



## Advancing a Living Wage for Washington’s Paraeducators

### 2024 Supplemental Operating Budget Decision Package

### Recommendation Summary

Paraeducators are critical members of a student’s learning and instructional support team. Despite their necessity, paraeducators across Washington state are not compensated equitably, and for many of them, compensation is not a living wage. This makes it difficult for school districts to hire and retain talented paraeducators. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) proposes providing school districts with an additional allocation equal to \$7 per hour plus benefits for all paraeducators hired in the 2022–23 school year, adjusted for inflation and the same regionalization adjustments provided for school districts under RCW 28A.150.412. These dollars are intended to be added to the current salary for paraeducators.

### Fiscal Details (Funding, FTEs, Revenue, Objects)

Operating Expenditures	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027
General Fund State - 01	\$0	\$193,190,000	\$253,076,000	\$257,191,000
Opportunity Pathways – 17F	\$0	\$439,000	\$576,000	\$585,000
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	\$0	\$193,629,000	\$253,652,000	\$257,776,000
<b>Biennial Totals</b>	<b>\$193,629,000</b>		<b>\$511,428,000</b>	
Staffing	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027
FTEs	0	0	0	0
<b>Average Annual</b>	<b>0</b>		<b>0</b>	
Revenue	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027
General Fund State - 01	\$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>	
Object of Expenditure	FY 2024	FY 2025	FY 2026	FY 2027
Obj. N	\$0	\$193,629,000	\$253,652,000	\$257,776,000

## Package Description

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

Paraeducators play an essential role in Washington's public school system, often serving as the primary instructional support for our most vulnerable student populations. Recognizing the important role paraeducators play, House Bill 1115 (2017) set common statewide standards for paraeducators increasing the expectations and professionalism of the profession. Paraeducators represent more racial diversity in Washington's schools than the diversity in the state's certificated teaching population.

The living wage is the income required to cover basic family needs without reliance on outside assistance. According to Massachusetts's Institute of Technology's living wage calculator<sup>1</sup>, a living wage for a single adult in Seattle with zero children is \$19.58, and the living wage for a single adult in Seattle with two children is \$49.71, with the average being around \$34. The average salary for paraeducators in Washington, in high regionalization areas like Seattle, is \$27.87.

Inflation has eroded paraeducators modest hourly rate, making it even more difficult for them to afford the increasing cost of living. There are currently around 38,000 individual paraeducators working in Washington's schools. Despite their importance and necessity to implementing a program of basic education, paraeducators are one of the lowest paid employees in our school buildings. Economic barriers driven by low pay can prevent paraeducators from living in the communities they serve, further isolating students who rely on these paraeducators for their education and often, much more.

Appropriate paraeducator compensation is necessary to continue providing crucial services to Washington's students.

### What is your proposed solution?

To remedy this inequity, OSPI proposes additional resources for school districts to provide paraeducators with a living hourly wage, regionalized. This can be accomplished by providing a \$7 per hour increase (plus benefits at a rate of 18.06%) to districts based on the total full-time equivalent paraeducator hired in the 2022–23 school year.

The basis of the \$7 per hour increase, is that when you reverse regionalize the \$34 average living wage for Seattle, Washington (regionalization inversion) you get to roughly \$28.81. The current average hourly wage of districts with no regionalization factor is \$22.12, therefore an increase of \$7 per hour, before regionalization would lift Washington state paraeducators to a more livable hourly wage (see Table 1).

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<sup>1</sup> Glasmeier, Amy K. Living Wage Calculator. 2023. Massachusetts Institute of Technology. <https://livingwage.mit.edu/states/53>.

**Table 1. Proposed Paraeducator Salary Increase**

Regionalization	Average Hourly Paraeducator Wage	Regionalized Hourly Increase	Target Living Wage	Newly Funded Average Hourly Wage
1.00	\$22.12	\$7.00	\$28.81	\$29.12
1.06	\$24.05	\$7.42	\$30.36	\$31.47
1.12	\$25.42	\$7.84	\$32.08	\$33.26
1.18	\$27.87	\$8.26	\$34.00	\$36.13

**Note:** For Table 1, the hourly rate assumptions are 182 days, 7 hours per day, and 1,274 hours in 1.0 full-time equivalent (FTE).

This \$7 per hour increase will be adjusted by the same salary inflationary increases provided to teachers under RCW 28A.400.205, and the same regionalization adjustments provided under RCW 28A.150.412. Benefit rate percentages will also update by year based on projections.

Increasing the compensation for paraeducator will benefit Washington's students statewide, while simultaneously incentivizing paraeducators to remain in the profession.

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

This proposal requests state funds to ensure that paraeducators are paid a living wage based on the region of the state in which they work. Calculations are based on the full-time equivalent (FTE) count of paraeducators hired by Washington school districts in the 2022–23 school year. This investment would allow districts to either increase paraeducator minimum wage to \$28.81 per hour regionalized, or it would allow districts to free up and re-purpose levy resources if they currently pay more than \$28.81 regionalized. This will support school districts in making a minimum hourly wage for paraeducators part of the state funding allocation.

As part of this proposal, OSPI will also be proposing an immediate policy change that establishes a staffing compliance mechanism for school districts to maintain an overall student-to-staff ratio using total paraeducators hired in the baseline year compared to the ratio calculated in future years. This compliance mechanism will support Washington's students in continuing to have access to the number of paraeducators they currently have access to.

In a future year of implementation, OSPI also proposes establishing a minimum wage requirement and a requirement for these funds to be spent on paraeducator salaries only, like what is currently in place for Certificated Instructional Staff.

Funding will be provided to school districts via state apportionment.

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

In September 2022, the legislatively mandated Basic Education Compensation Advisory Committee [published its key K–12 salary recommendations](#). The Committee recommended increased state salaries for all K–12 instructional staff, including paraeducators. The price of the

report's recommendations ultimately deterred the state from adopting the Committee's recommendations.

This proposal would fund state salary increases solely for paraeducators, lowering the cost to the state and funding modest salary increases for these critical instructional support staff who deserve fair compensation.

OSPI also considered increasing the number of paraeducators provided in the prototypical school funding formula. However, that formula is for allocation purposes only and will not immediately address the problem of providing more equitable, living wage compensation.

## Performance Measures

### Performance outcomes:

Providing market rate salaries for paraeducators will help to retain those employees. This proposal will reduce the salary allocation discrepancy that creates incentives for paraeducators to change school districts or careers. A diverse and retained workforce across Washington's K–12 public schools will support better outcomes for students.

## Assumptions and Calculations

### Expansion or alteration of a current program or service:

This proposal is not an expansion, reduction, elimination or alteration of a current program or service.

### Detailed assumptions and calculations:

The baseline for these calculations is based on actual paraeducator full-time equivalent staff hired by school districts as reported in the 2022–23 school year. The proposal increases the state allocation for paraeducators by an amount equal to \$7 per hour times the regionalization factor for the district plus 18.06% for benefits. OSPI assumes that the average annual length of a paraeducator contract is 1,274 hours base, 7 hours per day, for 182 days.

The district specific calculation for the initial year is as follows:

$(\text{Paraeducator FTE Actually Hired} \times (\$7 \times \text{Regionalization}) \times 1,274 \text{ hours}) = \text{Total Cost}$

OSPI increased the total cost of the proposal by the projected Implicit Price Deflator (IPD) as follows:

- 2025–26 used 2.4%
- 2026–27 used 2.4%

For purposes of this calculation, OSPI assumes a living wage for a single adult with up to two children, using the Living Wage Calculation for Washington State by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Not included in these assumptions are two-adult households or households with more than two children.

## Workforce assumptions:

None.

## How our Proposal Impacts Equity in the State

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 will advance equity in Washington by providing additional supports to paraeducators, many of whom work directly with many of Washington's students who are furthest from educational justice. This proposal will provide a living wage to paraeducators which will support school districts' ability to keep their paraeducators in classrooms providing crucial services to students. Paraeducators represent more racial diversity in Washington's schools than the diversity in the state's certificated teaching population. This request is systemic in nature, focusing on inequities in the K–12 funding model that results in barriers to recruit and retain a diverse, skilled, and highly trained workforce.

This proposal was based on discussions and feedback collected from a wide array of educational stakeholders including the makeup of the 2022 Compensation Technical Workgroup, which includes a student representative, representatives from Public School Employees, Washington Education Association, Washington Association of School Administrators, Washington School Personnel Association, Washington Association of School Business Officials, and the Washington State Native American Education Advisory Committee. The original proposal addressed multiple high-cost elements of the K–12 funding system and was a very high cost ask. OSPI narrowed the scope of the proposal to address the nature of the supplemental budget, and to improve the cost structure around a single element—paraeducator compensation.

## Strategic and Performance Outcomes

### Strategic framework:

This proposal aligns with the Governor's Results Washington Goal #1: World-class education. The proposal also aligns with Superintendent Reykdal's Strategic Goal #4, in which the agency commits to supporting school districts through consistent, timely, and meaningful funding and supports that center the needs of students. Finally, this proposal aligns with Superintendent Reykdal's Strategic Goal #3, providing a Diverse, Inclusive, and Highly Skilled Workforce.

## Other Collateral Connections

### Intergovernmental:

OSPI anticipates broad school district support. School districts rely on paraeducators and understand their value in the classroom.

### Stakeholder response:

In September 2022, the legislatively mandated Basic Education Compensation Advisory Committee, composed of various education stakeholders, published its key K–12 salary recommendations. The Committee recommended increased state salaries for all K–12 instructional staff, including paraeducators.

### Legal or administrative mandates:

None.

### Changes from current law:

Changes from existing law include:

- Increased Paraeducator Salaries,
- Providing a Regionalization Adjustment to Paraeducator Salaries,
- Providing Inflationary Adjustments to Paraeducator Salaries, and
- Additional staffing compliance requirements to maintain a baseline paraeducator FTE student-to-staff ratios.

### State workforce impacts:

None.

### State facilities impacts:

None.

### Puget Sound recovery:

N/A