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Seeing ACT with New Eyes

ACT Rochester continues to take a leadership role in delivering credible, timely and independent data to a nine-county region to help communities make more informed decisions. The focus of today's 2018 Community Report Card Event is leveraging the data – sometimes-overlooked data – to tell stories about, and more directly engage our communities.

The audience of more than 250 representing government, business, nonprofit, faith based, and education sectors, along with sixth-grade students from Genesee Community Charter School, were challenged to combine data with stories to support their learning and decision-making.

Ann Johnson, ACT Rochester's senior director, opened the 90-minute session by recognizing the release of *Hard Facts: Race and Ethnicity in the Nine County Area*, a joint report of Rochester Area Community Foundation and ACT Rochester. She also announced the addition of data for regional cities – Batavia, Canandaigua and Geneva – to ACT's website. The regional cities data, a subset of the county indicators, covers demographics and income, housing, children and youth, education and crime. The Community Foundation and United Way of Greater Rochester funded the project.

Johnson then provided an overview of the nine-county Regional Report Card. She shared that only three of the 18 grades changed since last year. Education, which had previously performed better than New York State, is now slightly worse. The indicators driving the change were English exam results for 4th Grade and 8th Grade. The rate of Children Receiving Public Assistance decreased from 2015. Health trends that saw improvement last year, remain unchanged.

The Report Card highlights focused on several key indicators. Johnson began by asking: "What if ... our voter participation rate was higher, earned income tax credit dollars and charitable giving as a percent of income were equal to New York State's and our employment-to-population ratio had increased instead of decreasing since 2007?"

Voter Registration and Participation: In 2016 (a presidential election year), 58% of residents in the region voted, while statewide turnout was 50%. Between 78% and 85% of the region's voting-age population has been registered to vote since 2000, consistently higher than statewide rates.

Earned Income Tax Credit: In 2015, payments from the EITC amounted to \$179 per resident in the region, a 5% increase from 2011. This is substantially lower than statewide (\$218) and national figures (\$215). Assuming 10,000 low-income residents accessed the same payment amount as the state, the \$26 difference could bring an additional \$230,000 to our residents and communities.

Charitable Contributions as a Percent of Income: Charitable giving supports a wide variety of organizations, including those that provide essential services to the community and people in need. In 2015, residents in the region gave 1.9% of their income as charitable contributions, below the levels for the state (2.4%) and nation (2.2%). This indicator provides insight as to residents' generosity and capacity for potentially more giving.

Employment-to-Population Ratio: The ratio is an indicator of people's willingness and ability to find work. The employment-to-population ratio for the region was 73% in 2016, decreasing from 78% in 2000. In a period of rapid economic growth, a larger share of the population (including teens, second earners in a family, and elders) will be enticed into the workforce.

Total Population: From 2000 to 2016, the total population of the nine-county Rochester region grew 1.1%, with just over 1.2 million residents calling the area home in 2016. This compares to growth of 4% statewide and 15% across the country. The City of Rochester had a population decline of 5% since 2000.

Change in Total Population by Race/Ethnicity Since 2000: The nine-county Rochester region has become increasingly diverse. Between 2000 and 2012-16, the greatest increase (57%) occurred in the group identifying as Hispanic. Growth over that time also was substantial among the Asian (51%) and African American (12%) populations, in contrast to the 1% decline in the white population. Several scenarios performed by members of ACT Rochester's Advisory Committee while infographics displaying data were shown to the audience.

"ACT Rochester has led the way in raising our awareness about the critical issues affecting our community, including the complex interrelationship of race and poverty", says Simeon Banister, interim vice president, Community Programs at the Community Foundation. "I am excited about this new approach to reporting that combines compelling narrative with undeniable data to drive the point home that to solve our challenges it's time for us to ... ACT!"

Audience members, seated at tables of 10, were asked to discuss and provide insights and "ah-ha's" from the personal reflections/experiences shared by members of the ACT Rochester Advisory Committee; and how they will be able to combine the use of data and stories to inform their decision-making.

Tom Argust, chair of the ACT Rochester Advisory Committee, reminded the audience that “the massive data available on ACT Rochester, coupled with compelling stories, can bring out of hiding community issues in such a way that they can no longer be ignored.”

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

Data for indicators in the Report Card are from different years, ranging from 2014 to 2017. Compiled by the Center for Governmental Research, data is updated three times a year and only when information from authoritative sources is final.

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

For more on the regional and nine County Report Cards and detailed Trend Snapshots, and city summaries visit ACTRochester.org.

About the Report Card Data

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. Data points cover the topics of Arts, Culture and Leisure, Children and Youth, Community Engagement, Economy, Education, Financial Self-Sufficiency, Health, Housing, and Public Safety.

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.