



# Equity Can't Wait

Examining Racial Disparities in K-12  
Education in Washington State

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## Preface

In May 2021, Governor Inslee issued a partial veto of Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill No. 5405 in the 2021-2022 legislative session. Section 2 of the bill called for a racial equity analysis of the impact of remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic on K-12 education. The Governor’s veto message stated that “racial equity in education is a longstanding issue that was made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic” and directed the Washington Student Achievement Council to conduct a broader review of racial inequities in the K-12 system. This report aims to present an analysis of racial inequities in the state’s K-12 education system in broad context, including recent trends and the current state of racial disparities in Washington.<sup>1</sup>

See Governor Inslee’s full veto message:

<https://crmpublicwebservice.ofm.wa.gov/bats/attachment/vetomessage/f617073c-cbb4-eb11-81b9-005056ba1db5>

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the report, we primarily use the term “race” to refer to racial and ethnic subgroups.

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### **Racial disparities are evident across Washington’s K-12 education system.**

This report provides an analysis of Washington K-12 education data and reveals that there are consistent opportunity gaps for students of color. The COVID-19 pandemic has emphasized the need to address racial disparities as communities of color have faced disproportionate challenges. However, many of these issues are not new—rather, the pandemic highlighted persistent racial inequities for which progress is long overdue. The state can respond to data findings by implementing effective policies and practices to address longstanding issues in K-12 education so that all students can succeed.

**Education is foundational to individual and societal wellbeing and providing equitable education opportunities for students can help improve outcomes for all Washington residents.** There are many areas of progress in educational outcomes for Washington students. However, data suggests that there are significant and longstanding racial disparities in K-12 education outcomes. While data on some measures indicates that racial disparities have declined marginally over the last several years, most show little or no progress—suggesting that the state has a long way to go to address racial inequities in K-12 education. Pervasive racial inequities will continue to impact a larger proportion of students and the population as the state’s communities of color grow. The COVID-19 pandemic has also exacerbated existing educational equity issues and highlighted the need to address racial disparities as communities of color faced many disproportionate challenges.

**Racial disparities are apparent beginning in kindergarten and opportunity gaps persist across the K-12 system through high school graduation.** Persistent disparities by race in K-12 education have been widely documented in the national literature. Washington data on key K-12 education measures provide important insights for policymakers as they work to build a more equitable education system in the state. Key findings from the report for select measures are shared below, and more detailed findings and data insights can be found in the full report.

### **Kindergarten Readiness**

Washington students are assessed in six areas of development and learning when they enter kindergarten: social-emotional, physical, language, cognitive, literacy, and math. Data from the 2021-2022 school year indicates that there are significant racial disparities in kindergarten readiness. The racial group with the highest rate of kindergarten readiness had nearly twice the proportion of students who demonstrated kindergarten readiness as the racial group with the lowest performance. And despite marginal gains for all racial groups since 2015-2016, disparities between groups have persisted over time.



### Standardized Academic Assessments

Each year, Washington students in specific grades are assessed in math, English language arts, and science. There are substantial racial disparities in assessment performance across subjects in Washington. Assessment data from the 2021-2022 school year for English language arts and science assessments across all grades indicate that the racial group with the highest proficiency rate was at least three times as likely to meet grade level standards than the group with the lowest performance. In math, the proficiency rate for the group with the highest performance was nearly five times as high as the rate for the group with the lowest performance. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, standardized academic assessment outcomes were improving marginally each year for students of all races despite persistent racial disparities. However, assessment outcomes during the pandemic broke with previous patterns when all groups experienced declines in performance. Assessment outcomes improved in 2021-2022 compared to the prior year, but they did not recover to pre-pandemic levels and racial disparities were more pronounced than in prior years.

### Attendance

When students are absent, they are not able to access instruction and actively engage in their classes. During the 2020-2021 school year, data suggests substantial racial disparities in the regular attendance rate—ranging from around 55 percent to over 90 percent. This means that the group with the highest rate of regular attendance is about 1.7 times as likely to attend school regularly than the group with the lowest rate. Prior to the pandemic, trends in regular attendance rates were fairly consistent over time, although racial disparities were still apparent. Regular attendance rates increased for all racial groups at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019-2020 but in 2020-2021, rates dropped for all groups and racial disparities grew.

### Mental Health

Mental health has an impact on students' ability to succeed and thrive in school. Survey data indicates that there are differences in the prevalence of mental health issues by student race. For instance, some students of color consistently report a higher likelihood of experiencing depression. The prevalence of depression among all racial groups has increased over time. During the COVID-19 pandemic, K-12 students reported increased mental health issues and national sources suggest that structural racism has contributed to disproportionate mental health impacts on students of color.

### Discipline

Exclusionary discipline can have negative effects on students including causing disruption to their academic progress and increasing their risk of dropping out. For K-12 students in 2019-2020, the proportion of each racial group that received an exclusionary discipline action ranged from less than one percent to more than five percent. This means that the exclusionary discipline rate is more than five times higher for the group with the highest rate than the group with the lowest. Racial disparities in exclusionary discipline have persisted over time in Washington. However, the proportion of students receiving exclusionary discipline was lower in the 2019-2020 academic year than prior years for all racial groups. That shift in the trend corresponds with the COVID-19 crisis and may also reflect changes in policies and remote learning during the pandemic.

### Ninth Grade on Track

Student performance in ninth grade has been shown to be a strong predictor of high school graduation. In the 2020-2021 academic year, there were significant racial disparities in the proportion of students



who were on track in ninth grade. The group with the highest rate was twice as likely to be on track in ninth grade than the group with the lowest rate. Racial disparities in ninth grade on track have remained consistent over the past five years, despite fluctuations for all racial groups during the COVID-19 pandemic that may be attributable to special COVID-19 grading policies regarding failing or no credit grades.

### Dual Credit

Dual credit coursework allows students to fulfill high school requirements while simultaneously earning college credit. Despite the documented benefits, there are substantial racial disparities in the proportion of students who participate in dual credit courses. In the 2020-2021 school year, the racial group with the highest proportion of dual credit participants was almost twice as likely to enroll in a dual credit course than the group with the lowest proportion. Data indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic did not have a significant impact on dual credit participation overall or for any particular racial group.

### Course Outcomes

Students who earn an incomplete or failing grade do not receive credit for a course, which could impact their eligibility for high school graduation. In the 2020-2021 school year, just three-quarters of high school students in the state received credit for all of their courses. There were also substantial disparities by race—ranging from just over half of students receiving passing credit for all their courses to over 90 percent. This means the group with the highest proportion of students passing all their courses had a rate that was 1.7 times the rate for the group with the lowest proportion. Course outcomes improved for all racial groups with the introduction of emergency rules at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019-2020, but racial disparities widened in 2020-2021 when rules changed and students continued to experience challenges caused by the pandemic.

### Graduation

Students who graduate high school can move on to college and career opportunities that are more likely to provide a higher income and standard of living. However, academic and personal hurdles still prohibit many students from reaching high school graduation in four years, and there are persistent racial disparities in high school graduation rates. The racial group with the highest graduation rate had a rate that was nearly one and a half times that of the group with the lowest graduation rate in the 2020-2021 academic year. Graduation rates for Washington students of all races have steadily increased over the past several years. At the same time, racial disparities have decreased—but only marginally. However, in the 2020-2021 academic year, most racial groups saw slight declines in graduation rates compared to the prior year.

### Dropout

Unfortunately, a sizeable number of students in Washington drop out of high school before reaching graduation. The dropout rate in 2020-2021 ranged from less than 4 percent to nearly 16 percent by race, meaning the rate for the group with the highest dropout rate is more than four times the rate of the lowest group. All racial groups have seen declines in dropout rates over time. Racial disparities have narrowed over time but are still significant. Despite speculation that the COVID-19 pandemic would have a profound impact on high school graduation and dropout rates, the data suggests that has largely not been the case.



### Direct Postsecondary Enrollment

Students who delay college enrollment after high school graduation may lose academic momentum and may be faced with additional competing priorities that make it more difficult to transition to postsecondary education and training later on. Overall, approximately 60 percent of Washington high school graduates went on to postsecondary education programs within a year of graduating high school in 2019. However, for some racial groups, the direct enrollment rate was considerably lower. The group with the highest direct enrollment rate was more than twice as likely to enroll as the group with the lowest direct enrollment rate. Direct postsecondary enrollment rates have not changed significantly for all racial groups, and racial disparities have also been consistent over time.

**There are many proven practices that can be prioritized for students furthest from educational equity to help reduce racial disparities and improve educational outcomes.** Several evidence-based practices are presented below to help guide policy priorities and implementation in the state. More details about these proven practices can be found in the full report.

- Providing high-quality early education opportunities can improve outcomes for students later in their educational journey.
- Recruiting and retaining a diverse teacher pipeline can help improve outcomes for diverse students.
- Implementing high dosage, low student-to-teacher ratio tutoring that is tied to classroom learning can help accelerate learning for students who are struggling.
- Offering opportunities for extended learning time can improve students' academic performance.
- Increasing dual credit participation can improve students' high school and postsecondary outcomes.
- Engaging students in academic and technical education around a career theme can keep students engaged in school and prepare them for postsecondary education and careers after high school.
- Providing integrated student support in schools can address barriers to academic success.
- Supporting social and emotional learning can improve behavior and academic performance leading to positive educational outcomes.
- Promoting a positive school climate can help improve student outcomes and wellbeing.
- Engaging with families in culturally appropriate and affirming ways can support student learning and academic outcomes.
- Targeting postsecondary transition supports towards students of color can increase their likelihood of enrolling in postsecondary education after high school.
- Using Opportunity to Learn indicators alongside data on student outcomes can help identify student needs and where resources should be targeted to reduce disparities in outcomes.

**As the state continues to respond to and rebuild from the COVID-19 pandemic, there is an opportunity to develop a K-12 education system that provides equitable opportunities for all students and explicitly works to reduce racial disparities.** Washington State has done a lot to address the challenges that the pandemic imposed, including providing supports for schools, students, and families in the K-12 education system. The state already has in place numerous programs and initiatives to support students across K-12 education, and it is imperative that the state prioritizes closing racial equity gaps at the center of this work. In addition, data and evidence-based practices should drive the state's work to effectively achieve more equitable outcomes to improve opportunities for all Washington residents to succeed in K-12 education and beyond.

## Introduction

Across many foundational aspects of society, it is evident that race has a significant influence on one's opportunities and life outcomes. Racial inequities have existed and persisted over time in the United States. For instance, the racial wealth gap between Black and White families has been consistent since the 1960s—a typical Black household still has a net worth less than one-tenth of a typical White household (Luhby, 2020). The poverty rate is also more than twice as high for Black and Hispanic people compared to White people (Creamer, 2020). Racial disparities were further exposed during the COVID-19 pandemic, when people of color were more likely to experience illness and fatality (CDC, 2022). During the pandemic, people of color and people with less education also had higher rates of unemployment and experienced economic hardship made worse by the crisis. For instance, at the onset of the pandemic, the unemployment rate in Washington for those with only a high school diploma spiked to twice the unemployment rate compared to those with a bachelor's degree, and unemployment rates were also several points higher for people of color in the state (Kwakye & Kibort-Crocker, 2020).

Throughout the report, the term “students of color” is used to broadly categorize racially minoritized students, and “race” is used to describe racial and ethnic subgroups. Phrasing around racial groups has shifted over time in response to social and cultural shifts. We are cognizant of the delicate and changing nature of language and aim to describe differences in outcomes for subgroups without implicitly or explicitly assigning responsibility for disparities to students or groups themselves. Rather, we see disparities as functions of systems and institutions that have failed to provide equitable opportunities regardless of individual characteristics, including race.

Education can help improve people's lives by reducing poverty and closing racial wealth gaps. People with higher levels of educational attainment fare better in the labor market, resulting in financial stability and opportunities for fulfilling work. Those with higher levels of educational attainment also tend to have higher incomes than those with only a high school diploma. Over their lifetimes, bachelor's degree holders earn approximately \$1.5 million more on average than those with only a high school diploma (Kwakye & Kibort-Crocker, 2020). Employment and income are tied to health, wealth, and personal wellbeing, so those with higher educational attainment tend to experience better outcomes than those without. Addressing racial inequities in education that were evident before the pandemic and continue to impact communities of color during the ongoing COVID-19 crisis is critical to ensuring opportunities for all people in Washington to thrive.

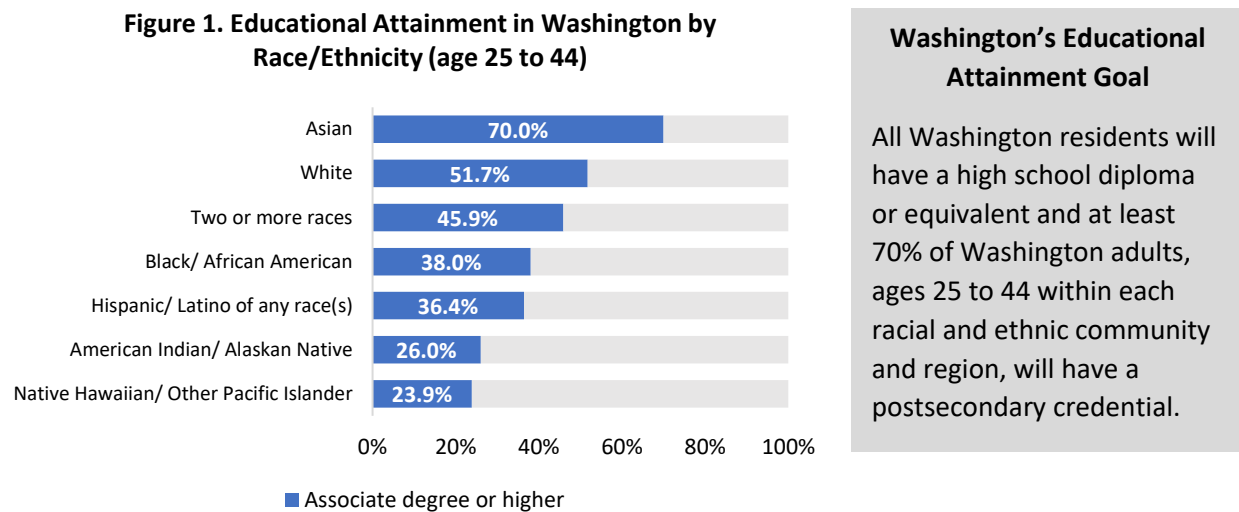
The state has an educational attainment goal that all residents will have a high school diploma or equivalent and at least 70 percent of residents ages 25 to 44 will hold a postsecondary credential. The statewide goal is also meant to be achieved within each racial and ethnic community and region. However, there are substantial racial disparities in educational outcomes leading to inequities in education attainment in Washington.<sup>2</sup> As of 2019, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino of any race(s), and Black/African American Washington

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<sup>2</sup> In the report text, we primarily use the term “race” to refer to racial and ethnic subgroups.



residents ages 25 to 44 were significantly less likely to have an associate degree or above than White or Asian residents (Figure 1).



Source: American Community Survey, 1-Year PUMS data, 2019

These inequities in educational attainment may be a consequence of racial disparities in K-12 education, which create unequal opportunities for postsecondary education access and success for students of color. Longstanding trends in K-12 education suggest that students of different racial backgrounds have different outcomes—in attendance, performance on assessments, participation in certain academic programs, transitions to postsecondary education, and many other areas. These racial inequities in education may be caused by or correlated with other racial inequities in our state. However, the public education system in Washington is intended to close opportunity gaps and prepare every student for postsecondary pathways, career, and civic engagement.<sup>3</sup> Ensuring equitable opportunities for students of all racial backgrounds requires examining student outcomes for key educational measures, identifying disparities, and targeting solutions to address inequities.

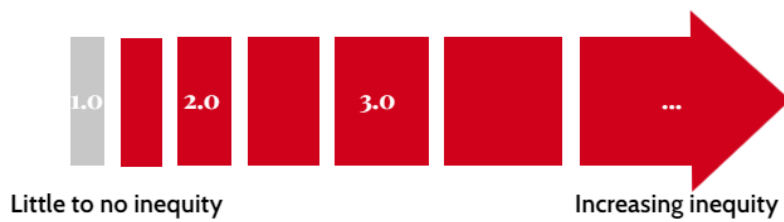
Even though this report provides an overview of racial equity issues across K-12 education measures in Washington, racial inequities may also be related to other intersecting characteristics, such as income. Despite potential intersecting factors that may be correlated with racial inequities, like income, we focus on race in particular in this report because the data does not allow for a cross tabulation of race and income. But national research demonstrates that even after controlling for income, racial disparities in K-12 educational outcomes persist (Shores et al., 2019). Opportunity gaps by race are more than just differences in socioeconomic status, they are the result of racial inequities that have persisted in our education system over time.

We also present observations of racial equity issues that have been further exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused unprecedented learning disruption in education (Kwakye & Kibort-Crocker, 2021). We present snapshots of outcomes by race for select K-12 education measures, provide insight into how trends have evolved over time, and discuss how the pandemic has impacted outcomes and inequities. This structure situates the pandemic’s impact into the greater context of racial inequities

<sup>3</sup> See About the Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction: <https://www.k12.wa.us/about-ospi>

in the state’s education system. It is worth noting that some data on student outcomes during the pandemic is limited, and K-12 data is collected on different timelines throughout the year. Therefore, the report uses available data from Washington and national data sources to examine the impact of the pandemic. Data from during the pandemic may also reflect challenges that schools were facing as they

**Box 1. Equity Gap Scores**



Equity gap scores are a simple but powerful indicator that offer additional context to averages (Krause, 2021). The equity gap score provides a scale of disparities between subpopulations—such as racial groups. The higher the score, the larger the disparity. A score of 1.0 implies that all groups perform equally on a given measure, while a score above 1.0 indicates an increasing level of inequity between groups. Specifically, the equity gap score measures the ratio between the highest and lowest rates of a given measure for different subpopulations.

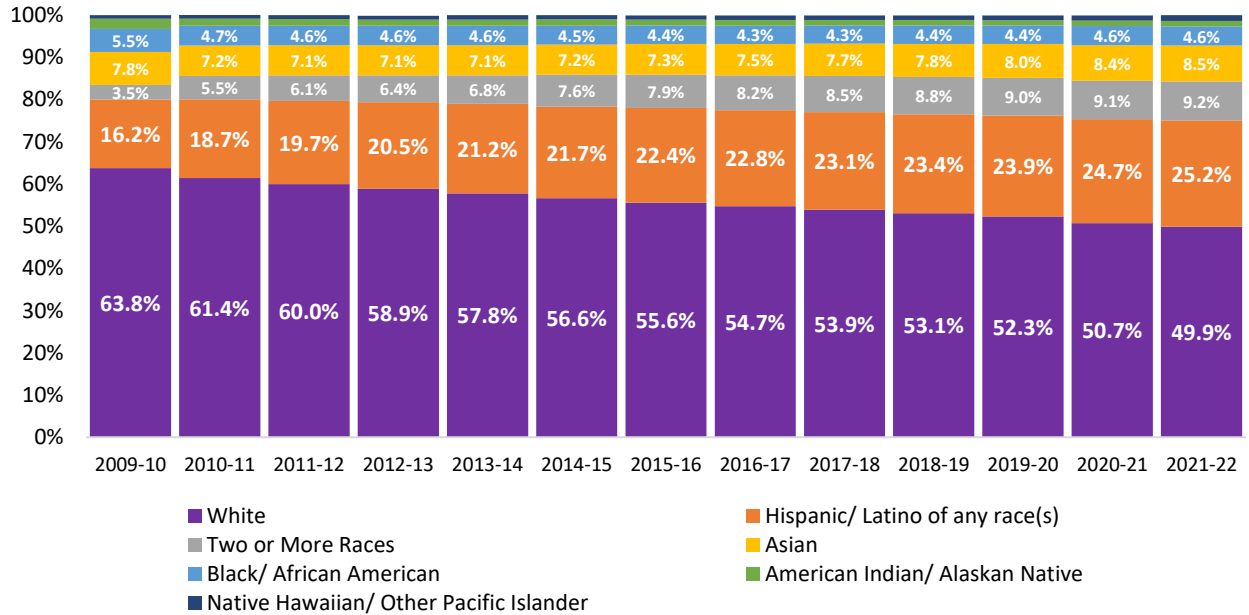
For example, 70 percent of Asian adults have an associate degree or higher, compared to 23.9 percent of Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander adults (Figure 1). The ratio between the highest and lowest educational attainment rates—the equity gap score—is 2.9 (70 percent divided by 23.9 percent). In other words, the group with the highest educational attainment has a rate that is almost three times the group with the lowest education attainment. This suggests a high level of racial inequity in adult educational attainment in Washington.

managed disruptions to normal operations. Throughout the report, we will refer to “equity gap scores” to help illustrate the relative scale of inequities for different measures in K-12 education (see Box 1).

## Washington K-12 Context: What is the Racial Composition of K-12 Students?

Washington’s K-12 population is becoming more racially diverse. In the 2021-2022 school year, half of K-12 students in Washington were non-White. The K-12 population in Washington is considerably more racially diverse than a decade ago, when just over a third of students were non-White. The growth in the proportion of students who are Hispanic/Latino of any race(s) accounts for the majority of the change. In the 2021-2022 school year, Hispanic students comprised a quarter of all K-12 students, the second largest racial group after White students. The proportion of students who were two or more races has also increased over the past decade (Figure 2 and full data table in Appendix A).

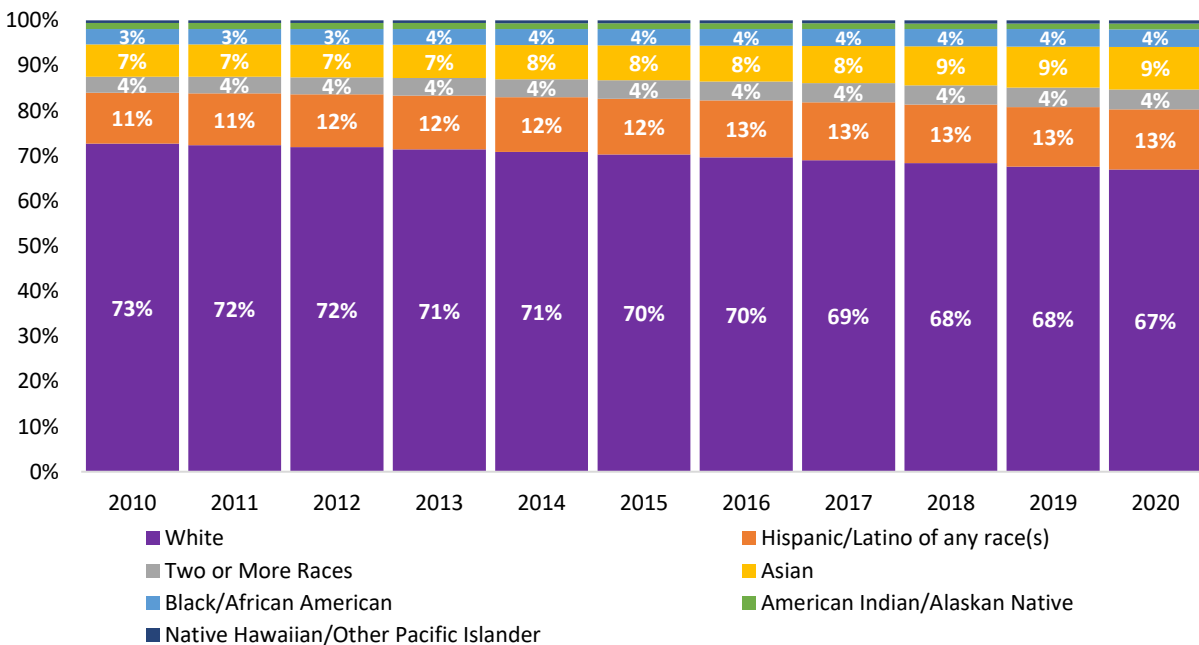
**Figure 2. Distribution of K-12 Students in Washington by Race/Ethnicity**



Source: Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Data Portal

The composition of the K-12 population indicates that K-12 students in the state are more diverse than the state population overall (Figure 3 and full data table in Appendix B). However, as the younger population ages, the state’s adult population will become more racially diverse too. Pervasive racial inequities will continue to impact a larger proportion of students and the population as the state’s communities of color grow.

**Figure 3. Distribution of Washington State Population by Race/Ethnicity**



Source: Washington Office of Financial Management Population Estimates

Examining data for key K-12 education measures can help identify racial disparities that must be eliminated to provide equitable opportunities for all Washington students.

## Key K-12 Education Measures: How Do Outcomes for Racial Groups Compare?

Persistent disparities by race in K-12 education have been widely documented in the national literature. Evidence from research suggests that racial disparities begin in kindergarten and continue to grow throughout students' years of schooling (Reardon and Galindo, 2009). Beyond academic performance, national research indicates racial disparities in other aspects of students' holistic school experience. For instance, across the nation, Black students were disproportionately represented among school suspensions (GAO, 2018). Students of color are more likely to experience mental health issues (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2021). They have also been shown to have less access to high-level and dual credit courses and are less likely to enroll in postsecondary education following high school graduation (U.S. Department of Education, 2014 and NSC, 2021).

Data from Washington can help determine whether Washington trends are consistent with racial inequities apparent in the national literature. This section presents outcomes for racial groups on key measures in K-12 education, including a snapshot of the current data, how trends have changed over time, and discussion of the effects that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on student outcomes.<sup>4</sup> For each measure, we present equity gap scores to provide a sense of the scale of disparities between the highest and lowest performing groups. Examining the trends over time provides insight about how disparities have changed or remained over time.

The pandemic has highlighted immediate needs in K-12 education. However, these needs are also part of longstanding racial equity issues in education in our state. Data findings in this section provide important insights for policymakers as they work to build a more equitable K-12 system in Washington.

### Kindergarten Readiness

The only requirement to begin kindergarten in Washington is to be five years old, but the state also assesses students to measure their development in several areas. The kindergarten readiness assessment (Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills, or WaKIDS) is administered during the first two months of kindergarten to measure six different areas of development and learning. Those areas include social-emotional, physical, language, cognitive, literacy, and math. Poor kindergarten readiness assessment outcomes may affect students' later academic success. Research indicates that school readiness in children's early years is linked with achievement in later school years (Duncan et al., 2007).

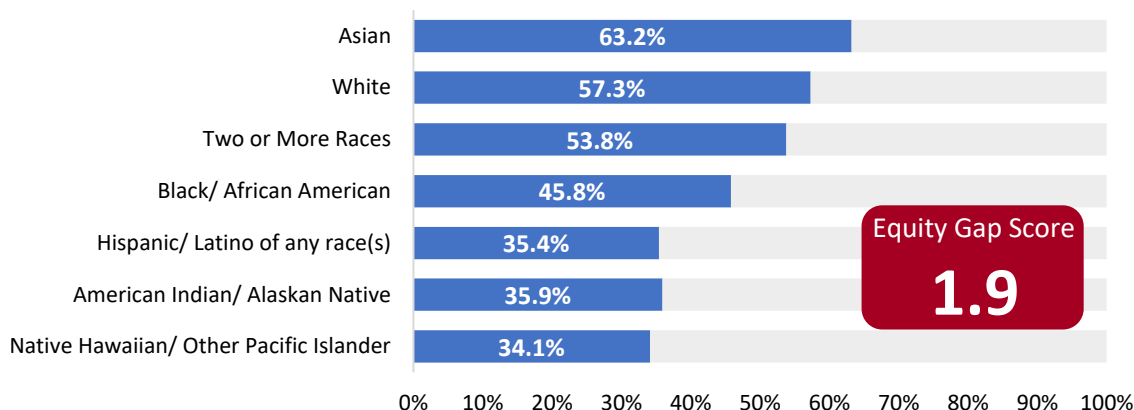
#### Data Snapshot

There were significant racial disparities in kindergarten readiness in the 2021-2022 academic year.

<sup>4</sup> Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) data are typically finalized in the summer/early fall following the end of the school year and are posted publicly the following winter/early spring. For example, 2021-22 OSPI data are anticipated to be finalized and made public between November 2022 and March 2023. Data from the Education Research and Data Center (ERDC) also lag by one to two years.

Kindergarten readiness data in Washington shows that there are large disparities in kindergarten readiness by race, with an equity gap score of 1.9 in 2021-2022 school year, indicating that the highest group had almost double the proportion of students who demonstrated kindergarten readiness than the lowest racial group (Figure 4).

**Figure 4. Kindergarten Readiness by Race/Ethnicity (2021-2022)**



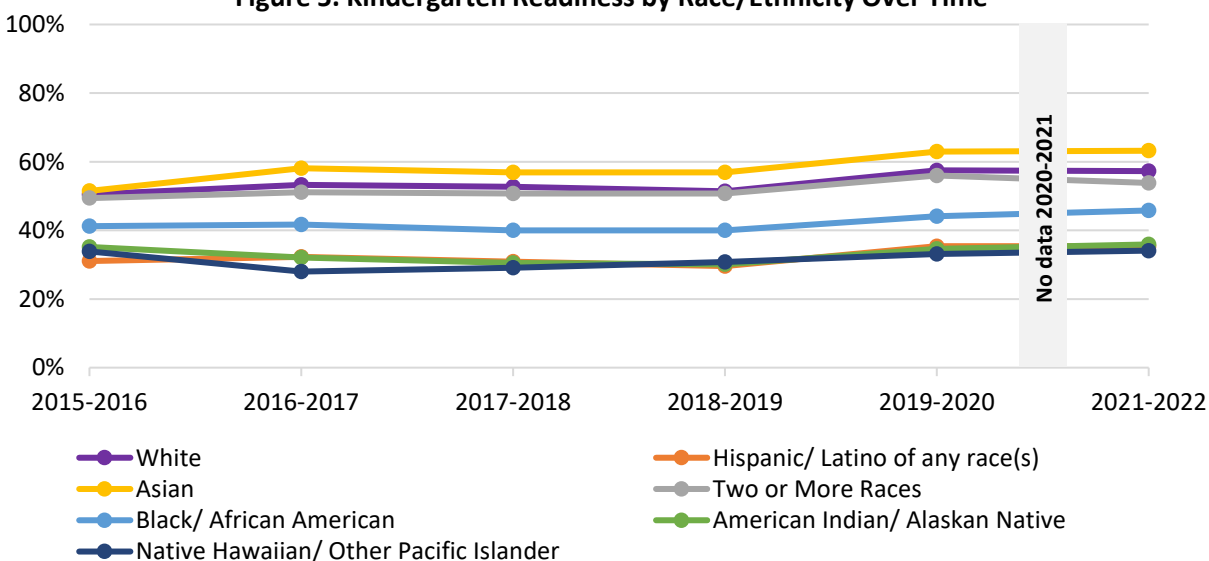
Source: Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Data Portal

### Data Trend

Racial disparities in kindergarten readiness have persisted over the past five years, despite marginal gains for all groups.

Racial disparities in kindergarten readiness have stayed fairly consistent since the 2015-2016 school year. All racial groups have seen higher levels of kindergarten readiness in the past several years. However, the gaps between racial groups have remained (Figure 5).

**Figure 5. Kindergarten Readiness by Race/Ethnicity Over Time**



Source: Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Data Portal

Kindergarten enrollment in Washington fell by 15 percent overall in 2020-2021 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, when many schools were operating remotely for at least part of the year.

National data also suggests that there was a significant decline in kindergarten enrollment throughout the pandemic, and that decline was most prominent for students from low-income neighborhoods (Goldstein and Parlapiano, 2021). Kindergarten enrollment decline during the 2020-2021 school year worried some that kindergarten readiness would see a downturn the following year. However, that theory is not reflected in the data. Data from 2021-2022 shows that kindergarten readiness remained about the

same as pre-pandemic levels for all racial groups. However, the significant racial disparities evident in kindergarten readiness data over time persisted too, indicating that there is still work to be done to ensure that all the state's youngest learners are provided with opportunities to succeed in K-12 education and beyond. Despite the consistency in kindergarten readiness levels in the 2021-2022 data, it will be important to continue to monitor the development of young students who were impacted by COVID-19 disruptions as they progress through elementary school and beyond.

Kindergarten readiness data show that racial disparities are evident in kindergarten at the beginning of students' K-12 education trajectories, signifying that some students enter the K-12 education system already at a disadvantage. Data suggest that racial disparities in kindergarten readiness persist through later grade levels, resulting in disparate outcomes in later grade standardized academic assessments.

### COVID-19 Effects

Despite concerns amidst pandemic enrollment declines, kindergarten readiness levels remained consistent to pre-pandemic levels for all racial groups.

## Standardized Academic Assessments

Standardized academic assessments are widely used measures to examine student performance and comply with state and federal accountability requirements in K-12 education. Assessments also help compare performance for students across the state since they are measured to the same standard. Each year, Washington students in specific grades are assessed in math, English language arts (ELA), and science.<sup>5</sup> Students are given a score indicating whether they meet grade level proficiency standards for those subjects. While certainly not a perfect measure of holistic student learning or school performance, these assessments can help provide insight on grade-level proficiency for specific subjects and allow for a comparison of performance across different student groups.

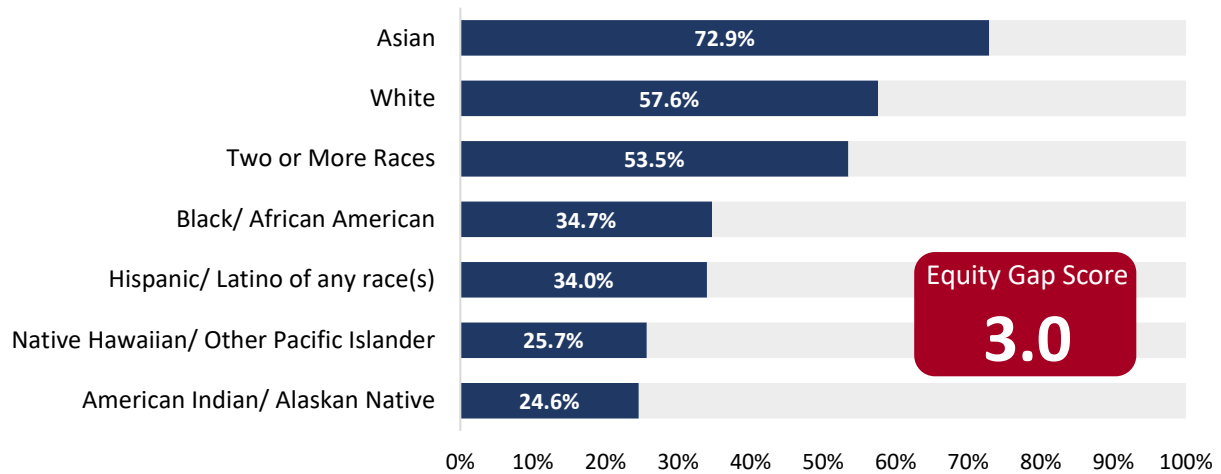
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<sup>5</sup> In Washington, Smarter Balanced Assessments for English language arts and math are issued in grades 3 through 8 and 10, and the Washington Comprehensive Assessment of Sciences is issued in grades 5, 8, and 11.

Data from Washington assessments conducted in 2021-2022 indicate significant racial disparities in academic assessment performance. There is an equity gap score of three for ELA assessment outcomes by race, meaning the group with the highest performance is three times as likely to meet grade level proficiency standards as the group with the lowest performance (Figure 7). In math, the equity gap score was even larger—the proficiency rate for the group with the highest performance was nearly five times as high as the rate for the group with the lowest performance (Figure 8). The science assessment proficiency rate for the group with the highest performance was more than three times higher than the group with the lowest rate (Figure 9). These equity gap scores suggest that there are substantial differences in assessment performance across subjects for students of different races, with the largest racial disparities in math assessments.

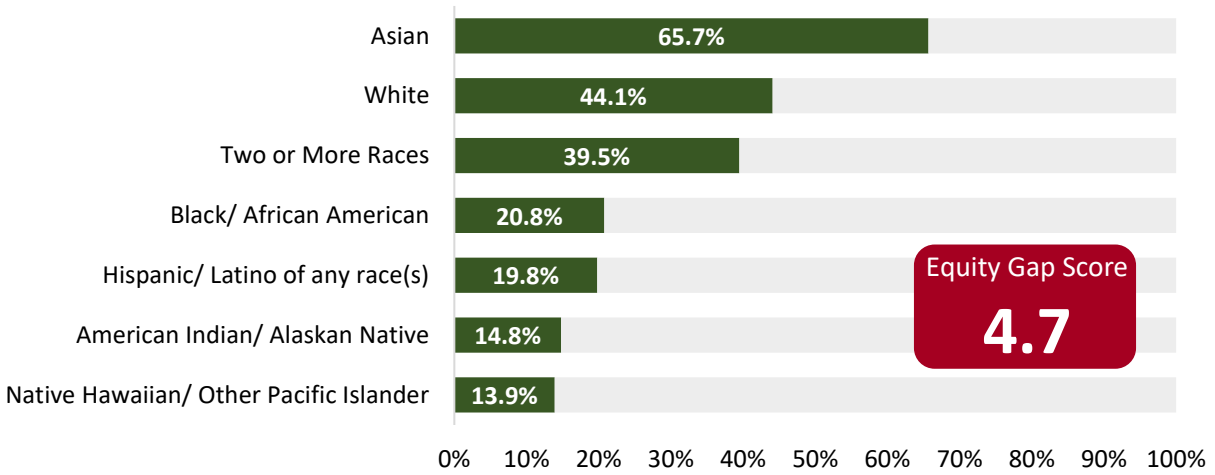
**Data Snapshot**  
 Assessment outcomes differ greatly by student race. Math assessments have the largest disparities by race.

**Figure 7. Percent of Students Meeting Standards in ELA by Race/Ethnicity (2021-2022)**



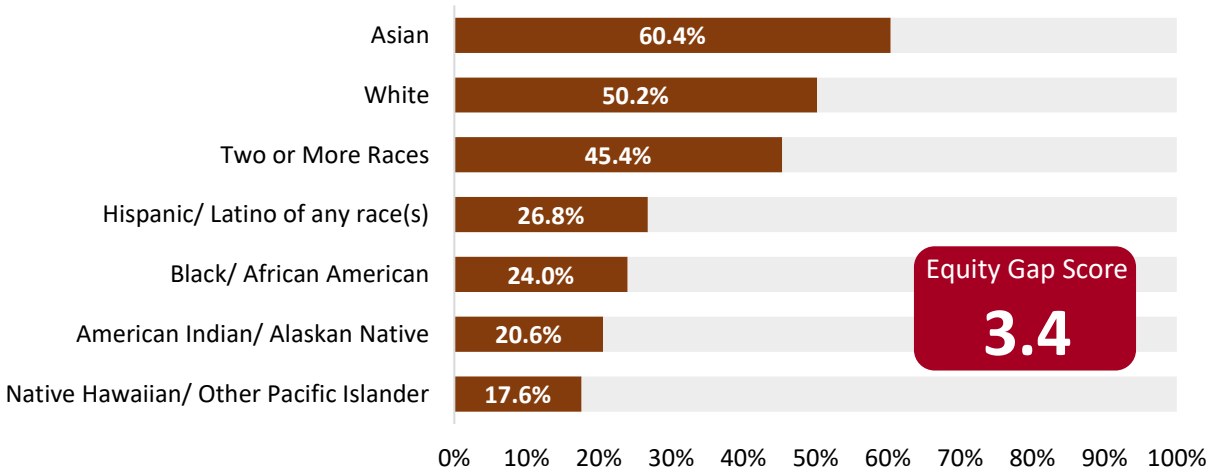
Source: Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Data Portal

**Figure 8. Percent of Students Meeting Standards in Math by Race/Ethnicity (2021-2022)**



Source: Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Data Portal

**Figure 9. Percent of Students Meeting Standards in Science by Race/Ethnicity (2021-2022)**



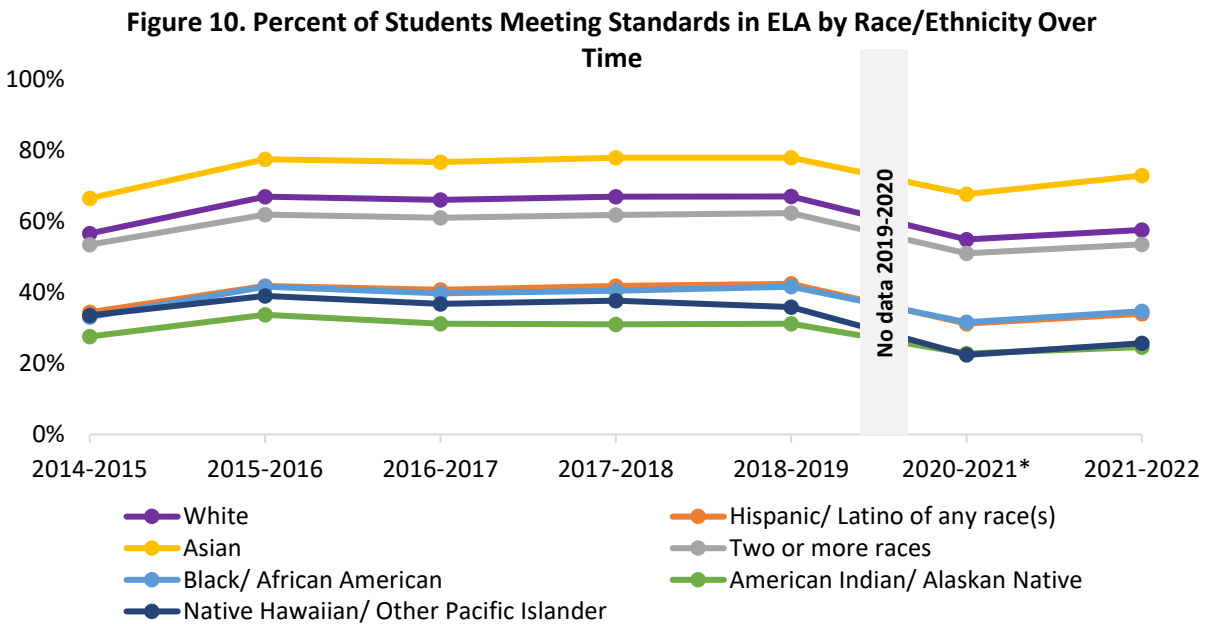
Source: Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Data Portal



Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, standardized academic assessment outcomes were, in general, improving marginally each year for students of all races in both ELA and math. However, racial disparities have persisted over time (Figure 10 and Figure 11). Assessment outcomes during the pandemic broke with previous patterns when all racial groups experienced declines in the proportion of students who met grade level standards. Declines were larger for some racial groups and racial disparities widened, most notably in math assessments. Assessment outcomes in 2021-2022 improved compared to the prior year, however they did not reach pre-pandemic levels.

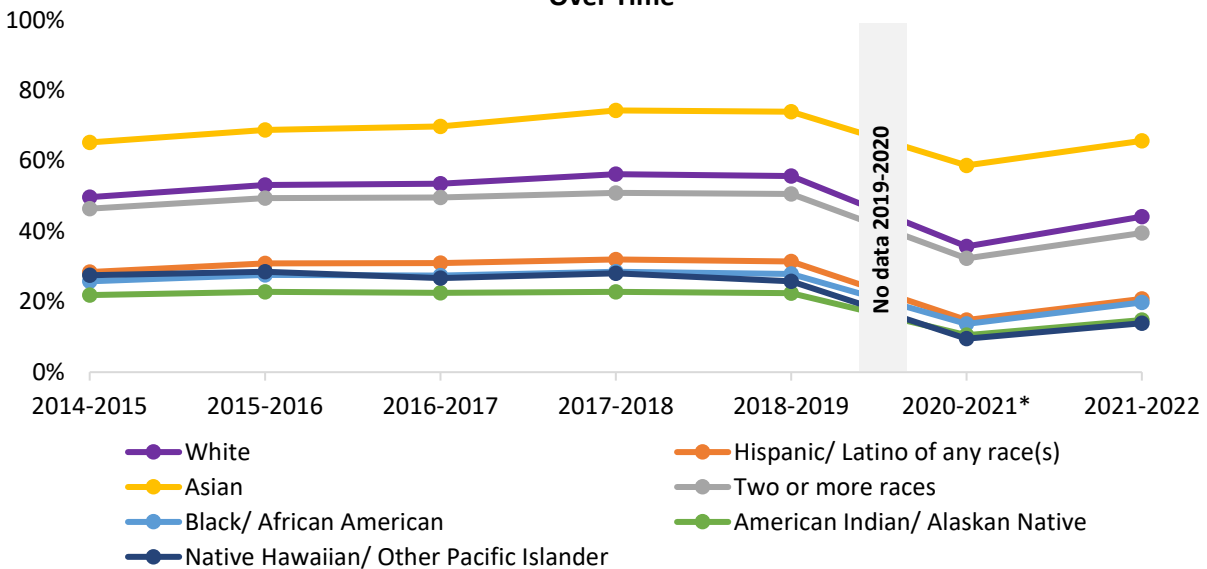
### Data Trend

The pattern of improvement in standardized academic assessment outcomes was broken during the COVID-19 pandemic, when all racial groups saw significant declines that were more pronounced for some groups.



Source: Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Data Portal  
 Note: Due to U.S. Department of Education (ED) assessment waivers for Spring 2020, assessment data are not available for the 2019-2020 school year. Also, given the flexibility offered by ED, the 2020-2021\* assessments were administered in Fall 2021.

**Figure 11. Percent of Students Meeting Standards in Math by Race/Ethnicity Over Time**



Source: Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Data Portal

Note: Due to U.S. Department of Education (ED) assessment waivers for Spring 2020, assessment data are not available for the 2019-2020 school year. Also, given the flexibility offered by ED, the 2020-2021\* assessments were administered in Fall 2021.

### COVID-19 Effects

Assessments were not conducted during the first year of the pandemic but results from Fall 2021 indicate significant declines and widening racial inequities. Assessment performance partially rebounded in 2021-2022, but performance and racial disparities remained worse than pre-pandemic levels.

Changes in normal school operations during the pandemic interrupted normal assessments in Washington, limiting some data availability. State standardized assessments were not conducted in the spring of 2020. Assessments meant to be held in the spring of 2021 were administered in the fall of 2021. As described above, performance on assessments in the fall of 2021 was worse than in the previous year for all groups, and racial disparities in assessment outcomes were made worse during the pandemic—particularly in math. These data highlight the impact that the pandemic may have had on student learning and skill mastery, as well as the disproportionate disruption to learning that students of color faced. Data from the 2021-2022 school year indicate that assessment outcomes at least partially recovered for all racial groups, however performance did not reach pre-pandemic levels, and racial disparities remained larger than prior to the pandemic.

Assessment outcome patterns in Washington during the pandemic mirror national trends, which indicated declines in reading and math scores too. Average reading scores for nine-year-old students on the National Assessment of Educational Progress fell by five points, while math scores dropped seven points in 2022 compared to 2020 before the pandemic. These declines mark the largest drop in national reading scores in more than three decades, and the first ever score decline in national math scores. The

declines were larger for some groups and exacerbated disparities. For example, the 13-point decrease in average math scores for Black students compared to the 5-point decrease for White students resulted in a wider Black-White score gap (from 25 points in 2020 to 33 points in 2022). Scores for lower performers also declined more dramatically compared to higher performers across all racial groups. For instance, math scores for Hispanic students who scored at the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile declined by 7 points between 2020 and 2022, compared to a decline of 12 points for Hispanic students who scored at the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

Even as schools have returned to in-person operations, there are still lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic that continue to have consequences on student outcomes and may be even more detrimental to some groups of students. Ongoing health and safety concerns, recovering from lost in-person instruction time, increased strain on teachers, and other factors like mental health issues have continued to contribute to the complexity of the pandemic’s disruption for K-12 students.

Poor performance on assessments may also be associated with other factors that influence students’ engagement in school, such as attendance.

## Attendance

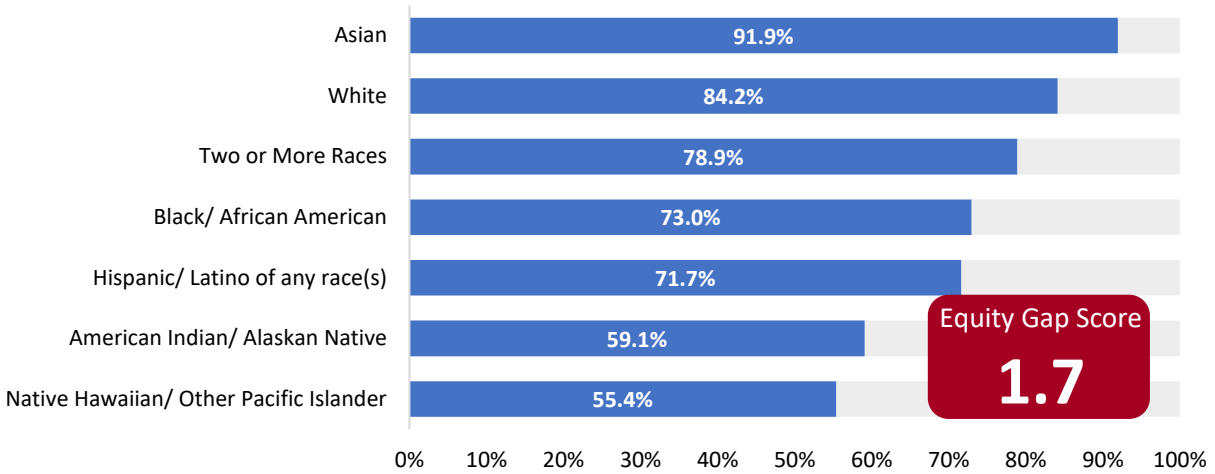
Regular attendance is foundational for student learning—if students are absent, they are not able to access instruction and actively engage in their classes. Research suggests that attendance has a significant impact on school success. For instance, research shows that students who demonstrate kindergarten readiness skills but are chronically absent in kindergarten and first grade are much less likely to perform at grade level in third grade than their peers (ASR, 2011). Chronic absenteeism does not just impact younger students. Students who miss two days of school per month are less likely to read at grade level and more likely to not graduate high school than their peers (Chang and Balfanz, 2016).

### Data Snapshot

There are substantial racial disparities in regular attendance, which ranges from less than 60 percent to more than 90 percent.

Regular attendance for K-12 students in Washington is defined as having less than two absences (either unexcused or excused) per month, on average throughout the year. During the 2020-2021 school year, data suggests substantial racial disparities in the regular attendance rate—ranging from around 55 percent for Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander students to over 90 percent for Asian students (Figure 12). The regular attendance measure has an equity gap score of 1.7, meaning that the group with the highest rate is about 1.7 times as likely to attend school regularly than the group with the lowest rate.

**Figure 12. Regular Attendance by Race/Ethnicity (2020-2021)**

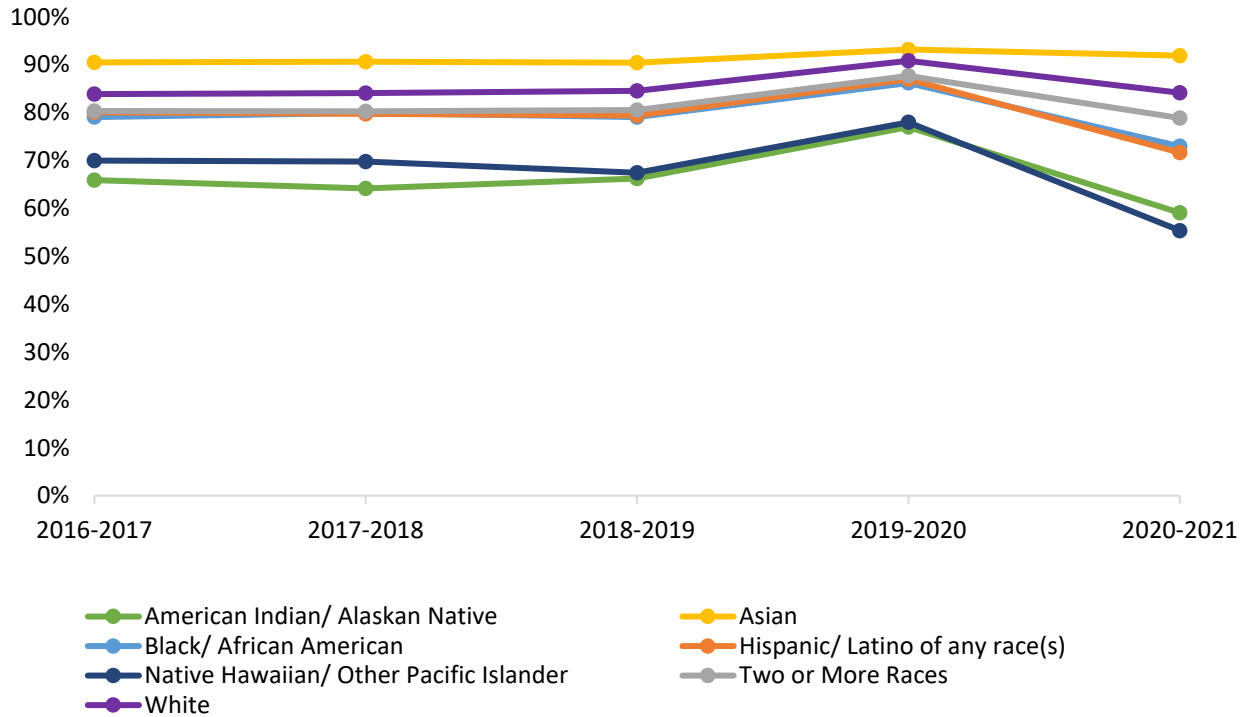


Source: Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Data Portal  
 Prior to the pandemic, trends in regular attendance rates were fairly consistent over time, although racial disparities were still apparent. All racial groups had increased levels of regular attendance in 2019-2020 compared to prior years, but in 2020-2021, rates dropped for all groups and racial disparities grew (Figure 13).

**Data Trend**

Regular attendance broke from previous patterns during the pandemic, including a decline in 2020-2021 that was worse for some racial groups.

**Figure 13. Regular Attendance by Race/Ethnicity Over Time**



Source: Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Data Portal

COVID-19 restrictions on in-person gathering and guidelines on quarantining when exposed or experiencing symptoms meant that many students were learning remotely. Typically, attendance is measured by physical presence at school. Washington added rules to clarify the definition of attendance when students were learning remotely in 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. For synchronous online instruction, students were considered absent when they did not log on to the online class. For asynchronous online instruction, students were considered absent when there was no evidence of a student’s participation in asynchronous learning activities that day.<sup>6</sup>

**COVID-19 Effects**

Attendance rules were adapted during the pandemic, but some racial groups still had more significant declines in regular attendance.

During remote learning, there were additional factors that may have impacted students’ attendance. Technology concerns—including access to appropriate computers and high-speed internet connectivity—may have limited some students’ ability to actively engage in online instruction. Data suggest that access to high-speed internet and computers at home were lower for students of color in

<sup>6</sup> See OSPI Absence Rule Update for 2021-2022: <https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/profpractices/adminresources/rulesprocess/OTS-3114.2.pdf>

Washington (Kwakye et al., 2021a). Initiatives to provide all students with computers and Wi-Fi access may have helped curb this issue. However, it is likely that some disparities in technology access remained a barrier for some students of color. In addition to technology, other factors may have affected students' ability to actively participate in remote learning, such as parents' work schedules, access to quiet space to learn at home, and health and economic issues impacting families.

One issue impeding students' attendance that stood out during the pandemic was heightened mental health concerns. Ensuring students have accessible supports for mental health issues is a key component of an equitable K-12 education system.

## Mental Health

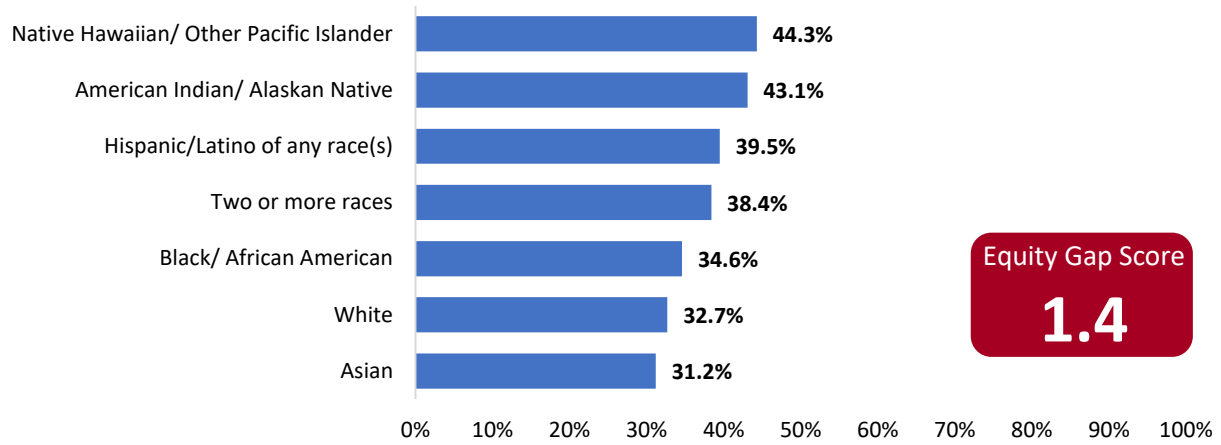
Mental health is a critical issue impacting students' ability to succeed and thrive in school. School climate can have a significant effect on students' mental health. Research also suggests that mental health issues increase the risk of poor academic outcomes that can impact educational attainment (Agnafors et al., 2021). Mental health services are a critical part of broader student supports—such as food access, social support for families, and physical health care—that can help students thrive at school. Washington has invested in multiple programs and strategies to ensure students have access to mental health services at school. However, data indicates that many students in Washington struggle with mental health issues that may have negative effects on their academic performance and wellbeing.

### Data Snapshot

Many students experienced depression in 2021, but survey data indicates a higher prevalence for some racial groups.

The Washington Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) partners with the Department of Health and the Health Care Authority to administer the Healthy Youth Survey to students across the state. The survey is designed to provide information about the prevalence of major adolescent health risk behaviors and guide policy formation and improve programs that serve youth. Results from the 2021 Healthy Youth Survey suggests that there are differences in the prevalence of mental health issues by student race. Data presented in Figure 14 shows survey responses for 8<sup>th</sup> grade students who indicated that they had experienced depression at some point in the past year. Rates for different racial groups ranged from about 31 percent to about 44 percent. This equates to an equity gap score of 1.4—indicating the group with the highest rate of reported depression is 1.4 times the rate of the group with the lowest rate of depression.

**Figure 14. 8th Grade Students: During the past 12 months, did you ever feel so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that you stopped doing some usual activities? (2021)**



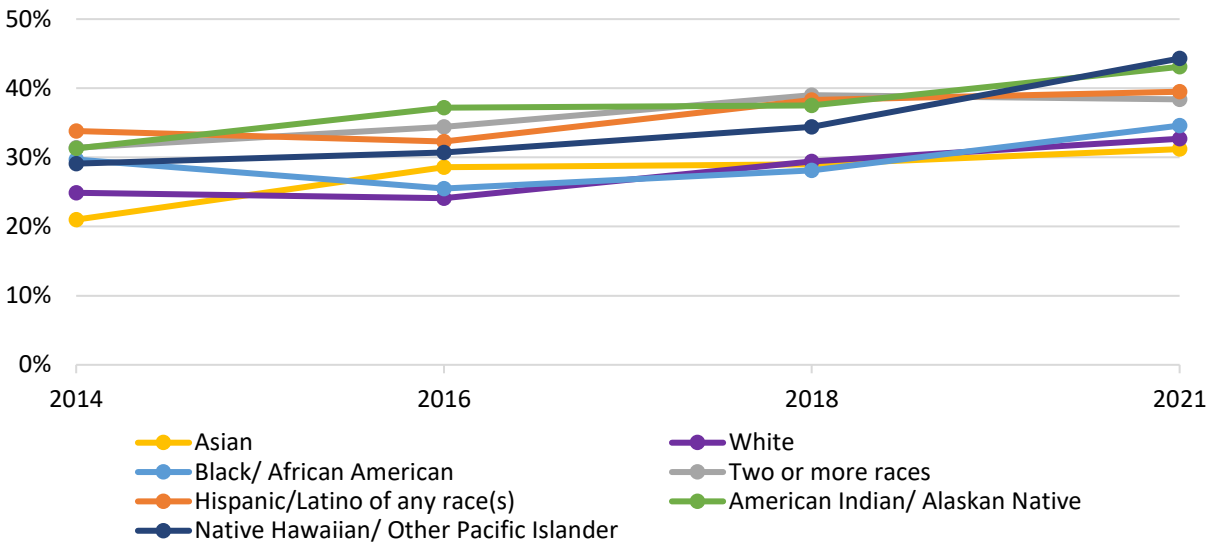
Source: Washington Healthy Youth Survey 2021

### Data Trend

Mental health issues have increased for all racial groups in recent years. However, some groups have consistently had higher prevalence.

Survey data indicates that the prevalence of depression among students has increased for all racial groups over time. Results from the Healthy Youth Survey administered in 2014 showed a range in depression among 8<sup>th</sup> grade students by racial group from a low of about 21 percent to a high of about 34 percent. In 2021, the range was about 33 percent to about 44 percent. Across years, there have been differences by student race with some students of color consistently reporting a higher likelihood of experiencing depression (Figure 15).

**Figure 15. 8th Grade Students Over Time: During the past 12 months, did you ever feel so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that you stopped doing some usual activities?**



Source: Washington Healthy Youth Survey 2014, 2016, 2018, and 2021

State and national evidence suggests that students experienced increased mental health issues during the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, results from a national survey in April 2022 showed that 94 percent of school counselors reported students were showing signs of anxiety or depression more often than before the pandemic (Miller et al., 2022). Data also indicates that the number of mental health-related emergency room visits among children increased dramatically during the pandemic (Leeb et al., 2020). Numerous state and national organizations issued public statements declaring emergencies in youth mental health. For instance, in Washington in March 2021, Governor Inslee declared a statewide youth mental health crisis spurred by evidence of increased mental health issues for students amidst the pandemic and widespread remote learning.<sup>7</sup>

### COVID-19 Effects

Increased mental health issues were reported by students of all races during the pandemic, but some evidence suggests worse outcomes for students of color.

To better understand student mental health in Washington during the pandemic, the COVID-19 Student Survey (CSS) was issued to middle and high school students across Washington State in March 2021. The CSS was developed to specifically capture the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of Washington students during the pandemic. Results indicated significant mental health concerns for survey respondents during the pandemic. More than a third of middle school and high school students were worried about feeling alone, and more than half were worried about falling behind in their learning. About 45 percent of

<sup>7</sup> See Emergency Proclamation of the Governor 21-05 Children and Youth Mental Health Crisis: [https://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/proclamations/2105\\_Children%27s\\_Mental\\_Health\\_Crisis\\_%28t mp%29.pdf](https://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/proclamations/2105_Children%27s_Mental_Health_Crisis_%28t mp%29.pdf)



middle school survey respondents indicated that they felt depressed or sad most days in the past year, and the number was even higher for high school students—about 58 percent. Troublingly, about 13 percent of middle school respondents and 17 percent of high school respondents indicated that they had seriously considered suicide in the past year.

The Washington CSS did not include data disaggregated by race, but national evidence suggests that students of color may have had disproportionate mental health issues during the pandemic as well as the ongoing confrontation of longstanding racial injustices in our society. In their Declaration of a National Emergency in Child and Adolescent Mental Health, the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and Children’s Hospital Association stated that inequities resulting from structural racism have contributed to disproportionate mental health impacts on students of color during the pandemic (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2021). Addressing ongoing inequities and ensuring mental health services are accessible to all Washington students, and students of color in particular, will be fundamental to improving equity in educational outcomes across the K-12 system.

Addressing increased mental health concerns during the pandemic may also help reduce behavioral issues resulting in disciplinary action at school for students.

## Discipline

Schools may issue exclusionary discipline to students in response to a behavioral violation. Exclusionary discipline can cause interruption to students’ academic progress, remove them from their school communities, and label them as deviants. Research suggests that exclusionary discipline measures are linked with a host of negative outcomes. Students who experience exclusionary discipline are more likely to have adverse outcomes in school, such as being held back a grade and dropping out (Fabelo et al., 2011). Research has also linked exclusionary discipline in school with a higher likelihood of incarceration in adulthood (Wolf and Kupchik, 2017).

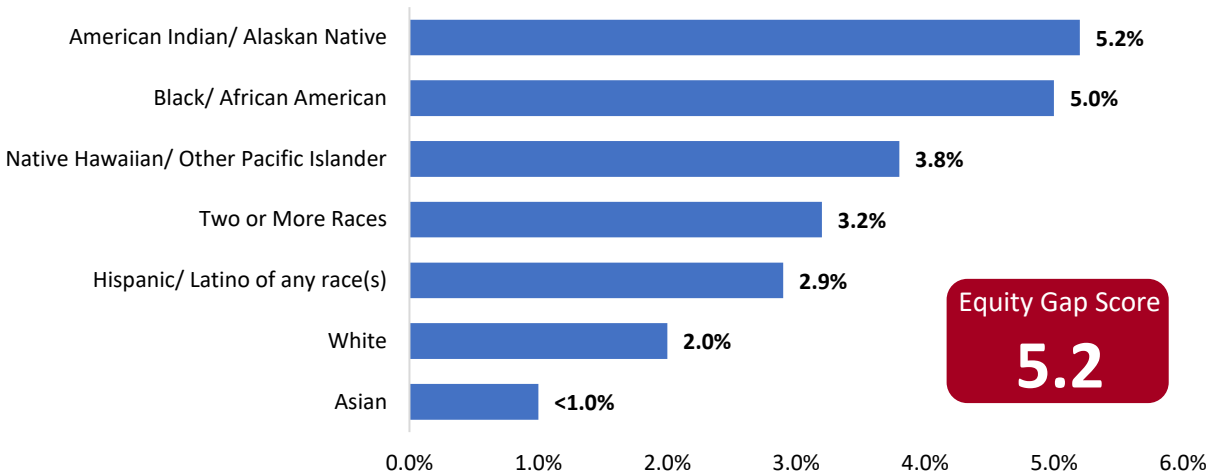
### Data Snapshot

There are substantial racial disparities in the proportion of students who receive exclusionary discipline.

In K-12 schools in Washington, exclusionary discipline may include short-term suspension, long-term suspension, emergency expulsion, and expulsion. Students may receive multiple forms of exclusionary disciplinary actions throughout a given school year. The exclusionary discipline rate is the number of distinct students in each group who received any out-of-school exclusionary discipline action during the school year.

Data indicates that there are racial disparities in exclusionary discipline in Washington. For students in all grades in 2019-2020, the proportion of each racial group that received an exclusionary discipline action ranged from less than one percent to more than five percent. This equates to an equity gap score of more than five, meaning the exclusionary discipline rate is more than five times higher for the group with the highest rate than the group with the lowest (Figure 16).

**Figure 16. Exclusionary Discipline Rate by Race/Ethnicity (2019-2020)**



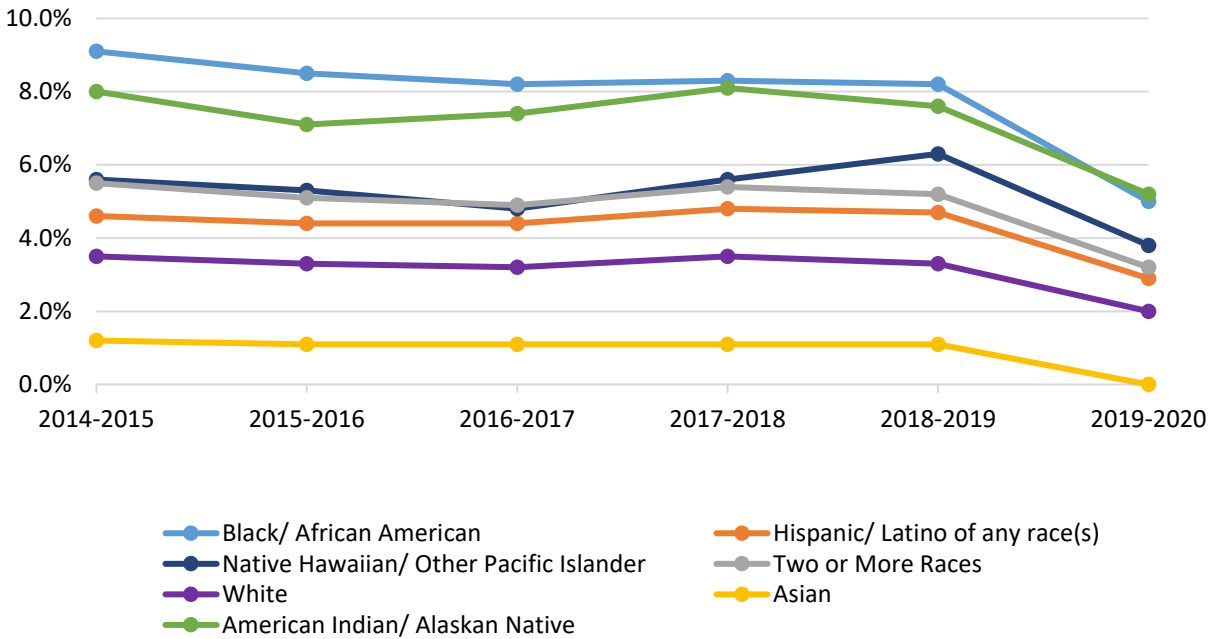
Source: Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Data Portal

### Data Trend

There have been racial disparities in exclusionary discipline over time, but all students saw declines during the 2019-2020 academic year.

Racial disparities in exclusionary discipline have persisted over time. However, the proportion of students receiving exclusionary discipline was lower in the 2019-2020 academic year than prior years for all racial groups. That shift in the trend corresponds with the COVID-19 crisis and may be a reflection of changes in policies and remote learning during the pandemic. However, racial disparities in this area have been persistent, and some students of color are still more likely to receive exclusionary discipline than their peers (Figure 17).

**Figure 17. Exclusionary Discipline Rate by Race/Ethnicity Over Time**



Source: Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Data Portal

### COVID-19 Effects

The decline in exclusionary discipline for all racial groups in 2019-2020 may be artificially caused by the onset of remote learning during the pandemic. Additional resources to address mental health and behavioral issues may be necessary in the future.

The decline in exclusionary discipline that occurred in the 2019-2020 school year may be due to the onset of the pandemic and school closures in the spring of 2020. Despite declines for all groups, racial disparities were still evident. With most students in the state learning remotely for the spring of 2020 and into the 2020-2021 school year, it is possible that the exclusionary discipline rates continued to shrink. However, the likely decline of the exclusionary disciplinary rate is not necessarily indicative of changing trends, but rather a reaction to students learning from home. Research has pointed to remote learning as isolating and potentially harmful to students' mental health, which could lead to behavioral issues down the road and may require additional services and resources to address in the

future (Preston and Butrymowicz, 2021). For instance, a national survey conducted in April 2022 found that 72 percent of school counselors reported that students were breaking classroom rules more often than before the pandemic and 88 percent of school counselors reported that students were having more trouble with emotional regulation (Miller et al., 2022). The pandemic provides a unique opportunity to reassess exclusionary discipline and implement more constructive means of behavioral management to ensure more equitable practices that do not result in racial inequities.

In addition to behavioral concerns, academic performance at critical junctures in students' educational journeys, such as the transition to ninth grade, can impact their likelihood of reaching high school graduation.

## Ninth Grade on Track

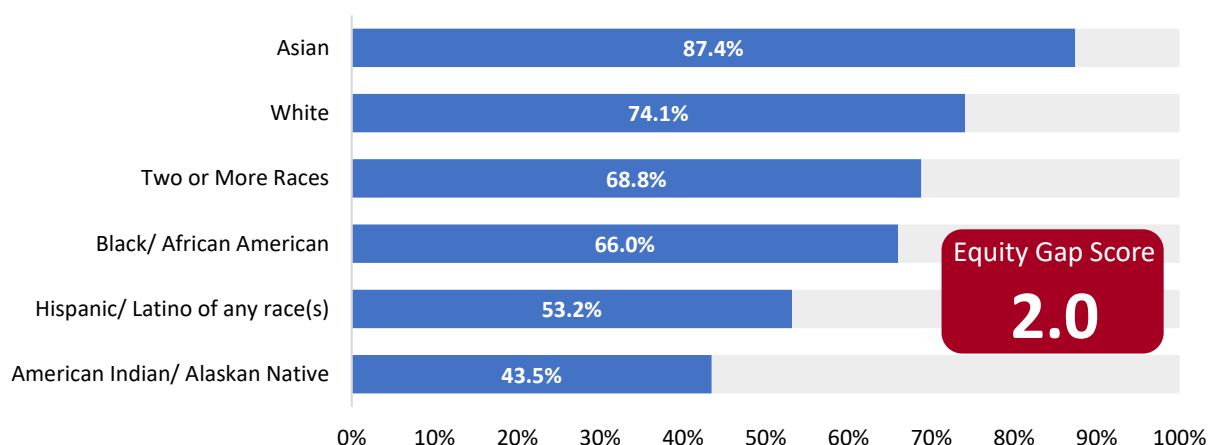
Ninth grade marks the transition from middle to high school, which can present challenges for students as they navigate increasingly difficult academic coursework and social changes. Student performance in ninth grade has been shown to be a strong predictor of high school graduation—research shows that students who end ninth grade on track are nearly four times as likely to graduate from high school as their peers who are not on track (Allensworth and Easton, 2005). In Washington, ninth grade students are considered “on track” if they pass all of the credits they attempt that year.

### Data Snapshot

There are considerable disparities in the proportion of students in each racial group who are on track in ninth grade.

In the 2020-2021 academic year, there were significant racial disparities in the proportion of students who were on track in ninth grade (Figure 18). The racial equity gap score was 2.0, indicating that the group with the highest performance was twice as likely to be on track in ninth grade than the group with the lowest performance.

Figure 18. Ninth Grade on Track by Race/Ethnicity (2020-2021)



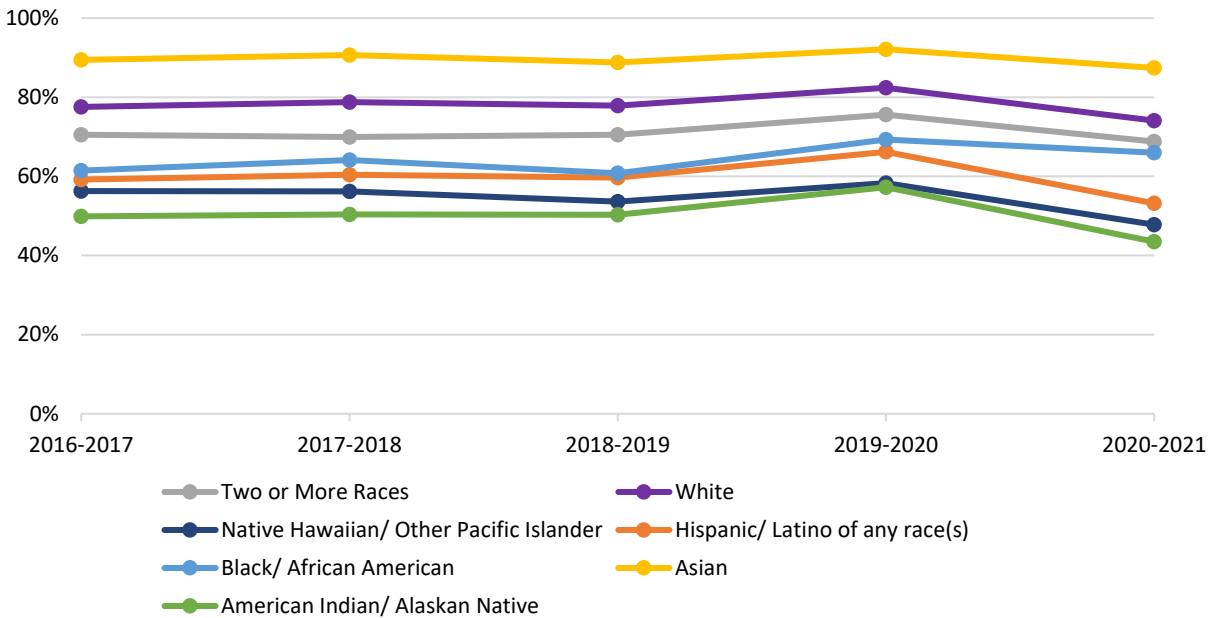
Source: Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Data Portal

### Data Trend

Racial disparities in ninth grade on track have remained consistent over the past five years, despite fluctuations for all racial groups during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Racial disparities in the proportion of students who were on track in ninth grade were fairly consistent over time prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. All racial groups experienced an increase in the proportion of students who were on track in ninth grade in 2019-2020, followed by declines for all groups in 2020-2021 (Figure 19). This trend coincides with changes in grading rules discussed further in the Course Outcomes section below. Despite these fluctuations, the racial disparities have remained consistent over time.

**Figure 19. Ninth Grade on Track by Race/Ethnicity Over Time**



Source: Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Data Portal

### COVID-19 Effects

The proportion of students who were on track in ninth grade declined for all racial groups during the pandemic.

Data indicates that fewer ninth grade students of all races were on track in 2020-2021 than the previous year. It's likely that some of the decline in ninth grade on track was due to the removal of special COVID-19 grading policies regarding failing or no credit grades. The declines in ninth grade on track may also be a consequence of the pandemic's impact on learning. The pandemic may be especially difficult for students as they transition from middle to high school and may have long-term impacts on their ability to succeed in high school and beyond. Continuing to provide appropriate supports for students who have been impacted by the disruptions to learning and school

environment caused by the pandemic will continue to be crucial through the aftermath of the pandemic. Also, as evidence suggests that students of color have confronted disproportionate challenges during the pandemic, it will be important to proactively address racial inequities in order to improve racial disparities that have persisted over time.

Providing opportunities for all students, and especially students of color, to progress academically and participate in advanced learning like dual credit courses can help increase their chances of success in high school and beyond.

## Dual Credit

Dual credit coursework allows students to fulfill high school requirements while simultaneously earning college credit, saving students time and money in working towards a postsecondary credential. Research suggests that students who participate in dual credit coursework are more likely to enroll and persist in postsecondary education, accumulate more credits, and earn a higher GPA (CCRC, 2012). The four types of dual credit courses offered to Washington high school students include exam-based (such as Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and Cambridge), College in the High School (CiHS), Running Start, and Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses. Not all schools offer all types of dual credit courses.

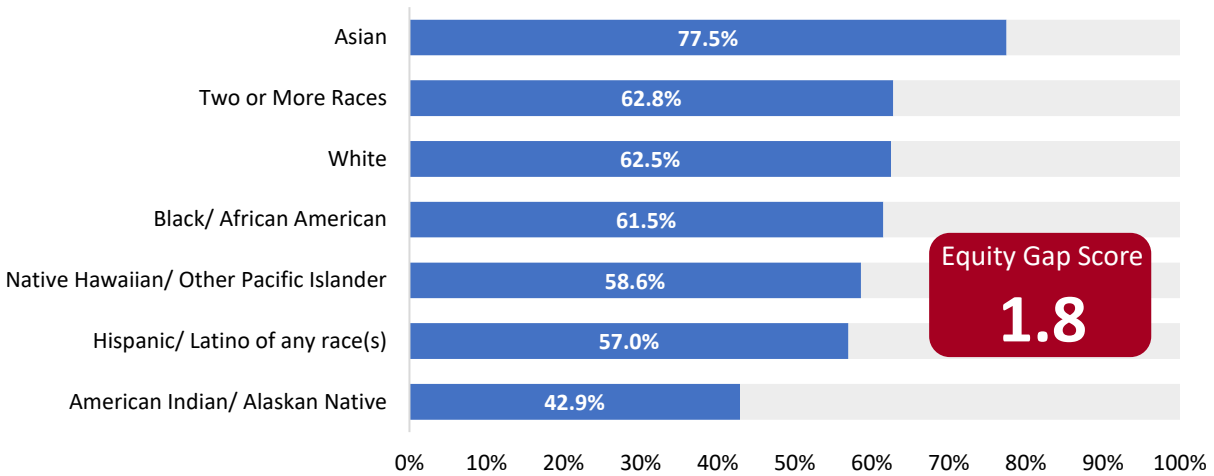
### Data Snapshot

There are racial disparities in dual credit participation, and some student groups are less likely to participate and earn credits that could help increase their likelihood of postsecondary enrollment and success.

Despite the documented benefits, there are substantial racial disparities in the proportion of students who participate in dual credit courses. In the 2020-2021 academic year, the range of participation in any dual credit coursework ranged from 43 percent to nearly 78 percent for different racial groups. This equates to an equity gap score of 1.8, indicating that the group with the highest proportion is almost twice as likely to enroll in a dual credit course than the group with the lowest proportion (Figure 20).

For example, Running Start is a particular type of dual credit that allows Washington high school juniors and seniors to take classes at community college without paying tuition. Students receive both high school and college credit for these courses, which can accelerate their progress through the postsecondary education system. In the 2020-2021 academic year, data indicates that some racial groups were more likely to participate in Running Start—14 percent of Asian students and 11 percent of White students participated, compared to 9 percent of Black/African American and multi-racial students, 6 percent of Hispanic/Latino students, 5 percent of American Indian/Alaskan Native students, and 4 percent of Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander students (OSPI Data Portal). The racial disparities in Running Start participation are even larger than in dual credit overall. While the equity gap score for dual credit participation overall is 1.8, the equity gap score for Running Start in particular equates to 3.5, suggesting that students in some racial groups are more than three times as likely to participate in the Running Start program.

**Figure 20. Dual Credit Participation by Race/Ethnicity (2020-2021)**



Source: Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Data Portal

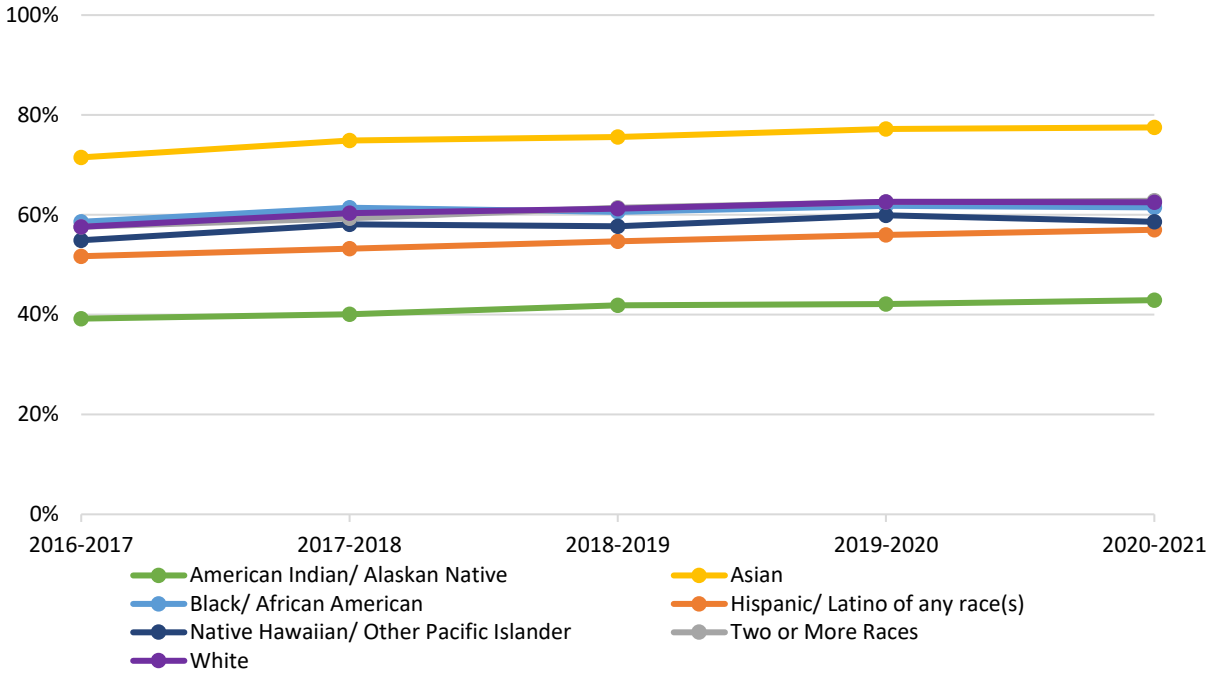
### Data Trend

Although dual credit participation has increased for all groups in recent years, there are still substantial racial disparities.

Dual credit participation has increased for all racial groups over the past several years. However, significant racial disparities in participation have remained consistent over time. Differences in participation rates may be due to disparities in the availability of dual credit courses at students' schools in addition to individual choices and school guidance to encourage participation.<sup>8</sup> The data also indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic did not have a notable impact on dual credit participation, but racial inequities remain (Figure 21).

<sup>8</sup> WSAC's Dual Credit Task Force has identified several recommendations to improve access and equity in dual credit coursework. See <https://wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2021-12-Dual-Credit-Legislative-Report.pdf>

**Figure 21. Dual Credit Participation by Race/Ethnicity Over Time**



Source: Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Data Portal

### COVID-19 Effects

Unlike most measures, dual credit participation remained steady during the pandemic for all racial groups.

Data indicate that the pandemic did not have a significant impact on dual credit participation overall or for any particular racial group. This is somewhat of an anomaly as many other K-12 measures saw disruptions in trends during the pandemic. Ensuring continuous and expanded access to dual credit opportunities for all students, and especially those who have been historically underrepresented in dual credit courses such as students of color, is an important strategy for improving educational outcomes and ensuring equitable opportunities for education and training after high school.



## Course Outcomes

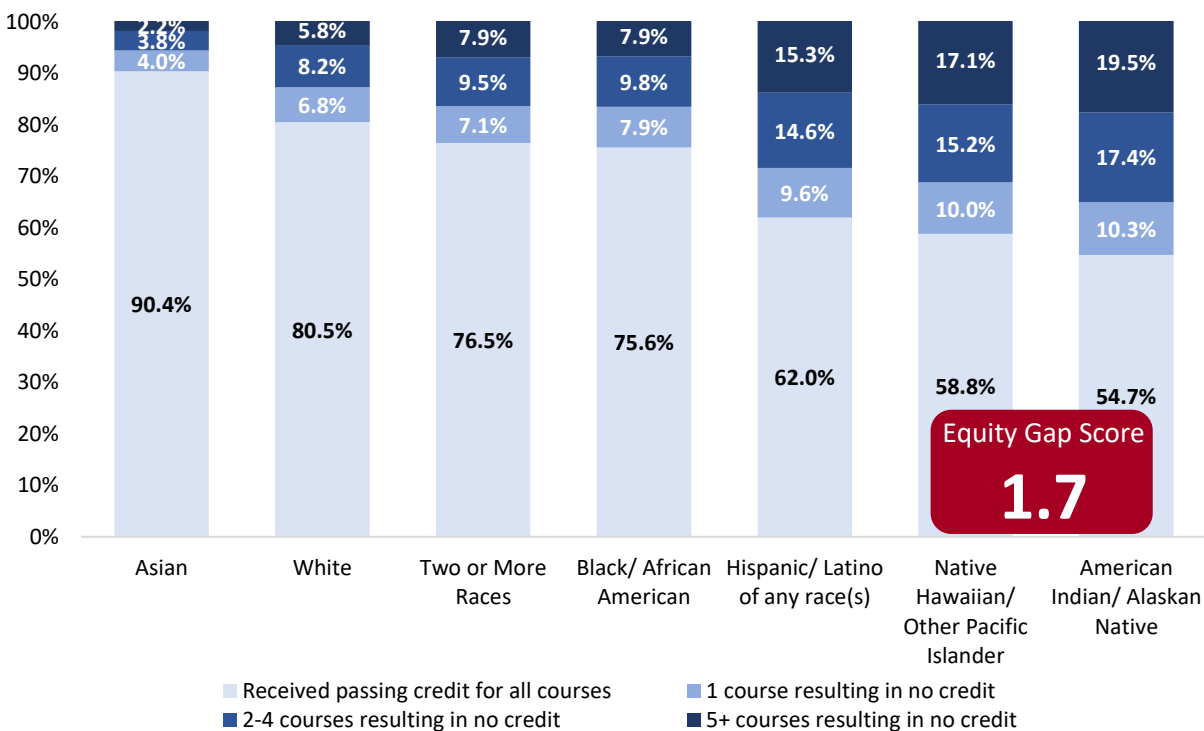
Course outcomes can provide a picture of high school students' academic performance throughout the year. Students who receive an incomplete or failing grade do not receive credit for a course, which could impact their eligibility for high school graduation. Despite opportunities to make up credits, some research has raised concern about the long-term impacts associated with credit recovery. For instance, a study of students who used online courses to recover credits in high school showed that they had a lower likelihood of enrolling in four-year higher education institutions than their peers (Heinrich and Darling-Aduana, 2020). Credit recovery for failed courses may affect future outcomes in postsecondary education and labor market opportunities.

### Data Snapshot

There are substantial racial disparities in the proportion of high school students in each racial group who receive passing credit for all courses.

In the 2020-2021 school year, just 76 percent of high school students in Washington overall received credit for all the courses they took. In other words, nearly one-quarter of high school students in the state did not receive credit for at least one of their courses. There were also substantial disparities by race—ranging from just over half of students receiving passing credit for all their courses to over 90 percent. This equates to a 1.7 equity gap score, which means the group with the highest proportion of students passing all their courses had a rate that was almost twice as high as the group with the lowest proportion (Figure 22). Figure 22 shows that some racial groups also have a higher proportion of students not receiving credit for more than one course, which could make it even more difficult for students to recover credits and graduate high school on time.

**Figure 22. Course Outcomes by Race/Ethnicity (2020-2021)**



Source: Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Data Portal

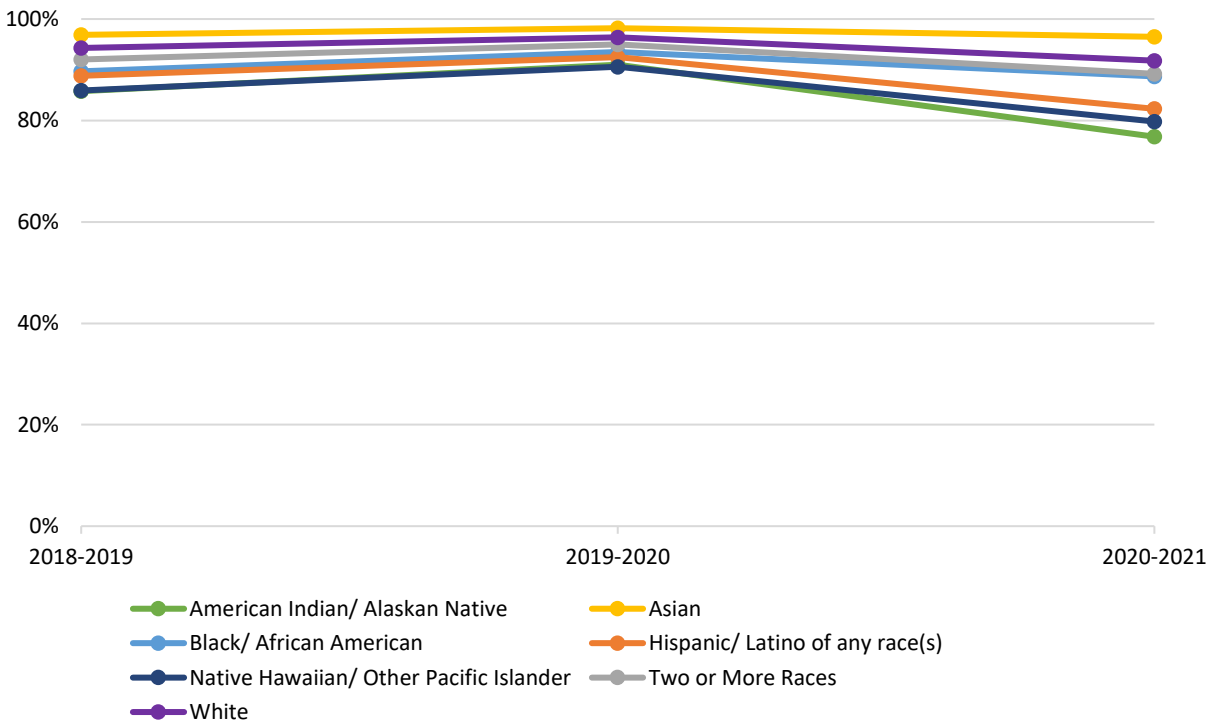
## Data Trend

Racial disparities in the proportion of students receiving passing credit for all their courses grew larger in 2020-2021 after rules from the onset of remote learning during COVID-19 changed.

Course outcome data in Washington has only been published for the past several years to show the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on student learning and academic outcomes. Data indicate that the proportion of students receiving passing credit for all their courses increased for all racial groups in 2019-2020, possibly due to pandemic rules that limited schools' ability to give non-passing grades during the latter part of the year at the onset of school closures during the pandemic. During that year, racial disparities also decreased compared to the previous year, however some differences still remained. In the 2020-2021 school year, grading rules were amended again and all groups saw declines in the proportion of students receiving passing

credit for all their courses. However, the decline from the previous year was much steeper for some racial groups. This trend led to widening racial disparities (Figure 23).

**Figure 23. Proportion of Students Receiving Passing Credit for All Courses by Race/Ethnicity Over Time**



Source: Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Data Portal

The state issued guidance and emergency rules around grading for high school students at the onset of the pandemic in Spring 2020 to provide flexibility and understanding during the challenging shift to remote learning.<sup>9</sup> Guidance encouraged schools to “do no harm” and provide all students with opportunities to improve their grades after school closures on March 17, 2020. Schools were directed not to issue “pass,” “fail,” or “no credit” grades. They could issue “incomplete” grades, however the state encouraged schools to provide numerous opportunities to re-engage in learning for incomplete courses (e.g., summer school, independent study, competency-based courses, etc.) (Miller et al., 2020). The guidance was updated for the 2020-2021 academic year when many schools remained in remote learning. The updated guidance shifted to allow “fail” and “no credit” grades in addition to “incomplete,” but continued to encourage schools to offer multiple ways for students to rectify their grades.

### COVID-19 Effects

Emergency rules decreased “no credit” grades for all racial groups at the onset of the pandemic, but racial disparities widened in 2020-2021.

As the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to impact learning, students who are at risk of failing a course may need additional supports. Providing additional, targeted academic supports may help address racial inequities and help more students reach high school graduation.

## Graduation

The state aspires to a goal that all adults in Washington have a high school diploma or equivalent as part of the statewide educational attainment goal. Students who graduate high school are able to move on to college and career opportunities that are more likely to provide a higher income and standard of living. However, academic and personal hurdles still prohibit many students from reaching high school graduation in four years, and persistent racial inequities in high school graduation rates mean some groups are further from the statewide educational attainment goal.

### Data Snapshot

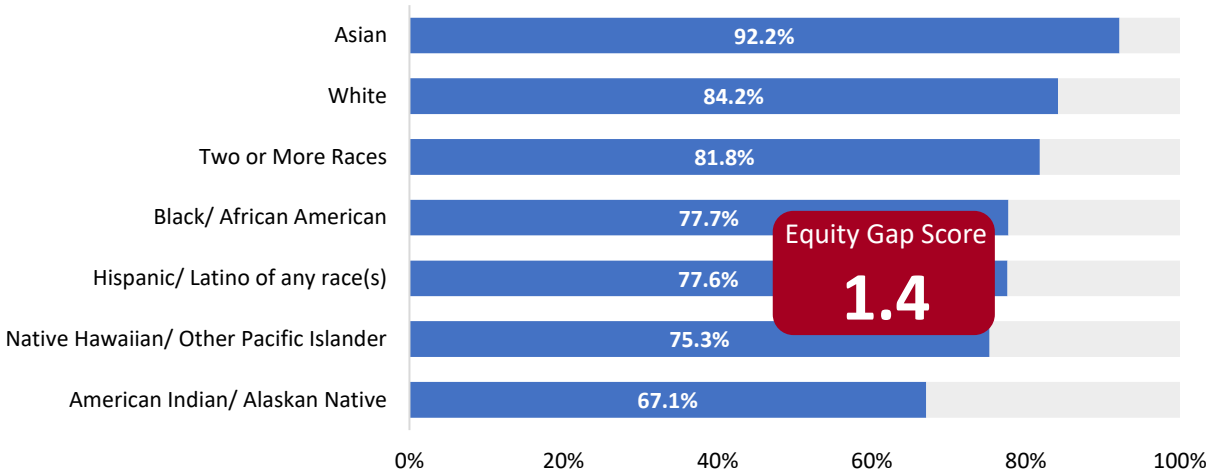
Racial disparities were evident in four-year high school graduation rates in 2020-2021.

Graduation rates presented in this section show the proportion of students in a ninth-grade cohort who graduate in four years. Students who transfer in or out of a school are added or removed from the cohort, students who stop attending are counted as “dropped out” (see Dropout section), and students who are still attending are considered “continuing” (OSPI Report Card). The overall graduation rate for Washington students in 2020-2021 was about 83 percent. However, the equity gap score was 1.4, meaning the group with the highest graduation rate had a rate that was nearly one and a half times that of the group with the lowest graduation rate. The graduation rate for specific racial groups ranged from 67 to 92 percent (Figure 24).

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<sup>9</sup> Governor Inslee directed all K-12 schools to close in March 2020 to limit the spread of COVID-19 and issued another emergency proclamation to reopen schools in March 2021. See Emergency Proclamation of the Governor 21-05: [https://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/proclamations/21-05\\_Children%27s\\_Mental\\_Health\\_Crisis\\_%28tmp%29.pdf?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=govdelivery](https://www.governor.wa.gov/sites/default/files/proclamations/21-05_Children%27s_Mental_Health_Crisis_%28tmp%29.pdf?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery)

**Figure 24. Four-Year High School Graduation Rate by Race/Ethnicity (2020-2021)**



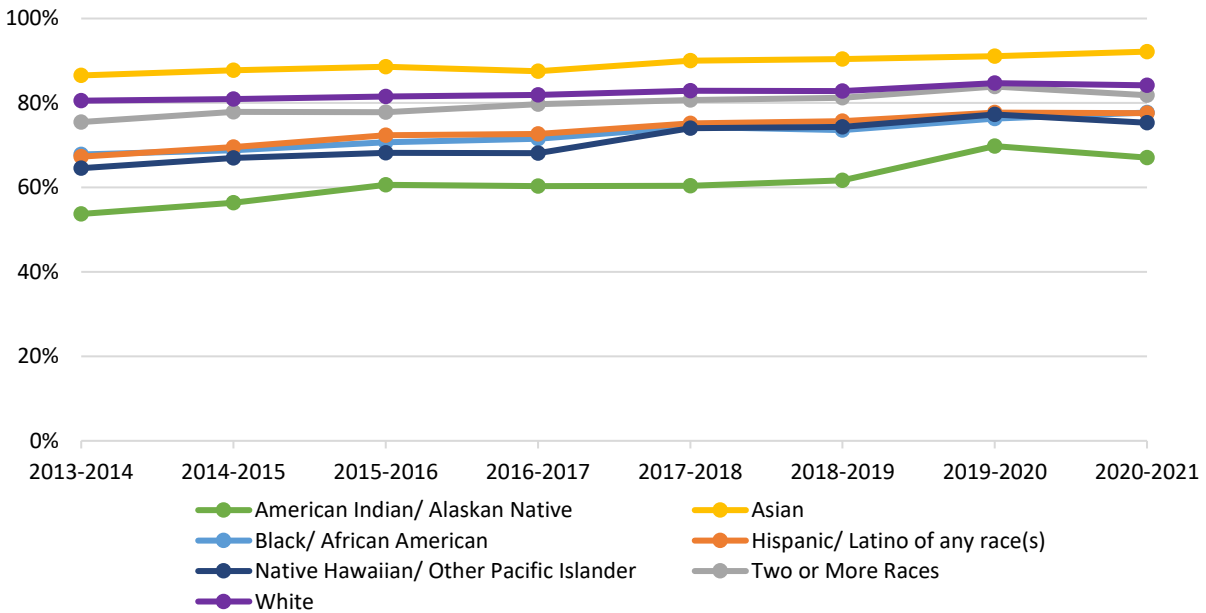
Source: Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Data Portal

**Data Trend**

High school graduation rates have increased for all racial groups, but racial disparities have stayed fairly consistent.

Graduation rates for Washington students of all races have steadily increased over the past several years (Figure 25). At the same time, racial disparities have decreased—but only marginally. However, in the 2020-2021 academic year, most racial groups saw slight declines in graduation rates compared to the prior year. This may be due to increased challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Figure 25. Four-Year High School Graduation Rate by Race/Ethnicity Over Time**



Source: Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Data Portal

During the pandemic, the State Board of Education adopted rules for an emergency waiver program to allow K-12 education entities flexibility to waive certain graduation requirements on an individual student basis. The waiver program is considered a “last resort” to help students graduate despite the unique challenges brought on by the pandemic, and school districts must first make a good faith effort to help students meet all graduation requirements. The waiver program allowed schools to excuse up to two required credits and graduation pathway requirements for students graduating in 2020 through 2022. The Board has since adopted permanent rules to extend the waiver to the class of 2023 and allow one credit to be waived for students in the class of 2024 (SBE, 2022).

### COVID-19 Effects

Emergency waivers helped maintain graduation rates at the onset of the pandemic, but there were racial disparities in usage that may have long-term implications for students.

Data for the class of 2021 indicates that more than 9,000 students across the state were granted a credit waiver and/or pathway waiver—accounting for more than 10 percent of the graduating cohort (nearly 85,000 students). Students who were Asian or White more often met the credit and graduation pathway requirements without the use of a waiver compared to their peers who were another race. Table 2 indicates the percent of waiver grantees next to the percent of the graduating cohort for the class of 2021. White and Asian students were underrepresented in the proportion of waiver grantees compared to their proportion of the graduation cohort, whereas Hispanic/Latino of any race(s), Black/African American, Native American/Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, and students of two or more races were overrepresented.<sup>10</sup>

**Table 2. Racial Distribution of Graduation Requirement Emergency Waiver Grantees Compared to Graduating Cohort, Class of 2021**

Race	Proportion of Waiver Grantees (Class of 2021)	Proportion of Graduates (Class of 2021)	Waiver Usage
American Indian/Alaskan Native	1.8%	1.4%	Higher usage
Asian	5.2%	8.3%	Lower usage
Black/African American	6.1%	4.5%	Higher usage
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	32.2%	22.9%	Higher usage
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	1.9%	1.2%	Higher usage
White	45.1%	54.2%	Lower usage
Two or More Races	7.7%	7.4%	Higher usage
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	

Source: Washington State Board of Education (2022)

<sup>10</sup> See Washington State Board of Education High School Graduation Requirements Emergency Waiver Program: Graduation Class of 2021 Final Report to the Legislature: [https://www.sbe.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/documents/Waivers/2021%20Graduation%20Waiver%20Leg%20Report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.sbe.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/documents/Waivers/2021%20Graduation%20Waiver%20Leg%20Report_FINAL.pdf)

Emergency graduation waivers may have helped provide some students with a last resort way to graduate from high school during the heightened challenges of the pandemic. However, some students drop out before they reach graduation.

## Dropout

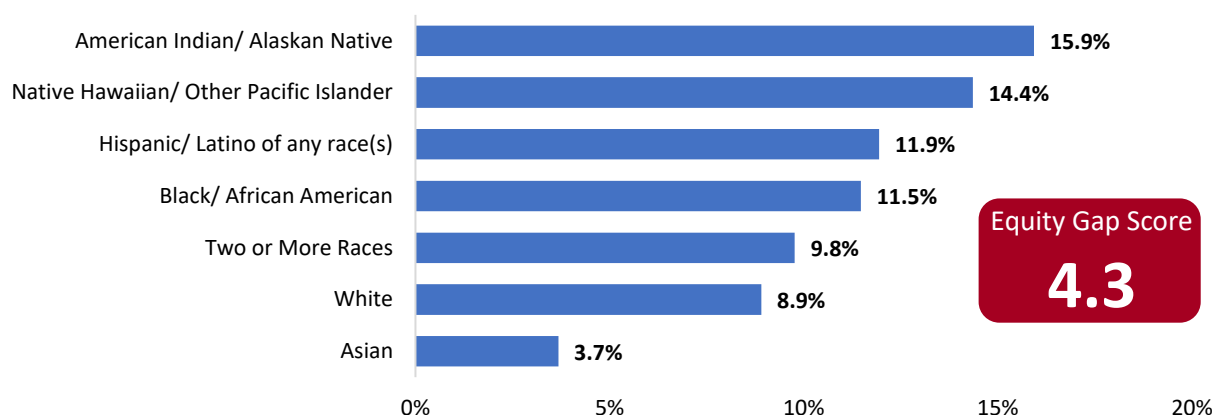
Unfortunately, a sizeable number of students in Washington drop out of high school before reaching graduation. Research suggests that dropping out of high school is related to a range of negative individual outcomes—including lower earnings and a higher likelihood of unemployment in adulthood, worse health, and higher rates of criminal activity and incarceration. Additionally, dropping out of high school is linked to poorer outcomes for society, including a higher reliance on state welfare programs and lower tax contributions (MacFarland et al., 2020). Reducing the number of students who drop out of high school can also help improve the state’s progress towards its educational attainment goals, including increasing the number of high school diplomas awarded and potential postsecondary credentials attained.

### Data Snapshot

Dropout rates in the 2020-2021 academic year indicate significant racial disparities.

The dropout rate in 2020-2021 ranged from less than 4 percent to nearly 16 percent by race (Figure 26). This substantial range is equal to a 4.3 equity gap score—meaning the rate for group with the highest dropout rate is more than four times the rate of the lowest group. This difference suggests significant racial disparities.

**Figure 26. Dropout Rate by Race/Ethnicity (2020-2021)**



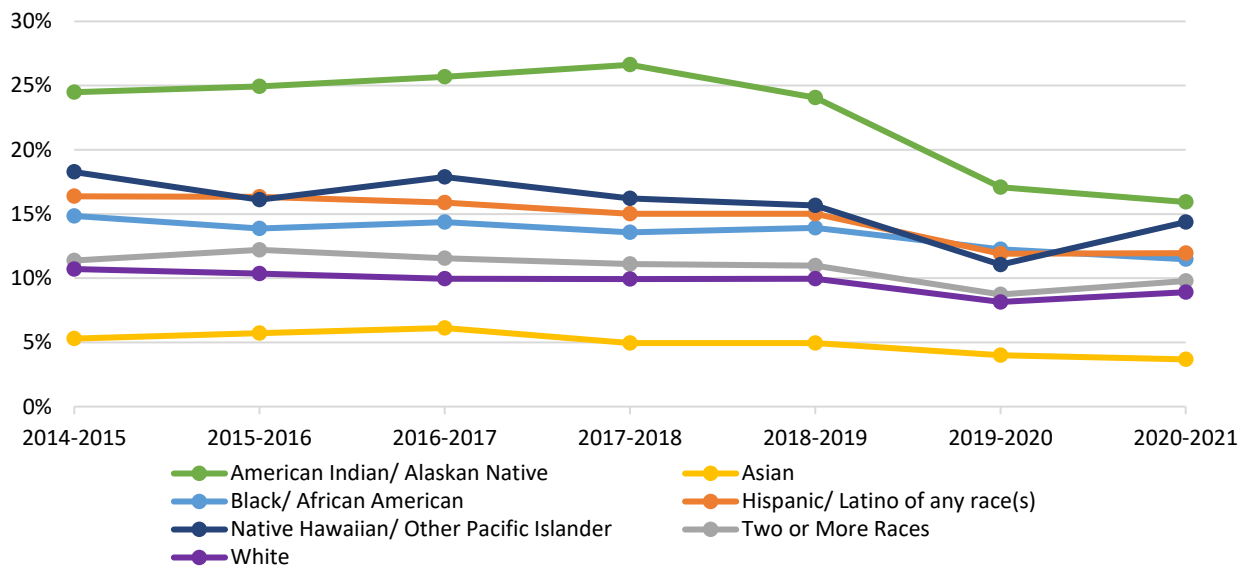
Source: Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Data Portal

## Data Trend

High school dropout rates have declined for all groups over the past several years, but racial disparities have persisted. Several groups saw an increase in dropout rates during the pandemic.

All racial groups have seen declines in dropout rates over time. In the 2014-2015 school year, the dropout rate for different racial groups ranged from a low of 5 percent to a high of nearly 25 percent. By the 2020-2021 school year, the range was smaller— from 4 percent to 16 percent. These declines have led some decreased racial differences, however clear disparities have persisted over time. Several racial groups saw upticks in dropouts in 2020-2021 compared to 2019-2020 (Figure 27).

Figure 27. Dropout Rate by Race/Ethnicity Over Time



Source: Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Data Portal

## COVID-19 Effects

So far, the pandemic has not had a significant impact on the dropout rate, however some racial groups saw slight increases from the prior year.

Despite speculation that the COVID-19 pandemic would have a profound impact on high school graduation and dropout rates, the data suggests that has largely not been the case. This may be in part due to relaxed requirements for high school graduation discussed in the Graduation section above. However, several racial groups did experience slight increases in the dropout rates in the 2020-2021 school year, coinciding with ongoing remote learning and challenges brought on by the pandemic. The long-term impact of the pandemic may also cause increased dropout rates and racial disparities in the future.

Providing proactive supports to help these students reach high school graduation and enroll in postsecondary programs should continue to be a top priority for the state.

## Direct Postsecondary Enrollment

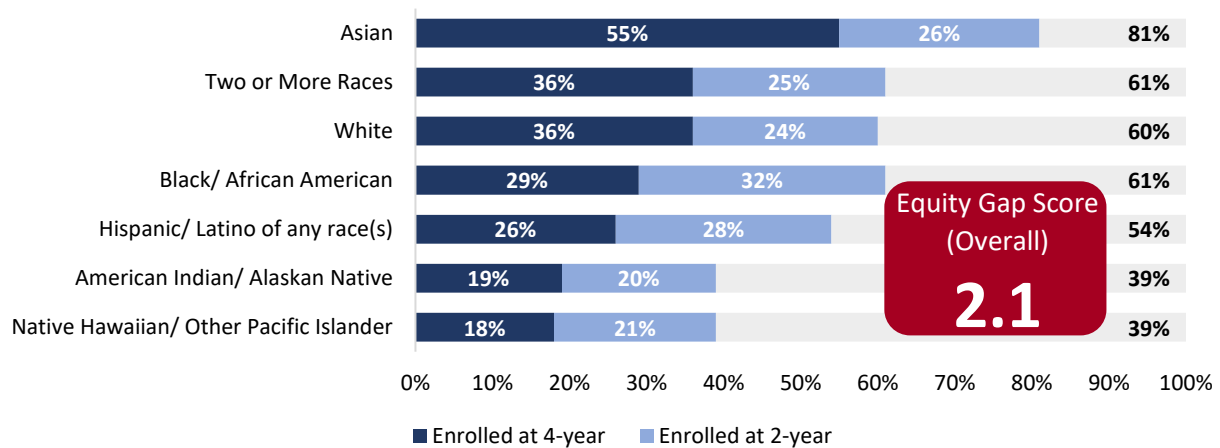
Students who delay college enrollment after high school graduation may lose academic momentum, and may be faced with additional competing priorities, making a successful transition to postsecondary education and training more challenging. Some research indicates that students who delay enrollment have lower rates of degree completion (Bozick & DeLuca, 2005). Direct postsecondary enrollment may increase postsecondary persistence and completion which can help improve our state’s progress towards its educational attainment goal.

### Data Snapshot

There are significant racial disparities in direct postsecondary enrollment, most notably for enrollment at 4-year institutions.

Overall, approximately 60 percent of Washington high school graduates went on to postsecondary education programs within a year of graduating high school in 2019. However, for some racial groups, the direct enrollment rate was considerably lower and there was an equity gap score of more than two (Figure 28). The equity gap score suggests that the group with the highest proportion of students enrolling in any postsecondary education program within one year of high school graduation has a rate that is more than twice as high as the group with the lowest direct enrollment rate. Looking specifically at direct enrollment at 4-year institutions, racial disparities are even more pronounced. The group with the highest proportion of students enrolling at 4-year institutions within one year of high school graduation has a rate that is more than three times as high as the group with the lowest direct enrollment rate at 4-year institutions.

**Figure 28. Direct Postsecondary Enrollment Rate by Race/Ethnicity (2019)**



Source: Washington Education Research and Data Center High School Graduate Outcomes Dashboard

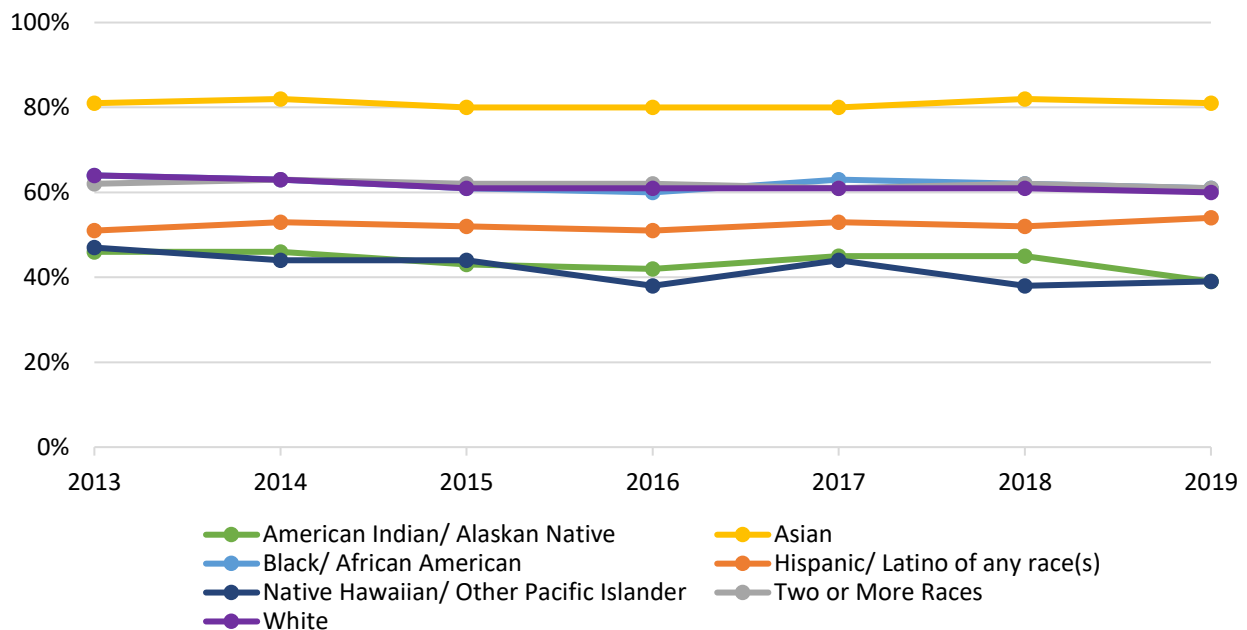


## Data Trend

Direct postsecondary enrollment trends have remained fairly steady over time, and racial disparities have been consistent.

Direct postsecondary enrollment trends have stayed fairly level for all racial groups, and racial disparities have also been consistent over time (Figure 29). Between 2013 and 2019, most racial groups saw steady or slightly declining overall postsecondary enrollment rates, with the exception of Hispanic/Latino students of any race(s) who experienced marginal gains. Examination of more detailed data reveals that gains for Hispanic students is driven by a higher proportion enrolling at 4-year institutions (from 19 percent in 2013 to 26 percent in 2019), despite minor declines in direct enrollment at 2-year institutions (from 32 percent in 2013 to 28 percent in 2019).

Figure 29. Direct Postsecondary Enrollment Rate by Race/Ethnicity Over Time



Source: Washington Education Research and Data Center High School Graduate Outcomes Dashboard

## COVID-19 Effects

Washington data is not yet available for direct postsecondary enrollment during the pandemic, but national data indicate declines that were most significant for students of color.

Washington data on direct postsecondary enrollment during the COVID-19 pandemic is not yet available. However, national data indicate that there have been declines in the proportion of high school graduates nationally who enrolled directly in postsecondary education during the pandemic (NSC, 2021). National data also indicate that students from schools with a higher proportion of students of color, or “high-minority schools,” were even less likely to directly enroll in postsecondary education than students from

schools with a lower proportion of students of color.<sup>11</sup> For the graduating class of 2020, at the onset of the pandemic, just over half of public school students (52 percent) from high-minority high schools enrolled in postsecondary education in the first fall after graduation, compared to nearly two-thirds of students (64 percent) from low-minority high schools. And despite speculation at the onset of the pandemic that many students would take a gap year and enroll the following year, data indicates that national gap year enrollment (one year after the first fall following high school graduation) decreased slightly from previous years. Only a small proportion of students in the class of 2020 who had not enrolled in postsecondary programs by the fall of 2020 went on to enroll by the fall of 2021. The gap year enrollment rate was even lower for students who attended high-minority high schools than those who attended low-minority high schools (NSC, 2021).

National data suggests that states may see fewer students enrolling in postsecondary programs directly from high school in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Washington direct enrollment data during the pandemic is not yet available. However, overall undergraduate enrollment in Washington was down by nearly 14 percent in the fall of 2020 compared to the prior year and declines were even larger for some students of color (Kwakye et al., 2021b). Declining enrollment could have long-term implications for our state’s economic future. Ongoing challenges and racial disparities in K-12 educational outcomes may also contribute to poor direct postsecondary enrollment trends that further exacerbate racial inequities in our state. Implementing policies and programs to help minimize the barriers that students face in enrolling in postsecondary programs should continue to be an important priority for educational leaders in Washington State.

## Current and Emerging Efforts: What is Washington Doing to Address Racial Inequities in K-12 Education?

Research suggests that there are significant, longstanding racial inequities in the K-12 education system. Washington education data indicate that disparities emerge as early as kindergarten and persist throughout students’ educational journeys—resulting in lower high school graduation rates and postsecondary education transitions for some racial groups. In some cases, racial inequities in Washington were made worse during the COVID-19 pandemic. These patterns may contribute to larger inequities in our society, including disparate labor market opportunities and a significant racial wealth gap that perpetuates unequal opportunities for future generations. Addressing these deeply rooted racial inequities will require deliberate action to advance outcomes for students furthest from educational equity in the K-12 system.

The state has in place a number of approaches that aim to address opportunity gaps across many educational measures. For instance, the Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) houses the **Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee (EOGOAC)** that was created by the state legislature in 2009. The committee recommends policies and strategies to support outreach efforts, improve cultural competency and teacher diversity, expand programs that can

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<sup>11</sup> “High minority schools” are defined as those schools where at least 40 percent of students are Black or Hispanic (NSC, 2021).

help close equity gaps, and identify data needed to monitor progress.<sup>12</sup> Committee recommendations in the 2022 annual report include diversifying school board leadership, incorporating ethnic studies content into K-12 curriculum, conducting an updated study of opportunity gaps, recruiting and retaining educators of color, increasing social emotional learning resources, and more.

The **Washington State Board of Education (SBE)** also conducts efforts aimed at narrowing opportunity gaps. An example is SBE's Mastery-based Learning Work Group 2021 report, which proposed a mastery-based "Profile of a Graduate" as an alternative route to receiving a high school diploma.<sup>13</sup> Mastery-based learning is an emerging strategy intended to reduce barriers to educational success by recognizing varying methods of demonstrating proficiency and valuing the skills that students bring to their education from their diverse cultures. As this strategy emerges in the state, it will be important to look at evidence from research on how mastery-based learning can produce more equitable student outcomes.

In addition to the work by the EOGOAC and SBE, there are also a number of state initiatives that are meant to support students across various educational measures. A few selected state initiatives are described below.

One statewide program, the **Washington Reading Corps**, aims to improve reading abilities of kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade students. The program utilizes research-based tutoring strategies to engage with struggling readers and offer literacy events for students and families. Priority schools selected to receive support from the Washington Reading Corps have a high free or reduced-priced lunch population and have been identified as needing additional support. The program could also address racial disparities in literacy by targeting schools with high populations of students of color.<sup>14</sup>

During the 2022 legislative session, the state legislature passed a bill directing the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction to **categorize mental health reasons as excused absences** for students beginning in the 2022-2023 school year. This ensures that students who are experiencing mental health symptoms, illness, or a medical appointment that cause them to miss school will be able to have their absence excused.<sup>15</sup> The new rule may also provide additional data and insights about mental health issues that can help schools target preventative supports and early interventions.

Another emerging example of an initiative that could aid high school students is the **Dual Enrollment Scholarship Pilot Program** passed by the state legislature in 2019 and administered by the Washington Student Achievement Council. The scholarship covers course and lab fees and provides textbook vouchers to reduce out-of-pocket costs of students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch and are

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<sup>12</sup> See Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee 2022 annual report: [https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/workgroups/eogoac/pubdocs/EOGOAC\\_2022\\_Annual\\_Report%20%281%29.pdf](https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/workgroups/eogoac/pubdocs/EOGOAC_2022_Annual_Report%20%281%29.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> See Mastery-based Learning in Washington State 2021 Report: <https://www.sbe.wa.gov/sites/default/files/public/documents/GradRequirements/2021%20MBL%20Work%20Group%20Report.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> See Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction Washington Reading Corps: <https://www.k12.wa.us/student-success/resources-subject-area/english-language-arts/washington-reading-corps>

<sup>15</sup> See Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction Mental Health-Related Absences (HB 1834) Explainer for School Districts: [https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/attendance/pubdocs/Mental\\_Health\\_Absences\\_Explainer.pdf](https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/attendance/pubdocs/Mental_Health_Absences_Explainer.pdf)

enrolled in College in the High School or Running Start courses at a pilot site in the state.<sup>16</sup> This program may make dual credit opportunities more accessible for students who have been underrepresented in dual credit participation in the past, including students of color.

The **Washington State Educator Workforce Program** provides financial aid to attract future teachers to work in geographic areas with educator shortages in the state. The program is administered by the Washington Student Achievement Council and has the potential to increase teacher diversity in the state. This type of program can help recruit and retain a more diverse teacher workforce that better represents the racial diversity of Washington K-12 students.<sup>17</sup>

Continuing to evaluate data on educational outcomes to understand racial disparities and implementing evidence-based strategies can help the state address inequities and work towards better educational outcomes for all students. There are many initiatives in the state that are working to support students across K-12 education, but there is an opportunity to integrate additional evidence-based practices into our state's work to address racial inequities. Evidence-based practices can guide policy conversations to promote effective strategies that can improve outcomes for students of color.

## Proven Practices: What Do We Know from Research?

There are many proven practices that can be prioritized for students furthest from educational equity to help reduce racial disparities and improve educational outcomes. Several selected evidence-based strategies are presented in this section to help guide policy priorities and implementation in the state. In addition, the U.S. Department of Education compiled the COVID-19 Handbook that presents numerous additional strategies for schools and districts in response to the heightened challenges of the pandemic.<sup>18</sup>

**Providing high-quality early education opportunities** can improve outcomes for students later in their educational journey. The effects of high-quality early childhood education programs tend to be more profound for students who are low-income or dual language learners, many of whom are also students of color. Research shows that well-implemented, evidence-based curricula and coaching for instructors can improve the effectiveness of programs. Effective early childhood education programs provide engaging activities that are sequenced in ways that support, build on, and can be adapted to the stages of children's learning progression (Phillips et al., 2017). Ensuring that students of color have access to high-quality early childhood education programs may set them up for improved outcomes later in their educational trajectory.

**Recruiting and retaining a diverse teacher pipeline** can help improve outcomes for diverse students. Research shows that students taught by same-race teachers perform better on assessments and have more positive perceptions of their teachers. In the long-term, students who have even one same-race teacher in their elementary years have been shown to be less likely to drop out of high school and more likely to aspire to attend a four-year college (Gershenson et al., 2017). Recruiting and retaining a teacher

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<sup>16</sup> See Washington Student Achievement Council Dual Credit: <https://wsac.wa.gov/college-credit-high-school>

<sup>17</sup> See Washington Student Achievement Council Teacher Programs: <https://wsac.wa.gov/teachers>

<sup>18</sup> See U.S. Department of Education COVID-19 Handbook: <https://www2.ed.gov/documents/coronavirus/reopening-2.pdf>

workforce that mirrors the K-12 population’s increasingly diverse racial composition may help reduce racial disparities that have persisted in the state over time.

**Implementing high dosage, low student-to-teacher ratio tutoring** that is tied to classroom learning can help accelerate learning for students who are struggling. A study of individualized tutoring showed that high school students who received regular tutoring significantly improved their English language arts performance (Kraft, 2013). Another study showed that high school students who worked with tutors for an hour each day during their school day significantly increased math scores, and their grades in both math and non-math subjects also improved (Guryan et al., 2021). Effective individual tutoring interventions can improve academic achievement and narrow equity gaps, but implementation can be expensive. Providing intensive tutoring to students who are furthest from educational equity may accelerate their learning and help address disparities between racial groups.

**Offering opportunities for extended learning time** can improve students’ academic performance. A study of ninth-grade students with low math scores who were placed in an additional math support class alongside their regular algebra course showed improvements in their math scores (Nomi and Allensworth, 2009). The additional support class promoted mathematical reasoning skills using student-centered instructional practices. A follow-up study found positive long-term impacts for students who took the additional math class—including better high school graduation and college enrollment rates (Cortes et al., 2015). In addition to in-school learning, extended learning time may include after-school and summer academic programming. For instance, acceleration academies that provide students with targeted, small-group instruction during school vacations have been shown to contribute to improved academic outcomes (Scheuler et al., 2017). Targeting extended learning opportunities for groups with higher academic needs may help reduce racial disparities in academic outcomes.

**Increasing dual credit participation** can improve students’ high school and postsecondary outcomes. Research indicates that students who participate in dual credit coursework are more likely to enroll and persist in postsecondary education, accumulate more credits, and earn a higher GPA (CCRC, 2012). However, Washington and national data suggest gaps in dual credit participation by race. Particular focus on providing equitable access and support for dual credit opportunities is needed for students who are currently underrepresented in dual credit courses. This may include conducting outreach to underrepresented students, ensuring equitable opportunities at high schools across the state, and reducing or eliminating out-of-pocket costs for students to participate.

**Engaging students in academic and technical education around a career theme** can keep students engaged in school and prepare them for postsecondary education and careers after high school graduation. Evidence from research suggests that participation in programs that provide small learning communities and work-based learning opportunities lead to success in high school and significantly higher earnings later in their careers. Effective programs have shown particular promise for improving outcomes for young men of color and provide a path to more equitable labor market and life outcomes (Kemple, 2008). Implementing career-focused learning opportunities for students of color during high school can lead to better and more equitable outcomes.

**Providing integrated student support** in schools can address barriers to academic success and wellbeing for students. Access to comprehensive supports—including enrichment activities, food, and physical and mental health services—promotes student wellbeing and learning. Many schools already provide numerous supports for students. Research shows that intentionally and systematically integrated

supports can lead to higher academic achievement, improved attendance and engagement in school, reduced likelihood of dropping out, and better social emotional outcomes for students. Providing integrated student support may be especially effective at improving outcomes for students who attend schools with a high proportion of low-income students and can help narrow opportunity gaps (Boston College, 2022).

**Supporting social and emotional learning (SEL)** can improve behavior and academic performance leading to positive educational outcomes. Research suggests that programs that explicitly engage students in SEL can improve their social and emotional skills, attitudes, and behaviors and reduce their likelihood of having behavioral issues or emotional distress. SEL programs have also been shown to improve students' academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011). Ensuring equitable access to SEL programs and targeting students with the highest levels of need can improve mental health and academic outcomes for students and help address racial disparities for students experiencing mental health and behavioral issues.

**Promoting a positive school climate** can help improve student outcomes and wellbeing. School climate reflects the norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures within schools. Positive school climate is associated with many benefits, including academic achievement, school success, effective violence prevention, students' healthy development, and teacher retention (Cohen et al., 2009). Research also shows that students who attend schools with healthy learning environments perform better on standardized assessments (MacNeil et al., 2009). Continuous measurement to understand school climate using methods such as school climate surveys with students, staff, and families, is an important aspect of sustaining a positive school environment to help all students succeed.

**Engaging with families** in culturally appropriate and affirming ways can support student learning and academic outcomes. Research has shown that family engagement in children's education is associated with better academic performance, behavior, and a higher likelihood of graduation and postsecondary transition. Schools can help families engage by encouraging teacher outreach to communicate about student progress and hold workshops to help families support their children at home (Henderson and Mapp, 2002). For family engagement efforts to be inclusive and effective for racially and culturally diverse students, it is important that they recognize the unique lived experiences and needs of diverse families and engage in culturally affirming ways.

**Targeting postsecondary transition supports towards students of color** can increase their likelihood of enrolling in postsecondary education after high school. For instance, one successful pre-college program geared towards Hispanic and low-income high school students utilized a near-peer model by hiring college students to aid high schoolers in the college application and enrollment processes. The study showed positive effects on postsecondary enrollment for Hispanic students in the program (Bettinger and Evans, 2019). Other evidence from research suggests that offering grant aid and providing information and hands-on support to help families complete financial aid applications can increase their likelihood of postsecondary enrollment (Dynarski, 2003 and Bettinger et al., 2012). Gearing proven supports and strategies towards students of color may help reduce racial disparities in high school to postsecondary transitions.

**Using Opportunity to Learn (OTL) indicators** alongside data on student outcomes (such as the key K-12 education measures presented in this report) can help identify student needs and where resources

should be targeted to reduce disparities in outcomes. Some examples of OTL indicators include qualified teachers, clean and safe facilities, up-to-date books and quality learning materials, high-quality coursework opportunities, and school conditions that provide students with fair and equal opportunities to learn and develop critical knowledge and skills. Research suggests that OTL indicators are associated with student outcomes and tracking OTL indicators can help identify opportunities that students have for learning (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Incorporating OTL indicators into decision-making processes and building a culture of data use and responsiveness may help education leaders allocate resources to best support students and reduce racial inequities in K-12 education.

## Conclusion

Education is foundational to individual and societal wellbeing and providing equitable education opportunities for students can help improve outcomes for all Washington residents. However, the data presented in this report show that there are significant and longstanding racial inequities in K-12 education outcomes across many different measures. Beginning in kindergarten, gaps in outcomes between different racial groups are apparent, and opportunity gaps persist across the K-12 system through high school graduation and transitions into postsecondary education. While data on some measures indicate that racial disparities have declined marginally over the last several years, most show little or no progress—suggesting that the state has a long way to go to address racial inequities in K-12 education.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted learning for all students, bringing new challenges with remote learning, changes in rules, and ongoing stressors for students, families, and educators alike. The COVID-19 pandemic has also emphasized the need to address racial inequities as communities of color faced disproportionate challenges during the pandemic. However, many of these issues were not new—rather, the pandemic highlighted persistent issues and inequities for which progress is long overdue. It also provides an opportune time to address these inequities by improving policies and practices that target resources for students who are furthest from educational equity.

Washington State has done a lot to address the challenges that the pandemic imposed, including providing supports for schools, students, and families in the K-12 education system. As the state continues to respond to and rebuild from the COVID-19 pandemic, there is an opportunity to develop a K-12 education system that provides equitable opportunities for all students and explicitly works to reduce racial disparities. The state already has in place numerous programs and initiatives to support students across K-12 education. It is imperative that the state prioritizes closing racial equity gaps at the center of this work. Data and evidence-based practices should drive the state's work to foster more equitable outcomes to improve opportunities for all Washington residents to succeed in K-12 education and beyond.

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## Appendix A. Distribution of Washington K-12 Population by Race

School Year	White	Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	Two or More Races	Asian	Black/African American	American Indian/Alaskan Native	Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
2009-10	63.8%	16.2%	3.5%	7.8%	5.5%	2.4%	0.8%
2010-11	61.4%	18.7%	5.5%	7.2%	4.7%	1.7%	0.9%
2011-12	60.0%	19.7%	6.1%	7.1%	4.6%	1.6%	0.9%
2012-13	58.9%	20.5%	6.4%	7.1%	4.6%	1.5%	0.9%
2013-14	57.8%	21.2%	6.8%	7.1%	4.6%	1.5%	1.0%
2014-15	56.6%	21.7%	7.6%	7.2%	4.5%	1.5%	1.0%
2015-16	55.6%	22.4%	7.9%	7.3%	4.4%	1.4%	1.0%
2016-17	54.7%	22.8%	8.2%	7.5%	4.3%	1.4%	1.1%
2017-18	53.9%	23.1%	8.5%	7.7%	4.3%	1.3%	1.1%
2018-19	53.1%	23.4%	8.8%	7.8%	4.4%	1.3%	1.1%
2019-20	52.3%	23.9%	9.0%	8.0%	4.4%	1.3%	1.2%
2020-21	50.7%	24.7%	9.1%	8.4%	4.6%	1.3%	1.2%
2021-22	49.9%	25.2%	9.2%	8.5%	4.6%	1.3%	1.3%

Source: Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) Data Portal

## Appendix B. Distribution of Washington Population Overall by Race

Year	White	Hispanic/ Latino of any race(s)	Asian	Two or More Races	Black / African American	American Indian / Alaskan Native	Native Hawaiian/ Other Pacific Islander
2010	73%	11%	7%	4%	3%	1%	1%
2011	72%	11%	7%	4%	3%	1%	1%
2012	72%	12%	7%	4%	3%	1%	1%
2013	71%	12%	7%	4%	4%	1%	1%
2014	71%	12%	8%	4%	4%	1%	1%
2015	70%	12%	8%	4%	4%	1%	1%
2016	70%	13%	8%	4%	4%	1%	1%
2017	69%	13%	8%	4%	4%	1%	1%
2018	68%	13%	9%	4%	4%	1%	1%
2019	68%	13%	9%	4%	4%	1%	1%
2020	67%	13%	9%	4%	4%	1%	1%

Source: Washington Office of Financial Management Population Estimates