



JUNE 30, 2021

A COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE ON EDUCATIONAL JUSTICE IN THE TIME OF COVID

THE ROLE OF THE WASHINGTON EDUCATION ASSOCIATION
IN AN ANTI-RACIST SYSTEM

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EEC Report

I. Introduction and Purpose of this Report

Historical understanding of the educational system informs us that public education was never tasked to educate all. The Equity in Education Coalition (EEC) aims to eliminate the institutionalized racism and classism of the public education system because we believe that each and every child in our state deserves access to a high-quality education. We operate on the commonsense assumption that white kids do not “naturally” perform better in academics than kids of color, and that white families do not provide a “superior” academic culture. Instead, we understand that institutional racism, especially but not exclusively in the education system, unduly burdens our kids and deprives them of the world class education they deserve. And it is institutional racism that created, sustains, and grows the opportunity gap in Washington.

We believe that no one can advocate better for our kids than our communities and our allies. Therefore, we work with local, regional and state legislatures to ensure that laws, policies, and programs work for kids often trapped in the opportunity and achievement gap. We also hold our leaders accountable until they secure the resources required to make all children safe, healthy, and vibrant. We do whatever is needed to make sure that the implementation of those laws does not perpetuate more vicious cycles of bias, poverty or racism. We act as the bridge between real people experiencing the opportunity gap and the decision makers who want to close it. We seek to create a two-way conversation between parents and teachers who feel that no one is listening, and decision makers looking for guidance on issues of equity. Instead of gatekeeping, we work to gate-break.

Because of the alignment between the mission of EEC and the aims of the Road Map for Educational Justice Project, EEC joined in partnership with the project. EEC was charged with gathering the perspectives of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) and families of color regarding educational justice in Washington state.

This report presents results from two surveys undertaken by the Equity in Education Coalition. The first survey inquired about perspectives on educational justice and the role of the Washington Education Association (WEA) in anti-racist work. The second survey focused on the needs of families of color in addressing inequities in access to digital resources during the COVID-19 restrictions and the pandemic-related switch to remote learning. The report also describes feedback gathered from conversations and meetings with CBO leaders and families of color and concludes with a discussion of implications and recommendations.

II. Inquiry Methods

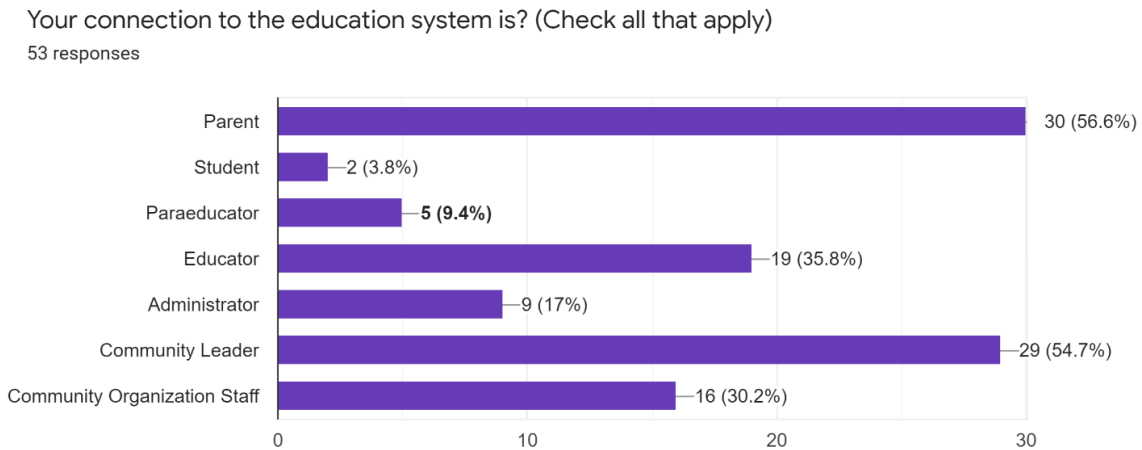
Eighteen months ago, staff and stakeholders of the Equity in Education Coalition met to ask the question:

“What does Educational Justice look like in today’s public education system? And, what role does the Washington Education Association (WEA) play in achieving anti-racism in schools?”

In collaboration with researchers and faculty at the University of Washington College of Education, we developed the Educational Justice Survey to ask leaders within communities of color throughout Washington those two questions and dig deeper into what those questions mean – mainly to get a sense of how the WEA was viewed by leaders of color, regardless of whether they worked in or outside of the realm of public education.

And, like most things 2020, COVID-19 hit and the intent and scope of the survey went sideways. The Educational Justice Survey was launched in May of 2020 and, in six months, resulted in 53 responses. More than half of respondents indicated that they were parents, and 55% identified themselves as community leaders (see Figure 1). With respect to the race and ethnicity of respondents, the majority (64%) identified as individuals of color or a member of a multi-ethnic family (see Figure 2).

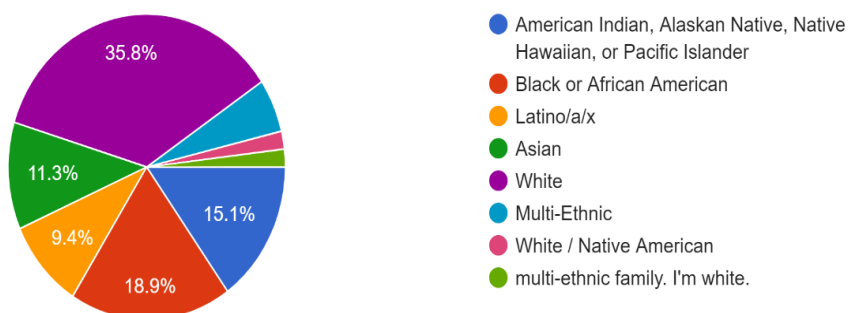
**Figure 1: Educational Justice Survey
Connections of Respondents to the Educational System**



**Figure 2: Educational Justice Survey
Demographic Information Regarding Survey Respondents**

What is the demographic (racial or ethnic group) that best describes you?

53 responses

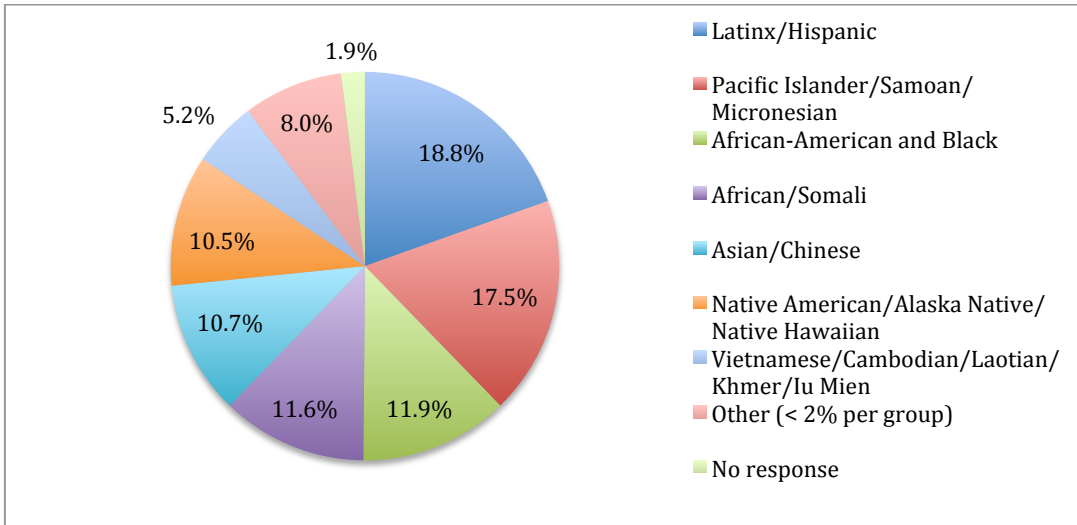


During the same time in which the Educational Justice Survey was deployed, the Equity in Education Coalition became the recipient of two large CARES Act Federal Relief funding from the King County Public Health Food Security Assistance Program and the King County and Puget Sound ESD Digital Equity Program. With both of these grants, the EEC was able to sub-grant to 18 community-based organizations throughout King County and some statewide. One of the features of implementing this program was a Digital Equity Survey. This survey collected data about how community-based organizations and BIPOC and Non-Dominant English-Speaking parents viewed the public education system, the hurdles they faced during remote learning, and what supports they and their students needed to attain educational services. Each community-based organization was awarded \$6K per month per staff person to reach out to their parents/clients to fill out the survey as well as participate in a once-a-week meeting to discuss digital equity needs as well as any other public education concern. Not surprisingly, the survey connected to the Digital Equity program yielded 808 responses from families in two and a half months.

There was a large-scale targeted social media campaign around the Digital Equity Survey. It was placed front and center of the EEC monthly newsletter which hits 3200 viewers, our social media campaign targeting our 5500 followers also centered the survey, and the survey was linked to over 30 Facebook groups that center parents, teachers, educators, students, and/or community leaders throughout the state of Washington – including groups like the African American Caucuses, Tribal Leadership Council on Education, and the Commission of Hispanic Affairs.

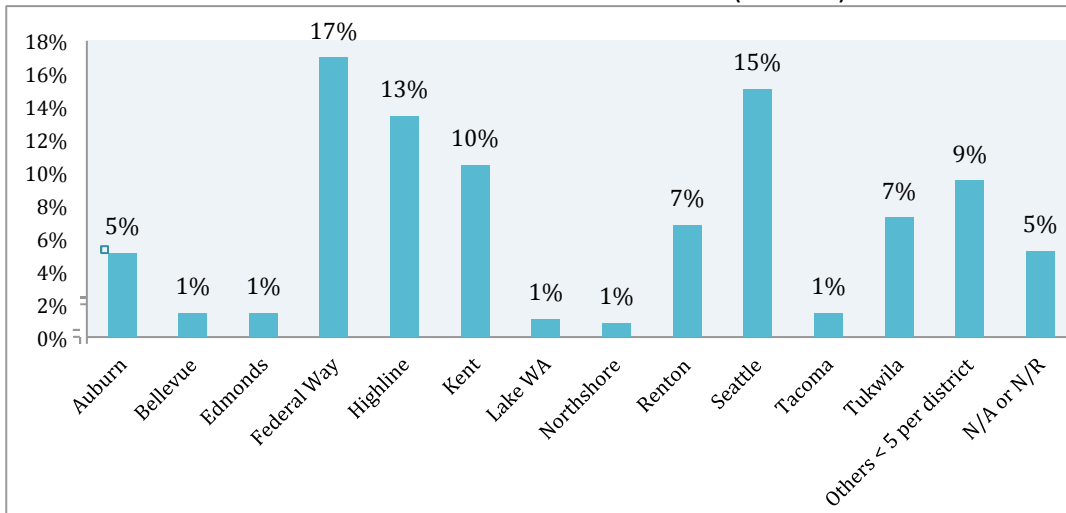
In contrast to the respondents for the Educational Justice Survey, nearly all respondents to the Digital Equity Survey (99%) identified their race/ethnicity as non-White (see Figure 3 and Appendix A). Families reported speaking a total of 34 different languages, with nearly a third of respondents speaking 2 or more languages. More than half of families (56%) indicated that they speak English, 21% speak Spanish, 17% speak Somali, and 8% speak Samoan. (see Appendix B).

**Figure 3: Digital Equity Survey
Ethnicity of Respondents (n = 808)**



The respondents to the Digital Equity Survey reported that they came from a variety of school districts located in King, Snohomish and Pierce Counties. Figure 4 displays the school districts their children attend. At least 10% of respondents reported that their children attend the following school districts: Federal Way (17%), Seattle (15%), Highline (13%), and Kent (10%).

**Figure 4: Digital Equity Survey
School District Attended (n = 808)**



In the next two sections, we discuss results from the two surveys that were administered, beginning with the Educational Justice Survey, followed by results from the Digital Equity Survey.

III. Results from the Educational Justice Survey

Key Findings

- Approximately four-fifths of respondents (81%) stated that they knew about the WEA. However, 65% report that they have never partnered with the WEA.
- The majority of respondents (66%) described the response of public schools to their personal and/or organizational requests and actions as either minimally responsive (50.9%) or not responsive at all (15.1%). One third of respondents characterized the public schools as being either responsive or very responsive.
- Slightly more than a third of respondents (36%) indicated that the public school system has served their community very poorly or not well at all during the Covid-19 pandemic. A somewhat higher proportion of respondents (40%) indicated that the public school system served their community somewhat well.

Additional details regarding the findings from the Educational Justice Survey are provided in Figures 5 through 7 below.

Figure 5: Educational Justice Survey Partnering with the WEA (n = 52)

Have you ever partnered with WEA?
52 responses

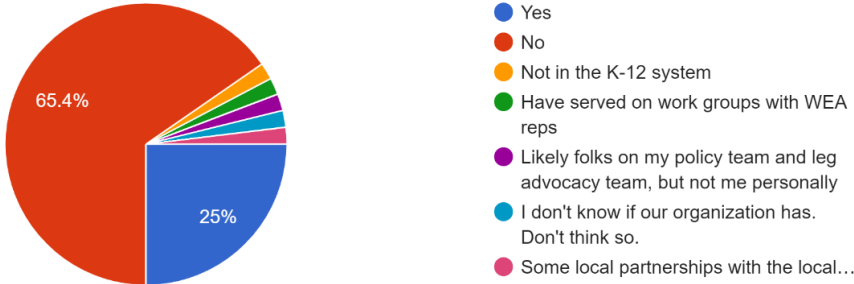


Figure 6: Educational Justice Survey Responsiveness of Schools (n = 53)

How would you describe the response of public schools to your personal and/or organizational requests and actions?

53 responses

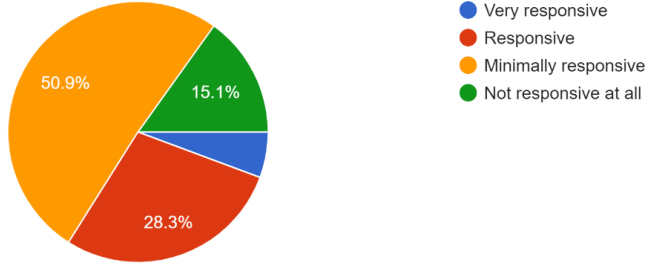
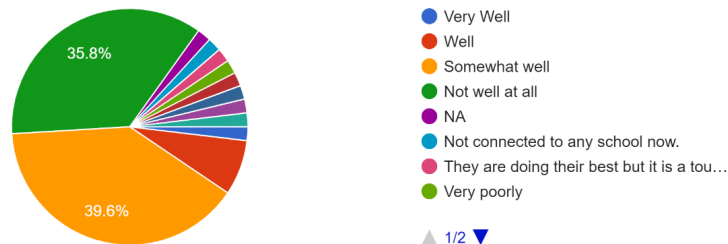


Figure 7: Educational Justice Survey
How schools have served communities during COVID-19 (n = 53)

In your opinion, how has the public school system served your community during the COVID-19 pandemic?

53 responses



Next, we review the results of the Digital Equity Survey. This survey was administered with the support of CBOs over the time period from September 2020 through January 2021, with a total of 808 respondents.

IV. Results from the Digital Equity Survey

Key Findings

- 54% of families have 3 or more children living at home.
- 51% of families have 4 or more people on the internet at the same time, and nearly 60% of families experience internet issues when multiple people are using it.
- The vast majority of families (88%) do not need someone to train and assist them on how to use a laptop or internet in their homes.
- Slightly more than one quarter of families (27%) need an interpreter in their language to support their communication with school staff.
- When inquiring about the digital needs of families, the needs most frequently identified were laptops (67%), headset or earphones (64%), and access to internet/WIFI (45%). More than half of families (56%) identified more than one digital need.
- One third of families indicated that they needed other forms of assistance in addition to digital needs. Of this third, 40% indicated they need food assistance, 32% need assistance with rent, and 16% need assistance with utility bills. One fifth of these families indicated they needed more than one of these forms of non-digital assistance.

- 51% of families indicated that it has been 2 months or more since they heard from their district or teacher, while nearly a quarter of families (24%) indicated that they have heard from their district or teacher one week ago or less.

Additional details about these key findings are found in Figures 8 through 13 below.

Figure 8: Digital Equity Survey
Number of Children Living at Home (n = 808)

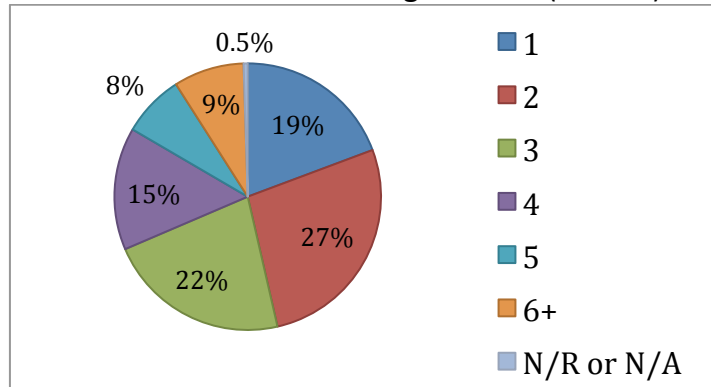


Figure 9: Digital Equity Survey
Number of People in the Household on the Internet at the Same Time (n = 808)

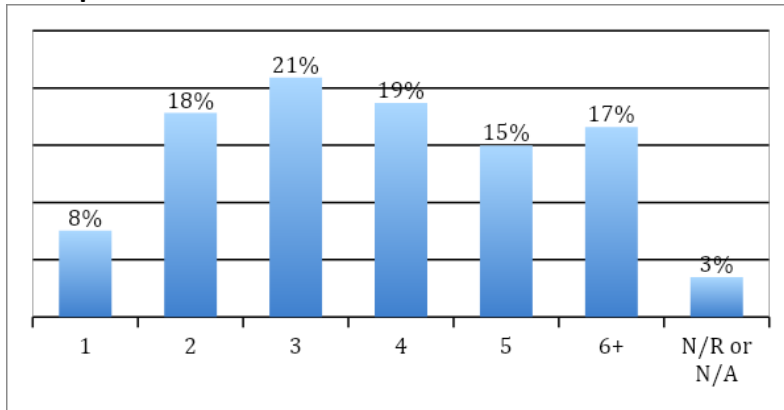


Figure 10: Digital Equity Survey

Do You Experience Internet issues When Multiple People Are Using It? (n = 808)

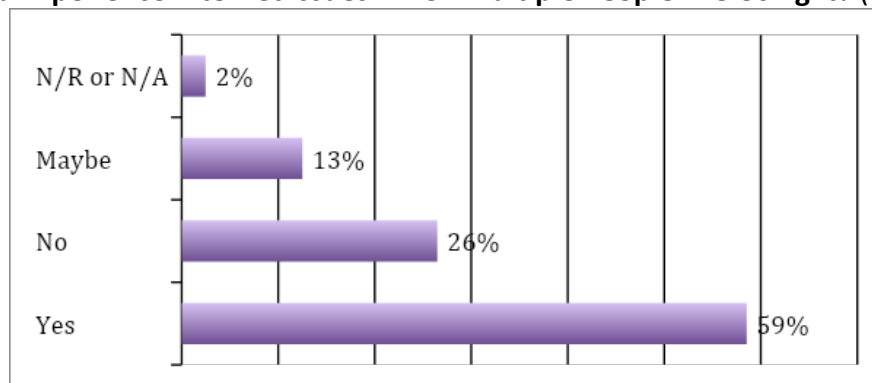


Figure 11: Digital Equity Survey

What are your digital needs? (n = 808)

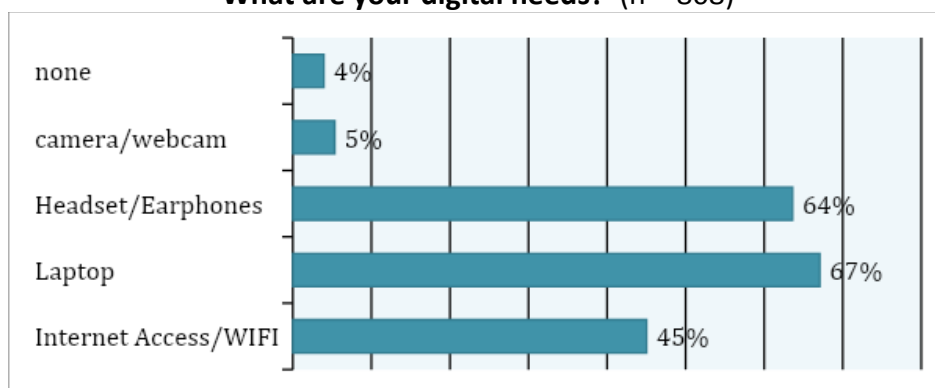
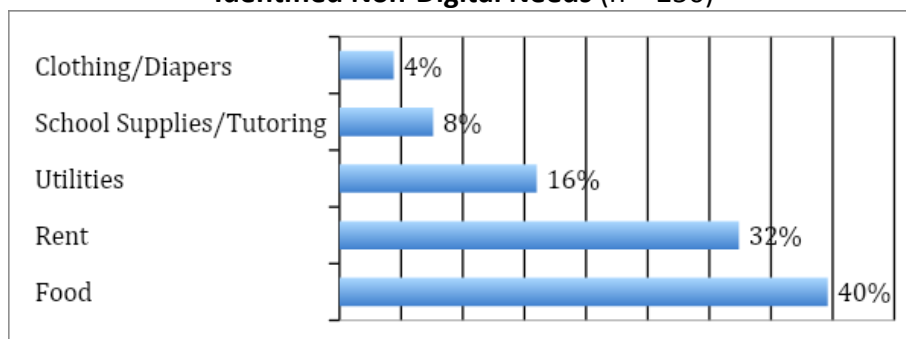


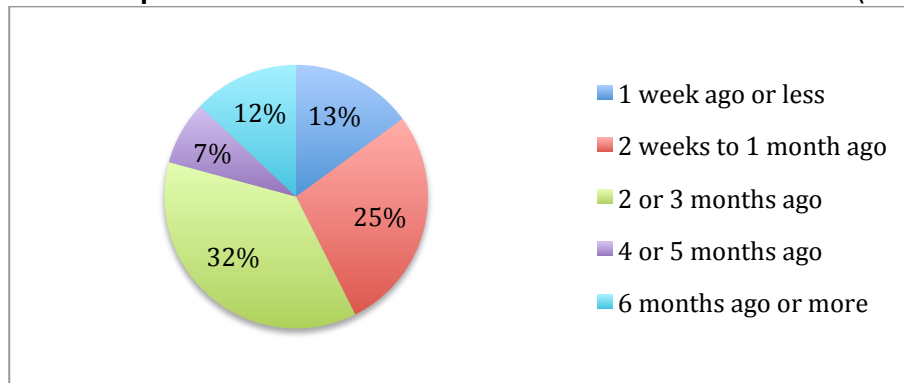
Figure 12: Digital Equity Survey

Identified Non-Digital Needs (n = 250)



Note: Of the 290 respondents who said they had non-digital needs, 86% (n = 250) identified their needs. The remaining 14% did not provide a specific list of needs.

Figure 13: Digital Equity Survey
Last Time Respondents Heard from Their School District or Teacher (n = 736)



Note: 8.9% of those surveyed did not respond to this item.

V. Discussion of feedback from community-based organizations

Emails, feedback, stories, and conversations show that although Educational Justice is an important topic and front of center in the minds of most community leaders and BIPOC parents and students, COVID-19 re-arranged the priorities of needs and the survey made public to garner information and feedback about the WEA's commitment to racial justice and educational justice felt out of touch with the new reality of the pandemic, therefore, not a priority for folx to fill out, even if the survey was short and had some COVID-related questions.

For example, during a two hour meeting regarding the topic of Learning Loss with over 40 Washington state educators, community leaders, parents, and students of color and/or whose dominant language is not English, the conversation quickly changed from the constant and historical reality of learning loss experienced by students of color, into a re-imagining of an educational system that centered the lives and experiences of students of color, immigrant, refugee, native, and non-English dominant speakers. The meeting changed from a conversation about the everyday struggle within an educational system that has always been traumatic, racist, and segregationist, to a revolution towards an educational system that practiced targeted universalism, anti-racism, and holistic approaches that mirrored the best intentions and practices of ECEAP and HeadStart.

What became very clear was that COVID-19 and Maslow's hierarchy of needs clashed quickly and, with remote learning being the basis for educational attainment during the pandemic, the limitations of zip code and neighborhood schools could, finally, be removed. When the suggestion of incorporating the WEA into this conversation came up, the response was overwhelmingly negative, with the theory that if zip code no longer is one of the indicators of what kind of teacher a low-income student of color might get, why not create an online platform of education where all of our BIPOC students could be taught by BIPOC teachers that centered anti-racism and our own lived experiences. This brought up the interesting and

pretty complex subject of educational funding and how it is, still, tied to property taxes and inequitable distribution.

VI. Implications and Recommendations

Throughout the multiple conversations with community-based leaders, the following recommendations emerged:

1. Schools and districts must create supports and opportunities for educators through embedded professional development to effectively use technology tools, digital curricula, and other effective strategies for students to learn remotely or in blended learning settings.
2. Schools must also work to build genuine relationships with students and families before any future crises unfold. Strong adult/student and peer relationships are the foundation of student engagement and student engagement is the foundation of student success. The pandemic has demonstrated that deep, lasting learning will not happen without these relationships, as crisis-response is most effective, and sometimes only possible, when schools, families, and students have established a strong foundation of trust and communication. By establishing a more inclusive and culturally responsive school environment, schools will have the foundation of trust necessary to keep students and families engaged in future crisis-mode education (as seen during the pandemic or other natural disasters that frequent WA State).
3. Schools and districts support the sharing of data and best practices, including highlighting examples where student-centered innovative learning is reshaping what is expected from students and educators.
4. As a state, encourage more flexibility in course structure and design, such as shifting from a seat-based model to a learning growth model.
5. Schools and districts rethink how outcomes are defined to provide greater flexibility for innovating in student learning. We recommend a statewide move to more formative assessments in lieu of summative assessments when possible.
6. In preparation for the next major disruption, the legislature gives OSPI the statutory authority to move into a previously agreed upon remote learning model that allows districts increased flexibility in instructional time and other requirements. This model should stipulate effective and engaging digital curricula to support remote learning on personal devices.

Addressing Inequities and Improving School Culture:

1. District administrators develop capacity-building strategic plans to prepare for future learning disruptions. These plans are vetted by all key stakeholders including families, students, educators, staff, and principals. Furthermore, these plans are practiced (like a fire drill) frequently (i.e., at least monthly) when there is no crisis to manage to help these constituents become fluent in blended/remote learning. The state legislature and OSPI have important roles to play in providing incentives for the development of these capacity plans across the state.
2. Schools work to grow the foundation of trust that is necessary to keep students and families engaged in future remote scenarios by embracing a more inclusive and culturally responsive school environment. This includes a greater focus on the whole child's well-being by providing socio-emotional support and communication to families throughout the school year that is both proactive and responsive.
3. Districts define and articulate an anti-racist frame and create a plan for reviewing and resolving policies regularly, both horizontally and vertically across departments and schools.
4. Districts ensure through hiring and reviewing practices that all educators and staff possess the mindset and skills to serve our students effectively and compassionately regardless of how schooling is delivered.
5. Fully funding the Educational Opportunity Gap Oversight and Accountability Committee's 2020 recommendation¹ to improve family engagement in Washington State. These recommendations include: literacy support, and connect people to opportunities and resources for digital inclusion, including food, housing, health, and mental health services.
 1. OSPI directs school districts to fully fund and prioritize staffing of family engagement coordinators when staffing schools, particularly schools with high percentages of students in poverty and large variance in home languages.
 2. The plans will draw from **Washington Family Engagement's** clearinghouse² on best practices for family engagement and districts will review and revise their plans annually, with input from a representative panel of community members.
6. Lastly, it is important to realize that the pandemic has changed the way many students and families—as well as school professionals think about school and schooling. When schooling models shift to include remote locations, learning must not be interrupted. Even if schools close, learning must stay “on” for ALL kids, regardless of the zip code in which they live.

¹ The EOGOAC Committee's 2020 recommendations can be found at: <https://www.k12.wa.us/about-ospi/workgroups-committees/currently-meeting-workgroups/family-engagement-framework-workgroup>

² For information about the Family Engagement Framework see: <https://www.k12.wa.us/about-ospi/workgroups-committees/currently-meeting-workgroups/family-engagement-framework-workgroup>

Families in the Conversation: OSPI requires that school districts report on how state family engagement funds are spent, and holds them accountable for how they are using their set aside dollars for family engagement under Title I. OSPI and the State Board of Education require that each district has a written plan in place for how to communicate clearly and effectively with families about plans for education and student support in the event of a school dedicated workspaces at homes, the software innovations and flexibility in communication channels received positive reviews from families.

The Digital Navigator program presents an innovative approach to the challenges of connecting people to the internet. Digital Navigators work to identify people in need of internet access, hardware, and digital skills, provide people with those technologies and digital opportunities.

Digital Navigators are experienced, trauma-informed social service providers who, while reaching out to families around food, housing, health, and mental health services, are also cross-trained to offer digital access and digital literacy support. This role is vital to both connecting families with their schools and connecting schools and families to community organizations and outside resources.

Digital Navigators:

1. Offer base level technical advice, social service support, and digital literacy training;
2. Are full-time employees of either a community-based organization, school district, or anchor institutions throughout a community (religious building, library, college campus, etc);
3. Create a warm “hand-off” to a technology support call-in center if needed

This offers a solution to many of the barriers families currently face, from access to hardware to guidance on how to use their devices. Digital Navigator training as a coordinating tool where digital inclusion resource mapping could contribute to community planning, prioritizing the building of more resources, statewide asset mapping, data collection, and coordination with Washington’s Broadband Action Team.

Implementing these recommendations will take the state further down the path of serving its most vulnerable students: **those who were already furthest from educational justice**. And while it is tempting to dismiss these necessary changes due to cost, the pandemic has made the truth inescapable: lack of investment is far more expensive than the financial investment it will take to be prepared for the next crisis. At the same time, developing plans and forming relationships is a process. The hard work that we need to do to prepare for the next pandemic must begin now.

Acknowledgments

We would like to acknowledge that no matter where each of us are physically, we are on the traditional lands of Native Americans, whose ancestors were the original inhabitants. As we proceed with our work, let us make sure that our deliberations benefit their descendants equitably. Recognizing the original inhabitants of the spaces we occupy through awareness building and lack acknowledgement practices is an important step toward equity.

We would like to thank the community-based organizations, their staff, and clients for taking time out of their days to offer their perspectives on education, the public sector response to COVID, and the role the WEA has and can play in creating an anti-racist educational system. We'd also like to thank everyone who took the time to complete our survey and to forward it onto others.

Lastly, we would like to thank the University of Washington College of Education team, especially Drs. Margaret Plecki, Manka Varghese, and Ana Elfers for their research analysis, writing and preparation of this report, as well as their continued support, guidance, and leadership.

We would like to thank the Puget Sound Education Service District, mainly Superintendent John Welch and Matthew Gulbrason, Director, Family & Community Partnerships, Equity in Education Department for their continued support, guidance, and belief in the vision of the Equity in Education Coalition in centering the voices and experience of communities of color to revolutionize how educational services are delivered to our children.

Appendix A: Digital Equity Survey
Race/Ethnicities Reported by Respondents (n = 808)

	Percent	Number		Percent	Number
Latinx/Hispanic	19.7%	166	Laotian	1.3%	11
Asian	11.0%	93	Micronesian	1.1%	9
Somali	8.6%	73	Indian	0.9%	8
African-American	8.5%	72	Chinese	0.8%	7
Native American	7.8%	66	Alaska Native	0.7%	6
Pacific Islander	7.3%	62	Khmer	0.7%	6
Samoan	5.9%	50	Middle Eastern	0.5%	4
African	5.1%	43	Iu Mien	0.5%	4
Black	5.0%	42	Mixed/Multi	0.4%	3
White	3.6%	30	Hawaiian	0.4%	3
Garifuna	2.0%	17	Arab	0.2%	2
Filipino/a	1.7%	14	Punjabi	0.2%	2
Afghan	1.7%	14	Ukrainian	0.1%	1
Vietnamese	1.4%	12	No response	0.7%	6
Cambodian	1.3%	11			

Appendix B: Digital Equity Survey
Languages Spoken by Respondents (n = 808)

	Percent	Number	Languages	Percent	Number
English	52.8%	446	Chinese	0.6%	5
Spanish	20.4%	172	Marshallese	0.6%	5
Somali	15.2%	128	French	0.5%	4
Samoan	7.1%	60	Iu Mien	0.5%	4
Tagalog	3.7%	31	Tigrinya	0.5%	4
Hindi	3.4%	29	Pashto	0.4%	3
Punjabi	3.2%	27	Swahili	0.4%	3
Dari	2.8%	24	ASL	0.2%	2
Khmer	2.7%	23	Cambodian	0.2%	2
Lao	2.6%	22	Fijian	0.2%	2
Chuukese	1.7%	14	Cayuga	0.1%	1
Arabic	1.4%	12	Hawaiian	0.1%	1
Vietnamese	1.4%	12	Italian	0.1%	1
Farsi	1.3%	11	Navajo	0.1%	1
Garifuna	1.2%	10	Ukrainian	0.1%	1
Chamorro	0.9%	8	Urdu	0.1%	1
Amharic	0.6%	5			

