



## Building Michigan's Future Workforce

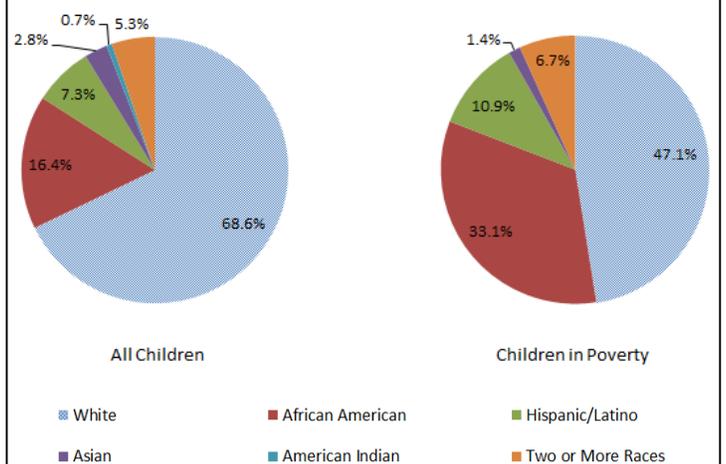
Michigan's economy is turning around. Unemployment is slowly declining and state revenues are up, both of which are signs of economic growth. To maintain and continue that growth, *everyone* in Michigan must be given an equal chance to succeed and obtain employment that will sustain a family and help their community thrive. This opportunity begins at birth. Unfortunately, when children are born into poverty, the challenges on the road to economic and life success – while they can be overcome – are great.

### Child Poverty's Challenges Continue Into Adulthood

According to the 2010 American Community Survey, there were approximately 158,000 children in Kent County, of which nearly two-thirds were White children. Over 37,000 Kent County children lived in poverty that same year meaning that just under one in four of all children in the county lived in families with total incomes of less than \$22,113 for a family of four. Thus, nearly one-fourth of all children in Kent County lack access to opportunities that contribute to school success, high school completion, and college or career readiness.

High poverty rates are even more prevalent for children of color, who are rapidly making up a larger and larger share of children in the state.<sup>1</sup> While children of color represent just over one-third of all children in Kent County, they accounted for over two-thirds of the approximately 37,000 children living in poverty in the county in 2010. This disparity is expected to get worse as children of color represented the overwhelming majority of the number of children who lost cash assistance benefits through the 2011 Family Independence Program policy changes. In addition to being at risk for the same outcomes as all children in poverty, children of color who are raised in poverty face more systemic barriers resulting in a higher likelihood to be in poverty as adults, compared to their White counterparts.<sup>2</sup> If children lack access to high quality education from cradle to career and families don't have the tools they need to support their children, West Michigan's economy may slow in the future as more adults struggle to find employment.

Children of Color Comprise Nearly One-Third of All Children in Michigan But Account for Over Half of All Children in Poverty



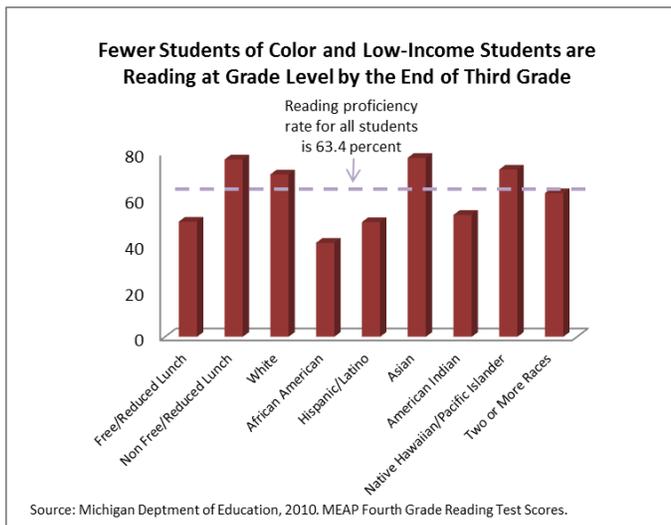
Source: 2010 American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates.

Note: Due to the small sample size, data is not available for American Indian children in poverty. Data may not sum to zero due to rounding.

<sup>1</sup> For more on this trend, see Michigan's Children's fact sheet, *Michigan's Changing Demographics and the Future* available at <http://michiganschildren.org/Download-document/577-Michigan-s-Changing-Demographics-and-the-Future.html>

<sup>2</sup> Ratcliffe, C. & McKernan, S. *Childhood poverty persistence: Facts and consequences*. June, 2010. The Urban Institute. Washington: DC.

## Educational Achievement Gaps Have Links to Race and Income



Access to a high quality education is one of the keys to obtaining employment as an adult. If children do not have the supports in their community needed to be successful in elementary school, the chances of graduating from high school decline substantially.<sup>3</sup> One of the biggest predictors is whether a student is reading proficiently by the end of third grade.

Nearly 70 percent of students in the Kent Intermediate School District (ISD), regardless of race and income, were reading at grade level by the end of third grade, which is above the statewide rate of 63 percent. However, when examined by race and income, a different picture emerges. Just over half of students receiving free/reduced lunch in the Kent ISD were reading at grade level by the end of the third grade.

This is in contrast to the more than 80 percent of higher income students who were grade level proficient.

Further, just over half of Hispanic/Latino children in the Kent ISD are reading at grade level by the end of third grade. For African American students, this is just over one-third. This rate is lower than that of low-income students and has a direct correlation to disparities in high school dropout rates for students in Kent County schools.

Over 13 percent of Kent County youths who would have graduated in 2010 left high school without a diploma. Unfortunately, more than one in four African American students and Hispanic/Latino students did not complete high school, which is much higher than the one in ten rate for their White counterparts. Fortunately, another large percentage of youths are still connected to school but need more time to finish. This illustrates the benefit of more time to succeed and the need for a variety of pathways to high school completion.

	On-Track Graduation Rate	Dropout Rate	Off Track Continuing
All Students	74%	13%	13%
Economically Disadvantaged	58%	16%	26%
White	78%	11%	11%
African American	46%	26%	28%
Hispanic/Latino	54%	28%	17%
Asian	67%	20%	13%
Two or More Races	50%	16%	34%

Source: State of Michigan, Center for Educational Performance and Information. Four-year Cohort Graduation and Dropout Reports, 2010.

## Conclusion

Children represent tomorrow's workforce and their well-being is a vital piece of the state's continued economic recovery. This is true of all children regardless of family income, ethnicity, or geography. Parents and teachers have vital roles to play in ensuring that children are physically, emotionally, and educationally prepared to become successful adults. Policymakers can support communities by increasing access to high quality education that supports children from cradle to career; and by giving families, teachers and communities the tools they need to support *all* children. This way, all children will be well-positioned for economic and life success and help Michigan move forward.

<sup>3</sup> Annie E. Casey Foundation. 2010. *Early warning! Why reading by the end of the third grade matters*. Available at [http://www.aecf.org/~media/Pubs/Initiatives/KIDS%20COUNT/123/2010KCSpecReport/AEC\\_report\\_color\\_highres.pdf](http://www.aecf.org/~media/Pubs/Initiatives/KIDS%20COUNT/123/2010KCSpecReport/AEC_report_color_highres.pdf)