

High School Dropouts

During the most recent year on record (school year 1996-97), almost twelve thousand (11,673) young Oklahomans quit school without graduating. Nearly ten thousand (9,513) of those dropping out were ages 18 or younger.

About two of every ten students in Oklahoma who start high school as freshmen do not earn a high school diploma. This year students dropped out sooner. Most left school in the ninth grade.

Even though the number of children (under age 19) dropping out of high school (grades 9 through 12) improved slightly for the state (449 fewer) during this past year, the rate of children leaving school without graduating worsened (from 5.3% to 5.6%). The dropout rates worsened in more than half (45 of 77) of Oklahoma's counties during the same period.

This year Oklahoma's high school dropout rate (5.6%) is slightly worse, but remains close, to that of the comparison school year of 1994 - 1995 (5.5%). Such rates also worsened in a majority (45 of 77) of Oklahoma's counties during the same period.

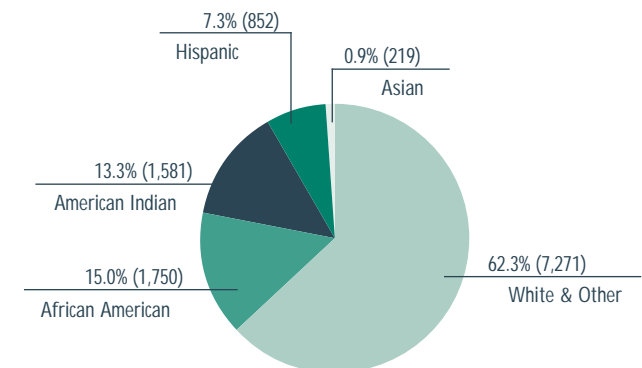
The dropout rates were better than the average county rate (4.4%) in about half of Oklahoma's counties (38 of 77) and worse in about half of Oklahoma's counties (39 of 77). During this most recent period, the highest and worst rate of children leaving school without graduating (9.0%) is found in Pawnee County; the lowest and best (1.3%) is in Cimarron County.

During this past year, the proportion of girls failing to finish high school increased only slightly (from 44.7% to 45.1% of all dropouts) as the proportion of boys decreased accordingly (55.3% to 54.9% of all dropouts).

The large majority (62.3%) 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 nearly one-third (30.4%, 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 (7.3%) are counted as Hispanic.

Impact on Oklahoma

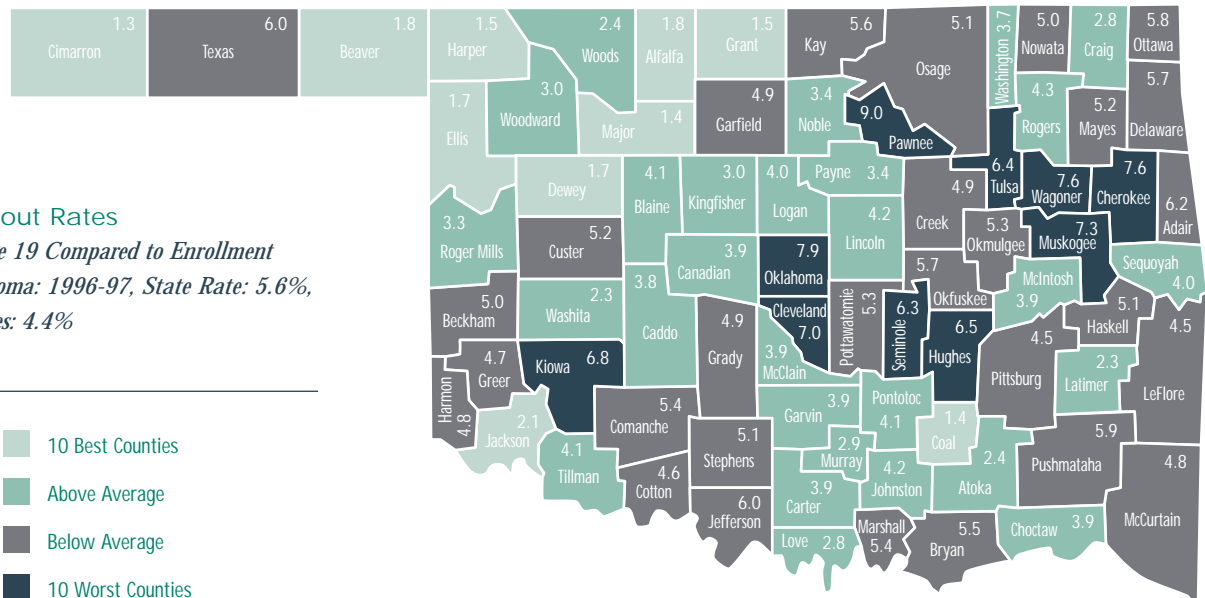
- ▶ **A lack of education impacts a child's health and well-being.** Dropouts have higher rates of substance abuse than those who complete high school. Smoking is far more common among women who have lower levels of education.
- ▶ **Risk factors.** Factors which place students at risk of dropping out include teen pregnancy, adolescent fatherhood, poor school performance, substance abuse and behavior problems. If children can't read well by the end of third grade, their entire school experience is at risk. 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.



Students Quitting High School Without Graduating
All Ages, By Race, Oklahoma
School Year 1996-1997

► *High school dropouts face bleak futures.* 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. In 1996, a majority of Oklahoma inmates were high school dropouts.

High School Dropout Rates
All Dropouts Under Age 19 Compared to Enrollment in Grades 9-12; Oklahoma: 1996-97, State Rate: 5.6%, Average of County Rates: 4.4%



A number approaching half (4,233 youth or 44.5%) 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 account for just under one-third (31.5%) of Oklahoma's high school attendance.