

13TH ANNUAL STATE OF OUR CHILDREN ADDRESS

SCHOLAR *BY* SCHOLAR

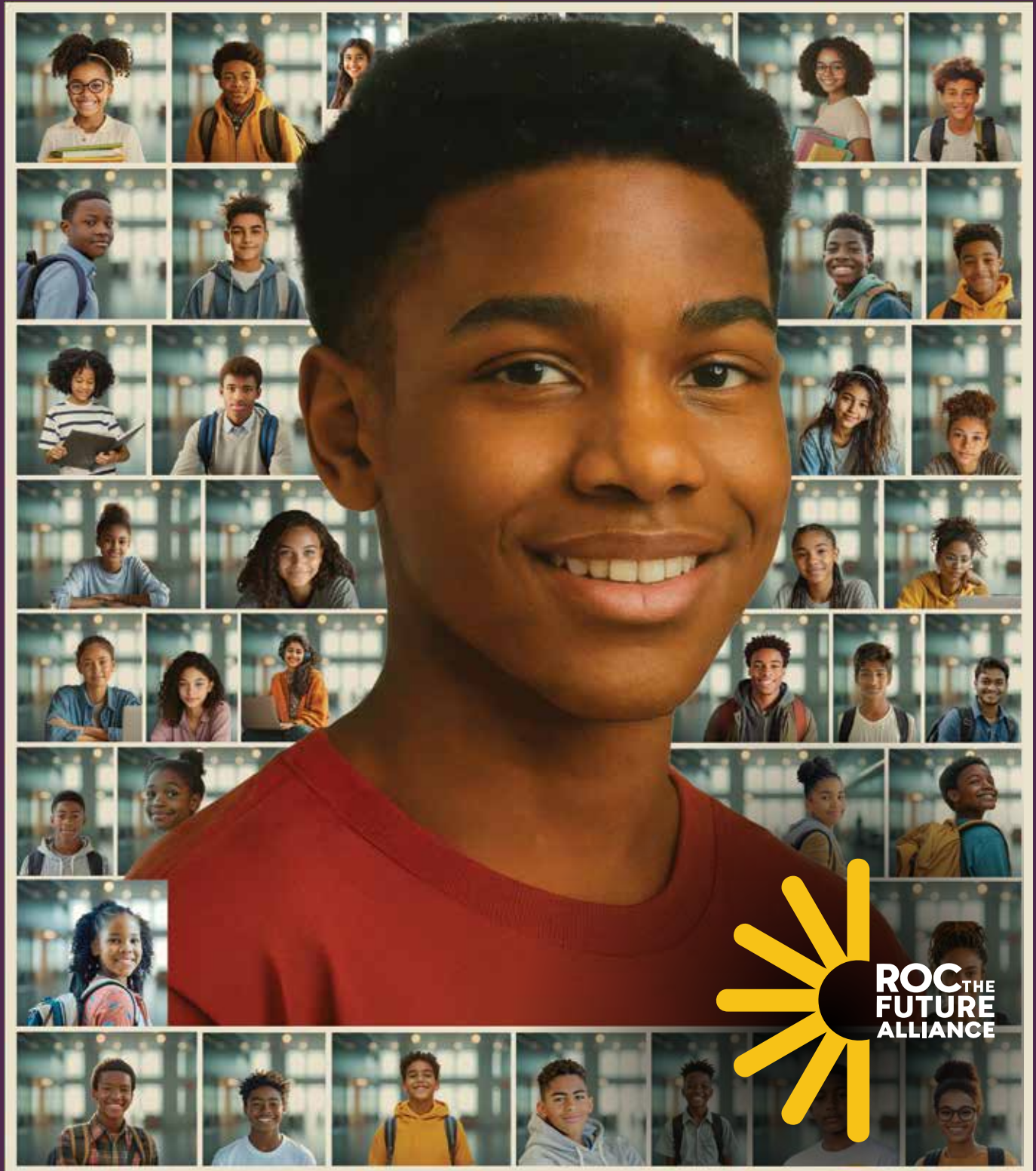




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WELCOME



Brian Lewis
Executive Director
ROC the Future Alliance



Dr. LeKeyah Wilson
Board Chair
ROC the Future Alliance

To the 13th Annual State of Our Children Address & Report Card Release

As we gather for this year's State of Our Children Address, we do so in the midst of extremely challenging circumstances that deeply affect our families, our educators, and our entire community. We are confronting unprecedented federal disinvestment and navigating the fear and uncertainty brought on by concerning national trends — including an increase in ICE raids that have left many Rochesterians afraid to attend school or even leave their homes. We are also enduring the longest government shutdown in our nation's history, adding further instability for those already facing hardship.

And yet, in the face of these intractable challenges, Rochester continues to rise. We continue to show up — for our scholars, for our families, and for one another. The theme of “Scholar by Scholar” and the stories of resilience, progress, and possibility that we share in this report card reflect our unwavering commitment to collective care, to equity, and to cradle-to-career success for every child in our community.

We are excited to announce “Scholar by Scholar” as the theme for our 13th Annual State of Our Children Address. This theme reflects our commitment to position 11,396 youth toward success from cradle to career, one student at a time.

We are implementing the Success Planning strategy, developed by The EdRedesign Lab at Harvard Graduate

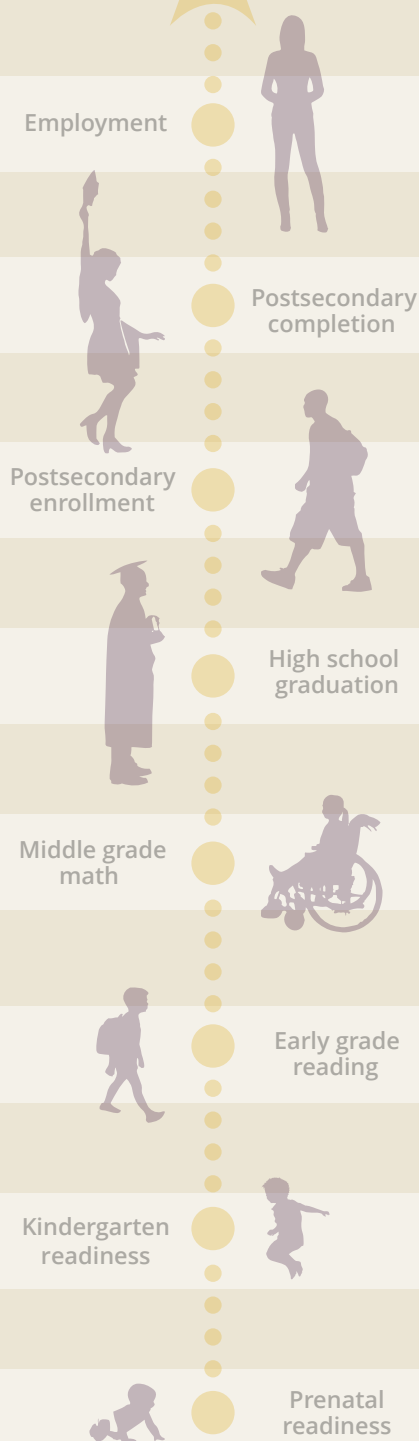
School of Education, made up of ROC the Future Alliance and other cross-sector changemakers across the nation. Through this initiative, ROC the Future Alliance is connecting youth with adult Navigators. These Navigators collaborate with families and other caring adults to create personalized action plans that identify a child's needs and strengths, provide necessary supports and enrichments, and remove barriers to help them thrive and achieve their goals. In conjunction with our “Know Your Number” campaign, we will quantify our collective impact as we work toward our “Scholar by Scholar” objective.

Our years of experience leading place-based, cross-sector collaborative efforts have shown us that everyone — teachers, nurses, doctors, parents, advocates, and system leaders — plays a vital role in realizing our shared vision: that every child in Rochester is school-ready, supported, and successful throughout their journey from cradle to career. This year's theme emphasizes the powerful impact of peer-to-peer outreach. We achieve this through parent cafés, fostering positive school culture and climate, and building strong connections by investing in our Parent Engagement Collaborative Network and Youth Leadership Coalition. By integrating our collaborative efforts and strategically aligning best practices and resources, we aim to position more than 11,000 youth on a path to upward mobility.

This report is an illustrative reflection, not an exhaustive list, of our collaborative efforts to position every child in Rochester on a path to academic success.
rocthefuture.org/#data-dashboard

CRADLE-TO-CAREER OUTCOMES

UPWARD MOBILITY



Meet The Executive Officers



Dr. LeKeyah Wilson
Chair

Vice President of Community
Engagement and Social Impact
Rochester Regional Health



Dr. Lorna Washington
Vice-Chair

Executive Director William
& Sheila Konar Foundation



Dr. Shirley Green
Treasurer

Commissioner of Recreation &
Human Services City of Rochester



Dina Faticone
Secretary

Chief Program Officer
Common Ground Health

Whole Child Initiative Co-Chairs



Jasmin Vega
Parent/Family Partner



Dr. Lynn M. Lubecki
Assistant Professor
of Educational Studies,
Empire State University



Dr. Eva Thomas
RCSD Executive Director
of Early Childhood Education

High School Graduation Outcomes Team Co-Chairs



Marlene Blocker
Chief of Innovation
& School Reform
Rochester City School District



Shawanda Evans
Director of Pre-Collegiate
Programs and Dual-Enrollment
Monroe Community College

Parent Engagement Collaborative Action Network Co-Chair



Janice Kpor
Parent/Family Partner

Youth Leadership Coalition Co-chairs

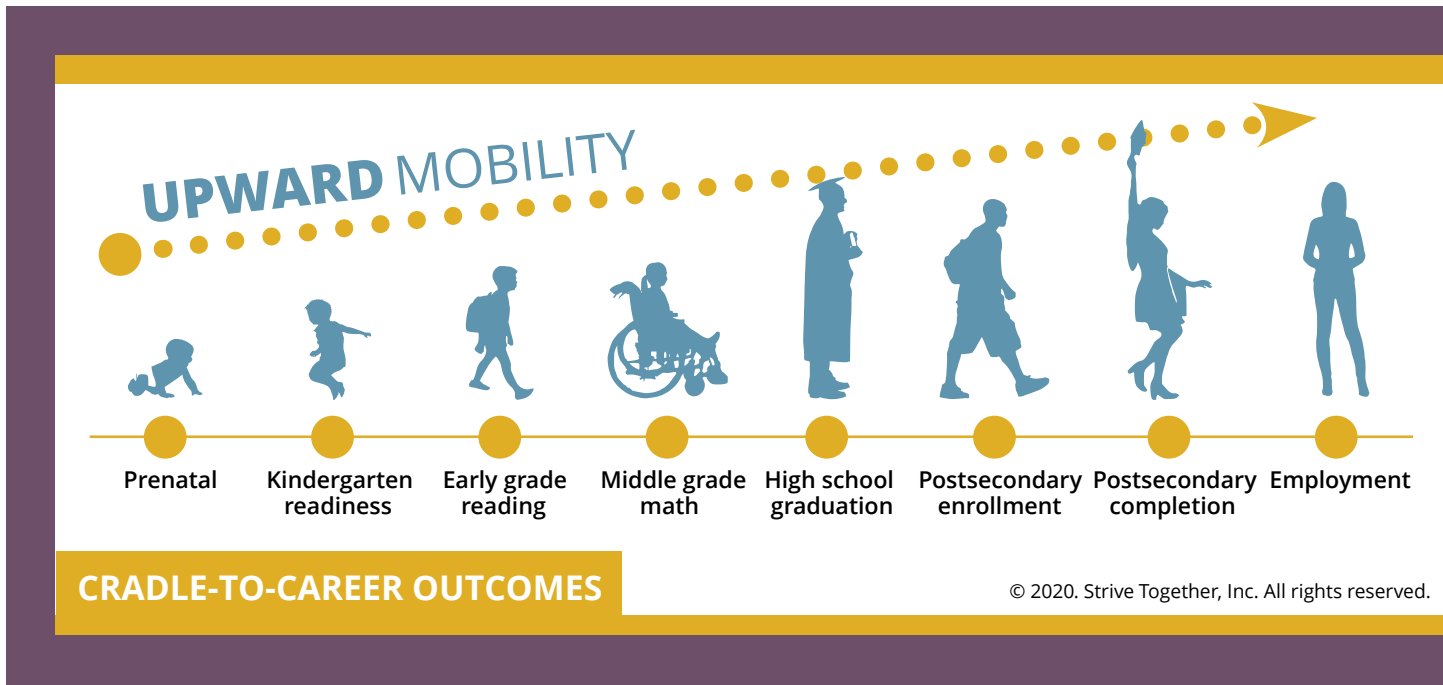


Cayden Bharath
Youth Leader



SahNye Prather
Youth Leader

KEY RESULT AREAS FOR COLLECTIVE IMPACT



ROC the Future Alliance's strategic framework is built on five Key Results Areas (KRAs) that give our workgroups and alliance members tangible goals to aim for. Here is a summary of our KRAs for the 2025 – 2027 timeframe.

KINDERGARTEN READINESS

2337 kindergarten-age children living in the City of Rochester will be kindergarten ready by September 2027, a 45% increase (or 720 additional) from the 2023 baseline.

EARLY GRADE READING PROFICIENCY

711 third graders living in the City of Rochester will achieve target reading proficiency by September 2027, a 65% increase (or 299 additional) from the 2023 baseline.

MIDDLE GRADE MATH PROFICIENCY

511 eighth graders living in the City of Rochester will achieve target math proficiency by September 2027, a 40% increase (or 145 additional) from the 2023 baseline.

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION

1583 twelfth graders living in the City of Rochester will graduate by June 2027, a 10% increase (or 138 additional) from the 2023 baseline.

POWERFUL PARENTS & YOUTH PARTNERSHIP

Parent and youth power is visible and leveraged to achieve improved outcomes for students. Child-serving systems recognize parents as central in the success of their work.



KNOW YOUR NUMBER

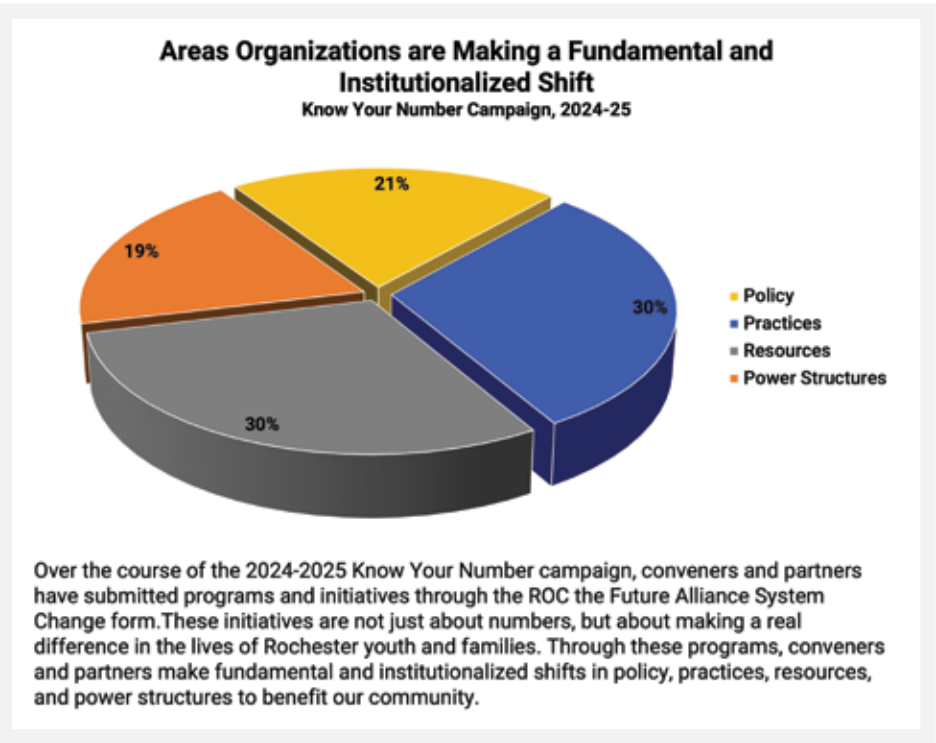
Overview

Making systems-level change requires a coordinated team effort, so the more specific we are when establishing goals, the better equipped we'll be to improve cradle to career outcomes. ROC the Future Alliance launched the **"Know Your Number" (KYN)** campaign to address this need. Since kicking off the campaign in 2024, RTFA has asked alliance members one central question:

"How are you making fundamental, institutionalized shifts in the areas of policy, practices, resources, or power structures to benefit Rochester youth and families?"

Key Highlights

Progress Towards 11,396



Inside the Numbers

Currently, 35,000 young people in Rochester are not on a path to upward mobility. If no action is taken, this number is expected to increase by 2030. The idea behind the Know Your Number campaign is that alliance members are well-positioned to help put nearly a third of these youth (11,396) on a path to upward mobility by 2030. When every alliance member identifies their contribution to "the number" (e.g., how many of the 11,396 youth can each member commit to placing on a path to upward mobility, as defined in our Key Results Areas), our collective goal becomes much clearer and more achievable.



EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

EPK & UPK Enrollment (city-wide)

A Strong Start to Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education lays the foundation for a child's academic advancement, social development, and future success. When a child enters pre-kindergarten, they become part of a learning community that nurtures social-emotional skills and individual growth.

Since 1993, Generations Child Care has been dedicated to providing a nurturing and stimulating environment where children from infancy to preschool can learn and grow through play. They offer both full-time and part-time care, along with enrichment programs. They also serve as a vital community-based site for the Rochester City School District.

At the start of the 2025-2026 school year, all of Generations' EPK and UPK classrooms were full. There were 16 RCSD students enrolled in EPK (the three-year-old classroom) and 18 RCSD students enrolled in UPK (four-year-old classroom). All of the UPK enrollees rolled over from EPK last year.

Each year, Generations conducts a series of assessments to measure kindergarten readiness, including Common Core assessments three times per year, the Brigance Inventory of Early Development, and the Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ). "We work hand in hand with the school district to keep everybody on the same page," says Theresa Smith, Director of Generations Child Care. "We're learning through play and real-life activities and helping the children problem solve so that when they become kindergartners, they have the foundation to figure things out on their own as well as those crucial social emotional skills."

Meet Jenesah, a bright four-year-old whose mother, Sherica Ross-Nickel, is a parent/family partner with RTFA's Parent Engagement Collaborative Action Network (PECAN). She enrolled her daughter in Generations in September 2024 when she was three years old. At the time, Jenesah



faced some challenges with speech development. However, thanks to the dedicated educators and the imaginative curriculum at Generations, Jenesah has made remarkable progress in her communication skills in just one school year. Beyond her speech improvement, she has also blossomed socially, learning to recite the alphabet, count, identify numerous colors, and even spell her name.

Sherica is delighted with Jenesah's experience, stating, "I feel very welcomed at Generations. The teachers are easy to reach, and the communication is incredibly convenient with their app. I appreciate being able to check my daughter in with a QR code each day and easily access the building."

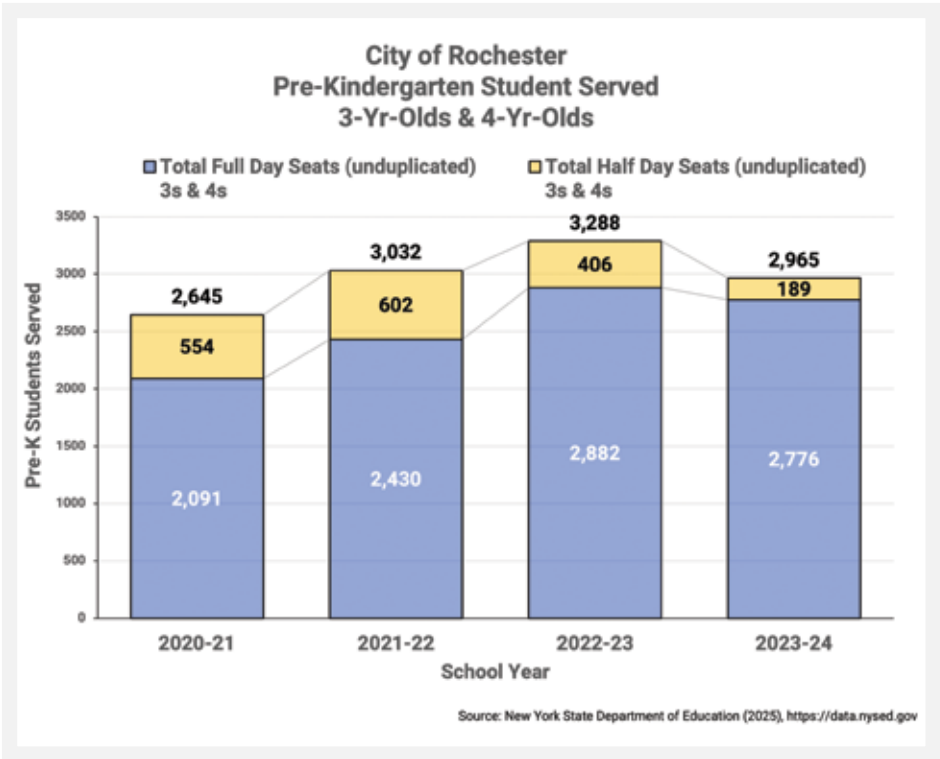
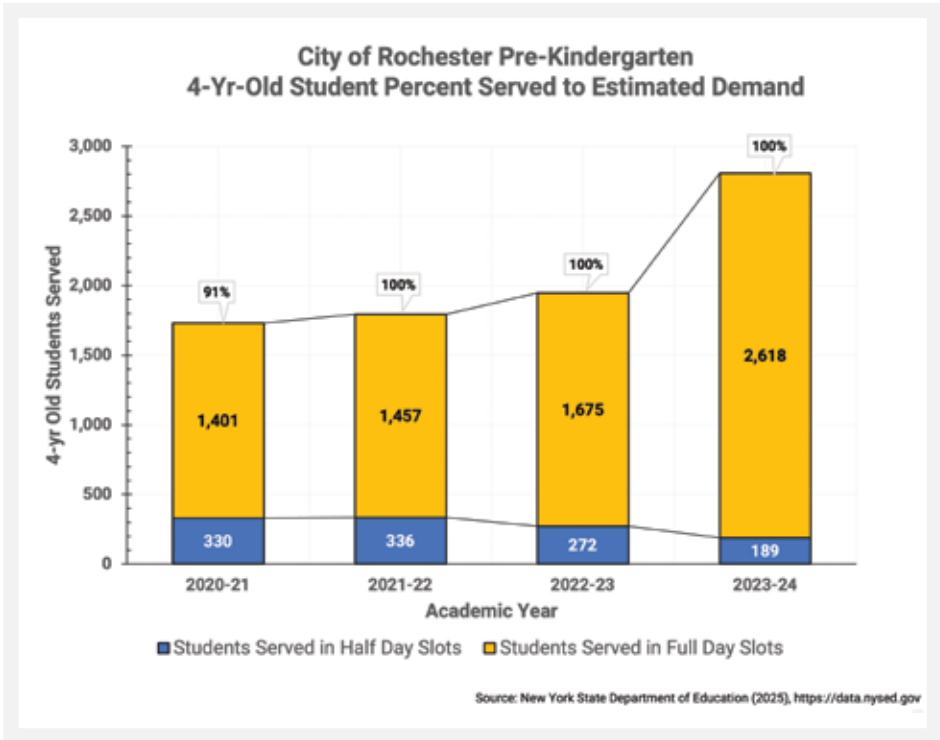


*Meet
Jenesah*

Looking ahead, Sherica intends to keep Jenesah in Generations's Pre-K program and is enthusiastic about her upcoming enrollment in their UPK program. Generations also supports parents in their child's learning journey by providing quarterly learning kits filled with books, letters, numbers, and sensory materials, all designed to ensure that children are well-prepared for kindergarten.



Currently, more than 2700 students are enrolled in early childhood programs through the RCSD and community-based sites like Generations Child Care.



ROC the Future Alliance Early Childhood Systems Mapping

The systems map report aims to provide a holistic view of the early childhood system in Rochester and Monroe County, including dashboards of key data and profiles of the major programs serving children and families from the prenatal period to age five.

HIGHLIGHTED RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The systems mapping process surfaced several urgent priorities that will strengthen Rochester and Monroe County's early childhood ecosystem and improve outcomes for children and families:

1. STRENGTHEN AND STABILIZE THE EARLY CHILDHOOD WORKFORCE

Across childcare, early intervention, and home visiting, the workforce is experiencing a crisis marked by low compensation, limited benefits, and challenging working conditions. These challenges fuel long waitlists, staffing instability, and reduced service quality. Increasing wages, providing benefits, and expanding paid professional development and career pathways—particularly for a diverse and bilingual workforce—are essential.

2. ADVANCE MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH EQUITY

Significant racial disparities persist in perinatal and infant health outcomes, especially for Black women. These inequities are driven by structural racism, economic barriers, implicit bias in healthcare, and chronic stress. Targeted investments and system reforms are needed to improve maternal health, reduce disparities, and support healthier outcomes for infants.

3. REDUCE EARLY INTERVENTION AND SPECIAL EDUCATION WAITLISTS

Families reported long delays in accessing early intervention and preschool special education services—delays driven by underfunding and a shortage of qualified providers. Advocacy with partners such as The Children's Agenda is critical to ensure the State of New York meets its responsibility to young children with disabilities.

4. IMPROVE ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND HEALTHY FOOD

Despite a strong countywide food security index, Rochester's high-poverty neighborhoods remain far from grocery stores and lack reliable transportation. Supporting ongoing community efforts to improve access to healthy food and stable, quality housing will reduce family economic stress and support better child outcomes.

5. EXPAND INFANT AND TODDLER CHILDCARE AVAILABILITY

While pre-K capacity is sufficient, there is a dramatic shortage of infant-toddler slots—largely due to the high cost of care and staffing ratios. Families consistently cited affordability as a barrier

HOW THE SYSTEMS MAP WAS DEVELOPED

The systems map is the product of deep collaboration between parents, caregivers, community-based organizations, and system leaders. Parents played a central role—sharing their lived experiences, identifying pain points, and shaping priorities to ensure the map reflects what families truly need and value. System partners contributed

operational knowledge and helped identify where structures, policies, and funding streams intersect—or collide.

The process was supported by pro bono technical assistance from Start Early, whose team facilitated workshops, synthesized feedback, and guided the mapping methodology. This work was made possible through generous funding from ESL, the Farash Foundation, Wegmans, Education Success Foundation, the William and Sheila Konar Foundation, and the Sands Family Foundation.

Together, these partners created a shared vision and a practical tool that highlights both barriers and opportunities—setting the stage for coordinated action to improve outcomes for young children and the families who support them every day.

Please read ROC the Future Alliance's Early Childhood Systems Report for a holistic view of the early childhood system in Rochester and Monroe County, including dashboards of key data and profiles of the major programs serving children and families from the prenatal period to age five.



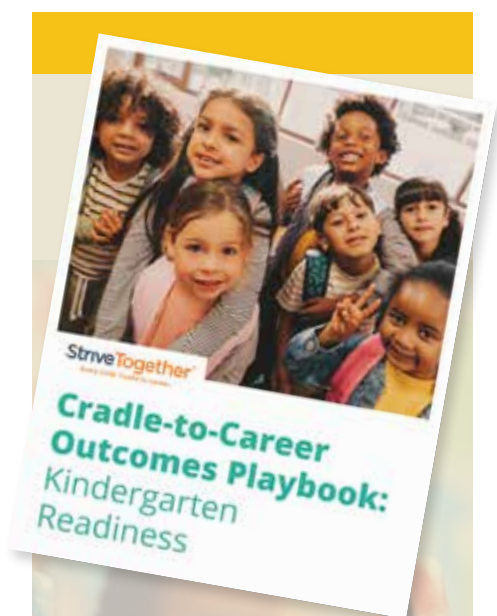
Scan for full
Systems Map
report

A PARENT, A PROVIDER, A LEADER:

*The SummerLEAP
Journey of
Tenecia D. Dudley*



Tenecia Dudley

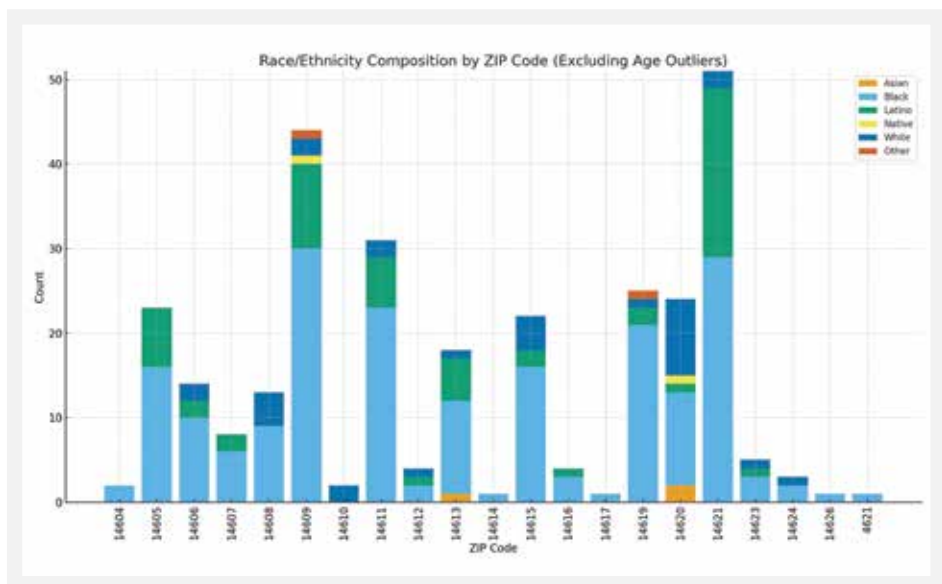


PLEASE USE
STRIVETOGETHER'S

[Cradle-to-Career Playbook for
Kindergarten Readiness](#)



**BUILD STRONG FOUNDATIONS FOR
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION.**



FROM PARENT TO PARTNER

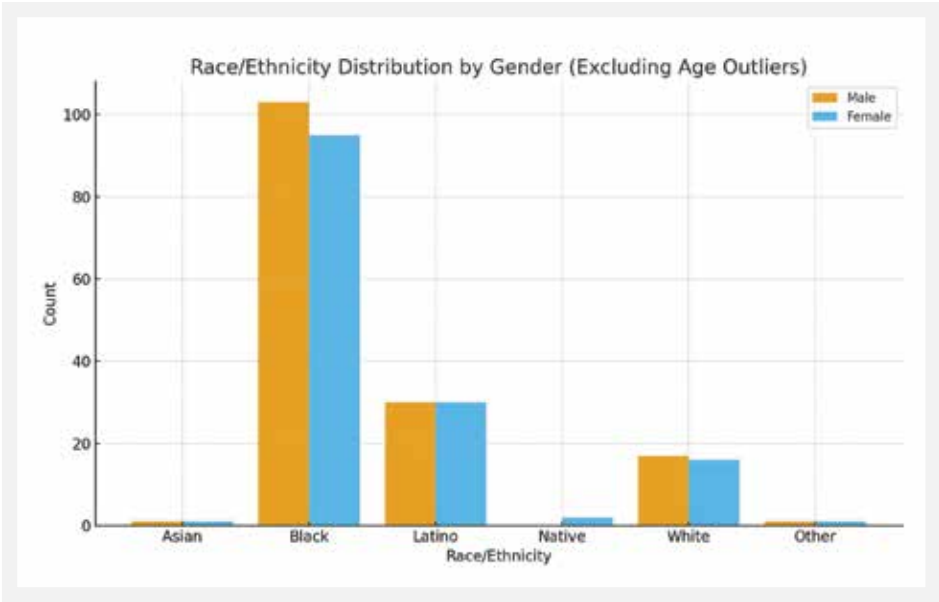
Tenecia Dudley's connection to SummerLEAP began long before she became the Director of Little Hearts Child Care Center. Her children participated in the program, and she experienced firsthand the difference it made in their lives. "I saw my kids grow more confident, curious, and ready for school," she reflects. "They came home excited about learning, and I knew this program was something special."

Inspired by that personal experience, Tenecia approached SummerLEAP about becoming a provider herself. Her motivation was simple but powerful: to bring the same opportunities and life-changing growth she saw in her own children to other families in the Rochester community.

A CENTER'S TRANSFORMATION

When Tenecia took over leadership at Little Hearts Child Care two years ago, she inherited a small center with big potential. Partnering with SummerLEAP became a turning point. Through the program, Little Hearts introduced hands-on science exploration, daily social-emotional learning practices, and enrichment opportunities many children would not otherwise have.

The results were immediate. Children showed progress in letter recognition, early writing skills, and emotional awareness. Parents noticed the changes as well, reporting that their children came home more confident, eager to share what they learned, and proud of their growth.



The Greater Rochester Summer Learning Association helps ensure that low-income children in the Greater Rochester area have access to high-quality summer learning opportunities to help them succeed in school and in life.



Kindergarten Readiness 2023-2024 School Year

All Rochester City Students	K-Ready	Current Trend
All Students	45.0%	→
All African American/Black Students	42.9%	↓
All Hispanic or Latino Students	44.3%	↑
All White Students	50.4%	↑
All Female Students	48.9%	↑
All Male Students	40.6%	↓

A COMMUNITY IMPACT

For families in the Maplewood neighborhood, SummerLEAP at Little Hearts has become more than a program; it's a bridge to equity. In a community where many children might otherwise spend summers with limited educational engagement, Tenecia ensures that learning doesn't stop when the school year ends.

Her commitment extends beyond academics. "I want every child here to know they can be whatever they want, as long as they try," she says. By fostering curiosity, resilience, and self-belief, Tenecia and her team are helping children carry forward lessons that last well beyond the classroom.



Tariq Smith

Greater Rochester Summer Learning Association

EARLY GRADE LITERACY(3rd Grade)

NYSED 3rd Grade English Language Arts proficiency



Clianda Florence

Let's Get L.I.T. and EDceptional Partner to Promote Early Grade Literacy

Let's Get L.I.T. is a literacy-based organization that aids families, individuals, and community members by equipping them with tools and resources that will impact their lives for generations. L.I.T. stands for "liberating individuals through literary text."

"No matter where you are, no matter what your socioeconomic background, literacy is the great equalizer," says Let's Get L.I.T. Founder and CEO Clianda Florence. According to a 2023 report published by The Education Trust-New York, district-level data showed that third grade ELA proficiency rates were 11% in the city of Rochester compared to 75% in Pittsford. "Rochester and Pittsford are not even an hour away from each other," says Florence. "To have this type of disparity is alarming."

Last year, Let's Get L.I.T. formed a partnership with EDceptional, a ROC the Future Alliance convener, to bridge the gap between in-school and out-of-school learning and empower parents and children in our community to thrive. "We are in a state of emergency," explains Florence. "There's a connection between dropout rate and poverty, and it ripples from early grade literacy out into so many other facets of life. I truly believe that literacy is the greatest social justice issue of our generation."



Let's Get L.I.T. and EDceptional are working to shift parents' mindsets so they understand that learning doesn't begin and end at the classroom door. An important part of this process is affirming that parents are their children's first teacher, then equipping students and their parents with valuable resources and strategies for continued learning at home.

During the 2025 Summer Family Literacy Program, Let's Get L.I.T. conducted a weekly survey to understand how often parents read with their children at home. The average

time was 15 minutes per week—not enough to make a meaningful impact on early grade literacy. Survey responses also revealed a lack of financial investment in learning.

Nearly all participants spent significantly more on video games and Air Jordans than books for their kids.



In 2025, Let's Get L.I.T. and EDceptional launched a coordinated response to these issues by:

- Hosting town hall meetings to get parents more engaged in their kids' education. Many parents are disengaged from the system because of their own traumatic experiences in school. Having a forum to talk about these experiences is helpful.
- Offering tutoring, not just for children but also for their parents. Many parents don't read with their kids because they struggle with reading themselves.
- Providing educators with tools and resources to inform policy decisions that directly and indirectly impact students, families, teachers, administrators and our communities.
- Announcing a statewide literacy conference in 2026 for educators and parents.



Sebrone Johnson
EDceptional

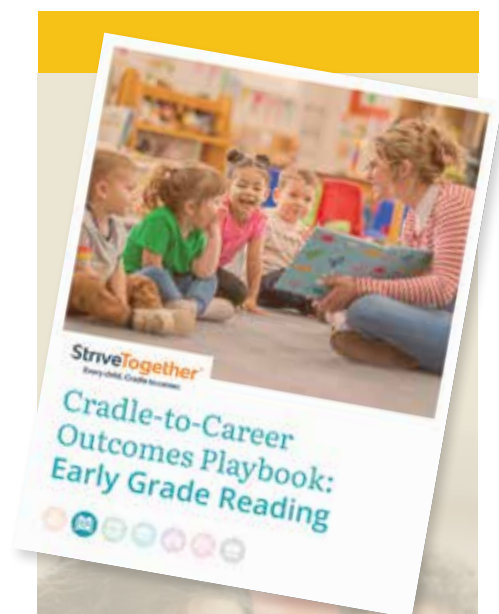


"Literacy is life saving and life changing," says Florence. "We're looking to fortify students and their families with the tools they need to succeed, now and into the future."

Because families are essential to re-imagining the systems in Rochester that serve youth, RTFA parent/family partners worked with the Center for Governmental Research last year to develop a report that examines the impacts of parent café strategies

on early-grade literacy. The report highlights change in early literacy systems and how parent cafés create safe spaces where families can share, learn, and grow together.

Read the executive summary here - <https://rocthefuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/WCI-Evaluation-Report-Executive-Summary-A-Community-Based-Participatory-Evaluation-of-Systems-Change.pdf>



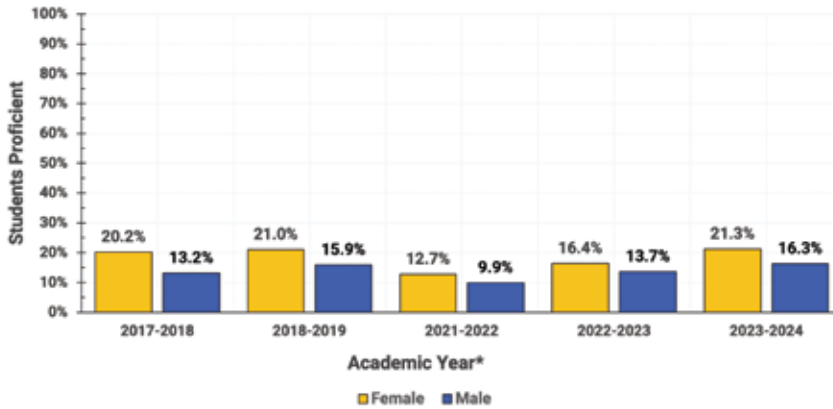
**PLEASE USE
STRIVETOGETHER'S
Cradle-to-Career Playbook for
Early Grade Reading**



**HELP STUDENTS ACHIEVE THIRD
GRADE LITERACY GOALS.**



Third Grade English Language Arts Proficiency All Students by Gender



* SY2019-2020 & SY2020-2021 have been determined to be invalid due to abnormal number of students not tested during COVID-19 pandemic

Source: New York State Department of Education (2023), <https://data.nysed.gov>



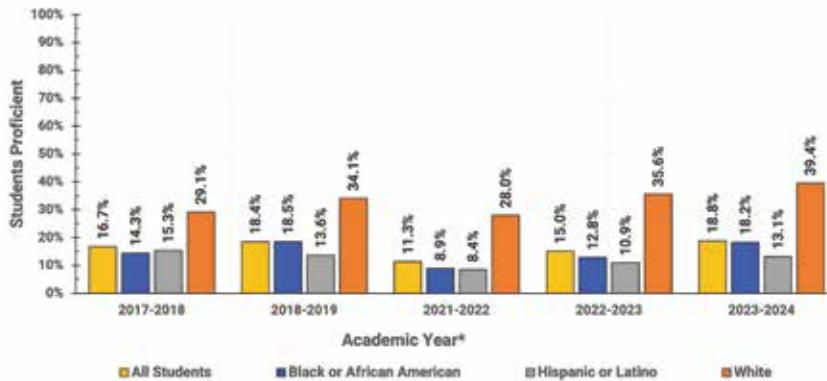
A Community-Based Participatory Evaluation of System Change

Examining the Impacts of Early
Literacy and Parent Café Strategies

Advocacy Impact

83% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Parent Cafés helped them become better advocates for their families.

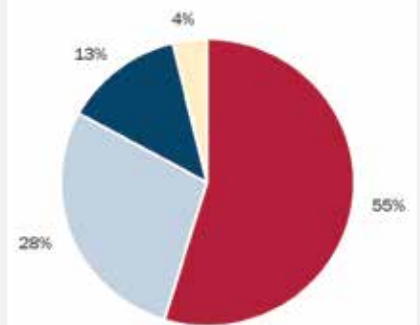
Third Grade English Language Arts Proficiency All Students by Race & Ethnicity



* SY2019-2020 & SY2020-2021 have been determined to be invalid due to abnormal number of students not tested during COVID-19 pandemic

Source: New York State Department of Education (2023), <https://data.nysed.gov>

My involvement with Parent Cafés helped me to better advocate for my family.



Strongly Agree
Agree
Neutral
Disagree



**Parent Family
Power**



**Whole
Child
Initiative**



SECONDARY SUCCESS

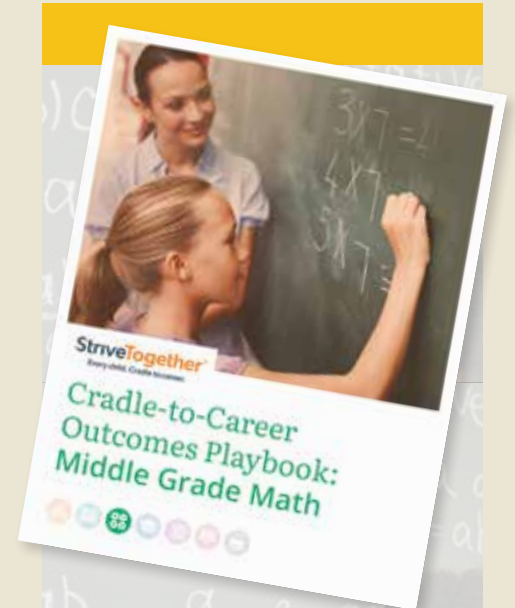
Middle Grade Math

REF's "Smile" Program and RCSD Engage the Community to Deliver Successful Math Tutoring Program

Last summer, the RCSD Math Department partnered with RIT students, community volunteers, and the Rochester Education Foundation (REF) to implement a pilot program designed to help elementary and middle school students strengthen their math skills by pairing them with an RIT student math tutor. The tutors worked with more than 100 students at School of the Arts (SOTA), Loretta Johnson Middle School, and Schools 23, 15, and 12 to provide a much-needed boost to learning

outcomes and achievement. Many of the tutors worked alongside Algebra teachers to offer individualized support several days per week.

Feedback from teachers and students has been overwhelmingly positive. Participants benefited from receiving additional classroom math instruction, and RIT tutors also served as mentors and role models to make the experience more impactful for everyone involved.



**PLEASE USE
STRIVETOGETHER'S**

**Cradle-to-Career Playbook for
Middle Grade Math**



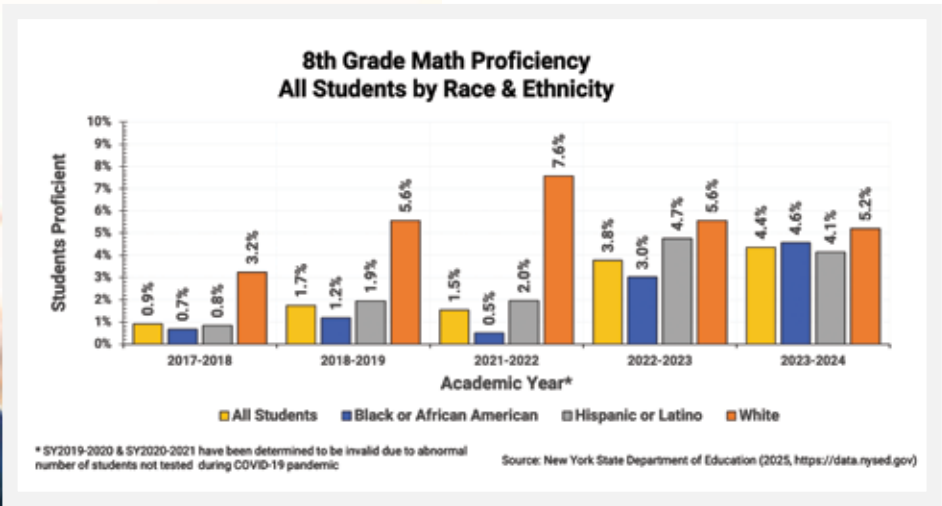
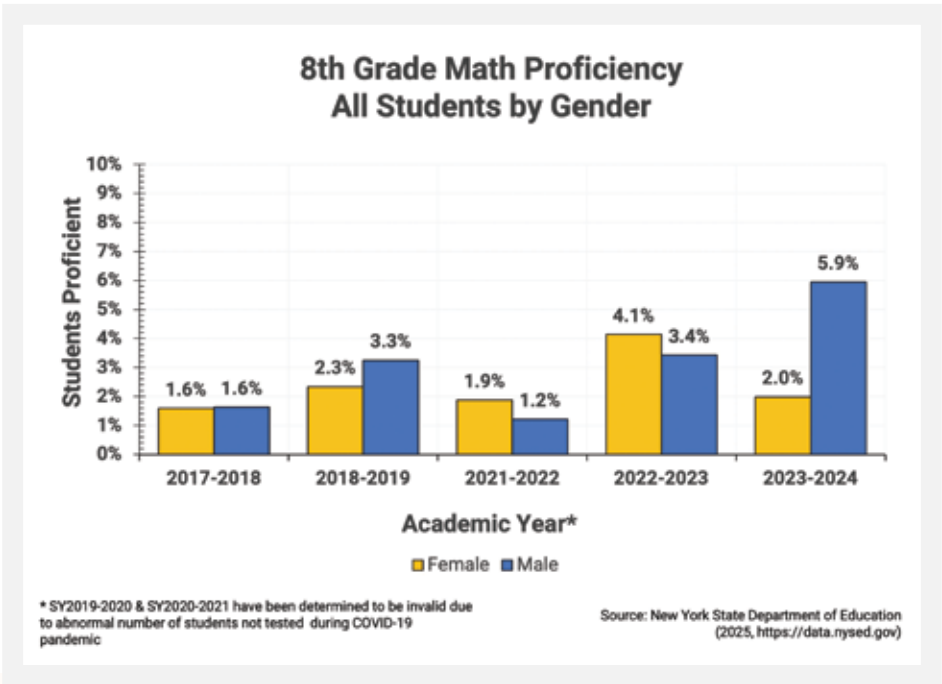
**HELP POSITION HIGH SCHOOL
STUDENTS FOR SUCCESS.**



**PRELIMINARY ALGEBRA 1
REGENTS TEST RESULTS**

Classrooms that participated in tutoring saw encouraging gains in both Algebra 1 Regents “pass” and “proficiency” rates. RCSD has expanded both the elementary and middle school programs for the 2025–26 school year, and they’re looking to grow the pool of adult and college student tutors. The goal is to increase capacity to support more elementary, middle school, and potentially 9th-grade students in the future.

Many thanks to REF’s Smile Program for funding the pilot program and to all the volunteers who made it possible!



High School Graduation

Urban League of Rochester Provides a Host of Learning Experiences to Position High School Students for Success



The Urban League of Rochester celebrated 60 years of collective community impact in 2025. Their strategy for lifting disadvantaged populations out of poverty to achieve upward mobility depends largely on ensuring that children are well-educated and equipped for economic self-reliance. The Urban League's Youth Education & Development programs offer a wide range of innovative and engaging activities to help students and families develop a vision and strategy to achieve this goal, starting with high school graduation.

AFTERSCHOOL ACADEMY

The Afterschool Academy is an academic achievement program that prepares students in grades six through eight for the transition to a successful high school career. Students engage in activities that strengthen their academic, social, and leadership skills and expose them to the community's cultural resources.

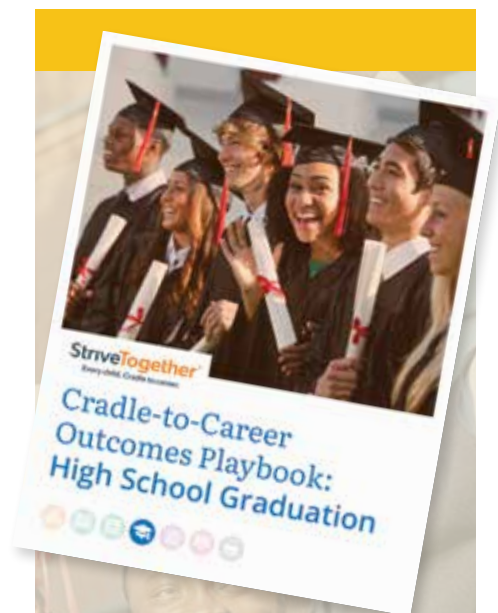
"The work of improving high school graduation rates has to start at a younger age," says staff member for the Urban League of Rochester and a member of RTFA's High School Graduation Outcomes Team.

"Historically, we have put a lot of support in high schools, but sometimes that's too late. Our Afterschool Academy and Summer Enrichment Programs start in middle school to make sure students are exposed to learning opportunities at a younger age and ready for high school."

TUTORING SUPPORT

The Urban League of Rochester provides access to Tutor.com, an online tutoring platform that connects students with qualified tutors for one-on-one assistance. This service allows students to receive personalized help in real-time, addressing specific academic challenges and reinforcing concepts taught in the classroom.

To help prepare for SAT exams, ULR also has a partnership with Princeton Review, which offers structured tutoring sessions and other resources focused on standardized test preparation and



**PLEASE USE
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Cradle-to-Career Playbook for
High School Graduation**



**HELP POSITION HIGH SCHOOL
STUDENTS FOR SUCCESS.**

foundational math skills. The program helps students build confidence and develop effective study habits.

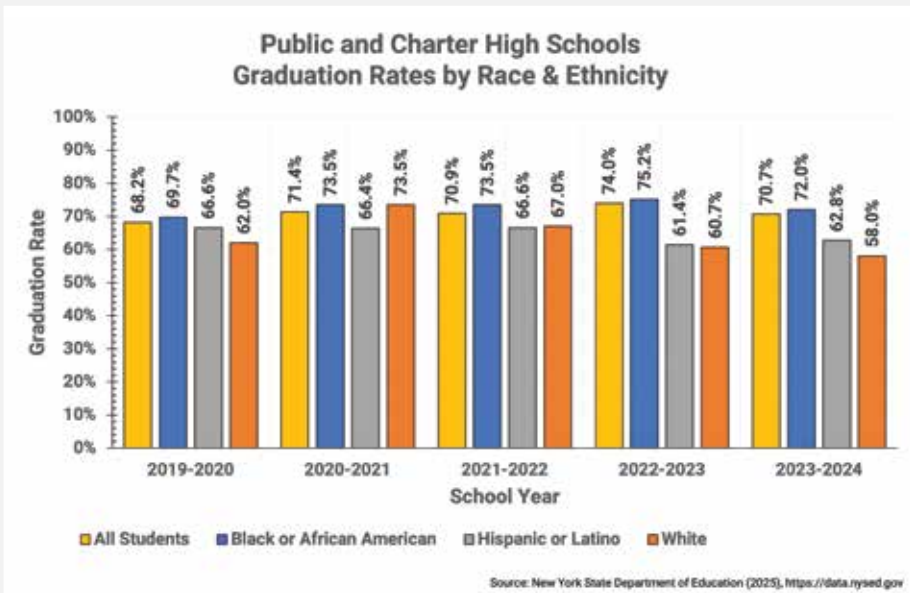
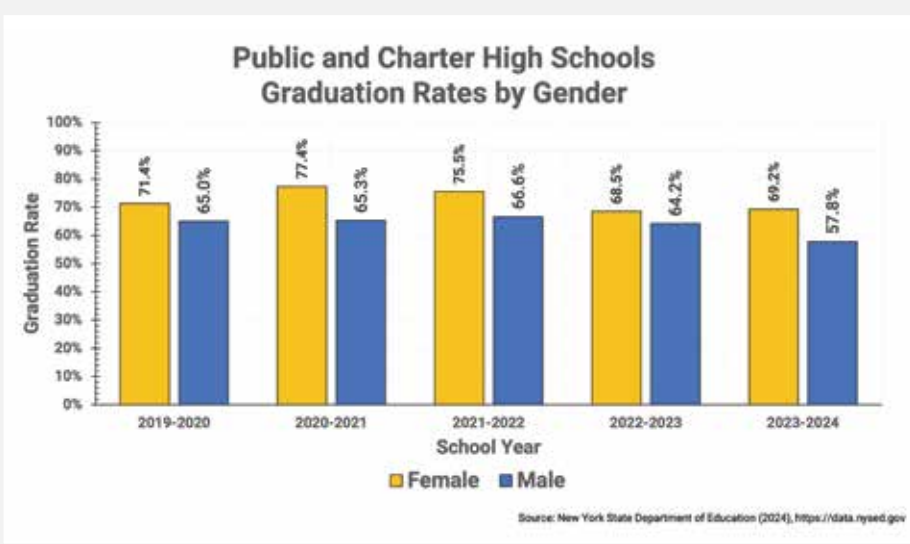
PROJECT READY

Project Ready provides students in grades eight through twelve with the support, guidance, and encouragement needed to prepare them for the future. Students engage in an evidence-based curriculum that prepares them academically, socially, and culturally for college and future careers.

“Project Ready places a lot of young people with mentors,” explains staff member. “Most successful people had a mentor somewhere in life that they looked up to and aspired to be like, so that’s an important component of our Project Ready program.”

We are grateful for The Urban League of Rochester’s tireless commitment to support students throughout high school and prepare them for a lifetime of success.

Please use StriveTogether’s Cradle-to-Career Playbook for High School Graduation to help position high school students for success.



POST-SECONDARY ATTAINMENT

Post-Secondary Enrollment

SUNY Brockport's Focus: Reducing Barriers to Admission Helps Attract Largest First-Year Class in Nearly 50 Years

While some colleges and universities in New York State have seen lower enrollment in recent years, SUNY Brockport's enrollment has increased more than 20% since 2022. Last fall, Brockport welcomed more than 2,000 new undergraduates to campus—the largest first-year class in nearly 50 years.


SUNY Brockport's recruitment efforts in the city of Rochester are paying off. They've increased the number of **applicants among Rochester City School District students by 62%** over the past three years. Over the same three-year period, **RCSD admissions increased by 47%**.

"We're excited to report these metrics out," says Robert Wyant, Director of Undergraduate Admissions for SUNY Brockport. "It's a hard needle to move. It starts with getting students comfortable with applying and getting them to come out and see the campus."

Behind the scenes, SUNY Brockport's admissions team is intentional about making education accessible, which starts with making it affordable for all families. One way Brockport addresses affordability is by offering an aggressive scholarship program that rewards students based on their high school GPA. It's also free to apply to SUNY Brockport from September 15 through




Postsecondary Enrollment - All Rochester City Graduating Seniors																							
Year	Subgroup	Graduates	NYS Public						NYS Private						Out-of-State						Total		Trend
			2-year		4-year		Combined		≤ 2- year		4-year		Combined		≤ 2- year		4-year		Combined				
			#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	
2024	All Students	1,628	320	19.7%	81	5.0%	401	24.6%	0	0%	123	7.6%	123	7.6%	6	0.4%	50	3.1%	56	3.4%	580	35.6%	⬆️
2024	Female	820	183	22.3%	42	5.1%	225	27.4%	0	0%	78	9.5%	78	9.5%	1	0.1%	20	2.4%	21	2.6%	324	39.5%	⬆️
2024	Male	805	34	4.2%	13	1.6%	47	5.8%	0	0%	10	1.2%	10	1.2%	1	0.1%	12	1.5%	13	1.6%	70	8.7%	⬇️
2024	Black or African American	971	215	22.1%	50	5.1%	265	27.3%	0	0%	77	7.9%	77	7.9%	1	0.1%	31	3.2%	32	3.3%	374	38.5%	⬆️
2024	Hispanic or Latino	470	66	14.0%	12	2.6%	78	16.6%	0	0%	25	5.3%	25	5.3%	5	1.1%	13	2.8%	18	3.8%	121	25.7%	➡️
2024	White	120	18	15.0%	15	12.5%	33	27.5%	0	0%	10	8.3%	10	8.3%	0	0.0%	2	1.7%	2	1.7%	45	37.5%	⬇️



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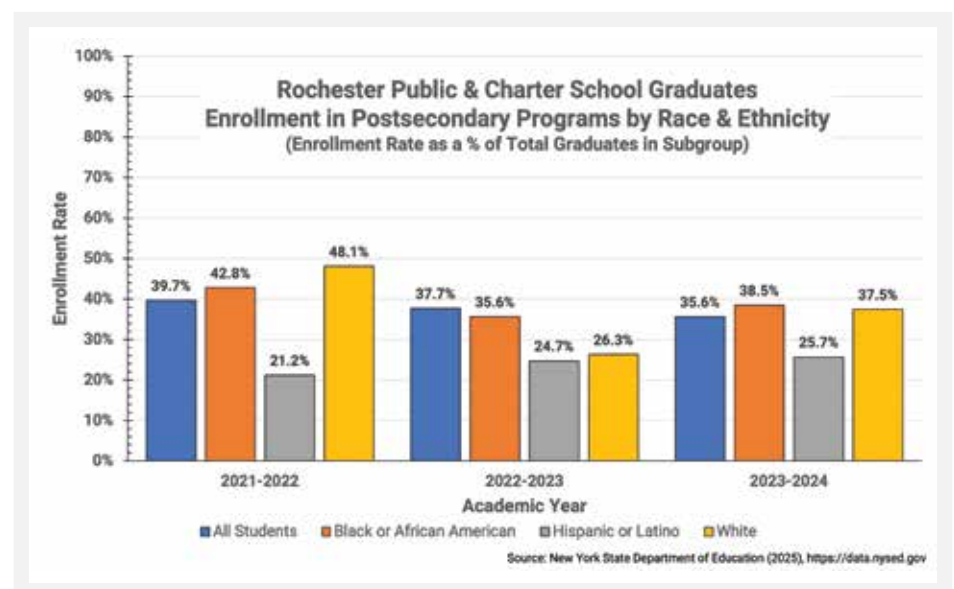
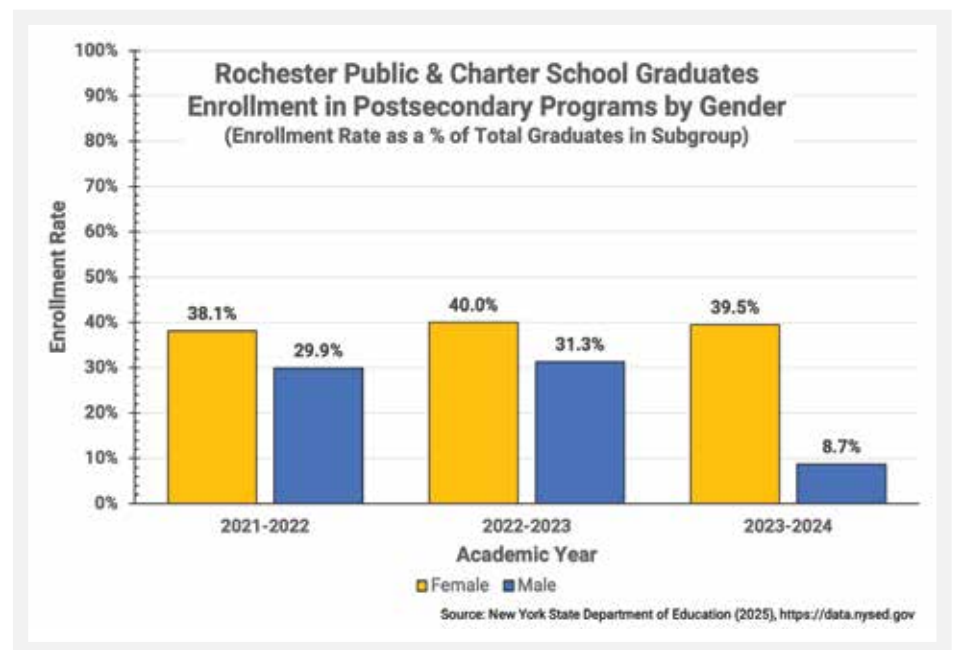
**STRATEGIES TO MAKE HIGHER
EDUCATION MORE ACCESSIBLE TO
ALL STUDENTS.**

the end of October. Many colleges and universities charge a \$50 application fee. Eliminating this barrier helps make the application process more affordable. "If you're applying to seven or eight schools, that adds up," explains Wyant. "That's a lot of money to spend before even committing to a school."

High school visits and instant decision days are another key pillar of the strategy. Students can meet with an advisor from the admissions department in September. If they bring their high school transcript, SUNY Brockport can give them an admission decision

on the spot. This allows students to have a face-to-face conversation with a college admissions representative, and potentially be admitted to college, without ever needing to leave their high school.

"It's all about reducing barriers and making it as easy as possible to navigate what can be a complicated process," says Wyant. "My philosophy is to reduce these barriers as much as we can."



Post-secondary completion

Kool Nerd Connect Links Diverse Students with In-Demand Careers

Kool Nerd Connect is a career education company that connects students from underserved communities to in-demand careers.

As many employers struggle to find workers, Kool Nerd Connect (KNC) engages with middle and high school students from the city of Rochester to increase awareness about jobs that pay well and can lead to long-term employment. By increasing awareness and interest in these opportunities, KNC aims to help students launch high-quality careers in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics [STEM].

“A lot of our kids don't know about jobs and careers that they can be getting ready for, whether that's by earning a certificate, a two-year or four-year degree, a masters, or a doctorate,” says Kool Nerd Connect Founder Orane Barrett. “We compliment the school's guidance counselors by creating content and material that will get students excited about careers and jobs at an early stage. We want our kids thinking about these jobs, talking about them, wanting to pursue them, and adjusting their education so they're ready to enter the workforce in the future.”

KOOL NERD CONNECT

CONNECTING STUDENTS TO CAREERS

ADDRESSING THE WORKFORCE TALENT GAP IN HEALTHCARE

KNC engaged with 368 RCSD students for healthcare career awareness classes in the 2024-2025 school year. 55 of these students visited Highland Hospital to learn about careers in healthcare, and 12 high-potential candidates attended KNC's healthcare summer camp to learn about the “soft skills” required in healthcare and get some hands-on experience. Students were most interested in pursuing careers in nursing, emergency medical services, clinical lab sciences, and mental health therapy—all high-demand careers.

The partnership with Highland Hospital and other providers such as American Medical Response (AMR), the primary 911 and emergency medical services (EMS) provider for Rochester, is part of KNC's strategy to turn students into career-focused professionals.



"What's great about working with Kool Nerd Connect is that they are career focused," says Eric Aforismo, Sr. Human Resources & Recruitment Manager for Highland Hospital. "A lot of groups want to help kids find work in low-paying hourly positions, but that's not changing socioeconomic status; it's not changing our community. We are teaching students that hospitals are more than just scary places—they represent thriving economic futures for young people and our city."



It's a great option for students who want to enter the workforce right after high school and for those who plan on going to college, whether they plan to make emergency medical services their career or not. "We have dozens of EMTs who started their careers with AMR and have gone on to be police officers, nurses, physicians assistants, and doctors," says Aponte. "We're willing to engage with anyone and meet them where they are."

Highland Hospital allowed students to tour departments such as medical imaging (e.g., X-rays, ultrasounds, CTs), respiratory therapy, clinical labs, radiology, and nursing to meet young professionals who are working in these careers.

AMR recently launched a similar program. They're partnering with KNC to build their workforce pipeline by recruiting people to work in the communities where they live. "Mistakes in the field can happen due to language and other communication barriers," says Luis Aponte, AMR Community Liaison. "Sometimes communication barriers are caused by cultural barriers. Understanding what it's like growing up in certain neighborhoods—especially impoverished communities—can make a huge difference."



AMR offers a 5-month paid training program and covers the cost for staff to pursue further education once they've completed one year of employment. Employees can earn more than \$60,000 per year by their third year.

ADDRESSING THE HOUSING CRISIS IN COLLABORATION WITH PARENTS

Stable Housing: A Link to Academic Success



A secure and stable home environment provides students with the foundation they need to focus, learn, and thrive academically. Currently, **more than 3,024 students in the city of Rochester are without shelter**, a situation that significantly impacts their ability to get the education they deserve.

To address the urgent issue of child homelessness in Rochester, ROC the Future Alliance is partnering with the Rochester Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative (RMAPI), Rochester City School District (RCSD), EDceptional, and Enterprise Community Partners to form the “Housing X Education” team and mobilize additional partners across a variety of sectors.

The extended team includes organizations that work directly with youth and families in housing shelters, while also advocating for policy changes to support housing security for all families. These community-based organizations also assist homeless students in schools, within the wider community, and in partnership

with parents and other community members. “When it comes to housing and education, no one knows the true impact of how homelessness or housing issues can impact education more than a parent who is living out the experience,” says Danielle Jones, a mother of two and member of the Housing X Education team. “I really love how they brought the community to the table to share our lived experience with the systems that we have to work through in order to find housing, and the difficulties of managing those systems.”

The Housing X Education team aims to drastically reduce the number of unhoused students in Rochester and provide crucial support to our most vulnerable and under-resourced youth, enabling them to achieve success from early childhood throughout their careers.

As part of this initiative, the Housing X Education team worked with the Rochester Housing Authority (RHA) to explore opportunities to prioritize families with children when determining

who would receive Housing Choice Vouchers (Formerly Section 8)—a federally funded HUD program that subsidizes the rents of eligible low-income households. Eligible families can live in a qualifying rental unit of their choosing within the RHA jurisdiction. Families typically pay 30 to 40 percent of their monthly income (rent plus utilities), with RHA entering an agreement to pay the landlord the remaining balance.

Inspired and informed by our advocacy, RHA shifted its housing voucher policy by allowing families with children enrolled at RCSD who met the McKinney Vento definition of homelessness to move up the waitlist, as well as all qualifying families with school-aged children under the age of 18. To date, 350 households have been pulled off the waitlist and received a voucher; 25 of these families are currently housed using vouchers they received due to RHA’s new voucher policy.



FORGING A FUTURE WITH OUR YOUTH

Youth Policy Task Force Provides Platform for Young People to Effect Policy Change in Rochester



Rochester was one of three cities (along with Omaha, Nebraska and Dallas, Texas) selected to establish a Youth Policy Task Force by the National Civic League (NCL) in 2024. The one-year program, which ended in June 2025, engaged youth in identifying, prioritizing, and influencing policy changes that affect their daily lives. The 20-member task force was developed through a partnership between the NCL and City of Rochester, with a **\$50,000 grant** provided by the Rochester Area Community Foundation.

Youth Policy Task Force members conducted community outreach to identify youth priorities and hosted a Youth Policy Summit that brought together young people from across the city to engage in conversations about issues that were important to them. The program also provided a system for task force members to give politicians their “stamp of approval” about policies that directly affect youth. And by facilitating town hall meetings and gathering data to develop a youth-focused community

policy strategy, task force members learned how to advocate on behalf of other Rochester youth.

At the end of their one-year term, the Youth Policy Task Force identified poverty, youth homelessness and substance use disorders as key barriers to youth success.

In addition, the task force presented their findings to the Rochester City Council with the following list of priorities and unmet needs:

- Access to training, support, and resources
- Substance use awareness-building and prevention
- Trauma-informed training and crisis response
- Prevention and restorative justice measures
- Accountability and youth-centered implementation

On August 26, 2025, City Council passed a resolution affirming the City's commitment to address poverty, homelessness, and substance abuse, through citywide engagement, as prioritized by the Youth Policy Task Force. Congratulations to the Youth Policy Task Force for seeding youth success by advocating for policy change.

Also in late August, ROC the Future Alliance announced the formation of our new Policy Change Workgroup. Led by parents and youth, and in collaboration with systems partners and local elected officials, we are mobilizing to shift policies, funding, practices, and power structures, all with the goal of improving cradle-to-career outcomes.

City of Rochester Launches Child Savings Account Program



The City of Rochester's Office of Financial Empowerment is launching the city's first universal Children's Savings Account program in 2026. All city of Rochester kindergartners are eligible for the "R-Future Fund" program. The goal is for 1,000 kindergartners to participate in the program for the 2025-2026 school year.

R-Future Fund was developed in partnership with parents and community service organizations, including ROC the Future Alliance. The year-long community design process engaged more than 300 city residents. Every participating child will receive a \$50 seed deposit in a savings account owned by the City of Rochester. Children living in poverty (approximately half of all participants) will receive an additional equity bonus deposit.

From Kindergarten through 12th Grade, youth are eligible to earn incentive deposits by taking actions that improve their educational, emotional, and financial well-being. Parents may also earn deposits in their child's account through a variety of financial empowerment activities. In addition to the program deposits, youth and their families are encouraged to save in their "Future Fund" account, with the goal of saving \$585 over 13 years. Youth can access their funds at high school graduation or after earning their GED.

HOW THE CSA PROGRAM WILL HELP ADDRESS POVERTY FOR CHILDREN IN ROCHESTER

In the City of Rochester, the upward mobility rate is less than 6% in the city's poorest zip codes. More than 40% of Rochester children live in poverty and 98% of Rochester City School District students are considered economically disadvantaged. In a survey of City of Rochester parents, 40% have either not started or don't know how to start saving for their child's future, and 45% don't have at least \$500 saved for an emergency.

Children's Savings Accounts can have a major impact on the educational, emotional and economic outcomes of youth, including increasing college enrollment and high school graduation, improving math and reading scores, reducing maternal depression, and guaranteeing assets for every child entering adulthood, regardless of family income. Children's Savings Accounts have also been found to increase the "college bound" identity of youth and a parent's hope for their child's future.

To learn more, please visit the R-Future Fund page on the City of Rochester website:
<https://www.cityofrochester.gov/departments/office-financial-empowerment/r-future-fund>.



THANK YOU'S

CONVENERS for setting strategic priorities, providing leadership, and elevating educational priorities in the community.

- Action for a Better Community
- Center for Governmental Research
- Children's Institute
- City of Rochester
- Common Ground Health
- Department of Pediatrics at Rochester Regional Health and University of Rochester Medical Center
- East High School
- EDceptional
- ESL Federal Credit Union
- Farash Foundation
- Great Schools for All
- Greater Rochester Health Foundation
- Ibero American Action League
- Monroe Community College
- Monroe County Department of Human Services
- Nazareth University
- New York Charter School Association
- NYS Assembly Member Harry B. Bronson
- NYS Assembly Member Sarah Clark
- READY
- Rochester Area Community Foundation
- Rochester City Council
- Rochester City School Board
- Rochester City School District
- Rochester Education Foundation
- Rochester Educational Opportunity Center
- Rochester Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative
- Rochester Public Library
- St. John Fisher University
- SUNY Brockport
- The Children's Agenda
- TogetherNow
- Urban League of Rochester
- William and Sheila Konar Foundation
- YMCA of Greater Rochester

PARENT/FAMILY PARTNERS

AND YOUTH for stepping up to lead, representing community voices, participating in strategic decision-making, and shaping our future.

- Whole Child Initiative
- PECAN
- Healthi & Equitable Futures Project
- Youth Leadership Coalition

OUTCOME TEAMS AND WORKGROUPS

for leaning in and centering racial equity when identifying factors and root causes, identifying measurable outcomes, measuring impact, and providing recommendations.

- Whole Child Outcome Team
- High School Graduation Outcome Team
- Data Advisory Team
- Funding Committee
- Governance Committee

FUNDERS for investing in systems change and sustainability.

- Ampact AmeriCorps
- ESL Foundation
- Farash Foundation
- Greater Rochester Health Foundation
- William and Sheila Konar Foundation
- Peruvian Project
- Rochester Area Community Foundation
- Sands Foundation
- StriveTogether
- Wegmans Foundation

IF YOU WANT TO GET INVOLVED,
PLEASE CONTACT US AT INFO@ROCTHEFUTURE.ORG

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