



REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

UPDATE: Online Learning

2018

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

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Executive Summary

Online learning continues to grow in Washington state, with more representation from some specific student groups.

In the 2017–18 school year, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, and students of two or more races showed growth in accessing online learning. Of all race and ethnicity demographics, American Indian/Alaskan Native students were the most likely to access online learning, and Asian students were the least likely.

English learners (EL), students who qualify for special education services, and students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch also showed growth. These students were less likely to take an online course than their counterparts. The largest enrollment gap was between EL students and students that did not qualify as EL. The enrollment gap between students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch and students that are not eligible is decreasing.

Measuring Success

Success is currently measured at the course level. The overall online course success rate decreased to 78.95 percent in 2017–18 from 81.5 percent in 2016–17. By comparison, the success rate for non-online courses decreased to 90 percent from 92 percent in 2016–17.

There was a decrease in online course success for Hispanic/Latino, Asian, and Black/African American students. Students who identify as two or more races and American Indian/Alaskan Native students improved in online course success. Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander students saw a significant increase in online course success. Students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch saw an improvement in online course success, however, students receiving special education services had the greatest online course success rate.

Data Quality

The effort communicating the reporting requirements for Alternative Learning Experiences (ALE) has identified that some schools and districts were misreporting online courses. This has also highlighted a need to provide additional guidance for the online learning definition. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) is expecting to see this shift in reporting in the report for 2018–19.

Also identified is a challenge to reporting online course information when not for high school credit. Some districts report broad course information in student schedules and may not provide information in student grade history. As a result, online learning reporting may be lower for grades kindergarten through eight, particularly for course outcomes.

Background

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

- student demographics,
- course enrollment data,
- aggregated student course completion and passing rates, and
- activities and outcomes of course and provider approval reviews.

This report provides information about online learning for the 2017–18 school year. Online learning is a delivery model for instruction. Depending on the structure, an online course may be delivered as a traditional course and schedule, or more commonly as one of three course models as an Alternative Learning Experience (ALE).

Definitions

“Online course” is defined in RCW 28A.250.010 as a course where:

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

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

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

- Online course providers must supply all of the following: course content, access to a learning management system, and online teachers.

- Online courses can be delivered to students at school as part of the regularly scheduled school day.
- Online courses can be delivered to students, in whole or in part, independently from a regular classroom schedule. Such courses must comply with RCW 28A.150.262 to qualify for state basic education funding as an ALE program.

This report uses the following terms:

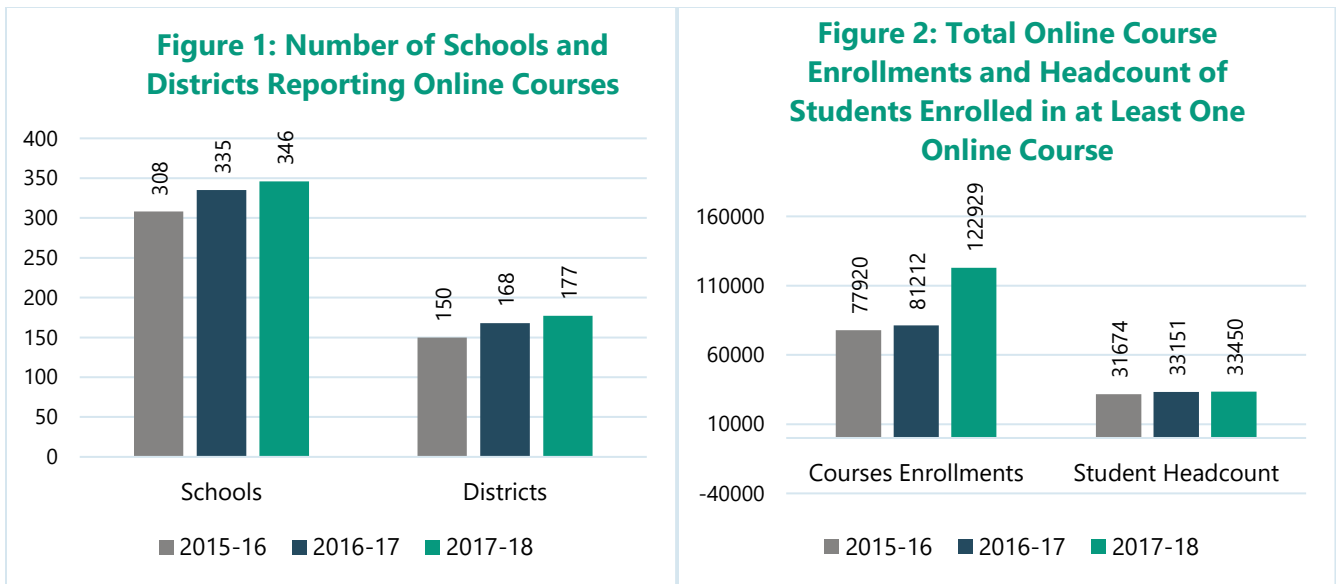
- “Headcount” measures each unique student served.
- A “course enrollment” refers to a single student enrolled in a single course for a single grading period. For example, a single high school student taking a full load of courses would have 10 (if the district offers five periods a day) or 12 (if six periods are offered) course enrollments for the school year.
- “Enrollment rate” refers to the percentage of the student population enrolled in at least one online course.
- “Course success rate” is defined in Washington Administrative Code (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, Pass, Credit, or Satisfactory. Courses marked E, F, No Pass, No Credit, Unsatisfactory, or Withdraw are not considered successful outcomes.

Update Status

Data used in this report are from the 2017–18 school year. The data were extracted from the Comprehensive Education Data and Research System (CEDARS) on September 20, 2018, unless otherwise noted.

Growth

Online learning continues to grow in Washington state. The most significant was a 34 percent increase in online course enrollments from 2016–17. This may be impacted by OSPI’s effort to improve data reporting for ALE, where schools are now appropriately categorizing their online courses. The following charts show the number of online courses reported, as well as the number of students, schools, and school districts reporting at least one online course enrollment.



Online Programs and Providers

During the 2017–18 school year, OSPI approved eight new single district and affiliate online school programs. One new Multidistrict Online Course Provider was approved after an appeal.

Data on approved online school programs and course providers is limited. In the spring of 2017, OSPI extracted CEDARS data about online enrollments. Analysis of CEDARS data showed that OSPI does not have the reporting elements needed to tie online courses and students to approved online school programs or course providers. OSPI staff are working to create a plan to collect this information.

Online course providers submitted student level data on course enrollments and performance for 2017–18. Unlike school programs, the data do not provide student demographics. OSPI will use these data to inform educators, students, and families through comparable course completion and success rate information. OSPI will also use these data to compare to district data reports and for data reporting quality assurance as well as to evaluate existing performance targets of online course providers set in WAC 392-502-030.

In 2017–18, approved course providers saw an average of 78.3 percent course completions, and of those completions, 79.3 percent were assigned a passing grade by the provider. OSPI intends to look more deeply into the data on incomplete courses to establish a method to include some of this data in overall performance. The challenge to this is understanding when the student withdrew from the course, why the student withdrew, and how well they were doing at the time they withdrew.

Demographics

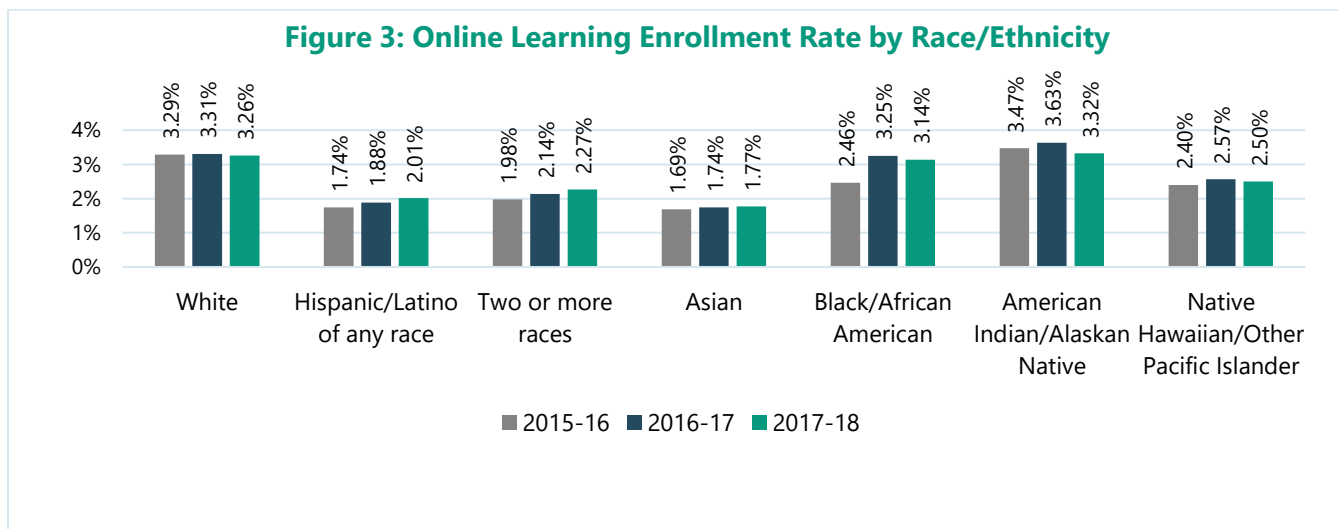
This report focuses on enrollment rates by student group, rather than student numbers. Enrollment rates show the percent of that student group who participated in online learning. This rate is a more “apples to apples” comparison between student groups than student numbers.

Gender

In 2017–18, girls were more likely to enroll in online learning than boys. Enrollment rates by gender show that 3.02 percent of all girls participated in online learning, down from 3.04 percent from the year before. In comparison, 2.55 percent of all boys participated, the same rate as the previous year.

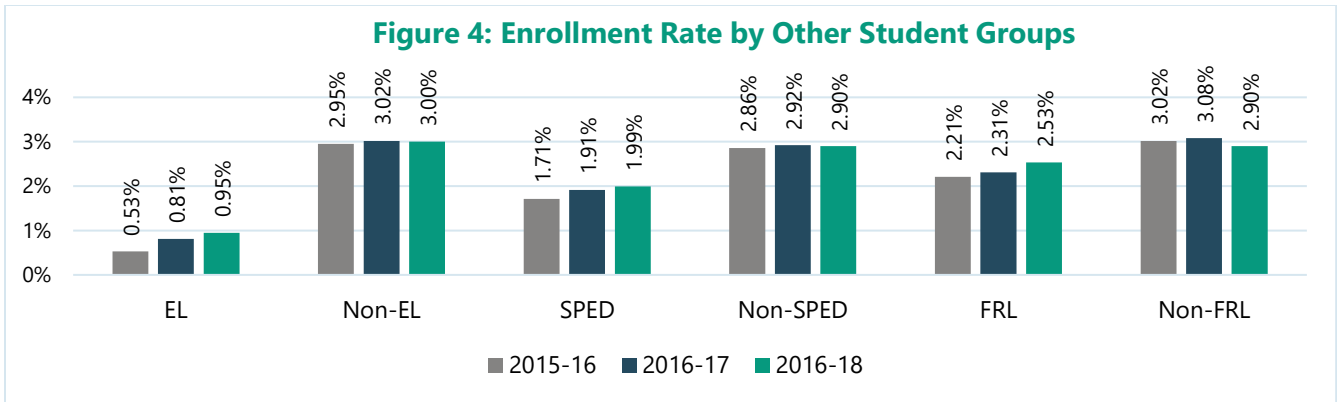
Race/Ethnicity

Enrollment rates by race/ethnicity show which student groups are more likely or able to access online learning courses. The following charts show the percent of each student group who participated in at least one online course in the 2015–16 school year, in the 2016–17 school year, and in the 2017–18 school year.



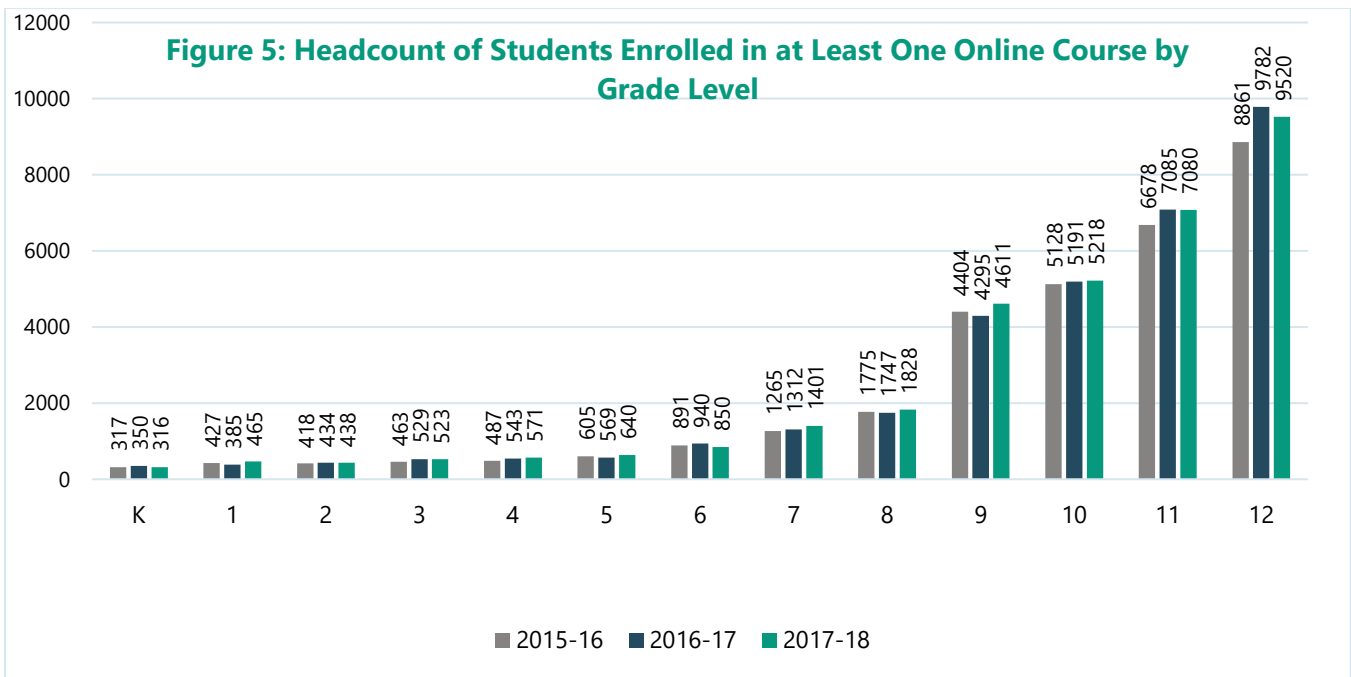
Other Student Groups

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



Grade Level

Headcount by grade level in K–10 are comparable to 2016–17 data. There is noticeable growth for students in grade 9 while there is a noticeable decrease for students in grade 12.



Home-based

Home-based students may enroll in public schools part-time, while maintaining a declaration of intent to provide home-based instruction per RCW 28A.200.011 (1). Of the overall 8,218 students reported as part-time home-based students, 9.09 percent (747) participated in online learning. This is the highest enrollment rate of any group. The 2017–18 enrollment rate is a slight increase from the 9 percent reported in 2016–17.

Non-resident

Non-resident students are Washington students who have transferred completely to a public school district different from the one in which they reside, or their enrollment is split between

districts to access courses or services not available in their resident district. These do not include students enrolled in charter schools or tribal-education compact schools.

In 2017–18, a total headcount of 12,795 students were enrolled in at least one online course in a district other than their resident district.

Ninety-eight districts reported online enrollment of non-resident students, less than the 99 districts reported the previous year. Of these, only 12 reported 100 or more non-resident students. The top three districts account for 72 percent of the reported non-resident students. These top three are, from most non-resident students to least, Omak School District, Quillayute Valley School District, and Toppenish School District.

Measuring Success

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

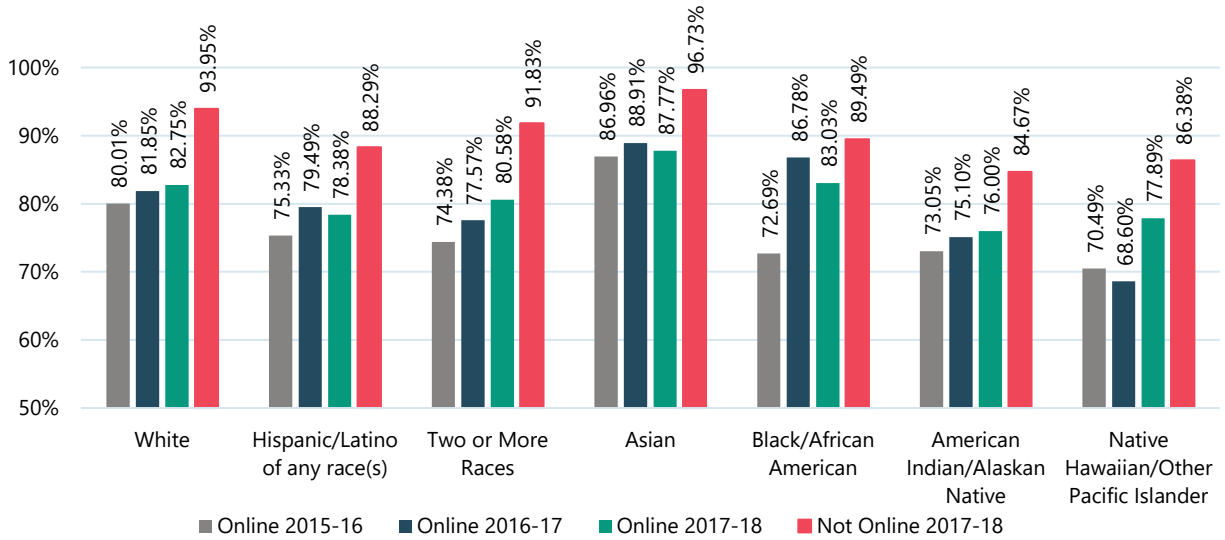
Overall

Online courses had an overall course success rate of 79 percent. This rate is the same as 2015–16, but a decrease from last year’s 81.5 percent. The course success rate for non-online courses dropped to 90 percent from 92 percent in 2016–17. OSPI is unsure if the gap in course success between online and non-online courses is related to the quality of the course, delivery of the course, access to student supports, or if there are other factors at work.

Race/Ethnicity

Highlights of the data include Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander online students improved the most from the previous year. Black/African American students have the smallest gap between online and non-online success. Figure 6 shows the online course success rates by race/ethnicity for 2015–16, 2016–17, and 2017–18 as well as the one-year non-online course success rate for the 2017–18 school year.

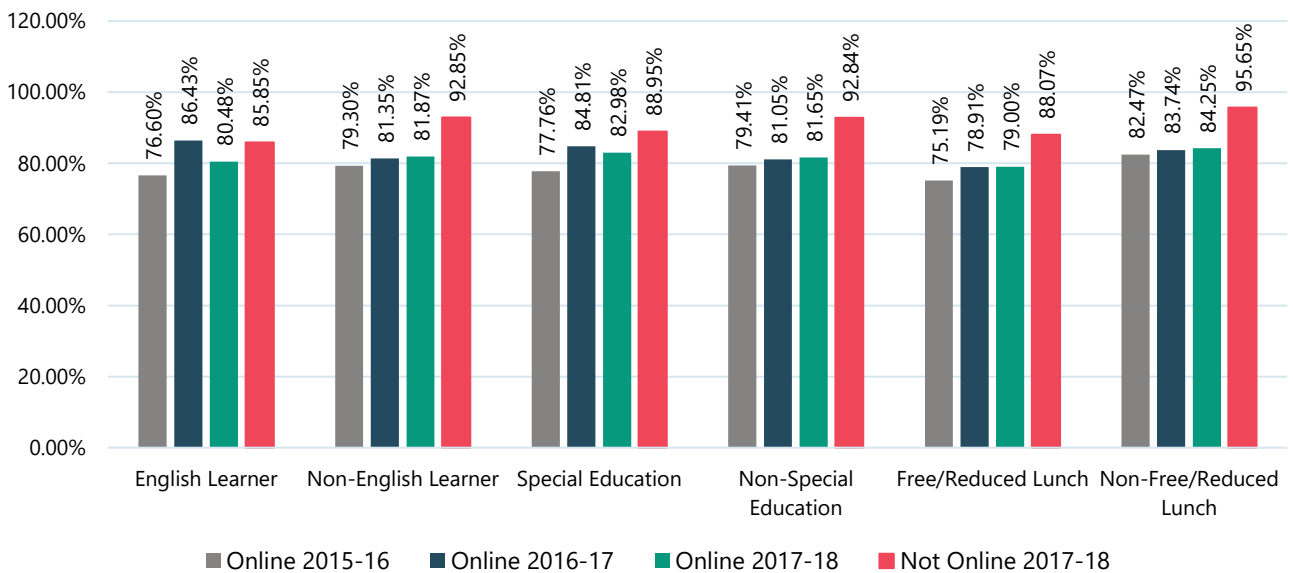
Figure 6: Course Success Rate By Race/Ethnicity



Other Student Groups

Students qualifying for special education services outperformed their peers not receiving services. Figure 7 shows the online course success rate by student group for 2015–16, 2016–17, and 2017–18 as well as the one-year non-online course success rate for the 2017–18 school year.

Figure 7: Course Success Rate By Other Student Groups



Collaboration

The Online Learning Advisory Committee (OLAC) continues to be a resource for online learning. They provide valuable input on the needs of students, teachers, parents and families, programs, and providers. Currently the group is advising on how OSPI is collecting information and measuring the success of online learning. OSPI has identified a need to better utilize the Committee to prioritize and support the needs of online learning.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Growth

Online learning continues to grow in courses, students, schools, and districts across Washington state. Students benefit from online learning as a way to access school when there are barriers to the traditional schedule, and to access courses that the school may not be able to offer. Schools benefit by being able to offer and support courses that they may have trouble hiring qualified teachers for, or by providing specific courses that would have limited enrollment. As schools adapt to the assorted needs of their students, online learning will continue to be an important element of public education.

Data Collection

Online learning data collection continues to improve. OSPI will continue to communicate data reporting expectations. As noted, OSPI, K–12 data governance stakeholders, and OLAC will work to improve data collection on approved online programs and providers.

Based on feedback and questions from school districts we anticipate some shifts in online learning reporting for next school year. The increased communication has been effective to improve schools understanding of online learning.

Data Use

From the data, OSPI is learning where the state is doing well, or improving, and is identifying gaps in accessibility and performance. The agency's next steps will be to identify districts, programs, and providers that are improving accessibility with equity and reducing the achievement gaps between student groups. This information will inform OSPI's communication and support of promising practices in an effort to improve online learning across the state.

This process to improve data collection and to use data to inform OSPI's cycle of improvement is part of the agency's efforts to improve accountability and support for ALE and other non-traditional learning options. These options are all seeing growth as schools work to meet the needs of all students, including those who struggle in the traditional setting or need access to opportunities that districts may not have the teachers or student numbers to provide.

Increased Communication and Support

OSPI is prioritizing learning in the 2018–19 school year. Learning means communicating with districts, understanding what they are offering, how they are supporting students, and where they are seeing success. It also means learning how regulations, funding, and state level supports help and hinder their efforts. OSPI looks forward to better understanding how the agency and state can better support online learning effectiveness and engagement.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Demographics

Group	Online Headcount	Statewide Headcount
All Students	33,450	1,211,761
Girls	17,572	581,710
Boys	15,879	623,309
White	21,272	653,288
Hispanic/Latino of any race	5,678	282,246
Two or More Races	2,250	99,059
Asian	1,632	91,956
Black/African American	1,734	55,160
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	343	13,718
American Indian/Alaskan Native	570	17,155
English Learner	1,347	141,143
Non-English Learner	32,128	1,070,618
Special Education	3,678	184,403
Non-Special Education	29,779	1,025,579
Free and Reduced-Price Lunch	14,303	565,393
Non-Free and Reduced-Price Lunch	19,424	670,687
Part-time Homebased Instruction	578	5,610

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