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Once 'Dropout Factories,' Tacoma Schools See Record Graduation Rates

By [WILL JAMES](#) - APRIL 28, 2017

Tacoma's Stadium High School in 2010, the year Tacoma public schools had a four-year graduation rate of 55 percent

"THE SCHOOL" BY ERIC FROMMER IS LICENSED UNDER CC BY 2.0 [HTTP://BIT.LY/2P8KNRC](http://bit.ly/2P8KNRC)

Tacoma Public Schools, once labeled "dropout factories," posted record-high graduation rates last year that beat statewide averages.

That's according to a [report released Friday](#) by the nonprofit [Foundation for Tacoma Students](#). The group formed in 2010, the year a dismal 55 percent of the city's students finished high school in four years.

A lot has changed. Tacoma's four-year graduation rate was up to 85 percent for the class of 2016. That's above Washington's statewide average.

The five-year graduation rate -- which counts students who were scheduled to graduate in 2015 but took an extra year to rack up enough credits -- was 86 percent.

"We are seeing, over a number of years, steady progress," said Eric Wilson, president of the Foundation for Tacoma Students. "And we realize we're onto something here."

Wilson's group has convened more than 200 city organizations that work with school leaders to lower dropout rates in an effort called "[Graduate Tacoma](#)."

The coalition has already met its goal of raising the four-year graduation rate by 50 percent by 2020. It remains just shy of that goal for the five-year graduation rate.

Gaps between white students and students of color are steadily shrinking, Wilson said.

It's been a decade since a [national report](#) labeled several Tacoma high schools "dropout factories" due to the low percentages of freshmen who made it through their senior year.

Today, Tacoma beats the statewide average not just for its overall graduation rate, but also for graduating low-income students, homeless students, and English learners.

Nearly two-thirds of Tacoma students live in poverty and 59 percent are students of color, according to the report.

Wilson said Tacoma public schools have room for improvement in literacy at the elementary level, reducing chronic absences, and other areas. His group is also working to boost college graduation rates among Tacoma alumni.