



# VITAL SIGNS

## Disrupting Poverty

SUMMER 2021 RESEARCH BRIEF

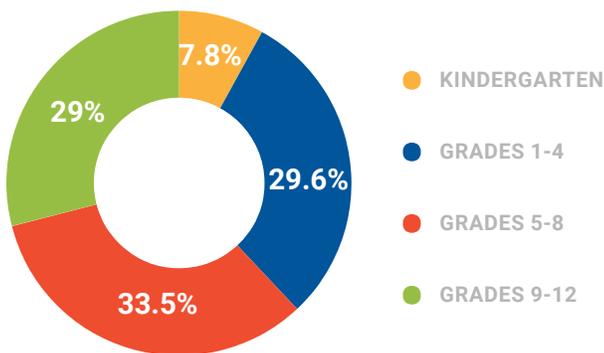
### POVERTY AND AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

Even before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, approximately 1 in 6 Oklahoma children were under the poverty level in March 2020. One of the community assets working to disrupt poverty is after-school programs for youth. These programs occupy a vital role in serving social, educational and mental health needs of children, especially those that are underserved. This research brief reviews the positive impact of after-school programs on youth and families, as well as the role of United Way Partner Agencies in building a strong after-school network in central Oklahoma.

#### After-School and Out-of-School-Time Programs Defined

After-school programs, or “out-of-school-time” programs, are voluntary, organized enrichment activities which serve K-12 children outside of the traditional school day or school year. A foundational goal of all programs is to give children safe, beneficial places to be, apart from their time at school.<sup>1</sup>

Percent of Oklahoma City Metro Area Children by School Grade (2019)



### KEY AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM AREAS

A core strength of after-school programs is their uniqueness and flexibility to respond to the different interests of their clients. After-school programs may partner with schools or child care centers, but usually are separately run by nonprofit organizations. Youth-focused

nonprofits supported through state initiatives and those partnered with United Way strive for high-quality programs based on measured student outcomes such as behavior improvement, academic achievement and other areas of positive youth development.<sup>2</sup>

#### ACADEMIC AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

- Tutoring & Homework Help
- Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM)
- College and Career Readiness

#### ENRICHMENT AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

- Sports and Physical Activity
- Outdoor Skills and Education
- Leadership and Civics
- Arts, Music and Cultural Programs

#### Quality After-School Programs Pyramid:

- Engagement: Quality programs intend to engage students, measured by attendance and student growth.
- Interaction: Quality programs aim for prosocial opportunities including mentorship and guidance from adults and peers.
- Supportive Environment: Quality programs focus on children and families, encourage participation and positive interaction.
- Safe Environment: Quality programs provide food and safe activities (emotionally and physically).



OSDE 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program Model<sup>3</sup>

## ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION BARRIERS TO AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

According to a 2020 survey, an estimated 1 in 4 children in Oklahoma did not participate in any out-of-school-time activities.<sup>4</sup> Family income and parental education level are two of the key factors correlated with a child’s participation. Recent studies demonstrate how inequities related to socioeconomic status (SES) hinder equal opportunity for children:

- 5.2 hours per week: the average time U.S. children spend on enrichment activities, including after-school and extracurricular programs.<sup>5</sup>
- Lower and middle SES households spend nearly four hours per week less on enrichment activities than the highest SES households.<sup>6</sup>
- A gap persists for participation in after-school between white (non-Hispanic) and children of color.

### Support for Working Families

Parents rely on after-school programs primarily between the hours of 3 and 6 p.m., when school is out and when many parents are at work. After-school programs are especially helpful to parents with irregular work schedules, or work that does not allow for paid

leave. About 1 in 5 Oklahoma children live in a household with a single parent<sup>7</sup>. Programs offered at low or no cost ease the burden of finding a safe place for kids outside of school hours. Studies also demonstrate that between 3 and 6 p.m. each school day, youth are more likely to engage in risky behaviors due to decreased adult supervision.<sup>8</sup> After-school programs provide an alternative activity and adult interaction during this important block of time in the day.

## BENEFITS OF AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAMS

### Health and Physical Activity

Physical activity has numerous benefits for children.<sup>9</sup> Recent studies demonstrate a significant increase in weekly minutes of exercise for children in after-school programs, compared to those that do not attend.<sup>10</sup> Access to after-school programs also disrupts neighborhood-based inequities, when underserved populations gain access to recreational facilities, parks and equipment that otherwise may be out of reach.

### Academic Achievement

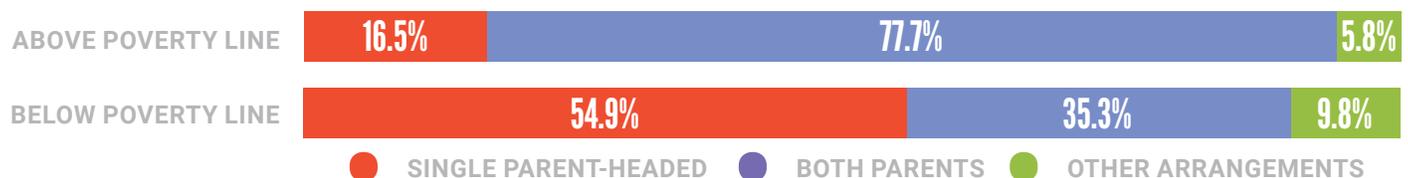
After-school programs are addressing the urgent concern of disparities in academic achievement by providing different forms of education assistance. After-school programs vary in their

approaches, but all operate as places where students can learn both soft skills and specific academic skills.<sup>11</sup> Literacy and homework resources through after-school programs have been found to narrow achievement gaps in math between children of different incomes. Another benefit thought to be linked with after-school programs is the acquisition of better study habits and task persistence.<sup>12</sup>

### Social Skills, Mentoring and Prosocial Behavior

After-school programs broaden social skills through positive interaction with peers and other adults. Intentional support from adults—specifically after-school program staff—is linked to fewer behavioral problems, especially for boys.<sup>13</sup> Mentoring refers to relationships between youth (mentees) and adults (mentors), with regular meetings and social activity allowing for adults to be a positive influence for youth. Finally, after-school programs are valuable for their history of being inclusive and empowering to youth of many racial and ethnic backgrounds. After-school programs assist youth with recognizing cultural contributions of people with different backgrounds, through arts and team-based activities. For minority youth, in particular, socialization during after-school helps youth identify with a more positive sense of self and community for minority youth.

## LIVING ARRANGEMENT FOR OKLAHOMA CHILDREN BY POVERTY STATUS (2019)



Lower-income households have disproportionate risk of kids being unsupervised.

## SPOTLIGHT: TINKER YOUTH CENTER<sup>14</sup>

Tinker Youth Center, a United Way Partner Agency, is an example of an agency offering supervised recreational and social programs to a targeted community in central Oklahoma. Since 1976, Tinker has offered services to children of Active Duty, Retired, Reserve and civilian affiliates of Tinker Air Force Base in the Midwest City-Del City area. Military-connected youth and their families face several unique stressors. Family moves and changes in school settings every few years contribute to anxiety and social disconnection for youth in military settings.<sup>15</sup>

Tinker's social program helps to connect youth in a setting that might be most familiar to them. The club's affiliation with the national Boys and Girls Club of America, as well as 4-H, opens many participation avenues for military families. Participants between age 10 to 18 at the Youth Center can develop leadership skills, culminating in potential to compete against other bases for chances at scholarship awards.

## SUCCESS STORY:

*"Tinker Youth Center has provided him with a nurturing network of support through his critical years of development. His positive outlook, moral development, sense of humor and social skills were all developed through his years with the Tinker Youth Center. The service and leadership resume that he has built through the Tinker Youth Center gained him an invitation into the Oklahoma State University honors program and many scholarships. We confidently credit the security that he has within himself and his trajectory toward success in large part to the guidance and experience that he received from the Tinker Youth Center."*

-Provided by Tinker Youth Center Parents, May 2021.

## A RESOURCE TO FAMILIES THROUGHOUT COVID-19

With in-person school attendance limited for most of 2020, more than 250,000 K-12 age children residing in the OKC metropolitan area were at a higher risk of isolation from services and caring adults.<sup>16</sup> After-school programs in central Oklahoma quickly created "full-day" service options to better support families. Since July 2020, four United Way of Central Oklahoma Partner Agencies have collaborated with the Department of Human Services to extend services including mental health, virtual learning and meals to vulnerable families through the Community HOPE Centers initiative.<sup>17</sup>

Several United Way Partner Agency programs adapted to all-day programs with as little as 48-hours' notice. The full-day services initiated during the pandemic, such as packaged "grab-and-go" meals and remote learning aided families at a time when the economic downturn greatly distressed families.

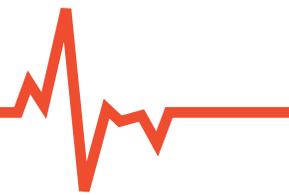
## AFTER-SCHOOL: POLICY AND PRACTICE IN THE FUTURE

Overall, after-school programs have proven instrumental for families needing stability and support during the pandemic, and encouraging policy developments appear to be on the horizon. In 2021, the Oklahoma Legislature enacted HB1882 to create an "Out-of-School-Time Task Force," tasked with identifying best practices and potential funding sources, with the goal of expanding programs.<sup>18</sup>

This approach has assisted other states in promoting the impact of after-school programs, and disseminating the latest evidence to key stakeholders, across sectors. Although poverty has a number of negative impacts on children, after-school programs give youth the chance to thrive and provide more stability and resources to their families. Despite pandemic disruptions, Central Oklahoma's after-school programs are dynamic and committed to delivering services to vulnerable and at-risk families and youth. Through the excellent work of youth after-school providers, Central Oklahoma's school-age residents have a more promising future.

Interested in printed copies of our research publications or a presentation?

Contact United Way of Central Oklahoma's Community Impact Department at [research@unitedwayokc.org](mailto:research@unitedwayokc.org) or 405-236-8441



## REFERENCES

1. Oklahoma Partnership for Expanded Learning. About – OPEL. [Online] 2021. <https://www.opelok.org/about>
2. Oklahoma Department of Human Services. OKDHS Blog - Community Hope Center Sites Serve Statewide. [Online] 2020. <https://www.ouokdhs.org/s/blogs/community-hope-center-sites-serve-statewide-MC4WCPUVUMV5FF7KVHY32MDA 4RLM>
3. Oklahoma State Department of Education. Evaluating Oklahoma 21st Century Community Learning Centers. <https://sde.ok.gov/21st-cclc-grantee-resources-program-evaluation>
4. Maternal and Child Health Bureau. 2018-2019 National Survey of Children's Health. [Online] 2021. <https://www.childhealthdata.org>
5. Hall, H., Nielsen, E. How do children spend their time? Time use and skill development in the PSID. FEDS Notes – Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System. Federal Reserve Bank [Online] 2020. <https://www.federalreserve.gov/econres/notes/feds-notes/how-do-children-spend-their-time-time-use-and-skill-development-in-the-psid-20200526.htm>
6. Hall, H., Nielsen, E. 2020.
7. U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey. 2020.
8. Afterschool Alliance. Oklahoma After 3PM. [Online] 2020. <http://afterschoolalliance.org/AA3PM/data/geo/Oklahoma/overview>
9. American Heart Association. How can I help my child be more physically active? [Online] 2018. <https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/fitness/fitness-basics/aha-recs-for-physical-activity-in-children>
10. Booth, J.V., et al. Objective Measurement of Physical Activity Attributed to a Park-Based Afterschool Program. Journal of Physical Activity and Health. [Online] 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jpah.2020-0162>
11. Peterson, T.K., Expanding Minds and Opportunities: Leveraging the Power of Afterschool and Summer Learning for Student Success. [Online Book]. 2013. <https://www.expandinglearning.org/expandingminds>
12. Smith, E.P., Witherspoon, D.P., & Osgood, D. Positive Youth Development Among Diverse Racial-Ethnic Children: Quality Afterschool Contexts as Developmental Assets. Child Development 88(4), 1063-1078. [Online] 2017. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12860>
13. Smith, E.P. 2017.
14. United Way of Central Oklahoma. Tinker AFB ARP. 2021. <https://www.unitedwayokc.org>
15. Sullivan, K.S., Hawkins, S.A., Gilreath, T.D., Castro, C. A. Mental Health Outcomes Associated with Risk and Resilience among Military-Connected Youth. Fam Process 60(2) 507-522. [Online] 2021. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1111/famp.12596>
16. U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey. [Online] 2020. <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=School%20Enrollment&g=0400000US40&tid=ACSST1Y2019.S1401&hidePreview=true>
17. Note: Partner Agencies include Boys and Girls Club of Oklahoma County, Salvation Army Central Oklahoma Area Command, Urban League of Greater Oklahoma City and YMCA of Greater Oklahoma City.
18. Oklahoma State Legislature. Bill Information – HB1889. [Online] 2021. <http://www.oklegislature.gov/BillInfo.aspx?Bill=HB1882&Session=2100>



An enduring community analysis of the health and human service needs in Central Oklahoma

**United Way of Central Oklahoma**  
1444 NW 28th Street  
Oklahoma City, OK 73106  
405.236.8441 · [unitedwayokc.org](http://unitedwayokc.org)



**United Way  
of Central Oklahoma**