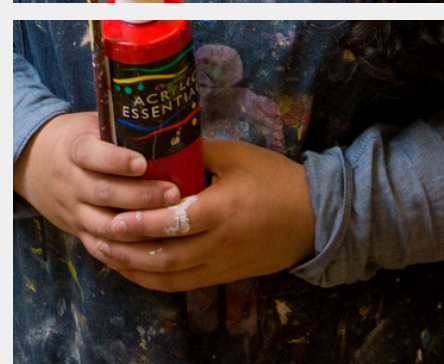


2025

CLOSING THE OPPORTUNITY GAP IN WASHINGTON'S PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM

By the
Educational Opportunity Gap
Oversight and Accountability
Committee (EOGOAC)



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Dedicated to the Legacy of Sen. John McCoy

The EOGOAC has dedicated this report to the late Sen. John McCoy and his unwavering dedication and focus on supporting the mental and behavioral health of students of color. We lift our hands to honor his legacy and vow to not stop our advocacy until our students feel safe, seen and heard in our education system.



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Executive Summary

The Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee (EOGOAC) is a bicameral, bipartisan legislative and community workgroup committed to closing racial opportunity gaps in Washington’s K-12 public education system. The term “opportunity gap” refers to systemic inequity in education that structurally disadvantages certain demographics of students (e.g., students of color, low-income students, and students with disabilities). The EOGOAC’s 2025 report provides policy and strategy recommendations for decreasing pervasive racial disparities in education.

The order in which the recommendations are presented in this report do not imply a hierarchy of priority or a sequence of steps. Since its creation in 2009, the EOGOAC has made recommendations representing a holistic approach toward closing the opportunity gap. The recommendations in this report follow in that tradition and are interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

Table of Recommendations

| Recommendations | Audience | | | |
|---|----------|------------------|-------------|--------|
| | OSPI | School Districts | Legislature | Others |
| 1. The EOGOAC recommends that the Washington State School Director’s Association (WSSDA) include strategies for culturally responsive, authentic family and community engagement in required training for school board members. | | | | ✓ |
| 2. The EOGOAC recommends that school districts complete periodic equity audits that include the cultural and linguistic responsiveness of mental and behavioral health services and curriculum. The results should be provided to the district board of directors and local and school community and result in an action plan to close any opportunity gaps. | | ✓ | | |
| 3. The EOGOAC recommends that the Washington School Counselor’s Association (WSCA), in consultation with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and the Social Emotional Learning Advisory Committee (SELAC), develop and maintain a database of culturally and linguistically responsive college/career and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum. | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| 4. The EOGOAC recommends that the number of pathways into school-based mental and behavioral health careers be expanded, including accessible routes for career changers. | | | | ✓ |

| Recommendations | Audience | | | |
|---|----------|------------------|-------------|--------|
| | OSPI | School Districts | Legislature | Others |
| 5. The EOGOAC recommends establishment of scholarships to support the recruitment and retention of diverse staff in mental and behavioral health support roles including school counselors and school psychologist. These scholarships should provide a livable wage and the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) should organize and evaluate the impact of the scholarship program. | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| 6. The EOGOAC recommends continuation and expansion of the current pilot BIPOC School Counselor Mentor Program with expansion to all mental and behavioral health support roles. | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| 7. The EOGOAC recommends that the Educational Service Districts (ESDs), with guidance from the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), create uniform, regional partnership processes for community-based organizations (CBOs) working with Local Education Agencies to provide mental and behavioral health services to students. | ✓ | | | ✓ |
| 8. The EOGOAC supports Recommendation #2 of the School-based Behavioral Health & Suicide Prevention Subgroup “Strengthen statewide guidance and direction for behavioral health in schools” and #8 “Establish a Technical Assistance & Training Network (TATN)” with the addition that cultural competency be added as a key component of the definition of minimum expectations, strategic direction and capacity, and training and technical assistance provided. | | | ✓ | |
| 9. The EOGOAC recommends that the Health Care Authority (HCA) work with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to ensure that Washington meets the expectations of Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) and the Department of Education by creating a plan that maximizes the ability of schools and districts to utilize Medicaid covered services. | ✓ | | | ✓ |

| Recommendations | Audience | | | |
|--|----------|------------------|-------------|--------|
| | OSPI | School Districts | Legislature | Others |
| 10. The EOGOAC supports recommendation #3 of the Youth and Young Adult Continuum of Care Subgroup “Expand the Bridge Residential housing program” and #5 “Support expansion of recovery high schools” with the expectation that both programs work with families and communities to be culturally responsive. | | | ✓ | |
| 11. The EOGOAC recommends that the Legislature increase allocations for school psychologists in alignment with the ratio recommended by the National Association of School Psychologists. | | | ✓ | |
| 12. The EOGOAC recommends to the Legislature and the Governor, that the state provide funding and leadership for a coordinated approach to disaggregated race and ethnicity data collection, including reconvening the Race and Ethnicity Student Data Task Force to collaborate with other state agencies. | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| 13. The EOGOAC recommends to the Governor, Legislature, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), and other state agencies, that when investing state dollars (grants, budget provisos, contracts, etc.) current disaggregated data should be used to direct spending towards closing opportunity gaps for students of color. | ✓ | | ✓ | ✓ |
| 14. The EOGOAC recommends that the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) add a measure of school climate to the Washington School Improvement Framework. | ✓ | | | |
| 15. The EOGOAC recommends support for school-based health centers that partner with community-based organization and public health to get mental and behavioral health services into schools. | | | | ✓ |
| 16. The EOGOAC recommends that the Legislature target the use of funding to support Mastery Based Learning (MBL) on closing opportunity gaps for student of color by ensuring diversity in cohorts, disaggregation of data, program sustainability, family and community engagement, and a measure of accountability through reporting. | | | ✓ | |

| Recommendations | Audience | | | |
|--|----------|------------------|-------------|--------|
| | OSPI | School Districts | Legislature | Others |
| 17. The EOGOAC recommends that the Legislature invest in providing increased linguistically and culturally sustaining early learning and childcare programs to support both younger students and their older siblings. | | | ✓ | |
| 18. The EOGOAC recommends that the Legislature support inclusionary practices in Special Education, focusing on the development of culturally responsive training supports for educators. | | | ✓ | |
| 19. The EOGOAC recommends that the Washington Integrated Student Supports Protocol (WISSP) is used to identify student needs through disaggregated data and to elevate and identify culturally responsive community supports for mental and behavioral health for students of color. | ✓ | ✓ | | |

Background on Committee

Unique in structure and purpose, the Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee (EOGOAC) was established in 2009 by Second Substitute Senate Bill 5973² and is charged by RCW 28A.300.136³ to:

*“synthesize the findings and recommendations from the five 2008 Achievement Gap Studies into an implementation plan, and to recommend policies and strategies to the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Professional Educator Standards Board, and the State Board of Education.”*⁴

Recommendations by the EOGOAC must, at a minimum, encompass the following areas:

- Supporting and facilitating the engagement of and outreach to parents and communities of color.
- Enhancing the cultural competency of current and future educators and the cultural relevance of curriculum and instruction.
- Expanding pathways and strategies to prepare, recruit, hire, and retain diverse teachers and administrators.

² Washington State Legislature Second Substitute Senate Bill 5973, *Closing the achievement gap in order to provide all students an excellent and equitable education* (2009). Retrieved from: <http://lawfilesexst.leg.wa.gov/biennium/2009-10/Pdf/Bills/Senate%20Passed%20Legislature/5973-S2.PL.pdf>

³ Washington State Legislature RCW 28A.300.136, *Educational opportunity gap oversight and accountability committee-Policy and strategy recommendations* (2009). Retrieved from <http://app.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=28A.300.136>

⁴ Ibid.

- Recommending current programs and resources that should be redirected to narrow the opportunity gap.
- Identifying data elements and systems needed to monitor progress in closing the gap.
- Making closing the opportunity gap part of the school and school district improvement process.
- Exploring innovative school models that have shown success in closing the opportunity gap.

In summary, the EOGOAC’s explicit purpose is to monitor and make recommendations to close the opportunity gap for **students of color** in Washington, recognizing intersecting identities and experiences that add additional systemic challenges. The EOGOAC submits recommendations in the form of annual reports to the Legislature, the Governor, the House and Senate Education Committees, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), the Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB), and the State Board of Education (SBE).

Although the EOGOAC focuses specifically on the K-12 education system, committee members are unanimous in their belief that learning is a continuum. From early childhood to higher education, equitable opportunities for students of color must exist in all facets of the education system.

Governance and Structure

The EOGOAC Operating Protocols document, which outlines the policies and procedures of the committee related to membership, finances, decision making protocols, meeting conduct, and communications, can be found on [their website](#).

Committee Membership

Section 4 of RCW 28A.300.136 states the EOGOAC shall be composed of the following members:

- The chairs and ranking minority members of the House and Senate Education Committees, or their designees.
- One additional member of the House of Representatives appointed by the Speaker of the House and one additional member of the Senate appointed by the President of the Senate.
- A representative of the Office of the Education Ombuds (OEO).
- A representative of the Center for the Improvement of Student Learning (CISL) in the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.
- A representative of federally recognized Indian tribes whose traditional lands and territories lie within the borders of Washington State, designated by the federally recognized tribes.
- Four members appointed by the Governor in consultation with the state ethnic commissions, who represent the following populations: African-Americans, Latino/a Americans, Asian Americans, and Pacific Islander Americans.

Table I. Committee Members 2024

| Name | Representing |
|------------------------|---|
| Dr. James Smith | Commission on African American Affairs |
| Frieda Takamura | Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs (Asian American) |
| Fiasili Savusa | Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs (Pacific Islander) |
| Dr. Randy Nuñez | Commission on Hispanic Affairs |
| Bill Kallappa | Governor’s Office of Indian Affairs |

| Name | Representing |
|--|--|
| Erin Okuno | Governor’s Office of the Education Ombuds |
| Representative Lillian Ortiz-Self | House of Representatives |
| Representative Skyler Rude | House of Representatives |
| Representative Sharon Tomiko Santos | House of Representatives |
| Tennille Jefferies-Simmons | Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction |
| Senator Bob Hasegawa | Senate |
| Senator Lisa Wellman | Senate |

Table II. Committee Member Alternates 2024

| Name | Representing |
|----------------------------|---|
| Dr. Tyson Marsh | Commission on African American Affairs |
| Brianne Ramos | Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs (Asian American) |
| Lydia Faitalia | Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs (Pacific Islander) |
| Michael Peña | Commission on Hispanic Affairs |
| Yordanos Gebreamlak | Governor’s Office of the Education Ombuds |
| Maria Flores | Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction |

Committee Co-Chairs

Section 7 of RCW 28A.300.136 states the chair or co-chairs of the committee shall be selected by the members of the committee. The committee co-chairs for 2024 include:

- Representative Lillian Ortiz-Self
- Fiasili Savusa

Committee Staff

Section 7 of RCW 28A.300.136 also states staff support for the committee shall be provided by the Center for the Improvement of Student Learning (CISL) at the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. Committee staff include:

- Maria Flores, Executive Director, CISL
- Heather Rees, Research and Policy Development Program Manager, CISL

Introduction

Our students of color are living in an increasingly hostile, racist, and politically volatile world and it is devastating their mental and behavioral health.

In 2021, Surgeon General Dr. Vivek H. Murthy issued an advisory declaring a youth mental crisis due to major increases in rates of depression and suicidal ideation.

From 2009 to 2019, the proportion of high school students reporting persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness increased by 40%; the share seriously considering attempting suicide increased by 36%; and the share creating a suicide plan increased by 44%. Between 2011 and 2015, youth psychiatric visits to emergency departments for depression, anxiety, and behavioral challenges increased by 28%. Between 2007 and 2018, suicide rates among youth ages 10-24 in the US increased by 57%. Early estimates from the National Center for Health Statistics suggest there were tragically more than 6,600 deaths by suicide among the 10-24 age group in 2020.⁵

For our Asian, African American, Latino/a/x/e, Native American/Alaska Native, and Pacific Islander students, the environmental factors of racial discrimination, exposure to violence directed at their cultural communities, and living in under-resourced schools and neighborhoods shape their mental health and ability to thrive.

The Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee (EOGOAC) has focused this last year solely on the topic of the mental and behavioral health of our students of color within the public education system in Washington State. As the opportunity gaps our students of color experience in our schools persist, so does the gap in culturally competent, integrated mental health supports in our schools.

Washington State is unique in that our state constitution has defined that it is the “the paramount duty of our state to make ample provision for the education of all children residing within its borders.”⁶

This phrase and legal meaning was relied upon by the WA Supreme Court in the McCleary case as an argument to invoke the positive constitutional right of all students within Washington to an amply funded basic education.

However, the rest of the sentence is often forgotten or neglected entirely - that the paramount duty to provide education is “without distinction or preference on account of **race, color**, caste or sex.” Our students of color are experiencing the highest increases in mental health symptoms and are receiving the least student support.

The EOGOAC believes that to have a true public education system we must not rest until all opportunity gaps for students of color are closed and each and every African American, Asian, Latino/a/x/e, Pacific Islander and Native student is able to realize their inherent potential and achieve their dreams. Opportunity gaps exist when we settle for a public education system that only serves some and not all students. The EOGOAC will not rest until the opportunity gap no longer exist.

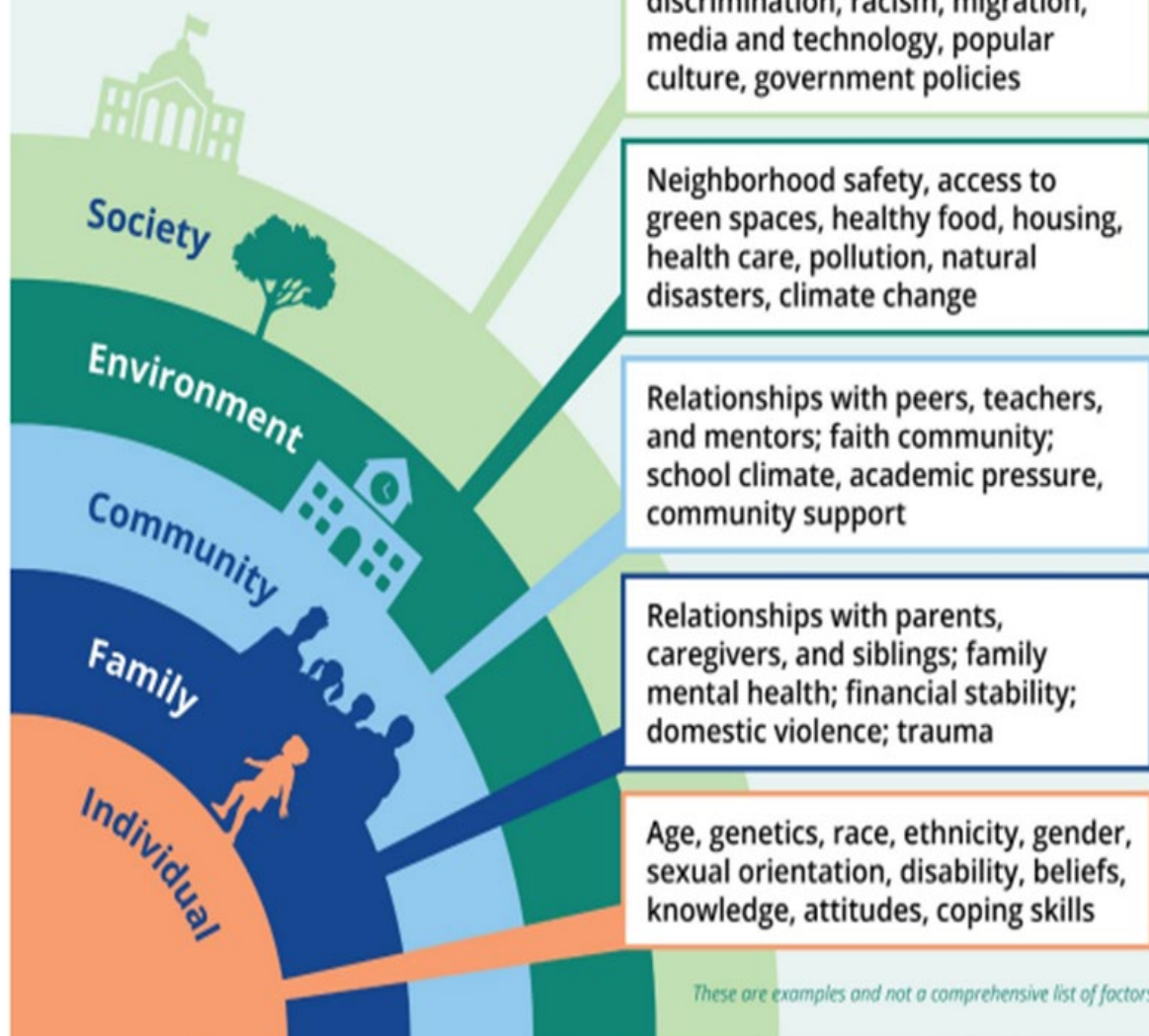
⁵ Protecting Youth Mental Health: The U.S. Surgeon General’s Advisory. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services. <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-general-youth-mental-health-advisory.pdf>

⁶ Washington State Constitution- Article IX Education, Section 1 Preamble. <https://leg.wa.gov/media/o3fg0ey1/washington-state-constitution.pdf>

FACTORS THAT CAN SHAPE THE MENTAL HEALTH OF YOUNG PEOPLE



Source: Adapted from WHO's *Determinants of Adolescent Health Development: An Ecological Model*, 2014 and Bronfenbrenner & Ceci (1994)



Recommendations

(a) Supporting and facilitating parent and community involvement and outreach.

Rationale

While schools can and should play a significant role in addressing student mental and behavioral health issues, they represent only one part of a student's day and life. In order to be effective and culturally responsive, any school-based strategies must be developed in collaboration with families and communities. Their engagement is essential for the implementation of wrap-around supports that can create lasting positive change. A district-wide approach to culturally responsive family and community engagement starts at the top with leadership from the school district. Therefore, new and existing board members should receive the training necessary to lead this work. The EOGOAC is recommending that this content be developed and delivered by the Washington State School Director's Association (WSSDA) as part of their required cultural competency training.

Recommendation 1. The EOGOAC recommends that the Washington State School Director's Association (WSSDA) include strategies for culturally responsive, authentic family and community engagement in required training for school board members.

(b) Enhancing the cultural competency of current and future educators and the cultural relevance of curriculum and instruction.

Rationale

Culture is one of the many intersecting factors that impact an individual's mental and behavioral health. Therefore, any mental and behavioral health supports must be culturally relevant to that individual. The systems that provide these supports must be responsive to cultural differences and be competent in cultural strengths and assets. This applies to all parts of the system from the planning process and identification to training and standards, curriculum and content, and evaluation and accountability (see measure of school climate [Recommendation 14](#)).

The EOGOAC supports recommendations 2 and 3 provided by the Washington State Counselors Association (WSCA) which seek to enhance systemic cultural competency by increasing accountability and transparency with the public as well as providing culturally and linguistically responsive resources to educators.

Recommendation 2. The EOGOAC recommends that school districts complete periodic equity audits that include the cultural and linguistic responsiveness of mental and behavioral health services and curriculum. The results should be provided to the district board of directors and local and school community and result in an action plan to close any opportunity gaps.

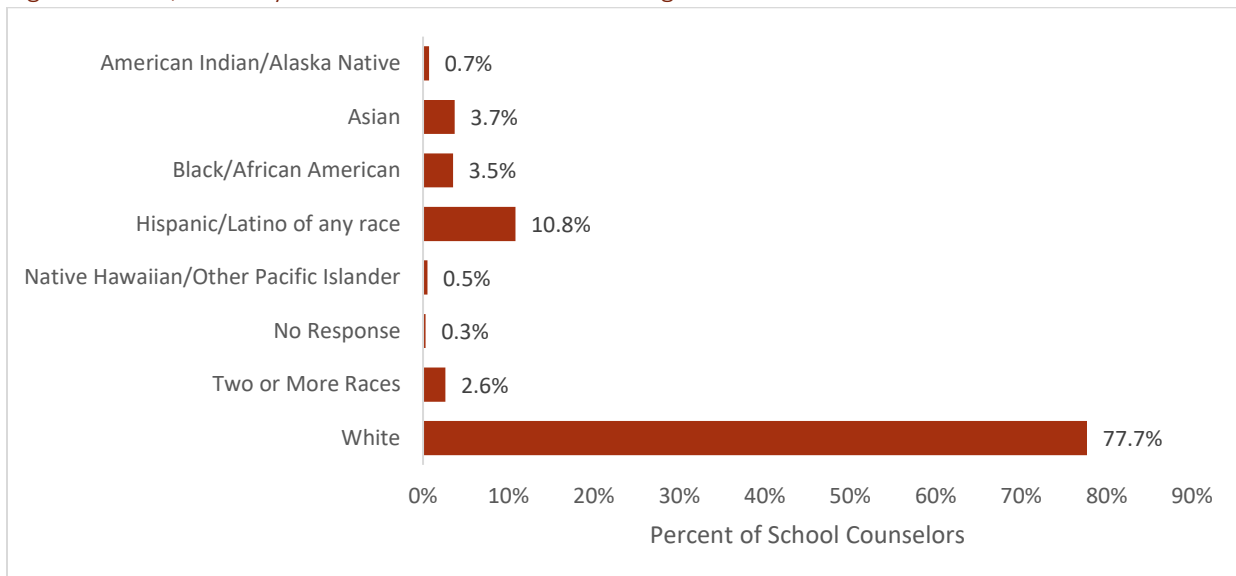
Recommendation 3. The EOGOAC recommends that the Washington School Counselor’s Association (WSCA), in consultation with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) and the Social Emotional Learning Advisory Committee (SELAC), develop and maintain a database of culturally and linguistically responsive college/career and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) curriculum.

(c) Expanding pathways and strategies to prepare and recruit diverse teachers and administrators.

Rationale

The EOGOAC continues to recognize the need for increased diversity in our teaching force. This is also true for school-based mental and behavioral health support roles such as school psychologists and school counselors. In the 2023-2024 school year, only 21.8% of school counselors identified as a race/ethnicity other than white, while 51.6% of students did (see Figure 1.).

Figure 1. Race/Ethnicity of School Counselors in Washington State 2023-2024⁷



Students of color need to be able to access support from staff who look like them and have similar cultural experiences, especially when dealing with issues like bullying, harassment, and mental health. Recruitment and retention of diverse staff will require increased availability of affordable, accessible preparation programs and routes to transition from other roles such as Educational Staff Associate, social worker, or therapist. Currently, options are limited with only one approved public school counseling program in the State of Washington.

⁷ Data provided by Washington School Counselor Association (WSCA). Mendez, L. & Morgan, J. (2024, October 15). *EOGOAC WSCA presentation* [PowerPoint slides]. <https://padlet.com/cisl/eogoac-vid9wnkvq5dvyula/wish/R7dXadB9pk2nZ6bl>

Recommendation 4. The EOGOAC recommends that the number of pathways into school-based mental and behavioral health careers be expanded, including accessible routes for career changers.

Recommendation 5. The EOGOAC recommends establishment of scholarships to support the recruitment and retention of diverse staff in mental and behavioral health support roles including school counselors and school psychologist. These scholarships should provide a livable wage and the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) should organize and evaluate the impact of the scholarship program.

Recommendation 6. The EOGOAC recommends continuation and expansion of the current pilot BIPOC School Counselor Mentor Program with expansion to all mental and behavioral health support roles.

(d) Recommending current programs and resources that should be redirected to narrow the gap.

Rationale

Over the course of 2024, the EOGOAC heard from schools, state agencies and community-based organizations (CBOs) that the school-based mental and behavioral supports continuum lacks systemic leadership and organization. Siloed and uncoordinated efforts lead to inefficiencies, duplication of effort, lack of accountability and system failures which disproportionately impact students of color's access to supports.

There are many proposed ways that current programs and resources can be organized and directed to better support students and their families.

- First, CBOs which provide services across district boundaries find themselves navigating multiple complex systems, often resulting in delayed supports at the start of the school year. Statewide and regional partnerships should provide uniform processes that increase efficiency and decrease barriers for CBO service providers.

Recommendation 7. The EOGOAC recommends that the Educational Service Districts (ESDs), with guidance from the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), create uniform, regional partnership processes for community-based organizations (CBOs) working with Local Education Agencies to provide mental and behavioral health services to students.

- The EOGOAC supports recommendations #2, "Strengthen statewide guidance and direction for behavioral health in schools" and #9, "Establish a Technical Assistance & Training Network (TATN)" of the School-based Behavioral Health & Suicide Prevention Subgroup, a subcommittee of the Children & Youth Behavioral Health Work Group (CYBHWG). See the CYBHWG 2024 Annual Report for more details. Recommendation 2 requires,

the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), in partnership with state, regional, and local entities, to define minimum expectations for behavioral health supports provided and/or coordinated by WA schools and establish strategic direction for state-wide programming to strengthen the capacity of schools to implement [and] meet those supports and reduce system barriers.⁸

#8 recommends the creation of a Technical Assistance & Training Network to provide support, resources, and training necessary to coordinate comprehensive supports. See the CYBHWG 2024 Annual Report for more details on these recommendations.

Recommendation 8. The EGOAC supports Recommendation #2 of the School-based Behavioral Health & Suicide Prevention Subgroup: “Strengthen statewide guidance and direction for behavioral health in schools” and #8 “Establish a Technical Assistance & Training Network (TATN)” with the addition that cultural competency be added as a key component of the definition of minimum expectations, strategic direction and capacity, and training and technical assistance provided.

- The EGOAC determined that significant barriers exist that keep school districts and Educational Service Districts from fully utilizing federal Medicaid funding for mental and behavioral health services. The EGOAC urges the Health Care Authority and Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction to take full advantage of the flexibilities provided by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services to reduce administrative burden and increase Medicaid reimbursement.

Recommendation 9. The EGOAC recommends that the Health Care Authority (HCA) work with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to ensure that Washington meets the expectations of Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) and the Department of Education by creating a plan that maximizes the ability of schools and districts to utilize Medicaid covered services.

- The EGOAC identified the need for increased wrap-around supports for students transitioning from inpatient and intensive mental and behavioral health treatment who are re-engaging with school systems. Two existing model programs that should be expanded include the Bridge Residential Housing program that serves young people exiting inpatient behavioral treatment and recovery high schools, a supportive school environment for student who complete substance use disorder treatment.

Recommendation 10. The EGOAC supports recommendation #3 of the Youth and Young Adult Continuum of Care Subgroup: “Expand the Bridge Residential housing program” and #5 “Support expansion of recovery high schools” with the expectation that both programs work with families and communities to be culturally responsive.

⁸ Children & Youth Behavioral Health Work Group Annual Report – Part 1 (November 2024), p. 49.
<https://www.hca.wa.gov/assets/program/report-cybhwg-recommendations-part1-2025.pdf>

- The EGOAC is concerned about community reports of delays in creation and reviews of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for students of color who experience both over and under identification for Special Education.⁹ In conversation with the Washington State Association of School Psychologists (WSASP), they expressed that delays are due in part to a shortage of school psychologists who are required to conduct IEP evaluations. High funding ratios also mean that school psychologist often spend a disproportionate amount of time on tasks unrelated to directly supporting students.¹⁰ In order to direct these staff roles to supporting the mental and behavioral health of our students of color, the State should dedicate resources to increasing allocation for school psychologists and reducing caseloads.

Recommendation 11. The EGOAC recommends that the Legislature increase allocations for school psychologists in alignment with the ratio recommended by the National Association of School Psychologists.

(e) Identifying data elements and systems needed to monitor progress in closing the gap.

Rationale

The EGOAC maintains that an up-to-date collection of detailed race and ethnicity data is key to monitoring progress in closing the opportunity gap. In March 2024, the federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB) published revisions to Statistical Policy Directive No. 15: Standards for Maintaining, Collecting, and Presenting Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity.¹¹ These revisions essentially make detailed race and ethnicity data collection the default for all federal agencies and therefore the state agencies that report to them. Federal agencies had 18 months from publishing to submit plans for implementing the data collection changes. As Washington state agencies prepare for and respond to their respective federal authorities, state level coordination will be needed in order to ensure that the changes create cross sector compatible data sets.

As more and more detailed data sets become available, they must be used appropriately to hold the system accountable and communicate with the broader public. The EGOAC has observed a disconnect between the gaps demonstrated by the data and the direction of funds and programs to support students and educators. Disaggregated data must be used to target funds to those who need them most.

Recommendation 12. The EGOAC recommends to the Legislature and the Governor, that the state provide funding and leadership for a coordinated approach to disaggregated race and ethnicity data collection, including reconvening the Race and Ethnicity Student Data Task Force to collaborate with other state agencies.

⁹ May, T. (2023, July 18). *Centering Equity & Disrupting Disproportionality in Washington State* [PowerPoint slides]. Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. <https://padlet.com/cisl/eogoac-vjd9wnkvq5dvyula/wish/zV61Q6PrY87PWO98>

¹⁰ See [2022 WSASP Census Results](#) for self-reported information on staff ratios and duties.

¹¹ The EGOAC submitted public comment on the proposed changes in 2023 which can be found in Appendix A of the [2024 report](#).

Recommendation 13. The EOGOAC recommends to the Governor, Legislature, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), and other state agencies, that when investing state dollars (grants, budget provisos, contracts, etc.) current disaggregated data should be used to direct spending towards closing opportunity gaps for students of color.

(f) Making closing the achievement gap part of the school and school district improvement process.

Rationale

For many years, the EOGOAC has recommended that the Washington School Improvement Framework (WSIF) be updated to include a measure of school climate as an alternative measure of student engagement to attendance and truancy.¹² School climate and culture are additionally results of and have impacts on-student mental and behavioral health. Measuring school climate would provide a tool for accountability and targeting of strategies like social emotional learning.

This measure must be developed in consultation with families and communities of color in order to be culturally and linguistically relevant to families. A useful measure will be representative of the demographics of the student population and measure what matters to the community.

Recommendation 14. The EOGOAC recommends that the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) add a measure of school climate to the Washington School Improvement Framework.

(g) Exploring innovative school models that have shown success in closing the achievement gap.

Rationale

The EOGOAC recognizes school-based health centers as an innovative model that has shown success in reducing barriers to accessing care such as cost, missing instructional time, and travel time and cost. The Washington School-Based Health Alliance should work with OSPI and ESDs to address barriers for partnerships including methods for braiding and blending funding sources and ensuring culturally relevant services.

Recommendation 15. The EOGOAC recommends support for school-based health centers that partner with community-based organization and public health to get mental and behavioral health services into schools.

Rationale

The EOGOAC continues to monitor the implementation of Master Based Learning (MBL, also known as Competency Based Education) as an innovative school model with promise. MBL's focus on student agency, relevance, differentiation, inclusion, and innovative assessment provide opportunities to tailor

¹² See Recommendation 3A [EOGOAC 2024 Annual Report](#), Recommendation 3A [EOGOAC 2023 Annual Report](#), and Recommendation 9A [EOGOCA 2022 Annual Report](#).

learning to the unique needs and success of students of color. These nontraditional settings can provide support for students who may be struggling with mental and behavioral health as well as vulnerable populations, students placed in institutions, and who need credit retrieval.

The main vehicle for this work in Washington State has been the Mastery-Based Learning Collaborative led by the State Board of Education. Similar to the use of disaggregated data, the EOGOAC recommends that the Legislature direct this work in such a way that prioritizes closing gaps for students of color.

Recommendation 16. The EOGOAC recommends that the Legislature target the use of funding to support Mastery Based Learning (MBL) on closing opportunity gaps for student of color by ensuring diversity in cohorts, disaggregation of data, program sustainability, family and community engagement, and a measure of accountability through reporting.

(i) Additional Recommendations

Rationale

Learning starts with families and communities, with a child's family being their first and most important life-long teacher. Family and community traditions, languages, and activities are the foundation for children's learning and development. Children build their identities from the people, communities, and places in their lives, relying on a web of support that includes caregivers, child care professionals and teachers. For many students and families of color, it is often older children who take care of younger siblings. This responsibility is both a necessity and a cultural expectation that can impact a student's academic engagement and time for extracurricular activities.

Recommendation 17. The EOGOAC recommends that the Legislature invest in providing increased linguistically and culturally sustaining early learning and childcare programs to support both younger students and their older siblings.

Rationale

Students of color with disabilities often struggle to have their needs met in the Special Education system. From difficulty in the identification of a disability to timely and appropriate referral for an evaluation for an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), many disabled students of color and their families do not receive the specially designed instruction and accommodations necessary to have a free and appropriate public education. While many students of color are under-identified and have difficulty navigating the system, many also experience being inappropriately over-identified for specific qualifying disabilities with culturally laden bias like emotional disturbance. Students of color with disabilities are often segregated in the most restrictive classroom environment, rather than having their IEP implemented in an inclusive environment being served in a general education classroom as much as possible based on their unique needs.¹³

¹³ May, T. (2023, July 18). *Centering Equity & Disrupting Disproportionality in Washington State* [PowerPoint slides]. Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. <https://padlet.com/cisl/eogoac-vid9wnkvq5dvyula/wish/zV61Q6PrY87PW098>

Recommendation 18. The EOGOAC recommends that the Legislature support inclusionary practices in Special Education, focusing on the development of culturally responsive training supports for educators.

Rationale

Students benefit from integrated student supports (ISS) which is “a school-based approach to promoting a student’s academic success by developing or securing and coordinating supports that target academic and nonacademic barriers to achievement.”¹⁴ The Washington Integrated Student Supports Protocol (WISSP) allows for the systemic identification of school-based needs and provides for the identification of culturally appropriate, community-based supports. Starting in the 2025-26 school year, the WISSP must be used to plan and implement data-informed, evidence-based supplemental support for students being served by the Learning Assistance Program (LAP). School districts may use up to 15% of their LAP base funds and 15% of high poverty funds per eligible school to provide direct supplemental services to participating students through partnership with community or other, out-of-school organizations.

Recommendation 19. The EOGOAC recommends that the Washington Integrated Student Supports Protocol (WISSP) is used to identify student needs through disaggregated data and to elevate and identify culturally responsive community supports for mental and behavioral health for students of color.

¹⁴ Anderson, K. & Emig, C. (2014). Integrated students supports: A summary of the evidence base for policymakers. Child Trends. Retrieved from <https://childtrends-ciw49tixgw5lbab.stackpathdns.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/2014-05ISSWhitePaper3.pdf>

Future Work

In 2023, the Legislature funded the ethnic commissions and GOIA to contract for a detailed analysis of the opportunity gap for their student community. These studies are a recommission of the 2008 “achievement gap” studies that resulted in the creation of the EOGOAC. Profound systemic and demographic changes have since occurred which necessitate adjustments to the evolving needs of communities of color. The EOGOAC looks forward to reviewing the results of the reports and expects them to have a profound impact on their future work. Thank you to each of the Governor’s ethnic commissions and the Governor’s Office of Indian Affairs for your work so far.

Timeline:

- December 1, 2024 – study update due.
- June 30th, 2025 – full studies due to the EOGOAC, the governor, OSPI, SBE, and the education committees of the legislature.
- July – Nov 2025 – EOGOAC review studies, synthesize, and make recommendations to the Legislature.

Conclusion

The Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee (EOGOAC) has served for 16 years as a direct conduit between our public education system to our African American, Asian, Latina/o/x/e, Native American and Pacific Islander communities within Washington. Students and families of color report that they are uncertain and scared for their future, given the increased targeting of diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives and the erosion of their civil rights by the Trump administration. Schools must continue to be safe places which celebrate and protect the civil rights of each and every student and the fundamental Constitutional right for equal protection under the law as enshrined in the 14th amendment. Beyond just being safe places for students and families of color, schools are sites of collective liberation and empowerment that can address the generational effects of centuries of segregation and racist laws and practices. The EOGOAC remains steadfast and committed to ensuring our students of color receive an equitable public education