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## Letter From The President >



**Salvador Lopez, President**  
*Photo by Isabel Garcia*

Hello! For those of you who have not met me yet, my name is Salvador Lopez, and I'm excited to be the new KConnect President. I started in late September and have enjoyed my time meeting network partners, learning about the work that has been done, and imagining what the future of KConnect will look like.

As I familiarize myself with KConnect's current work, I find myself continually referring back to our Common Agenda and Roadmap that launched the organization and, ultimately, the creation of our ever-growing network. One section particularly struck me: "No single organization is responsible for any major social problem, nor can any single organization solve it." To me, what that sentence means is that it will take a collection of people to obtain a community impact that will improve the lives of all children and families. We must continue to work together to eliminate disparities in the data showing that, across the board, African American and Latinx children are positioned to fail when compared to their White peers. We must acknowledge disparities and work towards equitable and measurable outcomes that challenge the status quo. I believe that the Board of Trustees hired me because they believe in KConnect's vision to do just that.

The KConnect foundation is strong and I believe that I can help build upon the great

work that has been established. My purpose or 'my why' behind this work is closely tied to my upbringing. I am the son of Mexican immigrants and grew up in low-income housing and a struggling school system in California. My parents moved to Grand Rapids when I was in my first year of high school. We were fortunate enough to purchase a home near Northview High School, where I learned quickly that not all school districts are created equal. My change in education, neighborhood, and community networks helped me learn first-hand how important it is to invest in ALL students and work collectively to create a system that provides students with a high quality education and experience, no matter their race, gender, or socio-economic status. I believe that exposure can change a life. Through the prenatal to career work at KConnect, we can help dismantle systems of oppression and help all children be successful.

It's time that we start pushing the envelope. We need to acknowledge the data, and work towards eliminating disparities that affect our children; more specifically children from historically marginalized and underrepresented communities. COVID-19 has compounded and brought to light long-standing inequities that children, not unlike myself, have experienced for decades. My hope is that I can build on the strong foundation that is here, reinvigorate our focus on community engagement and equity and inclusion, and continue to develop strategies that change outcomes for children across the prenatal to career continuum.

Thank you for being with KConnect over the past six years. I look forward to working with you as we continue to move forward and I'm excited for what the future holds.

**Salvador Lopez**  
*President, KConnect*



**Andrew Brower,**  
*KConnect Board of Trustees Co-Chair*

## Letter From the Co-Chairs >

Amidst pain and challenges, we value you and honor your work. The COVID-19 crisis of 2020 has made more visible inequities that have been prevalent for decades. The murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and countless more Black men and women in our country have led to the highest racial tensions we've seen since the Civil Rights movement. The year 2020 has been challenging, even more so for Black and Brown communities throughout our country and here in Kent County.

Yet, communities have rallied to support families and small businesses affected by COVID-19. Peaceful protests have led to some practice and policy change. Voter turnout is some of the highest we've ever seen. Cross-race advocates are working for systemic change.

KConnect was built to uncover and address racial disparities. With your guidance, we have continued to develop strategies that work toward improving outcomes for children and families. Our recent facilitation and convening work to address housing insecurity has resulted in a comprehensive community plan aimed at moving families who have no housing toward being able to choose the housing that's best for their families. The Day One Doula Collective, launched as a strategy



**Teresa Weatherall Neal,**  
*KConnect Board of Trustees Co-Chair*

from the Prenatal to Third Grade workgroup to address inequitable birth outcomes, has hired its first staff member and launches its first cohort of doulas of color in early 2021. KConnect continues to convene community partners to address the vast disparity between White children and children of color across the prenatal to career continuum. We know this work will help make a difference so that every child may thrive.

KConnect went through some significant changes this year. Our inaugural President, Pamela Parriott, moved to another position outside of the organization. Anissa Eddie, KConnect's Associate Director and a Pritzker Fellow, completed her fellowship and left to pursue her doctoral degree and launch Liminality Consulting. After a robust search process, we have brought on a President that we know will invigorate KConnect and further strengthen our core values of racial equity, trust, and community engagement. Salvador Lopez, our new President, began in late September and is already demonstrating fantastic leadership.

Although we too are uncertain what 2021 will bring, we know that this organization will work in partnership with you to affect meaningful change for children and families in Kent County. We are here to support your work in closing racial disparities in all areas of our community and connect all the many talents and assets to opportunities to live fully and thrive.

Thank you for your work and support now and in the past, and we look forward to our continued partnership.

**Andrew Brower**  
*Co-Chair, KConnect*

**Teresa Weatherall Neal**  
*Co-Chair, KConnect*

