



Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

UPDATE: Online Learning

2022

Authorizing Legislation: [RCW 28A.250.040](#)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The number of students, schools, and districts participating in online learning increased as did the number of online course enrollments. The COVID-19 pandemic caused learning to shift online resulting in 60.35% more students participating in online courses and 68.73% more online courses taken during the 2020–21 school year.

Demographics

In the 2020–21 school year, of all race and ethnicity demographics, white students were the most likely to access online learning, and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander students were the least likely.

English learners (EL), students receiving special education services, and students eligible for free and reduced-price meals showed an increase in online course enrollments. However, these students were less likely to take an online course than their counterparts. The largest enrollment gap was between EL students and non-EL students.

Measuring Success

“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 Courses marked as not passing, unsatisfactory, or withdrawn are not considered successful outcomes.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 increased to 81.72% from 79.34% in 2019–20. The success rate for non-online courses decreased to 85.53% from 91.65% in 2019–20.

Data Quality

In recent years, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) has increased its communication about the reporting requirements for Alternative Learning Experiences (ALE). This communication showed that some schools and districts underreport online courses. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools adopted more online instructional strategies and tools but have not realized that their courses now meet the state definition of Online Learning. This highlights a need to provide additional guidance for Online Learning reporting. OSPI hopes to see improved data quality in the report for 2021–22.

There is also 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 (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

This report provides information about online learning for the 2020–21 school year. 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 as one of three course models as an Alternative Learning Experience (ALE).

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 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 2020–21 school year. The data were extracted from the Comprehensive Education Data and Research System (CEDARS) on October 24, 2021.

Growth

The number of online course enrollments continues to increase in Washington state with 5.3% of course enrollments taking place online. 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.

Table 1: Number of Schools and Districts Reporting Online Courses

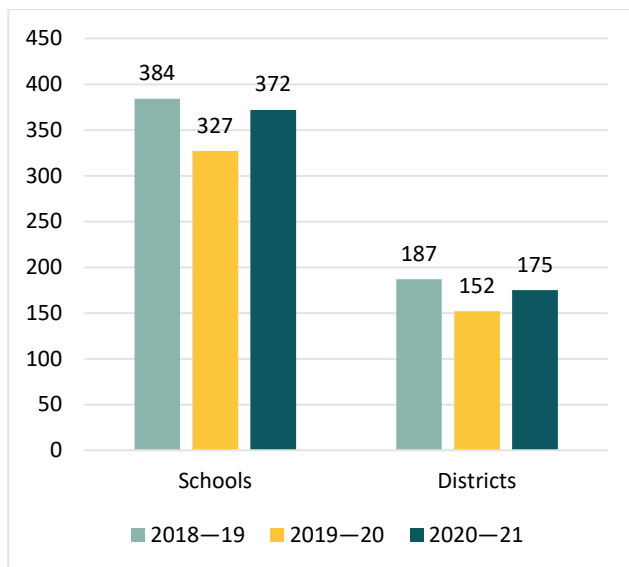
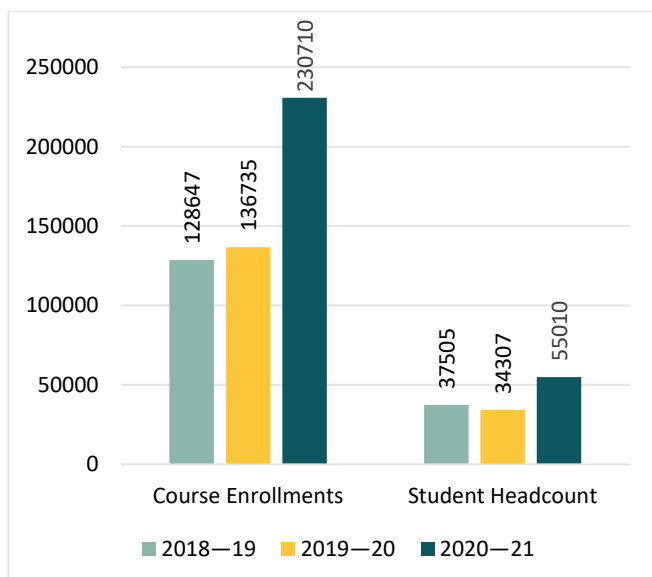


Table 2: Total Online Course Enrollments and Headcount of Students Enrolled in at Least One Online Course



Online Programs and Providers

During the 2020–21 school year, OSPI approved 80 new single district and affiliate online school programs, and 5 multi-district online school programs for a total of 203 online school programs. One new online course provider was approved for a total of 24 online course providers.

In 2020–21, approved course providers saw an average of 75.17% course completions, and of those completions, 89.75% 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 percentage of that student group who participated in online learning. This rate is a more “apples to apples” comparison between student groups than student numbers.

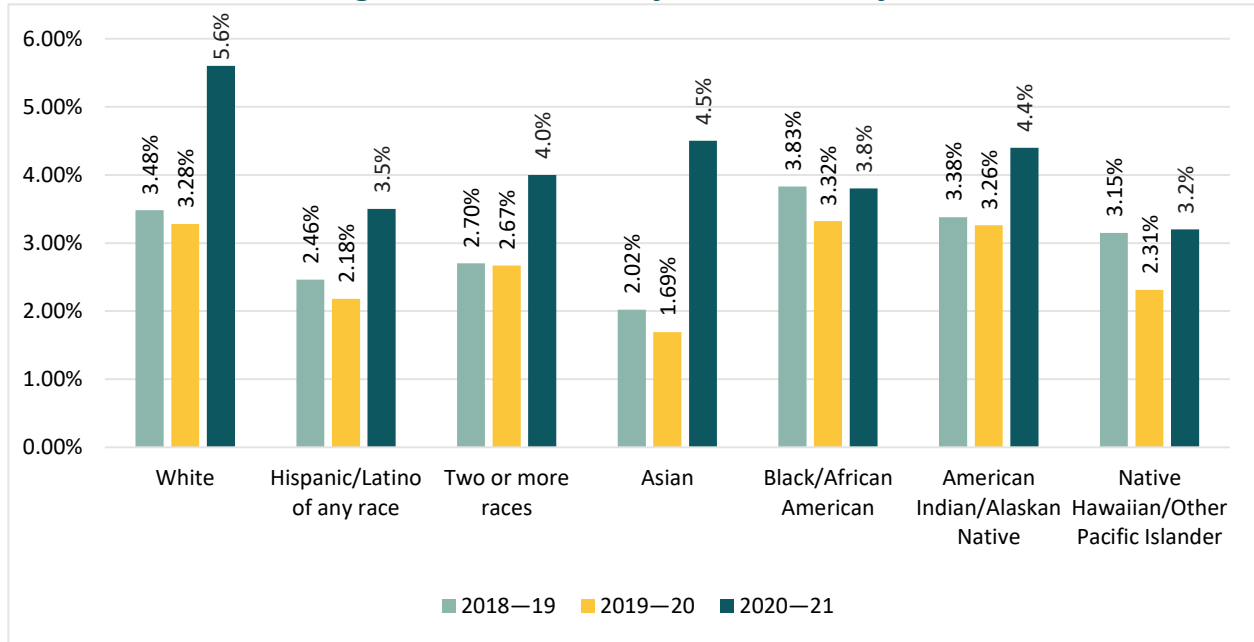
Gender

In 2020–21, students identified as Gender X were more likely to enroll in online learning with 5.16% of them participating in online learning, an increase from 1.34% the previous year. Enrollment rates by gender show that 5% of all female students participated in online learning, up from 3.77% from the year before, and 4.43% of all male students participated, an increase from 2.76% of all male students the previous year.

Race/Ethnicity

Enrollment rates by race/ethnicity show an increase for all student groups with more than double the increase for Asian students. The following charts show the percentage of each student group who participated in at least one online course in the 2018–19 school year, in the 2019–20 school year, and in the 2020–21 school year.

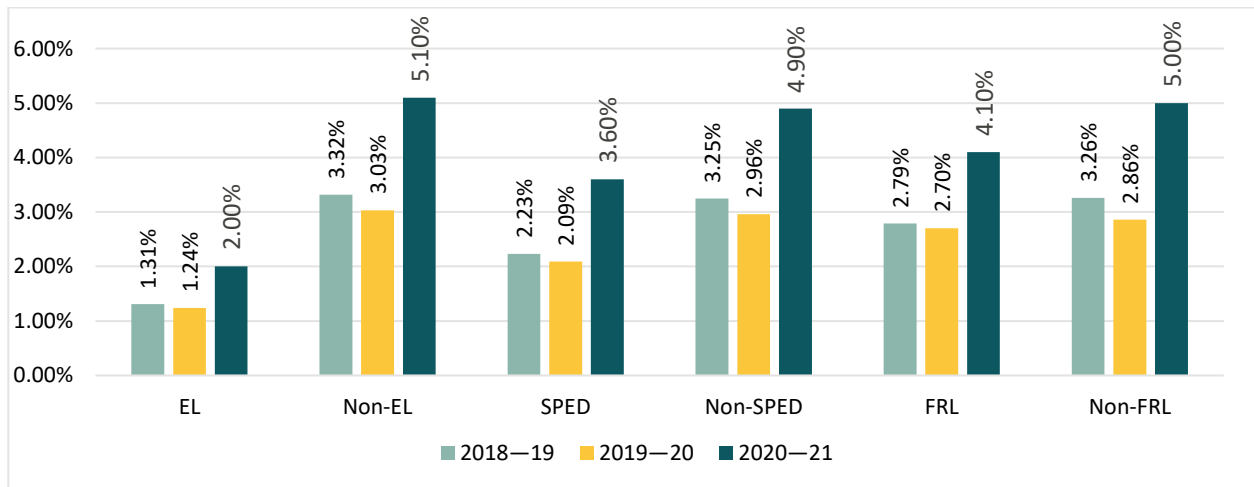
Table 3: Online Learning Enrollment Rate by Race/Ethnicity



Other Student Groups

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

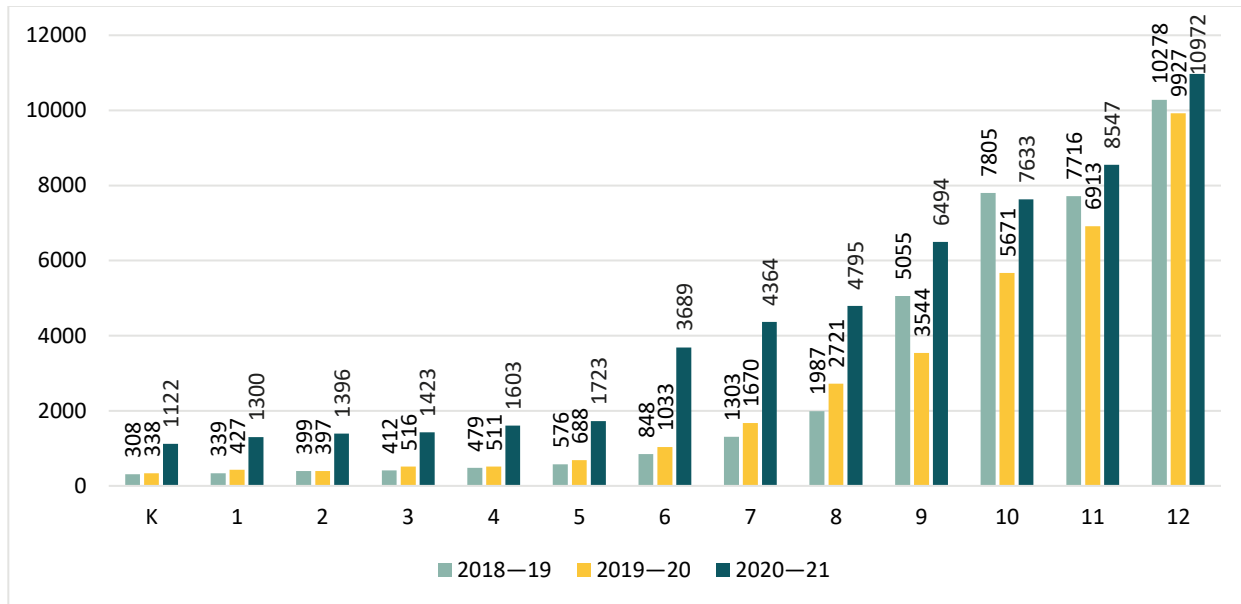
Table 4: Enrollment Rate by Other Student Groups



Grade Level

Headcount by grade level increased in all grades. The most significant expansion was a 257.12% increase in online course enrollments for 6th graders, from 1,033 to 3,689 students. The grade band that saw the biggest increase was K–5.

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



Home-Based

Home-based students 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 5,062 students reported as part-time home-based students, 9.62% participated in online learning. The 2020–21 enrollment rate is a slight increase from the 8.29% reported in 2019–20. This is the highest enrollment rate of any 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 2020–21, a total headcount of 19,862 students were enrolled in at least one online course outside their resident district. This is an increase from 14,607 students the previous year.

One hundred nine districts reported online enrollment of non-resident students, more than the 85 districts reported the previous year. Of these, only 12 reported 100 or more non-resident students. The top three districts account for 60.28% of the reported non-resident students. These top three are, from most non-resident students to least, Omak School District (6,338), Quillayute Valley School District (3,096), and Mary M. Knight School District (2,539).

Measuring Success

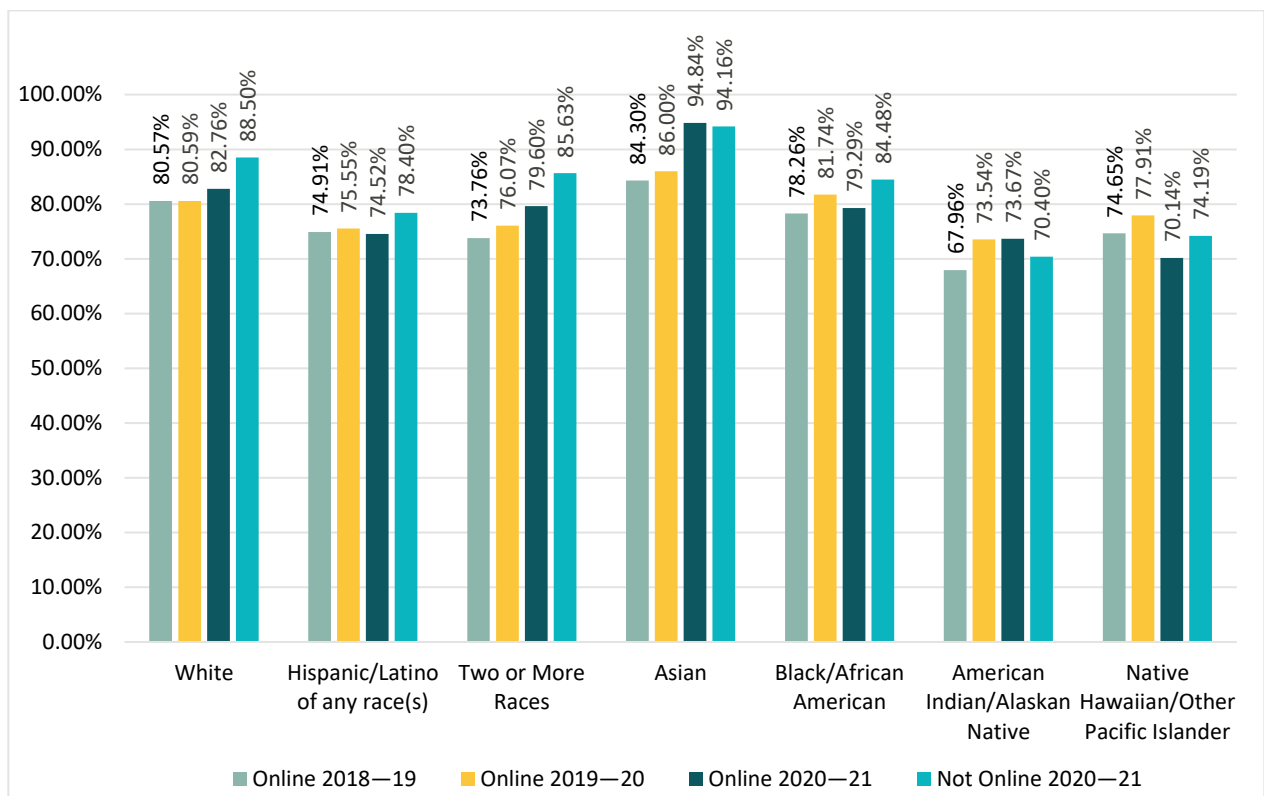
CEDARS provides data on course completions and grades through “student grade history.” Grade histories are only submitted for students in grades 9–12, so course-based achievement data is not available for students in grades K–8. Transfer credits are not included in this report. Transfer credits are often 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 increased in school year 2020–21 to 81.72% from 79.34% in 2019–20. The success rate for non-online courses decreased to 85.53% from 91.65% in 2019–20.

Race/Ethnicity

Table 6: Course Success Rate by Race/Ethnicity

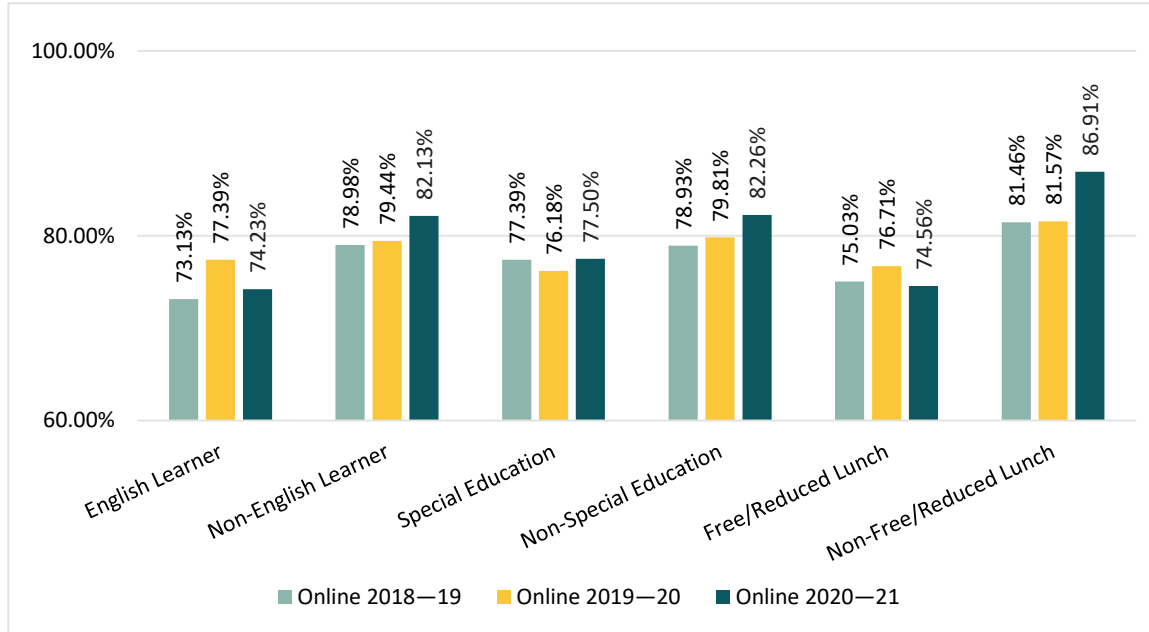


Highlights of the data include Asian students having the smallest gap between online and non-online success, and Asian and American Indian/Alaskan Native students performing better in online courses than in non-online courses. Table 6 shows the online course success rates by race/ethnicity for 2019–20, 2019–20, and 2020–21 as well as the one-year non-online course success rate for the 2020–21 school year.

Other Student Groups

Table 7 shows the online course success rate by student group for 2018–19, 2019–20, and 2020–21. In 2020–21, the non-online success rate was greater than the online success rate by an average of 2.99% across student groups.

Table 7: Course Success Rate by Other Student Groups



CONCLUSION

Growth

Online learning continues to grow in course enrollments across Washington state. Students benefit from online learning as a way to access school when there are barriers to the traditional schedule, and 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.

Based on feedback and questions from school districts, OSPI staff anticipate some shifts in online learning reporting for next school year. The increased communication has been effective to improve schools' understanding of online learning. OSPI is interested in learning how many more districts will utilize online learning.

Data Use

From the data, OSPI is learning where the state is doing well, or improving, and is 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 in an effort 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.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Demographics

Group	Online Headcount	Statewide Headcount
All Students	55,014	1,168,846
Female	28,182	562,924
Male	26,695	603,266
Gender X	137	2,656
White	33,350	599,847
Hispanic/Latino of any race	9,948	288,343
Two or More Races	4,175	103,441
Asian	4,273	95,360
Black/African American	2,095	54,952
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	481	15,052
American Indian/Alaskan Native	710	16,091
English Learner	2,815	139,628
Non-English Learner	52,327	982,279
Special Education	6,184	173,273
Non-Special Education	48,835	998,355
Free and Reduced-Price Lunch	22,020	532,679
Non-Free and Reduced-Price Lunch	33,425	664,837
Part-Time Home-Based Instruction	487	5,062

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

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