

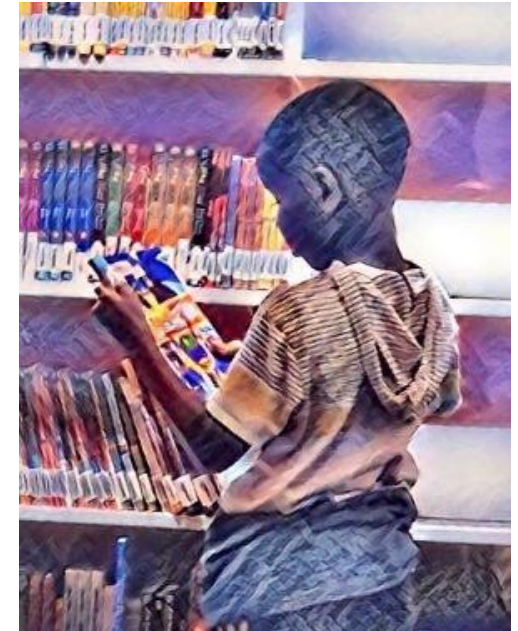


Washington State
Governor's Office of the

Education Ombuds

We listen. We inform. We help solve problems.

Phone: 1-866-297-2597 Web: www.oeo.wa.gov



Annual Report 2020-2021

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.



September 1, 2021

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

We have all been fundamentally changed by the pandemic, even more so students and families furthest from educational justice and marginalized by racism, ableism, anti-Blackness, and xenophobia. This past school year highlighted the ways that we can and should do better when it comes to addressing inequities and creating systems that honor the whole student. The pandemic compounded existing trauma and widened disparities in resources and power.

Some of the most significant calls for change came from what worked for students, too. We heard stories about how education improved for some students of color learning remotely, who did not fear retaliation or discrimination because they weren't in a school building, and for some disabled students who saw smaller class sizes and more flexible instructional practices online, for example, than they had in person. I do not want to gloss over the fact that many students were not engaged this year and dropped out or were unenrolled because of COVID and the ongoing effects of racism. The challenge in the coming years will be learning from this moment and understanding what flexibility school systems have to exercise to respond to families and students individually and support educators in entering and remaining in the profession.

Like the families, educators, and students we collaborated with this year, we had no idea what to expect but we focused on communities most affected by COVID in our state. Our work turned out to be more intersectional than ever before. We grew outreach from 180,000 people in 2019-2020 to more than 253,000 this year. Given that all our workshops have been virtual, we were surprised by the numbers. However, we were able to collaborate with everyone from Univision to school boards to ensure that students, families, and educators had the information they needed.

Our conflict resolution requests looked similar in their impact. While requests for support were low in the fall, they grew exponentially in March through May, when we reached 41% of our 627 cases for the year in just three months. Of the 290 students within our strategic plan focus, 89% had more than one intersectional identity within our priorities, particularly when we looked at students of color or immigrant and refugee students with disabilities.

We enter the new school year with a mix of hope and anxiety, realizing that we will continue to learn from and adapt to whatever comes. We will be strongest with the voices and expertise of the people most impacted by COVID and structural racism and ableism at the center.

Carrie Griffin Basas, JD, MEd
Director

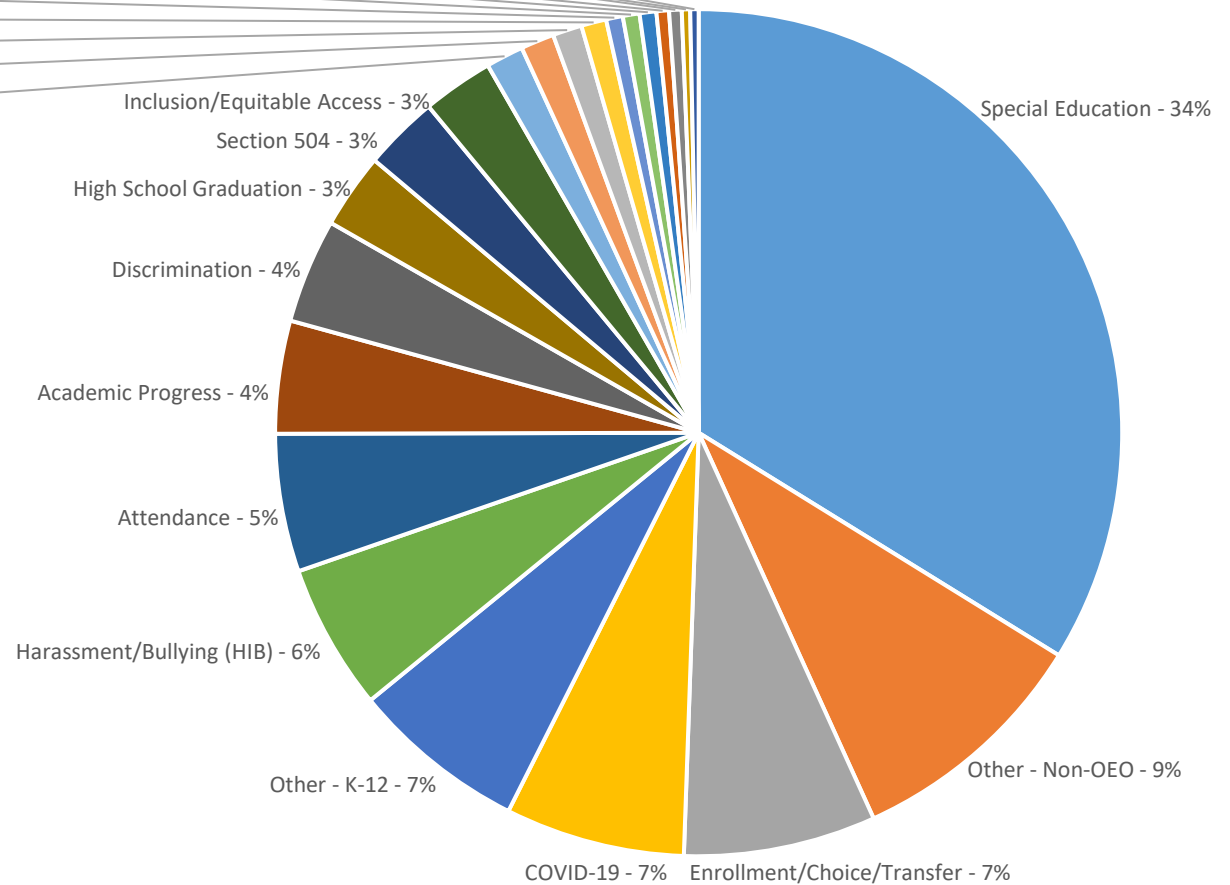
2020-2021 Data Overview

OEO received a total of **627** education-related concerns during the 2020-2021 fiscal year. The primary concerns were **Inclusion/Equitable Access for Students with Disabilities – especially those who struggled with or were unable to access remote learning during COVID-19, Enrollment/Choice/Transfer, COVID-19 issues for General Education Students and Other K-12 Concerns.**

Concerns ≤ 1% Include:

- Highly Capable
- Discipline
- Law and Policy Research
- Athletics
- Student Safety
- School Climate
- Cultural Competency
- Special Education Transition
- Transportation
- Language Access
- ALE/Charter/Online/Home

Education Concerns 2020-2021



Education Concerns 2020-2021

Although there were fewer issues reported to OEO in the first and second quarters of this year, there was a significant increase in the third and fourth quarters as more schools re-opened for hybrid or fully in-person instruction. Nearly 41% of OEO's cases for the year came in during March through May. Primary concerns in the spring involved: **Special Education, Enrollment/Choice/Transfer, and other non-OEO-related** concerns.

OEO created a new three-year plan dedicated to educational justice and disability justice for specific populations most impacted by opportunity gaps and COVID-19. The chart to the right represents the breakdown of strategic populations who contacted OEO during 2020-2021.

89% of students and families with strategic plan concerns fell into more than one strategic population category. The most common combination of multiple strategic plan populations in 2020-2021 was:

- **BIPOC students/families+**
- **Immigrant/Refugee/Migrant/Asylee or EL+**
- **Students receiving ELL services+**
- **Students Out of School+**
- **Students on partial day placements for Special Education.**

Of the 627 concerns brought to OEO during 2020-2021, **290 involved OEO's 2020-2023 strategic plan populations.**

How People Contacted OEO:

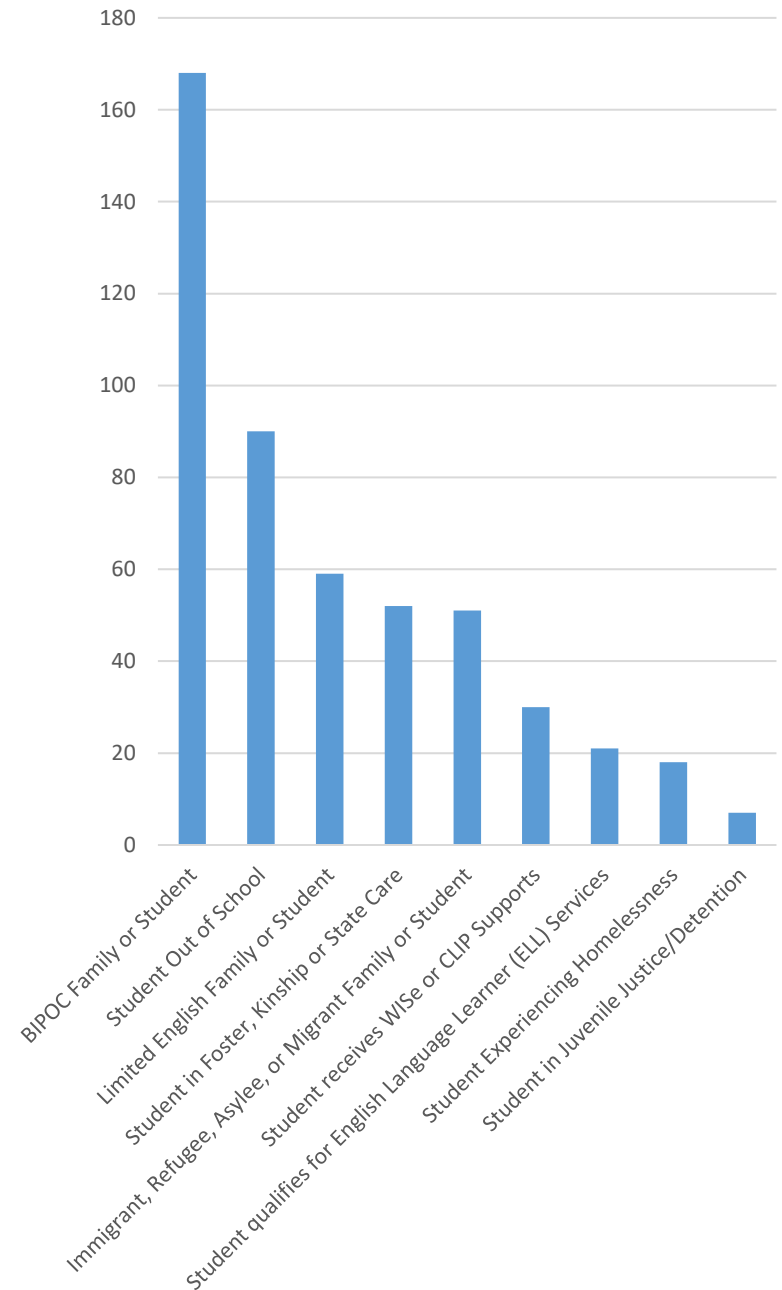
During 2020-2021, 83% of concerns were reported to OEO through OEO's toll-free phone number or email. OEO offers phone interpretation in 240+ languages for callers whose primary language is not English. OEO also has an online intake process, which is available in ten languages: Arabic, Chinese Simplified, Chinese Traditional, English, Korean, Russian, Somali, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese. 17% of concerns were submitted via online intake, in English, Spanish, and Chinese Traditional. The online intake is available at: <https://services.oeo.wa.gov/oeo>.

91% of the people who contacted OEO during 2020-2021 were families with concerns about their children's education.

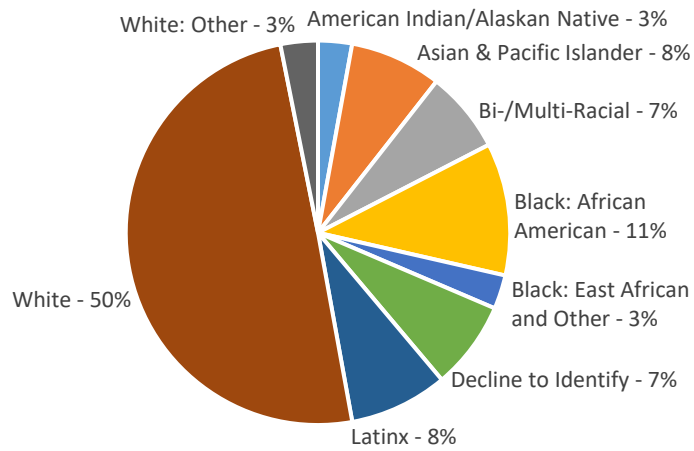
Districts Collaborating with OEO on 15+ Issues included:

Seattle, 43; Kent, 24; Northshore, 15

of Strategic Populations Families or Students 2020-2021



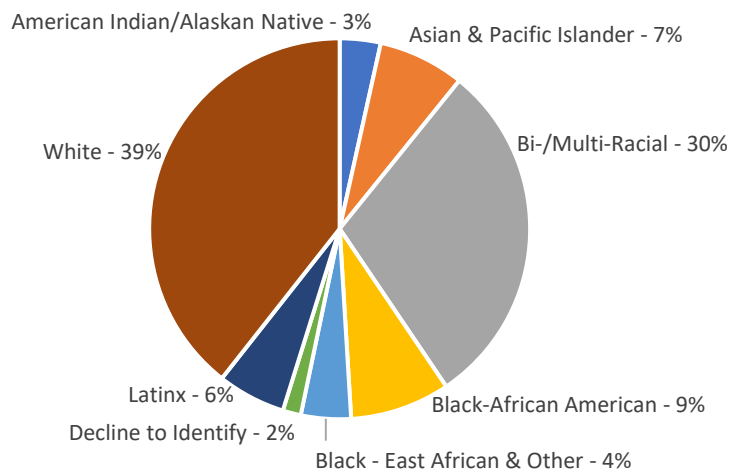
Caller Race / Ethnicity 2020-2021



**Due to small n-size in 2020-2021, Asian and Pacific Islander Student Groups are combined.*

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

Student Race / Ethnicity 2020-2021



Student Race / Ethnicity	#1 Concern	#2 Concern	#3 Concern
American Indian / Alaskan Native	Special Education / Inclusion / Equitable Access 57%	Discrimination 14%	Attendance 10%
Asian & Pacific Islander*	Special Education / Inclusion / Equitable Access 60%	Enrollment / Choice / Transfer 10%	Academic Progress 7%
Bi- / Multi-Racial	Special Education / Inclusion / Equitable Access 77%	Harassment / Bullying (HIB) 15%	Academic Progress 8%
Black: African American	Special Education / Inclusion / Equitable Access 49%	Enrollment / Choice / Transfer 12%	Harassment / Bullying (HIB) 12%
Black: African & Other	Special Education / Inclusion / Equitable Access 62%	Academic Progress 15%	Attendance 8%
Latinx	Special Education / Inclusion / Equitable Access 67%	Enrollment / Choice / Transfer 12%	Academic Progress 3%
White	Special Education / Inclusion / Equitable Access 66%	Enrollment / Choice / Transfer 6%	Harassment / Bullying (HIB) 6%
White: Other	Special Education / Inclusion / Equitable Access 45%	COVID-19 18%	Academic Progress 9%

Referrals to OEO:

- Self-Referral: 38%
- OEO Website: 15%
- Community Professionals: 13%
- Other: 8%
- Medical Professionals: 6%
- Other Parents/Friends: 5%

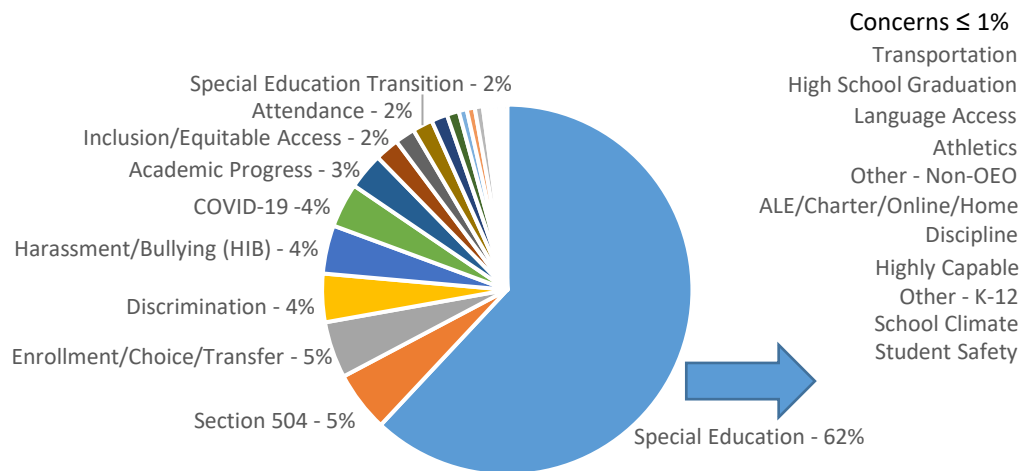
- OEO Outreach/Social Media: 5%
- Educators/School Professionals: 3%
- Organizations Supporting OEO Strategic Populations: 3%
- OSPI: 1%

Opportunity Gap Populations

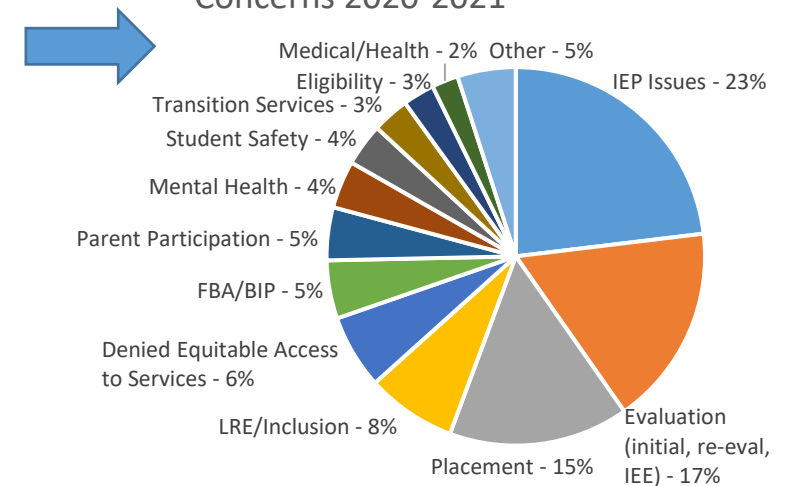
OEO often receives questions about education issues for specific groups of students impacted by opportunity gaps. The following chart identifies the top concerns reported to OEO from distinct Opportunity Gap Populations. While the top concern was Special Education across all groups, we see that other concerns included Enrollment/Choice/Transfer, Discrimination, Academic Progress, Harassment and Bullying, and COVID-19 issues.

Opportunity Gap Populations	#1 Concern	#2 Concern	#3 Concern
Students with Disabilities	Special Education/Inclusion/Equitable Access/Transition: 71%	Enrollment/Choice/Transfer: 5%	Discrimination: 4%
Linguistically Diverse Learners	Special Education/Inclusion/Equitable Access: 64%	Academic Progress: 6%	Harassment/Bullying (HIB): 5%
Students Receiving Free and Reduced Meals	Special Education/Inclusion/Equitable Access: 60%	Discrimination: 6%	Enrollment/Choice/Transfer: 6%
Students in the Foster Care System or Without Housing	Special Education/Inclusion/Equitable Access: 64%	Enrollment/Choice/Transfer: 6%	COVID-19: 6%

Concerns for Students with Disabilities 2020-2021



Breakdown of the 62% of Special Education Concerns 2020-2021



Language Access

13% of families contacting OEO spoke languages other than English in the home in 2020-2021. Those languages included: Spanish, Vietnamese, American Sign Language, Cantonese, Korean, Arabic, Amharic, Hindi, Somali, Tigrinya, Khmer, and Oromo.

5% of families requested phone interpretation in the following languages: Arabic, Cantonese, Khmer, Korean, Oromo, Somali, Spanish, Tigrinya, and Vietnamese.

Policy Recommendations

OEO's mission of reducing opportunity gaps, increasing collaboration between families and schools, and promoting equitable outcomes for students drives our annual policy recommendations. Guided by our strategic plan priorities, we focused this past year on addressing racism, ableism, and other forms of oppression, while learning from communities, families, and students' experiences. Our recommendations are based on data from our outreach and casework this year, as well as priorities expressed by community partners.

Concerns related to COVID-19 pervaded almost every case and exposed and increased inequities in our education system. We cannot overstate the effects that the pandemic had on our students, from an increase in the need for mental health services to the existence of unprecedented barriers to attendance and graduation. These concerns will likely increase next year, even as the pandemic begins to ebb, due to its cascading effects. While we recognize that the pandemic affected everyone in unprecedented ways, it did not do so equally. Our policy recommendations this year address some of the issues exposed as the deepest rifts in the system.

THE STATE NEEDS TO ENSURE THAT WASHINGTON RESIDENTS HAVE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Families lack information about educational services and available supports. Access to the right information at the right time is crucial to increasing educational equity. We have outlined some of the disproportionate effects that we have seen this year for families and students who are not primarily English-speaking, are homeless, and/or experience inconsistent internet and technology access.

For families and students who use a primary language other than English:

The information asymmetry most heavily disadvantages non-English speaking immigrant and migrant families who are furthest from educational justice. When information about new resources or new processes is rolled out, we see those families with more resources served first and our most vulnerable students are served last, if they are served at all. Families report not hearing about recovery services from their school directly, and not receiving information in their primary languages even when the school is aware of their ongoing language access needs. While OSPI has translated and made information about recovery services available in multiple languages on their website, school districts consistently fail to provide these resources to non-English speaking families who are left in the dark when new information becomes available. A parent who speaks and reads English fluently, for example, has no difficulty understanding an email or flyer from their local school detailing the state's plan for recovery services, while a parent whose primary home language is not English might never be informed that these services are available.

This barrier is not limited to recovery services. Implementation of language access obligations remains inconsistent across the state, leaving many—if not most—non-English-speaking families without timely access to critical information. To fill inequitable information gaps, the state, including OSPI and the Governor's Office, should consider how to increase compliance with language access mandates through more robust monitoring and enforcement measures.

For families and students experiencing homelessness or housing instability:

Information asymmetry extends beyond non-English-speaking families to other disadvantaged populations. We anticipate that once the rent and eviction freezes end, there will be an increase in youth and families experiencing housing instability and homelessness. Currently, each school district has a McKinney Vento liaison charged with leading the identification of students who meet the definition of "homeless" and connecting them with supports. Those supports include transportation to stay in their school of origin, and the right to be enrolled immediately if they go to a new school. However, many families are unaware of their rights to access these services until there has already been a disruptive school move or considerable delay in new enrollment. This is another

example where state-level efforts to remedy information gaps are needed. Improvements could include supporting districts in increasing their informational outreach and partnering with community organizations and trusted messengers to increase community-wide awareness of these supports.

For families and students with inequitable access to technology and the internet:

Inequitable access to technology, such as internet and devices, as well as the lack of familiarity with using those devices, contribute to information asymmetry. The pandemic showed that schools rely almost exclusively on email and internet-based platforms to communicate with and teach students, as well as to engage with families. But this approach left many students and families who did not have reliable internet or devices without access to education or to important updates affecting their educational opportunities. Additionally, some of these platforms were inaccessible to individuals with disabilities despite legal requirements or did not offer user-friendly interfaces for families and students who did not speak English as their primary language. The state, under OSPI's leadership and that of other invested agencies, must implement policies to ensure that schools offer alternative methods of disseminating information to all students and families. Lack of email, school information only provided online, or families' discomfort and unfamiliarity with technology must not be the reasons why families are not informed about or able to engage with their children's learning.

TO ADDRESS THE GAPS EXPOSED AND EXACERBATED BY COVID-19, WE MUST INDIVIDUALIZE REMEDIES AND REQUIRE SYSTEMIC ACCOUNTABILITY

Due to a myriad of reasons—including an inability to access online services, a lack of information about McKinney Vento protections, the need to work to help their families survive, mental health concerns, and inadequate transportation—many students missed so much school that they were unenrolled for nonattendance. There have always been some number of students who “go missing” from our public schools and who are not enrolled in any district or engaged with homeschooling. With COVID, we can only assume that there has been a significant increase in the number of students who have seemingly vanished from our education system. With existing data collection and reporting, individual districts and OSPI should be able to estimate how many students are missing and use that data to target resources for increased outreach and re-engagement efforts.

Unfortunately, it is not clear whether or how each district will address the specific needs of these missing students. Without a state-level initiative to engage students, families, and community groups, we may never fully identify or recapture these students. Losing students from our schools is unacceptable and demands an urgent response. The complexities of the issues call for careful consideration of what steps would be most likely to lead to re-engagement and avoid exacerbating existing opportunity gaps. However, state-level decision-making without the input of stakeholders would be ineffective and counterproductive. The state, under OSPI's leadership, should invite students, families, and community groups most significantly impacted to participate in the development of new rules on school engagement. To encourage equitable and respectful participation, the state should offer compensation to these community partners for their time.

Our state has allocated significant funds for recovery services. As we use these funds for their intended purpose – to help students recover what was lost during 2020 and 2021—the state, including OSPI and the Governor's Office, needs to demand accountability and transparency on the use of those funds to achieve the goals of equitable educational access.

Work with Policy Committees and Stakeholder Groups

In addition to the annual report, OEO shares policy recommendations and improves experiences for students and families while serving on many Policy Committees and Stakeholder Groups, such as:

[Becca Task Force](#)

[Coalition on Inclusive Emergency Planning](#)

[Children of Incarcerated Parents](#)

[Department of Health Disability Stakeholders Group](#)

[Disability Policy Consortium](#)

[Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Deputies Action Group](#)

[Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee \(EOGOAC\)](#)

[ESD 105 Youth Advocates](#)

[Kittitas County Parent to Parent](#)

[Kittitas County Transition Council](#)

[Office of Administrative Hearings Suitable Representative Advisory Committee](#)

[OSPI Dispute Resolution Group](#)

[OSPI Family Engagement Framework Workgroup](#)

[OSPI Language Access Workgroup](#)

[OSPI School Reopening Workgroup](#)

[OSPI Special Education Advisory Committee \(SEAC\)](#)

[OSPI WAKids Review Subcommittee](#)

[Project Education Impact](#)

[School Safety and Student Well-Being Advisory Committee](#)

[Social Emotional Learning Advisory Committee \(represented by Jen Chong from PAVE\)](#)

[Washington State Coalition for Language Access \(WASCLA\)](#)

[Workplace Strategy Council](#)

[Yakima County Interagency Transition Network](#)

Outreach to Families, Students, Educators, and Community Stakeholders 2020-2021

Outreach Type	# Views
OEO Staff Outreach Event Audience Totals	51,779
OEO Website	179,284
OEO Social Media	10,758
OEO YouTube	11,410
Total	253,231

OEO Website

The OEO website is now available in **20 languages**: Amharic, Arabic, Chinese Simplified, Chinese Traditional, English, French, Hindi, Khmer, Korean, Marshallese, Punjabi, Russian, Samoan, Somali, Spanish, Swahili, Tagalog, Tigrinya, Ukrainian and Vietnamese. Visit <https://oew.wa.gov/en> and select from the language picker to view the translated pages.

During 2020-2021, the OEO website has received over **179,284 views**, many of which were in Tagalog, Chinese Traditional, and Vietnamese languages.

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

Top pages viewed included **33,800+ views of COVID 19 Resources for Families page** in Tagalog, **15,300+ views of OEO’s Attendance and Truancy page**, **13,600+ views of the OEO Welcome page**, **8,000+ views of OEO’s Education Issues page** in Tagalog, and **7,100+ views of the One Out of Five: Disability History and Pride Project**.

OEO Social Media

OEO continued to use social media to share information to a larger audience with its limited resources. OEO’s Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/WAEducationOmbuds>, reached over **10,758** viewers during 2020-2021. OEO also had over **11,410** views on its [YouTube channel](#), and added new webinars such as:

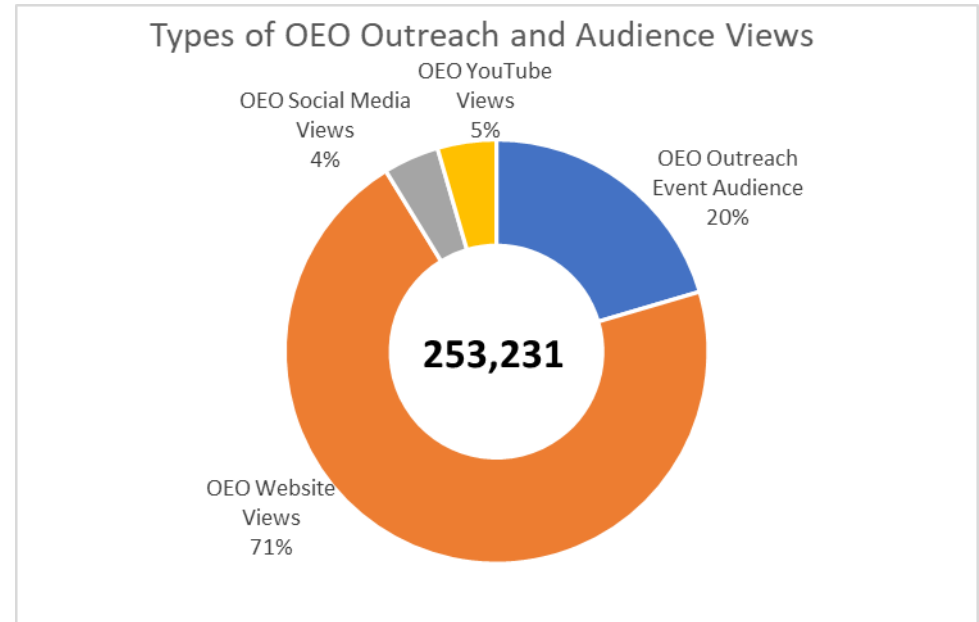
[*Disability Teaches Us: Listen to and Learn from Youth*](#)

[*Investing in Student Potential 2021 – Know Your Rights \(Hosted by League of Education Voters\)*](#)

[*Intersectionality and Disability: Bringing Our Whole Selves*](#)

[*Time to Learn: Shaping OEO’s Future - part of the Seattle Design Festival*](#)

[*Working Effectively with Interpreters \(hosted by Open Doors for Multicultural Families\)*](#)



Outreach through OEO Staff-Led Events

OEO staff participated in **259** virtual presentations, workshops, webinars, blog posts, and outreach events this year, reaching more than **51,775** people. Of those 259 events, 236 reached OEO's Strategic Plan Populations.

OEO offered presentations in **Arabic, English, Portuguese, Spanish, and Tigrinya**. OEO also offered presentations in English where interpretation was provided in the following languages: **American Sign Language (ASL), Amharic, Arabic, Cantonese, French, Japanese, Oromo, Somali, Spanish, Swahili, Tigrinya, and Vietnamese**.

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 services, 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.

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 [One Out of Five: Disability History and Pride Project](#). At the end of June 2021, the *One Out of Five: Disability History and Pride Project* student videos had received **13,452 views** on the OEO YouTube Channel.

Over the 2020-2021 school year, OEO began to collaborate with researchers at the University of Washington's College of Education to better understand how educators were using the resources, as well as to observe the impacts on school climate and attitudes. In-classroom research began just before the COVID-19 school closures, but the team was able to conduct interviews, evaluations, and observations remotely. Educators also created learning resources for exploring disability's intersection with COVID and Black Lives Matter, as well as modifications to support remote learning.

Disability Teaches Us Webinar Series

OEO also continued a webinar series on Disability Justice, called "Disability Teaches Us." The first event, "[Disability Teaches Us: Disability Justice in Schools](#)" has been viewed 249 times on the OEO YouTube Channel this year, in addition to the 3201 views when it was livestreamed on Facebook last year. [Disability Teaches Us: Listen to and Learn from Youth](#) has been viewed 739 times. Planning is in the works for the next two webinars, which should take place in fall 2021.

OEO Publications

OEO produced the following new or revised publications, which are available on the OEO website:

- *Back to School Planning for Remote Learning* available in 15 languages. Available [online](#).
- *OEO Strategic Plan 2020-2023* available in 16 languages [online](#).

How Satisfied Are Our Stakeholders?

- Of the 22% of returned surveys for Ombuds, **88% liked their experience with OEO.**

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:

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Or emailed to: oeoinfo@gov.wa.gov

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