

# civic infrastructure helps communities respond and recover from COVID-19

A closer look at four Wisconsin communities provides lessons for an equitable recovery

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Strong infrastructure is key to economic development: Communities need roads, electrical grids and technology to keep and attract businesses and to develop their workforces. But to improve opportunities for young people — to prepare them for those workforces — communities also need connections among the entities that serve them. Along with physical infrastructure, communities need civic infrastructure to ensure good outcomes for youth.

Civic infrastructure is not a single program or initiative; it's all the pieces that shape the systems that impact a community. It joins leaders from education, nonprofit, business and other sectors to work collaboratively, using data, to change the systems that improve economic mobility for children and their families.

StriveTogether is a national network that helps communities build civic infrastructure

to ensure that every child succeeds from cradle to career. It works with nearly 70 communities nationwide to help them engage local stakeholders, advance equity, develop a culture of continuous improvement and leverage existing resources.



The COVID-19 pandemic and its economic fallout, along with the public awakening to racial injustice, have tested communities as never before. But those with established civic infrastructures have been better prepared than others to tackle these challenges. Four such communities are Milwaukee, Kenosha, Racine and Green Bay, who together make up the StriveTogether Wisconsin Partnership.

Since 2018, the focus of the Wisconsin Partnership has been securing access to high-quality, affordable childhood education. The network members have worked to shape public policy by providing crucial data and by training parents and child care workers as advocates. Before the pandemic, nearly half of Wisconsin residents lived in child care deserts. When the pandemic hit, 25% of Wisconsin's child care centers were suddenly at risk of closing.

The Wisconsin Partnership has put child care and other early childhood needs at the heart of its pandemic response, quickly pivoting to leverage its existing relationships to meet the needs of the moment while still pursuing its longer-term goals. And they have kept equity front and center.

In this series of case studies, we take a deeper look at how each of these communities has used its civic infrastructure to address immediate, pandemic-related needs in ways that have also informed and enhanced their long-term work. The Wisconsin partners are models for communities nationwide as they work toward equitable recovery for every child and family.

## MILWAUKEE



In Milwaukee, which lost one-third of its child care providers almost overnight, partners collaborated to reopen centers safely, secure protective equipment, open new centers and add capacity for students learning remotely.

## RACINE



In Racine, where 30% of students in city schools lacked the technology needed for online learning, partners helped change state internet policies, open up Wi-Fi access and put laptops and tablets in the hands of all students.

## GREEN BAY



In Green Bay, partners gathered and analyzed data to create an easily accessible, visual map of what child-related services were offered, what were needed and where opportunities for collaboration existed.

## KENOSHA



In Kenosha, the site of uprisings over racial injustice, partners convened community members in difficult yet productive conversations about equity, starting the process of healing that has advanced and brought context to existing work.

# StriveTogether<sup>®</sup>

Every child. Cradle to career.

StriveTogether is a national movement with a clear purpose: help every child succeed in school and in life from cradle to career, regardless of race, ethnicity, zip code or circumstance. In partnership with nearly 70 communities across the country, StriveTogether provides resources, best practices and processes to give every child every chance for success. The StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network reaches more than 11 million students, including more than 7 million children of color, and has partners in 29 states and Washington, D.C.

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