NYU | STEINHARDT

EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE IN COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

STUDY OF EDUCATION IN BATTLE CREEK, MICHIGAN

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Metro Center promotes equity and opportunity in education through engaged sciences—research, program evaluation, policy analysis, and professional assistance to educational, governmental, and community agencies serving vulnerable communities and populations. Metro Center is nationally and internationally renowned for its work on educational equity and school improvement, bringing together scholars, educators, and innovators from diverse backgrounds to collaborate on a range of projects to strengthen and improve access, opportunity, and educational quality across varied settings, but particularly in striving communities.

For nearly four decades, Metro Center has been a partner and resource for schools and school districts throughout the U.S. and beyond, including Detroit, Denver, Houston, New York City, Pittsburgh, San Juan, Washington, D.C., and Wilmington. Its research and community engagement programs help prepare teachers, school leaders and staff, and parents improve school culture and climate, reduce referrals to special education, and better support the unique needs of youth across a range of abilities and backgrounds. Its research initiatives inform policy and intervention communities on how best to serve vulnerable populations in and beyond our school systems.

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Table of Contents

Table of Tables

Table of Figures

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was commissioned by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation as part of a broader Battle Creek region community initiative – BC Vision. The study was guided by three overarching questions:

a. What does it mean to be college and career ready in the Battle Creek region?
b. How do community members perceive schools and educational opportunities in the region?
c. What resources, supports, and other school and community inputs shape college and career readiness for Battle Creek region students?

The study was framed in relation to larger issues of equity and excellence in education, and found that structural bias and cultural, socioeconomic, and residential segregation limit the region's pursuit of career and college readiness for all of its residents. The evidence illustrates a complicated set of tensions that surround racial, cultural, and linguistic diversities in relationship to college and career readiness. As one community member put it: "The Battle Creek region is racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse but deeply segregated." Moreover, in places where racial and cultural diversity may exist, socioeconomic segregation appears to be more entrenched. One community respondent described "the Battle Creek Region" as "most certainly segregated by socioeconomic status."

Regardless the fault points that splinter the Battle Creek region into isolated community camps, the intersectionality of identities across race, class, and region seem to define inequities in the region the most. Such inequities play out through patterns of mobility as consequence of school choice and dramatized by significant shifts in student population. Such shifts have redrawn the districts, leaving Battle Creek Public Schools all but alone in a struggle to retain the youth of its community. Such patterns of shift—mobility propelled by Michigan's 2003 Schools of Choice law—explain outcomes of racial and socioeconomic segregation, which correlate with rates of employment. According to the data, lower rates of employment are concentrated among the most disadvantaged, usually but not exclusively the region's low-income residents and residents of color.

These issues of structural bias and segregation uniquely inspire conditions in the Battle Creek region that breed vulnerability and maintain disproportionate educational experiences and outcomes. Thus, academically under-prepared and socially disadvantaged students—the vulnerable—become locked into cycles of disparity that are, themselves, linked to structural bias and segregation. According to the evidence, such cycles reinforce existing constraints to college and careers, particularly for the region's most vulnerable students.

In this light, the study found that vulnerable students are the least well served by schools in the Battle Creek region. According to the data, vulnerability predicts access to rigorous college prep curricula and resources needed to advance beyond high school. The data also illustrates gaps in SAT scores defined by characteristics of vulnerability. Because of the relationship between access to a rigorous curriculum and test scores, it is reasonable to draw the conclusion that curriculum inequity in the Battle Creek region leaves vulnerable students underprepared (as compared to their less vulnerable peers) for college entrance exams such as the SAT. Moreover, just as it predicts employment rates and academic achievement across the Battle Creek region, vulnerability also predicts with graduation and college persistence rates.

In spite of these inequities, the story of education in the Battle Creek region is about much more than vulnerability and disparity, bias and segregation. There is evidence of a fragile but lingering hope defined by a promise of potential. This hope—the community and its cherished wealth of resources, from groundbreaking early childhood programs to a series of community based organizations—can move the region and its residents beyond postures of vulnerability and towards unique pathways to college and careers. The data suggest that community features such as access to early childhood education and persistence to high school graduation, even in the most disadvantaged parts of the region, are becoming the norm. In terms of both access to early childhood education and persistence to graduation, all four districts in the Battle Creek region meet or exceed national averages. However, more work needs to be done, as community members are vexed with questions that revolve around choice: whether to pursue college or career (as opposed to career and college). And the region's more vulnerable students are least likely to be supported due to fragile links between schools and community based organizations.

These findings on college and career readiness in the Battle Creek region all point to three important conclusions:

1. Structural bias and segregation create concentrated pockets of vulnerability that limit career and college readiness for some Battle Creek region residents.

2. Vulnerability drives key educational (outcome) gaps between school districts and within school districts.

3. The Battle Creek region boasts a level of resources and commitments that has the potential to transform college and career trajectories throughout the region; however, this hope is fragile, as resources are often misaligned and the region's most vulnerable students may lack access to them.

Recommendations from this study respond to these conclusions:

Recommendation #1: Leverage the Fragile Hope and Lingering Potential that exist in the community

Recommendation #2: Disrupt Disproportionality and Vulnerability

Recommendation #3: Resolve the Tensions of Structural Bias and Segregation

Thus, these recommendations frame the logics for a range of simple changes to programs and policies. They also should inform suggestions for transforming the region's districts in ways that inspire collaboration and community partnerships. For the sake of categorization, these recommendations are framed as broad solutions (open to more specific programs). Collectively, the proposed they are meant to guide members of the Battle Creek community as they work to foster more equitable learning environments conducive to helping all students in the region thrive from cradle to career.

IN 2014, The W.K. Kellogg Foundation and Kellogg Company hosted a community meeting with Battle Creek area leaders and residents to discuss ways to spark transformation in Battle Creek and improve the educational and economic conditions of Battle Creek area communities.

As an outgrowth of that meeting, researchers from New York University's Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools (NYU Metro Center) conducted the following study to support BC Vision's community-wide mission of promoting educational excellence and equity throughout the Battle Creek community – i.e., the school catchment area shared by Battle Creek Public Schools, Lakeview School District, Harper Creek Community Schools, and Pennfield Schools.[1] With support from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, NYU Metro Center, in collaboration with BC Vision and the Battle Creek community, conducted a community review of educational outcomes, policies, and practices, and supported the development of a community narrative around education.

The goal of the project was to help develop a plan of action for excellent and equitable education systems that benefit all students in the Battle Creek region—one that promotes success beyond school. Equity, as defined in this report, does not mean the lowering of standards, the equal treatment of all students, or something schools that only serve low income students of color should be concerned about. In this report, equity means giving all students what they need to be successful (academically, psychologically, emotionally, socially, and so on), thus recognizing that all students are different. Equitable schooling, then, is about adapting strategies to meet the needs of individual and groups of students and scaffolding strategies to meet the unique needs of all students.

"We envision a thriving community for all people, where there is equitable opportunity for residents to have the income, education, and resources they need to be successful."

This specific definition of equity frames findings, conclusions, and recommendations drawn from this study. As part of this work, a team of researchers from NYU Metro Center examined school data and invited community members to share their perspectives of and visions for education in Battle Creek through interviews, focus groups, and surveys. Thus, this study was situated as part of a broader community initiative to advance equitable

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[1] Throughout this report, we attempt to make a distinction between the Battle Creek Public School District and the larger Community. In spaces where there might be some confusion, we use the phrase "Battle Creek Community" or "Battle Creek Area" to denote all four school districts, and "Battle Creek" "Battle Creek Public Schools" of "BCPS" to indicate the local school district and its catchment area.

opportunity for residents to have the income, education, and resources needed to enjoy success.

NYU Metro Center, in conducting this study, worked closely with Battle Creek Community organizations and residents to surface critical issues relevant to the Battle Creek region. Additionally, NYU Metro Center worked with Education First (Ed-First) and the National Equity Project (NEP) in efforts leading to this report.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

This study was guided by three overarching research questions: (1) What does it mean to be college and career ready in the Battle Creek region (a postindustrial region not unlike other regions across the American Rustbelt)? (2) How do community members perceive schools and educational opportunities across the region? (3) What resources, supports, and other school and community inputs shape college and career readiness? In this report, each question is addressed though a lens of equity, with specific attention paid to structural arrangements of opportunity and related outcomes (e.g., systems of disparity across student achievement; access to educational opportunities, rigorous curriculum, and highly qualified teachers; among other issues of disproportionality).

The first of these questions engages multiple sources of data to highlight key educational outcomes that community stakeholders associate with college and career readiness. Drawing from interview and survey data, our analysis examined indicators of being "on track" for college and career across and within each of the school districts.

Findings from this study suggests that career and college readiness in the Battle Creek region is influenced by at least three drivers: (1) Structural bias and segregation, (2) disproportionality and concentrated vulnerability, and (3) the fragile potential and hope patterned by sets of unique programs, people, and resources peppered throughout the region. By structural bias, we mean the implicit and explicit ways that privilege and disadvantage get baked into systems to favor some while marginalizing others usually along lines of race, class, geography, and so on (Goodwin & Jasper, 1999). By vulnerability, we refer to conditions that leave people "susceptible to misfortune, violence, illness, and death" (Hill, 2016, p. xvii). Vulnerable students are "those marked as poor, Black, Brown, immigrant, queer, or trans. . ." (Hill, 2016, p. xvii).

These findings promote a holistic view of the data, integrating diverse perspectives and differing conceptions of who *is* and who *is not* college and career ready, advancing conversations of why the Battle Creek region should be concerned about college and career readiness, and interrogating what educational excellence and equity mean to the Battle Creek region.

With the second question, we delve further into local perceptions of education in the Battle Creek region, exploring systems and beliefs that fosters divisions within the region and contribute to inequitable outcomes. Here, our discussion foregrounds community voices from interviews and surveys to unpack shared and disparate perspectives of education.

The final question investigates resources and supports that foster college and career readiness, focusing on how schools and community organizations within and across the Battle Creek region seek to promote college and career readiness, and outlining several obstacles to accessing those resources. This discussion highlights, as valuable resources, a number of within-school programs and services, as well as community-based (out-of-school time) organizations and supports.

Through our close examination of these questions, we draw our conclusions and provide recommendations on how to promote greater and more equitable college and career readiness outcomes in and across the Battle Creek region.

METHODS

NYU Metro Center used a sequential and iterative research design to examine college and career readiness in the Battle Creek region. Our researchers gained familiarity with the local community through a review of publicly-available community and school data, in combination with informal interviews of community stakeholders, archival documents, and other key artifacts. Insights were then shared with members of the BC Vision Education Study Taskforce and the BC Vision College and Career Readiness Action Team for reflection and response.

Our research team conducted initial "light touch" interviews with community members in the Battle Creek region to gather necessary information about the region itself and to gauge the range of local perceptions of education. Researchers conducted these brief interviews at various community events and public spaces throughout the Battle Creek region. We also conducted in-depth interviews with specific community stakeholders whose professional and personal experiences positioned them as knowledgeable informants. From these initial conversations, as part of this study we developed a brief survey for distribution to Battle Creek region residents, as well as educator and student surveys intended for use by each of the school districts in their efforts to better prepare students for college and career development. NYU Metro Center, along with participating community organizations, distributed surveys in November and December of 2016.

Leading up to and concurrent with survey distribution, our research team conducted in-depth focus groups and interviews with local community members and educators.

The collection and analysis of survey and qualitative data were informed by publicly-available community and school data, in addition to de-identified student data from each of the districts.

Community and School Data

Our research team compiled community and school data from a range of sources. We began with a review of publicly-available data from the Michigan Department of Education (mischooldata.org) and the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey. Each of the school districts provided de-identified student data for enrolled students through an agreement with Calhoun ISD. District data included demographic information, achievement and outcome records, course selection records, and data on school transfers.

Once the research team had a general perspective of demographic and educational trends, we worked with each school district and the Calhoun ISD to analyze de-identified student-level data. When available, data from the districts were used to facilitate in-depth analyses by demographic subgroups. Groups of students were compared on multiple measures of college and career readiness, both within and between districts, to understand trends in and across various communities.

Interviews and Focus Groups

During interviews and focus groups, we asked participants to share their perceptions of the community, education, and college and career readiness. Participants were prompted to share their perspectives on issues they believed to be important about education in general, and the skills needed to be college and career ready in specific. They also shared their personal connections to local schools and community organizations supporting education.

Our research team conducted approximately 50 "light touch" interviews, 27 informal interviews, 49 formal interviews and focus groups sessions, involving more than 130 community members. These community members included store owners, parents, community leaders, educators from each of the local districts, as well as youth attending local schools. In all forms of data collection, the research team made special efforts to reach out to a diverse range of communities, including low-income communities and communities of color in the Battle Creek Community. Focus groups were designed to ensure the perspectives of various vulnerable communities were captured. Purposeful sampling enabled the research team to bring together individuals associated with organizations that primarily served communities of color as participants in focus groups.

Surveys

Our research team developed surveys in consultation with BC Vision's College and Career Readiness Action Team and local educators. NYU Metro Center conducted community surveys across the Battle Creek region. Online and paper versions of the community surveys were distributed throughout November and December, 2016. Additionally, through BC Vision's College and Career Readiness Action Team, our research team developed educator and student surveys, in collaboration with local school districts. Community surveys were distributed via multiple sources. The surveys were distributed electronically and in paper format through the following organizations and venues to ensure we collected a large number of survey responses throughout the community.[2]

- BC Vision Facebook Page
- BC Vision Website
- WKKF Connected Communities
- Kellogg Community College Website
- The Burma Center

- Michigan Works (Southwest)
- The Women's Coop
- New Harvest Christian Center
- Voces
- Battle Creek Area Schools

COMMUNITY SURVEY RESPONDENTS BY DISTRICT (N=646)

- Battle Creek Public Schools — 41.60%
- Harper Creek Community Schools — 7.00%
- Lakeview School District — 26.80%
- Pennfield Schools — 22.80%
- I'm not sure — 1.90%
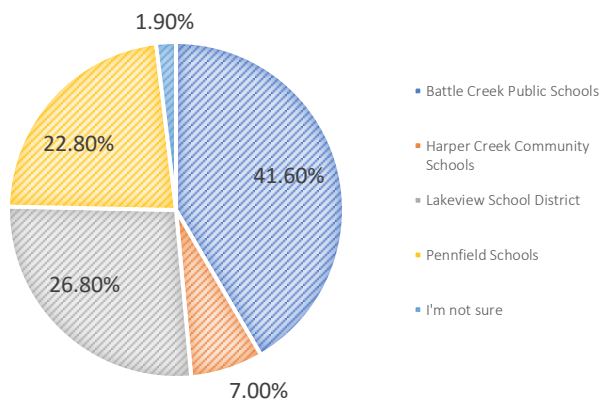
Additionally, our research team distributed surveys directly to individuals who expressed interest in the study and provided contact information.

A total of 646 residents of the Battle Creek area completed all or most of the community survey.[3] The survey, distributed to all community members regardless of parental status, asked respondents about their feelings about the quality of area schools and their opinions about community initiatives. Parents with children in local public schools were asked about their level of engagement with their child's teacher and school, the climate of their child's school, and their expectations regarding their child's future education.

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[2] Throughout the survey process, individuals in different communities express a sense of survey overload. In both Lakeview and Battle Creek Public Schools, the surveys distributed after district surveys. Community members indicated having taken several surveys. While participation in surveys should always be voluntary, the overuse of surveys in a community may depress response rates. This is taken into consideration in the analysis of the data and in the study recommendations.

[3] Over 725 residents clicked on the survey link or started a paper survey, however, did not get passed the first question, making their responses unusable.
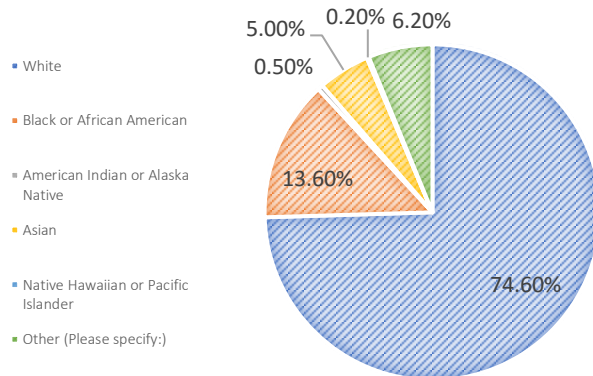
The survey respondents were demographically diverse, corresponding to the racial demographics of the Battle Creek community. Given the relatively low percentage of people of color in the community, attention was paid to ensuring that people of color were well represented in focus groups and interviews.

About 45 percent of community respondents had children who attended public schools in the area. Among these parents, 25 percent had children enrolled in Battle Creek Public Schools, 4 percent had children enrolled in Harper Creek Community Schools, 16 percent had children enrolled in Lakeview School District, and 46 percent had children enrolled in Pennfield Schools. Nine percent of respondents had children enrolled in more than one school district. Due to the disproportionate rates of response from each of the four school districts, claims about parents in individual districts could not be made from the data.

In addition to helping share the community survey, school districts distributed the educator and student surveys.

Legend:
- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Other (Please specify:)

5.00% 0.50% 0.20% 6.20%
13.60%
74.60%

LANGUAGE OTHER THAN ENGLISH

- No
- Spanish
- Burmese
- Other
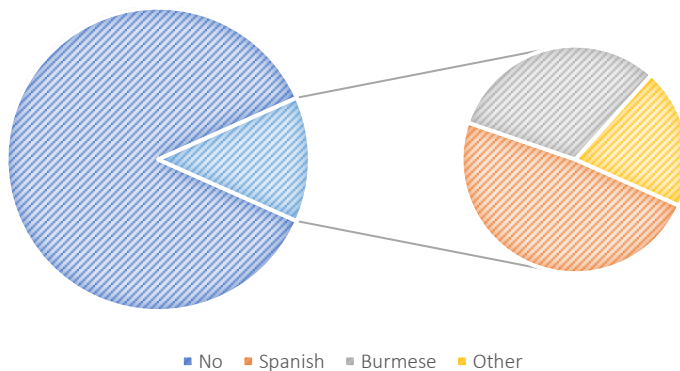
Two hundred eighteen educators participated in the teacher survey; 38.6 percent worked in Battle Creek, 14.7 percent worked in Lakeview, 27.2 percent worked in Harper Creek and 13.6 percent worked in Pennfield.

The student survey received 1573 total responses. Thirty-three percent of student respondents attended schools in Battle Creek, 41 percent in Harper Creek, and 26 percent in Pennfield. Eighty-six individual students from Lakeview started the survey, but most did not answer more than the first two survey questions. Because of this, most survey items did not have enough data from Lakeview to prepare meaningful analysis or draw conclusions about its population. All Lakeview student respondents were omitted from the final survey analysis. About 17 percent of all students in the Battle Creek area participated in the survey.

To more closely represent the distribution of students throughout Battle Creek, Harper Creek, and Pennfield, student survey responses were weighted according to their proportion of the overall student population. Although Battle Creek

survey responses made up 33 percent of the total student surveys received, Battle Creek students comprised 47.8 percent of the student population in Battle Creek, Harper Creek, and Pennfield. Our decision to weight survey data in this manner ensures that no one district is over- or under-represented in final analysis and reporting across all districts (see Table 1).

Table 1: Student Survey Respondents and Weighting

	Total Student Proportion	Original Proportion of Surveys	Weight Factor	Weighted Proportion of Surveys
Battle Creek Public Schools	47.8%	33%	1.53	47.8%
Harper Creek Community Schools	29.0%	41%	0.76	29.0%
Pennfield Schools	23.2%	26%	0.94	23.2%

College and Career Readiness Action Team

The College and Career Readiness Action Team and the Education Study Taskforce developed the initial research questions that guided this study. Ongoing relationships and subsequent interactions with the Action Team and Taskforce continued to shape the collection and analysis of data. Researchers from NYU Metro Center met on a bi-monthly rotating schedule with members of the Action Team and Taskforce. As part of these meetings, researchers from NYU Metro Center provided the Action Team and the Taskforce members with updates about the study and solicited critical information and feedback that was used to drive the study.

Analysis

Key findings were based on the triangulation of data, engaging multiple data sources to identify and corroborate findings. Descriptive analyses were conducted on all quantitative data, including survey data. When possible, data were disaggregated by key demographic groups. Formal interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed verbatim following data collection. Informal interviews were captured through field notes. Using Dedoose, a cross-platform software designed to analyze mixed methods and qualitative data, transcripts and field notes from observations were coded, clustered, and themed by members of the research team. These analyses surfaced key themes that shed light on the questions under investigation (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013).

THE BATTLE CREEK COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS

The diversity of the Battle Creek Community is complex, yielding paradoxical results. Diversity often functions as a dividing mechanism between districts and communities, but also represents a valuable asset to school districts. As one White resident noted, racial and class divides were readily perceived by members of the community. However, when discussing his decision to keep his children in Battle Creek Public Schools, he explained:

> Obviously, you want your kids to grow academically, right, but we chose Battle Creek Public Schools specifically because of the diversity, both racially and economically. We knew that's what our kids were going to face when they got out of public school, whether they went to college or got a job, whatever.

"There's this racial divide. There's also a- I think a class divide that exists. Whether it exists or not, there's certainly the perception that that's what's happening."

A significant number of the conversations about college and career readiness in Battle Creek were set against the backdrop of race and class, and framed by divisions between communities and school districts. Thus, to understand college and career readiness from the perspective of both equity and excellence, it is important to consider the demographic picture of the Battle Creek Community, specifically examining racial and socioeconomic demographic patterns. Both data from the U.S. Bureau of the Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS) 2014 5-Year Estimates, school enrollment data, and the words of community members show racial and socioeconomic divides within the Battle Creek community. Battle Creek is a community with sharp differences between districts and neighborhoods, reflected by community racial and socioeconomic demographics.

Race, Ethnicity, and Language

All communities in the Battle Creek region are predominately White (see Table 2). Of the districts, the majority of African American community members reside within the Battle Creek School District boundaries. Battle Creek also has a growing Asian and Hispanic community. The neighborhoods within the Battle Creek Public School catchment have the highest concentrations of poverty. Lakeview has a small, but growing African-American community, and a shrinking White community. It also has a small, but growing Hispanic community. Similarly, Pennfield has a small African American community in the area closest to Battle Creek. The community of Harper Creek is predominantly White and unchanged relative to the rest of the Battle Creek area.

In 2014, an estimated 89,124 people lived in the school districts of Battle Creek, Pennfield, Lakeview, and Harper Creek. Nearly half of area residents (42,836) lived in Battle Creek, and nearly four out of five residents in the area were White. In Battle Creek, Black residents comprised 22 percent of the population.

Table 2: Battle Creek Community Demographics

District	Total Population	Percent White	Percent Black	Percent Other Races
Battle Creek Public Schools	42,836	69.05	22.07	8.89
Harper Creek Community Schools	15,149	93.50	2.89	3.61
Lakeview School District	21,780	83.53	6.67	9.80
Pennfield School District	9,359	90.27	4.88	4.85
Total	89,124	78.97	13.24	7.79
Data source: American Community Survey 2014 5-Year Estimates; variable B02001				

It is important to note that the demographics of the larger communities do not necessarily match the demographics of the students attending school in each district. While enrollment data from mischooldata.org show that the overall school demographic data is similar to the community data, there are key demographic differences of note across districts as well as key differences between community and school demographics.

Combined, the student population is predominately White, and more than 50% of the student population is low-income. However, the demographics of the schools differ significantly between districts. The 5,435 PreK-12 students who attended Battle Creek Public Schools for the 2015-2016 school year were characterized by higher proportions of students of color and economically disadvantaged students than in Michigan overall. As such, Battle Creek Public Schools is both the largest of the school districts and the most diverse, with more than two-thirds of its student body identifying as some race other than White. Additionally, nearly two-thirds of students in the school district are from low-income backgrounds, and one out of every twelve students are designated as English language learners (see Table 3). The 4,046 PreK-12 students who attended Lakeview School District Schools for the 2015-2016 school year were similar to students in Michigan overall, with somewhat lower proportions of Black/African American students and slightly higher proportions of Asian American students, multiracial students, and English Language Learners. Approximately half of all students in Lakeview School District schools come from low-income backgrounds, and similar to Battle Creek Public Schools, more than 8% of the student population are designated as English language learners. The 2,712 PreK-12 students who attended Harper Creek Community Schools for the 2015-2016 school year were characterized by higher proportions of White students and lower proportions of English Language Learners than in Michigan overall. Similarly, the 2,175 PreK-12 students who

Battle Creek Public Schools is both the largest of the school districts and most diverse, with more than two-thirds of its student body identifying as some race other than White.

attended Pennfield Schools for the 2015-2016 school year were characterized by higher proportions of White students than in Michigan overall. Relative to the combined enrollment, students of color are underrepresented in both Harper Creek and Pennfield. Harper Creek and Pennfield do, however, have proportionate shares of low-income students enrolled in their districts.

Comparing community demographics to district enrollment, while about 70 percent of people living in the Battle Creek Public Schools catchment area were White, only 36 percent of students attending Battle Creek Public Schools were White (see also Table 3). Similarly, even though Black residents comprised 22 percent of Battle Creek Public School zoned district, Black students made up 37 percent of students attending Battle Creek Public Schools. This disparity may be indicative of a number of things; for example, a disproportionate number of White students zoned for Battle Creek Public Schools may use school choice policies to attend neighboring districts.

Table 3: PreK-12 Student Population Demographics for Battle Creek Area School Districts and All Michigan Districts Combined, 2015 – 2016

	Battle Creek Public Schools	Harper Creek Community Schools	Lakeview School District	Pennfield Schools	Michigan
All Students (N)	4,474	2,712	4,046	2,175	1,540,005
Gender					
Female	47.5	48.9	50.2	50.9	48.5
Male	52.5	51.1	49.8	49.1	51.5
Race or Ethnicity					
Asian American	4.7	0.8	8.2	0.4	3.1
Black or African American	36.5	2.1	9.2	4.8	18.2
Hispanic or Latino	12.0	4.8	9.1	4.7	7.4
Two or More Races	10.1	5.0	10.1	5.8	3.4
White	36.1	86.2	62.9	83.2	67.1
Other Races	0.6	1.1	0.5	1.1	0.8
Economic Background					
Disadvantaged	64.5	39.1	49.2	44.1	46.3
Not Disadvantaged	35.5	60.9	50.8		43.7
English Language Learner Status					
ELL	8.5	1.6	8.2	*	5.9
Not ELL	91.5	98.4	91.8	>99.0	94.1

Notes: Data are drawn from mischooldata.org and represent an unduplicated count (pupil headcount) of students attending schools within the district/state. Because fewer than 10 English Language Learners attended Pennfield schools, specific frequencies were not reported by the state. Additionally, it has been suggested that the data under reports the number of students who might be from low-income backgrounds. This is because some districts provide free meals for all students, and thus there is no real incentive for families to complete the forms used in the calculation of economic disadvantage.

Income and Earnings

Figure 1: Annual Household Earnings
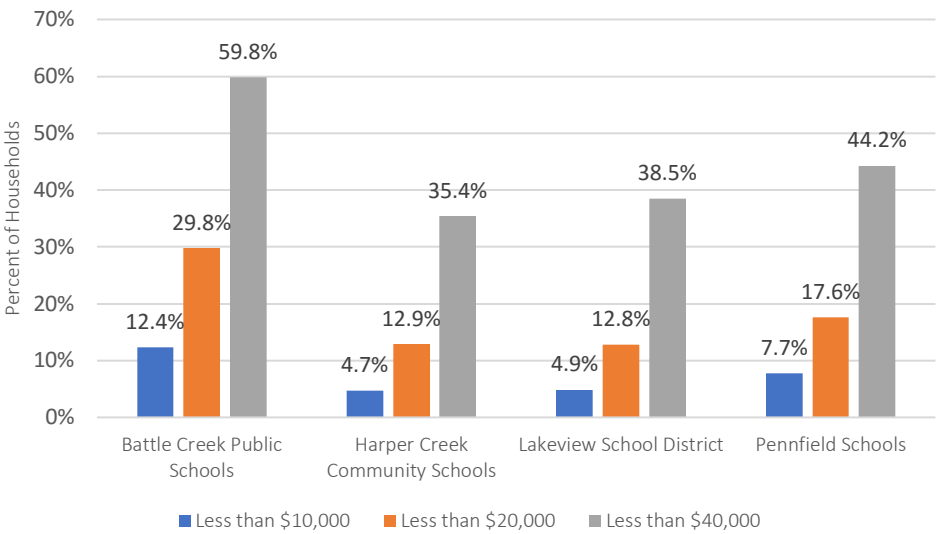
The socioeconomic data tends to mirror the racial demographic data; that is, areas with highest concentrations of people of color are the same areas with lowest average household income. As such, communities marked by racial divides are often similarly divided in terms of class (see Figure 1). Across the four districts, about 9 percent of households earned less than $10,000 per year, 21 percent earned less than $20,000 per year, and 49 percent earned less than $40,000 per year (Figure 1). In Battle Creek, 12 percent of households earned less than $10,000 annually, compared to just 4.7 percent in Harper Creek.

On average, Battle Creek has lower levels of household income, compared to the other three districts (see Table 4). The average household income across the four school districts was $55,820. In the Battle Creek Public Schools catchment,

Figure 2: Map of Annual Household Earnings
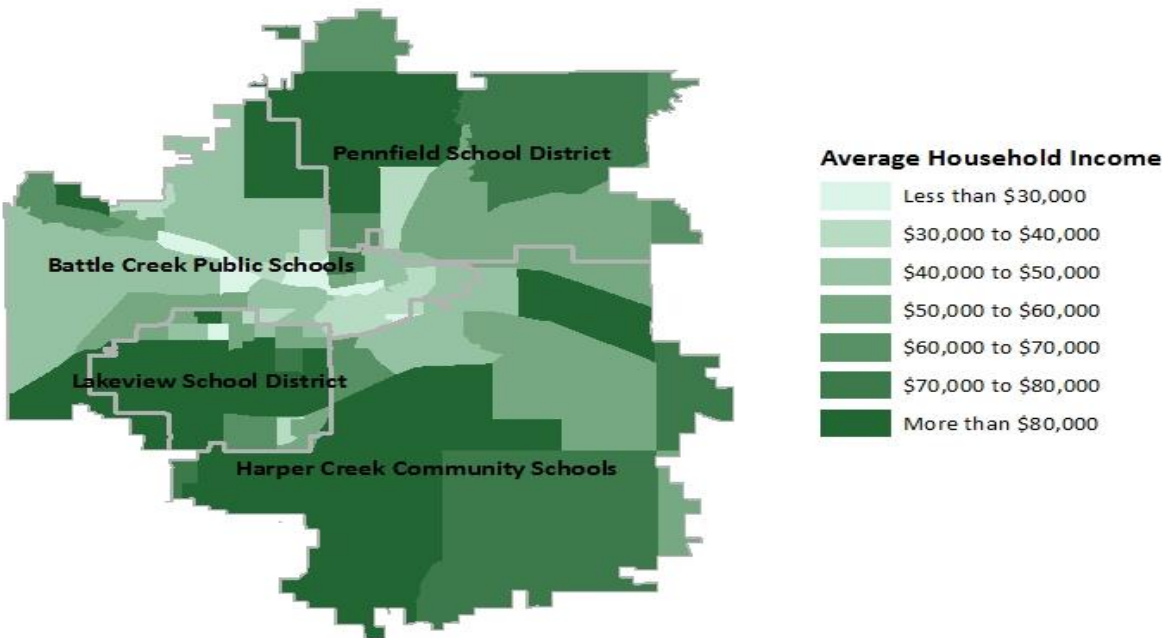
the average household income was $41,335. Comparatively, Pennfield has an average household income of almost $58,966, and Lakeview and Harper Creek both have average household incomes of above $70,000, though as the map indicates there are wide ranges of income in each of the districts (see Figure 2).[4]

Table 4: Average Household Income by District

District	Average Household Income
Battle Creek Public Schools	$41,335
Harper Creek Community Schools	$75,587
Lakeview School District	$71,559
Pennfield School District	$58,966

Data source: American Community Survey 2014 5-Year Estimates; variable B19025 Aggregate Household Income in the past 12 months

This is not to say that there are not residents in each district who are impacted by poverty. The 2014 American Community Survey estimated that 21.8 percent of the total Battle Creek population fell below the federal poverty level; among children under 18, the rate of poverty increased to 32.3 percent. Among the four school districts, both overall poverty and child poverty were highest in Battle Creek Public Schools; 27 percent of the total population lived below the poverty line, as did 38 percent of children. In the other three school districts, adult and child poverty rates were significantly lower than those in Battle Creek Public Schools, and there was less of a disparity between adult and child poverty rates (see Figure 3). In 2015, the federal poverty level for a family of four was defined as a combined household income of less than $24,250.

Approximately 3.3 percent of area residents speak Spanish at home, according to Census estimates; about two-thirds of Spanish speakers are located in the Battle Creek Public Schools catchment area. Seventy-six percent of Spanish speakers also speak English "very well."

The U.S. Census estimates that approximately 1.6 percent of Battle Creek Public Schools and 1.3 percent of Lakeview residents speak "other Asian languages" (e.g., a language outside the major languages including Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese). Only 18 percent of these residents speak English "very well." While not explicitly captured in the

Figure 3: Poverty Rates of Total Population and Children Under 18

Census data, based on conversations within the community, it is reasonable to assume that a significant number of these residents speak some dialect of Burmese.

Employment

Hand-in-hand with income and earnings is employment. According to 2014 ACS estimates, 18 percent of residents over the age of 16 in the Battle Creek Public Schools district were unemployed, compared to 5 percent in Harper Creek, 8 percent in Pennfield, and 7 percent in Lakeview. In Battle Creek, Black residents were more likely than White residents to be unemployed. Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates that as of July 2016, the unemployment rate in the Battle Creek metropolitan area was 5.0 percent This represents a significant decrease in the unemployment rate from a peak of 13.2 percent in July 2010.

Table 5: Unemployment by District and Race

District	Total Unemployment Rate	White (Non-Hispanic) Unemployment Rate*	Black Unemployment Rate*
Battle Creek Public Schools	18.09	14.59	26.83
Harper Creek Community Schools	5.09	5.23	0.00
Lakeview School District	7.49	8.68	6.43
Pennfield School District	8.08	8.61	0.00

Data source: American Community Survey 2014 5-Year Estimates; variables B23025, C23002A, C23002B, C23002H, C23002I
Notes: The unemployment rates reported here are from the American Community Survey 5-Year estimates released in 2014. They are not the unemployment rates released monthly by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The unemployment rates reported here reflect data collected in the five years prior to the data's release.

Manufacturing jobs dominated the job market in the area, with 8922 jobs in the sector, or 22 percent of all jobs. Manufacturing jobs were located almost exclusively in Battle Creek. Jobs in the healthcare sector comprised 20 percent of all jobs; accommodation and food services and the retail trade sectors each comprised 11 percent of all jobs in the area.

Table 6: Major Job Sectors by School District

District	Top Job Sectors
Battle Creek Public Schools	Manufacturing (33.6%)
	Health care and social assistance (22.7%)
	Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (7.3%)
Harper Creek Community Schools	Accommodation and Food Services (36.4%)
	Retail Trade (31.2%)
	Health Care and Social Assistance (5.9%)
Lakeview School District	Accommodation and Food Services (20.9%)
	Health Care and Social Assistance (18.5%)
	Retail Trade (16.9%)
Pennfield School District	Health Care and Social Assistance (25.8%)
	Educational Services (21.6%)
	Retail Trade (10.7%)

According to employment data from the U.S. Census, 25,404 people work in Battle Creek. Of these, 78.5 percent (19,943) live outside of the Battle Creek school district, and 21.5 percent both live and work within the district region. Nearly 8000 Battle Creek residents travel outside district boundaries for work.

Table 7: Employment Inflow and Outflow

District	Live outside district and work in district	Live and work in district	Live in district and work outside district
Battle Creek Public Schools	19,943	5461	7935
Harper Creek Community Schools	4374	531	7049
Lakeview School District	7269	1111	7935
Pennfield School District	1225	222	4212

Educational Attainment

Educational attainment levels varied widely amongst residents of the four school districts. In Battle Creek, 20 percent of residents had earned at least an Associate's degree, compared to 35 percent in Harper Creek, 39 percent in Lakeview, and 29 percent in Pennfield. Fourteen percent of Battle Creek residents did not hold a high school diploma or GED. Although students from across all four districts voiced postsecondary aspirations, their local communities vary considerably in the proportion of adults with postsecondary credentials..

Figure 4: Educational Attainment in the Battle Creek Community
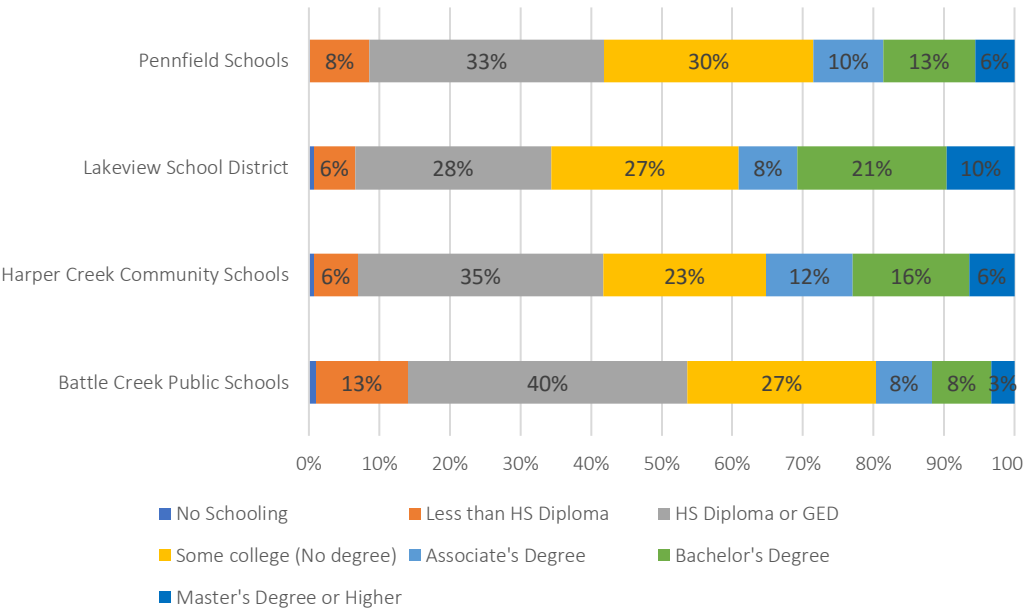
COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS IN BATTLE CREEK

Battle Creek Area students face a number of potential challenges with respect to persisting and persevering through school. In this section, we provide an overview of college and career readiness in Battle Creek, describing key student outcomes and students' aspirations related to college and career.

The broader picture of college and career readiness painted by educational outcomes and attainment data highlights critical distinctions within *and*

"...some of those kids that you thought would never make it, or they had so much going on in their life. Then through sheer force of will, of working with them, helping them out every day, and then they finally walk across the stage, and it's like they're the first one in their family that's ever graduated, stuff like that. There's a lot of moments that are memorable for other reasons that aren't positive ones, but typically I find I focus on the more positive ones when possible."

between districts, insofar as these gaps exists both between districts and within individual communities, between groups of students. In particular, in all of the districts, students of color and students from low-income backgrounds fare worse than their peers. Moreover, students in Battle Creek Public Schools fare worse than their peers in neighboring districts. Thus, in terms of school success, factors of geography and social identity, chiefly class, race, and linguistic background, appear to be elements predictive of career and college readiness.

In this regard, several key academic indicators are useful in identifying the extent to which students are "on-track" to be designated college or career ready. Of these, the most obvious examples include academic achievement (at the elementary, middle, and secondary grade levels), attendance, high school graduation, and college enrollment.[5, 6] Students who are performing on or above grade level throughout their enrollment in grades K-12, who graduate on time from high school, and who enroll immediately in college after graduation are more likely to experience success in college and careers (beyond college). For students who fall behind at any point in this pathway (what we call educational delay or disruption), additional supports – provided either in their school, community, or family – are often needed to help them get back on track.

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[5] This brief focuses mainly on college readiness. Career readiness is usually aligned with college readiness through high school and therefore there are overlapping measures, however, this brief does not have an outcome measure for career in the same way that it does for college.
[6] For a more in-depth and comprehensive look at research-based indicators and predictors of college and career readiness, please see College and Career Readiness and Success Center at the American Institutes for Research http://www.air.org/resource/predictors-postsecondary-success

Why College and Career Readiness Matters

Evidence shared in this report consistently illustrates that the Battle Creek Community, collectively, expects local systems to prepare students to be college and career ready. Definitions of readiness, along with degrees of confidence in the schools to meet these objectives, varies across communities.

College and career readiness translates into higher earnings for residents (see Figure 5). Figures from the 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates show that each progressive level of education corresponds with significantly higher earnings for individuals. For example, individuals with a high school degree in the Battle Creek Community earn $6,000 more, annually, than individuals without high school degrees. At the same time, adults with some college or an associate's degree earn approximately $5,300 more annually than those with only a high school degree, and individuals with a bachelor's degree earn $15,000 more annually than those with some college or an associate's degree.

Figure 5: Median 12-Month Earnings by Educational Attainment, 2015
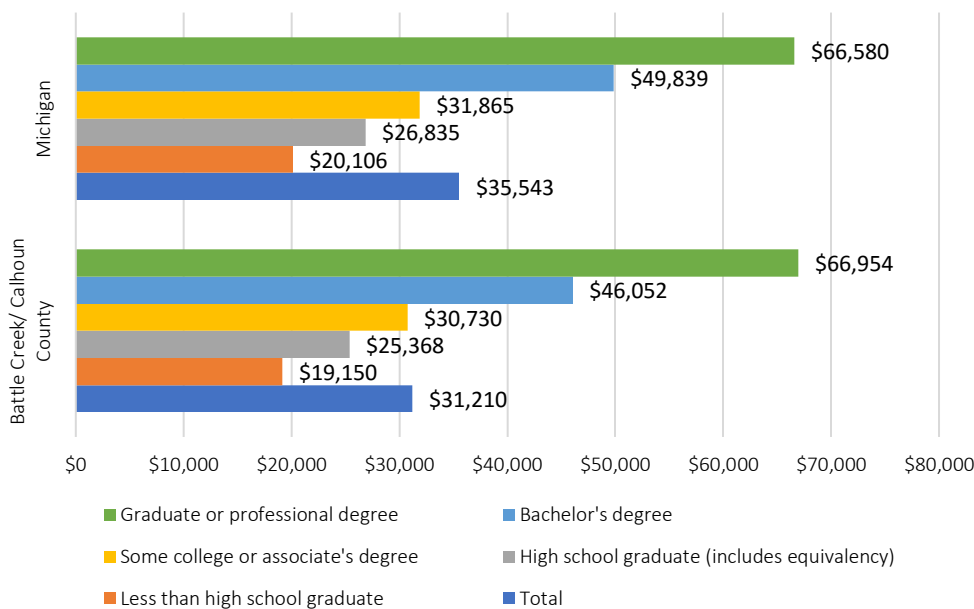
Research conducted by Georgetown's Center on Education and the Workforce demonstrates that workers need at least *some* postsecondary education or training in order to be competitive in the labor market, and further suggests that getting a bachelor's degree is the best way for most workers to earn middle-class wages (Carnevale, Jayasundara, & Hanson, 2012). Though some jobs exist, which provide comparable wages while requiring only sub-baccalaureate credentials (e.g., completion of employer-based training, industry-based certifications, apprenticeships, and associate's degrees), in a recent study comparing post-secondary pathways and long-term earnings in Texas and Colorado, researchers found that, over the long term, people who hold bachelor's degrees earn more than graduates with sub-baccalaureate

"We define [college and career readiness] as student preparation that is adequate to allow a student to pass first-year technical training and first-year college courses in core areas without remediation. Our state is preparing students not just for the opportunities we know about today, but also for the economic and intellectual challenges of the future." (Michigan Department of Education, 2015)

credentials. They do, however, note that in certain career pathways broadly characterized by "fixing things or fixing people," workers holding sub-baccalaureate credentials in technical fields can earn middle-class wages, and occasionally fare better than graduates with bachelor's degrees in liberal arts fields (Schneider, 2015). This, of course, is dependent on the labor markets and the availability of such jobs.

Early Childhood Participation

Being "off-track" for college and career exists as an unfortunate reality for many students – affecting some even before they enter the K-12 school system. Research points to a strong connection between participation in early childhood programs and long-term student outcomes, including lower rates of special education classifications, higher graduation rates, higher rates of employment, greater earnings, lower incidents of arrest, and lower utilization of welfare and other government subsidies (Gorey, 2001; Schweinhart, 2004).

Investments in early childhood education programs translate into long term economic savings and returns. Research from the Perry preschool study in Ypsilanti, MI showed that after 40 years, there was a 16 to 1 return on every dollar invested in early-childhood programs (Schweinhart, 2004). Findings such as these underscore the need for high-quality early childhood programs as part of systematic school readiness efforts. However, research also finds that many students lack opportunities or are unable to take advantage of their community's early childhood programs.

Between the 2011-12 and 2014-15 academic years, enrollment in early childhood programs increased in all four Battle Creek area school districts (see Figure 6). The total number of children enrolled in these programs rose from 625 to 1064 over the four-year period – a 70 percent increase.

Figure 6: Enrollment in Early Childhood Programs, 2011-12 to 2014-15
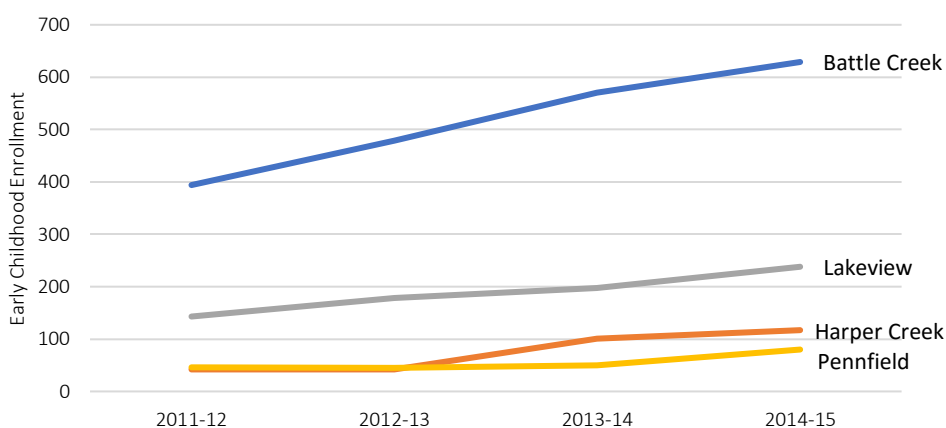
In the 2015-16 school year, 60 percent of kindergarten students in the four districts had attended an early childhood program. Among students who had participated in early childhood programs, more than two-thirds (70.5 percent, or 447 students) attended a Great Start Readiness Program (GSRP),

15 percent had attended an early childhood special education program, 9 percent attended a GSRP/Head Start blended program, and 5 percent attended an Early On program. While roughly 60 percent of kindergarten students in Battle Creek, Lakeview, and Pennfield participated in early childhood programs, the same was true of just 54 percent in Harper Creek.

The rate of early childhood education participation amongst kindergarten students increased in all four districts between 2012-13 and 2015-16, as did the overall number of students participating in these programs (see Figures 7 & 8). In Battle Creek, rates of participation in early childhood programs by newly enrolled kindergarten students rose from 42 percent in 2012-13 to 62 percent in 2015-16. In the same period, pre-kindergarten program participation in Harper Creek jumped from 17 percent to 54 percent, though they continued to lag behind the other three districts.

Figure 8: Kindergarten Rate of Participation in Early Childhood Programs, 2012-13 to 2015-16
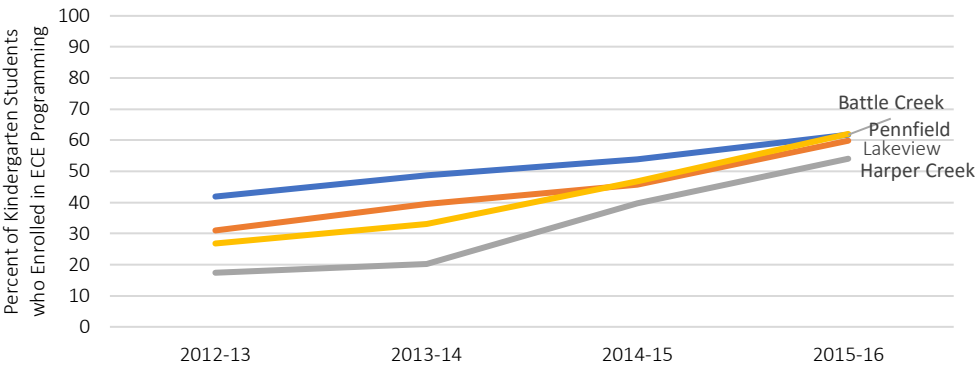
A closer examination of kindergarten enrollment numbers during this period reveals a slightly different story. While the early childhood program participation rate in Battle Creek increased by 20 percentage points - from 42 to 62 percent - kindergarten enrollment during the same period rose by just 19 students, indicating a net decline in the number of kindergarten students in the district. The other three districts experienced more significant increases in the total number of kindergarten students participating in early childhood programming.

Figure 7 Number of Kindergarten Students Participating in Early Childhood Programs, 2012-13 to 2015-16
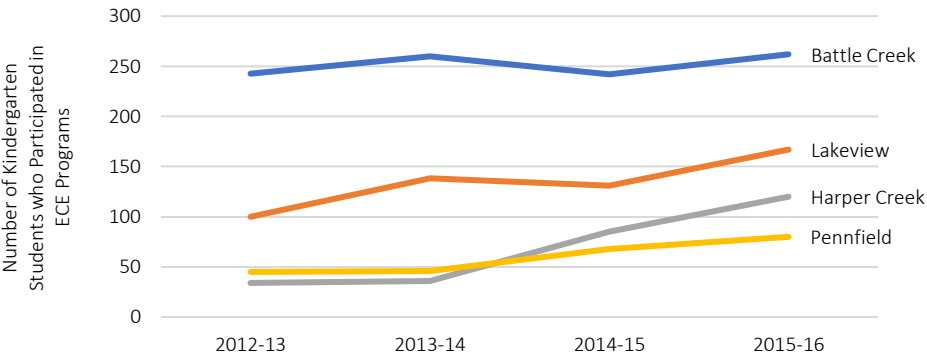
According to BC Pulse and their community profile of youth in the Battle Creek School District, in 2012, seven percent of kindergarteners entered kinder-garden ready for school as measured by the Early Development Instrument (EDI).

Student Achievement

While it is difficult to link elementary school outcomes directly to college and career readiness, research suggests a correlation between proficiency in third-grade reading levels and general academic proficiency in later grades (ACT, 2008; Silver & Saunders, 2008).

Student performance on 3rd and 8th Grade English Language Arts (ELA) and Math exams, SAT Benchmark performance, and high school completion were utilized as measures of academic achievement.

Our findings point to two key issues. First, on average across all districts, Black and Hispanic students are experiencing lower achievement levels when compared to their peers. Students from low-income backgrounds and students with limited English proficiency are similarly underperforming relative to their peers on measures of academic achievement. Collectively, these findings point to achievement gaps that warrant the attention of all four districts. We find consistent evidence of these gaps across several indicators of academic performance such as M-STEP and SAT performance data.

"Black and Hispanic students are experiencing lower achievement levels when compared to their peers. Students from low-income backgrounds and students with limited English proficiency are similarly underperforming relative to their peers on measures of academic achievement."

Second, on average, students in the Battle Creek Public School District are demonstrating lower levels of achievement compared to their peers in the three neighboring school districts. This is true even in comparisons drawn across similar demographic groups – for example, students from low-income backgrounds achieved lower levels of academic performance in Battle Creek Public Schools compared to similar students in the other districts' schools; similarly, Black, Hispanic, and White students achieved, on average, lower levels of academic performance in Battle Creek Public Schools compared to similar student groups in the other area schools.

Rates of academic proficiency, as measured by standardized exams, were low for Battle Creek students in 2015-2016. This was true across all grade levels, with Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Economically Disadvantaged students underperforming relative to their peers.

According to research published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2011), students who fail to achieve proficiency in reading by third grade are four times more likely not to graduate from high school, compared to their proficient peers (cf. Tables 8 & 9). Of students not achieving proficiency in third grade, one in six will fail to graduate from high school.

Table 8: Percent Achieving Proficient or Advanced Exam Scores on 3rd Grade ELA M-STEP, 2015-2016

	Battle Creek Public Schools	Harper Creek Community Schools	Lakeview School District	Pennfield Schools
All Students	20.0	52.8	42.5	44.8
Race or Ethnicity				
Black or African American	12.8	*	33.3	*
Hispanic or Latino	18.4	*	36.0	28.6
White	24.6	56.0	44.3	45.6
Economic Background				
Disadvantaged	19.9	35.4	34.3	28.1
Not Disadvantaged	20.5	70.8	53.5	64.9
English Language Learner Status				
English Language Learners	27.3	*	*	*
Notes: Cells with an asterisk indicate subgroups of two or fewer students.				

Table 9: Percent Achieving Proficient or Advanced Exam Scores on 8th Grade ELA M-STEP, 2015-2016

	Battle Creek Public Schools	Harper Creek Community Schools	Lakeview School District	Pennfield Schools
All Students	29.8	43.5	61.1	50.8
Race or Ethnicity				
Black or African American	22.2	60.0	35.1	25.5
Hispanic or Latino	18.6	60.0	58.8	*
White	41.2	41.1	65.2	54.0
Economic Background				
Disadvantaged	24.8	30.0	46.2	35.3
Not Disadvantaged	41.5	44.1	77.0	63.0
English Language Learner Status				
English Language Learners	16.1	*	37.5	*
Notes: Cells with an asterisk indicate subgroups of two or fewer students.				

Students' academic performance was also assessed *within* socioeconomic groups using data from each of the districts (see Tables 10 & 11). This allows for an assessment of racial achievement gaps, while controlling for socioeconomic status. In most within-district comparisons, non-White students tended to perform as well, or nearly as well, as their White peers in their same economic background, with two notable exceptions. In Battle Creek Public Schools, non-Economically Disadvantaged third grade students of color outperformed their White peers. More generally, in Battle Creek Public Schools, White students outperformed students of color, even when taking into account socioeconomic status. No such pattern was evident in Lakeview. Across districts, comparing Battle Creek and Lakeview, the data shows that students of color in Lakeview demonstrate higher levels of academic achievement, regardless of socioeconomic status.

Table 10: Percent Achieving Proficient or Advanced Exam Scores on 3rd Grade M-STEP by Race and Family Socioeconomic Disadvantaged versus Not Disadvantaged 2015-2016

	3rd Grade ELA Students of Color	3rd Grad ELA White Students	3rd Grade Math Students of Color	3rd Grade Math White Students
Battle Creek Public Schools				
Disadvantaged	25.8	29.2	28.6	36.4
Not Disadvantaged	48.0	52.5	68.0	57.5
Harper Creek Community Schools				
Disadvantaged	*	*	*	*
Not Disadvantaged	*	58.2	*	47.3
Lakeview School District				
Disadvantaged	40.5	43.6	47.2	44.5
Not Disadvantaged	71.8	75.7	79.5	80.4
Pennfield Schools				
Disadvantaged	*	33.8	*	31.3
Not Disadvantaged	*	67.1	*	63.0

Notes: Cells with an asterisk indicate subgroups of fewer than 10 students.

Table 11: Percent Achieving Proficient or Advanced Exam Scores on 8th Grade M-STEP by Race and Family Socioeconomic Disadvantaged versus Not Disadvantaged 2015-2016

	8th Grade ELA Students of Color	8th Grade ELA White Students	8th Grade Math Students of Color	8th Grade Math White Students
Battle Creek Public Schools				
Disadvantaged	21.6	32.1	14.4	23.1
Not Disadvantaged	28.3	54.7	18.9	35.9
Harper Creek Community Schools				
Disadvantaged	*	*	*	*
Not Disadvantaged	*	42.4	*	27.6
Lakeview School District				
Disadvantaged	47.4	44.7	31.6	36.0
Not Disadvantaged	65.2	80.7	52.2	62.7
Pennfield Schools				
Disadvantaged	*	42.2	*	23.4
Not Disadvantaged	*	61.9	*	47.4

Notes: Cells with an asterisk indicate subgroups of fewer than 10 students.

Academic performance data also suggest that the goal of one-hundred percent college and career readiness will pose considerable challenges for all four districts, with the greatest need located in Battle Creek Public Schools. Battle Creek Public Schools student proficiency was low in 2015-2016. This was true across all grade levels, with Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and Economically Disadvantaged students underperforming as compared to their peers.

Course Enrollment

In line with existing research, enrollment rates of eighth-grade students in Algebra I courses represent another useful measure of academic achievement (Wimberly & Noeth, 2005). Middle school students who take Algebra I by 8th

grade can access higher-level courses in high school, which in turn provide greater academic opportunities and increase the likelihood of applying to a four-year college (Atanda, 1999; National Commission on the High School Senior Year, 2001; Finkelstein et al., 2012; Wang & Goldschmidt, 2003). This is particularly true amongst minority and first-generation college students (Horn & Nuñez, 2000). Additionally, taking rigorous coursework, such as Advanced Placement (AP) courses is related to college success (Alderman, 1999; Mattern, Marini, & Shaw, 2013). Students who participate in AP courses are more likely to successfully complete college within four years.

The data shows that a while more than 25 percent of 8th-grade students in Battle Creek Public Schools are enrolled in algebra, Black students in 8th are much less likely to be enrolled in algebra (see Tables 12 & 13). Similarly, there are 8th-grade algebra enrollment gaps between students from low-socio economic backgrounds and their peers in both Battle Creek Public Schools and Lakeview.

Table 12: Percent of Eighth Graders Enrolled in Algebra I, 2015-2016

	Battle Creek Public Schools	Lakeview School District
All Students	25.6	17.2
Race or Ethnicity		
Black or African American	15.4	*
Hispanic or Latino	30.2	*
White	33.6	18.9
Economic Background		
Disadvantaged	21.4	12.9
Not Disadvantaged	35.9	21.9
English Language Learner Status		
English Language Learners	*	*

Notes: Cells with an asterisk indicate subgroups fewer than 10 students. Data from Harper Creek and Pennfield were not available.

Table 13: Percent of Eighth Graders Enrolled in Algebra I by Race and Socioeconomic Status, 2015-2016

	8th Grade Algebra I Enrollment Students of Color	8th Grade Algebra I Enrollment White Students
Battle Creek Public Schools		
Disadvantaged	19.8	24.4
Not Disadvantaged	24.5	47.2
Lakeview School District		
Disadvantaged	12.6	13.6
Not Disadvantaged	*	23.3

Notes: Cells with an asterisk indicate subgroups fewer than 10 students. Data from Harper Creek and Pennfield were not available.

Similarly, AP enrollment gaps exist between students from low-socio economic backgrounds and their peers in both Battle Creek Public Schools and Lakeview (see Tables 14 & 15). Though there appears to be no racial gap in AP enrollment in Battle Creek Public Schools, within Lakeview, an AP enrollment gap is visible between Black students and their peers.

Table 14: Percent of High School Students Enrolled in Advanced Placement Classes, 2015-2016

	Battle Creek Public Schools	Lakeview School District
All Students	11.4	27.2
Race or Ethnicity		
Black or African American	10.2	19.4
Hispanic or Latino	13.9	28.9
White	10.6	27.3
Economic Background		
Disadvantaged	6.6	19.0
Not Disadvantaged	15.0	34.5
English Language Learner Status		
English Language Learners	*	*

Notes: Cells with an asterisk indicate subgroups of fewer than 10 students. Data from Harper Creek and Pennfield were not available.

Table 15: Percent of High School Students Enrolled in Advanced Placement Classes by Race and Socioeconomic Status, 2015-2016

	High School AP Enrollment Nonwhite	High School AP Enrollment White
Battle Creek Public Schools		
Disadvantaged	5.9	8.2
Not Disadvantaged	18.9	11.8
Lakeview School District		
Disadvantaged	20.6	17.6
Not Disadvantaged	37.9	33.3

Notes: Data from Harper Creek and Pennfield were not available.

In total, data point to disparities in enrollment opportunities across districts and within schools, between student groups. These gaps may result from differences in course offerings and sequencing, as well as differences in students' preparedness for advanced courses that could promote higher levels of college and career readiness. These gaps could also be socially and culturally specific, where the curriculum and course offering correspond to the unique and situated needs of specific communities. Regardless the explanation for them, the mere persistence of the gaps illustrates very different educational pictures across the Battle Creek region. The images represent a tale of many school experiences that feature pathways both closer for some students and farther away for others to colleges and careers.

College Readiness

An examination of proportions of students who are college-ready, as measured by the SAT, paints a mixed picture of potentially college-bound students in the greater Battle Creek area (see Tables 16-18). In Lakeview and Battle Creek, there are noticeable achievement gaps between Black and Hispanic students and their White Peers, as well as between students from low-income backgrounds and their more well-off peers.

Table 16: Percent Ready on SAT College Benchmarks – Evidence-Based Reading & Writing, 2015-2016

	Battle Creek Public Schools	Harper Creek Community Schools	Lakeview School District	Pennfield Schools
All Students	41.7	59.6	57.2	55.9
Race or Ethnicity				
Black or African American	24.4	*	40.7	*
Hispanic or Latino	32.1	*	53.3	*
White	67.0	57.8	62.6	57.9
Economic Background				
Disadvantaged	22.9	54.7	50.9	51
Not Disadvantaged	53.6	61.5	60.7	58.6
English Language Learner Status				
English Language Learners	5.3	*	*	*

Notes: Cells with an asterisk are missing because mischooldata.org does not report specific numbers for subgroups fewer than 10 students.

Across all districts, Battle Creek Public School students' college readiness rate is substantially lower than their peers in other area districts. This pattern holds true overall, and when comparing students who are Economically Disadvantaged and/or identified as belonging to a racial and ethnic minority (i.e., Black and Hispanic). However, White students and students who were not from economically disadvantaged backgrounds performed similarly across all of the schools. This indicates that low-income, Black, and Hispanic student populations all fared worse in Battle Creek compared to students from similar racial and economic backgrounds in the neighboring districts.

Table 17: Percent Ready on SAT College Benchmarks – All Subjects, 2015-2016

	Battle Creek Public Schools	Harper Creek Community Schools	Lakeview School District	Pennfield Schools
All Students	22.3	25.7	32.7	25.7
Race or Ethnicity				
Black or African American	7.8	*	22.2	*
Hispanic or Latino	7.1	*	23.3	*
White	45.4	27.3	37.4	28.1
Economic Background				
Disadvantaged	11.5	18.9	20.9	20.4
Not Disadvantaged	29.1	28.5	39.3	28.7
English Language Learner Status				
English Language Learners	*	*	*	*

Notes: Cells with an asterisk are missing because mischooldata.org does not report specific numbers for subgroups fewer than 10 students.

Table 18: Percent Ready on SAT College Benchmarks – All Subjects, 2015-2016

	Battle Creek Public Schools	Harper Creek Community Schools	Lakeview School District	Pennfield Schools
All Students	22.3	25.7	32.7	25.7
Race or Ethnicity				
Black or African American	7.8	*	22.2	*
Hispanic or Latino	7.1	*	23.3	*
White	45.4	27.3	37.4	28.1
Economic Background				
Disadvantaged	11.5	18.9	20.9	20.4
Not Disadvantaged	29.1	28.5	39.3	28.7
English Language Learner Status				
English Language Learners	*	*	*	*

Notes: Cells with an asterisk are missing because mischooldata.org does not report specific numbers for subgroups fewer than 10 students.

Attendance

Across grade levels, attendance is a consistent indicator of being on-track to graduate (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Balfanz, 2009; Chang & Mariajose, 2008). Attendance rates and percentages of chronic absenteeism can serve as additional indicators of college and career readiness at the school and district level.

Data show that across districts, attendance rates are generally high, though attendance in Battle Creek Public Schools is slightly lower, by comparison (see Tables 19 & 20). Additionally, there is a greater percentage of chronically absent students in Battle Creek Public Schools compared to the neighboring school districts. With the exception of Harper Creek, students of color had higher rates of chronic absenteeism; across all the school districts, students from low-income background higher rates of chronic absenteeism.

Table 19: Attendance Rates, 2015-2016

	Battle Creek Public Schools	Harper Creek Community Schools	Lakeview School District	Pennfield Schools
All Students	92.7	95.1	95.3	95.3
Race or Ethnicity				
Black or African American	91.8	96.0	94.1	94.4
Hispanic or Latino	94.0	94.9	95.3	95.7
White	92.5	95.1	95.3	95.3
Economic Background				
Disadvantaged	91.8	93.7	94.4	94.1
English Language Learner Status				
English Language Learners	>95%	>95%	>95%	>95%

Notes: Cells with an asterisk are missing because mischooldata.org does not report specific numbers for subgroups fewer than 10 students.

Table 20: Rates of Chronic Absenteeism, 2015-2016

	Battle Creek Public Schools	Harper Creek Community Schools	Lakeview School District	Pennfield Schools
All Students	20.7	11.6	9.3	9.9
Race or Ethnicity				
Black or African American	24.0	8.6	14.5	14.6
Hispanic or Latino	16.6	12.3	8.9	8.7
White	20.9	11.2	8.6	9.4
Economic Background				
Disadvantaged	24.6	19.4	12.9	15.4
English Language Learner Status				
English Language Learners	8.7	13.0	5.4	*

Notes: Cells with an asterisk are missing because mischooldata.org does not report specific numbers for subgroups fewer than 10 students.

Within districts, Black and African American students tended to have lower attendance rates, and higher rates of chronic absenteeism than overall district rates.

Discipline Involvement

Being suspended negatively affects students' chances of graduating high school and increases their likelihood of dropping out (Balfanz, Brynes, & Fox 2015; Tobin & Sugai, 1999). Often, school discipline and academic achievement patterns are related, with students who experience higher rates of suspension suffering academically as a result (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Moreover, research shows that Black students are significantly overrepresented in terms of rates of school suspension and disciplinary referrals (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Skiba et al., 2003; Skiba, Wu, Kohler, Chung, & Simmons, 2001; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, & Bachman, 2008), which may further contribute to educational outcome and opportunity gaps. Recent data from the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights suggest that Black students, in particular, experience disproportionately high rates of being suspended, expelled, arrested, and referred to law enforcement compared to their White peers (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014).

"We must recognize that the children of the poor and children of color are no less deserving than the children of the affluent to be educated in a nurturing and supportive environment. Perhaps what is needed even more than a shift in disciplinary tactics is recruitment of educators who question the tendency to punish through exclusion and humiliation and see themselves as advocates of children, not as wardens and prison guards. Without this approach, the drive to punish will be difficult to reverse." (Noguera, 2015)

U.S. Office of Civil Rights data from the most recent available year were examined to better understand characteristics of suspended students in the four districts (see Table 21). As is common across the country, students of color and students with disabilities were suspended at a rate disproportionate to their districts' populations. Within each district, Black/African American students made up around twice the suspended

student populations compared to each district population overall. Similarly, students enrolled in special education made up substantially higher proportions of suspended student populations compared to their district enrollment overall.

Table 21: Out-of-School Suspension Rates versus District Enrollment Rates Reported to the Office of Civil Rights, 2013-2014

		Battle Creek Public Schools	Harper Creek Community Schools	Lakeview School District	Pennfield Schools
District Enrollment		5,435	2,692	3,961	2,138
Count of Suspended Students		969	183	243	135
Race or Ethnicity					
Black or African American	Proportion of Enrollment	33.4	3.2	9.2	2.9
	Proportion of Suspensions	52.5	6.6	26.3	10.4
Hispanic or Latino	Proportion of Enrollment	10.9	3.3	8.8	4.7
	Proportion of Suspensions	8.2	6.6	7.8	4.4
White	Proportion of Enrollment	40.9	86.8	67.1	86.3
	Proportion of Suspensions	26.9	80.3	51.4	82.2
Special Education Status					
Any Special Education	Proportion of Enrollment	10.9	9.7	9.5	9.9
	Proportion of Suspensions	22.6	34.4	24.3	18.5
No Special Education	Proportion of Enrollment	89.1	90.3	90.5	81.5
	Proportion of Suspensions	77.4	65.6	75.7	81.5

High School Graduation Rates and College Trajectories

Across districts, four-year graduation rates and postsecondary education enrollment data were compiled for the most recent cohort for which data were available: the 2015-2016 school year cohort (see Table 22).

Our analysis of district-level graduation rates for the 2015-2016 cohort revealed several patterns. First, Economically Disadvantaged students achieved substantially lower rates of graduation than their peers in all districts. This rate was particularly low for Battle Creek Public Schools, where only 66.8 percent of Economically Disadvantaged students graduated.

Patterns were inconsistent across districts when examining graduation rate outcomes by race. Students of color graduated at much higher rates in both Lakeview and Harper Creek than in Michigan overall, but still lagged behind than their White peers within their respective districts. In Battle Creek Public Schools, cohort graduation outcomes were reversed: students of color demonstrated

four-year graduation rates that were higher than their White peers. Although it is not clear why this may be, one possible explanation could be demographic patterns in students who transfer out of Battle Creek Public Schools to other area districts.

Table 22: Four Year Graduation Rate, 2015-2016

	Battle Creek Public Schools	Harper Creek Community Schools	Lakeview School District	Pennfield Schools
All Students	70.3	90.2	91.4	94.4
Race or Ethnicity				
Black or African American	76.6	83.3	87.5	*
Hispanic or Latino	75.0	90.9	96.0	*
White	58.5	90.2	90.2	93.9
Economic Background				
Disadvantaged	66.8	82.1	80.8	91.9
Not Disadvantaged	76.7	95.3	97.0	95.3
English Language Learner Status				
English Language Learners	96.0	50.0	100.0	*

Notes: Cells with an asterisk are missing because mischooldata.org does not report specific numbers for subgroups fewer than 10 students.

Graduation rates, however, are only one dimension of college and career readiness. When four-year high school graduation rates are examined in conjunction with immediate enrollment in postsecondary education (i.e., within six months of graduation), a clearer picture of college trajectories starts to emerge (see Table 23).

Although graduation rates overall were higher in Harper Creek, Lakeview, and Pennfield than in the state of Michigan overall, only Lakeview went on to report a six-month college enrollment rate higher than the state average (71.7 percent versus 61.3 percent). Battle Creek Public Schools graduation and enrollment rates were both lower than state averages.

That Battle Creek Public Schools enroll a larger proportion of Economically Disadvantaged students than surrounding districts may help to explain Battle Creek Public Schools' lower rates of graduation and college enrollment. However, poor students from Battle Creek Public Schools achieved lower high school graduation rates and lower college enrollment rates even when compared to similarly Economically Disadvantaged counterparts in other districts. This suggests that although families' income influence students' outcomes in each district, additional barriers to student graduation and college enrollment success exist for Economically Disadvantaged students in Battle Creek Public Schools that are not present for their Economically Disadvantaged peers in the other three districts. Additional analyses of student-level data can provide an understanding of what those barriers and challenges may be.

Table 23: Graduates Attending College within Six Months of Graduation, 2015 Cohort

	Battle Creek Public Schools	Harper Creek Community Schools	Lakeview School District	Pennfield Schools
All Students	43.3	56.1	71.7	48.5
Race or Ethnicity				
Black or African American	41	*	85.7	*
Hispanic or Latino	51.6	60	70.8	*
White	40.2	56	73.5	51.2
Economic Background				
Disadvantaged	36.4	40	57.3	40
Not Disadvantaged	54.2	63.8	77.1	51.5
English Language Learner Status				
English Language Learners	*	*	*	*

Notes: Cells with an asterisk are missing because mischooldata.org does not report specific numbers for subgroups fewer than 10 students.

Aside from the previously-discussed irregularities in Battle Creek, findings across all districts for which graduation and college enrollment statistics were available to suggest that Black and African American students and students who are Economically Disadvantaged are the subgroup least likely to be college and career ready, compared to their peers. Findings indicate that these issues are present in the early grades, as evident in the performance on 3rd grade ELA assessments and persist through middle school, culminating in differential high school graduation and postsecondary enrollment rates. Factors contributing to these patterns may be different in each district, given that gaps in Economically Disadvantaged and Black and African American students' college and career readiness are more pronounced in some districts than in others.

The demographic data combined with the student outcomes data reveal a contrast in needs between and within the districts. Most notably, Black or African American students and Economically Disadvantaged students are, on average, more likely to be off-track on the college pathway, and these students are more likely to be enrolled in Battle Creek Public Schools and Lakeview. The data shows that issues of being on- or off-track emerge in the early grades and persist, indicating the need for interventions and supports at all levels of the educational trajectory. Before landing on any set of strategies for promoting college and career readiness, we must first delve deeper into the data to understand why and how patterns of inequality take shape.

Aspirations and Expectations for Future Education

Students reported high expectations for their future education (see Figures 9 & 10). More than two-third of students (68 percent) said that they expect to earn at least a Bachelor's degree. Thirty-one percent of students expected to earn a Master's, Doctorate, or other advanced degree.

Students in Battle Creek and Pennfield reported somewhat lower educational aspirations than students in Harper Creek. Sixty-one percent of students in Battle Creek and 69 percent of students in Pennfield expected to earn at least a Bachelor's degree, in contrast to 78 percent of students in Harper Creek.

Figure 9: Student Educational Aspirations
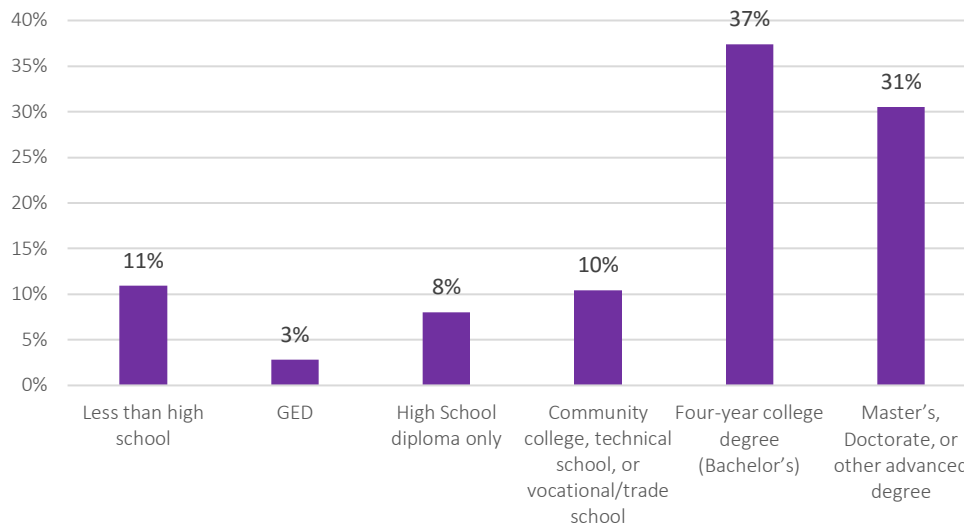
Examining educational attainment aspirations by grade level revealed some contradictions. When compared to high school students, more middle school students did not expect to graduate from high school (14 percent compared to 8 percent), though more middle school students expected to earn an advanced degree. More than a third of middle school respondents expected to earn an advanced degree, compared to 27 percent of high school students.

White students anticipated completing more years of education than their peers. Eight percent of White students did not expect to complete high school, compared to 17 percent of Black students and 12 percent of Hispanic students. Seventy-three percent of White students, 67 percent of Black students, and 65 percent of Hispanic students expected to earn at least a Bachelor's degree.

Figure 10: Student Educational Aspirations, by Race Ethnicity
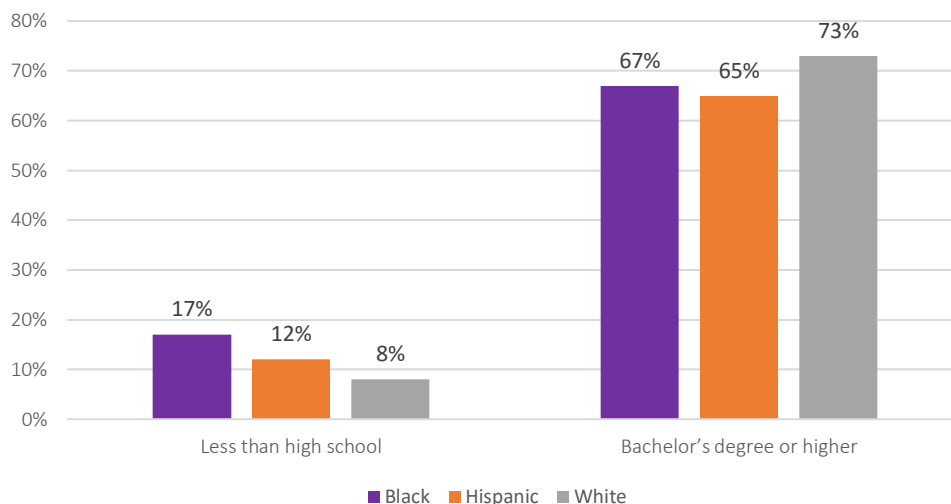
A large majority of parents also expected their children to continue their education after high school; 80 percent of parents surveyed agreed that their children would attend a community college or university after graduating from high school (see Table 24).

Educators' expectations of their students' educational attainment varied by the perceived level of student performance (see Table 25). Nearly three-quarters

of educators (72.9 percent) expected that their low-performing students would earn, at most, high school diplomas or GEDs, compared to 14 percent of average-performing students and 1.4 percent of high-performing students. Nearly eighty-three percent of educators felt that their high-performing students would earn at least a Bachelor's degree.

Table 24: Parent Educational Aspirations

(n=277)	Strongly and Somewhat Disagree	Strongly and Somewhat Agree
My child is capable of high performance on the standardized exams given at school	26.6%	65.0%
My child will continue his/her education at a community college or university	13.7%	79.8%

Table 25: Educator Expectations of Student Attainment

(n=218)	Less than HS graduation	HS graduation or GED only	Attend or complete community college (Associate's), technical school, or vocational/ trade school	Attend a college but not complete a 4-year degree	Graduate from a 4-year college (Bachelor's)	Obtain a Master's degree, Doctorate, or other advanced degree
Low performing students	18.3%	54.6%	22.5%	1.4%	2.8%	0.5%
Average performing students	1.4%	12.6%	36.4%	25.2%	22.9%	1.4%
High performing students	0.0%	1.4%	8.9%	7.0%	54.9%	27.7%

COMMUNITY NARRATIVE

When asked what they hoped their children would get from school, parents across all of the Battle Creek communities indicated that they look to schools to provide more than just academic learning; they expect schools to support their children in developing a range of skills to increase their success in school and beyond. Parents pointed to competencies such as task and time management, critical thinking skills, understanding of what college is like, what the workplace is like, and financial literacy. In a sense, they hope schools can help their children become life ready - i.e., be able to pursue a career successfully and lead a fulfilling life as a productive citizen. As a foundation, parents, like one mother we interviewed, want their children's schools to be supportive and nurturing environments, where they can grow.

I'm hoping that first of all, that my children, that they go to a place that is safe, and when I say safe it's more than just physically safe. It's emotionally safe. It's a place where they feel welcomed and they feel wanted as well, where their teacher knows them as an individual. I want my children to go to a place where their strengths are celebrated. Again, it has a lot to do with relationships, knowing your students. Their strengths are noticed and celebrated. I think I would want my children to be in a school with a teacher that pushes them to grow. They meet them where they are, but they push them to grow.

Several key themes arose in our analysis of conversations with educators with community members, which shed light on the ways college and career readiness might most productively be discussed in the Battle Creek Community context. Among these themes are the following: tensions college and career pathways, difference and divisions between communities, experiences around schools of choice, and family-school relationships. While certain tensions surfaced in our analysis and are, thusly, reported in this community narrative, the data consistently showed that tensions appeared strongly rooted in community members' desires and commitments to enhancing educational opportunities and fostering the life-long success of the youth of Battle Creek.

College Versus Career

As noted above, the survey data shows that parents with children enrolled in local public schools were optimistic about their children's future education; approximately 80 percent of parents agreed that their child would eventually enroll in a community college or university, matching the aspirations found in the student survey. When considering the purpose of education, it is apparent that the Battle Creek community is chiefly career-oriented. As we revisit later in

this report, our study found that educational systems in the Battle Creek Community are designed to support career pathways. While college and career trajectories were rarely conceived in explicit opposition, in speaking with community members about what their hopes for their children and the role that schooling plays, we noted apparent tensions between college and career pathways.

The community and educational systems at work in Battle Creek are, in many ways, linked to industries and labor needs in the Battle Creek Community. This framing results in considerable tension between how community members understand being college ready versus being career ready. While leaders of community organizations and local educators attempt to join the conversations together, many individuals see these options as conflicted.

In interviews, some participants voiced concerns that schools seem to be preparing students for higher education, while ignoring career and technical education. One said:

> ...not every kid is going to go to a four-year academic institution. They have to break that pedagogy, which is tough, right? Because that's what their counselors, that's what teachers are preparing all the kids for, right? There's a vast number of those kids that could go on and get a certificate program. They could get an Associate's Degree. They could go right into work.

Comments such as these position career and technical education as a means toward equity - acknowledging that some youth need more or different services to be successful. At the same time, conversations that pit college against career are, in some ways, antithetical to equity in that they frame two distinct outcomes - college or career - claiming equivalency between them, while at the same time implicitly stating that students who cannot or who are not able or ready to go to college should pursue careers.

At the opposite end of the continuum, some community members suggested that a focus on career and technical education suppresses the potential of Battle Creek area youth. The focus on career, they argued, obfuscates other opportunities, as one community member explained:

> Everybody work at the factory...Nobody that has ever graduated from the Battle Creek education system has been even a CEO of Kellogg's, (which is) a Battle Creek corporation. There is no aspirations, there is no, "If you do this, you can become this and you can become that." There is none of that going on around here. Nobody is walking around this city hoping one day they can be the CEO of Kellogg's or Post, things of that nature. You go straight out of school to the factory. There's a lot of factories out here. It's a... mentality, go out there, do that hard work. They don't even do a lot of college prep here.... There's no big success stories of a Battle Creek alumni who came and opened a business here, or opened a business there. We don't have any of those things that you can get the hero awards for.

These two examples point to a perceived, though potentially false, dichotomy between career education and college preparation. As evidenced by the survey data, a large proportion of high school students expect to attain a bachelor's or advanced degree. However, research suggests on average, approximately two-thirds of these students will not complete their undergraduate degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). With these statistics in mind, if Battle Creek Area schools focus on preparing all students for college at the expense of career and technical education, many graduates may be unprepared for gainful employment. Alternatively, reserving college preparatory coursework exclusively for those students who show academic promise too easily neglects the strengths and needs of other students, particularly those from vulnerable racial or linguistic backgrounds, recent immigrants, and youth from low-income communities. Our findings suggest that the mindset of many community members leans heavily towards this latter position, reinforcing the notion that career and technical education is designed for students who are not college bound.

A second issue deals with the shaping of educational options reflective of the interest of particular community members. If career and technical education programs are directed at students perceived not to be college bound, then creative educational options reflective of the interests of vulnerable student groups seem nonexistent. One young man in Battle Creek commented on his desire to "do [rap] music." He keenly noted, "There are no programs at my school [in Battle Creek] where I can study to be a better rapper."

Separate and Different

Local perceptions of the school districts in the Battle Creek area provide an important framework for understanding educational experiences and opportunities within the community.

A common narrative we encountered in conversations with community members juxtaposed Battle Creek Public Schools, or "BCPS," with its surrounding districts. More often than not, these discussions framed BCPS as a troubled, struggling, or "worse" school district compared to Lakeview, Harper Creek, and Pennfield. Battle Creek was described as less academically rigorous, less responsive, and generally of poorer quality compared to its neighbors. Several interviewees offered encoded racial and class distinctions between Battle Creek and Lakeview, characterizing Battle Creek as the more "diverse" district, while referring to Lakeview as the "wealthy" district. One interviewee who works with young children across the Battle Creek region said, "Battle Creek is different than the other communities [in this region]. There are a lot of poor parents in the city who don't care about their kids."

Many were quick to apply these evaluations to the schools as well. When asked about the differences between districts, one parent shared:

> I just know that the inner-city schools [Battle Creek Public Schools] are lacking, the wealthy schools [Lakeview, Harper Creek, and Pennfield] are doing really good…Test results are down inner city. Tests are up in outer city [Lakeview, Harper Creek, and Pennfield].

Community members and students alike seemed cognizant of perceived differences in the quality of education across districts in the Battle Creek area, differences that some understood as predicated upon distinctions of race and class. As one African-American community member noted, "One of the problems is the expectations, the preconceived notions they [Battle Creek Public School educators] have about Black children."

Concerns over perceived disparities in educational quality were corroborated both by educational outcomes and measures of teacher effectiveness. In Michigan, local public school districts use local evaluation systems to evaluate teacher effectiveness. Data from the Michigan Department of Education show that Battle Creek Public Schools and Pennfield have lower proportions of Highly Effective teachers compared to Harper Creek and Lakeview (see Table 26). Additionally, Battle Creek Public Schools have higher proportions of teachers who have been designated Minimally Effective and Ineffective than any of the other three districts.[7]

Table 26: Teacher Effectiveness

	Highly Effective	Effective or More	Minimally Effective or Less	Ineffective
Statewide	42%	98%	2%	0%
Battle Creek Public Schools	39%	93%	7%	1%
Harper Creek Community Schools	87%	99%	1%	0%
Lakeview School District	57%	96%	4%	0%
Pennfield Schools	35%	98%	2%	2%

Longtime residents and Battle Creek alumni have strong, positive feelings about Battle Creek Public Schools. Many are quick to note that BCPS used to be considered a great school district, harkening back to halcyon days of top academics, powerhouse athletics, and strong fiscal footing. But over the past 30 years, Battle Creek – like many post-industrial American cities – has been ravaged by political instability and economic collapse. In the eyes of the community, an unfortunate combination of poor administration, punctuated incidents of neighborhood violence, increased racial and economic segregation, and the opening of school borders and choice programs has contributed to the decline of Battle Creek Public Schools.

To some extent, community members' deficit perspectives of Battle Creek Schools appear grounded in data, though one could just as easily interpret the numbers as reflections of the district's stigmatization and subsequent decline, or

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[7] Differences between districts could be the result of differences between how teachers were evaluated in each district. Michigan's Public Act 173 of 2015 outlines evaluation factors for school year 2015-16 and beyond.

other, larger social influences associated with deindustrialization, persistent patterns of social bias, and residential segregation. Stakeholders' accounts consistently juxtapose Lakeview, Harper Creek, and Pennfield against Battle Creek Public Schools, pointing to present conditions in Battle Creek as evidence of the long shadows of history. As one Battle Creek student noted:

> I think living here, the bad reputation that we still have at schools and stuff. Just because it happened back then we still have to carry on every year.

In interviews and conversations, many people referred to Battle Creek Central High School as an "inner city" school. Community members cited issues with violence and pointed to the school's use of metal detectors as a signal that the school is unsafe. A former teacher in the school district speculated about the negative message these devices sent to the community, saying:

> A roadblock is the fact that you have to go through metal detectors to get inside. I think that sends a message to the community that this school is different than the other ones. The other schools aren't like that. Think about the places in society that you go to where you have to go through a metal detector to get inside. They are quite different. They are not the places you want to visit. As a school, putting those up, I think sends a message to the community.

Despite these considerations, Battle Creek and Lakeview remain attractive to families because of the resources they offer students. As later discussions will revisit, community members value the resources afforded by large districts, which enable schools to serve students and families with particular needs. As one community member whose children attend Harper Creek noted:

> It's like you were talking about, the food banks, Battle Creek Public, they make sure their parents know about the food banks and how to get to them, and different things. Harper Creek, Pennfield don't. Battle Creek has Legacy Programs that help their students to actually get to college. Harper Creek, Pennfield don't. Because they don't feel even though we have an elementary that is more than 80% on food stamps over here at Harper Creek. More than 80% of the students are on food stamps.

For many with whom we spoke, the diversity associated with the Battle Creek Community is deemed a community asset. Stakeholders from all different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds found value in the diversity of BCPS schools. As is evident in the demographic profile of area, however, the Battle Creek community remains very much divided along lines of race, language, and class. One community member pointed to these boundaries as obstacles to improving local education, saying:

> What still ends up being the situation, ultimately, …the one thing that's remaining, is that it's the racial divide in this community that's keeping us from having really good discussions about what's best in this community for our students.

Issues of racial tension and race relations surfaced in several community members' accounts. In particular, members of the Black community noted distrust in the neighboring school districts, as well as their perception that Black and African Americans might not be welcome in the more rural parts of Battle Creek. One community member invoked these sentiments in sharing his thoughts about how families might engage with school choice policies, saying:

> Yeah, because if you think about it would be more logical for somebody living on the north side of town, where most of the blacks live, to go to Pennfield, than to go to Lakeview because it's right by the capitol. They want to go to where White people are because they believe that it's better, but if you ask me, they know, or they think, or we think that Harper and possibly Pennfield … definitely Harper, but possibly Pennfield is KKK land. If you go out there you might get hung, it's not safe. Lakeview, it's White. If you behave yourself, you'll be all right. You go out there, good luck.

As this comment illustrates, the context and scope of this study meant that school choice served as both a backdrop and talking point in key political discussions about education in Battle Creek.

Choice: Patterns, Perceptions, and Experiences

While Schools of Choice policies are regularly exercised by parents in the region, there is a vocal constituency within the Battle Creek Public School District who argue that the transfer of student out of Battle Creek Public Schools to neighboring public schools creates a more segregated school community. To better understand the characteristics of students who transfer out of their zoned schools, data from Fall 2016 was used to compare students' actual enrollment with their districts of residence (see Tables 27 & 28). A high level of attrition characterized enrollment patterns in the Battle Creek Public Schools, whereas in other districts, particularly Pennfield, schools attracted more residents from other districts than the number who transferred out. Given the racial and socioeconomic divides in the Battle Creek community, it not surprising that decisions to exercise choice and many of the conversations around choice policies are inextricably intertwined with race and class. Examining patterns of choice also sheds light on community members' perceptions of their schools, both past and present.

"State policies like school of choice have unintended consequences at the local level. You get folks who have ability to move leaving BCPS, leaving behind the poorest concentrated in one school, who are often kids of color."

Student district of residence and assignment district data were obtained from the Calhoun ISD office and analyzed to examine where students from each of the four districts attend school - whether in their district or in one of the other three. Data encompassed those students enrolled in schools in one of the four districts involved in this study. Most were residents of one of the four districts, though the sample also included students from other districts who attended public schools in the Battle Creek community. The data do not include students who attended schools outside of the four focal districts or private schools.

Of the sample, students from *other* districts comprised only 4.4 percent of Battle Creek Public School's *assigned* student population. In contrast, 34.9 percent of Battle Creek Public School district's 5,344 student residents attended schools in one of the other three districts. Harper Creek's assigned population was 26.4 percent transfers into the district, versus 9.0 percent of 1,970 residents who transferred out. Lakeview's assigned population was 27.7 percent transfers in, with 7.5 percent of 3,138 residents who transferred out. Pennfield's assigned population was nearly half (46.2 percent) from out of area, with 7.7 percent of their 1,161 residents attending schools in one of the other three districts.

Students who transferred out of their home districts did not share the same demographic characteristics across all districts. Residents in the Battle Creek Public School catchment who transferred out were disproportionately White and not Economically Disadvantaged: approximately half of White students and half of non-Economically Disadvantaged students who were residents of Battle Creek Public School attended schools in other three area districts, compared to just 16.2 percent of Battle Creek Public School's 1,552 Black student residents and only 28.8 percent of the 3,890 Economically Disadvantaged Battle Creek residents who transferred out. This pattern was somewhat different for Black residents of Lakeview and Pennfield, who were characterized by higher transfer rates out of area than their districts overall (Lakeview: 14.6 vs. 7.5; Pennfield: 12.7 vs. 7.7). Socioeconomically Disadvantaged Harper Creek residents attended schools in other area districts at a much higher rate than overall resident area transfers for the district (62.7 versus 9.0).

Across all districts, relatively equal shares of elementary, middle, and high school students attended schools in their district of residence, versus one of the other three. However, this cross-sectional data provides only a snapshot of student enrollment in Fall 2016, and does not include information about whether these students were previously residents of other districts. Further analyses of longitudinal data about student residence and assignment could support better understandings of trends in families' enrollment and transfer decisions, as well as their engagement with choice policies over time.

Further analysis of students attending area schools outside their districts of residence considering race and socioeconomic status together reveals more detail on the factors driving transfers out of each district. White students of any economic status and non-Economically Disadvantaged students of all races transfer out of Battle Creek Public Schools at dramatically higher rates than their peers. In Harper Creek, Economically Disadvantaged students transferred to one of the other three districts at dramatically higher rates than their non-disadvantaged peers, regardless of race. Thus, key demographic populations in the Battle Creek are surprisingly mobile, with more advantaged students electing to self-segregate. The result is school systems with extreme concentrations of advantage or disadvantage that play out in terms of race, class, linguistic background, and geography.

Table 27: Percentages of Students who Attended a School outside of Their District of Residence in Fall 2016

	Battle Creek Public Schools Residents	Harper Creek Community Schools Residents	Lakeview School District Residents	Pennfield Schools Residents
All Resident Students Transferred Out	34.9	9.0	7.5	7.7
Grade Level				
Elementary	33.4	8.5	6.7	6.7
Middle	37.6	10.2	7.4	7.5
High	36.0	9.1	9.1	9.4
Race or Ethnicity				
Black or African American	16.2	*	14.6	12.7
Hispanic or Latino	28.3	*	*	*
White	51	8.4	8	7
Economic Background				
Disadvantaged	28.8	62.7	4.2	7.1
Not Disadvantaged	51.1	5.8	12.2	8.0
Special Education Status				
Any Special Education Classification	29.5	*	6.0	*
No Special Education Classification	35.9	9.5	7.7	7.9
Notes: Cells with an asterisk indicate subgroups of fewer than 10 students.				

Table 28: Percentages of Students Attending Schools Outside Their Districts of Residence by Race and Socioeconomic Status, Fall 2016

	Resident Students of Color	Resident White Students
Battle Creek Public Schools		
Disadvantaged	20.1	41.6
Not Disadvantaged	27.1	68.
Harper Creek Community Schools		
Disadvantaged	60.0	63.3
Not Disadvantaged	8.8	5.5
Lakeview School District		
Disadvantaged	5.0	3.4
Not Disadvantaged	7.3	13.6
Pennfield Schools		
Disadvantaged	15.3	5.3
Not Disadvantaged	*	8.1
Notes: Cells with an asterisk indicate subgroups of fewer than 10 students.		

In addition to the characteristics of students who transfer out of their home district, patterns of *where* those students transferred was also examined. Most noteworthy are the disparities between students who remain in their home district compared to those who transfer out to Battle Creek Public schools versus the other districts (see Table 29). Battle Creek, despite its status as the most-populated district, retains just 65.8 percent of its resident students, compared to about 90 percent retention in all other districts. Each of the other districts absorbs a far greater number of Battle Creek Public School students

than they lose to other districts, combined. (Harper Creek: 208 total out vs. 384 from Battle Creek, Lakeview: 189 total out versus 924 in from Battle Creek; Pennfield: 104 total out versus 809 in from Battle Creek).

Battle Creek transfer students were most likely to attend schools in Lakeview or Pennfield (14.9 and 13.1 percent of residents, respectively). About half of students who transferred out of Harper Creek and Pennfield attended Lakeview Schools (6.3 and 4.0 percent, respectively). Lakeview residents who transferred tended to prefer Harper Creek (4.3 percent).

Table 29: Student Assignment Districts for Each District of Residence, Fall 2016

	Percent of Residents Attending Each Assignment District			
District of Residence	Battle Creek Public Schools	Harper Creek Community Schools	Lakeview School District	Pennfield Schools
Battle Creek Public Schools	65.8	6.2	14.9	13.1
Harper Creek Community School	1.3	90.5	6.3	2.0
Lakeview School District	2.6	4.3	92.2	0.8
Pennfield Schools	2.2	1.9	4.0	91.9

Notes: A total of 475 students from other school districts attend one of the four area districts. Data do not include residents of the four districts attending a school outside the four districts.

Further investigation reveals that transfer students' family economic status is tied not only to *whether* students leave their districts of residence, but also to *which* of the three districts they choose to attend. For example, among the Battle Creek residents attending schools in one of the other three districts, the 743 students who were *not* Economically Disadvantaged attended Harper Creek schools at a much higher rate than the 1,120 Economically Disadvantaged Battle Creek residents (42.0 percent versus 2.4 percent of transfer students, respectively). Economically Disadvantaged students who transferred out of Lakeview and Pennfield had similarly low levels of enrollment in Harper Creek compared to non-disadvantaged students from their home districts.

Patterns in out-of-district enrollment also correlated with transfer students' race (see Tables 30 & 31). Students of color transferred from other districts to Harper Creek at rates disproportionately lower than their White peers. Transfer students of color tended to enroll in Lakeview at higher rates than their White peers. (This was not true for Pennfield residents, but small subgroup sizes for Pennfield transfer residents may make these percentages susceptible to skew, and should be interpreted cautiously.)

Table 30: Transfer Student Assignment District Preferences for Each District of Residence by Socioeconomic Status, Fall 2016

District of Residence	Total in District of Resid.	Total Outside District of Resid.	Proportion of Transfer Students Attending...			
			Battle Creek Public Schools	Harper Creek Community Schools	Lakeview School District	Pennfield Schools
Battle Creek Public Schools						
Disadvantaged	71.2	28.2	n/a	2.4	57.7	39.9
Not Disadvantaged	48.9	51.1	n/a	42	23.2	34.9
Harper Creek Community Schools						
Disadvantaged	37.3	62.7	14.5	n/a	59.4	26.1
Not Disadvantaged	94.2	5.8	11.1	n/a	65.4	23.2
Lakeview School District						
Disadvantaged	95.8	4.2	76	*	n/a	19
Not Disadvantaged	87.8	12.2	15.4	77.6	n/a	7.1
Pennfield Schools						
Disadvantaged	92.9	7.1	44.1	*	47.1	n/a
Not Disadvantaged	91.9	8.1	*	30.9	52.7	n/a

Notes: A total of 57 Economically Disadvantaged students from other school districts attend one of the four area districts and a total of 323 non-disadvantaged students from other school districts attend one of the four area districts. Data do not include residents of the four districts attending a school outside the four districts. Cells with an asterisk indicate subgroups of fewer than 10 students.

Table 31: Transfer Student Assignment District Preferences for Each District of Residence by Race, Fall 2016

District of Residence	Total in District of Resid.	Total Outside District of Resid	Proportion of Transfer Students Attending...			
			Battle Creek Public Schools	Harper Creek Community Schools	Lakeview School District	Pennfield Schools
Battle Creek Public Schools						
Students of Color	78.5	21.5	n/a	11.7	62	26.3
White Students	49	51	n/a	21.5	34.7	43.8
Harper Creek Community Schools						
Students of Color	85.8	14.2	*	n/a	77.8	*
White Students	91.6	8.4	11.3	n/a	60.7	28
Lakeview School District						
Students of Color	94.5	5.5	79	17.4	n/a	*
White Students	91.5	8.6	19.8	66.3	n/a	14
Pennfield Schools						
Students of Color	88.7	11.3	72.2	0	*	n/a
White Students	93	*	15.7	27.1	57.1	n/a

Notes: A total of 35 students of color from other school districts attend one of the four area district and a total of 345 White students from other school districts attend one of the four area districts. Data do not include residents of the four districts attending a school outside the four districts. Cells with an asterisk indicate subgroups of fewer than 10 students.

Given that demographic analysis revealed a strong correlation between concentrations of poverty and concentrations of residents of color within areas of the larger Battle Creek community, it could be that more-affluent families within the Battle Creek Public School District (1) are more likely to be White and (2) by virtue of their relative financial resources, are better positioned to incur costs of sending their children to another school district (e.g., transportation time and costs). As other studies have found the demographics of families who make use of school choice policies, in combination with the demographics of schools sending and receiving transfer students, may ultimately lead to greater segregation by race and class (Bifulco et al., 2009; Hastings, Kane, & Staiger, 2005; Holme & Richards, 2009; Koedel, Betts, Rice, & Zau, 2009; Lacireno-Paquet & Brantley, 2008; Ni, 2010; Ni & Arsen, 2011; Spalding, 2013).

Targeting the reasons behind families' decisions to transfer out of their district of residence sheds additional light on community members' perspectives on education and their perceptions of local schools. Research suggests that, when given the option, parents exercise choice for a number of different reasons, including fit and academic quality (Carlson, Lavery, & Witte, 2011; Hastings et al., 2005; Koedel et al., 2009; Reback, 2008; Spalding, 2013; Zeehandelaar & Northern, 2013). While our research identified certain negative perceptions of Battle Creek Public Schools and positive perceptions of neighboring school districts, we used conversations with parents who had opted out of BCPS to contextualize and understand these decisions.

In talking with parents who have opted to exercise schools of choice, many indicated their decisions were made in direct reaction to experiences with Battle Creek Public Schools. They pointed to a lack of responsiveness by the district to struggling learners as a primary driver of why they opted out of Battle Creek and chose to enroll their children the neighboring school districts. Others pointed to a specific need, service, or program offering they believed Battle Creek Public Schools could not meet.

For many, a combination of these factors led them to pursue alternative school options. One low-income parent explained:

> The main thing that's kept me from going to the Battle Creek schools isn't race, it isn't anything else. It's the fact of the availability of programming to help my children who have special learning needs, the inability that they seem to have to put those types of programs in place in all of their schools, not just through high school or anything, but all of their schools…. I don't think they provide the services as much as the school she's currently in. I have got several friends [whose children attend Battle Creek Public Schools] that no matter what they have done to help their children who have special needs, they keep getting put off or the teachers do not have the training to deal with children who have special needs. I have a friend who has a child who's autistic, high-end autistic, very functional but does have some other autistic characteristics and for three years, she had her kid over here at Verona and for three years, she had to come pick her student up three out of five days because the teacher didn't know how to handle him and had nobody in the classroom to help

In Battle Creek, many parents expressed frustration and even pain in the having to make the choice of keeping their children in the district or sending their children to one of the neighboring districts.

This choice appeared particularly difficult for African American families who confronted a loss of diversity and the possibility of sending their children to an environment where they worried they might be socially isolated (or even discriminated against) because of their race. As one African-American mother recounted, having voiced concerns about her child's learning, she felt that Battle Creek Public Schools were not responsive to her child's needs, and was faced with a difficult choice. Describing her decision to transfer her child she acknowledged sadness and ambivalence, saying:

> ...if I was afforded the ability to work with the [Battle Creek] and if I was taken serious, I would still be there.... I would have stayed if I felt supported...I shouldn't have to fight to feel supportive. I'm a Battle Creek Public Alumni and I cried. It was the hardest decision that I made as parent.

In reflecting on the decision to sending her child to Lakeview, she described removing her son from a school with more students of color who resembled him to a predominately White school. She said, "I had to weigh the academic aspect and the social aspect, and those things are really tough." She wanted her son to be with other students of color, but was afraid he might be "lost" academically. She went on to voice her approval that Lakeview had expressed a commitment to equity, and she added that she would not have sent her son to Harper Creek or Pennfield.

Students voice also plays a significant role in the decision to transfer school. Data from student surveys show that, 32 percent have considered transferring from their current school. More students in Battle Creek and Pennfield considered transferring (35 percent and 34 percent, respectively) than in Harper Creek (26 percent). The most common reasons for wanting to transfer included not liking the school (42 percent), feeling they could get a better education somewhere else (31 percent), and being picked on or bullied (29 percent). In focus groups with youth, their statements revealed a widely shared consensus that Lakeview was the best school for academics.

School choice has had a dramatic impact on the Battle Creek Public Schools budget, a point that weighs heavily on many residents. In both the community survey and in focus groups, residents voiced their concerns regarding the financial burden placed on the community in sustaining four districts, as well as the implications of school choice policies on the financial health and stability of Battle Creek Public Schools.

As this community member explains:

> I think one of the things that I'm most concerned about is Schools of Choice and how that is negatively impacting Battle Creek Central and the Battle Creek Public Schools. Now, Schools of Choice- there's a lot of factors that come into the head, right? Battle Creek Public Schools has some blame in what's happened to their system, but I'm really concerned about how that is creating kind of a have and have-not in our ... local districts. I think Battle Creek's a very positive community, but when one of the school systems is viewed as failing, that has an impact on property values and perception and so on and so forth.

> ...now once you've created schools of choice, and for the longest time there was an agreement amongst the superintendents to not open up schools of choice. Once [schools] started to accept schools of choice and people want to say, "Let's stop schools of choice and that'll solve ..." You can't put that toothpaste back in the tube unfortunately, there's no way around it. But that then caused us to bleed dry. We've closed six, seven school buildings ... Eight? At one point in time, Battle Creek public schools had five junior high and middle schools and fourteen elementary schools I think? And now we're down to two middle schools and six or seven elementary schools.... It has now collapsed ... The way we fund education in this state has allowed this to happen, and I don't know how we're going to turn around. Our current superintendent has got some good leadership and has some good ideas, but I just don't know how you're going to change that. We can't pay the teachers what they need to be able to retain them, there's no way that we can stabilize this situation.

Schools choice policies can drastically influence budgets. Research on charter schools has demonstrated that districts losing large numbers of students to transfer policies struggle to adjust their budgets and are forced to implement expenditure reductions to keep pace with the loss of revenue (Bifulco & Reback, 2014). As it has played out in Battle Creek Public Schools, the loss of students and subsequent revenue has resulted in cuts to extracurricular and arts programs, which in turn fuel parental dissatisfaction with the District, leading to even more students choosing leave the District and further erosion of revenue, forming a vicious cycle.

For the other three districts, schools of choice policies provide some financial windfall, but even these are not without drawbacks. For example, several residents in Pennfield attributed Schools of Choice to overcrowding and poorer academic conditions in their schools. As one parent notes:

> Without school of choice students, our district would not be able to survive financially. however, many students come into the district for the wrong reasons...there's got to be a balance, and Pennfield has not found it.

The data clearly show that as student enrollment has declined in Battle Creek Public schools, so, too, has the District's revenue. At the same time revenue in Harper Creek, Lakeview, and Pennfield has increased as student enrollment continues to climb.

Family-School Relationships

Parents are seen as playing a vital role in young people's educational experiences. In the eyes of both community members and local educators, children's success and shortcomings in schools are oftentimes credited to parents and their involvement in the educational process. Within the Battle Creek Community, there exists a firmly held belief that parents play an integral role in preparing youth to be college and career ready; parents' knowledge of and access to resources shape their children's educational opportunities throughout their schooling trajectories. However, schools in Battle Creek, as elsewhere, struggle to reach those families and students who are most vulnerable.

Community and family engagement with schools is often discussed as a key component of successful schooling (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Lightfoot, 2004), and plays an essential part in contemporary school reform efforts (Tough, 2008; Comer, 2009). Family involvement in schools is associated with higher student achievement outcomes (Jeynes, 2007; 2012; Wilder, 2014), improved mental health (Wang & Khalil, 2014), and student motivation (Fan, Williams, & Wolters, 2012). School improvement initiatives are therefore wise to focus on developing and maintaining family involvement and community engagement (Jeynes, 2012).

"I think as a parent you need to be involved, you need to show up for conferences. If you can't make it, then you need to send someone else in your family to go. My son couldn't make it to my grandchildren's conference last week. Bet you I was there, though. Somebody was going to be there."

However, research shows that there is often a disconnect between what educators credit as family engagement and what family members experience as engagement. Educators' perspectives of family involvement tend to be narrowly focused on school-centric parental behaviors and activities, thereby discounting the subtler ways in which many parents are involved with their children's education (Okpala, Okpala, and Smith, 2001; Griffith, 1996; Warren, Hong, Rubin, & Uy, 2009). Several studies have shown that middle- and upper-class parents display higher levels of traditional parental involvement behaviors compared to low-income parents (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; de Carvalho, 2001; Epstein, 1995; Lareau, 2000; O'Connor, 2001); however, low-income parents are equally as interested in their children's education as their middle- and upper-class peers (Chavkin & Williams, 2015).

Similarly, research has shown that immigrant parents possess a range of understandings with respect to education and how to engage with schools (Carreon, Drake, & Barton, 2005). Although immigrant parents score lower on conventional measures of school involvement (Crosnoe, 2006), these lower scores are more reflective of socioeconomic and language barriers than different values or motivations (Crosnoe & Kahil, 2010; Glick et al., 2009; Lopez et al., 2001; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Moreover, there are cultural discontinuities between schools and homes that effectively marginalize immigrant parents (Martinez-Cosio, 2010; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, &

Todrova, 2009; Yosso, 2005). Thus, low-income and immigrant families may be perceived as being disengaged, when in fact, they are simply not exhibiting the same *types* of parental involvement as non-immigrant families.

Some of these more subtle forms of parental involvement that immigrant parents enact, such as parental expectations, have been found to have a large impact on student outcomes when compared to the more school-centric parental behaviors and traditional forms of family engagement, such as homework assistance (Jeynes, 2005; Wilder, 2013).

Although in interviews several parents, like the mother quoted earlier, reported feeling that their children's schools were not responsive to them, community survey responses indicate that Battle Creek community schools were able to engage with most parents (see Table 32).

Table 32: Parent-School Interactions

(n=273)	Never	Once a year	2-4 times a year	5-10 times a year	11 or more times a year
I visit my child's school	0.7%	3.7%	33.7%	26.4%	35.5%
My child's teacher sends me notes home, calls me, or texts me	14.3%	7.7%	24.3%	19.1%	34.6%
I visit my child's classroom	19.6%	11.1%	42.8%	11.8%	14.8%

Parental engagement surfaced as a widely-contested topic amongst educator and community focus groups (see Table 33). Many educators reported in surveys feeling limited in their ability to connect with parents. Educators were fairly split in their evaluations of how much support they received from parents, their ability to overcome cultural barriers, and perceptions of parents as partners in students' education.

Table 33: Educators' Perceptions of Home-School Relationships

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I receive a great deal of support from parents for the work I do	7.3%	29.0%	20.7%	28.0%	15.0%
It is difficult to overcome the cultural barriers between teachers and parents	5.7%	29.0%	28.0%	25.4%	11.9%
Teachers and parents think of each other as partners in educating children	3.1%	37.8%	22.3%	31.6%	5.2%

Survey responses suggested that teachers in Battle Creek felt less supported by parents than teachers in other districts; 25 percent of teachers in Battle Creek felt they received a great deal of support from parents, compared to 33 percent in Lakeview, 43 percent in Harper Creek, and 44 percent in Pennfield. Likewise,

only 30 percent of Battle Creek teachers agreed that teachers and parents are partners in education, in contrast to 43 percent in Harper Creek and 48 percent in both Lakeview and Pennfield (see Figure 11).

Though not widely shared as a sentiment, a number of educators (and some community members) voiced the opinion that some families are unwilling to engage in their children's educational process, stating plainly that "some parents just don't care." Others sought to explain differences in perceived levels of parental involvement in terms of families' knowledge and access to community resources. Several acknowledged that in comparison to White parents and more affluent families, some African American families and families with low household incomes were less likely to know about existing programs, and more likely to face some sort of barrier to accessing resources – most commonly work obligations and transportation. Others conveyed the sense that for some parents, schools can be intimidating institutions. One teacher speculated that some parents struggle with the idea of coming to school:

Figure 11: Educators' Perceptions of Home-School Relationships, by School Districts

I think parents try their best to do their very best with the knowledge that they have. We as educators need to continue to do a better job to reach out to meet our parents where they're at. Maybe that means sometimes not coming into the high school because they are intimidated. To do a better job of reaching them where they're at so that we can connect with them and build a bridge for our future.

Lawrence-Lightfoot (2004) calls explains that when parents come to school to talk to teachers, they bring with them the weight of their own educational experiences; for those with fewer positive memories of schooling, it follows they may less inclined to pursue engagement with schools. Educational and physical barriers may further account for some of the separation between the community and schools.

From the community perspective, there is a large percentage of community members who have a negative perception of their local school district (see Table 34). Community survey data shows that more than half of community survey

members (57 percent) reported feeling satisfied with the public schools in the Battle Creek area, and more than a quarter (29 percent) felt dissatisfied.

Table 34: Community Satisfaction with Schools

	Extremely satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Extremely dissatisfied
Overall, how satisfied are you with the public schools in the Battle Creek community? (n=648)	10.7%	46.6%	13.7%	19.4%	9.6%
	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	Terrible
How would you rate the quality of the public schools in the Battle Creek community? (n=649)	4.9%	35.1%	41.9%	15.7%	2.3%

Community survey members who did not have children in area public schools reported higher levels of dissatisfaction with the local schools (see Figure 12). Sixty-five percent of respondents with children in area public schools reported feeling satisfied with the local schools, compared to 52 percent of respondents without children in area public schools. A full one-third of community members without children in the district reported dissatisfaction with local schools.

Five percent of community respondents rated area schools as 'excellent', while an additional 35 percent rated them 'good.' Sixteen percent of respondents felt schools were 'poor' and 2 percent rated local public schools as 'terrible.' Community members without children in local public schools also felt more negatively about the overall quality of area schools; 21 percent of people without children in area schools felt negatively about area schools compared to 14 percent of those with children in area schools.

Figure 12: Satisfaction with Local Public Schools

The survey data also showed that amongst parents with children enrolled in the public schools, more than two-thirds had positive perceptions of schools, indicating that they trusted their child's teacher, felt listened to, and felt welcome (see Table 35).
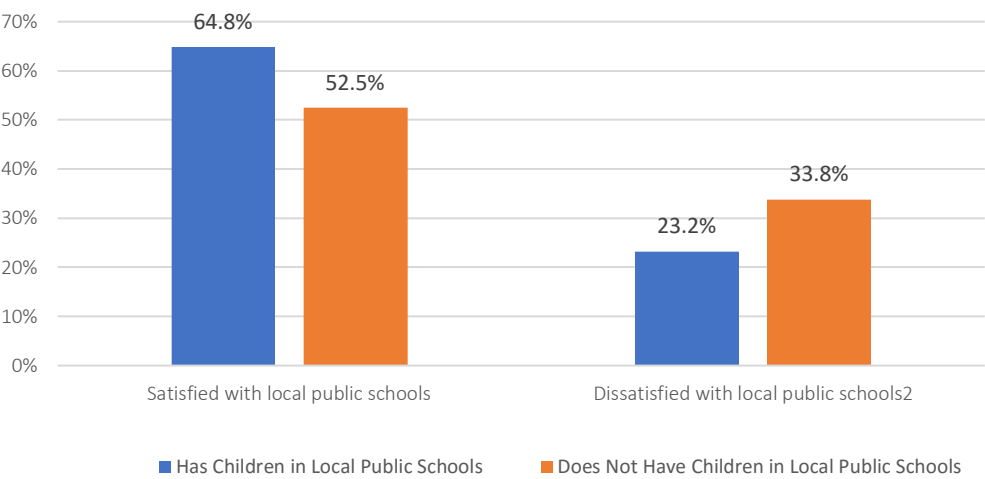
The data point to issues and feelings of disconnect between families and schools. As will be discussed in next section, this incongruence means that some students, and particularly vulnerable students, may miss out on opportunities to further their academic success and better prepare them for college and career.

Table 35: Parent Perceptions of Trust, Respect, and Welcoming

(n=278)	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree
I trust the teachers at my child's school	36.3%	35.3%	11.9%	8.3%	8.3%
The teachers at my child's school listen to me	34.7%	31.4%	14.4%	10.8%	8.7%
The teachers at my child's school care whether or not my child is successful	38.3%	36.1%	7.9%	7.2%	10.5%
I feel welcome in my child's school	41.0%	30.2%	9.0%	10.8%	9.0%

COMMUNITY AND SCHOOL RESOURCES

"Battle Creek is a community that has often been on the cusp of realizing its full potential. We have a lot of resources here that could help us do that. I think we're always close to a tipping point to combining all those resources and that energy and those good ideas to actually move the community forward in the ways that we talked about. Sometimes we don't quite get over that hill, but I always feel like we're very close to that."

This section examines the resources and supports that help foster college and career readiness, focusing on how schools and community organizations shape college and career readiness in the Battle Creek Community, as well as the challenges in accessing those resources. This includes the both within schools and out-of-school community resources. In examining community resources, we sought to describe the vast array of community supports in Battle Creek and as well as explore the extent to which community organizations are connected with local school districts and how they might wrap themselves around problems faced by school children. As is articulated in the aside quotation, Battle Creek is resource rich – having both in-school resources and supplemental offerings provided through community based organizations – and yet many struggle to find the right constellation of resources that will best meet students' needs. The interviews and focus groups with individuals working alongside schools and various community organizations in the Battle Creek Area corroborate this as a persistent challenge. Despite myriad resources and supportive community partners, fragmentation across service providers and siloed communication limit the success of the community in linking youth with meaningful opportunities in and out of school.

Each school has tailored its own suite of services based on their own perception of student needs. Across all the schools, guidance counselors and teachers serve as the primary point of contact from which students and families can learn about college and career opportunities.

Preparing for College and Career Opportunities

Interviewer:	Are there any guidance counselors that you guys have, that you to talk to about your career paths?
Student 1:	No.
Interviewer:	Have you ever talked to your guidance counselor at all about what classes you should take and what path you're interested in?
Student 1:	No.

Interviewer:	Are you interested in any path at all, school-wise? Do you know what you want to do with your life? What do you want to do?
Student 1:	Doctor or dentist.
Interviewer:	Doctor or dentist.
Student 2:	Lawyer or nurse.
Interviewer:	Lawyer or a nurse. This is cool. Congratulations, guys. Do you know what you need in order to get to that point right now, where you're at in school? You know what classes to take?
Student 1:	No.
Interviewer:	No? Is there anyone that you can openly talk to at school that can give you any ideas about how to get into those interests or those career paths? Is there a teacher that you talk to about wanting to be a dentist or a doctor? No? Let's see, what other questions about that. You don't talk to guidance counselors, you guys don't talk with your teachers about your career goals, but you have career goals, right? Is there anything outside of school that you have where you can have these conversations?
Student 1:	Here at Voces.

Across the Battle Creek Community, middle school and high school aged students are actively in search of conversations about college and career opportunities. For some young people, their aspirations are guided and supported at school, whereas for others, outside organizations and individuals provide them with vital college and career supports. This is not to say that schools have not done their part, but rather that meaningful opportunities exist in fostering collaboration across the community.

Student survey responses suggest that Battle Creek Public Schools place more emphasis on the development of career skills than either Harper Creek or Pennfield. While 60 percent of Battle Creek students reported focusing 'a great deal' or 'a lot' on developing their career goals, only 53 percent of Harper Creek students and 44 percent of Pennfield students responded similarly. Furthermore, 63 percent of Battle Creek students said they learned 'a great deal' or 'a lot' about job skills, while only 59 percent of Harper Creek students and 42 percent of Pennfield students felt the same. Battle Creek student survey respondents also reported more emphasis on applying skills to everyday life, developing job skills, and gaining an understanding of why school is important for life than did students in either Harper Creek or Pennfield.

"Battle Creek Public Schools place more emphasis on the development of career skills than either Harper Creek or Pennfield."

Student survey responses also suggest that students talk more frequently to adults at school about their career goals and less frequently about applying to college. Nearly half of students in high school (45 percent) and 63 percent of

middle school students have never spoken to an adult in their school about how to apply for college. Thirty percent of high school students and 47 percent of middle school students indicated never having spoken to an adult in their school about career goals. While a fair proportion of students spoke with adults at least occasionally about their pathways after high school, a sizeable percentage of students did not have these types of conversations with adults at all. Twenty-four percent of high school students and 40 percent of middle school students had never spoken to an adult at school about either college or career pathways.

Students in Battle Creek reported more frequent conversations with adults at school regarding their college and career plans than students in other districts. In Battle Creek, 11 percent of students said they talked to an adult frequently (more than once a week) about how to apply for college, in contrast to 3 percent of students in Harper Creek and 4 percent in Pennfield. Fourteen percent of Battle Creek students talked to an adult at school frequently about their career goals, as did 8 percent of Harper Creek students and 9 percent of Pennfield students. Even though Battle Creek students tended to engage more with adults about their future plans, large numbers of students in all three districts had never spoken to an adult at school about either applying for college or their career goals.

Seventy percent of high school teachers agreed that students at their school get the college planning information they need, and 45 percent agreed that they get information about planning for a career (see Figure 13). Only 18 percent of elementary and middle school teachers felt students received information about college and 17 percent felt they got information about careers.

Compared to the other districts, fewer teachers in Battle Creek Public Schools felt that students in their school were getting enough information about college and career planning (see Figure 14). Only 30 percent of teachers in Battle Creek felt students got enough information about college, and just 22 percent felt students got enough information about careers. In contrast, 56 percent of teachers in Pennfield felt students received enough information about preparing for college and 48 percent felt students got enough information about planning for a future career.

Figure 13: College and Career Education

Students at my school get the information they need about planning for college — Other Teachers 18.2; High School Teachers 69.4

Students at my school get the information they need about planning for their careers — Other Teachers 16.9; High School Teachers 45.2

Percent of Teachers who Agree

■ Other Teachers ■ High School Teachers
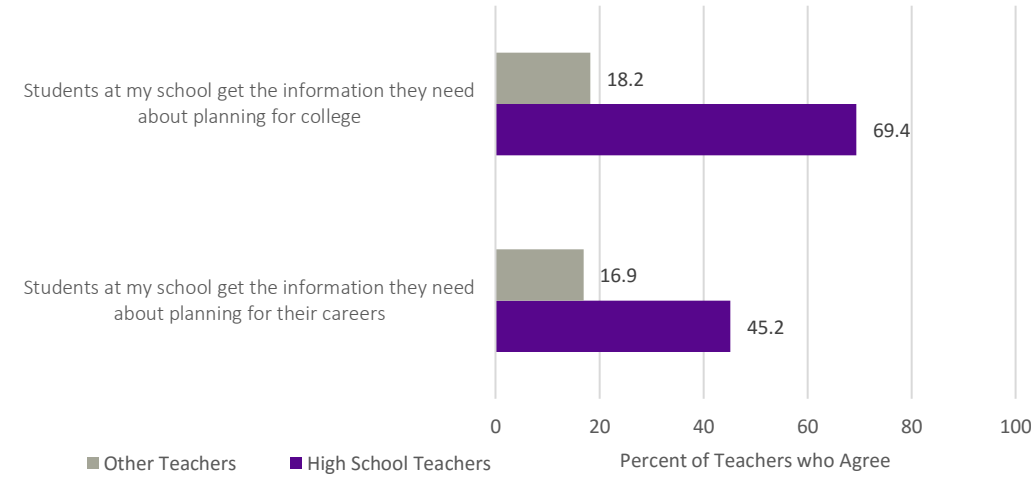
In preparation for college and career, teachers seem to focus more on developing academic skills rather than exposing students to college and careers. About half of teachers said that students at their school focused 'a great deal' or 'a lot' on writing effectively, reading and understanding challenging materials, thinking critically, and working with others to complete tasks. These skills are vital in preparing student to be college and career ready, and in line with what many parents want for their children. However, fewer teachers reported that their students learned about careers and how school can apply to daily life. Only one-quarter of teachers reported that their students focused 'a great deal' or 'a lot' on developing career goals, and 23 percent said their students learned about job skills.

Figure 14: College and Career Education by District

Students at my school get the information they need about planning for college: 56, 47, 44, 30

Students at my school get the information they need about planning for their careers: 48, 33, 30, 22

Percent of Teachers who Agree

■ Pennfield ■ Harper Creek □ Lakeview ■ Battle Creek

Students diverged from teachers in their perceptions of their own learning. While 25 percent of teachers said students spent a significant amount of time developing career goals, 55 percent of students said their school experiences had helped them in this area. Similarly, while only 23 percent of teachers reported that students spend a great deal of time learning job skills, 57 percent of students felt they had learned 'a great deal' or 'a lot' about job skills (see Figure 15). This indicates that while not all teachers feel as if they are explicitly providing information on college and career readiness to students, the majority of students believe this knowledge has been imparted to them in school.

Teacher and Student Perceptions of Learning

Teachers reported that students focused more on career-related topics at the high school level, though student accounts suggest the opposite (see Table 32). Thirty-two percent of high school teachers said their students spent a significant amount of time developing career goals (compared to 9 percent of other teachers) and 29 percent said their students developed job or career skills (compared to 11 percent of other teachers). Interestingly, inverse results emerged among students. Among middle school students, 61 percent said they learned 'a lot' or 'a great deal' about developing career goals, compared to 48 percent of high school respondents. Likewise, 65 percent of middle schoolers said they learned a lot about job skills, as did 48 percent of high school students.

This may be due to recent policy changes and initiatives that are engaging with middle school students around college and career options. In contrast, high school students reported spending less time than other students on understanding how learning in school can be applied to life, speaking and writing effectively, reading and understanding challenging materials.

Table 36: Teacher and Student Perceptions of Learning

	Teachers	Students
Developing career goals	25%	55%
Skills for a job or career after completing high school	23%	57%
Understanding why what you learn in school will be important for life after school	35%	59%
Applying what you learn at school to everyday life	36%	58%
Writing effectively	53%	66%
Speaking effectively	39%	65%
Reading and understanding challenging materials	50%	68%
Thinking critically (reasoning, asking 'why?')	52%	67%
Working well with others to complete a task	56%	67%
Learning independently	45%	71%

Percentages reflect the percent of teachers and students who reported that students learn about each item 'a great deal' or 'a lot'.

Beyond the traditional school classroom, schools are able to access other school and community resources to support students' pursuits of college and career. Collectively, educators pointed to in-school programs such as career days, college visits, the Math and Science Center, Career Cruising, the Calhoun Area Career Center, Early College, Legacy Scholars, partnerships with colleges and universities, and financial aid programs as valued resources. As one educator explained (with the exception of Legacy Scholars), the availability of programs is generally the same across the districts.[8]

> Generally, I think that because of the standards that we have in Michigan, a lot of the similar courses, and expectations, and final graduation credits are the same across all of the city schools. I would say that we have similar graduation requirements. We all have access to a lot of the same programs ... Kellogg Community College dual-enrollment, the Tech [Career] Center, Math and Science center, online courses, so in terms of that, there's a lot of similarity across all of the districts. The other part being the larger schools, like Lakeview, would have more opportunity for a diverse range of elective courses. That kids would have that opportunity to take part in and signup for.

Students involved in these programs learned about college and career readiness through direct instruction, curriculum, and structured experiences. Moreover, as programs like Career Cruising and Early College are expanded to the schools, there is reason to believe that more students will be exposed to messages from schools about college and career.

There are, however, concerns about a lack of support within schools to guide students to those opportunities. In interviews, several community members and local educators noted a limited number of counselors to support students.

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[8] Data related to dual enrollment was requested, but we did not receive it with enough time to include it our analysis.

Figure 15: Learning Environment

Understanding information and ideas for classes — High School Teachers: 69.9, Other Teachers: 79.2

Using computers and other technology for class work — High School Teachers: 69.3, Other Teachers: 40.8

Working well with others to complete a task — High School Teachers: 48.4, Other Teachers: 52.7

Furthering education or training beyond high school — High School Teachers: 47.6, Other Teachers: 31.5

Thinking critically (Reasoning, asking "why?") — High School Teachers: 46.7, Other Teachers: 49.3

Writing effectively — High School Teachers: 43.6, Other Teachers: 56

Reading and understanding challenging materials — High School Teachers: 40.3, Other Teachers: 52

Learning independently — High School Teachers: 37.1, Other Teachers: 40

Speaking effectively — High School Teachers: 34.4, Other Teachers: 40

Developing career goals — High School Teachers: 32.3, Other Teachers: 9.3

Skills for work outside of school — High School Teachers: 31.7, Other Teachers: 19.7

Applying what they learn at school to every day life — High School Teachers: 29.1, Other Teachers: 32.9

Skills for a job or career after completing high school — High School Teachers: 29, Other Teachers: 10.6

Spending time preparing for state and district standardized tests — High School Teachers: 28.6, Other Teachers: 31.5

Understanding why what they learn in school will be important for life after school — High School Teachers: 25.2, Other Teachers: 37.4

Memorizing facts and figures for classes — High School Teachers: 20.9, Other Teachers: 14.4

Homework and studying at home — High School Teachers: 17.4, Other Teachers: 21.1

Percent of teachers who say their students learn about each item 'a great deal' or 'a lot'

■ High School Teachers ■ Other Teachers

According to one respondent, "you may have one counselor that has so many kids, even seniors, and they can't do it all because you've got too many that you're trying to work with."

This sentiment was corroborated by area educators. When discussing the challenges they face, local guidance counselors noted how their caseload prevented them from meeting the needs of their students. As one local educator noted:

> I think the first [challenge] is time. I would love to be able to just focus my attention on this process for my juniors and seniors and inviting families in, and we just find that there's just so much meat and so no time to do it. I think our high school counselors operate on a caseload of around 400 students, and they're not just supporting their career development but their academic, their social, their emotional development, and that pulls on our time as well.

According to data from the Michigan Department of Education's Center for Educational Performance and Information collected as part of their Registry of Educational Personnel (REP), Battle Creek Area High School Guidance Counselors serve a large number of students. Across the area high schools, the student to counselor ratio ranges from 368 students per counselor in Battle Creek and 299 students per counselor in Harper Creek. Given the apparent academic need in Battle Creek, this indicates that Battle Creek Public Schools students may be underserved with respect to traditional guidance services.

Within schools, educators acknowledge that more can be done to improve college and career readiness. As one local educator explains:

> We, as a district, have not done a very good job with that so far. We have gotten much more on board this year with teaching people what that means, that it's far, far more than just hanging out, pennants down the hallway, or putting a sign by each teacher's door what college or university they attended. Even more than taking some students on college visits, but it's about rigor in instruction from kindergarten on. It's about having students envision themselves from the time they're very young as a fireman, a doctor, a teacher, whatever in a way that's not just that imaginary place but a real possibility and an understanding from very early on that from the day they walk into school, they have a job to do to prepare themselves to be whatever it is that they want to be and that we are here to help them do that.

From this perspective, along with the perspective expressed in the community narrative section above preparing youth to be college and career ready is a whole school and whole community effort. In interviews with current and past students many young people learn about college and career through specialized school and out-of-school programs like Upward Bound or through other community members (e.g., friends, family, and community leaders). These programs and individuals play important roles in supporting guidance counselors and providing additional needed services. In particular, several community members and organizations pointed towards the need for mentorship. For them, mentors served the role of informal guidance counselors. One community member, who recently graduated from college noted it was his mentor - his pastor - who made him aware of programs and supported his college pursuits. In discussing the need for mentorship, he noted:

For instance, my mentor. Someone that took the time to really reach out to me and find out who I was. Not just as a person but who I am. What are my fears, what are my things that were really important to me? Building that relationship teaching me things that I will need to know in life. I think having him there lead me to a great road of discovery of what is in me, what do I desire to do. I think I learned the most being aware of what's in my heart that I that I'm definitely going to do…

…It was not a school mentor. That's an absence here - school mentorship. Mentorship is a really big need…. I utilized guidance counselors but not to the extent where, like a mentorship. [Guidance counselors] helped with scholarships and I think they were available for people but I don't think the actual connection for me be what they intend for the purpose of a guidance counselor wasn't' always there.

Across the community, there are several organizations that are willing and able to provide youth with opportunities to be mentored as well as provide supplemental academic supports. In cases such as these, it is not a matter of available resources, but rather an alignment those resources so that more students are able to access them.

Table 37: Count of Area Guidance Counselors

School	District	Guidance Counselors	Enrollment	Student to Counselor
Battle Creek Central High School	Battle Creek Public Schools	3.00	1,103	367.67
Harper Creek High School	Harper Creek Community Schools	3.00	895	298.33
Lakeview High School	Lakeview School District	4.00	1373	343.25
Pennfield Senior High School	Pennfield Schools	2.00	675	337.00
Northwestern Middle School	Battle Creek Public Schools	1.00	422	422.00
Springfield Middle School	Battle Creek Public Schools	1.00	524	524.00
Harper Creek Middle School	Harper Creek Community Schools	1.00	836	836.00
Lakeview Middle School	Lakeview School District	2.00	1,290	645.00
Pennfield Middle School	Pennfield Schools	1.00	593	593.00
Pennfield Dunlap Elementary also has one guidance counselor and North Pennfield Elementary and Pennfield Purdy school each have 0.5 guidance counselors.				

Time Spent Out of School

When asked to specify how much time they spent per week on certain activities, students reported that they spent most of their out-of-school hours in recreational activities (see Figure 16). Seventy-eight percent of students spent at least two hours per week engaging with technology (including texting and social media) and nearly more than a quarter (27 percent) spent 8 hours or more per week with technology. Seventy-seven percent of students spent at least two hours a week with their friends. Fewer students spent time studying or doing homework, reading for personal interests, working, and volunteering.

Middle and high school students generally spent their out-of-school hours similarly. However, high school students spent more time using technology; 35 percent spent eight hours or more per week with technology, compared to 20 percent of middle school students. High school students also tended to spend more time pursuing hobbies (including sports) while middle school students tended to spend more time reading for pleasure. About 11 percent of high school students spent eight hours or more per week working for pay, as did 8 percent of middle school students.

Figure 16: Students Use of Time Outside of School

Percent of students spending 2 or more hours on activity

Students across the three districts spent roughly the same amount of time per week doing volunteer work, attending to family commitments, watching television, and playing video games. Students in Harper Creek spent more time on hobbies or clubs; 77 percent spent at least two hours per week, compared to 60 percent of students in Battle Creek and 67 percent of students in Pennfield. Students in Battle Creek tended to spend more time working for pay and spent much less time than other students studying and doing homework.

Support for Struggling Learners

While the schools are working hard to develop clear college and career pathways through early college and career and technical education programs, struggling learners oftentimes fail to reach key benchmarks needed to enter and persist in these programs. This issue is not unique to the Battle Community. A recent evaluation of California's Linked Learning program (a career pathway program) found that the most vulnerable students in their program (i.e., English learners, students with disabilities, and underachieving students) faced challenges with respect to successfully matriculating through the program (Guha et al., 2014). While local Battle Creek Area schools have support systems in place

for struggling learners, there is evidence to suggest that more can be done both in the classroom and in the community to help.

Teachers expressed mixed opinions on their own self-efficacy as educators. Teachers reported feeling fairly confident about adjusting lessons for struggling students, but also expressed doubt about their own training and the impact of their class on students' overall lives. Eighty percent of teachers said they felt confident in their ability to adjust a lesson for a struggling student, but fewer – 65 percent – agreed that when some struggling students earned a better grade, it was because they found better ways of teaching that student. Even fewer teachers – 50 percent – said that when a student does better than they normally do, it is because the teacher put in extra effort. Forty percent of teachers agreed that the time spent in their classroom contributes little when compared to the influence of a student's home environment, and nearly half felt that a teacher's potential impact on a student is very limited.

"I have a god daughter that goes to Central. She really needs some help, she's really struggling and there's nobody to help her."

Fifty-eight percent of teachers felt confident that most of their students would gain the requisite knowledge and skills by the end of the school year. Roughly one-third of teachers (37 percent) felt confident that they could turn around their hardest-to-reach students by the end of the school year.

Teachers in elementary and middle grades tended to feel less optimistic regarding the impact of a student's home life on their performance in the classroom when compared to high school teachers. Seventy one percent of elementary and middle school teachers agreed that they could do more for students if parents would do more, compared to 58 percent of high school teachers. Likewise, 53 percent of elementary and middle school teachers felt their influence on a child was very limited when compared to their home environment; 43 percent of high school teachers felt similarly.

Similarly, surveys of educators in four districts conducted by Education First, point to two important needs across the districts - providing social and emotional supports for students and improving supports for teaching and learning. Survey respondents indicated that both supports should be high priority across the districts. With regard to social and emotional supports, while the districts do offer a suite of student facing supports (e.g., wraparound services, restorative practices and licensed behavioral therapists were the most common interventions at the school and district levels), only about a one-third of the respondents perceived that current interventions are working. Moreover, the survey results show a strong belief that educators and schools may require more support and professional development to be proficient in these areas. This sentiment was corroborated by members of the action team. With regard to teaching and learning, only approximately 60% of survey takers indicated that they had the right tools or training to improve teaching and learning. While educators pointed to several interventions in place that support strong teaching

(e.g., professional learning communities), professional learning and training leading to data driven instruction were the most common interventions at the school and district levels. Strong evaluation and observation protocols and effective curriculum that supports grade level learning and critical thinking were the least common.

Figure 17: Ability to Support Struggling Learners
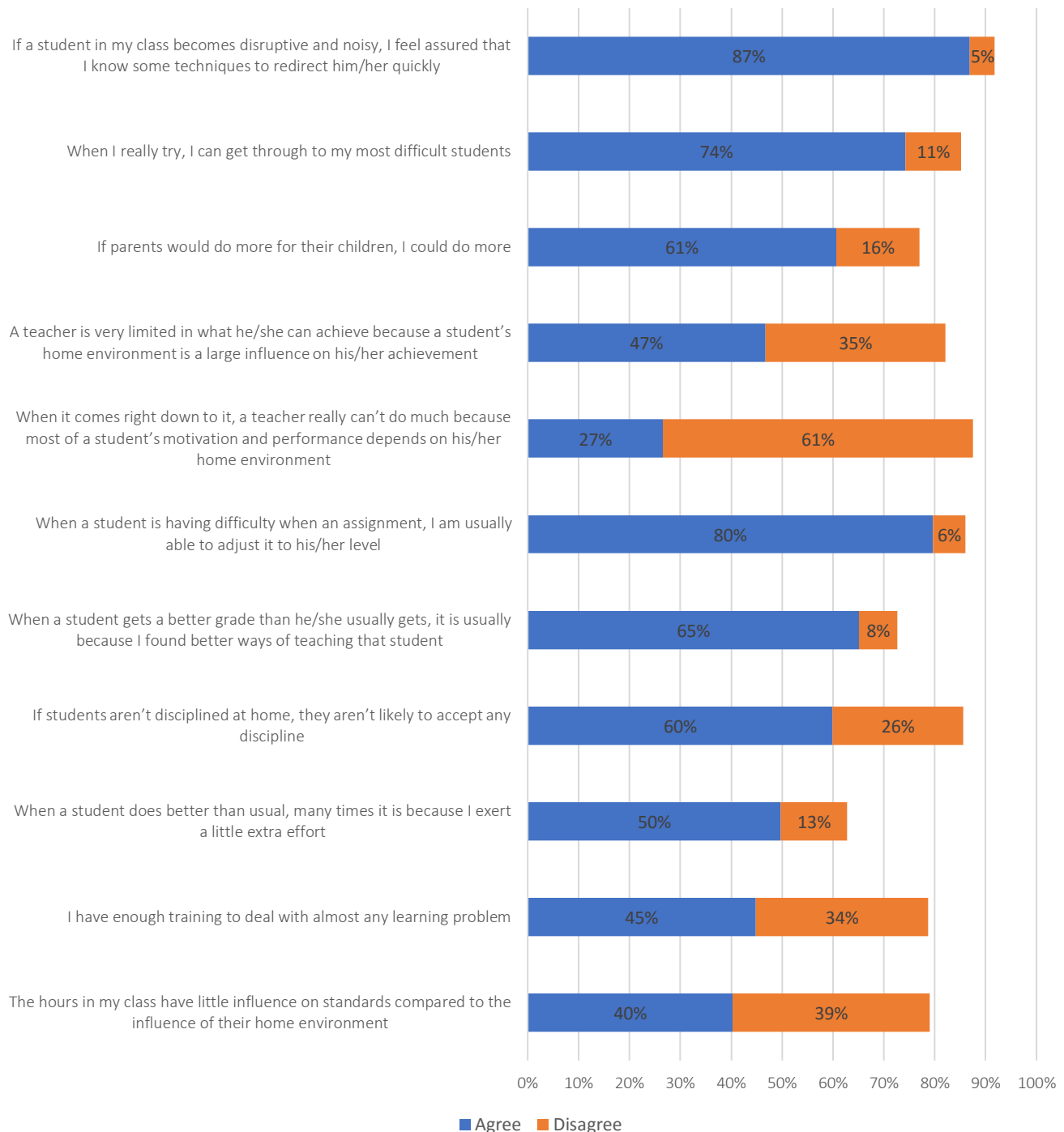
Community Organizations as Culture and Knowledge Brokers

Community-Based organization such as the Burma Center and Voces play an important role in the Battle Creek Area relative to education, serving as cultural brokers, working between schools and immigrant families. Both organizations are able to mobilize and provide resources to students and families that enable families to navigate the complexities of the educational (Gentemann & Whitehead, 1983; Lawson & Alameda-Lawson 2011; Martinez-Cosio & Iannacone 2007; Stanton-Salazar, 2010). The Burma Center and Voces have staff members who both speak languages found in the community and understand various cultures found in the community, as well as socioeconomic challenges community members face. As exemplified in the quotation in the sidebar, this knowledge is married with relationships with schools and knowledge of how schools systems function. This enables them to serve as translators, help parents navigate the school policies and practices, and help educations better understand, connect with, and support immigrant communities (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2011; Warren et al., 2009). Both the Burma Center and Voces have the capacity to provide family services to connect schools with families, support students, and train educators, making them a valuable community resource. Similarly, other community organizations such as New Level Sports Ministries, the Urban League, and local churches have strong relationships with members of the African American community, and are able to leverage those relationships to provide supplemental educational programing.

"With the work that [Lakeview] is doing, they want to bring in some sort of equity to the ESL students. In order to really understand the students better, they come to the Burma Center and ask us what the needs are. We have this thing called Family Liaisons. The Family Liaisons here at the Burma Center, we do home visitations through the tour of families or Lakeview School District Burmese families. Through this home visitation, we have survey with us and then at the end, we ask them is there any support that they need around their kids' education. A lot of the needs are around learning English and getting tutors.

"With that information, we go back to Lakeview School District. We have these meetings maybe twice a month. It goes to show that they start something and they want to maintain that, how they can improve. It's not a one-time thing and then they don't want to do it anymore. I see this consistency with the school really wanting to bring change. Not only are they providing the greatest ESL services to the students, they're going above and beyond to give services to the parents as well. I think it's just amazing."

Community-based organizations have a level of autonomy and flexibly to respond to community needs that is not commonly found in schools (Keith, 1996; Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2011; Shirley, 2001; Warren, 2005). Moreover, they are better equipped to engage and work with marginalized parents because of the array of services they provide and their ability to match programs and services more closely with parents needs and interests (Lawson & Alameda- Lawson, 2011; Warren et al., 2009). For example, Voces offers English as a Second Language, Family Leadership Institute (FLI), and Community Connections, all of which serve to empower families in the Latino community of Battle Creek; the Burma Center provides parent liaisons; the Urban League provides scholarship and academic support and works with the Battle Creek Freedom Schools; New Level Sports Ministries provide athletic and academic supports; and faith based organizations like local churches offer bible study.

Countless times throughout the study, we found that if we wanted to engage with a specific racial or ethnic group within the Battle Creek Community, the best way was not through schools, but through community based organizations (inclusive of faith-based organizations).

Early Childhood Education

Data collected from Michigan's Great Start to Quality early childhood provider website identified 97 early childhood provider sites in the Battle Creek area: 45 licensed centers, 11 licensed group homes, and 40 registered family homes. These programs are dispersed throughout the community, but are largely concentrated in the Battle Creek Public Schools and Lakeview areas (see Figure 18).

Licensed centers had a total capacity of 3721 children, group homes a capacity of 132 children, and family homes a capacity of 238 children, for a total childcare capacity of 4091 childcare slots. In total, 5642 children ages zero to five reside in the Battle Creek area, suggesting a potential childcare shortage of approximately 1500 total slots (see table 38). While not all community members with young children may want to access - among parents surveyed, 51 percent reported that their child currently or previously attended an early childhood program or prekindergarten program in the Battle Creek area - there is gap in total available slots in relation to the estimates number of children ages 0-5 in Battle Creek, with larger gaps in Battle Creek Public Schools and Harper Creek Community Schools catchments.

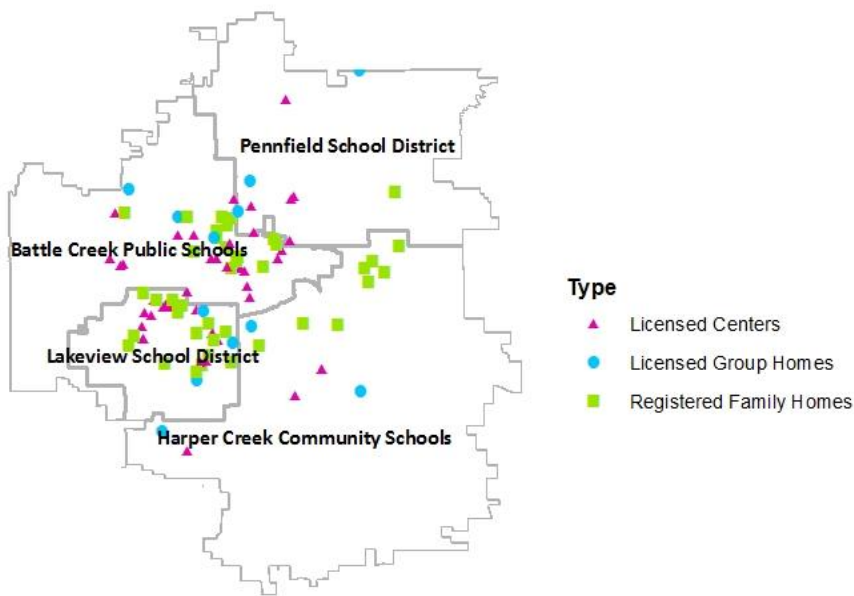**Figure 18: Childcare Providers in the Battle Creek Community**

Table 38: Childcare Supply and Demand

	Population Age 0-5	Estimated Supply	Estimated Surplus/Deficit	Ratio of Population to Supply
Battle Creek	3068	2031	-1037	1.5
Harper Creek	750	332	-418	2.3
Pennfield	366	452	86	0.8
Lakeview	1458	1276	-182	1.1
Total	5642	4091	-1551	1.4

Data source: American Community Survey 2014 5-Year Estimates; variable B01001; greatstarttoquality.org

According to data collected by BC Pulse through their survey, highly vulnerable members of the Battle Creek community voiced some concerns about access to quality child care placements and preschools.[9]

The BC Pulse survey reports that of adults looking for childcare, 63% had a difficulty finding childcare programs that they wanted, 46% said there were no good Quality Child Care options in their neighborhood. The BC Pulse survey also identified racial and economic disparities in access to quality childcare. Their findings show that comparatively, Asian parents were far less likely to seek external childcare supports; only 14% of Asian parents indicated that they sought out child care outside the family compared to 54% for all other parents. At the same time, African-American parents were far more likely to feel limited by the childcare options in their community; 64% of African American parents indicated that they felt that there were no good options for childcare in their neighborhood compared to 26% of all other parents. With respect to income the survey showed differential access to quality child care. 77% of parents earning less than $10,000 indicated experiencing greater difficulties finding child care; comparatively, only 22% of parents earning more than $31,460 indicated difficulties finding childcare.

With respect to preschool, 25% of parents whose child was not in preschool indicated that cost was a primary barrier. Additionally, African-American parents (28%) were more likely to include transportation as a key barrier to attending preschool compared to other parents (0%).

When assessing preschool quality, parents used different sets of criteria. Unemployed parents (47%) were less likely to prioritize the availability of learning opportunities to help their children succeed in school in childcare settings than parents who are employed (70%); and Hispanic and Asian parents (51%) were more likely to prioritize adults with experience/education in childcare settings than African-American and White parents (31%). However, according to their survey, there were no differences (income, race, or age) in those who thought preschool costs too much. Moreover, rates of preschool

[9] The BC Pulse survey was distributed to vulnerable families in Battle Creek in summer 2014 who met one or more of the following criteria: Families living at or below 200% of the federal poverty level; Teenagers who are pregnant or have children; Individuals who identified themselves as a racial/ethnic minority; and Individuals/Families receiving supports at WIC, Nurse Family Partnership, or Head Start

attendance are consistent across race, income, employment, and parent's age groups.[10]

Disconnect and Unequal/Inequitable Distribution of Services

Community members and organization leaders identified three key points of disconnect that seem to reduce the potential positive impact of community-based educational services and supports in the Battle Creek Community – a disconnect with school, an unequal distribution of services across the community, and a general inability of those with the greatest level of need to access services.

"Once you finally get to know someone and form relationships with them, they tend to move on. Then you're going through that again and you're re-educating people on what you do, and how you do it …There is no historical knowledge. There is a lot of moving around of parts within their organization and this is all the schools. This is across the board. It's just very difficult to help support them and when that leadership is constantly revolving. That's what I've found. Of course, you know, with every change of leadership, they have different philosophies and they have different directions they want to go. We're just really here...to help support them in their goals and so that's been quite a challenge."

Several leaders of community organizations voiced some concern about the disconnect between schools and community-based services designed to support student learning. Across the districts, many of the services needed to support students are available through outside organizations who are looking for opportunities to serve the community and its youth. However, for outside organizations seeking to support college and career readiness, there is a perceived disconnect between the schools and the community organizations. A common frustration amongst organizations is not being known within the schools. Moreover, the reliance on personal connections with educators and school leaders makes it difficult for community organizations to develop and maintain strong connections with school, as the community leader in the sidebar notes.

Additionally, interview data suggests that community resources are not equally distributed across the school districts. Battle Creek and Lakeview are viewed as having more external resources for their students to support learning at all levels. This is in part due to extra support from local funders. School leaders and educators from Harper Creek and Pennfield voiced concerns about the availability of and financial supports for programs in their districts. Legacy Scholars and Goodwill Connects were singled out as programs they feel are important to college and career readiness, which are supported in Battle Creek

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[10] There is also a possible disconnect within the education system between early-childhood programs and the K-12 education system. As one local educator noted:

> ...you've got even such misalignment between the kindergarten staff and the preschool staff in the same building. They're using different curriculums, they're talking different language, and then these preschool kids who are receiving High Scope curriculum, making great strides in independence because that's what High Scope is about...The misalignment there is that the gains that you've created throughout preschool get lost pretty quickly once they get under that kindergarten setting.

This fell outside the scope of the study, but it is important to note given the recommendations offered. Most educators who participated in the study focused on K-12 programs. However, as preschool become more integrated within the school districts, this is an important point to keep in mind.

and Lakeview, but not in Harper Creek and Pennfield. In frustration, one educator expressed:

> I think one of the big differences is, with Battle Creek, Lakeview, and Battle Creek public schools, those kids have access to the Legacy Scholars. They can go to KCC for free. Now, they've done that and this is my own opinion, you can ... I'm not going to exclude it because I hope they hear this but I called the foundation and asked why is it that Pennfield and Harper Creek don't get access to that scholarship and they gave me the thing ... Way back when, when W. K. Kellogg was around the Kellogg's and he was really committed to the education of those students within the Battle Creek public school system.

Similarly, despite the level of diversity in Battle Creek, both Voces and the Burma Center have limited contact with the district. This is despite the fact there are 341 English language learners attending Battle Creek Public Schools, and at the same time, educators in Battle Creek expressed some difficulty in connecting with English language learners and their parents. Leaders from both the Burma Center and Voces noted that they provide services to Lakeview to help work with their English language learner populations and help families with limited English proficiency navigate their school system, but they do not have strong relationships with Battle Creek Public Schools or the neighboring school districts.

Last, amongst community members, there is a perception that those who would benefit from services and supports are not always able to take advantage of them. As one community member notes:

> Yes, although there are opportunities for kids and there are some positive things that schools are doing. I'm just going to say this because I'm in this world. The thing is it doesn't apply to everybody and or they're limited in who they can offer it to. The majority of the times the people or the young people that really need it, that really could benefit from it for whatever reason is not meeting a certain criteria so then the get left out. The ones that may not really need the support or need the program because they're going to be successful anyway are the ones that end up being the one that get taken advantage of.

In discussing this issue community members explained that both transportation, parents working multiple jobs or different shifts may contribute to this issue.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings described above presented in this report point to three important conclusions:

1. Structural bias and segregation create concentrated pockets of vulnerability that limit career and college readiness for some Battle Creek region residents.

2. Vulnerability drives key educational (outcome) gaps between school districts and within school districts.

3. The Battle Creek region boasts a level of resources and commitments that has the potential to transform college and career trajectories throughout the region; however, this hope is fragile as resources are often misaligned and vulnerable students may lack access to them.

Below we provide a more detailed assessment of these conclusions.

Structural Bias and Segregation

It has been mentioned several times in this report that structural bias and segregation are key factors limiting career and college readiness for vulnerable Battle Creek region residents. The issues of structural bias and segregation seem tied to the State of Michigan's 2003 "Schools of Choice" Policy, which has deepened tensions surrounding racial, cultural, and linguistic differences throughout the state and, by association, across the Battle Creek region. According to one community respondent, "The Battle Creek region is racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse but deeply segregated."

Instead of integrating schools, the consequence of "Schools of Choice" seemed to have made schools across the region (and across the state of Michigan) more segregated, with economically advantaged (primarily White) students retreating at higher rates from schools with high proportions of low income students and students of color. Indeed, the findings presented in this report affirm national testing statistics, which show that Michigan, as a choice state since 1996, has plummeted in national measures of student achievement. As one example, the state is now ranked 41st in 4th grade reading scores, down from 28th in 2003. Data in this report provides contexts for these rankings.

PROJECT PURPOSE

The purpose of the Battle Creek Youth Co-Researcher Project was to support the NYU Metro Center's study of educational opportunity in the greater Battle Creek community by providing insight into the experiences and perspectives of youth attending local schools. We worked to achieve this goal by enacting a youth co-researcher project that extends notions of Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) (Cammarota & Fine, 2008) as a means for increasing youth involvement in social and political movements, and to generate renewed enthusiasm for social change and youth leadership. YPAR projects are unique because they employ the perspectives of youth to develop new understandings of success and challenges in their communities. YPAR also forefronts issues of social justice, asking youth how to meaningfully engage community members in solving what they perceive to be community issues, and mobilizing youth to seek perspectives of peers, parents, family members, and others who are stakeholders in their educational lives. A total of 20 youth participated in the Battle Creek Youth Co-Research Project, representing seven school communities across the greater Battle Creek area.

PHASE 1: COMMUNITY DIALOGUE GROUPS

We began our work in Battle Creek by familiarizing ourselves with the community. We did this in two distinct ways. First, we participated in canvassing the larger Battle Creek community for participants in the larger research study being conducted by the NYU Metro Center. We attended two days of the Battle Creek Cereal Festival, and the Battle Creek Juneteenth celebration. At both events, we talked with dozens of community members about their experiences related to educational opportunity in the greater Battle Creek community, providing valuable insights that informed our work with the youth co-researchers. Secondly, we partnered with Voces, a community-based organization in Battle Creek, to hold five Community Dialogue Groups with youth. These Community Dialogue Groups provided an opportunity for youth to share their experiences and perspectives regarding educational opportunity in the Battle Creek community. Community Dialogue Groups were audio recorded. The recordings were transcribed, and further informed the development of Phase 2 of the Battle Creek Youth Co-Researcher Project.

The Battle Creek region, located southwest-central Michigan, is marked by racial and socioeconomic divides. While each community in the Battle Creek region is predominately White, neighborhoods within the Battle Creek Public School District share the highest concentration of low income students and students of color. Thus, segregation typifies the region. Further, with the exception of Battle Creek Public Schools, school demographics are similar to community demographics. For example, there is a lower proportion of White students attending Battle Creek Public Schools (36%) compared to residents in the District (69%). In addition, Battle Creek Public Schools population is double that of Lakeview, yet each district serves roughly the same number of students (~4,000).

The Battle Creek region is most certainly segregated by socio-economic status, as poverty rates cut across race and are significantly highest in Battle Creek. More than one-third (38%) of children living in the Battle Creek School District live at or below the poverty line compared to just above 10% in neighboring districts. Residents in Battle Creek, on average, earn approximately $25,000 per year less than residents in neighboring districts.

The economic differences that characterize communities in the region correlate with varying perceptions of Battle Creek region schools. Thus, perceptions of the different school districts play out in an exercise of school choice that has left Battle Creek Public schools bleeding students and neighboring school district experiencing bloat. In 2015-16, more than a third of Battle Creek residents transferred out of Battle Creek Public Schools, with a majority of White (51%) and economically advantaged (51.1%) students leaving the district.

While they foster patterns of racial and socioeconomic segregation, such mobility and choice patterns correlate as well with employment rates. For example, Battle Creek Public Schools experiences a higher rate of unemployment than neighboring districts. Within the district boundaries of the Battle Creek Public Schools, unemployment disproportionately impacts the Black community. Moreover, compared to its neighboring districts, Battle Creek Public Schools is considered poor, whereas Lakeview, Harper Creek, and Pennfield are considered "wealthy." According to one community respondent: "I just know that the inner-city schools [Battle Creek Public Schools] are lacking. The wealthy schools [Lakeview, Harper Creek, and Pennfield] are doing really good. . . . Test results are down in the inner city. Tests are up in the outer city."

What becomes apparent in the data are the systems of bias, or what Goodwin and Jasper (1999) label "structural bias," that over-determine educational outcomes and experiences, thus career and college trajectories, in the Battle Creek region. Structural bias, the implicit and explicit ways that privilege and disadvantage get baked into a system to favor some and marginalize others, shape educational experiences and outcomes in the region along lines of race, class, geography, and so on.

On Friday, August 13, youth participants traveled by bus to the campus of Michigan State University where we met from 10 a.m. - 4 p.m. before they traveled back to Battle Creek by bus.

We developed and facilitated an innovative and participatory literacy-based curriculum throughout the Summer Research Seminar to assist youth co-researchers in developing the qualitative research skills needed to conduct research projects examining educational (in)opportunity in their communities throughout the fall semester. These skills include, but are not limited to: working as collaborative members of a research team; asset and issue mapping; preparing for, conducting and analyzing individual interviews and focus groups; taking and analyzing photographs; coding qualitative data; identifying and presenting themes; creating multimodal representations of research findings. In addition, youth:

- ✎ Further developed and articulated their understandings of how they perceive their community, including educational opportunities they perceive and experience;
- ✎ Further developed and articulated their understandings of how others perceive their community, including educational opportunities they perceive and experience;
- ✎ Compared and contrasted their own and others' understandings of their community, including educational opportunities they perceive and experience;
- ✎ Developed research team and plans for continued research throughout the fall semester.
- ✎ Visited the campus of Michigan State University to experience a campus environment, and the context in which researchers working on this project do their work;
- ✎ Strengthened and further developed literacies practices, particularly reading, writing, speaking, listening, analytic, and presentation skills valued in the Common Core.

By the end of the Youth Co-Researcher Summer Institute, youth produced the following:

- ✎ "Where I'm From" multimodal representations (screened at MSU on 8/5/16)
- ✎ Individual interview and focus group interview protocols
- ✎ Qualitative data, including interview and focus group data
- ✎ Photographs representing issues and assets in their community
- ✎ Preliminary planning for fall research project, including research team members, research question generation, and meeting times/locations
- ✎ Written reflections, analytic memos, and generative feedback

In the Battle Creek region, the data suggest that structural bias leading to segregated schooling creates concentrated pockets of vulnerability which limits career and college readiness for particular Battle Creek region students. While all communities in the Battle Creek region are predominately White, nearly-two thirds of students attending Battle Creek Public Schools is non-White. Thus, structural bias, segregation mixed with income inequities, breeds systems of vulnerability in the region, which appear to concentrate poverty in the Battle Creek School District and among its Asian, Black, Latino, and extremely poor White residents.

Disproportionality and Vulnerability

There is a growing body of research linking the consequences of structural bias and segregation to disproportionate student outcomes and increased student vulnerability. Hill (2016) defines vulnerability as "susceptible to misfortune, violence, illness, and death." Adding to Hill's definition, vulnerability can also be thought of as increased susceptibility to under-supported structures, discrimination, and systems of oppression that limit access to opportunity and social mobility. Thus, vulnerable students are "those marked as poor, Black, Brown, immigrant, queer, or trans . . ." (Hill, 2016, p. xvii). In Battle Creek region schools, vulnerable students are the least well served. For example, low income students and Black and Latino students across the Battle Creek region experience lower achievement levels when compared to their peers. In addition, students with limited English proficiency similarly achieve at lower levels than do their peers on all significant measures of academic achievement.

When examining achievement differences in the region, it is important to look at both the impact of racialization and poverty. For example, some racial achievement differences persisted across the region after controlling for socioeconomic status. Further, socioeconomic achievement differences persisted, as well, after controlling for race. Indicators such as the SAT Benchmark, which gives an estimate of college readiness, show a persistence of racial, regional, and socioeconomic differences in college readiness across the region.

Across Battle Creek region schools, vulnerability also correlated with graduation and college persistence rates. For example, White students who remained at Battle Creek Public Schools graduated at a rate of 58.5% (the lowest rate in any district by race or socioeconomic status). Economically disadvantaged students (across districts) were less likely to persist to college, with economically disadvantaged students who attended Battle Creek Public Schools comprising the least likely students across the districts to persist (36.4%).

What is clear from our study's finding is that vulnerability drives key educational (outcome) gaps between school districts and within school districts. Vulnerable

Throughout the Fall semester, August 31 - December 7, youth co-researchers met in their research teams with Dr. Marciano, Dr. Warren, and four of the doctoral student Research Mentors who attended the weekly sessions in pairs on a rotating basis. These meetings were held on Wednesday afternoons at the Kellogg Foundation in Battle Creek from either 4 - 6 p.m. or 5 - 7 p.m. We alternated the start and end times of the weekly research team meetings to remain responsive to youth's commitments to additional activities, including sports.

The weekly research meetings were developed and facilitated to support youth in working collaboratively with peers on their research teams to develop and enact research projects focusing on an issue of their choice related to educational (in)equities in the greater Battle Creek community. Youth co-researchers chose topics to study, came to a consensus about their team's research question, developed a plan for gathering data, gathered and analyzed the data, prepared written reports of their work, and presented their findings to the community in an event held at the Battle Creek Math and Science Center on December 7, 2016. The research papers youth wrote describing their work will be made available as part of the final report of our work. Below, we provide an outline of the work youth conducted in their research teams.

■ CREEK ACCESSIBILITY TEAM (C.A.T.)

Research Question: How do students perceive systems of support in Battle Creek-area schools?

Data Sources: Interviews, focus groups, surveys

Findings: Three main systems of support existed in some form within each of the five participating school districts: academic, emotional, and extracurricular support; these pillars of support are not treated equally or approached similarly within the school districts; views on what systems of support are available for students and the quality of those supports vary depending on position in the school (teachers or students, for example; and students are typically required to take their own initiative in order to receive emotional support.

Recommendations: Teachers, counselors, and administrators hopefully will learn from this research and change local practices; Greater Creek Accessibility Program (GCAP) to train faculty on the three systems of support identified; Like to expand by researching administrator support of faculty members.

students, for example, experience education significantly different than their less vulnerable peers. Further, across education data points, disparity (i.e., disproportionality) plays out between more and less vulnerable students. As already notes, the structures of education in the Battle Creek region—chiefly choice, which we have suggested drives segregation—intensify disparities, as school systems and programs serving vulnerable students do not provide such students access to a rigorous, college prep curriculum necessary for success on college entrance exams. These structures graduate vulnerable students at lower rates and offer them fewer post-high school options. Thus, key structural issues that drive disproportionality and vulnerability are indicative of the gaps in college and career readiness across the region.

A Fragile Hope

In spite of some sobering realities, the Battle Creek region is best typified by a fragile hope and the potential of its many promises. The region's rather unique attributes, particularly its daring to come together and collaborative to confront stubborn structural issues that disadvantage particular groups, can move the region and its residents beyond its deeply-seated vulnerabilities and toward unique pathways that could lead to meaningful careers and college for all its residents. In the Battle Creek region, a lot has been done to expand the reach of early childhood education programs. Between 2012-13 and 2015-16, the rate of early childhood education participation among kindergarten students increased in all four school districts, as did the overall number of students participating in these programs. According to the BC Pulse community profile, the percent of students across the region who enter kindergarten school ready has dramatically increased in all four districts.

The growing reach of early childhood programs isn't the only bright spot in the region. While communities vary with respect to educational attainment, graduation rates across the region rival (and, in many places, exceed) national averages. Further, the majority of students in the Battle Creek region aspire towards college and other post-secondary opportunities. However, while college is perceived to be important across the Battle Creek region, the majority of residents living in the Battle Creek Public School District have no college experience. By comparison, two-thirds of residents living in the Lakeview district have some level of college education.

Across all districts, there are minor aspiration differences with respect to race. White students, for example, aspire towards college at a slightly higher rate than Black and Latino students. (This may be indicative of community messaging, differential levels of readiness, or differential levels of access to college programs.) It is interesting, however, that the majority of students—regardless of race, class, or region—believe that knowledge for career and college readiness has been imparted upon them. By contrast, not all teachers across the

■ TEAM COLOR BLAST

Research Question: How are Battle Creek High School students, as well as coaches and club sponsors, affected by funding allocation decisions for extracurricular activities and sports?

Data Sources: Surveys, interviews

Findings: The cost of participating in extracurricular activities influences students' decisions about whether or not to participate; Club sponsors take on the burden when there is a lack of funding; and students who participate in extracurricular activities tended to perform better in class. Also, students from low-income families are limited in their extracurricular options if their families are responsible for supplementing a lack of funding to a particular club. This becomes a non-issue for their participation in well-funded extracurricular opportunities like football for example. Also, there is evidence of funding inequities by gender-related activity.

Recommendations: Students and parents should learn more about where funding for extracurricular activities and sports is; the community could offer scholarships for students who cannot afford to participate in extracurricular activities and sports.

■ QUALITY CREW

Research Question: How do academic opportunities and in-opportunities differ in local Battle Creek high schools?

Data Sources: Surveys, focus groups, interviews, course descriptions from high schools in Battle Creek, information from MiSchoolData.

Findings: Course offerings and school transfers - Students at smaller schools, such as Pennfield, wanted to attend larger schools, such as Lakeview, where more and a greater variety of courses are offered; Teacher style affects student learning - Teachers who focus on building relationships with students seem to have more success in teaching them; Teacher care - Students experienced varying levels of teacher care across the Battle Creek area high schools.

Recommendations: Students should find out more about their schools; Teachers could help build better support systems in classrooms; School administrators could work to balance academic opportunity in each high school.

region feel as if they are explicitly providing information on career and college readiness. Collectively, educators pointed to in-school programs such as career days, college visits, the Math and Science Center, Career Cruising, the Calhoun Area Career Center, Early College, Legacy Scholars, partnerships with colleges and universities, and financial aid programs as valued resources.

However, district guidance resources, we found, may hinder schools' ability to support all students. Ultimately, many young people learn about college and career through specialized school and out-of-school programs like Upward Bound or through other community members (e.g., friends, family, and community leaders). Since community-based organizations have a level of autonomy and flexibility to respond to community needs that are not commonly found in schools, they seem better equipped to engage and work with marginalized parents because of the array of services they provide and their ability to match programs and services more closely with parents' needs and interests. For example, in the Battle Creek region, organizations such as the Burma Center and Voces play an important role relative to education, serving as cultural brokers, working between schools and immigrant families. Yet, the region's most vulnerable students are least likely to be supported, even by these organizations, due to fragile links between schools and community-based organizations.

Community members and organizational leaders identified three key points of disconnect that seem to reduce the potential positive impact of community-based educational services and supports in the Battle Creek Region: (1) a disconnect with school; (2) an unequal distribution of services across the community; and (3) a general inability of those with the greatest level of need to access services. A common frustration among organizations is not being known within the schools. Moreover, the reliance on personal connections with educators and school leaders makes it difficult for community organizations to develop and maintain strong connections with schools.

Outside funding also creates an imbalance of resources. School leaders and educators from Harper Creek and Pennfield voiced concerns about the availability of financial supports for programs in their districts. Notwithstanding, the Battle Creek region boasts a level of resources and commitments that has the potential to transform college and career trajectories throughout the region; however, this hope is fragile as resources are often misaligned and vulnerable students may lack access to them.

Further, community members, teachers, and students are looking for schools to provide more than just academic learning. They want schools to teach children specific skills that will help them to succeed in school and beyond it. They also want schools to be supportive and nurturing environments, where children can grow into healthy adults. Indeed, there are divisions between communities and school districts. Still, Battle Creek is resource rich; it has all or most of the

resources it needs to interrupt structural inequities and transform education for its most vulnerable youth.

■ IMPLICATIONS/NEXT STEPS

While we are continuing to develop our understandings of youth's perspectives about their involvement in the Battle Creek Youth Co-Researcher Project, several successes and challenges emerged in our work throughout the summer and fall.

■ SUCCESSES

✚ Youth developed new understandings about educational (in)equities in the broader Battle Creek community and within their local school communities.

✚ Youth examined and challenged existing stereotypes about people and communities with whom they were previously unfamiliar.

✚ Youth demonstrated literacy skills valued by the Common Core in authentic and meaningful ways that included reading, writing, speaking, listening, analyzing and critiquing.

✚ Youth worked collaboratively with peers and adults to extend their understandings of what it means to do qualitative research.

✚ Youth developed new media literacy skills as they utilized technology to gather data as part of their research projects, to collaborate in data analysis, and to present their work through Google Docs, PowerPoint presentations, and iMovie projects.

✚ Youth demonstrated skills valued in traditional considerations of college readiness, including managing their time, prioritizing multiple tasks, collaborating with others, and organizing materials.

■ CHALLENGES

✗ A total of 74 youth in the greater Battle Creek community indicated interest in participating in the Battle Creek Youth Co-Researcher project. However, we could only accommodate 20 youth participants in our work.

✗ Meeting with youth weekly, outside of the contexts of their school communities, created some challenges in staying in contact with youth between each meeting. We utilized the GroupMe app and email to facilitate communication with youth in between our scheduled meeting times.

✗ Several youth co-researchers experienced challenges in balancing their commitments to extracurricular activities, including athletics, with the scheduled meeting times for the youth co-researcher project.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions presented above, NYU Metro Center proposes three recommendation for improving college and career readiness and helping to transform the educational landscape of the Battle Creek region:

Recommendation #1: Leverage the Fragile Hope and Lingering Potential that exist in the community

Strategy Suggestions: Align school and community resources (e.g., Office of Community Schools and institution of community schools/community school logics across districts), Support healthy "transitions" to middle and high school (e.g., "Freshman Academies"), Establish regular communication and learn from one another's successes (e.g., Interschool Collaborative Learning Network)

Recommendation #2: Disrupt Disproportionality and Vulnerability

Strategy Suggestions: Development and treat root causes of vulnerability (e.g., culturally relevant education, restorative practices, trauma informed practices), Implement specialization school programs (e.g., coding, design-based learning), Scale up high school associates degree program, early college savings accounts

Recommendation #3: Resolve the Tensions of Structural Bias and Segregation

Strategy Suggestions: Give reasons to families to choice district schools (e.g., magnet schools), Directly address implicit and explicit biases (e.g., on-going implementation of anti-bias education and cultural sensitivity trainings), Repurpose vacant or less densely populated school properties (e.g., Business Incubation Program), Partial or Full Consolidation of Services (e.g., shared metrics and data systems, early-warning systems, student programs), Interrupt concentrated poverty and create more diverse schools (e.g., Controlled Choice Policies)

These recommendations range from simple changes to programs and policies for each school to larger solutions that require the collaboration of districts and community partners. For the sake of categorization, the "strategy suggestions"

beneath these recommendations can be framed as whole community suggestions that would involve two or more school districts working with community organizations and other school districts, and targeted programs that could be implemented by and within individual schools. The idea of whole community solutions is meant as a form of quasi consolidation. While each district would remain autonomous, whole community solutions will allow schools to join some resources together in the service of all students and for their collective betterment. Targeted programs can be taken up by individual districts, but for the purposes of this report, the specific suggestion are aimed at increasing stability for the most vulnerable students, primarily those enrolled within Battle Creek Public Schools. Collectively, all the proposed strategic suggestions are presented as points of deliberation, meant to help the Battle Creek Community foster their own unique ideas for advancing an equitable learning environment that is conducive to students thriving from cradle to career.

Additional Suggestions from the Community

In addition to the strategic suggestions listed above, the Action Team, Taskforce, and community members articulated a number of suggestions through their BC Vision meetings as well as in focus groups and interviews. We have discussed some of them in this report, but believe there are more, small scale suggestions listed here that are worthy of consideration.

- Develop and implement a curriculum that focuses on the history of Battle Creek and the contribution of African Americans
- Improved transportation options
- Sharing/linking data across the community
- Raise teacher salary to attract the best quality teachers
- Smaller classes
- Magnet schools
- Quality free pre-school
- Early exploration of college and career; career cursing; internships
- On site college and career experiences
- Individual grad plan and supports
- Citywide language immersion school
- Common elementary report card
- Grades by level, not by age
- Dyslexia services
- Home visits for incoming kindergarteners
- Align college and career readiness standards with KCC standards
- Connect early childhood programs with K-12 system
- Reshape BCPS image
- BCPS should get to know their community better

- Equitable school funding, resources, and opportunities
- Teacher feeding program for local schools
- Tutors and mentoring
- Rigorous curriculum/culturally relevant curriculum
- Restorative justice programs/practices
- Small learning communities
- Pair schools with businesses
- Parental involvement
- College visits
- FAFSA training
- Meet families' basic needs
- Four-year legacy scholarship
- Stronger school-community connections
- Summer academic enrichment
- Provide additional resources to the neediest neighborhoods
- Technical assistance on disproportionality
- Stronger teacher workforce
- Equity/anti-bias trainings for all educators
- Redefining how the BC community thinks about college
- Pre-natal support
- Mental health supports to prevent and address trauma

MOVING AHEAD

The students who are most on track for college and career in the Battle Creek region are White and economically advantaged. Comparatively, Black students and students from low-income backgrounds are more likely to be off-track for college and career. Moreover, students from Lakeview, Harper Creek, and Pennfield are more likely to be on-track compared to students from Battle Creek.

Each point of being off-track is evident at every level of the cradle-to-career pathway, starting with access and utilization of early childhood programs and continuing through secondary and post-secondary programs.

"The issue is once the Battle Creek schools started to lose students under the school of choice program...Once that started to happen, then it became a, the reduction of students means a reduction of money. Once you get into any business organization or nonprofit or a governmental organization, once you get into a downward spiral regarding income coming in, and your only choice is to reduce expenses in order to balance the budget, it typically only becomes a matter of time unless there's a significant intervention before that catches up with you. Every time you have to make a reduction in expense to meet something, it means typically eliminating something.

"I think the Battle Creek schools have a tough issue right now. The other schools seem to be doing okay, the other districts. But that's the one that concerns me the most because the community, if for any reason the Battle Creek public schools goes out of business or gets taken over by the state or what have you, it will impact the entire community, including the other districts. It will not be isolated to the Battle Creek public schools, or to the city of Battle Creek. The importance for people who don't normally think much about schools, our business community, our professional community, and several others, if they don't see that as a priority and anticipate what those negative impacts could be, they may wait too long before taking any actions that are needed to avoid that outcome."

At the same time, it is apparent that the Battle Creek region is resource rich, meaning that it has the sufficient capacity to help support improved college and career readiness efforts, but lack the necessary coordination, shared vision, and collective will to do so.

Focus on Bringing the Community Together.

Moving ahead, the region will need to focus on bringing all communities together. This report has highlighted differences and divisions within and across the Battle Creek region. Data show divisions along district, racial, and socioeconomic lines, as well as divisions related to access to resources and services. However, the one thing that people can agree on is need for an educational system that prepares youth for college, career, and beyond.

Focus on Interventions to Support Vulnerable Students.

While there are numerous supports to help students who are on college and career pathways, attention should be paid to support for more vulnerable students–students whose academic, social, and emotional needs might preclude them from meaningful and rewarding participation in schools – as well as supporting families in supporting their children. The data points to a large number of students in the Battle Creek region who are not prepared for college and career and the general understanding amongst community members and educators that some students lack the supports needed to become college and career ready. Additional supports for struggling leaners will ensure that students have the maximum number of opportunities available to them, and that they are not asked to make a false choice between college and career, where careers are pathways for students who are not academically accomplished.

Focus on Battle Creek.

The data also suggest that Battle Creek Public Schools has the greatest need among the four districts. It is also the largest of the school districts, with the greatest concentration of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds. Moreover, Battle Creek Public Schools has garnered a negative perception that seems to be, in part, self-perpetuating. These perceptions are grounded both in rumors, data, and community-wide views of race and class.

Concomitantly, a recent audit from Plante & Moran shows that despite efforts by districts to cut costs, by 2017, Battle Creek Public Schools faces a potential $1.7 million deficit and a fund balance that would raise concerns with the Michigan Department of Education. This suggests solutions for improving college and career readiness in the Battle Creek region should be centered primarily in Battle Creek Public Schools.

In focusing on Battle Creek Public Schools, solutions should take one of two tacks. First solutions should focus on improving the image of Battle Creek Public Schools, making it a school district where parents do not feel like they are sacrificing their children's quality of education for some other benefit - e.g., diversity or convenience. Second, solutions should focus on supporting the community members within Battle Creek, addressing broader risk factors and stresses that hinder community members' ability to participate in the education system and reap its benefits.

In all, the Battle Creek region is unique. Moving ahead will require courageous conversations and unselfish actions. This work will not be easy; it will be time consuming and, at times, discouraging. But if these actions are taken, and taken seriously, all students in the Battle Creek region will have a greater chance at attending college and/or obtaining a meaningful career.

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