

# WERA Focus Groups

**Bellingham High School**

**Options High School**

**Sehome High School**

**Squalicum High School**



**Bellingham  
Public Schools**

*a collective commitment*

# Bellingham

- In northwest Washington, we live on the ancestral homelands of the Coast Salish Peoples, who have lived in the Salish Sea basin, throughout the San Juan Islands and the North Cascades watershed.
- The Lummi Nation and Nooksack Tribe have shown enduring care and protection of our shared lands and waterways since time immemorial.
- Bellingham has a population of about 95,000 and is home to Bellingham Technical College, Whatcom Community College and Western Washington University.



# Bellingham Public Schools Overview

- 11,500 students, PK through 12<sup>th</sup> grades
- 1,600 staff
- 22 schools
- 40.6% students in low-income households
- 8.8% multilingual learners
- 5.8% students in highly capable program
- 17% students with disabilities
- 6% students are homeless



# BPS Focus Group Schools

**Bellingham High School**  
**7 student participants**



**1,191**

Students Enrolled  
 2023-24 School Year

<b>71.8%</b>	<b>38.2%</b>	<b>36.1%</b>
Met ELA* Standards	Met Math Standards	Met Science Standard
<i>Spring 2023</i>		



**84.3%**  
 Graduated in 4 Years

**Options High School**  
**9 student participants**



**206**

Students Enrolled  
 2023-24 School Year

<b>37.3%</b>	<b>5.1%</b>	<b>34.5%</b>
Met ELA* Standards	Met Math Standards	Met Science Standard
<i>Spring 2023</i>		



**67.2%**  
 Graduated in 4 Years

# BPS Focus Group Schools

**Sehome High School**  
**7 student participants**



**1,180**

Students Enrolled  
*2023-24 School Year*

**69.0%**   **36.6%**   **59.6%**  
Met ELA\*   Met Math   Met Science  
Standards   Standards   Standard  
*Spring 2023*



**88.0%**

Graduated in 4 Years

**Squalicum High School**  
**3 student participants**



**1,245**

Students Enrolled  
*2023-24 School Year*

**53.2%**   **28.5%**   **22.8%**  
Met ELA\*   Met Math   Met Science  
Standards   Standards   Standard  
*Spring 2023*



**86.7%**

Graduated in 4 Years

# Post-Secondary Preparation

Bellingham students completing dual credit courses in 2023

	Bellingham	State
CTE Dual Credit	55%	42%
Advanced Placement	35%	20%
College in the High School	20%	16%
Running Start	12%	8%

Bellingham graduates' 1st year post-secondary enrollment in 2023

- 11% enrolled in 2-year institutions and 45% enrolled in 4-year institutions
- Total of 60% of 2022 high school graduates enrolled in any post-secondary institution with one year after high school graduation



# Sampling to Amplify Voices

- The project is interested in the voices of Hispanic, Latine, Black, Indigenous, rural, and low-income students.
- Focus group samples selected from total 11th and 12th grade enrollment
- To maximize the representation of the federal racial groups, students identified as Hispanic/Latino were also coded by their racial identification
- Students identified as more than one race were further identified as belonging to any racial group in which a race was one that they identified
- Stratified samples of 20-25 students per school were randomly selected as potential participants

# Group Demographics to Amplify Voices

- Within the samples, students were coded in groups such that the Hispanic/Latine, Black, Indigenous, and low-income students each represented from 100% to 200% of the group's representation among the total population
- From these samples, schools recruited volunteers from within coded groups to retain representation
- Absenteeism and (ironically) enrollment in Running Start or off-campus CTE programs made it difficult to get 8-10 students from each school



# Focus Group Themes

## Positives

- Diversity of choice in course options
- Various levels of course rigor
- Touted benefits of CTE courses and teachers with industry experience
- CTE connections to internships, work-based learning and employment opportunities
- Counselor guidance with course planning, recommendations and decision-making

# Focus Group Themes

## Challenges

- Lack of hope, joy, and excitement about life after graduation
- Uncertainty about post-graduation plans
- Perception that school staff expect all students to attend college
- Stress and pressure about the future, especially financial burdens and living independently
- Negativity towards "advisory" and High School & Beyond requirements
- Struggles with self-direction and decision-making skills

# Focus Group Themes

## Take-Aways

- Differing student responses indicate varied reactions to challenges
- Importance of normalizing the uncertainty of future choices
- Small group discussions on topics of interest could lead to better participation and feedback
- All students should have access to practical and beneficial courses (e.g., financial literacy, independent living)
- A need for more guidance in course selection and courses with practical applications

# Possible Action Steps

- Integrate data from various sources to enhance student perspectives for a broader understanding
- Reassess graduation requirements (e.g. technical literacy vs. financial literacy, independent living)
- Prioritizing the importance of practical life skills through course offerings
- Revisit CTE graduation pathway requirements
- Provide additional counselor training on student CTE course selection and academic guidance
- Clearly identify the appropriate support resources/people for different student needs
- Educate parents and students about post-graduation options, including non-4-year pathways

# Questions?

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