



Good afternoon. My name is Cris Gulacy-Worrel. I'm one of the founding members of Oakmont Education and currently serve as our Vice President. Our network includes public charter schools focused on dropout recovery and career technical education across Ohio, Michigan, and Iowa. What we do is simple: we meet young people where they are, many of whom have been written off, and help them build a future.

This work is deeply personal for me. As a teenager, I was taken from my home and cycled through institutions and programs. It was a disorienting and dehumanizing time. But I made a promise to myself then: that I would change the way we see and serve young people who've been pushed to the margins. That promise lives in every decision we make at Oakmont.

Our students aren't just behind, they're often completely disconnected. The average student who walks through our doors is just under 18, are basic skills deficient in literacy and math and missing more than 80% of the credits required to graduate. Over 95% are economically disadvantaged; one-third are systems-involved youth (homeless, foster care or justice involved). Over 7% are parents themselves and mostly all have experienced some type of childhood trauma. These are youth no longer covered by compulsory education laws. For many, we are the last public option they have.

Ohio is facing a quiet crisis. Over a recent five-year span, more than 112,000 students dropped out of public schools across our state. That's more than a number, that's lost potential, higher incarceration rates, lower lifetime earnings, and generational cycles of poverty. Economists estimate each dropout costs the state over \$300,000 across their lifetime due to lower tax contributions and increased public assistance. This isn't just a social problem—it's an economic one.

At Oakmont, we've built something different. We serve over 5,000 students across Ohio with a model rooted in both recovery and relevance. Our programs incorporate the critical aspects of workforce development. Our career tech pathways use nationally recognized industry credentials to guide instruction while incorporating Work-Based Learning to provide relevant skills experience. Together, along with guidance from local business leaders in each sector - our graduates are prepared to meet the entry-level expectations of employers. Our Pre-Apprenticeship programs include construction, manufacturing, healthcare, and culinary just to name a few.

One differentiator of Oakmont Education is our commitment to a "Quality Life After Graduation". In addition to placement assistance, our Career Navigators and Family Advocates ensure that our graduates have access to those resources necessary to successfully navigate their first year after high school. Our graduates are entering



Ohio's workforce at a time when labor supply shortages are peaking. In fact, in CNBC's 2024 State of the States Report, Ohio ranked 38th in the nation for labor supply. When considering the 1,203 graduates from last year's class and our placement rate of 87%, Oakmont, in 2024 alone, has directly infused over 1,000 entry level workers into Ohio's economy. As our network grows so does the impact - for them, their families, and our State.

Supporting high-quality dropout recovery schools is more than an investment in education, it's an investment in public safety, economic development, and human dignity. These students are not unreachable, they've just been underserved and often excluded.

Ohio has a chance to lead in this work. We urge you to support the kind of funding and accountability that recognizes the unique role schools like Oakmont play. We're not just helping students graduate, we're helping them rebuild their lives.

Thank you for your time and support and helping change the narrative for thousands of students across our state, it's incredible. Additional funding can do for our schools, \$5000 of additional quality school choice funding would be game changing and allow schools to fully scale, develop and implement high-quality dropout recovery programming that doesn't just end with a diploma but rather a successful future through career exposure and experience. We would much rather invest now than pay later. We know that the work we do at dropout recovery schools is critical and we thank you for your support of some of Ohio's most forgotten about students.

Cris Gulacy-Worrel