Washington Office of Superintendent of **PUBLIC INSTRUCTION**

UPDATE: Online Learning

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Authorizing Legislation: RCW 28A.250.040

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While the number of schools and districts offering online learning increased in the 2021–22 school year, the number of students participating in online courses and online course enrollments decreased. There were 27.2% more schools offering online courses and a 3.31% increase in the number of districts offering online courses during the 2021–22 school year. There was a 3.76% decrease in students participating in online courses and 10.62% fewer online courses taken.

Demographics saw some changes in the 2021–22 school year. Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander students were the most likely to access online learning which is a significant shift from the previous year when they were the least likely group to access online learning. Asian students were the least likely students to access online learning in 2021–22.

Multilingual/English learners (ML), students who qualify for special education services, and students eligible for free and reduced-price meals continue to show an increase in online course enrollments. However, ML students and students who qualify for special education services were less likely to take an online course than their counterparts. Students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch were more likely to take an online course than their counterparts. The largest enrollment gap was between ML students and students that did not qualify as ML.

OSPI measures success of online learning through course performance. "Course success rate" is defined in Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 392-502-010 as the percentage of online course enrollments where the student earned a passing or satisfactory grade in the course. Courses marked as not passing, unsatisfactory, or withdrawn are not considered successful outcomes.

The overall online course success rate decreased to 78.05% from the rate of 81.72% reported in 2020–21. The success rate for non-online courses increased to 88.36% from 85.53% in 2020–21.

Data quality issues continue to be noted and addressed. Some school buildings were reopened due to the end of COVID-19 pandemic measures, and this may have impacted data reporting for the school year. Previous to this, communications about the reporting requirements for Alternative Learning Experiences (ALE) indicated that some schools and districts were not reporting online courses as such due to confusion over state definitions. This highlighted a need to provide additional guidance for the online learning definition. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) is expecting to see improved data quality in the report for 2022–23.

There is also still a challenge in reporting online course outcome information for elementary and middle school. Some districts report broad course information in the student schedules such as general grade level instruction but often do not provide course outcome information in student grade history. As a result, data on outcomes such as course completion and course success rate are limited to primarily high school grade levels that assign completions and letter grades in student grade history.

BACKGROUND

In 2009, the Legislature created an accountability system for online learning in Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 28A.250.005. The Legislature directed OSPI to develop an online provider approval system and report annually on the state of online learning in Washington (RCW 28A.250.040). The Legislature asked OSPI to include:

- Student demographics

- Course enrollment data

- Aggregated student course completion and passing rates

- Activities and outcomes of course and provider approval reviews

Online learning is a delivery model for instruction. Depending on the structure, an online course may be delivered as a traditional course and schedule, or more commonly through one of three course models as an Alternative Learning Experience (ALE).

This report provides information about online learning for the 2021–22 school year.

Definitions

"Online course" is defined in RCW 28A.250.010 as a course where:

- More than half of the course content is delivered electronically using the internet or other computer-based methods.

- More than half of the teaching is conducted from a remote location through an online course learning management system or other online or electronic tools.

- A certificated teacher has the primary responsibility for the student's instructional interaction. Instructional interaction between the teacher and the student includes, but is not limited to, direct instruction, review of assignments, assessment, testing, progress monitoring, and educational facilitation.

- Students have access to the teacher synchronously, asynchronously, or both.

"Online school program" is defined in law as "a school program that offers a sequential set of online courses or grade-level coursework that may be taken in a single school term or throughout the school year in a manner that could provide a full-time basic education program if so desired by the student" (RCW 28A.250.010).

"Online course providers" offer individual online courses (as defined above) and have the following characteristics:

- Online course providers must supply all of the following: course content, access to a learning management system, and online teachers.

- Online courses can be delivered to students at school as part of the regularly scheduled school day.

- Online courses can be delivered to students, in whole or in part, independently from a regular classroom schedule. Such courses must comply with RCW 28A.150.262 to qualify for state basic education funding as an ALE program.

This report uses the following terms:

- "Headcount" measures each unique student served.

- A "course enrollment" refers to a single student enrolled in a single course for a single grading period. For example, a single high school student taking a full load of courses would have 10 (if the district offers five periods a day) or 12 (if six periods are offered) course enrollments for the school year.

- "Enrollment rate" refers to the percentage of the student population enrolled in at least one online course.

- "Course success rate" is defined in Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 392-502-010 as the percentage of online course enrollments where the student earned one of the following grades for the course: A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D, Pass, Credit, or Satisfactory. Courses marked E, F, No Pass, No Credit, Unsatisfactory, or Withdraw are not considered successful outcomes.

UPDATE STATUS

Data used in this report are from the 2021–22 school year. The data were extracted from the Comprehensive Education Data and Research System (CEDARS) on October 26, 2022.

Growth

The following charts show the number of online courses reported, as well as the number of students, schools, and school districts reporting at least one online course enrollment. A greater number of schools and districts reported online courses. The number of online course enrollments decreased in Washington state, with 4.58% of course enrollments taking place online for the 2021–22 school year.

Figure 1: Number of Schools and Districts Reporting Online Courses
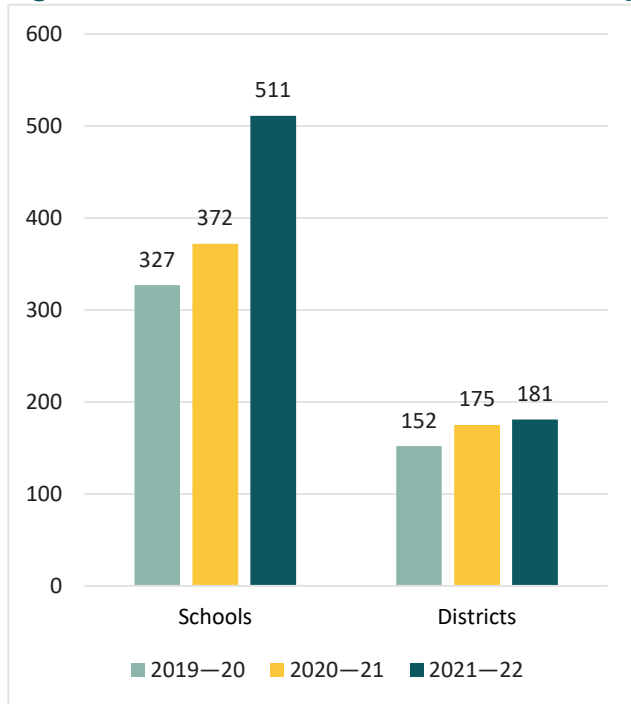
Source: CEDARS, October 26, 2022.

Figure 2: Total Online Course Enrollments and Headcount of Students Enrolled in at Least One Online Course
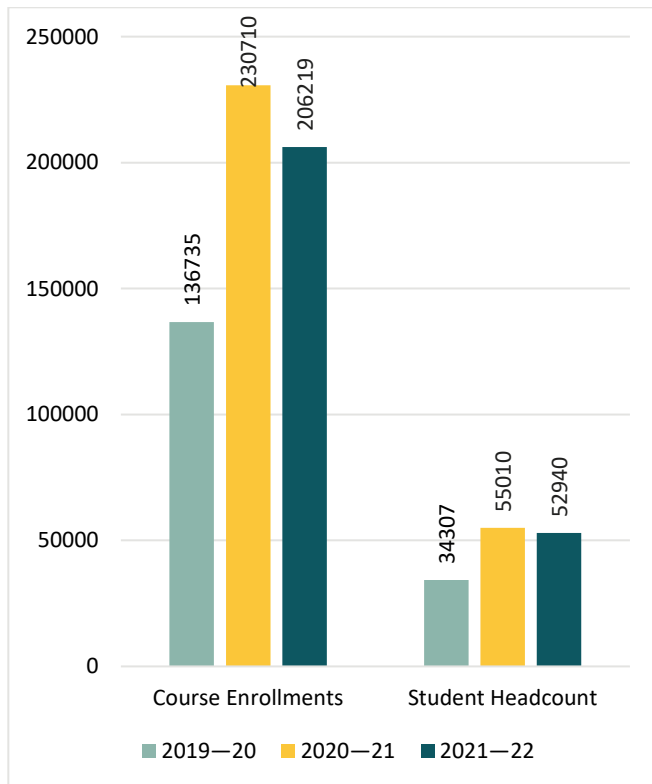
Source: CEDARS, October 26, 2022.

Online Programs and Providers

During the 2021–22 school year, OSPI approved 48 new single district and affiliate online school programs and 7 multi district online school programs, for a total of 267 online school programs. Two new online course providers were approved for a total of 26 online course providers.

In 2021–22, approved online course providers saw an average of 76.27% course completions, and of those completions, 82.72% were assigned a passing grade by the provider.

Demographics

This report focuses on enrollment rates by student group rather than student numbers. Enrollment rates show the percent of that student group who participated in online learning. This rate is a more "apples to apples" comparison between student groups than student numbers.

Gender

In 2021–22, students identified as gender X were more likely than their peers to enroll in online learning with 5.22% of them participating in online learning, an increase from 5.16% the previous year. Enrollment rates by gender show that 4.83% of all female students participated in online learning, down from 5% from the year before, and 4.18% of all male students participated, a decrease from 4.43% of all male students the previous year.

Race/Ethnicity

Enrollment rates by race/ethnicity show an increase for all student groups except White and Asian students who show a decrease in online course enrollments. Students who are Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander saw a 2.62% increase. The following charts show the percent of each student group who participated in at least one online course in the 2019–20 school year, in the 2020–21 school year, and in the 2021–22 school year.

**Figure 3: Online Learning Enrollment Rate by Race/Ethnicity**
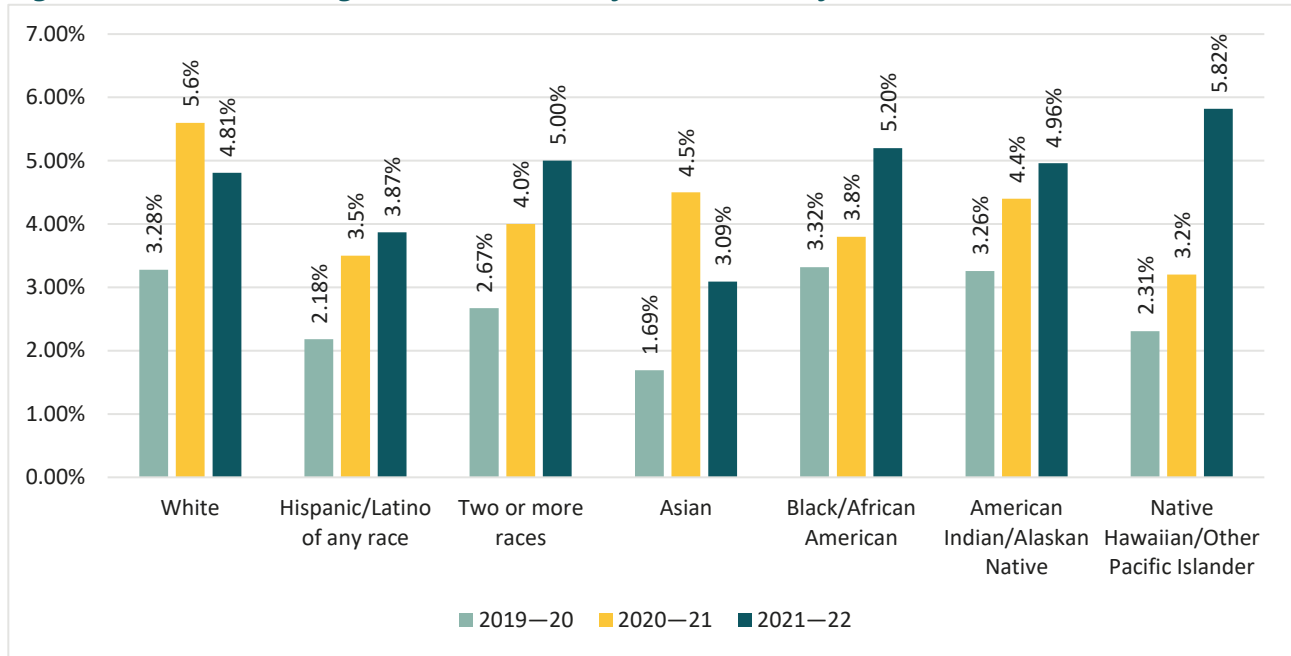
Source: CEDARS, October 26, 2022.

Other Student Groups

Other student groups that are listed are students receiving multilingual/English learner (ML) services, as well as students who qualify for special education services (SPED) and free and reduced-price meals/lunch (FRL). These are shown in contrast to those students who did not qualify as part of each student group.

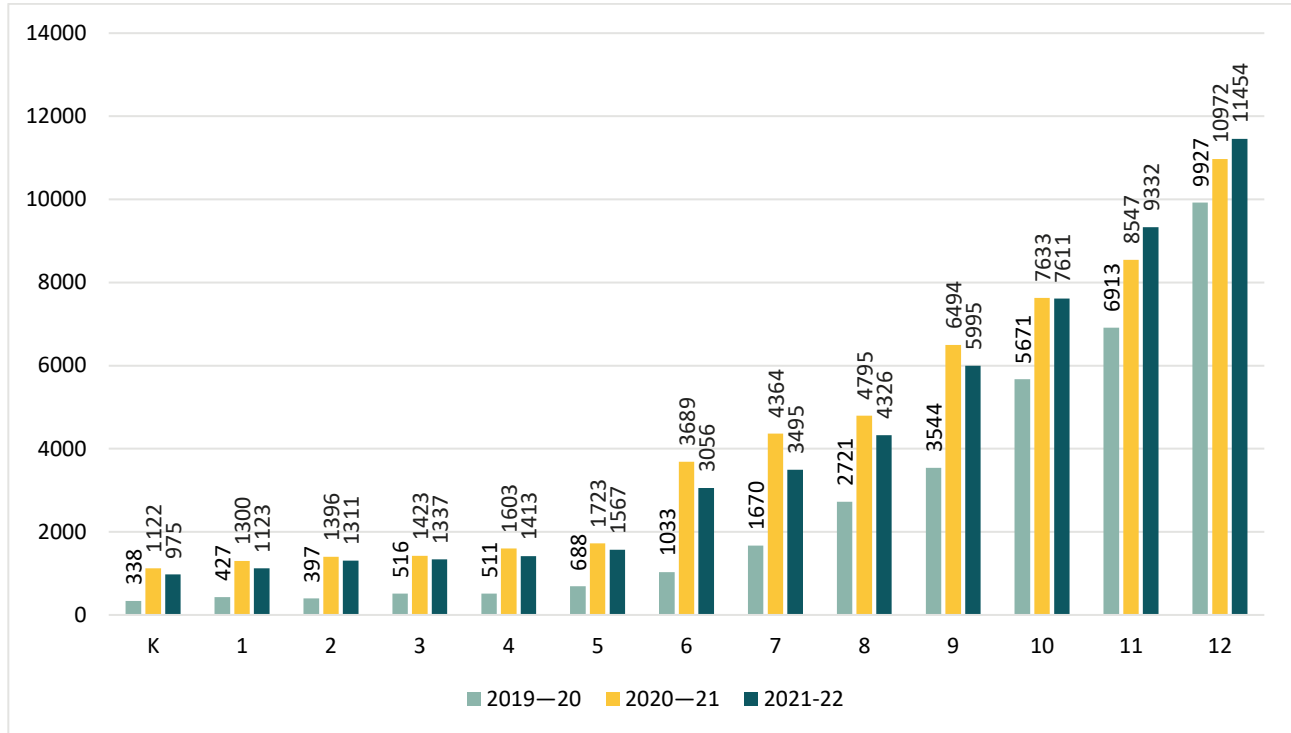**Figure 4: Enrollment Rate by Other Student Groups**
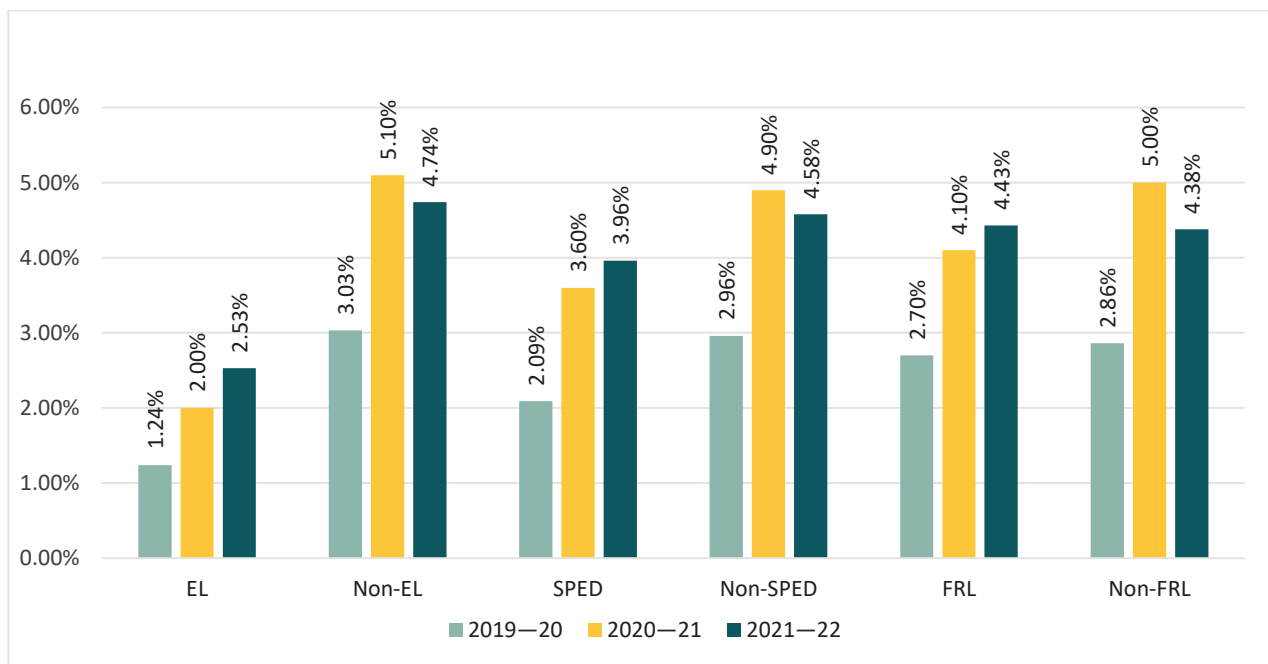
Source: CEDARS, October 26, 2022.

Grade Level

Headcount by grade level decreased in all grades except 11th and 12th grades. The most significant difference was a 19.91% decrease in online course enrollments for 7th graders, from 4,364 to 3,495 students. The grade band that saw the biggest increase was 9–12.

Figure 5: Headcount of Students Enrolled in at Least One Online Course by Grade Level

Grade	2019—20	2020—21	2021-22
K	338	1122	975
1	427	1300	1123
2	397	1396	1311
3	516	1423	1337
4	511	1603	1413
5	688	1723	1567
6	1033	3689	3056
7	1670	4364	3495
8	2721	4795	4326
9	3544	6494	5995
10	5671	7633	7611
11	6913	8547	9332
12	9927	10972	11454

Source: CEDARS, October 26, 2022.

Home-based

Students enrolled in home-based learning may enroll in public schools part-time while maintaining a declaration of intent to provide home-based instruction per RCW 28A.200.011(1). Of the overall 4,233 students reported as part-time home-based students, 8.95% participated in online learning. The 2021–22 enrollment rate is a decrease from the 9.62% reported in 2020–21. This is the highest enrollment rate of any student group.

Non-resident

Non-resident students are Washington students who have transferred completely to a public school district different from the one in which they reside, or their enrollment is split between districts to access courses or services not available in their resident district. These do not include students enrolled in charter schools or tribal-education compact schools.

In 2021–22, a total headcount of 14,569 students were enrolled in at least one online course outside their resident district. This is a decrease from 19,862 students the previous year.

One hundred eight (108) districts reported online enrollment of non-resident students, less than the 109 districts reported the previous year. Of these, 17 reported 100 or more non-resident students. The top three districts account for 46.75% of the reported non-resident students. These top three are, from most non-resident students to least, Quillayute Valley School District (3,040), Goldendale School District (2,007), and Mary M. Knight School District (1,764).

Measuring Success

CEDARS provides data on course completions and grades through "student grade history." Grade histories are only submitted for students in grades 9–12, so course-based achievement data is not available for students in grades K–8. Transfer credits are not included in this report. Transfer credits are often online courses taken outside of the standard school day or year. OSPI's guidance and oversight of these types of courses is limited so the quality of the data is limited as well.

Overall

The overall online course success rate decreased in school year 2021–22 to 78.05% from 81.72% in 2020–2021. The success rate for non-online courses increased to 88.36% from 85.53% in 2020–21.

Race/Ethnicity

Figure 6 shows the online course success rates by race/ethnicity for 2019–20, 2020–21, and 2021–22 as well as the one-year non-online course success rate for the 2021–22 school year. A highlight of the data is American Indian/Alaskan Native students having the smallest gap between online and non-online success.

**Figure 6: Course Success Rate by Race/Ethnicity**
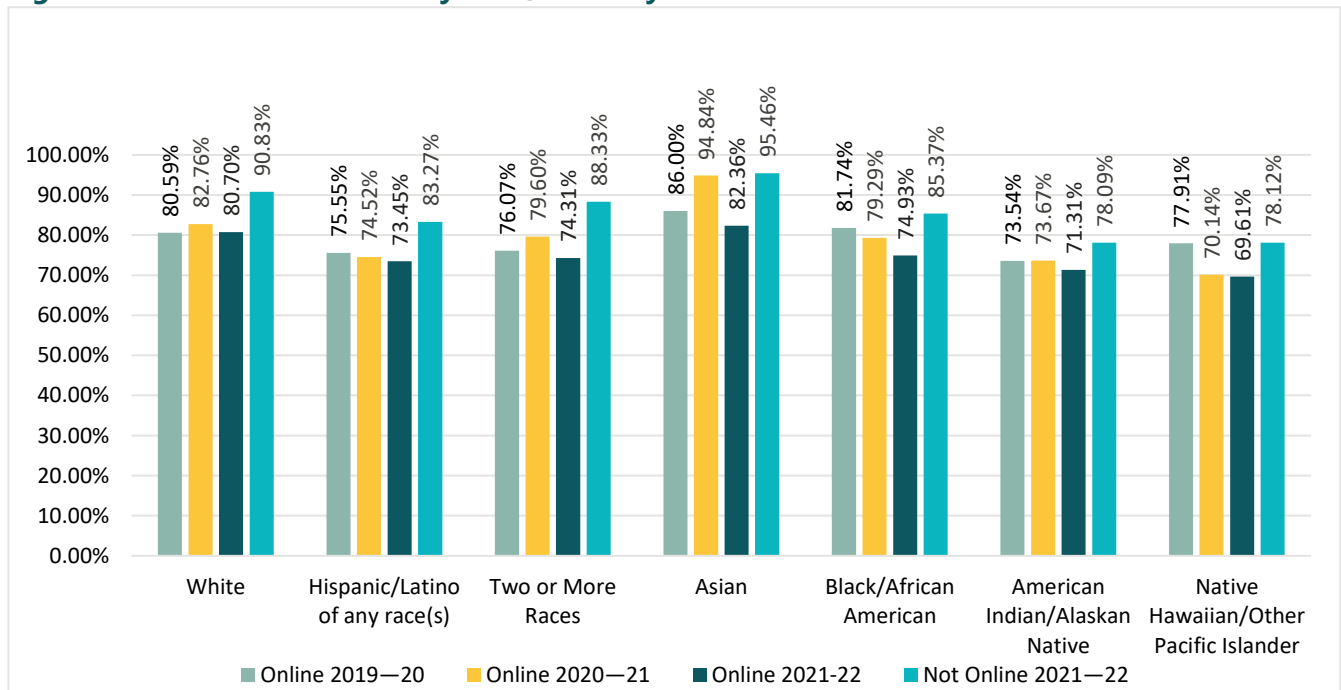
Source: CEDARS, October 26, 2022.

Other Student Groups

Figure 7 shows the online course success rate by student group for 2019–20, 2020–21, and 2021-22. In 2021–22, the non-online success rate was greater than the online success rate by an average of 6.69% across student groups.

Figure 7: Course Success Rate by Other Student Groups
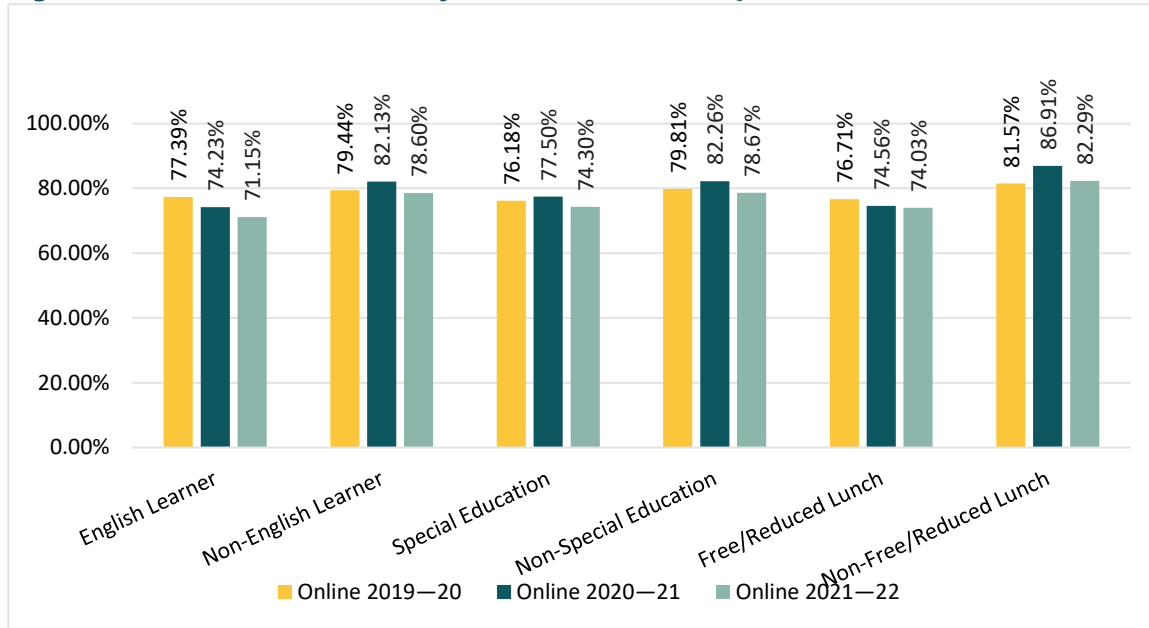
Source: CEDARS, October 26, 2022.

CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

Growth

Online learning continues to grow as an enrollment option across Washington. Students benefit from online learning as a way to access school when there are barriers to the traditional schedule, and as a way to access courses that the school may not be able to offer. Schools benefit by being able to offer and support courses that they may have trouble hiring qualified teachers for, or by providing specific courses that would have limited enrollment. As schools adapt to the assorted needs of their students, online learning will continue to be an important element of public education.

Data Collection

Online learning data collection continues to improve. OSPI will continue to communicate data reporting expectations. Work has begun on improving data collection from approved online programs and providers. Guidance on the new CEDARS fields has been shared with schools and districts which has led to increased conversations around online learning and approval applications. The increased communication has been effective in improving schools' understanding of online learning.

Based on feedback and questions from school districts, OSPI anticipates some shifts in online learning reporting for next school year as they make decisions on which enrollment options will continued to be offered post-pandemic. OSPI is interested in learning how many more districts will use online learning.

Data Use

From the data, OSPI is learning where the state is doing well or improving while also identifying gaps in accessibility and performance. The agency's next steps will be to identify districts, programs, and providers that are improving accessibility with equity and reducing the achievement gaps between student groups. This information will inform OSPI's communication and support of promising practices to improve online learning across the state.

This process to improve data collection and to use data to inform OSPI's cycle of improvement is part of the agency's efforts to improve accountability and support for ALE and other non-traditional learning options. These options are all seeing growth as schools work to meet the needs of all students, including those who struggle in the traditional setting or need access to opportunities that districts may not have the teachers or student numbers to provide.

APPENDIX

Figure 8: Student Demographics

Group	Online Headcount	Statewide Headcount
All Students	52,940	1,177,636
Girls	27,332	565,743
Boys	25,385	607,427
Gender X	233	4,466
White	28,263	559,899
Hispanic/Latino of any race	11,577	299,270
Two or More Races	5,204	103,986
Asian	3,052	98,850
Black/African American	3,048	58,581
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	957	16,448
American Indian/Alaskan Native	774	14,822
English Learner	3,631	143,673
Non-English Learner	49,336	1,040,247
Special Education	7,114	197,851
Non-Special Education	45,836	1,000,719
Free and Reduced-Price Lunch	25,118	566,813
Non-Free and Reduced-Price Lunch	28,088	641,405
Home-Based Instruction	379	4,233

Source: CEDARS, October 26, 2022.

Note: "Online headcount" is the number of students who accessed at least one online course.

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Washington Office of Superintendent of **PUBLIC INSTRUCTION**

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