EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE IN COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

STUDY OF EDUCATION IN BATTLE CREEK, MICHIGAN

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Researchers have consistently found a relationship between socioeconomic status and academic achievement, demonstrating that youth from low-income backgrounds generally achieve at significantly lower levels than their more advantaged peers (Campbell, Hombo, & Mazzeo, 2000). The educational inequities related to poverty are evident throughout the schooling experience. The relationship between academic achievement and socioeconomic status is noticeable at the start of students’ educational trajectories (Barnett & Lamy, 2013; Lee & Burkam, 2002). Further, data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (U.S. Department of Education, 2013) reveal that low-income students (as measured by eligibility for the National School Lunch Program) score, on average, 24 points lower on 8th grade reading exams than their peers. Moreover, students in schools with high concentrations of poverty score significantly lower on 8th grade reading exams than those from schools with wealthier populations. This pattern is also evident in the Battle Creek region.

Rothstein (2013) notes, however, that low-income itself does not cause low achievement, but rather structures that penalizes students for being low-income create real obstacles to learning and academic achievement. Outside-of-school factors related to poverty can hinder student outcomes (Rothstein, 2004; Phillips, Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov, & Crane, 1998). As a result, people from lower income backgrounds are more likely to experience health issues (e.g., increased likelihood of poor vision, exposure to environmental pollutants, and poor nutrition). This, coupled with limited access to healthcare, leads to a greater likelihood of developing chronic health issues which in turn directly and indirectly hinder academic learning (Basch, 2011; Collin & Collin, 1997; Forrest et al., 1997; Orfield & Lee, 2007; Whitman, Williams, & Shah, 2004). Unstable housing and employment conditions within low-income families increase family stress as well as contribute to student transiency (Bruno & Isken, 1996; Gasper et al., 2012; Kerbow, 1996; Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994). These factors are closely related to the impact of poverty and the social problems that frequently accompany intergenerational, concentrated poverty (e.g., exposure to violence, trauma, food insecurity, etc.), both at the individual level (Yoshikawa, Aber, & Beardslee, 2012) and the community level (Wilson, 1987). Unsurprisingly, youth living in neighborhoods with high concentrations of poverty are more likely to vulnerable, and the conditions we maintain in schools and society promote for vulnerable students lower academic achievement and higher risk of school pushout (Brooks-Gunn et al., 1993; Cutler & Glaeser, 1997; Harding, 2003; Jencks & Mayer, 1990; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Sampson et al, 2002; Sampson, et al. 2008).

Complicating this picture, segregation tends concentrate social and material resources in location difficult for vulnerable students to access (Orfield, 2013).

The recommendations we outline below, respond to this issue, which we have empirically laid in the main report to this addendum. Recommendations range from simple changes to programs and policies to larger structural solutions that require the collaboration of districts and community partners. For the sake of categorization, these recommendations are framed as broadly and are accompanied by sets of suggestions for implementation that may involve districts to work with community organizations and/or other districts. Collectively, the proposed recommendations and list of suggestions are meant to help members of the Battle Creek region foster more equitable learning environments conducive to helping all students thrive from cradle to career.

Recommendation #1: Leverage the Fragile Hope and Lingering Potential that exist in the community

Suggestion A. Align School and Community Resources

Battle Creek area schools would greatly benefit from leveraging existing community resources. In doing so, we suggest the implementation of community school models across the region. Community schools are the co-location of community resources in school, with local schools serving as a hub for a variety of services for children and families through partnerships with community-based organizations (Melaville, Berg & Blank, 2006; Warren, 2005). Community schools represent both a physical space – the school – as well as an educational ideal – that by co-
locating academic services with health and social services, youth and community development program, and community engagement initiatives, schools can not only improve student learning, but also help strengthen families and foster healthier communities. They are primary conceived of as a means to provide support for students and families from low-income backgrounds. Given the number of community based organizations within the Battle Creek region, this suggestion matches resources with needs.

The theory of community schools posits that schools and their community partners can mitigate the relationship between poverty and student achievement indirectly by addressing the effects of poverty. As Richard Rothstein (2010) notes, “Good teachers alone, for most children, cannot fully compensate for the disadvantages many children bring to school” (p. 2). Schools must support these children in ways that go beyond strong classroom instruction.

There is no one prescribed community school model or approach. As explained by the National Center for Community Schools, community-school partnerships vary from school to school (Lubell, 2011). Community-school partnerships fall across a broad spectrum from loose systems of informal support that aim to encourage improved student learning to highly formalized and codified community schools with a wide range of community supports designed to undergird student learning by providing support to students and their families.

Research on community-school partnerships comes in several forms dictated by the focus of the work itself and is therefore limited and somewhat fragmented, but collectively show that community schools have the potential to improve the structures of schooling by positively influencing student academic and behavioral outcomes, by shaping teacher attitudes, and by increasing family engagement and strengthening home-school connections. The Children’s Aid Society funded evaluations of its community schools and found that children who participated in community school afterschool programs demonstrated greater gains in math and reading. Both students and teachers had increased rates of attendance. Schools had improved school climates and family-school relationships (The Children’s Aid Society, 2011).

Additionally, programs that provide on-site health clinics and mental health supports contribute to reduction in emergency room visits and expanded mental health services (The Children’s Aid Society, 2012). A ten-year longitudinal study of an intervention model exploring the effect of a highly structured approach to student and family referrals for a variety of social, health and educational services shows that students receiving the interventions outperformed their peers on academic measures compared to students not receiving them (Walsh et al, 2014). Beyond academic outcomes, community schools with mental health services have been found beneficial for students’ well-being and overall success (Leaf et al, 1996; Weist, Ambrose & Lewis, 2006).

It is important to note that there are some key elements required to build a successful full-service community school. These include strong support from building leadership; clear and open communication between community-based organizations, schools, and community members; full-time coordinators at school sites to facilitate and monitor the integration of educational and support components; and strong initial financial support (Dryfoos, 2003). To this end, we suggest a centralized, cross-district Battle Creek Region Community School Office (perhaps housed at the Calhoun County ISD) to forge and maintain school and community relationships, leveraging the support of community organizations who are able to support school initiatives, and bridge any apparent disconnects. This office would be co-funded by all of the districts, and would assess schools and community needs and help establish community-based programs and supports in schools. This office can be a stand-alone office, housed in a central location.¹ Each community school would also have its own site coordinator.

Based on the needs of the community and the resources available, it would seem appropriate to place health, mental health, and other social services within schools located in high-needs communities, starting in schools (and district-owned properties) situated in low-income communities. By placing these suites of services within schools and making them available to students and their families, schools can not only better meet the needs of the

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¹ Alternatively, this office can be part of the Calhoun ISD
community, but in doing so, become community hubs and improve family engagement (Blanc, Goldwasser, & Brown 2003).

While the costs of community schools vary from community to community, given the depth of resources available in Battle Creek, we anticipate that a large proportion of the costs of “cool” community schools in Battle Creek are already built into organizations’ existing operating budgets. The organizations would simply co-locate in schools. Thus, remuneration can be anticipated through the elimination of waste (e.g., wasted spaces), the presence of volunteer labor, and the raising of low-cost rent as feature of business incubation (see below). Additionally, with some services such as mental health and healthcare programs, districts can recoup a large amount of costs through insurance and Medicaid. The additional costs would be district personnel needed to manage the “cool” community schools, both at the central office and within each school. This is a key, but relatively inexpensive component of community schools (Blank, Jacobson, Melaville, & Pearson, 2010).

In looking for examples of community schools at work, both Cincinnati Public Schools (OH) and Baltimore City Public Schools (MD) have garnered a significant amount of national attention, and serve as strong example of how to develop community schools. NYU Metro Center has also worked more closely with the Newburgh Enlarged City School District (New York) in support of their community schools, and believe they can provide insights as to how to develop and implement “cool” community schools on at a scale similar to Battle Creek.

**Suggestion B. Support Healthy “Transitions” to Middle and High School**

Community school programs should extend beyond K-12 spaces to include early childhood programs. The Battle Creek area has a strong network of Early Childcare providers that have loose relationships with local public schools. Many of the Battle Creek Area schools have already begun to co-locate early childhood programs in their school buildings, more can be done to coordinate between local school districts, community organizations, and early
childcare providers. By explicitly placing early childhood education within the bailiwick of community schools, region schools have benefited from better communication.

The work in early childhood, as an invested community model, provides a blueprint for deeper developmental engagement throughout the region. The work in early childhood has provided at least one important transition point on the pathway to college and career. Other milestones on this pathway could benefit from such support. Thus, one aspect of the Battle Creek region that impressed our team was the community’s wealth of social and human resources available to serve youth, particularly the region’s most vulnerable youth. We believe that more can be done to align and leverage those resources to provide not just school entry support for young children (birth-5) but also at other important transition points in the educational trajectory from cradle to career.

There is evidence that support in transitions can be designed to mitigate against the effects of poverty. For example, all districts could benefit from community mentoring/tutoring programs that utilize retired volunteers (e.g., “foster grandparents”) to provide compensatory educational services to support students with limited or interrupted formal education, ensuring that students have support to fill educational gaps as they transition from grade to grade, for example. In Colorado, one such program exists through Volunteers of America (https://www.voacolorado.org/volunteer-opportunities/foster-grandparent-program). Colorado’s Foster Grandparents Program leverages, aligns, and delivers existing community resources to support the development and transition needs of the state’s most disadvantaged students. To be college and career ready, students must be school ready—and in particular well prepared and ready to make important transitions as they move from one school level to the next on their postsecondary education pathways.

Given this, there is overwhelming evidence that a key indicator of a successful middle school experience is a positive transition from elementary school. Most schools provide some sort of transition program for students in their final year of elementary school consisting of a parent/student night, followed by a tour of the school for students, usually sometime in the spring. These are excellent activities; however, they only comprise two activities in the absence of an overall transition plan. While these activities provide some sense of what’s next, they do not address the questions and anxieties students might have as they progress through a system. A well-planned, systematic transition program involves all the stakeholders: students, school personnel, and parents.

Metro Center suggests that incoming middle school students be involved in a variety of activities preparing them for middle school. They should have the opportunity to meet middle school students and teachers in their elementary school. They should have the opportunity to visit the middle school in the spring and meet the staff and students, particularly their homeroom teacher and classmates. Educators in both the elementary and the middle school should provide activities for students that lessen their concerns, build their confidence, and reduce their anxiety. Current middle school students also should be prepared for and included in orientation presentations—through a leadership/student government class, a “buddy” system, or other planned ways.

There is evidence that healthy transitions take place when school leaders plan and provide for several events that involve students, teachers, and parents. These events should focus on providing a positive message about middle school, that it is safe and fun. They should also focus on providing information about the changes that early adolescents will be experiencing. In addition, a recent study on middle school transition programs illustrated the roles of elementary teachers, counselors, and other licensed staff members in gaining awareness of the concerns of their students and the anxieties of moving into middle schools. According to the study, this awareness promoted their abilities to reassure students by helping them set goals and anticipate strategically what they can and school get from a middle school education. The same study warned against using middle schools as a “threat” or misplaced motivational tool. Rather, educators should inform students about the developmental issues; indeed, some of these students will already be experiencing some of these changes.

There is also evidence of the positive impacts of parent involvement and parent education. Parents should attend school meetings to learn about the concerns and questions their children have and will have. They should be taught how to talk with their children about the upcoming school year and emphasize the positive aspects of attending middle school. Parents should watch for signs of depression and be ready to address them. Thus, they need to learn
about young adolescents and their developmental issues and stages so that they will understand better this new and wonderful person with whom they live, and be able to interact with them in positive ways that build relationships.

Again, there is overwhelming evidence that making the transition into middle school is the first and most significant step to insuring a successful middle school experience. It is one that deserves time and attention. A well-planned transition program helps parents and students have a greater peace of mind by taking some of the stress out of the summer before middle school and providing the groundwork for a successful beginning of the middle school adventure.

In addition to elementary to middle school transitions, Metro Center suggests strategic planning and programming around middle to high school transitions. Middle to high school transition applies typically to eighth graders who would be transitioning to a high school, as well as ninth grade students who have recently been enrolled in a high school. While evidence suggests that providing a variety of supports to all students making that transition is valuable, it may be especially important to provide even more intense supports to those students who are at higher risk levels of dropping out. A variety of risk calculators addressed elsewhere may be used to assess the relative risk level of specific students.

Dedmond (2005), Oakes (2009), and Cohen and Smerdon (2009) provide a blueprint for well-designed framework for middle to high school transitions, beginning with courses that not only carry the same rigor, credibility and status of traditional academic courses, but that also increase school retention, academic achievement, and postsecondary matriculation. In addition to high-quality and socially responsive high school prep middle school course, the framework laid out in the research has five requirements: (1) A 10-year education and career plan for every student, (2) a curriculum that meets the course standards for freshman transition classes, (3) well-qualified teachers, (4) leadership continuity between the transitions (e.g., a counselor, mentor, or peer support group), and (5) a systemic and sustainable district-/school-wide implementation initiative.

Some districts have created middle to high school transition plans through freshman academies or centers. However, there is relatively little research on the impact of freshmen centers on students’ outcomes and no research on the role of freshmen centers on educational transition (Smith, 2008, p. 2). There is some data on the success of monitoring teams (teams of two or three teachers who meet every other month to discuss and share instructional issues, and assessment data on particular students) (Oakes & Waite, 2009, p. 3). One such program had its “SUCCESS teams” receive reports from each school administrator after monthly meetings at which all school administrators discuss common issues and develop common practices that are instituted in all their schools (Oakes & Waite, 2009, p. 3). Thus, school were able to monitor students over the course of their high-school careers, and were also able to match eighth-grade planning with the four years of high-school reality (Oakes & Waite, 2009, p.4).

Other successful programs pair each eighth-grade student with a ninth or tenth grade student for a full day, seeing classes and extracurricular activities through the eyes of that student (Oakes & Waite, 2009, p.5). Each visiting eighth grader receives a transition packet, with a picture of his or her counselor. Students keep the same counselor for all four years at the high school as well as mentor (Oakes & Waite, 2009, p.5). Summer bridge programs have shown mixed effects. In such programs, incoming ninth graders attend a week of orientation at the high school, sometimes separating the sexes, allowing teachers to address academic and social issues, some of which might be gender specific (Oakes & Waite, 2009, p.5).

The costs of these programs, of course, varies; however, most transitional program treatments are relatively inexpensive and are usually worth their weight in educational gold, as well-supported students are more likely to persist throughout educational systems to completion. They also tend to achieve higher academic and socio-emotional outcomes—key indicators of career and college readiness.

Suggestion C. Establish regular communication and learn from one another’s successes (e.g., Interschool Collaborative Learning Network)
Battle Creek area school leaders (superintendents and board members) need to come together regularly to discuss how they might work together to improve education and in doing so, bridge the differences between the districts that drive schools of choice. While each district should be able to preserve their own unique character and tradition, they should all work together to elevate the standard of education in the community.

Within the Battle Creek region, district consolidation is a hotly contested topic. Based on the data collected, the districts may benefit from some form of cooperation and may want to engage in formal conversations about partial consolidation of services before considering full consolidation. One initial step might be to start with an interschool collaborative learning network that allows for the exploration of data around potential convergences of interests. In some ways, the districts stand to gain much from learning from each other.

Research does show that there is a strong negative correlation between increased district size and the achievement of poor students (Howley et al., 2011). The optimal district size for economy of scale is 2,000-4,000 (Boser, 2013). Even studies that support consolidation do not consider districts too small unless they have under 1000 students. According to one model, the most cost-effective size for Michigan school districts is roughly 2,900 students. Both smaller and larger districts are likely to spend more per pupil, all other things being equal (Coulson, 2007). This means that any consolidation of four districts in nearly all configurations may reduce the overall cost-effectiveness of the districts. Some projections based on Michigan data predict significant cost saving by consolidating districts at the county level. However, similar studies in Arizona and New Jersey showed the hoped for savings that did not materialize. At the same time, several studies argue that the assumption that consolidation is the key to savings is fundamentally flawed and that in many cases, more money would be saved by breaking up (or “deconsolidating”) overly large districts (Coulson, 2007; Howley et al., 2011).

An Office of Interschool Collaborative Learning could, perhaps, be more beneficial in the region, if not just less controversial. Such an office has the potential to build the capacity of school communities within a focus area by providing structured, supportive opportunities for collaboration between schools/districts, tailored coaching, leadership development, resource sharing, and constructive feedback. In New York City, for example, these opportunities are administered through three innovative programs, two of which may be of interests in Battle Creek.

First, an office of interschool collaborative learning could promote conditions within regional schools where innovation and critical thinking can thrive in order to develop the critical capacities of students. The other takeaway would be a “learning partners program,” which could promote interschool collaborative learning and leverage the rich reservoir of expertise that already resides within the Battle Creek region. Within this collaborative learning model, each district should be given opportunity to “showcase” areas in which it excels so that other districts might learn from their neighbor’s models of success. Such a program should be designed to recognize, celebrate, and share promising practices across the Battle Creek region. The goal would also be to promote collaboration by hosting a pre-determined number of visits throughout the school year, in which any interested education leader or educator may attend.

Such moves could be important in terms of moving the region beyond postures of competition. Research seems clear that collaboration, not competition, is the key to school improvement. Thus, instead of consolidation, we such collaboration. With the support of an office of interschool collaborative learning, Battle Creek region districts will begin to build collaborative systems that are more textured than school consolidation plans. Within these system, all districts are given opportunities to improve by learning from one another about specific practices, the conditions that contribute to their growth and sustainability, and the stories of how they came to be.

**Recommendation #2: Disrupt Disproportionality and Vulnerability**

**Suggestion A. Development and treat root causes of vulnerability**

In order to help area students stay on track towards college and career, it is important for the four districts to understand and treat the root causes of vulnerability. One way to begin is by developing shared metrics on student
progress as well as shared tools for monitoring school progress. With respect to this study, the four school districts and the ISD should create a formal partnership to monitor college and career readiness, as well as commit to developing an annual college and career readiness report, with common metrics.

A present, there is no consistency with respect to how district data are collected and warehoused across the four districts, and across Calhoun County in general. To this end, Calhoun ISD should take a more proactive role in aligning data systems across the county. This may mean developing the capacity to compile and warehouse data from multiple data systems (e.g., PowerSchool, Infinite Campus, Skyward) or help establish or maintain a single system or standard needed to lead this process.

To keep abreast of critical issues, the districts should also develop and implement shared teacher, student, and family surveys. Large school districts such as New York City, Chicago Public Schools, and Miami-Dade County Public Schools conduct similar surveys. Currently, each district designs and implements its own surveys, but a shared survey would help bridge gaps between districts and allow for meaningful cross-district comparisons. Teacher and student surveys can help the district keep abreast of critical issues in schools that impact educational outcomes, such as teachers’ levels of self-efficacy or students’ level of engagement. Additionally, these surveys can be used to monitor and get feedback on district and school initiatives.

Regular tracking of student and teacher opinions on recurring and new relevant issues within the districts will provide both baseline information for decision-making and test reception to new initiatives within the districts and across the Battle Creek Community. Furthermore, opening regular lines of communication from school staff, students, and their families to district officials and regularly incorporating feedback into decision making processes has potential to increase these stakeholders’ engagement with the districts. Surveying parents can also be part of a broader strategy to improve parental engagement (NEA, 2008). It can help gather information regarding what these parents think about the school and their perceptions concerning how their schools can be improved, thus providing actionable information about schools’ learning environments and providing community members the opportunity to have input into school matters, while addressing traditional challenges to access (e.g., scheduling and transportation).

Additionally, efforts should especially target ELL families, recently-immigrated families, and less engaged families for feedback. Partnership with community organizations could be especially useful to ensure cultural-responsiveness and broader reach in feedback solicitation. Thus, as part of its shared data system, the Battle Creek area schools should develop and maintain an early warning system that can be used to identify struggling learners and support them. McKinsey & Company (2007) note that high performing school systems monitor and identify issues in student learning to intervene early to address both academic and socio-emotional needs.

The use of early interventions like school-based teams can help vulnerable students remain on track and reduce the number of students who are referred to committees for special education and special education placement (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Bahr, 1990; Hartman & Fay, 1996; Kovaleski, Tucker, & Duffy, 1995), and can also reduce disproportionality in schools (Gravois & Rosenfield, 2002; Gravois & Rosenfield, 2006). Moreover, teachers in schools where those teachers perceive there to be well-defined intervention systems were less likely to refer students who they perceive as having academic or behavior challenges for additional services, and are more likely to take increased responsibility for student learning (Drame, 2002; Nelson et al., 1991). Early intervention practices not only provide students with additional support to meet their learning needs, but also can provide teachers with new and better instructional practices to help meet the needs of struggling learners (Costas, Rosenfield, & Gravois, 2003; Drame, 2002) and can shift teachers’ perceptions of students’ difficulties from being internal to the students to being related to instructional practices (Knotek, 2003).

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2 AdvanceED, in collaboration with the Michigan Department of Education, offers a suite of parent, teacher, and student surveys aimed at school improvement. However, due to the limited language options, most notably the absence of Burmese, this survey might not be suited for the Battle Creek Community.
Efforts to improve schools’ use of early interventions can be done in conjunction with fostering professional learning communities. Professional learning communities are ideal spaces for educators in schools to engage in meaningful and productive work to develop supports for students who are experiencing difficulty in learning and/or with behavioral issues; moreover, professional learning communities build a culture of collaboration in schools that is results-oriented (DuFour, 2004).

To understand and respond meaningfully to vulnerability, educators within these communities must be developed in ways that treat root cause of school inequity. Shared data systems and early warning systems might provide ways into courageous conversation about issues such as racial inequities (for example) that quietly sit at the epicenter of vulnerability in the region. These conversations will need to go beyond talk, to strategic developments of practical interventions that are data-informed, such as trauma-informed practices rooted in the disciplines, culturally sustaining educational practices, and alternatives to school suspension (e.g., mindfulness and meditation, restorative practices, PBIS).

**Suggestion B. Implement (and/or scale up) specialization programs that are innovative and socially responsive**

Within the larger framework of community schools, one can imagine a unique model for the Battle Creek region, aimed at college and career readiness as well as educational equity and excellence. A unique model of community schooling for the Battle Creek region would go beyond Suggestion A in Recommendation 1. A unique model of community schools could borrow programming/alignments from other places, and could include magnet and specialization programs (e.g., technology and coding, architecture and design, science and engineering) strategically situated in all district high schools and linked to expected employment gaps and gains, college and career pathways, and existing community resources and infrastructures in the Battle Creek region. Additionally, a unique model of community schools for the Battle Creek region could also borrow from other effective innovation and community transformation policies in place in Michigan.

The 2003 State of Michigan “Cool Cities Initiative,” for example, could provide a meaningful framework for the implementation or scaling up of specialization programs linked to innovation and regional labor needs. Proposed under the gubernatorial administration of Jennifer Granholm, the “Cool Cities” Initiative was highly effectively in redeveloping cities across Michigan, from sections of Detroit to Muskegon. Similarly, a Battle Creek region “cool” community schools initiative could not only invite rigorous magnet curricula or specialized curricular programming throughout the region, it could also present cutting edge and community relevant learning options for students (i.e., a “cool” curriculum), such as a music production/music making curricular track for students interested in producing music, a state of the arts technology and design program for students interested in producing web/phone apps, a health and human services program for students interested in healthcare, and so on. There is important evidence suggesting that socially responsive learning options could be key to re-engaging the imaginations of 21st Century youth.

These programs and curricular offerings would leverage the resources of community based organizations and local businesses to update curricular offerings and extend learning opportunities beyond the school. Within this model, students, particularly the region’s most vulnerable ones, would also comprise an important volunteer workforce (working for course credit) to service the needs of revitalizing the Battle Creek region (e.g., through urban gardening, neighborhood rehabilitation, start-up business support, peer-tutoring and mentoring, healthcare service to the elderly, and so forth).

**Suggestion C. Scale up high school associates degree program, early college savings accounts**

To increase demand for high quality early childhood programs and build community ties to college at an early age, Battle Creek Public Schools can scale it programs that provide small cash incentives for community members who enroll their children in high quality early childhood programs. These incentives would be in the form of payments in Michigan Education Savings Program (MESP) accounts. MESP is a state-sponsored, tax-advantaged 529 college savings plan designed for families and individuals plan for the cost of higher education.

Recent research from a similar program in Oklahoma that provided payments to infants along with incentives for mothers to save their own money for their child’s education, found that youth from low-income backgrounds had
improved socioemotional development, and the mothers of infants also showed fewer symptoms of depression (Beverly, Clancy, & Sherraden, 2016).

These incentives can be continued through students’ entrance in the K-12 system based on particularly parent or student benchmarks that occur across the K-12 continuum – e.g., matriculation from elementary school to middle school and middle school to high school, participating in afterschool programs or jobs, or internships. Battle Creek Public School recently launched a college savings program. In November, the districts announced a new program, the SEED (Save Encourage Educate Dream) Award program with provides award money for students in grades K-11 for 529 college savings accounts at Omni Credit Union. At present, the program provides 18 awards annually through a competition. Money from Legacy Scholars and other local scholarship funds can be re-appropriated to fund this initiative. Additionally, to keep the initial costs down, the money can be targeted to residents in particular high-needs communities or residents who meet certain income requirements.

Recommendation #3: Resolve the Tensions of Structural Bias and Segregation

Suggestion A. Directly address implicit and explicit biases
Considering issues of structural bias within the fabric of schools and educational organizations within the Battle Creek region broadly, Metro Center recommends the on-going implementation of anti-bias education and cultural sensitivity trainings for reducing the effects of implicit bias on the institutional values regional schools adopt. In general, several conditions on an institutional level contribute to heightened reliance on one’s implicit associations. When bias interventions are limited, educators are more likely to rely on four automatic, rather than deliberative, mental processes; examples include increased time pressures and cognitive busyness —both of which are present in an educational context (Bertrand, Chugh, & Mullainathan, 2005; Gilbert & Hixon, 1991). These conditions play a larger role in the likelihood of bias perpetuating in institutional decision-making practices, and staff development and culture. Decision Making Practices: Multiple aspects of decision-making processes—such as salient social categories, stress, and ambiguity—leave schools vulnerable to the effects of implicit bias (Mitchell, Banaji, & Nosek, 2003; Van Knippenberg, Dijksterhuis, & Vermeulen, 1999). Thus, holding the following institutional values may help prevent bias from permeating critical decision points:

Culturally-responsive education. To illustrate the connected nature between implicit bias and stereotype threat, Kiefer and Sekaquaptewa (2007) demonstrated that women who were high in an implicit male-math association were more likely to perform poorly on a math assessment than those with less implicit bias. Thus, school personnel should be mindful of how values are communicated through cultural value systems and other forms of discriminatory and hidden messaging. In this light, stereotype Threat is defined as “being at risk of confirming, as self-characteristic, a negative stereotype about one’s group” (Steele & Aronson, 1995, p. 797). Culturally responsive education interventions promote healthier engagements between educators and students that begin with high expectations. High expectations for disabled youth and youth of color, are not only culturally relevant, they are among the best predictors of student outcomes.

Anti-bias education. It goes without noting, teacher expectations are susceptible to the effects of implicit bias. Indeed, researchers have found teachers’ implicit biases to predict differences in their expectations of students based on race. Examples of these differing expectations include ratings of vulnerable students as “being less intelligent” and “having less promising prospects for their school careers” (Van den Bergh et al., 2010, p. 518). Alarmingly, researchers have also found correlations between teachers’ implicit biases and the racial/ethnic achievement gap exhibited in the teacher’s classroom (Van den Bergh et al., 2010). This suggests a self-fulfilling prophecy effect—where predictions of negative behavior cause the behavior itself—particularly if students are part of a stigmatized group (Jussim, Eccles, & Madon, 1996). Research suggests that on-going teacher mindset development must occur to offset the multiple effects of implicit bias.

Staff Culture & Development. Recruiting a school staff comprised of different races, cultures, and genders offers opportunity for perspective taking and valuable collaborative input. However, mere contact with individuals is typically insufficient for bridging cultural barriers (Pettigrew, 1998). Thus, ensuring meaningful contact though
trainings and other cooperative interactions also increases the potential to limit implicit biases. Ways to utilize staff development as a means to reduce implicit bias include: (1) using professional development time to provide opportunities for education on implicit bias and other types of cultural competency-focused training, and (2) creating an atmosphere where staff can identify, discuss, and find solutions for instances of bias.

Addressing the root causes of bias may be challenging at first; however, failure to acknowledge one’s biases can instead perpetuate them, particularly when race is a relevant factor (Apfelbaum, Sommers, & Norton, 2008). Thus, opportunities to continually engage with diverse partners and safely create dialogue around race and other forms of identity can help reduce implicit bias. Metro Center’s suggestion is to leverage existing organizational relationships in the Battle Creek region, particularly Jorge Zeballos and the Center for Diversity and Innovation at Kellogg Community College, to continue to carry out this work at scale.

**Suggestion B. Repurpose vacant or less densely populated school properties (e.g., Business Incubation Program)**

While a “cool” community initiative in the Battle Creek region promises to interrupt the decline in school enrollments at Battle Creek Central High School and promote greater equity across regional schools, absent a plan to repopulate or the will to consolidate low-enrolled schools in the Battle Creek region, other solutions for revitalizing Battle Creek Central High School (and other vacant educational properties) will be needed. One such solution might be the use of strategic sections of Battle Creek Central (and other vacant properties) as incubator spaces, co-working space networks that provide low-cost space, business services, training, and networking opportunities to hundreds of startups and small businesses across a variety of sectors. In NYC, for example, this plan has been implemented successfully to revitalize school buildings that have lost a significant population of students. Dozens of schools in NYC have been repurposed, housing over 1,000 startup businesses where 1,500 employees have benefited from City-supported incubators. These companies have raised more than $180 million in venture funding.

Of course, a Battle Creek model would differ significantly from a NYC model. As a unique aspect of a potential “cool” community schools program, the model would center educational goals over entrepreneurial ones. This means that co-located businesses would propose plans that situate their business models within the school curriculum as an educational asset, offering Battle Creek students learning opportunities that advance career and college readiness. The goal here would be to use existing school spaces to seed and grow a new economy in the Battle Creek region, apprentice students while giving them some ownership over new community industries, and utilize community systems and structures to rigorously prepare students for future careers in and beyond Battle Creek.

**Suggestion C. Interrupt concentrated poverty and create more diverse schools (e.g., Controlled Choice Policies)**

Another suggestion comes in the form of “controlled choice,” which is a policy designed to create diverse, academically rigorous schools with equal access to educational resources. The concept was conceived in 1980 when the Cambridge School Committee voted to desegregate its schools by moving away from a neighborhood schools model. The original controlled choice plan followed a formula that emphasized socioeconomic integration. In 2001, the assignment process was changed to emphasize socioeconomic status (SES) as measured by the percentage of students who do and do not qualify for the Federal Free & Reduced Lunch Program. When the percentage of students at a school who do and do not qualify for this benefit reflects the School District’s averages, the school is considered to be “balanced.”

Although it requires time and patience, consolidated controlled choice might yield important benefits to all schools in the Battle Creek region. While a regional controlled choice plan would be unprecedented, research suggests that controlled choice among schools relatively the size and with similar populations demographics promotes academic excellence in all participating schools (Annenberg Institute, 2014). It offers parents and students an assurance that if they move to another residence within the region, they won’t need to switch schools. It eliminates the need to redraw boundaries due to changes in housing and demographic patterns throughout the district. It allows the district to monitor class size at each building. Parents are not limited to their neighborhood school, and have the ability to seek out a location, structure, schedule, and teaching approach that fits their children’s needs. And
importantly, students can gain opportunities to work outside their neighborhood and experience the rich diversity of the Battle Creek community.

Controlled choice may also offer the Battle Creek region a viable alternative to consolidation. While consolidation may increase savings due to economies of scale, the process also involves additional expenditures, especially due to transition costs (Duncombe and Yinger, 2010). Overall, small districts typically save 30-40% over 30 years – margins are much smaller in a 10-year window (Duncombe and Yinger, 2010; Howley et al., 2011). Again, district consolidation does not generally reduce overall expenditures. Additional costs (e.g. fewer superintendents but more mid-level administrators, increased cost of transportation, operating costs, guidance) can offset or overall increase the district costs (Howley et al., 2011). The state of Michigan does, over grants – Section 22g District/ISD Consolidation Grant – to defray the costs of consolidation.

However, potential points of conflict for parents may include broken connections to beloved schools, increased transportation costs for family, possible loss in property value for wealthy families (Duncombe & Yinger, 2010). The first of these reasons was cited frequently by those opposed to consolidation in Battle Creek. Negative community responses to consolidation can be mitigated by inviting families into the process (i.e., controlled choice) – but when community involvement is successful, it is carefully managed by educational leaders and policymakers, since it opens the door to objections (Howley et al., 2011). Controlled choice might be one option more acceptable to community advocates, promoting coordination of services across district lines as opposed to the elimination of them (Shakrani, 2010).
BUDGET ESTIMATES

The calculations presented below are research-based grounded on average costs for similar projects, programs, and services. All calculations are estimates, rounded to the thousands (with the exception of fringe rates which have been calculated based on 29.5% of new personnel costs, which is an adjusted average of fringe rates for the industrial Midwest). All calculations are based on one-year projections. Thus, some expenses could be annual. Other expenses are one-time expenses. No delineation between these two types of expenses is made in this budget.

The budget itself is suggested and should be altered based on the realities of the Battle Creek region. This estimated budget identifies three categories: a budget item (in column one), types of costs (in column two), and estimated costs (in column three). Projections are given for each suggestion outlined in the recommendations section of this document. Where concrete and approximate estimations could not be made (because of a lack of information to forecast or other un-/under available details), we write the item as “variable” in the budget. Variable means that the expense is unstable and/or is subject to change based on a number of confounding/uncontrolled/uncontrollable factors. We use the term “not defined” to refer to items capable of offsetting some costs/generating possible revenue.

Light analysis is provided in each budget section. This analysis is meant to provide modest detail as to where the monies can derive and how budget items might be paid for. Some explanation is provided in column two for this; however, the budget narrative provides more information concerning the specific paths of investment and funding for the listed recommendations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation #1: Leverage the Fragile Hope and Lingering Potential that exist in the community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Suggestion A. Align School and Community Resources</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director of Community Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site Coordinators (@4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Suggestion B. Support Healthy “Transitions” to Middle and High School</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Suggestion C. Establish regular communication and learn from one another’s successes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Budget</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are two types of new costs associated with the above budget items: “new costs” associated with new personnel and investments to jumpstart programs, and “in-kind” expenses associated with new work (but not necessarily new positions). New costs for running community schools initiatives could come from the Calhoun County ISD (with shared site coordinator costs coming from each of the districts). Program/project budgets for suggestion B should be written into the general budget of each school, and for suggestion C monies should be pooled between schools. To save costs, duties of existing district staff might be re-envisioned. For example, a school administrator or teacher leader or some other school personnel can have her or his duties revised to include project administration work and responsibilities.
Recommendation #2: Disrupt Disproportionality and Vulnerability

**Suggestion A. Development and treat root causes of vulnerability**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shared Metrics</th>
<th>In-Kind (utilization of existing systems)</th>
<th>variable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early Warning Systems</td>
<td>New Costs</td>
<td>$50,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systems Manager</td>
<td>In-Kind (expanded personnel duties)</td>
<td>$30,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Budget</td>
<td>New Costs</td>
<td>variable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Suggestion B. Implement (and/or scale up) specialization programs that are innovative and socially responsive**

| Curricular Planning and Implementation  | In-Kind (School Improvement budget)       | $50,000.00 |
| Project Budget                          | In-Kind                                  |           |

**Suggestion C. Scale up high school associates degree program, early college savings accounts**

| Project Administration                  | In-Kind (expanded personnel duties)       | $50,000.00 |
| Program Budget                          | New Costs                                | variable   |

**Subtotal** $180,000.00+

There are also two types of new costs associated with the above budget items: “new costs” associated with new personnel and investments to jumpstart or scale programs, and “in-kind” expenses associated with new work (but not necessarily new positions). New costs for creating early warning systems can be pooled across districts, and should be written into the general budget of each district. Costs of a scaled-up associates degree program and early college savings are variable. Some funding could be available at state, federal and local levels, in addition to potential county allocations. To save costs, duties of existing district staff might be re-articulated. For example, a school administrator or teacher leader or some other district personnel can have her or his duties amended to include project administration work and responsibilities associated with these sets of suggestions.

Recommendation #3: Resolve the Tensions of Structural Bias and Segregation

**Suggestion A. Directly address implicit and explicit biases**

| Racial Tolerance/Anti-bias Trainings    | New Costs/In-Kind (PD budget)            | $150,000.00 |
| CRE PD and Regional Implementation     | In-Kind (School Improvement budget)      | $50,000.00   |

**Suggestion B. Repurpose vacant or less densely populated school properties**

| Program Administration                  | New Costs                                | $70,000.00   |
| Program Investment                      | New Costs                                | $50,000.00   |
| Program Budget                          | New Costs                                | $30,000.00   |
| Program Revenue                         | No costs                                 | Not defined  |

**Suggestion C. Interrupt concentrated poverty and create more diverse schools**

| Program Administration                  | In-Kind (expanded personnel duties)      | $30,000.00   |

**Subtotal** $380,000.00+

There are mostly new costs associated with the above budget items; however, “in-kind” expenses can be associated with the redistribution of PD funding, for example, to offset costs of anti-bias trainings. Some of this
work should be given to local vendors to offset costs and secure community trust. Funding from school improvement budgets can also be reallocated to update and institute specialized curriculum programs, etc. Other in-kind funding would be needed to pay for new work (but not necessarily new positions). There are new costs associated with repurposing vacant spaces; however, much of these costs can be built into tenant agreements made for each incubator site. These costs are moderate and would pay for program administration, project budgets, and other costs associated with getting projects off the ground. In addition, the incubator project has the potential to generate important revenue for the regional school collaborate. These funds listed here as “not defined” could offset other project/program expenses. For each program, there also may be grant funding available at state, federal and local levels. To save costs, duties of existing district staff might be re-articulated. For example, a school administrator or teacher leader or some other school personnel could have her or his duties adjusted to include project administration work and responsibilities associated with the above budget items.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Miscellaneous Items</th>
<th>New Costs</th>
<th>$200,000.00</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Policy/Program Evaluations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steering/Oversight Committee</td>
<td>In-Kind (BC Vision budget)</td>
<td>absorbed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discretionary</td>
<td>New Costs</td>
<td>$100,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel Salary Fringes @29.5%</td>
<td>New Costs for New Personnel Salaries</td>
<td>$100,300.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subtotal $400,300.00

There are mostly new costs associated with the above budget items. New costs are associated with the following expenses: program evaluations (internal or external), discretionary/flexible spending, and fringe rates for new projected personnel. “In-kind” expenses are associated with new work (but not necessarily new positions). BC Vision currently has a rather effective steering committee. This committee could work in kind and be given broad oversight of the above initiatives and spending.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total Projected Costs</th>
<th>$1,390,300.00+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Adjusted Costs</td>
<td>+/- $1,100,300.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The total projected costs for the implementation of NYU Metro Center suggestions for addressing our three broad recommendation are greater than $1,390,300.00. The total adjusted costs of this estimated budget reflect all new expenses associated with the above suggestions. Adjusted costs are estimated at (+/-) $1,100,300.00. These costs include new programs and personnel, as well as miscellaneous expenses.

The costs projections articulated in this budget are modest given the scale of the interventions we propose. These interventions could be paid for via a combination of in-kind funding (re-allocation of existing resources, programs, and staff responsibilities), a resource pool that each district within the regional collaborative pays into, support from Calhoun County ISD, contributions from regional businesses, new revenues from the business incubator project, and other forms of investment from state, local, federal agencies (including grants).