Building an Infrastructure of Opportunity for the next generation
At the root of the uncertainty lies a pervasive doubt: whether the South can sustain the American Dream of each generation moving up and doing better than previous generations.
ABOUT MDC

MDC, a nonprofit based in Durham, N.C., began publishing State of the South reports in 1996 to further its mission of helping communities, organizations, and leaders close the gaps that separate people from opportunity. Founded in 1967 to help North Carolina make the transition from an agricultural to an industrial economy and from a segregated to an integrated workforce, MDC now focuses on increasing educational attainment, connecting people to work that pays, and helping them get the resources they need to become successful. To accomplish that, MDC publishes research that highlights the importance of removing inequities; organizes leaders community-wide to create a will for change; develops programs that strengthen the workforce and foster economic development; and incubates those programs so they can be made sustainable and replicated at scale.

MDC’s organizing principle:
**Education + Work + Assets = the Pathway to Opportunity**

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For nearly 20 years, MDC has published *State of the South* reports to alert our region’s leaders in all sectors to the challenges and opportunities we face in making the South a place that works well for all its people. This edition examines the landscape of possibilities and pitfalls facing the South’s youth and young adults, who are poised to be—if they are not already—the workforce, the parents, and the leaders we will count on for our future collective wellbeing.

Prospects for Southern youth and young adults in the 15 to 24 age group are widely variable, depending on the circumstances of their birth, the inclusiveness of their communities, the dynamism of the economies in which they function, and the quality of the education and workforce systems that serve them. A recent national study on intergenerational mobility underscores the distressing fact that it is harder in the South than anywhere else in the nation for someone born at the bottom of the income ladder to make it higher up the ladder as an adult. If the American Dream centers on the belief that where you start out shouldn’t determine where you end up, that dream is far too elusive and its promises more illusory here than elsewhere in our nation.

The youth mobility challenge is even more stark and pervasive than is poverty in the South. Immobility plagues both our fast-growing New South cities and struggling, remote rural areas. For too many youth and young adults, geography, class, race, and ethnicity determine the messages they receive about what is possible, the resources they are connected to, and the way our education and employment systems treat them. A pervasive climate of fiscal stringency threatens many of the progressive social and policy pillars built by earlier generations to foster broader prosperity.

The headwinds of uneven recovery from the Great Recession and uncertain directions in federal and state policy make progress against immobility a profound challenge.

Yet our region is punctuated with signs of determined innovation to change the opportunity landscape for youth and young adults. This edition of the *State of the South* examines where diverse communities—large metros, small cities, and rural regions—are placing their bets and working to create an “infrastructure of opportunity”: a clear and deliberate set of pathways and supports to connect youth and young adults to educational credentials and economic opportunity. No single formula characterizes these efforts. They reflect the culture and circumstances of their locales. But most center on fostering educational attainment and postsecondary completion, building deliberate connections to economically rewarding work, providing social and community supports to help young people stay the course as they move up the opportunity ladder, reforming institutional policy and practices that impede mobility, and marshaling the economic, political, and civic leadership needed to turn disparate programs into strong, coherent systems of youth and young adult advancement.

With this report, we hope to spur leaders across the South to examine patterns of youth and young adult mobility and success in their communities, to examine who is—and is not—realizing the American Dream and why, and to create a shared agenda for building a vigorous and pervasive opportunity infrastructure. We will continue this analysis over the coming months on our website, stateofthesouth.org. The price of failing to change the odds for youth and young adult success in the South is steep; the payoff rich for all of us. Society benefits when everyone succeeds.

David L. Dodson
Durham, NC
October 2014
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Five years after the Great Recession, the American South has emerged as a region divided. The great sweep of territory from the Potomac to the Rio Grande offers stark juxtapositions of bright hopes and deep distress and discontent. The South has both powerhouse cities, growing in jobs and population, and depressed towns and neighborhoods, where people seem stuck without prospect of upward mobility.

The South has a contradictory economy, polarized politics, an anxious populace, a divided head and a conflicted heart.

In much of today’s South, economic and demographic vibrancy exist side-by-side, as veritable next-door neighbors, with poverty, underemployment, educational disparities, and stagnant social mobility. The time-worn descriptions of Southern dichotomies—Old South vs. New South, affluent urban vs. poor rural—do not fully capture the complex set of challenges now facing Southern policy makers, civic and business leaders, and engaged citizens.

The persistent inequality and economic uncertainties now afflicting the South are not simply Southern phenomena, but rather national, even international, in scope. Still, the South can learn from its own recent history that it need not be paralyzed in the face of big challenges—that Southern communities can go about fashioning local infrastructures of opportunity to provide uplift for stranded people and places, even as the nation engages in unresolved debates over how to hasten the economic recovery and stimulate the expansion of well-paying jobs.

It is the purpose of this State of the South report, the eighth in a series dating back to 1996, to apply insights from national data sources and recent scholarly studies to the American South, complemented by a scan of nine Southern communities, to propel initiatives and innovation to promote economic opportunities, to heighten educational achievement, and to increase our young peoples’ chances for upward mobility.

Consider, for example, contrasting rankings indicating that the South has several of the nation’s strongest metropolitan areas, yet those places of robust growth contain high poverty and wide income inequality.

In the closely watched Forbes rating of “Best Places for Business and Careers,” six Southern metros placed in the top 10 among the 100 largest metropolitan areas in the nation. Raleigh, N.C., placed first, followed by Nashville, Tenn. (6th), Charlotte, N.C. (7th), Dallas, Texas (8th), Atlanta, Ga. (9th), and Houston, Texas (10th). In contrast, Raleigh ranked 92nd in a measurement of inequality, Nashville 67th, Charlotte 36th, Dallas 46th, Atlanta 28th, and Houston 31st.

A United Nations report recently projected that North Carolina’s two powerhouse cities—Raleigh and Charlotte—would grow by 70 percent by 2030, leading the list of U.S. cities of more than 500,000. (Southern cities dominated the top 15 in projected rates of growth.) Meanwhile, Census data assembled by the Brookings Institution showed that the poor population of Charlotte grew from 160,000 to 314,000 from 2000 to 2012, and from 66,000 to 130,000 in Raleigh, nearly doubling in each city. Clearly, robust growth has a double-edge—vibrant places attract both high-paid, well-educated citizens and people of low-skills who take low-paying, part-time service work.

In 2014, scholars from Harvard University and the University of California, Berkeley, published a paper titled, “Geography of

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1 For its analyses of economic, demographic and social trends, MDC defines the South as 13 states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia.
The Paradox of the Metro South: Economic Health Indicators for Southern Metros

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>City</th>
<th>Forbes Best for Business List, rank out of largest 100 metros (#1 is best)</th>
<th>Mobility, rank of 100 largest commuting zones (#100 is least mobile, #1 is most)</th>
<th>Inequality, rank of 100 largest metros (#100 is most unequal, #1 is least unequal)</th>
<th>Percent of people in poverty, 2008–2012</th>
<th>Increase in number of people in poverty, 2000 to 2008–2012</th>
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<td>89</td>
<td>23</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Sources and Notes

**Best for Business:** Forbes’ ranking of the Best Places for Business and Careers looks at the 200 largest metropolitan statistical areas in the U.S. Here, we look at only the largest 100. They consider 12 metrics relating to job growth (1-year, 5-year, and projected 3-year), costs (business and living), income growth over the past five years, educational attainment (college and high school), and projected economic growth through 2016. They also factor in net migration patterns over the past five years, as well as cultural and recreational opportunities. Lastly, they included the number of highly ranked colleges in an area per their annual college rankings. They give the most weighting to business costs and educational attainment in the overall ranking.

**Mobility:** The Equality of Opportunity Project calculated mobility for U.S. commuting zones. Here, we look at only mobility in the largest 100 commuting zones (which are named for the biggest city in that zone and correspond to the metros we look at for the other columns). The zones are ranked based on Absolute Upward Mobility, which is a measure of the average economic outcome of a child from a below-median income family. Statistically, they define absolute upward mobility as the average percentile in the national income distribution of a child who is born to parents at the 25th percentile in the national income distribution. In areas with higher absolute upward mobility, children from low-income parents earn higher incomes on average as adults.

**Inequality:** Trulia calculated and ranked levels of inequality for the 100 largest U.S. metros using the 90/10 ratio. The 90/10 ratio is the ratio of income at the 90th percentile to income at the 10th percentile, for a given metro. A higher ratio means greater income inequality. Inequality is measured as the ratio of different percentiles of household income at the metro level. All income data come from the U.S. Census Bureau 2012 1-year American Community Survey. Metros were identified based on Public Use Microdata Areas (PUMAs) mapped to consistent 2009 definitions for metro areas and divisions. U.S. Census Bureau data were obtained through Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Steven Ruggles, J. Trent Alexander, Kate Genadek, Ronald Goeken, Matthew B. Schroeder, and Matthew Sobek. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 5.0 [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2010.

**Poverty:** The poverty rate is based on American Community Survey 2009-2012 5-year average data using 2010 definitions for metro areas. Source for growth of number of people in poverty. Brookings Institution analysis of decennial census (2000) and American Community Survey data (2008–2012 5-year average data). This analysis uses 2013 metropolitan statistical area (MSA) definitions delineated by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget and the U.S. Census Bureau. The 100 largest U.S. metro areas are determined by 2013 population estimates. Unlike the other metro-focused columns, the Dallas metro data includes Ft. Worth, and the Miami data includes Ft. Lauderdale.
Intergenerational Mobility." Along with the study came a stunning interactive map that spotlights which American localities offer slim prospects for young people who live in the lowest fifth of household income to rise to the top fifth. Not surprisingly, several old-industry cities in the North ranked low in mobility. But it is sobering to see on that map an expanse of the darkest coloration sweeping across the Southeast, denoting places, including the region’s shiniest cities, with the least prospects for upward mobility.

“The fact that children who grow up in low-income families in Atlanta and Raleigh fare poorly is perhaps especially striking because these cities are generally considered to be booming cities in the South with relatively high rates of job growth,” the Harvard-Berkeley scholars wrote.

Along with their fellow Americans, Southerners have a strong sense that the American Dream has faded in the early years of the 21st century. Fully 77 percent of Southerners responded “not confident” to this question posed by Hart Research Associates and Public Opinion Strategies for the NBC News/Wall Street Journal in a 2014 poll: “Do you feel confident or not confident that life for our children’s generation will be better than it has been for us?” Only 21 percent of Americans felt confident in upward mobility, while 76 percent were not confident—a 20 percentage-point rise in no-confidence since September 2008.

Southerners who are honest with themselves know that long-held sentiments and predispositions compound the challenges posed by the slow recovery from the Great Recession of 2007–09. Even with renewed in-migration of black citizens and the expansion of the black middle class, the South remains a region divided along the fault line of race. Even as most Southerners say they are happy living where they are, the South remains afflicted with an absence of long-range vision and low expectations for too many of its people—a failure to imagine a future for people and places beyond the current trajectory. Southern policy often has rested on the assumption that certain people—whites, blacks, and Latinos—will remain stuck at or near the bottom, that mobility is not in their destiny.
Asked whether they prefer elected officials who make compromises with people with whom they disagree or who stick to their positions, 43 percent of Southerners—more than in any other region—rej ected compromisers.

The Pew survey asked, “Would you prefer to live in a community where the houses are larger and farther apart, but schools, stores, and restaurants are several miles away, or a community where the houses are smaller and closer to each other, but schools, stores, and restaurants are within walking distance?” Southerners preferred a spread-out community over a denser community by a 55–43 percent margin, wider than residents of any other region.

These findings contribute to an understanding of the South’s decision-making context and of the region’s political landscape. The policy and attitudinal environments across the South erect barriers to sweeping initiatives to address the complex array of factors that produce widening income inequality, softening of the middle class, and stagnant economic mobility.

State by state, the region has experienced a prolonged period of disinvestment, a pulling back from public services. To some extent, the cause can be attributed to the drop in tax revenues resulting from the recession; the states have legal mandates to operate within a balanced budget. But disinvestment also stemmed from policy decisions to cut or hold the line on taxes and to reduce services within limited revenues. While private employment has rebounded in several sectors, state and local government cutbacks have contributed to weaker job markets in the states. Of the 19 states that have not moved forward with Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act, nine are in the South—nine that have declined federal funding that would have created jobs and provided healthcare services to people of modest means.

In public education, spending per pupil declined in all Southern states, except Tennessee, from fiscal year 2008 to 2014. Spending fell by as little as $60 per pupil in West Virginia and $150 in Florida to as much as $700 in Georgia and $1,200 in Alabama. Meanwhile, across the region, racial re-segregation has proceeded in elementary through high schools. And, according to a calculation by the Southern Education Foundation, half or more of public school students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch in all Southern states, except Virginia.

Similarly, in the fiscal 2008–14 period, state spending per student in higher education declined in all but three states: North Carolina and Tennessee had modest gains, while Texas went up by 8 percent. State support fell by 9 percent in Alabama, 8 percent in Kentucky, and a huge 34 percent in Louisiana. Tuition rose by more than 50 percent in Louisiana, Georgia, and Florida.

Disinvestment in Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Change in state K-12 spending per student, inflation-adjusted, FY08 to FY14</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
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Policy and attitudinal environments across the South make it difficult to address widening income inequality, softening of the middle class, and stagnant economic mobility.
Disinvestment in Education

State fiscal support for higher education, Southern states
Source: Illinois State University College of Education, Grapevine. Note: Per capita calculation based on July 2012 population estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Total ($)</th>
<th>Spending per Capita</th>
<th>5-Year % Change, FY09–FY14</th>
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<td>250.20</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>1,771,251,361</td>
<td>214.43</td>
<td>-6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>515,665,320</td>
<td>278.09</td>
<td>-0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>76,238,167,052</td>
<td>241.66</td>
<td>-1.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The quest for recovery has generated a fierce debate between Southerners who see tax cuts and a slimmed-down public sector as the stimulus to job growth through private enterprise, and Southerners who believe that economic advancement and a high quality of life flow out of investments in education and job training, health insurance, and environmental regulations. Republicans who advocate the limited-government, depend-on-private-enterprise approach have gained the upper hand in most state governments in the region. In 2014, Republicans occupied nine of the region’s governor’s offices; Democrats, four. Of the 26 legislative chambers, House and Senate combined, Republicans held a majority in 22, Democrats in four.

With both Washington and state capitals influenced more by self-limiting ideologies than basic pragmatism, there is all the more reason why communities, especially growing metropolitan areas with adequate resources, must initiate efforts to give the rising generation of Southerners experiences and life-tools to pursue a future better than their parents. While improving mobility will create more equitable conditions for individuals, it is also instrumental to making the South more globally competitive: our young people, successful or not, are poised to determine the progress of the region.

**FOCUS ON 15- TO 24-YEAR-OLD SOUTHERNERS**

The South’s teenagers and young adults face an economic future fraught with a lack of upward mobility and greater uncertainty than their parents and grandparents encountered as they completed schooling, formed families, and advanced into working age. At the root of the uncertainty lies a pervasive doubt: whether the South can sustain the American Dream of each generation moving up and doing better than previous generations.

Today’s 15- to 24-year-olds, who constitute about 15 percent of the people living in the region, find themselves buffeted by the still-potent effects of the deepest national recession since the Great Depression, as well as by the powerful forces of globalization and technological change. They approach the beginning of their productive lives in a period of sluggish or stagnant wage growth, eroding middle-skills jobs, high rates of poverty, sweeping income inequality, and significant public disinvestment.

Their grandparents and parents also lived through times of conflict, economic turbulence, and social change. Still, most of them could see a nation and region moving forward through both private enterprise and public investment, providing expanded opportunities and offering the prospects of stable employment and, for many, steadily rising middle-class income.

Southerners born during and immediately after World War II came of age in a society segregated by laws that severely limited the freedom and prospects of black citizens. The South had a low-wage farm-and-factory economy. Still, most high school graduates could look forward to long-term employment in the same trade or for the same employer. The GI bill and federal research grants stimulated an expansion of higher education, while states developed vocational-technical schools that evolved into community colleges. Interstate highways and airports connected the South to the national and world economies, further diminishing the region’s pre-war, persistent isolation.

The parents of today’s 15- to 24-year-olds are products of the South that blossomed in the wake of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts. The lifting of legalized segregation liberated the South economically. Through both public and private investment, the once-laggard region led the nation in population and job growth in the 1980s and ’90s. Reversing the Great Migration to the North and West, black Americans moved to the South in greater numbers than to any other region. Simultaneously, Spanish-speakers from Mexico and Central America spread across the region, defining its future as multi-ethnic rather than biracial. Old-economy jobs declined, as newer, higher-wage jobs multiplied. While structural changes left a digital divide and a widening urban-rural gap, public universities and community colleges charged relatively low tuition to prepare Southerners for the newer jobs that required education beyond high school.

Today’s youth and young adults face a South transformed by the two recessions since the turn of the century, which exacted a heavy price throughout the region. The 2000-01 recession, though relatively shallow, stifled the South’s economic momentum built over the last quarter of the 20th century. Then the Great Recession...
of 2007–09 reshaped the national—and Southern—labor market in dramatic fashion. There has not been—and is unlikely to be—a return to “normal.”

For this analysis, MDC chose to focus on the prospects of 15- to 24-year-olds because the young people in this segment of the population range from students entering high school to young adults recently emerging from college and/or training. In the near term—by 2025 they will, of course, be 10 years older—they should be building careers and families, as well as contributing to their communities’ economic and civic lives. They are our next generation workforce and our next generation parents; failure to help them succeed now weakens their long-term prospects for economic security and, for the poorest, increases the chances that their children will grow up in poverty. It serves the South to pay attention to this cohort of people in developing policies to combat intergenerational poverty, as well as to restore confidence that the American Dream lives on.

This report, therefore, calls on the South to develop and implement purposeful policies and systemic practices—which we call here the “infrastructure of opportunity”—to bolster the prospects for its 15- to 24-year-olds to achieve economic resilience as adults and a fulfilling social and civic life. It is a call to action to the region’s state and local governments, to its educational institutions, to its business and civic leaders, and to its philanthropies and nonprofit organizations to demonstrate social innovation despite gridlock in Washington.

This population cohort, in effect, combines two “generations” much discussed in journalism and popular surveys. The so-called Millennial Generation is generally defined as including today’s 18- to 33-year-olds, while today’s teenagers do not yet have a commonly agreed upon generation name.

Of the 110 million people who live in the 13 states that constitute the South in this report, more than 15 million are in the 15–24 age range. Just as Southern population growth varies markedly between slow-growing, inner-South states and fast-growing, outer-South states, growth in the youth and young-adult segments of the population is unevenly distributed across the region.

From 2000 to 2012, the fast-growing states had high growth in the 15–24 age bracket—29 percent in Florida, 21 percent in North Carolina, and 20 percent in Georgia and Texas. In contrast, Louisiana and West Virginia experienced a decline in 15- to 24-year-olds of 5 percent and 2.5 percent, respectively, and Mississippi had a mere 0.4 percent increase in this age bracket.

In terms of race and ethnicity, today’s youth and young adults present a significantly different, more diverse, profile than that of older Southerners. Of people in the 15–24 age bracket, half are white, 22 percent black, 19 percent Hispanic, with the remainder including American Indians, Asians, and people of two or more races or ethnicities. In Texas and Florida, where more than 40 percent of the South’s population lives, the population is even more diverse. In Texas, 34 percent of 15- to 24-year-olds are white, 41 percent are Hispanic or Latino, and 12 percent are black. The same age group in Florida is 45 percent white, 21 percent black, and 26 percent Hispanic or Latino.

In March 2014, the Pew Research Center issued a study, “Millennials in Adulthood,” which sheds light on the implications of economic distress on the life situations and choices of young adults. “Millennials are also the first in the modern era to have higher levels of student loan debt, poverty and unemployment, and lower levels of wealth and personal income than their two immediate predecessor generations (Gen-Xers and Boomers) had at the same stage in their life cycles,” said the Pew researchers. They found that only 26 percent of Millennials are married, and 36 percent of them were living in their parents’ homes in 2012.

“Most unmarried Millennials (69 percent) say they would like to marry, but many, especially those with lower levels of income and education, lack what they deem to be a necessary prerequisite—a solid economic foundation,” Pew reported.

The near-term health of the South’s civil society rests on the urgency with which the region addresses barriers to educational advancement, job creation, and economic mobility. But in addition to removing barriers, the challenge is also to erect an infrastructure of opportunity—that is, the systems and supports to boost young people to higher rungs on the ladder of economic and personal advancement. Those systems and supports reach from quality pre-K programs to retraining options for dislocated workers.

Our purpose here is to suggest how communities can connect and design the portion of the infrastructure of opportunity that serves youth and young adults.

In our analysis of the prospects for youth and young adults in the South, guided by national research and regional data, we considered the systems, policies, and practices that need to be in place for economic mobility to grow. In visits to nine communities across the South, we looked not simply for promising programs, but for analysis that acknowledges the particular needs of young people and how local systems address those. Other communities in the South could use a similar frame to look at themselves and make decisions about how to change their policies and practices to strengthen their infrastructure of opportunity. Communities should consider how to:

- Foster a common strategic vision of aim and outcomes for education and training systems at the secondary and postsecondary level. They should communicate about and align their curricula, performance measures, and community relationships to devise and promote clear paths for all young people to prepare for, enter, persist in, and complete postsecondary training and credentials that prepare them for good jobs.

\(^{2}\) Children under 15 years old account for 22.2 million Southerners, and they are even more diverse: 46 percent white, 22 percent Hispanic or Latino, 20 percent black. By contrast, more than 75 percent of Southerners 65 years old and above are white, and more than 60 percent between 45 and 64 are white.
• Engage young people in work experiences that enhance their learning and training, preparing them to compete in the workforce. Such engagement requires committed involvement of local employers in the design and provision of work-based learning and job experiences.

This alignment is undergirded by policies that move people along the education and employment infrastructure, like an interconnected highway system. Such policies:

• support demand-side strategies in the labor market to stimulate job creation and economic growth, not only with major employers, but also support and promotion of small business development that encourages local entrepreneurs through financing and incubators. This also includes an active role for employers in defining and developing the skills individuals need to be successful in the workforce

• reform criminal and juvenile justice practices, including policing and probation systems, that drastically limit employment opportunities and have a disparate impact on communities of color, particularly young men

• expand access to financial supports that help individuals and families meet basic needs, build financial stability, offer opportunities for saving and wealth creation, and prevent against predatory pay and lending practices

• improve job quality, including family-sustaining wages, flexible work environments and stable scheduling, and quality dependent care

This infrastructure is place-based, taking advantage of local assets and addressing a community’s distinctive challenges while acknowledging regional and even national policies and pressures that influence local conditions. To be effective and sustainable, it also relies on a community’s physical infrastructure. The maintenance and construction of public works and utilities present job opportunities for young people; public transit connects individuals to school and work and has the potential to reduce isolation of marginalized neighborhoods and populations. There also are policies related to physical infrastructure—like affordable housing and broadband access—that, historically and currently, have blocked access to and full participation in the infrastructure of opportunity. Modifying these policies has the potential to reverse or at least mitigate some of the consequences of exclusion.

Aligning and maintaining an infrastructure of opportunity requires pragmatic leadership, and in some cases may require new ways of organizing partnerships and institutions to build strong...
pathways to progress for all young people, both those who are connected to the education and employment systems as well as those who are radically disconnected.

Currently, across the South, there are gaps in workforce preparation along with a job market that doesn’t provide enough good jobs. At the same time, the social supports and education systems that undergird the infrastructure of opportunity are facing historic disinvestment. (There are federal and state initiatives that could strengthen this infrastructure, like expanding the availability of low-interest student loans and increasing the minimum wage and other efforts to improve job quality.) Instead of disappearing, this infrastructure should be as pervasive and reliable as the physical infrastructure of roads and water lines. It needs to be as integrated and dynamic as any network of power lines and the electric grid to restore what was lost in the Great Recession and to provide a way up for young Southerners with limited prospects for a livelihood.

WHAT RESEARCH AND DATA SAY

Key Research
The following scan of recent studies outlines the dimensions of the economic mobility challenge facing 15- to 24-year-olds in the South, pointing to gaps in the opportunity infrastructure:

“Geography of Intergenerational Mobility,” the massive study from a team of researchers at Harvard and the University of California at Berkeley, examines children born in the United States between 1980 and 1982 and looked at their income in 2011–12, when they were approximately 30 years old. The national cohort was divided into commuting zones, which are groups of counties defined by commuting patterns. Study authors looked at low-income individuals and tracked where they ended up in that income distribution, on average, 30 years later. A higher mobility ranking means that, on average, individuals born in that particular place have moved higher up the income ladder than peers born in other places. Of the nation’s 100 largest commuting zones, no Southern city ranked in the top 20 in this measurement of upward mobility, while eight ranked in the bottom 10, including Raleigh and Charlotte, N.C.; Jacksonville, Fla.; and Atlanta, Ga. These findings call into question whether the American Dream is in good health in the South.

This paper generated considerable attention in the national press. The scholars are careful to say that their study does not show causation for the differences in mobility among U.S. locales. Nevertheless, the Harvard-Berkeley scholars identified five factors as strongly correlated with variations in intergenerational mobility:

- Communities characterized by low mobility tend to feature more residential segregation,
- wider income inequality,
- weaker public schools,
- less social capital, and
- more broken family structures than communities of high mobility.

The Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago issued a subsequent report that looked at education and family structure. It generally reaffirms and adds context to the Harvard-Berkeley study. Conducted by Senior Economist Bhashkar Mazumder, the Chicago Fed analysis offers a hopeful finding in that “among those with 16 years of schooling, the racial gap in upward mobility is essentially closed”—a clear signal that efforts to close the college-attainment gap would have a significant pay-off. While recognizing progress in the recent past in reducing racial segregation, the Chicago Fed finds that if current patterns of intergenerational mobility persist “blacks on average would not make any relative progress” in the income distribution—academic language that contains a clear warning.

An analysis of the Survey of Consumer Finances data by Demos found that when controlling for income, the median wealth of a white household is three times that of a black household. In other words, a white family has, on average, substantially more wealth than a black family at the same income level. The racial wealth gap, or the difference between the net worth of the median white household ($134,000) to that of the median black ($11,000) or Latino ($14,000) household, shows no signs of narrowing. Wealth building is critical to improving intergenerational mobility. Families with wealth are better able to remain economically stable during unexpected events, such as a layoff or a health crisis, and they have enhanced opportunities to prepare their children for education and employment. As the costs of higher education increase, a family’s ability to financially support a student is even more important for his or her success in completing a postsecondary credential.

Key Indicators
To help keep the American Dream alive in the region, Southern leaders should examine data in their own communities to identify policy changes and points of intervention, by both public and private sectors, that hold promise to strengthen the infrastructure of opportunity serving youth and young adults. The following indicators suggest where repair and renewal of the opportunity infrastructure are required to improve the life-chances of 15- to 24-year-olds.

- Extreme income inequality, says Standard and Poor’s, the credit rating agency, can exert a “drag on long-run economic growth.” In an August 2014 report, S&P pointed out that a market economy will inevitably produce differences in income and wealth—and that such differences provide incentives to investment and expansion. But S&P notes that “too much inequality can undermine growth,” and warns that the U.S. is approaching extreme levels.

- Underemployment is substantially higher among workers under age 25 than among all workers in every Southern state. In 2013–14, unemployment rates went down in most states, and yet underemployment was higher in 2013 than in 2000. Underemployed people include a combination of jobless people actively seeking work, people working part-time who want full-time jobs, and people who have given up after

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3 Study authors created 741 Commuting Zones. As described in the report, “For example, if people in neighboring counties work in the same city, then those counties are likely to belong to the same Commuting Zone. Commuting Zones are similar to metro areas, but have the advantage of covering rural areas as well. Note that each Commuting Zone is typically named after the biggest city in that zone. Hence, our statistics reflect average outcomes in a broad area around that city and not just that one city itself.”

http://www.equality-of-opportunity.org/index.php/faq-s
Not Enough Full-Time Work  Underemployment rates, Southern states


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Workers Under Age 25</th>
<th>All workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>22.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>21.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Includes all workers 16 and older. This measure includes the unemployed (jobless workers who are actively seeking work), and it also includes those who work part-time but want full-time work (“involuntary” part-timers) and those who want a job and have looked for work in the last year but have given up seeking work (“marginal workers”). This is the U-6 measure of labor underutilization.

seeking work in the past year. Seven states—Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee—had underemployment rates higher than the national rate of 27 percent in 2013. National data produced by the Center for Economic and Policy Research show an unemployment rate for recent black college graduates higher than 12 percent, double the unemployment rate for all graduates. More than 55 percent of recent black college graduates work in jobs that do not require a bachelor’s degree, compared to 45 percent of all recent college graduates.

• Disconnected youths consist of teenagers not in school, not working, and disconnected from societal anchors, thus vulnerable to an array of impediments to achievement. The 2014 Kids Count data book of the Annie E. Casey Foundation reported that every Southern state, except Virginia, had a higher percentage of disconnected youths than the national rate of 8 percent. Two-thirds of 16- to 19-year-olds are not in the labor force; most, of course, are in school. Among those in this age group who are in the labor force—meaning they actively seek work—young African-American Southerners have an especially high unemployment rate—46 percent. That’s compared to unemployment rates of 29 percent for Hispanics and 26 percent for whites.

Among the seven out of 10 young adults (20 to 24 years old) in the labor force, unemployment is substantially lower. Still, a major gap exists: Whites and Hispanics have a 14 percent unemployment rate, far below the 27 percent unemployment rate among young black adults.

• Income data by quintiles provide insight into the uneasy economic standing of millions of Southerners. Despite the recovery, poverty rates have remained stubbornly high, and a Brookings Institution report recently showed that several Southern metros—North Port, Fla., Greensboro, N.C., Orlando, Fla., Winston-Salem, N.C., Austin, Texas, Atlanta, Ga., Raleigh, N.C., Charlotte, N.C., and Cape Coral, Fla.—ranked among the 15 metros nationally in increase of poor people from 2000 to 2012.

And yet, the economic profile of Southerners is not complete in looking only at people in poverty. A data-set of households by quintiles—that is, divided into fifths—makes clear that, even if they remain above the poverty line, millions of Southerners live on the economic margins, vulnerable to a loss of job, an illness, or accident that saps a household’s income. This is so despite the

\(^*\) CEPR defines recent college graduates as those between the ages of 22 and 27.
fact that the middle class expanded across the region during the expansion years of the late 20th century.

Adding together households in the lowest fifth of income and the second lowest fifth shows that four out of 10 households in the South have incomes below $40,000. Only Virginia stands apart, with its second fifth reaching up to $49,000. Mississippi’s second fifth goes up to a mere $28,600 in income. The second fifth in the remaining Southern states fall between $39,700 (Texas) and $30,800 (West Virginia). The federal poverty line is drawn at roughly $23,500 for a family of four.

For most lower-income Southerners, the challenge is not so much to vault into the top fifth in income (the measurement spotlighted in the Harvard-Berkeley study) as to reach the middle or even upper-middle class. In most Southern states, the third quintile of households—the middle-middle class—has incomes between $50,000 and $60,000, somewhat higher in Texas and Virginia. Upper-middle class households in the fourth quintile have top annual incomes ranging from $125,000 in Virginia, to $103,000 in Texas, to $96,000 in Georgia, to a low of $77,000 in Mississippi.

For more Southerners to reach into the middle-class requires growth in middle-level jobs, increased educational attainment beyond high school, and better alignment of credentialing options and labor market demand. Alan Krueger, a former chair of the president’s Council of Economic Advisers, has pointed out that from 1947 to 1979, households in all five quintiles experienced income growth, but from 1979 to 2010, the top fifth grew, the middle fifths barely grew, and incomes in the bottom fifth declined.

### Modest Means: Household Income in the South

**Household income quintile upper limits, 2012, by state**

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey; MIT Living Wage Calculator, 2004*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Lowest Quintile</th>
<th>Second Quintile</th>
<th>Third Quintile</th>
<th>Fourth Quintile</th>
<th>Lower Limit of Top 5 Percent</th>
<th>MIT Living Wage, Estimated Minimum Income for Covering Expenses, One parent with one child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>$16,231</td>
<td>$32,254</td>
<td>$52,756</td>
<td>$86,395</td>
<td>$152,470</td>
<td>$36,091</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>$16,489</td>
<td>$31,081</td>
<td>$50,404</td>
<td>$80,402</td>
<td>$141,688</td>
<td>$34,056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>$19,421</td>
<td>$35,637</td>
<td>$56,324</td>
<td>$91,192</td>
<td>$172,176</td>
<td>$43,012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>$18,815</td>
<td>$36,610</td>
<td>$59,852</td>
<td>$96,280</td>
<td>$180,800</td>
<td>$37,534</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>$16,406</td>
<td>$32,135</td>
<td>$52,793</td>
<td>$85,232</td>
<td>$146,015</td>
<td>$34,922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>$16,348</td>
<td>$32,432</td>
<td>$55,023</td>
<td>$91,414</td>
<td>$164,015</td>
<td>$37,570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>$14,610</td>
<td>$28,599</td>
<td>$47,205</td>
<td>$77,027</td>
<td>$141,479</td>
<td>$35,120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>$18,795</td>
<td>$35,412</td>
<td>$56,147</td>
<td>$89,874</td>
<td>$164,247</td>
<td>$39,363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>$17,703</td>
<td>$33,949</td>
<td>$54,091</td>
<td>$86,819</td>
<td>$157,052</td>
<td>$35,325</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Unemployment Hits Young and People of Color

**Unemployment rates by age group and race and ethnicity, 2010–2012 average, South**

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>White alone, not Hispanic or Latino</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Hispanic or Latino</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>American Indian, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, Alaska Native</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Two or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16 to 19 years</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 to 24 years</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 to 54 years</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>$16,231</td>
<td>$32,254</td>
<td>$52,756</td>
<td>$86,395</td>
<td>$152,470</td>
<td>$36,091</td>
<td>$34,056</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• **Educational attainment** remains a key determinant of who is employed and who is not, and who earns a good living and who does not. Yes, the Great Recession made it more difficult for college graduates to find the jobs they wanted, and many graduates have taken jobs that do not require a degree, probably displacing people without degrees. Still, as the Economic Policy Institute has reported, the earnings gap has widened between people with a four-year degree and everyone without a degree.

**For more Southerners to reach into the middle-class requires growth in middle-level jobs, increased educational attainment beyond high school, and better alignment of credentialing options and labor market demand.**

In the South, the median income of high school graduates is $26,500; for people with some college, $32,299; and for four-year graduates, $48,317. Across all educational attainment levels, a distinct gender pay gap remains in the region, with median income for men higher than for women.

All across the region, students fall out of the leaky pipeline that runs from ninth grade to college completion, depriving Southern communities of the lift that would result from having more of its young people prepared for higher-skill, higher-wage jobs and connected to those through work experiences like mentorships, on-the-job training, and apprenticeships. It’s important for states and communities to sustain easy access to education, even when state budget cuts put upward pressure on tuition at universities.

### A Widening Income Gap

*Annual growth rate of real income across the family income distribution, National*


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quintile</th>
<th>1947 to 1979</th>
<th>1979 to 2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lowest</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>-0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Top</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Lowest Quintile</th>
<th>2nd Quintile</th>
<th>Middle Quintile</th>
<th>4th Quintile</th>
<th>Top Quintile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>$17,946</td>
<td>$33,512</td>
<td>$53,613</td>
<td>$85,694</td>
<td>$156,762</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MIT Living Wage, Estimated Minimum Income for Covering Expenses, One parent with one child</th>
<th>1979 to 2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>$36,252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>$38,292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>$43,200</td>
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</table>
| West Virginia                                                                                 | $34,965      | n/a
As a region

As we know from our inquiries around the region, Southern communities abound with pilot projects, demonstrations, models, start-ups—some generated by private enterprises, some by nonprofits. A major challenge facing community leaders has to do with converting successful initiatives into policies and practices that are systemic and sustainable. Just as private businesses thrive when they adopt fresh ideas, so too should city, county and state governments, school systems, higher education, the justice system of police, courts, and prisons, and the complex of arrangements that make up the workforce system. In the last decade—and in some cases, just since the end of the Great Recession—there are national and statewide efforts to change these outcomes for youth and young adults at a large scale. With national philanthropic support, organizations, states, and collaboratives have placed big bets on elements of the opportunity infrastructure to improve educational achievement and employment options. A few examples:

• Achieving the Dream, the nation’s largest community college reform effort, has combined new institutional practices with state policy changes to improve instruction, retention, and completion outcomes for community colleges across the country—with a significant footprint in Arkansas, Florida, North Carolina, Texas, and Virginia, and expanding into Georgia and Alabama.

Outcomes and exit points vary from state to state. Some states lose too many young people in high school; others have a stronger high school graduation rate but a not-so-strong college completion rate. Constructing an infrastructure of opportunity entails plugging the leaks at transition points.

and community colleges. It’s also crucial for the region’s future prosperity that more Southerners attain degrees and credentials beyond high school.

The chart on page 19 gives a statistical portrait of the leaky educational pipeline of ninth graders to university graduates. In general, of a cohort of 100 ninth graders:

• 25 to 40 would not graduate from high school in four years
• Roughly 25 would graduate from high school but not go directly to college
• 15 out of the 100 would enroll in college but not make it through their second year
• Fewer than 20 out of those 100 once-9th graders would end up with an associate’s or bachelor’s degree in three to six years, depending on program type, in most Southern states

Outcomes and exit points vary from state to state. Some states lose too many young people in high school; others have a stronger high school graduation rate but a not-so-strong college completion rate. Constructing an infrastructure of opportunity entails plugging the leaks at transition points.
• Gov. Bill Haslam’s Tennessee Promise lays out a plan to cover the full cost of two-year college for every high school graduate beginning in fall 2015. Participants also will be paired with a mentor to navigate the college admissions process.

• Regional workforce development efforts like the National Fund for Workforce Solutions (NFWS), funded by a group of local and national funders, are supporting employer engagement and innovations to help low-wage workers develop new skills that lead to better career opportunities—and a better prepared workforce for regional industries. NFWS has collaboratives in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, Texas, and Virginia.

• New Orleans’ Economic Opportunity Strategy, spearheaded by Mayor Mitch Landrieu, will connect several anchor institutions—from government, private employers, and education sectors—with philanthropic support to remove barriers for disadvantaged job seekers. Another mayor-led effort is under way in Richmond, Va.; Mayor Dwight Jones created the Office of Community Wealth Building, a response—backed by $3.4 million in city funds—to several community task force efforts focused on lowering Richmond’s 27 percent poverty rate.

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For Every 100 9th Graders

**Estimated educational completion and persistence by state, 2010**

Source: NCHEMS Information Center estimate using data from Tom Mortenson—Public high school graduation rates and College-going rates of students directly from HS, ACT Institutional Survey—Freshmen to sophomore retention rates, NCES-IPEDS Graduation Rate Survey—Graduation Rates; Note: Both two- and four-year college programs are considered. Chart sorted by percent graduating college on time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Don’t graduate from High school on time</th>
<th>Graduate from High school on time, but don’t enroll in college</th>
<th>Go directly to college, but don’t make it to the second year</th>
<th>Are still enrolled their second year, but don’t graduate on time</th>
<th>Graduate within 150% of program time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>27%</td>
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</tr>
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<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>40%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>39%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>34%</td>
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<td>13%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 (any portion not covered by other Federal and state grants)
Arkansas Gov. Mike Beebe and Kentucky Gov. Steve Beshear bucked a trend in the region by leading efforts to approve Medicaid expansion under the Affordable Care Act. Discussing his commitment to the expansion, Beshear said, “You’re not going to have a productive workforce unless they’re also a healthy workforce.”

As communities
In addition to drawing on studies and analyzing data, MDC sent teams of its staff to diverse communities across the region to explore the potential of—and barriers to—erecting local infrastructures of opportunity to boost young Southerners up the ladders of economic and social advancement. Profile writers interviewed local leaders to learn whether and how communities are increasing the likelihood of successful transitions in secondary and postsecondary education, linking learning and work, and addressing weak job markets.

These profiles offer illustrations of what communities can try to accomplish amid fractious politics and economic anxieties. As the essays that follow illustrate, leaders in Southern communities—as huge as Houston, Texas, and as compact as Port St. Joe, Fla.—are striving, and often struggling, to erect institutional structures for people to climb out of economic distress. Indeed, communities can build their own infrastructures of opportunity with a special focus on youth and young adults who need more to hold onto in an era of a sluggish labor market.

Our Findings
The foundation of an infrastructure of opportunity can be seen in these regional and local efforts, but it is weak and uneven across the South. The conversation, then, begins with what we have to build on. As a starting point for these discussions across the region, here are key findings from MDC’s scan of studies and soundings in communities:

1. Across the region as a whole, the South does not have enough jobs, and not enough middle-income jobs. The national economy has indeed made a long climb up from the depths of the Great Recession. But Southern states and most communities have not rebounded to produce the quantity of jobs needed to keep up with population growth and to afford young people a mobility boost at the outset of their careers. The profile of Danville, Va., illustrates how a former milltown is trying to diversify its economy by building an entrepreneurial ecosystem that draws new investment and provides employment options for local talent.

2. Job growth, of course, is driven by private investment but depends heavily on federal policies. And, no doubt, the region’s governments will continue to deploy industry hunters and tax-funded incentives to lure job-producing companies. But, as evidence from the Harvard-Berkeley study and others have shown, those efforts are not sufficient to give upward mobility to thousands of young Southerners. The profiles of Northern Neck, Va., and Port St. Joe, Fla., explore the unique challenges rural, Southern communities face when it comes to expanding the job market.

3. There is a need for state and local governments to expand the supply of jobs through public works projects—building parks, schools, roads; repairing bridges and old sewer systems—with special provisions for hiring out-of-work or underemployed young people. The Brookings Institution computes that 14.2 million Americans are employed in building or operating infrastructure, with one quarter expected to retire or leave their jobs by 2022. With interest rates remaining exceptionally low, governments could borrow money for public works, putting people to work now at a relatively modest cost for the future. Another alternative would entail subsidized jobs for connecting young people left behind to the world of work.

4. Most Southern cities are less dense than most old, industrial cities of the Midwest and Northeast. In sprawling metropolitanization, a disconnect often exists between low- and moderate-income neighborhoods and the location of good jobs. Further, even in cities with relatively robust job growth, there remains a struggle to communicate job opportunities—and the skills needed—to young people growing up in an environment of little hope. Greenville, S.C., is starting in middle school—and involving employers—to change attitudes about career readiness and work experience.

5. There is no mobility strategy that does not include education. Even in an era of heightened federal involvement in education, public schools, colleges, and universities remain in the domains of local and state governance. The South’s future depends on state and local policies and funding to assure near-universal high school graduation, to elevate completion rates in community colleges and universities, and to narrow achievement gaps along lines of race and ethnicity. With a statewide lens, the Arkansas profile highlights initiatives that aim to improve education and employment outcomes at the regional and state level.

6. An education agenda has multiple components: giving children a strong start with pre-kindergarten enrichment; strengthening middle schools as a means for stifling the propensity of many to drop out around the ninth grade; continuing and expanding the movement to meld high schools and community colleges for young people in need of a job-ready credential but not inclined to pursue a four-year degree; restraining tuition creep and enlarging need-based financial aid to assure access to higher education and contain the debt burden. The Charlotte, N.C., profile details work among K-12, two-year, and four-year systems, in partnership with community-based organizations, employers, and philanthropy, to support young people who face significant barriers to achievement.

7. The recent enactment of new federal workforce law provides an opportunity for the South to strengthen its training strategies and systems. WIOA replaces WIA. The new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act requires states to come up with a single, strategic plan for training, employment services, adult education, and vocational rehabilitation, and it emphasizes real-world training. It’s a moment for Southern states and cities to add their
own policies and funding to the federal initiative in order to blend work and learning to prepare and connect youth. In Durham, N.C., there are efforts to unite neighborhoods, educational and training institutions, and employers into a coherent system to prepare youth and young adults for careers.

8. A true infrastructure of opportunity gives reliable options to all young people regardless of race and ethnicity, gender, class, or neighborhood. As data show, however, that is not currently the case, and race specifically remains a significant factor in the economic outcomes of individuals across the South. Blacks raised in low-income homes are less likely to move up the income distribution than low-income whites. A national study from The Pew Charitable Trusts on intergenerational mobility found that more than half of black adults raised in the bottom quintile remain there as adults, and only a third of whites do. The South also has a large population of undocumented students, many of whom are high achievers in our secondary school systems. Undocumented students are ineligible for federal financial aid, and in all Southern states except Texas, they are ineligible for state financial aid and must pay out-of-state tuition (in Alabama and South Carolina, they are not admitted to public postsecondary institutions). If these young people are unable to pursue further education, the region stands to lose a promising talent pool and instead see increasing rates of poverty and immobility. To eliminate racial and ethnic disparities in social and economic outcomes, Southern leaders must continue work to remove structural and institutional racism. One of the first steps toward this challenging goal is acknowledging that racial discrimination persists in practice. In our interviews across the South, we asked people to tell us who, of their community’s youth and young adults, is getting ahead and who isn’t. We noted a widespread reluctance to discuss racial and ethnic disparities. Communities can begin by examining data on educational attainment, income, wealth, and health to identify racial and ethnic gaps in well-being. They also can explore their history critically, asking who has benefited from past change and growth and who has the ability to make decisions about the community’s future. As long as patterns of exclusion and segregation match economic outcomes, as they do across much of the South, then structural racism persists.

9. The South has a component of radically disconnected youth who need an array of services and initiatives to tap their potential for education, employment, and civic participation. Southern states incarcerate 45 percent of all state-held inmates in the nation. African-Americans represent more than one-third of local inmates and state prisoners, well above their share of the population. Four out of 10 prisoners are between the ages of 18 and 29. Incarceration disrupts the educational trajectory of young men and women, and erects barriers to employment. Among the steps to be taken is reconsidering sentencing policies—especially for nonviolent offenders; punishment shouldn’t erect an even higher barrier to a useful career.

10. Now is the time for municipal and county officeholders to join with business leaders and demonstrate their ability to lead and rejuvenate American pragmatism. Because the region’s major cities have emerged as the principal engines of the economy, the South especially needs a broad spectrum of leaders to renew engagement in civic uplift. In today’s polarized politics, mayors have an opportunity to join with leaders in the business community to work across lines of party, class, and race to construct a physical and social infrastructure that gives their residents a boost toward the American Dream.

11. As long ago as the 1830s, Alexis de Tocqueville hailed the importance of the American inclination to form voluntary associations that enrich civic life. Today, the South benefits from the efforts of philanthropies and nonprofits, though they need to work in coordination to be complementary, not redundant. Also, the forging of place-based leadership units—formal coalitions of government, business, nonprofits, and education—can become powerful forces for targeting initiatives toward youth and young adults. The profiles of two very different Texas cities—Brownsville and Houston—outline the potential and pitfalls of private/public partnership.

In calling on Southern citizens, as well as leaders in the public and private sectors, to attend to the economic prospects of youth and young adults, this report seeks to contribute to the enhancement of individual lives and the prospects of communities, from metropolitan regions to rural towns. But just as important is that the South renew its sense of, and commitment to, the common good.

It was, after all, a leader of one of what are now the Southern states—Thomas Jefferson of Virginia—who wrote words that remain embedded as guiding principles: that all men are created equal, endowed by their creator with unalienable rights protected by government deriving its powers from the people. As a slave owner, Jefferson did not fully embody the words he wrote. And yet, after serving as governor of Virginia and president of the United States, Jefferson founded the University of Virginia, a public educational institution, which he said was to be based on the “illimitable freedom of the human mind.”

In the South, a tension remains between what’s good for an individual and what’s good for the community and nation as a whole.

Still, as the opening of the Declaration of Independence suggests, the pursuit of happiness only fully comes alive in a community, region, and nation where citizens work toward the common good.
BROWNSVILLE / TEXAS
Kate Mitchell

More than a third of the 180,000 residents live below the poverty line, and Mexican drug cartels pose a regular challenge to the stability of the economy. Historically, living-wage jobs have been scarce and almost always out of reach for young people without postsecondary credentials.

THE PLACE: a border town with a high poverty rate and developing culture of collaboration and success

THE CHALLENGE: learning to work together to improve young people’s access to education, training, and living-wage work

ELEMENTS OF OPPORTUNITY
INFRASTRUCTURE: a robust community partnership linking the education, business, and human service sectors; student leaders connecting other young people to opportunity

HISTORY AND CONTEXT

Brownsville is the southernmost city in Texas. Its city limits are marked by a winding barrier wall, interrupted only by a guarded border crossing to Mexico and part of the University of Texas at Brownsville (UTB) campus. Breezes from the Gulf of Mexico blow through the small downtown most afternoons. More than a third of the 180,000 residents live below the poverty line, and Mexican drug cartels pose a regular challenge to the stability of the economy. Historically, living-wage jobs have been scarce and almost always out of reach for young people without postsecondary credentials.

In 2008, less than half of Brownsville high school seniors applied to college. Those who attended UTB and Texas Southmost College (UTB-TSC) were part of freshman classes where only 45 percent of students were considered college-ready and 55 percent needed developmental (remedial) education. Local leaders reported that the students who succeeded in applying and attending were

1 In 2011 UTB and TSC began the process of separating. Texas Southmost will become a standalone community college. UTB will merge with the University of Texas-Pan American.
new nonprofit entity—charged with implementing a 10-year comprehensive community plan. Predictably, education was one major component of the plan, which appealed to United Way of Southern Cameron County—a longtime education funder and advocate in Brownsville.

A Funding Invitation
Planning for an educational improvement effort was already under way at United Way when Brownsville was invited to apply for an MDC initiative called Partners for Postsecondary Success (PPS), funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. PPS was created to establish or improve cross-sector community partnerships that could significantly increase the number of low-income young adults completing postsecondary credentials leading to living-wage work. Over approximately three years, beginning in 2010, sites could receive up to $1.4 million in planning and implementation grants with technical and learning support from MDC.

Traditionally those with strong support systems from families familiar with the higher education system, while those without intensive individualized support outside of school remained disconnected from college pathways or career tracks.

Over the last six years, however, the educational landscape has been changing in Brownsville. In 2012, the college readiness rate at UTB-TSC had increased almost 20 percent from 2008 and the developmental education rate had fallen by nearly the same percentage. By 2014, every one of Brownsville’s seniors from six high schools applied for college—a remarkable 100 percent application rate—and 94 percent completed an application for federal or state student aid, a critical step in accessing postsecondary education for a community consistently ranked as one of the poorest in America.

Brownsville also was selected in August 2014 as a new site for a major aeronautical company called Space X, which designs, manufactures, and launches rockets and spacecraft. The company is expected to bring 500 or more jobs with a minimum annual salary of $55,000, and the partnership is already considering ways to best connect local young people with those careers—in particular through a strong aeronautics program at UTB.

The story of those changes—and of the broader community conversation that prompted them and many others—is one of perseverance, flexibility, and ingenuity in a region of scarce resources. It’s also one of love, humor, and a dogged determination to collectively build up students and the community around them, referred to with deep care as la familia. Even in a time of slow economic recovery and big community changes—including local leadership transitions and the restructuring of the University of Texas at Brownsville and Texas Southmost College—this community has joined together in partnership to significantly improve outcomes for young people.

THE CHALLENGE

Today’s community partnership efforts began in 2008, when a group of local leaders began a major visioning process called Imagine Brownsville.

At the time Imagine Brownsville began “there was no real direction here,” says Mariana Tumlinson, the community relations manager at Valley Regional Medical Center in Brownsville. “People were operating in put-out-the-fire mode….This was the first initiative that started bringing institutions together [and they] were very careful and very intentional about having a lot of community meetings.”

Imagine Brownsville led to the creation of United Brownsville—a new nonprofit entity—charged with implementing a 10-year comprehensive community plan. Predictably, education was one major component of the plan, which appealed to United Way of Southern Cameron County—a longtime education funder and advocate in Brownsville.

Cameron County, Texas / City of Brownsville
Median Household Income

- $12,604–$20,257
- $20,258–$28,224
- $28,225–$35,938
- $35,939–$49,650
- $49,651–$67,146
- Data not available

City of Brownsville

This figure does not include students who are entering the military or students with special needs who have satisfied graduation requirements and will continue receiving services from the Brownsville Independent School District (BISD).
The grant opportunity and subsequent award accelerated the growing momentum for change in Brownsville. “It was divine timing,” says Tumlinson. “We were already organizing and creating shared agendas. It made it easier for us to get together faster to respond to the opportunity. Had we not already had those relationships in place... it would have been much harder.”

The sense of urgency was also heightened by the importance of the site selection and the funder. Irv Downing, vice president for Economic and Community Development at UTB, says, “When [the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation] said ‘you should be concerned with this’ ... it wasn’t me personally saying it, or the usual group of suspects. Gates was saying this nationwide.”

That attention, as well as a grant requirement for improved data collection and analysis, prompted Brownsville leaders to directly address a less-than-helpful aspect of la familia culture—that of gossip, or chisme. In the old Brownsville, leaders explain, institutions—especially educational ones—were reluctant to share their own data and instead framed the community problem through private conversations, often singling out others as the cause for low achievement. The first step for Brownsville was changing that trend to one of transparent, shared analysis and problem solving.

THE ANALYSIS AND STRATEGY

Downing remembers an early community data presentation that was made to the economic development board by community leaders working on Partners for Postsecondary Success. While the information presented was not necessarily new—local graduation rates and employment data, for example—having it all in one place highlighted the major challenges facing young people, and importantly, the insufficiency of anything less than a coordinated community response.

“When you put out there how slowly these numbers move... it had a real impact,” Downing says. This was not a problem that could be solved by firing a high-level educational leader, for example. “Attendees said, ‘We’ve got to do something.’”

For Brownsville, “doing something” meant deeply committing to a thoughtfully constructed partnership with four task forces: Community Engagement, Policy and Practice, Sustainability, and Data. The work was guided by project director Traci Wickett, president and CEO of the United Way of Southern Cameron County, and Tumlinson, who previously served as the partnership coordinator at the United Way, the lead organization and fiscal agent for the effort. Wickett notes that in forming the partnership, “We uncovered this latent hunger to work together. We found that people were just waiting for somebody to set the table and invite them to sit together and solve problems.”

In a nod to the power found in this new collective, the partnership named itself “All in” and in 2013 released a Community Indicator Report, outlining more than 20 key data trends that framed overarching education and employment issues in Brownsville. These included major high school indicators—like the passing rate for Algebra I, a key gateway course for college preparation, especially for students aiming for STEM careers—as well as postsecondary readiness assessments and projected salaries for local college graduates.

The process of compiling the report wasn’t without challenges, but the release of the Indicator Report marked a major change for Brownsville. “We’ve learned to see data as data—not a means to assign blame to different institutions in the community,” says Downing. Jill Williams, a former public school administrator, says that the new community ethos prompted her understanding that “the common thread [of youth experience] ran from high school through employment” and in working together “the gaps didn’t seem like chasms anymore ... our communication became the bridges.”

Building Pathways to Living-Wage Work

According to several community leaders, the current job opportunities for young people who do not have work experience or credentials in addition to a high school diploma or equivalent are limited to a few industries in Brownsville, often retail or food service. While All In is actively interested in helping employers in these industries develop career ladder programs and work-based learning opportunities, leaders note that young people who are currently employed in these positions may have a difficult time increasing earnings without additional credentials.

Leaders agreed that there are career opportunities in Brownsville and the larger Rio Grande Valley region, even with the economy in a slow recovery. A 2013 Labor Market study completed...
by Rio Grande Valley LEAD (RGV LEAD), formerly Tech Prep of the Rio Grande Valley, Inc., found 80 “targeted occupations” within 11 industries projected to have stable growth in the region and pay an average wage of at least $10 an hour. Some occupations within health or education tracks are familiar to students—like nursing or teaching—but many others are lesser known, like those in information technology and manufacturing. One early and ongoing effort of the partnership—the web-based Career Planning Tool—was created to help students and parents understand how to academically prepare for in-demand careers. Critically, RGV LEAD found that 86 percent of these targeted occupations require education beyond high school.

By 2014, every one of Brownsville’s seniors from six high schools applied for college—a remarkable 100 percent application rate—and 94 percent completed an application for federal or state student aid, a critical step in accessing postsecondary education for a community consistently ranked as one of the poorest in America.

In order to move young people to living-wage work, All In partners had to understand why some students—however few—were able to access postsecondary credential programs and others were not, and then create programs to address that disparity. Tumlinson notes this problem was particularly vexing for young Hispanic men and students whose parents had not attended school in the U.S. “We don’t have a lot of boys graduating with [postsecondary] credentials,” says Tumlinson. “We also find that it’s easier for children of parents who are not first generation, who have navigated the system before [and who] have that academic socialization. How are [students] supposed to figure that out?”

Here was an opportunity to strengthen the city’s infrastructure of opportunity—the human capital development, employment generation, and social and financial supports necessary to help young people succeed. They started by engaging an existing piece of that infrastructure: young people themselves.

The Student Ambassador Program

All In picked up steam as Brownsville partners found that high school seniors often learned about college and career options from an obvious but often underused resource: college freshmen. Fueled in part by collaboration between the public school system and local colleges, a corps of Student Ambassadors began returning to their high school alma maters to promote a culture of college-going through direct support to students and their families. Student Ambassadors intimately understand the barriers youth in a poor community face in continuing to postsecondary education and often become a trusted source of potential solutions.” It is hard for them to talk about,” says Blanca Davila, a lead student ambassador, of the messages students receive from families encouraging them to forgo college for immediate work. Imelda Guererro, a student ambassador and City of Brownsville intern, echoed Davila, noting that “there are lots of cases I’ve heard where parents say ‘we need you here now,’” indicating that youth are needed at home to generate income for the family. The Student Ambassadors—often through their own life examples—are able to explain the intricacies of student aid, loans, scholarships, and work study, as well as equip students to speak with their parents about the importance of a postsecondary education. Student Ambassadors also are speaking with parents—more than 100 so far—about supporting their children’s college attendance.

Though the program is supported by the All In partnership, and particularly its Policy and Practice Task Force, it’s now run almost entirely by students, who design their own curriculum to teach in five-week courses, lasting an hour per week at all six high schools in Brownsville and some middle schools, serving more than 1,300 students in the 2013–2014 academic year. High schoolers are given “passports,” where they record ongoing learning on financial aid, course work expectations, courses of study, and, most importantly, what it is actually like to be a postsecondary student. The Student Ambassadors have emerged as leaders within the All In partnership, actively participating in task force meetings and co-designing program evaluations. They also are leading new work for parents and elementary school students, supported in part by a 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant through the Brownsville Independent School District (BISD).
Career Services Center, remarked how the connectivity among institutions in Brownsville allows collaborations like this to happen more easily. “I can easily call the HR director of the City to understand employment needs,” says Rodriguez. “It’s key that we’re not working in silos. Everything has become more of a network.”

**Internship Programs**

With Student Ambassadors supporting the connection from high school to college, two internship efforts are helping students meaningfully engage with potential future employers. In September 2013, a newly formed All In Employer Engagement Task Force connected eight postsecondary students and three high school students with internships at 10 local businesses.

Additionally, a new partnership between the UTB Student Employment Initiative and the City of Brownsville allowed six undergraduate students to gain experience in government work. In particular, one student is managing a major survey to measure citizen satisfaction with city services—an effort the city was very excited to deploy. The partnership aspires to scale these work-based learning initiatives to create opportunities for every student who wants one.

Juan Andres Rodriguez, the program director for the UTB

Brownsville’s success in building and sustaining a multi-sector community partnership with robust programs is even more impressive given the multitude of institutional and leadership changes that have occurred since 2010. In four years, the community has seen two different mayors, two superintendents, and several new school board members.

Perhaps the most notable change has been the major
restructuring of the University of Texas at Brownsville (UTB) and the local community college, Texas Southmost College (TSC). For 20 years, UTB and TSC functioned as UTB-TSC, a unique partnership between a community college and a four-year institution, where students entering through TSC could seamlessly continue to an additional degree without transferring institutions. In 2010, however, just as the All In partnership was getting under way, UTB and TSC began the process of separating. Texas Southmost is on its way to becoming a standalone community college; UTB is now poised to merge with the University of Texas-Pan American and a planned medical school to form a new regional institution called University of Texas Rio Grande Valley.

The restructuring will pose a challenge for some students, says Ethel Cantu, associate vice president for academic affairs at UTB, but leaders agreed that the community is better prepared to address the impact on student experience because of the All In partnership. Rodriguez says that increased effectiveness in working across institutions has become a hallmark of the Brownsville culture change. “It’s no longer ‘well, my job ends here’ and my role is limited [in regards to student success], [now it is] ‘my role continues beyond the time a student came to my agency.’”

ALL AMERICAN CITY

In 2014, Brownsville was named one of 10 All-American Cities, a major award from the National Civic League, in part for the innovative All In work as well as other collaborative community efforts, including a health partnership. Janeth Rico, a lead student ambassador, received the All-American Youth award, which went to only one student nationally, for her outstanding efforts leading the implementation of the high school outreach work. These awards, while impressive, are most meaningful when understood as part of a larger community-driven effort defined by determination, openness, and compassion.

All In’s influence is spreading through the partnership’s active engagement with a regional collaboration to advance education called RGV Focus, driven by Educate Texas. Along with other All In partners, Traci Wickett serves in a leadership role for RGV Focus, which includes five regional postsecondary presidents and 15 school district superintendents sharing what they have learned through their local work and using the regional conversation to further inform All In. The All In partnership—and Brownsville at large—benefited when RGV Focus secured a grant from the Educate Texas Fund of Communities Foundation of Texas, funding the City Internship program.

Today, this city long plagued by poverty and low educational attainment is on its way to becoming a model of open dialogue and shared measurement, fueled by the destruction of institutional barriers that historically fostered a culture of blame. Leaders today are choosing to focus instead on the shared challenge of equipping students for a changing economy, and it’s working. Reba Cardenas McNair, a community leader and local business owner says simply, “We know that we’re among the poorest cities in the country. But we’re changing, and we’re already rich in so many ways.”

“[Four years ago] a lot of students weren’t sure of their own future,” says Imelda Guerrero, of the general attitude of seniors in Brownsville high schools in years past. “They didn’t know opportunities were out there. Today they do. I’m proud to be a part of that.”
The city has significant educational and employment opportunities—critical pieces of an infrastructure of opportunity that is necessary to help young people succeed. But, as in many cities, for young people outside that economic dynamism, these resources are not accessible and strategically aligned.

On the surface, Charlotte, N.C., is a can-do city with pragmatic corporate support for public initiatives—sun reflecting off the bank buildings onto pleasant pocket parks. It has amenities that often follow that corporate culture: a convention center, professional sports teams, a light-rail system, along with some that might be unexpected, like a NASCAR hub and the Levine Museum of the New South, interpreting post-Civil War Southern society. Charlotte is a good representative of that new South: it has grappled with racial divides and witnessed a significant demographic change with in-migration from both Northern and Southern states, as well as Central and South America and Asia. But places are always more complicated than they seem. During the Great Recession, losses at the high and low ends of the economy exposed in Charlotte previously hidden risks: people stranded at the bottom, pressures from those shifting demographics, weakened conventional pathways to economic security, and signs of skepticism of Charlotte’s prevailing belief in the viability of public/private partnerships. Recently, the Charlotte Observer’s Taylor Batten wrote, “Charlotte has been on a great run for more

THE PLACE: a global financial metro with 1.5 million residents

THE CHALLENGE: addressing increasing income inequality and ensuring that all young people in Charlotte have the skills to enter and compete in its dynamic economy

ELEMENTS OF OPPORTUNITY

INFRASTRUCTURE: public and private partnerships at the neighborhood, institutional, and city-wide level to improve young people’s connections—both social and physical—to the resources and skills necessary for civic participation and economic success
Charlotte's transformation from farmland to banking center began with the construction of railroads; there were three by the mid-1850s. Eventually, industrialists realized that the bales of cotton being transported through the area could just as easily be turning in Southern mills. By 1905, half of the South's looms were within 100 miles of nearby Gastonia—though most outside of the Charlotte city limits. Charlotte preferred to finance the growth, which led to the next shift: a banking charter and lending to local entrepreneurs previously reliant on Northern banks for capital. A branch of the Federal Reserve was announced in 1927, the first national recognition of Charlotte's place in the financial world. Assisted by North Carolina state policies that led the way in the South, changes to Federal interstate banking regulations in the 1980s, and aggressive bank leadership, the industry continued to grow into the 1990s. However, while banking was on the rise, Southern mills declined. (As Jane McIntyre, director of the local United Way said, the jobs in Charlotte now are "technical, not textile.") Subsequent mergers, acquisitions, and the Great Recession have shuttered some and shrunk the workforce of others, but Charlotte banks are still central to the local economy and the national financial system, with sights set on a more global position.

A city is more than its industrial history. And inescapable in the history of any Southern city is the matter of race. White leaders in Charlotte were often more concerned about union organizing than civil rights organizing, though Jim Crow laws separated education, employment, and residential development, including years of policies that unsettled historically African-American neighborhoods and discouraged investment in them. However, black and white leaders dined together to integrate downtown lunch counters two years before the 1964 Civil Rights Act passed, and in 1971 in their Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg School Board ruling, the U.S. Supreme Court
upheld the constitutionality of mandatory busing to achieve school desegregation. After the ruling, business leaders united and applied their political influence—in the community and in school board elections—toward desegregation. Political alliances formed across race lines and helped move the community from resistance to acceptance, until the assignment program became a point of local pride and national recognition. Researcher Stephen Samuel Smith has noted that the demographic shift in the ‘80s and ‘90s brought new residents who “not having lived through CMS’ [Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools] desegregation battles...lacked the pride of more-established Charlotteans in the busing plan.”

A 1997 challenge to using racial guidelines for school assignment led to a 1999 U.S. District Court order for CMS to discontinue the busing effort. After appeals and shifts in school board composition that saw long-time members leave, a new assignment plan was adopted in 2001; subsequently, CMS saw a significant jump in school segregation. Such outcomes could have long-term consequences for economic and educational attainment for young people of color in Charlotte. And that has implications for economic mobility for all young people in Charlotte.

THE CHALLENGE

Charlotte has responded to recent data unveiling low economic mobility with efforts at the city, neighborhood, and institutional level. All will be essential to improving prospects for Charlotte’s young people. Those young people need experiences that help them move from education to careers and prepare them for civic life.

The city has significant educational and employment opportunities—critical pieces of an infrastructure of opportunity that is necessary to help young people succeed. But, as in many cities, for young people outside that economic dynamism, these resources are not accessible and strategically aligned. And, as Astrid Chirinos of the Latin American Chamber of Commerce noted, individuals at the bottom may move from survival to safety, but never make it to success.

Charlotte’s poverty rate has been inching up year-by-year, and a tight post-recession job market blocks some young people from prosperity. Some leaders lament a limited ability to foster financial security, entrepreneurship, and a sense of possibility in neighborhoods with chronic poverty. Ronald Carter, the president of Johnson C. Smith University, a legacy HBCU, is taking a different approach to neighborhood engagement and investment with the Northwest Corridor Revitalization initiative, securing private and philanthropic support to bring housing and commercial spaces, community health resources, urban gardens, and public art to a section of Charlotte left behind by other development. Goodwill Industries of the Southern Piedmont is in the early stages of a new service model to establish economic connections for individuals who always have been on the fringes of the economy. CMS is at the center of a public/private partnership focused on improving academic outcomes in one of the city’s lowest performing high schools. The public institutions, philanthropists, and corporate supporters involved are concentrating their resources in the K–12 portion of the education-to-career pathway.
THE ANALYSIS AND STRATEGY

Charlotte has a long history of working across political, public-private, and municipal boundaries. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools are often a connecting point. Efforts with local nonprofits and Central Piedmont Community College are prime examples.

Project L.I.F.T. (Leadership and Investment for Transformation) is a nonprofit organization operating as one of five CMS learning communities, with financial backing from local philanthropy and corporations and partnerships with community-based organizations. The project began with a UNC Charlotte analysis of neighborhood-level indicators like employment rate, school attendance, and teen parenting rate. Organizers identified children attending West Charlotte High School and its feeder schools as those with most significant barriers to achieving Project L.I.F.T.’s desired outcomes for academic proficiency and high school graduation. Focus areas include staffing schools with high performing principals and teachers; strengthening out-of-school-time partnerships; integrating technology to support principals, teachers, and students; and establishing school-based resource teams to connect schools and local communities. They maintain connections with four other high schools so lessons can be shared.

Project L.I.F.T. is committed to measuring improvement, but frequent revisions to state curriculum standards since the program began have presented reporting challenges and made it difficult to standardize professional development for teachers. Despite setbacks, Project L.I.F.T. remains committed to its expectations for accountability; partners that don’t meet metrics can’t count on continued funding. And those that see improvements are encouraged to share them. While there is an ongoing evaluation with yearly progress reports, they aren’t waiting to disseminate findings and new programing. CMS Deputy Superintendent Ann Clark says, “If we see a proof point, we do it immediately.” It takes a lot of proof points to see widespread changes; Year-1 reports showed positive bumps in school climate measures, with improvement still to be made in academic proficiency indicators.

CMS recognizes that a high school diploma has to be the starting point—not the end goal—so they have developed an extensive dual enrollment program as well as a middle college with Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC). There is a career development counselor at every high school and its feeder schools as those with most significant barriers to achieving Project L.I.F.T.’s desired outcomes for academic proficiency and high school graduation. Focus areas include staffing schools with high performing principals and teachers; strengthening out-of-school-time partnerships; integrating technology to support principals, teachers, and students; and establishing school-based resource teams to connect schools and local communities. They maintain connections with four other high schools so lessons can be shared.

The city has significant educational and employment opportunities—critical pieces of an infrastructure of opportunity that is necessary to help young people succeed. But, as in many cities, for young people outside that economic dynamism, these resources are not accessible and strategically aligned.

PROJECT L.I.F.T. GOALS:
- 90 percent of students will be at grade-level in reading and math
- 90 percent will achieve more than one year’s growth in one year’s time
- 90 percent will graduate from high school

The city is developing a municipal response to a national issue—something they’ve done before—and these efforts could give young people more traction in the city’s economy. There is the common tension between generating immediate results and investing for long-term outcomes. In Charlotte, this seems to apply to both organizations (given corporate ROI expectations) and to individuals (meeting immediate needs vs. building resiliency). Navigating this tension requires trust—from the individuals who are struggling to make ends meet and from funders who are anxious to see results. While the results happen person-by-person, to see change at a community level, solutions have to be scalable. That means supporting what’s promising so that it can improve and expand. Jeff Michael of the UNC Charlotte Urban Institute suggested, “Maybe before any of us go for another grant, we should figure out how to direct resources to those on the front lines like..."
Charlotte: Mecklenburg County, NC

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**Poverty Rate**

- Charlotte: 14.5%
- State: 20.0%
- US: 20.8%

**Child (Under 18) Poverty Rate**

- Charlotte: 14.9%
- State: 21.8%
- US: 20.8%

**Median Household Income**

- Charlotte: $55,961
- State: $46,450
- US: $53,046

**2012 Annual Unemployment Average**

- Charlotte: 16.8%
- State: 14.9%
- US: 20.0%

**Economic Mobility:** Children who grew up with parents making $16,000 (10th Percentile) end up in the...

- Commuting zone: Charlotte, NC Area

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**Percent of 25–34 yr olds with at least a 2-yr degree**

- Charlotte: 52.3%
- State: 38.3%
- US: 400%

**Percent of 18–24 yr olds with at least a HS diploma or equivalency**

- Charlotte: 81.7%
- State: 82.5%
- US: 83.8%

**MIT Living Wage annual income for one adult and child**

- Charlotte: n/a
- State: $40,943
- US: $39,363

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Sources: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey; MIT Living Wage Calculator; Equality of Opportunity Project via New York Times; Notes: Economic mobility data is provided for the commuting zone that includes this community; a commuting zone is a grouping of counties determined by commuting patterns and named for the largest city in that area. MIT Living Wage data estimates the minimum required living expenses for each county or state.

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Project L.I.F.T., Renaissance West, and JCSU corridor development; we spend a lot of time speaking globally, but maybe over the next 10 years we should be investing in what we’re doing locally in neighborhoods.” To see a shift in mobility for young people, these discrete efforts will need to be coordinated, with institutions working with the same urgency and vision.

Some are optimistic about Charlotte’s ability to convene people and solve a problem; others worry that city leaders underestimate what continued immigration, a majority-minority shift, and increased suburbanization could have on the social contract, as well as transportation access to jobs, schools, and vibrant neighborhoods. Charlotte may be big enough and well-resourced enough to make something happen, but the city must deal with increasingly polarized state and federal politics and skepticism about public/private partnerships. It is even more important that those responding to these changes work together to integrate and increase the effectiveness of their efforts to ensure a secure infrastructure of opportunity for Charlotte’s young people. In our current economy, it’s hard to predict the future, but if Charlotte continues to support efforts already under way, they could have the future they say they want.

Charlotte may be big enough and well-resourced enough to make something happen, but they’ll have to deal with increasingly polarized state and federal politics and skepticism about public/private partnerships.
While an informal network is working to rebuild the economy and give young people the tools to thrive amid harsh economic and social realities, they haven’t formally linked key components—the school system, community college, workforce development, and economic development—that would create an infrastructure of opportunity.

**THE PLACE:** a tight-knit beach community seeking to restore an economy undone by the departure of a major paper mill, its economic driver

**THE CHALLENGE:** building a workforce and a job market in parallel that can be sustained over time

**ELEMENTS OF OPPORTUNITY**

**INFRASTRUCTURE:** municipal, community-based, and philanthropic organizations working to address education, training, and community health challenges

Ask just about anyone in this Florida panhandle town about its future, and they’ll tell you that the sky (a beautiful blue over sugar-sand beaches) is the limit.

“The potential for this community, the people black and white, is phenomenal,” says the Rev. David Woods, Jr. of the Port St. Joe Church of God in Christ.

But ask them about the future for its young people, and they’re not so sure.

“For years, people looked at getting good jobs at the mill,” says Kimberly Bodine, executive director of CareerSource Gulf Coast. “I don’t know what they dream for now, because there aren’t any jobs here. If they can dream big enough, if they’re thinking that way, they’re thinking of getting out.”

It’s not because town leaders aren’t trying. Many are working toward a shared economic vision. The town is a small, manageable size. It has social service agencies and nonprofits taking creative approaches, and it receives support from a foundation dedicated to eliminating deep-seated social and economic gaps.

“And there are so many dedicated people from all walks of life
who really are trying to connect it all and keep moving forward so we are still a wonderful place five, 10, 15 years from now,” says Dr. Loretta Costin, director of the Gulf/Franklin (counties) campus of Gulf Coast State College.

“But,” she says, “we need to make sure that’s true for everyone.” And there’s the challenge. As in many rural communities, around a third of young, working-age people (18- to 35-years-old) in Port St. Joe’s Gulf County didn’t finish high school, around a third have only a high school diploma, and of the rest who attended some kind of postsecondary education, only 3 percent of 18- to 24-year-olds went on to get either an associate’s or bachelor’s degree, and only about 15 percent of those 25- to 34-years-old did.

While an informal network is working to rebuild the economy and give young people the tools to thrive amid harsh economic and social realities, they haven’t formally linked key components—the school system, community college, workforce development, and economic development—that would create an infrastructure of opportunity.

There also is a sense in some parts of the community that a handful of people pull the strings and efforts at collaboration and civic engagement are incomplete. Informal networking—along with an established power structure led by long-time families—leaves out people who would be included in a more formal network designed to be inclusive. That feeds mistrust.

The feeling is particularly strong in the African-American community, which suffered decades of injustice under Jim Crow. North Port St. Joe, a predominantly African-American neighborhood, was recently added to the area covered by urban redevelopment only after residents complained and organized themselves. When the city began connecting to a $21 million water plant, white neighborhoods were hooked up first, though city leaders say it was because of the way grant funding came in. And organizers of city-wide youth programs in North Port St. Joe say it is difficult to get white families to participate.

“T
he biggest obstacle is culture,” says the Rev. Woods, a relative newcomer to town after becoming pastor of a Port St. Joe church in addition to his Panama City congregation. “All of us just need to sit down in one room and figure out what do you want Port St. Joe to look like over the next five, 10, 20 years... I think those conversations are happening at the city meetings, at the county meetings, but as far as representation of all the players who impact the culture, it’s just not happening.”

City leaders say they’re trying to be inclusive, and because of the town’s small size—the high school has just around 500 students in grades 7–12—attention can be paid to all of the town’s young people.

“Everybody knows all the kids in town—and their parents and grandparents, probably,” says Jim Anderson, the city manager. “Both sides work together when there is a need or emergency.”

The Jessie Ball duPont Fund also contributed support to this report.
For decades, the path to the middle class in Port St. Joe was a job at the St. Joe Paper Company mill and associated industries. It was a company town—the mill opened in 1938 after “Joe” acquired tens of thousands of acres of timber in the area, bought a nearby railroad, and extended its lines into Port St. Joe. The mill provided thousands of union jobs over the decades—for whites and African Americans—but with a declining market, the company sold the plant in 1996 and its new owners closed it in 1998.

By then, the St. Joe Company had moved into land development. With the port’s foul smelling industries gone (it was called “the smell of money” by locals) and beach development now an option, hopes were raised in 2008 when the company announced plans for WindMark Beach, a high-end resort community. But the Great Recession quashed sales, and the St. Joe Company put the project on the market, downsized, and moved its headquarters from Jacksonville to Panama City.

In the wake of WindMark’s demise, Port St. Joe embarked on an ambitious vision. The goal is to develop its deep-water port to attract commercial shipping and shipbuilding and the higher paying jobs that go with them. The town also sees it as a potential stop for boutique cruise ships taking advantage of the area’s beautiful waterways, increasing tourism. To boost tourism and make new development more attractive, the Port St. Joe Redevelopment Agency has spent $3.8 million to landscape the beach highway and spruce up downtown. Leaders hope that making the town more attractive will lure not only tourists, but a growing winter and weekend beach population that City Manager Jim Anderson says has increased five-fold in the last five years.
a middle class. Leaders pride themselves on their ability to cross boundaries and work with one another. The reason, they say, is that in a town like Port St. Joe, everyone knows everybody and all you have to do is pick up the phone.

**THE ANALYSIS AND STRATEGY**

There are promising pieces of what could become an infrastructure of opportunity in Port St. Joe. Many have been aided by the support of the Jessie Ball duPont Fund. Mrs. DuPont had personal connections and business relationships (via her family’s ownership of the St. Joe Paper Co.) and included organizations in the city as beneficiaries of her estate. The fund has encouraged efforts that address fundamental social weaknesses and pumped more than $7 million into area programs since 2003. It is nonprofits and government agencies that are most actively crossing traditional boundaries to improve conditions for young people. They include workforce development programs that reach as far down as elementary school students, a community college campus director who meets with middle-schoolers, pre-schools that also focus on parents, and a county health center that recognizes poverty as a significant factor in people’s health.

**North Florida Child Development Center:** The North Florida Child Development Center focuses on early childhood programs, as its name suggests, but doesn’t stop there. It reaches deep into families, providing support for young adults with children. It offers Early Head Start, Head Start, Pre-K, and school readiness programs, including medical, dental, and educational services. It works closely with parents, requiring family partnership agreements with goals that can include getting a home if they’re homeless or getting a high school degree if they don’t have one. The center is home to the Nemours BrightStart! Program, an early literacy intervention that focuses on teacher training, has reached into every pre-school in town, and been extended to kindergarten and first grade. The center also teaches parental literacy—steps parents can take at home that don’t cost anything. “Sometimes parents just don’t know the little things at home that can make a difference,” says Jade Hatcher, who leads the program.

**Port St. Joe Youth Choir:** Working out of the Port St. Joe Church of Christ, the Rev. Woods has built an after-school music program that serves more than 30 young people daily. While music is the focus, it also teaches life skills, helps children address family issues, takes them on cultural field trips, and has volunteers who provide homework assistance. A key innovation was providing activities for younger siblings, making the program accessible to more teens by relieving them of after-school responsibilities at home. The Rev. Woods says outreach to include children from the white community has not been successful.

**North Port St. Joe Community Youth Initiative:** North Port St. Joe Community Youth Initiative is an after-school program for elementary school students at the former Washington High School complex, the African-American high school before integration.

With test scores starting to fall off by the fourth grade, particularly among African-American boys, “we said something has to be done to help these students, to help the potential that they have,” says Minnie Likely, executive director of the youth initiative. Likely and her volunteers provide tutoring and homework assistance, along with recreational activities. An important part of their work is to build students’ confidence in their ability to succeed; they hold an honors party at the end of each nine-week grading period, celebrating every student who has made progress.

**CareerSource Gulf Coast:** It is far from the norm for workforce development boards to work at the elementary school level, but CareerSource Gulf Coast isn’t a typical workforce development agency. It is the organization coming closest to addressing each step along young people’s path to building lives better than those of their parents. Its leaders see a clear connection between their mission and activities for young people—even elementary school children—and are skilled at using private philanthropy to stretch federal dollars and do things that federal workforce funds don’t. “You can look at workforce through a very small frame if you choose to,” says Kimberly Bodine, the executive director. “I don’t see it that way. I see it as building a workforce from the very ground-level up.”

In addition to traditional services for jobseekers and employers, CareerSource operates a Summer Youth Leadership Program at the Washington High School complex to maintain learning gains from the previous school year. When they saw the disparity between black and white students on the FCAT (Florida’s Comprehensive Assessment Test), they decided to create the summer program. It offers more than 120 children healthy meals, recreation, and academic enrichment, including twice-weekly field trips. These expeditions introduce young people—many of whom have never been outside of Port St. Joe—to new experiences that can spark learning and growth.

For young adults 18–21 years old, CareerSource created a 12-week “Ladder Program” that offers intensive employment services including: remediation for those who never graduated from high school, employability skills, resume building, Dale Carnegie leadership training, life coaching, personal finance lessons, and career exploration.

“You can look at workforce through a very small frame if you choose to,” says Kimberly Bodine, “I don’t see it that way. I see it as building a workforce from the very ground-level up.”

**Gulf Coast State College:** The college is working to become a key link in the network connecting young people, economic development decision makers, and employers. Still, it is a challenge to meet everyone’s needs—in part because of a lack of basic skills of many young people.
Port St. Joe: Gulf County, FL

Poverty Rate

Child (Under 18) Poverty Rate

Median Household Income

2012 Annual Unemployment Average (for population 20 to 64 years)

Economic Mobility: Children who grew up with parents making $16,000 (10th Percentile) end up in the...

Commuting zone: Panama City, FL Area

7% 12% 20% 27% 34%

Upper income Quintile
Upper Middle Quintile
Middle Income Quintile
Lower Middle Quintile
Lowest Income Quintile

$39,535 $47,309 $53,046

$37,324 $43,012

$37,324 $43,012

$37,324 $43,012

Percent of 25–34 yr olds with at least a 2-yr degree

Percent of 18–24 yr olds with at least a HS diploma or equivalency

MIT Living Wage annual income for one adult and child

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey; MIT Living Wage Calculator; Equality of Opportunity Project via New York Times; Notes: Economic mobility data is provided for the commuting zone that includes this community; a commuting zone is a grouping of counties determined by commuting patterns and named for the largest city in that area. MIT Living Wage data estimates the minimum required living expenses for each county or state.

For instance, with a growing retirement community, a number of nursing homes, and a new and expanded Sacred Heart Hospital on the Gulf, there is a need for Certified Nursing Assistants. The college attracted more than 30 people to an information session about its expanded nursing program. Costin says. But in the end, only three people stayed through the process. Costin says the others fell out because their basic skills weren't sufficient, and some had criminal records that made them ineligible for the jobs.

Costin recognizes the college needs to reach students earlier, and starts talking to them in the eighth grade. The college has an eight-week, summer Jumpstart College Success program for recent grads that offers courses in math, leadership development, and college and career management.

Gulf County Health Department: The Gulf County Health Department believes health outcomes are a significant factor in many aspects of the community's life, including the strengthening of its workforce. In 2001, recognizing there was a significant lack of basic care, Gulf County became the first health department in Florida to be designated as a Federally Qualified Health Center, significantly broadening its funding and services. Now it operates medical and dental clinics for eligible patients as well as a wide range of programs for treatment and prevention.

"What we've learned is that while our volumes are huge, the health stats are worsening—more obesity and illnesses related to tobacco use," says Marsha Lindeman, administrator of the Franklin and Gulf county health departments.

The office performs the usual health department services (WIC, birth and death certificates, etc.) but also is focused on identifying and addressing key health issues such as smoking, diabetes, and obesity rates, which are above the state averages. Florida's surgeon general has identified obesity as the state's biggest medical problem.

Sandy Martin, CEO of the health center, says addressing those
health issues is important to Port St. Joe’s economic future. “If you have diabetes, you can’t work,” she says. “If you can’t find work, and this is the best it’s going to be, then you’re likelier to smoke, drink, and get into a cycle that self-perpetuates.”

**QUESTIONS AND NEXT STEPS**

Port St. Joe has a number of advantages working for it: a deep-water port that one day may attract cargo and small cruise ships; a developable coastline that has been hailed as the most beautiful beach in America; leaders in government, business, education, and social services with a vision for the town’s economic future; and creative support systems and a community college that bring people together from across the community to address economic and workforce needs. But because Port St. Joe relies on an informal system of collaboration—one that leaders in the African-American community believe has left them out—not everyone in the city feels included in that vision for the future.

At the same time, many leaders believe economic development—developing the port, building a new highway, rebuilding the railroad—will bring jobs for young people, and that it is the role of the schools and workforce agencies to get them ready. There isn’t recognition that building an infrastructure of opportunity that connects the two, creating a skilled workforce that is attuned to the needs of existing and prospective employers, will likely make both goals more attainable.

As Kimberly Bodine at CareerSource says, “This is not a chicken or egg issue.”

Many leaders believe economic development—developing the port, building a new highway, rebuilding the railroad—will bring jobs for young people, and that it is the role of the schools and workforce agencies to get them ready.
There is still work to do on connecting systems and moving from collaboration to coordination. As leaders in Danville plan for their community’s future, they must ask themselves who they are building an infrastructure of opportunity for, and how they can make sure no one is left behind.

**HISTORY AND CONTEXT**

With an economy that grew initially around tobacco markets and generated significant wealth, Danville, Va., like many Southern cities, flourished as a textile milltown for much of the 20th century. Nationally, employment in the manufacturing sector peaked in the early 1970s, but it wasn’t until the late 1990s that Danville was hit with rapid job loss and factory closures. By 2004, the crisis was full-blown. Dan River Mills, the largest employer in Danville and once the largest textile firm in the world, laid off its last employees in 2006.

Because the mill employed so many people in the community for much of the 20th century, its owners were able to dictate much of the local public policy. Education beyond high school was actively discouraged for mill workers, and other businesses were discouraged for fear of competition for labor. According to Karl Stauber, president of the Danville Regional Foundation (DRF), “One of the largest challenges that we have as a region is a continuing
cultural ghost. Here, if you’re the child or grandchild of a mill worker, part of your family story is that you can make it without much education.”

When the mills were open, Danville’s future had some certainty to it, and individuals could see the pathways to jobs. According to Clark Casteel, a senior program officer at the Danville Regional Foundation, the opening of the mill in the early 1900s “completely changed the way people lived, worked, and learned.” He explains, “We built platforms, like unified school systems and office buildings, to enable the transition from agriculture to industry. Those platforms worked well for 100 years. Back then, you could see around the corner: You could be demand-driven and you knew what school was for.” This meant young people could navigate from school to work, and it meant community leaders generally understood what types of investments were needed. The challenge now in Danville, and across many Southern communities undergoing similar economic transitions, says Casteel, is that how we live, work, and learn is changing again because of technological advances. The future is shifting rapidly and unpredictably, which makes it difficult for young people and community leaders to decide how to invest in their education and skills.

If you are not able to see around the corner and predict where the economy will take you, what can you do to ensure broadly distributed opportunity for young people? In the past, you could target a particular sector. The pace of change in the new economy makes it harder to build such specific strategies and pathways, so a diversity of tactics is important. According to Laurie Moran, president of the Danville Pittsylvania County Chamber of Commerce, “We want a diversity of jobs and sectors to weather the storms and offer opportunities to people at various skill levels.” They want to avoid relying on a single industry, because another natural economic shift could send them back to where they were 10 years ago. Danville’s leaders are trying to attract new economic drivers, and they also are working to ensure that community members, particularly young people, have the skills to compete in the new economy.

THE CHALLENGE

The demise of Dan River Mills altered the economic and social fabric of the community: options for the working class became scarce, the middle class shrank, and young people had fewer opportunities. As late as 1969, Danville had a median household income that was equivalent to the rest of Virginia and the U.S. as a whole. Today, Danville’s median income is half that of the state of Virginia, and only a little more than half that of the U.S. There is deep concern in the community about the loss of talented young people. A young person growing up and leaving home is part of the American story. That’s not always a bad thing, Stauber points
out, “as long as opportunities exist and people have equal access to the skills and cultural norms necessary to take advantage of those opportunities.” In Danville, it’s generally agreed that access to opportunity goes up dramatically based on your economic situation, race, and social connections.

“We built platforms, like unified school systems and office buildings, to enable the transition from agriculture to industry. Those platforms worked well for 100 years. Back then, you could see around the corner. You could be demand-driven and you knew what school was for.”

With the loss of much of its middle class, and with a persistent racial divide, Danville has struggled to build systems that connect all young people in the community with education, employment, and aspirations for both. There are some young people who are very successful in school, mostly through the gifted and talented program in the public schools, and, increasingly, in private schools; those students go to college and often leave the area. The students who are not doing as well are more likely to be low-income or students of color, and they are less likely to graduate from high school, go on to college, and find a good job. As Clark Casteel puts it, “Figuring out the pathways to prosperity and a living wage if you’re a middle-of-the-road student without affluent parents—it’s one of the great challenges of this region and of rural America.”

Even for those who leave the area for better education and to start careers, there is a divide in who is able to come back to Danville. “The young people who are coming back and being successful are individuals who are very connected in certain social circles,” says Wendi Goods Everson, a senior program officer at DRF. “Low-wealth young adults, and particularly people of color, have to go elsewhere to find opportunity. Their families don’t have the financial wherewithal to let them figure things out slowly.” In a place with limited choices, figuring out things slowly can be a necessity—younger adults may need to wait until the right opportunity opens up.

**THE ANALYSIS AND STRATEGY**

Facing a dwindling employment base in the late 1990s, leaders in Danville had to decide what types of investments and strategies they wanted to pursue to keep the community alive. They could try to bring back manufacturing jobs like the ones they were losing, or they could pursue a different and less familiar path to end a downward spiral. One group of influential community members formed the Future of the Piedmont Foundation to take advantage of economic development resources available from the tobacco settlement. The foundation board created a plan for long-term regional development. Their efforts have brought about needed improvements in technology, regionalism, education, and collaboration.

When Danville Regional Medical Center was sold to LifePoint Hospitals, Inc., $200 million was invested to create the Danville Regional Foundation. The creation of DRF was a game-changer for Danville, as it brought in substantial resources and thought leadership. DRF serves as a catalyst for many community projects. With significant resources and organized leadership, Danville is better positioned to strategically invest in the community’s future than many places in the South. Still, there are major challenges, including the uncertainty of the new economy, the continued cultural and social divides of the mill economy, and a narrow leadership base.

**Building Skills to Compete**

On the skills-building side, the Danville Regional Foundation, along with key partners like Danville Community College (DCC), is seeking to connect young people with good careers, beginning with investments in early childhood and workforce development. DRF sees investment in early childhood as a first step on an
education-to-career pathway, with the aim of ensuring all students start school ready to learn. The workforce development investments are targeted at preparing people for employment and drawing in new businesses, with the idea that companies will come to Danville if they see that there is a strong workforce development infrastructure that can adapt to meet their needs. The emphasis is on living-wage jobs; they do not want to train people for careers that will keep them in poverty.

One area of workforce development that has received significant attention and investment is STEM education. According to Charles Majors, executive chairman of Danville's American National Bank and Trust, “We’ve been so successful that some people are leaving because they get very high-paying opportunities in other places. We are trying to identify opportunities in this region so that they can stay here.” DRF and its partners want to create a STEM ecosystem, where career training and economic development are interdependent.

Danville Community College is a hub for the community’s approach to workforce development. It is partnering with area school systems to expose students to career options earlier. Acknowledging the financial hardships of many of its students, it wants to break up some programs into short-term opportunities that have economic value and can be built on later. DCC tries to tie all programs to industry-recognized credentials to make students more competitive for jobs and give economic developers a business recruitment tool.

“We’ve been so successful that some people are leaving because they get very high-paying opportunities in other places. We are trying to identify opportunities in this region so that they can stay here.”

There is still concern about why some youth are able to navigate the current education and employment system and others are not. Clark Casteel, a native of the region, points out that the pathways that were available when he grew up were stratified—affluent or middle class kids were steered toward one set of options, and low-income students, and often students of color, were steered toward another. This is why considering
Danville: City of Danville (county equivalent) and Pittsylvania County, VA

Poverty Rate

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Child (Under 18) Poverty Rate

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Median Household Income

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2012 Annual Unemployment Rate

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<td>6.3%</td>
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Percent of 25–34 yr olds with at least a 2-yr degree

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<td>45.8%</td>
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Percent of 18–24 yr olds with at least a HS diploma or equivalency

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<td>84.6%</td>
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MIT Living Wage annual income for one adult and child

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<td>$36,995</td>
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Sources: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey; MIT Living Wage Calculator; Equality of Opportunity Project via New York Times; Notes: Economic mobility data is provided for the commuting zone that includes this community; a commuting zone is a grouping of counties determined by commuting patterns and named for the largest city in that area. MIT Living Wage data estimates the minimum required living expenses for each county or state.

since they don't know what jobs people need to be trained for, they want young people to have the types of skills that will be important in the new economy, including critical thinking and being confident and capable of finding the intersection between passion, talent, and opportunity.

DRF is providing resources for businesses to get started and gain momentum, and a safety net so that failure isn't seen as negatively. Approximately three years ago, DRF made a $10 million investment in The Launch Place, which offers business consulting, seed funding, office space and residential subsidies, and other services to entrepreneurs interested in locating in the Southern Virginia region. “Right now, we are trying to create a new economy and a new culture for an old milltown at the same time,” says Karl Stauber. “Developing an entrepreneurship ecosystem is essential to that. This has the potential not only to attract and generate businesses but also to change the conversation here. One of the issues we have in Danville is an attitude that we don't...
about the community’s potential and are willing to come to the table. Even as they analyze persistent challenges, they are showing people what is possible.

To achieve their goals, Danville’s current leaders are intentionally engaging and empowering younger leaders to broaden the leadership base. “This is a region used to a very small group making all the decisions,” says Clark Casteel. People used to reference the “men at the mill” as shorthand for the group they saw as in charge, and now they talk about the “boys at the bank.” The old model of leadership in Danville was centered around businesses—the same people who were in charge of major economic entities, like the mills, were the ones involved in community planning. Today, large industries that aren’t headquartered in Danville see their responsibility as creating profit, not being part of the community. Hence, the effort to develop young leaders who are more diverse and inclusive, like the new Middle Border Forward initiative, which has brought together a group of young leaders to work for more equitable outcomes in the region. “Current leaders must make an effort to groom and develop the next level of leaders,” says Laurie Moran. “They need people to invest the time in them.”

QUESTIONS AND NEXT STEPS

As many Southern communities know all too well, you can’t build a new economy overnight. “The good news is we’re diversifying,” says Majors. “The bad news is that it takes a lot of businesses with a few hundred employees to make up for the thousands of jobs we lost.”

While Danville has already seen some success in its investments, there is still work to do on connecting systems and moving from collaboration to coordination. “We still need to do more to put together a regional vision that integrates the different components of the work we’re doing,” says Moran. With so much of their future dependent on strengthening the economic base, there is the danger of focusing too much on keeping and attracting the middle class and not addressing eroding employment security and mobility for youth growing up in low- or moderate-income families. Other cities have successfully transitioned to a knowledge economy. But economic dynamism does not guarantee a broad distribution of opportunity for all young people. As leaders in Danville plan for their community’s future, they must ask themselves who they are building an infrastructure of opportunity for, and how they can make sure no one is left behind.

“It’s not that our youth don’t want to do wonderful things; they do. All kids have aspirations. They all have dreams,” says Laurie Moran. “When do they lose that? How do we not let that get extinguished?”

deserve excellence. Mediocre is okay in education and economic development. In our work to promote entrepreneurship, we’re spending a lot of time helping people see what is excellent.”

Culture Shift
In addition to investments in building skills and new economic drivers, Danville is exorcising its cultural ghosts. “A lot of people who live in this area aren’t as positive about the region as those outside of the community,” says Charles Majors. “How are we going to change that attitude?” Danville has struggled to make that change while still being clear about the challenges the community needs to address. “Part of our success to date has come from identifying our problems rather than sitting with our head in the sand,” says Majors. “We went through a period where people didn’t want to hear those conversations, and at times it felt counterproductive to the idea of rebranding.” They found that as some strategies have been successful, more people are excited
In tackling the complex issues that some of Greenville’s youth face—geographic isolation, intergenerational poverty, fragmented pathways from education to employment—there is a commitment to public-private partnerships and a long-term bold vision, carefully shepherded by a string of local leaders.

Walking along the wide, tree-lined Main Street of downtown Greenville, S.C., it is hard to imagine that just 40 years ago the same path was deserted. Dozens of locally owned restaurants, luxury condos and hotels, and bustling shops belie the city’s history. The city is now a hub of advanced manufacturing, engineering, information technology, and other high-growth industries.

Like many other former milltowns across the South, Greenville’s economy centered on textile manufacturing for much of the 20th century. But unlike many others, Greenville successfully diversified its economy before globalization and technological innovation sent many jobs overseas. In the early 1970s, Michelin invested in the Upstate region, followed by several other automotive manufacturers, and by the mid-1990s, BMW had established a major auto assembly plant in the area. The story of Greenville’s revitalization and economic growth is praised. City
Greenville is filled with prosperity, but there is a divide at White Horse Road where that same level of prosperity just does not exist,” says Tish Young McCutchen, vice president of organizational planning and public affairs at United Way of Greenville County.

In many of these neighborhoods, students lack the work experiences and information they need to make decisions about how to prepare and compete for family-sustaining jobs. “It’s really hard to get the message across to youth how good the options are in manufacturing,” says John Baker, executive director of Greenville Works. For some students, particularly those living in neighborhoods with high unemployment, there also is mistrust of manufacturing jobs, since their parents were laid off when textile jobs were outsourced. “They have old perceptions of manufacturing—that it’s dirty and nasty. They need to see other people like themselves doing these jobs and helping them to understand the strong possibilities in this industry,” says Becky Godbey, vice president of career development services at Goodwill Industries of the Upstate/Midlands South Carolina.
“A young person’s economic prospects should not be determined by his or her zip code,” says John Concklin, program investment manager at United Way of Greenville County. “Unfortunately, in the area known as the ‘White Horse Corridor,’ prospects for a successful future are tough—32 percent of households live in poverty; 66 percent have only a high school diploma or less; unemployment is greater than 25 percent in some sections; and the city’s lowest performing high schools are found here.”

**THE CHALLENGE**

In 2007, a study found that two-thirds of Greenville-area companies could not find enough qualified entry-level workers, skilled-production workers, as well as engineering and IT professionals. To solve this problem in the short term, many businesses are relying on young transplants, who are attracted by the density of well-paying jobs and a vibrant downtown. But civic leaders know that talent recruitment isn’t a viable long-term solution for businesses or the community. “All the incentives in the world will not make a company settle where there isn’t a strong labor force,” says Nancy Whitworth, director of economic development for the City of Greenville. If Greenville doesn’t develop more effective strategies to connect its own young adults to its industries, the city won’t retain its businesses. And many youth growing up in areas of high unemployment and attending lower-performing schools will likely remain on the fringes of the mainstream economy and in cycles of intergenerational poverty. “We have a beautiful downtown and tremendous opportunity in the east side of the county,” says Martin Livingston, executive director of the Greenville County Redevelopment Authority. “But we don’t always want to talk about the fact that we are leaving a big corridor out of that prosperity.”

**THE ANALYSIS AND STRATEGY**

When asked how Greenville has been so successful in transforming itself, many leaders describe the city’s long history of public-private partnerships and a long-term commitment to a bold vision, carefully shepherded by a string of local leaders. In tackling the complex issues that some of Greenville’s youth face—geographic isolation, intergenerational poverty, fragmented pathways from education to employment—there is a commitment to applying a similar approach. Many individuals and organizations from the public, private, and philanthropic sectors have come together in partnerships focused on a number of these issues, and United Way of Greenville is often the convening backbone organization. In 2003, United Way began working on a community impact agenda; in 2008, it embarked on a bold project to create strategies for three new focus areas: school readiness, high school graduation, and financial stability. “We worked with the broad community—moms and dads, experts in community development, business leaders—to assess what we were already doing and what we needed to do to address each issue,” says Phyllis Martin, vice president for strategy and investment at United Way. From this process emerged three “road maps”—one for each of United Way’s priority issues—that describe the goals, benchmarks, and strategies for each pathway. Together, these three strategies represent some of Greenville’s major bets on building an infrastructure of opportunity—the human capital development, employment generation, and social and financial supports necessary to help young people succeed—for youth and young adults, as well as those in early childhood.

Along the education-to-career pathway, United Way has made
an intensive investment in the middle grades. “Middle schools are often the poorest performing piece of the K-12 education continuum, and success in those years is crucial for students’ completion of high school and transition into postsecondary education,” says Ted Hendry, president of United Way. “In collaboration with the school district, we’ve identified the middle schools that need the most intensive support, which are all in the White Horse Corridor.” These investments include implementation of a formal early warning system to identify struggling students before they drop out. United Way and Communities in Schools are building a network of public and private after-school programs to ensure providers are delivering high-quality programs with national best practices and reaching kids who are most in need.

Working with students and families in one part of the city represents United Way’s shift toward place-based work. “By focusing on a specific geography and spending a lot of time there, we are hoping to learn what the people living in a specific community really care about and need. We want to work collectively to implement strategies that address multiple problems in a coordinated way with the right supports at the right time. Then we can see what is working and what isn’t before we attempt to scale the strategies in other places,” says Martin.

While United Way is focusing on middle grades success and postsecondary readiness, other organizations are taking the lead on infusing work exposure and experience throughout the education-to-career pipeline. In 2012, the Chamber of Commerce created an Education & Workforce Committee to facilitate integration between business and the school system. Two years later, the Chamber is now part of the schools’ strategic planning process and participated in the search process for the current superintendent. The Chamber’s approach to educational involvement is wide-ranging, supporting efforts from early childhood to higher education. The Greenville business community has been supportive of the development of a successful STEM elementary school as well as a STEAM middle school, set to open this fall. To complete the K-12 educational preparation for these types of careers, the Chamber has been very supportive of the NEXT High School, slated to open in the fall of 2016. Integral to all of these educational efforts are strong business involvement and project-based learning. The Chamber is committed to providing business linkages that give students exposure and the skills needed to succeed in the area’s technical, high-growth industries.

Through a partnership with Furman University’s Riley Institute and some of the area’s biggest employers, including Michelin, Greenville Health System, and BMW, the Chamber has tried to address the misinformation about advanced manufacturing and other technical jobs. “You can’t wait until high school to expose kids to career opportunities, so we are helping foster partnerships with middle schools to bring business leaders into seventh
plans to scale effective practices. “We know United Way cannot do or fund all of the work that is under way or that we need in Greenville,” says Martin. “What we can do is provide a framework for long-term change.” But getting people to understand that long-term change will require long-term investment, particularly in the White Horse Corridor, is a challenge. “We can’t fall into the typical trap of committing to something for three to five years before moving on to the ‘next big thing.’ We are trying to figure out how we convene people to commit to an approach for a longer period of time and in the context of a smaller geographic area,” says Martin.

But United Way also thinks it is uniquely positioned to facilitate these conversations. “Getting business leaders and community members in the same room, at the same table, is critical” Concklin says. “It will take much more than just money to solve problems like a 75 percent high school graduation rate. The key to our success hinges on engaging the right people, giving people...
“We have a beautiful downtown and tremendous opportunity in the east side of the county,” says Martin Livingston, executive director of the Greenville County Redevelopment Authority. “But we don’t always want to talk about the fact that we are leaving a big corridor out of that prosperity.”

Leaders at United Way shared this view. Although public-private institutional partnerships put Greenville on the map, there is a growing sense that reducing growing inequality will rely just as much on community engagement as CEO buy-in. “As we’ve started working at the neighborhood level, we’ve learned that we have to do more than blanket a neighborhood with programs and supports without engaging its residents in the solution,” says Tish Young McCutchen. “After all, the people living in the neighborhood are even more invested in outcomes than we are—because it’s their lives and futures. We want them to be at the table from the beginning, helping to create the solution.”

Despite these challenges, many leaders are committed to working over the long-term to create what United Way calls a cycle of success. “We’ve got to convince people that poverty is not a moment in time,” says Concklin of United Way. “This is such a different conversation to have because of how we have been trained to think about poverty,” Martin added. “These issues are complex, and we have to understand how long it will take to address them. We must have strength, leadership, desire, and courage to realize there is no quick fix.”

Pastor Sean Dogan echoes these sentiments. “It’s hard to see Greenville as this glorious, beautiful place until entry-level workers at the hospital can afford to get the health care services they need. That’s the same for other industries. In Greenville, we can really have the American Dream.”

Questions and Next Steps

This kind of collaborative work is difficult, particularly in a community that still suffers from racial division and a widening gap between the rich and poor. Phyllis Martin described the persistent achievement gap between young African-American men and other demographic groups. Sean Dogan, pastor at Long Branch Baptist Church, spoke to the long-lasting mistrust between members of the African-American community, who have disproportionately been left in poverty, and the leadership of the city. “We have a lot of people talking about poverty—but it’s not necessarily with the people who are living it,” says Pastor Dogan. “We’re having this conversation about the lowest quartile rather than talking to or with the people in it. For whatever reason, lived experience isn’t qualified experience at some of our conversations.”
Arkansas is making progress in building a stronger pipeline and placing “new steps of change” that support everyone. To move forward, the state must continue to build strategies that develop, retain, and recruit youth and young adults of all races and socioeconomic statuses.

The horizon leans forward, offering you space to place new steps of change. Here, on the pulse of this fine day, you may have the courage to look up and out...”

These words, spoken by Maya Angelou in the poem On the Pulse of Morning, were delivered during Arkansas native and former President Bill Clinton’s first inauguration. The poem conveys strong images of hope for the future, while acknowledging the struggles of the past. Communities across Arkansas, from the farmlands of the Delta to the Ozark Mountains in the northwest, have found the space to look forward and step into a new day, but still struggle to overcome population decline and economic hardship. Arkansas may have one of the smallest populations of the Southern states, but its warm and friendly residents know that collaboration increases their capacity to achieve results. Promising efforts at both the local and state levels demonstrate a willingness and commitment to address the critical issues that will shape Arkansas’ economic and social progress.

Here, we highlight three distinct regions of Arkansas—Little Rock, Northwest Arkansas, and the Delta—and their efforts to
“place new steps of change” in the state’s education-to-career pipeline. Looking not just at one community, but at a whole state, one sees different landscapes and can consider opportunity at a different scale. In the east, the Arkansas Delta is a leading producer of cotton, but has seen decades of decline, with increasing unemployment and poverty rates, and dramatic population loss limiting economic growth and educational opportunities. Along the Missouri border in the northwest, there has been tremendous growth over the past two decades as several Fortune 500 corporations and their suppliers established themselves in the region, including Walmart, Tyson Foods, and J.B. Hunt. And in the center of the state is Little Rock, a governmental center, but also an anchor for an array of industries, including information technology and health care.

When looking across the state, Arkansas’ leaders see that:

• Students who attend college are not graduating
• Connections among postsecondary institutions and business and industry are often weak
• Students need more exposure to innovative approaches to entering the labor market of the evolving knowledge economy

Arkansas’ investments in an infrastructure of opportunity are focused on those key transition points in the education-to-career continuum.

Fixing the Leaky Pipeline

Consider how youth and young adults move from the education system into the labor market. Some move directly from high school into a two-year or four-year postsecondary institution, and then into a good job. For some, the pathway is not as direct. They fall out of the education-to-career pipeline and struggle to find their way back in. They get off-track for numerous reasons, but whatever the causes are, it is critical that they get back on the path to success.

Recognizing that placement in developmental (remedial) courses at the beginning of their postsecondary journey can jeopardize eventual completion, the Arkansas legislature created the College and Career Coach Program, geared toward increasing the number of underrepresented students who complete postsecondary education, especially in the state’s most economically challenged counties. With this program, middle and high school students receive academic tutoring, career counseling, and financial guidance from career coaches on college campuses. Coaches are provided to each county through TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) funds and a grant from the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation. Early results show the strategy is working. In the first two years of implementation, there was a 17 percent increase in the college-going rate, an almost one point increase in ACT scores, and a 3.5 percentage point decrease in the remediation rate. Pleased with the performance, the General Assembly passed legislation in April 2013 to expand the program throughout the state.

Getting students into postsecondary training is important; equally important is helping them stay engaged. Another statewide program, the Arkansas Career Pathways Initiative, is focused on increasing postsecondary attendance and completion rates. Career Pathways is funded annually with TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) dollars, providing participants with funding for tuition, books, child care, and transportation. Since 2006, more than 29,000 low-income Arkansans have enrolled in Career Pathways, and more than 30,000 certificates and degrees have been awarded.

6 Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation also contributed support to this report
Arkansas

<table>
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Population Change 2000–2013

- State: 10.7% (7.0%)
- US: 12.3% (12.2%)

Race and Ethnicity of 15–24 yr olds

- 68.2% White, not Hispanic or Latino
- 19.1% Black or African American
- 8.4% Hispanic or Latino
- 2.2% Two or More Races
- 1.5% Asian

General Assembly is trying to strengthen the relationship between employers and two-year colleges. This spring, policymakers passed legislation allocating $15 million to the Arkansas Economic Development Commission (AEDC) to restructure and build new workforce training programs that meet the needs of Arkansas businesses. The Fast Track Workforce Initiative creates partnerships between two-year colleges and local employers to ensure that students are trained to industry standards in high-demand areas. Some of the funding came from a reallocation of existing dollars for community colleges. There are mixed feelings among two-year college administrators and economic development leaders on how effective this new system will be.

Evelyn Jorgenson, president of NorthWest Arkansas Community College, understands that the relationship between her college and local industries is critical to closing the skills gap. “People want jobs but they are not qualified for the jobs. That’s the link that’s missing. That’s the responsibility of our college. We want to help people fill that gap,” she says.

Mike Malone, president of the Northwest Arkansas Council, says the gap is a systems issue: “We don’t have the right system to relay information between education and industry. We need the right people to have the right conversations.”

One example of the right people having the right conversation is the Certified Retail Analyst program at NorthWest Arkansas Community College. Before this program, Walmart was losing...
employees trained on Retail Link—the company’s supplier database—to suppliers who were actively recruiting workers who had inside knowledge on how to use the software. To remedy that, Walmart worked with its suppliers and the college to design a program that would train students on Retail Link. High-demand graduates of this program are placed in jobs with Walmart or one of its suppliers immediately upon credential completion.

“We need to help people recognize opportunity. They need to see that better is possible.” — Karama Neal

Innovating for Job Creation

Education and employment alignment are critical for more than just training programs. Naccaman Williams, director of special initiatives for the Walton Family Foundation, describes the challenge this way: “It’s the chicken or the egg. Businesses want great education before they come, but great education normally comes with business. We need both good businesses and great education.” One organization working to build both educational success and business development in Arkansas is Southern Bancorp Community Partners (SBCP); they’ve been using community and business development to drive economic improvement in the Delta for 25 years. Karama Neal, director of SBCP, knows they are having an impact on the region, noting progress on key indicators like job creation and housing development. She also believes that changing the expectations of Delta residents is instrumental to changing the region. “People set realistic and unrealistic limits for themselves and tend not to go past these limits,” says Neal. “We need to help people recognize opportunity. They need to see that better is possible.” SBCP is helping people see “better is possible” by offering workforce training funds, grant-writing workshops, and small business development so residents can take active roles in creating a more prosperous community.

In North Little Rock, the Arkansas Regional Innovation Hub is trying to create prosperity by building innovative approaches to help low-income students move from schools into the labor market via entrepreneurship opportunities. Creators of this public-private partnership are developing “a collaborative ecosystem of innovation that drives economic development.” This ecosystem includes three major components:

1. **Art Connection.** Students start by learning to paint, mainly self-portraits. They learn the basics of project production and develop their artistic talents. Students also learn soft skills such as showing up for work and listening to peers and supervisors. After completing the painting course, students transition to other studios at the hub, including sculpture and computer-aided design.

2. **Launch Pad.** When students have a business idea, they develop prototypes here. Staff also plan to build a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and math) lab as part of this space with state-of-the-art equipment.
Arkansas

Poverty Rate
- State: 18.7%
- US: 14.9%

Child (Under 18) Poverty Rate
- State: 27.0%
- US: 20.8%

Median Household Income
- $40,531
- $53,046

2012 Annual Unemployment Average (for population 20 to 64 years)
- State: 7.80%
- US: 8.60%

Percent of 25–34 yr olds with at least a 2-yr degree
- State: 29.2%
- US: 400%

Percent of 18–24 yr olds with at least a HS diploma or equivalency
- State: 83.1%
- US: 83.8%

MIT Living Wage annual income for one adult and child
- $34,056

Upper Income Quintile: 5%
Upper Middle Quintile: 11%
Middle Income Quintile: 18%
Lower Middle Quintile: 29%
Lowest Income Quintile: 36%

Economic Mobility: Children who grew up with parents making $16,000 (10th Percentile) end up in the...
Commuting zone: Little Rock, AR Area

3. The Silver Mine. This entrepreneurship/incubation space is for young adults who have more than just an idea. Here they can build their idea into something real.

John Gaudin, a member of the Innovation Hub’s Board of Directors, says people all over the state, including the governor, are assessing whether this incubation model is replicable in other areas of Arkansas. “This is an opportunity for students to access the latest and greatest in manufacturing—access they would not have otherwise.”

While many Southern states focus on recruiting big businesses, Arkansas is recruiting from within. “Everybody wants to cut a ribbon on a big manufacturing plant,” says State Representative and Innovation Hub Executive Director Warwick Sabin. “It’s less sexy to focus on small business. Most of our businesses are small business. They are more sustainable. We’ll always be outbid for large industrial projects because other states will always have more money. It’s a losing and outdated strategy.” To cultivate start-up business development, Arkansas must provide more youth and young adults with opportunities to foster their entrepreneurial skills—opportunities like the Innovation Hub.

Providing Support and a Voice to Move Forward
Even with statewide efforts and local innovation, there still are gaps between those who can easily access the education-to-career pipeline and those who are disconnected from it. For nonprofit leaders in Little Rock, closing gaps means addressing intergenerational poverty. Rich Huddleston, executive director of Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, describes it as a Catch-22. “There is a recognition that we need to do more for the far too many who come from disadvantaged backgrounds,” he says. “The odds are stacked against them. We need to do things to break the cycle of poverty, but until we do that they are not going to be in a position to succeed.” Huddleston’s organization believes...
that helping youth succeed in the short and long term is the way to break the cycle. They are working to ensure that all children have access to health care and that basic needs are met. Since Arkansas expanded Medicaid in 2013, there has been a dramatic decrease in the number of uninsured youth. While he is excited about this momentum, he also knows they are not going to cut child poverty rates in half overnight.

While many Southern states focus on recruiting big businesses, Arkansas is recruiting from within. To cultivate start-up business development, Arkansas must provide more youth and young adults with opportunities to foster their entrepreneurial skills—opportunities like the Innovation Hub.

A different opportunity gap is evident in Northwest Arkansas. Despite strong economic growth, many young adults have been left out of the region’s success. These dynamics are complicated by a large immigrant population in the region, mainly Latino and Pacific Islander. Without training for competitive skills, there will be many youth pursuing the same low-wage work as their parents. Mireya Reith, the executive director of the Arkansas United Community Coalition (AUCC), wants to improve upward mobility for immigrants. She understands that systems-change takes time and advocacy. Her Fayetteville-based nonprofit organization created Change Agents, a one-year leadership program that encourages first- and second-generation immigrants to lead community-building efforts across the state. In the past two years, 55 change agents completed the program and AUCC expects 50 more graduates in the next year. AUCC is trying to bring new, often unheard voices to state-level policy discussions and decisions through broad-based coalitions and advocacy campaigns. Reith says that businesses and government agencies are starting to offer seats at the table for immigrants, but those seats have limitations. “They are fine sitting around the table with an educated immigrant without an accent. We’re trying to push Arkansas decision makers out of their comfort zone to recognize immigrants as equal residents, who bring value and whose integration is necessary for the state to achieve its potential,” she says. “We want them to also sit at tables with undocumented workers.”

**QUESTIONS AND NEXT STEPS**

Arkansas’ formula for sealing leaks in the education-to-career pipeline is getting the right mix of government involvement, collaboration between educational institutions and business and industry, and participation from private and nonprofit organizations. And the formula shows signs of promise. In the past, Arkansas high school graduates went away for college and never returned. The goal now is to get these students to come back. Steven Murray thinks it’s starting to happen. “Students from Arkansas are returning after college graduation,” Murray says. “And young adults are moving here from other places. They see an opportunity here to make a real difference.”

For Arkansas to move forward, the state must continue to build strategies that develop, retain, and recruit youth and young adults of all races and socioeconomic statuses. State-level policies and the adaptation of these policies at the local level have the potential to change the outcomes for more young Arkansans. According to Rich Huddleston of Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families, “Social mobility is being played out in the education arena.” If this is true, then a strong education-to-career pipeline is essential to creating economic advancement opportunities for youth and young adults from all regions of the state. Arkansas is making progress in building a stronger pipeline and placing “new steps of change” that support everyone—for the state’s economy of today and tomorrow.
Even if the region is able to bolster its economic base, the absence of a robust infrastructure of opportunity for young people will make it difficult for those growing up in the area to meaningfully connect with the local labor market.

**THE PLACE**: a rural four-county region bordering the Chesapeake Bay whose young adult population is declining while the retiree population grows

**THE CHALLENGE**: finding realistic ways to build an economic base that provides opportunities for residents—young and old—to make a life in the region

**ELEMENTS OF OPPORTUNITY**

**INFRASTRUCTURE**: strategies to create a culture of collaboration and inclusive leadership to tackle this rural region’s unique challenges

**HISTORY AND CONTEXT**

The Northern Neck region of Virginia, birthplace of both George Washington and Robert E. Lee, was once home to some of Virginia’s most elite families, unparalleled in its political and economic influence in the state. In the late 17th and 18th centuries, Northern Neck was a tobacco plantation economy, mostly growing tobacco or milling flour for export, relying on the exploitation of slave labor to build wealth. After the Civil War, extractive industries ascended based on the region’s natural assets, like lumber and agricultural crops, especially tomatoes, along with oystering, crabbing, and fishing.

From 1870 to 1930, the region’s isolated communities were connected by steamboat lines, operated by and connected to the Pennsylvania Railroad, tying the area to Baltimore’s economy. This infrastructure gave the Northern Neck an agricultural and aquacultural advantage, getting products to major markets relatively quickly and inexpensively. With the construction of the...
Northern Neck: Richmond, Lancaster, Westmoreland and Northumberland Counties, VA

Median Household Income

interstate highway system in the mid-20th century, development shifted west, leaving the region isolated from major economic activity. Tom Coye, pastor at St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church in Kilmarnock, Va., and president of a local organization that connects people with resources to improve economic security, says of Northern Neck today, “If you can make a living here, God bless you, but don’t expect it.”

THE CHALLENGE

As many of the Northern Neck’s traditional industries have become less profitable or less labor-intensive, opportunities for employment and mobility have declined. Between the 2000 Census and the 2008–2012 population estimates, the size of the under-45 population in the Northern Neck shrank by 10.4 percent while the 45-and-older population grew by 14.7 percent. As in many rural Southern communities, those that stay face a scarcity of jobs, and the jobs that are available are often low-wage and unreliable.

Amaya, a rising high-school senior, plans to apply to colleges and eventually go to law school. There are not many jobs in the area, and she has seen the people who stay struggle, so Amaya and her classmates have their sights set elsewhere. The youth who don’t see any options or opportunities are the ones who are stuck in the Northern Neck, she says.

“There is nothing tangible to keep young people here,” says Ken Rioland, pastor at Macedonia Baptist Church in Heathsville, Va. “There’s nothing to aspire to, nothing to become.”

The region’s situation is complicated by its development patterns. Over the past few decades, the Northern Neck has seen an in-migration of retirees that bought and built homes along the extensive Chesapeake Bay and riverine coastline. The retired population brought significant wealth with them, but, as in many tourism- and retirement-based economies, their arrival has not created opportunities for income-generation and wealth-building by those who already lived in the region. In the lower Northern Neck, the two counties at the end of the peninsula that reach the Chesapeake, the retiree population is mostly affluent, while those in the upper Northern Neck, at the base of the peninsula, are lower-wealth, often mid-level government retirees from the Washington, D.C., metro.

The “come heres,” as those who move to the region are known, are, in many ways, an asset for the region and drive growth in certain sectors, like the service industry and home health assistance. However, the majority of those jobs are low-wage. And the retired population shifts the political and resource allocation priorities significantly. The county governments respond to the people who vote and mobilize to make their opinions heard, and in Northern Neck, that’s usually retirees. People who have lived their lives elsewhere may not understand the challenges the region faces and the investments needed to improve the future for youth. They are likely to vote against raising taxes and mobilize against ideas they see as threatening their quality of life, which can include economic development (they moved there for the rural tranquility, after all).

In addition to the divide between the “come heres” and “been heres,” the Northern Neck faces geographic and racial divisions that make it difficult to build a plan for the future with broad buy-in.

“We want our young people to have the skills to get jobs, build wealth, and have a better quality of life.” —Lindsy Gardner

in. Geographically, the main divide is between the upper and lower peninsula. The upper counties, Richmond and Westmoreland, have fewer economic centers. The lower counties, Lancaster and Northumberland, are still largely rural, but have more towns, infrastructure, and affluence. While the counties of the peninsula are connected by their shared history and, to a certain extent, by their shared isolation, there is not a strong regional identity or sense that their future prosperity is intertwined.

The legacy of plantation-era slavery and the Civil War created racial divides in the region that remain very present, with significant residential and social segregation on the peninsula.
and higher poverty rates and lower levels of wealth for African Americans. Unlike the formal legal segregation of the past, current-day segregation is not as overt. “There is an implied understanding of where white people go and where black people go,” says Ken Rioland. Because of longstanding prejudice and discrimination, black people do not feel welcome in certain places. Prejudice may run both ways, Pastor Rioland told us, but because of historical oppression and disparities in power between the white and black communities, it is the black community that is the most affected. There is deep mistrust, and it will require significant and intentional work to bring cohesion to the region.

In addition to the divide between the “come heres” and “been heres,” the Northern Neck faces geographic and racial divisions that make it difficult to build a plan for the future with broad buy-in.

As working-age adults leave the region and raise their children elsewhere, enrollment in schools is also dropping, with enrollment in Lancaster County schools dropping by more than 6 percent between the fall of 2009 and 2011. In Lancaster County, 71.7 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced lunch, and in Westmoreland 73.9 percent of students are. Even in Northumberland and Richmond Counties, where 56.1 and 54.6 percent of students are eligible, respectively, the rate is significantly higher than the state average of 41.2 percent.

The ability of the region to draw more middle- or high-paying jobs is limited not just by its isolation but also by its relatively low levels of educational attainment, ranging from 12 percent of adults with at least a two-year degree in Richmond County to 24 percent of adults in Westmoreland County. Those who see the region’s challenges and divides but want to work toward a better future for its young people know they have very little in the way of an infrastructure of opportunity to work with—the human capital development, employment generation, and social and financial supports necessary to help young people succeed. Most of the region’s nonprofits are small and run primarily by volunteers. Geographic barriers make it difficult for nonprofits and public entities to share services across multiple counties. There is little coordination between programs, and strong partnerships are rare, with the exception of a few institutions, including Rappahanock Community College.

**THE ANALYSIS AND STRATEGY**

Despite these barriers, civic and business leaders in the Northern Neck are organizing themselves to work toward a better future for the region. They recognize that before comprehensive systems can be built to promote economic development and security, they need to build a broad awareness of the region’s challenges, create a more inclusive leadership base, and promote more collaboration and communication.

One relatively new community organization, known as VISIONS, formed following a meeting hosted by the Jessie Ball duPont Fund focused on reducing poverty. “This all started because we were talking about how to help people build assets to get out of poverty,” says Lindsy Gardner, director of the Lancaster Community Library. “We want our young people to have the skills to get jobs, build wealth, and have a better quality of life.”

The leaders who participated in that conversation decided to make VISIONS their main community platform to explore and pursue a goal of building a new region-wide economy. They want to create return opportunities for those who have left, but they especially want to create opportunities for the people who have stayed and are struggling to find good employment. They realize they cannot get much done without more buy-in and awareness from the community, so VISIONS released a report in 2012, *A Community at the Crossroads*, which analyzed the economic and social situation in the Northern Neck and offered recommendations for how to move forward. A consistent theme of this report is public awareness: “Changing the mind-set of the public to support job creation initiatives that are the right fit for...
provide low-income students with the skills and connections to keep going.

The longer-term strategies leaders are pursuing are focused on creating the culture of collaboration and inclusive leadership needed to tackle big ideas, there also is a mix of small strategies to improve opportunities for young people in the short-term.

Many of the region’s young people do not see a path to success in the region, but they also do not see leaving as a real possibility. Ken Rioland and his wife and co-pastor, Cynthia Rioland, are working with young people of color in their community to create a stronger sense of self-worth and to set higher goals for themselves. Cynthia started a summer camp for high school girls a few years ago with the goal of developing a positive self-image and aspirations. Last year they visited Bethune-Cookman University in Daytona, Fla., an HBCU founded in 1904 by Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune, the daughter of former slaves; they also went to Universal Studios. “They just haven’t seen it,” says Cynthia Rioland. “We want to show them what is possible.” Now, the challenge is figuring out how to make sure these young people have access to the resources they need to achieve their goals.

QUESTIONS AND NEXT STEPS

From the perspective of VISIONS and other community leaders, it will be difficult to connect youth with opportunity until the region has a better economic base. Given their relative geographic and economic isolation, leaders want to be realistic about the type of economic development they pursue. Without four-lane highways, it’s unlikely they will attract any large industries. They are pursuing ideas that have the greatest chance of success and can be worked on incrementally. Some of their best bets do not require large numbers of people, or pay low wages, like home health assistants.

The region has significant natural and historical assets that could drive a strong tourism economy, including Stratford Hall, the historic family home of Robert E. Lee. Cultivating a stronger tourism base will require significant regional coordination, which could be helped along if their application to become a National Heritage Area is successful. The area has a long history of agricultural production, and some are trying to capitalize on the farm-to-table movement that has broad appeal in nearby metros. While agriculture requires fewer people than it once did, many families in the Northern Neck have land, and they could be growing something on it if they knew how. Paul Reber, executive director of Stratford Hall, wants to develop an agricultural education program for the school system.
Northern Neck: Richmond, Lancaster, Westmoreland, and Northumberland Counties, VA

**Median Household Income**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Median Household Income</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Westmoreland</td>
<td>$49,516</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northumberland</td>
<td>$51,911</td>
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<td>Richmond</td>
<td>$48,958</td>
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<td>$63,636</td>
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<td>US</td>
<td>$53,046</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources:** U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey; MIT Living Wage Calculator; Equality of Opportunity Project via New York Times

**Notes:** Economic mobility data is provided for the commuting zone that includes this community, a commuting zone is a grouping of counties determined by commuting patterns and named for the largest city in that area. MIT Living Wage data estimates the minimum required living expenses for each county or state.

**Economic Mobility:** Children who grew up with parents making $16,000 (10th Percentile) end up in the...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quintile</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lowest Income Quintile</td>
<td>39%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lower Middle Quintile</td>
<td>26%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle Income Quintile</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Upper Middle Quintile</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Income Quintile</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Commuting zone:** Colonial Beach, VA Area

**Percent of 25–34 yr olds with at least a 2-yr degree**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>20.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northumberland</td>
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<td>Richmond</td>
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<td>Lancaster</td>
<td>45.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>State</td>
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**Percent of 18–24 yr olds with at least a HS diploma or equivalency**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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<td>Westmoreland</td>
<td>79%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northumberland</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Richmond</td>
<td>51%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lancaster</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>6.30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>8.60%</td>
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</table>

**2012 Annual Unemployment Average (for population 20 to 64 years)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Westmoreland</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northumberland</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richmond</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lancaster</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources:** U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, MIT Living Wage Calculator, Equality of Opportunity Project via New York Times; Notes: Economic mobility data is provided for the commuting zone that includes this community, a commuting zone is a grouping of counties determined by commuting patterns and named for the largest city in that area. MIT Living Wage data estimates the minimum required living expenses for each county or state.
in Westmoreland County. The region is seeking to take better advantage of aquaculture as well, particularly oysters, given the recently announced creation of the Virginia Oyster Trail and oyster harvests coming in at their highest levels in decades.

Even if the region is able to bolster its economic base, the absence of a robust infrastructure of opportunity for young people will make it difficult for those growing up in the area to meaningfully connect with the local labor market. As long as young people continue to see leaving the area as their only chance at success, it will make it more difficult for their voices and perspectives on the future of the region to be heard. This resource tension between an aging population and an increasingly diverse youth population has been discussed broadly as a national and Southern challenge, with demographers like James H. Johnson Jr. referring to the simultaneous “browning” and “greying” of the region; in smaller communities like the Northern Neck, where resources are already scarce and the opportunity infrastructure is unsteady, that pressure is exacerbated. These issues, including a lack of economic drivers, significant loss of young people (and in particular skilled young people), and inadequate support among political and economic resources to invest in education and youth opportunity, are ones with which much of the rural South is struggling to come to terms.

“We want to show them what is possible.” — Cynthia Rioland
While Houston leads the country in job growth, low-wage jobs are growing at a faster pace than job growth as a whole. To increase upward economic mobility, Houston will have to connect people to the growth industries and improve the quality of existing jobs.

On its sprawling surface, Houston tells a story of how human ingenuity uninhibited by government regulation creates the American Dream.


“[Houston] has become a city of opportunity, where we respect people from all backgrounds and allow them to use their full talents,” wrote former Mayor Bill White, upon leaving his position in 2010.

A low-income person in Houston is more likely to reach the top-20 percent of earners than in any other large Southern city. The Houston region has a diverse and growing economy, which looks less like the past—oil and its cousins—and more like the future’s knowledge-based industries. The region’s affordable housing and job growth drives a surging population, with a soon-to-be majority Latino population, and an aging, whiter workforce.

In Houston, the South’s booming cities can see their dynamic...
future. However, sooner than the South’s other boomtowns, Houston might face a collision between inequity, economic prosperity, and a fervent belief in small government. Latino and African-American young people, who will fill the jobs vacated by retiring whites, are far behind on every step between education and career. Those students depend on systems of public education that are dispersed and often strapped for resources. Houston’s infrastructure of opportunity challenge—namely, the human capital development, employment generation, and social and financial supports necessary to help young people succeed—is in connecting Latino and African-American populations to the booming economy, and doing so at tremendous scale.

“If Houston’s African-American and Latino young people are unable to succeed,” says Stephen Klineberg, director of the Kinder Institute at Rice University, “it is impossible to envision a prosperous future for the city as a whole.”

**HISTORY AND CONTEXT**

Houston began as a trade and railroad economy, but in the 1800s lacked the easy connection to water to truly be a center of commerce. Buffalo Bayou, connecting Houston to Galveston Bay approximately 40 miles away, could only accommodate small ships. Business leaders knew that to take Houston from a commercial town to a larger hub, a strong port was essential. In the early 1900s, with a series of federal grants in response to the “Great Storm” that destroyed Galveston, local leaders dredged Buffalo Bayou, establishing a channel from the bay to the Port of Houston. The port became the second busiest in the United States. Federal support continued to play a critical role in Houston’s economic growth, including placement of the Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center and research grants to Houston’s Texas Medical Center, which became the largest medical complex in the country.

Through the mid-1900s, oil drove both growth in the population and the economy. By 1980, when the world’s price of oil reached a peak, 82 percent of the Houston region’s primary jobs were either in the oil industry or directly associated with it.

Klineberg has surveyed Houston’s population annually for 33 years, beginning right in the middle of a dramatic shift: a receding economy combined with a new wave of demographics. The decreased demand and increased non-OPEC oil supply of the early 1980s were a big hit to the region’s oil economy. The Houston region lost 220,000 jobs, nearly one in seven, during the oil bust. Housing prices fell by 30 percent, with more than 3,000 foreclosures per month.

The crash forced diversification, both within the energy sector and to health and technology, as well. Today, Houston’s economy is growing faster than any other major U.S. city. Not only was it the first major metropolitan area to regain all jobs lost by the recession, the Houston region has gained more than 2.5 jobs for every job lost.

Oil still plays a critical economic role. According to an analysis by the Greater Houston Partnership, Houston’s powerful Chamber of Commerce, about one in two jobs are affected by energy prices. At the same time, Houston has become a national leader in applied technology, construction, engineering, and health. That same

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**Houston Metropolitan Statistical Area Median Household Income**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Range</th>
<th>Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>$41,564–$65,069</td>
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<tr>
<td>$65,070–$96,250</td>
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<tr>
<td>$96,251–$143,259</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$143,260–$250,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data not available</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**City of Houston**
analysis shows that non-energy related jobs have made up almost three in four new jobs over the last 30 years.

**Today, Houston’s economy is growing faster than any other major U.S. city. Not only was it the first major metropolitan area to regain all jobs lost by the recession, the Houston region has gained more than 2.5 jobs for every job lost.**

“The source of wealth for cities like Houston in the 21st century is housed between the ears of the best and brightest people in America, who can live anywhere,” Klineberg said.

While Houston leads the country in job growth, low-wage jobs are growing at a faster pace than job growth as a whole, according to an analysis by Richard Florida in *The Atlantic*’s CityLab. To increase upward economic mobility, Houston will have to connect people to the growth industries and improve the quality of existing jobs.

**THE CHALLENGE**

As the Houston economy moved away from oil, growth in the Latino and African-American communities has reshaped the region’s demographics. In the 1960s, one in five Harris County residents was black, three in four were white, and one in 20 was Latino. That has changed, driven by low housing costs, high job growth, and a wave of immigration. According to Klineberg, “This biracial, Southern city dominated and controlled by white men has quite suddenly become the single most ethnically diverse large metropolitan region in the country.”

Now, more than 60 percent of the six million residents of the Houston region are non-white. The region has seen a bifurcated stream of immigrants, including high-skilled immigrants from Africa and Asia, and low-skilled immigrants from Mexico and Central America.

By 2050, the Houston region’s population is expected to grow to more than 10 million residents, primarily driven by Latinos. By that year, it’s projected that Latinos will make up more than half of all Houston area residents.

As whites age out of the workforce, making sure Latinos and African Americans are able to succeed will become even more important. Yet Latinos and African Americans lag behind their peers on every measure of economic and educational success. In the Houston Independent School District (HISD), 87 percent of the students are African American or Latino. At the same time, consider the portion of the HISD class of 2011 students who are college ready, according to scores on the SAT and ACT:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race and Ethnicity of 15–24 yr olds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, not Hispanic or Latino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More Races</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- 19.6 percent of African Americans
- 42.1 percent of Latinos
- 31.2 percent of Whites
- 5.8 percent of Asians
- 2.3 percent of Two or More Races

"The achievement gaps are huge, and that has enormous implications for our future," says Ruth López Turley, who leads the Houston Education Research Consortium at Rice University.

In 1987, Texas Southern University Professor Robert Bullard published *Invisible Houston*, which argued that black communities in Houston had not received the benefits of the city’s economic boom. Today, according to survey data compiled by Klineberg and to be published in an upcoming book updating Bullard’s *Invisible Houston*, African Americans still are living in a very different version of Houston. For example, two-thirds of African Americans say that African Americans still are a long way from “having the same chance in life as whites,” compared to about one-third of whites and Latinos.

Central to Bullard’s question is a worry that laudatory headlines...
There are three areas in which Houston is placing particularly ambitious bets on the education-to-career pathway: alternative educational options, community partnerships, and connecting with Houstonians where they live and work.

**Advocating for Educational Choice**

The Houston region has many good schools, both charter and traditional public schools. The Houston Independent School District twice won the Broad Prize for Urban Education, given annually to a large public school district that made the greatest improvement in student achievement. The Aldine Independent School District, less than 20 miles north of downtown Houston, also has received the award. Two of the three winners of the similar prize for charter schools began in Houston, and both of those charter systems have a large and growing presence.

However, the charter schools still represent only a fraction of students who need education for successful careers. In Harris County and six surrounding counties that make up a regional education district, there are more than one million students, 50 public school districts, and only one charter school for every 10 traditional public schools.

Further, according to Turley, charter schools often are not like "America's Opportunity City," from a recent *Wall Street Journal* article, can take the focus away from populations who do not have access to opportunity. According to an analysis from the Urban Institute that compared Houston to Atlanta, Charlotte, Orlando, and other similar cities, Houston has worse inequality and a higher poverty rate.

"If you look at how well this city is doing, is it masking some challenging undercurrents to long-term success?" says George Grainger, a senior program officer of the Houston Endowment.

**THE ANALYSIS AND STRATEGY**

The leaders of Houston know the size of their demographic and economic challenge, thanks in part to a range of regional research from Rice University, University of Houston, Texas Southern University, and organizations like the Partnership.

Students are leaving the education pipeline at many points between secondary education and quality employment. According to data from the All Kids Alliance, a cradle-to-career initiative, in 2000 there were 64,354 eighth graders in the Greater Houston area, 91 percent entered ninth grade, but only 69 percent completed high school four years later. Twenty percent completed college, but when disaggregated by income, only 10 percent of low-income students finished. There is a clear desire to change those trends. In a Kinder Institute survey, more than 90 percent of parents of school-age children said that they wanted their students at least to graduate from college.

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9 The Urban Institute defines Houston's similar cities by high population growth and diversity, few seniors, above-average college education and labor force participation, average black-white segregation, and below-average poverty, inequality and wage growth; 10 Greater Houston is defined as a seven-county region by All Kids Alliance; 11 MDC calculation from Texas Educational Agency data
Houston MSA: Harris, Fort Bend, Montgomery, Brazoria, Galveston, Liberty, Waller, Chambers, Austin Counties, TX

Houston, Texas

15.8%
23.1%
20.8%

2012 Annual Unemployment Average
(for population 20 to 64 years)

$57,426
$51,563
$53,046

57,426 (for population 20 to 64 years)
51,563 (for population 20 to 64 years)
53,046 (for population 20 to 64 years)

$39,758
$38,292
n/a

Percent of 25–34 yr olds with at least a 2-yr degree
Percent of 18–24 yr olds with at least a HS diploma or equivalency

34.9% 33.2% 400%
78.0% 80.6% 83.8%

Poverty Rate
Child (Under 18) Poverty Rate
Median Household Income

8% 14% 20% 28% 30%

Upper Income Quintile
Upper Middle Quintile
Middle Income Quintile
Lower Middle Quintile
Lowest Income Quintile

Economic Mobility: Children who grew up with parents making $16,000 (10th Percentile) end up in the...

Commuting zone: Houston, TX Area

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey; MIT Living Wage Calculator; Equality of Opportunity Project via New York Times; Notes: Economic mobility data is provided for the commuting zone that includes this community, a commuting zone is a grouping of counties determined by commuting patterns and named for the largest city in that area. MIT Living Wage data estimates the minimum required living expenses for each county or state.

reaching the most disadvantaged students.

The Houston public school system is trying to learn from the most successful of those charter schools. Through Apollo 20, the Houston Independent School District, working with Roland Fryer of EdLabs at Harvard University, implemented five promising practices from stand-out charters in 20 of their lowest-performing schools.

Education-to-Employment Partnerships

Between 2012 and 2017, due to an aging workforce and growing economy, Houston expects about 75,000 annual openings for middle-skill jobs.

For leaders in the business community, filling those jobs will be critical to continued economic development. For leaders of training and community organizations, those jobs represent opportunities to help Houston’s low-income people find family-supporting careers. In response, the Greater Houston Partnership, working with a wide range of partners, has launched UpSkill Houston, focused on closing the skills gap in key industries such as construction, health care, and manufacturing. UpSkill is focused on four primary areas: increasing awareness of middle-skills jobs, improving the pool of applicants for those jobs, coordinating the education, business, and social services sectors, and collecting better data on talent and job demand.

The Partnership released an action plan in April 2014, so the results are still to come. However, organizers are confident that the initiative can begin to reframe success, making clear to young people and their families the value of technical skills and credentials and bringing together leaders within business, government, education, and the community, which is essential to addressing cross-sector challenges. Houston’s business community is influential in setting public policy, and UpSkill has helped business leaders see the importance of the success of the education and training system.
Outreach to Low-Income People in Place

At a recent town hall meeting, Claudia Aguirre-Vasquez, chief program officer at Neighborhood Centers, Inc., asked the 300 people in the room whether they knew what it would take to get certain middle-skill jobs. Three people raised their hands.

Because of both geographic size and population growth, information and resources critical in helping people access education and employment opportunities often can fail to reach distant corners of the city. Several organizations, including Neighborhood Centers, are thinking about how to connect with low-income people where they live.

Neighborhood Centers works to bring information, support, and resources to underserved neighborhoods at 73 locations across the region, building on existing institutions such as workforce development centers.

In multiple publications, the Urban Institute has lauded Neighborhood Centers for its scale and commitment to place, calling the organization an “orchestra conductor,” critical in a fast-growing region. Neighborhood Centers emphasizes the unique assets of communities throughout the region in building “launch pads” for low-income residents.

“Houston and the region are large, but it’s manageable if you start to work neighborhood by neighborhood, community by community,” Aguirre-Vasquez says.

QUESTIONS AND NEXT STEPS

What should be replicated and what should be a cautionary tale from the South’s most mobile, big city? Joel Kotkin proposes an answer in *Opportunity Urbanism: an Emerging Paradigm for the 21st Century*. In the report, underwritten by the Greater Houston Partnership and released in 2007, Kotkin defines “opportunity cities,” including Houston, Atlanta, Dallas, Charlotte, and Phoenix, by their “openness to outsiders, a diverse and highly entrepreneurial economy, a friendly business climate, a commitment to continued infrastructure development (particularly mobility), and a basically positive attitude toward growth.” He contrasts opportunity cities with superstar cities, including New York City, Boston, and San Francisco, which are defined by a focus on attracting elites, rising housing prices, and low net migration. He suggests that Houston and its peers should be models for how a city can create economic mobility.

However, Kotkin’s analysis has a serious flaw: besides Houston, using the newly released data, his opportunity cities show lower economic mobility, using almost any measure, than his superstar cities. Several of Kotkin’s Southern opportunity cities, including Charlotte, Raleigh, and Atlanta, are among the 15 worst large places for economic mobility. Additionally, as the Urban Institute points out in its analysis, Houston itself “lagged behind the largest coastal metropolitan areas” such as San Francisco and New York. While Kotkin’s opportunity cities might present chances for some, they lack that same opportunity for people outside the pull of this dynamism.

Houston’s pro-growth, small government stance might play a role in economic mobility, but it is insufficient as an explanation for all that is happening in the city. Further, that ideology will pose a challenge as Houston attempts to promote opportunity for millions of new people. The community leadership often supports private enterprise solutions at the expense of government intervention, leading to lower spending on essential scaling infrastructure. According to an analysis from the Partnership, while enrollment in the Houston region’s school districts grew by 35,000 over the last several years, the number of teachers fell by 4,000. Texas ranks 40th among states in per-pupil spending on education, and Houston area school districts generally spend even less than the state.

Houston’s immense private philanthropic resources, working with partners such as Neighborhood Centers and the Greater Houston Partnership, has developed and tested a range of ideas for making sure all Houstonians succeed. But how will Houston scale its promising and ambitious ideas to reach the African-American and Latino students who will make up an increasing majority of young people, while under-investing in society’s most proven scaling tool: public infrastructure and supports?

At the same time, Houston has lessons to teach the rest of the Southern United States. In partnerships, Houston has brought many sectors to bear on the issues of economic mobility. Through applied research, the universities are playing an important role in shaping the community agenda. Through the Greater Houston Partnership and UpSkill Houston, the business community is helping to define the skills needed for tomorrow’s jobs. Various philanthropies, including the Houston Endowment and the United Way of Greater Houston, are investing funds in education and vigorously evaluating what works and what does not. Houston’s economic mobility in the middle of demographic shifts cannot be easily explained by any of these factors, but they’re worth watching.

“How Houston navigates this transition will have enormous significance not just for Houston’s future, but for America’s future,” says Klineberg.
Blessed with a high-octane economy capable of producing abundant employment opportunities but hampered by the traditional curses of poverty and youth disconnection, does Durham have the will and wherewithal to improve its systems and scale up its innovations so that the infrastructure of opportunity is pervasive in the lives of all its people?

THE PLACE: a tobacco and textile city that has transitioned to a knowledge economy

THE CHALLENGE: connecting employers and educators so that Durham’s young people are prepared to take advantage of the city’s dynamic employment opportunities

ELEMENTS OF OPPORTUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE: promising and established programs along the education pipeline—from pre-K to college—and a history of organizing for action

Editor’s note: Now, we turn our analysis to the place where we live. This final profile shares our perspective on the infrastructure of opportunity in our hometown, including our involvement in a local effort to strengthen connections between education and employment systems.

HISTORY AND CONTEXT

To stand in the lobby of DPAC, Durham’s glittering performing arts center, is to straddle two contradictory worlds. One block to the west sprawls the more than one million-square-foot American Tobacco Historic District, once the heart of James B. Duke’s tobacco manufacturing empire and the epicenter of industrial employment in Durham for the better part of a century. Today American Tobacco is a post-modern economic dynamo and the poster child for contemporary Durham, N.C.: home to dozens of entrepreneurial startups and a host of entertainment options that draw tourists and in-migrants alike. But one block in the opposite...
The story of Durham’s economy begins in the late 19th century, when the sleepy railroad stop vaulted to prosperity as a capital of cigarette production in America. The fledgling city’s tobacco factories drew waves of unskilled black and white laborers, who formed a strong, bi-racial working- and middle-class Carolina. With an economy centered on health care, life sciences, and information technology, grounded by the powerful presence of Duke University and its world-renowned medical center, contemporary Durham represents the promise and the paradoxes of the modern South and much of urban America. Thanks to an economic base anchored in what economist Enrico Moretti terms the “innovation sector,” the Durham economy also supports a rich

The mobility landscape facing youth and young adults in Durham reflects the unique history, challenges, and opportunities of a former center of tobacco and textile manufacturing that has reinvented itself as the “City of Medicine.”

direction is a monument to stunted dreams; Durham’s massive jail, a predictable way-station for too many Durham residents, too often young, brown and black, for whom prosperity is a frequently hollow, taunting dream. One community, two worlds, one block apart.

The mobility landscape facing youth and young adults in Durham reflects the unique history, challenges, and opportunities of a former center of tobacco and textile manufacturing that has reinvented itself as the “City of Medicine.” It also stands as an archetype of cities and towns across the United States facing a catastrophic loss of industrial jobs that provided living wages for low-skilled workers. Like those cities and towns, Durham’s leaders must address the challenge of aligning the work of the city’s major educational and social-service institutions, making best use of innovative, small nonprofits, and then scaling-up the efforts to meet the needs of both young people and local employers.

The story of Durham’s economy begins in the late 19th century, when the sleepy railroad stop vaulted to prosperity as a capital of cigarette production in America. The fledgling city’s tobacco factories drew waves of unskilled black and white laborers, who formed a strong, bi-racial working- and middle-class
THE CHALLENGE

The rapid evolution of Durham from a center of traditional, often low-wage, manufacturing to a knowledge-driven economy marooned many local residents who lacked the skills and education needed to adapt to the newly demanding labor market. Despite the thriving economy, 16.6 percent of county residents lived below the poverty line in 2013. Youth poverty persists, as does disillusion with conventional paths to success—an estimated 4,500 to 6,000 youth and young adults are disconnected from school and work. The result today is “two Durhams”—one prosperous and positioned to capitalize on abundant, emerging economic opportunities, and another increasingly disconnected and lacking the education, experience, and social connections needed to connect to prosperity that is close at hand geographically but painfully out of reach.

Add to this bifurcated economic landscape a demographic transformation forged by a 112 percent surge in Latino residents between 2000 and 2010, and Durham faces an exciting and daunting frontier: how to leverage its assets and repair its vulnerabilities to become a multicultural exemplar of 21st century opportunity for the South and the nation.

THE ANALYSIS AND STRATEGY

The foundations of Durham’s infrastructure of opportunity have been laid in pieces over time, sometimes with foresight, sometimes in defiance and reaction to prevailing patterns of exclusion. In 1910, local African-American leaders established the National Religious Training School and Chautauqua, which would become the first public, liberal arts institution for African Americans in the nation. Designed to accelerate upward mobility and propel self-help uplift in a Jim Crow culture, the college became North Carolina Central University, the local branch of the University of North Carolina system and Durham’s public education capstone. Half a century later, Durham gained a technically oriented community college as the state built a system to serve industry and train workers. In the 1960s, Gov. Terry Sanford’s model anti-poverty program, the North Carolina Fund, sponsored sophisticated community organizing in Durham’s African-American community to bring the voices of working people into the center of civic and political life, strengthening a tradition of yeasty neighborhood and grassroots organizing that defines Durham politics to this day.

In the 1960s, Gov. Terry Sanford’s model anti-poverty program, the North Carolina Fund, sponsored sophisticated community organizing in Durham’s African-American community to bring the voices of working people into the center of civic and political life, strengthening a tradition of yeasty neighborhood and grassroots organizing that defines Durham politics to this day.

as one community with respect to race and education, the merger fell short of unifying residents. Since then, the portion of white young people attending Durham Public Schools has slowly but continuously decreased.

Local leaders have continued to establish innovations to get disadvantaged young children a strong start in life and
school, nurture occupational exposure and readiness, accelerate postsecondary entry and completion, and build Durham’s talent development pipeline in ways that connect communities on the margins of success to the region’s high-wage employment opportunities in health and life sciences, information technology, and specialty services. Many of these programs are small relative to the scale of need and opportunity that characterizes modern Durham. Durham continues to need wider, stronger bridges to close the gap between the contradictory worlds facing thousands of its youth and young adults.

**Starting Early**

Modeled on the Harlem Children’s Zone’s cradle-to-career vision, the East Durham Children’s Initiative (EDCI) integrates education and social supports to give young children in a 120 block section of one of Durham’s lowest wealth neighborhoods a strong foundation for subsequent success. Founded in 2008, EDCI has forged partnerships with more than 20 neighborhood and city-wide organizations to create a deeply embedded community presence characterized by strong parent engagement and data-driven program execution. EDCI’s strategy of linking high-quality existing resources to the needs of low-income children and their families is a welcome attempt to avoid duplication and ensure neighborhood implementation. EDCI is complemented by Durham’s Partnership for Children, through which Durham’s leaders are working to make sure that all young people are prepared for kindergarten. The Partnership, which is part of North Carolina’s Smart Start program, serves as a backbone organization for countywide efforts focused on ages zero to five.

Additional county-level programs, such as Durham Connects, a neonatal home visitation program, are cementing the community’s commitment to giving young people in poor families a solid early start.

**Bridging High School and College**

Local innovation coupled with state-level policy and technical support also is refashioning high school education in Durham in the wake of the enduring challenges and elusive promises of school merger. For a decade, with catalytic philanthropic support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and strong public policy reinforcement, a state-level nonprofit, North Carolina New Schools (NCNS), has been creating a pervasive network of public high schools characterized by academic rigor and a mission focused on student success. With their guidance and support, Durham Public Schools has collaborated with local higher education to create two “accelerated” high school models—one at Durham Technical Community College, one at N.C. Central—and several thematically focused high schools. Durham Tech’s Middle College and N.C. Central’s Josephine Dobbs Clement Early College enable students to take a blended high school and college-level course of study to prepare for a seamless transition to postsecondary education. The City of Medicine Academy, founded in 2003, brings together Durham’s largest employer, Duke University Health System, and the Durham Public Schools.

“City of Medicine Academy is giving students direct experience in the real world of medicine through extending learning outside the classroom through internships and job shadowing experiences,” says Dr. Victor Dzau, former CEO of Duke University Health System and current President of the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences. Graduation and postsecondary entrance rates for most of Durham’s specialty high schools far outpace those of their conventional counterparts, though they often enroll a lower proportion of free- and reduced-lunch students. The new schools stand as beacons for a district still challenged to make high performance a norm for large numbers of high-poverty students.

**Focusing on Postsecondary Completion, Employment Readiness, and Youth Reconnection**

In 2012, an unprecedented partnership among major employers, the public K–20 institutions, and community leaders began building Made in Durham, an effort to facilitate education-to-career pathways to equip all Durham youth and young adults, ages 14–24, with the postsecondary credentials and workplace experience required to gain entry and succeed in Durham’s opportunity-rich economy. Researched and incubated by MDC, Made in Durham will build an anchor organization that will work with educators and employers to deepen and expand opportunities for work-based learning, striving for an aspirational goal that all Durham young adults earn a postsecondary credential and be connected to economically rewarding work by age 25. Made in Durham will embrace a “dual-customer approach” to satisfy both the needs of young people and the requirements of Durham’s employers. This will include establishing cross-institutional data systems to track student progress, improving the currency of regional labor market information to guide programming, and building vehicles for feedback from youth, employers, and the community to foster public accountability. MDC research estimates 40 percent of Durham’s young people are either lagging behind or completely disconnected from conventional education-to-career pathways. Made in Durham also has set for itself a tough goal of creating transitional on-ramps that will move youth from the margins to the mainstream of Durham’s economy, drawing on the community’s rich culture of social entrepreneurship and innovation. Expectations are high, and the need to demonstrate performance is urgent given the uneven results of prior efforts to connect disconnected youth to opportunity. “With Made in Durham, we are working to demonstrate the kinds of innovative approaches that can bring about systemic change necessary to make these experiences the norm and focus on employment sectors—like health care and life sciences—that drive the vibrant Durham economy,” wrote Dr. Dzau, chair of Made in Durham, in a recent op-ed.

Complementing Made in Durham are two new initiatives designed to foster postsecondary entry, affordability, and completion. Created by a voter-approved quarter-cent sales-and-use tax in 2011 that funds early childhood and postsecondary education, Durham “ConnectFunds” provide work-study stipends of up to $2,500 for Durham Tech students who need to supplement other forms of financial aid. “Eagle Connect,” one of North Carolina’s first residential dual-enrollment programs, enables students to live on the N.C. Central campus while completing...
Durham County, NC

Poverty Rate 18.0% 16.8% 14.9%
Child (Under 18) Poverty Rate 25.1% 23.8% 20.8%
Median Household Income $50,997 $46,450 $53,046
2012 Annual Unemployment Average (for population 20 to 64 years)

Percent of 25-34 yr olds with at least a 2-yr degree 57.1% 38.3% 400%
Percent of 18-24 yr olds with at least a HS diploma or equivalency 83.1% 82.5% 83.8%

$41,361 $39,363 n/a
MIT Living Wage annual income for one adult and child

Economic Mobility: Children who grew up with parents making $16,000 (10th Percentile) end up in the...

Commuting zone: Raleigh, NC Area

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, MIT Living Wage Calculator, Equality of Opportunity Project via New York Times; Notes: Economic mobility data is provided for the commuting zone that includes this community, a commuting zone is a grouping of counties determined by commuting patterns and named for the largest city in that area. MIT Living Wage data estimates the minimum required living expenses for each county or state.

Changing the Conversation about Poverty amid Plenty
Poverty stubbornly endures in Durham, despite a remarkable transition from its tobacco-town roots. In February 2014, in his State of the City Address, Mayor Bill Bell announced that he would challenge the city and dedicate his administration to "reducing poverty one neighborhood at a time" by focusing public services and civic energy on the city’s lowest-income Census tracts. "We as a city and county are rich in many resources," he said. “We must find a way to harness those many resources to focus or target the reduction in poverty in our community.”

Like EDCI, the Mayor’s initiative hopes to capitalize on Durham’s long tradition of neighborhood-level activism and marry it to the intensive deployment of existing government and community resources. Rebuilding trust with neighborhoods that have long felt marginalized in Durham’s race to reinvent itself is proving to be an essential and challenging first step. For the mayor’s vision to succeed, Durham will need to unite to deploy an infrastructure of opportunity to build the capabilities of low-income residents into assets that match the needs of a 21st century economy. "There’s a sense of ‘we-ness’ to Durham, that these are our problems to solve together," says Dave Currey, who is working to create that unity in his role as project director of BECOMING.

BECOMING is a cross-sector collaboration focused on creating a continuum of care for young adults facing mental health challenges. BECOMING has formalized partnerships with the Department of
immigrants in Durham are undocumented, according to a study from University of Pennsylvania sociologist Chenoa Flippen. Immigration status complicates access to the infrastructure of opportunity. Undocumented students do not qualify for North Carolina’s deeply subsidized in-state tuition rates for public higher education or for federal financial aid. While the rate at which Latinos are graduating from high school in Durham is rising, postsecondary entry and persistence is an enduring struggle. Triangle for Latino Student Success, a coalition of education leaders and community advocates, recently formed to elevate the access of Latinos to postsecondary education.

Further complicating upward mobility, political shifts at the state level are challenging the “education-first” orthodoxy that characterized North Carolina for 50 years—a pervasive philosophy that spurred upward mobility for tens of thousands of once-poor residents. Today, Tar Heels’ appetite for ever-expanding public investment in schools and colleges is slacking off just as historically underserved segments of the population—African Americans and Latinos—are projected to become an even larger proportion of the state’s workforce.

Blessed with a high-octane economy capable of producing abundant employment opportunities, but hampered by the traditional curses of poverty and youth disconnection, does Durham have the will and wherewithal to improve its systems and scale up its innovations so that the “infrastructure of opportunity” is pervasive in the lives of all its people? Much turns on the answer.

Note that only 75 percent of Latinos in Durham, at the time of this study, were not born in the United States. So, 90 percent of those 75 percent were undocumented.
Thanks to Our Funders

The Kresge Foundation
Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation
Hollingsworth Funds
Jessie Ball duPont Fund
Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation
John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

Foundation For The Carolinas
Greenville Technical College
United Way of Greenville County
Lumina Foundation
Park Foundation

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Greenville, South Carolina: Beth Caldwell and Shun Robertson
Arkansas: Shun Robertson and Ivanna Gonzalez
Northern Neck, Virginia: Alyson Zandt and Richard Hart
Houston, Texas: Max Rose and David Dodson
Durham, North Carolina: David Dodson, Max Rose, and Ivanna Gonzalez

Additional Thanks

Ted Abernathy, Economic Leadership LLC
Cory Anderson, Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation
Russell Carey, Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation
Brian Collier, Foundation For The Carolinas
Mark Constantine, Jessie Ball duPont Fund
Katie Ensign, Jessie Ball duPont Fund
George Grainger, Houston Endowment
Cammie Hauptfuhrer, MDC Board Member
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Joan Lipsitz, MDC Senior Fellow
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Phyllis Martin, United Way of Greenville County
Tazra Mitchell, NC Budget & Tax Center
Regan Gruber Moffitt, Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation
Julie Mooney, MDC Senior Fellow
William Moses, The Kresge Foundation
Susan Patterson, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation
John Quinterno, South by North Strategies, Ltd.
Sally Robinson, Former MDC Board Member
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Karl Stauber, Danville Regional Foundation
Cay Stratton, MDC Senior Fellow
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Gage Weekes, Hollingsworth Funds
Sherece West-Scantlebury, Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation
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Photos

We are grateful to the Creative Commons community for use of illustrative photos of the South. Photos of Danville, Va., by Alex Maness.
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CityLab

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Vox

The Wall Street Journal

Brownsville, Texas
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Navile Rodriguez, Former All In Student Ambassador and Teach for America Corps Member, Frederick Douglass Elementary School. Seafor, DE
Mariana Tumlinson, Community Relations Manager, Valley Regional Medical Center
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All In.

McAllen Independent School District
Charlotte, North Carolina

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Linda Tschudi, Employment Specialist, Gulf County Schools
David Woods, Jr., Pastor, Church of God in Christ

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"Yes, Charlotte is a great city, but..." Taylor Batten, June 7, 2014.

Charlotte, NC: The Global Evolution of a New South City

Project LIFT
Project LIFT: www.projectliftcharlotte.org

Port St. Joe, Florida

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Jennifer German, Deputy Director, CareerSource Gulf Coast
Tom Gibson, Partner, Rish, Gibson, Scholz, and Groom, P.A.
Minnie Likely, Executive Director, North Port St. Joe Community Youth Initiative
Marsha Lindeman, Administrator, Gulf and Franklin Counties, Florida Department of Health
Lesia McDaniel, Government Operations Consultant II, Florida Department of Health
Sandy Martin, CEO, St. Joseph Care of Florida, Inc. and Health Services Manager, Florida Department of Health
Clementina Nickson, afterschool program coordinator, Church of God in Christ
Charlotte Pierce, City Auditor/Clerk, Port St. Joe
Kenetha Tschudi, community volunteer, Church of God in Christ
Linda Tschudi, Employment Specialist, Gulf County Schools
David Woods, Jr., Pastor, Church of God in Christ

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Danville, Virginia

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Wendi Goods Everson, Program Officer, Danville Regional Foundation
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Laurie Moran, President, Danville Pittsylvania County Chamber of Commerce
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Interviewees and Contributors
Gabriel Fosting, Founder and CEO, The College Initiative
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Rich Huddleston, Executive Director, Arkansas Advocates for Children and Families
Evelyn Jorgenson, President, Northwest Arkansas Community College
Mike Leach, Director of Center for Student Success, Arkansas Association of Two-Year Colleges
Mike Malone, President and CEO, Northwest Arkansas Council
Steven Murray, Chancellor, Phillips Community College of the University of Arkansas
Karama Neal, Director, Southern Bancorp Community Partners
Mireya Reith, Co-Founder and Executive Director, The Arkansas United Community Coalition
Melissa Rivers, Executive Director, East Arkansas Planning and Development District
Warwick Sabin, Executive Director of Arkansas Regional Innovation Hub and Arkansas State House of Representatives Member
Grant Tennille, Executive Director, Arkansas Economic Development Commission
Kyla Waters, Director of WorkForce Training, Arkansas Association of Two-Year Colleges
Naccaman Williams, Director of Special Initiatives, Walton Family Foundation

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Northern Neck, Virginia
Interviewees and Contributors
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Elizabeth Crowther, President, Rappahannock Community College
Leslie Franklin, Regional Grants Management Associate, River Counties Community Foundation
Lindsy Gardner, Director, Lancaster Community Library
Tina Hagen, Office Manager, Boys and Girls Club of the Northern Neck
Phillip Mumford, Executive Director/CPO, Boys and Girls Club of the Northern Neck
Margaret Nost, Affiliate Director, River Counties Community Foundation
Paul Reber, Executive Director, Stratford Hall
Cynthia Rioland, Co-Pastor, Macedonia Baptist Church
Kenneth Rioland, Jr., Pastor, Macedonia Baptist Church
Paul Sciacchitano, Managing Director, Investments, Wells Fargo Advisors
Mark Walker, Knowledge Management and Technology Officer, Jessie Ball duPont Fund

Frank Hawkins Kenan Institute of Private Enterprise

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