

OPINION

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OUR VIEW

A third engine behind Tacoma students, teachers

Graduate Tacoma deserves the exclamation mark. This educational initiative – coordinated by the Foundation for Tacoma Students – deserves to succeed.

The fundamental idea is to take a crocodile-sized bite out of the Tacoma School District's discouraging dropout rate. High school failure can be measured in various ways; using the district's numbers, the foundation calculates that 42 percent of Tacoma's should-be graduates fell short of their diploma in 2010.

A big factor is poverty. Nearly two-thirds of Tacoma students come from low-income homes.

The community leaders who've launched Graduate Tacoma want to increase the district's 58 percent graduation rate by half – to 87 percent – by 2020.

Another key goal is to help more Tacoma graduates complete college or vocational training. As of 2011,



Courtesy of Foundation for Tacoma Students

Sixth-graders from Gray Middle School take part in a Graduate Tacoma presentation Thursday at the STAR Center.

only 31 percent of them were finishing some form of post-high-school education. The initiative aims for 47 percent, which would be a landmark achievement.

What's most promising about Graduate Tacoma is the array of leaders and organizations behind it.

The effort to help children get ready for kindergarten, for example, is led by United Way and First Five; their partners include the Boys and Girls Clubs, the Tacoma Housing Authority

and the Children's Museum.

The effort to get graduates to (and through) college includes the Tacoma College Support Network, the University of Washington Tacoma, Tacoma Community College and Bates Technical College.

In all, more than 100 organizations and foundations have joined to push for those graduation goals and the intermediate goals – such as class-level third-grade reading and eighth-grade algebra – needed to achieve them.

This broad-based initiative is the third engine driving an ambitious campaign to create a college-going culture in Tacoma Public Schools. School Superintendent Carla Santorno has been leading the effort within the district.

The third engine is the University of Washington Tacoma. UWT Chancellor Debra Friedman has been working closely with Santorno to instill college expectations in students from kindergarten on up. They may eventually attend the UWT itself, or they may not. The point is to aim them toward higher education.

The Foundation for Tacoma Students completes the circle by bringing in the city at large. Graduate Tacoma is an unprecedented community coalition committed to helping the district succeed.

Educators are often wearied by complainers who won't lift a finger to support them in the classroom. Tacoma's teachers need partners and allies. Here they are.