



REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

UPDATE: Building Bridges Workgroup (Dropout Prevention, Intervention, and Reengagement)

2018

Authorizing legislation: [RCW 28A.175.075](#)

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Executive Summary

The Legislature established the Building Bridges program and workgroup in 2007 to keep all students visible and on track to graduate from high school. The state's ongoing dropout prevention efforts are based on the three major recommendations of the Building Bridges Workgroup:

1. Set an educational goal for youth- and family serving agencies and coordinate efforts to achieve it.
2. Build local dropout prevention and intervention systems and practices at every grade level.
3. Create a dropout reengagement system for 16- to 24-year-old youth who are not likely to return to high school.

With Building Bridges as a foundation, the Graduation: A Team Effort (GATE) initiative continues to meet regularly, with a focus on coordinating efforts around:

- the integration of an academic, behavioral, social/emotional support system;
- the intentional support of schools and student groups identified for support in the new School Quality and Student Success accountability measures; and,
- ongoing promotion of evidence-based data and teaming practices and processes.

Washington state continues to improve on the number of students graduating from high school on time (within four years). The graduation rate for students in the Class of 2011 was 76.6 percent; for the Class of 2018, the rate increased to 80.9 percent. Extended (five-year) graduation rates increased from 78.2 percent for the Class of 2011 to 82.9 percent for the Class of 2018.

While overall graduation rates are increasing, we are not yet at our goal of 90 percent on-time graduation. For the Class of 2017—students who began as ninth graders in the 2013–14 school year—about one in nine students dropped out (9,478 students). Of the students reported as dropping out in the 2016–17 school year, 78.5 percent were identified as either unconfirmed transfers or reason unknown. Gaps between some student group graduation rates and overall graduation rates are also persisting, though some gains (such as with Pacific Islanders) have been made.

In 2018, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction began to leverage the newly adopted Washington School Improvement Framework, authorized under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act, and the successes of the Building Bridges Workgroup to further

accelerate graduation rates for all students. Dropout prevention and identification practices have been strengthened by the Improvement Framework's focus on factors in addition to academic proficiency, such as regular attendance, ninth graders on-track for graduation, and dual credit course completion.

Reengagement system development also continues through the Open Doors programming. Over 4,700 full-time equivalent students were served monthly in the 2017–18 school year in programming through school districts, technical colleges, educational service districts, and tribal-education compact schools.

Background

In 2007, the Legislature established the Building Bridges Workgroup. This high-level Workgroup, comprised of state legislators and state agency partners, was charged with creating a statewide program for comprehensive dropout prevention, intervention, and retrieval (DPIR) programming, and to make annual recommendations to the Legislature and the Governor on DPIR best practices and system needs.

The Workgroup created three primary recommendations which continue to serve as the guiding principles for DPIR programming:

- Set an educational goal for youth- and family-serving agencies, and coordinate efforts to achieve it.
- Build local dropout prevention and intervention system practices at every grade level.
- Create a dropout reengagement system for 16- to 24-year old youth.

The Legislature has continued to support the development of a comprehensive dropout prevention system through various policy actions, such as:

- House Bill (HB) 1418 (2010), which established a dropout reengagement system;
- HB 1599 (2011), which established the Pay for Actual Student Success program and tasked the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) with creating a standard definition of 'absence';
- HB 1541 (2016), which established educational programming for suspension alternatives and behavior best practices;
- HB 2449 (2016), which added processes—such as a community truancy board—to lessen instances of truancy;

- HB 1541 (2016), which tasked the Center for the Improvement of Student Learning with creating the Washington Integrated Student Supports Protocol; and
- HB 1170 (2017), which builds on past community truancy board and promotion of positive attendance legislation.

Graduation: A Team Effort

Under the umbrella of Building Bridges, OSPI and partners across the state created the Graduation: A Team Effort (GATE) initiative. GATE is a collective impact effort, aligned with the Building Bridges primary recommendations, which coordinates and shares what is working across systems that serve youth and families. The goal of the effort is to increase high school graduation rates by developing and sustaining a dropout prevention/intervention system, and reengaging youth who have dropped out.

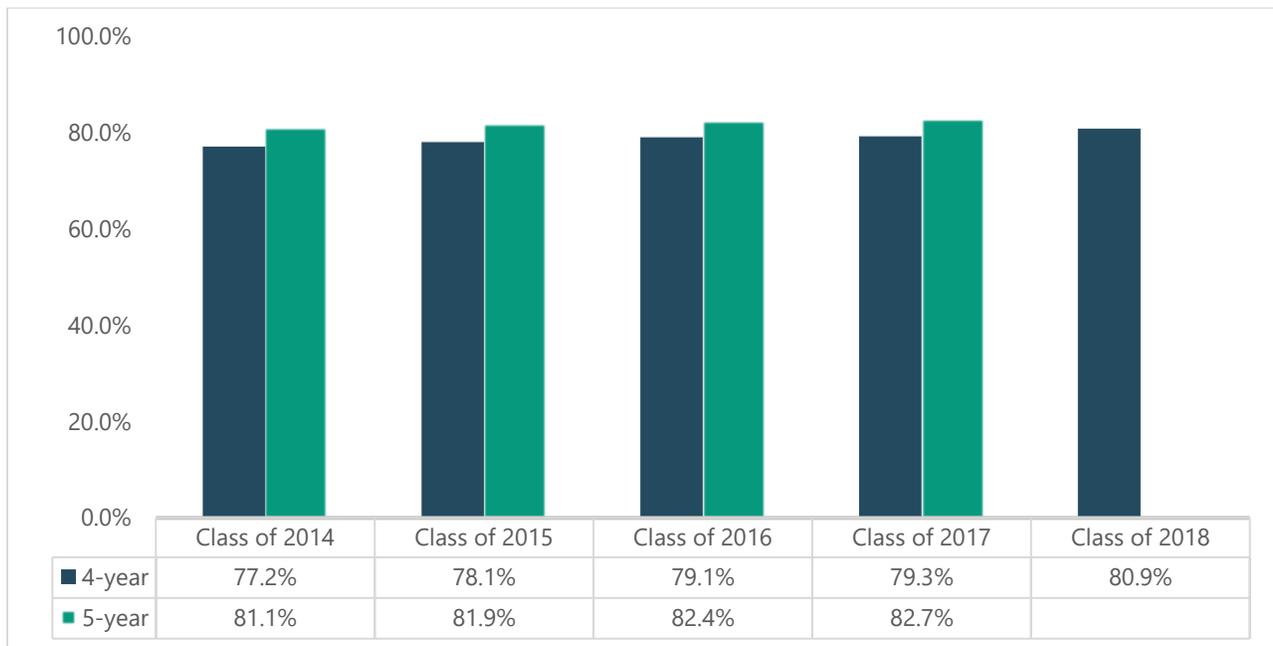
The Building Bridges Workgroup convenes annually as the GATE Steering Committee, and provides guidance, policy alignment, and recommendations to increase graduation rates for all of Washington's youth. A smaller group of representatives from core agencies (for example, Department of Children, Youth and Families; Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board; educational service districts; and school districts) meet monthly to develop DPIR strategies and coordinate available resources.

Update Status

Washington's graduation trends and goals

For the fifth year in a row the 4-year statewide graduation rate grew in 2018, becoming the new all-time high of 80.9 percent of students graduating on time. The graduation rate for students who graduated within five years of their ninth-grade year also hit a new high at 82.7 percent.

Figure 1: 4- and 5-Year Graduation Rates



Source: Washington State Report Card, retrieved December 31, 2018.

Washington’s goal is that every student group will reach a minimum 4-year graduation rate of 90 percent by the 2027–28 school year (see [Washington’s ESSA Consolidated Plan, section A.4.iii. “Establishment of Long-Term Goals”](#)). Several student groups saw gains in their graduation rates in 2018 which were higher than the state average, including English learners (6.4 percent) and Pacific Islanders (5.9 percent). While gaps in graduation rates among student groups are closing, there is still a lot of work to do so every student can earn their high school diploma. GATE programming is a key tool in meeting these goals.

Figure 2: 4-Year Graduation Rates by Race/Ethnicity over Time

Student Race/Ethnicity	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
American Indian/Alaskan Native	53.7%	56.4%	60.6%	60.3%	60.4%
Asian	86.5%	87.8%	88.6%	87.5%	90.0%
Black/ African American	67.8%	68.8%	70.7%	71.5%	74.4%
Hispanic/Latino	67.3%	69.6%	72.3%	72.7%	75.2%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	64.6%	67.0%	68.2%	68.1%	74.0%
Two or More Races	75.5%	77.9%	77.9%	79.7%	80.6%
White	80.5%	80.9%	81.5%	81.9%	82.9%

Source: Washington State Report Card, retrieved December 31, 2018.

Figure 3: 4-Year Graduation Rates in Student Groups

Student Group	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
English Language Learners	53.7%	55.8%	57.6%	57.8%	64.2%
Low Income	66.4%	68.0%	64.0%	70.0%	72.1%
Students with Disabilities	55.7%	57.9%	58.1%	59.4%	61.7%
Migrant	66.0%	64.4%	67.4%	68.2%	79.0%
Homeless	48.7%	51.3%	53.4%	53.9%	55.5%
Female	81.1%	81.6%	82.4%	82.6%	84.0%
Male	73.6%	74.7%	76.0%	76.3%	77.8%

Source: Washington State Report Card, retrieved December 31, 2018.

Building Bridges Programming Through the GATE Initiative

Using the Building Bridges recommendations as a foundation, Graduation: A Team Effort (GATE) continues to serve as a collaborative effort to share what is working across state, regional, and local systems to increase graduation rates.

In 2018, GATE efforts focused on:

- Sharing evidence-based strategies relative to school quality and student success with schools identified for support through the Washington School Improvement Framework.
- Providing ongoing support of the GATE Advisory Committee and webinar series.
- Supporting multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) system development with districts and schools, with specific focus on data use and team-initiated problem-solving.

In 2018, GATE’s work concentrated on creating common understanding around key accountability measures, including regular attendance, ninth grade course performance, and dual credit course-taking, and evidence-based practices to support the programming to address these areas. A communication strategy was developed to create shared messaging across agencies highlighting these specific early warning indicators. The strategy included tweets, Facebook postings, newspaper articles, as well as trainings and workshops for diverse audiences across the state. The Washington State Department of Social and Health Services continued to play a critical role in the development and dissemination of informational materials to Community Service Offices and Child Welfare Offices statewide related to the importance of regular school attendance.

Advisory Committee meetings are held quarterly and include a diverse membership. Topics for 2017–18 included: using youth voice to inform relevant programming; the power of authentic community engagement; supporting students and families with regular attendance; and,

engaging students through caring relationships and cultural connections. Past presentations and notes are available on the [GATE webpage](#).

The GATE Equity Webinar Series is a monthly professional learning offering that supports graduation by exploring topics related to the key indicators of student success, such as: chronic absenteeism, behavior, ninth grade course performance, postsecondary enrollment, and high school graduation. The webinars are a resource for partners who wish to improve support systems, data use, and instruction in an effort to increase student achievement. The webinars include current research, state and local statistics, and presentations by school and community representatives that have experienced success. A list of past webinar recordings, as well as a schedule for 2018-19, is available on the GATE webpage.

To assist in the development and implementation of a program delivery system that supports effective, efficient, and equitable access to services for students and families, there has been resource development and professional learning dedicated to assist staff and students to create a culture for learning. Specific attention has been given to the development of leadership capacity-building in collaborative inquiry – practices that involve staff in action research to improve teaching and learning, and data practices – evidence-based processes that monitor and connect staff and students to a system of supports.

System and School Improvement

In the past year, GATE efforts have been operated out of OSPI's System and School Improvement division. System and School Improvement is responsible for creating a coordinated, regionalized, and responsive support and improvement model for Washington's schools. The work is focused on closing opportunity gaps for all students as measured by academic growth and proficiency, graduation rates, attendance, ninth graders on-track for graduation, and dual credit attainment.

This alignment allows for the work of school improvement to bolster dropout prevention, intervention, and retrieval (DPIR) activities by bringing new resources to the conversation. The GATE initiative, in turn, strengthens school improvement activities by providing targeted DPIR supports to schools identified for improvement.

Building Bridges Grants/Creating a System of Supports

One of the key features of a comprehensive dropout prevention system includes a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS). There has been extensive work throughout OSPI to create agency-wide use of an MTSS service delivery model. Work has centered on the development of an agency MTSS framework and the defining of key work using an MTSS lens.

There has also been an effort to collect resources for districts interested in implementing and sustaining MTSS efforts. There is an opportunity on the MTSS webpage to register as an MTSS resource, as well as an opportunity for districts to review the list of consultants and access a suite of tools and resources to assist in the development and sustainability of an MTSS. OSPI also started a monthly MTSS District Leadership Professional Learning Community (PLC) offered in a webinar format to provide current research and brainstorm barriers to implementation.

Key components of an MTSS are being implemented in districts across the state. Three of those districts continue to serve as models for other districts working to implement a dropout prevention system. District grantees for 2017–18 were Franklin Pierce School District, Kelso School District, and Sunnyside School District.

The three district grantees entered into a multi-year process of developing professional development resources and providing presentations and on-site visits. The work of the grantees focuses on reviewing data to a problem of practice that negatively impacts student success, and ultimately, graduation.

Open Doors—Youth Reengagement

Youth report many different reasons for dropping out of school. As much work as schools across the state do to prevent and identify students who are at risk of dropping out, some students still leave school before they graduate. The table below describes some of the reasons for leaving school provided by students who dropped out during the 2017–18 school year.

Figure 4: Annual Dropouts – Reasons for Dropping Out

Reason	Total Students who Dropped Out	Percent of Total Enrollment
Attended School for 4 Years; Didn't Graduate	762	4.2%
Lacked Progress or had Poor Grades	1,060	5.9%
School Not for Me; Chose to Stay Home	1,264	7%
Married, Family Support, or Child-Related	65	0.4%
Offered Training or Chose to Work	221	1.2%
Left to Take GED	378	2.1%
Expelled or Suspended	90	0.5%
Drug- or Alcohol-Related	27	0.2%
Unconfirmed Transfer	4,547	25.3%
Dropped for Other or Unknown Reason	9,554	53.2%
Total	17,968	100%

The Open Doors Youth Reengagement framework (Revised Code of Washington [RCW] 28A.175.100–115) continues to expand. This program reengages older youth who have dropped out with pathways to college and career. Youth reengagement aligns with the 2014 update to the Building Bridges Workgroup’s third recommendation: Create a dropout reengagement system for youth (ages 16–24) who are not likely to return to high school.

During the past year, the program has expanded to 124 school districts, two of the three direct-funded technical colleges, 5 of the 9 educational service districts, and one tribal-education compact school delivering or partnering to deliver reengagement programming for older youth not likely to graduate in the traditional or traditional alternative education models. Collectively, they served more than 4,700 full-time equivalent students monthly in the 2017–18 school year.

Additionally, OSPI continues to partner with the Washington State Education Research and Data Center (ERDC) on the longitudinal study of youth reengagement students. As OSPI has refined data collection at the student level for students served by Open Doors, the ERDC has begun tracking the first cohort of more than 7,000 students and will be releasing their first report to the Legislature this December.

There was also an increase in Open Doors programming through community and technical colleges, specifically coordinating programming between Open Doors and the High School 21+ program. These may improve transitions and outcomes for youth as they age out of the K–12 supported system and become eligible to be served in the adult education system. This effort is a collaboration between OSPI and the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges.

Conclusion and Next Steps

In collaboration with school and community partners across the state, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) will continue to promote the use of early warning indicator data and data processes and the development of comprehensive multi-tiered systems of supports (MTSS) to assist students facing substantial barriers to getting to school. An issue tied to chronic absenteeism, as well as school success in general, is behavioral health. Through work associated with Student Assistance Program, Project AWARE (Advancing Wellness and Resilience in Education) mental health grant, and the U.S. Department of Education School Climate Transformation Grant, OSPI continues to find system capacity relative to behavioral health.

The Building Bridges program will continue to align and share what is working to keep students on track to graduation, with a targeted focus on regular attendance, ninth grade

success, and dual credit course-taking. Reengagement efforts will be building on existing efforts and expanding programs focused on the evaluation process of program accountability and efficacy. There will also be a focus on increasing transition support for youth aging out of the K–12 supported system, including pathways to vocational rehabilitation, college and adult education, vocational training, and industry. Staff at OSPI will work to further coordinate with Juvenile Rehabilitation (JR) to better transition, serve, and provide opportunities for disengaged youth who reengaged through the juvenile rehabilitation institution system.



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