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## Data Brief: White-Black Achievement Gap in Seattle Public Schools

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### Summary

Seattle Public Schools (SPS) was recently identified as having the largest white-black achievement gap in WA State, and the fifth largest achievement gap among the nation's 200 largest school districts (<http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/data/seattle-schools-have-biggest-white-black-achievement-gap-in-state/>).

This data report provides charts and tables to highlight patterns of white and black achievement for SPS students in comparison with other districts and schools within WA State, as measured by annual state assessments in Reading/English language arts (ELA) and Mathematics.<sup>1</sup>

Key data highlights include the following:

- **SPS has the largest white-black achievement gaps in WA State due to a combination of the following:**
  - Extremely high white proficiency rates compared to other districts
  - Below average to average black proficiency rates compared to other districts
  
- **SPS white students outperform statewide proficiency averages for white students in other WA State districts by a significant margin**
  - The proficiency gap between SPS white students and white students in all other districts widened after the transition to the new Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA) in 2015. For example, the gap for elementary students (grades 3-5) between SPS white students and all white students in other districts widened from 13.5 percentage points in 2011 to 22.0 percentage points in 2015.
  - Out of 196 districts with at least 100 white students tested on Smarter Balanced in 2015, SPS white students ranked # 1 in overall ELA proficiency (84.5%) and ranked #2 in math proficiency (79.8%).
  
- **SPS black students have generally performed below statewide averages for black students in other districts**
  - Among the 40 districts in WA State with the largest number of black students tested on Smarter Balanced in 2015, SPS ranked 31 out of 40 in black student ELA proficiency and 21 out of 40 in black student math proficiency
  - One exception is of middle school mathematics (grades 6-8) where the Smarter Balanced proficiency rate for SPS black students was 3.9 percentage points higher than the average for black students in other districts in 2015
  
- **Pockets of relatively strong achievement for SPS black students do exist, particularly in middle school**
  - Among the 20 middle schools in WA State with the largest populations of black students, the top 3 schools for black proficiency rates in mathematics (based on the 2015 Smarter Balanced assessments) are each SPS schools: Denny Middle School, Mercer Middle School, and Aki Kurose Middle School.

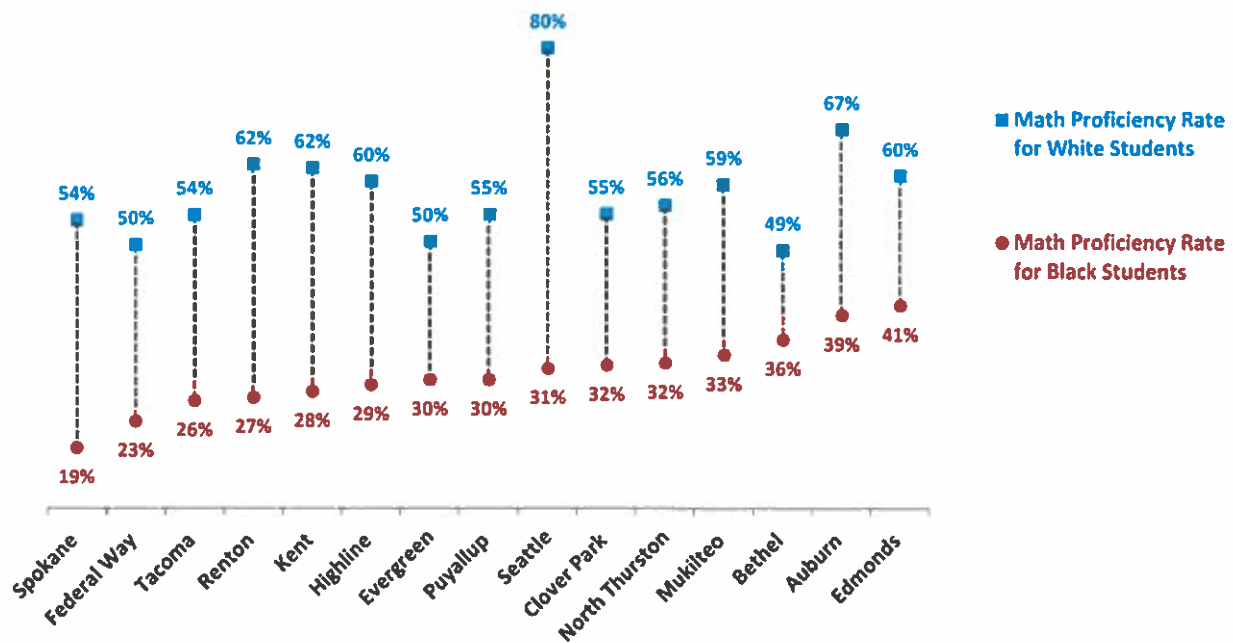
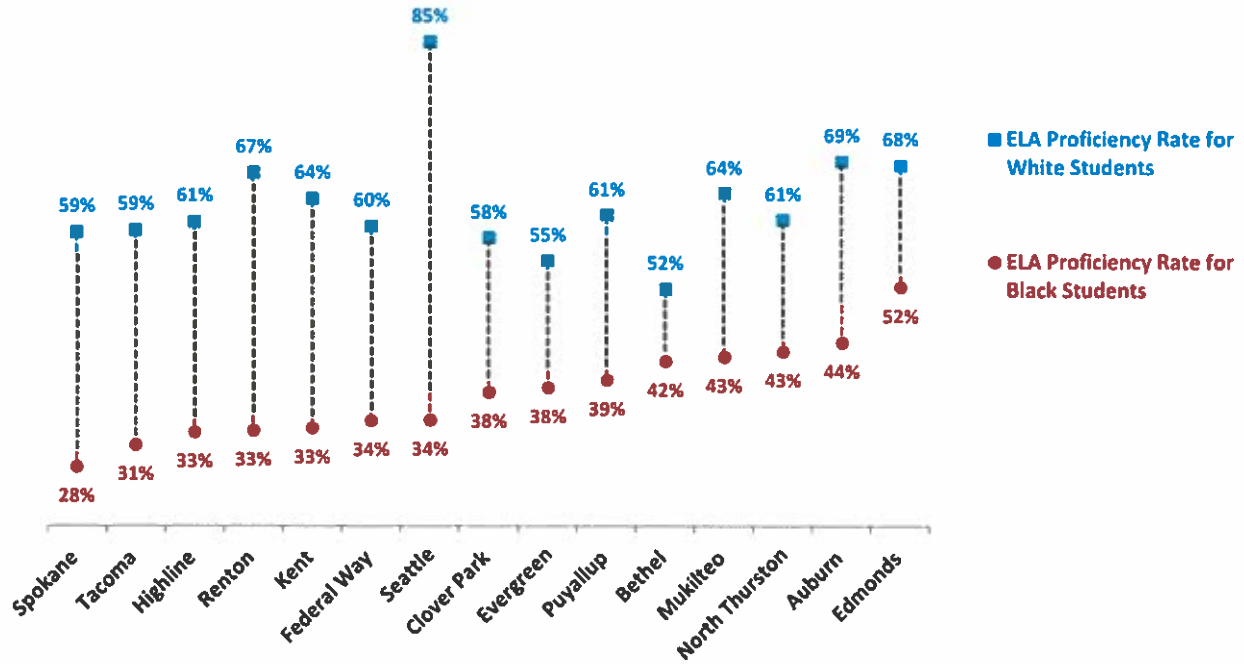
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<sup>1</sup> Students who did not participate in state testing (for any reason) are excluded from the analysis in this report. Such students may be counted by the state agency for federal accountability and reporting purposes.

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As can be seen below, SPS has comparatively large white-black achievement gaps due to a combination of extremely high white proficiency rates and below average to average black proficiency rates compared to other districts.

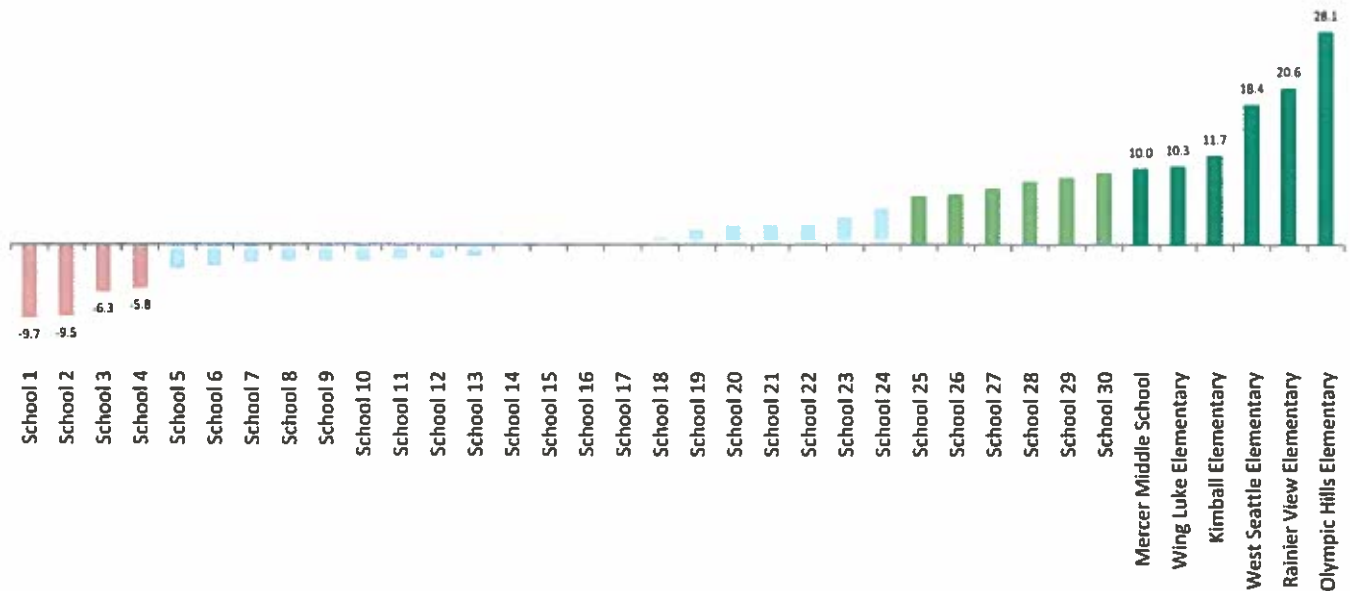
**Chart 1A-1B: White-Black Gaps for 15 Districts with Largest # Black Students Tested (SBA 2015, Grades 3-8)**



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Denny Middle School, Mercer Middle School, and Aki Kurose Middle School were identified by Seattle Public Schools as “positive outlier schools” making significant gains with students of color (based on statewide analysis of state assessments between 2011 and 2014). On the Smarter Balanced Assessments in 2015, low income students of color at a number of SPS schools scored significantly higher than statewide averages. For example, these students at Olympic Hills Elementary scored on average 28 percentile points higher than predicted based on state averages for similar students.

Mean Residual Percentile Ranks <sup>2</sup> for Low-Income Students of Color (Grades 3-8, Math & ELA combined) <sup>3</sup>



What makes the difference? Our research into the common factors present in SPS positive outlier schools indicates that these schools work hard to establish and foster the following practices and conditions: <sup>4</sup>

- **Positive Learning**
  - Staff collaboratively plans instruction and collectively monitor student progress
  - Teachers consistently use assessment data to differentiate instruction
- **Positive Beliefs**
  - Staff believes all students can succeed and maintain high expectations for student learning
  - Staff shares a common vision with high levels of trust and open lines of communication
- **Positive Relationships**
  - Adults build strong personal connections with each and every student
  - All students feel like they belong to supportive community
  - Support systems and resources are in place to meet students’ social emotional and behavioral needs
- **Positive Partnerships**
  - Families are engaged and involved; staff view families as partners in the learning process
  - Staff is culturally competent and experienced working with multicultural families

<sup>2</sup> Mean Residual = Average difference between predicted and actual student percentile ranks (based on statewide averages)

<sup>3</sup> Only includes schools with 20% or more low-income students of color

<sup>4</sup> Findings from spring 2015 study of eight “positive outlier schools” by Research & Evaluation Department