



HEALTH ♦ EDUCATION ♦ ECONOMY

KALAMAZOO MATTERS

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

by

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ALL OF US DO BETTER WHEN ALL OF US DO BETTER

All of us do better when all of us do better. This is the theme of ***Kalamazoo Matters***—a series of community conversations on, health, education and jobs. In 2010, 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 fortunate that the Kalamazoo Public Schools benefit from strong and bold leadership that has implemented promising reforms of curriculum and instruction. The community also is uniquely fortunate to be the home of the Kalamazoo Promise, a scholarship program that greatly reduces financial barriers to college for its beneficiaries.¹ 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.² Further, 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, and the Hispanic American Council—just to name a few.

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

Students enrolled in other area school districts do not have access to the Kalamazoo Promise, and not everyone is able to fully take advantage of Kalamazoo’s fine community 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*. Evidence indicates that we are still far from achieving this goal. For this reason, it is important that we ask, Why?

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 made more effective.
- Resources are not sufficient to address the serious challenges facing Kalamazoo area children and families.

¹ 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>

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

³ 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>

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

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 minority, high poverty neighborhoods.⁵ 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.⁶

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, 2010.⁷ The manner in which health-related and other stressors, in turn, affect education outcomes is well described by David Berliner.⁸

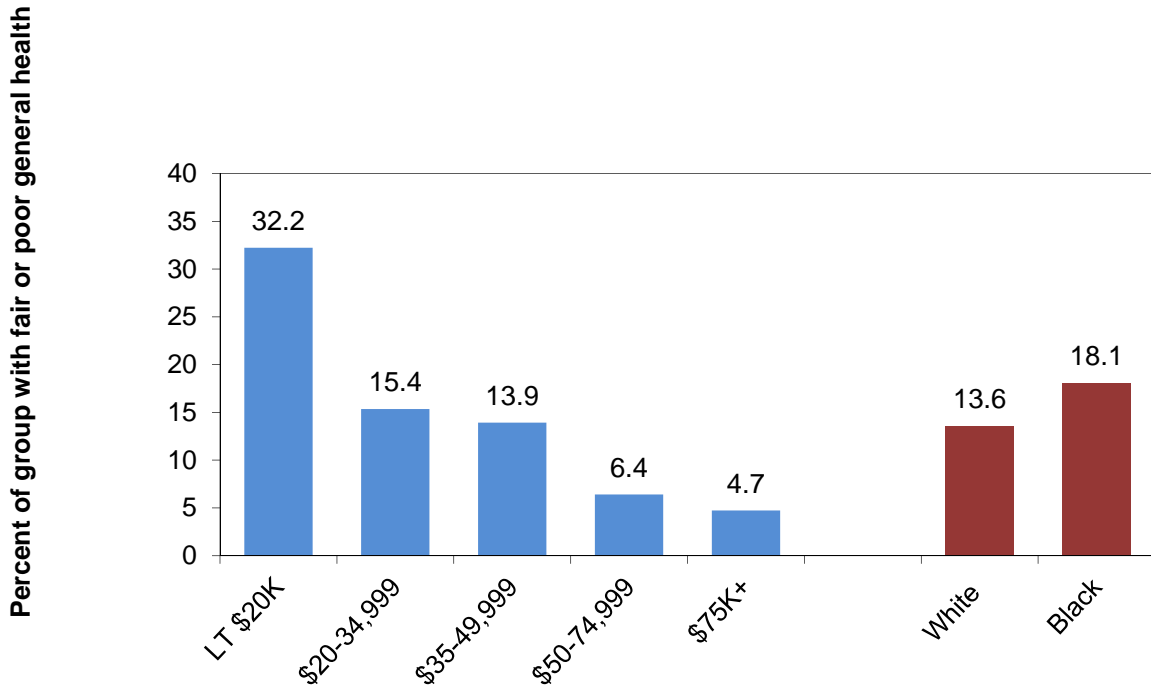
⁵ For a summary of information about causes of achievement gaps related to race, ethnicity and class, as well as what has and has not been accomplished in closing those gaps, see, *Achieving High Education Standards for All*, Timothy Ready, Christopher Edley, Jr. and Catherine E. Snow, eds). National Academies Press: Washington, DC. 2002.

⁶ 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§ionid=1893> .

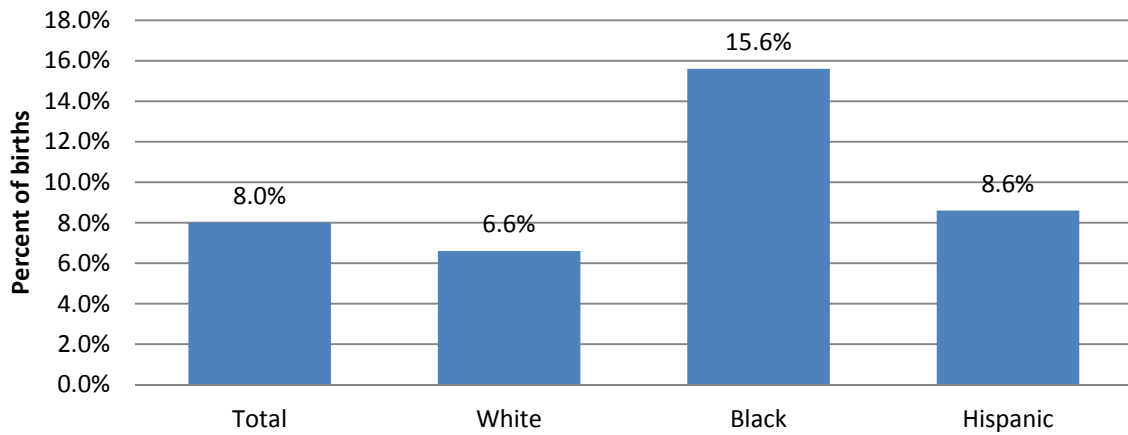
⁷ The title is *Kalamazoo County Health Indicators Disaggregated by Race, Place and Socioeconomic Status*, by Annie Wendt, Timothy Ready and Ann Miles and can be downloaded at <http://www.wmich.edu/walkerinstitute/research.html>

⁸See, Our Impoverished View of Educational Research (Teachers College Record 108: 949-995, 2006), by David Berliner.

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



Low Birthweight Births by Race and Hispanic Ethnicity, Kalamazoo County 2007



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 2006.⁹ For this reason, improving education outcomes and addressing the poverty-related factors that are impeding further gains is more urgent than ever.

Child Poverty Rate in Kalamazoo is among the Highest in the Nation

69% of all Kalamazoo Public School students are eligible for free and reduced cost lunch because of their families' low income.¹⁰ 35% of children living within the boundaries of the Kalamazoo Public School District are from families with incomes below the poverty level—an even more stringent definition of poverty than eligibility for the school lunch program. By this definition, nearly half (49%) of African American children are poor.

The poverty rate for children living in the city of Kalamazoo is even higher.¹¹ 45% of all children living in the city are from families in poverty. Comparing Kalamazoo's child poverty rate to rates in the nation's larger cities,¹² only Detroit (51%), Cleveland (51%) and Buffalo (46%) have higher poverty rates. 57% of Black children in Kalamazoo are poor. 75% of Black children under 5 years of age—a particularly sensitive and critical time for learning—are poor. 45% of white children in the city also are poor.¹³

Among Michigan cities of 55,000 or more, only Flint, Detroit and Pontiac have higher child poverty rates than Kalamazoo. Kalamazoo's Black child poverty rate is exceeded in Michigan only by that of Westland. The city's White child poverty rate is exceeded only by that of Detroit.

⁹ 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. See: http://www.michiganschildren.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=707:dropout-summit&catid=180:dropout-prevention-a-recovery&Itemid=209

¹⁰ Data from the Michigan State Department of Education, CEIP for the 2009-10 school year.

¹¹ 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.

¹² Comparison is to cities with a population of at least 250,000.

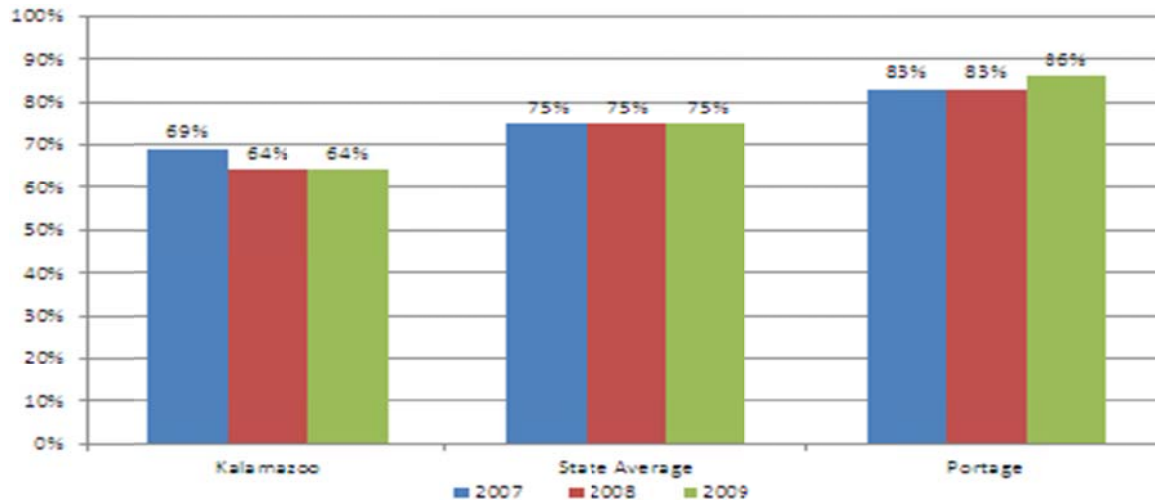
¹³ These figures are estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau based on the 2009 American Community Survey. Although these estimates have a substantial margin of error, estimates for black child poverty and poverty for all children are close to those from previous years. Estimates for poverty among white children are somewhat higher. Differences may be attributable to real increases in poverty, sampling error, or a combination of both.

Education Outcomes in Kalamazoo.

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 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. In addition, plans and strategies have been developed to align the work of community organizations and the schools to better support learning.¹⁴ An emphasis on reading and literacy is the centerpiece of these plans.

That said, the four year cohort graduation rate for Kalamazoo Central High School was 76%, only one percentage point higher than the state average of 75% in 2009.¹⁵ District-wide, only 64% of students graduated on-time—9 percentage points lower than the state average of 75%. Kalamazoo’s graduation rate in 2009 was 22 percentage points lower than that of Portage, Kalamazoo’s more affluent neighbor.

Four-Year Cohort Graduation Rates, 2007 to 2009



Although MEAP scores have risen, substantial gaps remain between the average scores of children in Kalamazoo and students statewide. Gaps are even larger when Kalamazoo’s scores are compared to those of Portage. Further, gaps tend to widen substantially after initial MEAP testing in third grade.

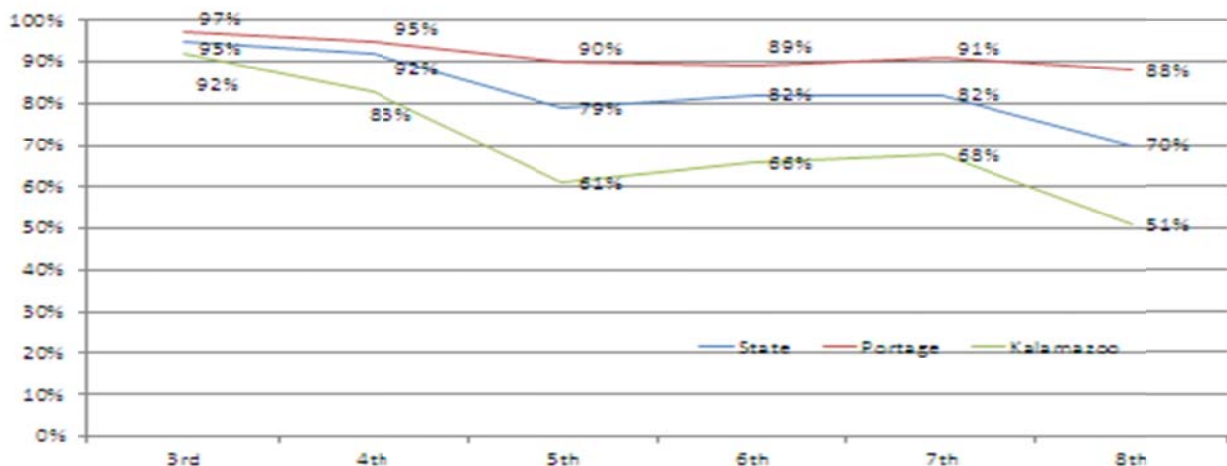
¹⁴ See *The Power of a Promise: Education and Economic Renewal in Kalamazoo*, by Michelle Miller-Adams. The W.E. Upjohn Institute: Kalamazoo.

¹⁵ Most recent data available from the Michigan State Department of Education.

Similar Patterns of Disparity in Health and Education Outcomes: 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*¹⁶ and in a local report for Kalamazoo written by Annie Wendt, Timothy Ready and Ann Miles.¹⁷

Percent of Students Proficient in the MEAP Mathematics Exam by Grade: Kalamazoo, Portage Public Schools and Statewide, 2009



In Kalamazoo as occurs 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. Dr. 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.

¹⁶ *Unnatural Causes* is available in local libraries. For more information, see <http://www.unnaturalcauses.org/>

¹⁷ *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>

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.

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.¹⁸ There also are some high achieving high schools, although far fewer in number.¹⁹ These schools are remarkable precisely because they are much more the exception than the rule. There would be many more such schools if the underlying inequalities plaguing the families and neighborhoods from which students come were addressed.

Education policy during the past decade, has been guided by No Child Left Behind. This legislation, enacted almost 10 years ago, reflects the still prevailing conventional wisdom that held educators are primarily responsible for how much students learn. Schools that fail to make adequate yearly progress over time are singled out for reorganization and possible closure. Two of Kalamazoo's four 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 importance of this fact is underscored when one considers that the percentage of low income students at the high performing Kalamazoo Area Math and Science Center is only 3%, as defined by participation in the school lunch program.

Conclusion

The growth, development and learning of children is all of a piece; that is, they are best considered together as part of a single process. It is no coincidence that health status and education are related because school learning in the 21st Century must be part of the overall maturation process—part of 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 only one part of a larger integrated system of nurturing supports, encouragement and progressive challenges that mark the pathway from childhood to adulthood. The rapidly growing number of vulnerable children and families require more and better support to overcome their vulnerability; to thrive, to learn, to contribute to, and benefit from all that our community, our state and our nation have to offer. There is much that each citizen can do to

¹⁸ See <http://www.edtrust.org/dc/resources/success-stories>

¹⁹ For a report on How High Schools Become Exemplary, see <http://www.agi.harvard.edu/Books.php>

help ensure that the many talents of all our children are developed. 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 today's low income families and children.

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 will be at risk. It is ours, together. No matter our different backgrounds, we are One Kalamazoo, One Community. *We all do better when we all do better.*