

BELLINGHAM SCHOOL DISTRICT
Bellingham, Washington

MEMORANDUM

TO: Board of Directors

FROM: Dr. Greg Baker, Superintendent

DATE: March 13, 2025

SUBJECT: Ends Monitoring Report 2.1, Part 2

I am pleased to submit this Ends monitoring report to the school district's board of directors. Our process for reporting on Ends 2.1 during the 2024-25 school year began with the previously submitted Ends 2.1, Part 1 report at the February 13, 2025, meeting. This report focuses on evidence of student advancement toward on-time or extended graduation and reduction in drop-out rates as well as students' participation in post-secondary education and career preparation in comparison to peer districts. Our final Ends report for this year on the vision, mission and outcomes in The Bellingham Promise (Ends 1, 2 and 3) will be presented at the May 15, 2025, meeting.

Introduction

The first section of the report explores the graduation rates of Bellingham students, both on time and extended, highlighting trends in overall student drop-out rates as well as those within specific subgroups. Additionally, it compares the graduation trends of Bellingham Public Schools (BPS) with those of demographically similar districts. The second section delves into trends in college preparatory and career and technical preparatory course enrollments. The report's final section focuses on the post-secondary enrollment rates of Bellingham students, examining their participation in higher education, including both two-year and four-year institutions.

We include comparisons with Bellevue, Olympia and Shoreline school districts as the small group of high-bar peer districts whose populations of students eligible for free/reduced priced meals fall below those eligible in our district.

Language included in the revised Ends 2.1 policy focuses us on comparing progress to districts that are demographically like Bellingham, as well as to districts whose students typically outperform our students on the standardized test. The Ends 2.1 policy follows:

STUDENT COMPETENCE

Ends 2.1: Consistent with the district Vision and Mission, all children of the Bellingham Public Schools community will attain high academic achievement, develop essential skills and attributes necessary for continuous growth in learning, and graduate from high school ready for

participation in post-secondary education and career opportunities. All students will succeed and grow regardless of ethnicity, socio-economic status, English language proficiency or disabilities.

1. Every student's achievement, skills and attributes will show continuous significant growth, and measures will exceed the Washington state benchmarks and be high performing relative to similar students in demographically comparable districts, as measured by state assessments and other available data, as appropriate.
2. Gaps in achievement, skills and attributes between groups of students will close. For state or federally identified student populations, any gap in achievement will be eliminated, and annual achievement will be greater than that of similar students in demographically comparable districts.
3. Every student will make continuous advancement toward graduation. Measures of on-time and extended graduation attainment will be high performing relative to similar students in demographically comparable districts.
4. After graduation, student participation in post-secondary education and career preparation shall increase and exceed participation in comparison to demographically comparable districts.

While being held accountable to our demographically comparable districts, we also continue to compare our progress to other district, state and national data that offer a more comprehensive view of student competence.

In this Part 2 report, we focus on numbers three and four above.

Section 1: High School Graduation Trends

Figure 1 displays big picture data on overall graduation rates of students in Bellingham over time, compared with other districts. Specifically, this graph displays the graduation rates for the five-year adjusted cohorts of the class of 2013 and class of 2023 for Bellingham and 38 demographically comparable or high-bar peer districts and Washington State. This is the same group of comparable districts we relied on for comparisons in the report on Ends 2.1, part 1 earlier this year.

Over this period of a decade, graduation rates for Bellingham students increased from 84 percent in 2013 to 90 percent in 2023 which puts our district 5 percentage points above the state average, and still below high bar peer districts Shoreline (95 percent), Olympia (93 percent) and Bellevue (95 percent). We continue to track each cohort of students out into the seventh year of high school to assess the progress toward ensuring graduation for all, regardless of timeline.

Figure 1. 5-Year Adjusted Graduation Rates for 2013 and 2023

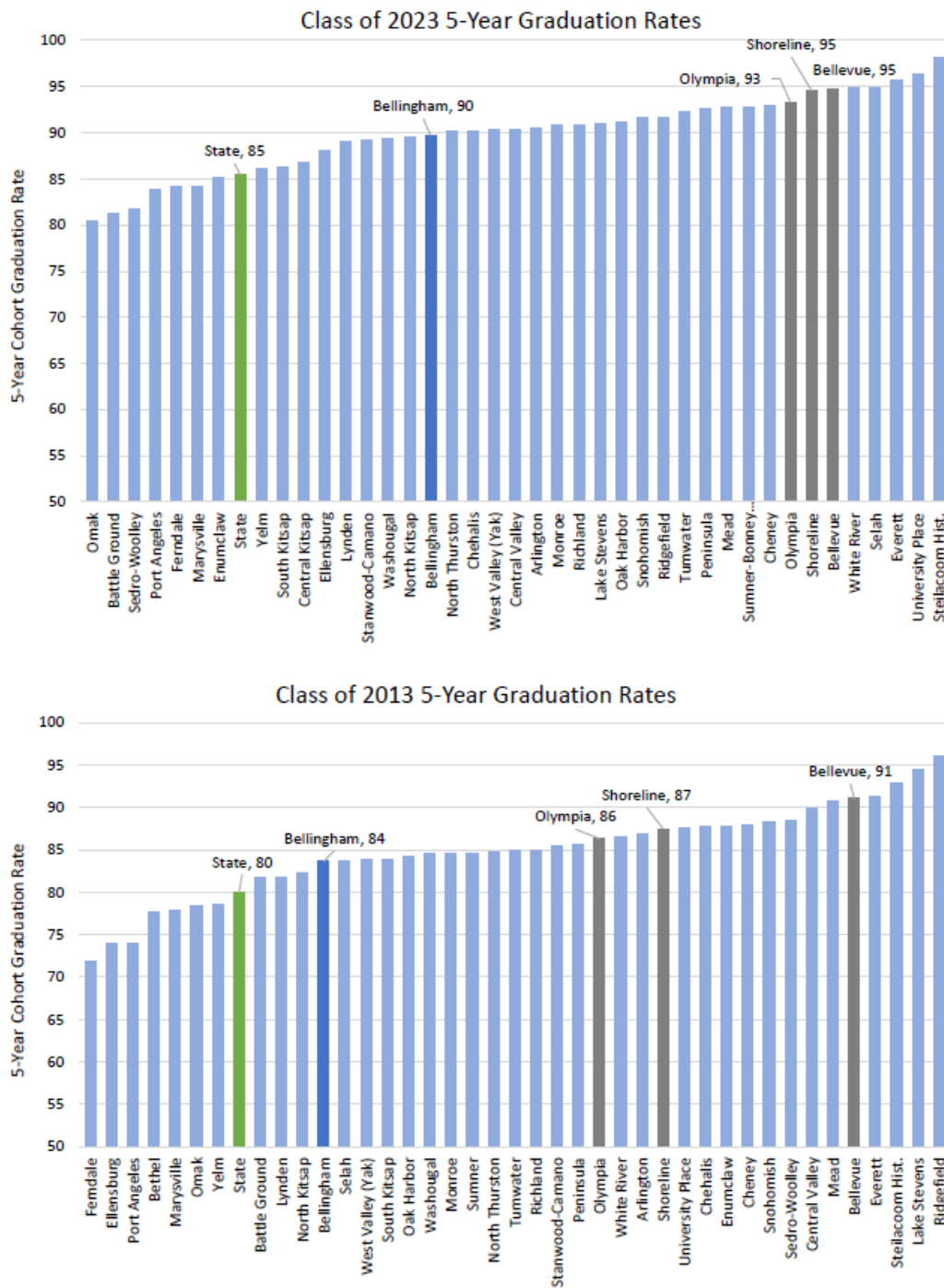


Figure 2 displays the four-year and extended graduation rates for Bellingham, our three high-bar peer districts and Washington state. The most recent seven-year cohort (class of 2021) attained a 91 percent graduation rate. As noted above, our five-year rate improved by 1 percent in year-over-year comparison, from 89 to 90 percent. The six-year rate also improved by 1 percentage point in comparison to the prior year, moving from 89 to 90 percent.

Figure 2. Trends in Graduation Rates for Districts and WA State

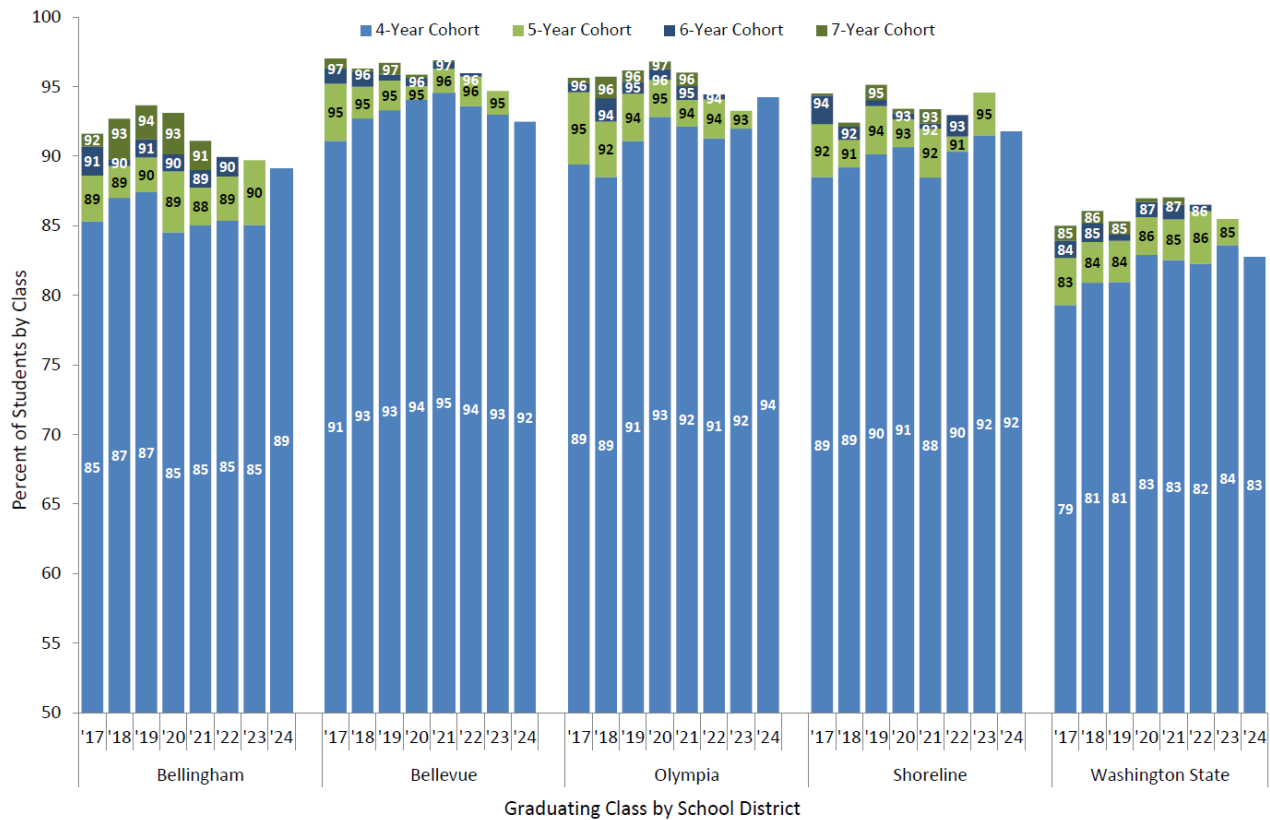


Figure 3 graphs four-year and five-year cohorts' graduation rates (green), rates for students continuing progress toward graduation (yellow) and dropout rates (red) over the past seven years for Bellingham and Washington state. The four-year graduation rate for Bellingham students increased from 85 to 89 percent in year-over-year comparison, while the state average dropped by 1 percentage point (from 84 percent in 2023 to 83 percent in 2024). The five-year rate in Bellingham increased a percentage point while the five-year rate for the state decreased by 1 percent in year-over-year comparisons. Year-over-year dropout rates decreased by a point in Bellingham and held steady across the state.

Figure 3. Graduation and Dropout Rate Trends for Bellingham and WA State



We also continue to examine the extended graduation trends for four larger Bellingham student subgroups. Figure 4 displays extended graduation rate trends over the past 11 years for Bellingham's multilingual learners (MLL), students identifying as Hispanic/Latinx, students served in special education with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and students from low income households. Four-year and six-year rates for students identified as low income hit new highs this year. The four-year rate for students identified as low income improved to 84 percent, and the six-year rate hit 86 percent, both new highs for this subgroup. Four-year graduation rates for June of 2024 for students served in special education and Hispanic/Latinx students also improved in year-over-year comparisons. The five-year rate for multilingual learners improved to a new high (80 percent), at the same time the four-year rate for this group dropped by 6 percent. In addition to the internal comparisons over time, we examined gaps between contrasting subgroups of students compared with the overall statewide picture.

Figure 4. Extended Graduation Rates Trends for Bellingham Student Subgroups

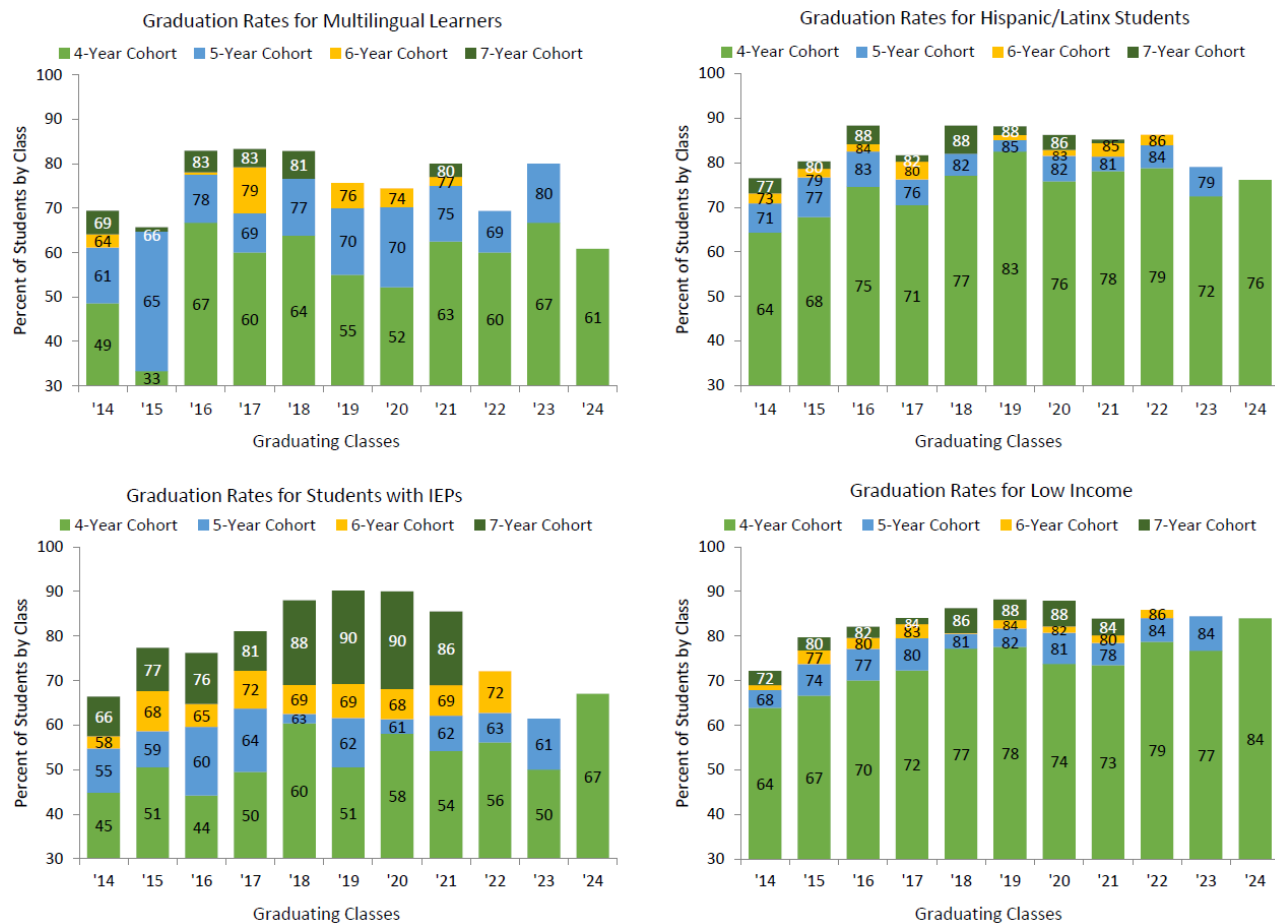
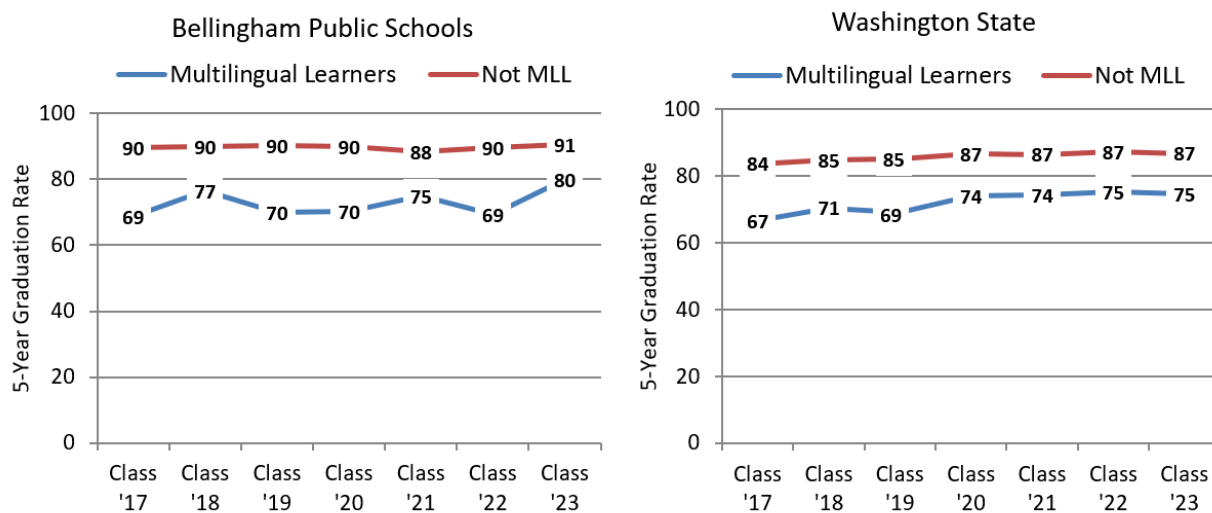


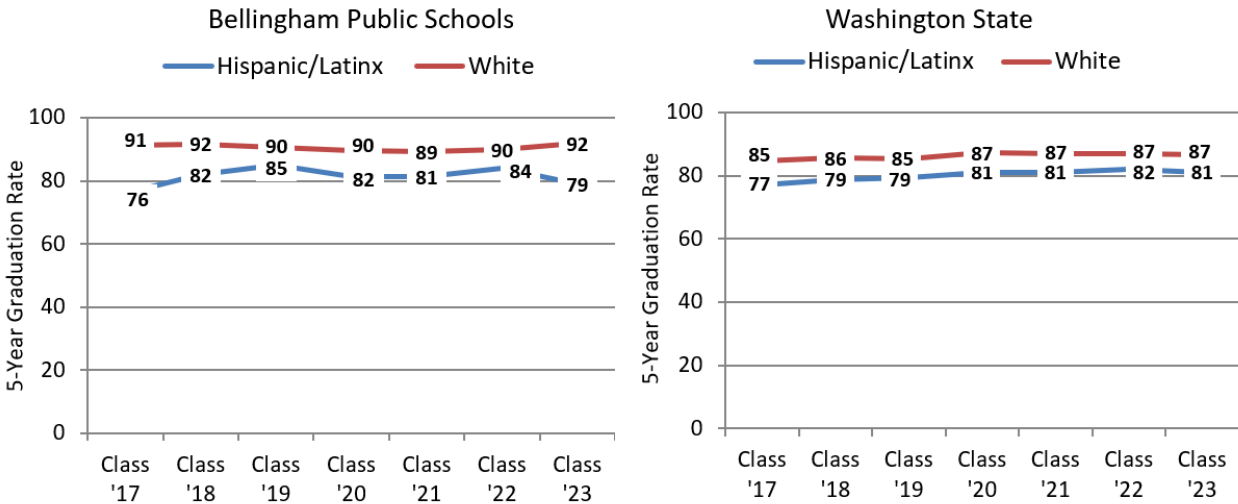
Figure 5 shows the graduation gap between Bellingham’s multilingual and non-multilingual learners significantly decreased in year-over-year comparisons, while the gap across the state remained flat.

Figure 5. Gap Trends in 5-Year Graduation Rates – Multilingual vs. Non-Multilingual Learners



While it is great to observe this dramatic decrease in the multilingual graduation gap, we recognize that, given the relatively small *n* size of our Bellingham MLL population, this gap has varied in year-over-year comparisons over the time we have tracked these trends. This is also true of the graduation gap between Hispanic/Latinx and non-Hispanic/Latinx Bellingham students (Figure 6) which went the other direction this year, increasing to 13 percent from 6 percent in year-over- year comparison, while the state gap also increased by a percentage point.

Figure 6. Gap Trends in 5-Year Graduation Rates – Hispanic/Latinx vs. White



This gap also tends to fluctuate given the group size for Hispanic/Latinx students locally, but over the 2020-2022 cohorts, the gap reduced slightly each year, so to see an increase in that gap again this year is counter to that positive trend and caught our attention. The five-year rate for Hispanic/Latinx students in 2023 dipped below the 80 percent mark for the first time since the class of 2017 and positioned our district below the state average by comparison.

Figure 7 shows that the graduation gap between groups of Bellingham graduates identified as low income and non-low income increased from 9 to 11 percent in year-over-year comparison, while the gap remained approximately 13 percent across the state.

Figure 7. Gap Trends in 5-Year Graduation Rates – Low Income vs. Non-low Income

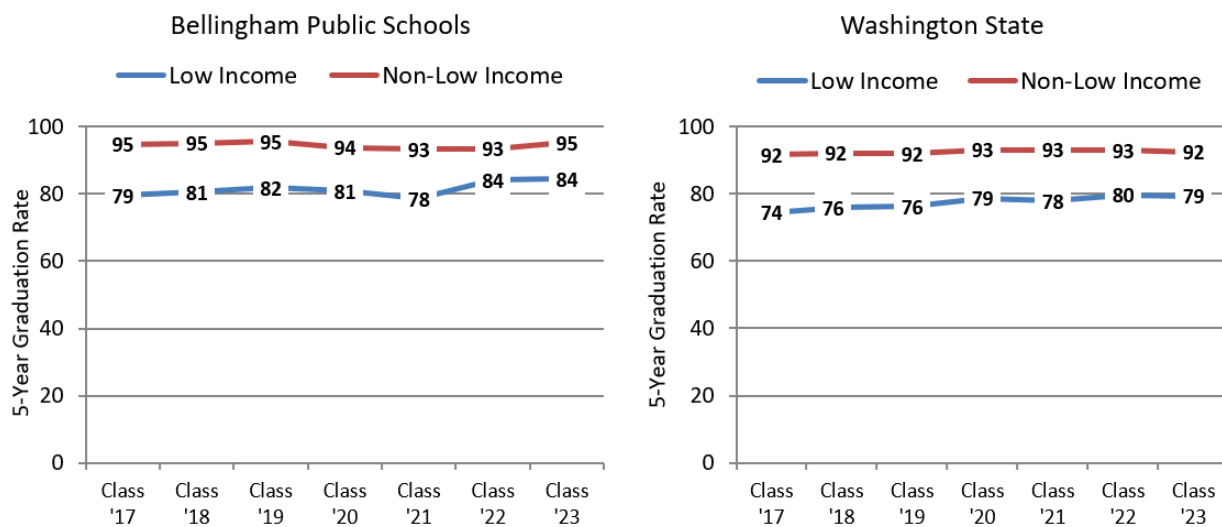
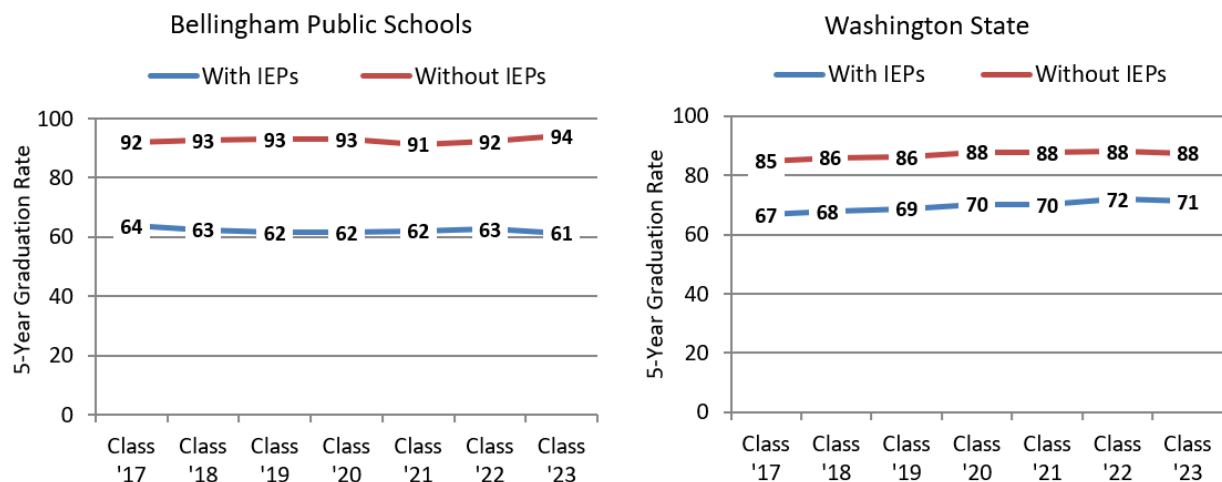


Figure 8 shows the graduation gap between students served in special education and those without widened in year-over-year comparisons from 29 percent in 2022 to 33 percent among our students in the class of 2023, while statewide, this gap also widened slightly. It is concerning to observe the five-year gap increase for the 2023 cohort subgroup of students.

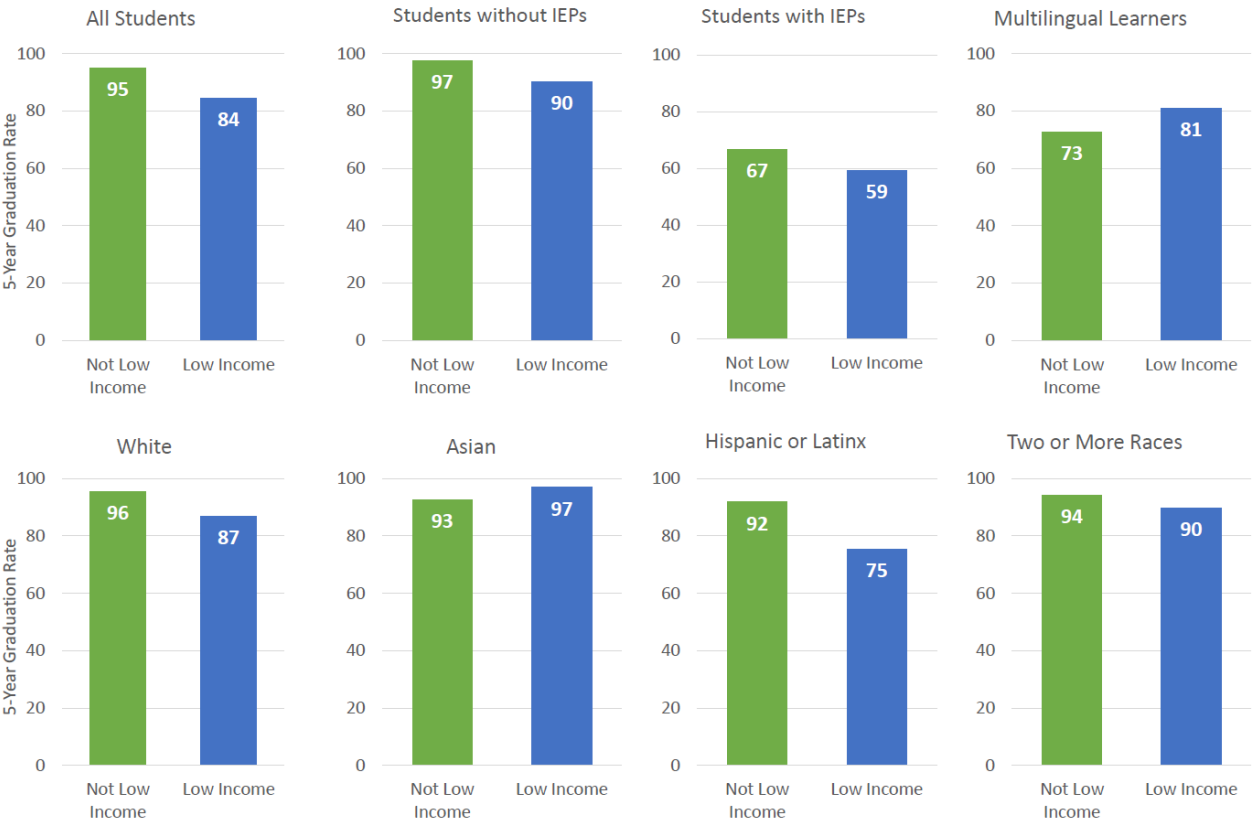
Figure 8. Gap Trends in 5-Year Graduation Rates – With and Without IEPs



However, it is also important to recall the data on the four-year and six-year cohorts of students served in special education noted positive results. The four-year graduation rate of 67 percent for the class of 2024 is the highest noted for any cohort of students with IEPs in the last 10 years, and the six-year rate of 72 percent equaled the highest mark during that same period. Also notable is the fact that our seven-year graduation rate for students served in special education once again held above 85 percent.

We again assessed the impact of the intersection of income level on graduation rates for the various student cohorts. Figure 9 displays five-year graduation rates for all Bellingham students (upper left) and subgroups identifying as Asian, Hispanic/Latinx, two or more races, White, students served in special education, students not served in special education and multilingual learners each broken down by low income and non-low income household identification. Data reveal that income gaps in graduation rates exist for most subgroups; if a student is from a low income household, that factor alone has a tangible negative predictive impact on graduation chances. As noted in Figure 9, overall, 95 percent of students identified as non-low income and 84 percent of students identified as low income graduated in 2023 in our district. Data from two of these comparisons stood out as not following this trend.

Figure 9. Intersection of Income with 5-year Graduation Rates – BPS Student Subgroups 2023



We observed in Asian and MLL subgroups that the group of students identified as low income had higher graduation rates than their non-low income peers. Going a little deeper, these differences, again, we attributed to the small *n* size of the groups. For MLL students, the non-low income group comprised 11 students, of which three students did not graduate, while the low income group had 11 of 63 students who did not graduate. For the Asian student subgroup, two students in the non-low income group did not graduate while only one in the low income group did not graduate.

Finally, as we look forward to analysis of graduation rates in 2025 and beyond, it may be important for the board to understand what is occurring with state and district credits needed for

graduation and available graduation credit waivers. Washington state requires 24 credits to be earned for conveyance of a high school diploma. Because of our enhanced eight period schedule in Bellingham, our high school credits required for graduation and the conveying of the diploma have totaled 30 for every class since the class of 2021. Students must earn a total of 30 credits (out of 32 possible course credit slots over their four-year high school experience – 8 classes per year x 4 years) to graduate from Bellingham Public Schools.

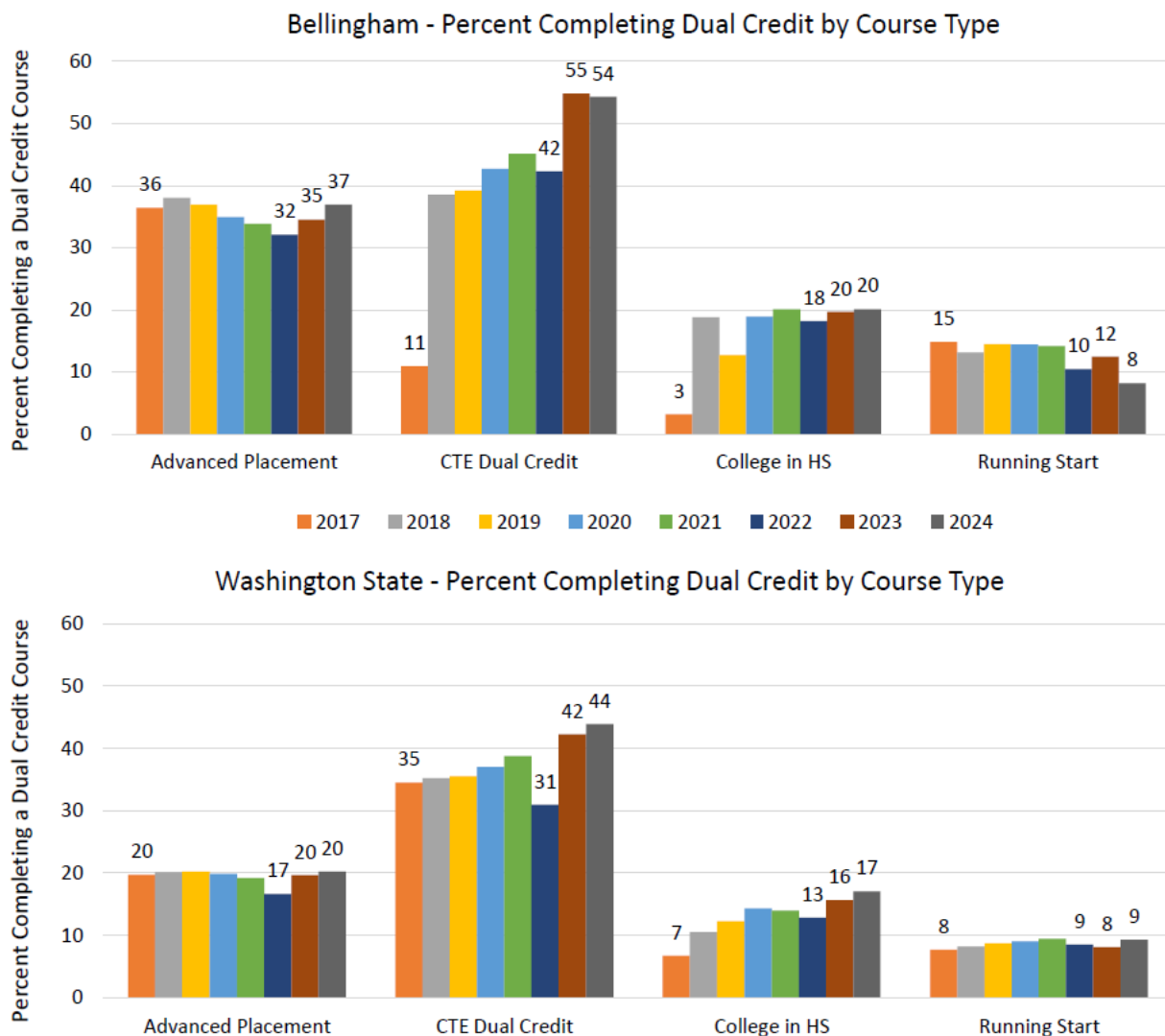
During the period following the pandemic, the Washington State Board of Education granted a special two-credit waiver called the Graduation Requirement Emergency Waiver (GREW). GREW has been available as a last resort for students whose education was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic to petition for up to a two-credit waiver in their graduation requirements, but not more than one credit in each core subject area. The state implemented the GREW waiver in 2021 and the 2.0 credits were available to students who petitioned to use these in their total credits toward graduation in the classes of 2021, 2022 and 2023. Only one credit in the form of a GREW waiver was allowed for the class of 2024.

Starting with the class of 2025, the GREW waiver is no longer available. We envision there may be some impact on graduation rates as a result, but it is difficult to predict what the amount of impact will be. We know, for example, while fewer than 10 percent of our students in the class of 2024 accessed the one credit GREW waiver, the availability of that one GREW credit probably did contribute to our four-year graduation rates continuing to rise. But, in the three prior years (2021-23), when students could access up to two GREW credits, our four-year graduation rate was never as high as it was for the 2024 class. So, while we think there will be some impact when these waivers are completely gone next year, we just aren't sure how to predict what it will be.

Section 2: Preparation for Post-High-School Opportunities

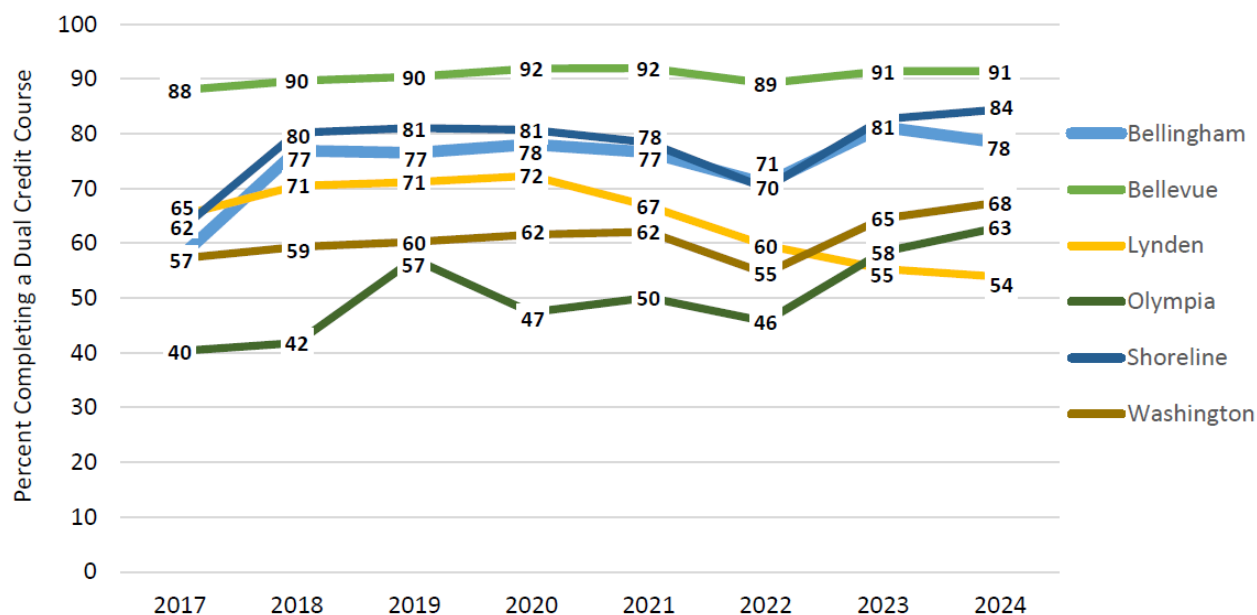
Section 2 examines the numerous ways students are preparing for post-high-school opportunities through completion of dual credit coursework that provides a head start into college and/or enrollment in career and technical coursework that could lead to additional schooling or career opportunities. Figure 10 displays the breakdown of dual credit course attainment by type of course - Advanced Placement (AP), Career and Technical Education (CTE), College in the High School (CIHS) and Running Start - for Bellingham and Washington state.

Figure 10. Percent Completing Dual Credit by Course Type



Statewide trends examined also revealed steady or slight gains in every category of course type. For Bellingham students, Advanced Placement (AP) course completion increased 2 percent between 2023 and 2024, the third annual year-over-year increase we have observed in a row in that category. Career and Technical Education (CTE) dual credit course completion remained constant, down just a percentage point from the prior year to 54 percent, as did College in the High School (CIHS) course taking, which held steady at 20 percent year-over-year. As a district, our students' completion of dual credit courses, as noted in Figure 11, places us above the state and peer districts Lynden and Olympia and below Bellevue and Shoreline.

Figure 11. Trends in High School Students Completing Dual Credit Courses



We were curious to see that Running Start participation decreased by 4 percent for Bellingham students (as noted in Figure 10), consistent with a trend that shows Running Start participation down by nearly half compared with eight years ago. This drop caused a deeper conversation with high school counselors and career pathways specialists. We were interested to know their perspectives on the cause for the decline and whether students are pursuing fewer dual credit offerings or simply that their access has shifted to different dual credit options within our system.

The eight-period schedule created the opportunity for additional access to CIHS, AP courses and CTE dual-credit courses. To be clear, we think it is a good thing that we have more opportunities within our students' high school schedule for these dual credits to be earned while they are enrolled with us. And the sense is that this combination of eight periods with more dual credit access has contributed to fewer students accessing classes through Running Start off campus. Further, during the pandemic, many students expressed a preference for college online classes over high school online classes. Counselors suggest that post-pandemic, many students were motivated to return to in-person learning in their home schools. Other students express enjoyment over being at their high schools due to the variety of classes, clubs and groups available.

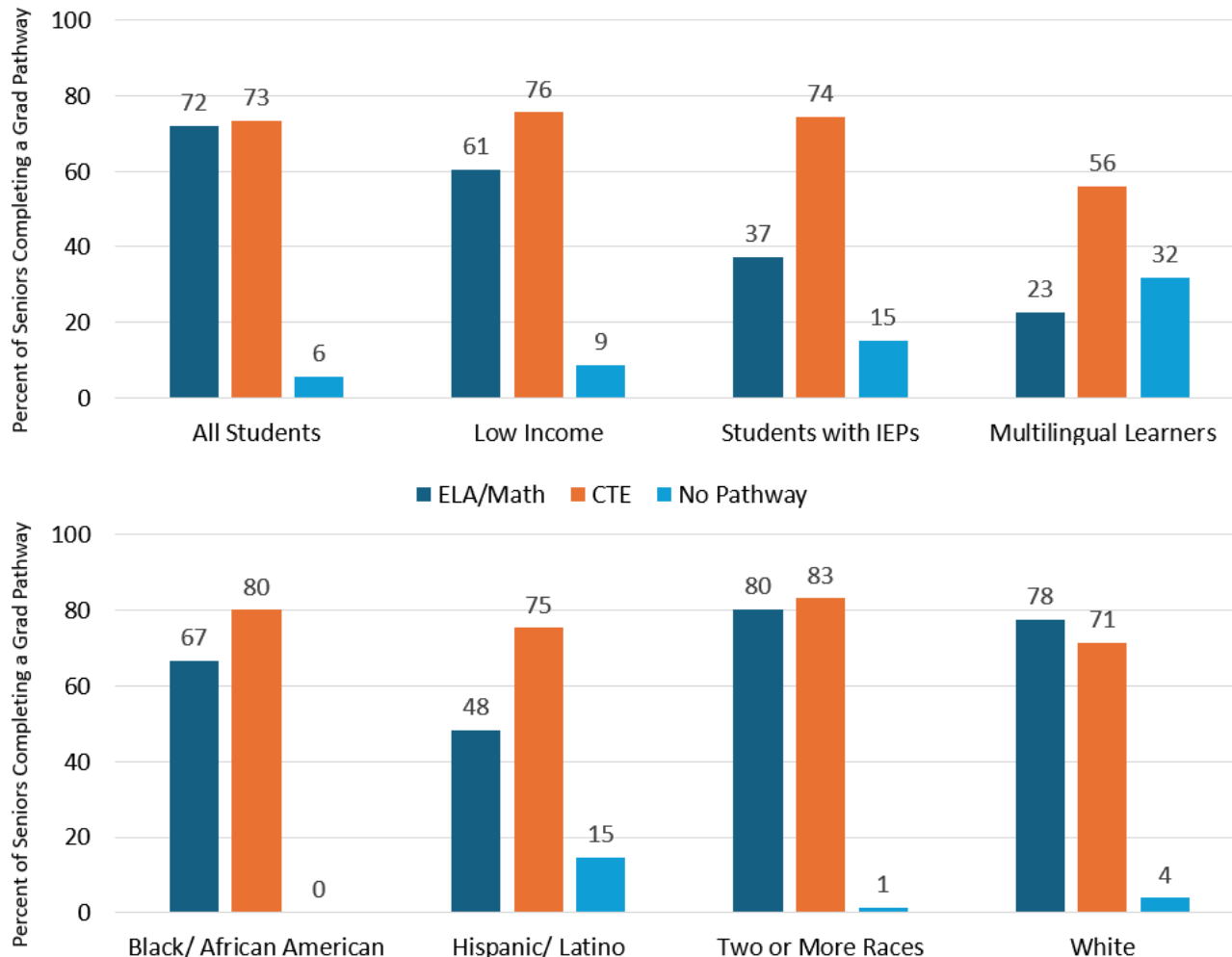
Last year, we reported on the effects of House Bill 1599 that passed into law, which decoupled statewide assessments from graduation requirements. By way of reminder, to graduate from high school in Washington, students must complete: 1) a High School and Beyond Plan (HSBP); 2) the credit and subject area requirements; and 3) a graduation pathway option, along with any other local requirements. The State Board of Education has defined the following pathways for graduation, and students must meet at least one of these pathway options:

1. **State Assessment:** Meet or exceed the graduation scores in the Smarter Balanced Assessments (SBA) in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics or in WA-AIM (Washington Access to Instruction & Measurement).
2. **Dual Credit:** Earn at least one high school credit in ELA and at least one high school credit in math in dual credit courses (Running Start, College in the High School and/or Career and Technical Education dual credit courses).
3. **AP/IB/Cambridge:** For both ELA and math, earn a 3 or higher on certain Advanced Placement (AP) exams or a 4 or higher on certain International Baccalaureate (IB) exams or an E on certain Cambridge International exams, or pass the course with at least a C+.
4. **SAT/ACT:** Meet or exceed the graduation scores set by the Washington State Board of Education in the math and ELA portions of the SAT or ACT.
5. **Transition Course:** Pass a transition course in ELA and math (for example, a Bridge to College course) which allows a student to place directly into a credit-bearing college level course.
6. **Performance-based¹:** This student-centered pathway is customizable, aligned with a student's individual goals for life after high school, with the aim of being relevant and engaging to the student. The performance-based path can take a variety of forms including a culminating project, practicum, work-related experience, community service or cultural activity which can be evaluated through a performance, presentation, report, film or exhibit. This experience may or may not be done as a part of a class where the student also earns credit.
7. **Combination:** Meet any combination of at least one ELA and one math option of those options listed in 1-6.
8. **ASVAB:** Meet standard on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) by scoring at least the minimum established by the military for eligibility to serve in a branch of the armed services.
9. **CTE Sequence:** Complete a sequence of Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses.

These pathways must align with the students' postsecondary goals as described in their HSBP and provide students with multiple avenues to show readiness for their individual education and career goals. Figure 12 displays graduation pathways data from Bellingham's graduating class of 2024, noting whether a student completed one of the ELA/Math pathways, a CTE course pathway or no pathway. Data are presented by percentage in categories for students overall and for student subgroups. What these data reveal for the class of 2024 overall is that 72 percent of Bellingham students completed an ELA/Math pathway and 73 percent completed a CTE pathway. Students identified as low income, served in special education, multilingual, Black, Hispanic/Latinx or as two or more races all completed a CTE graduation pathway at a higher rate than an ELA/Math pathway.

¹ Bellingham Public Schools have not adopted the performance-based pathway to date. Based on a soon-to-be released legislative report from OSPI, across the State in 2024, there were 82 students who used the performance-based pathway in ELA and 100 students who did so in math.

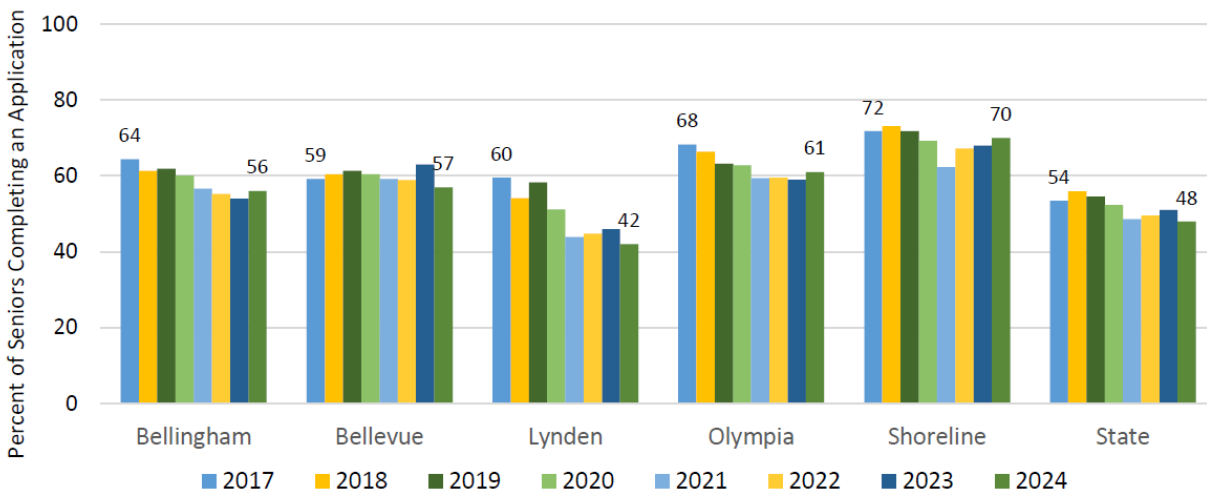
**Figure 12. 2024 Graduation Pathways Data for BPS Grade 12:
All Students and Students from Low Income Households**



Higher percentages of multilingual learners (32 percent), students served in special education (15 percent) and Hispanic/Latinx students (15 percent) were noted as having made no graduation pathway choice. These numbers are of concern and merit our further attention to ensure that all students can access a pathway toward graduation.

As we have reported in prior years, completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) application for student aid is predictive of college attendance at a national level. For some students this is a critical hurdle that jumpstarts their thinking about post-secondary options. FAFSA completion still lags pre-pandemic levels but is showing some signs of recovery for our students locally. Figure 13 shows the percentage of expected high school graduates from Bellingham, select districts and Washington state who completed a FAFSA application each year. Year-over-year comparisons show Bellingham students' FAFSA completion up 2 percent. Olympia and Shoreline students FAFSA completion was also up slightly, while Lynden, Bellevue and overall Washington state participation dropped in year-over-year comparisons.

Figure 13. FAFSA Completion Rate for Districts and Washington State

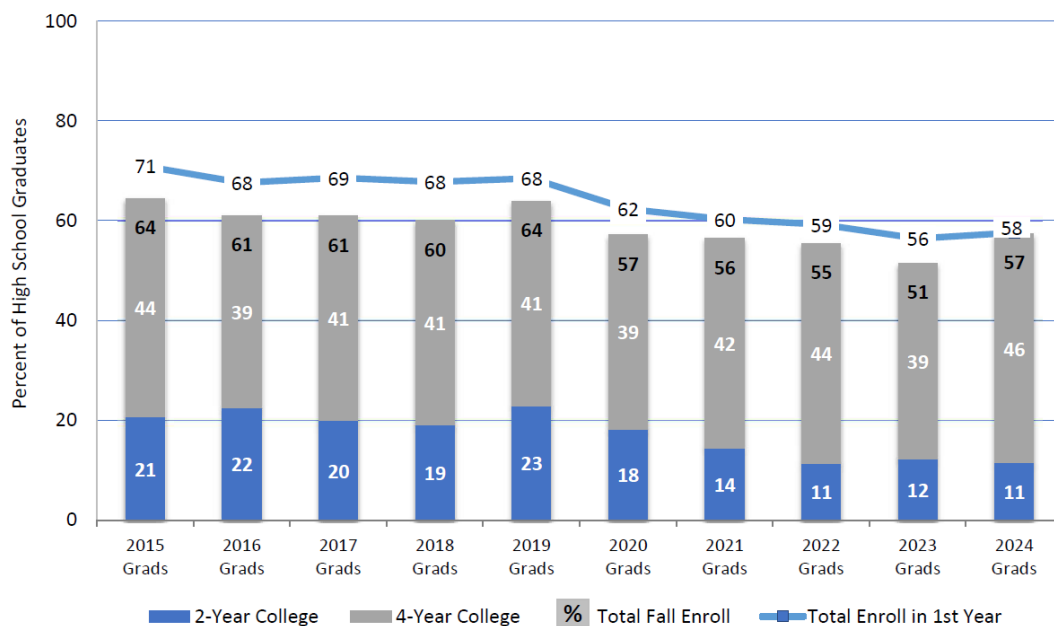


Section 3: College Attendance and Perseverance

As students leave our system and head into post-secondary institutions, we follow their pathways and report on that data annually in this report. Figure 14 displays a graphic representation of the 10 year trend in the percentage of Bellingham students enrolled in two- and four-year post-secondary institutions during their first year after high school graduation. Bellingham graduates' overall total enrollment in post-secondary institutions is not yet back to pre-pandemic levels but improved in year-over-year comparison from 56 percent in 2023 to 58 percent in 2024. All this increase is accounted for by an increase in our graduates' four-year college going rate. Four-year college enrollment significantly improved this past fall to 46 percent of Bellingham graduates overall, hitting the highest mark since we started reporting this data 10 years ago. Two-year college enrollment dropped steeply after the pandemic and has yet to recover; 11 percent of 2024 graduates headed into two-year schools, a 1 percent decrease over 2023.

It is also noteworthy that a small percentage of graduates do not enroll in the fall of their first post-secondary year but do enroll at some point during the remainder of that first year.

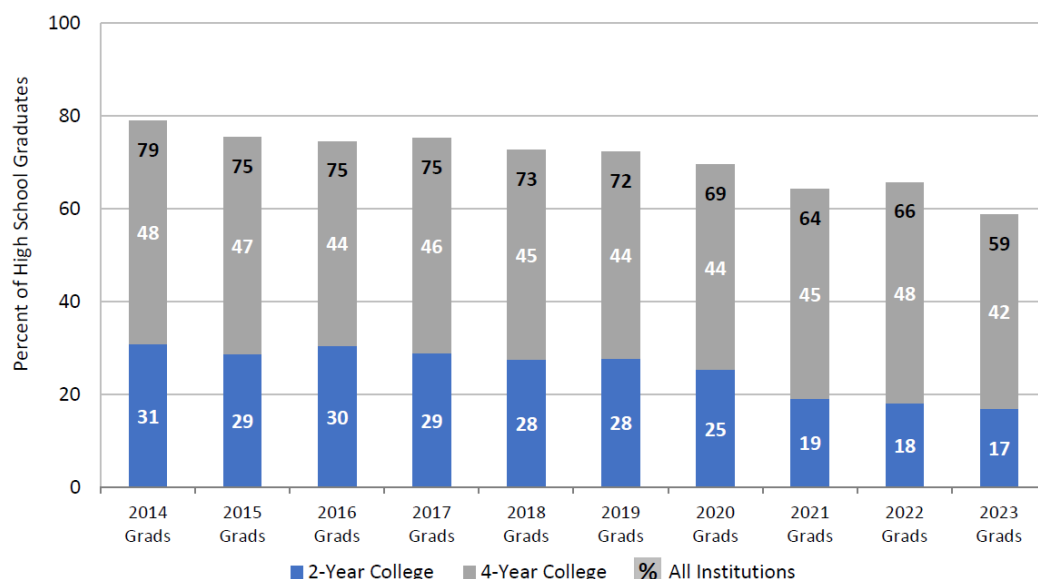
Figure 14. BPS Graduates' First Year Post-Secondary Enrollment by Institution Type



For the class of 2024, 57 percent of graduates enrolled in either two- or four-year options in the fall after their graduation, and another 1 percent joined at some point during the first year.

Figure 15 displays the percentage of Bellingham students enrolled in two- and four-year post-secondary institutions two years after graduation. We observed four-year college- going rates decreased (48 percent for the 2022 class to 42 percent for the 2023 class), as well as an overall one percent decrease in students enrolling in a two-year college (18 percent for the 2022 class to 17 percent for the 2023 class). However, two years after graduation for the class of 2022, we observed an

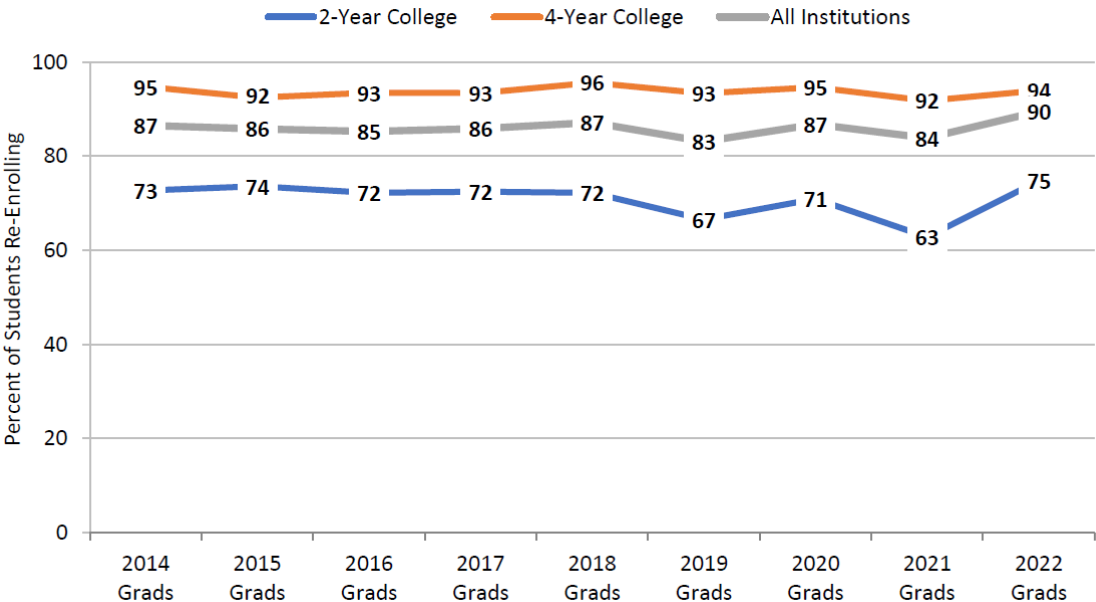
Figure 15. BPS Graduates' Enrolled in College at Any Time During the First Two Years After High School by Institution Type



increase in enrollment in the second year. Enrollment jumped 3 percent, from 39 to 42 percent for four-year colleges and 5 percent, from 12 to 17 percent for two-year institutions.

We also track the extent to which our graduates who enroll in either two-year or four-year school after high school persist in college into their second year. Trends in persistence in college enrollment shown by the percentage of students returning for a second year of college are displayed in Figure 16. Bellingham graduates’ persistence into a second year of post-secondary schooling showed a solid increase overall and at both two-year and four-year schools.

Figure 16. Percent of BPS Student Who Enrolled in College the First Year After High School Graduation and Returned for a Second Year



Of our graduates from 2022 who enrolled in either two-year or four-year colleges 90 percent persisted into the second year, the highest mark since we started reporting this data. This included a 94 percent persistence rate for graduates attending four-year colleges and, after last year’s low (63 percent), a nice bounce to a 75 percent persistence rate for graduates attending two-year colleges.

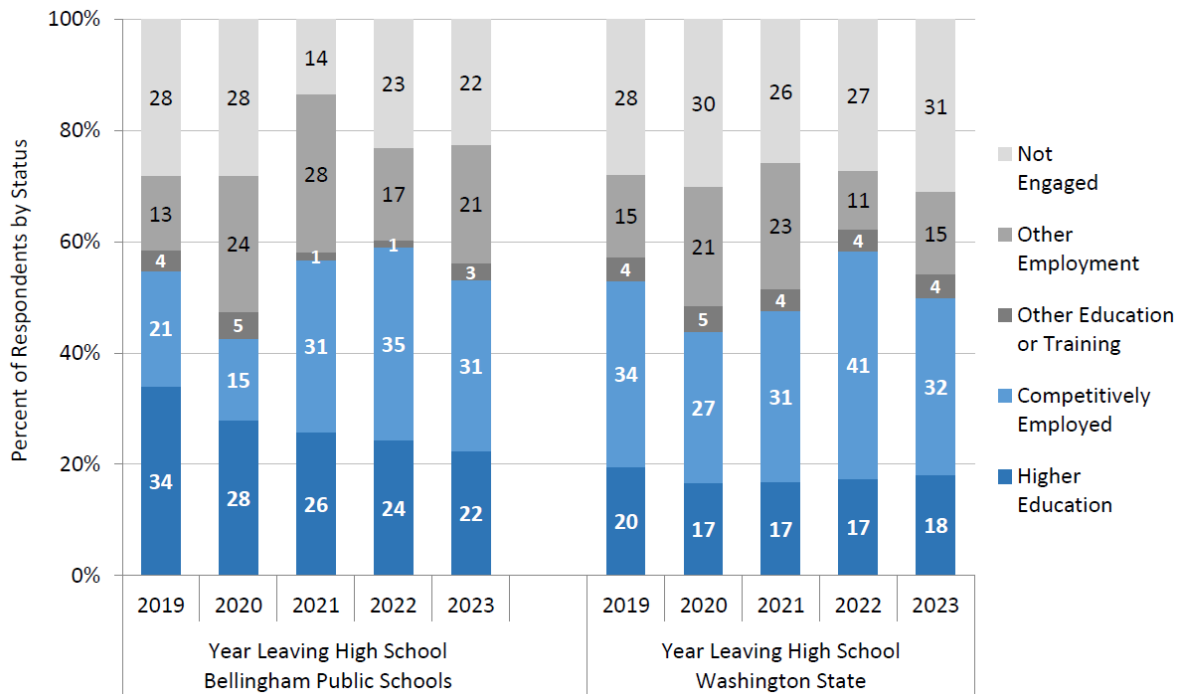
When our students leave for post-secondary schooling, where do they go? Figure 17 displays the top 10 most attended two- or four-year schools by Bellingham graduates for the years 2019, 2022 and 2024. Western Washington University (WWU) ranked as the number one school enrolling the highest number of graduates from the most recent graduating class. Whatcom Community College (WCC) enrollment ranked number two, however enrollment numbers dropped once again compared with pre-pandemic numbers. This is consistent with the data reported earlier demonstrating the persistent decline in two-year college attendance by Bellingham graduates.

Figure 17. Top 10 Post-Secondary Institutions by Enrollment for BPS Graduates 2019, 2022 and 2024.

Institutions	2024		2022		2019	
	Rank	Enroll	Rank	Enroll	Rank	Enroll
Western Washington University	1	78	2	90	2	87
Whatcom Community College	2	73	1	93	1	196
University Of Washington - Seattle	3	59	3	47	3	42
Bellingham Technical College	4	25	5	28	4	39
Washington State University- Pullman	5	24	4	29	5	24
Montana State University - Bozeman	6	16	6	15	22	4
Central Washington University	7	13	9	7	7	9
Oregon State University	8	11	11	6	8	8
University Of Utah	9	10	24	3	--	--
California Polytechnic State University	10	8	7	9	--	--

Finally, Figure 18 displays trends in post-school activities for Bellingham and Washington state students served in special education in their first year after leaving high school over the years 2019-2023. The board should recall that this data display is built on phone survey data of graduates and non-graduates who were served in special education during their time in school. Respondents are drawn from those who left school at the end of a school year and thus are from different graduation year cohort groups. As such, the data shown cuts across

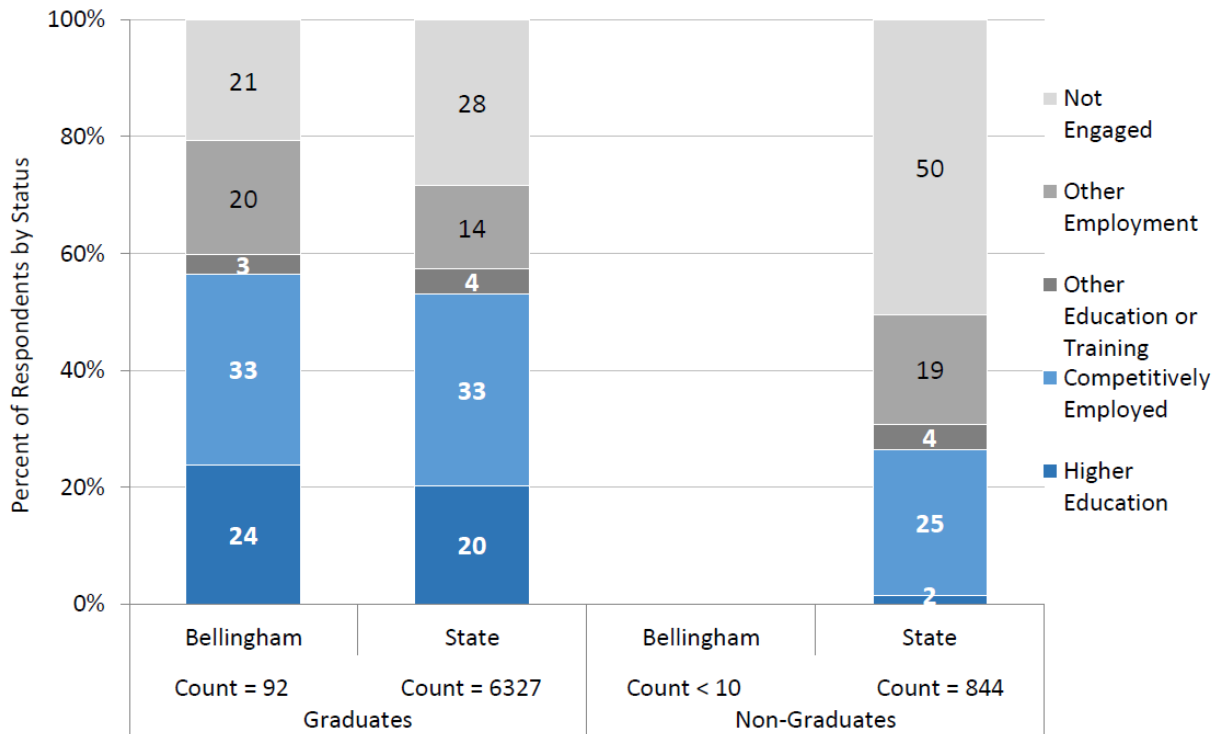
Figure 18. Trends in Engagement in the First Year After High School for BPS and Washington State Students with IEPs



multiple cohorts of students and does not correspond to cohort graduation data for students served in special education presented earlier. That said, as in prior years we include these data because they are collected in a systematic manner and help with understanding the post-secondary experiences of students who were served in special education during their time with Bellingham schools. As in prior years, our students are engaged at higher levels in the combined categories of higher education, competitive employment and other education or other employment than is typical according to state averages. And nearly 10 percent fewer of our students report as “not engaged” compared to state averages.

Figure 19 displays the district and state data for graduates and non-graduates served in special education; notably non-graduates included in the Bellingham sample numbered fewer than 10 in the 2023 cohort, and therefore data is suppressed and not displayed. A higher percentage of our graduates served in special education entered higher education settings than the state average and a smaller percentage of our BPS graduates served in special education end up in the “not engaged” category than the state average.

Figure 19. Graduates and Non-Graduates with IEPs Engagement in First Year After Leaving School in 2023 in Bellingham and Washington State



Summary Discussion

Ensuring that students graduate from our schools continues to be a foundational goal, and over the decade from 2013-2023, graduation rates for Bellingham students have continued to increase; for the first time since we began reporting on this data our students hit the 90 percent overall mark in five-year graduation rates. Below are some summary challenges or concerns remaining from our Ends 2.1, part 2 analysis, along with some of the positive highlights.

Challenges/Concerns:

- The five-year rate for Hispanic/Latinx students in 2023 dipped below the 80 percent mark for the first time since the class of 2017 and also positioned our district below the state average for that group.
- The four-year rate for this group dropped by 6 percent.
- The five-year graduation gap between groups of Bellingham graduates identified as low income and non-low income increased from 9 to 11 percent in year-over-year comparison.
- The five-year graduation gap between students served in special education and those without widened slightly among our students in the class of 2023.
- Higher percentages of multilingual learners (32 percent), students served in special education (15 percent) and Hispanic/Latinx students (15 percent) were noted as having made no graduation pathway choice.

- Two-year college enrollment dropped steeply after the pandemic and has yet to recover; 11 percent of 2024 graduates headed into two-year schools, a 1 percent decrease over 2023.

Positive Highlights:

- Graduation rates for Bellingham students increased from 84 percent in 2013 to 90 percent in 2023 which puts our district 5 percentage points above the state average.
- The most recent seven-year cohort (class of 2021) attained a 91 percent graduation rate. As noted above, our five-year rate improved by 1 percent in year-over-year comparison, from 89 to 90 percent. The six-year rate also improved by 1 percentage point in comparison to the prior year, moving from 89 to 90 percent.
- Overall year-over-year dropout rates decreased by a point in Bellingham.
- Four-year and six-year rates for students identified as low income hit new highs this year. The four-year rate for students identified as low income improved to 84 percent, and the six-year rate hit 86 percent, both new highs for this subgroup.
- Four-year graduation rates for students served in special education and Hispanic/Latinx students also improved in year-over-year comparisons.
- The five-year graduation rate for multilingual students improved to a new high (80 percent).
- The graduation gap between Bellingham's multilingual learners and non-multilingual learners decreased in year-over-year comparisons.
- The four-year graduation rate of 67 percent for the class of 2024 is the highest noted for any cohort of students served in special education in the last 10 years, and the six-year rate of 72 percent equaled the highest mark during that same period.
- Advanced Placement course completion increased 2 percent between 2023 and 2024, the third annual year-over-year increase in a row we have observed in that category.
- Bellingham students' FAFSA completion was up 2 percent in year-over-year comparisons.
- Our four-year college going rate significantly improved this past fall to 46 percent overall, hitting the highest mark since we started reporting this data 10 years ago.
- Two years after graduation for the class of 2022, we observed an increase in post-secondary enrollment in the second year. Enrollment jumped 3 percent, from 39 to 42 percent for four-year colleges and 5 percent, from 12 to 17 percent for two-year institutions.
- Of our graduates from 2022 who enrolled in either two-year or four-year colleges 90 percent persisted into the second year, the highest mark since we started reporting this data.
- Our students who were served in special education and leave our school system are engaged at higher levels in the combined categories of higher education, competitive employment, other education or other employment post-high school than is typical according to state averages. Nearly 10 percent fewer of our students who were served in special education report as "not engaged" compared to state averages upon leaving the system.

This second installment of the Ends 2.1 monitoring report, with the earlier Part 1 report, serves as compelling evidence of progress that is aligned with our vision, mission and desired outcomes. There will, no doubt, always be more to do. However, we want to celebrate the positive accomplishments of our students and graduates noted within these reports, while staying focused on our efforts as a school system to continuously improve. We appreciate the direction provided by the school board in prioritizing the development of exceptional students with strong character and a genuine passion for learning. Our aim remains to ensure that our graduates are thoroughly prepared for a wide range of educational and vocational opportunities, empowering them to make diverse life choices with confidence.

From: Baker, Greg <Greg.Baker@bellingshamschools.org>

Sent: Thursday, April 17, 2025 4:35 PM

Subject: Board Update - Questions re Ends 2.1

Board,

Via email and in the board responses, we received some questions re Ends 2.1. Below are some responses. We can also discuss any of these tonight.

Thanks

Greg

Question: "...one thing I found odd about the 2.1 report was in figure re: student subgroups and the impact of income. Between last year's report on 2022 and this year's, its non-low-income students with IEPs that show a decrease in graduation rates. The rate for low income with (IEPs) stays the same, but does jump dramatically (for) MLLs which seems to show low-income MLLs outperforming non-low income, which the report contributes to relatively low n values. Just wondering if that's also true for the students with disabilities numbers."

Response: The first thing to consider is the cohort n sizes:

Students with IEPs – (36) non-low income; (91) low income

ML Students – (11) non-low income; (63) low income

For MLL, with a non-low group size of 11, the difference of one kid graduating or not equals an almost ten percent graduation rate for the group. So, easy to understand how one or two kids missing the graduation bar from that group could make it look dramatically different from the low-income group. As well, typically speaking, the ML graduation rates tend to fluctuate more than other groups, because the overall n size tends to be smaller. We would need to get further into the weeds of individual kid trajectories and stories to really understand what happened in this year for the non-low group. Difficult to be able to say/determine one specific factor that caused this spike in the low-income group outpacing the non-low group.

For the students with disabilities, the decrease for the non-low-income group from 2022 to 2023 is less likely to be about n size. Other factors are probably at work, such as: (a) We have many students whose transition plan extends their time in school until 21 or 22 years

old. These students specifically stay enrolled in high school (do not graduate) so as to be able to continue in the extended pathway of Community Transitions. This number fluctuates a bit every year. One other speculation we have – could it be that students from low-income families are more likely to expedite graduation (not extend for CT) while those with fewer economic barriers may have more ability to extend their time in school. We don't have 7-year cohort by income data readily available, but could work on that if helpful.

Question: To whatever degree filing a FAFSA is an indication of college attendance, it might be useful to have an explanation as to why these rates are declining slightly in recent years overall, noting Bellingham's has ticked up slightly the past year. The same question can be asked regarding the overall decrease in college attendance since pre-covid years.

Response: The percentage of BPS students' enrollment in four-year schools averages about 10 percentage points higher than the state, historically speaking, and increased this past year. We think this is probably what is underneath that bump up in FAFSA rates. However, BPS students' enrollment in two-year schools is right at or just below the state average, and this rate has not returned to pre-pandemic levels (7-8% lower on average). Fewer kids going to two-year and lower FAFSA participation rates are probably related. It also could be that the lower FAFSA rates are linked to post-pandemic economic stresses; a recent report from WERA supports this notion ([WERA Focus Group Report - A summary of student focus groups in 2024 - February 2025](#)). We were glad to see FAFSA tick up a notch, and hope that trend will continue.

Question: How many students with IEPs who do not go on to CT graduate in between years 4 and 7?

Response: One way to estimate that is to consider the 5- and 6-year trends in that population over time. These would be students with IEPs who do not do the full three-year extension in CT, but graduate in one or two years after high school. On average, looking over the past ten years just under 9% of this population graduates in year 5; just under an additional 7% graduate in year 6. So, on average, about 16% of the population of graduates with IEPs graduate in either 5 or 6 years. This one may need some more analysis to help tease out the role CT plays in graduation rates.