



MEASURE OF AMERICA
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www.OpportunityIndex.org





Opportunity Index

DIMENSIONS & INDICATORS

JOBS AND LOCAL ECONOMY

Jobs

Wages

Poverty

Inequality

Assets

Affordable Housing

Internet Access

EDUCATION

Preschool enrollment

On-time high school graduation

Postsecondary completion

COMMUNITY HEALTH AND CIVIC LIFE

Community Engagement
(states only)

Volunteerism
(states only)

Youth Economic and Academic Inclusion

Community Safety

Access to Health Care

Access to Healthy Food

SCORES

ECONOMY SCORE

EDUCATION SCORE

COMMUNITY SCORE

SCORES SCALED & AVERAGED

STATES

OPPORTUNITY SCORE
(out of 100)

COUNTIES

OPPORTUNITY GRADE
(from A+ to F)

The Opportunity Index is constructed using official statistics from a variety of sources, including the U.S. Census Bureau, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Federal Communications Commission, and the U.S. Department of Justice (see Appendix for list and source of indicators). The state Index is made up of sixteen indicators that combine to yield a score from 1–100 in each of the three dimensions; the state is also awarded an overall grade out of 100. The county Index is made up of fourteen indicators; data for two indicators related to community engagement and volunteerism are not available at the county level. Counties are awarded letter grades from A+ to F for their overall performance (see Methodological Notes for full details on construction of the Index).

I. INTRODUCTION

What is Opportunity Nation?

Opportunity Nation is a national campaign to expand economic opportunity and mobility in America. Over the next ten years, Opportunity Nation wants to see Opportunity Scores in all 50 states increase by at least 10 percent. Reaching this goal is the guiding light for our policy and advocacy efforts, and for our community and business partnerships. At the community level, we will work with elected and grassroots leaders to set goals and roadmaps to increase Opportunity Scores based on their priorities, local assets, and challenges. Together with our coalition of over 250 organizations representing 100 million Americans, we are all taking action to increase opportunity and to make progress.

What is the Opportunity Index?

Opportunity Nation's guiding principle is this: the zip code you're born into should not determine your chances in life. If the ability to move up the ladder of opportunity grinds to a halt, we are in grave danger of losing the best of America. Unfortunately, that is exactly what is happening in the country today. Taking action to restore the promise of the American Dream requires knowing where we stand, particularly what is happening in our neighborhoods and whether current community, private sector, foundation, and government actions and investments are helping to expand opportunity for all in our society.

The Opportunity Index is a unique tool designed to provide a snapshot of what opportunity looks like at the state and county levels. The Opportunity Index was first presented in September 2011 with a ranking of every state and over 2,400 counties. This report offers a second ranking of states and counties, presenting both a picture of today and a comparison with last year.

What is opportunity and how is it being measured?

Opportunity can be defined in many ways; overall, the term encompasses a range of circumstances that open doors to economic mobility and human progress. Opportunity stems from many sources. One important component of opportunity is the things that *individuals cannot change*, such as their parents' educational level, or their racial or ethnic heritage. Those born to parents who did not graduate high school have fewer opportunities, in general, than those born to parents with college degrees, for example. A second critical facet of opportunity is an individual's *personal characteristics and attributes*. Most of us can think of people whose persistence, hard work, charisma, or talents opened doors for them, even allowing them to overcome a disadvantaged start. A third source of opportunity is *the conditions present in different communities*. Are there decent jobs? Enough primary care physicians? High schools that graduate the majority of young people and prepare them for higher education?

The indicators that make up the Index are grouped into three main dimensions: **jobs and local economy**, **education**, and **community health and civic life**.

JOBS AND LOCAL ECONOMY

The availability of good jobs is critical to opportunity, and the Great Recession's unemployment crisis has put the need for jobs center stage. Nonetheless, jobs are not the only ingredient for a prosperous and sustainable economy that allows for security and mobility; an abundance of low-wage jobs or the absence of jobs that can support a family, for instance, do not create optimal conditions for long-term opportunity. Local residents must be prepared for today's and tomorrow's jobs, and also be in a position to accumulate savings to weather unpredictable economic downturns, or make the large expenditures—a house in a good school system, a car to get to work, college tuition—necessary for upward mobility. The economic situation of a family has significant repercussions for children's life chances. **Areas measured: employment, wages, poverty, inequality, assets, affordable housing, and Internet access.**

EDUCATION

Vital to the concept of opportunity is education. As chairman of the Federal Reserve Ben Bernanke said, "In the long term ... the best way by far to improve economic opportunity and to reduce inequality is to increase the educational attainment and skills of American workers." High school and college graduates earn significantly more every year and over their lifetimes than high school and college dropouts. Many students live in communities with "dropout factory" high schools that graduate less than 60 percent of their students every year. The quality of a public school is typically tied closely to the socioeconomic status of the families it serves, and subsequently, what neighborhood it is located in. Several studies show positive outcomes for low-income children and adolescents who live in the same community as more affluent neighbors, including increased childhood IQ and a decrease in leaving school prematurely. **Areas measured: preschool enrollment, on-time high school graduation, and the percentage of adults with a two-year college (associate) degree or above.**

COMMUNITY HEALTH AND CIVIC LIFE

Evidence shows that community institutions, norms, and relationships, together known as social capital, play an important role in expanding people's opportunities, including the opportunities to attend good schools and find good jobs. Volunteerism and group membership, two indicators of social capital, are correlated to community trust and are important social infrastructure for solving collective problems. Yet if residents do not feel safe within their own communities, children may struggle in the classroom and adults are less able to establish the links and connections for a cohesive social network. Health suffers when people do not feel safe enough to exercise outdoors, when the lack of full-service grocery stores makes obtaining fresh produce difficult, and when medical care is inaccessible. **Areas measured: membership in community groups, volunteerism, the percentage of young people ages 16 to 24 who are neither working nor in school, community safety, access to health care, and access to healthy food.**

The indicators included in the Opportunity Index do not measure the first and second set of factors above—factors that are beyond a person's control (racial or ethnic heritage, who one's parents are, etc.) or that reside at the level of the individual (intelligence, work ethic, athleticism, drive, etc.)—although these areas are highly relevant to opportunity. Instead, the Opportunity Index focuses on the third set of factors, ***namely the conditions present in different communities***; these factors are amenable to policy change and to collective efforts to bring about improvements for a community's residents.

The places where people live are pivotal to the opportunities available to them. Neighborhoods matter for employment, education, housing quality and availability, transportation, green space, access to health care, law enforcement and public safety, community organizations, and political processes. Some communities have characteristics that open many windows of opportunity for their residents; others do not.

Composite indexes focused on the realities of people's lives help us explore these conditions in a variety of ways; they can look at how groups compare based on geography, race and ethnicity, age, gender, social class, and many others. The Opportunity Index focuses primarily on geography. The geographic approach offers an objective snapshot of a place today and a roadmap for improvement tomorrow. Focusing on place is valuable because many of the policies and actions required to address lagging conditions for opportunity and economic mobility are taken at the county or state level.

While the traditional way of talking about opportunity is often in monetary terms, the Opportunity Index takes a more comprehensive approach to measuring access to opportunity by including both non-economic and economic indicators. The result is a measure designed to help local communities connect economic, academic, civic, and other factors together to identify concrete solutions to complex problems.

Opportunity Nation is a bipartisan, cross-sector national campaign made up of more than 250 non-profits, businesses, educational institutions, faith-based organizations, community organizations, and individuals all working together to expand economic opportunity and close the opportunity gap in America.

The Opportunity Index was created by the not-for-profit **Measure of America**, a project of the Social Science Research Council, for Opportunity Nation. Paper authored by Measure of America.

II. HOW IS THE OPPORTUNITY INDEX BEING USED?

Opportunity Nation's mission is to close the growing opportunity gap in our country by creating and advocating for an agenda that successfully rebuilds the ladder of opportunity for all Americans. The Opportunity Index, released one year ago, is being leveraged to make real change at the state and local levels by rallying together differing segments of society in a process aimed at increasing Opportunity Scores. The steps of this process include:

1

Raising awareness of the issues

The first step is to raise awareness about what contributes to opportunity and mobility, and to introduce the Opportunity Index as a new tool for measuring opportunity. The Index reflects the reality that the environment into which a person is born and grows up plays a large role in determining that person's chances for upward mobility. While personal characteristics and attributes also affect one's opportunities, this Index identifies a set of issues linked to measurable areas for action in every community.

2

Advocating for opportunity

The second step is to identify and champion federal and state legislation and philanthropic and private-sector actions that would contribute to increasing communities' Opportunity Scores. The Opportunity Index helps constituents engage their elected officials and local decision-makers to make access to opportunity a legislative priority.

3

Taking action to increase scores

The final step is to engage other stakeholders—community, business, and civic institutional leaders—to make a tangible commitment that will raise their community's score. Opportunity Nation is facilitating and supporting local leadership of ACTION Communities (Areas Committed to Increasing Opportunity Now) to engage all sectors to increase opportunity at the county level.

With these steps, the Opportunity Index will be utilized extensively as a road map for measuring and monitoring progress. In addition, it will encourage the collection of local, up-to-date information and data-driven policymaking. See www.OpportunityNation.org/action for more details.

III. HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 2012 INDEX

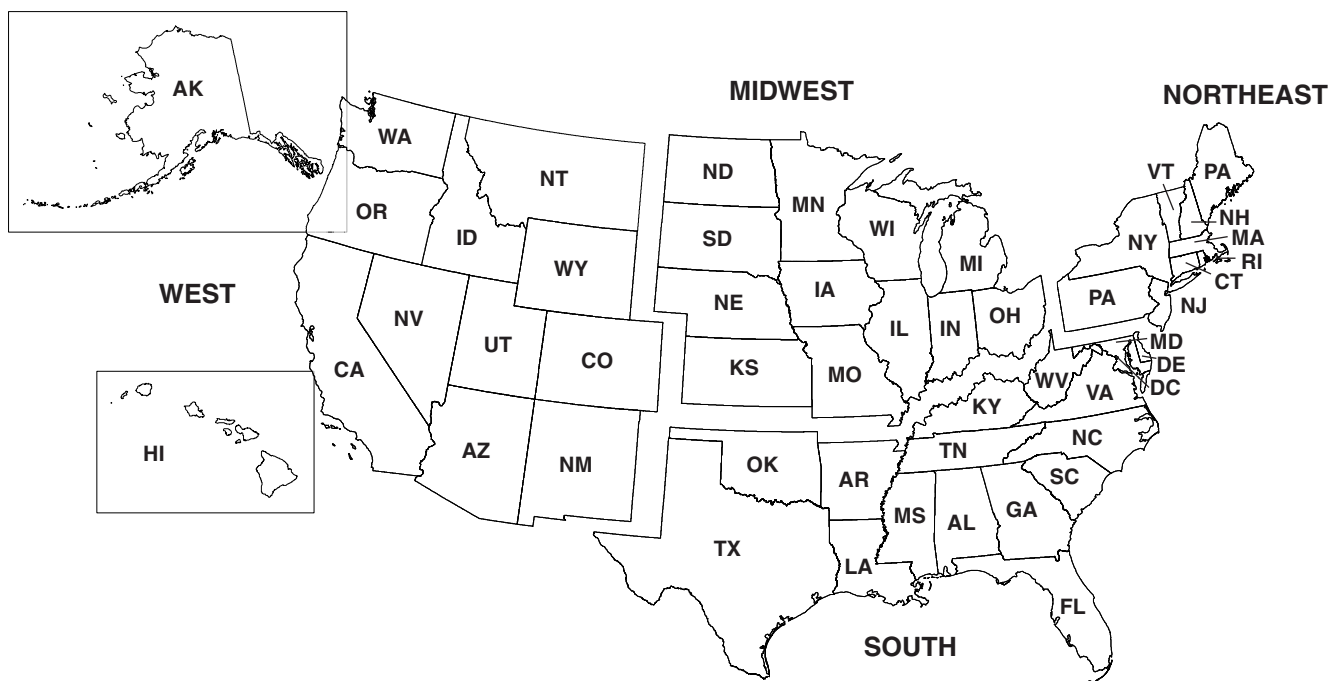
REGIONAL OVERVIEW OF STATES

Which regions of the country offer the most opportunity, and what has changed since the 2011 Index? In the 2011 Index, states from the Northeast region (one of the four U.S. regions designated by the U.S. Census Bureau) occupied the top three positions in the state ranking. In 2012, two Midwest states moved up to join Vermont among the top three states, with Vermont remaining number one, and North Dakota and Minnesota displacing New Hampshire and Connecticut for second and third place.

The bottom three states on the 2012 index are New Mexico, Mississippi, and Nevada, two in the West and one in the South. The three western states that appeared in the bottom ten states on the state ranking in 2011 (New Mexico, Arizona, and Nevada) remain there in 2012, with Nevada solidly at the bottom both years.

As for broader regional trends, the Northeast and Midwest regions dominate the highest ranks of the state Opportunity Score, with the top ten states split evenly between these two regions. The sixteen southern states are disproportionately represented in the bottom of the ranking table, with only four southern states not among those clustered toward the bottom: Maryland (No. 11), Virginia (No. 15), Washington, DC (No. 23), and Delaware (No. 27). All four states have strong economic ties to the nation's capital.

The eleven western states largely occupy the middle to lower-middle rankings, with three extremes at the very bottom: Arizona (No. 48), New Mexico (No. 49), and Nevada (last).



TOP AND BOTTOM STATES

The top three states on the Opportunity Index are Vermont, North Dakota, and Minnesota. Interestingly, none of these three states are among the richest states, as measured by income (they rank 21st, 24th, and 13th, respectively, on household income), yet they have the distinction of excelling in many other very important characteristics. They have some of the lowest unemployment rates in the nation, rank within the top five in terms of the concentration of primary care providers and high school graduation rates, and have the lowest proportion of adolescents and young adults who are neither working nor in school in the nation. They also have below-average poverty and violent crime rates. While there is certainly considerable variation within these three states in each of these important areas, the Index provides an overall picture of states that offer their residents comparatively more ingredients that enable them to grasp the economic, academic, health, and other rungs of the ladder to upward mobility.

The bottom three states on the Opportunity Index are New Mexico, Mississippi, and Nevada. Across all three dimensions, they score well below the national average, particularly in terms of education. While three-quarters of the nation's entering high school freshmen graduate in four years, these three states fall at the bottom of the pack: only about 56 percent of Nevada's freshmen graduate high school on time, and under 65 percent of students in Mississippi and New Mexico do. These states are also lagging well behind the national average in adults who have a two-year associate degree or higher. The one area where Nevada performs well is in income. But higher median incomes are found alongside the highest unemployment rate of any state in the nation today. Across the board, when academic and economic forces align, the conditions for economic dynamism and mobility are stronger, and Index scores are higher.

Table 1. Opportunity Index State Rankings

RANK	STATE	OPPORTUNITY SCORE (out of 100)
1	Vermont	64.3
2	North Dakota	61.3
3	Minnesota	60.7
4	New Hampshire	60.4
5	Nebraska	59.9
6	Massachusetts	59.1
7	Iowa	58.6
8	New Jersey	58.2
9	Wisconsin	57.8
10	Connecticut	57.4
11	Maryland	56.7
12	Maine	56.7
13	South Dakota	56.6
14	Kansas	56.3
15	Virginia	55.3
16	Utah	54.9
17	Colorado	54.7
18	Montana	54.4
19	New York	53.9
20	Pennsylvania	53.7
21	Alaska	53.6
22	Wyoming	53.6
23	District of Columbia	53.2
24	Illinois	52.8
25	Washington	52.8
26	Hawaii	52.7
27	Delaware	51.5
28	Oregon	51.1
29	Ohio	50.9
30	Rhode Island	50.9
31	Idaho	50.7
32	Missouri	50.7
33	Michigan	49.2
34	Indiana	48.9
35	Oklahoma	48.5
36	North Carolina	48.0
37	California	47.6
38	Texas	46.4
39	Tennessee	45.9
40	Kentucky	45.9
41	Florida	45.8
42	South Carolina	45.4
43	West Virginia	44.9
44	Georgia	44.8
45	Arkansas	44.6
46	Louisiana	44.2
47	Alabama	43.9
48	Arizona	43.7
49	New Mexico	42.7
50	Mississippi	39.9
51	Nevada	35.9

Highest Ranked State Vermont

64.3/100



What sets **Vermont** apart? In both 2011 and 2012, Vermont outperformed every other state. In 2012, Vermont received an Opportunity Score of 64.3 out of 100. While there is always room to aim higher, Vermont does not just excel in one area but rather is an opportunity leader across all three dimensions measured in the Index. Vermont has put crucial building blocks in place for its residents to seize opportunities and make decisions that help them succeed. Some of the factors that set Vermont apart are:

- Providing basic economic security: Despite a relatively low median income (#21) when compared to its top-ranking Opportunity Score, Vermont has very low unemployment (5 percent) and a poverty rate well below the national average.
- Excelling in education: Vermont has the second-highest rate of on-time high school graduation, ranking just behind Wisconsin, and one of the highest proportions of adults with higher education degree as well (42 percent), giving Vermont the third-highest ranking on the Education Dimension.
- Building strong communities: Vermont soars above the pack in terms of community health and civic life, with 9.2 percent of adolescents and young adults not in school and not working, compared with the national average of 14.7 percent (and one in five in Nevada and Mississippi). Vermont's violent crime rate is less than half that of the national average, and the involvement of its residents in both volunteerism and social and civic groups is very high. The state has the second-highest rates of primary-care providers in the nation, second only to Washington, DC.

Lowest Ranked State Nevada

35.9/100



In 2012 **Nevada** remains the state with the lowest Opportunity Score, with comparatively low rankings across all three dimensions of the Index. The one area where Nevada does well is in median household income. Yet despite its rank just above Vermont—the state with the highest Opportunity Score—very high income is not enough to pull Nevada from its last-place position. Nevada has the highest unemployment rate in the nation, 11.5 percent, and a substantial proportion of its population, 44.3 percent, spends more than 30 percent of their household income on housing. This high proportion stands in stark contrast to neighboring Wyoming, where only one in four residents spend over 30 percent of income on housing costs.

Nevada is the bottom-ranked state in both the Education and Community Health and Civic Life Dimensions. In education, Nevada has the lowest preschool enrollment rate in the nation, with fewer than one in three of its preschool-age children in school, and it ranks last for high school graduation by a wide margin. Only 56.3 percent of its freshmen graduate high school on time, compared with the U.S. average of 75.5 percent. Further, only 28.7 percent of the population have an associate degree or higher. Only West Virginia, Arkansas, Louisiana, Kentucky, and Mississippi fare worse. Finally, on civic life, Nevada has very low rates of group membership and volunteerism, and ranks second-highest in terms of youth not in school and not working as well as in violent crime. Finally, the state is severely underserved by doctors and grocery stores. While this paints a bleak picture, knowing relative strengths and weaknesses in critical areas using objective statistics is a vital step to taking action to build greater opportunity for Nevada's residents.

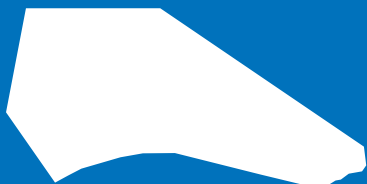
TOP AND BOTTOM COUNTIES

The United States contains over 3,000 counties.¹ The range in results for the indicators that make up the Opportunity Index among them is striking. For example, in some U.S. counties, three in four adults have at least a two-year college degree; in others, only one in ten do. In a few counties, over 600 doctors serve every 100,000 residents; in nearly 100 counties, there are fewer than 20 doctors per 100,000 residents. A handful of counties have median household incomes over \$100,000, and a similar number of counties struggle with typical household incomes under \$22,000 (see Top and Bottom County Scorecard for the range of values for each indicator). It is also important to note that counties vary widely in size. Los Angeles County tops the list with a population of nearly 10 million people. At the other end is rural Loving County, Texas, home to just 82 people.

Each county has areas where it excels and remaining challenges. The Opportunity Grades in this Index help to benchmark each county against its neighbors, its state, and the country as a whole in terms of opportunity and to identify specific priorities for concerted action.

Highest-Ranked County Falls Church City, VA

A+



In this brief analysis, we will explore only the peaks and troughs on the Index. At the upper end of the scale, **Falls Church, Virginia**, is the only county to be awarded an A+ in the 2012 Index. Interestingly, Falls Church, a suburban county in the greater Washington, DC, metropolitan area, has continued to feel the pinch of the recession, with a drop in median earnings of \$775. Yet it is still in the number-one position, with median household income (\$114,409) more than double the nation's and with excellent access to primary-care physicians and grocery stores.

Falls Church outstrips most counties in preschool enrollment and on-time high school graduation, and is the nation's highest-ranking county in terms of the percentage of the population with an associate degree or higher, 74.3 percent—twice the national average. Finally, crime is low, about half the national average.

Lowest-Ranked County Tallahatchie, MS

F



Tallahatchie, Mississippi, is one of only three counties² to receive an F. At a time when the national trend is toward improved educational attainment and where the benefits of education for better jobs and higher earnings are increasing, Tallahatchie's outcomes fell compared with 2011, with lower levels of on-time graduation. Only half of Tallahatchie's high school freshmen graduate in four years, compared to three in four nationally. Tallahatchie also has the highest violent crime rate of any county for which data are available, at over 2,300 violent crimes per 100,000 people, nearly six times the national rate.

While rural counties such as Tallahatchie face particular strains in terms of mobilizing the human and financial resources to meet today's challenges, lessons from other rural counties could be very useful for investing in today's youth and applying proven programs to better meet the challenges of the century.

¹ Some states use county equivalents, such as Louisiana (parishes) and Alaska (boroughs), and a number of cities have county status.

² The other counties are Apache County, Arizona, and Lowndes County, Alabama.



2012 Opportunity Index

Top and Bottom County Scorecard

DIMENSION		INDICATOR	UNITED STATES	TOP COUNTY	BOTTOM COUNTY
JOBS AND LOCAL ECONOMY	JOBS	Unemployment Rate (%)	8.1%	Williams, ND 0.7	Imperial, CA 26.8
	WAGES	Median Household Income (\$)	\$50,046	Loudoun, VA \$115,574	Breathitt, KY \$19,906
	POVERTY	Poverty (% of population below poverty line)	15.3%	Douglas, CO 2.9	Todd, SD 48.8
	INEQUALITY	80/20 Ratio (ratio of household income of 80th percentile to that of 20th percentile)	4.8	Kendall, IL 2.8	New York, NY 8.4
	ASSETS	Banking Institutions (commercial banks, savings institutions, and credit unions per 10,000 residents)	4.0	Nelson, ND 25.6	San Jacinto, TX 0.4
	AFFORDABLE HOUSING	Households Spending Less Than 30% of income on Housing (%)	61.9%	Alfalfa, OK 89.1	Miami-Dade, FL 43.6
	INTERNET ACCESS	High-Speed Internet (5-level categories)	4	Monroe, FL, and 187 other counties have score of 5: over 800 households per 1,000 have Internet at homes	Noxubee, MS, and 37 other counties have a score of 1: 200 or fewer households per 1,000 have Internet at home
EDUCATION	PRESCHOOL ENROLLMENT	Preschool (% ages 3 and 4 in school)	48.3%	Ouray and Pitkin, CO 100	Franklin, WA 16.5
	ON-TIME HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION	On-Time High School Graduation (% of freshmen who graduate in four years)	75.5%	Kimble, TX, and 24 other counties have a rate of 100	Osage, OK 26.7
	POSTSECONDARY COMPLETION	Associate Degree or Higher (% of adults 25 and older)	35.8%	Falls Church City, VA 74.3	McDowell, WV 9.3
COMMUNITY HEALTH AND CIVIC LIFE	YOUTH ECONOMIC AND ACADEMIC INCLUSION	Youth Not in School and Not Working (% ages 16–24)	14.7%	Boone, Dallas, and Story, IA 1.8	Apache and Navajo, AZ 32.8
	SAFETY	Violent Crime (per 100,000 population)	403.6	Gregory, SD, and 3 other counties have a rate of 0 per 100,000 population	Tallahatchie, MS 2,349.6
	ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE	Primary Care Providers (per 100,000 population)	117.9	Charlottesville City, VA 728.1	Robertson, TX 6.4
	ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD	Grocery Stores and Produce Vendors (per 10,000 population)	2.2	Nome Census Area, AK 15.7	Gallatin, IL, and 12 other counties have 0 per 10,000 population

NOTE: High and low values presented here are for counties for which Opportunity Grades could be calculated in both the 2011 and 2012 series.

DIFFERENCES AMONG THE TWENTY-FIVE MOST POPULOUS URBAN COUNTIES

As mentioned above, counties vary tremendously in size, and looking at similarly sized counties can be very useful. Of the twenty-five most populous counties, eight are located in California. New York and Texas each have four counties that make the list. None of the twenty-five most populous counties have scores higher than a B+ (Middlesex County, Massachusetts), with three scoring a low of D+ (San Bernardino, California; Wayne, Michigan; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania). Middlesex, Massachusetts' high Opportunity Grade is due to its high performance across all three dimensions. It has an unemployment rate almost half that of the nation, at 4.6 percent as opposed to 8.1 percent. Riverside, California, has the highest unemployment rate of the twenty-five most populous counties, at 11.8 percent.

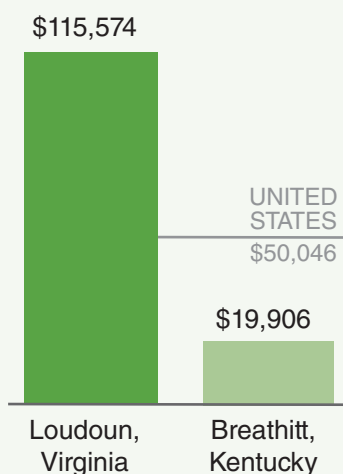
Six of the twenty-five most populous counties have median household incomes lower than the national figure of \$50,046: Dallas and Bexar, Texas; Miami-Dade, Florida; Kings, New York; Wayne, Michigan; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania, has the lowest median household income of the list, at \$36,251, and also the highest poverty rate, at 25.1 percent, as opposed to the national average of 15.3 percent. Santa Clara, California; Middlesex, Massachusetts; and Suffolk, New York, are the only three to have single-digit poverty rates.

Not surprisingly, New York County, New York (Manhattan), has the highest concentration of banking institutions, at 6.7 per 10,000 residents, more than one and a half times the national average of 4 per 10,000. Yet neighboring Kings County (Brooklyn) has the lowest concentration of banking institutions of the top 25 counties by population, with only 1.5 institutions per 10,000 people.

While New York and Kings counties lie on opposite ends of the spectrum when it comes to the accessibility of banking institutions, both counties have very high levels of income inequality. Philadelphia County also ties with Kings County on this indicator.

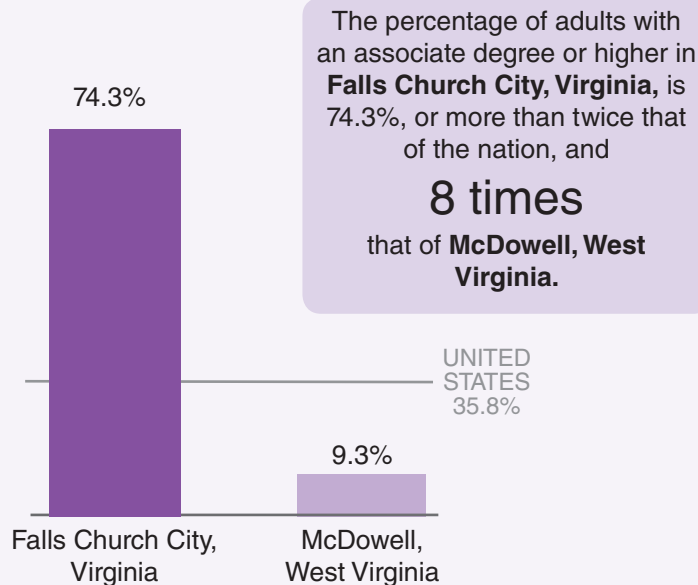
The boroughs of Manhattan and Brooklyn (New York and Kings counties, respectively) both also feature together at the top of the list in terms of the number of grocery stores and produce vendors, with a rate about four times that of the national average (New York had 8.9, and Kings 8.6 per 10,000). In fact, all four New York counties in the top-twenty-five most populous list dominate the highest rankings in access to healthy food.

TOP & BOTTOM COUNTIES: MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME (\$)



The gap in median household income between **Loudoun, VA**, and **Breathitt, KY**, is **\$95,668**—almost twice the median household income for the nation as a whole.

**TOP & BOTTOM COUNTIES:
ASSOCIATE DEGREE OR HIGHER**
(% of adults 25 and older)



In terms of preschool enrollment, Clark, Nevada, has the lowest rates, at 28.3 percent, as opposed to New York, at 68.6 percent. New York also ranks highest in terms of the percentage of people with an associates degree or higher, at 60.7 percent, as opposed to San Bernardino, California, at 26.6 percent. Philadelphia has the lowest on-time high school graduation rate, with one in two students taking longer than four years to graduate from high school.

Violent crime is also greatest in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, at 1,382 per 100,000 people, followed by Wayne, Michigan, at 1,171 per 100,000 people. The national average is 403.6 per

100,000 people. The lowest crime rate can be found in Suffolk, New York, at less than half the national rate. Philadelphia and Wayne also share the first and third rankings in the percentage of disconnected youths, at 19.9 and 17.9 percent, respectively. Kings County, New York, is at second place, at 18 percent. The national average is 14.7 percent.

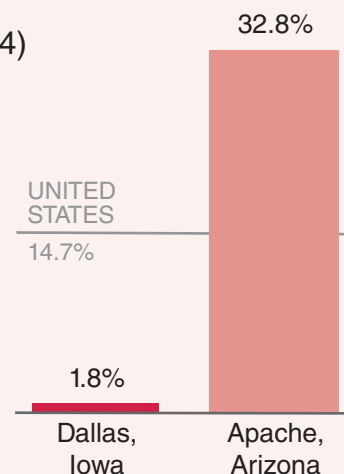
The percentage of disconnected youths—those between the ages of 16 to 24 who are neither in school nor working—in Orange County, California; Suffolk, New York; and Middlesex, Massachusetts, are all in single digits.

New York County (Manhattan) also has the greatest availability of primary health providers, at 279.5 per 100,000 people, as opposed to the national average of 117.9. San Bernardino and Riverside, California, take the fourth-to-last place and last place in the top twenty-five metro areas when it comes to primary health providers.

**TOP & BOTTOM COUNTIES:
YOUTH NOT IN SCHOOL &
NOT WORKING (% ages 16–24)**

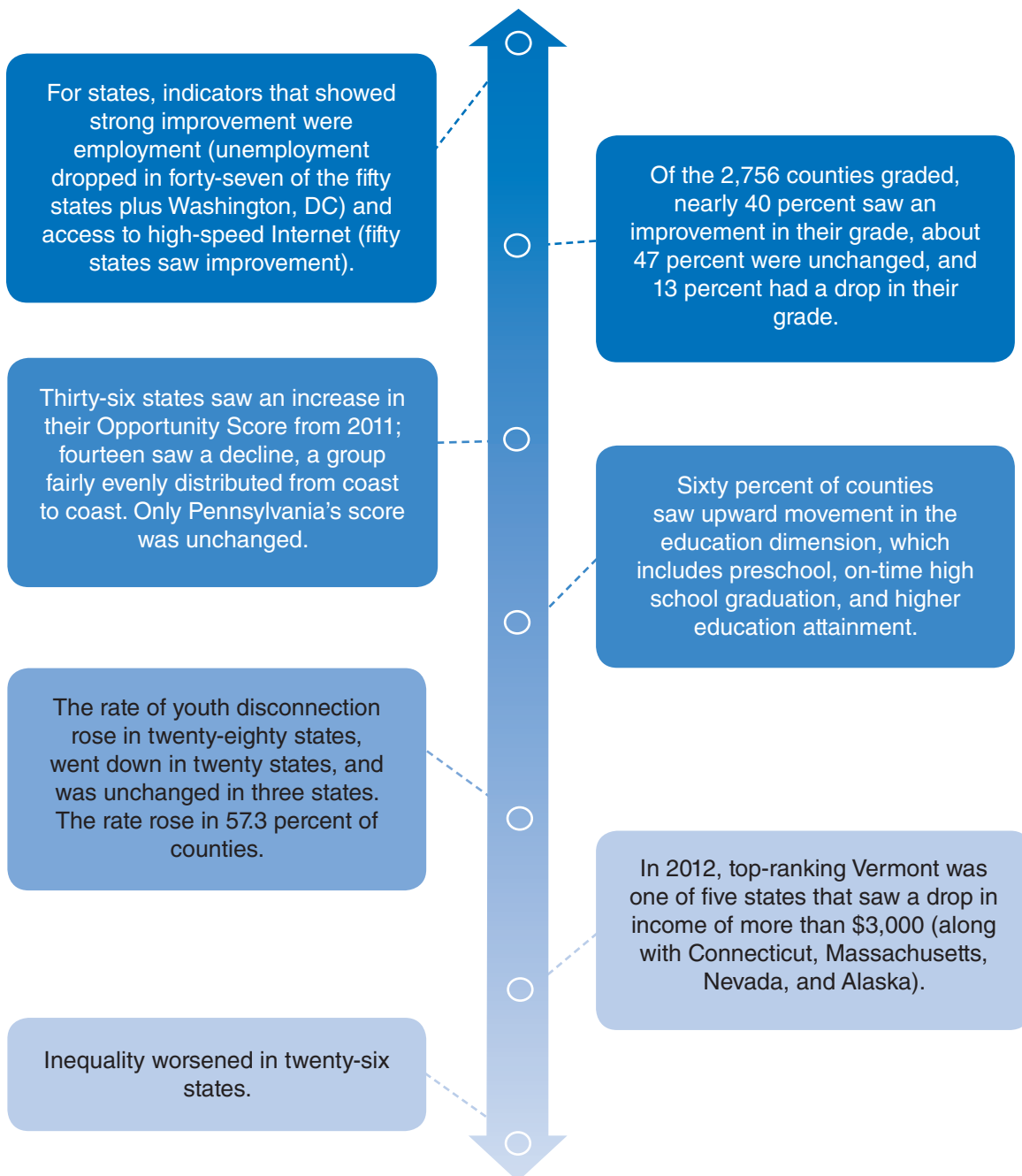
The percentage of youth in **Apache, AZ**, who are not in school and not working is more than

18 times
that of **Dallas, IA**, and more than twice the national average.



IV. GAINS AND LOSSES SINCE 2011

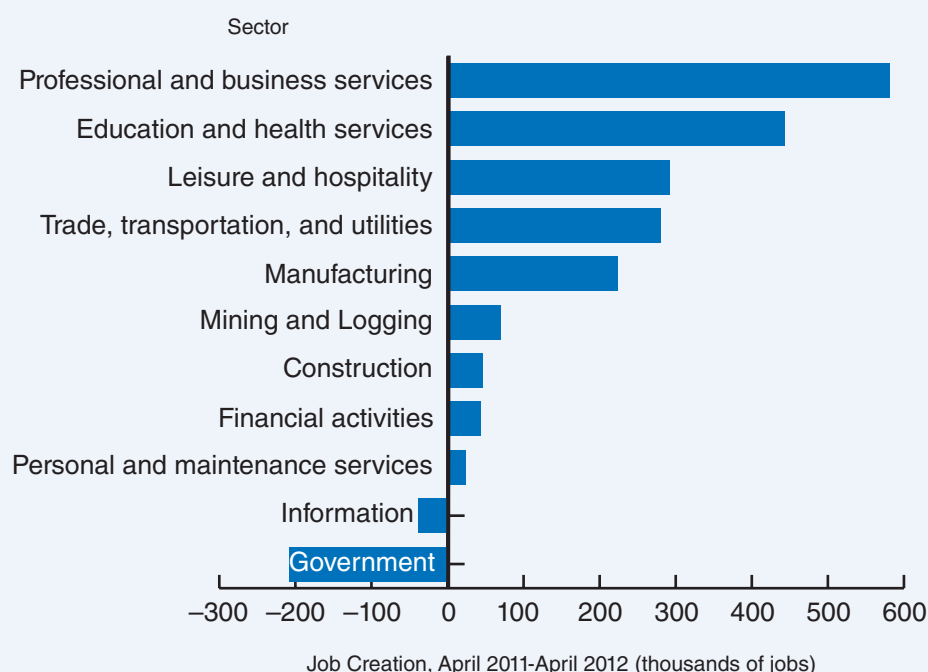
The good news from 2011 to 2012 is that far more states and counties are moving in a positive direction than are sliding back. Overall, indicators show that America is slowly getting back to work and is better connected and safer, but inequality and disconnected youth remain problematic:



SHIFTS IN THE JOB MARKET SINCE 2011

One important factor that has affected the Opportunity Index in terms of its jobs and local economy dimension is the structural changes in our economy and in the labor market today. These shifts in the makeup of employment in different sectors are reflected in Index scores in states and counties across the nation. As **Figure 1** illustrates, some categories soared over these twelve months, and others saw a considerable decline in the number of jobs.

Figure 1. Job Creation by Sector Since Mid-2011



The biggest gains were found in professional business services, education and health services, and leisure and hospitality. About 1.3 million jobs were created in these three industries. Earnings in the business, education, and health fields tend to be relatively high: average weekly earnings in these sectors are about \$830 and \$680 per week, respectively. Weekly earnings in the leisure and hospitality sector, however, are less than \$300 per week. The smallest job gains were found in personal and maintenance service industries, which created only 24,000 jobs, and there were job losses in both information industries and government.

In terms of the regional job market, unemployment fell in all regions over the last year. The unemployment rate continues to be highest in the West, where it stands at 9.4 percent. The Midwest has the lowest rate, 7.3 percent. The unemployment rate is 7.8 percent in the South and 8.1 percent in the Northeast.

Sources: Measure of America analysis from Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Current Employment Statistics survey (<http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/survey/most?ce>) and BLS Historical Hours and Earnings (http://www.bls.gov/opub/ee/2012/ces/tableb2_201206.pdf).

STATE GAINS AND LOSSES SINCE 2011



Four of the top five states on the Opportunity Index in 2011 remained there in 2012.

Connecticut, which ranked third in 2011,³ dropped to tenth place in 2012. The major declines that explain this drop in ranking come from only two indicators, income and high school graduation. Connecticut saw the largest fall in median household income, over \$4,000, from 2011. But this decline is relative to a very high starting point, over \$64,000, leaving Connecticut with the fourth-highest income of any state in 2012 despite the drop. The second indicator in which there was a substantial decline in Connecticut is in high school graduation rates. In 2011 Connecticut graduated 82.2 percent of its freshmen in four years, well above the national average of 74.7 percent; in 2012 that rate had declined to 75.4 percent, just about at the national average and placing Connecticut at 28th place on this indicator. Given the importance of attaining this minimum credential in today's knowledge economy, this is a clear area for targeted efforts.

Despite the large decline in income, Connecticut has one of the lowest poverty rates in the nation, which increased only slightly despite a dramatic drop in income, and the unemployment rate improved from 9.2 percent to 7.5 percent. These strong economic indicators help Connecticut to retain its relatively high overall ranking. Connecticut also has the third-highest percentage of households with high speed Internet, at 77.8 percent, just behind New Jersey and New Hampshire.

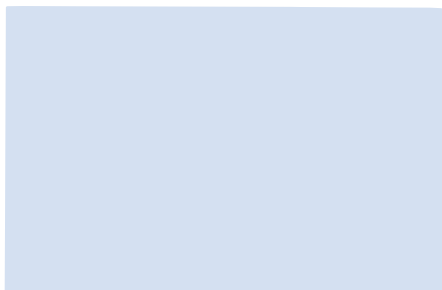
Washington, DC, considered a state for the purposes of this Index, was the top gainer over the 2011 Index score, with a jump in its ranking from number 29 in 2011 to 23 on the 2012 Opportunity Index. DC saw the greatest improvement of any state in income, one of only six states where income rose; and the drop in unemployment, from 11.3 percent in 2011 to 8.3 percent in 2012, was the third largest, after Michigan and Alabama. In high school performance, Washington, DC, improved the most of any state in the proportion of students who graduate high school on time. This is an area of particular challenge for DC, which has one of the lowest rates among the states. Only seven states made progress of over 3 percentage points in this critical issue from 2011 to 2012, and DC's rate rose from 56 percent to 62.4 percent—a difference of 6.4 percentage points.

While Washington, DC, performs just above the middle in the state ranking, it is a case study in extreme contrasts. This is in large part because of the very different opportunities available to those who grow up in DC as compared with DC's highly educated residents drawn to the city for high-skilled employment. So on measures such as income, higher education, and doctors, DC tops the charts. But so, too, does it lead in terms of crime, poverty, and high school dropouts. For a closer look at opportunity in Washington, DC, see **Box 1**.

³ Connecticut ranked first in the Opportunity Index released in 2011, but was revised to third with the adjustment of indicators.

COUNTY GAINS AND LOSSES SINCE 2011

Moving Backward
Chase, Nebraska



While the majority of counties in Nebraska saw little or no change from 2011 on the Opportunity Index, several experienced a backslide. One of these that saw a reduction in its Opportunity Grade from an A– to a B+ (and the one with the biggest absolute reduction in its score) was **Chase County, Nebraska**.

This southwest Nebraska county, with under 4,000 residents, has strong indicators in a number of areas, including very low unemployment (only 2.4 percent) as well as excellent access to banking institutions and grocery stores.

However, in the period under study, several important declines are cause for concerted attention to ensure that Chase County is making efforts to maximize opportunity for its residents. Poverty increased from 11.5 percent to 14 percent, and the county experienced a considerable increase in young people neither working nor in school—from only 6.8 percent in 2011 to just under 10 percent in 2012. In addition, the county saw a considerable decline in preschool enrollment, from just over 79 percent in 2011 to just over 73 percent in 2012.

Moving Forward
Hancock, Georgia



Sixteen counties received an Opportunity Grade of F in 2011. The county that made the most improvement on its score in 2012 was **Hancock County, Georgia**. While a grade of D is not typically a cause for celebration, progress on these indicators represents tangible improvements in the lives of real families and individuals.

Hancock, a small county in the center of the state anchored by the city of Sparta, saw an important decline in its unemployment rate, from a very high 18.8 percent in 2011 to 15.2 percent in 2012. Other indicators critical for opportunity edged upward as well, including home Internet connections and on-time high school graduation rates.

Despite progress in a number of areas, Hancock still struggles with very low median household incomes (only \$22,000, which is about the poverty threshold for a family of four) and among the lowest educational attainment in the nation. Only about 13 percent of adults in Hancock have at least an associate degree as compared with about 34 percent of Georgia's adults and nearly 36 percent nationwide.

Box 1. Spotlight on Washington, DC

In the aftermath of the Great Recession, the struggling state of the economy has been felt across the nation. Only six states saw an increase in median household income between 2011 and 2012: Washington, DC, Virginia, Nebraska, West Virginia, and the Dakotas. As discussed above, Washington, DC, saw the largest increase in its Opportunity Score and a jump in its ranking from number 29 to number 23. North Dakota was the only other state with an increase of over 2 percentage points. While its overall position is just above average, DC shows wildly varying results and extreme contrasts.

One manifestation of these extremes is DC's high degree of income inequality. The Opportunity Index measures income inequality using the 80/20 ratio, which is the ratio of household incomes of those at the 80th percentile of the income distribution to those at the 20th percentile. The Washington, DC, ratio is the country's highest by a large margin at 6.8 (the next-highest inequality is found in New York, where the ratio is 5.3, and the national average is 4.8). DC is one of a small handful of states with incomes above \$60,000, but it also has the third-highest poverty rate, just ahead of Mississippi and New Mexico.

Likewise, in education, Washington, DC, excels at the level of higher

education (mainly on the strength of migrants to the city), yet struggles to get its longtime residents through high school.

More than half of Washington, DC's, adult population holds an associate degree or higher (53.3 percent), a percentage significantly higher than the national average of 35.8 percent. It has been at the top of the chart in college two years running. But only 62.4 percent of DC's high school students graduate within four years, compared with the national rate of 75.5 percent. Only Mississippi and Nevada have lower high school graduation rates. Despite this low ranking, as mentioned above, DC has made the most progress here of any state.

In the Community Health and Civic Life Dimension, DC once again is a place of contrasts. The violent crime rate decreased slightly from 2011 to 2012, but is still the highest in the nation by far, more than twice the rate of Nevada, the place with the second-highest rate of violent crime. Washington, DC's, violent crime rate, at 1,330.2 per 100,000 people, is equivalent to that of Idaho, Virginia, Utah, Wyoming, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine combined—the seven states with the lowest crime rates. Yet Washington, DC, also has the highest rate of primary care providers, almost double the national average.



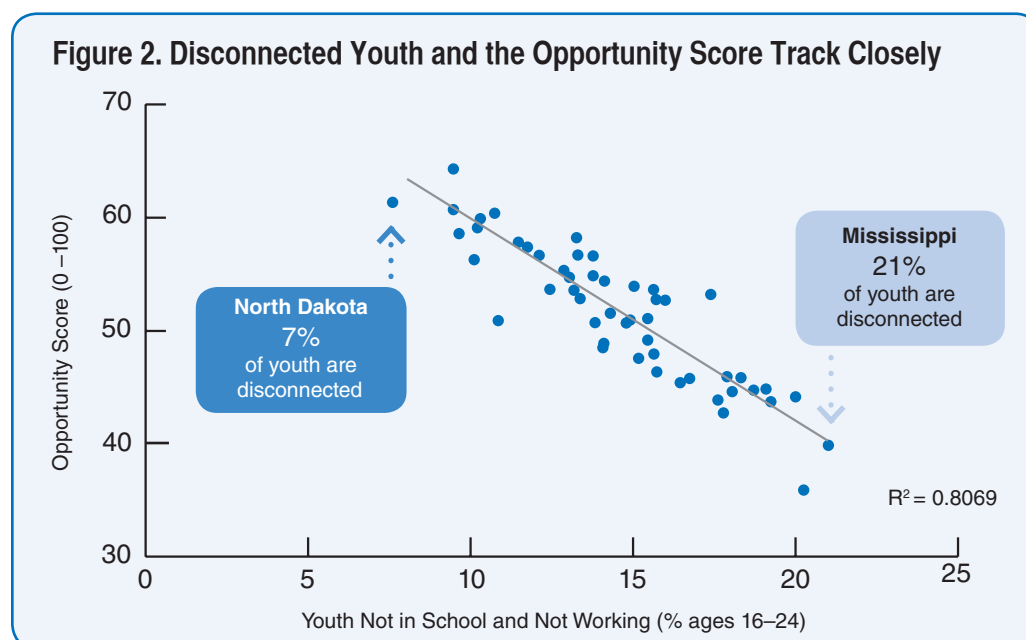
V. EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES: WHAT ACTIONS MATTER MOST

Which areas have the most impact on Opportunity Scores? Where should nonprofit organizations, the business community, philanthropists, and government focus their efforts to truly move the needle on expanding opportunity in their counties and states? The answer depends very much upon the place in question. Nevada, for instance, lags badly across a range of educational indicators; improving access to opportunity there will require greater focus on improving access to quality education. Washington, DC, on the other hand, is soaring far above the rest of the country in terms of its education scores, thanks to highly credentialed migrants to the nation's capital. A look at individual indicators, however, particularly the percentage of students who graduate high school within four years, shows that the city is failing DC natives; improving access to opportunity there will require laser-like focus on high school completion. The strength of the Opportunity Index is that it moves the conversation beyond generic recommendations to identify concrete priorities state-by-state and county-by-county.

Nevertheless, an analysis of the relationship between various indicators as well as between indicators and the overall Index for states and counties shows that some issues are closely associated with opportunity across the country. Overall, disconnected youth is again a strong correlate of the Opportunity Index, as it was in the 2011 iteration of the Index. Below are several other important correlations as well.

States with higher levels of youth disconnection tend to have far lower Opportunity Scores.

Across the 50 states and DC, there is a very strong relationship between the proportion of youth who are not in school and not working—often referred to as disconnected youth—and low opportunity as measured by the Index. This indicator has the strongest correlation with the Opportunity Index at the state level of any of the indicators included in the Index (see **Figure 2**). On-time high school graduation and the share of adults with postsecondary degrees are also strongly correlated with the Opportunity Index.



Graduating high school on time, remaining connected to school or joining the labor force as a young adult, and earning an educational credential beyond high school all appear to be important components of opportunity.

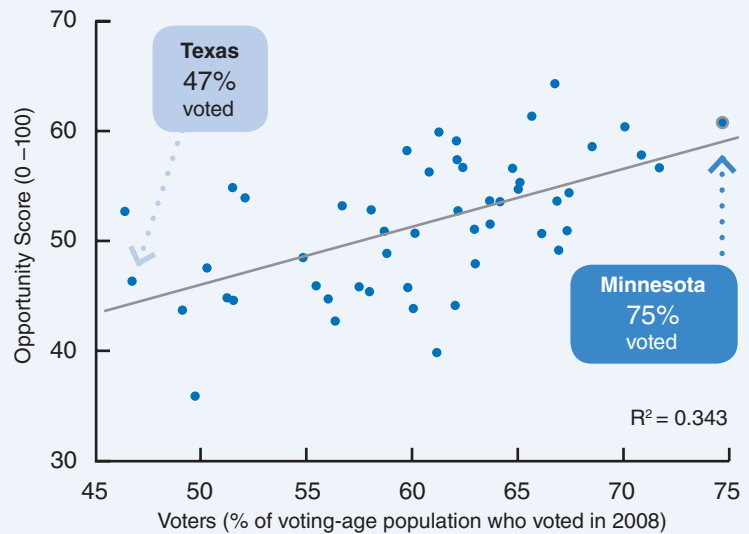
In states and counties, voter turnout tends to be higher in places where Opportunity Scores are higher.

Voting is one of the most basic forms of participation in our democracy. The proportion of Americans who vote in elections is, overall, relatively low. In some large urban counties, such as Los Angeles, Miami-Dade, all five boroughs of New York City, and Bexar County in Texas, fewer than half of the voting-age population went to the polls in 2008. Voter turnout, as measured by the proportion of the voting-age population that voted in the last presidential election, tends to be higher at both the state and county levels where Opportunity Scores are higher. **See Figure 3.**

Rural and urban counties both have Opportunity Grades across the spectrum.

U.S. counties range in size tremendously, from Los Angeles with over 10 million residents to a handful of rural counties with fewer than 100 people. The challenges they face in terms of opening doors of economic mobility and progress obviously differ in part due to population size. However, when considered across the indicators in the Index, counties large and small are equally likely to excel, or struggle, with the conditions for opportunity. About 30 percent of more rural counties and 24 percent of more urban counties (as measured by the U.S. Census Bureau as being part of a Metropolitan or Micropolitan Statistical Area) received grades of A or B. About 18 percent of more rural and 15 percent of more urban counties received Ds or Fs. Urban counties were more likely to be average, with 61 percent receiving a C, as opposed to only 52 percent of more rural counties.

Figure 3. Voter Turnout Tends to Be Higher Where Opportunity Scores are Higher



At the county level, poverty has a strong negative relationship with opportunity.

As is true at the state level, the share of disconnected youth and the percentage of adults with at least an associate degree correlated strongly with the Opportunity Index at the county level. Unlike at the state level, however, the strongest county-level correlation is poverty and the Opportunity Index. Poorer counties across the board tend to have lower Opportunity Grades.

Inequality is associated with higher crime and far lower levels of civic engagement.

Inequality, a new indicator in this updated version of the Index, correlates strongly with the violent crime rate. However, removing Washington, DC, a place that is an outlier on violent crime and inequality by a significant margin, weakens but does not eliminate this association. If Washington, DC, is taken out of the state analysis, inequality is most strongly associated with both indicators of civic engagement included in the Index—volunteerism and group membership—as well as with preschool enrollment. People are less likely to volunteer and join groups where inequality is high.

VI. WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Visit www.opportunityindex.org to learn your score, share it with elected officials, start a community conversation or plan an activity to improve your score. The following are examples of actions to improve opportunity in states and counties, and through coalitions:

County: Ouachita, Arkansas

Community leader Linda Nelson was sure they could do better than a C. Executive director of Ouachita-Calhoun County Literacy Council and one of Opportunity Nation's Opportunity Leaders, Ms. Nelson decided to take action to address the needs of her community. She started by fostering awareness through presenting data to her local PTA and elected officials. Out of a possible score of 5 in each of the three dimensions of the Index, Ouachita received a 2 in Jobs and Economy, a 3 in Education, and a 2 in Community Health and Civic Life. Spurred on by this information, Ms. Nelson has initiated and is now growing an ACTION Community in Ouachita, with support from Opportunity Nation's national campaign.

The county's 16- to 24-year-olds are particularly struggling, with 17.6 percent of teens and young adults in this age range not working or attending school. Ms. Nelson has piloted a workshop series, Don't Be Good, Be Great—Youth Challenge Workshops. With guest speakers and community mentors, Ms. Nelson is promoting self-awareness and self-esteem, building a network of social entrepreneurs, raising awareness of the need for skill building and higher education, engaging youth in volunteerism and social services, and leading many other targeted efforts. www.opportunitynation.org/action.

State: Iowa

Opportunity Iowa was launched with a Governor's Proclamation on January 26, 2012, initiated through a partnership led by Des Moines Area Community College President Robert Denson. The proclamation encourages all Iowa businesses and individuals to engage in one or more activities to enhance access to the American Dream locally. Since then, they have created Opportunity Iowa, declared an official "month of opportunity" to harness ideas and spur commitments from elected, civic, and business leaders, and put an 18-wheel truck in service to raise awareness at major events. Reclaiming their rich history as a longtime opportunity generator, Iowa's leaders are committed to increasing their Index score.

National Impact Map

As a part of the 2012 Opportunity Index launched in conjunction with the Opportunity Nation Summit in Washington, DC, a database of the efforts of a coalition of 250 organizations working to increase Index scores will be featured. These organizations are generating opportunity through work in early education, college access, job training, financial literacy, violence prevention, and more. The database will enable them to share their impacts by indicator and by county to increase opportunity in their communities. Those interested in being part of this effort can join a local organization, and they can also use Opportunity Nation's new Local Action Toolkit, which provides tools for leading community conversations on local assets and challenges and for working with neighbors to increase Index scores. www.opportunitynation.org/toolkit.

VII. APPENDIX

DIMENSION	THEME	INDICATOR	SOURCE
Jobs and Local Economy Dimension	JOBS	Unemployment Rate (%)	Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics
	WAGES	Median Household Income (\$)	U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey
	POVERTY	Poverty (% of population below poverty line)	U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey
	INEQUALITY	80/20 Ratio (Ratio of household income at the 80th percentile to that of the 20th percentile)	U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey
	ASSETS	Banking Institutions (commercial banks, savings institutions, and credit unions per 10,000 residents)	U.S. Census Bureau, County Business Patterns and Population Estimates Program
	AFFORDABLE HOUSING	Households Spending Less than 30% of Income on Housing (%)	U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey
	INTERNET ACCESS	High-Speed Internet (% of households for states or 5-level categories for counties)	Federal Communications Commission Internet Access Services
Education Dimension	PRESCHOOL ENROLLMENT	Preschool (% ages 3 and 4 in school)	U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey
	ON-TIME HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION	On-Time High School Graduation (% of freshmen who graduate in four years)	U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, State Departments of Education, and County Health Rankings
	POSTSECONDARY COMPLETION	Associate Degree or Higher (% of adults ages 25 and older)	U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey
Community Health and Civic Life Dimension	CIVIC ENGAGEMENT	Group Membership (% of adults 18 and over involved in social, civic, sports, and religious groups) [STATES ONLY]	U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey
	VOLUNTEERISM	Volunteerism (% of adults ages 18 and older) [STATES ONLY]	U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey
	YOUTH ECONOMIC AND ACADEMIC INCLUSION	Youth Not in School and Not Working (% ages 16–24)	U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey
	SAFETY	Violent Crime (per 100,000 population)	Federal Bureau of Investigation and County Health Rankings
	ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE	Primary Care Providers (per 100,000 population)	U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration and County Health Rankings
	ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD	Grocery Stores and Produce Vendors (per 10,000 population)	U.S. Census Bureau, County Business Patterns and Population Estimates Program

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TODAY'S OPPORTUNITY INDEX AND THE FIRST OPPORTUNITY INDEX, RELEASED IN 2011

The Opportunity Index was created by Measure of America drawing on robust social science research and inputs from a coalition of organizations partnering with Opportunity Nation. Following the launch of the 2011 Index and its application in a number of local communities across the nation, further feedback and “road testing” allowed for a refinement of the Index. Two indicators were removed, another was added, a few definitions were tweaked, and the county coverage was significantly expanded. Other changes include:

- A measure of income inequality was added to the Index to reflect the fact that the economic ladder is harder to climb when its rungs become too far apart. Today's large and growing socioeconomic inequality is increasingly presenting obstacles to those at the bottom and middle rungs. Highly unequal societies often struggle with economic inefficiency, reduced social cohesion and stability, and politics that too often favor the few in place of policies that benefit everyone.
- The indicator for postsecondary education was changed from the percentage of adults 25 and older with at least a bachelor's degree to the percentage with at least an associate degree, a response to a growing understanding that while postsecondary education is increasingly important in the job market, a traditional, four-year bachelor's degree program is not necessarily right for everyone.

Because of these refinements, the 2012 Index is not comparable to the Index launched at the November 2011 Opportunity Summit. However, a rerun of the 2011 Index using the 2012 indicators and methodologies means that comparisons are now fully possible. The new 2011 data is now visible at **www.OpportunityIndex.org**.

For an explanation of the modifications, see the Methodological Notes, available at **www.measureofamerica.org/opportunityindex**.

For more information, email **info@opportunitynation.org**.

“My ambition to take advantage of opportunity was never a problem, having access was.”

Kern Williams

Opportunity Scholar,
Real Estate Professional,
Year Up Boston Class of January 2010



2012 Opportunity Index
www.OpportunityIndex.org