Beyond Educational Access: Inequities from FAFSA Filing to Postsecondary Attainment

Report Snapshot **June 2026**

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Washington students who appear to be particularly underserved are:

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

About the Cohorts
This report focuses on Washington public school students who entered ninth grade between 2009–10 and 2018–19; this is the most recent decade of available data.

Note: The above student subgroups appear underserved in certificate and degree programs but may be better represented in workforce education and training programs. For example, male students make up 72 percent of enrollment in apprenticeships.[1] Future data collection is expected to allow for analyses inclusive of workforce education and training outcomes.

12th-Grade FAFSA Filing

Low-income students' FAFSA filing rates for the most recent cohort show male and White students trailing their peers.

	All Low-Income Students	**Male**	Female & Nonbinary	**White**	Asian	Black/African American	Hispanic/Latino of any race
Total N	38,318	19,934	18,384	14,805	2,177	2,520	14,577
FAFSA Rate	36.0	**28.3**	44.4	**30.5**	67.3	50.8	35.0

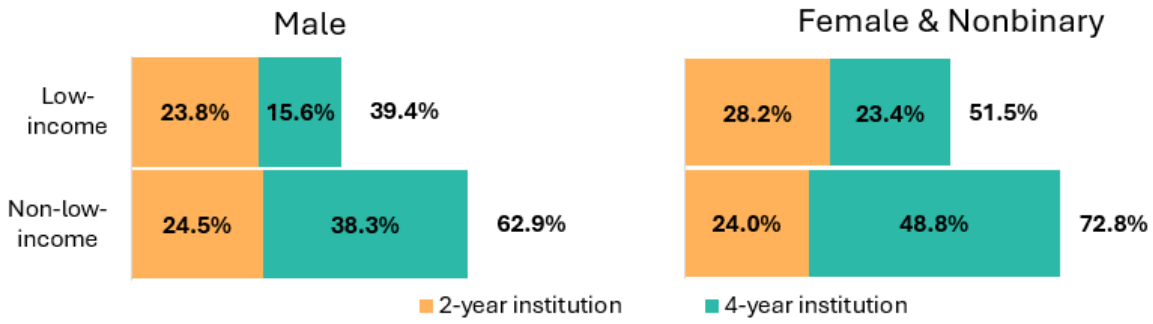
When all else[2] is equal, low-income male seniors and low-income White seniors are significantly less likely to file the FAFSA than their low-income gender group and low-income racial/ethnic[3] counterparts, respectively.

Postsecondary Enrollment

Male students may be pursuing occupations that do not require a postsecondary credential. Their enrollment rate is lower than for female and nonbinary students (53.3% compared to 64.0%, respectively). The gender group disparity also occurs across race/ethnicity.

[1] For more fall enrollment trends, visit: https://wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/Fall2025EnrollmentBrief.pdf.
[2] The regression analyses compare FAFSA filing rates among students with similar non-academic student characteristics, school-related factors, and standardized academic measures.
[3] Because of sample size limitations, the regression analyses exclude American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) or Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (NH/OPI) students. However, these students are the most underserved: Across cohorts, only 33.0% of AI/AN seniors and 38.0% of NH/OPI seniors file the FAFSA.

However, male students from non-low-income households (62.9%) are more likely to enroll in postsecondary education[4] than female and nonbinary students who are from low-income households (51.5%).

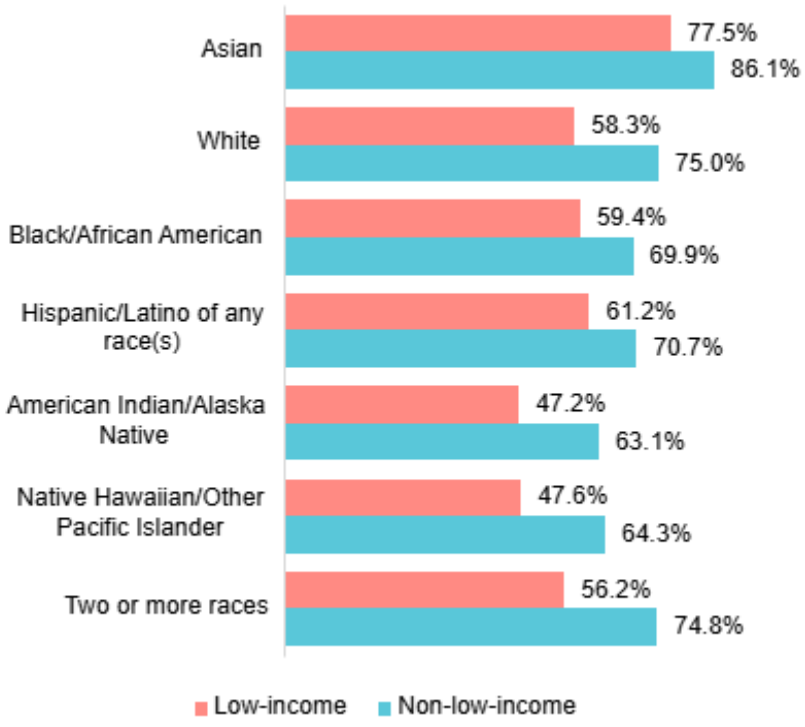


Across gender groups, students from non-low-income households are more likely to enroll at four-year institutions than at two-year institutions. ***In contrast, low-income students of either gender group are more likely to enroll at two-year institutions than at four-year institutions.***

Second-Year Persistence[5]

Low-income students of every racial / ethnic group persist into the second year at lower rates than their non-low-income racial/ethnic group counterparts.

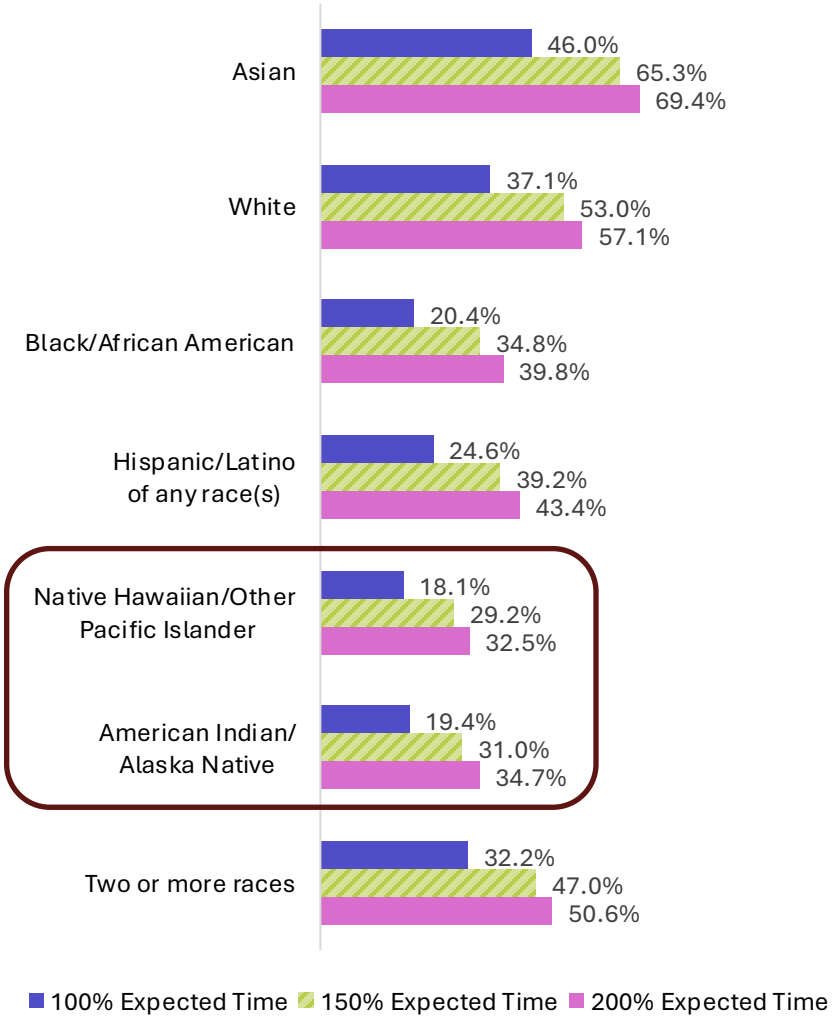
Examining intersecting identities emphasizes disparities: Students who are male, low-income, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, or American Indian/Alaska Native appear to face heightened challenges to persistence.



[4] In the figure, the percentage to the right of each bar is the total enrollment rate (within one year of high school graduation) across institution types for a given household income status and gender group.
[5] In this report, persistence refers to continuing postsecondary enrollment into the second year or attaining a certificate or degree by the end of the first year; persistence or attainment may occur at the same or at a different institution as students initially enrolled.

Postsecondary Attainment

Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander and American Indian/Alaska Native students have the lowest levels of postsecondary attainment. AI/AN and NH/OPI students are also more likely than their counterparts to complete a postsecondary program at a two-year institution rather than a four-year institution and to earn certificates rather than degrees.



Within 150% of expected time, ***male students (46.3%) and students from low-income households (37.1%) complete their postsecondary programs at markedly lower rates*** than female and nonbinary (54.6%) and non-low-income students (57.6%).

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

See the full report: Beyond Educational Access: Inequities from FAFSA Filing to Postsecondary Attainment

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.