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Leveraging Resources by Changing the Culture of Problem Solving

Today’s release of the 2015 Community Report Card is one more reason to celebrate the anniversary of ACT Rochester. During its five-year history, ACT Rochester has been leading the effort to change the culture of how our communities use data to solve problems and make decisions.

“ACT Rochester data first helped the community — and the Community Foundation — become aware of critical inequities based on race, education and poverty,” says Jennifer Leonard, president and CEO of Rochester Area Community Foundation, who opened the Report Card Event this morning at Rochester Museum & Science Center. “Today, that same data helps our community become more accountable as we work to generate solutions.”

Ann Johnson, senior director of ACT Rochester, provided an overview of the Report Card. She reminded the 200-plus members of the audience at the Eisenhart Auditorium that “while we have yet to set community targets, ACT stands for Achieving Community Targets. We have been a catalyst for actionable change delivering two compelling poverty reports in the last 15 months, along with the Community Foundation.”

The Report Card highlights focused on several critical indicators:

**Children in poverty and disparities in the City of Rochester:** The percentage of children living in poverty in the United States, New York, the region, and Monroe County is between 20-22%. However, the child poverty rate for the City of Rochester is more than double at 50%. This disparity is across all races, with African American and Hispanic children faring worst compared to their counterparts across the state. Johnson referenced many efforts including

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ongoing poverty presentations, poverty simulations, and the anti-poverty initiative as burgeoning efforts to address this significant issue.

**Population changes:** Since 2000, the number of people of color living in Monroe County is rising. The African American population grew 14%, Asian (42%) and Hispanic (52%). Audience members at the 90-minute event were challenged to consider how broadly our community has adapted culturally to this change.

**Average salary:** Throughout the region, the average salary continues to lag behind state and national levels. In 2013, the region’s average salary of $44,100 ranked below the $48,300 average of New York State’s (excluding NYC) and the national average of $49,800. With the exception of educational services, all sectors reported lower wages than both state and national levels, while the rate of increase for average salary consistently declined since 2004. Aside from salary, a discussion ensued about exploring potential opportunities to expand the community’s workforce.

**School readiness:** This is a major component in measuring the success of a child. One of the key measures is pre-kindergarten enrollment. The event touched on the struggle to update this indicator. Data initially showed a dramatic downward trend in enrollment. New York State reports 2013 pre-K enrollment at 1,617 in Monroe County (compared to 3,205 in 2012). However, the Rochester City School District reports pre-K enrollment at 1,900 for 2013. This number exceeds the state’s reported number for Monroe County and does not include other districts or community-based organizations. The error in the data was highlighted in an effort to promote transparency from trusted data sources. A Freedom of Information request from Center for Governmental Research is pending with the New York State Education Department.

“If we cannot obtain reliable data from trusted sources, how can we measure our results and the impact of our investments as a community?” Johnson asked event participants.

The remainder of the Report Card event detailed testimonials from three participants in the Poverty Simulation held in January and organized by ACT Rochester: Gladys Pedraza-Burgos, chief operating officer at Ibero-American Action League; Hanif Abdul-Wahid, community liaison for Monroe County; and Bill Moehle, Brighton town supervisor. The Community Foundation pans to continue these simulations to ensure more people have the opportunity to have this insightful and moving experience.

Tom Argust, chair of ACT Rochester’s advisory committee, posed three tenets of a model for culture change:
• Reducing and integrating systems of silos;
• Shifting accountability from individuals/organizations to the community as a whole; and
• Moving from power brokers to process brokers

“ACT Rochester is not just a community data base. Rather, it is a means toward an end. And that end is to change the way our community goes about solving its problems” says Argust. Audience members, seated at tables of 10, discussed how they could adopt this model as their personal commitment to change.

Participants at today’s event represented government, business, nonprofit and education sectors from Monroe and eight nearby counties.

The Community Report Card is an aggregation of data from more than 100 community indicators for Genesee, Livingston, Monroe, Ontario, Orleans, Seneca, Wayne, Wyoming, and Yates counties on ACTRochester.org. An indicator is a measure that helps describe an economic, environmental, social or cultural condition over time.

Symbols, colors and arrows are used to provide a quick, at-a-glance overview of the region compared to New York State and the extent of long-term progress made since 2000. This data cover the topics of Arts, Culture and Leisure, Children and Youth, Community Engagement, Economy, Education, Financial Self-Sufficiency, Health, Housing, and Public Safety.

Overall, the Report Card shows that our region is doing as well or better than New York State in five of nine areas: Children, the Economy, Education, Health, and Housing. Our region is performing slightly worse than the state in Community Engagement. Areas in which our region trails the state by 10% or more include the Arts, Financial Self-Sufficiency, and Public Safety.

Data for some indicators in the Report Card are from different years, ranging from 2009 to 2014. Compiled by the Center for Governmental Research, data is updated three times a year and only when information from authoritative sources is final.

Since its inception, ACT Rochester has promoted three components — Learn, Connect, and ACT. In 2012, ACT Rochester focused on educating the region about its data. In 2013, this initiative of Rochester Area Community Foundation focused on forging connections, using new partnerships to create awareness of racial and ethnic inequities
in the region. Last year the event reflected on moving to action and posed the question: “When it comes to taking long-term action on serious systemic issues, does our activity lead to action and results?” The focal point this year is ACT Rochester’s purpose as it relates to leveraging our resources and results by changing the culture of problem solving.

For more on the regional and Monroe County Community Report Card and detailed Trend Snapshots, visit ACTRochester.org. County Report Cards for the surrounding eight counties will be announced in May.

About ACT Rochester
Launched in 2009, ACT Rochester’s purpose is to change the culture of community problem-solving and associated decision-making through the use of credible, independent and timely data. This is accomplished when people LEARN about key issues, CONNECT with others in the community, and ACT to promote change.

Currently a community indicators program of Rochester Area Community Foundation, ACT Rochester provides an objective assessment of the nine-county region’s performance on key indicators of well-being. The website, a robust public utility at www.ACTRochester.org, creates a "one-stop shop" for data and analysis, with more than 100 indicators as well as links to more than 300 community initiatives and resources.