

Tacoma grad rates rising, but 'opportunity gaps' persist for students of color

BY CAMILLE LEMKE
Staff writer

Graduate Tacoma has seen steady success in increasing graduation rates among Tacoma Public School students.

Four-year on-time graduation rates have gone from 55 percent to 86 percent and five-year extended graduation rates from 58 percent to 89 percent since USA Today named Tacoma a dropout factory in 2010, according to the group's latest report, which was unveiled Friday.

For the first time, the graduation gap between black and white students closed entirely for the five-year extended rate, with 92 percent of black students graduating in the Class of 2016 compared to 89 percent of white students. The graduation gap between Hispanic students and white students also decreased to three points.

"We're really proud of these numbers and all of the students, teachers and organizations that came together to make it possible. Now we need to

make sure we keep moving in the right direction," said Kristy Gledhill, communications director for Graduate Tacoma.

Work remains to be done to close the so-called "opportunity gap" between students of color and white students, according to the latest report's findings.

The opportunity gap measures the differences between white students and students of color in 10 indicators of success that Graduate Tacoma monitors.

Gledhill explained that white students are typically at higher achievement levels and face less disparity and challenges, which is why Graduate Tacoma compares data for students of color to white students to see where gaps exist.

"Some of the data is encouraging, but it helps us see what we need to work on," said Gledhill.

Even in areas the report categorizes as bright spots, opportunity gaps between students of color and white students persist:

- Between 2011 and 2017, the overall opportu-

nity gap decreased by 3 percent in sixth-grade achievement, but Pacific Islander students saw a three-point increase in the gap.

- The only gap that decreased in eighth-grade math was between Hispanic and white students. Multiracial, Pacific Islander, Native American and black students all had gaps increase between two and eight points.

- Performance on the college entry exam, the SAT, had an 8 percent gap between white students and students of color in reading, an 18 percent gap in math and a 20 percent gap in writing.

- Gaps have increased by two to six points for all students of color in college credit-eligible classes.

The 2018 Community Impact Report highlights other opportunities for improvement:

- Less than half of third graders meet the Washington state standardized test for third-grade literacy.

- Only 24 percent of black third-grade students are reading at grade level and the gap between black students and white stu-

dents increased by nine points.

- Chronic absence rates for black and Pacific Islander students have risen across the district in nearly every grade since 2014.

"This isn't just us saying, look at all the good things we've done, and we don't want it to be," said Gledhill. "We are committed to transparency and equity and this Report shows us where we're still lacking."

The Early Learning and Reading Network, one of the four Collaborative Action Networks that make up Graduate Tacoma, is focused on closing the gap between black and white students in third-grade reading and literacy.

"They looked for people who are influential in the lives of black and Hispanic youth. The people they found were barbers, who provide strong and consistent connections to young boys," said Gledhill.

The Book to Barbershop program was developed two years ago and equips 13 Tacoma barbershops with books for their young patrons to practice reading.

"If we see the gap between black and white students decrease as more black students are reading at grade level, we'll see a domino effect where the gaps close in sixth-grade achievement, eighth-grade math, performance on SAT, all the way to college completion," said Gledhill.

Car, school bus crash; 3 hurt

BURIEN

Authorities say a car collided with a school bus full of children in Burien, critically injuring three people in the car.

KOMO reports deputies and medics responded to

head-on crash involving a school bus.

Seventeen students and the driver were in the school bus at the time of the crash. Four of the students were taken to Highline Medical Center with

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