

What We Learned:

Seattle Public Schools Diagnostic Report

2024-2025



Seattle Public Schools (SPS) partnered with Education Resource Strategies to review how our resources—time, people, and money—are used. The goal is to understand what’s working and where we can improve for students and staff.

1. Unequal access to experienced teachers

- Schools with the highest poverty levels have more teachers who are new to the profession (less than three years of experience). These teachers often need extra support to succeed.
- Black students, multilingual learners, and students from low-income families are more likely to attend schools with more new teachers.
- Coaches who work with teachers help them succeed, but SPS has fewer instructional coaches than districts with similar size and demographic makeup, so each coach supports more teachers.

Why it matters: Experienced teachers and support systems help students learn and thrive.

2. Gaps in advanced course enrollment

- American Indian, Hispanic, and Black students take advanced classes—like Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB)—less often than other students.
- Many students take college classes through Running Start, a program that lets high school students earn college credit. Running Start has strong participation from Black and Asian students.
- For Hispanic students, strong performance in classes makes them more likely to enroll in the classes. For Black students, gaps remain even when there is evidence of strong performance. This suggests that classes are not available, or there are inequitable scheduling practices at schools.
- Inconsistent academic support programs make these challenges harder.

Why it matters: Access to advanced courses opens doors to life readiness.

3. School leaders need more support

- Principals in SPS have a lot of flexibility, but 42% have 0–2 years of experience and need help using that flexibility effectively.
- Supervisors oversee more principals than in other large districts.
- Only half of school leaders say central office support is well-coordinated or easy to navigate.

Why it matters: Strong leadership helps schools deliver rigorous and inclusive learning experiences for students.

4. Funding doesn't always match need

- Poverty strongly affects school performance, but schools with similar poverty levels achieve different results. Teaching and leadership make an impact.
- Extra spending at high-poverty schools mostly funds special education and multilingual programs.
- Only one-third of principals believe resources are allocated fairly.

Why it matters: Fair funding can help every student get what they need to succeed.

5. Financial sustainability is at risk

- SPS needs more revenue per student to cover teacher costs than peer districts.
- SPS has more small elementary schools (buildings with less than 350 students) than other large districts.
- The district faces an \$87 million budget deficit for 2026–27, requiring tough decisions.

Why it matters: Financial health is critical to maintaining quality education for all students.

6. Strategy execution is unclear and fragmented

- Many principals struggle to find the right person for support.
- Less than half believe central office teams coordinate effectively.
- Ownership of key initiatives and training is unclear.

Why it matters: Clear roles and coordination help schools implement strategies that improve student outcomes.

Next Steps

This diagnostic analysis will inform the draft strategic plan that the district is developing. It will also help us shape our budget moving forward. You can learn more about that plan on our Strategic Planning Process webpage.



**Read the full
Diagnostic
Report**

