

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

2025 STATE OF THE ECOSYSTEM REPORT

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**CURTO
MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY
AUGUST 2025**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The past year has been an exciting one for centering youth voice in Milwaukee and its educational ecosystem, even as various changes continue. Milwaukee Succeeds' Autonomous Youth Council has really become an established force, the Milwaukee Public Schools' (MPS) board has been discussing youth representatives, the Common Council started an Emerging Youth Achievement Advisory Committee (EYAAC), and we at the BLEST Hub completed a Latine Youth Achievement Report in collaboration with Data You Can Use.

The year has also been a complicated one. Nationally, political dynamics have pushed back on support for these underserved and historically marginalized groups. The histories and recent dynamics matter: nationwide, only 36% of Black youth and 33% of Latino/a youth between 18 and 22 were enrolled in college. More locally, news reports were filled with stories about low standardized test scores, structural issues like lead in schools, and other dynamics like artificial intelligence, which further undermine the perceived value of education.

Our efforts recognize these trends and respond by studying their causes, adding transparency to the ecosystem, and forming partnerships with like-minded organizations supporting our students. We are seeing common threads in desires for mentorship, valuing alternatives to traditional educational trajectories, and feeling generational differences.

As we look to 2025-2026, we will work to leverage the relationships we have been building and the spaces into which we have been invited to turn youth voice into meaningful policy, supported by aligned funding, leading to systems change. These efforts include advocating for policy change at a state level to support broader access to dual enrollment, driving the work of the EYAAC research committee forward with youth voice, and leading data efforts as the My Brother's Keeper (MBK-MKE) effort focuses on postsecondary enrollment.

The BLEST Hub's aim in this work is to better harness the strengths that exist in our ecosystem through collaboration, synergy, and better understandings of the entire landscape.

MAIN NEW EFFORTS IN 2024-2025

1. Completing a Latine Youth Achievement Report in collaboration with Data You Can Use.
2. Supporting the creation of the Emerging Youth Achievement Advisory Council in the City Council and consulting on its research efforts.
3. Bridging the transition of the MBK-MKE Initiative from being led by ALAAM to GLUE.
4. Joining policy development conversations related to dual enrollment.
5. Maintaining the map and database of reports on the Milwaukee ecosystem.

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 AIM TO 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 AIM TO 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 AIM TO OFFER 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 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
**Education & Community
Leadership**

Bevin Christie is a passionate social entrepreneur and educator dedicated to advancing holistic approaches to learning, program development, social justice, organizational culture, and workforce development. She blends deep experience in education with a commitment to building equitable opportunities, fostering strong communities, and creating systems that empower individuals to thrive.



Alberto Maldonado
Higher Education

Alberto is director of UWM's Roberto Hernandez Center and Special Assistant to the Vice Chancellor for DEI. In these roles, Alberto serves the Latino/a 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 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 is Dean of Student Experience at MATC, driving strategies that boost student retention, success, and engagement. He leads equity-centered initiatives that dismantle barriers and create inclusive pathways for all students to excel.



David Emmanuelle Castillo
Iztaccuahtli (White Eagle)
Education & Youth Empowerment

David 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 by mentoring Black and Brown young people, using his agency to provide them access to opportunities and resources.



Nate Deans Jr.
Public Schools

Nate is Director of MPS' BLMA, overseeing programming and provide supports to increase Black and Latino students' success. He is also a graduate student in the UW-Madison's Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis program.

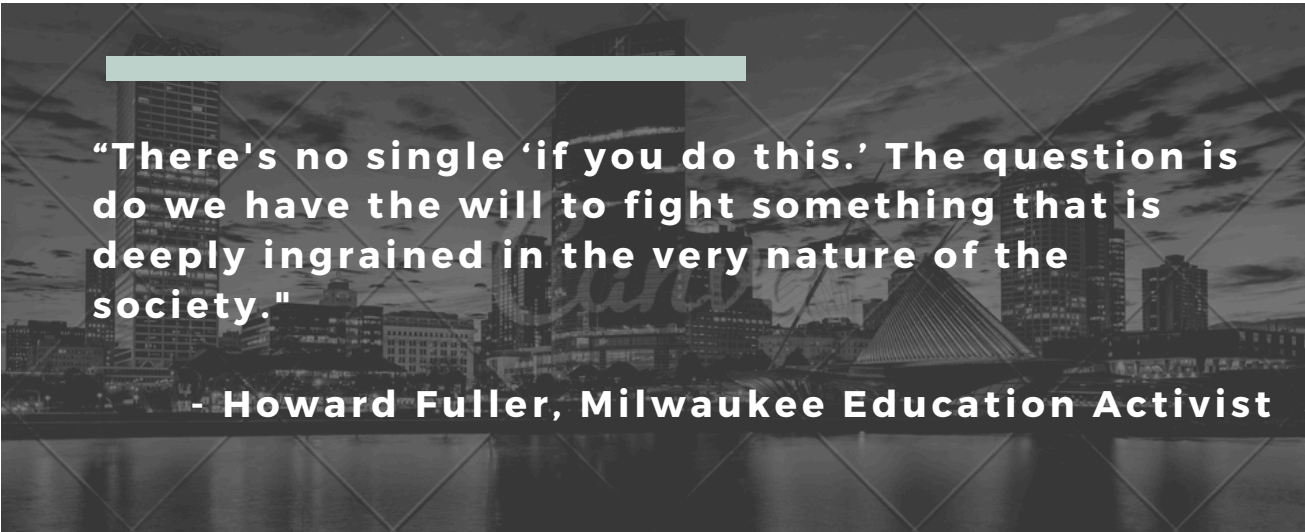
History of BLEST Hub

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

CURTO

The Center for Urban Research, Teaching & Outreach positions itself as an intellectual axis and key convener of programs that address issues central to affirming human rights and human dignity.

Building from our networks with local community experts and stakeholders, CURTO projects and initiatives share a number of core features that are rooted in our mission and guiding values. While each project takes on its own life and identity in these university-community collaborations, CURTO projects and initiatives are aligned in that they are all deeply interdisciplinary, they center stakeholders in all phases of project development, undergraduate and graduate students play an active leadership role in project management, and they are at the intersection of our three pillars - research, teaching, and outreach.

CURTO projects and initiatives aim to center stakeholders in all phases of project development. These projects emerge in response to research and teaching needs expressed by our Milwaukee-area partners. Undergraduate and graduate students are intimately involved in all phases of project development, and they are often the creative inspiration for many of CURTO's projects and initiatives. Phases of project development in which CURTO strives to incorporate all stakeholder voices include stakeholder research and mapping, project ideation, program development, program evaluation, and program reporting.

CURTO VALUES

- Support Faculty Research
- Support Undergraduate/Graduate Student Research
- Serve As A Hub For Interdisciplinary Collaborations
- Provide A Model For Engaged Scholarship
- Fully Integrate Community Voices/Experts In CURTO's Efforts
- Champion Engaged Scholarship In The Promotion/Tenure Process
- Strengthen Relationships Between Marquette And Milwaukee

Summary of 2024 Report

In the 2024 State of the Ecosystem Report, we documented the BLEST Hub's fourth year of operation amid persistent challenges facing Milwaukee's educational ecosystem.

Highlights included:

- **Expansion and Updating of the Ecosystem Map and Report Database**
 - We expanded the interactive map by meeting with over 20 organizations and adding many more to our Kumu visualization
- **Creation of Ecosystem Report Database**
 - Led by research assistants, we developed a public database centralizing research and reports on Black and Latino/a youth. This tool supports transparency, collaboration, and resource-sharing across the ecosystem.
- **Advancing Dual Enrollment Research and Programming**
 - We completed a collaborative study with DPI and NACEP on dual enrollment experiences, identifying logistical barriers and benefits for participating students. The Hub continued operating and scaling dual enrollment courses in partnership with MPS and Marquette University, with a specific focus on equity and restorative justice.
- **Leadership in Regional Collective Impact Networks with a Focus on Research**
 - We continued to lead the Research Committee for MBK-MKE and joined the Racial Equity Impact Data (REID) initiative, supporting coordinated action and asset mapping for racial equity across Milwaukee County. We have also informed the work of the EYAAC and its new research committee.
- **Research on STEM Equity and Student Support**
 - We expanded our studies of underrepresented STEM students in higher education in Milwaukee, publishing new findings and informing practices to strengthen student success and sense of belonging.
- **Evaluation Collaborations**
 - We maintained our support of various local organizations and actors in the educational ecosystem by providing evaluation support for groups like MATC's FAST Fund, MPS' Department of Black and Latino Male Achievement (BLMA) and Office of Restorative Practices.

2023-2024 SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES

1. Expanded ecosystem map, timeline, and report database
2. Advanced dual enrollment research and programming
3. Deepened restorative justice initiatives
4. Led regional impact networks (MBK-MKE, REID)
5. Researched STEM equity and student support
6. Evaluated emergency support at MATC
7. Sustained student engagement and leadership

2024-2025 Projects

Project Area	Page Number
Latine Youth Achievement	<u>10</u>
EYAAC	<u>12-13</u>
Dual Enrollment	<u>14</u>
Ecosystem Map & Resources	<u>16</u>
MBK & REID	<u>18</u>
Restorative Justice	<u>19</u>
STEM Equity	<u>20</u>
Other Research	<u>21</u>





In 2024-2025, we collaborated with Data You Can Use to delve into detailed statistics about Latine youth in Milwaukee, focusing on how these data points are experienced by young people and their supporters. The impetus behind the report was a similar one that Data You Can Use produced about Black youth just two years earlier.

In the fall of 2024, we compiled a presentation of key metrics and data across various sectors, and then worked with our partners to develop a Data Chat script to use with community partners.

In the end, more than 60 participants attended 9 data chats, providing voices and perspectives from across a broad spectrum of Latine youth and youth-serving organizations.



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



LATINE YOUTH ACHIEVEMENT REPORT

Below, we note the key findings from the report, along with highlighting one of the main takeaways for future action: the needed supports and resources that emerged in these conversations.

The report was shared at an event with participants that was meant to inspire action and respond to what we found. We are currently in the process of developing these insights into next steps.

As a note about terminology, we began the project using Latinx, but many of the early data that participants brought up that this label did not resonate with them or young people broadly. With their input, we settled on using Latine.

We would also like to recognize key sponsors that made this report possible, including Milwaukee Succeeds and the Brady Corporation.

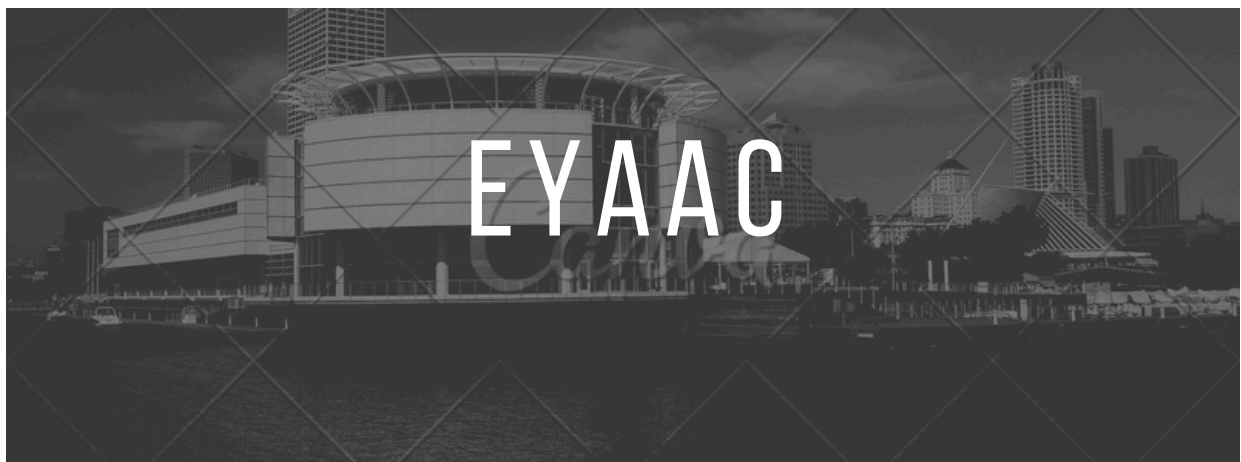
KEY FINDINGS

THEMES

- Generational differences, but also cultural strengths
- Education
 - Impacts of COVID-19
 - Desire to work
 - Obstacles in higher education
- Entrepreneurial spirit stronger in younger generations
- Mental health, spaces, mentorship among key resources needed

RESOURCES NEEDED

- More third spaces
- More mentorship
- Extracurricular activities
- Connecting parents and guardians with mental health resources
- Financial supports for education and job training



In 2025, the Common Council of Milwaukee launched the Emerging Youth Achievement Advisory Council to bring together actors working with young people and develop collaborative solutions to address a variety of concerns these young people face.

The Committee first met in April of 2025 and has representation from diverse sectors across Milwaukee (see next page). It's creation and running have been managed by Bevin Christie, a key BLEST Hub partner and member of our community advisory board.

BLEST Hub played a consulting role in the development of the committee, and has presented various times to its members. At the time of publication, we have also stepped into a lead role in the research and evaluation sub-committee.

As part of this work, our goals are:

- 1.To develop a better understanding of key metrics for measuring our progress on supporting young people's success and thriving
- 2.To build out a citywide data dashboard that reflects these metrics and adds greater transparency
- 3.To create guides and technical assistance resources for organizations in Milwaukee to better measure the impact of the work that they do with young people

EYAAC SUBCOMMITTEES

- 1.Education and Workforce Development
- 2.Wellness
- 3.Public Safety
- 4.Data, Evaluation, and Equity

EYAAC

Overview of the Board's Purpose & Collective Impact Approach

Purpose of the Board:

- The Emerging Youth Achievement Advisory Council (EYAAC) is established to advance the City's commitment to youth and young adult well-being.
- Supports the implementation and oversight of strategies that improve life outcomes for Milwaukee youth and young adults across systems.

Strategic Approach:

- Guided by the principles of collective impact to drive population-level change.
- Fosters collaborative, cross-sector partnerships that center youth voice, equity, and data-informed decision-making.

Five Strategic Priorities (Milestones)

1. Enhance safety by reducing exposure to violent crime and increasing support for second chances
2. Promote mental health awareness and expand access to wellness resources
3. Improve high school graduation rates & readiness
4. Increase post-secondary education and training completion
5. Expand employment opportunities that lead to economic stability

EYAAC Board Members



Jose Perez, Common Council President
City of Milwaukee
Common Council President or Designee



Dr. Brenda Cassellius, MPS Superintendent
Representative of Milwaukee Public Schools



Dr. Brad Kroupa, Executive Director
Forest County Potawatomi Foundation
Representative of the Philanthropic Community



Dr. Anthony Cruz, President
Milwaukee Area Technical College
Workforce Development Representative



Alderman Russell Stamper
City of Milwaukee
General Representative



Dr. Lindsey Harness, Director of the Research
Alverno College, Center for Women & Girls
Representative of Higher Learning



Amber Danyus, Mayor's Council Liaison Officer
City of Milwaukee
Mayor or Designee



Dr. Michael Totoraitis, Commissioner of Health
City of Milwaukee
Commissioner of Health or Designee



Ugo Nwagbaraocha, President
Diamond Discs International
Representative of the Business Community



Marcy Patterson, Community Engagement Mgr.
Milwaukee Police Dept., City of Milwaukee
Representative of Milwaukee Police Dept.



Steven Mahan, Deputy Director
City of Milwaukee Department of Administration
General Representative



In the last year, the BLEST Hub has been increasingly involved in conversations about how to best support students' development, growth, and success as dual enrollment has continued to grow rapidly in Wisconsin (and across the country).

These efforts have built on our previous research (in collaboration with DPI and using statewide school report cards), our programming with MPS students and BLMA, and our conversations and learning from regional partners.

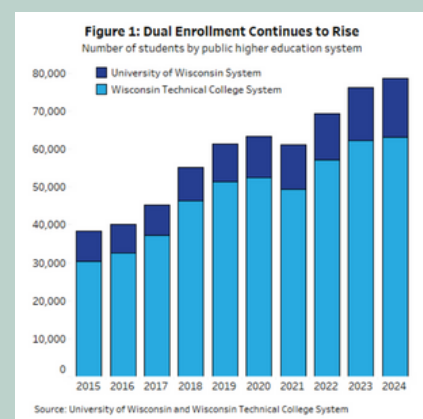
In this space, our work in 2024-2025 involved several branches that will continue to grow into the next year. These include:

- Providing professional development, sharing best practices and insights from research, and supporting local schools, districts, and organizations in understanding dual enrollment
- Collaborating with other institutions of higher education to discuss needs, developments, and policy changes
- Presenting at local meetings and forums about the work.
- Joining conversations and workshops on how to think about policy changes needed at a state level in order to expand access and support best practices

GROWING OPPORTUNITY

The Wisconsin Policy Forum's "A Jumpstart on College Credit" Report in July 2025 highlighted how dual enrollment opportunities continue to grow across the state. The image on right from the report highlights these dynamics.

As these opportunities take off, there is much room to ensure broad access and that they are serving young people in their development.





DUAL ENROLLMENT

Additionally, we continued to serve our Black and Latino/a students in our area through providing a summer dual enrollment course on social justice in education.

The course engaged with local community partners and focused on questions of social justice in education broadly and in our local Milwaukee context.

As we reflect on this work in 2024-2025 and look ahead to the next year, we see a number of bright spots and potential for further action and development.

These potentials and movement include:

- Greater collaboration and coordination with M-Cubed in the Milwaukee area
- Further supporting local schools, local districts, and college access programs in understanding and helping students navigate these opportunities
- Conversations to make statewide policy change with the goal of facilitating access and student success

HIGHLIGHTS OF DUAL ENROLLMENT COURSE WITH MPS

In collaboration with BLMA and the College of Education, the BLEST Hub has run dual enrollment courses for three years. Our courses are offered on Marquette's campus with university faculty and have spanned diverse topics.

In the summer of 2025, eight MPS students participated in a course on social justice in education, which included a visit to America's Black Holocaust Museum, guests from Leaders Igniting Transformation, Marquette, and Milwaukee Succeeds, and final projects on envisioning justice in education.

The BLEST Hub would like to thank the Greater Milwaukee Foundation for its financial support, which made this dual enrollment course possible.

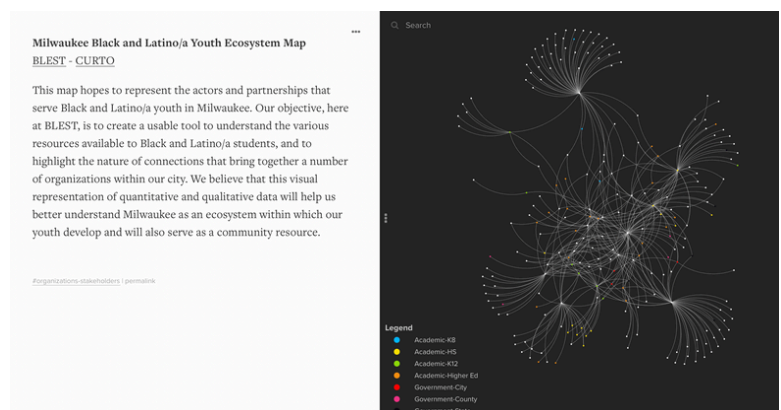
SUPPORT & SERVICES ECOSYSTEM MAP

This past year was the fifth of our core project focused on mapping the educational ecosystem for Black and Latino/a students in Milwaukee. We continued to use this process to engage with new folks and organizations and to better understand strengths, challenges, emerging questions, and needs across this space.

The ecosystem map continues to be a public resource and a process-oriented project. We encourage community members, educators, activists, and others to reach out and connect to help us expand this map and support its continued development.

As historical context, the mapping work began in 2020 when 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.

SCAN QR CODE OR CLICK
HERE TO ACCESS MAP



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

[Orientation Presentation Link](#)

OTHER ECOSYSTEM RESOURCES

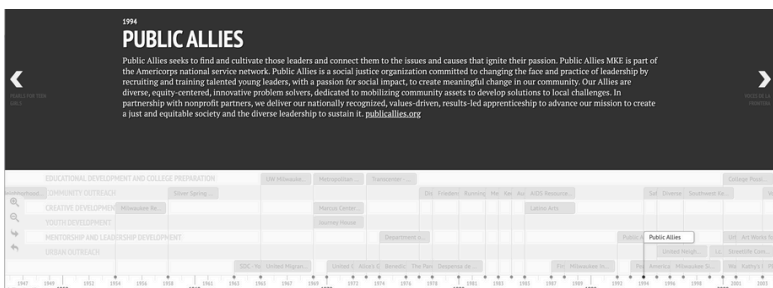


SCAN QR CODE OR USE [THIS LINK](#) TO ACCESS TIMELINE

ECOSYSTEM TIMELINE

In 2024, we built out a visual timeline of events and organizations (i.e., their founding) across the educational ecosystem. These points were curated and expanded with feedback from Dr. Robert Smith - Director of CURTO - and other partners.

This tool was developed to be an online resource for the broader public. The timeline highlights how many current efforts and positive work is both long-standing and connected to historical developments and dynamics.



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

REPORT DATABASE

In 2025, we built out a database of reports related to Black and Latino/a students and their educational trajectories, outcomes, and experiences.

Our aim is to provide a compilation with thematic labels to make these insights more accessible broadly.

Black and Latinx Youth Milwaukee Rep... Copy base

Table 1

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

Find a view

Grid view | Gallery | Kanban

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



For multiple years, the BLEST Hub has been a leader in helping support regional initiatives driving collective action with equity lenses. This work specifically includes leading the Research Committee for the countywide My Brother's Keeper Initiative (MBK-MKE) and contributing to the Racial Equity Impact Data (REID) group, led by the Hispanic Collaborative.

MBK-MKE

MBK is a collective of communities led by the Obama Foundation to drive transformational change to promote positive outcomes for male youth of color.

MBK-MKE began in the 2010s, and has evolved over the last decade. The main metrics that our community has chosen to focus on, and we are helping leading efforts around, are focused on 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

Key Changes and Foci of MBK MKE in 2025

The initiative is now under the direction of Great Lakes Urban Empowerment (GLUE) Solutions, which is led by Walter Lanier (visionary in the creation of the BLEST Hub)

Directly engaging with work of the EYAAC

Convening stakeholders to develop plans for collective action

Focusing efforts around data gathering and coalition building for metric 2: completing post-secondary education and training



Restorative justice holds deep potential not only to address inequities in education (particularly in response to zero tolerance and overly punitive approaches), but also to mitigate the harm that has been caused in these systems. Implementation is difficult and requires coordinated efforts and collaboration.

It has been central to the work of the BLEST Hub because of this possibility, as well as its growing presence across spaces in the Milwaukee area. This growth has been across decades and particularly expanded since an agreement with the Office of Civil Rights in 2016.

RECENT RESTORATIVE JUSTICE EFFORTS

In 2024-2025, we mainly continued to build on work from previous years. These efforts included giving workshops and talks, supporting with evaluation, and building capacity on Marquette's campus.

- The BLEST Hub co-presented with partners from MPS and University of Wisconsin-Whitewater at the Wisconsin Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies yearly conference.
- These partners, along with others from University of Wisconsin-Madison and University of Texas-Austin, have been developing a project to address the potential of restorative justice to address issues with absenteeism.
- For the second year in a row, Dr. Velez and Dr. Smith co-taught a dual enrollment course with MPS students in the summer of 2025 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.



On April 21st, 2025, the BLEST Hub hosted BLMA's 4th Annual Mental Health Awareness Summit on Marquette's campus. The event focused on engaging more than 200 MPS male students in conversations around their mental well-being.

The summit included an opening keynote from Ms. Simmone Kilgore, BlackSpace, two rounds of workshops with small groups, and a closing lunch and engagement with Marquette students and admissions.

The event, in honor of Mental Health Awareness Month in May, has become an annual tradition and collaboration with key partners. We want especially to thank all of the BLMA folks (and in particular Paul Moga), as well as Benjamin Linzy of CURTO, for their work on this event.



MPS EVALUATION AND STUDENT VOICE SUPPORT

For the first time, the BLEST Hub collaborated with MPS' District Discipline Manager to help engage student voice around two programs:

1. Speak Out Against Racism (SOAR)
2. Student Leadership Program

Both programs seek to amplify student voice and engagement in shaping their educational spaces. Our role with the BLEST Hub was to help design and carry out evaluations highlighting how students felt about the programs.

HIGHLIGHTS AND KEY FINDINGS

SOAR

46 participants

- Students noted the engagement across schools and hearing other perspectives as powerful
- They reported using the Courageous Conversations Compass and Four Agreements, and having a school plan
- Students feel represented in school in relation to race/ethnicity in curriculum and events, but not teachers and staff
- Strong sense of racial identity, but lower levels of exploration.

STUDENT LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

- Many of the participants had a positive experience with the summit. They seemed to enjoy the experience of sharing, hearing about other schools' projects, and the food.
- They were left with a desire for more talking about different topics, more discussion, more engagement with administrators and MPS staff.
- Students felt heard, but not that their school or MPS acted in response.
- They desired action based on what happened at the summit.



8.36 out of 10

Student Rating of Program



The BLEST Hub has been a partner with Marquette University’s STEM Research in Diversity and Education (STRIDE) Initiative.

STRIDE has been working to develop programming, interventions, and research to better support a wide range of underrepresented minoritized students in STEM majors in higher education.

The efforts have ranged from research projects using focus groups and interviews to develop understandings of how groups of these students define success to overseeing the research and evaluation of programming that was developed to support racial/ethnic identity. We have also done similar studies with students at MSOE and worked closely with their institution to share that work.

Below, we detail some of the current work, which has taken on a different context since the start of the 2025.

Project	Status
URM Wellbeing and Success in STEM	MSOE and Marquette students. Completed, results shared, and academic dissemination in progress
Experiences Across the First Year	MSOE and Marquette students. Completed, results shared, and academic dissemination in progress
Positionality Intervention	Funded by National Science Foundation and in progress

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

- Lopez, S., Velez, G., Smith, R., and Gibson, M. (Under Review). “Cool People Doing Good Work”: A Rights-Based, Relational Model for Research, Teaching, and Outreach Rooted in Urban Settings.
- Velez, G., Black, J., & Lopez, S. (2025). 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., Black, J., Lopez S., & D’Anna-Hernandez, K. (2024). From Predominantly White to Hispanic-Serving: Latinx Student Experiences on a Campus in Transition. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*.
- Velez, G., Deans, N., Jones, A. L., & Smith, R. (Forthcoming). Harnessing A University-Community Partnership for Dual Enrollment and Equity. In C. Denecker & T. Focarile, *Reflections on Pedagogical Cross-Pollination: Dual Enrollment’s Impact on Teaching and Learning*.
- 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.
- 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. (2025). Mapping Ecosystems: Building an Understanding of An Urban Network of Supports and Resources for Black and Latino/a Students.
- Velez, G., & Smith, R. (Under Review). Conceptualizing the Ecosystem: Leveraging Research for Transformational Change in Milwaukee.

Article

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

Gabriel Velez¹, Jacqueline Black¹, Saúl López¹, and Kimberly D’Anna-Hernandez¹

Journal of His

sagepub.cc
DOI: 10.1177/
journals

Original Research Article

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

Gabriel Velez¹, Verónica Mancheno¹ and Saúl López¹

Urban Education
1–30
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DOI
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

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Emerging Adulthood
2022, Vol. 10(4) 852–858
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DOI: 10.1177/21676568221094489
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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 novel insights and perspectives.

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

In 2024-2025, 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



Recently, we at the BLEST Hub have been a part of a number of conversations with a similar theme: it feels like Milwaukee is possibly at a potential turning point. The markers seem diverse and everywhere: Dr. Howard Fuller's reading efforts, a new MPS superintendent, a re-energized MBK.

The work together to combat inequities and center Black and Latino/a students is always ongoing, but feels like an even more important process to be taking on collectively in 2025-2026.

Our goal is to be a part of this movement by helping support with data, research, and creating synergy. Specifically, we will be working to help elevate youth voice in the EYAAC and support its data committee moving forward, be a voice in dual enrollment policy and research conversations, and contribute to moving the needle on key MBK metrics.

COMMITMENTS FOR 2025-2026 ACADEMIC YEAR

- 1) Bridge the MBK and EYAAC research committees, along with other key partners, to help establish data and processes to make better-informed decisions together.
- 2) Share more broadly about dual enrollment in ways that grow understandings of its potential and best practices, as well as the potential policy efforts to open access more widely.
- 3) Conduct a participatory project with Milwaukee Succeeds, MCW partners, and Bevin Christie to engage opportunity youth in better understanding their needs and developing a toolkit to serve them.
- 4) Train, promote intellectual development, and draw on the expertise and strength of Marquette Black and Latino/a students.

ABOUT US

PEOPLE BEHIND THE BLEST HUB



DR. ROBERT
SMITH



WALTER LANIER



DR. GABRIEL
VELEZ



ALI SHANA



MICHAEL
VAZQUEZ



CARMELO KNIGHT



TAILUS RUSH



CATHERINE FINK



KENDALL WATTS



SAÚL LOPEZ

STATE OF THE ECOSYSTEM

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

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AUGUST 2025