

High School Dropouts

During the most recent three-year period (School Years 1996/97 - 1998/99) an annual average of more than eleven thousand (11,286) young Oklahomans quit school without graduating. Over nine thousand (9,289) of those dropping out were ages 18 or younger.

Nearly one of every five students in Oklahoma who starts high school as a freshman does not earn a high school diploma. Compared to any other grade, the largest numbers leave school during the ninth grade.

Even though the rate of children leaving school without graduating improved slightly (from 5.5% to 5.4%) during the most recent three-year period when compared to the three-year period just one year earlier, the average number of Oklahoma children (under age 19) dropping out of high school (grades 9 through 12) each year is virtually the same. The dropout rates improved in a little more than half (40 of 77) of Oklahoma's counties during the same period.

Oklahoma's high school dropout rate (5.4%) during the most recent three-year period is slightly better, but remains close, to that of the comparison three-year period (5.5% for School Years 1994/95 - 1996/97). Such rates also improved in a small majority (41 of 77) of Oklahoma's counties during the same period.

The dropout rates were worse than the average county rate (4.3%) in most of Oklahoma's counties (42 of 77). During this most recent period, the highest and worst rate of children leaving school without graduating (7.6%) is found in Hughes County; the lowest and best (0.8%) is in Dewey County.

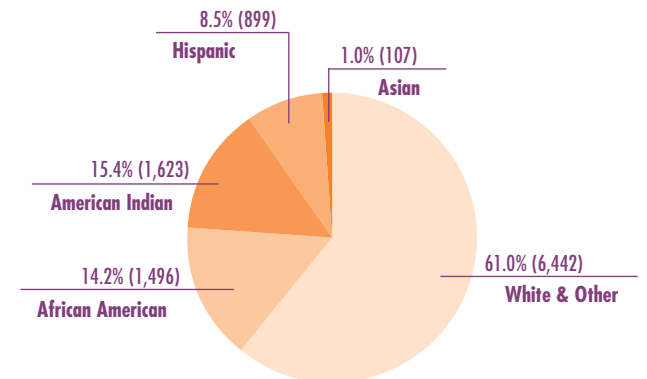
During School Year 1998/99 the proportion of high school dropouts who were girls (45.1%) and the proportion who were boys (54.9%) did not change from the prior year.

During the most recent year on record (School Year 1998/99) the large majority (61.0%) of children failing to finish high school are White. However, while non-White children comprise only about one-fifth (21.7%) of the child population, they account for about one-third (33.4%, excluding Hispanics) of the high school dropouts. Hispanic children, recorded as a nationality rather than a race, comprise just over five percent (5.5%) of Oklahoma's child population. A slightly higher proportion of Oklahoma dropouts (8.5%) are counted as Hispanic.

During the most recent year for which comparison data is available (1997), Oklahoma remained at about the middle of all states (29th) in the percent of teens who are high school dropouts (9.0% of those ages 16 through 19).

Impact on early childhood and Oklahoma's future

- » *Preventing youth from dropping out of high school begins before kindergarten.* Children from families whose parents never completed high school, or started the family as teens themselves, are more likely to drop out than their peers. Poor literacy skills, poor progress in school and academic failure push young people out of school. If a child can't read well by the end of third grade, their entire school experience is at risk. There is a relationship between how much a child has been read to and how well they learn to read. Only half of infants and toddlers are routinely read to by their parents.



Students Quitting High School Without Graduating

All Ages, By Race, Oklahoma
School Year 1998-1999

- » *Oklahoma must lower its high school dropout rate in order to improve early childhood care.* Children born to mothers without adequate education are likely to be born too small, to have lifelong developmental and health problems, to have lower cognitive functioning, to do poorly in school, to exhibit problem behavior, to have babies too soon and too often, and to drop out of school themselves.
- » *Lack of education is part of a cycle threatening future generations of infants, toddlers and preschool children.* A parent's lack of education

prevents too many children from receiving the physical, emotional, and mental nurturing necessary during their early developmental years. Youth not completing high school face severe economic consequences including poverty, little employment opportunity, poor earning ability and the possibility of a lifetime of financial dependence. Unemployment rates for workers over age 19 are twice as high for dropouts than for graduates. The lack of education is intertwined with crime. A majority of Oklahoma inmates were high school dropouts. About four thousand Oklahoma infants, toddlers and preschool children have one, both or their only parent in

prison. High school dropouts and their babies face bleak futures. Research indicates that children of high school dropouts are at a higher risk of quitting school themselves.

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Three-year High School Dropout Rate (Youth under age 19 dropping out of grades 9 through 12); Oklahoma: School Years 1996/97-1998/99, State Rate: 5.4%, Average of County Rates: 4.3%

Almost forty percent (3,672 per year or 39.5%) of the children under age 19 who quit high school without graduating live in one of the state's two large metropolitan counties (Oklahoma or Tulsa County) which together are populated with just under one-third (31.2%) of Oklahoma's high school attendees.

