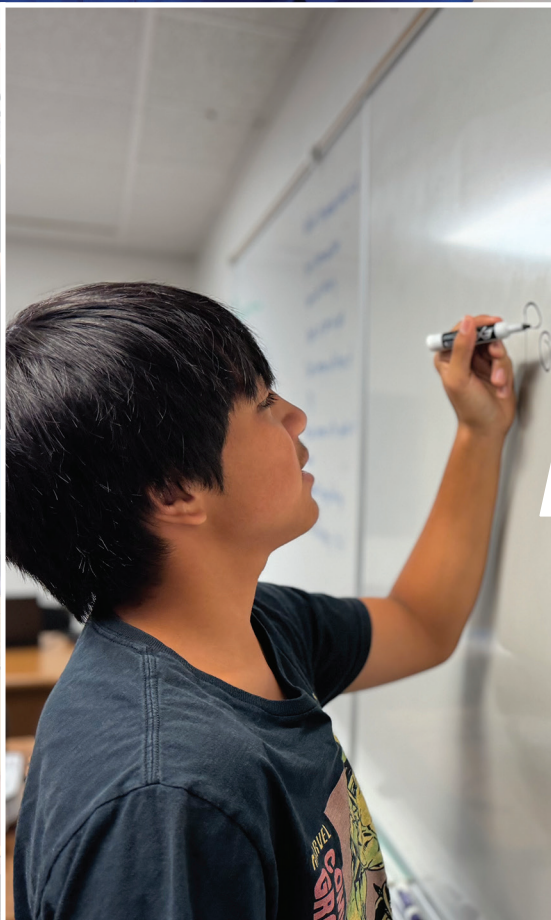
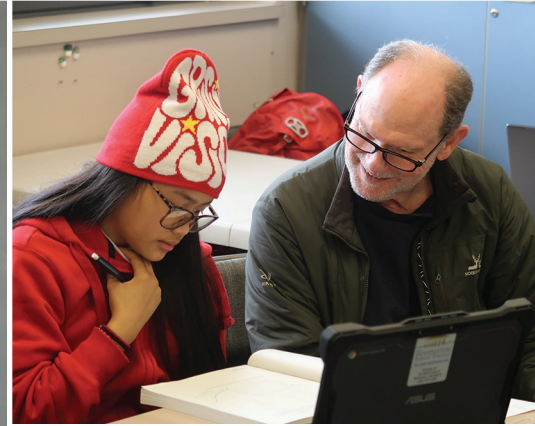




**VOICES OF
PACIFIC ISLAND NATIONS**
EDUCATION+WISDOM=ENDLESS OPPORTUNITIES



**ANNUAL
REPORT
2023**



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ABOUT US

Voices of Pacific Island Nations (VOPIN) is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization established in 2015 as a grassroots movement in response to the longstanding academic crisis facing Pasefika (Pacific Islander) students and families. VOPIN began – and continues today – as a group of parents, grandparents, educators, youth, and community members with the shared vision of improving Pasefika educational outcomes and academic achievement.

HOW IT ALL STARTED

Pasefika students have been overlooked in educational research, equity, and inclusion. The academic crisis was obscured in part due to the aggregation of Pasefika and Asian students into the demographic Asian/Pacific Islander (API) or Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI). This demographic includes 50 distinct ethnic groups from such culturally diverse populations as China, Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Indonesia, India, Vietnam, Guam, Samoa, Fiji, and the Northern Marianas.

Disaggregating the data demonstrates Pasefika have experienced education inequity in Washington schools for decades. According to data published by various organizations such as the Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), Pasefika students struggle with multiple education disparities. Almost half of Washington's Pasefika live below 200% percent of the Federal Poverty Level. Pasefika students have some of the highest rates of food insecurity of any ethnicity and homelessness rates two to three times above the state average. They are more likely to have disproportionate discipline rates. A substantial number are not meeting academic standards, and they have one of the highest chronic absenteeism and dropout rates of any race/ethnicity.

Pasefika are proud of their cultural identity, expressed through their culture and arts. Through the centuries, their learning style has been hands-on, learning by doing. Our values define the way we interact, individually and collectively. Pasefika values shape our culture and reflect what's important to us. Our faith, values, culture, and arts have and will remain the fabric of our society.

VOPIN and our communities regard our youth as future leaders who will share our history and heritage with others. VOPIN is committed to empowering Pasefika youth to take ownership of a just society. Addressing Pasefika inequities will require the support of all stakeholders from the private and public sectors. Thank you for continuously supporting the Mission and Vision of Voices Of Pacific Island Nations.

ALMOST HALF OF WASHINGTON'S PASEFIKA LIVE BELOW 200% OF THE FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL



OUR MISSION

VOPIN is committed to inspiring Pasefika students and their families by providing high-quality, culturally responsive services and resources to eliminate educational and opportunity inequities. We serve as a bridge to develop stronger relationships between students, schools, families, and the community.

OUR VISION

We envision a vibrant and interconnected community rich in cultural identity in which the youth of Pasefika communities thrive and are empowered to contribute to the ongoing legacy of strength, resilience, and inspiration for generations to come.

WHAT WE DO

Our partnership between parents, community members, educators, and other community stakeholders resulted in a strategic plan that includes three interrelated departments to eliminate inequities to uplift Pasefika youth and families. These three departments are:

- Youth and Young Adults Services
- Family Services
- Arts and Culture

Youth and Young Adult Services

Youth and Young Adults Services provides culturally resonant tutoring and mentoring to improve academic achievement, social/emotional learning, and skills that will set youth on a positive trajectory. For example, our Navigating Education program is a school-based mentoring and tutoring program that provides evidence-based, culturally-resonant services during and after school.

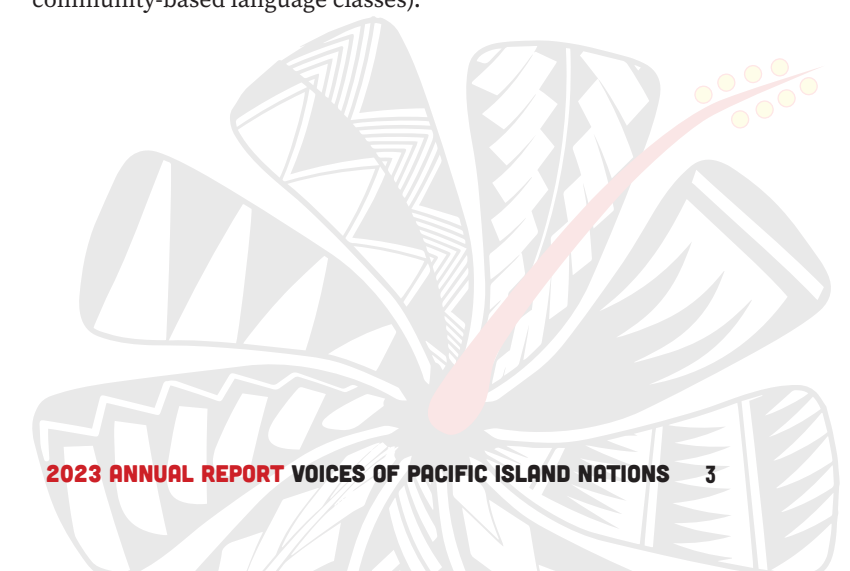
Family Services

Family is central to the fabric of Pasefika communities and an influential factor in the educational trajectory of youth. Family Services supports education through the following three programs:

- **Family and Community Engagement** (engaging families and the Pasefika community in schools);
- **Culturally Resonant Schools** (advocating for Pasefika families, providing cultural resonance training for schools, and supporting accommodations for English Language Learner families); and
- **Pasefika System of Care** (a coordinated network of service providers who work together to ensure the health and wellness of families).

Arts and Culture

Arts and Culture will increase positive youth development through cultural identity. It will engage Pasefika elders and community members, allowing culture bearers to share knowledge across generations. VOPIN will facilitate activities in schools through projects like Pasefika arts and culture clubs and cultural celebrations, and in the community through arts and culture events and Language Journeys (intergenerational community-based language classes).

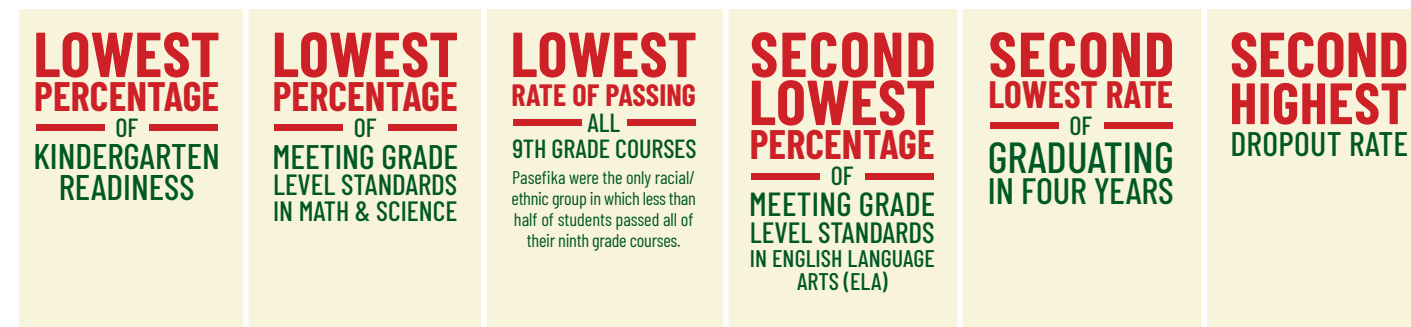




PROBLEM STATEMENT

Education Barriers

Pasefika have some of the lowest academic achievement and educational outcomes of any race/ethnicity. According to the United States Office of Minority Health, more than half of Pasefika who live in the US never attend college. Of those who enroll, more than half don't complete their degree. Statewide data by race/ethnicity for the 2021/22 academic year shows Washington's Pasefika have the following:



VOPIN IS A VERY IMPORTANT ORGANIZATION AND IT'S... FOR NOT only just Pacific Islanders but also for other students. VOPIN has helped me with problems outside of school. They give me advice, and they will help me with even schoolwork . . . They have helped other students—not only Pacific Islanders but also other students in Washington..

— Lua Enoka, Navigating Education participant and 2022 Bremerton High School graduate



In 2017, VOPIN partnered with Washington State University in a research project to identify educational needs and barriers. This project was called Tofasaili, which means “to study closely” in Samoan. Participants were Pasefika ages 14 and up from throughout the Puget Sound area. Results mirrored those of VOPIN’s annual needs assessments. Following is a summary of some of these barriers and how VOPIN works to address these barriers.¹

BARRIERS TO EDUCATION

LANGUAGE BARRIERS FOR STUDENTS: Nationally, according to the United States Office of Minority Health, almost 30% of NHPI speak a language other than English at home. Many Pasefika youth with limited English do not receive sufficient English as a Second Language (ESL) support, resulting in low grades and/or being placed in remedial classes *purely because of language barriers*. The need for ESL and translation often go unmet due to a lack of translators in schools and because immigrant Pasefika families may not know how to advocate for their families.

“It is a disadvantage to our kids being introduced in the school system without getting any support from their school and at home especially with English courses. So, when the students are being assessed based on testing, they are either held back to a lower grade and being ridiculed or bullied in school...” — Pasefika parent, Tofasaili Study

MANY PASEFIKA PARENTS HAVE DIFFICULTY NAVIGATING SCHOOLS: Barriers include low education levels, language barriers, and cultural barriers.

“My dad only got into high school and my mom didn’t even finish elementary... They didn’t help me with schoolwork... when I have some questions, I don’t think [my parents] would know what I’m talking about.” — Pasefika youth, Tofasaili Study

In the US education system, families are expected to advocate for their children and to navigate complex systems to ensure their children’s needs are met. Sometimes Pasefika families – especially families that have moved to the mainland recently – do not know how to navigate this system and, as a result, cannot fully support their children’s education.

“Our parents, they’re not educated on things like the school system, how to help their kids, how to give them the tools they need...they just expect us to go to school and learn.” — Pasefika young adult, Tofasaili Study

LACK OF CULTURAL RESONANCE IN SCHOOLS: The lack of cultural resonance in schools often leads to unconscious bias. For example, Pasefika ways of showing respect often do not align with school expectations and are sometimes misinterpreted as hostility, petulance, disengagement, or apathy. Culturally, Pasefika youth may show respect by listening without speaking or making eye contact. Teachers’ expectations that students join in class discussions *may be asking Pasefika students to do something they have been taught is disrespectful*.

Pasefika students and families also describe experiences of inequitably enforced discipline. In the 2018-19 and 2020-21 school years, Pasefika *students experienced in-school discipline or exclusion at twice the rate of White students*. The misconception that male Pasefika are aggressive increases biased discipline and may lead Pasefika youth to disengage to avoid being singled out. Tofasaili participants also described teachers setting low academic expectations based on Pasefika stereotypes.

“Something bad happens in class...and the teacher looks straight to that Micronesian, and then [the teacher] just go off, saying, This is why you’re not passing the class. This is why you never come to class. This is why your parents don’t care for you.’ ...The disrespect in that doesn’t make the kids want to come to class. ...It all starts from that one comment. ‘You’re just worthless.’” — Pasefika youth, Tofasaili Study

ADDRESSING BARRIERS

VOPIN will provide translation services, advocacy, and whole-family education to help Pasefika families connect and build relationships with school staff and other families. VOPIN will also provide Pasefika language classes (Language Journeys) that increase skills in Pasefika languages and English.

VOPIN will serve as a bridge to develop stronger relationships between students, schools, families, and the Pasefika community. VOPIN will help families navigate the education system, increase public school cultural resonance, and connect families with community resources. VOPIN will provide culturally resonant tutoring, academic support, mentoring, and social/emotional support services.

VOPIN will increase cultural programs and cultural awareness in schools through Pasefika arts and culture clubs and cultural events and in the community through arts and culture events and Pasefika language classes.

VOPIN will increase cultural resonance in schools by providing cultural training and events for school staff and students. VOPIN will also provide Pasefika youth with cultural education and leadership skills.

¹ Lile, Joy, Ph.D. and Woo-Ching, Patrick, MPA (2021), *Tofasaili: Educational Risk and Protective Factors in Pacific Islander Students*

² Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (2021) Diversity Report. Retrieved August 7, 2021 from: <https://washingtonstatereportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us/ReportCard/ViewSchoolOrDistrict/103300>



FY2023 FINANCIALS: INCOME AND EXPENSES

POVERTY

The Tofasaili Study and annual needs assessments also identified poverty as a primary barrier for Pasefika families. Almost half of Washington’s Pasefika lives below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Pasefika also have some of the highest rates of Working Poverty (people who work full-time but still live below 200% of the FPL). Pasefika students have some of the highest rates of food insecurity of any ethnicity; 21% of Pasefika 10th graders report their families to reduce or skip meals due to food insecurity. This is almost twice the rate of their White peers (12%) and the overall state average (13%). Pasefika students have homelessness rates two to three times above the state average.

Education is key to escaping poverty. People 25 and over with less than a high school diploma have the lowest earnings and the highest unemployment rates. However, education disparities have left generations of Pasefika without the tools to escape poverty. Living in poverty is associated with lower academic performance and lower rates of school completion. Barriers to educational opportunities in early childhood set youth on a trajectory for a lifetime of low earnings, poor health outcomes, and a higher rate of contact with the criminal justice system.

ALMOST 1/2 OF WASHINGTON'S PASEFIKA LIVE BELOW 200% OF THE FEDERAL POVERTY LEVEL

21% OF PASEFIKA 10TH GRADERS REPORT THEIR FAMILIES REDUCE OR SKIP MEALS DUE TO FOOD INSECURITY

ALMOST 2x THE RATE OF THEIR WHITE PEERS (12%) AND THE OVERALL STATE AVERAGE (13%)

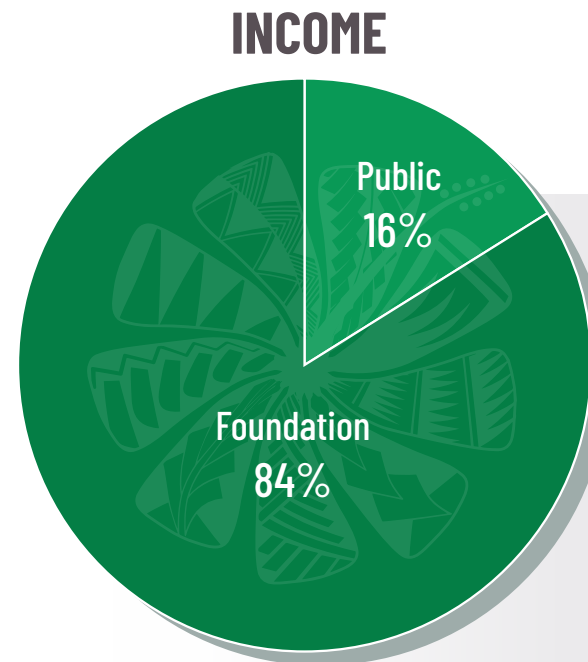
2-3x ABOVE STATE AVERAGE HOMELESSNESS RATES AMONG PASEFIKA STUDENTS

VOPIN Navigating Education Summer Program

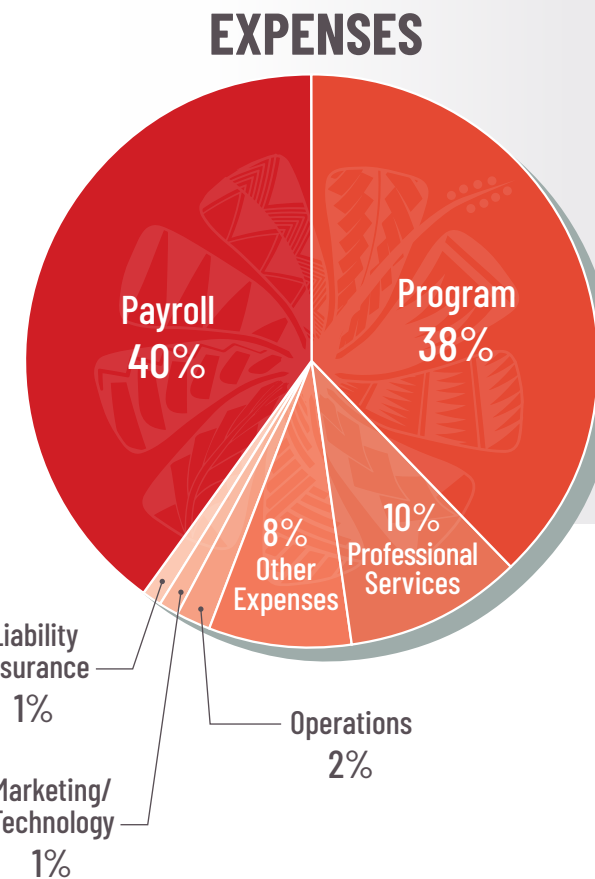
As our diverse student population continues to grow, so does the demand for culturally responsive services and resources for our children and families. VOPIN’s Navigating Education project aims to provide these services and resources, including a new cultural resonance summer program. This program is designed to support students academically while also deepening their connection to their cultural heritage and self-awareness. Each class begins with a student-led Talking Circle, where participants choose themes to explore. This practice encourages students to express themselves openly, fosters critical thinking, and builds a strong sense of community.

The summer program has helped our students understand their cultural identity and the importance of this understanding as they navigate life’s complexities. One of the topics explored was ‘hope,’ and students took a deep dive into recognizing their own potential and what it takes to achieve their goals. As one student puts it, “I can’t change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination (J. Dean).”

The summer program’s impact was significant. Students showed increased confidence, a deeper understanding of their cultural roots, and improved mental health. The program’s success highlights the importance of culturally responsive education and the resilience and talent of our youth.



INCOME	
Foundation	\$406,037.00
Government	\$ -
Indirect Public Support	\$77,312.00
Total Income	\$483,349.00



EXPENSES	
Liability Insurance	\$3,800.00
Marketing/Technology	\$4,000.00
Operations	\$8,860.00
Other Expenses	\$27,502.00
Payroll	\$140,495.00
Professional Services	\$34,278.00
Program	\$135,861.00
Total Expenses	\$354,796.00
Net Gain/(Loss)	\$128,553.00



“Being involved with VOPIN made me understand how school is really important. ...To me, it’s like something that will help me get through my academic works and stuff. ...it really helped me more to get where I want to be.”

“Since I came here, [VOPIN] was always giving me that support I needed to succeed.”

“I think VOPIN is a great organization. I think it’s not only gonna help students who are Pacific Islanders, it’ll help other students as well.”

“When I come up here [to Navigating Education], I feel like it’s a safe place where I get to be myself and no one’s gonna judge me, you know? It’s like family.”

“I think having programs like VOPIN’s shows diversity. Like it’s easier to connect, you know, to have someone who knows the culture and to come here and teach the culture.”

“When I first came here during my freshman year I told myself you’re gonna fail. You’re not going to graduate. And what I needed is somebody to believe in me. ... I just need people to believe in me, that I can make it through.”

THANK YOU!

On behalf of the VOPIN Board of Directors, staff, volunteers, and the families we serve, we would like to express our deepest gratitude for the generous support of our mission to improve the educational outcomes and academic achievement of Pasefika youth. The following have been key in supporting our work. We are particularly grateful for the support that has allowed Navigating Education to provide tutoring and mentoring to 47 youth at Bremerton High School in the 2022/23 academic year.

We have seen firsthand the positive impact. And the youth we serve have felt it. Here is that impact in their own words.

With your support, we are providing services that result in positive outcomes. We are humbled and excited to have the opportunity to make an impact on the lives of these youth and families.

Fa’afetai, Mahalo, Si yu’os ma’ase, Salamat, Kinisou, Malo-e-lelei, Kia ora Thank you!

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS:



**VOICES OF
PACIFIC ISLAND NATIONS**