



Southeast Seattle Education Coalition

EQUITY AT A CROSSROADS: MAPPING RACIAL, SOCIAL, AND EDUCATIONAL DISPARITIES IN SOUTHEAST SEATTLE

A Report for Community Leaders, Partners and Stakeholders of Southeast Seattle Education Coalition

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INTRODUCTION

This memo presents a data-based analysis of educational inequities affecting communities of color in Southeast Seattle, with a focus on identifying where disparities are most concentrated and how they intersect with broader systemic factors. Using the City of Seattle's Racial and Social Equity (RSE) Index, supplemented by publicly available demographic, health, and education data, the analysis maps out geographic and demographic patterns of need and highlights priority areas for targeted intervention.

The RSE Index is a composite index comprising three equally weighted sub-indices: the Socio-economic Disadvantage Index, the Race, ELL, and Origins Index, and the Health Disadvantage Index. The index ranks tracts based on their levels of priority and categorizes them into five levels: Highest Priority, Second Highest Priority, Middle, Low Priority, and Lowest Priority. It is essential to note that while the Index highlights priority areas, it serves as a baseline for research rather than a standalone tool for decision-making.

In addition to the RSE index, we reviewed the 2021 5-Year American Community Survey (ACS) and insights from the Seattle Department of Neighborhoods, Office of Planning & Community Development, and Office of Immigrant & Refugee Affairs. It highlights demographic, economic, and cultural features of Southeast Seattle neighborhoods, offering a brief overview of population diversity, income and education trends, housing patterns, and community strengths.

SESEC leadership, community partners, policymakers, funders, and advocacy groups can use the findings to guide strategic planning, shape equitable policies, and prioritize investments in schools and neighborhoods where disparities are most pronounced. By serving as a shared foundation of data, the memo helps align stakeholders around common goals. It strengthens the case for systemic change that advances racial and educational equity in Southeast Seattle.

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OVERVIEW OF SOUTHEAST SEATTLE

Southeast Seattle is one of the most racially and ethnically diverse areas in the city. The district is home to approximately 108,000 residents, resulting in a higher population density-13.3 people per acre-compared to the citywide average of 8.9. People of color, including those of Hispanic or Latino origin, make up nearly 65% of the population, compared to just 36% citywide. The district has notably higher proportions of Black or African American residents (16.5% vs. 6.8%) and Asian residents (29.6% vs. 15.8%). Hispanic or Latino residents comprise 9.6% of the population, also above the city average of 7.3%.

Households & Housing: There are approximately 43,800 households in Southeast Seattle, with an average household size of 2.4 people, larger than the city average of 2.1. Families represent a larger portion of households in District 2 (54%) compared to 47% citywide. More homes in the district have children (25%) and seniors (26%) present, indicating a higher proportion of multigenerational and family households. Homeownership is slightly more common in the district, with 49% of households owning their homes, while renters account for 51%. Southeast Seattle has over 47,000 housing units, with an occupancy rate of 93%, slightly above the city average. Half of the housing stock consists of single-family detached homes, compared to 48% of the city's housing stock. Multifamily buildings with five or more units make up 35.9% of the housing, slightly lower than Seattle's average. Larger homes are more common here: 43.6% of housing units have three or more bedrooms, compared to only 35% citywide.

Income & Housing Costs: Per capita income in Southeast Seattle is significantly lower than the city average, at \$58,817, compared to \$71,100. A smaller proportion of households (48.4%) earn over \$100,000 annually compared to the city average of 55%. Renters are slightly more likely to be cost-burdened, meaning they spend more than 30% of their income on housing, with 48.5% affected compared to 45.6% citywide. Similarly, a slightly higher percentage of homeowners with a mortgage are cost-burdened in District 2 (29.9% vs. 28.7%).

Employment & Occupations: Unemployment in Southeast Seattle stands at 3.6%, slightly better than the city average of 4.1%. However, residents are less likely to be employed in management, business, or science occupations (52.1%) than the city average (61.3%) and more likely to work in service occupations (18.5% vs. 13.9%). A larger share of the population in District 2 does not participate in the labor force (30.5%) compared to about 26% across Seattle.

Poverty: Poverty rates in Southeast Seattle are higher than the city average. Approximately 14.3% of the population lives below the poverty line, compared to 11.1% of the city's population. The rates of deep poverty (those earning less than 50% of the federal poverty threshold) and near-poverty are also higher in District 2, at 6.6% and 11.6% respectively, versus 5.0% and 9.3% citywide. Families in poverty make up 10.2% of households in the district, compared to 7.8% across Seattle.

Language & Education: Southeast Seattle is linguistically diverse, with 37% of residents speaking a language other than English at home—far above the city average of 23.5%. Limited English proficiency is also much more common, affecting 18.5% of the population aged five and older, nearly double the Seattle average of 9.6%. Educational attainment is lower in District 2: only 48.8% of adults aged 25 and older hold a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 65.4% citywide. Additionally, 12.8% of adults in the district have no high school diploma, compared to just 7.2% across the city.

Transportation: Transportation patterns in Southeast Seattle show greater reliance on alternatives to personal vehicles. Approximately 19% of households in District 2 do not own a car, which is higher than the 16.4% citywide rate. A slightly smaller share of residents work from home (24.9%) compared to the Seattle average (27.8%). Public transit use for commuting is comparable between the district (16.9%) and the city overall (17.3%).

Health & Disability: In terms of health and disability, Southeast Seattle has higher rates of uninsured residents (6.7%) compared to the city average (4.9%). Adults with disabilities comprise 13.3% of the district's population, compared to 9.9% of the city's population. A greater percentage of households in District 2 include at least one member with a disability—22.7%, versus roughly 18% across Seattle.

The logo for the Southeast Seattle Education Coalition (SEEC) is a large, light blue, stylized graphic of the letters 'SEEC' overlaid on a light pink rectangular background. The letters are bold and blocky, with the 'S' and 'E' being larger and more prominent than the 'E' and 'C'.

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KEY INSIGHTS FROM THE RACIAL AND SOCIAL EQUITY (RSE) INDEX

Southeast Seattle is known for its diverse racial, ethnic, and linguistic composition, with people of color comprising 64.8% of the population, compared to the citywide average of 36%. The neighborhoods in Southeast Seattle experienced redlining and other forms of housing discrimination that had lasting effects. Economic crises (1930, 2008), Subprime mortgage crises (2011), and the global pandemic (2020) have all impacted and reinforced discriminatory and harmful policies, which are reflected in the neighborhood's demographic, social, and health disadvantages. Therefore, it is essential to note that the following findings only show the results of long-standing systemic issues. As a result, they should be understood within the context of historical legacies.

The Southeast Seattle district RSE index is higher compared to any other district in Seattle, indicating that more than 70% of residents in the neighborhoods are in high RSE priority areas and experience a significant need to address racial, language, socio-economic, and health disparities. The most important concentrations of racial, socio-economic, and health disparities are found in South Beacon Hill/New Holly and Rainier Beach.

- ◆ South Beacon Hill/New Holly shows poverty rates below 200% of the federal poverty level (up to 53%), low educational attainment, and high levels of obesity, diabetes, mental health issues, and disability. English learners make up 22.2%, and the foreign-born population can be as high as 33.1%. Similarly, Rainier Beach has significant portions of residents with poverty rates between 20% and 36%, along with high rates of obesity, diabetes, asthma, and lower life expectancy.
- ◆ North Beacon Hill and North Rainier are among the second-highest priority areas. However, while their residents mostly experience fewer socio-economic disadvantages, educational attainment and access to health remain similarly low in high-priority areas. Foreign-born residents make up as much as 33% of the population in North Beacon Hill and Jefferson Park. The area is also linguistically diverse: 37% of residents speak a language other than English at home (compared with 23.5% citywide), and 18.5% have limited English proficiency—nearly twice the citywide rate of 9.6%.
- ◆ Areas such as Columbia City, Seward Park, Jefferson Park, and Mt. Baker shows mixed patterns of elevated disadvantages across several indicators, including limited English proficiency, lower rates of bachelor's degree attainment, and some health challenges. Although aggregated data indicate that socioeconomic and health disadvantages are relatively small compared to other neighborhoods in Seattle, the racial inequality index

remains high, meaning that despite improved quality of life, communities of color are still underserved. Columbia City presents the highest priority areas locally.

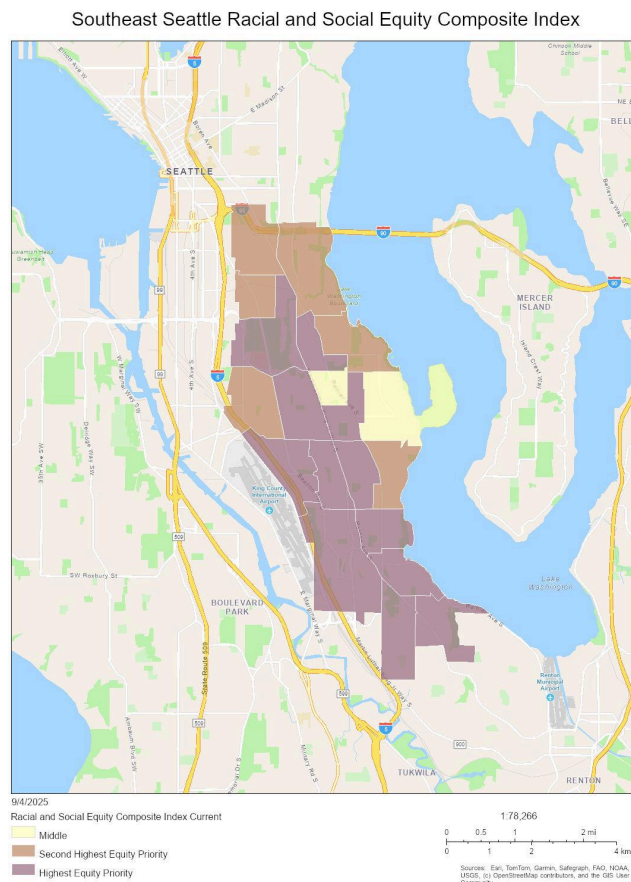
DISPLACEMENT TRENDS AND RISK AREAS

- ◆ Over the past 10 years, demographic data have shown a clear trend of gentrification in Southeast Seattle. In King County, the population of people of color grew by 47%, while the white population decreased by 2%. However, in Rainier Valley, the population of people of color grew by only 5%, while the white population increased by 17%.
- ◆ City and research maps highlight significant displacement risk and gentrification pressure spreading through Rainier Valley and parts of South Seattle. Some of these areas have already seen rapid increases in rents and home values since 2000–2015, primarily where transit projects, such as the Link light rail, and new developments are concentrated.
- ◆ These displacement-risk layers often overlap with the high-disadvantage areas identified earlier. Disadvantaged census tracts along ‘Rainier Ave S’ tend to cluster around transit hubs (Columbia City, Othello, Rainier Beach) and historic public housing or redevelopment sites (New Holly/Rainier Vista). Neighborhoods that have historically experienced disinvestment, with higher proportions of immigrants and people of color, are now facing market pressures due to increased demand across the city.

IMPACT ON EDUCATION

- ◆ One in three children lives in poverty. About 80% of children in public schools in Southeast Seattle qualify for free or reduced lunch, and these schools consistently have the lowest scores for academic achievement in the entire city.
- ◆ Local levy-derived funding is regressive: neighborhoods with lower property tax bases generate less local revenue, even though students’ needs are greater. This creates persistent resource gaps unless district-level redistributive policies intervene.
- ◆ Public displacement and gentrification mapping show property values rising in parts of the corridor. However, higher property values do not automatically lead to more equitable school investments; instead, they can accelerate demographic turnover and increase pressure on long-term residents and students.
- ◆ Concentrated poverty, high rates of limited-English households, and gaps in adult educational attainment reduce home-based educational resources and family-school engagement. These issues are linked to lower test scores and graduation rates. This increases demand for targeted supports such as tutoring, health services, and extended learning, which are not always adequately funded.

NEIGHBORHOOD PROFILES: RSE INDEX AND COMMUNITY CONDITIONS

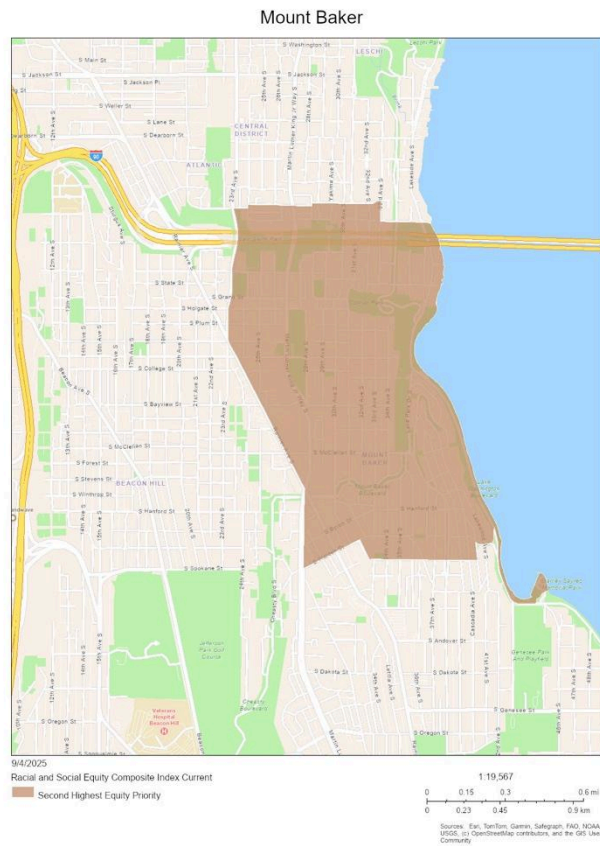


Southeast Seattle comprises five neighborhoods —Beacon Hill, Rainier Beach, Columbia City, Seward Park/Hillman City, and Mt. Baker/North Rainier —that together encompass 20 census tracts. Each neighborhood has distinct demographic, economic, health, and cultural characteristics that shape local experiences of equity and opportunity. The profiles in this memo utilize the RSE Index, along with census and community data, to highlight key demographic features, socioeconomic patterns, and health outcomes. Each profile identifies specific equity challenges and opportunities within the area, offering a more detailed understanding of how inequities are distributed across Southeast Seattle and where targeted actions could be most effective.

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Mt. Baker / North Rainier

Mt. Baker /North Rainier has historical significance in Seattle's Black history and remains home



to many diverse immigrant families. Nearly half of residents (46.3%) are BIPOC, and the area has a relatively high median household income of \$131,412, along with lower poverty rates (6.6%) and unemployment rates (3.6%) compared to city averages. About 42.6% of households are renters, reflecting a balance between homeowners and renters. Educational attainment is strong, with 65% of the population holding a college degree or higher, and 1% holding a bachelor's degree or higher. The neighborhood also has a significant older population (21.7% aged 65+) and 15.1% under 18. Roughly 22% of residents speak a language other than English at home, with Vietnamese, Somali, Amharic, Oromo, Spanish, and Chinese dialects among the most common languages. Rising property values and redevelopment projects are reshaping the community, threatening the cultural continuity that has long anchored the area.

The RSE Index shows that Census Tract 95 ranks in the top 40% of equity priority tracts, reflecting moderate but layered disadvantages.

The tract is relatively diverse, with nearly half of residents identifying as persons of color and a moderate share of English language learners and foreign-born residents. Socio-economic indicators place the tract in the middle range, with poverty and educational attainment slightly worse than the city average, but not among the most severe. Health outcomes, however, elevate its priority status: residents experience higher rates of diabetes, obesity, and disability compared to much of the city, even though life expectancy remains relatively high. Overall, Mount Baker represents a community where equity concerns are driven less by extreme poverty and more by a combination of diversity and higher health risks.

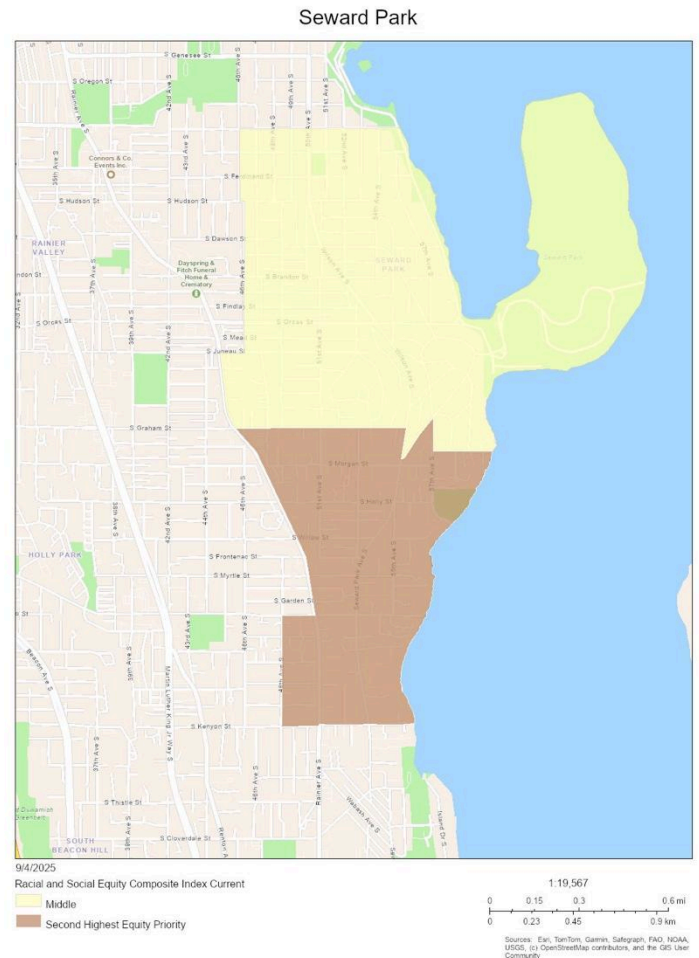
Public schools serving the Mount Baker/North Rainier neighborhood include John Muir Elementary, Kimball Elementary, Jane Addams Middle School, and Franklin High School or Cleveland STEM High School.

SEWARD PARK/HILLMAN CITY

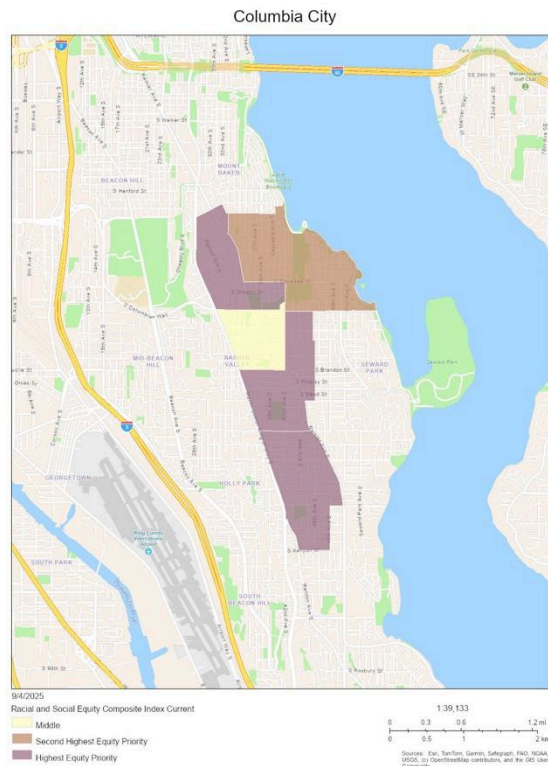
Seward Park neighborhood features a diverse mix of communities of color and predominantly white areas. Nearly half of the residents (49.6%) are BIPOC, including significant Black, Asian, and Latino populations. The median household income is \$130,085, which is higher than the city average, and poverty and unemployment rates are relatively low. Homeownership rates exceed the citywide average, and the area has a large proportion of older residents (20.7% aged 65+). About 22.7% of residents speak a language other than English at home, with the most common languages being Spanish, Vietnamese, Tagalog, Somali, Amharic, Tigrinya, and Oromo.

The RSE index presents a mixed picture of the Seward Park community. Tract 111.02 has a higher equity priority due to greater racial and ethnic diversity, higher poverty levels, and lower educational attainment. However, health indicators are mixed—shorter life expectancy, more diabetes, but relatively low rates of asthma and disability. Tract 102 is more socioeconomically stable, with lower poverty rates and higher education levels, but it has somewhat higher obesity and diabetes prevalence despite a longer life expectancy. From an equity perspective, 111.02 faces more structural disadvantages, making it a higher priority for interventions and resources. While aggregated neighborhood data can hide inequities, especially in tracts with higher proportions of residents of color, these dynamics emphasize the importance of disaggregated analysis when planning community interventions.

Public schools serving the Seward Park neighborhood of Seattle include Graham Hill Elementary, Hawthorne Elementary, and Dunlap Elementary, with the alternative Orca K-8 School located near the boundary. For high school students, Cleveland High School serves the area.



COLUMBIA CITY: MT. BAKER, HILLMAN CITY, BRIGHTON, GENESEE, AND LAKEWOOD



The Columbia City neighborhood combines the historic presence of African American and immigrant communities with an influx of new residents. Community-led cultural spaces and local advocacy groups play a vital role in resisting displacement and preserving the neighborhood's heritage. The racial and ethnic makeup is 20.1% Black, 21.3% Asian, 4.3% Latino, 43.1% White, with BIPOC residents making up 56.9% of the population. The median household income is \$87,464, and 54.9% of adults have a bachelor's degree or higher. Nearly 48% of households rent, unemployment stays low at 2.8%, and 14.5% of residents live below the poverty line. About 30.8% of residents speak a language other than English at home, including Vietnamese, Somali, Amharic, Tigrinya, Oromo, Tagalog, Spanish, Mandarin, and Cantonese.

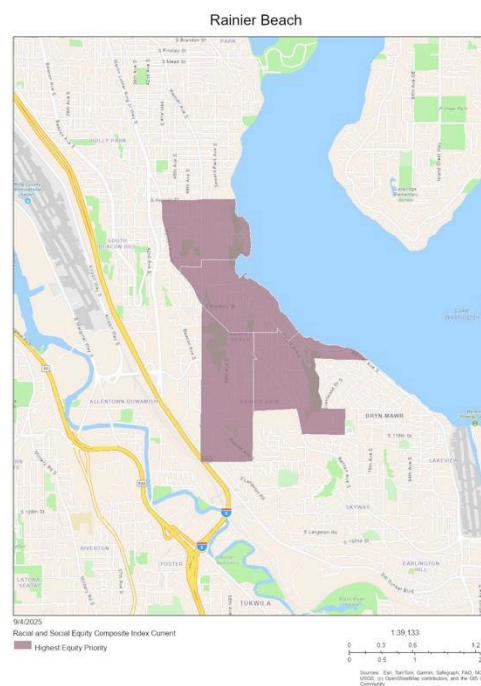
The RSE index, aligned with gentrification mapping, reveals that although some areas exhibit signs of economic growth, long-term residents, particularly families of color, face increasing

housing costs and displacement pressures. This has created disparities within the neighborhood, with certain tracts remaining high in poverty and low in educational attainment. Among these census tracts, the highest equity priority areas—101.01, 103.01, and 111.01—face overlapping issues, including racial and ethnic diversity, higher poverty rates, lower educational achievement, and poor health outcomes, making them the most disadvantaged. Tracts 111.02 and 101.02 are also classified as equity priorities, with the former mainly affected by socio-economic disadvantages and the latter by severe health problems despite relatively better economic conditions. Conversely, tracts 102 and 103.02 fall into the middle range of equity priority, exhibiting fewer socio-economic issues but notable health disparities, especially concerning chronic conditions. Overall, while some neighborhoods encounter disadvantages across multiple areas, others are primarily prioritized due to ongoing health inequities.

Public schools serving the Columbia City neighborhood of Seattle include Orca K-8, Graham Hill Elementary, Washington Middle School, a K-8 STEM school, and the Interagency Academy.

RAINIER BEACH (DUNLAP, RAINIER VIEW)

Rainier Beach is a diverse and culturally rich neighborhood, known for its intense arts scene, youth leadership, and community activism. Families in Rainier Beach contribute significantly to Seattle's cultural identity, yet the neighborhood struggles with systemic inequities such as racialized poverty, underfunded schools, and higher rates of chronic health conditions. These challenges reflect structural barriers rather than community capacity. The neighborhood is 23.6% Black, 26.3% Asian, 10.8% Latino, and 29.1% White, with BIPOC residents making up 70.9%. Median household income is \$99,681, and 38.0% of adults hold a bachelor's degree or higher. Renter households comprise 28.8%, unemployment is 5.3%, and 13.8% of residents live in poverty. Non-English languages are spoken in 35% of households, including Spanish, Vietnamese, Somali, Amharic, Tigrinya, Oromo, Mandarin, Cantonese, Tagalog, Laotian, and Arabic.



The RSE index indicates that tracts 118.01, 118.02, 119.01, and 119.02 all fall within the highest 20% of equity priority tracts, reflecting deep and overlapping disadvantage across race, socioeconomic status, and health outcomes. These neighborhoods are among the most racially and ethnically diverse in the city, with very high shares of persons of color, English language learners, and foreign-born residents. Poverty levels are elevated, and more than half of adults lack a bachelor's degree in most of these tracts, with Tract 119.01 standing out for its extremely high share of residents without a college degree despite somewhat lower poverty. Health burdens are consistently severe across all four areas, with high rates of diabetes, obesity, asthma, and poor mental health, alongside lower life expectancy compared to much of the city. Taken together, these tracts represent some of the city's highest priority areas, where barriers related to race, education, and health intersect most acutely and reinforce the need for targeted equity interventions.

Public schools serving the Dunlap and Rainier View neighborhoods include Dunlap Elementary, Rainier Beach High School, Rainier View Elementary, and Aki Kurose Middle School.

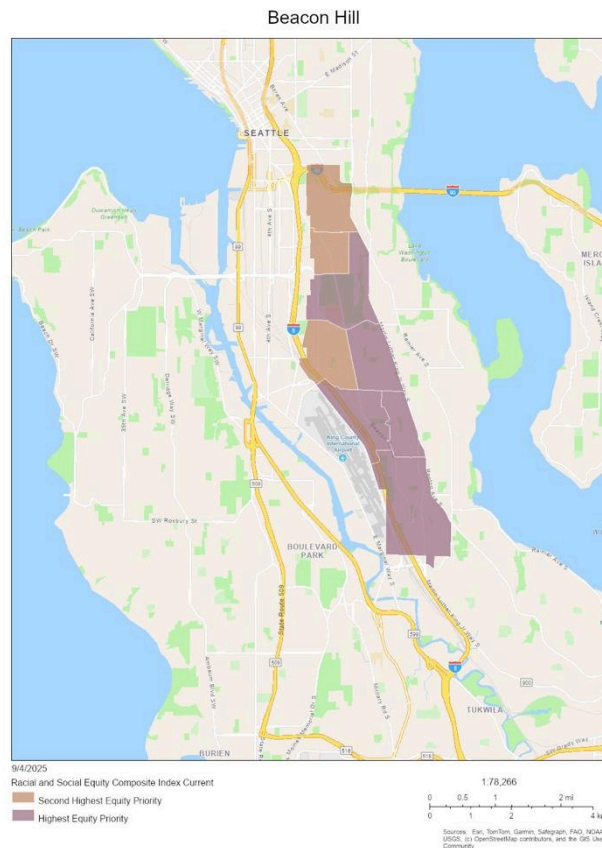
BEACON HILL (JEFFERSON PARK, NEW HOLLY, NORTH & SOUTH BEACON HILL)

Beacon Hill is a multilingual, immigrant-rich neighborhood with strong intergenerational support networks and significant cultural capital.

Despite these strengths, residents face concentrated poverty, limited access to higher education, and health disparities resulting from historic disinvestment.

The community actively engages in cultural preservation and organizing for equitable housing and education.

Racially, the neighborhood comprises 19.6% Black, 39.1% Asian, 10.0% Latino, and 24.7% White residents, with BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) residents accounting for 75.3% of the population. The median household income is \$76,697, and 40.3% of adults hold a bachelor's degree or higher. Renter households constitute 45.9%, unemployment stands at 5.8%, and 14.2% live in poverty. Half of the residents (50.1%) speak a language other than English at home, including Mandarin, Cantonese, Somali, Amharic, Tigrinya, Oromo, Vietnamese, Spanish, and Tagalog.



The RSE index indicates that Beacon Hill is characterized by high racial and cultural diversity, with significant portions of residents who are persons of color, foreign-born, and English language learners. Throughout the neighborhood, socio-economic disadvantages and health disparities are widespread, with the southern tracts experiencing the most profound inequities compared to the north.

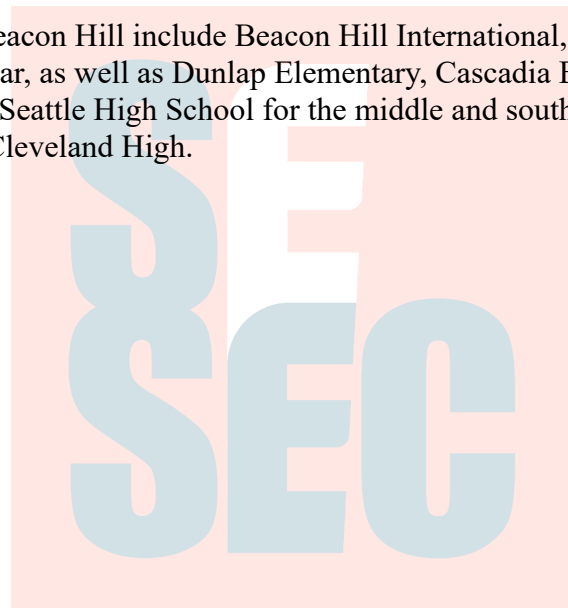
North Beacon Hill, located within Census Tract 94, features a highly diverse community, with over 60% of residents identifying as people of color, a significant proportion of English language learners, and a substantial number of foreign-born residents. While poverty and education levels suggest moderate disadvantage, health outcomes raise serious concerns, notably high rates of diabetes and disability. These overlapping challenges highlight the need for targeted support in chronic disease management and healthcare access.

Mid Beacon Hill, represented by Census Tracts 100.01 and 100.02, exhibits severe inequities, particularly in 100.01, which ranks among the most disadvantaged areas in the city in terms of poverty, education, and health. More than 40% of residents live below 200% of the poverty line,

and it has some of the highest rates of diabetes and disability citywide. Tract 100.02, though somewhat less burdened, still exhibits high levels of language isolation, poverty, and chronic health issues. Altogether, Mid Beacon Hill faces some of the city's steepest barriers to opportunity.

South Beacon Hill, through Census Tracts 104.01, 104.02, 110.01, 110.02, and 117, displays some of the most extreme inequities across the city. These tracts have exceptionally high proportions of persons of color, English language learners, and foreign-born residents—often topping city percentiles. Poverty and low educational attainment are common, with many tracts exceeding 70% of adults without a bachelor's degree. Health indicators also show high rates of diabetes, obesity, asthma, and mental health challenges, especially in 110.01 and 110.02. Taken together, South Beacon Hill stands as one of the city's most concentrated areas of structural disadvantage, where racial diversity and language isolation intersect with deep socio-economic and health inequities.

Public schools serving Beacon Hill include Beacon Hill International, South Shore Elementary, Wing Luke, and Rising Star, as well as Dunlap Elementary, Cascadia Elementary, Aki Kurose Middle School, and West Seattle High School for the middle and south sections, along with Rainier Beach High and Cleveland High.

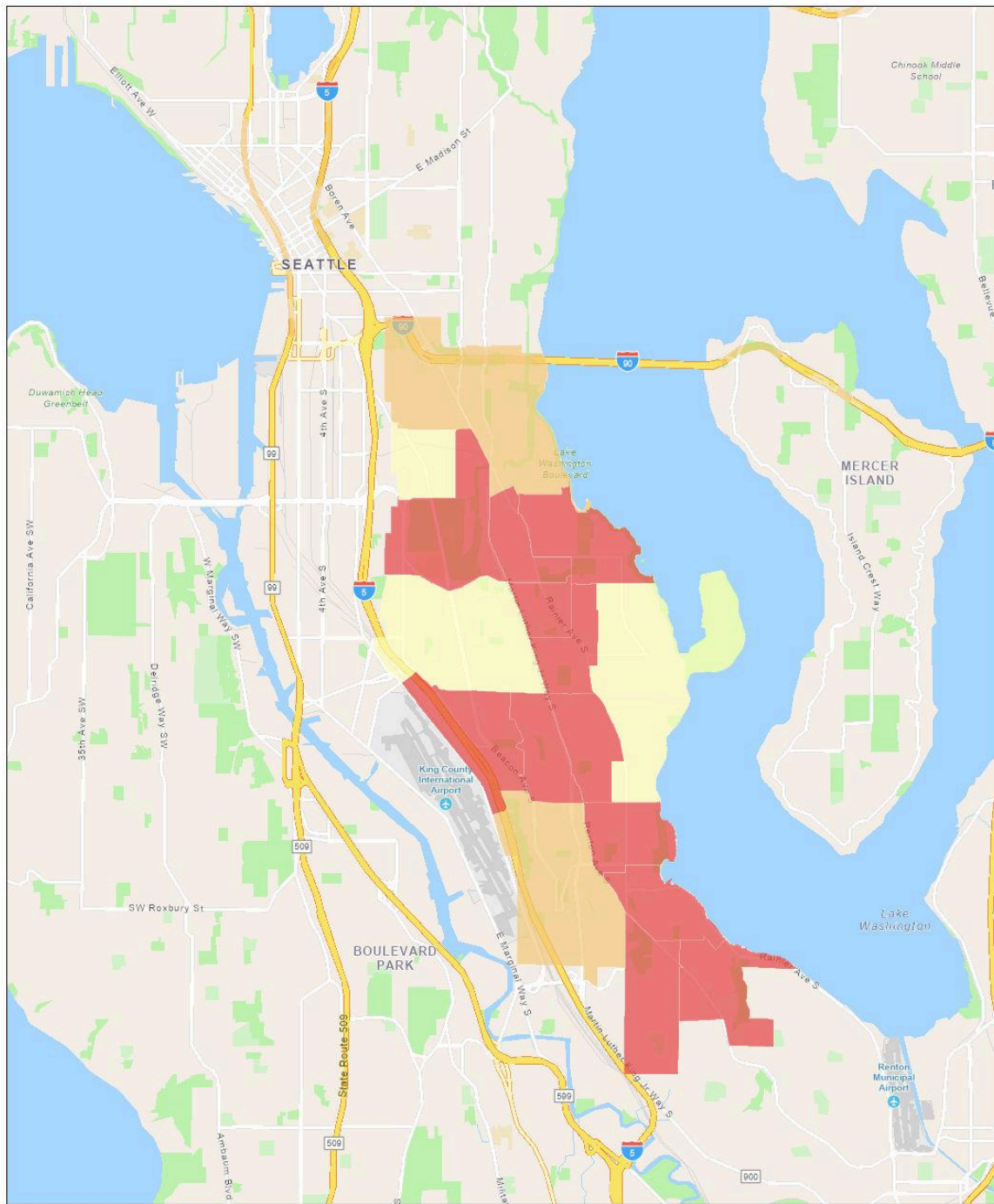


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Southeast Seattle Health Disadvantage Index

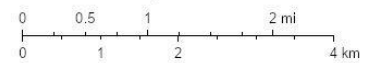


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Health Disadvantage Index Current

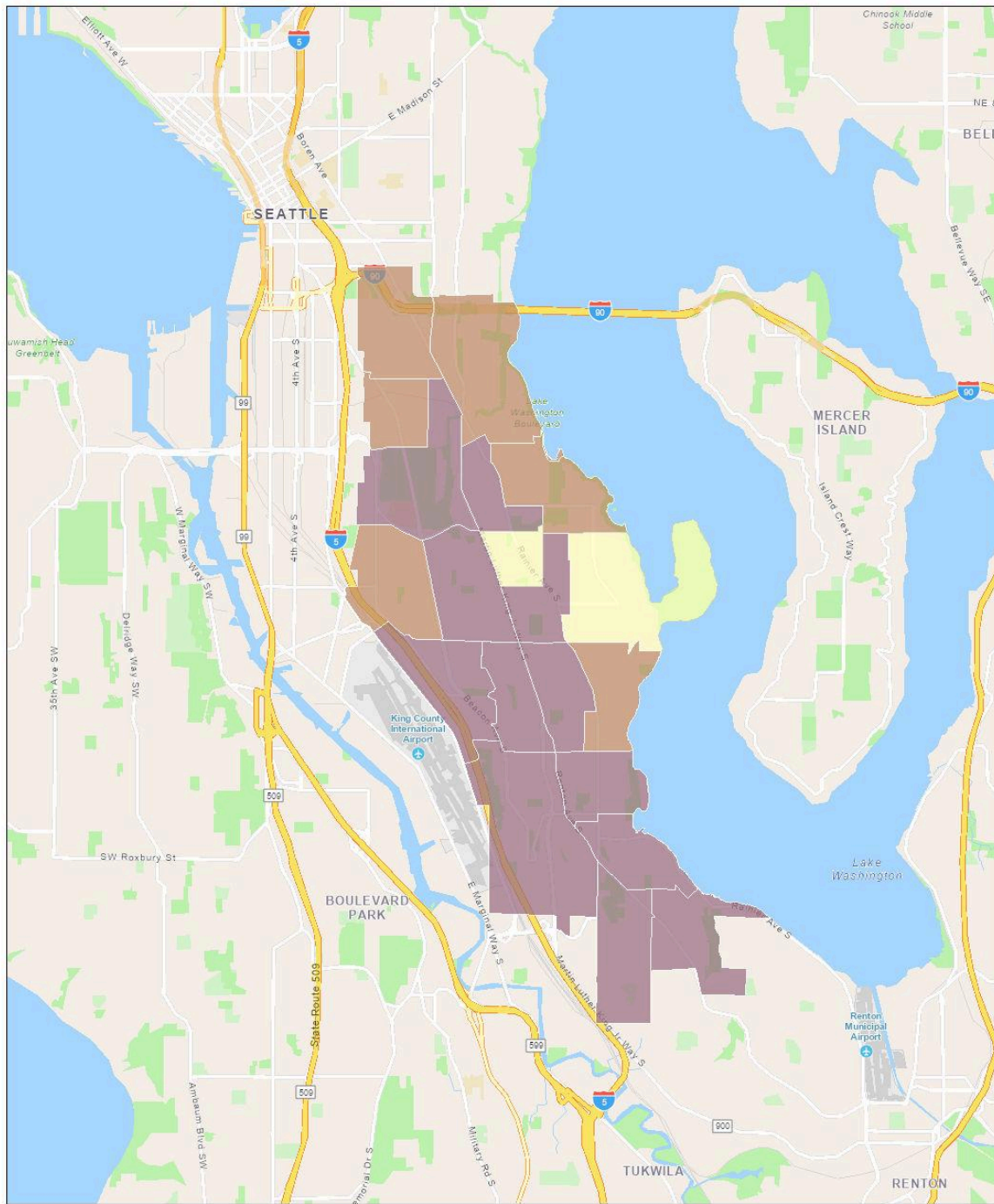
- Middle
- Second Highest Equity Priority/Disadvantaged
- Highest Equity Priority/Most Disadvantaged

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Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, Safegraph, FAO, NOAA, USGS, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

Southeast Seattle Racial and Social Equity Composite Index

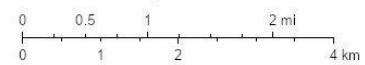


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Racial and Social Equity Composite Index Current

- Middle
- Second Highest Equity Priority
- Highest Equity Priority

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Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, Safegraph, FAO, NOAA, USGS, (c) OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

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