

engage

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Data Driven: How tracking and measurement can help improve communities

*Part of a series exploring issues
from The Community Foundation's
Aspire Arkansas report.*





Heather Larkin

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Diving Deeper Into the Numbers

The premise of Arkansas Community Foundation's *Aspire Arkansas* report, from its beginning back in 2011, has been that better information can lead to better giving choices and clearer paths to improving communities.

This edition of *ENGAGE* takes a deeper dive into some of the statistics from *Aspire Arkansas* and other sources to see how Arkansans are making an impact on the numbers. Though we don't have to have numbers to make a difference in our communities, data is very useful in identifying and clarifying the challenges our communities face and helping each of us to make decisions on what organizations to support.

You can see some significant change in areas where there has been a concentration of nonprofit efforts. Working together, classroom teachers, after-school programs and initiatives like Reach Out and Read that work to put more books in the hands of children, have helped to raise the numbers of third graders scoring proficient or advanced on the ACTAAP exams from 59 percent in 2007 to 82 percent in 2012.

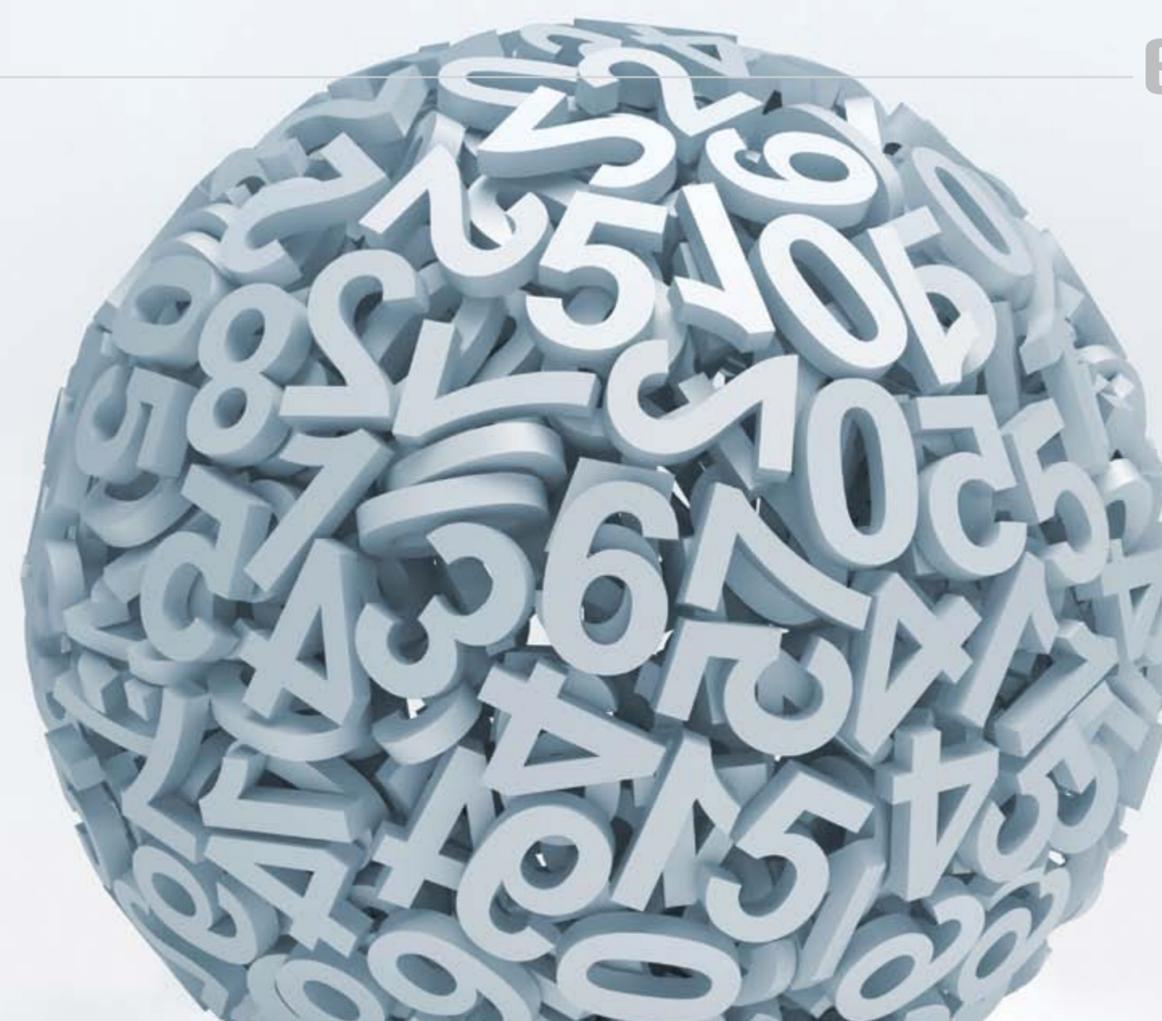
However, there's still a grade-level reading gap based on race — a 15-point spread exists between the 85 percent of white third graders

who are proficient or advanced and the 70 percent of African-American third graders who score in those parameters.

Sometimes the data takes unexpected turns. For instance, there has been a lot of anti-smoking activity by government and nonprofit organizations in the past decade. And between 2005 and 2008, the percentages of current smokers went down from 23.5 percent to 21.5 percent. But the most recent data from 2010 shows the rate climbing back to 22.9. Did we get complacent that the numbers were going down? What can we do to reverse this dangerous trend when we know that 4,900 Arkansans die from tobacco-related illnesses each year?

As we'll see throughout this issue, the data gives us much food for thought. And for action. Let's work together to ensure our dollars make a lasting impact on Arkansas's most pressing needs.

Heather Larkin, J.D.
President and CEO



Truth in Numbers

by Julie Johnson Holt

“It's too easy to lie with numbers.”

“Yes, but it's even easier to lie with words.”

No, that's not a joke by Bill Nye the Science Guy. It was how Professor William Ware caught the attention of a bunch of “words” people in his statistics class at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill years ago.

The skeptical statement was one he said he heard all too often from people complaining that statistics could be poked and prodded until they could support any position.

The pithy response? His logical reply to such silliness. Still, just as a statement's not necessarily true simply because it's printed in black and white, a statistic also needs to be understood in context.

No question, numbers and statistics are valuable tools in figuring out “what is,” especially for people who are committed to changing “what is” (high rates of drug use or low education attainment, for instance) into “what can be.” In fact, those good folks shouldn't make a move without knowing what the data tells them.

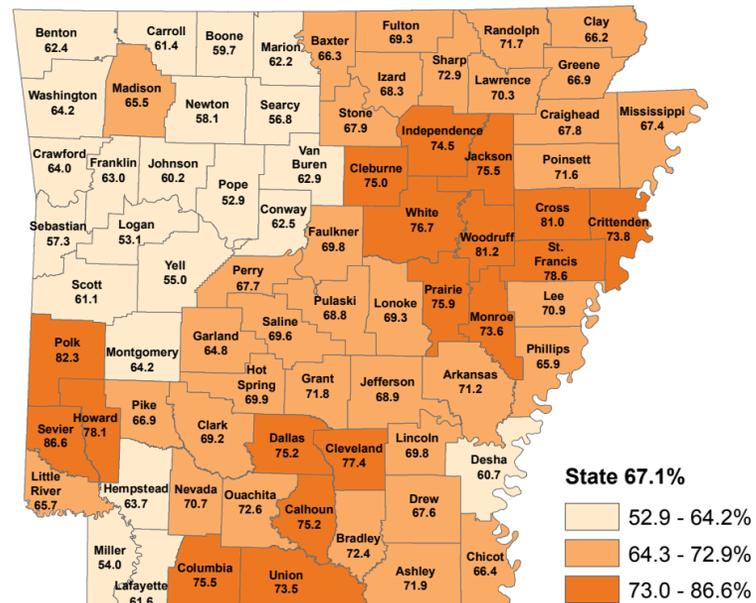
Arkansas by the Numbers

One of the best places to find such indicators is in the collection of measures reported in the Arkansas Community Foundation's *Aspire Arkansas* report. The report's pages are chockfull of numbers that, together, paint a portrait of the health, education and economic status of the people in our state. Granted, it's not always a pretty picture, but it provides a stark portrayal of what needs to be improved.



adult obesity

Percent of Overweight or Obese Adults;
Arkansas by County, 2010



Source: Arkansas Department of Health, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey

Thumb through one of these publications, and a few numbers may jump out at you because they seem so outside the norm. These pieces of data are lovingly called outliers by statisticians because, if you plot them on a piece of graph paper, they would fall quite noticeably outside the cluster of all the other bits of data.

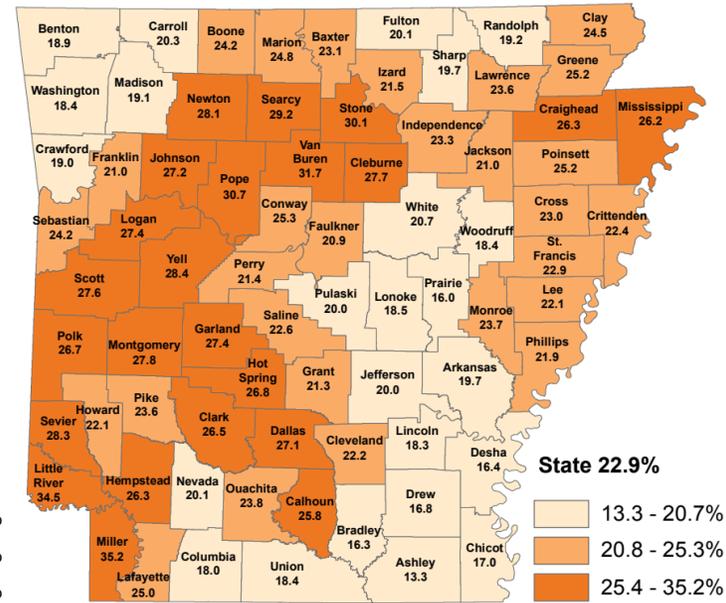
A few outliers that might catch your eye in the most recent *Aspire Arkansas* include:

- At 60.7 percent, the rate of “obese adults” in Desha County appears much lower than in surrounding counties. That’s according to data for 2010 provided by the Arkansas Health Department.
- Higher rates of smokers live in Arkansas’s western, mountainous counties, though the rate drops when you get to Northwest Arkansas. Again, those rates are based on 2010 data provided by the Health Department.
- While Lee County has some of the worst ranks in the state when it comes to education and poverty indicators, it looks better than you’d expect when it comes to teen birth rate.

The immediate question that arises when one stumbles upon outliers such as these is, of course, why? Soon behind that inquiry for many well-meaning people is, what can we do to fix it (if it’s a negative outlier) or replicate it (if it’s a positive one). It’s important to answer that first question, well, first. Let’s take

smokers

Percent of Adults Reporting Currently Being Cigarette Smokers;
Arkansas by County, 2010



Source: Arkansas Department of Health, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey

a closer look at each to see what might be influencing these rates.

Adult Obesity in Desha County

At first glance, something quite positive seems to be happening in Desha County when it comes to adults and weight. In the *Aspire Arkansas* chart labeled “adult obesity” the rate in Desha (60.7 percent) is quite a bit lower than it is in surrounding counties. In fact, of all the Delta counties on the map of 2010 rates, Desha is the only one that ranks in the state’s lower third of counties.

But this seems to be a case where the numbers may look better than they actually are. The percentage for obesity on the map actually includes the percent obese plus the percent overweight. “If you look at these separately, there’s not as much variation,” Andrea Ridgway with the Health Department’s Hometown Initiative explained. But that’s not the only reason the true situation in Desha may be somewhat different than the numbers, at first blush, indicate.

“Desha had a smaller sample size than surrounding counties,” said Sabra Miller with the survey section of the Health Department’s Center for Public Health Practice. The obesity data is collected through phone surveys — in 2010, that collection was done via landlines. “With African-Americans

and [other minority] populations, cell phone usage is more likely,” Miller explained, adding “so we may not have reached as many of the population” as we did in some of the other counties.

When that happens, responses are adjusted with a weighting formula so the final statistics reflect the actual age, gender and racial makeup of each county, Miller said.

The result is that the final numbers have to be considered an estimate, and, with statistics, all estimates have a margin of error measured as a standard deviation. “So it would all fall within the standard deviation,” Miller said.

The more important point, she stresses, is that even though Desha might stand out from among its Delta peers when the statistics are taken at face value, the county still illustrates how large a problem obesity is in Arkansas as a whole. While Desha County’s reported obesity rate is 31.4 percent, the state’s is 31 percent. Sadly, that’s just about the same number of people in each who are neither overweight nor obese.

The Health Department’s Hometown Health Initiative and the Arkansas Coalition for Obesity Prevention are two initiatives focused on improving this unhealthy facet of our state.

Smokers in Western Arkansas

Except for the five counties of Northwest Arkansas, the western portion of our state appears to be populated by a lot of smokers. With rates ranging from 25.8 percent to 35.2 percent of adults who smoke, almost all of the top-third tier of Arkansas counties in this measure are located in the western regions of Arkansas. “I think maybe socioeconomic indicators come into play,” said Bobby Willborg, the Health Department’s southwest regional tobacco grants administrator.

His colleague agrees. “Smoking is more prevalent among whites and lower income [persons]. Northwest Arkansas has high white populations but is very affluent. Other mountainous areas of Arkansas are predominantly white but also [have] high poverty,” said Don Adams, southwest regional manager with the Health Department.

Those are exactly the reasons efforts to educate about the dangers of smoking and to create policies to discourage the behavior should be focused in such areas, and they have been. For instance, the Hometown Health Initiative in Newton County, which had a 28.1 percent rate of adult smokers in 2010, has implemented a number of anti-smoking initiatives over the last 10-15 years, according to Linda Thompson with the Health Department’s northwest region. These include working with the region’s Tri-County Tobacco Coalition to award smoke-free restaurants (before state law addressed the issue) and working with local schools on tobacco education activities.

Such efforts take money, Thompson said. “Newton County is fortunate to have access to the Boone County North Arkansas Partnership for Health Education at North Arkansas College and the large Boone County Hometown Health Coalition that gets funding including past grants for drug-free and tobacco-free [efforts].”

Teen Behaviors in Lee County

Another place where concerted community efforts seem to be taking root is in Lee County. Lee County fares poorly in comparison with the rest of the state in terms of educational attainment and income. As several of the people interviewed for this article have pointed out, it’s hard to rate well on most measures of well-being when that’s the case.

So it’s surprising that a place like Lee County seems to, well, if not shine, at least stand out on an indicator like births to teenage mothers. Lee County’s rate of 9.1 births per thousand teens, while in the middle tier of all Arkansas counties, is far below that of its contiguous counties of St. Francis (19.1), Monroe (14.8) and Phillips (20.1).

The efforts of community members like Bishop Michael Thomas likely have something to do with that. A little over 10 years ago, Bishop Thomas was involved with a program to reduce the number of teenage girls giving birth in his community. It was a combined effort, he said, through an organization called Our House.

The 18 or so young women in the program received “mothering”

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Data is Key Ingredient to End Hunger and Improve Nutrition in Arkansas



Chef Matthew Bell of South on Main (left) teaches students in a Cooking Matters class at the Hillary Rodham Clinton Children's Library in Little Rock.

How do you craft a recipe to end hunger and improve nutrition in Arkansas? A dash of fundraising, a handful of volunteers and a large scoop of food donation, mixed together in an efficient distribution system? The truth is, for a problem as longstanding and complex as hunger, there's just no easy recipe to follow.

Arkansas Hunger Relief Alliance is working to change that, though, with the addition of a crucial missing ingredient: data. Back in 2010, AHRA signed on to the No Kid Hungry Campaign (a national program led by the nonprofit organization Share Our Strength) to tackle a startling statistic: Arkansas ranked first in childhood food insecurity in the nation.

Working with a coalition of local government agencies, food banks and pantries, hunger relief advocates and national leaders from Share Our Strength, the Arkansas No Kid Hungry Campaign zeroed in on three objectives that they would track and measure relentlessly:

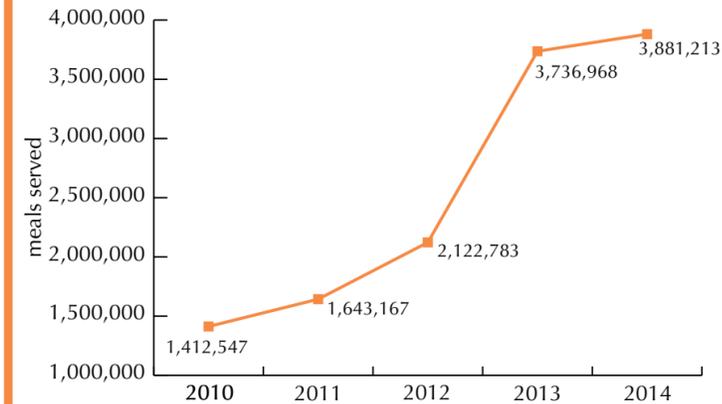
- Increase the number of students taking advantage of free or reduced-price school breakfasts.

- Increase the number of children who receive meals through summer and after-school feeding programs.
- Increase participation in Cooking Matters classes, which teach families how to prepare healthy meals on a budget.

The No Kid Hungry coalition soon found that there was plenty of room for growth in each area; in many cases, only a fraction of eligible individuals were participating in state or federally funded feeding programs. The coalition set out to educate schools, after-school programs and community groups, along with parents and students, about the options that were available to them.

For example, at the program's outset, only 51 percent of eligible students were participating in the federal school breakfast program. AHRA's goal is to reach 70 percent. "We looked at schools with a high population of students eligible for free or reduced-price school meals and did a calculation to look at how many kids they're currently serving and how many more they could reach if they started a new breakfast service," explained Patty Barker, Arkansas No Kid Hungry campaign director. "We

ARKANSAS SUMMER MEALS GROWTH



started contacting them and working with them. We've got a committee of advocates, including legislators and former superintendents, who helped us knock on doors and explain the problem. We've added 400 schools since starting the program."

Barker explained that the data collection process helps keep the program on track. "Each objective has its own individual goals and bi-weekly check-in calls. If we're not on target, we go through a process of understanding why we're not meeting target. It's not punitive — it's diagnostic."

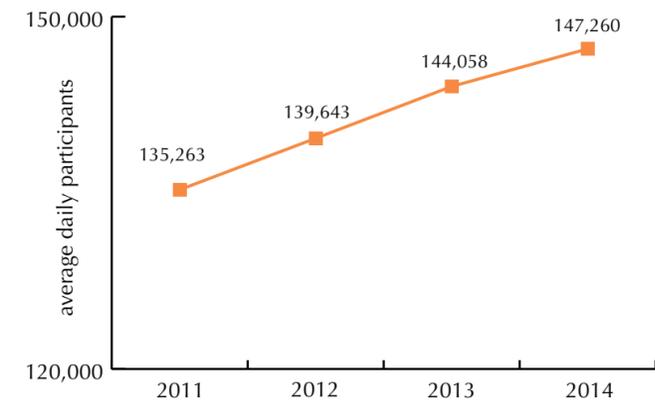
And while the measurement and tracking may sound dry, the results certainly aren't. Take for example Objective Three: increasing participation in Cooking Matters classes. On a recent Saturday morning at the Hillary Rodham Clinton Children's Library, a group of home cooks took their sixth lesson on healthy, budget-friendly cooking from Chef Matthew Bell, owner of downtown Little Rock's South on Main restaurant.

"People say, 'I can't afford to cook.' But if you gave me six dollars at the grocery store, I could make six meals," Bell explained. Through the program, students receive nutrition instruction and participate in hands-on cooking demos. Each week, they learn a new recipe that can feed four people on \$10. For homework, they receive a bag of take-home ingredients and a recipe to try on their own.

"I've always cooked, but I wanted to improve my cooking and make it more healthy," said Pearlne Williams. "I want to teach my grandbaby better eating habits."

Participants join the classes for many reasons — some to eat healthier, others to learn advanced kitchen techniques and still others to be more effective budgeters. Often the skills an individual learns end up benefitting an entire family. "It's cool because the participants talk about teaching their kids, nieces and nephews

ARKANSAS SCHOOL BREAKFAST PARTICIPATION GROWTH



to cook. They're cooking and eating with their families," said Elizabeth Baker, an AmeriCorps Direct member who works with the Cooking Matters program.

The program's 2014 goal was to host 800 Cooking Matters

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Shawna Long Photography

The annual Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure is one way breast cancer advocates are raising awareness and changing breast cancer statistics in a positive direction.

Awareness, Early Detection, Research Improve Breast Cancer Statistics

Sherrye McBryde, Executive Director of the Arkansas Affiliate of Susan G. Komen for the Cure tells the story of how awareness of breast cancer has changed in Arkansas.

“Back in 1982 when Komen was formed people didn’t say the word ‘breast’ in public or talk openly about breast cancer,” McBryde said. “But this past year I was speaking to a group of women about Komen when Governor Beebe stepped in to say hello. In a very

short greeting, he said every one of our key messages almost verbatim — including how important it was for the women to get their mammogram.”

But what about changes in statistics? Mortality from breast cancer dropped significantly in the U.S. between 2000 and 2014 from 26.6 to 21.5 per 100,000 population, according to Dr. Issam Makhoul, Associate Professor in Medicine at the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences and Director of the Division of Hematology/Oncology Fellowship Program. The drop of breast



cancer mortality in Arkansas was equivalent to the national average from 23 to 20.9*.

This improvement of breast cancer mortality was seen in white and black women. In white women mortality dropped from 21 to 19* and in black women from 38 to 33*. “It is clear that breast cancer remains more deadly in black women in general and in Arkansas in particular,” said Dr. Makhoul.

Other statistics that have improved include the stage at which breast cancer is diagnosed — detection at an earlier stage means a much better chance of survival. Additionally, efforts to ensure women have access to mammograms and receive testing recommended for their age have steadily increased in Arkansas, according to McBryde.

Making the diagnosis of breast cancer in women living in remote areas has been a challenge in our state where close to 50 percent of the population live in rural areas (as opposed to 20 percent for the U.S.). In 2010, UAMS launched its new mobile mammography program (MammoVan) that screened almost 5,000 women in three years, exceeding its initial projections by 1,800 screening tests.

The annual National Breast Cancer Awareness month in October culminates with the Komen Race for the Cure. Since its inception the race has engaged 647,010 participants to raise \$24,349,000, with \$5,223,292 going to breast cancer research and \$15,163,544 going to grants in Arkansas.

“The word ‘nonprofit’ is a misnomer; all nonprofits want to make a profit. But it is the use of those funds where these organizations differ,” said McBryde. “The profits improve our community and affect change for individuals.”

The choice of a breast cancer car license plate is another example of collaboration between Komen and the Winthrop P. Rockefeller Cancer Institute at UAMS to raise awareness and collect funds that get injected into the care of patients with breast cancer.

“On a different scale, the women volunteers of Ashley County have been collaborating with the WPRCI over many years to raise funds dedicated to supporting breast cancer research in Arkansas,” said Dr. Makhoul.

Care for breast cancer patients has significantly benefited from the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Programs. Arkansas is among the 10 states where the state appropriations for the programs are 100 percent or more than

the CDC award. This resulted in the realistic possibility to treat every woman diagnosed with breast cancer in the state regardless of her insurance status, according to Dr. Makhoul.

“Local and national research have been crucial in helping us find new drugs to cure certain varieties of breast cancer,” said Dr. Makhoul. “Disseminating the results of research remains a challenge as access to care is still a problem.”

“Komen statistics find currently there is a 99 percent survival rate after five years of those with breast cancer diagnosed at Stage One,” McBryde said. “Susan G. Komen, the organization, was founded to make certain women knew about breast health issues but also to speed research to find a cure. We were the catalyst for a major shift – going from breast cancer being a secret that women kept even from their family to marching a million strong across the world proudly proclaiming they have survived breast cancer.”

*Numbers reported by Dr. Makhoul are per 100,000 population; all the rates are from 2000 and 2014, respectively.



Shawna Long Photography



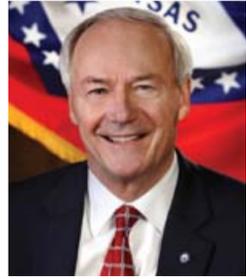
Between 2000 and 2014, breast cancer mortality in Arkansas dropped from 23 deaths per 100,000 people to 20.9.





ARKANSAS VIEWPOINTS

“What is the most important statistic/metric that Arkansans should be working to change?”



By Governor Asa Hutchinson

The most important measure of success for Arkansas is whether we are creating jobs and growing our economy. That’s my No. 1 goal. That’s the reason we have focused on reducing our high income tax rate, requiring computer science to be offered in every high school, reducing burdensome regulations and increasing job-skill training in the state.

All of those things will help us create more jobs and grow our economy, and that is the most important metric that we need to change here in Arkansas.

As Governor, I started with a plan to lower income taxes for the middle class. It was a promise I made to the people of Arkansas during the campaign. In January, I signed the Middle-Class Tax Relief Act into law. This will give a tax break to some 600,000 hard-working Arkansans.

Arkansas has been an island of high taxation for too long. Every neighboring state has a lower income tax rate than we do. The Middle-Class Tax Relief Act is a significant first step toward making our income taxes more competitive. Ultimately, that will help us attract jobs, improve our economy and change the state’s metrics for the better.



By Sherece Y. West-Scantlebury
Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation

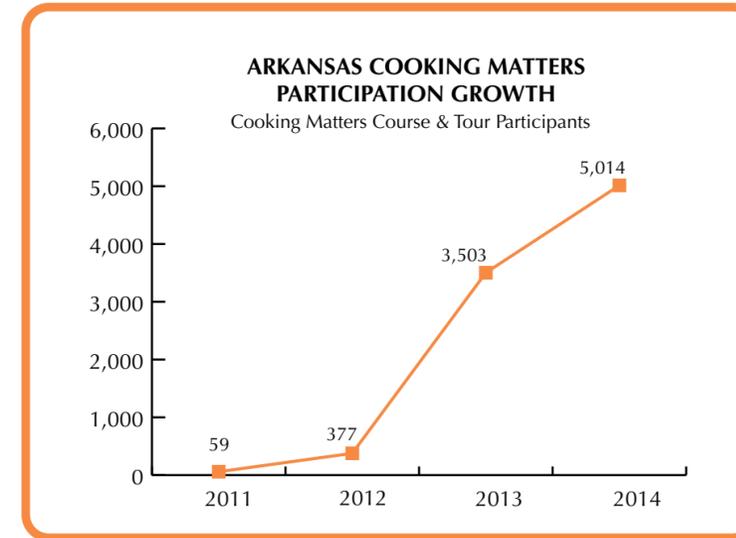
I was asked to write an essay on what are the one or two most important metrics to measure in community change initiatives. As I began preparing this essay, the metric I am most compelled to say is the most important is . . . well, the metric. In my 30-something years working in community change, I have observed that community leaders, stakeholders and nonprofit organizations know that data is powerful and great for informing decisions. But we do not “metrics.” I know that metrics is a noun and not a verb, but indulge me for a moment. We know we need to “metric” at the outset of any work we do in community to

- (1) Make data-driven decisions to build our communities,
- (2) Help increase effectiveness by showing which efforts have the greatest impact, and thus, where we should spend our money and time,
- (3) Be accountable to our constituents, whether they are clients, donors, board members or those who believe in what we do,
- (4) Support fundraising, and
- (5) Promote our impact and tell our stories.

If we know we need to metric, we should just do it. Seriously, just do it. The metrics that are most important for you to track depend on your vision, mission and goals. Communities have the power to decide which metrics to track, when to track them, how to track them and why they are important. Do what is best, most cost effective and metrically measurable (indulge me here, too) for your community change. Keep metrics simple. Keep metrics doable. Most important, just do it.



Data is Key Ingredient to End Hunger story continued from page 6



participants in the six-week class and 3,500 in shorter in-store demos that emphasize reading nutrition labels and consulting unit prices to get the best bargains. In both cases, the program exceeded its goals, reaching 1,062 classroom participants and 3,952 store participants.

But did all that measuring and tracking make a difference? The proof, as they say, is in the pudding. In 2014, Arkansas ranked 7th in childhood food insecurity, moving six places in the right direction in just four years. As Arkansas’s hunger relief advocates continue on the long road ahead, they don’t just hope their work is making a difference – they can measure it.



Between 2010 and 2014, Arkansas moved from first in the nation for childhood food insecurity to 7th.

Truth in Numbers continued from page 4

as well as lessons in abstinence, faith practices, the importance of spacing pregnancies and children apart and the prevention of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Though that program ended around 2006, Thomas said, “The thing I see about doing this type of stuff is that, if you have a passion for it and implement it strong enough – even if that program is no longer in place, the effect will continue, like a residue.”

In addition to the possible lingering and assuredly positive effects of the Our House program, Lee County benefits from a strong Health Department presence that works well with the school system’s nurse, according to Veronica Sellars, who works with the Health Department in Lee County. The team effort provides not only in-school health education to students but also a case management approach to dealing with teenage family planning issues.

Sometimes the data goes against the conventional wisdom. For instance, when Bishop Thomas in Lee County was reached for this story, he was meeting with some people in his latest outreach effort, one involving intervening with young men who have been in trouble.

So when he was asked about another surprising outlier for Lee County – the relatively low rate of drug usage in 2010 that *Arkansas Aspire* reports — he responded with surprise and disbelief, saying thoughtfully, “I’m not sure that’s right.”

Maybe it is just a fluke of the data. Perhaps it’s caused by under-reporting or another sampling error. Or, perhaps, just perhaps, it’s a reflection on the work that he and others do to make Lee County a better place.

If it is, it’s work that’s definitely worth replicating.





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Thanks TWO Million, Arkansas!

Nonprofits Receive \$2.33 million through ArkansasGives

More than 350 nonprofits statewide received \$2.33 million to make an impact on their communities thanks to ArkansasGives, the one-day online giving program from Arkansas Community Foundation.

In addition to \$1.98 million in online gifts, the Community Foundation contributed \$250,000 in bonus dollars, and First Security Bank gave \$40,000 in prize money for nonprofits that had the most donors and donations. Jane Hunt Meade provided \$10,000 for prizes for nonprofits that raised the most dollars in their service categories. Selected nonprofits received matching funds from the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation.

"I am overwhelmed by the generosity of Arkansans. April 2 was a landmark day for nonprofits in our state," said Heather Larkin, CEO of Arkansas Community Foundation.

A big thank you also goes to ArkansasGives partners and sponsors including Arkansas Nonprofit Alliance, AT&T Arkansas, First Security Bank, THV 11 in Little Rock, KFSM News 5 in Fort Smith, KAIT8 in Jonesboro, the Arkansas Press Association, AY Magazine, KUAR/KLRE Public Radio, and iHeartMedia radio stations statewide.



Heather Larkin, CEO of the Community Foundation and Brian Turley, development director of City Year Little Rock celebrating the success of ArkansasGives.org.



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G R O W T H E L O V E

