

Edmonds School District Accountability Brief

Start Times, Transportation, Student Outcomes, and Workforce Readiness

Executive Summary

Edmonds School District has known for years that early school start times are a health and learning problem. The district was already considering later high school starts in 2017. Yet the 2027–28 plan keeps a 7:20 a.m. tier and shifts 12 elementary schools into it. That does not solve the problem. It transfers it to younger children. Section 1 explains the start-time history and Tier 0 burden. [R1, R2, R3]

This is not only a parent-convenience issue. It is about our children's future. Later school start times support better sleep, focus, health, learning, and long-term life success. Harmful early starts increase the risk of chronic sleep loss, weaker attention, poorer attendance, worse academic performance, worse health outcomes, and lower readiness for college, work, independence, and future success.

The evidence is clear. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends middle and high schools start no earlier than 8:30 a.m.; CDC data connect insufficient sleep with academic, behavioral, mental-health, and physical-health risks; and a Seattle study found that delaying high school start times by 55 minutes increased student sleep by a median of 34 minutes per night. Section 3 summarizes the health, learning, and workforce-readiness evidence. [R4, R5, R6, R7, R8, R9, R10, R11]

The district's response also raises a governance issue. Nearly 2,000 parents and community members have objected to the 7:20 a.m. elementary start plan, and public comments at the June 9 board meeting were overwhelmingly opposed. Section 2 explains why moving forward without costed alternatives is not meaningful public accountability. [R12, R13, R14]

The budget raises additional accountability concerns. Transportation has been cited for years as the barrier to healthier start times, yet the 2025–26 budget shows Pupil Transportation increasing by less than \$1 million, while Central Administration increased by about \$5.1 million and a Human Resources / Employee Benefits and Payroll Taxes line increased nearly ninefold, from about \$612,000 to about \$5.4 million. Sections 4 and 5 explain the spending comparison and the Program 97 / HR-coded benefits red flag. [R15, R16]

Washington's statewide education context makes these questions more urgent. Washington ranked 31st in education in the 2026 KIDS COUNT Data Book, down from 27th, while public reporting on 2024 data found that 70% of Washington eighth graders were not proficient in math and 68% of fourth graders were not proficient in reading. Section 4 explains why spending must be tied to measurable student-facing results. [R17, R18, R19]

Families were also told that levy and technology dollars support students, programs, and learning. Section 6 explains why the district should show how levy-supported funding reaches student-facing programs such as IB, AP, music, athletics, counseling, transportation, and technology, and what measurable value those dollars produce. [R25, R26, R27, R28, R29, R30, R31]

The ask is simple: before the 2027–28 plan moves forward, Edmonds should publish one clear accountability package: current transportation baseline, adopted plan, costed scenario for eliminating harmful early starts including Tier 0, fallback scenario, Program 97 reconciliation, levy-to-program report, technology accountability report, and student-facing KPI scorecard. Section 7 lists the requested records and metrics.

1. Start Times: A Known Problem Since at Least 2017

Edmonds School District has been aware of the early-start problem for years. In 2017, local reporting showed the district was already seeking input on school schedules and considering later high school starts. A task force reviewed more than 6,300 survey responses from students, staff, families, and community members, and transportation was identified as a major obstacle. [R1, R2]

The problem remains unresolved after all these years. The district's 2027–28 plan moves high schools later but keeps a 7:20 a.m. tier and assigns it to 12 elementary schools: Beverly, Cedar Valley, Cedar Way, Chase Lake, College Place, Hilltop, Martha Lake, Meadowdale, Mountlake Terrace, Oak Heights, Terrace Park, and Westgate. [R3]

For high school students, a 7:20 a.m. start already means much earlier wake-up times, especially for bus riders. For students taking Tier 0 / zero-period classes around 6:20 a.m., families report wake-up times around 4:00–4:30 a.m. and bus-stop times around 5:20 a.m.

Tier 0 is not meaningfully optional for students who choose Band or International Baccalaureate programs if participation requires a zero-period schedule. That creates an academic-access problem: students should not have to choose between sleep and participation in Band, IB, or advanced academic programs.

2. Public Opposition and Governance Accountability

This is no longer only a technical transportation issue. It is also a public-governance issue.

Nearly 2,000 parents and community members have signed or supported a petition asking Edmonds School District to reverse the 2027–28 plan assigning 12 elementary schools to a 7:20 a.m. start. At the June 9 board meeting, public comments on the issue were overwhelmingly opposed to the 7:20 a.m. elementary tier. [R12, R13, R14]

The district may continue to receive feedback, but moving forward without a costed alternative is not meaningful responsiveness. If thousands of families object to a policy that affects sleep, childcare, safety, attendance, and learning, the district should not treat the issue as closed.

A decision affecting thousands of children should not rest on a general transportation assertion. It should rest on transparent evidence, costed scenarios, and a public explanation of tradeoffs.

3. Health, Learning, and Workforce Readiness

Sleep is not a lifestyle preference. It is a learning condition.

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that middle and high schools start at 8:30 a.m. or later because early starts contribute to insufficient adolescent sleep. CDC guidance states that teenagers need 8–10 hours of sleep, and younger children need 9–12 hours. CDC also connects insufficient sleep with attention and behavior problems, lower academic performance, poor mental health, injuries, obesity, and type 2 diabetes. [R4, R5]

Local evidence is especially relevant. In Seattle, a 55-minute delay in high school start times produced a median gain of 34 minutes of sleep per school night. Edmonds' own materials recognize that later starts are linked to improved attendance, increased alertness, better academic performance, and positive mental-health outcomes. [R3, R6, R7]

The workforce connection is also important. PIAAC data show that U.S. adults with stronger literacy and numeracy are more likely to be employed. About 31% of adults at Level 2 or below in literacy were unemployed or out of the labor force, compared with about 20% at Level 3 or above. In numeracy, the gap was about 31% versus 17%. [R9]

That difference reflects many factors, but school districts are part of the pipeline. Decisions that harm sleep, attention, attendance, reading, math, and academic readiness affect the same foundations that later determine whether students become employable, economically independent adults.

Washington also has a large adult-literacy challenge: NCES estimates that about 44% of Washington adults ages 16–74 are at Level 2 or below in literacy. In an economy shaped by AI, automation, and robotics, students who are sleep-deprived and academically underprepared will face fewer paths to economic independence. [R8, R10, R11]

Figure 1A. Adult skills and workforce-risk indicators



Note: First four bars show unemployed or out-of-labor-force share by adult skill level; the Washington bar shows adult literacy Level 2 or below, not employment status.

The broader workforce context is also troubling. The U.S. employment-population ratio — the share of the civilian population age 16 and older that is employed — remains well below its 2000 level. In 2000, about 64.4% of adults 16+ were employed. By 2025, the annual average was about 59.7%, and the latest 2026 monthly value was 59.2% in May. A lower share of adults working means fewer people building the tax base, supporting public services, and sustaining

future economic growth. That makes it even more important for schools to protect sleep, attendance, literacy, numeracy, and workforce readiness. [R32]

Year	Adult 16+ employment-population ratio
2000	64.4%
2010	58.5%
2020	56.8%
2025	59.7%
2026 May	59.2%

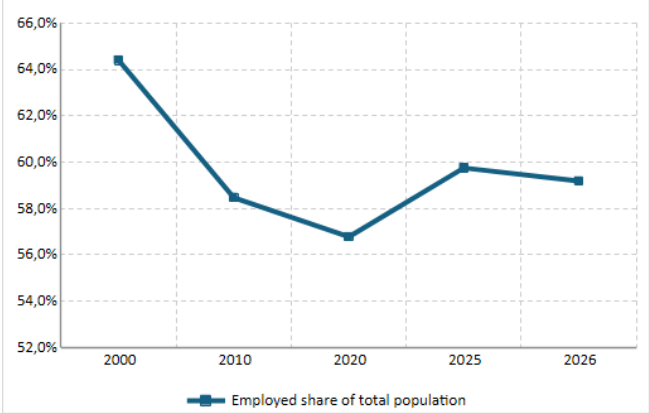


Table 1. Employment-Population Ratio, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

4. Spending, Academic Outcomes, and Transportation Priorities

The Edmonds issue sits inside a larger accountability problem: education spending has increased substantially, but academic outcomes have not clearly improved. Rising spending should be tied to measurable student-facing results: reading, math, attendance, chronic absenteeism, graduation readiness, student sleep, transportation reliability, and family impact.

Scale of the 2024–25 to 2025–26 budget comparison, rounded:

Budget measure	2024–25	2025–26	Change	Scale / accountability note
General Fund revenue	\$426.5M	\$452.4M	+\$25.9M	Total budget growth context
Local property-tax revenue	\$63.9M	\$70.3M	+\$6.4M	Baseline for scale comparison
Pupil Transportation	\$18.2M	\$19.1M	+\$0.9M	About 14% of local-tax increase
Central Administration	\$21.8M	\$26.8M	+\$5.1M	About 79% of local-tax increase
Program 97 / HR / Object 4	\$0.6M	\$5.4M	+\$4.8M	About 75% of local-tax increase

Table 2. Edmonds School District 2024-25 to 2025-26 budget comparison

Selected budget lines, rounded:

Budget line	2024-25	2025-26	Increase
Pupil Transportation	\$18.2M	\$19.1M	+4.9%
Central Administration	\$21.8M	\$26.8M	+22.9%
Employee Benefits (*)	\$0.6M	\$5.4M	+782.8%

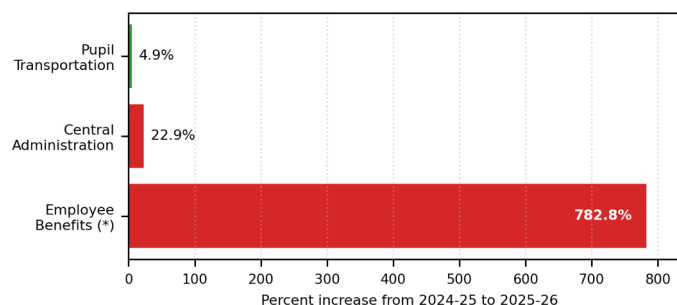


Figure 2. Selected 2025-26 budget increases (%), Edmonds School District F-195 budgets

* Employee Benefits = Program 97 / Human Resources / Object 4 (Employee Benefits and Payroll Taxes).

These budget documents show scale and priorities. Transportation has been cited for years as the barrier to healthier start times, yet Pupil Transportation increased by less than \$1 million while Central Administration and HR-coded benefits increased by millions. That allocation should be explained against student-facing KPIs. [R15, R16]

The 2026 KIDS COUNT context reinforces the concern. The Annie E. Casey Foundation described education as the most concerning domain nationally, with three of four education indicators worsening since 2019 and 47 states experiencing education declines. Public reporting on 2024 data also found that 70% of Washington eighth graders were not proficient in math and 68% of fourth graders were not proficient in reading. [R17, R18, R19]

Selected Washington proficiency gaps, 2024:

Measure	Proficient	Not proficient
8th grade math	30%	70%
4th grade reading	32%	68%

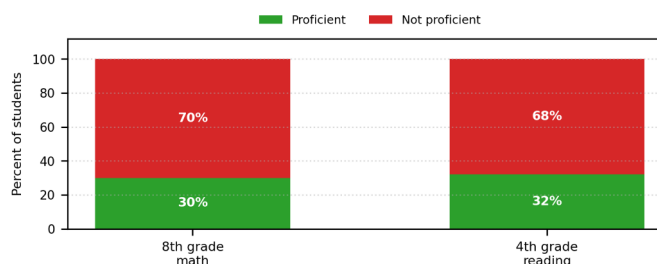


Figure 3. Washington proficiency levels, 2024

NCES data show that Washington's current expenditure per pupil has risen substantially over roughly three decades, while selected NAEP outcomes remained flat or declined. Figure 4 compares Washington with the U.S. average where NCES data are available and adds current Washington/Edmonds fiscal context. Figure 5 shows selected Washington NAEP score trends from 2005 through 2024, the latest available state NAEP year. Higher spending does not automatically produce better outcomes; spending must be tied to measurable student results. [R20, R21, R22, R23, R33, R34]

Figure 4. Per-pupil/FTE spending: Washington, U.S. average, and Edmonds

Note: NCES data are reported dollars through 2020-21; 2025-26 current-year data are from fiscal.wa.gov and are not CPI-adjusted.

Year / source	U.S. avg	WA	Edmonds
1989-90 (NCES)	\$4,980	\$4,702	--
1999-00 (NCES)	\$7,394	\$6,914	--
2010-11 (NCES)	\$11,433	\$10,402	--
2020-21 (NCES)	\$15,362	\$17,165	--
2025-26 Jan (fiscal.wa.gov)	--	\$19,636	\$20,433

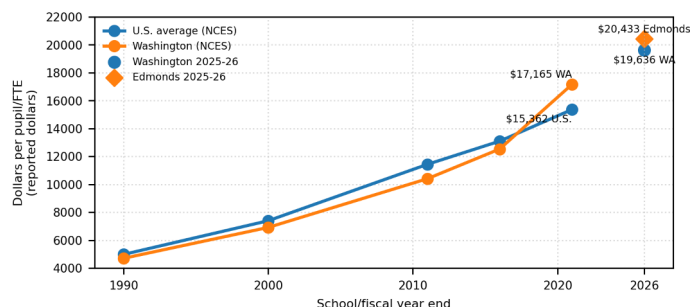
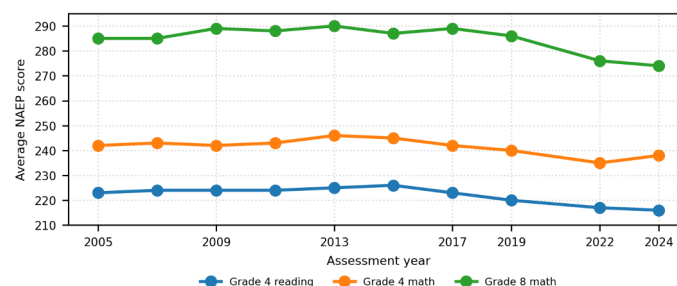


Figure 5. Selected Washington NAEP score trends, 2005-2024

Note: No 2026 Washington state NAEP grade 4/8 scores are available; 2024 is the latest state NAEP release.

Assessment	2005	2015	2019	2022	2024
Grade 4 reading	223	226	220	217	216
Grade 4 math	242	245	240	235	238
Grade 8 math	285	287	286	276	274



There is a broader school-bus driver shortage nationally, so Edmonds' transportation concern should not be dismissed. But if the shortage has blocked a healthier start-time solution since at least 2017, the district should provide an operational plan, not simply repeat the constraint. [R24]

The correct standard is proportionality: how many students are harmed, how many families are affected, what alternatives were tested, what each alternative costs, and which model produces the least harm and greatest student benefit.

5. Budget Red Flag: Program 97 / HR-Coded Employee Benefits

The most striking budget line is:

Program 97 District-wide Support
Activity 14 Human Resources
Object 4 Employee Benefits and Payroll Taxes

That line increased from about \$611,806 in 2024–25 to about \$5,401,057 in 2025–26 — an increase of about \$4,789,251, nearly ninefold. [R15, R16]

The budget documents show the increase. They do not explain what changed, which obligations are covered, whether the increase is one-time or recurring, or why the cost appears under Human Resources / Employee Benefits and Payroll Taxes.

The district is struggling to reverse academic decline, asking families to accept harmful early starts, and telling parents that transportation cannot be fixed. In that context, a nearly ninefold increase in an HR-coded Employee Benefits and Payroll Taxes line requires a clear public explanation.

The question is not whether employee benefits matter. The question is why transportation, student sleep, academic conditions, and family burden appear underfunded while large increases appear elsewhere in the budget.

A budget increase of this size should be tied to transparent accounting and student-facing KPIs: sleep, attendance, reading, math, graduation readiness, transportation reliability, and family impact.

6. Levy, IB, and Technology Accountability

Edmonds tells voters that EP&O levy dollars support student opportunities and programs not fully funded by the state. The district's 2026 levy page lists music, art, drama, extracurriculars, athletics, clubs, STEM, AP, College in the High School, International Baccalaureate, Highly Capable, and Multi-Language Learning. It also states that the EP&O levy represents about 15% of the district budget. [R25]

That messaging creates a reasonable expectation: families should be able to see how levy dollars reach students.

The public record supports a careful conclusion on IB. Levy funding can be used for IB and other enrichment programs because Washington law allows local enrichment funding for documented activities beyond the state basic-education program, including additional course offerings and extracurricular activities. OSPI also describes local levies as supporting programs, services, materials, technology, and staff positions not fully funded by the state. [R28, R30, R31]

The transparency problem is that the public F-195 does not show IB as a separate program line. It does not show how much levy-supported funding reaches IB, AP, College in the High School, music, athletics, clubs, counseling, nurses, transportation, or central/districtwide support. It also does not show whether IB would actually be reduced without levy funding. [R15, R16, R25]

The earlier assumption that IB exams are paid by state or federal money is not reliable for 2025–27. OSPI states that AP, IB, and Cambridge exam-fee subsidies and associated grants will not be available for the 2025–27 school years due to state budget cuts. Exam-fee support is also not the same as full IB program funding, because IB may involve staffing, coordination, training, authorization fees, materials, scheduling, and other operating costs. [R29]

Technology spending raises a similar accountability issue. In 2024, voters approved Edmonds School District's \$120 million Technology/Capital Levy. District materials state that the levy includes Chromebooks, digital tools and subscriptions, classroom technology stations, translation tablets, professional development, instructional technology coaching, infrastructure, cybersecurity, automation/integration, and office computers. [R26, R27]

Parents and students have raised concerns that some technology purchases are not producing visible student value. I have not found public evidence of a specific districtwide electronic-board

contract, total cost, vendor, device count, or failure rate. Those claims should therefore be treated as parent/student-reported until confirmed through public records.

The documented issue is broader and stronger: voters approved levy funding for student-facing technology and programs, but the district should show whether major purchases and levy-supported programs solved measurable problems for students, teachers, and families.

7. The Ask

Edmonds families are asking for one clear public accountability package before the 2027–28 start-time plan moves forward.

The district should publish:

1. **A start-time and transportation baseline**
Current start times, Tier 0 schedules, earliest pickup times, bus tiers, routes, buses, drivers, and transportation cost.
2. **The adopted 2026–27 plan**
School assignments by tier, earliest pickup times, affected students and families, Tier 0 impacts, bus and driver assumptions, route changes, and cost.
3. **A costed scenario for eliminating harmful early starts**
A model with no regular or program-required harmful early starts, including extra-early Tier 0 schedules for high school students.
4. **A fallback scenario**
If full elimination is not possible, the latest feasible start-time model with exact buses, drivers, routes, pickup times, costs, and tradeoffs.
5. **A Program 97 / HR-coded benefits reconciliation**
An explanation of the increase from about \$612,000 to about \$5.4 million, including what changed, which obligations are covered, whether the increase is one-time or recurring, and what funding sources support the line.
6. **A levy-to-program report**
How much levy-supported funding reaches IB, AP, College in the High School, music, arts, athletics, clubs, counseling, nurses, special education gap coverage, transportation, and central/districtwide support.
7. **A technology accountability report**
What each major technology purchase was supposed to solve, what it cost, how often it is used, uptime and repair data, and whether teachers, students, and families see measurable value.
8. **A student-facing KPI scorecard**
Sleep, attendance, chronic absenteeism, tardiness, reading, math, graduation readiness, transportation reliability, student wellness, family impact, and cost per demonstrated improvement.

The district should not ask families to accept harmful early starts based on general transportation claims. It should show the numbers, the tradeoffs, the costs, and the student outcomes.

Conclusion

Edmonds' families are not asking for convenience. They are asking for basic learning conditions, fiscal transparency, and accountability.

The district has known about the early-start problem since at least 2017. It now recognizes the health and academic case for later starts. But the adopted 2027–28 plan keeps a 7:20 a.m. tier and shifts it to elementary students, while Tier 0 remains a burden for high school students in programs such as Band and IB.

This matters beyond today's school schedule. Sleep, attendance, reading, math, mental health, graduation readiness, and future workforce readiness are connected. In an economy increasingly shaped by AI, automation, and robotics, students who are sleep-deprived and academically underprepared will face fewer paths to economic independence.

The budget documents show another accountability problem. Transportation has been cited for years as the barrier to healthier start times, yet the 2025–26 budget shows a much smaller increase for Pupil Transportation than for Central Administration and the HR-coded Employee Benefits and Payroll Taxes line.

Families were also told that levy and technology dollars support students, programs, and learning. The district should show, with numbers and KPIs, how those dollars reach students and what measurable value they produce.

The standard should be simple: student health, learning, attendance, academic readiness, and future independence should come before administrative convenience.

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<https://www.heraldnet.com/2017/03/19/edmonds-school-board-exploring-later-start-times-for-schools/>

R3 — Edmonds School District, Start/End Times Committee page.
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<https://resources.finalsite.net/images/v1752770840/edmondswednetedu/dm27g96xydbtbbyph48n/F195final2025-26.pdf>

R16 — Edmonds School District 2024–25 F-195 Annual Budget.
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Levy, IB, and Technology Accountability

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R27 — Edmonds School District Technology Department page.

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