

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

2022 STATE OF THE ECOSYSTEM REPORT

PREPARED BY

ROBERTO ARCE & FÁTIMA JIMÉNEZ GONZÁLEZ

Undergraduate Students, College of Education

SAÚL LOPEZ

Graduate Student, College of Education

GABRIEL VELEZ, PHD

Assistant Professor, College of Education

**CURTO
MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY
AUGUST 2022**

CONTENTS

03

Executive Summary

04

Vision, Mission, and Aims

07

History of BLEST Hub

10

2021-2022 Projects

12

Support and Services Ecosystem Map

13

Restorative Justice

15

Dual Enrollment

17

Youth Consultant Program

19

Research Efforts

24

Student Engagement

27

Next Steps

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In some ways, 2021-2022 was a difficult year for Black and Latino/a students in Milwaukee. As the pandemic stabilized and educational institutions and everyday life returned to some semblance of normal, its lasting impacts, reverberations, and deepened challenges became increasingly apparent.

In Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS), disciplinary gaps between Black students and their peers were once again at some of the highest levels ever. According to a report by the Center for Popular Democracy and Leaders Igniting Transformation, Black students were suspended at 32 percent higher than what would be equivalent to their share of the MPS student body. There were also numerous reports highlighting challenges in college access, with enrollment rates at community colleges declining and renewed attention to the fact that the percentage of Black students at University of Wisconsin-Madison has not been above 3% in decades.

While average college graduation rates improved across Wisconsin, Latino/a and Black students still lagged behind, with six-year rates at 50.9% and 44.3%, respectively, compared to 69% for White peers and 73.7% for Asian American ones.

In this context, the BLEST Hub continued with its core work, while creating new avenues to support the ecosystem of supports for Black and Latino/a students in Milwaukee. In the report, we detail the BLEST Hub's background and history and our efforts in 2021-2022 to expand on those foundations. We recognize that much of our work is still in development. We are continually learning, humbled by the extent and strength of others' efforts, and trying to amplify best practices and build bridges.

The work to support Black and Latino/a students is ever growing and evolving, and the BLEST Hub's efforts are just a small part of a broader movement and network engaging, uplifting, and centering these young people.

As we did in 2021, we frame this report as an effort in transparency and a call to others to engage with us, challenge us, use our resources, and come together to form greater synergies and be a more powerful collective catalyst.

MAIN EFFORTS IN 2021-2022

1. Growing and updating the ecosystem map visualization
2. Engaging with the local restorative justice community and laying the groundwork for supporting the growth of this work across the region and beyond
3. Beginning to scan the dual enrollment landscape in Milwaukee and Wisconsin
4. Expanding our research efforts to include Hispanic Serving Institution work and MATC student experience
5. Starting a youth consultant pilot program to integrate young people's voice into our work
6. Building a network of graduate and undergraduate students researchers

Vision, Mission, & Aims

Vision Statement

Our vision with the BLEST Hub is to contribute to improving life outcomes for Black and Latino/a students in the Milwaukee area by strengthening spaces and connections that support our youth during periods of transition, from middle school through post-secondary completion and/or fulfilling and stable employment.

This broad vision encompasses:

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

Our Mission

Our mission with the BLEST Hub is to build a concrete understanding of the ecosystem of supports for Black and Latino/a students in Milwaukee from middle school through post-secondary completion and/or fulfilling and stable employment. We also aim to lay the foundation for providing logistical, informational and catalytic support to these students and the organizations and institutions serving them.

Underlying this mission and our connected actions is a commitment to be attentive to our positionality. For those of us at CURTO, we are especially cognizant of ourselves as adults embedded within a private, Jesuit, Predominantly and Historically White Institution of higher education. Our efforts seek to be open to the needs, voices, and perspectives of young people themselves and those whose work is committed to serving them. Concretely, this entails aiming to center and amplify students (including giving them space to share in the process), as well as to not replicate or complicate the efforts of others. We do this by being particularly attentive to organizations' resources and the time and humanity of employees, advocates, and activists.

Vision, Mission, & Aims

Aims

It is our aim to understand the strengths and needs of Black and Latino/a students as well as the supports present at points of transition in their lives. During our work with students in and out of school settings—and as educators, researchers, parents, and community members—we have experienced a lack of communication, coordination, and collaboration among organizations and institutions that seek to serve young people of color. This may be one reason for the short lifespan of many initiatives that seek to improve the life outcomes of Black and Latino/a students in Milwaukee.

What we can offer Milwaukee

We offer Milwaukee up-to-date information regarding the state of the services that we, as a city, offer our students. We are calling this process the mapping of our ecosystem because collectively, our programs, services, and outreach efforts create a web that has the potential to sustain and support the flourishing of our youth through mutually beneficial relationships. This process of mapping our ecosystem allows us to design a trusting space for communication, collaboration and coordination among organizers, activists, educators, government officials and academics.

What we can offer organizations

What we offer organizations is a safe space that is independent of city politics and funding sources. Such a space can sustain conversations across sectors and organizations in order to collectively build our capacity as a city with the aim of better supporting the development of our youth. It is within this space that we offer an intellectual hub where best practices, key metrics, and research can be identified and shared with all.

What we can offer our Black and Latino/a students

We offer our Black and Latino/a students in Milwaukee practical and effective programming that supports their development where there are gaps in such services. We offer our students timely information about available resources, opportunities, and organizations as they navigate key transition points. We cannot do any of this without the active engagement of our youth and their voices across all sectors and throughout the process necessary to develop our understanding of Milwaukee as an ecosystem. Therefore, our most important contribution and desire is to make visible the voices of our youth and to be influenced by their lived experiences.

ACTIVITIES TO FULFILL MISSION

In 2021-2022, our activities built on foundational work from the previous two years. We focused on developing and sharing better understandings of the ecosystem, best practices, the needs of organizations and students, and opportunities for amplifying the ongoing work. Some activities are new and others are extensions or continuations of previous undertakings.

CURRENTLY, WE ARE ENGAGED IN FIVE EFFORTS:

1. Dialoguing with organizations, activists, and institutional offices and actors

Meeting with different organizations and actors whose work involves supporting Black and Latino/a students in high school, and specifically thinking about the transitions to post-secondary education and employment

2. Creating publicly available, useable resources

Continuing to expand and update the ecosystem map, while adding further resources, such as a timeline

3. Engaging in targeted research projects

Gathering student perspectives and experiences in relation to Milwaukee, their institution of higher education, and their career thinking

4. Interpreting/analyzing/understanding metrics and measurements used in this ecosystem by diverse actors

Collecting and systematizing the ways that success in this area is defined and measured by organizations, collaboratives, institutions, and students themselves

5. Running programming

Building on initiatives already housed at CURTO to harness the potential of Marquette University and its resources to create new support opportunities for Black and Latino/a students in Milwaukee



History of BLEST Hub

The BLEST Hub has emerged from years of work and the vision of two members of our leadership team: Dr. Robert Smith, Director of CURTO, and Walter Lanier, CEO of the African American Leadership Alliance of Milwaukee and community activist and organizer. Their personal experiences and interaction with various Milwaukee organizations and institutions across sectors (e.g., education, employment, health, mental health) brought to light the need for collaboration, synergy, and amplification to address the deep needs of Black and Latino/a students as they transition from high school to post-secondary education and beyond. The beginning formulation of these needs and projects was driven particularly by discussions and insight from leaders in the Black and Latino Male Achievement (BLMA) Office of MPS, who continues to be a partner in this initiative.

Initial Funding

In 2019, with initial funding received from The City of Milwaukee Community Block Grant Association, the BLEST Hub began as a collaboration with major educational institutions in Milwaukee, including Marquette University, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UWM), MATC, and Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS). The beginning stages involved multiple meetings with these partners, as well as representatives from Employ Milwaukee and the Black and Latino Male Achievement Department of MPS.

"The agenda is justice. A lot of people wonder what justice looks like. It can look many different ways, but right now it looks like all the power to the people."

- Khalil Coleman , MKE Activist

THE ADVISORY BOARD

From the inception of the BLEST Hub as a concept, a community advisory board has helped us by generating ideas, guiding plans for action and dissemination, and offering valuable insights. The role of the advisory board is strengthening and guiding the community-driven approach to this project, informing the development of the visual asset map, and guiding the strategic plan and priorities of the BLEST Hub. Regular meetings with this group have served to identify organizations in the ecosystem, provide feedback on initiatives and the asset map, and brainstorm connections across multiple sectors. This input has guided individual meetings with Milwaukee-area groups, collaboratives, and organizations working with Black and Latino/a students or issues related to their success.

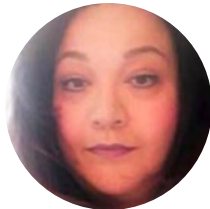
The advisory board is comprised of individuals who work in public schools, charter schools, and institutions of higher education. Below are some representatives that sit on the Advisory Board.

SELECT MEMBERS OF ADVISORY BOARD



Alberto Maldonado
Higher Education

Alberto Maldonado serves as director for UWM's Roberto Hernandez Center. The Roberto Hernández Center is dedicated to serving Latinx students at UWM as well as the Latinx population of southeastern Wisconsin.



Bevin Christie
Charter Schools

Bevin Christie is an educator who believes in educating the whole child and closing the achievement gap. She has worked in education and workforce development for over 20 years.



Paul Moga
Public Schools

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



Equan Burrows
Higher Education

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



David Emmanuelle Castillo
Education & Youth Empowerment

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



Nate Deans Jr.
Public Schools

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

Summary of 2021 Report

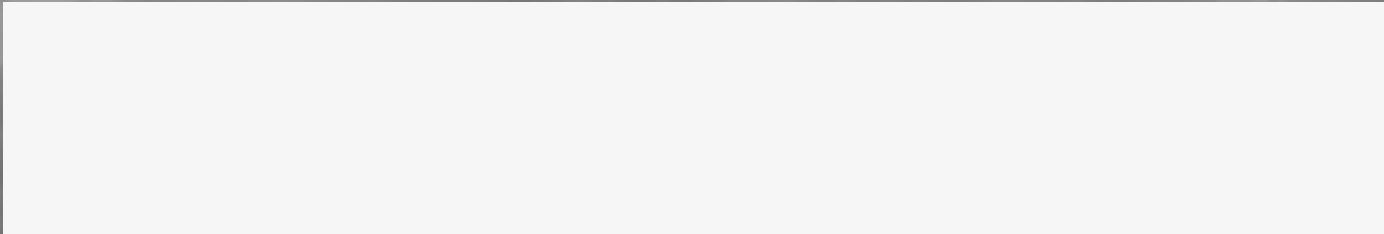
In the 2021 State of the Ecosystem Report, we highlighted concrete lessons learned from the beginning of our work, as well as next steps for our future endeavors. The report summarized our first year across various initiatives, with a focus on building of the ecosystem visualization, what we heard from community organizations and activists, and our dissemination efforts.

The 2021 report highlighted these takeaways from community conversations:

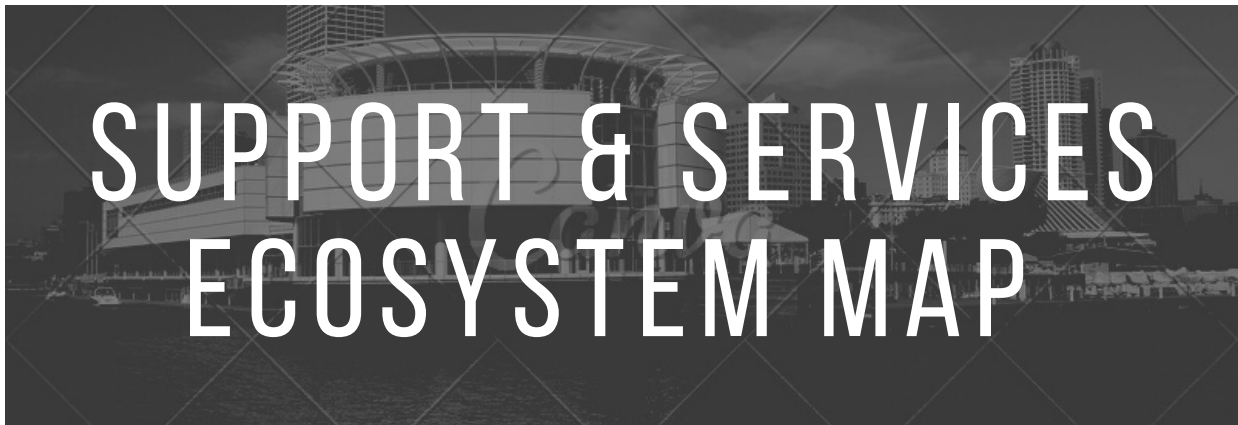
- **Ecosystem Visualization**
 - The visualization of the relationships among organizations through KUMU is helpful and could support serving Black and Latino/a students.
- **Persons of Color in Leadership**
 - Why is there a high burn out rate for Persons of Color in leadership, which in turn affects initiatives that serve Black and Brown students?
- **Measurement and Success**
 - What does success look like for these organizations and students themselves?
 - How do grassroots organizations and non-profits measure success? How does that differ from what grants require? What is obscured or lost by not including outcomes mattering to students and their communities?
- **Milwaukee, Segregation, and Geography**
 - How does geographical location—specifically its connection to segregation, inequality, and different experiences for Black and Latino/a students—impact services offered and received by youth? How does geographical location act as a gatekeeper for opportunities?
- **Trust and Leadership**
 - How does trust (or lack thereof) among Black, Brown, and White leaders offers possibilities and/or limit the services and quality that youth receive?

2021 STATE OF THE ECOSYSTEM REPORT COMMITMENTS

1. Continuing to meet with organizations and actors in the ecosystem to build the network and understanding of connections and gaps
2. Make the ecosystem visualization a public resource with systematized process for its continued development
3. Engage student voices and experiences through research, programming, and development of youth fellowship opportunities
4. Engage in 2021 LAB: Leadership and Brotherhood Summit for Young Men of Color to provide programming for youth participants
5. Collect and organize metrics for success across the ecosystem
6. Explore collaborative grant opportunities to extend our work
7. Publish and disseminate findings from focus group work with Marquette, UWM, and MATC students



Project Area	New or Continuing	Page Number
Ecosystem Map	Continuing	11
Restorative Justice	New	13
Dual Enrollment	New	15
Youth Consultant Program	New	17
Research	Continuing	19
Historical Scan	New	22
Student Engagement	Continuing	24



This past academic year, we continued to expand the scope and depth of our ecosystem map through meetings with community partners and the addition of more resources and information.

The map is an inherently continual process as the ecosystem is dynamic and shifting. While we recognize this ground-up approach has meant that we are missing some groups and important work, we strive to keep growing our list of resources, as well as alter our use of the KUMU software to make the map as valuable as possible to students and those who work with them.

Roots of Current Work

The ecosystem map began with a collaboration with graduate students in Marquette's College of Education. In Spring 2020, a team of graduate students attended meetings with community leaders, reached out to organizations to gather information, created and disseminated a survey for leaders of organizations, and searched online platforms. They produced a database of existing local programming with available information, which laid the groundwork for our current visualization.

DEVELOPMENTS IN ECOSYSTEM MAP

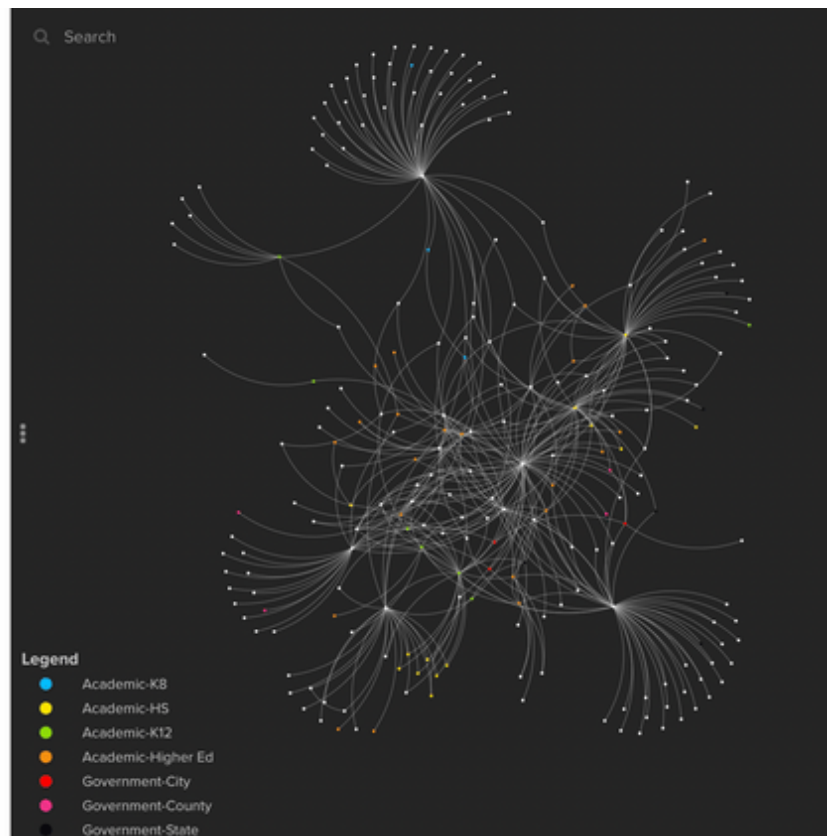
1. Met with and added information for over 30 organizations
2. Began to add direct contact information and geographical location of organizations
3. Incorporated over 50 new mental health organizations into ecosystem map
4. Shared the map and introductory presentation with various audiences, including as part of the Social Development Commission's Summit on Poverty, the HSI-Network of Wisconsin yearly meetings, a webinar for the Coalition of Urban & Metropolitan Universities, and with the Education Deans of Greater Milwaukee
5. Began conversations with Near West Side Partners, 211, IMPACT Connect

SUPPORT & SERVICES ECOSYSTEM MAP

Milwaukee Black and Latino/a Youth Ecosystem Map BLEST - CURTO

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

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



SCAN QR CODE TO ACCESS

KUMU MAP



USE LINK BELOW TO ACCESS MAP

PRESENTATION

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

[Orientation Presentation Link](#)



Building on our focus on supporting holistic, systematic efforts, our 2021 efforts included expanding our work to support restorative justice work with and led by youth across the city, region, and even internationally. These initiatives are led by Dr. Troy Washington, a seasoned restorative justice practitioner and visiting professor at Marquette.

Restorative Justice Summit

On Saturday, April 9, Marquette University and the Center for Urban Research, Teaching, and Outreach (CURTO) hosted a restorative justice summit. This meeting introduced the core tenets of restorative justice, including community healing, forgiveness, and sociocultural awareness. The theme was community building with an emphasis on restorative justice as a conduit for creating equity among community members. Participants discussed strategies for implementing restorative justice in their careers, which included jobs as librarians, psychologists, and students, among others. External partners provided general resources and additional support while community members engaged in extensive dialogue around community related issues.

The event showcased numerous community members, as well as several local and campus figures in restorative justice research and practice, including:

- Dr. Troy Washington, restorative justice practitioner and professor of education at Marquette University
- Stephen Jackson, renowned restorative justice practitioner and Director of Equity and Antiracism at the Oak Park Public Library
- Arielle Mayer, youth organizer at Safe and Sound
- Dr. Heather Hlavka, restorative justice practitioner at Milwaukee Turners and professor of social and cultural sciences at Marquette University

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

BLEST Hub Global Initiative

Over the past several years it has become clear that including a global perspective for understanding social justice has great value for minoritized students. This typically means implementing an educational model that informs students about ways to address conflict and resolve issues in society.

Having this project be a global experience for college students adds a level of reality and practicality to the learning experience. It is also increasingly common for students to work with students in other countries.

Thus, although cross-cultural educational programs are very successful, they could be improved by including an international component which would make them even stronger learning experiences. Working across international boundaries provides many learning opportunities (e.g., understanding the global context of situations and cultural differences in the workplace, dealing with language barriers, time zone issues, and other obstacles).

In 2022, BLEST Hub began working with Saint Louis University Madrid to coordinate a global exchange project. Dr. Washington worked with the Saint Louis University Madrid in addressing their social justice issues through a restorative justice certification program.

This was facilitated by establishing an exchange model where faculty and doctoral students from the BLEST Hub would sponsor restorative justice initiatives to be done in different (selected) countries. The inaugural program was held at Saint-Louis University Madrid and was led by Dr. Washington and Dr. Paul Vita of Saint Louis University Madrid. The results were very successful based on the responses from students.



Our 2022 efforts have involved working with people from UWM and the Higher Education Research Association (HERA) in creating a working group that gathers data on dual enrollment and equity in Milwaukee. We have also connected with representatives from the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and City Forward Collective as they have been able to assist with the development of this initiative. In January 2022, BLEST Hub moved forward with Dual Enrollment efforts to better understand and support this work. The overall goal is to be a center for data on dual enrollment in the greater Milwaukee area and a driver of equity in this space. We began by collecting information on policies and programs along with data available on dual enrollment. In addition, we aim to analyze equity issues that are prevalent within dual enrollment programs. As we continued to compile key information for our Dual Enrollment Report, we met with people from UWM, HERA, DPI, MPS, and City Forward Collective through the Spring 2022 Semester.

SELECTED MEETINGS AND DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Meetings Include:

- Karin Smith - Dual Enrollment Education Consultant, WI DPI
- Eric Hill - Regional Career Pathways Coordinator, CESA #1
- Patricia Hoben - President/Executive Director, City Forward Collective
- Vicki Bott - Dual Enrollment Manager, UWM
- Margo Leone - Assistant Director of Transfer Admissions, Marquette
- James Sokolowski - Postsecondary Engagement Coordinator, MPS

Documents Reviewed Include:

- 2020 Legislative Interim Research Report on Dual Enrollment
- 2021 WTCS System-wide Equity Report
- Wisconsin Technical College System - Dual Credit Report
- National Alliance of Concurrent Enrollment Partnerships' "The Dual Enrollment Playbook: A Guide to Equitable Acceleration for Students"
- "College in High School Alliance: Reporting and Using Dual Enrollment Data to Improve Equity"

DUAL ENROLLMENT

Meetings allowed for further conversations about data on dual enrollment. In addition, we gained a deeper understanding of the challenges and benefits that may come with dual enrollment programming. We also supplemented these meetings by reviewing numerous reports, documents, and academic papers.

Main Takeaways

1

Equity issues are prevalent: for example, Black, Latino, and multiracial students still take concurrent enrollment at about half the rate of white students.

2

Key barriers surrounding a dual enrollment program include funding, eligibility, and certification issues.

3

Students who participate in dual enrollment programs have higher academic achievement, perform better on state assessments, are more likely to graduate from high school and enroll in and graduate from college, and are less likely to need developmental or special support in college.

4

- Some recommendations and goals for dual enrollment programs include:
- Adopt multiple measures for dual enrollment eligibility
 - Create pathways/opportunities for students to obtain college credit through high school courses
 - Provide support and advising for student success, specifically for students who have been historically underserved (i.e., demonstrate that equity is a priority)

5

- Meetings raised questions to consider in relation to dual enrollment:
- What are we hearing from schools regarding dual enrollment?
 - What are other states doing with dual enrollment?
 - How can equity be promoted across educational contexts?



YOUTH CONSULTANT PROGRAM

As part of our efforts to engage more youth voice in our work, we developed a pilot program that launched in the fall of 2021. Our goal was to engage a small group of high school students in a paid advisory role, meeting regularly to solicit feedback and generate action items for the BLEST Hub. We also provided academic, college application, and scholarship support, and created opportunities for them to engage with academics and other resources on topics of interest to them.

Our inaugural cohort of youth consultants included four students (two from Carmen High Schools, one from Nicolet High School, and one from Reagan High School). The group met 6 times from late fall of 2021 through late spring of 2022, and meetings were supplemented with one-on-one tutoring and college application work.

Session	Focus
1	Individual meetings with youth consultants to get to know them and their goals and plans
2	Group introductions & overview of CURTO, BLEST Hub
3	Scholarship workshop and discussing ecosystem map
4	Engagement in BLEST Hub Restorative justice summit
5	Scholarship support and discussion on racism using academic sources to drive conversation
6	Presentation on admissions and preparing for college

YOUTH CONSULTANT PROGRAM

Feedback and Lessons Learned from Youth Consultants:

Across these meetings and work with our pilot program of youth consultants, we heard several clear themes about the needs and perspectives of them and their peers. These are not meant to be representative of all Black and Latino/a students or youth in Milwaukee, but rather to highlight some important themes and areas that we can focus on in our own work.

The themes from these young people can be summarized as:

- A significant need for support with finding and completing scholarships and applications to college, including the FAFSA
- Interest in better understanding the effects of racism, with a focus on actionable ways to address and push back on it
- A desire to be connected and able to engage in leadership development opportunities
- Academic support is always welcome, and can particularly serve young people in feeling more prepared for college
- Youth are searching for opportunities for in-person interaction, but there are real barriers and obstacles to bringing them together across the city
- They enjoyed and found valuable the opportunity to engage with their peers in a non-school, non-extracurricular activity setting

In response to these, we are committing to the following:

1. Invite different schools' multicultural/Latinx/Black student unions to events
2. Expand this program into 2022-2023 with greater focus on leadership development
3. Recruit student participants from a greater range of schools



NAVIGATING HIGHER EDUCATION IN MILWAUKEE: BLACK AND BROWN STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

In 2020 and 2021, BLEST Hub helped conduct focus groups with students at Marquette, UWM, and MATC that explored Black, Latino/a and/or first-generation students' experiences on their campuses and of Milwaukee. This work was supported by an Advancing Social Equity Research Grant from Marquette's Office of Institution Diversity and Inclusion and was coordinated with student success efforts. In total, four student researchers were trained, and 11 conversations were held with 43 participants during the months of April and May 2021.

Themes across institutions regarding the experience of Milwaukee included:

1. Diverse, but segregated
2. Family members and friends often think of the city as unsafe
3. Transportation is a barrier to engaging with the city
4. Marquette and UWM campuses as insulated bubbles
5. MATC students feel the campus represents Milwaukee, but this fact is not recognized or celebrated

As a note, this work is also being disseminated via academic channels. We are in the process of developing a manuscript comparing the student responses across institutions, and we have published a research report on student responses to institutional messaging in the journal *Emerging Adulthood*.

"It's been happening and occurring since my freshman year—racial incidents. And it's crazy that it's still happening. It seems like every single time it's the same. It's a cycle, it's okay, let's host a town hall meeting. Let's talk about it. And then pretty much there's no follow up."

RESEARCH

BEING A HISPANIC SERVING INSTITUTION: STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

In collaboration with the Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) Steering Committee at Marquette University and with the support of a Race, Ethnicity, and Indigenous Studies research grant, we ran five focus groups with a total of 26 Latinx students in the spring and early summer of 2022. Our goal was to explore how they envisioned an HSI campus, what students felt about the Latinx community on campus, and what barriers and challenges the community encountered.

This project was conceptualized as a beginning; our goal is to expand to other campuses in the greater Milwaukee area to build better understandings of what the HSI movement means for students and how they envision an HSI campus.

Our participants came from various backgrounds and places on campus, including qualifying for Federal Pell grants or receiving free/reduced school lunch in high school, being a first-generation student, and/or being a commuter student.

Across the focus groups, we identified four themes:

HOMESPACES - Overall, there was a sense that the Latinx community at Marquette was very strong, and that key spaces—including clubs, organizations, academic programs, and residence communities—were important for building connections.

BARRIERS TO BELONGING - Participants described developing a sense of belonging on campus as difficult, particularly early in college. Students had to find resources or friend groups on their own or by relying on word of mouth. There were also divisions by Latinxs of different origins and socioeconomic status and with different racial/ethnic minorities.

REPRESENTATION - Students were split between feeling like Marquette had strong or poor diversity in enrollment and representation on campus. Still, students largely agreed having more Latinx students, faculty, and staff was important to their success, and many mentioned specific individuals like them with whom they connected.

SUPPORTS NEEDED - Many participants detailed needing more resources for Latinx students. Financial resources were the most often mentioned barrier to thriving, with a focus on scholarship dollars or other money for tuition. Participants also noted a disconnect between home/school cultures and HSI aspirations and reality.

“Although there may not be many of us, we know how to connect with one another and make it so that [the] few that are here - we can uplift one another, like create our own spaces.”

RESEARCH

MATC STUDENT SUCCESS AND THE FAST FUND INITIATIVE

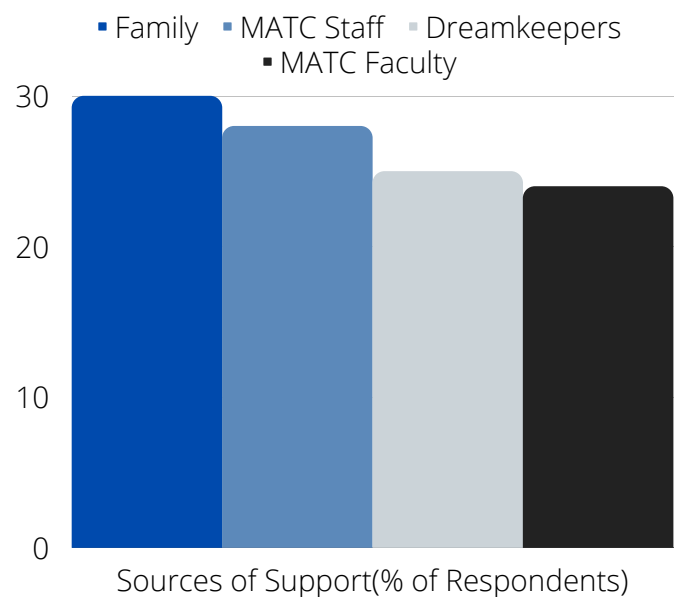
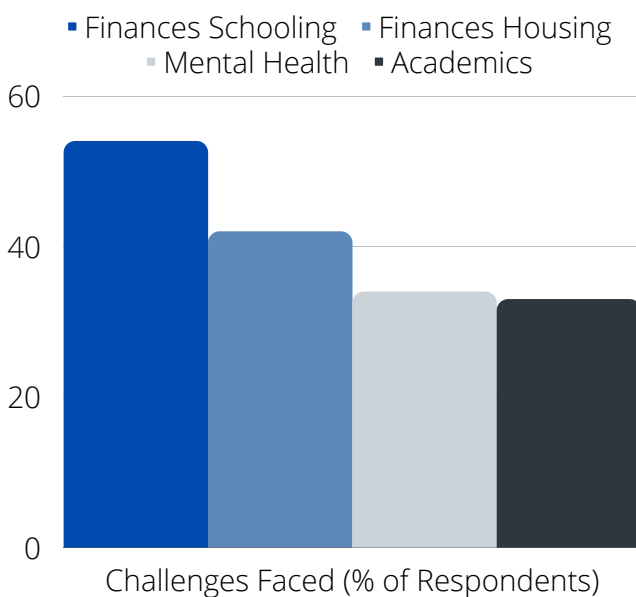
In collaboration with MATC's FAST Fund—a non-profit run by MATC faculty that provides emergency financial assistance to students—we explored how MATC students navigate accessing resources during their educational trajectory. The study aimed to better understand student needs and barriers to success, while supporting FAST Fund in its work providing emergency resources to MATC students and also better informing understandings of the barriers to student success in Milwaukee.

FAST Fund recipients and applicants were sent an online survey. In total, 152 participants responded in May 2022, with the majority being current students. Two-thirds of respondents were Black, over a tenth identified as Latino/a/x, and almost all reported having incomes below \$50,000, with the majority reporting under \$10,000.

Generally, participants rated their MATC experience positively (with an average rating of over 8 out of 10), and many were deeply thankful for the supports they received.

Some other takeaways included:

- A need for better communication about supports and networks coordinating them (like a systematized and well-connected way that students were supported).
- FAST Fund was an especially critical support for covering diverse financial needs. Many noted it helped achieved goals or prevented them from dropping out.
- Not knowing where to get information and not hearing back or receiving slow responses were significant challenges.
- Students experienced various hurdles or obstacles in the financial aid system (e.g., not available via emergency support, applying for financial aid appeal, etc.).
- Broadly, finances were one of the greatest barriers to their success, including the cost of tuition, books, and fees.



RESEARCH

HISTORICAL SCAN OF THE ECOSYSTEM

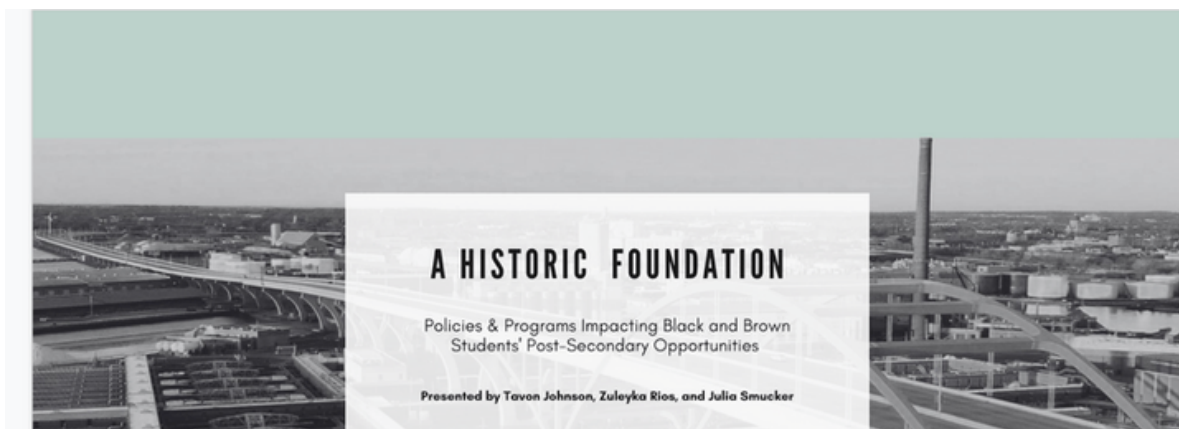
As part of our efforts to extend an understanding of the ecosystem around Black and Latino/a students in Milwaukee over time, we recruited a graduate student team engaged in their capstone project.

After planning meetings, we agreed that the team would spend the semester working on this project with the following two goals:

1. compile a database of the programs and policies impacting access to postsecondary opportunities in Milwaukee
2. analyze our findings to demonstrate a playbook of successes

Their process for addressing these aims included researching, gathering, and documenting programs for MATC, MU, UWM, and MPS with links, dates, descriptions, and findings; interviewing key stakeholders with experience in three of the four institutions of interest and summarizing key insights; gathering information on historical programs and policies and synthesizing them in a timeline; researching trends in student graduation and post-secondary plans from the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) website; and researching institutional data on enrollment, retention, and graduation rates from institutional websites and the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).

The results of this process will inform the work of BLEST Hub and contribute to the construction of a publicly available resource to document the history and development of the ecosystem.



The graduate student team was comprised of Tavon Johnson, Zuleyka Rios, and Julia Smucker, all Marquette master's students.

RESEARCH

HISTORICAL SCAN OF THE ECOSYSTEM

At the end of the spring semester in May 2022, the graduate student team presented the BLEST Hub leadership with the database and this summary of findings. We are currently working on developing the database into a public-facing resource, and we offer below a summary of findings from their work. We present these not as definitive statements, but rather as questions meriting further consideration.

Takeaways

There are many college access programs working in silos

Access programs are often too limited in scope to create institutional-level change

Milwaukee's higher education pipeline shows improvements for Hispanic students

Milwaukee's higher education pipeline is not working for Black students

Higher-level policies play a significant role in funding and encouraging urgency to address access



The BLEST Hub, with the support of CURTO's research assistant program, expanded its work through deeper engagement with Marquette students. Over the year, we engaged a broad array of graduate and undergraduate students in various projects, with most of the students identifying as Black and/or Latino/a/x and coming from Milwaukee. Their insight, perspectives, and work were invaluable to advancing our efforts to map and support the ecosystem in the city.

This year, BLEST Hub worked with:

- Five graduate students - three doctoral and two masters students
- Three of these students were mentors for undergraduates and have become leaders in supporting ecosystem mapping efforts across the city
- The other oversaw our youth consultant program
 - 2 undergraduates during Spring 2022, including one Urban Scholars student
 - 3 undergraduates during Summer 2022
 - 3 graduate students who served as co-investigators and focus group facilitators for research work

STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

Fátima Jiménez González

Undergraduate Student Research Assistant, College of Education

My work mostly focused on speaking with individuals that support our greater Milwaukee community through the work they put into carrying out countless programs and organizations which fostering positive and bright futures for our Black and Brown youth. While it may seem minimal, this part of our research was vital for creating an initial channel of communication between these organizations and our research team, as well as for gathering first-hand accounts from these leaders about what they do, why they do it, and who they work in partnership with. The biggest takeaway I obtained, after speaking with Quentin Prince from Journey House, was the reminder of the importance in recognizing that "it's not a matter of 'my kids versus their kids, it's a matter of them being OUR kids and what we can offer to them as a multitude of organizations." It is crucial to understand that the community organizations in our city are not working in competition with one another; if anything, they are working in harmony so that our youth can thrive and live successful and content lives.

STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

*Saúl Lopez- Graduate Student Research Assistant, College of Education
Doctoral Student*


This past year I have facilitated trainings around the ecosystem mapping effort for CURTO Undergraduate Interns and graduate students from UWM's Institute for Systems Change and Peacebuilding. The trainings varied from explaining how to conduct a community conversation to detailing the processes behind the BLEST Hub mapping project.

Thanks to a Summer Research Mentor Award from Marquette's Office of Research and Innovation my undergraduate mentee, Roberto Arce, and I have taken a deeper look into the city's South Side. This summer's community conversations with South Side organizations have been both productive and educational. We began with a scan of the current organizations that were already part of the map. The initial conversations were interesting given the breadth of partnerships organizations held with both high school students and international entities.

Language and biculturalism play an essential role. In education, bilingual staff and programming are key to engaging with the community. Local organizations that hired local talent seemed to move faster by implementing new or updated programming directed to the community. Religious organizations' impact and influence became palpable, particularly through deep connections between higher education and the Archdiocese or private Catholic high schools in the area.

Selected Student Summer Meetings	Selected Student Dissemination Efforts
Mexican Fiesta	Social Development Commission, Summit on Poverty
Alverno College	MKE Neighborhood News Service: Community Post
Hunger Task Force	CURTO Conversations Podcast
VIA CDC	Marquette University College of Education Magazine: "On the Map"
St.Patrick's Jesuit parish	Presentation: UW-Milwaukee's Institute for Systems Change and Peacebuilding.
United Community Center	KUMU training for CURTO/ISCP projects
Secure Futures	Presentation: MATC DEI Task Force

NEXT STEPS



As we enter our third year of work, our goal is to continue to stabilize, create sustainability, and grow the core projects that we have engaged in. The last two years have been a process of definition and development amid a turbulent context of the COVID-19 pandemic. We now look to turn what we have learned into actionable support for various actors across the Milwaukee area.

With this in mind, this report – as did last year’s – serves also as a call to engage and collaborate. We humbly ask for activists, professionals, community members, intellectuals, and particularly youth in the Milwaukee area to challenge us and help us in being a positive support to efforts to contribute to the capacity and thriving of Black and Latinx students.

COMMITMENTS FOR 2022-2023 ACADEMIC YEAR

- 1) Continue iterative development and expansion of ecosystem mapping
- 2) Move from Youth Consultant as a pilot program to an established pillar of BLEST Hub work
- 3) Support the work of Youth Forward Milwaukee and its youth-led projects
- 4) Train, promote intellectual development, and draw on the expertise and strength of Marquette University Latinx and Black students
- 5) Support and extend research efforts
- 6) Develop a dual enrollment report with a focus on data and equity gaps in the greater Milwaukee area
- 7) Expand coordination and collaboration across our own campus, specifically with the College of Engineering
- 8) Turn our database of historical initiatives and the development of ecosystem into a public-facing resource

ABOUT US

PEOPLE BEHIND THE BLEST HUB



DR. ROBERT
SMITH



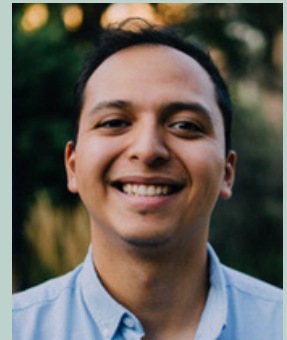
DR. GABRIEL
VELEZ



WALTER LANIER



DR. TROY
WASHINGTON



SAÚL LÓPEZ



MAX HERTEEN



MICHAEL
VAZQUEZ



FÁTIMA JIMÉNEZ
GONZÁLEZ



ROBERTO ARCE



KENDALL WATTS

OTHERS NOT
PICTURED:

DARRELL
CAMBPELL

STATE OF THE ECOSYSTEM

BLACK AND LATINO/A ECOSYSTEM AND SUPPORT TRANSITION HUB

CONTACT

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

AUGUST 2022