

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5210

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Early Learning & K-12 Education, February 4, 2025

Title: An act relating to establishing the ninth grade success grant program.

Brief Description: Establishing the ninth grade success grant program.

Sponsors: Senators Liias, Harris, Cortes, Gildon, Hasegawa, Nobles, Pedersen, Salomon, Shewmake and Wilson, C..

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 1/15/25, 2/04/25 [DP-WM, w/oRec].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes the Ninth Grade Success Grant Program, which funds the creation of ninth grade success teams that can identify and support incoming high school students who are at risk of not graduating.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Wellman, Chair; Nobles, Vice Chair, K-12; Wilson, C., Vice Chair, Early Learning; Harris, Ranking Member; Cortes, Hansen and Krishnadasan.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senators Dozier and McCune.

Staff: Alex Fairfortune (786-7416)

Background: In the 2019-21 biennial budget the Legislature appropriated \$125,000 a year to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to administer a pilot

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program to identify and support incoming high school students who were at risk of not graduating. Five school districts were selected to participate in the pilot program based on their Ninth Grade On-Track scores in the Washington School Improvement Framework and their higher than average enrollment of students classified as low-income or English language learners. Those districts were Ellensburg, Wapato, Moses Lake, Grandview, and Toppenish.

Pilot districts created success teams of educators composed of administrators, counselors, student support staff, and ninth grade teachers. Success teams regularly reviewed attendance, behavior, and grade data to deploy strategic supports to students showing early signs of falling behind. Each pilot district received \$21,000 in pilot program funds to pay for data systems, travel related to professional development, release time for educators to staff the success teams, and student supports.

In 2021, OSPI expanded the pilot project to 30 schools using \$3 million of funding provided by the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund. In the 2023-25 supplemental operating budget the Legislature appropriated \$3 million for fiscal year 2025 to continue providing grants to school districts, and authorized OSPI to hire an evaluator to conduct a yearly evaluation of the program's success.

Summary of Bill: OSPI must establish and administer the Ninth Grade Success Grant Program (grant program), subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for that purpose. The purpose of the grant program is to fund the creation of ninth grade success teams that can identify and support incoming high school students who are at risk of not graduating.

Beginning in the 2025-26 school year, OSPI must award grants to eligible public schools. When awarding grants, OSPI must prioritize schools with low Ninth Grade On-Track scores identified through the Washington School Improvement Framework and schools that have graduation rates below the statewide average. OSPI must attempt to award grants to public schools in different geographic regions of the state.

Grant recipients may use grant funds for costs associated with establishing and operating a Ninth Grade Success Team Program, including but not limited to:

- providing additional compensation or stipends for success team members;
- providing related professional development and training for success team members;
- hiring substitute teachers during periods when success team members are performing program duties and training; and
- providing student supports needed to help ninth grade students thrive.

OSPI may contract with a qualified nonprofit organization that has experience coaching school success teams to provide individualized coaching to grant recipients.

By June 30, 2026, and annually thereafter until 2030, OSPI must report to the Governor and

the education committees of the Legislature on the implementation of the grant program. The report must include:

- the number of grants awarded and which schools received an award, organized by geographic location;
- the demographics of the students served by recipient schools' ninth grade success teams, disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, students receiving free or reduced price lunch, students receiving special education services, students receiving transitional bilingual instruction, students in foster care, and students experiencing homelessness;
- data comparing each recipient school's Ninth Grade On-Track scores before and after implementing ninth grade success teams;
- longitudinal data on graduation rates for recipient schools, if available; and
- recommendations for statutory improvements, resource needs, or opportunities for scalability.

Appropriation: The bill contains a section or sections to limit implementation to the availability of amounts appropriated for that specific purpose.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The ninth grade experience is pivotal. It is the first step of learning to be an adult, navigating autonomy, and having changing friend groups. Students are more likely to fail in ninth grade than any other grade due to the physical, emotional, and social changes. Getting it right for this group is critically important. There is actual data on how the ninth grade success program works by taking educational professionals and helping coach them to success. The University of Washington did an evaluation and students in schools with these programs are 7 percent higher on track than comparable schools and 10 percent better than average. In the Tacoma School District they saw a 10 percent increase in students passing all classes after implementing the program. Graduation rates have increased by a similar amount in participating districts. The program has an immense focus on improvement and implementation science, identifies equity gaps, digs into root causes and sets clear goals, attends to local contexts, and identifies what works where and under what conditions. The program also uses evidence based coaching approaches, publishes best practice guides, and hosts national collaborative site visits. The current ninth grade success program is now in 68 schools serving nearly 19,000 ninth graders. This needs to be expanded to more if not all schools.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Marko Lias, Prime Sponsor; Doug Judge, Center for High School Success; Myle Tang, Stand for Children Washington; Doug Hostetter, Tacoma Public Schools; David Knight, Associate Professor; David Funk, Prosser High School;

Matthew Yarkosky, Graham Kapowsin High School; Liz Trautman, Stand for Children Washington.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.