



Investing in 9th Grade Success to Support On-Time Graduation

Community Partner: Stand for Children

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Describe the specific need within the K–12 system

The success of Washington state is tied to the success of its people. Washington's economy depends on a skilled, high-performing workforce empowered to pursue personal growth and upward mobility. To that end, the mission of Washington's K–12 education system is to prepare all students for postsecondary success, whether that is through higher education, trades, military service, or other pathways to fulfilling and financially stable futures. To fulfill its mission, OSPI and the K–12 system's goal is to support each and every student up to, through, and beyond high school graduation, and onto meaningful postsecondary pathways that drive both individual and state-level economic success.

Research from the University of Chicago's To&Through Project¹ shows that a successful 9th grade year is a strong indicator of a student's overall academic success in high school, with those that finish 9th grade on-track being four times as likely to graduate.² While Washington's four-year graduation rate has held strong in recent years with a record-high of 83.6% in the 2022–23 school year, gaps remain for some student groups. Black/African American students' 2022–23 four-year graduation rate sits a couple points below the state average at 81.3%, and fewer than 80% of students who identify as American Indian/Alaska Native, Hispanic/Latino, and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander graduated on-time in that same year. Dropout rates among these communities are over 10%, with American Indian/Alaska Native students dropping out at a rate of 18.1%.³

Data focused on student performance in 9th grade shows similar disparities, with fewer than half of American Indian/Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students on-track to graduate, and on-track performance for Black/African American Students and Hispanic/Latino Students at 63.3% and 56.9% respectively. When looking at social demographic data, such as students in foster care and experiencing homelessness, students from low-income households, students who are migratory, and multilingual/English learners, those belonging to these traditionally underserved communities often face more opportunity gaps than their peers.⁴

¹ *The To & Through Project*. (2023). University of Chicago. <https://toandthrough.uchicago.edu>

² Roderick, M., Kelly-Kemple, T., et. all. (April 2014). *Preventable Failure. Improvement in Long-Term Outcomes when High Schools Focused on the 9th Grade Year*. The University of Chicago Consortium on Chicago School Research. <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/2018-10/On-Track%20Validation%20RS.pdf>.

^{3,4} Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. Washington State Report Card. (2024, August 13). OSPI. <https://washingtonstatereportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/reportcard/viewschoolordistrict/103300>

How state investment in community partnership meets this need

It is clear from the data that some students, particularly those from historically underserved communities, lack needed supports during that crucial 9th grade year, falling behind their peers and, in some cases, disengaging from the school system entirely. Targeted investment in the Center for High School Success's 9th Grade Success Initiative will drive academic performance in high school and push Washington toward its goal of high school graduation and post-secondary success for each and every student. This investment does not represent a permanent enhancement to financial support for partner districts; rather, the program is designed around coaching and developing in-district expertise that is incorporated into larger district practice. This change in overall school culture allows the districts to eventually phase out 9th grade grant support in favor of a self-sustaining, long-term model.

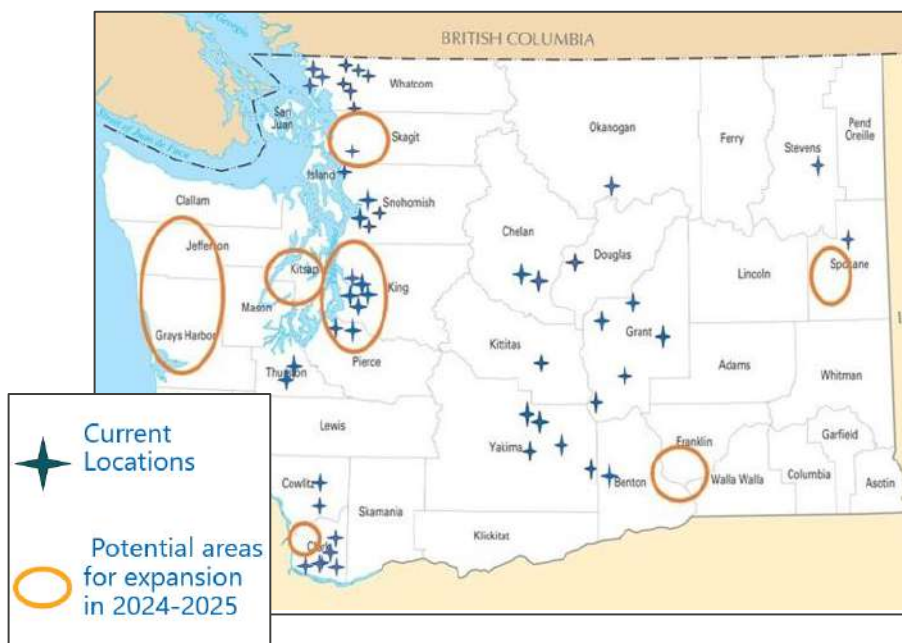
Broadly speaking, once districts have had 9th grade success teams in place for an average of four to five years, receiving consistent and regular coaching, districts have shown themselves able to sustain high ninth grade on-track rates across all student groups. Once they achieve this level of sustainability, district need for external support and funding focuses on participation in the network and collaborative gatherings with other participating districts. At this point they no longer need the intensive coaching, and many elements of the program are largely self-sustaining. Grant amounts for alumni-status districts are smaller than those in their first few years. This allows network growth with relatively stable state investment.

Describe existing or previous state investment in this work

The 9th Grade Success pilot launched by OSPI in the 2019–20 school year operated in five high schools. Over the 2021–22, 2022–23 and 2023–24 school years, the program was funded through federal COVID-19 emergency relief dollars and expanded to include 51 schools across 40 school districts, and state funding secured through the 2024 Supplemental Operating Budget (5950, Sec. 522[2][t]) will fund further expansion to 61 schools in the upcoming 2024–25 school year.

SUPPORTING DATA AND EVIDENCE OF POSITIVE IMPACT

Investments in 9th Grade Success over the past few years have already paid off, with three high schools in the Evergreen School District transitioning to alumni-status in 2023. One of these schools, Union High School, now serves as a national demonstration site for other schools and districts interested in implementing this program.



Rigorous, academic program evaluation of impact over three years shows Ninth Grade On-Track rates that are 6.69 percentage points higher than comparison schools, a performance that is consistent across race and socioeconomic groups (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2023).

FISCAL DETAIL

Operating Expenditures	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Fund 001-1 (program 05X)	\$3,484,000	\$3,595,000	\$3,595,000	\$3,595,000
Total Expenditures	\$3,484,000	\$3,595,000	\$3,595,000	\$3,595,000
Biennial Totals	\$7,079,000		\$7,190,000	
Staffing	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
FTEs	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Average Annual	0.0		0.0	
Object of Expenditure	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Obj. C	\$3,484,000	\$3,595,000	\$3,595,000	\$3,595,000
Revenue	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Total Revenue	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00	\$0.00
Biennial Totals	\$0		\$0	

ASSUMPTIONS AND CALCULATIONS

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

In Section 522(2)(t) of the 2024 Supplemental Operating Budget, OSPI received one-time funding of \$3,000,000 in fiscal year 2025 for ninth grade success.

Detailed assumptions and calculations:

Contract and Grants

OSPI requests \$3,484,000 in fiscal year 2026 and \$3,595,000 in annual ongoing funding beginning in fiscal year 2027 to continue OSPI's existing grant program. Grant funds go to schools to cover costs of setting up and running a Ninth Grade Success team (costs include additional teacher compensation, substitute time, materials and supplies for tutoring and other interventions, software licenses, curricula, etc.). The funds will also go toward a contract with a nonprofit organization for data support, coaching, professional development, and technical assistance to Ninth Grade Success teams in research-backed approaches to increasing ninth grade on-track rates and eliminating opportunity gaps.

Each foundational school in the network costs an average of about \$55,655 per year, while an alumni school costs an average of about \$22,250 per year. There are an estimated 55

foundational schools funded in fiscal year 2026 and ongoing, and an estimated 19 alumni schools in fiscal year 2026 and 24 in fiscal year 2027 and ongoing. A portion of this is provided as a building-level grant to cover incidental costs of establishing and maintaining a Ninth Grade Success team, and a portion is used to cover cost of contracting with a technical assistance provider for coaching.

Historical funding:

There is no funding in carry-forward budget to continue this project into 2025–27.

Fiscal Year 2026

- FTE = 0.00
- Total Funds = \$0.00
- Near General Fund = \$0.00
- Other Funds = \$0.00

Fiscal Year 2027

- FTE = 0.00
- Total Funds = \$0.00
- Near General Fund = \$0.00
- Other Funds = \$0.00