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**ACT Rochester at 10 Years:**

**Reflecting on Our Past, Focusing on Our Future**

Ten years after its launch as our region’s community indicators program, ACT Rochester delivered its annual Report Card this morning to an audience of more than 225 representing the government, business, nonprofit, faith-based and education sectors. The event focused on keeping data relevant, reflecting on accomplishments, and focusing on future “impACT.”

“ACT Rochester continues to take a leadership role in delivering credible, timely and independent data to a nine-county region to help communities make decisions that are more informed, “ says Jennifer Leonard, president and CEO of Rochester Area Community Foundation, who opened the event at Rochester Museum & Science Center. “I am proud to be at this point in ACT’s history and celebrating its 10th anniversary as a community asset.”

ACT Executive Director, Ann Johnson, reminded the audience that data informs action. She challenged them, as individuals and as a group, to take action that is more impactful and focused on improving our community results.

“For the first time in eight years, the Report Card shows our region performing worse than NYS in half (four) of the areas measured — Economy, Education, Health, and Public Safety,” said Johnson. The Rochester region is performing slightly worse than the state in Economic Security (previously Financial Self-Sufficiency) and better or equal to the state in Children & Youth, Community Vitality (combined Arts, Culture & Leisure and Community Engagement topics), and Housing.

Johnson reminded participants that, last year, *ACTRochester.org* added data for three regional cities — Batavia in Genesee County, and Canandaigua and Geneva in Ontario County. The regional cities data, a subset of the county indicators, covers demographics and income, housing, children and youth, education, and crime.

In November, ACT Rochester debuted a refreshed website, including improved features, responsive design and more relevant content. This refresh was undertaken to ensure a cost-effective framework, interactive features, and quicker access. A full review of ACT indicators with community input led to the addition of 20 indicators, a new data source for two indicators, and the removal of 31 indicators.

The Report Card highlights focused on several new indicators:

**Education Performance by Subgroup:** ACT Rochester has always disaggregated education performance by race and ethnicity and ~~i~~ncome. Now student subgroup information is available for 3rd and 8th grades byincome, English Language Learners, and students with disabilities.

**Instructional School Spending:** High instructional spending for schools can indicate a lot of different things — better-qualified or more experienced teachers, stronger curricular materials or offerings, better teacher retention, and/or stronger instructional experiences for students. Instructional spending captures the amount per student that directly relates to students' classroom experiences. In 2017, instructional spending in our region was about $15,800 per student, lower than the state ($18,600) and the state excluding New York City ($17,700). Instructional spending has increased by 43% since 2000, after adjusting for inflation, less than the 60% increase statewide. The Rochester City School District spent more per pupil than the region and counties at almost $17,200.

**Admissions to Substance Abuse Treatment by Primary Substance:** While overall admissions to substance abuse treatment have been flat over the past decade, admissions related to heroin use skyrocketed 211% in the region, rising from about 2,000 in 2007 to almost 7,000 in 2017. The percentage increase was even larger in the counties surrounding Monroe, at nearly 500%, growing to more than 2,500 in 2017. Alcohol admissions, however, were still the largest share, at 33% of the total admissions in the region, followed by heroin admissions at 32%, marijuana-related admissions at 18%, cocaine 9% and other opioids 6%.

**Disengaged Youth, Ages 16 to 19:** In 2013-17, 6% of the region's youth were neither working nor in school. The City of Rochester rate, at 11%, was roughly double that of Monroe County (5%) and the overall region, though that rate represents a decrease of 3 percentage points (or 348 fewer disengaged youth) from 2000.

**Households without Vehicles:** A vehicle makes it easier for people to work and to conduct daily business, such as doctor's visits and shopping. Ready access to transportation also can make it easier to get involved in schools, religious organizations, and other forms of civic life. In 2013-17, 10% of the region's households did not have a vehicle; cities in our region had rates above the regional average: Batavia 16%; Canandaigua 12%; Geneva 18%; and Rochester 25%.

The majority of data for ACT Rochester indicators is sourced from the U.S. Census. Although still a year away, audience members were encouraged to tell everyone they know to participate.

As moderator of the discussion of ACT’s past and future, Joseph Stefko, president and CEO of the Center for Government Research, reflected on the growth of ACT Rochester, from initial concept in 2006 to key regional information provider today:

“This remarkably powerful information asset we’re so fortunate to have demonstrates with stark clarity how the seeds of community conversation — of community *change* — can grow when nurtured. What started as an idea to measure and track community indicators has changed the culture of how we approach issues in this region,” said Stefko.

ACT Rochester, he added, has served as a “data-centered touchstone” for nearly all of the critical conversations in our community. “It’s helped bring vitally important issues forward; it’s helped benchmark our progress; and it’s helped shine a bright light on where we still have work to do. More than anything it’s helped us leverage data to better understand, engage and tell the story of our community in powerful and actionable ways,” Stefko said.

Participants included in the discussion were:

* Margaret Sánchez, principal, Sanchez and Associates, added a historical narrative to the data;
* Ed Doherty, author of ACT/Community Foundation poverty and race/ethnicity reports, reviewed the importance of engaging our community;
* Hanif Abdul-Wahid, community liaison for neighborhood initiatives for the Monroe County Department of Planning & Development, reflected on where our region would be without ACT; and
* Simeon Banister, vice president of community programs at the Community Foundation, and Johnson predicted potential improvements for our community as we become more accountable and results focused.

Tom Argust, chair of the ACT Rochester Advisory Committee, closed the event by providing a new way to view the value of ACT Rochester. “We must view ACT as a public utility, similar to our water, gas and electric utilities. It is constantly, consistently and seamlessly available to everyone at all times. It is the keeper of our region’s ‘democracy of data,’” Argust said.

Today’s release of the regional Report Card will be accompanied by county-level report cards for each of the nine counties, as well as comparison data for the four cities in our nine-county region.

Data for indicators in the Report Card are from different years, ranging from 2015 to 2018. Compiled by the Center for Governmental Research, data are updated three times per year and only when information from authoritative sources is final. County and city summaries will be rolled out through June 2019.

For more on the regional and nine county report cards, visit *ACTRochester.org*.

**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.*

*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.* ACTRochester.org *creates a "one-stop shop" for data and analysis, with more than 100 indicators as well as links to hundreds of our community’s initiatives and resources.*