

*OUR VISION: Strong families – Thriving Children*

*OUR MISSION: Best Beginnings Yellowstone County strengthens early childhood systems of care to ensure that all children prenatally to kindergarten have the language, health, and social-emotional building blocks necessary for healthy brain construction.*

*Our Structure: Best Beginnings has a leadership team and work groups. We are connected to a network of Best Beginnings coalitions across Montana.*



# Table of Contents

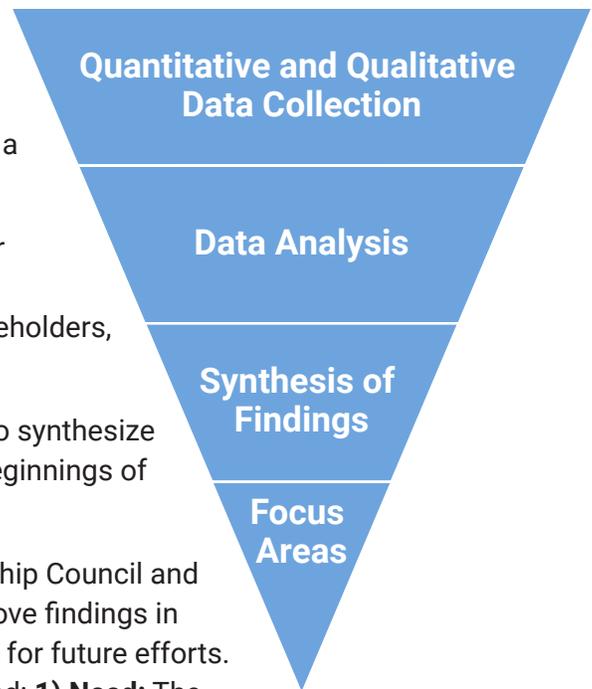
<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	2
➤ Methodology	
➤ Key Insights	
<b>Section 1: Demographics Analysis</b> .....	11
➤ County Data	
➤ Neighborhood Data	
➤ Stakeholder Input	
➤ Considerations	
<b>Section 2: Income Analysis</b> .....	15
➤ County Data	
➤ Neighborhood Data	
➤ Stakeholder Input	
➤ Considerations	
<b>Section 3: Education Analysis</b> .....	22
➤ County Data	
➤ Neighborhood Data	
➤ Stakeholder Input	
➤ Considerations	
<b>Section 4: Health Analysis</b> .....	34
➤ Physical Health .....	34
○ County Data	
○ Neighborhood Data	
○ Stakeholder Input	
○ Considerations	
➤ Mental Health .....	39
○ County Data	
○ Neighborhood Data	
○ Stakeholder Input	
○ Considerations	
<b>Section 5: Synthesis of Findings</b> .....	42
<b>Section 6: Prioritized Focus Areas</b> .....	47
<b>Best Beginnings Coalition</b> .....	48

## Methodology

**Purpose of Document:** This document is intended to be a follow-up and extension of the Best Beginnings of Yellowstone County Needs Assessment conducted in 2012. This assessment builds upon the 2012 work to provide a clear vision and direction for community efforts for the following 3 years.

**Needs Assessment Process:** This assessment included a comprehensive process that started with the broad collection of quantitative and qualitative data for Yellowstone County, Billings, and Billings Neighborhoods. From there, multiple groups analyzed the data and repeatedly synthesized and prioritized findings down to a narrower and narrower focus. Below is a brief overview of this process.

- **Quantitative Data:** Collection of archival data included sources such as the U.S. Census, MT Department of Public Health and Human Services, MT Office of Public Instruction, Child Count, and the Youth Risk Behavior Survey.
- **Qualitative Data:** Multiple sessions were held with groups identified as vital to a full understanding of community needs. These groups included Best Beginnings leadership and work group members from a variety of community agencies and work specialties.
- **Analysis:** A robust analysis was conducted to discover meaningful findings and useful insights. This process included analysis of all data by focus groups, key stakeholders, and the Best Beginnings membership.
- **Synthesis:** Stakeholders built upon the data analysis to synthesize findings into specific findings most relevant to Best Beginnings of Yellowstone County.
- **Prioritized Focus Areas:** The Best Beginnings Leadership Council and key community groups reviewed and assessed the above findings in order to determine specific strategies and focus areas for future efforts. Key criteria used to determine prioritized areas included: **1) Need:** The importance of the issue is supported by data analysis and focus group input. **2) Fit:** The issue fits the Best Beginnings vision and goals. **3) Feasibility:** It is an issue that can be impacted by Best Beginnings and fits the group's resources. **4) Momentum:** The issue has commitment and energy from key stakeholders.



**Caution:** All data, findings, and conclusions in this assessment are susceptible to limitations of data collection and analysis; such as sampling error, self-reporting bias, and complex factors that influence human behavior. These limitations should be considered when reviewing and drawing conclusions from this assessment.

## Key Insights - Demographics

Below is an overview of key insights based on the alignment of data and stakeholder input.

**The largest demographic changes in Yellowstone County from 2010-2015 were an increase in the American Indian and Hispanic populations as well as in children age 5-9 of all races.**

For details, see page 11.

### Basic County Demographics:

- Population of 153,692 with urban, rural, and reservation border towns.
- 23.4% under age 18
- 6.5% under age 5
- About 90% white; 4.4% American Indian or Alaska Native; .7% Asian; .7% Black. Some neighborhoods reflect much greater diversity. North Park is 8% Hispanic and Southside is 36% non-white.

Quantitative and Qualitative Data Collection

Data Analysis

Synthesis of Findings

Focus Areas

### Overall Population Increase: <sup>1</sup>

- 6.7% increase in Yellowstone County and 6.5% in Billings populations from 2010-2015.
- These rates are higher than Montana which saw a 4.2% increase.

### Racial Diversity Increase: <sup>1</sup>

- 20% increase in American Indian and 21% increase in Hispanic residents in the county.
- 13% increase in American Indian and 28% increase in Hispanic residents in Billings.

### Youth: <sup>1</sup>

- Children under age 5 declined 4.5% in Billings but rose 2.7% in the county and 1.6% statewide.
- Children ages 5-9 increased by 20.4% in Billings, 13.4% in Yellowstone County and 8.3% in MT.
- Youth under age 18 rose by 6.9% in Billings, 5.9% in Yellowstone County, and 1% statewide.



<sup>1</sup> Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey: 2006-2010 and 2011-2015, Five Year Estimates.

## Executive Summary

**Neighborhood Variation:** <sup>1</sup> Rates of racial diversity vary greatly by neighborhood. Examples include:

- Yellowstone County East: 0.9% American Indian — 2.9% Hispanic.
- Southside: 14.5% American Indian — 17.3% Hispanic.

**Large Neighborhood Populations:** The size of Yellowstone County neighborhoods is substantial with many being larger than most Montana cities.

Demographics Takeaway	
Issue	Insight
<b>Growth</b>	Billings and Yellowstone County saw growth in overall population and in racially diverse populations. This growth was larger than Montana.
<b>Neighborhood Variations</b>	Racial diversity varies greatly among neighborhoods. This suggests the need to include culturally sensitive strategies based on individual neighborhoods.



## Key Insights - Income

Despite strong employment and rising incomes, poverty changes from 2010-2015 were mixed.  
For details, see page 15.

**Economic Growth:** <sup>1</sup> Median Household income increased by 9.9% in Billings, 8.6% in Yellowstone County, and 7.5% in Montana. Unemployment remained well below national levels.

**Mixed Poverty Results:** <sup>1</sup> Despite income increases, poverty did not show a decrease.

- Poverty rates rose in Billings from 12.1% to 12.8% (5.8% change) from 2010-2015 and rose from 11.2% to 11.5% in Yellowstone County.
- Families with children under 18 living in poverty increased in Billings from 14.6% to 15.5% (6.2% increase) and remained mostly steady at 13.5% in Yellowstone County. In comparison, rates rose from 16.6% to 17% (2.4% increase) in Montana overall.
- **Note:** Poverty rate changes were not larger than the Margin of Error so were not statistically significant.

**Neighborhood Variation:** <sup>1</sup> Economic factors varied greatly by neighborhood:

- Median Family Income ranged from \$29,318 in the Billings Southside to over \$98,000 in Yellowstone County West.
- Families with children under 18 living in poverty varied from 2.6% in Yellowstone County West to over 33% in the North Park, Heights South and Southside neighborhoods.
- Even within specific neighborhoods, wide variations in income can be found among specific census tracts; ranging from \$38,843 to \$61,776 and families in poverty ranging from 9% to 36.1% in the Heights West neighborhood.



<sup>1</sup> Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey: 2006-2010 and 2011-2015, Five Year Estimates.

**Underlying Issues Identified:**

- The issue of “working poor” is still substantial.
- A “Living Wage” is higher than minimum wage.
- Affordable housing and childcare create challenges and increased costs.
- Transportation is a significant barrier to accessing jobs, medical care, resources, and childcare.
- Mental health and ACE’s affect lifelong income and poverty.
- Early childhood education and care contribute to academic success and lifelong income.

**High Rental Burden:** <sup>1</sup> Increased rent costs were also seen as an underlying issue to poverty. High Rental Burden is defined as households that spend 30% or more of income on rent.

- High Rental Burden ranged from 30.3% in Yellowstone County South to 66.5% in Heights East.
- Many neighborhoods, including Yellowstone County East, Yellowstone County Northwest, West End North, Southside, and Lockwood have a 50% or higher rental burden rate.

Income Takeaway			
Issue	Successes	Needs	Insights
<b>Poverty</b>	Income has risen steadily.	Poverty continues; especially among families with children.	Potential contributing factors include low wage jobs, lack of transportation, housing costs, childcare costs, and mental health.
<b>Neighborhood Variations</b>	Dividing areas into neighborhoods by census tracts provides a deeper understanding.	Large variety in demographic and economic factors occur by and within neighborhoods; which complicates services.	Developing programs to fit micro areas may be effective.

## Key Insights - Education

**Despite strong gains, subgroups continue to graduate at much lower rates; with American Indian students at 57.7% in Billings.**

For details, see page 22.

**Increased Graduation Rates:** <sup>2</sup> Data from 2011-2016 show healthy trends for graduation rates:

- Billings was up 7.7% to 83.6% ..... Huntley Project was up 5% to 90%.
- Laurel was up 17.3% to 90.7% ..... Shepherd was relatively flat at 89.8%.

**Remaining Gaps:** <sup>2</sup> Despite consistent increases, sub-populations still graduate at a lower rate. Sub-population rates in Billings Public Schools include:

- American Indians: 57.7% ..... Economically Disadvantaged: 71.8% ..... Special Education: 75.1%

**Increased Absences:** <sup>3</sup> Chronic absence rates from the 2015/2016 to 2016/2017 school years showed a 25.3% increase in BPS. Schools participating in a UWYC pilot attendance program saw a 30% reduction in chronic absences during this same period. While suggestive, these findings are for only a 1 year so no trends can be determined.

**Mixed Reading and Math Proficiency:** 3rd Grade Reading and Math proficiency rates in Billings were mixed with 13 of 22 elementary schools meeting the 2016 goals set by the N.W. Evaluation Association. <sup>3</sup>

3rd grade reading proficiency rates in Billings Public Schools ranged from 94% to 32%:

- Poly Drive: 94%.....Bench: 72%.....Orchard: 32%

School bullying remained high in the county, and electronic bullying was found as a newer trend with 36.2% of middle school students experiencing bullying and 20.9% electronic bullying. <sup>4</sup>

**Early Childhood Education and Quality Childcare:** Data and focus group input showed a strong impact of quality early childhood education and childcare. Despite high impact, availability of quality childcare in Yellowstone County seems to be limited.<sup>5</sup>



<sup>2</sup> Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI)

<sup>3</sup> Billings Public Schools, tracking records

<sup>4</sup> 2015 Youth Risk Behavior Survey

<sup>5</sup> District 7 HRDC, database records

## Executive Summary

Education Takeaway			
Issue	Successes	Needs	Insights
<b>Graduation</b>	Steady increase among all populations. Billings rates have increased faster than MT.	Subgroups continue to have lower graduation rates and Billings still lags behind MT.	Contributors to school success include attendance, reading proficiency, and early childhood education and care.
<b>Attendance</b>	Programs are showing positive impacts.	Billings saw an increase in absenteeism over the past year.	Important factors include parental awareness and involvement as well as school norms.
<b>Proficiency</b>	Programs have shown success.	Proficiency levels in Billings elementary schools are often below set goals.	Reading and verbal expression with young children is vital to promote proficiency.



## Key Insights - Health

**Mental health continues to be seen as a major contributor to community concerns and a barrier to accessing services.** For details, see page 39.

### PHYSICAL HEALTH

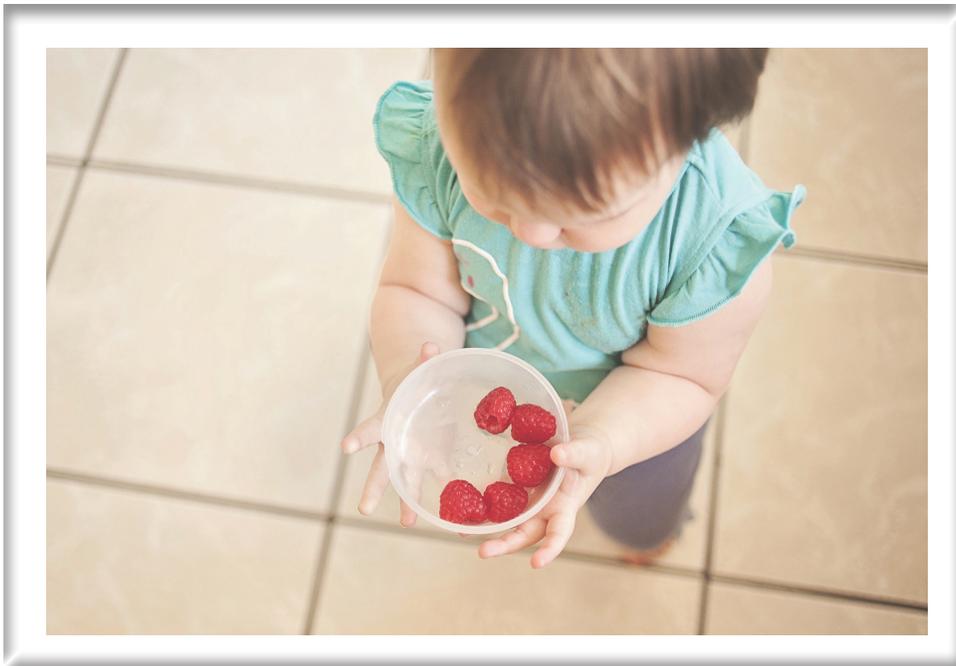
**Youth with Disabilities:** Youth under 18 with disabilities increased in Billings from 6.6% in 2010 to 8.1% in 2015. Yellowstone County increased from 7.5% to 8.8% during this time. In comparison, Montana moved from 5.7% to 5.6% which was not statistically significant. <sup>6</sup>

**Low Birth Weight:** 8% of county births in 2015 were considered low weight; compared to 7% statewide. <sup>7</sup>

**Infant Mortality** in Yellowstone County was at 6.8 per 1,000 live births in 2015; compared to 5.8 in MT. <sup>7</sup>

**Teen Birth Rates** have decreased by 30% for the county and 27.4% for the state, from 2011-2015. <sup>7</sup>

**Food Insecurity** was reported by 11.9% of county residents. 36% of those do not qualify for SNAP. <sup>8</sup>



<sup>6</sup> U.S. Census, American Community Survey: 2006-2010 and 2011-2015, Five Year Estimates.

<sup>7</sup> MT DPHHS, Office of Vital Statistics

<sup>8</sup> Feeding America, <http://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2014/overall/montana/county/yellowstone>

## MENTAL HEALTH

**Depression and suicide rates** for county youth remained much higher than the US, with 25.3% of county middle school students reporting symptoms of depression. <sup>9</sup>

**Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE's)** were highly supported by data and group input as a strong underlying influence on many social concerns.

- MT ranked highest in the Nation in rate of children with 3 or more ACE's (17%) in 2014. <sup>10</sup>
- The most common ACE's: 1) Economic Hardship.  
2) Divorce. 3) Alcohol. 4) Mental Illness. <sup>11</sup>

**Underutilized Resources:** While services are sometimes difficult to access, there were also findings that many resources are available but underutilized. Reasons found for this included:

- Lack of awareness - Stigma - Mental health issues and addictions - Insurance that only covers short term care - Systems that do not integrate mental health support into services.



Health Takeaway			
Issue	Successes	Needs	Insights
<b>Physical Health</b>	Coalitions have developed programs and system interventions to promote health.	Increased youth with disabilities and food insecurity stood out as consistent issues of concern.	An increase in disabilities suggests the need for childcare providers, schools, parents, and medical providers to develop strategies, policies and procedures to identify and support children in need.
<b>Mental Health</b>	Programs focused on ACE's and Trauma Informed Care have shown strong progress.	Discussed as a main contributor to community concerns and an inhibitor of change.	Increasing mental health service participation must include not just availability of services but also issues such as stigma, awareness, and system change from reactive to proactive.

<sup>9</sup> 2015 Youth Risk Behavior Survey

<sup>10</sup> Sacks, V., Murphey, D., & Moore, K. (2014) Adverse childhood experiences: National and state-level prevalence. Child Trends. Retrieved from [http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Brief-adverse-childhood-experiences\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Brief-adverse-childhood-experiences_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Sacks, V., Murphey, D., & Moore, K. (2014) Adverse childhood experiences: National and state-level prevalence. Child Trends. Retrieved from [http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Brief-adverse-childhood-experiences\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Brief-adverse-childhood-experiences_FINAL.pdf)

# Section 1: Demographics

## Demographics Analysis

Quantitative and Qualitative Data Collection

Data Analysis

Synthesis of Findings

Focus Areas

## Demographics Analysis

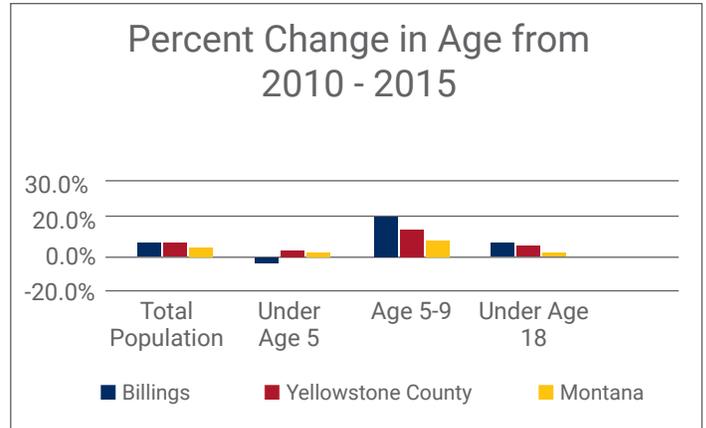
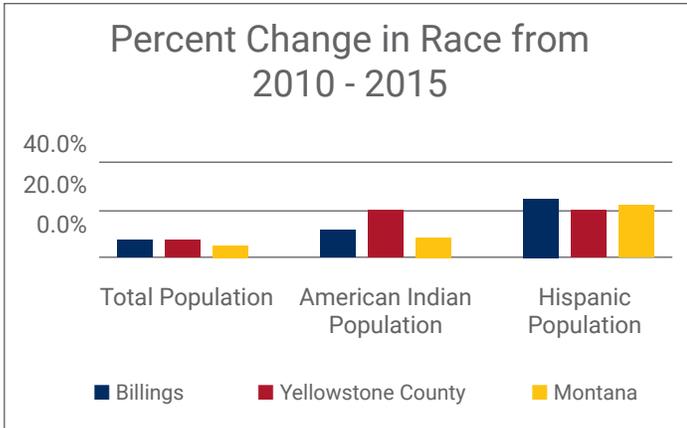
### County Demographic Data

Focus Areas	Billings				Yellowstone County				Montana		
	2010	2015	2010-2015 Change	Change compared to MT	2010	2015	2010-2015 Change	Change compared to MT	2010	2015	2010-2015 Change
Total Population	101,549	108,134	6.5%	↑	144,050	153,692	6.7%	↑	973,739	1,014,699	4.2%
Total Households	43,179	44,092	2.1%	=	59,746	61,442	2.8%	↑	401,328	409,394	2%
Family Households	25,742	26,065	1.3%	↑	38,047	38,586	1.4%	↑	256,130	255,470	-0.3%
American Indian	4,215	4,780	13%	↑	5,563	6,696	20.4%	↑	60,135	65,693	9.2%
Hispanic	4,918	6,317	28.4%	↑	6,584	7,938	20.6%	↓	27,260	33,622	23.3%
White Only	93,582	97,232	3.9%	↑	133,847	139,385	4.1%	↑	895,472	904,977	1.1%
Under Age 18	23,072	24,658	6.9%	↑	34,000	36,015	5.9%	↑	220,808	223,090	1%
Under Age 5	7,369	7,032	-4.5%	↓	9,685	9,934	2.7%	=	59,722	60,697	1.6%

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey: 2006-2010 and 2011-2015, Five Year Estimates.

## Section 1: Demographics

**Growth:** Overall population increased by 6.5% in Billings, 6.7% in Yellowstone County and 4.2% in MT.



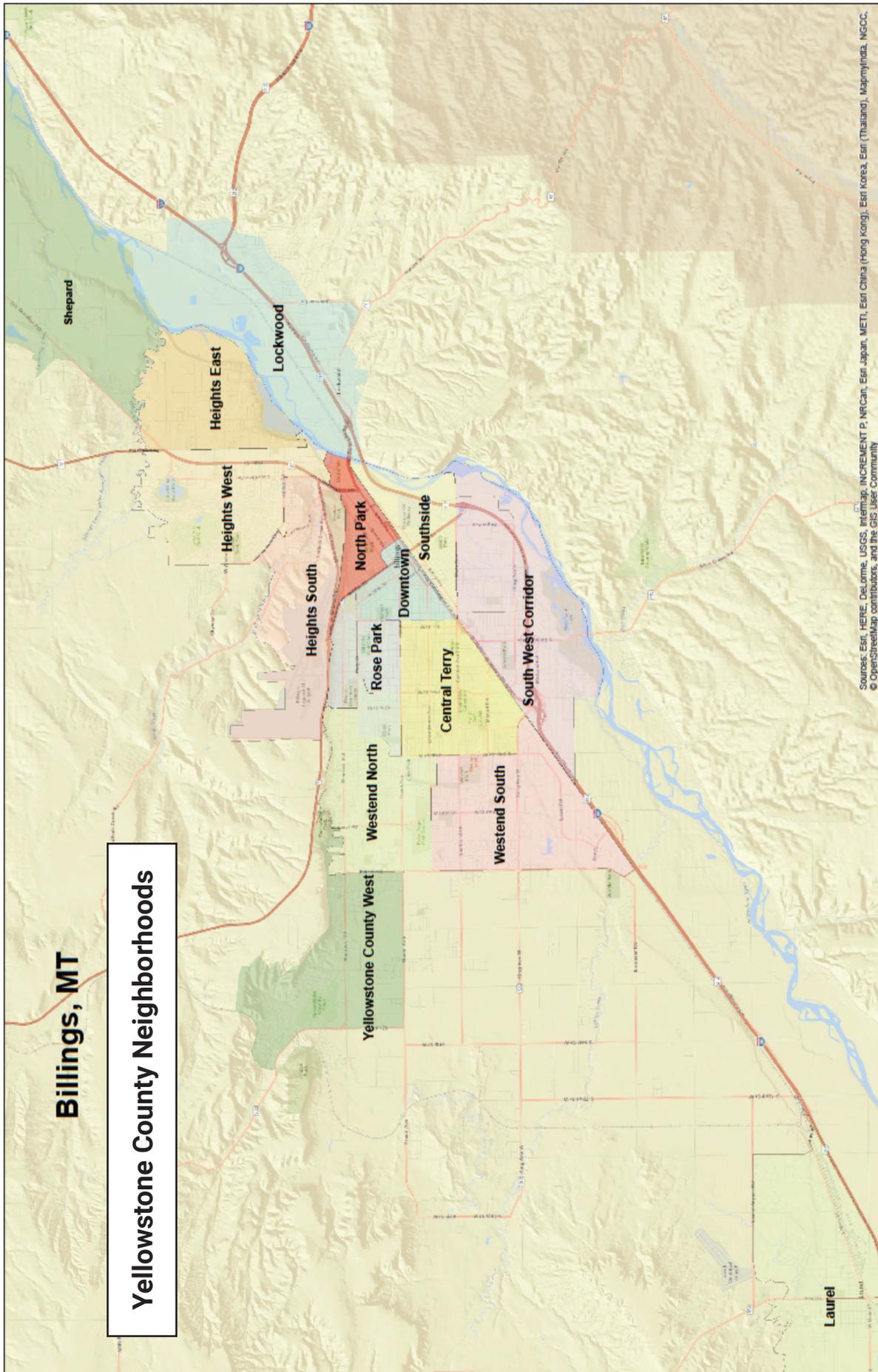
**Racial Diversity:** Yellowstone County continued the trend of increases in racially diverse populations.

- 20% increase in American Indian and 21% increase in Hispanic residents from 2010-2015.
- Over 6,700 American Indians live in the county. This is more than the entire population of the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation which is home to approximately 5,000 American Indians.

**Youth Growth:** Changes in the youth population were slightly mixed:

- Children age 5-9 in Billings and Yellowstone County increased at a greater rate than Montana.
- Children Under age 5 decreased in Billings but increased overall in Yellowstone County.

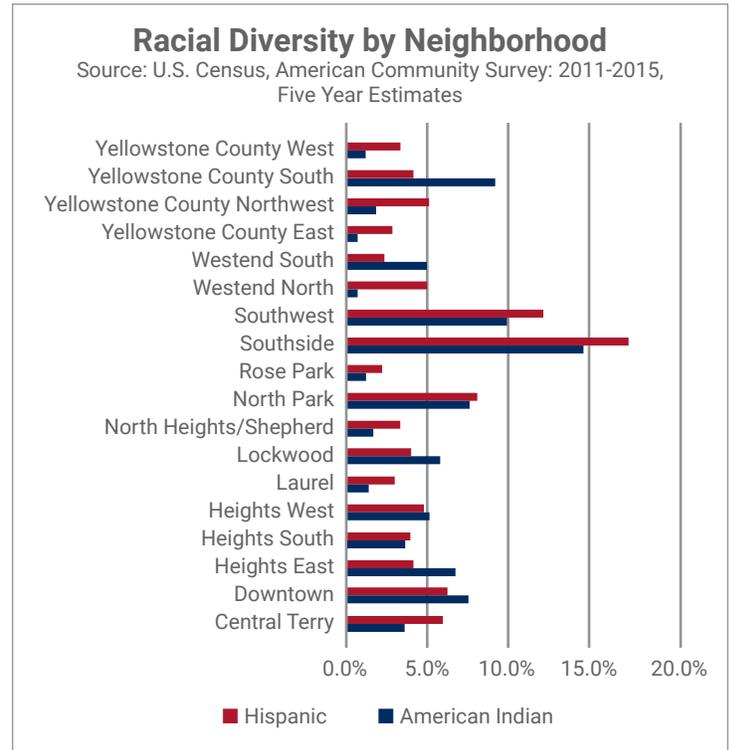
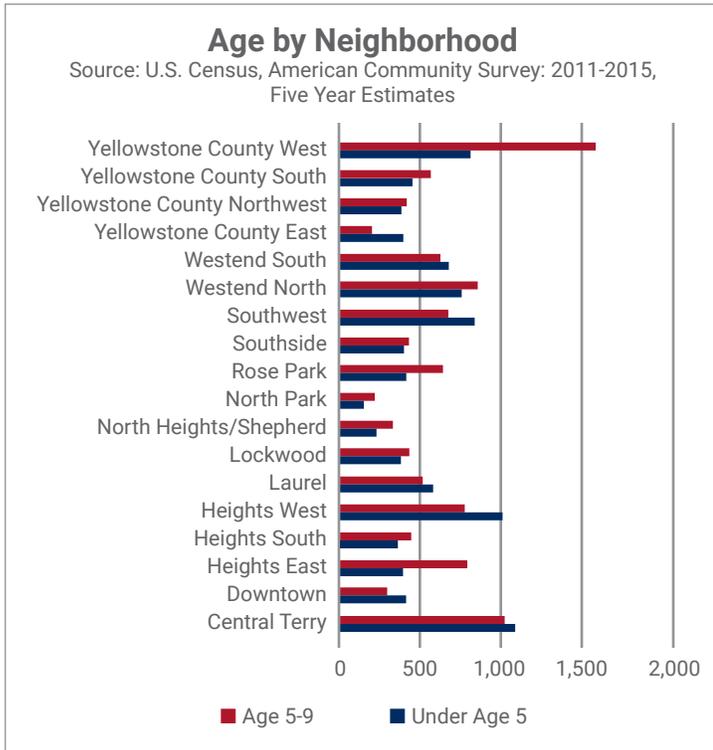
# Section 1: Demographics



# Section 1: Demographics

## Neighborhood Demographic Data

Data below have been broken down by census tracts to represent specific Yellowstone County neighborhoods. The map above provides an illustration of these boundaries. **Neighborhood Variation:**



Racial diversity varies greatly by neighborhood.

- Yellowstone County East: 0.9% American Indian ---- 2.9% Hispanic
- Rose Park: 1.3% American Indian ---- 2.3% Hispanic
- Yellowstone County West: 1.3% American Indian ---- 3.4% Hispanic
- Yellowstone County South: 9.2% American Indian ---- 4.3% Hispanic
- Southwest: 9.9% American Indian ---- 12.1% Hispanic
- Southside: 14.5% American Indian ---- 17.3% Hispanic

**Large Populations:** Yellowstone County has several neighborhoods with populations larger than most Montana cities. The Central Terry neighborhood alone has over 14,000 residents.

### Demographic Considerations

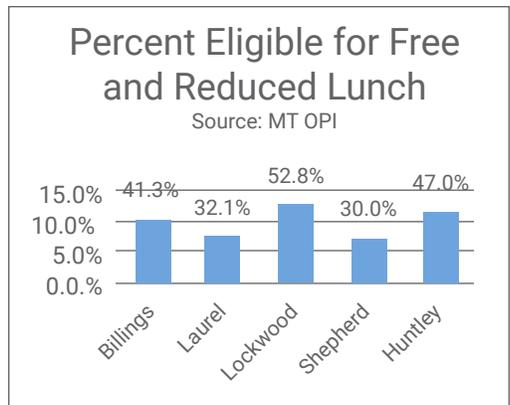
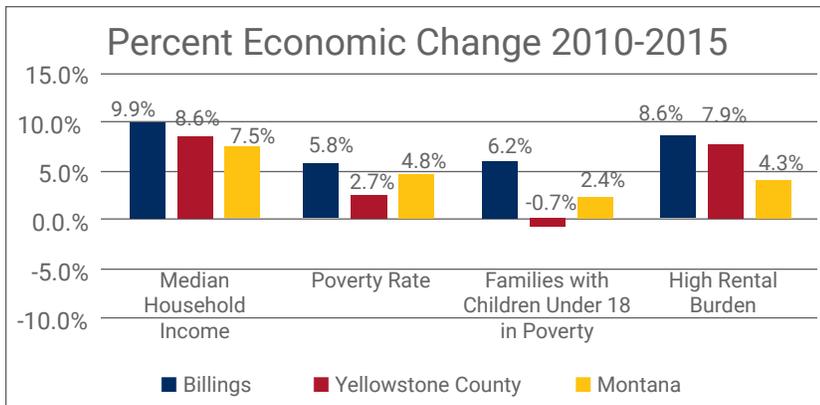
Primary Issue	Population Growth
<b>Conclusions and Insights</b>	The racial and age diversification of Yellowstone County suggests the importance of considering the specific needs of each neighborhood and targeting specific programs to areas of highest impact.
<b>Alignment with Best Beginnings</b>	Best Beginnings maintains an awareness of the unique needs in Yellowstone County and each individual neighborhood. This awareness was included in discussions for a variety of potential projects.

**Income Analysis**

**County Income Data**

	Billings			Yellowstone County			Montana		
	2010	2015	Change	2010	2015	Change	2010	2015	Change
Median Household Income	\$46,433	\$51,012	↑	\$48,641	\$52,802	↑	\$43,872	\$47,169	↑
Median Family Income	\$61,236	\$66,212	↑	\$62,380	\$67,467	↑	\$55,725	\$61,271	↑
Poverty Rate	12.1%	12.8%	↑	11.2%	11.5%	=	14.5%	15.2%	↑
Families with Children Under Age 18 Living in poverty	14.6%	15.5%	↑	13.6%	13.5%	=	16.6%	17.0%	=
Families with Children Under Age 5 Living in Poverty	25%	26.2%	↑	26.8%	21.3%	↓	23.9%	19.4%	↓
Unemployment Rate All	4.4%	3.9%	↓	4.3%	4.1%	↓	5.7%	6.2%	↑
Hi Rental Burden: Rent Costs 30% or More of Income	43.2%	46.9%	↑	43.3%	46.7%	↑	44.7%	46.6%	↑
No Vehicle	6.2%	5.9%	↓	5.1%	5.1%	=	5.1%	5.2%	=

Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey: 2006-2010 and 2011-2015, Five Year Estimates.



## Section 2: Income

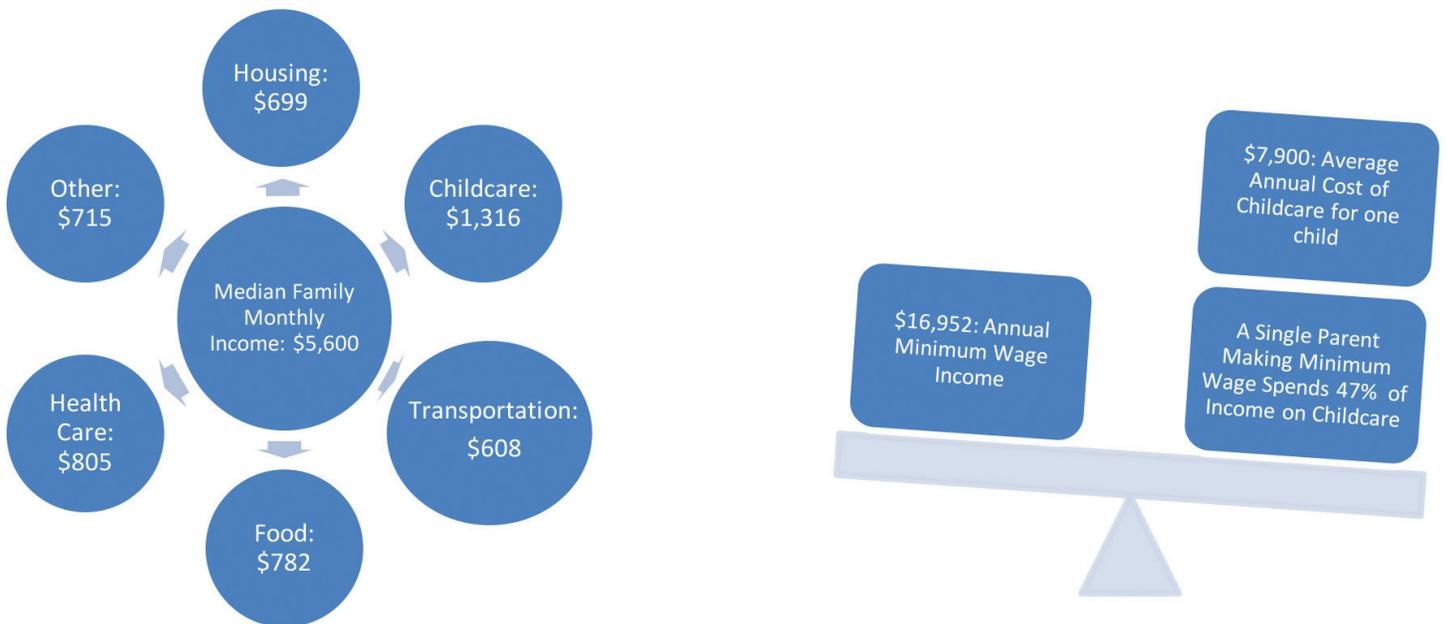
**Economic Growth:** Economic conditions in Yellowstone County saw Healthy Growth from 2010-2015:

- Median Household Income rose by 9%.
- Unemployment was well below national levels.

**Poverty Mixed:** During this time, poverty factors were mixed:

- Poverty rates increased for Billings, Yellowstone County, and Montana.
- Families with children under 18 living in poverty increased in Billings and dropped only slightly in Yellowstone County.
- Families with children under 5 living in poverty decreased in Yellowstone County and Montana but was up in Billings.
- Households experiencing high rental burden increased for both the city and county; at rates higher than the state.
- Households without access to a vehicle decreased in Billings but remained the same in Yellowstone County.

### Common Expenses: Where does the money go?

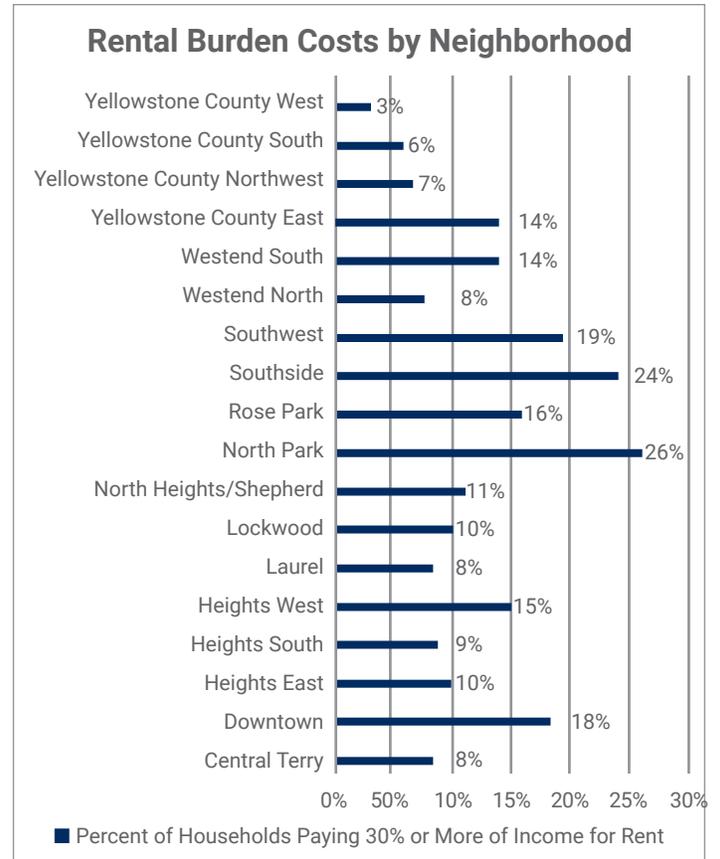
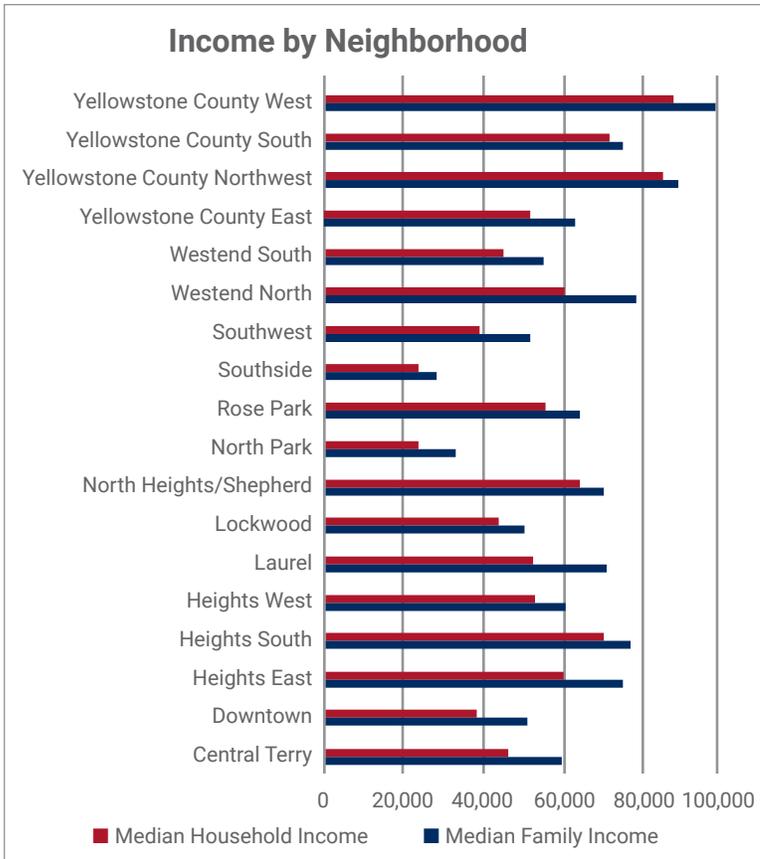


**Source:** Economic Policy Institute's Family Budget Calculator. <http://www.epi.org/resources/budget/>

**Note:** Monthly costs based on a 2 adult family with 2 children (4 year old and school age child). Billings Average Monthly Expenses, 2014.

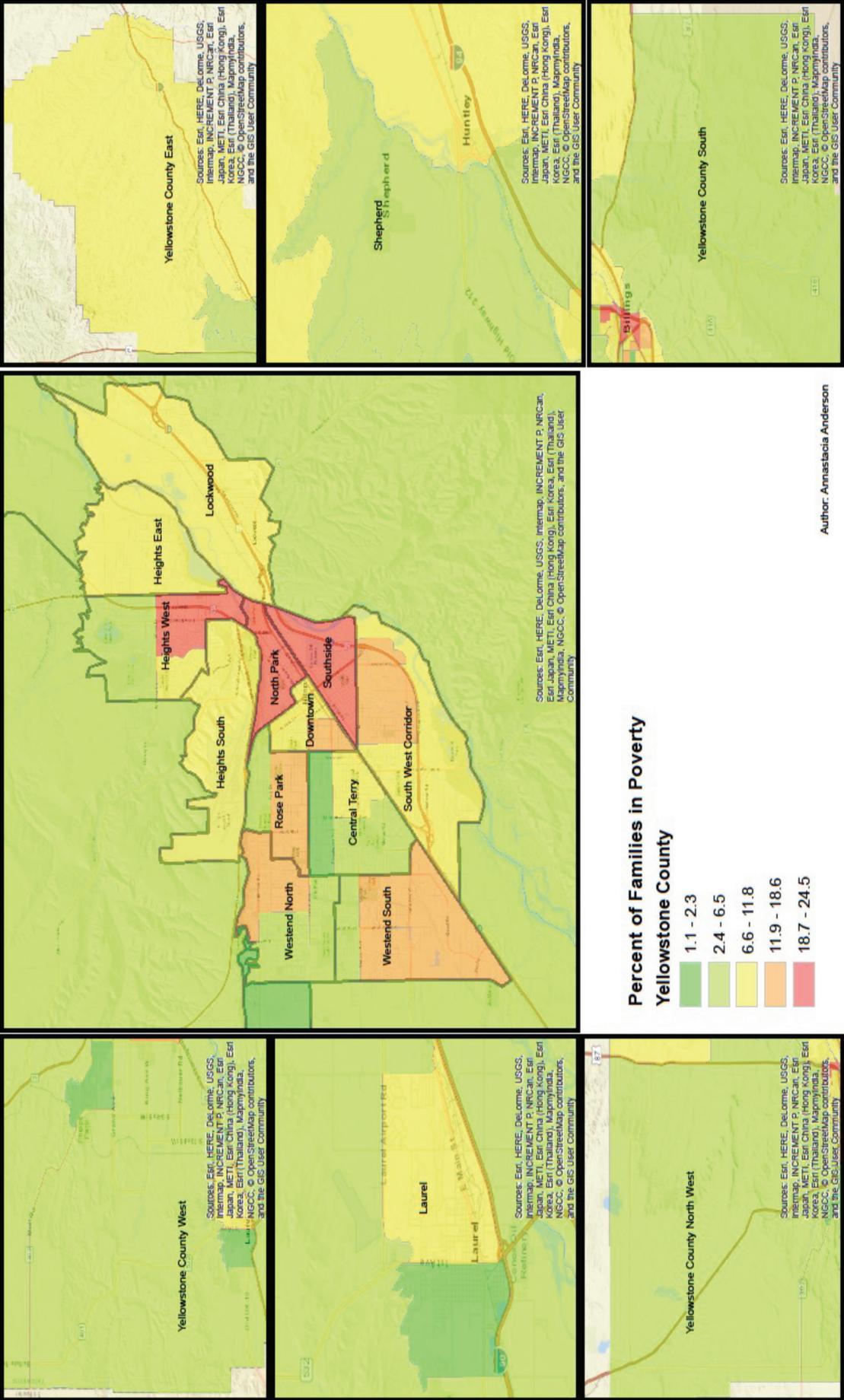
## Section 2: Income

### Neighborhood Income Data

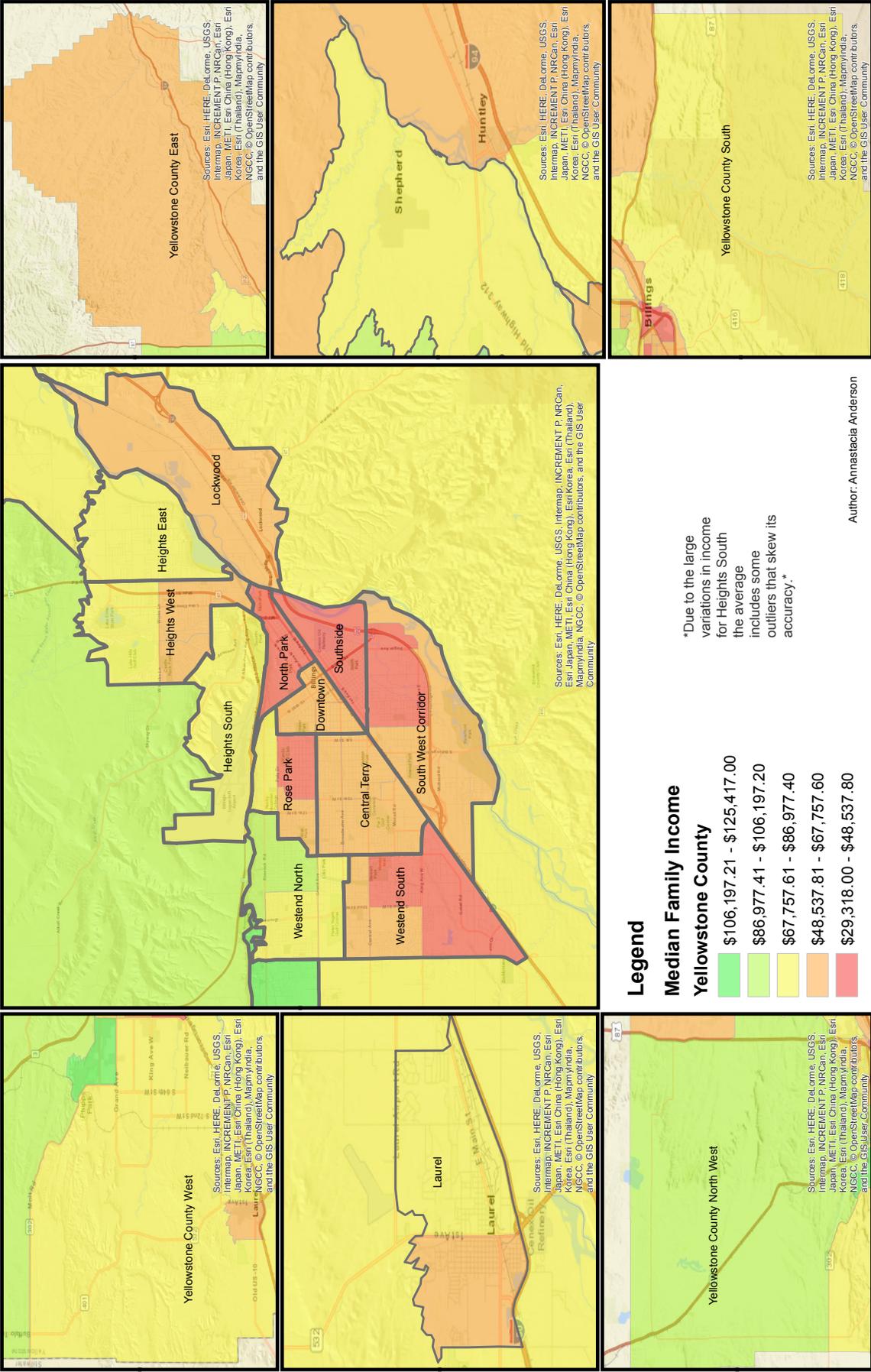


Source: U.S. Census, American Community Survey: 2006-2010 and 2011-2015, Five Year Estimates.

# Section 2: Income



# Section 2: Income



## Section 2: Income

**Neighborhood Variation:** Median Family Income varied greatly by neighborhood:

- Ranging from \$29,318 in the Billings Southside to over \$98,000 in the Yellowstone County West area.
- Approximately 30% of families in the Southside and North Park neighborhoods live in poverty.

**Deeper Variation:** Even within specific neighborhoods, wide variation in income can be found.

- The Heights West neighborhood is calculated based on 3 census tracts that range in Median Household Income from \$38,843 to \$61,776 and families in poverty ranging from 9% to 36.1%.

**Large Populations:** The size of Yellowstone County neighborhoods with high poverty rates is substantial with many being larger than most Montana towns.

- The South Side and Southwest neighborhoods, have a combined population of nearly 13,000 residents. This is larger than the cities of Miles City (8,650), Forsyth (1,870), and Baker (1,990) combined.

### Stakeholder Income Input

Key Informants provided depth and insights to the issue of income. Key findings included:

#### Contributing Issues:

- The issue of “working poor” is still substantial. Most parents are employed but still struggle with poverty due to low wages and unreliable hours.
- A “Living Wage” is much higher than minimum wage.
- Affordable housing and childcare create challenges and increased costs. Low income housing is often in unsafe areas and affordable childcare is often also lower quality.
- Transportation is a significant barrier to accessing jobs, medical care, resources, and childcare. Public transportation is very limited in Yellowstone County, even in Billings.
- Some services fully cut off support once recipients reach a minimum earnings level. This means parents often cannot afford to get a better paying job or a raise.

Living Wage Calculation for Yellowstone County: From <a href="http://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/30111">http://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/30111</a>				
Hourly Wages	1 Adult	1 Adult 1 Child	1 Adult 2 Children	1 Adult 3 Children
Living Wage	\$10.19	\$22.57	\$29.77	\$38.78
Poverty Wage	\$5.00	\$7.00	\$9.00	\$11.00
Minimum Wage	\$8.15	\$8.15	\$8.15	\$8.15
Calculations include average costs for: Housing, Healthcare, Food, Childcare, and Transportation				

**Early Childhood Education and Care:** Stakeholder input and multiple studies have shown positive impacts upon child behaviors, emotions, school performance, and adult income. One study by the Georgetown Center on Poverty found that male children who received quality care earned an average of \$19,800 more each year at age 30.

**Underutilized Resources:** This common factor included the insight that many county residents in need of services were not accessing those services that are currently available. Main reasons for this lack of access are discussed in the Mental Health section below.

## Section 2: Income

### Income Considerations

Primary Issue	Poverty
<p><b>Conclusions and Insights</b></p>	<p>Poverty continues to be a major issue in Yellowstone County and increases many risks for youth development.</p> <p>North Park and Southside neighborhoods stand out as areas of high poverty density. Other neighborhoods also have pockets of dense poverty which are masked when looking at income overall. These differences in income within neighborhoods suggests the need to assess and tailor approaches to very localized populations.</p> <p>Underlying Issues: Data and focus group input suggest underlying issues that promote poverty:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental health and ACE's affect lifelong income.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o James Patrick Smith with RAND Corporation and Gillian C Smith with Washington University School of Medicine in Saint Louis found that children experiencing mental health issues had a 20% reduction in annual income as adults. This calculates to \$300,000 lifetime cost per child.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Race and income still show a strong correlation.</li> <li>• Working poor and living wage continue to be an issue.</li> <li>• Housing costs continue to rise and create a burden on budgets.</li> <li>• Lack of transportation creates limitations.</li> </ul> <p>Factors that Reduce Poverty: Data and focus group input suggest potential strategies that reduce poverty:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality early childhood education and childcare needs to be available and affordable.</li> <li>• School attendance and reading proficiency promote educational success and earning potential.</li> <li>• Increasing parental involvement in resources strengthens families and child development.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Alignment with Best Beginnings</b></p>	<p>Proposed focus areas that support parents and strengthen families include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universal Home Visiting and Referral.</li> <li>• Virtual Coaching.</li> <li>• Education: Includes parent education and promoting awareness of resources.</li> <li>• Childcare quality promotion.</li> </ul>

### Education Analysis

#### Graduation Data

Graduation Rates 2016					
Indicator	2016 Rate	Percentage Change from 2015	Percentage Change from 2011	2016 Ranks in AA Districts * 1=Best 7=Worst	How Do We Compare to MT in 2016? (Percentage Difference)
<b>BILLINGS SCHOOL DISTRICT 2</b>					
Cohort Graduation Rate (CGR)	83.6%	↑1.8%	↑7.7%	6	↓2.3%
CGR: Economically Disadvantaged	71.8%	↑1.6%	↑32.5%	5	↓6.0%
CGR: American Indian	57.7%	↑1.9%	↑18.7%	3*	↓8.1%
CGR: Special Ed	75.1%	↑1.5%	↑30.4%	4	↓3.5%
Dropout Rate	3.8%	↓17.4%	↓17.4%	5	↑10.5%
<b>BILLINGS - SKYVIEW</b>					
Cohort Graduation Rate (CGR)	84.9%	↑2.0%	↑7.3%		↓0.8%
CGR: Economically Disadvantaged	76.3%	↓0.52%	↑22.3%		↓0.13%
CGR: Special Ed	84.3%	↑11.7%	↑57.0%		↑8.4%
<b>BILLINGS - SENIOR</b>					
Cohort Graduation Rate (CGR)	81.5%	↑1.8%	↑11.8%		↓4.8%
CGR: Economically Disadvantaged	71.2%	↑4.4%	↑35.1%		↓6.8%
CGR: Special Ed	73.9%	↑0.68%	↑36.6%		↓5.0%
<b>BILLINGS - WEST</b>					
Cohort Graduation Rate (CGR)	84.5%	↑1.7%	↑3.7%		↓1.3%
CGR: Economically Disadvantaged	68.1%	↓2.0%	↑40.1%		↓10.9%
CGR: Special Ed	67.9%	↓7.2%	↑2.9%		↓12.7%

## Section 3: Education

HUNTLEY PROJECT					
Cohort Graduation Rate (CGR)	90%	↓6.4%	↑5%		↑5.1%
CGR: Economically Disadvantaged	87.5%	↓3.3%	↑10.9%		↑14.5%
CGR: Special Ed	91.7%				↑17.9%
LAUREL					
Cohort Graduation Rate (CGR)	90.7%	=	↑17.3%		↑6%
CGR: Economically Disadvantaged	83%	↓2.1%	↑55.7%		↑8.6%
CGR: Special Ed	77.8%	↑11.1%	↑16.6%		=
SHEPHERD					
Cohort Graduation Rate (CGR)	89.8%	↑3.7%	↓0.4%		↑4.9%
CGR: Economically Disadvantaged	87.5%	↑0.9%	=		↑14.5%
CGR: Special Ed					
*Bozeman, Butte, Flathead and Missoula Districts did not have enough American Indian students to report, thus the ranking is out of 3 not 7					
Source: Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI)					

**Graduation Rates Continued Increase:** Graduation rates in Yellowstone County have been steadily increasing since 2011.

- Despite a decrease from 2014-2015, Billings graduation rates increased by 1.8% from 2015-2016 and 7.7% since 2011.
- All high schools in Billings increased from 2015-2016 with Senior and West increasing by 1.7% and Skyview by 2%.
- Huntley Project has increased by 5% since 2011 and Laurel increased by 17.3%. While shepherd remained steady during this time, their graduation rate of 89.8% is above the state rate.

### Billings Catching up but Still Behind the State:

2016 Billings Public Schools Cohort Graduation Rate: 83.6%

2016 Montana Graduation Rate: 85.6%

- Billings has trailed the state rate every year since 2011 but has been increasing at a faster pace.
- Graduation rates increased by 7.7% in Billings and by 4.1% in Montana from 2011-2016.
- In 2011, Billings was 5.9% below the state average. In 2016, Billings was 2.3% behind.
- Only Billings and Helena saw increases in graduation rates in 2016 (Among AA districts).

**County Schools Above the State Rate:** Rural schools in Yellowstone County showed strong graduation rates above the state.

- Huntley Project: 90%
- Laurel: 90.7%
- Shepherd: 89.8%

## Section 3: Education

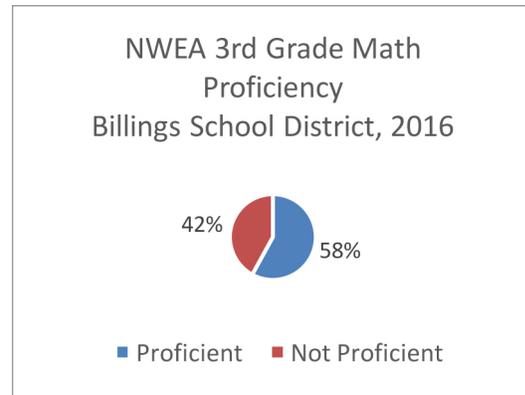
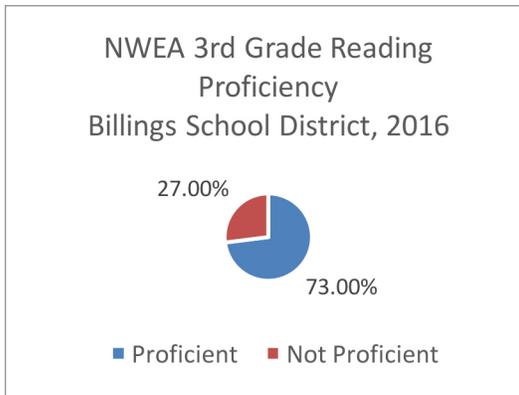
### Sub-Populations Graduation Rates Still Behind:

Despite consistent increases since 2011, sub-populations still graduate at a much lower rate:

- **2016 BPS Economically Disadvantaged Graduation Rate: 71.8%.** The district graduation rate for economically disadvantaged students continued gains with a 1.6% increase from 2015 and a 32.5% increase from 2011. However, this population still remains at a much higher risk for dropout. 71.5% of students who dropped out of school were from economically disadvantaged households.
- **2016 BPS American Indian Graduation Rate: 57.7%.** Graduation rates for American Indian students has also increased significantly (18.7% increase from 2011-2016). However, this trend has been volatile among individual schools; perhaps due to a smaller population size.
- **2016 BPS Special Education Graduation Rate: 75.1%.** Graduation rates for students in Special Education increased by 1.5% from 2015-2016 and by 30.4% since 2011.

Elementary Students in Special Education Source: Montana Office of Public Instruction	
Billings Elementary Schools	11.3%
Laurel Elementary Schools	12.3%
Lockwood Elementary Schools	12.1%
Shepherd Elementary Schools	14.9%

### Reading and Math Proficiency Data



Source: Billings Public Schools

Rates of reading proficiency vary greatly by school with a high of 94% at Poly Drive and a low of 32% at Orchard. 13 of 22 elementary schools met or exceeded the NWEA 2% goal for 3rd Grade math and reading proficiency in 2016. Details can be found in Appendix C.

## Section 3: Education

### Attendance Data

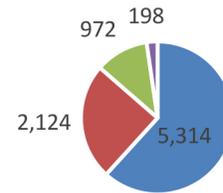
Research and stakeholder input confirm the importance of school attendance and absenteeism upon youth development.

**Attendance Status:** BPS elementary students were categorized based on number of days absent. Findings for the 2016/2017 school year found:

- 61.8% of students were categorized as having Satisfactory Attendance.
- 24.7% At-Risk Attendance.
- 11.3% Chronic Absenteeism.
- 2.3% Severe Absenteeism.

### Billings Elementary Attendance 2016/2017 School Year

Source: Billings Public Schools



- Satisfactory (61.2%)
- At-Risk (25.5%)
- Chronic Absenteeism (10.8%)
- Severe Absenteeism (2.5%)

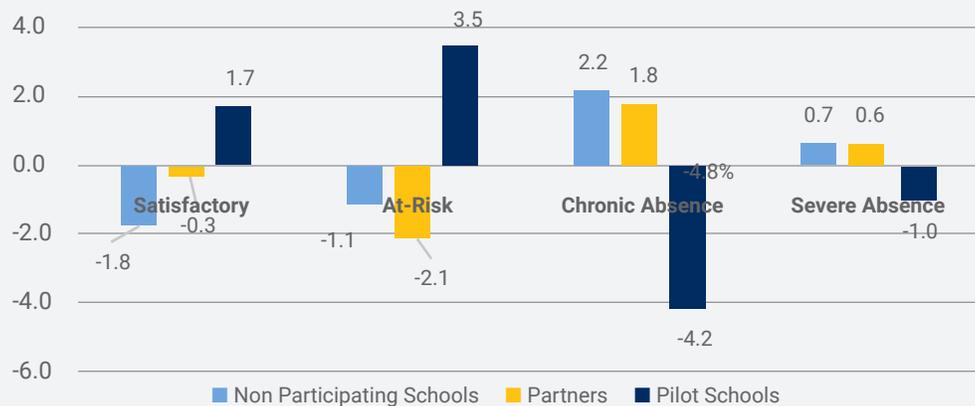
**Overall Decrease:** Attendance for school district 2 saw a slight decrease from 2015/2016 to 2016/2017 school years.

- The number of students with Chronic Absences increased and Satisfactory Attendance decreased.

**Positive Intervention:** Schools that participated in a UWYC pilot attendance program saw significant improvement.

- Participating schools saw a 5.2 percentage point decrease in Chronic and Severe Absences between school years while other schools increased.

### All Schools - Year to Year Change in Attendance by Percentage Point - 2015/16 to 2016/17 School Years



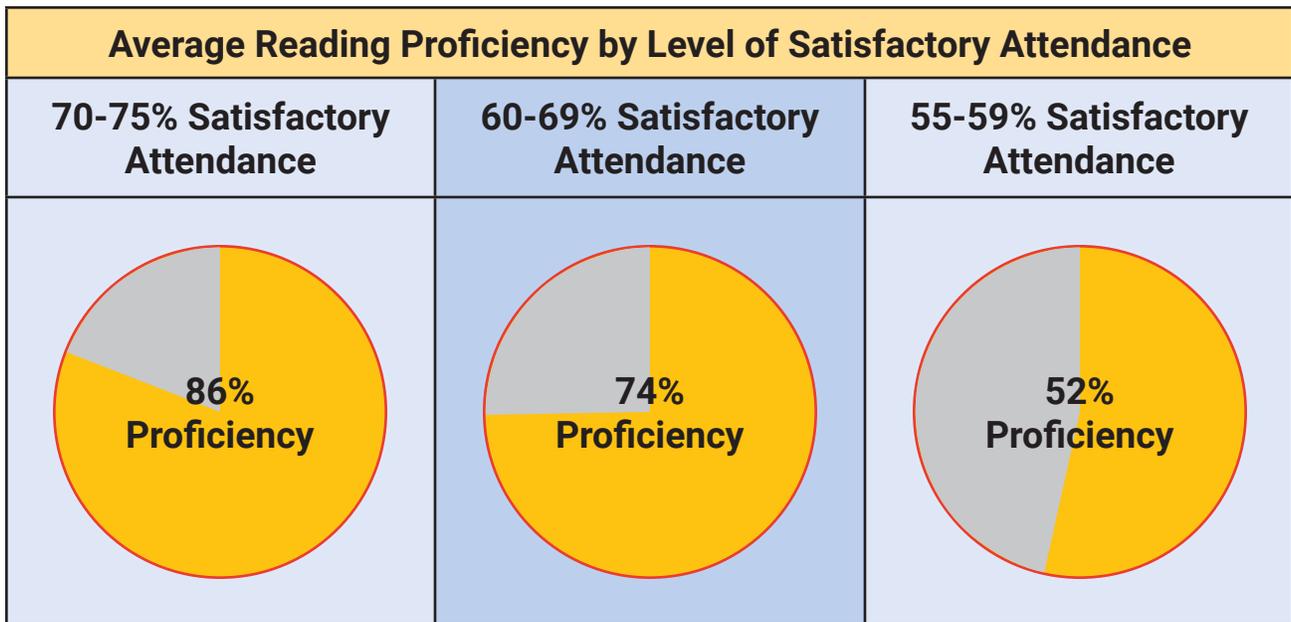
## Section 3: Education

Data confirms the focus group findings that attendance and reading proficiency are directly correlated. The chart below shows this correlation along with Free and Reduced Lunch eligibility.

Comparison of Attendance, Reading Proficiency, and Free and Reduced Lunch Eligibility Billings Public Elementary Schools, 2016/2017 School Year						
Sorted by Satisfactory Attendance	Attendance				3rd Grade Reading Proficiency	Free and Reduced Lunch
	% Satisfactory	% At-Risk	% Chronic	% Severe		
Arrowhead	74.31%	19.95%	5.35%	0.39%	92%	11.5%
Meadowlark	73.08%	19.76%	6.45%	0.71%	72%	32.8%
Poly Drive	73.01%	20.51%	5.85%	0.63%	94%	23.4%
Boulder	71.49%	20.52%	7.06%	0.93%	92%	18.4%
Eagle Cliffs	70.37%	21.68%	6.38%	1.54%	79%	25.9%
Central Heights	69.0%	22.66%	7.13%	1.21%	92%	37.6%
Sandstone	68.18%	22.76%	7.88%	1.19%	70%	45.2%
Burlington	68.01%	22.84%	8.24%	0.90%	70%	46.4%
Highland	67.84%	22.27%	8.93%	0.40%	72%	39%
Bitterroot	67.78%	23.72%	7.36%	1.15%	86%	42.4%
Miles Ave.	66.65%	22.2%	8.68%	2.46%	84%	62.3%
Rose Park	65.44%	24.61%	6.69%	3.26%	72%	40.6%
Big Sky Elem	64.49%	22.28%	10.88%	2.37%	67%	42.7%
Newman	63.81%	25.70%	8.70%	1.79%	63%	76.7%
Beartooth	63.77%	24.06%	9.93%	2.25%	66%	48.6%
Alkali Creek	63.51%	25.41%	9.78%	1.30%	79%	24.2%
Broadwater	63.33%	23.73%	10.74%	2.20%	72%	62.6%
Bench	61.05%	23.54%	13.42%	1.99%	72%	69%
Ponderosa	59.71%	24.06%	12.42%	3.81%	57%	76.5%
Orchard	59.36%	21.52%	15.86%	3.25%	32%	100%
Washington	56.29%	23.59%	14.60%	5.53%	59%	100%
McKinley	54.80%	27.20%	14.47%	3.53%	59%	73.3%

Source: Billings Public Schools – Spring, 2016 - NWEA

## Section 3: Education



### School Climate Data

Yellowstone County 2015 Youth Risk Behavior Survey				
	Yellowstone County		Montana	United States
	Middle School	High School	High School	High School
Past 30 days, did not go to school because felt unsafe at school or on way to or from school	7.4%	4.7%	5%	5.6%
Past 12 months, was bullied on school property	36.2%	25.5%	25.3%	20.2%
Past 12 months, was electronically bullied	20.9%	20.6%	18.5%	15.5%

**Bullying** continued to be expressed as a concern with more than 1 in 3 (36.2%) of Yellowstone County middle school students reporting having been bullied at school over the past year.

- Electronic bullying emerged as a trend with over 1 in 5 (20%) reporting they had been bullied electronically.

**Safety:** Perceptions of safety emerged as a potential influence upon school attendance and performance.

- 7.4% of middle school and 4.7% of high school students in Yellowstone County reported missing school due to feeling unsafe. This accounts for over 300 students in Billings.
- 2.6% of middle school and 7.6% of high school students in Yellowstone County reported carrying a weapon on school property during the past 30 days.
- 12.3% of middle school and 22.4% of high school students stated they had been offered an illegal drug on school property during the past year.

## Section 3: Education

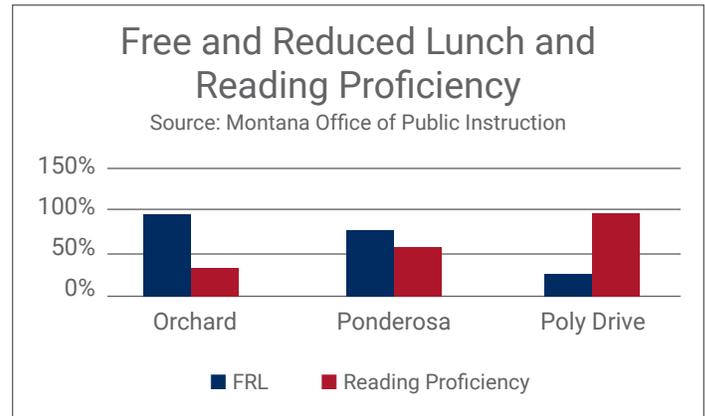
### Neighborhood Education Data

**Proficiency Variation:** Reading proficiency in 3rd grade is seen as a strong indicator for success in school as well as throughout life. 2016 reading proficiency varied greatly among elementary schools with NWEA rates ranging from:

- Poly Drive: 94% ..... Arrowhead, Boulder, Central Heights, : 92%
- Ponderosa: 57% ..... Orchard: 32%

**Attendance Variation:** Levels of absenteeism also varied greatly by school. The percent of students categorized as Chronically Absent included:

- Orchard: 15.9%
- Ponderosa: 12.4%
- Poly Drive: 5.9%
- Arrowhead: 5.4%



**Correlations:** There was a correlation among schools with income, reading proficiency, and attendance:

- Schools with lower reading proficiency rates tend to have lower attendance and to be in a lower income area.

### 30 Million Word Gap

Research shows a strong correlation between verbal interactions with children and future outcomes.

Below are some insights from this work: <sup>12</sup>

- Children who are read to frequently and have frequent verbal interactions tend to have larger vocabularies and stronger development of conceptual knowledge and decoding skills that promote literacy and learning.
- Findings show that lower income families tend to spend less time reading and verbalizing. One study estimated that middle class children receive an average of 1,000-1,700 hours of book reading compared to 25 hours for children in low income families.

### Early Childhood Education and Quality Childcare

Data and focus group input showed a strong impact of quality early childhood education and childcare.

- A 2016 study published by the University of Chicago found that children in high quality care increases school performance and median income as an adult.
- Multiple studies have shown positive impacts upon child behaviors, emotions, school performance, and adult income.

<sup>12</sup> The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading: 3rd Grade Reading Success Matters: The 30 Million Word Gap, The Role of Parent-Child Verbal Interaction in Language and Literacy Development.

Available: <http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-30millionwordgap-2011.pdf>

## Section 3: Education

Despite high impact, early care and education is poorly supported.

- The Center for the Study of Child Care Employment came to the conclusion that “the lack of funding and proliferation of low-wage positions has led to poor quality of care and high turnover” among childcare workers.
- Childcare workers in MT earn a Median wage of \$9.18; which is 40% lower than the Median Wage for all occupations (\$15.37) and below the “Living Wage” of \$10.19 for a single person with no kids.

An analysis by the Montana Budget and Policy Center<sup>13</sup> confirms the above findings. A summary of results includes:

### Strain on Budgets:

- Average cost of care for a 4 year old is \$7,900 per year – Cost for an infant is \$9,000 per year.
- Childcare is considered affordable if it is less than 10% of income. - A single mom earning minimum wage spends 47% of income on care for 1 child.

### Strain on Economy:

- U.S. businesses lose about \$4.4 Billion each year when employees miss work for child care needs.

### Gap in Support Services:

- The Best Beginnings scholarship program serves only 14% of eligible children.
- 7,500 Montana families cannot afford child care but do not qualify for assistance through Best Beginnings.

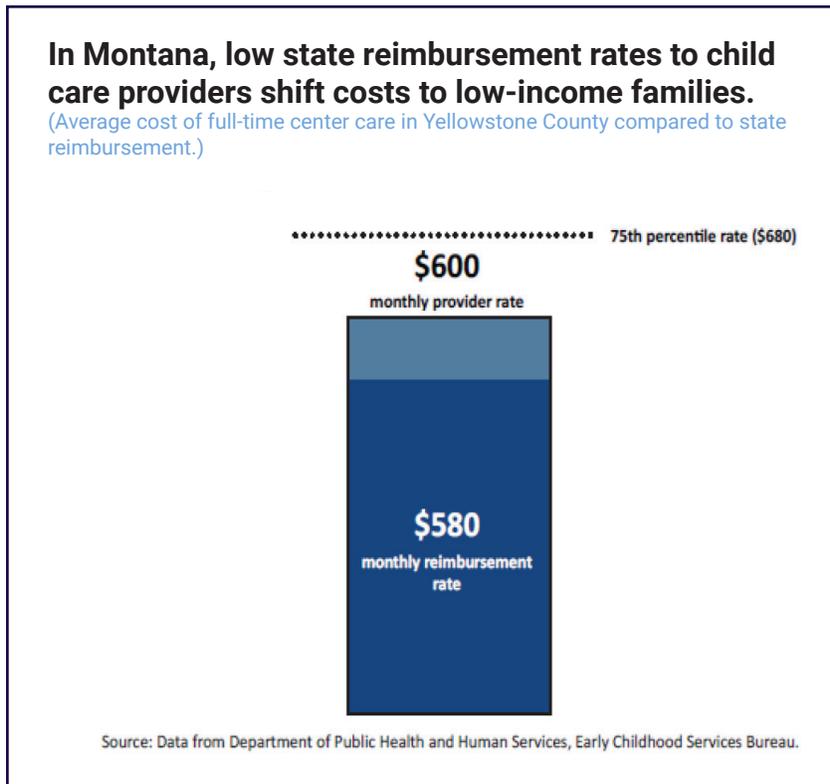
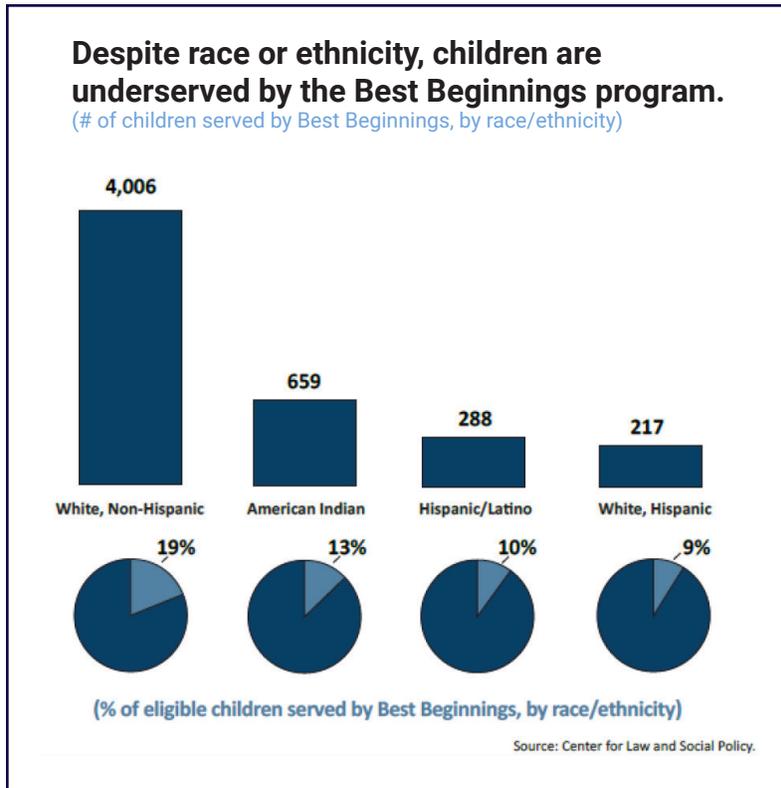
### Montana Budget and Policy Center recommendations to Improve Access:

- **Increase income eligibility limits** for the Best Beginnings Scholarship program to the federally recommended level.
- **Streamline and simplify** the Best Beginnings Scholarship application and activity requirements to accommodate low-income workers who struggle to verify work schedules, employment, and child support.
- **Expand the recognition of “job search”** as an acceptable activity requirement to determine eligibility for scholarships so parents looking for work can apply for assistance.
- **Increase state investment in reimbursement levels** for child care providers, helping to support small businesses and keeping providers from pushing additional costs onto families.
- **Consider investments** that would improve wages, benefits, and professional Development opportunities for early childhood education and development workers.
- **Invest in statewide public pre-kindergarten programs**, which would help expand availability and offset the high costs of child care for Montana families.
- **Align application and eligibility processes** for families participating in both Head Start and Best Beginnings Scholarship programs.

---

<sup>13</sup> Montana Budget and Policy Center, Child Care in Montana: Access to Affordable and Quality Care, Sept. 2016. Available: <http://www.montanabudget.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Child-Care-Final.pdf>

## Section 3: Education





### Stakeholder Education Input

The importance of reading proficiency, attendance, and quality childcare were echoed repeatedly by focus group participants who saw these as vital elements to increase graduation rates and improve outcomes for children.

**Attendance Contributors:** Stated factors that contribute to low attendance included:

- **Parent Commitment:** A main reason children miss school is because a parent does not actively prioritize attendance. This may be due to a parent's misperception of the importance of attendance or misperception of how many days absent is acceptable.
- **Parent mental health and substance abuse** was expressed as a contributor.
- **Lack of Affordable Quality Childcare:** Some children stay home to care for younger siblings so parents can work etc.
- The high levels of bullying were also seen as a potential contributor to missed school days.

**Reading Proficiency Contributors:** Parents reading to children was a key factor expressed to promote proficiency; which supports the research findings above on reading and verbalizing to children, as well as the 30 Million Word Gap concept.

**Attendance** was another key contributor expressed by both focus group participants and data.

**Transitions:** Children moving from kindergarten to first grade was seen as a high risk period. Participants expressed the value in monitoring students during this period in order to identify concerns and implement interventions.

## Section 3: Education

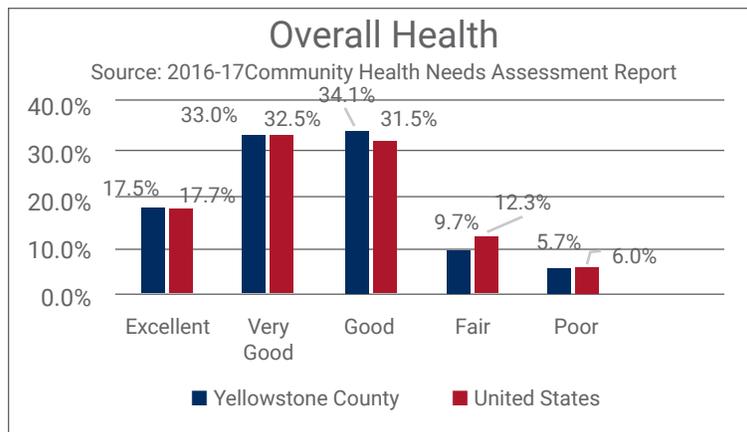
### Education Considerations

<p><b>Primary Issue</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>School Readiness and Success</b></p> <p>Success in school and graduation from high school are strong contributors to higher lifelong income and positive outcomes for youth. The “Common Good Forecaster” predicts that if everyone in Yellowstone County were to graduate high school and attend some college, poverty would decrease by 52% in Yellowstone County.</p>
<p><b>Conclusions and Insights</b></p>	<p><b>Graduation Gap:</b> Lower graduation rates for subgroups continues to be a concern despite improvement.</p> <p><b>Strategies that Support Readiness:</b> Data and focus group input showed a strong impact from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality and affordable early childhood education and care.</li> <li>• Parent involvement in preparing their child for school; including reading and verbal interactions.</li> <li>• Parent and caregiver awareness and education of school readiness issues.</li> <li>• Attention to transitions from kindergarten.</li> </ul> <p><b>Strategies that Support Success:</b> Data and focus group input suggested key contributors to school success:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3rd grade reading proficiency.</li> <li>• Attendance promotion.</li> <li>• Mentoring and tutoring.</li> <li>• Parental involvement.</li> <li>• Language Nutrition.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Alignment with Best Beginnings</b></p>	<p><b>Quality Care:</b> The need to increase quality and affordable childcare was a clear finding that carried over from the 2012 assessment. Potential activities discussed to promote quality care included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educating childcare workers on school readiness strategies.</li> <li>• Promoting quality standards.</li> </ul> <p><b>Education:</b> The need to support parents with increased skills and knowledge was a consistent theme. Specific strategies to accomplish this focus included:</p>

## Health Analysis

### Physical Health Data

Source: 2017 County Health Rankings & Roadmaps	Yellowstone County	Montana	Top U.S. Performers
Poor or Fair Health	12%	14%	12%
Poor Physical Health Days	3.5	3.9	3
Low Birthweight	8%	7%	6%



**Overall Health:** Most survey respondents rated themselves to be in good health or better. However, the 2017 County Health Rankings estimated that approximately 12% of county residents reported being in poor or fair health and 15% of respondents to the Community Health Needs Assessment survey rated themselves as being in Fair or Poor Health. This was slightly below national levels.

## Section 4: Health

Infant Mortality and Teen Birth						
Source: MT DPHHS Office of Vital Statistics	Yellowstone County		Montana		United States	
	2015	Change from 2011	2015	Change from 2011	2015	Change from 2011
Infant Mortality Rate (per 1,000 Live Births)	6.8	=	5.8	=	5.9	↓
Teen Birth Rate (per 1,000)	28	↓30%	27.4	↓28%	26.7	↓35%

Youth With Disabilities								
Source: U.S. Census: American Community Survey	Billings		Yellowstone County		Montana		United States	
	2010	2015	2010	2015	2015	2015	2010	2015
Under Age 18 with a Disability	6.6%	8.1%	7.5%	8.8%	5.7%	5.6%	6%	6.1%

**Youth with Disabilities:** Youth under 18 with disabilities increased in Billings from 6.6% in 2010 to 8.1% in 2015. Yellowstone County increased from 7.5% to 8.8% during this time. In comparison, Montana and the United States remained mostly steady.

**Census Bureau Definition of Disability:** “Disability is defined as a long-lasting sensory, physical, mental, or emotional condition that makes it difficult for a person to perform activities such as walking, climbing stairs, dressing, bathing, learning, or remembering. It may impede a person from being able to go outside of the home alone or work at a job or business; the definition includes people with severe vision or hearing impairments.

Elementary Students in Special Education	
Source: Montana Office of Public Instruction	
Billings Elementary Schools	11.6%
Laurel Elementary Schools	12.3%
Lockwood Elementary Schools	12.1%
Shepherd Elementary Schools	14.9%

## Section 4: Health

**Elementary Students:** Data from OPI shows a higher disability rate among elementary students with an average of 12.7% among Billings, Laurel, Lockwood, and Shepherd elementary schools.

**Disabilities Increase:** Focus group members confirmed that service agencies are experiencing an increase in persons with disabilities. This especially has an impact on childcare, preschool, public schools, and out of school time.

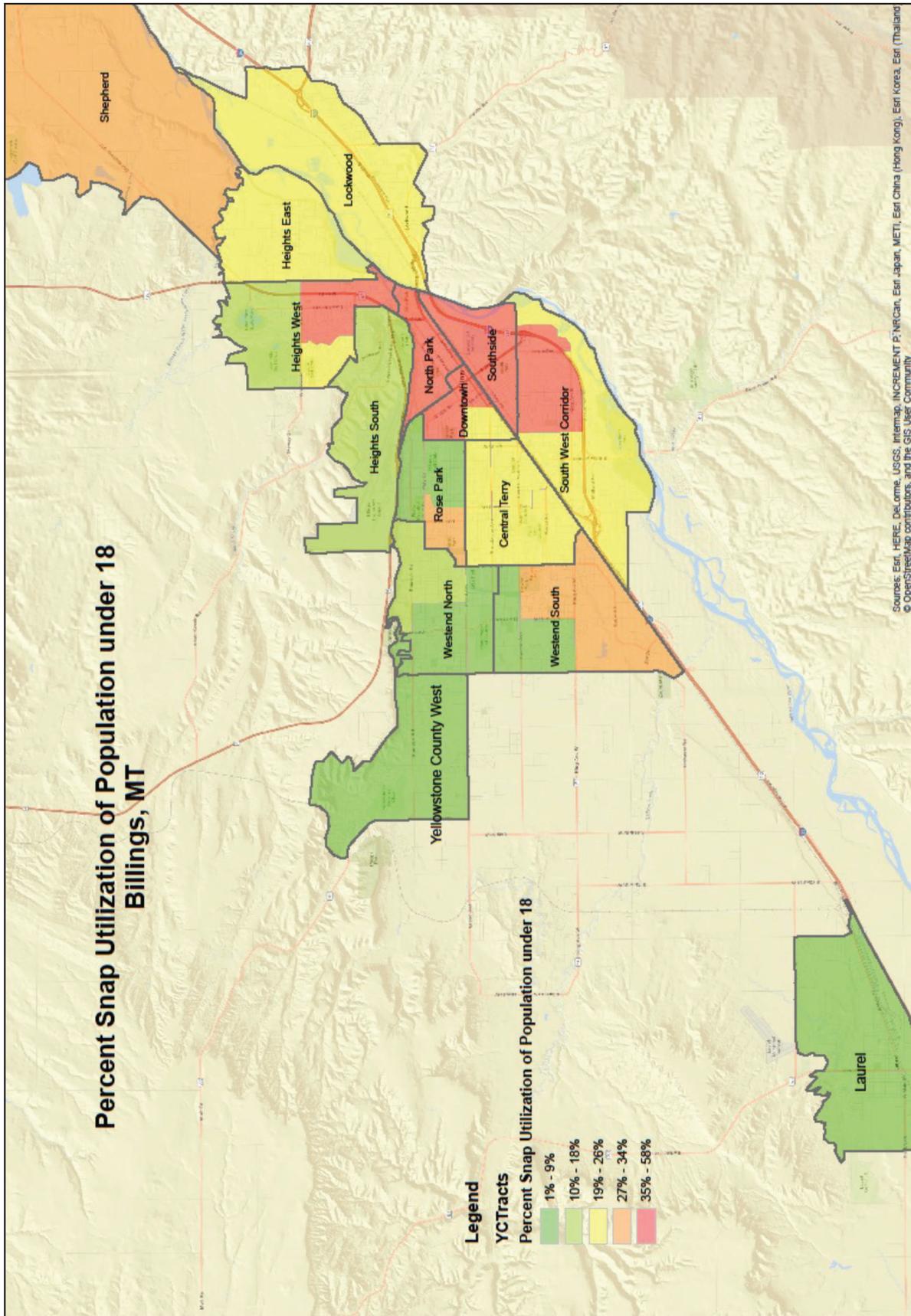
### Food Insecurity:

2014 Food Insecurity	Yellowstone County	Montana
# Food Insecure	18,020	139,140
Food Insecurity Rate	11.9%	13.6%
Food Insecure Persons Not Eligible for SNAP	36%	30%
Annual Food Budget Shortfall (Amount needed to eliminate food insecurity)	\$9,180,000	\$69,518,000
Source: Feeding America, <a href="http://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2014/overall/montana/county/yellowstone">http://map.feedingamerica.org/county/2014/overall/montana/county/yellowstone</a>		

Food insecurity rates are lower than the national average but still considered high by focus group participants, at nearly 12%.

- 36% of residents with food insecurity do not qualify for SNAP.
- A survey through the 2016-17 Community Health Needs Assessment found a 14.1% rate of food insecurity.

# Section 4: Health



### Physical Health Stakeholder Input

**Food Concerns:** Stakeholders expressed concerns about the availability of quality and affordable food. These concerns included:

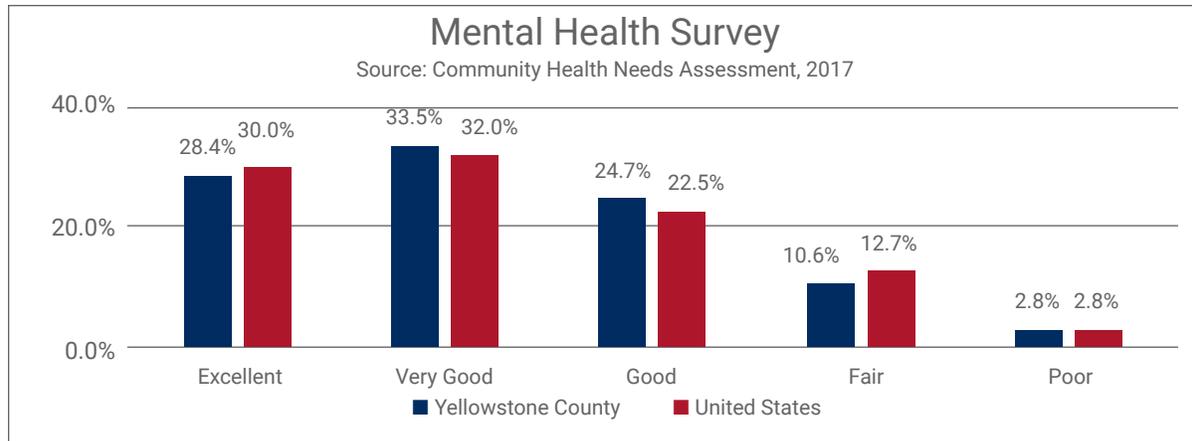
- “Food desert” areas and lack of transportation to reach grocery stores.
- Lack of quality among some current sources of food.
- Limited participation by program beneficiaries. The barriers to accepting assistance included mental health problems, substance abuse, lack of awareness, and stigma.

**System Concerns:** Stakeholders expressed concerns that some food systems lacked policies and procedures as well as coordinated efforts to avoid food waste, assure nutritional quality, and reach isolated areas of the county.

### Physical Health Considerations

Primary Issue	Physical Health
<p><b>Conclusions and Issues</b></p>	<p><b>Disabilities:</b> The increase of children with disabilities seems to be supported by both data and input from Key Informants. This seems to be a significant issue since disabilities can affect school performance and thus life outcomes. This finding suggests:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The importance of early screening and intervention services to help children overcome challenges and succeed in school and beyond.</li> <li>• The need for childcare, schools and out of school time programs to include policies, procedures, and strategies specific to children with disabilities.</li> </ul> <p><b>Food:</b> Input suggests that improving food availability may require a comprehensive approach that includes promoting participation in services and creating system change that supports quality food access.</p> <p><b>Participation:</b> Increase utilization of services by addressing barriers such as stigma, mental health etc. Specific strategies included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building relationships and trust with potential participants.</li> <li>• Providing universal services so no group is stigmatized.</li> <li>• Increasing awareness of current services.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Conclusions and Issues</b></p>	<p>Potential strategies prioritized by Best Beginnings include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Universal Home Visiting and Referral</b> may be a tool to identify early signs of disabilities and implement supportive strategies. Home visiting may also identify food and nutritional deficiencies and provide services in a manner that overcomes access and participation barriers.</li> <li>• <b>Food system changes</b> discussed included "Smart Snack" standards for sports leagues and after school programs...Food waste policies...hunger and nutrition screening...shared quality standards.</li> <li>• <b>Disabilities system changes</b> included supporting childcare providers and others to assess and develop appropriate strategies to support children with disabilities.</li> <li>• <b>Increase participation</b> by promoting awareness by promoting awareness of services through 211.</li> </ul>

### Mental Health



Source: 2017 County Health Rankings & Roadmaps	Yellowstone County	Montana	Top U.S. Performers
Poor Mental Health Days	3.4	3.6	3
Mental Health Providers	370:1	410:1	360:1
Excessive Drinking	22%	22%	12%

Youth Mental Health						
Source: Yellowstone County 2015 Youth Risk Behavior Survey	Yellowstone County		Montana		United States	
	Middle School	High School	Middle School	High School	Middle School	High School
Demonstrated signs of depression in past year	25.3%	32.3%	-	29.3%	-	29.9%
Considered suicide in past year	17.8%	20.6%	-	18.8%	-	17.7%
Attempted suicide in past year	10.7%	13.6%	-	8.9%	-	8.6%

**Mental Health Prevalence:** According to the 2017 Community Health Needs Assessment conducted by the Alliance in Billings:

- 31% reported symptoms of clinical depression and over 25% had been diagnosed with depression.
- 35.5% of survey respondents reported seeking help for mental health problems.

**Depression:** Both depression and suicide rates remained much higher than the US average.

- Depression is considered a strong contributor to suicide.
- Contributors to depression include adverse childhood experiences, family characteristics, and genetic makeup.

**Adverse Childhood Experiences**

**Mental Health and ACE Impact:** ACEs are potentially traumatic events experienced by children from birth to age 18 that can have negative, lasting effects on health and well-being. These experiences range from physical, emotional, or sexual abuse to parental divorce or the incarceration of a parent.

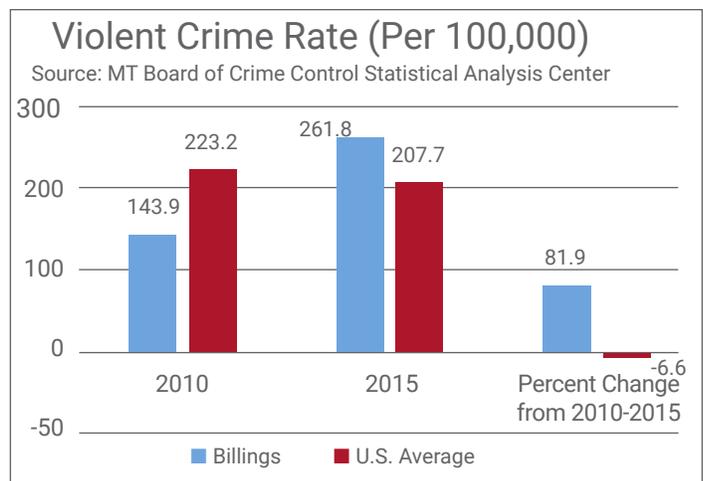
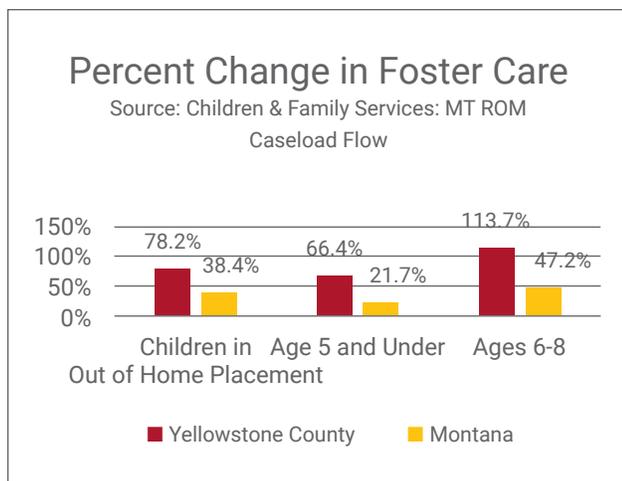
4 or more ACEs significantly increases the likelihood of future issues such as depression, diabetes, heart disease, school failure, and lowered lifelong income.

- James Patrick Smith with RAND Corporation and Gillian C Smith with Washington University School of Medicine in Saint Louis conducted a study that found children who experienced mental health problems had:
  - o 20% reduction in annual income as an adult ----- \$300,000 lifetime cost
  - o Lower likelihood of being married: 11 percentage points lower.

In Montana 10-12% of children have experienced 4 or more ACEs (Among the highest in the country).

- That comes to over 3,600 children in Yellowstone County. Enough children to Fill Alberta Bair Theater 2.5 times. - Or - Fill Dehler Park to capacity...Standing room only.

**Local ACE Indicators**



**Foster Care Increase:** The trend of increased foster care enrollment continued with an increase from 349 in 2014 to 622 in 2016 (78% increase).

- Stakeholder input expressed that this trend has been due to increased children in need, rather than other factors such as changes in screening.
- Alcohol and substance abuse were listed as main contributors to children being removed from the home.

**Crime Increase:** While the U.S. has seen a consistent decrease in violent crime over the past several years, Billings has increased significantly (82% increase from 2010-2015).

## Section 4: Health

### Mental Health - Stakeholder Input:

Mental health was the most often stated factor that both contributes to social concerns and prevents persons in need from accessing available services. Stakeholders considered mental health of the parent and/or child to be a factor in all the issues discussed throughout this needs assessment.

**Underutilized Resources:** Many sources have stated for years that lack of resources is the main reason people in need do not seek mental health services. However, input from professional stakeholders and data, suggest that many resources are available but underutilized. Reasons found for this included:

- Lack of awareness among potential recipients and professionals who could make referrals.
- Stigma of accepting help.
- Mental health issues and addictions that interfere with seeking help.
- Insurance that only covers short term care.

### **Systems Contributors:**

Many stakeholders expressed concerns that current systems are not designed to identify and correct mental health problems. Specific input included:

- Our system of care is not designed to identify and heal ACEs. It is designed to punish the behaviors that result from ACEs. For example, when we incarcerate a mother, there is no plan to care for the child.
- We don't have an Early Warning System to alert us to the fact that a child needs extra support.

### Mental Health Considerations

Primary Issue	Mental Health
Conclusions and Insights	<p>The importance of mental health and ACE's were strongly supported through data and focus group input. Mental health and ACE's are seen as a core contributor to the above issues and affect lifelong development.</p> <p><b>Underlying Contributors:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) that are not identified and properly addressed.</li> <li>• Underutilized Resources due to stigma, lack of awareness, and systemic barriers.</li> <li>• Mental health itself is a barrier to accessing services.</li> <li>• Systems that punish behaviors without addressing underlying mental health needs.</li> </ul>
Alignment with Best Beginnings	<p><b>Specific focus areas that address mental health include:</b></p> <p><b>Trauma Informed Care (TIC):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased ACE and TIC education throughout the community and for prioritized groups that work in potential ACE situations (police, medical, social services, divorce lawyers, funeral workers).</li> <li>• TIC education systemized into prioritized settings such as medical school, teaching degrees, social work degrees, police academies etc.</li> </ul> <p><b>Crisis stabilization</b> efforts may provide opportunities to identify ACE's and implement interventions.</p> <p><b>Resource Utilization:</b> Efforts to increase participation in mental health services are important and should address the identified barriers by reducing stigma, increasing awareness, and removing barriers.</p>

## Section 5: Synthesis of Findings

### Synthesis of Findings

Quantitative and Qualitative Data Collection

Data Analysis

Synthesis of Findings

Focus Areas

In order to identify key areas, data analysis and focus group feedback analysis were conducted with the Best Beginnings of Yellowstone County membership along with community partners. From this process, key issues, insights, and potential strategies were developed.

#### Primary Issues and Insights

<b>Primary Issue</b>	<p>Access and Underutilized Resources: Data and focus group assessments confirmed past findings and concerns about limited access to services. Along with a need to promote access, another key finding was that many resources are available but are being underutilized by those who could benefit.</p>
<b>Insights</b>	<p>Specific factors reducing participation in services include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of awareness among potential recipients and professionals who could make referrals.</li> <li>• Stigma of accepting help.</li> <li>• Mental health issues and addictions.</li> <li>• Insurance that only covers short term care.</li> <li>• Transportation restrictions.</li> <li>• Systems that do not incorporate screening and referral</li> </ul>
<b>Strategies</b>	<p>Include strategies to increase participation in all activities: Reduce stigma, build trust etc.</p> <p>Implement universal strategies that have systemized access points.</p> <p><b>Prioritized Activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Universal Home Visiting and Referral: Brings services directly to all new parents which eliminates many barriers and overcomes stigma by providing services to all.</li> <li>• Virtual Coaching: Provides services in a manner that is easily accessible and limits issues of stigma.</li> <li>• Resource awareness through 211.</li> <li>• Educate legislators, service providers, public sector of available resources.</li> </ul>

## Section 5: Synthesis of Findings

<b>Primary Issue</b>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Mental Health</b></p> <p>Mental health and substance abuse were stated as underlying issues that affect all other areas and limit the potential for growth. This impact of mental health was supported by data showing a high level of mental health concerns in Yellowstone County.</p>
<b>Insights</b>	<p><b>ACE's</b> are very significant in Yellowstone County and provide a structure to understand, identify, and treat children before mental health conditions manifest.</p> <p><b>Systems changes</b> are vital to create the broad, sustainable impact needed to move the needle on prioritized issues.</p>
<b>Strategies</b>	<p><b>Trauma Informed Care:</b> TIC has gained awareness and momentum in Yellowstone County as a tool to counter ACE's and promote mental health. Due to this local momentum, and potential impact, TIC is seen as a key focus area for future efforts. Specific TIC activities considered include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased TIC training among populations that deal with crisis (police, CPS, healthcare, funeral homes, divorce courts etc.)</li> <li>• TIC training systemized: Mandatory education for teachers, nurses etc.</li> </ul> <p><b>Systems Change:</b> Potential changes to current systems included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental health screening systemized in schools, pediatrician offices, etc.</li> <li>• Trauma informed procedures adopted by systems that work in potential ACE situations; such as procedures to support a child when a parent is arrested, or divorce court procedures when a child is involved.</li> </ul> <p><b>Resource Utilization:</b> Efforts to increase participation in mental health services are important and should address the identified barriers, such as stigma.</p>

## Section 5: Synthesis of Findings

<b>Primary Issue</b>	<b>Parental Influence</b> A consistent theme was the importance of the parents and the need to support families in order to promote healthy, thriving children.
<b>Insights</b>	<p><b>Access to Supports:</b> It is often not easy for parents to find resources, and barriers discussed above, such as stigma, further decrease access to support services.</p> <p><b>Parental Health:</b> The health of the parent was considered a strong contributor to concerns and barrier to getting help, including challenges of substance abuse and mental health.</p>
<b>Strategies</b>	<p><b>Parent Engagement:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Systemize parent engagement in settings such as schools, pediatrician offices etc.</li> <li>• Systemized to include event based triggers such as classes for teen parents.</li> </ul> <p><b>Parent Child Interaction (PCI) Program</b> was described as an effective tool to optimize the parental influence. A specific strategy expressed was to promote PCI by creating a Train the Trainer for Yellowstone County.</p> <p><b>Universal Home Visiting and Referral:</b> Provides direct support in a manner that overcomes obstacles to access and participation.</p> <p><b>Virtual Coaching:</b> Seen as a way to distribute information efficiently in a manner that is accessible to all parents. Can provide ongoing engagement opportunities for parenting classes, family events, assistance, screening events etc.</p>

<b>Primary Issue</b>	<b>Poverty and Basic Needs:</b> The influence of poverty on youth development was discussed repeatedly; including poor nutrition and housing.
<b>Insights</b>	<p>Potential contributors to poverty included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low paying jobs with unreliable hours and few benefits...some require a person to be on call which limits other work opportunities.</li> <li>• Rising childcare and housing costs.</li> <li>• Mental health.</li> <li>• Underutilized resources due to stigma, transportation, and mental health issues.</li> </ul>
<b>Strategies</b>	Crisis stabilization efforts were discussed as ways to counter the impact of poverty upon youth. This included a focus on increasing access to quality food, housing, and childcare. This also included the potential to support the formation of a crisis needs group.

## Section 5: Synthesis of Findings

<p><b>Primary Issue</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>School Readiness and Success</b></p> <p>Many contributors to school readiness and success were discussed as factors to promote school and lifelong success.</p>
<p><b>Insights</b></p>	<p>Specific factors that arose from the assessment included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Reading Proficiency:</b> Was seen as a strong contributor to school success.</li> <li>• <b>Parental Involvement:</b> Includes the importance of supporting parents to understand and implement school readiness and success strategies.</li> <li>• <b>Exposure to verbal language and reading:</b> The 30 Million Word Gap confirms the importance of promoting early reading and verbalization. This also shows the value of focusing efforts specifically on low income areas to promote impact.</li> <li>• <b>Quality Early Childhood Education and Care:</b> The finding of the impact of quality care and the lack of such care in Yellowstone County makes this a significant area.</li> <li>• <b>Attendance:</b> Children can't succeed in school if they are not in school...and teachers can't teach to an empty desk.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Strategies</b></p>	<p><b>Quality Care:</b> The need to increase quality and affordable childcare was a clear finding. Potential activities discussed included promoting a video on kindergarten readiness to childcare providers and working with providers to support children with disabilities.</p> <p><b>Parent Engagement and Education:</b> The need to support parents with increased skills and knowledge was a consistent theme. Specific strategies to accomplish this focus included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent education systemized in settings such as schools, doctor offices etc.</li> <li>• Education delivered in convenient ways, such as texts through Virtual Coaching.</li> </ul> <p><b>Remember the 30 Million Word Gap:</b> Specific strategies that address this need include promoting the importance of reading to parents, childcare providers, and others as well as providing access points such as book distribution at pediatrician visits.</p> <p><b>Universal Home Visiting and Referral</b> was seen as a way to promote education and avoid the sense of stigma that can reduce participation.</p>

## Section 5: Synthesis of Findings

Primary Issue	<b>Systems Change</b>
<b>Insights</b>	<p>The value of creating systemic strategies was emphasized as a way to create deeper, sustainable impacts. This strategy was often described as a way to “Move the Needle” on prioritized issues.</p> <p>Barriers and challenges to systemic interventions included difficulty in getting commitment from individuals and agencies. Specific contributors to lack of commitment include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty in fully understanding the value of such a broad strategy.</li> <li>• Internal fears such as fear of change or loss of control.</li> <li>• Internal pessimism that change can work.</li> <li>• Perceived costs that outweigh perceived rewards.</li> <li>• Difficulty getting agency decision makers to the table.</li> </ul>
<b>Strategies</b>	<p>Best Beginnings has begun discussions that include systemic change. These discussions may be strengthened by including strategies and insights, such as:</p> <p><b>Reduce Costs and Increase Rewards of Participation:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remember that costs include not just finances and staff time.</li> <li>• Quick wins are important.</li> <li>• Rewards can be front loaded and costs delayed.</li> </ul> <p><b>Cultivate Champions in Positions of Power</b> <b>Promote an Inspirational, Consistent Vision</b></p>

Primary Issue	<b>Data Collection and Analysis</b>
<b>Insights</b>	<p>Data has emerged as a vital resource for measuring and guiding progress towards true impact. This need was expressed repeatedly throughout the needs assessment process and was seen as a primary tool to support efforts and drive success.</p> <p>Identified barriers to data collection included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of a shared data system.</li> <li>• Some groups are hesitant or unable to share data.</li> </ul>
<b>Strategies</b>	<p>Potential strategies included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement a shared data collection system through Noble.</li> <li>• Increase data sharing with county schools and other prioritized groups.</li> </ul>

Primary Issue	<b>Resource Enhancement</b>
<b>Insights</b>	<p>While stakeholders discussed great growth and strength within the Best Beginnings coalition, there was still a need for continued enhancement.</p> <p>Primary issues seen as barriers to increased collaboration included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need for greater clarity among partners; including a shared direction and vision.</li> <li>• Need for increased commitment and maintained momentum.</li> <li>• Need for increased communication.</li> <li>• Need for shared data to inform, drive, and assess efforts.</li> <li>• Need for system changes to create population level impact.</li> </ul>

## Section 6: Prioritized Focus Areas

### Prioritized Focus Areas

Quantitative and Qualitative Data Collection

Data Analysis

Synthesis of Findings

Focus Areas

Best Beginnings Leadership and key partners analyzed all the above work to prioritize a few specific focus areas for future work in Yellowstone County. Key criteria used to determine prioritized areas included: **1) Need:** Data analysis and focus group input show a strong need. **2) Fit:** The issue fits the Best Beginnings vision and goals. **3) Feasibility:** The issue can be impacted by Best Beginnings and the group’s resources. **4) Momentum:** The issue has commitment and energy from key stakeholders.

Best Beginnings Priority Focus	Specific Potential Strategies
<b>Universal Home Visiting and Referral</b>	Continue implementation of pilot home visiting and Referral (Parent Connect). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement Noble data sharing system</li> <li>• Continue phased expansion</li> <li>• Secure funding for Universal Home Visiting pilot.</li> </ul>
<b>Virtual Coaching</b>	Implement pilot utilizing Bright By Text system
<b>Trauma Informed Care</b>	Virtual Connect platform for healthy youth development opportunities. Training among populations that deal with crisis and ACE situations (police, CPS, healthcare, funeral homes, divorce courts). TIC training systemized: Mandatory for teachers, nurses, police etc. Responders on call to work with children in ACE situations.
<b>Food and Nutrition</b>	Increase access to quality and affordable food. Potential strategies include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Smart Snack concept</li> <li>• Food waste policies</li> <li>• Healthy food retail</li> <li>• Public transportation</li> <li>• Screen and intervene</li> </ul>
<b>Kindergarten and School Readiness</b>	Promote the current online class to childcare providers and teachers. Promote early reading and language exposure through awareness, education, and book distribution.
<b>Parent Engagement</b>	Parent engagement was seen as a valuable strategy across all focus areas. Systemize parenting classes in high schools, pediatrician visits, prenatal care etc. Parent Child Interaction program increased by bringing a PCI Train the Trainer to Billings.
<b>Advocacy and Awareness</b>	Increase awareness among resource professionals and consumers. Conduct education and advocacy to legislators, government representatives, non-profit boards, and others. This may include poverty simulations. Promote 211

# Best Beginnings Coalition

The Best Beginnings Council of Yellowstone County was established in 2012 to oversee the community's Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Infrastructure Development (MIECHV-ID) project. Since then, the coalition has grown to include representation from multiple agencies and stakeholders working toward their vision for Yellowstone County: strong families – thriving children.

Best Beginnings Leadership Team
AWARE Inc.
Early Childhood Intervention
The Family Tree Center
District 7 HRDC Community Action Agency
RiverStone Health
South Central Montana Regional Mental Health Center
The Center for Children and Families
United Way of Yellowstone County
Virginia Lee (Ginny) Mermel, PhD, CNS (Billings Backpack and Teen Pantry Program, Team Billings Nutrition)
Young Families Early Head Start

**Many other organizations are members of Best Beginnings. For a complete list of partners please contact the Best Beginnings Coordinator, Kristin Lundgren, [klundgren@uwyellowstone.org](mailto:klundgren@uwyellowstone.org).**

This assessment was produced for Best Beginnings by United Way of Yellowstone County (UWYC). Partial funding was provided by the Montana DPHHS Preschool Development Grant.  
*Special thank you to Rocky Mountain College Intern, Annastacia Anderson, for her contributions to the neighborhood mapping.*

#### More Information

Kristin Lundgren, Director of Impact, UWYC: [klundgren@uwyellowstone.org](mailto:klundgren@uwyellowstone.org), 406-272-8505  
 Dean Wells, Impact Analyst, UWYC: [dwells@uwyellowstone.org](mailto:dwells@uwyellowstone.org), 406-272-8507

