Play to Learn Annual Report 2025 - 2026

Rooted in Play, Growing Community

Play to Learn is a free, hands-on program where young children and their grown-ups come together to learn, explore, and grow through joyful play. Designed to support school readiness for children ages 6 and under and to build parents' and caregivers' knowledge, strategies, and connections, the program takes place at welcoming neighborhood locations across Pierce County.

In the 2025–2026 program year, collaboration was at the heart of everything we did. Staff worked hand-in-hand with families, not just facilitating play, but also connecting caregivers to community resources that support their children's learning and their family's well-being.

Families, in turn, built connections with each other, forging friendships that eased social isolation and gave caregivers a trusted circle of support.

We also deepened our partnerships with community organizations to bring Play to Learn into neighborhoods across the county. Building on a long-standing co-facilitation model created with A Step Ahead in Pierce County, our pilot co-facilitation with Pierce County Library System at their Lakewood branch established a new, sustainable model for expansion, one we're excited to build on as we grow our reach to even more families.

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Honor Children. Champion Play.

Program Goals and Impact

Child Development & School Readiness

Families emphasized gains in social-emotional growth, language, confidence, curiosity, and kindergarten readiness. Many said their children made friends, practiced new skills, and became more comfortable in group settings.

93% said Play to Learn helped their child prepare to transition successfully into kindergarten

93% agreed Play to Learn fostered their child's social emotional growth, such as managing feelings and balancing needs and rights of self and others

"Play to Learn has expanded my child's vocabulary and brought her out of her shell."

— Participant

"My kid did amazing in kindergarten this year and Play to Learn helped fill a huge gap in pre-K skills after we had to pull them from daycare/preschool due to cost."

— Participant

Joyful, Natural Learning

A recurring message was that learning happens through play, choice, and fun rather than rigid instruction. Families valued the playful environment, engaging activities, and the way staff supported participation without pressure.

"He has learned he is safe to be shy or more adventurous and interactive, depending on how he feels. He is more brave and comfortable with other children and teachers."

— Participant

Reducing Isolation & Building Caregiver Support

Play to Learn serves as a welcoming space where families feel seen, included, and less isolated. Caregivers repeatedly describe it as a place to build relationships with other adults while their children connect through play. The program is valued not only for children's learning, but also for helping adults build parenting strategies, reduce stress, and get through difficult periods.

87% strongly agreed Play to Learn provided their family more social connections and/or reduced isolation

99% agreed Play to Learn helped them feel like part of a community

"They welcome our child with special needs with open arms. It makes a huge difference to have spaces where we can belong."

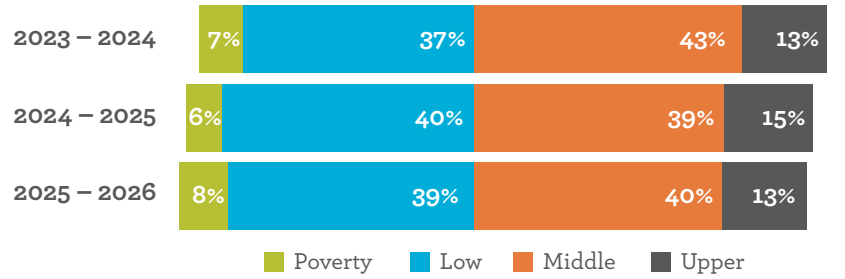
— Participant

"Play to learn helped me get through postpartum depression with my second. We had just moved here from out of state and had no friends and we went almost every day to make it through that time."

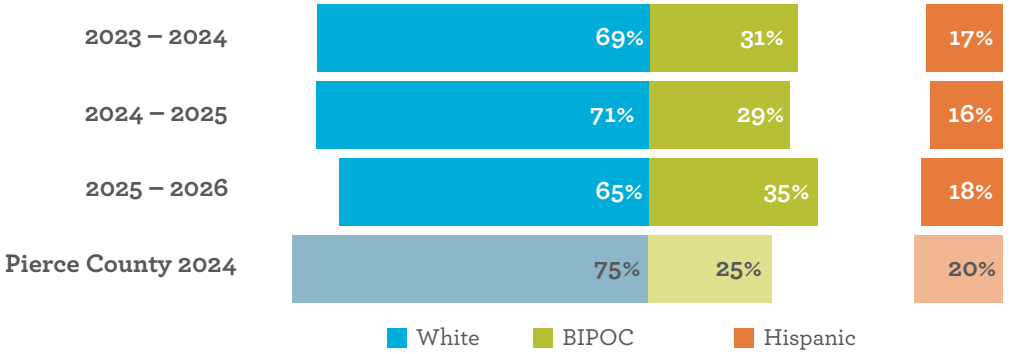
— Participant

Demographics

Increased Participation from Households with Lower Incomes



Percentage of BIPOC Increased, Remains Higher Than County



Service Statistics

Classes	2025 – 2026	Since 2008
Number of Classes	406	5,649
Number of Hours	609	8,473.5

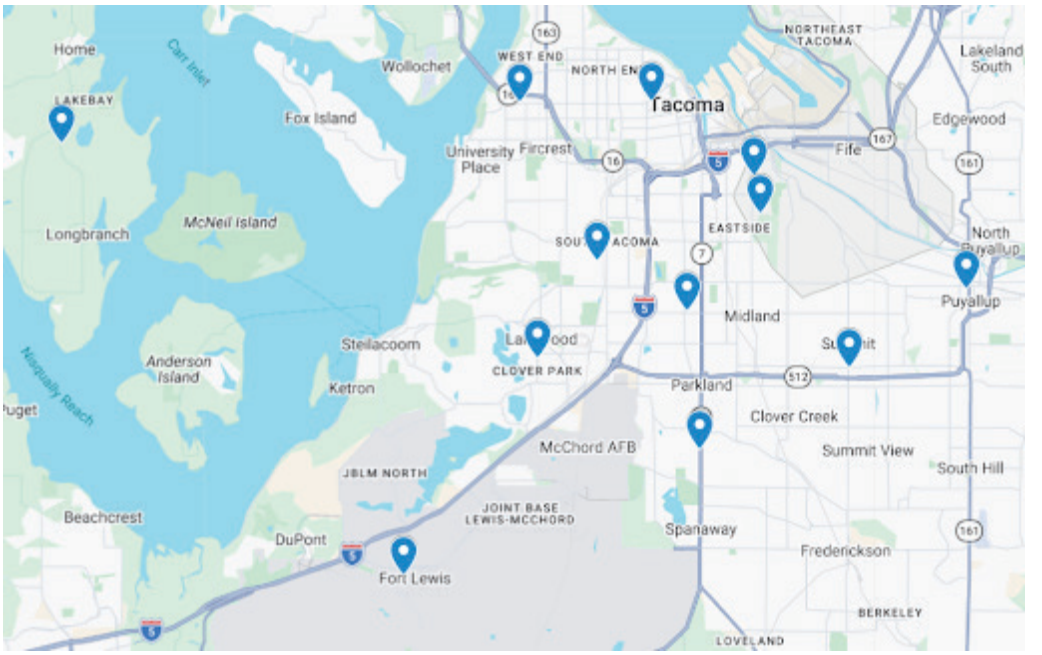
Participants	2025 – 2026	Since 2008
New	2,125	36,812
Repeat	12,697	178,670
Adults	6,471	101,236
Children	8,351	129,068
Total Participants	14,822	230,304

2025 – 2026 Sites

- A Step Ahead Pierce County
- Asia Pacific Cultural Center
- Bryant Neighborhood Center
- Children's Museum at Joint Base Lewis-McChord
- Evergreen Elementary School, Peninsula School District
- Henry T. Schatz Boys and Girls Club
- Lakewood Library*
- Parkland Spanaway Library
- Puyallup Public Library**
- Tacoma Housing Authority: Salishan
- Tacoma Public Library: Swasey Branch**
- Tacoma Public Library: Fern Hill Branch

* = expansion site in 2025-2026

** = morning & afternoon classes



2025 – 2026 Funders and Partners

MANY THANKS TO PLAY TO LEARN PIERCE COUNTY SUPPORTERS!

Play to Learn Pierce County is presented by:

With support from:

Allison Foundation, The Ball Foundation, Columbia Bank, Community Club of Lewis-McChord, Jordan Fund, KeyBank Foundation, Florence B Kilworth Foundation, William Kilworth Foundation, Medina Foundation, Pierce County Arts Commission, Rotary Club of Tacoma #8, and Helen Martha Schiff Foundation.

Presented in partnership with:

A Step Ahead in Pierce County, Asia Pacific Cultural Center, Bryant Neighborhood Center, Henry T. Schatz Boys and Girls Club, Joint Base Lewis-McChord,, Peninsula School District, Pierce County Library System, Puyallup Public Library, Tacoma Housing Authority, Tacoma Public Libraries, Tacoma Public Utilities, Tacoma Rescue Mission, Tacoma Tree Foundation, Tom Taylor Family YMCA, and Zeno.