



# Shared Policy Agenda

UPDATED JUNE 2024



KConnect is a network of community leaders, content experts, and systems change-makers working toward this shared vision. We support children and families by using data and working with those most harmed by inequities. We don't design systems; we don't build them; we don't manage them; we connect them.

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. The 2013 KConnect Common Agenda and Roadmap - the organization's founding document - communicates a goal for Policy and Advocacy 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 focuses on equity and access, applicable legislation, and budget priorities. Overall, we seek to advance equity and dissolve the systems that perpetuate disparity.

## An Evolving Document

The comprehensive list of policy priorities is designed to remain dynamic. It undergoes continuous review and updates from our Policy and Advocacy Workgroup, concentrating on endeavors actively pursued by KConnect and Network members.

We acknowledge two fundamental understandings 1) policy and advocacy are complex and have many parts to consider, 2) our policy agenda is one step on a much larger journey toward dissolving system inequities. Therefore, by design, this policy agenda will remain an evolving document.

## **Equity First**

We know systemic racism is the root of many problems across the country. Communities are situated differently in relation to well-being and opportunity. Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian communities each have their own experiences of racism. We must address and acknowledge each community's unique expertise, assets, and needs. We must also break down and rebuild the policies and power structures that fail people of color. Racial and ethnic equity is necessary to help every child succeed in school and life. Our shared policy agenda mirrors this commitment to equity and aims to ensure that everybody in Kent County has equitable access to economic prosperity.

## **Dissolution Continuum**

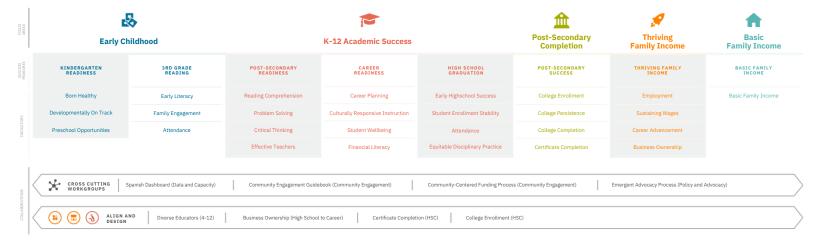
Dissolution is a concept that refers to the process of breaking down deeply ingrained issues or structures within a system that contribute to systemic problems or inequities. It involves identifying and addressing the root causes of these challenges and working to disrupt and transform the factors that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

The Policy and Advocacy Workgroup is developing a framework to identify where each policy sits on the dissolution continuum, as pictured below.



## A System-Level Approach

Our policy agenda aligns with our workplan with five focus areas, eight success measures, and twenty-seven indicators. Our focus areas include Early Childhood, K-12 Academic Success, Postsecondary Completion, Career Success, and Home and Family Stability. Our workplan indicates the comprehensive, system-level focus we must have to dissolve deeply-rooted inequities in our community and beyond. Our strategies will include local and state-level focuses to ensure we advocate at our greatest potential and support state-level alignment where there's opportunity.



## Policy Priorities — Guiding Principles

KConnect's network has identified the following core principles to guide our policy and advocacy work. These guiding principles are also reflective of focus areas in our workplan.





## Home and Family Stability

KConnect is committed to prioritizing the well-being of all children and families in Kent County by advocating for policies prioritizing access to high-quality, affordable, and equitable resources, supports, and services that families need to succeed.

## Postsecondary Completion

KConnect strives to ensure every student's success by championing policies that promote equitable access to the social and financial resources necessary for post-secondary education.

### K-12 Academic Success

KConnect is dedicated to promoting educational equity by supporting policies that provide adequate funding to vulnerable school districts while recognizing educators' invaluable role in a student's success.

Home & Family Stability

# 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.

### Workplan Success Measure

Employment

## **Dissolution Rating**

In Progress

## **Applicable Legislation**

Tri-Share - A cost-sharing model that ignites equally shared investment from employers, employees, and the state of Michigan into childcare costs.

## Short-Term Policy Goal:

Continue to grow awareness and support tri-share as a budget and expansion priority for 2024.

## **Applicable Budget Priorities**

\$50 million towards scaling and executing the tri-share model statewide.

## **Advocacy Actions**

Join regional efforts and local coalitions such as Vibrant Future's "Village"

Complete the tri-share, employee and/or employer interest froms <u>here</u>

Contact local lawmakers to increase the market rate compensation for early childhood professionals





Home & Family Stability

# 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.

### Workplan Success Measure

**Employment** 

## **Dissolution Rating**

In Progress

## **Applicable Legislation**

MI Family Leave Optimal Coverage - A proposed state-run paid leave program that would provide eligible employees with up to 15 weeks of paid leave, giving workers time away from their jobs to care for their health and a family member, including parental leave.

## Short-Term Policy Goal:

Support refining the FLOC bills proposed in May 2023 through discussion with the community, task force, and lawmakers.

## **Applicable Budget Priorities**

Not identified, although it has been quoted that an inclusive program such as this could cost between \$1-1.5 billion. Include a citation or link to the article.

### **Advocacy Actions**

Contact lawmakers regarding the need for paid family and medical leave. Refer to the KConnect policy brief for helpful statistics.

### Sign on to the FLOC Coalition letter.

• Currently, there are four organizations in Kent County signed on to the Coalition letter.





K-12 Academic Success

# 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.

## Workplan Success Measure

All indicators under the K-12 Academic Success Focus Area

## **Applicable Legislation**

Opportunity Index- A statewide school funding per-pupil formula that ensures our more vulnerable schools/districts get the equitable funding they need to support their scholars.

## **Applicable Budget Priorities**

Ensuring that the opportunity index increases in funding by 30% by 2030 and, ultimately, 100% funding.

### **Dissolution Rating**

In Progress

## Short-Term Policy Goal:

Collaborate with EdTrust Midwest, community partners, and legislators each legislative cycle to keep this issue and properly fund it on the forefront.

#### **Advocacy Actions**

Engage local lawmakers in support of the Opportunity Index. EdTrust Midwest shares that in order to fully fund the index within 5 years it would require an additional \$500 million dollar investment starting this year.

Currently, the senate is proposing an increase of \$122 million, and the House is proposing a \$70 million increase. Both of these are below what is needed.





K-12 Academic Success

# 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.

### Workplan Success Measure

**Effective Teachers** 

## **Dissolution Rating**

In Progress

## **Applicable Legislation**

Not identified

### Short-Term Policy Goal:

Continue to pay student teachers and the Future Educator Stipend (PA 103).

## **Applicable Budget Priorities**

Future Educator Stipend (PA 103)

## Long-Term Policy Goal

Educate lawmakers on the many moving parts and the importance of teacher pay as one essential step to reaching the indicators listed above.

### **Advocacy Actions**

Coordinate local and state advocacy efforts.

Operationalize the KConnect 360-Degree Diverse Educators model.





K-12 Academic Success

# 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.

### Workplan Success Measure

Student Wellbeing

## **Dissolution Rating**

In Progress

## **Applicable Legislation**

Not identified

## Short-Term Policy Goal:

Permanently fund 31N funding so schools can plan and hire staff for mental health support beyond assessments.

## **Applicable Budget Priorities**

(31N) provide support and/or hire qualified mental health professionals and interventions in a school setting; (31aa) pay per pupil for school safety and mental health services; (97j) \$6 million to identify students with potentially harmful behaviors

### **Advocacy Actions**

Coordinate local and state advocacy efforts





## 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.

## Workplan Success Measure

College Enrollment

**Applicable Legislation** 

## Universal FAFSA - a statewide mandate that requires

promoting FAFSA completion among all high school seniors.

## **Applicable Budget Priorities**

Community College Guarantee; recommendations range from \$5 million to \$30 million

## **Dissolution Rating**

In Progress

## Short and Long-Term Policy Goal:

Help educate the wider community on the applicability of the FAFSA to the trades, college access, etc., and help educate lawmakers on community and K-12 needs and necessary supports.

## **Advocacy Actions**

Contact Legislator





Post-Secondary Completion

# Access to Wraparound 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.

## Workplan Success Measure

College Completion, Certificate Completion

## **Applicable Legislation**

HB5097 (proposed substitute H-1) Hunger-Free Campus Act

## **Applicable Budget Priorities**

\$11 million for student wraparound services and basic needs support; \$26.3 million for College Success Fund; \$5 million for Reconnect Entry; \$5 million for Career and Education Navigation

## **Dissolution Rating**

In Progress

## Short and Long-Term Policy Goal:

Fund wraparound services for those at-risk students in post-secondary education and continued investment into college student success.

#### **Advocacy Actions**

Contact Legislator







# The Power of Connection

Advocacy is defined as any action that speaks in favor of, recommends, argues for a cause, supports or defends, or pleads on behalf of others<sup>1</sup>. In the intricate web of policy, advocacy emerges as a tool that offers hope, momentum, and, ultimately, a power shift. Our advocacy strategy is centered around forging power through storytelling, data, purposeful relationships, and connection. As we navigate the interplay between power dynamics and the need for connection, we champion strategies that empower the community, are data-driven, and ensure collective action.

We remain committed to serving as a catalyst for dissolving inequities and shaping policy that fosters equitable outcomes. As an organization, we have three guiding principles to describe how we show up in our collective impact work: curious, creative, and courageous. These three guiding principles help to strengthen our advocacy efforts and influence how we function around policy and advocacy. As an organization, we envision a future where every child and family thrives; we must reconstruct systems to achieve this.

Our advocacy strategy is a three-part approach that includes connection through stories, data, people, and purpose. All of our policy priorities and advocacy efforts are tied to the KConnect workplan. To further illustrate our advocacy framework we will utilize the example of our Diverse Educators initiative and 360° model.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Alliance for Justice. (2013). What is Advocacy? [Fact sheet]. <a href="https://mffh.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/AFJ">https://mffh.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/AFJ</a> what-is-advocacy.pdf



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>



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.





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.





## >KCONNECT