

Oklahoma Institute for Child Advocacy

2005 Legislative Agenda for Children and Youth

Background Information

Alternative Education

Issue #6

Getting a good start as a young adult is vital to lifelong success. Those who spend their young adult years out of school and unemployed have a hard time finding and getting a job later in life. Education is critical to obtaining and maintaining employment, yet one of every four students in Oklahoma (25%) who start high school as a freshman disappear from the roster prior to graduation.

Beginning in 1995, the Oklahoma Legislature responded to a growing need for nontraditional approaches to help students at-risk of dropping out of school, or who were returning to public school to complete their education. Since then, legislators have provided funding for Alternative Education Academies to serve students in Grades 6-12 who are most "at-risk" of not completing high school. In 2003-04, there were 252 programs serving 13,161 students in 467 school districts.

These programs have shown remarkable success. In the 2004 school year, over two-thirds (70.5%) of the seniors enrolled in the program graduated, and others earned GED diplomas. In addition, students in alternative education showed improvement on every variable measured, and the gains were substantial. Evaluators report that by investing in this successful model, Oklahoma taxpayers are saving more than \$80 million each year just in recovery of dropouts.

Education is vital to the long-term economic growth of our state. Keeping kids in school helps them make a successful transition from risk to opportunity, and sets them on the path to prosperity - both for themselves and for Oklahoma.

Fiscal Note:

The Oklahoma State Department of Education is requesting \$4,121,416 to restore funds to the Alternative Education Program. *Total request: \$4,121,416*

Recommendation:

The Children's Agenda supports restoring funding for alternative education and dropout recovery to FY 2002 levels (\$4.2 million).