



Educational Attainment for Children and Youth

Increased educational attainment is one of Orange County United Way's long-term strategies for assisting Orange County residents to attain economic self-sufficiency. Youth who graduate from high school and complete a bachelor's or an advanced degree will have increased employment opportunities and earning potential.¹

To assist children and youth to attain the education they will need to be self-sufficient adults, Orange County United Way supports programs that provide:

- After school academic assistance and enrichment activities for children and youth from low-income families in safe, supervised environments
- Youth leadership, character and resiliency development
- Skill-building in computer technology and career preparation

Within this long-term strategy, the **Keeping Kids On Track (KKOT)** initiative provides leadership and resources to enhance the educational success of Orange County youth ages 7-17. Resources are targeted to programs that prepare and support youth to pursue education beyond high school and provide college scholarships. KKOT also increases the capacity of youth development and after school organizations to build developmental assets and resiliency among Orange County youth and to implement high-quality programs. Funding is also available for computer and other technology equipment for these programs.



Community needsⁱⁱ

- ✓ Orange County has *wide disparities* in academic success rates: The 2005-06 *dropout rate among African American students was 3.4% and 2.3% among Hispanic students* countywide. The four-year derived *dropout rate in Santa Ana Unified School District was 12.5%* compared with 5.9% countywide. In 2005-06, among 27 school districts, 12 districts showed a mean score on the state's Academic Performance Index of less than 800, which is the target performance for all schools.
- ✓ Orange County *schools also face many challenges*. For example, during the past 10 years, the number of *English Learners among the public school population has increased by 7.3%*. This represents *28% of the students from kindergarten to 12th grade*. In addition, *39% of the students qualify for free and reduced lunches* (an indication of poverty), which is a *9% increase* since 1996-97.
- ✓ The number of students *passing both the mathematics and English language portions of the California High School Exit Exam has decreased* by approximately 12% since 2004. Students who have special needs or are English Learners are failing to pass at a higher rate than other students. In 2006, *only 31% of the students with special needs passed the English portion of the exam and only 34% of the English Learners passed*.
- ✓ The number of high school graduates *passing all courses requirements for admission to the University of California or the California State University systems has increased slightly to 43.4%*, but some ethnic groups still lag behind. *Only 27% of the Pacific Islanders, 28% of the African American and 35% of the Hispanic students meet these eligibility requirements*.

Community Impact

- 17,257 children and youth participated in after-school academic assistance and enrichment activities in safe, supervised environments.
- 7,500 youth participated in college-preparatory activities to help them reach their goal of graduating from high school and enrolling in college.
- 87 high school seniors or returning college students receive academic scholarships.
- 4 youth development organizations serving more than 1,000 youth received computer equipment or other technology assistance.
- 3 youth development organizations received assistance to increase their capacity to serve 650 youth.

Success Is Personal

- ★ *Ellen, a high school senior, enrolled reluctantly in a SAT preparation class at Orange County Asian and Pacific Islander Community Association in Garden Grove. She was struggling with trying to meet her parents' expectations for her and discovering what she wanted to pursue beyond high school. Through her relationships with OCAPICA staff and extra tutoring sessions, Ellen began to think more clearly about her interests and plans. She joined Young Leading Women (YLW), a leadership program for high school girls that raises awareness of social justice issues and empowers girls to be change agents in their communities. Ellen now has developed a more positive and confident outlook on her future. "After I graduate," she says, "I want to go to Orange Coast College and major in culinary design. I really like it and think I'm pretty good at it, too." Her friends at OCAPICA agree: Her homemade biscotti cookies were a big hit at the YLW fundraising tea!*
- ★ *Sylvia is a high school junior enrolled at THINK Together's Shalimar Teen Center in Costa Mesa where she is the editor of the center's yearbook, mentors new students, and gives tours to new volunteers and guests. Sylvia spoke at a recent event about her experience at the center: "When I first came to Shalimar, I was too young to understand what was going on in my(neighborhood). We didn't speak English. Then my mom heard about the learning center, so she signed me and my (six) siblings up... As years went on, we soon began to speak English fluently. My oldest sister and brother graduated and went off to college. Shalimar Teen Center helped us a lot because it gave us a reason to succeed and to acknowledge the fact that education is important... It gives us a safe place to be and keeps us off the streets. We also get help with our homework that we wouldn't be able to complete without the tutors. My mom is really thankful for the teen center because she came here to give us a better education and we are really taking advantage of that."*

ⁱ America's Children: *Key National Indicators of Well-Being* (2002) Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Agency

ⁱⁱ These data are taken from *The 13th Annual Report on the Conditions of Children in Orange County* (2007) Orange County Children's Services Coordination Committee and sponsored by the Orange County Board of Supervisors and the Children and Families Commission of Orange County.
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