For the past four years, the work of our Networks and schools in building a college-bound culture has been further reinforced by TPS’ commitment to removing barriers to SAT participation. Unlike most districts, TPS absorbs the financial, scheduling, and travel burdens to taking the SAT by offering it free during the school day for all students.

This policy change has directly led to a dramatic increase in SAT participation for Tacoma students. For the second year in a row, nearly 99 percent of seniors are taking the test before October of their graduating year. The average student graduating in 2019 has taken the test 1.7 times, and an increasing number are taking their first test in their junior year.

It is difficult to derive trends on this indicator as the College Board has made significant updates to the exam at the same time this policy change occurred. However, we have seen excellent gains in participation and scores for students living in poverty, including composite scores almost 100 points higher than in 2016. Meanwhile, gaps have narrowed for almost all racial groups in reading, but persist in writing and math.

Despite these gains, there is more work yet to do. This year’s average composite score fell to 983, a decline from last year’s average of 1036. The aim must continue to be on higher achievement for all students. However, it’s important to note these composite scores reflect all seniors — not just those planning to pursue college, as is the case in many other districts.

In response to this gap and the subsequent outpouring of interest by school counselors, the College Success Foundation and Graduate Tacoma’s College Support Network are helping bring free prep courses directly to high schools this spring. Learn more about this effort from Riabelle Vivas, featured on the left.

This workshop would not be possible on the scale that it’s happening without the help of community partners. A true example of collaboration, Graduate Tacoma has offered financial support while Enhanced Prep is providing the tutorial services. Tacoma Public Schools and others host the workshop sessions, while organizations like TRiO coordinate them at the schools and help promote them to students.

It would be great to be able to offer these workshops on an annual or semi-annual basis for all TPS students in the future. Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds often don’t have access to resources, such as tutors or lessons, so this refresher workshop can help level the playing field in a way.”

Riabelle Vivas is the Educational Planner and Advisor of the TRiO program at Tacoma Community College.

DIG DEEPER: Visit GraduateTacoma.org/Data to dig deeper into the data!

Data Source: College Board via TPS