

Behind the numbers

TURNING THE CURVE ON SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

One of the indicators that the FCFC has been tracking since our first *Report* is Public School Attendance (K-12), the overall school attendance for the 16 districts within the county. The most recent value, 93.5% for the 2003-04 school year, is over 3 percentage points higher than the low point reached in the 1995-96 school year and marks the fifth straight year that the value has risen.

No such positive momentum was present six years ago when the FCFC published *Turning the Curve*. The data published in that first *Report* are summarized in **Fig.1**. There was a downward trend from 1991-92 to 1993-94, followed by three years of bouncing around the 91% level, two percentage points below the state's standard, as shown by the two-year moving average indicated by the blue line. The low point, more than 2.2 percentage points below the 1991-92 value, was reached in 1995-96. Montgomery County regularly ranked 9th or 10th lowest among Ohio's ten largest counties during this time period. Individually, between one and four school districts failed to meet the state's standard in any given year except the last year (1996-97) when five districts fell below the standard.

So attendance was a problem ... and it was getting worse. When the FCFC launched its three Strategic Community Initiatives, the School Attendance Indicator became part of the scope of the Alternative Learning Opportunities Team (A.L.O.T.), championed by John E. Moore, Sr. The Team quickly picked apart these data in an attempt to understand the underlying story. They knew that Dayton, being the largest district in the county and one of the largest in the state, was not immune from attendance problems that generally plague urban school districts. But a key observation for the Team was that attendance was a problem all across the county, not just in Dayton. **Fig. 2** shows that between 1991-92 and the low point of 1995-96, attendance at 13 of the county's 16 school districts fell while only three districts saw an increase in attendance. Not only that, but the average decrease was 1.6 points while the average increase was only 0.2 points.

The A.L.O.T. Team began to meet in 1999. Based on these and other data, the Team designed broad responses (the Mentoring Collaborative and the *Education – Think About It!* campaign are described on page 5) that would benefit the entire county. Elements of these plans were

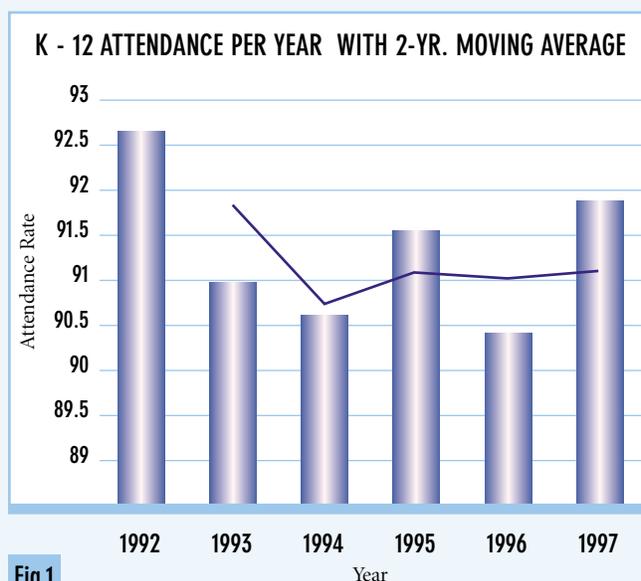


Fig.1

The School Attendance data confronting the FCFC in its first *Report* showed that, after a decline, the two-year moving average (blue line) hovered around 91%.

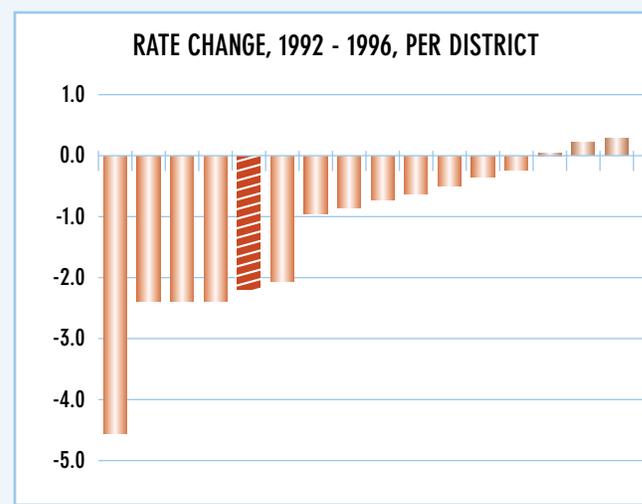


Fig.2

Thirteen districts had a drop in attendance (solid bars) between 1991-92 and 1995-96. The striped bar represents the change for the whole county during this period.



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rolled out over the next couple of years, around the time (Fall of 2000) that the state's new truancy law and its provisions holding parents and guardians more accountable went into effect. Also emerging at this time were the *Easy Steps to Grow Great Kids* campaign and the Parents as Teachers program (pages 4-5), both products of the School Readiness/Fourth Grade Success Team championed by Tom Breitenbach. We cannot say which, if any, of these caused the improvement in attendance, but it stands to reason that the combined efforts of parents, schools and the community at-large – with some of that effort channeled through the FCFC – have played a part. We CAN say that 14 districts had better attendance in 2003-04 than they did in 1998-99 (Fig. 3).

Fig. 4 shows all of the attendance data; the yearly improvement since 1998-99 can clearly be seen. While there is still progress to make – for example, two districts are currently below the state standard for attendance, 93.0% – we can say that **we have turned the curve on attendance.**

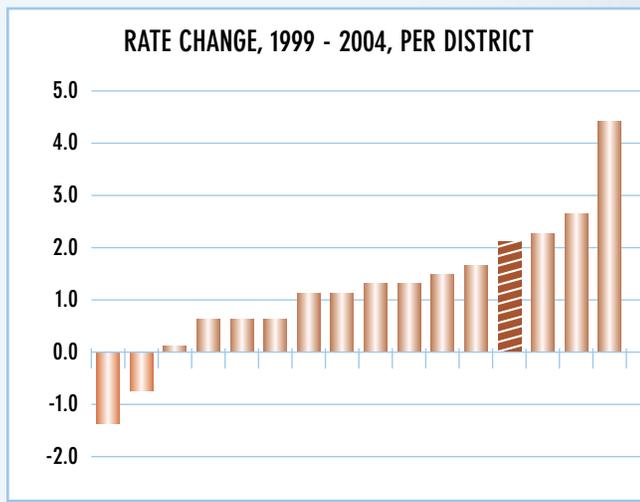
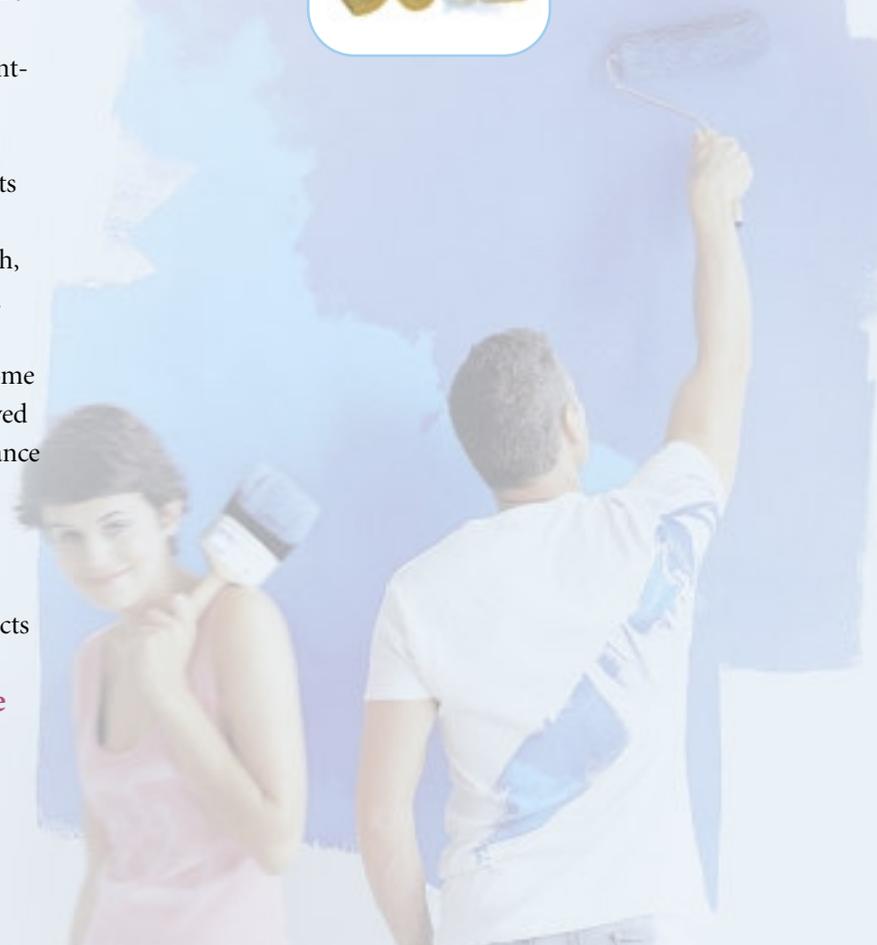


Fig.3

Fourteen districts had improved attendance (solid bars) between 1998-99 and 2003-04. The striped bar represents the change for the whole county during this period.

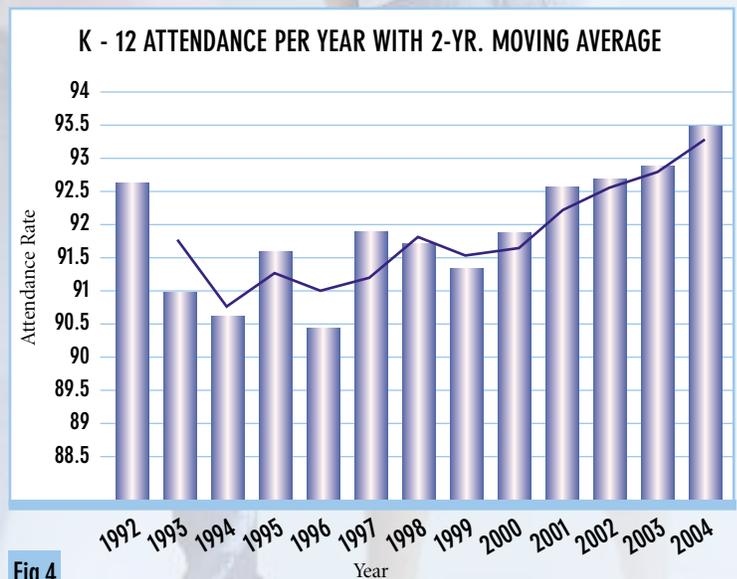


Fig.4

The attendance rate for 2003-04 is the highest since the FCFC began tracking this indicator.