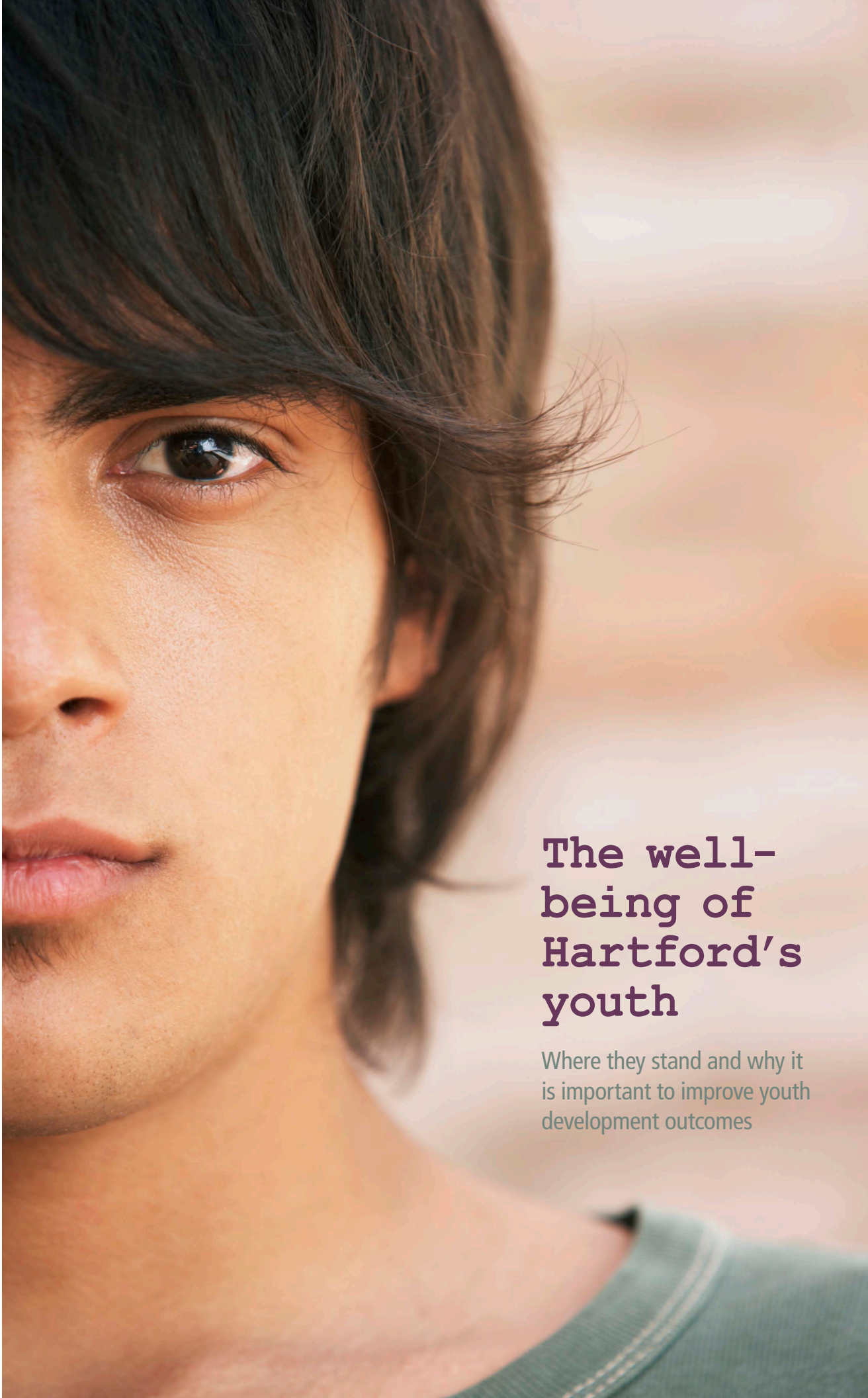
Landscape Report on Hartford Youth



The well-being of Hartford's youth

Where they stand and why it is important to improve youth development outcomes

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Numerous community stakeholders have provided significant guidance and input to the Hartford Office of Youth Services (HOYS) as HOYS prepared this *Landscape Report on Hartford Youth*.

The *Landscape Report* uses data on selected topics as indicators to paint a broad portrait of the status of nine-to-24-year-old young people living in Hartford. This report is one of four related HOYS documents to be released over the next several months. HOYS's *Four-Year Report*, *Roadmap for Youth Development* and *Hartford Youth Speak*, are the three other reports now in development.

HOYS' *Four-Year Report* will describe targeted investments, programs and services that have been put into place since 2006 to address the City's most urgent youth development priorities. The *Roadmap for Youth Development* will detail specific strategies HOYS proposes to pursue in addressing the greatest challenges and opportunities now facing the City's young people. The *Roadmap for Youth Development* will be complemented by *Hartford Youth Speak*, which documents the observations of more than a thousand of Hartford's young people.

As a municipal agency, HOYS is uniquely positioned to lead the effort to effectively address the key issues described in this *Landscape Report*. Despite all the great work being done by individual youth-serving agencies in Hartford, no single agency or organization can provide the scale and scope of youth services that are needed to bring about meaningful and lasting improvements in the overall well-being of Harford's youth.

Since 2006, HOYS has marshaled efforts to support and connect youth-serving agencies to create a cohesive, comprehensive support system for youth. HOYS is the lead convener and intermediary of a citywide effort to improve results for Hartford's youth—by pulling together the resources that will ease the transition from childhood to young adulthood to becoming a responsible adult member of the community.

Today, HOYS continues to be innovative, to make wise investments, to expand access and supports, and to develop further partnerships among state and local agencies, nonprofits and philanthropic organizations.

The content of this *Landscape Report* represents a rallying call to the leadership of the City and its local and state partner organizations to join together in addressing the challenges facing our youth. I hope this document will inspire review and informed discussion focused on the strategic investments that must be made on behalf of Hartford's young people. Truly, it will take a collaborative effort to provide our youth with the opportunities they need to become successful adult members of our community.

Enid Rey, *Director*
City of Hartford Office for Youth Services

A citywide focus on better results for Hartford youth is starting to pay-off

The overall well-being of Hartford's youth age nine to 24 needs to be improved.

Too many youth in Hartford live in poverty and face significant barriers to success in school, work and life. Hartford's Office of Youth Services (HOYS) and its local and state partners are committed to work together to help address the needs of the City's youth. Since its inception in 2006, HOYS has collaborated with municipal and state agencies, youth services providers, schools and educators, funders, and employers to begin the process of comprehensively improving results for Hartford's youth. A variety of significant youth development initiatives are underway across Hartford. Combined, they inspire confidence that positive, large-scale improvements can be achieved. Examples of innovative efforts in the areas of education, at-risk youth and infrastructure include the following:

Education

- Reforming Hartford public schools in ways that provide more choice and accountability.
- Creating new schools for over-aged and under-credited youth such as Opportunity High School.
- Helping youth stay and succeed in school through middle school transition projects and community schools.
- Developing theme-based schools such as the International Magnet School for Global Citizenship to stimulate the specific interests of students in order to have them stay successfully engaged in their high school studies.
- Improving and expanding early childhood programs, practices, and policies that increase the number of children entering school healthy and ready to succeed.

At-Risk Youth

- Engaging with at-risk youth and their families through programs such as the Juvenile Review Board.
- Community-wide work with high-risk youth through the PeaceBuilders program.

Infrastructure

- Building capacity of youth workers through the Youth Development Practitioners Academy and the Middle Management Institute.
- Increased use of the *Hartford Connects* data management system to ensure accountability and to track and support results.
- Development of a results framework for adoption by youth-serving agencies.

While still in the early stages, the initial results of these efforts are promising:

- 8th grade Connecticut Mastery Test reading scores increased from 45.2 percent proficiency in 2008 to 59.5 percent in 2010.
- On-time high school graduation rates improved from 29 percent in 2008 to 43 percent in 2010.
- Between 2006 and 2009, arrests for youth under 18 declined by 25 percent.

Much more, however, needs to be done to improve outcomes in the areas of basic needs, education, at-risk youth, health, career development, and youth employment.

Identifying the biggest problems and challenges

Hartford is a young community. One in three residents is under 18 (see table accompanying this section). To succeed in the 21st century, Hartford's young people must acquire the skills and knowledge needed to keep the city, state, and region competitive in an increasingly global environment. To pave their path to success, youth must be prepared to accept lifelong learning as both a challenge and an opportunity.

The high percentage (22 percent) of Hartford youth 18-24 without a high school diploma and the low percentage (6.9 percent) with a four-year college degree or higher, indicate that Hartford youth have a long way to go to meet the challenges that face them.

Poverty is a significant barrier to achieving improved results for youth. Hartford has the highest poverty rate of any Connecticut city. Coupled with the large number of single-parent families, this high poverty rate means that many families in Hartford struggle to provide the bare necessities children need to grow and thrive – proper nutrition, good healthcare, safe and secure homes, effective parenting, and stable neighborhoods.

The burdens associated with poverty challenge the future of Hartford's children. While school dropout rates have declined, more than half of Hartford's students still fail to graduate from high school on time. Students who drop out not only lack the skills to get good jobs, but they are also more likely to be incarcerated, to have children outside of marriage, and to become a financial drain on, rather than a contributor to, the Hartford economy. It is "increasingly difficult for them to transition to adulthood, to form independent households, to marry, and to raise their children in a stable, non-poverty environment."[1]

Even young people with only a high school diploma will face limited lifetime earnings potential and other significant economic challenges throughout life.

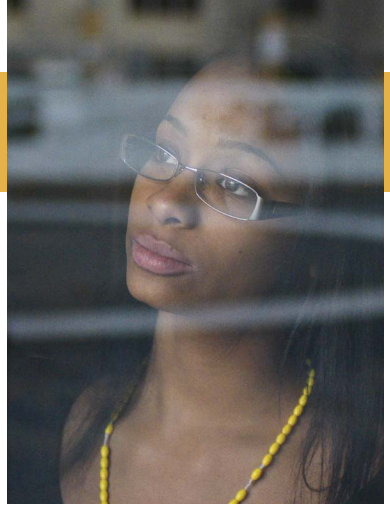
This *Landscape* report takes a close look at the key indicators of poverty, poor school performance, health deficiencies, and workforce challenges that impede the positive development of Hartford's youth. The data used in this report were chosen to increase public understanding of the status of youth across Hartford and their most important unmet needs. The reliability and validity of the data have been confirmed by national experts and established institutions.

Three follow-up reports to this Landscape Report are in development and will be released in the near future:

- HOYS's Four-Year Report (2006-2010) of accomplishments in developing and implementing city-wide strategies for improving results for Hartford's youth.
- HOYS's *Roadmap for Hartford Youth Development*, proposing specific strategies and investments to achieve significant, measurable and sustainable improvements in the well-being of Hartford's youth.
- The *Youth Speaks Report* that gives voice to the authentic wants and needs of Hartford's young people from age nine to 24.

[2]	number	percent
Total Population	**118,000**[3]	
- Children under 5	9,000	7.6%
- Children 5 to less than 9	8,300	7.0%
- Children 9 to less than 18	20,000	17.0%
- Total under 18	37,300	31.6%
Educational Attainment (Population 18-24)	**15,930**	
- Less than high school graduate	3,505	22%
- High school graduate or equivalent	4,301	28%
- Some college or associate's degree	6,850	44%
- Bachelor's degree or higher	1,099	6.9%

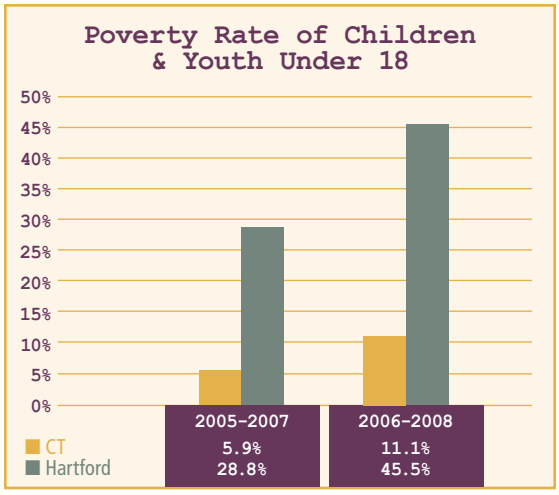
[1] *The Labor Market Experiences and Fortunes of CT Working Age Adults 16-64 by Educational Attainment: Dire Straits for High School Dropouts,* Sum, Khatiwada, McLaughlin, October 2009
[2] US Census 2006-2008, American Community Survey
[3] Numbers rounded to nearest thousand



The basic needs of too many Hartford youth are not being met

Indicator #1: Children living in poverty

In 2006-2008, over 45 percent (31,555) of Hartford's children younger than 18 were living below the poverty level.



How poverty affects Hartford's youth

The poverty level for a family of three under current federal guidelines is $18,310.[i] Children growing up in poverty face numerous challenges that can affect their physical and mental health as well as their achievement in school. Levels of stress are often high in poor households, accompanied by turmoil resulting from constant difficulty in meeting basic needs like food, shelter, and transportation.

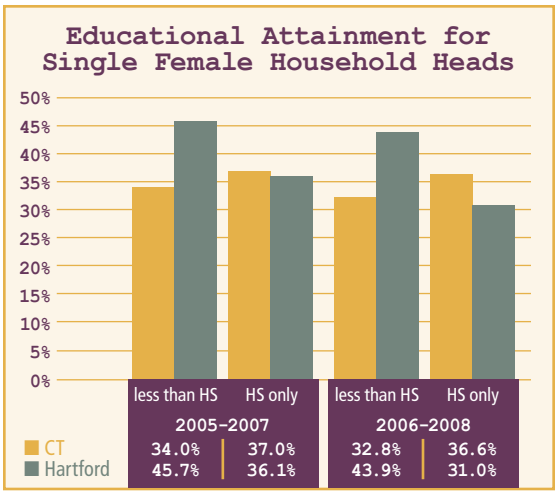
In many single-parent families, the parent often works at more than one job, leaving little time for the nurturing of children. Nutrition often suffers, with adverse effects on children's health. Living in a neighborhood where household poverty is common often correlates with unsafe streets, causing parents to keep their children indoors, limiting opportunities for exercise and play. Health problems may also go undetected or untreated if local doctors refuse to take Medicaid patients (there is an increasing problem of limited access to health care for the poor).[ii] Research indicates that poor children are disproportionately exposed to risk factors that impair brain development and affect social and emotional development. These risks include exposure to environmental toxins, inadequate nutrition, maternal depression, parental substance abuse, trauma and abuse, violent crime, divorce, low- quality childcare, and decreased cognitive stimulation and vocabulary exposure in the preschool years.

Where Hartford stands

- Hartford's percentage of children and youth under 18 in poverty is more than four times the rate for the rest of Connecticut.
- 89 percent (12,751) of Hartford children in poverty live in households without two parents heading the family.
- Both the lack of two parents and low education levels among the adults in these families add to the challenges children face.

Indicator #2: Educational attainment of female-headed households below poverty level

In 2006-2008, 77 percent of Hartford's children in households below the poverty level lived in families headed by a single female, and 44 percent of those female heads of household lacked a high school diploma.



The relationship between mothers' education and their children

Consistently, children's test scores rise in relation to their mothers' educational attainment (see accompanying charts). Among mothers with a high school education or less, about 30 percent of the children scored low in reading. In contrast, nearly all children whose mothers finished college scored in the high and middle ranges on reading. There were similar findings for math.[iii] Mothers with education beyond the high school diploma, even in poor neighborhoods, are likely to have children who do relatively well in reading and math. More of their children will graduate from high school.[4]

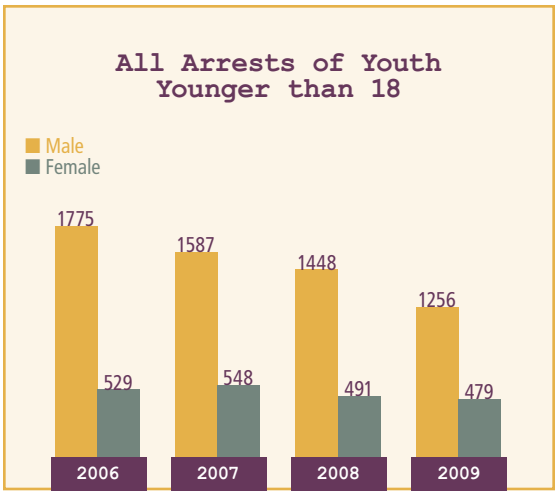
A review by the Rand Corporation notes that better-educated mothers are more likely to understand the importance of learning basic skills. These mothers may also be more likely to understand the learning *process* and how to help their children develop the skills they need. The stresses and challenges of managing day-to-day living only increase the difficulties faced by low-income, single mothers in giving their children the support and guidance they need to thrive in elementary and secondary school and to progress toward success in post-secondary education and careers.

Where Hartford stands

- The total percent of single women heading poor families in Hartford has declined slightly.
- Three-quarters of single, female household heads in Hartford have no education beyond high school completion.
- Hartford has 11 percent more poor households headed by single females lacking high school diplomas than does Connecticut as a whole.

Indicator #3: Arrests for youth less than 18 years of age

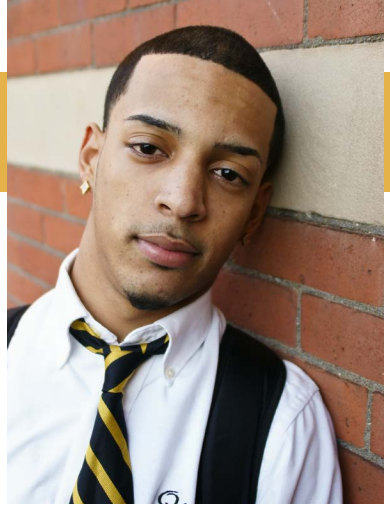
Arrests for Hartford youth under 18 have declined by 25 percent between 2006 and 2009. One hundred ninety-two fewer males and 12 fewer females under age 18 were arrested in 2009 than in 2008.



Fewer but still too many arrests

The degree to which this decline in arrests results from changes in juvenile policy or law enforcement practice or changes in youth behaviors is unclear. However, juvenile arrests are the proverbial tip of the iceberg and – while the trend is promising - arrests continue to be unacceptably high.

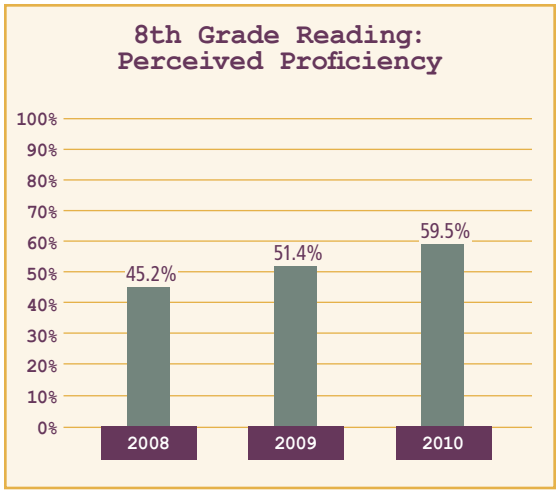
[4] A Matter of Class, Rand Review; www.rand.org/ publications/randreview/issues/fall2004/class.html



The results of formal education in Hartford are headed in the right direction

Indicator #4: 8th Grade Reading Scores

59.5 percent of Hartford students achieved proficiency on the 8th grade Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) for reading in 2010.



Two indicators provide a foundation for understanding educational achievement in Hartford: eighth grade reading scores and on-time high school graduation. Eighth grade reading ability tells us about the quality of student learning. On-time high school graduation is a key transition point in the formal education process, since further education, productive careers and adequate income are all related to successful attainment of this milestone.

Why 8th grade reading proficiency in Hartford should continue to improve

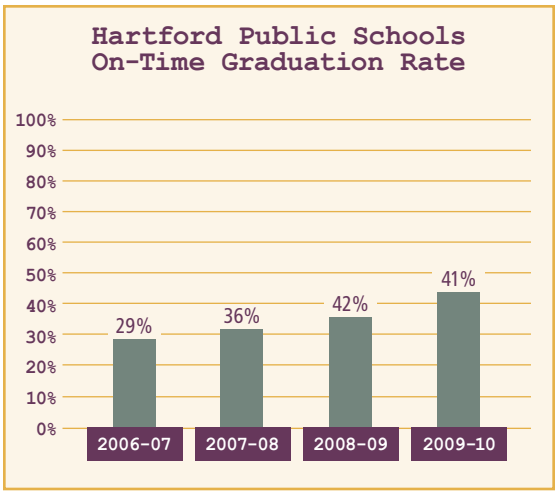
Eighth-grade reading is a powerful predictor of the degree of academic success students are likely to have in high school and how well prepared they are to compete in the workforce.

Reading scores at this stage of development relate to a variety of factors. Family environment is important for early reading success and readiness for school. Young children who are read to and hear and learn spoken words do better on reading tests. Another contributing factor is the primary language used by the family. The number of English Language Learners (ELL) in Hartford schools is high. ELL students face the challenge of attaining English proficiency while simultaneously trying to master academic content in general education classrooms.

Indicator #5: On-time high school graduation rate

Fewer than 50 percent of Hartford youth graduate from high school on time.

On-time high school graduation (completing grades 9-12 within four years) relates strongly to the need for significant remediation in post-secondary education. On-time high school graduation also corresponds strongly to work-readiness and the ability to pursue career goals effectively. Employers view high school graduation as a threshold predictor of a young person's work ethic, persistence and possession of the basic skills needed to succeed in the workplace.



Where Hartford stands

- On-time graduation rates in Hartford have significantly improved from 29 percent to 41 percent in the past five years.
- However, Hartford still graduates fewer than 50 percent of its high school students on time.

Health disparities between Hartford's youth and the rest of the state are significant

Overall there are several health disparities between Hartford and the rest of the state which track along racial and ethnic lines. One of the most significant health disparities involves childhood obesity.

Across the United States, childhood obesity has expanded to near epidemic proportions. Although precise obesity prevalence figures are difficult to obtain, one recent estimate indicates that approximately 50 percent of Hartford's 11-year-old children are "at risk of obesity," "obese," or "extremely obese." Thirty percent of Hartford's two-year olds are in the same categories. Obesity may be the single greatest health risk facing Hartford youth.

National obesity rates correspond with income rates and educational achievement – the lower the income and educational achievement, the higher the obesity rate. This relationship is very evident in Connecticut. Rates of obesity vary by income (from 19 percent in the top income bracket to 28 percent in the lowest bracket) and education (from 17 percent among those with the highest education levels to 34 percent for those with the lowest education levels).

Differences in rates of adult obesity and overweight are particularly pronounced when comparing education levels. Fifty-five percent of adult college graduates are overweight or obese, compared to 65 percent of those who have only finished high school.[iii] Rates of childhood obesity in Connecticut vary substantially by race, ranging from 9.6 percent for white children to 17.5 percent among Latino children and 21.1 percent for African American school children.[5] In other words, Connecticut's Latino children are almost twice as likely and African American children are somewhat more than twice as likely to be obese than white children. The high percentage of Latino and African American children in Hartford means that childhood obesity is twice as likely in Hartford than in the rest of Connecticut.

These data are confirmed in a Sustinet report[5] (a study recently released for Connecticut) and in recent findings of the Department of Health and Human Services.[6] "Obesity-related medical expenditures for Connecticut adults are $1.08 billion each year. Public funds such as Medicare and Medicaid pay for more than three quarters of all adult medical expenditures in Connecticut attributable to obesity."[6]

Obesity-related illnesses include high blood pressure, diabetes, congestive heart failure, stroke, gallstones, gout, osteoarthritis, some types of cancer, and complications of pregnancy.

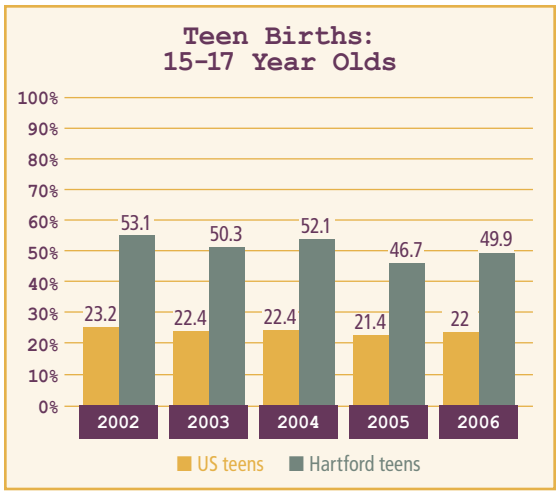
Where Hartford stands

- While precise figures for Hartford are not available, Hartford's high percentage of minorities and high levels of poverty suggest that the City's obesity rates may be more than double (25 percent or more) the obesity rates in the rest of the state (12 percent).

[5] Final Report of the Sustinet Obesity Task Force, July 2010
[6] Healthy Hartford Campaign, 2010

Indicator #6: Rate of births to teens 15-17 per 1,000 births

In 2006, the teen birth rate rose by 3.2 percent after years of generally declining numbers.



High teenage births have major social, economic and health implications

High teen birth rates are an important concern because teen mothers and their babies face increased health risks and long-term barriers to their chances of building a financially secure future. Life is often difficult for teenage mothers and their children. Teen mothers are more likely to drop out of high school than girls who delay childbearing. Only 40 percent of teenagers who have children before age 18 go on to graduate from high school, compared to 75 percent of teens from similar social and economic backgrounds who delay having children until at least age 20.

With her education cut short, a teenage mother may lack basic job skills, making it hard to find and keep a job. She may become financially dependent on her family or on public assistance. Teen mothers are more likely to live in poverty than women who delay childbearing. More than 75 percent of all unmarried teen mothers go on welfare within five years of the birth of their first child.[7]

Where Hartford stands

- After years of decline, teen birth rates in Hartford, Connecticut and the United States have begun to rise.
- The Hartford teen birth rate was more than double the statewide average for the five most recent years for which data are available.

[7] www.marchofdimes.com/professionals

Career readiness is a key issue in the development of Hartford's youth

Job readiness is crucial in order for young people to be able to pursue employment and gain the work experience they need to prepare for careers. Important components of job readiness include: knowledge of relevant career opportunities; job-seeking skills; access to job training; and workplace experience that teaches skills and behaviors necessary for workplace success (positive attitude, timeliness, performance accountability, ability to relate to supervisors and fellow workers). By 2020, forty percent of Connecticut's workforce is projected to come from urban centers like Hartford, where the educational achievement gap is greatest. That is why the job and career readiness of Hartford youth is vital for the state's future economic competitiveness.

Indicator #7: Percent of 16-19 year olds not working or in school[iv]

In 2006-2008, seven percent of Hartford's 16-19 year olds were not in school and not in the labor force.

A vicious cycle

Youth who are 16-19 years old and neither in school nor in the labor force risk being trapped in a lifelong cycle of poverty. They are likely to be disaffected; because absence from the labor force means that they are neither working nor looking for work. At a critical juncture, their lives are essentially "on hold" regarding both their educational progress and ability to gain valuable work experience that can help them progress toward productive, well-paying careers. This situation puts them at significant risk for diminished employment and limited economic security. More immediately, it increases the likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors or becoming involved in crime.

Where Hartford stands

- According to the 2006-2008 census data, Hartford has twice as many 16-19 year olds not in school and not in the labor force as the state overall (seven percent compared to 3.5 percent).
- In 2005-2007, 6.5 percent of Hartford youth 16-19 were not in school and not working while the national rate was only 5.2 percent.

Indicator #8: Percent of 18-24 year olds with education beyond a high school diploma

Only 6.9 percent of Hartford youth age 18-24 have a four-year college degree.

A key predictor of a more financially secure life

It is an established fact that an individual with a four-year college degree earns 60 percent more over a lifetime than someone with only a high school diploma. Obtaining even some post-secondary education short of a degree raises income by 20 percent.[v] Pursuing education beyond a high school diploma is the surest way to build a career. Since today's average worker will have more than 10 jobs between the ages of 18 and 44, entering the workforce with only a high school diploma limits the possibility of advancement and reduces opportunities for building a career. As a practical matter, those without a high school diploma are often incapable of acquiring new skills because they do not have the foundation of basic skills on which to build. Those lacking post-secondary education will pay less in taxes and are less likely to be involved in civic affairs, voting and community life.

Where Hartford stands

- In 2006-2008, 50 percent of Hartford 18-24 year olds had educational attainment beyond a high school diploma, compared to 56 percent of 18-24 year olds statewide.

Strategic Priorities

Viewed broadly, these indicators portray an array of challenges that must be overcome if we are to prepare all Hartford youth to succeed in college and careers by age 24. Young people growing up in poverty (in households where their parents face daunting economic, educational and social barriers) need and deserve help to become productive adults.

The portrait of Hartford youth painted in this *Landscape Report* suggests strategic actions that HOYS and its youth development partners can pursue. To have any realistic chance of making the impacts necessary to successfully address the challenges outlined in this report, focused, coordinated engagement and investment among key state, local and regional youth development stakeholders is essential.

No single entity is capable of marshaling all the resources and services needed to take on this broad youth development agenda alone. HOYS plays a significant role in leading the effort to create a cohesive citywide system to improve the well-being of Hartford's youth.

Several strategic themes emerge in this *Landscape Report* as priorities warranting focused attention by HOYS and its youth development partners. These include the need to:

- Improve student learning and educational achievement.
- Improve high school graduation rates.
- Support youth in transition—from systems (e.g., juvenile justice or foster care) and during difficult life changes (e.g., moving from high school to college or to the work place).
- Enhance opportunities for success in post-secondary education.
- Increase opportunities for career awareness, job readiness and work experience.
- Promote opportunities for young parents to advance their education and careers.
- Increase youth recreation and enrichment opportunities that promote healthy lifestyles and behaviors. Youth development is more than academic enrichment. It also includes opportunities to practice social skills, build friendships, and create healthy relationships.
- Intervene with at-risk youth to deter violence and get them on track for success.
- Ensure that every young person has a caring, supportive adult in his or her life.
- Strengthen the capacity of youth-serving staff and programs to perform well, including using data effectively.

HOYS plans to implement its strategic priorities by:

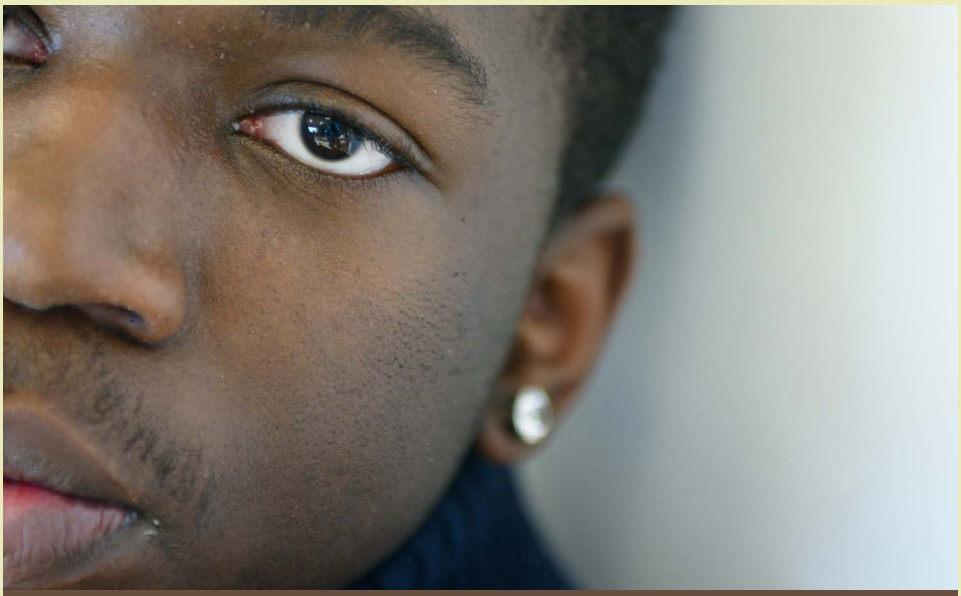
- Increasing partnerships and collaborations among key stakeholders to pursue and achieve common youth development objectives.
- Aligning partner resources and investments to maximize best practices and focus strategic action for greater results.

Investing in Hartford's Youth

To successfully address how strategic priorities can be translated into action, HOYS will examine the broader picture of the investments being made in youth development throughout the City. The soon to be released Roadmap for Youth Development will provide a snapshot along with a foundation and context for the actions advocated in its pages.

Understanding the big picture of youth investments as well as the expected return on these investments is vital to the roles HOYS plays as an intermediary and convener of an ever expanding list of key stakeholders. It will take a unified effort by many to impact the scale and scope of improved results needed by Hartford's youth on a sustained basis.

The action plan for how HOYS intends to address its strategic priorities will soon be introduced in our Roadmap for Youth Development report. The Roadmap is being developed in concert with HOYS' partners, collaborators and funders who are committed to solving the challenges and pursuing the opportunities outlined in this Landscape Report



End Notes

i U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey.

ii Child Trends Research Brief, April 2009. Children in Poverty: Trends, Consequences, and Policy Options.

iii Magnuson and McGroder, The Effect of Increasing Welfare Mothers' Education on their Young Children's Academic Problems and School Readiness, unpublished.

iv Population Reference Bureau, analysis of data from the U.S. Census Bureau, Census 200 Supplementary Survey, 2001 Supplementary Survey, 2002 through 2007 American Community Survey.

v The College Board. Fast Facts from *Education Pays 2007.*

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