



W

WHOLE COMMUNITY

YOUTH

Grand Rapids Youth Master Plan
A collective vision for action.

We envision a **community** driven by **hope** and sustained by **passion** where youth are nurtured and supported to thrive in all aspects of **life**.

We will align and coordinate youth efforts that put children front and center.

GRAND RAPIDS YOUTH MASTER PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE
Vision & Mission Statements

passion

The Heart of a Community

There are more than 67,000 children and youth between the ages of zero and 21 living in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The people of Grand Rapids choose to put these youngest residents first through a longstanding commitment to proactive policy that enriches the lives of children and families. Evidence of this devotion abounds throughout the local landscape of knowledgeable and nurturing community programs and services. It is powerfully evident in the City Commission's ratification of both the "Our Children, Our Future" community-developed standards for children and the U.N. Declaration of the Rights of the Child. I am particularly proud of the establishment of Our Community's Children, an advocacy office in partnership with the Grand Rapids Public Schools. Over the past decade, this office has provided a voice for Grand Rapids' area youth by actively engaging them in policy and facilitating caring, youth-focused partnerships to improve the lives of our city's children.

The development and publication of a master plan for youth, championed by Our Community's Children, is a fitting project for the City of Grand Rapids. This unique and unprecedented approach towards improving outcomes for youth is rooted in extensive community collaboration and the informed contributions of a wide spectrum of adults and young people. The result is the Grand Rapids Youth Master Plan—an expression of the hopes of our community and a guide for assembling the best possible supports for our children and youth. It is a plan that recognizes what is at the heart of our community—a city plan with implications that will reach far beyond our city boundaries.

Please join with me in marshaling our collective resources in the city and across the region in support of our children!



GEORGE HEARTWELL
Mayor, City of Grand Rapids

66%

of Grand Rapids Area teen survey respondents say that they intend to complete a 4-year college degree.

GRAND RAPIDS TEEN PROFILE
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Crafting a vision.
The Development of
a Youth Master Plan

VISION

2007

Building on a solid history of working together to address the needs of children and youth, the City of Grand Rapids sets out to harness the passion and **commitment** of a community that seeks to put youth at the forefront. Our Community's Children, formerly The Office of Children, Youth and Families, is asked by the Grand Rapids City Commission, the Community Forum on Youth Violence and the Grand Rapids Community Relations Commission to lead a coordinated effort to create a Youth Master Plan—a **blueprint** for the community to improve outcomes for children and youth.

2008

Grand Rapids is one of six cities nationally to be awarded The MetLife Foundation City-Schools Youth Planning Initiative grant from the National League of Cities and earns a spot among 12 national recipients of a Quality Counts! grant from the Forum for Youth Investment.

The **participation** of community youth is a fundamental dimension of the Grand Rapids' Youth Master Plan strategy. A 25-member Youth Commission is selected after reviewing 114 applications from city teens and interviewing 66 candidates. Youth Commissioners receive training in civic leadership, media relations, project design and neighborhood asset mapping.

A 39-member Youth Master Plan Steering Committee is formed with representatives from various city sectors including government, K-12 education, higher education, the faith-based **community**, business leaders, foundation leaders, health and child welfare professionals, youth development agencies, parents and youth. The Steering Committee identifies key **stakeholders** and develops shared vision and mission statements.

"City government has a moral obligation to address the needs of our youngest citizens. Together, with parents and community partners, we can guide comprehensive planning that improves the quality of life for children and their families. A Youth Master Plan highlights Grand Rapids as a city that cares for its people and its sustained future."

JAMES WHITE
Grand Rapids City Commissioner

2009

The Youth Commission completes a ten-month survey and evaluation project with The Evaluation Center of Western Michigan University resulting in the publication of the 65-page Grand Rapids Teen Profile, "an **analysis** of who area youth are, what they think and how they live."

The Youth Master Plan Steering Committee, with the support of community partners, undertakes the task of mapping all current youth services and works with numerous stakeholder focus groups to draft "outcomes" for Grand Rapids youth and then to identify "indicators" for outcome **achievement**.

2010

Our Community's Children hosts the Ready by 21™ Summit at New Hope Baptist Church. Over 115 community stakeholders, elected officials and youth representatives gather to identify common themes based on the Youth Master Plan Dashboard Outcomes and Indicators and to engage directly in identifying next steps.

After incorporating community feedback, the first edition of the Grand Rapids Youth Master Plan is published and distributed to serve as a pioneering roadmap for coordinating outcomes, services and support for all children ages birth to 21. This groundbreaking effort will impact over 60,000 children and youth across the city of Grand Rapids and many more in neighboring regions.



72%

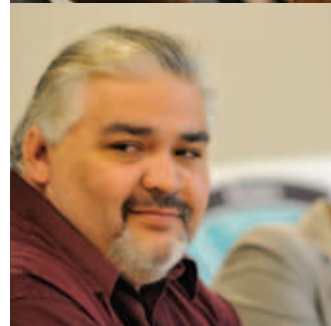
of Grand Rapids Area teen survey respondents believe that they could voice their opinions about their schools and communities and that someone would listen.

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56%

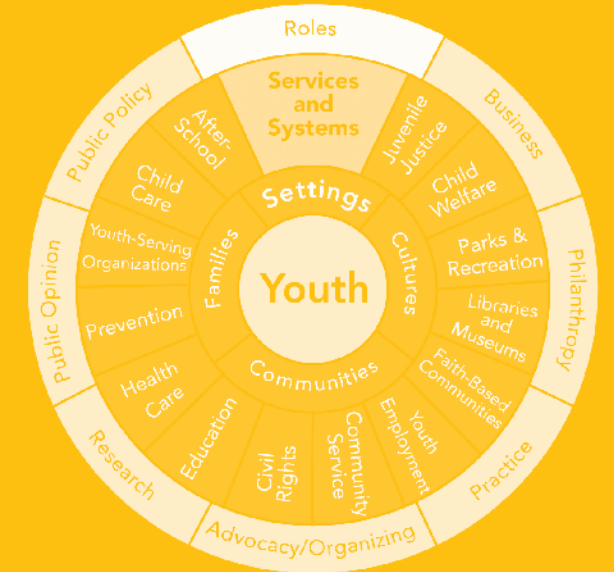
of area teens do not know where a family could go for help when there are major disagreements between parents and children.

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“By bringing city, school and community partners together on behalf of its children, youth and families, Grand Rapids has built a strong foundation for future progress and offers a great model that can guide the efforts of other cities across the nation.”

CLIFF JOHNSON
Executive Director, Institute of Youth,
Education & Families National League of Cities



Connecting for a difference.

A Need for Change

Monitoring a jump in youth violence in 2005, Grand Rapids City Commissioners and Our Community's Children, then the Office of Children, Youth and Families, rallied for an all-encompassing effort to gauge the well-being of community youth and to join with youth to counter the harmful fallout of isolated incidents of violence. While highlighting an exciting range of youth-focused endeavors and supports, this effort also identified a concerning shortage of community-wide avenues for collaboration and coordination. To effect comprehensive change, a wide-reaching plan with detailed outcomes needed to be in place.

A Proactive Approach

The decision was made to activate a city-wide Youth Master Plan—a data-driven, strength-based endeavor enriched by the consensus decision-making of community stakeholders and youth. It is defined by the community, for the community and provides a highly intentional antidote to the threats of disconnection and the negative profiling of youth.

Collaborative, coordinated and comprehensive.

Mapping Supports

Early in the construction of the Youth Master Plan, efforts were made to map who was doing what for youth. In partnership with the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation and the Child and Family Resource Council, all youth-serving agencies were mapped per neighborhood to identify potential gaps and current strengths. Over 31 city and county community initiatives were surveyed. It is clear that while a number of strong efforts are in place to develop a thorough system of service for prenatal care into the earliest years, much can be done to ensure services and supports for every age and phase of development.

Key Stakeholders

The identification of all of the variables and resources that support the success of children and youth ages zero to 21 provides much of the foundation for the development of the Grand Rapids Youth Master Plan. The community-wide participation and partnership of the people involved in this endeavor provide the rest.

Identifying Stakeholders

To really “change the odds” for youth, there must be a range of stakeholders. Young people are not only the focal point of the wheel, but are key participants as well.

Forum for Youth Investment, Stakeholder Wheel

whole community

Supported and engaged.

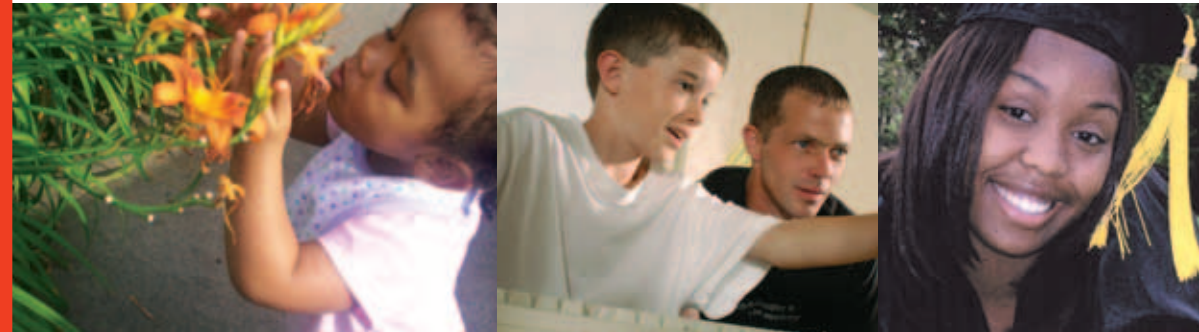
Birth to 21

The representation of children and youth in every dimension of the planning process is a distinctive feature of the Grand Rapids Youth Master Plan. The active participation of 25 Youth Commissioners, from grades seven through twelve, has informed every step of the project development. The contributions and experiences of parents, childhood professionals and service providers have ensured the representation of the youngest Grand Rapids residents. The ongoing work of well-established community collaboratives was honored, and helped shape the focus on the whole child.

68%

of city teens choose to volunteer with their free time.

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wholechild



“The Youth Commission has given me a lot of good experiences and taught me a lot about the city and how it works. It’s given me great job skills, made me a more well-rounded person and a lot more outgoing.”

ISAAC MULDER
Grand Rapids Youth Commissioner

Informing, partnering and leading.

A Vital Voice

Over the course of a brisk and busy year-and-one-half, Grand Rapids Youth Commissioners proved to be invaluable partners to the Youth Master Plan Steering Committee and were instrumental in the crafting of the Grand Rapids Youth Master Plan. Their dynamic participation also extended into numerous community engagements and collaborations. Throughout the tenure of their work, Youth Commissioners consistently and enthusiastically embraced opportunities to practice and enrich skills including public speaking, meeting facilitation, team building and working with diverse groups of teens and adults.

Youth Commission Highlights

Partnered with the Evaluation Center of Western Michigan University to design, administer and publish the Grand Rapids Teen Profile—a youth survey that highlights the opinions of over 1,500 teens regarding their aspirations, safety, employment, education, families and more.

Participated in Youth Master Plan Steering Committee meetings and the Ready by 21™ Summit to assist in the creation of results statements and outcomes that reflect how the Grand Rapids community will ensure youth are ready for college, work and life.

Participated in the Mayor’s Youth Council annual KidSpeak® Youth Forum to provide testimony to city officials and community leaders about the importance and challenges of youth employment.

Planned and facilitated press conferences at City Hall and the local bus transit center addressing audiences that included local television channels, newspapers, the mayor of Grand Rapids, city commissioners, school board members, parents and peers.

Participated in City of Grand Rapids’ Community Budget Gatherings to learn about the city’s financial challenges and to voice informed opinions to an audience of city commissioners and city staff.

Created and produced two Public Service Announcements designed to share Teen Profile results and gather community feedback.

Created a teen website to promote and share youth voices and opportunities: www.grteens.com.

Planned and organized three GR Teen Profile community forums in each of the city’s three wards.

0-21 All Youth Ready for College, Work & Life

approach

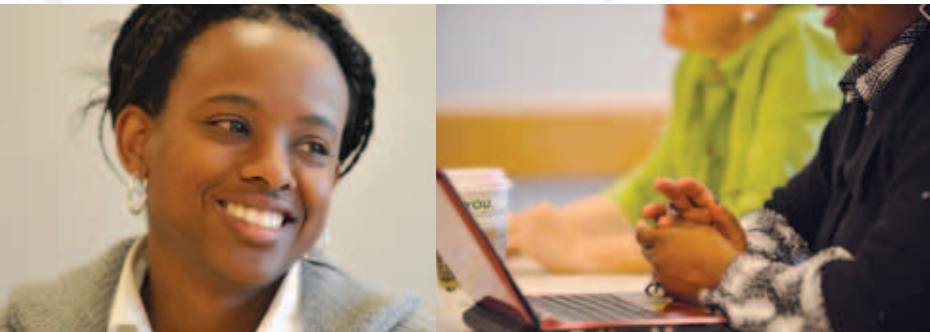
21%

of City of Grand Rapids teen respondents say that their neighbors have trouble getting along.

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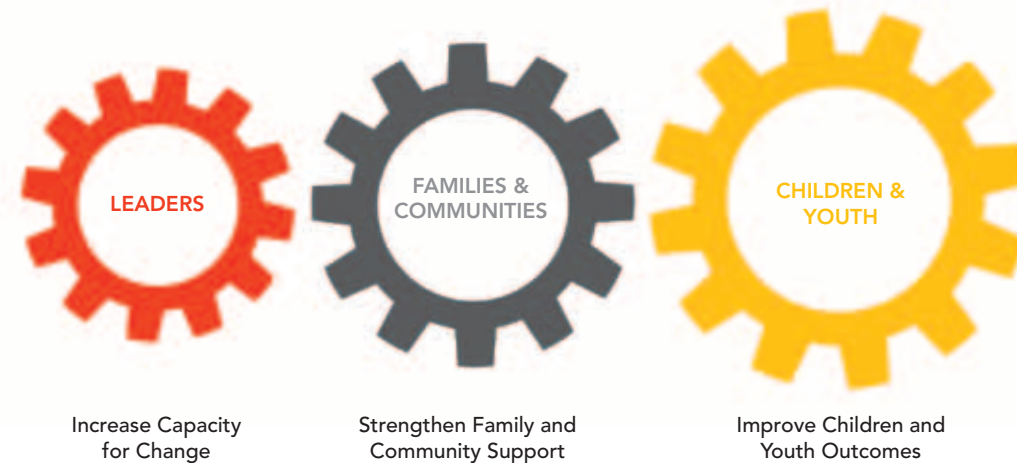
“The Forum for Youth Investment’s Ready by 21™ Framework is a tool to help us think differently about the big picture for all children to improve the odds that children will be ready for college, work and life.”

LYNN HEEMSTRA
Executive Director, Our Community’s Children



Creating a Shared Framework

Our Community’s Children—a child advocacy office of both the City of Grand Rapids and the Grand Rapids Public Schools—launched the Youth Master Planning initiative in partnership with key community stakeholders, the National League of Cities and the Forum for Youth Investment. Fundamental to this pioneering work is identifying shared language and a shared framework that everyone can understand and use to align their efforts. The Youth Master Plan Steering Committee adopted the Forum for Youth Investment’s Ready by 21™ Framework. Ready by 21™ is about Big Picture thinking. It uses common language to take aim, take stock, target action, and track progress for youth. Inherent is the ability to set bigger goals, use bolder strategies and form broader partnerships.



Creating a Common Language

Grand Rapids community stakeholders utilized the Ready by 21™ Framework to define five key outcome areas for children and youth—Learning, Working, Thriving, Connecting and Leading. The designation of these target areas provides unifying language for mapping services, identifying shortages and tracking progress.



5 Defined Outcomes for Grand Rapids’ Children and Youth

LEARNING
Early childhood development, life-long learning & education

WORKING
Employment & financial independence

THRIVING
Basic, physical & psychological needs

CONNECTING
Mentoring, afterschool, cultural activities & strategic planning

LEADING
Civic engagement, training & leadership

“The community steering process stands as a good example of our willingness to come together on behalf of youth for the long-haul—learning from, building upon and positively impacting the various sectors of our community.”

DR. RHAЕ-ANN BOOKER
Grand Rapids Youth Master Plan
Steering Committee Chair

collaboration

A community in action.

A relevant and successful youth master plan is driven by the input and experience of the entire community. To honor and garner these critical dimensions requires a dynamic and robust guiding body. The 39-member Youth Master Plan Steering Committee, composed of key stakeholders from a wide-ranging spectrum of community sectors, provided invaluable leadership, direction and oversight. From the foundational work of creating a shared vision and mission, to project coordination and the synthesis of surveys and data, the Youth Master Plan Steering Committee embodied the spirit of collaboration and partnership at the core of the Youth Master Plan project.



Defining Success

Committed to a Big Picture approach, and well-versed in the Ready by 21™ Framework, the Youth Master Plan Steering Committee set out to identify result statements that would define success for youth in every area of their lives. **A result statement identifies a goal—a condition of well-being for children, adults, families or communities—that provides a concrete outcome for the evaluation of success.** Result statements were developed around the five identified outcomes for Grand Rapids children and youth—Learning, Working, Thriving, Connecting and Leading—and for all ages, birth to 21.

Measuring Success

To determine whether a desired outcome is reached or to gauge a community’s performance according to any given outcome, success must be quantifiable. Following the establishment of result statement outcomes, the Youth Master Plan Steering Committee undertook the goal of defining **indicators—measures that help to quantify the achievement of a result.** Great care was taken to ensure that indicators were realistic, balanced and applicable across a range of outcomes, ages, populations, goals and approaches.

A Unified Vision

In addition to the spectrum of voices and perspectives from the Steering Committee, great effort was made to gain feedback and recommendations from the larger community. Thirteen community focus groups were hosted by the Youth Master Plan Steering Committee and Our Community’s Children to review the emerging result statements and indicators dashboard. A focus on usability and relevance was top priority as were exercises to explore and boost the strength of the defined indicators. The Ready by 21™ Summit provided an additional opportunity for community stakeholders to review and reflect on the dashboard development.

64%

of Grand Rapids area teens report having experienced discrimination at some point.

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Youth Master Plan Steering Committee Guiding Principles

CHILDREN Keep our young people first, remembering that their success is our primary goal.

CARING Be concerned about the work we are doing and about those with whom we are working.

CREATIVITY Embrace innovation with passion.

COLLABORATION Work together as an inclusive team of youth, parents, adults, families, organizations and systems.

COMMUNICATION Be honest and clear about our intentions and actions and ensure that the voices of young people are heard.

COMPASSION Practice kindness towards one another and the community at large.

COMMITMENT Devote time, talents and positive energy to the work of the plan.

CHANGE Embrace new ideas that help us meet our goals.

The big picture.

Grand Rapids Youth Master Plan
Dashboard of Result Statements and Indicators for Children and Youth

A Living Document

The result of many months of community exploration, refining, and revision, the Dashboard of Result Statements and Indicators for Children and Youth provides a groundbreaking, big picture view of community-wide outcomes for the whole child, from birth to 21 years of age. Unique in both scope and measurability, the dashboard will serve as a versatile and actionable barometer for youth-centered community efforts.

KEY

Result Statement

A condition of well-being for children, adults, families or communities.

→ **All children are ready to learn.**

- Increase number of children ready for kindergarten
- Increase participation in quality early childhood programs, pre-school and childcare

Indicator

A measure that helps quantify the achievement of a result.

- Increase assessment and referral services for children with disabilities

	Pre-Kindergarten Ages 0-5	Elementary School Ages 6-10	Middle School Ages 11-14	High School Ages 15-18	Young Adults Ages 19-21+
LEARNING Early childhood development, life-long learning & education	<p>All children are ready to learn.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase number of children ready for kindergarten • Increase participation in quality early childhood programs, pre-school and childcare • Increase assessment and referral services for children with disabilities 	<p>All children are successful in school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in 3rd, 4th & 5th grade MEAP scores above the 75th percentile • Increase in attendance rates • Increase demonstratable proficiencies 	<p>All youth are successful in school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase 7th & 8th grade MEAP scores above the 75th percentile • Increase in attendance rates • Increase demonstratable proficiencies in current technologies 	<p>All youth are prepared for college, work and life.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase number that meet or exceed MME/WorkKeys® Standards • Increase in attendance rate • Increase in graduation rate • Increase student access to college and technical/trade schools • Increase demonstratable proficiencies in current technologies 	<p>All young adults are prepared with skills to be life-long learners.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase percentage having a high school diploma or equivalency degree • Increase enrollment in post-secondary educational institutions and technical/trade schools
WORKING Employment & financial independence	<p>All children have a positive awareness that adults work inside or outside the home.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase number of children with parent in labor force • Decrease percentage of children in poverty 	<p>All children understand the relevancy of work and income.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase number of children with a parent in labor force • Increase number of children who have a savings account 	<p>All youth are aware of possible career paths and have opportunities for career exploration.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in number of youth with a parent in labor force • Increase number of youth who have a savings account and basic financial management skills • Increase job readiness skills and opportunities 	<p>All youth plan and have opportunities for short- and long-term employment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase number of youth with a parent in labor force • Increase to 70% those receiving Silver WorkKeys® Certificate • Increase job readiness skills and opportunities • Increase in financial management and literacy skills • Decrease unemployment rate for youth 	<p>All youth and adults are employed or engaged in career development activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase job opportunities • Increase financial management and literacy skills
THRIVING Basic, physical & psychological needs	<p>All children are physically and mentally safe.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase number of families of young children who have access to comprehensive healthcare • Increase number of families who have access to basic resources to meet needs • Increase percentage having age-appropriate pro-social behaviors • Increase in physical fitness • Decrease unsubstantiated child abuse and neglect cases at a category 1 or 2 • Decrease in infant mortality rate 	<p>All children meet age appropriate developmental standards and are learning healthy habits.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in physical fitness • Increase neighborhood safety for youth • Increase learning opportunities for wellness • Increase number of annual vision and hearing screenings 	<p>All youth develop proper nutrition and hygiene and practice healthy behaviors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase neighborhood safety for youth • Increase learning opportunities for physical and behavioral wellness • Increase in physical fitness • Decrease use of alcohol and other drugs • Decrease in suicide rate • Decrease teen pregnancy rate • Decrease in STDs and sexual activity 	<p>All youth develop proper nutrition and hygiene and practice healthy behaviors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in physical fitness • Increase neighborhood safety for youth • Increase learning opportunities for physical and behavioral wellness • Decrease use of alcohol and other drugs • Decrease in teen pregnancy rate • Decrease in suicide rate • Decrease in STDs and sexual activity 	<p>All young adults have good health and healthy habits.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase medical coverage • Increase in physical fitness • Decrease in alcohol-related deaths and injuries • Decrease in binge drinking • Decrease in suicide rate • Decrease in STDs
CONNECTING Mentoring, afterschool, cultural activities & strategic planning	<p>All children have positive adults in their lives.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase percentage of children who are developmentally on track as evidenced by Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) • Increase percentage of parents using services and resources • Increase percentage of home visits to families of newborns • Increase participation at enrichment and cultural activities including parks and libraries 	<p>All children have a positive adult in their lives and experiences to develop spiritually, emotionally and culturally.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in percentage of youth exhibiting 2 or more positive social skills • Increase parent engagement and positive role modeling • Increase participation in community athletic and afterschool programs • Increase participation at enrichment and cultural activities including parks and libraries • Decrease in juvenile offenses 	<p>All youth have a positive self-image, respect diversity and have opportunities to develop spiritually, emotionally and culturally.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase percentage exhibiting 2 or more positive social skills • Increase participation in community athletic and afterschool programs • Increase parent engagement and positive role modeling • Increase number of mentors • Increase participation at enrichment and cultural activities including parks and libraries • Decrease in juvenile offenses 	<p>All youth have a strong support network of positive peers and adults, and appreciate and respect cultural and individual identity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in percentage of youth exhibiting 2 or more positive social skills • Increase participation in community athletic and afterschool programs • Increase parent engagement and positive role modeling • Increase number of mentors • Increase participation at enrichment and cultural activities including parks and libraries • Decrease in juvenile offenses 	<p>All young adults have social skills and emotional well-being to live independently in the community.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase participation at enrichment and cultural activities including parks and libraries • Decrease number of homeless young adults
LEADING Civic engagement, training & leadership	<p>All children are supported and have opportunities to engage with the community around them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase attendance at licensed childcare centers and pre-schools • Decrease in suspension rates from community-based childcare centers 	<p>All children understand social rules, and are encouraged to practice leadership skills.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase participation in civic engagement and leadership programs • Increase participation in community service projects 	<p>All youth learn civic responsibilities and have opportunities for community leadership.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in volunteerism and community service • Increase participation in civic engagement and leadership programs 	<p>All youth are engaged in community service and leadership programs and are impacting public policy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in volunteerism and community service • Increase in 18-year-olds registered to vote • Increase participation in civic engagement and leadership programs 	<p>All young adults are making a positive contribution in their community and have opportunities to inform public policy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase registered voters • Increase in volunteerism and community service

Using indicator data to address outcomes.



Significant effort must be made to address deficiencies.



Indicator reflects progress that will positively affect outcomes for Grand Rapids' children and youth.

A closer look at a small sampling of indicator data, organized under the five defined outcomes areas for Grand Rapids' children and youth, provides a compelling preview of the substantive snapshots that the Grand Rapids Youth Master Plan Dashboard will inspire and provide. Indicator data combines to form relevant and actionable measures that will directly inform community efforts and understandings. It provides increased visibility and accountability for the achievement of results. The measurement and monitoring of Dashboard indicators will provide a custom gauge for assessing the well-being of the children and youth of Grand Rapids.

LEARNING Early childhood development, life-long learning & education

RESULT STATEMENT
All children are successful in school.

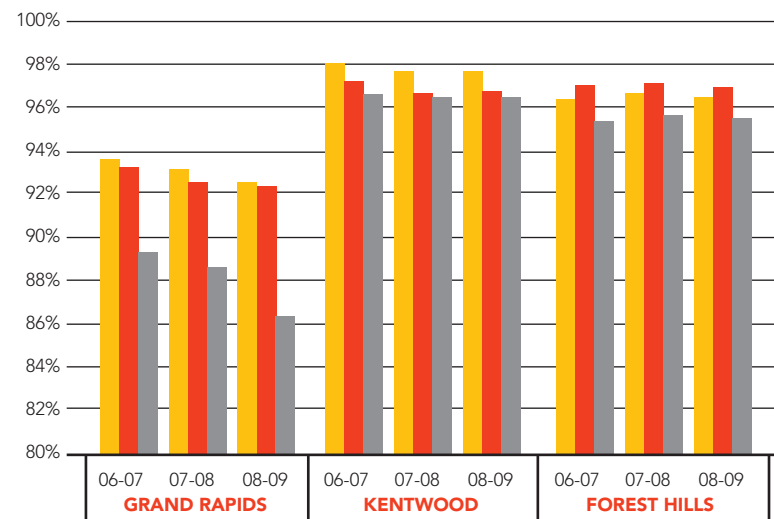
INDICATOR
Increase in attendance rates.

AGE CATEGORY
Elementary School: 6-10 Years Old

- K-8th
- Middle School
- High School

SOURCE: Grand Rapids Public Schools (Office of Assessment & Evaluation), Kentwood Public Schools (Office of the Superintendent) and Forest Hills Public Schools (Office of Instruction).

AVERAGE ATTENDANCE RATES



WORKING Employment & financial independence

RESULT STATEMENT
All children have a positive awareness that adults work inside or outside the home.

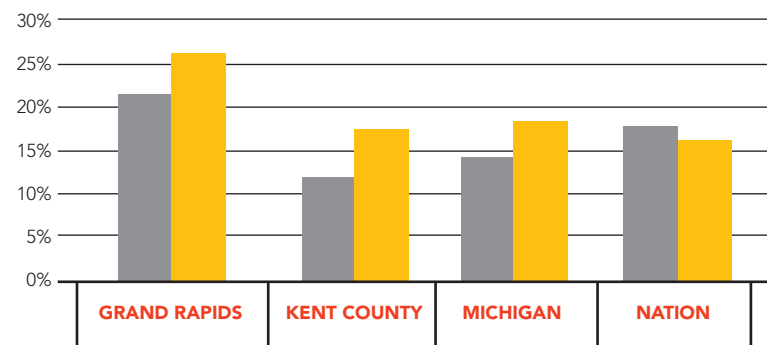
INDICATOR
Decrease of children in poverty.

AGE CATEGORY
Pre-Kindergarten: 0-5 Years Old

- 2006-2008
- 2000

SOURCE: 2000 US Census & 2006-2008 American Factfinder/US Census

PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN IN POVERTY



THRIVING Basic, physical & psychological needs

RESULT STATEMENT
All youth develop proper nutrition and hygiene and practice healthy behaviors.

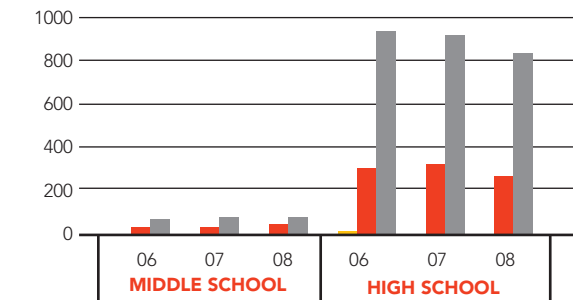
INDICATOR
Decrease in sexually transmitted diseases and sexual activity.

AGE CATEGORY
Middle School; 12-14 Years Old
High School; 15-18 Years Old

- Syphilis
- Gonorrhea
- Chlamydia

SOURCE: Michigan Disease Surveillance System (MDSS)

GRAND RAPIDS STD CASES



CONNECTING Mentoring, afterschool, cultural activities & strategic planning

RESULT STATEMENT
All youth have a strong support network of positive peers and adults, and appreciate and respect cultural and individual identity.

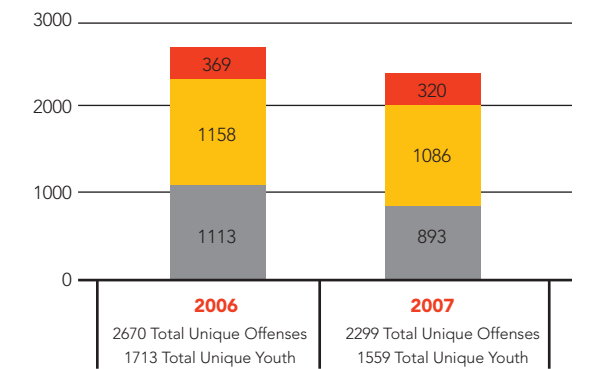
INDICATOR
Decrease in juvenile offenses.

AGE CATEGORY
High School: 15-18 Years Old

- Family/Domestic Incidents
- Status Offenses (i.e., curfew violations, runaways, trancies)
- Crimes (i.e., property, drug-related, violent)

SOURCE: Grand Rapids Juvenile Offenses Index Reports, 2006 & 2007 Data

JUVENILE OFFENSES



Total Unique Youth represents unduplicated counts within each offense type and represents offenses committed by 8 to 16-year-olds.

LEADING Civic engagement, training & leadership

RESULT STATEMENT
All youth are engaged in community service and leadership programs and are impacting public policy.

INDICATOR
Increase in volunteerism and community service.

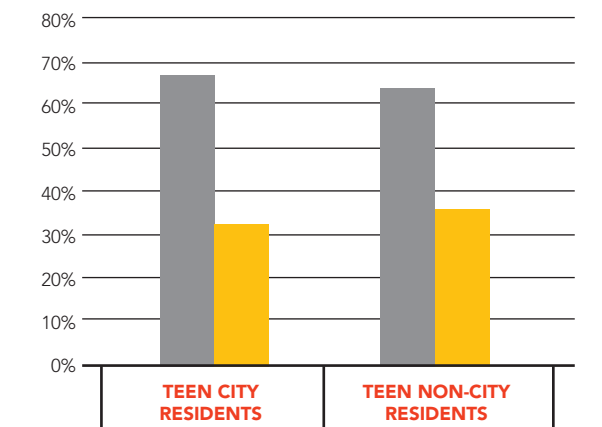
AGE CATEGORY
High School: 15-18 Years Old

- Yes
- No

SOURCE: Grand Rapids Teen Profile

Data is not tracked on an annual basis for this age range. However, the overall average annual volunteer rate is 37.8% in Grand Rapids, 29.9% in Michigan and 27% in the U.S.
SOURCE: Volunteering in America

VOLUNTEERISM 1,544 Area Middle School and High School Youth Were Asked: Do you volunteer free time for your religious group, community or for people in need?



nextsteps

Recommendations for action.

The two-year process chronicled in this document has involved a host of contributions from every sector of the community. Data has been collected from the landscape of child and youth services, reports on juvenile offenses and the Grand Rapids Teen Profile. Community forums and focus groups have been held to join with city residents, to connect with community stakeholders and to learn from existing collaborations. City leaders and city youth have been active in every step of the process, yet the work is far from done.

The following recommendations reflect what has been learned throughout the community-wide Youth Master Plan process. They look at the big picture for all children, ages zero to 21, while showing an extended focus on middle and late adolescence as community data shows these age groups suffering from intensified needs and a decrease in services. The recommendations outline areas for improvement within a three- to five-year framework of action and collaborative work. They also include some shorter-term strategies that can produce more immediate results.

It has been abundantly clear that this community wants children to find success at every level of development. Consistent themes have emerged that embody and address these desires. These themes have developed throughout the substantial work that the Grand Rapids community has undertaken with the National League of Cities and the Forum for Youth Investment and form the basis for the following recommendations. Recommendations are organized under the Forum for Youth Investment's 4B's for improving outcomes for youth: Broader Partnerships, Bigger Goals, Better Data and Bolder Strategies. We hope that you find them as relevant and invigorating as we do.

Sincerely,


DR. RHAЕ-ANN BOOKER, CHAIR
 GR Youth Master Plan Steering Committee


LYNN HEEMSTRA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
 Our Community's Children

Promote youth and families as agents of change.

Involve youth and parents as community collaborators.

The Youth Master Plan process actively involved people from city neighborhoods who do not normally sit at community problem-solving tables. The results are much better for it. Teen, parent and city resident involvement needs to continue to occur regularly as there are often huge gaps between the needs of neighborhood residents and the delivery of services. Efforts such as the Kent Social Services Network, the Parent Coalition of Healthy Start, Network 180's Community Family Partnership and neighborhood associations are beginning to bridge the gaps, but much remains to be done at the grassroots level for effective and sustainable improvement strategies for children. Neighborhoods are critically important in generating feelings of safety and well-being for children. While the degree of feeling safe within neighborhoods was quite high for all teens, 20% of teens felt unsafe and 29% claimed that their neighbors are not willing to help young people. Targeted neighborhood strategies such as the Seeds of Promise or the Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation Hope Zones are good examples of the groundwork that needs to be done for sustainable change. **The bottom line is that youth and parents must be able to provide input and feel ownership towards changes designed to enhance their quality of life.**

broader partnerships

Improve city, county and regional alliances.

Join together annually to strengthen coordination and collaboration.

The Grand Rapids Youth Master Plan process incorporated the cities of Kentwood and Wyoming because our destinies are linked not only geographically but also by the resources we use and the collective future that we share. While this is a City of Grand Rapids plan, it has significant county and regional implications. The Dashboard of Result Statements and Indicators for children provides a tangible start to big picture thinking and welcomes everyone at the table to target action. Intentional collaboration among city, county and regional leaders from all community sectors is critical to evaluate resources that can increase the odds that more youth will be ready for college, work and life. For the many collaborations that exist, **it is important that time is set aside, at least annually, to highlight goals and effective strategies so we can learn from each other and better utilize our shared capital.** On a regional level, the West Michigan Strategic Alliance could play a significant role in broadening the reach on vital signs that include child data as it has done for poverty and educational attainment indicators. It makes good sense to regionalize efforts to consolidate data and track outcomes for children. Especially given scarce resources, the more we can work closely together to leverage our resources and align our efforts, the better off our children will be.

Collaborate with families early and often.

Promote parent education and awareness in new and relevant ways.

Parents are a child's first and most influential teachers. It is, therefore, worth paying attention when time and time again our young people voice the need for a caring adult in their lives to provide guidance and direction. In the teen profile, only 48% of teens said that their parents or guardians often ask them *who their friends are* with 24% saying *their parent rarely or never asks*. And, while more than half, 55% of respondents, reported that *their parents often eat with them for a family meal*, 21% shared that *a parent rarely or never eats with them*. The Grand Rapids Juvenile Offense Index Report for 2006 and 2007 showed that the primary reason juveniles come to the attention of the police is for family domestic issues. These findings suggest that we must raise the importance of good parenting throughout all sectors of our community.

For a child to have a great start in life, parents need to have easy access to information and education about parenting, child development, health, education and community services. While we have many agencies and services available for parents, too often families only connect when deeply in crises. We need creative strategies to engage parents as true partners in achieving successful outcomes for all our community's children. First Steps and the Family Community Partnership are taking the lead in ensuring greater parent participation in the development of service strategies. **All community partners including businesses, libraries, churches and higher education can play a critical role in promoting positive parenting messages and elevating the importance of parents in the lives of children and in our community.**



Increase employment opportunities for city youth.

Support career readiness within youth development programs.

The national teenage unemployment rate is 27% and for minority youth is as high as 50%. Similar trends are emerging locally. For the past three years, the Grand Rapids' Mayor's Youth Council has heard from teens that employment is a key issue. The Council organized a KidSpeak™ event in 2009 dedicated to teen employment. Young people gave testimony emphasizing that efforts must be made to reach out to youth with career opportunities in emerging fields. While there has been a comprehensive effort with the Workforce Investment Act through ACSET for low-income youth, **broader efforts are needed for all youth and young adults to experience paid internships, to learn job-readiness skills and to explore a range of careers.** The Heart of West Michigan United Way Income Building Block focuses on goals that help promote youth employment and build assets to support self-sufficiency. The City of Grand Rapids, through Our Community's Children, has also recently secured youth employment grants that will further promote job readiness and business/city partnerships for youth.

Our business community has endorsed the WorkKeys® career readiness certificate as a meaningful indicator of workplace preparedness. This certificate denotes Bronze, Silver and Gold level attainment on core subject areas. The majority of high schools within the Kent Intermediate School District require students to take this assessment of the foundational and real-world skills employers seek. Job-readiness assessments serve as an additional opportunity for educators to strategize on methods that bridge gaps between proficiency and employability. We must ensure that all students receive at least a Silver Level attainment on this test so that they are prepared to enter the workforce.

Increase civic engagement for middle and high school teens.

Increase hands-on opportunities for youth to lead and serve.

The Grand Rapids Teen Profile saw 67% of teen respondents reporting some level of volunteerism. Our young people like to participate in their community, yet too many teens are unsure of how to become involved and express a need for more opportunities to make meaningful contributions. Fifty-two percent of teens indicate that there are not enough events or occasions to give their opinion on important issues. The current landscape map of resources for youth shows that there are limited services available to help teenagers pursue leadership and civic engagement opportunities. **Young people need opportunities outside of the school day to develop the skills for creativity, problem-solving and active engagement in community affairs.** They must have experiences that will help them participate as contributing members of society. Youth participation is extremely beneficial at every level of community planning. The process is enriched on many levels when youth can contribute, generate ideas and make a difference. We want every child to experience at least one meaningful community service project per year.

Increase school attendance.

Promote regular school attendance throughout all youth-serving programs.

Daily school attendance is critical starting from an early age. Students who attend school regularly learn more and are more successful. These patterns carry on throughout life. Many of our kindergarten and 1st graders are missing 30 days of schooling or more per school year. The Kent Social Services Network is working to integrate services within schools to help parents ensure their children attend regularly. The afterschool providers in the Expanded Learning Opportunities Network have shown that afterschool participation enhances school attendance. Emphasizing academic success within youth development programs positively impacts school attendance.

Attendance rates fall dramatically in high school years and the graduation rate is still appalling low at 52%. The school district is working to ensure student graduation by offering success centers and increasing early identification of struggling students through "Response to Intervention" methods. The need for support, however, remains significant. The community must rise to the challenge to provide all youth the means to achieve, graduate and go to college. **The message of good school attendance must be infused in all youth programs and activities.**

25%

of Grand Rapids area teens report that a parent rarely or never checks up on them after school.

GRAND RAPIDS TEEN PROFILE
www.grcity.us/ourchildren

biggger goals





betterdata

Complete indicator benchmarks and community mapping.

Strengthen capacity for data-driven planning and action.

Continued effort is needed to collect and compare data among all defined indicators. Defining outcome indicators for youth civic engagement and community leadership can be challenging. More development is needed to create meaningful indicators for tracking these goals. The Kent County Youth Services Landscape Survey provided an excellent beginning to the work of mapping child-and-youth-centered services throughout the city and county. Key stakeholders, including the proposed Council for Child and Youth Outcomes, **need to determine how to best and most efficiently centralize youth-outcome data, keep it updated and use it to identify gaps in services.**

Develop online data repository for child-related outcomes.

Ensure community access to guiding data.

Finding statistics and research on all the outcomes we want for children is time-consuming and complex. There is not one organization that holds the local data on children and youth. By nature of its work, The Community Research Institute at the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership at Grand Valley State University is becoming a central resource. However, further development of organizational capacity and the involvement of additional key data providers, such as those surrounding health and education, is needed.

Data should be online and accessible for everyone and would be a valuable resource and communication tool for all stakeholders. An online data repository would also greatly support the work of the Council for Child and Youth Outcomes.



Create a council for child and youth outcomes.

Track and organize community efforts and data over time.

Unanimously recommended by Ready by 21™ Summit attendees, a strong accountability council or board is needed to annually review and reflect on the big picture outcomes and indicators for children and youth. Council or board participation could include youth, parents, regional mayors, the chair of the Kent County Board of Commissioners, chairs of community collaborations, educators, the West Michigan Strategic Alliance, health and human services and representatives from the business and arts communities. **A strong community effort is needed to track measurements and to organize efforts over time.** The Dashboard and survey tools are extremely useful and, when collectively harnessed, can greatly streamline efficiencies and efforts.

Ensure quality programs.

Invest in accountability tools and processes to ensure best outcomes.

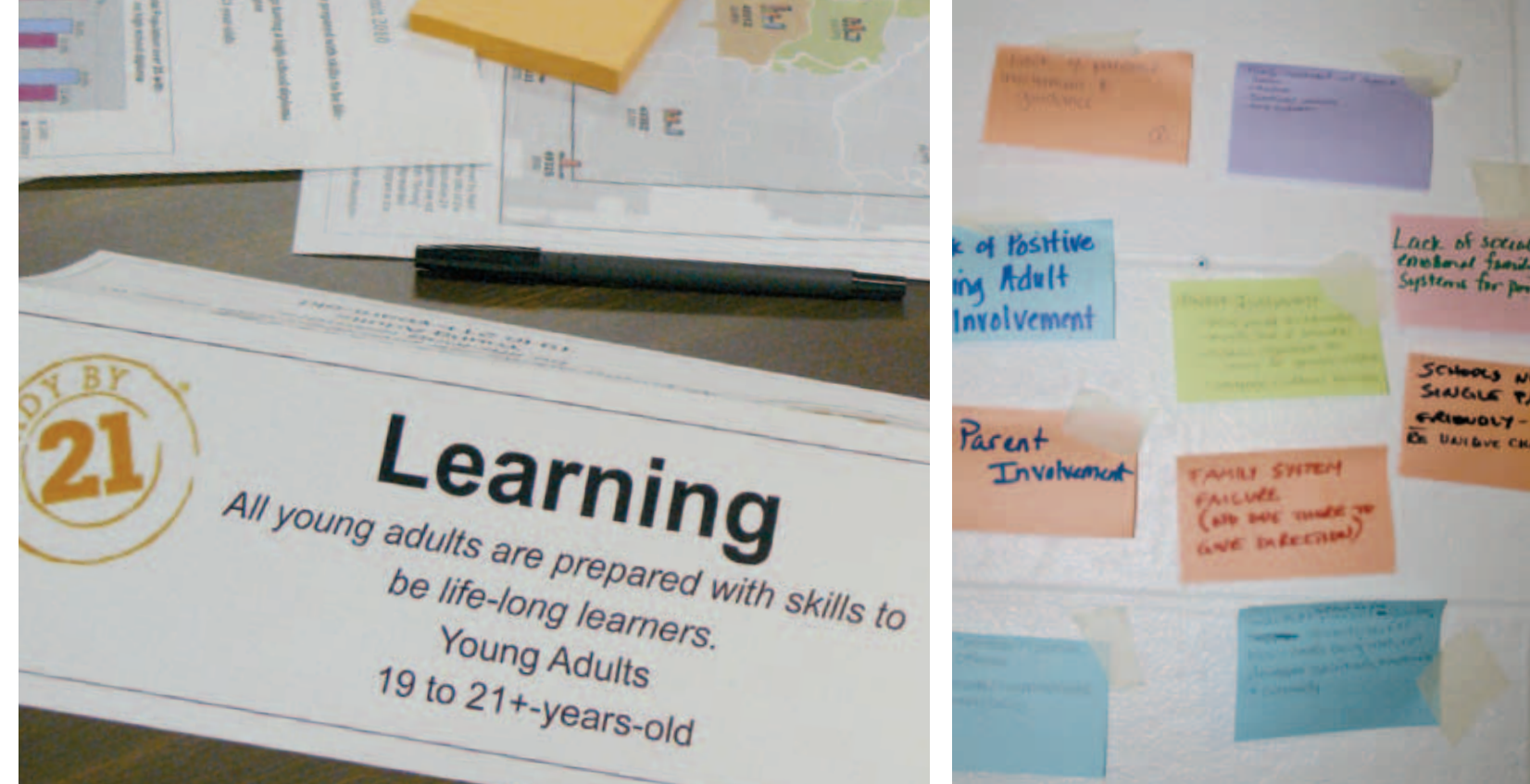
Quality practices generate better outcomes for children, yet attention to quality standards, staff training and accountability tend not to be prioritized, especially in times of budget tightening. The Expanded Learning Opportunities Network is an example of a collaboration that has prioritized standards, implemented the Youth Program Quality Assessment and promoted accountability among members through external assessments. The Heart of West Michigan United Way has also included adherence to quality standards as a requirement in its Request for Proposal process. There are important lessons to share from this meaningful work.

A focus on ensuring that all programs for children zero to 21 have standards of good practice, as well as means to measure how well each program is meeting those standards, is fundamental to long-term sustainability and success.

87%

of Grand Rapids area teen respondents report that they feel prepared for life after school.

GRAND RAPIDS TEEN PROFILE
www.grcity.us/ourchildren



bold strategies

Strengthen support for education systems.

Increase public education supports and services.

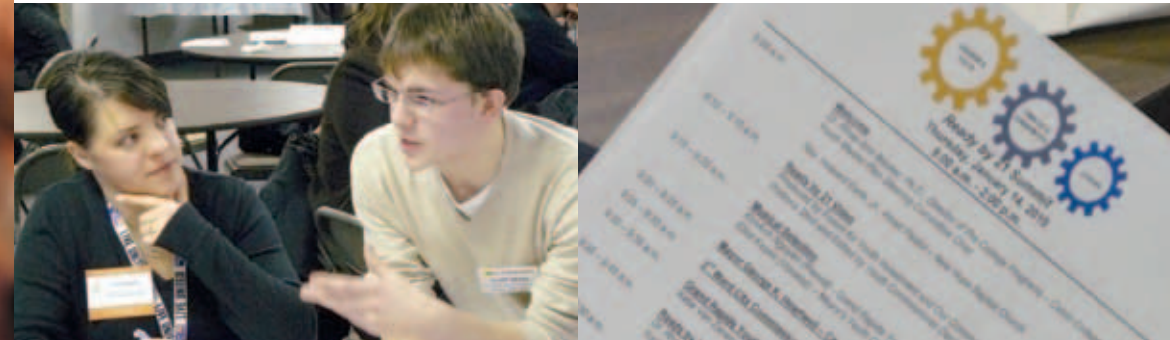
Dwindling education resources directly impact student outcomes. Too many of our older youth are not graduating because they are struggling with learning challenges, family issues and a general deficit of adult support. Many times, students have to fend for themselves. One of the main reasons teens cite for dropping out of school is that no one cares enough. Grand Rapids Public Middle and High Schools have made tremendous academic gains as they transform their educational efforts and invest in teacher training and student accountability. They have been creative in minimizing the impact of the budget cuts while best serving students. There also has been incredible community support to rally the resources to assist students in learning 21st-century skills. In a time of unprecedented educational reform and innovation, there is more to be done. Constructive community partnership with the school system is critical as we transition from outdated educational models to new ones. Education is a federal and state policy issue that has huge implications at a local level.

We must utilize our collective resources to prioritize policies that support strong, well-rounded education for our young people.

Increase educational access and attainment.

Build guidance for career and college aspirations.

Exposure to secondary education needs to be integrated throughout elementary, middle and high school and within afterschool programs. We know that college is a critical component in securing the good jobs of tomorrow. Students from kindergarten through high school need support, preparation and encouragement to be college-ready. Children should be exposed to career planning early in life. One promising initiative is the Kent College Access Network plan for "first generation" students who have not considered college as an option. All youth need experience with emerging career fields and job growth opportunities. Students need the support of adults and peers who will guide and nurture their post-secondary aspirations. Sixty-six percent of our teens reported they were going on to college, yet too many of these same young people are left on their own to navigate what is needed to get into college or to secure a job. **Every adult who has contact with a young person should talk about future aspirations and, when possible, help that person understand the college preparation process.** Everyday conversations go a long way towards helping a teen become more hopeful about their future.



moving forward

This is a living document.

It captures and communicates the work and commitment of the Grand Rapids community. It reflects on the past and sets a course for the future but cannot tell the whole story. The story of Grand Rapids' children and youth is written every day. It is composed by the citizen who steps up to mentor a child, the service provider who utilizes community-wide data to inform future decision-making and the educator who seeks to contribute to system-wide change. It is scripted by the teen who commits to using free time constructively, the infant who receives nurturing care and the families who ensure that children are regularly at school and ready to learn.

The Grand Rapids Youth Master Plan recognizes the many narratives taking place every day that better the lives of our youngest residents. It calls upon every community stakeholder to add their own storyline by taking ownership of one or more recommendations for improving outcomes for children and youth. It provides a shared and comprehensive framework of outcomes and indicators—created by the community for the community—and demonstrates the powerful potential of continued regional data collection, aligned effort and partnership. **The possibilities are many. The time is now.**

Please join us in sustaining the significant work that has been done and in creating, together, a positive next chapter for all of the children and youth of Grand Rapids.

“In Grand Rapids, on any given day, leaders are making decisions about which priorities to set, which data to review, which providers to support, which funding sources to tap and which groups to work with. Issuing a Youth Master Plan is not about pushing the “restart” button, but pausing to understand where you are, reflect on where you’ve been and chart a course for moving forward in a collective, strategic way.”

KAREN PITTMAN
President, Forum for Youth Investment

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115
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1554
Teen Voices

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ACCESS Food Network
Area Community Service
Employment & Training Council
Central City Weed & Seed
Communities Empowering Youth
Community Forum on Youth Violence
Community Relations Commission
Connected by 25 Initiative
Doug & Maria DeVos
Foundation's Gang Initiative
Early Childhood Children's Commission
Expanded Learning Opportunities Network
First Steps
Grand Rapids African-American Health Institute
Grand Rapids Area Coalition to End Homelessness
Great Start
Greater GR Children's Environmental Health Initiative
Greater Grand Rapids Reads
GRPS – Homeless Teens Program
Healthy Kent 2010
Healthy Homes Coalition
Healthy Start
Kent County College Access Network (KCCAN)
Kent County Family & Children's Coordinating Council
Kent County Mentoring Collaborative
Kent County Prevention Coalition
Kent Intermediate Superintendent's Association/ Diversity Initiative
Kent Schools Services Network (KSSN)
KISD's Bright Beginnings
RDV Hope Zones
Safe Kids of Greater GR
Seeds of Promise
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Cook Library Center
ddm marketing & communications
Doug and Maria DeVos Foundation
Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church
First Christian Reformed Church
Grand Rapids Public Library
Grand Rapids Public Library Foundation
Grand Rapids Public Schools
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Kent County Health Department
Kent Intermediate School District
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RDV Corporation
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