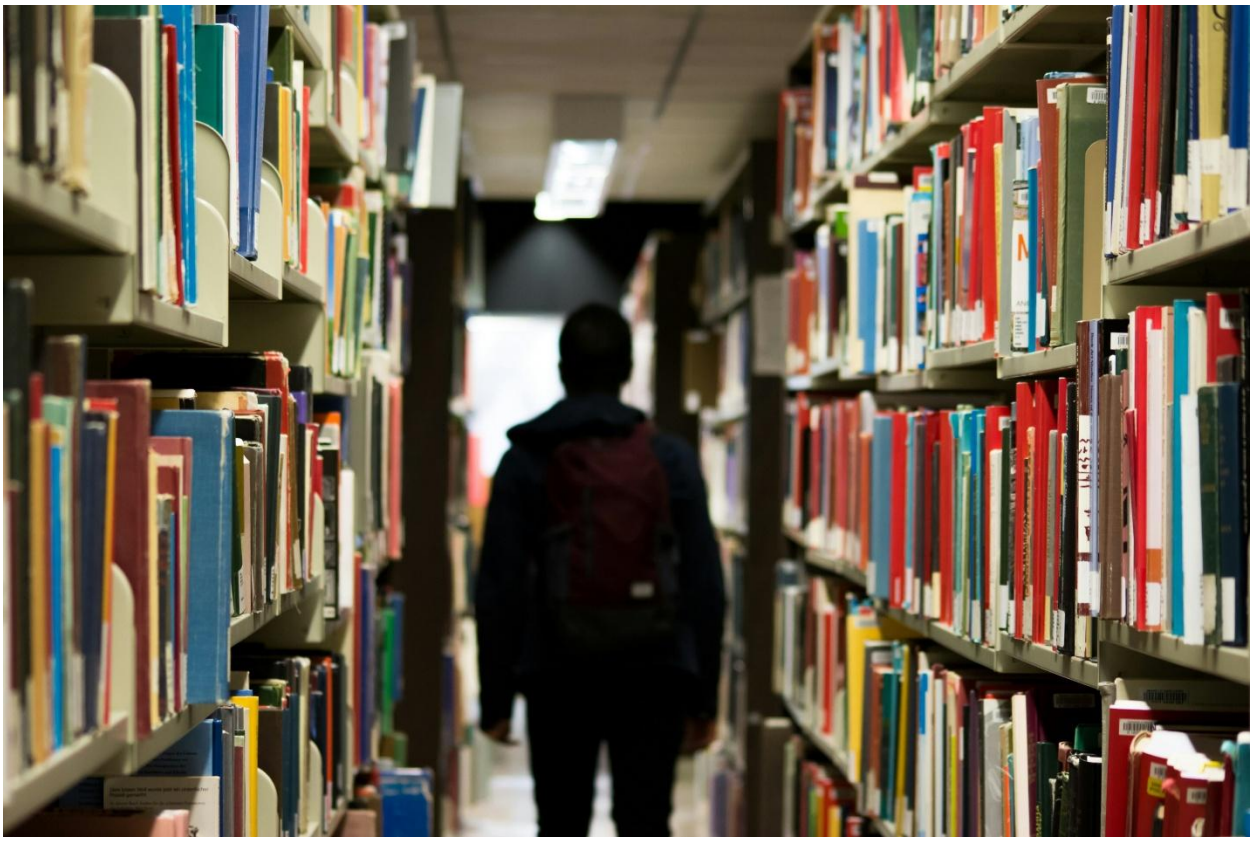

Beyond Educational Access:

Inequities from FAFSA Filing to Postsecondary Attainment

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June 2026

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Acknowledgements

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Preface

In January 2022, Governor Inslee issued Executive Order 22-02: "Achieving Equity in Washington State Government," which directed the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) "to prepare a report describing the differences in patterns of access and success across student subpopulations." In response, this report analyzes rates of high school FAFSA filing, postsecondary enrollment, second-year persistence, and postsecondary degree or certificate attainment in Washington State over time by student demographics. The report also lays the foundation for further investigations into higher education equity issues in Washington.

Disclaimer: The research presented here uses confidential data from the Education Research and Data Center (ERDC) located within the Washington Office of Financial Management (OFM). ERDC's data system is a statewide longitudinal data system that includes de-identified data about people's preschool, educational, and workforce experiences. The views expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of OFM or other data contributors. Any errors are attributable to the authors.

Executive Summary

The most recent decade of data shows that there are persistent inequities in postsecondary access and success for Washington public high school students. Overall findings in this report suggest that male, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and low-income students as well as students who are from rural high schools, have Spanish as their primary home language, are English Language Learners, are from migrant households, or have a disability appear to be particularly underserved in Washington's current education system.

Postsecondary education [1] is foundational to a state's economic stability and the well-being of its residents. Washington has a comprehensive postsecondary education system, including dozens of public institutions and state financial aid that can cover up to the full cost of tuition at public institutions for students from low- and middle-income families. However, these significant investments in the state's postsecondary system are not improving outcomes for all groups equally. This report explores data and research to document the presence and severity of inequities in Washington's education system. A prior WSAC report examined K–12 education disparities by race/ethnicity (Kwakye & Lacalli, 2022), and this report is the first to describe the state of postsecondary inequities in Washington.

Washington students who appear to be underserved are:

- Male
- Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
- American Indian/Alaska Native
- Low-income
- Rural
- Primarily Spanish speakers at home
- English Language Learners
- Migrant
- Disabled

Note: The above student subgroups appear underserved in certificate and degree programs but may be better represented in workforce education and training programs. Future postsecondary data collection is expected to allow for analyses inclusive of these program outcomes.

Washington State aims for 70 percent of residents to have a postsecondary credential. In 2023, only 62 percent of the population met the criteria (WSAC, 2025). Projections by the Center for Education and the Workforce (CEW, 2023) suggest that 72 percent of jobs in the state will require postsecondary education by 2031: 14 percent of jobs will require a

[1] Postsecondary workforce education and training play an important role in Washington, and a number of agencies are collaborating to integrate relevant data into the state's longitudinal data system. This report's analysis is unable to account for these programs. This means that some subgroups, such as male students, appear underserved but may be better represented in workforce programs rather than certificate or degree programs. Future postsecondary data collection is expected to allow for analyses inclusive of workforce education and training outcomes.

graduate degree, 36 percent a bachelor's or associate degree, and 22 percent some college, no degree. Washington's college graduates earn more and have greater job opportunities than its high school graduates (Kwakye & Oliver, 2022). Differences in postsecondary access and success across student subgroups can worsen other existing disparities and result in lower-paying jobs, poorer health outcomes, greater dependence on social services, and so on.

Questions Guiding This Report

1. **What are the differences in high school FAFSA filing rates by select student demographics?**
2. **What are the differences in postsecondary enrollment rates by student demographics?**
3. **What are the differences in second-year persistence rates by student demographics?**
4. **What are the differences in postsecondary attainment rates by student demographics?**

Data Sources

This report uses data from Washington's Preschool-to-Grade20-to-Workforce state longitudinal data system. The sample is composed of Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) students who began ninth grade between the 2009-10 and 2018-19 academic years. [2]

Analyses use the following student-level categories: [3]

1. Gender group [4]
2. Race/ethnicity [5]
3. Household income status [6]
4. Intersectionality [7]

[2] Except for FAFSA filing, which only uses 9 cohorts, this report focuses on outcomes for 10 cohorts of ninth-grade students. Enrollment, persistence, and attainment data exclude students who graduated from high schools outside the OSPI system.
[3] All categorizations are based on OSPI records as of students' ninth-grade year except for geographic context, which is based on the urban or rural designation of the last Washington public high school of attendance.
[4] Due to the small number of nonbinary students in the sample and data reporting limitations, students identified as nonbinary or female in ninth grade are categorized together as one gender group.
[5] This report uses the race/ethnicity labels indicated in OSPI records. "Hispanic/Latino" includes those of any race(s).
[6] Low-income students are defined in this report as those who are eligible for the federal Free and Reduced-Price Lunch program in ninth grade.
[7] These analyses recognize that the human experience is jointly shaped by multiple social positions (e.g., race/ethnicity and gender) and cannot be adequately understood by considering social positions independently (Crenshaw, 1991; Bauer et al, 2021). However, this report does not offer a truly intersectional analysis, as results do not reflect social constructs such as power. The results are also limited to the examination of only two joint identities at a time. That is, they do not attempt to statistically control for the multiplicative effect of several identities.

5. Geographic context
6. Primary language spoken at home
7. English Language Learner status
8. Migrant status [8]
9. Disability status

Throughout this report, students are referred to by their ninth-grade cohort year. For example, students who were expected to be in twelfth grade during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in spring 2020 are referred to as Cohort 2016, or the 2016 Cohort, as they were in ninth grade in 2016-17. **Figure ES1** indicates the expected grade level of each ninth-grade cohort for a given academic year.

Figure ES1. Expected Grade Level in Each Academic Year by Ninth-Grade Cohort

	Expected grade level in each academic year										COVID-19 Period			
Ninth Grade Cohort	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
2009	**9**	10	11	12	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
2010		**9**	10	11	12	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9
2011			**9**	10	11	12	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8
2012				**9**	10	11	12	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7
2013					**9**	10	11	12	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
2014						**9**	10	11	12	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
2015							**9**	10	11	12	P1	P2	P3	P4
2016								**9**	10	11	12	P1	P2	P3
2017									**9**	10	11	12	P1	P2
2018										**9**	10	11	12	P1

High School | High School during COVID-19 Period | Postsecondary

Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse

Key Findings

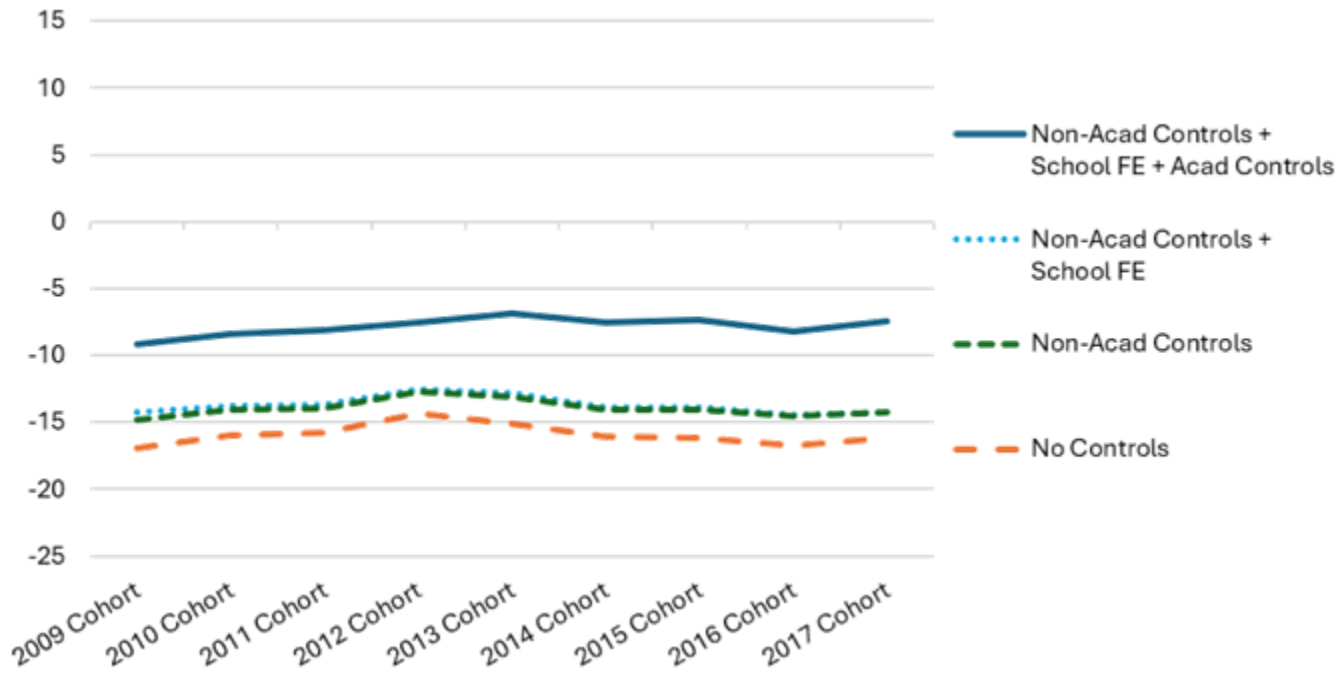
1. What are the differences in high school FAFSA filing rates by select student demographics?

- **Black/African American seniors file the FAFSA at a higher-than-average rate (50.8% compared to 47.5%), whereas other underrepresented minority (URM) students have lower-than-average rates**: Only 41.1% of Hispanic/Latino seniors, 38.0% of Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander seniors, and 33.0% of American Indian/Alaska Native seniors file the FAFSA.

[8] Students are considered migrant if they participated in OSPI's Migrant Education Program in ninth grade.

- Across cohorts, **there is a persistent and large gender group gap in FAFSA filing, even when controlling for key observable factors** (i.e., non-academic student characteristics, school-related factors, and standardized academic measures). Over time, male seniors are anywhere from 6.3 to 8.3 percentage points less likely than female and nonbinary seniors to file the FAFSA. This gender group gap is even larger among students from low-income households (6.9 to 9.2 percentage points; see **Figure ES2**).

Figure ES2. Male–Female/Nonbinary Gap in FAFSA Filing Rates Across Ninth-Grade Cohorts, Low-Income Students



Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse

Note. This gender group gap is calculated as a percentage point difference between twelfth-grade FAFSA filing rates of low-income male students and low-income female/nonbinary students. The non-academic controls ("Non-Acad Controls") are a student's race/ethnicity, special education status, disability status, English Language Learner status, migrant status, and English or Spanish-speaking household status. School fixed effects ("School FE") account for factors associated with a student's school (e.g., neighborhood, teachers, local resources, and geographic context). The academic controls ("Acad Controls") are a student's standardized GPA at the end of ninth grade, standardized eighth grade math test scores, and standardized eighth grade reading or English Language Arts (ELA) test scores. Reading test scores are used from 2010 through 2015 and replaced with the ELA test scores in 2016 through 2018. Cohorts 2009 through 2017 were expected to be in twelfth grade during the 2012-13 through 2020-21 academic years, respectively. At the time of analysis, FAFSA filing data were not yet available for Cohort 2018. Due to the small number of nonbinary students in the sample and data reporting limitations, students identified as nonbinary or female in ninth grade are categorized together as one gender group. Low-income students are defined in this report as those who are eligible for the federal Free and Reduced-Price Lunch program in ninth grade.

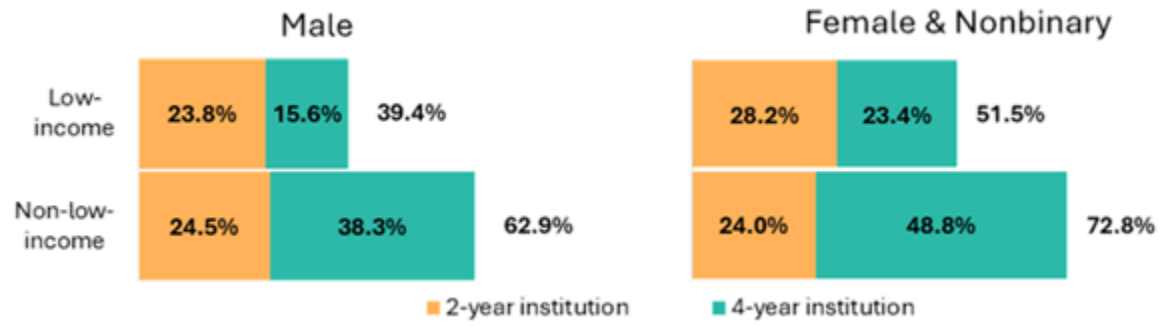
2. What are the differences in postsecondary enrollment rates by student demographics?

- Within one year of high school graduation, **male, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, Hispanic/Latino, and low-income students enroll in postsecondary education at lower rates** than their peers.

- **Across all race/ethnicity categories, male students enroll in postsecondary education at lower rates** than their female and nonbinary counterparts.

- **Across race/ethnicity or gender group, students from low-income households enroll in postsecondary education at lower rates** than their non-low-income counterparts. For example, female and nonbinary students who are from low-income households enroll in postsecondary education at lower rates than male students from non-low-income households (see **Figure ES3**).

Figure ES3. Postsecondary Enrollment Rate Within 1 Year of High School Graduation by Household Income Status and Gender Group



Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse
Note. The percentage to the right of each bar is the total enrollment rate across institution types for a given household income status and gender group. Overall averages by household income status and by gender group are indicated in Appendix Table 6. Low-income students are defined in this report as those who are eligible for the federal Free and Reduced-Price Lunch program in ninth grade. Due to the small number of nonbinary students in the sample and data reporting limitations, students identified as nonbinary or female in ninth grade are categorized together as one gender group.

- **Students from rural, English Language Learner, and migrant backgrounds enroll in postsecondary education at lower rates** than their counterparts. Additionally, **students with a disability are less likely to enroll** than those without a disability.

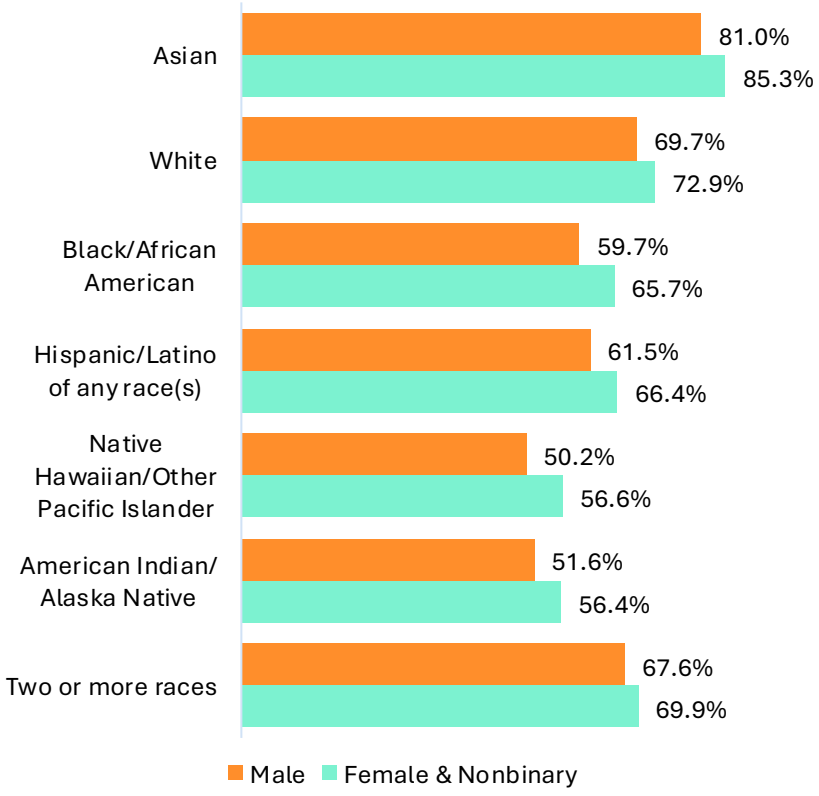
- **Students whose primary home language is Spanish enroll at a lower rate** than those for whom English is the primary home language. However, the enrollment rate is highest for students whose primary home language is neither English nor Spanish (i.e., all other languages spoken at home combined).

3. What are the differences in second-year persistence rates by student demographics?

- **Across institution type, low-income students (60.9%) or those with a disability (53.8%) have lower persistence rates** than students who are not low-income (75.6%) or do not have a disability (71.7%).

- **Across institution type, students who are migrants (63.6%) or English Language Learners (60.9%), or who come from a rural high school (67.7%), have lower persistence rates than their non-migrant (70.7%), non-ELL (71.0%), or urban counterparts (71.6%).**
- Examining intersecting identities emphasizes that **students who are male, low-income, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, or American Indian/Alaska Native may face particularly heightened challenges to persistence**. As an example, **Figure ES4** shows that Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaska Native have the lowest persistence rates, and the rates are particularly low for male students in these racial subgroups.

Figure ES4. Second-Year Persistence Rate by Race/Ethnicity and Gender Group



Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse

Note. Persistence refers to continuing postsecondary education from the first year into the second year (or completing a program before the second postsecondary year), regardless of the term of entry. Due to the small number of nonbinary students in the sample and data reporting limitations, students identified as nonbinary or female in ninth grade are categorized together as one gender group.

- **Students whose primary home language is Spanish persist at two-year institutions similarly to students whose primary home language is English (56.4% vs. 56.2%, respectively).** Yet, they are 2.5 percentage points less likely to persist at four-year institutions than their English language household counterparts (80.8% vs. 83.3%).

4. What are the differences in postsecondary attainment rates by student demographics?

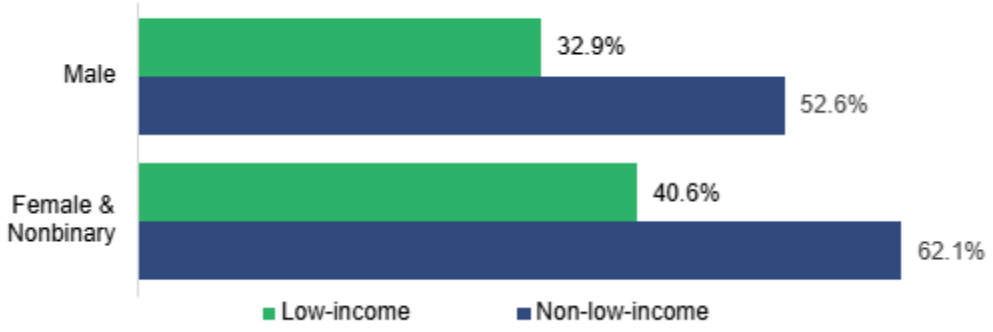
- **Male students are less likely than female and nonbinary students to earn a postsecondary credential** within 100% of expected time, 150% of expected time, and 200% of expected time.

- In terms of race/ethnicity, **Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (29.2%) and American Indian/Alaska Native (31.0%) students have the lowest attainment rates** within 150% expected time, followed by Black/African American (34.8%) and Hispanic/Latino (39.2%) students.

- **The largest gender group gaps by race/ethnicity exist among Asian, White, Black/African American, and Hispanic/Latino students**; these male students are the least likely to complete postsecondary programs compared to their female and nonbinary counterparts.

- **Across gender groups, students from low-income households are less likely to earn a postsecondary credential than their non-low-income counterparts** (see **Figure ES5**).

Figure ES5. Postsecondary Educational Attainment Rate by Gender Group and Household Income Status



Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse
c educational attainment within 150% expected time is reflected in this figure. In this report, 150% expected time is 6 years at a four-year institution and 3 years at a two-year institution. Due to the small number of nonbinary students in the sample and data reporting limitations, students identified as nonbinary or female in ninth grade are categorized together as one gender group. Low-income students are defined in this report as those who are eligible for the federal Free and Reduced-Price Lunch program in ninth grade.

- Within 150% of expected time, roughly half of students from urban high schools (51.9%) and of those from rural high schools (48.0%) earn a postsecondary credential. Yet **rural students are more likely to complete a postsecondary program at a two-year institution than urban students are**.

- **Students who are low-income, have Spanish as their primary home language, are English Language Learners, are from migrant households, or have a disability are less likely to complete postsecondary education** than their counterparts.

Limitations

There are several key limitations to these analyses. First and foremost, this report describes inequities and cannot identify or address the cause of those inequities. Moreover, the analyses rely solely on administrative data and cannot fully capture the magnitude of the disparities. The administrative data also disallow a fuller picture of postsecondary enrollment and persistence given that a student's intended credential is not discernible.

There are also limitations to the categorization of student groups. For example, data suppression requirements disallowed an examination of nonbinary students as their own group, so these students are combined with female students in this report. It was also not possible to disaggregate the Asian racial category into ethnic groups, despite it being well documented that educational experiences and outcomes vary widely within this population (e.g., Lowe, 1991; Nguyen et al., 2015). Similarly, disability status can be vastly heterogenous, and the data offer a simple representation of a complex category. Future work could provide more nuanced investigations into these and other types of student demographics.

Conclusion

Effectively addressing inequities in the education system is critical for a sustainable and vibrant Washington. This report provides an overview of access and success by examining FAFSA filing, enrollment, second-year persistence, and attainment by student demographics. In addition to male, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and low-income students, those who are from rural high schools, have Spanish as their primary home language, are English Language Learners, are from migrant households, or have a disability appear to experience more barriers to and through postsecondary education than their counterparts.

Postsecondary Access

Making postsecondary education more affordable can be a meaningful way to increase enrollment, particularly for low-income students. The Washington Completes FAFSA Campaign, first launched in Fall 2025, is intended to bolster the number of students

receiving financial aid to make postsecondary education that much more accessible. Also new in the 2025-26 academic year is the pilot implementation of the guarantee of a full WA Grant to graduating high school students who qualify for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (known as Basic Food in Washington). Both the Washington Completes FAFSA Campaign and guaranteed full WA Grant for eligible students are expected to increase postsecondary access for students and possibly reduce enrollment disparities by household income status.

Washington's efforts to improve postsecondary access would also benefit from more research into innovations taking place across the state. Firstly, future analyses could identify Washington schools where underserved students have relatively high rates of high school graduation and postsecondary enrollment. Understanding the work being done at these schools could inspire policy that supports high schools across the state to increase postsecondary access. Secondly, learning from the Washington Completes FAFSA Campaign (e.g., Alvarado & Deane, 2025) could inform a similarly devised statewide initiative to increase the number of students applying to postsecondary programs. A campaign could motivate and support students to learn about and apply to various postsecondary program types—including workforce education and training, which are programs not able to be included in the analysis for this report.

Postsecondary Success

Students who apply for financial aid and enroll in postsecondary programs would ideally persist and attain a certificate or degree. Importantly, addressing issues of postsecondary access should include understanding the role of academic preparation, student supports, educational alignment, and more, which could also improve some issues of postsecondary success. However, access is insufficient. Students may transfer, stop out, or otherwise exit postsecondary education, making persistence and attainment issues rather complex and their measures oversimplified.

As is true of studying high schools where postsecondary access is high, studying postsecondary institutions that appear particularly effective in supporting otherwise underserved students could inform policy to improve postsecondary success. Additionally, Washington needs to continue developing and iterating on new programs. Current work is examining a pilot program promoting public benefits to improve basic needs security for Washington's postsecondary students (Burtch et al., 2025), and an expansion of this could yield positive results across the state. Efforts to proactively highlight the connection between postsecondary education and career pathways are also needed. Underrepresented students would especially benefit from support to identify career or life goals and how postsecondary education can help them achieve those goals (Sandbox, 2025). Washington's new High School and Beyond Plan [9] and modernized Career

[9] Following the passage of Senate Bill 5243 in 2023, OSPI began rolling out a statewide platform for the High School and Beyond Plan (HSBP). The HSBP aims to support students in their exploration of various postsecondary pathways in alignment with their interests, skills, and life goals. More information about the state graduation requirement is available at: https://ospi.k12.wa.us/student-success/graduation/high-school-and-beyond-plan.

Bridge platform [10] could be vital to helping students connect educational plans with career and life goals.

There is also value in considering the efforts of other states. For example, there is a plan to "identify [administrative practices and policies] that create obstacles for students, particularly first-generation college-goers and students from underserved populations" to help California reach its attainment goals (College Futures Foundation, 2025, p. 11). Performing an audit may be warranted for Washington's postsecondary institutions and its high schools. While no two states are identical, Washington could glean insight into effective strategies employed by other states.

Considerations for Policy and Practice

The gaps identified in this report have largely persisted over several cohorts of high school students; accordingly, the state should use multiple approaches to tackling these inequities. Importantly, studying the broader systemic problems could inform statewide improvements to infrastructure. While focusing on targeted programs may yield more immediate results, they may not be sustainable. Thus, the state should proactively account for the needs of particularly underserved students while continuing to improve the education infrastructure of Washington. Employing a range of strategies has the benefit of simultaneously uplifting underserved groups *and* increasing educational attainment among Washingtonians, overall.

Already, Washington is implementing broad efforts, such as through OtterBot and @CollegeToolkit. When scaled, these efforts are expected to increase postsecondary access and success across students. Examples of other evidence-based approaches that the state could pursue include:

- Leveraging Career and Technical Education [11]
- Expanding Opportunities for Postsecondary Attainment
- Implementing and Adapting Wraparound Services
- Diversifying the Education Workforce

This report identifies where disparities endure between student groups. Understanding disparities in FAFSA filing, postsecondary enrollment, second-year persistence, and postsecondary attainment can enable Washington to provide all students with access to—and success in—postsecondary education and training. After all, postsecondary education expands economic opportunity and offers nonmonetary benefits for individuals, their communities, and society.

[10] Washington's Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board's efforts to modernize Career Bridge are described at: https://wtb.wa.gov/career-bridge-modernization/

[11] Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs could especially support male students. High school boys who engage more deeply with CTE pathways are more likely to attain a postsecondary certificate (Riggs & Kennedy, 2025).

Introduction

Postsecondary education [1] is foundational to a state's economic stability and the well-being of its residents. Washington has a comprehensive postsecondary education system, including dozens of public institutions and state financial aid that can cover up to the full cost of tuition at public institutions for students from low- and middle-income families. However, these significant investments in the state's postsecondary system are not improving outcomes for all groups equally. This report explores data and research to document the presence and severity of inequities in Washington's postsecondary education system. A prior WSAC report examined K-12 education disparities by race/ethnicity (Kwakye & Lacalli, 2022), and this report is the first to describe the state of postsecondary inequities in Washington.

The ability to access and succeed in postsecondary education can be crucial to a student's opportunities in life. Postsecondary credentials offer numerous benefits like higher paying jobs, better health, and higher levels of civic engagement. However, research indicates that not all students have equal access to postsecondary education. Widespread disparities in postsecondary access and success have been reported by gender, race/ethnicity, geography, and family income level (Goldin 2014; Chetty et al. 2020; Sloane et al., 2021). For example, research finds gaps in college going and college completion between male and female students at the national level in the United States as well as across most countries, with females attending and completing at higher rates (Reeves et al., 2021).

Washington State aims for 70 percent of residents to have a postsecondary credential. In 2023, only 62 percent of the population met the criteria (WSAC, 2025). Projections by the Center for Education and the Workforce (CEW, 2023) suggest that 72 percent of jobs in the state will require postsecondary education by 2031: 14 percent of jobs will require a graduate degree, 36 percent a bachelor's or associate degree, and 22 percent some college, no degree. Washington's college graduates earn more and have greater job opportunities than its high school graduates (Kwakye & Oliver, 2022). Differences in postsecondary access and success across student subgroups can worsen other existing disparities and result in lower paying jobs, poorer health outcomes, greater dependence on social services, and so on.

Questions Guiding This Report

This report examines twelfth-grade FAFSA filing, postsecondary enrollment, second-year persistence, and postsecondary attainment for the most recent decade of Washington

[1] Postsecondary workforce education and training play an important role in Washington, and a number of agencies are collaborating to integrate relevant data into the state's longitudinal data system. This report's analysis is unable to account for these programs. This means that some subgroups, such as male students, appear underserved but may be better represented in workforce programs rather than certificate or degree programs. Future postsecondary data collection is expected to allow for analyses inclusive of workforce education and training outcomes.

public high school students for whom we have data. The analyses identify patterns of postsecondary access and success over time to inform policy and practice. Accordingly, this report focuses on four research questions:

1. **What are the differences in high school FAFSA filing rates by select student demographics?**
2. **What are the differences in postsecondary enrollment rates by student demographics?**
3. **What are the differences in second-year persistence rates by student demographics?**
4. **What are the differences in postsecondary attainment rates by student demographics?**

Data Sources

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1. Gender group [4]
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3. Household income status [6]
4. Intersectionality [7]
5. Geographic context
6. Primary language spoken at home
7. English Language Learner status

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Throughout this report, students are referred to by their ninth-grade cohort year. For example, students who were expected to be in twelfth grade during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in spring 2020 are referred to as Cohort 2016, or the 2016 Cohort, as they were in ninth grade in 2016-17. **Figure 1** indicates the expected grade level of each ninth-grade cohort for a given academic year.

Figure 1. Expected Grade Level in Each Academic Year by Ninth-Grade Cohort

	Expected grade level in each academic year										COVID-19 Period			
Ninth Grade Cohort	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013	2013-2014	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023
2009	**9**	10	11	12	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
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2018										**9**	10	11	12	P1

High School | High School during COVID-19 Period | Postsecondary

Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse

[8] Students are considered migrant if they participated in OSPI's Migrant Education Program in ninth grade.

1. What Are the Differences in High School FAFSA Filing Rates by Select Student Demographics?

Supporting college affordability can increase access to higher education, and the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is the vehicle that ensures prospective students have information about what they can expect to pay. Given its role in shaping affordability, FAFSA completion is linked to postsecondary enrollment: Students who complete the FAFSA are significantly more likely to enroll in postsecondary education the fall after graduating from high school than if they do not complete the FAFSA (DeBaun, 2019a). Students who complete the FAFSA are also more likely to enroll full-time than part-time. In 2016, the FAFSA underwent the first in a series of simplifications to improve college choice and help students pay for higher education: The FAFSA became simpler—– tax information could be provided electronically and directly from the IRS—and available earlier: students could apply as early as October 1st instead of January 1st (The White House, 2015). Following these changes, FAFSA completion rates increased nationally (Warick, 2017).

Washington has one of the most generous financial aid programs in the U.S. Historically, students who do not complete the requisite financial aid applications [9] are not able to receive awards, such as the Washington College Grant (WA Grant). Unfortunately, Washington's low-income students (i.e., those eligible for the federal Free and Reduced-Price Lunch program) file the FAFSA at lower rates than other students (WSAC, n.d.), which means critical aid dollars are left unawarded. In September 2025, Governor Ferguson's Executive Order 25-08 established the Washington Completes FAFSA Campaign intended to raise the statewide FAFSA completion rate annually. Before a FAFSA is considered complete (i.e., processed with no errors), a student must first file (i.e., submit) a FAFSA.

The **WA Grant** gives eligible Washington residents **more money for more types of education**, like certificate programs, job training, apprenticeships, or college.

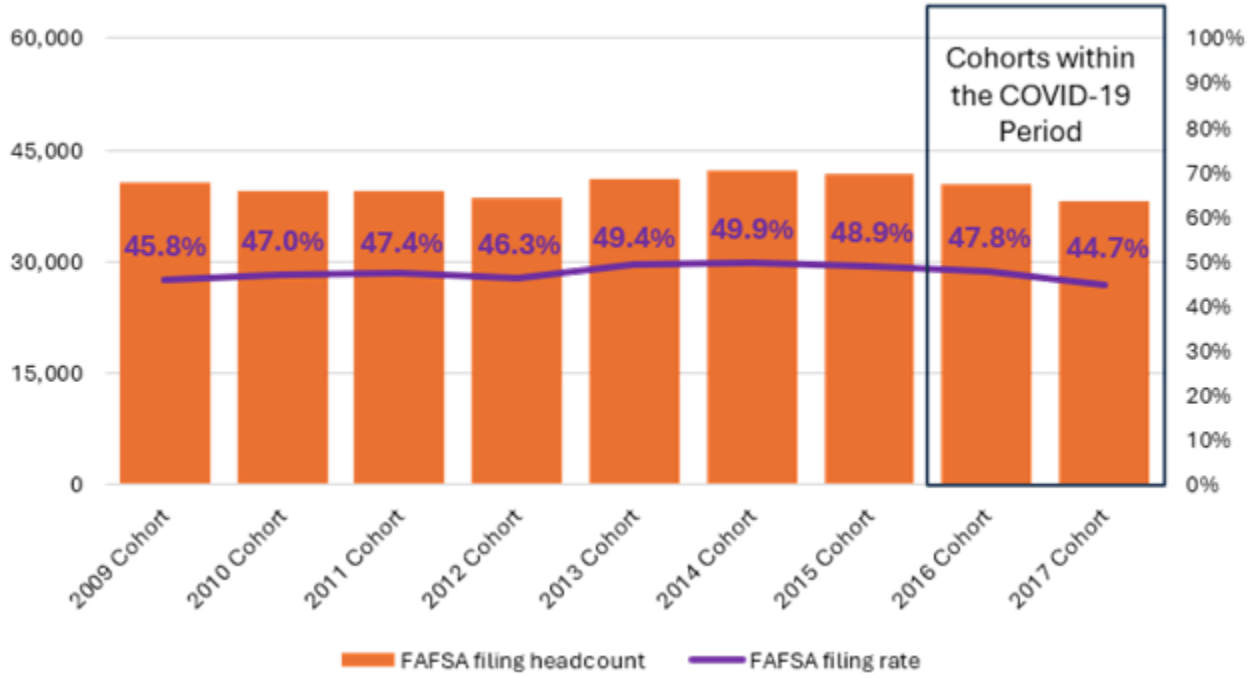
For more information, visit ***wsac.wa.gov/wcg***.

Historically, less than half of Washington high school seniors (47.5%) file the FAFSA (see **Appendix Table 1**). As shown in **Figure 2**, the average FAFSA filing rate rose to nearly 50% in 2016-17, which is when the FAFSA became simpler and available earlier. By spring 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic began, many seniors in 2019-20 had already filed their

[9] In the 2014-15 academic year, the Washington Application for State Financial Aid (WASFA) became available as a way for students to apply for state aid without completing the FAFSA. This was a result of the Real Hope Act. The WASFA is separate from the FAFSA, and students are expected to file only one of these applications.

FAFSA. Still, overall FAFSA filing dropped to 47.8% for that cohort of students. The more substantial pandemic era decline occurred for the seniors in 2020-21.

Figure 2. FAFSA Filing Headcount and Rate by Ninth-Grade Cohort



Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse
Note. FAFSA filing four years after entering ninth grade is reported here as a proxy for applying for financial aid in a student's final year of high school. Cohorts 2016 to 2017 were expected to be high school seniors during the COVID-19 period of 2019-20 to 2020-21. At the time of analysis, FAFSA filing data are not yet available for Cohort 2018.

The remainder of this section addresses the first research question: **What are the differences in high school FAFSA filing rates by select student demographics?**

Summary of Findings

- Across cohorts, **male students (40.1%) are an average of 15.1 percentage points less likely than female and nonbinary students (55.2%) to file the FAFSA** in their senior year of high school.

- Across cohorts, **there is a persistent and large gender group gap in FAFSA filing, even when controlling for key observable factors** (i.e., non-academic student characteristics, school-related factors, and standardized academic measures). Over time, male seniors are anywhere from 6.3 to 8.3 percentage points less likely than female and nonbinary seniors to file the FAFSA. This gender group gap is even larger among students from low-income households (6.9 to 9.2 percentage points).

- **Black/African American seniors file the FAFSA at a higher-than-average rate (50.8% compared to 47.5%), whereas other underrepresented minority (URM) students have lower-than-average rates**: Only 41.1% of Hispanic/Latino seniors, 38.0% of Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander seniors, and 33.0% of American Indian/Alaska Native seniors file the FAFSA.

- Among non-underrepresented minority (non-URM) students, **Asian (65.7%) seniors file the FAFSA at a higher-than-average rate, and White seniors (47.4%) have a FAFSA filing rate similar to the average of 47.5%** across all students.

- Across cohorts, **there are varying racial/ethnic [10] gaps in FAFSA filing** when all else (i.e., non-academic student characteristics, school-related factors, and standardized academic measures) is equal. White students are significantly less likely than Black/African American, Asian, and Hispanic/Latino students to file the FAFSA in their senior year of high school. When examining only low-income students, the racial gap is larger between Black/African American and White seniors for every ninth-grade cohort except Cohort 2010. Asian low-income seniors are historically even more likely to file the FAFSA than White low-income seniors. Hispanic/Latino low-income seniors are generally more likely to file the FAFSA than White low-income seniors, but the gap is sometimes larger when considering overall FAFSA filing rates rather than only for low-income students.

Inequities in FAFSA Filing Patterns

This section describes differences in twelfth-grade FAFSA filing rates across two categories: [11]

1. Gender group
2. Race/ethnicity

Overall FAFSA filing rates by household income status, migrant status, English Language Learner status, primary language spoken at home, disability status, and geographic context are noted in **Appendix Table 2**. FAFSA filing rates by race/ethnicity and gender group, race/ethnicity and household income status, as well as gender group and household income status are in **Appendix Table 3**. Low-income students' FAFSA filing rates across cohorts and by gender group or race/ethnicity are shown in **Appendix Table 4**.

[10] Due to sample size limitations, the regression analysis does not include American Indian/Alaska Native or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander students.
[11] Please refer to page 2 for information about these categories.

Gender Group

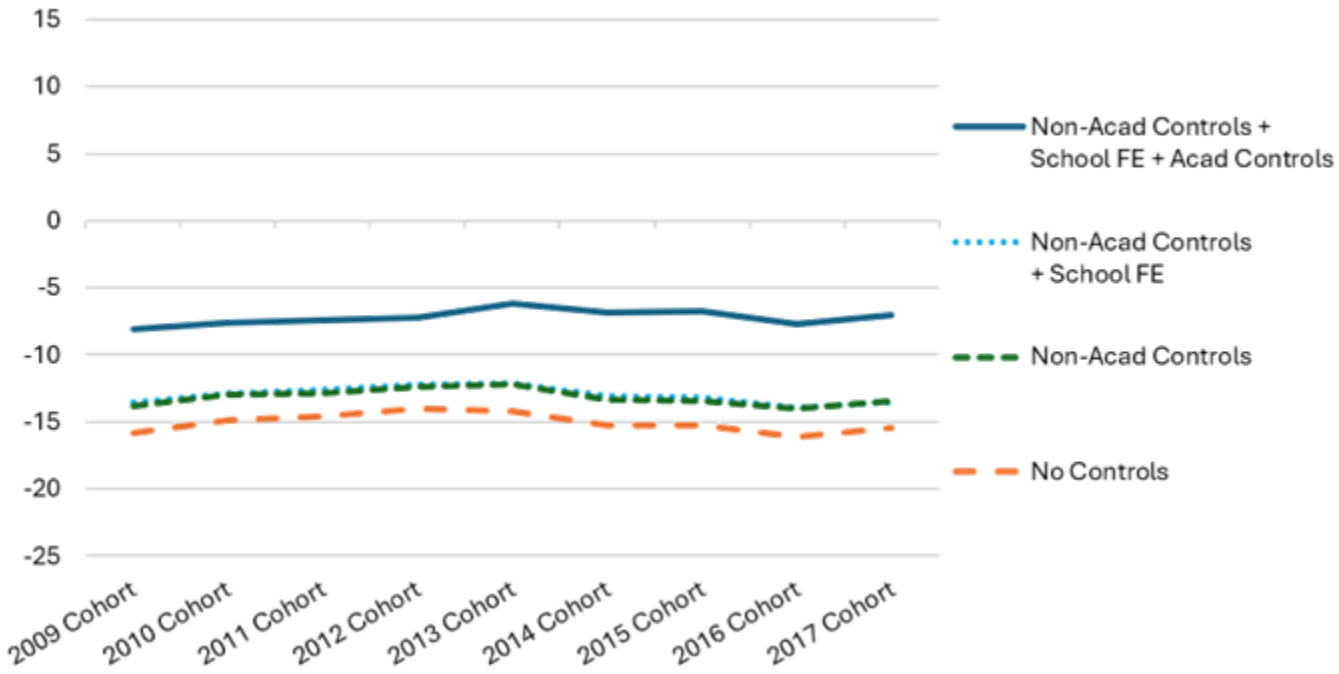
Across cohorts in Washington, male high school seniors consistently file the FAFSA at lower rates than female and nonbinary high school seniors. On average, male students (40.1%) are 15.1 percentage points less likely than female and nonbinary students (55.2%) to file the FAFSA in their senior year of high school (see **Appendix Table 2**).

Non-academic student characteristics, [12] factors associated with a student's school, [13] and student-level academic measures [14] altogether explain roughly half of the gender group gap. **Figure 3** shows the gender difference in twelfth-grade FAFSA filing over time and when 1) no controls, 2) non-academic student-level controls, 3) non-academic student-level controls and school fixed effects, or 4) non-academic student-level controls, school fixed effects, and academic student-level controls are applied. Negative values indicate how much lower male FAFSA filing rates are relative to FAFSA filing rates for female and nonbinary students. The dashed orange trend line ("No Controls") shows that the FAFSA filing rate for male seniors typically hovers around 15 percentage points lower than FAFSA filing rates for female and nonbinary seniors over nine cohorts. The dark green dashed line ("Non-Acad Controls") indicates that the gender group gap decreases by roughly 2 percentage points for each cohort when accounting for other non-academic student characteristics (e.g., race/ethnicity, household income status, and disability status). Factors associated with a student's school do not appear to explain much of the gender group gap since the light blue dotted line ("Non-Acad Controls + School FE") mostly coincides with the non-academic controls trend line. In contrast, accounting for student-level academic measures substantially reduces the gender group gap: Across cohorts, the difference between FAFSA filing rates for male students compared to FAFSA filing rates for female and nonbinary students decreases 4.9 to 6.5 percentage points, as shown by the solid navy line ("Non-Acad Controls + School FE + Acad Controls").

As shown below, there remains a persistent and large gender group gap in FAFSA filing even when all else is held constant. Across cohorts, male seniors are 6.3 to 8.3 percentage points less likely than female and nonbinary seniors to file the FAFSA. In other words, male students are noticeably less likely to file the FAFSA even when compared to their otherwise similar female and nonbinary peers.

[12] The regression analysis controls for the following non-academic student characteristics: Race/ethnicity, Free and Reduced-Price Lunch program eligibility (i.e., household income status), special education status, disability status, English Language Learner status, migrant status, and English or Spanish-speaking household status.
[13] Factors such as neighborhood, teachers, local resources, and geographic context are captured in school fixed effects in the regression model.
[14] The regression analysis controls for the following student-level standardized academic measures: Standardized GPA at the end of ninth grade, standardized 8th grade math test scores, and standardized 8th grade reading or English Language Arts (ELA) test scores. Reading test scores are used from 2010 through 2015 and replaced with the ELA test scores in 2016 through 2018.

Figure 3. Male–Female/Nonbinary Gap in FAFSA Filing Rates Across Ninth-Grade Cohorts, All Students

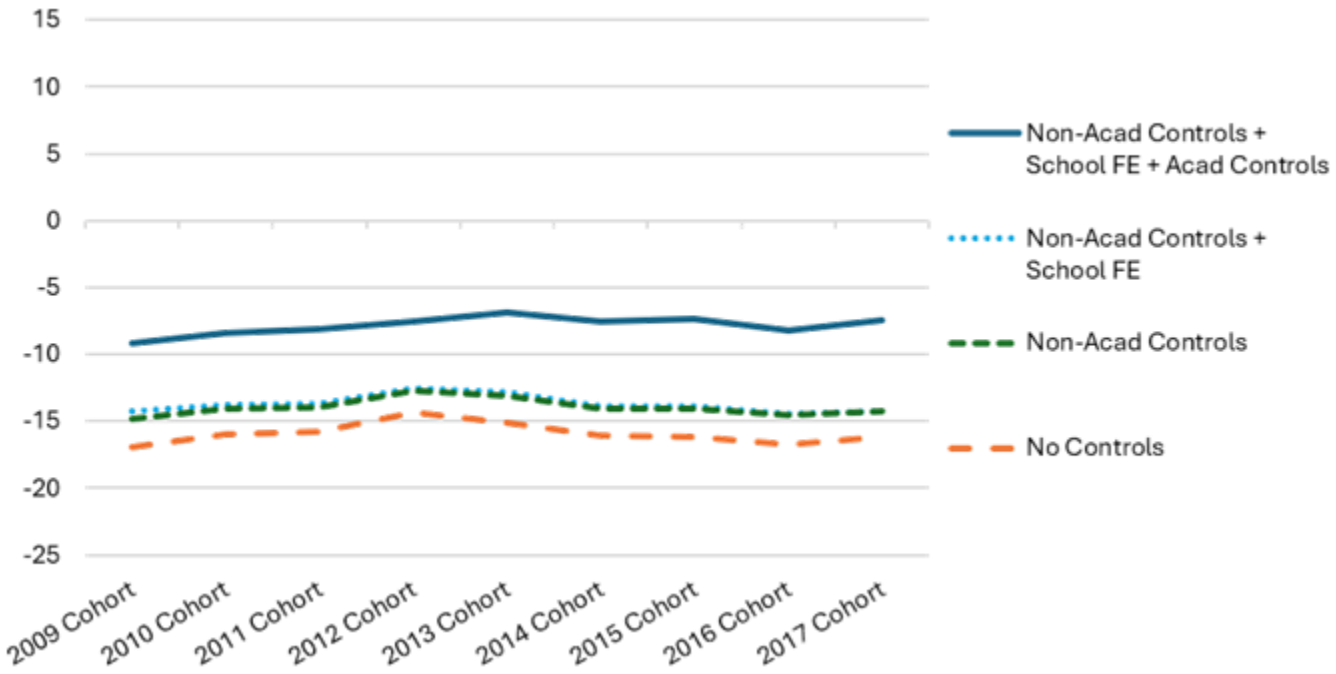


Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse

Note. This gender group gap is calculated as a percentage point difference between twelfth-grade FAFSA filing rates of all male students and all female/nonbinary students. The non-academic controls ("Non-Acad Controls") are a student's race/ethnicity, special education status, disability status, English Language Learner status, migrant status, and English or Spanish-speaking household status. School fixed effects ("School FE") account for factors associated with a student's school (e.g., neighborhood, teachers, local resources, and geographic context). The academic controls ("Acad Controls") are a student's standardized GPA at the end of ninth grade, standardized eighth grade math test scores, and standardized eighth grade reading or English Language Arts (ELA) test scores. Reading test scores are used from 2010 through 2015 and replaced with the ELA test scores in 2016 through 2018. Cohorts 2009 through 2017 were expected to be in twelfth grade during the 2012-13 through 2020-21 academic years, respectively. At the time of analysis, FAFSA filing data were not yet available for Cohort 2018. Due to the small number of nonbinary students in the sample and data reporting limitations, students identified as nonbinary or female in ninth grade are categorized together as one gender group.

The gender group gap is larger among low-income students: Male low-income seniors are 6.9 to 9.2 percentage points less likely than female low-income and nonbinary low-income seniors to file the FAFSA (see **Figure 4**).

Figure 4. Male–Female/Nonbinary Gap in FAFSA Filing Rates Across Ninth-Grade Cohorts, Low-Income Students



Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse

Note. This gender group gap is calculated as a percentage point difference between twelfth-grade FAFSA filing rates of low-income male students and low-income female/nonbinary students. The non-academic controls ("Non-Acad Controls") are a student's race/ethnicity, special education status, disability status, English Language Learner status, migrant status, and English or Spanish-speaking household status. School fixed effects ("School FE") account for factors associated with a student's school (e.g., neighborhood, teachers, local resources, and geographic context). The academic controls ("Acad Controls") are a student's standardized GPA at the end of ninth grade, standardized eighth grade math test scores, and standardized eighth grade reading or English Language Arts (ELA) test scores. Reading test scores are used from 2010 through 2015 and replaced with the ELA test scores in 2016 through 2018. Cohorts 2009 through 2017 were expected to be in twelfth grade during the 2012-13 through 2020-21 academic years, respectively. At the time of analysis, FAFSA filing data were not yet available for Cohort 2018. Due to the small number of nonbinary students in the sample and data reporting limitations, students identified as nonbinary or female in ninth grade are categorized together as one gender group. Low-income students are defined in this report as those who are eligible for the federal Free and Reduced-Price Lunch program in ninth grade.

Race/Ethnicity

FAFSA filing rates for high school seniors in Washington differ by race/ethnicity. Black/African American seniors (50.8%) file the FAFSA at a higher-than-average rate in high school, whereas other underrepresented minority (URM) students have lower-than-average rates: Only 41.1% of Hispanic/Latino seniors, 38.0% of Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander seniors, and 33.0% of American Indian/Alaska Native seniors file the FAFSA. Among non-underrepresented minority (non-URM) students, Asian (65.7%) seniors file the FAFSA at a higher-than-average rate, and White students (47.4%) have a FAFSA filing rate only 0.1 percentage points lower than the average across all students.

American Indian/Alaska Native students are the most underserved in terms of FAFSA filing. Only 33.0% of these students file the FAFSA in their senior year of high school.

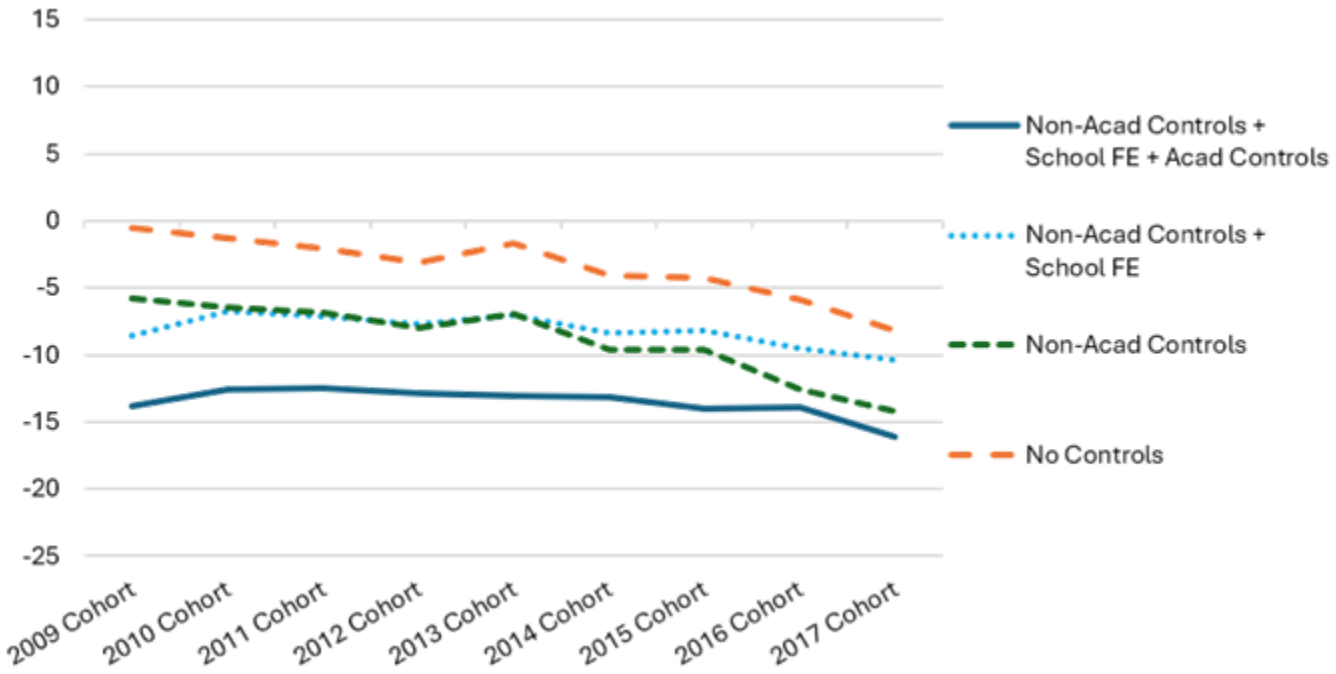
When accounting for students' non-academic characteristics, [15] school- and neighborhood-related factors, and student-level academic measures, [16] Black/African American, Asian, and Hispanic/Latino students are significantly more likely than White students to file the FAFSA in twelfth-grade. Figures 5 through 9 show the gap between White and Black/African American students, White and Asian students, then White and Hispanic/Latino students across cohorts. A value of zero would indicate parity in FAFSA filing rates between groups. Negative values indicate how much lower FAFSA filing rates are for White students compared to FAFSA filing rates of Black/African American, Asian, and Hispanic/Latino students. Positive values show how much higher White students' FAFSA filing rates are when compared to each racial/ethnic group.

Without controls ("No Controls"), FAFSA filing rates are lower for White students than for Black/African American students, and the racial gap further increases when applying all controls; see **Figure 5**. The navy solid line ("Non-Acad Controls + School FE + Acad Controls") shows the White–Black/African American gap in FAFSA filing rate across cohorts when all else is held constant: White seniors have a FAFSA filing rate 12.5 to 16.1 percentage points lower than Black/African American seniors. This means that students who share other non-academic characteristics (e.g., gender group, household income status, and disability status), school-related factors, and academic measures are significantly less likely to file the FAFSA if they are White than if they are Black/African American.

[15] The regression analysis controls for the following non-academic student characteristics: Gender group, Free and Reduced-Price Lunch program eligibility (i.e., household income status), special education status, disability status, English Language Learner status, migrant status, and English or Spanish-speaking household status.

[16] The regression analysis controls for the following student-level standardized academic measures: Standardized GPA at the end of ninth grade, standardized 8th grade math test scores, and standardized 8th grade reading or English Language Arts (ELA) test scores. Reading test scores are used from 2010 through 2015 and replaced with the ELA test scores in 2016 through 2018.

Figure 5. White–Black/African American Gap in FAFSA Filing Rates Across Ninth-Grade Cohorts, All Students

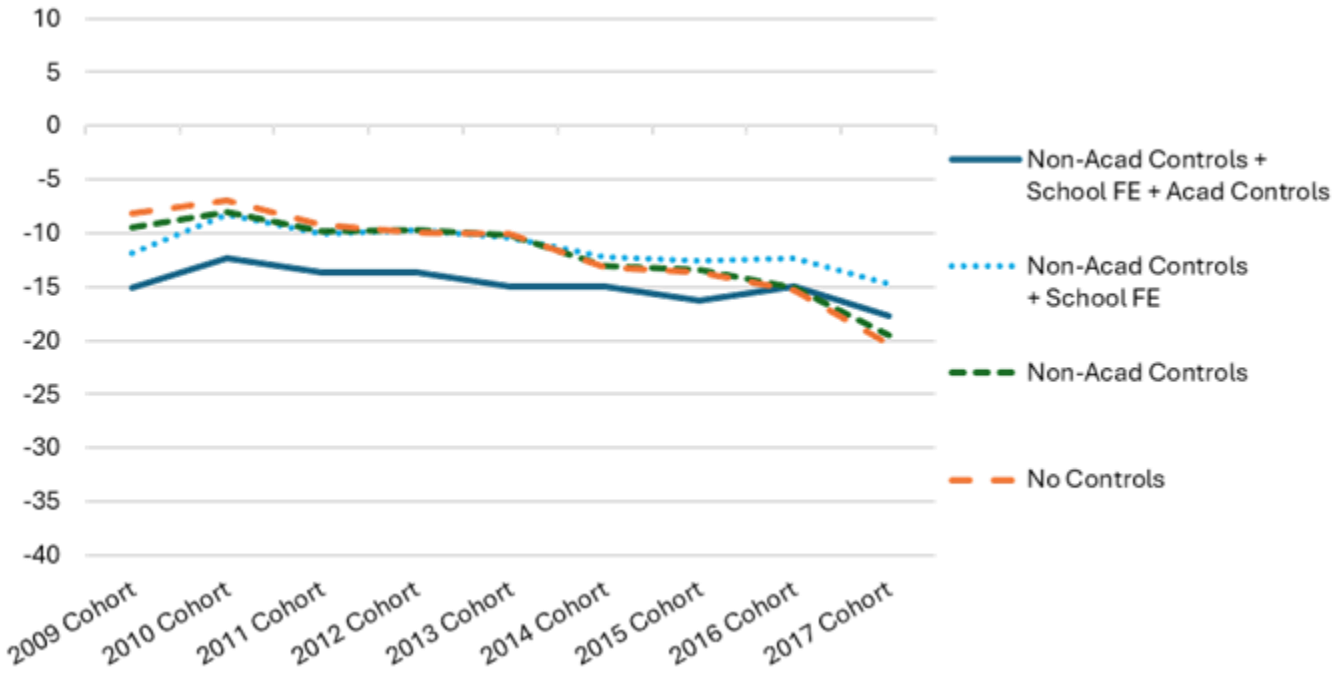


Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse

Note. This White–Black/African American gap is calculated as a percentage point difference between twelfth-grade FAFSA filing rates of all White students and all Black/African American students. The non-academic controls ("Non-Acad Controls") are a student's race/ethnicity, special education status, disability status, English Language Learner status, migrant status, and English or Spanish-speaking household status. School fixed effects ("School FE") account for factors associated with a student's school (e.g., neighborhood, teachers, local resources, and geographic context). The academic controls ("Acad Controls") are a student's standardized GPA at the end of ninth grade, standardized eighth grade math test scores, and standardized eighth grade reading or English Language Arts (ELA) test scores. Reading test scores are used from 2010 through 2015 and replaced with the ELA test scores in 2016 through 2018. Cohorts 2009 through 2017 were expected to be in twelfth grade during the 2012-13 through 2020-21 academic years, respectively. At the time of analysis, FAFSA filing data were not yet available for Cohort 2018.

When examining only low-income students (see **Figure 6**), the racial gap is even larger between White and Black/African American seniors for every year of data except for Cohort 2010.

Figure 6. White–Black/African American Gap in FAFSA Filing Rates Across Ninth-Grade Cohorts, Low-Income Students

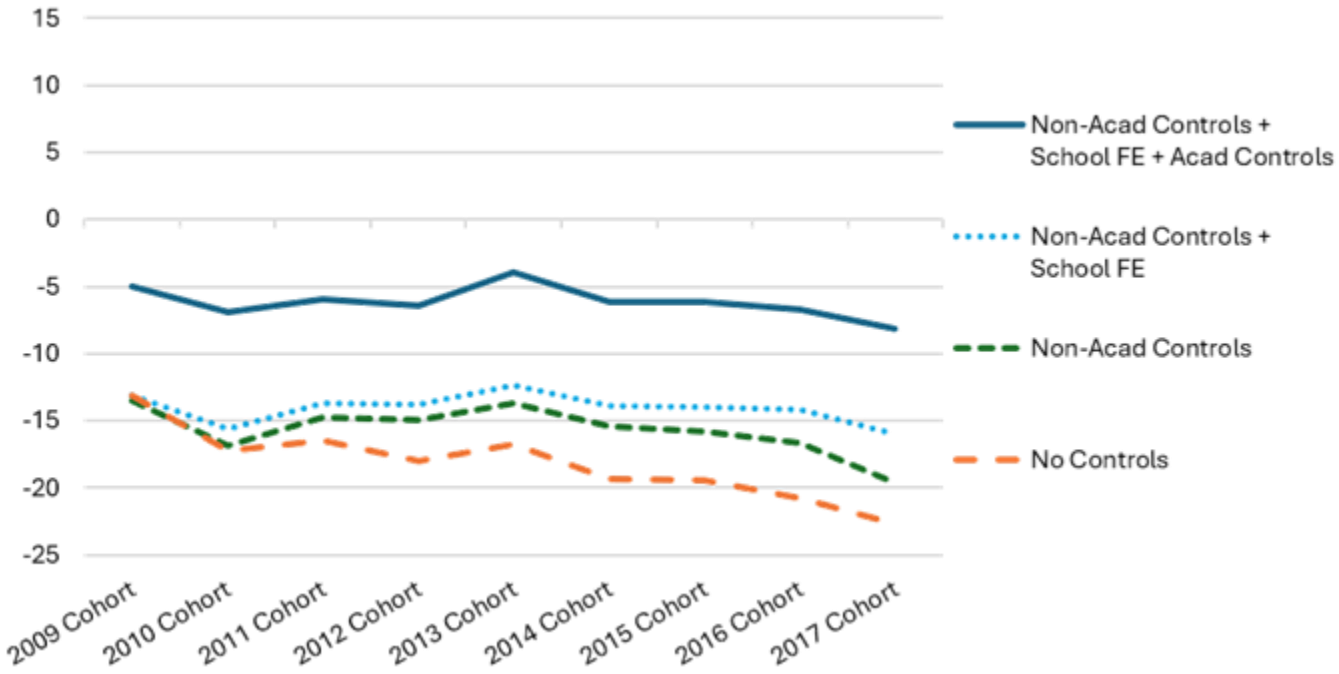


Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse

Note. This White–Black/African American gap is calculated as a percentage point difference between twelfth-grade FAFSA filing rates of low-income White students and low-income Black/African American students. The non-academic controls ("Non-Acad Controls") are a student's race/ethnicity, special education status, disability status, English Language Learner status, migrant status, and English or Spanish-speaking household status. School fixed effects ("School FE") account for factors associated with a student's school (e.g., neighborhood, teachers, local resources, and geographic context). The academic controls ("Acad Controls") are a student's standardized GPA at the end of ninth grade, standardized eighth grade math test scores, and standardized eighth grade reading or English Language Arts (ELA) test scores. Reading test scores are used from 2010 through 2015 and replaced with the ELA test scores in 2016 through 2018. Cohorts 2009 through 2017 were expected to be in twelfth grade during the 2012-13 through 2020-21 academic years, respectively. At the time of analysis, FAFSA filing data were not yet available for Cohort 2018. Low-income students are defined in this report as those who are eligible for the federal Free and Reduced-Price Lunch program in ninth grade.

Applying all controls increases the gap between White and Black/African American students' FAFSA filing rates, yet doing so decreases the White–Asian gap in FAFSA filing rates. The navy solid line ("Non-Acad Controls + School FE + Acad Controls") in **Figure 7** shows the FAFSA filing rate of White students is anywhere from 4.0 to 8.2 percentage points lower than that of their Asian counterparts, all else held constant. The significant racial gap further increases when comparing White low-income students and Asian low-income students (see **Figure 8**).

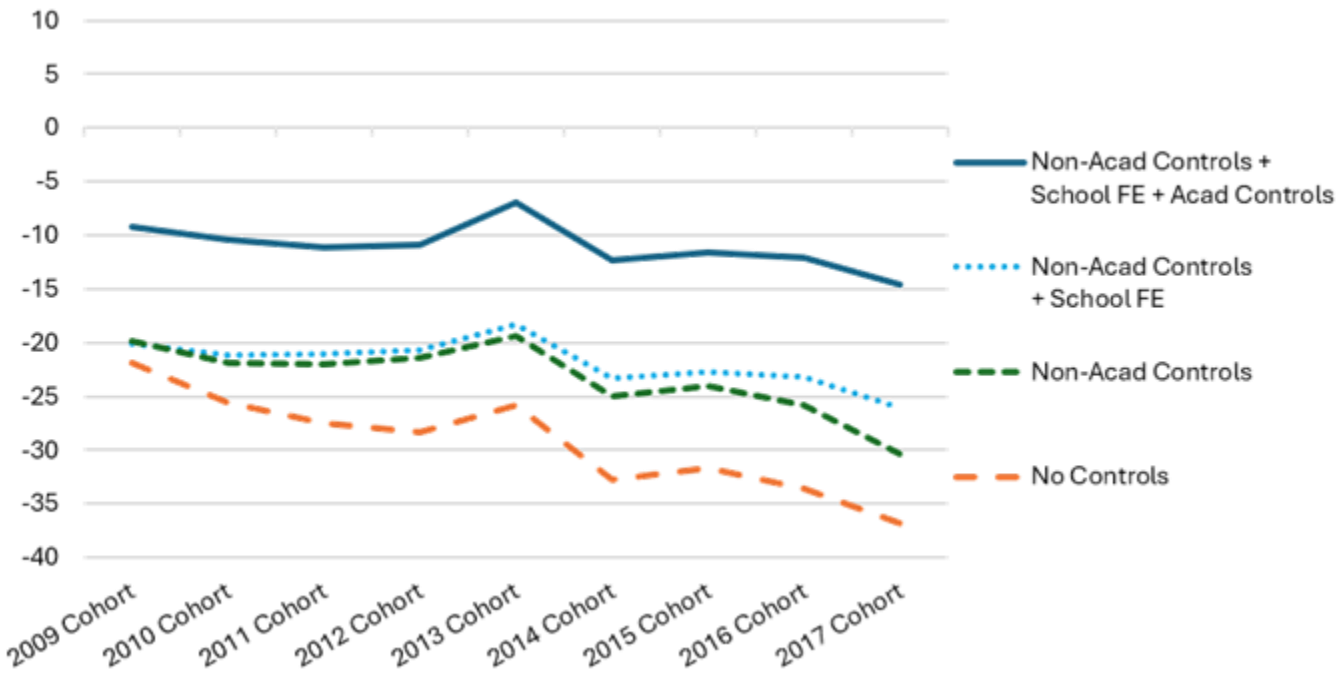
Figure 7. White–Asian Gap in FAFSA Filing Rates Across Ninth-Grade Cohorts, All Students



Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse

Note. This White–Asian gap is calculated as a percentage point difference between twelfth-grade FAFSA filing rates of all White students and all Asian students. The non-academic controls ("Non-Acad Controls") are a student's race/ethnicity, special education status, disability status, English Language Learner status, migrant status, and English or Spanish-speaking household status. School fixed effects ("School FE") account for factors associated with a student's school (e.g., neighborhood, teachers, local resources, and geographic context). The academic controls ("Acad Controls") are a student's standardized GPA at the end of ninth grade, standardized eighth grade math test scores, and standardized eighth grade reading or English Language Arts (ELA) test scores. Reading test scores are used from 2010 through 2015 and replaced with the ELA test scores in 2016 through 2018. Cohorts 2009 through 2017 were expected to be in twelfth grade during the 2012-13 through 2020-21 academic years, respectively. At the time of analysis, FAFSA filing data were not yet available for Cohort 2018.

Figure 8. White–Asian Gap in FAFSA Filing Rates Across Ninth-Grade Cohorts, Low-Income Students

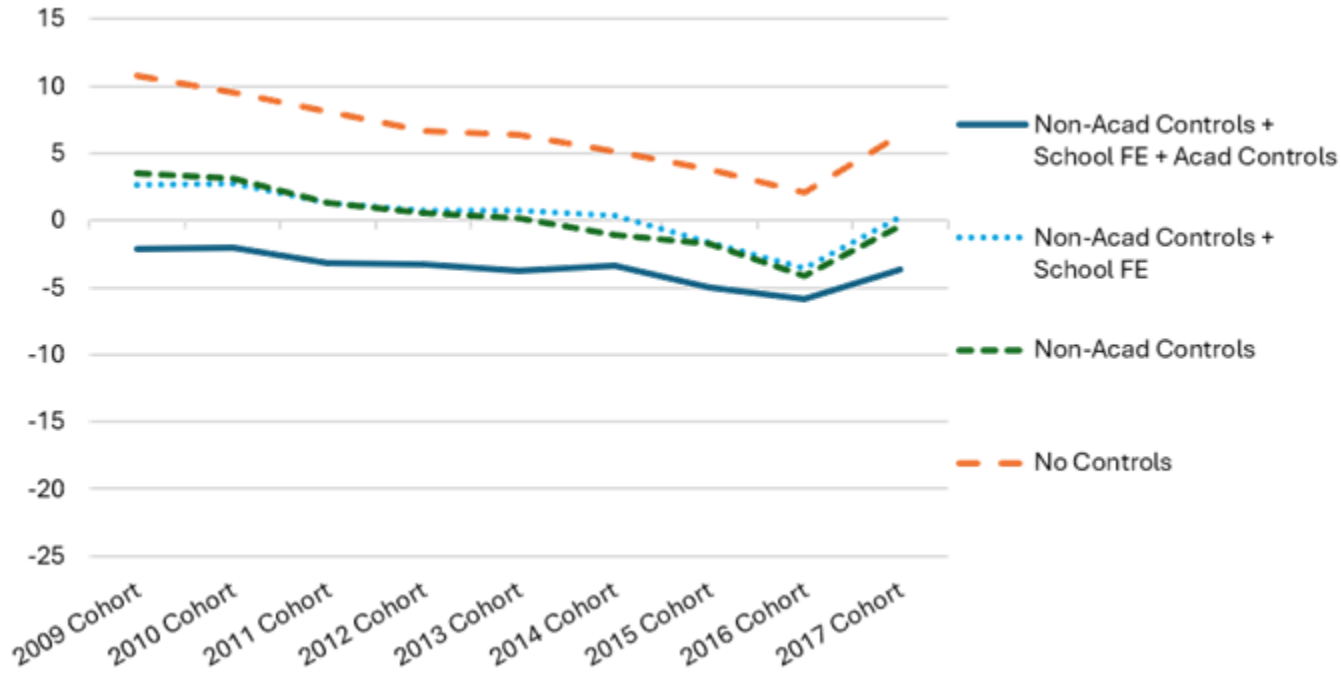


Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse

Note. This White–Asian gap is calculated as a percentage point difference between twelfth-grade FAFSA filing rates of low-income White students and low-income Asian students. The non-academic controls ("Non-Acad Controls") are a student's race/ethnicity, special education status, disability status, English Language Learner status, migrant status, and English or Spanish-speaking household status. School fixed effects ("School FE") account for factors associated with a student's school (e.g., neighborhood, teachers, local resources, and geographic context). The academic controls ("Acad Controls") are a student's standardized GPA at the end of ninth grade, standardized eighth grade math test scores, and standardized eighth grade reading or English Language Arts (ELA) test scores. Reading test scores are used from 2010 through 2015 and replaced with the ELA test scores in 2016 through 2018. Cohorts 2009 through 2017 were expected to be in twelfth grade during the 2012-13 through 2020-21 academic years, respectively. At the time of analysis, FAFSA filing data were not yet available for Cohort 2018. Low-income students are defined in this report as those who are eligible for the federal Free and Reduced-Price Lunch program in ninth grade.

Without controls, White students' FAFSA filing rate is 2.1 to 10.8 percentage points higher than Hispanic/Latino students' FAFSA filing rate (see **Figure 9**). However, with all controls, White students' FAFSA filing rate is 2.1 to 5.9 percentage points *lower* than for their Hispanic/Latino counterparts. As shown in **Figure 10**, White low-income students are less likely to file the FAFSA than Hispanic/Latino low-income students, when all else is equal. The racial/ethnic gap is sometimes larger between White students and Hispanic/Latino students when considering their overall FAFSA filing rates rather than only for low-income seniors.

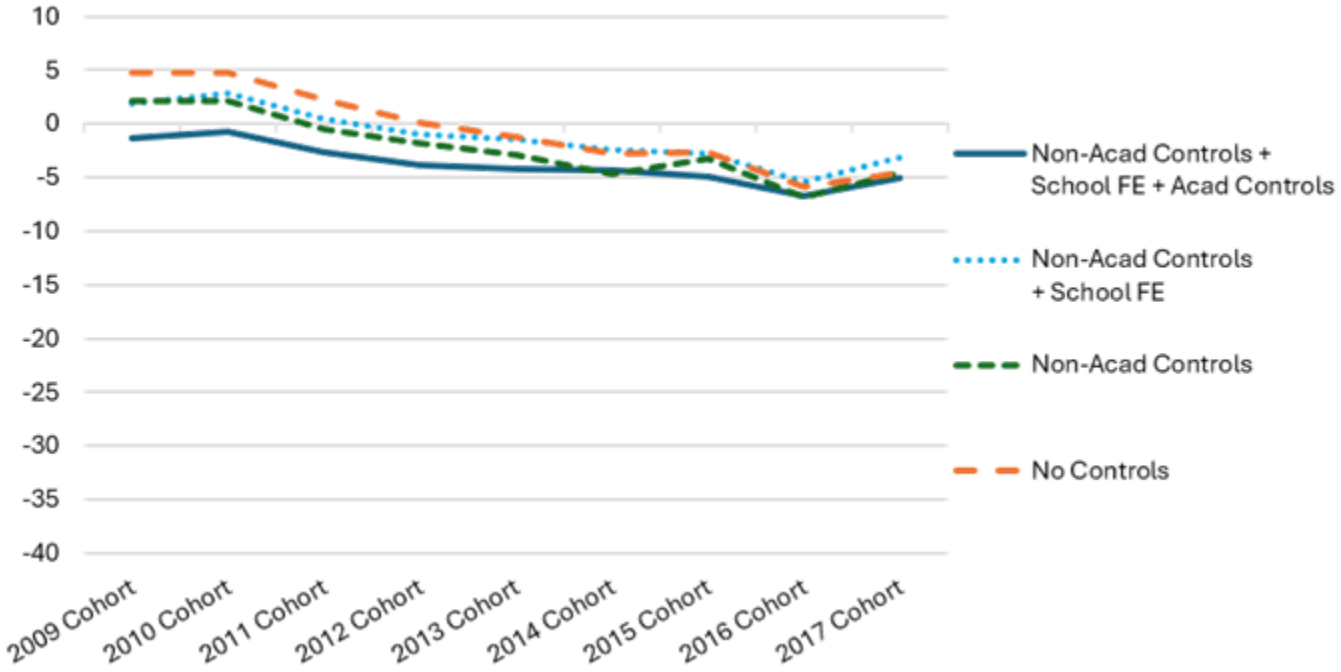
Figure 9. White–Hispanic/Latino Gap in FAFSA Filing Rates Across Ninth-Grade Cohorts, All Students



Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse

Note. This White–Hispanic/Latino gap is calculated as a percentage point difference between twelfth-grade FAFSA filing rates of all White students and all Hispanic/Latino students. The non-academic controls ("Non-Acad Controls") are a student's race/ethnicity, special education status, disability status, English Language Learner status, migrant status, and English or Spanish-speaking household status. School fixed effects ("School FE") account for factors associated with a student's school (e.g., neighborhood, teachers, local resources, and geographic context). The academic controls ("Acad Controls") are a student's standardized GPA at the end of ninth grade, standardized eighth grade math test scores, and standardized eighth grade reading or English Language Arts (ELA) test scores. Reading test scores are used from 2010 through 2015 and replaced with the ELA test scores in 2016 through 2018. Cohorts 2009 through 2017 were expected to be in twelfth grade during the 2012-13 through 2020-21 academic years, respectively. At the time of analysis, FAFSA filing data were not yet available for Cohort 2018. "Hispanic/Latino" includes those of any race(s).

Figure 10. White–Hispanic/Latino Gap in FAFSA Filing Rates Across Ninth-Grade Cohorts, Low-Income Students



Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse

Note. This White–Hispanic/Latino gap is calculated as a percentage point difference between twelfth-grade FAFSA filing rates of low-income White students and low-income Hispanic/Latino students. The non-academic controls ("Non-Acad Controls") are a student's race/ethnicity, special education status, disability status, English Language Learner status, migrant status, and English or Spanish-speaking household status. School fixed effects ("School FE") account for factors associated with a student's school (e.g., neighborhood, teachers, local resources, and geographic context). The academic controls ("Acad Controls") are a student's standardized GPA at the end of ninth grade, standardized eighth grade math test scores, and standardized eighth grade reading or English Language Arts (ELA) test scores. Reading test scores are used from 2010 through 2015 and replaced with the ELA test scores in 2016 through 2018. Cohorts 2009 through 2017 were expected to be in twelfth grade during the 2012-13 through 2020-21 academic years, respectively. At the time of analysis, FAFSA filing data were not yet available for Cohort 2018. "Hispanic/Latino" includes those of any race(s). Low-income students are defined in this report as those who are eligible for the federal Free and Reduced-Price Lunch program in ninth grade.

Implications and Discussion

FAFSA completion can enable more students to receive financial aid and thus support postsecondary access and success. Policy change can be effective towards increasing FAFSA filing rates, such as when the U.S. Department of Education made the FAFSA income tax reporting process simpler and the submission window earlier in 2016. Governor Ferguson's Executive Order establishing the Washington Completes FAFSA Campaign is another step towards improving FAFSA filing among high school seniors. Understanding how FAFSA filing differs by gender and race/ethnicity—especially among low-income students—can inform efforts to raise FAFSA completion and increase postsecondary attainment in the state.

Analyzing data from nine cohorts of high school students across the state shows persistent and large gender and racial/ethnic disparities in FAFSA filing. When all else is equal, male

seniors are less likely to file the FAFSA than their female and nonbinary counterparts, and White seniors are less likely to file the FAFSA than their racial/ethnic counterparts. Across almost all cohorts, the gaps between groups are even larger when looking specifically at low-income students. Yet, low-income students are the most likely to be eligible for need-based financial aid if they complete a FAFSA.

The U.S. Department of Education's FAFSA changes in 2016-17 made applying for financial aid easier and provided students with more time to receive support navigating the process during their senior year. However, the process changes did not result in long-term filing rate increases across low-income students. Among low-income students, FAFSA filing peaked for Asian, Black/African American, and Hispanic/Latino students in the second year of the FAFSA process changes (see Cohort 2014 in **Appendix Table 4**) but generally declined since then. However, the trends suggest that FAFSA outreach to low-income students in Washington has been more successful in bolstering filing for Asian, Black/African American, and Hispanic/Latino seniors than for White seniors.

Results suggest that FAFSA outreach to low-income students in Washington has been particularly successful in bolstering FAFSA filing for Asian, Black/African American, and Hispanic/Latino seniors.

Exploring new ways of reaching students (e.g., Carrell, 2018), especially those who are male or White, earlier in high school may improve financial aid uptake. Students may not be well-informed about funding for apprenticeship programs through the Washington College Grant and may mistakenly believe that the WA Grant can only be applied to baccalaureate programs. As part of fostering a college-going culture that includes FAFSA filing, WSAC recently developed tools and resources (e.g., OtterBot and @CollegeToolkit) that can support high school students, their parents/guardians, and trusted messengers (i.e., educators, counselors, and college access professionals) with information about financial aid and college planning. Continually iterating to meet students where they are will be important to effect change.

The Washington Completes FAFSA Campaign is expected to have a major impact statewide, and a universal FAFSA policy could potentially improve FAFSA filing even more. Washington does not currently have a policy mandating FAFSA completion for high school graduation (Kwakye & Deane, 2022). However, research on similar mandates in five other states suggests doing so could have an immediate and positive impact on FAFSA completions, including reducing equity gaps (Granville et al., 2025; DeBaun, 2019b). Louisiana was the first state to institute a universal FAFSA policy and, as a result, the state topped the country in FAFSA completion rankings for several years. Importantly,

Louisiana's increased FAFSA completion rates translated into increased college enrollment (Deneault, 2023). However, the policy was rescinded in March 2024 (DeBaun, 2024). The following year, Louisiana dropped to 29th in the nation for FAFSA filing after experiencing a 12% decline in applications (Wall, 2025). Therefore, mandating the FAFSA for high school graduation could be a worthwhile policy lever [17] to increase FAFSA completions and possibly improve postsecondary access.

[17] As with any mandate, a FAFSA requirement would present a number of challenges. For example, the requirement may not be cost effective since enforcement could be expensive for districts, schools, community-based organizations, and state agencies, and students may still not enroll in postsecondary education for reasons that simply cannot be addressed with financial aid. Ideally, if the FAFSA is introduced as a high school graduation requirement, then there should also be more resources to help students not only file the FAFSA but also apply to and enroll in postsecondary education (Granville et al., 2025).

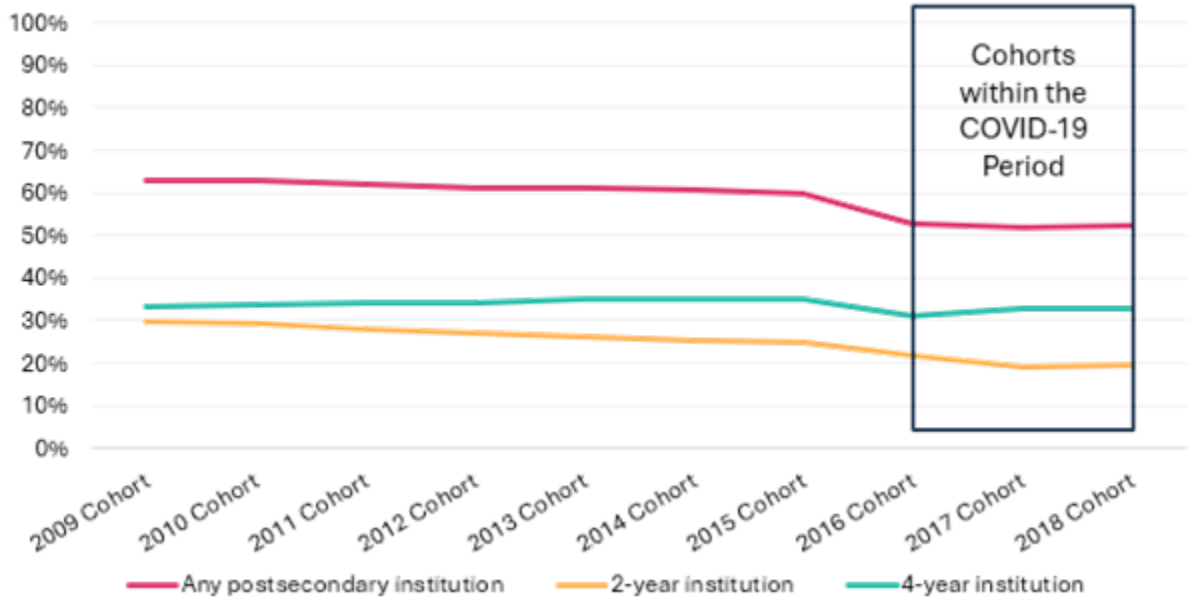
2. What Are the Differences in Postsecondary Enrollment Rates by Student Demographics?

This section examines postsecondary enrollment rates within one year of high school graduation. Students in Cohorts 2009 to 2018 were expected to graduate high school from 2012-2013 to 2021-2022, respectively. For the purposes of this report, postsecondary enrollment refers to enrollment at the first higher education institution after high school graduation. It does not include students who have enrolled in college courses as part of their high school curriculum or dual enrollment courses. Students enrolled in workforce education and training programs are also not included as the necessary data are not currently available.

Across the ninth-grade cohorts, 58.7 percent of Washington State public high school students enrolled at a postsecondary institution within one year of graduating high school (see **Appendix Table 5**). The average enrollment rate across all cohorts that were expected to graduate high school pre-pandemic was 61.5 percent, which is higher than for those who were expected to graduate in 2019-20 or later (i.e., Cohorts 2016 to 2018).

Among high school graduates, a higher percentage (33.7%) enrolled in four-year institutions within one year of graduating than in two-year institutions (25.0%). **Figure 11** shows the trend in postsecondary enrollment rates beginning with Cohort 2009. The rectangle indicates which ninth-grade cohorts were expected to enroll in postsecondary education (within one year of high school graduation) during the COVID-19 period. The percentage of students enrolling in two-year institutions had already declined about 5 percentage points before COVID-19, and enrollment generally decreased during the pandemic.

Figure 11. Postsecondary Enrollment Rate Within 1 Year of High School Graduation by Ninth-Grade Cohort and Institution Type



Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse
Note. Cohort 2015 was expected to enroll in postsecondary education in the 2019-20 academic year; the COVID-19 pandemic began in spring of their first postsecondary year. Cohorts 2016 to 2018 were expected to graduate high school during the COVID-19 period of 2019-20 to 2021-22.

The remainder of this section addresses the second research question: **What are the differences in postsecondary enrollment rates by student demographics?**

Summary of Findings

- Within one year of high school graduation, **male, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, Hispanic/Latino, and low-income students enroll in postsecondary education at lower rates** than their peers. It is possible these students are better represented in workforce education and training programs [18] or are pursuing occupations that do not require a postsecondary credential.
- Examining race/ethnicity with gender group, race/ethnicity with household income status, and gender group with household income status reveals additional nuance to enrollment patterns.
    - **Across all race/ethnicity categories, male students enroll in postsecondary education at lower rates** than their female and nonbinary counterparts. Except for those who are Asian, male students of every race/ethnicity enroll in postsecondary education at below average rates.

[18] For example, male students make up 72 percent of enrollment in apprenticeships (Huynh & Byrne, 2026), but data limitations disallow these programs from being included in the analysis for this report.

Notably, male students, except those who are Asian, are more likely to enroll at two-year institutions than four-year institutions.

- **Except for those who are Asian, low-income students of every race/ethnicity enroll in postsecondary education at below average rates.** Additionally, low-income students, except those who are Asian, are more likely to enroll at two-year institutions than four-year institutions.

- **Across race/ethnicity or gender group, students from low-income households enroll in postsecondary education at lower rates** than their non-low-income counterparts. For example, female and nonbinary students who are from low-income households enroll in postsecondary education at lower rates than male students from non-low-income households.

- **Students from rural, English Language Learner, and migrant backgrounds enroll in postsecondary education at lower rates** than their counterparts. Additionally, **students with a disability are less likely to enroll** than those without a disability.

- **Students whose primary home language is Spanish enroll at a lower rate** than those for whom English is the primary home language. However, the enrollment rate is highest for students whose primary home language is neither English nor Spanish (i.e., all other languages spoken at home combined).

Inequities in Postsecondary Enrollment Patterns

This section describes postsecondary enrollment rates by nine categories: [19]

1. Gender group
2. Race/ethnicity
3. Household income status
4. Intersectionality
5. Geographic context
6. Primary language spoken at home
7. English Language Learner status
8. Migrant status
9. Disability status

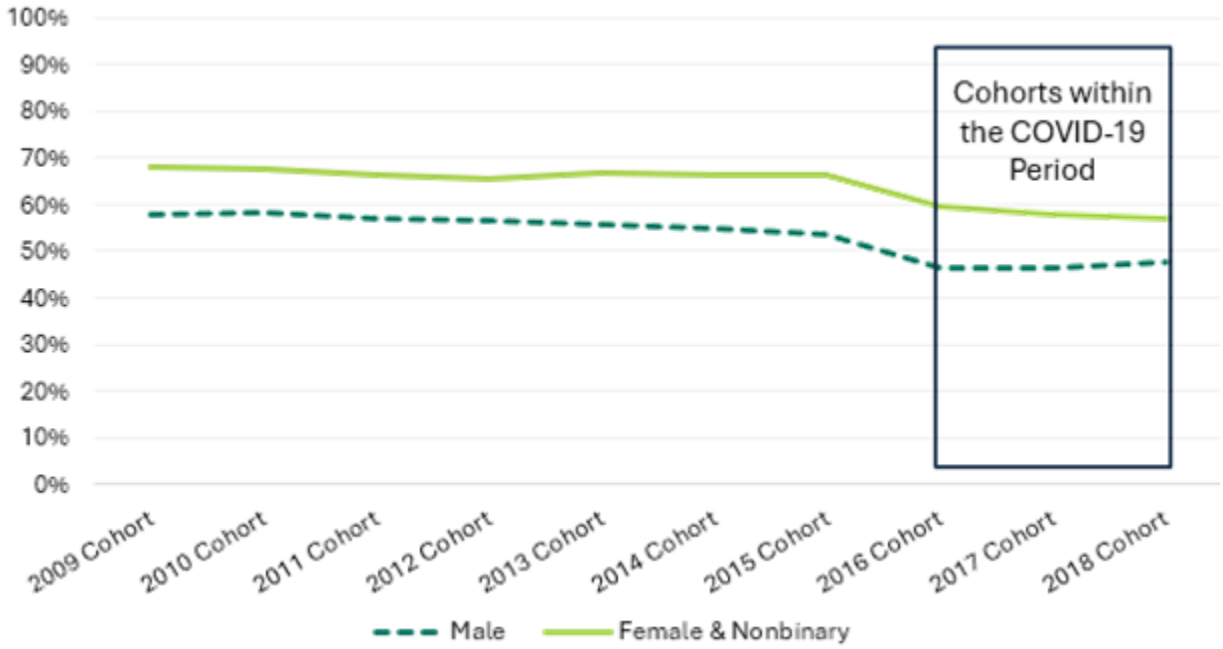
See Appendix Tables for enrollment rates by cohort and institution type (**Appendix Table 5**), by cohort and student demographic (**Appendix Table 6**), and by institution type and intersecting student demographics (**Appendix Table 7**).

[19] Please refer to page 2 for information about these categories.

Gender Group

Overall, fewer male students enroll in postsecondary education within one year of high school graduation than female and nonbinary students (53.3% compared to 64.0%, respectively; see **Appendix Table 6**). **Figure 12** illustrates the trends underlying these averages. Across cohorts, female and nonbinary students consistently had higher enrollment rates than male students.

Figure 12. Postsecondary Enrollment Rate Within 1 Year of High School Graduation by Ninth-Grade Cohort and Gender Group

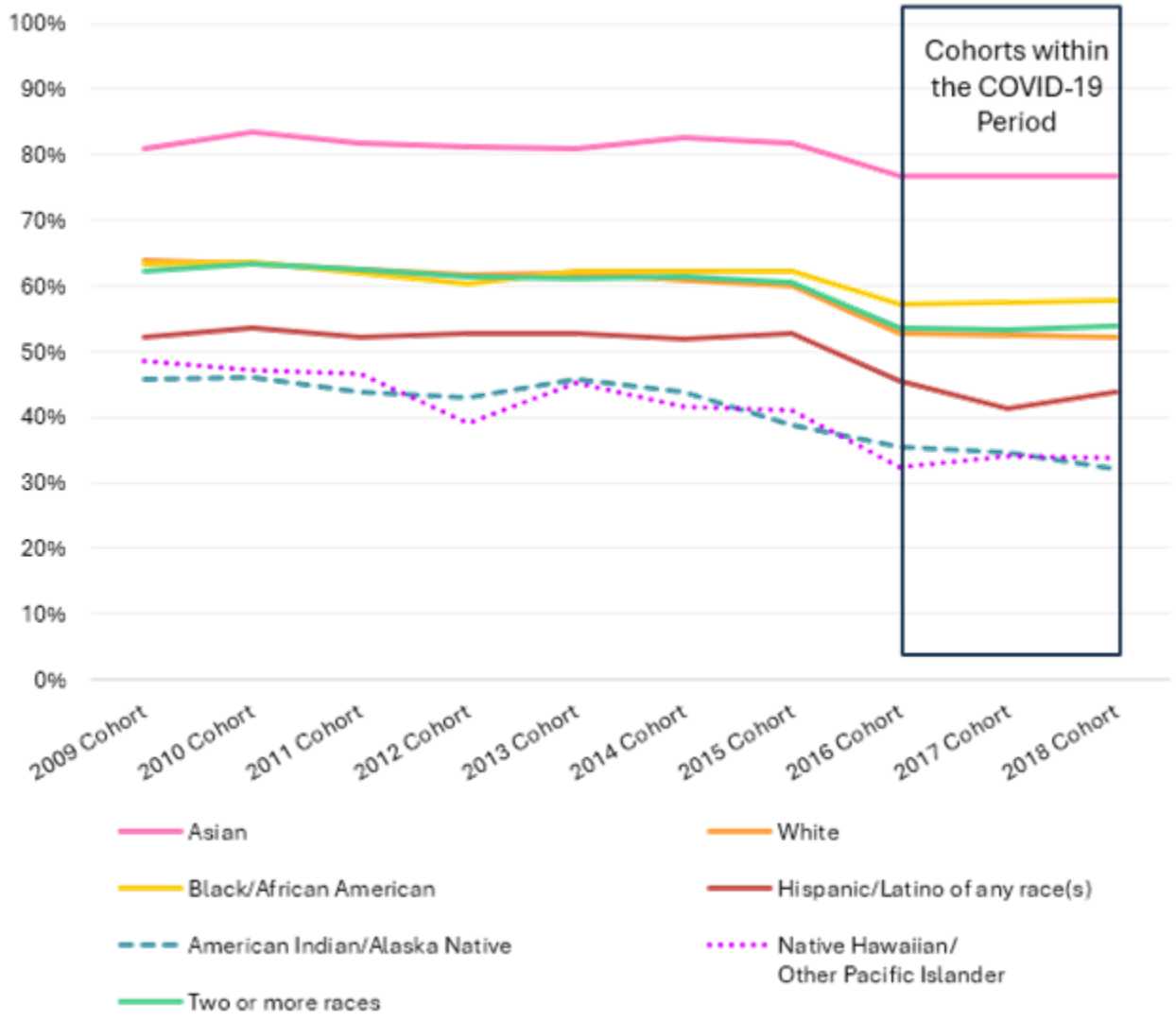


Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse
Note. Cohort 2015 was expected to enroll in postsecondary education in the 2019-20 academic year; the COVID-19 pandemic began in spring of their first postsecondary year. Cohorts 2016 to 2018 were expected to graduate high school during the COVID-19 period of 2019-20 to 2021-22. Due to the small number of nonbinary students in the sample and data reporting limitations, students identified as nonbinary or female in ninth grade are categorized together as one gender group.

Race/Ethnicity

By race/ethnicity, there are vast differences in enrollment rates within one year of high school graduation; they range from 40.0 percent for Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islanders to 80.1 percent of Asian students. Students who are of two or more races (58.8%), White (59.2%), or Black/African American (60.8%) enroll in postsecondary education at similar rates as the overall average (58.7%); see **Appendix Table 6**. As shown in **Figure 13**, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Hispanic/Latino students enrolled at the lowest rates across cohorts.

Figure 13. Postsecondary Enrollment Rate Within 1 Year of High School Graduation by Ninth-Grade Cohort and Race/Ethnicity

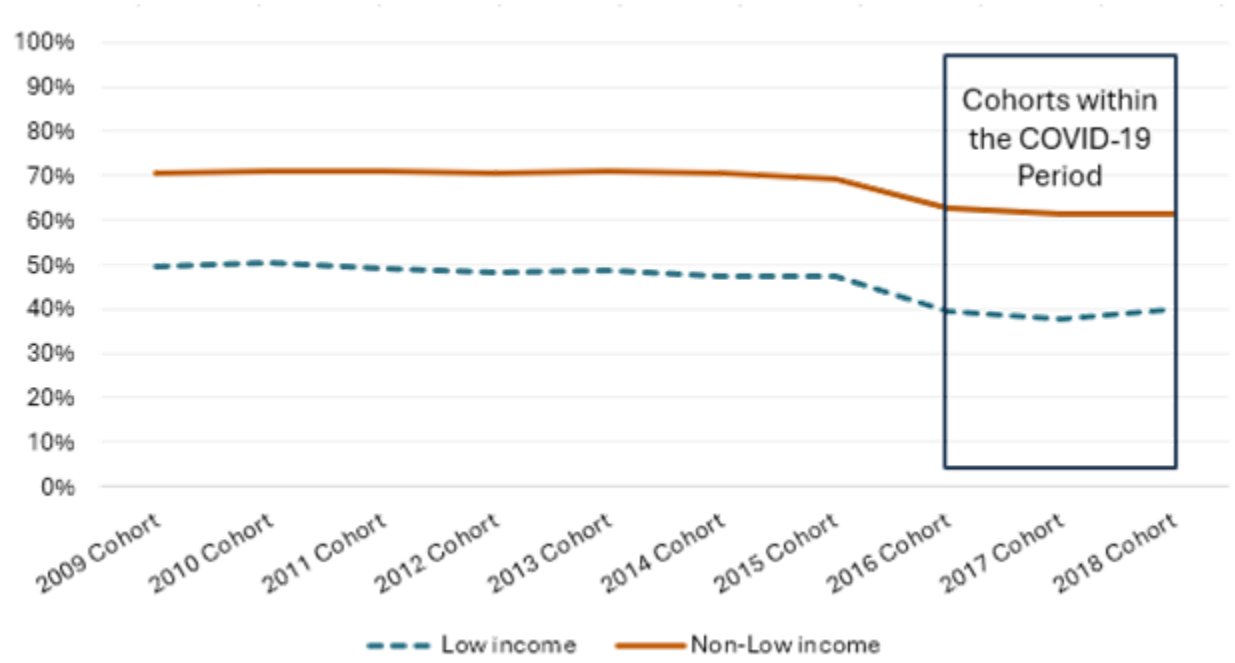


Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse
Note. Cohort 2015 was expected to enroll in postsecondary education in the 2019-20 academic year; the COVID-19 pandemic began in spring of their first postsecondary year. Cohorts 2016 to 2018 were expected to graduate high school during the COVID-19 period of 2019-20 to 2021-22.

Household Income Status

Between low-income (45.6%) and non-low-income (67.8%) students, there is a 22.2 percentage point difference in rates of postsecondary enrollment within one year of high school graduation (see **Appendix Table 6**). **Figure 14** shows that the gap is large and persistent over time.

Figure 14. Postsecondary Enrollment Rate Within 1 Year of High School Graduation by Ninth-Grade Cohort and Household Income Status



Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse
Note. Cohort 2015 was expected to enroll in postsecondary education in the 2019-20 academic year; the COVID-19 pandemic began in spring of their first postsecondary year. Cohorts 2016 to 2018 were expected to graduate high school during the COVID-19 period of 2019-20 to 2021-22. Low-income students are defined in this report as those who are eligible for the federal Free and Reduced-Price Lunch program in ninth grade.

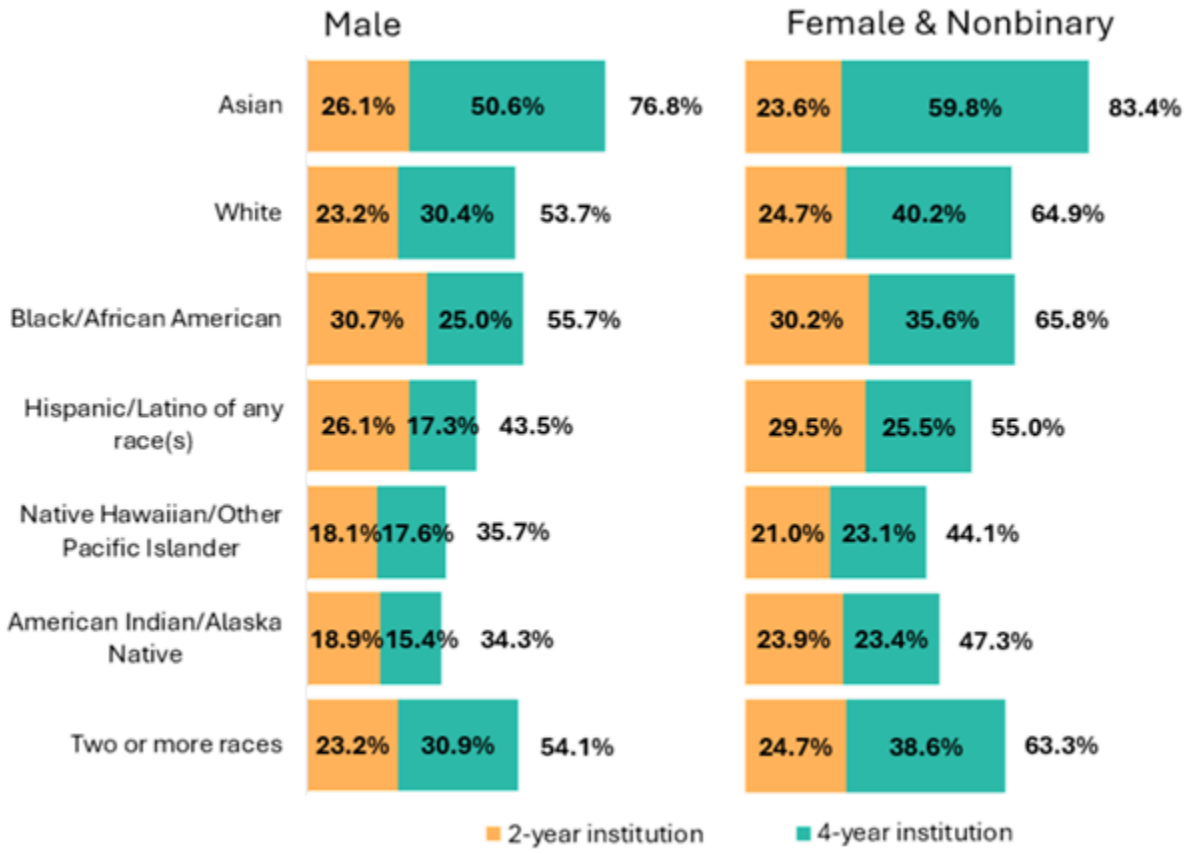
Intersectionality

Examining gender group with household income status, gender group with race/ethnicity, and race/ethnicity with household income status reveals additional nuance to enrollment patterns. This section focuses on enrollment rates by race/ethnicity and gender group, race/ethnicity and household income status, then gender group and household income status.

Race/Ethnicity X Gender Group

When examining gender within race/ethnicity, one pattern clearly emerges: Across race/ethnicity, male students enroll in postsecondary education at lower rates than their female and nonbinary counterparts (see **Figure 15**). For example, among American Indian/Alaska Native students, male students are 13.0 percentage points less likely than female and nonbinary students to enroll in postsecondary education; this is the largest gender group gap by race/ethnicity.

Figure 15. Postsecondary Enrollment Rate Within 1 Year of High School Graduation by Race/Ethnicity and Gender Group



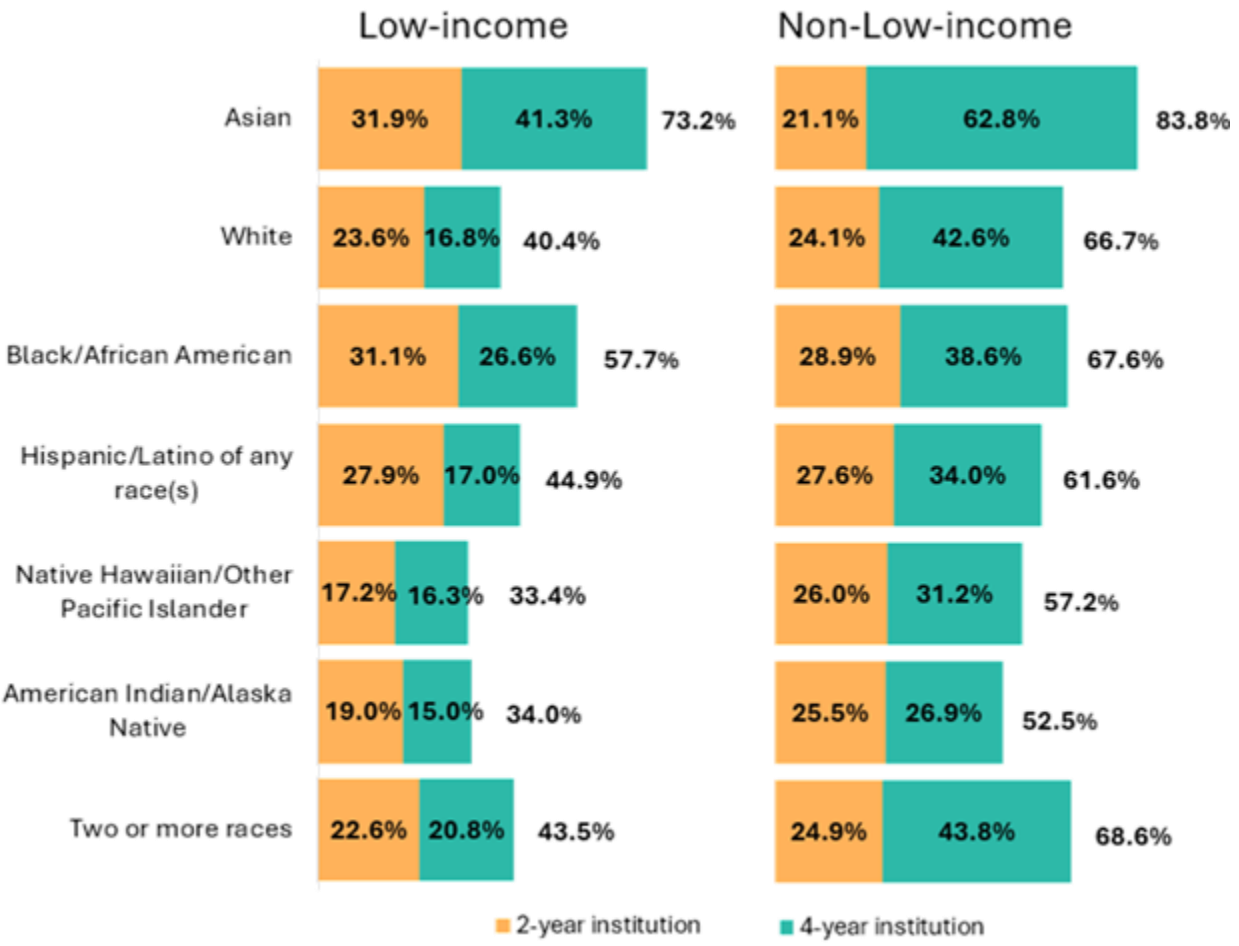
Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse
Note. The percentage to the right of each bar is the total enrollment rate across institution types for a given race/ethnicity and gender group. Overall averages by race/ethnicity and by gender group are indicated in Appendix Table 6. Due to the small number of nonbinary students in the sample and data reporting limitations, students identified as nonbinary or female in ninth grade are categorized together as one gender group.

Among female and nonbinary students, only those who are Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, or Hispanic/Latino have enrollment rates below the sample's overall average enrollment rate of 58.7 percent. Also, female and nonbinary students of most race/ethnicity groups are more likely to enroll at four-year institutions than two-year institutions.

Race/Ethnicity X Household Income Status

The importance of household income continues when examining its intersection with race/ethnicity: Students from low-income households enroll at lower rates than their non-low-income counterparts, as shown in **Figure 16**. Differences by household income status within race/ethnic group range from 9.9 percentage points for Black/African American students to 26.3 percentage points for White students.

Figure 16. Postsecondary Enrollment Rate Within 1 Year of High School Graduation by Race/Ethnicity and Household Income Status



Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse
Note. The percentage to the right of each bar is the total enrollment rate across institution types for a given race/ethnicity and household income status. Overall averages by race/ethnicity and by household income status are indicated in Appendix Table 6. Low-income students are defined in this report as those who are eligible for the federal Free and Reduced-Price Lunch program in ninth grade.

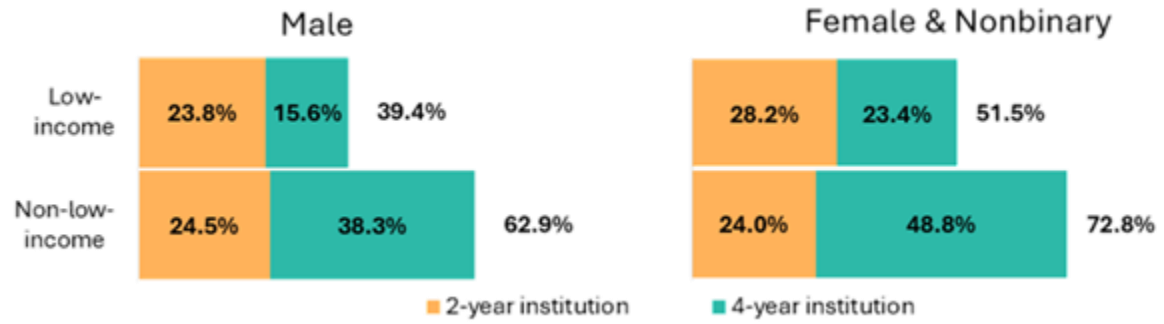
Except for those who are Asian, low-income students of every race/ethnicity enroll in postsecondary education at rates below the sample's overall average of 58.7 percent. Additionally, low-income students, except those who are Asian, are more likely to enroll at two-year institutions than four-year institutions. Among non-low-income students, only those who are American Indian/Alaska Native or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander have below average enrollment rates. Non-low-income students of every race/ethnicity are more likely to enroll at four-year institutions than two-year institutions.

Gender Group X Household Income Status

After accounting for gender group and household income status, non-low-income female and nonbinary students have the highest levels of enrollment within one year of high school graduation, followed by non-low-income male students (72.8% and 62.9%,

respectively; see **Figure 17**). Female and nonbinary students from low-income households enroll at a rate of 51.5 percent, and male students from low-income households have the lowest enrollment rate at 39.4 percent. Across gender group, students from non-low-income households are more likely to enroll at four-year institutions than two-year institutions. In contrast, students of both gender groups from low-income households are more likely to enroll at two-year institutions than four-year institutions.

Figure 17. Postsecondary Enrollment Rate Within 1 Year of High School Graduation by Household Income Status and Gender Group



Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse

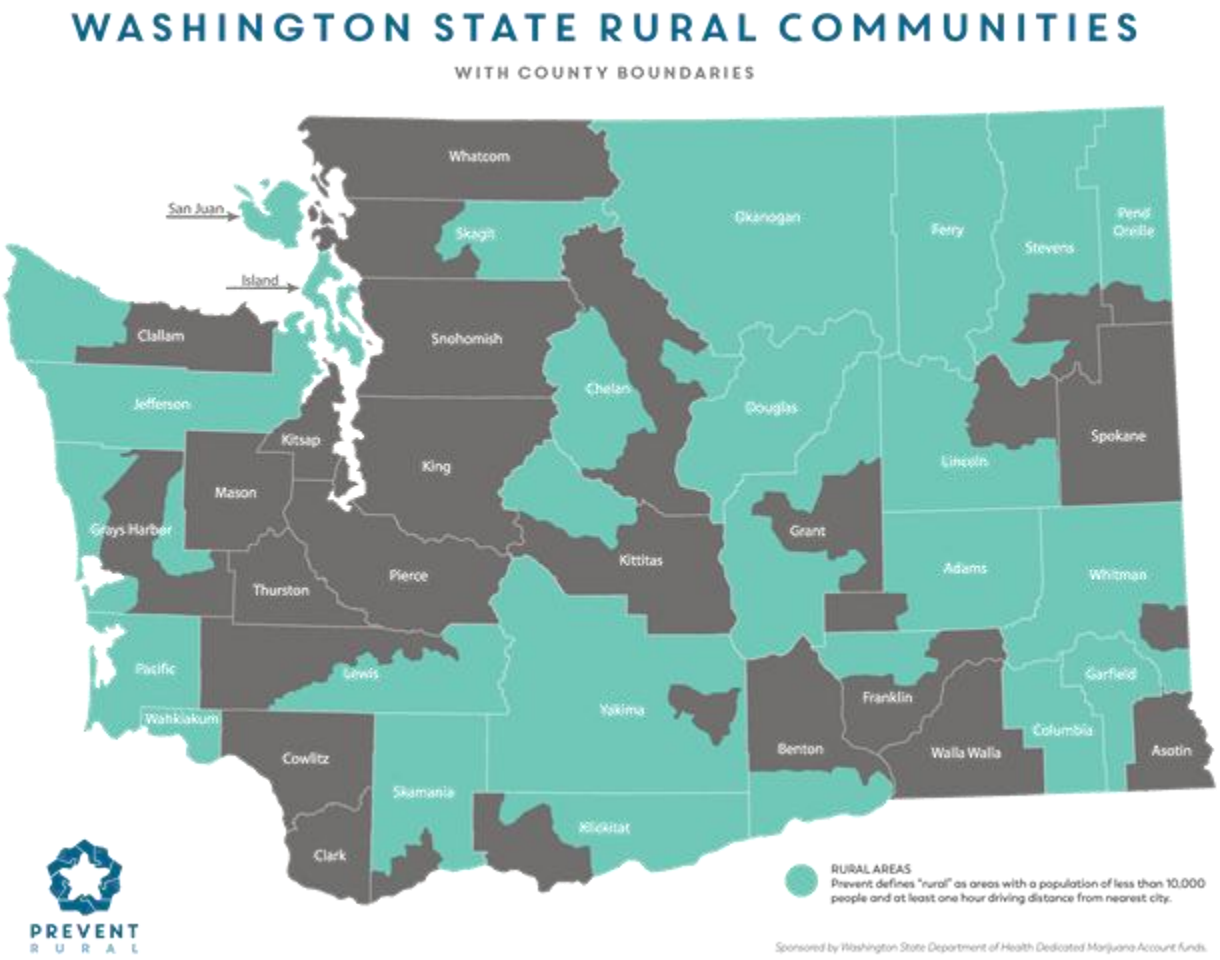
Note. The percentage to the right of each bar is the total enrollment rate across institution types for a given household income status and gender group. Overall averages by household income status and by gender group are indicated in Appendix Table 6. Low-income students are defined in this report as those who are eligible for the federal Free and Reduced-Price Lunch program in ninth grade. Due to the small number of nonbinary students in the sample and data reporting limitations, students identified as nonbinary or female in ninth grade are categorized together as one gender group.

Geographic Context

Compared to students from high schools in urban areas, students from high schools in rural areas are 8.5 percentage points less likely to enroll in postsecondary education within one year of high school graduation (see **Appendix Table 6**). Widespread disparities in enrollment have been reported by geography (Chetty et al. 2020). Such patterns may be expected in Washington State given the large number of rural areas, which correspond to fewer options to attend local postsecondary institutions.

These potential geographic disparities in enrollment are supported by an investigation that identified Washington to be 1 of only 11 states where 10 to 20 percent of the population lives in an "education desert," defined as an area that requires at least a 60-minute drive to the nearest college campus (Long, 2018). The map in **Figure 18** shows the counties in the state with a population of less than 10,000 people and at least a one-hour driving distance to the nearest city. Geographic location may also affect the fields of study available to students, with those living in "choice deserts" having limited program options (Blagg & Chingos, 2016).

Figure 18. Map of Rural Counties in Washington State



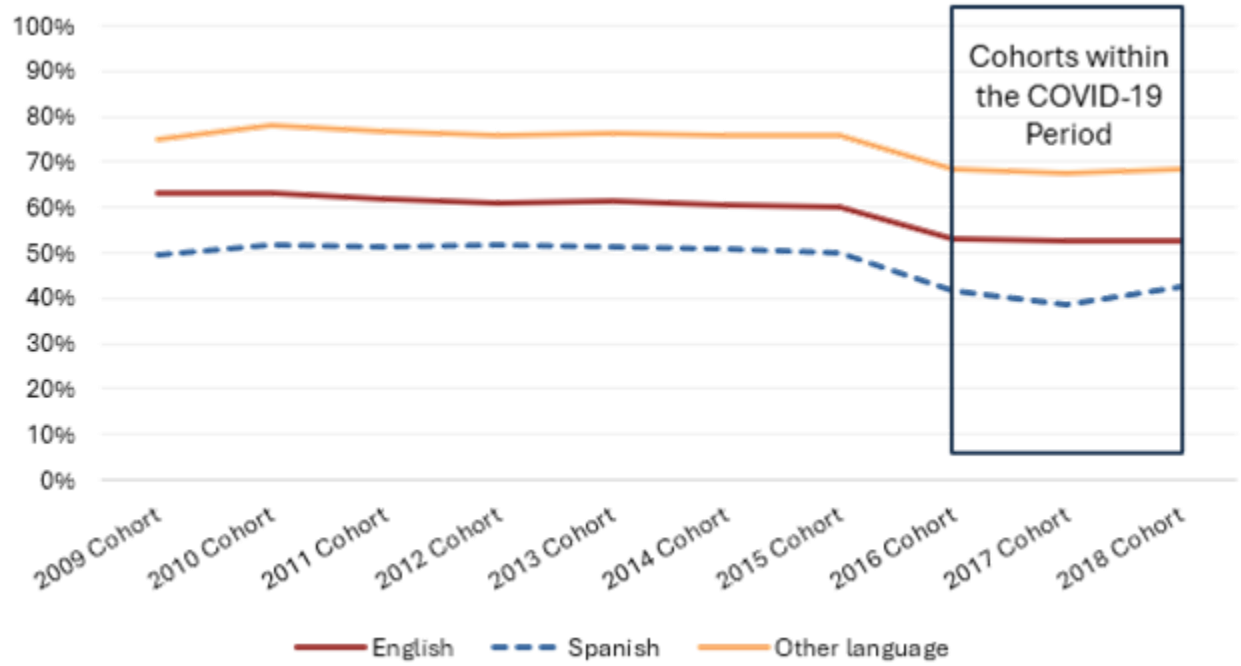
Source: Prevent Coalition. Accessed from https://www.preventcoalition.org/rural/resources/

Primary Language Spoken at Home

About 17 percent of students (or about 145,800 students) in the sample are from homes where English is not the primary language spoken at home. In Washington, there are more than 100 different languages spoken in students' homes, with Spanish, Chinese, and Russian being the most common.

Students who speak Spanish as the primary language at home enroll at a lower rate than those for whom English is the primary home language (47.3% and 58.8%, respectively; see **Appendix Table 6**). At 73.4 percent, the enrollment rate is highest for students whose primary home language is something other than English or Spanish. As seen in **Figure 19**, this pattern persists across cohorts.

Figure 19. Postsecondary Enrollment Rate Within 1 Year of High School Graduation by Ninth-Grade Cohort and Primary Language



Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse
Note. Cohort 2015 was expected to enroll in postsecondary education in the 2019-20 academic year; the COVID-19 pandemic began in spring of their first postsecondary year. Cohorts 2016 to 2018 were expected to graduate high school during the COVID-19 period of 2019-20 to 2021-22. Primary language is recorded as the language spoken in the student's home.

English Language Learner Status

Across cohorts, English Language Learner (ELL) students enroll in postsecondary education at a lower rate than non-ELL students (41.4% compared to 59.6%, respectively; see **Appendix Table 6**).

An ELL student is one who receives extra support to learn English in school. Eligibility for support is determined by an annual assessment of academic English skills in listening, reading, speaking, and writing (WIDA, 2020). This annual assessment allows administrators to track student progress and proficiency as well as help them determine when students are ready to exit from extra support. ELL students represent 6 percent of all K-12 students (or about 53,000 students) in Washington State.

Migrant Status

Compared to their non-migrant peers, students from migrant families are 13.2 percentage points less likely to enroll in postsecondary education within one year of high school graduation (45.7 percent compared to 58.9 percent, respectively; see **Appendix Table 6**).

Washington State has the second highest number of migrant students nationwide, where migrant status refers to households that met eligibility standards for federal funding under the Migrant Education Program (MEP; Title I, Part C). [20] Students qualify for MEP if they are entitled to a free public education through grade 12 and made a qualifying move in the preceding 3 years as part of a family that seeks temporary or seasonal work in agriculture or fishing due to economic necessity. These students' families contribute economically to agriculture, fishing, forestry, and dairy industries. [21] At the same time, they may face significant barriers to accessing quality education services due to a lack of geographic continuity (given their family's need to relocate for work), cultural and language barriers, and poverty (Free, Kriz, & Konecnik, 2014).

Disability Status

Students with a disability are less likely to enroll in postsecondary education within one year of high school graduation (29.9% compared to 62.1% for students without a disability; see **Appendix Table 6**).

About 105,000 students in the sample for this report (or about 12 percent) are classified as having a disability in accordance with the requirements of the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 2004. Such students are less likely to graduate from high school (67 percent compared to 78.8 percent for students without a disability).

Students with disabilities are the most underserved in terms of enrollment. Only 29.9% of these students enroll in postsecondary education within one year of high school graduation.

Implications and Discussion

There are several notable patterns in postsecondary enrollment rates across student groups, with household income status being particularly relevant. Analyses confirm lower enrollment rates among students from households with low income, after accounting for joint identities such as gender group or race/ethnicity. Existing research has established variation in enrollment rates by household income status, with students from more

[20] For more information, visit: https://ospi.k12.wa.us/student-success/access-opportunity-education/migrant-and-multilingual-education/migrant-education-program.
[21] For more information, visit: https://ospi.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/2023-08/mep-infographic.pdf.

affluent households enrolling in postsecondary institutions at significantly higher rates than students from households with low-income (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011). When examining by race/ethnicity, White students in Washington have the largest disparity in enrollment by household income status. Put another way, there are more substantial challenges to postsecondary access for low-income White students than for non-low-income White students. As with the trend in FAFSA filing, it seems that outreach to low-income students has been less effective for White students than others.

Additionally, the pattern of female students enrolling at higher rates than male students is well documented (Bae et al., 2000; Goldin, Katz, & Kuziemko, 2006; Bailey & Dynarski, 2011). Studies show that a combination of better grades in high school, greater social networks, and better non-cognitive skills of females relative to males explain much of the difference in postsecondary enrollment by gender (Riegle-Crumb, 2010; Jacob 2002). However, such an in-depth investigation has not yet been conducted for students in Washington. Male students may be pursuing occupations that do not require a postsecondary credential. They are also the majority of students in apprenticeship programs (Huynh & Byrne, 2026), which are not included in the analysis for this report due to data limitations.

The analyses reported in this section can contribute to the state's understanding of the decline in enrollment, which is a necessary consideration in understanding postsecondary attainment. For example, it could be possible that some of the enrollment decline reflects students weighing the cost of postsecondary education investment with the perceived labor market value and return on investment (WSAC, 2023). To address this issue, the state and higher education institutions could provide information to prospective students about the demand for workers with credentials. These efforts can contribute to existing efforts the state is already making to address enrollment. This is an important component of reaching the state's goal to have 70 percent of adult residents with a postsecondary credential (WSAC, 2024).

3. What Are the Differences in Second-Year Persistence Rates by Student Demographics?

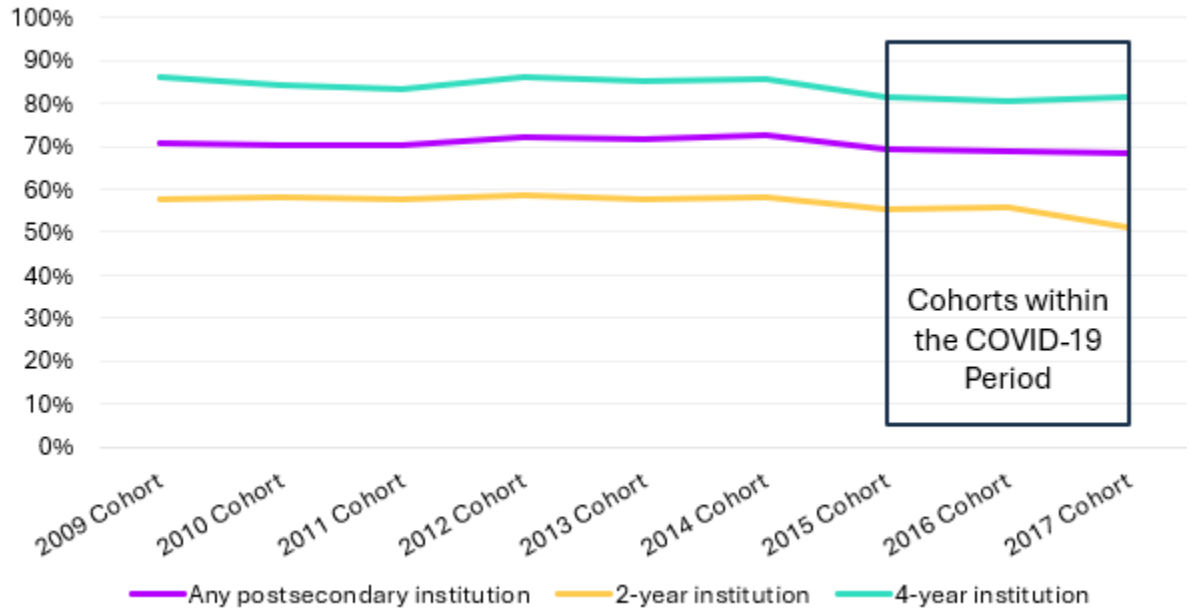
Persistence into the second-year of postsecondary education is an important interim metric of success as it represents the most efficient route towards educational attainment. For this report, students who persist are those who continue postsecondary enrollment into their second year or who attain a certificate or degree by the end of their first year; this may occur at the same or at a different institution as they initially enrolled. Although first spring or fall-to-fall (i.e., "second fall") persistence rates are commonly reported (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2025), these rates [22] conceal inequities in persistence. Students who begin their postsecondary education in the fall term often face fewer barriers to their enrollment than students who begin their programs later in the academic year.

Overall persistence rates dropped roughly 3 percentage points [23] for students whose first year of postsecondary education coincided with pandemic years. As shown in **Figure 20**, persistence rates fell at both two-year institutions and four-year institutions during the COVID-19 period. Pre-pandemic, the persistence rate consistently hovered around 58% at two-year institutions and about 85% at four-year institutions. The average persistence rate after the onset of COVID-19 was 54.3% at two-year institutions and 81.1% at four-year institutions.

[22] For the current sample of students, fall-to-fall persistence rates are indeed higher than persistence rates calculated from one year after their first term of enrollment (regardless of what term they entered).

[23] Cohort 2015 and subsequent ninth-grade cohorts were expected to enroll in postsecondary education in 2019-20 or later. Those cohorts had second-year persistence rates of roughly 69 percent whereas the cohorts immediately preceding them had rates of about 72 percent (see **Appendix Table 8**).

Figure 20. Second-Year Persistence Rate by Ninth-Grade Cohort and Institution Type



Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse
Note. Cohort 2014 was expected to enroll in postsecondary education in the 2018-19 academic year and their persistence into 2019-20 is considered pre-pandemic. Cohort 2015 was expected to be in their first postsecondary year when the COVID-19 period began, which likely played a role in their persistence into 2020-21. Persistence refers to continuing postsecondary education from the first year into the second year (or completing a program before the second postsecondary year), regardless of the term of entry.

The remainder of this section addresses the third research question: **What are the differences in second-year persistence rates by student demographics?**

Summary of Findings

- **Male students (68.7%) are less likely than female and nonbinary students (72.2%) to persist** from first to second year of postsecondary education. Compared to their female and nonbinary counterparts, male students are 2.2 percentage points less likely to persist at two-year institutions and 2.1 percentage points less likely to persist at four-year institutions.

- **Among URM students, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (53.8%) have the lowest overall persistence rate**, then American Indian/Alaska Native (54.3%), Black/African American (62.9%), and Hispanic/Latino students (64.2%). Their persistence rates are all substantially higher at four-year institutions than at two-year institutions.

- Across all racial/ethnic groups, **Asian students (83.2%) are the most likely to persist regardless of institution type, and White students (71.4%) are the second most likely.**

- Examining intersecting identities emphasizes that **students who are male, low-income, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, or American Indian/Alaska Native may face particularly heightened challenges to persistence.**

    - Male students of every single racial/ethnic group persist at lower rates than their female and nonbinary racial/ethnic group counterparts.

    - Compared to their non-low-income racial/ethnic group counterparts, low-income students of every racial/ethnic group have lower second-year persistence rates.

    - Across gender group or household income status, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaska Native students have the lowest persistence rates of any other race/ethnicity.

    - Low-income students of both gender groups have lower persistence rates than their non-low-income gender group counterparts.

- **Across institution type, low-income students (60.9%) or those with a disability (53.8%) have lower persistence rates** than students who are not low-income (75.6%) or do not have a disability (71.7%).

- **Across institution type, students who are migrants (63.6%) or English Language Learners (60.9%), or who come from a rural geographic context (67.7%), have lower persistence rates than their non-migrant (70.7%), non-ELL (71.0%), or urban counterparts (71.6%).** For these groups, the difference between their persistence rates at two-year institutions is relatively small. In other words, two-year institutions see students persist at similar rates despite different migrant statuses, ELL statuses, or geographic contexts. For example, migrant students are only 0.7 percentage points less likely than non-migrant students to persist at two-year institutions.

- **Students whose primary home language is Spanish persist at two-year institutions similarly to students whose primary home language is English (56.4% vs. 56.2%, respectively).** Yet, they are 2.5 percentage points less likely to persist at four-year institutions than their English language household counterparts (80.8% vs. 83.3%).

Inequities in Second-Year Persistence Patterns

This section describes disparities in second-year persistence across nine categories: [24]

1. Gender group
2. Race/ethnicity
3. Household income status
4. Intersectionality
5. Geographic context
6. Primary language spoken at home
7. English Language Learner status
8. Migrant status
9. Disability status

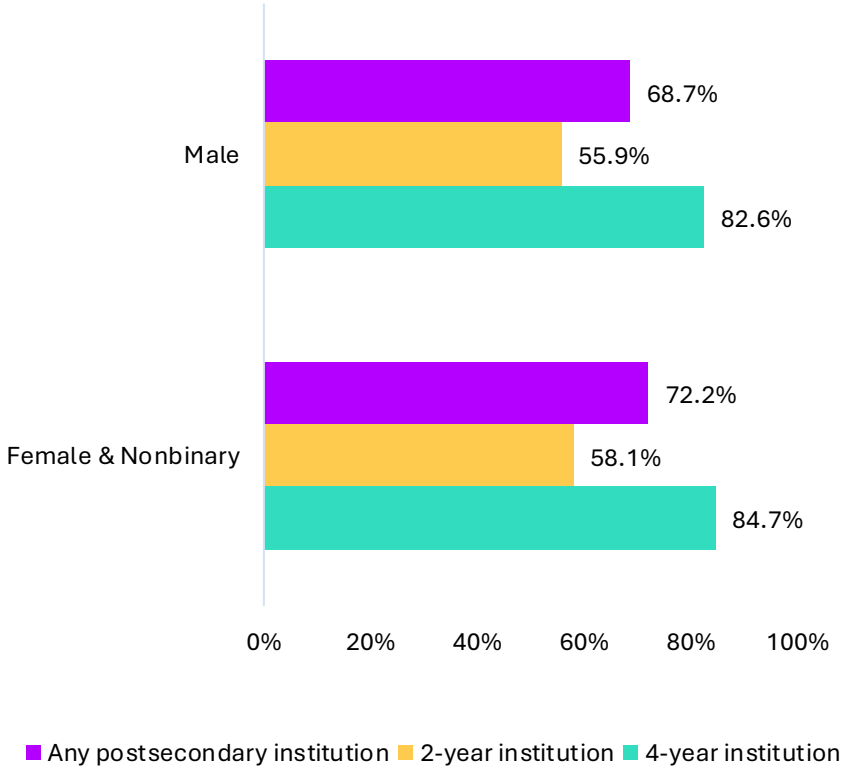
See **Appendix Tables 8 through 10** for additional detail.

Gender Group

Overall, male students (68.7%) are less likely than female and nonbinary students (72.2%) to persist from first to second year of postsecondary education (see **Figure 21**). The gender disparity is similar across institution types: Compared to their female and nonbinary counterparts, male students are 2.2 percentage points less likely to persist at two-year institutions and 2.1 percentage points less likely to persist at four-year institutions. This suggests that gender-related persistence issues may be similarly present across institution types.

[24] Please refer to page 2 for information about these categories.

Figure 21. Second-Year Persistence Rate by Gender Group and Institution Type



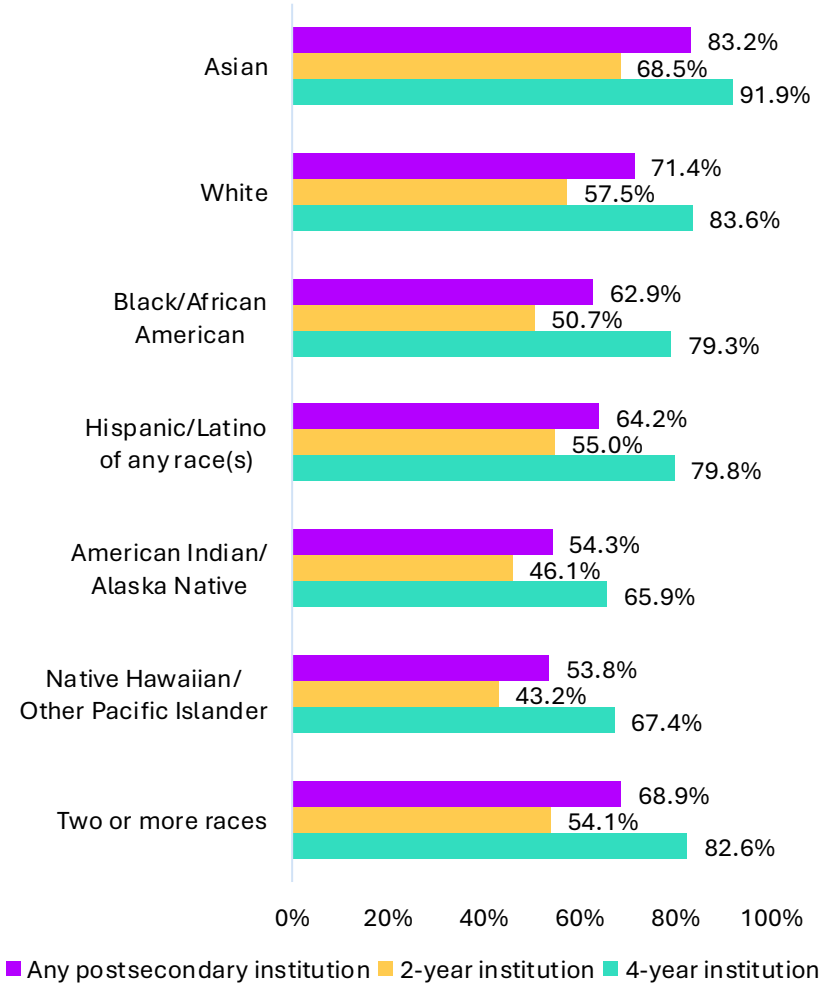
Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse
Note. Persistence refers to continuing postsecondary education from the first year into the second year (or completing a program before the second postsecondary year), regardless of the term of entry. Due to the small number of nonbinary students in the sample and data reporting limitations, students identified as nonbinary or female in ninth grade are categorized together as one gender group.

Race/Ethnicity

Among underrepresented minority students, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (53.8%) have the lowest overall persistence rate, then American Indian/Alaska Native (54.3%), Black/African American (62.9%), and Hispanic/Latino students (64.2%). As shown in **Figure 22**, their persistence rates are all substantially higher at four-year institutions than at two-year institutions. The institutional gap is largest for Black/African American students: At four-year institutions, Black/African American students are 28.6 percentage points more likely to persist than they are at two-year institutions. In contrast, persistence rates of American Indian/Alaska Native students only differ by 19.8 percentage points at two-year (46.1%) vs. four-year institutions (65.9%).

Across all racial/ethnic groups, Asian students (83.2%) are the most likely to persist regardless of institution type, and White students (71.4%) are the second most likely.

Figure 22. Second-Year Persistence Rate by Race/Ethnicity and Institution Type

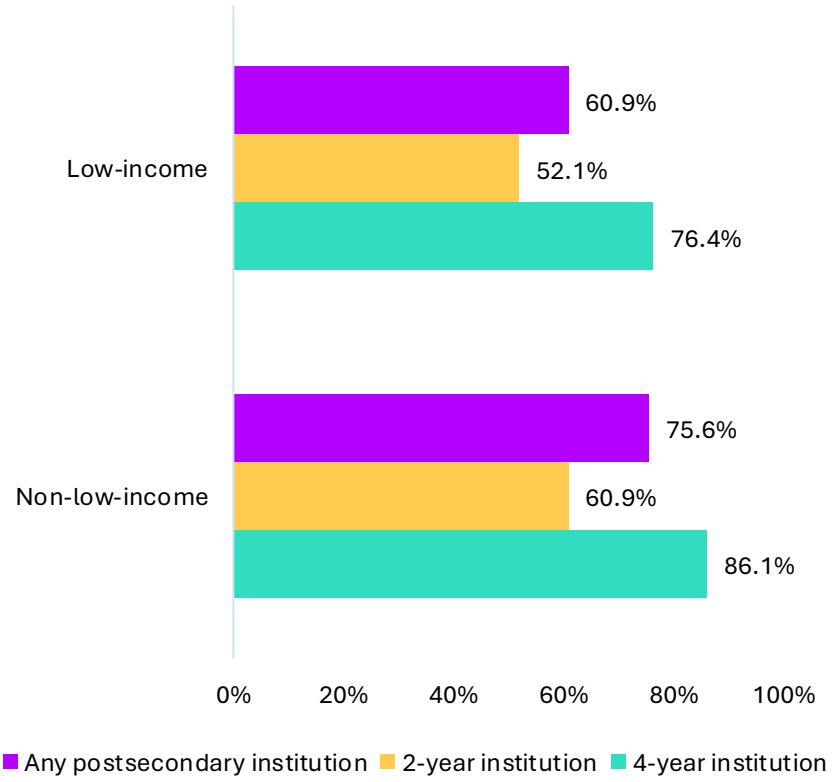


Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse
Note. Persistence refers to continuing postsecondary education from the first year into the second year (or completing a program before the second postsecondary year), regardless of the term of entry.

Household Income Status

As shown in **Figure 23**, low-income students persist at lower rates (60.9%), on average, than their non-low-income counterparts (75.6%). When examined by institution type, disparities by income status are larger at four-year institution (9.7 percentage point difference) than at two-year institutions (8.8 percentage point difference). In other words, students from low-income households may face more challenges to persistence than those from higher-income households.

Figure 23. Second-Year Persistence Rate by Household Income Status and Institution Type



Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse
Note. Persistence refers to continuing postsecondary education from the first year into the second year (or completing a program before the second postsecondary year), regardless of the term of entry. Low-income students are defined in this report as those who are eligible for the federal Free and Reduced-Price Lunch program in ninth grade.

Intersectionality

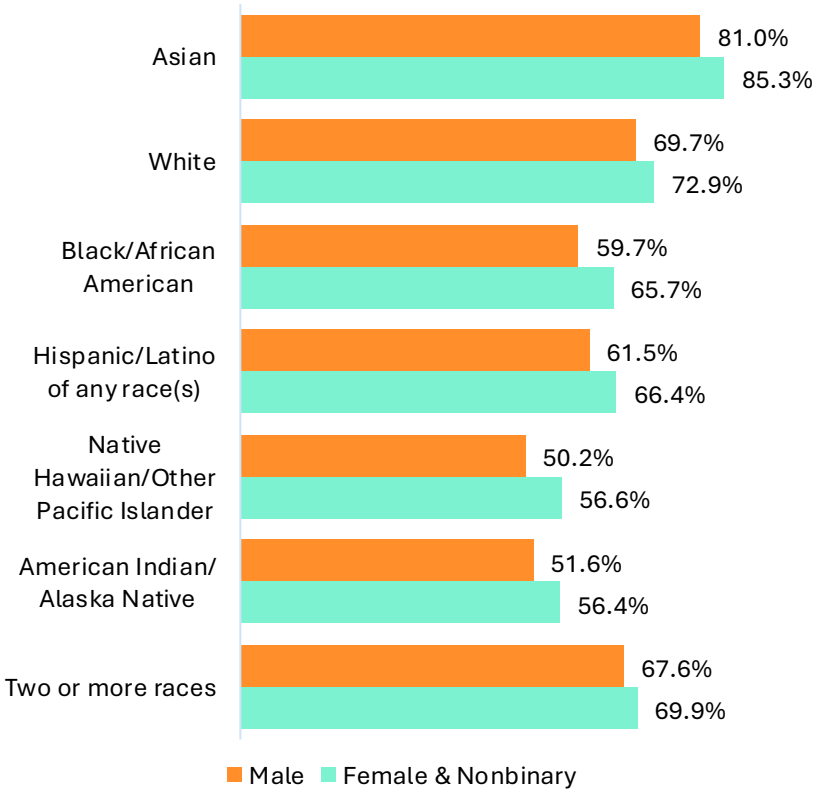
This section focuses on persistence rates by race/ethnicity and gender group, race/ethnicity and household income status, then gender group and household income status.

Race/Ethnicity X Gender Group

Examining persistence rates by gender and race/ethnicity shows that male students of every single racial/ethnic group persist at lower rates than their female and nonbinary racial/ethnic group counterparts (see **Figure 24**). This is true overall as well as by institution type. The largest gender group gaps by race/ethnicity exist for Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander: Male Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander students are less likely to persist than their female and nonbinary counterparts overall (6.4 percentage point difference), at two-year institutions (5.2 percentage point difference), and at four-year institutions (6.1 percentage point difference); see **Appendix Table 10**.

Across gender and race/ethnicity, persistence rates are lowest for male Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander students (50.2%), male American Indian/Alaska Native students (51.6%), female and nonbinary American Indian/Alaska Native students (56.4%), female and nonbinary Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander students (56.6%), male Black/African American students (59.7%), and male Hispanic/Latino students (61.5%).

Figure 24. Second-Year Persistence Rate by Race/Ethnicity and Gender Group

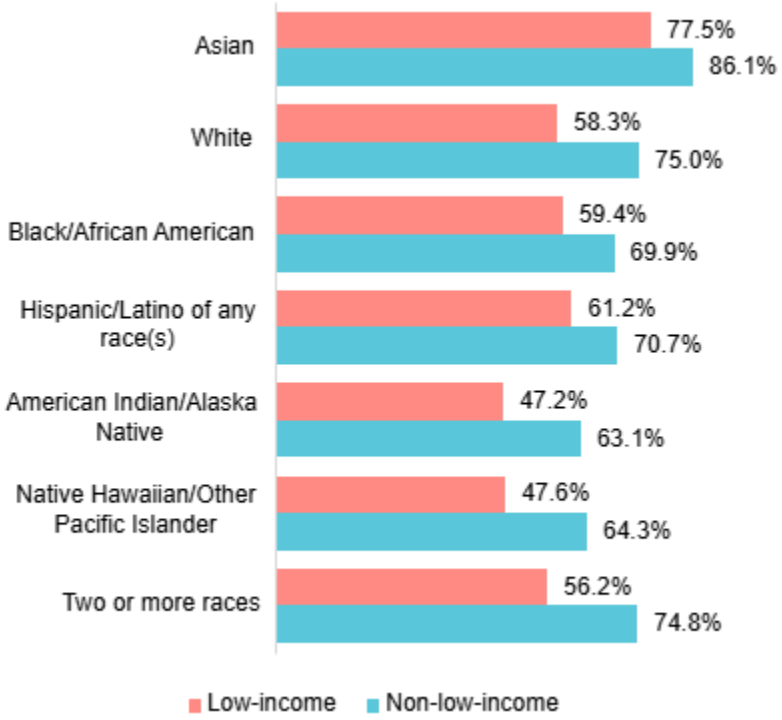


Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse
Note. Persistence refers to continuing postsecondary education from the first year into the second year (or completing a program before the second postsecondary year), regardless of the term of entry. Due to the small number of nonbinary students in the sample and data reporting limitations, students identified as nonbinary or female in ninth grade are categorized together as one gender group.

Race/Ethnicity X Household Income Status

Compared to their non-low-income racial/ethnic group counterparts, low-income students of every racial/ethnic group have lower persistence rates overall, at two-year institutions, and at four-year institutions. Overall, the disparity by household income status is largest for students who are two or more races (18.6 percentage point difference), White (16.8 percentage point difference), and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (16.7 percentage point difference); see **Figure 25**.

Figure 25. Second-Year Persistence Rate by Race/Ethnicity and Household Income Status



Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse
Note. Persistence refers to continuing postsecondary education from the first year into the second year (or completing a program before the second postsecondary year), regardless of the term of entry. Low-income students are defined in this report as those who are eligible for the federal Free and Reduced-Price Lunch program in ninth grade.

Low-income American Indian/Alaska Native students are the most underserved in terms of second-year persistence. Only 47.2% of these students persist into their second year of postsecondary education (or complete a certificate or degree within their first year).

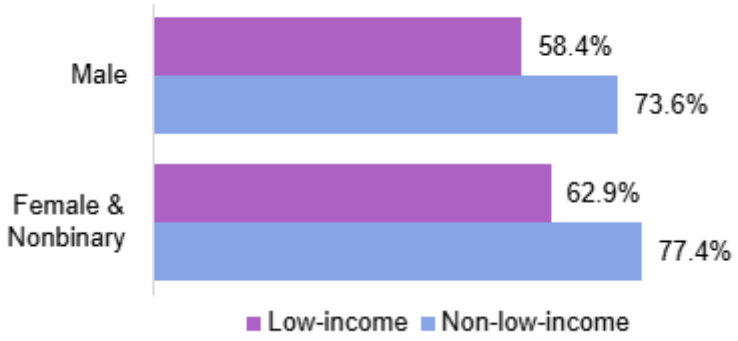
At two-year institutions, the largest gaps in persistence rates by household income status exist for students who are two or more races (14.4 percentage point difference, 59.8% for non-low-income households compared to 45.4% for low-income households) and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (13.5 percentage point difference; 52% for non-low-income households compared to 38.5% for low-income households). However, at four-year institutions, American Indian/Alaska Native (19.2 percentage point difference; 75.6% for non-low-income households compared to 56.4% for low-income households) and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (18.4 percentage point difference; 78.5% for non-low-income households compared to 60.1% for low-income households) have the largest

disparity by household income status. Overall, American Indian/Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander have the lowest persistence rates of low-income students (47.2% and 47.6%, respectively) and of non-low-income students (63.1% and 64.3%, respectively). See **Appendix Table 10**.

Gender Group X Household Income Status

Overall, low-income students of both gender groups have lower persistence rates than their non-low-income gender group counterparts (see **Figure 26**). This is also the case at two-year and four-year institutions (see **Appendix Table 10**).

Figure 26. Second-Year Persistence Rate by Gender Group and Household Income Status



Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse

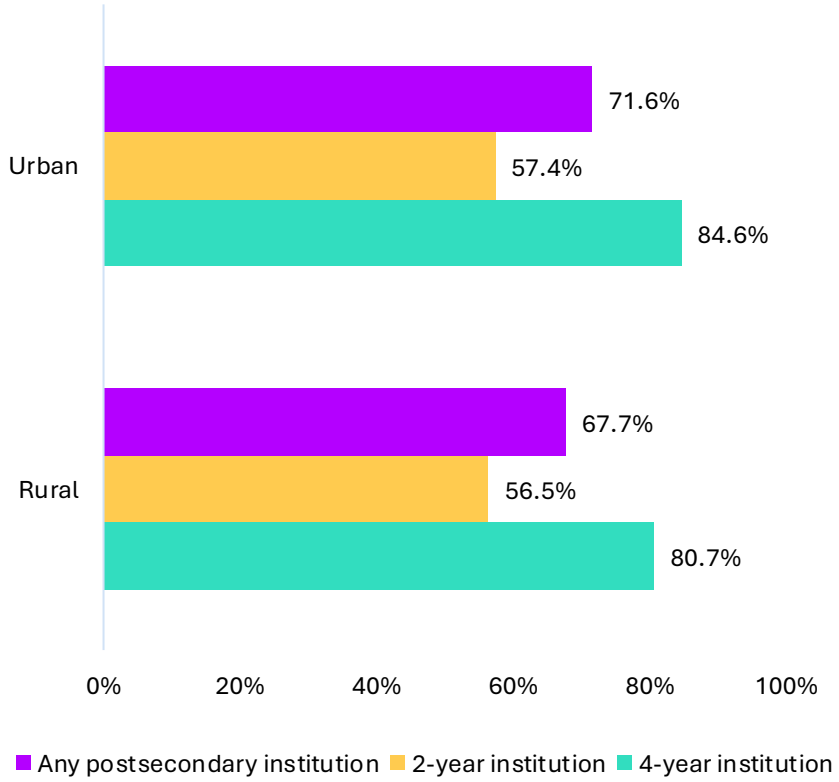
Note. Persistence refers to continuing postsecondary education from the first year into the second year (or completing a program before the second postsecondary year), regardless of the term of entry. Due to the small number of nonbinary students in the sample and data reporting limitations, students identified as nonbinary or female in ninth grade are categorized together as one gender group. Low-income students are defined in this report as those who are eligible for the federal Free and Reduced-Price Lunch program in ninth grade.

The gender group gap by household income status is similar at two-year institutions: Male low-income students are 2.7 percentage points less likely to persist than female and nonbinary low-income students, and the gender group gap between non-low-income students is 2.6 percentage points. At four-year institutions, the difference is markedly greater: The persistence rate of male low-income students is 4.1 percentage points lower than for female and nonbinary low-income students whereas the gender difference is only 1.9 percentage points for non-low-income students.

Geographic Context

As shown in **Figure 27**, students who come from a rural geographic context (67.7%) have lower persistence rates than their urban counterparts (71.6%). Two-year institutions see students from rural and urban high schools persist quite similarly: Students from rural areas are only 0.9 percentage points less likely to persist than those from urban areas. The greater disparity is at four-year institutions where the gap is 4.0 percentage points. Put another way, the geographic context of a student's high school seems to matter more for persistence at four-year institutions than at two-year institutions.

Figure 27. Second-Year Persistence Rate by Geographic Context and Institution Type



Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse
Note. Persistence refers to continuing postsecondary education from the first year into the second year (or completing a program before the second postsecondary year), regardless of the term of entry. Geographic context is based on the urban or rural designation of the last Washington public high school of attendance.

Primary Language Spoken at Home

Students who primarily speak Spanish at home persist at two-year institutions at rates similar to those of students who primarily speak English at home.

Across institution types, students from primarily Spanish-speaking homes have a 6.5 percentage point lower second-year persistence rate than students from primarily English-speaking homes. Students who have Spanish as their primary home language (80.8%) are 2.5 percentage points less likely to persist at four-year institutions than their English language household counterparts (83.3%). Notably, they are as likely to persist at two-year institutions as students whose primary home language is English (56.4% vs. 56.2%, respectively).

English Language Learner Status

Students who are English Language Learners (60.9%) persist at lower rates than their non-ELL counterparts (71.0%). ELL students are more likely to enroll at two-year institutions rather than four-year institutions, but their persistence rates are higher at four-year institutions rather than two-year institutions (79.1% compared to 55.5%).

Whereas the disparity in persistence rates by ELL status is only 1.6 percentage points at two-year institutions, it is 4.8 percentage points at four-year institutions. In other words, two-year institutions see students persist quite similarly despite different ELL statuses, but that is not as much the case at four-year institutions.

Migrant Status

Across institution type, students who are migrants (63.6%) have lower persistence rates than their non-migrant peers (70.7%). At two-year institutions, the difference in persistence rates is relatively small: Migrant students are only 0.7 percentage points less likely than non-migrant students to persist at two-year institutions. At four-year institutions, however, the gap is 3.9 percentage points.

Disability Status

Students with a disability (53.8%) have lower persistence rates than students who do not have a disability (71.7%). Compared to their counterparts without disabilities, they are 9.1 percentage points less likely to persist at two-year institutions and 13.2 percentage points less likely to persist at four-year institutions.

Implications and Discussion

As with FAFSA filing rates and postsecondary enrollment rates, male, low-income, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaska Native students have the lowest persistence rates, which suggests they face particularly heightened challenges to postsecondary access and success. Targeted student supports for these groups, such as affordability initiatives, academic support services, and mentorship programs, may close some of these gaps. Presently, Washington is conducting a pilot program of state benefits promotion to improve basic needs security (Burtch et al., 2025), and learnings from this work could improve second-year persistence. Further analyses, such as a mixed methods investigation of additional persistence issues, would be helpful to inform education policies and interventions pertinent to students who graduate from Washington high schools.

Students who are from rural contexts, are English Language Learners, or have migrant status also appear to be consistently disadvantaged before and during their postsecondary education. These students have lower rates of FAFSA filing, enrollment, and persistence

than their counterparts. Interestingly, however, persistence rate differences by migrant status (0.7 percentage point difference), ELL status (1.6 percentage points), and geographic context (0.9 percentage points) are relatively small at two-year institutions.

Put another way, equity issues related to these subgroups' persistence may be less pronounced at two-year institutions than at four-year institutions. This may reflect institutional differences in academic programs, course taking, support services, affordability, faculty diversity, student preparedness, or other factors related to persistence. For example, rural students are 3.9 percentage points less likely to persist at four-year institutions than urban students, but the difference by geographic context is only 0.9 percentage points at two-year institutions. Perhaps this smaller disparity in persistence rates at two-year institutions is because of the relative geographic accessibility of two-year institutions across the state. Compared to four-year institutions, there are many more two-year institutions in Washington, some of which are in rural areas. It may be easier for rural students to transition into postsecondary education when the institution is nearer to where they currently live (and thus, students may not need to relocate or have a long commute), requires less adjustment to an unfamiliar geographic context, has more students of rural backgrounds, etc.

Compared to four-year institutions, **two-year institutions seem to be more effective in supporting the persistence of students who graduated from rural high schools, who are English Language Learners, or who migrated to Washington.**

In many ways, persistence issues are connected to enrollment and attainment issues. WSAC's (2025) Strategic Action Plan describes affordability, enrollment, student supports (e.g., basic needs), and completion aims that could address the persistence inequities described here.

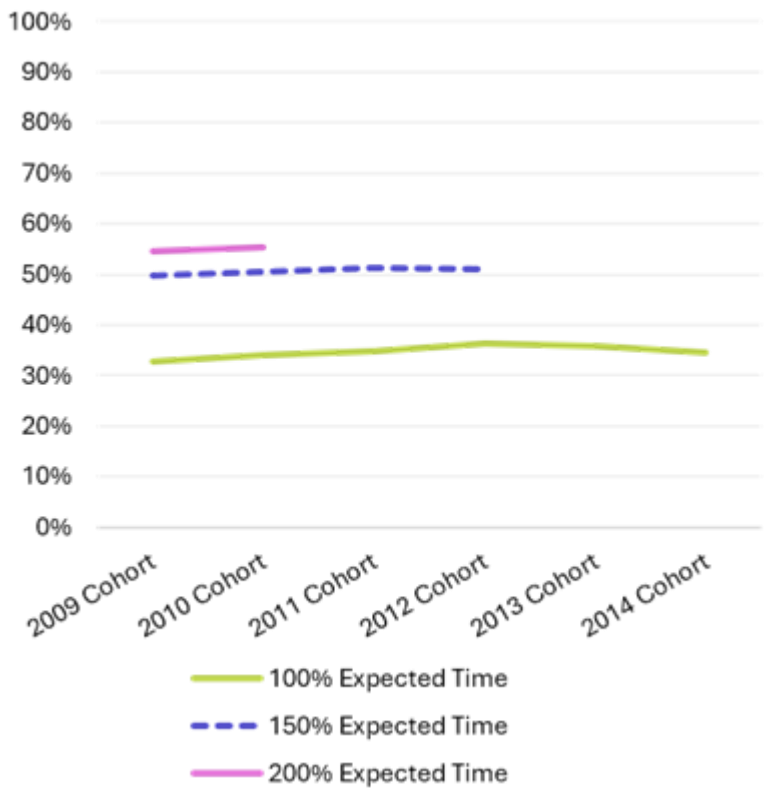
4. What Are the Differences in Postsecondary Attainment Rates by Student Demographics?

Enrolling in college is a major milestone, and persisting beyond the first year is an important marker of success, but the benefits to postsecondary education largely accrue for those who attain a degree or certificate. Research consistently documents that obtaining a postsecondary credential is the clearest path to economic mobility (CEW, 2023), particularly given the growing demands for college-educated workers with complex, nonroutine skills (Deming, 2017; 2023). This section focuses on postsecondary educational attainment to describe patterns of success across student subpopulations. In this report, postsecondary educational attainment is defined as earning a certificate, associate degree, or bachelor's degree. This includes certificates or degrees earned while participating in dual enrollment during high school (such as Washington State's Running Start program) if the student did not ultimately earn a higher degree. [25]

Across cohorts, the attainment rate for enrolled students is 34.7 percent within 100% expected time, 50.7 percent within 150% expected time, and 54.9 percent within 200% expected time. As shown in **Figure 28**, there has been very little variation over the years. Among those who complete postsecondary education, 80.1 percent earn bachelor's degrees. Of all postsecondary completions, associate degree and certificate completion are the highest credentials earned for 13.3 percent and 6.6 percent, respectively (see **Appendix Table 15**).

[25] Dual enrollment is a high school program that provides students the opportunity to earn high school and college credit simultaneously. Dual enrollment rates are very high in the state with many school districts reporting 80 to 100 percent of students enrolled in at least one dual credit course (Dehlbom et al., 2024).

Figure 28. Postsecondary Educational Attainment Rate by Ninth-Grade Cohort and Expected Time to Completion



Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse
Note. In this report, expected time to certificate or degree completion is based on the institution type at which a student is enrolled. For example, 150% expected time is 6 years at a four-year institution and 3 years at a two-year institution.

The remainder of this section addresses the fourth research question: **What are the differences in postsecondary attainment rates by student demographics?**

Summary of Findings

- **Male students are less likely than female and nonbinary students to earn a postsecondary credential** within 100% of expected time, 150% of expected time, and 200% of expected time. Notably, male students are more likely to earn an associate degree or certificate than female and nonbinary students.

- In terms of race/ethnicity, **Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (29.2%) and American Indian/Alaska Native (31.0%) students have the lowest attainment rates** within 150% expected time, followed by Black/African American (34.8%) and Hispanic/Latino (39.2%) students. These racial/ethnic groups are also more likely to finish a program at a two-year institution and earn certificates than their counterparts.

- Across gender group, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaska Native students have some of the lowest attainment rates. However, **the largest gender group gaps by race/ethnicity exist among Asian, White, Black/African American, and Hispanic/Latino students**; these male students are the least likely to complete postsecondary programs compared to their female and nonbinary counterparts.

- For postsecondary attainment within 150% expected time, **the largest gaps by race/ethnicity and household income status are found among students who are White or of two or more races**. These low-income students have a much lower attainment rate than non-low-income students.

- **Across gender group, students from low-income households are less likely to earn a postsecondary credential than their non-low-income counterparts.** The disparity by household income status is more pronounced for female and nonbinary students than male students: Low-income female and nonbinary students are 21.5 percentage points less likely (40.6% compared to 62.1%) to complete a certificate or degree within 150% of expected time than non-low-income female and nonbinary students. In contrast, the difference between attainment rates for male students who are low-income and non-low-income is 19.7 percentage points (32.9% compared to 52.6%).

- Within 150% of expected time, roughly half of students from urban high schools (51.9%) and of those from rural high schools (48.0%) earn a postsecondary credential. Yet **rural students are more likely to complete a postsecondary program at a two-year institution than urban students are**.

- **Students who are low-income, have Spanish as their primary home language, are English Language Learners, are from migrant households, or have a disability are less likely to complete postsecondary education** than their counterparts. If they earn a credential, they are more likely than their peers to have completed their program at a two-year institution, and they are more likely to have either a certificate or associate degree as their highest credential rather than a bachelor's degree.

Inequities in Postsecondary Attainment Patterns

This section describes differences in postsecondary attainment across nine categories: [26]

1. Gender group
2. Race/ethnicity
3. Household income status

[26] Please refer to page 2 for information about these categories.

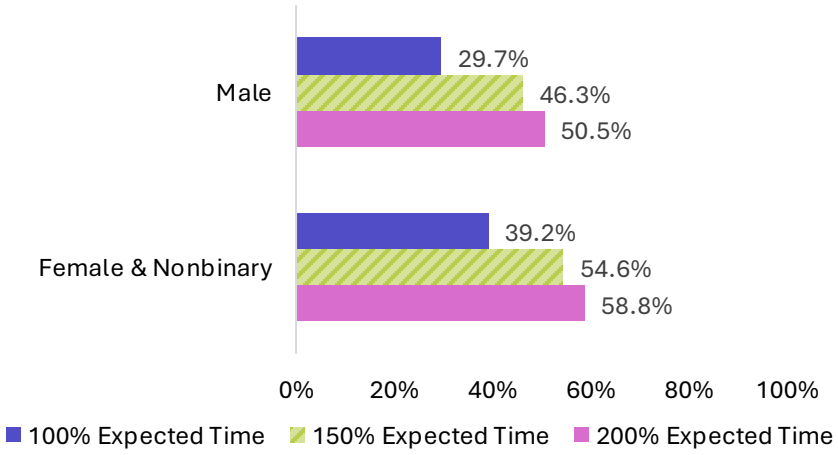
4. Intersectionality
5. Geographic context
6. Primary language spoken at home
7. English Language Learner status
8. Migrant status
9. Disability status

See **Appendix Tables 11 through 19** for additional detail.

Gender Group

As shown in **Figure 29**, 54.6 percent of female and nonbinary students and 46.3 percent of male students complete some sort of postsecondary education within 150% of expected time.

Figure 29. Postsecondary Educational Attainment Rate by Gender Group and Expected Time to Completion



Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse
Note. In this report, expected time to certificate or degree completion is based on the institution type at which a student is enrolled. For example, 150% expected time is 6 years at a four-year institution and 3 years at a two-year institution. Due to the small number of nonbinary students in the sample and data reporting limitations, students identified as nonbinary or female in ninth grade are categorized together as one gender group.

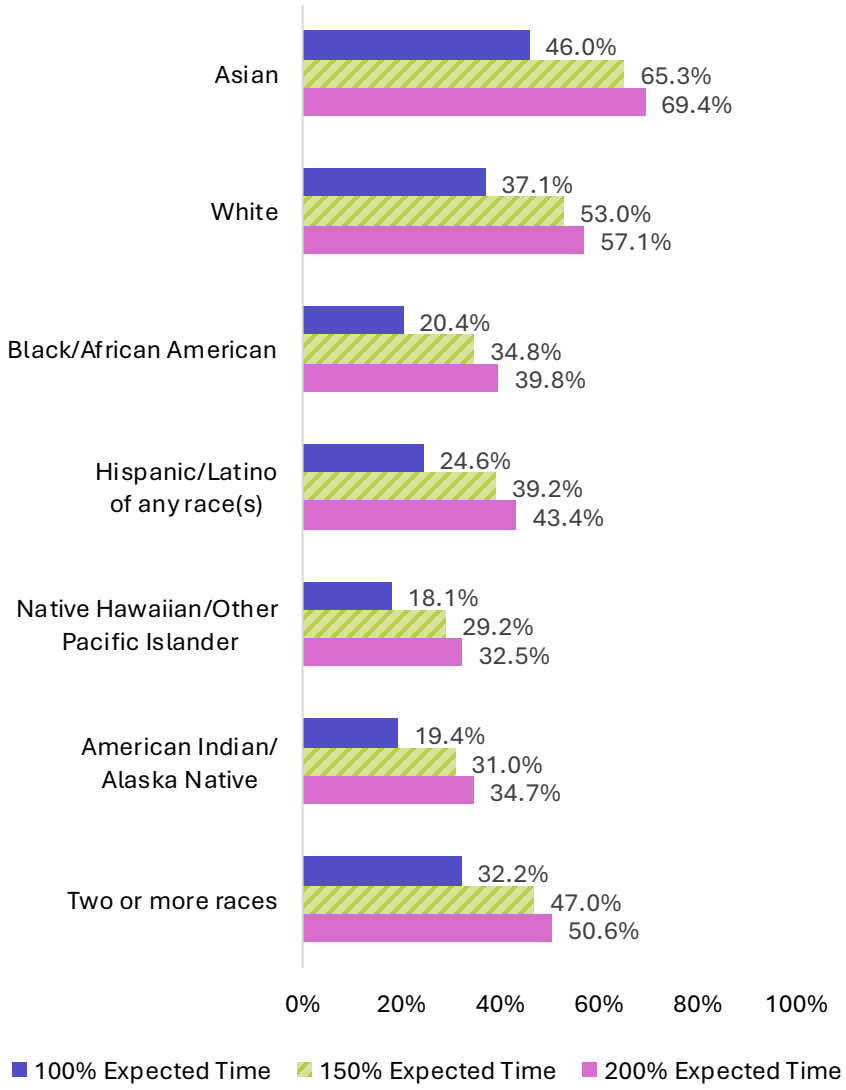
Among those who complete their program within 150% of expected time, male students (21.8%) are slightly more likely than female and nonbinary students (19.2%) to obtain a credential from a two-year institution than at a four-year institution (78.2% vs. 80.8%).

For both gender groups, bachelor's degrees are the most common postsecondary credential students earn. Compared to the share of female and nonbinary students completing bachelor's degrees, a smaller share of male students complete bachelor's degrees (81.2% vs. 78.6%). A smaller share of female and nonbinary students than the share of male students earns associate degrees (12.7% vs. 14.2%) or certificates (6.1% vs. 7.2%).

Race/Ethnicity

Figure 30 shows that the postsecondary attainment rate within 150% of expected time is lowest for Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (29.2%), American Indian/Alaska Native (31.0%), Black/African American (34.8%), and Hispanic/Latino (39.2%) students. These racial/ethnic groups are more likely than their counterparts to complete a postsecondary program at a two-year institution rather than a four-year institution and earn certificates rather than degrees.

Figure 30. Postsecondary Educational Attainment Rate by Race/Ethnicity and Expected Time to Completion



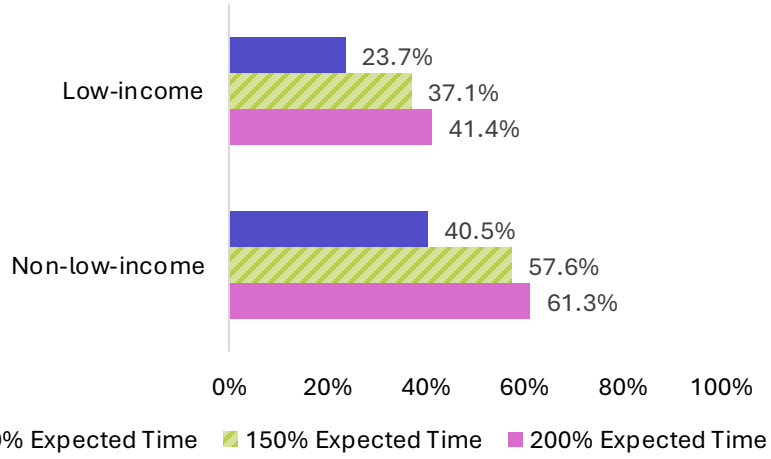
Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse

Note. In this report, expected time to certificate or degree completion is based on the institution type at which a student is enrolled. For example, 150% expected time is 6 years at a four-year institution and 3 years at a two-year institution.

Household Income Status

Compared to those from non-low-income households, students from low-income households are less likely to complete postsecondary education within 150% of expected time (57.6% vs. 37.1%, respectively; see **Figure 31**).

Figure 31. Postsecondary Educational Attainment Rate by Household Income Status and Expected Time to Completion



Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse
Note. In this report, expected time to certificate or degree completion is based on the institution type at which a student is enrolled. For example, 150% expected time is 6 years at a four-year institution and 3 years at a two-year institution. Low-income students are defined in this report as those who are eligible for the federal Free and Reduced-Price Lunch program in ninth grade.

Across household income, most students are likely to complete a program at a four-year institution than at a two-year institution, but this is especially true for non-low-income students (see **Appendix Table 16**). Whereas 84.6 percent of students from non-low-income households earn bachelor's degrees, only 66.2% of students from low-income households do the same (see **Appendix Table 17**). Meanwhile, low-income students are more likely to earn certificates (13.7%) or associate degrees (20.1%) than non-low-income students (4.2% and 11.2%, respectively).

Intersectionality

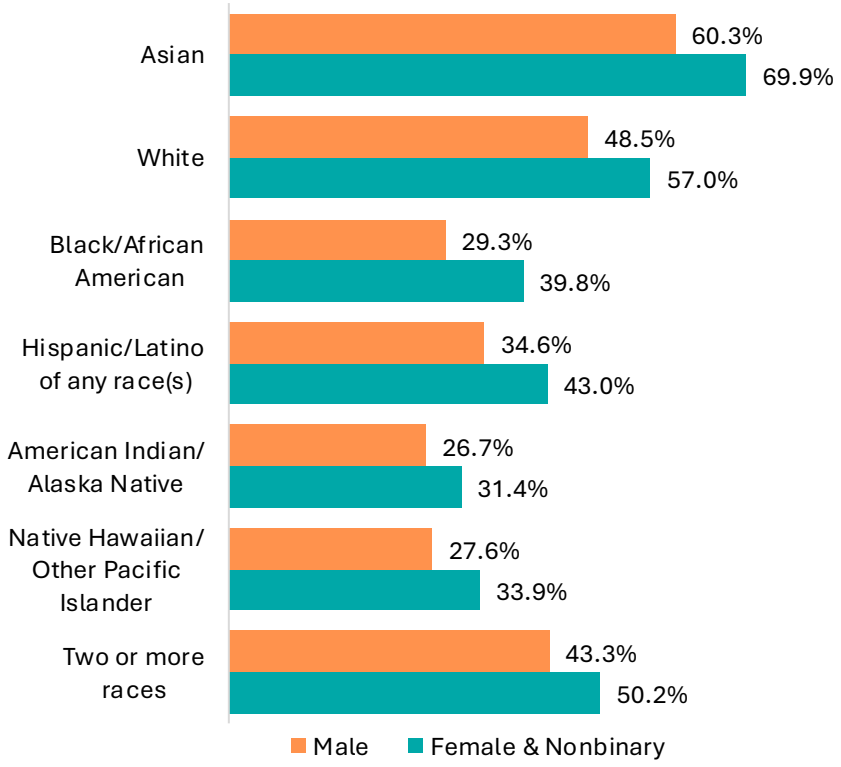
This section focuses on attainment rates by race/ethnicity and gender group, race/ethnicity and household income status, then gender group and household income status.

Race/Ethnicity X Gender Group

Across gender groups, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaska Native have some of the lowest attainments rate within 150% of expected time (see **Figure 32**). However, the largest gender group gaps occur within Asian, White, Black/African American, and Hispanic/Latino students such that these male students complete a

postsecondary program at particularly low rates compared to their female and nonbinary counterparts.

Figure 32. Postsecondary Educational Attainment Rate by Race/Ethnicity and Gender Group



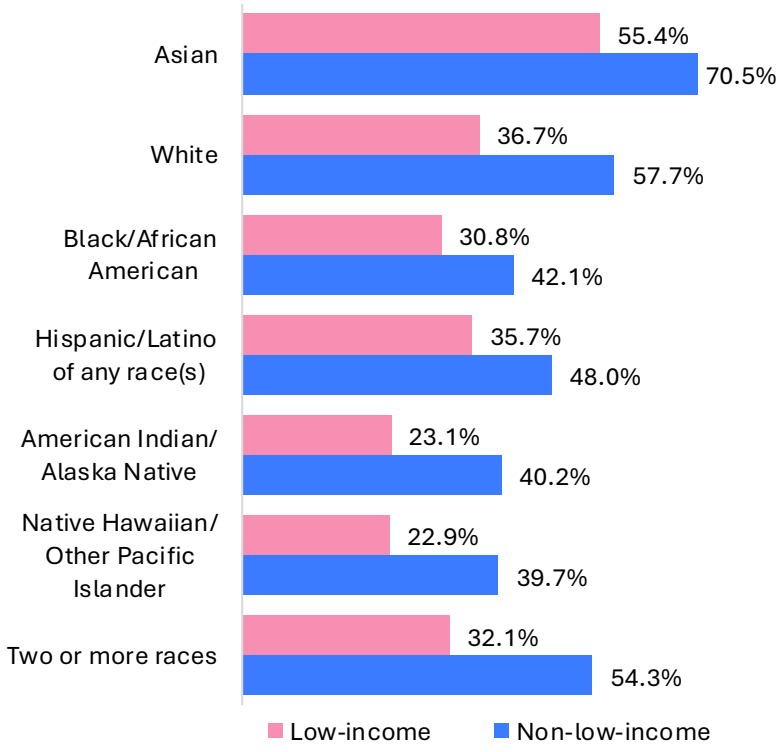
Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse
Note. Only postsecondary educational attainment within 150% expected time is reflected in this figure. In this report, 150% expected time is 6 years at a four-year institution and 3 years at a two-year institution. Due to the small number of nonbinary students in the sample and data reporting limitations, students identified as nonbinary or female in ninth grade are categorized together as one gender group.

Race/Ethnicity X Household Income Status

For attainment within 150% of expected time, the largest difference in rates by household income status is for students who are White or two or more races. Among White students, there is a 21-percentage point difference in attainment between those from low-income households (36.7%) vs. non-low-income households (57.7%); see **Figure 33**. For students of two or more races, it is a 22.2 percentage point difference.

From Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander students (22.9%) to White students (36.7%), the postsecondary attainment rate for low-income students is very low, regardless of race/ethnicity. Asian students are the one exception: Over half of low-income Asian students earn a postsecondary credential (55.4%).

Figure 33. Postsecondary Educational Attainment Rate by Race/Ethnicity and Household Income Status



Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse
Note. Only postsecondary educational attainment within 150% expected time is reflected in this figure. In this report, 150% expected time is 6 years at a four-year institution and 3 years at a two-year institution. Low-income students are defined in this report as those who are eligible for the federal Free and Reduced-Price Lunch program in ninth grade.

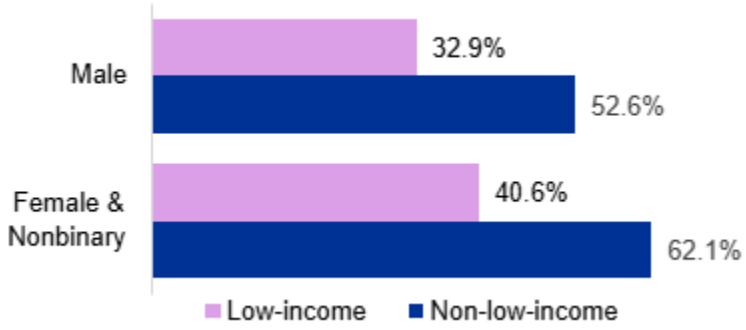
Low-income Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander students are the most underserved
in terms of postsecondary attainment. Only 22.9% of these students attain a certificate or degree within 150% of expected time.

Gender Group X Household Income Status

Across gender groups, students from low-income households are less likely to earn a postsecondary credential than their non-low-income counterparts. The disparity by household income status is more pronounced for female and nonbinary students than male students: The attainment rate within 150% expected time is 40.6 percent for low-income female and nonbinary students and 62.1 percent for non-low-income female and nonbinary students (see **Figure 34**); this is a 21.5 percentage point difference. The attainment rate within 150% of expected time is 32.9 percent for low-income male

students and 52.6 percent for non-low-income male students, which is a 19.7 percentage point difference.

Figure 34. Postsecondary Educational Attainment Rate by Gender Group and Household Income Status



Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse
Note. Only postsecondary educational attainment within 150% expected time is reflected in this figure. In this report, 150% expected time is 6 years at a four-year institution and 3 years at a two-year institution. Due to the small number of nonbinary students in the sample and data reporting limitations, students identified as nonbinary or female in ninth grade are categorized together as one gender group. Low-income students are defined in this report as those who are eligible for the federal Free and Reduced-Price Lunch program in ninth grade.

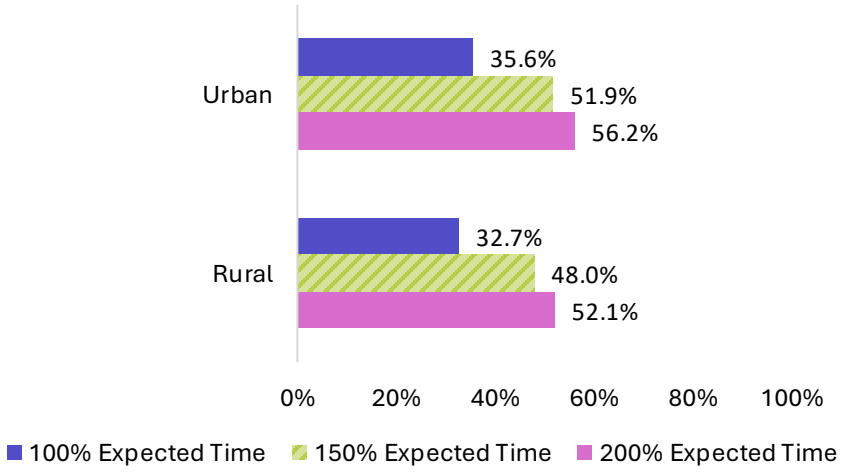
The postsecondary attainment gap by household income status is greater for female and nonbinary students than for male students.

Geographic Context

As shown in **Figure 35**, approximately half of students from high schools in either urban or rural areas attain a postsecondary credential within 150% of expected time (51.9% and 48.0%, respectively).

Across geographic context, most students who complete a postsecondary program earn their credential from a 4-year institution, but this is more so the case for urban students rather than rural students (81.8% vs. 73.2%). The share of rural students earning certificates (8.7%) is greater than the share of urban students receiving certificates (5.8%). Students from rural high schools are also more likely to earn associate degrees than students from urban high schools (17.8% and 12.0%, respectively). Accordingly, a smaller share of rural students (73.5%) receives bachelor's degrees than urban students (82.2%).

Figure 35. Postsecondary Educational Attainment Rate by Geographic Context and Expected Time to Completion



Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse
Note. In this report, expected time to certificate or degree completion is based on the institution type at which a student is enrolled. For example, 150% expected time is 6 years at a four-year institution and 3 years at a two-year institution. Geographic context is based on the urban or rural designation of the last Washington public high school of attendance.

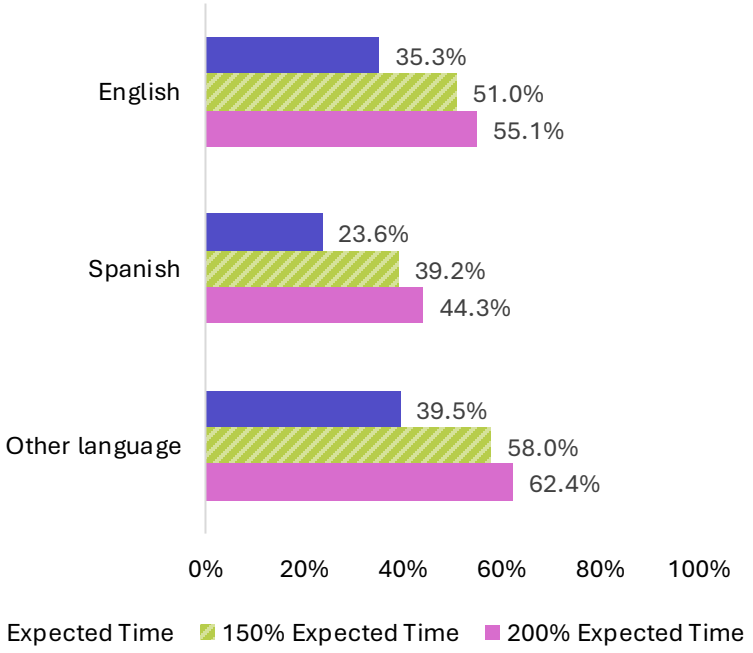
Primary Language Spoken at Home

Figure 36 shows that the postsecondary attainment rate within 150% of expected time is 51.0 percent for students whose primary language spoken at home is English and 39.2 percent for those with Spanish as their primary home language. Students with a home language other than English or Spanish have the highest attainment rate.

Students who primarily speak Spanish at home are more likely than others to earn a certificate or degree at a two-year institution rather than a four-year institution.

Across primary language spoken at home, most students graduate from a four-year institution. Among students who complete a postsecondary credential and have Spanish as their primary home language, 40.2 percent earn their credential at a two-year institution, whereas this is the case for only half that for students whose primary home language is English (19.0%) or another language (20.4%). Accordingly, students from homes where Spanish is the primary language spoken are more likely than others to earn a certificate or an associate degree; they are less likely to receive a bachelor's degree.

Figure 36. Postsecondary Educational Attainment Rate by Primary Language and Expected Time to Completion



Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse

Note. In this report, expected time to certificate or degree completion is based on the institution type at which a student is enrolled. For example, 150% expected time is 6 years at a four-year institution and 3 years at a two-year institution. Primary language is recorded as the language spoken in the student's home.

English Language Learner Status

Only 35.6 percent of English Language Learners earn a postsecondary credential within 150% of time while most non-ELL students (51.2%) do. A larger share of ELL students completes a postsecondary program at a two-year institution (45.0%) than non-ELL students (19.7%). However, both ELL (55.0%) and non-ELL (80.3%) students are more likely to earn a credential at a four-year institution. Compared to non-ELL students, a greater share of ELL students complete certificates (6.2% vs. 23.6%) or associate degrees (13.2% vs. 19.7%). A smaller share of ELL students (56.6%) earns bachelor's degrees than non-ELL students (80.6%).

Migrant Status

Migrant students have a lower postsecondary attainment rate than non-migrant students (40.5% vs. 50.8%). A larger share of migrant students (43.4%) finishes at a two-year institution than non-migrant students (20.0%). Across migrant status, most postsecondary attainment occurs at a four-year institution. Among migrant students who earned postsecondary credentials, 18.8 percent receive certificates, 23.9 percent attain associate degrees, and 57.3 percent graduate with bachelor's degrees.

Disability Status

Across institution type, a quarter of students with a disability (25.3%) complete postsecondary education, and about half of those without disabilities (52.4%) do. Of those who earn a credential, four out of five students with no disability (80.6 percent) and one out of two students with a disability (52.6%) graduate from a 4-year institution rather than a 2-year institution. About one-fourth of students with disabilities (25.5%) obtain certificates, more than one-fifth graduate with an associate degree, and over half receive bachelor's degrees (52.8%).

Implications and Discussion

The path towards attaining a postsecondary credential can be complex, and any number of factors can encourage, deter, support, or hinder student progress. Findings in this report suggest that there are long-standing and substantial equity issues at play. In all measures of access and success examined in this report—FAFSA filing, enrollment, persistence, and attainment)—male, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and low-income students fare worse than their counterparts. Students who are from rural geographic contexts, have Spanish as their primary home language, are English Language Learners, are from migrant households, or have a disability also have consistently lower rates of enrollment, persistence, and attainment than their peers.

Efforts to reduce inequities in postsecondary education should be particularly tailored to these students' needs, yet it is likely that all students would benefit as a result. For example, studying motivations and barriers to college access, particularly for underrepresented students, then getting feedback for improvements resulted in the development of @CollegeToolkit, a platform designed to ease the transition to college (Sandbox, 2025). Institutions could iterate on tools and resources to support persistence and attainment in addition to offering wraparound services, fostering an inclusive environment, etc.

More considerations for addressing disparities in postsecondary educational attainment are offered in the conclusion. Additionally, the WSAC (2025a) Strategic Action Plan describes efforts already underway or planned to support Washington students.

Limitations

There are several key limitations to these analyses. First and foremost, the findings are not causal. Rather, this report describes inequities and cannot identify or address the cause of those inequities. Moreover, the analyses rely solely on administrative data and cannot fully capture the magnitude of the disparities or represent the range of opportunities for postsecondary education available in Washington. Due to data limitations, this report is unable to include workforce education and training outcomes. This means, for example, gender group differences may be overestimated since male students are the majority of enrollees in apprenticeship programs (Huynh & Byrne, 2026).

Additionally, the administrative data disallow a fuller picture of postsecondary enrollment and persistence given that a student's intended credential is not discernible. Rather than being able to detail differences by in-progress certificate, associate degree, or bachelor's degree programs, this report describes inequities by institution type (two-year or four-year). Postsecondary attainment is the only outcome for which this report can distinguish results by credential type; shares of students attaining a given credential are indicated in **Appendix Tables 15, 17, and 19**. Time to completion by credential type is not reportable since it is unknown when a student effectively began either a certificate, associate, or bachelor's degree program.

Last but not least, there are limitations to the categorization of student groups. For example, data suppression requirements disallowed an examination of nonbinary students as their own group, so these students are combined with female students in this report. It was also not possible to disaggregate the Asian racial category into ethnic groups, despite it being well documented that educational experiences and outcomes vary widely within this population (e.g., Lowe, 1991; Nguyen et al., 2015). Similarly, disability status can be vastly heterogenous, and the data offer a simple representation of a complex category. Future work could provide more nuanced investigations into these and other types of student demographics.

Conclusion

Effectively addressing inequities in the education system is critical for a sustainable and vibrant Washington. The most recent decade of data shows that there are persistent inequities in postsecondary access and success for Washington public high school students. Specifically, this report provides an overview of postsecondary access and success by examining FAFSA filing, enrollment, second-year persistence, and attainment by student demographics. In addition to male, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and low-income students, those who are from rural high schools, have Spanish as their primary home language, are English Language Learners, are from migrant households, or have a disability appear to experience more barriers to and through postsecondary education [27] than their counterparts.

Washington students who appear to be underserved are:

- Male
- Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander
- American Indian/Alaska Native
- Low-income
- Rural
- Primarily Spanish speakers at home
- English Language Learners
- Migrant
- Disabled

Note: The above student subgroups appear underserved in certificate and degree programs but may be better represented in workforce education and training programs. Future postsecondary data collection is expected to allow for analyses inclusive of these program outcomes.

Postsecondary Access

Making postsecondary education more affordable can be a meaningful way to increase enrollment, particularly for low-income students. The Washington Completes FAFSA Campaign, first launched in Fall 2025, is intended to bolster the number of students receiving financial aid to make postsecondary education that much more accessible. The effort will raise awareness of important state aid programs, such as the Washington College Grant (WA Grant). [28] Also new in the 2025-26 academic year is the pilot implementation of the guarantee of a full WA Grant to graduating high school students who qualify for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (known as Basic Food in

[27] Although workforce education and training are an important part of Washington's postsecondary education offerings, analyses for this report are unable to include such program outcomes due to data limitations.
[28] While the WA Grant can already be used towards job training and apprenticeships, the newly established federal Workforce Pell Grant could encourage even more students to pursue postsecondary education. The Workforce Pell Grant provides funding for students to complete short-term career-focused training that they can later apply towards a degree program (NASFAA, 2025), which means it would make additional education more affordable to these students in the future.

Washington). Communication about the WA Grant guarantee for students in eligible households will ultimately begin in tenth grade, and there will be other early awareness efforts, as well (WSAC, 2025b). Both the Washington Completes FAFSA Campaign and guaranteed full WA Grant for eligible students are expected to increase postsecondary access for students and possibly reduce enrollment disparities by household income status.

Washington's efforts to improve postsecondary access would also benefit from more research into innovations taking place across the state. Firstly, future analyses could identify Washington schools where underserved students have relatively high rates of high school graduation and postsecondary enrollment. Understanding the work being done at these schools could inspire policy that supports high schools across the state to increase postsecondary access. Secondly, learning from the Washington Completes FAFSA Campaign (e.g., Alvarado & Deane, 2025) could inform a similarly devised statewide initiative to increase the number of students applying to postsecondary programs. Such an effort could help dispel the myth that higher education is only for those pursuing a college or university degree. A campaign could motivate and support students to learn about and apply to various postsecondary program types— including workforce education and training, which are programs not able to be included in the analysis for this report.

Postsecondary Success

Students who apply for financial aid and enroll in postsecondary programs would ideally persist and attain a certificate or degree. Importantly, addressing issues of postsecondary access should include understanding the role of academic preparation, student supports, educational alignment, and more, which could also improve some issues of postsecondary success. However, access is insufficient. For example, Black/African American students have higher-than-average rates of FAFSA filing (50.8% vs. 47.5%) and enrollment (60.8% vs. 58.7%), but they have lower-than-average rates of persistence (62.9% vs. 70.6%) and attainment (34.8% vs. 50.7%). Students may transfer, stop out, or otherwise exit postsecondary education, making persistence and attainment issues rather complex and their measures oversimplified.

As is true of studying high schools where postsecondary access is high, studying postsecondary institutions that appear particularly effective in supporting otherwise underserved students could inform policy to improve postsecondary success. Additionally, Washington needs to continue developing and iterating on new programs. For example, some current work is examining a pilot program that promotes public benefits to improve basic needs security for Washington's postsecondary students (Burtch et al., 2025), and an expansion of such efforts could yield positive results across the state. Efforts to proactively highlight the connection between postsecondary education and career pathways are also needed. Underrepresented students would especially benefit from support to identify career or life goals and understand how postsecondary education can help them achieve those goals (Sandbox, 2025). Washington's new High School and

Beyond Plan [29] and modernized Career Bridge platform [30] could be vital to helping students connect their educational plans with their career and life goals.

While education policy relevant to Washingtonians should be informed by in-state practice and research, there is also value in considering the efforts of other states. For example, to help achieve California's goal of a 70 percent attainment rate, there is a plan to "identify [administrative practices and policies] that create obstacles for students, particularly first-generation college-goers and students from underserved populations" (College Futures Foundation, 2025, p. 11). Performing such an audit may be warranted not only for Washington's postsecondary institutions but also its high schools. While no two states are identical, Washington could glean insight into effective strategies employed by other states.

Considerations for Policy and Practice

The gaps identified in this report have largely persisted over several cohorts of high school students; the state should use multiple approaches to tackle these inequities. Importantly, studying the broader systemic problems could inform statewide improvements to infrastructure. Findings in this report suggest that male, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, and low-income students as well as students who are from rural high schools, have Spanish as their home language, are English Language Learners, are from migrant households, or have a disability appear to be particularly underserved in Washington's current education system. These student groups have the most potential to benefit from targeted programs that can address their needs. While focusing on targeted programs may yield more immediate results, they may not be sustainable. Thus, the state should proactively account for these students' needs while continuing to improve the education infrastructure of Washington. Employing a range of strategies has the benefit of simultaneously uplifting underserved groups *and* increasing educational attainment among Washingtonians, overall.

Already, Washington is implementing broad efforts, such as through OtterBot and @CollegeToolkit. When scaled, these efforts are expected to increase postsecondary access and success across students. The following are examples of other evidence-based approaches that the state could pursue.

Leverage Career and Technical Education

A recent study of Washington students found that earning more credits in a single Career and Technical Education (CTE) pathway is associated with better postsecondary or labor

[29] Following the passage of Senate Bill 5243 in 2023, OSPI began rolling out a statewide platform for the High School and Beyond Plan (HSBP). The HSBP aims to support students in their exploration of various postsecondary pathways in alignment with their interests, skills, and life goals. More information about the state graduation requirement is available at: https://ospi.k12.wa.us/student-success/graduation/high-school-and-beyond-plan.

[30] Washington's Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board's efforts to modernize Career Bridge are described at: https://wtb.wa.gov/career-bridge-modernization/

market outcomes after high school (Riggs & Cigarroa Kennedy, 2025). The benefits of CTE are especially positive for male students: Boys who engage more deeply with CTE are more likely to finish high school, attain a postsecondary certificate, have higher annual earnings, and receive a living wage.

Expand Opportunities for Postsecondary Attainment

The state could expand opportunities for postsecondary attainment by enhancing existing pathways and developing new ones. In particular, investing in postsecondary workforce education and training and community college baccalaureate (CCB) programs could increase attainment and bolster the local economy. Such programs may especially attract students who can pursue postsecondary opportunities only within commuting distance and those desiring close alignment between their postsecondary education and their employment prospects. While there is more to learn about workforce education and training and CCB outcomes, one study found that CCB graduates in fields such as criminal justice and nursing have earnings similar to graduates of bachelor's degrees awarded by four-year institutions (Acton et al., 2026). Washington's CCB programs have been growing rapidly in the past decade, enabling bachelor's degree attainment for those who may not otherwise be able to access postsecondary education (Meza, 2024).

Implement and Adapt Wraparound Services

While faculty engagement can increase student success (e.g., Carrell & Kurlaender, 2023), wraparound services are intended to provide student support beyond the classroom. The City University of New York's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) has been heralded as highly effective by integrating advising, academic and career support, funding, and a very structured degree pathway. One Million Degrees (OMD) has a similarly comprehensive model of wraparound supports but is not housed within a single institution. Rather, OMD partners with the City Colleges of Chicago. Research indicates that ASAP and OMD each meaningfully raise associate degree attainment (Strumbos et al., 2018; Hallberg et al., 2022). Implementing these programs in Washington is not feasible (SBCTC & WSAC, n.d.), but adapting elements of their models is likely to prove fruitful not only at the state's two-year institutions but also at its four-year institutions.

Diversify the Education Workforce

As the population of students increasingly diversifies, so, too, should the education workforce. Often, programs like ASAP and OMD have diverse staff whose identities meaningfully reflect the students they serve. Having demographically similar teachers, teaching assistants (Oliver et al., 2021), advisors (Gaule & Piacentini, 2018), or professors (Hoffman & Oreopoulos, 2009; Fairlie et al., 2014) has been shown to yield benefits for otherwise underserved students. The importance of diversity within the education workforce is not limited to high school and postsecondary institutions. As an example, Black students in grades K–3 who were randomly assigned at least one Black teacher were

ultimately more likely than other Black students to finish high school and enroll in college (Gershenson et al., 2021). This suggests that diversity among educators is critically important throughout the pathways of schooling.

The above considerations offer a glimpse into what is possible. This report identifies where disparities endure between student groups. Understanding disparities in FAFSA filing, postsecondary enrollment, second-year persistence, and postsecondary attainment can enable Washington to provide all students with access to—and success in—postsecondary education and training. After all, postsecondary education expands economic opportunity and offers nonmonetary benefits for individuals, their communities, and society.

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Appendix Tables

Appendix Table 1. Twelfth-Grade FAFSA Filing Headcount and Rate by Ninth-Grade Cohort Year

Ninth-Grade Cohort	Headcount	Rate
All cohorts	362,159	47.5%
2009	40,759	45.8%
2010	39,464	47.0%
2011	39,456	47.4%
2012	38,656	46.3%
2013	41,107	49.4%
2014	42,318	49.9%
2015	41,808	48.9%
2016	40,370	47.8%
2017	38,221	44.7%

Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse
Note. Cohorts 2016 to 2017 were expected to be high school seniors during the COVID-19 period of 2019-20 to 2020-21. At the time of analysis, FAFSA filing data are not yet available for Cohort 2018.

Appendix Table 2. Twelfth-Grade FAFSA Filing Rate by Student Demographics

Student Demographic	Rate
All students	47.5%
Male	40.1%
Female & Nonbinary	55.2%
Asian	65.7%
White	47.4%
Black/African American	50.8%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	41.1%
American Indian/Alaska Native	33.0%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	38.0%
Two or more races	50.1%
Unknown race/ethnicity	5.9%
Low income	40.8%
Non-Low income	53.2%
Migrant	37.8%
Non-Migrant	47.7%
ELL	30.6%
Non-ELL	48.5%
English	47.7%
Spanish	38.2%
Other language	59.5%

Unknown primary language at home	36.1%
Has a disability	23.0%
No disability	50.9%
Urban	48.8%
Rural	45.9%

Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse

Note. All categorizations are accurate as of students' ninth-grade year except geographic context, which is based on the urban or rural designation of the last Washington public high school of attendance.

Appendix Table 3. Twelfth-Grade FAFSA Filing Rate by Intersecting Student Demographics

Student Demographic	Intersectional Demographic	Rate
All students	All students	47.5%
Asian	Male	60.2%
Asian	Female & Nonbinary	71.3%
White	Male	39.9%
White	Female & Nonbinary	55.5%
Black/African American	Male	43.8%
Black/African American	Female & Nonbinary	58.4%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	Male	33.7%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	Female & Nonbinary	49.0%
American Indian/Alaska Native	Male	26.6%
American Indian/Alaska Native	Female & Nonbinary	40.0%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Male	31.7%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Female & Nonbinary	44.4%
Two or more races	Male	43.0%
Two or more races	Female & Nonbinary	57.2%
Asian	Low income	67.2%
Asian	Non-Low income	64.8%
White	Low income	38.0%
White	Non-Low income	52.3%
Black/African American	Low income	49.6%
Black/African American	Non-Low income	53.5%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	Low income	38.5%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	Non-Low income	49.1%
American Indian/Alaska Native	Low income	29.4%
American Indian/Alaska Native	Non-Low income	41.2%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Low income	35.6%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Non-Low income	45.4%
Two or more races	Low income	42.4%
Two or more races	Non-Low income	56.3%
Male	Low income	33.1%
Male	Non-Low income	46.3%

Female & Nonbinary	Low income	49.1%
Female & Nonbinary	Non-Low income	60.4%

Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse
Note. All categorizations are accurate as of students' ninth-grade year.

Appendix Table 4. Twelfth-Grade FAFSA Filing Rate for Low-Income Students Across Ninth-Grade Cohort Years by Gender Group or Race/Ethnicity

Student Demographic	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Male	31.3%	33.0%	33.9%	33.2%	35.8%	35.8%	34.3%	32.2%	28.3%
Female & Nonbinary	48.2%	49.0%	49.7%	47.6%	51.0%	51.9%	50.5%	48.9%	44.4%
Asian	60.8%	66.0%	67.3%	66.0%	66.3%	72.4%	70.0%	68.3%	67.3%
White	38.9%	40.3%	39.8%	37.7%	40.5%	39.6%	38.2%	34.7%	30.5%
Black/African American	47.1%	47.3%	48.9%	47.6%	50.6%	52.8%	51.8%	50.1%	50.8%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	34.1%	35.6%	37.5%	37.6%	41.7%	42.4%	40.9%	40.6%	35.0%

Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse
Note. These are raw average FAFSA filing rates for each cohort and do not control for non-academic student characteristics, school-related factors, or standardized academic measures. Cohorts 2009 through 2017 were expected to be in twelfth grade during the 2012-13 through 2020-21 academic years, respectively. At the time of analysis, FAFSA filing data were not yet available for Cohort 2018. Due to the small number of nonbinary students in the sample and data reporting limitations, students identified as nonbinary or female in ninth grade are categorized together as one gender group. Low-income students are defined in this report as those who are eligible for the federal Free and Reduced-Price Lunch program in ninth grade.

Appendix Table 5. Enrollment Rate Within 1 Year of High School Graduation by Institution Type and Ninth-Grade Cohort Year

Ninth-Grade Cohort	Any Postsecondary Enrollment	2-year Institution	4-year Institution
All cohorts	58.7%	25.0%	33.7%
2009	63.0%	29.8%	33.2%
2010	63.1%	29.2%	33.9%
2011	61.9%	27.8%	34.1%
2012	61.2%	27.0%	34.1%
2013	61.3%	26.4%	34.9%
2014	60.6%	25.5%	35.0%
2015	59.9%	24.9%	35.1%
2016	52.9%	21.7%	31.2%
2017	52.0%	19.3%	32.7%
2018	52.4%	19.5%	32.9%

Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse
Note. Cohorts 2016 to 2018 were expected to graduate high school during the COVID-19 period of 2019-20 to 2021-22.

Appendix Table 6. Enrollment Rate Within 1 Year of High School Graduation by Student Demographics and Ninth-Grade Cohort Year

Student Demographic	All Cohorts	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
All students	58.7%	63.0%	63.1%	61.9%	61.2%	61.3%	60.6%	59.9%	52.9%	52.0%	52.4%
Male	53.3%	58.0%	58.4%	57.2%	56.7%	55.9%	54.9%	53.7%	46.3%	46.2%	47.7%
Female & Nonbinary	64.0%	67.8%	67.7%	66.5%	65.7%	66.6%	66.2%	66.2%	59.4%	57.7%	57.1%
Asian	80.1%	81.0%	83.3%	81.6%	81.1%	80.8%	82.6%	81.7%	76.7%	76.9%	76.8%
White	59.2%	63.8%	63.2%	62.4%	61.7%	61.9%	60.8%	60.1%	52.8%	52.3%	52.1%
Black/African American	60.8%	63.3%	63.6%	61.9%	60.2%	62.3%	62.2%	62.3%	57.2%	57.6%	57.9%
Hispanic/ Latino of any race(s)	49.4%	52.2%	53.7%	52.3%	52.9%	52.8%	51.9%	52.8%	45.6%	41.3%	43.8%
American Indian/Alaska Native	40.8%	45.8%	46.0%	43.8%	42.9%	45.8%	43.8%	38.7%	35.5%	34.5%	32.2%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	40.0%	48.5%	47.2%	46.6%	39.0%	45.3%	41.6%	41.1%	32.5%	34.2%	33.7%
Two or more races	58.8%	62.1%	63.4%	62.6%	61.5%	61.1%	61.4%	60.4%	53.5%	53.3%	53.9%
Unknown	30.8%	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%	100%	.	50.0%	.	14.3%	0.0%	50.0%
Low income	45.6%	49.6%	50.6%	49.0%	48.0%	48.8%	47.3%	47.2%	39.5%	37.9%	39.7%
Non-Low income	67.8%	70.4%	70.9%	71.0%	70.6%	71.0%	70.5%	69.2%	62.7%	61.5%	61.6%
Migrant	45.7%	49.6%	51.0%	50.8%	51.0%	47.2%	49.8%	48.4%	37.8%	36.7%	40.6%
Non-Migrant	58.9%	63.2%	63.3%	62.1%	61.4%	61.5%	60.8%	60.2%	53.2%	52.3%	52.7%
ELL	41.4%	48.3%	49.4%	47.8%	45.9%	45.0%	44.7%	44.0%	35.6%	34.5%	36.4%
Non-ELL	59.6%	63.5%	63.6%	62.5%	61.8%	62.0%	61.3%	60.7%	54.1%	53.3%	53.9%
English	58.8%	63.1%	63.0%	61.8%	61.0%	61.2%	60.4%	59.9%	53.0%	52.4%	52.4%
Spanish	47.3%	49.5%	51.9%	51.2%	51.8%	51.5%	51.0%	50.1%	41.8%	38.8%	42.6%
Other language	73.4%	74.9%	77.9%	76.9%	75.7%	76.2%	75.7%	75.9%	68.3%	67.4%	68.3%
Unknown	72.4%	73.3%	66.2%	77.4%	66.7%	70.7%	76.1%	64.4%	60.0%	58.8%	67.5%
Has a disability	29.9%	31.6%	33.2%	32.9%	32.9%	33.1%	30.8%	29.2%	23.2%	25.5%	27.6%
No disability	62.1%	66.4%	66.6%	65.3%	64.7%	65.0%	64.1%	63.7%	56.5%	55.2%	55.3%
Urban	61.0%	65.4%	65.5%	64.2%	63.2%	63.3%	62.6%	62.0%	55.1%	55.0%	55.5%
Rural	52.5%	57.5%	57.8%	56.7%	56.6%	56.1%	54.9%	54.0%	46.3%	43.0%	43.4%

Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse

Note. Cohorts 2016 to 2018 were expected to graduate high school during the COVID-19 period of 2019-20 to 2021-22. All categorizations are accurate as of students' ninth-grade year except geographic context, which is based on the urban or rural designation of the last Washington public high school of attendance.

Appendix Table 7. Enrollment Rate Within 1 Year of High School Graduation by Institution Type and Intersecting Student Demographics

Student Demographic	Intersectional Demographic	Any Postsecondary Enrollment	2-Year Institution	4-Year Institution
All students	All students	58.7%	42.6%	57.4%
Asian	Male	76.8%	34.1%	65.9%
Asian	Female & Nonbinary	83.4%	28.3%	71.7%
White	Male	53.7%	43.3%	56.7%
White	Female & Nonbinary	64.9%	38.0%	62.0%
Black/African American	Male	55.7%	55.1%	44.9%
Black/African American	Female & Nonbinary	65.8%	45.9%	54.1%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	Male	43.5%	60.2%	39.8%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	Female & Nonbinary	55.0%	53.6%	46.4%
American Indian/Alaska Native	Male	34.3%	55.2%	44.8%
American Indian/Alaska Native	Female & Nonbinary	47.3%	50.5%	49.5%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Male	35.7%	50.7%	49.3%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Female & Nonbinary	44.1%	47.7%	52.3%
Two or more races	Male	54.1%	42.9%	57.1%
Two or more races	Female & Nonbinary	63.3%	39.1%	60.9%
Asian	Low income	73.2%	43.6%	56.4%
Asian	Non-Low income	83.8%	25.1%	74.9%
White	Low income	40.4%	58.4%	41.6%
White	Non-Low income	66.7%	36.1%	63.9%

Black/African American	Low income	57.7%	53.9%	46.1%
Black/African American	Non-Low income	67.6%	42.8%	57.2%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	Low income	44.9%	62.2%	37.8%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	Non-Low income	61.6%	44.8%	55.2%
American Indian/Alaska Native	Low income	34.0%	55.9%	44.1%
American Indian/Alaska Native	Non-Low income	52.5%	48.7%	51.3%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Low income	33.4%	51.3%	48.7%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Non-Low income	57.2%	45.5%	54.5%
Two or more races	Low income	43.5%	52.0%	48.0%
Two or more races	Non-Low income	68.6%	36.2%	63.8%
Male	Low income	39.4%	60.5%	39.5%
Male	Non-Low income	62.9%	39.1%	60.9%
Female & Nonbinary	Low income	51.5%	54.7%	45.3%
Female & Nonbinary	Non-Low income	72.8%	33.0%	67.0%

Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse
Note. All categorizations are accurate as of students' ninth-grade year.

Appendix Table 8. Persistence Rate from First to Second Year by Institution Type and Ninth-Grade Cohort Year

Ninth-Grade Cohort	Any Persistence/Attainment	2-Year Institution	4-Year Institution
All cohorts	70.6%	57.0%	83.8%
2009	70.8%	57.9%	86.1%
2010	70.5%	58.1%	84.3%
2011	70.2%	57.9%	83.2%

2012	72.2%	58.7%	86.0%
2013	71.7%	57.9%	85.0%
2014	72.6%	58.2%	85.6%
2015	69.5%	55.3%	81.7%
2016	69.0%	55.9%	80.4%
2017	68.6%	51.3%	81.3%

Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse

Note. Persistence refers to continuing postsecondary education from the first year into the second year (or completing a program before the second postsecondary year), regardless of the term of entry.

Appendix Table 9. Persistence Rate from First to Second Year by Institution Type and Student Demographics

Student Demographic	Any Postsecondary Enrollment	2-year Institution	4-year Institution
All students	70.6%	57.0%	83.8%
Female & Nonbinary	72.2%	58.1%	84.7%
Male	68.7%	55.9%	82.6%
Two or more races	68.9%	54.1%	82.6%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	53.8%	43.2%	67.4%
American Indian/Alaska Native	54.3%	46.1%	65.9%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	64.2%	55.0%	79.8%
Black/African American	62.9%	50.7%	79.3%
White	71.4%	57.5%	83.6%
Asian	83.2%	68.5%	91.9%
Non-Low income	75.6%	60.9%	86.1%
Low income	60.9%	52.1%	76.4%
Non-Migrant	70.7%	57.1%	83.8%
Migrant	63.6%	56.4%	79.9%
Non-ELL	71.0%	57.1%	83.8%
ELL	60.9%	55.5%	79.1%
Other language	78.1%	66.0%	90.8%
Spanish	64.0%	56.4%	80.8%
English	70.5%	56.2%	83.3%
No disability	71.7%	57.9%	84.1%
Has a disability	53.8%	48.8%	71.0%
Rural	67.7%	56.5%	80.7%
Urban	71.6%	57.4%	84.6%

Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse

Note. Persistence refers to continuing postsecondary education from the first year into the second year (or completing a program before the second postsecondary year), regardless of the term of entry. All categorizations are accurate as of students' ninth-grade year except geographic context, which is based on the urban or rural designation of the last Washington public high school of attendance.

Appendix Table 10. Persistence Rate from First to Second Year by Institution Type and Intersecting Student Demographics

Student Demographic	Intersectional Demographic	Any Postsecondary Enrollment	2-Year Institution	4-Year Institution
All students	All students	70.6%	57.0%	83.8%
Asian	Male	81.0%	66.6%	90.7%
Asian	Female & Nonbinary	85.3%	70.5%	93.0%
White	Male	69.7%	56.6%	82.5%
White	Female & Nonbinary	72.9%	58.4%	84.5%
Black/African American	Male	59.7%	48.7%	77.4%
Black/African American	Female & Nonbinary	65.7%	52.7%	80.6%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	Male	61.5%	53.3%	77.4%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	Female & Nonbinary	66.4%	56.4%	81.4%
American Indian/Alaska Native	Male	51.6%	43.3%	64.5%
American Indian/Alaska Native	Female & Nonbinary	56.4%	48.4%	66.8%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Male	50.2%	40.4%	63.8%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Female & Nonbinary	56.6%	45.6%	69.9%
Two or more races	Male	67.6%	53.4%	81.9%
Two or more races	Female & Nonbinary	69.9%	54.7%	83.2%
Asian	Low income	77.5%	65.2%	89.7%
Asian	Non-Low income	86.1%	71.2%	92.7%
White	Low income	58.3%	50.2%	72.8%

White	Non-Low income	75.0%	60.6%	85.4%
Black/African American	Low income	59.4%	48.4%	76.6%
Black/African American	Non-Low income	69.9%	56.3%	83.4%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	Low income	61.2%	53.7%	77.3%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	Non-Low income	70.7%	58.6%	83.2%
American Indian/Alaska Native	Low income	47.2%	41.5%	56.4%
American Indian/Alaska Native	Non-Low income	63.1%	52.6%	75.6%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Low income	47.6%	38.5%	60.1%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Non-Low income	64.3%	52.0%	78.5%
Two or more races	Low income	56.2%	45.4%	72.3%
Two or more races	Non-Low income	74.8%	59.8%	86.0%
Male	Low income	58.4%	50.6%	74.0%
Male	Non-Low income	73.6%	59.6%	85.0%
Female & Nonbinary	Low income	62.9%	53.3%	78.1%
Female & Nonbinary	Non-Low income	77.4%	62.3%	87.0%

Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse

Note. Persistence refers to continuing postsecondary education from the first year into the second year (or completing a program before the second postsecondary year), regardless of the term of entry. All categorizations are accurate as of students' ninth-grade year.

Appendix Table 11. Postsecondary Educational Attainment Rate of Enrolled Students by Time to Completion and Ninth-Grade Cohort

Ninth-Grade Cohort	100% Expected Time	150% Expected Time	200% Expected Time
All cohorts	34.7%	50.7%	54.9%
2009	32.7%	49.8%	54.6%
2010	34.0%	50.6%	55.3%
2011	34.8%	51.2%	
2012	36.3%	51.1%	
2013	35.9%		
2014	34.7%		

Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse

Note. In this report, expected time to certificate or degree completion is based on the institution type at which a student is enrolled. For example, 150% expected time is 6 years at a four-year institution and 3 years at a two-year institution.

Appendix Table 12. Postsecondary Educational Attainment Rate of Enrolled Students by Time to Completion and Student Demographics

Student Demographics	100% Expected Time	150% Expected Time	200% Expected Time
All students	34.7%	50.7%	54.9%
Male	29.7%	46.3%	50.5%
Female & Nonbinary	39.2%	54.6%	58.8%
Asian	46.0%	65.3%	69.4%
White	37.1%	53.0%	57.1%
Black/African American	20.4%	34.8%	39.8%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	24.6%	39.2%	43.4%
American Indian/Alaska Native	19.4%	31.0%	34.7%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	18.1%	29.2%	32.5%
Two or more races	32.2%	47.0%	50.6%
Low income	23.7%	37.1%	41.4%
Non-Low income	40.5%	57.6%	61.3%
Migrant	23.2%	40.5%	45.3%
Non-Migrant	34.9%	50.8%	55.1%
ELL	19.4%	35.6%	41.6%
Non-ELL	35.2%	51.2%	55.4%
English	35.3%	51.0%	55.1%
Spanish	23.6%	39.2%	44.3%

Other language	39.5%	58.0%	62.4%
Unknown	38.8%	56.5%	60.1%
Has a disability	15.0%	25.3%	29.4%
No disability	36.1%	52.4%	56.6%
Urban	35.6%	51.9%	56.2%
Rural	32.7%	48.0%	52.1%

Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse

Note. In this report, expected time to certificate or degree completion is based on the institution type at which a student is enrolled. For example, 150% expected time is 6 years at a four-year institution and 3 years at a two-year institution. All categorizations are accurate as of students' ninth-grade year except geographic context, which is based on the urban or rural designation of the last Washington public high school of attendance.

Appendix Table 13. Postsecondary Educational Attainment Rate of Enrolled Students by Time to Completion and Intersecting Student Demographics

Student Demographic	Intersectional Demographic	100% Expected Time	150% Expected Time	200% Expected Time
All students	All students	34.7%	50.7%	54.9%
Asian	Male	39.7%	60.3%	65.0%
Asian	Female & Nonbinary	51.9%	69.9%	73.5%
White	Male	31.8%	48.5%	52.8%
White	Female & Nonbinary	41.8%	57.0%	61.0%
Black/African American	Male	15.0%	29.3%	34.2%
Black/African American	Female & Nonbinary	25.2%	39.8%	44.8%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	Male	20.4%	34.6%	38.5%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	Female & Nonbinary	28.1%	43.0%	47.6%
American Indian/Alaska Native	Male	15.6%	27.6%	31.4%
American Indian/Alaska Native	Female & Nonbinary	22.4%	33.9%	37.7%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Male	13.7%	26.7%	26.8%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Female & Nonbinary	21.8%	31.4%	37.4%
Two or more races	Male	27.4%	43.3%	46.6%
Two or more races	Female & Nonbinary	36.3%	50.2%	54.0%
Asian	Low income	35.8%	55.4%	60.5%
Asian	Non-Low income	51.4%	70.5%	73.9%
White	Low income	24.7%	36.7%	40.7%
White	Non-Low income	40.7%	57.7%	61.7%
Black/African American	Low income	17.3%	30.8%	36.0%

Black/African American	Non-Low income	26.6%	42.1%	45.9%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	Low income	21.8%	35.7%	39.8%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	Non-Low income	31.7%	48.0%	51.7%
American Indian/Alaska Native	Low income	14.3%	23.1%	27.5%
American Indian/Alaska Native	Non-Low income	25.8%	40.2%	42.4%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Low income	13.5%	22.9%	25.2%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Non-Low income	26.1%	39.7%	43.7%
Two or more races	Low income	21.0%	32.1%	36.3%
Two or more races	Non-Low income	37.8%	54.3%	56.9%
Male	Low income	19.7%	32.9%	36.7%
Male	Non-Low income	34.5%	52.6%	56.7%
Female & Nonbinary	Low income	27.0%	40.6%	45.2%
Female & Nonbinary	Non-Low income	46.0%	62.1%	65.6%

Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse

Note. In this report, expected time to certificate or degree completion is based on the institution type at which a student is enrolled. For example, 150% expected time is 6 years at a four-year institution and 3 years at a two-year institution. All categorizations are accurate as of students' ninth-grade year.

Appendix Table 14. Share of Postsecondary Educational Attainment Within 150% Expected Time by Institution Type and Ninth-Grade Cohort

Ninth-Grade Cohort	2-Year Institution	4-Year Institution
All cohorts	20.3%	79.7%
2009	20.6%	79.4%
2010	20.3%	79.7%
2011	19.9%	80.1%
2012	20.3%	79.7%

Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse

Note. In this report, expected time to certificate or degree completion is based on the institution type at which a student is enrolled. For example, 150% expected time is 6 years at a four-year institution and 3 years at a two-year institution.

Appendix Table 15. Share of Postsecondary Educational Attainment Within 150% Expected Time by Credential Type and Ninth-Grade Cohort

Ninth-Grade Cohort	Certificate	Associate Degree	Bachelor's Degree
All cohorts	6.6%	13.3%	80.1%
2009	7.2%	13.4%	79.4%
2010	6.8%	13.3%	79.9%
2011	6.4%	13.0%	80.6%
2012	5.9%	13.8%	80.4%

Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse

Note. In this report, expected time to certificate or degree completion is based on the institution type at which a student is enrolled. For example, 150% expected time is 6 years at a four-year institution and 3 years at a two-year institution.

Appendix Table 16. Share of Postsecondary Educational Attainment Within 150% Expected Time by Institution Type and Student Demographics

Student Characteristics	2-Year Institution	4-Year Institution
All students	20.3%	79.7%
Male	21.8%	78.2%
Female & Nonbinary	19.2%	80.8%
Asian	11.8%	88.2%
White	19.4%	80.6%
Black/African American	21.3%	78.7%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	34.3%	65.7%
American Indian/Alaska Native	30.0%	70.0%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	26.6%	73.4%
Two or more races	19.4%	80.6%
Low income	34.4%	65.6%
Non-Low income	15.7%	84.3%
Migrant	43.4%	56.6%
Non-Migrant	20.0%	80.0%
ELL	45.0%	55.0%
Non-ELL	19.7%	80.3%
English	19.0%	81.0%
Spanish	40.2%	59.8%
Other language	20.4%	79.6%
Unknown	15.3%	84.7%
Has a disability	47.4%	52.6%
No disability	19.4%	80.6%
Urban	18.2%	81.8%
Rural	26.8%	73.2%

Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse

Note. In this report, expected time to certificate or degree completion is based on the institution type at which a student is enrolled. For example, 150% expected time is 6 years at a four-year institution and 3 years at a two-year institution. All categorizations are accurate as of students' ninth-grade year except geographic context, which is based on the urban or rural designation of the last Washington public high school of attendance.

Appendix Table 17. Share of Postsecondary Educational Attainment Within 150% Expected Time by Credential Type and Student Demographics

Student Characteristics	Certificate	Associate Degree	Bachelor's Degree
All students	6.6%	13.3%	80.1%
Male	7.2%	14.2%	78.6%
Female & Nonbinary	6.1%	12.7%	81.2%
Asian	3.5%	7.8%	88.7%
White	5.5%	13.5%	80.9%
Black/African American	10.2%	11.3%	78.5%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	14.6%	18.8%	66.6%
American Indian/Alaska Native	11.7%	20.3%	68.0%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	13.8%	13.2%	73.0%
Two or more races	6.4%	12.8%	80.8%
Low income	13.7%	20.1%	66.2%
Non-Low income	4.2%	11.2%	84.6%
Migrant	18.8%	23.9%	57.3%
Non-Migrant	6.4%	13.2%	80.3%
ELL	23.6%	19.7%	56.6%
Non-ELL	6.2%	13.2%	80.6%
English	5.8%	13.0%	81.2%
Spanish	19.3%	20.0%	60.8%
Other language	5.7%	13.3%	80.9%
Unknown	5.5%	8.9%	85.6%
Has a disability	25.5%	21.7%	52.8%
No disability	5.9%	13.1%	81.0%
Urban	5.8%	12.0%	82.2%
Rural	8.7%	17.8%	73.5%

Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse

Note. In this report, expected time to certificate or degree completion is based on the institution type at which a student is enrolled. For example, 150% expected time is 6 years at a four-year institution and 3 years at a two-year institution. All categorizations are accurate as of students' ninth-grade year except geographic context, which is based on the urban or rural designation of the last Washington public high school of attendance.

Appendix Table 18. Share of Postsecondary Educational Attainment Within 150% Expected Time by Institution Type and Intersecting Student Demographics

Student Demographic	Intersectional Demographic	2-Year Institution	4-Year Institution
All students	All students	20.3%	79.7%
Asian	Male	13.4%	86.6%
Asian	Female & Nonbinary	10.6%	89.4%

White	Male	21.0%	79.0%
White	Female & Nonbinary	18.2%	81.8%
Black/African American	Male	22.2%	77.8%
Black/African American	Female & Nonbinary	20.6%	79.4%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	Male	36.7%	63.3%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	Female & Nonbinary	32.8%	67.2%
American Indian/Alaska Native	Male	34.3%	65.7%
American Indian/Alaska Native	Female & Nonbinary	27.1%	72.9%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Male	27.5%	72.5%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Female & Nonbinary	26.0%	74.0%
Two or more races	Male	20.6%	79.4%
Two or more races	Female & Nonbinary	18.4%	81.6%
Asian	Low income	18.8%	81.2%
Asian	Non-Low income	8.9%	91.1%
White	Low income	37.1%	62.9%
White	Non-Low income	16.1%	83.9%
Black/African American	Low income	24.6%	75.4%
Black/African American	Non-Low income	16.8%	83.2%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	Low income	41.0%	59.0%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	Non-Low income	22.1%	77.9%
American Indian/Alaska Native	Low income	39.1%	60.9%
American Indian/Alaska Native	Non-Low income	24.0%	76.0%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Low income	32.9%	67.1%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Non-Low income	20.6%	79.4%
Two or more races	Low income	30.1%	69.9%
Two or more races	Non-Low income	16.3%	83.7%
Male	Low income	36.0%	64.0%

Male	Non-Low income	17.5%	82.5%
Female & Nonbinary	Low income	33.3%	66.7%
Female & Nonbinary	Non-Low income	14.2%	85.8%

Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse

Note. In this report, expected time to certificate or degree completion is based on the institution type at which a student is enrolled. For example, 150% expected time is 6 years at a four-year institution and 3 years at a two-year institution. All categorizations are accurate as of students' ninth-grade year.

Appendix Table 19. Share of Postsecondary Educational Attainment Within 150% Expected Time by Credential Type and Intersecting Student Demographics

Student Demographic	Intersectional Demographic	Certificate	Associate Degree	Bachelor's Degree
All students	All students	6.6%	13.3%	80.1%
Asian	Male	4.2%	8.4%	87.3%
Asian	Female & Nonbinary	2.9%	7.2%	89.9%
White	Male	6.3%	14.4%	79.3%
White	Female & Nonbinary	5.0%	12.9%	82.1%
Black/African American	Male	11.1%	11.4%	77.5%
Black/African American	Female & Nonbinary	9.7%	11.3%	79.1%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	Male	15.3%	20.6%	64.1%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	Female & Nonbinary	14.1%	17.6%	68.3%
American Indian/Alaska Native	Male	12.0%	23.1%	64.9%
American Indian/Alaska Native	Female & Nonbinary	11.6%	18.4%	70.1%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Male	15.3%	11.5%	73.3%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Female & Nonbinary	12.7%	14.5%	72.8%
Two or more races	Male	7.0%	13.3%	79.8%
Two or more races	Female & Nonbinary	6.0%	12.4%	81.6%
Asian	Low income	6.6%	11.3%	82.1%
Asian	Non-Low income	2.2%	6.3%	91.5%
White	Low income	12.8%	23.9%	63.4%
White	Non-Low income	4.2%	11.7%	84.1%
Black/African American	Low income	13.1%	11.8%	75.1%
Black/African American	Non-Low income	6.5%	10.7%	82.8%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	Low income	18.9%	21.2%	59.9%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	Non-Low income	6.7%	14.4%	78.9%
American Indian/Alaska Native	Low income	18.5%	24.8%	56.7%

American Indian/Alaska Native	Non-Low income	7.3%	17.3%	75.4%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Low income	19.5%	14.1%	66.4%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	Non-Low income	8.4%	12.3%	79.4%
Two or more races	Low income	11.6%	18.4%	70.0%
Two or more races	Non-Low income	4.9%	11.1%	84.0%
Male	Low income	14.1%	21.3%	64.6%
Male	Non-Low income	5.2%	12.1%	82.7%
Female & Nonbinary	Low income	13.5%	19.3%	67.2%
Female & Nonbinary	Non-Low income	3.5%	10.4%	86.1%

Source: Education Research and Data Center, P20W Data Warehouse

Note. In this report, expected time to certificate or degree completion is based on the institution type at which a student is enrolled. For example, 150% expected time is 6 years at a four-year institution and 3 years at a two-year institution. All categorizations are accurate as of students' ninth-grade year.