Ongoing Impacts of the Covid-19 Pandemic on K-12 in Washington State
FINAL REPORT

Lessons, Reflections, and Recommendations from Across Washington State

July 2025

The William D. Ruckelshaus Center is an impartial resource for collaborative problem solving in the State of Washington and the Pacific Northwest, dedicated to assisting public, private, tribal, nonprofit, and other community leaders in their efforts to build consensus and resolve conflicts around difficult public policy issues. It is a joint effort of Washington State University, hosted and administered by the WSU Office of the Provost and the University of Washington, hosted by the Daniel J. Evans School of Public Policy and Governance.

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DISCLAIMER

The following report was prepared by the William D. Ruckelshaus Center, a joint effort of the University of Washington and Washington State University, whose mission is to help parties involved in complex public policy challenges in the State of Washington and Pacific Northwest tap university expertise to develop collaborative, durable, and effective solutions. University leadership and the Center's Advisory Board support the preparation of this report, and other reports produced under the Center's auspices. However, the findings and recommendations contained in this report are intended to reflect the opinions of the interviewees.

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Table of Contents

HEADLINES

The following headlines showcase significant issues that arose from the interviews.

Interviewees emphasized the significant ongoing impacts from the pandemic on the social, emotional, behavioral, and academic well-being of students, as well as the parents, educators, administrators, and other adults who engage with them.

These impacts, if left unaddressed, are likely to affect young people's well-being and future potential and could lead to broader social and economic implications, such as worsening societal inequities and diminishing community well-being, as children and youth who lack self-regulation, communication, and conflict resolution skills, for example, grow into adulthood.

Many interviewees described how pandemic-related social isolation, along with increased internet and social media use, has affected children and youth of all ages. They reported that this isolation has impaired communication and social skills, leading to social anxiety, antisocial behavior, and difficulties managing everyday stress, making friends, and engaging with teachers.

With the end of federal Elementary and Secondary School Education Recovery (ESSER) funds, interviewees spoke of the urgent need to address pandemic impacts through a statewide approach that emphasizes shared information and learning, collaboration, and partnership.

The pandemic exacerbated pre-existing inequities in academic achievement and access to resources, interviewees acknowledged. They emphasized the importance of prioritizing the needs of students and families that were historically marginalized or disadvantaged prior to the pandemic by poverty, race, ethnicity, instability, disability, or special

CALL TO ACTION

The Call-to-Action highlights significant actions that can be taken to address ongoing pandemic impacts. For more detail, see Recommendations.

- ✦ Develop a state-wide, locally adaptable initiative or initiatives to address the ongoing social, emotional, and behavioral impacts of the pandemic on children and youth that partners with local communities and community-based organizations, through a combination of public and philanthropic funding.

- ✦ Develop a comprehensive state strategy on equity utilizing the "Equity Can't-Wait" report to enable a more just and equitable K-12 system.

- ✦ Develop, implement, and expand targeted and individualized academic interventions, including tutoring, summer school, and after-school programs, for the children and youth that need it most, from kindergarten through post-secondary.

- ✦ Invest in and support programs that enhance healthy, diverse, and skilled educators and administrators including expanding initiatives to address all forms of trauma and incorporate trauma awareness in programs and curricula for all staff that need it in the K-12 system.

- ✦ Identify what has been working across the state, provide opportunities to share approaches, and scale the most promising practices.

- ✦ Identify lessons learned, and practical approaches to address education and service needs for children and youth with disabilities in emergencies to incorporate into emergency plans and policies and improve current conditions.

- ✦ Develop a campaign for schools and districts to more effectively engage with local communities and rebuild trust in the public school system.

Introduction

Background

In March of 2021, the William D. Ruckelshaus Center (the Center) initiated a comprehensive effort to identify lessons learned and share key insights from Washington's response to the Covid-19 pandemic to improve preparedness, recovery, and resilience in Washington State. The project was designed to collect and synthesize information, frame issues, and consider recommendations with consideration of race, equity, and social justice principles. More than 75 individuals and groups with responsibilities for decision-making and response implementation were interviewed.

A significant area of concern interviewees raised was the impact of the pandemic on K-12 students. The pandemic dramatically interrupted K-12 education for students across the state and led to a range of academic, social, physical, mental, and behavioral health impacts. Studies show that the disruptions caused by the pandemic disproportionately impacted students and families whose incomes are lower, as well as Black and Latino students and students with special needs.[1]

> **A very brief timeline of the pandemic**
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> Between January 2020 and October 2022 there were a number of key events and actions that occurred in Washington State related to the Covid-19 crisis. On January 31, 2020 the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services declared a public health emergency in response to Covid-19. On February 29, 2020, Washington Governor Jay Inslee issued a Covid-19 emergency proclamation. On March 12, Governor Inslee announced school closures in King, Snohomish, and Pierce counties. Following up on March 13, he announced statewide school closures for public and independent schools. These school closures were extended for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year.
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> In September, 2020 public charter and independent schools mostly reopened to in-person instruction. For the 2020-21 school year, most public schools in the state remained closed to in person instruction until early April 2021, when some schools began a hybrid approach, combining in-person and remote learning. Public schools reopened fully to in-person learning in September 2021. It wasn't until October 28, 2022, that Governor Inslee announced that Washington's Covid-19 emergency order would end the following week.

As a follow-up to the initial project, the Center engaged in a deep inquiry in 2023 and 2024 to better understand the ongoing impacts of the pandemic on Washington's children and youth. The Center conducted interviews with 91 teachers, students, principals, superintendents, state agency staff, community organizations, school board directors, mental health professionals, researchers, and others,

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[1] For example, see Center on Reinventing Public Education. (2024) The State of the American Student: Fall 2024. https://crpe.org/the-state-of-the-american-student-2024/; Kwakye, Isaac and Lacalli, Emma. (2022) Equity Can't Wait Examining Racial Disparities in K-12 Education in Washington State. Washington Student Achievement Council. https://wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2022.EquityCantWait.pdf; and Roddy Theobald, Dan Goldhaber, Andrew Katz (2024). Special Education Identification Throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic. CALDER Policy Brief No. 37-0624. https://caldercenter.org/publications/special-education-identification-throughout-covid-19-pandemic

to understand the ongoing impacts from the pandemic and to identify initiatives and interventions that are successfully supporting students' social, emotional, physical, and academic health and recovery.

In December 2024, the Center produced a Preliminary Summary (revised in January 2025).[2] It was disseminated to interviewees and interested legislators. It highlighted key findings and issues that arose from interviews and a call to action of priorities for intervention from interviewees. The final report provides additional detail on the Center's findings and potential actions that could be considered to address the significant ongoing impacts of the pandemic.

Project Purpose

The purpose of the project is to identify or develop initiatives and successful interventions that can best support students' social, emotional, physical, and academic health and recovery. Ultimately, the project aims to inform policies and practices and identify strategies needed to improve the long-term social, emotional, and educational outcomes of students, especially those disproportionately impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic in Washington State. The project is also intended to create opportunities for enhanced sharing of practices and programs that are working to address the lingering impacts of Covid-19. Since the pandemic disproportionately impacted Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and other people from historically marginalized groups, the project was designed to collect and synthesize information, frame issues, and consider recommendations through race, equity, and social justice principles.

Project Approach

This report is based on individual one-hour semi-structured interviews and longer small group discussions with teachers, high school students, principals, assistant principals, superintendents, state agency staff, community organizations, school board directors, mental health professionals, representatives from associations throughout the state, and others. A list of participants can be found in Appendix A. The Project Team provided a copy of the interview questions and background about the project to interviewees in advance of the interview. The questions were as follows:

> **Why we focus on equity and how we define it**
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> The project was designed to collect and synthesize information, frame issues, and consider recommendations through race, equity, and social justice principles. The Project Team utilized the following definition of equity: The principle of equity acknowledges the different life circumstances of each person and strives to provide the resources and opportunities needed for each person to have the potential to reach an equal or similar outcome to others. Equity is sometimes confused with equality, which is when each person or group has the same resources or opportunities. Thus, equity considers what each person and group of people needs to be successful. This includes historically marginalized groups, people with disabilities and special needs, those in rural and low-income communities, and others.

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[2] https://wpcdn.web.wsu.edu/wp-wsucahnrs/uploads/sites/2180/2025/01/K-12-Preliminary-Summary-01-07-2025.pdf

1. Please introduce yourself, your background, and your role as it relates to Washington State's children and youth.
2. Do you see any lingering impacts (including social, emotional, or academic impacts) of the Covid-19 pandemic? What are they?
   - Who are the most impacted students? What are they experiencing?
3. Do you know of any interventions or programs to mitigate these impacts? How are they working?
   - What else do you think should be done to address those impacts?
   - What is working well? What is not?
   - What are the greatest challenges or barriers?
4. What information, data, or research are you using to design, implement, and evaluate your interventions or programs?
   - What information, data, or research is missing?
5. Are the most impacted students being supported sufficiently? Why or why not?
   - Are you seeing differences in how interventions or programs to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic work for the most impacted students?
6. The pandemic exposed and widened many of the existing educational gaps in the K-12 system. Do you see a connection between efforts to address equity in the broader educational system and pandemic recovery? What are your thoughts about this?
   - What do you think are the most important priorities for reform to increase equity? What is working? What is not?
7. What lessons did you learn during and after the Covid pandemic?
8. What would stimulate collaboration and sharing of lessons learned to address ongoing pandemic impacts (between and among disciplines and professions and on multiple scales)?
   - How is sharing currently happening, if at all?
   - What would be most helpful for you to learn about?
   - Who are you not learning from that you would like to learn from?
9. What collaborations, if any, emerged to mitigate the impacts on children and families?
10. What should we have asked you that we did not?
11. Who else should we talk to and why?

The role of the Project Team was to listen to and collect information and stories shared by interviewees who have extensive on-the-ground experience in the Kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) system. The Project Team consolidated and synthesized the information and identified options and recommendations to consider for action by those involved in the K-12 system.

Findings

Between January 2020 and March 2023, the Covid-19 pandemic infected more than 100 million people and killed more than a million in the United States alone.[3] Experience from previous disasters has shown that recovery from the impacts of disasters can take a long time. Because of the scope, scale, and ripple effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, some experts estimate that recovery will take a decade or longer.[4] The pandemic, and how government and society responded to it, set in motion deep and abiding changes in our society, economy, and lives. Despite these enormous impacts, or perhaps because of them, the overwhelming response to the pandemic, has been to try to return to "normal" as quickly as possible, even as the impacts continue to ripple through our society, economy, and lives.

The picture that emerged from the Center's interviews is of a statewide K-12 system, including its students and staff, still deeply affected by the ongoing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic. Interviewees described how pandemic impacts continue to affect communities, families, colleges and universities, employers, and the healthcare system and how this in turn impacts schools. Many said there is a need to urgently address ongoing pandemic impacts that ensure that all students are educated "without distinction or preference on account of race, color, caste, or sex", as stated in the Washington State Constitution. At the same time, interviewees' interest in urgently addressing pandemic impacts was tempered by what they called Covid fatigue, a lack of energy to think about pandemic-related issues.

Nearly all interviewees spoke of the pressing need for additional funding and interventions to enable schools to continue to address ongoing pandemic impacts. They shared numerous examples of positive efforts of administrators and educators to address the ongoing impacts of the pandemic, utilizing the limited and often diminishing resources available to them. However, as some noted, absent a statewide approach and dedicated funding, most interventions are by necessity disparate, localized, and focused on specific downstream effects more than systemic upstream causes.

This report reflects the views and opinions of the interviewees who gave their time and talent to this inquiry. The role of the Ruckelshaus Center's Project Team was to listen to, collect, and synthesize the viewpoints of interviewees and their ideas for action.

Continuing impacts on students

The Covid-19 pandemic had a dramatic and sustained impact on virtually every aspect of life in Washington State. For the state's children and youth, the pandemic years were formative. For many of these children and youth, key developmental stages, social developments, and academic milestones came and went while they were at home, rather than with their peers and teachers at school. As many of the interviewees the project team spoke with noted, this impacted some students more than others, especially those students who were already furthest behind. These disproportionate impacts exacerbated ongoing issues of equity in the state's K-12 system, in which some groups of students continue to be left behind. At the same time, perhaps because of the trauma of the pandemic, there has

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[3] Hernandez, Sergio; Manley, Byron; O'Key, Sean, and Pettersson, Henrik. CNN website. Tracking Covid-19 cases in the US. https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2020/health/coronavirus-us-maps-and-cases/

[4] McClelland, A. G., Shaw, D., O'Grady, N., & Fattoum, A. (2022). Recovery for Development: A Multi-Dimensional, Practice-Oriented Framework for Transformative Change Post-Disaster. *The Journal of Development Studies*, *59*(1), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2022.2130055

been a tendency to move on from it without closure, curiosity, or in many cases, acknowledgement. Independent school students may have been less impacted by school building closures in many cases than public school students, because most independent school buildings did not stay closed as long as their public school counterparts, according to interviewees, though private school enrollments grew by more than a quarter during the pandemic.[5]

The impact of the pandemic on learning has been well documented, including how disproportionately Black, Latino, and lower-income students continue to be impacted.[6] There was widespread acknowledgement among the interviewees the project team spoke with of the continuing impact of the pandemic on academic achievement, as well as the extent to which those impacts have disproportionately impacted some students. However, the primary focus of many interviews was the impact of the pandemic on students' social, emotional, and behavioral well-being and the extent to which social and emotional well-being can affect students' ability to learn.

Social, emotional, and behavioral impacts

Just prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, public health officials declared a youth mental health crisis in the U.S. The pandemic exacerbated the youth mental health crisis, particularly for Black, Latino, and LGBTQ+ youth.[7] Anxiety and depression peaked in youth during the pandemic, including suicidal ideation, and are decreasing slowly. Interviewees representing public schools at all levels, independent schools, tribal schools, and before-and-after school programs all mentioned similar issues related to the social, mental, and academic well-being of students, as described in more detail below, though the severity of these issues in independent schools was said to be lesser.

Trauma and emotional well-being

Interviewees reported higher volumes of anxiety, chronic absence, and maladaptive aggressive behavior among students after the pandemic than before. Several interviewees said that the pandemic exacerbated pre-existing trauma and mental health issues in many communities. A higher number of students experienced some level of trauma and need more support, they say, than before the pandemic.

Levels of anxiety and depression are high, interviewees reported. Some said it has become common for elementary school students to run away from classrooms when things get difficult, a previously rare occurrence. Some students, said others, need frequent breaks and constant support to stay in their classrooms, and some school counselors are no longer able to organize group activities because of the intensity of care required for some students.

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[5] West, Sami. "Here's how much private and homeschooling in WA has jumped since the pandemic." KUOW. (December 21, 2023) https://www.kuow.org/stories/new-data-more-wa-students-are-enrolling-in-private-school-even-after-the-pandemic

[6] Dewey, Daniel C., et al. (February 2025). Pivoting from Pandemic Recovery to Long-term Reform: A District-Level Analysis. Education Recovery Scorecard. https://educationrecoveryscorecard.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Pivoting-from-Pandemic-Recovery-to-Long-Term-Reform-A-District-Level-Analysis.pdf

[7] U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website. (November 29, 2024). Youth Mental Health: The Numbers. https://www.cdc.gov/healthy-youth/mental-health/mental-health-numbers.html Figures are for high-school age youth.

Several respondents said it can be very difficult for students to access mental healthcare, because of a shortage of mental and behavioral health providers in schools and communities, particularly those with a large percentage of low-income families. This shortage, many said, is particularly acute in rural areas. Some respondents reported long waitlists for students to receive mental health care or evaluation. The lack of providers in schools, said some interviewees, means that students are referred to providers in the community, which can be difficult when students are in crisis. For example, they said, a student in their school who was actively attempting to take their life could only be seen every two to three weeks.

Some interviewees cited a *Seattle Times* series on the surge in pediatric boarding in local hospitals of children and youth with mental health crises, because there is insufficient treatment capacity for children and youth with intensive mental health needs. Some children and youth were boarded in hospitals for as long as a year.[8] Mental health resources are even scarcer, some respondents said, for children and youth on the autism spectrum and with developmental disabilities, and many of these children and youth struggled during the pandemic.

Many interviewees talked about the difficulty in getting students to attend school. Students are attending school less and less consistently, several said. Chronic absences are a big problem. Some interviewees said that something about the nature of the pandemic changed how families prioritize education and their children's consistent attendance. "Chronic excused absenteeism," said some interviewees, is a new category for students that have been excused from 20 to 30 days of school in a year. Their caretakers may be prioritizing travel and vacation or allowing their children to skip school for other reasons, they said.

Students who have access to mental health services are more likely to attend school, some interviewees said. Interviewees mentioned several efforts to address student mental health issues, including universal mental health screenings in some districts, partnering with local mental health agencies to provide training about anxiety and depression to adults in in their community in others, and access to telehealth resources in still other districts.

Behavioral issues

Behavioral issues were mentioned by virtually all interviewees. Examples include leaving school, alcohol and drug use, physical aggression, and property destruction.

Interviewees reported more intense behaviors in young students than before the pandemic, including preschoolers and kindergarteners, such as physical aggression, property destruction, and leaving school. Some interviewees said that there are students eating meals in bathroom stalls. Others reported elementary students using racial slurs, alcohol, and vapes. They said weapons are being confiscated from children as young as 10 or 11. These unsafe behaviors, they noted, impact other students.

Middle school administrators, some interviewees said, are noticing higher levels of sexual harassment, assault, vaping, and pot smoking in school. In some schools, interviewees said, high school administrators may need to attend school sporting events because of an increase in racist remarks and potential violence at the events. Others spoke of seeing higher levels of substance abuse. Some

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[8] Seattle Times staff. "Housed at the hospital: Stories of a youth mental health crisis." *Seattle Times*. Feb. 21, 2022. https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/mental-health/housed-at-the-hospital-stories-of-a-youth-mental-health-crisis/

caregivers try to get help for their children, some interviewees noted, but are unable to obtain services because of the lack of service providers.

Some interviewees said that there are an increased number of students in each district that have behavioral issues unlike anything school administrators and superintendents have seen before. The behavior of these students can have a major impact on others in the building. These intense behavioral issues are particularly difficult for rural districts that don't always have behavioral specialists or mental health resources.

Nearly all educators, school administrators, and youth spoke about the use of smartphones and social media by students. Some educators and administrators said that students have become much more tech savvy than before the pandemic, as well as preternaturally socially savvy because of their exposure to the internet and social media, even while their maturity and decision-making capabilities remain limited to their physical stage of cognitive development. They said that social media dramas play out after school hours and can play a large role during school the next day, even when phones are not allowed at school, a policy that educators and administrators in our interviews unanimously supported.

Social impacts

Several respondents said that a large number of students missed the acquisition of critical developmental socialization skills during the pandemic that most students pick up while attending school. In addition to the physical isolation the pandemic imposed on students, most students became more deeply immersed in the digital world, as many schools shifted to online learning, and the only way to get together with friends was to meet online. This, interviewees said, has had a continued impact on students' social skills and how they socialize. Several interviewees said that the lack of social skills among some students was so severe that educators were compelled to write scripts to help them better navigate basic social interactions at school.

As several interviewees put it, many students have developmental deficits from the grade levels they missed, and educators and administrators are able to see this at a cohort level. For example, interviewees reported that freshmen this year are meaner, which some suggested was due to their not having developed social skills usually learned in earlier grades.

Belonging

Many interviewees emphasized the importance of belonging in schools for students' well-being, including cultural belonging. According to some interviewees, the more relationships a student has, the lower the potential for risky behaviors such as substance abuse and teen pregnancy, a finding supported by research.[9] Several said that a student's sense of belonging is a critical element of well-being, is a foundation for academic achievement. This included culturally responsive instruction and spaces.

As several interviewees emphasized, trusted and supportive relationships with adults are critical for healthy childhood development, both in and outside of the classroom; students need adults who believe in them and show them the steps to get what they want in life. As some interviewees put it, adults have

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[9] Centers for Disease Control website, "School Connectedness and Risk Behaviors and Experiences Among High School Students — Youth Risk Behavior Survey, United States, 2021." (April 28, 2023) https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/72/su/su7201a2.htm

to be well to promote wellness in students. The adults in students' lives, including workers, educators, administrators, and caregivers, sometimes need extra support.

Continuing academic impacts

As interviewees noted, standardized test scores decreased dramatically in Washington State, particularly for those students starting out at a disadvantage, including students who are Latino, Black, and from lower-income families.[10] According to the Harvard and Standford University Education Recovery Scorecard Project, student math scores fell below more than a full grade level and reading scores fell by nearly a full grade level in Washington State, between 2019 and 2022. School districts with higher percentages of students from lower-income families eligible for free and reduced lunch fared more poorly than those with fewer percentages of these students.[11]

Some interviewees said that grades are staying high, even while test scores are decreasing, indicating that teachers are inflating grades. This, in turn, they said, can lead to decreased expectation and achievement, which has the potential to exacerbate issues of equity, as expectations of BIPOC students are lowered. Other interviewees said that some students are lacking study skills and don't understand how to be students.

Several interviewees expressed concern that critical learning gaps are following students through their academic and professional careers; gaps that, if not addressed, could undermine these students' future learning and success. Some interviewees stated that learning loss was not consistently or equitably measured and that the use of emergency waivers widened the achievement gap. There was concern that academic interventions, for example, tutoring, didn't always reach the most impacted students.

After the pandemic, there was a push to accelerate student learning to close learning gaps, said interviewees, and tutoring was a strategy used by many schools and districts to support students in addressing learning gaps after the pandemic. At the same time, as some interviewees noted, students were out of practice and had lost up to two years of in-class schooling, so it was more difficult for them to shift to a school learning mode, much less an accelerated learning mode.

College readiness

The pandemic has also continued to have an impact on college readiness, according to several interviewees. In 2021, The Legislature granted the State Board of Education emergency waiver authority (2021 EHB 1121). The authority allows the Board to approve emergency waivers of subjects that districts are unable to teach, so that students can graduate on time, but without having to take those subjects. The Board's emergency waiver authority was extended through the class of 2024.[12]

However, as some interviewees pointed out, no study of students who were granted credit waivers and then pursued some form of higher education has so far been carried out to understand the impact these waivers may be having. Those students, they noted, are deficient in basic skills, such as reading, math,

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[10] Educational Recovery Scorecard, Washington State. (2025). https://educationrecoveryscorecard.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/WA_combined_report.pdf Black students' scores in math and reading decreased less than white students' scores, but they started off at a much greater disadvantage.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Washington State Board of Education website: https://sbe.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2024-08/SBE%202022%20Emergency%20Waiver.ac.pdf

and science. Several interviewees expressed concern that these learning gaps in students' past are following them into their higher education and professional careers.

Ongoing impacts on equity

According to many interviewees, equity concerns in Washington schools continue to be a major issue since the pandemic, when gaps in educational achievement, particularly for low-income, Black, Latino, Native American, Pacific Islander, and students with special needs and/or disabilities.

Some interviewees said that since the federal No Child Left Behind Act, which ended in 2015, there has been less school accountability for addressing the achievement gap between Black, Latino, Native American, and Pacific Islander students, and their peers. They also observed that rather than addressing the systemic issues contributing to these disparities, such as implicit biases, the response within schools is to often lower academic expectations for these students.

There have been important gains in shifting students with disabilities into the general education population and out of segregated settings since the pandemic, according to some interviewees, due to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction's (OSPI) Inclusionary Practices Project (see Appendix B: *Specific programs mentioned by interviewees*).[13] However, Black students with disabilities and students with intellectual and developmental disabilities were already the most segregated and they have not been included in the general education population at the same rate as other students with disabilities, according to some interviewees, as well as OSPI data.[14]

Other interviewees spoke of the need to better identify which students continue to need the most support, determine their needs, and support them with targeted interventions. Typically, said some interviewees, schools rely on special education placements because they don't have the resources students need and, as a result, Black students in particular are often overrepresented in special education.

As other interviewees noted, there is a balance between the need to bring all students along and considering individual needs and cultural sensitivities. Walking this balance as an administrator or educator requires a high level of intention and support, they said. At the same time, addressing equity issues requires prioritization, said others; some students require additional support and resources to keep up or catch up to their peers.

The importance of including teachers and administrators who mirror the makeup of the student body, was mentioned by several interviewees. This is important so that students can see people that look like them in positions of authority, but also because of the importance of cultural understanding and connection, interviewees said. Other interviewees stressed the need to try different approaches, rather than simply returning "back to normal" and maintaining the status quo. Established ways of thinking, said some interviewees, can be a barrier to approaching things differently to better support the needs of

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[13] Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (February 7, 2024). News Release: "Washington Students with Disabilities are Spending More Time Learning Alongside Their Peers, Data Show" https://ospi.k12.wa.us/about-ospi/news-center/news-releases/washington-students-disabilities-are-spending-more-time-learning-alongside-their-peers-data-show

[14] Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (July 2024).Presentation: "Extended Myths & Facts About Inclusionary Practices in Washington" https://ospi.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/2024-11/guidance-specialeducation-extended-myths-facts-inclusion.pdf

a culturally diverse student body. Others stressed the importance of updating the curriculum to include a broader range of cultural perspectives.

Native American students

Many Native American students were socially, emotionally, and academically impacted by the pandemic, according to interviewees. They stressed the importance of culturally responsive practices for Native students, which could include activities like tribal song and dance, allowing time for students to process their emotions, and gathering around a fire. Native students are under-identified in the K-12 system and there has been a large decrease in the number of Native students, according to some interviewees, who said this makes it more difficult to prioritize the issues they may be facing. In addition, they said there is a need to systematically support English language proficiency for Native kids, many of whom learn their tribal language as a first language. As a result of their reduced proficiency in English, these students may be over-referred for language delays.

Funding for equity

Successfully addressing issues of equity takes time and resources, according to interviewees. Additional funding, they said, is needed to do things like recruit, hire, train, and retain BIPOC teachers and male teachers; provide extra support to students that need it; prioritize professional learning about achieving equitable results; and give staff extra time to learn, plan, and implement new teaching materials. Additional funding might also support longer school days, tutoring, or other interventions to improve academic achievement for specific students.

Several interviewees said the current funding model for schools is not working well. Some interviewees said the current funding model, which is based on student enrollment, should instead be based on student need.

Politicization of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)

Nearly all of the interviewees we spoke with acknowledged the importance of increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion or culturally responsive education in the K-12 system, while acknowledging that DEI has been politicized. This has created a lot of resistance, especially in the eastern side of the state, to even discussing these ideas, people said. Several interviewees added that certain topics have become much more difficult to talk about in the classroom and community. Others said that changing the language they use has been helpful in decreasing polarization and explaining what is at stake and what is being done to support the students who need more help than others because of issues of historic marginalization and denial of opportunities stemming from structural causes such as racism, ableism, and bias.

Who continues to be most impacted?

Interviewees offered a wide range of responses to the question of which students continue to be most impacted by the pandemic. Answers included students who lost family members, students from low-income, homeless families, foster children, students with disabilities or special needs, English language learners, students in transitional grades, and Black, Native American, Pacific Islander, and Latino students. Many interviewees commented that inequity in Washington State is persistent and has deep roots, shaped by factors including poverty, racism, and ableism. These responses underline how widespread pandemic impacts are and the extent to which the pandemic exacerbated existing inequities.

Students underserved prior to the pandemic

The majority of interviewees said that students who were underserved or from historically marginalized groups prior to the pandemic are some of the most impacted since the pandemic. Most interviewees said Black, Native American, Latino, and Pacific Islander students, as well as students from low-income families, particularly those in rural areas, are the most impacted. Several interviewees added LGBTQ+ students. Interviewees also spoke of the disproportionate impacts on students with disabilities and special needs. Finally, interviewees said that students from refugee and immigrant families were deeply impacted by the pandemic.

Many interviewees stated that BIPOC students, refugee families, and immigrant communities were some of the most impacted, because families from those communities had difficulty accessing the services that schools provide or to advocate for services for their children, some interviewees said. BIPOC students were impacted in ways other students were not because, for example, many of these students are in multi-generational households and lost elders, some interviewees said. Still other English language learners, many from refugee and immigrant families, lost access to English instruction and fell further behind. Also, interviewees stated that low-income, foster housed, and unhoused students continue to be disproportionately impacted as these students often lack basic resources like convenient internet access, stable housing, and school meals, leading to continuing academic and emotional impacts.

Other interviewees said that students in many rural school districts, where the majority of students qualify for free and reduced lunch, continue to be some of the most impacted. Rural poverty looks different than urban poverty, interviewees said; families may not have access to running water or indoor plumbing, for example, or students may need to commute long distances to get to school. This is particularly true, according to some interviewees, of students in extremely rural settings.

Many interviewees talked about the impact on students with learning and other disabilities, who they felt were some of the most impacted. For many of these students, several interviewees said, online learning was a disaster. All students show drops in test results, some interviewees said, but students with disabilities show the largest drops. Interviewees commented that many students with disabilities faced major setbacks, including regression in skills, lack of support, and long waits for services. It was stated that Black boys with disabilities were especially impacted. Since the pandemic, more families of students with disabilities are homeschooling, because of their experience during the pandemic, according to interviewees. Part of this, according to these interviewees, is that the wait times for assessing students with disabilities—a first step in supporting the transition of a student with disabilities into a school—have increased, in some cases, to more than a year.

There was a concern among several interviewees that many students, especially those with disabilities, lost hard-won progress during the pandemic that will be difficult, if not impossible, to fully regain. Students in special education have also faced major challenges, interviewees said. Federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) dollars funded extra support for these students when they returned to the classroom after isolating during the pandemic. However, across the state, districts don't have the programs necessary to support the students with the highest needs, according to some interviewees.

Students experiencing instability

Students experiencing instability at home, particularly those experiencing chronic instability and even abuse, are another group that interviewees said were some of the most impacted. These include students experiencing homelessness, in foster care, or who are experiencing other forms of instability at home, including neglect, abuse, and violence. As some interviewees said, the more unstable a student's family, the more at risk the student.

A 2021 study by the Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) said, "Students experiencing homelessness are more likely to suffer academically and are more likely to drop out of school when compared to their housed peers. Students experiencing homelessness are less likely to engage in school, have higher absentee rates, and have lower achievement test scores."[15]

Other interviewees spoke about the disproportionate impacts on foster children, many of whom are moving regularly to different family situations, another kind of instability. In addition, some interviewees said that the protocols for transferring foster children between districts don't necessarily support these students. Each district, they said, wants to do its own evaluation of incoming students, and they withhold services until the evaluation is complete. Foster children whose families are unhoused experience another level of impacts on learning and well-being, some interviewees noted.

Several interviewees lamented the end of ESSER funding, which supported many of the one-to-one services districts were able to provide for students and families with the highest needs. Many said the need remains huge.

Cohort impacts

According to several interviewees, students in specific cohorts were often the most impacted or at least were impacted very differently, because of where they were at in their physical and social development at the time of the pandemic. Some said that older students were the most impacted, others said it was younger students, and still others said it was middle school students.

Several interviewees said that the youngest students have more speech delays and more trouble with social learning than older students. Students who missed preschool and kindergarten missed formative norming experiences, they stated. Others said that kindergarten students whose schooling was interrupted halfway through the school year really struggled.

Older students have delays in social and emotional skills, including difficulty paying attention and regulating their behavior, according to some interviewees. Others noted that middle school students have relatively high rates of aggression and suicidal ideation.

Other cohorts mentioned by interviewees included sixth and second graders, who were said to be exhibiting more aggressive behaviors than before the pandemic; eighth graders, who were online through fifth and sixth grade and didn't see teachers for up to two years; and students in fourth and fifth grade, who some interviewees said have really struggled.

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[15] Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. UPDATE: Data on Students Experiencing Homelessness (2021). https://ospi.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/2022-12/03-22-UPDATE-Data-on-Students-Experiencing-Homelessness.pdf

In addition, some respondents spoke to the sometimes devastating impacts on students who may have been hospitalized or whose close relatives may have been hospitalized or even died. They also spoke of caregivers who worked full time, while students were home, perhaps taking care of younger siblings; caregivers who lost their jobs; caregivers or students who were immunocompromised. School, some interviewees noted, became very important and provided a sense of consistency and solidarity in many students' lives.

Students with multiple impacts

Finally, some interviewees stated that students with multiple adverse factors in their lives are more impacted than others. For example, students from low-income families who lost caregivers, Black boys with disabilities, homeless English language learners, or foster children in rural areas. For these students, the pandemic and its aftermath have dramatically compounded the challenges in their lives and in the classroom.

Discipline

With the increase in student behavioral issues since the pandemic, several interviewees mentioned the misplaced use of discipline, including exclusionary discipline such as expulsions and suspensions, to address these issues. Punishment like this can negatively impact learning and socializing, but fail to address the underlying issues causing the behavior, they said. Some interviewees felt that there could be an opportunity to reframe problems and responses for educators, because the tools available to address issues with students are mostly ineffective and involve punishment. They do nothing to address underlying issues and do not improve learning, they said.

Other interviewees complained that some of the limited tools to discipline students, such as exclusionary discipline, are being taken away, which limits the options of educators and administrators to address more extreme behavior. Still other interviewees suggested that discipline may not be an appropriate response in most situations, because the behavior is likely being caused by trauma or other difficulties in students' lives, which the pandemic may have exacerbated. Alternatives, they such as trying to address the underlying issues that are driving the behavior, would elicit better results for everyone, they stated.

Implications for the future

Finally, several interviewees spoke of how the widespread, ongoing social, emotional, and academic impacts from the pandemic on students are likely to have broader social and economic implications in the future, if left unaddressed. As mentioned earlier, pandemic-era learning gaps are likely to follow students into their academic and professional lives. In addition, ongoing pandemic impacts on students' well-being and behaviors may very well exacerbate ongoing societal inequities and diminish community well-being, as students with underdeveloped social skills, unresolved behavioral issues, academic learning gaps, difficulty in resolving conflict, problems with self-regulation, and untreated mental health issues grow into adulthood.

Continuing impacts on adults—administrators, educators, school staff, parents

K-12 students are not the only ones experiencing ongoing impacts from the pandemic. Many interviewees mentioned the significant ongoing economic, social, and mental and behavioral health

impacts on adults, including caregivers, educators, school workers, counselors, and administrators. These impacts are reflected in data that shows dramatic turnover in superintendents and principals, as well as significant turnover of teachers and other school staff.

K-12 system staff

Turnover and burnout

As many respondents related, the impacts of the pandemic on school staff in both public and independent schools have been and continue to be profound. They said that turnover, stress, and burnout affected all levels of the system. Several interviewees attributed it to the rise in mental and behavioral health issues and associated behaviors among students, others to the politicization of the K-12 system during the pandemic.

Turnover of public school superintendents was mentioned by several interviewees, which is backed up by data. The Superintendent Lab found that a superintendent transitioned in 23 percent of all school districts in Washington between 2022-23 and 2023-24. In addition, 60 percent of Washington school districts have experienced superintendent turnover since 2019-20.[16]

Public school principals experienced a spike in turnover as well. For much of the past 20 years, turnover has remained at a consistent 20 percent, but in the 2023-2024 school year it spiked to almost 25 percent, according to a policy brief from the University of Washington.[17] The increase was largely due to principals leaving the workforce or their positions. According to one of the researchers, "Principal turnover disproportionately impacts schools in high-poverty areas, and schools with a high proportion of BIPOC students."[18] Independent schools likewise experienced a higher-than-normal turnover of educators and school administrators, according to interviewees.

In interviews with principals and vice principals (the school administrators), the project team heard a lot about the amount of time they spend on crisis management and helping kids meet basic needs. As some interviewees put it, school administrators hear about the hardest parts of students' lives. They noted that school administrators are taking care of the needs and concerns of others, including students, parents, community members, and staff, leaving little time for their own professional development or self-care.

At the same time, public school administrators say that new "unfunded mandates" from the legislature continue to add work. As public school budgets are squeezed and staff are reduced, principals are left to take on additional duties, like maintenance, they say. These issues can be compounded, according to respondents, in smaller districts. The systems of support would work better, some said, if public school administrators were better supported.

Both public and independent school educators were also deeply impacted by the pandemic, many interviewees said, whether because of the loss of loved ones, illness, stress, or overwork. Several

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[16] The Superintendent Lab. National Longitudinal Superintendent Database (NLSD). https://thesuperintendentlab.com/communicating-our-work/nlsd-data-visualizations/
[17] Knight, D. S., Candelaria, C. A., Sun, M., Almasi, P., Shin, J., DeMatthews, D. (2023). Principal retention and turnover during the COVID-19 Era: Do students have equitable access to stable school leadership? Seattle WA: University of Washington. https://digital.lib.washington.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/39656210-3616-4377-9918-ea9a46b91fe5/content
[18] Washington STEM website. "Principal Turnover." https://washingtonstem.org/principal-turnover/

interviewees said that often the most experienced teachers left after the pandemic subsided, which left big shoes to fill in many schools. In addition, some interviewees noted, public school teacher shortages disproportionately affect rural and schools with students from lower-income families.

Staff capacity

Largely because of the issues of staff burnout and turnover discussed above, several respondents mentioned the issue of staff capacity in public schools. Finding qualified staff, particularly in rural areas or for tribal schools, has been challenging, respondents said. In addition, at the district level, some interviewees said that the experience level of incoming superintendents has been somewhat lower than before the pandemic.

In part because of the new post-pandemic climate, public school administrators said, it has become increasingly challenging to recruit teachers to take on assistant principal or principal roles. Many teachers, they say, are reluctant to take on new and stressful responsibilities in a job that may not pay much more than their teaching job, if at all, and be less secure. It can also be difficult to recruit for specialist positions, especially in rural areas and tribal schools.

Staff that support student mental health, including public school psychologists, nurses, school social workers, family support workers, and school counselors, are in particularly short supply, according to several interviewees, even with funding from the state legislature to support extra positions.

As several interviewees noted, it is important for students to have teachers that look like them and understand their background and history. Tribal schools have a difficult time recruiting Native teachers, who can better understand the history and experience of their Native students, according to some interviewees. Other interviewees said that the teachers' union's "last hired, first fired" policy has made it especially difficult to retain BIPOC teachers, many of whom are relatively new hires.

The time constraints on educators and administrators can inhibit their ability to take on new initiatives to address the continuing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, interviewees said. Several interviewees said it can be difficult to agree on and mobilize transformational action, even though many commented that innovative, systemic actions are needed.

Caregivers and families

As some interviewees noted, some of the most impacted kids have the most impacted caregivers. Interviewees reported seeing caregiver fatigue or even caregivers giving up on parenting their children and kicking them out of their homes. Some respondents speculated that parenting changed for many families because children were home for so long, often by themselves. Interviewees also noted that low-income and rural families lack access to the tools needed to support learning—such as access to computers and the internet—and that collaboration with community-based organizations can be uneven.

Ongoing impacts on community

Several interviewees spoke about the importance of "civic infrastructure," the network of engaged residents, nonprofits, community-based organizations, supportive local governments, and associations in communities. If this civic infrastructure is robust, it can provide a major leg up to schools and students, who will likely benefit from increased numbers of volunteers, after-school activities,

fundraising potential, community partnerships, and other supports. If the civic infrastructure is lacking, schools and their students will likely suffer.

Research by the Education Recovery Scorecard Project "found that the test score declines were smaller in communities with high voting rates and high census response rates — indicators of what sociologists call "institutional trust." School closures were also less harmful in such places."[19] Institutional trust is foundational to stronger civic infrastructure and a proxy indicator for it.

Interviewees acknowledged that schools alone cannot address all of the ongoing pandemic impacts schools are experiencing. Several interviewees said it is important to break down silos between schools, districts, and agencies and recognize that the efforts to address ongoing pandemic impacts require connection, cooperation, and partnership.

Politicization of education

Many interviewees noted that the Covid-19 pandemic, and aspects of the response to it, compounded societal issues such as disinformation, distrust of institutions, political polarization, and civil discord. These societal issues continue to complicate pandemic recovery. Some interviewees described a deliberate and ongoing effort to undermine the public school system through the use of disinformation and political attacks.

Several interviewees said that public schools are challenged by a negative narrative and an increasing lack of trust in public education and decreasing respect for teachers, administrators, and school board members. This, combined with political polarization, makes it difficult for schools and districts in some cases to even name or talk about important issues, such as equity and gender identity. Politization and polarization can also make it difficult for schools to partner effectively with communities to support students, interviewees said, and this is likely to have the greatest impact on those communities with the greatest mistrust, which in many cases are rural communities with constrained funding, difficulties in finding qualified staff, and higher percentages of lower-income families. Students are seeing and hearing this political polarization talk and it impacts their engagement in school as well as their mental health, several interviewees said.

K-12 schools, some interviewees said, can have important health benefits for students, including learning how to socialize and navigate relationships with their peers, some basic healthcare services, and breakfast and lunch. They expressed concern about the health impact on some students of families that opt out of in-person learning. Others described a medical domino effect from the pandemic in which families did not get their children's required vaccinations for other diseases or did not get themselves or their children treated for medical issues that then worsened.

Outlier impacts

Several interviewees expressed interest in understanding some of the positive effects of the pandemic, such as:

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[19] Kane, Tom, and Reardon, Sean. "Parents Don't Understand How Far Behind Their Kids Are in School." New York Times. May 11, 2023. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/05/11/opinion/pandemic-learning-losses-steep-but-not-permanent.html. Kane and Reardon are leaders of the Education Recovery Scorecard project (https://educationrecoveryscorecard.org/), which tracks and analyzes detailed district-level data about learning loss across the country.

- When students were attending school remotely there seemed to be less bullying. What happened?
- For some students, online learning seemed to go better. For some BIPOC students, was it because the impact of racial bias was diminished online? For introverted students, was it reduced social pressure and increased independence?
- Some students lost motivation in the transition to online learning. What can be learned from that?
- During the pandemic, caregivers had a window into what their children were learning. After kids returned to school, caregivers weren't asked what they learned. What worked and what didn't work from the perspective of caregivers?

These interviewees expressed an interest in research into these issues and emphasized the importance of flexibility in learning modalities (e.g., in-person, virtual, or asynchronous) for students moving forward to accommodate learning differences.

Partnership and collaboration

The project team asked interviewees about what kinds of collaboration and partnership exist to address ongoing pandemic impacts. Many interviewees spoke about the intensive collaboration that often happened during the pandemic, driven by the need to protect lives and navigate uncertainty. According to respondents, pandemic-era collaboration was frequent and consistent and often straddled institutional and professional silos. It was inclusive, allowing people into the conversation who weren't always included before. In addition, meetings were often more informal. Most interviewees agreed that this level of collaboration is desirable, but difficult to sustain. Still, several interviewees asked what could be learned and carried over from pandemic-era collaboration efforts.

Equity became a major focus of the pandemic response, in part because of the Black Lives Matter movement in reaction to the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in May 2020, but also because of the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on many BIPOC communities, many of whom had higher death rates than white communities due to discrimination, access to healthcare, and other reasons.[20] Because of this focus on equity, some interviewees said that collaboration to increase equity was prioritized during the pandemic. Some interviewees said that the collaboration has fallen off, while others said that collaboration, including funding opportunities to address pandemic impacts, are continuing.

Challenges and barriers

Interviewees cited a number of challenges and barriers to addressing the ongoing social, emotional, and academic impacts from the pandemic on students. Lack of funding was one of the most frequently cited barriers by interviewees. Lack of urgency, politicization of education, political polarization, status quo

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[20] For background, see U.S. Census Bureau (2023) "COVID-19 Impacts on Mortality by Race/Ethnicity and Sex." https://www.census.gov/library/stories/2023/06/covid-19-impacts-on-mortality-by-race-ethnicity-and-sex.html and Mayo Clinic (2024) "COVID-19 infections by race: What's behind the health disparities?" https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/coronavirus/expert-answers/coronavirus-infection-by-race/faq-20488802

bias, lack of access to mental health services, shifting priorities, and lack of communication and collaboration were also cited by several interviewees as barriers.

Funding

Funding was cited frequently as a challenge to better addressing continuing pandemic impacts. Several interviewees said that they were experiencing or bracing for budget shortages and layoffs, as well as possible school closures. Other interviewees said that it was difficult to fund specific programs, such as the state's multi-tiered systems of support, which requires training to implement successfully. In addition, schools were required in fall 2025 to complete plans for integrated systems of support, for which funding was not provided to meet its requirements.

Washington state received more than $2.5 billion in federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding over three years to support responses to and recovery from the pandemic.[21] Many interviewees said that ESSER funding was valuable but ended too soon. Focused interventions and funding ideally should reflect the longer timeframe of up to 10 years that is likely needed to address the ongoing effects of a major disaster like the Covid-19 pandemic. Nearly all interviewees spoke of the urgent need for additional funding to enable schools to continue addressing ongoing pandemic impacts.

Several interviewees expressed concern that it was difficult to measure the impact of ESSER funds because it is not clear how the funds were utilized at the state level. Consequently, it is not clear what interventions districts focused on and what the results were.

Others described how, with ESSER funding, they were able to hire additional staff to provide more robust student services, increase partnerships with community health organizations, and help students with social and emotional issues. Schools were understaffed before the pandemic. Some interviewees said that when ESSER funding ended in districts where local levies didn't pass, those districts experienced a much more dramatic loss of funding.

Lack of urgency and status quo bias

Another major challenge identified by several interviewees is the perceived lack of urgency about the social, emotional, and academic impacts of the pandemic on students at the state level. This lack of urgency is also linked to Covid fatigue; many people were exhausted and/or traumatized by the pandemic and don't want to even think about it, much less talk about it. Some interviewees said that decreased test scores should be a much greater concern, while others said that there should be a more urgent focus on the social and emotional well-being of students. Many interviewees expressed concern that the education system is reverting to the "status quo" and forsaking some of the positive lessons learned during the pandemic.

Politicization and Polarization

The country's political polarization, which surged during the pandemic, and the extent to which schools and curricula became politicized was mentioned by many interviewees as a major challenge facing schools. Trust in government is at all-time lows, several interviewees noted, which has carried over to schools. As some interviewees said, a low-trust environment in a community makes it hard for a school

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[21] Washington Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction website. State and Federal Funding. https://ospi.k12.wa.us/about-ospi/novel-coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-resources/state-federal-funding

to be successful. Divisiveness around schools has increased around issues such as sex education and even social and emotional learning, according to many interviewees, and this has spilled over into highly contentious school board meetings in many communities.

Some interviewees said that there is disagreement in some communities with the idea that schools should provide food for students or support students who are unhoused. Rather than coming together as a community some interviewees said, we have become divisive and antagonistic. Others said that the pandemic brought people together in some places, while in other communities it was a dividing point.

Access to mental health services
The difficulties schools and students face in accessing mental health services was mentioned frequently by interviewees as a challenge to recovery from the pandemic for some students and their families. For some families, lack of money or insurance can be a barrier to accessing mental health care for their children. Perhaps the biggest barrier mentioned, however, was simply lack of availability of mental health professionals. For students struggling with significant mental illness or suicidal ideation it can be almost impossible to find suitable treatment options. More than some interviewees said that the only available option for some students with serious mental health conditions were facilities located in other, sometimes faraway states.

Shifting priorities
One widespread concern raised by several interviewees was the perceived tendency of the K-12 system to shift attention quickly from one solution to another, without always seeing an approach through long enough to know whether it works or not and without any evaluation of whether the approach in fact made a difference. Instead, as some interviewees said, districts and schools and sometimes the K-12 system at a state level are always looking for the next "shiny new thing" and shifting direction without considering what worked or didn't work with the previous approach. Some interviewees felt that districts should implement programs for at least several years before changing direction, so that their efficacy could be better determined. This issue of shifting priorities was seen as particularly problematic by smaller community-based nonprofits, who may get funding for an approach one year, then lose funding the next, according to respondents.

Lack of communication and collaboration
Lack of collaboration and communication between specific parties was mentioned by several interviewees. After school programs and childcare providers that work with schools, often on site, said that schools do not seem to see them as potential partners who could support school efforts to address some of the ongoing social and behavioral issues stemming from the pandemic, for example. Some interviewees perceived a lack of communication and coordination between some state agencies which can be problematic and negatively impacts children and youth that are served by them.

Findings related to research and data

The project team received a wide range of responses about the data and research interviewees are using or wish they had access to. The most common interest expressed was in the translation of research into practical guidance for educators, administrators, and agency staff and in research about what works to address the impacts of the pandemic in practice. Several respondents expressed frustration with a lack of data in specific areas. Some respondents were not interested in research and data, at least in part because of a lack of trust in research and researchers due to a history of past harms

in their communities. Some also felt that research might not be culturally or socially relevant to the specific circumstances of students.

According to interviewees, important data or research that is not available, includes:

- Statewide information on Individualized Education Program (IEP) implementation is not available but is needed to provide evidence-based prevention measures.[22]
- Data on the effectiveness of statewide programs that are universally (or near universally) implemented, such as Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), and Inclusionary Practices.
- More data on the mental health of students, such as a statewide school climate survey. (Districts currently opt in for school climate surveys through a private company, Panorama Education.) The data from the Healthy Youth Survey, a partnership with the University of Washington, is important and heavily relied on, but other data, such as universal screenings that some school districts implement on their own, are not statewide and the data is not necessarily shared with the state. Data on disciplinary actions is often available, but is not an effective proxy for students' mental and behavioral health.
- Data and research about caregiver, family, and community well-being. For example, how do impacts on student well-being impact community and caregiver well-being and vice versa and how does this help us to understand ongoing pandemic impacts?
- What kind of high-dose tutoring can help students who have fallen behind catch up?
- What is the effect of mobility between schools and districts on foster kids' learning?
- What are the lessons learned from the use of federal ESSER funds to support community-based organizations. Are there best practices that could be scaled?
- Do the post-secondary outcomes of 2020-2023 high school grads differ greatly from those who did not receive waivers? How prevalent were waivers?

Moving forward

Interviewees shared a range of thoughts on addressing ongoing social, emotional, and academic impacts from the pandemic, including the challenges preventing progress. They cited the importance of collaboration and partnership, the need for ongoing professional development, and the urgency of continuing to address equity in classrooms and schools. Finally, nearly all interviewees said there was a need for additional funding to address ongoing pandemic impacts. More than one respondent pointed out that the response to the pandemic at all levels of government and society demonstrated the potential of large systems to change and adapt quickly when needed.

The project team heard about a large and diverse number of programs and approaches being applied across the state to address pandemic impacts. Because Washington is a local control state, districts and schools are generally free to implement the approaches they want. OSPI gives broad guidance and supports some statewide approaches and programs (see Appendix B: Specific programs mentioned by interviewees) but does not dictate what programs districts implement. The result, as some interviewees noted, is a proliferation of approaches and programs in school buildings and districts across the state.

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[22] An IEP is a formal plan that details the special education services and supports a school will provide to meet the unique needs of a student with a disability, including specially designed instruction.

In theory, this proliferation of approaches could create opportunities for experimentation and testing of ideas. However, as interviewees noted there tend to be few resources and capacities to monitor, evaluate, and learn from approaches at the district and school level and there are also not many forums for sharing what is working and what is not among districts and schools. Approaches rolled out by regional educational service districts (ESD) seem to be better able to support evaluation, where there is at least some capacity for this, according to some interviewees.

The importance of collaboration and partnership

Collaboration and state leadership were cited by many interviewees as being important for addressing pandemic impacts equitably. Interviewees expressed a strong interest in addressing ongoing pandemic impacts through increased collaboration with organizations outside of the K-12 system, such as healthcare institutions, nonprofits, philanthropists, community-based organizations, and researchers.

Several respondents gave examples of collaboration and leadership that are working, including monthly webinars hosted by the Superintendent of Public Instruction, consortiums of districts meeting regionally across the state, and OSPI's statewide multi-tiered systems of support. Other respondents felt there could be more spaces for collaboration and connection. For example, working with research partners at the state level. OSPI is well placed to create additional opportunities for collaboration and sharing, some stated, but doesn't have sufficient bandwidth.

Many respondents emphasized the importance of collaboration between schools and their broader community to better support students and families. Other interviewees spoke of the importance of supporting what some called the broader 'civic infrastructure,' of their communities, the network of engaged residents, nonprofits, community-based organizations, supportive local governments, and associations in communities. If this civic infrastructure is robust, interviewees said, it can provide a major leg up to schools and students, who may benefit from increased numbers of volunteers, after-school activities, fundraising potential, community partnerships, and other supports. If the civic infrastructure is lacking, schools and their students will likely suffer. In lower-income communities, a strong civic infrastructure and partnership with schools can help to fill in some of the gaps where schools are unable to respond.

As some interviewees pointed out, some families may need advocates to help in leveling disparities in their social capital, a role that schools can help to fill by offering gathering space and pulling in social services. Local school buildings, some interviewees said, are often the heart of a community.

The importance of collaboration and partnership between schools and other organizations that work with children and youth, was mentioned by several interviewees, who also noted that in many cases it is not happening as well as it could. Community mental healthcare, youth summer camps, before-and-after-school programs, and learning enrichment programs have the potential to contribute significantly to addressing mental and behavioral health and socialization issues for youth, several interviewees noted. Many before-and-after-school programs and community-based organizations are interested in increased collaboration with schools and districts to improve social, emotional, and academic outcomes for students, they said. Childcare and after-school care providers can provide important opportunities for students to learn about social and emotional health, find a sense of belonging, and build important social skills, they said. Parent Teacher Student Associations were also identified by some interviewees as opportunities to build stronger relationships between schools, students, and families.

Many respondents emphasized the importance of collaboration between the K-12 system and healthcare providers, including healthcare-oriented nonprofits. Some interviewees expressed interest in learning from exemplars in the state that have established productive partnerships with community healthcare providers.

Interventions in school buildings and classrooms
Collaboration among educators was seen as important by many interviewees, particularly sharing what works and what doesn't in the classroom with each other. Some of the ideas mentioned were facilitated processes to share lessons learned, "Learning Fridays" for teachers in the same building to share learning, and professional development opportunities. Other interviewees expressed interest in successful programs and interventions in other states that could be applied in Washington. Intensive and targeted tutoring, longer school days, and longer school years were mentioned by several interviewees as possible approaches that can help students' catch up academically.

Some interviewees spoke of the importance of elementary, middle school, and high school teachers connecting with each other to enable the K-12 system as an integrated pathway for students. In addition, they emphasized the importance of connecting with higher education.

Some respondents said that math skills are a strong indicator of college attendance and future professional success. Targeted instruction and high-dose tutoring, they said, could do more to support students. Others said that interventions should be made during the regular school day and year if they are going to be equitable and ensure students get the help they need. Some interviewees said that summer school is helping students improve their math skills.

Some interviewees asked what could be done to address teacher burnout, such as job sharing or other kinds of more flexible arrangements.

Part of the learning for students, several interviewees noted, is learning how to be part of a community, recognize their own emotions, and seek help when they need it. Some interviewees were concerned about the lack of access to mental health services for students, particularly in middle school, and asked whether an increased focus on social and emotional learning in middle school could help. Others are interested in teaching students skills like empathy and how to lower their cortisol levels.

Still other interviewees said that increasing funding for dual credit programs could improve college readiness and increase the confidence of students and help students recover academically from pandemic learning loss.

Social connection and student voice

Many interviewees spoke of the importance of encouraging student voice and agency as a critical aspect of school and K-12 governance, but also in initiatives to address pandemic recovery. Engaging students meaningfully in addressing pandemic-related issues, they felt, could itself be a part of addressing pandemic impacts by engaging students in relevant real-world problem-solving and peer support related to the issues that they are experiencing, increasing their commitment to addressing those impacts, and unearthing new solutions and approaches that better engage them. Some interviewees noted that local school boards have doubled their student representatives. Students shared examples of student designed and led peer mental health initiatives that are helping to address the needs of students. Both students and educators noted the importance and success of these programs.

The need for additional funding

The response to the pandemic was a society-wide effort and interviewees emphasized that schools played a vital role. Districts and schools developed or expanded a wide range of partnerships with healthcare providers, nonprofits, funders, and community-based organizations during the Covid -19 pandemic that were essential in serving the needs of students, particularly those who are "at risk" or have special needs or disabilities. ESSER funds helped to sustain many of these partnerships, but with the end of ESSER funds, many schools lost essential community partnerships for supporting their students. Without additional funding, many interviewees said, it may be difficult to sustain existing programs to support recovery from pandemic impacts, much less expand or improve on them.

Interviewees mentioned several funding needs, including the need to pay paraeducators and principals more, support and train teachers who want to become principals, fully fund special education, and reestablish the gains made in digital equity during the pandemic, which have not been sustained. Some interviewees said that community-based organizations supporting effective programs to support equity efforts need funding to evaluate their work and scale programs.

In addition, some interviewees expressed concern with the state's current funding model, which they said favors schools in wealthier communities, while schools in less wealthy neighborhoods often have more need for resources to address learning gaps and other issues.

Recommendations

Interviewees emphasized that urgent and durable action is needed to address the lingering impacts of Covid and there is a need to prioritize initiatives that address underlying issues of equity. Interviewees also supported increasing opportunities to share information about what is working well, discuss challenges, and create or enhance networks that can provide guidance and stimulate innovation.

The significance and extent of ongoing pandemic impacts requires a response at the scale and scope of the challenges. Because of the systemic nature of the issues, a holistic and creative response that involves coordination among diverse interventions and enhances approaches by multiple actors at state and local levels is needed. For example, many students need mental health services, but schools do not have enough funding to provide services to each student who could benefit from them, nor are there enough funded providers. Interviewees described several examples of partnership and coordination between school districts, individual schools, health centers, mental health and culturally responsive providers, before-and-after-school providers, community-based organizations, and others to provide mental health services for students. Other interviewees described successful peer-to-peer initiatives, some initiated by students, to address mental health issues and belonging. By working together, schools and their surrounding communities can maximize resources, serve more students, and have a greater impact.

The following are potential priorities for action based on input from interviewees for policymakers, state agency staff, others in the K-12 system, and their partners.

1. **Develop a statewide, locally adaptable initiative or initiatives to address the ongoing social, emotional, and behavioral impacts of the pandemic on children and youth**
   The initiative would create a shared vision and a statewide framework for strategies that could enhance collaborative learning and direct actions that address the on-going pandemic impacts on children and youth. It would elevate the issues, breakdown silos, and enrich shared knowledge about what is working. The initiative could focus efforts on meeting the needs of the children and youth who are most impacted by the pandemic. The initiative could be led by a single entity (for example, OSPI) or a consortium of entities working together. It could be funded through a combination of public and philanthropic funding. The statewide framework could provide focused recommendations for schools to consider based on shared learning about ways to address on-going impacts. Potential recommendations that reflect what was learned in this project include:
   - Create and/or maintain partnerships between schools, health organizations, community organizations, and before-and-after-school programs to collaboratively identify what is needed to address ongoing pandemic impacts, including coordinating services and aligning programming to better tend to students' needs. Convene conversations among schools and caregivers to get input into what children and youth need to address the on-going impacts.
   - Create opportunities for and support peer-to-peer and youth-driven initiatives that improve mental health, develop skills in conflict mediation/resolution, and provide youth with agency to discuss and problem-solve about how to address the issues they are facing
   - Expand initiatives to address all forms of trauma and incorporate trauma awareness in programs and curricula for all students in the K-12 system that need it

- Emphasize programs and approaches that strengthen belonging and build social cohesion in the school
- Identify and continue to implement school-based programs that provide students with the developmental skills needed to engage and communicate with others and develop self-esteem

2. **Develop a comprehensive state strategy on equity utilizing the [“Equity Can't-Wait” report](#) to enable a more just and equitable K-12 system**
This strategy could be incorporated into the statewide initiative. It is important to consider how students' social, economic, and cultural differences impact their educational needs and how the educational environment and educational services might be designed to respond to them. For example, how schools might employ culturally responsive strategies and methods to address the needs of specific groups and individuals, including English language learners and with Black, Native American, Latino, and Pacific Islander students. In addition, it is important to understand how students' social and economic realities were affected by the pandemic and what interventions are needed to address the ongoing impacts of the pandemic in a way that enables all students to thrive.
- Recommit to addressing digital equity
- Commit to and expand culturally responsive educational methods to address historically marginalized students

3. **Develop, implement, and expand targeted and individualized academic interventions, including tutoring, summer school, and after-school programs, for the children and youth that need it most, from kindergarten through post-secondary**. **This could include:**
- Tutoring that targets those who need it most
- Summer learning programs
- Pre-college summer programs in math and writing for students enrolling in community and technical colleges and universities who need remedial help

4. **Invest in and support programs that enhance healthy, diverse, and skilled educators and administrators, including expanding initiatives to address all forms of trauma and incorporate trauma awareness in programs and curricula for all staff that need it in the K-12 system**. **Ideas include:**
- Provide funding for additional assistant principal positions to relieve principals' workload
- Expand initiatives to address all forms of trauma and incorporate trauma awareness in programs and curricula for all staff in the K-12 system that need it
- Recruit and retain a diverse teacher pipeline (per the "Equity Can't Wait" study)
- Provide professional development opportunities for educators and administrators to share experiences and approaches and learn from professionals, for example, about how to better address challenging student behaviors
- Convene a group to identify how to improve workforce development to address need for educators, principals, specialists, and superintendents
- Look for opportunities to increase work flexibility for teachers, for example, through job shares
- Provide funding to support and maintain peer learning, for example through the associations of principals, social workers, school nurses, and other K-12 staff

5. **Identify what has been working across the state, provide opportunities to share approaches, and scale the most promising practices**
   - Organize a forum or series of forums for educators, administrators, and researchers to share and discuss what is working well, findings from research, where there are research gaps, and what programs, frameworks, and strategies schools and districts are using and what is working and not working
   - Identify approaches that are successfully addressing the social, emotional, and academic impacts of the pandemic, particularly for those children and youth who are most impacted; determine which approaches could be readily scaled; and roll out the most promising practices where they are most needed

6. **Identify lessons learned, needs, and practical approaches to address education and service needs for children and youth with disabilities in emergencies to incorporate into emergency plans and policies and to improve current conditions**
   - Convene a workgroup to identify lessons learned, needs, and practical approaches to address education and service needs for kids with disabilities in emergencies (to incorporate into emergency plans and policies and to make improvements in current conditions)

7. **Develop a campaign for schools and districts to more effectively engage with local communities and rebuild trust in the public school system**
   - Develop a partnership among state universities, community-based organizations, state agencies, philanthropy, and others to identify and implement strategies to rebuilt trust in the public school system

Appendices

Appendix A: Interviewee List

Name	Title	Affiliation	Location
Aaron Fletcher	Principal	Liberty High School; Association of Washington School Principals	Spangle, WA
Adrienne Johnson	Preschool Instructional Assistant	Lowell Elementary Race and Equity Team	Seattle, WA
Aimee Allen	Head of School	Harbor Montessori School; Washington Federation of Independent Schools	Gig Harbor, WA
Allison Soules	Head of School	Matheia School; Washington Federation of Independent Schools	Seattle, WA
Amy Cast	School Board Director	North Shore School District	King & Snohomish counties
Anita Koyier-Mwamba	Manager of Black Education	Seattle Public Schools	Seattle, WA
Brian Jeffries	Policy Director	Washington Roundtable/ Partnership for Learning	Seattle, WA
Bryanna Pearson	Teacher	Lowell Elementary Race Equity Team	Seattle, WA
Carlecia Bell	President	Phenomenal She	Federal Way, WA
Carlina Brown-Banks	Deputy Director	Community Center for Education Results	Seattle, WA
Cathy Raye Hyland	Head of School	Community Montessori; Washington Federation of Independent Schools	Tacoma, WA
Charlie Davis	President and CEO	YMCA of Pierce and Kitsap Counties	Pierce & Kitsap Counties
Christine Griffin	Program Coordinator	Hands and Voices	Bellingham, WA
Christy Johnson	Development Director	Saint Patrick Catholic School; Washington Federation of Independent Schools	Pasco, WA
Craig Mattson	Principal	Northwest Christian School; Washington Federation of Independent Schools	Puyallup, WA
Crystal Goodwin	Assistant Principal	Glacier Middle School; Association of Washington School Principals	Buckley, WA
Damien Pattenaude	Superintendent	Renton School District	Renton, WA
Dan Goldhaber	Director	UW Center for Education Data and Research	Seattle, WA
Dawn Rains	CEO	Treehouse for Kids	Seattle, WA
Debbie Schindler	Head of School	Pacific Christian Academy; Washington Federation of Independent Schools	Federal Way, WA
Dixie Grunenfelder	Executive Director	OSPI Student Engagement and Support	Olympia, WA
Donald Felder	Administrator	Seattle Public Schools (Former)	Seattle, WA
Eric Stultz	CFO	Lake Washington Girls Middle School; Washington Federation of Independent Schools	Seattle, WA

Erin Hart	Superintendent	Three Rivers Christian School; Washington Federation of Independent Schools	Longview, WA
Erin McKee	Principal	Cougar Mountain Middle School; Association of Washington School Principals	Issaquah, WA
Erin Okuno	Director	Governor's Office of the Education Ombudsman	Seattle, WA
Henry Strom	Executive Director	OSPI Office of Native Education	Olympia, WA
Isaac Kwakye	Director of Research and Student Success	Washington Student Achievement Council	Olympia, WA
James Layman	Director	Association of Washington Student Leaders	Spokane, WA
Jen Sandvig	Childcare Director	Sagebrush Montessori; Washington Federation of Independent Schools	Richland, WA
Jessica Vavrus	Executive Director	Association of Educational Service Districts	Tumwater, WA
Jill McCormick	Program Director	Partnership for Action, Voices, and Empowerment	Tacoma, WA
Jim Buss	Head of School	Ebenezer Christian School; Washington Federation of Independent Schools	Lynden, WA
Jim Kowalkowski	Executive Director	Rural Education Center; Davenport School District	Lincoln County
John Welch	Superintendent	Puget Sound Educational Service District	Renton, WA
Joshua Murphy	Instructional Coach	Cedar Heights Middle School	Covington, WA
Karen Hedine	CEO	YMCA of Walla Walla County	Walla Walla County
Katya Miltimore	Executive Director	Boys and Girls Clubs of Washington	Olympia, WA
Kelley Boyd	Principal	Coulee-Hartline School District; AWSP	Coulee City, WA
Kevin Jacka	CEO	The Rural Alliance	Deer Park, WA
Krestin Bahr	Superintendent	Peninsula School District	Gig Harbor, WA
Lacey Griffiths	Assistant Principal	RA Long High School; Association of Washington School Principals	Longview, WA
Lacy Fehrenbach	Chief of Prevention	Washington State Department of Health	Olympia, WA
Leonard Forsman	Board President	Tribal Leaders Congress on Education	Port Madison Reservation
Lisa Dallas	Principal	Adna Elementary School; Association of Washington School Principals	Chehalis, WA
Maddy Thompson	Senior Policy Advisor, Education	Governor's Office	Olympia, WA
Marilee Hill-Anderson	Community Engagement Director	Sumner-Bonney Lake School District	Pierce County
Marissa Rathbone	Director of Strategic Advisory	Washington State School Directors' Association	Olympia, WA
Michelle Sorenson	Leadership Coordinating Team Member	Washington Association of School Social Workers	Seattle, WA
Mikael Olson	President	Washington State Association of School Psychologists	Spokane, WA
Mike Meotti	Executive Director	Washington Student Achievement Council	Olympia, WA
Molly Butler	Assistant Principal	Wenatchee High School; Association of Washington School Principals	Wenatchee, WA

Nancy Caroll	Assistant Principal	West Seattle High School	Seattle, WA
Natalie Turner-Depue	Director	WSU Child and Family Research Unit	Pullman, WA
Pam Kohlmeier	Policy Manager	Washington Medical Commission	Tumwater, WA
Pam Schwartz	Principal	St. Catherine of Sienna School; Washington Federation of Independent Schools	Seattle, WA
Patrick Vincent	Principal	Union Gap K-8 School; Association of Washington School Principals	Union Gap, WA
Paul Bootsma	Superintendent	Lynden Christian School; Washington Federation of Independent Schools	Lynden, WA
Paul Francis	Executive Director	State Board for Community and Technical Colleges	Olympia, WA
Paul Tran	Teacher	Lowell Elementary Race and Equity Team	Seattle, WA
Rae Richardson	Teacher	Lowell Elementary Race and Equity Team	Seattle, WA
Randy Spaulding	Executive Director	Washington State Board of Education	Olympia, WA
Renae Young	Principal	Yakima Adventist Christian School; Washington Federation of Independent Schools	Yakima, WA
Rosario Ortiz	Director	Casey Family Programs	Seattle, WA
Roz Thompson	Director of Government Relations	Association of Washington School Principals	Olympia, WA
Scott Friedman	Associate Director	Association of Washington School Principals	Olympia, WA
Scott Seaman	Executive Director	Association of Washington School Principals	Olympia, WA
Shelby Leyland	Music Teacher	Lowell Elementary Race and Equity Team	Seattle, WA
Stacy Dym	Executive Director	The Arc of WA	Seattle, WA
Susan Enfield	Superintendent	Highline School District (Former)	Burien, WA
Suzie Hanson	Executive Director	Washington Federation of Independent Schools	Seattle, WA
Taanvi Arekapudi	Student; Youth Mental Health Advocate	Inglemoor High School	Kenmore, WA
Tamera Marcoe	Assistant Principal	Hunt Elementary; Association of Washington School Principals	Puyallup, WA
Tania May	Assistant Superintendent	OSPI Special Education	Olympia, WA
Tawni Barlow	Director of Student Services	Medical Lake School District; Association of Washington School Principals	Medical Lake, WA
Thomasina Rogers	Principal	Ridgetop Middle School; Association of Washington School Principals	Silverdale, WA
Tona McGuire	Pediatric Psychologist	Health Support Team, LLC; UW SMART Center	Seattle, WA
Tracie Hoppis	Manager of Family Support Services	Washington Statewide Parent to Parent	Yakima, WA
Virginia Herrera-Paramo	Executive Director	Para Los Ninos	Burien, WA
Willie Seals III	Senior Director of Programs	Ace Academy	Seattle, WA
Winston Bell	Director	Everybody Can Win	Federal Way, WA

Student Interviewees: The Association of Washington Student Leaders

Name	Affiliation	Location
Aiden Shoote	Battle Ground High School	Battle Ground, WA
Bharat Dwivedi	Eastlake High School	Sammamish, WA
Brooke Berry	Stanwood High School	Stanwood, WA
Jeffrey Anton	Union High School	Vancouver, WA
Kyani Chen	Lindbergh High School	Renton, WA
Lanai Kleckley	Marysville Getchell High School	Marysville, WA
Railey Lamb	Kennewick High School	Kennewick, WA
Shivali Panda	Lake Washington High School	Kirkland, WA
Varnika Bhargava	Redmond High School	Redmond, WA
Vince Schile	Sehome High School	Bellingham, WA

Appendix B: Specific programs mentioned by interviewees

Statewide programs

- Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) is a framework supported by OSPI statewide to support student needs along a continuum and was mentioned by nearly all interviewees, most of whom spoke positively of the program. Tier One is the foundation and supports most students. Tier Two is for students with additional needs and Tier Three supports students who need the most intensive support. In terms of the MTSS, about 80% of children are at Tier One, about 10% are at Tier Two, and about 10% are at Tier Three, according to some interviewees. See the OSPI website for additional information (https://ospi.k12.wa.us/student-success/support-programs/multi-tiered-system-supports-mtss). MTSS is supported by a framework called Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), a school-wide to establish the social and behavioral supports students need for the school to be a positive learning environment. PBIS has been found by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy to be a highly cost effective intervention, offering direct, indirect, and long-term benefits for participants, taxpayers, and others (see https://www.wsipp.wa.gov/BenefitCost/Program/540 for details). The UW's SMART Center's Interconnected Systems Framework, an enhancement of PBIS, was also mentioned by some interviewees.
    - Across the state, districts don't have the programs necessary to support the children with the highest needs, several interviewees stated. More funding is needed to provide professional development to educators, staff, and administrators in administering MTSS effectively, some said.
    - Medical Lake School District was mentioned as a possible exemplar of MTSS implementation by some interviewees. It has layered mental health on its tiered system. Within MTSS, 80% of all students are successful at Tier One. About 15% of students are at Tier Two, and about 5% of students are at Tier Three. The system functions in a structured, predictable way. There are universal screenings to determine which students need more support. Medical Lake includes students, parents, and staff members in their program. You should go to visit their wellness center.
- Inclusionary practices seek to develop sustainable systems, structures, and practices that support all students with meaningful access and engagement in inclusive learning environments, with a focus on children with disabilities, which many interviewees referenced. OSPI has a Technical Assistance Network, the Association for Educational Service Districts has a professional learning network (https://www.waesd.org/aesd-professional-learning-network/inclusionary-practices-project/), and the Washington Association of School Administrators provides professional learning and support to district-level leadership teams (https://wasa-oly.org/wasa/Inclusion/About/WASA/5_0_Professional_Development/Events/PD_Workshops/Inclusionary_Practices/About.aspx).
    - Ruby Bridges Elementary School (Northshore School District) was mentioned by some interviewees as an example of a school that was designed to be fully inclusive. The school serves many students with significant intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), including students who are nonverbal. There are no segregated spaces, and special education is embedded into general education. Example: the Picture Exchange Communication System (PEX) is used. The schools have inclusionary practice demonstration sites that are open to visitors (https://ippdemosites.org/).
- Project Education Impact (https://www.wtb.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/2022.05.25WorkforceBoardPresentation-PDF.pdf) is a collaborative effort

to "Achieve educational parity for students experiencing foster care and/or homelessness from pre-K through post-secondary education, and close the disparities between racial groups by 2027."

- Education Advocates (https://ospi.k12.wa.us/sites/default/files/2022-12/ea_manual.pdf) work at grade level with students on the Tier 2 watch list or students with specific issues, such as those who have been previously incarcerated. They check in with students and families to work on specific problems. See also the Education Ombuds (https://www.oeo.wa.gov/en/education-issues/education-advocacy
- Efforts to increase student voice were mentioned by many interviewees, for example, empowering students to develop content for assemblies, doubling student representatives on school boards, superintendent advisory committees with students at all levels through the Washington State School District Administrators' (WSSDA) student representative network. See Washington Association of School Administrators Establishing Structures for Student Voice report 2022 and Best Practices for Elevating Student Voice 2022 and Association of Washington School Principals Authentic Student Voice in School Governance
- The Children and Youth Behavioral Health Work Group (CYBHWG) was created by the Legislature in 2016 and its work was extended in 2020 through 2026. The work group includes legislators, state agencies, health care providers, tribal governments, community behavioral health services, advocates, and other organizations, as well as youth and young people who have received services and parents of children and youth who have received services." It "provides recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature to improve behavioral health services and strategies for children, youth, young adults, and their families.
- The Educational Staff Association Behavioral Health Coalition was created in 2016, but really got to work post-pandemic, according to interviewees. The coalition is "a grassroots advocacy group with members representing the Washington State Association of School Psychologists (WSASP), the Washington School Counselor Association (WSCA), the Washington Association of School Social Workers (WASSW), the School Nurse Organization of Washington (SNOW), the Washington Association for Behavior Analysis (WABA), the Washington Speech-Language-Hearing Association (WSLHA), and the Washington Occupational Therapy Association (WOTA)." The coalition created a reference guide for the roles of behavioral health professionals specific to social and emotional health and wellness and provides support and services to students.

Regional and local programs
- YMCA of Pierce and Kitsap Counties
  - Bridge of Hope Program (https://www.ymcapkc.org/blog/view-bridge-hope) whose "purpose is to gather people within Pierce and Kitsap Counties who desire to increase civility, understanding, hope, and trust by participating in meaningful civil dialogue around complex issues with those of differing experience and perspectives."
  - Camp and outdoor recreation programs can contribute to socialization and breaking down isolation.
  - Safety around water program: an 8-week course that has improved participants' attendance, behavioral issues, and grades.
  - Power scholars is a summer program designed to address academic and social learning.
- SPERO, a program out of Vancouver, WA, focuses on anxiety and school avoidance. It starts at the student's door. Within a matter of weeks, the program can demonstrate remarkable results. Students often return to school within six weeks

- Some interviewees mentioned family resource centers (FRCs), place-based organizations that provide a single point of entry to a range of services for anyone in the community, including families experiencing homelessness. "FRCs provide information, assess needs, make referrals to family services, and provide direct delivery of family services by FRC staff or contracted providers. FRCs are welcoming and strengths-based and are designed to meet the needs, cultures, and interests of the communities served. Some family resource centers are school, or school district based."[23]
- AVID (Advancement by Individual Determination https://www.avid.org/) was mentioned by some interviewees. "AVID's mission is to close the opportunity gap by preparing all students for college and career readiness and success in a global society."
- WSU Center for Trauma Education and Community Health (C-TEaCH, does not yet have a website as of 2-13-2025) (Formerly the WSU Child and Family Research Unit.) The Collaborative Learning for Educational Achievement (CLEAR) program https://extension.wsu.edu/clear/ pairs schools with a coach for three years. The program, adapted from ARC (attachment, self-regulation, and competency) focuses on trauma awareness and trauma-informed approaches for educators, and often transforms disciplinary practices. The program is adapted to the unique needs of each school.)
- University of Washington Center for Educational Leadership, mentioned by several interviewees (https://www.washington.edu/research/research-centers/center-for-educational-leadership/), partners "with courageous leaders in classrooms, schools, and the systems that support them to eliminate educational inequalities by creating cultures of rigorous teaching, leading, and learning."
- Open Doors for Multi-Cultural Families (https://opendoorswa.org/) supports "culturally and linguistically diverse people with disabilities and their families to receive the services they need."
- The Center for Educational Effectiveness (https://www.effectiveness.org/) offers research and consulting services to a wide range of K-12 actors to address equity and educational effectiveness.

Community-based providers

Many districts and schools hire local community-based organizations to help them address specific needs or concerns in their district or school.

- Nexus: Mental Health Hub for Schools (https://www.nexusforschools.com/) is a by youth and for youth online mental health resource being used by several districts in Washington.

Private providers

- Panorama Education (https://www.panoramaed.com/) provides data and student support tools, including a school climate survey mentioned by some interviewees.
- Character Strong (https://characterstrong.com/) is "An evidence-based, multi-tiered solution to support whole child success. Curricula and trainings…improve behavior, increase safety, and support mental health."
- The Math Agency (https://themathagency.com/) uses small-group coaching, combined with family and classroom engagement to accelerate student learning. According to some interviewees, several Title 1 schools in the Seattle and Bellevue area worked with the Math Agency to improve student math skills in third through fifth grade using existing resources.

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After-school providers
- Boys and Girls Clubs of Washington (http://www.washingtonclubs.org/) is in year three of a mental health pilot project. They trained 1,000 staff to be "behavioral health support specialists" to support kids and other staff. They teamed up with the Paxis Institute (https://www.paxis.org/school-based-programming/).

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