



## **From Promise to Progress: Revisiting Educational Opportunity Gaps in Washington State**

October 2, 2025 AI Summary

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### **Historical Context and Purpose**

In 2008, landmark studies by Washington's ethnic commissions—African American, Asian Pacific American, and Hispanic Affairs—led to the creation of the Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee (EOGOAC). Nearly two decades later, the Washington State Legislature tasked these same commissions with conducting follow-up studies to assess progress and identify persistent and emerging gaps.

This webinar provided a platform for the commissions to share their findings, outline their recommendations, and discuss what lies ahead.

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### **Commission Reports: Findings and Recommendations**

#### **Commission on African American Affairs – Ed Prince**

Ed Prince, Executive Director, emphasized the commission's role as a gateway to state government for African American communities. Their study, conducted with Imago Consulting, identified eight core themes:

1. **Hiring and Supporting Black Educators:** Representation matters. Prince shared that only one of his children had a teacher who looked like them, underscoring the emotional and academic importance of diverse educators.
2. **Culturally Responsive Curriculum:** Students need curriculum that affirms their identity and tells the truth about history.
3. **Confronting Racism in Schools:** Racism remains a barrier to equity.
4. **Discipline Disparities:** Black students are still disproportionately disciplined, often missing valuable classroom time.

5. Expanding Pathways: Education must be flexible and responsive to student needs.
6. Listening to Students and Families: Their voices must guide reform.
7. Surrounding Students with Support: Prince shared a touching story of his daughter visiting her elementary school and receiving affirmations that transformed her demeanor.
8. Tackling Systemic Change: Programs alone aren't enough—systems must be restructured.

**The commission proposed five interdependent goals:**

- Increase Black educator representation
- Ensure equitable early learning access
- Reduce exclusionary discipline
- Provide anti-racist curriculum and fair assessments
- Expand post-secondary and career pathways

Bright spots included Teach253 (Tacoma), Rainier Prep and ACE Academy (Seattle), and Seattle Public Schools' Black Studies and Liberatory Education initiatives.

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**Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs – Nam Nguyen**

Nam Nguyen, Director, presented findings from two studies conducted by the University of Washington School of Education—one focused on Asian American students and the other on Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) students.

**Key Innovations in the Study**

- Data Disaggregation: Unlike previous studies, this one separated Asian and NHPI populations into over 20 ethnic subgroups, allowing for more accurate analysis.
- Community-Based Framework: Grounded in social justice and qualitative interviews.

**Findings for NHPI Students**

- NHPI students are the fastest-growing ethnic group in Washington.
- Despite academic potential, they face alarming mental health challenges:

- 40% report depression
- 20% report suicidal ideation
- 25% report bullying
- LGBTQ+ NHPI youth face even greater challenges.
- Many NHPI students feel they don't belong in school.

### **Recommendations**

- Increase NHPI educators
- Expand cultural programs and language services
- Showcase NHPI history and contributions
- Improve mental health supports

### **Findings for Asian American Students**

- Generally outperform state averages in academic achievement
- Disparities exist within subgroups, especially among English language learners
- Recommendations mirrored NHPI findings: more ethnic curriculum, diverse educators, and continued data disaggregation

Nguyen emphasized that mental health and belonging are central to future policy work.

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### **Commission on Hispanic Affairs – María Sigüenza**

María Sigüenza, Director, shared findings from a study conducted with Washington State University's Social and Economic Sciences Research Center.

### **Methodology**

- Mixed-methods approach using secondary data (Census, OSPI, OFM, WSAC) and primary data (focus groups and interviews with students and parents)

### **Key Findings**

- Early Learning: High engagement in ECAP programs, but gains fade without sustained support
- K–12: Graduation rates improving, but disparities persist in gifted programs and disability accommodations

- Post-Secondary: Strong aspirations, but barriers remain in affordability, enrollment, and completion
- Systemic Barriers: Housing instability, school mobility, and economic hardship impact learning

### **Themes from Interviews**

- Language and cultural identity are sources of pride and confidence
- Parents face interpreter and translation gaps
- Students feel underrepresented and constrained by rigid systems
- Bullying and discrimination are prevalent
- Trust-building and bilingual staff are highly valued

### **Policy Recommendations**

1. Academic equity: tutoring, after-school programs, dual language expansion
2. Student supports: more counselors and mental health services
3. Educator workforce: recruit and retain Hispanic/Latine teachers
4. Family engagement: improve communication and trust
5. School climate: ensure safety and cultural affirmation
6. Cultural identity: preserve language and heritage
7. Data improvement: disaggregate Latino data beyond the “Hispanic” label

Sigüenza stressed that the Latino community is not a monolith and called for more nuanced data collection to reflect its diversity.

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### **Reception and Next Steps**

All three directors noted that while their reports were well received by the EOGOAC and policymakers, there was shared disappointment in the slow pace of change. The opportunity gap remains “pernicious,” as Representative Santos once described.

### **Call to Action**

Panelists urged attendees to:

- Share the findings widely

- Engage with legislators, OSPI, and school districts
- Advocate for real, systemic change
- Support mental health initiatives
- Push for better data collection and accountability

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