## CONTENTS

## Notes from the Editor

This issue has papers related to principal isolation, support for teachers dealing with students in trauma, state graduation requirements related to assessments, bilingual education, and private school enrollment. Shorter commentaries deal with how national academic standards affected state testing, school rating systems, and highly capable students. Several books on data visualization are discussed. This issue also includes a new feature, *Summaries of Noteworthy Studies Published by Others*. Many studies are published in the Pacific Northwest and elsewhere that relate to topics of interest of WERA members but often go unnoticed. Information on studies published in 2018 is summarized at the end of this issue. The full studies and names of the authors can be accessed by using the links provided.

We are seeking submissions for the May 2019 issue of the *WERA Educational Journal*. The *WEJ* is a collection of academic papers, professional reports, book reviews, and other articles and summaries of general significance and interest to the Northwest education research and practitioner community. Topics in the *WEJ* cover a wide range of areas of educational research and related disciplines. These include but are not limited to issues related to the topics listed below.

- Early childhood education
- Curriculum and instruction
- State and national standards
- Professional development
- Special populations (e.g., gifted, ELLs, students with disabilities)
- Assessments and their relationship with other variables

- Early warning indicators
- Social and emotional issues
- School and district effectiveness
- Teacher and principal evaluation
- Education finance and policy
- Educational technology
- Educational leadership

We encourage the submission of condensed versions of dissertations and theses that are reader-friendly. Papers for the May 2019 issue are due January 15, 2019. For information about the *WEJ* and its submissions, see the Submission Guidelines posted on the WERA website. If you have questions about the process or about possible submissions, email WEJeditor@gmail.com.

This edition of the *WEJ* is my last as the editor. Having been the lead editor for the past four years and co-editor before that, I'm ready to hand it off to others. The *WEJ* has come a long way since it emerged as an idea 10 years ago while brainstorming with Peter Hendrickson at the AERA conference in San Francisco. Peter agreed to launch the first set of issues and I thank him for being up to the task. I thank Karen Banks, who took over from Peter when he retired and then continued as a co-editor, for her kindness and thoughtful insights about how to improve the quality of the *WEJ*, for reviewing many papers that have been submitted over the years, and for being a brilliant yet humble friend. I also thank many others who wrote and reviewed papers or assisted with its publication. I'm also indebted to Belinda Kelly, my very capable assistant in the Mukilteo School District, for her careful copy editing of all the papers – she has an amazing eye for detail and spots the littlest of things!

Finally, if you have read this far and have a few minutes, send DeAnn Hartman, WERA's Executive Secretary, a quick email with any general or specific thoughts you have about the *WEJ*, its contents and usefulness, and what needs to be changed in future issues. Her email is shown on the last page of this issue. She will pass on your views to the WERA Executive Board and the next *WEJ* editor(s).

Pete Bylsma, EdD, MPA
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Director, Assessment/Program Evaluation, Mukilteo School District

# From Isolation to Collaboration: Mitigating Professional Isolation for School Principals

Allison Drago, University Place School District
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*This study addressed the overarching question: What are the perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes of school principals in Washington State related to professional isolation? Principals are reportedly leaving the profession due to high work demands, lack of support, and feelings of isolation experienced in their work. By analyzing data obtained from a survey of school principals in Washington State, this study investigated perceived factors that contribute to professional isolation and the perceived impact of professional isolation on factors such as work performance. We also explore systems of collaboration that have the potential to lessen the impacts of professional isolation.*

## Introduction

The role of the school principal is frequently referred to as the "loneliest position in K-12 education" (Maxwell, 2015, p. 2). Most principals enter the profession with experience as classroom teachers, a role for which there is typically significant support and collegial collaboration. The contrast between the roles of teacher and principal is stark. The principal is no longer one of many teachers in the school; rather he or she is alone without job-alike peers. Acceptance of the supervisory and evaluative responsibilities of the administrative role delineates a clear separation between teachers and principal. As a result, novice principals often experience such feelings as surprise, a sense of ultimate responsibility, stress, and loneliness (Spillane & Lee, 2014).

But principals are not the only educators to feel isolated. To reduce isolation and autonomy among teachers, schools have introduced systems of collaboration, such as professional learning communities (PLCs) (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). However, these collaborative structures are not as readily available for principals, and studies have identified elementary school principals as especially isolated from job-alike peers (Simieou, Decman, Grigsby, & Schumacher, 2010).

Beyond the lack of collaborative structures, principal isolation exists in an environment of daily pressure to perform the complex, demanding, and stressful work of improving the achievement of all students (Fullan, 2002; Fullan, 2010; Hertling, 2001; Malone & Caddell, 2000). Without the support and guidance of supervisors and colleagues, the principalship can be extremely demanding. Support structures, such as professional learning communities, mentoring, and central office support, have the potential to assist principals' work in this demanding, dynamic, and stressful profession. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to identify and understand the impacts of school principal professional isolation and explore ways to minimize this phenomenon.

## Research Questions

The overarching theoretical question for this study is, What are the perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes of school principals in Washington State related to professional isolation? The following subquestions were designed to narrow the focus on such isolation:

1.  Do school principals perceive themselves to be professionally isolated?

2.  If school principals do perceive themselves as professionally isolated, what are the perceived causes of professional isolation in the school principalship?

3.  What are the demographic factors associated with perceived professional isolation in the school principalship?

4.  What is the perceived effect of professional isolation on school principals' work performance?

5.  What type of district-level supports do school principals recommend to reduce professional isolation?

6. How do school principals perceive principal professional learning communities and/or mentoring programs as a means to reduce professional isolation?

## Methods and Design

For this study, we employed survey research methods. Survey data pertaining to professional isolation and collaboration were obtained from school principals in Washington State via an anonymous electronic survey.

*Population Sample.* The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) reported that during the 2015–2016 school year, there were 2,328 school principals employed in the state of Washington. Of the 2,328 principals, 59.5% (1,385) were at the elementary level and 40.5% (943) were at the secondary level (middle and high school). All elementary and secondary school principals in Washington State, as listed in the OSPI principal directory, were invited via email to participate in the study. The OSPI principal directory contained 1,972 names of school principals in Washington State.

*Measures.* Participants were asked to complete an anonymous electronic survey divided into three sections. The first section asked respondents to provide specific demographic information about themselves, their districts, and their schools. The second section employed two Likert scales to identify perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes related to professional isolation. The third section asked participants to respond to a yes/no checklist and open-ended questions pertaining to professional isolation and collaboration.

*Procedures.* The names of all elementary and secondary school principals in Washington State were obtained from the 2015 OSPI Principal Directory and uploaded into an email distribution list. All Washington State school principals received via email, a written introduction to the study and a link that took them directly to an online version of the survey. Participating principals were instructed that they must electronically agree to an informed consent before beginning the survey. The survey window was from November 23, 2015 to December 31, 2015. A reminder email was sent to all participants on December 18, 2015, two weeks prior to the closing of the survey window. Returned survey data were compiled and stored anonymously in a secured and confidential database.

*Data Analysis.* We gathered data administering an anonymous electronic survey that included multiple choice, Likert scale, and open-ended questions. The collected data included demographic characteristics of respondents and respondents' perceptions as related to the study's research questions. We then compiled descriptive statistics, such as frequency, percentage, mean, median, mode, minimum value, maximum value, and standard deviation, for all quantitative survey items. Qualitative data obtained from two open-ended survey questions were examined for recurring themes. We employed descriptive statistics to summarize participants' demographic information (i.e., age, gender, ethnicity, years of working experience, and employment status), professional activities, (such as meeting with other principals and district administrators and mentoring), and reasons for professional isolation. Cross tabulation analysis was conducted to determine whether school principals' demographic indicators (i.e., age, gender, ethnicity, school type, school size, and district size) were related to their perceptions of professional isolation from other school principals. We examined the relations between perceived isolation and variables such as work performance, job satisfaction, and retention; and, finally, analyzed data from participants' responses to the open-ended questions through an inductive, theme-based analysis (Charmaz, 2006).

*Demographic Information of the Population Sample.* Of the 1,943 principals invited, 232 participated in the study for a response rate of 11.9%. Table 1 presents demographic data describing the respondents. The median age of the respondents was 48.3 years with an average of 4.7 years working in the same school and a total of 9.4 years in the principalship.

**Table 1: Demographic Information**

| Characteristics | N | % | M | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Individual** | | | | |
| Age | | | 48.3 | 8.3 |
| Years working in current school | | | 4.7 | 4.1 |
| Years as a school principal | | | 9.4 | 6.8 |
| Employed as assistant principal or dean of students prior to school principal | 166 | 72% | | |
| Male | 120 | 52% | | |
| Ethnicity | | | | |
| Caucasian | 202 | 87% | | |
| Black | 2 | 1% | | |
| Hispanic | 9 | 4% | | |
| Native American | 5 | 2% | | |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 7 | 3% | | |
| Multiracial/Other | 7 | 3% | | |
| **School** | | | | |
| Grade level | | | | |
| Elementary | 113 | 49% | | |
| Middle/Junior High | 43 | 18% | | |
| High | 47 | 20% | | |
| K-12 | 13 | 5% | | |
| Other | 16 | 8% | | |
| Free and reduced-price lunch | | | 51 | 24.3 |
| Student population | | | | |
| <300 | 45 | 19% | | |
| 300-600 | 103 | 44% | | |
| 601-900 | 49 | 21% | | |
| >900 | 33 | 14% | | |
| Missing | 2 | 2% | | |
| **District** | | | | |
| Rural | 80 | 35% | | |
| Suburban | 106 | 46% | | |
| Urban | 45 | 19% | | |
| Student population | | | | |
| <3500 | 69 | 30% | | |
| 3500-12000 | 75 | 33% | | |
| 12000-2000 | 32 | 14% | | |
| >2000 | 53 | 23% | | |

**Findings**

*Perceived Causes of Professional Isolation*

In Figure 1, respondents were asked to identify factors that influence professional isolation in their role as a school principal. Seventy-four percent (74%) of respondents identified "constraints on time" as a factor that influences professional isolation, 34% identified "lack of formal collaborative systems" as an influential factor, and 25% identified "physical distance between me and my colleagues" as an influential factor. Twenty-seven percent (27%) of the respondents indicated that they do not feel professionally isolated in their role as a school principal.

**Figure 1: Perceived Causes of Professional Isolation**
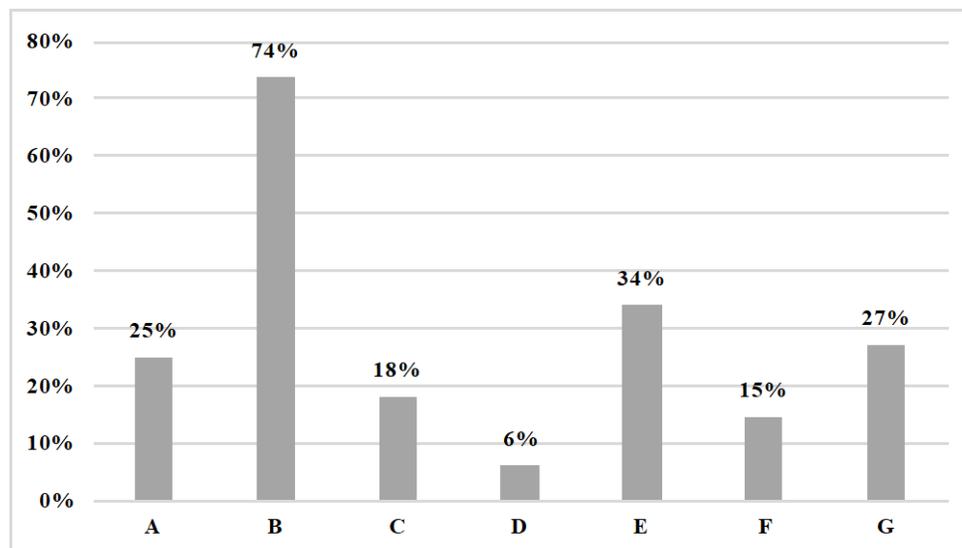


A= Physical distance between me and my colleagues
B= Constraints on time
C=Lack of support from central office leaders
D=Lack of support from other principal colleagues
E=Lack of formal collaborative systems
F=School or district climate
G=I do not feel professionally isolated in my role as a school principal

*Demographic Factors and Perceived Professional Isolation*

A cross tabulation analysis was conducted to determine whether school principals' demographic indicators (i.e., school type, school size, district size, work experience, age, gender, and ethnicity) were related to perceptions of professional isolation in the principalship. Statistically significant Chi square values were found in professional isolation by school type, professional isolation by school size, and professional isolation by work experience. Table 2 presents Chi square values that indicate dependent relationships between the demographic variables *school size*, *school type* and *work experience* and the variable *professional isolation*. In each case the strength of correlation as indicated by Cramer V values is relatively modest (.18, .22, and .21). Also presented are Chi square values that indicate independent relationships between the demographic variables *age, district size, ethnicity,* and *gender* and the variable *professional isolation*.

**Table 2: Summary of Chi Square Values Demographic Variables by Professional Isolation Tables**

| Variable | $\chi^2$ | $p$ | Cramer's V | $H_0$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| School Size | 30.2 | .017 | .180 | Rejected |
| School Type | 34.2 | .001 | .22 | Rejected |
| Work Experience | 19.8 | .001 | .21 | Rejected |
| Age | 12.7 | .123 | .167 | Not Rejected |
| District Size | 10.24 | .85 | .11 | Not Rejected |
| Ethnicity | 4.7 | .315 | .143 | Not Rejected |
| Gender | 7.93 | .440 | .131 | Not Rejected |

*Perceived Professional Isolation and Work Performance*

In Figure 2, results indicate that 47.9% of respondents disagree or strongly disagree that work performance is negatively impacted by professional isolation. In addition, about 48.7% of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree that their job satisfaction is negatively impacted by professional isolation. Slightly more than seventy-four percent (74.5%) of respondents disagree or strongly disagree that they have considered leaving the school principalship as a result of professional isolation.

**Figure 2: Perceived effect of professional isolation on work performance and satisfaction.**



|  | Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ■ Statement 1 | 1.7 | 21.6 | 28.8 | 31.5 | 16.4 |
| ■ Statement 2 | 6.9 | 20.3 | 24.1 | 31.0 | 17.7 |
| ■ Statement 3 | 3.0 | 6.5 | 16.0 | 22.8 | 51.7 |
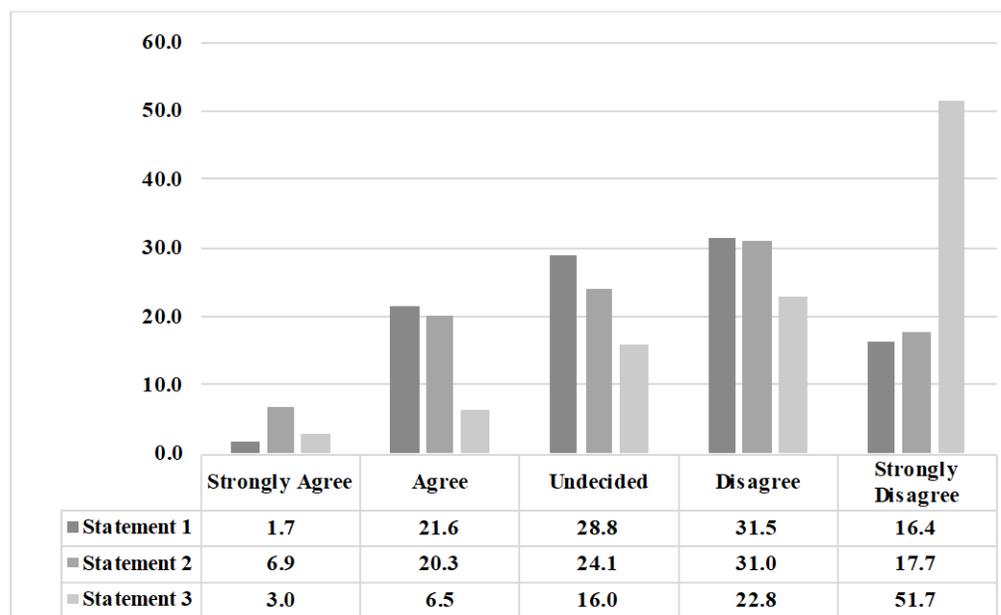
Statement 1= My work performance is negatively impacted by professional isolation.
Statement 2= My job satisfaction is negatively impacted by professional isolation.
Statement 3= I have considered leaving my position as a school principal due to professional isolation.

*District-level Supports to Reduce Professional Isolation*

Results presented in Figure 3 reveal that 65.9%, of respondents believed that "professional learning communities comprised of other school principals" would reduce professional isolation; 49.1% believed that "principal team meetings" would reduce professional isolation; and 47.4% believed that "administrative walk-throughs or learning

walks with other school principals" would reduce professional isolation. Slightly more than thirty-seven percent (37.5%) of the respondents indicated that they believed "central office support and conversations" would reduce professional isolation, and 35.3% indicated "mentoring of school principals" as a district-level support would reduce professional isolation.

**Figure 3: Perceived district strategies to reduce school principal isolation**
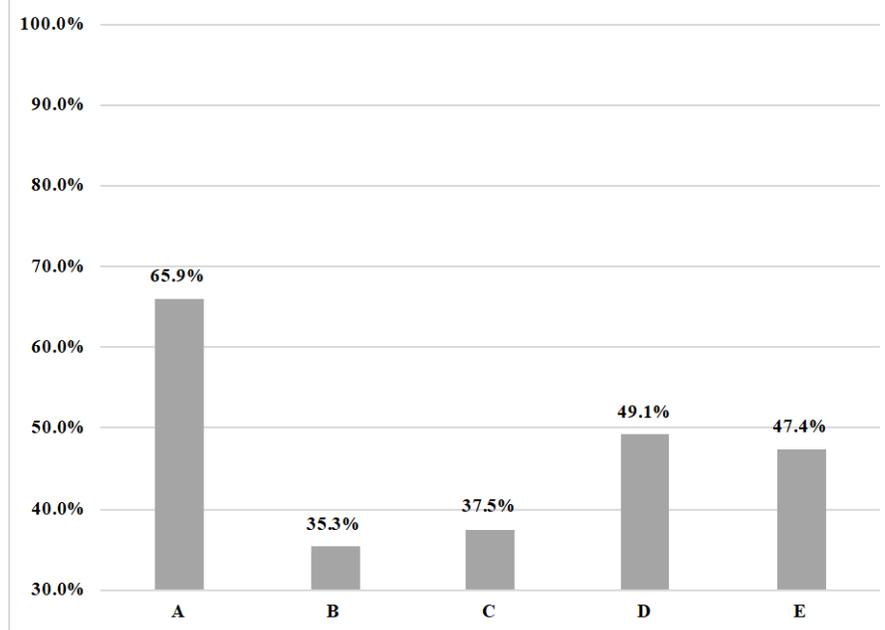


A=Professional learning communities comprised of school principals
B=Mentoring of school principals
C=Central office support and conversations
D=Principal team meetings
E=Administrative walk through or learning walks with other school principals

## Discussion

### *Professional Isolation of Elementary School Principals*

Thirty-eight percent (38%) of elementary school principals surveyed reported feeling professionally isolated either very frequently or frequently, and an additional 37% of elementary school principals reported occasionally feeling professionally isolated. In fact, only 6% of elementary school principals surveyed reported never feeling professionally isolated. An obvious difference between elementary schools and secondary schools is school size; elementary schools are typically a fraction of the size of high schools. Consequently, it is not surprising that the relation of school size to professional isolation is very similar to the relation of school type to professional isolation. Thirty-seven percent (37.3%) of principals in schools with 600 or fewer students reported very frequently or frequently feeling professionally isolated. Although some of these small schools are no doubt rural and magnet secondary schools, in the State of Washington it is safe to assume the overwhelming majority are elementary schools.

School size is understandably a primary driver of how schools are staffed. Typically, the small size of an elementary school results in only one administrator being assigned to the school. Usually, student enrollment at an elementary school must exceed 600 students before an assistant principal is assigned to it (Hertling, 2001). Elementary school principals are often the lone administrator in the school without an assistant principal or dean

of students with whom to collaborate. If in fact having multiple administrators in a school reduces feelings of professional isolation, then it is tenable that the interaction between school size and the differentiated staffing of schools contributes to a higher incidence of reported professional isolation in elementary and small schools. However, it would be difficult for pedagogical reasons to argue that elementary schools should be made larger in order to drive higher staffing levels of administrators at each site. It would be equally difficult to justify the expense of adding administrators to each site for the primary purpose of reducing principal isolation independent of costs. In the meantime, it would seem important to explore other avenues for elementary school principal collaboration and reduce principal isolation.

### *Time Demands Placed on Principals*

Seventy-four percent (74%) of respondents perceived constraints on time as the primary cause of their isolation. The second most mentioned cause of professional isolation was lack of formal collaborative systems, which was cited by 34% of respondents. These two causes of isolation have been demonstrated to interact as the principals indicate that they are too busy to professionally collaborate.

It is well known that school principals have complex and demanding jobs with limited time to be away from the daily work pressures directly connected to their assigned schools. Time constraints and time demands placed on principals are repeatedly cited by authors as one of the greatest obstacles in structuring professional learning and collaborative opportunities for school principals (Howard and Mallory, 2008; Rooney, 2003; Villani, 2006). It is critical that central office leaders consider existent time demands placed on school principals before developing systems of collaboration. Additional time demands may in fact intensify the negative impacts of professional isolation.

### *Demographic Factors and Professional Isolation*

*Work Experience.* The proportion of respondents with 0–3 years of experience and who very frequently or frequently experience professional isolation was 15% as compared to 32% of respondents with 4–9 and with 10 or more years of work experience. Principals with 3 or fewer years of work experience felt less professionally isolated than principals with more years of experience. Novice school principals typically receive more monitoring from central office administrators than do more veteran principals. This monitoring may be in the form of added supervision, and it may be in the form of added support and guidance through mentoring by veteran principals and/or central office administrators. As novice school principals become more experienced, the level of support is usually withdrawn. This may explain why respondents with 0–3 years of work experience reported feeling less isolated.

*Gender.* The association of gender with professional isolation was not statistically significant [$\chi^2(8, 230) = 7.93$, $p=.440$]. However, female respondents indicated that they meet less frequently with school principals from other school districts. Nine (9%) of female respondents indicated that they meet monthly with school principals from other school districts compared to 22% of male respondents. Seventeen percent (17%) of female respondents indicated that they meet quarterly with principals from other districts compared to 30% of male respondents; and 63% of female respondents indicated that they meet yearly with principals from other districts as compared to 44% of male respondents. Further research or investigation is needed to determine why female principals meet less frequently with principals from other districts.

*PLCs as a District-level Support.* Participants were provided a list of district-level supports and asked to indicate which strategies or initiatives would reduce professional isolation. Almost sixty-six percent (65.9%) of respondents indicated that PLCs comprised of school principals would reduce professional isolation. Slightly more than seventy-one percent (71.1%) of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that collaboration with their principal colleagues would decrease their sense of isolation. PLCs are cited in the literature as vehicles to reduce isolation of

teachers (DuFour et al., 2010; Dufour & Marzano, 2011; Hirsch & Hord, 2008; Howard & Mallory, 2008), and almost two-thirds (65%) of respondents in this survey indicated that principal PLCs would reduce isolation of principals as well.

*Mentoring as District-level Support.* Thirty-five percent of respondents identified mentoring as a strategy or initiative to reduce the professional isolation of principals. Of five school district supports—PLCs, central office support and conversations, principal team meetings, and administrative walk throughs or learning walks with other school principals, and mentoring—the least identified was mentoring. However, close to 35% of respondents did identify "mentoring of school principals" as a district- level support that may reduce professional isolation. These data suggest that school principals generally do not view mentoring as an effective means to reduce professional isolation; or the data may reflect a resistance to mentoring independent of its effect on professional isolation. In any event, these data were unexpected, and open-ended responses were examined for more detail as to why mentoring was identified by a lower percentage of principals than other district-level supports.

## Recommendations

We recommend that higher levels of support be provided to school principals beyond their first few years of service in the principalship. Since support, such as mentoring, is more readily available for novice principals, we suggest that school districts consider ways to offer ongoing professional development and assistance to principals with 4–9 years of work experience. Due to the complex nature of the work of school principals, it is likely that it will take more than the first one or two years of service for the principal to feel confident and proficient in all facets of his or her work, especially in the area of instructional leadership.

Opportunities, such as professional development, PLCs, and support may be equally important for later career school principals with 4–9 years of experience and beyond. Providing them with support and opportunities to collaborate with a central office leader might be one way of reducing professional isolation. Honig (2013) suggested the relationship between central office leaders and school principals can be a learning-focused partnership whereby the central office leader is dedicated to helping the principal grow as an instructional leader in an effort to improve the quality of instruction.

Secondly, since principals at smaller schools, and specifically elementary schools, generally report feeling more isolated than their colleagues in larger secondary schools, we recommend that collaborative opportunities and networking be targeted for them. One respondent of this study said, "It's the day-to-day isolation that greatly impacts me. I would love to have a colleague to work with; be an admin team. I've had this in the past at the elementary level and it is a game-changer." While it is likely not feasible to hire assistant principals for all elementary schools, it is reasonable to foster collegiality amongst the administrative team. Fostering such a team requires opportunities for principals to establish relationships and trust. Frequent opportunities for elementary school principals to collaborate with other school principals and central office leaders can reduce professional isolation.

## Limitations

The fact that school principals perceive themselves as professionally isolated is not entirely surprising. Self-report scales, such as the Likert scales used in this study, rely on perceptions and descriptions of the individual participants, and may lack accuracy. While this study demonstrates that school principals may perceive themselves as isolated and that collaboration with other school principals may mitigate the perceived isolation, it does not in any way evaluate the effectiveness of the school principals surveyed or the effect of collaboration on professional isolation. Although a representative sample was achieved, a much larger sample including school

principals outside of the state of Washington would be needed to truly make these results representative of school principals.

## Conclusion

School principals play a key role in the success and overall achievement of students in the school. The work of the principal is complex and demanding. We hope that uncovering perceptions of school principals about professional isolation increases awareness for the need to provide collaborative support systems and resources for them.

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# Supporting the Social and Emotional Health of Teachers: Building Resilience When Teaching Students With Trauma

Rebecca Smith, University of Portland

*This article is a call to action to support teachers who mentor, teach, and counsel students with trauma on a daily basis. According to Human and Health Services (2003), teachers are the number one reporter of child abuse, but there is a dearth of research on how teachers are impacted by vicarious traumatization. This article offers research-based teaching strategies to promote social-emotional learning to cope with traumatic stress. This article identifies the impact of trauma on professionals and advocates for building resilience through methods such as training, culturally responsive teaching, and mindfulness.*

Our students come to our classrooms with backpacks filled with trauma. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2014), U.S. Child Protective Services (CPS) received 3.4 million referrals of child abuse or neglect in the year 2012. It was estimated that 686,000 children (9.2 per 1,000) were victims of maltreatment, although this number may be underestimated (CDC, 2014). According to Human and Health Services (2016), 75% of this trauma is neglect, 17% involves physical abuse, and an additional 8% is sexual abuse. There are many other forms of trauma that impact our students, including divorce, death of a loved one, homelessness, illness, harassment, historical trauma, and oppression. The physical and emotional distress from these traumatic experiences fill our classrooms, and teachers are responsible for supporting these students, while still maintaining their own mental health.

According to Human and Health Services (2003), teachers are the number one reporter of child abuse. However, there is a dearth of research on how teachers are impacted by vicarious traumatization and a noticeable lack of support structures to help teachers cope with stress. Effects of working with trauma can include compassion fatigue and burnout. Research from social and health workers dealing with trauma can help guide strategies for incorporating self-care and resilience for teachers in their professional lives.

## Teaching Strategies that Promote SEL

The trauma that students bring to school must be addressed from various angles, and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) appears to be one effective method. SEL involves teaching students how to manage and control emotions and maintain positive social interactions. Research advocates targeted treatment, early intervention, often through SEL. Key skills taught in a SEL curriculum include: self-awareness, self-management, social-awareness, relational skills, and responsible decision-making (Elias, 2014).

Schools can implement SEL curriculum, yet teachers must also be informed on how to effectively support student social-emotional learning and development. The American Institutes for Research (2014) provides teaching strategy ideas that promote positive social behaviors and interactions with students:

Self-awareness:

- I am usually aware of how my emotions, culturally grounded beliefs, and background are precursors to my emotional reactions, and I understand how they impact my social teaching practices with my students.

- I understand how student responses (positive and negative) affect my emotions and my behaviors during social teaching practices.

Self-management:

- Through the effective management of my emotions (e.g., use of stress reduction techniques, breathing techniques, mindfulness), I am better able to implement social teaching practices, use positive approaches to

discipline, and develop a positive learning environment that is free from bias and prejudice.

- I model behaviors (e.g., form guidelines, set boundaries) to help students learn to regulate emotions during social teaching practices.

Social awareness:

- I try to understand why my students are or are not actively participating, and I am usually successful at providing my students the necessary skills to participate in the social teaching practices.

Relationship skills:

- I clearly communicate behavioral and academic expectations in a manner that addresses students' individual needs and strengths when implementing social teaching practices.

- I am comfortable helping my students resolve interpersonal conflicts that come up during social teaching practices, and I have experienced success with this.

Responsible decision-making:

- I regularly include my students and/or collaborate with colleagues to solve problems that arise in the classroom.

An awareness of how to support the social-emotional health of students can help teachers build their own resilience. However, school-wide and community supports are also needed to help keep our teachers healthy.

## School-Based Methods for Supporting Students and Teachers

Much like the responsibility to take care of the health of our students, schools are responsible for supporting the health of their teachers. There are several strategies that schools can utilize to help create a school-wide infrastructure and culture around supporting the SEL of the entire school community. This action plan can include analyzing existent policies and procedures to see if they need to be updated or changed (Cole et al., 2005). Furthermore, staff training should include partnerships with mental health professionals who can provide insight and expertise for increased support.

A school-wide plan for supporting SEL should also include implementing academic and non-academic strategies that support students impacted by trauma, including an SEL curriculum and SEL student screening questionnaires that can be assessed by family members, teachers, and students (Cole et al., 2005). Monitoring students' social-emotional health can help teachers better understand their students and themselves.

## Impact of Trauma on Professionals

As teachers, we often act as mother, father, counselor, and friend to our students who come to our classrooms burdened by trauma. The compassionate educator can quickly become fatigued and burnout. According to Finley (2017), "Any professional who listens to children recount traumatic experiences is at risk of *secondary traumatic stress*, the emotional weight that some teachers carry after exposure to children who suffer" (para. 6). This secondary traumatic stress can cause extreme mental, emotional, and spiritual exhaustion (Krop, 2013) and can also lead to vicarious traumatization resulting from the stress of helping a traumatized person (Figley, 1995). If schools build systemic structures to support the social-emotional health of the whole school community, burnout is less likely.

In a survey of over 5,000 teachers, 61% reported "always" or "often" finding work to be stressful (American Federation of Teachers & Badass Teachers Association, 2017). Further, 58% of respondents said their mental health was not good in 7 or more days in the last month. This stress is not healthy for teachers, which may be why

between 40 – 50% of new teachers leave the field within the first 5 years of teaching (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). We must do better for our teachers.

## Promising Practices for Building Resilience

Despite the dearth of research on vicarious traumatization of teachers, there is research outside of education that can help guide us in changing our practices to better support both teachers and students dealing with trauma. Building resilience can be an important coping strategy for students and teachers alike. Ebersohn and Ferreira (2011) describe resilience as an outcome and a process. Resilience means being able to adapt positively despite experiencing extreme adversity (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). Zembylas (2003) argues that teachers can build resilience through recognizing how their emotions impact their identity, potentially leading to self-transformation. Furthermore, teachers can promote resilience in schools by networking with service providers (Ebersohn & Ferreira, 2011).

Vicarious resilience involves learning how to overcome adversity "from witnessing and participating in trauma survivors' own recovery processes" (Hernandez-Wolfe, Killian, Engstrom, & Gangsei, 2015, p. 157). Building vicarious resilience depends on strong support systems, a strong commitment to professional development, and a proactive stance (Patterson, Collins, & Abbott, 2004). Acevedo and Hernandez-Wolfe (2014) identify several coping strategies that social workers have used to build vicarious resilience. These strategies can also apply to teachers dealing with traumatized students and may be used to guide trainings on coping strategies for teachers:

(a) Increased recognition of [students'] capacities and resources for healing and recovery, and being inspired by these capacities;

(b) Increased resilience (e.g., perceiving and reassessing problems as more manageable, increased perception of self as resourceful);

(c) Changes in life perspective (e.g., life direction, goals, priorities, connection with others, etc.);

(d) Increased self-reflection, self-attunement, mindfulness, and self-care practice;

(e) Increased comfort with the therapeutic process, engagement, and trusting clients to do their own work in therapy; and

(f) Increased recognition that [students'] social contexts have an impact on their ability to overcome adversity (p. 475).

Coping with trauma involves finding a balance, understanding boundaries, and getting help when needed (Krop, 2013). Additional strategies for building resilience are discussed below.

*Culturally Responsive Pedagogy.* Utilizing Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) can support and encourage students, and also help build awareness in teachers, by valuing the cultural assets of students and helping make learning meaningful and relevant. CRP can help students to feel accepted and affirmed in their cultural identities and promote critical reflection in students and teachers alike.

*Building Relationships that Promote Healing.* Another avenue for integrating resilience through SEL involves relationship-building. There is a current pedagogical shift toward *relational pedagogy*, which focuses on the affective domain of teaching (Gingwright, 2016). Affective processes include care, love, hope, joy, humility, faith, courage, and forgiveness. The focus is on teacher self-awareness and interactions with students, rather than on the cognitive processes of knowledge and culture, which is one focus of CRP. Relational pedagogy includes three key elements: 1) critical reflection; 2) forgiveness; and 3) restoration (Gingwright, 2016). One simple activity that teachers can do to integrate a healing-centered pedagogy is called the "I AM FROM" poem, which

numerous teachers use in various capacities, including in Christensen's (2017) *Reading, Writing, and Rising Up* text. The poem is written individually by students and shared with the group. The poem prompts include:

- I am from (three objects from around your childhood home)

- I am from (three objects from your backyard or near your house)

- I am from (three places near your neighborhood)

- I am from (family member)

- I am from (a phrase that you remember from your childhood)

- I am from (food that you had while growing up)

- I am from (some special event or experience that defines who you are today)

Helping teachers understand how to use affective pedagogy to support students can help build healing and hope.

*Art Therapy*.  One method that may help build resilience in students and teachers as well is arts-based education. Arts-based education can help rebuild a child's emotional and cognitive health following a traumatic event, especially in the focus on control and creativity (Smilan, 2009). In the Jersey City Public Schools, creative arts therapists provide arts education for students and teachers using a variety of disciplines such as: technology-based art therapy, music therapy, drama and theater, dance, and academic and arts integration (Nelson, 2010). The goals of the program include improving self-esteem and confidence, understanding and dealing with emotions, developing positive and coping and social skills, and accepting differences.

*Trauma Stewardship*.  Another way to build resilience is through *trauma stewardship*, which Lipsky and Burk (2009) define as a process of self-care for professionals who interact with people who are suffering, in pain, or in crisis. Trauma stewardship involves an intentional devotion to work and knowing one's personal philosophy of what it means to help others. Further, professionals must not internalize the struggles of others. Personal well-being can be fostered through trauma stewardship, including building community, finding balance in life, and practicing daily centering activities (Lipsky & Burk, 2009).

*Training*.  Research advocates for supporting staff through training (Cole et al., 2005). This training should include identifying the needs of staff, understanding the different roles of teachers and mental health professionals, and building on competencies teachers already possess. Furthermore, opportunities should allow teachers to reflectively share their reactions to working with traumatized students and how their own lives are impacted. Teachers may be trained to respond positively to student behaviors, focusing on emotions rather than actions.

*Mindfulness*.  Mindfulness is an additional tool that has been used in trauma-related training and researched as a coping mechanism for those dealing with trauma. Gingwright (2016) defines mindfulness as "the practice of paying attention to thoughts, feelings, body sensations, emotions, and other sensory experiences as they arise moment to moment" (p. 33). In the classroom, mindfulness may be used by the teacher indirectly or taught directly to the students for their benefit (Gingwright, 2016). Research indicates that practicing mindfulness has many potential benefits, including stress reduction, increased focus and attention, and emotional regulation (Waechter & Wekerle, 2015).

## Call to Action

The national statistics on the number of students who experience trauma are a grave reminder that education must support these students but also the teachers who teach them. Research on the impact of trauma on professionals in

helping fields suggests that teachers, too, experience vicarious traumatization and burnout from supporting traumatized students. There is a great need to develop support structures that support the social-emotional health of teachers and students alike. Educators must receive training, such as self-care, mindfulness, or art therapy in order to preserve their own mental and physical health and build resilience, so we can continue to support student learning. Let's do what it takes to keep great teachers in the field.

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# Does Requiring Students to Pass a High School Test Impact Graduation Rates?
## A Look at the Evidence in Washington State

Angela Parker, League of Education Voters

*Since the Class of 2008, Washington has required students to meet state standard on high school assessments in order to graduate. In the context of a polarized debate over graduation-linked assessment, the League of Education Voters (LEV) sought to evaluate assessment data in our state. We interviewed 70 assessment stakeholders – district staff, school-level staff, and students – to contextualize 15 years of statewide graduation, dropout, testing pass rate, and alternative assessment data. Our analysis indicates that graduation-linked assessment does not correlate with increased dropout or decreased graduation rates for most groups, and most subgroup graduation rates have increased since implementation. English Language Learners (ELLs), however, experience a disproportionate negative impact from the current assessment structure.*

## Introduction

For the past decade, Washington state has required high school students to meet a common standard on assessments in order to graduate. Currently those assessments include an English Language Arts (ELA) exam designed by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), and a Math exam also developed by the SBAC. Students who do not meet state standard can use assessment alternatives to demonstrate content area proficiency, but the state requires students to first attempt the graduation-linked tests. The current required score for graduation, or "graduation cut score," is lower than what many stakeholders consider college and career ready – but most stakeholders and advocates recognize that any standardized test is a proxy for understanding college- or career-readiness. Lacking definitive statewide quantitative or qualitative analysis, this study sought to understand and analyze the role of graduation-linked assessments, and alternative assessment pathways, in our state.

## Context

In 1992 the state legislature requested the development of a statewide assessment, and by 1997 the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) administered the first Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). In 2000 the State Board of Education (SBE) adopted a rule, confirmed by the State Legislature passing HB 2195 in 2004, requiring the Class of 2008 to successfully complete the WASL in reading, writing, communications, and mathematics to graduate from high school, as part of a larger effort to ensure a meaningful high school diploma and college/career readiness. In 2006 the first class of students (those in grade 10) took the WASL as an exit exam.

In 2010 OSPI discontinued using the WASL in favor of a shorter test called the High School Proficiency Exam (HSPE). At the same time, Washington led a coalition of states called the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium in successfully seeking federal funds to develop a new, unified set of tests aligned to Common Core standards. By 2015 Washington began transitioning high school sophomores and juniors to the Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA), and 2017 was the first year in which the state successfully gathered a full cohort of student test results for students graduating in 2019.

Today 12 states require their students to take and pass a standardized assessment to graduate: Florida, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Texas, Virginia, and Washington. Only Washington administers SBAC as a high school exit exam, while most of the states uses state-developed tests as their graduation requirement, and two use an assessment developed by another consortium of states (PARCC). Thirteen states use the SBA – nine use the high school level assessment, and five use only the elementary level tests. Twenty-four states currently require their students to take either the ACT or SAT to

graduate, and a dozen of those states use the SAT or ACT for federal accountability purposes – but none use these tests as exit exams.

Recent developments ensure that the testing landscape will continue to evolve in Washington state. In July 2017 Governor Inslee signed Engrossed Substitute House Bill (ESHB) 2224 which delayed enforcement of the science exit exam requirement until the Class of 2021, moved the Math and ELA SBAs from grade 11 to grade 10, and ended the Collection of Evidence (COE)[1] process. The legislation also required the development of an expedited waiver process for students who may not have met state standard but who have earned admission to a post-secondary institution, been awarded a higher education scholarship, enlisted in the military, or successfully completed a college level class in the relevant subject (an option no longer allowed for the Class of 2019). ESHB 2224 also added local course-based alternatives to meet the assessment portion of the graduation requirement.

## Relevant Literature

Current academic literature on graduation-linked assessment remains ambivalent. Some scholars criticize standardized testing structures (Au 2011 & 2016; Houser et al., 2017; Milner 2013), while others frame it as an accountability tool used to assess student preparedness and teaching quality, and to provide data necessary for systems to raise standards and provide equitable education to socioeconomically disadvantaged students (Bishop & Mane, 2001; Carnoy & Loeb, 2002; Loveless, 2005; Vranek 2008). Most agree, however, that high stakes assessment structures impact more than student achievement – many detect an influence on curricula, pedagogy, teacher preparation, and language policies. A National Bureau of Economic Research project identified no "large positive effects on student learning" or post-diploma economic productivity, but found that standards-based exams had a consistent and "robust" effect on increased incarceration rates (Baker & Lang, 2013). One research group notes that the cost and time constraints of the testing environment limit content and questions, and that an overemphasis on 'teaching to the test' decreases teaching time and student understanding of the standards not tested (National Research Council, 2011).

Research indicates that socioeconomic status has the highest correlation with student performance (Baker & Johnston, 2010), and that English Learner (EL) status has a large negative correlation with student achievement – even controlling for student socioeconomic status and other predictors (Maerten-Rivera et al., 2010). Researchers for the Washington State Board of Education caution that EL student groups face a unique collection of variables because they are assessed in their non-primary language, and even after gaining proficiency they "often have not mastered the content-specific vocabulary required to engage in the content area assessments in a meaningful way" (Parr & Lobell, 2015, p. 29). These researchers noted that former ELLs still need at least two years to achieve content area proficiency. Maerten-Rivera et al. also caution that even small achievement gaps based on gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status can accumulate when a student falls into multiple categories.

The predictive power of standardized assessments – or how effectively testing can predict student performance such as postsecondary GPA or persistence to a postsecondary degree – is weaker than high school GPA, even to the third year in college, and especially for socioeconomically disadvantaged students (Scott-Clayton, 2012; Kurlaender et al., 2018; Westrick et al., 2015). A California study comparing the predictive power of the SBA, SAT, and high school GPA found that assessments including the SBA are most accurate predictors when paired with high school GPA, and most accurately anticipate first year academic performance (Kurlaender et al., 2018).

## Objectives, Methods, and Limitations

LEV sought to answer four interrelated questions. (1) Has linking high school assessments to graduation affected graduation or dropout rates? (2) Has linking high school assessments to graduation impacted any particular student

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[1] The COE is a student work portfolio developed with instructional support and served as an approved alternative assessment.

group more than others, or contributed to achievement gaps? (3) Do stakeholders believe the SBAs accurately measure college/career-readiness? (4) What are the most commonly used alternative assessments, and how accessible are they?

To answer these questions, we analyzed 15 years of statewide graduation, dropout, and assessment performance data available on the OSPI website from (1) the 2002-2016 assessment performance data files; (2) the 2002-2016 Dropout and Graduation Reports data files; and (3) any assessment-related report available on the OSPI Reports to the Legislature webpage. We also completed 70 interview surveys within four stakeholder groups: superintendents and district-level assessment staff; high school principals and guidance staff; teachers; and students. We accessed staff and students from 13 districts in both eastern and western Washington State. For confidentiality we do not identify districts or schools contacted. Table 1 provides information on those who were interviewed.

**Table 1: Profile of Persons Interviewed**

| Stakeholder | Male | Female | Total | Asian | Black | Hispanic | Multi | Native | Pac Is | White |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teachers | 3 | 7 | **10** | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 |
| Principals/GCs | 6 | 11 | **17** | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 14 |
| Supts/Dist. Staff | 4 | 6 | **10** | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 8 |
| Students | 17 | 16 | **33** | 1 | 10 | 14 | 7 | 3 | 1 | 11 |
| TOTAL | 30 | 40 | **70** | 1 | 13 | 18 | 8 | 4 | 1 | 41 |

The 20-question interview surveys allowed us to pose a standard set of questions and request follow up information. LEV used a modified snowball sampling method that took into account district hierarchy, initially contacting the district superintendent for permission to interview their staff before leveraging our existing contacts among district and school-level staff. LEV did not compensate staff. All students interviewed were 18 years or older, and we sought students attending high school diploma programs at community colleges. We compensated students with a $50 gift card. After concluding the stakeholder interviews, we coded all qualitative data to identify and characterize unanticipated themes.

The collected qualitative data has two limitations. First, our sample size of 70 interviewees from the four stakeholder groups and the need to ensure regional diversity meant our qualitative data may not fully reflect the textures and diversity of regional viewpoints. Second, students we interviewed were currently enrolled in an alternative completion program, and thus were more likely to have been under-served by traditional K-12 institutions; further, because the SBA testing implementation is relatively recent, those interviewed may have had limited experiences with that version of the statewide exit exam.

Our quantitative data also holds limitations that may affect the results. We did not include the HSPE writing assessment in the English Language Arts data. Conforming to state practice in federal accountability reporting, we used the pass rate that included students who previously passed the assessment rather than the number of students who passed minus noncompletions during that year's specific assessment cycle. For student privacy, OSPI suppresses data relating to any student population base fewer than 20 students, so smaller populations like Native American students, homeless students, and others are not fully reflected in the data. Also, during the time period for which data were pulled, new categories were created for reporting, such as separating Asian & Pacific Islander students into two groups and beginning to track homeless and foster care students. Finally, using the 5-year "extended" graduation rate may show less impact than a 4-year graduation rate, particularly on subgroups with the lowest rates.

**Findings**

*Graduation Rates*

Both on-time and 5-year graduation rates slowly trend upward since the implementation of graduation-linked assessments, in all racial subgroup categories, and for most Special Program student subgroups (Special Education, English Learners, Low Income, Homeless, Foster Care, Migrant, and those with a 504 plan). White and Asian student graduation rates, both on-time and extended, regularly surpass the overall graduation rate, but racial/ethnic subgroups are drawing closer to the "All Student" rate. Black and Hispanic graduation rates vary from the all student rate by 5 to 15 points in any given year, but over the past 15 years, students in the state continued to chip away at the gap. Native American and Pacific Islander graduation rates, however, remain inconsistent and low.

In contrast, many of the Special Program subgroup graduation rates fall closer to the All Student rate but are holding steady or decreasing slightly (see figure below). Graduation rates of students with 504 plans often exceed the all student rate, but several groups show concerning graduation rate trends. For example, English learner graduation rates show a consistent decrease since the 2004-05 school year[2] – a particularly stark trend when compared to the all student norm; homeless and foster care students experience lower graduation rates than any other student group; the graduation rates for students in special education are holding steady, but the rates are gradually losing ground compared to the slight but steady rise in graduation rates for all students.
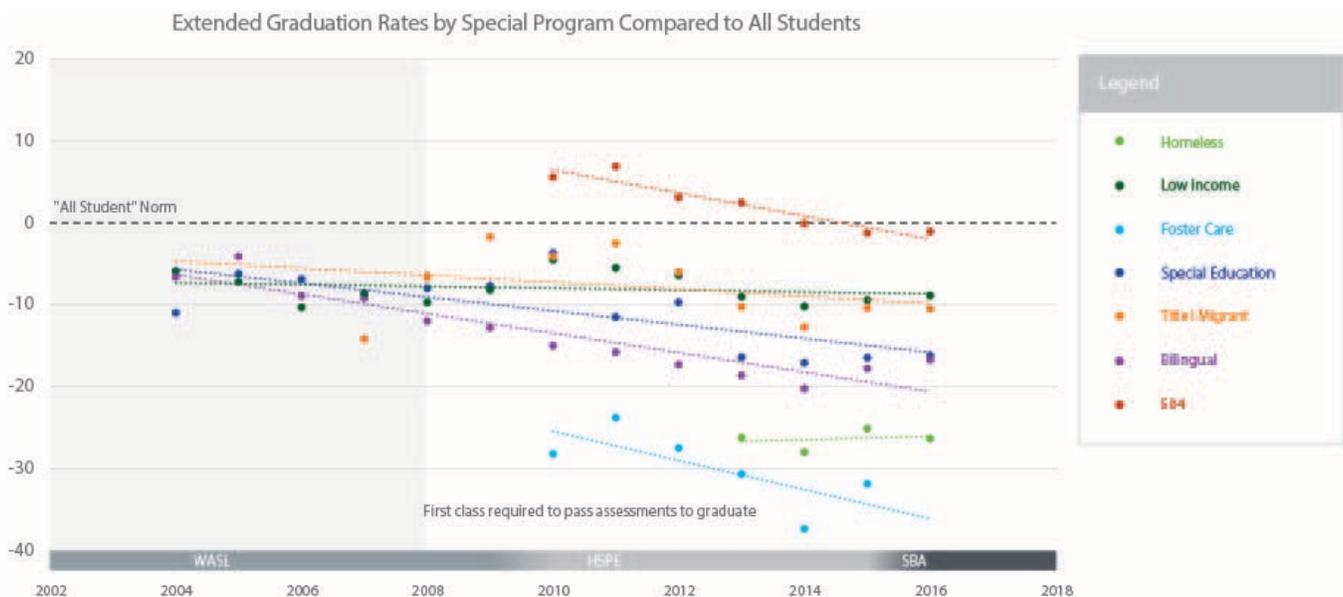


*Assessment Pass Rates*

We used the assessment pass rate including students who passed the assessment previously, following the state norm in federal reporting. OSPI assessment pass rate data show that Native American, Black, Hispanic, and Pacific Islander student groups consistently pass graduation-linked assessments at a lower rate than White and Asian students, regardless of the assessment subject or version. The pass rate gap is closest in English Language Arts (ELA) and largest in science and math assessments. The Hispanic student subgroup, however, has decreasing gaps for math and science pass rates. The pass rate gap for programmatic student subgroups such as low income, migrant, EL, special education, homeless, and foster care students is larger than the gap experienced by any racial

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[2] During the same time period, their demographic representation increased from 7.1% to 10.8% of the total student body.

group. Among these subgroups, the English learner group experiences the lowest pass rate of any tracked subgroup. Specifically, the EL group averages at 35 points below the All Student pass rate on the math assessment, 50 points below than the All Student rate on the science assessment, and a decreasing pass rate gap on the ELA assessment from 45 points to, now, 55 points below the All Student rate (see figure below).
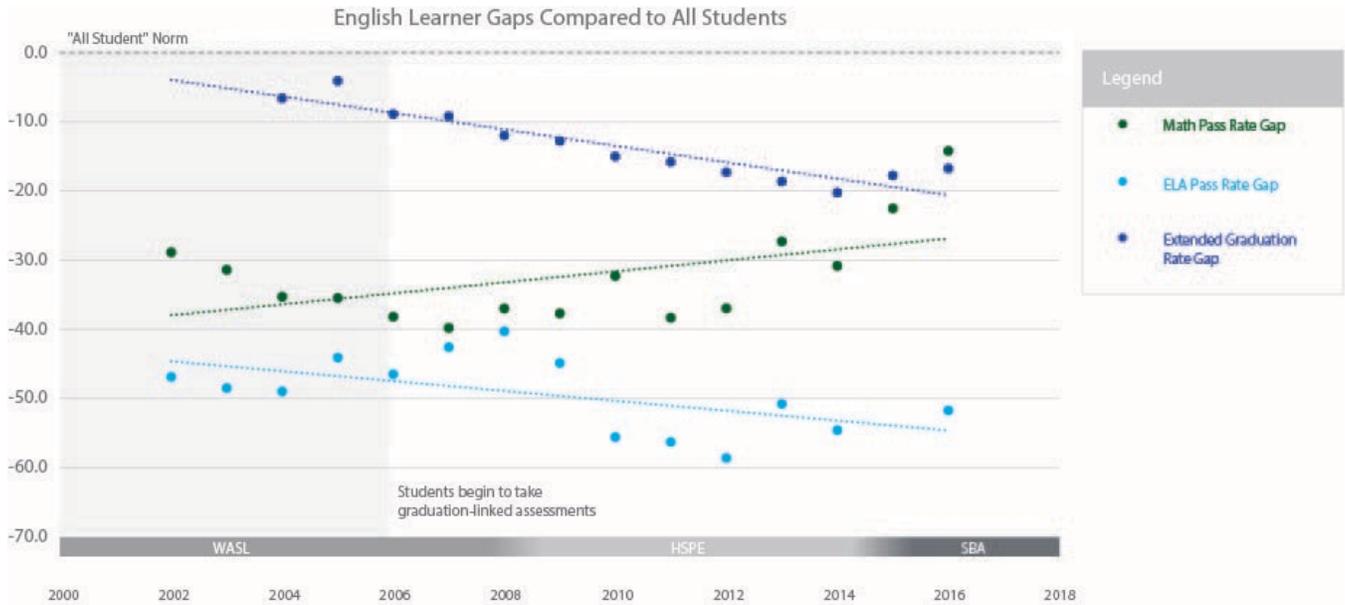


*Alternative Assessment Use*

As Washington policy on graduation linked assessments evolved, so did an alternative assessment structure. The Legislature and OSPI identified alternate routes for Special Education students to show they met academic competencies necessary for graduation. OSPI developed a three-category system of alternative assessments used by 3-10% of the assessment-completing population in a given year. Table 2 provides details about these alternatives.

**Table 2: Washington State Assessment-Related Graduation Alternatives**

| General Population Alternatives | Alternatives for Special Education Populations | Administrative Waivers |
|---|---|---|
| *Collection of Evidence (COE)* A student work portfolio developed with instructional support; discontinued by ESHB 2224 (2017)<br><br>*GPA Comparison* Student GPA earned in aligned courses compared with the mean GPA of students who took the same classes and passed the test; only available to seniors with an overall GPA of 3.2 or more<br><br>*College Admission/AP/IB tests*<br><br>*Dual Credit* (in effect after July 2017)<br><br>*Locally Determined Course* (in effect after July 2017) | *Cut Score* Earning a Level 2 (of four levels) on any of the assessments<br><br>*Off-Grade Level* Taking and earning a pass on an assessment designed for a pre-high school population<br><br>*Locally Determined Assessment (LDA)* Districts or schools could design their own assessment regime and, upon OSPI approval, offer it to students as an alternative assessment | *Out of State Transfer Waiver*<br><br>*Special, Unavoidable Circumstance Appeal (SUCA)* Only applicable to students who experienced a test implementation irregularity; district assessment staff are tasked with investigating and assigning these waivers |

The general student population could demonstrate proficiency by completing a Collection of Evidence (COE), achieving a set score on the SAT, ACT, AP, or IB exam, or through a GPA comparison. If a student qualifies for special education services, they may access alternatives such as cut-score and off-grade level testing. Each of the alternative assessments involves costs above and beyond the cost of administering the standardized testing. For example, while the per student cost of administering the SBA was $4, evaluating a COE cost $600 per student (OSPI, 2010). ACT, SAT, AP, or IB tests are costly — ranging from $57 to $116 per student[3] — and individual students or schools bear the costs. Out-of-State Transfer Waivers represent testing costs paid by other states, and each Special Unavoidable Circumstance Appeal (SUCA)[4] requires salary costs of a district assessment director interviewing multiple students and teachers to establish whether irregularities surrounding a test warrant the waiver. Cut Scores and Off-Grade Level scores represent normal testing costs, while each LDA represents a huge investment in staff time to develop the local assessment, gain approval from OSPI to administer it, assist the student to complete and document the assessment, and finally for an OSPI staff member to review the results. The full costs for the new Locally Determined Courses and associated assessments remain unknown.

Interview data indicate that alternative assessments are unequally available to students due to resource differences between districts, and by access to the large urban centers that host college admissions tests. For example, GPA comparison — when schools compare the class GPA of a student who did not pass an assessment with a comparison cohort of at least six students from their school who *did* pass the assessment, and who have taken the same classes, in the same learning environment, during the same time period — can only be completed in large high schools with enough students taking the same classes and passing the tests (to be eligible, the student must also have an overall GPA of 3.2 or better). The most commonly used alternative assessment, the eliminated COE, required instructional resources often more easily assembled by larger districts or those with more flexible budgets. We were not able to assess which alternatives were accessed most frequently by student groups, nor through which alternatives most students successfully completed their diplomas. OSPI does not make publicly available disaggregated alternative assessment data nor success rate data of each alternative assessment method.

*Interview Surveys*

LEV interviewed key stakeholder groups about their experiences with graduation-linked assessments and alternatives. In a 2-month period at the end of the 2016-17 school year, our interviews with 70 stakeholders used the 20-question interview survey protocols to elicit information and opinions around four questions: (1) Has linking high school assessments to graduation impacted graduation or dropout rates? (2) Do educators and students believe the SBAs and alternative assessments accurately measure college/career-readiness? (3) What are the most commonly used forms of alternative assessments, and how accessible are they? (4) What remediation occurs when a student has not met state standard on assessments? The results of the interviews are summarized below.

1. <u>Dropouts</u>  Staff stakeholders were asked to rank 10 variables that contribute to a student decision to drop out of high school (variables were pre-selected and drawn from academic research on high school dropout decisions, including Dee & Jacob, 2007; DeWitte et al., 2013; Dupéré et al., 2015; Freeman & Simonsen, 2015; Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999; Henry et al., 2012; Kearney & Levine, 2016; Kim et al., 2015; Lessard et al., 2010; Nield et al., 2001). Superintendents and district assessment directors placed an SBA result that did not meet state standard as contributing to dropout as the 8th or 9th out of 10 possible variables. Among principals and guidance counselors — staff members closest to students and tasked with analyzing dropout rates — the majority listed an SBA result as 10th out of 10 variables. Staff consensus on the link between graduation-linked assessment and dropout rates could be summarized by one educator who stated, "There are so many other factors in their lives, a kid's concern over the SBA is last." A counselor elaborated, "The SBA is never the number one reason why a kid

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[3] SAT and ACT tests with writing portions are the most reasonably priced, at $57 and $58.50 each, but a single AP test costs $93 per test, and each IB test costs $116. These costs were obtained from most recent testing websites.
[4] Applicable to students who experienced a test implementation irregularity.

decides to drop out, but it is the nail in the coffin after they've dealt with some of the tougher variables. An SBA result just hammers them; it ends their hope. An ELL student might stick around with us for a fifth year, but if they can't pass the SBA this is the nail in the coffin."

2. <u>Usefulness</u>  Staff groups rated the SBA as "useful" to "somewhat useful" in assessing a student's college/career readiness, although 45% said they did not know how useful the tests were. Of the remaining stakeholders, 18% felt negatively, 14% felt positively, and 14% were ambiguous about the usefulness of the tests in determining student readiness. Teachers, principals, and guidance counselors were more likely to rate the SBA as "somewhat useful," although principals and guidance counselors rated it slightly higher than teachers. The majority of superintendents and district staff felt they could not assess the usefulness at all. A representative from a postsecondary coalition noted, "No one is naïve regarding the limitations of the assessment… The SBA is far more sophisticated in ELL supports than the ACT or the SAT. And it's truly a consortium – issues have come up, but their response is transparent, unlike ACT or the College Board." A high school principal agreed, "Given that we're living in a world in which 70% of family wage jobs will require some college, we definitely need to prepare students to succeed in college… It's a better test. At least, it does a better job than the SAT or the ACT. But GPA is actually the best predictor of college success. It's as good as any test we have."

Students were evenly divided on whether they thought the full battery of graduation-linked assessments measured their college/career readiness. In our small sample, nearly half thought the Math & ELA measured their college/career readiness, compared to one-tenth that believed the Biology EOC accurately measured their readiness. Overall, a little more than one-third of our sample agreed the tests accurately measured readiness, and approximately the same proportion disagreed.

Just over two-thirds of all interviewed stakeholders favored de-linking; only one-quarter wanted to maintain the link. Students and teachers were most favorably disposed towards linking of all stakeholder groups: one-third of students and a bit less than one-third of the teachers thought the link should be maintained compared to somewhat less than one-fifth of guidance staff and principals who favored maintaining the link. Educator support for graduation-linked assessment was exemplified by one principal who told us, "If we didn't have the test, then we might just be inflating grades and passing [students] through without them having the skills they need. Testing is the only thing I've ever seen in this district, this state, this country, that has made the system realize that not all children are getting their needs met." Conversely, another educator stated, "The disadvantages [of graduation-linked assessment] are felt by the most at-risk populations – refugees, ELL, Special Education students. This is inequity."

Students who supported graduation-linked assessment generally felt the process of passing the test not only helped them understand important subject matter but was an important component in making sure that they were prepared for college or career. One student shared, "The tests should be linked to graduation because the test measures how well you know the subject. If you graduate without those skills, then you'll be stuck in remedial classes in postsecondary, and financial aid doesn't cover remedial classwork." Students who thought the assessment should be de-linked pointed to the emotional toll of the test, or the feeling that students who did not meet standard had lost the time they spent completing classwork.

None of the interviewed superintendents or assessment staff thought the link between the assessments and graduation should be maintained. Most administrators wanted more data that proved SBA test effectiveness in preparing students for college or career. Many also noted the inequities for EL students, wanted to know how colleges perceived the assessment, or pointed to the high costs of the assessment structure. One district administrator shared, "Our district spends a half a million dollars on assessment every year when you add up the [school and district] salaries … not to mention implementing the COE classes. If we didn't have to do this, what could the money be spent on?" A principal on the other side of the state asked, "Is this the best we can do? The

costs should be tracked at the state level, the district level, and in terms of staff time taken up at the school level, plus lost instructional time, the disruption to learning. We've had a staff member calling parents until eight P.M. every night for three weeks. We've had no access to the library and computer labs and career center because we're using them for testing."

3. <u>Alternatives</u>  Our interview surveys indicated most schools and districts use the COE and standardized tests such as the SAT or ACT, and rarely use GPA comparisons as assessment alternatives. Schools and districts widely used the full range of alternative assessments designated for Special Education populations, especially the Cut Score or the Off-Grade Level alternatives. Most students surveyed chose to retake the SBA or EOC until they passed, to the exclusion of alternative methods. Only 4 of the 33 students interviewed had completed a COE.

4. <u>Remediation</u>  Washington state has scattered accountability for remediation after a student does not meet state standard. Qualitative responses indicate that OSPI and districts place responsibility on schools. Most districts expect schools to develop remediation plans, and that schools should drive the communications with students and parents. Within schools, principals expected guidance staff to manage parent and student communication; teachers were often unclear regarding what their schools communicated to parents and students about assessment results. Overall, guidance counselors are the main drivers in managing and tracking student remediation.

Few districts have developed remediation protocols for students who do not reach state standard on 8th grade or high school assessments. Those with protocols relied on continuous communication with both principals and guidance staff. Most remediation protocol consisted of a flowchart to direct students to appropriate resources. Few schools had written remediation protocols, but all surveyed had built guidance systems that tracked assessment results and remediation efforts for all students. Principals and guidance counselors tended to believe there was more intra-school communication with the teaching staff than teachers believed.

Most schools and districts offer additional instruction to students who do not meet standard on graduation-linked assessments, most often COE courses or tutoring in subject areas during or after school. Many schools simultaneously use 5 or more remediation or alternative assessment strategies, and the top outliers use 9 to 10 distinct methods. As a principal in central Washington shared, "We won't just do one method, we'll do all the options. Once a student passes the ACT, we remove them from the COE class." The least-used strategies to remediate for SBA purposes were a Student Learning Plan and parent engagement programs.

## Discussion

*Question 1: Has linking high school assessments to graduation impacted graduation or dropout rates?*

Since linking high school assessments to graduation, graduation rates have increased overall and for most student groups based on their race/ethnicity (see figure below). Currently available data does not show that the assessment requirement has a negative impact on graduation rates for most student groups. Because currently available data sets are incomplete, we cannot fully assess the impact of linking high school assessments to graduation. For example, OSPI does not make publicly available data on whether students are on track to graduate by credit completion, by meeting assessment standards, or by both. Finally, the state does not track data on student reasons for exiting high school before completing their diploma via an interview or survey.

Extended Graduation Rate by Race
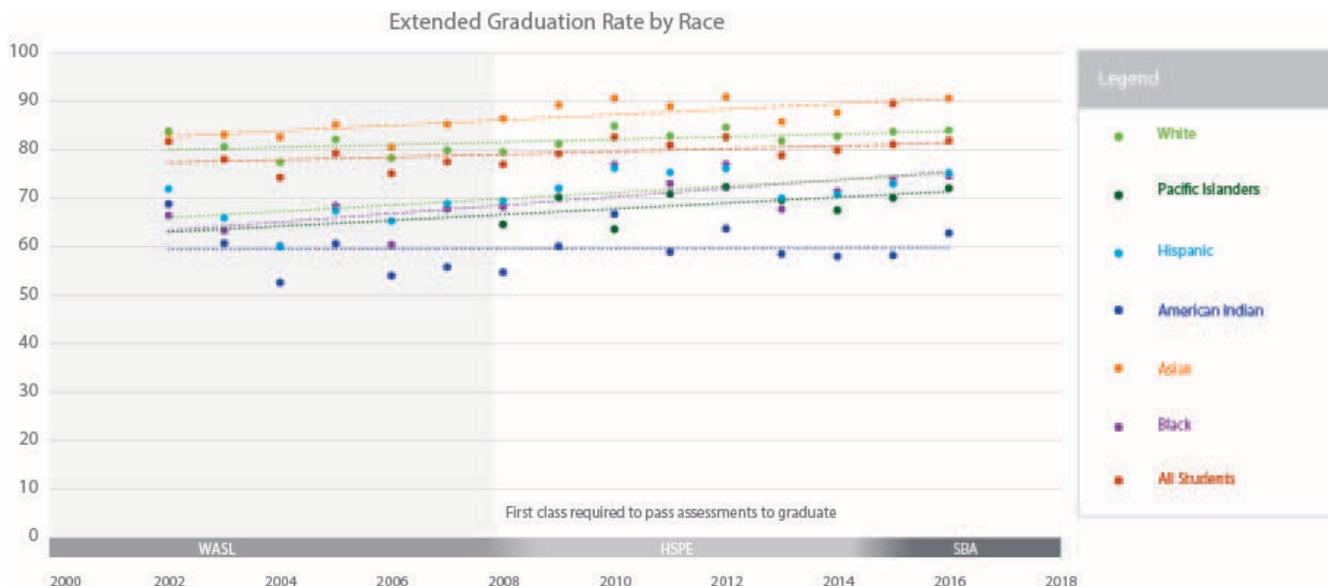
Question 2: Has linking high school assessments to graduation impacted any particular student group more than others, or contributed to achievement gaps?

Gaps persist and are widening for some. While all racial/ethnic student groups had increased graduation rates, not all student groups increased at the same pace as the All Student group. Further, all racial/ethnic subgroups except for White and Asian students experienced lower and more variable pass rates, indicating that gaps in pass rates trend with gaps in graduation rates. When examining graduation rates for student groups based on program, English learners and those in special education experience highly variable graduation rates and similarly volatile assessment pass rates. These trends did, however, exist prior to the implementation of the graduation-linked assessment. English learners experience major gaps in both graduation rates and assessment pass rates, and their graduation rates are trending downward.

Question 3: Do the SBAs accurately measure college/career-readiness?

K-12 educators and students understood the need for assessment but did not believe that the assessment most accurately measured college or career readiness. One principal stated, "Not necessarily the SBA should be linked. But as a principal in a high poverty school, I appreciate knowing that when students reach standard, they have met the same standard as a Bellevue high school student." Community and technical colleges broadly agree that the Smarter Balanced Assessments are high quality, reflect learning standards, and represent the skills students need in college-level English and math. However, moving the testing to 10th grade as legislated in 2017 may change the validity of whether the assessment accurately measures college-readiness in math.

Question 4: What are the most commonly used forms of alternative assessments, and how accessible are they?

The most commonly used alternatives for non-Special Education populations are the Collection of Evidence (COE) and college admissions testing. Both are widely available, but district and school size differences, regional differences, as well as family socioeconomic differences, create uneven accessibility. Assessment alternative use and success rates are not available disaggregated by student group and subject area. The Washington State Legislature also eliminated the COE as an alternative in the 2017 legislative session.

**Linking Assessments to Graduation Disproportionately Disadvantages English Learners**

During the course of this study, we found that English learners (ELLs) were disproportionally disadvantaged by the linking of state assessments to graduation compared to other groups. In school year 2017-18, nearly 12% of

Washington students fall into this group, according to OSPI's Report Card, and qualified for supports in the state's Transitional Bilingual Instructional Program (TBIP). These students score lower than a Level III ("intermediate" out of five possible levels) on the English Language Proficiency Assessment for the 21st Century exam (ELPA21).[5] Most eligible students are in grades K-3 (their enrollment represents about half of the eligible student population), and a slight majority of students transition out of TBIP eligibility within three years. Thus, it is likely that any TBIP-eligible students in high school are relatively recent arrivals to Washington schools.

Former EL students who exit the program perform better on all indicators, including testing, than students who have never been classified as EL (Parr, 2016; Pauley, 2018). Yet current ELLs perform at lower levels than all other tracked student subgroups except for foster care and homeless students (Parr, 2016). Researchers for the State Board of Education summarized the implications for the pre-SBA tests, the WASL and the HSBE: "When the assessment results are collectively considered, one could conclude that the assessments, as administered, are not providing valid results for the ELL students and perhaps some of the Former-ELL students depending on grade level and the number of years since exiting TBIP" (Parr & Lobdell, 2015, p. 36).

This research and our results led us to ask more deeply about how SBAC and OSPI identified and implemented testing accommodations that might improve test result validity for ELLs. SBAC assessed the academic literature on EL testing accommodations (Abedi & Ewers, 2013) and established a universal accommodations structure that expanded the availability of non-English "designated supports" to all students, not just those designated as eligible for TBIP support. Consortium FAQs (http://www.smarterbalanced.org/assessments/accessibility-and-accommodations/) point specifically to dictionaries and thesauri as well as translated test directions for ELLs who speak Spanish, Vietnamese, Arabic, Tagalog, Ilokano, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, Punjabi, Russian, Ukrainian, French, Hmong, Japanese, and Somali (among several others). Conversations with Consortium representatives clarified that because these supports are available to all students regardless of EL status, SBAC does not consider them to be accommodations. In crafting their assessments, SBAC follows thorough protocols that include bias review, cognitive labs with students, and field testing to identify specific questions that may interfere with testing validity for ELLs.

OSPI provides districts with a manual that describes their menu of universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations, from which districts draw to create a plan (OSPI, 2018). Aside from universal tools available to all students and accommodations aimed at students with disabilities, five designated supports are aimed at ELLs: English glossaries, translated glossaries, translated test directions, stacked test translations, and bilingual dictionaries in the most common languages (OSPI, 2018). Despite these universal tools and designated supports, pass rates on graduation-linked assessments trend 25–40 points less than the All Student group on the Math assessment, 48–50 points less on the Science assessment, and 45–55 points less on the ELA assessment.

The lower pass rate for ELLs requires that they seek alternative assessments within Washington's testing structure at a higher rate than other student groups. These alternative assessments are unequally accessible. For example, larger schools and districts could more easily assemble the resources needed for a student to complete the COE. The state paid for instruction in a COE class at 30 students per section, and staff at some schools we interviewed subsidized smaller class sizes associated with a higher COE completion using local dollars. The classwork provided by schools to assist their students to completion requires students – disproportionately ELLs – to forgo other coursework to complete the testing requirement. A district assessment director shared, "We had a Korean-speaking student who had passed all the other SBAs except the ELA. They retook it four times, and they finally met that requirement through their score on the ACT or the SAT. They were in the COE class two times, and because they had to take that class, they missed out on other learning opportunities that would have prepared them

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[5] ELPA21 is based on English Language Proficiency Standards by grade/developmental level, and "addresses the language demands needed to reach college and career readiness" (www.elpa21.org). Students with a home language other than English take the full exam annually until they reach a Level III/Intermediate designation in Reading, Writing, Listening, and Speaking.

for what they wanted to do in the future. Are they any better equipped with English now that they were able to meet the requirement through the ACT? No."

Individual students and their families may also bear the costs of college admissions testing – money that is not always available for lower middle class, working class, and poor families. The sole no-cost or low-cost alternative assessment — the GPA comparison — depends on a school having a large enough student comparison group in the correct classwork (at least six students in the same courses over a 2-year period who met standard on the SBA).

The uneven availability and funding of alternative assessments, minimal EL-specific test supports and accommodations, and the large gap in pass rates with the All Student group on each required assessment that requires ELLs to seek the unevenly available alternatives at a much higher rate, result in structural disadvantages for ELLs. This structural disadvantage is especially concerning in context of (a) a declining extended graduation rate from 68.4% in 2004 to 65.1% in 2016, and (b) a growing graduation rate gap from 2004 to 2016 (the gap grew from 6 points below the All Student group to 17 points below the All Student group). The low high school EL pass rates – which in 2018 were 7.7% on the Math SBA and 16.5% on the ELA – echo EL pass rates trends in earlier grades. With more than 15 years of similar assessment data, policymakers and advocates should commit to working with ELLs, their parents, and advocates to respond to these concerns.

**Recommendations**

*Reframe the Debate*  The "linking versus delinking" debate obscures the crucial issues: (a) how to ensure all students are college- and career-ready, and (b) how to eliminate achievement and opportunity gaps to improve graduation rates. As one superintendent contended, "I want legislators and your staff to remember that there are individual faces attached to the data and the rhetoric on this issue. We have kids taking a two- or three-hour test in a language that they're still learning – if you gave me a test in Spanish, I wouldn't meet standard. … I know there's very passionate feeling on either end of the issue, but I think we can protect student dignity and enforce high standards. We have to find common ground on this. The argument has to go beyond do we link or delink." Recent policy shifts, such as changing the exit exam to a student's second year in high school, less than half way through their learning there, do not fully address the findings and conclusions raised by this study. We need to focus on under-supported students, particularly EL students, and to create structures and norms that intervene earlier in a student's career.

*Address English Learner Needs*  The debate around graduation-linked assessments should shift to focus on how to address the unique needs of the students that are not being well-supported by our current system. EL testing equity requires an ongoing collaborative discussion. Where can we look to find solutions, we can use to establish equity for the 130,000+ emergent English learners in Washington schools?

- Professional development in sheltered instruction – a set of teaching strategies teachers can use in conjunction with English language development instruction and, ideally, native language instruction that "delivers language-rich, grade-level content area instruction in English" (Markos & Himmel 2016) – and establishing the strategies as best instructional practice for all students are tactics many districts with large EL populations already use. But more can be done in these two areas.

- Another site of innovation is the community college system. Washington's community colleges have pioneered a curriculum modification that provides accelerated, intensive instruction to students so they can gain math and English literacy skills while taking college-level, career-oriented classwork. Called the Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training Program (I-BEST), instructors team-teach: one instructor focuses on content delivery and the other provides concentrated instruction and support in reading, math or English language.

*Provide Additional Data*  OSPI should analyze and disseminate more of the data it gathers on assessments, alternatives, and graduation requirements to various stakeholders, e.g., districts, schools, teachers, families, and state legislature. Families and schools need longitudinal assessment data that show how schools, districts, and OSPI identify and improve outcomes for students who do not meet state assessment standards. Students, families, guidance counselors, and principals need statewide data on the success rate of the alternative assessments, disaggregated by student group and region. And all stakeholders need access to disaggregated data on how many students are on track to graduate by credits in any given year compared to those who are on track to graduate by completing all their assessment requirements. Finally, given the role of the state legislature in education policy, legislators need to analyze the data provided by OSPI before enacting further policy changes to the state's assessment and graduation system.

*Expand Intervention & Remediation*  Both the quantitative and qualitative data gathered for this report highlight the current lack of system-wide, intentional intervention for students before they are at risk of not passing their graduation-linked assessments in high school. If we are serious about closing achievement gaps and ensuring students are successful at earning a meaningful high school diploma, we need to respond to student needs much earlier in their academic careers, particularly at major transition points between elementary, middle school, and high school structures. Populations with strikingly high deviations from the "All Student" pass rates – ELLs, foster care, homeless, Native American, Pacific Islander, and special education students – should be prioritized in any increased remediation or intervention structures and efforts.

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## About the Author

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# Hopeful Possibilities in Dual Language Bilingual Education in the Pacific Northwest

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*This article summarizes a four-year ethnographic study that calls us to ponder dual language bilingual educational practices and norms. The study looked at the intersection of federal and state language education policies and classroom teaching and learning events through an in-depth analysis of the language practices in dual language bilingual contexts. Participants engaged in translanguaging practices for bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural determinations as language was authorized differently at different times for different purposes. The use of participants' full linguistic repertoires during instruction served as an effective shift to challenge language separation policies, which historically have viewed bilingual students as two monolinguals in one. The study offers examples of the realities, tensions, and hopeful promise of translanguaging within dual language classroom contexts for integrating partner languages in more natural and affirming ways. The study builds on the current understanding of the nature of translanguaging in bilingual spaces, and it augments current discussions about translanguaging by providing contextual, tangible, and nuanced examples of translanguaging in practice within a dual language classroom. The study offers rich insight into the empowering processes of becoming bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural through meaningful and authentic language experiences.*

*Key Words: bilingual education, translanguaging, dual language, language education policy*

## Educational Equity

An increasingly important component of the conversation around educational equity is consideration regarding how education within linguistically and culturally diverse communities, an ever-increasing reality in U.S. schools, bridges a link between the languages that frame students' lives and the language(s) of school (Alim, 2010; Rodríguez-Valls, 2011). The relationship between language, identity, and power is embedded in contradictory tensions for bilinguals as each language act imbues a negotiation of self within the larger, often opposing, sociocultural and sociopolitical context (Cervantes, Dorner, Palmer, Heiman, Schwerdtfeger, & Choi, 2017; Hymes, 1971; Norton, 2010), frequently resulting in deleterious educational outcomes for linguistically and culturally diverse students. The competencies required to develop academic proficiencies are often hidden within dominant social and political frameworks (Pennycook, 2000; 2017) and serve to impede access to educational equity (Freire, 1968) through deficit framing embedded in inequitable spaces that favor monolingual language practices (Anstrom et al., 2010; Valdez & Figueroa, 1996).

There have been efforts to establish educational programs aimed at building on bilingual and multilingual students' strengths. This movement aimed to journey beyond tolerance toward affirmation, solidarity, and critique (Collier & Thomas, 2017; Nieto, 2017) in order to better address both student and community needs through programs that appreciate, cognize, and normalize linguistic and cultural diversity (Hamayan, Genesee, & Cloud, 2013). These efforts are fueled in part by the efforts of linguistically and culturally diverse communities (Cortina, Makar, Mount-Cors, 2015; Lindholm-Leary & Block, 2010) to offer alternative, innovative, and enhanced bilingual educational opportunities such as dual language instructional models (Lindholm-Leary, 2001). Research studies exploring the benefits of dual language instructional models have concluded that advanced bilingual competence is associated with significant cognitive and culturally conscious advantages (Bialystok, 2001; 2007) that are often found within additive dual language bilingual education models (Sánchez, García & Solorza, 2017).

## Dual Language Bilingual Education

The research exploring bilingual education argues that dual language bilingual instructional contexts hold a promise for developing bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural students who have the potential to meet and exceed the academic achievement of their monolingual peers (Tedick, Christian, & Fortune, 2011). Dual language bilingual

education is rooted in second language acquisition theory (Baker, 2001; Bialystok, 2001; Collier & Thomas, 2004; Genesee, 1987; Genesee; Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006; Lindholm-Leary, 2001) which proposes a pluralistic understanding of bilingualism through the understanding that we are all dialogically and socioculturally positioned within frames of language and power (Bakhtin, 1935; Bourdieu, 1991; Geertz, 1973). These frames shape language education policies and rights (Blommaert, 2005; Hornberger, 1997; Ruiz, 1984; Tollefson, 1991) and directly impact the educational experiences of students and families in schools (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998). Educators have the power to act as agents of social change (Fairclough, 1992; Foucault, 1982; Freire, 1968,1987) given their agentive power to create or restrict spaces of linguistic acceptance (Kloss, 1977), with the potential to be instruments of social change through standardizing bilingualism and biliteracy impacting internalized behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes that eventually become normalized in society.

In contrast to the common practice of unequal access to both content and language as well as the despoilment of cultural identity, students benefit from seeing their own language, culture, and linguistic histories celebrated in schools. We need to develop an understanding of how emergent bilingual students are afforded access to both content and language during well-implemented instruction in tangible, visible, and transferable ways in the Pacific Northwest. Considering how it is possible to successfully implement instruction that meets the needs of learners in actual classrooms, not only in theory, but in practice, is vital as we carefully ponder the arduous struggle between language and power traversing matters of education for linguistically and culturally diverse students (Gándara & Contreras, 2010).

## Research Questions and Methodology

This investigation explored the ways in which federal and state language education policies impacted classroom teaching and learning in Spanish-English dual language bilingual contexts in the Pacific Northwest. Through systematic, participatory and sustained research, this study aimed to construct a rich understanding of how dual language bilingual education supported the linguistic, cultural, and educational needs of the students and families served. Combining ethnographic and sociolinguistic methods, the primary objective was to explore language use within the multilayered, nuanced, and intricate framework that is dual language bilingual education in the Pacific Northwest. The macro and micro bilingual education discourses transacted to result in events that significantly impacted emergent bilingual students' outcomes in unique and complex ways.

This study was guided by the following question: How did bilingual participants in dual language bilingual contexts use language to mediate understanding across educational events? As the analyses evolved, additional foci emerged, giving way to the following questions: (1) what were the tensions embedded in bilingual pedagogy; (2) how were students situated through the authorized language use; (3) how did participants enact bilingualism and biculturalism; and (4) how did these enactments impact outcomes?

The data in this investigation were generated through an intimate and prolonged ethnographic encounter in the Pacific Northwest. Ethnography as a methodological tool allowed me to more clearly understand the naturally occurring phenomena and everyday interactions (Spradley, 1980) that informed thick descriptions and offered an interpretative theory of culture as well as contextual understanding at the macro and micro levels of the educational process through researcher and participant reflexivity (Agar, 1996; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2010; Pillow, 2003). Reflexivity is a vital component to understanding the intertextuality of processes, actions, practices, and artifacts across time and events (Castanheira, Crawford, Dixon, & Green, 2001; Lillis, 2011) in order to deepen our ways of thinking about what it means to be a bilingual participant in dual language bilingual spaces.

Data were collected over a four-year period using participant observation, which represented a firsthand encounter with the participants and events (Merriam, 2009). Participant observation was used to understand insider perspectives through a multitude of vantage points (Adler & Adler, 2008), which could only be achieved over

prolonged periods of time through cultivated relationships built on trust and meaningful participation. Data collection evolved over time as did the research questions and foci. A summary of the findings from this investigation is provided below.

## Hopeful Possibilities

Dual language bilingual education is about much more than merely learning two distinct languages. It is about understanding participants' ways of thinking, doing, and being as bilingual peoples in a world often framed through monolingual ideologies. The discourse practices across the bilingual educational contexts within this study were indicative of a move away from dominant discourses positioning bilingual resources as deficits to be overcome and bilinguals as two monolinguals in one, and instead represented a move toward more emancipatory ways of knowing through alternative ideologies. One such alternative was found in a district administrator's stance towards kindness.

Affirmative Bilingual and Bicultural Learning Communities of Practice: A Stance Towards "Kindness"

One building administrator in this study fostered an affirmative bilingual and bicultural learning community for teachers, students, and families where linguistic and cultural diversity and kindness are valued. This building administrator's unyielding stance towards kindness shaped and influenced teacher, staff, and student interactions in profound ways that helped create implicit and explicit building policies that shaped instructional contexts schoolwide.

In a discussion around school climate and bilingualism at the school, this administrator noted, "the one thing, if you really want to work here, …I better see you being kind to the children." If teachers or staff were not seen being kind to children or families, they were encouraged to change or find a different place to work because nothing less than kindness would be tolerated (Pratt & Dantas-Whitney, forthcoming). In addition, this administrator instituted a kindness challenge where the objective was to be caught being kind. This was a school-wide investment by all staff, visitors, and students as they participated and were publicly affirmed for their acts of kindness to one another. The collaborative and unyielding stance towards kindness shaped and influenced attitudes, lesson designs, and willingness to allow language shifts to meet student and parent needs by attentively responding multilingually (Pratt & Dantas-Whitney, forthcoming).

In addition to a firm insistence on kindness, the administrator also exerted intentional efforts to reach out to the families of emergent bilingual students. While heritage-English speaking students from out of the area comprised over fifty percent of the student population at the beginning of this study, the administrator purposefully reached out to heritage-Spanish speaking neighborhood families to participate in the program (Pratt & Dantas-Whitney, forthcoming). This administrator recalled:

> If you look at…the population at [our school] and a lot of our ELL's are Spanish speakers, and then, if you look at what the research says is the best program for them, the immersion program is a natural fit… We send out all calls about our program to our neighborhood parents … to remind them [to sign up for] … the immersion program … we send it out in English and we send it out in Spanish… and now our Spanish speakers, they know about the program too and so they are invested… We have a lot of students whose parents are first generation or second generation who want their children to participate in the other half of their culture…it is actually a real nice mix.

Another intentional move towards creating more equitable spaces that this administrator implemented was in addressing the issue of parents being able to speak with office staff. If parents walked in the front door, this administrator ensured that their needs and concerns could be met through a language the parents were most comfortable using by having the office staffed by fully bilingual office-managers (Pratt & Dantas-Whitney, forthcoming). This meant that no matter if the parents spoke Spanish-only or English-only or if they were

bilingual, their needs could be addressed. This was important in shifting towards a school culture that was inclusive of all families.

The inclusive push to create a dual language bilingual program that valued, embraced, and celebrated linguistically and culturally diverse students and their families began with an administrator's choice to be intentional in creating space for affirmative bilingual and bicultural communities of practice. The administrator's efforts to create a *comunidad de aprendizaje* opened more equitable spaces for teaching, learning and being bilingual.

<u>Teaching and Learning: A *Comunidad de Aprendizaje*</u>

The building administrator's stance towards inclusive dual language bilingual spaces for students and families trickled-down to classroom practices that shaped the types of teaching, learning and interacting that occurred. When participants in this study were afforded the space to engage as bilinguals in bilingual ways using their full linguistic repertoires to negotiate their thinking, it created a *comunidad de aprendizaje*, a bilingual community of practice.

Participants within this *comunidad de aprendizaje* engaged in translingual language practices as they negotiated content and displayed a variety of identity performances (García, 2009). Participants were seen translanguaging, defined as the normative language practices of bilinguals that are ideologically, sociopolitically, and sociolinguistically situated as bilinguals engage their full linguistic repertoires to fluidly and efficiently communicate meaning and enact identity, for a variety of purposes. The purposes include: when bilingual participants spontaneously responded in unfiltered ways to an event in the class; during transition times when language performances were less strictly regulated; accommodating emotional contexts such as when students were under duress or there was a monolingual English-speaking person in the room; or when they were trying to position themselves as members within a particular group as a means to justify or legitimize their participation. What was most powerful about the use of translanguaging in this dual language bilingual context was that translanguaging by both the teacher and students subverted the dominant instructional practice of language separation policies (Pratt, forthcoming).

In spite of a pull towards the more common paralleled monoglossic practices of English-only and Spanish-only separation (Pratt & Johnson, forthcoming), translanguaging practices were used as a tool to (1) engage in meaningful oral language discussions, (2) foster literary comprehension, and (3) shape bicultural scholarly identities within their *comunidad de aprendizaje* (Pratt & Ernst-Slavit, under review). Freire and Macedo (2001) argue that any program attempting to emancipate historically marginalized students must bridge students' home language practices, and their own variety used in their daily interactions, with the language practices of school. Teachers and students in this study worked together to re-write and re-create their individual histories, cultures, and language varieties in order to subvert the asymmetrical power relations found in these monoglossic practices (Pratt, forthcoming). The subversion of dominant, English-only contexts afforded linguistically and culturally diverse students, who had historically been marginalized, more equitable access to the social, cultural, and linguistic capital found in educational context (Bourdieu, 1991), empowering both students and families to negate the dominant ideologies that encircled the English-dominant contexts within which they lived. In addition, translanguaging in this dual language bilingual program served to normalize and affirm bilingual ways of knowing, doing, and being as participants utilized their full linguistic and cultural resources in more fluid, natural, and affirming ways (Pratt & Ernst-Slavit, under review).

## Where Do We Go Next?

The findings from this study indicate that translanguaging was an integral part of the dual language literacy instructional context developing students bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural selves in spite of strict language separation policies as students negotiated language, content, and identity. The students in this study also circumvented the strict language separation policies and problematized notions of paralleled monolingualism,

which serve to maintain monolingual ways of expressing understanding that subjugated the partner language in unintended ways. This finding calls for educators to move away from strict language separation policies while still creating space and time for the partner language in an English-dominant context (Pratt & Johnson, forthcoming). The overwhelming evidence that regardless of rigidly imposed language separation policies, bilingual students and communities engage bilingually for a variety of purposes and often do so unconsciously. While there is validity in creating spaces for partner languages in dual language contexts, the strict and often restrictive practice of language separation suffocates the linguistic potential of students to engage casually, creatively and experimentally with the partner or non-English language.

An essential tool moving forward, as educators consider implementing translanguaging as an instructional construct, would be to articulate district, building and individual goals for dual language bilingual education as aligned with a vision for social justice and educational equity. If the vision and overarching goal of dual language bilingual education is to bring about more socially just spaces for linguistically and culturally diverse students, then continuing to impose monoglossic ideologies must be revisited. The next step would be to align these goals with lesson designs grounded in current educational research on dual language bilingual education in order to facilitate the adoption of effective translingual instructional strategies and practices.

The translanguaging findings presented in this study offer considerations for the importance of translingual language use in dual language bilingual classroom contexts for meaningful academic engagement and language development. The consideration of a translanguaging framework in programs designed for emergent bilinguals creates spaces for bilingual participants to utilize their full linguistic and cultural resources in more fluid, natural, and affirming ways (Pratt & Ernst-Slavit, under review). The opportunity to establish bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural norms situated in heteroglossic ideologies as emergent bilinguals engage bilingually in bilingual contexts cannot be missed (Pratt, forthcoming). It is not enough to offer instruction in two languages; within dual language bilingual educational contexts, reframing and normalizing bilingualism and bilingual ways of knowing is also our responsibility and obligation from a social justice and educational equity position.

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**About the Author**

**Kristen L. Pratt**, PhD, is an assistant professor at Western Oregon University in the Division of Education and Leadership specializing in ESOL and Bilingual Education. Her research explores the intersection of language and education unpacking the intertextuality of macro language education policies and micro enactments in local contexts using ethnographic and sociolinguistic perspectives with a particular focus on addressing issues surrounding educational equity within culturally and linguistically diverse communities. This paper summarizes her dissertation that received the Outstanding Dissertation Award given by the Second Language Research Special Interest Group of the American Educational Research Association (AERA).

# Who Goes to Private School? Long-term Enrollment Trends by Family Income[1]

Richard J. Murnane, Harvard University
Sean F. Reardon, Stanford University
Preeya P. Mbekeani and Anne Lamb, Harvard University

For the past half century, roughly one in 10 U.S. families has chosen to enroll their children in private school. The reasons behind these decisions are as individual as families themselves: some may perceive the quality of education to be better at a private school than their neighborhood school, some may wish to continue a family tradition or be motivated by religious beliefs, and others may seek specialized programs for a child with a particular interest or learning challenge.

The one factor uniting virtually all of these choices, scholarships aside, is the decision to pay tuition, which averaged $10,940 in 2011. Private schools historically ranged widely in their annual fees; many programs, such as those run by the Catholic Church, were designed to be broadly affordable and offered significant discounts for low-income families. However, the number of Catholic schools has fallen sharply in recent years, while the number of nonsectarian private schools has increased. At the same time, income inequality and residential and school segregation by income have grown.

How have these shifting trends affected private-school enrollment nationwide? Has expanding income inequality led to an increased concentration of affluent families at private schools? If so, has that fueled a broader increase in segregation at both public and private schools?

To explore these questions, we examine enrollment and family-income data from the past 50 years at Catholic, other religious, and nonsectarian private elementary schools (that is, schools serving grades K–8). Our analysis finds that private schools, like public schools, are increasingly segregated by income. In particular, the share of middle-income students attending private schools has declined by almost half, while the private-school enrollment rate of wealthy children has remained steady. Much of the decline among middle-income students is due to falling enrollment at Catholic schools, which have closed in droves in the past 20 years. Meanwhile, private-school enrollment among affluent students has shifted from religious to nonsectarian schools.

## Tracking Trends in Private-School Enrollment

The share of U.S. school-age children attending private elementary schools peaked during the postwar boom of the late 1950s and early 1960s, reaching 15 percent in 1958. By the mid-1970s, it had fallen to 10 percent and remained quite steady for the rest of the 20th century. During the subsequent 15 years, it drifted downward slowly and was slightly less than 9 percent in 2015 (see Figure 1).

Those relatively steady numbers since the mid-1970s mask significant changes in the mix of school types that make up the private-school market, driven in particular by widespread closures of Catholic schools. In 1965, 89 percent of American children who attended a private elementary school were enrolled in a Catholic school; in 2013, the comparable figure was 42 percent. By contrast, the percentage of private elementary-school students who attended a non-Catholic religious school increased from 8 percent in 1965 to 40 percent in 2013. During this same period, the percentage of private elementary-school students enrolled in nonsectarian schools increased from 4 percent to 18 percent.

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**Private-School Enrollment Falls for Elementary School Students** (Figure 1)

*The percentage of American children in grades 1 to 8 who attended private schools has fallen markedly in the last half century. Private-school enrollment in grades 9-12 also fell prior to 1970, but has held relatively steady since.*

Percentage of elementary and secondary school students attending private schools

SOURCE: U.S. Census and the Current Population Survey
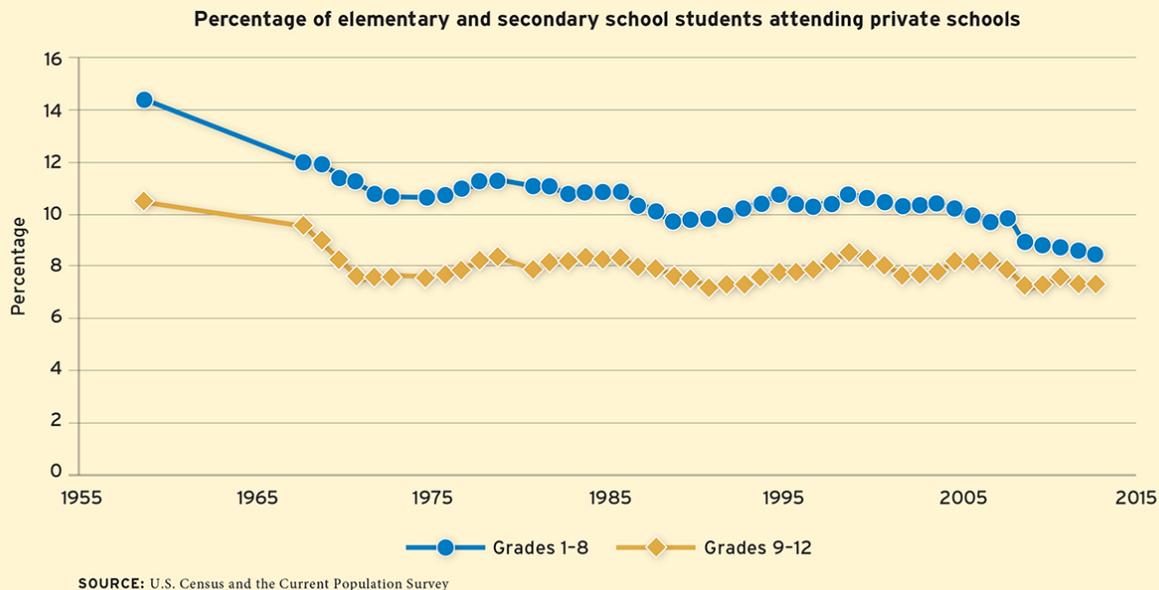
Has the family income mix of students attending each type of private school changed in recent decades? One reason it might have is that inequality in the incomes of American families, which held steady between 1945 and 1975, grew over subsequent decades. Looking at families with children in grades 1 to 8 between 1975 and 2010, the average income, net of inflation, among those in the 10th percentile declined by 11 percent. That of families with incomes in the middle, or 50th percentile, increased by 19 percent. That of relatively affluent families with incomes in the 90th percentile increased by 57 percent.

## Methodology

To answer these questions, we assembled data on families' incomes and elementary-school choices from the decennial census, Current Population Survey, U.S. Department of Education longitudinal surveys, and the National Household Education Survey, and combined them with information from the education department's Private School Universe Survey and survey data from *Phi Delta Kappan.*

Some surveys, such as the census, asked respondents to report the individual income for each family member, while others asked parents to place their household income within a set range of dollar amounts. To obtain a common metric, we converted ordinal income categories into percentiles of the national distribution of incomes for families with children enrolled in grades 1 to 8. Our analysis includes incomes from the 1968–69 school year until 2013–14, which we refer to as 1968 and 2013. To remove the effects of inflation, we express all family incomes and private-school tuitions in 2015 dollars.

We do not have enough data points to precisely measure the private-school enrollment rates of families at each income level. For example, the number of families with incomes of exactly $50,000 is too small to calculate a reliable enrollment rate. Instead, we use a statistical model to estimate the relationship between private-school enrollment and the family's income relative to families nationwide, and then compute the estimated proportion of

students enrolled in private school in the relevant year at the 10th, 50th, and 90th percentiles of the income distribution. We refer to these family-income percentiles as low, middle, and high.

In reporting our results, we pay particular attention to changes in the size of the gap in private-school enrollment rates between families at the 90th and 50th income percentiles, which we call the "90-50 gap." We do this because the growth in income inequality among families with school-age children in recent decades has been overwhelmingly in the top half of the income distribution. For example, among families with children in grades 1 to 8, the 90th percentile income in 1975 of $111,410 was roughly double that of the 50th percentile income of $56,084. In 2013, the comparable 90th percentile income of $183,959 was nearly triple the 50th percentile income of $68,256.

## Findings

Our analysis finds a strong positive role of family income in predicting private-school enrollment, as well as a marked decline between 1968 and 2013 in the share of students from middle-income families attending private schools (see Figure 2). For example, in 1968, 18 percent of elementary-school-age children from high-income families attended a private school, compared to 12 percent of children from middle-income families and 5 percent of children from low-income families. In 2013, the percentage of children from middle-income families had declined by almost half, to 7 percent, while the percentage of children from high-income families remained roughly steady at 16 percent. As a result, the 90-50 gap in private elementary-school enrollment rates grew from 5.5 percentage points in 1968 to 9.3 percentage points in 2013.

**Fewer Students from Middle-Income Families Enrolling in Private Schools (Figure 2)**

*From 1968 to 2013, the proportion of children from middle-income families enrolled in private elementary schools declined by almost half while the proportions of children from affluent and low-income families attending private schools held steady. Over this period, the gap in enrollment rates between high- and middle-income families widened from 5.5 to 9.3 percentage points.*
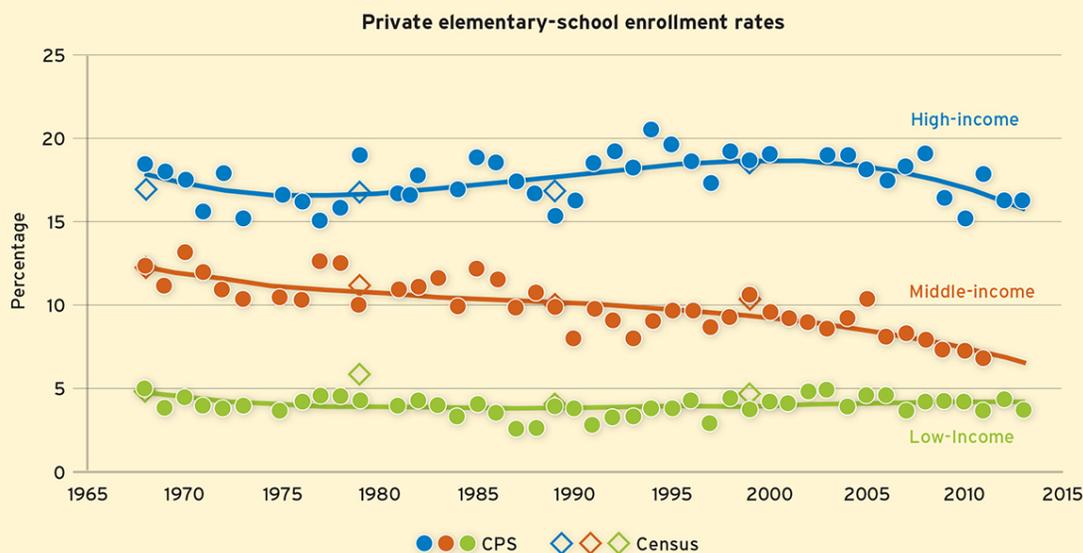
NOTE: Low-, middle-, and high-income families are defined as those from the 10th, 50th, and 90th percentile of the national income distribution for families with children in grades 1 to 8, respectively.

SOURCE: U.S. Census and the Current Population Survey

Much of the expanded 90-50 gap is due to declining enrollment at Catholic private schools, which historically served large numbers of children from low- and middle-income families. In addition, growth in the gap among students at private nonsectarian elementary schools has been particularly large, almost entirely due to a substantial increase in the enrollment rate of children from high-income families.

We also find that private-school enrollment rates are much higher among middle- and high-income families living in cities than among families with similar income levels living in suburbs, and that the 90-50 gap grew more among urban families than among suburban families. In addition, on the whole, private-school enrollment rates are lower for black and Hispanic families than for white families, but differences in family income account for a large part of those differences.

Finally, we find that private-school enrollment trends differ dramatically by region: the percentage of students from high-income families enrolled in private school increased in the South and West and decreased in the Northeast and Midwest. The 90-50 gap grew much more in the South than in other regions.

*School Type.*  While the private elementary-school enrollment rate for children from high-income families remained stable overall, many affluent families have shifted from religious to nonsectarian schools over the last four decades. And while the private-school enrollment rates for children from middle- and low-income families declined due to decreasing Catholic school enrollment rates for these groups, those declines were somewhat offset by increases in their enrollment at other private religious schools.

Private nonsectarian elementary schools serve a small percentage of the nation's students, but a growing share of high-income students. Just 1 percent of middle-income students enrolled in those schools in 1969, and the percentage grew slightly to between 1 and 2 percent in 2011. But the enrollment rate among high-income families grew from 2 percent in 1969 to 6 percent in 2011. As a result, the 90-50 enrollment rate gap grew from 1 percentage point in 1969 to almost 5 percentage points in 2011.

We also analyzed enrollment trends at Catholic elementary schools, looking closely at the period from 1987 to 2011. Enrollment rates for students from families in the bottom half of the income distribution fell slowly but steadily over those 24 years. Among middle-income students, the enrollment rate in Catholic schools fell from 7 percent to 3 percent in 2011. Meanwhile, the enrollment rate for high-income families declined by only 1 percentage point, from 11 percent to 10 percent. As a result, the 90-50 gap in enrollment rates grew from 4 to almost 7 percentage points.

At non-Catholic religious elementary schools, enrollment over the same 24-year period diverges from the trends elsewhere. Enrollment for children from middle-income families increased from 3 percent to 4 percent, while that of children from high-income families declined from 6 percent to 5 percent. As a result, the 90-50 gap in enrollment rates in non-Catholic religious elementary schools in 2011 was half the size of the comparable gap in 1987.

*Race.*  We looked at enrollment rates for white, black, and Hispanic students overall, as well as among low-, middle-, and high-income families in each group. On the whole, enrollment for white students decreased from 16 percent in 1959 to 11 percent in 2013. Enrollment decreased far more dramatically for Hispanic students, dropping from 13 percent enrolled in private schools to 3 percent. By contrast, the private-school enrollment rate increased among black students, from 3 percent to 5 percent.

These trends could reflect shifts in each group's income distribution or changes in the overall private-school enrollment rates by family income. Black and Hispanic families were less concentrated in the bottom 10 percent of the income distribution in 2013 compared to 1969, so we might expect their private-school enrollment rates to rise even if enrollment rates among families at each level of income remained constant. This is why it is important

to examine trends in private-school enrollment rates for black and Hispanic families at particular points in the national family-income distribution.

In 1969, just under 2 percent of black children from low-income families attended private elementary schools. This rate rose slowly over the next four decades, reaching 4 percent in 2013 (see Figure 3). Enrollment for black children from middle-income families was steady, at 5 percent in 1969 and 6 percent in 2013. In contrast, the private-school enrollment rate for black students from high-income families increased from 11 percent in 1969 to more than 16 percent in the mid-1990s. Subsequently, this rate fell slightly, to 14 percent in 2013. The net effect of these trends is that the 90-50 gap among black students in 2013 was 8 percentage points, slightly larger but not statistically different from the comparable gap of 6 points in 1969.

## Contrasting Trends for Black and Hispanic Families (Figure 3)

*For black families across the income distribution, private-school enrollment rates ticked up between 1 and 3 percentage points from 1969 to 2013. Private-school enrollment rates fell over this period for Hispanic families across the income distribution, with the fastest rate of decline for children from middle-income Hispanic families.*



**Private elementary-school enrollment rates**

NOTE: Low-, middle-, and high-income families are defined as those from the 10th, 50th, and 90th percentile of the national income distribution for families with children in grades 1 to 8, respectively.

SOURCE: U.S. Census and the Current Population Survey

Hispanic children were less likely to enroll in private school overall in 2013 than in 1969 (the first year with data available for Hispanic student enrollment), with the steepest decline among middle-class families, whose rates fell from 15 percent to 3 percent. However, the decline was modest for children from high-income families, falling from 18 percent to 15 percent, and the 90-50 gap among Hispanic families grew from 3 points in 1969 to 12 points in 2013.

*Community Type.* In 1968, 19 percent of children living in cities and 13 percent of those living in suburbs attended a private elementary school. Over the next half century, both percentages declined, to 10 percent of city dwellers and 8 percent of suburban children. Among high-income urban families during those years, the share of children enrolled in private school peaked at 30 percent in 1989 and was 24 percent in 2013 (see Figure 4a).

## Varying Trends by Location (Figure 4)

**4a)** Private-school enrollment rates are higher among families living in cities than among families with similar income levels living in suburbs, although enrollment fell across all groups between 1968 and 2013. The gap in enrollment between middle-income and high-income families grew more among urban families than among suburban families.

### Private elementary-school enrollment rates
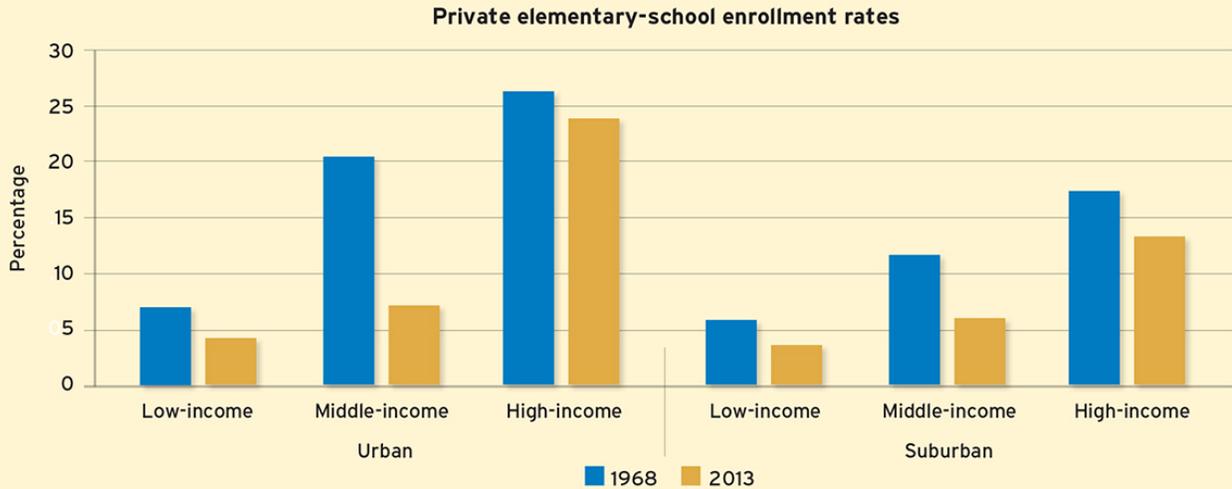


**4b)** Between 1968 and 2013, the percentage of students enrolled in private school increased in the South and West and decreased in the Northeast and Midwest. The gap in enrollment between middle-income and high-income families grew much more in the South than in other regions.
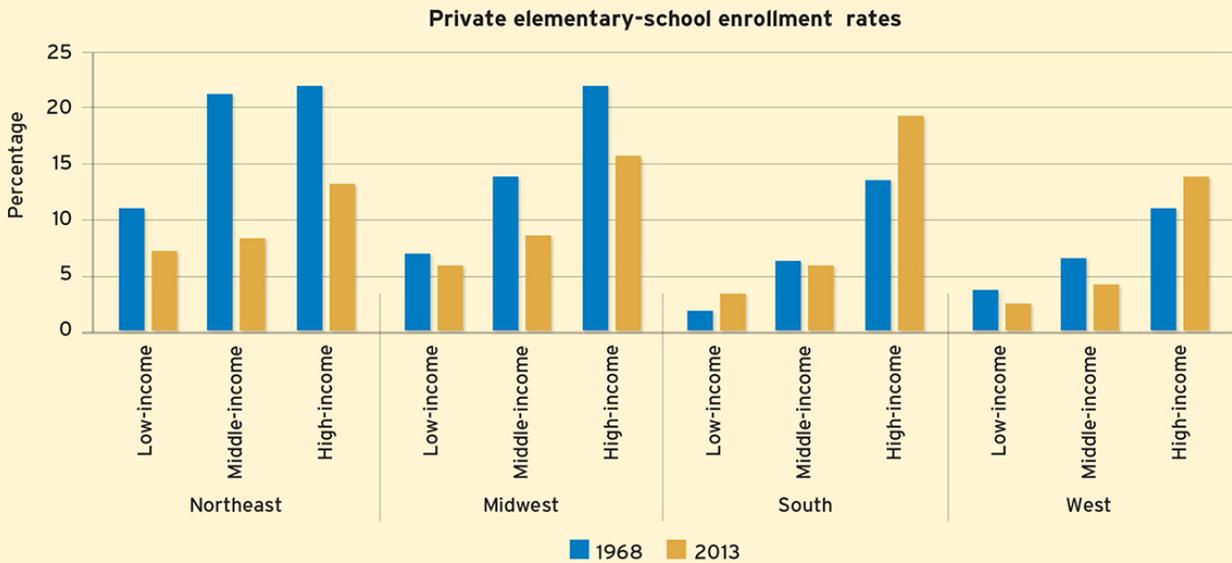
### Private elementary-school enrollment rates



NOTE: Low-, middle-, and high-income families are defined as those from the 10th, 50th, and 90th percentile of the national income distribution of families with children in grades 1 to 8, respectively.

**SOURCE:** U.S. Census and the Current Population Survey

For middle-income families living in the suburbs, the private-school enrollment rate fell from 11 percent in 1968 to 6 percent in 2013. The comparable enrollment rate for children from high-income suburban families remained steady, between 15 and 18 percent, from 1968 until recently, but fell in the years following the onset of the Great

Recession. As a result of that decline, the 90-50 gap among suburban families was the same in 2013 as it had been in 1968: 7 percentage points.

We also find declines in overall private-school enrollment rates among families living in the Northeast and Midwest during the study period. The rates fell by roughly half, from 22 percent to 10 percent in the Northeast and from 16 percent to 9 percent in the Midwest. Meanwhile, those in the South and West held steady at around 7 percent. Looking at enrollment by family income, in the South, the enrollment rate of children from high-income families actually increased from 14 percent in 1968 to 19 percent in 2013. We find a gap of 14 percentage points in 2013 between the private-school enrollment rates of children from high- and middle-income families—twice as large as the comparable gap in 1968 (see Figure 4b).

## Explaining the Patterns

We consider a number of potential explanations for the trends that we observe in private-school enrollment. We do not claim to present evidence of causation; rather, our potential explanations are hypotheses supported by descriptive evidence, which we offer to motivate future research.

One major explanation for these patterns is the widespread closures of Catholic schools, which had relatively low tuitions and were concentrated in the Northeast and Midwest. Due to a decline in the number of clergy and members of religious orders, who provided low-cost teaching services, as well as financial and other pressures related to public disclosures of long-standing sexual-abuse issues in the church, the number of Catholic elementary schools in the U.S. declined by 37 percent between 1970 and 2010.

The Catholic elementary schools that remain open are more expensive, with an average tuition in 2010 of $5,858 (in 2015 dollars), which is more than six times the average tuition of $873 in Catholic elementary schools in 1970. During this period, middle-income families with elementary-school-age children experienced an average real-income increase of 23 percent, while the average real income of low-income families with children declined by 22 percent. Though average tuition rates do not reflect scholarships and other discounts, these averages and income trends may help explain why Catholic elementary schools increasingly serve affluent students.

Meanwhile, since the late 1970s, tuitions at other types of private schools also have increased more rapidly than median incomes. The average inflation-adjusted tuition in nonsectarian private elementary schools increased from $4,120 in 1979 to $22,611 in 2011. Given the high tuitions in nonsectarian private elementary schools, it is not surprising that enrollment in these schools rose faster among students from high-income families than among those from low-income families, or that the 90-50 enrollment gap increased substantially.

Tuitions have also increased substantially in non-Catholic religious elementary schools in recent years. In 1993, the average inflation-adjusted tuition was $3,896; that nearly tripled by 2011, to $9,134. It is therefore surprising that the 90-50 enrollment gap did not increase between 1987 and 2011.

Another relevant factor for families' decisions is the perceived quality of the public schools with which private schools compete. One mark of comparison is student performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), where the difference between the average math scores of public and private 4th-grade students declined markedly between the 1990s and 2011. This could explain why the percentage of elementary-school students attending private schools declined slightly during this period.

But these patterns differ between cities and suburbs. Average math and reading scores on NAEP are considerably lower for public-school students in cities compared to those in suburban schools, in part due to residential segregation by income. Suburban families give their schools better ratings, too: annual survey data from Phi Beta Kappan show that more families in the suburbs rated their local public schools an "A" or "B" throughout the

1980s and early 1990s than urban parents at the same income level. Further, high-income suburban parents gave their local schools better ratings than low-income suburban parents, likely reflecting the greater capacity of high-income parents to move to communities with high-quality public schools. In contrast, high-income parents living in cities did not rate their local public schools more favorably than lower-income urban parents, which helps to explain why high-income urban parents are more likely than affluent suburbanites to send their children to private school.

The striking differences across regions in private-school enrollment trends may reflect regional differences in the composition of private-school enrollment. Private-school enrollment in the South was not substantially affected by Catholic school closures; it was affected by white flight following school desegregation orders. In addition, the South is home to a significant number of conservative Christian families, and Supreme Court decisions banning prayer in schools may explain the increasing percentage of middle-income families sending their children to non-Catholic religious elementary schools. Interestingly, the percentage of high-income families in the South who sent their children to non-Catholic religious elementary schools declined over this same period, and the 90-50 gap in enrollment rates in other religious elementary schools narrowed.

## Implications

The distribution of private elementary-school enrollments in the U.S. has changed dramatically over the last 45 years. Today, non-Catholic religious elementary schools serve more low-income students than Catholic elementary schools do. Meanwhile, the percentage of students from high-income families who attend private nonsectarian schools has grown substantially. Much less is known about nonsectarian private schools than about Catholic schools, which historically were the dominant supplier of private-school services in the U.S. and the subject of a great deal of research.

Given that less than 10 percent of American children attend a private elementary or secondary school, why should we care if gaps by family income in private-school enrollment rates have grown? Relative to residential mobility patterns, trends in private-school enrollment play only a modest role in explaining increases in school segregation by income. But that role is not inconsequential, and could be important for two additional reasons.

First, if the private schools' affluent families choose for their children provide a better education than the schools available to children from lower-income families, these choices pass on economic advantage to the next generation and undercut the potential for intergenerational economic mobility. Second, it is possible that well-educated affluent parents who send their children to private schools may be less interested in devoting their political and social capital to advocating for better public schools.

What can the data tell us? We know that the percentage of American children attending private elementary schools has declined from 15 to less than 9 percent in recent decades, and that Catholic schools and nonsectarian private schools increasingly serve students from high-income families. It is more difficult to judge whether these shifts in enrollment have contributed to gaps in educational outcomes. If average per-student expenditure is an indicator of instructional quality, this may be the case. The 90-50 enrollment rate gap has increased the most in nonsectarian elementary schools, which are more than twice as expensive, on average, as religious schools. However, middle-income parents pay less than high-income parents who enroll their children in private school, due not only to scholarship assistance but also to the relative costs of the schools these types of families choose. We know of no evidence about whether more-expensive private schools are more effective than less-expensive schools, though the choices of affluent families suggest that they believe they are.

The key trends identified by our analysis have troubling implications. As a result of growing residential segregation by income, low-income families are increasingly concentrated in urban areas. In such places, one quarter of high-income families enroll their children in private schools compared to a much smaller—and

declining—proportion of middle- and low-income families. As a result, both urban public schools and urban private schools have less socioeconomic diversity today than they had several decades ago.

Higher-income families increasingly live either in the suburbs or enroll their children in private schools. Moreover, the private schools their children attend are more likely to be expensive nonsectarian schools than was the case four decades ago. Together, these trends indicate an increasingly polarized pattern of school enrollment. As a result, American schools—both public and private—are increasingly segregated by income.

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# Commentary

## How the Common Core Changed Standardized Testing

Laura Slover and Lesley Muldoon, CenterPoint Education Solutions

When the U.S. Department of Education awarded $350 million to two consortia of states in September 2010 to develop new assessments measuring performance of the Common Core State Standards, state commissioners of education called it a milestone in American education. "By working together, states can make greater—and faster—progress than we can if we go it alone," said Mitchell Chester, the late Massachusetts education commissioner and chair of the PARCC Governing Board from 2010 to 2015.

Eight years later, the number of states participating in at least one of the two consortia that developed the new assessments has dropped from 44 to 16, plus the District of Columbia, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Bureau of Indian Education, and the Department of Defense Education Agency. The reasons for leaving vary, but the decrease in participation makes it easy for some to declare the program a failure.

A closer look, however, suggests that Commissioner Chester's optimism was not misplaced. Indeed, the testing landscape today is much improved. In many states, assessments have advanced considerably over the previous generation of assessments, which were generally regarded as narrowly focused, unengaging for students, and pegged at low levels of rigor that drove some educators to lower expectations for students.

Today, many state assessments measure more ambitious content like critical thinking and writing, and use innovative item types and formats, especially technology-based approaches, that engage students. These shifts are significant and are the result of the two state-led consortia—PARCC and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium—which have ushered in the significant progress that Chester foresaw in 2010. Those programs upped the game for assessment quality, and other states and testing companies followed suit. Today's tests—whether they are consortia based or not—are a far cry from their predecessors.

According to a new report from the Thomas B. Fordham Institute (2018) on Common Core implementation, some states are backtracking on the quality and rigor of standards. In that context, it is even more important to hold firm on the progress we've made on assessment. As leaders of the organization that launched and managed the PARCC assessments from 2010 to 2017, we would like to share some reflections on the evolution in the testing landscape that came about as the result of the two assessment consortia.

## Establishing a Common, Higher Bar

One of the most important features of state tests today is their focus on college and career readiness. Unlike in the past, tests now measure a broad range of knowledge and skills that are essential to readiness and report students' progress toward that goal. Tests of old, like the standards undergirding them, often fell short of measuring the most important knowledge and skills that are critical for being prepared for college and for work.

PARCC and Smarter Balanced set these advances in motion by establishing common performance levels for the assessments across the states in their consortia, a process that engaged K-12 and higher education leaders, using research and professional educator judgment to define what college- and career-ready performance looks like. Recent reports from Education Next (Hamlin and Peterson, 2017) and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, Bandeira de Mello, Rahman, & Park, 2018) confirm that PARCC and Smarter established a more rigorous bar for proficiency.

The fact that these common performance levels are shared by multiple states means that for the first time at this scale, states are able to compare individual student results. This is an important advance for educational equity; in the past, states set different performance levels, some higher than others, in effect establishing different targets for what level of academic achievement was expected of students and exacerbating the problem of disparities by Zip code. Consistent assessment standards also help families who move across state lines (within a consortium) and are now able to track student progress more easily.

The recent NCES study shows that cut scores for what states consider proficient have risen when compared to performance levels for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). It also shows that the difference between the state with the lowest performance standard and the state with the highest standard narrowed between 2013 (before the consortia tests) and 2015 (after the consortia assessments).

Taken together, this research is clear that the consortia assessments, particularly PARCC, set a higher standard for student proficiency and that most other states—whether administering a consortium test or not—raised the bar as well. These new, shared expectations of what students should know and be able to do reflect the expectations of the world of college and the workforce much more fully than did their predecessors.

## Engaging Educators, Building Transparency

For many years, large-scale assessments have been a black box for educators, providing limited opportunities for them to participate in test development and little information on what's assessed, how it will be scored, and what to do with the results. While many states have historically had a representative set of teachers review test items, the consortia were able to foster a depth and breadth of educator engagement that set a new bar for the industry. Indeed, the consortia engaged thousands of classroom educators to review items and offer insights on development of key policies such as accessibility and accommodations and performance-level setting.

This engagement from teachers and administrators helped align the assessments with instructional practices effective teachers use in classrooms. It also helped ensure transparency, as did the release of thousands of original items and full-length practice tests for every grade level.

The design of the assessments has also helped push the education field in important ways by sending signals about the critical knowledge and skills for students to master at each grade level. Writing is a prime example: The consortia assessments include more extensive measurement of writing than most previous state assessments and include a strong focus on evidence-based writing. We have heard from educators that this in turn has driven their schools to focus more on writing in the curriculum, giving students more opportunities to build this critical skill. This common focus can help ensure an equitable education for all children and close achievement gaps.

## Moving to Computer Testing

Beyond the content and quality of the tests and expectations for student mastery, PARCC and Smarter Balanced helped change the way assessments are delivered. When the consortia were first established in 2010, only six of the 26 original PARCC states were administering some state assessments via computer.

Moving to online testing was a key priority for states for multiple reasons: Technology-enhanced items allowed for measuring knowledge and skills that paper and pencil tests could not assess, typically deeper learning concepts; computer-delivered tests could also allow for more efficient test administration technology and improve access to the assessments for students with disabilities and English learners.

Computer-based tests can also reduce the amount of time needed to score and report results, particularly if automated scoring technologies are used. And, critically, it is less expensive to administer and score computer-based tests than paper-based versions.

States were understandably cautious about transitioning to computer testing, given the investments required in local technology infrastructure and the lack of familiarity that many students and teachers had using computers for high-stakes assessments. The PARCC and Smarter Balanced teams conducted research and development to help states prepare for the transition, while state leaders worked with partners to prepare schools and districts.

In 2011, four years prior to the launch of the PARCC and Smarter Balanced assessments, the State Education Technology Directors Association (Levin, Fletcher, & Chau, 2011) reported that 33 states offered some type of online testing; only 5 of these states required that students take the end-of-year assessment online and none of these states planned to administer PARCC. In the first year of PARCC administration, 2015, more than 75 percent of students took the assessments online—far exceeding the consortium's 50 percent goal for the first year. By spring 2017, more than 95 percent of students took the assessments via computer. This is a remarkable shift for states to make over less than a decade, one that took significant leadership from state and local officials to make a reality.

## Bringing States Together

Above all, the experience of the consortia demonstrated that collective state action on complex work is doable. It can improve quality significantly, and it can leverage economies of scale to make better use of public dollars. Indeed, states that left the consortia to go it alone, ended up spending millions of dollars to develop their new tests from scratch. This successful model of collective state action—and the lessons learned—should influence states' current approaches to joint work in science, career and technical education, and civics.

And yet, there is more to do. The political battles over testing (and education more broadly) limited the advances in assessment that the leaders of the consortia envisioned in 2010. For example, concerns about testing time caused the PARCC states to move away from their initial bold vision of embedding the assessments into courses and distributing them throughout the year. This was an innovative design that would have more closely connected assessment to classrooms, but states ultimately determined it was too challenging to implement at scale. Luckily, there is now an opportunity for states to explore models like this through some of the flexibility provided under the federal Every Student Succeeds Act.

In addition, a number of states, for largely political reasons, pulled out of the consortia to develop or buy tests on their own, which means that many parents and policymakers can no longer compare test results across state lines using a shared, annual, and widely used benchmark for student success. In contrast, NAEP—which is administered once every two years to a sample of students in 4th, 8th, and 12thgrades—serves as an important high-level barometer of student progress in the nation but doesn't provide information to school systems that can be used to inform academic programming, supports and interventions, or professional learning.

Further, testing "opt outs" in some states meant that the data from the assessments were not as useful as they could be because they did not fully reflect all students in a school. This limited districts' ability to fully make use of the data to make instructional decisions. Opt outs are less prevalent today, but still create a challenge to schools seeking to have complete academic picture of their student body.

Finally, we learned that leaders taking on an ambitious reform agenda should not give short shrift to the communications and outreach required to build support for and understanding of the work—including building strong relationships with stakeholders and seeking to form coalitions of supporters. Reform leaders should not assume that good work on its own will win the day, especially if key stakeholders don't know about or support it.

Despite these challenges, the quality of state testing has improved substantially in recent years. Millions of students today take assessments borne out of or influenced by this work—tests that better reflect what they know, and what the nation needs them to know.

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## About the Authors

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# Commentary

## Why School Ratings Should Stress Learning Gains

Chris Minnich, NWEA

Imagine how it might feel to be an educator at a school deemed "failing," despite raising students' performance dramatically. Unfortunately, that's a reality for some of the nation's most dedicated educators, especially those serving in historically marginalized communities.

That's because many states and districts evaluate schools on the basis of how many students achieve proficiency standards on standardized tests rather than how far schools move students, regardless of where they start on the achievement spectrum. Schools serving students from disadvantaged backgrounds often come up short on proficiency metrics, even when they move their students further over the course of a school year than do schools serving students from more advantaged families.

Proficiency matters, of course. Achievement standards indicate if students are meeting grade-level expectations, if they should be considered for enrichment programs, and if they are prepared for college.

But school rating systems that consider both proficiency and student growth are far fairer to these schools. We can, and should, differentiate between a school with low achievement scores but high rates of growth and a school with low achievement and little growth.

The good news is that the federal Every Student Succeeds Act enables states to include growth in new school rating systems—and all 50 states and the District of Columbia have pledged to do so. But to truly serve students and close opportunity gaps, growth can't just be added to the mix. It must be weighted heavily. Illinois, where growth accounts for two-thirds of core academic indicators, has pointed the way. So has Georgia, where growth is weighted at 50 percent, including 15 percent focused on narrowing achievement gaps.

These steps signal a much-needed shift in the school accountability paradigm. A recent national study of 1,500 randomly selected schools by NWEA found that many schools with low achievement were at the same time producing average or better growth. Strikingly, this was true for 60 percent of schools where more than 90 percent of students were eligible for free or reduced-price lunches. Conversely, student growth in schools with few disadvantaged students varied widely, undermining the assumption that students educated in more affluent schools are learning at higher rates.

The study, _Evaluating the Relationships Between Poverty and School Performance_, confirms that growth metrics more closely reflect educators' true contributions without introducing much bias based on the poverty-level of the students they serve, and provide a more accurate reflection of school performance. But as states incorporate student growth into new school accountability systems, they should not merely measure "growth" in the percentage of students achieving proficiency levels. Rather, they should measure how much students learn over the course of a school year.

Measuring within-year growth and having a school rating policy that appropriately weights growth and achievement gives effective teachers an incentive to work in disadvantaged schools. And when schools effectively grow students at a rate faster than the norm, they should be recognized and their best practices shared with similar schools that are not achieving the same results.

There is no magic wand that can instantly increase student achievement. The function of a school is to meet students where they are and help them learn a lot, year after year. When educators and the communities they serve

have insight into how much, or how little, each student is learning annually, they stand a much better chance of helping students reach their potential, creating achievement levels that put students on the path for a lifetime of success.

## About the Author

**Chris Minnich** is the Chief Executive Officer of NWEA, a national not-for-profit provider of assessment solutions based in Portland, Oregon. He previously served as the Executive Director of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) in Washington, DC and as the Director of Test Design and Implementation at the Oregon Department of Education. This piece originally appeared on the *FutureEd website* in October 2018. FutureEd is an independent, solution-oriented think tank at Georgetown's McCourt School of Public Policy.

# Commentary

## Giftedness Is Not a Number

Nancy Hertzog, University of Washington

Imagine a bright five-year-old boy whose parents recently immigrated to Washington state. He's getting ready to start kindergarten speaking Spanish as his first language and qualifies for a free and reduced-price lunch. What are the odds he'll be identified as a highly-capable learner?

Unfortunately, his white classmates who are native English speakers and don't receive free/reduced lunch are 2.5 times more likely to receive the benefit of highly-capable services (Siegal, et al, 2016).

As he starts school, a cascade of experiences follows. The assumption that his potential isn't equal to his kindergarten classmates. The belief that the competencies he brings to the learning environment—speaking Spanish and learning English at the same time—are not as highly valued as the reading competencies of children who have had their favorite books read aloud to them for years. The missed opportunities to fully explore and realize his gifts are more than an individual tragedy. We all lose what he could contribute to our society.

Although Washington is a national leader in addressing the historic problem of disparities in who receives gifted education, we have yet to tackle the fundamental barrier to getting better at identifying and serving children from low-income homes. Namely, we continue to perpetuate outdated definitions and views of giftedness as a number.

In our state's attempt to change the identification system, emphasis in the Washington Codes is being placed on universal screening, local norms and measures of non-verbal assessment—all of which focus on outdated, narrow definitions of gifted students as high IQ, placing in the top 3-5 percentile on a measure of cognitive ability. This focus on standardized testing is not the way to ensure equity. It carries an assumption that giftedness is relative to others and we need to offer services only to those children whose scores place them in an arbitrary top percentage of all test takers. However, this narrow definition on which state laws and policies are based ignores the inherent biases of standardized testing and the presumption that gifted students are defined by being compared to others.

First, it is problematic, assuming that language is the barrier for children who speak English as a second language, to mandate the use of nonverbal assessments when assessments are not available in one's native language. Recent research tells us that districts should be cautious in their use of nonverbal ability tests (or any cognitive-based tests) and should recognize that, no matter how a test is advertised, the use of a nonverbal test alone will not result in proportional identification of highly-capable learners (Carman, Walther, & Bartsch, 2018).

Moreover, the National Association for the Education of Young Children has guidelines that promote caution for using standardized testing with children ages preschool to 8. Yet Washington state law requires selection into highly-capable programs to be based on criteria benchmarked on local norms. Those norms rely upon standardized testing, even when we know that students from low-income homes, students who do not speak English as a first language, students with disabilities and young students should not have high stakes decisions such as admittance into gifted education programs made by using standardized instruments.

We should ask for learning environments where teachers challenge advanced learners appropriately and nurture the potential of all learners—creating a system where race, language and socioeconomic status do not predict student success.

For young children in particular, there are other means of finding out who needs advanced and accelerated instruction. Rather than mandating any particular form of standardized assessment, it would be much more

educationally appropriate to provide many ways to assess learning needs and include those data points in a multiple criteria process.

Changing an inequitable system of gifted education also requires going beyond simply addressing identification methods. We need funding for professional development that addresses institutional racism, culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy, and thorough content knowledge on how to challenge all advanced learners.

Over the last 20 years, the federally-funded Javits grant program has supported the design of performance-based curriculum and instruction that provide opportunities for more students to demonstrate their strengths and talents. Washington is completing its third year of a Javits grant that funded the creation of two online courses ("Equity and Access" and "Pedagogies and Strategies that Enhanced Learning for All Students"). Each course has modules filled with readings, resources and practical strategies to bring teachers and school districts closer to equitable practices in gifted education.

This is a promising start, but we must also change laws in our state. Rather than perpetuating a system that still mandates finding "the most highly-capable" students, I encourage all who want equity in gifted education to ask for changes in the language of the law so that a test score doesn't define the "most highly capable."

We are looking for children who need advanced learning, and it should not matter how many there are with reference to others. We should ask for learning environments where teachers challenge advanced learners appropriately and nurture the potential of all learners—creating a system where race, language and socioeconomic status do not predict student success.

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## About the Author

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# Three Good Books on Data Visualization

by Andrea Meld

Why do we care about effective data presentations? Weak presentations are expensive, confusing, misleading, and discourage interaction with your data. "Effective data presentation, by contrast, is clear and useful. It supports the audience's efforts at reading and cognition… It gets remembered (Evergreen, 2018, p. 197)." This review of three books, all of which I consider very good, provides a brief look at each and recommendations for who might like to read each one.

*Presenting Data Effectively: Communicating Your Findings for Maximum Impact* by Stephanie Evergreen provides a richly illustrated, breezy tutorial and style book on effective data presentation and its justification. She explains in detail the best use of graphics, text, color, and arrangement. Evergreen draws on research on how the brain processes visual information, as well as communication theory, always keeping the viewer of data in mind. This book might be a good choice if you are just starting out or want to further hone your data visualization skills. A checklist for data visualization is provided in the appendix. (Also available at: http://stephanieevergreen.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/DataVizChecklist_May2016.pdf)
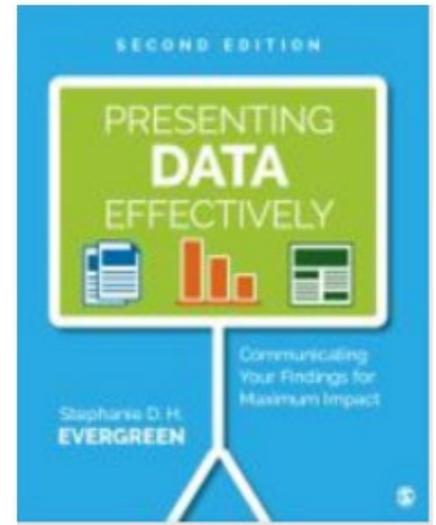
*Storytelling with Data: A Visualization Guide for Business Professionals* by Cole Nussbaumer Knaflic goes further than theory or practical how-to advice. She makes a strong case for connecting your data with a compelling narrative that will enable the audience to "get" your data story, something "we're not naturally good at." If I were to purchase just one of these three books, this is the one that I would select.

Why is story telling with our data important? Even the most beautiful data visualization can fall flat if a convincing account is lacking. How to tell stories with data has become more important as the amount of data has sharply increased, with a demand for data-driven decision making. Effective story telling with data can be the key to success "in communicating the findings of your study, "raising money for your non-profit, presenting to your board, or simply getting your point across to the audience." (Knaflic, 2015, p. 8).

This book explores the importance of context and audience, as well as how to:
- select an effective visual
- avoid clutter (the enemy!)
- focus the audience's attention
- think like a designer
- dissect exemplary data visualizations, and
- understand what makes a story a story.
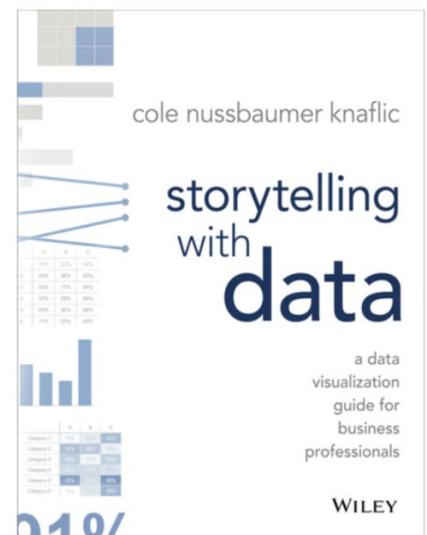
Explore the 12 most common visualizations, and before-and-after case studies. Find out what a "spaghetti graph" is, and how to avoid it, and some alternatives to the dreaded pie and donut charts. The book concludes by discussing best practices and guidelines, tips on mastering the storytelling approach, the value of feedback from colleagues, and how to get your team on board.

***The Big Book of Dashboards: Visualizing Your Data Using Real-World Scenarios*** by Steve Wexler, Jeffrey Shaffer, and Andy Cotgreave is the longest, most comprehensive of the three books discussed here. The authors define "data dashboard" as a "visual display of data used to monitor conditions and/or facilitate understanding." The book incorporates the authors' considerable experience in data dashboard design in the real world and is lavishly illustrated. If you are designing a data dashboard or managing a dashboard team, this is the book for you.

*The Big Book of Dashboards* consists of a brief section on the basics of data visualization, followed by dashboard scenarios and solutions, drawn from actual cases, which comprise most of the book. The authors suggest finding a scenario similar to a situation you are working on and exploring how the data visualization techniques that are shown led to a successful outcome. A final section discusses problems and pitfalls, engaging your audience, and how to succeed in the real world. After reading this book, you should have a clear idea about why different chart types work in different situations, and how to succeed with dashboards, keeping in mind the point of view of the user.
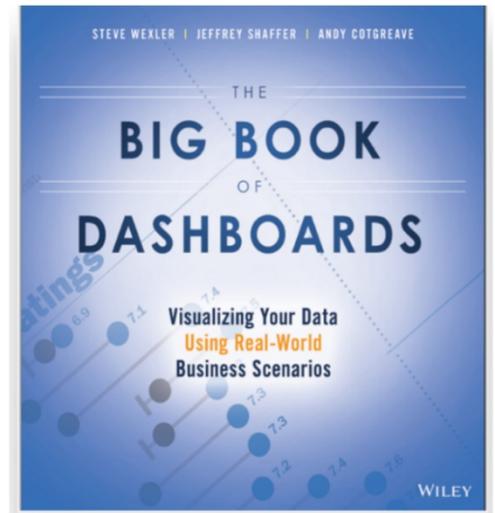
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# Summaries of Noteworthy Studies Published by Others

Many studies are published in the Pacific Northwest that relate to topics of interest of WERA members but often go unnoticed and are too long to reproduce in this journal. Information on eight such studies published in 2018 is provided below. The full studies and names of the authors can be accessed by using the links provided.

### Unmet Need among Financially Needy College Students in the State of Washington

Education Research & Data Center (ERDC), May 2018
https://erdc.wa.gov/publications/student-outcomes/unmet-need-among-financially-needy-college-students-state-washington

This study examined Washington high school graduates who entered Washington public higher education institutions and at some time received need-based financial aid and the persistence and completion rates of these students over six years. The study produced the following findings.

- There are many more women in the study cohorts than men because of several factors. The high school graduating classes of 2008 and 2009, the starting point for this study, include more women than men. Women are more likely than men to pursue postsecondary education and are more likely than men to receive need-based financial aid. Furthermore, women are more likely than men to earn a degree. For these reasons, the findings of the study were disaggregated by gender.

- Students with greater amounts of unmet need were less likely to persist and complete than students with lower amounts of unmet need. Not surprisingly, students having higher costs of higher education (e.g., tuition, room and board, books, etc.) not covered by family contributions and financial aid are less likely to continue attending college and graduating.

- In spite of being less expensive, community and technical colleges have higher levels of unmet need than the public four-year institutions. Even though the costs of attending community or technical colleges are considerably less than at four-year institutions, (a) the students attending community or technical colleges generally are poorer and the expected family contributions are less, and (b) the financial aid packages at community and technical colleges are smaller than at four-year institutions.

- Students with better high school academic records are more likely to receive better financial aid packages. Among all the cohorts, students with higher high school GPAs, on average, had lower amounts of unmet need. With the exception of men who started at a four-year institution, students who had met the high school math assessment standard were more likely to have lower amounts of unmet need.

- Students attending the four-year institutions borrow more than students attending the community and technical colleges; students attending the community and technical colleges (CTCs) work more than students attending the four-year institutions. Half the students beginning at a four-year institution borrow an average of $6,000 in unsubsidized loans in their first year while only about 10 percent of the beginning CTC students borrow, on average, $2,600. Two-thirds of the first-year CTC students work about 15 hours per week during the academic year, earning $6,000, while one-half of the first-year four-year students work six hours per week, earning $2,200.

- Even students who do not complete a bachelor's degree borrow. Not all students graduate, and many students who do not graduate take out loans. Overall, 70 percent of the students who start at a four-year institution earn a bachelor's degree within six years after graduating from high school. Of the remaining students who do not earn a bachelor's degree, 85 percent leave with an average $19,000 in debt. At the CTCs, of those who do not earn a bachelor's or associate degree or a long-term certificate, 35 percent incur an average $9,000 in debt.

**The Earnings Premium of Washington Higher Education: Gender Deficit in Earnings Among Washington College Graduates**  Education Research & Data Center (ERDC), June 2018
https://erdc.wa.gov/publications/economic-returns/earnings-premium-washington-higher-education-gender-deficit-earnings

Directly comparing postgraduate earnings of workers with bachelor's degrees and those with only a high school diploma overstates the earnings gains of the college graduates. This bias, called selection bias, stems from the self-selection of high school graduates into college. This study explores the earnings premiums of postsecondary awards and degrees in Washington state, but corrects for this selection bias using a statistical method called propensity score matching. This method compares the earnings of those who received postsecondary awards and degrees with high school graduates who received no degree, but who were comparable in many other measurable ways.

How much more do Washington college graduates earn than comparable peers with no degree? How does this differ between male and female graduates? The study produced the following findings.

- While completing a postsecondary credential or degree generally lead to higher annual real earnings, females consistently earned less than men, regardless of educational achievement.
- The increase in earnings associated with each postsecondary degree type differs between males and females (with respect to their comparison groups).
- While the earnings gender deficit seems to grow with educational attainment, female earnings as a percentage of male earnings remains fairly static.
- The female earnings premium exceeds the male earnings premium for short- and long-term certificates but was smaller than the male premium for the associate, bachelor's and graduate degrees.
- For most degree types, the female earnings premium decreased over time (with respect to the comparison group) while the male earnings premium did not.
- The gender deficit for workers who earned higher degrees grew over time, while the gender deficit for comparable high school graduates (who earned no degree) decreased.
- The hours worked by male and female bachelor's degree holders became more similar over the six years, even as their earnings diverged.
- For bachelor's degrees, the major categories in which females earned the most had a smallest percentage of females; the major categories with the highest percentage of females earned comparatively less.

**To and Through: Community and Technical College Pathways in South Seattle and South King County**  Community Center for Education Results, October 2018   https://roadmapproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/CTC-Pathways-in-South-Seattle-and-South-King-County-Full-Report-Oct.-2018.pdf

In today's economy, young adults have a hard time securing a stable, living wage job without some kind of post-secondary credential. This is especially true in the Road Map Project region in south King County where the booming local economy is creating unprecedented opportunity but also intense competition for skilled workers. To compete for living wage jobs, students in the region must navigate a local education system in which only 3 of 10 ninth graders earn any kind of post-secondary credential within six years of high school graduation. Students of color face even greater barriers in the local education system, and therefore experience lower rates of post-secondary completion.

This report and accompanying data dashboard shed light on the educational experiences of Road Map Project region students by examining the pathways of those who graduated from local high schools and directly enroll into the region's community and technical colleges (CTCs). Specifically, the report uses data from the Washington State Education Research and Data Center (ERDC) High School Feedback Report to examine post-secondary outcomes among 2012 high school graduates in the Road Map Project region. Information in the Feedback Report

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comes from the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, the Public Centralized Higher Education Enrollment System (PCHEES) maintained by the Office of Financial Management (OFM), and the National Student Clearinghouse. The report answers the following questions.

- How many Road Map region high school graduates enroll directly in college, and where do they enroll?
- Who are Road Map Project high school graduates who enroll directly in local CTCs?
- How many CTC students persist to year two, and how many complete or transfer within three years?
- To what extent is our system supporting Road Map Project students to reach key indicators of student success at local community and technical colleges?
- What is the relationship between advanced course taking in high school and student success in local CTCs?
- What are the strongest predictors of on-time credential completion?

**No School Alone 2018: Community Characteristics, Academic Success, and Youth Well-being**
Child and Family Research Unit, Washington State University, 2018
https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2101/2018/02/NoSchoolAlone2018Final.pdf

This report is part of a series of studies addressing the potential effects that community differences have on academic success and youth well-being. In this report, the original No School Alone report is updated with school performance data through the 2016-2017 school year. Changes in the data systems maintained by OSPI permitted an examination of school performance differences for specific populations of Washington students.

The study confirms the previous No School Alone finding that school poverty and levels of community ACEs are predictive of academic success based on standardized test results. In addition, school enrollment across specific student groups (ethnicity enrollment, English Language Learner enrollment, poverty levels, special education enrollment) helped explain differences in standardized academic measures in addition to the primary predictors of school poverty and community ACEs. These findings point to unique opportunities for local development of responses suited to the range of resources and challenges defining communities.

**The Association between Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) and School Success in Elementary School Children**   Child and Family Research Unit, Washington State University, 2018
https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2101/2018/02/ACE-manuscript-final-accepted-by-APA.pdf

Recently accepted for publication in the APA journal *School Psychology Quarter*, this article explores the feasibility of using school personnel as reporters to examine the relationship between the level of ACE exposure and academic risk among a non-clinical and random sample of 2,101 public elementary school children. ACE prevalence was reported for 44% of students with 13% of students having three of more ACE. A dose-response effect was found between the number of ACE and risk of poor school attendance, behavioral issues and failure to meet grade level standards in mathematics, reading, or writing. Results suggest that using staff reports of known ACE exposure in students is useful to describe the prevalence of ACE in the school population and that understanding and responding to ACE profiles might be an important strategy for improving the academic trajectory of at-risk children.

**The Costs of Mentorship? Exploring Student Teaching Placements and Their Impact on Student Achievement**   Center for Education Data & Research (CEDR), 2018
http://www.cedr.us/papers/working/CEDR%20WP%202018-1.pdf

The study used comprehensive data on student teaching placements from 14 teacher education programs (TEPs) in Washington State to explore the sorting of teacher candidates to the teachers who supervise their student teaching ("cooperating teachers" or CTs) and the schools in which student teaching occurs. All else equal, teachers with more experience and higher degree levels are more likely to host student teachers, as are schools

with lower levels of historical teacher turnover but with more open positions the following year. Teacher candidates are also more likely to work with CTs of the same gender and race and are more likely to be placed with CTs and in schools with administrators who graduated from the candidate's TEP. The study assessed the impact of these placements on student achievement in the classrooms in which student teaching occurs and found that a teacher's students perform only slightly worse in math and not significantly better or worse in English Language Arts, all else equal, in years in which the teacher hosts a student teacher than in other years. The negative effect in math is driven by CTs in the lowest quartile of value added, suggesting that more effective CTs can mitigate the impact of hosting a student teacher on student performance.

### Every Child School Ready: Community, School, and Student Predictors of Kindergarten Readiness and Academic Progress   Education Research & Data Center (ERDC), 2018
https://s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2101/2018/05/Every-Child-School-Ready_OFM-CAFRU.pdf

Kindergarten readiness is highly predictive of subsequent academic success, which in turn is predictive of health and wellbeing and economic success. In addition, the demands of growing up poor become a shared risk for residents in low income communities (in addition to the individual risk factors). Prior researchers have established that poverty – as a *community* characteristic – has a major impact on social success, emotional wellbeing, and health in individuals.

This study addressed several research questions: Do community characteristics help explain differences in school readiness across Washington State communities? In other words, do risk factors prevalent within a community – regardless of whether they are experienced by individual students – help account for variations in whether children are prepared for kindergarten? The study uses four years of data from the WaKIDS school readiness system developed in Washington and includes the initial school readiness results and subsequent early academic progress for a group of more than 150,000 students.

The study found that the level of poverty within a community was a statistically significant predictor of community differences in kindergarten readiness. In other words, whether or not a child grows up in a low-income home, growing up in a low-income community has a statistically significant (negative) impact on their kindergarten readiness. The percent of students who were Hispanic, and the percent of students who were English language learners, were also statistically significant predictors. Further, the number of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) within a community was associated with decreased kindergarten readiness on some WaKIDS measures but not others.

Several community characteristics within poor communities can act as buffers to the collective impact of poverty. Understanding the scope of ACEs in a community provides an explanatory tool related to poverty but distinct in terms of its impact. While understanding individual differences remains an important strategy for understanding risk, the community characteristics of poverty and adversity history add value and provide another mechanism for considering the policies and investments needed to improve overall academic readiness and success in our communities.

### Seattle Pre-K Program Evaluation, Year 3 Report
National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) and Cultivate Learning, September 2018
https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/4992960-SPP-Evaluation-Year-3-Report-v9-30-18-Final.html
This report focuses on the of the 2017–2018 school year and includes information on the prior two years.

In 2017–18 Seattle Pre-K Program (SPP) grew to 48 classrooms and 13 family child care providers from 32 classrooms in the prior year. SPP quality continued to improve and now reaches levels associated with strong gains in children's learning and development. We recommend that SPP build on its success by seeking further improvements in the quality of instruction with particular attention to language and literacy, integration of content across domains in children's activities, and supports for sustained, reflective thinking as well as personal care

routines that contribute to health. In Year 3 of the evaluation we addressed four specific questions. The key findings for each are summarized below.

1. Who enrolled in SPP in 2017–18, and how do they compare demographically to children in Seattle more generally?

SPP children closely resemble the general public-school population in Seattle with respect to gender, language, and income. SPP children are somewhat more likely to identify as African-American or Black and Asian (and less likely to identify as White) than the overall public-school population. Overall, 74% of the children enrolled in SPP were 4-year-olds, 29% were dual language learners, and were 12% Hispanic, 22% White, 27% African-American, and 28% Asian.

2. What was the observed quality of children's SPP classroom experiences in 2017–18, and did it improve over the prior year?

SPP quality has continued to improve on two separate measures, the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale—Third edition (ECERS-3) and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS). The average ECERS-3 score increased from 3.89 to 3.99 (on a 7-point scale) and this increase was statistically significant. CLASS scores also increased, with a particularly large gain for instructional supports that are important for building academic success, moving from 3.06 to 3.42 on a 7-point scale. Emotional support moved from 6.29 to 6.38 and Classroom Organization moved from 5.55 to 5.96. SPP quality as measured by the ECERS-3 and CLASS now exceeds that in some other major city and state pre-k and/or childcare systems. SPP quality is similar to that of the widely recognized New York City and San Antonio programs. Quality must continue to improve if it is to reach the levels in the states and cities with the highest levels of quality observed in research.

3. How does quality vary within SPP, and do children from different backgrounds experience different quality?

Average quality does not differ significantly between classrooms and family child care providers (FCCs), which were added this year as part of a pilot. Controlling for center and classroom characteristics (lead teacher qualifications, class size, among others), quality is lower for FCCs on the Emotional Support and Classroom Organization dimensions of CLASS. There is some variation in quality among classrooms, and continuous improvement should seek to raise the bottom end of the distribution. Average quality as measured by the ECERS-3 and average quality of instructional support as measured by the CLASS are not significantly different by race and ethnicity. Modest differences in quality of classroom organization and emotional supports are observed by children's race and ethnicity, but average quality in those two domains were high for all groups.

4. How did children in SPP classrooms and family childcare providers progress in 2017–18, and how did it vary with classroom quality? Other program characteristics? How did it vary with child characteristics?

Children in SPP made gains in every domain measured. Gains in language, literacy and mathematics were larger than would be expected based on maturation (increased age) alone. There were no large differences in gains by gender, race or ethnicity, or language. Children identified as Asian made smaller gains in receptive vocabulary, but larger gains in executive functions, when accounting for other child and school characteristics. No systematic differences in gains were found by income. Differences in classroom size or curriculum were not found to relate to children's performance. Better quality of classroom organization was associated with strong gains in math. (Last year's evaluation indicated that better classroom organization also improves literacy scores.) Teacher qualifications were not found to be associated with test score gains. African-American and Asian teachers' students had larger gains in vocabulary, reinforcing the importance of teacher diversity in SPP where most students identify as African-American, Black, or Asian.

Link to The Seattle Times article about the study and its implications (October 8)
Link to a University of Washington article about the study (October 9)

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The Washington Educational Research Association (WERA) is the state affiliate of the American Educational Research Association (AERA). It was established in 1973 as a non-profit organization and is governed by members of an Executive Board who serve a 3-year term.

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