

# Washington Public School Enrollment Climbs by Nearly 2,000

*Largest increases are in 2nd grade, 5th grade, 11th grade*

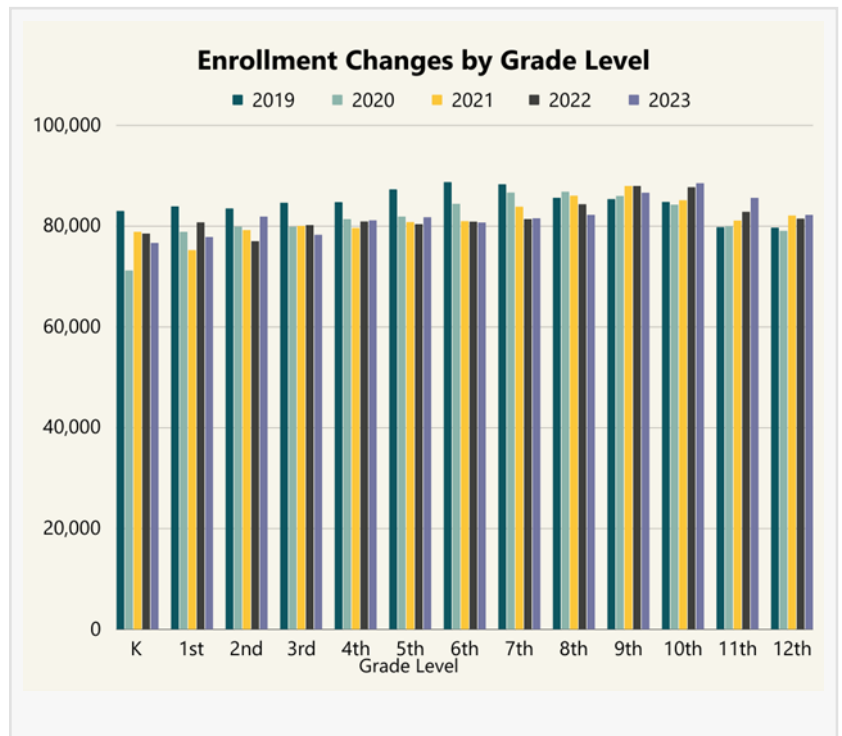
OLYMPIA, WA, USA, December 7, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Today, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) announced that enrollment in Washington's public schools this fall has climbed by nearly 2,000 students when compared to fall of last school year.

The largest increases over the last year are in the 2nd grade (6.3% increase), Running Start (4.3% increase), 11th grade (3.3% increase), and 5th grade (1.7% increase). The largest decreases are in 1st grade (3.7% decrease), 8th grade (2.5% decrease), kindergarten (2.4% decrease), and 3rd grade (2.4% decrease).

In the earlier elementary grades, continued declines in enrollment appear to be attributed to additional homeschooling and declining birth rates.

Student enrollment has an impact on the amount of state funds that school districts receive to serve their students with dedicated staff, supplies, and other operating costs. To support school districts in continued service delivery and in student learning and well-being recovery, during the pandemic, Congress allocated billions of dollars to schools nationwide, including \$3 billion to schools in Washington.

These one-time, flexible dollars were provided over multiple years, and are set to expire in September of 2024. School districts are on track to have all funds spent before the deadline. In Washington, the funds made up just 3–5% of the average school district's budget, and the \$800 million provided each year only slightly offset the \$600 million that districts lost in state funds after a decline in student enrollment at the height of the pandemic.



“While our enrollments are continuing to climb, they aren’t yet where they were before the pandemic, and many of our school districts are making tough financial decisions as a result,” said State Superintendent Chris Reykdal. “The impacts on local budgets are compounded by persistently high inflation.”

To reengage students who disconnected from school or who are at-risk of disconnecting from school, OSPI invested some of the agency’s federal emergency relief funds in the Attendance and Reengagement Program during the 2022–23 school year. With OSPI’s portion of emergency relief funds, the agency has chosen to invest in evidence-based, community-driven strategies to support student learning and well-being recovery, prioritizing supports for student groups who were most impacted by the pandemic.

To date, the Attendance and Reengagement Program has served over 8,000 students across Washington state with direct one-on-one support. Of the students served by the program, 56% of students who were unenrolled at the start of the program later re-enrolled in school, and 94% of students who were enrolled at the start of the program were still enrolled at the end of the school year. The students that have been served through this project were selected because they had the highest rates of absences or were completely disengaged from school.

The program enables direct outreach, relationship building, accessing community resources, and supporting students to remain engaged in school or to re-enroll. In addition, the program supports schools and districts in building systems that address attendance and engagement, such as accessing and analyzing attendance data and building staffing teams to deploy to provide interventions and other supports.

OSPI leveraged \$4.75 million to provide grant funds to school districts, state-tribal education compact schools, and regional educational service districts based on need. OSPI targeted the funds to districts and schools with the highest historical rates of student absences and/or students who have disengaged from school without graduating.

To sustain this state-level effort as the federal emergency relief funds expire in 2024, OSPI put forward a request to the Governor and Legislature to support more schools and districts in building early warning data systems focused on attendance. The data systems aim to sustain student engagement by detecting students at-risk of disengaging and then deploying staff to support the students. The proposal will be considered during the 2024 Legislative Session.

#### For More Information

- Enrollment data by school, school district, and by student group will be published to the [Washington State Report Card](#) by the end of January 2024.
- See [OSPI’s request to fund integrated student supports](#), including early warning data systems to sustain student engagement.
- Watch [OSPI’s video series](#) highlighting the Attendance and Engagement Program.

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