Characteristics of Positive Outlier Schools:

Illuminating the Strengths of American Indian/ Alaska Native, Black, Latino/a, and Students Experiencing Poverty

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The Center for Educational Effectiveness

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Land Acknowledgement

There are 29 tribal nations in Washington. The ancestral homelands of those American Indian tribes that have inhabited this place for centuries include the Chehalis, Colville, Cowlitz, Hoh, Jamestown S'Klallam, Kalispel, Lower Elwha Klallam, Lummi, Makah, Muckleshoot, Nisqually, Nooksack, Port Gamble S'Klallam, Puyallup, Quileute, Quinault, Samish, Sauk-Suiattle, Shoalwater Bay, Skokomish, Snoqualmie, Spokane, Squaxin Island, Stillaguamish, Suquamish, Swinomish, Tulalip, Upper Skagit, and Yakama. In addition, the Duwamish, Wanapum, and Chinook are tribes working for recognition by the U.S. federal government and have a long history in present-day Washington.

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Executive Summary

District and building administrators and educators have a responsibility to create the conditions for illuminating and building on students' strengths. Using academic and engagement data over the 2014–15, 2015–16, 2016–17, 2017–18, and 2018–19 school years, this study identified schools in Washington State that have successfully removed barriers and created the conditions that allow for the strengths of Black, Latino/a,[1] American Indian/Alaska Native, and students experiencing poverty to shine. Each day, these schools are generating practice-based evidence showing that when the learning environment is set up for success, students can make steep, continuous academic gains in mathematics and reading, attendance, preparation for high school, high school rigor, improving graduation rates, and postsecondary enrollment.

The positive outlier schools are:

- creating trust and a family-like atmosphere;

- embracing the strengths of diverse students' cultures and ethnicities;

- reaching to integrate relevant and family-engaged education into K–12 schooling;

- repurposing building leadership teams to equity leadership teams;

- empowering diverse students to teach others about racism based on their lived experiences; and

- eliminating deficit-based vocabulary.

> **Student Voice**
>
> *Have you thought about what you want to be when you grow up?*
>
> *Well, there's a couple things, actually. I want to be an author because I want to write books. I really enjoy writing. I've written two books already. They haven't been published.* **(6th grade student)**
>
> *I like reading but I also want to be a speaker. I want to speak about big topics and have my own organization somehow. I haven't fully put enough thought in it, but I kind of want to do that so I can help people in a big way.* **(6th grade student)**

Education is fundamental to student development and growth. The human mind makes possible all development achievements, from health advances and agricultural innovations to efficient public administration and private sector growth. For communities to reap these benefits fully, they must invest in the potential of each student, encouraging and empowering them to realize their strengths and apply their talents to current and future challenges.

There is no better tool for such investment than education. Today's students are tomorrow's inventors, entrepreneurs, physicians, creative artists, scientists, and leaders. School leaders have demonstrated that they are skilled and capable of pivoting and adapting school structures and learning paradigms to provide equitable opportunity for education during the pandemic. Imagine the possibilities if every school applied these skills and capabilities, this capacity for adaptation, to ensure that their school structures equitably served their student population, providing each student with what they need to be successful.

Schools are at the heart and soul of the quest to defend educational equity for each student. However, inequality of outcomes and inequality of opportunity reinforce each other, and contribute to students never realizing their potential. It is a moral imperative that each student is empowered to realize their equitable opportunities.

> *"Education is the foundation upon which we build our future."*
>
> *-Christine Gregoire, former Governor, Washington State*

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[1] Latino/a is a term used to describe the U.S. population of people tracing their roots to Latin America.

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Introduction

Purpose of Study

This study sought to identify and learn from the schools serving American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN), Black, Latino/a, and students experiencing poverty that were most successful on academic and student engagement pre-K–12 indicators[2] over a 3-to-5-yearperiod. It is important to begin by recognizing the traditional knowledge systems across diverse races and ethnicities that have cultivated brilliance and genius well-suited to each unique place. Though these traditional systems have been disrupted and primarily replaced by public K–12, this knowledge is resilient in students and continues to remain relevant in AI/AN, Black, and Latino/a communities. A small number of schools are highly successful in recognizing and multiplying these knowledge systems within the context of the K–12 schooling system. In the book *Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy*, Dr. Gholdy Muhammad writes:

> ***Listening to the Advisory Team***
>
> *"For this study, the critical knowledge is the schools' practices which can help other schools make needed improvements."*
>
> **-Advisory Team Member**

> ***History from Black communities tells us that educators don't need to empower youth or give them brilliance or genius. Instead, the power and genius are already within them. Genius is the brilliance, intellect, ability, cleverness, and artistry that have been flowing through their minds and spirits across the generations. This cultivation calls for reaching back into students' histories and deeply knowing them and their ancestries to teach in ways that raise, grow, and develop their existing genius. (Muhammad & Love, 2020)***

The schools described in this study serve as examples and assist in the development of a deeper understanding of the social and cultural systems of shared beliefs and the ways they have been manifested among administrators, teaching staff, and students. The intent of this study is to liberally share these success stories, in order to provide insight into ways in which all schools can illuminate the genius of and positively affect the lives of AI/AN, Black, Latino/a, and students experiencing poverty and their communities. By creating a dynamic, adaptive learning environment, these schools seek to serve every student, rather than forcing all students to conform to one narrow model for success.

Significance of Study

This study occurred during a period of time called the "twin pandemics"—the novel coronavirus and intertwined structural racism in America. As schools closed, the pervasive inequities affecting students of color within our education system became inescapably apparent. For some school leaders and educators, this may have been the first time they became aware of how embedded policies and practices lead to inequitable outcomes for students of color. For the school leaders and educators in this study, the pandemic experience confirmed what they knew already about the qualities of a school environment that illuminate the strengths of diverse students, including the need for a dogged, unshakable belief that all students can succeed. Confirmation of this knowledge drove the urgency to dismantle unproductive barriers.

This study would not have been viable in ordinary times, let alone during the twin pandemics, had not the relationship and trust from the districts and schools been in place. Each member of the research team has 20–

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[2] The indicators will be discussed at length in the methodology section but are based on Washington indicators as closely aligned as possible with the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation's P–16 framework. See: https://uspp16.org/home

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40 years of experience in education and also lives and works in the state. Some team members also volunteer in the school communities to help during emergencies, including wildfires and the pandemic.

During the study, pandemic school closures mobilized the school districts to pivot, and find new ways to meet families' needs for food, personal care, and social/emotional health—all of the services for which school buildings have become a nexus. Students and families faced further challenges with distance learning, including lack of technology and internet connections. School staff were busy distributing laptops and technology to assist students' learning as well as developing ways to connect families to the internet. Being mindful of the added stress and duties the schools assumed, each member of the research team reached out to the schools they knew personally in order to recognize their efforts and inquire about the possibility of scheduling interviews and/or focus groups to determine how they are achieving positive outlier performance.

To check if this was indeed the right thing to do during a pandemic, after the initial focus group, participants were invited to reflect on their feelings. Overwhelmingly, participants expressed elation to be a part of a study that cultivates understanding and growth to enable K–12 schools to dismantle barriers and create inclusionary and empowering experiences for students and their families. This written document is not intended to be a prescribed approach to school improvement. Rather, it is intended to be a resource for discussion, to firmly contextualize and root the strategies into the unique school districts, leaders, educators, students, and families within the community.

> **Listening to the Advisory Team**
>
> *"The paramount mindfulness that comes with the report is the framing of the words in the reporting and communicating of the research and the learning and recommendations based on the analysis of the data from this study."*
>
> **-Advisory Team Member**

Background/Context

Washington Schools

Public education in Washington State is guided by the State Board of Education (SBE) in partnership with the Superintendent of Public Instruction. The SBE is charged with advocacy and oversight of Washington's education system, provides leadership for a system that personalizes education based on each student's needs, develops policies and structures designed to create an accountability system to improve student achievement, and promotes the achievement of state goals for basic education. The 16-member board consists of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, two students, five members elected by local school boards, one representative of private schools, and seven members appointed by the governor.

The publicly elected state Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) are charged with overseeing public K–12 education in Washington State. Working with the 295 public school districts, nine educational service districts (ESDs), 12 public charter schools, and nine state-tribal compact schools, OSPI allocates funding and provides tools, resources, and technical assistance so every student in Washington is provided a high-quality public education with a strong focus on equity, continuous improvement, and whole child development.

Washington's 295 school districts are comprised of 2,300 public schools that serve more than 1.1 million students (12 percent English language learners, 47 percent low-income, 12 percent with disabilities), and the state is responsible for funding the basic public education for each of those students. Although there are variances across school districts and grade levels, the state spent an average of $11,500 per student in basic education funding in 2019. In addition to basic education funding, the 295 school districts can apply for state, federal, and local grants, receive targeted funding for specific purposes such as school improvement, or raise levy funds within their local community (OSPI, 2019).

Recent student learning assessments among Washington students found that 60 percent met grade level standards in English/language arts, 49 percent in mathematics, and 47 percent in science. About 73 percent of Washington ninth graders were on track to graduate in four years (OSPI, 2019).

Geography

Geographically, the most prominent feature impacting schools is the separation of Western Washington from Eastern Washington by the Cascade mountain range. In Western Washington, the Interstate 5 corridor from Bellingham in the north to Vancouver in the south serves approximately 775,000 students or 68 percent of the K–12 public school enrollment. The Olympic Peninsula, separated from the I-5 corridor by Puget Sound and reaching down to the mouth of the Columbia River in southwest Washington, serves 63,000 students or 6 percent of the student enrollment. Eastern Washington districts serve 289,000 students or 26 percent of enrollment (OSPI 2020).

Organization of School Supports

Schools in Washington State are supported by OSPI, the local ESDs, and local resources. OSPI provides overall fiscal management, including federal funding. OSPI also provides extensive supports for curriculum, instruction and assessment, transitional bilingual instructional programs, migrant services, and support for school and system improvements. At the regional level, the state is served by nine regional ESDs that provide fiscal resources, human resources, curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and related professional development services to the schools in their regions. The network of ESDs commonly known as the AESD (Association of Educational Service Districts), works in partnership with OSPI to provide comprehensive services in a number of areas.
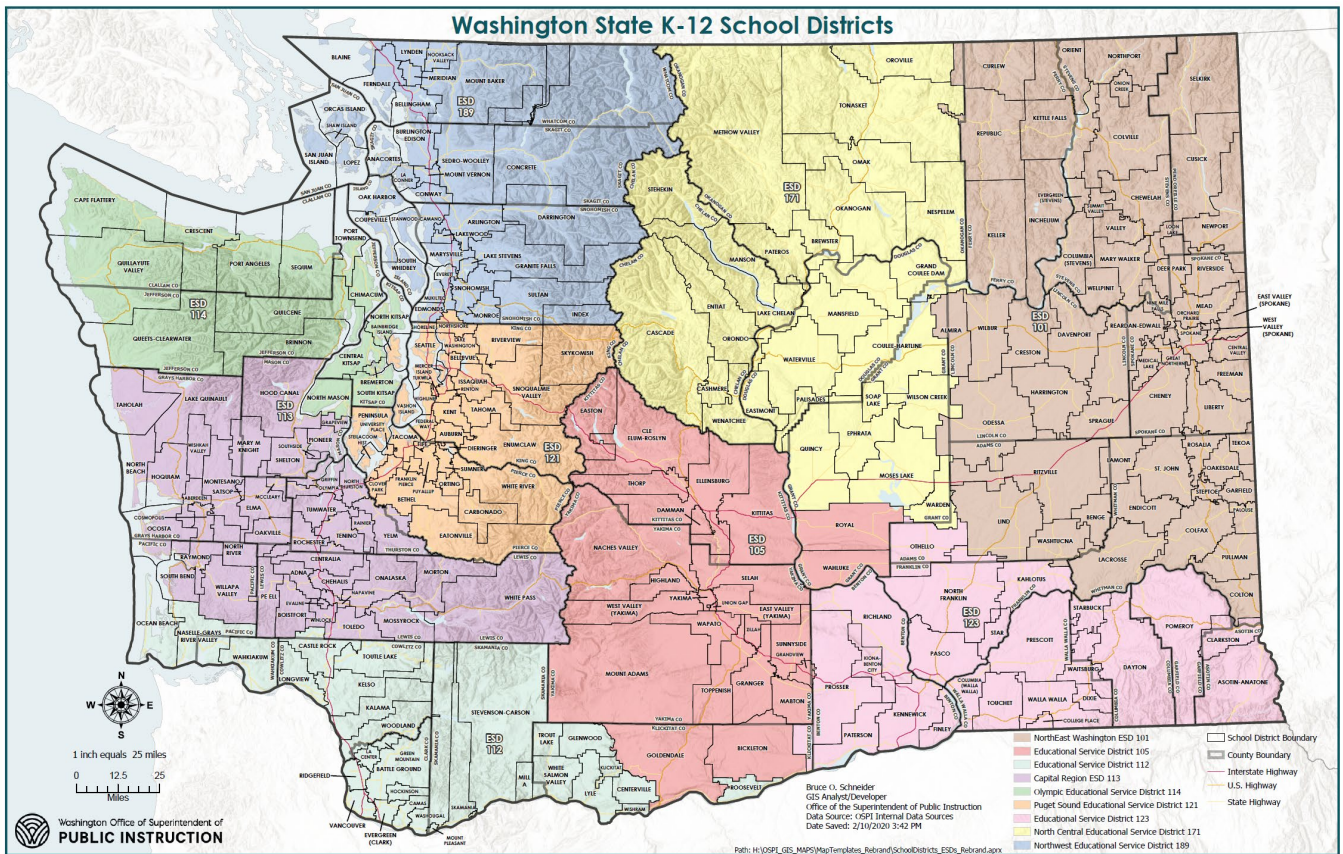
Figure 1: Washington State Public School Districts (OSPI, 2020)

Table 1: List of Educational Service Districts

Regional Educational Service Districts	Districts	Schools	Student Enrollment	Enrollment Percent Total K–12
Spokane Region ESD (101)	59	266	95,440	8%
Yakima Valley Region ESD (105)	25	139	66,135	6%
Vancouver/Southwest Washington Region ESD (112)	30	215	102,310	9%
Olympia/Capital Region ESD (113)	44	183	75,830	7%
Olympic Peninsula Region ESD (114)	15	107	48,239	4%
Puget Sound Region ESD (121)	35	762	441,765	39%
Tri-Cities/Southeast Washington Region ESD (123)	23	149	77,949	7%
North Central Region ESD (171)	29	126	48,984	4%
Northwest Region ESD (189)	35	346	171,486	15%

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Demographic Trends in Washington K–12 Public Schools

Enrollment trends in Washington State show dramatic changes in the student population over the last 20 years (OSPI, 2020). While overall enrollment in the state's K–12 public school systems has grown a moderate 14 percent, Latino/a enrollment has tripled from 90,965 in 2000 to 274,222 in 2020 (OSPI, 2020).

The percentage of students learning English statewide has grown by 165 percent over this same 20-year span. The trends in the 21st century are a continuation of population movement into Washington State seen in the late 20th century (Pennucci & Kavanaugh, 2004; OSPI, 2020).

In the 2000–2001 academic year, 1 in 3 students (33%) were eligible for free or reduced-price meal programs. Following the global recession of 2008, the percentage of students experiencing poverty in Washington rose steadily, peaking in the 2013–14 academic year with 50 percent of the students in the state.

As the economy strengthened from 2015 to 2019, the percentage declined modestly to 46.1 percent during the 2019–20 academic year. In summary, the percentage of students qualifying for subsidized meals increased significantly from 32.5 percent to 43.3 percent during the 20-year period.
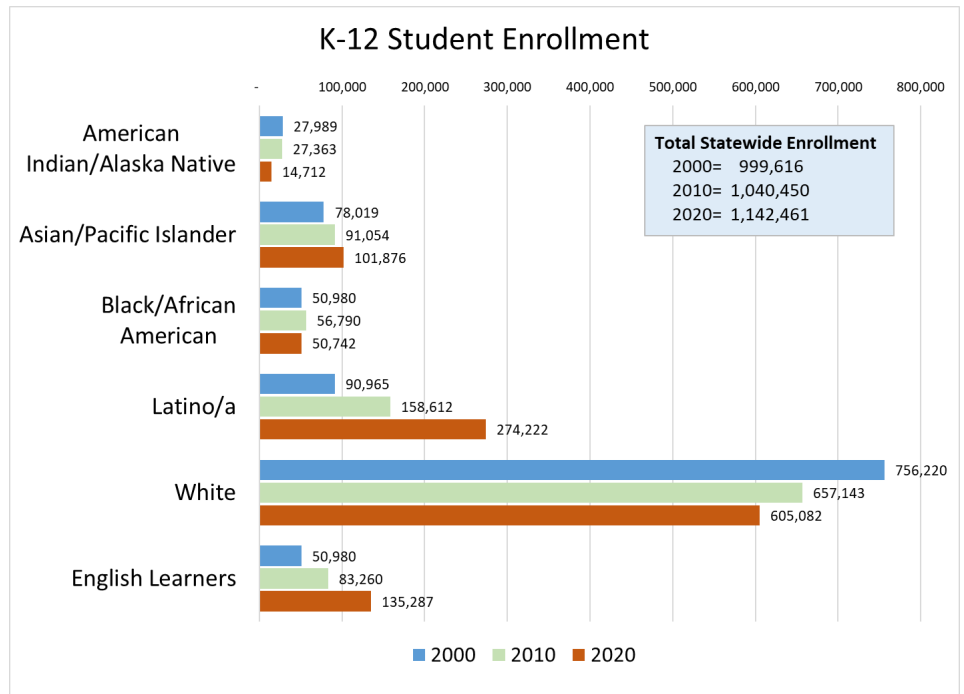
Figure 2: K–12 Student Enrollment
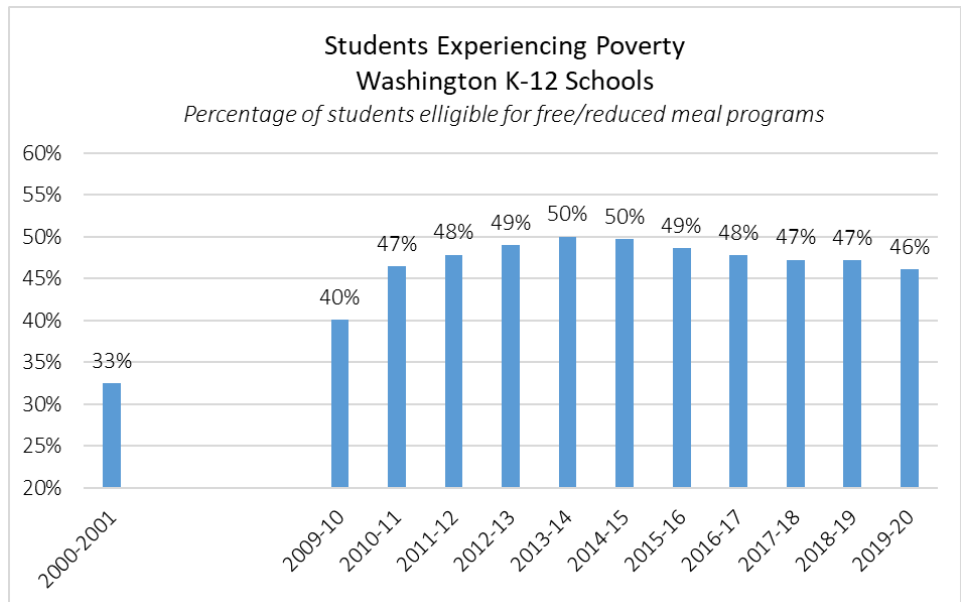
Figure 3: K-12 Poverty Rates

Methodology

Overarching Approach

This study used a mixed-methods, multi-phase approach to address two research questions:

Phase I: In a comparison of AI/AN, Black, Latino/a, and low-income students in Washington State, which schools made significantly better performance/larger improvements over time?

Phase II: What were the contributing elements to successful continuous improvement as perceived by (1) school district and building administrators, (2) teachers, (3) students, (4) parents and guardians, and (5) community members?

After the Internal Review Board (IRB) at Montana State University approved the study in January 2020, the data-sharing agreements were established with OSPI to obtain quantitative data representing every school in the state across academic and engagement domains. This included assessment data in English-language arts and mathematics, attendance, program progress for English learners, the number of ninth graders on track to graduate on time, high school participation in postsecondary-level work, high school graduation, and postsecondary enrollment data. (These indicators are available for every school in the state of Washington and align with the indicators in the Gates Foundation's P–16 framework).[3] These data were assembled into a PostgreSQL database using the National Center for Education Statistics school ID numbers.

Next, using academic and engagement data over the 2014–15, 2015–16, 2016–17, 2017–18, and 2018–19 school years, the positive outlier schools were identified using seven independent linear regression models. The independent variable used in each regression was a measure of the percentage of students in the school who were experiencing poverty.[4] The dependent variables, or performance indicators, were seven academic and student engagement indicators available for all schools in Washington State.[5] The regressions were analyzed independently as researchers were interested in schools that were positive outliers in _each_ of the performance indicators.

Lastly, qualitative data were collected through interviews and focus groups with district and building administrators, teaching staff, students, and families at these positive outlier schools. The interviews and focus groups were transcribed and qualitative narrative analyses were performed.

Throughout each phase of the study, a 21-member advisory committee provided insight, expertise, and guidance along the way. The members represent a cross section of expertise from OSPI, the State Board of Education, the professional associations supporting Washington school boards (WSSDA), administrators (WASA), and principals (AWSP), ESDs, data scientists, researchers, evaluators, and practicing school administrators and teachers. The racially and ethnically diverse members generously shared their experiences, critically informing the approach, methodology, interpretation, and dissemination of the results.

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[3] For details on the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation's P–16 indicators see: https://usprogram.gatesfoundation.org/who-we-are/p16-framework

[4] The study research team and our advisory team performed an extensive analysis of "poverty" with respect to the validity of the data represented. With the recovery from the recession of 2008–2012 occurring at different rates in different areas of the state, the advisory team felt the percentage of students eligible for free-reduced meal programs was the most accurate measure of the percentage of students experiencing poverty in each school locale.

[5] The performance indicators included academic measures of English-language arts, mathematics, English learner progress, and engagement measures of attendance, ninth grade on track (passing all ninth-grade credits), high school dual-credit course participation, and high school graduation. Subsequent to the analysis with these seven measures, the research team also included postsecondary enrollment.

Phase I. Identification of Washington Positive Outlier Schools

Rationale

This study uses residual-based techniques to identify positive outliers. While this technique is widely used with assessment scores on high-stakes tests, this study expanded this narrow view to include both academic and nonacademic indicators of student performance. Residuals from linear regressions enable us to identify those schools furthest from the regression line, and thus, those schools who are the positive outliers (McCoach et al., 2010).

As a two-phase study, this work was also influenced by the California positive outlier work from the Learning Policy Institute (Podolsky et al, 2019). As a race-labeled study, our diverse advisory team encouraged us to confront the status quo—to flip old assumptions about struggling students and look instead at how failing structures have been fixed—and look for positive outliers who are achieving the unexpected across a wide set of academic and engagement indicators.

Data Set

The research team and the supporting advisory team sought a more holistic view of performance than simply using test scores on high-stakes assessments. After reviewing the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation's P–16 framework indicators, the research team, guided by the advisory team, selected measures most closely aligned with the P–16 framework in use within all schools in Washington State. These academic and engagement indicators of school performance encompassed:

- Recurring issues such as attendance, student mobility, and summer learning loss
- Social and emotional factors such as growth mindset and future orientation
- Academic benchmarks such as assessment scores, graduation rates, and high school readiness through ninth grade GPA or credits
- Enabling environments such as college-level coursework, dual-language learning, and kindergarten participation and quality

As a comprehensive landscape study of all schools in Washington State, we had the following objectives guiding our selection of the dependent variables used in this analysis.

- Availability: The data item must be available for all schools in the state, as appropriate to the grade level.
- Comprehensiveness: The dependent variables used to determine positive outlier performance should be widely viewed as critical indicators of overall school performance. The overarching objective is to determine if there are schools which are positive outliers on all of the dependent variables.
- Relevance: For the study to be relevant and meaningful, the data must be as current as possible (at least through the 2018–19 academic year).
- Internal Consistency: Data items selected should cover the same time frame, have the same definition throughout the years included, and have consistent measurement definition across the state.[6]

As a holistic landscape study, all parts of the public school system in the state were considered, with the primary unit of analysis being the school building. To ensure that schools identified represent the wide geographical diversity of Washington State, the selection of positive outliers was stratified using the Educational

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[6] For example, we do not use assessment scores from the 2016–2019 year and the older National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) data on household income from 2014–2018 (most recent available from NCES of the American Community Survey/Edge data).

Research & Data Center (ERDC) simplified categories. Identified schools are in the state's large urban centers and their suburbs as well as in medium-size cities, small rural communities, and American Indian communities. The district context was also considered when identifying high-performing and improving schools by considering the grade level of the school, and the group of interest (AI/AN, Black, Latino/a, and students experiencing poverty).

CEE worked with OSPI to secure a data-sharing agreement that provided access to statewide quantitative educational indicators at the student, school, and district levels. Each indicator required the availability of disaggregated data for each student group. Separate linear regressions were run for each of the seven indicators (dependent variables) to determine their relative performance levels. These indicators were as follows:

Table 2: Study Data and Variables

Dependent Variables (performance indicators)	Description
English Language Arts Performance	Percent of students meeting standard as measured by the Smarter Balanced Assessment in grades 3–8 and 10
Mathematics Performance	Percent of students meeting standard as measured by the Smarter Balanced Assessment in grades 3–8 and 10
Attendance	Percentage of students present for at least 90 percent of the school days or missing fewer than 2 days per month[7]
EL Progress	Percent of students making sufficient progress to exit English language learning services in a 6-year timeframe, based on the annual English Language Proficiency (ELP) assessment (see WSIF footnote this page)
Ninth Graders on Track	Percentage of first-time ninth graders who earned credit for all attempted courses (see WSIF footnote this page)
Dual-Credit Participation	Among all enrolled students in grades 9–12, the percentage of students who completed at least one dual-credit (postsecondary credit bearing) course (see WSIF footnote this page)
Graduation Rate	Percent of students who graduate within 5 years of entering high school (cohort starts when first entering ninth grade)
Postsecondary Enrollment[8]	The percent of students enrolling in postsecondary education (2-year or 4-year programs)

Independent Variable	Description
Students Experiencing Poverty	Also known as the "poverty percent," this is the percentage of students eligible for free and reduced-price meal programs

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[7] Definition from the Washington School Improvement Framework (WSIF). Retrieved from: https://www.k12.wa.us/policy-funding/grants-grant-management/every-student-succeeds-act-essa-implementation/washington-school-improvement-framework.

[8] The initial analytical steps to identify the positive outliers occurred in Q1, 2020 and did not include postsecondary enrollment. As COVID-19 impacted the study and our schedule was extended from 12/31/2020 to 4/30/2021, the research was expanded to include a view of positive outliers for postsecondary enrollment.

Descriptive Statistics

All data shown in the tables below are for indicators with N≥ 20 students per year per school.

Table 3: Elementary and Middle Schools-Descriptive Statistics

Data Element	Schools	Mean	Standard Deviation
English Language Arts Performance	1508	.5640	.1692
Mathematics Performance	1508	.4947	.1815
Attendance	1508	.8840	.0709
EL Progress	869	.7035	.1160
Percent of Students Experiencing Poverty	1508	.5229	.2513

Table 4: High School-Descriptive Statistics

Data Element	Schools	Mean	Standard Deviation
English Language Arts Performance	352	.6494	.1752
Mathematics Performance	352	.3629	.1899
Attendance	352	.7582	.1495
EL Progress	155	.6201	.1164
Ninth Graders on Track	304	.7222	.1478
Dual-Credit Participation	347	.5007	.24156
Graduation Rate	352	.8676	.1450
Postsecondary Enrollment	319	.5609	.1659
Percent of Students Experiencing Poverty	352	.4780	.2098

Data Management

While data was delivered in Microsoft Excel format, the data storage environment for all analytical steps was the PostgreSQL relational database running on the Amazon Web Services (AWS) environment. Consolidation, analytical steps, and data visualization was accomplished in the Tableau visual analytics platform. All analytical steps were performed blind with respect to school and district names. Relational tables in the database were keyed off the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) school ID number.

Analytic Process

Data Normalization

All data were normalized relative to the year and the four student groups of interest (AI/AN, Black, Latino/a, and students experiencing poverty). The school-level results for each indicator were converted into Z-scores (number of standard deviations above/below the mean) to put each indicator on the same standardized scale.

Regression Models

Driven by the objectives above, the research team elected to run multiple independent linear regression models to independently identify positive outliers, toward the goal of determining if schools exist which are positive outliers across all of the indicators. The basic form of the regressions uses each of the independent variables (X) and the seven dependent variables (Y).[9] This model then effectively specifies the relation of dependent variable (Y) to the independent variables (X). The form of the model would be:

$$Y = a + bX$$

Where:

$$b = \frac{n \sum xy - (\sum x)(\sum y)}{n(\sum x^2) - (\sum x)^2}$$

$$a = \frac{\sum y - b \sum x}{n}$$

Each performance indicator (dependent variables) was then analyzed on the basis of one contextual variable (independent variable): the percentage of students who qualified for a free or reduced-price meal (FRL), a proxy for family income that is commonly used in research studies because of its strong predictive relationship with student performance.

Regression models revealed the relationships between each performance indicator and the percentage of students experiencing poverty. Regressions were run for each indicator by year, student group, and school. Each regression was weighted by the number of students with applicable data. For indicators that had data by grade, regressions were run for each grade and then aggregated to the school level. To increase reliability of the data, a minimum N of 20 students was used for each indicator. There had to be at least 20 students in a group to generate results.[10]

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[9] For a simple explanation of regression models and their uses, see: https://research-methodology.net/research-methods/quantitative-research/regression-analysis/

[10] The minimum N of 20 in this research is an important difference between this study and the positive outlier work in California (Podolsky et al., 2019). In that study, they required a school to have at least 200 White students from either Black or Latino/a student groups. This requirement of 200 white and 200 Black or Latino/a students would have severely limited the number of schools considered in the analysis based on Washington State school demographics.

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Based on the regression formulas, residual values (the distance between the predicted performance and the actual performance) were calculated for each indicator by year, student group, and school. This residual measured how far a school's actual performance was above or below the performance predicted for their level of poverty. For example, in the figure to the right, performance declines (Y-axis) as the percentage of students experiencing poverty increases (X-axis). The distance from the regression line (or predicted level) to the school directly above it (a school that is an extreme outlier in the upper right area of the figure) is the **residual**, a measure of the extent to which the school is a positive outlier (or, how significantly they are "beating the odds"). Schools were selected both from districts that showed overall positive outlier status (top schools in those districts) as well as individual schools who showed positive outlier status independent of district performance.
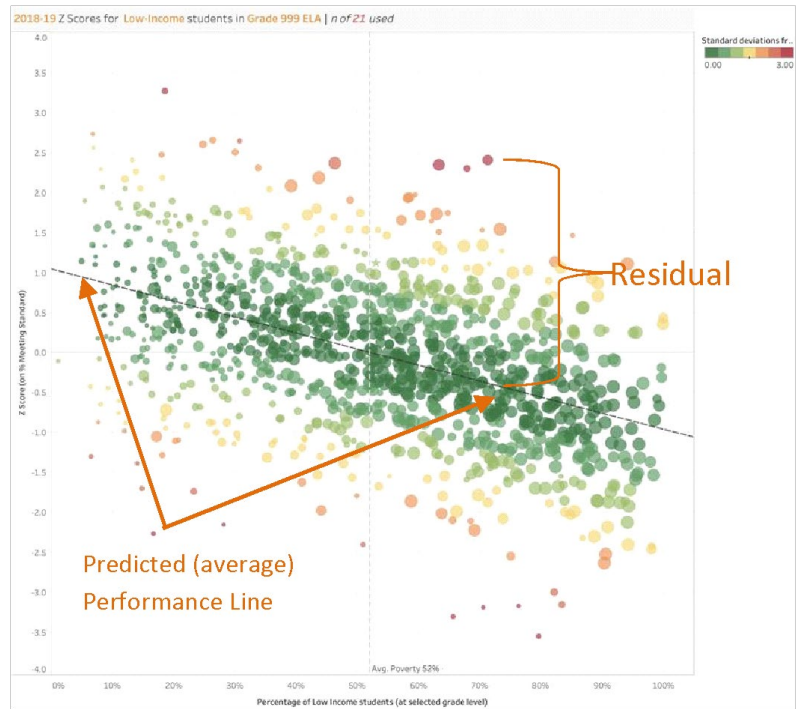
Figure 4: Example of Residual Calculation

School and District Weights in Aggregate Calculations[11]

To understand which schools were the greatest positive outliers, the residuals from the seven regression models had to be aggregated at the school level. Leveraging the work of Kirk (1996), the research team (in consultation with the advisory team) analyzed several different weighting scenarios before adopting the following:

Table 5: Aggregate Weighting

Performance Indicator Residual	Weight for Elementary & Middle School	Weight for High School	Data Available
ELA (SBA)	28%	12%	Grades 3–8 and 10
Math (SBA)	28%	12%	Grades 3–8 and 10
EL Progress (WSIF)	16%	6%	All Grades
Attendance (WSIF)	28%	12%	All Grades
Dual-Credit Participation	NA	12%	High School Only
Ninth Graders on Track	NA	18%	High School Only
Graduation Rate	NA	28%	High School Only
Note: Schools which span Elem/MS and HS use the high school weights			

To measure improvement, the study used a baseline for each school defined as the average of the residuals for the spring 2015, 2016, and 2017 data. Trends for each school were then calculated between the baseline and the spring 2019 data. The computations were performed "*blind*" to ensure that district and school names did not influence the interpretation of results. The 12-digit ID number from NCES was the only identifier tied to each school and district.

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[11] See Kirkwood, C. (1996).

Segmentation for Urbanicity

In 2006, the NCES redefined their school locale codes from the previous "metro-centric" to an updated "urban-centric" definition.[12] This 12-level system categorized schools and districts based on the population and density estimates from the Census Bureau. In Washington State, ERDC determined that these 12 categories were overly granular for research purposes in the state, and in 2010 created an aggregated model based on five categories of urbanicity. Schools and districts in this research are categorized using the ERDC model as follows:

Table 6: Geographic Stratification

Geographical Setting	Count of Districts	Count of Schools	Students
Large Metro	6	344	182,141
Metro Suburb	33	731	392,350
Mid-Size Town	25	433	222,121
Urban Fringe	46	298	128,356
Rural/Distant	185	581	141,305
Counts based on OSPI data for the 2018–19 school year			

Selection Algorithm

In summary,

1) Weighted regressions are run for each indicator for each student group for each year.

2) Residuals (distance above/below the regression) are calculated for each indicator.

3) Residuals are aggregated for each school based on weighting discussed above.

4) For each Geographical Setting and each student group, determine the top five schools on aggregated residual that have met required indicators.

   a) Elementary and middle schools: ELA, Math, and Attendance

   b) High school: ELA, Math, Attendance, and Grad Rate

5) Remove schools where the percentage of student group is below state average.

6) Remove schools that are underperforming in any one of the required indicators.

7) Determine the schools with the highest improvement trend.

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[12] See: https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ruraled/definitions.asp

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Consider Grandview's McClure Elementary School as an example:

Following the selection algorithm on the previous page, this school has data in each of the required indicators: ELA, math, and attendance. The school is 95 percent Latino/a students, well above the state average of 24.6 percent. The school is a positive outlier in all four indicators. The school has positive trends of improvement for each of the residuals. Therefore, this school is identified as a positive outlier and was invited to participate in Phase II of this research.

Figure 5: Selection Example with Residual Values

Postsecondary Enrollment Expansion

As the impact of COVID-19 manifested itself across the state, the study timeline was extended to provide CEE the opportunity to add five more high schools to the study. Working with the advisory team, researchers supplemented the analysis described above and used postsecondary enrollment data (percentage of students enrolled in either 2-year or 4-year programs 1 year after high school graduation) from ERDC. A similar positive outlier technique (as described above) was used on the 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018 postsecondary enrollment data. The positive outliers which had the highest improving trends across these years resulted in five high schools being added to the research for the qualitative Phase II. It should be noted that all 11 high schools previously identified in Phase I were also positive outliers for postsecondary enrollment data.

Positive Outlier Identification — Conclusion

Our analysis indicates that there are a number of schools outperforming expectations on not only academic indicators (English-language arts and math) but also in attendance, progress for English learners, and for high schools, ninth graders on track to graduate, dual-credit participation, graduation rate, and enrollment in postsecondary education. By including a more holistic set of indicators—including nonacademic indicators—across schools, the results illuminate schools that excel at uplifting the strengths of AI/AN, Black, Latino/a, and students experiencing poverty. To shed light on the practices, attitudes, and systems, we turn to Phase II of the research, the qualitative analysis of how these schools accomplished their positive outlier results.

Phase II. Qualitative Research

Approach

The first phase (Phase I) of the study identified the top 46 positive outlier school districts across Washington State. An announcement and information packet was emailed to the superintendent of each school district with an invitation to participate in the study. Follow-up phone and/or video calls were made to provide more information, answer questions, and outline potential next steps. Each school district decided whether or not to participate based on their unique circumstances and capacity during the pandemic. Next, data collection ensued in the second phase (Phase II) for the schools that wished to participate.

Data Collection

Of the 46 schools that were identified, 38 schools accepted the invitation to participate. For each school, the sources of data collected included (1) a list of prioritized school district initiatives completed prior to the interviews, (2) a school district questionnaire, (3) school improvement plans, (4) school newsletters, and (5) interviews/focus groups.

Before the interviews and focus groups occurred, district leaders completed a list of prioritized initiatives (see Appendix E) and a questionnaire (see Appendix E). These sources provided useful background information for the interviewer to probe during the conversation. In addition, participants were able to review the questions ahead of time to reflect prior to the interviews. In-depth interviews and focus groups were conducted with district and building administrators, teachers and paraprofessionals, students, and family members in two parts. Part One consisted of the district and/or building administrators participating in an interview or focus group. Part Two required the administrator(s) to recruit teachers, students, family, and community members who would share the cultural background of the school characteristics identified in Phase I. To provide greater accessibility, participants had the option of writing out and submitting responses to the focus group questions.

The in-depth interviews and focus groups ranged from 90 to 120 minutes and from one to five participants each. The semi-structured format and extended time allowed for conversation that fostered greater human connection and offered an opportunity for clarification. The interviews and focus groups were recorded, transcribed, and uploaded into Dedoose, a specialized software package for qualitative research. For increased accuracy, a human transcribed the recordings as opposed to the artificial intelligence (AI) transcriptions offered by transcription firms.

The number of interviews are listed in the tables below. Interviewees are further categorized by demographic factors in Appendix D.

Table 7: District Leader Interview Participants

Superintendents	Deputy Superintendents	Assistant Superintendents	District Level Executive Staff	Total
15	1	6	9	**31**

Table 8: Building Leader Interview Participants

Principals	Assistant Principals	Building Leader Staff	Proxies for Building Leader	Total
36	3	1	2	**42**

Table 9: Teacher Interview Participants

Elementary School	Middle School	High School	Total
59	12	48	**119**

Table 10: Student Interview Participants

Elementary School	Middle School	High School	Total
4	3	30	**37**

Table 11: Family-Community Interview Participants

Elementary School	Middle School	High School	Total
3	3	2	**8**

Qualitative Analytic Approaches

In the first round of analysis, qualitative narrative analysis (QNA) was used to systematically review the large volume of transcripts and identify overarching emerging themes. Within the overarching themes, related subcodes emerged during the QNA. For example, the overarching theme "culturally-responsive leadership" included the related subcodes "hiring diverse teachers" and "valuing diverse cultures and identities." This process resulted in the development of a precise coding tree from which codes were applied to all of the transcripts. A coding dictionary provides a clear definition of each code applied.

Following the code applications within each participant type, a unit analysis occurred resulting in the development of analytic memos for each school building. A second round of analysis focused on the patterns that emerged across participant types. This intragroup and intergroup analysis offered increased validity and reliability of the results.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

As the initial list of data was collected, the date items were evaluated for inclusion or exclusion in the study based on certain criteria. Initially, the study team explored extant district and school materials such as strategic plans, individual school improvement plans, district and building assessment calendars, newsletters, and annual community reports as potential factors associated with continuous student learning. The extant data, however, were not uniform enough across the participating schools to draw reliable conclusions. Thus, the primary data found to be most valuable and associated with continuous student learning were drawn from the lived experiences of the administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, students, and families.

Results—Positive Outlier School Identification

The models described above show when a school is achieving higher scores than historical data would predict for a specific student group, given the socioeconomic characteristics of the school. Using a broad set of academic and engagement performance indicators, research revealed the schools exceeding predicted performance on multiple indicators and provided a comprehensive and relevant view of each schools' performance.

English-Language Arts	Math	Attendance	EL Progress	9th Grade on Track	Dual-Credit Participation	Graduation Rate
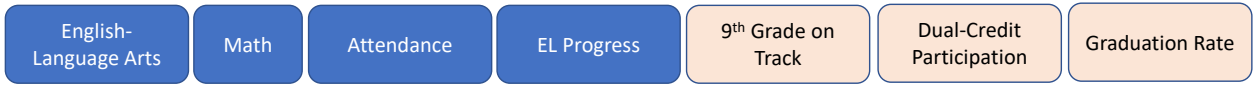
For each of these measures, per year, per subgroup, calculate Predicted Performance

Using this predicted performance

Actual Performance	−	Predicted Performance	=	Residual *Positive=Outperform, Negative=Underperform*
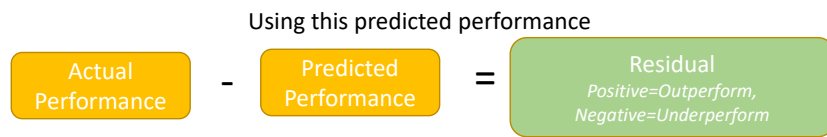
Figure 6: Methodology

To illustrate performance, the chart below shows actual data which resulted in these schools being identified as positive outliers for the common indicators of graduation rates and percent of students meeting standard on English language arts and mathematics.

The positive outlier schools shown in the following graphs average 66 percent students of color and 64 percent low income (compared to state averages of 40 percent and 43 percent respectively). These four figures show how dramatically different these schools are relative to their peers throughout the state.

Figures 7 and 8 show the performance on English-language arts and mathematics on the Smarter Balanced Assessments (SBA). It is interesting to note that in the first year of measuring the Common Core State Standards with the SBA, these positive outlier schools showed performance equal to the state. Over the following four years, these schools have demonstrated that they are outperforming the state. While the state has remained relatively flat, these positive outlier schools have shown strong improvement year over year.
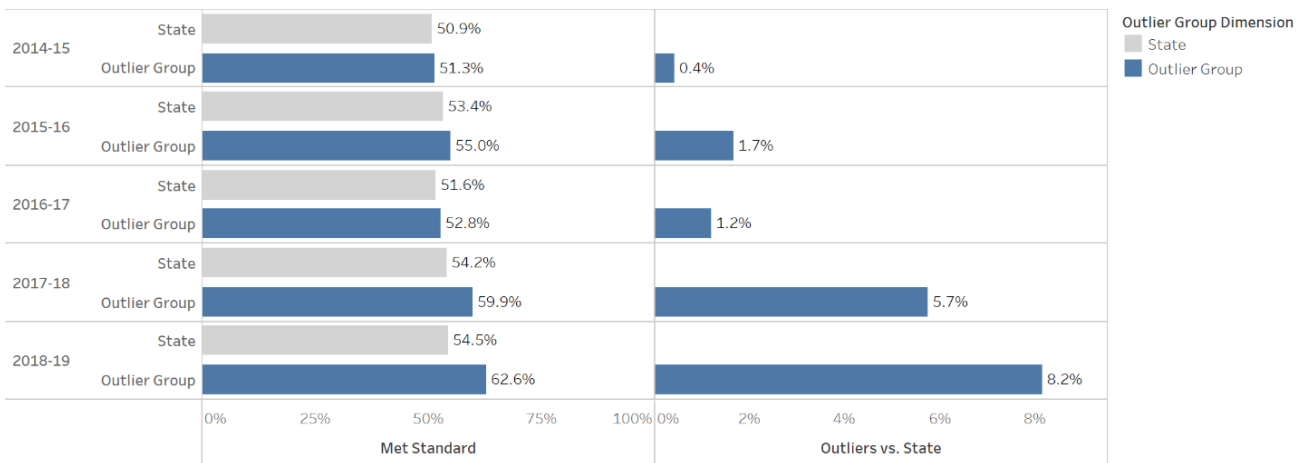
Figure 7: ELA Percent Meeting Standard, Difference Between Positive Outliers and State
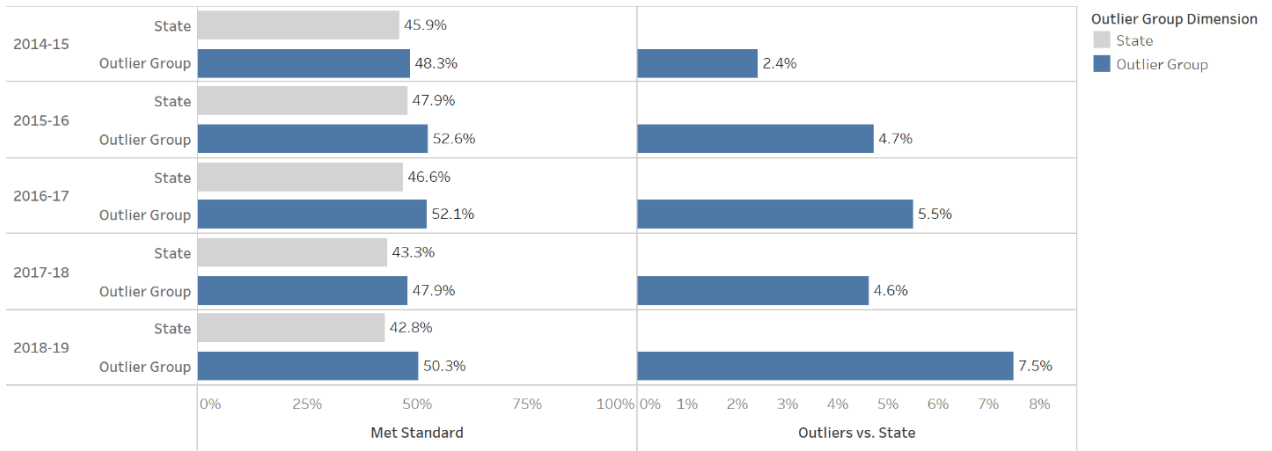
Figure 8: Mathematics Percent Meeting Standard, Difference Between Positive Outliers and State

For the high schools in the study, Figures 9 and 10 show the graduation rates in the positive outlier schools for specific student groups. The state values shown are for the same student group. For the last 3 years (the 3 latest years of 5th-year graduation rate data available) the positive outlier schools have shown not only that they significantly outperform the state, but that they are continuing to grow their rate of improvement, while the state remains relatively flat for these two student groups.
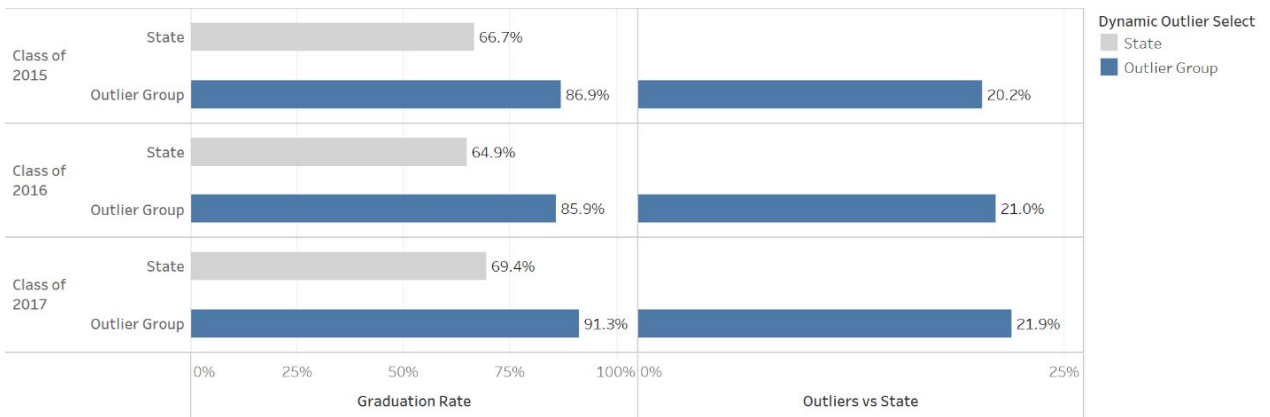
Figure 9: Graduation Rate Black Student Group, Difference Between Positive Outliers and State
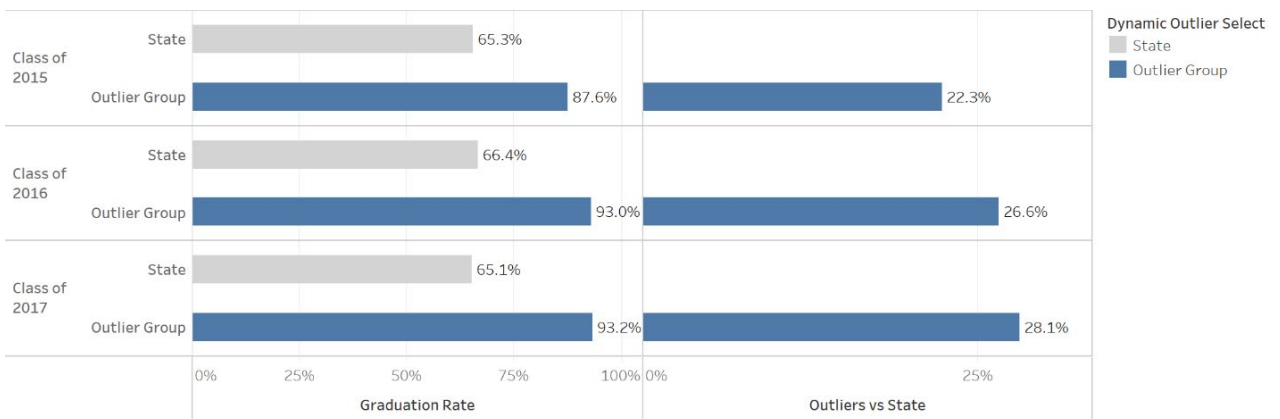
Figure 10: Graduation Rate Latino/a Student Group, Difference Between Positive Outliers and State

Performance Results

As noted in the Methodology section, schools designated in the positive outlier identification phase of the study were characterized by:

- *Positive outlier performance* in a majority of indicators for which they had data. For elementary and middle schools, at a minimum, this had to include ELA, math, and attendance. For high schools, this had to include ELA, math, attendance, and graduation rate;

  and

- Show a *positive trend of improvement* in a majority of indicators for which they had data over the 2014–15, 2015–16, 2016–17, 2017–18, and 2018–19 school years;

  and

- In the student group of interest, be *at or above the state in percentage of enrollment* for that student group.

Since this study used independent linear regressions of the percentage of students experiencing poverty and seven indicators of performance across 5 years and four student groups of interest, graphic display of these hundreds of regression models would be extremely complex and therefore the graphs of the individual models are not presented in this report.

The results of the positive outlier analysis illuminated 46 schools in 31 districts which excel at uplifting and multiplying the strengths of AI/AN, Black, Latino/a, and students experiencing poverty (a complete list in Appendix C). While there are schools across the state which excel in one or two indicators of school performance, the schools included in this study demonstrated that they are both improving and consistently beating the odds for all indicators. Geographically, the positive outlier schools span the 71,362 square miles of Washington State and reside in all of the state's nine Educational Service Districts.

Geographic and Demographic Diversity

One of the most significant findings from the identification of these positive outliers is the geographical diversity represented. These schools are spread across the entire state of Washington—nearly 500 miles from Cape Flattery in the northwest corner of the state to Pullman in the southeast corner.
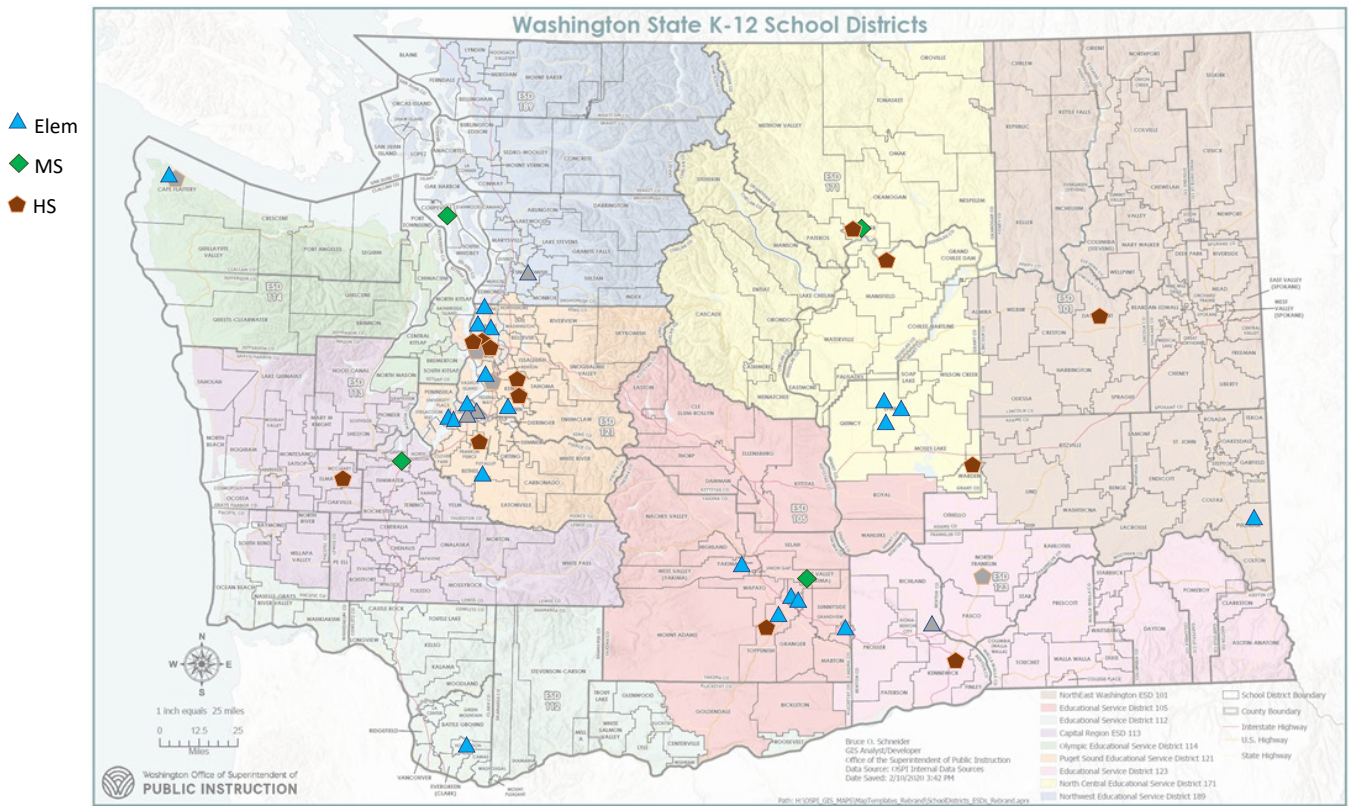
Figure 11: Positive Outliers in Washington State

Within the state, the nine educational service districts which provide extensive services to K–12 public schools are fully represented.

Table 12: Positive Outlier Schools by ESD

By ESD	
ESD 101	2
ESD 105	7
ESD 112	1
ESD 113	2
ESD 114	2
ESD 121	21
ESD 123	3
ESD 171	6
ESD 189	2

The identified positive outliers serve 24 elementary student populations and 22 secondary populations. This distribution is similar to the state's distribution of elementary and secondary schools.

Table 13: Positive Outlier Schools by Level

By Level	
Elementary	24
Middle School	4
High School	18
Total	**46**

These schools were identified as positive outliers for these student groups of interest.

Table 14: Positive Outlier Schools by Demographics

Schools Designated For	
American Indian/Alaska Native	3
Black	10
Latino/a	24
Students Experiencing Poverty	25
13 Schools are Designated for 2 or more groups	

Twenty-one of these schools are in the large metropolitan and metropolitan suburb areas along the I-5 corridor spanning from Olympia to north of Seattle. Outside this urban/suburban area, 70 percent of the state's school districts serve student populations of 3,000 students and less. Twenty of the positive outlier schools are from small rural/distant and urban fringe school districts with five from mid-size towns.

Table 15: Positive Outlier Schools by Urbanicity

School by Urbanicity	
Large Metro	9
Metro Suburb	12
Mid-Size Town	5
Urban Fringe	7
Rural / Distant	13

Demographically,[13] the positive outlier schools serve 25,111 students with an average enrollment of 661 students per school. This is larger than the state average due largely to the number of high schools identified.

Table 16: Positive Outlier Student Demographics

Student Demographics							
	Student Enrollment	% American Indian/Alaska Native	% Black	%Latino/a	% Two or More Races	% English Learners	% Students Experiencing Poverty
Outlier Schools	25,111						
Outlier Schools - Average	661	1.5%	10.6%	34.5%	7.4%	16.8%	63.5%
WA State	1,134,264						
WA State - Average	487	1.3%	4.5%	23.6%	8.4%	11.8%	47.2%

[13] All demographics are from the OSPI state report card, see: https://washingtonstatereportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/

Because the positive outlier identification required that the schools' percentage within a student group of interest (AI/AN, Black, Latino/a, and students experiencing poverty) exceeded the state averages, these schools serve far more students of color than the state average and far more students experiencing poverty.

Since the student groups of interest were a critical research objective of the study, the student demographics will be presented, by school, in each of the groups of interest. Descriptions and details for each positive outlier school can be found in the tables in the appendices.

Demographic Details by Student Groups of Interest

It is important to remember that schools can be identified as a positive outlier for multiple student groups within the four groups of interest to the study: AI/AN, Black, Latino/a, and students experiencing poverty.

American Indian/Alaska Native

Three schools were identified as positive outliers for performance in the AI/AN student population. Whereas the state averages 1.3 percent AI/AN enrollment, these schools on average serve nearly 30 percent AI/AN students. Because these schools are in small rural areas, these schools are smaller in enrollment, averaging 288 students. More than 90 percent of the students in these schools were eligible for free-reduced meal programs, nearly double the statewide rate.

Black

Ten schools were identified as positive outliers for performance for Black students. Whereas the state has 5 percent Black enrollment, these schools, on average, serve 4 times that amount (20 percent).

Latino/a

Eighteen schools were identified as positive outliers for performance of Latino/a students. Statewide, Latino/a enrollment is 24 percent of the total enrollment by school, but the positive outlier schools average 44 percent Latino/a students of enrollment by school.

Students Experiencing Poverty

Nineteen schools were identified as positive outliers for performance in the students experiencing poverty student group. On average, the enrollment of students experiencing poverty is 62 percent, compared to the statewide rate of 47 percent. Due to systemic societal inequities in the state, these schools with higher enrollment rates of low-income students also serve significantly more students of color (13 percent Black, 30 percent Latino/a, 15 percent ELs).

Results—Qualitative Narrative Analysis

This section presents the results of the qualitative narrative analysis. First, common characteristics across the schools are discussed, then characteristics unique to elementary and secondary levels are described. Finally, profiles of district and building administrators, teachers, and students are offered based on what was learned through the transcripts and analysis.

Characteristics Common Across Schools

The study revealed a complex intersection of school leadership, teaching, and the communities served. While each school is unique and dynamic, a number of common characteristics surfaced. These characteristics have been integrated into the mindset of school staff, and certain processes are now in place that allow family voice and the genius of diverse students to be illuminated.

Years ago, 16 of the schools in the study occupied a spot in the bottom 5 percent of Washington State schools in terms of their performance on the Washington State accountability indicators. Indeed, throughout the interviews, administrators and teachers reflect back to a time before their students' steep improvement and describe conditions prior to centering the needs of all students, and the subsequent improvements seen in the building.

The analysis revealed three common conditions that occurred, disrupting the habit of following unproductive mandated protocols which kept school leaders and educators from seeing and fostering the brilliance of their students. These three common conditions are: (1) a catalyst for change (e.g., new leadership, an emotional charge, etc.); (2) a fertile foundation established by a predecessor or current administrator to implement processes; and (3) structures in place for sustainability. These three conditions enabled transformative work to begin and be sustained effectively. The details concerning these conditions are not intended to be generalized. They are different for each school district because they are uniquely contextualized in the district, staff, students, and families in the community.

Common Condition #1 — A Catalyst for Change

Within the study schools, examples of catalysts that spark momentum towards change included: (1) new leadership; (2) an emotional charge; and (3) a strong commitment to the community to begin the difficult work of transformation. School leaders help staff recognize they have not been successful and affirm to staff that they can do better. "We were fed up … we are not a dropout factory," said a district administrator. School leaders rally the school staff with an emotional charge to improve student graduation and attendance rates, staff attrition, and bond pass rates.

Administrators make a commitment to the community and turn to the knowledge of people who had lived experience or have studied issues related to diversity, equity, inclusion, and racism.[14] Rather than dismiss an insight or fall into racial arrogance, the administrators set out to learn from experts and challenge assertions historically embedded in their school systems. For example: A new administrator provided a catalyst. They assessed the current situation and implemented a different strategy to provide the instructional support for students, thereby sending a message to the staff through action:

> *When I started, there's a couple of things that were very surprising to me. [We had] 85 percent Hispanic, 30 percent monolingual students but we didn't have any Spanish translators and very few Spanish-speaking teachers. In my first month, we thought we'd get a little creative and we had extra funds to have an ELL TOSA [teacher on special assignment]. I understand*

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[14] Racism is articulated as a structural phenomenon, as opposed to a "problem that derives from the failure on the part of the individuals and institutions to treat people formally the same." Carbado (2011).

laws and segregation … so I called [our State Education Agency] and told them of an idea to create a class of monolingual students of our lowest achieving third graders, all in one pod. The goal was to show how data would drive instruction. And we went week to week based on their performance. It was the lowest performing group when we started school and by the end of that first school year, they were the highest performing third grade classroom.

The school leaders and staff began to listen to family and community voices around equity and asked, "How can we bring in the community to help us more deeply understand our students?" One district administrator shared that family and community culture and values needed to be reflected school-wide, requiring a shift in organizational practice to catalyze change:

There's been a real commitment to … shifting our hiring practices so that … our staff reflects our community and the students that we serve. Again, we're doing good things in that regard, we're certainly not there yet, but the staff is much more diverse than it was even 3 years ago.

Continued guidance from the community helps inform school staff about necessary changes and building the organizational structures and processes needed for that change. Continuity of guidance nurtures trusting relationships, and mutual respect has become the norm in these schools.

Common Condition #2 — Readiness and Willingness to Benefit

While the catalyst starts the school toward improvement, a strong readiness and willingness to benefit offers the foundation to implement change. This foundation includes centering racial equity and envisioning family and community well-being that begins in nondominant family and community ecologies.[15] School leaders and teachers shared the evolution of their school:

Cultural attitudes toward the school have changed an awful lot … when I first arrived, there was still a lot of mistrust of the school and the staff and not a feeling that we were working with the community. Having [a community member] take over as principal has made a huge difference. We've just worked really hard to integrate culture and care into everything that we do.

Years ago our superintendent really pushed this agenda of being a school family. We know family first and we really embrace that … it made a huge difference and was a turning point. A lot of us call our classes our school family, and that relationship we have with kids, I think, is probably our #1 indicator of success.

The result of intentionally building a strong foundation is evident in teachers' and students' descriptions that "we feel like one big family." For some school staff, this family and community approach to education may bring a learning curve. One teacher described it this way: "I think there's more knowledge and use of family ties and how each family is part of the school and who's related to who. Those kind of things are much easier to navigate now."

One outcome is that "communities are integral to the school now." An administrator put it this way: "We know the [community] volunteers that we have in the classroom …; we have community support being mentors for students; we have [a] senior project that every student has to have a mentor and do a career shadow … so that really activates our community …"

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[15] Nondominant families in this context are Black, Latina/o, American Indian/Alaska Native and low-income families (Ishimaru & Bang, 2016).

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Common Condition #3 — Sustainability

Schools institute structures to perpetuate the progress being made and to sustain the mindset, actions, and structures that result in positive equitable outcomes. To sustain the mindset, efforts to teach staff cultural competence and awareness of racism do not have a singular implementation but instead are embedded in the fabric of the school through the following: (1) inclusion of perspectives of ethnically diverse staff and students; (2) identification of barriers; (3) support for change; and (4) commitment of resources.

Schools also value partnerships and use them to continue to successfully accomplish goals. For example, they reach out to local colleges and universities to open lines of communication with diverse students and their families in their native language. They partner with regional Education Service Districts (ESDs) to provide expertise and build capacity in equity-focused teacher leadership. Teachers build capacity to sustain the work through participation in the OSPI/AESD Fellows' Network, a 3-year leadership program facilitated by the ESD Regional Coordinators. A foundational tenet of the program is bringing equity to student learning. The ESD Regional Coordinators guide reflective discussions of race and social justice, ways to lead with equity using strategies to tackle discriminatory practices, and ways to increase access to academic content and assessments for inclusion of all students.

Sustainability is built into the definition of success criteria and the evaluation of initiatives, such as the promotion of student voice in everyday processes, curricula, and formal and informal activities. Structures are in place to center students' voices in the decision-making and needs-identification process to make improvements in their school-day experience. This helps ensure that initiatives can survive changes in leadership.

Finally, school staff hold each other accountable: "We hold the students at the heart of everything that we do and having those same morals and values … we hold each other accountable and hold ourselves accountable." Another teacher said, "The fact that the family that we have as a staff and the community and everything, we really push one another as well, professionally. And so I think that that is a very important thing."

Characteristics and Qualities Across All Positive Outlier Schools

The next sections provide descriptions of the characteristics and qualities common across all schools. The common qualities across the schools are: (1) equitable access to high-quality teachers and principals for all students; (2) clear and visible learning objectives for all students; (3) a culture of lifelong learning among school staff; (4) continuous collaboration between staff at all levels; (5) data-driven decisions within schools; and (6) funding sources that provide necessary resources.

Equitable and Stable Access to High-Quality Teachers and Principals

Students are taught by high-quality, certified, experienced teachers and principals. The teachers interviewed have taught an average of 15 years. Some teachers continue with their college education, pursuing advanced degrees in their content area, dual endorsements (e.g., EL, SPED), and National Board Certification.[16] Some schools have a high utilization rate of paraprofessionals who play a key role not only in students' learning, but also in providing stability and close connections to students. As one teacher stated:

> *I thought, we need more stability here. I've got to become a teacher. Teachers are leaving after two or three years to go find different jobs and the kids are watching teachers come and go, and it's not stability. They need stability. That was kind of why I started in this area that I started in was because I wanted to provide stability for my own children and then it just blossomed from there.*

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[16] https://www.nbpts.org/national-board-certification/

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Clear Student Learning Objectives

Teachers use multiple strategies to communicate their learning objectives to students, so they are clear and visible. The ability to clearly communicate the learning objectives is a skill learned by attending professional development courses. General education teachers work to expand their skill and ability to clearly communicate to students with disabilities, "what they are learning, where they are going and why they are doing this." A teacher elaborated, "Students [need to be] able to communicate their learning goals and outcomes through rubrics and other tools, what's happening in the classroom and how to get from one place to another." A first-grade teacher described how they go "a step further" in her instruction:

> *So, taking a step further and … communicating to students … helping them write goals or just think about what they need to do to be a successful learner. And explaining the why. Why are we learning to read? Why are we learning to add? Well, if we want to get a job, we need to know how to read and write and do math. So, we just explain the why a lot in first grade. And we really try to help the kids tap into their own learning and think about what they need to do to be successful.*

Students are able to monitor their own growth and progress toward the learning objective using data from formative assessments and feedback. As one teacher explained:

> *I would add that as far as monitoring their growth, I think it's really important … that kids every day are so aware of our learning target and how that daily learning target … builds into our overarching goals … and then they can constantly assess or see through our formative assessments and our feedback, how they're progressing toward achieving those goals and mastering those concepts and skills.*

In tandem, teachers and education staff (e.g., paraprofessionals, special education staff, etc.) come together and use structured reviews of the data to determine where students are in meeting their collective goals:

> *We evaluate student success starting from the … goals for each student, where they are and how we can move them along in their learning. Our goals operate at several tiers … we have a general fourth grade goal. Then we look at it in terms of individual students and what goal we have for this student so that we can move them in their learning, their understanding and progress.*

This underscores the importance of collaboration between students, teachers, and education staff to build the shared vision of teaching.

A Culture of Lifelong Learning Among School Staff

Administrators, teachers, and education staff alike are all highly motivated to improve both personally and professionally. Dedicated, committed self-starters, they share the importance of continued learning through professional development (PD). Their definition of professional development is broad, encompassing training across both formal and informal learning settings. All the schools use a combination of different types of PD, the design and delivery of which vary from in-house expert teams (who customize training to specific needs), to experts from international advocacy organizations (such as TASH).[17] School staff also connect with universities, colleges, support staff (e.g., school psychologists), instructional coaches, and teachers on special assignment (TOSAs). Students and local cultural experts are additional sources of knowledge teachers tap into, helping them increase their skills and abilities across a broad range of subjects.

While staff turn to PD to increase knowledge across content areas and pedagogical strategies, they also access training in other topics, including Powerful Partnerships; Special Education Boot Camp; Right Response; Guided

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[17] TASH is an international leader in disability advocacy. See https://tash.org/

Language Acquisition (GLAD); Social and Emotional Learning (SEL, e.g., RULER and Character Strong); Love and Logic; Trauma-Informed Trainings; Multi-Tiered Systems of Student Support (MTSS); Response to Intervention (RTI); formative and summative assessments; curriculum; Growth Mindset; equity; culturally responsive teaching; and data driven decisions and facilitation. Professional development in these content areas is delivered across a wide variety of platforms, including staff meetings, Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings, brown-bag lunches, book studies, ESD on-campus offerings, online, and compensated summertime PD, to name a few.

Frequent School Collaboration

Collaboration, one of the most frequent themes heard throughout the interviews, occurs frequently and in many ways. A teacher shared: "There is an understanding that the more we collaborate, the better we will do. We will perform at a higher level." Most interviewees said that positional power or hierarchy of value by job role is not present because classified staff, certificated staff, administrators, first-year teachers, paraprofessionals and veteran teachers alike collaborate on behalf of their students. This nonhierarchical collaboration allows all school staff to share their varying strengths and feel valued as part of the team. The outcomes are not only student success, but also trusting relationships among staff that provide social and emotional support for each other.

Formal collaborations occurred in professional learning circles across content areas, grade level, small teams (e.g., special education team), and building wide. Formal collaborations occur in weekly data meetings; co-teaching meetings; peer classroom observations; grade-level team sessions; building-wide initiatives (e.g., curricula adoption, safety, school improvement teams); essential learning skills (e.g., Whole Child, SEL supports); support center teams (e.g., ELL, gen-ed teachers, Title); special committees (e.g., family engagement, equity, Positive Behavioral Intervention System (PBIS); cross-disciplinary; specific programs (e.g., reading buddies, compass points); induction/mentoring new teachers; vertical/horizontal alignment; and book studies.

Also, informal collaborations occur frequently; in hallways, for example, where this later evolved into what one school called "mini-PLC meetings." Ubiquitous collaboration may be a challenge for some, and when that is the case, educators and teachers will perform a member self-check, asking new staff: "Is this where you want to be and is this what you want to do?" Another interviewee added, "[Collaboration] can be an issue in some schools. People would be like, 'Contractually you can't make me do that.' But in here it's like, 'Hey this is what we do. This is what we're about and you're either into it or you're not.'" Indeed, interviewees confirmed that when educators do not fit within this culture and do not feel a sense of belonging or membership to the group, they leave.

Data Driven Decisions

It is no surprise that all decisions are informed from extensive data at multiple levels: district, building, classroom, and small groups. The schools build a unified data collection system that supports aligned content and frequent common assessment. Any gaps in the data collection are filled with additional assessments for learning. Some assessments were designed to pinpoint areas where "just in time" additional teaching efficiently and effectively satisfies students' needs. Additionally, some schools support software programs that collect student social emotional perspectives and are able to include these data in order to take a whole child approach.

Data are disaggregated by grade level, content strand, demographics, individualized education plan characteristics and other factors. The analysis of the data is meaningful and precise and can influence the pace of school plans. As a teacher explained, "We are receptive to what the data tells us and do not just keep pushing forward with a plan if there's something else that's highlighted that we need to address."

Finally, knowing the amount of time teachers need to process and reflect on student data, administrators sought out creative ways to "braid" funding (e.g., using multiple related funding strands such as Title I, Title III, and grants) and use professional development days to support this effort. For example, some professional

development days supported a "Data Night" event that brought teachers together in a fun and congenial way to study and discuss the stories in the student data, and to plan and prepare interventions.

Funding Sources that Provide Necessary Resources

In many cases, the schools have additional funding sources to cover the costs of the resources (e.g., people, learning resources, furniture) needed to carry out their vision of equitable outcomes. School leaders shared that these additional funding sources are critical to braid together for adequate resources and include federal, state, local, and private foundation funding. Schools in unincorporated areas rely heavily on their local partners to provide and make up the necessary financial resources needed for student support.

Some schools are eligible for funding due to their serving students from nearby military bases, including funds from the Department of Defense (DOD), Department of Justice (DOJ), and Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA). These monies help support mental health counselors, a school-based health clinic, the Second-Step Program, and the purchase of scientific calculators in secondary schools. The funds also support a family liaison who assists schools to build a better understanding of the military culture and families.

A few of the study schools receive additional state funding as a part of the No Child Left Behind/Every Student Succeeds Act, as well as state school improvement grants which are provided to schools performing in the bottom 5 percent of the state (Table 17). The administrators from these schools commented that these funds are critical to move up from the bottom 5 percent.

Supplemental funding sources include the following:

- Federal: U.S. Department of Defense, U.S. Department of Justice, Drug Enforcement Agency, American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) Roadmap Grant

- State: Title I, Title II, LAP, BEST Mentor Model grant fund from OSPI

- Private: Technology grants

- Local: Bond levy, school foundation, parent teacher organization (PTO), local agencies, church organizations, higher education institutions, businesses, nonprofit organizations, community service clubs, health clinics

Sixteen of the 38 schools in Phase II of the study were previously designated as a struggling school under the state's accountability framework, the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This designation provided additional funding to braid in with multiple sources of funding in order to meet identified student needs. In 2012–2016, "priority" represented bottom 5 percent of the state, whereas that is named "comprehensive" in 2017–2019. Schools designated for specific student groups were designated "focus" in 2012–2016 and "targeted" for 2017–2019.

Table 17: Study Schools Previously Designated as Needing Support

District	School	Level	WA State Supports 2012–2016	WA State Supports 2017–2019
Brewster	Brewster MS	Middle School	Priority	
Clover Park	Harrison Preparatory School	High School		Targeted 1–2
East Valley (Yakima)	East Valley Central MS	Middle School	Priority	Targeted 1–2
Ephrata	Parkway Elem.	Elementary	Focus-EL	
Grandview	McClure Elem.	Elementary	Focus-SWD	Targeted 1–2
Highline	McMicken Heights Elem.	Elementary	Focus EL & SWD	

District	School	Level	WA State Supports 2012–2016	WA State Supports 2017–2019
Oak Harbor	North Whidbey MS	Middle School		Targeted 1–2
Richland	Jefferson Elem.	Elementary		Targeted 1–2
Seattle	Cleveland HS	High School	Priority	
Seattle	Rainier Beach HS	High School	Priority	
Seattle	West Seattle Elem.	Elementary	Priority	Targeted 1–2
Tacoma	Edison Elem.	Elementary	Priority	Targeted 1–2
Toppenish	Lincoln Elem.	Elementary	Priority	Comprehensive
Warden	Warden HS	High School		Targeted EL
Yakima	Roosevelt Elem.	Elementary	Priority	Targeted 1–2
Zillah	Zillah Intermediate	Elementary	Focus	

Characteristics Within Elementary and Secondary Schools

The next two sections separately spotlight elementary and secondary schools. Both middle and high schools are included in the secondary school section because of their similarities and few differences in the findings. Examples within each theme provide a glimpse into how mindsets manifest to change systems and dislodge systemic racism and oppression of students.

Spotlight on Elementary Schools

Children bring assets gained from their home and community with them to kindergarten. Before attending school, children enjoy learning at home through observation and "pitching in" in family and community endeavors (Rogoff, 2014). Learning is not time-bound within the confines of walls, like Western schooling, but instead embedded in the repertoires of education in everyday life. Children bring this knowledge with them to school; however, the school system is often not equipped to recognize, illuminate, and work with these assets. For example, students may be accustomed to social conversational talk rather than didactic responses; they may be accustomed to collaborative goals rather than individual goals. In kindergarten, these differences may register on assessments as "academically behind," thus signaling to administrators and teachers to administer interventions for kindergarten readiness in reading, writing, and mathematics, when in fact it is a misalignment of learning paradigms between the student and the school, and rather than piling on interventions, the school might need to shift habits and practices to better serve its community.

Learning Supports for Kindergarten Readiness

This section highlights the ways that the administrators and teachers in the elementary schools work creatively to jump-start children's readiness for formal school learning. One such way is through informal learning opportunities before school (e.g., library hour) as well as after school; for example, through the 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC; e.g., After School Program). The 21st CCLC program funding can be used for summer programming, and some schools extend the program throughout the entire summer (compared to the average 5–6 weeks). Taught by qualified teachers through a supplemental contract, students have access to high-quality educators year-round. They receive bus transportation and meals during the summer to lay the foundation for success in school, create a sense of belonging/connectedness, and to mitigate summer learning loss.

For pre-kindergartners, data drives the decision for some schools to offer summer programming to incoming kindergartners as they were "2 years off their mark academically." Elementary school staff take a long-term, action-oriented view, and dedicate resources to strategically build and strengthen kindergartners' abilities. For example: learning cohorts will gain the skills required for middle school academics through a 4-year summer program.

Family First Attitude — A Big School Family

Consistent across the elementary schools is the orientation of family first and the school as family too: "We are a giant school family … all of the students that are at our school, they're not just our own individual kids, they're all of ours." Administrators and teachers alike expressed deep feelings of connectedness to the school family and shared how this prioritization has made a difference:

> *… The school-family, it happens throughout the day. If somebody's feelings are hurt coming in off the playground, we're stopping and we're addressing that and letting that child be heard. The kids … look out for members of their school family… It's a really big deal, for sure.*

Being close and connected as a school family boosts trust in each other to act on behalf of students. A teacher offered the following description that nicely illustrates a common theme across the focus groups:

> *I think it stems from all of our kids are all of our kids and we're all in education to help these kids. I trust my teammates 100%. If I send a student over there for math, they're going to get what they need because we plan so closely together and we talk about what that group of students, looking at the data, what they are going to need.*

In action, operating in this environment means that schools make decisions based on what is best for their students' families. For example, in some rural schools, the school calendar is adjusted according to agriculture and orchard season schedules, so students are successful and available resources are maximized. Additionally, in these rural schools, decisions are made to provide year-round wraparound services, with the goal of ensuring stability in the family during the summer, as most parents work in the fields and children need a safe place to go to learn during the day.

Some schools recognize that a top-down approach does not engage those parents who do not usually come into the school. These schools offer opportunities for parents to lead the meetings. In this model, the school staff are the listeners, and the families are the leaders influencing schools' actions. As an administrator shared:

> *Our Family Advisory Council has been a great opportunity to engage parents that may not be coming into the school for different reasons. A lot of our students are ELL students, and so there is that language barrier. But with this advisory council, we've worked really hard to open up that communication and platform and to utilize our translators and to really let parents guide the meeting. And so, they are feeling like their voices are heard and then taking their ideas with curriculum and discussions and putting those into place in our classrooms.*

Creating a Non-Passive Student-Centered Classroom

Throughout the primary classrooms, there is a keen ambition to create conditions that will promote active student involvement in their learning. Opportunities for student engagement are continually being weighted as a factor. When students are passively achieving grade-level expectations and not reaching their highest potential, the pedagogy is reevaluated. An administrator explained their thinking as: "Yes, [the students] are on time and they turn work in, but it's not deep enough." They continued, "Teachers were struggling with how to teach reading features [and] saying that it was the curriculum, but no, it's not the curriculum … it's the methodology [pedagogy] … we didn't have enough student voice."

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Terminology used in the schools illustrates the concept of a student-centered classroom. As a teacher shared:

> *That's common [in this school], where it's very clear that this is our classroom, not my classroom, and the space is for you to learn, not me, I already know Spanish. [I ask the students], 'What would you be most interested in focusing on?' or 'What questions do you have about it so we can tie that in?'*

Another teacher explained how they previously created lessons but now they share the learning target, opening it up to students to design their own lesson, so that they can learn in a way that is most meaningful to them. They said:

> *The kids usually have choices of how you want to tackle this and then lead … in the past I've always given them the lessons and given them the learning target and gave them a little bit of leeway. [Now] they have ownership and they're able to create their own lessons or modify them in their own way. So, they're very much in charge of their own destinies in a way.*

These examples illustrate a commitment to question the status quo and prioritize the need to build teachers' capacity to promote student ideas in classroom teaching.

Going Beyond an "At Grade Level" Mentality

Students are not left "at grade level," but instead are provided with the opportunity to learn unbounded. Structures (e.g., schedule, resources) are in place for teachers to provide effective enrichment for students, so that they can continue to learn wherever they are on the grade level progression. In addition, the schools work to remove barriers, such as language, for students to participate in gifted and highly capable programs. As one administrator explained:

> *We have a high number of transitional bilingual students (TBS) and we didn't have any gifted English teachers. Our system was basically saying, gosh, if you're a TBS, you really can't be in a gifted classroom because you don't have language support. So, I found a little bit of funding and worked really hard with our SPED director and every grade level now has a gifted teacher that is a transitional bilingual education teacher. We've been able to grow and equitably provide our gifted program and that's been huge for us and the morale of the parents and students … 'Hey, I'm smart too', kind of a thing.*

The concept of "student success groups" and differentiated instruction is a common theme (student grouping is common in RTI and MTSS systems and these are evolving to include students who are ahead of grade level or gifted/highly capable students). Students attend the success group that matches their needs and current level of content knowledge. Whether below or above grade level, the groups are fluid and informed by data. This flexible student grouping model has shifted the language used by a teacher who described the process of tailoring instructional practices as well as content to match students' needs:

> *We're not looking at my class anymore, we're looking at our classes and we're asking, 'What are we doing for these kids?' And you start to really develop groups targeted towards those needs that then adjust frequently. Every six to eight weeks formally, but then infrequently weekly dependent upon the kids' needs.*

Opportunities are provided for students to work at their cognitive levels, where collaboration on learning assignments is encouraged and where social and emotional difficulties diminish when students work together. Students benefit from having more choice in what materials they use and what assignments and projects they complete. Accelerated learning is a common practice, as is student goal setting and self-assessment. Finally, students are provided independent projects that permit them to explore a topic more deeply.

Inclusion

Most of the elementary school staff interviewed did not talk about students with disabilities; however, the interviewees who worked in special education provided a glimpse into their work. These schools are changing discriminatory attitudes and enabling opportunities for students with disabilities to interact and build social relationships. Administrators, teachers, counselors, and parents attend PD to gain substantial SPED knowledge and skills that promote accessibility to content and improving students' learning.

General education (gen ed) teachers shared that they are impacted by PD allowing them to explore their personal implicit and explicit biases. Armed with a deeper understanding, they now have higher expectations of students with disabilities.

A teacher said, "I would say the inclusive professional development [sessions] for me has really pushed my practice and I'm able to come back [to the school] and make some changes." For example, some interviewees described the slow, challenging process of creating positive change and implementing co-teaching models with differentiated instruction. In the co-teaching model, both gen ed and SPED teachers collaborate to co-teach in the classroom. "Sometimes you can't even tell that I am the special education teacher, and they are the gen ed teacher and I think that is powerful," said a teacher. Roles "switch in and out" and both acknowledge that they learn from each other.

Social Emotional Support for Elementary Teachers

Social emotional learning supports (SEL) are in place for teachers as well as students. The interviews provided a clear picture of the emphasis on SEL for school staff and how it is embedded throughout the school day. Teachers shared:

> *Something that our district has really pushed … this year is generation wellness. So, every classroom in our school has resources and a little calm down area … this isn't just for our students, but it's for the teachers as well.*

Teachers model the behavior of wellness and mindfulness by asking for help from their peers. They work together to figure out ways to be supportive to each other to mitigate fatigue. Informal wellness checks occur throughout the day to discuss work, allow more time together, and to strengthen the bond between team members. Teachers take collective responsibility to provide SEL support to each other:

> *We really look towards each other for encouragement, collaboration, support, and we really work together and we're like a family basically. And we're here for each other for not just only things that are dealing with school, but also outside of school.*

> *Our social emotional learning team does a good job of also recognizing when that's happening and advocating for those teachers…The social emotional learning team had done some work around mindfulness and making sure that teachers are taking that time to be mindful and taking deep breaths and getting yourself to a good place and how we can push that with our students as well. And open up that space for mindfulness too. So as a whole team, it's just a really great culture of support and trust.*

There is a clear emphasis on the importance of self-care among staff so that they can be present, available, and at their best for their students. As a teacher shared:

> *When things are out of whack and we're realizing that plates are really full or teachers are feeling stressed, we take that time to take a step back. Administrators will often shift the agenda for our meeting or we'll take time in our team meetings or our classroom meetings to make sure that we're slowing down and getting ourselves to a good space where we can learn and be the best educators we can be.*

Finally, the school counselor is also a trusted friend who provides SEL support for teachers, as described here:

We have such a wonderful counselor here and she's not only a good listener for our kids, but she's a good listener for our staff. And she's somebody that I can go to and say, 'I'm struggling with this.' She's an active listener, but she's also somebody who builds us up and encourages us and picks us up.

Social Emotional Supports for Elementary Students

Social emotional learning is at the forefront of everything, supported with a school-wide systematic approach to weave SEL into everyday activities. As a teacher shared:

Sometimes it's in the morning, sometimes later, but the point is to bring students together and talk about how they're feeling and what they're dealing with and going through so that we can be in the best place to do our learning that day. Having that through line of social emotional learning I think has been what's led to our school culture.

Administrators' and teachers' descriptions of social/emotional supports align with the responsive classroom model[18] "designed to create safe, joyful and engaging classroom and school communities for both students and teachers." Explicit lessons are taught, focusing on social emotional learning. Teachers cited numerous evidence-based strategies in use, including RULER,[19] which teaches the five skills of emotional intelligence (Recognizing, Understanding, Labeling, Expressing, and Regulating), and Responsive Classroom. "[What has been helpful is] educating [the children] on how to control their emotions and release those emotions that they may have coming from home to school, so that they can be ready to learn," began a teacher. They continued to describe how a counselor does monthly group presentations within each grade level, so students better understand the material. Additional evidence-based strategies mentioned can be found in Appendix G.

Within the classrooms, teachers described a physical area set aside for students when they are feeling like they need some time away from the group. One school referred to this area as "the pause center" where students talk about their feelings using colors. "If they're feeling in the blue, which is sad … they can take a moment to gather their feelings and thoughts … most kids view it as a place as 'I need a moment so I can continue to be my best self throughout the day."

Effective behavioral health and social emotional learning supports are ideal when the staff providing theses supports share the same ethnicity as the student. Some of the study schools have counseling and health staff from the community who share the same ethnicity as students. They work hand-in-hand with families, as described below:

We have a wonderful staff member that's a full-time school nurse. So, if there's medical or family issues, she's a member of the community and can intervene. She's often the first place when a student is identified as needing some support or some help. We also do talk to the Indian Health Center and that's not a separate thing. They're more than willing to talk to us and we talk to them so that integration is a really nice part of our school also.

Spotlight on Secondary Schools

The following sections disaggregate the overarching themes that emerged from the focus groups with secondary school administrators, teachers, and students. The themes are a combination of frameworks and approaches that promote equity in all aspects of learning, equitable outcomes, cultural relevance, and provide social emotional support specifically for secondary students and their families.

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[18] https://www.responsiveclassroom.org/

[19] https://www.ycei.org/ruler

Leading with Equity

Administrators seek out inequitable policies and unwritten practices perpetuated in the old model of a building leadership team (BLT), usually comprised of department leaders. New models of BLTs are developed, transitioning to a team focused on eliminating the marginalization of students of color.

> *In our building equity team, [which] I couldn't be more proud of, they have been growing and growing every year. We will transition from a design where the BLT, building leadership team, generally your department leaders, [to a design where] … we want our equity leaders steering our ship.*

Similarly, a building administrator shared his forward-thinking approach to the school's equity policy, and how they took the initiative to create an in-house equity team before their school district:

> *We started our [equity] work at our school 7 years ago. The school has a Director of Equity and Family Engagement that was hired into the district 6 years ago. So, it wasn't something that came down as a district mandate or some sort of a program that was rolled out… It is authentic and it's embedded.*

A building administrator described how they analyzed data in the classroom grading books and reflected on the mechanisms in place that increased the likelihood that a student would fail. The administrator explained how this led to the adoption of more equitable grading practices, resulting in fewer students failing:

> *…This started back when we were really looking at our instructional delivery, and one of the data points we really looked at was student failure rate. I think we asked the question a lot, "Are kids failing because they don't know the material, or are they failing because they're not complying with our expectations of turning work in?" One of the things we pushed on pretty hard, and this probably took 4 or 5 years of work, was to really look at the grading practice, and it's a first-level change, but the thinking behind it obviously is a whole lot deeper. We have eliminated zeros in our grade book. While we still use a percentage system, 50 is our lowest F.*

Adults are not the only equity leaders in these schools. Exemplifying a framework of relational power as opposed to unilateral power (Warren et al., 2001), students take a leadership role in educating their teachers and peers about race. This perspective requires less dependence on institutional agents (e.g., schools) to serve as "gatekeepers" in the quest for equity (Ishimaru, Torres, et al., 2016).

> *A club called STARS; that is, Students Talking About Race Safely. So, this is a student based, mixed group club of kids who want to be the social justice warriors for equity in terms of race, so they're learning how to train other clubs. They've now been traveling from club to club, they did a bond presentation for us, and they're running activities for other clubs to really start to get comfortable talking about race, and your individual position in race and the larger conversation.*

Priority is given to reduce the gaps in staff members' cultural knowledge and perspective of the communities they serve. One such indicator includes the empowerment of students in their club (e.g., Black Lives Matter, Latino/a Club, etc.) to act as a valued committee, increasing the cultural sensitivity and awareness of the staff. Empowered high school students in the clubs planned and delivered professional development to staff and provided an honest account of race and racism as a social construct. This is an example of an "equity culture" where "student voices are honored, which leads to student agency and leadership, which in turn allows students to not only feel included and supported but also to be provided opportunities to confront and change some of the oppressive structure that they may be privileged or harmed by" (Fullan & Malloy, 2019).

Framework to Support Equitable Outcomes

One of the top contributors cited for secondary students' success is a framework to monitor equitable access to the supports needed at various times in a student's academic life. The most cited framework is a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), "a systemic, continuous improvement framework in which data-based problem-solving and decision making is practiced" to provide the academic and behavioral supports needed at the time.[20] Administrators and teachers feel that the MTSS framework is "spot on" and allows for personalized early interventions for every student "who is struggling in any way, shape or form." Schools adopt the MTSS framework to implement blended, evidence-based practices (EBP), to improve climate, and reinforce the importance of establishing and repairing trusting relationships. An administrator continued, "Our [MTSS] focus starts with ninth graders and they aren't allowed to fail … before we have arms wrapped around them."

Principals alike described MTSS as "a safety net" and "interconnected web" that signals an increase in support as the need increases, until the student is "lifted up" to achieve "equal access and equal outcomes." Each school has varying interventions in their MTSS framework; however, several common EBPs mentioned included restorative practice,[21] and positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS).[22] These utilize repair circles, while class meetings provide constructivist culture practices.

Earning a Diploma and Career/College Readiness

Prevalent in the secondary schools is a strong focus on earning a diploma and preparing students for their postsecondary endeavors. Some secondary schools challenged the deficit-based narrative around the relationship between student mobility/family responsibility and "drop-out." They shifted to a college mindset where students are earning credits toward their graduation every year, with an upfront understanding that this may take more than 4 years. This mindset reduces the stress high school students face if life events take priority for a period. Students are able to take a longer-term view (5 years) to attain their high school diploma, thus reducing stress and giving them room to take care of their family without being labeled in deficit terms.

The schools focus on preparing students for postsecondary endeavors: entrepreneurship, career, and/or college. Many of the administrators and students interviewed described the dual-credit program and its benefits. Especially in rural schools in agricultural communities, schools are responsive to families' desires to provide the opportunity for their student to go to college "because they didn't have the opportunity to go to and get that higher education so we can have a career in our life."

Additionally, programs are in place to bring professional trades from the community into the school, to create networks and build awareness of postsecondary pathways alternative to college. An administrator shared his desire to raise awareness of students that the professional trades may be an attractive alternative to college work while fulfilling the needs of the community.

> *[We] really [want to] help kids become aware … of what's in the community for them to pursue … [like] welding and the electrician's union. The carpenters union came to a board meeting to show their support [and said] we need people to come into the trades and work in the construction or carpenters union.*

The programs focus on building practical life skills, networks, and relationships that students can use to help launch postsecondary careers. One such program mentioned is SkillsUSA. Students reflected on this approach to teaching and learning; spending their time on activities which are relevant and value-added: "I think the system of how they teach is going to help you if you go to college or do any businesses or anything like that."

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[20] https://www.pbisrewards.com/blog/what-is-mtss/

[21] https://www.iirp.edu/

[22] https://www.pbis.org/

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SEL Supports

Focus group participants described their secondary schools as a family-like school culture with trusting relationships amongst administrators, teachers, staff, and students—a strong sense of community and caring for each other. Teachers and students alike described how they receive the social/emotional support needed from their school community, especially during difficult times. The PLCs that teachers participated in offered SEL supports for teachers, and the building administrators also provide SEL support for teachers.

Students have multiple teachers and staff members (e.g., janitor, bus driver, coach) with whom they have an established, trusting relationship, whom they can confide in and ask for advice: "We do have a counselor, but then again, like everybody, every teacher in here acts as their own little degree of counseling." Some students mentioned that they receive SEL support from their guidance counselor or advisor, "When I wasn't having a good day, I would just go and talk to my high school counselor or my Gear Up advisor. They would always be there to give me good advice and lift me up when I didn't have a good day."

Other students described how the school brings their mood up when they are feeling down:

> *When I am not having a great day, what make me feel great is when I walk into school everyone greets you and make me feel welcome and loved. Also, I love how many teachers ask you on how your day is going if you need any help and on how they can help us.*

> *Our school is a safe zone, where we're open to discuss things and teachers are always willing to listen and help you with whatever you need. If it's a bad day, or a family member is injured or just stuff like basic, everything that's going through your head, they will always listen to you.*

> *Our counseling department ... I believe they're the best. Just the way they care for students. We have our migrant counselor as well [and] our Native American liaison. I feel like if a student just has trouble getting to school, they have no problem just going and picking them up in a school vehicle. Just making sure that those needs are met, I feel like our counseling department is absolutely top-notch.*

Clear and Consistent High Expectations

Consistency across key aspects in the secondary schools help provide clarity to students around high expectations. For example, across content areas, teachers have common grading practices (e.g., acceptance of late work, etc.) which serve to reinforce and remind students.

Some schools use a cohort model of support to provide consistency and establish trust and further meaningful relationships with students. Each grade level cohort has an assistant principal and a counselor who move with the students from 9th through 12th grade. This model allows the assistant principal, counselors and success coordinators to focus on the challenges of that grade level cohort collectively, and thus more effectively.

Across the K–12 interviews, administrators and teachers exhibit a deep understanding of factors and conditions that lead to student disengagement as they progress through elementary and transition from intermediate to secondary school. They are astute in customizing their approach (e.g., supports, interventions, etc.) to the situational context.

Characteristics by Role

Consistent evaluation and the changing of old school systems which promote oppression of students is difficult and challenging work. A cross analysis of the extensive focus groups and interviews revealed particular characteristics in the many school staff successfully doing this work. Interviewees consistently emphasized the collective nature of the work. As such, characteristics and traits by job role are offered and discussed to provide

insight into the mindset of the people successfully accomplishing the collective work, and how these various roles interact with each other.

Administrators

Both school district and building administrators felt and spoke with a sense of urgency to implement solutions. Many of them inherited the school with challenges, including high staff turnover and low academic achievement. They immediately elevated the importance of evaluation and reflective processes, assessment, and implemented a comprehensive system to address the myriad challenges. These systems include the establishment of baseline and continuous student academic achievement disaggregated by student demographics (e.g., EL, etc.), nonacademic data, and/or a multi-tiered system of support.

Each building administrator operates with a clear vision of the overall data-driven system needed to support student learning. "You have to triangulate the data," said a principal when reflecting on the additional assessments they implemented. They established a schedule of regular reviews of student data "to look for insight into shifts or a lack of shifts" in student understanding.

Annual baseline data and the shifts are the foundation for expanded discussions around curriculum support, teacher professional development plans, and school improvement plans. "We constantly do formative assessments that drive to the school improvement plan," shared a building principal whose accountability is fostered through regularly scheduled presentations on student progress to their district administrator and the board.

Action-oriented problem solving characterizes how leadership works together with teachers to triage and deliver solutions to students and their families. By working collectively, they utilize their networks outside of school (e.g., church groups, community groups) when families need extra assistance at home or advice or assistance in navigating systems (e.g., medical, behavior health).

Additionally, administrators came with an eagerness to reform policy, such as discipline policy, and devise more constructive strategies to keep students engaged. They explained how they work to keep communication lines open and invite dialogue: "… The kids that have issues are the ones you talked to the most, but it also gives you the time to talk and get to know those kids. So they'll get feedback that allows us to individualize some of our interventions," shared a principal. For example, instead of taking students to Becca court[23] for attendance, the administrator tries to find a way to get the student to come to school and talk about ways to remove barriers. An administrator reflected on students' feelings when they decide to come back to school:

> *Mainly the biggest barrier is guilt and shame and feeling like they're lost. [We] find a way to welcome them back … building some hope that we show a lot of grace … so that the kids feel like, all right, I can get a second chance or a third chance or a fourth chance.*

Administrators expressed how they maintain a critical lens on educators' mindsets, with no tolerance for deficit-thinking. One strategy to maintain this culture is through formalized induction of teachers who are new to the district. Matched mentors, extensive professional development, supplemental training, and regular check-ins help new teachers learn and open their eyes to leading with equity. Administrators build in ample time during the school day for teachers to learn from each other through in-house expertise. In-house customized professional development and training, with the assistance of outside education consultants, provide "a more committed focus" to creating successful systems with the conditions needed for diversity, equity, and inclusion.

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[23] Washington State law, RCW 28A. 225.030, sometimes referred to as the Becca Bill, requires that school districts file truancy petitions with the Juvenile Court when students (up to the age of 17) have accumulated seven unexcused absences in 1 month or 10 unexcused absences in an academic year.

Through purposeful observation of colleagues, new teachers are afforded the opportunities and direction needed to develop a mindset conducive to illuminating the strengths of students. And when new teachers do not fit into the school culture, rather than compromise students' learning, administrators make the courageous decision for contract nonrenewal during the probationary period.

> *Leaders in equity cultures consider all of the issues and perspective but are not compromised by those with power and privilege when making appropriate decisions.*
>
> **Fullan and Malloy, 2019**

Further, some district leaders have shifted their own practice in ways to support principals' learning and have created a Principal Professional Learning Community. With an attitude of teaching rather than directing, principals actively engage with their peers and supports are embedded within principals' practice in real situations, rather than in stand-alone PD.

Finally, the administrators bring the trait of humility as they align policies and practices with anti-racist goals and publicly recognize and acknowledge that they can do better.

> *… We've made a real commitment to becoming an anti-racist organization. And so we're in a yearlong commitment in developing an ethnic studies approach to everything we do across all curriculums. So partnering with an ethnic studies organization now to do all the nine modules and that's been met with a lot of open arms and a lot of vulnerability. And so I think that that one also rises to the top of what's really important at our school. Our community is beautifully diverse in so many ways. And you know, it's really important for us to lead by listening and understanding who our students are and what strengths and assets they're bringing to the learning community. So that we can then create curriculum and content and learning experiences that are rich and diverse and reflective of our students and families.*

Teachers

Teachers exhibited a number of common traits: (1) leadership; (2) interdependence rather than independence; (3) trust amongst colleagues/willingness to take risks; and (4) eagerness and enthusiasm to continue to improve their personal practice.

Teacher Leadership

The teachers interviewed exhibit traits of teacher leaders centering equity. Some participate in the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)/Association of Educational Service Districts (AESD) Washington State Fellows Network (the Fellows Network).[24] The Fellows Network is an exemplary professional development model for building academic content, pedagogical strategies, and leadership skills especially around achieving equitable access and outcomes. Facilitated discussions led by the ESD Regional Coordinators equip teachers with the skills necessary to examine potential marginalization of students, challenge the school system, and ultimately transform it.

Teachers spoke about the distributed leadership model in their school, and how they are empowered to be proactive: "Yes, there is more responsibility on us … but I see that it is a way in which we can accomplish what we need to," shared a teacher. Another interviewee explained:

> *It's distributed leadership. We don't have to wait for admin or our coaches, we take it upon the collaboration of our team and we implement it and go through the cycle over and over to meet our students' needs.*

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[24] OSPI Washington State Fellows Network: https://www.k12.wa.us/educator-support/educator-leadership/washington-state-fellows-network

Some teacher leaders expressed a personal commitment to change the education system for students; fortified and resilient, certain teachers shared that they experience microaggressions at times but are nevertheless driven by a better vision for students.

Teacher Norm—Interdependence not Independence

The individualism-collectivism framework is used to describe different dimensions of cultural norms (Hofstede, 2001). People who have a collectivistic perspective value group norms and goals and are interdependent within their group. This perspective came across consistently in the focus groups. Teachers saw and described themselves in terms connected to other teachers and students, rather than in individualistic terms (seeing themselves as separate).

They expressed the idea that "no one person can do their job alone" and collaboration occurs continuously to benefit not only the students but also to avoid burnout and overload on individual teachers. "Just to reiterate that our success within our school is based on what everyone does … it's a team effort," shared a teacher concluding, "It's not one or two people here and there shining."

> *But I think there's an understanding that the more we collaborate, the better we will do. We will perform at a higher level. It's also more interesting to us as adults. It's more positive. There's no longer a sense that any one person can do it alone, which certainly when I started teaching, some people have that, but that does not exist.*

Interdependence is a lifeline for teachers based on trust, collaboration, and communication. A school culture of interdependence permeates throughout the entire building. The possibility of working without interdependence, collaboration, and teamwork is unfathomable for some teachers.

> *I don't think I could work anywhere else because I don't know how to be a teacher in a different school. I don't know how to be on my own. I don't know how to not have support from the entire school. I would have really struggled.*

The shared group identity is facilitated by school-wide professional development and professional learning communities:

> *I remember the days before we had PLCs, where it was just kind of every man for himself in the classroom. We tried to stay relatively together, but we weren't teaching in the same ways, we weren't showing information in the same ways. I was sort of in on the ground floor of that…I think every teacher would feel lost without their PLC now. I can't imagine working on my own again. I think that professional development and that training for everybody has been critical to what we do, how we do it, and how it affects the kids.*

Trust — "A No Judgement Zone" for Teachers

Teachers expressed the importance of risk-taking, failure, and struggle in a "no judgement zone" in order to become better for the students. "It's a no judgement zone and people are there to help you process and help you reflect," began a teacher. "And I think that, that's what's truly making ourselves with such strong educators," they concluded. Another shared:

> *We work really, really hard and none of these things come easy and we've seen a lot of times where a lot of things we try on don't work and they fail and we struggle through it together.*

The trusting environment nurtures teachers to be comfortable with their practice as public and visible. "Our practice is public, we don't hide it," began a teacher. "We want people coming in. We want people looking at our work. We want to bounce ideas," they concluded. Vulnerability and trust are critical to build an environment where feedback and brainstorming among teachers and staff are embraced.

In this risk-taking zone, teachers also trust the administrators to provide the tools they need to be successful, especially when implementing a new model to improve student learning. A superintendent explained how the

district moved away from a "pull out" model to reduce the stigma of a student having to leave the room to work with a paraprofessional. They said student peers think, "Oh, you're a dummy. You have to leave the room to work on reading." Instead, the new "push in" model allows the student to remain in the classroom and the teacher provides the instruction the student needed. The district works to equip teachers with the tools needed to provide this instruction. They explained:

> *[The teachers] put their data on the wall … and it's structured around the coaches … we got our math coach, we already had the reading coach … there was a tremendous increase in the level of trust that was developed because we were investing in them [and] providing the tools to do so. If you look at our reading scores for the last 5 years, they have done nothing but increase at literally every grade level ever since. So they created this beautiful system. It continues to this day and they use their data.*

Eagerness and Enthusiasm to Continue to Learn and Grow

A predominant trait of the teachers is an eagerness and enthusiasm to continue to learn and grow across many topics, including equity, diversity, inclusion, culture, empowering student voice, etc. They also pursue increased knowledge in their specific content area, including content standards, formative and summative assessment, culturally responsive curriculum/pedagogy, etc. A more complete list is included in Appendix G. Teachers pursue advanced degrees in content area, national board certification, and the OSPI/AESD Fellows' Network, a 3-year teacher leadership program. This exemplifies a teacher growth mindset.

Teachers are concerned not only with their practice and transferring their professional knowledge to their peers, but they are also concerned that their colleagues are receiving the professional learning that they need to improve their practice. "Sometimes we have to challenge each other and do it with kindness. And I think that's one of the biggest things that you're just, you feel safe being able to be a professional and challenge one another," shared a teacher.

Students

Students reflecting the diversity of the schools shared their perspectives on multiple aspects, including how their school promotes equity and inclusion, student voice, student leadership, and equitable outcomes for all students. Additionally, common themes emerged across all of the student focus groups and their thoughts and feedback are summarized within each of the themes below.

Equity and Inclusion—Students' Perspectives

The conversations with students revealed the intentional focus the administrators and teachers have on equity and inclusion. In a trusting environment, students engage in discussions in classrooms, in their clubs, and in after-school informal activities. Students described the positive outcomes, including becoming closer as a school community and expanding perspectives beyond "two ethnicities" as one student expressed:

> *Last year, our entire thing was inclusion. It was bringing everybody's background, race, ethnicity, and putting them together so the school could be closer as a community and just an overall school. It was a good outcome. So we can have the same common goal and we also have everybody's different aspects. So it's not just two ethnicities in comparison … we have more voices.*

Day after day, the schools work to include opportunities for students to learn, process, and critically discuss current issues of significance related to diversity, racism, and privilege. One student acknowledged the cognitive complexity and nuance with which some teachers discuss current events, and expressed appreciatively, "[Our teacher would] go over current events every morning before we start the class. So we are kept up on that pretty often. I definitely think that is helpful … some students were like, 'Okay, this is so much harder doing this.'"

Students feel safe and shared they have "a lot of different learning experiences where we can contribute our differences," such as in their current events courses, advisory, and in their student-led clubs. They enjoyed lessons on diversity, Latino/a culture, and Black Lives Matter presented by their teachers who wore t-shirts with messages of support:

> *For advisory, and especially this month, we've had lessons on diversity. We have lessons on Latino/a month, we had lessons on Black Lives Matter and what it means. The teachers wore [themed] t-shirts and gave out [backpack] pins [while] talking about diversity of the heart and Black Lives Matter … and we all have a discussion at the end of the lesson.*

Students expressed empathy and support for their peers "struggling with identity" and are proud that their school provides a safe place where they feel accepted:

> *An after-school club, called the LGBTQ, helps a lot of students who struggle with identifying themself or who want to identify themselves but can't because they're afraid of being judged. That kind of gives them a standpoint and a place where they feel accepted. Even though, from what I've seen, our school overall accepts them and we want them to express their differences.*

Equitable Outcomes

Students all agreed that their school supports students of all races, ethnicities, and cultures. Students commonly cited the key elements of their school's success as a school that is inclusive, welcoming, and has a family-like culture. They shared that their teachers provide the necessary support unique to each student because "they just want every kid to succeed." They agreed that their schools support students "in a way that doesn't discriminate people of other races."

Students new to this country cite the dual-language learning program as a critical element to their academic success. This makes them feel more welcomed and "they [the school] don't make them feel less." New students still learning English also receive student-led, simultaneous translation support during class to keep up with learning the academic content.

The students interviewed, many of whom were first-generation college students for their families, spoke about the value of education. They shared the ways the school engages their parents to learn about college and academic requirements and reduce overall apprehension. Inviting parents to the college campus with their student and holding parent evening information sessions in their first language helped parents increase their comfort level and confidence in allowing their student to leave home to complete their degree. They reflected that with large family responsibilities, gaining college credit and financial literacy while attending high school is the ideal path to meet their life goals:

> *As we keep getting older, we help our parents and siblings. We see the struggle our parents are going through. We feel it is our responsibility to get a college degree and come back and support them. We understand that we have something great going on and we can't just throw it away.*

> *A lot of what I'm taking in school now influences my future … what life's going to be outside of school … financial literacy [and] colleges and making sure you know how to use your money right … you already have a pre-mindset of what it will be like before you actually start experiencing it.*

Students as Agents of Change

Empowered students expressed a personal responsibility not only for their academic success but also for their peers' success. They embody the same care and guidance they have received from school staff and extend it to their peers. Students shared:

We see a little of our responsibility to get students on track. We scold students to get them on track. We understand that things get hard and since we've all been there, we make sure we're there to help. We understand that what's happening outside of school may trigger something, so we make sure our friends are okay.

I think from my sense, through my experience, I try to be that example, but teachers try to set a standard. So, the teachers don't correct [my peers] but the students may correct them. It just takes that accountability that students should have on other students.

Structures are in place to move beyond the old paradigm of the "sage on the stage" teacher and the "passive learner" student. Instead, student agency is promoted, clearing a path for students to achieve the outcomes they desire not only in their lives but in their peers' lives as well. Agency is exercised through peer-to-peer mentoring opportunities both formally and informally. As these students shared:

We actually have a mentorship program for seniors to freshman … during our core flex period. Everyone would get assigned a student for the entire year, and they would just talk about all the things through high school, and help with homework, and stuff like that. I'd like to say that even the seniors are very approachable…

I did [like the mentors], they were great. They got to meet us, talk to us, you got one-on-one time with them for assignments and everything.

Definitely the students help a lot too because I would go to lunch and like struggle with my homework after my classes. And then they would be like, "Oh, like, I can help you" with that or "Go to this teacher and they can do this for you …"

Students spoke about the benefits they received from their advisory and clubs focused on leadership skills. Authentic and relevant experiences increase student agency as student leaders, for example, work alongside teachers to help assist their community members in obtaining U.S. citizenship.

Student Voice

Students affirmed that their schools clear multiple paths for them to offer their voice and influence their school and classroom. "All the staff are very open to suggestions and open to talk to students … they love talking to students," shared a student. Student clubs are invited to take on leadership roles and influence school culture. They provide opportunities for students to think critically about ways their school can value and embrace cultural differences. Multiple students talked about the ways their school encourages and amplifies their voice, for example, through student clubs:

Part of my responsibility to my club is to make sure that all of the students' voices are heard. I do my best to make sure that [my peers'] ideas are incorporated. I can tell that they are satisfied when they see their idea used.

Students talked positively about informal learning structures such as clubs and student-led events, spaces that provide them with the opportunity to create after-school clubs in areas that they are passionate about. A teacher advisor is assigned to support student voice and agency in clubs that are led by and open to all students. Some clubs are focused on cultural learning and sharing, such as the Latino/a and Native American clubs, where student-led activities and events are held inside and outside of the school. Clubs like the Black Student Union provide a place for discourse on a range of topics related to students of color, as well as an exploration of the contributions to history, music, and art made by people of color.

Within the classroom, a trusting environment provides students with opportunities to learn and "talk about our differences within ethnicity, culture, and genders." As a student shared:

We also have a lot of learning experiences where we can contribute our differences. When I was in... Heritage Spanish we had opportunities to … talk about our differences within ethnicity, culture, or even gender.

Across the interviews, students affirmed that their voices are heard and acted upon down to the classroom level. A student shared that they said to their teacher, "We should change the layout of the class, it would be easier for me to focus, because maybe I can't focus in the line setting." The student added that the desks were arranged differently when they returned to the class.

Students' Cultural Strengths & Identity Are at the Center

Cultural strengths and identity are centered at these schools, reducing the need for students to straddle a line between home and school, feeling the need to be a different person in each place. For example, a school with a large AI/AN population fortifies Native students' identity when building administrators and teachers welcome students each morning in their native language. In some grade levels, math is taught using cultural traditions like canoe building. Some schools partner with local museums or cultural centers and display artwork around the school campus, offering rich cultural narratives through art that are relevant to the students and their families.

Students talked with excitement about the cultural celebrations they led including Martin Luther King Day, Cinco de Mayo, and Día de los Muertos. A middle schooler described the key role their club played in leading the school's celebration of Día de Los Muertos (Day of the Dead) where they built an agenda and included photos of loved ones who died to honor their memory. "That was very special to me and probably to everyone participating," they said. Día de los Muertos is also a way to learn about oral histories and elevate student voice and participation. Through these activities, the schools reinforce the value of students' cultural heritage and identity by empowering students to develop deeper connections through the sharing of their families' oral histories. Teachers and staff also benefit by better understanding their students through their stories and hearing about how they navigate between school life, home, family, and community. Pep rallies and assemblies feature culturally diverse motivational speakers multiple times a year, who speak about current issues of importance to students and offer advice.

Seniors interviewed expressed enjoyment learning about the strengths of the diverse Latino/a people in multiple high school classes. Their Spanish language class (taught by a Latino/a teacher), history, and leadership classes all intentionally include lessons that teach about the strengths in the Latino/a culture as described by a senior:

Whenever the Spanish and history teachers can implement a lesson, on a topic where it applies to a lot of students or they've been used to seeing it since they were a kid, they always do. Even if a lot of the kids know about it, they still do the lesson. Not because they feel that they need to, but because they feel it's just a nice refresher for anyone who doesn't know, but for some people, "Oh, okay, I forgot that."

Students' Creativity Expressed in the Physical Environment

A priority is creating a physical environment that reflects the student's voice, culture, and identity to foster a sense of belonging.[25] A high school student in the Mural Club expressed how they felt empowered by the administrator to paint murals on the walls and explained:

Our school has a lot of student artwork around, and I really appreciate that because it gives us a voice and lets us know the school wants us to be there and that they appreciate us there.

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[25] For details on the connection between student identity, environments, and outcomes see:
https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/full/10.1146/annurev-devpsych-040920-042107

The Center for Educational Effectiveness

It's nice to see my friends at school and also the scenery. I really like the artwork because it's so different and it seems like every month there's something new. For example, we have this tree … and so every year new rocks come around the tree, and the students in the art club, they painted the rocks, so it's really nice to see everyone's rocks.

Native art is displayed around the campus of several schools in the study with high populations of American Indian students, thus creating a physical environment that reflects students' culture and identity. Each piece of art is created by a Native artist and holds meaning that is grounded in the histories and place of the people in the community.

Students Feel That They Are Cared About

Students express that they feel genuinely cared about, not just by their teachers, but across the school staff. All of the school staff take time to learn each student's name and to brighten up their day. A student shared their perceptions and feelings:

It just starts with simply knowing our names. Obviously, a teacher would know your name, but custodians, my bus drivers, they know our names. They recognize you during lunch. I just think that little thing can brighten up anybody's day, just knowing their name, having a little conversation that can change an entire spectrum of somebody's day.

Students said that there is a real culture of trust and caring in their schools, such that they feel free to say what is on their minds, knowing that there will be support and action to get the issue figured out:

I think it's pretty awesome here … because everyone knows that if they voice their opinion or idea that someone will hear them, and a staff member will talk to them and it will get figured out, it will get it done. So, I think that's super important to feel that comfort that you will always be heard here.

I think they care about me individually … going over kindness lessons and advisory really shows that they care about everyone, that they want everyone to be safe and happy at school.

School staff continually think about the students and shared their concerns about the most difficult students to reach, citing student-led strategies that might help:

I would like to see us do better in this area. The most difficult students to reach are the ones who are least involved. I would love to see our student leaders find ways to develop a rapport and establish trust with students who are not involved in clubs or athletics … the kids who don't have but NEED connections with others at our school.

Family

Families of students across all grade levels shared similar responses concerning what their school does differently to support students' improvement and success. Families were forthcoming about their positive experience with the schools and feelings of respect, inclusion, and trust. Their responses fell into three categories: (1) student-centered environment; (2) regular communication; and (3) family voice.

Student-Centered Learning Environment

Families described the school administrators, teachers, and staff as dedicated people who care about and can be trusted with students. Schools provide students with engaging, context-specific learning opportunities, both formal and informal: after-school activities, arts, music, sports, social activism, and culture.

Families praised how teachers hold high expectations and recognize their students' full potential. They acknowledged that teachers understand their students' learning style, provide personalized instruction, and make themselves available for academic support (questions about a homework assignment or the need for extra help with a lesson) before, during, and after school hours.

Regular Communication

Most frequently, families cited regular communication from the administrators and the teachers. Communication occurs by email, mobile text messages, phone, U.S. post, and video conference calls about upcoming events, announcements, and students' academic progress. Parents expressed appreciation for accessing a web portal to check a student's progress, homework assignment, and grades. Families trust the school to keep them informed.

Traditional one-way communication has expanded in some cases into two-way communication, such as parent surveys. The surveys range from input on the district strategic plan and curriculum and inquiries into families' plans for their child's virtual learning options for the upcoming new school year.

Family Voice

One family member described how they were invited to district-wide events to understand the planning process better and provide input into curricula choice. Additionally, another family member shared how the principal sent an email to all students and their families expressing their support for the Black Lives Matter movement. Families also spoke with the principal and requested an increase in Black history content in the school curriculum, which was implemented, as a parent shared:

> *We've already seen [the Black history units] actually, it was in the curriculum that we were presented from [the teacher] in third grade … there will be units, not just in February, specific to learning more about the history of our country and the people in it.*

Some family members volunteer as mentors in school programs designed to foster a sense of belonging, identity, and agency. A volunteer family member recognized the urgency to connect and share their lived experiences with young boys of color, so that those students remain engaged in school.

> *This program to help students that are a smaller representation of a larger community is really helpful. And to help them establish footing and a sense of identity and a sense of pride. I think that's really been powerful as well as even calling forth other men of color to say, "Hey, we want you to be a part of this. We want you to speak with these kids and be mentors on some levels," is really appreciated.*

The informal programs focus on respect, leadership, follow-through, and other traits of a "quality student" that readily transfer to the formal classroom environment. Moreover, sometimes the mentor just listens to what the student is going through, as a mentor explained:

> *And I think part of what I enjoy about being there for the program is seeing these kids grow and develop and know that they feel safe and they have a place that's looking out for them.*

This mentoring approach is an equitable, systemic approach not based on Eurocentric normative definitions of family engagement.

Overall, parents expressed satisfaction with administrators, teachers, and staff. However, some district and building administrators and teachers acknowledged that family engagement can still be improved, such as more collaboration and school-community efforts (Ishimaru et al., 2016). This requires reflection on the existing asymmetrical power dynamics between parents, teachers, and administrators, and what systems can be created to support an equitable relationship with families and create sustainable change (Ishimaru, 2019; Nolan et al., 2019). Collaboration efforts are often thought of as a parent partnership extending from an individual student, rather than as a collective of families and their deep knowledge and wisdom. For example, a collective of families can be represented in a community-based partnership with a local organization working with a specific population of students and can provide schools with cultural training.

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Further, the inclusion of parents on a committee to review school-wide plans, curriculum, and selection of textbooks is well-intentioned but limited to a non-active role, as they provide feedback only toward the end of the process, rather than at the beginning. Instead, a parent-led effort to create change in the curriculum taps into families' local knowledge and expertise and creates higher quality and equitable partnerships with families (Ishimaru & Bang, 2016).

Challenges

These successful schools are characterized by leadership with the will, skill, and authority to drive change at their schools. This includes empowering students, prioritizing equity and equitable outcomes, creating a culture of staff collaboration around data and student supports, bolstering professional learning, and engaging family and community. However, their success did not come without facing challenges as their schools strive to close opportunity gaps and organize and energize everyone around this work. Below is a list of a few of the challenges they face.

1) Constant scrutiny of current resources available with an equity lens.

2) Static definitions and theories of giftedness that give little consideration to cultural differences and that ignore how students' backgrounds influence their opportunities to demonstrate skills and abilities.

3) Lack of culturally sensitive definitions, lack of definitions that recognize how differential opportunities result in poor outcomes, and lack of definitions that recognize how differences can mask skills and abilities.

4) Lack of provision of substantive and ongoing professional development for teachers on cultural, linguistic, and economic diversity that can deepen understanding of anti-racism and the perspectives of teachers and students of color.

5) Conflation of the term "students of color" with American Indian/Alaska Native students and not recognizing that sovereign tribal nations are advocating for and with the AI/AN students. In order to address equity for AI/AN students, tribal history, sovereignty, and self-determination need to be in the conversation.

6) Structures in place that do not allow for an equity-focused school, such as the barrier for non-English speaking gifted students to take part in gifted opportunities.

7) Funding models that do not allow for equity (e.g., same FTE per student, SPED funding).

8) Discipline policies that are exclusionary and need to be revised for inclusion and restorative practices.

9) Lack of understanding around how to authentically engage and draw on the knowledge and wisdom of students' families and communities to inform school initiatives.

10) Shortage of staff from the community who speak and represent families' home languages.

Study Limitations and Constraints

Quantitative Analyses

The quantitative analyses used to identify these positive outliers were challenged with the timeliness of the data, the breadth of the data required, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This study was in its design phase November through December of 2019. At that time, the most recent performance data available were the Smarter Balanced Assessment data from the spring 2019. The other data elements used for this study were not available at that time for the exact same time span. Data on attendance, EL progress, dual-credit, and ninth grade on track indicators were only available through the 2017–18 academic year due to constraints related to the COVID-19 virus.

The team was encouraged and supported by our advisory team to add an indicator of postsecondary success (the percentage of students enrolled in postsecondary program within 1 year of high school graduation), and the study team worked with ERDC to obtain these data. The team hoped to get data from the 2017–18 academic year, but these data were only available through the 2016–17 academic year. While this represented the most recently available data for this indicator, it was 2 full years behind the most recent year of data for the other indicators.

Qualitative Analyses

Due to school closures and challenges faced from the pandemic, a limited number of focus groups with students, families, and the communities could be completed. Administrators and school staff helped recruit students, families, and community members for virtual or handwritten responses.

Being respectful of the situation, the research team did not travel to all of the communities as originally anticipated. Virtual focus groups replaced in-person focus groups. The virtual platform was less than ideal to establish a friendly, trusting atmosphere and limited the responses.

In some instances, the building principal joined the teachers, and the district superintendent joined the building principal interview. In each of these circumstances, the presence of the senior job position may have compromised transparent and candid conversation.

All of the school staff, students, and family members interviewed felt the heavy burden that the pandemic has brought to our lives. The overwhelming burden included the loss of family, food deficits, inadequate access to physical and mental health care, problems with housing stability, and disparities in educational technology and internet connectivity. These realities and sense of urgency occupied the thoughts of all those involved. This may have constrained the ability to provide a 100 percent focus while conducting interviews.

Recommendations

This list of recommendations is informed by the study findings and Washington's leading equity organizations, such as the Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee (EOGOAC).

District Level

- Encourage and promote school board membership representing the culture, race, and ethnicity of the community and students served.
- Adopt hiring practices for equity that reflect the culture and ethnicity of the students and families served.
- Write and adopt an equity policy with accountability indicators for community engagement and anti-racism training for school board members and district and school staff.[26]
- Adopt a career and college mindset (postsecondary pathways) where, when students are mobile or have family responsibilities, they are able to take a brief break from earning credits toward their diploma without being labeled as a "dropout."
- Expand student success indicators to include culturally relevant and community-defined criteria (e.g., native language acquisition, etc.).
- Provide funding and/or honoraria for families and cultural experts who help define and implement school policies.
- Provide opportunities for parents to work in the school system and receive scholarships to become educators.
- Implement cultural competency training for all district employees.

School Level

- Establish alternative pathways to hear student voice other than the Associated Student Body (ASB) in order to encourage other voices (e.g., student-led clubs, student board, and cabinet positions).
- Extend SEL training to the high school teachers and staff.
- Increase investment in building community relationships (churches, chambers of commerce, non-profits, etc.).
- Increase opportunities for student-to-student and student-to-adult relationships (e.g., advisory).
- Implement alternative discipline models (e.g., restorative practices).
- Disaggregate academic and nonacademic measures by ethnicity, English learners, students with disabilities, and students experiencing poverty (who are especially vulnerable), to help schools best provide equitable resources.
- Develop systems for high levels of collaboration among teachers.
- Implement MTSS/RTI for early intervention.
- Offer professional learning about business and industry opportunities available after high school (aerospace manufacturing, software, agriculture careers, etc.).
- Include more opportunities for advanced learning for ALL students.

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[26] Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee (EOGOAC), 2021. Two Pandemics: Addressing the Experience of Racial Violence and the Covid-19 Pandemic for Students and Families of Color, p.3.

Conclusion

The findings suggest that first and foremost, positive outlier schools are prioritizing the development of an "equity culture", defined by Fullan and Malloy (2019) as "one that centers the voices and experiences of those most underserved in all decisions." As such, each school in the study has made significant, continuous improvement in student academic and nonacademic outcomes. And while they all rejected historical narratives and put in place structures and supports that illuminate the strengths of AI/AN, Black, Latino/a, and students experiencing poverty, they are all at different places on their equity journey. They all started from a similar place in the public K–12 school system and their stories illustrate what is possible.

Administrators and teachers interviewed acknowledged that this work is difficult, and that it is exhausting to break the mold of what is historically embedded in the public school system. Deliberate and strategic action is needed for steady progress, and as these exemplar schools noted, much work remains to be completed. Within these schools there are those doing the righteous work to stand up for and encourage student and family agency throughout their school experience and to eliminate the overt and covert institutional racism[27] that exists in the education system (Young, 2011). As such, school leaders and educators are called to consistently interrogate the current system, and to realize the hope, as Durrell Cooper states, "that despite all of the historical evidence to the contrary, that one day Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) students, could inhabit a full life of liberation from the structural oppression and violence enacted upon them daily by the very same system meant to lead to their emancipation."

Suggestions for Further Research

- Bridging formal and informal learning settings: Examining how to bridge content from the classroom with after-school, student-led clubs playing an essential role in supporting student agency, student voice, student apprenticeship, understanding, funds of knowledge and identity across a broad area of interests.

- Family engagement: Further research on equitable, co-participatory engagement frameworks between schools, families, and communities.

- Understanding urban vs. rural differences: This study did not seek to deeply understand differences between positive outlier schools served in large urban, metro suburb, urban fringe, mid-size towns, and rural/distant districts. With 70 percent of the districts in Washington State in rural/distant category, there is an opportunity for further research into ways schools in both urban/metro suburb and rural/distant and fringe districts are recognizing and magnifying students' strengths.

- Understanding strategies unique to serving highly diverse vs. single-ethnic community settings: The schools analyzed in this study could be segmented into ethnically heterogeneous and homogeneous communities. Urban/metro suburban schools often have multiple ethnic groups which are greater than 10 percent of student enrollment (often serving dozens of home languages) whereas rural/distant and fringe districts are often more ethnically homogeneous (often Latino/a students with Spanish as home language are 65 percent or more of student population). It would be useful to understand if there are strategies unique to each environment which engage the local communities, parents, and families, and develop positive outlier strengths amongst their students.

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[27] Institutional racism is defined as the collective failure of institutions to provide appropriate and professional services to people because of their color, culture, or ethnicity (González, 2007).

A Final Note from the CEO of CEE

The 2020 school year was pivotal for Washington schools. The COVID-19 pandemic was unprecedented and, in many cases, overwhelmed the functioning and performance of the educational system. The closure of the physical schools and switch to remote learning, compounded by the associated public health and economic crises, posed major challenges to students and their teachers. The educational system was not built for, nor prepared to cope with the pandemic. The education system lacks structures to sustain effective teaching and learning during the shutdown and provide the safety net supports that many children receive in school (Garcia & Weiss, 2020).

As of the completion of this research report, through a subsequent grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates foundation, CEE is actively engaged with 14 of the outlier high school principals and six rural superintendents. This work involves facilitating leaders in meetings and online thought sharing around COVID recovery efforts centered on the findings from the research. Our initial focus is improving student and family voice. Products from the community of practice will be publicly available through the CEE website and include: (1) podcasts of outlier leaders highlighting their best practices; (2) artifacts, conceptual frameworks, reference documents, and recommendations of group exploration of various current problems of practice; and (3) short videos of the takeaways our leaders implemented following these discussions. Also in production are video vignettes highlighting the stories behind some of the study's schools. We are excited to go deeper into the work of these schools and learn more that we can share with the education community.

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About the Authors

Greg Lobdell

In 2000, Greg co-founded the Center for Educational Effectiveness (CEE). Greg served as CEE's President and Research Director from 2001 to 2015, the CEO from 2015 to 2019, and Chief Research Officer from 2019 to current. Prior to founding the CEE, Greg worked for Microsoft Corporation as a developer, program manager, product manager, and as Director of Product Management for Windows NT Workstation and Microsoft Exchange Server. Greg retired from Microsoft in 1998 to pursue his Masters in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment and focus on research and tools to assist schools in improvement and transformation.

Janet Gordon, Ed.D.

Currently serves as Vice President of Education at Kauffman and Associates, Inc. and holds a doctoral degree in education. She has over 35 years of experience in research and evaluation of programs including formal education (primary, secondary, post-secondary), teacher professional development, informal education, parent/community outreach, social/emotional development, and health policy. Dr. Gordon leads statewide and nationwide evaluation projects designed to inform legislative decisions, advance understanding, and serve students, families and communities. She works primarily with indigenous and underserved students and communities in the U.S. and in the Pacific Islands with a focus on equitable education and health outcomes.

John Steach, Ed.D.

Currently serves at the Chief Executive Officer for the CEE. His educational career spans over 23 years leading as a Board Member, Board Chair, Superintendent in both Washington and Oregon, HR Director, Principal Supervisor, and running all support services. Dr. Steach combines this educational career with 20 years engineering experience in the petroleum and nuclear industries to bring an analytic approach to improving K-12 education. Doctor Steach eared his BS degree in Chemical Engineering, MBA, and Ed.D. in Educational Leadership all from Washington State University.

Gene Sharratt, Ph.D.

Currently serves as a Senior Research Advisor for the CEE. He is the past president of the Washington Educational Research Association. His research interests are in equity, measurement, and program evaluation. He served for ten years as a clinical assistant and associate professor for Washington State University. He has 30 years of K-12 experience as a teacher, counselor, principal, school superintendent, and ESD superintendent in public and international schools. In addition to his research work, he serves on the boards of Education Northwest, Complete College America, and the Washington College Promise Coalition. He is the past executive director of the Washington Student Achievement Council.

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Is an independent researcher and evaluator. She has graduate-level research experience in qualitative research designs, including ethnography, grounded theory, narrative inquiry, and case study. She performs primary and secondary research, interviews, focus groups, participant observations, literature reviews, environmental scans, and qualitative narrative analysis. She has worked at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian, Washington, D.C. as a Public Programs Specialist and later as the Manager of Seminars and Symposia. She also worked as a Researcher for the National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement for the Office of Head Start, Administration for Children & Families, HHS.

Erich Bolz, M.Ed.

Currently serves as the Vice President of Research and District Engagement for the CEE. Prior to joining CEE, Erich spent 25 years in public education, that included experience as a remedial reading teacher, pre-K-12 principal, central office administrator (small, large, and Educational Service District levels), and Adjunct Professor at Heritage University. He is the 2013 recipient of the Violet Lumley Rau Alumni Outstanding Alumnus Award and currently serves as a Board Member at Communities In Schools of Benton-Franklin, Washington and Partners for Early Learning serving Tri-Cities, WA.

Roni Rumsey, M.Ed.

Currently serves as the Director of Professional Learning for the CEE. Prior to joining CEE, Roni spent 30 years as a teacher, principal and central office administrator in public education. She successfully developed a Dual Language Program which has been operating for 15 years and a districtwide job-embedded professional development program that has resulted in empowering teacher efficacy for over 6 years.

Appendix A. Advisory Team

Data Analysis Advisory Team

The data advisory team worked with the research team during the design and implementation of the methodology to identify positive outlier schools. They <u>also</u> served on the project advisory team.

Pete Bylsma, Ed.D., Former Director, Assessment & Program Evaluation, Mukilteo School District

Matthew Frizzell, Ed.D., Assistant Director for Data and Implementation, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

Brian Gabele, Ph.D., Director of Assessment & Program Evaluation, Clover Park School District

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Andrew Parr, Ph.D., Research Director, Washington State Board of Education

Jim Schmidt, Ph.D., Director, Education Research & Data Center

Randy Spaulding, Ph.D., Executive Director, Washington State Board of Education

Research Advisory Team

The overall research advisory team (along with the data advisory team) provided feedback on the design, implementation, analysis, results interpretation, and communications regarding the study.

Joel Aune, Executive Director, WASA (Washington Association of School Administrators)

Teleah Bell-Davis (T.J.), Ed.D., Principal Robertson Elementary, Yakima School District

Andrea Cobb, Ed.D., School Board Member, Tacoma Public Schools; Program Officer, Bill & Melinda Gates foundation

Constance Daw, Ed.D., Principal Franklin Elementary School, Tacoma Public Schools

Tim Garchow, Executive Director, WSSDA (Washington State School Directors Association)

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John Welch, Superintendent, Puget Sound Educational Service District

Appendix B. List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACS. American Communities Survey. https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs

AESD. Association of Educational Service Districts

AI/AN. American Indian/Alaska Native

AWSP. Association of Washington School Principals

CEE. Center for Educational Effectiveness. The researchers for this study. www.effectiveness.org

Dedoose. Mixed methods analytical software used by study team for qualitative analysis. www.dedoose.com.

EL. English Learner. Preferred term for a K–12 student who is served in the Transitional Bilingual Instructional Program. Often listed as ELL, English Language Learner.

ELA. English/language arts. One of the major assessments in the Smarter Balanced Assessment systems. Given statewide in Washington to students in grades 3–8 and 10 as part of state and federal accountability measures.

ERDC. Educational Research & Data Center. https://erdc.wa.gov/

ESD. Educational Service District. Washington State K–12 public education is served by nine regional education agencies known locally as ESDs.

FTE. Full time equivalent.

NCES. National Center for Educational Statistics. https://nces.ed.gov/

OSPI. Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. https://www.k12.wa.us/

SBA. Smarter Balanced Assessment. Aligned with the Common Core State Standards, this assessment is used as the primary progress monitoring and accountability assessment for English-language arts and mathematics in grades 3–8 and 10 in Washington State.

SBE. State Board of Education, Washington State. https://www.sbe.wa.gov/

SEL. Social and emotional learning.

SPED. Special Education. Students receiving services as a student with a disability.

SPI. Superintendent of Public Instruction. Publicly elected by the citizens of Washington State with primary duties to oversee K–12 public education. https://www.k12.wa.us/about-ospi/superintendent-chris-reykdal.

WASA. Washington Association of School Administrators. Primary professional association for administrators in Washington State. https://www.wasa-oly.org/

WSIF. Washington School Improvement Framework. The primary accountability measures used for state and federal accountability of K–12 public schools. https://www.k12.wa.us/policy-funding/grants-grant-management/every-student-succeeds-act-essa-implementation/washington-school-improvement-framework

WSSDA. Washington State School Directors Association. Primary professional association for school directors (school board members) in Washington State. https://www.wssda.org/

Appendix C. Positive Outlier Schools

Table 18: Positive Outliers (continues next three pages)

District	School	Level	ESD	American Indian / Alaska Native	Black	Latino/a	Students Experiencing Poverty	Geographic Setting
Auburn	Gildo Rey Elem.	Elementary	ESD 121			✓		Metro Suburb
Bethel	Fredrickson Elem.	Elementary	ESD 121		✓			Metro Suburb
Brewster	Brewster HS	High School	ESD 171			✓	✓	Rural / Distant
Brewster	Brewster MS	Middle School	ESD 171			✓	✓	Rural / Distant
Bridgeport	Bridgeport HS	High School	ESD 171			✓		Rural / Distant
Cape Flattery	Neah Bay Elem.	Elementary	ESD 114	✓				Rural / Distant
Cape Flattery	Neah Bay Secondary/HS	High School	ESD 114	✓				Rural / Distant
Clover Park	Harrison Preparatory School	High School	ESD 121			✓	✓	Metro Suburb
North Franklin	Connell HS	High School	ESD 123			✓		Urban Fringe
Davenport	Davenport HS	High School	ESD 101				✓	Rural / Distant
East Valley (Yakima)	East Valley Central MS	Middle School	ESD 105			✓	✓	Urban Fringe
Elma	Elma HS	High School	ESD 113				✓	Rural / Distant
Ephrata	Columbia Ridge Elem.	Elementary	ESD 171			✓		Rural / Distant
Ephrata	Grant Elem.	Elementary	ESD 171			✓		Rural / Distant
Ephrata	Parkway Elem.	Elementary	ESD 171			✓		Rural / Distant

District	School	Level	ESD	Outlier Group				Geographic Setting
				American Indian / Alaska Native	Black	Latino/a	Students Experiencing Poverty	
Franklin Pierce	Franklin Pierce HS	High School	ESD 121			✓		Metro Suburb
Grandview	McClure Elem.	Elementary	ESD 105			✓		Rural / Distant
Highline	McMicken Heights Elem.	Elementary	ESD 121		✓			Metro Suburb
Hockinson	Hockinson Heights Elem.	Elementary	ESD 112				✓	Urban Fringe
Kennewick	Kennewick HS	High School	ESD 123			✓		Mid-size
Kent	Kent Meridian HS	High School	ESD 121		✓			Metro Suburb
Kent	Kentridge HS	High School	ESD 121		✓			Metro Suburb
Oak Harbor	North Whidbey MS	Middle School	ESD 189		✓			Rural / Distant
Olympia	Jefferson MS	Middle School	ESD 113		✓	✓	✓	Mid-size Town
Pullman	Franklin Elem.	Elementary	ESD 101				✓	Mid-size Town
Richland	Jefferson Elem.	Elementary	ESD 123				✓	Mid-size Town
Seattle	Franklin HS	High School	ESD 121			✓	✓	Large Metro
Seattle	Chief Sealth HS	High School	ESD 121			✓		Large Metro
Seattle	Cleveland HS	High School	ESD 121		✓	✓		Large Metro
Seattle	Northgate Elem.	Elementary	ESD 121				✓	Large Metro
Seattle	Rainier Beach HS	High School	ESD 121		✓		✓	Large Metro
Seattle	West Seattle Elem.	Elementary	ESD 121		✓		✓	Large Metro

District	School	Level	ESD	Outlier Group American Indian / Alaska Native	Black	Latino/a	Students Experiencing Poverty	Geographic Setting
Shoreline	Parkwood Elem.	Elementary	ESD 121		✓			Metro Suburb
Snohomish	Seattle Hill Elem.	Elementary	ESD 189			✓		Metro Suburb
Tacoma	Edison Elem.	Elementary	ESD 121			✓	✓	Large Metro
Tacoma	Lowell Elem.	Elementary	ESD 121			✓		Large Metro
Tacoma	Stanley Elem.	Elementary	ESD 121				✓	Large Metro
Toppenish	Lincoln Elem.	Elementary	ESD 105	✓				Urban Fringe
Toppenish	Toppenish HS	High School	ESD 105			✓		Urban Fringe
Tukwila	Foster HS	High School	ESD 121				✓	Metro Suburb
University Place	Narrows View Intermediate	Elementary	ESD 121			✓	✓	Metro Suburb
University Place	University Place Primary	Elementary	ESD 121			✓	✓	Metro Suburb
Warden	Warden HS	High School	ESD 121				✓	Rural / Distant
Yakima	Roosevelt Elem.	Elementary	ESD 105			✓	✓	Mid-size Town
Zillah	Hilton Elem.	Elementary	ESD 105			✓	✓	Urban Fringe
Zillah	Zillah Intermediate	Elementary	ESD 105			✓	✓	Urban Fringe

Appendix D. Interview Details

Table 19: Number of Individuals Interviewed by Role and Geographic Category

Number of individuals interviewed by role by geographic category						
Role	Total # of Individuals Interviewed	Urban Category: Number of Sites				
		Large Metro	Metro Suburb	Mid-size Town	Urban Fringe	Rural / Distant
District Administrator	31	6	9	3	4	9
Building Administrator (Principal)	36	6	10	4	4	12
Teachers / Staff	107	5	9	3	5	11
Students	18	1	4	1	2	5
Parents / Community	5	0	3	1	1	0

Table 20: Number of Individuals Interviewed by Student Group

Number of individuals interviewed within each school demographic selection factor					
Role	Total # of individuals interviewed	School Demographic Selection Factor: Number of Sites			
		AI / AN	Black	Latino/a	Students Experiencing Poverty
District Administrator	31	1	7	19	15
Building Administrator (Principal)	36	2	9	20	17
Teachers / Staff	107	2	7	19	16
Students	18	0	1	9	9
Parents / Community	5	0	0	5	4
Note: Numbers will not sum row-wise to total number of interviews because schools could be identified for multiple student groups of interest					

Table 21: Teachers-Staff Interview Participants by Geographic Codes

Distant-Rural	Large Metro	Metro-Suburb	Urban-Fringe	**Total**
41	19	35	20	**115**

Table 22: Rural/Distant - Schools of Participating Teachers - Staff

School Name (n = 12)	Interviewed Teachers - Staff
Brewster High School	3
Brewster Middle School	3
Bridgeport High School	3
Columbia Ridge Elementary	3
Davenport High School	5
Elma High School	3
Franklin Elementary	4
Grant Elementary	3
McClure Elementary	6
Neah Bay Elementary	3
North Whidbey Middle School	3
Warden High School	2
Total	**41**

Table 23: Large Metro - Schools of Participating Teachers - Staff

School Name (n = 6)	Interviewed Teachers - Staff
Chief Sealth High School	2
Lowell Elementary	3
Northgate Elementary	2
Rainier Beach High School	3
University Place Primary	3
West Seattle Elementary	6
Total	**19**

Table 24: Metro Suburb - Schools of Participating Teachers - Staff

School Name (n = 9)	Interviewed Teachers - Staff
Franklin Pierce High School	2
Frederickson Elementary	7
Gildo Rey Elementary	5
Harrison Preparatory	4
Kennewick High School	2
Kent-Meridian High School	6
Kentridge High School	3
McMicken Heights Elementary	3
Narrows View Intermediate	3
Total	**35**

Table 25: Urban Fringe - Schools of Participating Teachers - Staff

School Name (n = 6)	Interviewed Teachers-Staff
East Valley Central Middle School	6
Hilton Elementary	4
Lincoln Elementary	3
Roosevelt Elementary	2
Toppenish High School	2
Zillah Intermediate	3
Total	**20**

Table 26: Student Interview Participants: Geo-Codes

Rural/Distant	Large Metro	Metro Suburb	Urban Fringe	**Total**
17	4	11	5	**37**

Table 27: Rural/Distant - Schools of Participating Students

School Name	Interviewed Students
Brewster High School	2
Bridgeport High School	3
Davenport High School	5
Elma High School	5
Warden High School	2
Total	**17**

Table 28: Large Metro - Schools of Participating Students

School Name	Interviewed Students
West Seattle Elementary	4
Total	**4**

Table 29: Metro Suburb - Schools of Participating Students

School Name	Interviewed Students
Franklin Pierce High School	2
Harrison Preparatory	3
Kennewick High School	2
Narrows View Intermediate	4
Total	**11**

Table 30: Urban Fringe - Schools of Participating Students

School Name	Interviewed Students
East Valley Central Middle School	3
Toppenish High School	2
Total	**5**

Table 31: Family-Community Interview Participants: Geo-Codes

Metro Suburb	Urban Fringe	Total
4	3	**7**

Table 32: Metro Suburb - Schools of Participating Families-Communities

School Name	Total
Narrows View Elementary	3
Kennewick High School	1
Total	**4**

Table 33: Urban Fringe - Schools of Participating Families-Communities

School Name	Total
East Valley Central Middle School	3
Total	**3**

Appendix E. Qualitative Protocols

Pre-Survey/Inventory – for Building Administrators & District Leaders

Below is a list of indicators that have been found to influence student outcomes. On a scale from 1 to 10, please indicate the extent that your school resources such as time (professional development days, book study, professional learning circles, etc.) and money (curriculum, ESD services, etc.) have been dedicated to this area.

To what extent have your district resources such as time and money been dedicated to the following areas over the past three years?	Very Little at this time			Moderate Focus				To a Great Extent		
Scale from 1-10	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Cultural relevance (local traditions and culture)										
2. Dual language learning										
3. Use of digital tools and resources for students										
4. Use of digital tools and resources for staff										
5. Pre-K Participation and Quality										
6. Kindergarten Participation and Quality										
7. Teacher and Staff High Expectations (non-deficit view)										
8. Growth mindsets in teachers and students										
9. Restorative Practices or PBIS approaches										
10. Multi-Tier Systems of Supports (MTSS)										
11. Accurate Special Education identification										
12. Student mobility supports (food insecurity, clean clothes, etc.)										
13. School safety										
14. Teacher team building for a trusting, collaborative environment										
15. After school program enrichment, informal learning										
16. Summer learning loss prevention strategies										
17. Providing mentors for students										
18. Post-Secondary and Career Pathways										
19. Financial Aid literacy and Access										
20. College-level Coursework in the High School										
21. Credit Transfer										
22. Job Placement after High School										
23. Trauma-informed teachers and school staff (tending to social emotional needs of students)										
24. Self-regulating emotional strategies for students and teachers										
25. Family supports (social services, court system, etc.)										
26. Data analysis and accountability systems										
27. District and School Strategic planning and alignment										
28. Coaching for classroom teachers										
29. Attendance Improvement Programs										
30. Others:										

Administrator — Large District Leadership Protocol

Your school has been recognized as exceptional in a variety of ways that helps students make excellent progress in learning. We would like to learn about your strategies, programs and other things that potentially have influenced your schools' ability to make continuous improvement. Thank-you for agreeing to share your experiences so we can learn from you.

- Consent forms—Thank you!

- Building Pre-survey—let us know when to expect it?

- Zoom Security—while we have not had a situation where we have been "zoom bombed" we have heard of these situations. As soon as all interviewees/interviewers are on the meeting, we will lock the meeting from anyone else entering.

- Technical Glitch—If we have a technical glitch (like you or my camera freezes) then just exit the meeting and come back in using the same link.

- Recording—We would like to ask your permission to record this meeting. Only the 4 members of the research team will have access to your recording, and we use it to check our notes / create transcripts for analysis. Do we have your permission to record?

1. Please share your name, role and how long have you been in your position. Did you work in the district prior to your current role?

2. Over the last 5 years, please describe the key changes that have occurred that you feel may have influenced the continuous growth your **[Black, Latino/a, or low income]** students have made.

3. What model is used to distribute funds across the school buildings? (i.e., equal or other factors considered)

4. How does the district support and monitor school improvement at each school?

5. What guides the development of district-directed professional development to support school improvement?

6. Share some examples of how district leadership interacts with staff in schools.

7. Share some examples of how district leadership works with building staff to resolve conflict.

8. In what ways does the district involve the community in your schools?

9. Is there anything else you would like to add or think we should have asked?

Administrator — School Principal Protocol

Your school has been recognized as exceptional in a variety of ways that helps students make excellent progress in learning. We would like to learn about your strategies, programs and other things that potentially have influenced your schools' ability to make continuous improvement. Thank-you for agreeing to share your experiences so we can learn from you.

- Consent forms—Thank you!

- Building Pre-survey—let us know when to expect it?

- Zoom Security—while we have not had a situation where we have been "zoom bombed" we have heard of these situations. As soon as all interviewees/interviewers are on the meeting, we will lock the meeting from anyone else entering.

- Technical Glitch—If we have a technical glitch (like you or my camera freezes) then just exit the meeting and come back in using the same link.

- Recording—We would like to ask your permission to record this meeting. Only the 4 members of the research team will have access to your recording, and we use it to check our notes / create transcripts for analysis. Do we have your permission to record?

To begin, please share your name, role, and how long you've been in your current role at the school.

Overall, how many years have you been a building administrator?

1. Let's begin with your school. In your opinion, what are 3 things your school does differently than other schools that might help explain why the students here are among those making the most improvement in the state?

2. Next, I'd like to learn more about your teachers, specifically, the professional development opportunities that your teachers and educators have participated in. Which professional development activities have had the greatest impact on and/or been most frequently implemented by your teachers?

3. How do you support your teachers when they are implementing newly learned materials and skills?

4. In what ways do you support your brand-new teachers and educators that come to your school?

5. What ways do you deal with challenges that your staff face?

6. Please describe any resources and/or infrastructure in place that help your staff develop cultural proficiency and how do you keep informed of current best practices.

7. Now, I'd like to learn more about your students. How are students involved in leadership positions and activities at your school?

8. How have you utilized or incorporated student ideas into the school (such as resource allocation, student discipline policies, etc.)?

9. How do you evaluate school improvement and student success? For example, what measures do you use and how often do you conduct evaluations?

10. In what ways does the school:

11. Lift up and recognize strengths and assets of the students?

12. Help to mitigate challenges faced by students?

13. In your opinion, what programs and activities have strongly influenced the school's and students' continuous improvement? (probe: unique, creative, augmented funding streams, assigning highest teachers to lowest performing students, integration of initiatives such as daytime and after school teaching, campus-based health services, etc.)

14. Finally, let's talk about the community. Do community members (leaders, culture and language staff, families, etc.) have opportunities to participate in any school or classroom activities for example Family Night, Back to School Night, school improvement meetings?

15. What strategies have you used to successfully engage parents, especially those parents who have not been engaged?

16. Finally, is there anything else that you would like to share about your school or students' success that I haven't asked you about today?

Teacher and Staff Protocol

Your school has been recognized as exceptional in a variety of ways that helps students make excellent progress in learning. We would like to learn about your strategies, programs and other things that potentially have influenced your schools' ability to make continuous improvement. Thank-you for coming and agreeing to share your experiences so we can learn from you.

- **Consent forms**—Thank you!

- **Building Pre-survey**—let us know when to expect it?

- **Zoom Security**—while we have not had a situation where we have been "zoom bombed" we have heard of these situations. As soon as all interviewees/interviewers are on the meeting, we will lock the meeting from anyone else entering.

- **Technical Glitch**—If we have a technical glitch (like your or my camera freezes) then just exit the meeting and come back in using the same link.

- **Recording**—We would like to ask your permission to record this meeting. Only the 4 members of the research team will have access to your recording, and we use it to check our notes / create transcripts for analysis. Do we have your permission to record?

Please share with us your name and your professional background, years in this building, as well as any other information you feel may be relevant to our study.

1. Please share the "top three" factors that you believe are associated with your school's success in demonstrating continuous student improvement.

2. Please identify the professional development activities that have had the greatest impact on you and which have you felt were effective in promoting continuous student improvement?

3. Please describe the attributes of your school culture that have had the greatest impact / contribute to continuous student learning?

4. Please describe the ways that you work with other school staff. How do you collaborate to support student learning?

5. Describe the school's level of cultural proficiency and how your personal development has been supported.

6. How do you actively engage students in their own learning? (For Secondary- how are student leaders involved in promoting/improving student learning?

7. How does your school evaluate school improvement and student success? For example, what measures do you use and how often do you conduct evaluations?

8. In what ways does the school help to mitigate challenges faced by students?

9. For staff, how does the school a) recognize/celebrate staff assets and strengths, and b) support the social and emotional health of staff?

10. What is being done to successfully engage parents in the school, especially those parents who have not been engaged?

11. What programs and activities have strongly influenced the school's and students' continuous improvement?

12. In what way does school leadership influence continued student improvement? How is the leadership of the school structured?

13. *Did preparing for this interview, give you a sense of the good work that you are doing at your school? Was it helpful for you to do this interview from your perspective*?

14. Finally, what else would like to share about your school or student's success? What did we not ask that you would like to share?

Students' Protocol

Your school has been recognized as exceptional in a variety of ways that helps students make excellent progress in learning. We would like to learn about your strategies, programs and other things that potentially have influenced your schools' ability to make continuous improvement. Thank-you for agreeing to share your experiences so we can learn from you.

- Consent forms—Thank you!

- Building Pre-survey—let us know when to expect it?

- Zoom Security—while we have not had a situation where we have been "zoom bombed" we have heard of these situations. As soon as all interviewees/interviewers are on the meeting, we will lock the meeting from anyone else entering.

- Technical Glitch—If we have a technical glitch (like you or my camera freezes) then just exit the meeting and come back in using the same link.

- Recording—We would like to ask your permission to record this meeting. Only the 4 members of the research team will have access to your recording, and we use it to check our notes / create transcripts for analysis. Do we have your permission to record?

We would like to learn about your schools and what it does to help students be successful. Thank you for agreeing to talk with me so I can find out what you think.

1. When people learn that your school is recognized for helping student learn, they will want to know more. Please share 3 things that you would like people to know about your school.

2. What do you think makes your school great at helping students learn?

3. Please tell me what you enjoy most about coming to school and being here.

4. When you have a good idea or want to share something, what are the different ways can you do that?

5. When you're **not** having a great day, what are the things at school that make you feel better?

6. Does your school talk about differences students may have?

7. Do you feel people at this school like teachers, the secretary, parapros, bus drivers, custodians care about you? If so, what makes you think this?

8. If someone doesn't follow the classroom expectations or rules, how do the teachers help students get back on track?

9. What are some ways your school talks about treating students fairly and why treating others fairly is important?

10. Finally, what else would you like to share with us? (e.g.: COVID response, etc.)

Parent/Guardian Protocol

Your school has been recognized as exceptional in a variety of ways that helps students make excellent progress in learning. We would like to learn about what you see as a parent that have influenced your schools' ability to make continuous improvement. Thank-you for agreeing to share your experiences so we can learn from you.

- Consent forms—Thank you!

- Building Pre-survey—let us know when to expect it?

- Zoom Security—while we have not had a situation where we have been "zoom bombed" we have heard of these situations. As soon as all interviewees/interviewers are on the meeting, we will lock the meeting from anyone else entering.

- Technical Glitch—If we have a technical glitch (like you or my camera freezes) then just exit the meeting and come back in using the same link.

- Recording—We would like to ask your permission to record this meeting. Only the 4 members of the research team will have access to your recording, and we use it to check our notes / create transcripts for analysis. Do we have your permission to record?

We would like to learn about your schools and what it does to help students be successful. Thank you for agreeing to talk with me so I can find out what you think.

1. How are you involved in the school?

2. Share with me some significant times and events that have occurred over the past 10 years for this school.

3. What 3 things the school does differently than other schools that might help explain why the students here are making the most improvement in the state?

4. In what ways does the school invite the community to give input into school planning and processes?

5. Reflecting back, how does the school and teachers make you feel as a parent or community member?

6. What are teachers' expectations of all students?

7. What does your child tell you about their experiences at this school?

8. Finally, what else would you like to share with us?

Community Questions (if community members present)

1. What words come to mind when you think of each of the following:

   a) Teachers

   b) The Principal and school leadership

   c) Other school staff (Prompt for counselors if not addressed)

   d) Students,

   e) Parents,

   f) The district leadership and the School Board

   g) The Community support of your child's school

2. Finally, what else would you like to share with us?

Appendix F. Item Correlations and Residual Plots

Data Acquisition Notes:

- Data source for the first seven indicators was the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) under data-sharing agreement 2020DE-01.

- Each indicator's data normalized relative to year and student group.

- All data indicators were the latest data available in December 2019 when data analysis was initiated.

- Definitions of Attendance, EL Progress, Dual-Credit, Ninth Grade on Track, and Graduation Rate indicators can be found in business rules for the Washington School Improvement Framework at https://www.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/public/wsifbusinessrules.docx

Table 34: Normalized Indicators used in regressions.

Indicator	Grades	Definition	Years
English Language Arts- Smarter Balanced Assessment	3-8 and 10	Percent of students meeting standard	Spring 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019
Mathematics- Smarter Balanced Assessment	3-8 and 10	Percent of students meeting standard	Spring 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019
Attendance	All grades in school		2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18 academic years
English Language (EL) Progress	All grades in school		2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18 academic years
Dual-Credit Participation	Grades 9-12 (high school)	Percent of high-school students taking one or more postsecondary credit bearing course	2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18 academic years
Ninth Graders On Track	Grades 9-12 (high school)	Percent of students passing all credits attempted in 9th grade year	2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18 academic years
Graduation Rate	High school	5th-year adjusted cohort graduation rate	Freshman starting high school in 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017 (5th year graduation data for spring 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018)
Postsecondary Enrollment	Postsecondary	Percent of students who, after 1 year from high school, are enrolled in a 2-year or 4-year educational opportunity	High school graduates from classes of 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017

Inter-Item Correlations for Required Indicators

Elementary & Middle Schools

```
Observations: 1,508

             |  ELAPcnt   MathPcnt Attend~e Povert~t

-------------+----------------------------------------

    ELAPcnt  |   1.0000

    MathPcnt |   0.9112    1.0000

  Attendance |   0.4142    0.4572   1.0000

  PovertyPcnt|  -0.7665   -0.7114  -0.5202    1.0000
```

High Schools

```
Observations: 352

             |  ELAPcnt MathPcnt Attend~e grad_r~e Povert~t
-------------+---------------------------------------------
     ELAPcnt |   1.0000
     MathPcnt |   0.8511   1.0000
   Attendance |   0.4561   0.4991   1.0000
    grad_rate |   0.6485   0.5911   0.4940   1.0000
   PovertyPcnt |  -0.7268  -0.7337  -0.4783  -0.3916   1.0000
```

Inter-Item Correlations for all Indicators

Elementary and Middle Schools- All Possible Indicators

```
Observations=869

             |  ELAPcnt MathPcnt Attend~e ELProg~s Povert~t
-------------+---------------------------------------------
     ELAPcnt |   1.0000
     MathPcnt |   0.9241   1.0000
   Attendance |   0.5167   0.5824   1.0000
    ELProgress |   0.4980   0.4920   0.3419   1.0000
   PovertyPcnt |  -0.8470  -0.7990  -0.5420  -0.4255   1.0000
```

Observations=133

```
             |  ELAPcnt MathPcnt Attend~e DualCr~t ELProg~s  OnTrack grad_r~e PS_Enr~l Povert~t
-------------+---------------------------------------------------------------------------------
    ELAPcnt  |  1.0000
    MathPcnt |  0.8831   1.0000
  Attendance |  0.5180   0.5263   1.0000
  DualCredit |  0.1849   0.2527  -0.0769   1.0000
   ELProgress| 0.5288    0.5498   0.3129   0.1672   1.0000
     OnTrack |  0.7320   0.7589   0.5137   0.1955   0.3994   1.0000
   grad_rate |  0.4573   0.4293   0.2889   0.1701   0.3285   0.3456   1.0000
    PS_Enroll|  0.6184   0.7174   0.3191   0.3837   0.3957   0.5680   0.3259   1.0000
  PovertyPcnt| -0.8415  -0.8356  -0.4535  -0.2479  -0.4447  -0.7202  -0.4044  -0.5882   1.0000
```

Composite Residual Plots for Positive Outliers and all State of Washington Schools
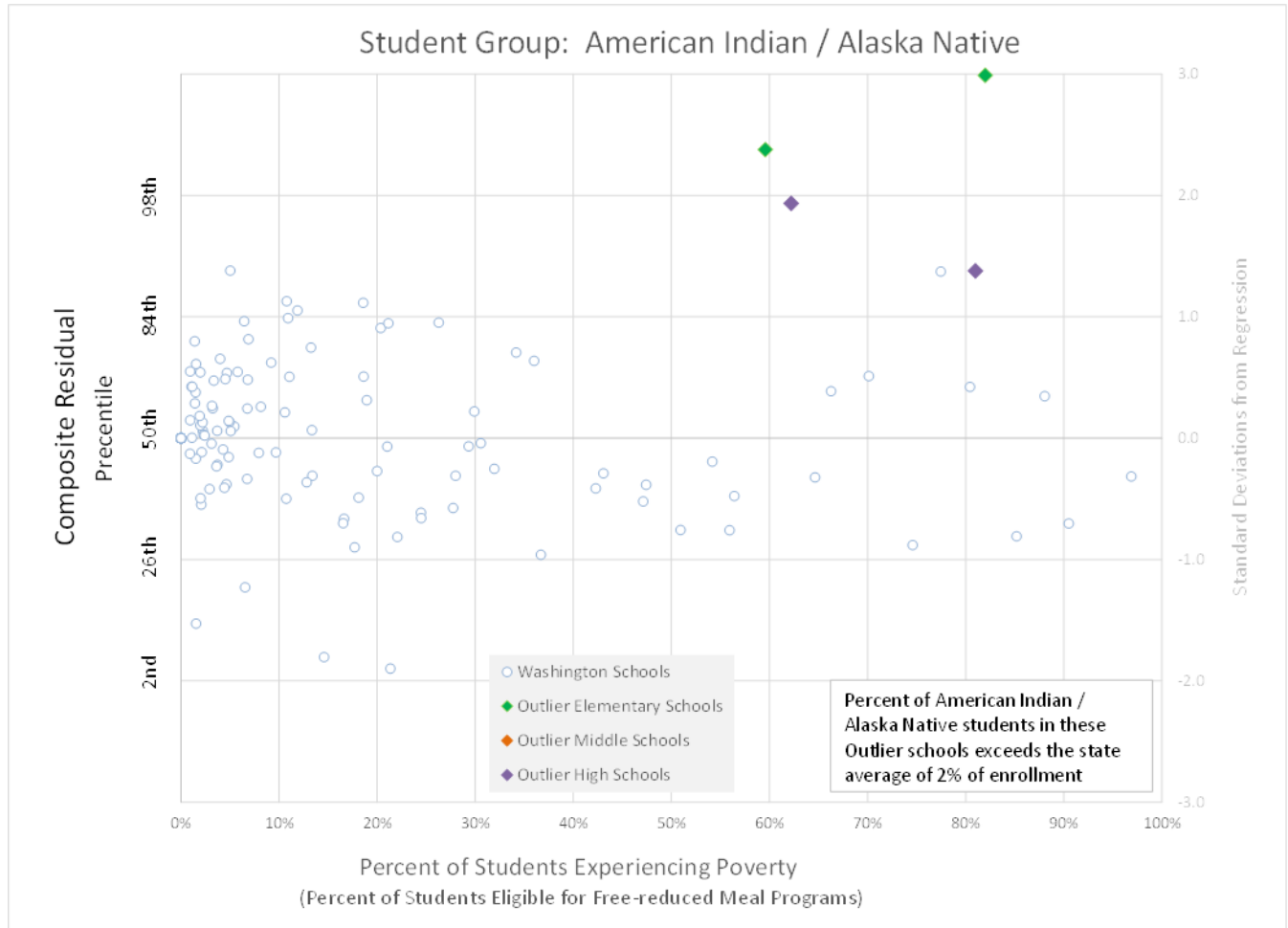
American Indian/Alaska Native Student Group

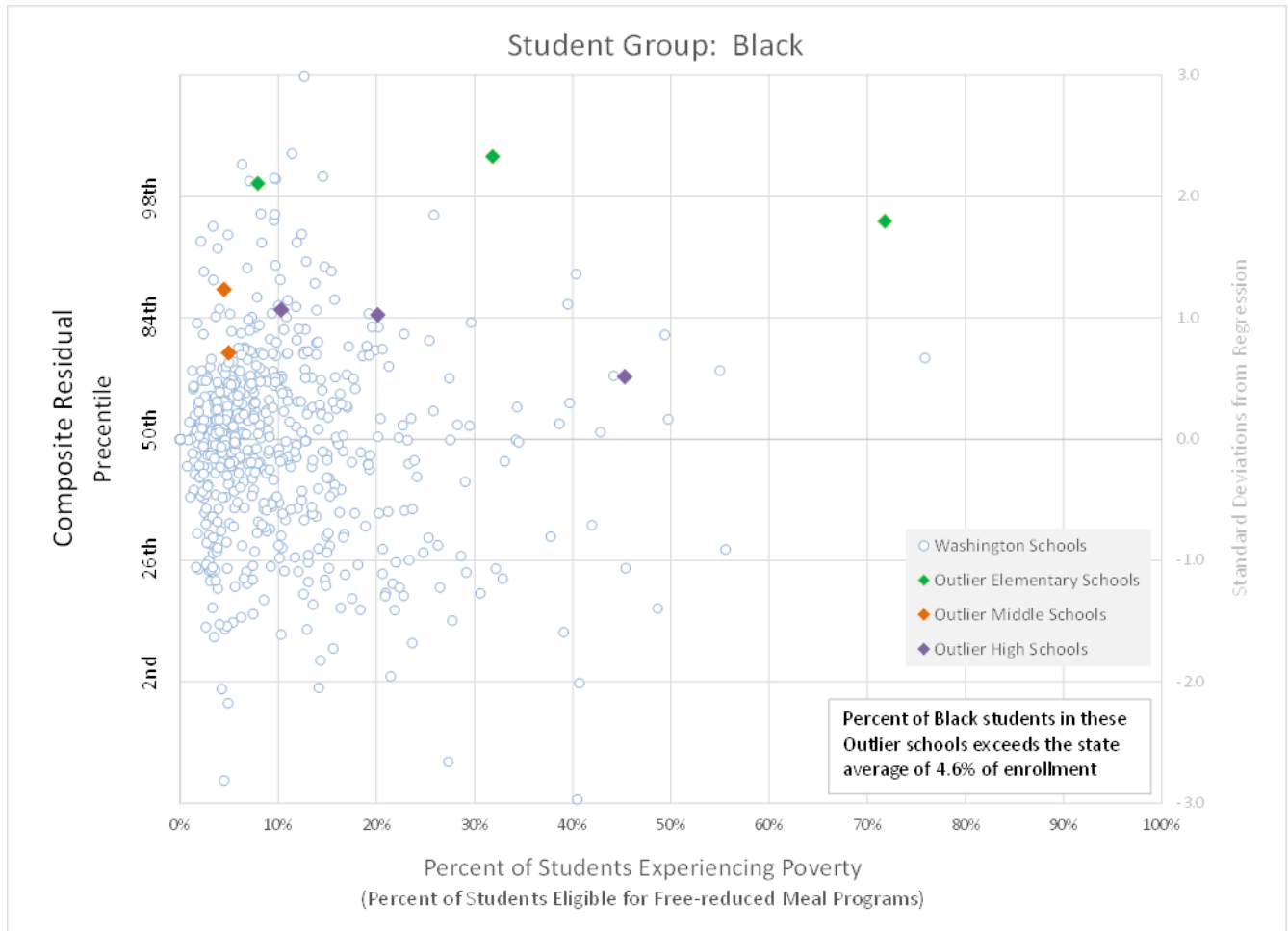*Figure 12: Composite Residuals-American Indian/Alaska Native Student Group*

Figure 13: Composite Residuals-Black Student Group
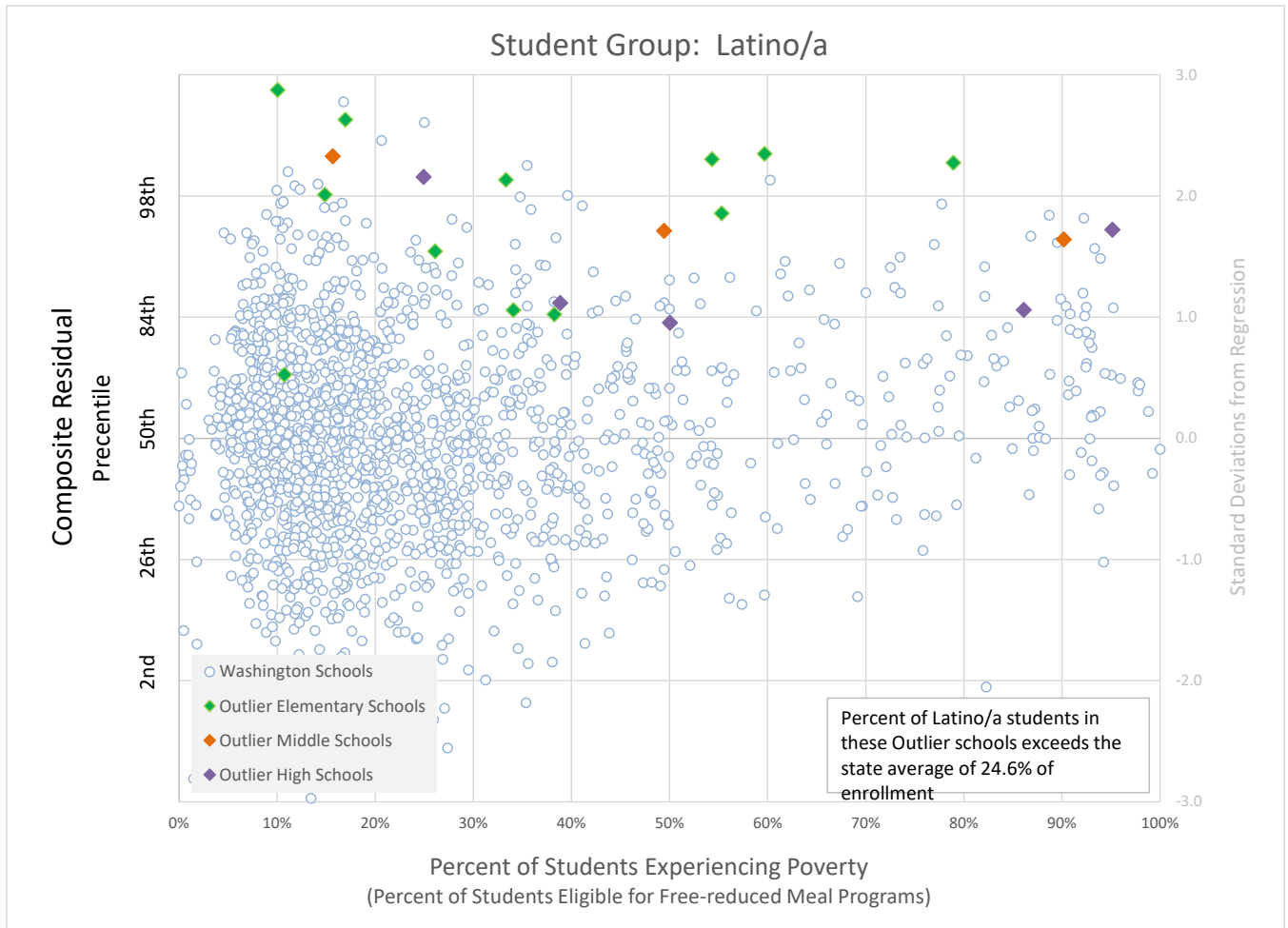
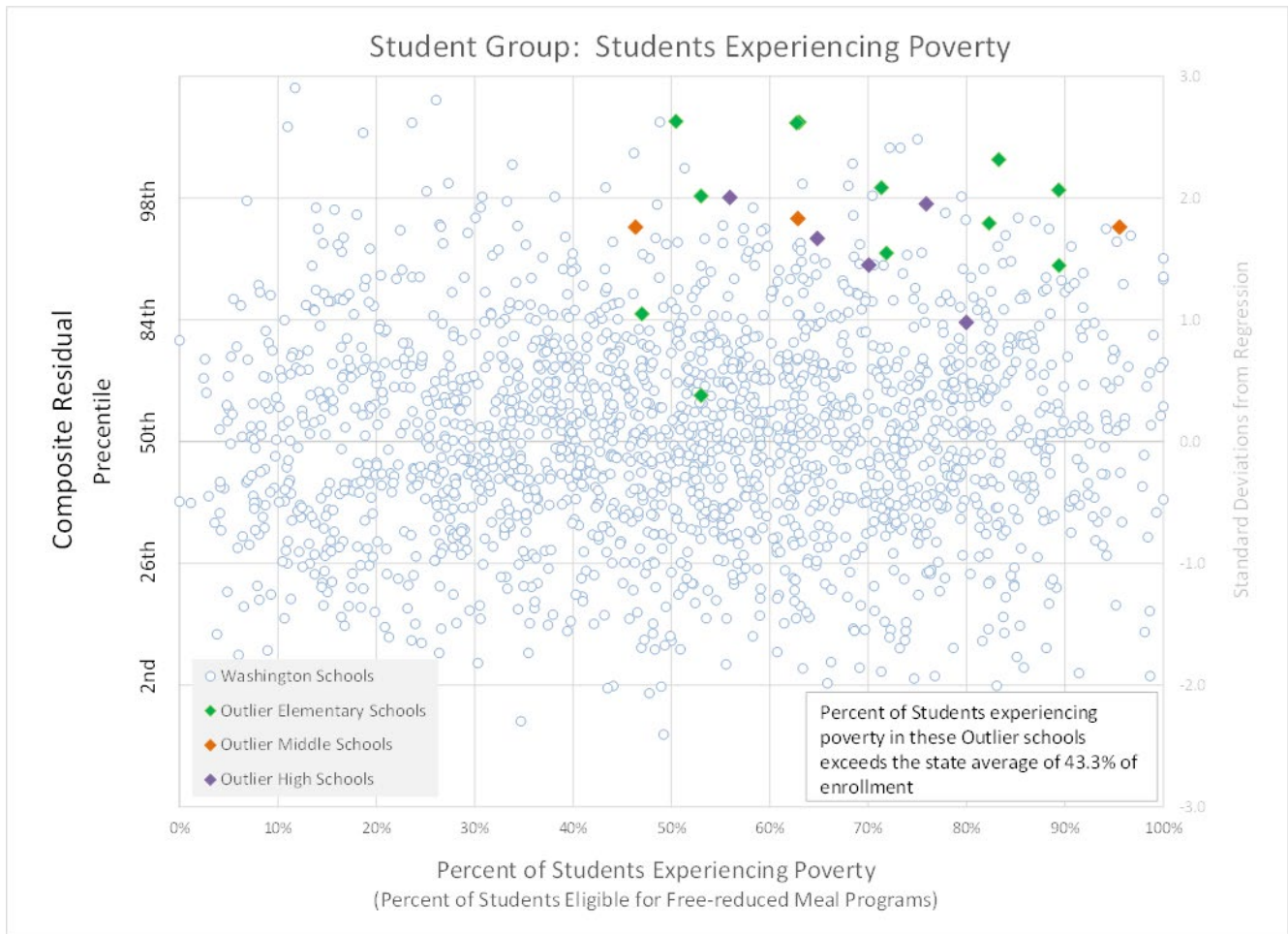*Figure 14: Composite Residuals-Latino/a Student Group*

Figure 15: Composite Residuals-Students Experiencing Poverty Student Group

Appendix G. Books, Resources and Professional Development Noted in Interviews

Table 35: Books and Resources Noted in Interviews (continues next five pages)

Name of Program	Note1	Note2	Unit of Analysis	Grade Level
Spiral Math			Teachers	Elementary
STAR 360			Teachers	Elementary
Reading Wonders			Teachers	Elementary
Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD)			Teachers	Elementary
Intervention Block		Small group check-ins with students in classroom and one-on-one check-in with student	Teachers	Elementary
Number Talks			Teachers	Elementary
Open-door policy for teachers with principal			Teachers	Elementary
Open-door policy for all classrooms			Teachers	Elementary
IGNITE Peer Mentoring			Teachers	Middle School
Setting limits in the classroom: A complete guide to effective classroom management with a school-wide discipline plan. Authors: Lisa Stanzione & Robert J. MacKenzie	Book		Teachers	High School
Lost at school: Why our kids with behavioral challenges are falling through the cracks and how we can help them. Author: Ross W. Greene	Book		Teachers	High School
Dr. Robert Eaker, Solution Tree	Team-learning approach and create a shared vision	Guest speaker at the Washington Principal's Association Conference	Teachers	High School
Character Education program	SEL	Program	Teachers	Elementary
Student Intervention Team (SIT)	Intervention for students and monitor students' progress		Teachers	Elementary
Restorative Practices			Teachers	Elementary
Reads Counts			Teachers	Elementary
Master Track			Teachers	Elementary
Second Step program			Teachers	Elementary

Name of Program	Note1	Note2	Unit of Analysis	Grade Level
AVID			Teachers	High School
Big 5 Initiative			Teachers	Middle School
iReady Reading/Math	Assessment tool	Training	Teachers	Middle School
Science of Teaching Reading (STR)			Teachers	Elementary
Cahoots	Technology	Uses for an online geography student competition	Teachers	Elementary
Essential Learning			Teachers	Elementary
Teacher Education Prep program-need more info			Teachers	Elementary
IXL Diagnostic for Teachers	Assessment tool		Teachers	High School
NWEA Student Centric Assessments			Teachers	High School
Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC)			Teachers	High School
Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum			Teachers	High School
The guide for white women who teach black boys. (2018) Eddie More Jr., Ali Michael, Marguerite W. Penick-Parks.	Book		Teachers	High School
The educator's handbook for understanding and closing achievement gaps. (2009) Joseph Murphy	Book		Teachers	High School
White fragility. (2018) Robin DiAngelo	Book		Teachers	High School
How to be an anti-racist. (2019) Ibram X. Kendi	Book			
Character Strong	Curriculum	Character education and social emotional learning (SEL)	Teachers	Middle School
The problem with math is English: A language-focused approach to helping all students develop a deeper understanding of mathematics. (2012) Concepcion Molina	Book		Teachers	Middle School
Collective Teacher Efficacy (CTE). John Hattie			Teachers	Middle School
Trauma Informed Education	Teacher PD		Teachers	Middle School

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The Center for Educational Effectiveness

Name of Program	Note1	Note2	Unit of Analysis	Grade Level
Standards Based Grading (SBG)				
PBIS				
MTSS				
RTI				
GEAR UP! Program				
College in a High School				
Advance Placement (AP) Summer Institute's World History, US History, Government.	Teacher PD			
AVID—teaching science	Teacher PD		Teacher	High School
Socratic Seminars	Teacher PD		Teacher	High School
Dual Credit Program				
Road Map Project Cohort, College and Career Leadership Institute (CCLI)		Road Map Project is a collective impact initiative to boost student success from early learning to college and career	Teacher	High School
College Success Foundation			Teacher	High School
Aligned grading system across classrooms			Teacher	High School
Blended Funding School			Teacher	High School
Full time summer school program for grades K–12 — includes 3x meals and bus transportation			Teacher	High School
Standards Based Learning			Teacher	High School
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Team			Teacher	Elementary
Student Representative on Building Leadership Team			Teacher	High School
Volunteer opportunities for community partners, Rainier Beach Coalition, Wall Block and NAACP			Teacher	High School
Social worker member of school team			Teacher	High School
Freedom Summer School		8th graders take ELA classes in preparation to raise their reading levels before entering the 9th grade	Teacher	High School

Name of Program	Note1	Note2	Unit of Analysis	Grade Level
Writing Assistant Leadership Team training				
Family Leadership Institute (FLI)	Delivers on-site assemblies for students and families.	(FLI) is a multifaceted educational curriculum focused on providing families with the knowledge, tools and inspiration to help their children succeed in school and in life.	Teacher	High School
5W's KWL training	Summer Professional Development - How to teach reading at the high school level? By a UW professor. In preparation to implement College in the High School program and AP classes		Teacher	High School
Solution Tree	PD Teacher provider	Training: Blended learning and station rotation at the secondary level.	Teacher	Middle School
Northwest Writing Program	Four-week program teacher PD		Teacher	Middle School
Inclusive Practice in Special Education				
The Association for the Severely Handicapped (TASH)	Inclusive teaching PD (from administrators to parents)		Teacher	Elementary
Orton-Gillingham Training	Reading teacher PD- Summer training		Teacher	Elementary
Organic World Language Consortium			Teacher	High School
Fellows Program – OSPI				
Special education training offered by University of Washington Seattle	Teacher PD			
Washington Association for Bilingual Education (WABE)	Conferences - Teacher PD			
Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA)	Conferences - Teacher PD			
Growth Mindset			Principal	High School

Name of Program	Note1	Note2	Unit of Analysis	Grade Level
Washington Ethnic Studies Now	Ethnic studies approach training		Principal	High School
Culturally responsive teaching and the brain: Promoting authentic engagement and rigor among culturally and linguistically diverse students. (2014) Zaretta L. Hammond	Book		Principal	High School
Ethnic Studies integrated in school curriculum			Principal	High School
Jensen Learning—Brain Based Teaching & Learning with Eric Jensen			Principal	High School