



REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

# UPDATE: Special Education Safety Net Survey

2017

**Authorizing legislation:** RCW 28A.150.392

(<http://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=28A.150.392>)

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## Executive Summary

Federal and state laws provide funding for students receiving special education services as required in their Individual Education Programs (IEPs). State laws limit state special education funding to 13.5 percent of students within a district.

At times, the funding is inadequate due to the high cost of special education services for an individual student (for example, the student needs a full-time nurse), or because more than 13.5 percent of students in a district require special education services (known as a community impact). Districts can apply for additional funding through a process known as “Safety Net” for high-need individual student costs and for community impact.

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) publishes a bulletin and application for Safety Net funding annually.

In 2016–17, the Safety Net committee approved awards for 107 Local Education Agencies (LEAs), including an Educational Service Agency (ESA), the Washington State School for the Blind, the Center for Childhood Deafness and Hearing Loss, and one charter school. The committee awarded 2,530 high-need individual student applications and eight community impact applications. The total amount awarded in 2016–17 was \$49,642,945. Eleven LEAs that applied for Safety Net did not receive funding.

The Legislature requires OSPI to annually survey school districts about their satisfaction with the Safety Net process. The results are used to improve the Safety Net process. In September 2017, a survey was sent to 472 administrators in the 118 LEAs that participated in Safety Net during the 2016–17 school year.

Survey takers responded to 10 questions. They recorded agreement at 85 percent or higher to seven of the 10 questions. This is a decrease from previous years when 10 of the 10 questions had an 85 percent or higher agreement rate.

One hundred eight individuals from 85 districts took the survey. This was 18 percent of the survey pool and more than 70 percent of the applicant districts. Fifty-five individuals gave comments representing 11 percent of the survey pool. The number of responses and comments on the survey increased this year.

## Background

Safety Net has been available in some form since the 1996–97 school year. Since its beginning, the Safety Net Oversight Committee has awarded more than \$502 million in state and federal Safety Net funding. For a more complete background of the program, see the [2014–15 Safety Net Survey Report](#).

## Update Status

Participants of the survey responded to 10 questions about the Safety Net process. Survey takers recorded agreement at 85 percent or higher to seven of the 10 questions. This is a decrease from the previous year where survey takers recorded agreement at 85 percent or higher to all 10 questions. The survey results are available online in [Appendix A of the Safety Net Survey Report](#).

As in previous years, a majority of responses said:

- The Safety Net bulletin was clear and the training and website were helpful.
- OSPI staff members were helpful during the Safety Net application process.

Multiple respondents said the process could be improved by:

- Lowering the threshold applied to individual student applications.
- Providing more feedback when the cost associated with an individual student application is reduced.
- Making the application completely electronic.
- Improving consistency in the reviews from year to year.

## Conclusion and Next Steps

A Safety Net Study workgroup has been named by Superintendent Chris Reykdal and is tasked with reviewing the current Safety Net process. The workgroup will review the current Safety Net process, make recommendations on possible adjustments to improve the process, and evaluate the appropriate funding level to meet the purpose. Other factors to be considered are specified in House Bill 2242 (2017), Section 408. This workgroup is separate from the Special Education State Oversight Committee, referred to as the Safety Net Committee. A roster of the legislative workgroup and the State Oversight Committee is posted on the [OSPI Safety Net Funding web page](#).

Superintendent Reykdal recommends major changes should not be made to the Safety Net process until after the Safety Net Study has been completed. The [Safety Net bulletin released October 13, 2017](#) outlines the process for the 2017–18 school year.

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