

OSD makes successful strides in combatting student homelessness

By **Caroline Berry**

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January was recently named National Poverty Awareness Month. The Charger first covered issues of homelessness and poverty in the Oxford School District in its February 2017 issue. A lot has changed since that time. Students can be registered to receive money and resources from their school under the Title X McKinney-Vento Act if they are considered “those who lack a fixed, adequate, and regular nighttime housing.

The OSD receives roughly \$25,000-\$30,000 each year under this Act. Due to the district’s improvements, there are now two students registered under McKinney-Vento at Oxford High School compared to the nine that there were in 2017. Ninety-three students in the OSD were registered in 2017, and now that number is down to nine.

According to a press release by the United State Department of Education, Mississippi received \$13.4 million in April of 2021 to help account for the homeless population that was even further negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. \$800 million was distributed nationally to those living in poverty all across the United States. Despite this, in the district homelessness numbers went down thanks to OSD’s Chief of Accountability & Accreditation, Dr. Suzanne Liddell, and Superintendent Bradley Roberson.

“The number of students enrolled as homeless has gone down over the years of the pandemic and is currently at one of the lowest rates in over ten years,” Liddell said. “During the pandemic, the Oxford School District Child Nutrition Department continued to provide meals and the district continued to provide academic services to homeless stu-

dents. The homeless liaison worked with homeless families to ensure their needs were met.”

Keeping good relationships with these charity and federal service programs has been key to the success of limiting poverty among students.

“The Oxford School district provides a variety of services in the school setting such as a multi-tiered system of support for students experiencing academic challenges that may arise from homelessness,” Liddell said. “Likewise, the Oxford School District, using federal Title I funds as applicable and often in partnership with state and local agencies, collaborates to remove barriers that potentially have a negative impact on students attending school.”

In a highly-ranked public high school with a plethora of resources, it can be easy to forget that not everyone in attendance has a great deal of privilege. It is not without the various programs around Oxford that the OSD partners with that they could provide for students in need. Many of these organizations have clubs or chapters at OHS, allowing students to help make a difference in their community for their peers as well.

“Some of the services provided, include transportation to and from school, additional food on weekends and over breaks, health and hygiene supplies, clothing, and assistance with living expenses,” Liddell said. “Some of our partners include Love Packs, Interfaith Compassion Ministries, the Pantry, and Doors of Hope. The District also provides a homeless liaison to assist families who are experiencing homelessness in navigating available services.”

While Oxford may be doing well at maintaining its support programs, others are not quite as fortunate statewide.

According to the National Center for Homeless Education, the percentage of people under eighteen years old in the state who are below the poverty level is 21.9%.

The National Alliance to End Homelessness found that 1,352 people are homeless on a given night in Mississippi and about 506 in the region containing Oxford. They further that 54% of these people live sheltered and that 24% of these people live in families. These are only a few statistics. While being homeless of course affects people’s lives in a variety of different ways, studies show just how great that effect can be on childhood education.

According to Senior Analyst and researcher for Ararat Capital, Richard McCallum, “For the affected child, homelessness is a tragic loss of childhood and a huge barrier to achieving academically. The disruptions continued to go on to affect peers and teachers alike, meaning the impacts are many and long-lasting.”

The Oxford School District plans to continue adapting and partnering with different governmental organizations to make sure that the students are adequately provided for. When it comes down to it, one might say the most important thing an Oxford High School student can do to help alleviate the issues of homelessness and poverty in the district is by spreading awareness (as the holiday suggests) and bringing light to the fact and that not all of their classmates have a home to do their homework in.

“Meeting the needs of our homeless students is a priority across the district. The district will continue partnering with state and community agencies to ensure our students’ academic needs are met,” Liddell said.

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AT OR BELOW THE POVERTY LINE
#46: MISSISSIPPI’S RANK IN HOMELESS
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1352: NUMBER OF HOMELESS PEOPLE ON
ANY GIVEN NIGHT IN MISSISSIPPI**