



Strengthening Early Literacy Through State Learning Standards and Innovative Tutoring Tools

2025–27 Operating Budget Decision Package

RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY

State law (RCW 28A.655.070) charges the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) with developing and updating the state K–12 learning standards. Learning standards provide the foundation on which curricula and lessons are built, with early literacy standards laying the groundwork for all future learning. It is essential that the state invest in support for school districts and educators adopting and implementing new learning standards, and that investments prioritize early literacy. OSPI requests funding to provide centralized support to school districts with the implementation of revised learning standards, providing technical support, and piloting innovative technologies to support student learning.

FISCAL DETAIL

Operating Expenditures	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
General Fund 001 (Program 05X)	\$35,551,000	\$74,648,000	\$74,648,000	\$74,648,000
Total Expenditures	\$35,551,000	\$74,648,000	\$74,648,000	\$74,648,000
Biennial Totals	\$110,199,000		\$149,296,000	
Staffing	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
FTEs	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Average Annual	1.0		1.0	
Object of Expenditure	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Obj. A	\$111,000	\$111,000	\$111,000	\$111,000
Obj. B	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000	\$50,000
Obj. C	\$1,892,000	\$5,142,000	\$5,142,000	\$5,142,000
Obj. E	\$7,000	\$7,000	\$7,000	\$7,000
Obj. G	\$7,000	\$7,000	\$7,000	\$7,000
Obj. J	\$11,000	\$0	\$0	\$0
Obj. N	\$33,473,000	\$69,331,000	\$69,331,000	\$69,331,000
Revenue	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
General Fund	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total Revenue	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Biennial Totals	\$0		\$0	

PACKAGE DESCRIPTION

Literacy is the foundational skill on which all other learning is built. The ability to read, comprehend, reason, summarize, and report are essential to every school subject and to successfully navigate the world both as a child and as an adult. What it means to be literate evolves alongside society as new tools, new technology, and new ways of interacting with one another change the learning landscape. To support students' developing strong literacy skills across all subjects that prepare them for communicating with the world inside and outside of school, Washington must invest in high-quality, science-driven learning standards, and in tools that both aid and measure student attainment of these fundamental skills.

State law (RCW 28A.655.070) charges OSPI with developing the state's K–12 learning standards and updating and revising them periodically, ensuring standards are aligned with current understandings of the key elements of knowledge that students need to enter adult society and the workforce. For example, inclusion of media literacy as a critical component of overall literacy is essential for developing the robust critical thinking skills students need as creators and consumers in a media-rich environment. Recent revisions to update the standards identify "priority standards," which are the most important, universal learning elements for all students. These revised standards will better support mastery-based and competency-based learning in all content areas by focusing on the essential skills and knowledge students need to demonstrate mastery of content.

Learning standards identify the goals for what students should know, understand, and be able to do by the end of each grade. Local school boards use these standards to shape and guide the selection of curriculum for use in their schools. The review, revision, and implementation of revised state learning standards is a multi-year process for each subject area, and involves significant engagement with key stakeholders including educators, subject-matter experts, educational service district (ESD) content leads and ESD leadership, and many organizations and groups, including those that elevate community voice and lived experiences.

In the current round of revisions to the state learning standards, OSPI has presented at conferences and to education advisory boards including the Washington State Native American Education Advisory Committee (WSNAEAC), the dual language advisory board, multilingual education advisory board, special education advisory committee, the Association of Washington School Leaders (AWSL), the Association of Washington School Principals (AWSP), the Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA), the Washington Association of Learning Alternatives (WALA), and others. The stakeholder feedback process also includes collaboration across OSPI's many content and systems experts and their teams.

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

Learning standards revision requires additional, focused resources from OSPI to oversee and direct the multi-year process of review, engaging with stakeholders, and introduction across the K–12 system. Internal expertise and stakeholder feedback must be collected and incorporated in

a timely and organized manner to allow OSPI to meet revision timelines. As these new standards are released, districts need technical support and professional development to embed the standards with fidelity at the local level.

At the same time, educators need support in understanding and embedding the new standards into their teaching, as well as the latest tools and innovations in teaching and assessment. An important tool emerging across many areas of teaching and learning is artificial intelligence (AI). AI can serve as a partner to in-classroom instruction, allowing for instruction, practice, coaching, and assessment that can be tailored to the individual child's needs and progress. Carefully selected AI tools that work alongside new standards to ensure students build strong, sound foundations in literacy across all subjects with an emphasis media literacy, better prepare them for success in the information economy.

What is your proposal?

OSPI proposes professional learning for educators and school leaders to support the introduction and embedding of new or revised learning standards consistently and with fidelity across the state. OSPI also proposes investing in an AI reading support tool for students in kindergarten through third grade, a critical window in which students' foundational literacy skillset is established.

How is your proposal impacting equity in the state?

1. This proposal is directly connected to equitable access to educational opportunities for Washington students. See above for more details.
2. 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 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 which perpetuate larger systemic inequities that persist along racial and socioeconomic lines.
3. See above.
4. See above.

What are you purchasing and how does it solve the problem?

To support districts in successfully embedding new learning standards, particularly literacy standards, across all Washington public schools, OSPI requests funding for a day of professional learning for teachers, paraeducators, librarians, and principals. Funds requested would support professional learning across the elementary grades in the 2026 fiscal year, expanding to include all grade levels in the 2027 fiscal year. OSPI also requests funding from the state for consistent, ongoing, centralized support within the agency to coordinate, oversee, and consolidate feedback gathered during the internal and external stakeholder engagement processes.

Finally, OSPI requests funding to provide teachers across the state with access to an AI reading assessment tool to support literacy attainment among Washington students. Currently, in many classrooms, time to provide one-to-one support to individual students is limited. Using this tool, students will be able to practice reading out loud and receive immediate, individualized analysis and feedback from the AI tool. Educators will be able to receive consistent, real-time data on each student's progress, allowing educators to quickly identify students who may need additional support. By focusing on core literacy skills for kindergarteners through third-graders, Washington students will have a strong foundation on which to build their learning in every subject area throughout their K–12 career. While the investment is targeted at specific skills and grade levels, the benefits to the students, the system, and the state will be felt across every area of learning throughout students' entire learning journeys.

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

Introducing new learning standards without an investment in centralized guidance and professional development for educators and school leaders leads to inconsistent implementation across the state as the new standards are understood and embedded to varying degrees. Inconsistent implementation exacerbates opportunity gaps and inequities within the school system and weakens the ability of the new standards to strengthen learning for all students. At the same time, without dedicated resources, OSPI will be unable to invest in the deep, careful, and thorough stakeholder engagement that is so essential to the standards revision process, allowing new standards to truly reflect the wide-ranging, diverse input of Washington's many education partners.

In selecting an AI-based strategy to support early literacy specifically, OSPI focused on identifying the most essential skillset at the most essential grade levels to maximize the impact of this innovative investment. AI not only offers new methods of instruction and assessment, it is much more cost effective than investing in individual reading coaches for Washington students, but serves a similar purpose.

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

The office currently has no permanent resources dedicated to this purpose.

ASSUMPTIONS AND CALCULATIONS

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

This is the first request for an additional day of professional development focused on literacy learning standards and funding for artificial intelligence technology to support student learning.

Detailed assumptions and calculations:

OSPI requests \$33,473,000 in fiscal year 2026 and \$69,331,000 in fiscal year 2027 for

professional development grants to school districts. Estimated daily professional development costs are calculated based on district staff and salaries reported to OSPI for the 2023–24 school year for teachers, librarians, principals, and paraeducators.

To contract with a vendor to support early literacy by developing an artificial intelligence (AI) tool for students in kindergarten through third grade, OSPI requests \$1.892 million in fiscal year 2026 and \$5.142 million annually starting in fiscal year 2027. This is estimating an implementation pilot of approximately 30% of K–3 students statewide (\$17 per student) in fiscal year 2026 and then transitioning to statewide implementation in fiscal year 2027 (\$14 per student).

OSPI requests \$186,000 in fiscal year 2026 and \$175,000 in fiscal year 2027 and ongoing to support a 1.0 full-time equivalent (FTE) associate director of learning standards. Fiscal year 2026 includes \$11,000 in one-time costs to prepare for this position. This position will be responsible for creating and supporting the professional development standards implemented during the requested additional professional development day, and for coordinating the ongoing review and revisions of the various sets of K–12 learning standards.

Workforce assumptions:

Fiscal Year 2026 (Total \$186,000)

- FTE = 1.0 FTE
- Salary: \$110,601
- Benefits: \$50,913
- Good/Services: \$6,678
- Travel: \$6,678
- Capital Outlays (one-time): \$11,130

Fiscal Year 2027 (Total \$175,000 and Ongoing)

- FTE = 1.0 FTE
- Salary: \$110,601
- Benefits: \$51,043
- Good/Services: \$6,678
- Travel: \$6,678

Historical funding:

Fiscal Year 2026

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

Fiscal Year 2027

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

STRATEGIC AND PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES

Strategic framework:

This proposal makes progress on all four of Superintendent Reykdal's Strategic Goals, which are to ensure all students have equitable access to strong foundations; to provide every student with rigorous, learner-centered academic options in their community; to prepare all students with a diverse and highly skilled educator workforce; and to ensure that OSPI is timely, unified, and customer-focused.

By focusing on learning standards—with a primary focus on early literacy—Washington can support each and every student in developing a strong foundation for their learning across all subjects, a key element of a world class education, which is among the Governor's Results Washington goals.

Performance outcomes:

By funding this proposal, Washington will ensure that revised state learning standards are thoroughly vetted by our various, diverse stakeholders; rolled out consistently across the state; and adopted with fidelity by all K–12 school districts. Funding this request will also provide Washington's students in kindergarten through third grade with new and innovative AI technologies to strengthen their attainment of key literacy skills.

OTHER COLLATERAL CONNECTIONS

Intergovernmental:

None.

Stakeholder impacts:

OSPI anticipates strong support from school districts, educators, and the professional organizations and associations serving K–12 school leaders and staff.

Legal or administrative mandates:

OSPI is charged by the Legislature to develop, update, and revise the state K–12 Learning Standards under RCW 28A.655.070.

Changes from current law:

None.

State workforce impacts:

None.

State facilities impacts:

None.

Puget Sound recovery:

N/A

Governor's salmon strategy:

N/A