



Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Chris Reykdal, State Superintendent

*All students prepared  
for post-secondary pathways,  
careers, & civic engagement.*

REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

# UPDATE: Online Learning

2020

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 2018–19 school year, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, and students of two or more races showed a total of 1.13% growth in accessing online learning. Of all race and ethnicity demographics, White students remain 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 with a total of 0.86%. 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.

### Measuring Success

Success is currently measured at the course level. The overall online course success rate decreased to 78.86% in 2018–19 from 79.95% in 2017–18. By comparison, the success rate for non-online courses increased to 90.18% from 90% in 2017–18.

EL students, students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, and students receiving special education services saw a decline in online course success.

### 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. OSPI is expecting to see improved data quality in the report for 2019–20.

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, high school grades will report more on course outcomes.

## 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 2018–19 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:

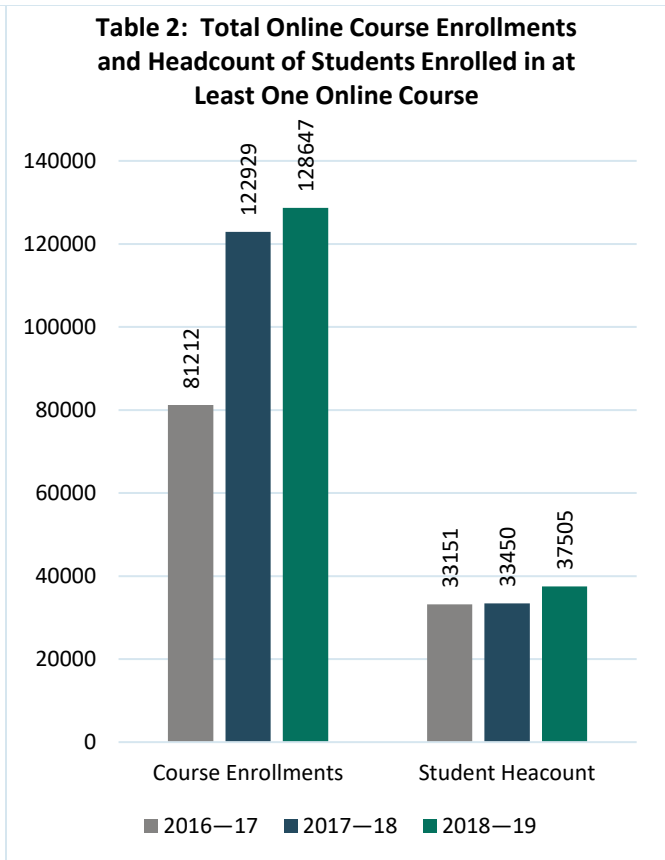
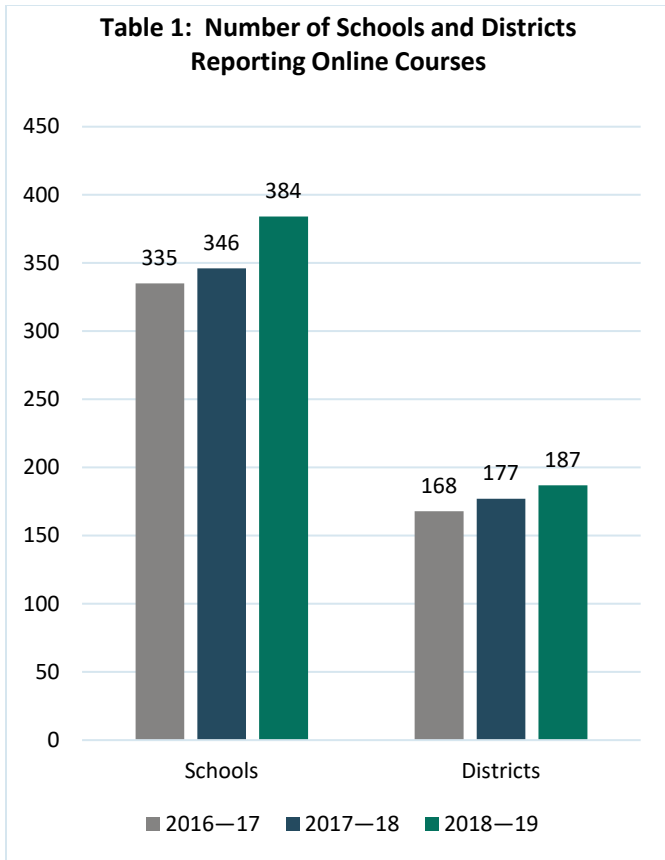
- "Headcount" measures each unique student served.
- A "course enrollment" refers to a single student enrolled in a single course for a single grading period. For example, a single high school student taking a full load of courses would have 10 (if the district offers five periods a day) or 12 (if six 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 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 are from the 2018–19 school year. The data were extracted from the Comprehensive Education Data and Research System (CEDARS) on October 30, 2019.

## Growth

Online learning continues to expand in Washington state with 1.56% of course enrollments taking place online. The most significant expansion was a 49.58% increase in online course enrollments for 10th graders, from 5,218 to 7,805 students. 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 2018–19 school year, OSPI approved 21 new single district and affiliate online school programs. Two new online course providers were approved after appeals.

Online course providers submitted student level data on course enrollments and performance for 2018–19. Unlike school programs, the data does not provide student demographics. OSPI will use these data results to inform educators, students, and families through comparable course completion and success rate information. OSPI will also use this data to compare to district data reports, for data reporting quality assurance, and to evaluate existing performance targets of online course providers set in WAC 392-502-030.

In 2018–19, approved course providers saw an average of 69.29% course completions, and of those completions, 78.45% 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.

For the 2019–20 school year, OSPI staff created two new CEDARS fields to tie online courses and students to approved online school programs or course providers. Data collection for the first year may be inconsistent but future years should give a clearer picture of online learning in Washington.

**Demographics**

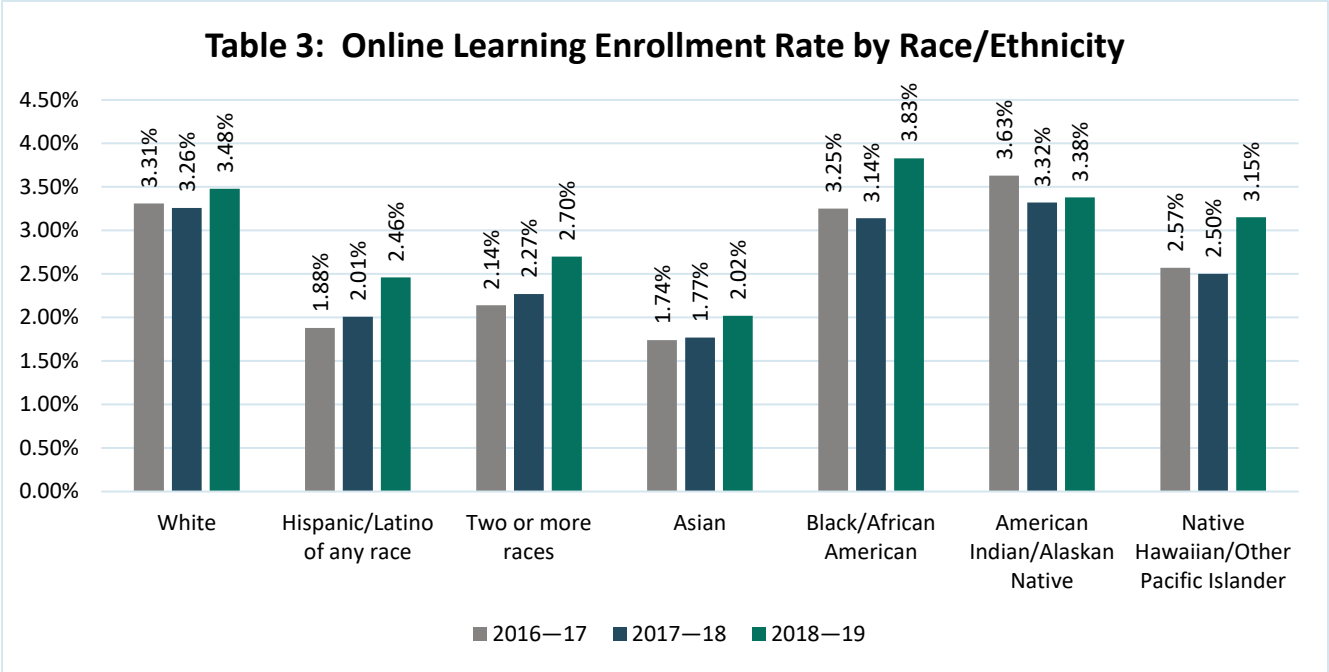
This report focuses on enrollment rates by student group rather than student numbers. Enrollment rates show the percent of that student group who participated in online learning. This rate is a more “apples to apples” comparison between student groups than student numbers.

**Gender**

In 2018–19, girls were more likely to enroll in online learning. Enrollment rates by gender show that 3.37% of all girls participated in online learning, up from 3.02% from the year before. In comparison, 2.84% of all boys participated, an increase from 2.55% of all boys the previous year, and 2.36% of all gender X students participated in online learning.

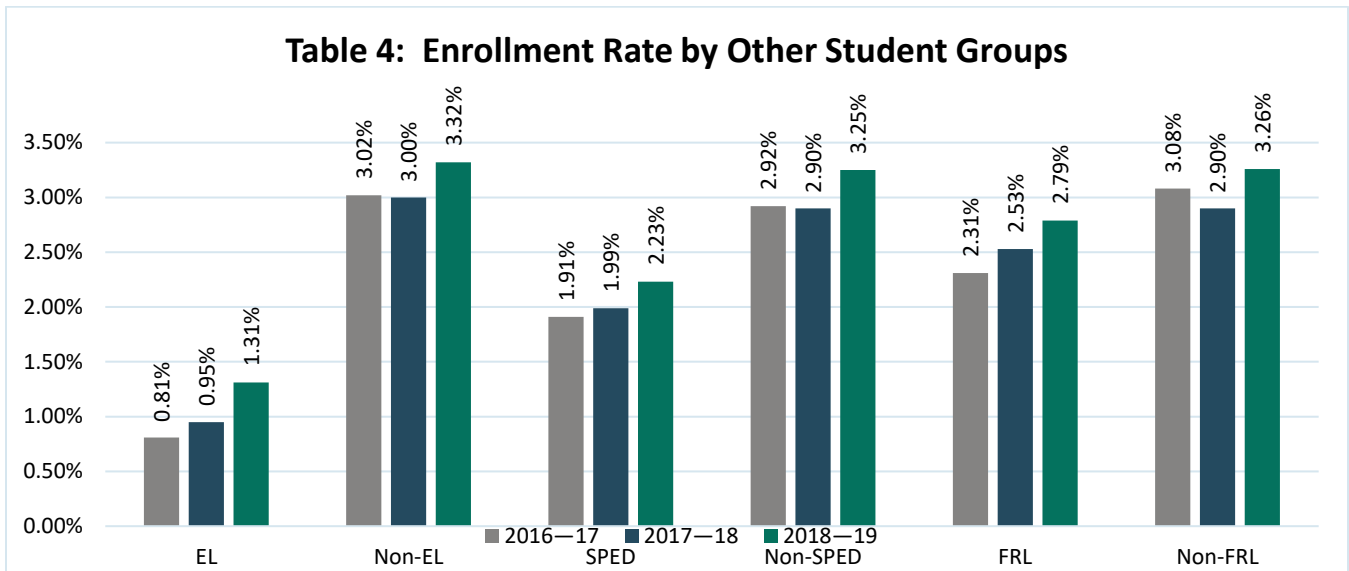
**Race/Ethnicity**

Enrollment rates by race/ethnicity show an increase for all student groups. The following charts show the percent of each student group who participated in at least one online course in the 2016–17 school year, in the 2017–18 school year, and in the 2018–19 school year.



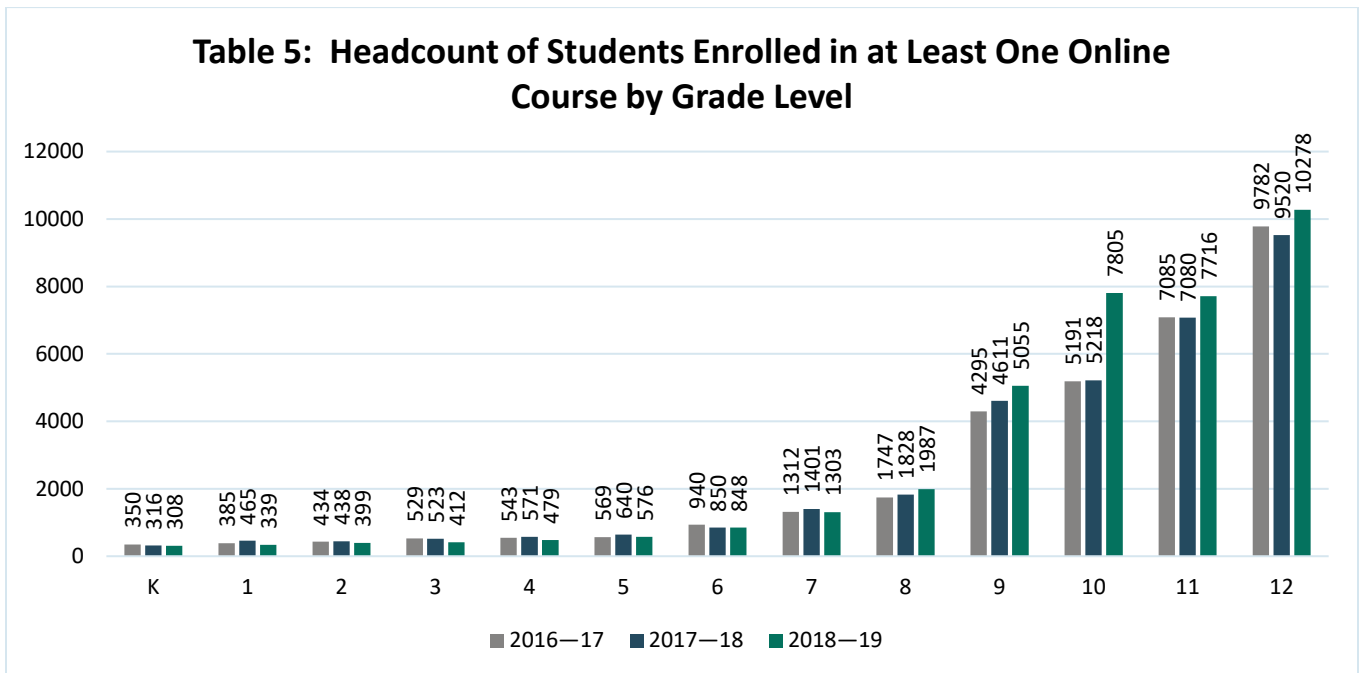
## Other Student Groups

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-7 slightly decreased from 2017-18 enrollments. There is noticeable growth for students in grades 8-12.





## 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 9,835 students reported as part-time home-based students, 8.70% (856) participated in online learning. This is the highest enrollment rate of any group. The 2018–19 enrollment rate is a slight decrease from the 9.09% reported in 2017–18.

## 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 2018–19, a total headcount of 12,586 students were enrolled in at least one online course in a district outside their resident district.

One hundred fifteen districts reported online enrollment of non-resident students, more than the 98 districts reported the previous year. Of these, only 11 reported 100 or more non-resident students. The top three districts account for 69.80% of the reported non-resident students. These top three are, from most non-resident students to least, Omak School District (3,855), Quillayute Valley School District (3,213), and Mary M. Knight School District (1,717).

## Measuring Success

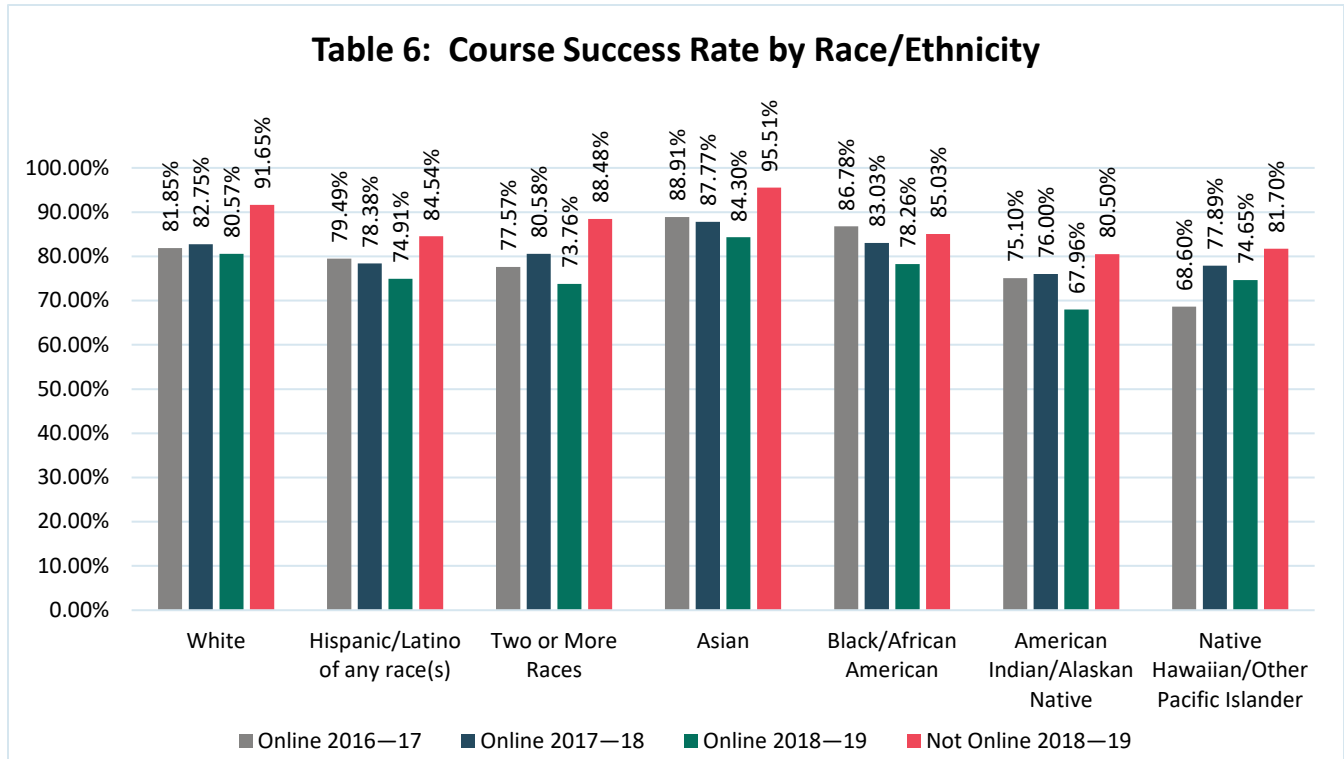
CEDARS provides data on course completions and grades through “student grade history.” Grade histories are only submitted for students in grades 9–12, so course-based achievement data is not available for students in grades K–8. Transfer credits are not included in this report. Transfer credits are often 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 78.86%. This rate is a slight decrease from last year’s 79%. The course success rate for non-online courses slightly increased to 90.18% from 90% in 2017–18. This gap in course success between online and non-online courses may be related to the quality of the course, delivery of the course, access to student supports, or other factors.

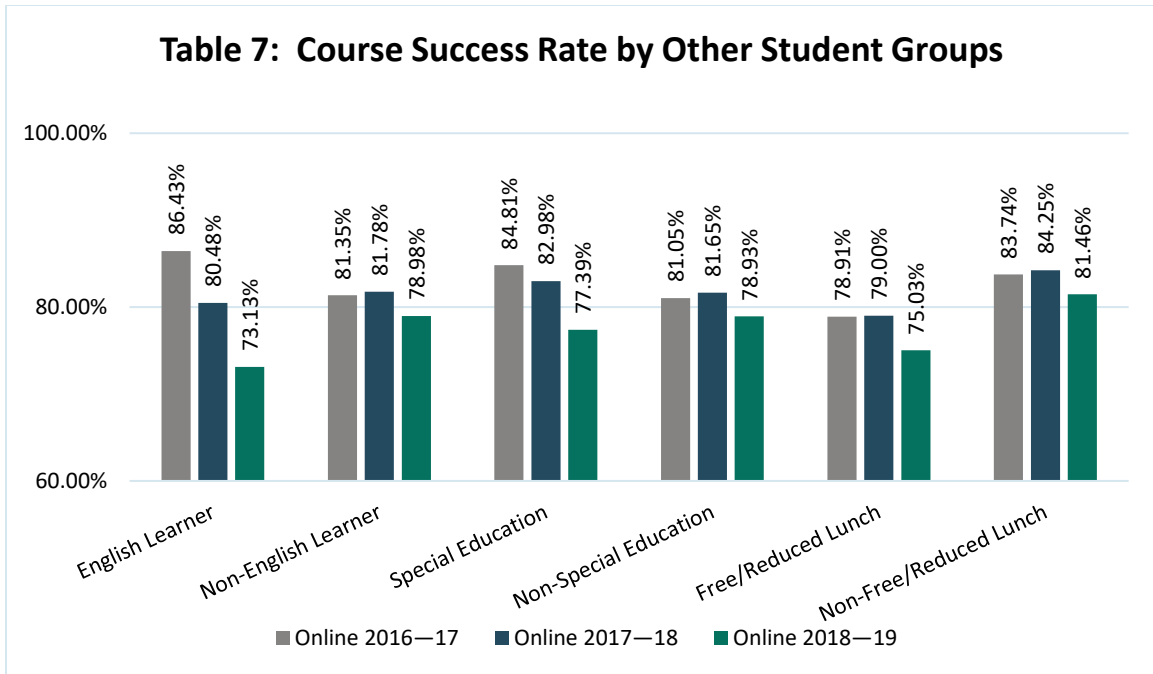
## Race/Ethnicity

Highlights of the data include Black/African American students having the smallest gap between online and non-online success. Table 6 shows the online course success rates by race/ethnicity for 2016–17, 2017–18, and 2018–19 as well as the one-year non-online course success rate for the 2018–19 school year.



## Other Student Groups

Table 7 shows the online course success rate by student group for 2015–16, 2016–17, and 2017–18. In 2017–18, the non-online success rate was greater than the online success rate by an average of 9.82% across 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.

## 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. Work has begun on improving data collection from approved online programs and providers. Guidance on the new CEDARS fields has been shared with schools and districts which has led to increased conversations around online learning and approval applications.

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 2019–20 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. Work groups have been established to clarify guidance on a new approval category, on definitions pertaining to online learning, and on policy. 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	37,457	1,029,838
Girls	19,664	582,866
Boys	17,777	626,190
Gender X	18	764
White	22,463	644,614
Hispanic/Latino of any race	7,061	287,497
Two or More Races	2,779	102,908
Asian	1,898	94,113
Black/African American	2,173	56,768
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	448	14,240
American Indian/Alaskan Native	653	16,831
English Learner	1,873	142,905
Non-English Learner	35,607	1,073,305
Special Education	4,243	190,651
Non-Special Education	33,216	1,023,432
Free and Reduced-Price Lunch	15,785	564,867
Non-Free and Reduced-Price Lunch	21,960	674,393
Part-time Homebased Instruction	456	5,811

Note: "Online headcount" is the number of students who accessed at least one online course.



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