

When you close your eyes and try to imagine hunger in our state, what image comes to mind? Is it our homeless population at a local soup kitchen? Maybe a family who has just been the victim of a recent storm or tornado? While these images are certainly accurate and such scenarios are a prevalent part of our state's struggle with hunger, there is a face of hunger that many do not realize or see: our local student. The numbers for hunger in our state are staggering. According to Feeding America's Map the Meal Gap 2013 report, 1 in 4 children in our state are at risk of laying their heads down tonight without having been fed a proper meal. That same report found that 17 percent of our statewide population is considered food insecure, meaning they are unsure where they will get their next meal. That means as we think about our next lunch or dinner, there are 654,640 fellow Oklahomans who do not have a concrete plan as how they will eat their next meal. Yet, through all the numbers, it is easy to lose sight that these are real people, many of whom you may rub shoulders with every day. Few of us consider that the student that just walked past us, books in hand, could also be heading to class deficient of adequate nutrition. Former Tulsa Public Schools Superintendent Keith Ballard once noted how one of the most difficult aspects of choosing to close school during the winter months is the reality that without school meals, many students will go hungry for the day. The unfortunate reality is there also are students, ranging from pre-school to college, who find themselves entering the classroom daily, who are attempting to learn while also battling hunger. Much of this struggle with hunger can be closely tied to Tulsa's various "food deserts" throughout the city. The U.S. Department of Agriculture defines a food desert as, "urban neighborhoods and rural towns without ready access to fresh, healthy and affordable food." Tulsa Community College sees this first hand at the TCC Northeast Campus, where some students live in a food desert and struggle daily with food

insecurities. These conditions mean that learning can often be hindered by hunger. TCC has made a concerted effort to address these conditions through the launching of Northeast Campus Community Garden, which will have first harvest later this fall. Food On The Move also is coming back to TCC this fall. In addition to the efforts being made at the Northeast Campus, Tulsa Community College is teaming up with the Community Food Bank of Eastern Oklahoma to lead Gov. Mary Fallin's 2015 Feeding Oklahoma Food Drive. Now entering its sixth year, the Feeding Oklahoma Food drive has become an annual initiative created out of Gov. Fallin's passion and commitment to help fight hunger in our state. Last year alone, Gov. Fallin and the Community Foodbank of Eastern Oklahoma were able to raise 1,692,743 pounds of food and \$519,543 in donations, the equivalent of 4 million meals, to feed the hungry. In addition, the Community Food Bank of Eastern Oklahoma distributed more than 21.6 million pounds of food last year. That is the equivalent of more than 18 million meals. TCC and Community Food Bank of Eastern Oklahoma are proud to welcome Gov. Fallin to Tulsa for a food drive rally on Oct. 14 at TCC's Northeast Campus. We encourage all companies, organizations and concerned individuals to join our efforts and help fight hunger in our community. While it would be naïve to believe that one food drive could solve this problem entirely, the truth is that with every dollar donated, the Community Food Bank of Eastern Oklahoma can distribute four meals to those in need. This may mean that every dollar raised during this food drive may result in four fewer students going to class hungry. You can learn more about Gov. Fallin's Feeding Oklahoma Food Drive and register for the Oct. 14 event at okfoodbank.org/events and clicking on "Feeding Oklahoma Banquet." Leigh B. Goodson, is president and CEO of Tulsa Community College, and is co-chair for Gov. Mary Fallin's Feeding Oklahoma Food Drive. Eileen Bradshaw is the executive director of the Community Food Bank of Eastern Oklahoma and also is a co-chair for Gov. Fallin's Feeding Oklahoma Food Drive. Subscribe to Daily Headlines Sign

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