



REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

UPDATE: Online Learning

February 2017

Authorizing legislation: RCW 28A.250.040

(<http://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=28A.250.040>)

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Executive Summary

In 2015-16, the number of online courses, students, and schools using online courses increased. School districts reporting online courses decreased slightly.

White students were over represented in online learning. Students of color, except for Native Americans/Alaskan Natives were under represented. Other groups were also under represented. These groups included:

- English language learners
- Low income students
- Students receiving special education services

High school students made up a majority of online learners (79 percent). Only 13 percent of online learners were close to full-time in online courses. The majority (71 percent) enrolled in fewer than 5 courses.

Measuring Success

Currently we measure success at the course level. Online course success rate improved from 74.7 percent in 2014-15 to 79 percent in 2015-16. By comparison, the course success rate for non-online courses was 92 percent. Gaps based on race, ethnicity, income, and special services were like those in non-online courses.

In the future, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) will align the accountability of online programs to the OSPI performance indicators. Step one is to better understand why students use online learning. Accountability may need flexibility depending on whether the student is accessing a course:

- Not available at the school, to meet scheduling needs, or by parent/student choice.
- As an intervention for a student not successful in a traditional classroom model.
- For credit retrieval.
- As an educational opportunity for a student in long term suspension.

These models may need individualized guidance and measures of accountability.

Background

In 2009 the Washington State Legislature created an accountability system for online learning (Substitute Senate Bill 5410, RCW 28A.250.005). The Legislature directed OSPI to develop an online provider approval system and report annually on the state of online learning in Washington (RCW 28A.250.040). The Legislature asked OSPI to include:

- Student demographics
- Course enrollment data
- Aggregated student course completion and passing rates
- Activities and outcomes of course and provider approval reviews

This report provides information about online learning for the 2015–16 school year.

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

Definitions

As defined in RCW 28A.250.010, an **online course** is one where:

- More than half of the course content is delivered electronically using the Internet or other computer-based methods, and
- More than half of the teaching is conducted from a remote location through an online course learning management system or other online or electronic tools, and
- A certificated teacher has the primary responsibility for the student's instructional interaction. Instructional interaction between the teacher and the student includes, but is not limited to, direct instruction, review of assignments, assessment, testing, progress monitoring, and educational facilitation; and
- Students have access to the teacher synchronously, asynchronously, or both.

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

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

- Online course providers must supply all of the following: course content, access to a learning management system, and online teachers.
- Online courses can be delivered to students at school as part of the regularly scheduled school day.

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

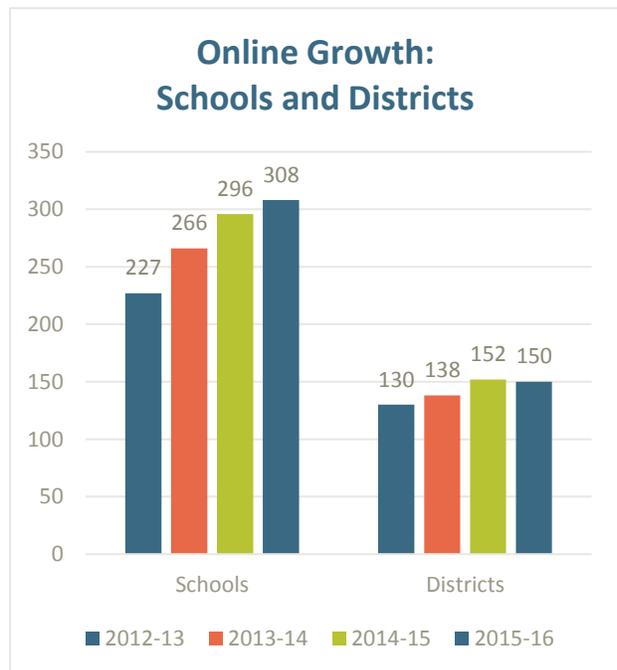
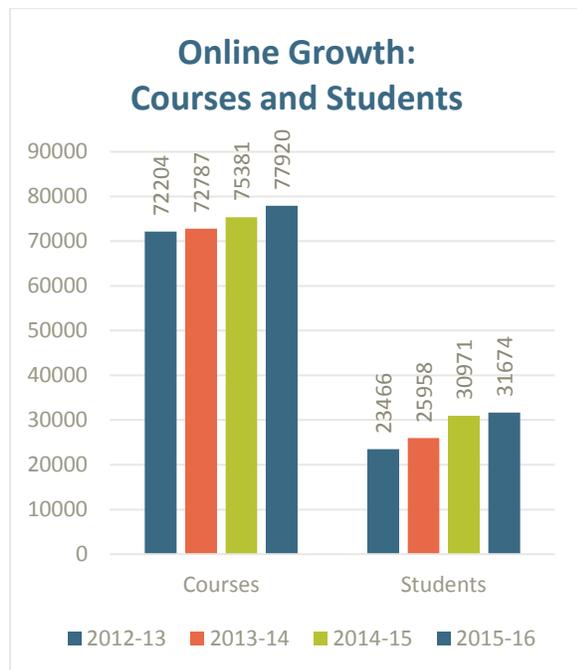
This report uses the following terms to refer to students:

- **Headcount** measures each unique student served.
- A **course enrollment** refers to a single student enrolled in a single course for a single term. For example, a single high school student taking a full load of courses would have 10 (if the district offers five periods a day) or 12 course enrollments (if six periods are offered) for the school year.
- **Enrollment rate** refers to the percent of the student population enrolled in at least one online course.

Update Status

The data used in this report is from a 2015-16 CEDARS report pulled October 19, 2016 unless otherwise noted.

Online learning has continued to expand. More students accessed more courses through more schools. There was a slight decrease in the number of districts reporting online courses.



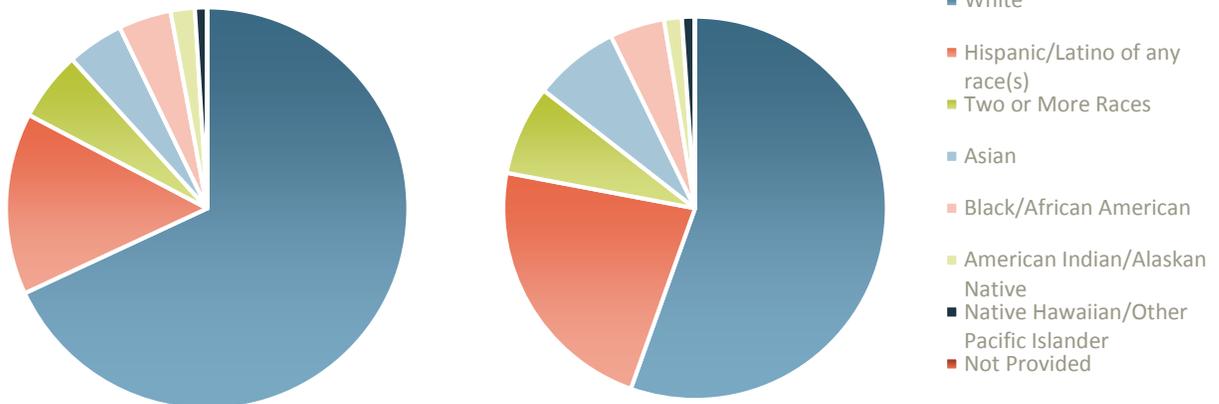
Demographics

Race and Ethnicity

White students are the majority of online learners, representing 68.1 percent of students. This is significantly larger than their statewide proportion of 55.4 percent. Other races are underrepresented in online learning, with the exception of American Indian.

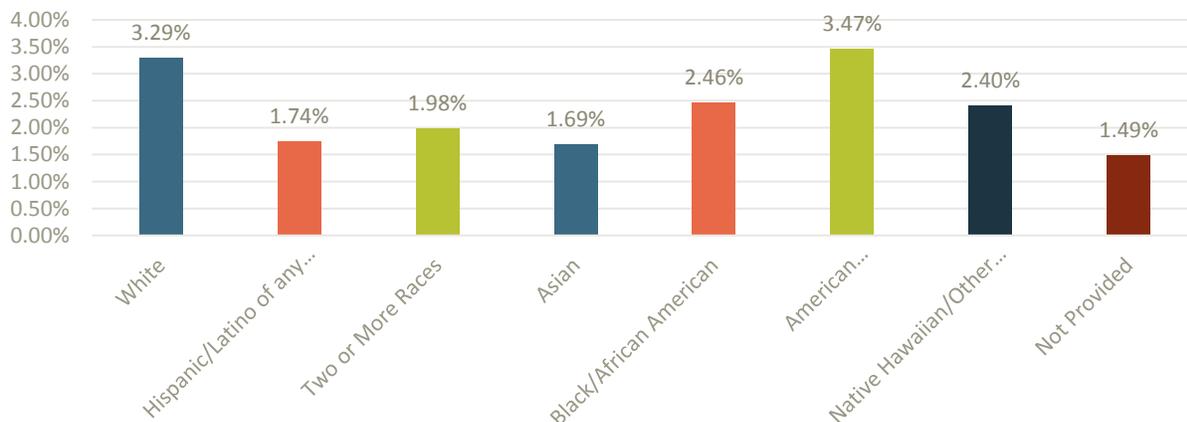
Online Demographics

Statewide Demographics



Enrollment rate is the percent of students in a group that are accessing at least one online course. We can then compare access by each group and identify disparities that may need to be addressed.

Enrollment Rate: Percent of Student Group Enrolling in One or More Online Course

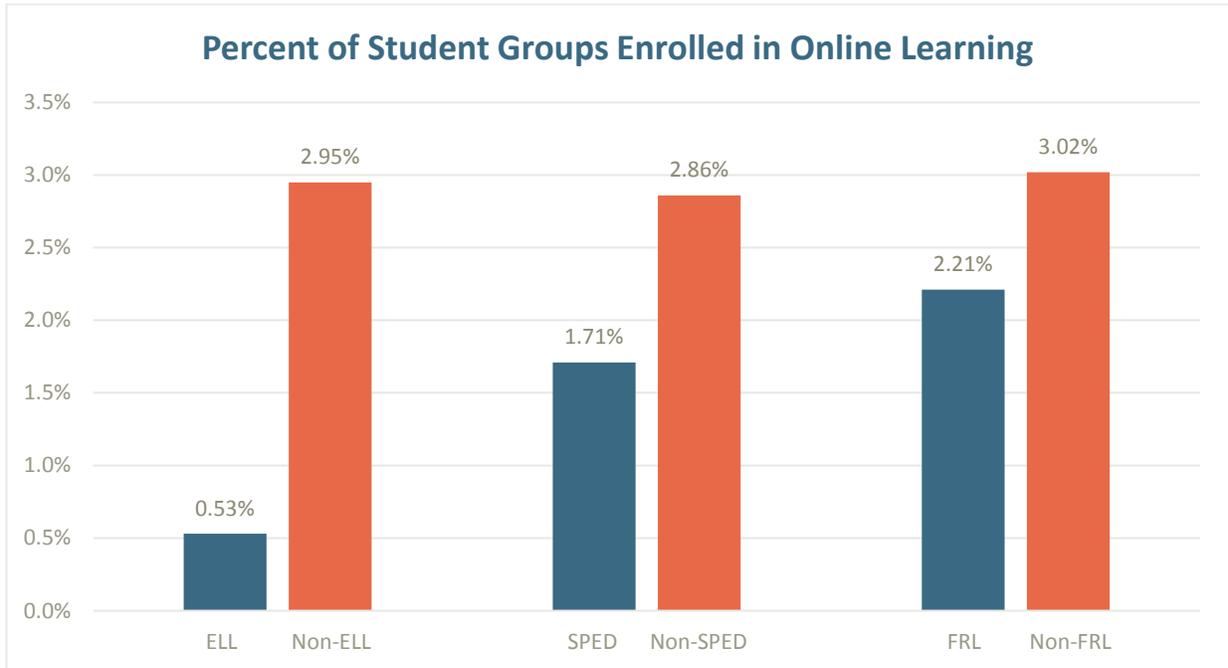


Gender

Female students continue to be slightly more likely to participate in online courses with an enrollment rate of 2.9 percent. Male students enrolled at a rate of 2.5 percent in 2015-16.

Students Eligible for Services

Eligible services include bilingual and English language learners, special education, and free/reduced lunch. There is disparity in accessing online learning for these groups, especially for English language learners. The chart below shows the gap in enrollment rates between students eligible for services and their non eligible peers.



Home-Based Students

Home-based students are students who partially enroll in public schools, while maintaining a declaration of intent to provide home-based instruction per RCW 28A.200.011 (1). These students enrolled in online options at a much greater rate than any other group. In 2015-16 home-based students had an online enrollment rate of 13 percent.

Nonresident Students

Nonresident students are Washington students who have transferred completely to a school district that they do not reside in, or their enrollment is split between districts to access courses or services not available in their resident district.

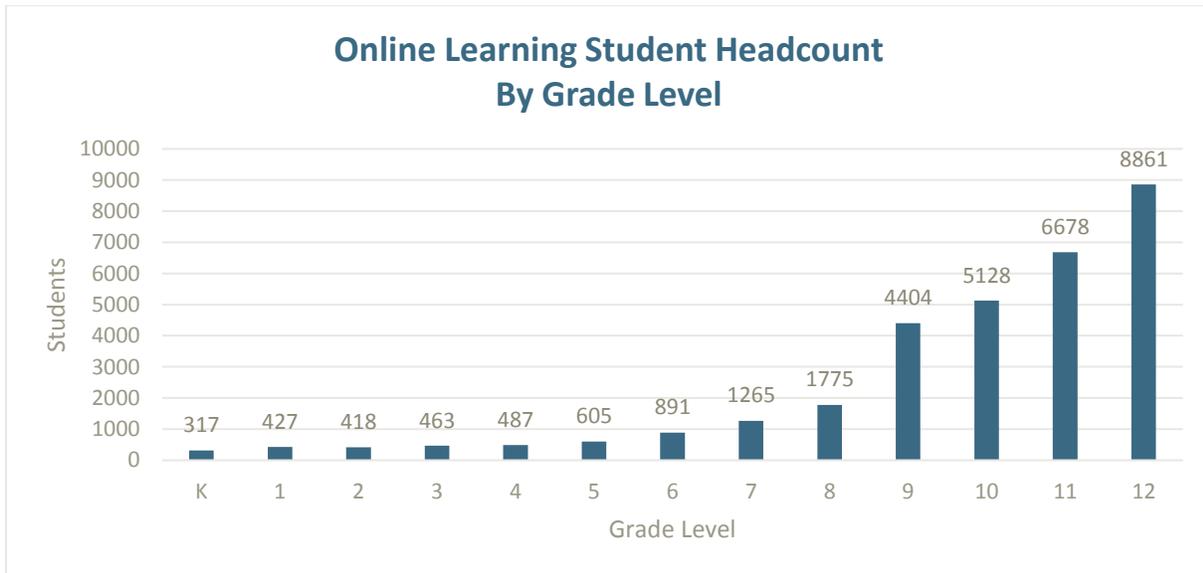
Based on nonresident district data submitted to CEDARS, a total headcount of 12,292 students enrolled in an online course in a district other than their resident district.

Eighty-three districts reported online enrollment of nonresident students. Of these, only 12 reported more than 100 students, with the top three districts accounting for 77 percent of the reported nonresident students.

Course Enrollment Patterns

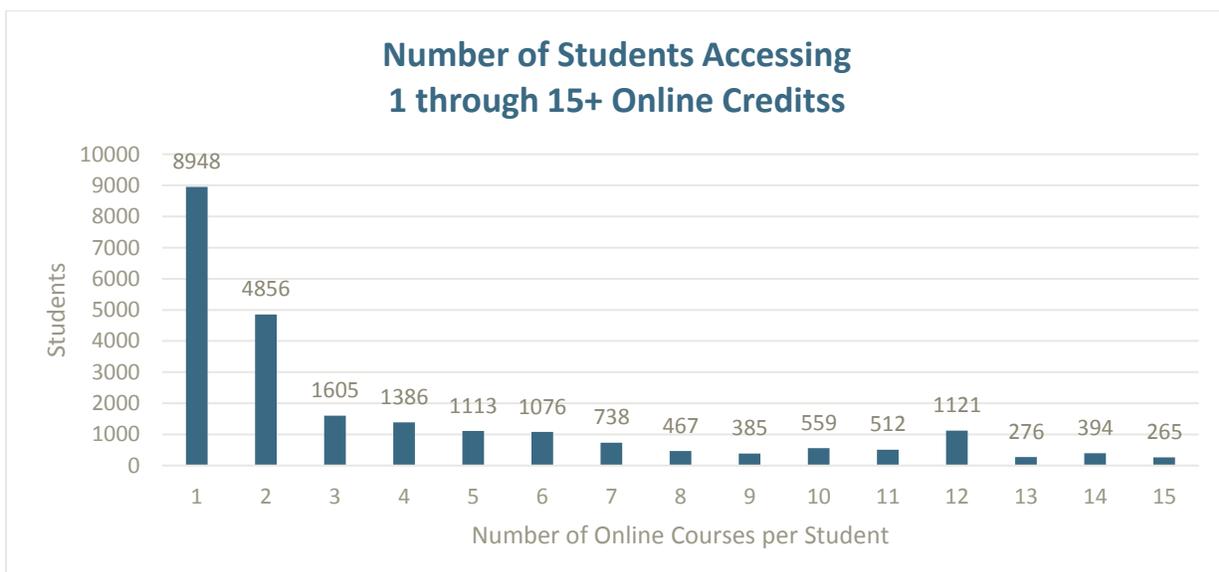
Grade Level Distribution

Enrollment rates in online courses rose slowly through elementary with sharp growth in middle school and high school. As a result, grades 9-12 made up 79 percent of online learners, grades 6-8 represented 12.39 percent, and the remaining 8.5 percent were comprised of students in grades K-5.



Part-time and Full-time Course Enrollment Patterns

Most online students do not take all of their coursework online. Of the high school students who took online courses during the 2015-16 school year, 70.8 percent took less than 5 credits, down from 72.5 percent from 2014-15, and 74 percent in 2013-14. The students who took enough courses (10 or more) to be considered full-time for the school year rose from 11.96 percent in 2014-15 to 13.2 percent in the 2015-16 school year.



Subjects

Five subjects accounted for 75 percent of non-elementary enrollments. These subjects are:

1. English Language Arts (14,477 enrollments)
2. Math (12,857 enrollments)
3. Physical/Health/Safety (11,682 enrollments)
4. History (10,372 enrollments)
5. Science (8,193 enrollments)

Measuring Success

CEDARS provides data on course completions and grades through “grade history” data submitted by school districts to OSPI. Grade histories are only submitted for students in grades 9–12, so course-based achievement data is not available for students in grades K–8. We also chose to leave transfer credits out of this report. Transfer credits are frequently online courses taken outside of the standard school day or year. OSPI’s guidance and oversight of these types of courses is limited, so the quality of the data will be limited as well.

For the 2015-16 school year we followed our policy of measuring course success rate. Course success rate is defined in WAC 392-502-010 as the percentage of online enrollments where the student earned one of the following grades for the course: A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D, P, CR, S. Courses marked E, F, N, NC, U, or W are not considered successful outcomes.

Beginning with this update we added disaggregated course success data to set a baseline to look at equity in not only access to online learning but outcomes as well.

Overall

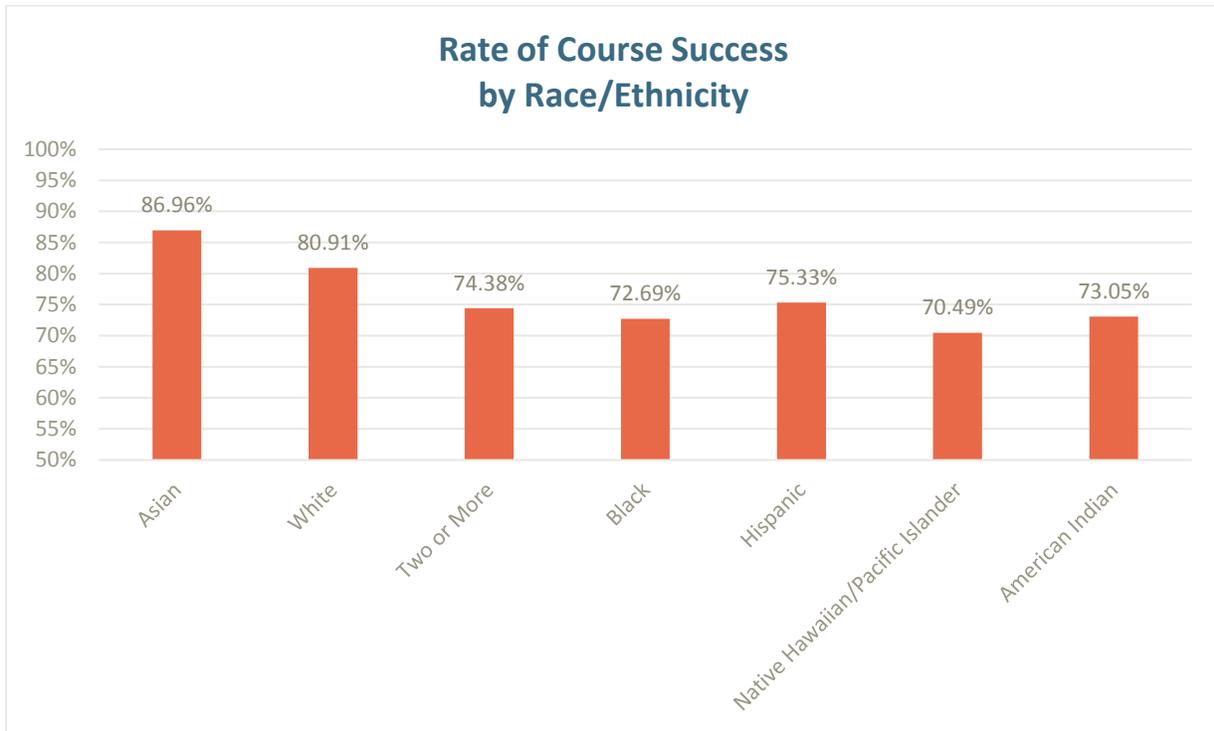
Online Courses had a positive outcome rate of 79 percent. This is an improvement over 2014-15 rate of 74.7 percent and 75.1 percent in 2013-14. Non-online courses had a positive outcome rate of 92 percent in 2015-16.

Gender

The 2015-16 school year showed less than a percentage point in gap between genders in positive course outcomes in the online environment. This is a smaller gap than in a non-online model where female students are 3 percent more likely to have course success.

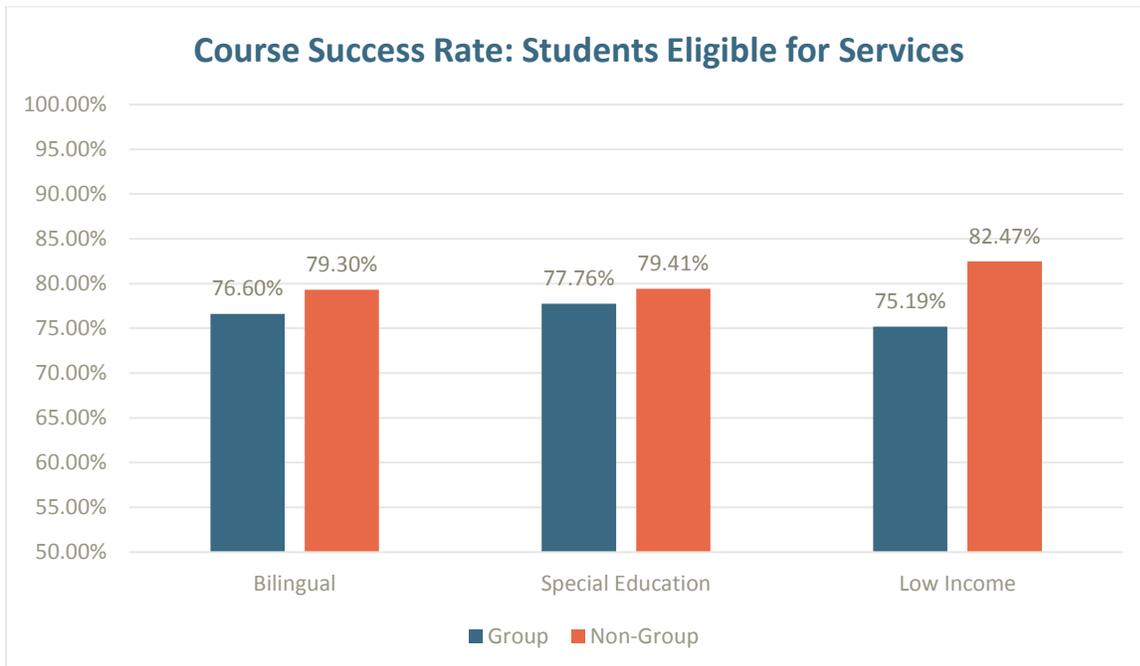
Race and Ethnicity

Many outcome disparities by race in the traditional model are echoed in the online environment.



Students Eligible for Services

Students eligible for ELL/Bilingual, Special Education, Free and Reduced Lunch also experienced disparities in course success rates to their non-group peers.



Online Course Providers

As of October 16, 2016 there were a total of 134 approved providers, including:

- 22 online course providers, approved through the full review approval pathway
- 81 single district online school programs, of which 21 were approved through the affiliate program approval pathway
- 31 multidistrict online school programs, 18 of which were approved through the affiliate program approval pathway, and 13 approved through the full review approval pathway
- 76 school districts offer at least 1 online school program.

The most significant growth was in multidistrict programs which more than doubled the number of multidistrict programs from 15 in December, 2015 to October 15, 2016. Single district programs increased by 10. Only 2 new online course providers were approved in the same timeframe.

For a complete list of approved providers see:

<https://digitalllearning.k12.wa.us/approval/providers/>.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Online learning continues to grow in Washington state. More students are accessing more online courses. Schools are also using online learning as a tool for many purposes. OSPI is shifting our online learning resources to support equity and student achievement.

One key part of this shift is streamlining access. Initially schools had to access providers through OPSI using an online enrollment tool. Over time enrollments grew, course catalogs expanded, and providers increased. Managing this system taxed resources and became a barrier to enrollment.

In 2016-17 DLD will allow districts to work directly with approved course providers. This will provide easier access to online courses. We will maintain an online resource for districts to make informed choices about providers.

Through this transition the DLD will also look at what good online learning looks like. This may differ based on the goal and model of the online learning program including:

- Expanded course offerings.
- Online only schools for students and parents who want a non-traditional model.
- Models that support students unable to work in the traditional classroom or schedule.
- Credit retrieval options for students who did not pass a course.
- An option for students suspended or expelled.

Improving Data Quality

OSPI found some data issues for online and Alternative Learning Experience (ALE) courses this year. More students were reported for ALE funding than were reported in online or ALE courses. The data in this report is based on course enrollments only. Some students who took online courses may be missing from this report. The Alternative Learning Department (ALD) is developing a plan to communicate reporting guidelines for more accurate data collection.

Collaboration

The Online Learning Advisory Committee (OLAC) will work with the ALD on how we measure success for online learning.

The state auditor's office is providing a performance audit of ALE. This 4-year audit will identify successful online programs. The audit will also tell OSPI where to improve guidance, data, and resources for ALE programs.

The 2016 state legislature asked OSPI for recommendations on truancy in the online environment (SSHB 2449). OSPI submitted recommendations in December 2016. We hope they will result in legislation to identify and respond to truancy in all ALE programs.

Moving forward OSPI will support districts and providers to:

- Increase equity in access
- Identify best practices
- Align accountability to student outcomes

The legislative environment for online learning has remained stable over the past year. This has allowed OSPI and our partners to begin building robust accountability measures. We are using quality data to build these measures. Our work will help decision makers better understand how schools use online learning. That better understanding will lead to policies that help all students graduate ready for college, career, and life.

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