



# 2024 ANNUAL IMPACT REPORT



# MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



## BUILDING OUR FUTURE TEAM

(pictured below, left to right)  
Kevin Meagher, Data Manager;  
Maggie Campbell, Director of Strategic Initiatives;  
Tatjana Bicanin, Executive Director;  
Brandon Morris, Partnership Development Manager



Dear Friends,

What a year it has been to stand alongside leaders who recognize that the most critical work we can do is right here—locally and statewide. Investing in the education of our young people is not just about their individual success; it's about fostering economic growth, workforce stability, and the overall vitality of our community.

As I reflect on 2024, I am reminded of the transformative power of connection. By building networks—linking the right people and resources—we unify efforts to support our youth, shape decisions that impact their futures, and strengthen community partnerships.

Additionally, by building capacity—equipping local organizations with the skills, tools, and strategies they need to thrive—we are driving meaningful, measurable change for Kenosha's families and children.

Successful partnerships are grounded in clear, shared goals. At Building Our Future, our partners are united in advancing early childhood education and literacy, increasing postsecondary attainment, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement. The stories and achievements highlighted in this report—such as Help Me Grow, FAFSA, and the Youth Voice Project—demonstrate what's possible when we come together around a shared purpose.

I encourage you to explore these pages and see how our collective vision is transforming into action, opportunity, and hope for families across Kenosha.

It is an honor to be part of this partnership and to witness the tireless efforts of so many who are shaping a bright future for all of our young learners. Together, we are building our future—one connection, one family, and one success story at a time.

Thank you for being an integral part of this journey.

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# DATA SNAPSHOT

## WHY CRADLE TO CAREER INDICATORS?

Cradle to Career indicators provide a snapshot of how a community is doing at key milestones along a child's journey from birth to the time they enter the workforce. These seven indicators give a "birds-eye-view" of the cradle-to-career pipeline but should also be used to further interrogate what's happening on the "ground-level." Research has shown that each of the seven indicators are connected to a child's future success in school and life. To dive deeper into the data and learn more about the research behind these indicators visit <https://www.buildingourfuturekc.org/cradle-to-career-data.html>.

Outcome	Indicator	Baseline Year	Most Recent Year	Change from Baseline
KINDERGARTEN READINESS	Percent of Children meeting expectations in Teaching Strategies Gold Dimension: Attends and Engages	2021	91% (2024)	-1%
SCHOOL SUCCESS	Percent of third-graders proficient in reading	2023	49% (2023)	(baseline year - no change)
	Percent of eighth-graders proficient in math	2023	42% (2023)	(baseline year - no change)
HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION	4-year high school graduation rate	2015	90% (2023)	+1%
POST-SECONDARY ACCESS & COMPLETION	Enrollment in first fall after high school	2016	46% (2023)	-8%
	Postsecondary graduation rate from local institutions	2018	50% (2023)	+3%
SELF SUFFICIENCY	Percent of families meeting self-sufficiency standard	2023	66% (2023)	(baseline year - no change)

**Data Notes and Sources:** Kindergarten Readiness: Teaching Strategies GOLD data self reported and provided by KUSD Early Learning and Westosha Head Start programs representing the percentage of children meeting or exceeding expectations in Spring 2024. | Early Grade Reading, Eighth Grade Math: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Download type: Forward, forward\_certified\_2022-23.zip <https://bit.ly/2KEnBnU> | High School Graduation Rate, Enrollment in First Fall after High School: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Download type: High School Completion, hs\_completion\_certified\_2022-23.zip, Postsecondary Enrollment, postsecondary\_enrollment\_current\_2022-23.zip, <https://bit.ly/2KEnBnU> | Postsecondary graduation rate from local institutions: National Center for Education Statistics, Selected Institutions: Carthage College, Gateway Technical College, Herzing University-Kenosha, and University of Wisconsin-Parkside. Selected Variables: 'Graduation rate data within 150 percent of normal time - 4-year and 2-year institutions', Years 2018-2023, Race/ethnicity (new) - 2011 to current year-All Student Groups <https://bit.ly/3CmCNUP> | Self Sufficiency: Center for Women's Welfare, University of Washington's Self Sufficiency Calculator <https://bit.ly/4gZXqoZ> American Community Survey, PUMS (Public Use Microdata Sample) data, 5-yr estimates, for 2017-2022, <https://bit.ly/40Cc3cf>. Data prepared by StriveTogether.



# SMART BEGINNINGS

Smart Beginnings brings together local early care and education organizations, programs, and agency representatives who meet monthly to advance the network's vision. Through data sharing, policy advocacy, parent engagement, and community action planning, Smart Beginnings promotes optimal child development and ensures access to quality, affordable early care and education—cornerstones of a thriving community.

## VISION

All children in  
Kenosha County  
enter Kindergarten  
ready to learn on the  
first day of school.

## HELP ME GROW: BUILDING STRONG FOUNDATIONS FOR KENOSHA'S YOUNGEST LEARNERS

In 2021, Building Our Future (BOF) introduced Help Me Grow (HMG) to Kenosha County, marking a pivotal moment in the community's commitment to early childhood development. HMG is a nationally recognized, cost-free resource offering developmental screenings, vital services, and referrals to families with young children. This initiative empowers caregivers with the tools and support needed to foster healthy development from pregnancy through early childhood.

Since its launch, BOF has worked diligently to expand and sustain HMG in partnership with KAC and other local organizations. In 2024, BOF deepened its impact through the Smart Beginnings Collaborative Action Network, emphasizing increased participation among childcare centers and early childhood educators.

### KEY IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS:

- > Increased the number of families utilizing HMG by over 140% from 327 in 2022 and 2023 to 795 in 2024
- > Increased the number of local childcare centers participating in HMG from 3 to 10
- > Grew HMG's Ages and Stages Questionnaire database by 54%, or 361 children, ensuring more youth receive developmental support early in life.

Scan QR Code  
for Help Me Grow  
Podcast Episode:





# BRIGHTSPOT: SPARKLER APP— FREE APP TO SUPPORT CHILD DEVELOPMENT

In 2024, the Sparkler app was introduced to Kenosha County as a free, innovative resource in partnership with Help Me Grow affiliates nationwide, including Help Me Grow Kenosha. Sparkler’s mission aligns seamlessly with Help Me Grow’s goal of empowering families with the tools and resources needed to raise happy, healthy children.

This app offers free developmental screenings designed to enhance developmental outcomes for children. With 30 Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) screens covering ages 2 months to 60 months, Sparkler also features a prenatal mode to provide guidance for expectant parents. Beyond screenings, Sparkler gives families access to over 2,000 engaging play activities and practical parenting tips, helping caregivers support their children’s growth and learning every step of the way.

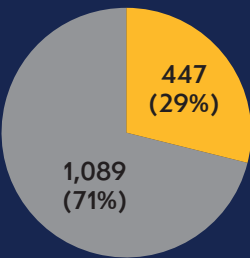
Scan to download  
the Sparkler App



## HMG/AGES & STAGES QUESTIONNAIRE (ASQ) DATA:

Last year 29% of the ASQ screens completed were recommended for referral. This allows children exhibiting signs of delays to receive the early support they need that might otherwise go unnoticed.

Percent of screens  
needing referral  
(Below in any ASQ-3  
domain or monitoring  
in more than one, or  
above in the ASQ:SE 2)



Referral needed  
No referral needed



At Building Our Future, we believe that for Wisconsin’s children to succeed, we must address the systemic barriers in education. Meaningful change requires collective action. In 2024, we renewed our partnership with Achieve

Brown County, Higher Expectations for Racine County, and Milwaukee Succeeds to relaunch the Wisconsin Partnership.

As members of the national StriveTogether network, each of these organizations is united in a shared commitment to improving educational outcomes for children across the state by leveraging evidence-based practices and collaborative efforts. Through this partnership, we are collectively driving change to ensure every child has the opportunity to thrive.

Since 2021, we’ve focused on providing children from birth through age 9 with the foundation they need for long-term success. Our renewed efforts center on a data-driven approach that prioritizes early literacy and kindergarten readiness, with a bold goal: putting 10,000 more children on a pathway to economic mobility by 2030.

## POLICY CHANGE FOR LASTING IMPACT

We know that lasting systems change requires policy reform. That’s why Building Our Future is advocating for policies that support high-quality early care, community-based pre-kindergarten programs, and the implementation of science-based reading curricula. In 2024, the Wisconsin Partnership was one of 5 states recognized by StriveTogether for its history of strong collaboration and policy advocacy. The partnership received grant funding to support the initiatives outlined in our **Two-Year Policy Agenda (2024-2026)**, which focuses on three key areas:



# EARLY GRADE READING

## LITERACY STEERING COMMITTEE

The Literacy Steering Committee is dedicated to aligning resources and setting clear goals to foster early childhood literacy development. In 2024, the committee worked alongside local partners to understand what effective literacy development looks like for children ages 0-8 in the homes of parents and caregivers.

A key initiative to better understand the community's needs was the development of a literacy survey, which provided invaluable insights to ensure that resources and support are tailored to the specific needs of families.

## LITERACY SURVEY: UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY NEEDS

In May 2024, the Literacy Steering Committee launched a survey targeting caregivers of children ages 0-8 to gauge local trends in literacy attitudes, home practices, and potential opportunities to positively influence early-grade reading on a broader scale.

The committee's goal was to survey 10% of households with children under the age of 9, or 670 of the estimated 6,700 households in Kenosha County [1]. Ultimately, 401 surveys were completed, representing 690 children. While the survey did not meet its original target, it still gathered a significant, diverse sample that reflects the evolving demographic of our community.

[1][https://bit.ly/24BOF\\_citation\\_pg6](https://bit.ly/24BOF_citation_pg6)

To read the full survey summary, visit:



“The survey data revealed key insights, such as a correlation between parents' confidence in supporting reading and their children's reading habits. This will help us develop initiatives to empower parents and foster a love of reading in children. Our work is just beginning, and we're committed to using this data to create impactful literacy programs for Kenosha families.”

— Jackie Easley, Professor of Education, Co-Director of the Teaching Commons, Literacy Programs Director, Carthage College



## VISION

All students in Kenosha County complete third grade reading at grade level.





# YOUTH VOICE PROJECT

The Youth Voice Project offers high school sophomores, juniors, and seniors a chance to take an active role in shaping decisions that affect their lives. By fostering leadership and civic engagement, the program amplifies the voices of young people in our community.

During the 2023–24 cohort, students organized and facilitated a youth-led School Board Candidate Forum, engaging directly with local leaders in a panel discussion. This forum provided a platform for students to highlight key issues, ask critical questions, and demonstrate the power of student-driven initiatives. Building Our Future provided mentorship and guidance, equipping students with the tools they needed to succeed.

For the 2024–25 cohort, BOF welcomed Destiny Garcia, a freshman at Carthage College studying Biology and Spanish, as the Youth Voice Project Intern. Destiny co-facilitates initiatives, bringing fresh energy and insight to the project. Her contributions have already made a significant impact, further strengthening the program’s reach and influence.

Through initiatives like the Youth Voice Project, BOF continues to cultivate the next generation of leaders, equipping them with the skills and confidence to drive meaningful change in their communities.

## APPLY FOR THE 2025–26 YVP COHORT! WHAT YOU’LL GAIN:

Over six months, this leadership development program will empower you to realize your potential and design projects that raise awareness about causes you’re passionate about. Plus, it’s a great way to earn community service hours!





# CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT COHORT

In February, Building Our Future hosted the fourth iteration of its Continuous Improvement Cohort, bringing together teams from the Shalom Center and the Kenosha Fire Department's Diversity and Recruitment Committee. Grounded in the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Results Count Framework, the cohort equips teams to effectively analyze their data, identify root causes, and develop targeted strategies to drive meaningful change.

The Shalom Center team focused on improving outreach to Kenosha's Hispanic residents, a group underrepresented among those utilizing their services. As a result of their cohort participation, the team created marketing materials in Spanish, formed partnerships with Hispanic-serving organizations, and integrated new outreach goals into staff evaluations. These changes aim to bridge gaps and ensure equitable access to vital resources.

Meanwhile, the Fire Department team tackled the challenge of increasing female representation in their workforce.

By the end of the cohort, they had outlined a plan to attend four additional career fairs, participate in ten community outreach events, and develop a social media campaign to showcase firefighting as an inclusive career path. Their goal: a 50% increase in female applicants by the next hiring cycle in June 2025.



**Scan QR Code for more info on the Continuous Improvement initiative.**



**Scan QR Code to see a video about the Kenosha Fire Department's cohort.**



## AFRICAN AMERICAN YOUTH INITIATIVE (AAYI)

In August, Building Our Future partnered with leaders from Kenosha Unified School District's African American Youth Initiative (AAYI) for a two-day strategic planning session. Focused on continuous improvement, the session centered on analyzing past data to uncover key factors influencing college and career readiness for African American students.

Through guided activities, the team reflected on previous engagement strategies, identifying what worked well and exploring new opportunities to expand their reach and impact. The result was a strategic plan for the 2024-25 school year that reinforces AAYI's core principles of character development and camaraderie while setting bold new goals.

AAYI's plan focuses on increasing enrollment in Advanced Placement (AP) courses, dual-enrollment opportunities, and youth apprenticeship programs. To achieve this, the team will host workshops, information sessions, and regular gatherings that strategically expose students to these opportunities. By empowering African American youth with the tools and guidance they need to succeed, AAYI continues to pave the way for brighter futures and greater equity in education.



# EQUITABLE ENROLLMENT COLLABORATIVE



## VISION

By 2028, 62% of ALL high school completers in our region will enroll in a post-secondary program the first fall after graduation. By 2030, persistent equity gaps in enrollment will be eliminated.

Wisconsin currently ranks 38th out of 50 states in FAFSA completion.



## FAFSA SUMMER WORKSHOPS

Cost remains one of the largest barriers to post-secondary education. In 2023 alone, high school graduates left \$4 billion in Pell Grant funds unclaimed due to incomplete FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) forms [1]. To address this, the Financial Aid Support Team (FAST) FAFSA Initiative helped students and families in Kenosha and Racine complete the FAFSA applications. Funded by the ECMC Foundation, this initiative brought national resources directly into our communities.

Our outreach efforts were extensive, including:



**1,120  
PHONE  
CALLS**



**465  
TEXTS**



**439 FOLLOW-UP  
CONVERSATIONS**

**These proactive measures resulted in 290 additional FAFSA completions [2] this summer—a 21% increase compared with 2023.**

[1] <https://www.ncan.org/page/WhyInvestFAFSA>, [2] <https://studentaid.gov/data-center/student/application-volume/fafsa-completion-high-school>

“

Before joining FAST, I didn't know how important the FAFSA was or how to even begin the process. But with support, I completed my application and feel much more confident about my future.

”

—Allan Sanchez, a UW-Parkside senior  
& FAST team member



# EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

**Crystal Callahan**  
Co-Trustee,  
The Callahan-Palmer Trust

**Tamarra Coleman**  
Chief Executive Officer, Racine  
Family YMCA

**John Jansen**  
Director, Kenosha County  
Department of Human Services

**John Swallow**  
President, Carthage College

**Jeffrey Weiss**  
Superintendent of Schools,  
Kenosha Unified School District

**Nicole Ryf**  
President,  
Kenosha Area Business Alliance

**Lawrence Kirby**  
Vice President Community  
Manager,  
JPMorganChase

# LEADERSHIP TABLE

**Osmar Aguilar**  
Executive Director,  
Youth For Christ

**Lynn Akey**  
Chancellor,  
University of  
Wisconsin-Parkside

**Crystal Callahan**  
Co-Trustee, The  
Callahan-Palmer Trust

**Tamarra Coleman**  
CEO, Racine Family  
YMCA

**Gil De Las Alas**  
Chief Human  
Resources Officer,  
Uline

**Nick Drummer**  
Director Human  
Resources Industrial  
Division, Snap-on  
Incorporated

**Brandi Cummings**  
Interim Director,  
Kenosha Public  
Library

**Carolynn Friesch**  
CEO, United Way of  
Kenosha County

**Nicholas Galich**  
Staff Vice President  
Administration,  
Froedtert South

**Jeff Hill**  
Regional President,  
Herzing University  
Kenosha & Madison  
Campuses

**Yolanda Jackson-  
Lewis**  
Coordinator of  
Diversity/Student &  
Family Engagement,  
Kenosha Unified  
School District

**Lawrence Kirby**  
Vice President  
Community  
Manager,  
JPMorganChase

**John Jansen**  
Director, Kenosha  
County Department  
of Human Services

**Samantha Kerkman**  
County Executive,  
Kenosha County

**Ash Noble**  
Senior VP,  
Commercial  
Banking  
Johnson Financial  
Group

**Patrick Langston II**  
Senior Financial  
Analyst, Namera

**Jake McGhee**  
Vice President,  
New Business  
Development  
& Community  
Engagement,  
Jockey  
International, Inc.

**Pamela Fable**  
Operations Leader,  
Herzing University

**Destiny Garcia**  
Postsecondary  
Student, Carthage  
College

**Jean Moran**  
Founding Executive  
Sponsor of Building  
Our Future

**JP Moran**  
President/CEO, LMI  
Packaging Solutions

**Tara Panasewicz**  
CEO, Boys & Girls  
Club of Kenosha

**Ritu Raju**  
President, Gateway  
Technical College

**Nicole Ryf**  
President, Kenosha  
Area Business  
Alliance

**John Swallow**  
President, Carthage  
College

**Robert Terwall**  
Founder, Hallum  
Enterprises

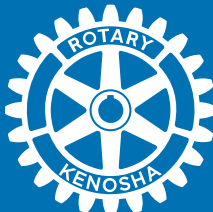
**Jeffrey Weiss**  
Superintendent of  
Schools, Kenosha  
Unified School  
District

**Chris Weyker**  
CEO, KAC



# INVESTING IN CHANGE

These dedicated funders invest in our core operations and systems strategies in order to ensure economic vitality and prosperity for all children in Kenosha County, cradle through career.



## INDIVIDUAL DONORS

- > Jean Moran
- > Shirley A. Duncan
- > Jim Hawkins
- > Jennie Tunkieicz
- > John & Cameron Swallow
- > Bryon Wright

The Kenosha Area Business Alliance (KABA) Foundation is the fiscal sponsor for Building Our Future, a 501(c)(3) organization. Donations made to Building Our Future are tax-deductible under IRS guidelines. Please make checks payable to the KABA Foundation.

Investments in Building Our Future’s work help us leverage more public and private resources to advance student outcomes across the community. If you would like to support the work of BOF, please reach out to Executive Director Tatjana Bicanin at [tbicanin@buildingourfuturekc.org](mailto:tbicanin@buildingourfuturekc.org).



Scan QR code  
to learn more  
about us!



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