amount allocated per new teacher declining. In 2008-09, the allocation was $880 per new teacher, insufficient for districts to carry out the directives of the TAP legislation, let alone offer quality induction programs that include research-identified components for effectiveness. Magnified by the 20-year impact of the increased cost of living, the result was that some districts, unable to afford to meet the RCW criteria, did not even apply for funding. Many more districts were forced to supplement the state allocation from other unstable federal, state, and local funding sources (e.g., Title I, Title II, I-728, local levy funds, etc.) to provide effective programs. Still other districts cobbled together programs which fell short of the level of support that research indicates can make a difference in improving both teacher retention and student achievement (Strong, 2005; Villars and Strong, 2005 and 2007).

Recognizing these issues, the legislature provided funding for beginning educator support to develop and implement BEST in FY 2010. With the same level of previous TAP funding, OSPI's Beginning Educator Support Team (BEST) program was directed to provide comprehensive

induction and mentoring programs in "five to fifteen districts and/or regional consortia" (ESSB 6444) through a competitive grant process. Support for first, second, and third-year teachers and assistance to candidates for Professional Certification was initially funded in grantee districts.

In 2013-14, BEST provided two-year pilot grants to seven districts across Washington. Those districts served 220 first year teachers and enhanced the expertise of their mentors. The Legislature added $2 million in additional funds for the 2014-15 school year, making possible support for 32 more districts and a total of 1347 early-career teachers. This represented less than 60% of the approximately 2300 first-year teachers hired in Washington annually.

The Legislature funded BEST at $5.5 million for 2015-2016, which allowed expansion to additional districts as well as expanded funding of Year 2 teachers and a pilot project to provide mentor support for Year 1 ESAs in selected districts. In 2016-2017, the Legislature added an additional $3.5 million, making the support of an additional 62 districts and 1,315 first and second-year teachers possible.

The 2018 budget funded BEST at $10.5 million, again allowing the program to expand. An additional 31 districts and 1,085 first and second-year teachers were added to the program. Each year, participating in the program, districts further develop their systemic support for their novice teachers.

Although funding did not increase in FY19, the scope of BEST's work did. An additional 20 districts, 200 Year 1 teachers, and 500 Year 2 teachers received support through BEST funds. The number of contractors, academies, and other supports also increased to meet demand. With the increase in number of teachers, BEST was unable to fully fund 21% of districts according to the per teacher rates set by BEST. Districts attempted to fill the shortfall with TPEP or other funds.

Significant increases in teacher salaries for FY20 resulted in tightening budgets in many districts and a decrease in the number of new teachers hired. With fewer Year 1 teachers, BEST closed the previous year's funding gap and provided much-needed enhanced funding to increase support for novice teachers of special education and novice teachers with limited certificates. The pandemic resulted in another decrease in the number of new teachers hired for FY21.

The fall of 2021 showed an unprecedented number of new teacher hires. With nearly 6,000 year 1 and year 2 teachers to support, BEST was stretched thin. Unable to adequately fund all grantees, BEST sought ESSER funds to help cover the gap. BEST was granted $2.5 million state pandemic relief funds for the 21-22 school year to help cover the demand for novice teacher support. This, in addition to over $700,000 in ESSER funds specifically for BEST grantees to support novice ESAs, helped BEST stretch to support the high funding needs of districts throughout the school year.

Unlike the 2021-22 school year, BEST was not granted additional ESSER funding to help support these new teachers. Instead, BEST tried to coach districts to utilize their limited funding in the

most high-need areas, such as for teachers of Special Education, teachers on limited certificates, and others most at risk of leaving the profession mid-year due to their challenging placements. BEST continued the ESSER-funded grant specifically for supporting ESAs, which served 595 year 1 and year 2 ESAs statewide and ended June 30, 2023.

For 2026-2027, BEST funding was limited to budget language stipulating Year 1 Educator Support only. The total funding allocation for 2026-2027 was reduced from 11,500,000 to $9,200,000.

Program(s) Evaluation or Major Findings

From the June 2022 report titled, "Creating a Sustainable Web of Support for Early Career Teachers: Examining Induction and Mentoring Practices in Washington State" by Elfers, Plecki, and Ungco, University of Washington.

The Role of State Level Supports: From page 32, "On their own many districts don't have the necessary capacity to design, implement or maintain high-quality induction programs. States, however, have a unique opportunity to improve the quality, diversity, and retention of the workforce by investing in a district's capacity to offer supports to early career teachers… Washington state has placed a high value on supporting early career teachers through a longstanding investment in the BEST program. Throughout this study, participants consistently remarked on the vital importance of the resources, staff, standards, and professional development that the state provides. Without exception, they commented that without state support, necessary supports for early career teachers would either be severely curtailed or nonexistent."

BEST Program Collaboration: From page 35, "As part of the structure of BEST symposia, teams involved with induction are invited to share their experiences in presentations for others across the state. These examples highlight the state's commitment to collaborative work in partnership with educators across a variety of settings and locations around the state."

BEST Support for Teachers of Color: For early career teachers of color, some districts have or are creating opportunities for these teachers to meet and collaborate with other teachers of color in the form of affinity spaces. From page 32, "In addition to recognizing and valuing the skills and expertise of mentors of color, district leaders are also using data to be aware of how previous systems also played a role in blocking teachers of color from becoming mentors. Both an awareness of the vital strengths of mentors of color and a commitment to disrupting previous mentor appointment systems are essential to supporting teacher diversity in the workforce. These findings suggest that concrete steps need to be taken to improve the experiences of new teachers of color who often navigate complex pathways towards becoming a teacher, and then later a mentor, in comparison to their white counterparts."

Major Challenges Faced by Program

- If budget language continues to limit use of funds to Year 1 Educators only, Grantees are reporting, fall 2026, that the limiting language will harm induction practices that may lead to reduced retention in hard-to-fill and hard-to-retain positions where educators in these positions benefit tremendously from support in Y2 and Y3.
- A year-to-year funding model creates uncertainty, and teachers are often hesitant to risk giving up a guaranteed teaching position for a mentoring job that may go away after a year if funding is cut. Recruiting released mentors when positions cannot be guaranteed beyond a single year is difficult.
- Districts need solid funding guarantees in spring when committing contracts for released mentors (e.g., by May 15).
- Agency compensation cannot compete with school district compensation, which makes recruiting and retaining program staff challenging.
- Small districts with just a few new teachers struggle to provide robust support for singleton teachers. Collaboration with and among ESD consortia is beginning to generate solutions such as mentors provided by the ESD and regional mentors.

Future Opportunities

- If budget language continues to limit use of funds to Year 1 Educators only, Grantees are reporting, fall 2026, that the limiting language will harm induction practices that may lead to reduced retention in hard-to-fill and hard-to-retain positions where educators in these positions benefit tremendously from support in Y2 and Y3.
- Extend support to teachers who often have students facing greater challenges by enhancing funding for teachers of special education, enhancing funding for teachers with limited certificates, and enhancing support for ESAs.
- Continue to expand BEST support to all 295 districts in the state, from the 219 districts being served in FY 26.
- Continue to provide Nakia Academy for leadership and mentor development in educator leaders of color.
- Continue to build mentors' capacity to identify and address patterns of racial inequity in classrooms and to help novice teachers foster equitable classroom environments.
- Continue to collaborate with partners focused on attracting, training, and retaining teachers of color. This includes partnering with other groups already engaged in this work.
- Incorporate induction support for novice ESAs as a foundational piece of participation in the BEST grant program.
- Collaborations across consortia and direct grantees to enhance rural and remote ESA support.

Other Relevant Information

Support from BEST is available to all 295 school districts in Washington:

- Mentor Academies and Mentor Roundtables for mentors, instructional coaches, teacher leaders, and administrators.
- Induction Leader Collaborations are provided monthly.
- Assistance from the BEST program staff in designing and improving district induction work.

Schools/Districts Receiving Assistance

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

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