

BFT - Q4 2018 Newsletter - working

Welcome!



It's hard to believe that the end of 2018 is already upon us. It is perhaps even more surprising that in just a few short months, the Benton Franklin Trends website and supporting newsletter will celebrate five years in existence. The [Benton-Franklin Trends](#) website provides information on a wide variety of topics across ten categories. It is sponsored by the community and presents information from a neutral perspective.

The newsletter is produced quarterly and the subjects are selected by a steering committee for their relevance. The committee does not always agree on the topics to be featured, causing some debate; which is a healthy way to ensure that the content remains balanced and fresh for you, the reader. In this edition the subjects that rose to the top include: employment by age group, food insecurity, and homelessness. Next quarter's topics will move on to other relevant topics, so stay tuned.

After you read this edition, I encourage you to spend some time poking around on the website. There is a gold mine of data, and you will find yourself referring people to it frequently as you travel through the community. Enjoy.

Kim Shugart, Senior Vice President, Visit Tri-Cities

Indicators in the News:

[The Urban Institute - Interactive Maps](#)



Web chatter around data is implying we are now experiencing a revolution - a data revolution. While not completely new, data visualization advances could be occurring as a part of the revolution because of their ability to explain real-world problems

We at the EWU's Community Indicators offices love data visualization and enjoy sharing what we find interesting. This is partly because we know good data visualization can do an excellent job of explaining complexity, as well as making the data a little more fun, too.

[The Urban Institute's Interactive Map website](#) is a great compilation of interactive data visualizations that takes the complex and simplifies the story. For example, most of the maps referenced include data for every county in the U.S., or a designated boundary, such as "Commuting Zones" as offered in the Mapping America's Futures interactive map. Taking boundaries people are already familiar with (county and state boundaries, for example) and supplying numbers within the boundaries makes the complex simpler.

A few of their mapped data visualizations:

- [Mapping America's Futures](#) - shows where births, deaths, and migration is occurring by age and race across the U.S.
- [State Economic Monitor](#) - multiple indicators offered in the following categories: employment, earnings, housing, taxes, as well as offering historical data.
- [Income and Race Concentration in Public Schools](#) - showing the share of children from low-income families in public schools.
- [A New View of the Housing Boom and Bust](#) - a visualization showing every mortgage in the U.S., including both purchases and refinances, broken down by the race of the purchaser.
- [America's Public Schools Remain Highly Segregated](#) - shows the share of white kids attending majority white schools across the U.S. during the 2011-2012 school year.

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[The Opportunity Atlas - The U.S. Census Bureau Maps the Roots of Social Mobility](#)



In recent times, we hear a lot about how much America is changing - how different we are becoming. Regardless of topic, “the where”, “the what”, and “the who” are the questions that every community indicator must answer. But is this change just hyperbole or can differences be quantified? Let’s see what the [Opportunity Atlas - Roots of Social Mobility](#) data visualization tells

us.

When Kennewick is chosen for the Location, for example, the Outcome section populates, showing that approximately 68% of people who grew up in Kennewick stay in Kennewick as adults. However, changing the featured topic will also change the map showing how other jurisdictions and topics compare to the selected location and outcome.

Although some of the data on the Opportunity Atlas aren’t as up-to-date as indicators on the Benton-Franklin Trends website, the Atlas incorporates maps, data, and graphs that are directly comparable to other locations across the U.S. The geographies include: the nation, each state, every county in the U.S. regardless of population, metropolitan statistical area (MSA), cities, and even census tracts. So search for a city or a region via the Where function.

For “the Who” and “the What” functions, you can select outcomes, including but not limited to income, incarceration rate, employment rate, spousal income, and marriage rate. Additionally, the demographics of the location, including neighborhood characteristics, are available.

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Benton-Franklin Trends Website New Look



The Benton-Franklin Trends website is in the process of being completely changed into a new, even more user friendly format. Very early in 2019, we will usher in an entire new look to the Benton-Franklin Trends website.

While the web design will be new, many of the functions you have become familiar with will not change. For example, the ability to switch views from the combined counties, to Benton or Franklin County individually, or to either Kennewick, Pasco, or Richland will work exactly as it did before. Also, the More Information and Download Data sections work exactly as the previous version.

Search is one of the newest functions available on the Benton-Franklin Trends website. Sitting directly above the new "hamburger" menu in the upper-right corner of the website, the Search function will allow users to type in a key word or phrase to quickly refine a search for relevant indicators.

Inside the menu, you will also find both familiar and new features. They include:

- **Indicators At A Glance** - a complete list of each indicator in the website with a convenient direct hyperlink to each indicator in the title.
- **Resources** - a list of helpful community resources separated by category.
- **In The Press** - indicators that make the news are featured here.
- **Other Sites** - a list of community indicators websites facilitated by Eastern Washington University.
- **Newsletter** - subscribe, manage your account, and view archived newsletters.
- **Blog** - a list of the most recently updated indicators on the Benton-Franklin Trends website.
- **Compare** - choose any two indicators from any community indicators website for a side-by-side comparison.

Community Indicator websites available in the Compare feature include: [Chelan-Douglas Trends](#), [Grant County Trends](#), [Kootenai County](#), [Idaho Trends](#), [NE Washington Trends](#) [Ferry, Pend Oreille, and Stevens Counties], [Skagit County Trends](#), [Spokane County Trends](#), [Walla Walla County Trends](#), and [Yakima Valley Trends](#).

How can I stay involved?

- **Follow us** on social media - find links at the bottom of the open hamburger menu.
- **Subscribe** to our newsletter and blog by sending an email to srichter20@ewu.edu with "Subscribe BFT" in the subject line
- **Send us your photos!** Do you have a high quality digital photo you would like to see on the website? Send it to srichter20@ewu.edu with "BFT Photo" in the subject line. We will be more than happy to add a photo credit with your name on it.

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Commented [RS1]: This is probably redundant, but I wrote this as an opportunity to show off the Hamburger Menu - both the old features but more so the new features.

I don't think its necessarily a bad thing - it's sort of like taking friends on a tour of a remodel - point out the new things and remind them of the cool things that remain

Indicators in Action:

Food Insecurity Shows Decline, But Serious Need Still Exists by Scott Richter & Dr. Patrick Jones

Most Americans find the number of people facing hunger both shocking and unacceptable. Lines at a food bank are a stark reminder that a basic physical need of many Americans is not consistently met. The experience in the Tri Cities is, unfortunately, no exception. A big question has been how many residents find themselves in this situation.

Feeding America, started the [Map the Meal Gap](#) website in 2011 in response to the need for more localized data by local foodbanks, government, and non-profits.

[Previous to 2011](#), many of the

approximately 200 Feeding America member food banks across the U.S. simply used poverty rates as an indicator of local food needs since the data are available at the county level. Around the same time, new research began to discover poverty on its own is not an accurate predictor for hunger. According to Feeding America, "national data reveal that about 58% of people struggling with hunger earn incomes above the federal poverty level and 61% of people living in poor households are food secure."

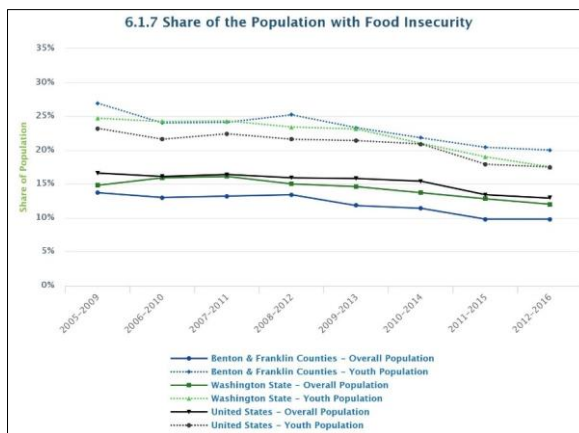
As a result, Feeding America developed a methodology resulting in four main data

estimates that are available at the county-level: overall food-insecurity; child food-insecurity; average meal costs; and food budget shortfalls.

The methodology is not one based on sampled counts at food banks, but rather on based on statistical relationships. The advantage of this approach is its ability to compare estimates of food insecurity for every county in the U.S. - both for the overall population and for children ages 0-17.

The data Feeding America uses in the calculation come from sources such as the

Census Bureau's [Current Population Survey](#) (CPS) and [American Community Survey](#) (ACS), the U.S. Department of Labor's [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) (BLS), the U.S. Department of Agriculture's [Thrifty Food Plan](#) (TFP), and others.



Components of the calculation include (but are not limited to) poverty, employment/unemployment, underemployment, demographics, homeownership, and the cost of food from the [Nieslen Scantrack Service](#). To arrive at statistically valid estimates at the county level, Feeding American aggregates five years' of data. Consequently, the estimates are five-year rolling averages. The most recent period for which estimates are available consists of the years 2012 through 2016.

Looking at the [Share of the Population with Food Insecurity](#) indicator on the Trends website, we see both the share of the overall and youth populations who experienced food insecurity have decreased for all locations in the series since the 2005-2009 time period.

More specifically, data sourced from Feeding America used in this indicator show the share of the total population who were food insecure during the 2012-2016 time period, compared to 2005-2009 in:

- Benton County was 11.1%, decreasing from 12.9%
- Franklin County was 7.0%, decreasing from 15.6%.
- Benton & Franklin Counties combined was 9.8%, decreasing from 13.7%.
- Washington State was 12.0%, decreasing from 14.8%.
- The U.S. was 12.9%, decreasing from 16.6%.

In a similar fashion, all decreasing since the beginning of the series, the share of the youth population experiencing food insecurity during the 2012-2016 time period in:

- Benton County was 20.1%, decreasing from 24.7%.
- Franklin County was 19.8%, decreasing from 31.0%.
- Benton & Franklin Counties combined was 20.0%, decreasing from 26.9%.
- Washington State was 17.5%, decreasing from 24.7%.
- The U.S. was 17.5%, decreasing from 23.2%.

In addition to calculating food insecurity estimates for both the overall and youth

populations, other outcomes provided by Feeding America include: the average cost per meal, and the share of food insecure persons eligible for the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

As estimates, the Feeding America Map the Meal Gap simply can't represent the actual figures of food insecure people. As a result, the true figures could either be higher or lower than the estimates. However, it's the local data most important to local food banks and local food assistance programs.

Drew Meuer, Chief Development Officer with Second Harvest, says, "While the Feeding America data, in some cases, might underestimate what is really happening in a community, it is the only data that estimates hunger across the U.S. down to the local level."

Ultimately, the local estimates are important due to hunger's effect on both life-long personal and public health. As research continues to advance on the impact of food insecurity, conclusions already very much support the concept that food insecure people are more likely to be (or will eventually be) suffering some diminished health aspects as a direct result of poor nutrition than people who are not food insecure.

Meuer says "Food insecurity remains high and has not yet returned to pre-Great Recession levels. The data continues to demonstrate more chronic need, including the many food-insecure people with incomes that put them above the threshold of eligibility for federal nutrition assistance."

Changing Employment by Age Group Shares Follow State Trends

by Scott Richter & Dr. Patrick Jones

The landscape of the American worker has changed over time, with more and more workers ages 55+ participating in the workforce. The Great Recession had a major influence on the overall age of workers, with all too familiar stories of personal finances unprepared for retirement or suffering diminished retirement funds inevitably postponing the retirement calendar.

Considering the age group of workers from an employer or even a community perspective, typically older workers are more experienced having accumulated many relevant skills. Younger workers might not be as experienced, but they typically won't be retiring in the

next few decades. So, a workforce with many older workers may lead to concerns about a wave of retirements occurring at same time. One with many younger workers might lead to concerns about the overall skill level of the workforce. However, this view doesn't take into consideration the overall educational attainment of a younger workforce.

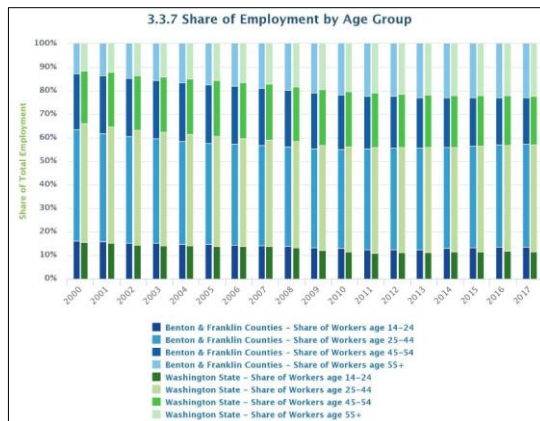
Taking a look at the [Share of Employment by Age Group](#) indicator on the Trends website, we see that all age groups have experienced decreasing shares of the total workforce from 2000 to 2017 - except for the share of workers in the ages 55+ category. This age group has increased from 12.6% of the total workforce in

Benton & Franklin Counties during 2000 to 22.9% in 2017, or a gain of 10.3 percentage points. This is also true for the state, where the share of 55+ workers increased from 11.5% of the total workforce during 2000 to 22.2% in 2017, a gain of 10.7 percentage points.

As individual counties, decreasing shares in all age groups other than workers ages 55+ in both Benton and Franklin closely match trends occurring in the combined counties and the state.

There are a couple of additional factors to

consider based on the civilian labor force participation rate. This rate is the number of those in the workforce, either employed or actively looking for employment, as a percentage of the population older than 16 years. According to the U.S. Department of



Labor, [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) (BLS), nationally: 1) the labor force participation rate by age has been driven by the Baby Boomers over the last seven decades, and 2) the labor force participation rate of 16-19 year olds peaked in the 1970s and has been on a downward trend since. While the latter factor is an ongoing trend, a higher share of 16-19 year olds are enrolled and attending high school now than in the 1970s, with "the most often cited reason for not working as school attendance."

[Indicator 3.3.1](#) shows the path over time for the two counties for the overall civilian labor force participation rate. Clearly, it has declined, now matching that of the state.

According to the [Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis Economic Research](#), the national civilian labor force participation rate for 25 to 54 year olds has decreased from a high mark of 84.6% in January 1999 to 82.3% in October 2018, or a drop of 2.3 percentage points. On the other hand, the civilian labor force participation rate for workers ages 55+ in January 1999 was 31.5%, increasing to 40.1% in October 2018 or a gain of 8.8 percentage points. Clearly, the boomers are behind the shifts in the employed among these age groups.

Personal finance statistics can make it seem like the 55+ worker doesn't have much choice, but that's not the whole story. In a highly competitive job market, there are advantages

for businesses to hire older workers. For example, they are often highly skilled with many decades of experience, often times requiring less training than younger workers making these workers more effective hiring decisions. Additionally, many people 55+ both want to and prefer to work.

According to the [American Association of Retired Persons](#) (AARP), during February 2018, "the unemployment rate for those 55+ was 3.2% — nearly a full point lower than the overall 4.1% rate for the entire U.S. population and drastically lower than the 14.4% rate for teens." AARP also says that with the majority of Americans not saving for retirement, the share of older workers will continue to increase.



Homelessness is Declining - What is Driving the Decline? By Brian Kennedy & Dr. Patrick Jones

Homelessness is a complex issue. Often when walking down the street and we observe somebody living out in the elements we can't help but ask, "What is causing this in our community?" As individuals, we are likely to feel compassion for the person sleeping under the awning of a building or out on the streets but it's truly hard to grasp what has led somebody to live in such conditions without actually knowing the severity of the issue surrounding homelessness.

To help understand how many of our fellow residents find themselves in this situation, the Homelessness Housing and Assistance Act requires an annual count of homeless persons in Washington State. This count is mandated to be taken within the last ten days of January each year. The State will issue a particular day

in which they advise all counties to undertake the count in order to avoid double counting. It's possible that individuals will be utilizing services from different agencies within a given week and be counted more than once. For example, if one homeless shelter undertakes a count on a Monday and a food bank does their count on a Friday, there is a higher likelihood that some individuals may be counted at both locations.

Benton and Franklin Counties have consistently shown a downward trend throughout the series, beginning in 2006, with the exception of a spike in 2008, hinting at impacts of the Great Recession. In 2006 there were 751 homeless individuals, 692 of which were in shelters and 59 were unsheltered. By 2018 this number had dropped to just 128 homeless persons, 83 sheltered and 45 unsheltered.

This reduction implies that the area has fared quite a bit better than the State. In terms of homeless persons per 1,000 residents, Benton

and Franklin Counties began the series at 3.3. This was largely on par with the State, which sat at 3.4 per 1,000. However, the State hasn't experienced the same decline as that of the local community. In the 2018 count, the local rate dropped to just 0.4 per 1,000 residents whereas the State still sat at 3.0 per 1,000.

Which portion of the homeless population is account for this major decline? Looking at [indicator 7.4.1](#) it is clear that the substantial decline in homelessness has largely been

accounted for by the sheltered individuals. With the exception of 2008, the unsheltered homeless hasn't shown a lot of variation. Removing the 2008 outlier, we calculate the average number of unsheltered homeless

persons rests at 52 across the entirety of the series. With a maximum of 73 and a minimum of 22, this series doesn't show a lot of variation. The count of the sheltered homeless is quite different. There have been substantial declines since 2006, with large fluctuations from year to year. With a maximum of 692 in 2006 to a minimum of 78 in 2013, it isn't uncommon to see increases or decreases of over one hundred individuals year to year.

The trend observed in 7.4.1 is, on most accounts positive; however, it runs counter to what is shown on [indicator 7.4.2](#), counting homeless students in the public schools. Here we can see an increasing number of homeless students as defined by the McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act. In the

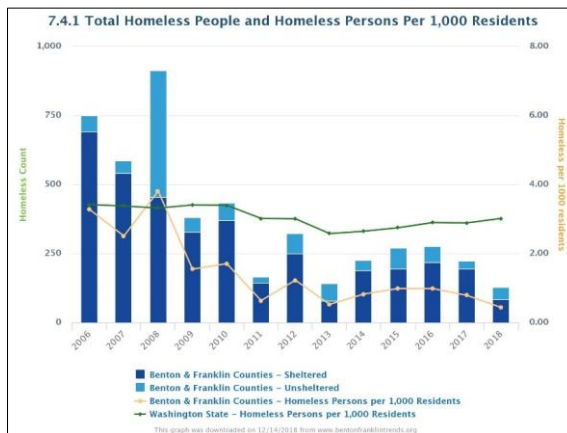
2009-2010 school year, there were about 17 students per 1,000 who were considered homeless, or 3 less than the state estimate at 20 per 1,000 students. By the 2016-2017 school year, the rate of local homeless students increased by ten, to about 27 students per 1,000.

While the increase is troubling, the phenomenon is still growing at a much lower rate than the state, which has now increased to 37 students per 1,000. Individuals that are

counted can range from those typically fall under the imminent risk of being homeless, such as those doubled up with friends or family, or those staying in hotels, to students who are staying in homeless shelters or are unsheltered homeless children. While the two

indicators are not directly comparable, the McKinney-Vento approach provides context to the standardized Point in Time homeless count.

The Point in Time count of homeless isn't without its flaws and most regard it as the floor of the true estimate. Shela Berry of Benton-Franklin Human Services believes there can be quite of bit of variation from year to year that may not be actualized. She cited bad weather as an example. "One year we had two feet of snow and the numbers dropped, getting volunteers is hard and homeless people on the streets tend to disappear into buildings not meant for habitations." Such issues can lead to increased variance in the sample and one should take these estimates as the lower bound of the true count of people living without a home.



The survey gathers a great deal of secondary data on the individuals as well. For example, it asks whether they are veterans or are they have been diagnosed with a serious mental illness or substance use disorder. The questions also cover a variety of issues relating to the family and its composition, such as if they have been impacted by domestic violence or whether or not they are unaccompanied minors without guardians of some kind. Homelessness is often a symptom of other underlying social issues and knowing all these extra details are very important when developing upstream policies aimed at curbing homelessness.

Berry stated that one of the largest drivers of homelessness in the community is the lack of affordable housing. This is evident in the Trends as well, in the comparison of [indicator 7.3.1](#) (median home resale value) and [indicator 3.1.2](#) (median household income). The compound annual growth rate from 2008 to 2017 for median household income was 2.1% in Benton and Franklin Counties. This is just shy of half the growth rate of the median home resale value, at 4.1%. Home prices are rising at a rate significantly faster than incomes are.

Not only are home prices rising at a rapid rate, entry level homes, or starter homes, are becoming more and more scarce in the market as well. [Indicator 7.3.4](#) tracks the number of months it would take to sell the number of homes on the market at the current selling pace. In the 2nd quarter of 2018 there were just a monthly supply of 1.8 of homes under \$80,000 and just 1.5 months for homes listed between \$80,000 and under \$160,000. This is a bit tighter than the current statewide market of 2.2 months for both home price levels. Examining the indicator just four years ago

shows just how the availability of these homes has dropped. In the 2nd quarter of 2014 the monthly supply for homes under \$80,000 was 6.4 and 4.1 months for homes between \$80,000 and \$160,000. At that date, the statewide benchmark was showing a tighter market than Benton and Franklin counties, at 4.2 and 5.2 months, respectively. So in a matter of four years, a market that once had an ample supply has reversed course.

Rising housing prices relative to income and lower availability of starter homes are putting increased pressure on the rental markets which have shown a sharp decrease in rental vacancy, as observed on [indicator 7.2.1](#). Berry goes on to state that “many of the homeless people we have encountered have had housing vouchers so that an agency can pay their rent, only they have nowhere to rent. I feel like our community has a vast pool of resources for people to access from employment, veteran services, and education, which all help sorts of things, but the one thing that will make all these things work is stable housing.”

Tackling the homelessness issue in the community doesn't seem to be a one size fits all type of problem. However, flawed though the Point in Time count may be, it does offer some insight into how to best develop a strategy. It gives policy makers and advocates hard data to help determine the root cause of homelessness in the community. In addition to affordable housing, would a focus on victims of domestic violence help alleviate homelessness, or would one on minors without supporting guardians be more effective? The Point in Time survey offers the relevant organizations a glimpse into the composition of the homeless to help make informed decisions.

5-Questions with: Dr. Rebekah Woods, President of Columbia Basin College



Q1) You've been in your job as president of Columbia Basin College (CBC) for about a year now. Can you share with the readers the college's three highest priorities for the near-term?

A1) The college's top priority is always our students and their success. We are focused on implementing Guided Pathways in order to increase the success of our students. Guided Pathways will provide more structured guidance for our students as they pursue their education to ensure they are able to complete a workplace credential, degree, or transfer to one of our partner institutions. Another priority is the culture of our institution. We are intentionally focused on being a mission-driven institution that lives out our values every day:

student learning; excellence; diversity, equity, and inclusion; sustainability; and the wellbeing of all our employees and students.

Q2) As head of the one of the largest community colleges in Washington State, many of your institution's decisions are doubtlessly driven by data. What are the metrics of CBC that you pay most attention to?

A2) The College monitors its work through metrics that measure the success of our students. This begins with access to the institution. We want to ensure the college – both students and employees – mirror the demographics of the communities we service. We also monitor the success of our students including the completion of workforce credentials, degrees, and transfer to our partner institutions. Last, it is important we are training our students for high-demand and high-wage jobs, therefore we monitor the post-completion metrics of our graduates including job attainment rates and the wages they earn.

Q3) Are there measures found in Benton Franklin Trends that help inform the decisions of CBC leadership?

A3) The State of Washington has a goal that by 2030, 70% of the High School graduating class will complete a postsecondary credential – such as a degree, apprenticeship, or certificate – by age 26. There is work to do across the state, including Benton and Franklin Counties, to accomplish this goal. In 2017, only 34.1% of the population in our counties aged 25 and higher had at least some college, yet almost half (49.6%) of the jobs in our counties required at least some college. This gap in postsecondary credential attainment compared to what is needed to obtain the jobs available in the Tri-Cities defines the outcomes that CBC must accomplish.

Q4) As a new resident to the area, what have been the biggest surprises to your life as a Tri-Citizen?

A4) I continue to be pleased at the amount of support for Columbia Basin College in the Tri-Cities. When I speak to different groups and ask for a show of hands of who has either attended CBC or had a family member attend, the room is full of raised hands. This continues to hold true across the state. EMC Research did a study on Washington Community and Technical Colleges (CTCs) and found that more than 8 in 10 Washingtonians have a connection to a community or technical college, either because they themselves or a family member attended. Plus, 80% of those surveyed had a favorable opinion of CTCs.

They recognized the vital role that CTCs play in higher education, in providing a critical path to a post-secondary education that is necessary for success in today's economy.

Q5) Similarly, as you look at the indicators on the Trends in general, are there any that have surprised you?

A5) Twenty-five percent (25.5) of the population aged 25 or higher only have a High School Diploma or GED, and another 14.7% don't have a Diploma or GED. This continues to tell me how important the educational institutions are in our community – including the K12s and colleges and universities – and the impact we can make by continuing to develop strong partnerships between us.

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