



Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

UPDATE: Online Learning

2024

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

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) is required by [RCW 28A.250.040](#) to report annually on online learning. In the 2022–23 school year, more students accessed online courses and more schools and districts used online courses. There was a small reduction in the overall number of online courses.

The demographics of students accessing online learning differs from the overall state demographics. The greatest differences are that students who are Asian or multilingual/English learners participate in online learning at the lowest rates, and students who identify as Gender X are the most likely to enroll in online learning by a large margin.

Course performance continues to be, on average, lower than course performance in non-online settings. An exception to this performance trend is students who identify as Gender X, who seemed to be as successful in online learning as non-online courses.

Data quality improvement efforts are ongoing, with OSPI noting district confusion about the definition of online learning. This confusion is related to:

- Overlap with other types of Alternative Learning Experiences (ALEs);
- Online courses that are delivered on-campus, such as students attending an online course in a computer lab or other classroom that may be supervised, but the teacher of the class is located elsewhere; and
- The increased use of technology and digital curricula, activities, and assignments in all learning environments makes the RCW definition of “online course” either less distinct or apply to more courses.

OSPI continues to look for clearer ways to help districts recognize online courses.

BACKGROUND

In 2009, the Washington State Legislature created an accountability system for online learning ([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 2022–23 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.
- 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" is a single student enrolled in a single course for a single grading period. For example, in a school with 2 grading periods and 5 courses per grading period could have a single student with 10 course enrollments.
- "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 course 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 is from the 2022–23 school year. The data for the 2022–23 school year was extracted from the Comprehensive Education Data and Research System (CEDARS) on November 1, 2023 and November 30, 2023.

Program and Provider Approvals

During the 2022–23 school year, OSPI approved two online course providers and 33 online school programs. Of these online school programs:

- 25 are single district programs primarily serving students who reside in the district.
- Seven affiliate programs exclusively using online courses contracted through approved course providers.
- One multidistrict online school program approved with no cap on nonresident enrollment and using any combination of district taught courses as well as contracted online courses.

Growth

The primary data point we have for online learning is online course enrollment. As the table below shows, online courses were reported for 54,380 students at 526 schools in 196 school districts.

While the data does show some growth in districts, schools, and students from the previous year, we also see that online learning maintains its significant increase from pre-pandemic years.

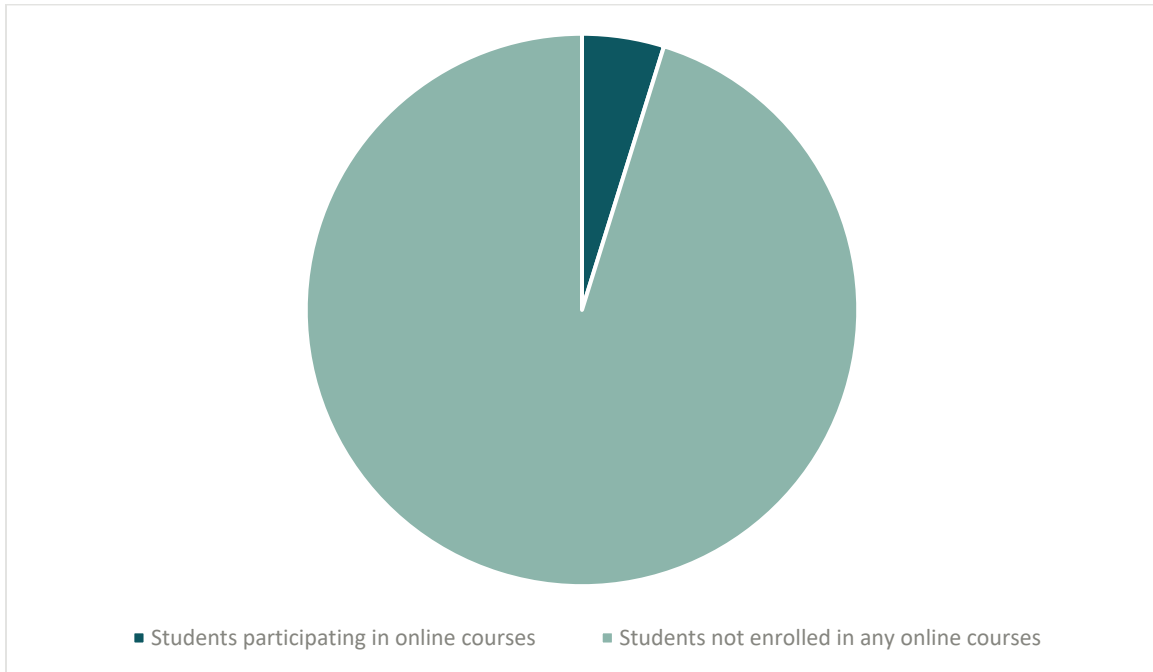
Table 1: Reported Online Learning Count Trends

School Year	Districts	Schools	Student Headcount	Course Count
2022–23	196	526	54,380	218,619
2021–22	181	511	52,940	224,594
2020–21	175	372	55,010	230,710
2019–20	152	327	34,307	136,735

Source: CEDARS data based on unique districts, schools, and students reporting at least one online course enrollment for the designated school year. Course count is the count of each student enrollment in an online course.

The 54,380 students enrolled in online courses in 2022–23 represent about 4.8% of all public school students.

Figure 1: State Enrollment by Online Course Enrollment



Source: CEDARS

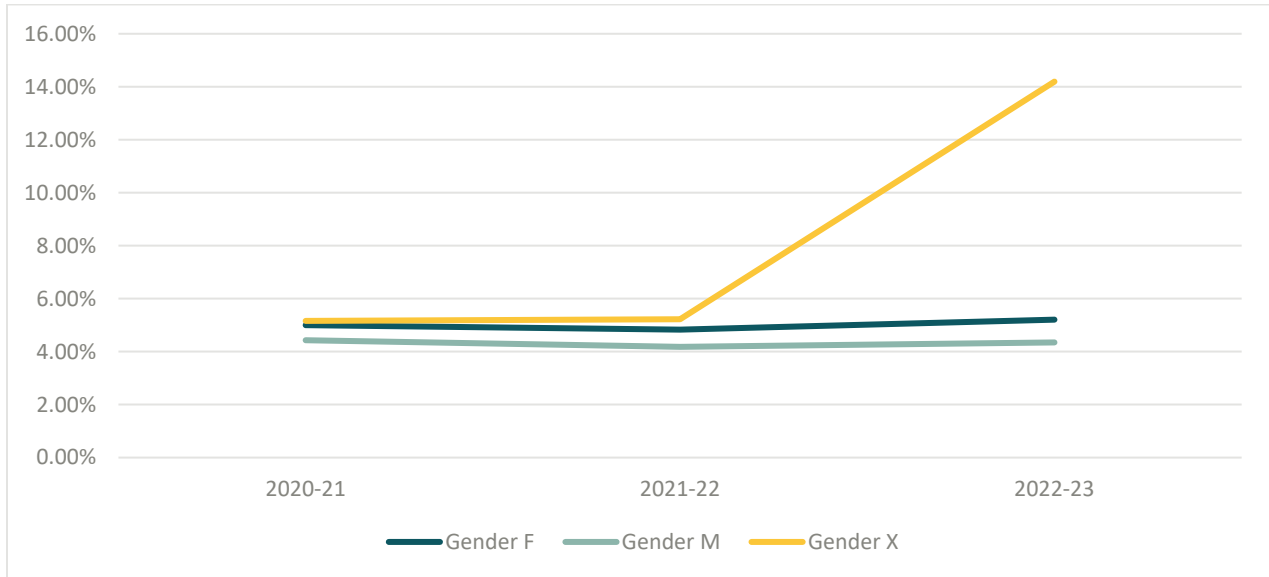
Demographics

The following charts show current demographics of students accessing online learning as well as enrollment trends over time.

Gender

The greatest change this year is the data on Gender X. Gender X not only had the most growth, but also has the highest percentage of any student group participating in online learning. Some of the variability from 2021–22 may be related to the small size of this group, but it also may reflect on where these students feel safe and feel safe identifying their gender as X.

Figure 2: Online Learning by Gender

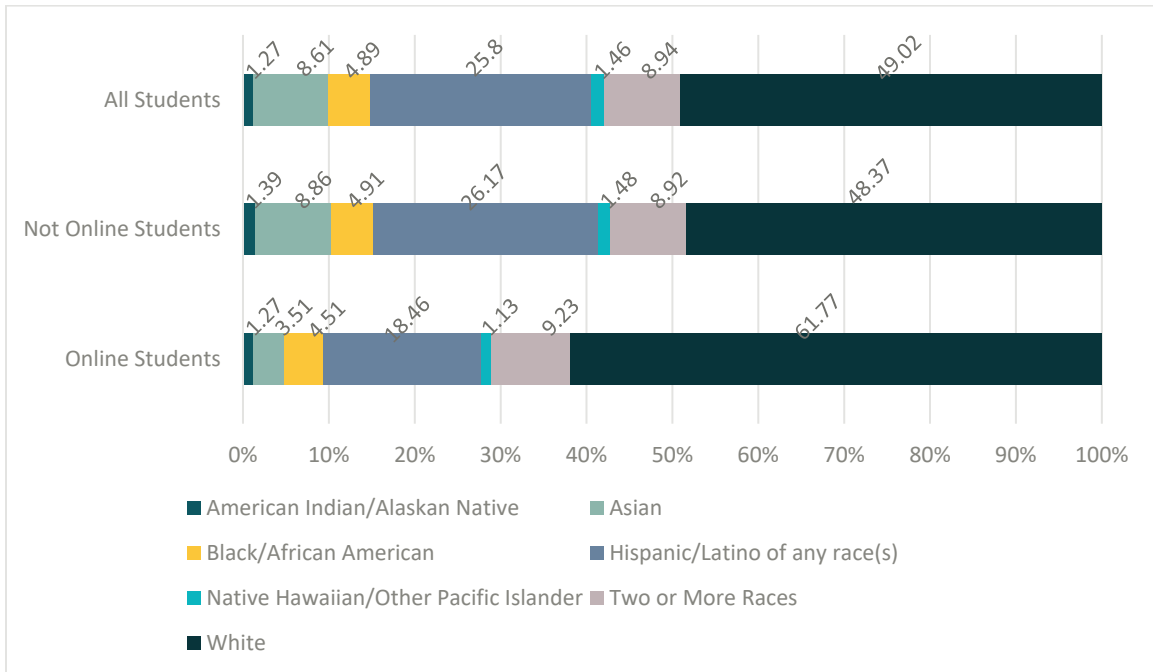


Source: CEDARS

Race and Ethnicity

In race and ethnicity demographics, online learning serves a larger percentage of students who are White, with students who are Hispanic/Latino and students who are Asian seeing the greatest reduction in percent of the overall population.

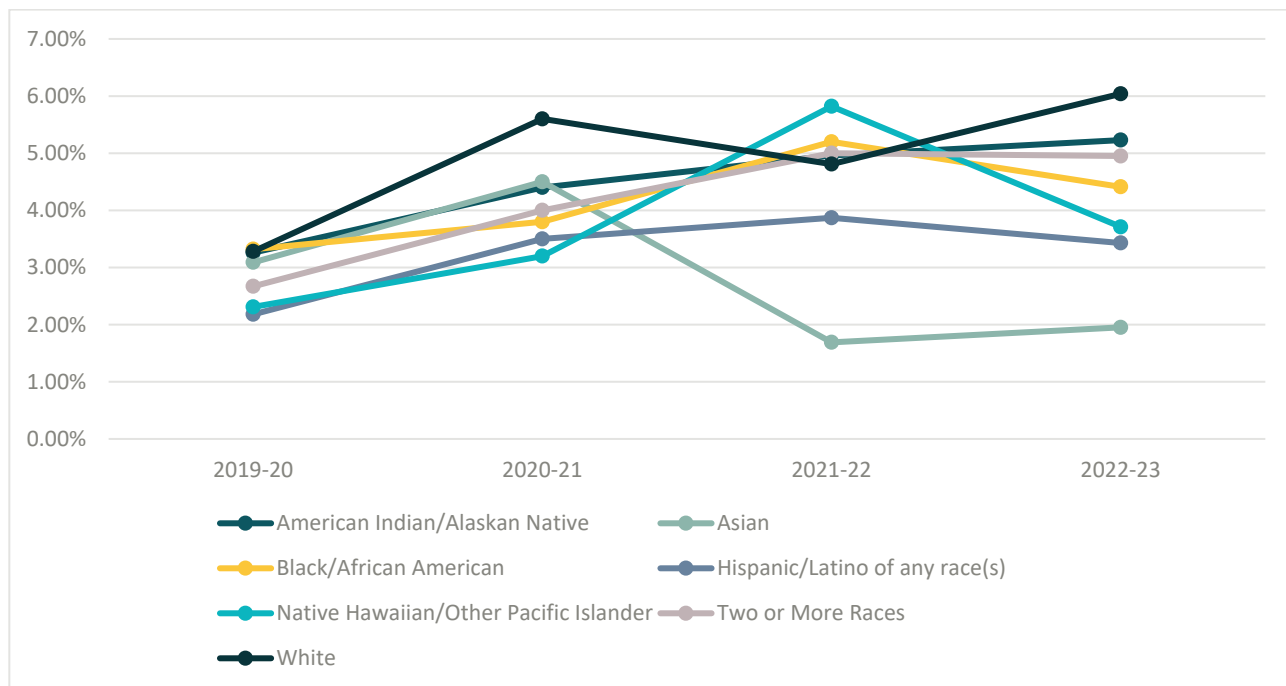
Figure 3: Online Learning by Race and Ethnicity



Source: CEDARS

Another way OSPI looks at this data is to look at the percentage of each population that is accessing online learning. In this view, it is easier to see which individual groups are accessing online learning at a greater rate and which may have barriers to access. As this next chart shows, white students are also accessing online learning at a greater rate but not as the same rate as some small populations such as American Indian/Alaskan Native and two or more races. It also shows that students who are Hispanic/Latino and students who are Asian are the least likely to participate in online learning. Except for students who are Asian, all students in all student groups are in online learning more than pre-pandemic levels.

Figure 4: Percentage of Student Group Participating in Online Learning



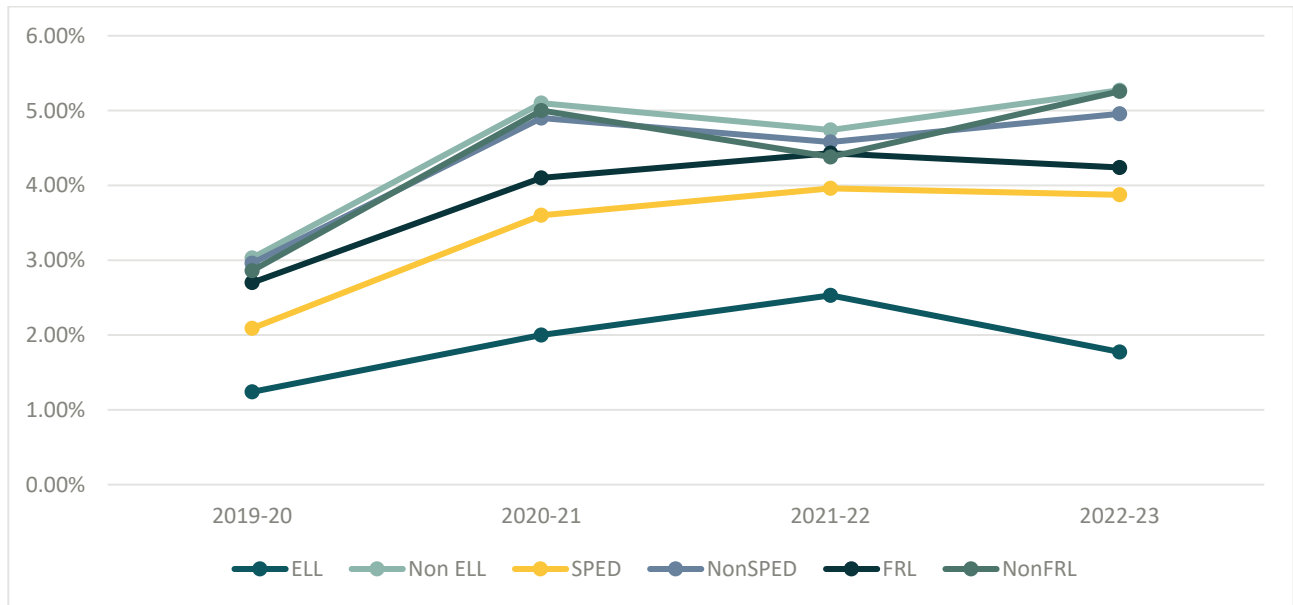
Source: CEDARS

Other Student Groups

When looking at students from the lens of eligible services, we see that English language learners (ELL) are consistently least likely to access online learning followed by students with disabilities and students eligible for free and reduced-priced lunch (FRL).

The chart below shows that all student groups accessing online learning more now than prior to the pandemic.

Figure 5: Percentage of Student Group Participating in Online Learning

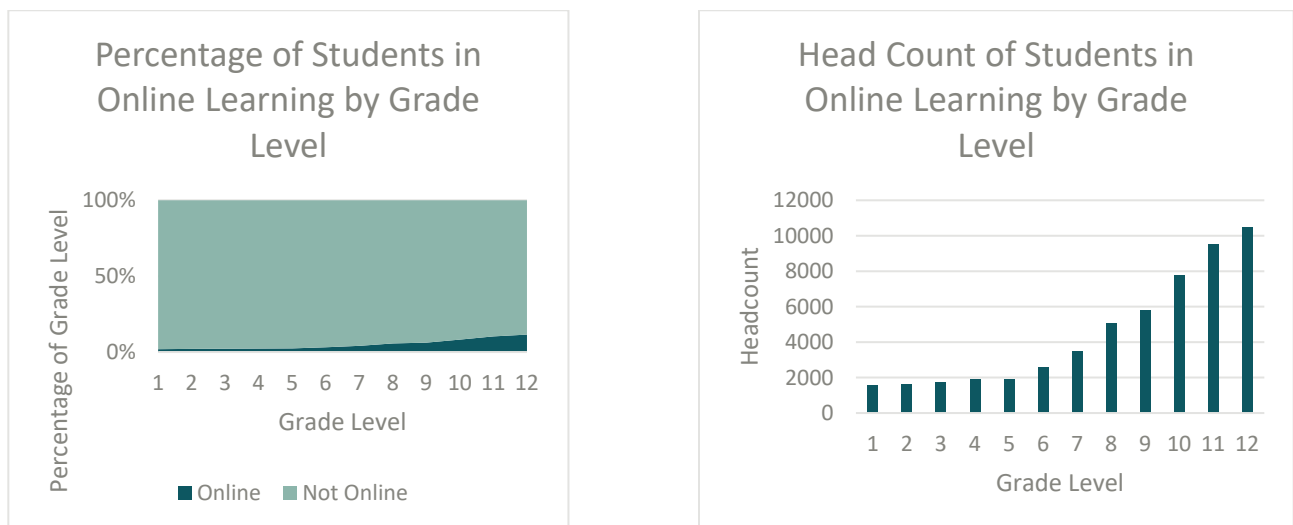


Source: CEDARS

Grade Level

Consistent with previous years' data, students are more likely to be reported in online learning beginning in grade 6 and growing from there. The reasons behind this may include how courses are reported in elementary grade levels and the use of online courses in later grades to supplement available courses and to make up courses. Additionally, older students often have an increased need or desire for flexible or remote learning.

Figure 6: Percentage of Students in Online Learning by Grade Level



Source: CEDARS

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 or very limited for students in grades K–8. Transfer credits are not included in this report. Transfer credits are often online courses taken privately 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.

Historically, online courses have a lower course success rate than non-online courses. The assumption that performance should be equivalent is false for some of the same reasons we see the demographics don’t match. Anecdotally, this may be related to the population of students seeking online options, who may perform lower in any setting. Students who choose online learning may have struggled over time in traditional settings or have other life events or needs that created barriers to in-person learning as well as focus on their academics. For example, a student who is struggling with anxiety may choose to enroll in online learning. Online learning doesn’t make the anxiety they are experiencing go away and it will continue to affect their success, but it does allow them to engage more consistently.

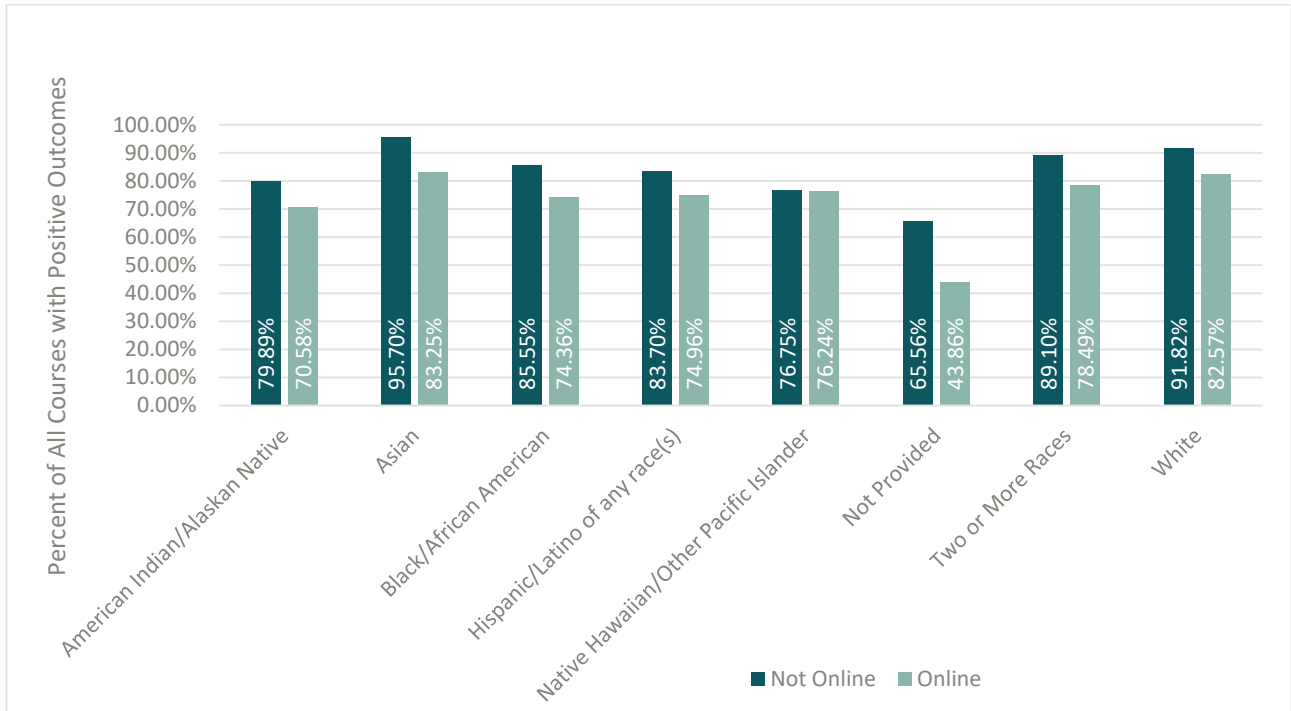
The following charts compare course success rate between online designated courses and courses not designated online.

Figure 7: Course Success Rate by Online Designation: Gender



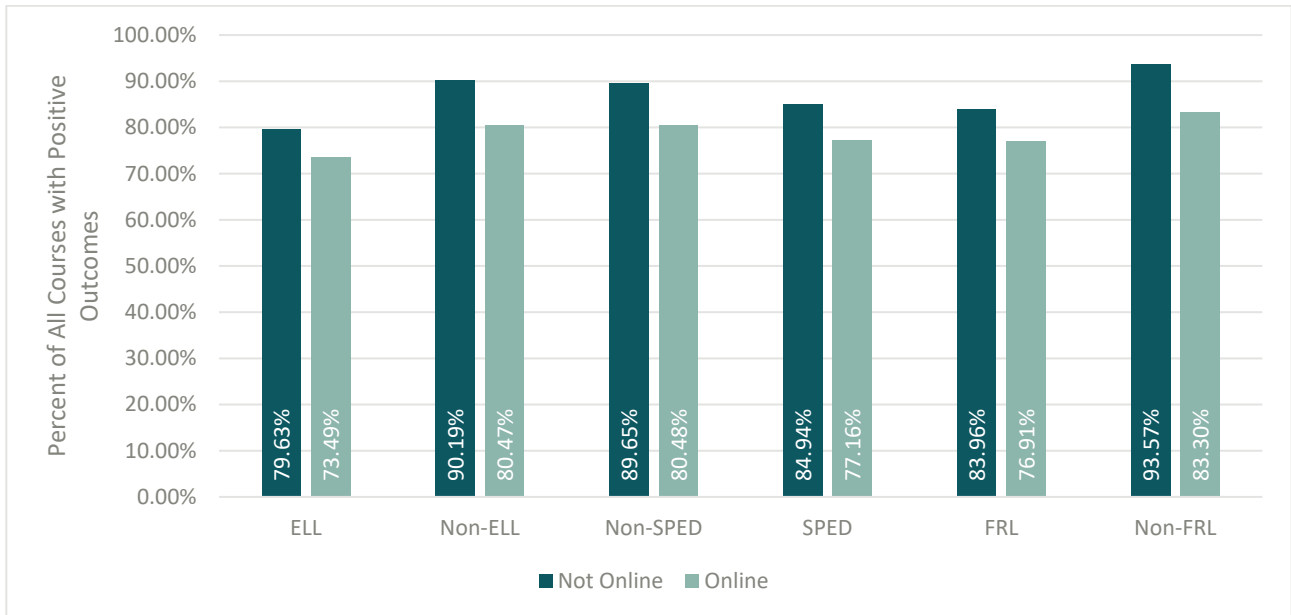
Source: CEDARS

Figure 8: Course Success Rate by Online Designation: Race Ethnicity



Source: CEDARS

Figure 9: Comparison of Positive Course Outcomes by Online Designation: Other Student Groups



Source: CEDARS

CONCLUSION & NEXT STEPS

Growth

Online learning continues to grow as an enrollment option 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 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 share data reporting expectations. OSPI is beginning to see CEDARS data about approved online programs and providers. Guidance on these CEDARS fields has led to increased conversations around online learning and approval applications. The increased communication has been effective to improve schools' understanding of online learning.

Finally, districts remain confused about when courses are considered online. This confusion primarily centers on three themes:

1. Overlaps with other types of Alternative Learning Experiences (ALEs);
2. When online courses are delivered on-campus, such as students attending an online course in a computer lab or other classroom that may be supervised, but the teacher of the class is located elsewhere;
3. The increased use of technology and digital curricula, activities, and assignments in all learning environments makes the RCW definition of "online course" either less distinct or apply to more courses.

OSPI may seek to update the definition or guidance to ensure accurate reporting and approval.

APPENDIX

Figure 10: Online Learning Demographics

Student Group	Online Headcount	Total Headcount	Percent of student group participating in online learning
All Students	54,399	1,113,134	4.8%
Gender F	28,434	546,093	5.21%
Gender M	25,305	582,391	4.35%
Gender X	660	4,650	14.19%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	756	14,457	5.23%
Asian	1,908	97,723	1.95%
Black/African American	2,452	55,574	4.41%
Hispanic/Latino of any race(s)	10,048	292,986	3.43%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	616	16,603	3.71%
Two or More Races	5,024	101,475	4.95%
White	33,618	556,623	6.04%
English Language Learners (ELL)	2,783	156,989	1.77%
Non-English Language Learners	51,621	979,158	5.27%
Special Education	6,612	170,646	3.87%
Non-Special Education	47,782	964,018	4.96%
Section 504	3,691	59,216	6.23%
Non-Section 504	50,783	1,076,142	4.72%
Free and Reduced Priced Lunch	23,648	557,832	4.24%
Non-Free and Reduced Priced Lunch	31,095	591,444	5.26%

Source: CEDARS unique students with one or more online course reported in student schedule or grade history for the 2022–23 school year as of 11/1/2023.

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