

OKLAHOMA COUNTY VITAL SIGNS

volume 1, edition 1

FOSTER EARLY LEARNING.
IMPROVE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT.
REDUCE THE DROPOUT RATE.
DEVELOP SUCCESSFUL KIDS AND
INFLUENCE THE CONDITION OF ALL.

SUCCESSFUL
KIDS EDITION

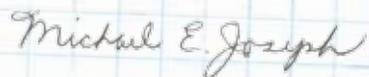
**“ON BEHALF OF UNITED WAY OF CENTRAL OKLAHOMA, I AM PLEASED TO PRESENT YOU WITH
OKLAHOMA COUNTY VITAL SIGNS: FOCUS ON SUCCESSFUL KIDS.”**

Started in 1994, *Vital Signs* is central Oklahoma’s only broad-based community evaluation. If the metro area could have a routine physical, this would be it. With growing access to the newest data, the 2009–2010 editions have been updated. Rather than offering a single edition biennially, United Way will now print issue-focused volumes every other month supplemented by far more extensive information on our Web site, www.unitedwayokc.org.

This inaugural release on Successful Kids is designed to give you a picture of our children’s overall well-being and the opportunities we have to improve their condition and future success. Editions on Strong Families, Healthy Citizens, Independent Living, and Community Preparedness will follow.

You have the ability to create positive change. We hope you will utilize the data printed here and expanded online as you influence policy, make funding decisions, and champion programs.

Sincerely,



MICHAEL E. JOSEPH

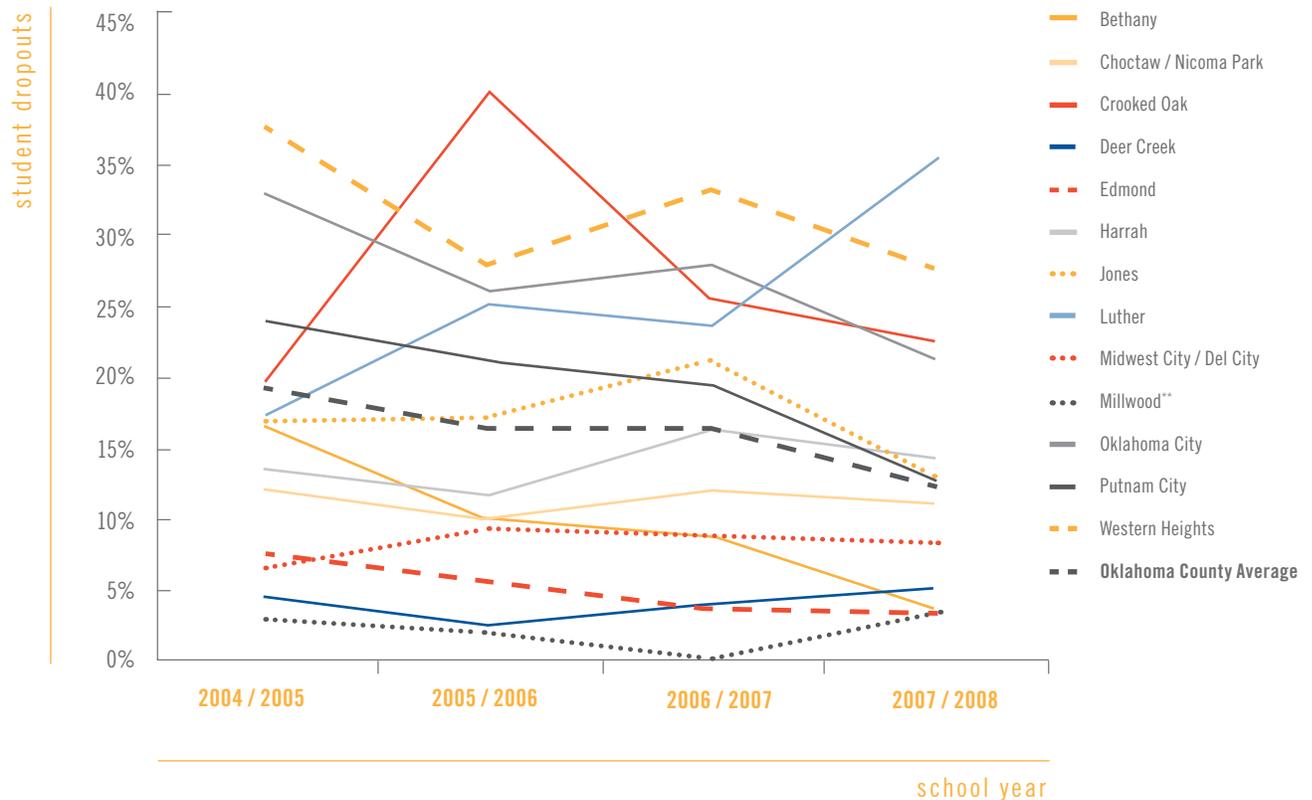
CHAIR, UNITED WAY RESEARCH & COMMUNITY INITIATIVES ADVISORY COMMITTEE
PARTNER, MCAFEE & TAFT

DIAGNOSIS: DROPOUT PREVENTION STARTS EARLY

High school graduation is the single most significant indicator of whether or not a young person coming from generations of poverty will break the cycle. Graduating from high school is a significant milestone on the path to success, but more than 12 percent of our county's young adults don't earn a diploma.¹ Dropouts are far more likely than graduates to be periodically unemployed and in poverty. They typically earn about \$10,000 less each year than a graduate and \$35,000 less per year than an individual with a bachelors degree.² There are costs to society as well. High school dropouts are significantly more likely to receive government assistance, cycle in and out of the prison system and have long-term health issues.

Research shows that the more support a child has in and out of the classroom, the more likely he or she will stay in school and be successful. Mentors, tutors, enhanced parental involvement, quality afterschool and summer programs, and character development programs make a difference academically. These supports not only need to be obtainable, but coordinated and connected to the student's school experience.³

PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT RATE FOR OKLAHOMA COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICTS*



Source: Oklahoma Office of Accountability, Profile District Reports

*4-year rate - The percentage of Oklahoma County public school students by school under age 19 who drop out of school between 9th and 12th grades.

**Millwood consistently is among the school districts with a lower dropout rate in the state and the lowest in the county. Some factors influencing the rate include size of the high school, scheduling, counseling, opportunities to recover credits and partnership with Francis Tuttle Technology Center.

1. United States. State of Oklahoma. Office of Accountability. *Profiles State Report*. Print

2. Alliance for Excellent Education. *The High Cost of High School Dropouts*. Issue Brief. Washington, D.C.: AEE, 2007.

3. Balfanz, Robert, Joanna Hornig Fox, John M. Bridgeland, and Mary McNaught. *Grad Nation: A Guidebook to Help Communities Tackle The Dropout Crisis*. Publication. America's Promise Alliance, November 2008. Print.

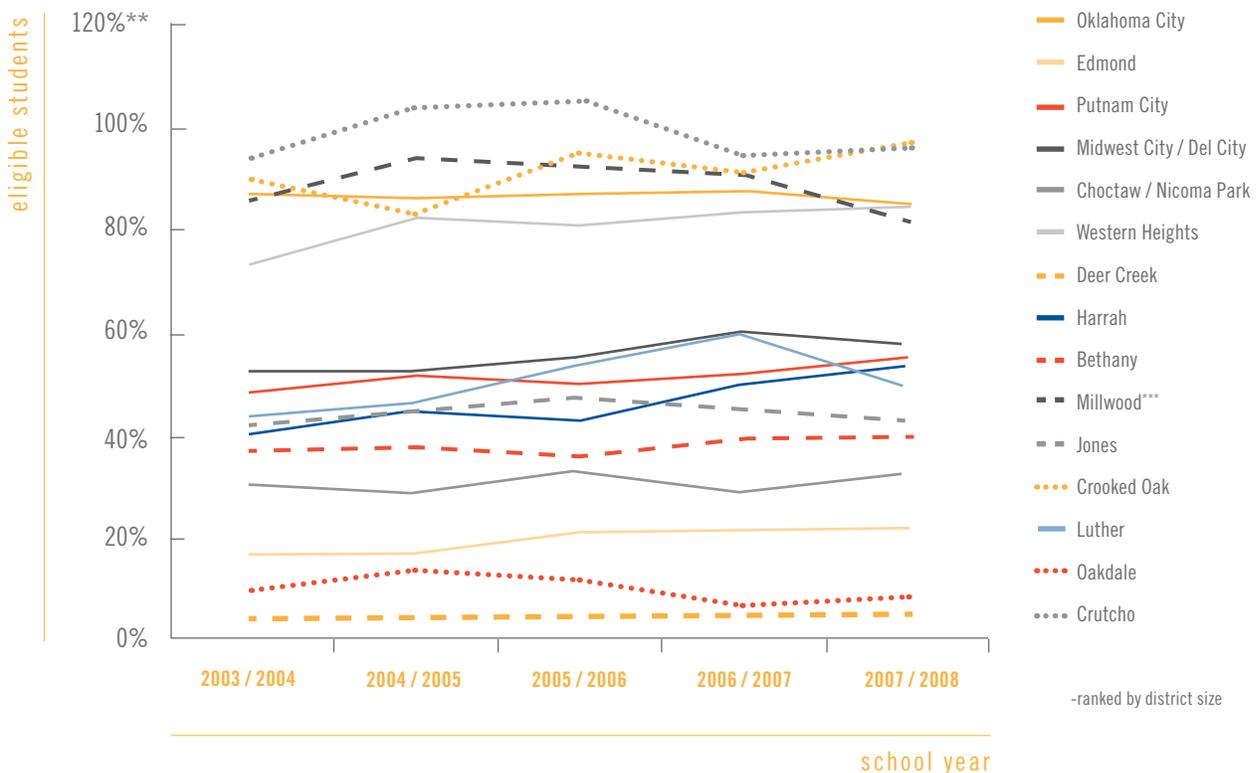
CHECK UP: STUDENTS IN POVERTY

The truth is, high school dropouts are more than 12 years in the making. Almost one in four children in Oklahoma County live in households with total annual incomes at or below 100 percent of the Federal poverty level of \$20,650. Not surprisingly, the percentage of children eligible for free or reduced-priced lunches is rising in many public school districts. Research indicates that children growing up in poverty are more likely to lack resources for a successful life.

INCOME FROM ONE FULL-TIME MINIMUM-WAGE JOB PROVIDES ONLY 40.7% OF THE AMOUNT NEEDED FOR A SINGLE PARENT WITH ONE INFANT TO LIVE SELF-SUFFICIENTLY IN AN AVERAGE METROPOLITAN COUNTY IN OKLAHOMA.⁴

Disadvantaged children come to school at least two years behind their peers in pre-reading skills.² They are usually lacking quality early learning experiences, severely reducing the chance of catching up with their peers. For every 50 children who don't learn to read in kindergarten, 44 of them will still be struggling to read in 3rd grade.³ Thirty-six percent of our state's 1st through 3rd graders needed reading remediation during the 2007-2008 school year.¹

STUDENTS ELIGIBLE FOR FREE AND REDUCED-PRICE LUNCH*



Source: Oklahoma Office of Accountability, Profile District Report

*Eligibility criteria is based upon family income. A student receives a free lunch if their family income is at or below 130% of the federal poverty level. Incomes above 130% to 185% qualify for reduced-priced lunches.

**Amount of students eligible may exceed the initial number of enrolled students.

***Millwood's declining rate parallels decreasing enrollment beginning in 2006 / 2007.

****The percentage of Oklahoma County public school students by school district in 1st through 3rd grade in need of reading remediation courses.

*****A majority of Millwood's transfers are elementary students who typically arrive in need of reading remediation.

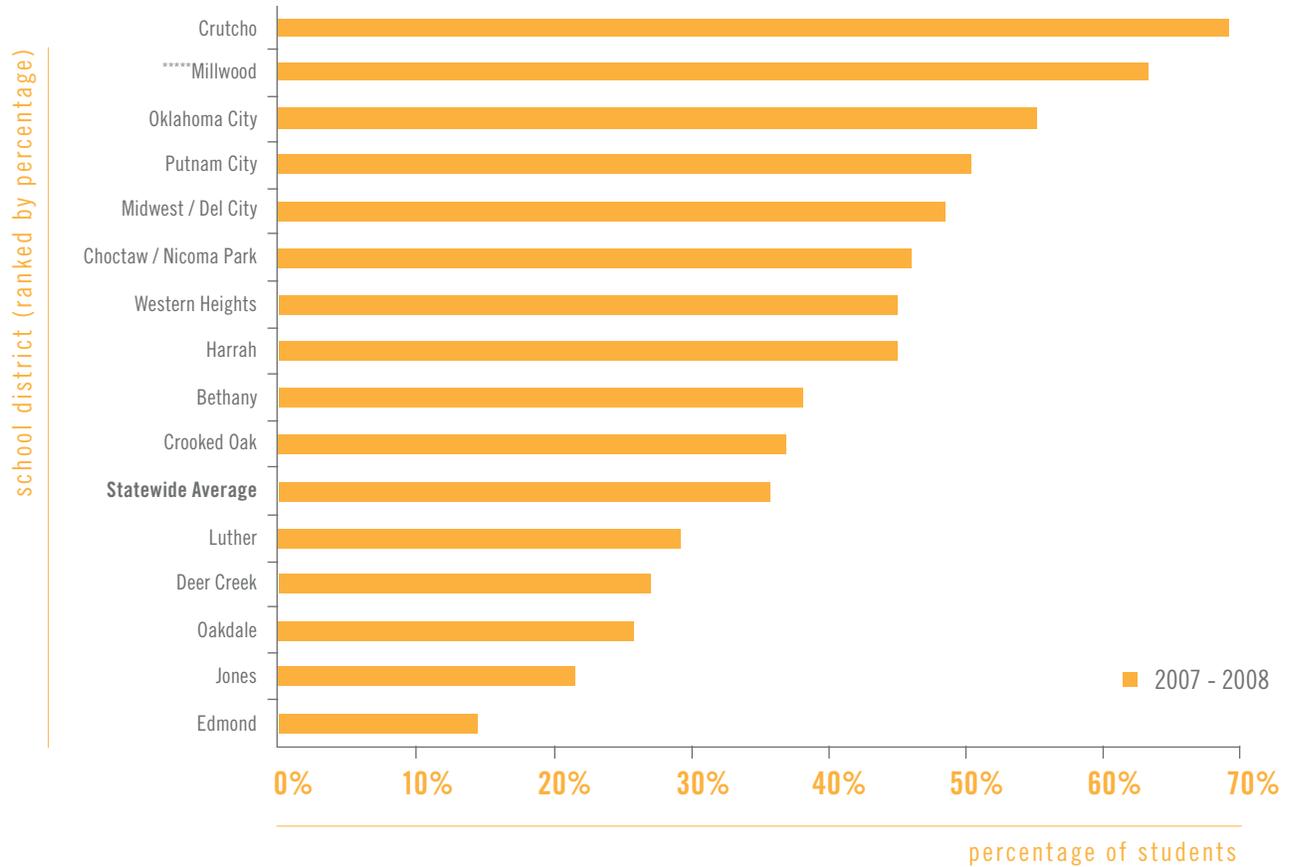
1. United States. State of Oklahoma. Office of Accountability. *Profiles State Report*. Print

2. Zill, Nicholas and West, Jerry, for the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *Entering Kindergarten: A Portrait of American Children When They Begin School*.

3. *Improving Education for the Common Good, United Way's Education Action Plan*. Publication. United Way of America, 2009. Print.

4. *2008 Oklahoma Child Care and Early Education Portfolio Data*. Oklahoma Child Care Resource and Referral Association, 2008. Web. <<http://www.okchildcareportfolio.org/>>.

1ST THROUGH 3RD GRADERS NOT READING AT GRADE LEVEL****



Source: Oklahoma Office of Accountability, Profile District Report

AN EXPERT WEIGHS IN: EARLY LEARNING MATTERS

Successful Kids thrive in school because they are safe, healthy, and eager to learn. They are connected to a dependable, caring adult and have spent time in enriching environments that encourage curiosity and creativity. Sadly, not all children have these experiences. Research identifies a developmental difference between kindergarten children who have had quality early learning experiences and those who have not, a developmental gap that is difficult to close. A strong foundation, one that is developed during the first five years of life through warm, nurturing relationships, stimulating environments which include daily reading, good nutrition and regular well-child visits, will ensure all Oklahoma County children are Successful Kids. The early years are the building blocks for school and life success and each of us has a role to play to ensure our children are thriving. Will your role be a parent mentor, a classroom volunteer, a supportive neighbor, the provider of a family friendly workplace, a financial contributor or an advocate?

STACY DYKSTRA, PHD

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

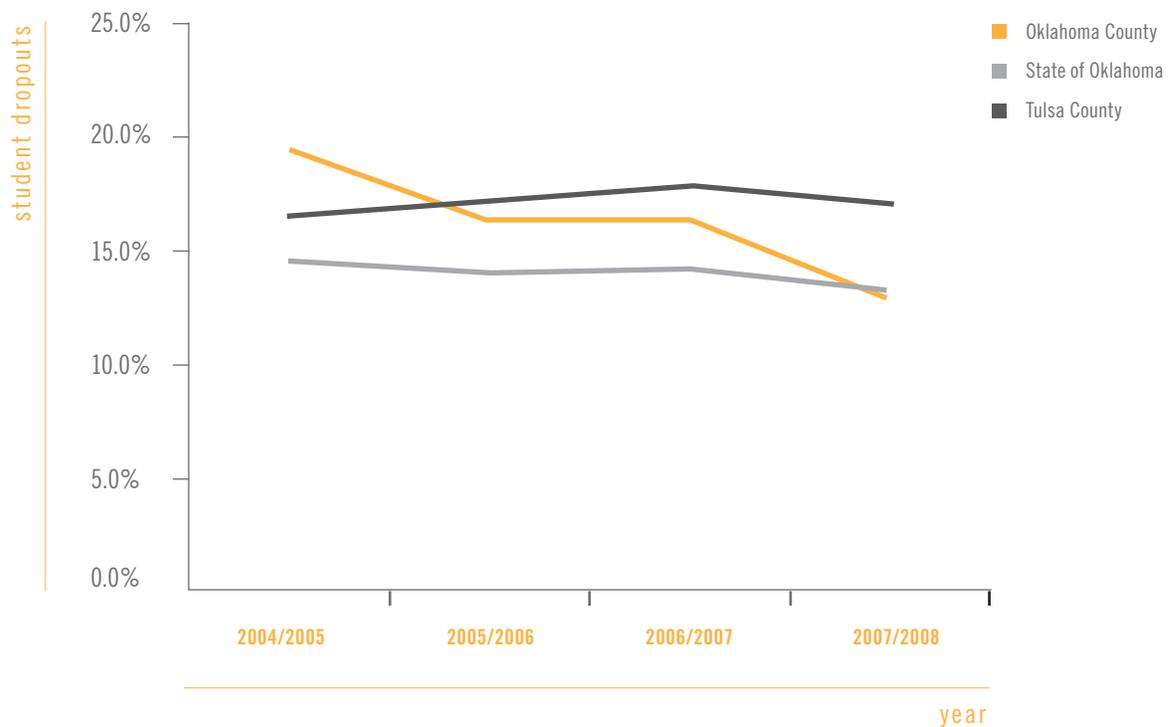
SMART START CENTRAL OKLAHOMA (AN EARLY LEARNING INITIATIVE DEVELOPED IN PART BY UNITED WAY)

ROUTINE EXAM: 5TH & 8TH GRADE ACHIEVEMENT

Most high school dropout prevention programs start in high school, which may be too late. Students' academic achievement by the 8th grade has a greater impact on college and career readiness than high school academic work.¹ Standardized tests are one way of determining students' performance. Fifth and 8th grade students in Oklahoma and Oklahoma County continue to improve their scores on the Oklahoma Core Curriculum Test. During the 2007-2008 school year 90 percent of 5th graders and 90 percent of 8th graders in Oklahoma County scored average or above average in reading.² Ninety percent of 5th graders and 86 percent of 8th graders scored average or above average in math.²

As mentioned, student success is most often determined by whether or not an individual graduates from high school. Interestingly enough, calculating the dropout rate is one of the most contested debates in education. This often creates confusion in the community. Oklahoma has a number of ways to calculate the dropout rate. The two most common include a single-year and four-year rate. The good news is, over time official statistics will get better. The US Department of Education is requiring all states to move to a uniform graduation rate methodology and Oklahoma should be able to implement these regulations no later than 2010.³

PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT RATE*



Source: Oklahoma Office of Accountability, Profile District Report

*4-year rate- The percentage of public school students under age 19 who drop out of school between 9th and 12th grades.

1. *Improving Education for the Common Good, United Way's Education Action Plan*. Publication. United Way of America, 2009. Print.

2. United States. State of Oklahoma. Office of Accountability. *Profiles State Report*. Print

3. Balfanz, Robert, Joanna Hornig Fox, John M. Bridgeland, and Mary McNaught. *Grad Nation: A Guidebook to Help Communities Tackle The Dropout Crisis*. Publication. America's Promise Alliance, November 2008. Print.

4. *America's Youngest Outcasts*. Rep. National Center on Family Homelessness, 2009. Web. <<http://www.homelesschildrenamerica.org/report.php>>.

STUDENT SUCCESS SUMMIT: TEENS SPEAK UP

In October 2008, United Way partnered with the Oklahoma City Public School District, the City of Oklahoma City, and the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber of Commerce to host the Student Success Summit. Two hundred 9th graders spoke honestly about why kids drop out and what can be done to help. Since then, additional focus groups with freshmen and sophomores have been held at United Way.

Though many other cities have also attempted to tackle this issue, no other community has allowed students to participate. There are many factors, but the students made it clear that there is a great need for more involvement in their lives from caring adults. The most common reasons they gave for leaving school included: lack of parental support, need to supplement family income, pregnancy, chronic absenteeism, failing grades, and dislike of teachers.

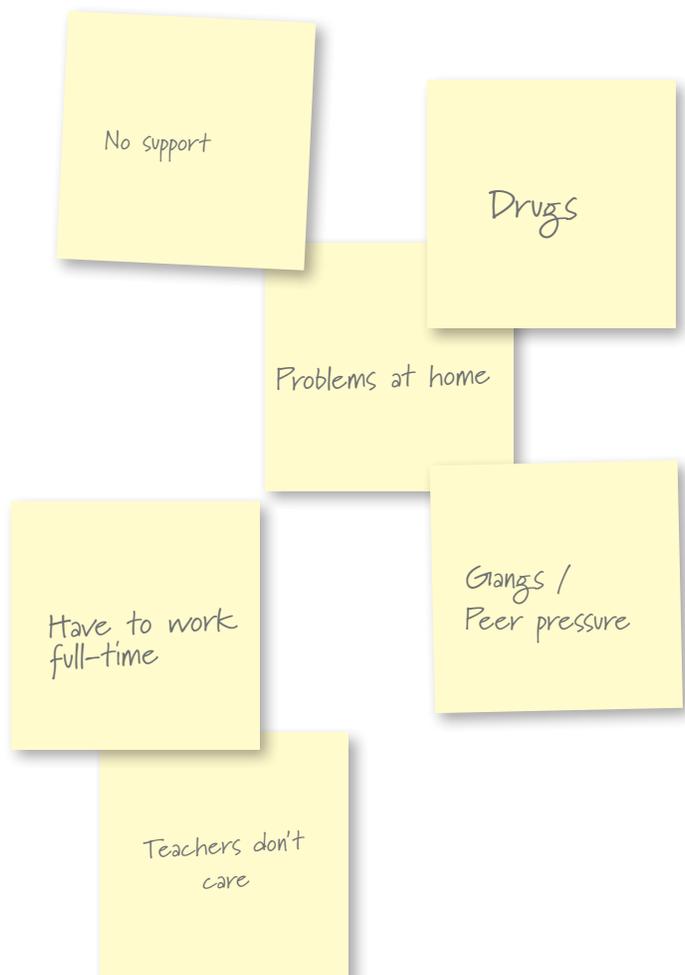
THE HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATE
FOR HOMELESS CHILDREN
IS LESS THAN 25%.⁴

“WE NEED TO CATCH STUDENTS IN THE EARLY STAGES OF ACADEMIC STRUGGLES
AND PROVIDE IMMEDIATE INTERVENTION STRATEGIES TO ENSURE THEIR SUCCESS.”

KARL SPRINGER, SUPERINTENDENT - OKLAHOMA CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS



Teens share their ideas about dropping out in an activity as part of the Student Success Summit.



A COMMUNITY LEADER WEIGHS IN:

I've often said that we in nonprofit management stand on the shoulders of the giants in our work who laid the groundwork for our efforts today. This has never been more the case than with Vital Signs.

Over 15 years ago, far-seeing leaders in Central Oklahoma decided that we needed a better way to measure needs and concerns in our area so resources could be more effectively directed to meet those needs. Our community has been the fortunate beneficiary of their vision and for many years, we've had an unbiased community evaluation on our community's most pressing issues. Originally published by the Community Council of Central Oklahoma, Vital Signs today has the same intent as then - to track trends that allow us to set current and future priorities for meeting community needs. United Way is proud to continue providing this information to the citizens of Central Oklahoma.

In 2009, we mark our United Way's 85th anniversary and though we began as a simple fundraising organization, we have evolved. Today we are challenged to address some of our community's most pressing concerns. As one of five critical focus areas, United Way of Central Oklahoma is focused on Successful Kids so that infants, children and youth are nurtured and given the opportunity to succeed in school, develop life skills, and become productive citizens. In that regard, United Way is a neutral convener, galvanizing a wide variety of stakeholders to address the spiraling dropout rate in our schools.

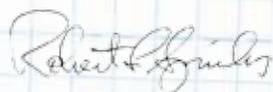
Over the past year, a partnership in addressing issues to ensure student success has developed among two key Oklahoma City school districts and United Way. Western Heights Public Schools has created a longitudinal-data system that gives teachers the capacity to refer to a dashboard of data to make quick decisions to improve student learning. The ability to analyze data in real time and from multiple sources at once has opened the doors to the issue of student mobility.

In looking at high school dropout rates and test scores, Western Heights District leaders have found that the students who frequently move from school to school or district to district are the ones with the lowest educational achievement. With information like this, we can marshal the forces of the community to help solve family issues that create this mobility.

In partnership with Oklahoma City Public Schools and others, United Way hosted the Student Success Summit. Hundreds of high school freshmen shared their ideas about why kids drop out and what can be done to help. At the request of the Oklahoma City Public Schools Superintendent, United Way held follow-up focus groups with freshmen and sophomores, digging more into the dropout issue. Now we have both quantitative and qualitative data to make better decisions in reducing the dropout rate, hopefully in a dramatic fashion.

It is our obligation, as parents, citizens and community leaders to mobilize our communities around such critical educational issues, ranging from early childhood education through dropout prevention to better college and career preparation. We seek permanent, long-term success, and with your help, we will achieve it.

All this happens because the giants of the past give us their strong shoulders upon which to stand. We thank them, and we invite you to join us.



ROBERT L. SPINKS, Ed.D.
PRESIDENT + CEO
UNITED WAY OF CENTRAL OKLAHOMA

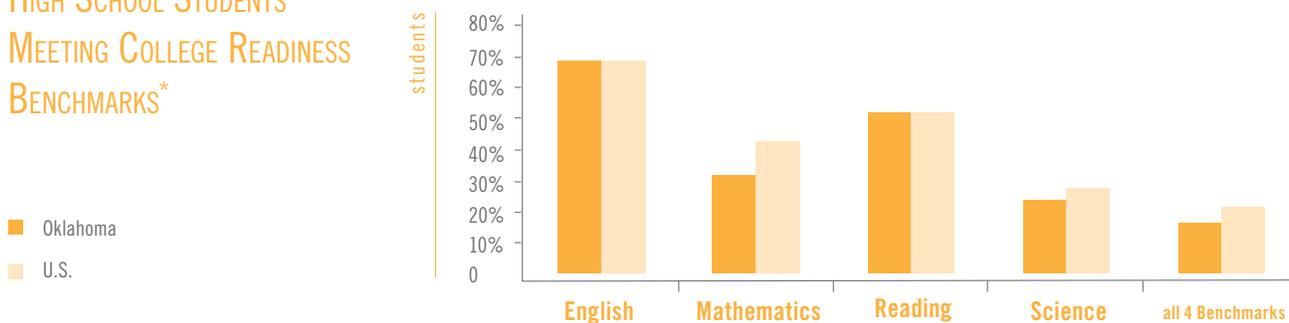
PROGNOSIS: DIPLOMA REQUIRED

High school graduation is not the final stop on the path to success. In today's economy, a high school diploma is only a bare minimum for the workforce. The 30 fastest-growing occupations include 19 that require at least a bachelor's degree.¹ Most employers and college professors say today's high school graduates don't have the skills to succeed in work or college.² Five percent below the national average, only 17 percent of all Oklahoma students are meeting all four benchmarks of college readiness. When looking at race or ethnicity, the number dips even lower specifically for African American, American Indian and Hispanic students. Though remedial courses are offered at the college level, research shows students who take remedial courses are more likely to drop out of college.

Of Oklahoma's population of 16 to 19-year-olds, 6.3 percent are neither enrolled in educational programs nor the labor force; compare this rate with the nation's 5.5 percent.³ Research suggests idleness climbs for high school dropouts from low-income families.⁴ This means individuals are not acquiring the skills needed to earn a livelihood or support a family, continuing the cycle of poverty.

A SINGLE HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT CONTRIBUTES ABOUT \$60,000 LESS IN TAXES OVER A LIFETIME.⁵

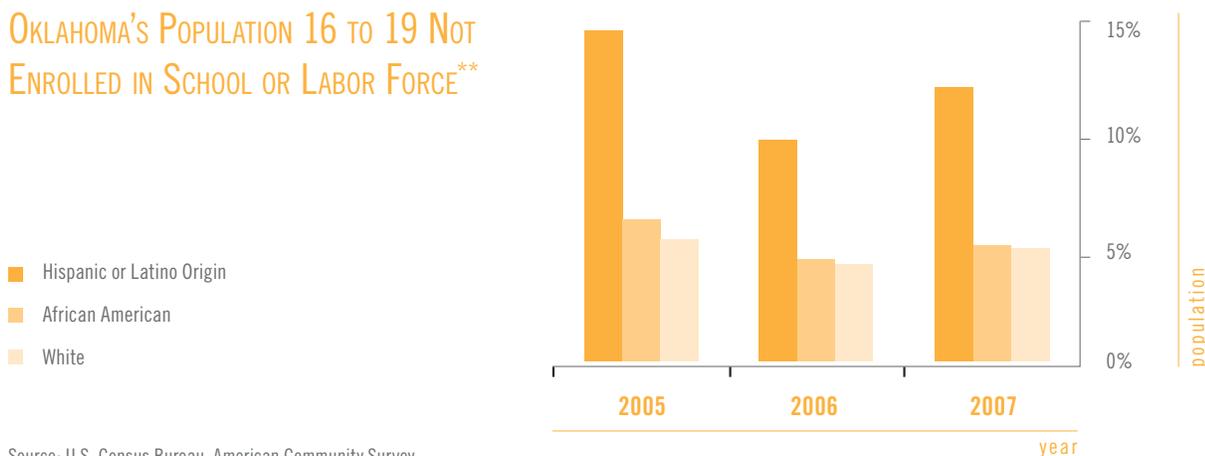
HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS MEETING COLLEGE READINESS BENCHMARKS*



Source: ACT, www.act.org

subject

OKLAHOMA'S POPULATION 16 TO 19 NOT ENROLLED IN SCHOOL OR LABOR FORCE**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey

year

*The percentage of Oklahoma public high school students meeting college readiness benchmarks on ACT exams.

**The percentage of Oklahoma's 16 to 19 year old population by race not enrolled in school or in the labor force.

1. United States. Bureau of Labor Statistics. United States Department of Labor. *Occupational Outlook Handbook. 2008-2009* ed. Print.

2. *Are They Ready to Work?: Employers' Perspective on the Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills of New Entrants to the 21st Century U.S. Workforce*. Publication. The Conference Board, November 2006. Print.

3. American Community Survey Database. U.S. Census Bureau. Web. <<http://www.census.gov/acs/www/>>.

4. Balfanz, Robert, Joanna Hornig Fox, John M. Bridgeland, and Mary McNaught. *Grad Nation: A Guidebook to Help Communities Tackle The Dropout Crisis*. Publication. America's Promise Alliance, November 2008. Print.

5. Alliance for Excellent Education. *The High Cost of High School Dropouts*. Issue Brief. Washington, D.C.: AEE, 2007.

A PRESCRIPTION FOR ACTION: SUCCESSFUL KIDS

FOR: successful kids

ADDRESS: _____

Rx

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. The ability to read from an early age leads directly to success in later life. Children who lack a positive relationship with a caring adult – a relative, teacher, coach, pastor, or mentor – are far more at risk. The best step any of us can take is to volunteer at a local school. There are dozens of programs here in the greater Oklahoma City area where groups or individuals have made the commitment to help students, teachers and parents by giving their time.

GET INVOLVED.
CONTACT THE UNITED WAY
VOLUNTEER CENTER.
405.523.3581 OR
VOLUNTEER@UNITEDWAYOKC.ORG.

BEST IN PRACTICE: TUTORS AND MENTORS HAVE IMPACT

- Through Retired Senior Volunteer Program's (RSVP) America Reads Tutoring and Mentoring Program, 215 volunteers have worked with 1,890 youth and adult learners. 93% of the students experience a higher rate of success in school, home and the workplace as a result.
- INTEGRIS Health helped to create the state's first elementary charter school at Western Village Academy. Since then, over 300 mentors from the business community have invested considerable time with students helping move the school off the state's high challenge/low performing list.
- When Devon Energy adopted Mark Twain Elementary, one of the city's lowest achieving schools, the school was considered "At-Risk" due to low test scores. Since then, Devon employees have been tutoring students weekly and test scores have improved each year through 2008.

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FOR MORE DATA ON SUCCESSFUL KIDS OR OTHER UNITED WAY FOCUS AREAS, VISIT OUR WEB SITE, WWW.UNITEDWAYOKC.ORG. PLEASE CHECK FREQUENTLY AS WE CONTINUOUSLY UPDATE AND ADD DATA.

ONE IN EVERY FOUR ADULTS
LIVING IN THE OKLAHOMA CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT
**HAS LESS THAN A
12TH GRADE EDUCATION.**

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Vital Signs is a publication of United Way of Central Oklahoma. For questions or comments, please contact Blair Schoeb, Sr. Vice President, bschoeb@unitedwayokc.org or Heather Elmenhorst, Director of Research, helmenhorst@unitedwayokc.org.

