

# SEEDING SUCCESS

*The Story of Seattle Public Schools'  
Office of African American Male Achievement*



# SEATTLE MENTORING CONNECTIONS

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Seattle Public Schools has become a learning organization because we are intentionally focused on **improving how our system supports the needs and experiences of African American males**. It started with this unapologetic focus on improving the conditions for our chronically least served students. As a result of applying our learning, we have more aligned programs and focused policies like Policy 0010 - our instructional philosophy <https://www.seattleschools.org/about/school-board/policies/0010-instructional-philosophy/>. We are focused on 1) our system's needs for improvement and 2) setting higher expectations of our system to tangibly support our students.

We also have new knowledge about student and family experiences. From these strategies, **we see our families engaged and empowered in how they are going to support their children**. We are in community, and value what community provides us; these and many other lessons and practices were catalyzed by the Office of African American Male Achievement. Our system is better for it."



**Superintendent Brent Jones**  
Seattle Public Schools



# ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report provides an overview of The Office of African American Male Achievement (AAMA or the Office) and shares insights for educators and practitioners in their work with every learner. Data in this report includes district and state administrative data, the Seattle Public Schools (SPS)'s Student Survey of School Climate, and AAMA's strategy review survey. Findings are strategy-specific outcomes rather than the culmination of a departmental evaluation.

AAMA is one department within a larger ecosystem of Seattle Public Schools services. The generational work of rectifying systemic educational inequities began long before AAMA's establishment and will continue long after. The Office believes that effective equity strategies—those that shift practices, policies, and programs to support communities who have been historically least served—can facilitate the redesign of schools to benefit all students and educators. The collective legacy of this work will manifest in how we sustain relationship-focused approaches for young people today and cultivate positive learning environments for young people to thrive tomorrow.

## ENGAGE

Learn more about AAMA, become a mentor or volunteer, or make a donation online at

 <https://www.seattleschools.org/aama>

## SEATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Seattle Public Schools aims to improve academic and life outcomes for students by disrupting the legacies of racism in our educational system. By actively becoming an anti-racist educational system—and ensuring students furthest away from educational justice thrive—SPS aims to improve conditions for all students. The district is committed to providing students with a high-quality education in a safe and welcoming learning environment. The district's academic strategies are designed to support inclusive practices, early confident readers, strong mathematicians, and Seattle-ready graduates. Learn more about Seattle's Student-Outcomes Focused Governance:

 <https://www.seattleschools.org/about/school-board/student-outcomes-focused-governance/>



**Confident Early Readers**



**Strong Mathematics**



**Seattle-Ready Graduates**



**Inclusionary Practices**

### SUGGESTED CITATION:

Cooley, S. & Williams, M. (2024). *Seeding Success: The Story of Seattle Public Schools' Office of African American Male Achievement*. Seattle Public Schools.



FIGURE 1. Seattle Public Schools' Office of African American Male Achievement Function

## OFFICE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE ACHIEVEMENT

The Office of African American Male Achievement was created in August 2019 as an innovation center within SPS focused on cultivating the strengths of Black boys and teens. As a driver of systemic change, professional development, and direct support, AAMA provides resources, focused programming, and data-equity capacity. The Office's small team also works with students, families, and educators to promote school culture, conditions, competencies, and community connections that enable students to succeed. AAMA approaches this work through a framework for systems change rather than student intervention. Learn more about AAMA at

<https://www.seattleschools.org/departments/aama/>



## Acknowledgments

AAMA would like to extend our gratitude to the many individuals who made this report possible. First, we want to express our deep appreciation for the insights and expertise shared by students, families, and community leaders who have participated in AAMA's focus groups, interviews, and surveys over the years and by those who shared their time and expertise to inform the Office's original strategies. Thank you to Dr. Shelby Cooley and our partners at Education Northwest for their collaboration on this report and to Teysia Parks of Studio T Designs for her design work.

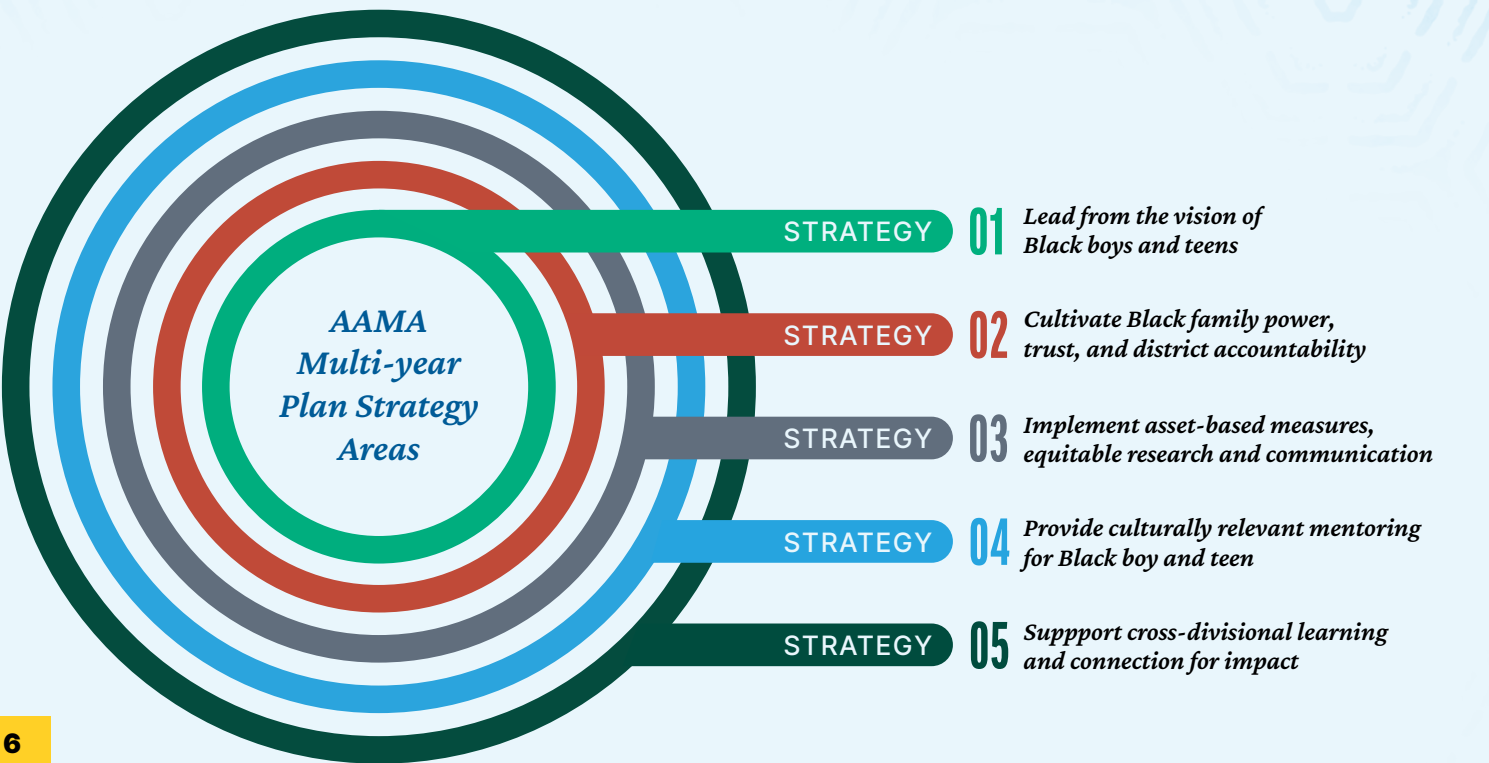
We want to thank the Alliance for Education and the philanthropic partners they rallied to invest in the Office, including Casey Family Programs, Amazon, The Ballmer Group, The Boeing Company, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Microsoft, Nesholm Family Foundation, Raikes Foundation, Remala Foundation, The Seattle Foundation, The John Stanford Fund, Tabor 100, Alaska Airlines Foundation, BECU, Premera, and Kaiser Permanente. We also thank the Player's Coalition and Walk Away City Collaborative for your support in extending these efforts and uplifting youth voices through art.



# STRATEGY OVERVIEW

The Office of AAMA promotes shared accountability and models equitable practices by listening to the experiences and solutions of students and co-designing efforts with families and the community. In the 2020–21 academic year, the Office conducted a listen-and-learn series and research study, *Our Voice Our Vision* report [<https://tinyurl.com/AAMA-OurVoiceOurVision>], to understand community aspirations and barriers (Cooley, et al., 2021). The strategic areas below—efforts within each of which are connected to multiple district goals—were developed from the findings of this study.

FIGURE 2. Office of African American Male Achievement multiyear plan strategy areas





# OUR BLACK BOYS AND TEENS

Our students are resilient and innovative leaders whose perspectives and lived experiences represent much of the diversity across our district and whose experiences intersect with services we hope to improve for all. Our Black students, their families, and Black communities represent the African diaspora. “Black/African American” is a federal racial category that does not capture our students’ many ethnicities, cultures, and backgrounds. As federally defined, this category excludes Black multiracial and multiethnic students, who are grouped into the “Two or More Races” or other categories.

Understanding nuances within the Black experience is also crucial to understanding both the educational barriers students face and their cultural assets (Agyepong, 2017; Alex-Assensoh, 2009; Asante et al., 2016). AAMA was the first to embed an accurate definition of Black students in districtwide SPS reporting.

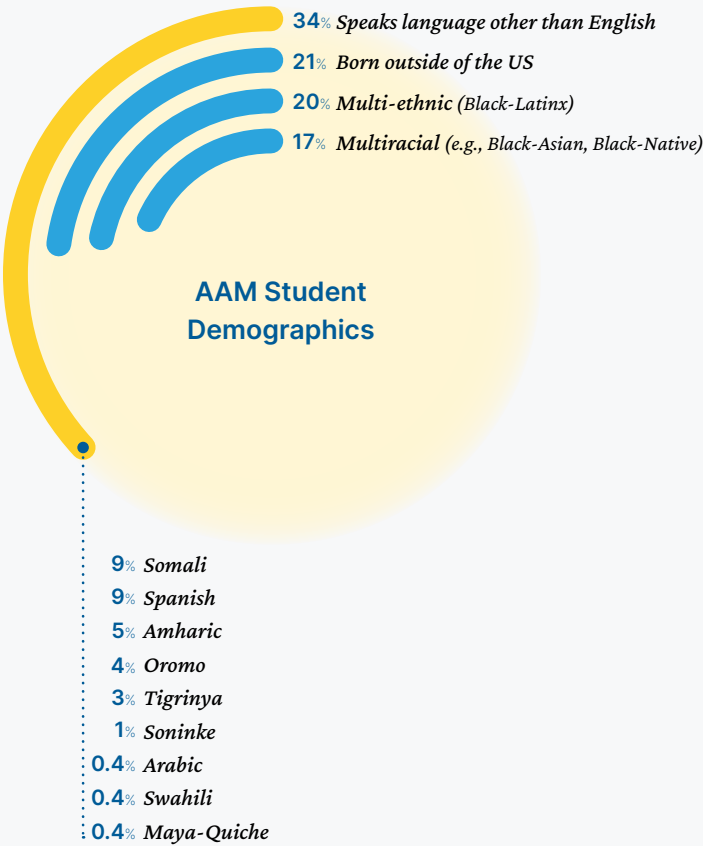
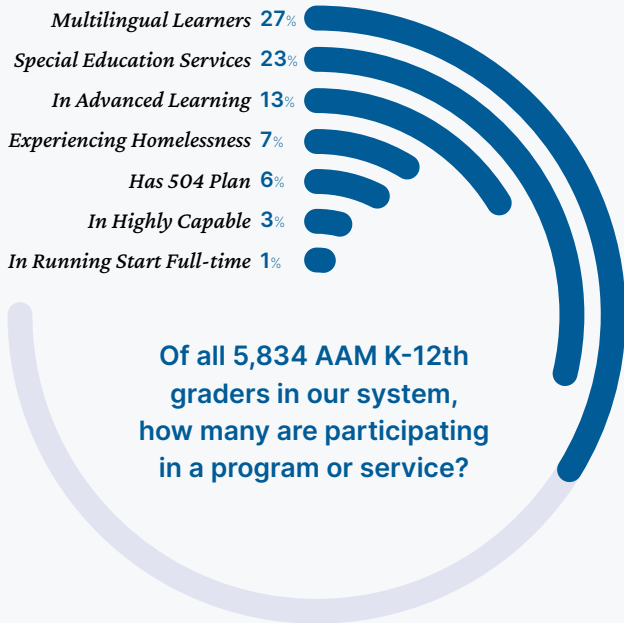
In the 2022–23 academic year the district’s 5,834 K–12 Black boys and teens represented 44 different spoken languages (including 66% English, 9% Somali, 9% Spanish, and 5% Amharic). Twenty-seven percent of our K–12 Black boys and teens were multilingual learners. Our Black students and Black boys and teens in particular are overrepresented in English language learning (ELL) and special education services and underrepresented in advanced learning.

## MAXIMUM REPRESENTATION IN ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

With many multiracial and multiethnic Black students invisible in the data, AAMA worked with analysts to create an inclusive definition of this diverse community. This data definition is now used in all SPS district-level reporting and sets a precedent for making visible our other marginalized communities.

FIGURE 3.  
Characteristics of African American males in Seattle Public Schools

### Our African American boys and teens represent many experiences and communities



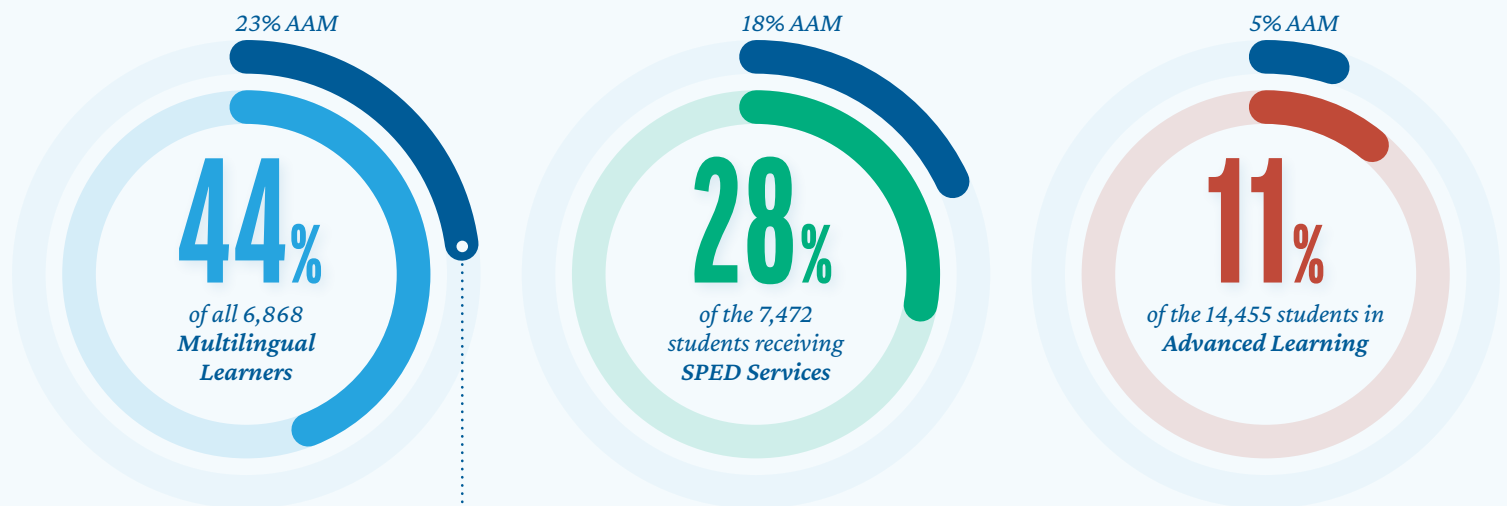


“For me, I inherited my culture, my Somali culture, from my parents. I also grew up in Kenya, and at the same time, had a lot of cultural embarking there. I’m here, and also trying to get some new things. This is an important thing.”

**Somali middle school boy**

A recent district-wide survey found seven percent of the 2,870 participating Black grade 3–12 students self-identify as nonbinary or other diverse genders and 21 percent of Black secondary students identify as queer or non-cisgender (SPS Research and Evaluation Student Survey of School Climate, 2021–22). While findings in this report focus on Black students overall and those who self-identified as male, we know these are just some of the voices of and experiences across a community that demands not only racial justice but also gender, economic, ability, and queer justice.

**FIGURE 4.** Characteristics of Black Seattle Public Schools K–12 students relative to their share of the student population



Black boys and teens are **11%** of all K-12th graders and **23%** of all multilingual learners



STRATEGY

01

# LEAD FROM THE VISION OF BLACK BOYS AND TEENS





01

225  
STUDENTS53  
SCHOOLS

Districtwide Goals



It feels like a space where you can really be free and share your experiences with fellow Black students and connect with them.”

Black middle school boy

Young people have unique and critical perspectives on learning, teaching, and schooling.

Student voice and leadership have long been associated with increased academic engagement and school attendance, and a growing body of literature highlights how student voice is directly associated with academic outcomes (e.g., Salisbury et al., 2023). Despite their many benefits, student voice initiatives are often localized and rarely part of systemic state or district policies (Mitra et al., 2014). Creating sustainable structures for student voice acknowledges that the insights of young people “warrant not only the attention but also the responses of adults; and that they should be afforded opportunities to actively shape their education” (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 359).



## STUDENT-LED CHANGE AND AFFINITY GROUPS

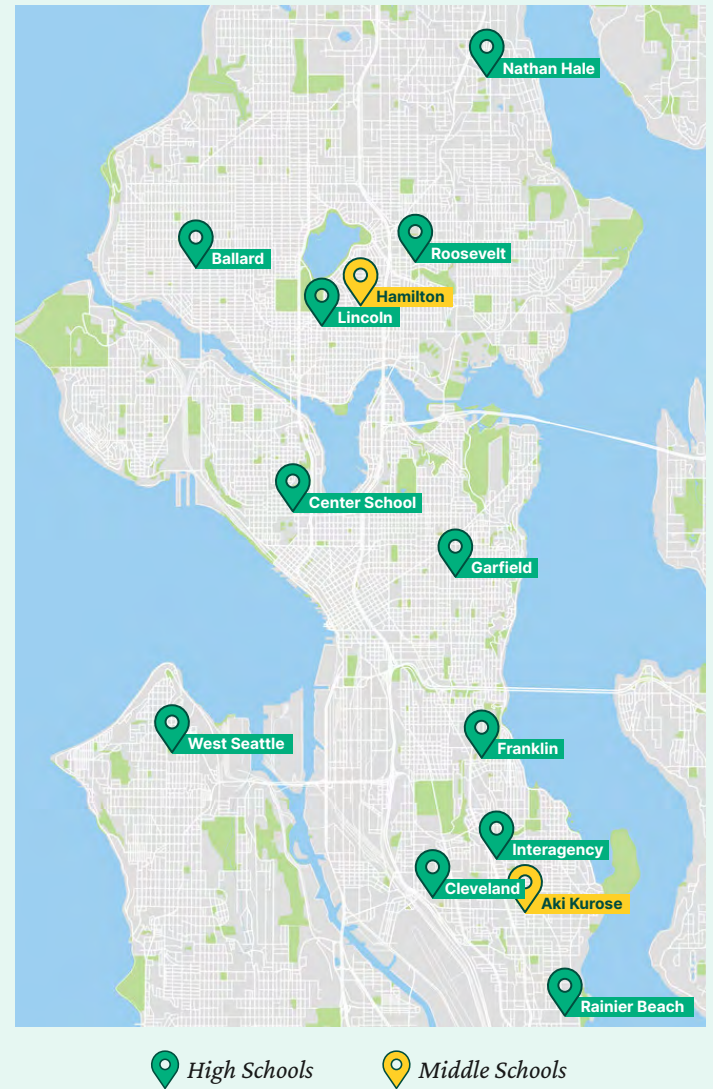
AAMA's inaugural effort, the Student Leadership Council (SLC), was established as an affinity and learning environment for Black boys and teens across the district to provide meaningful influence on school- and district-level decisions. SLC serves as a model for youth-led change and accountability to our students. Now in its fifth academic year, the SLC has engaged over 50 students from about 40 district schools. The group has participated in six SPS workgroups and equity policy development processes. For example, in the 2020–21 and 2021–22 academic years, SLC students partnered with the district's Remote Learning Taskforce to shape procedures for safety, resource access, and return to school. More recently, SLC and Black Student Union (BSU) members led a Seattle School Board workshop on student engagement as the board began to design student positions on the school board. During sessions, students discussed equitable representation, recruitment approaches, and approaches for empowering students who may not yet have access to leadership opportunities.

Black affinity spaces can promote a sense of belonging and provide students with social and academic skills and resources (e.g., Arroyo & Gasman 2014), yet not all schools host cultural or language affinity groups.

Thus, AAMA uplifts and supports Black Student Unions at 11 high schools and two middle schools, focusing on schools with fewer Black staff members, students, and/or Black-led CBO partnerships. The aim is to build community among this culturally and linguistically diverse group of students.

BSUs are an environment for students and families to organize and share resources within and across schools. In meetings, students discuss higher education, advanced coursework, curriculum, restorative justice, and financial literacy. In the last year, AAMA has partnered with the National College Resources Foundation to bring additional college knowledge resources and events to SPS, such as the Historically Black College and University Tour <https://www.seattleschools.org/news/whole-mentoring-spring-break-college-tours/>.

FIGURE 5. Map of Seattle Public Schools Black Student Unions Supported by AAMA





## STUDENT-LED INQUIRY FOR INNOVATION

Much of the education data in our local and national landscape are focused on student outcomes (e.g., attendance, grades, test scores). Young people rarely have agency in the production of information or system measures about the environments intended to support them. Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) is a social justice approach to youth development with the goal of leveraging student-led learning for change. AAMA's community partner fellow and staff members developed a novel, 14-week YPAR curriculum to promote youth leadership, critical thinking, and

communication skills at Cleveland High School. The project's outcomes extended far beyond these goals and led to substantive shifts in the school's math strategy.

In spring 2023, during AAMA's second year leading a YPAR cohort at Cleveland, students selected the topic of social justice math. Student researchers examined districtwide data on students' perceptions of math classes, sense of efficacy, and test performance. Some of this data, from spring 2022, appears in figure 6 below.

**FIGURE 6.** *Efficacy and support in mathematics among Black/African American students in grades 9–12*

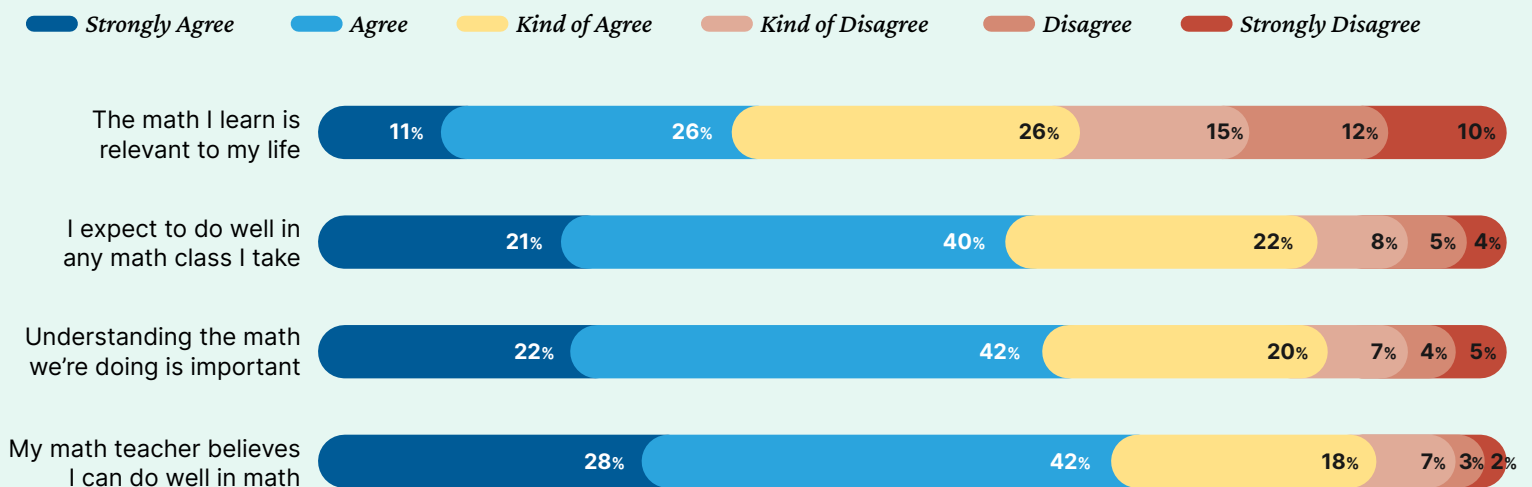




FIGURE 7. Student-developed Mathematics Class Index rubric

MATHEMATICS CLASS INDEX	SCORE	WEIGHT
Time for building relationships among students and teachers		0.35
Course materials and lessons that are culturally representative		0.20
Varied instructional approaches and relevant applications of math		0.20
Encouragement, high expectations, and opportunities for peer learning		0.15
Institutional racial equity commitments		0.10
Wellness of Math Class		1.00

Based on their initial research, students developed a mathematics class index as a rubric for students’ course-taking experience. Dimensions of the index included relationships, representation, pedagogical approaches, peer and educator encouragement, and racial equity values. Students assigned a weighted score to each dimension, placing relationships with educators at the top.

Students also developed a guide and reflection questions along with descriptions of each dimension of the index. Educators have used all these resources, along with literature about math achievement and joyful learning, and

elements are embedded in the school’s goal framework—Cleveland’s Continuous School Improvement Plan for 2023–26.

We know young people are our best informants about challenges and potential innovations in our school systems and programs (e.g., Salisbury et al., 2023). The ways we engage students also convey our values. Intentional learning alongside students begins with clear goals and co-leadership. Below are insights on youth leadership and engagement.

## LESSONS FROM STRATEGY 1

### Insights for our daily practice with every student

**Align goals and engage partners.** Grounding efforts on a pressing, asset-based, community-relevant question is one way to support mutual goals and trust-building. Sharing the work with community partners (e.g., youth group or local community advisors) can be an effective means of growing a coalition and adding capacity to school- and district-level efforts.

**Vary forms of communication.** Engaging young people and families takes time and varied approaches (e.g., individual calls, text, email, translation, printed flyers). A warm invite and opportunities for co-leadership set positive expectations and opens us up to new possibilities and innovation from others.

# CULTIVATE BLACK FAMILY POWER, TRUST, AND DISTRICT ACCOUNTABILITY





548  
STUDENTS29  
SCHOOLS

Districtwide Goals



Connected and supported families are essential for students to thrive. How we engage and “set the table” for those we serve is just as important as the outcomes we seek.

Honoring family insights and understanding priorities and unique cultural contexts are key to building trust and accountability. These engagement approaches begin with shared goals and outcomes include opportunities for families to express their experiences and ideas in formal, informal, or even family-led contexts (e.g., McKenna & Millen, 2013; Olivos, 2006). Past negative experiences can cause families to be hesitant to connect with schools, even when engagement opportunities exist (e.g., Marchand et al., 2019; Rowley et al., 2010). **As one parent shared:**

Given this foundational knowledge from ongoing work with families, AAMA has focused on family strategies that **expand access** to direct services and establish routines for **power-building and innovation**.

Trust can be built over time but lost quickly. This is especially true when actions feel like yet another example of being left behind or left out. Our family remains willing to trust and hopeful that next year and beyond will be better.”

Parent of Black male student during AAMA's 2020-21 Our Voice Our Vision listening sessions

I’m always going to be for healing and growth. Healing looks different for every person. But important because [I see] our parents experiencing a disconnect ... Is there an opportunity for a restorative moment in sessions [with families] ... more of a resource of healing? What that could look like to just honor that time. That way, parents, also get comfortable with it and it grows.”

---

AAMA staff member and parent

## COORDINATE SCHOOL AND FAMILY CARE

AAMA expanded resource access and cultural representation by hiring and supporting two full-time family support workers (FSWs)—one of East African descent, supporting multilingual learners and families, and one multigenerational African American. These FSWs provide case management, wrap-around services, and care coordination for over 60 families across 26 schools. Most of the work consists of one-on-one mentoring and school and home visits to develop individualized support plans. FSWs provide basic needs support, collaborate with school staff members for academic and social and emotional learning, and assist in multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) and coordinating family support. These key roles are essential for direct- and system-level support to Seattle families, students, and staff members, including:

- **Wraparound services.** Connecting with students, counselors, social workers, and behavioral specialists to provide social and emotional, health, housing, basic needs, and academic support.
- **Peer-to-peer restorative circles.** Piloted at Cascadia Elementary School (grades 3–5) and McClure Middle School (grades 6–8), these regular circles are spaces for student connection, modeling emotion regulation feedback, discussing culture, and improving belonging and engagement.
- **Culturally relevant practices.** In addition to direct student support, the team provides support to care coordinators at Lincoln High School, Nathan Hale High School, Meany Middle School, Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School, and John Rogers Elementary School and regularly engages with the Special Education department and behavior specialists in culturally responsive practices.





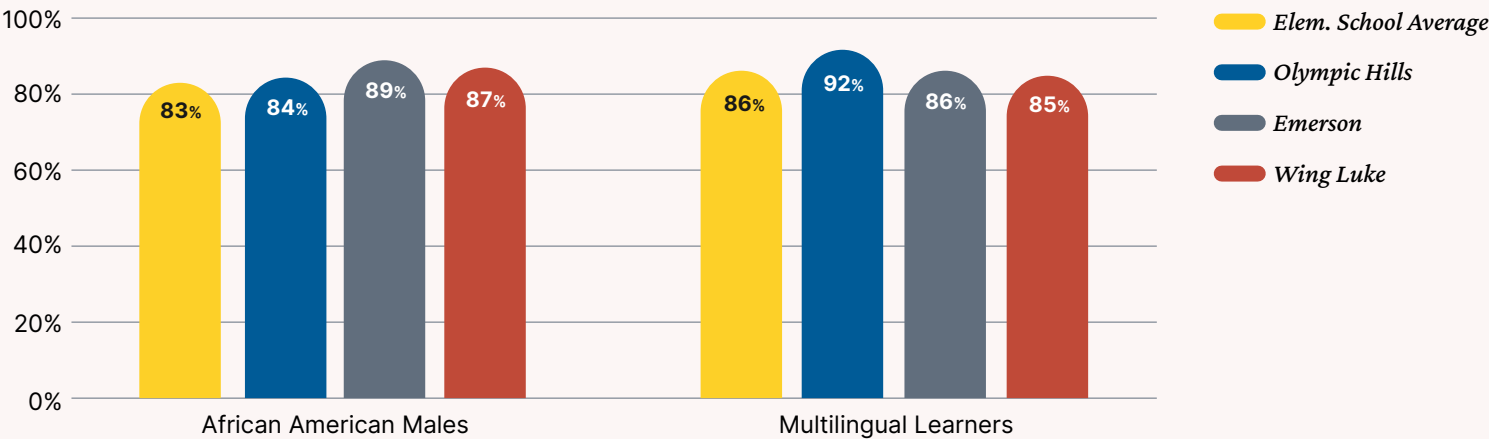
## COORDINATE SCHOOL AND FAMILY CARE

Literacy is more than reading at school—it includes the acquisition of home- and community-based knowledge (e.g., family history, culture, language, etc.). This learning practice develops when students, families, and educators have shared goals and strong communication. AAMA's Early Literacy Collaborative (ELC) is based in three Seattle elementary schools promoting justice-focused approaches and identity-affirming learning environments. The effort grew from a Black community call for increased culturally responsive instruction and structures for family power-building. As one parent shared during the 2020–21 listen-and-learn series:

“So how do you look at the big picture of getting African American parents involved? I think that involvement is very important even you were talking about some students not feeling welcome in the school, some parents feel the same, they feel intimidated. They might not feel like they have the words, so they don't know how to advocate for the students.

Like the proverb says, **'It takes a village to raise a child.'** So how are you going to get parents on board with this work that you're trying to do to help African American boys in school?”

**FIGURE 8.** Percentage of students in grades 3–5 who responded favorably to “I enjoy reading”

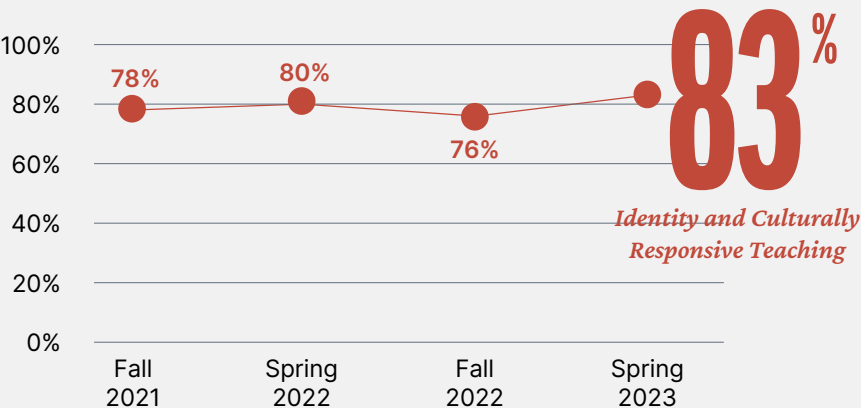


Source: Seattle Public Schools Department of Research and Evaluation, 2022–23 Student Survey of School Climate. Survey among students in grades 3–5 (N = 9,704). Emerson Elementary School, N = 114; Olympic Hills Elementary School, N = 178; Wing Luke Elementary School, N = 125. Survey items are translated into the district’s top five spoken languages and administered by survey coordinators for primary-grade students.

The ELC began in 2021–22 with a five-month pilot and has remained as an externally funded, continuous improvement effort within the district’s grade 3 goal. AAMA coordinated with school leaders, educators, families, and students in collective learning that resulted in an educator resource, research report, holistic measurement, and learning opportunity for school-based staff members and family literacy connectors. Families of Black students in grades 2–4 participated in this codesigned learning community to develop literacy tools based on cultural wisdom and community learning practices. The effort continues through the 2024–25 academic year in partnership with the University of Washington, funded by a W.T. Grant Reducing Inequalities Grant.

All three ELC schools have higher than average positive outcomes on the Literacy and Identity and Culturally Responsive Teaching constructs of the district’s student survey of school climate. Ninety-two percent of multilingual learners at Olympic Hills responded favorably to the item “I enjoy reading,” including 89 percent of African American boys at Emerson Elementary School. Also on the rise are students’ positive experiences of culturally responsive teaching and identity. Eighty-three percent of all participating grade 3–5 students at Wing Luke Elementary School and 89 percent of Wing Luke’s multilingual learners responded favorably to this construct, compared to the 77 percent district average—a rate that is strong yet has remained stable over time.

**FIGURE 9.** Percentage of Wing Luke students in grades 3–5 who responded favorably across culturally responsive teaching items





“In partnership, we were able to engage with families in our school. The feedback and information that families shared through the Early Literacy Collaborative were influential in how we began shifting instruction to better meet the needs of our students.”

—  
Elementary School Principal

ELC participants reported strengthened relationships among families, Early Literacy Connectors, instructional assistants, and teachers. This effort has expanded grade 3 goal progress measurement, provided professional development, and integrated elements of cultural identity exploration into the curricula—infrastructure improvements that aim to benefit every learner.

From these efforts and the literature, we see how racially and linguistically diverse families have cultural practices and knowledge in subject matter learning that can be leveraged in schools (Ishimaru, 2019). Black students’ racial identities are tied to their developing academic self-concept—such as math learning identity (Martin, 2009). The presence of anti-Black racism in curriculums and educator practices that frame negative stereotypes and perpetuate common racialized narratives present systemic challenges that prohibit Black students from maintaining strong learner self-concepts during their K–12 progression (Nasir & Shah, 2011; English-Clarke et al., 2012). Supporting strong communication and bridging lessons from the home can be ways of supporting students, families, and school environments.

## Co-designing in math through the grade 7 math collaborative

AAMA supported a parallel learning structure within the district’s middle school math strategy. Like the ELC, the grade 7 math collaborative uses a co-design approach to improving middle school math instruction, cultural relevance, and family engagement and develops new knowledge for professional development.

- Families, students, and educators gather with facilitators to design around home-based practices that nurture student identity and math development
- Educators receive home-based math practices from families and students, design lesson plans based on this inspiration, and then share their experiences and evidence with families and students for feedback
- District facilitators are tasked with taking what they learned from families into district practice, which might look like (a) developing a professional development course for other educators to practice learning in this way, (b) incorporating home-based math practices in districtwide instructional learning, and (c) deepening routines for educators to learn from student and family experiences



## LESSONS FROM STRATEGY 2

### Insights for our daily practice with all families

**Create joyful and flexible spaces.** Meeting families at their chosen times and locations allows for broader participation. Consider recurring engagement with translation support and affinity-based breakout groups. Create a welcoming environment by starting with music and a student- or family-led welcome and allow time to connect.

**Support a strong reception.** Engage key partners from the beginning (e.g., system leaders, community, youth, and/or educators) to ensure that they are ready to receive information and start to act.

**Nurture the momentum.** If the engagement (one-time or series) has been robust and mutually beneficial, work with partners to develop structures for continued learning and sustainability.



# IMPLEMENT ASSET-BASED MEASURES, EQUITABLE RESEARCH, AND COMMUNICATION



## Associated Goals



AAMA’s asset-focused approach to uplifting the existing brilliance of our students and communities has shaped the way I approach my work. I think that SPS, and the central office specifically, can continue to learn from AAMA’s vision and work.”

Central Office staff member, Operations Division

“The data we collect—and the data we don’t—reflect our values and what we think is important” (Piff, 2021).

Educational administrative data (i.e., test scores and student behavior) often capture the outcomes of systemic inequity, rather than causal factors and student strengths. These data are essential, yet when examined in isolation they obscure the role of policies and adult practices on students’ schooling experiences.

AAMA has worked to improve data capacity and modeled, through its programming, how a **varied measurement portfolio and equity-based constructs can and ought to be uplifted at scale for all students**. Our understanding of impact must be guided by holistic data on our students and system (e.g., Towns, 2019). One example has been through an evaluation of AAMA’s Kingmakers of Seattle (KOS).



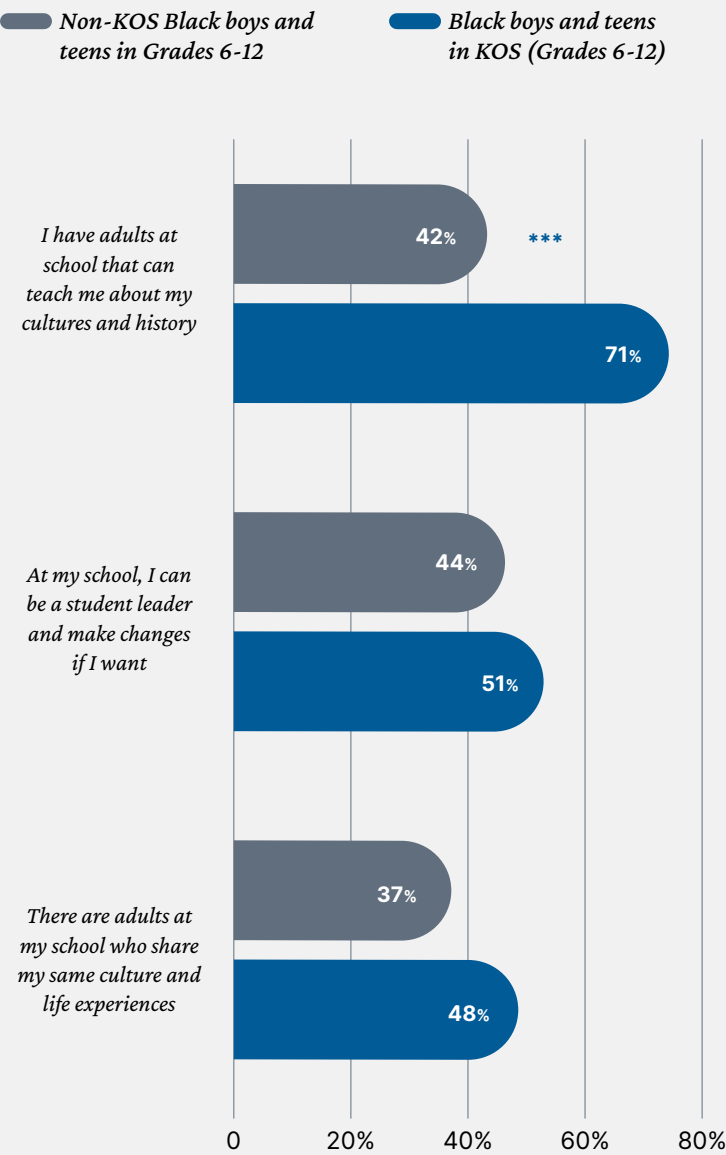
CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE  
AND EQUITABLE EVALUATION

Kingmakers of Seattle is an elective history course and mentorship program designed for Black boys and teens and taught by Black male educators. The program aims to create systems, structures, and conditions that foster positive identity, provide cultural knowledge, and build academic success for participating students. The ongoing evaluation of KOS has been a key partnership project to implement equity values across all phases of inquiry. The study uses a culturally responsive framework (e.g., Hood et al., 2015) to examine student experiences and outcomes in the program to determine which elements of the curricula, instructional approaches, or classroom environments are most impactful. Early findings show differences among student perceptions of their school communities.

Students receiving mentorship and Black education curricula through KOS experience more adult support than their Black male peers who do not participate in the program. Seventy-one percent of Kingmakers of Seattle students affirm that they have an adult in school to teach them about their culture and history—compared to 42 percent of nonparticipating peers.

Students in the program maintained higher rates of on-track course-taking during their high school years than those who did not participate (see Figure 11). This is notable as relative to their Black male peers of the same age who were not in the program, a higher proportion of KOS students are multilingual learners, have experienced homelessness, or are in special education, and fewer are in advanced learning or categorized as highly capable.

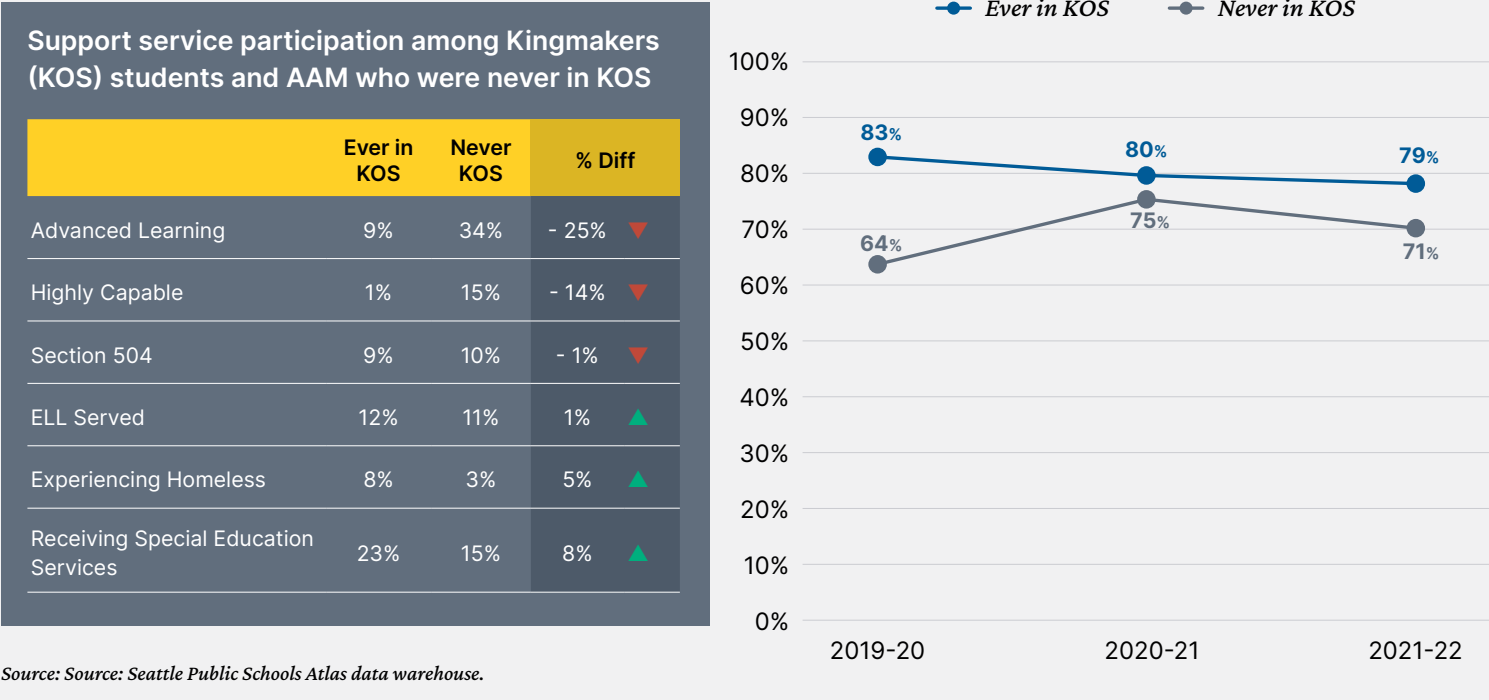
FIGURE 10. Percentage of favorable school climate responses among Black student Kingmakers of Seattle participants and nonparticipants



Source: \*\*\* =  $p < .001$ ;  $t(871) = 5.42$ ,  $p < .001$ .  
Source: Seattle Public Schools district wide Student Survey of School Climate.



FIGURE 11. KOS students have higher rates of meeting on-track credit accumulation, despite facing more barriers than Black peers of the same age



Additionally, this analysis included examination of later high school outcomes of many students who were in the program for one or two years in middle school, suggesting that KOS' impacts are sustained over time. Findings from the analysis of the KOS program suggest the importance of mentorship strategies, strong relationships, and staff sharing lived experiences of students for academic success (See Strategy 4).

“I just want to say thank you. I can see the impact of this class on my son who is now a freshman in college. I am so excited to see how my 6th grader will do. This program is so amazing. As much as parents ‘love on’ their children sometimes we need that reinforcement from the outside. So, thank you!”

Parent of student in Kingmakers of Seattle

PROGRESS MONITORING AND SYSTEM MEASURES

Working with the SPS Department of Research and Evaluation and the district’s survey platform provider, AAMA initiated custom reports on year-over-year data from the student climate survey for various district initiatives. This twice-a-year survey covers culturally relevant instruction, belonging, social and emotional learning, and academic self-concept in math, science, and literacy. With the goal of improving data use, AAMA worked with the Department of Community Partnerships to advance the internal use of a care management platform. The tool enables family support workers, mentors, and community-based partners to track their support services and have greater access to students’ school engagement and academic information. This has allowed closer connection and communication among educators, care coordinators, and families.





## LESSONS FROM STRATEGY 3

### Insights for our daily practice with every student

**Supporting mutual accountability.** Bring learners and families into formative and summative measure conversations that stem from insights learned.

**Communication for value alignment.** Humanize information with quotes, photos, and context. Invite students and families into decision-making spaces to share stories directly.

**Intentional dissemination.** Consider the primary audience for findings with learners and families as well as the degree to which the medium (i.e., slides, staff meeting, professional development session, report, blog, family forum) will reach this audience.



# PROVIDE CULTURALLY RELEVANT MENTORING FOR BLACK BOYS AND TEENS







STRATEGY

04

1,251  
STUDENTS

68  
SCHOOLS

Districtwide Goals



## Strong relationships with nonparental adults can promote young people's brilliance and resilience.

Such relationships can also support long-term well-being, especially among students from marginalized backgrounds (Hurd & Zimmerman, 2010; Jones et al., 2021; Jones & Neblett, 2017). Mentorship is found to have a positive social and academic impact when it starts early, when mentors have experience in youth development, and when the program includes professional development (Grossman et al., 2012; Hurd & Sellers, 2013; Raposa et al., 2019). Mentorship is most successful when program designers or the mentors themselves have a deep understanding of youths' cultural background and life experiences and when youth have opportunities for agency and leadership (Sánchez et al., 2017; Tolan et al., 2020).

I feel like a lot of [my challenges] stemmed from people having ideas of me before I even could have ideas for myself.”

Black male middle school student, Seattle

## Innovation through remote instruction

Rising Sons is a program of Leschi Elementary School. In collaboration with Leschi staff members during remote instruction, AAMA designed a peer-based, virtual extension of the program for primary-grade Black boys at schools with fewer Black students and staff members. Rising Sons Extended (RSE) has continued as a one-day-a-week mentorship program for Black boys in grades 3–5. The program is focused on identity, social and emotional learning, and self-advocacy. Students in RSE also participate in community events and in-person learning such as the Designing with Intention: Black Architects' Visions for Seattle's Future at the Museum of History and Industry and The Unspoken Truth's Traveling Museum.

<https://www.unspokentruths.org/>

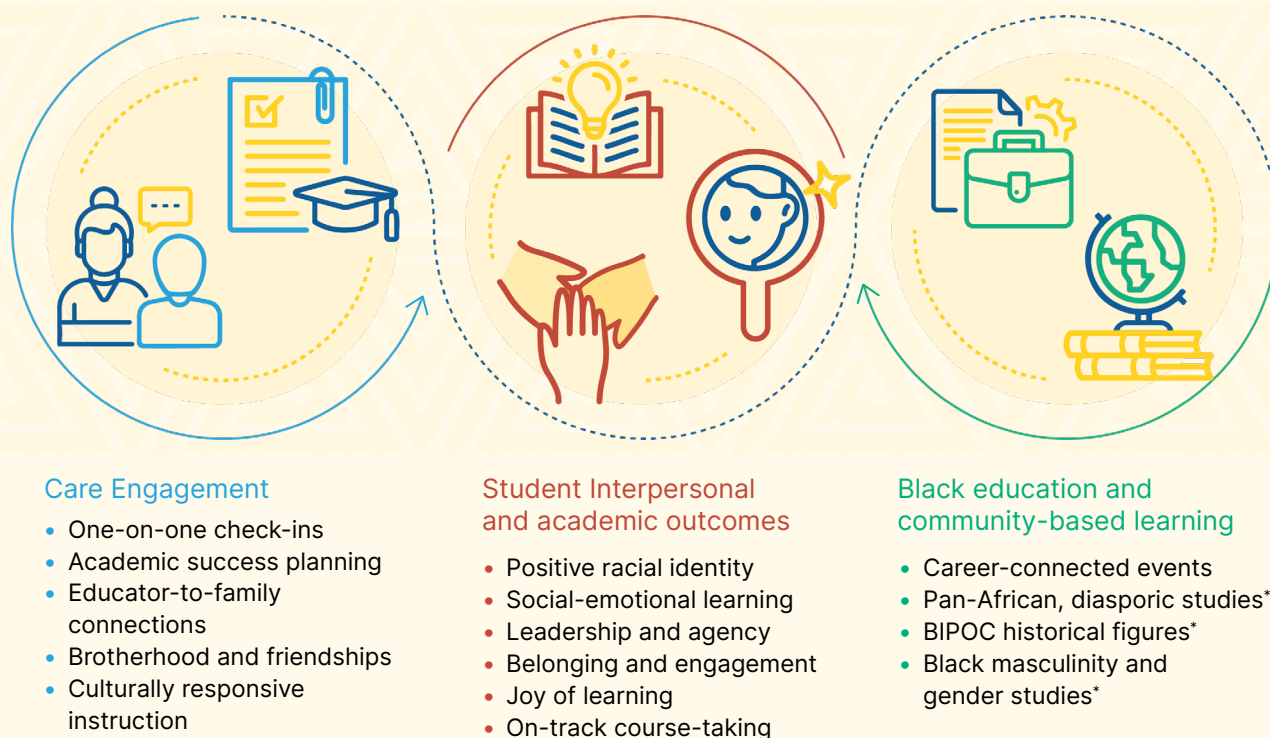
AAMA has developed and maintains three mentorship programs for Black boys and teens: the previously discussed Kingmakers of Seattle (serving 706 secondary-grade students over five years); WHOLE Mentoring (serving 496 secondary-grade students over three years) and Rising Sons Extended (serving 89 primary-grade students over three years). During the 2020–21 listen-and-learn series, we heard a strong call for Black male representation in schools, improved care support, and culturally relevant instruction:

In response to this call, and during the same academic year—a year of remote instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic—AAMA extended culturally responsive mentoring through Kingmakers of Seattle Extended and Rising Sons Extended. These two extended programs brought access to brotherhood and identity safety opportunities to students in 25 more elementary schools and several middle and high schools. The following year, in partnership with the City of Seattle's Department of Education and Early Learning, AAMA added Cleveland and Franklin high schools to KOS.

## THEORY OF ACTION

The early evaluation findings discussed earlier shed light on how culturally responsive mentorship can support young people. AAMA's mentorship theory of action highlights strong relationships, identity development, and support services as key elements.

FIGURE 12. Office of African American Male Achievement mentorship theory of action





“My son has a 3.0 GPA so far this year and I could not be more proud. He’s improved his academics and how he shows up at school over the last two years. A lot of credit goes to [Kingmakers facilitator] Marcus Bradford for taking my son under his wing and guiding him at school every day. Mr. Bradford is so positive and has so much enthusiasm for learning ... it truly takes a village and I’m so blessed to have great mentors around my son.”

—  
Father at Aki Kurose Middle School

“... I got a lot of miles on my car for going to baseball games, basketball games, family events ... when you show up in spaces that aren’t the classroom for our kids, it means so much to them.”

—  
Kingmakers of Seattle facilitator

“Investing in the students—in and outside of the schools’ walls. ... Their mentorship and interactive approach supports the entire student and gives them resources and empowerment.”

—  
Community partner

“I’ve appreciated how AAMA staff approach holistic wraparound services for young people and also bring in partners.”

—  
Community partner



MENTORSHIP AS A VEHICLE FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

High school course-taking matters for future success. AAMA's WHOLE mentorship program provides one-on-one mentoring, tutoring, and peer spaces for Black male grades 9 and 10 students at Chief Sealth International, Cleveland, Franklin, Garfield, Ingraham, and Rainier Beach high schools. Mentors provide a culturally relevant environment, assess service and academic needs, and focus on high school course-taking. AAMA and the SPS College and Career Team review data and engage with young people to identify barriers to advanced coursework enrollment and retention.

Course-taking rates are on the rise. Three of four SPS Black male 10th graders have met their on-track science credit requirements, up from 66.5% in 2021-22. Students in WHOLE mentoring have higher rates of advanced course taking and on-track credit earning for all subject areas than their peers overall.

TABLE 1. End-of-year outcomes for grade 10 students, 2022–23

	African American Males	WHOLE Mentoring Students	% Difference
Advanced Learning Passed At Least One Advanced Course	29.2%	30.3%	1.1% ▲
Met All Five Credit Earning Requirements	55.2%	62.1%	7.0% ▲
2+ Math Credits	66.7%	77.3%	10.5% ▲
1.5+ Social Studies Credits	74.2%	78.8%	4.5% ▲
2+ Science Credits	73.2%	77.3%	4.1% ▲
12+ Total Credits	74.0%	77.3%	3.2% ▲
2+ ELA Credits	75.3%	75.8%	0.4% ▲

Source: Source: SPS Atlas Database. End-of-year outcomes among all African American Male 10th graders (N = 466) and those in WHOLE mentoring (N = 66) in the 2022-23 academic year.

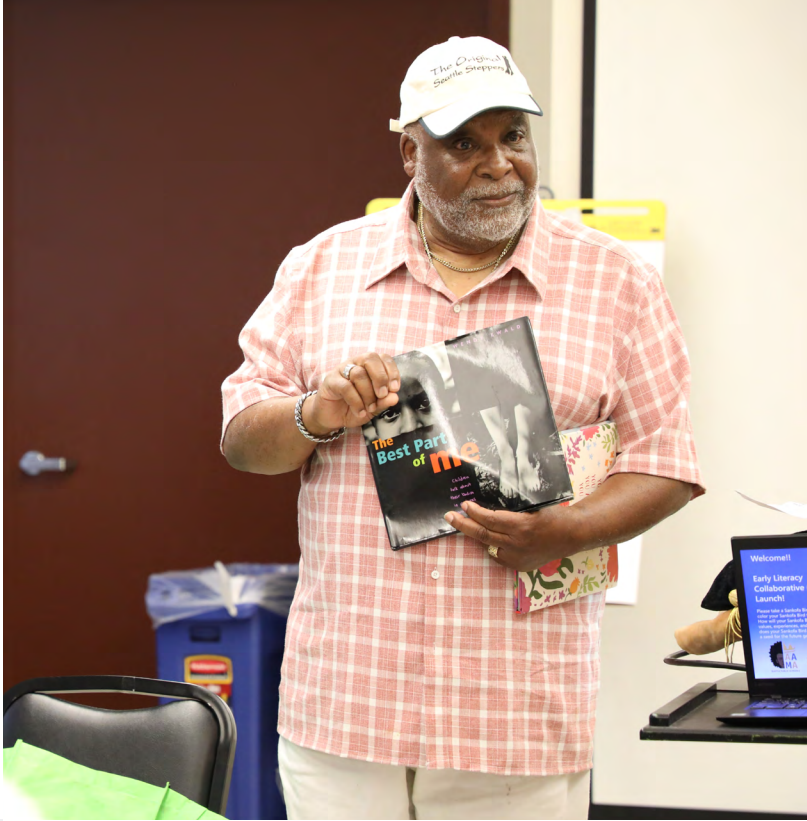
“Once you graduate, it’s like, okay, they’re only getting you ready just for college. They’re not getting you ready for the other things in life, like how to buy a house or things like that. I feel like that’s things that they should start teaching in schools to help better prepare the kids that are coming up.”

Black male student, Southeast Seattle

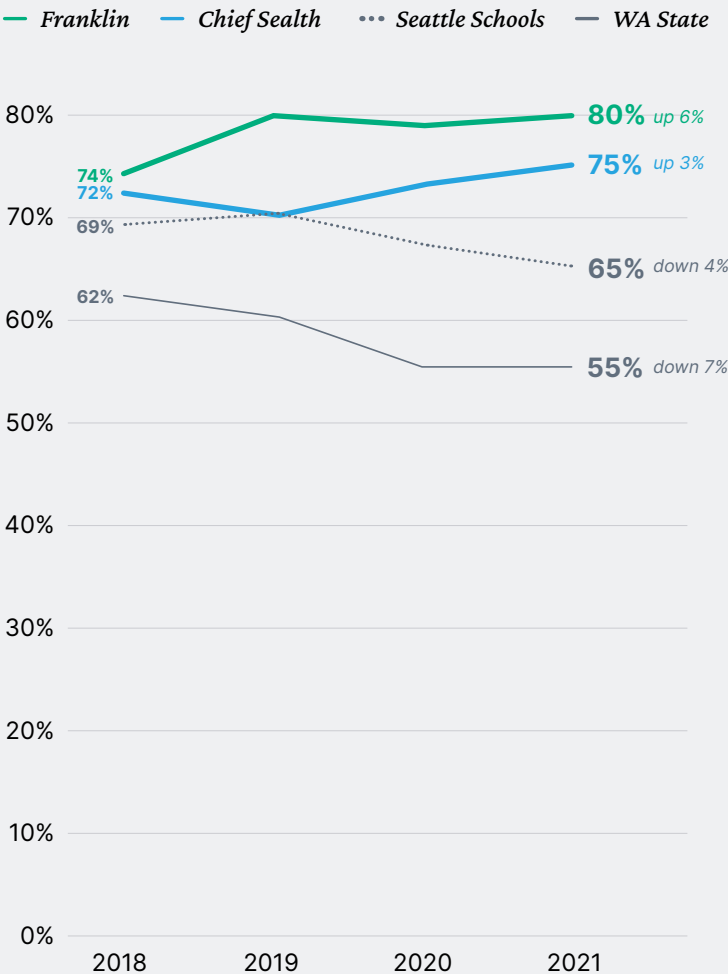


A positive and inviting school climate plays an important role in increasing equitable access to advanced courses. Students are more likely to enroll in advanced courses when they receive clear information about them and believe they will be welcomed and belong in the class (Patrick et al., 2022). Students who complete just one college credit course in high school are significantly more likely to enroll in and finish college (Tavares, 2022).

Over the last four years, Seattle has experienced a three percent decline in graduates enrolling in college within one year of high school graduation from 77 percent in 2018, compared to a 10 percent decline statewide. We see a similar trend among Black students, with a larger decrease statewide than at the district level. However, two of the WHOLE mentoring schools are among the few in Washington state with increasing rates of direct enrollment among Black high school graduates.



**FIGURE 13.** Black students’ two- and four-year postsecondary enrollment within one year of high school graduation



*“On the drive home today, I asked [my son] what he was writing in his notebook. He said he wrote: ‘Representation matters.’ [Later] my niece said she was super impressed and said the same thing. Representation does matter. She was happy that Black men were showing up for Black youth the way y’all are.”*

Parent and 2023 Pacific Science Center event attendee

Source: Education Research and Data Center’s High School Graduate Outcomes Report via OSPI CEDARS, NSC, SBCTC, and PCHEES databases.

## COLLEGE AND CAREER CONNECTED LEARNING

AAMA works with district and community partners to provide career exploration activities.

The AAMA has supported additional worksite tours, including panels with Black professionals. Partnerships have included Virginia Mason Franciscan Health, Google, Seattle Sounders (RAVE Foundation), and Pacific Science Center.

For a second year, AAMA and the district's College and Career Team partnered with Amazon to enroll interested students of color in the Amazon Career Quest summer externship. Fifteen Black students from WHOLE and BSUs toured six Historically Black Colleges and Universities in spring 2023.

## Microsoft –BAM Worksite Learning.

In 2022-23 AAMA partnered with the Seattle Seahawks Organization, Microsoft Philanthropies—Blacks at Microsoft (BAM), and The BE Project.

<https://www.seattleschools.org/news/student-visit-to-microsoft-for-career-exploration-and-mentorship/>

*“Black students were moving from 8th to 9th grade with little to no support. Now, we provide exposure to different career paths with Black employees—there are an array of employment opportunities in a variety of industries. We help connect what they are learning in school to future opportunities.”*

AAMA staff member

## LESSONS FROM STRATEGY 4

### Insights for our daily practice with every student

**Understand barriers.** Examining causal factors that lead to academic outcomes can become a key design feature for new supports (e.g., student expectations, course access, communication as a barrier to advanced course taking)

**Provide care engagement.** Culturally relevant support strategies that are designed to benefit a specific group of students and families and consider all aspects of the educational experience.



STRATEGY

05

# SUPPORT CROSS-DIVISIONAL LEARNING AND CONNECTION FOR IMPACT





## Related Goals



## Our schools are strong and our students successful when our families are connected, heard, and supported.

Decades of research have shown how schools play an essential role in uplifting student identities—the histories and socio-political contexts that underlie students’ perceptions of self, group, and society. When schools serve as a source of cultural socialization—promoting students’ ethnic and racial identities—they provide congruence between these identities and the school curriculum (Oyserman & Destin, 2010). This has been found to increase Black students’ academic self-confidence, to have positive longitudinal impacts on grades, and to improve educators’ ability to connect with students’ academic interests (Byrd, 2019; Del Toro & Wang, 2020; Gholdy, 2020). Yet rarely are family leadership and student voice initiatives institutionalized at the state or district levels (Mitra, 2014).

AAMA’s practice change work includes leading trainings with staff members, educators, and building leaders, such as the district’s annual School Leader Institute, mandatory professional development days for educators, and the 2023–24 Math Conference. This work also includes collaboration across departments to support communication, learning, and connection as well as leadership within working groups (e.g., PBIS Working Group, Advanced Learning, Guardrails 4 and 5 measure development). The Office’s public reporting on the Early Literacy Collaborative, Kingmakers of Seattle Evaluation, and numerous presentations have been used in policy and accountability systems (e.g., Student Outcomes Focused Governance).



*I believe a key piece is in student and family voice. I have seen this happen through the leadership council, families engaging through early childhood literacy, and through student groups with 3rd grade students. At each of these opportunities students and families were able to share what strategies help them feel engaged and supported. It has helped center the work on the voices most impacted by this work. I think this is a critical aspect in what I have seen shape the work our district has completed.”*

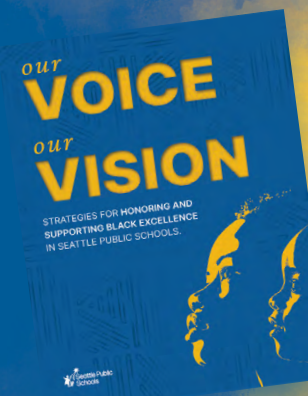
Principal

Systems change can be challenging to measure as the ideas and supports from resources and engagement may manifest in new ideas, changed perspectives, or policy language. What we can see is the presence of students in decision-making spaces (e.g., students on the Board of Directors for Seattle Public Schools) and community insights into our accountability systems. Over the last four years, SPS increased its use of surveys and qualitative data, improving understanding and honoring student- and community-held wisdom.

In the 2023–24 academic year, AAMA conducted a departmental strategy review. The most impactful strategies and resources for staff members and building leaders were AAMA’s **cross-strategy consultation** and **student-facing efforts** (mentorship and affinity programs).

Survey participants hoped for continued capacity-building support and learning structures from AAMA to help them learn from students of other marginalized backgrounds. There was interest in the continued expansion of programming for Black girls (in addition to BSUs, YPAR, etc.), and the further integration of AAMA into the academic goal areas. Below is a summary of outcomes by strategy area.

Starting with the dissemination approach, intentional learning, and positive community reception, **Our Voice Our Vision** themes continue to be used as organizing frameworks for school and system accountability.



- ✓ Districtwide CSIP plans
- ✓ Instructional Philosophy, Policy 0010
- ✓ Professional development
- ✓ Strategy map in goal-area budgeting

**FIGURE 14.** Office of African American Male Achievement’s central office and school building resources and engagement efforts’ influence on educators



Source: AAMA Strategy Reflection Survey, 2023–24.

## OUTCOMES SUMMARY

TABLE 2. Impact and highlighted efforts of the Seattle Public Schools Office of African American Male Achievement

Strategy	Outcomes and Highlighted Efforts
Lead from the vision of Black boys and teens	<p><i>Established structures and culturally relevant routines for learning from students. Promoted safe spaces, peer-to-peer enrichment, and student-led change strategies.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student Leadership Council</li> <li>• Black Student Unions</li> <li>• Youth Participatory Action Research</li> </ul>
Cultivate Black family power, trust, and district accountability	<p><i>Expanded access to family services and cultural representation. Created a model for relational engagement and school improvement focused on culturally responsive instruction.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AAMA Family Support Workers</li> <li>• Early Literacy Collaborative</li> <li>• Seventh Grade Math Collaborative</li> </ul>
Implement asset-based measures, equitable research, and communication	<p><i>Uplifted new measures, research, and structures to track whole-student outcomes and progress monitoring. Produced actionable public resources and modeled asset-based communication.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Culturally responsive evaluation</li> <li>• Progress monitoring and system measures</li> <li>• Collaborative research and communication</li> </ul>
Provide culturally relevant mentoring for Black boys and teens	<p><i>Demonstrated culturally relevant mentorship as an effective structure for providing wraparound and academic support.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WHOLE mentorship</li> <li>• Kingmakers of Seattle</li> <li>• Rising Sons Extended</li> </ul>
Support cross-divisional learning and connection for impact	<p><i>Improved cross-divisional coordination, common language, and tools for the central office, leaders, and educators. Modeled accountability toward unheard voices.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training (e.g., Math Conference, SLI)</li> <li>• Departmental collaboration (e.g., PBIS)</li> <li>• Public reporting</li> <li>• Policy (e.g., Policy 0010, CSIPs, SOFG)</li> </ul>

AAMA has provided a model for SPS on how to work across departments to support all students ... **I hope this is a model our district can continue to use moving forward.**"



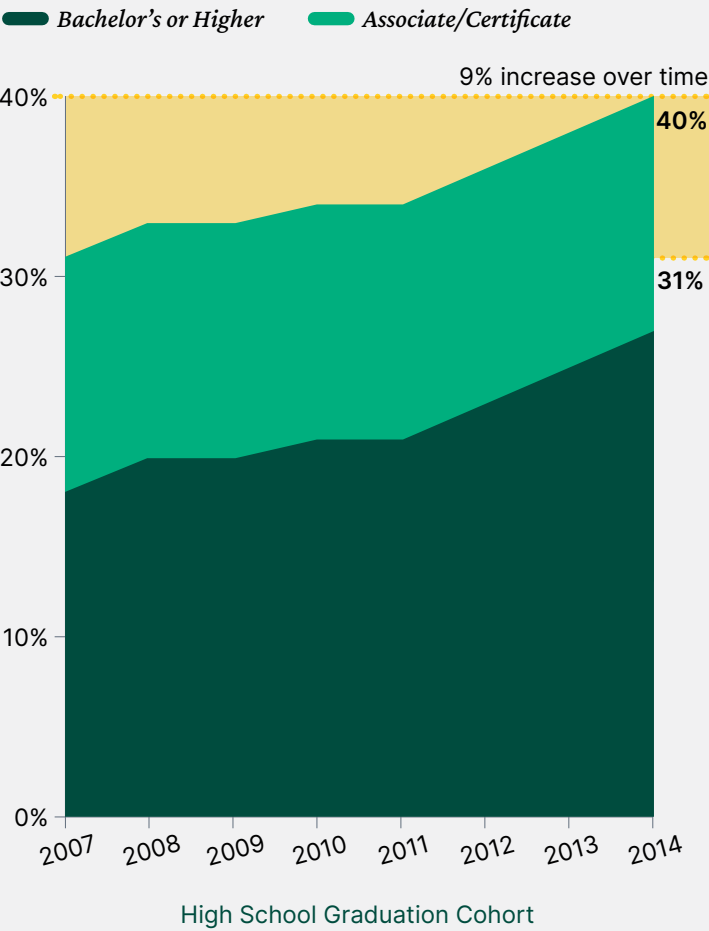
FUTURE-READY STUDENTS

Seventy-four percent of Seattle graduates directly enrolled in a two- or four-year college within one year of graduation. Seattle has the state's highest direct enrollment rate among all high school graduates at a time when direct enrollment is down statewide. The momentum is here and there is more work to do.

According to the 2022-23 SPS Senior Survey, 80 percent of SPS Black male seniors aspire to attend a two- or four-year college after high school. Of all Black students who graduated in 2021, 65 percent enrolled within one year of high school graduation. Closing this aspiration gap will take continued learning across the system and innovation from our young people, educators, and communities.

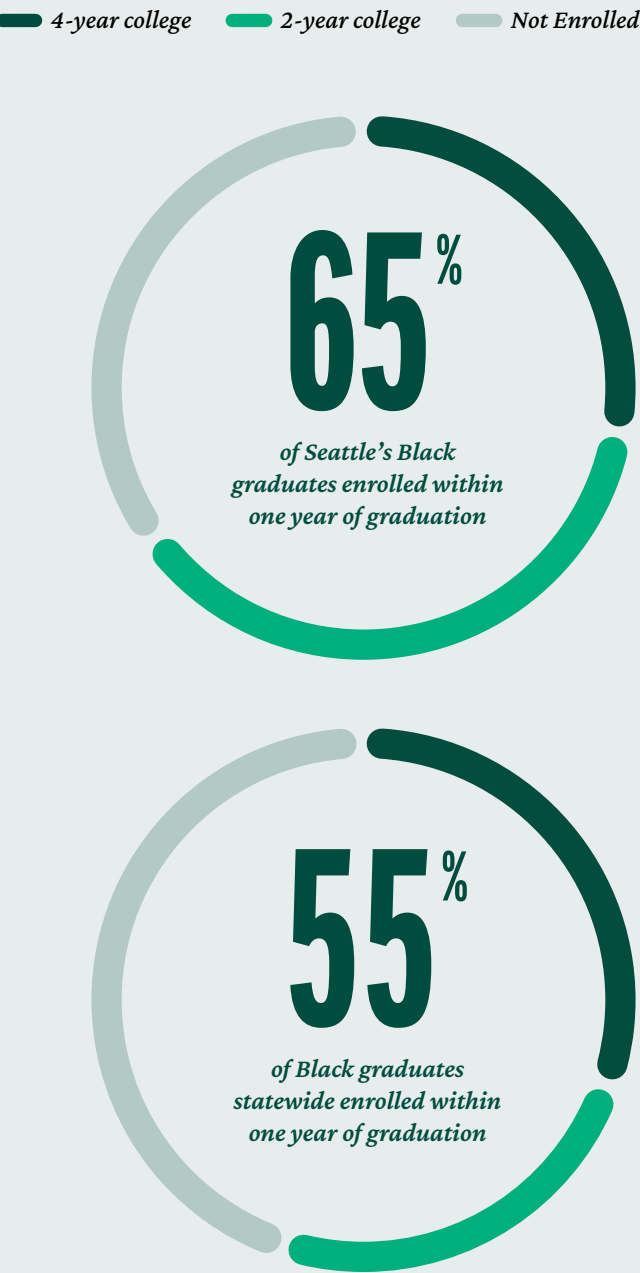
Data on completion among SPS cohorts eight years after graduation are promising. We see a 9 percent increase in rates of two- and four-year degree completion among Black students.

FIGURE 16. Postsecondary degree completion among Black students eight years after graduating from Seattle Public Schools



Source: Enrollment in a two- or four-year college during the 2021–22 academic year among the graduating class of 2021. Education Research and Data Center High School Graduate Outcomes Report via OSPI CEDARS, NSC, SBCTC, and PCHEES databases.

FIGURE 15. Percent of Black students who enroll in postsecondary within one year of graduation

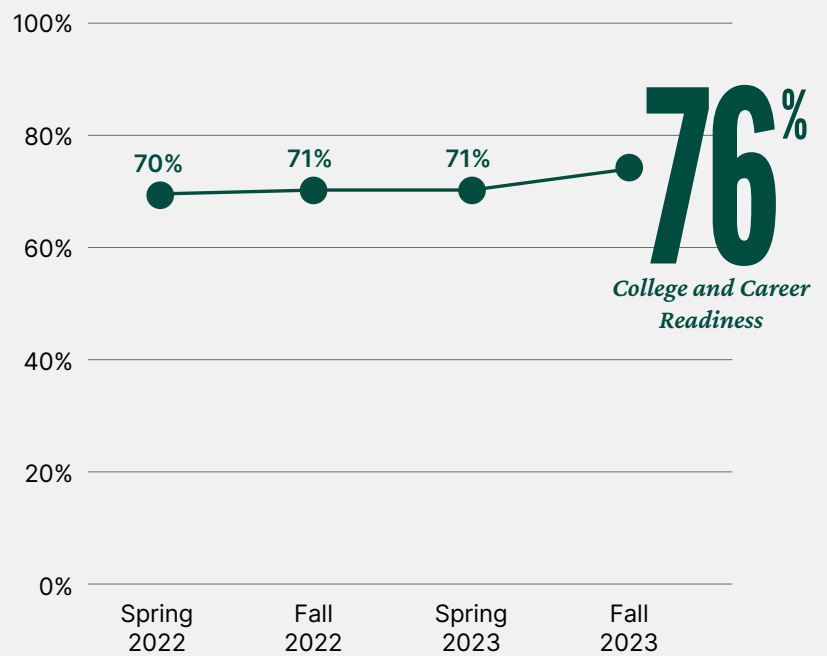


Source: Enrollment in a two- or four-year college during the 2021–22 academic year among the graduating class of 2021. Education Research and Data Center High School Graduate Outcomes Report via OSPI CEDARS, NSC, SBCTC, and PCHEES databases.

Preparing students for and supporting them in their postsecondary transitions is key. Across the system, we see improved support and information access among students in grades 9–12 districtwide and higher rates of access among multilingual learners, African American males, students experiencing homelessness, and those receiving special education services.

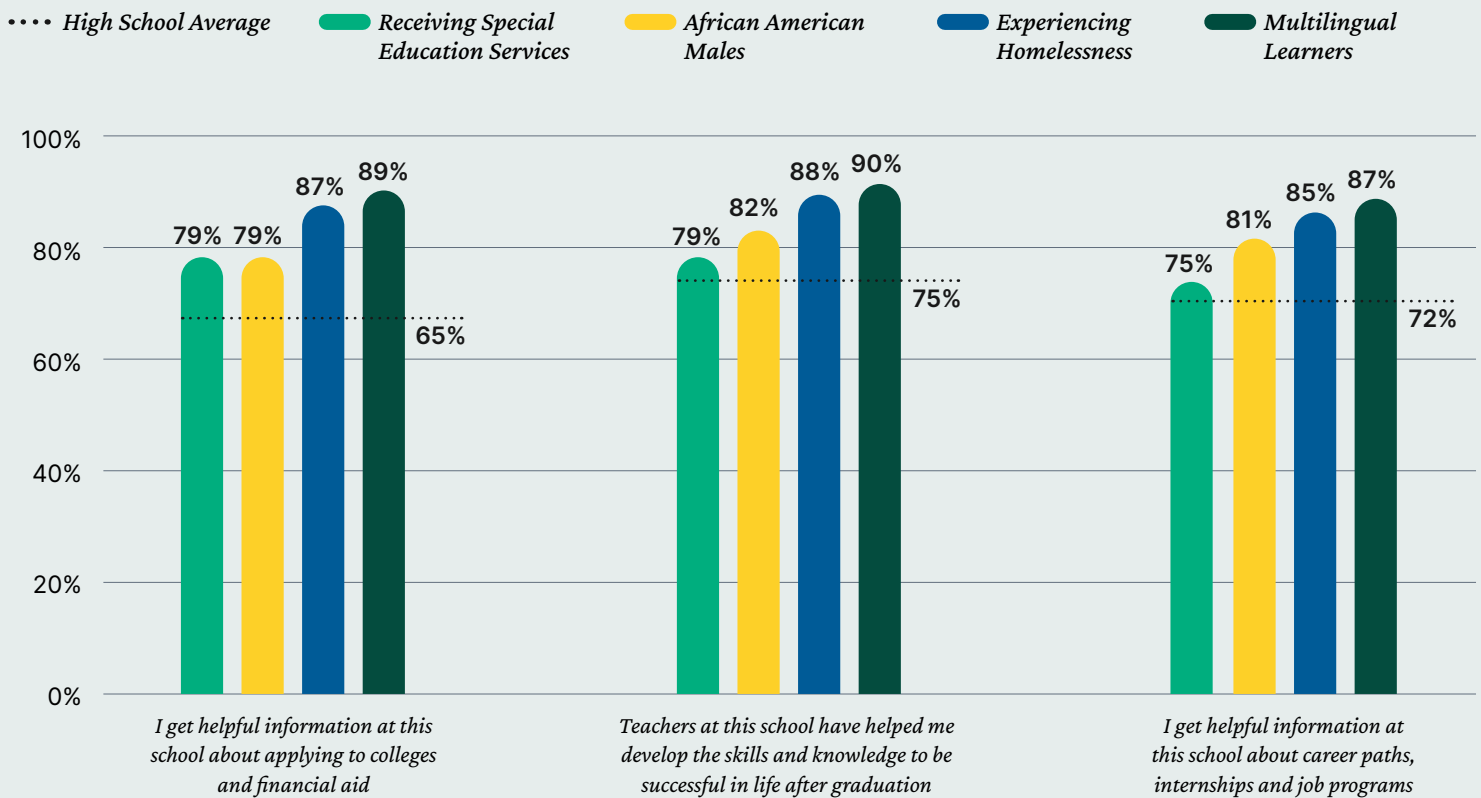


FIGURE 17. College and career readiness among students in grades 9–12



Source: Seattle Public Schools Department of Research and Evaluation student survey of school climate. Agreement is defined as the percentage of students in grades 9–12 who selected “Strongly Agree,” “Agree,” or “Kind of Agree” on items across the College and Career Readiness construct.

FIGURE 18. Experience with college and career readiness supports among 9–12th graders







AAMA's mentorship and leadership strategies initially focused on college and career readiness. Since the 2020–21 listen-and-learn series, the Office's efforts expanded to include math, early literacy, and inclusionary supports. **AAMA is now a programmatic hub within SPS' Student Support Services department, with efforts embedded within each of the districts' goal areas.** The team has seen how culturally responsive mentoring, leadership, and affinity spaces can be powerful vehicles for providing social and academic support. Additionally, the ability to maintain learning structures across

schools, departments, and organizations is essential for nurturing the momentum. AAMA's work represents one piece of a districtwide effort to promote thriving learners and school communities.

As a system- and student-facing department, AAMA aims to support a healthy ecosystem today while planting seeds for tomorrow. **The full impact of the work is to come and will be realized in the future successes of our students, families, and colleagues.**

## LESSONS FROM STRATEGY 5

### Insights for our daily practice with every student

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**Start with student aspirations.** Providing environments for students to explore, dream, and experience themselves in a variety of future possibilities creates connections between current coursework and future careers.

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**Support a strong reception.** Creating space for educators or system leaders to come along on the journey can be a useful step to ensuring they are ready to receive findings and view information as relevant and actionable.

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