



Tacoma Postsecondary Pathway Options

1. **Purpose:**

The purpose of this proviso is to fund Graduate Tacoma's What's Next Senior Supports Program. The Senior Supports Program funding is used to help graduating Tacoma Public School (TPS) seniors navigate their postsecondary pathway options. Through a data-driven approach, the program connects students to individualized case management support to help them identify a postsecondary pathway that is a good fit for their goals, such as a 4-year college or university, 2-year community or technical college, certificated programs, or a workforce pathway. Funding provided through this proviso will expand their efforts and outreach in 2022 and 2023 to ensure every high school student in Tacoma gets the support they need for a seamless transition into life after high school.

2. **Description of services provided:**

Funding supported the following aspects of the What's Next Senior Support program:

1. Use of a new collaborative technology platform, which includes response automation and real-time referral tracking, and Google Voice as a texting option for communication.
2. Capacity investments in community-based organization program providers who serve as part of the Community Response Team. These organizations shall provide tailored and individualized case management support to every TPS senior who indicates they need help navigating their postsecondary options.
3. Support for a part-time Program Manager who is responsible for the overall implementation of the program, including coordination among TPS staff and Community-Based Organization (CBO) providers, data tracking, and reporting.

Following three years of piloting this program in TPS, this proviso funding enabled expansion of these same supports to Franklin Pierce School District (FPSD).

3. **Criteria for receiving services and/or grants:**

Per the proviso language, this funding was provided solely for OSPI to contract with an organization to expand the senior support initiative that supports TPS seniors through academic supports, financial aid and scholarships, college entry and communication, workforce entry and apprenticeships, housing, childcare, and other basic needs. The organization had to be a foundation focused on students that coordinates the efforts of parents, youth, community, and policymakers across multiple sectors to address equity gaps facing youth in the TPS.



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Beneficiaries in the 2022-23 School Year:

- Number of School Districts:** 2
- Number of Schools:** 14 Total: 11 High Schools in TPS and 3 High Schools in FPSD
- Number of Students:** 805
- Number of Educators:** Not reported
- Other:** Funds also supported a network of cross-sector partners who implemented a coordinated community response team to support seniors transitioning out of TPS and FPSD.

4. Are federal or other funds contingent on state funding?

No

5. State funding history:

Fiscal Year	Amount Funded	Actual Expenditures
2023	\$250,000	\$250,000

6. Number of beneficiaries (e.g., school districts, schools, students, educators, other) history:

Fiscal Year	Number of Schools
2023	14

7. Programmatic changes since inception (if any):

Following three years of piloting this program in TPS, this proviso funding enabled both a more robust implementation across TPS and expansion of these same supports to three high schools in the Franklin Pierce School District (FPSD).

8. Program evaluation or evaluation of major findings:

The first three years of the What's Next program consistently saw between 500-600 survey responses from TPS seniors. As of June 2023, there were 805 completed in TPS, showing significant year-over-year growth and the strongest survey response yet. Much of the growth came from an increase in participation at high schools with a higher percentage of low-income students and students of color. This demonstrated increased participation in the schools where students are most likely to need additional supports navigating postsecondary pathways due to the additional barriers they are likely to encounter.



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Schools with the highest percentage increase in survey responses utilized one of two strategies: partnership at senior events or committed building champions. When school counselors or principals invited the What's Next team to attend senior events like cap and gown pick ups or college signing days, seniors were directly encouraged to fill out the survey during the event. This direct contact increased survey completion and built the foundation of a mentoring relationship for seniors who participated.

The other schools with the highest survey uptake had a committed building champion. Some schools had a principal or career counselor who made it their personal mission to follow-up with seniors who hadn't completed the survey. This also resulted in higher participation but required a greater time commitment by those building champions.

There is agreement among TPS partners in this initiative that the first few years of piloting the program also contributed to the increase this year. It has taken several years for school staff to understand the program, the benefits to their students, and the best ways to partner to expand program reach.

The other significant success of this proviso support was launching the What's Next program within FPSD this past winter. In this first year, FPSD recorded responses from roughly 27% of the senior class. Franklin Pierce High School had particularly strong participation, with over 40% of their seniors taking the survey. Furthermore, all three high schools in the district collected survey responses, laying a strong foundation for the future administration of this program. As with TPS, it is expected that as staff awareness grows, there will be the same increased student participation.

Finally, the Senior Supports Program team learned a great deal about how district size and dynamics impact implementation. Consistent communication and messaging is easier to coordinate across smaller districts. The lessons learned from the original pilot also provide a faster and more efficient onboarding for new districts, allowing the team to clearly articulate partnership needs and proactively address anticipated technology and communication challenges. The continuous learning and improvement cycle established by the TPS implementation team resulted in a smoother launch and instilled confidence in the partnership for FPSD staff.

9. Major challenges faced by the program:

There have been four distinct challenges and learnings in the implementation of this program:

1. student engagement with the Community Response Team (CRT),
2. data sharing with building staff,
3. engaging students interested in trades and workforce pathways, and
4. limitations on building staff capacity.



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Student engagement with the Community Response Team (CRT) has been limited despite utilization of a new technology platform (People Grove) and Google Voice for direct text messaging, and a commitment to making a quick connection with the senior following their completion of the survey. Since students are more likely to seek advice from someone they already know and trust, the CRT team is seeking opportunities to introduce seniors to the team before they take the survey. There are also efforts underway to increase connection between the CRT and CBOs already embedded in the high schools, such as College Success Foundation (CSF) or TRiO.

Sharing back survey information with school counselors and other staff in a timely way will enable more informed support for seniors based on their self-identified needs. Given district firewall issues with using Google Sheets to allow principals and school counselors live access to student survey responses, the team developed data dashboards for building staff using an interactive data visualization software product preferred within TPS.

While 80% of survey takers identify an interest in attending college, about 50% of all TPS seniors eventually enroll in a higher education institution. This discrepancy indicates the survey attracts students already on track to attend college and is not capturing students needing support with workforce entry.

One consistent challenge is the unforeseen challenges that arise despite significant planning and effort by the Senior Supports Program team. Several buildings with lower response rates also have limited school counselor staffing, experienced other staffing changes, and suffered from fatigue and capacity issues among remaining staff. Issues of gun violence that claimed the lives of several TPS teens affected the mental health of staff and students, shifting priorities for school counselors and further straining already limited capacity.

10. Future opportunities:

Generally speaking, the team intends in the coming year to prioritize building relationships within schools where there's still low turnout and seek out strategic opportunities to partner on senior events and recruit additional building champions to drive greater survey participation.

Specific to the challenges described above, one of the secondary goals that can improve the effort to connect seniors with an adult navigator is to minimize duplication of work across the CRT and CBOs. In buildings already supported by CSF and/or TRiO programs, when seniors complete the survey, the first referral to a potential mentor should be made within. This will provide students the opportunity for more immediate and consistent in-person access to a navigator. This approach will also offer CBOs the opportunity to recruit more potentially eligible students to their programs, adding benefit to CBO participation. For this



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strategy to work, there is a need for additional financial resources to support CBOs in this work, as it expands their existing caseloads.

Since existing technology platforms haven't proven too restrictive and cumbersome for staff to use, the team plans to explore new options for school staff to easily access and monitor live survey responses. They plan to migrate survey platforms to improve data sharing and have hired additional data team members, increasing our internal capacity for building and customizing tools in response to the varying data skills and needs of school staff. This is a technical problem that requires enough staff capacity to identify the best solutions for intended users.

To encourage broader participation in the survey for students who may be considering a workforce entry option, the What's Next branding and communications were altered to make it more friendly and more visible to students considering other pathways, including job training programs, pre-apprenticeships, and direct employment. This branding shift, combined with a direct mail campaign, yielded a 10-percentage point change among students who indicated they plan to pursue a pathway other than college, increasing from 20% to 30%. This is strong year-over-year growth but suggests there is still work to be done to expand awareness that the survey tool is intended to serve all students and that available supports are inclusive of all pathways.

Finally, ensuring adequate staffing and sufficient resource for schools grappling with significant mental health and physical safety issues necessitates continued advocacy. The team is also exploring with partners additional creative and relevant strategies for reaching out to students through different channels that might result in better participation.

11. Statutory and/or budget language:

\$250,000 of the general fund—state appropriation for fiscal year 2023 is provided solely for the office to contract with an organization to expand the senior support initiative that helps high school seniors in the Tacoma school district navigate their postsecondary pathway options. The organization may provide support to Tacoma school district seniors through academic supports, financial aid and scholarships, college entry and communication, workforce entry and apprenticeships, housing, child care, and other basic needs. The organization must be a foundation focused on students that coordinates the efforts of parents, youth, community, and policymakers across multiple sectors to address equity gaps facing children and youth in the Tacoma school district.

12. Other relevant information:

This proviso funding afforded the Senior Supports Program team additional capacity to plan with partners, improve the use of technology to more efficiently manage larger caseloads, and rebrand communications in ways that are inclusive of all postsecondary pathways. In SY



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2023–24, they plan to build upon the lessons learned to strengthen support for students by improving student engagement with the Community Response Team, sharing live data with school district staff, and reaching more students who are interested in workforce or alternative postsecondary credentials and pathways. They will also continue to invest in deepening and scaling supports to more schools and districts in Pierce County, with a goal of onboarding two new districts over the next 12 months.

13. Schools/districts receiving assistance:

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14. Program Contact Information:

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