

WA State Superintendent's Budget Prioritizes Clean Classroom Air, Paraeducator Wages, and Closing Opportunity Gaps

OSPI will submit supplemental budget requests for consideration by the State Legislature during the 2024 Legislative Session

OLYMPIA, WA, USA, September 28, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As the school year gets underway across Washington, State Superintendent Chris Reykdal is looking ahead to the supports our students, educators, and families will need by next school year.

Following regular and ongoing conversations with parents and families, students, educators and school staff, community leaders, and other education partners across the state, Reykdal announced his [budget proposals for the 2024 Legislative Session](#) today.

As this is a supplemental budget year intended for small changes, several of the proposals aim to make continued progress in areas with partial investments, while others introduce priorities that are too time sensitive to wait for the biennial budget in 2025. One priority area for Reykdal is air quality in schools.

"Many of our school buildings weren't built with HVAC systems or central air conditioning, which creates barriers to learning as our seasons get warmer and as smoke from wildfires becomes more prevalent," Reykdal said. "Schools are being forced to cancel school days because of air quality concerns with increasing regularity, and we are seeing these problems impact small, rural schools in Eastern Washington the most."

Inadequate air quality impacts students' health and learning. According to the [U.S. Environmental Protection Agency](#), climate-driven increases in temperature are projected to increase asthma in children by 4–11%, and decrease academic achievement per child by 4–7%



per year.

Reykdal's proposal would provide grants to school districts for HVAC installations, enhancements, and repairs, as well as a substantial investment in the School Construction Assistance Program, which is the state's matching program for school construction.

Another priority area for Reykdal is establishing a mandatory minimum living wage for all of Washington's paraeducators. Paraeducators make up 1 in 5 employees in a school district, and they often provide direct instructional support to students, working in partnership with certificated teachers to ensure all students' needs are met.

"Paraeducators are the backbone of our schools, and their low pay doesn't reflect how important they are to students," said Larry Delaney, President of the Washington Education Association. "Paraeducators need professional wages that honor their work."

Despite the critical role they play in the classroom, most paraeducators do not earn a living wage. In a recent [study by the American Institutes for Research \(AIR\)](#), researchers found that the average paraeducator in Washington earned a salary of less than \$30,000 per year.

"This proposed wage increase would be life-changing for so many paraeducators," said Charlotte Schindler, paraeducator and President of the Public School Employees of Washington. "Currently, paraeducators across the state care for students every day, yet they often are not paid enough to care for themselves or their families. The poverty wages that paraeducators make do not accurately reflect the value of the work they provide in our public schools."

Inadequate pay leads to high rates of turnover in paraeducator positions, creating instability for students, families, and school staff alike. AIR found that, in the 2021–22 school year, the turnover rate for Washington's paraeducators was 23%, much higher than the average of 8–11% per year a decade prior. In 2022, 48% of Washington's paraeducators had fewer than 5 years of experience, an increase of 20 percentage points since 2012.

"Our Legislature has made monumental progress in competitive salaries for our certificated teachers," Reykdal said. "Our work can't end there. Ask anyone in a school, and they will tell you what a critical role their paraeducators hold in their school community. As a state, we cannot continue to lose talented staff because the salary isn't competitive."

In Washington, the average paraeducator makes \$22–27 an hour, with those at the lower end typically living in areas with lower costs of living, and those at the higher end living in areas with higher costs of living. Nearly all paraeducators work throughout the school year, averaging roughly 1,200 hours worked — around 800 hours fewer than typical full-time employment.

Under Reykdal's proposal, the Legislature would fund an additional \$7 per hour, bringing the hourly wage up to \$29–36 depending on cost of living in the area. With this increase,

paraeducators could expect to earn \$9,000 to \$11,000 more per year.

“Paraeducators often support the most vulnerable students,” Schindler continued. “They are instructors, they are caretakers, they are highly qualified, and they are essential to ensuring every student receives a quality education. This wage increase would be a historic investment in our schools, our students, and our future.”

In addition to these investments in clean air and competitive wages for paraeducators, Reykdal continues to advocate for funding that would ensure all Washington students have access to nutritious meals at school each day at no out-of-pocket costs to students or their families. With this continued advocacy, Reykdal hopes that, at a minimum, the Legislature will fund meals for all students at all elementary schools in the 2024 Legislative Session.

Reykdal’s budget proposals also aim to close opportunity gaps in multiple areas, including continued progress toward fully funding special education services, as well as continued investment in the evidence-based Inclusionary Practices Project. In further supports for students with disabilities, Reykdal’s budget provides for an innovative residency model to recruit, prepare, and retain special education teachers, an area where our state and nation typically experience shortages.

In addition, recognizing that many students face significant barriers to engagement in school, Reykdal’s budget invests in systemic, proven systems to support attendance, prevent disengagement, and eliminate barriers to high school completion. These programs complement Reykdal’s advocacy for continued, permanent investments in regional mental and behavioral health supports, an initiative that is currently funded through the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction’s temporary emergency relief funds.

Finally, Reykdal’s budget proposes expanded state investments in community-based initiatives that are proven to increase postsecondary enrollment and success, particularly for students of color, students experiencing poverty, and those who are first generation college students.

“We have made an unbelievable amount of progress in supporting our students, families, and educators in recent years,” Reykdal said. “We have seen Washingtonians come together to advocate for meals, special education, competitive salaries, and more. Even in a supplemental budget year, we can continue to make progress in alignment with our values as a state.”

Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
+1 360-725-6000

[email us here](#)

Visit us on social media:

[Facebook](#)

[Twitter](#)

[LinkedIn](#)
[Instagram](#)
[YouTube](#)

This press release can be viewed online at: <https://www.einpresswire.com/article/658411870>

EIN Presswire's priority is source transparency. We do not allow opaque clients, and our editors try to be careful about weeding out false and misleading content. As a user, if you see something we have missed, please do bring it to our attention. Your help is welcome. EIN Presswire, Everyone's Internet News Presswire™, tries to define some of the boundaries that are reasonable in today's world. Please see our Editorial Guidelines for more information.

© 1995-2023 Newsmatics Inc. All Right Reserved.