



# Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma

P.O. Box 1210 Durant, OK 74702  
(580) 924-8280 ■ (800) 522-6170 ■ (580) 920-3178 fax

Gary Batton  
Chief

Jack Austin, Jr.  
Assistant Chief

## TESTIMONY OF JAMES PARRISH CHOCTAW NATION OF OKLAHOMA

Before the House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and  
Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies

Oversight Hearing on Native American Issues  
April 23, 2015

Halito,

Miko Gary Batton micha Chahta vhleha yvt 'Halito' chim achi. Sv hohchifo yvt Jim Parrish. Chahta Anumpa Aiikhvna i noshkoboka micha Nan Ikhvna i noshkoboka sia. Chi afama li kvv sv na yukpa. Himak nittak anumpula chi ka, achukma hoke!

Halito and good morning.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, my name is James Parrish, and I am the Executive Director of Education for the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. On behalf of our Chief, the Honorable Gary Batton, I thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the educational success the Choctaw Nation has realized, and the further challenges we face.

In my current capacity, I am responsible for the Choctaw Nation's School of Choctaw Language, as well as its early childhood and K-12 programs for youth. The overall goal of the Choctaw Nation Education Department is to increase the quality of education in all schools in southeastern Oklahoma. Previously, I worked for 34 years as an educator and school administrator in our public schools. I had direct, first-hand experience with the Title I, Title VII, and IDEA programs.

In recent years, the Choctaw Nation has significantly expanded its support for early childhood through secondary education. Our accomplishments are the direct result of partnerships and collaboration with public schools across our vast treaty territory in southeastern Oklahoma.

As you know, Mr. Chairman, the Choctaw Nation's jurisdictional boundaries encompass approximately 11,000 square miles, including 10½ counties in southeastern Oklahoma. This mostly rural area is home to 85 different school

districts. Because of our large geographic area, checkerboard land ownership, and commingling of tribal and nontribal communities, our challenges in education are a bit different from tribal governments exercising jurisdiction over a contiguous tribal land base with tribally-administered schools. Given its unique situation, Choctaw Nation has just one tribal school, Jones Academy in Hartshorne, Oklahoma. Jones Academy is a stellar model of the top-notch Indian education that can be produced when a tribe like Choctaw Nation partners with the U.S. Bureau of Indian Education (BIE), the U.S. Department of Education, and the local Hartshorne Public Schools.

Most of our Choctaw students, however, attend public schools across our Choctaw territory. There are approximately 8,500 Choctaw students within our treaty territory, and 14,329 Choctaw students throughout all public schools in the state of Oklahoma. The success of Choctaw students thus depends on the success of the public schools with whom we partner. And those schools are supported in important ways by the Title I, Title VII, and IDEA programs that are funded through this Subcommittee.

One shining example of these partnerships is the Choctaw Nation's Partnership Of Summer School Education Program, or "POSSE Program." POSSE works with local school districts to provide summer intervention in reading and math for **any** K-3 student, tribal or non-tribal, attending a public school within Choctaw territory. Selection of eligible students is based on end of year math and reading assessment benchmark scores or teacher recommendations. The summer instruction includes 24 days of learning and mornings are devoted to reading and math. Afternoons provide enrichment opportunities for students in STEM activities as well as Choctaw culture, art, music, and physical education. Morning instruction is delivered in a small group setting with a ratio of 1 teacher per 10 students.

To measure the program's effectiveness, grade level appropriate assessments are given at the beginning and ending of summer school instruction. We have seen remarkable success in this program with students' achievement during the summer, as well as continued into the school year. For example, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> graders from Summer 2014, on average, scored in the 20<sup>th</sup> percentile at the beginning of summer school instruction. They then progressed to the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile by the end of summer school, and then to the 40<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> percentiles as the school year progressed. Intensive summer school helped bridge that gap and prevent summer learning loss. Students are then empowered to achieve even more as they enter regular classrooms during the school year. (See Appendix A)

POSSE's remarkable results are the compilation of many factors. POSSE started as a pilot program and is now expanded to 14 locations throughout Choctaw territory and involves students from 19 school districts. Choctaw Nation hopes to expand and grow POSSE until all 85 school districts are involved throughout all of Choctaw territory. The POSSE summer school program is 100% funded by the Choctaw Nation from its tribal funds. However, increased funding to the U.S. Department of

Education is needed with a focus on tribal educational departments to help this and other results-based programs grow and expand and to serve as a model for Indian Country. Reading opens doors to many great life achievements, and Choctaw Nation wants to make reading skills a reality for all young people in southeastern Oklahoma. Tribal Education Departments need a bigger seat at the table at the federal level to promote positive youth educational and empowerment programs like POSSE.

The Choctaw Nation Tribal Council fully supports this program. It is wonderful to have the support of our Nation's legislative body, but additional federal support is needed to uphold the federal trust responsibility to Indian tribes and their members. Unfortunately, many grants programs and other funding opportunities from the U.S. Department of Education do not expressly list Indian tribes or their Tribal Education Departments as eligible grant applicants alongside states governments and state departments of education and public schools. Tribes like the Choctaw Nation need parity with state departments of education and schools to apply for these grants to support our educational programs. We seek equality of opportunity. Many of the schools that serve tribes are small, remote, rural schools. They do not have the internal capacity to apply for many of these complex federal programs. The Choctaw Nation is the uniting factor among all the school districts in Choctaw territory and has the leadership and capacity to lead these team efforts to positively impact education for all of southeastern Oklahoma.

Nationwide, approximately 90%<sup>1</sup> of tribal youth are **not** served by BIE schools, but instead attend public schools. In Oklahoma alone, 130,000 Native youth are enrolled in public schools. Continued and increased funding to Tribal Education Departments is needed to ensure tribal youth needs are met in public school systems through partnership and collaboration.

Another example of the Choctaw Nation's efforts to partner with school districts, on programs and services they could not otherwise obtain, is the Choctaw Nation Making A Difference Program, MAD, that serves 9-12<sup>th</sup> grade students. Established in 2011, our MAD program helps at risk Choctaw students residing in Choctaw territory to stay in school and graduate. We are taking responsibility for our Choctaw students in public schools to make sure they don't fall through the cracks. We're providing key supplemental assistance to counselors, teachers, and administrators serving our students. Additionally, MAD compiles student achievement and real time data to serve as an early warning system to address a student's individualized learning needs. This program works collaboratively with the Oklahoma State University Educational Research division and Mizuni Inc. to establish formulas that will measure the long term effectiveness of the program by monitoring student performance of the cohort groups (from POSSE and MAD)

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<sup>1</sup> National Indian Education Association, "Cultivated Ground: Effective Teaching Practices for Native Students in a Public High School" p. 4, available online: [http://www.niea.org/data/files/research/dorer.fetter.2013\\_cultivated%20grnd%20effective%20tchnng.pdf](http://www.niea.org/data/files/research/dorer.fetter.2013_cultivated%20grnd%20effective%20tchnng.pdf)

throughout their public school education. As identified Choctaw students enter high school they are assigned a “Making A Difference” counselor. This counselor will provide intervention strategies for students falling “off track” in the areas of attendance, grades, high stakes assessment, on track graduation, and college readiness as well as assist students with academic information to promote education and/or career path beyond high school. Program effectiveness will be measured by Choctaw students’ secondary education graduation rate as well as post-secondary placement. (See Appendix B)

Choctaw’s MAD Program provides an early warning indicator to intervene and positively impact students’ lives. We developed it together with the Oklahoma State Department of Education and our public school districts. To help facilitate and collect data from all our school districts, Choctaw Nation has partnered with Mizuni, a nationwide provider of K12 data management software solutions to create a custom next-generation software platform that delivers secure, cloud-based data management on Choctaw students attending a public school district within the boundaries of the Choctaw Nation. This platform is utilized by the POSSE and MAD programs. We worked diligently with each school district residing in our Nation to form a partnership allowing Choctaw Nation to see data such as grades and attendance on students who have a parent permission form. Mizuni K12 Aspire Platform allows us to see real time data on students. Of 63 high schools in the Choctaw Nation, 51 of those have agreed to allow our Choctaw Nation Education Department to see real time data on students. We hope to reach agreement with the remaining 12 school districts by the end of this school year.

The Choctaw K12 Aspire Platform is a next-generation platform that delivers secure, cloud-based data management solutions for our K-12 District Partners. Aspire provides data visualization, proactive notifications and predictive analysis in a user interface developed with a mobile responsive design. It consists of modules that solve specific problems common to K-12 school districts. The Choctaw K12 application provides an early warning system that delivers active alerts for Choctaw students falling “off track” in the areas of attendance, grades, discipline, high stakes assessment, on track for graduation, and college readiness. Choctaw Nation provides this system free of charge to all school districts that sign up, and many of our schools would not be able to afford sophisticated software like this independently. Additionally, each Choctaw student is assigned a counselor from Choctaw Nation to provide assistance tailored to their needs. This combination of real time quantitative data, as well as a hands-on personal connection is truly “Making A Difference” in the lives of Choctaw students. To our knowledge, there is no other entity or tribe in the country building consortiums of this size and magnitude to serve Native youth.

The School of Choctaw Language is another trail-blazing program that provides cultural and financial benefits to students in our public schools. Currently, Choctaw Nation is working with 38 schools districts throughout our territory to teach the Choctaw language. Another five schools will be added for the next school year.

Choctaw Nation led the advocacy efforts with the Oklahoma Legislature to have Native languages recognized as world languages in Oklahoma's public schools. This victory has opened the door for many students to learn more about their heritage and to have their language taught in school and recognized for academic credit as they work toward high school graduation. School of Choctaw Language instructors are certified teachers by the State of Oklahoma and by the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. The School of Choctaw Language is located in Durant, Oklahoma, but remotes in to 38 schools around our vast treaty territory. This interactive class provides world language teachers to schools that may not be able to afford full time language instructors. Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma saves each of these public schools up to \$50,000 annually by providing for these teachers' salaries and services.

Title I funds are vital to our school districts in southeastern Oklahoma serving Native students. Our schools work with Title I funds to bridge the achievement gap for disadvantaged students and lift up our students. However, our schools need even more resources to enhance their work. State budgets are squeezed tighter than ever, and our schools look to the Choctaw Nation for connections and additional resources. We are working with our schools and continually building programs like POSSE and MAD that build even stronger bridges to help students over the gap and to thrive academically. Our programs supplement the hard work our schools are already doing and help empower administrators, counselors, and teachers as they serve our students. Title VII funds are another valuable resource for our public schools in the Choctaw Nation. Title VII's structure is important as it includes tribal government as well as parent committee participation in providing educational funds to schools serving Native youth and in shaping culturally relevant educational services.

Through its commitment to collaboration and partnership, the Choctaw Nation has realized great benefits for more and more Choctaw students. However, many more students remain in need of these services. We still have a path of ahead of us to bridge academic achievement gaps in the Choctaw Nation and we need the support of this Subcommittee and of the Congress as a whole to reach those goals.

Choctaw Nation was designated as the first tribal Promise Zone by President Obama in 2014. We earned this distinction due to the many challenges we face in our region, and due to proven leadership and capacity of Choctaw Nation to efficiently use resources to make a difference and leverage federal investments in southeastern Oklahoma for all residents through partnership and collaboration.

Promise Zone statistics leading up to the designation included 20% of the population with less than a 12<sup>th</sup> grade education, and 15% of the population that lack basic literacy skills. We are motivated to change these statistics. It is our mission to enhance education for students in southeastern Oklahoma, both tribal and non-tribal residents.

The Promise Zone designation comes with significant priority points on grant applications from many different federal agencies, including the U.S. Department of Education. However, several of these Department of Education grant programs do not include Indian tribes or their Tribal Education Departments as eligible applicants. This creates a barrier to federal funds that could be put to good use in Indian Country. Even though we have “priority” as the **only** tribal Promise Zone in the whole country, we still do not have access to all programing from the U.S. Department of Education.

We are well-positioned to fully implement these programs by working with public school systems serving Native students. We ask for congressional consideration to treat Indian tribes as states, and their Tribal Education Departments as state departments of education, for purposes of determining eligibility to apply and administer all U.S. Department Education grant programs.

We are honored by this opportunity to testify and thank you for your time today. We appreciate your leadership on this Subcommittee, Mr. Chairman, and your stellar commitment to Indian Country and to our homeland, the United States. We are committed to continuing this dialogue and our enduring service to improving educational attainment for all residents of southeastern Oklahoma. Your continued support in these matters is critical to the success of education in Indian Country.

Yakoke (Thank you)

## Appendices

Partnership of Summer School Education, POSSE .....	Appendix A
Making A Difference, MAD .....	Appendix B

# APPENDIX A





***We believe intervention should begin at an early age.***

**We believe education is the best opportunity for individuals to break the cycle of poverty and crime.**

## **Promise Zone Statistics**

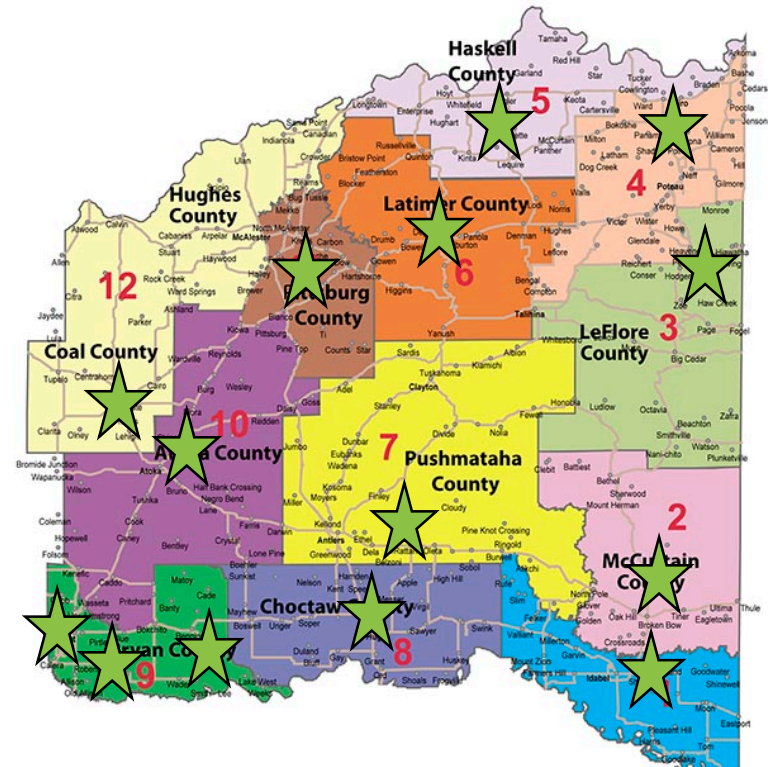
- **Poverty:** The Promise Zone Poverty rate is 22.56%, nearly seven points over the national average. All counties fall within the USDA **Extremely High** Poverty Designation. Nine census tracts with this region have poverty rates over 30%.
- **Crime:** The Promise Zone has the highest rate of violent deaths in the state.
- **Unemployment:** McCurtain and LeFlore Counties have the two highest unemployment rates for the entire state.
- **Education:** 20% of adults have less than a 12<sup>th</sup> grade education and 15% lack basic literacy skills.

# POSSE



PARTNERSHIP OF SUMMER SCHOOL EDUCATION

**2015 Summer School  
14 Locations  
19 Schools Participating**



**85 School Districts in the boundaries of the Choctaw Nation. Approximately 40,000 School Age Students**



The Partnership of Summer School Education (POSSE) is a Choctaw Nation initiative that partners with local school districts within the geographical boundaries of the Choctaw Nation. The program is designed to provide summer **intervention** in reading and math for **any** K-3 student attending a public school within these boundaries.



## Distribution of Responsibilities

Choctaw Nation	School District
Salary	Facility
Supplies	Transportation
Trade Books	Child Nutrition
Summer School Shirts	Access to Computer Labs
Afternoon Snacks	Employees
Curriculum/Teacher Resources	Hire Choctaw Summer Workers
Professional Development	Copy Machine
Assessments	Paper Resources



## Student Selection

Selection of eligible students is based on the end of year math and reading assessment benchmark scores or teacher recommendation. POSSE serves **all** eligible students in kindergarten through third grade who attend school within the geographical boundaries of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.



## Program Summary

- The session includes 24 days of learning
- Mornings are devoted to academic instruction in reading and math
- Afternoon provides enrichment opportunities for students in STEM activities as well as art, music, and physical education
- Morning instruction is delivered in a small group setting with a maximum of 10 students per group



## Typical Daily Schedule

- 7:30-8:15 a.m. Students arrive and eat breakfast in the cafeteria
- 8:15-8:30 a.m. Phonics Dance/Morning Exercise
- 8:30-10:10 a.m. Reading Instruction and Activities
- \*9:45-10:05 Kindergarten Recess and Restroom Break
- \*10:10-10:30 1/2/3 Recess and Restroom Break
- 10:30-11:00 Writing/Vocabulary Building Practice
- 11:00-12:00 Math Instruction and Activities
- 11:30-12:00 Lunch for any noon pick-ups
- 12:00-12:30 Lunch for those staying all day
- 12:30-1:00 Recess/DEAR time
- 1:00-4:30 Afternoon Enrichment Activities
- 4:30 Students are dismissed



<http://choctawsummerlearning.org>

## Theme Based Curriculum

### Year 1

#### Great Outdoor Adventure

Weeks 1 & 2: Camping

Book Studies:

K: Curious George Goes Camping

1: PJ Funnybunny Camps Out

2: Henry and Mudge and the Starry Night

Field trip

Weeks 2 & 3: Space

Book Studies:

K, 1: National Geographic Readers: Planets

2: Midnight on the Moon

Field trip

Weeks 3 & 4: Native American Heritage

Book Study:

K – 2: When Turtle Grew Feathers

Field trip

### Year 2

#### Superhero's in Training

Weeks 1 & 2:

Book Studies:

K: Superhero ABC

1: The Bravest Cat- The True Story of Scarlet, Splat the Cat

2: Magic Treehouse

Field Trip

Weeks 3 & 4:

Book Studies:

K: Superhero ABC

1: Buzz Boy and Fly Guy #9

2: Magic Treehouse

Field Trip

Weeks 5 & 6: Native American Heritage

Book Study:

K – 2: Sarah's Music

Field Trip





<http://choctawsummerlearning.org>

## Theme Based Curriculum

### Year 3

#### Fun in The Sun

Weeks 1 & 2:

Book Studies:

- K: Underwater Alphabet Book
- 1: Splat the Cat: Fishy Tales, Colorful Coral Reefs
- 2: Magic Tree House #9: Dolphins At Daybreak

Field trip

Weeks 2 & 3:

Book Studies:

- K: Underwater Alphabet Book
- 1: One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish
- 2: Dolphins and Sharks: A Nonfiction Companion

Field trip

Weeks 3 & 4: Native American Heritage

Book Study:

- K – 2: Chukfi Rabbit’s Big, Bad Bellyache

Field trip

### Year 4

#### TBD

Weeks 1 & 2:

Book Studies:

- K:
- 1:
- 2:

Field Trip

Weeks 3 & 4:

Book Studies:

- K:
- 1:
- 2:

Field Trip

Weeks 5 & 6: Native American Heritage

Book Study:

- K – 2:

Field Trip



**Assessments:** Assessments are to be given within the first couple of days of summer school and at the end preferably just prior to the July 4<sup>th</sup> holidays.

**Kindergarten Assessments:**

Capital Letter Recognition (# correct out of 26)  
Lower Case Letter Recognition (# correct out of 26)  
Letter Sound Recognition (# correct out of 26)  
Dolch Sight Word Recognition (# correct out of 40)  
Number Recognition (0-20)

**2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Assessments:**

Dolch Sight Word Recognition ( # correct out of 220)  
Star Reading Assessment  
Star Math Assessment

**1<sup>st</sup> Grade Assessments:**

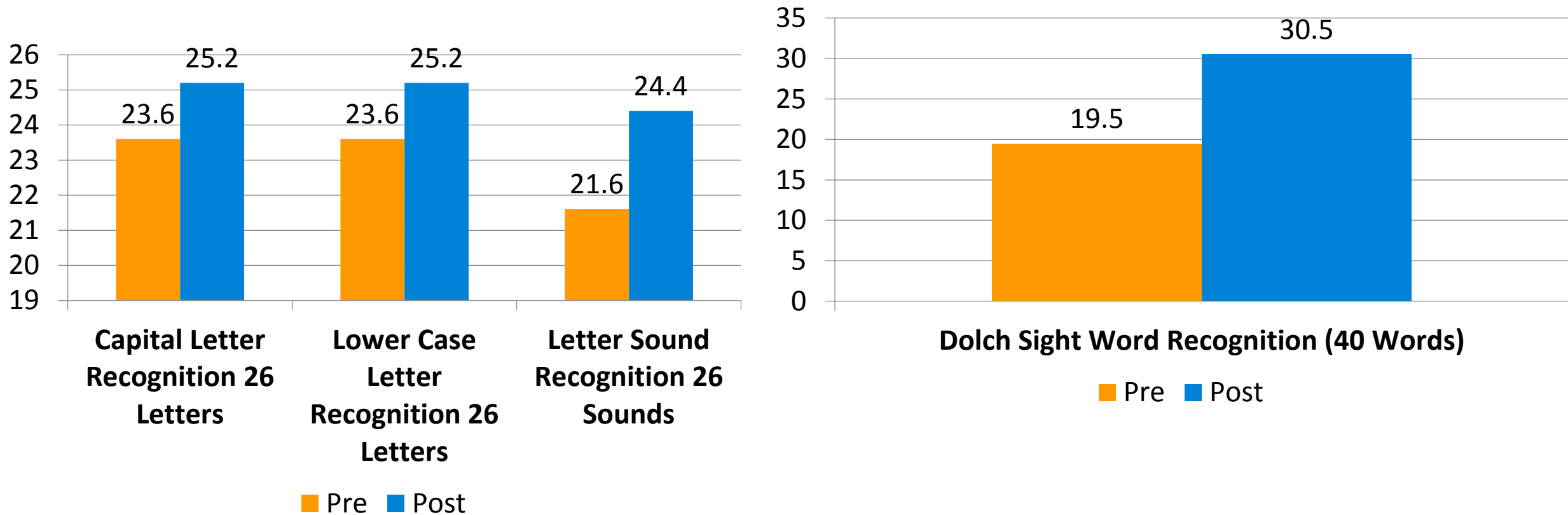
Capital Letter Recognition (# correct out of 26)  
Lower Case Letter Recognition (# correct out of 26)  
Letter Sound Recognition (# correct out of 26)  
Dolch Sight Word Recognition (# correct out of 40)  
Star Reading Assessment

**3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Assessments:**

Dolch Sight Word Recognition ( # correct out of 220)  
Star Reading Assessment  
Star Math Assessment

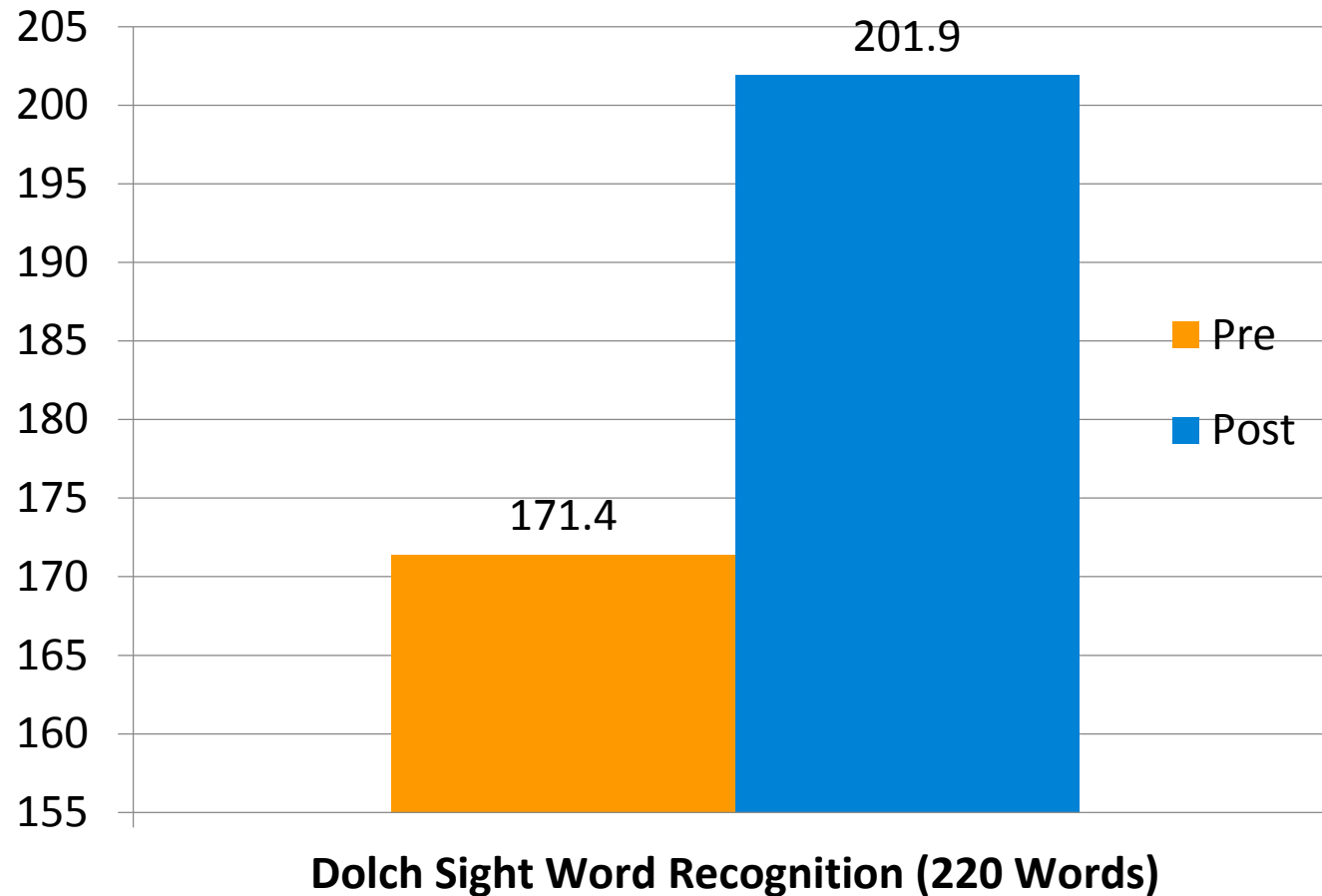


## Kindergarten Assessments



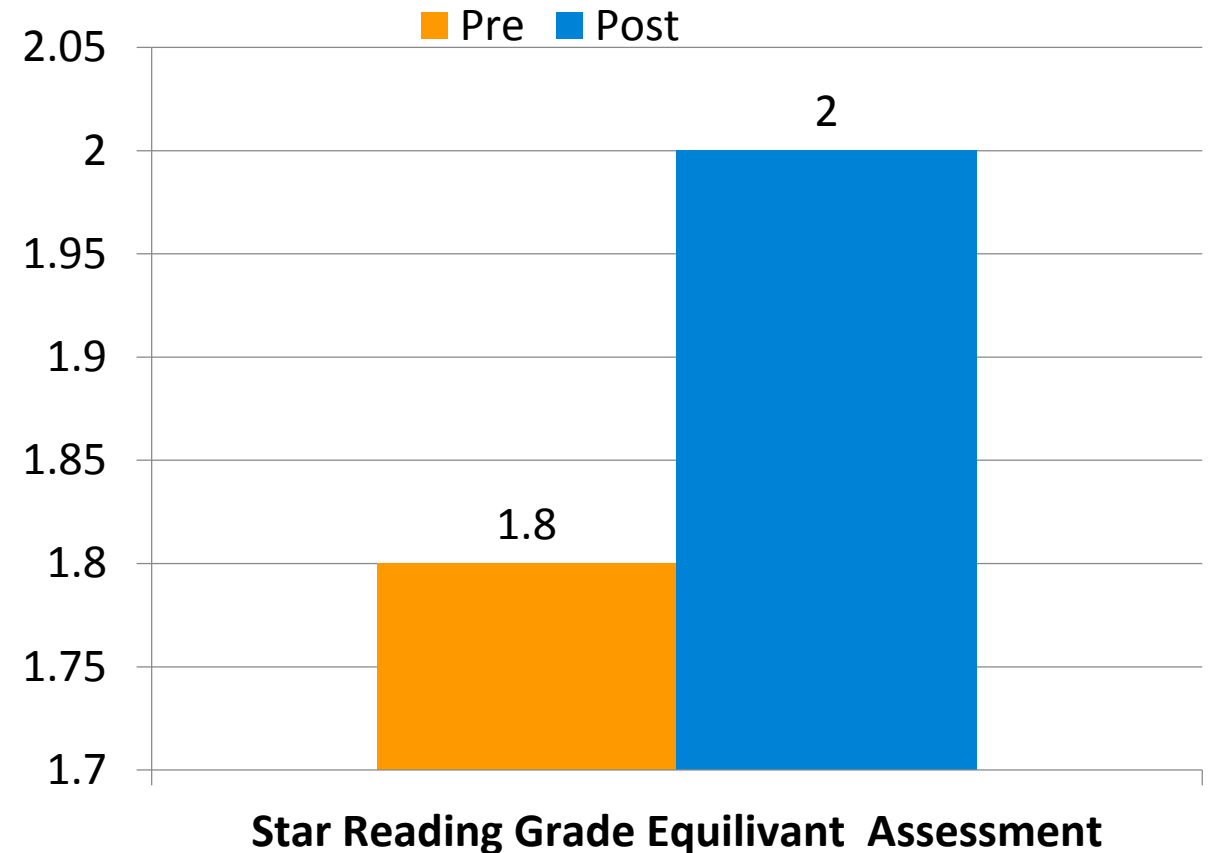
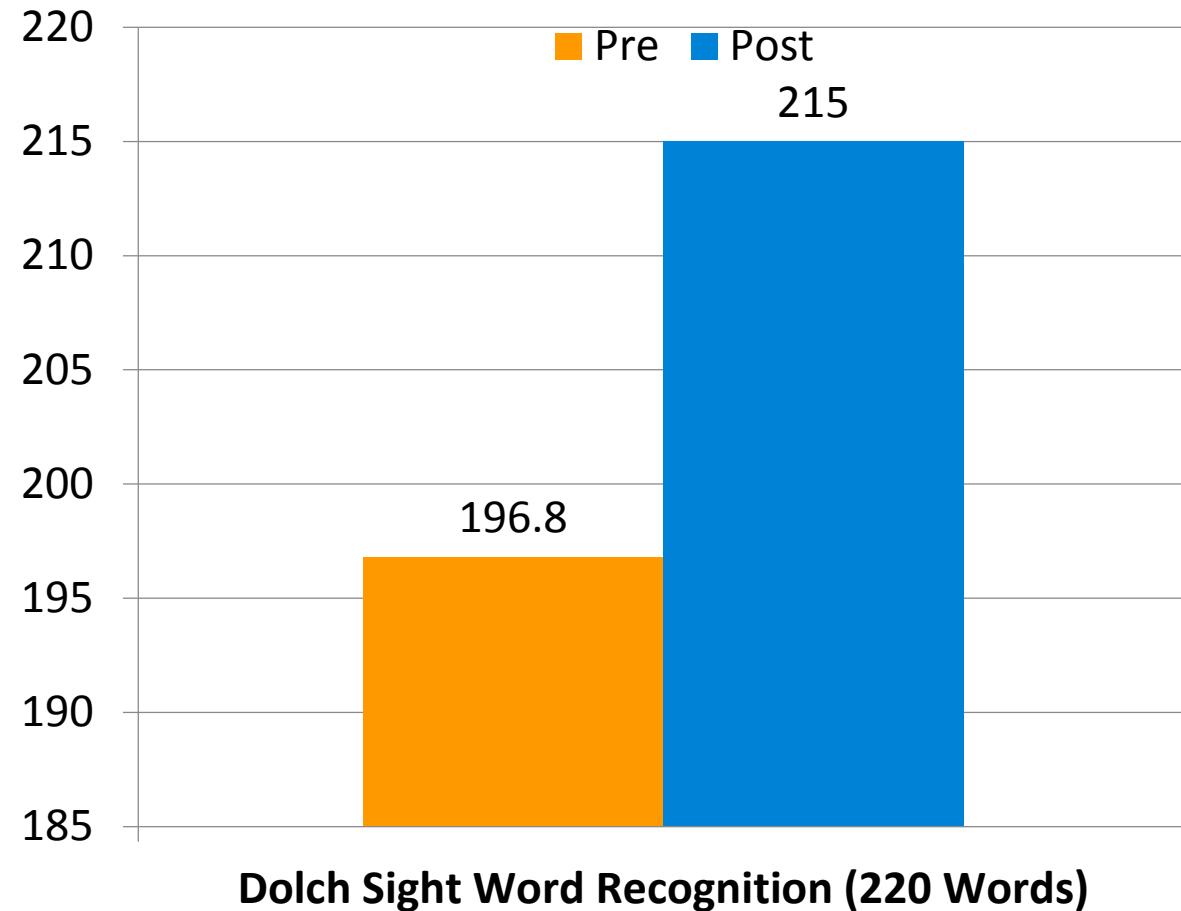


## 1st Grade Assessments





## 2nd Grade Assessments



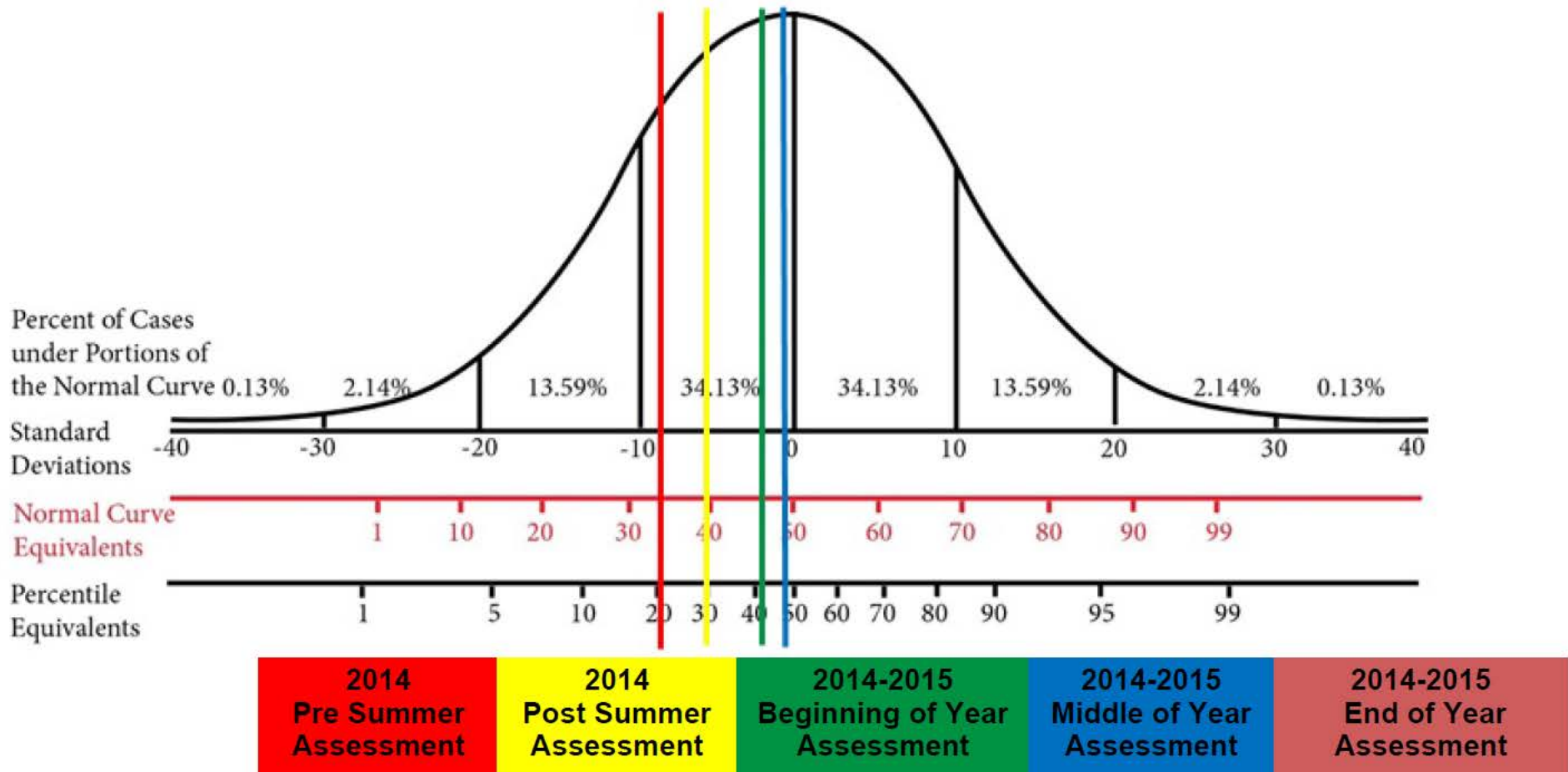
# POSSE

PARTNERSHIP OF SUMMER SCHOOL EDUCATION



Star Reading Assessment

Grade Levels: 2,3





## Partnerships

- Oklahoma State University
- Southeastern Oklahoma State University
- Eastern Oklahoma State College
- University of Oklahoma
- University of Oregon (DIBELS)
- Renaissance Learning (STAR)
- Public Sector



*Together we can ensure that every child is safe, healthy,  
and engaged in learning during the summer.*

1. Increase the duration, intensity, and scope of the traditional summer school model to a comprehensive research-based, 6-week, full-day model that makes summer an essential component of district school reform strategy.
2. Expand participation to all students in school-wide Title I programs, not just those who are struggling academically, and consider expanded year programs that include all students in participating schools.
3. Change the focus from narrow remediation and test preparation to a blended approach of both academic learning AND enrichment activities that provides hands-on, engaging programming that fosters critical 21st Century skills, including collaboration, innovation, creativity, communication, and data analysis.
4. Strengthen and expand partnerships with community-based organizations and public agencies that provide summer activities to align and leverage existing resources, identify and meet gaps in service, improve program quality, and develop shared outcomes for summer success.
5. Include strategies to improve student attendance and engagement by providing healthy food, field trips, recreation, electives, attendance policies, and comprehensive supports.
6. Provide innovative professional development for educators and ensure summer programs offer teachers a chance to test new models of teaching and gain valuable leadership experience.





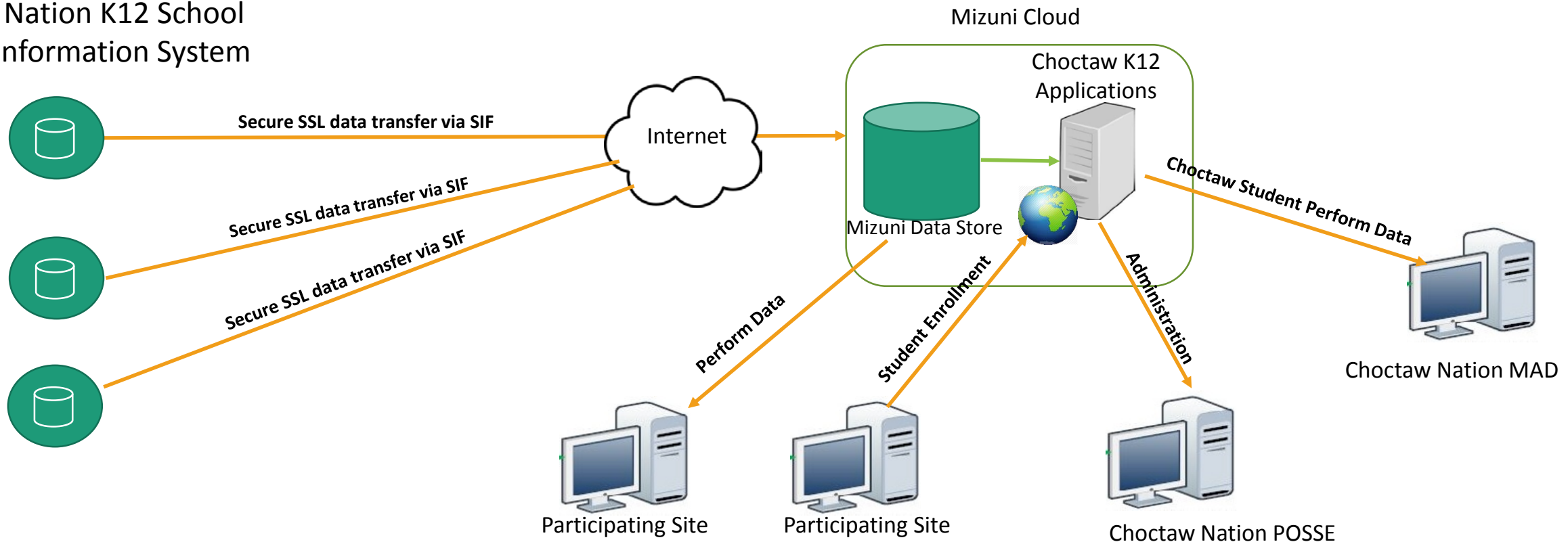
*Together we can ensure that every child is safe, healthy,  
and engaged in learning during the summer.*

7. Include innovative approaches to learning for older students, including proficiency-based learning, flexible credit recovery and acceleration, internships, college visits, and other college and career readiness opportunities that provide targeted interventions and workforce development skills to prepare students for future success.
8. Target key transition periods such as the summers before kindergarten, middle school, high school, and college to ensure students are prepared for success in new environments.
9. Lastly, summers need to move from the periphery to the center of school reform strategies through sustainable and stable funding from Title I and other sources, long-term planning, robust assessment and evaluation, and improved infrastructure and data collection.



## Technology Solution

Choctaw Nation K12 School Student Information System

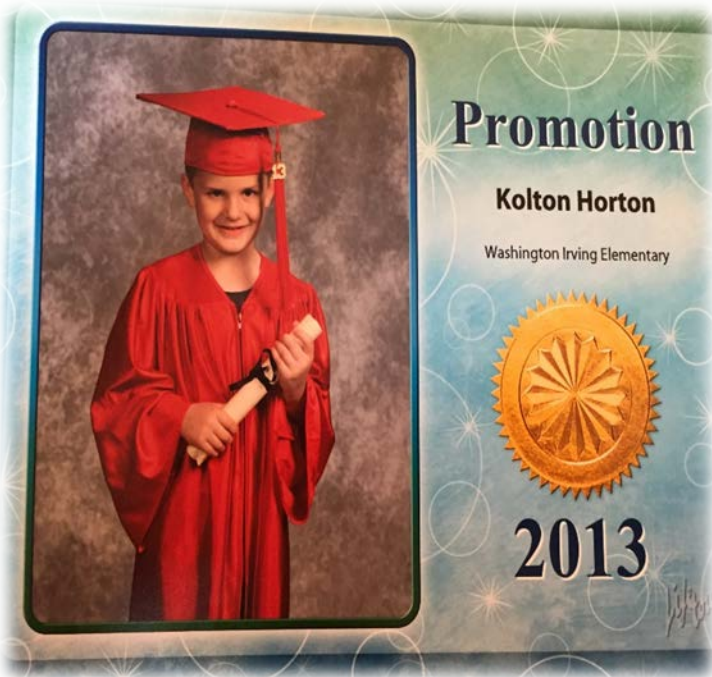


## Kolton Horton

The summer school program provided by Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma brought a new, fun, and exciting way of learning for my son! Kolton was happy to be one of the first few students nominated to be a part of this wonderful program. The program was first launched as an introductory period and would provide strenuous curriculum while enhancing the knowledge of children in the area. While Kolton's testing scores were above average, the program allowed preselected students to enroll to continue to improve their learning skills during the summer. Kolton was not only able to learn the necessary academics while attending the program, he also learned a lot about his Choctaw heritage and was able to experience learning in a profound way.

I do feel that it is important to extend the program to students whom have a proven drive to learn and want to extend their knowledge beyond the yearly academic requirements. After completing the first grade, Kolton was even more excited than usual, about the upcoming summer months. He just knew that summer meant "summer school with the Choctaws". However, Kolton continued to thrive and actually excelled in the first grade academically and was not able to attend the summer school program because his testing scores were too high at the end of the year. This left Kolton wondering why he should go above the required levels if he would not be able to be a part of the cultural activities and learning exercises in the summer as well.

Kolton is now in the second grade and has successfully met and prospered the goals set for a second grade student. His reading level is 4.5-4.9, which translates into fourth grade, fifth month to fourth grade, ninth month. He has successfully made it halfway through the fourth grade math level and has a 101 average in spelling. His teachers continue to compliment him on his knowledge, drive, and overall willingness to learn new things. He treats every problem as if it were a competition or game and will do all he can to solve it! It is amazing what we can learn from a seven year old boy! No problem is too big when you have a mind that continues to grow!



**Kindergarten graduation 2013**



Shown here, the students studied space and learned about astronauts and outer space. Also shown in the picture is a canoe, Native American necklace, and words they learned in the Choctaw language. After completing the camp, the students were able to color a camp bag and take all of the items they made during the summer home to show their parents.

Thank you,

Dana Horton

Lex Jestis



Lex was adopted in April of 2012 from Cali, Colombia. He had never been in a traditional school setting and only spoke Spanish. Beginning school at eight years old was a struggle for us as parents and almost impossible for him. He was trying to learn a new language and learn to read and write all at the same time. The one-on-one attention he received at the Choctaw Nation Summer School Program was a game changer for Lex. He came out of the summer program with more confidence and the understanding that he lacked. I am so thankful Lex had this opportunity.

Leandra Jestis

mother of Lex Jestis, 11 years old

Bokchito, OK

# APPENDIX B



# MAKING A DIFFERENCE

*A Choctaw Nation K-12 Education Program*

***Paula Harp, Senior Director***  
***Lori Wells, Director***  
*(800) 522-6170 Ext. 4105*

*Amanda Spencer, Admin. Asst. /Counselor*  
*Amanda Gentry, Counselor*  
*Padyn Hobgood, Counselor*

***Our Goal: To assist our students with academic information to promote education and/or career path beyond high school, thereby ensuring that our students become successful adults and leaders.***

***Requirements for eligibility:***

*Students must be tribal members of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma and verified by the Making A Difference staff.*

*Each student must have a parent permission form on file with the Choctaw Nation Making A Difference program. (one time application)*

*Any student, 9th-12th grade, attending an accredited high school within the 10 1/2 county service area of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma.*

***What services are available?***

- *ACT Reimbursement*
- *ACT Workshop*
- *College Prep Study guides*
- *School Visits*
- *Parent-Teacher Conferences*
- *College Fair*
- *Notification of event dates*

***Grade level folder with Choctaw Nation Education Program information which includes:***

- *Higher Education*
- *Career Development*
- *CAB (Choctaw Asset Building)*
- *Talent Search-if available*
- *STAR*
- *Summer Youth work program*
- *YAB-Youth Advisory Board*
- *Chahta Foundation*
- *FAFSA*
- *Oklahoma's Promise Application*
- *Adult Tribal Membership application (16 and up)*

Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma  
Making A Difference Program  
P.O. Box 1210  
Durant, OK 74702-1210

# Success Stories for MAD program

## Student A

The Making A Difference staff received an email from a student who was a senior and attended one of the high schools in the 10 ½ county service area of the Choctaw Nation. This student needed assistance with finding a job. She was 18, in her senior year, and had moved from her home due to abuse and neglect. She was living with her best friend's parents. She had no income and needed a job to support herself but also needed money for upcoming expenses regarding her senior year. Without a job, she feared she would have to quit school and work full-time to make ends meet. This student did not have a vehicle.

The MAD counselor visited with the student the next day at the high school. During the visit she spoke with the student about her plans after high school. She wanted to attend culinary school at OSU Okmulgee Tech. She had toured the campus with her high school but was unsure if she would be able to attend. She had taken the ACT. The MAD counselor explained FAFSA guidelines and how to apply. Due to the abuse, the student was scared to ask her parents to fill out the FAFSA. Her counselor with Educational Talent Search was assisting her in filling out the FAFSA and had contacted the parents for them to fill out. The MAD counselor explained the services with the Choctaw Nation such as Higher Education and Career Development funding and how to apply. This student was a straight A student.

Due to the resources of the Choctaw Nation, a job was created at the Grant Casino the next day which was a few blocks from where she was staying. Since she was still in high school, the casino worked with her schedule. This student was able to save her money for the upcoming school year. She worked through the summer months and left for OSU Okmulgee in August to begin college. The Choctaw Nation was able to assist with funds through Higher Education and Career Development and she also received FAFSA and OkPromise.

## Student B

The Making A Difference program helped a student who attended Durant High School. This student maintained good grades while in high school. His parents' income did not meet the guidelines for federal Pell grants. The Making A Difference staff assisted the student in filling out the OJ Harvey scholarship. This student was attending SOSU. He was chosen for the scholarship and was able to attend college and did not have to take out student loans.

# Student C

One of the counselors for the Making A Difference (MAD) program was calling high school counselors to check on students' needs. One of the school counselors informed the MAD counselor of a senior who was very bright and had scored a 26 on her ACT but was experiencing great difficulty at home—the father actually offered to pay the girl (who is his biological daughter) to *move out* of his home.

The senior student had the opportunity to interview for a college scholarship but was involved in an auto accident on the way to the interview and totaled her family's vehicle. This left her with no transportation and as a result was unable to reschedule the interview for a later date. She was very upset because the scholarship could have allowed her to go to college with little to no out-of-pocket expense. She asked her school counselor how she could afford to pay for college if she couldn't even afford to have her braces removed.

This student had been wearing braces for the past six years. The braces had been ready to be removed for the last two years but her parents didn't have the money to have them removed or purchase the retainer. The school counselor had been trying to find an orthodontist who accepted our state insurance to have the braces removed, but kept running into roadblocks due to financial and legal issues. The Making A Difference counselor was able to work with Choctaw Nation's Patient Relations to acquire funding to have the student's braces removed and purchase the retainer.

In the meantime, the MAD counselor called the Native American Director for the college where the student had missed her scholarship interview to see if there was any chance of scheduling a make-up interview. As it happens, the school is planning to host a make-up interview the first week in May, and the student is currently waiting to hear the exact date and time of her interview.