

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND EARLY LEARNING (DEEL)

2026 PROPOSED BUDGET

OVERVIEW & POLICY CONSIDERATIONS PAPER

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Table 1. Department Budget Summary

Budget Summary Level	2025 Adopted	2026 Endorsed	% Change	2026 Proposed	% Change
Operating Budget					
Early Learning	\$81.1M	\$52.3M	(35.5%)	\$93.8M	79.3%
K-12 Programs	\$54.4M	\$36.6M	(32.7%)	\$59.7M	62.9%
Leadership and Administration	\$9.2M	\$6.3M	(31.5%)	\$11.4M	81.0%
Post-Secondary Programs	\$6.5M	\$5.5M	(14.5%)	\$11.9M	115.2%
Total:	\$151.2M	\$100.8M	(33.3%)	\$176.9M	75.4%

I. OVERVIEW AND SUMMARY

The 2026 Proposed Budget for the Department of Education and Early Learning (DEEL) is 75.4 percent more than its 2026 Endorsed Budget, because the Endorsed Budget does not reflect the proposed renewal of the Families, Education, Preschool and Promise (FEPP) Levy, and instead reflects only 6 months of levy funding from the 2018 FEPP Levy.¹ Earlier this year, Council passed [Ordinance 127238](#) (FEPP Levy Ordinance), which submitted a proposition to voters to renew and expand FEPP Levy investments, with a property tax levy generating approximately \$1.3 billion over six years.

The 2026 Proposed Budget assumes passage of the 2025 FEPP Levy ballot measure, and reflects an increase of \$25.7 million compared to the 2025 Adopted Budget, a 17 percent increase. This increase is consistent with the breakdown of projected expenditures contained in the [FEPP Levy Ordinance's Summary and Fiscal Note](#), and is driven primarily by significant proposed new investments in early learning, K-12 health and safety, and post-secondary programs, broken down in Attachment A and described below.

If the ballot measure is approved by voters, DEEL would be required to submit an Implementation and Evaluation (I&E) Plan to Council for approval, establishing the criteria, outcomes, and methodology by which FEPP Levy-funded strategies would be selected and evaluated. The I&E Plan is anticipated to be transmitted to Council in March 2026.

If the levy does not pass in November, a revised version may be submitted for voter approval in February 2026.

A. Operating Budget

DEEL's 2026 Proposed Budget includes the following ongoing increases:

Early Learning: The 2026 Proposed Budget for early learning would increase by \$12.7 million relative to 2025, or roughly 15.7 percent. The primary drivers of this net increase are:

- \$4.5 million to expand the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) to serve 800 additional children in 2026.
- \$6.7 million increase to the Seattle Preschool Program (SPP), so that current slots offered extend throughout summer and expand from a 6-hour day to an 8-10-hour day.²

¹ DEEL investments from the FEPP Levy are allocated based on the school year, such that expenditures from the last year of the 2018 FEPP Levy would extend into the 2025-2026 school year, and therefore the 2026 Endorsed Budget. The 2026 Proposed Budget incorporates expenditures anticipated for the first half of the 2026-2027 school year.

² Ultimately, the six-year levy will expand to 3,100 slots offering extended day and summer learning

- \$2.8 million additional in childcare worker supports.
- \$1 million for a cost and risk reserve.

The 2026 Proposed Budget also includes a \$1.5 million reduction that eliminates the [Prenatal to 3 community grant program](#),³ as well as a \$1 million reduction in SPP quality teaching supports, stemming from cost savings identified in a recent cost analysis, with no reduction in services anticipated.

K-12 Programs: The Proposed Budget for the K-12 Programs BSL would increase by \$5.3 million relative to 2025, representing a 9.7 percent increase. This is primarily driven by:

- \$2.8 million for expanded learning opportunities⁴
- \$1.2 million for school safety in and around schools⁵
- \$500,000 for student mental health supports⁶
- \$300,000 for health centers⁷
- \$1.2 million for a cost and risk reserve.

These increases are offset by a proposed decrease of \$700,000 in the [Academy for Rising Educators](#) program, which will continue through the 2025-2026 school year, and may be renewed pending the I&E Plan and the proposal for expanded learning opportunities.

Post-Secondary Programs: The Proposed Budget for the Post-Secondary Programs BSL would increase by \$5.45 million, representing an 84 percent increase relative to 2025. This increase includes:

- \$4 million to expand the Seattle Promise Program to serve 1,475 students and sustain the Path to University of Washington program.
- \$900,000 to expand the Path to Trades Program.⁸
- \$400,000 to the Seattle Youth Employment Program.
- \$100,000 for a cost and risk reserve.

Leadership and Administration: The 2026 Proposed Budget would increase the Leadership and Administration BSL by \$2.2 million, a 24 percent increase relative to the 2025 Adopted Budget. This increase comprises approximately \$1.2 million in increased program labor costs, \$300,000 in other administrative costs, \$100,000 for a cost and risk reserve, and \$600,000 in program evaluation expenditures shifting from the Early Learning BSL.

³ 2025 funding for these grants will be awarded this year and provide funding for the 2026-2027 school year

⁴ The proposed budget would consolidate previous funding for school-based investments and “continuum supports” that serve students and families outside of school hours, for a total of \$31.9 million. The I&E plan is expected to propose a more detailed allocation of these funds.

⁵ This is anticipated to total \$2.4 million over the 2026-2027 school year, and average \$2.7 million per school year over the course of the Levy.

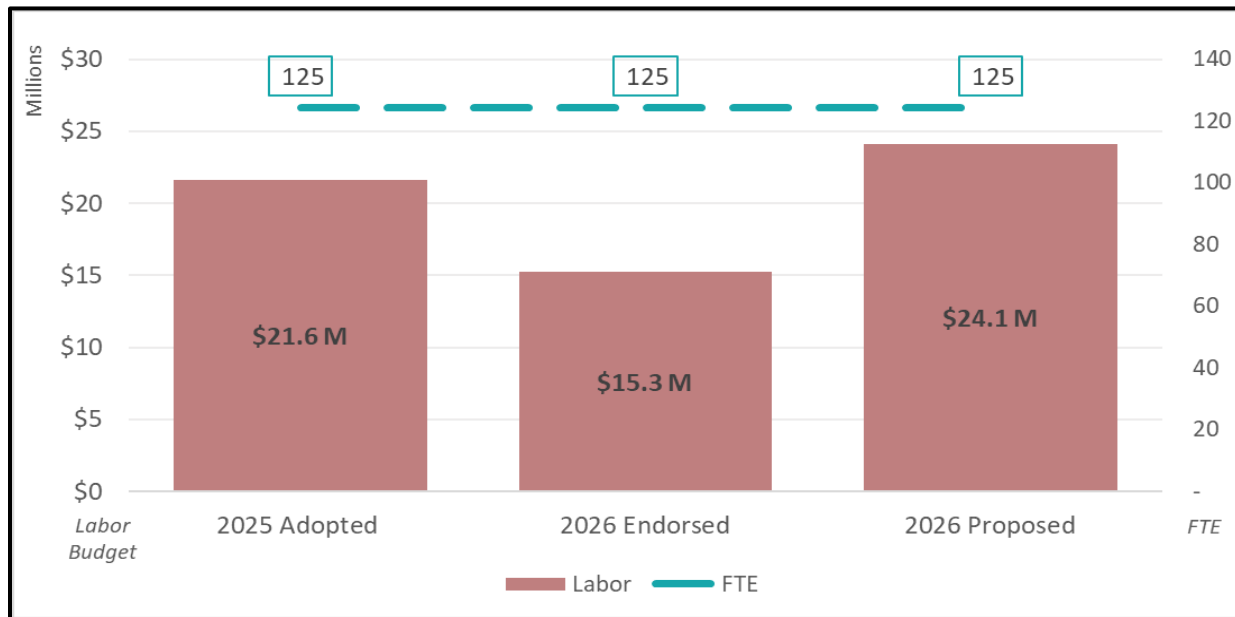
⁶ This reflects the expiration of \$500,000 in one-time funding that had gone to Parks in 2025 to develop the Youth Connector website, and is now being absorbed in DEEL’s mental health programming.

⁷ In future years, the FEPP renewal would result in an average increase of \$4.3 million each school year for health centers, above what is currently funded in the 2018 FEPP Levy.

⁸ This will eventually ramp up to an average of \$2.3 million each school year.

B. FTE & Labor Changes

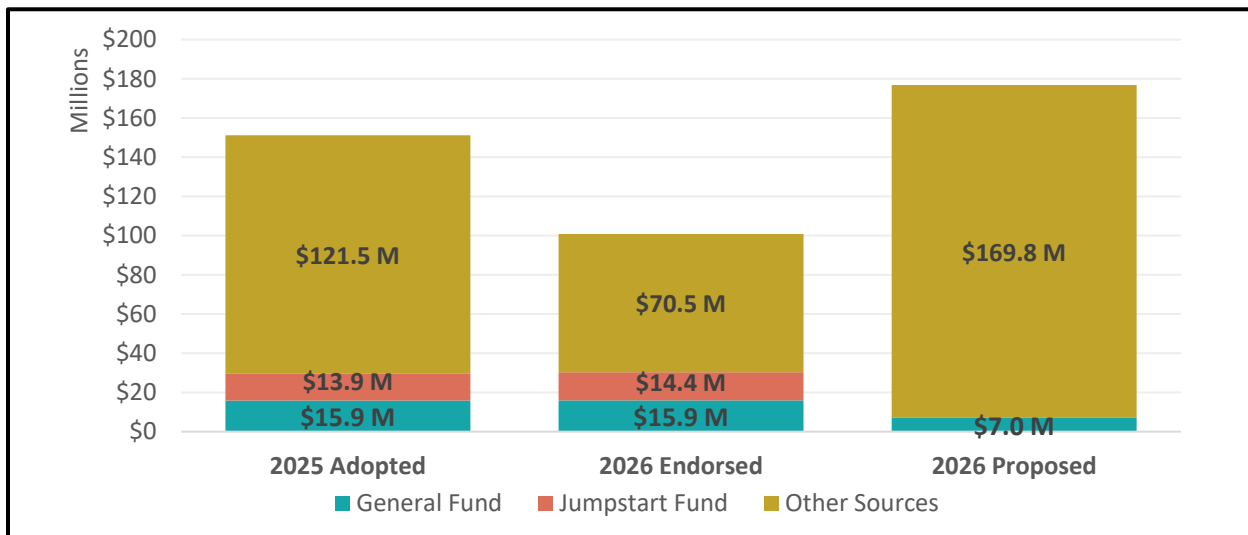
Figure 1. FTE & Labor Budget Summary



The 2026 Proposed Budget would increase labor appropriations by \$2.5 million relative to the 2025 Adopted Budget, an 11.6 percent increase. This increase is primarily driven by labor cost inflation, step increases, technical adjustments for miscoded labor, and city-wide central cost adjustments. The number of FTEs is not proposed to increase.

C. Fund Appropriations Summary

Figure 2. Fund Appropriations Summary



The 2026 Proposed Budget would shift almost all of DEEL's funding to the FEPP Levy. The remaining General Fund represents grant funding from the State's [Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program \(ECEAP\)](#) and a federal Upward Bound grant to support college readiness for low-income or first generation students.

II. ISSUES FOR COUNCIL CONSIDERATION DURING BUDGET DELIBERATIONS

1. Council Guidance for FEPP Levy Funds

The FEPP Levy Ordinance requires that all Levy funds be spent in accordance with the terms of an Implementation and Evaluation (I&E) Plan, anticipated to be transmitted to Council in March 2026.

The 2026 Proposed Budget proposes expenditures using the assumptions and cost estimates contained in Attachment A to this paper, which largely tracks the information provided to Council earlier this year during deliberation of the FEPP Levy Ordinance. And while it is possible that proposed expenditures might change during the I&E Plan development, according to DEEL these line items will serve as the basis for the I&E Plan and are unlikely to change substantively. During the I&E Plan development, community and partner stakeholders will be asked to speak to strategies, programs and activities within the cost assumptions in Attachment A.

Options:

- A. Approve the budget as proposed
- B. Provide further direction regarding the proposed FEPP Levy expenditures at this stage, in order to establish expectations or express Council priorities for the I&E Plan.

III. BUDGET LEGISLATION

1. CBO Year-End Supplemental

The proposed legislation would add \$1.7 million to reflect a continuation of DEEL's grant from the Washington Student Achievement Council to provide coordinated wraparound support for Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students from high school through their second year of postsecondary education.

The proposed legislation would also reduce DEEL's 2025 budget by \$400,000 to reflect the decrease in the Washington State ECEAP grant award for the 2025 portion of the 2025-2026 school year.

2. CBO 2026 Annual Grants Acceptance Ordinance

The 2026 Annual Grant Acceptance bill would authorize DEEL to accept two grants:

- One grant from the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families for the ECEAP Program: \$3.2 million for the 2026 portion of the 2025-2026 school year, and \$3.1 million for the first half of the 2026-2027 school year.
- One grant from the federal Department of Education's [Upward Bound](#) program to support college readiness for low-income and/or first generation students: \$280,000 for the 2026 portion of the 2025-2026 school year, and \$260,000 for the first half of the 2026-2027 school year.

IV. ATTACHMENTS

- A. DEEL 2026 Proposed Budget and FEPP Summary