

## FACT SHEET

### **Who Are California's At-Risk Kids?**

*Options for Youth is singularly focused on providing quality educational services to thousands of at-risk students throughout California. The following is an overview of who these students are and why they are at-risk.*

### **What Does "At-Risk" Mean?**

"At-Risk" refers to students who are in danger – or "at risk" of dropping out of school and society

### **Who Are "At-Risk" Students?**

Typically, at-risk students come from families that are:

- low-income
- ethnic minorities — predominantly Hispanic or African American
- inner-city or rural

### **What Causes a Student to Become "At-Risk?"**

Students find themselves at risk of dropping out for any number of reasons. Often these are students who:

- don't fit in with or have already left traditional schools
- are being bullied
- have unplanned pregnancies
- are single or teen parents
- have a history of truancy
- are in the juvenile justice system
- have had problems with the law
- have behavioral issues
- have health issues
- are learning below grade level
- have learning disabilities preventing them from keeping pace

### **Why Should Society Care About "At-Risk" Students?**

There is a perception in the United States that a student's destiny is already determined by the third grade.

While successful pre-school and early learning are indeed important indicators, it is never too late to recover a student. Consider:

- OFY Public Charter Schools are able to successfully help up to 60 percent of at-risk students return to public school or earn a high school diploma
- 50 percent of dropouts are unemployed
- An estimated two-thirds of all prison inmates are dropouts
- The net lifetime economic benefit to the public purse for each new high school graduate is \$127,000 and the benefits are 2.5 times greater than the costs. (*Teachers College, Columbia University, January 2007*)



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### Who We Are

Options for Youth (OFY) Public Charter Schools are run by John and Joan Hall, educators who came out of Los Angeles Unified School District and have dedicated their lives to helping at-risk students. Founded in 1987 as a contracted service of the LAUSD, OFY is one of the oldest charter schools in California, with five charters around the state. Its sister school, Opportunities for Learning (OFL) was established in 1999 and has four charter schools in Southern California. Combined, both schools teach over 20,000 students annually statewide.

### What We Do

Simply put, we are singularly focused on teenagers who are in danger of dropping out of school. We care about them. We believe in them. We see value in them. Our experience has shown it is possible to turn these lives around. Our mission is critical: teenagers who drop out of school also are highly likely to drop out of society, which can hardly afford the poverty, unemployment, crime, suicide, drug abuse, teen pregnancy and other ills that often shadow dropouts.

### Our Students

Our students reflect the communities we serve: primarily low-income, Hispanic or other ethnic-minority. For many reasons, these students have fallen behind, not adapted to a traditional school setting, have dropped out or are at-risk of dropping out of school and society. But, we believe they're full of promise and potential.

### Our Approach

The following mix of critical elements has made OFY and OFL programs highly successful in reaching at-risk students:

- Independent, self-paced, one-on-one directed learning
- Environment free from negative distractions of a mega-school setting
- Focus on state standards and continuous learning with more school days
- Goal is to make sure all students earn a high school diploma
- Inspire students to achieve their dreams through education
- Experiential learning and intense focus on one or two courses at a time

### Our Results

During the past 20 years we have been highly effective in helping teens attain academic recovery. We are among the most well-documented charter schools in the nation. All of our programs receive extensive independent reviews conducted annually by Dr. James Catterall, Professor at the Graduate School of Education and Information, University of California at Los Angeles. Our schools recently showed up to a 70-percent success rate in graduating or returning students to traditional schools. Furthermore, the schools do well on the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE), which is widely considered the key measurement by the State of California. In this area, **OFY and OFL charter schools' passage rates either meet or exceed the rates of all alternative schools in the counties where they operate.** This is a dramatic accomplishment considering the challenges in teaching at-risk students.



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**Dropping Out: By the Numbers**

- More than **1,300 students** drop out of school every day
- **30 percent** of Hispanic youths are dropouts
- **14 percent** of African American youths are dropouts
- **8 percent** of Caucasian youths are dropouts
- High school dropouts make **43 percent less money** in the workplace than those with diplomas
- More than **half** of all dropouts are **unemployed**
- Dropouts are **three times as likely** to face poverty and require public assistance than are high school graduates
- **5.5 million** people age 16 to 24 are **out of school and out of work**
- An estimated **30 percent** of California high school students **never graduate**
- An estimated **two-thirds** of all **prison inmates** are dropouts

*Source: The Ad Council*



## HIGHLIGHTS

### Rigor

- Student passage rates on the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) exceeded those of comparable schools and student peer groups in the districts we serve.
- 100 % of our teachers are No Child Left Behind (NCLB) compliant.
- All OFY schools rank in the top 10 when compared to the state's model continuation schools.
- API scores average 65.5 points higher than the alternative schools in the districts in which we operate
- All OFY charters have been renewed by their authorizing school districts.
- All of OFY Charters are Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) accredited
- All OFY curriculum falls within the guidelines of University of California and the NCAA

### Relevance

- Students attend our schools by choice.
- Students sign a contract that states they pledge to earn a high school diploma and that they have a dream they will achieve through education.
- OFY awards academic scholarships based on need, teacher recommendation and submitted essays
- OFY offers Small Group Instruction and tutoring to students needing additional assistance
- College Career Days are held each year to offer students guidance and counseling toward their higher education.
- All students are required to do 10 hours of community service in order to graduate.

### Relationships

- An Education Advisory Board comprised of retired superintendents of schools, and esteemed business and community leaders meets quarterly to advise and support Management in its mission of serving at-risk youth and moving them toward graduation.
- OFY offers experiential learning programs, connecting students to their communities.
- Students receive one-on-one attention from credentialed teachers who care about them.
- OFY builds strong relationships with community organizations
- Parent involvement is key to student success.
- OFY works hand in hand with its sponsoring districts to catch students up in credits and return them to their traditional home schools for graduation.

