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ACTION MEMORANDUM

TO:	Board Chairs of Charter Schools Sponsored by the State Public Charter School Authority
FROM:	Rebecca Feiden, Executive Director
SUBJECT:	Equitable Access to High Quality Public Schools
DATE:	April 14, 2021
CC:	State Public Charter School Authority; SPCSA-Sponsored School Leaders

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented circumstances in our state and across the world, leading to a school year far different than any one before it. I appreciate all the work that you, your school leaders, teachers, and staff have invested in ensuring the health, safety, academic success, and social and emotional wellbeing of your students. As we begin to turn the corner and look to the future, I write to you today regarding our continued efforts to ensure equitable access to high quality public schools.

As you know, public charter schools in Nevada have historically been criticized due to the lack of diversity in both the student body and teachers. While some of the criticism regarding diversity has been misplaced, some of this criticism has merit. Looking back five years to the 2015-2016 school year, SPCSA-sponsored schools served just 20.5% students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch, 5% English learners, and 8% students with disabilities. Recently, however, the SPCSA has seen steady progress towards serving a more representative population. The population of students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch is just below 40%, the population of English learners is up to nearly 8% and the population of students with disabilities is 9.5%. The changes have, in part, been driven by (1) the Authority's five-year strategic plan, (2) the Authority's Growth Management Plan, and (3) the Authority's Academic and Demographic Needs Assessment (see below for details on these three guidance documents). Despite this progress, we continue to lag behind the state in serving certain student groups and continue to see some student groups, on average, perform below their peers on state assessments and with regard to graduation rates. Closing these gaps will require investment and action not just from the SPCSA, but also from the schools we sponsor.

Therefore, I am urging the governing body of each SPCSA-sponsored school to start or continue to elevate equity as a focus and priority so that together, we can:

1) Ensure that charter schools serve a population of students that is representative of the state, and
2) Ensure that every SPCSA student succeeds – including those from historically underserved student groups.

Background

In December of 2019, the State Public Charter School Authority adopted a new, five-year strategic plan centered on a vision of *equitable access to diverse, innovative, and high-quality public schools for every Nevada student.* In conjunction with the new strategic plan, the SPCSA developed an *Academic and Demographic Needs Assessment* and a *Growth Management Plan,* which serve as tools for implementation and meet the requirements of Assembly Bill 462 from 2019 legislative session, now codified in NRS 388A.

> *Academic and Demographic Needs Assessment:* The Needs Assessment provides an annual evaluation of the needs of students across Nevada. The SPCSA is most likely to approve high quality applications for new schools and expansions that address the needs identified in the Needs Assessment.
>
> *Growth Management Plan:* The Growth Management Plan outlines the current performance of SPCSA-sponsored schools as well as goals and plans for growth over the next five years. Combined with regular communication with local school districts and the Nevada Department of Education, this Plan provides for increased transparency about the future of public charter schools in Nevada.

To that end, I urge the governing body of each SPCSA-sponsored school to start or continue to elevate equity as a focus and priority. This means:

1) Taking a deep look at your school through the lens of current and prospective students, families and teachers,
2) Identifying disparities or inequities, and
3) Building proactive plans to create an environment that embraces and supports all members of our community.

We can only achieve our vision of *equitable access to diverse, innovative, and high-quality public schools for every Nevada student* if our schools embrace this work alongside of us. Below you will find some ideas and suggestions for initial action steps. Ultimately, each charter school and its context are unique. The ideas below are simply a starting point, with an understanding that elevating equity will, and should, look different at each of our schools. I encourage the governing body of each SPCSA-sponsored school to engage in this work grounded in their local context and in partnership with their community.

Please know that SPCSA staff stand ready to answer questions and assist schools as they endeavor to elevate equity in their work. To that end, in the coming weeks I will be hosting virtual meetings with charter school governing board members to discuss this memo and how we can elevate equity as a focus and priority. Charter school board members can sign up to join one of these meetings using the link below. Once you sign up, an invitation with video/call-in information will be provided.

> Sign up to join a meeting:
> https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=5kCj5J64aE6OqhVE0nA5gLzOGP0IBThLtsHQoD1IfHVUNE9MMklNUkQyN0tGVUNRS1M5VklWRzNETy4u

Ideas and Suggestions for Governing Bodies to Elevate Equity as a Focus and Priority

The table below provides some ideas and suggestions for initial action steps. Again, this list is simply a starting point. I encourage the governing body of each SPCSA-sponsored school to engage in this work grounded in their local context and in partnership with their community.

Intended Outcome	Suggested Initial Action Steps	How the SPCSA can support
Alignment to the SPCSA's Strategic Plan	• Review annual and long-term plans for your school and identify ways to further align to the *SPCSA's Strategic Plan.* • Proactively align any plans for future expansion or growth to the *Academic and Demographic Needs Assessment.*	• SPCSA staff can join your school's board meeting to present on the *SPCSA's Strategic Plan* and/or *Academic and Demographic Needs Assessment* and answer any questions. • SPSCSA staff can meet with school leader and board chair to discuss potential plans for future growth and alignment to the *Academic and Demographic Needs Assessment.*
Enrolling and Serving a Representative Population	• Review the demographics of your school, looking at race, ethnicity, and student groups (students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch, English learners, and students with disabilities) compared to the local school district and neighborhood school. • Develop a strategic recruitment plan to address any disparities between the population your schools serves and the population of your community at large. For example, if your school serves a disproportionately low percentage of English learners, conducting more targeted outreach in a language other than English may be beneficial. • Consider requesting an amendment through the SPCSA to revise lottery preferences or implement a weighted lottery in accordance with NRS 388A.456 and Regulation R131-16.	• In February, SPCSA staff provided data to each school leader comparing the population of student groups (students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch, English learners, and students with disabilities) to the local school district and neighborhood school. SPCSA can meet with the school leadership and/or join a board meeting to review this data. • SPCSA staff can meet with school leaders and board chairs to discuss the laws and regulations that govern lottery preferences and weights and review any proposed revisions to lotteries.

Ensuring Equitable Student Experiences	• Review recent school data disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, and student group (students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch, English learners, and students with disabilities) to identify disparities and/or gaps between groups. Data may include:
	  ○ Student discipline data[1]
	  ○ School climate data[2]
	  ○ Student attendance data
	• Revise school policies and procedures to address root causes of inequities.
	• Plan staff professional development focused on addressing root causes of inequities.
		• SPCSA staff can meet with the school leadership and/or join a board meeting to review this data.
		• Through federal grants the SPCSA is now providing interested schools with coaching and support in implementing a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) which can help to build an inclusive and supporting environment. We are still accepting new schools for the 2021-22 school year cohort.
		• SPCSA staff can provide recommendations on third-party organizations that can provide training on cultural competence, trauma informed care, restorative justice practices, and other topics. Federal funds may be available to support this type of professional learning.

[1] Discipline data can be found here: http://nevadareportcard.nv.gov/DI/MoreDownload?filename=2019-2020%20Disaggregated%20Discipline%20Data%20File%20for%20the%20Nevada%20Report%20Card.xlsx

[2] Climate data can be found here: http://datatool.nevadaschoolclimate.org/

Intended Outcome	Suggested Initial Action Steps	How the SPCSA can support
Closing Opportunity Gaps	• Review recent assessment data, disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, and student group (students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch, English learners, and students with disabilities) to identify disparities and/or gaps between different groups. • Revise annual School Performance Plans and federal grant activities to provide strategic and targeted supports.	• SPCSA staff can meet with the school leadership and/or join a board meeting to review this data. • SPSCSA staff can review and provide feedback on School Performance Plans and grant activities.
Ensuring a Representative School Staff	• Review staff demographics compared to student demographics. • Develop plans to recruit and hire a staff that is representative of the student population.	• SPCSA staff can meet with the school leadership and/or join a board meeting to review this data.

Additionally, beginning in the fall of 2020, the SPCSA began identifying actions that the Authority can take to support schools in their efforts to serve all students equitably and uphold the SPCSA's values of equity and diversity. Throughout the course of this work, a primary focus has been on equitable access, experiences, and outcomes for all students. For more information on the work that the SPCSA is doing in regard to equity, please see this recent update provided to the Authority in February 2021: https://charterschools.nv.gov/uploadedFiles/CharterSchoolsnvgov/content/News/2021/210226-Equity-Initial-Steps-2021-02-22.pdf

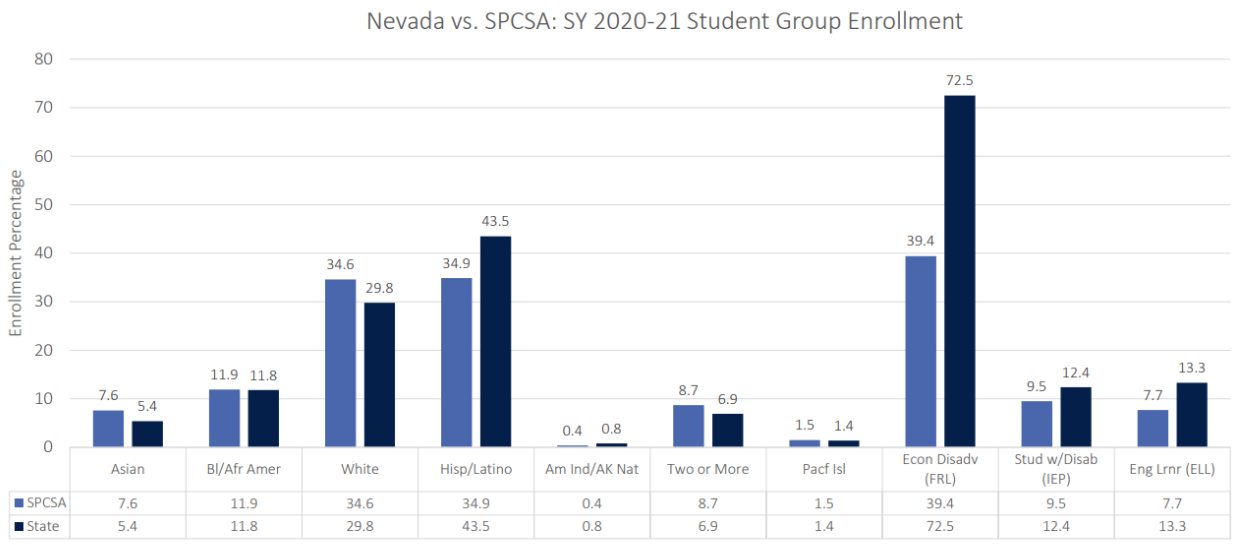
In closing, while this has been an unprecedented and highly unusual year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there are many signs that we have made progress towards our vision of equitable access to high-quality schools. Though this progress is cause for celebration and optimism, data also tells us that we still have substantial work to do. (see Appendix A for Equity Data). ***Again, SPCSA staff stand ready to answer questions and assist schools as they endeavor to elevate equity in their work. If you are interested in meeting with SPCSA staff and/or having SPCSA staff join on of your school board meetings, please contact Jennifer King at Jennifer.King@spcsa.nv.gov to schedule a meeting.***

Appendix A – Equity Data

Additional information can be found in the annual *State of the SPCSA Presentation*.

Demographics

Enrollment Comparison by Student Group



	Asian	Bl/Afr Amer	White	Hisp/Latino	Am Ind/AK Nat	Two or More	Pacf Isl	Econ Disadv (FRL)	Stud w/Disab (IEP)	Eng Lrnr (ELL)
SPCSA	7.6	11.9	34.6	34.9	0.4	8.7	1.5	39.4	9.5	7.7
State	5.4	11.8	29.8	43.5	0.8	6.9	1.4	72.5	12.4	13.3

Enrollment rates are from the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) October 1 2020 validation day. State data provided by the NDE and include SPCSA.

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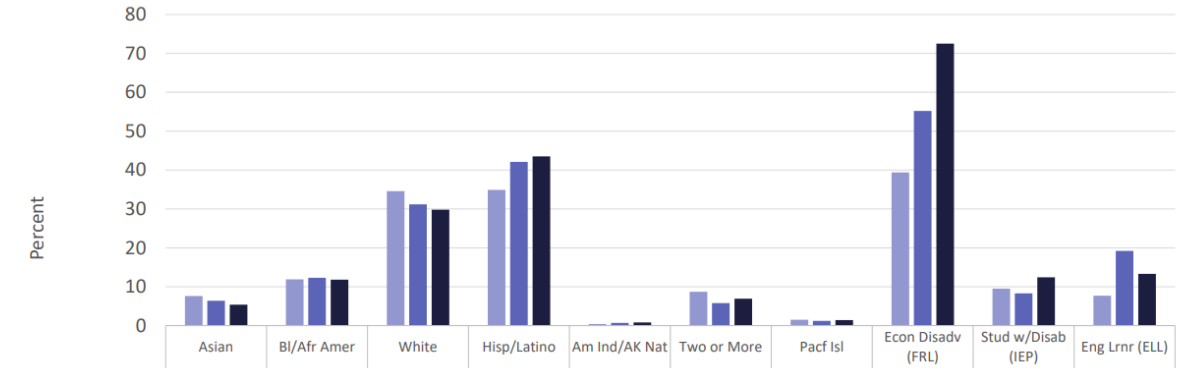
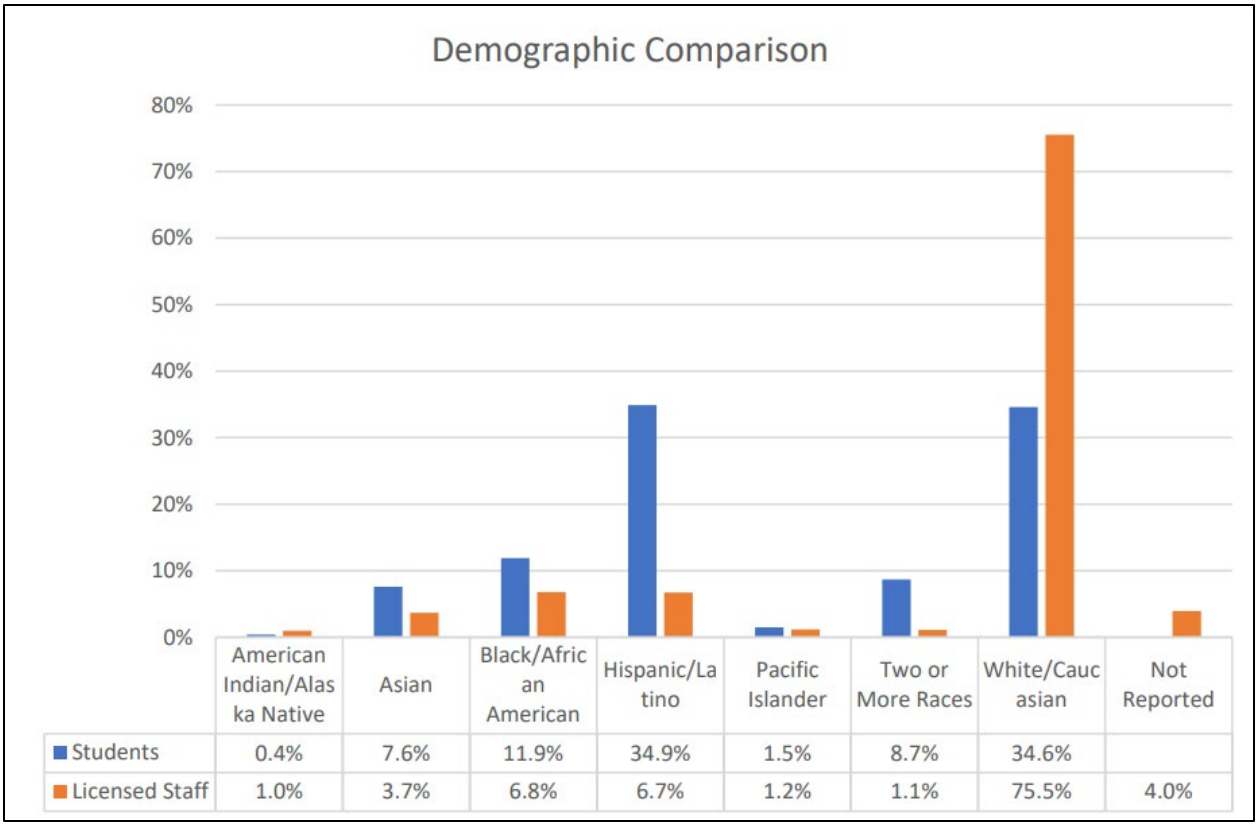
Comparison of Demographics for New Schools Opened in School Year 20-21



	Asian	Bl/Afr Amer	White	Hisp/Latino	Am Ind/AK Nat	Two or More	Pacf Isl	Econ Disadv (FRL)	Stud w/Disab (IEP)	Eng Lrnr (ELL)
SPCSA SY 20-21	7.6	11.9	34.6	34.9	0.4	8.7	1.5	39.4	9.5	7.7
New Schools SY 20-21	6.4	12.3	31.2	42.1	0.7	5.8	1.2	55.2	8.3	19.2
State SY 20-21	5.4	11.8	29.8	43.5	0.8	6.9	1.4	72.5	12.4	13.3

Enrollment rates are from the Nevada Department of Education (NDE) October 1 2020 validation day. "New schools" include Amplus Academy Rainbow, Explore Academy, Girls Athletic Leadership School (GALS), Mater East Las Vegas, Nevada State High School (NSHS) Downtown Henderson, NSHS Northwest, and Pinecrest Academy of Northern Nevada.



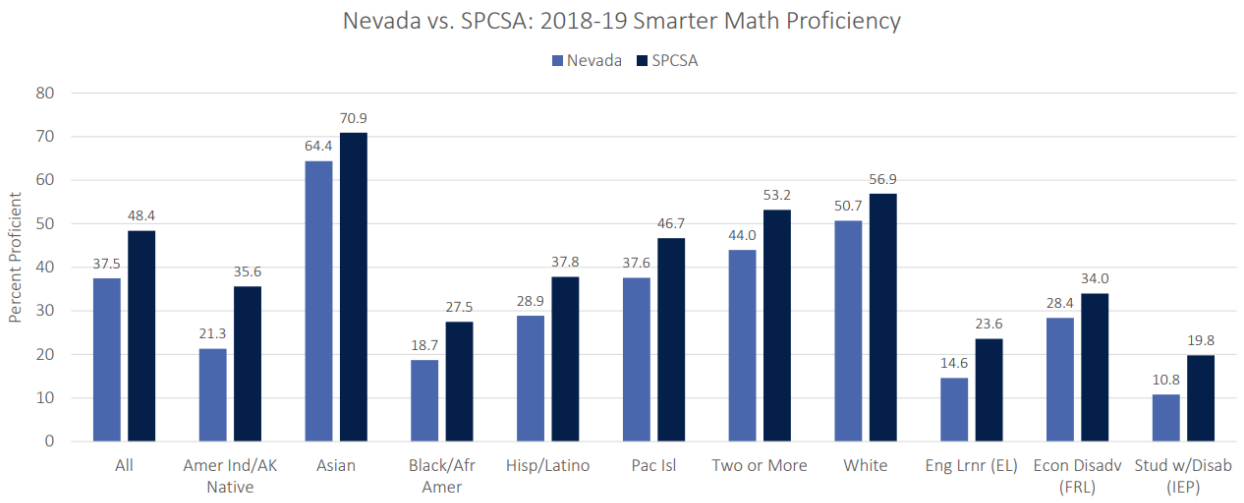
Discipline

Incidents Resulting in Suspension/Expulsion, by Population

Population	October 1 2019 Enrollment	Incidents Resulting in Suspension	Incidents Resulting in Suspension Rate Per 100 Students	Incidents Resulting in Expulsion	Incidents Resulting in Expulsion Rate Per 100 Students
Black/African American	5752	120	2.08	n<10	n<10
Male	24550	328	1.33	n<10	n<10
Students with Disabilities (IEP)	4666	55	1.17	n<10	n<10
Economically Disadvantaged (FRL)	17919	184	1.02	n<10	n<10
Two or More Races	4346	41	0.94	n<10	n<10
SPCSA	**49420**	**447**	**0.90**	**11**	**0.02**
Hispanic/Latino	16446	134	0.81	n<10	n<10
Asian	3675	27	0.73	n<10	n<10
White	18183	124	0.68	n<10	n<10
Female	24870	119	0.47	n<10	n<10
English Learners (EL)	3397	13	0.38	n<10	n<10
American Indian/Alaskan Native	222	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10
Pacific Islander	796	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10
Foster	69	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10
Military	2204	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10
Homeless	522	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10
Migrant	26	n<10	n<10	n<10	n<10

Rate = Total number SY 2019-20 incidents resulting in suspension or expulsion divided by the corresponding group's October 1 2019 enrollment count, multiplied by 100. The SPCSA rate was calculated via gender incident counts. To protect student privacy, n-counts less than 10 and their corresponding rates are displayed as "n<10". SPCSA data include former ASD schools. Incidents do not correspond one-to-one with suspensions/expulsions.

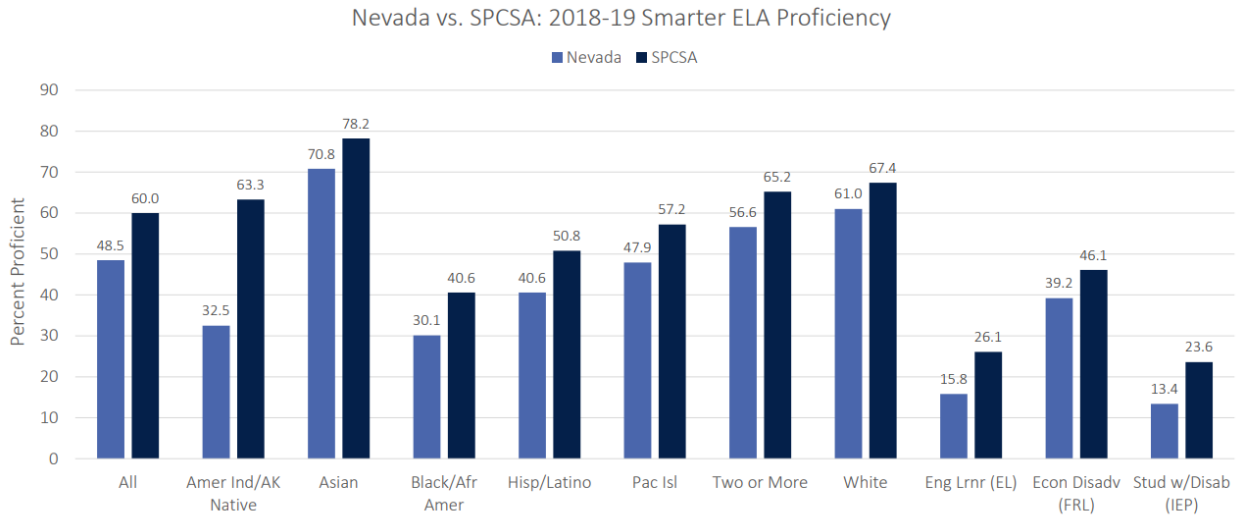
SPCSA Math Proficiency Comparison to State (3rd-8th Grade)



Nevada data are from all districts, including SPCSA.
ASD schools are not included in SPCSA data as they were local LEA or ASD in the year(s) shown.

41

SPCSA English Language Arts Proficiency Comparison to State (3rd-8th Grade)



Nevada data are from all districts, including SPCSA.
ASD schools are not included in SPCSA data as they were local LEA or ASD in the year(s) shown.

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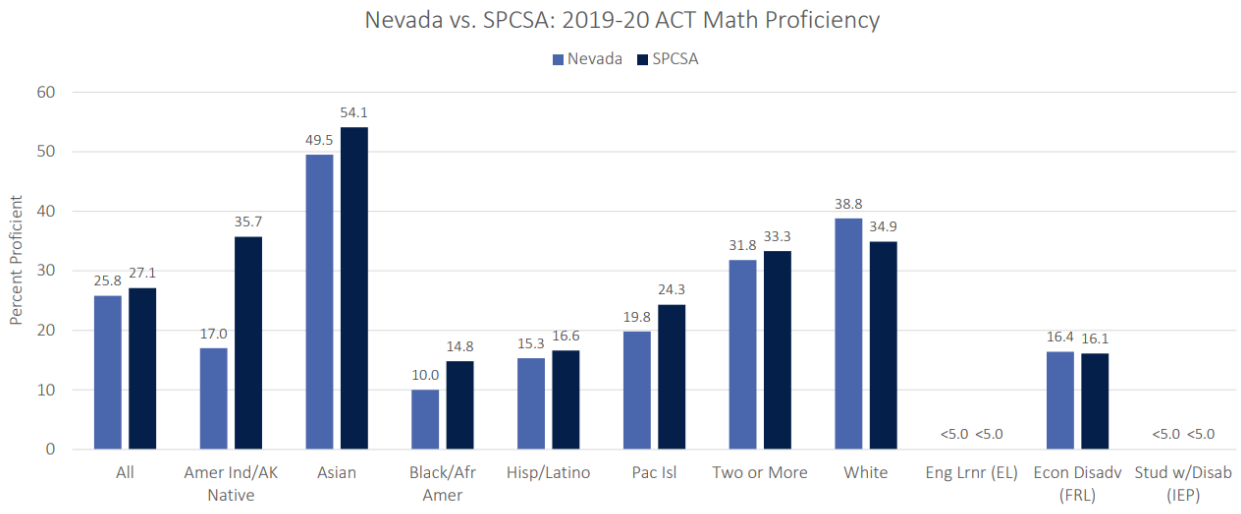
SPCSA Math Proficiency Comparison to State (11th Grade)



Nevada data are from all districts, including SPCSA. Former ASD schools are included beginning in the 2019-20 school year. To protect student privacy, proficiency rates less than 5% are shown as "<5.0".

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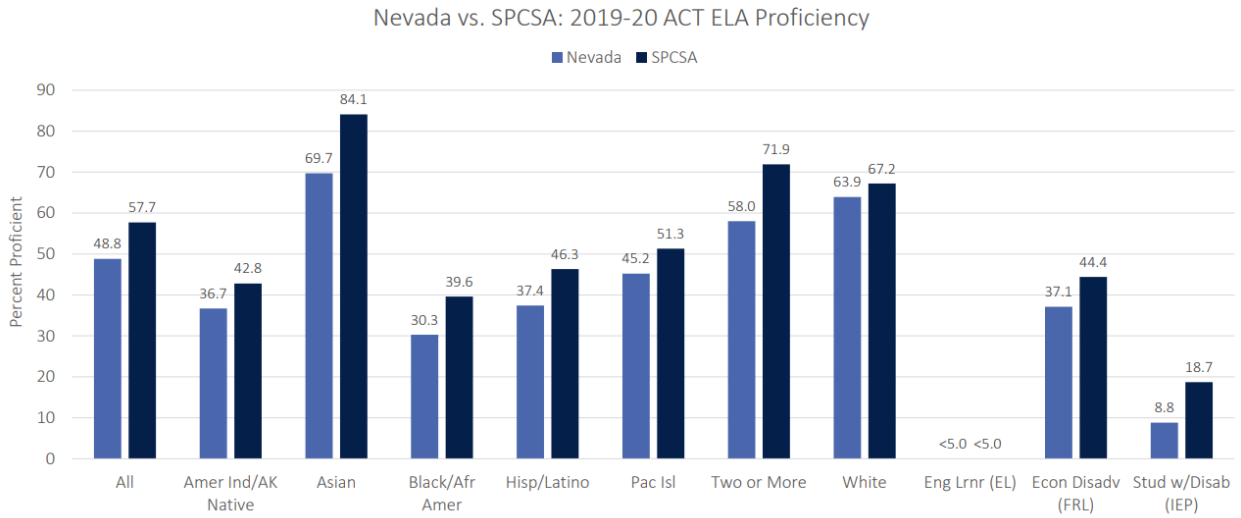
SPCSA English Language Arts Proficiency Comparison to State (11th Grade)



Nevada data are from all districts, including SPCSA. Former ASD schools are included beginning in the 2019-20 school year. To protect student privacy, proficiency rates less than 5% are shown as "<5.0".

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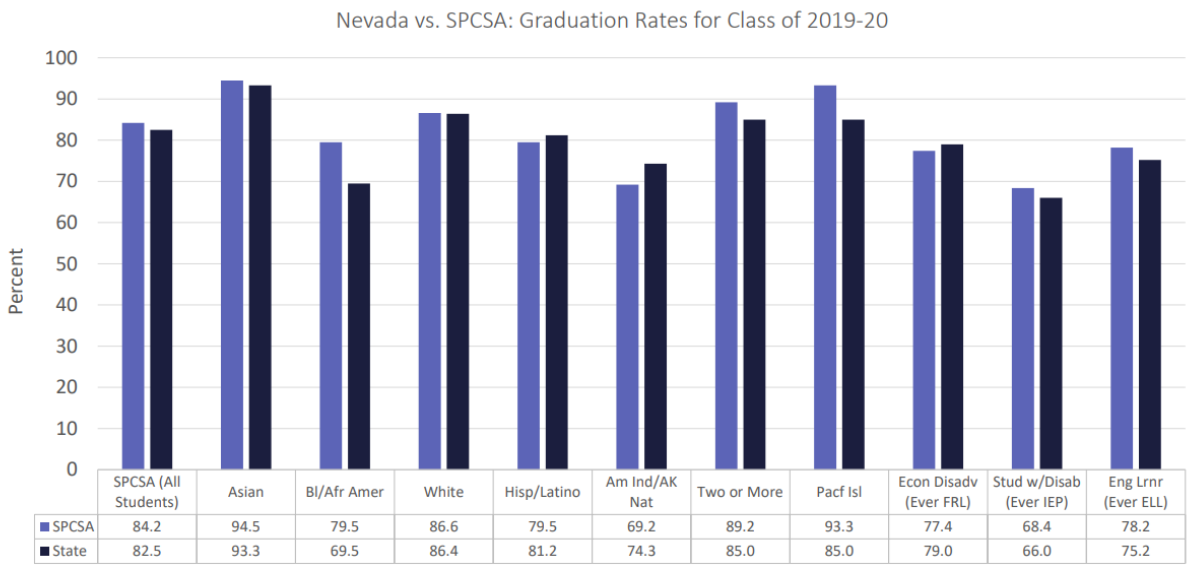
Graduation Rate

SPCSA Graduation Rate Comparison to State



	SPCSA (All Students)	Asian	Bl/Afr Amer	White	Hisp/Latino	Am Ind/AK Nat	Two or More	Pacf Isl	Econ Disadv (Ever FRL)	Stud w/Disab (Ever IEP)	Eng Lrnr (Ever ELL)
SPCSA	84.2	94.5	79.5	86.6	79.5	69.2	89.2	93.3	77.4	68.4	78.2
State	82.5	93.3	69.5	86.4	81.2	74.3	85.0	85.0	79.0	66.0	75.2

State rates were provided by the Nevada Department of Education and truncated to one decimal place by the SPCSA. State rates include SPCSA. "Ever" denotes students were part of that population during their high school career.

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