

# Policy and Advocacy Toolkit





# Welcome to the KConnect Policy and Advocacy Toolkit —

A comprehensive resource for identifying policies and launching advocacy efforts in Kent County, Michigan.

Rooted in a commitment to dismantling inequitable and unjust systems, this toolkit reflects the KConnect Network's efforts to improve outcomes for historically marginalized populations while advocating for policies, practices, and procedures that benefit everyone in our community.

Central to our approach is recognizing that policy and advocacy are powerful pathways for systems change. This toolkit aims to clarify the process, providing insights into why policy and advocacy are effective and essential for dissolving harmful systems and fostering positive, lasting change.

Navigating the toolkit, you will find considerations when identifying policies to support, ensuring our advocacy efforts are targeted and impactful. We delve into key policy themes integral to addressing issues disproportionately affecting marginalized populations. By understanding and addressing these themes, we aim to reshape policies to yield more equitable outcomes for all.

In this toolkit, you will discover resources and frameworks designed to guide individuals and organizations in their advocacy efforts. These tools are tailored to enable you to contribute meaningfully as we collaborate to create a community where everyone can thrive.

After exploring the toolkit, we hope you will join us in the collective endeavor to challenge and transform systems perpetuating inequity. Together, let's advocate for policies that dismantle barriers, uplift marginalized voices, and pave the way for a more just, equitable, and inclusive Kent County.

To address the root causes of any social issue – what many call systems change – you need to shift the legal, regulatory, and policy environment that perpetuates it."



#### ABOUT US

# KConnect History



The 2013 KConnect Common Agenda and Roadmap - the organization's founding document - recognizes that Kent County has significant resources. Despite these resources, disparity gaps continue to increase based on socioeconomic status and race/ethnicity. The KConnect initiative brings community partnership and collaboration to the table, intending to drive significant improvements in outcomes for all children and families from cradle to college and career across Kent County. The Common Agenda aims to improve the education, employment, and well-being of children and families by helping to align current efforts and fill necessary gaps.

One of the original goals of the Common Agenda and Roadmap was to launch a Policy and Advocacy Workgroup aimed to educate and advocate for policies, resources, and practices that can strengthen the political will to pass, implement, and sustain effective long-term solutions that are aligned to the goals of the initiative.

It went on to say that the Cross-Cutting Workgroup will collaborate closely with the other teams to identify key policies to support.

In 2022, KConnect hired its first Postdoctoral Fellow - Dr. Shayla Young - to focus on Community Engagement and Policy and Advocacy. Dr. Young created the framework of P.A.C.E. (Policy, Advocacy, and Community Engagement).

This structure highlights the interconnectedness of these two focus areas. It reminds us that the voices of those most impacted by inequitable policies are the very ones that should be brought to the table when advocating for change at a local, state, and national level.

In early 2023, Dr. Young brought three tri-chairs to lead the Workgroup These individuals are:

Kathleen Renell John Ley-Bruinsma Weathers Helmholdt

Jayme Vosovic from the Michigan League of Public Policy was also brought on board to provide technical assistance to the group.

Together, the Policy and Advocacy Workgroup developed practices and frameworks that led to the development of KConnect's first Shared Policy Agenda, which was launched in January 2024. This consensus policy agenda features seven system-level, statewide policies - in various stages of legislation - that advance equity and dissolve the systems that perpetuate disparity. More information about the inaugural shared policy agenda will be shared later in this document.

On January 30, 2024, the KConnect Network convened to participate in KConnect's voting protocol to affirm and provide feedback on the policies. This document will be updated in February 2024 to reflect the Network's decision.

# Why Policy and Advocacy



# KConnect is focusing its efforts on policy and advocacy for several reasons:

#### **Systems Change**

PACE allows organizations, such as KConnect, to address the root causes of social issues by advocating for systematic change in collaboration with those most impacted by systemic injustices.

#### **Dissolution**

While organizations that manage and solve problems are crucial, they often only address the symptoms of a problem. PACE creates systemic change as it dissolves inequities affecting entire communities and populations, leading to sustainable solutions with a broader reach and long-term impact.

#### **Amplifying Voices**

PACE empowers individuals and communities to have a voice in decision-making processes that affect them directly. This involvement fosters ownership, builds trust, and ensures that solutions are responsive to community needs.

#### **Collective Action**

KConnect, as a Collective Impact organization, relies on collaboration among diverse populations to reach a common goal. PACE allows collaboration between government, nonprofits, businesses, and community members to leverage available resources and expertise for greater impact.

# How Policy and Advocacy Can Help Us Achieve Goals

The vision of KConnect is to ensure all children in Kent County have an equitable path to economic prosperity. KConnect's Policy and Advocacy Workgroup uses the PACE SETTER framework to achieve this vision.

#### **Policy Identification**

The P&A Workgroup collaborates closely with the Community Engagement Workgroup to identify inequitable policies, practices, and procedures that create disparate outcomes for historically marginalized populations in Kent County. Once these policies have been chosen, they are brought before the KConnect Network for affirmation and feedback.

### Addressing Systemic Inequities

By analyzing policies through an equity lens, KConnect identifies and addresses systemic inequities embedded in current and proposed policies. This involves identifying and advocating for policies, practices, and procedures that specifically target and address historic and structural inequities.

#### Cross-Sector Collaboration

Working with the Community Engagement Workgroup and engaging cross-sector partners from the KConnect network allows for a comprehensive approach to addressing inequitable policies. Collaborative efforts leverage the strengths of each sector to create more effective policy solutions.

## **Empowering Community**

KConnect empowers communities by involving them in the policy and advocacy process. This may include providing resources and tools for community members to engage with and advocate for policies that directly affect them.

#### **Steeped in Data**

Utilizing data to highlight disparities and gaps in existing policies can strengthen advocacy efforts. Collecting and presenting data on the impact of policies can provide evidence for the need for change.

### **Education and Awareness**

Promoting awareness and understanding of policy issues within the community and among the KConnect network can build a stronger case for equity-focused policies. Education efforts can shed light on complex policy issues and mobilize support.

#### **Transparent Process**

Ensuring that the decision-making process is actively communicated to the KConnect audience. This entails designing frameworks and awareness that are easily communicable to both the KConnect network and the broader community.

### **Transformational Change**

Understanding that change requires root cause analysis and systems-level impact. Having a framework that accounts for big and small wins with dissolving deep inequities as the larger goal.

#### **Evaluation**

After successful advocacy efforts, KConnect contributes to the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the policies on the policy agenda. This ensures that intended equity outcomes are realized and provides insights for continuous improvement.

### Responsive Advocacy

Recognizing that policies and priorities may evolve, KConnect is flexible and responsive to changing circumstances. This includes adapting advocacy strategies to address emerging equity challenges and opportunities.







#### Considerations When Identifying Policies to Support

- O1 Equity and Inclusion: prioritize policies that promote equity and inclusivity, address root causes of inequities, address disparities, and ensure that marginalized groups are not being left behind
- O2 Community Engagement: identity the most pressing issues and challenges facing the community, and then prioritize issues that align with KConnect's vision
- O3 Data and Evidence: base policy recommendations on data and evidence (both qualitative and quantitative)

- 04 Feedback: layout the process for the feedback loop
- 05 Measurement and Evaluation: use the KConnect dashboard to identify a change in metrics and/or develop evaluation criteria to assess the success of the policy change
- What Else?: Iterative Design design policy priority formulation process to be nimble and iterative to remain responsive to emergent advocacy needs.
- O7 Refer to Frameworks: Listed in the appendices (See "Decision-Making Tools")

#### **Designing for Dissolution**

Dissolution is a concept that refers to the process of breaking down deeply ingrained issues or structures within a system that contribute to systemic problems or inequities. It involves identifying and addressing the root causes of these challenges and working to disrupt and transform the factors that continue to lead to inequities and injustice.

Small "d" Dissolution

Big "D" Dissolution



#### Manage

Working directly with individuals who need immediate support or assistance



#### Solve

Finding short or long-term solutions for individuals that need support



#### **Dissolve**

Addresses the root causes of why a problem exists, to begin with.

# Policy Priorities

Dive deeper into our 2024

Policy Priorities here

#### Access to Affordable & Quality Childcare

KConnect is committed to advancing accessible and quality childcare solutions by advocating for affordability, quality, and children's and providers' well-being. We believe all families in Kent Co. must have access to affordable and quality childcare, and childcare providers have the support and opportunities to thrive.

#### Access to Paid Family and Medical Leave

KConnect prioritizes family well-being by advocating for equitable policies and recognizing the importance of supporting individuals during life transitions. We believe that all employees must have access to paid family and medical leave, and all employers, whether small or large businesses, can offer paid leave without adverse impact.

#### Equity in K-12 Education Funding

KConnect is dedicated to promoting educational equity by advocating for fair and adequate funding for vulnerable schools and districts, ensuring every student has access to a quality education regardless of socioeconomic status. We believe that all children must have access to a high-quality educational experience in schools that are equitably funded.

#### **Equity in Teacher Compensation**

KConnect champions fair and increased teacher pay as a vital component of educational equity, recognizing the essential role educators play in shaping the future. Our approach includes addressing racial and geographical disparities in teacher wages.

# Access to Comprehensive School-Based Supports

KConnect is committed to fostering the well-being of students by advocating for comprehensive mental health support in PK-12 education, ensuring every child has access to the resources they need to thrive.

# Increased Access to Postsecondary Opportunities

KConnect advocates for universal access to financial aid for all high school seniors, ensuring equitable opportunities for post-secondary education and empowering students to pursue their academic aspirations without financial barriers.

# Access to Wrap Around Supports in Postsecondary

KConnect strives to ensure every student's success by championing increased college graduation rates through a collaborative community effort and statewide initiatives.

# Advocacy Framework



CREATIVE

# **Connection**Through Storytelling

Humanizing the Impact of Policy Through Storytelling: Storytelling is a tool that can help policy issues resonate with various audiences, ranging from legislators and administrators to community members, students, and families. Our advocacy efforts include adding stories to data points in a way that offers a deeper understanding of how policy impacts Kent County and beyond.

#### **Centering Lived Experience in Communication:**

Our advocacy includes utilizing communication techniques such as collective impact storytelling. Collective Impact storytelling crafts a narrative that captures the interest of the audience, highlights both qualitative and quantitative data, and inspires the audience to take action\*. It helps the audience make sense of the world, comprehend complex data, understand different perspectives, and convey cultural values. Collective impact storytelling is a powerful tool to create shared understanding, mobilize action, and foster collaboration among stakeholders.

Our strategy emphasizes lived experiences and storytelling as a means of education. This includes naming lived experience as an area of expertise and ensuring that there is access to equitable pathways of communication between legislators and community members. Additionally, KConnect commits to embedding lived experience throughout its organization and leadership composition.

"It is important to note that storytelling isn't just about personal anecdotes and inspiring narratives. It can also be used to explain complex policy issues in a way that is easy for voters to understand." (Izryadnov, 2023)\*\*

<sup>\*</sup> Hop, K., & Streng, M. (2023). Developing communications to create systems change. StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network Convening, San Francisco, California.

<sup>\*\*</sup>Vinci Agency. (2023). Why Storytelling is Crucial in Political Campaigns. LinkedIn. Retrieved April 9, 2023, from <a href="https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/why-storytelling-crucial-political-campaigns-alexander-izryadnov/">https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/why-storytelling-crucial-political-campaigns-alexander-izryadnov/</a>

# Advocacy Framework



CURIOUS

# **Connection**Through Data

#### **Creative Approach to Education and Awareness:**

We aim to ensure that our educational and awareness efforts meet the needs of the Network and people of the community. This includes a two-part approach as we seek to bridge education and awareness efforts between community, legislators and policymakers. Additionally, we will create space for folks in our Network to be highly engaged in our advocacy efforts, including training opportunities.

#### **Accessible and Relatable Data Dashboard:**

KConnect is data-informed, meaning we track and disaggregate local metrics on our 8 Success Measures and 27 Indicators to determine how to optimize strategies that create the most equitable outcomes for our community. We strive to ensure that data is easily and appropriately communicated through data visualization. Without data, we won't have a collective understanding of the problems facing our community nor will we have the tools to address them. As our network continues to evolve, this data - which is publicly available on our Data Dashboard - will affect policy changes and system-level strategies that address the areas that need the most attention.



# Advocacy Framework



COURAGEOUS

# **Connection** Through People & Purpose

#### **Mobilizing Community:**

We recognize that there are community leaders and mobilizers who work diligently within the community and are committed to equitable outcomes and seeing our community thrive. We desire to come alongside community mobilizers and continue to grow our Network members' capacity in their policy and advocacy efforts. Overall, we seek to amplify impact by forging partnerships and continuing to foster a collaborative environment.

#### Coalition Building at the Local and State Level:

There is a great deal of power that is harnessed when groups unify action rooted in shared values and purpose. KConnect embarks on a mission to cultivate and strengthen coalitions within the local and state context. We envision that through these alliances, we will propel our policy priorities forward and ultimately contribute to a thriving Kent County.



### Conclusion

Developing a policy agenda must be a celebrated step in an organization's Policy & Advocacy pathway, especially when it garners consensus amongst a broader group. Dissolution and system-level change is complex, and policy change is necessary to truly reach equitable outcomes. KConnect continues this work by developing Network-identified and community-centered advocacy strategies that move the needle on the policy priorities for our 2024-2025 policy agenda.

As an organization or individual that seeks equitable outcomes for children and families, we invite you to join us in our commitment to policy change. Please visit our webpage, www.k-connect.org



**>K**CONNECT

