

## CONTINUED OPPORTUNITIES

# DEVELOPMENTAL SCREENING

Developmental screening involves a health check for babies and young children under the age of 5 to help identify if a child has developmental delays or disabilities. Bringing focus to such an early point in life allows caretakers and future educators to better understand what support a child needs most in those crucial years of development prior to preschool.

In 2014, we saw a slight boost in state screenings due to legislation that brought support to Medicaid reimbursement and the statewide Help Me Grow Pilot, then led by WithinReach. This was an effort to coordinate health care providers and increase access to screenings in select communities. This led to an influx of referrals from agencies like Child Protective Services, faith-based organizations, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), physicians, and private child care programs.

Despite an increase in developmental screenings, however, the process of streamlining so that every child receives this check and subsequent care is long and complex. Once a kid is identified with an issue, they are referred to an outside specialist. Specialists are an expensive level of care. For families receiving Medicaid, this follow up is a long and expensive road.

The Help Me Grow Pilot has since launched in Pierce County, further centralizing a referral system and helping link families in three target zip codes (Tacoma's South End, parts of Lakewood, and unincorporated Pierce County) with needed resources. This year's legislative session carries additional potential as lawmakers consider funding the full Help Me Grow program in Pierce County.

Graduate Tacoma continues to monitor progress in these areas, as well as lend our advocacy support to fund the full Pierce County - Help Me Grow Pilot, in order to collect and analyze data trends. In the meantime, case management and home visiting provided by community organizations and the Tacoma Public Schools' ChildFind program play an important role in reaching and providing families with free screenings.

# PARENT & FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

**AIMING HIGHER GOAL:** Increase the number of parents and guardians who are supported and engaged in student success.

As a child's first teacher, families who are supported and engaged in the development and education of their children critically strengthen efforts to help students realize their potential. Research shows that when the three forces of family, community, and schools work together to support a kid, student success suddenly becomes within arms reach.

In the last two years, Graduate Tacoma has set forth to engage families around this understanding. In 2016, the first Graduate Tacoma Parent Advisory Council, consisting of parent leaders from across the city, defined 'parent and family engagement' as **a community of supporting adults sharing responsibility in fostering the success of every child**. The definition intended to both move us closer to a measurement we could track for this community indicator, as well as help all parents see themselves as integral to the Graduate Tacoma movement. Using feedback gathered from district families, in 2017, the Council began exploring ways to measure the impact of this newly-adopted definition. Their work led to deep discussions with Tacoma Public Schools' Community Partnership Office on increasing the number of parents and guardians who are supported and engaged in student success.

However, the more that progress was made, the more that entrenched challenges surfaced. It became apparent that bringing parents and schools to the same table was just a start. To sustainably engage families in student success at the scale Tacoma students deserve, more work needs to be done to connect, coordinate, and expand existing efforts. Likewise, Graduate Tacoma's role as intermediary to moving this work forward requires further clarifying in order to elevate shared responsibility as the cornerstone to this effort.

As we continue to grapple with the necessity of family engagement to move this indicator, and ultimately support all Tacoma kids to a career, 2019 will be focused on identifying the best approach to reviving this work. The challenges surfaced over the last two years begs the question: **What is community doing to support and engage families within a coordinated, sustainable system?**