



# Support for High Poverty Schools by Expanding the Learning Assistance Program

## 2025–27 Operating Budget Decision Package

### RECOMMENDATION SUMMARY

Students across Washington could benefit from accelerated learning and targeted supports, regardless of where they go to school. The Learning Assistance (LAP) High Poverty program meets this need but is currently only available for schools meeting a specific threshold, locking out these benefits from students in need who happen to attend a non-eligible school. This request expands on the successful and evidence-based LAP High Poverty program, both in the overall funding and eligibility. Under this request, all schools in the state would be eligible for LAP High Poverty funding, and schools with schools 50% or more students experiencing poverty would receive an enhanced rate, expanding access to these targeted resources to an additional 1,134 schools covering 460,000 students.

### FISCAL DETAIL

Operating Expenditures	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
General Fund- 001 (Program 010)	\$50,000	\$0	\$0	\$0
General Fund- 001 (Program 061)	\$119,502,000	\$156,391,000	\$159,583,000	\$162,934,000
WA Opp. Path- 17F (Program 068)	\$653,000	\$855,000	\$872,000	\$891,000
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$120,205,000</b>	<b>\$157,246,000</b>	<b>\$160,455,000</b>	<b>\$163,825,000</b>
<b>Biennial Totals</b>	<b>\$277,451,000</b>		<b>\$324,280,000</b>	
Staffing	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
FTEs	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
<b>Average Annual</b>	<b>0.0</b>		<b>0.0</b>	
Object of Expenditure	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
Obj. N	\$120,155,000	\$157,246,000	\$160,455,000	\$163,825,000
Obj. C	\$50,000	\$0	\$0	\$0
Revenue	FY 2026	FY 2027	FY 2028	FY 2029
General Fund- 001	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>
<b>Biennial Totals</b>	<b>\$0</b>		<b>\$0</b>	

# PACKAGE DESCRIPTION

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

The Learning Assistance Program (LAP) is a state-funded program designed to enhance educational opportunities for students who need additional academic support by providing supplemental academic and nonacademic services. LAP Base funding is generated at the school district level.

First created by the Legislature in 2016, the LAP High Poverty program was established to support high-need schools where 50% or more of the enrolled students are eligible for Free or Reduced-Price meals (F/RP), based on a rolling 3-year average. LAP Base funding and High Poverty funding can be used for many activities and beginning in 2025, school districts will begin to use the Washington Integrated Student Supports Protocol (WISSP) to budget and expend LAP funds.

Unlike LAP Base funding where all districts receive funding based on their poverty level, LAP High Poverty has a hard eligibility threshold of 50%. This means that schools just under the cutoff receive zero LAP High Poverty funding even though they, too, have enrolled students identified as low-income who may need the same support as a school that meets the eligibility cutoff.

Looking at the eligibility for the 2024–25 school year, there are 126 schools, representing nearly 50,000 students, between 45–49.9% F/RP and therefore will receive no High Poverty funding despite being so close to the eligibility criteria.

## What is your proposal?

### Expand LAP High Poverty

Currently, LAP High Poverty provides funding to schools where their 3-year rolling average percentage of students eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Meals (F/RP) is at or above 50%. Eligible schools receive 1.1 hours of instruction per week per student eligible for F/RP meals.

Under this request, all schools in the state would be eligible for LAP High Poverty and schools with schools at 50% or greater would receive an enhanced rate.

1. Tier 1 schools, defined as 50% students identified as low-income or greater, would be eligible for funding for 1.34 hours of instruction per student, per week.
  - Using 2024–25 school year numbers, this will cover 1,134 schools and approximately 460,000 students.
2. Tier 2 schools, defined as less than 50% students identified as low-income, would be eligible for funding for 0.67 hours of instruction per student, per week.
  - Using 2024–25 school year numbers, this would cover the remaining 1,225 schools, representing about 615,000 students.

Expanding LAP High Poverty funding to all schools will ensure that a greater number of students identified as low-income receive the supplemental instruction they may need. By providing additional instructional hours to both Tier 1 and Tier 2 schools, this proposal aims to reduce the opportunity gaps between students identified as low-income and their peers.

With the additional funding, schools will be better equipped to provide targeted interventions and supports tailored to the needs of their students identified as low-income. This will likely result in more effective implementation of educational strategies designed to help these students succeed.

### **Reevaluate Current Hold Harmless for LAP High Poverty**

In addition to moving the threshold down to meet all schools, this proposal would end the LAP High Poverty Hold Harmless outlined in RCW 28A.150.260 (10)(a)(ii). The hold harmless was enacted to ensure schools that were eligible for LAP High Poverty funding would not lose their funding after moving to no-cost school meals. As this proposal provides LAP High Poverty funding for all schools, the hold harmless is no longer necessary.

### **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. OSPI regularly engages with a wide array of partners and stakeholders to continuously connect with students, families, and community representatives as partners in decision-making.

The LAP High Poverty program was first enacted to support equity by driving additional resources to schools with higher proportions of students identified as low-income, recognizing that these schools and the students they serve may have additional needs. This proposal extends LAP High Poverty to all schools, expanding this equitable program for all students.

3. See above.
4. See above.

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

This proposal would provide LAP High Poverty funding to all schools in Washington state. Currently, funding is only available to schools where 50% or more of the students are eligible for Free or Reduced-Price Meals.

Instead of a 50% threshold and one formula based on enrollment, this proposal removes the threshold and creates a two-tiered formula where all schools are eligible for LAP High Poverty

funding and schools above the 50% threshold would receive an enhanced funding rate.

Under this proposal, the two tiers are as follows:

1. Tier 1 schools, defined as 50% students identified as low-income or greater, would be eligible for funding for 1.34 hours of instruction per student, per week.
2. Tier 2 schools, defined as less than 50% students identified as low-income, would be eligible for funding for 0.67 hours of instruction per student, per week.

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

OSPI explored other student-weighted funding mechanisms but given that the LAP High Poverty program already exists and is an understandable system for our schools, felt like this was the best method for driving out funding to support students identified as low-income.

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

LAP High Poverty funding is formula-based and the agency cannot distribute more funding without an adjustment to the formula and additional resources.

## **ASSUMPTIONS AND CALCULATIONS**

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

This increase will allow enhanced funding, intended to provide academic support to students identified as low-income, to reach all of the low-income students across the state. This proposal expands the LAP High Poverty program, which has shown success in supporting students who are not meeting academic standards.

The proposal increases both the pool of eligible schools and the funding for schools above the current threshold of 50% of enrolled students identified as low-income.

### **Detailed assumptions and calculations:**

OSPI used the maintenance level funding baseline for these calculations: student enrollment as approved by the Caseload Forecast Council and the current law inflationary values that are assumed for future fiscal years.

The current law assumes funding at an additional 1.1 hours of instruction per student, per week for schools with a three-year average poverty level at or greater than 50% for an assumed enrollment based on caseload forecast of 442,847.86 AAFTE (annual average full-time equivalent) students for school districts and state-tribal education compact schools, and 2,420.5 AAFTE for charter schools for an expected maintenance level funding of \$155 million in school year 2025–26 and \$157.9 million in school year 2026–27. Funding schools with a three-year average poverty less than 50% at 0.64 hours of instruction per student, per week and schools with a three-year average poverty of 50% or greater at an enhanced tier of 1.34 hours of instruction per student, per week would increase the estimated total High-Poverty LAP program

formula to \$310 million in school year 2025–26 and \$315.8 million in school year 2026–27. Therefore, OSPI proposes a net impact of \$155 million to school year 2025–26 school year and \$157.9 million to school year 2026–27.

Additionally, OSPI requests an additional \$50,000 one-time cost for additional maintenance contractor costs to program the additional tier into the apportionment system for the prototypical funding formula and apportionment funding reports.

### **Workforce assumptions:**

No Impact.

### **Historical funding:**

The Legislature added an enhancement to the Learning Assistance Program for High Poverty LAP through the prototypical funding formula during the 2017 Legislative Session, effective school year 2018–19.

#### **Fiscal Year 2026**

- FTE = 0 FTE
- Total Funds = \$120.2 million
- Near General Fund = \$120.2 million
- Other Funds = \$0

#### **Fiscal Year 2027**

- FTE = 0 FTE
- Total Funds = \$157.2 million
- Near General Fund = \$157.2 million
- Other Funds = \$0

## **STRATEGIC AND PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES**

### **Strategic framework:**

This proposal supports the heart of OSPI's mission and vision to prepare all students for postsecondary success and civic engagement, with an emphasis on **all** students. It helps drive Superintendent Reykdal's Strategic Goal #1, to ensure all students have equitable access to strong foundations, and Strategic Goal #2, providing every student with rigorous, learner-centered academic options in their community.

Supporting the mental and behavioral health of all students is part of a world class education, a goal of the Governor's Results Washington.

## **Performance outcomes:**

### **Improved Student Academic Performance**

The additional instructional hours funded by the LAP High Poverty expansion are expected to lead to improved academic performance, particularly in core subjects like math and reading. This will contribute to higher rates of students meeting or exceeding state academic standards.

### **Greater Equity in Resource Allocation**

Removing the hard eligibility threshold and implementing a two-tiered funding system will lead to a more equitable distribution of resources. Schools with significant, but slightly lower, poverty rates will now receive support, addressing the needs of students in these schools who were previously underserved.

## **OTHER COLLATERAL CONNECTIONS**

### **Intergovernmental:**

N/A

### **Stakeholder impacts:**

N/A

### **Legal or administrative mandates:**

N/A

### **Changes from current law:**

N/A

### **State workforce impacts:**

N/A

### **State facilities impacts:**

N/A

### **Puget Sound recovery:**

N/A

### **Governor's salmon strategy:**

N/A