



## **School District Health and Safety**

### ***2023–25 Capital Project Request***

**Project Title:** School District Health and Safety

**Starting Fiscal Year:** July 1, 2023

### **Project Summary**

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) requests \$24.3 million to continue the school health and safety programs funded by the Legislature in previous biennial Capital Budgets. The health and safety programs will continue to support the needs of school districts statewide who do not have the financial resources to address long-standing and urgent concerns to provide students with safe, healthy, and comfortable learning environments. This continuing grant program will provide three grant opportunities to address facility needs: health and safety, equal access, and emergency repairs.

### **Project Description**

School districts rely on capital levies and debt-service levies (also referred to as bond measures) which require voter approval to pay for minor repairs and major renovations of school facilities. Many factors influence a district's ability to pass levies or bond measures, including the assessed property values in a district. School districts with lower assessed property values will require a higher tax rate to raise the same amount of tax dollars as a school district with higher assessed property values. Capital levies require 51% approval from their voters, while bond measures require a higher threshold at 60% plus one vote. There had been no bond elections offered to the public in the calendar year of 2021. As of June 2022, only 2 out of the 295 school districts statewide had passed capital bond measures for accessing funding from the School Construction Assistance Program (SCAP).

This request would continue the funding of grants to support school districts to make needed health and safety repairs which impact student learning.

### **Health and Safety and Equal Access Grants: \$19.3 Million**

The Legislature funded the Urgent Repair grant program in the 2021-23 biennium with an appropriation of \$4.2 million to assist school districts in paying for non-recurring costs associated with school facility repairs and renovations necessary for health, safety, and equal access. The program included the following restrictions: 1) limiting recipient district applications to \$200,000 every other biennium; 2) prioritizing applications based on limited school district financial resources for the project; and 3) requiring any district receiving funding to demonstrate a consistent commitment to address school facility needs. In addition, the Legislature provided \$1.0 million to Equal Access grants to improve compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

In the 2021-23 biennium, OSPI received application requests totaling \$11.6 million from 70 school districts for Urgent Repair funding. OSPI was able to fund 20 of these applicants. Project funding was used for repairs such as upgraded fire alarm systems, replacement of failed heating and cooling systems, and removal and remediation of mold. The proposed grant program will continue to provide funding to school districts to address deferred maintenance projects focusing on health and safety issues which impact learning. Priority would be given to districts who have attempted and failed to pass a capital bond or capital levy in three consecutive elections. Grants would be awarded at the beginning of the biennium, and school districts will be expected to complete the projects before the end of biennium in which the funds are awarded.

Besides bond or levy failures, the following criteria were also used to determine priority for funding:

- Overall age and condition of facility systems and subsystem;
- Assessed property valuation per student as compared to state averages;
- Assurance by all school districts receiving funding to demonstrate a commitment to maintain any major improvements funded;
- Financial capacity and resources; and
- Other criteria developed by a project review committee comprised of school district facility managers and other stakeholders.

OSPI requests \$12 million in funding for the Urgent Repair grant program to continue assisting school districts with facility repairs and renovations needed for health and safety of the students and staff.

In the 2021-23 biennium, the Legislature provided \$1.0 million for Equal Access grants for school districts to improve compliance with the ADA and IDEA. School districts were limited to one grant, not to exceed \$100,000 in a three-year period, and were required to demonstrate a consistent commitment to addressing school facility needs. In the 2021-23 biennium, OSPI received application requests totaling \$3.6 million from 32 districts. OSPI was able to fund only 12 of these applicants, with projects ranging from making agricultural facilities wheelchair accessible to purchase of accessible playground equipment.

OSPI requests \$7.3 million in funding for Equal Access grants to continue assisting school districts with facility repairs and renovations needed for equal access of students and staff.

This request merges the Urgent Repair Grant and Equal Access Grant programs into one grant program to gain administrative efficiencies. OSPI's experience working with district grant applicants shows that some projects qualify for both grant programs. The combined grant program would merge the criteria of the two programs and adjust the prioritization process to provide favorable funding to the school districts trying to access both the grant programs.

### **Emergency Repair Pool: \$5.0 Million**

The Legislature first appropriated K-12 Emergency Repair Pool funding beginning in the 2011-13 biennial Capital Budget to address unexpected and imminent health and safety hazards at K-12 public schools, including skill centers, which have an impact on the day-to-day operations of the facility. Emergency Repair Pool grants are for school districts that do not have the financial resources to fix and repair building systems which impact health, safety, and student learning.

As of August 2022, OSPI has provided a total of \$2.3 million in funding to six districts for projects that required immediate remedies. Projects funded varied from Almira School District's grant to install portables for students to continue learning after the school burnt down to the ground in October of 2021 to Keller School District's grant to mitigate sewer backup.

OSPI seeks \$5.0 million in funding to continue this successful program and will continue using the Legislature's established criteria below when granting funding:

- An emergency declaration must be signed by the school district board of directors;
- The emergency declaration must include a description of the imminent health and safety hazard, the possible cause, the proposed scope of emergency repair work and related cost estimate, and identification of local funding to be applied to the project; and
- Grants of emergency repair moneys must be conditioned upon the written commitment and plan of the school district board of directors to repay the grant with any insurance payments or other judgments that may be awarded.

### **Total Funding Request for School District Health and Safety: \$24.3 Million.**

#### **What will the request produce or construct (i.e., building predesign or design, construction of additional space, etc.)? When will the project start and be completed?**

School districts rely on capital levies and bonds, which require voter approval, to pay for major and minor repairs at school facilities. Many school districts have been unsuccessful in passing capital levies or bonds and do not have the financial resources to address safety, health, and equal access issues that have a direct impact student learning.

This request would continue grant programs that provide school districts with the resources to address health, safety, and equal access concerns so students have a safe and healthy environment for learning.

#### **How would the request address the problem or opportunity identified by your proposed project? What would be the result of not taking action?**

Local school districts will receive funding to make needed major and minor repairs to schools to provide a safe and healthy learning environment for students. These major and minor repairs will help districts preserve their school facilities and extend their useful life which may delay the need for a major school replacement through the SCAP.

**What alternatives were explored? Why was the recommended alternative chosen?**

Bond elections and issuing levies require a lot of time in planning and would not serve Washington's school districts well in case of imminent health and safety and equal access issues. This grant program is the only feasible option.

**Which clientele would be impacted by the budget request? Where and how many units would be added, people or communities served, etc.**

This grant program will allow districts who do not have the financial resources to make major and minor repairs to schools to address needed safety and health repairs which impact student learning.

**Will non-state funds be used to complete the project? How much, what fund source, and could the request result in matching federal, state, local, or private funds?**

Local school district funds will not be required to apply for the competitive grant programs or request funding from the emergency repair pool.

**Describe how this project supports the agency's strategic master plan or would improve agency performance. Reference feasibility studies, master plans, space programming, and other analyses as appropriate.**

This project supports State Superintendent Chris Reykdal's K-12 education vision of his goal for Washington's public education system to prepare every student who walks through our school doors for post-secondary pathways, careers, and civic engagement.

**Does this project include IT-related costs, including hardware, software, cloud-based services, contracts or IT staff?**

N.A.

**If the project is linked to the Puget Sound Action Agenda, describe the impacts on the Action Agenda, including expenditure and FTE detail.**

This project does not impact the Puget Sound Action Agenda.

**How does this project contribute to meeting the greenhouse gas emissions limits established in RCW 70A.45.050, Clean Buildings performance standards in RCW 19.27A.210, or other statewide goals to reduce carbon pollution and/or improve energy efficiency? Please elaborate.**

The projects will meet OSPI's Washington Sustainable Schools Protocol.

**Does this project contribute to statewide goals to reduce carbon pollution and/or improve energy use? If yes, please elaborate.**

N.A.

**Historical Significance**

N.A.

**Location**

Statewide

**Describe Growth Management Impacts**

School districts are responsible for determining whether and how they need to participate in the planning process with the city or county planning authority.

**Grant Recipient Organization**

Local School Districts

**Application Process Used**

OSPI will continue the competitive grant processes for the Urgent Repair and Equal Access Grant Funding. The Emergency Repair Pool grant program will mirror the requirements established by the Legislature in the 2019-21 biennial Capital Budget.

**Funding Requested**

2023-25 \$24,300,000

2025-27 \$

2027-29 \$

2029-31 \$

2031-33 \$