

And the minority school-age population is growing – particularly Hispanic children. Of 73,521 graders enrolled last fall, 14 percent were Hispanic, while only 7 percent of the 12th-graders were.

The growing diversity affects everything from what's being taught, to how school money is spent.

Last school year, for example, the state spent \$38 million on transitional bilingual education for 6.7 percent of all children in school – nearly double the number of students in bilingual programs than there were 10 years ago.

Yet some schools are doing better than others in dealing with the dramatic shift in student populations.

"Really professional, quality teachers are doing all they can to really be sensitive to the diverse needs of the kids, but some people are amazingly resistant," said Gary Howard, founder of the REACH Center for Multicultural Education in Seattle. "We still have this kind of xenophobia . . . where diversity is seen as a threat rather than an opportunity."

The Ports Project at Mercer is one lauded example of how schools are changing the curriculum to better reflect the students in the classroom. Black and Hispanic students lag behind their white counterparts in test scores and graduation rates – both in Washington state and around the country.

Educators such as Banks, editor of the Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education, say students are more interested and perform better when they see themselves reflected in the curriculum.

"I feel better about myself in terms of worth and value because I see myself in the curriculum," said Richard Gomez, the state's director of bilingual and migrant programs. "It's going to affect my attitude toward learning and going to school."

In the past, textbooks have slighted the accomplishments of minorities and women in U.S. and world history, Gomez says, contributing to a sense among some minority children that they can't achieve.

"That's when you start getting things like people saying if you're smart you're acting white," Gomez says. "Often times they've equated success with a majority group."

The Ports Project was created

YOUNGEST CITIES

Many of the cities with high percentages of Hispanics also have high percentages of youth.

City and county	Total population	Total youth	Percent youth
Granger Yakima	2,530	1,089	43%
Mesa Franklin	425	181	43%
Mabton Yakima	1,891	793	42%
Royal City Grant	1,823	735	40%
Yacolt Clark	1,055	424	40%
Warden Grant	2,544	1,019	40%
Toppenish Yakima	8,946	3,469	39%
Wapato Yakima	4,582	1,751	38%
Mattawa Grant	2,609	995	38%

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about four years ago by two social-studies teachers, Anne Fitzpatrick and Gretchen Coe. They were looking for a flexible way to integrate the diverse backgrounds of the students into their teaching, based on the belief that students are more engaged if they see themselves in the curriculum and more respectful of the other students if they understand their cultures.

One day, they may talk about wheat exports to Russia, the next about Hmong in the Skagit Valley, the next about Filipino customs.

Mercer is one of the more diverse schools in the state. Of the 811 students enrolled in the fall, 55 percent were Asian, 26 percent black, 10 percent white, 6 percent Hispanic and 2 percent American Indian.

When the students go home, they may talk to their parents in one of 25 languages other than English, most frequently Tagalog (native to the Philippines), Spanish, Vietnamese or Cambodian.

In this environment, definitions of "minority" are turned upside down.

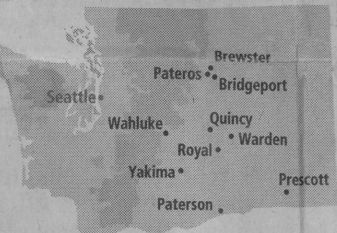
Obsa is a good example. He can tell you which of his classmates are

DIVERSITY IN WASHINGTON SCHOOLS

Elementary and secondary school enrollment in 1999 equaled the all-time high set in 1970, when the baby boomers hit the school system. Today's students are, however, far more diverse than their parents. Here are some of the characteristics of the state and our nation's schoolchildren.

GROWING HISPANIC POPULATIONS

Districts that have gained the greatest percentage Hispanic students since 1990:



HISPANIC ENROLLMENT, IN PERCENT

1990	2000
41%	Wahluke 78%
39%	Bridgeport 76%
32%	Royal 64%
15%	Paterson 46%
39%	Brewster 68%
29%	Prescott 57%
33%	Quincy 61%
26%	Yakima 50%
17%	Pateros 40%
47%	Warden 69%

MOST DIVERSE SCHOOLS IN THE STATE*

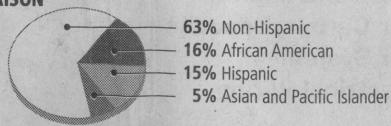
Percent breakdown of students, by race for 2000:

	BLACK	WHITE	ASIAN	AM. INDIAN	HISPANIC
Lakewood					
Oakwood Elementary	26%	32%	19%	2%	21%
SEATTLE					
Roxhill Elementary	25%	23%	23%	3%	25%
Northgate Elementary	22%	26%	26%	2%	24%
Denny Middle School	22%	30%	26%	5%	16%
Highland Park Elementary	16%	23%	29%	4%	28%
Fairmount Park Elementary	28%	34%	18%	7%	13%
Interagency SW Youth & Family	19%	38%	19%	12%	12%
Sealth High School	18%	32%	27%	3%	21%
SeaTac					
Madrona Elementary	28%	26%	20%	2%	24%
Tacoma					
Roosevelt Elementary	19%	37%	17%	12%	14%

*Diversity was determined using a formula that calculates the likelihood that two people picked at random will be of different races.

NATIONAL COMPARISON

Percent breakdown of 49 million students enrolled in primary and secondary schools in October 1999:



Some percentages do not add up to 100 percent because of rounding.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Washington Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

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from China, Vietnam, Laos and Samoa. Obsa himself was born in up-state New York, but his ancestry is Oromo, the largest ethnic group in what is today Ethiopia.

Ask Obsa what diversity means,

and he says: "We don't have a lot of one kind. We have mostly everything."

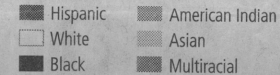
The Ports Project has spread to other grades at the school and now is the springboard for making Mercer

YOUTH AND ADULTS

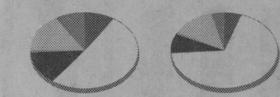
Statewide, the younger generation is more diverse than Washington's adults. In some cities, the contrast is even greater than for the state as a whole. Seattle's children are nearly half minority, and in Yakima the next generation is more than half Hispanic.

RACIAL BREAKDOWN

Percent breakdown, by race for 2000:



YOUTH ADULTS



Source: U.S. Census Bureau

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an "international community school."

"If you look at the attributes of highly successful schools, one of them is to address diversity," said Renko Dempster, Seattle Schools coordinator for K-12 social studies. "I think schools are gradually transforming in ways that they can bring that perspective into a meaningful, relevant context."

Migrant workers

Much of the growing diversity in Washington's schools comes from outside our borders. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the fertile valleys where migrant workers from Mexico and Central America bring in the harvests from the orchards and fields.

they're coming from," Garza says.

Washington's superintendent of public instruction recently reported that students with limited English perform better when taught in both languages.

But the state can't keep up with the rapidly rising bilingual population because of a lack of bilingual teachers.

Helping parents

It's one of the many mantras in education: "The parent is the child's first teacher."

That's easy to say when the parents are educated and speak English, but what of the parents who don't?

At the Pasco School District's Parent Center, Celia Gutierrez goes shy when she speaks English and asks program coordinator Lorraine Landon to translate from the Spanish. Gutierrez is there for free English classes taught by instructors from Columbia Basin College.

Her 4-year-old daughter is in the Children's Center next door, and on some days, her 15-year-old son drops in to do homework on the computers.

Some districts, such as Pasco, are reaching beyond the primary and secondary children it is their constitutional duty to teach and looking for ways to help parents.

The classes are full. In part that's because the Pasco district mails information about the free classes to the parents' homes and provides a place for children to go while their parents are in class.

The parent center opened about four years ago, when the district scraped together some federal money.

English and computer classes had popped up in individual schools, but the center makes the help available to all parents.

"This class is very important for my kids, because I can help with their assignments for the school," says Ana Maria Cruz, a mother of five who has been in the United States four years. "It's very important for a better life."

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