

SEATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS' INTERAGENCY RECOVERY CAMPUS BRIEF SERIES:

Mapping the Need for Washington's Only Public Recovery High School

This is the first of a series of three short reports that share how recovery high schools are an evidence-based approach to supporting high school graduation and abstinence from alcohol and drugs. The primary goal of Interagency Recovery Campus is to provide a safe and sober environment where young people in recovery pursue their academic and career goals. Staff members typically include substance use counselors, teachers, and mental health professionals.

In this brief, we make the case for recovery schools generally and Seattle Public School's Recovery Campus specifically. The Interagency Recovery Campus is the only public school of its kind in Washington. Together these short reports share data and stories showing the value of sober learning spaces tailored for young people in recovery from substance use and co-occurring mental health disorders.

Why We Need Recovery Schools

Both prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic, young people's behavioral health has become a pressing concern. During this timeperiod, students' experiences of instability, isolation, and fear have been documented in multiple studies. The American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Children's Hospital Association have declared a national emergency in children's mental health, citing the serious toll of the COVID-19 pandemic on top of existing challenges.

According to the U.S. Surgeon General one in five children reported having a mental, emotional, developmental, or behavioral disorder. ii











Mental health and substance use are connected:

- Mental health issues can influence a person's use of drugs and alcohol.
- Substance use can impact the development of mental illness.
- □ Risk and protective factors for both conditions can contribute to one another.
- Research suggests that adolescents with substance use disorders also have high rates of co-occurring mental illness.iii

Low high school graduation rates for youth impacted by co-occuring disorders underscore the need for recovery schools.

Only one in four Washington youth with substance use concerns graduated from high school within six years. For youth with co-occurring mental health and substance use needs, that number dropped to 17%.iv

Without a high school diploma, individuals are more likely to have poor health and economic outcomes. They are also more commonly involved in the juvenile legal system. Innovative post-treatment transitions like those offered at the Interagency Recovery Campus are critical to supporting student success.

Washington's Only Sober Public High School

Seattle Public School's Interagency Recovery Campus provides a singular and important service in King County. Hosted through the Interagency Academy network of specialized campuses across the city of Seattle, the Recovery Campus is the only one of its kind in Washington. The school offers programs and supports to address the Four Dimensions of Recovery: Health, Home, Purpose and Community.vi The Recovery Campus provides instructional programs for ninth through twelfth graders and daily sober support groups. It also partners with BRIDGES: Seattle Alternative Peer Group to offer fun and sober activities after school.

HISTORY The program was founded as a partnership between the King County Behavioral Health and Recovery Division of the Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS-BHRD) and Seattle Public Schools in 2014. Concerned about low high school graduation rates in Washington, DCHS-BHRD staff visited recovery high schools in Minnesota and Texas and then provided \$250,000 in startup funds to launch the program.

CONNECTIONS The Recovery Campus attracts students from a number of referral sources, including peers, counselors, treatment programs and families. Interagency Academy's Orientation Team promotes access to the program by informing all Interagency students, consulting across campuses and the district, and supporting out-of-district students in the enrollment process.

To ensure that the Recovery Campus is the right place, prospective students visit and participate in an afternoon recovery group coled by staff and students. These daily meetings build shared accountability among students who support each other in their progress through key milestones of sobriety.

Over three in five adolescents in community-based substance use disorder treatment programs also meet diagnostic criteria for another mental illness."

COMMUNIT

having relationships and social networks that offer support, friendship, love, and hope



HEALTH

overcoming or managing one's disease(s) or symptoms, and making informed, healthy choices that support physical and emotional well-being



PURPOSE

conducting meaningful daily activities, such as working, school volunteerism, family caretaking, or creative endeavors, and the independence, income, and resources to participate in

society



Dimensions

of Recovery

HOME

having a stable and safe place to live

Campus substance use counselor and social worker. is engaged in the national Association of Recovery Schools, serving on the organization's board, presenting locally and nationally, providing recommendations to emerging schools, and preparing the program for accreditation.

Seth Welch, the Recovery

STUDENTS The majority of the Recovery Campus students have co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders. Students commit to a program of sobriety during their attendance. Residential treatment for substance use and a sustained period of sobriety is recommended prior to enrollment. However, prospective students who have not completed treatment, and who are interested in starting their recovery journey, are welcome to meet with staff to develop a plan for enrollment. This flexibility promotes equitable entry points to the Campus. Student placements are facilitated by Interagency Academy's Orientation Team with final approval granted by school administration.

Recovery Campus staff can refer students to residential treatment if needed. More than one-quarter (26%) of students completed residential substance use treatment while attending the Recovery Campus.



AFTERSCHOOL ACTIVITIES Abstaining from drugs and alcohol is just the beginning. Engagement in prosocial activities and a supportive peer community outside of school are important to successful post-treatment recovery. Bridges offers afterschool drop-in and field trip activities, student and parent support groups, and arts programs. As young leaders, Recovery Campus students develop a sense of self-efficacy and confidence as they create positive change beyond the walls of the school:

"The Recovery Campus placed tools in front of me that I would not have found on my own, allowing barriers to be broken and help to be accepted."

— Recovery Campus student

FUNDING It is a common model for recovery schools to be funded through partnerships. At Interagency Recovery Campus, Seattle Public Schools pays for the academic components, and King County DCHS-BHRD pays for the behavioral health portion.

Please see the next two briefs in the series to read about the program's outcomes, student characteristics, and the impact of the program as described through the words of students, parents, and alumni. You will learn that Recovery Campus students are more likely than other similar young people to complete high school and build a recovery lifestyle of health, home, community, and purpose.

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SEATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS' INTERAGENCY RECOVERY CAMPUS BRIEF SERIES:

Recovery Campus Students' Characteristics and Outcomes: 2015–25

This is the second of three related short reports that describe how recovery schools are an evidence-based approach to supporting young people in graduating from high school and building a substance-free lifestyle. Recovery schools' primary goal is to provide a safe and sober environment where young people in recovery pursue their academic and career goals. Staff members typically include substance use counselors, teachers and mental health professionals. Together, the three briefs show the value of recovery high schools for youth in recovery from substance use and co-occurring mental health disorders.

Students in recovery from substance use disorder who attended recovery high schools had substantially higher rates of graduation and sobriety than those attending other high schools."

Who Attended the Interagency Recovery Campus?

In this report, we share data about the **190 students** who attended the Seattle Public Schools (SPS) Interagency Recovery Campus for at least 90 days between Fall 2015 and Spring 2025.^{III}



Interagency







Demographics and Characteristics

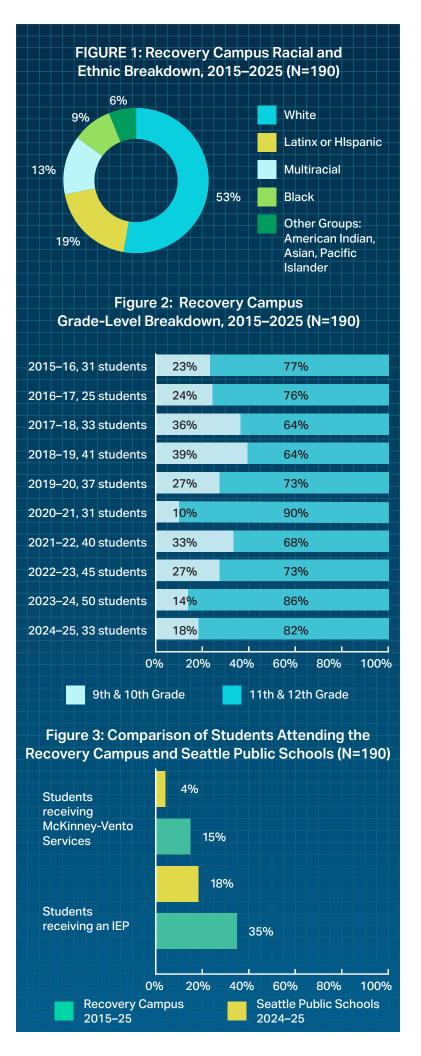
Figure 1 details the racial and ethnic background of Recovery Campus students. The breakdown of Recovery Campus students as compared with SPS students is as follows: White students (53% Recovery Campus, 45% SPS), Latinx or Hispanic students (19% Recovery Campus, 15% SPS), Multiracial (13% for both), Black students (9% Recovery Campus, 14% SPS), and other groups including Asian, Pacific Islander, and Native American (6% Recovery Campus, 13% SPS).

Students can enroll in the Recovery Campus at any point during their high school career.

Between 25 and 50 students attended the Recovery Campus for at least 90 days during each school year. The Recovery Campus enrolls an average of 37 students per year. Figure 2 shows the breakdown by grade level.

Note: Many students attended the Recovery Campus for more than one year, so the same student may be included in 2016 and 2017, for example.

Students at the Recovery Campus had substantially higher rates of homelessness or transitional living, and disability than their peers across the school district. **Fifteen percent** of Recovery Campus students received McKinney-Vento services for students experiencing homelessness or transitional living situations, compared with **4%** of district students. **Over one in three (35%)** Recovery Campus students had an Individualized Education Plan compared with **18%** of students in the district (see Figure 3).



What are the Outcomes of Recovery **Campus Students?**

NATIONAL DATA While studies show the positive effects of recovery schools, there are only approximately 40 recovery high schools across the U.S. One study of ten substance use treatment programs in three states compared student outcomes of those attending recovery schools with other high schools. Post treatment, national data about recovery school students' high school graduation rates were 61% as compared to 39% for other youth. Over one-third (35%) of the recovery school students reported they were abstinent from drugs and alcohol for one year while the sobriety rate for those not attending recovery schools was one in eight (12%).vi

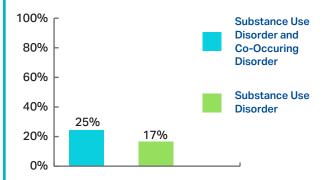
WASHINGTON AND SEATTLE DATA In 2013. the Washington Department of Social and Human Services reported that only 25% of young people who received publicly funded substance use disorder treatment graduated from high school.vii For students with co-occurring mental health disorders, the number dropped to 17%. (see Figure 4)



This report led the King County Behavioral Health and Recovery Division of the Department of Community and Human Services and Seattle Public Schools to collaborate on establishing a recovery school as part of the Interagency Academy system.

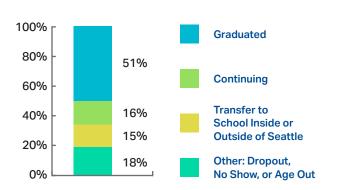
From 2015–2025, 67% of students at the Seattle Interagency Recovery Campus have earned, or are working toward, a high school diploma in the program. An additional 15% have transferred to continue schooling elsewhere. (see Figure 5)

FIGURE 4: 25% of Washington Students with Substance Use Disorder Graduated within Six Years (N=1,757)



Note: This is the proportion of students that graduated in six-years for students beginning ninth grade in 2006. Data Source: Behavioral Health Needs and School Success: Youth with Mental Health and Substance Abuse Problems are at Risk for Poor High School Performance.

FIGURE 5: 67% of Recovery Campus Students Have Earned, or are Working Toward, a High School Diploma (N=190)



Note: Students enrolled for more than 90 days between 2015-2025.



More than half (53%) of Recovery Campus students have more than one year of recovery following initial enrollment.

Data about student substance use demonstrates the power of the Recovery Campus. For a student to be in recovery means that they are building a sober lifestyle in and out of school which involves cultivating connections with sober peers, participating in prosocial activities, and engaging with the recovery community.

Summary

Read together, the national research and this summary of student outcomes at Seattle's Interagency Recovery Campus show the effectiveness of the model. Student perspectives on their time at the school help us understand the power of a drug and alcohol-free place to learn:

"The Recovery Campus gave me a place to fit in and find comfort in a sober lifestyle that not many people my age were doing. It gave me an environment where my ideas were valued, and my problems met with solutions rather than dismissal."

REFERENCES AND NOTES

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- viii The recovery status of 22% of the students is unknown.

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SEATTLE PUBLIC SCHOOLS' INTERAGENCY RECOVERY CAMPUS BRIEF SERIES:

Student, Alumni, and Parent Experiences

Introduction

This is the third in a series of interconnected briefs detailing how recovery high schools are an evidence-based approach to supporting young people in completing high school and building a substance-free lifestyle. Recovery schools are designed specifically for students in recovery from substance use and co-occurring mental health disorders. While their structures and operations vary, all schools share the primary goal of providing a safe and sober environment where young people in recovery pursue their academic and career goals. Staff members typically include substance use counselors, teachers and mental health professionals.



Together the briefs demonstrate the impact of a sober school setting for young people in recovery. The first brief documents the need for Seattle Public School's Interagency Recovery Campus and describes its history. The second brief highlights national and Washington data showing that students with substance use disorder have substantially higher rates of graduation and sobriety when attending a recovery high school.

Drawing from interviews and focus groups, this third brief reflects student, alumni and parent experiences in the program. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA) Four Dimensions of Recovery (see page 2) provides a framework documenting key services provided at the campus. SAMSHA defines recovery from mental health and substance use disorders as "a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential." For a student to be in recovery means that they are building a sober lifestyle in and out of school which involves cultivating connections with sober peers, participating in prosocial activities, and engaging with the recovery community. A stable and sustained recovery is built in each of the Dimensions.











COMMUNITY

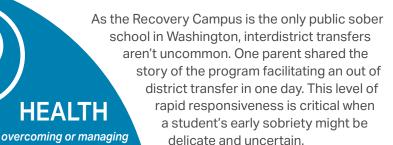
having relationships and social networks that offer support, friendship, love, and hope



conducting meaningful daily activities, such as working, school volunteerism, family caretaking, or independence, income, and resources to participate in society



Dimensions of Recovervii



symptoms, and making Recovery Campus students and informed, healthy choices alumni value the sober learning that support physical and environment, reflecting that alcohol emotional well-being and drug use were problems at the schools they previously attended. Sobriety is nurtured through daily recovery meetings facilitated by the substance use counselor and social worker. Students receive referrals to mental health and substance use providers and are encouraged to participate in community-based peer led sober support groups. As a campus under the umbrella of Interagency Academy, the

Recovery Campus has access to a school nurse and special education services, as more than onethird of students qualify for disability accommodations. v

Students and staff create a culture of support balanced with accountability, establishing a clear recovery path. If an instance of relapse occurs, the substance use counselor and social worker partners with the student and their family, developing actionable steps, getting the student back on track. Students and alumni shared that their involvement with the program was instrumental to their health and well-being. One student reflected, "To keep it straightforward, if it weren't for the school, I'd probably be dead. I was immersed in a community that was doing the work to stay sober, they did all the things we need to do, and I was taught how to do that."

PURPOSE

creative endeavors, and the



HOME

one's disease(s) or

having a stable and safe place to live

Health



The Interagency Recovery Campus provides a stable environment for students to build a happy, healthy, substance-free lifestyle.

When a student enters the Interagency Recovery Campus, the substance use counselor and social worker collaborates with the family to ensure a quick and smooth transition. While some Recovery Campus students begin their studies following inpatient treatment or a hospital stay, both the cost and access to residential treatment can present barriers to students and families. The Recovery Campus addresses these inequities by considering the holistic needs of each student and family. It is preferred that prospective students have a sustained period of sobriety upon enrollment. However, the most important determinant for enrollment is a potential student's voluntary commitment to sobriety.

Home

The Interagency Recovery Campus works to build bridges between students and their family members.

Multiple studies indicate that family involvement in substance use disorder treatment has positive effects on recovery. VI Staff members at the Interagency Recovery Campus communicate regularly with parents and caregivers, offering help,

information, and resources. Bridges, an Alternative Peer Group, provides after school programming for Recovery Campus students who are interested, and support groups for families.

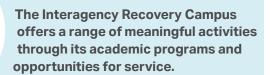
Parents shared that the early days of transition can be especially fragile. During this tender period, the Recovery Campus staff provides frequent updates about how students are doing. One parent elaborated that after this transitional period, she was very thankful for the consistent communication around her child's whereabouts and schoolwork.

Parents and caregivers are able to access support services from Bridges Alternative Peer Group and appreciate the collaboration between both programs:

"Between the school and [Bridges, they have] kept my kid safe, to have something to do after school until I could get them...They're super connected. They always know what's going on with each other. Without the two of them working, hand in hand together, my child would not be where they're at today. Which is hopefully graduated in June."

While rebuilding familial relationships is a priority at the Recovery Campus, close to one in five students experience housing instability and are served by the district's McKinney Vento program. For students who have conflicts with their families, the staff work to ensure that students are safe and can access a range of supports.

Purpose



Students and alumni described a classroom climate that is reminiscent of Carol Dweck's research about **growth mindset**. Individuals with a growth mindset believe that their talents and abilities can be cultivated through practice, persistence and good teaching. She explains, "The growth mindset is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts" (p. 7). Dweck contrasts this with fixed mindsets in which individuals conclude that ability and intelligence are fixed traits. One student relates:

"They change the idea of 'Okay, I'm not smart. I can't do this. I'm never going to be able to do this' to 'your mind is just growing, and your mind is always evolving.' The more practice you put in, the more you'll feel it and see it. And that was really pivotal for me because every other teacher I'd ever had just made me feel stupid for not understanding right off the bat or for being unmotivated."

One mother shared that during the conference with her child and a teacher, the student presented an assessment of goals and the progress they made. The staff also invite students to join outreach efforts, present at legislative forums, and participate on conference panels. Parents have expressed how these activities have brought up their children's self-esteem. Students reflect that engagement in 12-Step programs also present opportunities for service and leadership. Many students with sustained recovery experience provide transportation for their peers and serve as mentors for youth who are earlier in their recovery.







Community

The Interagency Recovery
Campus fosters relationships
and social networks that cultivate
friendship, love and hope.

Practices at the Interagency Recovery Campus are guided by the philosophy that **the opposite of addiction is connection and community.** Parents, students and alumni agreed that the Recovery Campus places a strong emphasis on community. Students appreciate that some staff were in recovery too. One parent shares,

"Each teacher takes on a role [as] a mentor and a family member. As far as their recovery and their success in school, these kids are so loved. It's the recovery community."

Another explains:

"There's a lot of community. They have relationships and social networks that offer support, friendship, love and hope. The whole school is like that. I'm not going to say that every kid loves each other every day. They go through their regular teenage behavior of hating one person one day and 'this person did this to me.' That doesn't stop. But I will tell you, and [my child] will say it too and the other kids will say it too, that when it gets down, they're going to be there for each other."

To sustain community, staff foster a strong commitment to sobriety and recovery. Parents expressed that students must choose sobriety for themselves. This commitment contributes to the culture of shared accountability in each student's recovery journey. One student concludes:

"At the end of the day, we all understand that we're fighting the same battle, and we are trying very hard...That's something that we can all understand. It's just the community, the recovery support."

SUMMARY

The shared experiences of students, alumni, and parents illustrate how recovery is built within the four dimensions. Their voices highlight essential components of a recovery high school model promoting sobriety and increasing graduation rates for students with co-occurring substance use and mental health disorders. The powerful impact Interagency Recovery Campus has had in the lives of students and families is clear through their own words.

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