

We work with families, communities, and schools to address problems together so that every student can fully participate and thrive in Washington's K-12 public schools.



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We listen. We inform. We help solve problems. Phone: 1-866-297-2597 Web: www.oeo.wa.gov



Annual Report 2023-2024

September 1, 2024

TO: The Honorable Jay Inslee, Governor
Chris Reykdal, Superintendent of Public Instruction
Randy Spaulding, Executive Director of the State Board of Education
Members of the Legislature

Thank you for the opportunity to serve the 1,073,794 K-12 students in Washington State. Our office fills an important role of supporting students and families, educators, and the public in ensuring students can access their Washington State constitutionally guaranteed public education.

We understand the gravity of this work. This year we know of three current or former clients, all students of color, who died due to preventable situations. I don't write this to call for sympathy—sympathy doesn't solve problems. Students deserve whole and well communities to obtain their education. The responsibility of fostering and perpetuating whole and healthy communities is a responsibility that belongs to all of us. The recommendations listed in this report will help to move systems to serving students in better ways. I sincerely hope to never have to write about losing students again in an annual report; K-12 education is about launching youth into their grown lives.

In 2023-24 we managed 1,400 cases. This represents a 15% increase over the previous fiscal year. Within these cases are stories of students from across the state who needed help accessing public education. Sometimes the questions were straightforward – how to find a key piece of information, or help understanding education jargon. In many other cases, the questions were complex, and the solution involved bringing multiple people together to find solutions. Our Ombuds are skilled, knowledgeable, and patient in supporting parents to ensure their problems are understood and resolved. The data shared in the report will demonstrate the complexity of our office and the cases we handle. It also lays out some potential solutions to address some of the problems clients bring to us. Preventing problems is the more ethical and effective way of providing education.

We look forward to working with you in the coming year.

Erin Okuno Director

Who We Are

Mission

We work with families, communities, and schools to address problems collaboratively so that every student can fully participate and thrive in Washington's K-12 public schools.

What we do

OEO listens, shares information and referrals, and works informally with families, communities, and schools to address concerns so that every student can fully participate and thrive in our state's public schools. OEO is committed to providing accessible processes, including disability-related accommodations, and providing support in multiple languages. To get help or learn more about what OEO does, please visit our website: https://www.oeo.wa.gov/en; email oeoinfo@gov.wa.gov, or call: 1-866-297-2597 (interpretation services are available).

The Team

Erin Okuno, MPA - Director

Yordanos Gebreamlak, MSW; Language proficiency: Tigrinya - Deputy Director

Brittni Thompson, MEd in Guidance and Counseling - Senior Education Ombuds

<u>Danielle Eidenberg, MIT – ELL, Anthropology, English, K-8; Parent Coach Certification - Senior Education Ombuds</u>

Karin Mendez, MEd – Bilingual Education; Language proficiency: Spanish - Senior Education Ombuds

<u>Carla Rogenmuser, Micro Masters Certification in Leading Educational Innovation and Improvement; Language proficiency: Conversational American Sign</u> Language - Senior Education Ombuds

Nadine Philp, MS – Associate Education Ombuds

Stephanie Palmquist, BA Spanish & Video Production; Language proficiency: Spanish - Media and Database Coordinator and Public Records Officer

Tamika Dean, AA Legal Administration - Community Engagement Specialist

Support OEO by doing the following:

- SHARE OEO with your networks of parents, educators, and anyone who is in touch with public school students in Washington
- SUBSCRIBE to our mailing list to learn more about OEO
- PREFER families who need support to OEO
- INVITE OEO to meet with your community, we offer presentations or can provide a resource table at an event

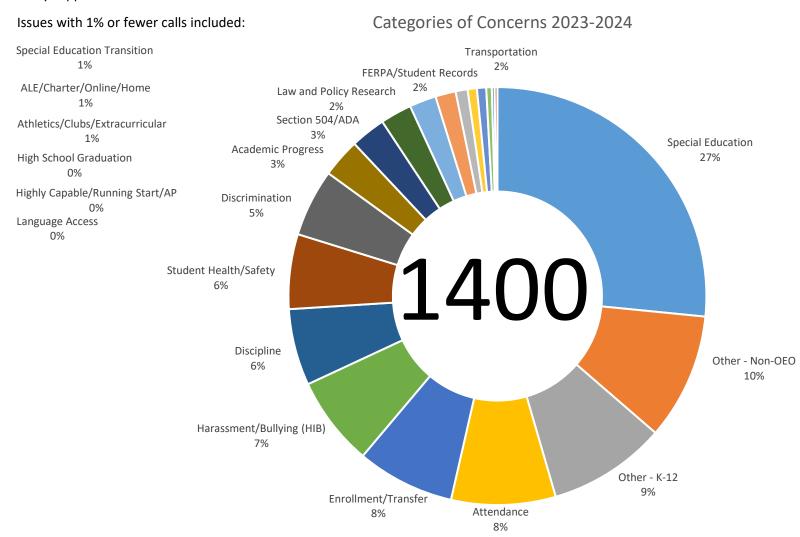
2023-2024 Data Overview

OEO received a total of **1,400** education-related concerns during the 2023-2024 school year, the highest number of concerns per year in OEO's history.

The primary categories of callers' questions were **Special Education**, **Other – Non-OEO***, **Other – K-12***, **Attendance**, **Enrollment/Transfer**, and **Harassment/Bullying** (HIB).

Supports for students with disabilities continue to be the biggest concerns reported to OEO via case categories of special education, special education transition, and Section 504/ADA, which accounted for 423 of the cases opened during 2023-2024.

*Other-Non-OEO concerns included accessing archived school records, higher education issues, non-public agencies, personnel issues, and incorrect referrals for family support services.



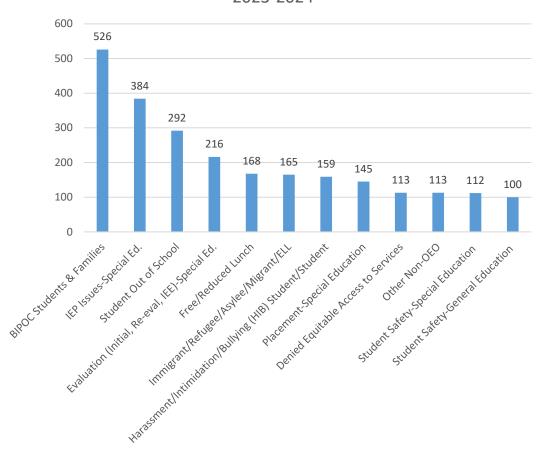
Strategic Populations

OEO's strategic plan focuses on students that have been historically furthest from educational justice. OEO serves all students/callers who reach out to our agency. We target our outreach and triage cases to ensure clients from strategic priority groups receive support.

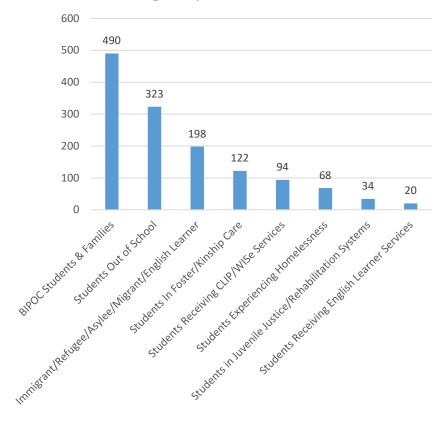
The chart to the right shows the number of strategic plan families served in 2023-2024.

Of the 1,400 concerns brought to OEO during the past year, **793 involved OEO's 2023-2024 strategic plan populations.**

Top Contributing Factors for Strategic Populations 2023-2024



Strategic Populations 2023-2024



The primary concern within most of OEO's strategic plan populations was **special education**. For students experiencing **homelessness** their primary concern was **enrollment/transfer**.

Many of the families and students within the strategic plan populations were part of two or more specific populations.

Many concerns included two or more contributing factors.

How People Contacted OEO:

During 2023-2024, 69% of concerns were reported to OEO through OEO's toll-free phone number or email. OEO offers phone interpretation in 240+ languages for callers whose primary language is not English.

OEO's added additional languages to the online intake process, which is now available in 22 languages: **Amharic**, Arabic, Chinese Simplified, Chinese Traditional, **Dari**, English, **French**, **Hindi**, **Khmer**, Korean, Marshallese, **Pashto**, Punjabi, Russian, **Samoan**, Somali, Spanish, **Swahili**, Tagalog, **Tigrinya**, Ukrainian and Vietnamese. (Bolded languages were added in 2023-24.)

436 concerns were submitted via the online intake form. The online intake is available at: https://services.oeo.wa.gov/oeo. OEO continued to offer an online scheduling feature, which allows intake appointments to be scheduled for dates and times that are convenient for the client. 200 appointments were scheduled through this feature during the 2023-2024 academic year.

86% of the people who contacted OEO during 2023-2024 were families with concerns for their child's education, the other 14% of callers were community partners, educators, and the general public.

Language Access

7% of families contacting OEO spoke languages other than English in the home in 2023-2024. Those languages included: American Sign Language (ASL), Amharic, Arabic, Dari, Dutch, Farsi, Hindi, Korean, Mandarin, Oromo, Pashto, Portuguese, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Swahili, Tagalog, Tigrinya, Ukrainian, and Vietnamese.

1% of families requested phone interpretation in the following languages: Amharic, Arabic, Mandarin, Pashto, Portuguese, Somali, Spanish, Tigrinya, Ukrainian and Vietnamese.

Referrals to OEO:

Self-Referral: 45%

Community and Medical Professionals: 13%

OEO Website, Social Media, and Outreach events: 12%

Other: 12%

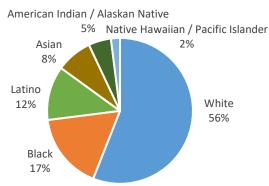
Other Parents/Friends: 7%

Organizations Supporting OEO Strategic Populations: 4%

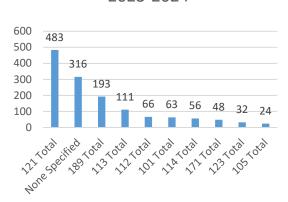
OSPI: 4%

Educators/School Professionals: 3%

Caller Race/Ethnicity 2023-2024



of Concerns by ESD 2023-2024



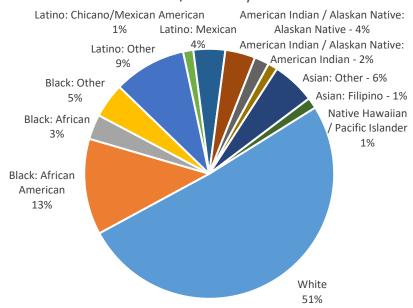
Location:

OEO received calls concerning students in all 9 Educational Service Districts across the state. Charter and Tribal School Concerns not included due to small n-size.

Top Issues by Student Race / Ethnicity

Not all callers provided student race/ethnicity information. Of that provided, we see the following race/ethnicity breakdown for students. See Appendix.

Student Race/Ethnicity 2023-2024



Student Race / Ethnicity	#1 Concern	#2 Concern	#3 Concern
American Indian / Alaskan Native	Special Education / Inclusion / Equitable Access 49%	Discipline 11%	Enrollment / Transfer 9%
Asian	Special Education / Inclusion / Equitable Access 36%	Harassment / Bullying (HIB) 19%	Discipline 9%
Black	Special Education / Inclusion / Equitable Access 40%	Attendance 10%	Discipline 10%
Latino	Special Education / Inclusion / Equitable Access 37%	Enrollment / Transfer 20%	Harassment / Bullying (HIB) 10%
Multi-Racial	Special Education / Inclusion / Equitable Access 39%	Attendance 10%	Enrollment / Transfer 9%
Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander	Special Education / Inclusion / Equitable Access 60%	Discrimination 20%	Inclusion / Equitable Access 20%
White	Special Education / Inclusion / Equitable Access 44%	Attendance 9%	Discipline 6%

Top Issues by Opportunity Gap Populations

The following chart identifies the top concerns reported to OEO from distinct Opportunity Gap Populations. While the top concern was Special Education across all groups, other concerns included Discipline, Enrollment/Transfer, Harassment/Bullying (HIB) and Attendance issues.

Opportunity Gap Populations	#1 Concern	#2 Concern	#3 Concern
Students with disabilities*	Special Education/Inclusion/Equitable Access: 48%	Discipline: 8%	Attendance: 7%
Students who are linguistically diverse learners	Special Education/Inclusion/Equitable Access: 38%	Attendance: 10%	Harassment/Bullying (HIB): 8%
Students who are in foster or kinship care	Special Education/Inclusion/Equitable Access: 47%	Attendance: 11%	Enrollment/Transfer: 8%
Students who are experiencing homelessness	Enrollment/Transfer: 23%	Special Education / Inclusion/Equitable Access: 20%	Attendance: 13%
Students who are receiving free and reduced- price lunch	Special Education/Inclusion/Equitable Access: 36%	Attendance: 9%	Harassment/Bullying (HIB): 9%

^{*}For Students with Disabilities, within the top concern of Special Education/Inclusion/Equitable Access, focus was on IEP Issues, Students Out of School, Evaluations, and Placement.

Policy Recommendations

OEO aggregates client information, trends, and data to come up with policy recommendations. These recommendations are made in consideration of the complaints we received and thinking about ways to prevent future problems.

Overarching recommendations

• Provide educators with high quality training and support around child development, family engagement and communicating with families of color, trauma informed practices. The goal is to support students by having educators adjusting their teaching practices to create inclusive learning environment for students – especially BIPOC students, students experiencing homelessness, juvenile justice involved, immigrant, in foster or kinship care, involved with other support systems, and students with disabilities.

Addressing violence and gun violence prevention

- Access to legally purchased and illegally procured guns is negatively impacting student's experiences and student's ability to learn. The prevalence of guns is creating unsafe environments inside and outside of schools. OEO recommends policymakers address gun access to improve the educational experience of students, educators, families, and the community.
- Gun culture is so prevalent students and educators are on hyper alert. This translates into students, especially students of color, being disciplined for behaviors as simple as making finger guns, gun sounds, unfounded or perceived threats related to guns, etc. OEO recommends dealing with gun access and gun violence overall to lower the prevalence of gun culture in schools and communities.
- Provide violence prevention and gang intervention training for school staff in community minded, non-punitive ways. Work with community-based organizations to holistically address community and student violence. Funding to make this possible needs to be prioritized at all levels of education funding.

Increase options for students who need intensive interventions to continue their education

- Increase options for students who need intensive interventions, including in-state residential education options. This will allow students to remain closer to home and provide more cost-effective options for school districts versus out of state placements. OEO's recommendation is always to keep students in school and to increase access in the least restrictive environment, however if a student needs an out of school placement, we urge the placements to be as close to their home as possible and for the shortest amount of time needed.
- Increase oversight, transparency, and accountability around programs that serve the most vulnerable K-12 students non-public agencies, ESD schools/programs, contracted services, and other programs that students are being placed into. Currently there is little public accountability over some of these educational placements and parents are unsure of where to turn for help.
- Students exiting in-patient medical treatment, including students in Children in Long-term Inpatient Program (CLIP) care, need stronger support transitioning back into K-12 public schools including working with schools to create flexible school schedules to allow for continued medical treatments and to stay on track to attain school credits.
- Provide mental health training and supports to school staff to address school avoidance and refusal.

Increase support for students with disabilities

- Shorten the timeline for IEP evaluations to be completed. OEO receives a high percentage of calls from parents asking about how to get their students evaluated for IEP services. A shorter timeline could help to help students to start receiving services quicker.
- Incentivize special education evaluations taking place outside of the traditional school year, targeting summer break, to allow students to start the school year with special education supports in place.
- Increase support for inclusion practices in schools for students with disabilities, versus pull-out services.
- Support for students with IEPs who are transitioning into kindergarten. Clearer uniform processes across the state and clear points of contact to ensure students' needs are met when they enter school.

Support educators in understanding how to deescalate students

- Provide educators with support around child development, trauma informed practices, understanding on how to adjust their teaching methods to create inclusive learning environments for students with disabilities and keep classroom conflicts at bay.
- Eliminate isolation in schools, instead investing in training, research, and supporting culture change in schools that create healthier alternatives to isolation.

Attendance

• Have clearer processes and understanding for concerned family and community members to report students not enrolled or attending school on a regular basis. This is important to find and retain students who may have 'disappeared' during the pandemic or could be at risk for child abuse or neglect. Build strong relationships with community-based organizations in this effort.

Work with Policy Committees and Stakeholder Groups

In addition to the annual report, OEO shares policy recommendations and serves on many Policy Committees and Stakeholder Groups, such as:

Becca Task Force

Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee (EOGOAC)

Kinship Care Oversight Committee (KCOC)

OSPI Truancy Workgroup

Project Education Impact Initiative

School Safety and Student Well-Being Advisory Committee

Social Emotional Learning Advisory Committee

Outreach to Families, Students, Educators, and Community Stakeholders 2023-2024

OEO outreach efforts to provide support to families, students, educators, and community stakeholders to promote educational access for students, especially students within the agency's strategic plan. We participated in over 100 events, including in-person presentations, workshops, clinics, webinars, and community fairs this year.

The agency has a focus on reaching rural communities by attending several in-person events. While our numbers have increased, OEO wants to ensure we are reaching families and students across the state. Examples of our in-person outreach includes a family resource fair at Eisenhower High School in Yakima, WA for students with disabilities and their families, Valley Cities Behavioral Health Clinics Youth Safety event which brought together community resources to support youth in the Kent area, and other events across the state. Our office worked with OSPI's Re-Envisioning Truancy Project as OSPI explores equitable truancy policies and practices needed for engaging and supporting youth to access their education. OEO partnered with DCYF to share information with regional education leads on navigating unique challenges that foster/kinship youth face in the education system. These are some examples of the opportunities we've had over the past year to engage with stakeholders in education and we look forward to future opportunities.

OEO Virtual Events

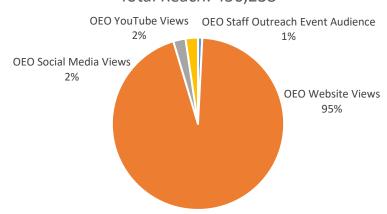
OEO launched our Virtual Events to share information about education topics including:

- 504 Plans and Individualized Education Programs
- Safety Planning Mental Health and Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying (HIB)
- McKinney Vento and Foster/Kinship Care Rights and Supports in Education
- Attendance
- Enrollment/Choice/Transfer Processes
- Grievance Process in the K-12 Public School System
- Language Access

These events provide an opportunity for community professionals, families, and educators to meet OEO staff, learn more about various topics and ask questions. OEO uses these events as part of our prevention and community building efforts. By providing upfront information to community providers, parents, and partners we can understand these parts of the K-12 education system.

Outreach Type	# Views
OEO Staff Outreach Event Audience Totals	3,656
OEO Website	431,478
OEO Social Media	10,504
OEO YouTube	10,600
Total	456,238

OEO Outreach Types and Views 2023-2024 Total Reach: 456,238



OEO Website

The OEO website is available in **22 languages**: Amharic, Arabic, Chinese Simplified, Chinese Traditional, **Dari**, English, French, Hindi, Khmer, Korean, Marshallese, **Pashto**, Punjabi, Russian, Samoan, Somali, Spanish, Swahili, Tagalog, Tigrinya, Ukrainian, and Vietnamese. *Bold – New languages added this year

Visit https://oeo.wa.gov/en and select from the language picker to view the translated pages.

OEO added the following web page content translations in 2023-2024:

- Discrimination Toolkit in French, Pashto, Samoan, Somali, Spanish, Swahili and Vietnamese
- <u>Special Education Dispute Resolution</u> in Amharic, Arabic, Chinese Simplified, Chinese Traditional, Dari, French, Hindi, Khmer, Korean, Marshallese, Pashto, Punjabi, Russian, Samoan, Somali, Spanish, Swahili, Tagalog, Tigrinya, Ukrainian, Vietnamese
- <u>School Discipline Rules for Students with Disabilities</u> in Chinese Simplified and Spanish
- <u>Functional Behavior Assessments (FBAs), and Behavior intervention Plans (BIPs) Toolkit</u> in Amharic, Arabic, Chinese Simplified, Marshallese, Pashto, Somali, Swahili, Tagalog and Tigrinya

During 2023-2024, the OEO website has received **431,478 views**, a <u>57% increase</u> from the previous year, many of which were in Tagalog, Chinese, and Spanish languages.

The OEO website was viewed with the following language browser settings in order of frequency – English, Spanish, Tagalog, Arabic, Chinese Simplified, Russian, Amharic, Khmer, Vietnamese, Somali, Hindi, Korean, and Chinese Traditional.

Top pages viewed included 73,347 views of OEO's <u>Attendance and Truancy</u> page, 35,022 views of the OEO <u>Welcome</u> page and 20,505 views of OEO's <u>Individualized Education Programs</u> (IEP) page.

OEO Social Media

OEO's Facebook page, https://www.facebook.com/WAEducationOmbuds, reached over 10,261 viewers during 2023-2024. OEO also had over 10,600 views on its YouTube channel. OEO launched a new Instagram page in spring of 2024. You can find OEO's news and upcoming events on https://www.instagram.com/waeducationombuds/.

Outreach through OEO Staff-Led Events

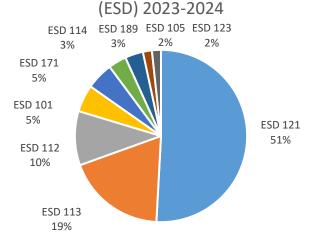
OEO staff participated in **141** presentations (virtual and in-person), workshops, webinars, blog posts, and outreach events this year, reaching more than **3,665** people. Of those 141 events, 100% of them included OEO's Strategic Plan Populations.

OEO offered presentations in **English, Spanish** and **Vietnamese.** OEO also offered presentations in English with interpretation in the following languages: **American Sign Language (ASL), Arabic,** and **Spanish.**

Presentations reached immigrant, refugee, asylee, migrant, and linguistically diverse families, as well as people of color, families experiencing homelessness, students and families involved in kinship or foster care, students receiving WISe and CLIP (Wraparound Intensive Services and Children in Long term Inpatient Program) services, organizations serving students in juvenile justice systems or detention and students out of school.

OEO often reached blended audiences of families, community professionals, educators, government leaders, and others.

OEO Outreach by Educational Service Districts



One Out of Five: Disability History and Pride Project

In the fall of 2018, OEO launched its learning resource for celebrating disability history and pride in Washington State called <u>One Out of Five: Disability History and Pride Project</u>. At the end of June 2024, the *One Out of Five: Disability History and Pride Project* student videos had received 30,100 **views** on the OEO YouTube Channel, **an 18% increase** from last year.

How Satisfied Are Our Stakeholders?

Of the 7% of returned surveys, 95% liked their initial experience with OEO, and 75% liked their Ombuds experience.

- "The Ombuds contact I worked with was very helpful and involved. I was very grateful for their role in helping to resolve the issues at hand and get things moving on behalf of the student."
- "This was great, the intake person was really nice and helpful!"
- "I am forever grateful for the assistance of the ombuds. We had a misunderstanding with the district and we were making no progress by ourselves, which meant our son was not able to attend school. The ombuds office worked quickly to help us have the conversation necessary to move forward. I hope the ombuds know how much their efforts are appreciated. I would love the opportunity to do this kind of work. How rewarding!"
- "This process was great. The information shared was wonderful and support given was good. How detailed she was and calm and validating she was helped me process and make informed decisions."
- "Thank you for all the guidance and resources!"

Contact Us

OEO values continuous improvement and the trust of the families, students, and educators that work with us. Please reach out if we can be of assistance.

Questions and/or comments about this report can be sent to:

P.O. Box 40004 Olympia, WA 98504

Emailed to: occurrent <a href="mailed-equation-occurrent

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- YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/user/TheWAEdOmbudsman



We listen. We inform. We help solve problems. Phone: 1-866-297-2597 Web: www.oeo.wa.gov Interpretation Available. Email: oeoinfo@gov.wa.gov

Appendix

Student Race/Ethnicity - OEO tracks race and ethnicity data in accordance with OSPI's Race and Ethnicity Student Data guidance. The data collected is provided voluntarily by clients and not required for service.

The total number of respondents with race and ethnicity data was 995. The list below shows every race and ethnicity that was reported to OEO. We are providing the list to demonstrate the diversity of our clients. The list is shown in this way to protect student's privacy.

11+ students

American Indian/Alaskan Native-Alaska Native-Other American Indian/Alaskan Native-American Indian-Other Black Black-African American Black-East African-Ethiopia Decline to Identify Latino

Latino-Chicano/Mex. American

Latino-Mexican Two or More-Other

White

White-Eastern European-Other

White-Other

Under 10 students

American Indian/Alaska Native

American Indian/Alaskan Native-Lummi
American Indian/Alaskan Native-Muckleshoot
American Indian/Alaskan Native-Yakama
American Indian/Alaskan Native, Asian – Indian
American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian – Filipino
American Indian/Alaska Native, Black – African American
American Indian/Alaska Native, Latino – Chicano
American Indian/Alaska Native, Latino – Mexican

American Indian/Alaska Native, Latino- Mexican American

American Indian/Alaska Native, White

Asian-Nepali

Asian-Pakistani

Asian-Thai

Asian-Tibetan

Asian-Black, African American

Asian-Latino, Chicano/Mexican American

Asian-Latino, Mexican

Asian-Latino, Puerto Rican

Asian-Pacific Islander-Native Hawaiian

Asian-Two or More Races

Asian-White, Eastern European – Bosnian Asian-White, Eastern European – Polish

Asian

Asian-Asian Indian Asian-Cambodian/Khmer Asian-Chinese

Asian-Filipino Asian-Japanese Asian- Korean Asian-Lao

Black

Black-Caribbean-Puerto Rico Black-Central African-Cameroon Black-East African – Ethiopia Black-East African-Eritrea Black-East African-Kenya Black-East African-Somalia Black-East African-Sudan

Black-Latin American

Black-Latin American-Brazil

Black-Latin American-Mexico

Black-Latin American-Mexico, Latino-Chicano/Mex. American

Black-Latino, Cuban

Black-Latino, Latino American – Mexican

Black-Latino, Puerto Rican

Black-Pacific Islander-Palauan

Black-Pacific Islander-Samoan

Black-West African-Niger

Black-West African-Nigeria

Black-West African-Other

Black-White, Eastern European-Other

Black-White, Middle Eastern and Noth African-Egyptian

Black-Other

Latino

Latino-Argentine

Latino-Brazilian

Latino-Chicano/Mex. American

Latino-Colombian

Latino-Costa Rican

Latino-Dominican

Latino-Guatemalan

Latino-Honduran

Latino-Mestizo

Latino-Mexican

Latino-Peruvian

Latino-Puerto Rican

Latino-Spaniard

Latino, Pacific Islander-Kosraean

Latino, Pacific Islander-Other

Latino-White, Middle Eastern and North African-Egyptian

Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

Pacific Islander-Chuukese

Pacific Islander-Guamian

Pacific Islander-Kosraean

Pacific Islander-Marshallese

Pacific Islander-Native Hawaiian

Pacific Islander-Other

Pacific Islander-Samoan

Pacific Islander -Tongan

Pacific Islander - White

White

White-Eastern European-Herzegovinian

White-Eastern European-Other

White-Eastern European-Polish

White-Eastern European-Russian

White-Eastern European-Ukrainian

White-Middle Eastern and North African – Arab or Arabic

White-Middle Eastern and North African-Algerian

White-Middle Eastern and North African-Egyptian

White-Middle Eastern and North African-Iranian

White-Middle Eastern and North African-Iragi

White-Middle Eastern and North African-Israeli

White-Middle Eastern and North African-Jordanian

White-Middle Eastern and North African-Lebanese

White-Middle Eastern and North African-Moroccan

White-Middle Eastern and North African-Saudi Arabian

White-Middle Eastern-Other

White-Non-Hispanic

White-North African-Other