COMMUNITY INSIGHTS

Transforming data into insights, insights into investments and investments into action for a thriving community

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN THE TULSA AREA UNITED WAY REGION
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The Impact of COVID-19 on Children and Youth in the Tulsa Area United Way Region

Prepared by Tulsa Area United Way
in partnership with Healthy Minds Policy Initiative

Sponsored by Blue Cross Blue Shield of Oklahoma

October 2023
Executive Summary

While the COVID-19 pandemic is officially over in the United States, this historic event continues to impact children and youth in the Tulsa Area United Way's six-county service region (Tulsa Area). This report covers impact in four areas: physical health, safety and well-being, mental health, and academics. Facing unprecedented levels of demand for services, Tulsa Area United Way (TAUW) partner nonprofits stepped up to the challenge posed by the pandemic and implemented expanded and innovative service models to adapt to the changing environment of need.

Physical Health

In addition to connecting community members to basic needs and other human service resources, TAUW-supported 211 Eastern Oklahoma (211EOK) served as the hub for providing reliable and factual information about COVID-19 infection rates and testing resources during the pandemic. During 2021, 211EOK experienced a 75% increase in calls over pre-pandemic 2019, handling over 300,000 requests for resources.

The pandemic eroded the economic well-being of communities across the nation and locally. Declining family resources due to reduced working hours and job loss during the pandemic have been replaced by high costs for food and basic needs, and a lack of affordable housing. Food insecurity among families with children tripled as families nationwide experienced record levels of need for basic necessities. Oklahoma has the highest rate of extreme child food insecurity in the nation. One in eight Oklahomans, and specifically one in five Oklahoma children, face hunger; Black and Hispanic/Latino children are at increased risk. Nearly 50,000 children in the Tulsa Area live with food insecurity.

TAUW Collaborations partner Hunger Free Oklahoma spearheaded local efforts to ensure that children who relied on school meals had access to meals during school closures by connecting school districts to the Food Bank of Eastern Oklahoma and providing information about meal waivers. Hunger Free Oklahoma also launched Tulsa Kitchens Unite to provide meals to entire families in the Tulsa area.

Safety and Well-being

In response to elevated stress levels during the pandemic, TAUW partner nonprofit Parent Child Center of Tulsa developed several new programs including enhanced parenting groups that help at-risk parents and caregivers improve their parenting skills and trauma-informed care for early learning professionals that enable them to identify and respond to trauma behaviors in children. These new programs continue today as families recover from pandemic and post-pandemic stressors.
Mental Health

The ongoing mental health crisis among children and youth in Oklahoma accelerated during the pandemic. An estimated 27,500 Tulsa area youth aged 6 to 17 have a mental health disorder. In 2020, eight Tulsa Area children under 18 died by suicide. An estimated 5,400 Tulsa Area youth attempted suicide in 2021.

The pandemic revealed gaps in the mental health continuum of care for Oklahoma’s children in the form of insufficient availability of child and adolescent psychiatrists, insurance barriers, and limited access to home and community-based intensive service for complex needs. During FY 2020, more than 91,000 children received Medicaid or state-funded mental health services, however, it is estimated that over half of Oklahoma youth experiencing a major depressive episode did not receive needed mental health services.

TAUW partner nonprofit Family & Children’s Services (F&CS) staff provided additional crisis response services to help clients cope with the rising number and severity of mental health issues in the school environment. F&CS’ on-site, school-based services have provided mental health services that children otherwise would have not received. The services have improved childhood outcomes by providing immediate response to mental health and behavioral health issues, aiding in trauma reduction, helping children focus on learning, and empowering students to build connections to caring adults.

Academic Achievement

Oklahoma students experienced some of the highest levels of learning loss during the pandemic. Unprecedented changes to educational formats and routines contributed to academic challenges nationwide. During the pandemic, Oklahoma’s proficiency levels on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) fell to 24% in fourth grade reading and 16% in eighth grade math, positioning the state as third-lowest in reading and second-lowest in math.

As a group, the more than 50 public school districts within the Tulsa Area United Way six-county region experienced declines on the Oklahoma School Testing Program (OSTP) Assessment during the pandemic, with third grade reading proficiency levels falling to 22% and eighth grade math levels dropping to 12%. These staggering statistics indicate that 78% of area third graders are not reading at grade level and 88% of area eighth graders lack proficiency in grade-appropriate math concepts.

In general, students with the fewest resources and the greatest educational needs prior to the pandemic experienced the greatest learning loss, generating even wider gaps for these children to overcome. Many of these students represent underserved populations – Black, Hispanic / Latino, and Native American students, English Learners, students with disabilities, and lower income students.

In response to COVID-19’s impact on the learning environment, new virtual opportunities were created. More than 400 Tulsa Area children and youth attended virtual classes at TAUW partner nonprofit YMCA (Y) every day while schools were operating virtually. The Y provided tutors and delivered school supplies, sports balls, and other resources to help kids learn and play at home in an effort to minimize learning losses during the pandemic.
Welcome to the first edition of Tulsa Area United Way’s Community Insights: Transforming data into insights, insights into investments and investments into action for a thriving community.

We appreciate the tremendous generosity of the businesses and residents of the Tulsa Area who give to the Tulsa Area United Way every year. We couldn’t support the amazing work of our Partner Nonprofits without those contributions. We hope that this report series offers you a clearer understanding of why investing in TAUW is so vital to the well-being of our community.

We chose to focus this first report of the Community Insights series on the impact of COVID-19 on children and youth of the Tulsa Area. While the pandemic has impacted each of us in different ways, children and youth have been especially vulnerable. Thank you for staying informed about the struggles faced by many children and youth of our community and about the efforts of TAUW Partner Nonprofits to help our young people navigate and thrive through these challenging times. And again, thank you for donating to the Tulsa Area United Way, helping mobilize the work of our outstanding Nonprofit Partners!

Brent Sadler
Chief Officer, Organizational Development and Transformation
Tulsa Area United Way
Six-County Region

Six counties
One million residents
Approximately 250,000 children and youth under 18
Nearly 70 nonprofit partners and 160 partner programs
Investments to support expanding education, improving health and safety, and strengthening financial stability
PHYSICAL HEALTH
Infected young people are more likely to experience asymptomatic or mild cases, which frequently go unreported.

**COVID-19 Infections and Fatalities**

Youth Share of COVID-19 Cases

Youth Share of Population

Infected young people are more likely to experience asymptomatic or mild cases, which frequently go unreported.

**TAUW Partner Nonprofit Highlight:**

Youth Services of Tulsa

Learn more at yst.org
Nearly 50,000 Positive COVID-19 Cases Among Children and Youth Across the Tulsa Area

Cumulative Positive COVID-19 Cases Among Children 0-17

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<th>Area</th>
<th>Cases</th>
<th>Per 1,000 Youth</th>
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TAUW Partner Nonprofit Highlight:

Morton Comprehensive Health Services

Learn more at mortonhealth.com

211 Eastern Oklahoma

Learn more at 211eok.org
COVID didn't create new health disparities; it exacerbated those that already existed.

Due to these and other inequitable systems and conditions, people of color generally had poorer health status and health outcomes than Whites before COVID arrived. COVID didn't create new health disparities; it exacerbated those that already existed.

Although difficult to diagnose, "long COVID," a condition roughly defined as the persistence or development of symptoms for weeks or months after infection, is estimated to afflict about a quarter of children diagnosed with COVID-19.

Researchers have learned that those with more acute cases of infection are more likely to develop long COVID. The condition may manifest in children and youth as extreme fatigue, sleep disorders, respiratory difficulties, headache, cognitive difficulties, anxiety, depression, fever, gastrointestinal symptoms, and loss of smell and taste.

Additionally, a recent CDC study found that young people who have had long COVID are more likely than those who have not to experience serious lung, heart, and kidney problems. Nationally, for the total population, COVID-19 has become the third leading cause of death, with an age-adjusted mortality rate of 94.7 per 100,000 population. Disaggregating by race, however, shows considerable inequities. COVID-19 is the leading cause of death among Native American and Hispanic/Latino individuals, with age-adjusted death rates of 180.0 and 153.8, respectively. Although rarely fatal among children and youth, 2,153 children under 18 from across the U.S., 29 from Oklahoma, and seven from the Tulsa Area, have died from the virus since its inception.

Indirect Physical Impacts of COVID-19

In addition to the direct physical effects of the virus, children and youth suffered other kinds of harm due to COVID-19. For many families, the virus exacerbated financial strain, food insecurity, abuse, and toxic stress. Children of color, living in poverty, or experiencing homelessness are disproportionately at risk for financial difficulties and food insecurity.

(Learn more about COVID's impact on toxic stress and child abuse in the next section of this report.)

The pandemic eroded the economic well-being of communities and families throughout the Tulsa Area in multiple ways. In the early days of the pandemic, families everywhere struggled with job loss, reduced wages and hours, lack of childcare options, and food shortages. More recently, families are contending with inflated costs of food and other basic needs, the risk of eviction, and housing shortages. Families face record levels of demand for basic necessities.

Food insecurity, defined by Feeding America as "the lack of access to sufficient food because of limited financial resources," among families with children has reportedly tripled across the nation during the COVID-19 pandemic.
Food insecurity among families with children has tripled across the nation during the pandemic. Nearly 50,000 children in the Tulsa Area live with food insecurity.

No state in the nation has a greater share of children facing extreme food insecurity than Oklahoma.
Caring Community Friends has always provided groceries, financial help, and other resources to area families in need, but they creatively adjusted their programs to ensure safety during the pandemic. Unprecedented numbers of individuals and families visited Caring Community Friends seeking food, rent, mortgage, utility, and other resources due to inflation and economic uncertainty related to the pandemic. Nearly three times as many people received food and other services in 2021 as in pre-pandemic 2019. The Nonprofit modified its grocery service to offer drive-through and delivery options when the pandemic required families to shelter in place and avoid physical contact.

Made possible beginning in 2018 through a Tulsa Area United Way Social Innovations Grant, the Book and Snack Mobile delivered books, snacks, fresh fruit, popsicles, and games to different neighborhoods across the community with social distancing and other modifications for safety. The Book and Snack Mobile included the Recreation Road Show allowing kids to play games, socialize, and have fun safely. Executive Director Camille Teale states, "Book and Snack Mobile was a lifeline for many children and families who had their summer vacation plans cancelled due to the pandemic. It was often the only thing they looked forward to every week."

The Christmas Star program continued during the pandemic thanks to help from 50 community volunteers who delivered turkeys and gifts to families’ doorsteps. Every child received a riding toy – either a bicycle, tricycle, or push toy.

Learn more at caringcommunityfriends.org

TAUW Partner Nonprofit Highlight:

YWCA Tulsa

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Learn more at ywcatulsa.org

Hunger Free Oklahoma

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Learn more at hungerfreeok.org
Taking Action: Recommendations from State and Local Partners

Morton Comprehensive Health Services

**Telehealth option:** Advancement of resources and technology for continuing option of Telehealth to increase access to both physical and behavioral health care for all Tulsa Area residents.

**Collaboration:** Optimize resources and expertise by elevating the Tulsa Area practice of collaboration among partners from diverse sectors – health care, universities, health departments, governmental entities, communities, nonprofit organizations, funders, and businesses – to address health and wellness in addition to social drivers of poor health outcomes.

**Emergency Preparedness:** Continued support of the Tulsa Area Emergency Management Agency (TAEMA) to ensure community disaster preparedness and response plans are ready to activate when needed. TAEMA works with several community partners in these efforts including the Tulsa Health Department, Tulsa area hospitals, community organizations, EMSA, law enforcement, fire departments, and the Tulsa Area Chapter of the Red Cross.

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Hunger Free Oklahoma (HFO)

**Increase SNAP Participation:** Help eligible families stretch their grocery budget by enrolling in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

- HFO offers a statewide SNAP application assistance hotline.
- Supporting outreach and referral materials, training on SNAP application assistance, and technical assistance are available for TAUW service area partners through the Tulsa Community Partner Program (TCPP).
- Advocate for Congress to ensure SNAP benefits reflect the cost of a balanced, nutritious diet.

**Offer Breakfast After the Bell:** Offering school breakfast through non-traditional service models increases participation, boosts nutrition, and improves academic performance.

- HFO can help area schools explore options and implement programming.

**Expand Summer and After School Meals:** Hosting Afterschool or Summer Meal sites for children and teens helps fill meal gaps for kids during out of school hours.

- Contact HFO to learn more about how to be a site or sponsor.
- Advocate for expanded service options for meal sites, including non-congregate service models.
SAFETY & WELL-BEING
Impact of Trauma

The topic of child well-being is wide-reaching and can refer to many different areas such as physical, emotional, educational, or financial well-being. In this report, we approach the topic using the framework of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) focusing on the traumatic impact of the pandemic on children’s development and wellness. Research on ACEs shows that toxic stress associated with traumatic events can impair children’s development, potentially leading to lifelong health impacts.

Based on data gathered during the pandemic, the United Health Foundation ranks Oklahoma as the fifth worst state in overall child wellness, as measured by social and economic factors, physical environment, clinical care, behaviors, and health outcomes. We know that within this ranking lies a wide range of outcomes in child wellness. Not all children fare equally. Racial inequities related to child well-being are deep, systemic, and persistent nationally and across the state. Generations of inequities and deeply entrenched discriminatory practices and policies related to accessing resources continue to impede the path towards well-being and success for disproportionate numbers of young people of color. COVID-19 didn’t create these inequities nor the poor status of child well-being, but it undeniably intensified both. Child well-being is shaped by a state’s wealth and resources, but also by policy and investment decisions made by state officials, lawmakers, and community leaders.

Adverse Childhood Experiences

Although low or moderate levels of stress are normal and can help children develop the capacity to handle challenging situations, high levels of stress can take a toll on children’s well-being. The presence of recurring high levels of stress hormones can be especially severe.

Childhood Trauma, Social Conditions, and Historical Trauma Can Generate Negative Health Outcomes

Mechanism by which Adverse Childhood Experiences Influence Health and Well-being Throughout the Lifespan

- Conception
- Early Death
- Disease, Disability, & Social Problems
- Adoption of Health Risk Behavior
- Social, Emotional, & Cognitive Impairment
- Disrupted Neurodevelopment
- Adverse Childhood Experiences
- Social Conditions / Local Context
- Generational Embodiment / Historical Trauma
- Death
Detrimental to children’s health and developing brains. Extensive research on Adverse Childhood Experiences finds that toxic stress associated with traumatic events can impair children’s physical, mental, and behavioral development, potentially resulting in lifelong health impacts. Although any traumatic event or adverse condition may trigger harmful levels of stress, ACEs clinical research and assessments often measure the presence of several key types of events including experiencing or witnessing violence, abuse or neglect, having a household member with mental health disorders or substance use conditions, and family instability. More recent studies include social, environmental, and generational factors known to affect children and youth adversely, such as poverty, racism, crime and historical trauma. The greater the number of traumatic experiences during childhood, the greater the likelihood of unhealthy risk behaviors and adverse physical and behavioral health outcomes throughout life. Prior to the pandemic, research consistently showed that Oklahoma residents collectively had one of the highest ACE scores in the nation, measured by the share of the population experiencing two or more adverse childhood experiences. The latest data from United Health Rankings’ 2022 Health of Women and Children Report indicate that, at 18.3%, Oklahoma has the 10th highest rate in the nation of children experiencing two or more ACEs. The pandemic amplified stress levels alongside reduced access to resources to help children process and cope with it in healthy ways, only adding to the intensity of adversities experienced by Oklahoma children. With the potential to counteract harmful effects of ACEs, Protective and Compensatory Experiences (PACEs) are positive childhood experiences in the form of supportive relationships and adequate resources. These types of experiences help build resilience in children and youth. ACEs do not impact all populations equally. Researchers find a disproportionate prevalence of adverse childhood experiences among populations that have been historically oppressed or neglected. Individuals and families that are Black, Native American, Hispanic/Latino, unemployed, have lower income, have lower education levels, have disabilities, identify as LGBTQ, or are in other ways marginalized tend to be excessively impacted by ACEs. Similarly, children COVID-19 didn’t create these inequities nor the poor status of child well-being, but it undeniably intensified both.

Child well-being is shaped by a state’s wealth and resources, but also by policy and investment decisions made by state officials, lawmakers, and community leaders.
in families struggling financially, challenged by mental health or substance use disorders or domestic violence, may have fewer opportunities to benefit from protective and compensatory experiences than other children. Pandemic-related stress and adversity haven't affected all children in the same way. Children of parents or caregivers who struggle with unmet needs or have difficulty modeling healthy coping strategies tend to be more adversely impacted by the pandemic. Families strained by pre-existing and unresolved stressors such as limited financial resources, domestic violence, substance abuse, and mental or physical health challenges are often less likely to have access to resources to help them effectively manage additional adversity. This inequity has the potential to develop new health conditions that disproportionately impact marginalized communities.

As a primary form of Adverse Childhood Experiences, we can drill down to observe trends in child abuse and neglect. Research shows child maltreatment (general term for all forms of child abuse and neglect) increases during natural disasters, including pandemics, due to elevated stress levels and reduced access to protective factors. Many experts believe that the COVID-19 pandemic created a confluence of factors contributing to increased levels of child maltreatment. Every aspect of the pandemic added a new layer of stress to families, especially those already dealing with strained financial resources, housing insecurity, and mental or physical health challenges. The addition of actual or anticipated family illness or death, job and income loss, school and childcare closures, and social isolation generated heightened stress levels within families. Heightened stress levels can trigger child maltreatment and other forms of domestic violence. Coinciding with these increased stressors was the social isolation of at-home schooling, restricted gatherings, and limited in-person healthcare visits, resulting in diminished access to trusted adults and fewer opportunities for mandatory reporters of suspected child maltreatment, like teachers and childcare providers.

The Parent Child Center of Tulsa (PCCT) has taken steps to intervene in pandemic-related increases in risk factors for child abuse and neglect by offering parenting groups for at-risk parents and caregivers to enhance their parenting skills before abuse or neglect happens, expanding staff training on additional treatment modalities, and providing trauma-informed training to childcare and early learning professionals to enable them to identify and respond to trauma behaviors in children in their care.

PCCT was nominated to participate in the first Child Parent Psychotherapy (CPP) Agency Mentorship Program, a SAMHSA funded initiative, due to their successful implementation of the program, low turnover rate, and knowledge and experience of staff. In response to growing financial strain and increased stress, anxiety, and depression among clients, PCCT has become certified through the National Family Support Network as a Family Resource Center. A Family Resource Navigator has been hired to offer enhanced referral and education services to help families access and apply for assistance. Several new services have been added to support families, including HealthySteps, which embeds pediatric specialists in clinics, a Fatherhood Initiative to strengthen father-child relationships, and social-emotional learning support in schools to reduce child stress.

Learn more at parentchildcenter.org
Reported and Substantiated Cases, Rates of Child Abuse and Neglect Increasing in Tulsa Area Prior to COVID-19

Tulsa Area Child Abuse and Neglect Trends
Research shows increased child maltreatment during natural disasters, including pandemics, due to elevated stress levels and reduced access to protective factors.

Taking Action: Recommendations from State and Local Partners

Look Out, Reach Out Campaign
• Watch for signs of abuse and neglect: 8LI

Look Out Reach Out GPSEFSCV XMZI GEQTEMKR SJ 8 BY PWE %VIE 9RMXIH EJ1*EQMP 1LMPHVIRW YZMGW4EVIRX 1LMPH IRIX4 SJ 8 BY PWE 1LMPH F%FY1I2I[SVO ERH 8 BY PWE 7% IRGSYVEKIXW XLI KIRIVETPY FPMX SVSITVSXW WMKR 5W SJ EFY WLV SV RIKPIGX 1WTIGMEPP HYVMR XMQIW LIR GLMPHVIR LEZI PMQX IH SSRXEGX [MXL X] MGEF EFYWIERH RIKPIGX SVSITXIVW

Oklahoma State University Extension PACEs for Children: Overcoming Adversity & Building Resilience
• Promotion of the science of Protective and Compensatory Experiences (PACEs): 8MP EFY WIERH RIKPIGX MRXLI 8Y PWE %VIE 9RMXIH EJ1*EQMP 1LMPHVIRW YZMGW4EVIRX 1LMPH IRIX4 SJ 8 BY PWE 1LMPH F%FY1I2I[SVO ERH 8 BY PWE 7% IRGSYVEKIXW XLI KIRIVETPY FPMX SVSITVSXW WMKR 5W SJ EFY WLV SV RIKPIGX 1WTIGMEPP HYVMR XMQIW LIR GLMPHVIR LEZI PMQX IH SSRXEGX [MXL X] MGEF EFYWIERH RIKPIGX VSVXIVW

TAUW Partner Nonprofit Highlight:
Child Abuse Network
‘LMPH%FY1I2I[SVO WY PXHM WGM TPM REV] ‘LMPH%FYWI 8EQWIVZIHBY PWE ‘SYRX GLMPHVIRL[SIVI VITSX1HPSIM QCMW XLSJ] EFYWISVRIKPIGX MRXLVSY KLJSVIRMXGMRXVZM[IWHERQIHM GEPIZEPY EMXSRW A MRGVIEWSIZVRYQIVJG SLMPHVIRWIVZIHMR

According to local experts, these lower numbers of reported cases mask an actual upsurge in unreported child abuse and neglect in the Tulsa Area during the pandemic due to social isolation, heightened stress levels, and limited access to mandatory reporters.

Learn more at childabusenetwork.org
MENTAL HEALTH
Children's Mental Health Pre-Pandemic

Oklahoma children and youth were already struggling with poor mental health and substance use prior to the pandemic. Before 2020, young people in Oklahoma consistently had higher rates of major depressive episodes, binge drinking, misuse of pain medications, and heroin and methamphetamine use compared to national estimates.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated the ongoing crisis in mental health among children and youth in Oklahoma, particularly among vulnerable populations. Disruptions resulting from the pandemic, such as school closures, have been linked to increased feelings of anxiety, depression, and distress among youth.

According to the National Survey of Children's Health, the percentage of Oklahoma children aged 3 to 17 ever diagnosed with or reported to experience anxiety or depression by a doctor or healthcare provider, increased by 15% from 10.5% in 2011.

Youth Suicide Indicators Increasing Leading Up to Pandemic

Suicide Indicators among Oklahoma High Schoolers

Oklahoma Youth Report Higher Rates of Poor Mental Health and Substance Use Than National Average

Pre-Pandemic Behavioral Health Indicators Among Youths Aged 12 to 17 Years Old, 2018 - 2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percent of youths:</th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>Oklahoma</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>RM</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Additionally, the mental health of certain youth populations, such as those from rural communities, lower-income households, and youth of color, have been disproportionately affected.

Based on a national prevalence rate of 16%, an estimated 27,500 Tulsa area youth aged 6 to 17 have a mental health disorder.

This rise in anxiety and depression is simultaneously caused by increased risk factors and loss of protective factors.

As a result of the pandemic, many families faced economic and food insecurity, with as many as 49% of households with children in the U.S. reporting a loss of employment income.

As previously mentioned, children from lower-income households have been especially vulnerable to negative mental health outcomes. The implementation of social distancing measures made it difficult for children to access school and community-based supports. During the early days of the pandemic, many children lost their only reliable source of daily nutrition through school meals. Experts note that losses in cognitive and social development due to pandemic-related disruptions also affected children's mental well-being. Other challenges to children's mental health include increased grief and loss of loved ones due to COVID-19 mortality.

**Oklahoma Children Aged 3 to 17 Diagnosed or Reported Anxiety or Depression**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
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**Oklahoma Students Struggling with High or Moderate Psychological Distress**

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>60.1%</td>
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**TAUW Partner Nonprofit Highlight:**

**Healthy Minds Policy Initiative**

89%: ‘SPPEFSVXEMSRW4EVXRIVIEPXLM1MRHW4SPMGJRMXEMMIIEPXLM1MRHWMW30PESQEUITYQIMIVXMLROXEROJSGYWHISQRIRXELIEPLXMWWYIWIXMLEJSYRHEXMSRMRHEERHVIEVGLIEPXLM1MRHWGSPPEFSVEIXIMXLWXHEXIERHPSGPEPIEVIWXXSHIZIPSPIEZIXERQTPMIRXRTSPMGERHGSSQYRMXIWSPYXMSRWXLEXLPIRTWYVIEP3OPESQERSWLEIXLQIRXEPLIEPLXLXVIEXQIRXERHTVIZIRXMSRWIVZMGIXL1RIIH[LIRERHLIVLX[RIIHXMLIQR

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XIPIEPLX

Learn more at healthymindspolicy.org/children
TAUW Partner Nonprofit Highlight:
Family & Children's Services

Family & Children's Services (F&CS) offers over 60 programs which restore children's well-being, heal victims of abuse, strengthen individuals and families, and provide hope and recovery for adults suffering from mental illness and addictions, which include TAUW funded Children's Center for Counseling and Mental Health and Child Abuse and Trauma Services (CATS).

F&CS programs buffer the damaging effects of poverty, trauma, adversity, and toxic stress by creating protective environments that generate new synapses in the brain.

COVID-19 accelerated a crisis in children's mental health care. Stressors unique to the COVID era (e.g., family deaths, financial hardship, fewer social supports due to 'Safer-at-Home' orders, virtual schooling) compounded already high levels of childhood trauma. CEO, Gail Lapidus, states, “without treatment, COVID plus ACEs-related risks set the stage for potential long-lasting mental health crises with generational consequences.”

As the impact of the pandemic on mental health continues, F&CS is seeing increases both in the severity of the conditions clients are struggling with and in the demand for treatment. A 15% increase in requests for assistance in 2021 coincided with increases in suicide, PTSD, crisis calls, and emergency department usage for mental health crises. As the weight of the pandemic crisis lifts, F&CS predict a long-term impact on children's mental health.

Providing therapy and counseling services to 7,500 children in 2022, F&CS’ Children’s Center for Counseling and Mental Health staff have provided crisis response to help clients cope with the rising number and severity of mental health issues in the school environment since the beginning of the pandemic. Many students returning to in-person learning brought with them the pandemic's negative effects on mental health, behavior, development, and learning. Public schools report that the pandemic negatively impacted student socio-emotional and behavioral development. F&CS’ on-site, school-based services have improved outcomes by providing immediate response to mental health and behavioral health issues, aiding in trauma reduction, helping children focus on learning, and empowering students to build connections to caring adults. Positive results linked to F&CS' impact include improvements in school attendance and high school graduation, and a more positive school environment.

Lingering mental health effects gave rise to a 9% increase in number of requests for child trauma services through CATS in 2022. Children are presenting with increased symptom severity related to trauma, increased depression, anxiety, PTSD and suicidality.

In addition to traditional services, CATS families continue to request help with basic needs and medications. FC&S provides aid via the F&CS COVID Help Line, COPES COVID Emotional Support Line, food boxes, age-specific activity bags, website resources such as parenting tips, and referrals to other community resources. Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services (ODMHSAS) grant-funded iPads allowed F&CS to provide technology to families who could not otherwise access telehealth from home.

Learn more at fcsok.org.
Data from the Oklahoma Prevention Needs Assessment (OPNA) collected during the pandemic indicate 60.1% of student respondents were struggling with high or moderate psychological distress during the prior 30 days, compared to 51.8% in pre-pandemic 2017-18.

In 2020, 38 children under 18 died by suicide in Oklahoma, eight of whom lived in the Tulsa Area United Way region (Tulsa Area).

Rates of youth suicide in Oklahoma and the Tulsa Area, at 4.0 and 3.3 per 100,000 youth, respectively, exceed the national rate of 2.3.

An estimated 5,400 Tulsa Area youth aged 14 to 17 attempted suicide in 2021—11.7% of youth, compared to 8.9% nationally.

Since 2016, Oklahoma has made strides in reducing rates of overdose death. However, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic reversed these positive trends and overdose deaths are again on the rise. In 2020, six children under 18 died of unintentional overdose.

Although overall drug overdose deaths have since leveled off both nationally and within the state, use of certain substances continues to be an issue among children.

It is worth noting that the capacity for robust survey data collection was severely limited during the early months of the pandemic. Therefore, 2020 prevalence values may be underestimated. Even as the world returns to normal, the effects of the pandemic will persist.

More than 26,000 Tulsa Area Youth Received Medicaid or State-Funded Mental Health Services During FY 2020

Number of Children 17 and Under Who Have Received Services Funded by Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Total Number of Treatment Admissions</th>
<th>Number of Treatment Admissions with Serious Emotional Disturbance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'VIII' 'SY RX]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30QY PKI 'SY RX]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3WEKI 'SY RX]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65KIVW 'SY RX]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8P 'PWE 'SY RX]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>;EK SRIV 'SY RX]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma State</td>
<td>91,573</td>
<td>45,242</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Experts suspect there will be long-lasting, compounding consequences that could negatively affect education, workforce development, and healthcare systems.

**Gaps in Children’s Mental Health Treatment System**

The pandemic revealed gaps in the children’s mental health treatment system within Oklahoma. During FY 2020, Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services reported more than 91,000 children receiving Medicaid or state-funded mental health services in Oklahoma, almost 50% of whom were identified as having a serious emotional disturbance. It is estimated that as many as 57% of Oklahoma youth aged 12 to 17 experiencing a major depressive episode did not receive mental health services.

Although increased telehealth usage helped increase treatment access to students, gaps in Oklahoma’s mental health continuum of care persist. As of late 2022, only six of Oklahoma’s 77 counties have at least one mental health provider with a team of care providers.

### Increase in Children’s ER Visits for Mental Health Crises, 2019-2021

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hospital</th>
<th>2019 (%)</th>
<th>2020 (%)</th>
<th>2021 (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ascension St. John</td>
<td>+84%</td>
<td>+104%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Francis Health System</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Led to increased overutilization of emergency departments.

Increase in Children’s ER Visits for Mental Health Crises, 2019-2021
Families often experience long waiting periods for professional evaluation and initiation of treatment that can worsen symptoms and increase the likelihood of crises. Insurance barriers and the limited availability of home and community-based intensive services for children with complex needs also hamper access to appropriate services. The lack of intensive care for children contributes to the overwhelming demand for inpatient facilities, hospitals, and child protective services, which can be avoided in most cases.

These gaps have thus led to increasing overutilization of emergency room visits from children with suicidal thoughts and other psychiatric conditions, compared to before the pandemic.

A record 1,300 kids in mental health distress flooded Tulsa County emergency rooms during 2021, resulting in increases in children’s emergency room visits for mental health crises of 84% for St. Francis Health System and 104% for Ascension St. John since 2019.

Taking Action: Recommendations from State and Local Partners

**Family & Children’s Services (F&CS)**

- **Promote children’s mental health:**
  - The best way to promote children’s mental health is to build up their strengths, help to protect them from risks, and give them tools to succeed in life. Promoting a child’s mental health means helping them feel secure, relate well with others, and foster their growth at home and at school. We can do this by helping build a child’s confidence and competence – the foundation of strong self-esteem. This can be achieved by providing a child with a safe and secure home; warmth and love; respect; caring and trusting relationships with family, friends, and adults in the community; opportunities to talk about experiences and feelings; time to play, learn, and succeed; encouragement and praise and consistent and fair expectations with clear consequences for misbehavior.

- **Adequate and appropriate mental health resources:**
  - Access to mental health services in school leads to a tenfold increase in mental health or substance abuse treatment. Prevention and early intervention in schools prevent behavioral issues from developing into deeper problems which may lead to suspension and dropping out.

- **Address inequities:**
  - Health and well-being are rooted in broader social and environmental conditions; for instance, poverty, trauma, unemployment, food insecurity, and housing instability. These conditions shape peoples’ lives, the conditions in which mental illness and other health problems develop, and access to resources. Systemic root causes of health disparities must be addressed in order to successfully manage our community’s youth mental health crisis.
Integration of Mental Health Multi-Tiered Support Systems (MTSS) in Local Schools Enables More Effective Service Delivery

Healthy Minds Policy Initiative

School-based, community-linked services and supports:
- School-based, community-linked services
- Integrated behavioral health in primary care
- Intensive home- and community-based treatment services

Integration of Mental Health Multi-Tiered Support Systems (MTSS) in Local Schools Enables More Effective Service Delivery

- Crisis services
- Intensive inpatient
- Small group therapies
- Family programs
- Substance use education
- Universal screenings
- Classroom-wide curriculum

The need to address children's mental health is more evident now than ever before. We need to ensure that children are protected from risk factors and have access to mental health care when and where they need it and at the required level of care.

- School-based, community-linked services
- Integrated behavioral health in primary care
- Intensive home- and community-based treatment services

Currently, only 19% of Oklahoma students attend a school set up to provide appropriate mental health support. In 2021, Tulsa Public Schools was one of only 14 Oklahoma school districts that are funded to implement a district-wide MTSS.

Pediatric primary care providers need access to mental health training and consultation from mental health professionals to effectively offer prevention education to families, screen young patients, and treat mild to moderate mental health challenges or refer them to specialty care.

More intensive home and community-based services in the Tulsa Area are needed to increase the number of children...
The reach of the Mental Health Association Oklahoma’s Youth Mental Health Program has expanded each year since prior to the pandemic. In 2022, nearly 15,000 students from area school districts received mental health education, a 400% increase over 2019.

Learn more at mhaok.org

The Tristesse Grief Center responded to the desperate need for youth grief services created by the pandemic by expanding its Healing Hearts Club, a school-based service centered around student bereavement support that incorporates school resources, the student’s own support system, strengths, and coping mechanisms. The Grief Center has added individual grief counseling at school sites to address increased demand. A Certified Healing Hearts Club Group Facilitator training program was recently launched to grow capacity for grief groups in Tulsa area schools.

Learn more at thegriefcenter.org

Okmulgee-Okfuskee County Youth Services’ Behavioral Health/CARS program provided counseling services to 250 clients in 2022. Increased levels of need for youth mental health services during the pandemic has created new opportunities for collaboration and referral.

Learn more at okamyskids.org

Through education and counseling services of Youth Services of Creek County, 1,200 students learned life, coping, and social skills in 2022. Virtual tele-therapy implemented during the pandemic continues to be offered along with in-person services to meet the growing demand due to higher levels of anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation among Creek County students.

Learn more at yscc.net

Youth Services of Creek County

3OPELSQERYouth Mental Health Program has

Learn more at mhaok.org
ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT
Overview
Prior to the pandemic, Oklahoma’s educational outcomes were poor. The Annie E. Casey 2022 Kids Count Data Book, which presents data primarily from before the onset of COVID-19, ranks the state 45th of 50 states in an analysis of key indicators in the education domain. The pandemic compounded those already unsatisfactory outcomes. Remote or hybrid learning, lack of classroom structure and consistency, lowered rigor and accountability, lack of internet access, teacher shortages, student illness, and deaths of family members all contributed to academic challenges during recent years. Along with the direct academic impact, the transition to remote learning for many students also meant limited access to consistent nutritious meals, social isolation, loss of connection to trusted adults, and disruption to mental health and other social supports typically provided at school.

The academic impact hasn’t been experienced equally across all student groups. Disparities in academic opportunities and outcomes were recognized before COVID-19, but the pandemic exacerbated the inequities. Although schools have returned to pre-pandemic formats, disparities in the impact of COVID-19 are present and have deepened. Generally, Black and Hispanic/Latino students and those from lower-income families attended school remotely for longer periods. They were less likely than other students to have internet access, a reliable computer or device, and other essential tools for learning, resulting in deeper academic lags. Addressed, students who started with fewer academic resources are likely to exit pandemic times with the greatest levels of learning loss, generating even wider gaps in educational and economic opportunities.

Standardized Assessment Results
One meaningful way to measure the academic impact is by comparing assessment scores before and since the onset of COVID-19. Reading and math assessments are important measures of young people’s ability to become successful citizens and effective participants in the economy.

Although standardized assessments are conducted at various points during elementary and secondary school, third and fourth grades are critical times to measure reading proficiency, and eighth grade is a key milestone for math. Through third grade, students are

TAUW Partner Nonprofit Highlight:
Global Gardens

Global Gardens empowers low-income students and families through gardening and education. While schools were in remote learning during the pandemic, Global Gardens staff delivered gardens to all of their after-school program participants, giving them something to nurture and care for. To foster a sense of connection and kindness in their neighborhoods, they encouraged their after-school students to create signs and small gifts for their neighbors.
If grade-appropriate reading mastery is not achieved by the end of third grade, students are more likely to struggle to comprehend reading materials for other subjects in later grades, curbing their potential for academic success. In adulthood, reading difficulty and the lack of post-secondary education or training can prohibit higher earnings potential and a secure economic trajectory. Further, eighth grade math is a gateway to more complex math concepts and skills. Difficulty with eighth grade math may indicate underdevelopment of foundational tools necessary to master more advanced math coursework. Math proficiency is becoming increasingly crucial for career paths as it is a building block for developing analytical and critical thinking skills.

Researchers find that, if not addressed, students who started with fewer academic resources are likely to exit pandemic times with the greatest levels of learning loss, generating even wider gaps in educational and economic opportunities.

**National Assessment of Educational Progress Performance Level Definitions**

**NAEP Advanced**: Students demonstrate superior performance on challenging subject matter.

**NAEP Proficient**: Students demonstrate mastery over appropriate grade-level subject matter and readiness for the next grade level.

**NAEP Basic**: Students demonstrate partial mastery of the essential knowledge and skills appropriate to their grade level.

**Below Basic**: Students have not performed at least at the Basic level.

**National Assessment of Educational Progress**

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), commonly known as The Nation's Report Card, is a federally mandated assessment of basic subject proficiency of a large-scale representative sample of elementary and secondary school students in the United States and administered by the National Center for Education Statistics. Because the NAEP is conducted nationwide, results can be compared across regions and states and are used to inform education policy.

Aggregated outcomes on NAEP assessments are reported in two ways:

**1. Scale Scores**: The NAEP Scale Score reflects the average score on an assessment using a scale of zero to five hundred for fourth grade reading and eighth grade math. Higher proficiency in a subject yields a higher score. Scale scores are grouped into performance standards or achievement levels by specified cut scores.

**2. Achievement Levels**: NAEP Achievement levels describe proficiency in a subject: NAEP Basic, NAEP Proficient, or NAEP Advanced. The percentage of students scoring within each of these levels is reported.
Achievement levels reflects the aggregate outcomes of the group. Scores in either the NAEP Proficient or Advanced categories indicate readiness for more challenging material.

NAEP Fourth Grade Reading

8L12%4QIEWYVIWIEVPVIEHMRKTVS5GMIRGMRJSYM5KVEHITRG1WXHYHXRWIRX4JYSYVXLKVEHIERHSGRXXLIMVEGEHIQMGN5YVRIXLIXLIEVII\[TIGXIXSFIIXEFPXETTP\]XLIMVIEHMRKOMPWWXSPIEVRXLIVWYFNI

Scores on the 2022 national average scale score of 216 on the NAEP Fourth Grade Reading Assessment reflects a three-point decline from pre-pandemic 2019. Both years' scores fall in the Basic achievement level. While every state averaged either lower or had no significant change from 2019, Oklahoma's eight-point loss was one of the largest of all states. Oklahoma's 2022 scale score of 208 matches the cut score for the Basic level and positions the state third from the bottom in fourth grade reading proficiency.

Achievement levels on the NAEP Fourth Grade Reading Assessment declined during the pandemic. The share of scores falling in the proficient or advanced levels declined nationally from 35% in 2019 to 32% in 2022, and from 29% to 24% in Oklahoma. Only two states had lower proficiency rates. Strategic interventions are needed to ensure that all Oklahoma students have the resources to read proficiently and excel academically throughout their educational journey.

Findings from NAEP research show an inverse relationship between reading level and amount of learning loss during the pandemic, resulting in widened gaps in outcomes.

NAEP Eighth Grade Mathematics

Nationwide, NAEP average eighth grade math scale scores remained at the Basic achievement level, falling from 281 in 2019 to 273 in 2022. While every state's scale score either declined or remained unchanged, Oklahoma experienced the greatest decline of all states in eighth grade math with a 13-point loss for a 2022 scale score of 264, just reaching the Basic achievement level and shifting the state from a position of 10th-lowest to third-lowest scale score.

Findings from NAEP research show an inverse relationship between reading level and amount of learning loss during the pandemic, resulting in widened gaps in outcomes.

Nationally and in Oklahoma Reading and Math Proficiency Levels Declined Sharply During Pandemic
NAEP eighth grade math scores in the proficient and advanced levels dropped from pre-pandemic 2019 to 2022, from 34% to 26% nationally and from 25% to 16% in Oklahoma. The state tied for the second lowest proficiency level in 2022. Oklahoma’s public school system has left eight out of 10 students unprepared for complex math concepts and skills. Widespread interventions are needed to ensure Oklahoma students have the resources to pursue more advanced math coursework.

The Oklahoma School Testing Program (OSTP) assessments are state-mandated, criterion-referenced standardized tests administered to assess student proficiency in particular subject areas and to help school districts identify strengths and gaps in instruction and curriculum.

The OSTP Third Grade English Language Arts (ELA) test assesses proficiency in the reading and writing process, critical reading and writing, vocabulary, language, and research. The percentage of scores falling in the proficient or advanced levels for third grade ELA among the more than 50 public school districts within the six-county Tulsa Area United Way region (Tulsa Area) dropped during the pandemic by 15 percentage points from 37% in 2019 to 22% in 2021. This means that Tulsa Area schools are producing about eight out of 10 third graders who are not reading at grade level, and are striving to learn and advance without this critical skill for academic success. Oklahoma must ensure that all Tulsa Area public school students have the resources necessary to thrive academically, including a firm base of reading proficiency.

Eighth grade math proficiency, as measured by the OSTP, also declined during the pandemic in the Tulsa Area. The share of scores falling in the proficient or advanced categories dropped by 10 percentage points from 22% in 2019 to 12% in 2021. About nine out of 10 Tulsa Area public school students are not sufficiently equipped with the foundational math skills necessary to succeed in higher-level mathematics courses. Oklahoma must target interventions and resources to ensure that every Tulsa Area student has the foundational skills necessary to advance to higher-level math coursework.
Oklahoma experienced the greatest decline of all states in eighth grade math.

Disparities

Researchers find that the pandemic’s impact on academic outcomes is not distributed equally. National data indicate that students with the fewest opportunities and the greatest educational needs prior to the pandemic have experienced the largest share of learning loss from COVID-19, generating even wider gaps in outcomes and opportunities. Many of these students represent historically marginalized and underserved populations Black, Hispanic, and Native American students, English Learners, students with disabilities, and lower-income students.

Disparities in testing outcomes existed before COVID-19 among Oklahoma and Tulsa Area students. Those disparities persisted and, in some cases, widened during the pandemic. Research by NAEP on student learning during the pandemic found that among students who attended school remotely during the 2022 school year, those performing higher on the assessments were significantly more likely to have: full-time access to a computer or tablet, a quiet space to study, and access to their teacher for help on a weekly basis. Additionally, higher-performing students were significantly more likely than others to have access to live video lessons with their teacher almost daily. Access to resources and attributes of the remote learning environment played pivotal roles in these outcomes.

While disaggregation by student characteristics reveals a loss in proficiency in fourth grade reading from 2019 to 0 for nearly every group in the state, measurable disparities emerge. Compared to the overall 1 loss in reading proficiency across the state, the loss for Oklahoma’s Hispanic students indicates that this population group experienced the greatest obstruction to reading progress due to the pandemic.

Similarly, disaggregated outcomes for the eighth-grade math assessment reveal a substantial loss of proficiency during the pandemic for all student groups in the state. While Oklahoma’s overall math proficiency rate declined by from 2019 to 0 the loss among Hispanic students reveals the group experiencing the greatest harm to math advancement due to the pandemic.

Access to resources and attributes of the remote learning environment clearly played pivotal roles in these outcomes.
As with NAEP results for the state, analysis of OSTP disaggregated data shows substantial academic loss during COVID-19 for Tulsa Area students across all student groups. Inequities are evident, however, in the scale of impact. The Tulsa Area experienced a 41% decline in third grade ELA (reading) proficiency from 2019 to 2021. Reading progress for every subgroup was disrupted by the pandemic. The greatest decline in proficient and advanced scores emerged among students for whom English is not the first language. Tulsa Area students who are English Learners experienced a 61% loss in reading proficiency during the pandemic.

The pandemic disrupted eighth grade math progress in the Tulsa Area, evidenced by the overall 45% decrease in scores in the proficient and advanced categories from 2019 to 2021. Again, disparities emerge in the extent of harm. The disruptions of the pandemic led to a 78% decline in proficiency rates among Black Tulsa Area students, followed by a 67% decline among English Learners.

These patterns of disparate degrees of learning loss reinforce the observation that those with the greatest opportunity gaps and the least access to academic resources before COVID-19 were often the most intensely harmed by the pandemic. If not addressed,
this inequity will continue to generate even wider gaps in educational and economic opportunities and outcomes if not addressed.

**ImpactTulsa’s Child Equity Index**

Research shows that variances in academic performance among different population groups do not equate to differences in intelligence or capacity to learn; instead, they largely reflect systemic inequalities and opportunities to excel. The Child Equity Index (CEI), a data-driven tool and resource developed in Tulsa by local collective impact organization and partner nonprofit, ImpactTulsa, in partnership with Tulsa Public Schools, shows that student outcomes reflect much more than the capacity to learn. This research finds that a complex, interrelated set of structural and systemic factors based both within and outside the educational system, deeply impact student outcomes. The model uses more than 40 indicators from six domains to measure the effects of geographically-based conditions on student outcomes. The six domains are student-level factors, access to resources and attributes of the remote learning environment clearly played pivotal roles in these outcomes.
Child Equity Index: Overall Contribution of Neighborhood Indicators to Academic Outcomes
A deeper understanding of the different factors impacting students in particular neighborhoods informs educators on strategically targeting interventions and resources, opening up opportunities and overcoming barriers to student success.

Pre-Kindergarten Enrollment

Because barriers to opportunities begin at a young age, so must interventions. One such impactful intervention is high-quality pre-K. A well-implemented, high-quality pre-K experience using an evidence-based curriculum has been linked to kindergarten readiness and improved overall academic outcomes in later grades, fewer behavior problems, higher levels of educational attainment, greater career success, and higher lifetime earnings. These outcomes ultimately

### ImpactTulsa Theory of Action

**If we use our data expertise:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Metrics and Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Student Level</strong></td>
<td>Gender, Race / Ethnicity, ELL, Student Mobility, Attended Pre-K, Economic Disadvantage, Homeless, Special Alert (i.e. medical), EBL, Suspensions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Neighborhood Health</strong></td>
<td>Built Environment Score, Life Expectancy, Mental Health / Substance Abuse Visits, ER Visits, Infant Mortality Rate, Teen Pregnancy, Low Birth Weight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Neighborhood Socio-Econ Status</strong></td>
<td>% of population with Less than a High School Education, % of Pop below 100% FPL, % of Pop below 200% FPL, Unemployment Rate, Receipt of SNAP (Food Stamps), Housing Cost Burdened, Housing Quality and Condition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Neighborhood Safety</strong></td>
<td>Violent Crime (aggravated assault, homicide, rape, robbery), Gun- related Mortality Arrests, Narcotics Crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5. Neighborhood Custodianship</strong></td>
<td>Nuisance / 311 Complaints, Negative Land Use, Built Environment Nuisance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because barriers to opportunities begin at a young age, so must interventions. One such impactful intervention is high-quality pre-K. A well-implemented, high-quality pre-K experience using an evidence-based curriculum has been linked to kindergarten readiness and improved overall academic outcomes in later grades, fewer behavior problems, higher levels of educational attainment, greater career success, and higher lifetime earnings.

The Child Equity Index is a complex, interrelated set of structural and systemic factors based both within and outside of the educational system that deeply impact student outcomes. Through our data expertise, we can use this information to convene and connect critical partners, build our collaborators’ capacity, disrupt systems of inequity and effect stronger cradle to career outcomes in the Tulsa Area. We can then boldly share our community’s stories and experiences.
generate a better-educated workforce and a stronger economy overall.

Because long-term gains derived from high-quality pre-K experiences are greatest for low-income children and dual-language learners, the diminished access to pre-K during COVID-19 was especially detrimental to those children.105

for all 4-year-olds, Oklahoma is recognized nationally as a leader in early childhood education.106 Before the pandemic, pre-K enrollment was on an upward trajectory. However, amidst the move to remote and hybrid learning, the closure of many private early childhood centers, and job loss or shift to remote work for many parents during COVID-19, public pre-K enrollment fell sharply across the state during the pandemic.107 In the Tulsa Area, public pre-K enrollment dropped by 19% between the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years.108 The greatest pre-K enrollment shrinkages in the Tulsa Area were found among Multi-racial, Hispanic/Latino, and Black students - all groups characterized by lower than average income levels. National trends indicate that the steepest declines in pre-K enrollment occurred among low-income from pre-K.109 Although not yet back to pre-pandemic levels, enrollment data indicate total pre-K enrollment increased in the 2021-22 school year.110

Taking Action: Recommendations from State and Local Partners

Community Action Project (CAP) Tulsa

• Two-Generation Approach:
  • Access to high-quality early childhood education:
  • System Alignment:

Impact Tulsa

• Theory of Action that all children in Tulsa receive every opportunity to succeed, from cradle to career:

Evidence-based, data-informed strategies and collaborative action are necessary to pinpoint policies, practices, and resources to alleviate disparities and ensure that all students have the opportunity to excel academically. Insights from the Child Equity Index and other resources can inform the systemic interventions needed to help close opportunity gaps and overcome barriers to student success.

Direct investments in schools are critical, but limitations and inequities in opportunities for student success are not restricted to the educational environment. We will also find important solutions in our housing, health care, economic, human service, criminal justice, and transportation systems.
Community Action Project (CAP) Tulsa’s Two Generation (2Gen) approach supports low-income families with early childhood education, parenting skills, and economic empowerment. Executive Director Karen Kiely reports that COVID-19 created new challenges for serving children and families. “The pandemic caused disruptions in social and emotional development for our children, and it’s still evident in classrooms three years later,” she said. “So, we continue to provide targeted training for teachers to build their toolbox so they can help these kids cope with the trauma they experienced during COVID. As a result, we have seen an increase in socio-emotional learning outcomes. Also, teachers feel more confident when dealing with challenging behaviors and can focus their energy on creating classroom environments that are both highly engaging and fun.”

To meet other challenges created by the pandemic, CAP Tulsa shifted its English as a Second Language (ESL) Program to a virtual platform in 2020. The ESL Program teaches families how to have important conversations in English with their child’s teacher, doctors, and others which was critical during the pandemic for distance learning and telehealth. With the successful implementation of this offering, virtual ESL classes will continue to be offered to provide more flexible options for families.

CAP Tulsa also assisted families to address financial struggles that were worsened by the pandemic. Emergency Assistance of more than $1 million has been distributed to families since the start of the pandemic to buy food and diapers, and pay rent, utilities, and medical bills. In addition, Family Advancement services have been expanded to integrate a proven housing stability counseling program.

Learn more at captulsa.org

TAUW Partner Nonprofit Highlight:

ImpactTulsa

ImpactTulsa is a collective impact organization that uses data to drive systemic change by convening community sectors through the shared vision that all children in Tulsa receive every opportunity to succeed, from cradle to career. Learn more at impacttulsa.org

A well-implemented, high-quality pre-K experience using an evidence-based curriculum has been linked to kindergarten readiness and to improved overall academic outcomes in later grades, fewer behavior problems, higher levels of educational attainment, greater career success, and higher lifetime earnings.
FINAL THOUGHTS

Tulsa Area United Way's Partner Nonprofits and our Innovations and Collaborations partners have been critical to empowering families to weather the storm of the pandemic. They maximized their efforts, shifted ways of doing business to meet clients where they were, and added services, resources and specialized staff to meet clients' emerging needs. They recognized disparities and strategized to more effectively target resources to those most in need. They stepped out of their lanes to provide more than their usual services; they saw the need, adapted, and served. Out of necessity, they responded to the immediate crisis of the pandemic.

While the COVID-19 pandemic is officially over, its impact on young people will continue to reverberate into the future. The long-term effects depend largely on how we as a community choose to move forward and confront the challenges that surfaced.

The pandemic illuminated pre-existing problems in many systems and structures that directly affect the well-being of children and youth – physical and mental health care, education, child welfare, and compensation – and caused those problems to worsen. Now is the time to learn from this experience, think proactively, and take steps to continue to help our youth heal, reduce the likelihood of harm in future crises, and eliminate barriers to success for all youth. Being informed about the pandemic's overall and disparate impacts felt by particular groups of youth is a key step. Identifying and strategizing to fill gaps in services and resources can guide recovery plans and ensure we're better prepared for the next emergency. Uncovering the root causes of disparities exacerbated by the pandemic can inform efforts to uproot them.

The Tulsa Area United Way and our Partner Nonprofits have played pivotal roles in building and supporting the human services safety net for the Tulsa Area for generations. Countless individuals and families have relied on this safety net for groceries and housing assistance, educational and training opportunities, physical and mental health care, mentorship and youth development, advocacy and counseling, and protection and recreation, to name a few. Our Partner Nonprofits display excellence in serving community members in need, and they eagerly strategize creatively and act courageously to adapt to changing needs and resources, as we saw with COVID-19.

We at Tulsa Area United Way are honored to serve as stewards of investments from businesses and individuals who want to support the crucial work of these organizations to help ensure that every community member has the opportunity to thrive. Learn more at tauw.org.
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1.

2.

3.


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MISSION

Tulsa Area United Way unites people and resources to improve lives and strengthen communities.

VISION

Tulsa Area United Way envisions a community working together to ensure that all of its members flourish and thrive.

Learn more about Tulsa Area United Way’s goals, values, and processes at tauw.org.