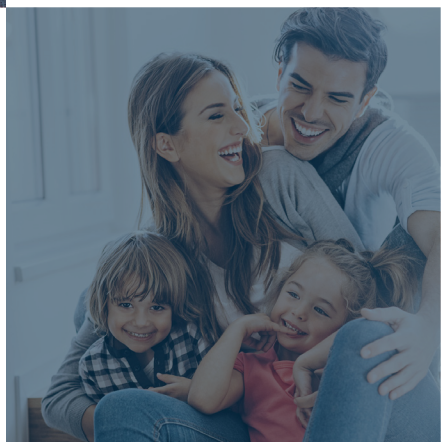
Leading on Opportunity

THE CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG OPPORTUNITY TASK FORCE REPORT



OUR
CHILDREN.
THEIR FUTURE.
OUR COMMITMENT.

HOW TO

USE THIS DOCUMENT

The report is divided into three sections:

- **Executive Summary**
- **Report and Recommendations**
- **Appendix**

The Appendix contains a full list of recommendations and examples of potential partners for implementation.

March 2017

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LETTER FROM THE TASK FORCE

TASK FORCE MEMBERS

SPONSOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

PROJECT SUPPORT

i. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1 CHAPTER I: CONTEXT

- A Wake-Up Call for Charlotte-Mecklenburg
- The Study That Caught Our Attention
- A Note about the American Dream
- The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Opportunity Task Force and Our Work
  - *Approach to Our Discovery Process*
- A Path Forward: Conclusions and Recommendations
  - *The Problem We Need to Solve*
  - *Our Highest Aspiration for Charlotte-Mecklenburg*
  - *Key Determinants: What Matters Most?*
  - *Factors We Chose Not to Include*
  - *Focus on Systems and Structures vs. Programming*

12 CHAPTER II: THE IMPACT OF SEGREGATION / A CROSS-CUTTING FACTOR

- How We Got to Where We Are: Our Segregation Story
- Breaking Down Barriers
- A Special Note on the Reduction of High Poverty Schools

18 CHAPTER III: DETERMINANT ONE / EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

- Quality Early Care and Preschool Education: A Game Changer
- Early Care and Education Professionals: Supporting and Strengthening
- Early Brain Development: Building a Strong Foundation

26 CHAPTER IV: DETERMINANT TWO / COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

- Career-Connected Learning and Readiness: "Next Generation" Pathways

TABLE OF CONTENTS
CONTINUED

26

- Advancing on a Career Pathway: The Importance of Career and College Guidance
- Apprenticeships, Paid Internships and Other Work-Based Learning: Learn and Earn
- Support for First Generation College Students: Staying the Course
- Disconnected Youth (Ages 16-24): Helping Them Reconnect
- Expectations for Post-Secondary Attainment: Building a Mecklenburg Talent Pipeline

38 **CHAPTER V: DETERMINANT THREE / CHILD AND FAMILY STABILITY**

- Family Structure: The Importance of Two-Parent Involvement
  - *Childbearing*
  - *Prenatal and Postnatal Health*
- Financial Security: Getting on a Path to a Living Wage Income
- Access to Affordable Housing: A Must For Families
- Access to Public Transportation: Getting Around When Just Getting By
- Mental Health: Managing the Impacts of Mental and Emotional Stress
- Involvement with the Criminal Justice System: Dealing with the Enduring Consequences
- Accessing Services and Support: Navigating Disjointed Systems

54 **CHAPTER VI: SOCIAL CAPITAL /A CROSS-CUTTING FACTOR**

- Life Navigators

58 **CHAPTER VII: WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE REPORT AND COMMUNITY**

- Guiding Principles
- Building Accountability
- Call to Action: What to do Right Now
- Final Thoughts from the Task Force

SOURCES/REFERENCES

A LETTER FROM THE
CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG
OPPORTUNITY TASK FORCE

DEAR COMMUNITY MEMBERS,

In the last two years, our community has learned–and relearned–a hard truth that has been difficult for some to accept: access to economic opportunity in Charlotte-Mecklenburg is far too often aligned with the zip code where one lives. For every young person with a bright spark of hope and a pathway for his or her future, there is another, not so far away, living day to day without the necessities to light his or her own path.

Our community is not unique. We live in a country that faces the inheritance of inequity daily, but has very little sense of how to address it together. A fear of unfamiliar people and ideas has crept into our politics and policies, leading us to focus ever inward. Our communities are divided by race and income. Our true neighbors are fewer. The circumstances of our daily lives and the way in which our community has physically evolved over time often inhibit us from crossing paths and knowing people whose lives are different from ours. Some of us are fearful of the differences and changes occurring around us; many of us are naturally inclined to stay close to the worlds we know; and others of us are not as aware as we would hope.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg stands at a crossroads. We must decide whether to remain distant from one another, or to join hands to build a better future for our city and county. This choice will determine the potential of generations to come.

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Opportunity Task Force includes twenty people charged with the responsibility of devising a path forward. Task Force members believe we must seize the moment we have inherited. All residents of Charlotte-Mecklenburg, regardless of position or particular interest, must come together with lasting resolve and common purpose to make a pledge to the future of our community. At the heart of this pledge must be a firm commitment to the most vulnerable, and yet the most promising members of our population—our children and youth.

The work begins today to ensure Charlotte-Mecklenburg is a place that honors the spark in young people and ensures they have the tools and opportunities to thrive. Our vision is ambitious but attainable. We need only the courage to confront what may hurt, embrace that which will help, and sustain collective action in the spirit of truth, trust, and compromise.

We ask that you join us on this journey for our future.

Respectfully,

OPHELIA GARMON-BROWN
Opportunity Task Force Co-Chair

DEE O'DELL
Opportunity Task Force Co-Chair

CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG
OPPORTUNITY TASK FORCE

Dr. Ophelia Garmon-Brown (Co-Chair)
SVP, Community Wellness and Education,
Novant Health

Ms. Crandall Bowles
Retired CEO, Springs Global

Dr. David Chadwick
Pastor, Forest Hill Church

Mr. Jeffrey A. Conway
Franchise Owner, Ruth's Chris Steak House

Mr. Esteban Echeverria
Attorney at Law

Dr. Michael Friedland
Founder, Friedland Foundation
Physician, Carolinas HealthCare System

Mr. Dale Gillmore
Founder/Chair – Make An Impact Foundation
Partner – Viking Mergers & Acquisitions

Dr. Tisha Greene
Principal, Oakhurst STEAM Academy

Mr. Alvaro Gurdián Jr.
Vice President of Operations, La Noticia

Ms. Grazell Howard
Strategic Business Consultant, King & Kairos

Mr. Ron Leeper
President & Owner, R.J. Leeper Construction

Ms. Marianne Lyall-Knusel
Associate Dean, College and Career Readiness,
Central Piedmont Community College

Mr. Dee O'Dell (Co-Chair)
Senior Vice President, US Bank

Mr. Matt Martin
Regional Executive, Federal Reserve Bank of
Richmond – Charlotte Branch

Rev. Clifford Matthews
Pastor, St. Luke Missionary Baptist Church

Ms. Felicia McAdoo
Retired, Chief Deputy, Mecklenburg County
Sheriff's Office

Ms. Symone McGee
Manager of High School Initiatives,
YMCA of Greater Charlotte

Mr. Andrew Plepler
Environmental, Social and Governance
Executive, Bank of America

Mr. Barry Sherman
Social Worker, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

Dr. Ricky Woods
Minister, First Baptist Church West

SPONSOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

FOUNDATION FOR THE CAROLINAS

MECKLENBURG COUNTY NORTH CAROLINA MAY 20,1775

CHARLOTTE

KNIGHT FOUNDATION

John M Belk Endowment

Z. Smith Reynolds FOUNDATION

CHARLOTTE WILL

Act Now. Change the Future.

PROJECT STAFF
SUPPORT

PROJECT COORDINATION: FOUNDATION FOR THE CAROLINAS

Brian Collier
Executive Vice President

Carol Morris
Assistant Director, Robinson Center for Civic Leadership

Eli Kahn
Community Programs & Civic Leadership Associate

Alli Celebron-Brown
Vice President and Director, Community Programs

CITY OF CHARLOTTE

Debra Campbell
Assistant City Manager

MECKLENBURG COUNTY

Leslie Johnson
Assistant County Manager

Anthony Trotman
Assistant County Manager

Z. SMITH REYNOLDS FOUNDATION

Tracy Greene-Washington
Program Officer, Community Economic Development

KNIGHT FOUNDATION

Susan Patterson
Program Director –Charlotte (Retired)

Charles Thomas
Program Director –Charlotte

UNC-CHARLOTTE URBAN INSTITUTE

Dr. Owen Furuseth
Associate Provost for Metropolitan Studies (Emeritus)

Laura Simmons
Director of Community Indicators

SOLID

Tracy Russ
Principal

Candice Langston
Principal

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Opportunity Task Force, a group of 20 community members, spent 18 months in 2015 and 2016 focused on the inheritance of intergenerational poverty and its negative impact on the life trajectory of far too many of Charlotte-Mecklenburg's children and youth. Yes, we are a thriving, opportunity-rich community that continues to attract people—nearly 50 a day—but that is only part of our story. In 2013, a Harvard University/UC Berkeley study uncovered the other part of our story - our community ranked 50th out of 50 in economic mobility among the largest U.S. cities—specifically the ability of a child born in the bottom income quintile to rise to the top income quintile as an adult.

The results of this study were tangible with serious consequences. It was time for our community to take bold action to bridge this opportunity gap. Community, government, and philanthropic leaders recognized the need for action, and formed the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Opportunity Task Force, knowing we could no longer remain idle when many of our residents struggle to make it day-to-day, and face tremendous challenges and barriers to opportunity.

Although ranked last in the study, Charlotte-Mecklenburg is not unique in dealing with low mobility for those living at or near the poverty level. Other communities across the country are dealing with the issue as well, particularly in the South.

The Task Force's highest aspiration is that Charlotte-Mecklenburg leaders—governmental, philanthropic, business, faith, nonprofit, neighborhood and grassroots—as well as the community at large, will come together in the months and years ahead to reorganize our systems and structures, change policies and practices and otherwise boldly embrace and rally around a vision of **Charlotte-Mecklenburg as a community that cares about all our children and youth—regardless of income, race or zip code—and where all our children feel they belong, have big dreams, and find the opportunities to achieve those dreams.**

This executive summary provides an overview of the key findings and recommendations detailed in our full report to the community. We acknowledge we don't have all the answers, and others may disagree with our findings. Therefore, we view our report as a living document, one we hope will be refined and added to over time. The Task Force is confident the report will not sit on a shelf. Already, numerous organizations have committed to align their work and interests around different aspects of economic opportunity. Others have indicated they are awaiting our report to identify how to best play a role.

Next critical steps include creation of an implementation structure with a diverse Leading on Opportunity Board/Council to provide overall leadership, working groups to engage diverse community voices and expertise, and dedicated staff to provide day-to-day support for the work going forward. A dashboard of key success metrics will also be developed, enabling us to measure short, medium and long-term progress.

FOCUS OF TASK FORCE STRATEGIES & RECOMMENDATIONS

During our discovery process, the Task Force consulted with over 50 national, regional and local experts who helped us understand the multiple, complex issues that impact generational poverty and access to opportunity. They shared evidence-based research, data, and well-informed perspectives. We also considered the input of thousands of community members with whom we engaged in our listening sessions and countless other interactions.

After much deliberation and fierce debate, we narrowed our focus to three highly interrelated determinants we believe are most likely to have the greatest influence on the opportunity trajectory of an individual:

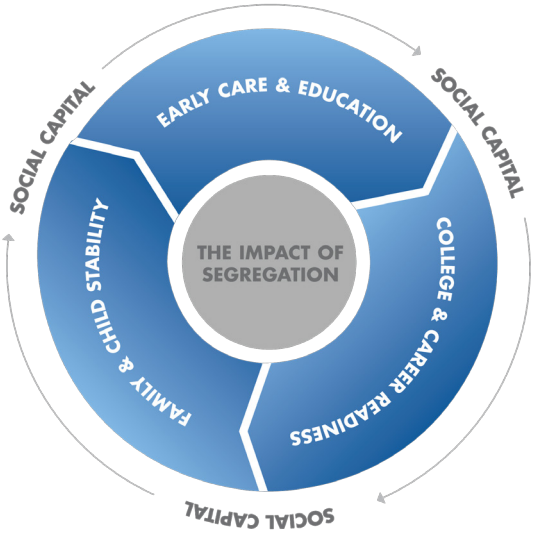
- **Early Care and Education**
- **College and Career Readiness**
- **Child and Family Stability**

We also identified two factors that cut across all three determinants:

1) Impact of Segregation and

2) Social Capital- the relationships and networks people have that can connect them to opportunities.

OPPORTUNITY "SYSTEM" STRATEGY



These are omnipresent factors with profound impact on economic opportunity, social mobility, and general quality of life.

The Task Force believes the community's greatest leverage for tackling intergenerational poverty and breaking down barriers to economic opportunity will come from focusing on systemic and structural change versus relying upon programmatic intervention. Although programs are critically important, they often deal with symptoms of problematic, complex systems and structures over which they have little control. By addressing systems and structures, we attend to underlying policies, practices and mindsets contributing to negative outcomes for children and families. Therefore, the strategies and recommendations in our report focus mainly on systems and structures, while some of the associated tactics we suggest for implementation are programmatic or activity-based. In total, our report includes 21 key strategies, 91 recommendations, and over 100 implementation tactics and policy considerations.

KEY DETERMINANTS AND CROSS-CUTTING FACTORS

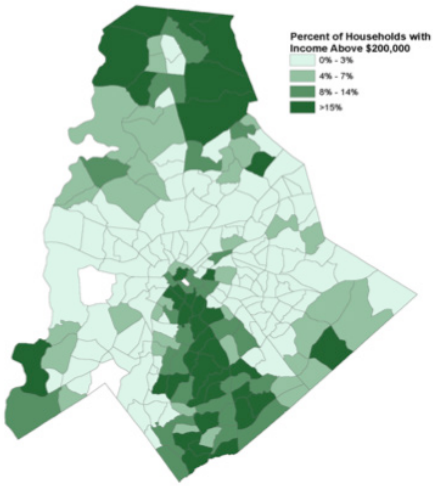
CROSS-CUTTING FACTOR ONE: IMPACTS OF SEGREGATION

Segregation stands apart as a cross-cutting factor because it is foundational to everything else. Not only are we segregated by race and ethnicity, we are also segregated by wealth and poverty. Maps of our county consistently reflect a “crescent” of lower-opportunity neighborhoods dominated by people of color in contrast with a “wedge” of white, wealthier residents in south and north Mecklenburg.

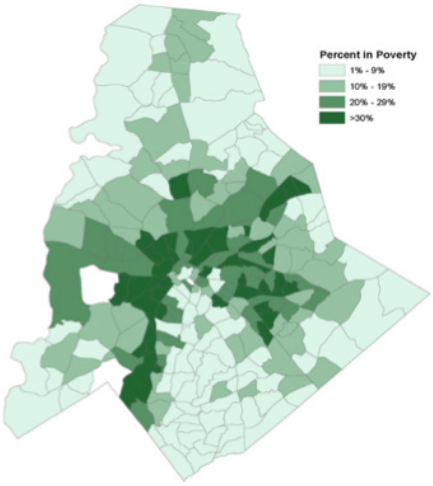
Charlotte-Mecklenburg has a deep history of segregation and discrimination that has manifested in community and neighborhood development over the years, and patterns of isolation that have evolved. Recent research indicates that this racial and economic segregation has deepened the gap in opportunity, despite many advancements in becoming a more inclusive community. Segregation is particularly difficult as it is a barrier that we, as a part of larger American society, have little practice in confronting openly and intentionally.

The longer we permit our current systems, policies and institutions to remain unchanged and implicit bias to play a role, the more lasting these trends will become—only exacerbating the divide in our community. The recent police shooting and subsequent protests focused our collective attention on the stark divide that exists. We may have inherited the obstacles to opportunity put in place over generations, but we have the power and responsibility to ensure this same inheritance is not passed on to our children and youth.

Segregation by Wealth

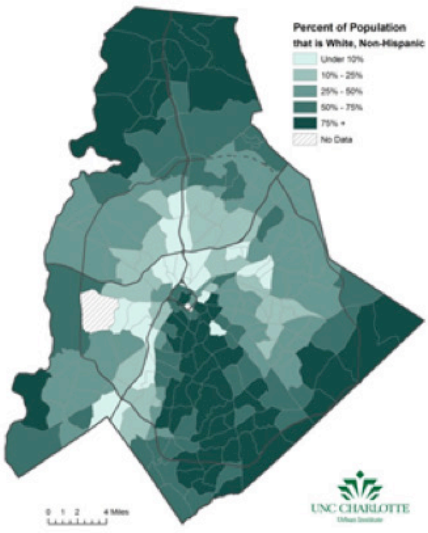


Segregation by Poverty

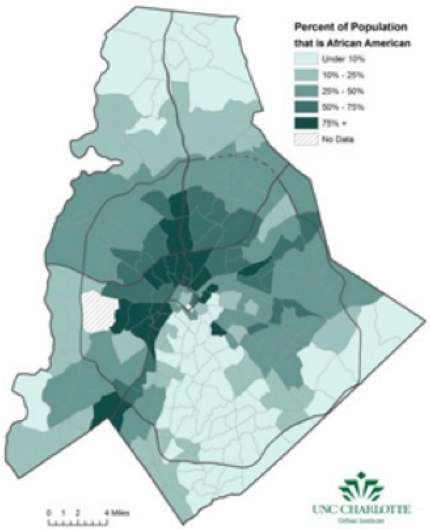


Segregation by Race/Ethnicity

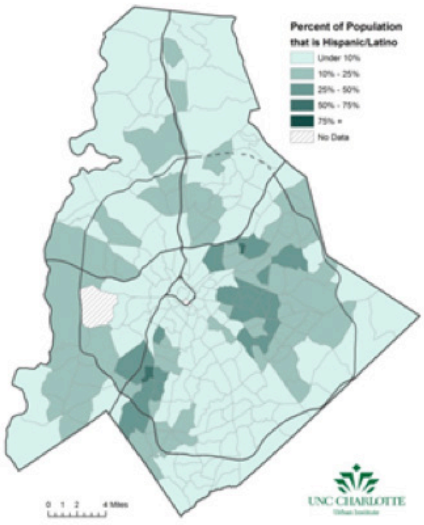
White, Non-Hispanic Population, 2010



African American Population, 2010



Hispanic/Latino Population, 2010



TASK FORCE STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS IMPACT OF SEGREGATION

A

Strategy A:
Acknowledge the significant roles segregation and racialization have played in our current opportunity narrative and commit to becoming a more inclusive, fair, and just community.

B

Strategy B:
Address the complex, multi-faceted issue of school segregation with a systems approach.

DETERMINANT ONE: EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

A child's earliest years have a profound and often lasting impact on his or her school success, career success, and adult life. Early care and education, in particular, pose opportunities for substantial long-term benefits to both children and the general public. High-ranking Federal Reserve official Arthur J. Rolnick and economist Rob Grunewald estimate a 12 percent return on investment, after inflation, for the intrinsic value of early care and education programs. Participating in quality early care and education programs also enables parents to seek, secure, and retain employment, increase household income and positively affect family stability.

Quality early care and education have resounding effects. They lay the groundwork for individuals to complete high school and postsecondary education, while decreasing the likelihood of the need for public assistance and chances of coming into contact with the criminal justice system. Research shows that children enrolled in high quality preschool programs are less likely to repeat grades, less likely to run into trouble with the law, and typically earn around $2,000 more per month as adults than those not enrolled. Additionally, early care and education support Charlotte-Mecklenburg's current commitment to improve literacy through programs such as Read Charlotte. The Task Force was so certain of the positive impacts of early care and education, we committed early on to support the Charlotte Executive Leadership Council's (CELC) funding for a major study for this subject in 2016. The study will provide a comprehensive roadmap for creating wider access to quality early care and education in our community.

TASK FORCE STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

C

Strategy C:
Make the necessary investments to ensure all children in Mecklenburg County from birth to age five have access to quality early childhood care and education.

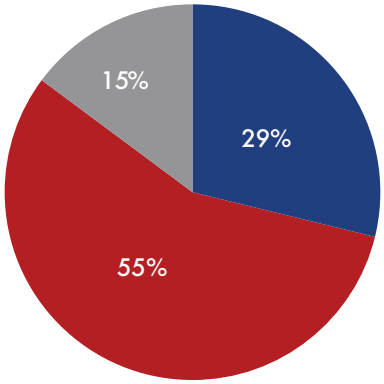
D

Strategy D:
Strengthen the early care and education workforce to improve the quality and experiences of early care and education available to children ages birth to five.

E

Strategy E:
Support parents and other caregivers as a child's first teacher in promoting positive early brain development, social and emotional health, and early literacy beginning at birth.

DETERMINANT TWO: COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS



Jobs by Skill Level, North Carolina, 2015

Demand for Middle-Skill Jobs is Strong

Fifty-five percent of all jobs in 2 015 were middle-skill

High-Skill
Middle-Skill
Low Skill

Source: NSC analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment Statistics by State, May 2015.

It is difficult to pinpoint the precise combination of factors ensuring a young person will advance to a successful career; however, a four-year degree or other postsecondary credential or certification have become essential in equipping students with the skills and education needed to build successful career paths and to support thriving families. Many middle-skill jobs for which only an industry certification is required are well-paying and in high demand. While the Task Force acknowledges the importance of a college education, a four-year degree should not be the only option we promote to our students. **We must change the current mindset around technical education and community colleges for students at all income levels.**

Our community must also place a higher priority on exposing all children to viable career options and different pathways through career exploration, guidance, and opportunities. A clear sequence of academic and technical courses, work-based learning experiences, intentional career and college advising, and opportunities to develop skills and earn credentials that will meet the current and future needs of the region's employers should be provided. Apprenticeships, paid internships, and other work-based learning opportunities help students apply academic learning to real-life work experience. Participating in work-based learning can be a game changer for many students. Special care should be taken to support students through all these processes, particularly students who may not have someone in their lives guiding them along the path. We also must not lose sight of our disconnected youth and young adults—those ages 16 to 24 who are not in school or the workforce. They are at exceptionally high risk of economic and social hardship.

TASK FORCE STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

F

Strategy F: Broaden the range of and access to high quality college and career pathways offered by our K-12 and postsecondary institutions, ensuring all students have access to and support for the full range of opportunities.

G

Strategy G: Equip all students and their parents with the information and guidance they need to understand and navigate multiple college and career pathways, preparation, and processes.

H

Strategy H: Galvanize community support to develop and implement a multi-faceted plan to increase paid work-based learning opportunities for students.

I

Strategy I: Expand and strengthen support for first-generation and other low-socioeconomic students who need help transitioning to and completing postsecondary education.

J

Strategy J: Create more on-ramps to education, training, and employment for our disconnected youth and young adults (ages 16-24).

K

Strategy K: Elevate and actively promote the critical importance of acquiring a postsecondary degree and/or industry certification for our young people to successfully compete in our rapidly changing, technologically advanced labor market.

DETERMINANT THREE: CHILD AND FAMILY STABILITY

Multiple and complex factors can impact family instability and compound stressful living environments for children and youth. The Task Force identified eight interrelated factors we believe have the greatest impact on child and family stability that need to be understood and addressed holistically as part of our community's opportunity agenda.

Family Structure: Research suggests that a child raised by two parents outperforms peers raised in a single-parent environment in many key developmental areas. Current trends, however, suggest a continuing departure from the traditional nuclear family structure. The prevalence of single-parent households can be driven, and at times exacerbated, by numerous circumstances and social phenomena including mass incarceration, reduction in benefits, and changes in cultural norms.

Family Formation: Access to reproductive health information and care play an important role in the stability of a family. Unintended pregnancy has the capacity to take a young woman or man off track from his or her educational and employment plans, prompting researchers to agree that the path to reducing intergenerational poverty includes encouraging all young people, regardless of background, to delay parenthood until ready. In addition, existing gaps in access to prenatal and postpartum care can have significant implications for both pregnant women and their infants. We must ensure that young women and men have the necessary information about and sources for reproductive health care to ensure they can plan pregnancy for when they are ready to raise a child.

Financial Security: Not having sufficient income to afford housing, food, transportation, childcare, and other basic necessities can be incredibly destabilizing, stressful, and demoralizing for both parents and their children. The Task Force proposes advancing toward the aspirational goal of all families earning a living wage by creating and providing greater access to more living-wage jobs, and by helping more low-income parents develop their skills and connect with such opportunities.

Access to Affordable Housing: Housing prices continue to rise while wages remain low, causing families to move often and, at times, to unsafe environments. We currently have a deficit of approximately 34,000 affordable housing units for people earning 60 percent or more below of the Area Median Income (AMI.) We must prioritize affordable housing in the same way we do other key infrastructure areas, promoting home ownership and investments in communities. This dire situation requires new and innovative thinking, community awareness, and dramatically expanded funding. The City of Charlotte recently announced a goal of building or preserving 5,000 affordable units over the next three years. The Task Force applauds these actions, but the reality is we will never make a significant impact in the deficit unless we set bolder goals. We realize no single strategy will solve our affordable housing crisis. Rather, multiple strategies and tactics must be undertaken, and greater collaboration among the public, private and nonprofit sectors will be required.

Public Transportation: Families relying on public transportation to get to work, to take children to child care, to access public services, to find health care, to go grocery shopping and to participate in out-of-school activities face challenges, particularly when a trip involves multiple destinations. Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) has a study underway to improve access and efficiencies within the system, which the Task Force supports.

Mental Health: It is difficult to disentangle poverty and poor mental health. Poor mental health is a significant cause of wider social and health problems. The impacts of mental health are not limited to people who live in poverty. It is an issue experienced by people across the entire economic strata. However, recent research reinforces that living with the chronic stress and anxiety of financial instability can create a particular psychological burden on low-income parents and their children. The concept of "scarcity" can leave low-income children and their families with diminished capacity to perform everyday tasks, such as finding a job or completing schoolwork.

Involvement in the Criminal Justice System: A comprehensive discussion of racial and ethnic disparities cannot omit the legacy of systematic oppression that underlies our current levels of mass incarceration as well as the overrepresentation of African Americans—particularly young males—in our jails and prisons. In recent years, disparities in the criminal justice system have been revealed, from policing and law enforcement, to pretrial release decisions, enforcement of drug laws, ability to pay court fees and fines, sentencing, and even traffic stops. The Task Force did not deeply examine national reform in criminal justice, although we recognize it is much needed to address inequities and disproportionality in arrests and incarcerations. However, as related to economic opportunity, we thought it important to address the impact of the criminal justice system on children, youth, and families in Charlotte-Mecklenburg.

Accessing Community Services and Support: Charlotte-Mecklenburg's public and community assistance programs span a range of support systems including housing, disability, physical health, mental health, child welfare, and workforce services. These systems and the programs within them can have tremendous, positive impacts. The Task Force applauds the tireless efforts of those working within the human service sector. However, our human service systems and programs are often not coordinated, lack common goals for impact, and can be difficult to navigate for those in need of assistance.

TASK FORCE STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS CHILD AND FAMILY STABILITY

L

Strategy L: Encourage the formation and maintenance of committed two-parent families.

M

Strategy M: Ensure young women and men have the necessary information about and resources for reproductive health care so they can plan for pregnancy when they are ready to raise a child.

N

Strategy N: Improve birth outcomes of all children and their mothers.

O

Strategy O: Help more families get on and stay on a path to living-wage income and asset building.

P

Strategy P: Take dramatic steps to address our affordable housing crisis, which will stabilize working families, prevent family homelessness, and minimize the disruption of a large number of children who move from school to school due to housing affordability issues.

Q

Strategy Q: Create a more connected community to ensure all families have ready access to employment, shopping, service areas, schools, parks, and other daily destinations.

R

Strategy R: Develop efforts focused on addressing mental health issues and/or reducing the mental health impacts of living in low-opportunity environments.

S

Strategy S: Invest in strategies that support comprehensive criminal justice reform, and create a community where families are not destabilized due to interactions with the criminal justice system.

T

Strategy T: Re-envision a human services system in which the needs of families are addressed holistically and services and support are coordinated to achieve the best possible outcomes.

CROSS-CUTTING FACTOR #2: SOCIAL CAPITAL

In addition to systemic and policy changes, we need to address the reality that children and youth who grow up in low-opportunity neighborhoods or attend high-poverty schools often find they are playing on an uneven field compared to those who grow up in higher-opportunity areas. Many do not have relationships, role models, and experiences that help them see possibilities for their lives outside their current circumstances. The Task Force believes social capital may, indeed, be the "secret sauce" for creating greater access to opportunity for our children and youth. Cultivating relationships and networks as social capital enables people to connect to information, ideas, resources, support, and opportunities. It also can help people navigate through unexpected crises and offer tangible pathways to achieving dreams. As Brookings scholar Richard Reeves has conveyed, social capital can help shift a young person's vague hopes to active aspirations.

As we explored social capital, the Task Force expanded the traditional definition to an even larger concept: creating

a culture of caring in Mecklenburg County. However, a community's culture cannot be prescribed or commanded by a single group or entity; it must be an authentic representation of who we are. The culture of caring must be demonstrated through our actions, decisions and investments. We believe by more of us sharing our relationships, networks and connections, we tangibly demonstrate we care. In addition, **if every house of faith, elected official, civic group, employer, foundation, institution or organization asked this one simple question before making significant decisions—"How will this decision impact the opportunity trajectory of our children, youth and families?"—the actions taken as a result would tangibly demonstrate the level of our community's commitment and caring for all children, youth, and families.**

TASK FORCE STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS SOCIAL CAPITAL

Leading on Opportunity

U

Strategy U: Ensure all children, youth and families have relationships in the community that connect them to opportunities, information, and resources; broaden their horizons about what's possible in their lives; assist in navigating through unexpected crises to stay on track; offer tangible pathways toward achieving their aspirations; and demonstrate to every child, youth, and family that their contribution is vital to the success of our community.

NEXT STEPS & CALL TO ACTION

The Task Force believes our report can serve as a catalyst for engaging the community in a deeper conversation and continued investigation of the best paths forward to bridge the opportunity gap that exists in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. Establishing the Leading on Opportunity implementation structure described earlier will be one of the first critical steps to take. In our full report, we identify principles to help guide the work moving forward. Diverse voices from across the community must be meaningfully engaged throughout the process, and on the Leading on Opportunity Board/Council.

In the meantime, we call on every resident, business, house of faith, foundation, nonprofit organization, government entity, neighborhood organization, civic group and others to join our Leading on Opportunity campaign, review our report, and provide feedback. It is our hope that with collective focus and accountability, Charlotte-Mecklenburg will transform through the experience of doing this work together, and we will earn a new reputation as a community that is "Leading on Opportunity".

Our Children. Their Future. Our Commitment.

OUR CHILDREN. THEIR FUTURE. OUR COMMITMENT.

CHAPTER I:

A WAKE-UP CALL FOR CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG

Over the last several decades, Charlotte-Mecklenburg has transformed from a small southern town to one of the country's largest and most dynamic communities. We continue to attract people—nearly 50 a day— who move here to take advantage of our strong business climate, favorable weather and geographic location, and our reputation as a great place to live and raise a family. Accolades from the outside regularly tell us how tall we stand among other communities. As recently as February 7, 2017, U.S. News and World Report ranked us as the 14th best place to live in the country.[1]

Yet, in 2013 when the headline broke about the Harvard University/UC Berkeley study that ranked Charlotte-Mecklenburg 50th out of 50 in upward mobility for children born into our lowest income quintile, many in our community responded with disbelief.[2] **How, on the one hand, can we be such a vital and opportunity-rich community, and on the other, be ranked dead last in the odds that our lowest income children and youth will be able to move up the economic ladder as they become adults?**

The reality that Charlotte-Mecklenburg may not always live up to its glowing headlines became wholly apparent in late September 2016 when, for 36 hours, the streets of Charlotte were in upheaval. What began as peaceful protests following the police shooting of Keith Lamont Scott, an African American father, quickly erupted into violence while the nation watched the situation unfolding on live network news. As protesters and police collided, the light-rail system and two interstate highways were shut down. The mayor imposed a citywide curfew, and the governor declared a state of emergency. The National Guard was deployed. Nearly 50 people were arrested, and 26-year old Justin Carr lost his life.

People across Charlotte-Mecklenburg experienced the events of those September nights very differently. For many who view our community as a beacon of prosperity and live in relative comfort and affluence, Charlotte seemed an unfathomable setting for racial protests.

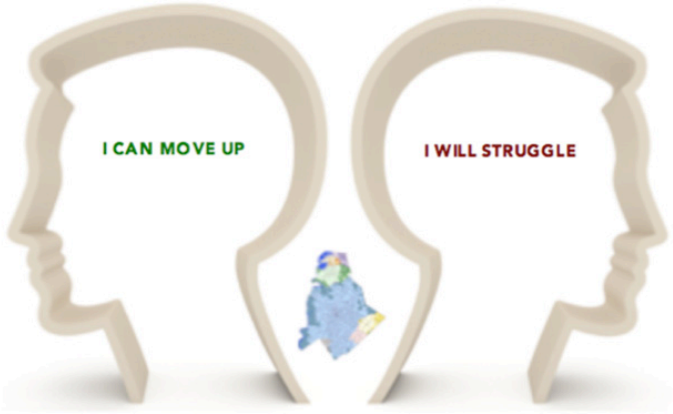
> **HOWEVER, FOR THOSE WHOSE VOICES HAVE BEEN IGNORED OR MISSED IN OUR COLLECTIVE GAZING AT CIVIC PROGRESS, IT WAS NO REVELATION THAT LONG-STANDING FRUSTRATIONS WERE FINALLY BEING AIRED IN THE STREETS.**

The protests ignited by the police shooting of Mr. Scott and the string of similar incidents elsewhere have focused our collective attention on the stark racial, ethnic and economic divides that exist in our community but are rarely openly discussed.

The reality is we are a community clearly segregated by race and income. Long before the Chetty study brought this to our attention, long before the protests, a segment of our community already knew the truth:

CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG'S STORY IS A TALE OF TWO CITIES.

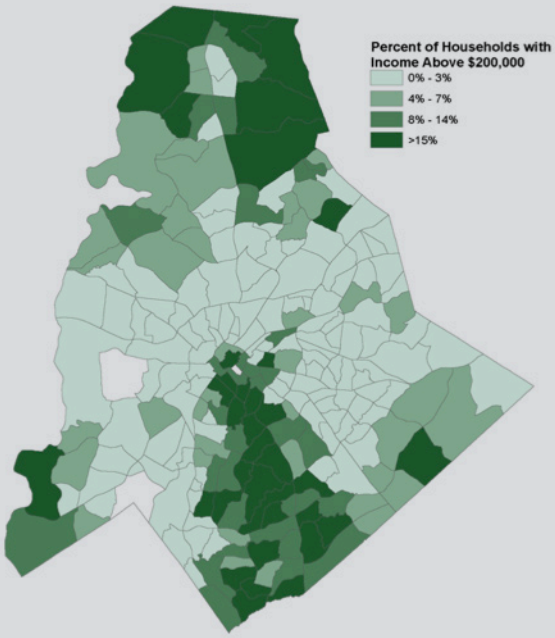
Many parts of Mecklenburg County exist as bastions of opportunity where access to solid employment, high-performing schools, medical facilities, healthy food and safe neighborhoods abound. These environments translate into high numbers of students taking rigorous college-preparatory courses, attending summer camp, participating in student-exchange programs, and ultimately graduating from college and entering the workforce.



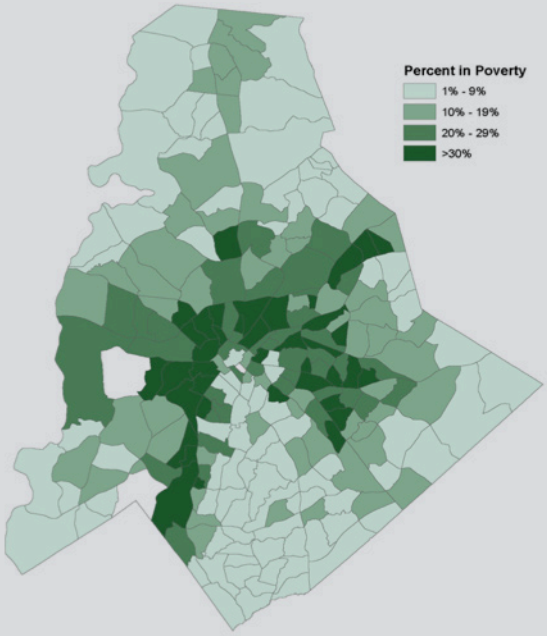
In other parts of our community, a less sure path exists for young people and families. Businesses and services are scarce, jobs are few, and wages are low. Educators are challenged to lift proficiency scores in high poverty schools. Students are at higher risk of dropping out, and those who do graduate, are often less prepared for higher education, entry into the workforce or service to our country in the armed forces.

Segregation by poverty, wealth, and race/ethnicity are most apparent in Charlotte-Mecklenburg when we look at maps of the county that reveal an undeniable “crescent” of lower-opportunity neighborhoods wrapping around more prosperous areas of our community. People of color are in the majority within this geography.

Many of our residents contend that Charlotte-Mecklenburg, with its developing skyscrapers, hot job market, and burgeoning cultural scene is not accessible to everyone, particularly for the people who live in low-opportunity areas. The Task Force’s work comes at a time in our community and country’s evolution when overall anxiety about the future is pervasive. We see this, not only among those with the least, but across all economic segments.



Segregation by Wealth

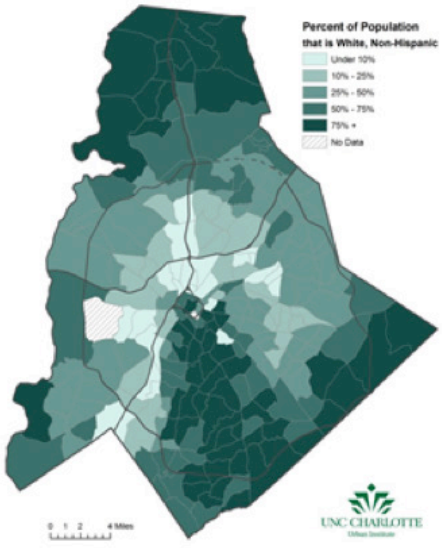


Segregation by Poverty

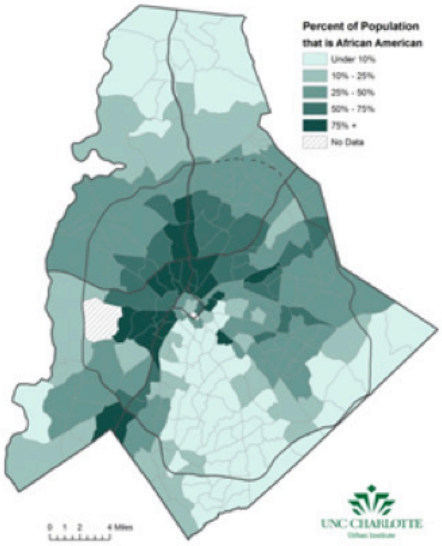
WE ARE ALL LIVING IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD, TRYING TO HOLD ONTO OUR SENSE OF PLACE AND BELONGING. COLLECTIVELY, WE CAN HOLD ON—TOGETHER—WITH COMPASSION, CARING AND RESPECT FOR OUR DIFFERENCES AND OUR SHARED HUMANITY.

Segregation by Race/Ethnicity

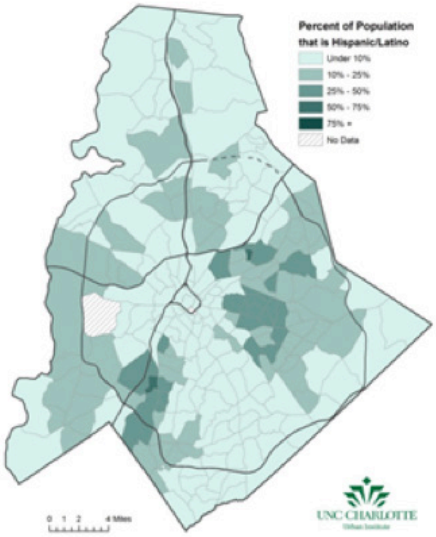
White, Non-Hispanic Population, 2010



African American Population, 2010

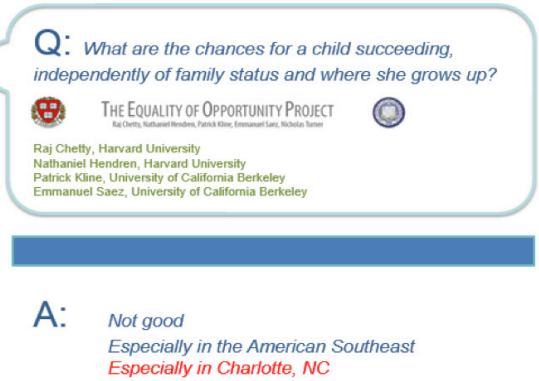


Hispanic/Latino Population, 2010



THE STUDY THAT CAUGHT OUR ATTENTION

Evan McGlinn for The New York Times

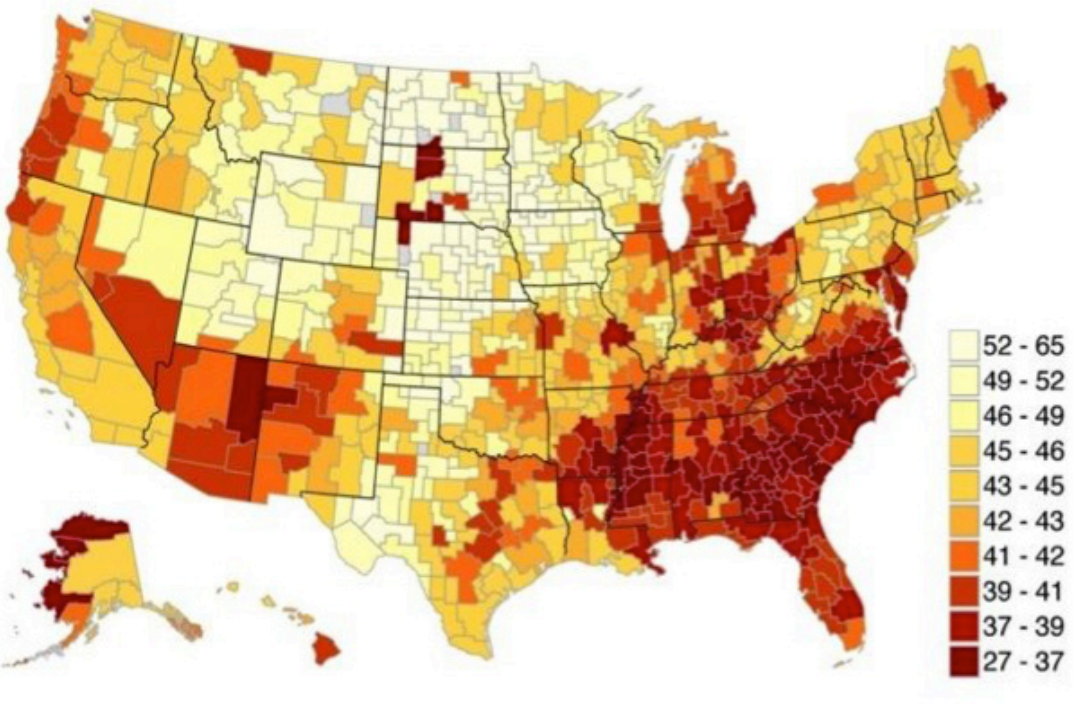


The Equality of Opportunity study ("the Chetty Study"), undertaken by Harvard University and University of California, Berkeley, was led by Raj Chetty and colleagues.
This groundbreaking report found that where a child is born has a dramatic effect on his or her chances of economic mobility. It focused on children in low-income families and measured economic mobility in two basic ways: how far these children moved up (or down) the income ladder as adults in comparison to their parents, on average, and the likelihood that these children would rise from the bottom fifth of the economic ladder to the top fifth by early adulthood. Chetty analyzed data from millions of de-identified tax records from parents of children born between 1980 through 1982 and then measured the income of those same children thirty years later. The study found that for children growing up in places like San Jose, the odds of moving from the bottom fifth of the national income distribution to the top fifth are 12.9 percent. Those are higher odds than the average in any other developed country in the world.

In contrast, in cities like Charlotte, Atlanta and Indianapolis, a child's odds of moving from the bottom fifth to the top fifth are less than 5 percent—less than the average any developed country for which the data was available. At 4.4 percent, Charlotte was at the very bottom of the 50 cities ranked in the study.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF INTERGENERATIONAL MOBILITY IN THE UNITED STATES

Average Child Percentile Rank for Parents at 25th Percentile



TOP 5 CITIES

San Jose (12.9%)
San Francisco
Washington DC
Seattle
Salt Lake City

BOTTOM 5 CITIES

Indianapolis
Dayton
Atlanta
Milwaukee
Charlotte (4.4%)

Darker areas have the least mobility. Source: Equality of Opportunity Project; research by Harvard University/UC Berkeley

Chetty and his colleagues identified five correlating factors that are the strongest predictors of upward mobility. They include segregation, income inequality, school quality, social capital (networks and relationships that provide access to people, information and opportunities), and family structure. Of these, family structure was found to be the most predictive of economic mobility. Children who grow up in communities with high percentages of single mothers are significantly less likely to experience upward mobility. The researchers caution that these five factors have not been proven to be causes of economic mobility, but rather are correlates that may be interdependent.

CHETTY STUDY FACTORS MOST PREDICTIVE OF UPWARD MOBILITY

In 2015, Chetty and some of the same researchers expanded on the earlier study by analyzing the same data differently. They found that incomes rise when children of poverty move to higher-opportunity communities—communities that are less segregated, have fewer incidents of crime, more two-parent families, higher performing schools, and so on. The earlier they move, the better the outcome. Every additional year of exposure to a higher-opportunity neighborhood adds to the odds that a child will succeed later in life. Children who moved to higher-opportunity neighborhoods were less likely to become teenage parents and were more likely to go to college and earn more as adults.

For Charlotte-Mecklenburg, the 2015 study reinforced what we already knew from the earlier study: the odds of low-income children and youth escaping poverty in Mecklenburg County are very low. Of the 100 largest counties in the U.S. identified in the study, Mecklenburg ranked 99th in upward mobility. Only Baltimore City was worse.[3]

> **THE CHETTY STUDY CAUGHT THE ATTENTION OF LOCAL LEADERS AND HAS SERVED AS A CATALYST FOR US TO TAKE A DEEP DIVE INTO THE DUAL REALITIES THAT EXIST FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES. WERE IT NOT FOR THIS RESEARCH AND THE STARK LOCAL HEADLINE IT TRIGGERED, WE LIKELY WOULD NOT HAVE FORMED A TASK FORCE.**

A NOTE ABOUT THE AMERICAN DREAM

Rather than seeing inequality of opportunity as the product of systemic inequities, some people scrutinize and cast blame upon the communities most impacted by societal failures and the people who most need help. An all-too-common reaction to the Equality of Opportunity study is that people living in poverty should simply "pull themselves up by their bootstraps" or "just make better decisions." This misconception has become deeply rooted in the American narrative and has resulted in a conflation of the exceptional case with the rule. The idea that our nation was built solely by the innovative, courageous and pioneering spirit of our forefathers is not supported by history and causes us to lose sight of many of the key elements of our country's current struggles with race, equity and inclusion.

> **THE ETHOS OF BOOTSTRAPPING, OR SCALING THE SOCIOECONOMIC LADDER THROUGH INDIVIDUAL EFFORT, HARD WORK, AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY IS, BY AND LARGE, AN IDEALIZED NARRATIVE.**

We all know "rags to riches stories" and the Task Force has heard quite a few during community meetings. While these stories are real, a cultural myth surrounds them. When more deeply examined, it was rarely bootstraps, but rather a fortunate, and at times miraculous, interplay of networks, timing and socio-economic structures that came together, and combined with hard work and education, to produce exceptional outcomes. The diversity of these experiences establishes them as uniquely varied, without a hard and fast formula for success.

When we perpetuate the bootstrap myth, laziness and lack of initiative are often seen as the reasons people remain in poverty. The assumption that people in low-income situations are lazy stems directly from the idea that poverty and financial vulnerability are problems we make for ourselves or hurdles we can overcome through hard work alone. The notion that anyone could be born poor and die rich, or immigrate to the U.S. and become a leader in their industry, remains widespread. It is not impossible; people do it. However, in our contemporary economic structure, it requires a great deal more than strong will and a work ethic.

Personal responsibility is important; we cannot simply blame the system and use that as an excuse to do nothing. However, we also cannot afford to blame people and do nothing to address a deck stacked against children inheriting systems we know are biased and otherwise flawed. As the Chetty data shows, the American Dream is, for most, out of reach and highly correlated to where one is born and the environment in which one is raised. To improve the odds for our children and youth to achieve economic opportunity, this narrative and our expectations need to change.

THE CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG OPPORTUNITY TASK FORCE AND OUR WORK

Starting in late 2013, several nonprofit organizations began using the Chetty research as a clarion call for action and a catalyst for reviewing the effectiveness of past strategies. For some, it was an opportunity to look in the mirror and reflect upon their investments and programs in light of unsettling findings. In late 2014, then Mecklenburg County Commission Chair Trevor Fuller, called for the creation of a task force on poverty. After discussions with then Mayor Dan Clodfelter and a number of foundations, Commissioner Fuller agreed to focus on increasing economic opportunities and helped formed the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Opportunity Task Force.

The 20-member Task Force assembled for the first time in May 2015 with a mission to address the community's social and economic divide and the opportunity and mobility challenges that so many children, youth and families are experiencing. **Our task was to investigate why the odds of moving out of poverty are so low for children born in our county and, based on our findings, recommend a plan of action to change this long-standing situation.**

Before we began our work, Brookings Institution scholar Richard Reeves, with whom we consulted during our process, warned that, "Task forces typically do few tasks and have little force." We recognize that creating a task force when a sticky issue arises is the "Charlotte way." We wanted to do things differently. Our Task Force was not a group of "the usual suspects," the people who are always asked to sit at the table. Many of us had never been involved in community change work. Some of us came to the issue of economic mobility and opportunity somewhat uninformed. For others, our first-hand knowledge of inequality and lack of opportunity is deeply personal. We represent a wide range of backgrounds and perspectives.

The Task Force was keenly committed to listening and learning. During our discovery phase, we met every three weeks for three hours, with several longer sessions covering many topics. We learned from over 50 national, regional and local experts across many disciplines, and from a diverse range of people in our community, including parents, teachers, teens, service providers, employers, and faith leaders.

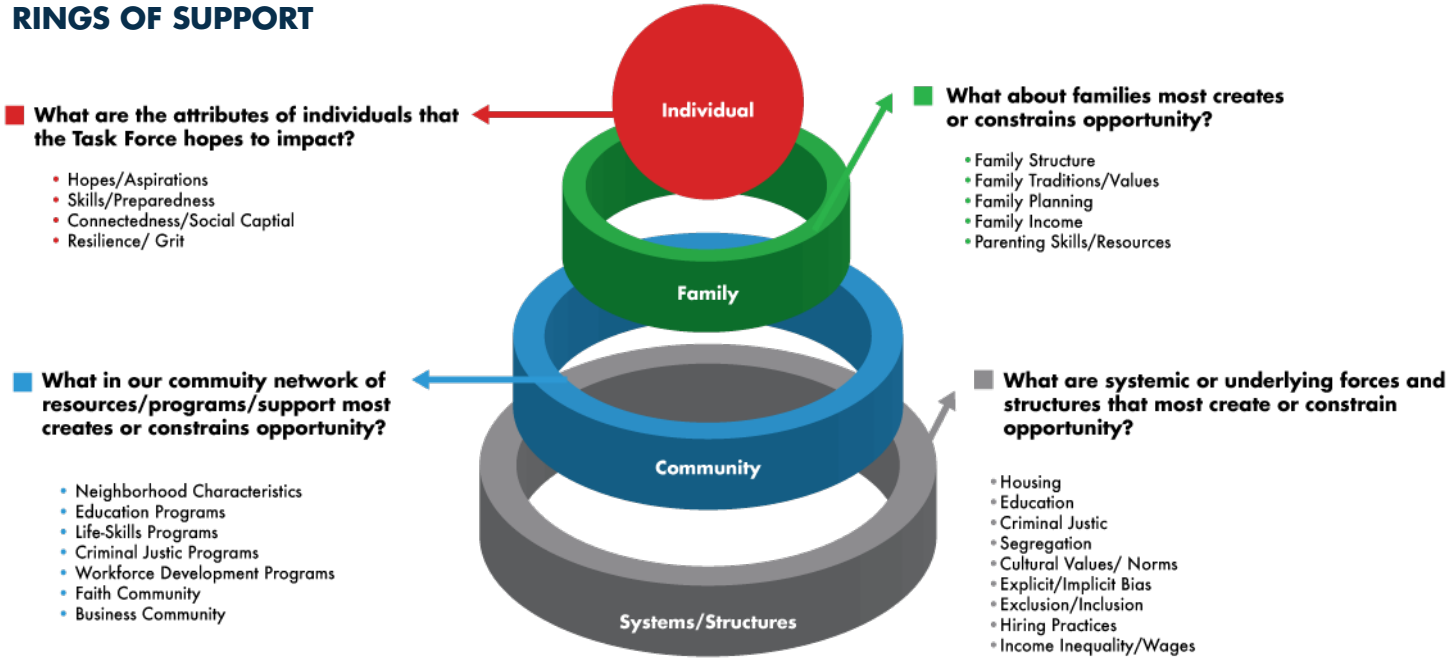
Among those who came to Charlotte to share their perspectives were Richard Reeves, Ron Haskins and Bruce Katz from the Brookings Institution, Robert Putnam from Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government, Erin Currier from The Pew Charitable Trusts, Scott Winship from the Manhattan Institute, Mark Edwards from Upstream USA, Joe Jones from the Center for Urban Families, Gerard Robinson from American Enterprise Institute, and dr. john a. powell from University of California, Berkeley's Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society.

Task Force Co-Chairs Dr. Ophelia Garmon-Brown and Dee O'Dell moderated a conversation with dr. john a. powell, who spoke to a crowd of around 600 people in October 2016. dr.powell is the author of *Race to Justice* and Director of the Hass Institute.

Together, we participated in the Crisis Assistance Ministry's Poverty Simulation[4], and most of us participated in the two-day workshop on Dismantling Racism by Race Matters for Juvenile Justice[5]. Both expanded our thinking about the day-to-day lives many people experience in our community and the deep impact structural racism has on opportunity.

Through our discovery process, we learned much about ourselves and our community. Each one of us has been deeply affected by our experience together, and without a doubt, our genuine interest in and commitment to seeing change in our community has deepened.

RINGS OF SUPPORT

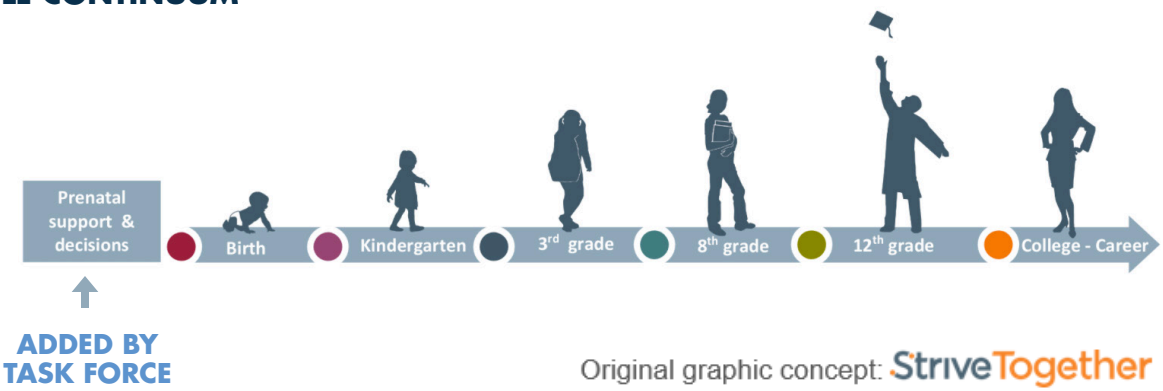


ABOUT OUR DISCOVERY PROCESS

Two approaches helped us organize our exploration of issues related to opportunity and mobility, as well as factors that contribute to them. First, we considered a layered approach that illustrates "rings of support" that surround children and youth as they grow and mature. These rings of support include family, community, and systems/structures. We used this layered approach to help develop the agendas for our meetings and to identify experts from whom we wanted to learn.

The second organizing approach was the life cycle continuum, which spans from an individual's circumstances at birth through adulthood. Discussion around the life cycle continuum enabled us to look sequentially at the key factors influencing each stage of life, as well as the inflection points between each stage. Specifically, the transitions from early childhood to kindergarten, from middle school to high school and from adolescence to early adulthood are critical milestones in human development. The life cycle approach establishes benchmarks—or measures of success or failure—along the road to greater mobility from birth to adulthood. We borrowed the following Life Cycle Continuum from Strive Together and added prenatal support and decisions at the beginning of the continuum.

LIFE CYCLE CONTINUUM



Ultimately, the goal of our work was to create a strategic framework we believe will make a significant, enduring impact, along with recommendations to improve mobility and opportunities. Although we met for over 18 months, it was clearly not enough time to review every issue. As a result, this report should be considered a living document—one that we expect the community, leaders, and experts to add to, refine, and build upon over the next ten, twenty or even thirty years.

PATH FORWARD: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

THE PROBLEM WE NEED TO SOLVE

One of our first big decisions was to agree on the underlying problem we were trying to solve. Some Task Force members came to the table convinced they knew what the problem was and had the answer to fix it. However, it soon became obvious to all of us **we were wrestling with a very complex set of interrelated, systemic, structural and cultural issues that cannot be easily solved.** We concluded our task was not to tackle the far-reaching scope of poverty and its impact on everyone living in our community, ***but rather, the inheritance of intergenerational poverty and its impact on the life trajectory of far too many of our children and youth.***

With inheritance of intergenerational poverty as our primary focus—that is, addressing opportunity for our lowest-income children and their families—we could not sidestep the conversation about race. Specifically, the role race plays in shaping the divergent narratives about children who grow up in different zip codes. We know many will read this report and conclude we are addressing only low-income, minority children.

In reality, we learned about the stress of raising a family across all races and income levels. Many of the Task Force members are middle-income and above and can attest to the difficulty of ensuring that their children have access to a good education and career pathways. In the book, *The Nordic Theory of Everything*, Ana Partanen, a recent immigrant from Finland noted:

> **"THE U.S. IS REMARKABLE AMONG THE ADVANCED NATIONS FOR THE WAY IT FORCES ITS PEOPLE INTO LIVES SO STRESSFUL THEY MAY HAVE TO TURN AGAINST THEIR OWN VALUES."**

Our hope and expectation is that the recommendations contained in this report will benefit all our children and youth, along with their parents and caregivers. We were particularly drawn to Professor john a. powell's concept of Targeted Universalism: "Identifying a problem, particularly one suffered by marginalized people, proposing a solution, and then broadening its scope to cover as many people as possible."

Targeted Universalism
A targeted universal strategy is one that is inclusive of the needs of both the dominant and the marginal groups, but pays particular attention to the situation of the marginal group.

As an example, Read Charlotte is working with a large number of community organizations to help increase 3rd grade literacy proficiency rates, currently at 39 percent across the district. But, within the proficient group of readers, wide variation by race and gender exists. White girls are at 72 percent proficiency while African American and Latino boys are at 22 and 18 percent proficiency, respectively[6]. Even in the highest performing group, too many young girls are in danger of being off-track academically.

> **WE SHOULD ESTABLISH A UNIVERSAL VISION OR GOAL THAT ALLOWS ALL GROUPS TO ADVANCE.**

OUR HIGHEST ASPIRATION FOR CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG

Applying targeted universalism, the Task Force agreed upon a universal vision for Charlotte-Mecklenburg: **Charlotte-Mecklenburg is a community that cares about all our children and youth —regardless of income, race or zip code— and is a community where all our children feel they belong, have big dreams, and find the opportunities to achieve those dreams.**

Our highest aspiration is that our leaders—governmental, philanthropic, business, faith, nonprofit, neighborhood, and grassroots—as well as the community at large, will willingly come together to reorganize our systems and structures, to change policies and practices, and to boldly embrace and rally around this vision.

To realize this vision, our community can and must work together. As Robert Putnam, author of *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*, said when he spoke in Charlotte in 2015, "These are all of our children." Putnam's directive cuts both ways: The Task Force is by no means suggesting that children born into upper- and middle-class families need to regress in order to improve the educational outcomes and life experiences of low-income children and youth. More affluent children and youth, too, need to thrive and move ahead. It is not a zero-sum game.

INSTEAD, WE NEED TO CREATE A CULTURE OF CARING THAT EXPANDS OPPORTUNITIES ACROSS OUR ENTIRE COMMUNITY SO ALL YOUNG PEOPLE GAIN ACCESS TO THE EXPERIENCES, EDUCATION, RESOURCES AND SUPPORT NECESSARY TO SUCCEED AS ADULTS.

Not only is it a moral imperative, it is an economic necessity when considering implications such as: increased costs related to health care, criminal justice and social services; employers being deprived of potential employees and customers; and the political instability likely to worsen if the gap between the haves and have-nots continues to grow.

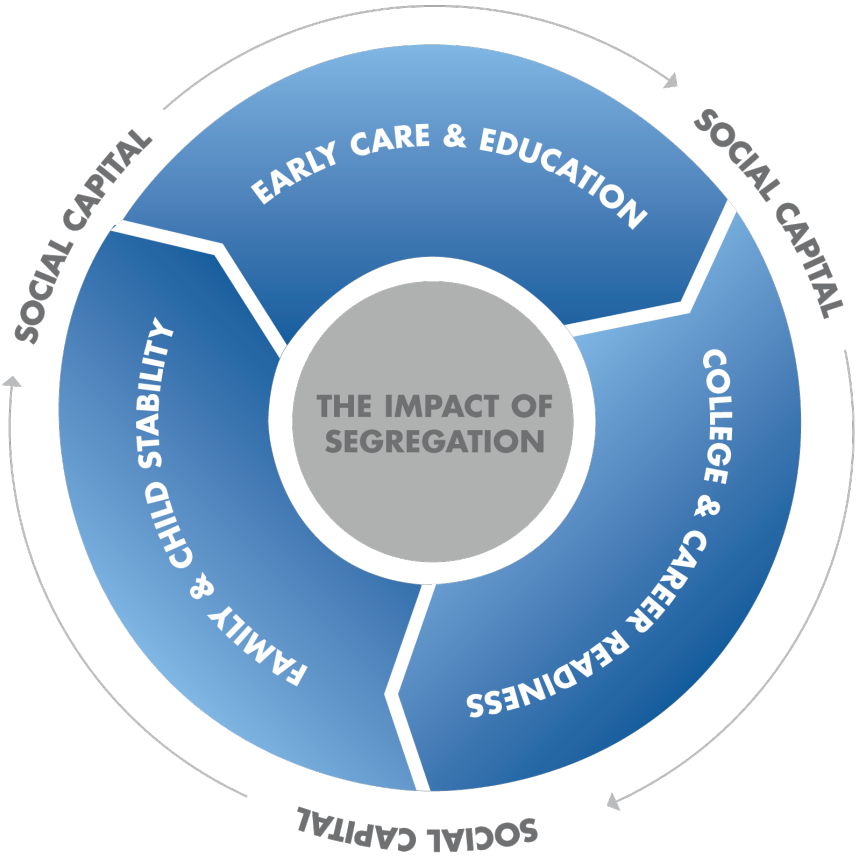
KEY DETERMINANTS: WHAT MATTERS MOST?

After considering all we learned from experts and research during our discovery phase, we framed our work moving forward around key "determinants"—the factors most likely to influence the opportunity trajectory of an individual. Hundreds, if not thousands, of potential determinants could influence a life. Our selection process led to fierce debates about what to include, what areas we have control over at the local and/or state level, and whether something is a determinant or an outcome. We had no argument about the importance of each issue; the debate was about prioritization.

At one point in our process, we had identified six key determinants, but in the end, we narrowed the number to three: 1) Early Care and Education 2) College and Career Readiness and 3) Family and Child Stability.

These determinants are inextricably linked: each connects to and reinforces the others. Therefore, they must be holistically addressed. In addition, we identified two factors we believe cut-across all three determinants: 1) the impacts of segregation and structural racism and 2) social capital. Both of these are powerful forces acting on access to opportunity. Impacts of segregation and structural racism suppress opportunity, while social capital—our relationships and networks— can dramatically increase opportunities.

OPPORTUNITY "SYSTEM" STRATEGY



FACTORS WE CHOSE NOT TO INCLUDE

Discussion of the three determinants we identified and two cross-cutting factors will be addressed in the following chapters. However, we are compelled to explain why we chose not to name three particular factors that routinely were brought up in our meetings as key determinants or recommendations. It is not that they are unimportant or we don't support them. Rather, we chose not to include them as determinants because: a) the research did not support them as mobility game changers; b) the research is split on their impact; or c) in the case of public school reform, we believe if we can make progress on the three determinants, dramatic improvements on school outcomes will result. The three factors and why we chose not to include them are as follows:

1. K-12 Education Reform

A number of reform efforts are underway (e.g. Project L.I.F.T., Beacon, etc.) that are still in the evaluation phase and are informing the future strategies for public schools. During our research, most experts and community leaders noted the lack of efforts aimed at early childhood and the "environmental" factors impacting student success. Many of our recommendations target positive student outcomes. We also believe investments in our public education system are critical, and we support growth in funding of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Foundation.

2. Increasing the Minimum Wage

In large part, research is split on the short-run impact of a minimum wage increase for workers' employment levels and overall pay. Additionally, minimum wage increases do not necessarily benefit the population of interest in this report and can mask key underlying workforce skill needs. Elsewhere in this report we have provided recommendations on wealth accumulation, job progression assistance (workforce skills), and the earned income tax credit (EITC.) We believe these may be more impactful paths to increase a family's income.

3. Access to and Quality of Healthcare

Data is scarce to support healthcare as a standalone determinant of mobility versus an outcome of other social factors. Notwithstanding, we have included healthcare in our discussion of healthy pregnancy outcomes and mental health. Finally, we are also encouraged by the recent announcements from Carolinas HealthCare System and Novant Health regarding their intentions to collaborate on initiatives aimed at improving health outcomes in low-income and underserved communities. In addition to providing traditional healthcare, we are hopeful these entities will embrace and implement our report recommendations.

FOCUS ON SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES VS. PROGRAMS

The Task Force believes focusing on systems and structures versus programmatic intervention will more effectively tackle intergenerational poverty and break down barriers to economic opportunity. Programs are critically important; however, they generally deal with the symptoms of problematic, complex systems and structures. By addressing systems and structures, we focus our attention on underlying policies, practices, and mindsets that produce negative outcomes we see with our children and families. Therefore, the strategies and recommendations we propose for each of the determinants and cross-cutting factors are, for the most part, focused on systemic or structural change and improvement, while some of the associated tactics we suggest for implementation are programmatic or activity-based.

CHAPTER II: THE IMPACT OF SEGREGATION

A CROSS-CUTTING FACTOR

We begin with this cross-cutting factor because it is foundational to everything else. Data clearly emphasizes Charlotte-Mecklenburg's profound segregation by both race and income, and how significant a barrier it is to opportunity. It is also a barrier we—as a community and part of larger American society—have little practice in confronting openly.

> **WE WILL HAVE TO ASK OURSELVES, DELIBERATELY AND REGULARLY, IF WE ARE DISMANTLING THE EFFECTS OF SEGREGATION AND RACIALIZATION, AND IF THE FOUNDATION WE ARE LAYING FOR THE FUTURE IS FREE OF THEM AS WELL.**

We may have inherited obstacles to opportunities put in place over generations, but we have the power and responsibility to ensure this same inheritance is not left for our children and youth.

The most visible impacts of segregation by race and income are:

• Spatial mismatch between jobs in high-opportunity vs. low-opportunity geographic areas. This includes the critical absence of public transportation necessary for people to access jobs and services.

• Lack of affordable housing for workers in opportunity-rich areas of the community.

• Concentrations of low-income students of color in low-opportunity communities and concentrations of higher wealth white students in high-opportunity neighborhoods.

• Disproportionate number of residents in opportunity-poor neighborhoods who lack devices, digital literacy skills, and access to broadband Internet.

HOW WE GOT TO WHERE WE ARE: OUR SEGREGATION STORY

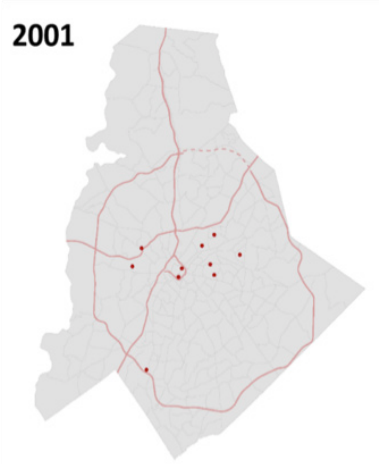
Charlotte followed a similar pattern of segregation that many Southern cities experienced following the Reconstruction Era. As early as 1910, discrete black and white areas were created across the four wards that formed the city. Ultimately, it was the federal government's New Deal programs that gave impetus and financial resources to support racial discrimination of Charlotte-Mecklenburg's African American community. Starting in the 1930s, segregation by race was sanctioned in the New Deal's backing of low-cost mortgages and refinance loans to promote and preserve white homeownership. For white families, who thrived from decades of accrued wealth benefits, these programs spurred one of the largest accumulations of wealth in our country's history. But the same cannot be said for families of color. Federal "red lining" prohibited them from getting loans to buy a home. All neighborhoods where the majority of residents were people of color received the bottom rating for investment. Even middle-class African American neighborhoods were ranked at the bottom. This set the stage for policies and outlooks that not only deepened economic divides in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area, but engendered deep divisions based upon race as well.

Map Source: : http://www.livinguptowncharlotte.com/

In the 1950s and 1960s, federal funding came to Charlotte-Mecklenburg for the purpose of demolishing neighborhoods in the name of "urban renewal." The Second Ward's Brooklyn neighborhood, consisting of 1,400 homes and over 215 owned businesses, was razed and no replacement housing provided. The entire community was disrupted. Subsequently, urban renewal targeted Greenville, northwest of Uptown Charlotte, and a large portion of First Ward, both African-American neighborhoods as well.

Displaced individuals from Brooklyn and other levelled areas were pushed to the northwest and central parts of the city into working class neighborhoods such as Belmont, Wesley Heights and Biddleville. White flight ensued. The construction of the two interstates and I-277 in the 1960s and 70s weakened the already fragile black neighborhoods. Zoning decisions exacerbated the fragility by placing heavy industrial development in areas adjacent to black neighborhoods.[7]

High poverty (80% FRL), high minority (80% non-white) schools



Similarly, deep racial and economic separations have persisted in our education system. Despite the progressive push to desegregate schools in the early 1970s, the 1999 release of schools from their integration mandate led to the current state of public school re-segregation, mirroring our housing patterns. In 1999, when Mecklenburg County's population was around 682,000, approximately 100,000 students were enrolled in Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools. At that time, 60 percent of students were white and 40 percent were students of color. **Since then, high-poverty and highly segregated schools have become a reality.** From 2001, when the then new student assignment plan took effect, to 2013, schools with student populations of over 80 percent minority and eligible for free or reduced lunch climbed from ten to 50.[8]

Now, with a county population of a little over a million people, approximately 147,000 students are enrolled at CMS, with about 39 percent black, 29 percent white, 23 percent Latino and 6 percent Asian.[9] A **third of the 168 schools in the system are segregated by poverty, half are segregated by race and a fifth are hyper-segregated, meaning that 90 percent of their students are from a particular race.**[10] Over half of all African American students attend schools that are 90 percent non-white. The majority of white students attend majority-white schools in our high-growth southern and northern suburbs where most of our new schools have been built in recent years, as well as in more affluent close-in neighborhoods such as Myers Park and Eastover.

In CMS schools with the greatest percentage of white students, 82% of third graders read at or above grade level. Proficiency drops to 59% at the balanced campuses, and to just under 29% at the ones with the high concentration of black students.

THE CUMULATIVE EFFECTS OF SYSTEMIC RACIAL AND ECONOMIC DISCRIMINATION, AS WELL AS THE RE-SEGREGATION OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS, HAVE LARGELY MAINTAINED AND, IN SOME CASES, EXACERBATED A SHARPLY SEGREGATED HOUSING MARKET.

This market has resulted in a separate and unequal neighborhood geography. The pattern is unambiguous—a wedge of predominantly white, wealthy neighborhoods to the south and southeast of Charlotte that is similarly represented in our northern towns. In contrast, the crescent of lower-opportunity neighborhoods of color discussed earlier wraps around our center city. As demand for housing closer into the urban core grows and gentrification continues to drive up housing prices, many lower-income people of color in the crescent are being pushed out to older suburban neighborhoods where they can find affordable housing.

The deep disparities we describe represent sharp differences between opportunity-rich and opportunity-poor neighborhoods. Our measure of opportunity is understood as neighborhood assets and conditions shaping a person's potential for economic and social mobility. For example, we have a digital divide in which many children and youth living in low-opportunity areas do not have access to computers or the Internet in their homes. This places them at a disadvantage for doing homework and virtual learning. These geographic inequities are, to a great extent, the direct outcome of structures that have existed for generations. Damaging policy failures, such as those in housing, education, transit and lending practices, as well as in the fields of criminal justice and immigration, have stimulated deep social segregation by both race and class and the resulting barriers they have created.

Our community is stellar at supporting charitable causes, but at the end of the day, people tend to retreat to their respective corners of work and home. This continues to perpetuate the segregated nature of our city and strips away the possibility of extending social capital to underserved communities as a means of improving upward mobility.

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

The Task Force believes breaking down barriers to equality and forging new bonds that will enhance and strengthen our community are within our collective capacity. Our world is more interconnected than ever; we must recognize our own successes are uniquely tied to the success of others in our community. **By building communities where people of all socioeconomic backgrounds have access to quality housing, high-level education, jobs and transportation, we ensure all of us thrive together.**

Some of us make decisions out of worry that the success of others comes at our expense. This perceived zero-sum game has been most evident in recent debates surrounding CMS student reassignment. While many fear school integration will threaten achievement for students in affluent neighborhoods, research demonstrates that all students, regardless of their background, receive profound benefits from an education in an integrated environment. Similarly, diversity in our neighborhoods and communities ensures all of our citizens receive the benefits and resources that are currently only afforded to a few. By lifting all those in Charlotte-Mecklenburg to a higher level, we may find that we inadvertently elevate ourselves as well.

TASK FORCE STRATEGY A:

A Acknowledge the significant role segregation and racialization have played in our current opportunity narrative and commit to becoming a more inclusive, fair, and just community.

Key Recommendations:

1. Provide more opportunities to include all voices, especially those who have been marginalized or excluded, in genuine community engagement and change efforts.

2. While we recognize that "inclusionary zoning" may be the goal that many seek (and may ultimately provide the long-term solution in Mecklenburg County and across the state), we must take action today to ensure we dramatically increase the creation of mixed-income housing throughout Mecklenburg County.

3. De-concentrate high poverty schools and create an educational environment in which all students can thrive. (See Special Note about the Reduction of High Poverty Schools.)

4. Build and support community efforts to increase transportation options and establish more efficient routes for people who live and work in different parts of the city and county.

5. Ensure children, youth and families in all areas of the community have access, devices and digital literacy training to connect with broadband Internet.

6. Urge governmental, educational, philanthropic, nonprofit, and faith-based organizations to make funding, programmatic design, and policy decisions through the lens of equity and opportunity.

7. Engage more of our governmental, educational, philanthropic, nonprofit and faith-based organizations, as well as residents at large, in initiatives and opportunities that, A) elevate awareness and understanding of the impacts of segregation, racialization, and inequality and, B) provide tools to help change behaviors and action.

What is an Equity Lens?
A quality improvement tool used to improve planning decision-making and resource allocation leading to more racially and socially equitable policies and programs. The lens provides a set of principles, reflective questions and processes that focuses at the individual, institutional and systemic levels. It helps decision makers pay disciplined attention to race and ethnicity while analyzing problems and seeking solutions. Equity lens can be adapted for use by all sectors.

Implementation Tactics and Policy Considerations:

- Provide incentives and use other tools to support development of more mixed-income housing (See additional recommendations in Chapter V.)
- Support efforts by Digital Charlotte aimed at helping everyone in the community take full advantage of digital tools, access and technology.
- Use a participatory budgeting process in our local government to engage people in decision-making around budget decisions that affect their lives.
- Investigate multi-sector use of an equity lens tool as a filter for decision-making.
- Build the capacity of local entities offering opportunities for genuine racial dialogue and powerful training on trust building and implicit bias—e.g. Dismantling Racism—in order to expand their reach into and impact in the community.
- Identify strategies to encourage greater integration of early care and education programs to start building interracial relationships and trust from an early age.

SPECIAL NOTE ABOUT THE REDUCTION OF HIGH POVERTY SCHOOLS

Like many school systems across the country, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools is currently in a state of de-facto segregation concentrating low-income/high-need students, the majority of whom are of color, into various low-opportunity pockets around the county. As education continues to be one of the most powerful tools for advancement, it is imperative that we reduce the number of schools with high concentrations of low-income/high-need students. Research establishes that the integration and general diversification of classrooms have no adverse effects on student achievement. In fact, students tend to gain more benefits, both academically and socially, from interactions with a diverse student body. **To this end, we must ensure that the Board of Education's student reassignment plan is designed to deconcentrate high-poverty schools and create an educational environment in which all students can thrive.** We urge the Board to adhere to its School Assignment Plan vision of "providing all students the best education available anywhere, preparing every child to lead a rich and productive life" and advance their agreed upon six goals:

• Provide choice and promote equitable access to varied and viable programmatic options for all children;

• Maximize efficiency in the use of school facilities, transportation, and other capital and operational resources to reduce overcrowding;

• Reduce the number of schools with high concentrations of poor and high-needs children

• Provide school assignment options to students assigned to schools that are not meeting performance standards established by the state; and

• Preserve and expand schools and programs in which students are successfully achieving the mission and vision of the Board.

As Robert Putnam noted in his book *Our Kids*, the interplay between schools, segregation, and student achievement is complex. There is no doubt schools are the sites where disparities show up, but they can hardly be held solely responsible for the disparities themselves. As others in our community have noted, the City of Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, and CMS all have areas of responsibility that dramatically impact where parents send their children to school. Just as we have noted the connectedness of the determinants and cross-cutting factors, we also see that decisions regarding zoning, housing, transportation, criminal justice, and parks work together to define school enrollment.

As a result, we believe it is unfair and short-sighted to ask CMS alone to fix issues related to segregation through an assignment plan. To more effectively address the issue, we believe an intergovernmental group should be convened (CMS, Mecklenburg County, City of Charlotte, and five Mecklenburg towns) to examine how funding, policies and systems could be aligned to provide a coordinated impact.

B TASK FORCE STRATEGY B:

Address the complex, multi-faceted issue of school segregation with a systems approach.

Key Recommendations:

1. Galvanize community support for the Board of Education's School Assignment Vision and Goals.

2. Increase community awareness of the impact of schools with highly concentrated poverty on economic opportunity.

3. Monitor progress of the assignment plan process and continuously encourage the Board of Education to be bold and courageous in developing the new assignment plan.

4. Create an intergovernmental working group, including representatives of Mecklenburg's five towns, to develop a coordinated plan to reduce schools of highly concentrated poverty.

5. Develop strategies to increase private sector funding of the CMS Foundation.

Implementation Tactics and Policy Considerations:

• Position the reduction of concentrated schools of poverty as a significant enhancer of economic opportunity for all students in Charlotte-Mecklenburg.

• Raise awareness about community events focused on the link between schools of concentrated poverty and economic opportunity.

• Support and expand efforts by academic institutions and key intermediaries to provide fact-based presentations regarding the historical context for CMS school enrollment patterns, national best practices regarding assignment plans, relevant data, and objective analysis.

• Evaluate opportunities to form partnerships and collaborations to inform the community and elected officials about the impact of highly concentrated schools of poverty.

• Encourage faith, business, and grassroots leaders, parents, and other interested parties from across Charlotte-Mecklenburg to advocate to elected leaders for the reduction of schools with high concentrations of poverty.

• Request that leadership from all elected bodies authorize the creation of an intergovernmental working group to evaluate the strategies and tactics that impact school assignment and enrollment.

CHAPTER III: DETERMINANT ONE

EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

A child's earliest years have a profound and lasting impact on their school success, their career success, and their lives. Those who care for and educate young children– parents and families, caregivers, teachers – are essential to childrens' healthy development. Programs focused on the development of children from birth to age five are rarely regarded as economic development initiatives. However, education serves as an equalizer with the potential to nullify the deficits many children face due to socio-economic circumstance, providing a unique opportunity for long-term public benefit. High-ranking Federal Reserve official Arthur J. Rolnick and economist Rob Grunewald estimate a 12 percent return on investment, after inflation, for the intrinsic value of early childhood development programs.[11]

ACCESS TO QUALITY EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS ALSO ENABLES PARENTS TO SEEK, SECURE, AND RETAIN EMPLOYMENT, THEREBY INCREASING FAMILY INCOME.

It is clear this determinant is one of the best investments our community can make, yet it remains significantly underfunded.

The Task Force identified three interrelated areas of significant importance:

• **Quality early care and public pre-kindergarten (pre-K):** Calls attention to the early care and education programs needed to serve our young children and how we can increase access to these programs.

• **Early care and education professionals:** Describes challenges facing educators and highlights private and public strategies to strengthen the workforce and improve outcomes for children.

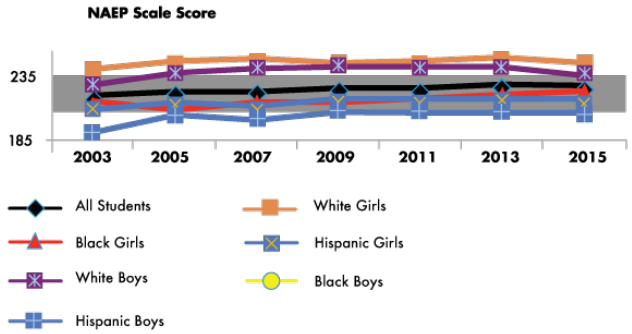
• **Early brain development:** Calls attention to how experiences shape brain development and outlines our opportunity to support parents and caregivers at this critical time for young children. We must also acknowledge that early brain development begins before a child is born.

QUALITY EARLY CARE AND PUBLIC PRE-KINDERGARTEN: A GAME-CHANGER

Without support during the early years, a child becomes more likely to drop out of school, require public assistance, and enter the criminal justice system. High profile studies such as the HighScope Perry Preschool Study and the Abecedarian Project found that children who were enrolled in high quality preschool programs are less likely to repeat grades, less likely to run into trouble with the law, and typically earn around $2,000 more per month than those who were not enrolled.[12]

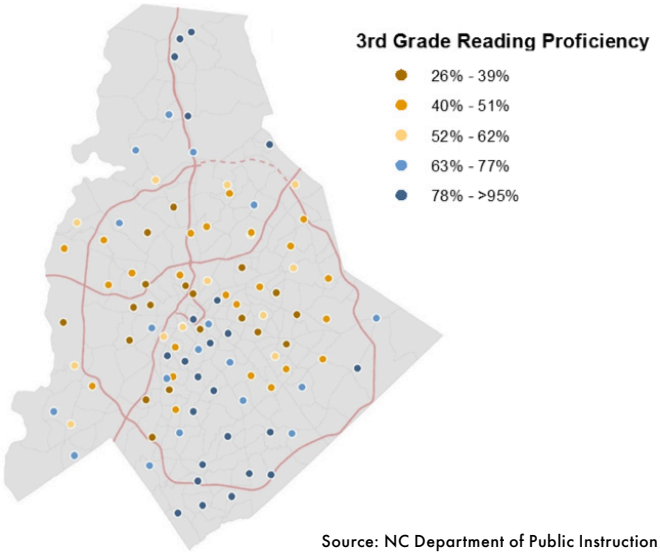
Having reviewed a number of compelling studies, the Task Force was so struck by the power of this determinant, we stepped up early to support the commitment of the Charlotte Executive Leadership Council (CELC) to fund a major study on this subject. In late 2016, a study group of community leaders began considering a range of options, including universal access to high quality early childhood education and the costs for implementation. Under the leadership of Mecklenburg County, this study will develop a comprehensive roadmap for wider access to quality early childhood education in our community. **We believe any program selected for trial or implementation must be given sufficient funding and the opportunity to demonstrate impact, so Charlotte-Mecklenburg may experience the same levels of improvement documented in other longitudinal studies.**

3RD Grade Reading Gaps in Charlotte-Mecklenburg



Source: 2003-2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress, Fourth Grade Reading Assessment, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools

The Task Force noted reading proficiency as a related factor. Children who enter kindergarten at a deficit can be half as likely to read proficiently by third grade. In turn, children who are not reading well by third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school. Only 39 percent of Charlotte-Mecklenburg's third graders were reading at grade level in 2014. Because third-grade reading proficiency is such a critical indicator along the path to high school graduation and beyond, private philanthropy coalesced to launch Read Charlotte in 2015, an initiative aimed at doubling third grade reading proficiency to 80 percent by 2025. The Task Force strongly supports the work of Read Charlotte and sees it as an important intervention for economic opportunity. In fact, Read Charlotte's systems-based approach could serve as a model for the implementation of this report.



Source: NC Department of Public Instruction

Furthermore, the issue of literacy is one that impacts all children in our community and is an example that illustrates the focus of this report. Work remains to be done for all children and youth, regardless of geography, race, gender, and ethnicity. This deficit in reading proficiency highlights the need for every community member and every neighborhood to embrace the work of the Task Force.

Achieving Read Charlotte's 2025 goal hinges, in part, on the preparedness of children before they enter kindergarten. Accordingly, quality child care and public pre-kindergarten education become important interventions for children.

The latest U.S. Census data indicates that In Mecklenburg County, there are:

• 55,814 children ages birth to four; of these, 24,558 children (44%) live in households earning below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level.

• 13,976 children ages four to five; of these, 6,149 children (44%) live in households earning below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level.

The average annual fee charged for providing full-time child care in Charlotte-Mecklenburg is $11,440 for an infant and $10,088 for four-and five-year-olds.[13] These fees challenge most families with young children and are absolutely cost-prohibitive for low-income working families, thereby limiting parental employment and access to child care without financial aid. In the absence of financial assistance, many parents resort to patching together child care for their children from family, friends and lower cost, unregulated providers.

While it is well documented that participation in quality child care before the age of four and in public pre-K for four-year-olds helps prepare children for school success, access to these programs is limited by cost and/or available spaces. **Currently, 3,014 Mecklenburg children ages birth to five (of whom 397 are four-years-old) are on the county's waiting list for child care subsidies, and 1,963 four-year-olds are on Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools' waiting list for public pre-K.**[14] (Note, these are point-in-time numbers that change frequently.)

To effectively invest in the future of this county's children and make strides toward lessening the current achievement gap, the community must pursue avenues to ensure access to affordable high quality child care for children ages birth to four, and to provide voluntary universal pre-kindergarten (and before and after school) for four-year-olds. To ensure accessibility and yield greater long-term community dividends, priority should be given and funding is needed, to, at a minimum, eliminate the county's wait list for child care subsidies and expand public pre-K for children. Four funding options provided by Child Care Resources, Inc. tell us that:

• Funding for an additional 10,120 spaces would be needed to ensure all four-year-olds in Mecklenburg County have access to public pre-K (universal public pre-K.)

• Funding for an additional 9,289 spaces would be needed to ensure all four-year-olds in Mecklenburg County (excluding those four-year-olds currently enrolled in child care with subsidy or already participating in public pre-K) have access to public pre-K.

• Funding for an additional 3,151 spaces would be needed to ensure all four-year-olds in Mecklenburg County living in households earning less than 200% of FPL have access to public pre-K.

• Funding for child care financial aid for an additional 2,617 birth to four-year-old children is needed to ensure children in this age group who are currently on the county's child care subsidy waiting list have access to child care. If we include children ages birth to five on the waiting list, the total is 3,014 children.

For these and other recommendations in this report, costs and funding sources will need to be identified and discussed. However, due to the complexity of addressing those concerns, including the opportunity for new funding or redirecting current investments, public sector vs. private sector, the role of philanthropy, etc., we have not provided direction for how to pay for the recommendations in our report. For example, we know a quarter cent sales tax increase can generate

$20 to $30 million annually, but deeper understanding of such an increase is needed to make a firm recommendation. The consultant study underway and funded by the CELC will identify costs associated with and recommend funding strategies to implement the options above.

Another issue we must pay attention to is that Latinos now comprise a little over 13 percent of our population; however, we are seeing a relatively small number of Latino children accessing licensed early child care and private pre-schools. Latino children are more likely to be cared for by family or friends. We need to do a better job of engaging Latino parents whose children may be missing out on opportunities to adequately prepare for success in kindergarten and beyond. We need to better understand barriers—perceived and real—that limit enrollment of Latino children in licensed care and/or preschool. We also need to ensure that early educators have the skills and resources to meet their cultural and linguistic needs.

TASK FORCE STRATEGY C:

Make the necessary investments to ensure all children in Mecklenburg County from birth to age five have access to quality early care and education.

Key Recommendations:

1. Eliminate the waitlist for subsidized child care for all children birth to age five (3,014 children).

2. Make high-quality voluntary public pre-k universally accessible to all four-year-old children.

3. Increase access to voluntary high quality early care and education starting at birth, for all children starting at birth, regardless of family income following attainment of #1 and #2.

4. Promote a clear definition of and related indicators for what "ready for school" means across multiple dimensions to ensure early educators and families share common readiness expectations for children.

5. Improve data collection and reporting on school readiness.

6. Provide expanded support of Read Charlotte and ensure necessary resources are available to implement identified strategies.

7. Increase enrollment of young Latino children in quality child care and public and private pre-k education programs.

8. Promote greater racial integration of our early care and pre-k programs to start building interracial relationships and trust from an early age.

Implementation Tactics and Policy Considerations:

• Complete a financial evaluation of options to expand access to early education in Mecklenburg County. This study is funded by the Charlotte Executive Leadership Council (CELC), and spearheaded by Mecklenburg County, with findings anticipated in 2017.

• Explore the possibility of utilizing a local sales tax increase to expand early childhood education.

• Complete and implement findings from Mecklenburg County's Feasibility Study of Pay For Success as a financing mechanism to enhance and expand access to Pre-K for four-year-olds. The study is funded by the Department of Education with results anticipated in 2017/early 2018.

• Develop and execute a comprehensive funding strategy to provide greater access to quality early child care for children ages birth to four and public pre-K for four-year-olds based on the two studies above.

• Quantify the costs and consequences to the community if greater access is not provided.

• Advocate for increased funding and reimbursement rates for child care and public pre-k at the federal and state level.

• Advocate for increased funding of public pre-K at the federal, state and, particularly the county level.

• Identify and convene Latino community leaders to identify access barriers and to inform strategies to increase Latino family awareness about the importance of early learning within and beyond the home.

EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS: SUPPORTING & STRENGTHENING

As we look at the issue of child care, it is imperative we maintain an emphasis on the quality of each child's experience. Demanding high quality care can be challenging when the average hourly wage of a child care teacher is $11 an hour and $8 an hour for assistant teachers. Turnover is understandably high in the field, with nearly a quarter of full-time child care teachers and assistants leaving their centers in the last year.

IMPORTANTLY, MANY CHILD CARE WORKERS ARE PARENTS THEMSELVES, TRYING TO MAKE ENDS MEET AND SUPPORT CHILDREN OF THEIR OWN. IN THE FACE OF LOW WAGES, CLOSE TO A THIRD OF THESE WORKERS RECEIVE SOME TYPE OF PUBLIC ASSISTANCE.

Just as an investment in early care and education will strengthen our future workforce and create a firm foundation for a prosperous Charlotte-Mecklenburg, an investment in the professionals who care for and educate our youngest children will strengthen and improve the quality of early care and educational programs available. As we move forward, we must focus on compensation, education, and professional development of our early care and education workforce.

The job of educating our next generation of leaders, creators and innovators must be understood and supported as a noble profession. Furthermore, Charlotte-Mecklenburg must embrace and support the blossoming diversity of our community by increasing the cultural competencies and linguistic diversity of our early childhood workforce to better serve children and families of all backgrounds, races, and ethnicities.

When comparing the enrollment of African American and white children in early licensed child care to the enrollment of Latino children, Latinos are underrepresented. In part, this may be due to the lack of Latino early childhood educators in these programs. Latino families may be less likely to enroll their children in programs where they do not see people who look like them or speak Spanish.

Accordingly, recruitment and training of Latino professionals can become a pathway to greater enrollment by Latino children. Cultural proficiency needs to be part of professional development for all early care and education teachers in order to serve an increasingly diverse enrollment.

TASK FORCE STRATEGY D:

D

Strengthen the early care and education workforce to improve the quality and experiences of early care and education available to children ages birth to five.

Key Recommendations:

1. Improve the compensation and benefits of early care and education providers.

2. Expand the number of early care and education providers with certifications, credentials, and degrees.

3. Increase access to ongoing professional development for early care and education providers that is responsive to their limited time and financial resources, as well as to their educational needs.

4. Grow the cultural and linguistic diversity of our early care and education workforce to better serve our Latino children and families.

Implementation Tactics and Policy Considerations:

• Determine the cost of raising our child care workforce's compensation to that of comparably educated staff in public Pre-K, Head Start, and Early Head Start to reduce turnover in the early care and education workforce.

• Investigate public and private strategies that have increased the early care and education workforce's compensation without increasing costs of care for families.

• Pursue strategies to increase our early care and education workforce's access to and engagement in pre-service, in-service, continuing and higher education, and peer learning.

• Increase access to classroom and program-based consultation, coaching, and mentoring available to early care and education teachers/providers to reinforce use of evidence-based early brain development and literacy practices.

• Train all early educators in "ready-for-school" indicators.

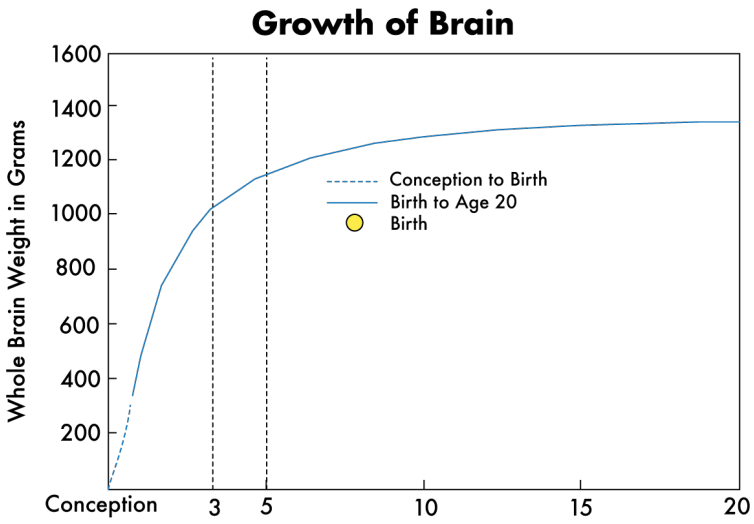
• Engage with community organizations and houses of faith that serve our Latino population to increase awareness of the need for Latino early educators and promote the profession.

• Create targeted recruitment strategies and supports for Latinos interested in entering the field, including having more bilingual early childhood educators.

• Expand recruitment and support for Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC) integrated pathway that targets english as a second language (ESL) students and combines ESL instruction with the courses needed to pass the early childhood certification exam.

EARLY BRAIN DEVELOPMENT: BUILDING A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR LIFE

Parents, guardians, and caregivers play crucial roles as a child's first teachers in promoting positive early brain development, social and emotional health, and early literacy. Beyond the home, engagement in high quality child care and other early learning programs enrich the early experiences of young children during a critical window when the brain is developing at an unparalleled rate. Sound "brain architecture" lays the foundation for later emotional, physical, intellectual and social development. This foundation begins before a child is born and is affected by a mother's prenatal care. After birth, healthy emotional experiences play a central role in building this architecture, 90 percent of which is developed by age five. Stress can undermine this process in children. Children in poverty, who may suffer prolonged periods of instability, often experience toxic stress, leaving them vulnerable to physical and mental illness later in life. The reliability of quality early care and education and other early learning programs in early life would provide some respite from uncertainty.



Parents and families should be engaged as partners and leaders in co-creating and implementing solutions to improve their children's social-emotional competency, language, and literacy development. One impactful way to do this is by building the capacity of child care and public pre-K programs, schools and providers to effectively engage families in a meaningful way. By providing parents with supports such as no-cost book services, access to adult education and support groups, we establish solid foundations on which early care and education providers can build. It is equally important that we provide parents with greater access to developmental screenings for their children to help them identify learning delays, vision problems and other issues that may affect school readiness and to enable them to seek help sooner than later.

Helping parents offset the cost of early care and education enables them to shift more resources to support services outside the early care and education setting. Access to such resources can help reduce anxiety for both families and children.

E TASK FORCE STRATEGY E:

Support parents and other caregivers as a child's first teacher in promoting positive early brain development, social and emotional health, and early literacy beginning at birth.

Key Recommendations:

1. Educate parents, early educators, and other caregivers on the importance of positive early brain development, social-emotional development, and early literacy and provide training on how to best support and interact with their children from an early age.

2. Promote families as partners and leaders in co-creating and implementing solutions to improve a child's social-emotional and language and literacy development.

3. Build the capacity of early child care and early learning programs to effectively engage families in meaningful ways to support their children's social-emotional, language, and literacy skills.

4. Leverage support from others in the community to promote early brain and social-emotional development and early literacy skills through their unique connections to parents and children.

5. Provide parents with greater access to developmental screenings for their children to identify learning delays, vision problems, and other issues that may be affecting school readiness and that will enable them to seek help sooner than later.

Implementation Tactics and Policy Considerations:

• Develop and launch a public campaign to promote positive early brain development and early literacy.

• Explore piloting a model community-based family resource center concept that uses a “whole child” approach in helping children and parents address the multiple variables that impact a child’s readiness for kindergarten.

• Help parents develop networks of peer and other support within their neighborhoods and communities create more mutual support for effective nurturing, early literacy, and advocacy for their children.

• Expand access to evidence-based programs such as “Raising A Reader” in child care centers, family child care and homes, preschools and faith-based preschools, and other community settings.

• Encourage more employers to provide paid maternity leave and utilize other employment practices that enable parents to better support their children’s early development.

• Increase the number of medical practices and clinics serving children and young mothers who are participating in the “Reach Out and Read” program that encourages active reading with children ages 0-3.

• Embed more early learning skills in brain building activities provided through cultural and educational institutions.

• Explore opportunities to make the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) available to more parents. (Examples: Columbus Kids and Spartanburg Academic Movement.)

• Increase access to post-screening developmental supportive services for children.

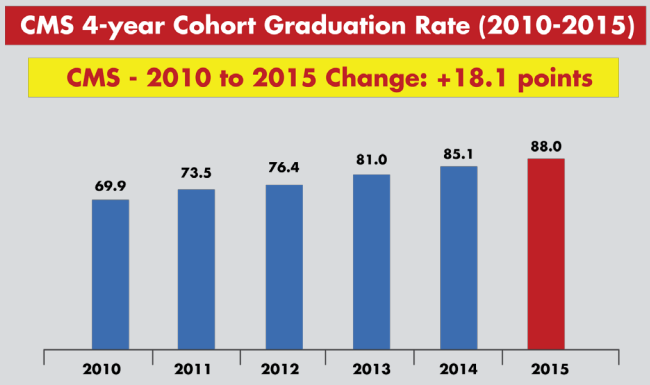
• Provide support for integrated family literacy programs at CMS elementary schools for parents and caregivers that integrate English language instruction and basic skills development with awareness of early brain development, social and emotional development, and skills needed to help parents support their child's education.

CHAPTER IV: DETERMINANT TWO

COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

A recent study by Georgetown University's Center on Education and Workforce reports that of the 7.2 million jobs lost during the Great Recession, 78 percent were for workers with a high school education or less. Most new jobs gained during the recent recovery have gone to employees with some form of postsecondary education or training. This loss has left many of the least educated workers either unemployed or underemployed. **Two of every three new jobs now require some level of postsecondary education—training credentials, an associate degree, a four-year degree, or higher.**[15] Many of today's jobs are at risk of becoming obsolete, as a product of new innovations in automation and other technological advancements. For example, in 2016, Walmart eliminated 1,500 positions in its financial and accounting back office due to efficiencies made possible by automation. Across the spectrum of employment, machines are quickly becoming the laborers of the future. Students need to be prepared for our rapidly-changing workforce needs.

SPECIAL NOTE REGARDING GRADUATION RATES VERSUS PROFICIENCY AND COLLEGE/CAREER PREPAREDNESS:



Source: CMS

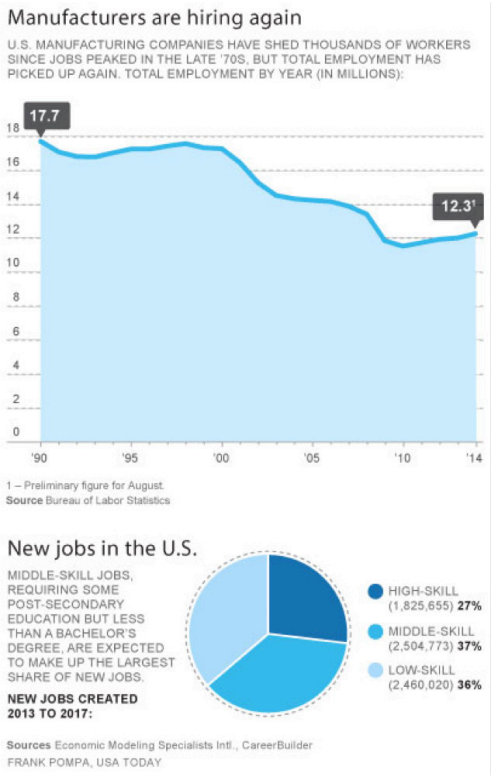
We have much to celebrate in Charlotte-Mecklenburg regarding our high school graduation rates. In 2010, our graduation rate hovered around 70 percent. Today, through a variety of successful tactics, the rate is approaching 90 percent. In fact, CMS now exceeds the state average by several percentage points.
Although more students are leaving high school with a diploma, we are concerned about those students graduating without the necessary skills to succeed in postsecondary opportunities. For example, Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC) indicates that in the recent past, approximately 70 percent of CMS graduates entering CPCC require remediation in math and/or reading before they can take college-level courses. That percentage is beginning to drop due to recent measures being taken by CMS and CPCC.

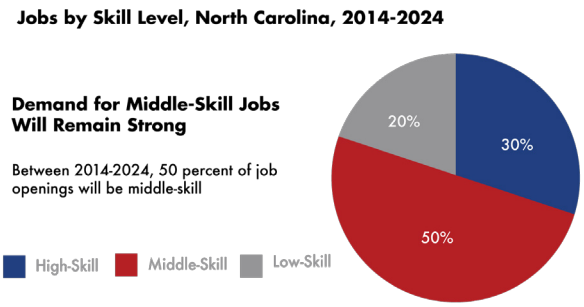
For our recommendations in this section to have meaningful impact, we urge CMS to continue its efforts to increase graduation rates. However, we hope the school system will apply the same tenacity to identifying and implementing strategies aimed at ensuring students graduate with the needed skills competencies and subject matter proficiencies.

It is difficult to pinpoint the precise combination of factors that ensure a young person will advance to a successful career. For too long, the goal of attaining a college degree was held so high that young people interested in other career opportunities often got lost in the emphasis. We acknowledge the importance of college, but it should not be the only option promoted for economic opportunity. A rapidly changing job market has opened other pathways to equip our students with the skills and education they will need to build and support thriving families. With more and more well-paying middle-skill jobs—jobs requiring more education and training than a high school diploma but less than a four-year college degree—we must change the mindset around technical education and community colleges. We should encourage more of our students from all income levels to pursue these practical and beneficial educational options.

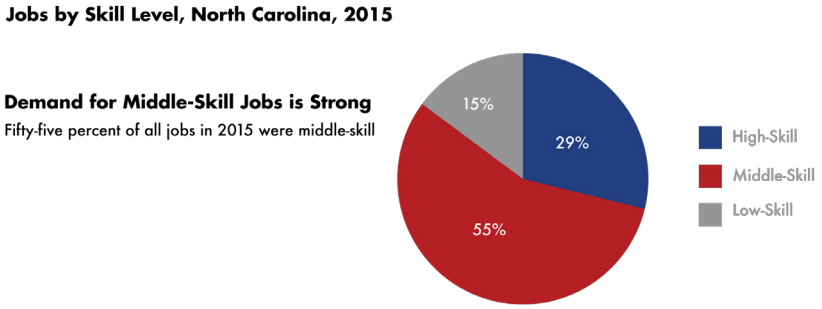
According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, an estimated 37 percent of all new jobs created between 2013 and 2017 were middle-skill jobs. Many of these jobs provide higher wages than those that require a four-year degree. These alternative certificates and degrees also come without the crippling debt that often goes hand-in-hand with a four-year (or more) education.

Even with the technical jobs available today, our community and region experienced a significant loss of manufacturing jobs in past decades and we have not forgotten that history. Parents of children who are now ready to explore postsecondary opportunities are reticent to encourage their children to pursue a technical career; only 35 percent have stated they would encourage this type of career.[16] Yet, the technical jobs that are available today look very different from and require more complex skills than those lost in the manufacturing sector previously.

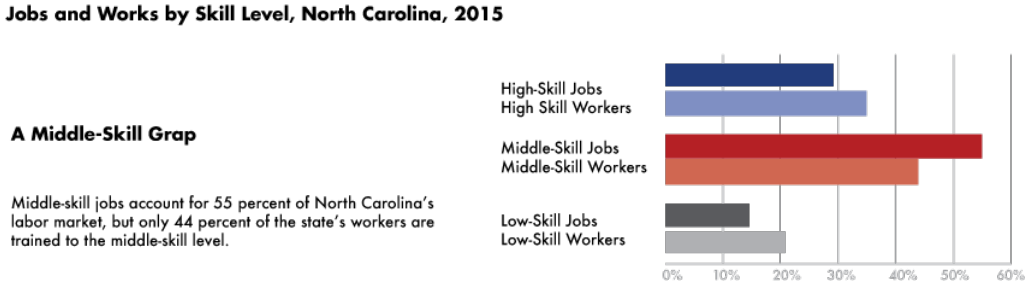




Source: NCS Analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment Statistics by State May 2015



Source: NCS analysis of long- term occupational projections from state labor/employment agency



Source: NCS analysis of Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Employment Statistics by State, May 2015 and American Community Survey Data 2015

CAREER-CONNECTED LEARNING AND READINESS: "NEXT GENERATION" PATHWAYS

Our community must place a higher priority on exposing children to viable career options and the different pathways to get there. **This career exploration and contemplation should begin much earlier (around the third grade) and occur more often.** To this end, we should endeavor to replicate, expand and improve career academies and other pathway models that provide a clear sequence of academic and technical courses, work-based learning experiences, intentional career advising, and opportunities to develop skills and earn credentials that will meet the current and future needs of the region's employers.

Additionally, we must give more high school students access to accelerated learning and dual enrollment opportunities (simultaneous enrollment in high school and college), which enables them to take college-level courses before graduation. Advanced Placement (AP) and International Baccalaureate (IB) are particularly effective examples of courses that present students with an opportunity to engage in rigorous academic study with the potential to earn college credit. To ensure each student advances toward a productive career path, Charlotte-Mecklenburg would benefit immensely from increasing the number of low-socioeconomic students enrolled in and completing higher-level college prep courses.

Although it is important to highlight all educational opportunities, not only four-year college or university degrees, it is also important that technical skill sets honed in high school, when available, should be accompanied by simultaneous enrollment in industry certification programs prior to graduation. These certifications can certainly be earned after high school graduation, but to the extent we can design them into the high school experience, students will find faster pathways to careers.

F

TASK FORCE STRATEGY F:

Broaden the range of and access to high quality college and career pathways offered by our K-12 and postsecondary institutions, ensuring all students have access to and support for the full range of opportunities.

Key Recommendations:

1. Replicate, expand and improve career academies and other pathway models that provide a clear sequence of academic and technical courses, work-based learning experiences, intentional career advising, and opportunities to develop skills and earn credentials that will meet the current and future needs of the region's employers.

2. Enable more students to access accelerated learning and dual enrollment opportunities, and make more credits "stackable" from high school into college, so high school courses count toward specific postsecondary credentials.

3. Increase the number of low-socioeconomic students enrolled in and completing higher- level college prep courses.

4. Explore funding options to ensure that every Career and Technical Education (CTE) student has the financial ability to attain a certification.

Implementation Tactics and Policy Considerations:

• Consider creating a leadership position at CMS focused on expanding the role of workforce development and work-based learning, and on building collaborative partnerships with government, local industry sectors, nonprofits and higher education to expand “next generation” learning opportunities for CMS youth.

• Ensure all high schools offer a minimum number of AP/IB courses and provide the necessary supports for students to succeed in them.

• Support a new policy to ensure every CMS career academy has an actively engaged Board of Directors comprised of industry stakeholders who are leading, advocating for apprenticeships and paid internships, supporting the career academy, and holding the institution accountable.

• Continue to improve and increase industry-targeted CTE options for more CMS students in collaboration with industry and higher education programs.

• Launch a recruitment campaign to encourage more eligible, low-socioeconomic students to take advantage of the state's Career and College Promise Program that enables high school students to earn free college credit at CPCC during their junior and senior years.

• Create/implement a communication strategy to reduce the stigma and cultural bias associated with vocational education and non-degree certificate programs that lead to middle-skill job opportunities.

• Fully integrate entrepreneurship within the larger strategy of preparing students for productive, high-skill careers.

• Strengthen and expand articulation agreements and partnerships between CMS, CPCC and UNC Charlotte.

ADVANCING ON A CAREER PATHWAY: THE IMPORTANCE OF CAREER AND COLLEGE GUIDANCE

Students need help understanding and navigating emerging and divergent college and career pathways and opportunities. Specifically, they need to: a) become aware of the broad range of jobs and careers that meet the evolving needs of the workplace, b) learn how to connect their interests and skills to an educational pathway that leads to rewarding opportunities in their career choice, and c) navigate postsecondary options, enrollment, and financial aid application processes.

We know when students start thinking about college or career pathways in their junior or senior years of high school, they are waiting too long. It needs to happen much earlier, beginning as a planned sequence of activities and experiences starting in elementary school. Some students are fortunate to have parents who can help their children

“WHY WOULD YOU PACK YOUR BAGS AND THEN DECIDE WHERE YOU’RE GOING? THAT’S WHAT OUR KIDS ARE DOING IN THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM. MOST KIDS ARE MAKING DECISIONS ABOUT WHAT THEY WANT TO DO WITH VIRTUALLY NO INFORMATION, AND THERE IS NO CONTEXT FOR THEIR EDUCATION.”

CLIFTON VANN, LIVINGSTON & HAVEN

navigate this process. They enroll their children in career-focused camps or classes, tap their networks of friends and colleagues to expose their children to career options, and build on their own college and career preparation experiences to help guide their children along a path. Other students, particularly those with parents who have not gone to college and do not know how to help, need much greater support in developing their career aspirations and navigating pathways. For these students, the role of our school guidance counselors and career development specialists is critically important. **Without sufficient counseling, students can stumble into poor decisions about their future.**

Although we have many great guidance counselors in our school, they are often not equipped or have the capacity to provide the level of career guidance their students need. They may lack the most up-to-date knowledge about career options and the educational pathways associated with them. They also may not have access to tools that provide information about the current and future labor markets, career pathways and job requirements. Additionally, in some instances, counselors—as well as teachers and administrators—may unintentionally bring cultural biases to their interactions with students causing them to have lower expectations for some, thus limiting the options they promote. CMS has recently begun using the Dismantling Racism training with its staff to address such implicit bias and plans to continue with this work, which we encourage.

Of all the significant challenges for career and college advisement, the biggest one is the ratio of guidance counselors to students. The American Counseling Association recommends an average ratio of one counselor to 250 students for high school and below. The ratio of counselors to students in CMS is far higher. In its 2015/2016 school year, the ratios of counselors in CMS were as follows:[17]

- Elementary school: 525 students to one counselor
- Middle school: 380 students to one counselor
- High school: 395 students to one counselor

CMS recognizes the gap and continues to seek funding additional counselors. Thirty-four new counselor positions were included in CMS's 2016/2017 budget.

At CPCC, the student/counselor ratio is 514:1. Despite the challenges this creates, counselors and advisors work hard to provide effective advising and counseling services. The majority of students are first generation and often have a challenge transitioning to college especially as it relates to course and program selection. Many students need additional assistance in exploring viable options. It is difficult to track and monitor the decisions and progress of a large number of students as they adjust to college and balance a multitude of demands and responsibilities with limited staffing. Students often enroll in basic skills or general education courses without understanding the level of rigor associated with the course or the applicability of the course to any specific program or transfer objective. Helping students make informed choices about their education is a critical strategy to increase student success in high school and beyond.

TASK FORCE STRATEGY G:

G

Equip all students and their parents with the information and guidance they need to understand and navigate multiple college and career pathways, preparation and processes.

Key Recommendations:

1. Ensure all students, beginning in middle school or earlier, are exposed to and understand how to navigate career pathways and the postsecondary enrollment process.

2. Increase the number of dedicated college and career guidance counselors/advisors available for students in every CMS school, meeting the industry recommended average student/counselor ratio of 1:250.

3. Expand the knowledge, capacity, and cultural competence of guidance counselors, advisors, career development coordinators, teachers, and near-peer mentors on the various college and career pathways and trends, and ensure they have the tools to help students and their parents understand and connect with college and career pathway opportunities.

4. Leverage nonprofit and other community resources to augment college and career advising in our schools.

Implementation Tactics and Policy Considerations:

• Include and support funding of additional guidance counselors in future CMS budgets to achieve the recommended counselor/student ratio.

• Provide a continuum of career awareness and planning support for all students beginning with career awareness in elementary school, career exploration in middle school and intentional skill development in high school and beyond.

• Bolster ongoing professional development opportunities to improve knowledge and skills relating to targeted career pathways and associated educational and industry requirements.

• Have more CMS counselors, advisors, teachers and administrators participate in implicit bias training to challenge occupational stereotypes and interactions with students about college and career aspirations and preparation.

• Evaluate the need for a coordinating entity to provide professional development on career pathways and labor market trends to local education institutions and workforce agencies to ensure common information, data, and best practices are shared.

• Explore opportunities for a consulting firm to partner with CMS to develop a roadmap for the future of CTE programs and community engagement.

• Aggressively grow work-based mentor programs to ensure every student has a tangible career path.

• Increase opportunities for teachers and counselors to participate in summer industry internships to learn how to contextualize learning with students.

• Leverage social media and technology tools to increase awareness and knowledge about navigating career pathways.

• Expand access to quality out-of-school time programming that integrates academic support with career awareness, exploration, and preparation and connects more low socio-economic students to opportunities.

•Increase support provided through programs such as the College Advising Corps.

APPRENTICESHIPS, PAID INTERNSHIPS AND OTHER WORK-BASED LEARNING: LEARN AND EARN

One of the most important ways high school and college students can fast track their career readiness and cultivate increased social capital is through apprenticeships, quality paid internships, and other work-based learning opportunities. Training programs offered through Red Ventures, Siemens, Bosch, CPCC's Apprenticeship Charlotte, and others benefit both students and employers by combining classroom and work-based experiences. Programs such as these match students to paid training, which leads to credentials and employment opportunities. The Task Force strongly believes the scalability of these types of programs is a game-changing strategy for economic opportunity. **Accordingly, we call upon our business and educational sectors to design and implement a plan for dramatic expansion of work-based learning programs. Note, this calling is for employers of all sizes—large, medium, and small.**

Beyond this programmatic work, we need greater collaboration between employers and our educational institutions to integrate relevant theory and practice into skill development in the classroom. These approaches would give students a developmental edge and add practical value as they continue on a path towards their career of choice.

Transportation can be a challenge for some students. Without transportation, students may not be able to take advantage of apprenticeships and paid internships. Employers and schools should consider this barrier when connecting students to work-based learning opportunities and help students overcome this challenge.

"WITHOUT APPLICATION, PRINCIPLES AND IDEALS HAVE NO BEARING AND NO TEST."

JOHN DEWEY

H TASK FORCE STRATEGY H:

Galvanize community support to develop and implement a multi-faceted plan to increase paid work-based learning opportunities for students.

Key Recommendations:

1. Increase community awareness about and support for apprenticeships, paid internships and other work-based learning programs.

2. Build the necessary infrastructure and employer commitment to implement and scale work-based learning to create at least 10,000 opportunities annually for CMS high school. The recommended target is to have 1,000 opportunities by 2018, 4,000 by 2020 and 10,000 by 10,000 when fully scaled.

3. Increase the involvement of employers in developing and helping to teach courses that incorporate sector-specific knowledge and skill development.

4. Require every student who completes a formal career academy experience to receive a paid internship as a capstone to his or her high school career. Also, require every CMS high school student, whether a career academy student, to receive a meaningful work-based learning experience before he or she graduates.

5. Provide paid internships for high-performing, low-income college students enrolled in local colleges and universities. Work-based learning opportunities for college students enrolled in certificate-level programs at CPCC are also needed.

6. Ensure students take advantage of the work-based learning opportunities by addressing structural barriers, such as transportation, work hours, etc.

Implementation Tactics and Policy Considerations:

• Organize a learning network of employers with experience and success in providing apprenticeships, paid internships and other education partnership activities to share their knowledge, lessons learned and value proposition with other employers, and to provide peer coaching.

• Evaluate the need for an intermediary or coordinator to promote, build and sustain collaborative partnerships with K-12, higher education institutions, local industry sectors and nonprofits.

• Create more pre-apprenticeship opportunities at CMS and CPCC to help students and workers understand how to qualify and prepare for apprenticeships.

• Publicly recognize and celebrate employers that support work-based learning and other collaborative work with education.

• Develop strategies to address transportation barriers for students to access apprenticeship and internship opportunities.

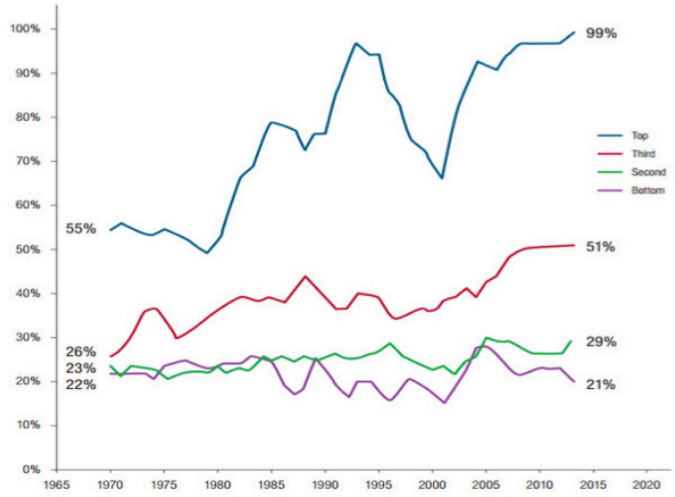
SUPPORT FOR FIRST GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS: HELPING THEM STAY THE COURSE

Despite the increasing importance of postsecondary education, a wide gap exists in college graduation rates between students from low-income backgrounds and those from higher-income families. A report by the Pell Institute indicates that only 21 percent of college students in families from the bottom income quintile obtained a bachelor's degree by the age of 24 in 2013 compared to 99 percent of college students from families in the top quintile.[18]

This gap in college persistence and completion exists for several reasons. Some students who have been accepted into two- or four-year colleges do not show up when school starts in the fall. This is known as "summer melt."

ANYWHERE FROM 10 PERCENT TO 40 PERCENT OF STUDENTS PRESUMED TO BE HEADED TO COLLEGE FAIL TO MATRICULATE TO A POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTION IN THE FALL FOLLOWING HIGH SCHOOL.[19]

Equity Indicator 5b: Bachelor's attainment rates by age 24 for dependent family members who entered college by income quartile: 1970 to 2013



Source: Pell Institute

Summer melt rates are highest among students from low-and moderate-income families and students with lower academic achievement. They lack guiding support during the summer months and feel overwhelmed with the tasks required of them in preparation for college in the fall (e.g. completing financial aid applications, filling out forms, attending college orientation, etc.). Other reasons often cited by lower-income students for not staying in or completing college include:

• Not being academically prepared for college coursework; they have not taken the more rigorous courses in high school to help them succeed in college.

• Making decisions about their postsecondary choice based on limited information.

• Dealing with rapidly rising tuition costs, which make college inaccessible or perceived to be inaccessible.

• Not being aware of financial support available to them and/or the financial support they do have—scholarships, loans, etc.—is not enough to cover college costs as well as living expenses (e.g. housing, transportation, childcare).

• Working full-time jobs while attending college, which distracts them from school work.

• Juggling family responsibilities while going to college (e.g. caring for children or others).

• No role models exist in their family or immediate networks with college experience.

• Not feeling as if they belong in the college culture.

TASK FORCE STRATEGY I:

Expand and strengthen support for first-generation and other low-socioeconomic students who need help in transitioning to and completing postsecondary education.

Key Recommendations:

1. Reduce the potential for "summer melt," by providing support to students prior to the first semester of college.

2. Continue to reduce the number of CMS graduates needing remediation at CPCC before they can take college-level coursework.

3. Connect more minority and low-socioeconomic college students to mentoring, academic tutoring, financial assistance, and other support to help them stay in and complete their education.

Implementation Tactics and Policy Considerations:

• Expand information about and access to summer bridge programs at CPCC and other educational institutions to help students follow through with their plans.

• Explore efforts like the Austin Chamber's Summer Melt Aversion Program, where high school or college counselors and/or volunteers stay connected with students over the summer months.

• Continue to align requirements for entry-level college courses with those for CMS diplomas.

• Administer the college-ready anchor assessment in 10th grade to address students' academic deficiencies before college.

• Create a learning network of administrators from CPCC, UNC Charlotte, Davidson College, Queens University, Johnson C. Smith University and Johnson and Wales to share and support evidence-based best practices that improve persistence and completion rates of low-socioeconomic students.

• Embed mentoring in more scholarship programs that serve low socioeconomic students to help improve recipient outcomes.

• Provide financial assistance to meet basic needs for scholarship and low-income students, such as food, books and transportation.

• Leverage external partnerships to provide services and support for students.

DISCONNECTED YOUTH (AGES 16-24): HELPING THEM RE-CONNECT

While the vast majority of young people successfully transition to adulthood, a number of young people ages 16 to 24 are disconnected, meaning they are neither working nor going to school or training. This puts them at an exceptionally high risk of economic and social hardship. In 2013, Measure of America estimated that 45,500 teens and young adults in the Charlotte metro area were considered disconnected. This represents approximately 14.5 percent of all young people ages 16 to 24 in the metro area.[20]

As we think about our next generation of leaders and innovators, we cannot lose sight of these young people and their potential. They too have talents, dreams and goals for their lives. We need to do more in our community to re-engage and connect these teens and young adults to educational, training, and employment opportunities that will put them on a more positive pathway.

TASK FORCE STRATEGY J:

Create more on-ramps to education, training, and employment for our disconnected youth.

Key Recommendations:

1. Make the training and hiring of disconnected youth a much higher community priority.

2. Expand collaboration and partnerships county-wide to reengage our disconnected youth and to develop new and innovative approaches to working with them.

3. Connect more youth to earn and learn training programs that allow them to make a living while earning a credential or degree.

4. Gain commitment from area employers to give disconnected youth a chance by providing them with training and/or work experiences.

Implementation Tactics and Policy Considerations:

• Develop creative outreach strategies to connect with and engage disconnected teens and young adults in job and career pathways and opportunities.

• Call on our business community to reach out to disconnected youth with entry level jobs that lead to meaningful careers. Businesses of all sizes and types, including entrepreneurs, have a role to play, and should be challenged to partner with workforce development agencies, CPCC, and other organizations supporting disconnected youth.

• Provide additional support to expand workforce development programs that offer remediation and GED support, soft skills training, and postsecondary education and training opportunities, including apprenticeships, for teens and young adults.

• Promote entrepreneurship as an alternative career path, and provide guidance and financial support to help young entrepreneurs get started.

• Connect youth and teens to caring adults who can help them navigate their challenges.

• Explore place-based initiatives that concentrate outreach and support in neighborhoods where larger numbers of disconnected youth live.

• Encourage more employers to use hiring policies and practices that do not automatically eliminate hiring young people with criminal records.

• Work with the local legal community to offer more opportunities for youth and young adults with a criminal record to seek expungement, which will make them more attractive candidates for jobs.

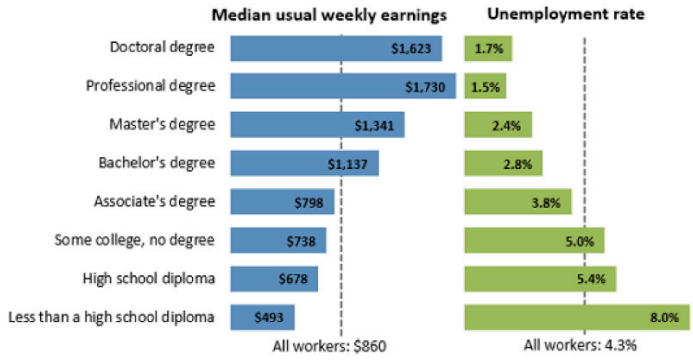
EXPECTATION FOR POSTSECONDARY ATTAINMENT: BUILDING A MECKLENBURG TALENT PIPELINE

While we want to increase awareness of multiple educational pathways to career opportunities, it would be disingenuous not to acknowledge that higher levels of educational attainment correlate with higher levels of economic opportunity.

In today's highly competitive job market, a high school diploma without a training "certificate" is no longer sufficient for success. Throughout Charlotte-Mecklenburg, we must elevate and actively promote the critical importance of the completion of a postsecondary degree and/or industry certification for our youth to successfully compete in our changing, technologically advanced labor market. **We must cultivate the immense talent, intelligence, and creativity of all children so they can grow to their full potential.**

While Charlotte-Mecklenburg is fortunate to have committed advocates for postsecondary attainment, we lack a common agenda to promote a career-ready culture, particularly in low-opportunity neighborhoods. Best practices in this area can be found in other cities that have made this a community-wide priority. In Louisville, KY, business, education, and nonprofit leaders came together in 2010 to launch the "55,000 Degrees" campaign with the goal of increasing the number of people in the region who obtain college degrees and other post-secondary credentials. In Austin, TX, the chamber of commerce is currently leading their "Direct to College" campaign with the goal of enrolling at least 70 percent of the city's public high school graduates directly into higher education. And, through a public/private partnership in Boston, MA, the city's leaders have created "Boston Success," a campaign to double the number of public school students obtaining a college degree or other postsecondary credential.

Earnings and unemployment rates by educational attainment, 2015



Note: Data are for persons age 25 and over. Earnings are for full-time wage and salary workers.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey

To address how families might be able to afford postsecondary educations for their children, many states are engaging in a growing movement to create children's savings accounts (CSAs) for all kindergartners. The Campaign for Every Kid's Future is leading this work nationally, building on the belief that every child, including the most vulnerable, should have dedicated savings that build aspirations and financial means for a future that includes post-secondary education. Research shows that low-income students with a college savings account from an early age are three times more likely to enroll in college and four times more likely to graduate.[21] Even though the savings amount may be relatively small, it helps foster a college-going mindset with the child and parents.

"Say Yes to Education Guilford" in Guilford County, NC, is another community initiative where scholarship support is made available to all low-income public and charter school students. Community leaders in Guilford County launched a chapter of Say Yes in 2015; a $70 million endowment is being established to support the work. We need to explore these and other scholarship opportunities to make postsecondary education more accessible to more students.

We also need to explore and learn from the examples of collective collaboration in other communities. If we fail to implement coordinated initiatives to narrow the achievement gap between low-income and higher-income children, it will translate to diminished hope, unfulfilled aspirations, and lost talent.

By expanding our supports and approaching education in Charlotte-Mecklenburg with the expectation that all children will receive a quality education and be prepared for a productive career, we will ensure the academic success of our own children and plant the seed of future economic success for Mecklenburg County.

TASK FORCE STRATEGY K:

K

Elevate and actively promote the critical importance of acquiring a postsecondary degree and/or industry certification to successfully compete in our changing, technologically advanced labor market.

Key Recommendations:

1. Develop and launch a public campaign and strategy aimed at promoting the importance of postsecondary attainment for all students.

2. Seek creative solutions to provide more young people with financial support/scholarships to enable them to participate in postsecondary education and training.

Implementation Tactics and Policy Considerations:

• Convene a local group of partners to investigate postsecondary campaigns in other communities to identify potential leadership infrastructure, costs, audience messages, what's working/not working and which models may be best to consider for Charlotte-Mecklenburg.

• Lead, support, and implement a community-wide campaign.

• Investigate "Say Yes to Education Guilford" and other universal higher education savings programs to determine feasibility in Charlotte-Mecklenburg and test for interest and willingness to pursue locally.

CHAPTER V: DETERMINANT THREE

CHILD AND FAMILY STABILITY

Common sense suggests and research confirms that children and youth do best in stable households where they know what to expect and where they feel safe and secure. Instability creates stress and can threaten children's and parents' sense of security and control over their lives. All parents juggle the competing demands of raising a family, but caregivers who are experiencing poverty or near poverty circumstances are more challenged to navigate these demands and provide stable environments and consistent support for their children. On a daily basis, they may have difficult choices: pay for food or for child care; take a sick child to the doctor or risk losing their job; or attend a parent/teacher meeting or find a new place to sleep that night. **Chronic, cumulative, and potentially toxic stress can be overwhelming for the entire family and have lasting impacts on the lives and outcomes of children.** A 2015 survey of state Teachers of the Year, our country's top educators, identified family stress as the greatest barrier to school success for K-12 students, followed by poverty and psychological problems.[22]

Multiple and complex factors can contribute to family instability and can compound stressful living environments for children and youth. Some of these factors are within a parent's ability to influence, while others are not. After reviewing the research and listening to the concerns of families and service providers, the Task Force identified eight interrelated factors we believe have the greatest impact on child and family stability and need to be understood and addressed holistically as part of our community's opportunity agenda.

- Family Structure
- Family Formation
- Financial Security
- Access to Affordable Housing
- Access to Public Transportation
- Mental Health
- Involvement in the Criminal Justice System
- Access to Community Services and Support

FAMILY STRUCTURE: THE IMPORTANCE OF TWO-PARENT INVOLVEMENT

The Chetty study identified family structure as the most predictive correlate of economic mobility, indicating that children who grow up in communities with a larger share of single mothers are significantly less likely to experience upward mobility than those with a smaller share of single mother households. Not to dismiss the heroic work that so many single parents undertake while managing parenthood, work, and the rest of life without a partner, statistics show that children receive substantial long-term benefits and opportunities when raised in a two-parent household, even more so when a couple is married. *Opportunity, Responsibility and Security*, a 2015 bipartisan report by the AEI/Brookings Working Group on Poverty and Opportunity, concluded that a child raised by two parents outperforms peers raised in a single-parent environment in many key developmental areas, including education, social engagement, and employment.[23] This strong correlation, reinforced in numerous studies, is commonly attributed to the increased economic resources, time, and support made available by two parents.

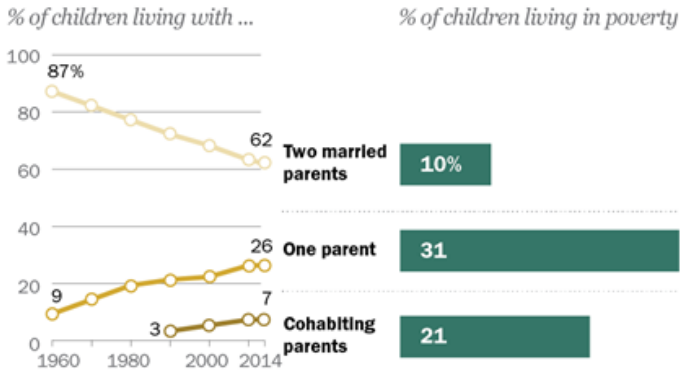
In a recent study, the Pew Research Center indicated that in 2014, 62 percent of children younger than 18 lived in a household with two married parents in the U.S. – a historic low. The share of children living with only one parent stood at 26 percent, and the share in households with two parents who are living together but not married (7 percent) has risen steadily in recent years.

Two-parent involvement, a key element in shaping a child's future, commonly occurs in the context of marriage. A study by Richard Reeves as quoted in the American Enterprise Institute ("AEI")/Brookings report states: "Four out of five children who started out at the bottom income quintile but who were raised by parents married throughout their childhood, rose out of the bottom quintile as adults. In contrast, children raised in the bottom quintile by a parent who remained unmarried throughout their childhood had a 50 percent chance of remaining there." **In general, healthy marriages are a source of family stability and contribute to economic opportunity prospects for children.**

However, current trends suggest a continuing departure from the traditional nuclear family structure. The Western world has seen a steady increase in single-parenthood for the last 40 years. The U.S. has the highest prevalence of single-parent households, with the greatest increase between 1970 and 1990. In Mecklenburg County, the number of married individuals dropped 22 percent between 1970 and 2015.

The Task Force had numerous conversations about family structure, including the role of fathers in the lives of their children and the evolving legal definition of marriage. This topic was one of the most challenging issues we tackled. Some members strongly advocated that we take a firm stand on "marriage for all" as a value to uphold. Others recognized that changing trends in family structure are unlikely to reverse and cultural realities can make marriage less attractive. Additionally, we learned where marriage-promoting initiatives have been attempted, little known evidence of their success exists.

For U.S. kids, strong link between parents' marital status and likelihood of living in poverty



Note: Based on children under 18. Data regarding cohabitation are not available prior to 1990; in earlier years, cohabiting parents are included in "one parent." Poverty is measured using the Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM) and not the Official Poverty Measure.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 1960-2000 decennial census, 2010 and 2014 American Community Survey and 2014 Current Population Survey (IPUMS)

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

After considering all factors noted above, we reached consensus. We believe research is clear about the positive impact of raising a child in a married, two-parent household where the parents also have a healthy relationship. However, the Task Force understands that parents should be free to choose the best arrangement for raising the child. Furthermore, we acknowledge marriage is not a panacea for ending poverty and many opt-out of the traditional family model. In some situations, children are better off living in a single-parent household when the relationship between two married or cohabitating parents is not healthy and stable, for example when domestic violence is a factor. **In consideration of the compelling research-based evidence, the Task Force calls on our community to promote the value and importance of effective and healthy co-parenting for children and youth, whether within or outside marriage.**

We also discussed the data showing single-parent households are overwhelmingly led by mothers. Too frequently in these circumstances fathers are largely absent from the upbringing of their children. We recognize that the consequences of mass incarceration, reduction in benefits, and/or cultural norms can drive or exacerbate these absences. Some of these issues are explored elsewhere in this report. Where education and removal of policy barriers can encourage the re-entry of fathers or prevent their absence to begin with, they must be pursued aggressively.

L

TASK FORCE STRATEGY L

Encourage the formation and maintenance of committed two-parent families.

Key Recommendations:

1. Promote marriage, which research shows is the most reliable route to mobility, recognizing it may not be the choice of all couples.

2. Advocate for the active involvement of fathers in the lives of their children.

Implementation Tactics and Policy Considerations:

• Develop culturally appropriate communications and data-rich messaging strategies to increase awareness of the value of marriage, committed relationships, and co-parenting, and highlight the potential challenges and related stressors of raising children.

• Study, adopt, and implement evidenced-based programs that effectively encourage young people to be part of committed relationships when considering parenthood.

• Expand access to evidence-based and informed programs that support responsible fatherhood.

• Investigate and, where desirable, advocate for the removal of barriers and restrictions to a father's involvement in his child's life due to state and local child support policies and practices and with entitlement and housing programs.

FAMILY FORMATION: INCREASING THE ODDS OF A STRONG START IN LIFE

CHILD BEARING

Implications of unintended pregnancy can be significant for a child and parents. Children from unintended births are more likely to be born with health conditions like neonatal abstinence syndrome, birth defects, and low-birth weight. As these children grow older, they are also more likely to exhibit mental and physical health issues, experience parental abuse and neglect, and become teen parents. Additionally, they are less likely to graduate from high school or college. Birth spacing is also a significant concern. Becoming pregnant within six months after the birth of baby can result in similar outcomes outlined above. The medical risk factors associated with short interval-pregnancies can be significant to both the mother and child.

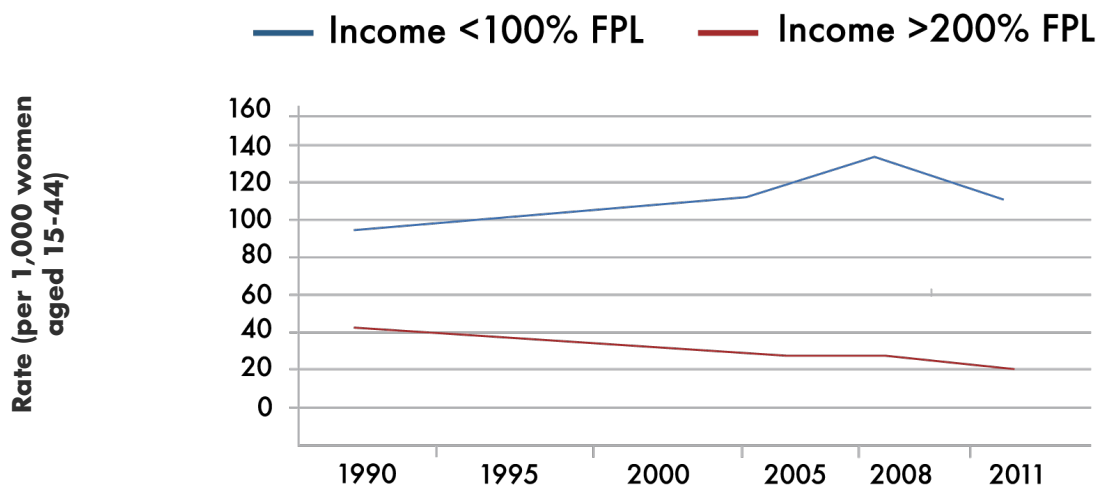
Unintended pregnancy can take a young woman or man off track from his or her educational and employment aspirations and plans.

NATIONALLY, UNPLANNED BIRTHS ACCOUNT FOR NEARLY ONE IN 10 DROPOUTS AMONG FEMALE STUDENTS AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES, AND 7 PERCENT OF DROPOUTS AMONG COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS OVERALL.[23]

The impact can extend to grandparents, with over 6,300 Mecklenburg County grandparents providing primary care for a child under the age of 18.[25]

The Guttmacher Institute and the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy report that an estimated 54 percent of all pregnancies in North Carolina are unintended.[26] Although unintended pregnancies occur across the entire income spectrum, lower income women are five times more likely to have an unintended pregnancy than wealthier women. In 2011, the unintended pregnancy rate

among women with a family income lower than the federal poverty level, at 112 per 1,000, was more than five times the rate among women with an income greater than 200 percent of poverty (20 per 1,000).

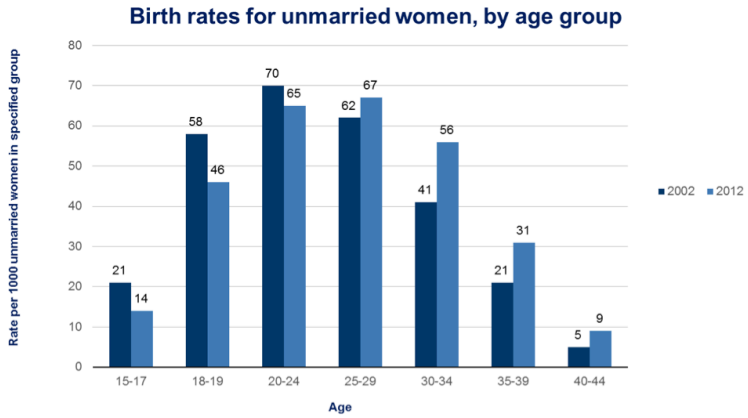


Source: Guttmacher Institute 2016

Scholars from Brookings Institute, AEI, Pew Charitable Trusts, Center on Families and Children, Center for Disease Control (CDC), and others universally agree: **the path to reducing intergenerational poverty is to encourage all young people, regardless of background, to delay parenthood until they are ready to raise a child**. These researchers point to poor knowledge about contraception options, lack of high-quality counseling in the healthcare system about contraception, and uneven access to the safest and most effective forms of birth control as the leading causes of unintended pregnancy.

The benefits of widely available reproductive health information and care are clear. We see it in programming targeting teens, and have seen it specifically in Mecklenburg County, where our rate of teen birth (ages 15-19) plummeted from a little over 80 births per 1,000 births to just under 30 births per 1,000 births between 1995 and 2014.[27] This decline can be attributed to pregnancy prevention programs and messaging, as well as availability of more effective contraception. Reduction in the teen pregnancy rate is good news; however, we still see a significant number of unplanned pregnancies for women ages 19 to 29.

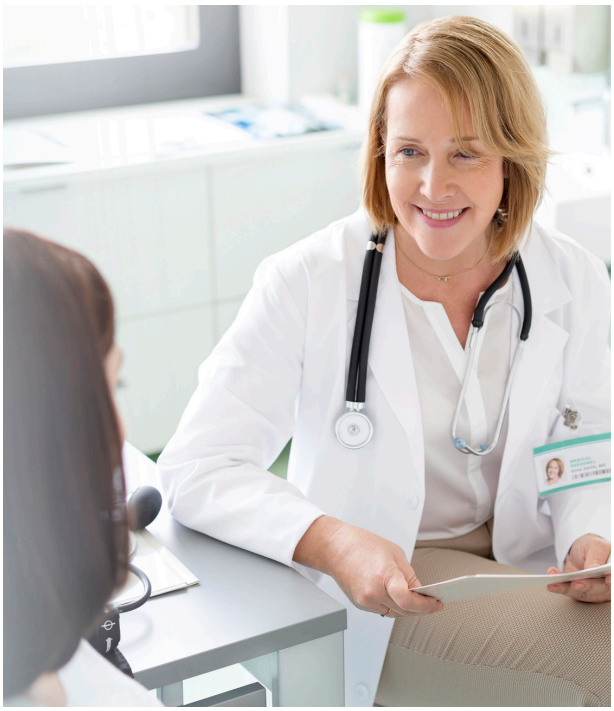
As with the topic of family structure, the Task Force wrestled with the conversation around delaying pregnancy. We acknowledge it can be a charged topic and people will have different perspectives on the matter. We also discussed and acknowledge North Carolina's shameful legacy of forced sterilization of poor and disabled people, many of color, between 1929 and 1974. Our interest is not about coercion, but rather about making informed decisions and access. We were led by the research and data, which clearly show that having a child before one is ready can have negative outcomes relative to the life trajectory of young parents and their children.



We were particularly impressed by a presentation from Upstream, a program that asks one simple question: "Do you intend to get pregnant in the next year?" If the answer is "Yes", the woman is connected to services that help ensure a healthy birth. If the answer is "No", the individual is provided with information about the full range of options to help with that decision, from abstinence to long acting reversible contraceptives. We believe pregnancy delay is an achievable goal for young people and is a worthy investment for our community. We also acknowledge the reality that low-income residents receive disparate health care information and service, specifically on reproductive health.

TASK FORCE STRATEGY M:

Ensure young women and men have access to the necessary information about and resources for reproductive health care to ensure they can plan for pregnancy when they are ready to raise a child.



Key Recommendations:

1. Complete a community health assessment, plan, and outreach strategy that builds understanding and provides a feasible approach to reducing pregnancy in Mecklenburg County. This plan should explore a range of options from abstinence to creating greater access to the most effective forms of contraceptives, including long-acting reversible contraception (LARCs.) The work is already underway through a study commissioned by several philanthropic organizations.

2. Develop fact-based and culturally appropriate messaging that empowers all young people to incorporate pregnancy planning into the vision they establish for their lives. We acknowledge, first, that abstinence works. Always. We acknowledge, also, that those who decide to become sexually active are not necessarily deciding to have children. To prevent unintended pregnancy and reduce the risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), young people need age-appropriate information.

3. Based upon the outcomes of the assessment, launch a comprehensive campaign to reduce the rates of unintended pregnancy in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, primarily among young women and men ages 17-29.

IMPLEMENTATION TACTICS AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS:

• Identify and secure philanthropic dollars for the campaign.

• Implement the community strategies developed in the three recommendations above.

• Ensure key stakeholders are engaged in the process, including Mecklenburg County Health Department, Carolinas HealthCare System, Novant Health, private clinics, and other institutions serving young men and women, such as education and faith-based organizations.

II. PRENATAL AND POSTNATAL HEALTH

When women and their partners in our community do decide to become pregnant, prenatal and postnatal care are critically important to providing a healthy start for a child. As noted above, providers can support these efforts by asking a simple question, “Do you intend to become pregnant in the next twelve months?” If the answer is “Yes,” the individual should be connected to the appropriate resources. Because cognitive and physical development of infants and children are influenced by the health, nutrition, and behaviors of their mothers during and after pregnancy, preparedness and intention are critical. The CDC indicates poor pregnancy outcomes often include low-birthweight, preterm births and infant mortality, which are associated with late or no prenatal care, cigarette smoking, alcohol and other drug use, short-interpregnancy spacing, diseases, obesity and poor nutrition.

State health records show that between 2011 and 2015 in Mecklenburg County:

- 11 percent of all babies were born at a low or very low-birth weight
- 10.6 percent were premature
- 12 percent of births were short-interval
- 6 infants under the age of 1 died per 1,000 live births
- Nearly 6 percent of births were to mothers who received late or no prenatal care

The racial disparities within these health statistics are clear. African American infants died at a rate almost four times that of white infants, and twice as many low and very-low weight African American infants were born than white underweight infants.

The days and weeks following childbirth are also critical to the health and well-being of mothers and their newborns. Access to postnatal care is important during this time for mothers to understand and address nutritional and breastfeeding practices that are beneficial, recognize postpartum depression, which is especially common among low-income mothers, and discuss other important health issues with a provider. Mecklenburg County Health Department, Carolinas HealthCare System, Novant Health, community clinics, educational institutions and nonprofits such as Nurse Family Partnership, are making great strides, and we encourage expansion of their work going forward.

Additionally, paid leave is often overlooked as vital to early child development. Parental leave time enables parents to bond with and care for their infants and prepare physically and emotionally before returning to work. According to a study by the PEW Research Center, the U.S. is the only country among 41 developed nations that does not mandate any paid leave for new parents.[28] While the majority of paid leave is for mothers, leave for fathers is now available in 31 countries, although the leave time is much shorter. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that in 2015, only 13 percent of American workers had access to paid family leave through their employers.[29] Low-income mothers are especially challenged to take time off after giving birth because they cannot afford to miss work. A 2012 survey conducted by the Department of Labor indicated that one in four new mothers returns to work within two weeks of giving birth.[30] Higher wage earners are much more likely to receive paid parental leave than lower-wage workers.

TASK FORCE STRATEGY N:

Improve birth outcomes for all children and their mothers.

Key Recommendations:

1.Provide access to evidence-based information for all women, regardless of their income level, and culturally sensitive information and programming for quality prenatal and postnatal care.

2.Encourage more employers to provide paid parental leave.

Implementation Tactics and Policy Considerations:

• Ensure prenatal care services are more widely available early in pregnancy.

• Expand the delivery of outreach strategies for low-income women who experience barriers to information and care.

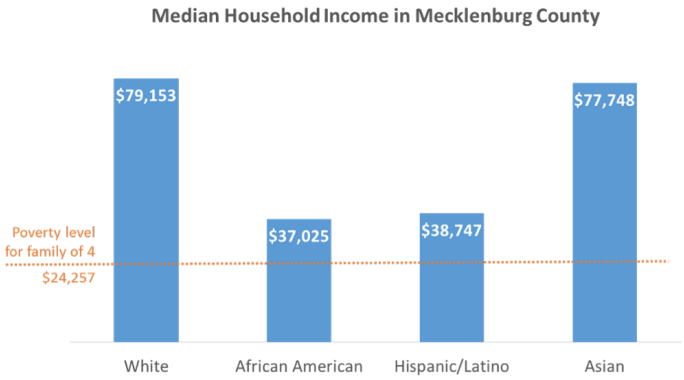
•Incorporate knowledge about and treatment for post-partum depression in pregnancy services.

•Pursue additional funding for evidence-based home visitation programs, such as Nurse Family Partnership.

FINANCIAL SECURITY: GETTING ON A PATH TO A LIVING WAGE INCOME

The Great Recession took a toll on many families in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, particularly those in our lower economic ranks who lost jobs and had few assets to keep them afloat. Although many families have recovered from this financial crisis, others still struggle to catch up.

LIVING PAYCHECK-TO-PAYCHECK, RELYING ON HIGH-COST LOANS FROM PREDATORY LENDERS, AND BORROWING FROM FAMILY AND FRIENDS IS A WAY OF LIFE THAT FAR TOO MANY OF OUR FAMILIES EXPERIENCE.



Source: U.S. Census 2015

Now, more than one in five children live in families below the poverty level in Mecklenburg County. For a family of four, poverty level is $24,257. As shown in the table above, the median income for white and Asian households is almost double that of African Americans and Latinos in Charlotte-Mecklenburg.

Lack of sufficient income to afford housing, food, transportation, childcare and other necessities, let alone pay for books, school field trips, and other opportunities for children, can be incredibly destabilizing, stressful, and demoralizing for parents and their children. Although public assistance programs can help many of these families, the support is not adequate and, in many instances, is time limited. Also, parents receiving public assistance can face a "benefits cliff" if their income increases. In other words, they will lose their benefit once they meet a certain income threshold. Recent changes at the state have provided transition time to lessen the immediate impact of the benefit cliff on families; however, even with a transition period, losing benefits for early care and education can be significant for families. Some parents choose not to seek advancement in their jobs because the increase in pay cannot offset the high cost of early care and education without a subsidy. This is an

unintended consequence of our public assistance system that not only affects early care and education, but other benefits such as food stamps and housing subsidies.

The Task Force recognizes the difficulty of raising a family on insufficient income, particularly considering the living wage for a family of four in Mecklenburg County was $27.61 an hour in 2016.[31] Ideally, we aspire for all families to make a living wage, but know it is difficult to earn $27 an hour with limited education and skills and other barriers, especially without the benefit of two incomes. Our focus for advancing this aspiration is two-fold: A) create and provide greater access to more living wage jobs, and B) help more low-income parents develop their skills and connect with higher paying jobs.

Monthly expenses for a family of 4	
Housing	$864
Food	$550
Childcare	$1,378
Healthcare	$429
Transportation	$587
Other necessities	$476
Taxes (payroll and income)	$520
Total	$4,804
Annual total	$57,436
Hourly wage needed	**$27.61**

Notes: Four-person family consists of two adults and two children.
Data Source: North Carolina Budget and Tax Center 2016 Living Income Standard

TASK FORCE STRATEGY O:

Help more families get and stay on a path to living-wage income and asset building.

Key Recommendations:

1. Create and provide access to more quality jobs that pay living wages for families living in low-opportunity communities.

2. Encourage more anchor institutions and other employers in the community to voluntarily raise wages and improve benefits for their lowest-paid employees.

3. Ramp up community efforts to place more parents of school-age children in jobs, particularly jobs with advancement opportunities and benefits.

4. Increase access and opportunities for parents to earn a high school or equivalency diploma and/or engage in post-secondary education or market-driven job training while meeting the demands of their families.

5. Encourage and support more low-income parents to pursue entrepreneurship as an alternative path to achieve financial stability.

6. Connect low-income families to financial and asset building education and low-cost products that will help them become more financially stable.

Implementation Tactics and Policy Considerations:

• Provide economic development incentives and use other tools (Tax Increment Financing, Opportunity Zones, etc.) to target new businesses in current "job deserts" in and around low-income areas of the community.

• Place a higher economic development priority on recruiting and retaining diverse businesses that provide entry-level and mid-level jobs.

• Ensure greater accountability for businesses that receive government tax incentives or support from other financing programs to hire workers from low-opportunity communities, and consider hiring and wage practices when selecting vendors for government contracts.

• Coordinate the job development activities between local workforce development agencies to better match job seekers with employers, and develop a dashboard to monitor job creation, hiring statistics, and wages for families living in low-opportunity communities.

• Educate and encourage more businesses to become "fair chance" employers who use best practices in giving job seekers with criminal records a fair chance for employment.

• Expand and connect more low-income parents to paid work and learn training models so they can make a living while being trained.

• Explore implementing evidence-based two-generation models in Mecklenburg County that bridge the workforce development system with the early childhood system.

• Integrate more wrap-around support (social workers and mentors) for parents enrolled in education and training programs.

• Promote and provide more entrepreneurship training and loan programs in low-opportunity communities.

• Integrate financial literacy, asset building, and financial capacity building into human service and housing programs.

• Increase awareness of the Federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and advocate for the reinstatement of the North Carolina EITC.

• Develop a campaign to educate families about the high cost of predatory lending and promote lower cost alternatives.

• Encourage local banks and other credible financial institutions to offer free or low-cost products that encourage families to save.

ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING: A MUST FOR FAMILIES

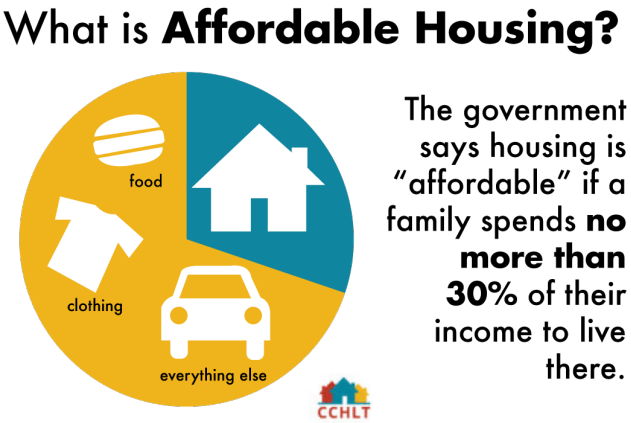
No matter where the Task Force went to solicit community input, lack of affordable housing surfaced as a major issue. Housing prices continue to rise in Charlotte-Mecklenburg at a time when wages are stagnant. **The average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in December 2016 was $1,468.** Nearly half of renters and more than a quarter of homeowners in our community were cost-burdened between 2010 and 2014, meaning they spent more than 30 percent of their gross income on housing costs. Many new housing developments are aimed at higher-income households, and older affordable rental communities are being demolished.

City staff estimate that over 34,000 more units of affordable housing are needed to meet the current demand of those making 60 percent or less of the area median income (AMI), and more units are needed in higher-opportunity areas to provide housing options near work for lower-wage employees.

Families challenged to find and keep affordable housing are often forced to move to challenging environments environments for their children. They also tend to move frequently causing their children to transfer from one school to another during the school year, further destabilizing children and youth. Sometimes they may live in a weekly motel, which takes a disproportionate share of their income, or they double up with relatives and friends.

We continue to see families with children that have become homeless seeking shelter at the Salvation Army's Center for Hope. The shelter is regularly at or beyond capacity, despite adding 64 more beds in 2015. This shelter's issues further underscores the pressing demand for housing that is affordable to working families.

To galvanize public support for affordable housing, we must prioritize housing in the same way we do other key infrastructure areas. We make substantial and expensive investments to ensure we have safe drinking water and efficient roads, but fail to apply the same commitment to the most basic requirement—a safe and affordable home. The housing deficit is too large to simply build our way out of the situation. Instead, we need to utilize all of the tools in our toolkit including expanded rental subsidies, refurbishing existing units and new developments.



As an example, the $20 million A Way Home Housing Endowment, created through a partnership between the City of Charlotte, local philanthropy, and Mecklenburg County is a step in the right direction. Through the endowment, homeless families receive rental subsidies and support services, while building their ability to retain unsubsidized housing within two years. Families at imminent risk of becoming homeless are provided targeted prevention support to help them remain housed. The fund is also prioritizing housing placements in high-opportunity areas of the community to reduce the impact of segregation and to build social capital.

We should also pay closer attention to providing more home ownership vs. rental opportunities for low-income residents. Home ownership can be one of the only ways families can grow assets for longer-term security. Increased home ownership also stabilizes neighborhoods and can provide greater stability for children and youth.

Our affordable housing crisis requires new and innovative thinking, community awareness, and dramatically expanded funding. The City of Charlotte recently announced a goal of building or preserving 5,000 affordable units over the next three years and committed resources to hire a consultant to develop a strategic housing strategy. The Task Force applauds these actions, but the reality is we will never make a significant impact in the deficit unless we set bolder goals. We realize no one strategy will solve this problem, rather, multiple strategies and greater collaboration among

the public, private, and nonprofit sectors is required.

For example, many in our community advocate for a mandatory inclusionary zoning policy to be implemented in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. Through this tool, housing developers would be required to provide a certain percentage of affordable units as part of their overall development. The City of Charlotte has had a voluntary inclusionary zoning policy in place for several years, but it has not been used. Although mandatory inclusionary zoning is a valid affordable housing strategy, consider state legislators have endorsed a provision that prevents local communities from using such a tool. We should continue to advocate for a policy change at the state level, which would enable us to consider using mandatory inclusionary zoning, but we should not count on it as an option available at the local level in our near-term future.

TASK FORCE STRATEGY P:

Take dramatic steps to address our affordable housing crisis, which will stabilize working families, prevent family homelessness, and minimize the disruption of children who currently move from school-to-school due to housing affordability issues.

Key Recommendations:

1. Support the City of Charlotte's goal of creating or preserving a net 5,000 affordable units over the next three years. Concurrently, investigate and implement strategies to set an ambitious goal for a second wave of housing that will substantially reduce the deficit of 34,000 units.

2. Pursue new and/or dramatically expanded sources of public funding to support affordable housing development.

3. Engage private, nonprofit, and public developers in new conversations to create innovative strategies to address locational, regulatory and financial barriers to affordable housing.

4. Encourage and support more place-based initiatives that include affordable housing as part of neighborhood revitalization efforts. (Renaissance West Community Initiative is an example of place-based initiative.)

5. Ensure mixed income housing—including rental and home ownership opportunities for low-income residents—is always considered when planning new residential or mixed-use development.

6. Use excess public-owned land for affordable housing when feasible.

7. Act on other key recommendations outlined in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Strategies for Affordable Housing Development Report (2016.)[32]

Implementation Tactics and Policy Considerations:

• Increase housing bonds referendum from the current $15M every two years to up to $50M every two years and maintain at these significantly higher levels.

• Explore the creation of a Housing Opportunity Investment Fund to incentivize new developments.

• Create strategies to increase use of the four percent Low-Income Tax Credit, TIF, and other incentives.

• Examine ways to lower barriers and fees associated with the development of affordable housing.

• Overhaul zoning and permitting processes to include the creation of an affordable housing overlay district, and continue to advocate for changes at the state level, which would enable local communities to use mandatory inclusionary zoning as a tool to create more affordable units.

• Advocate that elected official make affordable housing development the highest priority for using excess public land when deliberating on properties through the local government's Mandatory Referral Process.

• Partner with developers to understand the financial considerations of developing affordable housing and to identify opportunities to address those needs.

• Institute an initiative to acquire vacant, foreclosed residences with delinquent taxes and repurpose for affordable housing.

• Encourage large anchor institutions (i.e. schools, hospitals, and other large employers) to consider assisting with housing affordability for its workforce.

• Substantially increase access to and funding for rental subsidy vouchers paired with supportive services, including programs such as the A Way Home Endowment.

• Create and sustain a landlord consortium to encourage landlord participation in all zip codes to house families with public and/or private rental subsidies.

• Provide more mechanisms for lower-income families to purchase homes and build assets, such as creation of a community land trust and deed restrictions that control the resale price of a home.

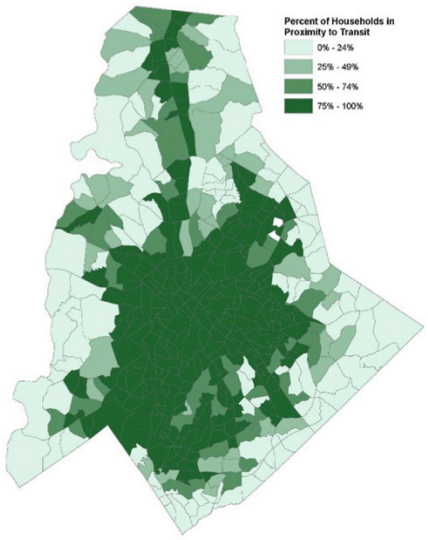
• Develop and launch a new community campaign to change the community mindset about affordable housing and shift to a "Yes, in my backyard" mentality by more people.

ACCESS TO PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION: GETTING AROUND WHEN JUST GETTING BY

Transportation was another consistent barrier to opportunity identified for low-income parents and their children. Families that rely on public transportation to get to work, take children to child care, access public services, find health care, shop for groceries, and participate in out-of-school activities face challenges, particularly when a trip involves multiple destinations. For example, many new entry-level jobs are in suburban areas where public transportation is limited or nonexistent, and many jobs require working late at night or on weekends when conventional transit services are reduced or not available. The cost of public transit can also be a barrier and, in June 2016, the Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) increased fees for riders.

In Charlotte, the average non-express bus trip takes 90 minutes due to the "hub and spoke" model, which forces people to come into the Center City and then transfer back out onto other routes to get to their destination. Fewer than 20 percent of bus riders can get to their destination in one bus ride.[33] Public transportation options in Mecklenburg's five towns are especially limited. When parents and their children lack reliable transportation, they are often stuck and cannot access opportunities.

In late 2016, CATS began "Envision My Ride," a year-long initiative aimed at redesigning the current bus system. Through this initiative, the bus route structure and frequency will be studied to determine how the system can be improved and better serve the Charlotte-Mecklenburg region. The study will consider cross-town and suburb-to-suburb bus service, connections between different bus routes and between bus service and light rail, the frequency of service, and more direct services.



PROXIMITY TO PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION 2016

TASK FORCE STRATEGY Q:

Create a more connected community to ensure all families have access to employment, shopping, service areas, schools, parks, and other daily destinations.

Key Recommendations:

1. Increase transportation options for families who don't have their own vehicles.

2. Improve alignment between housing and transportation.

Implementation Tactics and Policy Considerations:

• Support CATS' Envision My Ride initiative and subsequent implementation efforts, and prioritize connecting low-income families when implementing the bus route restructuring.

• Develop and expand public/private partnerships to provide low-cost transportation service, ridesharing, carpooling, and/or bus pass benefits that will enable more low-wage workers to access employment sites within the county and region.

• Explore/expand options for low-income parents to obtain their own vehicles through facilitating vehicle donation and repair programs and/or providing loan assistance to purchase or lease vehicles.

• Increase availability of safe and reliable transportation for youth to participate in out-of-school time activities, including sponsorships for bus passes.

MENTAL HEALTH:
MANAGING THE IMPACTS OF MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL STRESS

It is difficult to disentangle poverty and poor mental health. There's a two-way connection between economic and social well-being. Poor mental health is a significant cause of wider social and health problems, including low levels of education achievement and work productivity, poor community cohesion, high levels of poor physical health, premature death, violence, and relationship breakdown.

The impacts of mental health on a person's quality of life are not limited to people who live in poverty. It is experienced by people across the entire economic strata. However, recent research reinforces what common sense tells us—living with the chronic stress and anxiety of financial instability can create a significant psychological burden on low-income parents and their children. The concept of "scarcity" can leave low-income children and their families with diminished capacity to perform everyday tasks, such as finding another job or kids doing their schoolwork.

As noted earlier in our report, we learned about the impact toxic stress has on early brain development. We also learned of the long-term association between early poverty and mental health. When we consider the reality of generational poverty—that many parents were also raised in poverty—we understand the transmission of depression and mental health challenges from generation to generation. It is not always about stress and anxiety. Other mental disorders experienced by people across all income levels can be greatly exacerbated by living in poverty.

In Mecklenburg County's 2015 Community Pulse Report, 15 percent of residents identified having poor mental health for more than 7 days a month. Individuals making less than $50,000 reporting double the number of poor mental health days when compared to those making $50,000 or more.[34]

As the Task Force listened to people through our discovery process, mental health was consistently raised as an issue. Teachers and school administrators talked about difficulties trying to educate students dealing with stress and other mental health challenges. Parents talked about their own struggles with depression and the lack of support. Service providers who work with children and families in poverty reminded us not to forget the influence that mental health has on many of the clients they serve. They pointed to the lack of resources and support needed to deal with mental health issues for adults and children, particularly for those who don't have insurance or the financial means to get help. The mental health system, locally and nationally, is woefully insufficient. Finally, we repeatedly heard about the stigma attached to having and seeking assistance for mental health issues.

TASK FORCE STRATEGIC PRIORITY R:

Develop efforts focused on addressing mental health issues and/or reducing negative mental health impacts of living in low-opportunity environments.

Key Recommendations:

1. Deepen our understanding of the childhood mental health system and develop tangible strategies to address identified needs and gaps. An assessment is underway currently with recommendations forthcoming in spring 2017.

2. Increase the number of social workers in high poverty schools to expand access to students.

3. Provide all teachers and others working with children better training on evidence-based practices to best address emotional stress and other mental health challenges.

4. Expand access to mental health services for children, youth, and adults in low-income areas.

5. Increase availability of and access to parenting education classes, home visitation programs, mentoring, and other support to reduce toxic stress in the lives of low-income families.

6. Support opportunities to identify best practices and/or evidenced-based programs that reduce the impact of toxic stress in children, youth, and adults including physical exercise, mental health education, meditation, re-framing, etc.

7. Investigate strategies to reduce the stigma of mental health issues and associated treatment.

Implementation Tactics and Policy Considerations:

• Complete a pediatric mental health system assessment by June 1, 2017. Review and implement strategies based on the findings.

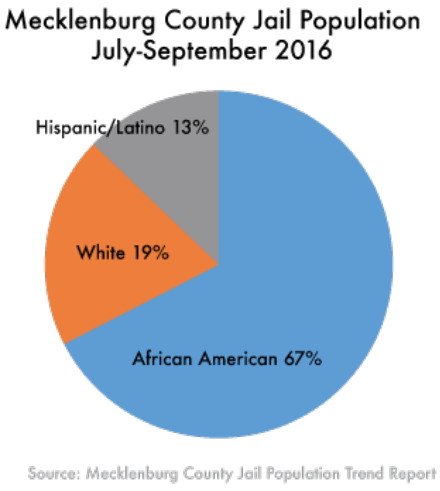
• Support increased public funding through the Mecklenburg County Health Department for social workers assigned to high poverty schools within CMS, and increase the number of other mental health professionals assigned to schools, particularly schools with high rates of suspension and other disciplinary action.

• Leverage the recently announced collaboration between Novant Health and Carolinas Healthcare to push for increased capacity to address mental health issues in low-income neighborhoods.

• Encourage creation of peer networks of women and parents with similar needs to support one another (i.e. Family Independence Initiative in California).

INVOLVEMENT WITH THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM: DEALING WITH THE ENDURING CONSEQUENCES

A comprehensive discussion of racial and ethnic disparities cannot omit the legacy of systematic oppression underlying our current levels of mass incarceration, and the overrepresentation of African Americans—particularly young males—in our jails and prisons. In recent years, disparities have been revealed at numerous levels in the criminal justice system, from policing and law enforcement, to pretrial release decisions, enforcement of drug laws, ability to pay court fees and fines, sentencing, and even traffic stops. Leaders from the Charlotte-based Race Matters for Juvenile Justice are currently working to reduce disproportionality and disparate outcomes for children and families of color within the local criminal justice system through programming such as Dismantling Racism and other implicit bias trainings. Our local judges, law enforcement agencies, public defenders, and others in the system have been actively participating, and progress is being made.



Source: Mecklenburg County Jail Population Trend Report

The Task Force did not deeply examine broad national reform in criminal justice, although we recognize it is much needed to address inequities and disproportionality in arrests and incarcerations. However, as related to economic opportunity, we thought it important to address the impact of the criminal justice system on children, youth, and families in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. Accordingly, our recommendations focus on strategies we believe will help prevent young people and their parents from entering the criminal justice system in the first place.

It is not difficult to imagine how disruptive the incarceration of a parent can be to the stability of a family. **Given the disproportionate incarceration of African American and Latino men in North Carolina and across the nation, an uneven burden is placed on many of our community's families.** Imprisonment diminishes the earnings of adults, compromises their health, reduces family resources, and contributes to family breakup. It can also lead to social, emotional, and educational challenges for affected children, perpetuating the effects of incarceration inter-generationally.

The uneven incarceration of people of color is not limited to adults. In 2012, the Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department reported 5,717 arrests to persons aged 15 or younger, with the overwhelming majority of them being African American. In North Carolina, when young people are adjudicated delinquent and incarcerated, they are sent to a Youth Development Center (YDC). In 2012, 23 young people from Mecklenburg County were sentenced to a YDC: Twenty-two of those youth were African American.

WHETHER OR NOT AN INDIVIDUAL HAS BEEN INCARCERATED, HAVING A CRIMINAL RECORD OFTEN CARRIES A LIFETIME OF CONSEQUENCES.

The Center for American Progress (CAP) recently published "One Strike and You're Out," a study of the impacts a criminal record can have on families. CAP estimates that between 33 million and 36.5 million children in the United States—nearly half of U.S. children—now have at least one parent with a criminal record. The study identifies five areas in which a criminal record can significantly exacerbate existing challenges among low-income parents and their families:[35]

• **Income:** Parents with criminal records have lower earning potential, as they often face major obstacles to securing employment and receiving public assistance.

• **Savings and assets:** Mounting criminal justice debts and unaffordable child support arrears severely limit families' ability to save for the future and can create a cycle of debt.

• **Education:** Parents with criminal records face barriers to education and training opportunities that would increase their chances of finding well-paying jobs and better equip them to support their families.

• **Housing:** Barriers to public as well as private housing for parents with criminal records can lead to housing instability and make family reunification difficult, if not impossible.

• **Family strength and stability:** Financial and emotional stressors associated with parental criminal records often pose challenges in maintaining healthy relationships and profoundly affect the stability of a family.

When teens and young adults become involved in the criminal justice system, they too face some of these same challenges. We hope by implementing the strategies and recommendations outlined in this report, our community will see a decline in the number of people arrested and incarcerated over time. For families dealing with incarcerated parents and/or youth, we ask our community to give these individuals a second chance to rebuild their lives.

TASK FORCE STRATEGY S:

Invest in strategies that support comprehensive criminal justice reform, and create a community where families are not destabilized due to interactions with the criminal justice system.

Key Recommendations:

1. Develop policies and interventions to decrease the high rates of adult and youth interactions with the criminal justice system and counteract the current national and local trends of unnecessary jail time.

2. Improve civilian-police relationships through increased trust and legitimacy, and develop local systems for law enforcement governance and oversight that brings civilians to the table as stakeholders and empowers the neighborhoods and communities being policed to address policies and practices.

Implementation Tactics and Policy Considerations:

• Advocate for policy changes to state legislation to raise the age when youthful offenders are charged as adults from 16 to 18 years old.

• Identify and implement evidence-based programs to increase school engagement and reduce youth delinquency and violence, thereby disrupting the "school-to-prison pipeline".

• Advocate for school policies and practices that promote keeping students in school and minimize the role of law enforcement in disciplinary action.

• Identify and pursue alternative intervention methods to replace disciplinary measures such as out-of-school suspensions, expulsion, and school based arrests, which disproportionately affect students of color and transfer them from the academic environment into the juvenile and criminal justice systems.

• Invest in training and implementation of pre-arrest diversion initiatives that redirect citizens from the criminal justice system and into appropriate health, mental health, and substance abuse services when appropriate.

• Improve processes that move cases through the system quickly so individuals are not incarcerated for long periods of time as their case proceeds.

• Implement new policies for bail, fines, and fees that will reduce incarceration of individuals who are incapable of paying fines, fees, and court costs.

• Pursue more ways to improve relationships, increase community engagement, and foster greater cooperation and collaboration between the criminal justice system and community members, especially in communities and neighborhoods disproportionately affected by crime. Improved trust, transparency, and mutual accountability should result from this collaborative work.

• Utilize consistent survey methods to track and analyze the level of trust communities have in law enforcement.

• Continue to implement recruitment, hiring, and retention practices that promote a police force that reflects the diversity of the communities law enforcement serves.

• Encourage area employers to use fair chance hiring practices for job applicants with criminal records.

ACCESSING SERVICES AND SUPPORT: NAVIGATING DISJOINTED SYSTEMS

Charlotte-Mecklenburg's public and community assistance programs span a range of support systems including housing, disability, physical health, mental health, child welfare, and workforce services. In many cases, human service agencies have evolved to address symptoms or singular issues, but fail to coordinate and achieve long-term impact. This translates into gaps and inflexibility, which result in barriers to serving people in greatest need. These systems can have tremendous positive impacts; however, many are challenged by the lack of common databases and policies that restrict data sharing.

A SHARED CLIENT PUBLIC SECTOR DATABASE WITH COMMON METRICS, WHERE FEASIBLE, COULD CREATE EFFICIENCIES AROUND THE INTAKE PROCESS AND IMPROVE CASE MANAGEMENT.

Mecklenburg County is implementing an integrated human services strategy and we applaud these efforts. However, we believe there is a broader opportunity to develop a community-led vision for how all stakeholders provide human services. The Cultural Vision Plan: Imagine 2025 is one example of how individuals and organizations (in this case, arts and culture) can come together to develop a shared vision. Developing a human services vision for the community will require a shift in thinking from how individual organizations serve a client vs. how the system, as a whole, serves a client. With client-centered integration of social services across public and nonprofit providers, we hope to better invest in evidence and research-based programs that produce the greatest impact on families and children, and connect families with the services they need.

One additional efficiency to explore is United Way's 2-1-1 system, which is used to connect individuals with human service agencies thereby meeting basic needs. However, additional capital and further innovation are required to leverage this tool to its fullest potential.

TASK FORCE STRATEGY T:

Re-envision a human services system in which the needs of families are addressed holistically and services and support are coordinated to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Key Recommendations:

1. Convene stakeholders to develop a community-centered human services vision plan.

2. Use a systems thinking/design approach to better integrate and coordinate service delivery across programs and systems to provide more client-centered service that achieves greater outcomes for families.

3. Improve and consolidate our information and referral systems to better and more efficiently serve families seeking assistance.

4. Invest in evidence- and research-based programs that produce the greatest impact on families and children.

Implementation Tactics and Policy Considerations:

• Develop shared client databases and metrics, where feasible, to streamline intake processes and coordinate case management.

• Coordinate social work case management across programs and systems (when multiple social workers are serving the same client) through assignment of lead social workers.

• Use the collective impact model to support common goals and outcomes for families and programs that use evidence-based or research-informed practices to achieve agreed upon outcomes.

• Transform United Way's 2-1-1 system to serve as the community's central clearinghouse for information about and referrals to human services resources.

• Invest capital in United Way's 2-1-1 system to allow for innovation and efficiencies.

• Develop data sharing policies of government agencies that currently prevent sharing of data across systems.

CHAPTER VI: SOCIAL CAPITAL

A CROSS-CUTTING FACTOR

"...there is enormous value in what economists call social capital. It's a professor's term, but the concept is pretty simple: The networks of people and institutions around us have real economic value. They connect us to the right people, ensure that we have opportunities, and impart valuable information. Without them, we're going it alone."
J.D. Vance, Hillbilly Elegy

It is not lost on us that most of the determinants and recommendations in this document were already known. Some might say that we haven't revealed anything new. That may be true to a degree, but we believe we've demonstrated that the innovation of our findings is in:

• Reflecting upon our history in an authentic way,

• Acknowledging the complexity of working with human beings free to choose their own paths,

• Identifying the need to look at the connectivity between the determinants,

• Encouraging solutions that address both systemic and individual challenges, and

• Wrapping the determinants in cross-cutting influences, one of which has already been addressed (the impact of segregation).

Just as the Task Force learned early on that segregation cuts across all the determinants, we were reminded along the way that social capital also carries tremendous power to influence outcomes in each of the areas. During one of our community sessions, a young adult used a phrase that stuck with us. He acknowledged his role in a checkered high school experience and said he thought he had until the 11th grade to get serious about his studies; however, the young man then paused and said he wished he had a *"life navigator"* starting in middle school. He wanted someone who could walk beside him to ensure that his aspirations and dreams were connected to tangible actions and results. To echo the quote in *Hillbilly Elegy*; without a life navigator, he felt like he was going it alone. In fact, we heard people describe a similar idea so many times that we believe having a life navigator could be the "secret sauce" that most reports and programs tend to gloss over.

So, what might life navigators do? In the simplest terms, their primary role would be to take the "vague hopes" of a young person and help turn them into "active-

aspirations." In a 2014 article entitled "Vague Hopes, Active Aspirations and Equality", Brookings Institution scholar Richard Reeves identified a distinction between a strongly grounded aspiration, one towards which an individual is actively working, and a general aspiration that has little impact on a person's conduct. He defines the two as:

• "An **active aspiration** is a goal or set of goals toward which a person is consciously and deliberately working. It likely requires investing time, energy and other resources; but also requires the ability to resist or defer gratification."

• "A **vague hope** consists of a loosely stated goal or set of goals, largely untethered from current activities and decision-making. A teenager may hope for a college degree, but doesn't really work at school, investigate colleges, research financial aid packages, or in some cases, even apply."

He summarizes by stating:

"Opportunities and aspirations develop in tandem, interacting with each other in both directions. There is no cultural gap in terms of overall aspirations in life. Most people want similar things: a worthwhile job, a stable family, a good education. A class gap is, however, visible in active aspirations: visible, realizable goals animating the formulation of plans and development of time, energy and skills."

Throughout our community conversations, almost every person who talked about his or her trajectory from poverty to middle class or above could trace that ascent back to one person—or at most a handful of people—who helped him or her develop goals and aspirations, but also provided a tangible pathway towards achieving them. Many times it was a parent or caregiver, but more often it was someone from a very different background who provided knowledge about and access to other networks: a coach, teacher, employer, youth director, etc. Invariably, this new relationship brought about the revelation that children and youth who grow up in low-opportunity neighborhoods are often playing on an uneven playing field when compared to those in higher-opportunity areas.

Mr. Reeves identifies three explanations for why an individual may end up with lower aspirations without exposure to and assistance from people in different groups:

1. **Beyond my reach:** The mistaken belief that the goal is beyond their reach.

2. **Not for people like me:** Individuals may inherit or adopt values, preferences, and norms from others that place a lower weight on particular goals.

3. **Never knew about it:** A person might not have an active aspiration simply because of ignorance of the object of the aspiration or the pathway towards it.

Mr. Reeves identifies a fourth reason for low aspirations: "Don't want it", but notes that this should not trouble us, because people want different things from life. If someone makes an informed decision to opt out, that is okay. [36]

LIFE NAVIGATORS

Social capital was the one intangible factor that children and youth identified during our community sessions as most important to them. While it is difficult to quantify and measure, **increasing social capital and access to life navigators could be one of the most impactful strategies and should be interwoven into all of the other determinants.**

Robert Putnam eloquently illustrates in his book, *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis*, how children growing up in poverty typically have extremely low levels of social capital. They often have considerable bonding social capital—relationships with people in their families, neighborhoods, or schools who are in similar circumstances to them. However, linking and bridging social capital are less prevalent. Thus, their knowledge across lines of difference and how social systems operate may be limited to what they experience in immediate circles.

To further bolster our recommendations, research indicates that the consistent, enduring presence of a caring adult in a young person's life can be the difference between staying in school or dropping out, making healthy decisions or engaging in risky behaviors, and realizing one's potential or failing to achieve one's dreams. According to Putnam's research, poor children typically lack the informal mentoring relationships more common among their affluent peers. The most effective mentoring relationships for lower-income young adults appear to be those that are formal, long-term, and use best-practice approaches to training mentors. Putnam's research reveals that while 64 percent of affluent children have mentoring relationships beyond their extended family, nearly two-thirds of children from low-income backgrounds do not. The Task Force unanimously agrees that all children should have "Life Navigators", mentors and sponsors capable of cultivating social capital and developing tangible pathways to opportunity in their lives.

We also believe our community should expand the traditional concept of social capital to address an even bigger issue illuminated during the protests of September 2016. In addition to concerns about policing, many people interviewed wanted to let community leaders know that they do not feel valued or respected. In the words of some residents, they feel as though their ability to contribute to the future of the community is not seriously considered. One of the most poignant examples of this was when a nine-year-old girl mustered all her courage and told the Charlotte City Council after the recent protests that she wasn't sure if decision makers cared about her life or the life of her neighbors. We believe these sentiments present a powerful opportunity to change this perception by fostering a "culture of caring" across Mecklenburg county.

We have not identified a "program" to develop a culture of caring, but perhaps that is the point. A community's culture can't be prescribed or commanded by a group or entity; it must be an authentic representation of who we are.

THE CULTURE OF CARING MUST BE DEMONSTRATED THROUGH OUR ACTIONS, DECISIONS AND INVESTMENTS.

As an example, what if every house of faith and civic organization used economic opportunity as the lens for its work? Or, what if every elected body, foundation, employer, institution or organization asked one simple question before making significant decisions: "How will this decision impact the opportunity trajectory of our children, youth and families?" Once we have used this lens, the actions we take will tangibly demonstrate the level of our commitment—one way or the other.

TASK FORCE STRATEGY U:

Ensure all children, youth and families have relationships in the community which:

- Connect them to opportunities, information and resources
- Broaden their horizons about what's possible in their lives
- Assist in navigating through unexpected crises to stay on track
- Offer tangible pathways toward achieving their aspirations
- Demonstrate to every child, youth, and family that their contribution is vital to the success of our community.

Key Recommendations:

1. Support an expectation that no later than 7th grade, all students have access to a Life Navigator or other supportive adult to help expose, navigate, and connect them to career, educational, and life opportunities.

2. Develop and execute a focused strategy to build, train, and coordinate an "army" of community volunteers committed to connecting more children, youth and families to knowledge, resources and opportunities.

3. Leverage relationships developed through the above and elsewhere to help young people and families build social capital and increase access to new networks.

4. Build on and expand efforts promoted through the 2014 Cultural Vision Plan for Charlotte-Mecklenburg, which focuses on connecting people and strengthening communities by using arts and culture to create pathways and bridges.

5. Encourage all sectors to use economic opportunity as a lens for their decision making.

Implementation Tactics and Policy Considerations:

- Research and evaluate local, regional and national models to develop the Life Navigator concept. Examples to explore include Kauffman Scholars and the Posse Foundation.
- Coordinate efforts by alumni organizations, civic/social groups, houses of faith, businesses, neighborhood associations, schools, etc. to have their members/employees engage young people through programs that create exposure and relationships.

• Encourage faith-based and civic organizations to use economic opportunity as a lens to rethink and expand their community support and outreach efforts to maximize network building opportunities for those with more limited bridging relationships.

• Ramp-up efforts of the staff and boards of cultural arts organizations to go into diverse areas of the community to build relationships, listen to what people say they need and want, and develop new strategies and programs to reach more diverse groups and communities.

• Train “gatekeepers” in social service agencies, houses of faith, and other organizations to share information and better connect families, children, and youth to resources and opportunities in the community.

• Explore ways to visibly demonstrate a “Culture of Caring” by asking, “How will this decision impact the opportunity trajectory for all children, youth and families?” prior to significant decision making.

CHAPTER VII: WHAT'S NEXT FOR THE
REPORT AND COMMUNITY

The Task Force intends for this report to be a living document for Charlotte-Mecklenburg as we, individually and collectively, take bold action in the months and years ahead. We offer 21 strategies, 91 recommendations, and over 100 tactics as a starting point, acknowledging we don't have all the answers, and others may disagree with our findings. However, we believe our report can serve as a catalyst for engaging our community in a deeper conversation and continued investigation of the best paths forward.

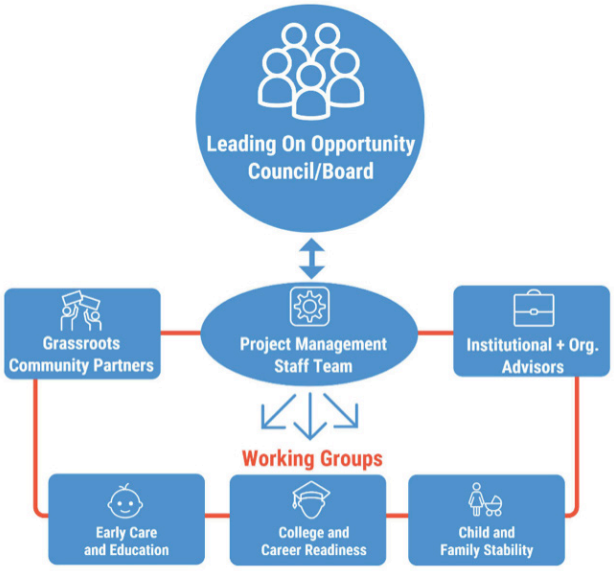
Whether you represent a house of faith, an employer, government, a civic organization, philanthropy or just an individual who wants to make a difference, we need you. In particular, we need the voices of people facing barriers to opportunity represented in public conversations about their future. Our hope is that everyone can find a place to connect with this work and help make a difference.

Structure for the work ahead is an immediate priority. Without structure, the next emerging crisis will grab the headlines and our attention will be diverted. Therefore, we need a process and a representative group of decision makers from the across Mecklenburg County to intentionally move our community to action. To this end, we support the immediate creation of a Leading on Opportunity Board/Council to take up the banner and go forward. We envision this board/council will:

- Solicit feedback from the community, as well as public and private sector representatives in business, philanthropy, faith, healthcare, education, etc.
- Refine the report recommendations as necessary.
- Set high-level goals, priorities, and expectations with respect to the interrelated determinants.
- Analyze how each decision contributes to desegregating our community racially, ethnically, and economically.
- Identify the cost of implementing key priorities and develop a funding strategy to execute these priorities.
- Establish a continuous improvement model for the work.
- Advocate for system and policy changes.
- Convene and connect various Mecklenburg County sectors and initiatives and identify opportunities to align with state and national initiatives.
- Develop state policy agendas with other communities for larger impact and support.
- Promote a strong opportunity culture for Charlotte-Mecklenburg and build community will.
- Implement sustainability strategies to support the board/council's infrastructure and an accountability strategy to inform the community of progress.

• Adapt the model of Read Charlotte with a dedicated staff, advisory boards, and working groups aligned with determinants and cross-cutting factors.

At a minimum, we recommend that staff to support this work should include a project director, assistant director, communications specialist, and data specialist, plus funding for initial data collection, seed funding, and awareness campaigns. We recommend on an interim basis, the work be supported by staff from Foundation For The Carolinas and United Way of Central Carolinas. During this interim phase, the board/council, through engagement with the community, should determine the most effective long-term structure and financing model. The adjacent diagram shows what an implementation structure might look like.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

To most effectively implement the findings of this report, the Task Force recommends the community and board/council adopt the following overarching principles:

• Above all else, ensure diverse voices and perspectives from across the community are meaningfully engaged throughout the process and included on the board/ council to provide guidance and support.

• Use a systems-thinking approach to address the determinants holistically. Systems thinking will enable us to better understand and attend to the connections and interconnectedness across the determinants and the community systems that influence and impact children, youth, and family outcomes, such as social services, criminal justice, education, health, housing, etc. It will also help avoid unintended consequences when making decisions across multiple systems. The early systems thinking efforts of Read Charlotte offer a local example of how this approach can work.

• Incorporate targeted universalism, as recommended by dr. john a. powell. This concept will help us identify universal goals for all children and families, but tailor and target our solutions or interventions dependent upon the differing needs and challenges of sub-populations and where they are situated in the community.

• Consider place-based initiatives to improve outcomes for children, youth and families. The place-based framework helps better support a community's response to challenges by focusing on solutions that tackle multiple problems and create transformation within specific neighborhoods or communities where needs may be greatest or unique.

• Ensure existing programs and services related to our recommendations are research informed and/or evidence-based to determine which are creating the most opportunities. Systems thinking can help us with this ambitious task. We cannot afford to continue doing the same old things in the same old ways. We also need to identify where bottlenecks exist within our current systems of services and support that create barriers to access and where greater coordination and collaboration can make a difference.

• Seek opportunities to align and leverage investments of government, philanthropic organizations, and others funding community programs and initiatives. Achieving the level of change we envision requires new approaches and risk-taking. Through collective impact and aligned investments, funders can embrace opportunities in a circle of support.

BUILD IN ACCOUNTABILITY

The Task Force members agree that creating a dashboard with short-term and long-term indicators for measuring our community's progress is imperative and should be an early task for implementation. The dashboard may include indicators of mobility and opportunity such as those included in Brookings Institute's Social Genome Model.

- Availability and enrollment in childcare and/or pre-K
- Early childhood verbal ability
- Preparedness for Kindergarten
- Math and literacy proficiency at third grade
- Math and literacy proficiency at eighth grade
- High school graduation status
- Participation in apprenticeships and paid internships
- College and career proficiency
- Percent of students leaving high school with at least one academic or career related credential
- College acceptance and completion
- Percent of low income children attending highly selective colleges and universities
- Maternal age at first birth
- Unintended pregnancy rate
- Relationship status of parents at the time of birth
- Birth weight (maternal and infant health measures)
- Parent emotional support
- Participation in clubs and other extracurricular activities
- Measure of self-esteem, goals, and aspirations
- Youth criminal arrest and conviction rates
- Young adult employment rate (non-college going)
- Housing availability and affordability
- Family income at age 29 (adjusted for inflation)

For an opportunity dashboard to be used as a tool for measuring our community's progress, we will need to identify which of the indicators are most important to measure and track over time and develop specific targets for them that we are collectively moving toward. This dashboard will help our community recognize success over time.

CALL TO ACTION: WHAT TO DO RIGHT NOW

The work begins today. Some organizations have swiftly committed to align their work around economic opportunity, and others are waiting for our report to help them decide how they can best play a role within their unique missions. These organizational commitments reflect an "opportunity movement" that is underway in our community and that we anticipate will grow.

The Leading on Opportunity structure and staffing will come together within the next few months. In the meantime, every person, house of faith, organization, institution, service club, or other group in Charlotte can begin today to be part of this movement. Here are some immediate ways to engage:

• **Join the Leading on Opportunity campaign online.** Updates on progress and opportunities for engagement will be continuously posted on our website (www.leadingonopportunity.org) and social media accounts. The Leading on Opportunity campaign will succeed only through ongoing participation and feedback.

• **Review this report,** or some aspect of it that interests you most, and discuss with your friends, family, colleagues and community connections. Take a step further by discussing this report with people whose perspectives may be different from yours.

• **Using an opportunity lens, begin looking at the work you are already doing and identify where you might play a role going forward.** For example:

• **If you are an employer,** look at your recruiting, hiring and workforce practices to see how you might be supporting or creating barriers for employees with families. Do you create opportunities for students to gain work experience? Do you automatically disqualify job candidates with a criminal record? Do you provide paid leave for new parents? Also, look at how you deploy volunteers and focus your volunteer efforts in the community. Take an honest look at the impact you are having. Could you be doing things differently? (Foundation For The Carolinas has developed an Opportunity Assessment Tool that will soon be on our website to help you consider your current practices through an opportunity lens. It will help you see what you may be doing well and where you could take more action to help create greater opportunity.)

• **If you are a leader or member of a house of faith,** assess your internal congregational outreach efforts to see how you could better support children, youth, and families within your congregations who may be dealing with some of the issues identified in this report. Also, take an honest look at your external outreach efforts to see if you could be doing more, or if you could do something differently to create better outcomes for our children, youth, and families. Stay up to date on the latest reports on mobility and opportunity and review books such as Read Robert Lupton's book *Toxic Charity* to ensure your congregation's work isn't unintentionally hurting those you are trying to help. Use your position to share information about what you have learned in this report about economic opportunity and our key strategies, and engage your congregants in conversations. (Local clergy have suggested developing a handbook on how they can work with their congregations using an opportunity lens. We applaud this initiative.)

• **If you are a government official, elected or otherwise,** look at the decisions you are making around budgeting, policies and other actions to see how you are contributing to the opportunity story. Leaders from the City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County have already committed to use an opportunity lens in decision making. Let the conversation about opportunity seep into the divisions within government so those closest to the work can identify improvements. We also encourage staff and elected officials from across the public sector to engage in conversations with each other to find ways to coordinate policies, funding, and service delivery.

• **If you are a philanthropist or foundation,** review your charitable investments to ensure you are working toward the highest possible human gain and you are collaborating with other public and private funders. You can ask new questions of your grantees to make certain your visions of success are aligned and more importantly, achievable with the level of funding that you provide. We also call on philanthropy to drive funding toward organizations with

demonstrated effectiveness and/or organizations that are committed to learning and improving to better meet the challenges ahead. As you consider things like impact and effectiveness, ask if you are providing the resources to help organizations measure their outcomes. Finally, we ask you to consider the possible unintended consequences of a major shift toward "opportunity" on organizations, causes, and issues that may fall outside the scope of our report. As we noted in the beginning of our report, our work was narrowly tailored to address a specific community challenge: intergenerational poverty. Other areas of need continue to be worthy of philanthropic support.

• **If you are nonprofit organization,** begin looking at your practices and policies to see how you are serving your clients/customers and the true impact you are having in creating opportunities for children, youth, and families in our community. Are you thinking about the needs of people holistically and partnering well with other organizations and systems? How are you defining success? Are you providing an impact beyond what would have happened without your program's support? Is your board inclusive of the voices from the community you serve? Are your board members informed and holding the organization accountable? Are you engaged in a deliberate process of empowering and fostering leadership in the communities you serve?

• **If you are a neighborhood leader,** look at ways to connect your neighbors internally within your community and also externally with people and resources to build a stronger and more mutually supportive neighborhood. If your neighborhood is strong and resource-rich, how might your neighborhood collectively partner with other neighborhoods, schools, and organizations to lift up all children and families?

• **If you are an individual,** begin thinking about the people and networks in your life that have connected you to opportunities over the years. How might you step outside your comfort zone and develop relationships with children, youth and families in our community who could use some support, not in a charitable, paternalistic way, but as a genuine connector to ideas, networks, and opportunities?

• **For any entity or individual interested in knowing how we became such a segregated community with such wide disparities,** explore resources like the Levine Museum of the New South; take the Community Building Initiative's (CBI) Bus Tour; attend the Race Matters for Juvenile Justice Dismantling Racism experience; or participate in the Crisis Assistance Ministry's Poverty Simulation. Additional resources are available on our website www.leadingonopportunity.org.

These are a handful of early suggestions for how people and organizations can begin to engage immediately. We want to hear what you are doing and hope you will share your stories on social media. As the opportunity structure falls into place over the next several months, additional and more detailed ways to engage will be developed with input from community members. This is one of those "all hands on deck" times when everyone is needed.

FINAL THOUGHTS FROM THE TASK FORCE

On behalf of all Task Force members, it was an honor to serve and provide recommendations on how to improve economic opportunity for all children, youth, and families in Charlotte-Mecklenburg. We have all been changed by our experience studying our community's greatest assets and challenges, and by having honest conversations about the circumstances that people living in our community face. We embrace your review of the recommendations, and hope community members will offer new perspectives and suggestions for revision and improvement.

Finally, the disparities in our community are real. It is our hope that with collective focus and accountability, Charlotte-Mecklenburg will transform through the experience of working together, and we will earn a new reputation as a community that is "Leading on Opportunity."

THESE ARE OUR CHILDREN. THIS IS THEIR FUTURE.
LET THIS REPRESENT OUR COMMITMENT.

SOURCES/REFERENCES

1 https://www.usnews.com/info/blogs/press-room/articles/2017-02-07/us-news-unveils-the-2017-best-places-to-live

2 https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/hendren/files/mobility_geo.pdf

3 http://www.equality-of-opportunity.org/images/mto_exec_summary.pdf

4 https://crisisassistance.org/poverty-simulation/be-an-advocate/

5 https://www.rmjj.org/

6 U.S. Department of Education, Institute of EducationSciences, National Center for Education Statistics,

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2015 Reading Assessment.

7 Hanchett, Tom. (1998). Sorting Out the New South City: Race, Class and Urban Development in Charlotte, 1875-1975: University of North Carolina Press.1998

8 North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

9 North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

10 Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Month 1, 2016-17 School Diversity Report

11 https://www.minneapolisfed.org/publications/fedgazette/early-childhood-development-economic-development-with-a-high-public-return

12 Barnett, S., Belfield, C., Montie, J., Nores, M., Scheweihart, L., and Xiang, Z. "The High/Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age Forty." High/Scope Education Research Foundation High/Scope Press. 2005.

13 Child Care Resources, Inc. 2017

14 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, America's Divided Recovery: College Haves and Have-Nots, 2016

16 http://www.themanufacturinginstitute.org/~/media/5856BC6196764320A6BEFA0D9962BE80/2012_Public_Perception_of_Manufacturing_Report.pdf

17 Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Operating Budget Highlights 2015-2016

18 http://www.pellinstitute.org/downloads/publications-Indicators_of_Higher_Education_Equity_in_the_US_45_Year_Trend_Report.pdf

19 Benjamin Castleman and Lindsay Page, Summer Melt, Harvard Education Press, 2014.

20 http://ssrc-static.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/MOA-Zeroing-In-Final.pdf

21 https://csd.wustl.edu/publications/documents/wp13-06.pdf

22 http://edublog.scholastic.com/post/we-surveyed-2015-state-teachers-year

23 https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Full-Report.pdf

24 http://thenationalcampaign.org/sites/default/files/resource-primary-download/briefly-_unplanned_pregnancy_college.pdf

25 American Community Survey 2015

26 https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/state-facts-about-unintended-pregnancy-north-carolina

27 North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics, Vital Statistics Report 1995 and 2014

28 http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/26/u-s-lacks-mandated-paid-parental-leave/

29 https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2016/13-percent-of-private-industry-workers-had-access-to-paid-family-leave-in-march-2016.htm

30 https://www.dol.gov/featured/paidleave/cost-of-doing-nothing-report.pdf

31 http://www.ncjustice.org/sites/default/files/LIS%20report%202016%20updated.PDF

32 http://ui.uncc.edu/sites/default/files/pdf/Final_affordable%20housing_9_15_2016.pdf

33 http://www.bizjournals.com/charlotte/blog/queen_city_agenda/2016/08/charlotte-transit-chief-bus-route-revamp-crucial.html

34 http://charmeck.org/mecklenburg/county/CountyManagersOffice/Documents/2015%20Mecklenburg%20County%20Community%20Pulse%20Report.pdf)

35 https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/poverty/report/2014/12/02/102308/one-strikeand-youre-out/

36 https://econresearch.uchicago.edu/sites/econresearch.uchicago.edu/files/Reeves_2014_Vague-Hopes-Active-Aspirations.pdf

APPENDIX TASK FORCE STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

IMPACT OF SEGREGATION: CROSS-CUTTING FACTOR #1

STRATEGY	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION TACTICS AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS	CRITICAL PARTNERS*
Strategy A: Acknowledge the significant role segregation and racialization have played in our current opportunity narrative and commit to becoming a more inclusive, fair and just community.	**A1.** Provide more opportunitities to include all voices, especially those who have been marginalized or excluded in genuine community engagement and change efforts.	• Use a participatory budgetting process in our local government to engage people in decision-making around budget decisions that affect their lives.	City of Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, CMS, Faith Community, Business Community, Philanthropy, Digital Charlotte, For Profit and Nonprofit Housing Developers, Grassroots Organizations, Criminal Justice System, Social Justice/Racial Equity Organizations
	A2. While we recognize that "inclusionary zoning" may be the goal that many seek (and may ultimately provide the long-term solution in Mecklenburg County and across the state), we must take action today to ensure we dramatically increase the creation of mixed-income housing throughout Mecklenburg County.	• Provide incentives and use other tools to support development of more mixed-income housing. • See tactics for Strategy O	
	A3. De-concentrate high poverty schools and create an educational environment in which all students can thrive.	• See tactics for Strategy B	
	A4. Build and support community efforts to increase transportation options and efficient routes for people who live and work in different parts of the city and county.	• See tactics for Strategy Q	
	A5. Ensure children, youth and families in all areas of the community have technology and digital literacy training to connect with broadband internet.	• Support efforts by Digital Charlotte aimed at helping everyone in the community take full advantage of digital tools, access and technology.	
	A6. Urge governmental, educational, philanthropic, nonprofit and faith-based organizations to make funding, programmatic design and policy decisions through the lens of equity and opportunity.	• Investigate multi-sector use of an equity lens tool as a filter for decision-making.	
	A7. Engage more of our governmental, educational, philanthropic, nonprofit and faith-based organizations, as well as residents-at-large, in initiatives and opportunities that, a) elevate awareness and understanding of the impacts of segregation, racialization and inequality and, b) provide tools to help change behaviors and actions.	• Identify strategies to encourage greater integration of early care and education programs to start building interracial relationships and trust from an early age.	

A

STRATEGY	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION TACTICS AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS	CRITICAL PARTNERS*
Strategy B: Address the complex, multi-faceted issue of school segregation with a systems approach	**B1.** Galvanize community support for the Board of Education's School Assignment Vision and Goals.	• Position the reduction of concentrated schools of poverty as a significant enhancer of economic opportunity for all students in Charlotte-Mecklenburg.	CMS, Mecklenburg County, City of Charlotte, Faith Community, Business Community, Philanthropy
	B2. Increase community awareness regarding the impact of schools with highly concentrated poverty on economic opportunity.	• Raise awareness about community events focused on the link between schools of concentrated poverty and economic opportunity. Evaluate opportunities to form partnerships and collaborations to inform the community and elected officials about the impact of highly concentrated schools of poverty.	
	B3. Monitor progress of the assignment plan process and continuously encourage the Board of Education to be bold and courageous in developing the new student assignment plan.	• Enourage faith, business, grassroots leaders, parents, and other interested parties from across Charlotte-Mecklenburg to advocate to elected leaders for the reduction of schools with high concentrations of poverty. • Support efforts by Digital Charlotte aimed at helping everyone in the community take full advantage of digital tools, access and technology.	
	B4. Create an intergovernmental working group, including Mecklenburg's five towns, to develop a coordinated plan to reduce the number of schools of highly concentrated poverty.	• Request that leadership from all elected bodies authorize the creation of an intergovernmental working group to evaluate strategies and tactics, which impact school assignment and enrollment.	
	B5. Develop strategies to increase private sector funding of the CMS Foundation.	To Be Determined	

B

DETERMINANT ONE: EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

STRATEGY	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION TACTICS AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS	CRITICAL PARTNERS*
Strategy C: Make the necessary investments to ensure all children in Mecklenburg County from birth to age five have access to quality early care and education.	**C1.** Eliminate the waitlist for subsidized child care for all children birth to age five (3,014 as of Feb. 2017)	•Complete a financial evaluation of options outlined in recommendations C1-C3 to expand access in Mecklenburg County. This study is funded by the Charlotte Executive Leadership Council (CELC) and spearheaded by Mecklenburg County, with findings anticipated for release in 2017/early 2018.	Child Care Resources, Inc., Mecklenburg County, Smart Start, CELC, Philanthropy, Latin American Coalition
	C2. Make high-quality voluntary public pre-K universally accessible to all four-year-old children in Mecklenburg County.	• Explore the possibility of utilizing a local option sales tax increase to expand early childhood education.	
	C3. Increase access to voluntary high-quality early care and education for all children starting at birth, regardless of family income following attainment of the two previous tactics.	• Complete and implement findings from Mecklenburg County's Feasibility Study of Pay For Success as a financing mechanism to enhance and expand access to Pre-K for four-year old children. This study is funded by the Department of Education with findings anticipated for release in 2017. • Quantify the costs and consequences to the community if greater access to quality early child care for children ages birth to four is not provided. • Develop and execute a comprehensive funding strategy to provide greater access to quality early child care for children ages birth to four and public pre-K for four-year olds based on the two studies above. • Advocate for increased funding and reimbursement rates for child care and public pre-K at the state and federal level. • Advocate for increased funding of public pre-k at the federal, state and particularly the county level.	
	C4. Promote a clear definition of and related indicators across multiple dimensions for what "ready for school" means to ensure early educators and families share common readiness expectations for children.	To Be Determined	
	C5. Improve data collection and reporting on school readiness.	To Be Determined	
	C6. Provide expanded support of Read Charlotte and ensure it has resources required for implementation of identified strategies.	To Be Determined	
C	**C7.** Increase enrollment of young Latino children in quality child care and public and private pre-K education programs.	• Identify and convene Latino community leaders to identify access barriers and to inform strategies to increase Latino family awareness about the importance of early learning within and beyond the home.	

STRATEGY	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION TACTICS AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS	CRITICAL PARTNERS*
Strategy D: Strengthen the early care and education workforce to improve the quality and experiences of early care and education available to children ages birth to five.	**D1.** Improve the compensation and benefits of early care and education providers.	• Determine the cost of raising our child care workforce's compensation to that of comparably educated staff in public Pre-K, Head Start and Early Head Start to improve the child care workforce and reduce teacher turnover. • Investigate public and private strategies that have increased early childhood workforce's compensation without increasing costs of care for families.	Child Care Resources, Inc., Smart Start, CELC, CPCC, UNC Charlotte, Latin American Coalition, Charlotte Works, Early Care and Education Centers and Providers
	D2. Expand the number of early care and education providers with certifications, credentials and degrees.	• Pursue strategies to increase our early childhood workforce's access to, and engagement in, pre-service, in-service, continuing and higher education and peer learning. • Expand recruitment and support for CPCC's intgegratged pathway that targets ESL students and combines ESL instruction with the courses needed to pass the early childhood certifcation exam.	
	D3. Make high-quality voluntary public pre-K universally accessible to all four-year-old children in Mecklenburg County.	• Increase access to classroom and program-based consultation, coaching and mentoring available to early childhood education teachers/providers to reinforce use of evidence-based early brain development and literacy practices. • Train all early educators in "ready-for-school" indicators recommended for development.	
D	**D4.** Grow the culture and linguistic diversity of our early care and education workforce to better serve our Latino children and families.	• Engage with community organizations and houses of faith that serve our Latino population to increase awareness of the need for Latino early educators and promote the profession. • Create targeted recruitment strategies and supports for Latinos interested in entering the field, including having more bilingual early childhood educators.	

STRATEGY	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION TACTICS AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS	CRITICAL PARTNERS*
Strategy E: Support parents and other caregivers as a child's first teacher in promoting positive early brain development, social and emotional health, and early literacy beginning at birth.	**E1.** Educate parents, early educators and other caregivers to help them understand the importance of positive early brain development, social-emotional development and early literacy and how to best support and interact with their children from an early age.	• Develop and launch a public campaign to promote positive early brain development and early literacy.	Smart Start, Child Care Resources, Inc., Other Family and Children Nonprofits, Early Care and Education Centers and Providers, Pediatricians, Faith Community
	E2. Promote families as partners and leaders in co-creating and implementing solutions to improve a child's social-emotional and language and literacy development.	• Help parents develop networks of peer and other support within their neighborhoods and communities create more mutual support for effective nurturing, early literacy and advocacy for their children.	
	E3. Build the capacity of early child care and early learning programs, schools and providers to effectively engage families in meaningful ways to support their children's social-emotional and language and literacy skills.	• Expand access to evidence-based programs such as Raising A Reader in child care centers, family child care and homes, pre-schools and faith-based preschools and other community settings.	
	E4. Grow the culture and linguistic diversity of our early care and education workforce to better serve our Latino children and families.	• Encourage more employers to provide paid maternity leave and utilize other employment practices that enable parents of young children to better support their children's early development. • Increase the number of medical practices and clinics serving children and young mothers who are participating in the Reach Out and Read program that encourages active reading with children ages 0-3.	
	E5. Provide parents with greater access to developmental screenings for their children to help them identify learning delays, vision problems and other issues that may be affecting school readiness and that will enable them to seek help sooner than later.	• Explore opportunities to make the Ages and Stages Questionairre (ASQ) available to more parents. (Examples: Columbus Kids and Spartanburg Academic Movement) • Increase access to needed post-screening developmental supportive services for children.	

E

DETERMINANT TWO: COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

STRATEGY	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION TACTICS AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS	CRITICAL PARTNERS*
Strategy F: Broaden the range of and access to high quality college and career pathways offered by our K-12 and postsecondary institutions, ensuring all students have access to and support for the full range of opportunities.	**F1.** Replicate, expand and improve career academies and other pathway models that provide a clear sequence of academic and technical courses, work-based learning experiences, intentional career advising, and opportunities to develop skills and earn credentials that will meet the current and future needs of the region's employers.	• Consider creating a leadership position at CMS focused on expanding the role of workforce development and work-based learning and building collaborative partnerships with government, local industry sectors, nonprofits and higher education to expand "next generation" learning opportunities for CMS youth. • Support a new policy that every CMS Career Academy has an actively engaged Board of Directors comprised of industry stakeholders who are leading, advocating for apprenticeships and paid internships and supporting the career academy and holding the institution accountable. • Continue to improve and increase industry-targeted CTE options for more CMS students in collaboration with industry and higher education programs. • Explore opportunities for a consulting firm to partner with CMS to develop a roadmap for the future of CTE programs and community engagement. • Create/implement a communication strategy to reduce the stigma and cultural bias associated with vocation education and non-degree certificcate programs that lead to middle-skill job opportunities. • Fully integrate entrepreneurship with the larger strategy of preparing students for productive, high-skill careers.	CMS, Employers, Charlotte Chamber, Charlotte Works, CPCC, UNC Charlotte, Meck Ed
	F2. Enable more students to access accelerated learning and dual enrollment opportunities, and make more credits "stackable" from high school into college, so high school courses count toward specific postsecondary credentials.	• Strengthen and expand articulation agreements and partnerships between CMS, CPCC and UNC-Charlotte. • Launch a recruitment campaign to encourage more eligible, low-socioeconomic students to take advantgage of the state's Career and College Promise Program that enables high school students to earn free coplege credit at CPCC during their junior an senior years.	
	F3. Increase the number of low-socioeconomic students enrolled in and completing higher- level college prep courses.	• Ensure that all high schools offer a minimum number of AP/IB courses and provide the necessary support for students to succeed in them.	
	F4. Explore funding options to ensure every Career and Technical Education (CTE) student has the financial ability to attain a certification.	To Be Determined	

F

STRATEGY	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION TACTICS AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS	CRITICAL PARTNERS*
Strategy G: Equip all students and parents with the information and guidance they need to understand and navigate multiple college and career pathways, preparation and processes.	**G1.** Ensure all students, beginning in middle school or earlier, are exposed to and understand how to navigate career pathways and the postsecondary enrollment process.	• Provide a continuum of career awareness and planning support for all students beginning with career awareness in elementary school, career exploration in middle school and intentional skill development in high school and beyond. • Leverage social media and technology tools to increase awareness and knowledge about career pathways and how to navigate them. • Include and support funding of additional guidance counselors in future CMS budgets to achieve the recommended counselor/student ratio.	CMS, CPCC, Areas Colleges and Universities, Education Nonprofits, Charlotte Works, Meck Ed
	G2. Increase the number of dedicated college and career guidance counselors/advisors available for students in every CMS school, meeting the industry recommended average student/counselor ratios of 1:250.	• Include and support funding of additional guidance counselors in future CMS budgets to achieve the recommended counselor/student ratio.	
	G3. Expand the knowledge, capacity and cultural competence of guidance counselors, advisors, career development coordinators, teachers and near-peer mentors on the various college and career pathways and trends, and ensure they have the tools to help students and their parents understand and connect with college and career pathway opportunities.	• Bolster ongoing professional development opportunities to improve knowledge and skills relating to targeted career pathways and associated educational and industry requirements. • Increase opportunities for teachers and counselors to participate in summer industry internships to help them better understand how to contextualize learning with students. • Have more CMS counselors, advisors, teachers and administrators participate in implicit bias training to challenge occupational stereotypes and interactions with students about their college and career aspirations and preparation.	
	G5. Leverage nonprofit and other community resources to augment college and career advising in our schools.	• Evaluate the need for a coordinating entity to lead professional development on career pathways and labor market trends for local education institutions and workforce agencies to ensure common information, data and best practices are shared. • Aggressively grow work-based mentor programs to ensure every student has a tangible career path. •Expand access to quality out-of-school time p rogramming that integrates academic support with career awareness, exploration and preparation and helps connect more low socio-economic students to these opportunities. • Increase support provided through programs such as College Advising Corps	

G

STRATEGY	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION TACTICS AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS	CRITICAL PARTNERS*
Strategy H: Galvanize community support to develop and implement a multi-faceted plan to increase paid work-based learning opportunities for students.	**H1.** Increase community awareness about and support for apprenticeships, paid internships and other work-based learning programs.	• Organize a learning network of employers with experience and success in providing apprenticeships, paid internships and other education partnership activities to share their knowledge, lessons learned and value proposition with other employers, and provide peer coaching.	CMS, CPCC, Charlotte Chamber, Employers, Charlotte Works, Meck Ed
	H2. Build the necessary infrastructure and employer commitment to implement and scale work-based learning in order to create at least 10,000 slots annually for CMS high school students; 1,000 by 2018, 4,000 by 2020 and 10,000 when fully scaled.	• Evaluate the need for an intermediary or coordinator to promote, build and sustain collaborative partnerships with K-12, higher education institutions, local industry sectors and nonprofits.	
	H3. Increase the involvement of employers in developing and helping to teach courses that incorporate sector-specific knowledge and skill development.	• Create more pre-apprenticeship opportunities at CMS and CPCC to help students and workers understand how to qualify and prepare for apprenticeships.	
	H4. Require every student who completes a formal career academy experience receive a paid internship as a capstone to his or her high school career and that every CMS high school student, whether a career academy student, receive some type of meaningful work-based learning experience before he or she graduates.	• Publically recognize and celebrate employers that support work-based learning and other collaborative work with education.	
	H5. Provide paid internships for high-performing, low-income college students enrolled in local colleges and universities.	To Be Determined	
	H6. Ensure students take advantage of the work-based learning opportunities by addressing structural barriers, such as transportation, work hours, etc.	• Develop strategies to address transportation barriers for students to access apprenticeship and internship opportunities.	

H

STRATEGY	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION TACTICS AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS	CRITICAL PARTNERS*
Strategy I: Expand and strengthen support for first-generation and other low socioeconomic students who need help in transitioning to and completing postsecondary education. I	**I1.** Reduce the potential for "summer melt," which often causes unsupported students to not follow through with their college plans between high school and the first semester of college.	• Expand information about and access to summer bridge programs at CPCC and other educational institutions to help students follow through with their plans. •Explore efforts such as the Austin Chamber's Summer Melt Aversion Program through which high school or college counselors and/or volunteers stay connected with students over the summer months.	CMS, CPCC, Area Colleges and Universtities, Faith Community, Charlotte Chamber, Business Community
	I2. Continue to reduce the number of CMS graduates needing remediation at CPCC before they can take college-level coursework.	• Continue to align requirements for entry-level college courses with those for CMS diplomas. •Administer the college-ready anchor assessment in 10th grade to address students' academic deficiencies before college.	
	I3. Connect more minority and low socioeconomic college students to mentoring, academic tutoring, financial assistance and other support to help them stay in and complete their education.	• Create a learning network of administrators from CPCC, UNC Charlotte, Davidson College, Queens University, Johnson C. Smith University, and Johnson and Wales to share and support evidence-based best practices that improve persistence and completion rates of low socio-economic students. • Embed mentoring in more scholarship programs that serve low socioeconomic students to help improve recipient outcomes. • Provide financial assistance to meet basic needs for scholarship and low-income students, such as food, books and transportation. • Leverage external partnerships to provide services and support for students.	

STRATEGY	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION TACTICS AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS	CRITICAL PARTNERS*
Strategy J: Create more on-ramps to education, training and employment for our disengaged youth. J	**J1.** Make the training and hiring of disconnected youth a higher community priority. **J2.** Expand collaboration and partnerships county-wide to support the reengagement of our disconnected youth and develop new and innovative approaches to working with them. **J3.** Connect more of these youth to earn and learn training programs that allow them to make a living while earning a credential or degree.	• Develop creative outreach strategies to connect with teens and young adults. • Provide additional funding and other support for workforce development programs that offer remediation and GED support, soft skills training, and postsecondary education and training opportunities, including apprenticeships, for teens and young adults. • Promote entrepreneurship as an alternative pathway, and provide guidance and financial support to help young entrepreneurs get started. • Connect youth and teens to caring adults who can help them navigate their challenges. • Explore place-based initiatives that concentrate outreach and support in neighborhoods where larger numbers of disconnected youth live.	Charlotte Works, Nonprofit Workforce Development Agencies, CPCC, Mecklenburg County, City of Charlotte, Nonprofits working with young people, Faith Community, Business Community
	J4. Gain commitment from area employers to give disconnected youth a chance by providing them with training and/or work experiences.	•Call on our business community to reach out to disconnected youth with entry level jobs that lead to meaningful career. Businesses of all sizes and types, including entrepreneurs, have a role to play, and should be challenged to partner withworkforce development agencies, CPCC, and other organizations supporting disconnected youth. • Encourage more employers to use hiring policies and practices that do not automatically eliminate their hiring young people with minor criminal records. • Work with the local legal community to offer opportunities for youth and young adults with a criminal record to seek expungement that will make them more attractive candidates for jobs.	

STRATEGY	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION TACTICS AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS	CRITICAL PARTNERS*
Strategy K: Elevate and actively promote the critical importance of our young people acquiring a postsecondary degree and/or industry certification to successfully compete in our changing, technologically advanced labor market. K	**K1.** Develop and launch a public campaign and strategy aimed at promoted the importance of postsecondary attainment for all students.	• Convene a local group of partners to investigate postsecondary campaigns in other communities to identify potential leadership infrastructure, costs, audience messages, what's working/not working and which models may be best to consider for Charlotte-Mecklenburg. • Lead, support and implement such a campaign.	Charlotte Chamber, CMS, CPCC, Area Colleges and Universities, Charlotte Works, Meck Ed
	K2. Seek creative solutions to provide more young people with financial support/ scholarships to enable them to participate in postsecondary education and training.	• Convene a group of leaders to investigate "Say YES to Education Guilford" and higher education savings account models across the country to determine which one may have the best application in Charlotte-Mecklenburg and test for interest and willingness to pursue locally.	

DETERMINANT THREE: CHILD AND FAMILY STABILITY

STRATEGY	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION TACTICS AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS	CRITICAL PARTNERS*
Strategy L: Encourage the formation and maintenance of committed two-parent families. L	**L1.** Promote marriage, which research shows is the most reliable route to mobility, recognizing it may not be the choice of all couples.	• Develop culturally appropriate communications and data-rich messaging strategies to increase awareness of the value of marriage, committed relationships, co-parenting and the potential challenges and related stressors in raising children. • Study, adopt, and implement evidence-based programs that effectgivley encourage people to be part of committed relationships when considering parenthood.	Faith Community, Community-Based Organizations, Mecklenburg County DSS
	L2. Advocate for the active involvement of fathers in the lives of their children.	• Expand access to evidence-based and informed programs that support responsible fatherhood. • Investigate and, where desirable, advocate for the removal of barriers and restrictions to father's involvement in their child's life due to state and local child support policies and practices and with entitlement and housing programs.	

STRATEGY	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION TACTICS AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS	CRITICAL PARTNERS*
Strategy M: Ensure young women and men have the necessary information and sources of reproductive health care to ensure they can plan for pregnancy when they are ready to raise a child. M	**M1.** Complete a community health assessment, plan and outreach strategy that builds understanding and provides a feasible approach to reducing unintended pregnancy in Mecklenburg County. This plan should explore a range of options from abstinence to creating greater access to the most effective forms of contraceptives, including long-acting reversible contraception (LARCs.) The work is already underway through a study commissioned by several philanthropic organizations.	• Identify and secure philanthropic dollars for the campaign.	Medical Community, Mecklenburg County Health Department, Health Nonprofits, Community-Based Organizations, Philanthropy
	M2. Develop fact-based and culturally appropriate messaging that empowers all young people to incorporate pregnancy planning into the vision they establish for their lives. We acknowledge, first, that abstinence works. Always. We acknowledge, also, that those who decide to become sexually active are not necessarily deciding to have children. In order to prevent unintended pregnancy and reduce the risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), young people need age-appropriate information.	• Implement the community strategies developed in the three recommendations above.	
	M3. Based upon the outcomes of the assessment, launch a comprehensive campaign to reduce the rates of unintended pregnancy in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, primarily among all young women and men ages 17-29.	• Ensure key stakeholders are engaged in the process including Mecklenburg County Health Department, Carolinas HealthCare System, Novant Health, private clinics and other institutions serving young men and women such as education and faith-based organizations.	

STRATEGY	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION TACTICS AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS	CRITICAL PARTNERS*
Strategy N: Improve birth outcomes for all children and their mothers.	**N1.** Provide access to evidence-based information for all women, regardless of their income level, and culturally sensitive information and programming for quality prenatal and postnatal care.	• Ensure prenatal care services are more widely available early in pregnancy. • Expand the delivery of outreach strategies for low-income women who experience barriers to information and care. • Incorporate knowledge about and treatment for post-partum depression in pregnancy services. • Pursue additional funding for evidence-based home visitation programs, such as Nurse Family Partnership.	Medical Community, Mecklenburg County Health Department, Health Nonprofits, Community-Based Organizations, Agencies Assisting Young Families
	N2. Encourage more employers to provide paid parental leave.	To Be Determined	

N

STRATEGY	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION TACTICS AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS	CRITICAL PARTNERS*
Strategy O: Help more families get and stay on a path to living wage income and asset building.	**O1.** Create and provide access to more quality jobs that pay living wages for families living in lower opportunity communities.	• Provide economic development incentives and use other targeted tools (Tax Increment Financing, Opportunity Zones, etc.) to help attract new businesses to current "job deserts" in and around low-income areas of the community. • Place a higher priority on recruitment of companies to the Charlotte region that offer entry-and mid-level positions. • Ensure greater accountability for businesses that receive government tax incentives or support from other financing programs to hire workers from low-opportiunity communities and consider hiring and wage practices when selecting vendors for government contracts. • Coordinate job development activities of local workforce development agencies that serve people with barriers to more efficiently and effectively match job seekers with employers.	Mecklenburg County, United Way, Human Services Agencies, Workforce Development Agencies, CPCC
	O2. Encourage more anchor institutions and other employers in the community to voluntarily raise wages and improve benefits of their lowest-paid employees. **O3.** Ramp up community efforts to place more parents of school-age children in jobs, particularly jobs with advancement opportunities and benefits. **O4.** Increase access and opportunities for parents to earn a high school or equivalency diploma and/or engage in post-secondary education or market-driven job training while meeting the demands of their families.	• Educate and encourage more businesses to become "fair chance" employers who use best practices in giving job seekers with criminal records a fair chance for employment. • Provide retention support for graduates of training programs. • Expand and connect more low-income parents to work and learn training models that enable parents to make a living while being trained through paid work experiences. • Explore implementing evidence-based two-generation models in Mecklenburg County that bridge the workforce development system with the early childhood system. Integrate more wrap-around support (social workers and mentors) for parents enrolled in education and training programs. • Integrate more wrap-around support (social workers and mentors) for parents enrolled in education and training programs.	
	O5. Encourage and support more low-Income parents to pursue entrepreneurship as an alternative path to their financial stability.	• Promote and provide more entrepreneurship training loan programs and support in low opportunity communities, including financial training and products to help them address cash flow challenges. • Incorporate entrepreneurship skills into workforce development programs and develop links for entrepreneurs from socially excluded groups to connect with broader business/social networks that can help them grow their business.	
	O6. Connect low-income families to financial and asset building education and products that will help them become more financially stable.	• Integrate financial literacy, asset building and financial capacity building into human service and housing programs. • Increase use of Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC) and Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) to low-income families and advocate for the reinstatement of the North Carolina earned income tax credit. • Develop a campaign to educate families about the high cost of predatory lending and promote lower cost alternatives. • Encourage local banks and other credible financial institutions to offer free or lower cost products that encourage families to save.	

O

STRATEGY	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION TACTICS AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS	CRITICAL PARTNERS*
Strategy P: Take dramatic steps to address our affordable housing crisis, which will stabilize working families, prevent family homelessness and minimize the disruption of of children who move from school-to-school due to housing affordability issues. P	**P1.** Support the City of Charlotte's goal of creating or preserving a net 5,000 affordable units over the next three years. Concurrently, investigate and implement strategies to set an ambitious goal for a second wave of housing that will substantially reduce the deficit of 34,000 units. **P2.** Pursue new and/or dramatically expanded sources of public funding to support affordable housing development. **P3.** Engage private, nonprofit and public developers in new conversations to create innovative strategies to address locational and financial barriers to affordable housing. **P4.** Encourage and support more place-based initiatives that include affordable housing as part of neighborhood revitalization efforts. (Renaissance West is example of place-based initiative.) **P5.** Ensure mixed income housing—including rental and home ownership opportunities for low-income residents—is always considered when planning new residential or mixed used development. **P6.** Act on the recommendations outlined in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Strategies for Affordable Housing Development Report.	• Increase housing bonds referendum from the current $15M every two years up to $50M every two years and maintain at these signficantly higher levels. • Explore the creation of a Housing Opportunity Investment Fund to incentivize new developments. • Create strategies to increase use of the 4 percent Low-Income Tax Credit, TIF • Examine ways to lower barriers and fees associated with the development of affordable housing. • Overhaul zoning and permitting process including the creation of an affordable housing overlay district, and continue to advocat4e for changes at the state level, which would enable local communities to use mandatory inclusionary zoning as a tool to create more affordable units. • Advocate that elected officials make affordable housing development the highest priority for using excess public land when deliberating on properties through the local government's Mandatory Referral Process. • Partner with developers to understand the financial considerations of developing affordable housing and identify opportunities to help address those needs. • Institute an initiative to acquire vacant, foreclosed residences with delinquent taxes and repurpose for affordable housing. • Encourage large anchor institutions (schools, hospitals and other large employers) to consider assisting with housing affordability for its workforce. • Substantially increase access to and funding for rental subsidy vouchers paired with supportive services, including programs such as the A Way Home Endowment. • Create and sustain a landlord consortium to encourage landlord participation in all zip codes to house families with public and/or private rental subsidies. • Provide more mechanisms for lower-income families to purchase homes that help build their assets such as creation of a community land trust, deed restrictions that control the resale price of a home. • Develop and launch a community campaign to change the community mindset about affordable housing and shift to a "Yes, in my backyard" mentality by more people.	City of Charlotte, Private/ Nonprofit Housing Developers, Business Leaders, Philanthropy, Mecklenburg County

STRATEGY	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION TACTICS AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS	CRITICAL PARTNERS*
Strategy Q: Create a more connected community to ensure all families have ready access to employment, shopping, service areas schools, parks, and other daily destinations. Q	**Q1.** Increase transportation options for families that don't have their own vehicles. **Q2.** Improve alignment between housing and transportation.	• Support the work of CATS' Envision My Ride study and subsequent implementation efforts, and prioritize connecting low-income families when implementing the bus route restructuring. • Develop and expand public/private partnerships to provide low-cost transportation service, ridesharing, carpooling and/or bus pass benefits that will enable more low-wage workers to access employment sites within the county and region. • Explore / expand options for low-income parents to obtain their own vehicles through facilitating vehicle donation and repair programs and/or providing loan assistance to purchase or lease vehicles. • Increase opportunities for safe and reliable transportation for youth to participate in out-of-school time activities.	City of Charlotte, CATS

STRATEGY	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION TACTICS AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS	CRITICAL PARTNERS*
Strategy R: Develop efforts focused on addressing mental health issues and/or reducing the mental health impacts of living in low-opportunity environments. R	**R1.** Deepen our understanding of the childhood mental health system, and develop tangible strategies to address identified needs and gaps. An assessment is underway currently with recommendations forthcoming this spring (2017). **R2.** Increase the number of social workers in high poverty schools to provide expand access to students. **R3.** Provide all teachers and others working with children better training on evidence-based practices to best address emotional stress and other mental health challenges of students. **R4.** Provide all teachers and others working with children better training on evidence-based practices to best address emotional stress and other mental health challenges of students. **R5.** Increase availability and access of parenting education classes, home visitation programs, mentoring and other support to help reduce toxic stress in the lives of low-income families. **R6.** Support opportunities to identify best practices and/or evidenced based programs that reduce the impact of toxic stress in children, youth and adults including physical exercise, mental health education, meditation, re-framing, etc. **R7.** Investigate strategies to reduce the stigma of mental health issues and associated treatment.	• Complete a pediatric mental health system assessment by June 1, 2017. Review and implement strategies based upon the findings. • Support increased public funding through the Mecklenburg County Health Department for social workers assigned to high poverty schools within CMS. • Leverage the recently announced collaboration between Novant and Carolinas Healthcare to ensure increased capacity to address mental health issues in low-income neighborhoods. • Encourage creation of peer networks of women and parents with similar needs to support one another (example: Family Independence Initiative in California).	Mecklenburg County, Mental Health Agencies and Providers, CMS and Other Schools, Philanthropy

STRATEGY	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION TACTICS AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS	CRITICAL PARTNERS*
Strategy S: Invest in strategies that lead to smart criminal justice reform and create a community where families are not split due to interactions with the criminal justice system. S	**S1.** Develop policies and interventions to decrease the high rates of adult and youth interactions with the criminal justice system and counteract the current national and local trends pof unnecessary jail time. **S2.** Improve civilian-police relationships through increased trust and legitimacy, and develop local systems for law enforcement governance and oversight that brings civilians to the table as stakeholders and empowers the neighborhoods and communities being policed to address policies and practices.	• Advocate for policy changes to State legislation to raise the age when youthful offenders are charged as adults from 16 to 18 years old. • Identify and implement evidence-based programs to increase school engagement, reduce youth delinquency and violence, thereby disrupting the “school-to-prison pipeline”. • Advocate for school policies and practices that promote keeping students in school and minimize the role of law enforcement in disciplinary action. • Identify and pursue alternative intervention methods to replace disciplinary measures such as out-of-school suspensions, expulsion, and school-based arrests, which disproportionately affect students of color and transfer them from the acadedmic environment into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. • Invest in training and implementation of pre-arrest diversion initiatives that redirect citizens from the criminal justice sysgtem and into appropriate health, mental health, and substance abuse services when appropriate. • Improve processes that move cases through the system quickly so individuals are not incarcerated for long periods of time as tgheir case proceeds. • Implement new policies for bail, fines and fees that will reduce incarceration of individuals who are incapable of paying fines, fees and court costs. • Pursue more ways to improve relationships, increase community engagement, and foster greater cooperatiopn and collaboration between the criminal justice system and community members, especially in communities and neighborhoods disproportionately affectged by crime. Improved trust, transparency, and mutual accountability should result from this collaborative work. • Utilize consistent survey methods to track and analyze the level of trust communities have in law enforcement. • Continue to implement recruitment, hiring, and retention practices that promote a polic force that reflects the diversity of the communities law enforcement serves. • Encourage area employers to use fair chance hiring practices for job applicants with criminal records.	Criminal Justice System Agencies and Partners, Race Matters For Juvenille Justice, Council for Children's Rights, City of Charlotte, Mecklenburg County

STRATEGY	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION TACTICS AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS	CRITICAL PARTNERS*
Strategy T: Re-envision a human services system in which the needs of families are addressed holistically and services and support are coordinated to achieve the best possible outcomes. T	**T1.** Convene stakeholders to develop a community-centered human services vision plan. **T2.** Use a systems thinking/design approach to better integrate and coordinate service delivery across programs and systems to provide more client-centered service and achieve greater outcomes for families.	• Develop shared client databases and metrics, where feasible, to streamline intake processes and coordinate case management. • Coordinate social work case management across programs and systems (when multiple social workers are serving the same client) through assignment of lead social workers. • Use the collective impact model to support common goals and outcomes for families and programs that use evidence-based or research-informed practices to achieve agreed upon outcomes.	Mecklenburg County, United Way, Human Services Agencies
	T3. Improve and consolidate our information and referral systems to better and more efficiently serve families seeking assistance.	• Transform United Way's 2-1-1 system to serve as the community's central clearinghouse for information about and referrals to human services resources. • Invest capital in United Way's 2-1-1 system to allow for innovation and efficiencies.	
	T4. Invest in evidence- and research-based programs that produce the greatest impact on families and children.	• Develop data sharing policies of government agencies that currently prevent sharing of data across systems.	

SOCIAL CAPITAL: CROSS-CUTTING FACTOR #2

STRATEGY	KEY RECOMMENDATIONS	INITIAL IMPLEMENTATION TACTICS AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS	CRITICAL PARTNERS*
Strategy U: Ensure all children, youth and families have relationships in the community which: - Connect them to opportunities, information and resources; - Broaden their horizons about what's possible in their lives; - Assist in navigating through unexpected crises to stay on track; - Offer tangible pathways toward achieving their aspirations; and - Demonstrate to every child, youth and adult that their contribution is vital to the success of our community U	**U1.** Support an expectation that beginning in 7th grade, all students have access to a Life Navigator or other supportive adult to help expose, navigate and connect them to career, educational and life opportunities. **U2.** Develop and execute a focused strategy to build, train and coordinate an "army" of community volunteers committed to connecting more children, youth and families to knowledge, resources and opportunities. **U3.** Leverage relationships developed through the above and elsewhere to help young people and families build social capital and increase access to new networks. **U4.** Build on and expand efforts promoted through the 2014 Cultural Vision Plan for Charlotte-Mecklenburg, which focuses on connecting people and strengthening communities by using arts and culture to create pathways and bridges. **U5.** Encourage all sectors to use economic opportunity as a lens for their decision making.	• Research and evaluate local, regional and national models to develop the Life Navigator concept. Examples include Kauffman Scholars, the Possee Foundation, etc. • Coordinate efforts by alumni organizations, civic/social groups, houses of faith, businesses, neighborhood associations, schools, etc. to have their members/employees engage young people through programs that create exposure and relationships. • Encourage faith-based and civic organizations to use economic opportunity as a lens to rethink and expand their community support and outreach efforts to maximize network building opportunities for those with more limited bridging relationships. • Ramp up efforts of the staff and boards of cultural arts organizations to go into diverse areas of the community to build relationships, listen to what people say they need and want and develop new strategies and programs that reach more diverse groups and communities. • Train "gatekeepers" in social service agencies, houses of faith and other organizations, to share information and better connect families, children and youth to resources and opportunities in the community. • Explore ways to visibly demonstrate a "Culture of Caring" by asking, "How will this decision impact the opportunity trajectory for all children, youth and families?", prior to significant decision making.	Civic Organizations, Community-Based Organizations, Postsecondary Institutions, CMS and other Schools, Faith Community, Business Community, United Way

* Entities identifiefd under critical partners are not all-inclusive.
This is a beginning list of potential partners/groups during implementation.

Leading on Opportunity