



WEST MICHIGAN
LEADERSHIP
COLLABORATIVE
2015

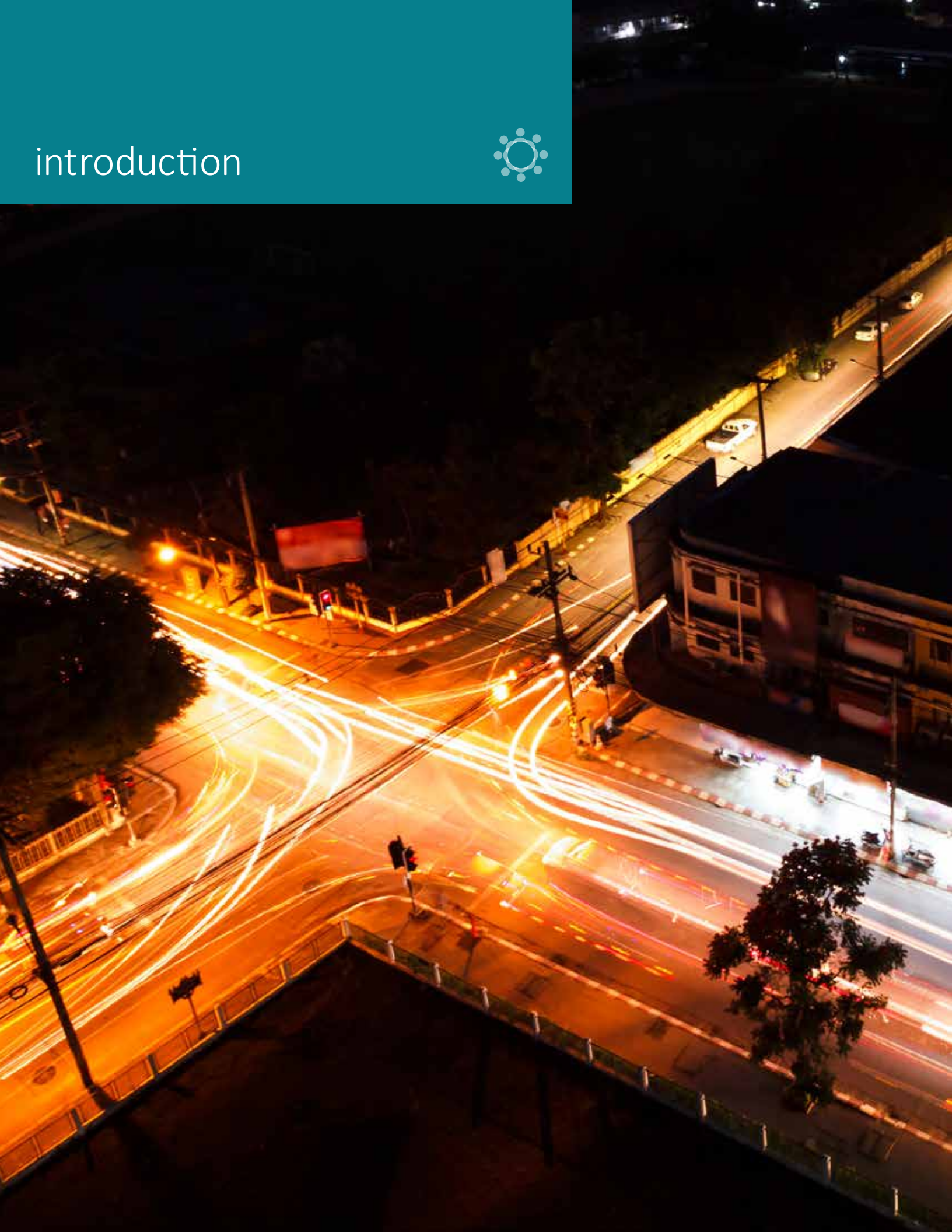
The High Cost of Disparities

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introduction



The facts are in: “Advancing racial equity—ensuring that all people, regardless of their race or zip code, have the resources and opportunities they need to reach their full potential—is both the right thing to do and smart economic strategy.”¹

Two recent reports showcase data that proves that social justice pays off.

The Altarum Institute found that Gross Domestic Product would have been \$1.9 trillion higher in 2012 without racial income gaps and that the economic gains of equity would grow to \$5 trillion per year by 2030 as demographics shift.”²

The most recent findings published in March 2015 by economists, Robert Lynch and Patrick Oakford, *An All-In Nation*, analyzed 118 metropolitan regions, and came up with the same conclusions in each of those regions. The study drilled down on the state level. Michigan was one of the states that was analyzed.

“Racial inclusion and income inequality are key factors driving regional economic growth, and are positively associated with growth in employment, output, productivity, and per capita income.”³

While these equations seem to help us set goals: some being more easily obtainable than others, we cannot ignore the actual changes in regard to race and our economy that have recently occurred and will continue to evolve.

Not many people will be surprised to hear that “a few decades from now, the nation’s racial and ethnic makeup will be increasingly different than it is today. The U.S. Census Bureau projects that the majority of the U.S. population will be People of Color by 2043.”⁴

If we consider the increased population of People of Color along with the buying power of these groups of people, we begin to see how drastically our economy would improve for the better through racial equity.

Buying power is the amount of money people have to spend after taxes and does not include savings or money that can be borrowed in the future.⁵

“Throughout 2014, African Americans, Asians and Native Americans will have a collective buying power of \$2 trillion, 117 percent higher than the \$916 billion they had available to spend in 2000.”⁶

If we start calculating the buying power numbers with the proposed U.S. Census Bureau projections, we make an even more compelling case for “all-in” thinking for the economy of the United States.



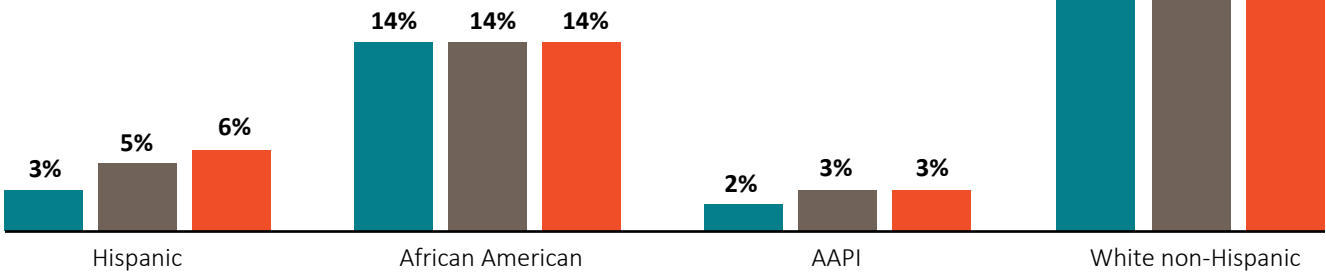
Equity: Ensuring that all people, regardless of their race or zip code, have the resources and opportunities they need to reach their full potential.

trending

People of Color are a growing share of Michigan's population

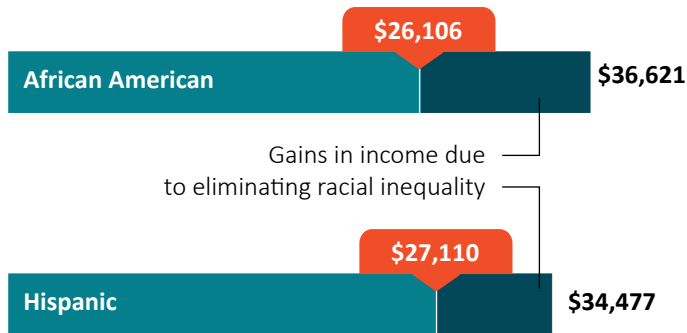
Share of population by race and ethnicity

2000 2013 2020



Reducing inequity would increase People of Color's income

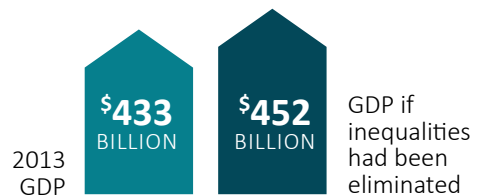
Mean income of White non-Hispanics in 2013: **\$38,035**



\$1.1 billion

Higher income means greater tax revenues; reducing inequality would mean a \$1.1 billion tax boost.

Eliminating racial and ethnic inequalities would benefit everyone

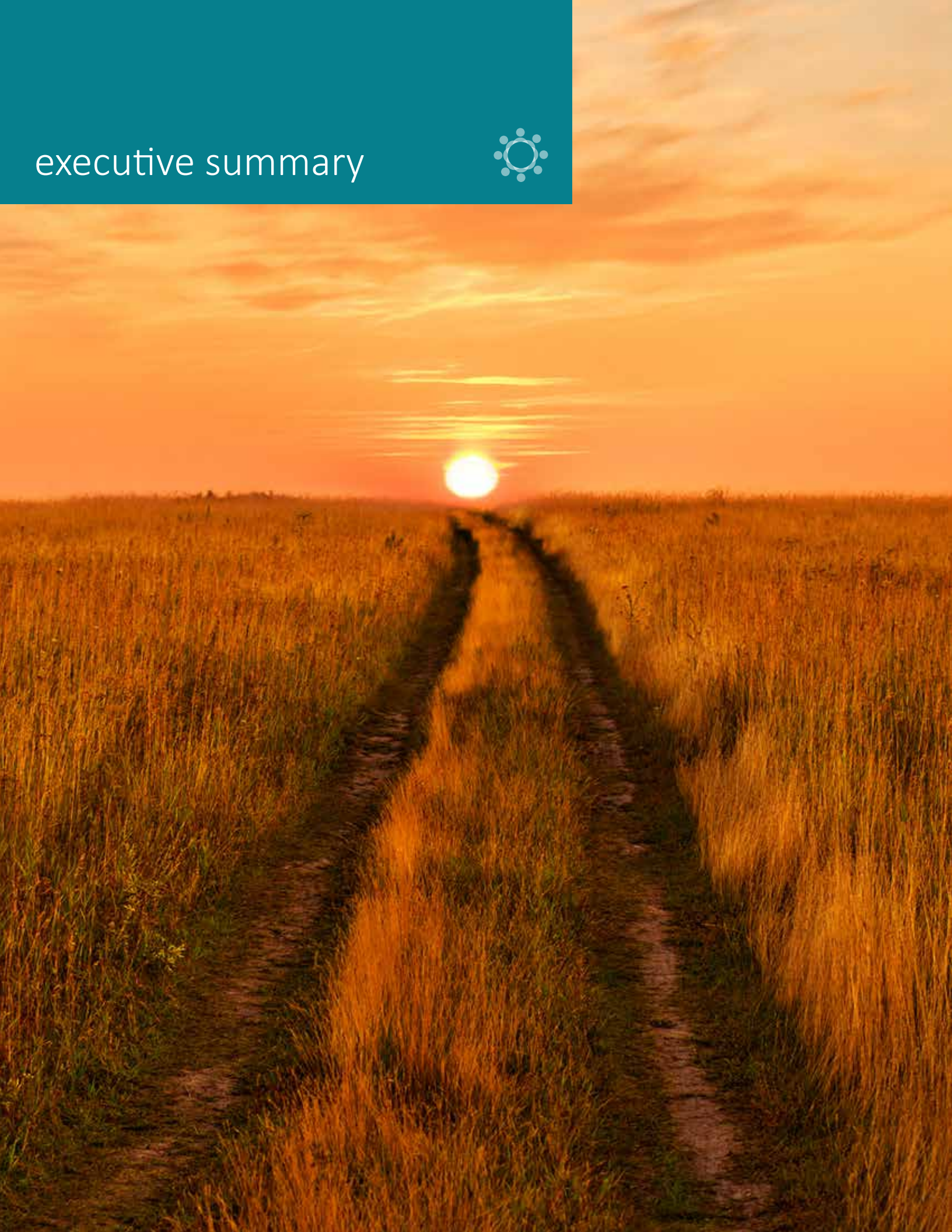


SOURCES: Lynch, Robert and Patrick Oakford (March 2015). *Charting New Trends and Imagining an All-In Nation: Economic benefits of reducing racial and ethnic inequality: Michigan*. Center for American Progress, 1.

“Hispanic Americans only held 3 percent of the board seats among Fortune 500 companies. Approximately 3 percent of senior executive positions are held by Black Americans at the nation’s largest companies. Furthermore, according to the Pew Research Center, Millennials are more diverse than previous generations, with nearly 40 percent of Millennials belonging to a non-white race or ethnicity. Given these demographic trends, diversity among Millennials and their children will only increase over time.”

—DiversityInc

executive summary





Equity: Ensuring that all people, regardless of their race or zip code, have the resources and opportunities they need to reach their full potential.

Disparities: If an outcome is seen in a greater or lesser extent between populations, there is disparity.

COLLABORATIVE MEMBERS

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The West Michigan Leadership Collaborative (The Leadership Collaborative) is issuing a Community Call-to-Action in *The High Cost of Disparities Report*. The Collaborative recognizes that Kent County has many strengths and assets, including a strong business sector, many collaborative efforts and growing racial and ethnic diversity within our neighborhoods.

However, considerable portions of our community are still being left behind—especially if we look at Kent County by race and ethnicity, income, and ZIP code. This reality does not make good economic or social sense for Kent County, especially for a county that boasts of being a “Cool City” and the global home of “Art Prize.”

The Collaborative understands that there are many terms that describe the racial and ethnic groups of Kent County residents. Some examples of various terminology might include American Indian/Native American, Asian American, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino American, White American. For the purposes of this study, we maintained the terminology utilized by each, individual study.

The Collaborative, which was organized by the Michigan Department of Civil Rights is a group of leaders representing many sectors of the community: such as community economic development, education, health and government sectors.

The Collaborative’s Report is a new kind of report, entitled *The High Cost of Disparities*. The Report is not a new study or survey; it is a review and overview of the valuable work that has already been done in regard to measuring racial and ethnic inequities. The Collaborative’s mission for the Report is to raise awareness, identify and categorize problems, review data that already exists in order to determine the cost to the community if they are not addressed; and issue a Call-to-Action by all stakeholders in the community to break down barriers to quality of life for all.

It is the Collaborative’s hope that the Report will be an example of intentionally considering economic racial equity—ensuring that all people, regardless of their race or zip code, have the resources and opportunities they need to reach their full potential⁷—when looking at data and integrating it into our decisions and policies, our county practices, our methods for engaging communities and how we allocate county resources.

The Report is also a tool to help us strategize about the necessary steps needed for us to live up to our claim as a world

ART PRIZE

“ArtPrize® is a radically open, independently organized international art competition. For 19 days, three square miles of downtown Grand Rapids, Michigan, become an open playing field where anyone can find a voice in the conversation about what is art and why it matters. Art from around the world pops up in every inch of downtown, and it’s all free and open to the public. It’s unorthodox, highly disruptive, and undeniably intriguing to the art world and the public alike.”

—ArtPrize Grand Rapids

CREATIVE CLASS/COOL CITY

“We’re the ones the pundits and scholars are talking about when they describe cities that are reinventing themselves by attracting young, well-educated knowledge workers. Grand Rapids ranked in the top 50 Creative Class communities in Richard Florida’s *The Rise of the Creative Class*. As a result, Grand Rapids has been awarded major grants as part of Michigan’s Cool City initiative.”

—*The Rise of the Creative Class* by Richard Florida

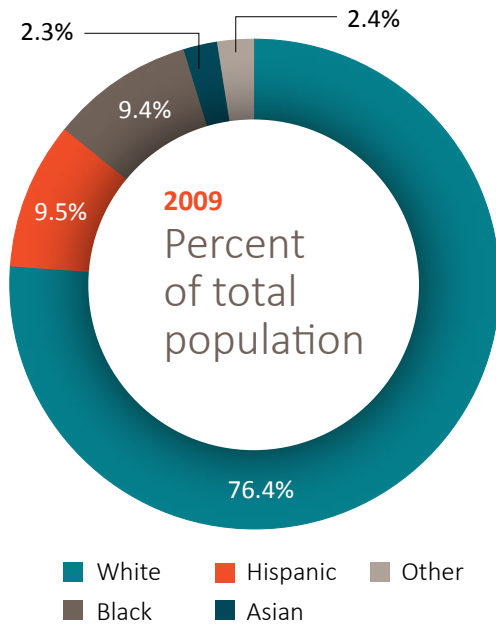
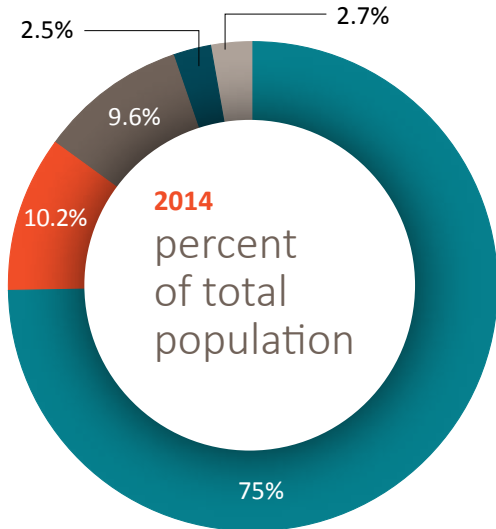
class community. It provides an impetus to create a vision for a stronger and more vibrant Kent County for all.

With Kent County neighborhood demographics following similar trends as national and state numbers, The Leadership Collaborative set out to bring attention to the demographic shifts, validate the impact of racial inequities on these shifts, while at the same time showcasing the potential economic benefits in decreasing and/or eliminating these inequities as illustrated in *The Equity Solution* and *Charting New Trends and Imaging an All-In Nation* reports.

On the next page is a quick look at Kent County yesterday, today and in our future. As you will see, Kent County demographics are following a similar demographic transformation in which People of Color are increasing faster than the majority.

Demographic transformation

You can see in the information presented below that our neighborhoods will follow a similar demographic transformation in which People of Color are becoming the majority. The Collaborative understands that there are many terms that describe the racial and ethnic groups of Kent County residents. Some examples of various terminology might include American Indian/Native American, Asian, Black/African, Hispanic/Latino, Pacific Islander, White/Caucasian/European descent. For the purposes of this study, we maintained the terminology utilized by each, individual study.



Kent County population percent change by race

RACE	2009 POPULATION	2014 POPULATION	PERCENT CHANGE
White	459,291	465,123	▲ 1%
Black	56,485	59,316	▲ 5%
Hispanic	57,317	63,484	▲ 10%
Asian	13,850	15,628	▲ 13%
Two or More Races	12,228	14,699	▲ 20%
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	2,096	2,188	▲ 4%
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	179	150	▼ 16%

620,588

Kent County's total population 2014



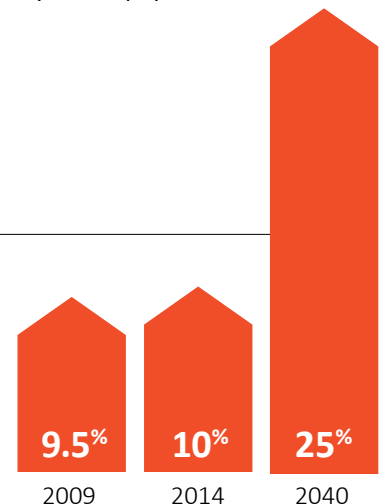
601,446

Kent County's total population 2009

Hispanic population growing

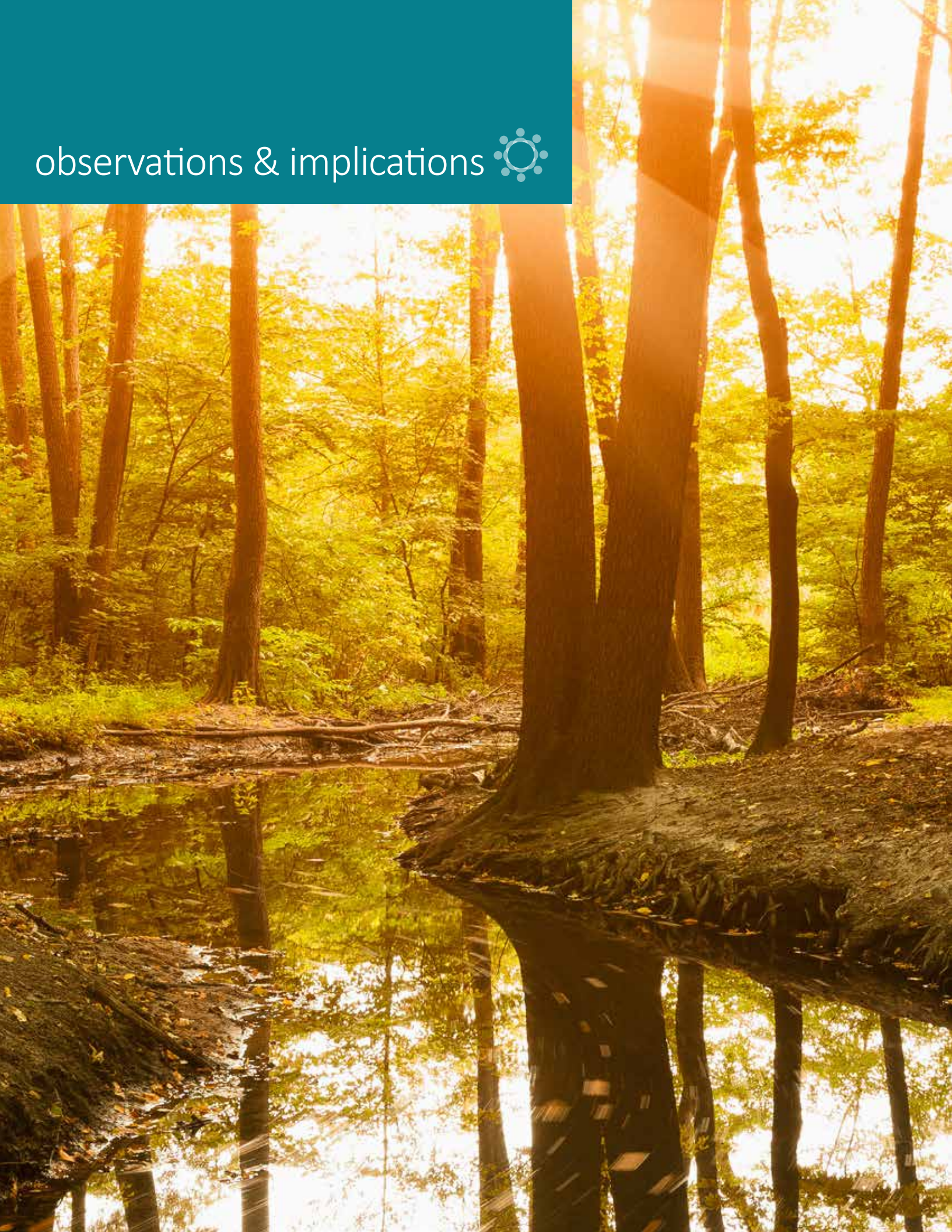
In Grand Rapids, Dr. Manuel Pastor projected that by 2040, **nearly a quarter of the city's population will be Latino.**

Pastor is Professor of Sociology and American Studies & Ethnicity at the University of Southern California, founding director of the Center for Justice, Tolerance, and Community at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and current director of the Program for Environmental and Regional Equity at USC.



SOURCE: MLive

observations & implications 





Estimated GDP gains with racial equity and with wage and employment shares of racial income gaps

Drawing from data on wages and employment (work hours) by major racial/ethnic group from the U.S. Census, the Equity Solution calculated what total economic output (GDP) would have been in 2012 under a scenario in which all racial groups had similar income levels, on average. They also analyzed the sources of the racial income gaps (the share due to wage differences and the share due to employment differences) by major racial/ethnic group and region.

Grand Rapids-Wyoming, MI

POPULATION 2010	PEOPLE OF COLOR	GDP 2012	PERCENT CHANGE	MILLIONS
774,160	21%	\$35,522	▲ 9%	\$3,318

SOURCE: Treuhaft, Sarah and Justin Scoggins and Jennifer Tran (October 22, 2014). *The Equity Solution: Racial Inclusion Is Key to Growing a Strong New Economy: PolicyLink.*

The Collaborative's Report, *The High Cost of Disparities*, is a social research project. The Report reviewed data that already exists in order to better understand the economic and human costs to the community should these racial and ethnic inequities not be addressed. Key premises in the data research include:

- It is NOT a scientific study, but a thorough review of existing racial and ethnicity equity data in Kent County and beyond.
- It is relevant. We reviewed data from within the last 5 years.
- It is reputable and reliable primary data as well as supportive (secondary) data.
- It is a review of demographic data, which are the characteristics of a population of interest: Examples may include income, education, age, gender and in the case of the emphasis of this study race and ethnicity.

Staff of the Bob and Aleicia Woodrick Diversity Learning Center at Grand Rapids Community College acted as Social Researchers for the project. They worked along with the Collaborative's data vetting team reviewing scores of reports. The team scanned reports looking through the demographic lens of race and ethnicity. Its findings were consistent with assumptions made in regard racial disparities in Kent County. Report after report (a sampling of these reports is provided in later sections) confirm that racial disparities exist throughout all sectors of our community. For the purposes of this document, we focused on Community Economic Development, Education and Health. Questions that we asked are: How do Education and Health racial disparities affect Community Economic Development? What indicators (a sign that something is wrong) do we need to collectively measure in order to help us plan for solutions?

At the end of the Report is a Community Call-to-Action section, which provides suggestions for Collaborative Equity Measurements and engagement with Community Collaborative Efforts.



BOOST EARNINGS AND BOOST GDP

Eliminating racial gaps in income in 2011 would have boosted earnings by \$687 billion, much of which would recirculate in the economy and create more jobs, and would have increased U.S. GDP by \$1.2 trillion.

SOURCE: *All in Nation: An America that Works for All*, pg. 140



A shifting workforce

African Americans and Hispanics will comprise 42% of the workforce in 2050.

SOURCE: *America's Future Workforce*, p. 47

an inclusive process



Other parts of our mission included raising awareness of the issue and identifying and categorizing the problem. In order to achieve this mission, the Collaborative sought out an inclusive process which included:

- Seeking input and direction from a broader group of leaders in our region.
- Garnering the support of businesses who will invest in and commit to this Call-to-Action.
- Coalescing the resources and opportunities available in Kent County to benefit our preferred future.
- Ensuring that equity and inclusion is not only understood but practiced in a real and meaningful way.

Social researchers met with the Collaborative on several occasions in order to develop a plan for the initiative. More than 50 community leaders were interviewed and several Collaborative members provided feedback in regard to steps for the initial data collection plan.

Social researchers met with a data team (see right) who provided feedback about various reports and research methodologies in regard to reliable data collection and distribution.

Indicators of Racial Inequity

Collaborative members, key stakeholders and data experts reviewed several Indicators of Racial Inequity in the categories of Community Economic Development, Health and Education. Indicators are a sign that something is right or wrong. Inequity suggests there is not full or equal access to opportunities that enable people to reach their full potential. The Collaborative decided on a proposed list of Indicators of Racial Inequity in September 2014. The social researchers spent months reviewing data in these areas, validating the existence of the disparities (differences) and comparing the indicators in the three sectors.

DATA TEAM

- Institutional and Research Planning Department (IRP) at Grand Rapids Community College
- Lynnette Mills, Research Assistant
- Jeremy Pyne, Community Research Institute at Grand Valley State University, GIS Manager
- Rebekah Watkins, Community Research Institute at Grand Valley State University, GIS Assistant
- Mark Woltman, Project Manager, KConnect

COMMUNITY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS

- Wealth Gap—Income of Residents in Kent County by Race/Ethnicity
- Unemployment of Residents in Kent County by Race/Ethnicity
- Housing
- College Attainment in Kent County by Race/Ethnicity

HEALTH EQUITY INDICATORS

- No Personal Health Care Provider in Kent County by Race/Ethnicity
- No Health Care Access Due to Cost in Kent County by Race/Ethnicity
- No Health Care Insurance in Kent County by Race/Ethnicity
- Health in Homes—Asthma

EDUCATION INDICATORS

- Enrollment in Kent ISD by Race/Ethnicity
- Number of Students receiving Free & Reduced Lunch by Race/Ethnicity
- Graduation Rate by Race/Ethnicity
- Chronic Absenteeism—Engagement Indicators

Understand the Past; Validate the Present and Strategize the Future



STOP. Look for warning signs from the past. How have past practices contributed to disparities and inequities?

- Recognize that there is a greater story behind any data set.
- Offer a summary of the history of the data in Kent County.



WAIT: Validate the present situation. *The High Cost of Disparities* is providing a summary of validating current disparities in all sectors of our neighborhoods and communities.

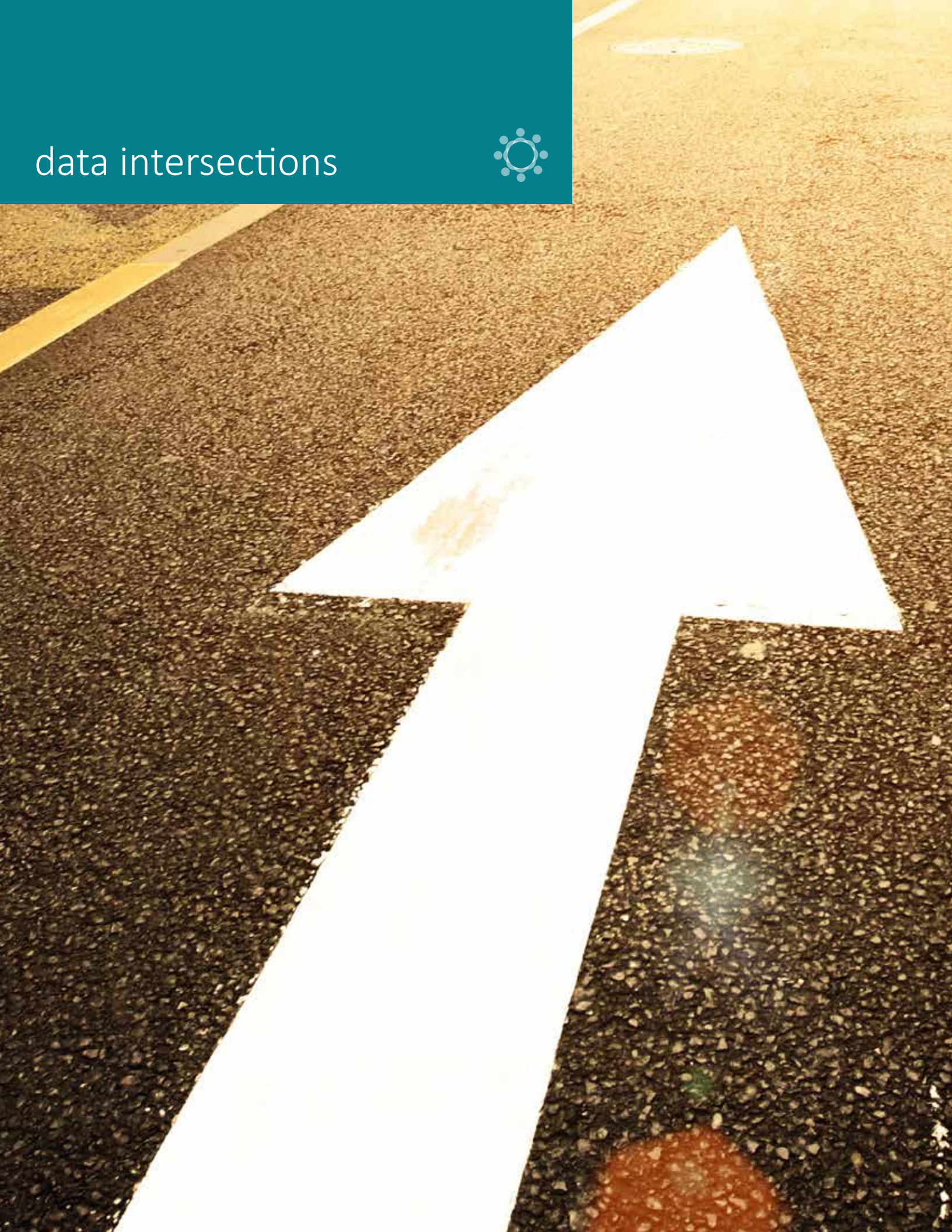
- Validate current disparities.
- View data differently: Start or continue a movement.
- Identify research questions through an Equity Lens.
- Collect and/or synthesize data in an inclusive way.
- Acknowledge when this was/is virtually impossible.
- Define and link common language.
- Identify data and highlight intersections.
- Create a design in which data talk to each other.



GO. Call-to-Action

- Move from “The Business Case vs. The Social Justice Case” to The West Michigan Case.
- Identify opportunities in which to take advantage.

data intersections



When we consider all of the work that is being done in regard to reducing racial and ethnic inequity in our community, one of the key factors in the efforts is collaboration. A lot of people are doing a lot of good work however the “collaborators” with whom we spoke believe that we need a larger community effort in order to make significant headway. The West Michigan Leadership Collaborative believes that it is essential to not only highlight these community collaborations in our Call-to-Action section (later in the Report), but also to consider these connections in regard to the data: We call them Data Intersections.

Borrowing from legal scholar, Kimberlé Crenshaw’s seminal writings on intersectionality which defines the notion that social identities, such as race and class (which may be seen in this Report) overlap and intersect in dynamic ways that shape each individual. Crenshaw provided the compelling image of an intersection filled with traffic.

“Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them.”⁸

Data Intersections overlap in dynamic ways that can help inform us on how to improve our community for all.

The High Cost of Disparities Report will not be able to showcase every collaborative effort or Data Intersection; however, we will provide samples of data that suggests areas of racial and ethnic disparities.

When we talk about intersections of racial equity data, we are not only validating the disparity and discrimination, but we are also hoping to see how in our intersections (Community Economic Development, Education, and Health Care) we may strategize and discover more productive and efficient means of achieving equity for all.

Community Economic Development Indicators

Drew DeSilver, a senior writer at the Pew Research Center has named 5 facts about economic inequality in his research that are very relevant to our discussion in this Report. His “5 Facts” primer is below.

1. By one measure, U.S. income inequality is the highest it’s been since 1928. In 1982, the highest-earning 1% of families received 10.8% of all pretax income, while the bottom 90% received 64.7%, according to research by

Data Intersections overlap in dynamic ways that can help inform us on how to **improve our community** for all.





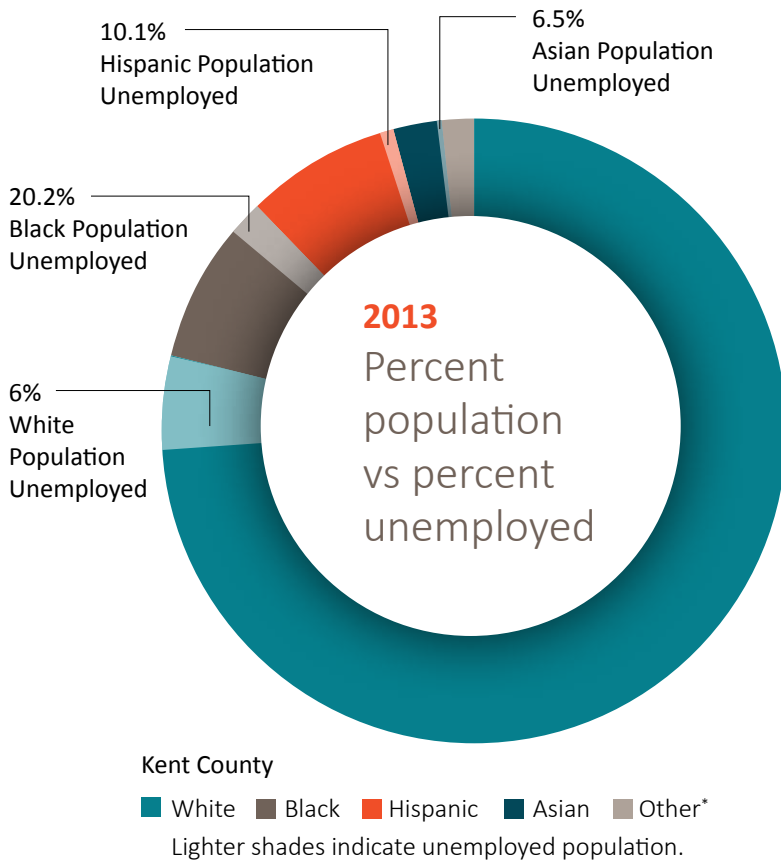
Fair housing

Fair housing is the right to choose housing free from unlawful discrimination. Federal, state and local fair housing laws protect people from discrimination in housing transactions such as rentals, sales, lending, and insurance. It ensures access for everyone.

Fair housing is the key to all people having the roof they want over their heads. It guarantees that regardless of your age, race, religion, family situation, or level of ability, you have the right to choose the housing that's best for your needs—with no outside preferences or stereotypes being imposed.

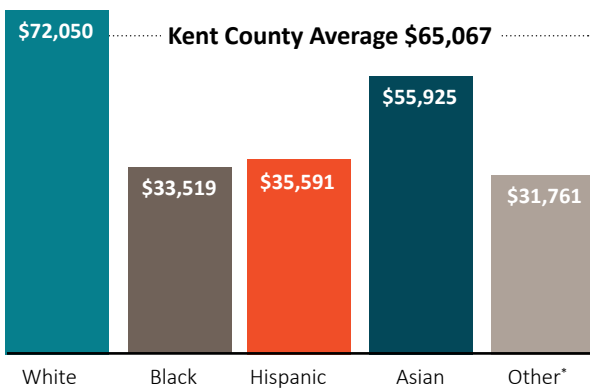
“It encourages neighborhoods to put out their welcome mat. Fair housing practices help people understand what it means to be a welcoming and vibrant neighborhood. The ideas, connections, and sense of pride that are found in diverse and open neighborhoods make a real difference, especially in the midst of tough economic times.”

—Fair Housing Center of West Michigan



Median family income

The median income for individuals is based on individuals 15 years old and over with income. The median divides the income distribution into two equal parts: one-half of the cases falling below the median income and one-half above the median.



2013

Post-secondary education's and relevance to home ownership

It is vital to not only measure median income and unemployment when we consider community economic development. We must expand our view to consider how these indicators intersect with educational attainment as well as home ownership.

RACE	POST-SECONDARY ATTAINMENT**	HOMES OCCUPIED	PERCENT OF HOMES OWNER OCCUPIED
White	46.1%	186,387	76.5%
Black	19.1%	21,194	34.8%
Hispanic	14.0%	14,782	46.1%
Asian	35.5%	3,669	69.3%
Kent County	49.1%	229,373	70.1%

SOURCES: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (2009-2013 1-year estimates) Table S2301; American Community Survey, One Year Estimates, 2013; U.S. Census prepared by Mark Woltman at K-Connect; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS 2013 5-year estimates) Table B25003(B, C, D, E, F, G, H & I)

* Other is defined as the median family income for Other race, Native American Races and Two or More Races

** Associates or Higher degree



“Indicators may be compared to an indicator light in a car. They let us know when something is wrong. Indicators can enable us to assess benchmarks and to monitor education systems.”

**DE LANDSHEERE; DE BROUCKER,
GENSBITTEL AND MAINGUET;
DEMEUSE AND BAYE**

UC-Berkeley professor Emmanuel Saez. Three decades later, preliminary estimates for 2012, the top 1% received 22.5% of pretax income, while the bottom 90%'s share had fallen to 49.6%.

2. The U.S. is more unequal than most of its developed-world peers. According to data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the U.S. ranked 10th out of 31 OECD countries in income inequality based on “market incomes,” that is, before taking into account the redistributive effects of tax policies and income-transfer programs such as Social Security and unemployment insurance. After accounting for taxes and transfers, the U.S. had the second-highest level of inequality, after Chile.

3. The black-white income gap in the U.S. has persisted. The difference in median household incomes between whites and blacks has grown from about \$19,000 in 1967 to roughly \$27,000 in 2011. Median black household income was 59% of median white household income in 2011, up modestly from 55% in 1967.

4. Americans are relatively unconcerned about the wide income gap between rich and poor. Americans in the upper fifth of the income distribution earn 16.7 times as much as those in the lowest fifth—by far the widest such gap among the 10 advanced countries in the Pew Research Center’s 2013 global attitudes survey. Yet barely half (47%) of Americans think the rich-poor gap is a very big problem.

5. Wealth inequality is even greater than income inequality. NYU economist Edward Wolff has found that, while the highest-earning fifth of U.S. families earned 59.1% of all income, the richest fifth held 88.9% of all wealth.

ECONOMIC VITALITY IN MICHIGAN

The Oakland Post reported in January 2015⁹ “the top 1 percent in Michigan took home 25 times more than the bottom 99 percent in 2012, according to latest analysis published by the Economic Policy Institute for the Economic Analysis and Research Network. Researchers Estelle Sommelier and Mark Price update their analysis of IRS data to show inequality is rising throughout the United States.”

Facts such as these are national data but reflect the greater Grand Rapids region as well. According to the research of Joel Kotkin, a professor of urban studies at Chapman University, of the 52 largest cities in America, Grand Rapids ranks 51st where economic vitality has been good for African Americans. His 2013 ranking is based on three metropolitan statistical area, or MSA, measures: homeownership, entrepreneurship or self-employment and median household income.

Evidence strongly suggests that economic vitality of people is closely connected to influences in their early life. *The Lifetime Effects: The Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40* highlights the

“More highly-skilled, trained, and educated workers at the top are experiencing real wage gains, while those at the bottom are experiencing real wage losses making the **wage distribution considerably more unequal**. Other factors related to the downward trend in wages of less-educated workers include intensifying global competition and immigration, the decline of the proportion of workers belonging to unions, the decline in the real value of the minimum wage, the increasing need for computer skills, and the increasing use of temporary workers.”

THE CENSUS BUREAU

profound impact of early education on the economic success of its participants. Its data shows that students who had the advantage of the original Headstart Program excelled by the age of 40 over their peer who did not have that academic experience in many economic indicators. Some of those categories included on average earning over \$15,000 more annually; leading 38% to 28% in home ownership; and fewer had ever received social services at some time in their life. It is estimated that the return on the investment in Headstart for these individuals was \$12.90 for each dollar spent on them.¹⁰ Thus, there is sound evidence that educational equity results in meaningful economic benefits.

Researchers have also tied the long-run increase in income inequality to changes in the U.S. labor market and household composition. The Census Bureau wrote:

“More highly-skilled, trained, and educated workers at the top are experiencing real wage gains, while those at the bottom are experiencing real wage losses making the wage distribution considerably more unequal. Other factors related to the downward trend in wages of less-educated workers include intensifying global competition and immigration, the decline of the proportion of workers belonging to unions, the decline in the real value of the minimum wage, the increasing need for computer skills, and the increasing use of temporary workers. Also, the increasing tendency for men with higher-than-average earnings to marry women with higher-than-average earnings may have contributed to widening the gap between high-income and low-income households. Whether the trend toward increasing income inequality the country has seen in the 1970s and 1980s will continue, or whether it has stopped or even reversed itself, remains to be seen.”¹¹

Yet, Michigan was hit harder than almost any state in the

“Job preparedness is questionable.” Many students want to start their own business, but according to the research they do not have the skill set to do so. **“It’s about getting a job, not a degree.”** This seems to be the consensus of every group that was interviewed.”¹²

union during the recent recession. As a matter of fact, the impact on many residents was more akin to a depression. Michigan’s jobless rate remains high relative to other states even in our post-recession era. In October 2014, only four states had a higher unemployment rate than Michigan.

The Michigan Economic and Workforce Indicators and Insights—Winter 2015 indicated the following:

“Rapid gains in total employment in Michigan are also evident from the survey of households. Total Michigan employment exceeded 4.4 million in October 2014 for the first time since 2008. So far during 2014, state employment has advanced by over 100,000, for a solid growth rate of 2.4 percent, exceeding national additions of 1.9 percent.”

While we have seen the economy rebound, Michigan’s current job levels still are below pre-recession numbers thus, we are still in the recovery mode. It is interesting to note that as the state’s economy recovers, not all sectors are recovering equally. The African American unemployment rate was highest in the District of Columbia (15.8 percent), surpassing Michigan, which had the highest black unemployment rate in the fourth quarter of 2014.¹³

Yes, data from Michigan Department of Economic Development shows that West Michigan is leading the state with job growth and that trend will continue for the next 10 years at least.¹⁴

§ 1.1 BILLION BENEFIT

A new report published in March 2015 entitled, *Charting New Trends and Imagining an All-In Nation: Economic benefits of reducing racial and ethnic inequality: Michigan* by the Center for American Progress, clearly infers that People of Color are increasing in West Michigan, especially in the Latino and Asian communities. This trend is expected to continue far into the future. Yet, there are significant earning discrepancies between Whites as compared to Latinos and African Americans. The study does an analysis suggesting that if economic disparities were eliminated, the entire state economy would benefit by \$1.1 billion. The math is easy. **If all people in our state had equitable opportunities, the entire state overall would stand to gain. There are no losers in this scenario.**

The Latino population in the West Michigan region is increasing faster than any other ethnic group. They currently make up the largest minority student group at Grand Rapids Community College at almost 11%. Overall, 25% of students at Grand Rapids Community College are students of color. That number is approximately 70% within the Grand Rapids Public School District. It then is imperative that as the region

prepares for its future workforce, that diversity and inclusion issues must be addressed successfully.

The 2010 *Survey of Consumer Finances* published by the Federal Reserve stated that the economic gap was actually closing during the last 20 years but the divide began to reverse in our recent recession with non-white families earning on average about 65% of what white families earn. But when household assets are measured, the real picture becomes much more alarming. The average white family has about six times the net worth of non-white families and this gap has not changed much over the last half century. Assets include bank accounts, retirement accounts, cash value of life insurance policies, home equity, and business equity.¹⁵

The June 2013 report by Talent 2025, *Comprehensive Analysis of the Current and Future Talent Needs for the TALENT 2025 Region* highlights this point regarding an emerging diverse workforce. The document also discusses the impact of poverty on the academic success of children. This reality coupled with the need for additional middle-skill workers means that our region must identify ways to ensure we have well-trained workers for the future. A middle-skill job is defined as one that requires at least a high school education and moderate on-the-job training (more than one month) but requires less than a bachelor’s degree. About one in three jobs in Michigan are considered middle-skill and that number is expected to only increase. Those jobs pay typically between \$15 and \$30 per hour.¹⁶

K. Brad Stamm, Professor of Economics at Cornerstone University in Grand Rapids, refuted the push to give low-skilled workers higher pay. In an article in the *Grand Rapids Business Journal* in July 2014, he asserted the following.

“One proven way to lessen income disparity is by having more people complete a bachelor’s degree. Occupations for college graduates tend to be higher paying, involve more creativity, are less routine, and subsequently less subject to automation. If fewer go to college, then the pay gap will only worsen between those with four-year degrees and everyone else. In 2013, the gap reached a record high with college graduates working hourly jobs making nearly double those without a degree.

Recent research suggests social mobility is higher in places with good schools, strong families, community spirit and smaller income gaps within the middle class. It appears that Grand Rapids, ranked No. 1 in the country by Forbes for raising a family, is on a faster track than most cities in reducing income disparity. And when it comes to college education and its ability to help bridge the income gap, our area is an academic mecca.”

Questions to consider in Community Economic Development

After reviewing the summary of relevant data and examining current racial and ethnic disparity data, here are a few questions for us to consider:

- Public policy related to investing in pre-K and higher education appears to be two of the Governor's priorities. Yet, how do we support increased funding to education with so many competing issues seeking support from the same pot?
- Will an increase in wages for unskilled positions ultimately result in an increase in the standard of living for those workers? This question needs additional research and a strategy to support the findings of such study.
- Middle skills is key to growing the west Michigan economy? How do we bring business and academia into the same room to develop a common strategy aimed at addressing this pressing need?
- Our region must go beyond mere diversity to understanding inclusion in the workplace. The future of our workforce will be more diverse than ever before. How do we ensure that our leaders and organizations understand the dire need for inclusion and how do we give them the skills to implement strategies effectively?
- How do we provide an educational opportunity to help younger People of Color to appreciate the value of "wealth" v. a paycheck?
- Housing appears to be an economic indicator of financial stability as well as a method to increase wealth. How can the region use housing as a tool for disenfranchised populations to build their economic portfolio?



The concept of “Educonomy” demonstrates a bridge between the economy and education. “Unless we get education and the economy working together more effectively, America will relinquish its role as leader of the free world.”

BRANDON BUSTEED

HEATHER LAVELLE/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Education Indicators

In this section of the Report, we provide an overview of relevant research in the area of measuring Education Indicators. We will provide a summary of the latest research; compare and contrast the findings; and provide a list of questions that may assist in moving the conversation to Call-to-Action.

As mentioned in the Data Intersection Introduction, we recognize that we will not be able to showcase every collaborative effort or Data Intersection. Our goal is to provide relevant examples in order for the community to join forces with these sampled groups and others listed in a Call-to-Action section and beyond.

RELEVANT RESEARCH

From research reviews, many factors stand out as playing a role in the future of measuring Education Indicators.

- The need to create Data Intersections between Education and other sectors of the community. For example, how does a person’s education attainment affect his or her economic status?
- Contrasting views on what to measure. For example, should we still measure test scores and standardized tests?
- Evolution in measurements. For example, moving from test scores to student engagement.

The concept of “Educonomy” demonstrates a bridge between the economy and education. It’s a great place to dive into Data Intersections.

“Unless we get education and the economy working together

more effectively, America will relinquish its role as leader of the free world.”¹⁶

The work of Educonomy began with various studies “looking at the linkages between education and long-term success in life and work.” More than 1 million Americans voiced their opinion about the topic.

The *Educonomy Report* found that “measuring grades and standardized test scores doesn’t tell us much about a student’s future success.”

Other education reports have also moved away from highlighting measurements such as test scores and standardized tests; however, measuring enrollment, graduation rate and achievement seem to still be prevalent in many studies. Measurements like 3rd Grade Reading Proficiency, 8th Grade Math Proficiency and even the number of words a child is able to use before entering the K-12 system¹⁷ are widely used.

The Kent Intermediate School District selected Student Achievement, Engagement, Inclusion, Global Competencies, and Collaboration as their top Education issues in which to address.

The Kent ISD provides services to twenty local public districts and to all non-public schools within its boundaries. Directly or indirectly, it serves almost 300 schools, more than 120,000 students and 7,000 educators. KISA is a committee comprised of superintendents from the twenty constituent public districts, as well as the Superintendents from the Christian and Catholic School systems in Kent County.¹⁸

Measuring engagement

Measuring engagement seems to be one of the keys to determining the economic future for all students. We see with current measures the racial disparities that exist when measuring enrollment and graduation rates, which can be seen here. Some national experts like John Powell have even called these numbers “a state of emergency.” Local Education Agency (LEA) is what people usually mean when they refer to a “public school.” Public School Academies (PSAs) or “charter school districts” are public districts established under a provision in the Michigan Revised School Code.

Enrollment in Kent ISD

RACE/ETHNICITY	ISD STUDENTS		PSA STUDENTS		LEA STUDENTS	
	2010	2014	2010	2014	2010	2014
American Indian	32	24	0	2	32	22
Asian	218	247	6	11	212	236
African American	1,294	1,066	23	203	1,271	863
Pacific Islander	7	2	0	0	7	2
White	5,668	5,285	91	479	5,577	4,806
Hispanic	742	1,030	12	90	730	940
Two or More Races	255	221	0	32	255	189
TOTAL	8,275	8,010	132	858	8,143	7,152

Graduation rate in Kent ISD

RACE/ETHNICITY	ISD GRAD RATE		PSA GRAD RATE		LEA GRAD RATE	
	2010	2014	2010	2014	2010	2014
American Indian	43.8%	50%	0%	0%	43.8%	54.6%
Asian	77.1%	83.4%	66.7%	72.7%	77.4%	83.9%
African American	48.2%	53.4%	30.4%	26.6%	48.5%	59.7%
Pacific Islander	57.1%	100%	0%	0%	57.1%	100%
White	84.5%	84%	75.8%	51.4%	84.6%	87.3%
Hispanic	56.7%	61.3%	33.3%	44.4%	57.1%	62.9%
Two or More Races	52.6%	67%	0%	50%	52.6%	69.8%
TOTAL	75%	76.2%	63.6%	43.6%	75.2%	80.1%

For the purposes of this Report, we will focus on one of Kent ISD’s top education issues: Student Engagement. Most research groups agree that student engagement is on the decline. Some have incorporated behavioral measurements along with achievement measurements.

National experts seem to emphasize the need for measuring disparities in order to validate inequities. Like vital signs on a patient, they say these measurements, help to show us when we are heading in the right or wrong direction. Some national experts like John Powell have even called these disparity numbers “a state of emergency.”

Data Intersections like Free and Reduced Lunch, which is shown on page 31, is one of the most telling indicators of racial and socioeconomic disparities. This graph not only alerts us to an extremely large racial gap, but it also shows us that these numbers increased for most racial groups in 2013/14.

The groups that are incorporating achievement and behavioral measurements believe that we need disparity reports—not to deepen a decline in engagement, but to track our progress, so that we may strategize about the future. Supporters of this work, also believe that we need to take the blame off of the victim and shift the onus onto our society as a whole to take action.

“Change is possible. The conditions and policies which impede the efforts of parents and caregivers to provide for their children aren’t natural, aren’t etched in stone; they are the result of decisions we, as a body politic, have made. The U.S. has a long history of social movements building the power to improve conditions for families with young children—from ending child labor and creating the 8–hour work day to the civil rights and women’s movements. We’ve done it before—we can do it again.”¹⁹



Chronic Absenteeism: Missing 10% or more of school due to unexcused or excused absences.

WHAT TYPE OF CHANGE DO WE SEE?

If Student Engagement is one of the key determinants of economic prosperity for all students, let’s dig deeper into measuring Student Engagement. A new way to measure engagement may be seen in Grand Rapids Public Schools’ movement to measure Chronic Absenteeism.

“Our goal this year is to ensure that every student attends school regularly. Showing up for school has a tremendous impact on student achievement. In previous years, GRPS only looked at Average Daily Attendance (ADA) and Truancy. After further review of the data, we unmasked a bigger problem called Chronic Absenteeism. Chronic Absenteeism is missing 10% or more of school due to unexcused or excused absences.”²⁰

GRPS partnered with the leading national expert and Director of Attendance Works, Hedy Chang.

In the 2013-2014 school year, 35.1% of our students were considered chronically absent. At the end of the 2014-2015 first semester, we reduced our chronically absent students by 25.6%.

In order to reduce Chronic Absenteeism, GRPS launched a district wide Attendance Challenge initiative called “Challenge 5.” The Attendance Challenge is a building level challenge in which each grade level (K, 1, 2, etc) competes to have the best attendance for the month.

Speaking a language other than English at home

Percent of those ages 5 and over. 2009-2013.

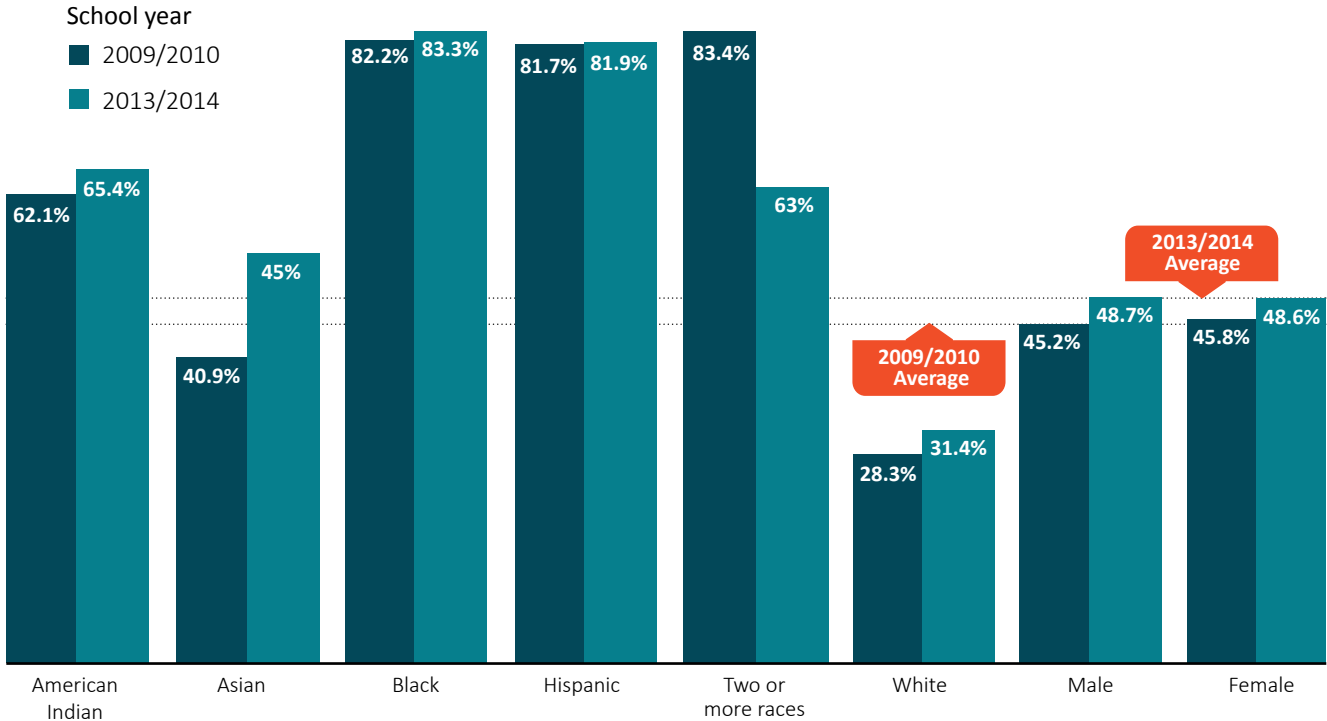
11.3%
Kent County

9.1%
Michigan

SOURCES: American Community Survey, U.S. Census

Kent ISD free and reduced lunch

Students from families with incomes below 185 percent of the poverty level are eligible for free or reduced prices in the federal School Lunch Program. Students from families reporting income between 130 and 185 percent of the federal poverty line are eligible for reduced priced meals, while children from families with incomes below 130 percent of poverty are eligible for a fully subsidized or “free” meal.

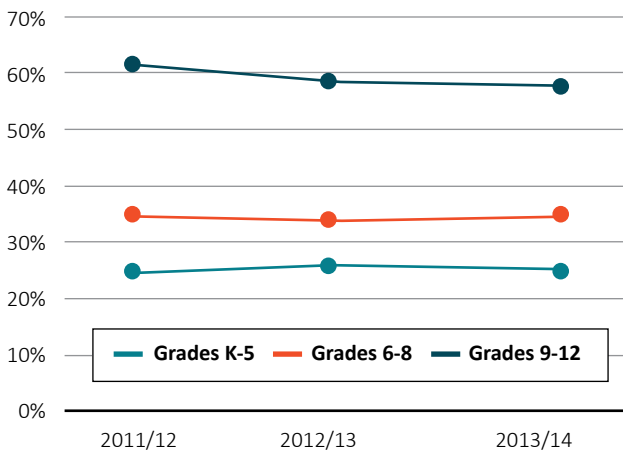


SOURCES: Michigan Department of Education, Student Count; Michigan Department of Education, Food and Nutrition Services, Office of Nutrition, for 1990-95; Center for Educational Performance Information (CEPI) web site since 1996 (www.michigan.gov/cepi)

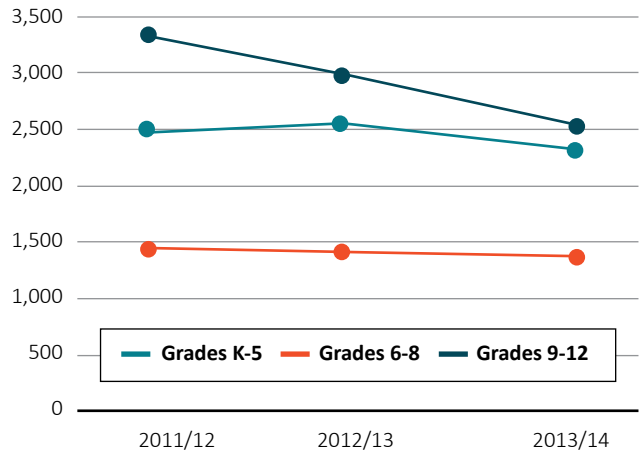
Three-year comparison of GRPS chronic absenteeism

In previous years, GRPS only looked at Average Daily Attendance (ADA) and Truancy. After further review of the data, we unmasked a bigger problem called Chronic Absenteeism. Chronic Absenteeism is missing 10% or more of school due to unexcused or excused absences.

Percentage of students, by grade level



Number of students, by grade level



SOURCE: Grand Rapids Public Schools, 2015

There is an Attendance/Wheel team focusing on five research strategies to reduce Chronic Absenteeism.

1. Recognize good and improved attendance
 - *Use your leader board*
 - *Integrate daily encouragement and recognition of good attendance*
2. Engage students and parents
 - *Conduct grade level challenge*
 - *Talk about Challenge 5 at every parent meeting*
3. Monitor attendance data and practice
 - *Attendance teams monitor data*
4. Provide personalized early outreach
 - *Call and/or send notes to students missing school*
5. Develop programmatic barriers as needed
 - *Work with the Office of Parent Engagement*²¹

Our review of Education Indicators and data surfaced many questions for us to consider as we move forward. The questions to consider are listed at the bottom of this page.

Health Equity Indicators

In this section of the Report, we provide an overview of relevant research in the area of measuring Health Indicators. Like the Economic and Education sections, we will provide a summary of the latest research; compare and contrast the findings and provide a list of questions that may assist in moving the conversation to a Call-to-Action.

As mentioned in the Data Intersection

Introduction, we recognize that **we will not be able to showcase every collaborative effort or Data Intersection.** Our goal is to provide relevant examples in order for the community to join forces with these sampled groups and others listed in the Call-to-Action section and beyond.

As mentioned in the Data Intersection Introduction, we recognize that we will not be able to showcase every collaborative effort or Data Intersection. Our goal is to provide relevant examples in order for the community to join forces with these sampled groups and others listed in the Call-to-Action section and beyond.

As we consider Data Intersections from earlier sections, we once again include the work of our school districts, which are creating partnerships with governmental entities as well as the health sector.

“Because we know that these interventions will not capture all our students and families, we are also working with the Grand Rapids Police Department, the Prosecutor’s Office and the Department of Health and Human Services to remove barriers that might keep students out of school.”²²

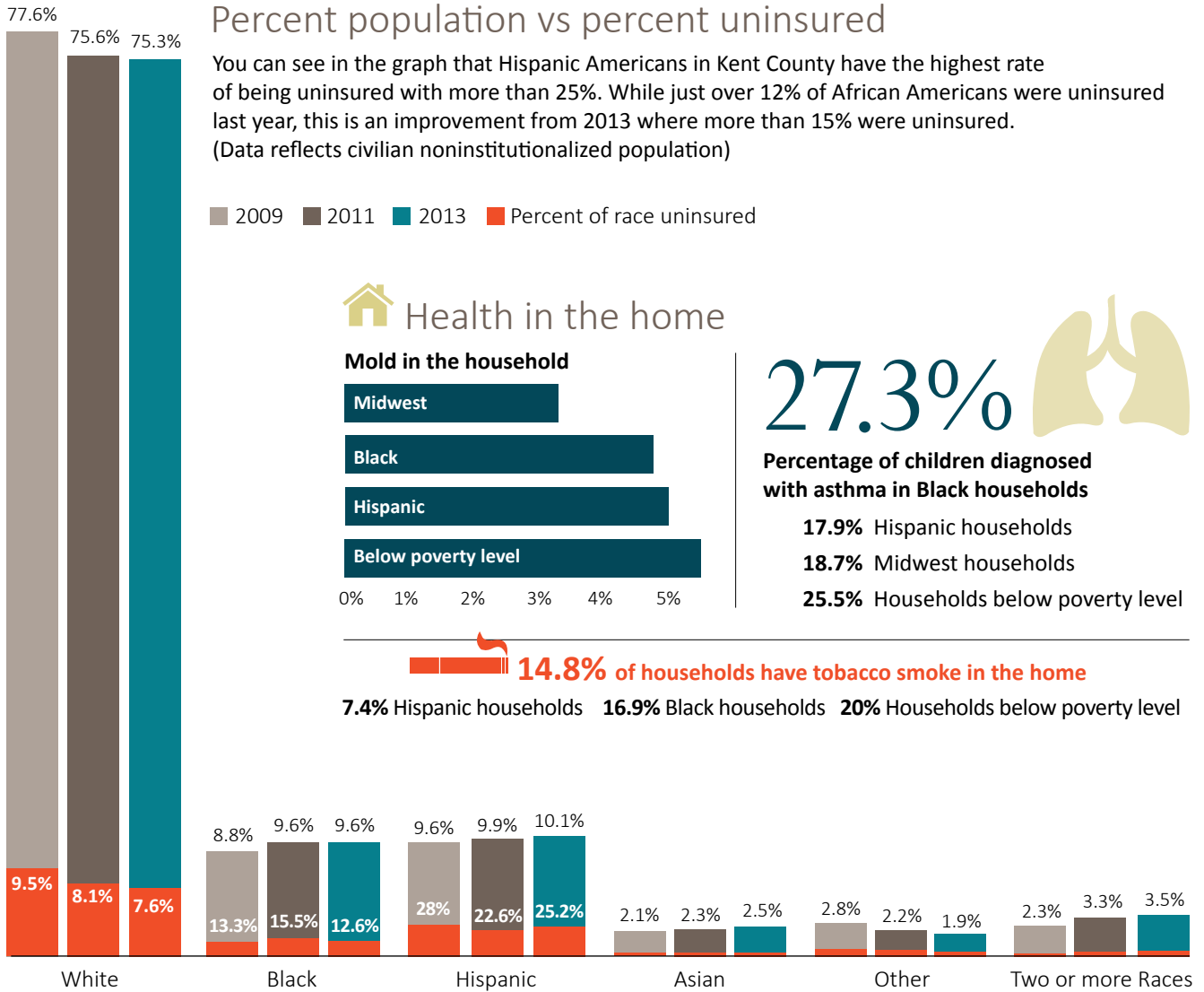
Questions to consider in Education

After reviewing the summary of relevant data and examining current racial and ethnic disparity data, here are a few questions for us to consider:

- Should we stop measuring and reporting on racial and ethnic disparities?
- If so, are there other things that need to be done in conjunction with this?
- If we did stop measuring disparities, how could we prove that doing so would spark equitable change?
- How would we strategize about improvements to our community in regard to equity without measurements?
- Who is reviewing disparity reports? Are the people who are negatively affected by inequity the majority of people who view disparity reports?
- Are there other reasons to consider in regard to the reason why students are less engaged?

Percent population vs percent uninsured

You can see in the graph that Hispanic Americans in Kent County have the highest rate of being uninsured with more than 25%. While just over 12% of African Americans were uninsured last year, this is an improvement from 2013 where more than 15% were uninsured. (Data reflects civilian noninstitutionalized population)



Health status

Perceived Health Status or “self-rated general health status is useful in determining unmet health needs, identifying disparities among subpopulations, and characterizing unmet health needs.” Below shows those in Kent County who said that their health, in general, was fair or poor.



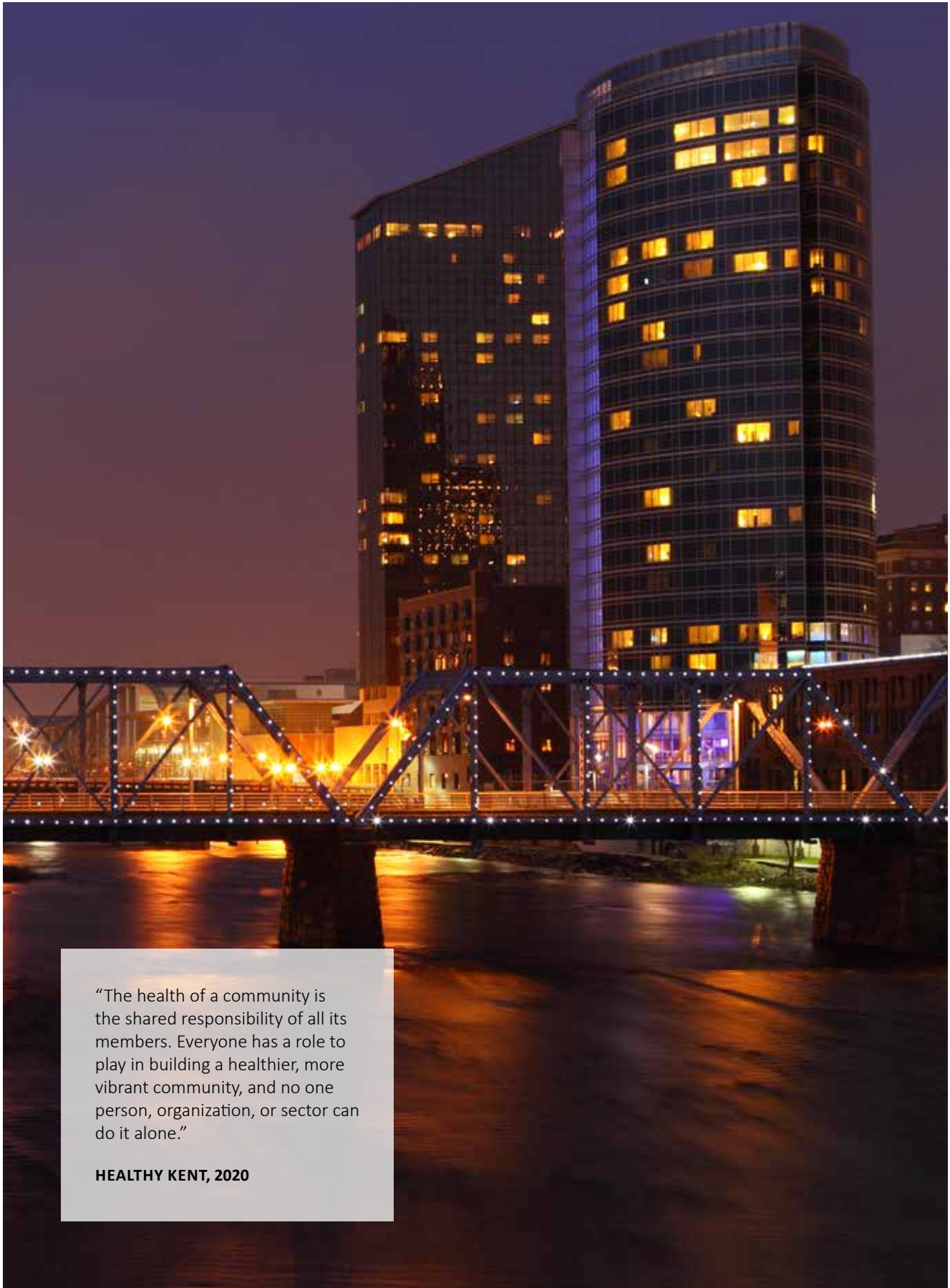
RACE	2008	2014	PERCENT CHANGE
White	10.0%	10.1%	▲ 0.1%
Black	19.9%	32.4%	▲ 12.5%
Hispanic	11.5%	29.7%	▲ 18.2%
Non-Hispanic	10.7%	11.7%	▲ 1.0%
Kent County Average	10.8%	13.7%	▲ 2.9%
State Average	14.5%	17.7%	▲ 3.2%

Limited health care coverage

An estimated 14.3% of Kent County adults do not have a personal doctor or health care provider—a figure virtually at par with the 2008 survey results, and notably lower than the statewide and nationwide rates. Below shows respondents in Kent County with no personal health care coverage due to cost.

RACE	2008	2014	PERCENT CHANGE
White	10.9%	10.4%	▼ 0.5%
Black	20.9%	22.9%	▲ 2.0%
Hispanic	20.7%	20.1%	▼ 0.6%
Non-Hispanic	11.9%	10.9%	▼ 1.0%
Kent County Average	12.7%	11.7%	▼ 1.0%
State Average	12.3%	15.5%	▲ 3.2%

SOURCES: Health in the Home; U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (2009-2013 1-year estimates) Table S2701; 2008 Behavioral Risk Factor Survey; 2014 Behavioral Risk Factor Survey



“The health of a community is the shared responsibility of all its members. Everyone has a role to play in building a healthier, more vibrant community, and no one person, organization, or sector can do it alone.”

HEALTHY KENT, 2020

Most people would agree that a healthy child is more likely to be engaged in academics and extracurricular activities. Progressive, collaborative efforts to increase the health of our children and all people in Kent County have been underway for several years.

Healthy Kent 2020 believes that “the health of a community is the shared responsibility of all its members. Everyone has a role to play in building a healthier, more vibrant community, and no one person, organization, or sector can do it alone. By fostering collaboration, Healthy Kent 2020 helps our community identify common concerns, take concrete steps to solve problems, and sustain a long term, community-wide vision—the actions necessary to create a healthier community.”²³

The West Michigan Leadership Collaborative selected Access to Health as one of the top racial equity indicators to review. The Healthy Kent 2020 Collaborative selected “Access to Health Services” as its number one Health Indicator. We highlighted Perceived Health Status, which also is proven to influence all aspects of a person’s life, including behaviors, environmental factors, and community. The goal of Healthy People 2020 was to “increase the proportion of adults who self-report good or better health.”

Other leading Health Indicators included Clinical Preventative Services and Environmental Quality. For example Health in Homes like the chart highlighting the percentage of children diagnosed with Asthma by race are just one of several environmental factors that demonstrate racial disparities between White residents and residents of Color.

You can see in the graph that Hispanic Americans have the highest rate of being uninsured with more than 25%. While just over 12% of African Americans were uninsured last year, this is an improvement from 2013 where more than 15% were uninsured.

Another indicator (a sign that something is wrong) that addresses Access to Health is whether a person has access to health care based on costs.

We see from the all sections of the data that Hispanic/Latino Americans, Black/African Americans and other People of Color have a significantly lower Access to Health Care based on several factors.

The estimated percentage of persons without health insurance:

- Is lowest for those under age 18 and highest for those age 18-39
- Falls as income increases
- Is highest for Hispanics
- Is lowest for whites overall because whites have the highest incomes among the racial groups for which these estimates are available
- Is lower for whites than for blacks in the highest income category, but lower for blacks than for whites in the four lower income categories
- Is lower for females than for males in all income categories.

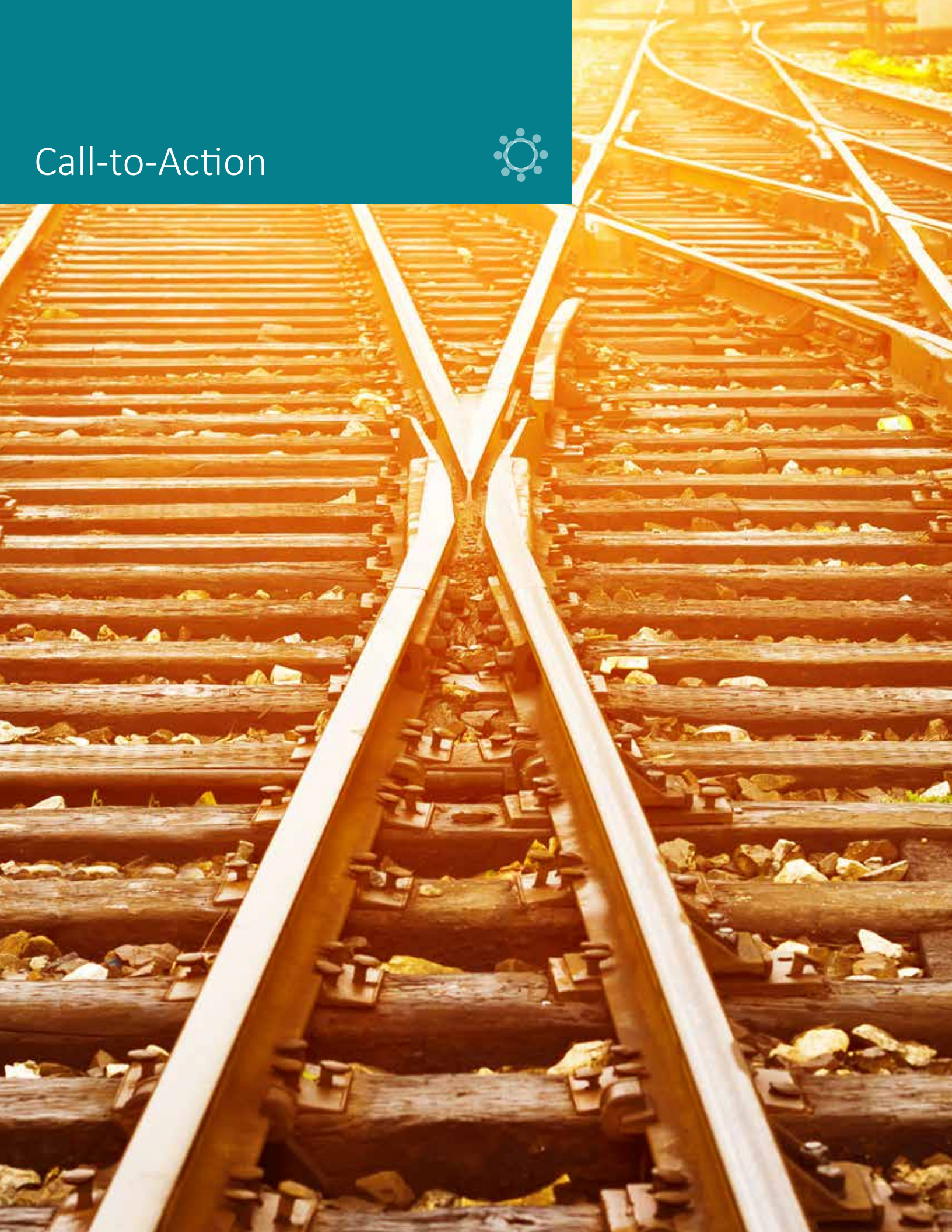
These estimates are not available for Asians, Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, or people with more than one race. Figures for that group of races cannot be computed reliably as a residual because of the extent to which figures for the major races have been rounded.²⁴

Questions to consider in Health

After reviewing the summary of relevant data and examining current racial and ethnic disparity data, here are a few questions for us to consider:

- How do we ensure quality programming at the same time advance the conversation around systems change in health equity?
- How do other sectors in the community tie into the health equity work that is already taking place?
- It appears as though health care is the only sector that has created National Standards on Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) and local groups seem to be moving in the same direction. How can we capitalize on these efforts in other sectors?
- What has been the impact locally of the Affordable Care Act? If the impact has been positive, how can the region expand its availability? If not helpful, how can we make change regionally?

Call-to-Action



The High Cost of Disparities is a Community Call-to-Action!

The Report validates that racial disparities exist throughout the three sectors we explored within our community. It confirms the negative economic impact if these disparities are not addressed. It also projects the missed opportunities for economic growth when we do not take necessary action.

“If all people in our state had equitable opportunities, the entire state overall would stand to gain. There are no losers in this scenario.”

If you agree that racial disparities is a State of Emergency, join us. We do not have to do this work alone. West Michigan currently has many collaborative efforts making critical junctures that are helping to move the equity needle. Later in this section is a list (although not exhaustive) of current collaborative efforts, in which we encourage you to connect. Nationally, a shining example of taking action against racial disparities is The Equity Project in King County Washington. The Leadership Collaborative echoes the words of its writers, inserting Kent County as the designated beneficiary.

“Through creatively addressing the root causes of our problems and finding better ways and new opportunities to conduct business and share power, we will create a more inclusive and prosperous ‘Kent County.’ We are learning the strategies needed to address these challenges before us, and now is the time to redouble our long-term commitment accompanied by related actions. The West Michigan Leadership Collaborative hopes that the outcome of this initiative will be to ask fellow elected officials, business leaders, nonprofits, and our residents, communities and partners to walk with us on this journey toward a fairer and more just Kent County.”²⁵

COLLABORATIVE EQUITY MEASUREMENTS

We also encourage the use of innovative tools for measuring equity.

“The Equity Impact Review tool that is a part of the King County Strategic Plan 2010-14: Working Together for One King County is both a process and a tool to identify, evaluate and communicate

the potential impact—both positive and negative—of a policy or program on equity.

This tool, which consists of 3 Stages, offers a systematic way of gathering information to direct planning and decision-making about public policies and programs which impact equity in King County.

- **Stage 1**

What is the impact of the proposal on determinants of equity?

The aim of the first stage is to determine whether the proposal will have an impact on equity or not.

- **Stage 2**

Assessment: Who is affected?

This stage identifies who is likely to be affected by the proposal.

- **Stage 3**

Impact review: Opportunities for Action

The third stage involves identifying the impacts of the proposal from an equity perspective. The goal is to develop a list of likely impacts and actions to ensure that negative impacts are mitigated and positive impacts are enhanced.”²⁶

- Sharing data is vital to appropriately diagnosing the problems and strategizing about how to fix them.
- We must chronically measure data.
- We need to conveniently organize data, so that it is easily found by all.
- We must create consistent and equitable Data Tracking, so that it is easier to measure “apples to apples.”
- We must create friendly codes for data.



Through creatively addressing the root causes of our problems and finding better ways and new opportunities to conduct business and share power, **we will create a more inclusive and prosperous Kent County.**

Get involved! Community collaborative efforts

Large-scale social change requires broad cross-sector coordination.” Research shows that there are five conditions of collective impact that “together produce true alignment and lead to powerful results.” The five conditions of collective impact are: a common agenda; shared measurement systems; mutually reinforcing activities; continuous communication; and backbone support organizations.”²⁷

Below is a list (although not exhaustive) of current collaborative efforts/organizations, which are interested in broad cross-sector coordination. We encourage you to get involved!

Fair Housing Center of West Michigan

www.fhcwm.org

GRCC’s ABO Program and Area Businesses

www.grcc.edu/counselingandcareercenter/resources/alphabetaomegabob

Grand Rapids Police Department

grcity.us/police-department/

Grand Rapids Public Schools

www.grps.org

Greater Grand Rapids Racial Equity Network (GGRREN)

Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan

www.healthyhomescoalition.org

Health Equity Initiatives

www.accesskent.com/Health/HealthEquity

Health Equity Social Justice Dialogue

The Health Equity Study at Health Net of West Michigan

www.healthnetwm.org

The Huntington Bank

www.huntington.com/us/region_west_michigan.htm

K-Connect

www.k-connect.org

Michigan Economic Development Corporation’s Community Ventures (CV) pilot program

The Grand Rapids African American Health Institute (GRAAHI) Health Equity Index

www.graahi.org

LINC

www.lincrev.org

Michigan’s Roundtable—Cultural Competency and Organizational Development Division

www.miroundtable.org

Spectrum Health

www.spectrumhealth.org

Talent 2025

www.talent2025.org



end notes

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Appendix A

definition of terms

BUYING POWER

The amount of money people have to spend after taxes and does not include savings or money that can be borrowed in the future (*Selig Center, Multicultural Economy, 2013*).

CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM

Missing 10% or more of school due to unexcused or excused absences.

DISPARITIES

Disparities in the use of school discipline by race, gender, and sexual orientation have been well-documented, and continue to place large numbers of students at risk for short- and long-term negative outcomes. In order to improve the state of our knowledge and encourage effective interventions, the Discipline Disparities Research to Practice Collaborative, a group of 26 nationally known researchers, educators, advocates, and policy analysts, came together to address the problem of disciplinary disparities. Funded by Atlantic Philanthropies and Open Society Foundations, the Collaborative has spent nearly three years conducting a series of meetings with groups of stakeholders—advocates, educators, juvenile justice representatives, intervention agents, researchers, and policymakers—in order to increase the availability of interventions that are both practical and evidence-based, and to develop and support a policy agenda for reform to improve equity in school discipline.

EDUCONOMY

The work of Educonomy began with various studies “looking at the linkages between education and long-term success in life and work.” (*Busteed, Brandon (2015). Why the Education Economy is the Next Big Thing for the American Workforce?*)

EQUITY

Ensuring that all people, regardless of their race or zip code, have the resources and opportunities they need to reach their full potential (*King County Equity Report*).

FREE AND REDUCED LUNCHES

When below 180% of the poverty level, between 130 and 185% of the federal poverty line children are eligible for free lunches. Michigan in 2009 went from 735,401, 45.8% to 737,094 48.6% in 2013.

HEALTH IN HOME

Housing in the Kent county district with lead poisoning, mold and pests. These situations or living condition are usually found in older homes and low income households.

INDICATORS

May be compared to an indicator light in a car. They let us know when something is wrong. Indicators can enable us to assess benchmarks and to monitor education systems (*de Landsheere, 1994; de Broucker, Gensbittel and Mainquet, 2000; Demeuse and Baye, 2001*).

INFANT MORTALITY

The number of children’s death less than one years of age, per 1000 live births. The number of children dying under one, divided by the number of births in a year, multiplied by a thousand.

INTERSECTIONALITY

The term intersectionality defines the notion that social identities, such as race, gender, sexuality, class, marital status, and age, overlap and intersect in dynamic ways that shape each individual. In other words, all of us possess more than one social identity (*Legal scholar, Kimberlé Crenshaw*).

MATERNAL HEALTH

Health of woman during pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum period. It encompasses the health care dimension, the prenatal, and postnatal in order to reduce mortality.

Appendix B

acknowledgements

- Asian American Chamber of Commerce
- Helpful advice from the staff of the Calvin College Center for Social Research
- City of Grand Rapids
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- County of Kent
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- Sheryl V. Whitney, *Partner, Whitney Jennings*
- Sook Wilkinson, Ph.D.
- West Michigan Asian American Association, Inc.



TAMBER BUSTANCE

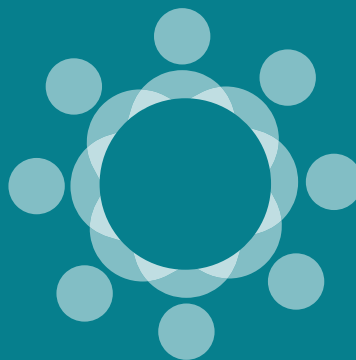
Tamber Bustance has a passion for bringing communities together. Tamber is currently the Manager of Training & Development for Grand Rapids Community College's Woodrick Diversity Learning Center. She works closely with corporate businesses, educational institutions, non-profit organizations and faith-based communities.

Although Tamber began her career as a television news producer, she has spent more than a decade working in the area of diversity, cultural agility and inclusion. She has presented keynote addresses at many local events and facilitated trainings throughout the United States. She has also designed a cultural agility curriculum and diversity strategic plans for several companies and organizations.

Tamber received her Bachelor of Science degree in Communication from Grand Valley State University and her master of divinity from Grand Rapids Theological Seminary.

ERIC WILLIAMS

Eric Williams is the Executive Director for Equity Affairs at Grand Rapids Community College. His primary role is to facilitate diversity and inclusion efforts at GRCC. In addition, he teaches business courses on an adjunct basis for the College. He has been employed in various capacities by The University of Michigan, Michigan State University, Oakland University and Calvin College. In addition, he has owned a consulting firm for over 20 years having worked with over 250 state and national organizations. He also published an award winning series of classic African American literature entitled the "Heritage Series" through his company Candace Press. He has served as an elected official for the City Commission of Grand Rapids and has participated on numerous boards & committees throughout West Michigan. He has a bachelor's and master's degree from Oakland University and has completed all but his dissertation for a doctoral degree in Public Administration at Western Michigan University.



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