



# Race Matters

for Michigan Children

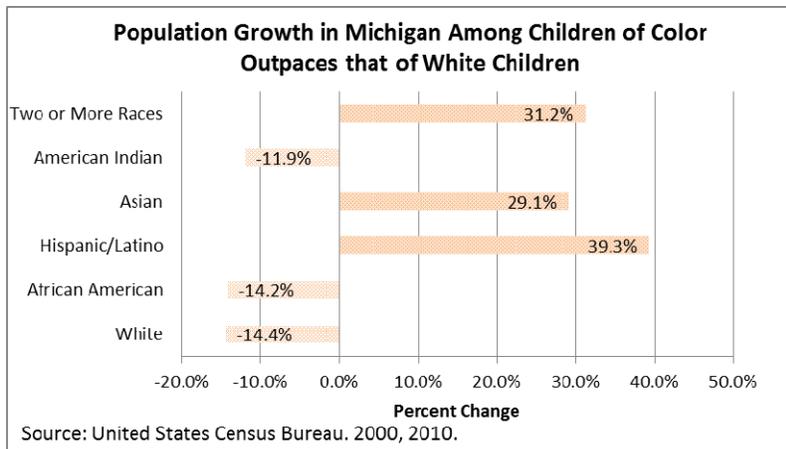
*In-depth issue analysis on racial/ethnic disparities and policy/budget implications.*

Voices for  
**Michigan's  
Children**

August, 2011

## Michigan's Changing Demographics and the Future

Despite Michigan being the only state to lose population between 2000 and 2010, one area that has shown growth is in communities of color. People of color now make up over 20 percent of the state's population, which was not true just 10 years ago. Growth has been



particularly strong among children of color. Children of color now make up just over 31 percent of all children in the state, whereas in 2000, they represented just over 27 percent.<sup>1</sup> This means that overall, White children represent a decreasing share of all children in the state.

### Where Growth is Happening

However, not all groups are growing, or growing at the same pace. While the state's overall child population declined nearly 10 percent between 2000 and 2010, this has been due entirely to the decline in the number of White and African American children. These groups combined made up nearly 90 percent of the child population in Michigan in 2000, but only 85 percent in 2010. Overall, the percentage of African American and White children living in Michigan have both declined by just over 14 percent over the last 10 years.

There has been significant growth in other communities but this growth has not been enough to counteract the decline in the overall child population. The number of children of Hispanic/Latino origin grew nearly 40 percent while the number of children of two or more races grew just over 31 percent in the last 10 years.

### Quick Facts

- Children of color now make up over 31 percent of the state's child population.
- The number of children of Hispanic/Latino origin grew nearly 40 percent over the last 10 years.
- Poorer outcomes for children of color begin early and continue through to adulthood.
- Unless policies are put into place to counteract this, disparities will continue to grow in Michigan as the population becomes more diverse.
- Access to early education, allowing for additional years in high school, and income supports & job training for low-income, low-skilled families can help ease growing disparities.

## Why Race Matters

As population growth rapidly increases among Hispanic/Latino, Asian, and children of two or more races, and declines at a higher rate than any other group among White children, it is expected that in the coming decades, people of color will make up the majority of Michigan's population. The evidence that race alone predicts outcomes related to every aspect of our lives are well known and not refutable. This demographic shift will have an impact on everything from income disparities, educational achievement, and access to quality health care.<sup>ii</sup>

Disparities in these areas begin at birth and can be felt throughout an individual's lifetime, and Michigan's racial and ethnic gaps in outcomes are among the worst in the country. Inequity in birth outcomes and literacy development result in differences in behavior, intellectual functioning and health evident as early as 9 months of age. This gap then contributes to differences in educational success, high school graduation and college enrollment, leading to clear disparities in earnings over a lifetime. Unless intentional action is taken, disparities will continue to grow in Michigan as the population becomes more diverse.

## Moving Forward

A lack of understanding of the impact that public policy has on equity, coupled with a lack of engagement in public policy discussions at all levels leave poor communities and communities of color disproportionately affected and vulnerable. With the changes taking place in the racial composition of Michigan's children, assessing the intentional and unintentional impact of policy on communities of color becomes increasingly critical. With children of color now making up nearly one-third of all children in the state, lawmakers must at least become aware of how their actions will impact what will soon be the majority of Michigan's population. Policies such as affirmative action and free college tuition for American Indian students have helped level the playing field for people of color. Access to Pre-K and allowing for additional years in high school can help ease growing disparities by increasing the graduation rate for students of color.<sup>iii</sup> Income supports and job training for low-income, low-skilled families are also essential.

Going forward, policymakers have two options: either better understand how their decisions play a role in increasing or decreasing disparities and seek to implement policies that alleviate those poorer outcomes, or put laws and policies into place with no regard for how different groups are affected, which can further institutionalize the disparities that exist. The entire state will either reap the benefits of more equitable public policy or pay the price of unintended consequences in the coming decades.

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<sup>i</sup> United States Census Bureau (2000, 2010). Census 2000. Census 2010.

<sup>ii</sup> Zehnder-Merrell, Jane. *Kids count in Michigan Data Book 2010: County profiles of child and family well-being*. Lansing, MI: Michigan League for Human Services, 2010.

<sup>iii</sup> Zehnder-Merrell, Jane. *Kids count in Michigan Data Book 2010: County profiles of child and family well-being*. Lansing, MI: Michigan League for Human Services, 2010.