

**BLACK AND LATINO/A ECOSYSTEM AND  
SUPPORT TRANSITION (BLEST) HUB**

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# 2024 STATE OF THE ECOSYSTEM REPORT

**PREPARED BY**

**KENDALL WATTS**

Undergraduate Student, College of Arts & Sciences and  
College of Education

**MICHAEL VAZQUEZ**

Graduate Student, College of Education

**ALI SHANA**

PhD Student, Researching academic, & state  
scholarship specialist. Freelance reporter (e.g., policy).

**GABRIEL VELEZ, PHD**

Assistant Professor, College of Education  
Faculty Director, BLEST Hub

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**CURTO  
MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY  
AUGUST 2024**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In some ways, 2023-2024 was a difficult one for the Milwaukee ecosystem. Data continued to show that the challenges intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic remained. In July 2024, the Wisconsin Policy Forum released a comprehensive analysis of the educational ecosystem that highlighted these struggles and affirmed that “After 30 years in which only pockets of progress have materialized within publicly funded schools in Milwaukee – and faced with the reality that Black students in particular and especially those enrolled at MPS continue to perform academically at levels far below their peers in other urban cities – city leaders and stakeholders once again find themselves at a crossroads.”

Toward the end of the year, Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) was in the news and on the public mindset almost weekly with a successful \$252 million referendum being approved by voters, a difficult budget process partially related to the end of emergency funds from the pandemic, and the resignation of Superintendent Keith Posley in June, 2024, amid swirling issues with delayed and questionable reporting to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI).

Within this context, the Black and Latino/a Ecosystem Support and Transition (BLEST) Hub sought to continue to provide its support to building comprehensive understandings attentive to the strengths and resilience within the ecosystem. The work has continued to evolve each year of the BLEST Hub’s existence. In 2023-2024, the efforts moved toward engagement in broader networks and efforts toward change, while also exploring opportunities to fund collaborative research efforts to inform transformational collective impact across the county.

Throughout the year, the BLEST Hub updated the ecosystem map, produced targeted research projects, contributed to building inclusive climates on Marquette’s campus, engaged with diverse community partners, engaged students’ experiences and expertise, and shared our insights with committees, academic audiences, and through [Op-Eds](#) and [podcasts](#).

As we look to 2024-2025, we are excited by scaling our efforts on numerous fronts. Funding from local organizations and national foundations is facilitating research efforts that elevate young people’s lived experiences and perspectives as part of the growing movement toward change in Milwaukee.

## MAIN NEW EFFORTS IN 2023-2024

1. Building a database of reports on the Milwaukee ecosystem.
2. Completing a study of experiences of dual enrollment courses in collaboration with DPI.
3. Making dual enrollment courses on educational equity and restorative justice a sustainable program for local Black and Latinx students.
4. Hosting a second annual Mental Health Awareness forum for students in MPS’ Department of Black and Latino Male Achievement.
5. Leading the Research Committee for the Milwaukee County My Brother's Keeper Alliance (MBK MKE).

# Vision, Mission, & Aims

## Our Mission

Our mission at BLEST Hub is to provide logistical, informational and catalytic support, as well as targeted programming, to contribute to the thriving and learning of Black and Latino/a students in Milwaukee.

## Our Vision

We began with a vision that all Black and Latino/a students in the city of Milwaukee are supported and excel from middle school through post-secondary education, fulfilling stable employment. We have moved to expand that more inclusively to all students of color, with an emphasis on Black and Latino/a.

This broad vision requires:

1. Supporting the synergy across organizations, institutions, and government efforts.
2. Understanding and identifying gaps in services offered to our youth.
3. Working towards amplifying and supplementing resources that are already available.

## Our Aims

It is our aim to understand the strengths and needs of Black and Latino/a students as well as the supports present at points of transition in their lives.

### *What we can offer Milwaukee*

We offer Milwaukee up-to-date information regarding the state of the services that we, as a city, offer our students. Programs, services, and outreach efforts create an ecosystem with the potential to sustain and support flourishing through mutually beneficial relationships. Documenting our ecosystem facilitates creating a trusting space for communication, collaboration and coordination.

### *What we can offer organizations*

We offer organizations a safe space that is independent of political divides and resource scarcity. Such a space can sustain conversations across sectors and organizations to collectively build capacity as a city with the aim of better supporting the development of our youth. To this end, we offer an intellectual hub where best practices, key metrics, and research can be identified and shared.

### *What we can offer our Black and Latino/a students*

We offer our students practical, effective programming to support their development. We provide timely information about available resources, opportunities, and organizations. We cannot do any of this without the active engagement of our youth and their voices across all sectors and throughout the process necessary to develop our understanding of Milwaukee as an ecosystem.



# THE ADVISORY BOARD

The advisory board is an informal group of educators, practitioners, activists, and others across the Milwaukee ecosystem who have provided guidance and served as key partners since the inception of the BLEST Hub. They are comprised of individuals who work in public schools, charter schools, and institutions of higher education across the region.

Below are some representatives who we work closely with.

## SELECT MEMBERS OF ADVISORY BOARD



Bevin Christie  
**Charter Schools**

Bevin Christie is a passionate social entrepreneur and educator who believes in a holistic approach to education, program development, social justice, organizational culture, and workforce development.



Alberto Maldonado  
**Higher Education**

Alberto Maldonado is director of UWM's Roberto Hernandez Center and Special Assistant to the Vice Chancellor for DEI. In these roles, Alberto serves the Latinx population at UWM and across southeastern Wisconsin, supporting all multicultural efforts at UWM and enhancing partnerships on campus and in the community.



Paul Moga  
**Public Schools**

Paul Moga serves as coordinator for MPS's BLMA department. BLMA works to improve the outcomes of Black and Latino male students within MPS.



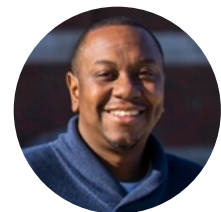
Equan Burrows  
**Higher Education**

Equan Burrows serves as the Dean of Student Experience at MATC, where his work focuses on student retention and success and fostering a culture of equity and inclusion.



David Emmanuelle Castillo  
**Education & Youth Empowerment**

David Castillo founded and runs Equitable Systems Consultants, LLC, and has been a lead in Milwaukee Succeeds' Design Your Future Fellowship. He previously worked for MPS' BLMA, and his work focuses on disrupting the carceral system that unjustly warehouses Black, Brown, and Indigenous bodies.



Nate Deans Jr.  
**Public Schools**

Nate Deans Jr is the Director of MPS' BLMA. He helps oversee programming and provide supports that increase Black and Latino students' success in MPS.

# History of BLEST Hub

The BLEST Hub was initiated in 2020 by the Center for Urban Research, Teaching, and Outreach (CURTO). It was driven by the vision of two members of our leadership team: Dr. Robert Smith, Director of CURTO, and Walter Lanier, President and CEO of the Great Lakes Urban Empowerment Solutions and community activist and organizer. Their personal experiences and years of work with Milwaukee organizations and institutions across sectors (e.g., education, employment, health, mental health) brought to light the need for collaboration, synergy, and amplification to address the deep needs of Black and Latino/a students as they transition from high school to post-secondary education and beyond.

## *Funding*

The initial funding to support the creation and first year of work came from The City of Milwaukee Community Block Grant Association. The BLEST Hub began as the beginning stages of a collaboration with major educational institutions in Milwaukee, including Marquette University, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM), MATC, and Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS), as well as representatives from Employ Milwaukee and the Black and Latino Male Achievement Department of MPS.

Currently, the BLEST Hub's work is funded primarily through CURTO, with additional funds accessed through institutional research grants and support for students to serve as research assistants.

**"There's no single 'if you do this.' The question is do we have the will to fight something that is deeply ingrained in the very nature of the society."**

**- Howard Fuller, Milwaukee Education Activist**

# Summary of 2023 Report

In the 2023 State of the Ecosystem Report, we detailed the development of the BLEST Hub's work in its third year of existence. During this time, we cemented and continued core pillars of our work, while stepping into roles that engaged more broadly with regional communities in terms of thinking and action toward collective transformation change.

Highlights included:

- **Expansion and Dissemination of Ecosystem Visualization**
  - We continued to meet with community organizations to further build out the map, while sharing it more broadly with community members, organizations, local and regional leaders, and more.
- **Expanding Work into Dual Enrollment**
  - We recognized the longstanding impact and importance of dual enrollment within the Milwaukee area through multiple branches of work: systematic literature reviews, helping create working groups, and producing reports on dual enrollment and equity and podcasts.
- **Continuing Youth Consultant Program**
  - In its second year of existence, we continued to engage youth voice in our work through a paid consultant program that created opportunities for personal development while gathering youth feedback on our work.
- **Built and Extended Various Research Projects**
  - Our studies included continuation of past projects (such as supporting MATC's Fast Fund), as well as new ones into areas of STEM equity in higher education and the value of an ecosystem lens.
- **Supporting Regional Efforts at Transformational Change**
  - In 2023, the African American Leadership Alliance of Milwaukee (AALAM) became the backbone organization for a reigniting of the county-wide My Brother's Keeper Initiative (MBK MKE). The BLEST Hub supported this work by leading the development and progress of the effort's research committee.

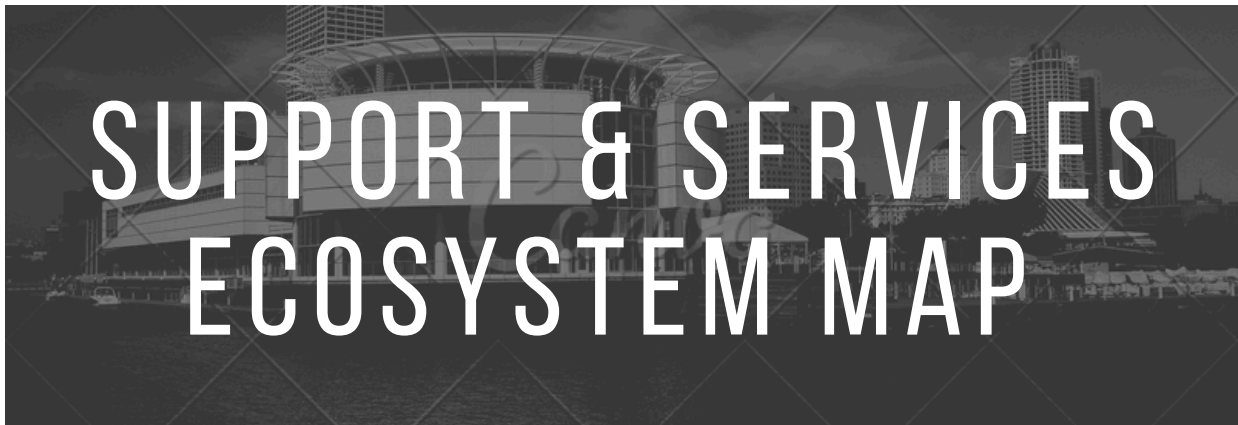
## 2022-2023 SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

1. Building and disseminating a timeline of the ecosystem.
2. Deepening our dual enrollment work to include targeted programming, research reports, podcasts, and local coalition building.
3. Expanding our network of graduate and undergraduate student's researchers.
4. Restarting the Leadership And Brotherhood (LAB) Summit in collaboration with Milwaukee Public Schools' Department of Black and Latino Male Achievement.
5. Becoming key partner for re-ignition of the My Brother's Keeper Alliance in Milwaukee

# 2023-2024 Projects

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The ecosystem map has been a pillar of the BLEST Hub work since its first year in 2020. The project involves constant communication, outreach, and updating as we strive to build a dynamic visualization of various resources serving Black and Latino/a students and their partnerships in Milwaukee.

The nature of the ecosystem is that it is always changing and this map will always be incomplete. We, therefore, offer it not as a complete picture, but rather a constantly developing process.

In 2020, a team of graduate students met with community organizations to gather information about their work, challenges, and partnerships. Their final project resulted in a database that was further developed by graduate student research assistants Saúl Lopez and Verónica Mancheno into the first iteration of the map.

2024 marks our fourth year of having this resource available and bringing it to conversations and work we are engaged in. We also made an attempt to return to organizations we had not connected with since the beginning, while bringing in new ones met through the MBK MKE Initiative.

## DEVELOPMENTS IN ECOSYSTEM MAP

1. Met with and added information for over 20 organizations.
2. Incorporated more direct contact information and geographical location of organizations.
3. Continued to share the map and introductory presentation with various audiences in Milwaukee and beyond.
4. Published an academic article about the ecosystem mapping process (see list on page 21), and developed a second one that is under review on the value of ecosystem thinking.
5. Built on this work to begin asset mapping for the REID initiative.



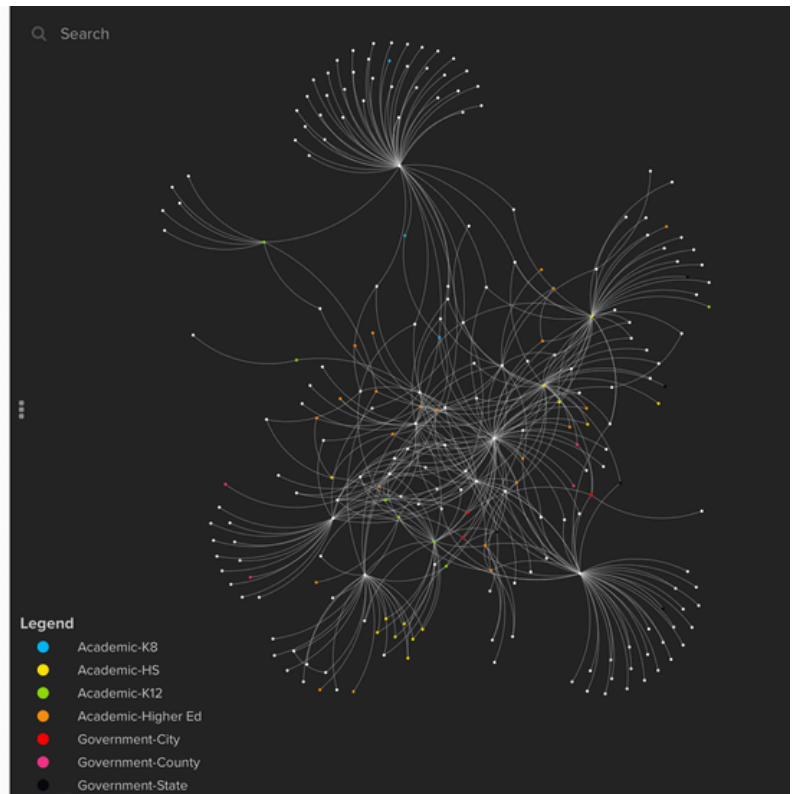
# SUPPORT & SERVICES ECOSYSTEM MAP

## Milwaukee Black and Latino/a Youth Ecosystem Map

[BLEST - CURTO](#)

This map hopes to represent the actors and partnerships that serve Black and Latino/a youth in Milwaukee. Our objective, here at BLEST, is to create a usable tool to understand the various resources available to Black and Latino/a students, and to highlight the nature of connections that bring together a number of organizations within our city. We believe that this visual representation of quantitative and qualitative data will help us better understand Milwaukee as an ecosystem within which our youth develop and will also serve as a community resource.

[#organizations-stakeholders](#) | [permalink](#)



SCAN QR CODE TO ACCESS

KUMU MAP



USE LINK BELOW TO ACCESS MAP

PRESENTATION

The link below goes to an online orientation presentation that walks through the map, explaining the different elements and providing greater detail.

[Orientation Presentation Link](#)

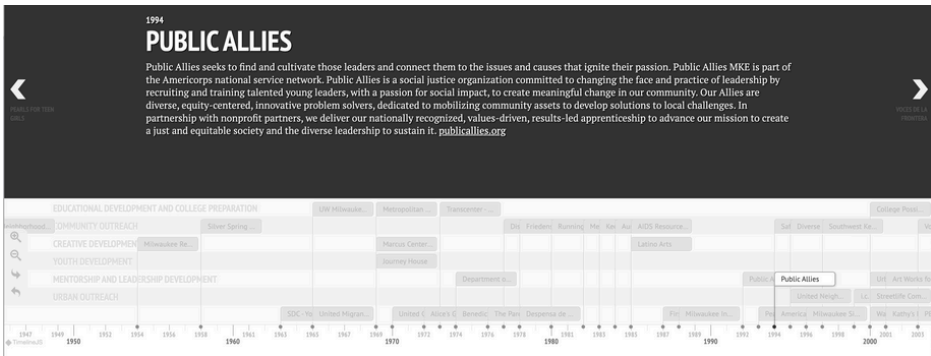


In 2023, we built on the expertise and knowledge of the founding visionaries of the BLEST Hub and connections with America’s Black Holocaust Museum, we undertook a project to detail the historical development of key moments and organizations. In 2022, we asked a team of graduate students to conduct a historical review of initiatives and programs in the ecosystem.

Our goal with a timeline is not to present the current state of the ecosystem as pre-determined or rooted to any specific inevitable process. Rather, this timeline offers a broad perspective and transparency about where Milwaukee has come to better understand where it is going.

Still, the number of efforts raises questions about accountability and lack of movement. No one cause is responsible for current conditions, but the results speak to the need for synergy and collective systems change.

The timeline also highlights the depth of these efforts, and their roots in the civil rights era, the housing marches, and other historical moments.



SCAN QR CODE OR USE [THIS LINK](#)  
TO ACCESS THE TIMELINE





In the process of creating the map and timeline, we can across another challenge to harnessing the power and potential of already existing efforts. Various organizations and academic institutions produce insightful research and reports about the ecosystem, but unless someone encounters these in social media, online, or via a newsletter, they are likely to be missed.

In order to help facilitate transparency and build synergy across existing understandings, we have worked over the last year to compile a publicly available database of research reports.

Our database includes short summaries, synthesized takeaways, and tags. By offering a centralized location and summary of this work, we hope to greater collaboration, shared understanding, and collective efforts to move the needle for Black and Latino/a students.

Black and Latinx Youth Milwaukee Rep... | Copy base | Airtio

Table 1

Views | Grid view | Hide fields | Filter | Group | Sort

	Name	Organization	Link to Article	Summary	Takeaways	Field 6	Tags
8	Wisconsin's Teacher Pay ...	Wisconsin Policy Forum ...		Wisconsin's teacher salar...	One takeaway from this p...		K-12 Education-Focu
9	School Enrollment Questi...	Wisconsin Policy Forum ...		Wisconsin's public and c...	Wisconsin has experienc...		K-12 Education-Focu
10	Revolving Classroom Doo...	Wisconsin Policy Forum ...		This article discusses ho...	Teacher turnover in Wisc...		K-12 Education-Focu
11	Earning Extra Credit	Wisconsin Policy Forum ...		Dual enrollment programs...	In Wisconsin, a quarter of...		K-12 Education-Focu
12	A look at Chronic Absent...	Wisconsin Policy Forum ...		The increase in chronic a...	Wisconsin experienced a ...		K-12 Education-Focu
13	College Material	Wisconsin Policy Forum ...		Milwaukee's educational ...	Milwaukee is facing a "co...		K-12 Education-Focu
14	Fewer Students of Color ...	Wisconsin Policy Forum ...		Wisconsin faces dispariti...	Enrolling in Advanced Pla...		College Readiness, F
15	Wisconsin Ranks in Scho...	Wisconsin Policy Forum ...		The decline in education ...	Wisconsin's per-pupil sch...		Funding, Governmen

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TO ACCESS THE DATABASE







The BLEST Hub strives to contribute to regional efforts for collaborative and collective change. In 2023, we became the leaders of the Research Committee for the countywide My Brother's Keeper Initiative (MBK-MKE) and joined the Racial Equity Impact Data (REID) group, co-led by the Hispanic Collaborative and African American Leadership Alliance of Milwaukee.

### **MBK-MKE**

MBK, based in the Obama Foundation, is a network of communities across the country sharing a vision of creating thriving neighborhoods, cities, and counties that promote positive outcomes for male youth of color.

MBK-MKE has roots in the 2010s, but relaunched last year focused on moving 4 metrics. These goals are to change the number of youth of color who:

1. Graduate from high school ready for what's next
2. Complete post-secondary education or training
3. Are gainfully employed
4. Are safe from violent crime and receiving the second chances they deserve

## **Highlights from 2023-2024 MBK-MKE Work**

Kick off celebration in May 2023 with declaration of support from Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley and Mayor Cavalier Johnson

Earned certification from the Obama Foundation

Research committee of almost 15 representatives from key stakeholders & organizations

Quarterly committee meetings to review work, discuss grants, and share efforts

Collaboratively designed and implemented grant-funded project to study local youth thinking about metrics

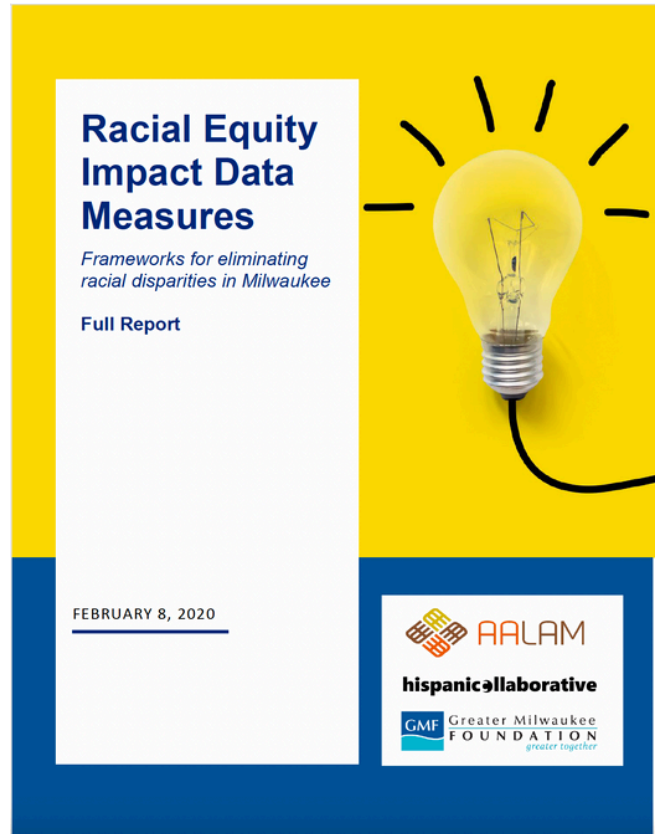
# MBK & REID

## REID

Born in response to the the summer of 2022 and Black Lives Matter protests, this effort involves representatives from dozens of Milwaukee organizations committed to focusing on and addressing racial equity. It has been bolstered by Milwaukee county's declaration of racism as a public health crisis.

The first completed step involved developing a framework for collective impact, and was completed in 2021. The project is currently looking toward action planning.

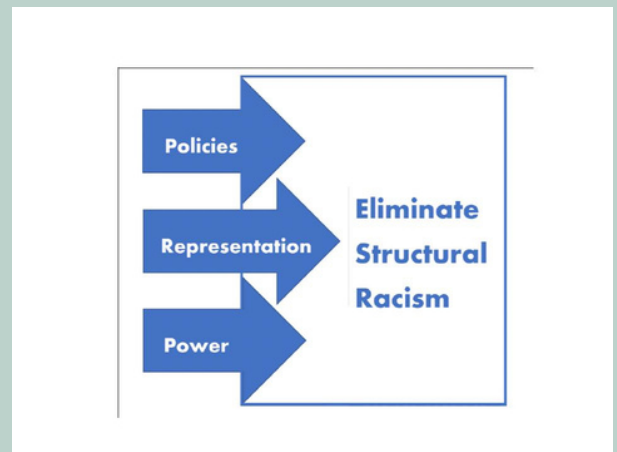
The BLEST Hub joined the organizing group in early 2024 and has been a part of regular conversations moving toward action. Additionally, in the summer, we have taken on the work of the Greater Milwaukee Foundation to help build an asset map as groundwork for the next steps in this process.



## RACIAL EQUITY VISION

The just and fair inclusion of all people of color, diverse ethnicities and backgrounds into a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential.

Under this vision, racial equity is both a process and an outcome, and the REID work has involved diverse community partners engaging collaboratively in the process to drive outcomes.





In 2022-2023, the BLEST Hub began to move more deeply into research and programming on dual enrollment courses. These are classes for high school students that provide credit both at the secondary and post-secondary levels. We started with an extensive project to review current research and best practices related to equity. From this basis, we organized a podcast with local and regional stakeholders and national experts. We also used available Wisconsin Report Card data to explore questions of equity in reported dual enrollment participants.

We found:

- Few schools were engaging large numbers of students in dual enrollment
- Black, Latinx, and economically disadvantaged students were participating at rates much lower than the state average
- There was a need to discuss more deeply and broadly in gathering and analyzing data related to diverse student engagement

Building on this report and our foundational work, Dr. Troy Washington began a dual enrollment program with MPS (see details below). This program has operated for 5 semesters, with over 100 students in total.

## DUAL ENROLLMENT COURSES WITH MPS

In collaboration with BLMA and the College of Education, the BLEST Hub has overseen 5 semesters of dual enrollment courses. Our courses are offered on Marquette's campus with university faculty.

The opportunity has been primarily for Black and Latino male students in MPS, with our summer 2024 version as the first that has been offered to additional MPS students.

Our courses have included:

- Africans, Europeans & Indian Nations in the Making of American Cultures and Education
- Social Justice in Education
- The Principles and Practices of Restorative Justice in the Classroom

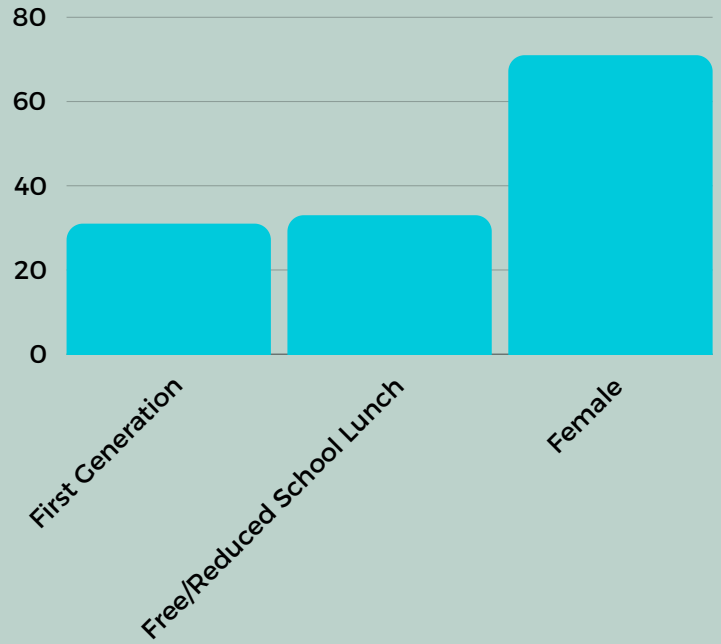
# DUAL ENROLLMENT

## FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH 2023-2024

In collaboration with Wisconsin's DPI, the BLEST Hub conducted research in the fall of 2023 with a diverse group of high school and college students who had participated in dual enrollment courses. The research was sponsored by the National Association of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships (NACEP), and involved 10 focus groups with 49 total participants.

Major takeaways are summarized below. We are in the final stages of writing up findings as an academic paper and will be presenting this work as well at the 2024 NACEP Annual Meetings.

Participant Breakdown (%)



## Selected Takeaways from Focus Groups

<b>1</b>	Took courses because made college cheaper and path to degree shorter.
<b>2</b>	Logistical hurdles to getting signed up and navigating new systems, with good orientation processes seen as critical supports.
<b>3</b>	Especially when on campus, made them feel more like a college student, though they appreciated professors being understanding and supportive of them as high schoolers.



Restorative justice is a fundamental component of how we understand our potential to contribute to transformational, collective change in Milwaukee. At individual, collective, and historical levels, Milwaukee is undoubtedly marked by experiences of trauma and harm (including direct and structural violence).

Moving forward requires healing and repair, while acknowledging the perspectives and humanity of all who have been affected.

Our work in restorative justice has been varied, including hosting summits, training youth, and incorporating it into course work taught by our faculty.

### **RESTORATIVE JUSTICE EFFORTS IN 2023-2024**

In the last year, we have continued these research, service, community, and educational efforts involving restorative justice. Specifically, the BLEST Hub has been a part of:

- Coordinating and running a community summit on circles and restorative justice hosted at Marquette University in June 2024. This event included sharing about our ecosystem mapping, and into the future we will help partners who ran this event to map circle work across the region.
- Dr. Velez represented the BLEST Hub at the 2024 Wisconsin Restorative Justice Summit hosted by UW-Madison Extension Schoolas part of a youth-led and focused session.
- Dr. Velez and Dr. Smith co-taught a dual enrollment course with MPS students in the summer of 2024 rooted in restorative justice, social justice, and education.
- Dr. Velez has been consulting with the MPS Department of Restorative Justice on assessment and evaluation of their work.



For two years, we have collaborated with colleagues in Marquette’s College of Engineering and College of Arts and Sciences to explore different facets of the experiences of underrepresented minoritized (URM) students in STEM majors in higher education. While URM is a classification that extends beyond Black and Latino/a youth, we have seen it as interrelated to our mission because of the depth of underrepresentation for these young people. In doing this work, it has become clear that many URM students feel “hard sciences” STEM fields are “de-identified.” In this sense, they feel like racial/ethnic identity is not connected to learning the material and succeeding as a scientist, engineering, etc.

We aim to bring light to their experiences, as contextualized within the Milwaukee ecosystem. To this end, the work has included collecting data and working with other Milwaukee-area institutions of higher education to compare experiences, share insights, and develop coordinated efforts to address the inequities across the pipeline.

Project	Status
URM Wellbeing and Success in STEM	Completed, see results on next page
Experiences Across the First Year	Completed, see results on next page, expanding to other institutions
Positionality Intervention	Grant application under review
Broadening Participation	Grant application under review



# STEM EQUITY

## *Dissemination*

We have shared insights and work across multiple settings, including at Marquette, at meetings with staff and administrators at other campuses, and in academic outlets. We aim to build a cross-Milwaukee conversation about strengthening the supports and structures of engagement fostering success for young Black and Latino/a students.

Some themes from our work include:

- Even when URM students do not experience microaggressions or prejudice, they are hyper aware of underrepresentation in STEM.
- In various higher education contexts, they generally feel like they have good academic supports, which are facilitated by feeling cared for and strong relationships with advisors and faculty.
- Many of them come to college defining success as grades, but as they face academic struggles are open to understanding it as related to effort and learning for application.
- Identity-based organizations, such as the Society for Women Engineers, provide key spaces of support and sharing of experiences of isolation.
- For engineering students (but not other STEM fields), URM students strength of feeling like an engineer helped buffer feelings of anxiety and stress.

In sharing this work in academic spaces, we currently have papers under review in: *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, *College Student Development*, and *Journal for STEM Education Research*.

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*"I hang out with a lot of people who are similarly driven in the sense they have goals and they wanna do stuff with their life. Those people will also keep me being successful because if I see them doing good, I wanna do good too."*

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# OTHER RESEARCH

## MATC FAST FUND

Continuing a multi-year collaboration, we continued to support the Milwaukee Area Technical College Local 212 FAST Fund in evaluating the impact of its emergency relief fund for students.

For three years, we have assisted in collecting and analyzing perspectives of students who receive their support in relation to areas of need, the ways the emergency support has aided their education and beyond, and obstacles they faced in accessing resources.

This past year, we worked with Glna Rosen (Senior Manager of Insights at Opportunity for Work) who developed concrete policy suggestions from the data and analyses. The 2022-2023 survey was administered to 1,579 students, with 64% identifying as Black and 14.5% as Latinx).

Key findings included:

- 72% experienced some form of basic needs insecurity (i.e., food or housing)
- Leading categories of need for which they used the money was tuition at MATC, rent, books/school materials, and utilities
- 78% of recipients are still enrolled, 9% graduated, and 11% have stopped attending

## POLICY SUGGESTIONS

### NATIONAL

- Increase Pell Grant - see Faculty Direct Dr. Velez's comments on this issue [here](#).

### STATE

- Increased funding of MATC

### MATC

- Transform MATC Promise Program to allow Pell Grants to pay cost of tuition
- Expand MATC's Student Emergency Grant eligibility
- Increase MATC's Student Emergency Grant



# OTHER RESEARCH

## PUBLICATIONS

The following are academic publications that we have produced through the BLEST Hub over the last two years.

Velez, G. & Smith, R. (Under Review). Conceptualizing the Ecosystem: Leveraging Research for Transformational Change in Milwaukee

Velez, G., Black, J., & Lopez, S. (Forthcoming). From Structures to Experiences: Nuancing Student Success at eHSIs through Stakeholder Perspectives. In Gutierrez, J. A., Banda, R. M., Grafnetterova, N., Lujan, J., & Flowers, A. L. (Eds.), *Student Success and Intersectionality at Hispanic-Serving Institutions: Policy and Practice*. Palgrave.

Velez, G., Kasper, A., D'Anna-Hernandez, K., & Murray, A. K. (Under Review). A Cross-Institutional Analysis of the STEM Experience for Students from Historically Underrepresented Groups.

Velez, G., Mancheno, V., & Lopez, S. (2024). Mapping Ecosystems: Building an Understanding of An Urban Network of Supports and Resources for Black and Latino/a Students. (See text [here](#))

Velez, G., Black, J., Lopez, S., & D'Anna-Hernandez, K. (2023). From Predominantly White to Hispanic-Serving: Latinx Student Experiences on a Campus in Transition. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*. (See text [here](#))

Velez, G., & Jessup-Anger, J. (2022). Messaging and Action around Race and Inclusion at a Predominantly White Institution: Perceived Dissonance of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color Students. *Emerging Adulthood*, 10(4), 852-858. (See text [here](#))

Original Research Article

**Mapping Ecosystems:  
Building an  
Understanding of an  
Urban Network of  
Supports and Resources  
for Black and Latino/a  
Students**

Urban Education  
1-30  
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Article

**From Predominantly White  
to Hispanic-Serving: Latinx  
Student Experiences on a  
Campus in Transition**

Journal of Hispanic Higher Education  
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Race/Ethnicity, Culture, and Related Issues

**Messaging and Action around Race and  
Inclusion at a Predominantly White  
Institution: Perceived Dissonance of Black,  
Indigenous, and People of Color Students**

Emerging Adulthood  
2022, Vol. 10(4) 852-858  
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Gabriel Velez<sup>1</sup>, Jacqueline Black<sup>1</sup>, Saúl López<sup>1</sup>,  
and Kimberly D'Anna-Hernandez<sup>1</sup>

Gabriel Velez<sup>1</sup> and Jody Jessup-Anger<sup>1</sup>



In line with CURTO’s overall mission and work, the BLEST Hub centers providing students with engaging experiences leading and developing our work. We especially believe it is critical to center their insights and input not only for their personal and intellectual development, but also because of their insights and perspective.


To this end, we focus on providing opportunities for Black and/or Latino/a/x students from Milwaukee.

In 2023-2024, the BLEST Hub included across our projects:

- 6 graduate students - four doctoral and two masters students - who oversaw our dual enrollment work, and also served as focus group leaders and co-investigators
- 3 undergraduate students. including one Burke Scholar and former BLMA leader, who were instrumental in such projects as the report database
- 4 service learning students who contributed to various efforts

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT OVER THE YEARS	
CATEGORY	NUMBER OF STUDENTS
Undergraduate Research Assistants	12
Service Learners	8
Graduate Research Assistants	18
Others	2

# NEXT STEPS



As the pandemic fades, numerous efforts in Milwaukee are addressing educational inequity and better serve our Black and Latino/a/x youth. In our own work, we have been invigorated by being a part of REID, observing the Milwaukee Succeeds youth ambassador program blossom, and seeing the depth of commitment across sectors that was clear in Wisconsin Policy Forum's project to capture the current state of the educational ecosystem.

There are also numerous challenges and many questions for key institutions, including MPS, to address.

Our aim is to best figure out our role in best supporting these varied efforts and processes into 2025.

## COMMITMENTS FOR 2024-2025 ACADEMIC YEAR

- 1) Move the Research Committee of the My Brother's Keeper initiative toward more action and dissemination, while continuing to bolster its re-energizing in Milwaukee.
- 2) Expand our dual enrollment program with MPS and secure further funding for sustainability.
- 3) Become an active voice in moving the REID initiative forward, including finishing our asset mapping work.
- 4) Continue to train, promote intellectual development, and draw on the expertise and strength of Marquette Black and Latino/a students.
- 5) Foster a cross-sector collaborative around STEM equity and education.
- 6) Co-lead the development of a Latinx Youth Achievement Report with Data You Can Use.

# ABOUT US

## PEOPLE BEHIND THE BLEST HUB



DR. ROBERT  
SMITH



WALTER LANIER



DR. GABRIEL  
VELEZ



ALI SHANA



MICHAEL  
VAZQUEZ



CARMELO KNIGHT



KENDALL WATTS



CATHERINE FINK



MICAH  
RICHARDSON

# STATE OF THE ECOSYSTEM

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## BLACK AND LATINO/A ECOSYSTEM AND SUPPORT TRANSITION HUB

# CONTACT

VISIT OUR [WEBSITE](#) OR EMAIL US AT  
GABRIEL.VELEZ@MARQUETTE.EDU

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**AUGUST 2024**