



Building Ladders of Opportunity for Young People in the Great Lakes States

A Synthesis of Recommendations

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The Great Lakes region—home to 50 million people in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin—has become a fixture in our national political discourse. Many of the country’s social, economic, and political challenges are being played out there. The Great Lakes states, despite these recent challenges, have the potential for broad-based prosperity, innovation, and a high quality of life, but attaining those will require that regional stakeholders work to foster young people’s productivity and well-being.

During the first decade of the 2000s, manufacturing employment in the region fell by over one-third. Manufacturing has begun to rebound, but communities throughout the region are still dealing with the direct and indirect effects of that unprecedented blow to their economic base. Incomes fell substantially, government revenues declined, and young people moved away from the region.

Lags in employment and incomes are not the only challenges the region faces. The proportion of residents in the region who are age 65 and over is growing rapidly, portending challenges that other regions in the United States are already confronting or will soon confront. Rural areas and small cities have been hard hit by manufacturing job loss. In some areas of the region, rising levels of opioid addiction and overdose deaths are stressing families, community health centers, and law enforcement. In cities, too many people of color live in neighborhoods with high levels of racial segregation, poverty, and violence amid the legacy of polluted manufacturing sites from past decades. State and local governments in the Great Lakes states face growing fiscal constraints.

Nonetheless, after a decade of job loss, demographic shifts, and falling household incomes, evidence suggests that the area has strong foundations capable of sustaining future growth. It still has a strong and diverse economic base; a population with increasing diversity by age, race, and national origin; and a growing number of skilled workers. Further, the region has many significant assets that can be

leveraged to support its future prosperity: the perennial resilience and innovation of its manufacturers, a wealth of colleges and universities, strong philanthropic and civic organizations, and natural resources such as the Great Lakes themselves.

If decisionmakers in the Great Lakes build on these strengths and foster the productivity and well-being of everyone who lives there, the region will innovate and sustain greater prosperity in the future. By building on these strengths, the Great Lakes region can rewrite its Rust Belt narrative as a story of resurgence.

To face the growing challenges, residents must be able to see themselves in the region's future, and leaders need an evidence-based vision for how to achieve broad-based prosperity. A variety of evidence-based policy and philanthropic strategies can help the Great Lakes region mitigate the challenges of the major demographic and economic transitions it faces and effectively leverage its assets to put it on the path to growth.

To improve the quality of life and economic mobility for Great Lakes residents and the future prosperity of the region, decisionmakers should pursue the following strategies:

- Invest in people to ensure broad-based prosperity and a high quality of life

Policies and investments that bolster the people currently living in the Great Lakes states are critical to ensuring the future productivity, stability, and prosperity of the region. These investments and supports will not only pay dividends for those who grow up in the region but also encourage more people born there to remain and attract more people from elsewhere to move in.

- » Build ladders of opportunity and economic mobility for young people, especially young people of color, so young families with children will stay in the region to sustain population levels and young adults will be prepared to enter the labor force.
- » Welcome and integrate immigrants and their children so that they move to the region, stay there, and become economically productive.
- » Support the health, economic security, and public engagement of older adults.
- » Address the stressors facing distressed communities in the region, including the most populous cities (which have long been associated with such issues) as well as the suburban, smaller city, and rural communities that are under increasing stress.

- Reform and align civic and budgetary efforts to support future growth and prosperity

The long-term prosperity of the Great Lakes region hinges upon its states and municipalities having the fiscal and civic capacity to implement the kinds of policies and investments outlined above. To lay the foundation for future prosperity in the Great Lakes region, stakeholders and decisionmakers should consider the following actions:

- » Invest in children and young adults even as demands increase to support the health and welfare of older adults.

- » Focus on economic development policies that create jobs rather than those that simply move jobs around.
- » Undertake structural budget reforms to address the impact of an aging population on public revenue streams and expenditures, especially unfunded obligations as pensions.
- » Implement new systems for civic engagement and decisionmaking at the state and local levels.
- » Create mechanisms for state and local governments to support the current and future capital costs of vital infrastructure, including water and energy utilities.

Although all of the above actions are important, this brief focuses on the first recommendation and offers evidence-based strategies for building ladders of opportunity and economic mobility for young people, especially young people of color.

The presence, skills, and choices of young people will shape the future productivity, stability, and prosperity of the region. Population growth will depend on whether young adults already growing up in and moving to the Great Lakes region decide to stay. People of color and the children of immigrants will lead population growth, increasing racial and ethnic diversity. Young people entering the labor force will hold the total labor force about steady. Without the influx of young workers, the retirement of older workers and out-migration of those in their 30s and 40s would reduce the size of the labor force. Thus, it is urgent to ensure that children and young adults are well equipped to enter the workforce ready to contribute their full potential to the region's economy and, once in the workforce, gain additional skills so that they can continue to enjoy income gains.

Policies and investments that **build ladders of opportunity and economic mobility for young people, especially young people of color**, will not only pay dividends for those who grow up in the region but also will encourage more of those born there to remain and attract more people from elsewhere to move in. International, national, state, and local efforts to restore job growth need to be complemented with concerted efforts to build the strength of the rising labor force. The biggest impact of such investments could come from closing the persistent disparities between non-Hispanic whites and young people of color, who increasingly include children of immigrants.

We recommend five broad strategies to build ladders of opportunity and economic mobility for young people, especially young people of color, in the Great Lakes states:

- **Support access to high-quality child development and preschool programs.** Investments in home visiting programs and high-quality preschool programs pay dividends for social and economic mobility, especially for young people of color. Access to high-quality affordable child care and preschool programs are attractive benefits that encourage and enable young people to stay and grow their families in the region, contributing to population growth as well as children's healthy development and school readiness.
- **Eliminate gaps in K-12 education so all can read by third grade and graduate from high school ready for college or career.** K-12 education is a core influence on youth development and opportunity. Reading at grade level by third grade is a strong predictor of future success.

Likewise, for youth to access higher education and workforce opportunities, they need to graduate from high school ready for college and a career.

- **Promote successful transitions to adulthood, higher education, and the workforce.** Future growth and prosperity depends on ensuring that young people who currently live in the region attain the education and skills relevant for the jobs of the future. Young people must continue to build foundational academic and workplace skills and prepare for college and careers through early employment experiences and career-oriented supports and learning in high school. Upon graduation from high school, young people need diverse post-high school learning opportunities and supports to help them succeed in college and access jobs.
- **Reduce criminal and juvenile justice involvement and related inequities.** Involvement with the criminal justice system can have lasting negative consequences for young people. In too many Great Lakes cities, racial and economic segregation separate vulnerable and low-income people from opportunity and expose them to high levels of toxic pollution and crime; high levels of poverty; and disparities in health, employment, and education, in turn creating conditions that contribute to both victimization and offending. Just as structural inequities can lead to justice involvement justice involvement can lead to or exacerbate those same inequities. Several promising and proven policies and practices can reduce criminal justice involvement or reduce the inequities that result from justice involvement.
- **Support the basic needs of low-income children and parents.** Better supporting the basic needs of low-income children and parents in the Great Lakes states requires making sure that families are aware of available work supports and how to access them, allowing those families to make informed decisions about whether to seek assistance. Work support programs for youth and families with children (such as health insurance, nutrition assistance, the earned income tax credit, and child care subsidies) promote health and healthy child development, increase educational attainment, and stabilize parental employment. The direct benefits from these supports, as well as the benefits of increased parental employment, can help families remain in the region and help children grow up ready to enter to labor force and contribute to the vitality of the Great Lakes region.

This paper makes the case for each of these strategies and recommends evidence-based actions for federal, state, and local governments and philanthropies that can build ladders of opportunity for young people and promote the productivity, stability, and prosperity of the Great Lakes region. Together these strategies span a child's life from birth through the transition adulthood, and they address both age-specific and persistent needs.

BOX 1

Past and Future Challenges and Promise in the Great Lakes Region

Key findings from the Urban Institute report *The Future of the Great Lakes Region* (Pendall et al. 2017) offer a glimpse into the past and future challenges and promise of the Great Lakes region. The report provides a comprehensive analysis of recent economic, demographic, and social trends in the region, coupled with projections on how those trends will play out between now and 2040. Here are the highlights:

Manufacturing collapse, but steady population and economic growth

- From 2000 to 2010, manufacturing jobs in the region fell 35 percent, a loss of nearly 1.6 million jobs.
- Overall, the region added 1.2 million jobs from 2000 to 2015. But the growth was mainly in low-wage jobs.
- Sixteen percent of Great Lakes residents were ages 65 and older in 2015.
- From 1990 to 2015, the region's white and native-born population was stable or declined, but African American, Hispanic, other nonwhite, and foreign-born populations grew rapidly. The region is still less diverse than other states were in 2000.

Gradual population growth and labor force stabilization

- By 2040, the region is expected to grow by 3.2 million people. Births will outnumber deaths until around 2030.
- Standing at 8 million today, the senior population will reach 13 million by 2040. Younger age groups will shrink over this period, however, because of out-migration and lower birth rates.
- The labor force will shrink because of early retirement and out-migration of workers in their 30s and 40s, but young people will continue to enter the labor force.
- Although fewer manufacturing jobs exist, remaining industries will still be a major source of employment and high wages.

Challenges and promise

- From 2000 to 2010, median household incomes fell more dramatically in five of the six Great Lakes states than in the entire United States.
- More workers will have associate's and four-year college degrees, but this increase will be held back by disparities between African Americans and Hispanics on one hand and whites and Asians on the other.
- In addition to racial and economic segregation, demographic change and economic stress have reduced the vitality of rural, suburban, and urban communities.

Five Strategies to Build Ladders of Opportunity and Economic Mobility for Young People in the Great Lakes States

Building ladders of opportunity requires rungs of investment and attention targeted to each stage of child development (early childhood, school years, and the transition to adulthood) as well as investment

and attention to persistent needs throughout childhood (health, nutrition, parental support, economic well-being, physical safety, and justice). Each stage of childhood and each persistent need is critical, but addressing all of them together is important as well. For example, investments in the youngest children will pay dividends into the future, but the dividends will compound if those children continue to have the best possible conditions and supports as they each become school age and transition to adulthood.

Support Access to High-Quality Child Development and Preschool Programs

Experiences during the first 1,000 days of a child's life (including the prenatal period) can influence his or her ability to learn, develop social skills, self-regulate, and respond to stress with resilience (Center on the Developing Child 2015). Vocabulary disparities between wealthy and low-income children appear as early as 18 months (Center on the Developing Child 2009). Crucial brain development continues from ages 3 to 5, when children learn essential cognitive, physical, behavioral, social, and emotional skills that prepare them to succeed in their formative years. Clearly, ensuring the long-term health and productivity of children and their communities in the Great Lakes region requires investing in children from birth to age 5.

Home visiting programs and high-quality preschool programs are two strategies that have proven to make a positive difference in young children's development.

Home visiting programs provide parent and child services focused on child health and well-being, child development and school readiness, positive parent-child relationships, parent health and well-being, family economic self-sufficiency, and family functioning. Typically, a trained nurse, social worker, or early childhood specialist provides these services at a family's home (National Home Visiting Resource Center 2017). High-quality home visiting programs have been proven to significantly improve children's language development, impulse control, and academic achievement compared with their peers in preschool and early grades (Kitzman et al. 2010, Olds et al. 2004), improve children's health (Sama-Miller et al. 2017), and have positive effects on parenting practices (Sama-Miller et al. 2017). Home visiting programs have not only recouped program costs within months, through reduced government medical assistance, but have quickly achieved returns of \$3 to \$5 for each dollar invested (Dodge and Goodman 2012; Karoly, Kilburn, and Cannon 2005; Washington State Institute for Public Policy 2014). Although only a small share of children currently receives home visiting services, recent changes to federal spending approaches offer states opportunities to grow their evidence-based home visiting programs.

High-quality preschool programs support cognitive, language, social and emotional, and physical skill development for children ages 3 to 5 before they enter kindergarten. Many programs target low-income children to reduce inequities and close the achievement gap. The universally positive effects of high-quality preschool programs on children's cognitive development and school readiness are even larger for black and Hispanic children as well as for children from low-income families (Yoshikawa et al. 2013; Philips et al. 2017). High-quality preschool programs have been linked to higher assessment scores, lower special education placement, and lower grade retention through all grades (O'Brien and Dervarics 2007) as well as higher rates of high school graduation (Reynolds et al. 2002). Three of the

most prominent longitudinal studies of high-quality preschool programs (the Perry Preschool project, the Abecedarian Project, and the Chicago Child Parent Centers program) found that participating children were less likely to be arrested in adulthood and more likely to attend college, be employed, and earn higher wages (García et al. 2016, Heckman et al. 2009, Reynolds et al. 2011). More recent studies have reaffirmed some of the findings on long-term outcomes (such as criminal activity and higher education achievement) for programs that resemble today's models (Smith 2015; Garces, Thomas, and Currie 2002). Expanded access to high-quality preschool programs not only benefits the participating children but also can create a more educated and qualified workforce and ultimately boost local economies (Bartik 2013). Expanded early education can particularly benefit low-income and working families as they have the greatest need for free or subsidized care for financial stability and employment (Aspen Institute 2013). Estimates of the return on investment for high-quality public preschool programs range from \$2.60 to \$8.90 for every dollar spent, depending on the program and location (Washington State Institute for Public Policy 2014; Karoly and Bigelow 2005; Lynch and Vaghul 2015). Each Great Lakes state is at a different phase of its preschool initiative, but they all can take concrete steps to enhance policy and expand high-quality preschool programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

The Great Lakes states have made strides in developing home visiting and preschool programs, but they could do more to develop their programs and reap the benefits for the children affected and for the region as a whole.

States should assess with their private and philanthropic partners how to **expand home visiting programs and cultivate new evidence-based programs**, leveraging the existing federal program funding and strong evidence of impact. States can also better integrate home visiting programs with the currently fragmented services and systems (such as infant and toddler child care and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children) for young children.

Public, private, and philanthropic partners in the Great Lakes states should build political and legislative support for concrete policy changes to improve preschool access, quality, and funding streams.

- **Garner bipartisan political and legislative support.** State and local legislators play a key role in determining the use of tax funds and in passing legislation with important budget implications. To garner the necessary support for expanding high quality preschool, supporters should publicize the evidence of the effectiveness of preschool and use strategic framing and messaging to build collaborations among key stakeholders. For example, Michigan used positive evaluation results demonstrating the impact of Michigan's Great Start Readiness Program to catalyze a \$130 million increase in funding over two years. This push for new funding was championed by Republican Governor Rick Snyder and garnered bipartisan support in the legislature.
- **Develop creative financing solutions.** Financing preschool expansion and improving quality lacks a one-size-fits-all solution and requires foresight about state and local context and short-

and long-term trade-offs. State leaders and legislators must think outside the box about how to build a high-quality early education system by leveraging new and existing funds, blending funding streams, tapping private-public partnerships, and generating new local tax sources. For example, Wisconsin, the District of Columbia, and other states with high preschool access rates built preschool funding into the state's education funding formula, reducing the vulnerability of preschool funding and tying it to expansions or improvements of the K-12 funding formula. In Georgia, where about 60 percent of 4-year-olds are enrolled in state prekindergarten, the program is funded by state lottery revenues, and several states use tobacco settlement funds to cover the cost of prekindergarten (Stone 2008). Many large cities have expanded preschool through local or blended funding streams; one such city is Cincinnati, which passed a property tax levy for \$15 million to fund the expansion of quality preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds. In Illinois, the Rockford Public School District coordinates a \$13.8 million budget for preschool that combines funding from the state prekindergarten program, Federal Preschool Development Grants, local funds, and Head Start (Fonseca 2015).

- **Improve quality.** Program quality is essential to realizing the positive effects of early childhood education for children, families, and the community. Quality is a shared goal across the early childhood field, but consensus is lacking regarding which aspects of quality (such as teacher training, professional development, class size, and staff ratios) are most important and what are the best trade-offs given limited resources. Measuring quality is also a challenge. Accordingly, discussions of quality often focus on measurable regulation components, such as well-defined standards and the successful delivery and monitoring of strong, evidence-based curricula. Standards for program quality focus primarily on classroom environment, instruction, and teacher preparation and training. To improve program quality, states should adopt and adapt the high standards developed for federal grants such as the Federal Preschool Development Grant or those used in high-performing states (such as Michigan); states should also develop and support the early childhood workforce.

For more information on how the Great Lakes region can support access to high-quality child development and preschool programs, see the companion to this brief, "Strategies for Supporting Access to High Quality Child Development and Preschool Programs" (Katz 2017).

Close Achievement Gaps through Early Reading Proficiency

Investments in reading skills for young children can close achievement gaps in K-12 education and unlock the potential of children of color and low-income children growing up in the Great Lakes states. Children who are not reading proficiently by third grade are four times more likely than proficient readers to drop out of high school (Hernandez 2012). Improving reading skills is foundational for middle and high school success, for increasing the capacity of the workforce, and for boosting economic prosperity for the region.

Children enter kindergarten with the experiences and knowledge from their family, child care, and prekindergarten environments. Because these experiences vary by race and family income, black and

Hispanic students and children from low-income families on average enter school lagging behind their white and higher-income peers. Evidence suggests, for instance, that children from low-income families are often exposed to millions fewer words, placing them on average at a disadvantage in vocabulary and comprehension (Hart and Risley 2003). Ensuring that all children can read by third grade regardless of their early experiences positions them to absorb content in later elementary grades and establish a strong foundation for secondary school. Reading can unlock the potential of children in the lower elementary grades to learn content in math, science, social studies, and other subjects. Growing racial diversity and income inequality in the Great Lakes region demand that educators double down on efforts to eliminate racial and income achievement gaps. Failure to target and close these gaps will lead to more lost potential and more inequality of opportunity and outcomes.

State and local stakeholders in the Great Lakes region can pursue several strategies that specifically focus on closing reading achievement gaps between children in different racial and economic groups in grades K–3. Most of the funding and policy levers for education are at the state and local level. States set key policies on standards for what students should know, which curricula should be used to meet those standards, accountability frameworks, human capital policies, and school choice policies. States also make decisions about sources and levels of funding for education. At the local level, school boards and (sometimes mayors) are responsible for implementing policies, staffing schools, and collecting additional funds to supplement state spending. Although state leaders are positioned to define and champion the strategies proposed here, localities will need to bring them to fruition. By working with states and localities, nonprofits and philanthropists can also make important contributions to education policy and practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- **Prepare teachers for racially and economically diverse classrooms.** In 2016, Harvard professor and researcher Dr. Ronald Ferguson compiled and reported on a variety of strategies for achieving better educational outcomes for boys and men of color (Ferguson 2016). The report emphasizes the importance of “person-environment fit,” meaning that teachers and students are well prepared to meet each other’s expectations in the classroom. Teacher training and professional development programs must ensure that teachers have the training and tools they need to succeed, particularly in classrooms where students are not well prepared or where students have a mix of abilities. Teachers with strong classroom management skills will be able to command attention and encourage cooperation in orderly classrooms without exercising harsh or exclusionary discipline practices.
- **Increase the share of teachers who are teachers of color.** Teachers of color are woefully underrepresented. In 2011–12 school year, children of color made up more than 52 percent of the school-age population nationally, but teachers of color made up only 18 percent of the teaching force (Boser 2014). The case for increasing the share of teachers of color is two-fold: teachers of color can be important role models for all children, regardless of their background, and can particularly benefit children of color with whom they share cultural background and experiences (Villegas 2012). Research shows that black and Hispanic students perform better

in reading and math when they have a teacher of the same race (Dee 2004) and students are less likely to be removed from the classroom for discipline when they are the same race as their teacher (Lindsay and Hart 2017). Longitudinal student data are the basis for a growing body of evidence that student-teacher race match matters for achievement and achievement-related outcomes (Egalite, Kisida, and Winters, n.d.; Gershenson et al. 2017).

- **Bolster funding formulas to support learning.** Closing the achievement gap requires examining school finance and spending and reconfiguring budgets to meet stated education goals. Research finds that increasing per pupil spending produces more years of education, higher wages, and lower rates of adult poverty (Jackson, Johnson, and Persico 2016). Among Great Lakes states, Illinois stands out for spending less on students in poverty than on students not in poverty, and Ohio stands out for spending significantly more on poor students.¹ After Michigan switched from funding schools through local property taxes to funding them with state revenues (a change that redistributed resources from more affluent to less affluent communities), spending increased and student outcomes improved substantially. Each \$1,000 increase in spending for grades four through seven produced a 3 percentage-point increase in the likelihood that a student would attend postsecondary school (Hyman 2016).
- **Use evidence-based strategies to improve reading and comprehension in the earliest grades.** For schools to eliminate opportunity and achievement gaps, they must tackle the gaps that exist when students enter kindergarten. Reading is foundational for learning because it opens doors to new content and understanding, and ensuring that young students build these skills between kindergarten and third grade will increase their ability to absorb information and succeed academically. Well-established, evidence-based strategies should be integrated into state curricula to improve reading and reading comprehension. For English learners, literacy and content should be combined in lesson planning to meet reading and content-based goals. The What Works Clearinghouse of the Institute for Education Sciences² had done extensive research on reading comprehension and assembled a guide for teaching English learners that includes strategies that are recommended based on research evidence that demonstrates their efficacy.

For more information on how the Great Lakes region can close achievement gaps in K–12 education, including examples of promising models in Great Lakes states, see the companion brief, “Strategies for Supporting Early Reading Proficiency to Close Achievement Gaps” (Gallagher and Chingos 2017).

Promote Successful Transitions to Adulthood, Higher Education, and the Workforce

Future growth and prosperity in the Great Lakes states depends on ensuring that young people who currently live in the region remain and attain the education and skills relevant for the jobs of the future. A person’s transition from late teens into mid-twenties is a critical time for establishing his or her foundation for future labor market success. Building on the fundamental skills that have been developed in early childhood and during primary and secondary school, the transition to adulthood is a

time when young people continue to build their academic skills, explore their career interests, and develop essential skills and qualifications for jobs through work and education or training. Further, the presence of caring adults can be critical in helping young people navigate this challenging time.

Assisting young people in obtaining high school and college credentials and providing strong career and college advising promotes their labor market success. Those with higher levels of education are more likely to be employed and to earn higher wages.³ In 2015, individuals with a bachelor's degree had weekly median earnings of \$1,341 compared with \$798 for individuals with an associate degree and \$678 for those with a high school diploma. Some programs of study, such as those in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, yield higher labor market earnings (Carnevale, Cheah, and Hanson 2015). In addition to academic skills and technical skills, employers value "twenty-first century skills," which include written and oral communication, teamwork and collaboration, and problem solving (Casner-Lotto and Barrington 2006). Early work experiences and extracurricular activities can be important mechanisms for building these workplace skills and exploring career interests (Sum et al. 2014).

Young people face many challenges in realizing educational and employment success, including structural racism, generational poverty, and inequality. With a greater likelihood of residing in isolated, low-income neighborhoods, youth of color are more likely to attend low-quality schools, face disciplinary action in school, be involved in crime or targeted for arrest especially for drug-related offenses, and have limited employment networks. These factors can affect their ability to build critical academic skills and access jobs. Relative to higher-income students, low-income students have less access to opportunities for enriched learning in and out of school and work experience, creating what some observers call an "opportunity gap" for developing the skills employers seek (Council of Economic Advisers 2015; Kaushal, Magnuson, and Waldfogel 2011; Reardon 2011). Discriminatory hiring practices combined with a reliance on personal networks in hiring further disadvantages certain job seekers (Spaulding et al. 2015). Changes in the economy and labor market in recent decades have also disproportionately affected youth, exacerbating structural barriers (Sum et al. 2014). Economic challenges in some of the Great Lakes states have contributed to even greater challenges for young people.

Nonetheless, with greater resources and heightened focus on effective strategies, states can help young people overcome these obstacles and thrive in adulthood. Although several federal funding streams aim to improve educational and workforce outcomes for youth, much of the power to affect change rests with state and local governments, which can partner with employers and philanthropies. Over the past decade, momentum has increased around addressing the needs of disadvantaged youth and improving the institutions that facilitate their successful transition to adulthood and the workforce. Government and philanthropies have focused resources on high youth unemployment and high numbers of disconnected youth as well as on reforms in higher education to address low graduation rates and concerns that the US education system is not adequately preparing young people for the future. State and local governments, including those in the Great Lakes region, have been instrumental in these efforts, working closely with employers and leveraging philanthropic investments to develop

effective strategies. To continue this momentum, states, in partnership with local governments and private funders, can focus on the following proven strategies.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- **Implement and expand career and college pathways programs in high schools.** Career Academies, early college high schools, and dual enrollment programs are evidence-based strategies for improving youth outcomes. Career academies—small learning communities developed within larger high schools that combine rigorous education with an industry focus and work-based learning—significantly improve labor market outcomes (Kemple 2008). Allowing students to enroll in course work in high school (dual enrollment) or work toward a college degree (early college high schools) can increase high school graduation, college enrollment and college completion (Berger et al 2008). These strategies are being implemented in all six Great Lakes states.

Broader adoption and expansion of these efforts will require the involvement and commitment of state and local governments, employers, and philanthropies. States can (1) contribute state resources and target federal resources to these strategies and establish policies that incentivize local areas to implement them; (2) set state education standards and policies that facilitate the development of dual-enrollment and early-college high schools; (3) help position educational systems to realize goals related to college and careers; and (4) can galvanize the participation of statewide partners, including Departments of Higher Education and major employers in a state. Because job markets are often local or regional, local governments have an important role to play in convening partners, including employers and philanthropic organizations, as well as in contributing local resources and overseeing K–12 education. Employers play a critical role in providing information to career and college pathway programs about the occupations that are in demand, offering feedback on the content of programs, creating opportunities for students to explore occupations and gain exposure to work. Philanthropic partners can spur innovation, provide more flexible funding to support local efforts, and bring stakeholders to the table.

- **Expand and improve opportunities for work-based and out-of-school learning.** Given the importance of early work experiences in building skills and credentials for youth, the opportunity for them to access work-based and other out-of-school learning opportunities is critical. Several of the Great Lakes states plan to use resources from the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act to support summer youth employment and other career-focused enrichment for youth. States have opportunities to expand and improve the options available to young people, particularly those who are disadvantaged and may not have equal access to jobs and enrichment activities. Registered apprenticeships have been shown to have strong positive impacts, offering young people the chance to build skills, earn credentials, receive mentorship, and enter good jobs and careers. However, registered apprenticeships have been limited to certain types of careers and sectors. States and employers can partner to bolster registered apprenticeship opportunities for youth and focus on how to expand apprenticeships to new occupations and sectors. Summer youth employment programs have shown positive impacts

both on employment in the summer of participation and on other medium- and longer-term outcomes, such as avoidance of criminal behavior, reduced mortality, and improved school attendance. However, research has found limited impacts of summer employment on later employment (Leos-Urbel 2014; Heller 2015; Gelber, Isen, and Kessler 2014). Great Lakes states, in partnership with employers and philanthropies, could experiment enhancing summer youth employment programs and testing their efficacy in achieving medium- and longer-term youth outcomes. For example, these programs could be linked to specific career and college pathway programs (described above) or to specific industries or groups of employers. At the state and local levels, governments can create alternative avenues for work-based learning, such as apprenticeships that are not registered, internships or externships for high school students, co-op education in which credit-bearing internships are required components of college programs, and clinical experience as a part of career and technical education programs.

- **Leverage federal policy changes to support continued systems reforms and effective programs.** Changes to the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act, which was reauthorized in 2014 with bipartisan congressional support, have provided the opportunity for states and localities to implement changes to workforce systems to improve and expand workforce services for young people. When the Perkins Career and Technical Education Act and the Higher Education Act are up for reauthorization, employers and philanthropy can push Congress to include reforms that will benefit young people in the Great Lakes states, including ensuring that funded programs engage and build relationships with industry and use funding to prepare young people for jobs in in-demand fields. For example, career and technical education (CTE) could also be linked to work experience programs to ensure that young people are developing the skills that employers demand and can access available opportunities. Higher Education Act reforms can expand access to financial aid by making it easier for students to apply while also supporting robust counseling, guidance, and supportive services, which are essential components of effective models for serving disadvantaged students.
- **Continue to develop labor market information capacity and use it to shape available programs and engage employers.** Great Lake states must use data to understand the needs of employers, help young people make choices about their careers, design programs that meet employer demand, and assess student outcomes. A key challenge across the nation is connecting education data with labor market data to follow the trajectory of young people through educational programs to careers. Although great progress has been made across the Great Lakes states in developing labor market information systems, some states still have further to go. Using data to understand the needs of employers can help states strengthen relationships with employers, which can then better position state leaders to understand the changing economy and skill demands of the future.

For more information on how the Great Lakes states currently support youth transitions to adulthood, and on strategies for bolstering these efforts, see the companion brief, “Strategies for

Promoting Successful Transitions to Adulthood, Higher Education and the Workforce” (Spaulding 2017).

Reducing Criminal and Juvenile Justice Involvement for Young People in the Great Lakes States

Crime, victimization, and justice system responses greatly affect the life prospects of the most vulnerable Great Lakes youth, restricting their access to ladders of opportunity. In too many Great Lakes cities, racial and economic segregation separate vulnerable and low-income people from opportunity and expose them to high levels of toxic stress and crime. Concentrated poverty and disparities in health, employment, and education create conditions that contribute to both victimization and offending. Law enforcement and other justice interventions are likewise concentrated in areas of high crime and general disadvantage. This cycle leads to high levels of involvement with the criminal justice system among young people, which can have lasting negative consequences for their development into adults. Moreover, estimates developed using the Social Genome Model suggest that simply acquiring a criminal record as a teenager reduces lifetime family incomes (Blumenthal, Martin, and Poethig 2016). Although structural inequities can lead to justice involvement, at the same time, justice-involvement can lead to or exacerbate these inequities.

Criminal offending peaks during youths’ teenage years and decline as they reach their early 20s, so youth will inevitably be the focus of crime control. Emerging evidence on adolescent development and life trajectories, however, highlights the importance of reconsidering justice interventions on youth. Neuroscience research finds that adolescent brain development continues into the mid-20s, improving areas that are related to criminal offending, such as impulse control. Consequently, most young people who offend as teens end their criminal involvement as they transition to adulthood (Steinberg 2014; Scott and Steinberg 2008). Helping youth successfully transition to adulthood requires policy reforms in both the juvenile justice system and the adult justice system. If the justice system can support rather than interfere with this process, many young adult offenders will desist and become law-abiding adults as they continue to mature.

To successfully transition to adulthood, youth need to develop a sense of self-direction, social competence, and autonomy. But the juvenile justice system exposes justice-involved youth to negative influences, hindering their development (Chung et al. 2005) and interfering with the process by which youth involved in criminal activity stop offending. Evidence is mounting that involvement in the justice system increases the likelihood of further involvement by labeling youth as “criminals;” interrupting their connections to school, family, and work; and detecting misconduct that would otherwise go unnoticed (Lieberman, Kirk, and Kim 2014).

In addition to justice-involvement, youth exposure to crime also affects their development and opportunities. The stress and trauma of crime victimization and of living in communities with high levels of crime and violence undermine healthy childhood development and adult decisionmaking.⁴ Further, high levels of crime can impede neighborhood economic development (Irvin-Erickson et al. 2017), limiting job opportunities for youth and their families living there. Although public discussions about

crime often focus separately on victims and perpetrators, those at risk of committing and those at risk of being victims of violence overlap significantly (Papachristos and Wildeman 2012).

Structural inequities further exacerbate the problem of crime exposure. Youth exposed to high crime levels disproportionately live in areas that also suffer from high levels of poverty and social disorganization; such areas tend to be where crime is concentrated (Sampson 2012). As a result of persistent residential segregation, this neighborhood disparity in safety is a highly racialized phenomenon, with African-American youth living, on average, in neighborhoods with much higher levels of violence than those where other Americans live (Peterson and Krivo 2010). Native youth also experience victimization at much higher rates than non-Native youth (Pavkov et al. 2010). The recently intensified focus on immigration enforcement may be increasing the vulnerability of youth in immigrant communities: people who are undocumented or whose family members are undocumented may be reluctant to report crime and partner with the police out of fear that doing so will increase the risk of deportation.

Unfortunately, many justice system efforts to control crime are overly broad or overly punitive in their application and can inadvertently increase crime or impede the life prospects of people in the most distressed neighborhoods. Mass incarceration is perhaps the most commonly cited example of a justice intervention that produces serious harms. Incarceration is associated with negative employment, wages, and income impacts disproportionately borne by young black men (Pavkov et al. 2010). Further, children of incarcerated parents are more likely to drop out of school, develop learning disabilities, have disciplinary problems in school, and suffer from physical and behavioral health issues, such as asthma, high cholesterol, and depression (Morsy and Rothstein 2016). These burdens are disproportionately borne by children of color—African-American children are 7.5 times more likely to have an incarcerated parent than white children, and Latino/Hispanic children are 2.3 times more likely (Glaze and Maruschak 2008). Further, intensive enforcement of minor offenses, popularly known as “broken windows” policing and involving tactics such as stop and frisk (La Vigne et al. 2014), can saddle youths with long criminal records of minor offenses, constitute probation violations for youth under supervision, and lead to collateral consequences and financial penalties.

Finally, the disparities and inadvertent harms discussed above have contributed to a lack of legitimacy of the justice system among youth in high-crime communities. Many young residents of high-crime neighborhoods feel that the police do not share their values and priorities, are not trustworthy, and treat people differently based on their race or ethnicity (La Vigne, Fontaine, and Dwivedi 2017). Overly broad application of enforcement and sanctions by the justice system can hamper the life prospects of young people, limit their development, and disproportionately disadvantage low-income people and people of color, who are overrepresented across all types of justice system involvement (Hartney and Vuong 2009). Therefore, the most promising package of policies and practices will be those that support safety while minimizing the justice system’s footprint.⁵

In most of the Great Lakes states, crime and violence rates have fallen over the past 15 years (as they have throughout the United States). All Great Lakes states except Indiana and Wisconsin experienced lower violent crime rates in 2015 than they did in 2000, according to FBI Uniform Crime

Reports. In 2015, only Michigan's violent crime rate was greater than the national average, and Illinois's rate was at that average. More recent trends are cause for concern, however, as Great Lakes cities such as Chicago, Cleveland, Indianapolis, and Milwaukee are seeing substantial increases in homicides. In a positive trend, juvenile incarceration has fallen substantially in all of the Great Lakes states with Ohio and Indiana experiencing the largest reductions. Juvenile incarceration rates in Michigan and Ohio remained above the national average in 2013, the most recent year for which data was available.

Great Lakes stakeholders can promote several policies and practices to reduce criminal justice involvement among youth or reduce the inequities that hinder youth success. One challenge of crafting good justice policy is distributing responsibility across different levels of government. For example, policing is largely a municipal function, prosecutors are generally elected at the county level, and the state sets sentencing law and administers the prison system. Reflecting this reality, changing policy and practice requires actions from policymakers at all levels of government. We recommend the following actions.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- **Reduce the justice system footprint.** Because involvement in the justice system can have serious and lasting negative effects on youth and parental involvement in the justice system has similarly negative effects on children, the justice system should deploy the minimum level of intervention and sanction necessary to achieve public safety goals. Several approaches can achieve this, including reducing the penalties for low-level offenses and building robust options for diverting youth away from the justice system and, if appropriate, toward behavioral health services. Stakeholders can also work to reduce incarceration of youth in out-of-home residential facilities and to reduce incarceration of young adults.

Further, states must mitigate the consequences of criminal-justice involvement once it has already occurred. State policymakers can conduct a systematic review of the collateral consequences caused by a criminal record, such as being barred from certain occupations or professional licenses, losing the ability to live in public housing, losing the right to vote, and losing access to educational opportunities,⁶ and work to remove those that do not serve public safety. States can also mitigate the lifelong consequences of juvenile offending by expanding protection of juvenile records and facilitating juvenile record expungement. Finally, governments can systematically review and reduce the application of justice system financial obligations, such as court fees, supervision fees, fines, and restitution. Given that many young people involved in the justice system (as well as their families) live in poverty, such obligations can be very burdensome and destabilizing.

- **Develop nonjustice options to address youth needs and issues.** Too often, the primary pathway for young people to receive needed services and treatment is involvement in the justice system. Given the evidence that involvement in the justice system increases the likelihood of further involvement, policymakers in Great Lakes states should ensure that valuable services and treatments to reduce risk of criminal offending are available without justice system involvement to youth who would benefit from them. Several promising

prevention intervention models address risk factors for crime, delinquency, and justice system involvement for youth populations at risk for these outcomes.⁷ For example, *Becoming a Man*, which offers youth weekly group sessions during the school day and uses cognitive behavioral therapy to help youth deal with high-stakes situations, was found to increase graduation rates and reduce criminal behavior among young men in Chicago public schools (Heller et al. 2017; Park 2017).

Further, schools can revise disciplinary criteria to prevent expulsion, which is a risk factor for justice involvement. Restorative justice models are increasingly being implemented as an alternative approach to school discipline, particularly in contrast to zero-tolerance approaches. Finally, policymakers in Great Lakes states should ensure residents have access to substance abuse and mental health interventions without justice involvement. Many behavioral health issues end up being addressed through the justice system, particularly local jails, because the community lacks an adequate capacity to intervene and treat them. The opioid epidemic can only exacerbate that dynamic. Great Lakes states such as Ohio have been leaders in figuring out how to connect justice-involved populations, particularly those returning from prison, to Medicaid coverage (Jannetta, Wishner, and Peters 2017). Yet treatment and services may often come to juveniles through the justice system because of insufficient funding for community-based interventions (Lieberman and Fontaine 2015).

- **Make responses to serious offenses effective, focused and appropriate for youth.** Strategies to reduce the criminal justice system footprint should be complemented by efforts to deliver targeted, evidence-based efforts to address crime and violence problems and youth who commit serious offenses. Great Lakes policymakers can support and adopt methods that reduce crime, violence, and victimization and that hold youth involved in them appropriately accountable while simultaneously recognizing and supporting their ability to positively change their lives. Given the neuroscience research on youth brain development, juvenile and adult criminal justice policies should integrate a positive youth development framework. Training for law enforcement, courts, probation officers, and defense and prosecution lawyers should be revised and refocused to facilitate healthy human development for young people who offend rather than punishing them.

Further, antiviolence efforts should focus on the relatively small population most at risk. Approaches to address pressing crime problems with precision and focus should complement those that push back on overbroad enforcement and its negative side effects. Focused deterrence strategies such as those promulgated by the National Network for Safe Communities⁸ have shown effectiveness in Great Lakes communities such as Chicago (Papachristos and Kirk 2015), Cincinnati (Engel, Skubak Tillyer, and Corsaro 2013), Indianapolis (Corsaro and McGarrell 2010), and Rockford (Corsaro, Brunson, and McGarrell 2009), reducing crime and violence in distressed communities without resorting to broad application of criminal penalties to residents there. Further, states can reduce access to firearms for people at risk of committing violence, raise the age of criminal court jurisdiction to 18, and explore new options

for sanctioning young adults. As discussed, many young adult offenders will desist and become law-abiding adults as they mature if the justice system can support rather than interfere with this process (Steinberg 2014). Finally, stakeholders in the Great Lakes region should insist that risk-reduction interventions be evidence based. The many syntheses and summaries of this evidence base enable policymakers to insist that interventions intended to reduce the risk of juveniles and adults involved in the justice system be proven models regardless of whether they are applied through alternatives to incarceration efforts, community supervision, or institutional corrections and reentry. Most of the Great Lakes states could improve substantially in this area, including whether they have defined standards for evidence, whether they have assessed existing programs against that standard, and whether they require that programs are evidence-based or prioritize such programming for funding.⁹

- **Build the legitimacy of the justice system.** In addition to working to reduce harm done by justice interventions and more effectively reduce crime and reduce recidivism, Great Lakes policymakers should build the legitimacy of the justice system, focusing on interactions of all kinds with youth, to lay the foundation for long-term compliance and cooperation with the law. Legitimacy is built through procedural justice, which involves adhering to four principles: treating people with dignity and respect, giving people a “voice” during encounters, making decisions neutral, and conveying trustworthy motives. State and local policymakers can lead the calls both to incorporate procedural justice into the operations of all parts of the justice system, including policing, the courts, and corrections, and to engage the community directly to identify public safety priorities shared by police and the people they serve. To further build legitimacy, Great Lakes policymakers should forthrightly acknowledge the racial and ethnic disparities in the justice system, commit to mitigating the drivers of disparity, and ensure that data regarding those disparities are collected, made publicly available, and used to track progress in reducing them. Similarly, Great Lakes policymakers should support transparency through publicly available criminal and juvenile justice data. Making these data available allows communities (and especially young people) to understand what the justice system is doing, how it affects them, and whether things are improving. Cure Violence, a model developed in Chicago that uses a public health model to interrupt the contagion-like spread of violence, operates with a focus on building the legitimacy of the justice system, though the evidence of its effectiveness is mixed to date (Butts et al. 2015). Recent evidence shows that New York City neighborhoods operating Cure Violence programs had significant improvements in public safety and greater reductions in gun violence than similar neighborhoods not operating the programs (Delgado et al. 2017).

For more information on crime and criminal justice involvement in the Great Lakes states and the policy recommendations for reducing them, see the companion brief, “Strategies for Reducing Criminal and Juvenile Justice Involvement” (Jannetta and Okeke 2017).

Support the Basic Needs of Low-Income Children and Parents

For children in the Great Lakes region to reach their full potential, they need more than high-quality care and education from their early years through adolescence and opportunities to enter the workforce while avoiding justice involvement. For children to seize those opportunities, they also must meet their basic needs for food, shelter, health, and engagement with caring adults. Even given the best conditions for young people growing up in the Great Lakes states, some families will struggle to meet these basic needs. For Great Lakes youth and families trying to make ends meet, several work supports are available to assist them, although access to supports and the level of support available vary by state. Key work supports for low-income families include Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), nutrition assistance (such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP), federal and state earned income tax credits (EITC), child care subsidies, and paid family leave. Access to work support programs can stabilize parental employment, increase educational attainment, and promote health and healthy child development, leading to a healthier and more productive generation that can remain in the region and contribute to the vitality of the Great Lakes states.

Although research shows each of these programs yields positive child outcomes, families are not always able to access supports. Paid family leave, for example, is available to relatively few workers, especially those in low-wage jobs. Child care subsidies lack sufficient funding for most families to access them. Even for programs such as Medicaid and SNAP, which are available to all eligible families who apply, some eligible families still do not access the assistance. Sometimes families are unaware of the program or lack accurate information about their eligibility. Others may find the challenges of applying for and maintaining benefits insurmountable or not worth the effort.

For the region to benefit from increased employment and improved outcomes, state and local policymakers and program administrators should ensure that families know what supports they are eligible for and how to access them so that families can make informed decisions about whether to seek assistance. Although the federal government provides the bulk of the funding and establishes basic program rules for most work supports, states make important policy choices that affect who has access to supports. Philanthropies also have an important role in facilitating improvements in state social service delivery. Philanthropies can support state staff and technical assistance needs as states identify and implement new policies, business practices, and technologies. Several actions could help more families access the supports for which they are eligible.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION:

- **Adopt systems, policies, and practices that promote access to Medicaid and CHIP.** Medicaid and CHIP are federal and state medical assistance programs that provide nonelderly adults and children with access to health care that they otherwise could not afford and improve their use of preventative and primary medical care. Expanded Medicaid and CHIP eligibility has proven not only to improve children's health insurance coverage, access to care and services, and health outcomes (Howell and Kenney 2012) but also to yield long-term life improvements, including higher wages, for these children. State policy and practice differences among the

Great Lakes states lead to variation in who is eligible for Medicaid and CHIP and how many eligible individuals participate. To boost participation, states can identify and enroll children in Medicaid or CHIP if they are already participating in certain other programs. States can also use technology to access electronic data from other programs to verify that a family is eligible for Medicaid, and they can use technology to simplify processes for families, such as by offering online applications and mobile apps for enrollees to manage their benefits.

- **Streamline and simplify access to nutrition assistance through policies and technology.** SNAP helps low-income individuals and families purchase food and, in turn, provides a boost to local economies. When children have adequate nutrition, they are healthier, are more emotionally stable, do better in school, and are more likely to graduate from high school (Carlson et al. 2016; Cook and Frank 2008; Frongillo, Jyoti, and Jones 2006). In the Great Lakes states, a large majority of eligible households participate in SNAP; that share is also larger than the national average and a larger share than participated just a few years ago. However, eligibility for SNAP and how many eligible families participate vary among the Great Lakes states. SNAP's statutes, regulations, and waivers provide policy options that give states flexibility to alter eligibility and benefits as well as to streamline program administration in ways that can make it easier for eligible families to participate. For example, states can allow SNAP participants to report less frequently on their income and household status, reduce the number of physical documents required for program enrollment, or allow participants to recertify their program eligibility or access case information online. Social service offices administering SNAP can also provide the application and assistance in more languages and aim to give eligible families their benefits the same day they apply when possible (rather than taking the full 30 days allowed by federal rules).
- **Expand outreach for EITCs.** EITCs help low- to moderate-income working people make ends meet by reducing the amount of taxes owed and refunding the difference if the credit is larger than the amount owed. EITCs can greatly improve opportunity and economic mobility for young people. They also encourage work, reduce poverty, help families meet child care expenses and other basic needs, boost financial assets and savings, improve children's achievement in school, increase college enrollment, and likely increase children's earnings as adults (Charite, Dutta-Gupta, and Marr 2012; Marr et al. 2015; Hathaway 2017). In addition to the federal EITC available to families throughout the nation, all six of the Great Lakes states have chosen to implement state EITCs, although the eligibility rules and credit amounts vary by state. Despite the substantial short and long-term benefits of the federal EITC to low-income families, an estimated 20 percent of eligible workers nationally do not claim it (Hathaway 2017). A Detroit Free Press investigation found that nearly 26,000 Detroit households eligible for the federal EITC in 2016 did not receive their combined total of \$80 million in refunds because they did not know about or understand their eligibility for it and did not file tax returns.¹⁰ States should raise awareness of the EITC through targeted informational campaigns that emphasize the importance of filing tax returns to access this widely available tax credit.

- **Simplify and align policies to improve access to child care assistance.** Child care assistance helps low-income parents access high-quality, affordable care. Child care is a critical resource both for helping parents maintain employment or complete education or training and for healthy child development. For example, research shows that children who attend higher-quality child care centers have better math, language, social, and behavioral skills than those who attend lower-quality ones (Peisner-Feinberg et al. 1999). Child care is expensive, though, and high-quality care often is unaffordable for low-income families. At the same time, because child care assistance is not an entitlement and the current federal block grant and state funds are not sufficient to cover all families needing assistance, only 15 percent of eligible families received subsidies in 2012 (Walker and Matthews 2017). The number of children receiving child care subsidies is falling nationally and in most of the Great Lakes states. States must choose how to target their limited funds, and they have considerable discretion to determine child care subsidy policies, practices, and administrative structures, as well as how much state funding to invest in the program, all of which leads to great variation in child care subsidy programs across the states (Hahn et al. 2016). Although CCDF funds are not sufficient to serve all families in need of child care subsidies, which may be the greatest challenge to the success of child care subsidies, states can take actions nonetheless to improve families' access to high-quality care by simplifying child care subsidy processes and aligning child care policies and processes with those of other work support programs serving the same families. For example, Illinois recently simplified the calculation of authorized child care hours by focusing on the total number of hours a parent works rather than detailed analyses of actual work schedules. Illinois also began allowing electronic wage deposits to serve as proof of employment, thus eliminating the need for a letter from the employer
- **Implement paid family leave policies.** Paid family leave provides paid time off work to care for family members. Paid leave increases family income both directly through the leave payments and indirectly through more stable employment. Paid leave may also positively affect the health of both parents and children. Access to paid leave is a challenge for parents in the Great Lakes states, just as it is for parents throughout the country. Nationally, paid family leave is included as an employee benefit for just one in seven civilian workers (14 percent). Somewhat larger shares have access to paid sick leave (68 percent) and short-term disability benefits (38 percent) that some families use in lieu of paid family leave (Isaacs, Healy, and Peters 2017). A handful of states have statewide family leave programs or partial wage-replacement benefits for pregnant women under temporary disability insurance programs, but none of these are Great Lakes states (Isaacs, Healy, and Peters 2017). The Great Lakes states could follow the examples of California, New Jersey, Rhode Island, New York, and the District of Columbia, which have enacted or implemented paid family leave legislation (requiring at least some employers to provide paid family leave as an employee benefit) within the past 15 years. Because current employer-sponsored family leave policies disproportionately reach workers in higher-wage jobs, new state or national leave policies would disproportionately benefit the lower-wage workers who would gain access to this vital support.

- **Align program requirements and processes to improve access to the full set of work supports.** Families eligible for any one of these supports also are likely to be eligible for other supports and to benefit from receiving the full set of supports for which they are eligible. However, such families are unlikely to receive all the supports for which they are eligible, because doing so would require that they overcome the participation challenges for each program separately (Mills, Compton, and Golden 2011). For example, in some states families must submit separate applications at separate offices for each program. Many of the people seeking support are workers, so they may need to take time off work to visit each social service office. This duplication burdens families seeking assistance as well as the state agencies administering the programs. States changes to policies, business processes, and technology can streamline access and retention of individual work supports and of the full package of work supports for which families are eligible (Hahn 2016). For example, states can create combined applications for multiple programs and routinely assess new applicants for the full range of programs for which they might be eligible. Each of the Great Lakes states except Minnesota has a combined application for SNAP and Medicaid, and some also include cash or child care assistance on the same application. As described, states can also share documentation across programs or automatically enroll those whose documentation for one program demonstrates their eligibility for another. In addition to formal policy and technology changes, behavioral economics research indicates that small changes in human service programs can help families take actions to support their goals. For example, clear letters and signs, simpler processes, and personalized outreach can help more eligible families access the supports they seek (Loprest 2017; Richburg-Hayes et al. 2017).

For more information on how the Great Lakes states currently support the basic needs of low-income families and strategies for improving access to supports, see the companion brief, “Strategies for Supporting Basic Needs to Promote Opportunity and Economic Mobility” (Hahn 2017).

Conclusions

The future prosperity of the Great Lakes states depends in large part on the productivity and well-being of young people. This paper has outlined five strategies for supporting young people from their earliest years through their transition to adulthood.

Governments, philanthropies, and other stakeholders in the Great Lakes states should support access to high-quality child development and preschool programs that lay the foundation for children’s abilities to learn and develop to their full potential. Great Lakes schools should use evidence-based strategies to ensure that children are reading proficiently by the end of third grade to close racial and income achievement gaps and to prime all children for academic success. As adolescents transition to adulthood, regional stakeholders should support them as they build their academic skills, explore their career interests, and develop essential skills and qualifications for jobs through work and education or training. The justice system should focus on helping teens and young adults who engage in criminal activity mature into law-abiding adults. Regional stakeholders should also build the legitimacy of the

justice system and address pressing crime problems with targeted antiviolence efforts that do not entail overbroad enforcement and its negative side effects. Finally, the Great Lakes states should support the basic needs of low-income children and parents by streamlining access to work support programs, which can stabilize parental employment, increase educational attainment, and promote health and healthy child development.

Engaging governments, philanthropy, and other stakeholders in undertaking these strategies will help more families come to and remain in the Great Lakes region and will ensure that all those who live there can thrive.

Notes

1. Matt Chingos and Kristin Blagg, “School Funding: Do Poor Kids Get Their Fair Share?” Urban Institute, accessed September 27, 2017, <http://apps.urban.org/features/school-funding-do-poor-kids-get-fair-share/>.
2. See the What Works Clearinghouse website, <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>.
3. Dennis Vilorio, “Education Matters,” US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Career Outlook, March 2016, <https://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2016/data-on-display/education-matters.htm>.
4. See for example, Sharkey (2010); and Shonkoff, Garner, and the Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, Committee on Early Childhood, Adoption and Dependent Care, and Section on Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics (2012).
5. For a fuller treatment of these issues as they pertain to boys and young men of color, see Liberman and Fontaine (2015).
6. See <http://ccresourcecenter.org/> for more information regarding the form these can take.
7. Several early childhood interventions, such as the Perry Preschool program and Nurse-Family Partnership visitation programs, have demonstrated long-term beneficial effects on delinquency and justice system involvement. A related brief covers those early childhood interventions; they are not discussed here.
8. See the National Networks for Safe Communities website, www.nnscommunities.org.
9. See Pew Charitable Trusts and MacArthur Foundation (2017). Researchers developed the ratings through a two-phase process consisting of (1) “an exhaustive review of statutes, administrative codes, executive orders and publicly available documents released between 2010 and 2015”; and (2) “an email survey of more than 200 state officials, including agency directors with control over policy areas examined in the study, budget directors, and directors of commission and entities that influence policy in these areas.”
10. Susan Tompor, “[Detroitters Leave \\$80 Million Unclaimed for Tax Credit](#),” *Detroit Free Press*, January 29, 2017.

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