



RACE FOR RESULTS

Wisconsin's Need to Reduce Racial Disparities

As the United States continues to become a more diverse nation, much work remains to be done to ensure that all children, regardless of their race or ethnicity, have the opportunity to thrive. A policy report recently published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation found that children of color face immense barriers to success in key categories of well-being, and that the status of African-American children in Wisconsin is the worst in the nation. Clearly, Wisconsin has a great deal of work to do with regard to the success of our children of color.

Race for Results: Building a Path to Opportunity for All Children unveils the new Race for Results index, which compares how children are progressing on key milestones across racial and ethnic groups at the national and state levels. The index is based on 12 indicators that together gauge children's success during each stage of life from birth to adulthood. The index shows a gaping disparity between Wisconsin's white children and their non-white peers. While Wisconsin had the 10th best index score for white children, we ranked 17th for Latino children, 37th for Asian children, 12th (out of 25) for American Indian children, and dead last for African-American children (46th out of 46).

Unfortunately, Casey's new report further confirms the alarming conclusions reached last year in the Wisconsin Council on Children and Families' (WCCF) own analytic study, *Race to Equity*. That study revealed that black/white disparities in Dane County, Wisconsin were among the worst in America. This new national comparative report

should serve to further amplify the growing calls for action to level the playing field for all the children in our state. Wisconsin is a state that claims to value opportunity, community, and fairness for all. That Wisconsin is the worst in the nation when it comes to the well-being of our African-American children belies those values. People all over the state have a responsibility to act with urgency and a long-term commitment to change this indefensible situation.

Wisconsin's African-American children not only fare worse than African-American kids elsewhere, but they also suffer extreme inequities when compared to white kids in Wisconsin. And while the disparities are not as egregious for children from other communities of color, they are still very alarming:

- Thirty percent of Wisconsin's white children live in households below 200% of the poverty level, while nearly 80% of African-American children experience that level of economic insecurity. Meanwhile, about two-thirds of Wisconsin's Latino and American Indian kids live in households below 200% of the poverty line.
- White adults ages 25 to 29 are three times as likely to have an associate's degree or higher than their African-American or Latino peers.
- White children are nearly six times more likely to be proficient in 8th grade math than their black fellow students.

Data

Using the data elements in the *Race for Results* report, the charts and graphs that follow illustrate the status of Wisconsin's children.

Race for Results Index

Ranking Child Well-being in Wisconsin, by Race

Wisconsin's ranking for the indicators that make up the index, compared to children of the same race in other states

	Wisconsin's overall rank on index	High school graduation	Delayed childbearing	School or work	Low poverty areas	Normal birthweight	Two-parent families	Math proficiency	Assoc + degree	Above 200% of poverty	Family education	Preschool enrollment	Reading proficiency
WHITE Non-Hispanic	10 of 50 states	1 of 50	9 of 50	9 of 50	10 of 50	11 of 50	12 of 50	15 of 50	17 of 50	17 of 50	19 of 50	28 of 50	30 of 50
BLACK	46 of 46 states	30 of 50	49 of 49	50 of 50	44 of 50	33 of 44	50 of 50	35 of 38	45 of 45	48 of 50	44 of 50	16 of 50	39 of 42
LATINO	17 of 47 states	11 of 50	23 of 49	13 of 50	25 of 50	15 of 47	31 of 50	29 of 45	31 of 47	29 of 50	26 of 50	17 of 50	39 of 47
ASIAN	37 of 43 states	24 of 50	38 of 40	40 of 50	30 of 42	19 of 44	34 of 50	29 of 33	41 of 49	49 of 50	42 of 50	34 of 50	28 of 37
NATIVE AMERICAN	12 of 25 states	11 of 50	36 of 41	39 of 48	N/A	5 of 31	35 of 46	N/A	24 of 28	31 of 45	17 of 50	9 of 41	N/A

How Wisconsin ranks among the states

- Top quarter
- 2nd quarter
- 3rd quarter
- Lowest quarter

Indicator descriptions

Average freshman high school graduation rate, 2009-10

Females age 15-19 who delay childbearing until adulthood, 2010

Young adults ages 19 to 26 who are in school or working, 2010-12

Children who live in low poverty areas (<20%), 2007-2011

Babies born at normal birthweight, 2011

Children who live in 2-parent families, 2010-12

8th graders scoring at least proficient in math, 2013

Adults age 25 to 29 who have completed at least an associate's degree, 2010-12

Children living above 200% of poverty, 2010-12

Children who live with someone who has at least a high school degree, 2010-12

3 to 5 year olds enrolled in preschool or kindergarten, 2010-12

4th graders scoring at least proficient in reading, 2013

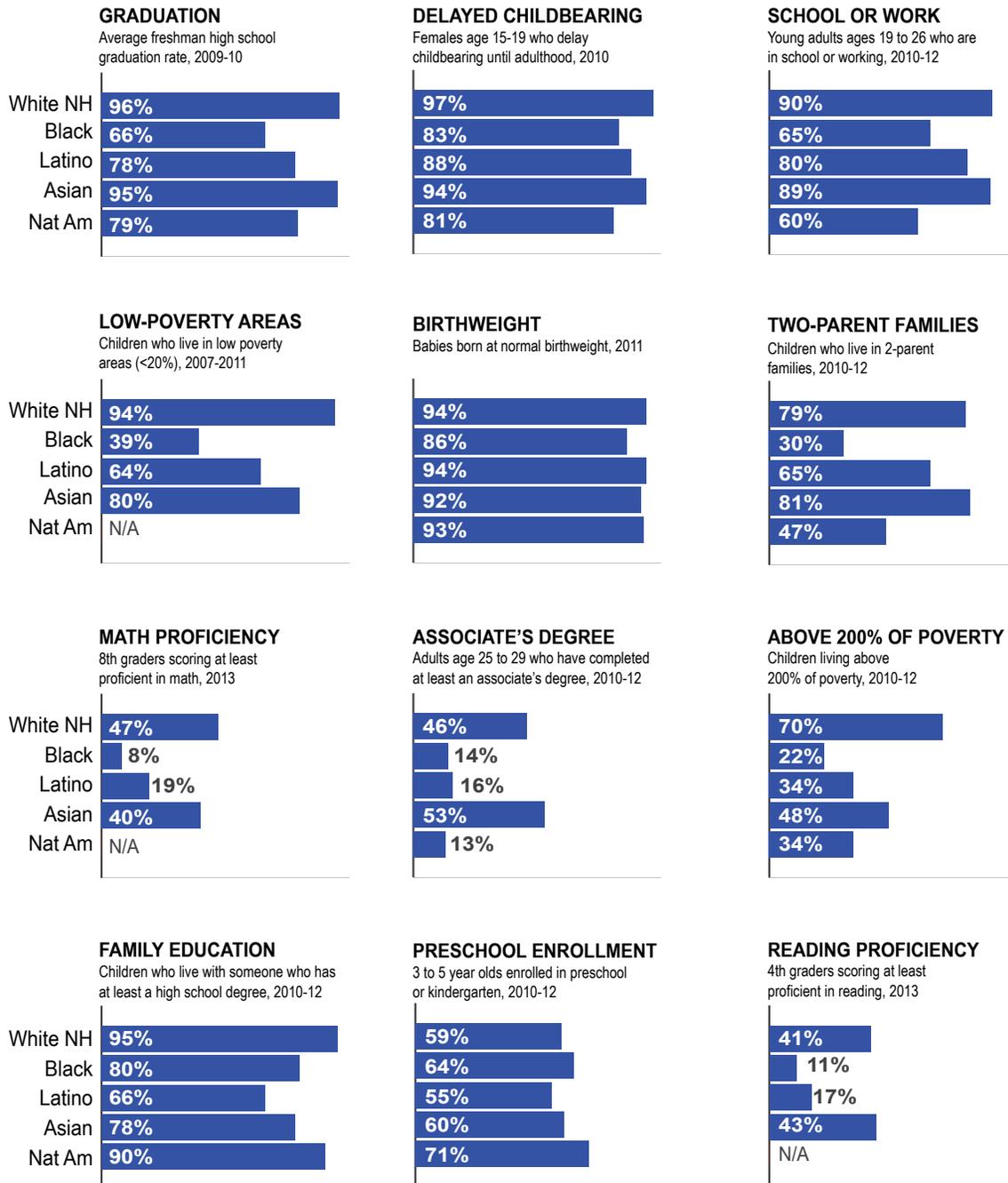
N/A means information is not available for Wisconsin, due to small population size

As you can see, the ranking for our black children is in the lowest quartile on almost every measure. In addition to being in last place overall, we were also worst in four individual indicators. Wisconsin's ranking for Asian children was also quite low, with a total score in the bottom quartile. Our Latino and Native American children both ranked in the second quartile, while white children were ranked in the top 10.

The bar charts on the following page show the percent for each data indicator in the *Race for Results* report. Based on what we know from the rankings, it is not surprising that for most of the indicators, whites have the highest percentage and blacks have the lowest percentage. For example, 94% of Wisconsin's white children live in low-poverty areas, compared to 39% of our black children.

Child Well-Being in Wisconsin

How Wisconsin children of different races fare on the 12 indicators that make up the Race for Results Index.



N/A means information is not available for Wisconsin, due to small population size

The information contained in this report and its index is based on data that is reliable and comparable across all fifty states. Here in Wisconsin, we can supplement this with state-specific data. WCCF has collected data on the disparities between white and African-American children through its *Race to Equity* project (www.racetoequity.net), which includes over 40 data elements related to the following categories: (1) economic well-being; (2) family formation; (3) health; (4) education; (5) juvenile justice; (6) child welfare; adult criminal justice; and (7) community and mobility.

Moving Forward

WCCF is committed to racial equity. In addition to creating a baseline report on the status of racial disparities in Dane County, our *Race to Equity* project has begun working with stakeholders across the community to confront the magnitude of the problem and intensify existing and emerging efforts to implement promising solutions. WCCF also plans to expand our efforts by joining with others across Wisconsin to reduce disparities throughout the state.

One thing that has become very clear through *Race to Equity*, which is reinforced by the *Race for Results* report, is the extreme racialization of disadvantage in Wisconsin. This is best illustrated by our top 10 rank for white children and our last place rank for African-American children, but there are many other data elements that reinforce this point. Sooner rather than later, this nexus between risk factors and race has to be eliminated. The status quo is toxic not only for the future of the African-American population and for other communities of color, but for our state as a whole. Failure to alter the current imbalances in opportunity, well-being, and outcomes is not in keeping with Wisconsin's values, and will likely discourage some families of color from coming or remaining here. Perhaps most importantly, the continued marginalization of communities of color will

undermine the state's cultural vitality, economic competitiveness, and overall quality of life in a world that increasingly values and demands racial and ethnic diversity and inclusion. This is not a zero sum game; improving the well-being of children of color benefits us all.

Our work demonstrates that the root causes of Wisconsin's and America's racial disparities are many and complex. But it is equally clear that there are strategies for addressing disparities that we know can make a difference. Those include making sure that all families have meaningful paths to employment opportunities and family-supporting incomes; that their children have access to high-quality education, particularly early in life; and that communities are supported with the resources to pursue a two-generation approach that invests in both children and their parents.

Based on what we have learned through *Race to Equity's* extensive outreach and engagement process in Dane County, we believe there are some general principles that should guide the work to address racial disparities across Wisconsin:

1. We need to authentically engage the families and communities most affected by these disparities in identifying and implementing solutions.
2. Our approach needs to be a two generation strategy-- one that supports under-resourced parents while intensifying investments in at-risk children, from cradle to career.
3. Our programs and services need to be woven together into a more integrated whole-- one that is comprehensive and collaborative, not siloed.
4. Our major investments of money and time must be more effectively targeted, recognizing the greatest needs are heavily concentrated among low-income families of color.
5. The work ahead is not about placing blame, but about accepting shared responsibility.
6. Given the depth and breadth of our challenges, our responses have to be driven by urgency and sustained by long-term commitment.





In addition, there are some overarching themes that have emerged from our work in Dane County. Because we have not yet begun working intensely in other parts of the state (which we plan to do as a next phase of the project), it is not clear how applicable these themes are elsewhere. That said, they are summarized below for consideration outside of Dane County:

- 1. Labor Market Mismatch:** In Dane County there is a mismatch between the major labor markets' skills and readiness expectations and the actual skill sets, work experience, and credentials of many local jobseekers of color. It is clear that there are far too few routes to family-supporting jobs in Dane County for workers with less formal education and fewer networks.
- 2. Neighborhood Isolation:** A significant fraction of at-risk African-American families (especially those who have arrived recently) live in scattered, small, and socially isolated residential concentrations that

lack family-supporting institutions and networks; that have only limited community strengthening resources; and have few meaningful connections to surrounding neighborhoods, workplaces, or broader civic participation opportunities.

- 3. Capacity Building in Our Family and Child Serving System:** Many of Dane County's educational and family serving institutions have incomplete experience, expertise, confidence, and resources for effectively addressing the strengths and needs of low-income families of color. The apparent under-representation of persons of color in the workforce of many of these institutions is an added dimension of the problem.

The challenges in other communities will no doubt differ to some extent, but we hope that the lessons learned here in Dane County regarding our African-American community can help others as they work to address their own challenges.

Next Steps for WCCF

WCCF has a long commitment to helping reduce racial disparities in Wisconsin, and over the next few years we plan to intensify our efforts and join with others across the state to achieve that reduction. Those efforts will include the following:

1. **Communicating and Building Relationships:** We believe that a significant and ongoing communications effort to both broaden and deepen the dialogue about the egregious disparities in our state is needed. These disparities are not news to most of our residents of color, but all too often they are not known or understood by the majority of Wisconsin residents. We hope and believe that once these disparities are known, fair-minded and well-meaning Wisconsinites will mobilize and act to decrease them. But people cannot address a problem they are not aware of. One of the important reasons so many Wisconsinites are not aware of these problems is that we are not sufficiently connected to those who are impacted; too many of us have no meaningful relationships with people of color. It has been stated numerous times throughout our engagement work that in Dane County, it is easy for whites to have very little interaction with people of color. That may be true to an even greater degree in many other parts of the state. So as we do this difficult work of disparity reduction, it must be in intentional relationship and true partnership with communities of color, and our projects must build safe places to have heartfelt and difficult conversations about race and ethnicity.
2. **Gathering and Analyzing Racial and Ethnic Data:** The main product of the *Race to Equity* project to date has been a comprehensive baseline report on the state of racial disparities in Dane County. This report has been very well covered in the media and much discussed across the county. It laid bare the stark disparities in our community that were well known by communities of color, but were often unknown or ignored by our majority white population. We chose to start with an African American/ white comparison for a number of reasons, one of the most important being that we know that different racial and ethnic groups have different experiences and so we needed to focus our efforts before expanding to other ethnicities. We are now in the process of expanding our data analysis to include Latinos in Dane County, and we plan to further expand our analysis to additional races and ethnicities as well as additional geographies throughout Wisconsin.
3. **Supporting a Two Generation Approach:** Ensuring that all families have meaningful paths to employment opportunities and family-supporting incomes, and that their children have access to high-quality education, particularly early in their lives.
 - a. We will be working to leverage relationships with anchor institutions--the University of Wisconsin; hospitals; state, county and local government; and private sector employers --to provide access to family supporting jobs to minority workers who have in the past been left out of the labor force.
 - b. Simultaneously, we will continue our work to improve the quality of early care and education settings to help ensure that children have the opportunity to fulfill their potential.
4. **Partnering with Local Initiatives:** While there are important state-level components of this work, much of it needs to be done in relationship in communities. So for this work to be expanded statewide we must build a network of linked local initiatives that learn from each other and leverage the strength of the network, but also have deep local roots. WCCF plans to help develop and support local partners in this work across the state as we continue to work deeply in our own community of Dane County.
5. **Stopping the Blame Game** and instead focusing on our shared responsibility for addressing our challenges. Throughout our engagement processes, we have found that there is a tendency to blame those moving into our communities for the challenges we face. We believe that is both wrongheaded and counterproductive. First, there are many residents of color who are struggling and who have been here for decades. In addition, the fact is that people moving to a “better” place for themselves and their families is fundamental to the American story and the American Dream. It is also true that throughout our history, recent immigrants were often discriminated against when they first

arrived; that was true with each successive wave of immigration, from the Irish to Italians to Eastern Europeans and beyond. The current wave of immigrants to Wisconsin includes those from places as far away as Latin America and Southeast Asia, and as close as Chicago. These recent immigrants share many of the same hopes, desires, and dreams as the Norwegian, Irish, and German immigrants of the last century. They also bring with them great strength, energy, and aspirations, characteristics that should be welcomed, not held at arm's length. In fact, we believe that our state's future success depends on the contributions and success of all our residents.

- 6. Making the Business Case:** We believe that reducing inequality and turning today's youth into tomorrow's innovators are crucial to restoring Wisconsin's growth and competitiveness. It is widely agreed that a skilled workforce is critical to our economic future, and research is beginning to show that inequity hinders sustained economic growth. It is increasingly understood that diversity is good for the bottom line because in our global economy,

companies with more a more diverse workforce perform better. The private sector must take the lead in producing economic growth that is truly inclusive, but all sectors (public, private, non-profit, faith, and individuals) have important roles to play in guiding and contributing to equitable economic growth.

Conclusion

The dialog about racial equity is underway in Dane County and in Wisconsin. But dialog will only get us so far. All of us, from elected officials to scholars to neighborhood activists to parents, must act now to promote a better future for every child and family. This is not only the right thing to do morally; it is also the smart thing to do economically. We cannot afford to miss out on the contributions communities of color make to our neighborhoods, our state, and our nation. WCCF is poised to engage in both a local and statewide multi-generational effort to address the egregious racial disparities in our state. Our work is driven by a sense of urgency and sustained by the long-term commitment that will be required to ensure that Wisconsin truly is a state of opportunity for all.



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