



HEALTH ♦ EDUCATION ♦ ECONOMY

KALAMAZOO  MATTERS

All of a Piece:  
Poverty and the Healthy Growth,  
Development and Learning of  
Kalamazoo's Children

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*ALL OF US DO BETTER WHEN ALL OF US DO BETTER*

## ***Preface:***

The Walker Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnic Relations is pleased to co-sponsor this conversation on education and poverty with Richard Rothstein with the Poverty Reduction Initiative (PRI), the Kalamazoo Learning Network, Kalamazoo Public Schools, KRESA, the Greater Kalamazoo United Way and ISAAC. We are happy to support the PRI, which has taken the lead role in organizing this event. The Poverty Reduction Initiative and the Walker Institute collaborate on many projects dedicated to building a more equitable and inclusive community in Kalamazoo, in Southwest Michigan and statewide. This event is the fourth in a series of community conversations that the Walker Institute has sponsored or co-sponsored as part of our Kalamazoo Matters series on health education and the economy.

The series includes:

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|------------------|---|
| April 1, 2010    | “How Can Kalamazoo Become a Healthier Community?” with guest speaker Brian Smedley, Director Health Policy Institute, Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies |
| October 5, 2010  | “Conversations on Education and Community” with David Berliner, Professor of Education, Arizona State University  |
| March 31, 2011   | “We, the People: Social Networking, New Media and Inclusive Democracy, with Eric Byler, film maker and co-founder of Coffee Party USA                                 |
| November 2, 2011 | “Poverty and Education,” with Richard Rothstein, Economic Policy Institute and former Education Columnist for the New York Times                                      |

The Walker Institute looks forward to continuing to collaborate with our community partners to spur dialogue about the fundamental questions facing the Kalamazoo community in the months and years ahead.

Tim Ready  
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## ***Introduction***

***All of us do better when all of us do better.*** This is the theme of ***Kalamazoo Matters***. In 2011, Kalamazoo is confronted with severe economic and social challenges that threaten the middle class way of life that most area families have come to enjoy and that seemed within reach for others. With good reason, more education is widely considered the key to a more secure future. But how do we get from here to there?

This community is uniquely fortunate to be the home of the Kalamazoo Promise, a scholarship program that greatly reduces financial barriers to college for its beneficiaries.<sup>1</sup> The scholarship effectively addresses the serious and growing national problem of college affordability, which along with academic preparedness represents a serious barrier to college access and completion.<sup>2</sup> Equally important, the Kalamazoo Promise has spurred community-wide efforts to enable more young people to be college-ready. Kalamazoo is blessed with many wonderful community-based organizations serving families and children, including Communities in Schools, the Douglass Community Association, the Boys and Girls Club, New Genesis, the Comstock Community Center, the Hispanic American Council and others.

Researchers at the W.E. Upjohn Institute have documented increases in enrollment and achievement since the Kalamazoo Promise was announced,<sup>3</sup> and a team of researchers led by Gary Miron of Western Michigan University has documented changes in attitudes and perceptions about school among students and other stakeholders.<sup>4</sup> Yet despite the wonderful resource of the Kalamazoo Promise and our well-above average array of community services, the needs of Kalamazoo area children and families are greater, still.

Students enrolled in districts other than Kalamazoo Public Schools do not have access to the Kalamazoo Promise, and not everyone is able to fully take advantage of Kalamazoo's fine youth services because of location and other reasons. But even for those who do, it is important to ask whether these resources are enough to enable the many children growing up in disadvantaged circumstances to *fully realize their promise*. As will be discussed below, evidence indicates that there is a long way to go. It is important that we ask, Why?

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<sup>1</sup> This Kalamazoo Promise scholarship is available to any graduate of Kalamazoo Public Schools who has been enrolled at least since ninth grade, with the amount of support prorated by the number of years enrolled. See <https://www.kalamazoopromise.com/?mode.page.view=76>

<sup>2</sup> See "College Affordability: Implications for College Opportunity," by Laura W. Perna and Chunyan Li <http://www.nasfaa.org/Annualpubs/Journal/vol36N1/CollegeAffordability.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> For example, see, The Kalamazoo Promise, and Enrollment and Achievement Trends in Kalamazoo Public Schools, by Timothy J. Bartik, Randall W. Eberts and Wei-Jang Huang. <http://research.upjohn.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1121&context=reports>

<sup>4</sup> To access working papers on the Kalamazoo Promise prepared by Dr. Miron and his research team, see <http://www.wmich.edu/kpromise/>

Possible answers include:

- More time is needed for the Kalamazoo Promise and in-school reforms to work
- In-school and out-of-school services for children need to be better coordinated with each other
- Community resources are simply insufficient to compensate for the many poverty-related problems affecting Kalamazoo area children and their families.

## *The Needs of Young People in Kalamazoo*

Educational achievement and outcomes for children in poverty, on average, are much lower than for other students. This is true in Kalamazoo as it is nationwide, and is especially true for children living in predominantly Black and Hispanic high poverty neighborhoods.<sup>5</sup> Poverty, in turn, is associated with a wide variety of stressors, and it is partially through these stressors that poverty adversely affects education outcomes. Among these stressors are low birth weight births and other non-genetic prenatal influences on growth and development; inadequate access to healthcare; food insecurity; environmental pollutants; family stress; and neighborhood factors such as violence and a relative lack of social connectedness to opportunities.<sup>6</sup>

Detailed information on how the health status of children and adults in Kalamazoo is related to race, place and class was compiled for the first Kalamazoo Matters report produced in April, 2010.<sup>7</sup> The manner in which health-related and other stressors, in turn, affect education outcomes is well described by Richard Rothstein and David Berliner.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For a summary of information about causes of achievement gaps related to race, ethnicity and class, as well as what has and has not been accomplished in closing those gaps, see, *Achieving High Education Standards for All*, Timothy Ready, Christopher Edley, Jr. and Catherine E. Snow, eds). National Academies Press: Washington, DC. 2002. See also *Class and Schools: Using Social, Economic and Educational Reform to Close the Black-White Achievement Gap* by Richard Rothstein. New York: Teachers College Press, 2004

<sup>6</sup> For a sampling of the literature on the relationship between poverty and education outcomes, see Poverty and Potential: Out-of-School Factors and School Success by David Berliner. <http://epicpolicy.org/files/PB-Berliner-NON-SCHOOL.pdf> . See also The Effects of Poverty on Children by Jeanne Brooks-Gunn and Greg J. Duncan in Future of Children, Fall 1997 <http://www.princeton.edu/futureofchildren/publications/journals/article/index.xml?journalid=53&articleid=287&sectionid=1893> .

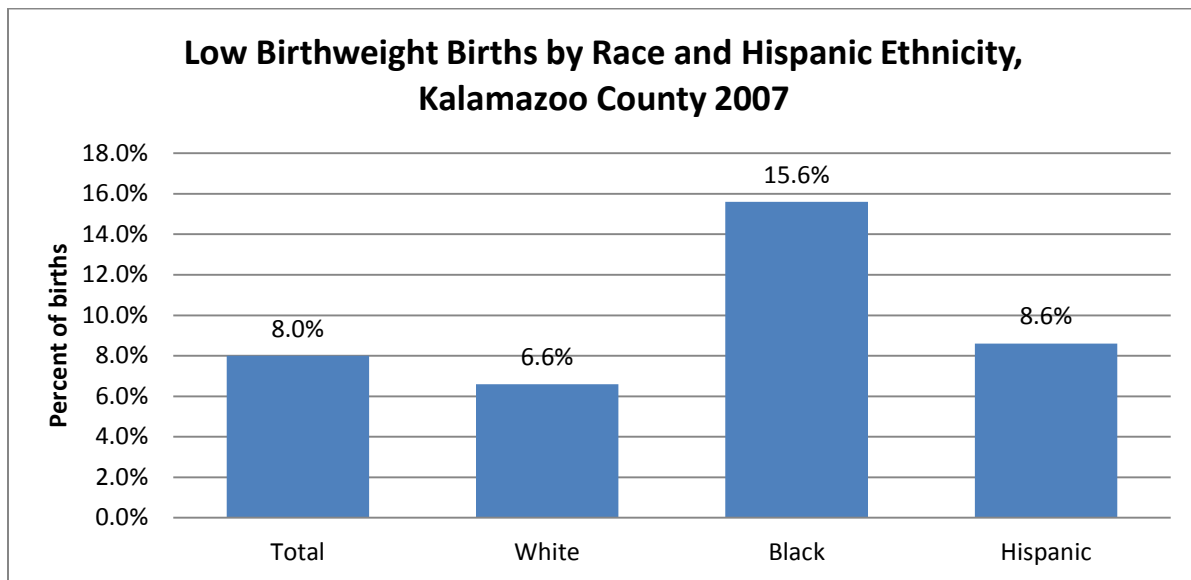
<sup>7</sup> The title is *Kalamazoo County Health Indicators Disaggregated by Race, Place and Socioeconomic Status*, by Annie Wendt, Timothy Ready and Ann Miles and can be downloaded at <http://www.wmich.edu/walkerinstitute/research.html>

<sup>8</sup> See, *Class and Schools* by Richard Rothstein. New York: Teachers College Press, 2004, and Our Impoverished View of Educational Research (Teachers College Record 108: 949-995, 2006), by David Berliner.

## ***Similar Patterns of Disparity in Health and Education: A Coincidence?***

Health was the topic of the first *Kalamazoo Matters* event that took place April 1, 2010. That day, community members discussed how people’s health, on average, is related to the neighborhoods where they live, socioeconomic status and race. This is documented at the national level in the video *Unnatural Causes*<sup>9</sup> and in a local report for Kalamazoo written by Annie Wendt, Timothy Ready and Ann Miles.<sup>10</sup>

In Kalamazoo, as in most other places in the United States, people living in high poverty neighborhoods—which tend to be predominantly Black and Hispanic—generally have more health problems and a substantially shorter life span than persons living in more affluent communities. Brian



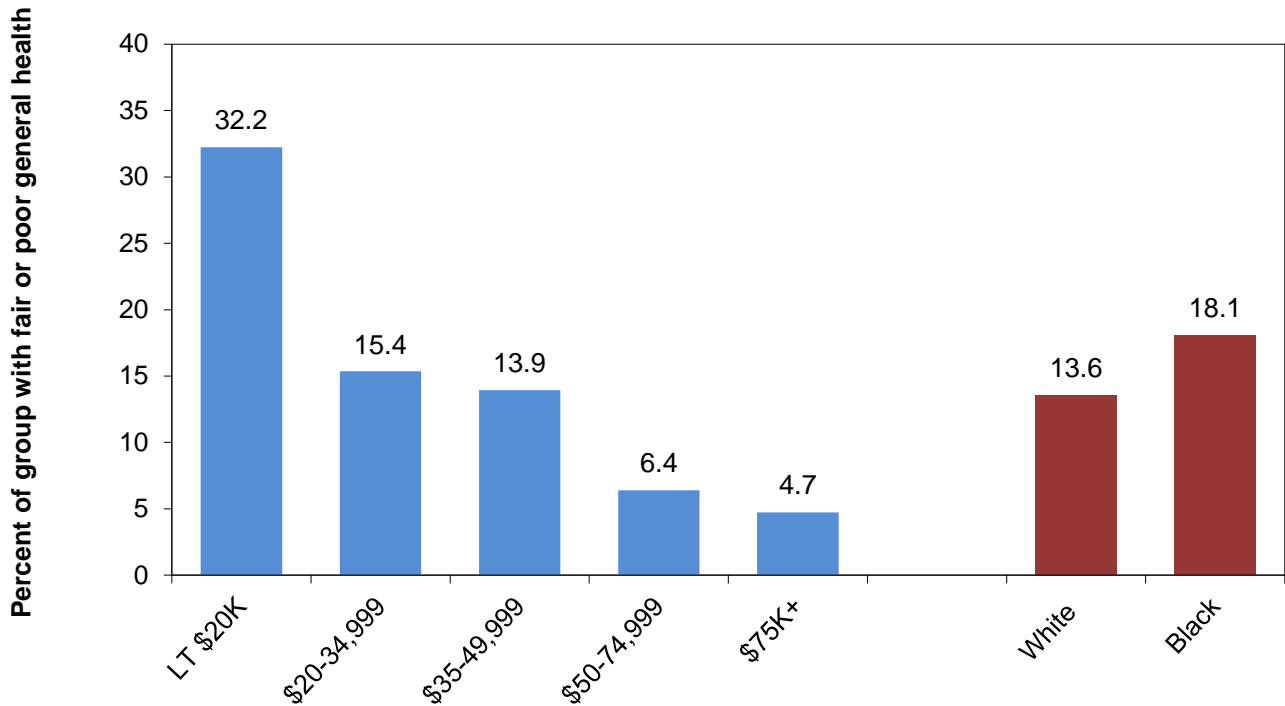
Smedley of the Washington, DC-based Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies Health Policy Institute, discussed how and why this occurs. High poverty, minority neighborhoods are much more likely than others to be contaminated by environmental pollutants, and the economic and social supports needed for families to thrive or even survive tend to be scarce. For residents of these neighborhoods, the net effect is a higher probability of a wide variety of illnesses, from birth through the geriatric years.

When one examines how educational outcomes are distributed by neighborhood, race, ethnicity and class, the pattern is similar. The causal factors are closely related, if not precisely the same.

<sup>9</sup> *Unnatural Causes* is available in local libraries. For more information, see <http://www.unnaturalcauses.org/>

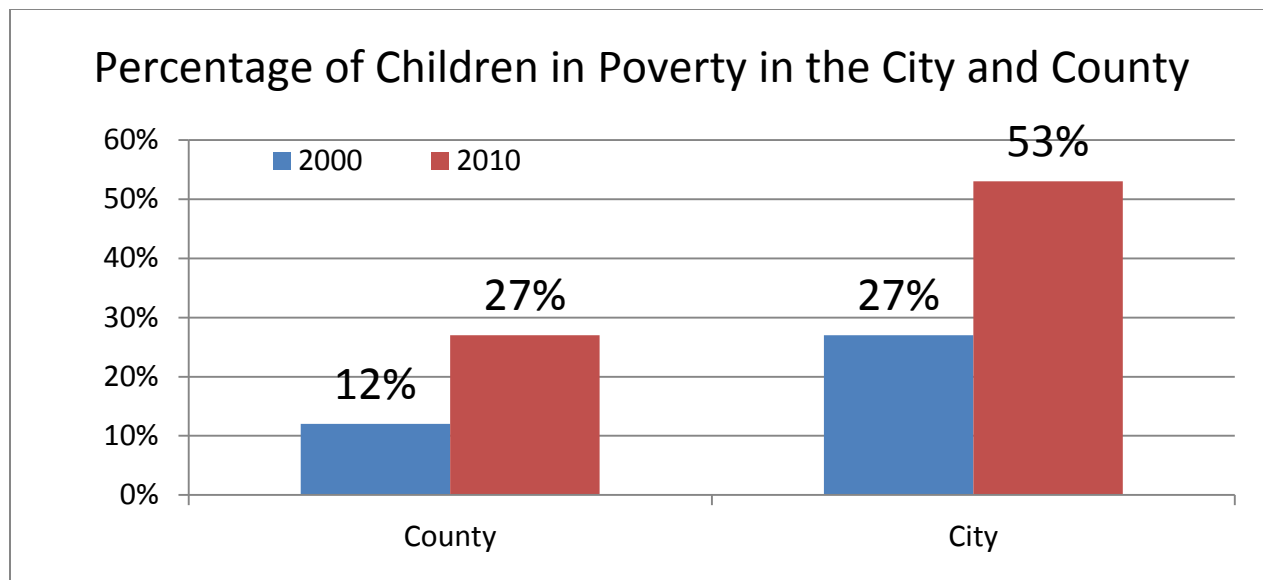
<sup>10</sup> *Kalamazoo County Health Indicators Disaggregated by Race, Place and Socioeconomic Status*, by Annie Wendt, Timothy Ready and Ann Miles. See <http://www.wmich.edu/walkerinstitute/research.html>

**General Health Fair or Poor by Income & Race, Kalamazoo County  
2004 - 2005**



Poverty and low educational attainment are closely related to each other and are mutually reinforcing. This relationship has become much more pronounced since 1980. For example, men in Michigan who have not gone beyond a high school education lost more than 40% of their earning power between 1979 and 2006.<sup>11</sup> For this reason, improving education outcomes and addressing the poverty-related factors that are impeding further gains is more urgent than ever. Many children growing up in poverty can and do excel in school, go on to work in good jobs, and leave poverty behind. But there is no question that poverty severely reduces the probability of this occurring and makes it harder for students, parents, educators and the community to get the kinds of education outcomes that are needed.

<sup>11</sup> From Assessing the Labor Market, Earnings, Income, Social, Civic, Health and Fiscal Consequences of Dropping Out of School, by Andrew Sum. Presented at the 2009 Michigan Dropout Prevention Leadership Summit, Lansing, MI. October 2008.



## ***Child Poverty Rate in Kalamazoo: Rising Fast and among the Highest in the Nation***

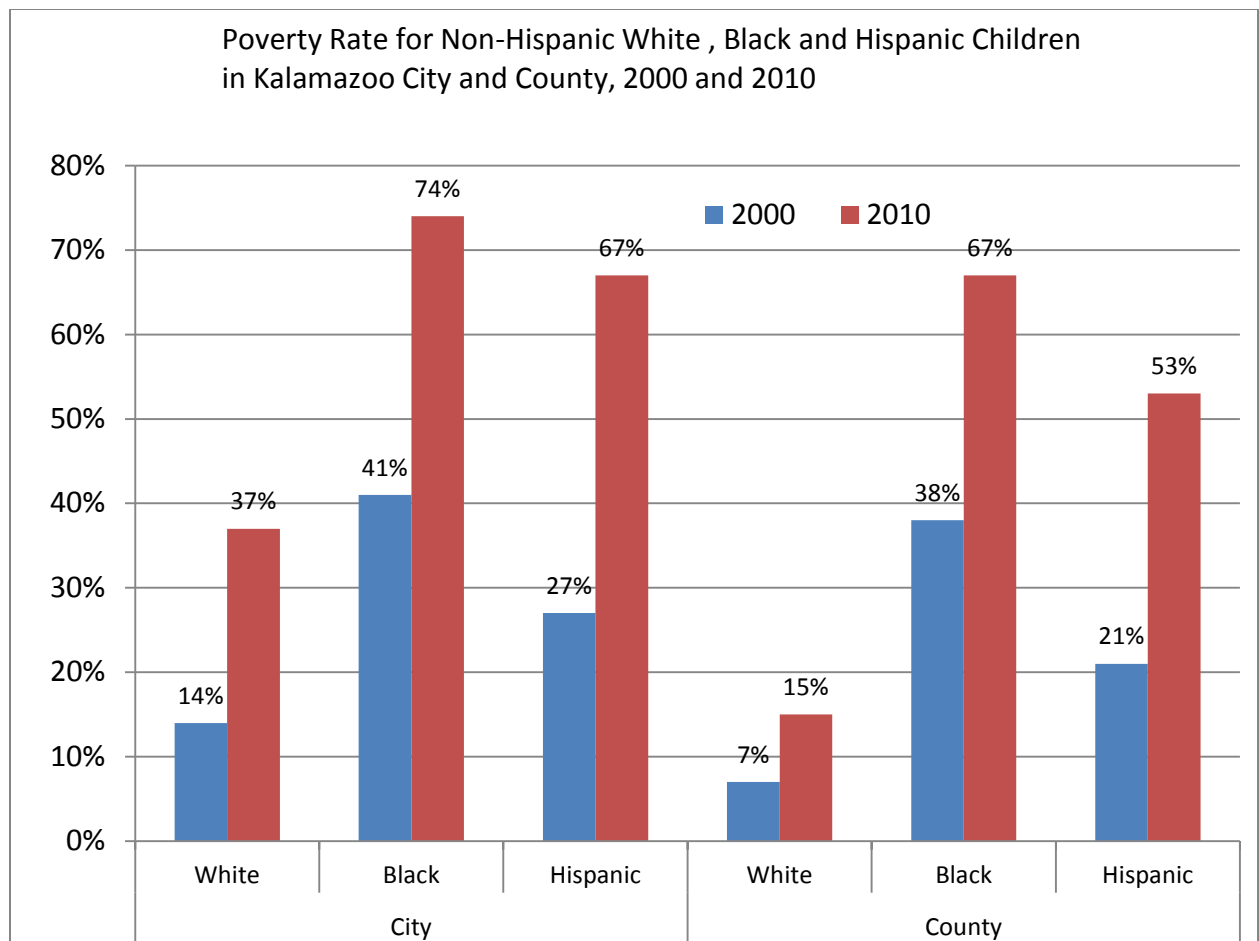
Child poverty rates have been rising rapidly in the Kalamazoo area, doubling in both the city and county between 2000 and 2010. In 2010, 53% of all children in the city of Kalamazoo were living in poverty, placing Kalamazoo third behind Flint (61%) and Detroit (56%) statewide. ***Kalamazoo's 53% child poverty rate places it at the 97<sup>th</sup> percentile nationally.*** Only 15 of 550 cities of 65,000 or more in the United States had higher child poverty rates than Kalamazoo in 2010 (American Community Survey).<sup>12</sup>

Kalamazoo's poverty rates for Black children (74%) and Hispanic children (67%) are the highest in Michigan and place the city at the 97<sup>th</sup> and 98<sup>th</sup> percentile for Black and Hispanic children, respectively, nationwide (American Community Survey, 2010 for cities with populations of 65,000 or more). The poverty rate for White children in the city (37%), although much lower than for Black and Hispanic children, also places Kalamazoo at the 97<sup>th</sup> percentile nationally for poverty among White children.<sup>13, 14</sup> The overall child poverty rate of 27% for Kalamazoo County places was significantly above the Michigan child poverty rate of 23%, and the national child poverty rate of 22%.

<sup>12</sup> A list of US cities with the highest child poverty rates is presented in Appendix A.

<sup>13</sup> All of the city of Kalamazoo is within the boundaries of the Kalamazoo Public School District. The district extends beyond the city limits into part of adjoining townships.

<sup>14</sup> For lists of the US cities with the highest Black, White and Hispanic child poverty rates, see Appendices B, C and D.



## ***Kalamazoo Area Poverty and Education Outcomes***

President Barak Obama honored Kalamazoo’s efforts in education by delivering the first-ever presidential high school commencement address at Kalamazoo Central High School in June, 2010. This great honor was bestowed on Kalamazoo Central High School and the City of Kalamazoo largely because of what has been accomplished since the Kalamazoo Promise was launched. School district enrollment has increased dramatically, in marked contrast to nearly all other urban school districts in Michigan. In addition, achievement scores on the state MEAP exams have increased at a slightly faster pace than they have statewide (Bartik, Eberts and Huang, 2010).<sup>17</sup> Also, plans and strategies have been developed to align the work of community organizations and the schools to better support learning through the Kalamazoo Learning Network.<sup>18</sup> Reading, literacy and early childhood education are the foundation of these plans.

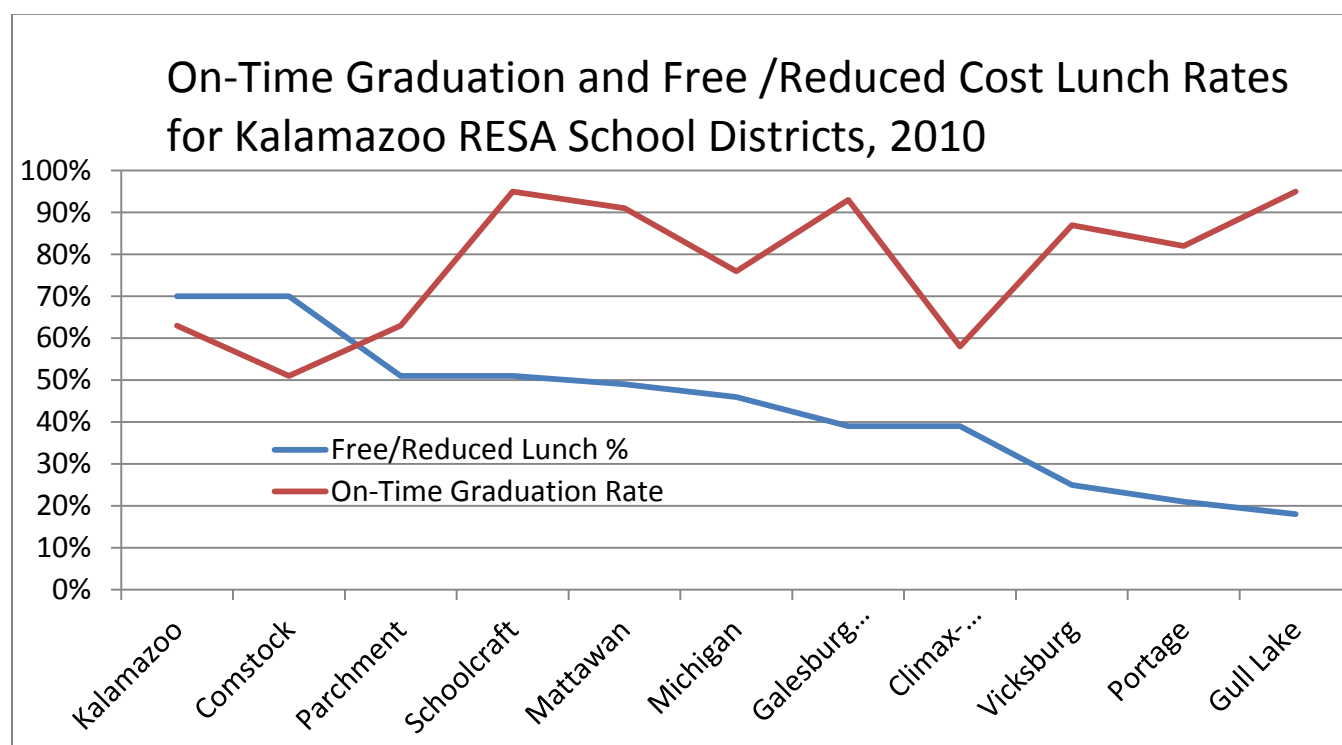
That said, the 4-year cohort graduation rate for Kalamazoo Central High School was 77%, only one percentage point higher than the state average of 76% in 2010. District-wide, only 63% of Kalamazoo Public School students graduated on-time, 12 percentage points lower than the state average of 75%.

<sup>17</sup> See “The Kalamazoo Promise and Enrollment and Achievement Trends in Kalamazoo Public Schools,” <http://research.upjohn.org/confpapers/15/>

<sup>18</sup> See <http://www.kalfound.org/TheLearningNetwork/tabid/243/Default.aspx>

Kalamazoo’s graduation rate is similar to that of the other two county school districts in which more than half of all students qualify for free or reduced cost lunch, but far lower than that of Vicksburg, Portage and Gull Lake, where fewer than a quarter of all students qualify for free or reduced cost lunch. Despite a modest rise in MEAP scores, on-time graduation rates in Kalamazoo have not increased over the past four years. Indeed, they have fallen from 67% in 2007 to 63% in 2010. While it is essential to note that correlation does not necessarily indicate causation, graduation rates were falling at the same time that the child poverty rate was rapidly rising.<sup>20</sup>

Among all KRESA school districts, only 80% of the class of 2008 cohort of students had graduated six years after starting ninth grade. Sixteen percent were counted as having dropped out, and an additional 4% were unaccounted for. As before, districts with the highest concentrations of low income students tended to have the highest percentage of non-completers, and Black and Hispanic students are at highest risks of not completing high school. In 2010, two years, after the class of 2008 was expected to graduate, 462 members of the cohort had dropped out, and an additional 107 were either still trying to complete high school or had disappeared from school records.<sup>21</sup> So, for the 2008 cohort, and presumably for others, **more than 500 young people from each yearly cohort of students do not graduate.** That is, nearly one in five Kalamazoo County youths *each year*. Although some will earn GEDs, this group is at risk of becoming stuck over an extended period of time in poverty, being unemployed or underemployed, suffering ill health, being socially isolated, and suffering a variety of other negative outcomes. Further, the consequences of failure to connect (or reconnect) these youths with opportunities not only hurts them, but diminishes the human capital needed to create a vibrant economic future that many envision for Kalamazoo.



<sup>20</sup> Michigan Center for Educational Performance and Information (CEPI), 2010 4-year cohort graduation rates

<sup>21</sup> Michigan CEPI

## *. We All Do Better when We All Do Better...*

What are the implications of these findings for education? Despite the strong and well-documented influence of out-of-school factors on education outcomes, there is much that can and must be done to improve curriculum and instruction in schools. This is especially true in schools that historically have poorly served low income and racial and ethnic minority students. Schools with outstanding records that serve a high concentration of students from disadvantaged neighborhoods are frequently cited and appropriately praised.<sup>23</sup> There are some high achieving high schools, although far fewer in number than high achieving low income elementary schools.<sup>24</sup> These schools are remarkable precisely because they are the exception and not the rule. There would be many more such schools if the underlying poverty-related stressors plaguing the families and neighborhoods from which students come could be addressed.

Education policy during the past decade has been guided by No Child Left Behind. This legislation, enacted a decade ago, reflects the conventional wisdom that educators are primarily responsible for how much students learn; yet when over 40 years of research indicates that the demographic characteristics of individual students and the social composition of schools (e.g., whether schools are largely segregated by race and/or class) are far more influential.<sup>25</sup> Schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress over time are singled out for reorganization and possible closure.

Two of Kalamazoo's middle schools currently are in this category, even though both recently have made strides. While the poverty rate at these two schools is not necessarily higher than that of many other Kalamazoo schools, the fact that at least seven of every ten students in both schools is poor greatly increases the chances that students will experience difficulties. The salience of this fact is underscored when one considers that the percentage of low income students enrolled in the academically elite Kalamazoo Area Math and Science Center (KAMC) is only 2%, as measured by students eligible for the free and reduced cost lunch program.<sup>26</sup>

## *Conclusion*

**The growth, development and learning of children is all of a piece.** That is, education and youth development are best considered as part of a single process involving families, the schools, the community and students, themselves. It is no coincidence that health status and education are related because school learning in the Twenty-First Century must be part of the overall maturation process. It is inseparable from other factors affecting the child's healthy growth and development. That is why responsibility for education cannot be delegated solely to the schools.

Effective education must involve not only the family but the entire community. If the ambitious goals of education policy are to be achieved, schools must be considered as only one part of a larger integrated system of nurturing supports, encouragement and progressive challenges that mark the pathway from

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<sup>23</sup> See <http://www.edtrust.org/dc/resources/success-stories>

<sup>24</sup> For a report on How High Schools Become Exemplary, see <http://www.agi.harvard.edu/Books.php>

<sup>25</sup> Eg, See Gamoran, Adam and Daniel A. Long, *Schools and Inequality: A Multilevel Analysis of Coleman's Inequality of Educational Opportunity Data, 2006*

[http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/publications/workingPapers/Working\\_Paper\\_No\\_2006\\_09.php](http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/publications/workingPapers/Working_Paper_No_2006_09.php)

<sup>26</sup> CEPI, Free and Reduced Cost Lunch Count, 2009-10

childhood to adulthood. The rapidly growing number of vulnerable children and families in Kalamazoo requires more and better supports to overcome poverty-related vulnerabilities if we are to significantly improve the odds that our young people will thrive, learn, contribute to, and benefit from all that our community, our state and our nation have to offer.

There is much that we are already doing, and more still that we can do, to help ensure that the talents of all of Kalamazoo's children are developed to their potential. This includes being a volunteer tutor or mentor, being mindful of our actions as parents and caregivers, and supporting policies that can address the many unmet needs of low income families and children in our community. In addition to what we do at the community level, however, change is also needed in state and national policies. Better policies are needed to support struggling families, children and schools, reverse the rising tide of poverty, and mitigate its pernicious effects on children.

During the War on Poverty, begun in the 1960s, child poverty was considered a national disgrace requiring urgent action. That action centered on supporting children and families and improving schools. While the War on Poverty was not perfect, there are lessons to be learned from its holistic approach to education and youth development as the key to promoting opportunity, equity and shared prosperity.

Kalamazoo's children are Kalamazoo's future. If we do not find a way to better meet their needs, it is not just the children's future that is at risk. It is ours, together. No matter our different backgrounds, we are One Kalamazoo, One Community.

## *Appendix A*

### **US Cities of 65,000 or More with Child Poverty Rates of 50% or Higher, 2010**

Reading, PA	62%
Brownsville, TX	61%
Flint, MI	61%
Camden, NJ	60%
Fort Myers, FL	57%
Albany, GA	56%
Perris, CA	56%
Detroit, MI	56%
Macon, GA	56%
Rochester, NY	55%
San Bernardino, CA	55%
Pharr, TX	55%
Lorain, OH	55%
Dayton, OH	54%
Gary, IN	54%
Syracuse, NY	53%
<b>Kalamazoo, MI</b>	<b>53%</b>
Laredo, TX	52%
Passaic, NJ	52%
Milwaukee, WI	52%
Indio, CA	52%
Cleveland, OH	52%
Canton, OH	52%
Fresno, CA	50%
Newark, NJ	50%
Hartford, CT	50%
New Haven, CT	50%

## *Appendix B*

### **US Cities of 65,000 or More with Black Child Poverty Rates of 60% or Higher, 2010**

Lincoln, NE	95%
Lorain, OH	80%
Ashville, NC	80%
Canton, OH	79%
Reno, NV	77%
Kenner, LA	75%
Deltona, FL	74%
Waterloo, IA	74%
<b>Kalamazoo, MI</b>	<b>74%</b>
Fort Myers, FL	71%
Abilene, TX	70%
Longview, TX	69%
Flint, MI	67%
Fort Smith, AR	67%
Spokane, WA	67%
Miami, FL	67%
Portland, ME	66%
Salt Lake City, UT	66%
Sunrise Manor, NV	65%
Merced, CA	65%
Macon, GA	65%
Grand Rapids, MI	65%
Cincinnati, OH	64%
Modesto, CA	63%
Portland, OR	63%
Lansing, MI	62%
Albany, GA	62%
Gary, IN	62%
Minneapolis, MN	61%
Dayton, OH	61%
Syracuse, NY	61%

## *Appendix C*

### **US Cities of 65,000 or More with White (Not-Hispanic) Child Poverty Rates of 30% or Higher**

Detroit, MI	67%
Flint, MI	52%
Patterson, NJ	49%
Muncie, IN	46%
Dayton, OH	45%
Dearborn, MI	44%
Fort Smith, AR	42%
Springfield, MO	39%
Pomona, CA	37%
<b>Kalamazoo, MI</b>	<b>37%</b>
Laredo, TX	36%
Kent, WA	36%
Gulfport, MS	35%
Erie, PA	35%
Mission, TX	35%
Trenton, NJ	35%
Akron, OH	35%
Baytown, TX	35%
Youngstown, OH	35%
Wyoming, MI	35%
Decatur, IL	33%
El Cajon, CA	33%
Perris, CA	33%
Mount Vernon, NY	32%
Daly City, CA	31%
Union City, NJ	31%
Fayetteville, AR	31%
Canton, OH	31%
Roanoke, VA	31%
Waco, TX	30%
Augusta, GA	30%
Miami Beach, FL	30%

## *Appendix D*

### **US Cities of 65,000 or More with Hispanic Child Poverty Rates of 60% or Higher**

Syracuse, NY	81%
Little Rock, AR	75%
Buffalo, NY	72%
Kent, WA	69%
Warner Robbins, GA	68%
Montgomery, AL	68%
Deerfield Beach, FL	68%
Athens, GA	68%
Fort Myers, FL	67%
<b>Kalamazoo, MI</b>	<b>67%</b>
Fall River, MA	67%
Cleveland, OH	66%
New Bedford, MA	66%
Sioux City, IA	65%
Topeka, KS	65%
St. Louis, MO	65%
Arden-Arcade, CA	65%
Reading, PA	64%
Cincinnati, OH	63%
Ogden, UT	63%
Gainesville, FL	60%