



Entry Name:

Jobs 253 expands to year-round to benefit students, community

Organization Name:

Tacoma Public Schools

Category:

Writing

Why did we tell this story?

The evolution of Tacoma's Jobs 253 program illustrates the way our school district works to engage students during school while also preparing them for life after graduation. Through Jobs 253, we train students, help them with job placement and get them connections in the community. It's critical that we provide students every advantage we can, and they have proven themselves hungry for it.

That work reflects our mission of providing a comprehensive educational experience that is rigorous, individualized and enables students to contribute to a changing and diverse world.

What challenges lay in telling this story?

To be sure the reporting and story crafting was thorough, we spent time observing students at work in addition to interviewing multiple students and others associated with the Jobs 253 program. We previewed the story with everyone featured in it.

How did we share this story?

Hard copy "Spotlight" newsletter, mailed to all mail stops in school district boundary
District web site
District eNewsletter
District social media

[Jobs 253 expands to year-round program to benefit students, community | Story Detail - Tacoma Public Schools \(tacomaschools.org\)](#)



Jobs 253 expands to year-round program to benefit students, community

Goal to connect all students to paid experience before graduation

With some washing, sorting and folding in the spring, a little seed of an idea sprouted.

That seed started with Baaroc Rivers, a Stadium High School sophomore, who notices things and wants to help.

He observed that when people experiencing homelessness use the People's Community Center free showers, they don't always have clean clothes to change into afterwards.

"I thought I could help them be more comfortable," he said. "That means a lot to me."

Rivers took that seed and transformed it into a "take what you need" clothing drive, complete with donations he solicited, cleaning and organizing he led, and event marketing he directed. The clothing drive was such a hit that the team at the People's Center continues to run it, taking donations twice a

week and distributing them to low-income families and people experiencing homelessness.

"That idea was huge successful, and now it's Baaroc's legacy," said Christy West, Rivers' project supervisor at People's Center.

Sometimes those little ideas have a big impact.

In 2012, a conversation at the National Conference of Mayors between then-President Barack Obama and then-Tacoma Mayor Marilyn Strickland was a catalyst for an idea that made a big difference. President Obama asked Mayor Strickland to come up with ways to get local youth into paying jobs during the summers.

The result was Summer Jobs 253, a program that – for the last decade – helped 1,200 Tacoma earn work experience, a paycheck

and school credit to prepare them for their next steps.

Now in its second iteration – Jobs 253 – the program expanded to cover the entire year, giving students more chances to work and explore their career options. Both then and now, however, the point of the program is providing meaningful job experience to prepare students for life after high school, combatting the conundrum of “you need experience to get your first job.”

Through Jobs 253, TPS trains students, helps with job placement, provides expanded engagement with financial literacy, and makes connections in the community. The City of Tacoma partners in funding the up to \$1,000 stipend students receive when they fulfill their job requirements.

“We’re giving our students a first step. We want to show them what I means to be successful in a workplace while simultaneously serving the community.”

- Brady Bekker, Tacoma Public Schools

Meeting community needs

Positions in Jobs 253 take on two forms, the first of which is working in existing jobs at community organizations. Many TPS students have worked at YMCA and Metro Parks summer camps, supported operations at food banks, performed trail maintenance for the Northwest Youth Corps, and held positions at Habitat for Humanity, 2nd cycle, NW Furniture Bank, Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium, Asia

Pacific Cultural Center and MultiCare.

Students can also design their own work project, much like Rivers did when he saw a community need.

“Allowing students the opportunity to identify a need in their community and create a plan for addressing that need is central to the entrepreneurial mindset,” Bekker said. “It develops leadership skills and allows students to see themselves as stakeholders in their own community.”

Jobs 253 also offers students the opportunity to earn high school credit toward graduation and formal career readiness training. That includes building resumes and cover letters, practicing job interviews, and taking an assessment that could indicate potential career interests.

“Pursuing expanded partnership and community ideas are an integral part of our commitment to connecting each experience to potential careers,” said Adam Kulaas, TPS director of Innovative Learning and Career and Technical Education. “We want to build a pipeline to employment by providing service-driven work experiences that get students to career opportunities that are high-wage, high-skill and high-demand.”

Growing the program

With the shift from summer jobs to a year-round focus comes increased program goals.

“Ideally, we want to ensure that each Tacoma student has access to a paid work experience by graduation,” Kulaas said.

To do that, TPS continuously grows its community partnerships. An example of that is working with Metro Parks Tacoma to fill the shortage of employees available to work with students in after-school programs.

TPS is also working toward helping students find more jobs year-round in the trades and providing more chances to earn industry-recognized credentials. Highlights of current programming includes programs drone piloting, pipefitters, electrical, Merchant Mariner, Tideflats warehouse and logistics, and environmental services.

Over the summer, Tacoma Online senior Quincy Tinnin participated in the Jobs 253 program for plumbing and pipefitting, learning about tools used in the trade and getting a start on learning how to weld. His training grew his confidence and a feeling that he has a knack for the job.

“I was a little unsure about pursuing the profession before my training, but the program convinced me 100 percent to do it,” he said.

It works even when it doesn't

When a student steps into a position through Jobs 253, or any of the work-based opportunities TPS offers, the expectation is not that they have made a life-long career decision, Kulaas said. Rather, the idea is to help students make informed decisions about career pathways at an earlier age.

“It can really change the course for a lot of our students. They can arrive at a conclusion to continue or shift to new possibilities,” Kulaas said. “It empowers ownership in their learning

pursuits and gives them a better idea of where they would like to go.”

For Baaroc Rivers, Jobs 253 provided a shape to ideas he had about helping his community.

“It wasn't anything new for him to want to give,” his mother Kennette Rivers said. “But for him to find a way to do it was what surprised me and made me proud. It might be the start of something more for him. This has his wheels turning.”