

**EDUCATIONAL DEMOGRAPHICS OF
CHRISTIAN, LYON, TODD, AND TRIGG COUNTIES**

Presented to

THE ATHENAEUM SOCIETY

September 1, 1994

ROBERT C. BAKER

First of all, I want to thank you for granting me this past year's leave of absence. While I very much missed the menstrual entertainment, the many witticisms, the erudite, learned papers, and the general comraderie the Athenaeum Society affords us all, I was literally tied to my desk 12-hours a day at the college writing a Federal grant. During the same period, my father passed away, my back went out (oblivious to the grant deadline), my wife, Laurel, and I separated after 24 years of marriage, I underwent an IRS audit, I made a less than judicious investment which nearly ruined me financially - all of this amid the normal joys and rigors of every day life. The good news is that the \$875,000 grant I wrote for the college was indeed successful. Despite the dismal year of 1993, all is well so far in 1994, and I am delighted to be here tonight in good health with a rigorous, sad '93 behind me.

Last year, while researching the economic and educational demographics of Christian, Lyon, Todd, and Trigg counties to establish the need for making application to the Federal Department of Education for funding an Educational Talent Search Program grant for UK's Hopkinsville Community College, I was struck by the bleak picture the educational and economic data paints in Christian and the surrounding 3 counties.

Before I share what I discovered, let me tell you that the Educational Talent Search Program is 1 of 6 programs funded under the Higher Education Act of 1965 which focuses on students from families whose incomes fall below 150% of the poverty level where

neither parent graduated from college. HCC's Talent Search Program is one of 312 projects throughout the nation working with 6th - 12th grade students and their parents to encourage them to consider college, to make sure they are enrolled in college preparatory programs, and to assist them in completing admissions and financial aid applications. No doubt many among us often view such Federal grant programs with a jaundiced eye, considering them wasteful and frivolous use of public monies. It is my hope that you will have another point of view after considering the information I offer you tonight.

In any case, Christian, Lyon, Todd, and Trigg counties are centered in an agrarian, culturally disadvantaged, rural region of the state where poverty is high and opportunities for upward economic mobility are increasingly limited. Our Pennyryle region has an extremely high number and percentage of low income and first generation students, has 47% of its adult population without a high school education or its equivalent, is in the top 10% of the state in number of juvenile crimes, is second in Kentucky of the fifteen area development districts in teenage pregnancy rate, and has a significantly high percentage and number of individuals and families receiving AFDC and food stamps. The following facts confirm the low value placed on education both by the state of Kentucky and the regional population:

*Forty-eight states graduate a higher percentage of their population from high school than Kentucky. According to the Statistical Abstract of the United States:1992, Kentucky has ranked in the lowest 2% of states for most of this century.

*The Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1992 indicates that Kentucky ranks forty-six out of 50 states in the percent

of population completing four or more years of college in 1991.

*The percentage of the population in the Pennyrile target area who have completed a bachelor's degree is a dismal 9%, as extrapolated from the 1990 Census of Population and Housing.

*According to the Kentucky Education Association's How Kentucky Ranks, 1992, the per capita expenditures of state and local governments for local public elementary and secondary schools was \$542, ranking Kentucky fiftieth (50th) out of the fifty states.

Currently, there are 5,033 families residing in Christian, Lyon, Todd, and Trigg counties living below the poverty level as determined by the criteria of poverty established by the Bureau of the Census of the U.S. Department of Commerce. This number represents 18% of all families. These data are shown county by county, with documentation, in Figure 2 (overhead).

Figure 2 illustrates a substantive need for other Title IV Higher Education Act programs like Talent Search. The large economically disadvantaged population is just as interested in a good quality of life as the rest of the population. However, given the persistent low value placed on education, this population does not associate a college degree with the attainment of a better standard of living. Convincing this population to obtain a college degree or other postsecondary training as a way up is the true need to be filled in Christian and surrounding counties.

According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census 1990, the total population of the four counties is 96,866. Figure 3 indicates the percentages of total populations below poverty level by county relative to the State of Kentucky and the U.S. Christian County alone has an alarming 20.1% of population below poverty level (40.9% of which are black), 68%

higher than that of the entire U.S. Collectively, the four county area's 18.8% poverty rate for the entire population is 5.2 percentage points above the national average.

Unfortunately, according to the "Demographic and Income Forecast Report of the Tennessee Valley Authority", the number of household incomes under poverty level within SW Kentucky will increase approximately 16.6% by the end of the 1994 year.

As well, unemployment rates for these counties are considerably higher than the national average as indicated in Figure 4 (overhead).

Additionally, the service area is considered distant and "rurally isolated" in relation to the entire state and support resources available. Collectively, the populations of these counties are 82.5% rural (Figure 5, overhead). Due to the absence of an existing urban area, many students find centers for training inaccessible; this factor contributes to academic and cultural illiteracy. Additionally, the Acorn Area Profile states the number of rural low income households are 5% higher than that of the national average.

Median family income data are just as dismal. As indicated in Figure 6 the median family income for Christian County is 37% below the U.S median while that of Todd County is 39% below. Together, the median family incomes for all four counties is an astonishing 25% below the national average and 12% below that of Kentucky.

The economic demographics continue to be alarming vis-a-vis the large percentage of students from low-income families enrolled in the thirteen schools U.K.'s Hopkinsville Community College ETSP

serves in the Pennyrile. The Superintendent's Annual Performance Report for each of the counties in the service area for 1992 - 93 indicates a frightfully high percentage of students from low-income families (Figure 7, overhead).

Regretfully, after a close review of the Superintendent Annual Reports for each county school system in the service area for 1990-91, 91-92, and 92-93, the percentage of students from low income families continues to increase, as the Tennessee Valley Authority's "Demographic and Income Forecast Report" indeed predicted.

Figure 8 (overhead) illustrates the estimated number and percentage of low-income students by county & school in grades 6 - 12 in the service area. Given the high percentage of low-income families in the service area and the "2.6-children-per-family" average, it is not surprising that approximately 42% of the entire grade 6 - 12 school population is low-income; 25% (775) of that low-income grade 6 - 12 student population is non-white.

In Christian, Lyon, Todd, and Trigg counties there are 52,109 individuals 25 years of age and older who do not have a bachelor's degree, 91% of the adult population. These data are shown by county with documentation in the following Figure 9 (overhead).

In comparing these educationally disadvantaged numbers against the state, region, and nation, the conclusion is unsettling: our four-county service area's 91% of the adult population without a college degree is among the highest in the state and nation. The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac (8-25-93) indicates 20.3% of the U.S. adult population and 13.6% of Kentucky's has a 4-year degree compared to the minor 9% in the service area who hold a

bachelor's degree.

Therefore, Figure 9 demonstrates yet another substantial need for help and intervention services. The high absence of college degrees in the service area is a reflection of a number of factors: largely rural family priorities which do not value education, economic hardship, the lack of consideration of a degree as an option, and, on the part of many, simply being afraid to try. College buildings and college professors are unknown entities and thus intimidating. And, when parents do not insist on college and the value of education, there is little incentive to walk onto a college campus and try to enroll in "something" called a major. Thus, many avoid this unknown and ominous "thing" called college. Moreover, many of the male population think that being educated is not manly and popular with their peers.

Figure 10 (overhead) depicts an extraordinarily high number and percentage of first generation students enrolled for the 1992 - 93 school year in Christian, Lyon, Todd, and Trigg county schools. Of the 6,584 first generation students approximately 1,562 are non-white, 24% of the total grades 6 - 12 first generation student population.

Economic hardship and rural family priorities which do not traditionally value education serve as continued barriers for many students who fail to complete their high school requirements or enroll in postsecondary education programs. Figure 11 (overhead) demonstrates what the Kentucky State Department of Education refers to as the "graduation rate", i.e. the percentage of ninth graders who complete high school. While the Kentucky Department of

Education finds it not politically correct to characterize Figure 11 data as a "drop-out" rate, these data are absolutely essential to establish a true picture of the high percentages of students who fail to graduate for whatever reason. Nearly 47% of students who began the 9th grade in Christian county failed to complete high school in 1991; in 1992, 37% failed to complete high school, a 10% improvement we feel is directly attributable to our Talent Search Program workshops, counseling, and activities. Collectively, the 4-county service area had nearly 31% fail to complete high school in '91 and almost 25% in '92, a virtual 6% improvement. Considering that our Talent Search Program currently works with 760 of the FG/LI "at-risk" population, this 6% increase in the graduation rate is gratifying.

Figures 12 and 13 (overhead) illustrate drop out rates by school for each of the three preceding years. While Figure 12 does not manifest a high drop out rate for students in grades 6 - 8, Figure 13 shows a very high drop out rate in grades 9 - 12, particularly in 3 high schools: Hopkinsville, Christian County, and Todd Central High Schools.

In Kentucky, traditionally the middle school drop out rate has been low principally because the mandatory school attendance age is by law 16. As illustrated in Figure 13 the overall drop out rate for the 4-county service area high schools jumped dramatically from 4.1% in 1991 to 5.7% in 1992. While our service area drop out rate is escalating, Kentucky's average of 2.96% for 1991-92 has declined over the past three years. In providing 1991-92 Kentucky state drop out data the Kentucky Department of Education stated that the

1992 - 93 Annual Percentage of Ninth Graders Completing High School data was not available, due to the controversial nature of this statistic. In speaking this past Monday with Kevin Hill, Research Consultant for the KY Dept of Education, the Department has not yet determined whether or not it will continue to generate this kind of statistic.

In any case, the most disturbing increase in drop out rates lies in the 2 Christian County high schools. These 2 high schools alone represent the highest average of 7.1% for 92-93, a substantive increase from the 1991-92 4.5% rate and, alarmingly, more than double the drop out rate for the entire state of Kentucky (240% higher). Note, as well, that 64% of the entire target school age population belongs to Christian County schools. Coupled with Christian County's dismal 63.1% "graduation rate" (percentage of ninth graders completing high school as referenced previously), the need for individual counseling is unquestionably critical!

Figure 14 provides a graphic view of the low postsecondary enrollment data for our 4-county service area high schools. According to the Kentucky Department of Education 52% of all Kentucky High School graduates in 1992 enrolled in postsecondary institutions. At the close of the 1992-93 school year 48% of the high school graduates in our service area enrolled in postsecondary education, 4% below the Kentucky state average. The Statistical Abstract of the United States:1992 indicates that Kentucky continues to rank in the lowest quadrant of states in percentage of postsecondary enrollment.

Our particular Talent Search Project was funded in October of 1991 for the first time, firmly established in our service area schools by March of 1992, and subsequently granted continuation monies through the cycle ending September 30, 1994. With the intervention services provided by our Talent Search Program in 1992, the postsecondary enrollment rates have improved most markedly in the 2 high schools in Christian County (3% increase), Lyon County High School (12% increase), and Todd County High School (1%). While the improvement may appear to be modest, the barriers which deter LI/FG students from entering or resuming programs of postsecondary education are significantly intrusive: paucity of information about higher education institutions and programs of study; lack of parental understanding and help; insufficient number of school counselors to provide assistance in admissions, housing, and financial aid applications; "rural" isolation from postsecondary institutions; and inadequate preparation in the basic skills of reading, writing, and mathematics. Without the assistance of our Talent Search counselors, any one of these barriers could be insurmountable to postsecondary entry.

The process of obtaining postsecondary educational resource information, applying for admission, financial aid, housing, and selecting a major course of study is often overwhelming for the LI/FG youth. It is particularly frustrating when these culturally, economically disadvantaged young people originate from a community environment lacking sorely in experience with and exposure to higher education and diverse career alternatives. Unfortunately, the youth in our service area know little about

available programs of study, the array of occupations and skills necessary to seek, maintain, and advance in the myriad of career choices and opportunities. Consequently, the 52%, on average, of the service county high school graduates failing to enter postsecondary institutions oftentimes find themselves in menial, low-paying jobs far below their potential. The dreary economy of our Pennyrile regions demands that residents seeking employment possess more than a minimum of skills with which to enter the world of work. The importance of career planning, logical decision making skills, pre-college and college curriculum guidance, and counseling are essential to the work of our Talent Search Project & other intervention programs, if we are to combat effectively the low postsecondary enrollment and training in this region. Such career counseling experiences for the LI/FG students in our target area have long been lacking in our schools.

Unfortunately, local industry has to import much of its labor force simply because our LI/FG students are not getting the required postsecondary and/or vocational/technical training to enter this region's world of work. Therefore, our community must begin to give this apparent deficiency the paramount attention it requires in our target area schools grades 6 -12. The University of Kentucky's Hopkinsville Community College and Talent Search Program recognize the fact that an institution's "open door" policy does not create equal opportunity and frequently admits students who are highly motivated but have yet to demonstrate adequate preparation in the basic skills of reading, writing, and mathematics. An "open

door" policy can easily become a revolving door for many LI/FG students in the service area, if we do not offer the necessary postsecondary counseling to meet their needs.

Although most of our service area school districts attempt to provide career counseling, financial aid workshops, and personal counseling, these services are not specifically targeted for the LI/FG students most in need of such services. Figure 15 focuses clearly on the high ratio of students to school counselors in our target middle and high schools.

The average ratio of 1 counselor to 423 students in the middle schools and 1 to 499 in the area high schools for this past year was inordinately high. Both the American Counselors Association and the Kentucky Counselors Association recommend a 1/300 ratio of counselor to student.

Local public school counselors are besieged with paper work. They are responsible for the annual registration and withdrawal of students, monitoring Chapter I and other entitlement programs, Special Education students, a myriad of testing assessments, writing and math portfolios for all high school students, overseeing graduation requirements, and a legion of other routine counseling duties. Where is there time for the essential postsecondary educational counseling for seniors and graduates? Few of these counselors ever find the time to acquire expertise and keep up-to-date on the numerous financial aid resources and the changing application procedures. If we hope to meet the needs of the LI/FG students and give them the necessary pre-college counseling the majority of students are not receiving,

our community must consider other support services, particularly Talent Search and Upward Bound, those entitlements available through the Higher Education Act of 1965.

Compilation of information from the Pennyrile Area Development District, the Bureau of the Census (1990), the Kentucky Department of Education, and the County School Boards of Education indicates that the number and percentages eligible to be served in the target area include 3100 low income (42% of the grade 6-12 population) and 6584 first generation students (89% of the grade 6-12 pool). The following data include those who have completed fifth grade or are within the 11 - 27 age group. These figures do not include drop outs, "stop outs", or veterans. Thus, it is a reasonable assumption that the numbers eligible to be served by our Talent Search Program are considerably higher. Figure 16 includes a summary of the estimated number of students to be served in each of the target schools in each of the four counties of our service area. As you can see, unfortunately only a small percentage of those at risk students who need individual attention can receive the services so desperately needed.

Figure 17 charts the percentage of adults in the target area who do not have a high school diploma or its equivalent. Note that nearly 47% of Kentucky's adult population do not have a high school education compared to 33.5% on the national level. 47% of the adult population in our 4-county target area do not have a high school diploma, almost 1 of every 2 people. Such a low level of educational attainment both directly and indirectly affects student academic achievement and persistence in our

target schools.

The indications of statistics such as these for minorities living in the service area are significantly disturbing. Nearly 15% of the 4-county population is of minority racial or ethnic background, 7% higher than that of the entire state of Kentucky. Figure 18 and 19 illustrate graphically the percentage of non-white population and minority students respectively in the Pennyrile. Christian County, the largest county in terms of low income, first generation population in the target area, is 28% non-white and 20.2% of its population is below the poverty level (40.9% of which are black). The 1990 Census Profile Report indicates that the average educational attainment level for blacks in our service counties collectively is grade 10.2 as compared to 10.8 for the white population.

Additionally, many of the low income households in the Pennyrile are headed by single parents who are principally female (Figure 20). Thirty-eight percent of the 4-county target families are managed by females; this distressing figure rates 23 percentage points above the state average.

Figure 21 lists the per capita incomes by service counties, state, and nation. With this already dismal plethora of demographic data, the per capita income for the entire Pennyrile service area is one of the lowest in the nation (\$9,785), over 40 percentage points below Kentucky's and almost 50% below that of the U.S.

Additional data, not shown in charts or graphs, continues to paint a bleak demography. According to Mr. Frank Kirk of the

Department of Social Insurance in Frankfort, Kentucky, currently 8% of the Pennyrile service area adults are receiving Aid for Dependent Children while 22% are receiving Food Stamps. These income statistics alone cannot reflect adequately the poverty, the poor housing, and the unfortunate low value placed on the importance of education by the LI/FG residents of our target service area.

While a majority of these "at-risk" students are receiving little secondary and almost no postsecondary education counseling, their greatest frustration lies with the intricate process of applying for and obtaining financial aid. Among those financial aid sources utilized by our target students are: the Pell Grant, Supplemental State Educational Grant, Kentucky College Access Program, Perkins Loan, Stafford Loan, College Work Study, JTPA, Vocational Rehab., institutional scholarships, private scholarships, AFDC, Guaranteed Student Loan, and a host of others. It is not uncommon for these students to process as many as 10 to 12 applications for financial assistance. Thus, without the knowledge and help of capable, sensitive counselors & support services agents, many of these students would simply fail to follow through, despairing of a financial aid system that requires knowledge, time, and attention. Unfortunately, parents of these potential students are more often than not less familiar with entrance and financial aid procedures. Yet, in just three years since the inception of HCC's Talent Search Program, we have established liaison with every financial aid office and funding agency resulting in extensive coordination in the

"packaging" of financial aid for students from our target area.

Figure 22 charts the available services in the 4-county service area. N.B.: the KEY at the bottom of the chart.

In summary, for many Americans a college education seems like an impossible dream. And for others, higher education is beyond their dreams. The barriers to equal educational opportunity are double-edged. In addition to economic barriers, there are class, social and cultural barriers that limit access to higher education. Many low-income young people and their parents simply do not know what most middle-income and college-educated families take for granted about the value, advantages, availability and the requirements of a college education. All too often, disadvantaged high school youth are not encouraged at home or at school to consider postsecondary education. Nor do they understand the importance of taking high school courses that will help them prepare for college. Those disadvantaged students who do make it to college tend to be underprepared academically. Disadvantaged students are often unaware of the costs of postsecondary education, their eligibility for financial aid programs and how to apply. Many lack confidence in themselves and their ability to learn. The Higher Education Act of 1965 established a series of programs to help students overcome these kinds of class, social and cultural barriers to higher education. They are known as TRIO Programs and they provide a comprehensive array of information, counseling, academic instruction, and support services to disadvantaged students in high school and in college. TRIO Programs reach out with the light of opportunity where there is none. TRIO Programs

help provide opportunity where it does not exist. TRIO Programs
create opportunity.