

Where Did Students Go During the COVID-19 Pandemic?

Exploring Data on Student Enrollment and Transfer in Alaska and Washington

The COVID-19 pandemic caused unprecedented disruption to schools across the country, and students continue to face acute consequences from school closures.¹ In spring 2020, stakeholders in Alaska and Washington worried that the shift away from in-person learning would lead more students to unenroll from school. REL Northwest worked with education leaders in Alaska and Washington to analyze their enrollment data and explore whether student enrollment in public schools changed during the 2020/21 school year compared to the two previous academic years. Leaders wanted to conduct these analyses to support decisionmaking about student reengagement. These analyses provide a snapshot of student enrollment and transfer outcomes at points in time in order to support decisionmakers' understanding of student experiences, but do not support claims of causality.



SPRING TO FALL 2020

COVID-19 and Public School Milestones in Alaska and Washington



Exploring the Data

Using administrative data from Alaska and Washington, REL Northwest tracked student enrollment and transfer among educational settings from spring to fall (from school years 2017/18 to 2018/19, 2018/19 to 2019/20, and 2019/20 to 2020/21).

Definitions

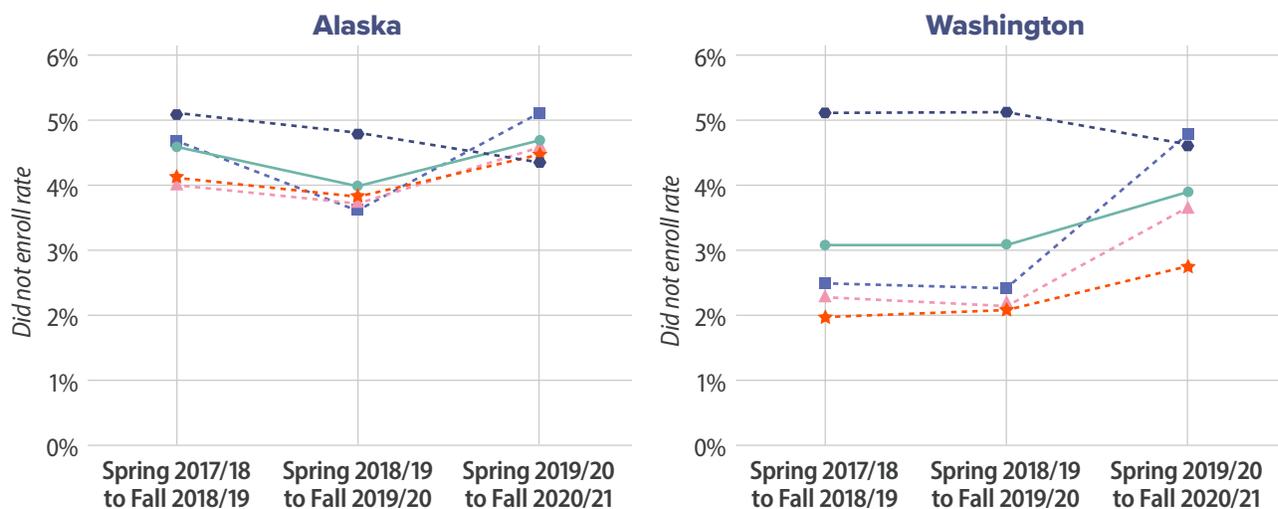
- EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS INCLUDE:**
 - Enrollment in the same or a different public school (including traditional, virtual, and correspondence schools).
 - Confirmed transfer to a private school.
 - Confirmed transfer out of state.
 - Registered home-schooling.
- DID NOT ENROLL** A student who was enrolled in a traditional public school in the spring who did not graduate and could not be tracked to another educational setting the following fall.
- CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS** Established by districts in Alaska for families who choose to home-school their children and for high school students learning independently.
- BRICK-AND-MORTAR SCHOOLS** Public schools that are not classified as virtual, correspondence, or facility/youth institutions. Includes public alternative/re-engagement schools and charter schools.

A slightly higher percentage of students did not enroll in fall 2020 than in prior years.

In Alaska, the percentage increased a small amount (less than 1%) from the previous year, but was equal to the percentage from two years prior.

In Washington, a higher percentage of K–12 students did not enroll in fall 2020 compared to the two previous school years.

In both states, compared to the previous year, did not enroll rates in fall 2020 increased for elementary and middle school students but decreased for high school students.



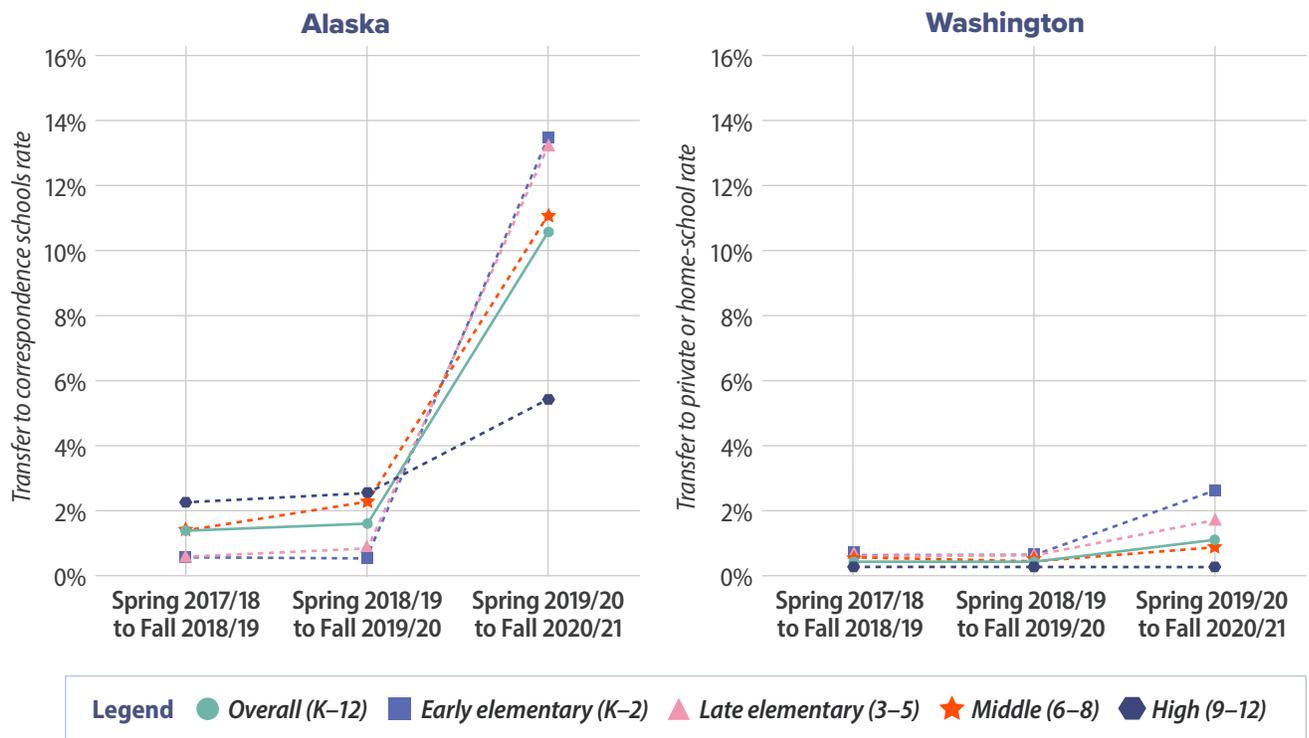
Legend ● Overall (K–12) ■ Early elementary (K–2) ▲ Late elementary (3–5) ★ Middle (6–8) ◆ High (9–12)



Transfers from brick-and-mortar public schools to other educational settings—such as correspondence schools, private schools, and home-schooling—increased in fall 2020.

In Alaska, rates of transfer to correspondence schools increased greatly in all grade bands, with the largest changes in grades K–2, 3–5, and 6–8.

In Washington, rates of transfer to private schools or home-schooling increased slightly in grades K–2, 3–5, and 6–8 but remained constant for high school.



Patterns for key student groups in grades K–12 varied within and between states.*

Alaska

- Alaska Native students had the **lowest did not enroll rates** in fall 2020.
- White students had the **highest rates of transfer to correspondence schools** in fall 2020.
- Students who were economically disadvantaged **transferred to correspondence schools at lower rates** than their peers in fall 2020, in contrast to historical trends.

Washington

Students who were economically disadvantaged **did not enroll at higher rates in fall 2020** than in previous years. In contrast, their peers did not enroll at similar rates to previous years.

Both states

Students who were economically disadvantaged **did not enroll and transferred to different educational settings** (correspondence schools in Alaska, private schools or home-schooling in Washington) **at lower rates** than their peers in fall 2020.

* The reported findings reflect differences that were 3 percent or greater.

Explore rates for different student groups, regions, and districts on the online dashboards.



Implications for Practice

Data from Alaska and Washington show that enrollment and transfer patterns during the pandemic were uneven among student groups. To understand outcomes for different groups of students in each state, district, and school, analysis of enrollment and transfer data should be dynamic, ongoing, and site-specific.^{2,3}

The data from these states show relative increases in student mobility in fall 2020, with higher proportions of students transferring to different educational settings or school districts. Students entering a district for the first time and students who may return in the future may need support during these transitions. If data show increases in student mobility, as they did in Alaska and Washington, consider using the following evidence-based practices to support students who transfer from another educational setting or who have not been enrolled in any educational setting.



Focus on student learning and well-being.^{4,5}

- Screen students for social, emotional, behavioral, and academic needs and implement supports.
- Use instructional practices that enhance student learning in all modalities—in-person, remote, and hybrid.
 - ▶ *Integrate social, emotional, behavioral, and academic instruction.*
 - ▶ *Use culturally responsive instructional approaches.*
- Monitor student progress.
 - ▶ *Use assessment data to prioritize which academic skills to teach.*
 - ▶ *Provide explicit and systematic instruction.*
- Regularly review data to adjust instruction, student grouping, and academic content.
- Use formative assessment to make instruction more responsive to student needs.



Fostering students' sense of belonging.

- Pronounce students' names correctly.⁶
- Learn something specific about each student. Intentionally interact with each student daily.⁷
- Ensure that student diversity is reflected in the curriculum.
- Provide opportunities for families to participate actively in their student's school life.
- Involve students, families, and the community in decision-making.⁸



Supporting smooth transitions back to the school building.⁹

- Create a partnership pledge with students that the members of each classroom will support each other and keep each other safe.
- Build a supportive community for learning within schools.
 - ▶ *Provide students opportunities to reflect on and share perspectives.*
 - ▶ *Give students time to socialize and to teach each other.*
 - ▶ *Talk to students about fears and anxieties.*
 - ▶ *Check in with students each day to debrief and address their concerns.*



References

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