



# Closing Opportunity Gaps

## in Washington's Public Education System

A Report by the Achievement Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee | January 2010

Public education that helps all students succeed is essential to the wellbeing of our nation and the State of Washington. In our statutes, case law, and public consciousness, we recognize the imperative of creating and sustaining schools that succeed in educating all students, regardless of their race, ethnicity, background, or other circumstances.

But 55 years after *Brown v. Board of Education*, we still provide students with an education that is grossly unequal. Washington test scores provide strong evidence that academic achievement is highly correlated to students' race, ethnicity, and economic circumstances.

While average academic achievement has improved over time, the achievement gap persists. Moreover, the student populations most at risk of getting a second-rate education are the ones growing the most rapidly (Table 1). Our public schools cannot afford to conduct business as usual. Excellence and equity are inseparable goals. We cannot attain one without the other.

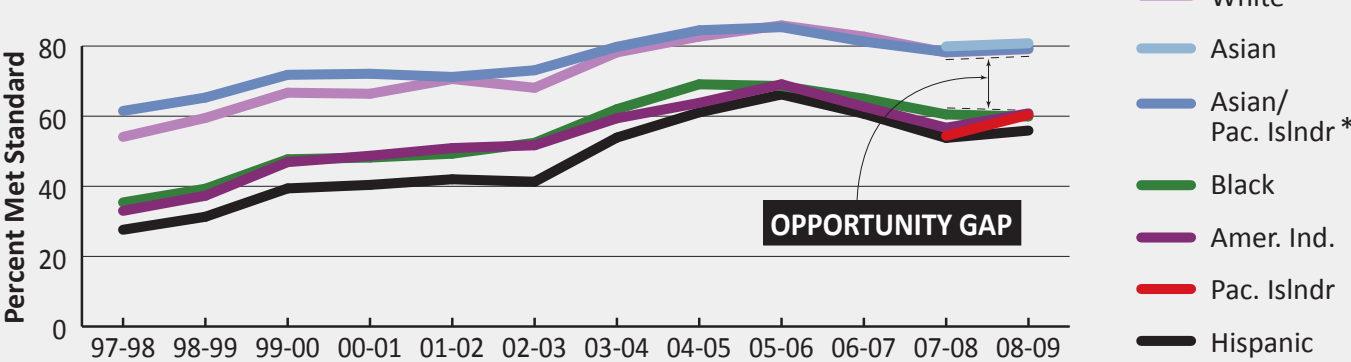
TABLE 1

### Student Demographics in Washington State

The white student population in Washington's public education system has declined, while the population of students of color has increased by 38%.

	1998-99	2009-10	Growth
All Students	999,616	1,040,750	4.1%
White	759,708	672,350	-11.5%
Latino	90,965	158,612	74.4%
Asian Amer./Pac. Islndr	70,973	89,231	25.7%
African American	50,980	56,790	11.4%
Amer. Ind./Alaska Native	27,989	27,363	-2.2%
Bilingual/ELL	50,980	83,260	63.3%

### 4th Grade Reading Test Scores in Washington



\* Pacific Island and Asian American students were first disaggregated in 2007-08.

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# About the Achievement Gap and Oversight

## Committee Members

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**Frieda Takamura,**  
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**Sen. Curtis King**

**Sen. Rosemary  
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**Rep. Dave Quall**

**Rep. Kevin Parker**

**Rep. Sharon Tomiko  
Santos**

**Adie Simmons,**  
Office of the  
Education  
Ombudsman

**Erin Jones,** Office of  
Superintendent of  
Public Instruction

## The Committee's Charge

1. Report strategies to address the achievement gap and the state's progress closing the gap.
2. Synthesize the findings and recommendations from the 2008 achievement gap studies into an implementation plan.
3. Recommend policies and strategies to State Legislature, OSPI, Governor Christine Gregoire, PESB, and SBE. Such recommendations should include at least the following:
  - Supporting and facilitating parent and community involvement and outreach.
  - Enhancing the cultural competence of current and future educators and the cultural relevance of curriculum and instruction.
  - Expanding pathways and strategies to prepare and recruit diverse teachers and administrators.
  - Recommending current programs and resources that should be redirected to narrow the gap.
  - Identifying data elements and systems needed to monitor progress in closing the gap.
  - Making closing the achievement gap part of the school and school district improvement process.
  - Exploring innovative school models that have shown success in closing the achievement gap.

## Staffing Support for the Committee

OSPI, Center for the Improvement of Student Learning: [www.yourlearningcenter.org](http://www.yourlearningcenter.org)  
OSPI, Office of Equity and Civil Rights: [www.k12.wa.us/Equity/default.aspx](http://www.k12.wa.us/Equity/default.aspx)

## Committee's Theory of Action



The Committee identifies, shares and advocates for strategies that work to reduce the achievement gap with a cultural competence lens.

## Governance

The Committee unanimously opted to use **John-Paul Chaisson-Cardenas**, Director of Equity and Civil Rights at OSPI, as a neutral facilitator in lieu of electing a chair. In addition, the Committee chose the consensus decision-making model – a process that seeks not only the agreement of most committee members, but also the resolution or mitigation of minority objections. In the relatively few instances where it was not possible to form unanimous decisions or recommendations, dissenting parties were allowed to record their disagreement.

# Accountability Committee

## 2009 Accomplishments

- Met eight times between September and December.
- Completed synthesis of Achievement Gap Studies from:
  - \* 5 very different studies
  - \* More than 700 Pages
  - \* More than 134 recommendations into 10 categories
- Based on the Achievement Gap studies, the Committee has drafted recommendations to:
  - \* Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) & PESB's Cultural Competency Work Group
  - \* State Board of Education
  - \* Quality Education Council
  - \* Data Governance Committee
  - \* Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
  - \* Legislature
  - \* Governor Christine Gregoire



**Q.** *Is the achievement gap a function of poverty or race?*

**A.** *It's not a matter of "either/or." Poverty and race are intertwined, and both correlate with our achievement gaps. The problem of educational inequality will not be fully addressed if we sweep aside race and ethnicity and focus on poverty alone.*

## Reframing the Gap: From Kids to Systems

The “achievement gap” classically refers to the difference in test scores between racial and ethnic students and their white counterparts. This terminology is deeply embedded in the nation’s vocabulary, including our own enabling legislation and our committee’s name – Achievement Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee. However, our work makes us increasingly wary of the term “the achievement gap” for two reasons. First, the plural form – “achievement gaps” – more correctly denotes the unique and complex challenges faced by our various ethnic and racial subgroups.

Second, and more importantly, we are increasingly convinced that the gap arises from inequities in the education system. All students can succeed, but they need highly effective teachers, exemplary curriculum and materials, and appropriate academic and social support – resources that are often missing today for students of color. These “opportunity gaps” or “access gaps” make student success difficult or impossible. Part of the work of the Committee is to remedy this situation and develop a statewide plan to provide equitable opportunities for ALL students.

“The term ‘achievement gap’ puts the blame on students of color—that they are to blame for not achieving at the same rates as their white peers. The achievement gap is evidence of the inadequacies of our education system, not our student’s ability to learn. All students can learn – the question is whether we give all students equitable opportunities or access to the tools they need to learn. In this context, the most appropriate term is ‘opportunity gap’ or ‘access gap.’”

– Wanda Brown

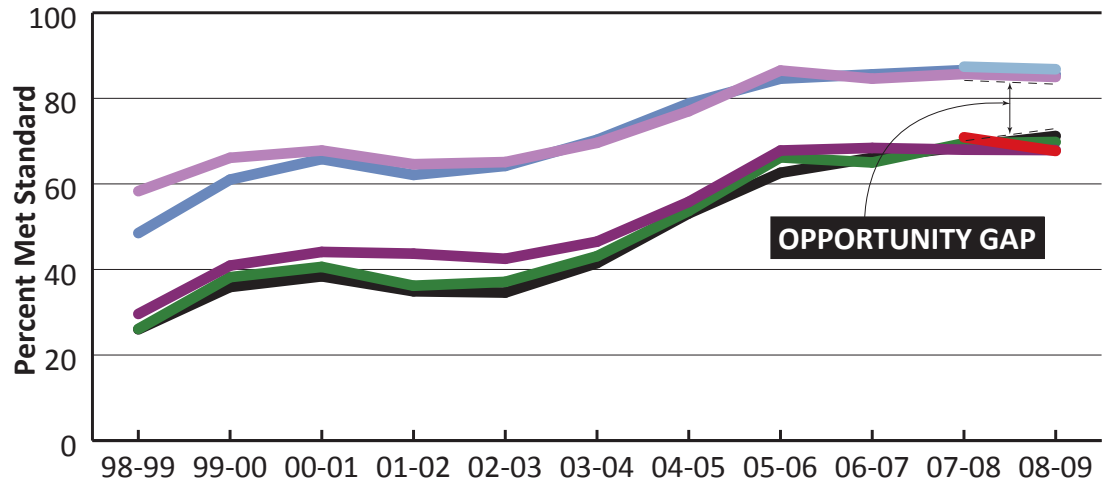
# An Urgent Concern

“Lumping’ communities makes the unique strengths and challenges within them invisible. Pacific Islanders have histories, cultures, and social circumstances distinct from those of Asian Americans, and they have made their own impressive and lasting contributions to our state.”

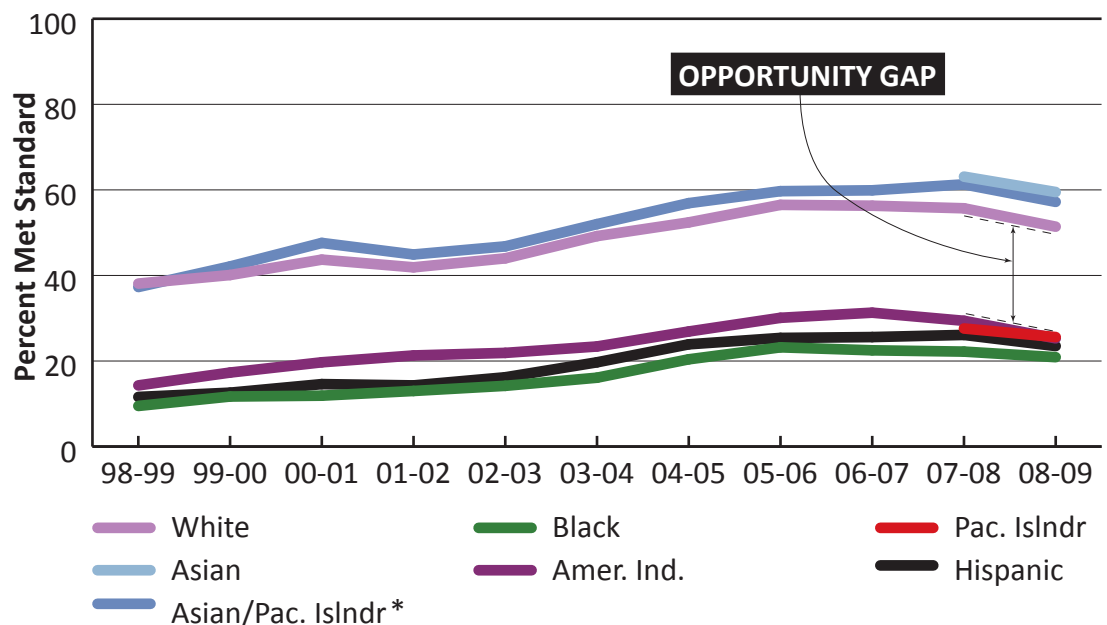
– Sili Savusa

Although it is narrowing in some subjects, the achievement gap persists today.

## 10th Grade Reading Test Scores in Washington



## 10th Grade Math Test Scores in Washington



\* Pacific Island and Asian Americans students were first disaggregated in 2007-08.

## Global Comparisons

In international scholastic comparisons like the Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), white and Asian-American students perform competitively. In the current education system, the average performance of Black and Latino

students – a growing portion of our student population – lags significantly behind. In math and science, our Black and Latino eighth grade students perform at the level of students from developing countries.

TABLE 2

## Closing the Achievement Gap

If nothing changes, it is estimated that Washington will close its opportunity gaps by the following years:

	Black	Hispanic	American Indian
4th Grade Reading	2022 (12 yrs)	2022 (12 yrs)	2029 (19 yrs)
4th Grade Math	2042 (32 yrs)	2050 (40 yrs)	2049 (39 yrs)
10th Grade Reading	2017 (7 yrs)	2017 (7 yrs)	2018 (8 yrs)
10th Grade Math	2064 (54 yrs)	2056 (46 yrs)	2058 (48 yrs)

Source: OSPI research

## Why is it important to close the racial and ethnic achievement gaps?

It is imperative for schools to work for all students, regardless of the cultural, racial, ethnic, national or linguistic background. The reasons are simple and straightforward. A strong education system creates opportunity for Washington citizens. Well-educated citizens support our economic growth and a competitive advantage in a diverse and democratic society.

Achievement gaps contribute to student disengagement from school-i.e. dropping out.

We recognize that student achievement is influenced by factors outside of the classroom-history, economics, family and personal experience. However, studies show that schools and educators have a significant impact on student achievement. Currently, students of color and low-income students encounter:

- Lower expectations.
- Inadequate instruction and support

from their schools and teachers.

- Lower level content (rather than thinking, understanding and application skills).
- Less experienced and qualified teachers.
- Inferior or limited curriculum materials.
- Schools also reflect the culture of white, middle-class society, which can lead to a disconnect between students who come from different cultures and family conditions and traditional school structure and expectations.

Achievement gaps are often milestones along the path of total student disengagement from school – i.e., dropping out. When students give specific reasons for dropping out, it is often related to a history of poor grades, and a lack of progress toward graduation.

“The racial achievement gap grows in magnitude as a child nears entry to the workforce from grade 4 to grade 12. Between fourth and twelfth grade, the gap grows 41% for Latino students and 22% for black students.”

**The Racial Achievement Gap – Copyright © McKinsey & Company (April 2009)**



# Committee Recommendations

The Committee was charged with recommending policies and strategies to Governor Christine Gregoire, the State Legislature, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Professional Educator Standards Board, and the State Board of Education.

Please note that recommendations are abbreviated below.

For full text visit: [www.k12.wa.us/AchievementGap](http://www.k12.wa.us/AchievementGap)

Needs Improvement!  
The Education Trust in its January 2010 report, “Gauging the Gap,” cites Washington as one of the “bottom five states” for narrowing the achievement gap.

[www.edtrust.org](http://www.edtrust.org)

## Top priorities

The Committee synthesized its work into ten priority areas identified in the 2008 achievement gap studies. These areas will drive the work and recommendations of the committee:

1. Supporting and facilitating parent, family, and community involvement and outreach.
2. Identifying data elements and systems needed to monitor progress in closing the gap.
3. Enhancing the cultural competence of current and future educators and the cultural relevance of curriculum and instruction.
4. Expanding pathways and strategies to prepare and recruit diverse teachers and administrators.
5. Recommending current programs and resources that should be redirected to narrow the gap.
6. Making closing the achievement gap part of the school and school improvement process.
7. Exploring innovative school models that have shown success in closing the achievement gap.
8. Health and wellbeing.
9. Post-secondary education and job training.
10. Early Learning – seamless birth to 20 support continuum.

Download the full synthesis at:

[www.k12.wa.us/cisl/pubdocs/Synthesis2008Recommendations.pdf](http://www.k12.wa.us/cisl/pubdocs/Synthesis2008Recommendations.pdf)

## Quality Education Council (QEC) | [www.k12.wa.us/QEC/default.aspx](http://www.k12.wa.us/QEC/default.aspx)

- Recruit a more diverse racial and ethnic membership that is representative of the students served in Washington State.
- Review the funding formula through the lens of equitable versus equal.
- Adopt a weighted formula be used for schools with high achievement gaps that would include increased allocation for:
  - \* Counselors, with the student-counselor ratio specified in the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) model
  - \* District equity/diversity coordinators
  - \* Family and community outreach staff
  - \* School nurses and health care providers
  - \* Social workers
- Make funding decisions that ensure all students can meet graduation requirements.
- Revise prototypical school funding model to ensure adequate accountability mechanisms for schools with high achievement gaps.
- Implement funding for English Language Learning (Bilingual Education) this year.
- Investigate implementing instructional coaches.
- Coordinate additional program funding with efforts to increase capacity, including building space and qualified staff.
- Designate the existing state-funded Learning Improvement Days (LID) for research-based professional development in the area of cultural competence.
- Allocate funding for cultural competence professional development of administrators, teachers, and other school staff.
- Provide additional funding for enabling the teaching and maintaining tribal languages, history and culture, as identified in RCW 28A.410.045.
- Implement the use of instructional materials early (not limited to textbooks).
- Allocate funding to districts to implement culturally relevant, research-based academic and social-emotional assessment tools so that districts can identify risk factors and employ appropriate intervention strategies for students.

[www.k12.wa.us/cisl/pubdocs/QECmemorandum.pdf](http://www.k12.wa.us/cisl/pubdocs/QECmemorandum.pdf)



The Quality Education Council was created to recommend and inform the ongoing implementation by the legislature of an evolving program of basic education and the financing necessary to support such program.

# Committee Recommendations

The Legislature proposes bills, investigates, holds hearings, and enacts the statutes of the state.

## State Legislature | [www.leg.wa.gov/pages/home.aspx](http://www.leg.wa.gov/pages/home.aspx)

- Modify our existing educational system, which functions under strong local control, to ensure that state-level requirements and agencies can better support, monitor and regulate districts and hold them accountable for educating all students.
- Give OSPI legal authority to ensure that school districts comply with state and federal civil rights laws.
- Implement research-based statewide initiatives to improve the achievement of students of color.
- Increase the authority of and funding for the Achievement Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee.
- Disconnect state assessments from graduation requirements.
- Pass House Bill 1162: Providing for social emotional learning in public schools.
- Increase funding provided for OSPI to implement an online educator certification system.

[www.k12.wa.us/cisl/pubdocs/MemotoLeg1.10.pdf](http://www.k12.wa.us/cisl/pubdocs/MemotoLeg1.10.pdf)

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction provides supervision over all matters pertaining to the public schools of the state.

## Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)

[www.k12.wa.us](http://www.k12.wa.us)

- Enhance its monitoring and compliance efforts in the area of cultural competence and the achievement gap
  - Respond to racial and ethnic subgroup concerns within the Data Governance Work Group
  - Develop a system within the Data Governance Work Group that is consistent with privacy restrictions
- while permitting disaggregated student data to be available to everyone who wants to use it (teachers and administrators, including government, education researchers, schools, families, community groups, etc.) in order to assure more transparency and accountability in the educational system.

[www.k12.wa.us/cisl/pubdocs/DataGovernance1.10.pdf](http://www.k12.wa.us/cisl/pubdocs/DataGovernance1.10.pdf)

The minority report of the Achievement Gap committee can be found at:  
<http://www.k12.wa.us/cisl/pubdocs/minorityreportlegrec.pdf>



## Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) | [www.pesb.wa.gov](http://www.pesb.wa.gov)

- Enhance its monitoring and compliance efforts in the area of cultural competence and the achievement gap
  - Require all teachers to have basic training on English Language Learner (ELL) strategies.
  - Use the term “cultural competence” instead of “cultural competency.”
  - Commit to system-wide training and accountability for administrators, including superintendents, school boards, principals and counselors, as well as all supporting staff (bus drivers, paraprofessionals and classified staff) for cultural competence.
  - Provide continued technical assistance and professional development for teachers to incorporate cultural competence.
  - Educator preparatory programs should mirror University of Washington admission requirements of 80 hours of volunteering with community-based organizations.
  - Write teacher standards in “plain talk” so that educators, families and non-educators can understand them.
  - Align and infuse cultural competence standards across academic categories in order to show how they interrelate across the teaching continuum.
  - Avoid standards that may be intrusive to diverse families.
- [www.k12.wa.us/cisl/pubdocs/pesbmemo.pdf](http://www.k12.wa.us/cisl/pubdocs/pesbmemo.pdf)

The Professional Educator Standards Board establishes policies, standards, and requirements for the preparation and certification of educators.

## State Board of Education (SBE) | [www.sbe.wa.gov](http://www.sbe.wa.gov)

- Advocate for modifying Washington’s local control statutes and regulations.
- Revise its regulations (WAC 180-16-220) in order to strengthen existing or develop new statewide requirements for school district improvement plans.
- Reject Core 24 graduation requirements.
- Enhance monitoring and compliance efforts in the area of cultural competence and the achievement gap.

[www.k12.wa.us/cisl/pubdocs/StateBoardMemo1.10.pdf](http://www.k12.wa.us/cisl/pubdocs/StateBoardMemo1.10.pdf)

State Board of Education provides advocacy and strategic oversight of public education.

# Measuring the Gap

“The research does suggest that unconscious racial bias, stereotypes and other race-linked factors have a significant impact on the patterns of identification, placement, and quality of services for minority children, and particularly for African-American children.”

Losen, D. & Orfield, G. (2002). *Racial Inequity in Special Education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

The Committee’s measurement of the opportunity gap focuses on the disparity in test score results between white students and students of color. Washington’s Report Card, published annually by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, shows long-standing and sustained racial disparities in test results at all grade levels and for all subject areas tested (reading, writing, mathematics, and science).

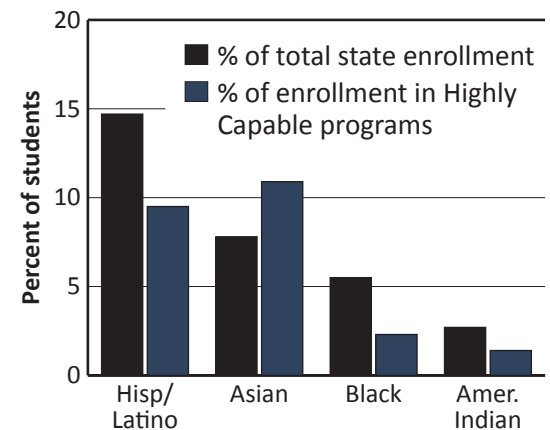
Evidence of the opportunity gap transcends test scores. “Many students are in demographic groups that are overrepresented in measures such as school disciplinary standards; failure to graduate; enrollment in special education and underperforming schools; enrollment in advanced placement courses, honors programs, and college preparatory classes; and enrollment in and completion of college.”

– Notes appended to RCW 28A.300.136

## The Highly Capable Program | [www.k12.wa.us/HighlyCapable](http://www.k12.wa.us/HighlyCapable)

The Highly Capable Program (HCP) provides funding to school districts to institute educational opportunities that meet the unique academic needs of students with have high levels of academic performance.

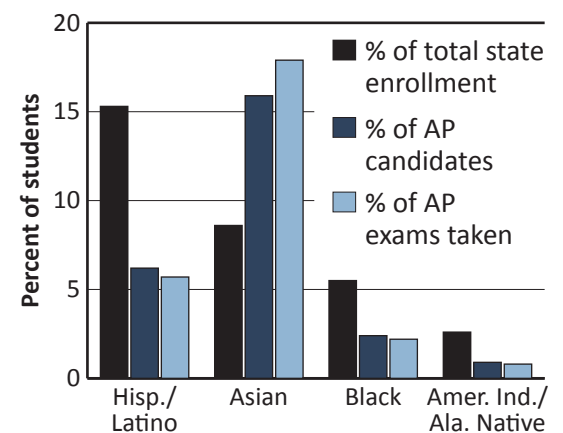
White students are overrepresented in HCP enrollment, while students of color are highly underrepresented.



## The Advanced Placement Program | [www.k12.wa.us/AdvancedPlacement](http://www.k12.wa.us/AdvancedPlacement)

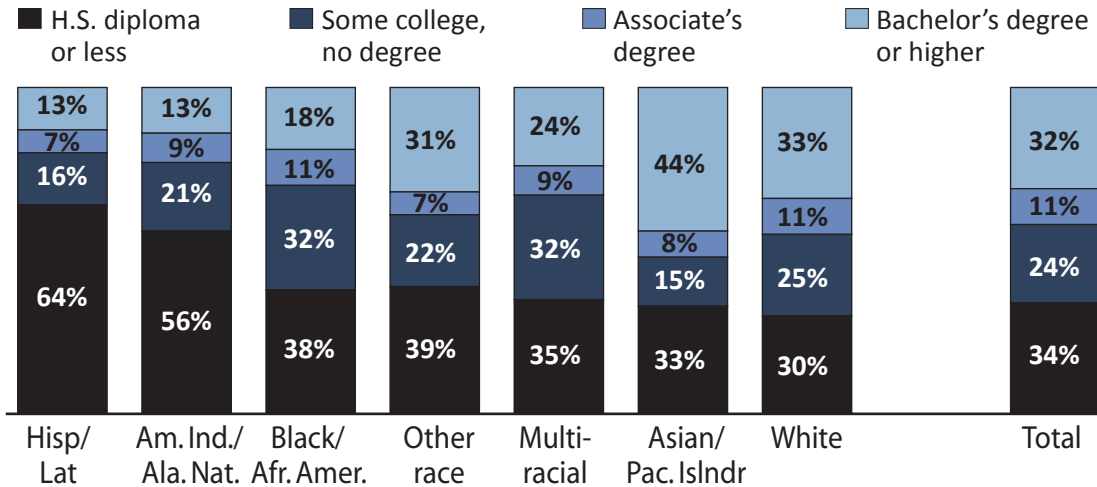
The Advanced Placement (AP) Program allows students to take rigorous college level courses while still in high school. Students may earn college credit and/or advanced placement into upper level college courses by taking AP exams.

African American, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaskan Native students are significantly underrepresented in the AP Program.



## Educational Attainment by Race/Ethnicity, ages 25-64, 2007

Asian/Pacific Islander students have the highest levels of college attainment, while Hispanic/Latino and American Indian/Alaska Native students have the lowest.



Source: 2007 American Community Survey, cited in *Population Demographics Affecting Washington Higher Education*, Randy Spaulding, Ph.D., Director of Academic Affairs, Higher Education Coordinating Board

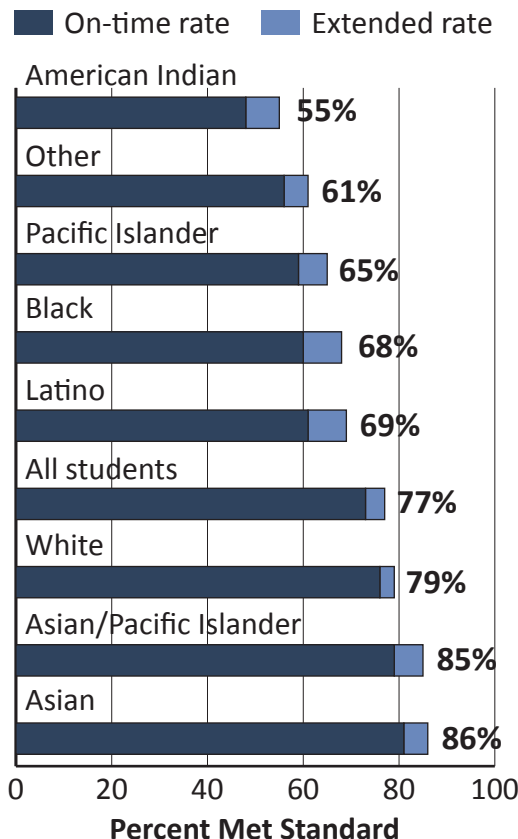
## What If We Don't Close the Gap?

The achievement gap is mirrored by disproportionate numbers of students of color within the juvenile justice system. Although youth of color are 27 percent of the juvenile population, they are 45 percent of the Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration population.

Race/Ethnicity	% of Juv. Pop.	% of Juv. Dispositions
Afr. Amer.	3.9%	13.1%
Asian/P. Isldr	6.2%	3.0%
White	72.3%	64.4%
Latino	11.2%	14.4%
Amer. Indian	2.0%	4.9%

Source: Sentencing Guidelines Commission, State of Washington, 2005.

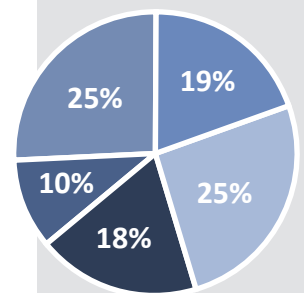
## High school graduation rates, 2007-08



## Special Education

Students of color are affected disproportionately when receiving special education services.

Percent of students receiving special education services in Washington:



19% of white students

25% of American Indian/Alaska Native students

18% of Latino students

10% of Asian/Pac. Islander students

25% of African American students

## For More Information:

### Achievement Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee Web site:

[www.k12.wa.us/AchievementGap/default.aspx](http://www.k12.wa.us/AchievementGap/default.aspx)

### Synthesis of the 2008 Achievement Gap Reports

Achievement Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee

[www.k12.wa.us/cisl/pubdocs/Synthesis2008Recommendations.pdf](http://www.k12.wa.us/cisl/pubdocs/Synthesis2008Recommendations.pdf)

### 2008 Achievement Gap Studies:

A Plan to Close the Achievement Gap for African American Students

Staffed by the Center for the Improvement of Student Learning

[www.k12.wa.us/cisl/pubdocs/AfrAmer%20AchGap%20Rpt%20FINAL.pdf](http://www.k12.wa.us/cisl/pubdocs/AfrAmer%20AchGap%20Rpt%20FINAL.pdf)

From Where the Sun Rises:

Addressing the Educational Achievement of Native Americans in Washington State

Submitted to the Governor's Office on Indian Affairs

[www.goia.wa.gov/Links-Resources/NativeAmericanAchievementReport.pdf](http://www.goia.wa.gov/Links-Resources/NativeAmericanAchievementReport.pdf)

Asian Americans in Washington State: Closing Their Hidden Achievement Gaps

Submitted to the Washington State Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs

[www.capaa.wa.gov/documents/AchievementGapReport.pdf](http://www.capaa.wa.gov/documents/AchievementGapReport.pdf)

Growing Presence, Emerging Voices:

Pacific Islanders and Academic Achievement in Washington

Submitted to the Washington State Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs

[www.capaa.wa.gov/documents/PacificIslanderAchievementGapReport.pdf](http://www.capaa.wa.gov/documents/PacificIslanderAchievementGapReport.pdf)

Understanding Opportunities to Learn for Latino Students in Washington

Submitted to the Washington State Commission on Hispanic Affairs

[www.cha.wa.gov/?q=files/WALatinoAchievementGapReport.pdf](http://www.cha.wa.gov/?q=files/WALatinoAchievementGapReport.pdf)

### 2009 Committee Recommendations:

Recommendations to the Professional Educator Standards Board

[www.k12.wa.us/cisl/pubdocs/pesbmemo.pdf](http://www.k12.wa.us/cisl/pubdocs/pesbmemo.pdf)

Recommendations to the State Board of Education

[www.k12.wa.us/cisl/pubdocs/StateBoardMemo1.10.pdf](http://www.k12.wa.us/cisl/pubdocs/StateBoardMemo1.10.pdf)

Recommendations to the State Legislature

[www.k12.wa.us/cisl/pubdocs/MemotoLeg1.10.pdf](http://www.k12.wa.us/cisl/pubdocs/MemotoLeg1.10.pdf)

Recommendations to the Data Governance Group

[www.k12.wa.us/cisl/pubdocs/DataGovernance1.10.pdf](http://www.k12.wa.us/cisl/pubdocs/DataGovernance1.10.pdf)

Recommendations to the Quality Education Council

[www.k12.wa.us/cisl/pubdocs/QECmemorandum.pdf](http://www.k12.wa.us/cisl/pubdocs/QECmemorandum.pdf)

“The most powerful changes we can make are changes in our own attitudes about kids - all kids can be successful, no exceptions!”

— Erin Jones

## About this Report

This report was compiled by staff from OSPI's Center for the Improvement of Student Learning and Equity and Civil Rights Office:

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