



Closing Gaps in Access to Learning Devices and Connectivity **2021–23 Biennial Operating Budget Decision Package (DP)**

Agency/Program Recommendation Summary

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) requests funding to help close the digital opportunity gap in K–12 learning. Funding is needed to help school districts support students and staff by acquiring learning devices and mobile hotspots, and by supporting broadband access outside of school. Funding is also needed to ensure providers caring for school-aged children have sufficient broadband access, allowing students to engage in school-based learning in their facilities.

Package Description

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

Use of technology and internet-based tools have become an essential skill for both educators and students being educated to succeed in the modern economy. Internet-connected technology has been integrated into K–12 learning and universal access to broadband and devices in the home is assumed in modern K–12 education. However, barriers faced by families with lower incomes, or those who live in rural settings where broadband access is limited, have created a technology opportunity gap for Washington students. These barriers are exacerbated by the need for students to be learning remotely in nearly all communities across the state this fall due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

OSPI requests funding to provide grants to school districts to address this important issue of educational equity by allowing them to purchase much-needed devices and mobile hotspots, and to supplement families' purchase of internet service in the home.

OSPI surveyed school districts in May and August of 2020 and found that an estimated 64,219 students and school staff lack an online learning device. OSPI also found that 44,425 families of students and school staff lack sufficient wireless internet signal strength to participate in online learning opportunities, a problem that could be remedied through use of a mobile hotspot. Finally, OSPI's surveys found that approximately 80,455 families of students and school staff are unable to afford available broadband connection fees to enable internet in their homes.

OSPI is using data provided by the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) showing approximately 4,400 licensed child care providers serve about 20,500 school-aged children, and could potentially need support through grant funds to ensure those children can access coursework from their child care facilities.

What is your proposed solution?

To address the persistent digital opportunity gap in K–12 schools, OSPI requests an increase in materials, supplies, and operating costs (MSOC) funding for technology to target three main areas of student and school staff need:

1. Learning devices,
2. Mobile hotspot devices and services, and
3. Residential broadband connections.

The additional \$8,800,000 in funding would support sufficient broadband access to students engaged in school-based learning in child care facilities. This would be an ongoing flat cost for each subsequent school year.

Learning Devices

All students need learning devices that connect to the internet. Learning devices of this kind include Chromebooks, low-cost Windows laptops, and iPads. This portion of the funding would support school districts' purchase of devices for students and instructional staff who need them. The cost of this portion is estimated to be \$20,871,175 in the 2021–22 school year, with similar replacement costs for outdated devices in future school years. The conversion of these values to state fiscal year is shown in the attached table.

Mobile Hotspot Devices and Service

When engaging in off-site school-based learning, some students cannot access the internet without a mobile hotspot device. This portion of the funding would support school districts in purchasing mobile hotspot devices and service, and providing them to students and staff who need them to amplify wireless signal strength in the home. The cost of this portion is estimated to be \$28,876,250 per school year beginning in 2020–21. This is an ongoing cost which declines slightly to \$26,655,000 in the 2021–22 school year. The conversion of these dollars to state fiscal year is shown in the attached table.

Residential Broadband Connections

Some students' and educators' families cannot afford residential broadband service, preventing them from participating in online school-based learning from home. This portion of the funding would support school districts in providing individual families with broadband connection at a subsidized rate where residential broadband is available. The cost of this portion is estimated to be \$39,473,000 in the 2020–21 school year and remains constant on an ongoing basis. These values are converted to state fiscal year in the attached table.

Child Care Facility Broadband Connections

Additional support is needed by child care facilities to support broadband access for students engaged in school-based learning in their facilities during remote or hybrid learning models, before and after school care, or during the summer months.

DCYF provided data to OSPI showing that 4,400 licensed child care facilities serve approximately 20,500 children. Ultimately, these facilities could access \$8,800,000 of proposed funds. Knowing this, OSPI assumes an average monthly service rate of approximately \$167 ($8,800,000/4,400/12=\166.67), or a monthly rate of \$36 per student ($8,800,000/20,489/12=35.79$). Since this is a grant program that is not allocated through MSOC in the prototypical school funding model, the \$8.8 million will be allocated by state fiscal year on an ongoing basis.

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

This proposal will direct funds to school districts to purchase the learning devices, mobile hotspots and service, and residential broadband access they need to ensure students and families can participate fully in remote learning provided online. It will also provide the funds needed to purchase broadband in child care facilities to support students engaged in school-based learning in their facilities.

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

OSPI considered using a grant program for one-time funding for districts to access these funds. That solution did not address the ongoing need for replacement costs of hardware nor the ongoing costs of upgraded internet access for districts. This option was chosen because it was the best mechanism for a defined ongoing per student allocation which could be specifically allocated for and tracked toward expenditures for its related purpose.

Performance Measures

Performance outcomes:

OSPI has learned through the COVID-19 school facility closure experience that access to adequate broadband service and the tools to access that service are a critical element of our K–12 learning environment. OSPI expects that these investments will increase students' ability to interact with technology in their learning and will ultimately help them gain confidence in interacting with tools that are used for assessments in the classroom on a regular basis.

Fiscal Details (Funding, FTEs, Revenue, Objects)

OSPI used the current caseload forecast enrollment numbers for full-time enrolled students, regardless of grade level or program, to arrive at the per student allocation proposed in this request. Funds will be specifically allocated for the purposes outlined in this request and cannot be used by districts for any other purpose. Funding will increase

in the general education program for the benefit of all students, and will not impact programmatic funding specific to career and technical education, skill centers, special education, or Running Start. While the funding will not be specifically allocated in these programs, nothing in this proposal prohibits the expenditure of these dollars for the designated purposes to benefit students participating in part or in whole in these programs.

Total investment for school year 2021–22, excluding the \$8.8 million for grants to child care facilities, is \$89,220,425. Total K–12 enrollment for that school year is projected to be 1,125,543.80 full-time equivalent (FTE) students. Therefore, the per FTE allocation for the 2021–22 school year is \$79.27.

Total investment for school year 2022–23, excluding the \$8.8 million for grants to child care facilities, is \$86,999,175. Total K–12 enrollment for that school year is projected to be 1,135,072.90 FTE. Therefore, the per FTE allocation for the 2022–23 school year is \$76.65.

This value represents on ongoing needed investment in these priorities for districts as replacement costs for hardware and services. These per student values should be considered basic education and should be adjusted by inflation on an ongoing basis.

The \$8.8 million in grants for child care facilities will be paid out by state fiscal year on an ongoing basis.

Operating Expenditures	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025
General Fund State - 001	\$77,695,000	\$95,982,000	\$96,828,000	\$98,588,000
Opp. Pathways – 17F	\$250,000	\$317,000	\$320,000	\$326,000
Total Expenditures	\$77,945,000	\$96,299,000	\$97,148,000	\$98,914,000
Biennial Totals	\$174,244,000		\$196,062,000	
Staffing	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025
FTEs	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Average Annual	0.0		0.0	
Revenue	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025
General Fund State	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total Revenue	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Biennial Totals	\$0		\$0	
Object of Expenditure	FY 2022	FY 2023	FY 2024	FY 2025
Obj. N	\$77,945,000	\$96,299,000	\$97,148,000	\$98,914,000

Assumptions and Calculations

Expansion or alteration of a current program or service:

N/A

Detailed assumptions and calculations:

Fiscal calculations are based on OSPI’s estimated statewide costs associated with the services being provided divided by the projected student enrollment as provided by the Caseload Forecast Council. The assumption made in estimating the cost of learning devices was an average cost of \$325 for a Chromebook, low-cost Windows device, or an iPad (the three most commonly used low-cost learning devices), with an estimated lifecycle of 4–5 years.

For mobile hotspots, we assumed an average one-time cost of \$50 for the device and an average monthly service fee cost of \$50. For residential broadband connections, we assumed an average monthly cost of \$50. OSPI assumes an average monthly service rate for child care facilities of approximately \$167 ($8,800,000/4,400/12=\166.67), or a monthly rate of \$36 per student ($8,800,000/20,489/12=35.79$).

Workforce assumptions:

N/A

How is your proposal impacting equity in the state?

Unequal access to online learning devices and internet connectivity severely hinders many students’ ability to access their K–12 education, particularly in an environment where much of the learning is provided online. This, in turn, widens existing opportunity gaps for students across the state.

By providing MSOC funds to school districts to purchase devices and broadband connectivity for students and staff who need it, the funding eliminates the affordability barriers that keep many families and staff from being able to participate in asynchronous online learning opportunities. In addition, this would provide equity of access for students to engage in school-based learning at child care facilities.

Strategic and Performance Outcomes

Strategic framework:

This proposal supports both the Governor’s and the Superintendent’s priorities for education by ensuring all students (as well as the families and providers that support students’ learning) have access to online learning devices and internet connectivity to fully access and engage in their education.

Other Collateral Connections

Intergovernmental:

It is anticipated that there will be strong support for this proposal from a variety of educational stakeholders, particularly those serving students from low-income families and other vulnerable populations.

Stakeholder response:

The non-governmental stakeholders impacted by this work are students and families.

Legal or administrative mandates:

None.

Changes from current law:

None.

State workforce impacts:

None.

State facilities impacts:

None.

Puget Sound recovery:

N/A

Other Documents

Reference documents:

N/A

Information technology (IT) addendum:

Does this decision package include funding for any IT-related costs, including hardware, software (including cloud-based services), contracts, or IT staff?

No

Yes