



Purple Aztec  
Forgotten Language Herbs



# MY BROTHER'S KEEPER

**MBK**  
MY BROTHER'S KEEPER  
**YONKERS**





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### **REVISED July 2017**

*As a result of the first Yonkers MBK Stakeholders Summit in April 2017, this document was revised to reflect the valuable contributions and recommendations provided by the community stakeholders present at the summit as well as online submissions at [YonkersPublicSchools.org/MBK](http://YonkersPublicSchools.org/MBK).*

**Yonkers MBK Action Plan** will evolve as this movement continues to grow in our community. Through commitment and support from municipal and law enforcement agencies, educational institutions – early childhood to higher education, business and industry, social service and health organizations and practitioners as well as individuals, the “cradle-to-college and career” opportunities delineated in this document will improve life outcomes for all young people in the City of Yonkers, and ensure they can reach their full potential, regardless of who they are, where they are from, or the circumstances into which they are born.

***Superintendent of Yonkers Schools, Dr. Edwin M. Quezada, and Nepperhan Community Center's Executive Director, Rev. Dr. Jim Bostic, have been designated by Mayor Mike Spano as co-chairs of the Yonkers MBK initiative. Dr. Quezada and Dr. Bostic are also members of the MBK Statewide Advisory Committee and are working diligently to impact the lives of young men of color in the City of Yonkers.***

## **City of Yonkers, Business, Community and Social Service Organizations**

Mayor Mike Spano

Dr. Jim Bostic, Executive Director, Nepperhan Community Center

Limarie Cabrera, Director of Data Analysis, Westchester Children's Association

Tony Carizales, Associate Professor, Marist College

Tajae Gaynor, Director, Westchester and Rockland Mediation Centers, Cluster, Inc.

Susan Gerry, First Deputy Mayor, City of Yonkers

Christina Gilmartin, Director of Communications, Office of the Mayor

Pastor James Hassell, Pastor, Kingdom Christian Cultural Center

Ed Lawson, Program Director, Nepperhan Community Center

Steve Levy, Second Deputy Mayor, City of Yonkers

Margie Schustack, Partnership Director, Yonkers Thrives

Euthimios Theotokatos, Director, Constituent Services, City of Yonkers

## **Yonkers Public Schools**

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## **MBK School Administrative Team**

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Daryl Mack, Assistant Principal

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Dr. Robert Vicuna, Assistant Principal



## A Message from the Mayor

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In September 2016, I proudly accepted President Barack Obama's My Brother's Keeper Community Challenge on behalf of the City of Yonkers. This national initiative challenges cities like Yonkers to come together to address the persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color to ensure that all young people can reach their full potential. While the City of Yonkers is experiencing a renaissance in development, annual improvement in our schools, and is rated one of the safest cities in the country, there

are still too many young men in our community who need help. It is incumbent on us as leaders in our communities to keep them on track. Through this initiative, the City of Yonkers joins with cities and towns, businesses, and foundations across the country that are taking important steps to connect young people to mentoring, support networks, and the tools they need to find a good job or go to college to become productive citizens.

Working with the Yonkers Public Schools, Nepperhan Community Center, and Yonkers Thrives, Yonkers My Brother's Keeper will connect young men of color with a network of mentors and educational programs that will foster education, employment, and life and social skills. We will bring educators, businesses, non-profit organizations, community and faith-based organizations, and

literally every aspect of our Yonkers community together to improve outcomes from cradle to career. We can build ladders of opportunity for these young men – in and outside the classroom – by connecting them with mentors and help them achieve success.

Businesses will provide mentors; parents will learn the most effective child development strategies; educators will devise new tools to improve outcomes; and funders will encourage collaboration to make it all work. This will be a community effort, on all levels.

I look forward to us planting the seeds of our children's future together. When our children succeed, Yonkers succeeds!

Sincerely,

**MIKE SPANO**  
Mayor  
City of Yonkers



## The Call to Action

*"That's what 'My Brother's Keeper' is all about. Helping more of our young people stay on track. Providing the support they need to think more broadly about their future. Building on what works – when it works, in those critical life-changing moments."*

– President Barack Obama

On September 21, 2016, Yonkers Mayor Mike Spano on behalf of the City of Yonkers accepted President Obama's My Brother's Keeper (MBK) Community Challenge.

This collaboration will focus on implementing a "cradle-to-college and career" program with the strongest evidence of improving life outcomes for all young people and ensuring that they can reach their full potential, regardless of who they are, where they come from, or the circumstances into which they are born.

Our focus is to build a community where all residents participate in the success of our youth, particularly Black and Hispanic/Latino boys,

girls, young women and young men; to make Yonkers a city where all our youngest of children enter school ready to learn, ready to read at grade level or better by third grade; to build a pipeline that graduates students from high school to a four-year degree or vocational training to successfully enter the workforce anywhere they desire in our community, the Yonkers Community; and to be able to raise a family free of violence and with the promise of our country's greatest hopes.



# The Challenge in Yonkers

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Persistent opportunity gaps are faced by boys and young men of color. Too many males of color are not experiencing optimal outcomes at the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels. It is also widely understood that meager educational outcomes often lead to poorer life choices. Institutions across the United States and throughout the educational pipeline have been confronted with innumerable challenges achieving parity in educating males of color.

With nearly 200,000 residents, Yonkers is New York's fourth largest city and the largest in Westchester County. Of the 32,320 urban students, 26,586 are prekindergarten to grade 12 students in the city's 39 public schools, 427 are Students with Disabilities in out-of-district

placements, 696 are students in the Charter School, and 4,602 are children in City of Yonkers parochial/ private schools.

Within the public school district, the total number of students is climbing; over a 5-year period the total number of students enrolled increased by 4 percent. In addition, the racial/ethnic breakdown is changing; while the proportion of students who identify as Hispanic or Latino has increased by 3 percent, the rate of students identifying with all other racial/ethnic groups decreased by a similar rate. In 2016, 57 percent of students identified as Hispanic or Latino; this represents a three percent increase over a 5-year period. Similarly, 19 percent identify as Black or African American and 23.9 percent of students identified as White/Other.

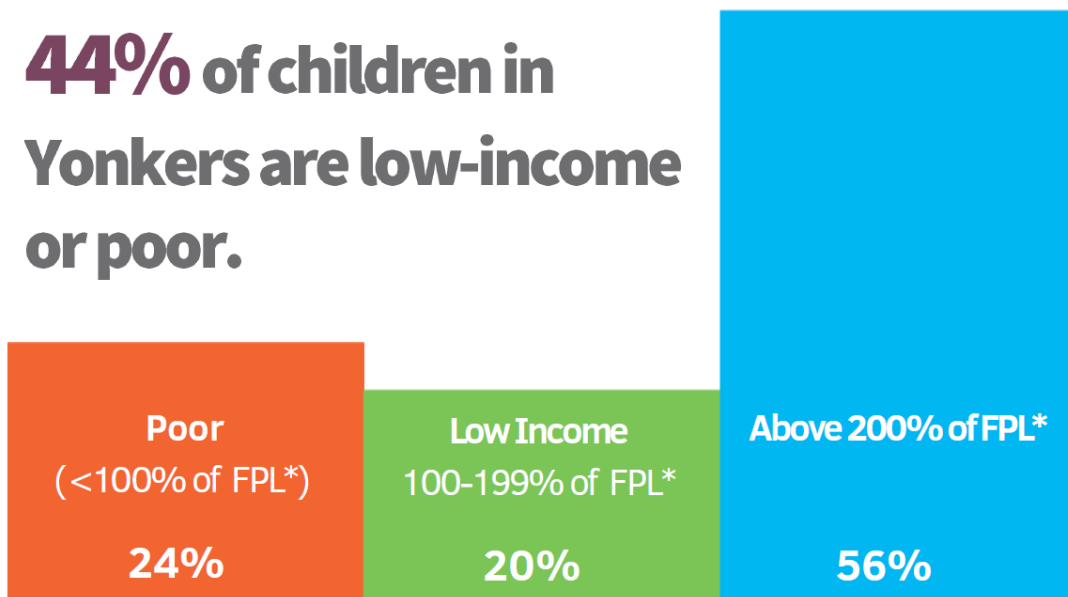




**Nearly 1 in 2 children in the City of Yonkers are low income or living in poverty.**

In the Yonkers Public Schools, more than 2 in 3 students are economically disadvantaged. The student poverty rate rose by 5 percent between 2012 and 2016 to a high of 75 percent.

**44% of children in Yonkers are low-income or poor.**



**\*FPL= Federal Poverty Level**

U.S. Census Bureau: 2010-2014 ACS 5-Year Estimates, Table B17024,  
<http://factfinder2.census.gov>.



## ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

**26%** of all students in grades 3-8 achieved proficiency on the NYS ELA exam

**17%** of Hispanic Males achieved proficiency on the NYS ELA exam

**15%** of Black Males achieved proficiency on the NYS ELA exam

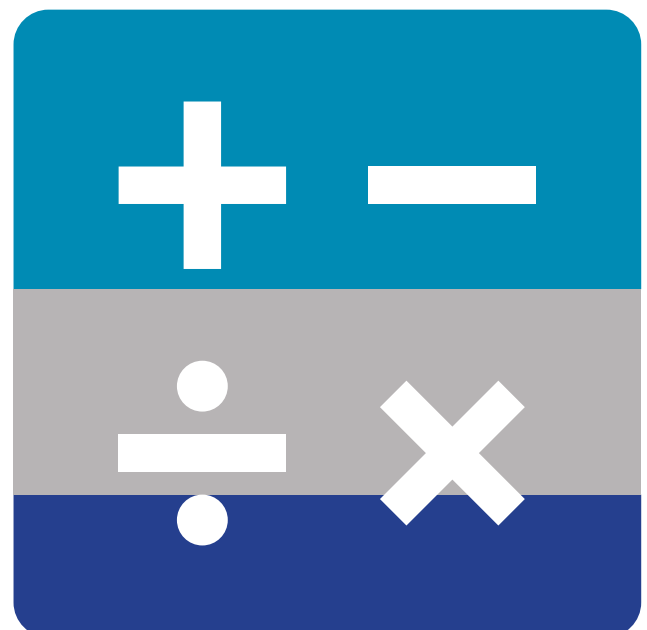


## MATHEMATICS PROFICIENCY

**25%** of all students in grades 3-8 achieved proficiency on the NYS Math exam

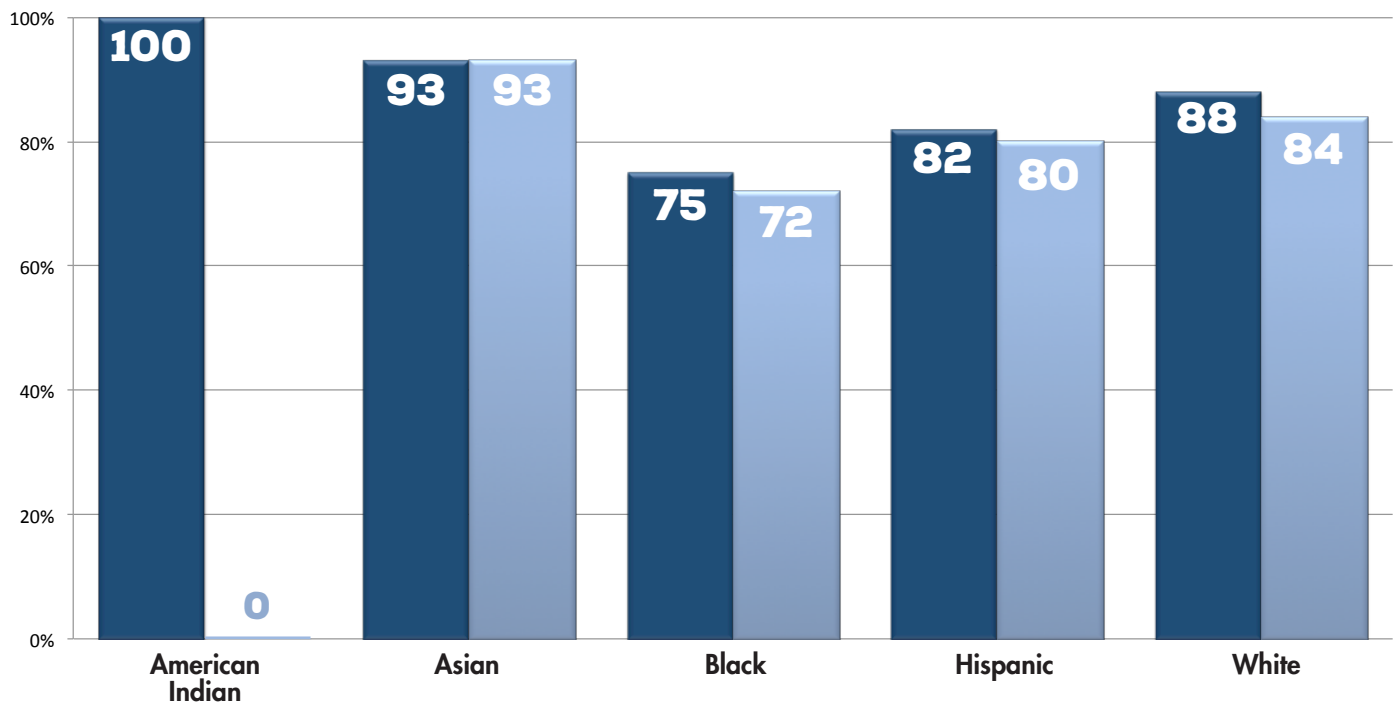
**19%** of Hispanic Males achieved proficiency on the NYS Math exam

**15%** of Black Males achieved proficiency on the NYS Math exam



# GRADUATION RATE

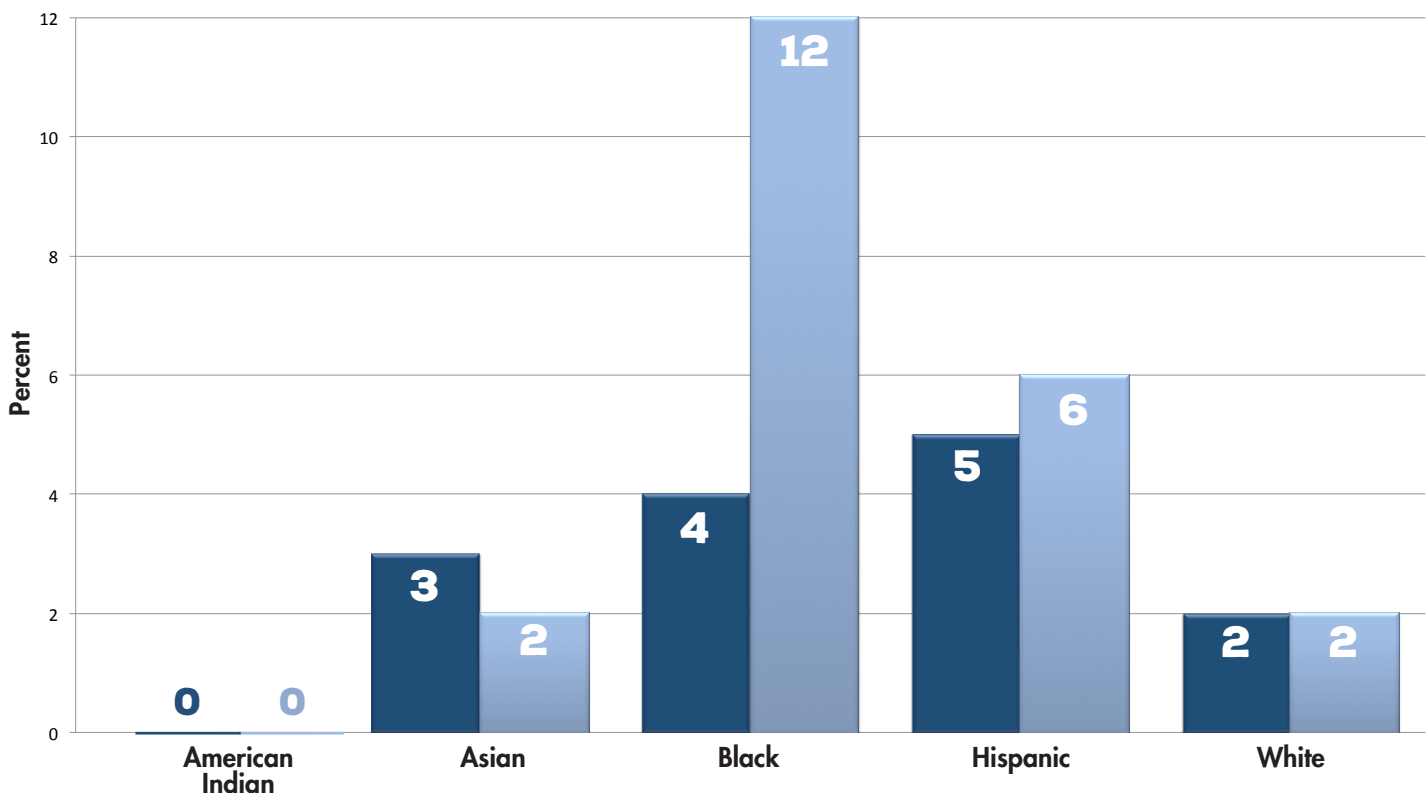
ALL STUDENTS MALES



Ethnic and racial disparities persist as reflected in disparate on-time graduation rates and drop-out rates.

# DROP OUT RATE

ALL STUDENTS MALES

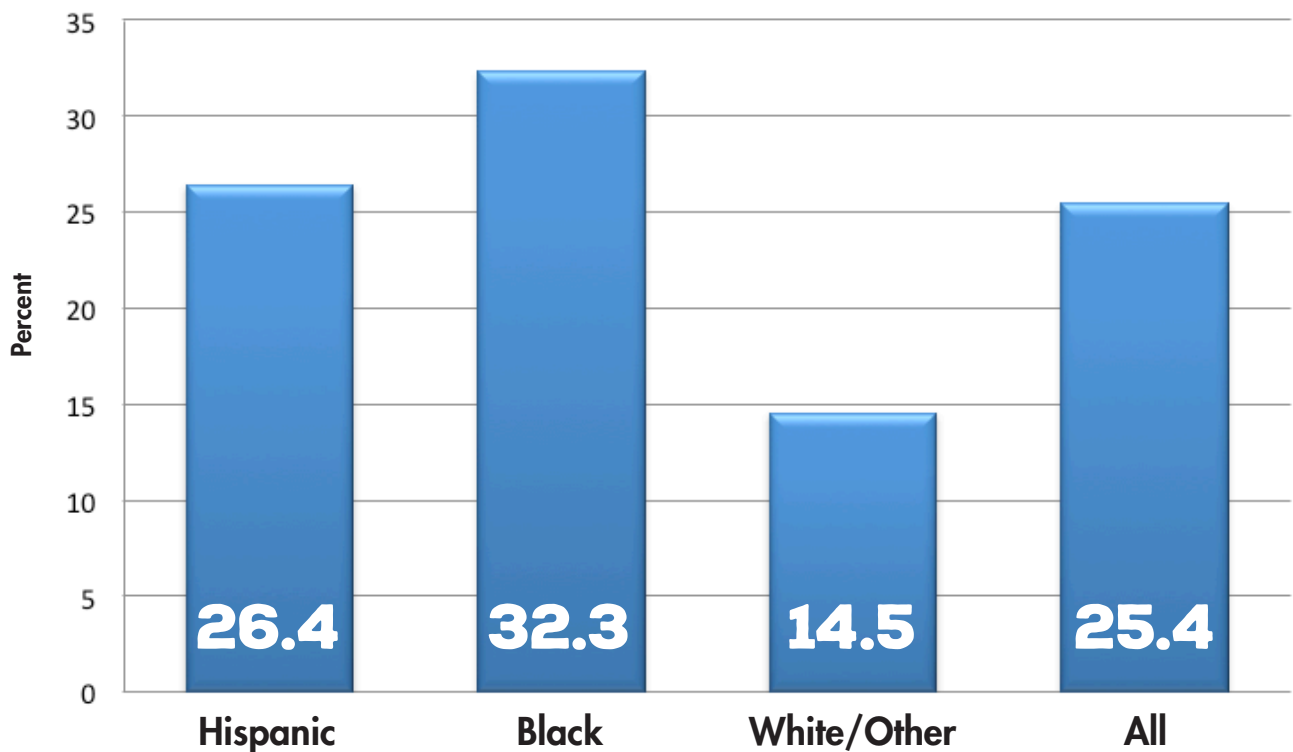




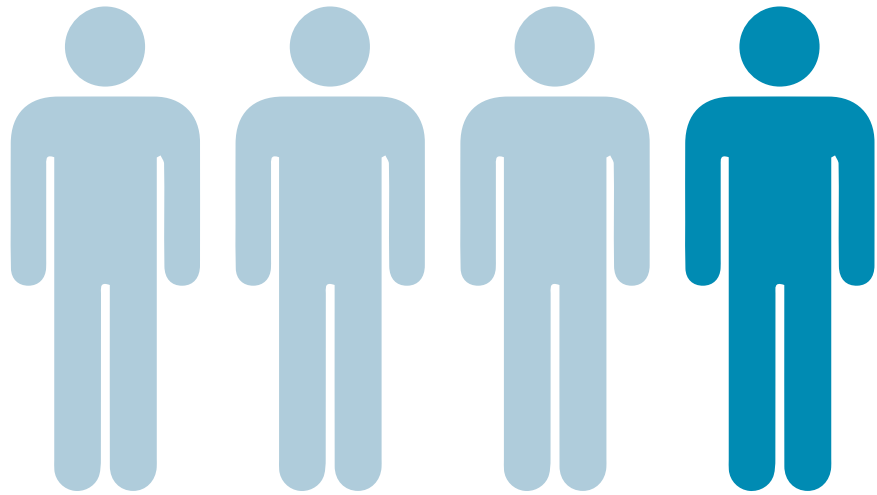
**Drop-out risk is predicted using Yonkers' robust Early Warning System.** Four risk factors in combination – absenteeism, number of failing grades in 9th grade, overall 9th grade GPA, and Prekindergarten attendance - predict student risk as either low, moderate, moderately high or high risk.

In 2016-17, a quarter of Yonkers incoming 10th graders are at moderate to high risk of dropping out in their senior year of high school. One third of Black students and over a quarter of Hispanic students in 10th grade are at risk of dropping out of high school.

## AT MODERATE TO HIGH DROP-OUT RISK

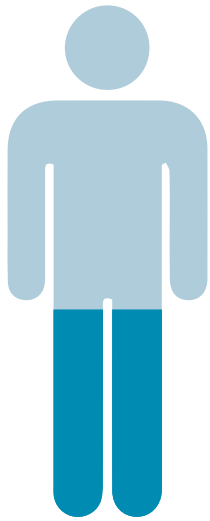


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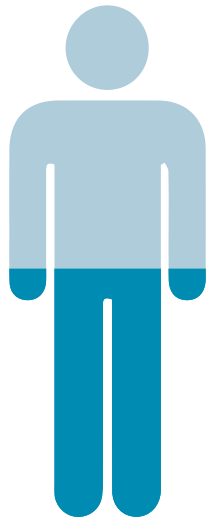
**1 in 4 Latino/African American students are enrolled in Special Education**

## **POVERTY RATE FOR PEOPLE 18 AND UNDER IN YONKERS**



**43.4%**

**Black**



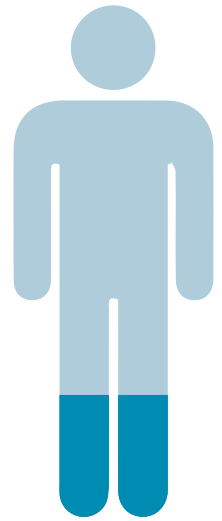
**48.7%**

**Hispanic/  
Latino**



**13.3%**

**White**



**24.8%**

**Asian**

**Black/Latino poverty rates in Yonkers for people under 18 are  
more than 3x their white counterparts.**





The following pages are a recommended action plan for work in the six MBK milestone areas. This plan will evolve over time and should be seen as a living document as we continually assess and refine our plans and programs. The plan makes the following assumptions

- Parents are their child's first and most important teachers. (Megan Northrup 1990)
- When parents, mentors and communities are involved in children's education, children are more successful in school. (Henderson & Mapp 2002)
- Students perform better academically in schools and school districts that have a comprehensive approach to addressing the social emotional developmental health of students. (Tenet 5, NYS DTDSE)
- Students perform better academically in schools and school districts that implement effective strategies for family and community engagement. (Tenet 6, NYS DTDSE)
- All students and their families are entitled to opportunities to succeed, regardless of any demographic, disability, geographic, or economic factors
- In an effort to effectively engage our target population, regardless of legal status, we will need to implement culturally conscious curricula and instructional strategies to enhance the instructional repertoire of teachers, facilitate independence in thinking and action, and promote student on-task behavior

The My Brother's Keeper Challenge identified six milestones that will result in better outcomes for our young people.

#### **Milestone 1**

Ensure all children enter school cognitively, physically, socially, and emotionally ready

#### **Milestone 2**

Ensure all children read at grade level by 3rd Grade

#### **Milestone 3**

Ensure all youth graduate from high school

#### **Milestone 4**

Ensure all youth complete post-secondary education or training

#### **Milestone 5**

Ensure all youth out of school are employed

#### **Milestone 6**

Ensure all youth remain safe from violent crime and have a second chance

There are a number of suggested action plans that cut across all the outcomes. These include:

- Creating Yonkers MBK Advisory Group at each school comprised of parents, students and school staff
- Implementing and collecting feedback on a minimum of ten empowerment assemblies that will be offered to motivate and engage MBK students in order to maximize their true potential by identifying barriers that impede student resiliency
- Adopting and implementing a comprehensive family and community engagement involvement policy through multiple means of communication
- Supporting Yonkers' MBK families in gaining access to community services and expanding community "lunch and learns" and support groups
- Coordinating evidence based mentoring practices that address racial and cultural needs of MBK students

# Milestone 1

## All children enter school ready to learn

**OVERVIEW:** An estimated 80% of brain development happens in the first three years of life. During this period, skill gaps between socio-economic, racial and ethnic groups become clearly apparent (Bostonbasics.org). Current research on brain development from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University indicates that early exposure to positive environments and experiences are central to healthy development. The RAND corporation has predicted gains from one year of high quality preschool for four year-olds across three major categories, including improvement in educational processes and attainment, reduction in child maltreatment, and reduction in juvenile crime.

**YONKERS CHALLENGE:** Northwest Evaluation Association MAP data indicates that Yonkers kindergarteners' performance is lower than norm group performance both in reading and in math. However, Yonkers students are showing significant growth from each years' Fall to Spring administration. Whereas the norm group grew an average of 17.2 points on the Reading test from Fall to Spring, Yonkers kindergartners grew by an average of 18.8 and 19.4 points in 2015-16 and 2014-15, respectively. The same trend is evident in math – the norm group grew an average of 19.1 RIT points whereas Yonkers kindergartners grew by 21.9 and 22 points from the Fall to Spring of 2015-16 and 2014-15, respectively. In summary, although Yonkers kindergartners' performance is relatively low, growth is high. Such significant growth allows the District to make strides towards narrowing the achievement gap.

## HEALTH

**10%** of infants were born underweight.

**34%** of children are obese/overweight.

**35%** of infants had delayed or non prenatal care.





### Strategic Objective

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All children enter kindergarten ready.

### Performance Measures

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These are our core indicators:

- Increase participation in quality early childhood care and education
- Increase number of children evaluated positively as kindergarten-ready
- Increase caregiver use of developmentally appropriate practices
- Increase number of children screened for health and emotional development
- Increase number of families that access the Family Welcome Centers

### Recommended Action Plans

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- Launch and continue to implement Yonkers Basics campaign which centers on five evidence-based parenting and caregiving principles designed to boost brain development from ages 0 to 3
- Create a comprehensive family and community engagement plan which includes mentors for parents

- Create a Yonkers MBK advisory group at each school comprised of parents, students and school staff
- Create parent workshops on literacy, problem-solving, empowerment and advocacy skills
- Create culturally conscious professional development for pre-school teachers, staff and administrators on implicit bias and cultural synchronization
- Provide annual technical assistance to all school and district administrators as part of the Yonkers Public Schools' professional learning community
- Increased access for Yonkers children to receive screenings for health, social/emotional development and trauma
- Launch a "Yonkers Families Read" program that provides free books and discussion opportunities for families on a regular basis
- Maintain an environment of tolerance for cultural diversity and varying legal status



# Milestone 2

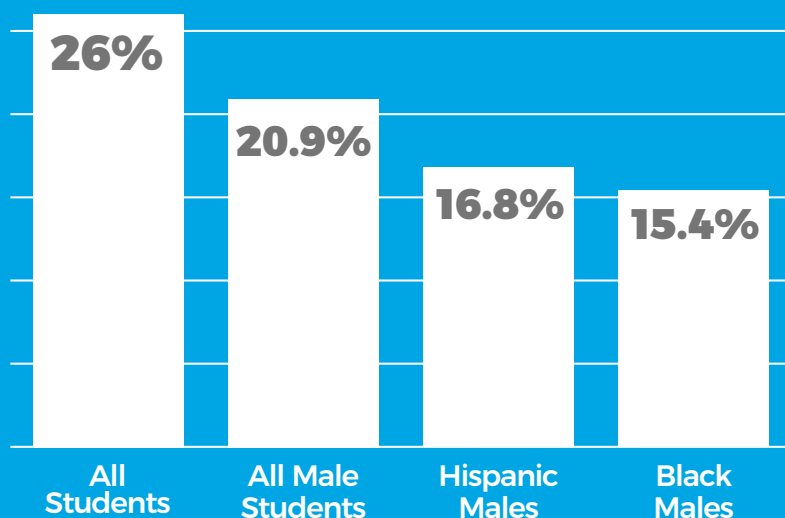
## Ensure all children read at grade level by 3rd Grade

**OVERVIEW:** An alarming number of children—about 67 percent nationwide and more than 80 percent of those from low-income families—are not proficient readers by the end of third grade. This has significant and long-term consequences not only for each of those children but for their communities, and for our nation as a whole. If left unchecked, this problem will undermine efforts to end intergenerational poverty, close the achievement gap, and reduce high school dropout rates. Far fewer of the next generation will be prepared to succeed in a global economy, participate in higher education, or enter military and civilian service. (The Campaign for Grade Level Reading, 2017)

**YONKERS CHALLENGE:** Reading at grade level is an enormous challenge overall in Yonkers. It is even more glaring for boys of color in Yonkers. Based on the NYS ELA assessments, only 26% of all students in Yonkers are reading on grade level. Only 20% of male students are reading on grade level. And boys of color at 16% or less.

There are a number of reasons for this which include chronic absence issues, disproportionate identification and assessment of boys and young men of color as students with disabilities, few teachers of color and even fewer male teachers of color as role models, homelessness, access to summer learning activities and programs focused on literacy (summer slide) and youth in residential treatment facilities.

### 2015-16 NYS ELA GRADES 3-8 AT OR ABOVE PROFICIENCY







### Strategic Objective

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Increase the percentage of 3rd graders reading on grade level

### Performance Measures

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These are our core indicators:

- Increase the number of students of color proficient at grade-level reading and mathematics
- Increase reading proficiency among all students
- Increase student attendance
- Decrease in student suspension and expulsion rates
- Increase home school partnerships in order to change educational culture of the city

### Recommended Action Plans

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- Collaborate with local colleges and Yonkers teachers' union to actively identify, recruit and place teachers of color
- Identify people of color from faith-based, fraternal and community organizations to provide guidance and counseling to students in individual and group settings

- Establish a recruitment mechanism to attract, screen, place and support mentors
- Implement culturally relevant curricula and instruction through clubs, tutoring, and online materials
- Create family events, parent workshops, an online learning center and community literacy programs aimed at generating enthusiasm for reading and school among students and families
- Conduct parent and teacher workshops to support the academic success of at-risk and special needs children
- Implement programs that help students realize their potential by enhancing their self-concept, self-sufficiency and ethnic identity
- Expand collaborations among and within schools to build learning communities within and cross-grade
- Create MBK mobile app to support literacy
- Establish home-school alliance focused on enhancing commitment to reading

# Milestone 3

## Ensure all youth graduate from high school

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**OVERVIEW:** High school graduates make, on average, \$300,000 more over their lifetime than dropouts, making a major impact on a person's life. High school graduates earn \$143 more per week than high school dropouts. Statistics show that individuals who complete high school in four years are less likely to be unemployed. According to a 2006 study, people who never completed high school had a 16.3% unemployment rate eight years later. During those same 8 years, the unemployment rate among those who earned their diplomas within four years was dramatically lower at only 4.7%.

**YONKERS CHALLENGE:** The graduation rate for 77% of Yonkers students is higher than any other large city in New York State. However, English Language Learners (ELL) and Students with Disabilities graduate at a much lower rate than other Yonkers high school graduates. There are a number of challenges including lack of summer employment opportunities, youth internships and apprenticeship programs, low numbers of Advanced Placement enrollees, honors classes and challenging electives, graduated youth who are not college ready.







### Strategic Objective

Increase the high school graduation rate among young people of color.

### Performance Measures

These are our core indicators:

- Reduce chronic absence rates
- Reduce detention, suspension and expulsion rates
- Increase the number of Advanced Placement test takers and improve performance on Regents exams
- Reduce drop-out rates for young people of color
- Increase graduation rates of young people of color

### Recommended Action Plans

Research from Johns Hopkins University shows that students who are at risk of dropping out can be identified as early as elementary school using three early warning indicators – poor attendance, disruptive behavior and failing math and English.

- Monitor attendance
- Provide additional social and emotional support for at-risk students, giving particular attention to middle school needs
- Provide academic support in math and English
- Provide at-risk students with additional credit recovery and academic enrichment opportunities
- Provide enrichment opportunities for high achievers, including peer-to-peer mentoring
- Expand and enhance youth sports programs
- Participate in community service projects
- Provide teachers with additional tools and resources to serve English Language Learners
- Collaborate with the Yonkers teachers' union to provide voluntary mentoring opportunities to teachers with five years or less experience

- Provide participants a broad array of additional services, programs, and activities such as youth development activities, service learning, drug and violence prevention programs, financial literacy programs, career and technical programs, internships or apprenticeship programs
- Provide resources for effective school safety and create positive school climate
- Maintain environment of tolerance for cultural diversity and varying legal status
- Identify people of color from faith-based, fraternal and community organizations to provide guidance and counseling to students in individual and group settings
- Provide free/affordable childcare for parenting teens
- Increase number of Yonkers youth acquiring "digital badges" in relevant competencies
- Offer job and resource tables, fairs and workshops
- Offer lessons in career exploration, cultural awareness and community problem-solving
- Implement Restorative Justice Practices and policies that help students utilize effective coping skills
- Establish academic support and mediation centers to improve study habits, goal setting, time management, and writing skills
- Support and enhance participation of community-based organizations (CBOs), including mental health care providers, ensuring that their programs are aligned with Yonkers Schools' curricula
- Emphasize and support first-generation college-bound students
- Establish college and career readiness programs for parents (in-person or online)
- Support and enhance existing parent-school collaboration

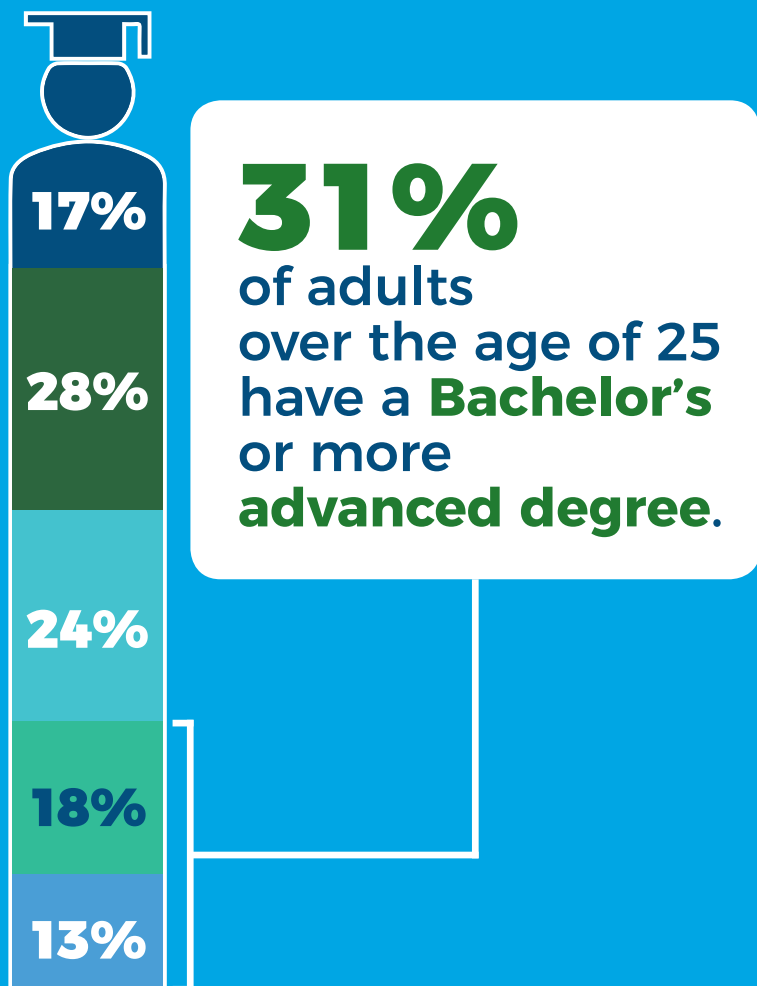
# Milestone 4

## Ensure all youth complete college or post-secondary training

**OVERVIEW:** Without successful completion of a post-secondary degree or vocational training, employment that offers adequate compensation can be difficult to obtain. In the next 10 years, most jobs will require some post-secondary education or training. The consequences of lower educational attainment levels are clear, as the economic disparity between adults who earn post-secondary degrees and those who do not has grown steadily since the 1960's.

**YONKERS CHALLENGE:** Only 24% of Yonkers residents have an Associates Degree (or attended some college). Only 18% of residents have a bachelor's degree. Will Yonkers have enough college educated workers at the time when the value of a bachelor's degree is critical? For those who do not wish to get a college degree are there enough opportunities for vocational training that will lead to good careers?

Post graduation plans of 2015/2016 Graduates are as follows - 54.6% of all females plan to go to a four year college, while 39% of all males plan to do the same.







### Strategic Objective

Ensure that students are graduating from high school career ready and complete college or vocational training.

### Performance Measures

These are our core indicators:

- Improve retention and persistence rates for young people of color in colleges
- Involve community partners in the support and improvement of college and career readiness programs to prepare and support students
- Increase yearly FAFSA completion rates for young people of color
- Increase rates of enrollment in college or vocational training programs
- Increase graduation rates for young people of color

### Recommended Action Plans

- Involve community partners in the support and improvement of college and career readiness programs
- Provide students with opportunities to connect with alumni from high schools and post-secondary institutions
- Align HS instruction with college readiness expectations
- Provide basic skills competencies to improve student preparedness for degree, certificate courses and employment
- Provide opportunities and resources to all school counselors to offer workshops for students and families on time management, study skills, goal setting, financial aid and scholarship opportunities
- Provide students with resources for college tours and campus visits and access to supportive

resources including distance learning opportunities and early college programs such as Naviance, College Board and You Can Go

- Work with unions, local companies and other organizations to increase vocational training and certification
- Provide resources for alignment to high-demand fields and sectors of the economy
- Provide and disseminate information about post-secondary education options, preparation and financing to students and families
- Create MBK post-secondary and training resource database
- Partner with local businesses and community based organizations to provide meaningful, career-oriented summer employment opportunities
- Provide academic support programs that focus on the challenges of the first year of college and help with persistence
- Provide legal, substance abuse and psychological counseling
- Conduct regular academic monitoring meeting with academic advisors
- Partner with student health services to increase access to health and wellness support
- Establish “bridge” coursework that will move students who test “conditionally ready” to “ready” by the end of their senior year
- Create consortium of higher education partners that support Yonkers schools
- Expand participation in the Army Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC)

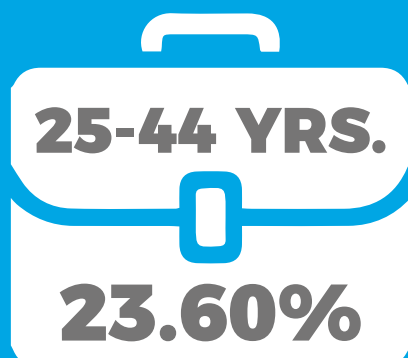
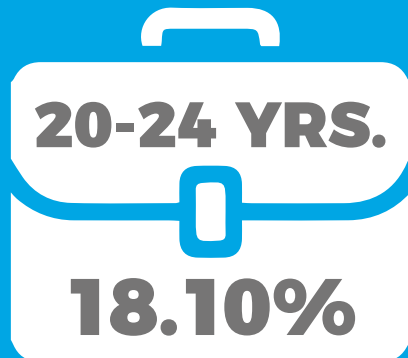
# Milestone 5

Ensure all youth out of school are employed

**OVERVIEW:** Ensuring that youth are gainfully employed to increase their earning potential and decrease the likelihood of their involvement in criminal activities or self-destructive patterns.

**YONKERS CHALLENGE:** One of the most recent reports from the Bureau of Labor Statistics indicates that more than seven in ten teens in the US are unemployed. 32% of Yonkers teens ages 16-19 are unemployed and 18% of those 20-24 are unemployed.

## 2015 Unemployment Rates of Yonkers Residents by Age







### Strategic Objective

To ensure meaningful employment and/or college experience.

To ensure young people of color are gainfully employed.

### Performance Measures

These are our core indicators:

- Increase internships and employment opportunities available to youth
- Increase youth participation in summer employment opportunities
- Increase business and municipal participation in internship and employment programs
- Decrease unemployment rate for youth (ages 16-19) in Yonkers

### Recommended Action Plans

- Provide post-program support services such as job placement services
- Host job fairs that match local youth with potential employers
- Provide students with career exploration assessments
- Create transitional job programs
- Cultivate employer partnerships for post-program apprenticeships and employments
- Partner with local businesses and community based organizations to provide meaningful, gainful, career oriented summer employment opportunities to youth
- Provide free or affordable childcare for students
- Develop strategy and public-private sector partnerships in the Lower Hudson Valley that will help youth gain 21st century skills and graduate from college
- Establish programs for parents to support teenagers transitioning into young adulthood
- Strengthen union apprenticeship program opportunities for our youth
- Encourage mentees to return as mentors to youth
- Create environment of tolerance for cultural diversity and varying legal status

# Milestone 6

Ensure all youth remain safe from violent crime and have a second chance

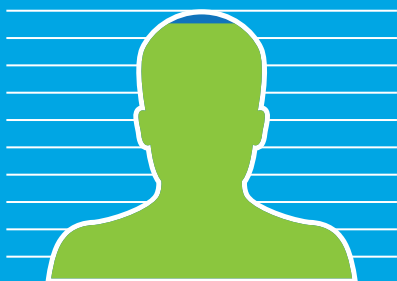
**OVERVIEW:** Education opportunities and crime are linked. When education and employment rises, crime decreases. Youth must also be safe from violence, abuse and bullying.

**YONKERS CHALLENGE:** Juvenile arrests in Yonkers show a very significant disparity. The law enforcement community is proactively working with Yonkers schools, but as the infographic below indicates there is much work still to be done. In addition, the overall impact of violence and unsafe community environments can lead to life-long issues.

## 2016 Yonkers Police Youth Division 185 JUVENILE ARRESTS



**85%**  
Yonkers  
Residents



**98%**  
Black or  
Hispanic



**10%**  
Under 12  
years old







### Strategic Objective

Reduce the number of young people of color who create or are victims of violence and other crimes.

### Performance Measures

These are our core indicators:

- Decrease the number of juvenile arrests and recidivism
- Reduce delinquency incidents

### Recommended Action Plans

- Establish and implement wrap-around services and family therapy
- Provide youth with opportunities to discuss and develop healthy coping mechanisms for dealing with conflict
- Expand evidence based youth violence prevention program
- Create MBK taskforce with law enforcement and the community to build stronger relationships
- Establish districtwide Youth Advisory Council subcommittee of the MBK task force focusing young people's perceptions, social justice and restorative practices
- Create meaningful community service opportunities
- Create environment of tolerance for cultural diversity and varying legal status

## 24





# MBK

MY BROTHER'S KEEPER

# YONKERS



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*Revised July 2017*