



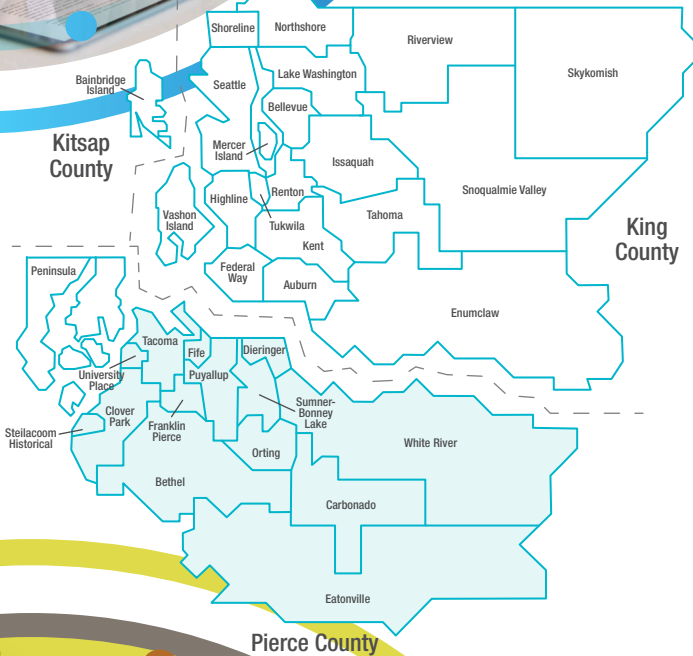
2023

FEDERAL POLICY FOCUS





QUICK FACTS



OUR END

Success for Each Child and Eliminate the Opportunity Gap by Leading with Racial Equity

WHO WE SERVE

King and Pierce counties, as well as Bainbridge Island:

- 35 school districts, 9 charter schools, and 2 tribal compact schools
- 424,289 K–12 public school students*
- 5,003 early learners (Early Head Start, Head Start and ECEAP models)
- 247 private schools serving 50,502 students**
- 39% of Washington's preK–12 public school students*
- 58% of the preK–12 students we serve are students of color*

WHAT WE BELIEVE

PSESD is committed to becoming an Antiracist, Multicultural Organization.

Each PSESD employee supports our regional educational communities. We hold each other accountable to meeting our End: Success for Each Child and Eliminate the Opportunity Gap by Leading with Racial Equity.

WHO WE ARE

Puget Sound Educational Service District (PSESD) develops and delivers an array of services that provide instructional and administrative support to preK–postsecondary schools and direct service to students and families in the Puget Sound region.

We coordinate more than 100 programs in King and Pierce counties, and Bainbridge Island, through the following departments:

- **Learning, Teaching and Family Support** delivers opportunity-gap-closing services, professional development and resources to preK–postsecondary students and school systems.
- **Equity in Education** works collaboratively to enhance and support racially equitable and culturally responsive approaches among staff, students, parents and communities, building capacity to lead with racial equity.
- **Administrative and Management Services** provides strategic leadership and inter-agency cooperatives to support all aspects of school, administrative, business, finance, communications, evaluation, policy, transportation and human resources functions.
- One of nine Educational Service Districts (ESD) in Washington state
- Governed by a nine-member ESD board, elected by local school directors
- John P. Welch is the Superintendent of PSESD
- Employs more than 400 staff members including administrators, educators and support personnel
- Manages multiple locations, with the main office headquartered in Renton, Washington
- Reaches students, families, teachers and educators across Washington state

WHAT WE DO

In addition to providing programs and services to students and school systems across the Puget Sound region, PSESD also manages the following regional initiatives:

Puget Sound College and Career Network (PSCCN)

PSCCN removes barriers so that students of color, first generation, and students impacted by poverty in the Puget Sound region have the opportunity and support to access and obtain postsecondary credentials. We build regional capacity to increase equitable postsecondary readiness and completion across South King County and Pierce County by working with students, educators, community organizations, schools, districts, colleges and state-level organizations to organize strategies, programming and supports.

Superintendents Advocating for and Valuing Education

The superintendents of the 35 school districts and two tribal schools in the Puget Sound region are united as Superintendents Advocating for and Valuing Education (SAVE). PSESD serves as convener of this group.

Educare Seattle

Educare School of Greater Seattle is a comprehensive early learning program based in White Center, serving children from birth to age five who face barriers to accessing high-quality learning. Educare serves as a community hub and early learning knowledge model for our region.

Educators of Color Leadership Community

The Educators of Color Leadership Community (ECLC) is designed to support and retain educators of color through community building, culturally responsive mentoring and coaching, and professional learning that builds on the strengths of educators of color.

Safety and Threat Assessment Cooperatives

The PSESD Safety and Threat Assessment Cooperatives strengthen safety, social-emotional, and threat-assessment services in school communities across the region through high-quality training, networking and coordination opportunities that are culturally responsive and trauma informed.

OUR FUNDING

Less than two percent of our funding comes from a state allocation. Our programs are funded primarily by entrepreneurial means. We apply for and receive competitive state, federal and private grants. We also operate cooperatives among schools and other agencies, which are supported through membership fees.

SCHOOL SAFETY



INTRODUCTION

The continued gun violence in our schools has refocused Americans on the question of how to best protect children in our schools. Parents send their children off to school in the morning, trusting that they will return home at the end of the school day. Yet recent events demonstrate that more attention and more resources to improving school safety must be considered thoughtfully and sustained over time.

Puget Sound Educational Service District believes all children have the right to live and learn in a safe and nurturing environment. Research demonstrates that learning is enhanced when children feel safe and have their physical and emotional needs met in a healthy school environment. This includes access to healthy foods, opportunities for physical activity, clean air to breathe, and access to preventive care and health services, including mental health. These are issues that we must face as a community and work together to solve. Schools play a critical role in helping students feel safe and supported, and in providing students more intensive services and supports as necessary.

A comprehensive approach is necessary to prevent future school violence. School districts cannot independently solve this problem. Congress must act by directing resources to states and districts for school safety enhancements and passing more common-sense gun safety legislation.

Schools remain the safest place for children and the significant decline of non-gun related violence in schools continues in a 30 year trend. Despite fervent efforts by school districts to protect students from non-gun related crimes, since 2018, there have been 119 shootings in American schools that resulted in death and injury of children and staff. Each day, 12 children die from gun violence in America and another 32 are shot and injured. Guns are now the leading cause of death among American children and teens. A comprehensive solution to prevent the killing of innocent youth cannot be the sole responsibility of the school community.

THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW

PSESD asks Congress to take the following steps to enhance school safety:

- Increase funding for Title IV of the Every Student Succeeds Act. Schools and states pay billions of dollars annually to address the results of substance abuse, school violence and unaddressed mental health needs through local and state funding. Title IV represents a critical, sustained federal investment in successful prevention and intervention efforts.
- Increase funding for the Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools grants designed to help schools prevent and manage emergencies.
- Increase funding for the STOP School Violence Act Grants, which distributes grants for security equipment, school hardening related purchases, school resource officers, professional development programs for school staff to identify and address student violence against themselves and others, school threat assessments and threat assessment teams, crisis intervention teams and technology that addresses anonymous reporting.
- Increase identified funding for mental health counselors and services in schools. Access to these services is a crucial component of any effort to prevent/respond to a school emergency.
- Support standalone funding for higher education institutions to partner with LEAs to build up the school mental health personnel pipeline and to place these critical specialized support staff in hard-to-staff schools.

- Support continued federal funding for research to identify the root causes of gun violence, the impact of school safety strategies on school shootings and the prevention of gun violence in schools.

PSESD implores Congress to pass more gun safety legislation that will:

- Increase enforcement of existing gun laws
- Reinstate the ban on the sale, import, transfer, and ownership of assault weapons
- Ban large-capacity magazines
- Require thorough background checks for all gun purchasers
- End the “gun-show” loophole
- Prevent individuals convicted of violent crimes from being able to purchase guns
- Prevent individuals with mental health issues from purchasing or owning a gun (18 U.S.C. 922 (g))
- Punish irresponsible gun owners

We cannot make our schools armed fortresses. The decision to bring police officers into schools should be determined on a school-by-school basis. We oppose efforts to bring more guns into our schools by arming teachers and administrators. Recognizing the importance of emergency exit safety, American schools are large buildings with many doors. It is not reasonable to operate on the premise that a school resource officer will always be able stop a determined shooter bearing an assault weapon with a large ammunition magazine. Eliminating easy access to weapons and increasing opportunities

for mental health care are essential steps towards mitigating the horrific reality of recurring murders of educators and children.

If we hope to prevent future tragedies at schools, we must comprehensively address both school safety and gun safety. Increased mental health services, community supports for youth, and new attitudes about violence in our entertainment must all be part of this approach. Sustainable changes require the investment of both time and resources. Federal funding is critical to ensuring schools remain the safest place for children. Now is the time to address school safety.

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EDUCATOR DIVERSITY



INTRODUCTION

The racial imbalance between U.S. students and their teachers is stark: nearly 80% of all K–12 teachers identify as white, while more than half of students identify as students of color. The lack of racially diverse teachers presents an urgent problem that federal policy, states, and districts can address right now. This disparity is a direct result of the disconnect between systems that recruit, prepare, and hire educators. The effects of disparate, marginalizing systems stunt efforts to achieve a workforce of educators who represent our students.

Once hired, research demonstrates that Educators of Color (EOC) are retained at lower rates than their white counterparts. They are challenged with navigating an unforgiving workplace, while simultaneously often bearing the pressure of being one of the only Educators of Color in the building. EOCs are frequently asked to assimilate into systems designed for white teachers and students that do not honor the richness of their cultural and community.

School systems that devalue EOCs trickle down to our student population, negatively impacting their educational experiences and outcomes. At the same time, there is compelling evidence to show that Educators of Color have profound beneficial impacts on the success of our nation's most underserved students, and in fact on white students as well. Recent research has demonstrated the positive academic and social-emotional benefits teachers of color have and their potential to bolster the academic success and well-being of all students while addressing the critical opportunity gap students of color have historically faced.

Additionally, students of color have expressed the need for educators who understand and effectively work with them as crucial to their success in school. PSESD's Youth Wisdom Council, the NAACP Youth Council and student of color advocacy, The Root of Our Youth, all identify the need for more educators of color as a key priority.

INVESTING IN A DIVERSE EDUCATOR WORKFORCE

Our educator workforce is at a critical point. Attrition over the last few years has been dramatic as educators across the board have left the profession. We believe the time is now to focus our efforts across systems to identify, recruit, and retain the educators who represent our students, understand their lives, and who embody the practices they tell us will help them learn and achieve their full potential. Federal funding can remove barriers to becoming an educator, incentivize the creation of pathways that connect our systems, and create systemic collective commitment to diversifying our educator workforce for the benefit of all our students. Specifically, we propose legislation that:

- Provides tuition relief, waivers, or reimbursement for Black, Indigenous and People of Color who want to pursue education as a career
- Provides financial support for Black, Indigenous and People of Color who need to give up full-time employment to complete student teaching requirements
- Provides financial incentives for districts and educational service agencies to provide professional learning for all educators on culturally responsive practices, and to implement active efforts to recruit, retain, and advance educators and leaders of color, such as:
 - Grow Your Own programs for paraeducators
 - High school teacher academies
 - Culturally responsive mentoring and intentional placement for new Educators of Color
- Affinity-based support groups for Educators of Color
- Leadership development or mentoring programs for Black, Indigenous and Educators of Color seeking advancement
- Implementing anti-racist hiring policies and practices
- Incentivizes recruitment and retention of Black, Indigenous and People of Color in educator preparation programs in institutions of higher education
- Provides financial incentives for states mandating the intentional recruitment, placement and mentoring of new Educators of Color
- Incentivizes collaborations and partnerships between community-based organizations serving Black, Indigenous and Educators of Color, institutions of higher education, and school districts creating pathways into educational careers for Black, Indigenous and People of Color.



A diverse educator workforce has the potential to transform our schools into humanizing places that allow all our students to thrive. When adults of color in a school feel valued, honored, and included, the students who most relate to them will feel the same. With investment in the systems that recruit, prepare, retain, and advance our Black, Indigenous and Educators of Color, we believe policy can play a powerful role in transforming our educator workforce into one that effectively serves our nation's students.

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EARLY LEARNING



INTRODUCTION

PSESD is the largest provider in the Northwest of Head Start – Early Head Start programs and the Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), the state’s preschool program. We also operate Educare Seattle, one of 25 Educare programs across the nation. We provide child development and family support services to over 5,000 families and their children from birth to five years old.

Head Start programs serve families living at or below the federal poverty level with children who are three or four years old. Early Head Start programs serve children from birth to age three and their families, and pregnant women and their families who are also living at or below the federal poverty level. For example, a family of four makes \$27,750 or less.

Demand far exceeds opportunity. Reliable short and long-term research demonstrates that Head Start works for children and families. Children who have been through the program are better prepared for kindergarten, do significantly better in school and benefit from improved family stability. Studies have even found that for each dollar taxpayers invest in the Head Start program, they receive a return of \$9. These savings occur because children who have been through the program are less likely to repeat a grade in school, more likely to graduate from high school and college, and are less likely to commit a crime.

PSESD federal funding consists of three Head Start and Early Head Start grants that serve infants, toddlers, and preschoolers in a variety of program models. These include part-day preschool, school day/school year preschool, and full day/full year early learning in licensed childcare settings and family childcare homes. We serve infants and toddlers through home visiting year-round, in licensed childcare facilities and in family childcare homes full day and full year.

EARLY LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES IN PSESD REGION

- More than 5,000 Served in HS, EHS & ECEAP funded models
- Total Population Under 5 in Poverty in PSESD Region is over 20,000
- The number of eligible children and families far exceeds enrollment opportunities.

TEACHER RECRUITMENT, LOSS, AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In Washington State, there is a \$40,000 gap between Head Start teachers with a bachelor’s degree compared to the annual salary of kindergarten teachers. We are losing high-quality teachers due to low wages and poor benefits. Inferior compensation undermines efforts to recruit a highly qualified workforce. Early childhood education has the lowest lifetime earning potential of all college majors, reducing

the field’s appeal for new graduates, particularly those with significant student debt. Waiving student loans for those who commit to serve as educators for our earliest learners during their most rapid time of brain development is just one strategy to support the early childhood workforce.

Low wages and poor benefits also affect retention. Among childcare centers who experienced turnover prior to COVID the average turnover rate is higher than 25%. Some teachers leave the field altogether, while others remain in education but seek higher-paying positions with better benefits and supports.

Federal policymakers and local grantees should continue working to increase the qualifications and skills of Head Start and other early childhood teachers. We must also consider the broader context in which Head Start teachers work, including compensation levels, quality of early childhood educator preparation programs, and the impact of trends in the early childhood landscape and K-12 teacher workforce that affect the employment market for Head Start teachers.

Early learning remains a profession in which predominantly white educators are instructing children and families who are mainly people of color, so it is imperative to consider the importance of training, recruiting, and retaining teachers of color. Increasing the percentage of teachers of color narrows the opportunity and achievement gap. Children struggle to be what they cannot see; they need to see themselves in their teachers. By recruiting, training, and retaining teachers of color, students of color can form relationships with professionals who may share their cultural background and lay a foundation for success.

SUPPORTING EARLY LEARNING AND CARE: EARLY HEAD START, HEAD START AND CHILDCARE ARE ESSENTIAL AND MUST BE PRIORITIZED

America needs early learning and care relief to keep the industry moving forward during the nation’s economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The disastrous economic crisis has hit the early learning and care system especially hard, causing widespread layoffs and closures because of catastrophic drops in enrollment. And while the nation’s economic recovery from this crisis will be a slow, phased process, early learning and care providers will be expected to be open to care for children as parents return to work, all while operating on financial losses for months to come due to new social distancing requirements and continued low enrollment.

HEAL, PROTECT, AND INVEST

Two major factors promote healing in early childhood education programs. The first is strong, trusting, and responsive relationships between parents and early childhood providers; parents and their children; and children and early childhood providers. The second is safe, consistent, predictable and nurturing environments. Head Start programs play a vital role in supporting these factors for the children and families they serve.

We need to not only protect the investments made in Head Start, but we must invest more. Early Head Start and Head Start are uniquely positioned to provide healing and learning opportunities for children and families that result in improved outcomes in school and life.



INCREASE ELIGIBILITY THRESHOLD

In the PSESD region, elementary school students and families who are eligible for free or reduced lunch exceed 40% of total enrollment. We believe aligning Early Head Start and Head Start eligibility with that of free and reduced lunch would better serve the children and families in King and Pierce Counties. Increasing the income threshold from 100% of the federal poverty level to align with the free and reduced lunch level at 185% would be an initial positive action towards equitable access to early learning, kindergarten readiness and support for families.

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KEY MESSAGES

- To expand opportunities for children and families we need more investments in Early Head Start and Head Start. The return on investment is high!
- The success of children is paramount. We must invest in teachers, create pathways for educators of color, and increase wages with targeted investments.
- We must invest in early learning and care systems with tangible and sustained funding to support the field, economic recovery, and children and families.
- We must invest in the mental wellness of young children and their parents as well as in school readiness.
- We need to increase the income threshold to create a more equitable early learning and care system with investment that creates opportunity.

MENTAL HEALTH & ANTIRACIST SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL LEARNING



KEY MESSAGE

As we consider opportunities to evaluate and improve upon SEL and restorative practices, the federal government, states and districts can guide this work through the development of guidelines and standards for teaching and learning and funding implementation. SEL standards and benchmarks can inform states and districts' understanding of how to create conditions that cultivate social and emotional skills for their students. Existing examples of guidelines for SEL implementation provide resources that can educate districts, administrators and educators on how to implement and integrate SEL into different contexts in a culturally responsive way.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past academic year, traditional models of teaching and learning have been completely transformed because of the pandemic. More than ever, it is critical to consider the impact that such dramatic changes have had on the mental health and well-being of our students and educators. Across the nation, we must recommit to providing our young people and those leading their learning with a scaffold of support to ensure that the challenges of today are met with long-term investments in their resiliency.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING THROUGH AN ANTIRACIST LENS

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) is the process through which individuals build awareness and skills in managing emotions, setting goals, establishing relationships, and making responsible decisions that support success in school and in life. When implemented effectively, engaging in SEL through restorative practices can lead to safer schools, greater belonging, higher achievement, higher graduation rates, improved college and career-ready skills, and achievement gains that persist over time (Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissburg 2017). However, Social and Emotional Learning that is provided in absence of an antiracist lens can do more harm than good to our students of color. Failure to teach SEL within the larger sociopolitical context can make learning opportunities irrelevant to our students, whereas SEL through an antiracist approach can leverage opportunities for students to bridge differences and foster courageous conversations that confront injustice, hate and inequity.

In the classroom, Antiracist SEL humanizes learning and teaching through creating authentic connections and relationships with students, families, community, and educators. These relationships support dismantling inequities, transforming systems, and centering the healing, belonging, and thriving of adults and youth. For a pandemic that has disproportionately impacted the Black community, other communities of color and refugees intensifying the likelihood of re-traumatization for young people who previously experienced trauma, it's critical that the social and emotional support we offer to our school communities is grounded in antiracism. Systems leaders, superintendents, school boards and educators all play a part in taking action to ensure that Antiracist SEL is infused into all aspects of school culture.

CONNECTING AND EMPOWERING A NETWORK OF SUPPORT

To effectively nurture the social and emotional development of our students, we must think beyond only the confines of the classroom. In the Social and Emotional Learning Roadmap for Reopening School, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) outlines the importance of implementing clear processes and structures for school staff to work with families and partner with school-employed or community-based mental health and trauma professionals. Emphasizing SEL in our school systems underscores a shift toward a whole-child approach that brings together the resources of our schools and communities to provide the appropriate support for each student. Intentional partnerships

with community partners who provide culturally responsive approaches aligned with the ethnic communities they serve creates an intentional connected and supportive network.

Today's Educators are more stressed than ever. Providing educators with opportunities to learn strategies to better identify and manage their stress can increase their overall well-being. Social and emotional skills not only improve academic outcomes and classroom behavior for students, but they can have a positive impact on educators' personal and professional success as well. To teach SEL, we need to acknowledge and continue to develop, the social and emotional skills of educators and other school staff. We must acknowledge dismantling inequities, center healing and belonging for educators and school staff. Only then can we effectively model and teach those same skills to our students. Educators need to be provided with training, coaching and consistent support.



ADOPTION AND EVALUATION

The adoption of an SEL program represents one step towards prioritizing the social, emotional, and mental health of our students. However, it is imperative that we invest in sustained training and support for our educators to provide them with

the necessary skills and resources to meet the unique needs of each student and school community. Allocating funding for continued professional development ensures that the adoption and improvement of SEL practices is an integral part of school-wide culture. Furthermore, when more educators are equipped to incorporate SEL into their curriculum and embed lessons throughout the school day, the benefits to students are even more pronounced.

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POSTSECONDARY READINESS



KEY MESSAGE

To ensure rates of completion, comprehensive funding should support students with strategies such as equity-based scholarships, transition, first-year and ongoing support services and policies that ensure postsecondary institutions provide high-quality supports to students such as revised assessment and placement processes that more adequately prepare high school students for postsecondary success.



INTRODUCTION

Federal investment in education will help the state of Washington maintain recent hard-won gains for students and families. In the last several years, we have seen increases in state investment in early learning for low-income families, significant increased investment in K–12 pursuant to the State Supreme Court order and significant new investment in higher education access including the expansion of the Washington College Grant (state financial aid), community college student guidance (Guided Pathways) and improved 2 and 4 year institutional support. We cannot let the pandemic take us backwards.

COVID recovery continues to be a time when first-time college students and unemployed adults are given the comprehensive support that they need to build marketable skills and attain postsecondary credentials. K–12, postsecondary institutions and community organizations across King and Pierce have invested time and committed to collective action and change to support students and their educational journeys and remain engaged in this work. This is our best chance at building a truly inclusive and equitable recovery.

MEETING OUR STUDENTS & SCHOOLS WHERE THEY ARE

When surveyed, 96% of local high schoolers from South King County indicated that they wanted to continue their education after high school. According to the most recent data from the Road Map Project, only 30% of students from this same region earn a college degree or career credential by their mid-twenties. This stark difference between students' goals and achievements reflects the underlying reality that our school systems are not providing the support that students need to succeed.

Students — especially students of color, first generation and other students facing barriers — need individualized, high-touch support throughout high school to make a smooth transition to postsecondary and ensure that support continues throughout postsecondary to ensure students are able to attain postsecondary credentials. The current counselor

to student ratio of our students is, on average, 482:1 — almost double the recommended standard. Data shows that students of color and first-generation students rely more heavily on school staff when it comes to understanding the college-going process, and by 11th grade only 64% of students in the Road Map Region had conversations about college options with a school staff member. Deficits in school support disproportionately affect first generation students, students of color, and students with disabilities, thus deepening the very opportunity gap that we are fighting to close.

For students and young people:

- Regardless of race/ethnicity, school, or zip code, they should have reliable, high quality postsecondary success advising in school and community organizations,

- They and their families should be engaged, early, meaningfully, and consistently
- They should be able to explore and choose a postsecondary path and complete required applications and financial aid forms during the school day with support from adults
- They should receive high quality support making the transition from K–12 to postsecondary in school and community organizations in a way that is more seamless, and experiencing fewer barriers, regardless of the high school they attend and the postsecondary school they choose
- Young people ages 16–26 who are not in school or working in a family wage earning job should have access to supports that navigate them back onto secondary and postsecondary tracks

To prioritize equitable support for our students, we must fund college and career planning staff that meet the recommended staff-student ratio of 250:1 in high school and postsecondary and integrate college and career planning into school curriculum, and provide funding for the strategies and resources that will support the staff and students and intended outcomes above

FINANCIAL AID BY THE NUMBERS

Completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is one of the best indicators of whether a high school senior will attend college. According to the National College Access Network (NCAN), seniors who complete the FAFSA are 84% more likely to immediately enroll in postsecondary education. Yet bureaucratic verification procedures vastly reduce the number of students who access financial aid.



Almost half of all low-income applicants are asked to submit additional documents to verify the accuracy of their demographic and financial information, further complicating a confusing process; as a result, only 56% of Pell-eligible students selected for verification complete the process. Recent data from NCAN shows that just 61% of high school seniors complete the application by the time they graduate, leaving \$24 billion in federal aid unclaimed. During this process, almost half of all low-income applicants are flagged by the federal government for verification.

To fully utilize the resources available from the Pell Grant, the FAFSA process should be simplified to minimize the burden on students and families.

PLANNING FOR POSTSECONDARY CREDENTIAL COMPLETION

Supporting postsecondary success does not end with access — it ends with the successful completion of postsecondary credentials by students and young people. While improved rates of college acceptances can be an exciting achievement, we must ensure that these acceptances lead to higher numbers

of postsecondary credential holders as well. With counselor to student ratios hovering around 800:1

Once at college, students should:

- Take a college transition and success course within the first term to support a smooth transition
- Be connected with reliable advising and support in navigating academic and life barriers
- Receive financial support that is targeted to address barriers and is available to highest need students

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DIGITAL EQUITY



INTRODUCTION

Across the country, districts, educators, students and families are reckoning with an educational environment that looks dramatically different due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Schools undertake the task of adapting their educational approaches, an increased and on-going reliance on remote or hybrid learning highlights the need for targeted support to address the exacerbation of systemic racial inequities in education and digital access. In the face of unprecedented challenges, immediate efforts to support our schools must be complemented with long-term investments to establish equitable digital learning environments.

THE BREADTH OF THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

According to the most recent 2018 data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the National Center for Education Statistics, before the pandemic an estimated 17 million K-12 public school students lived in households without either an internet connection or a device adequate for distance learning at home, representing 30% of all public K-12 students. Of these students, approximately nine million lived in households with neither an adequate connection nor an adequate device for distance learning.

The lack of digital access that disproportionately impacts communities of color is magnified by the impact of a pandemic that is affecting Black, Indigenous, Latinx and other people of color the most¹. When allocating funding to address gaps in digital access, it is imperative that policymakers apply an equity lens to ensure that investments serve the students and communities most affected.

This is not just a rural problem. Across the country, the makeup of students lacking adequate internet access is pervasive:

A SNAPSHOT OF WASHINGTON STATE

An estimated 735,000 people in Washington State do not have an internet connection in their homes. An additional 500,000 people rely solely on limited cell phone data plans, while 12,000 others still use slower dial-up services.

BUILDING A BRIDGE TO DIGITAL INCLUSION

Digital inclusion refers to the activities necessary to ensure that all individuals and communities have access to and use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). This includes five elements: affordable, robust broadband internet service; internet-enabled devices that meet the needs of the user; access to digital literacy training; quality technical support; and applications and online content designed to enable and encourage self-sufficiency, participation and collaboration.

Bridging the digital divide to achieve digital inclusion requires collective efforts between policymakers, districts, the private sector and education and nonprofit organizations.

IN WASHINGTON STATE



22% OF STUDENTS LACK ADEQUATE ACCESS TO HIGH-SPEED INTERNET CONNECTION

15% OF STUDENTS LACK DEVICES NECESSARY FOR REMOTE LEARNING

29% OF STUDENTS WHO LACK ADEQUATE ACCESS TO THE INTERNET ARE BLACK, LATINX, OR NATIVE AMERICAN

Congress must continue to invest in infrastructure to meet students and school needs. The goal is to help connect millions of students and families to the internet. Without this on-going support, the nation's skills, homework and educational digital divide will exacerbate existing inequity among students and learning gaps at an unacceptable rate.

¹ The COVID Racial Data Tracker. covidtracking.com/race.

² Gregerson, Mia, and Sabrina Roach. The Pandemic Shows Why Washington Needs Universal Internet Access. 11 May 2020, crosscut.com/2020/05/pandemic-shows-why-washington-needs-universal-internet-access.

³ "Definitions: Digital Inclusion." April 16, 2019. <https://www.digitalinclusion.org/definitions/>.

Data provided by Common Sense Media <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/digital-divide-stories#/state/WA>

KEY MESSAGE

Students Lacking Adequate Internet Access

BY GEOGRAPHY



21%
URBAN



25%
SUBURBAN



37%
RURAL

RACE/ETHNICITY



18%
WHITE



35%
NATIVE AMERICAN



30%
BLACK



26%
LATINX

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