

BUILDING A BETTER BLUE MOUNTAIN REGION



A REPORT ON THE CURRENT & FUTURE WELL-BEING OF THE BLUE MOUNTAIN REGION
COMMISSIONED BY COMMUNITY COUNCIL, BLUE MOUNTAIN COMMUNITY FOUNDATION, SHERWOOD TRUST, AND
WALLA WALLA COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY HEALTH

ABOUT US

Community Council seeks to foster a civic culture that inspires a citizen-driven, consensus-based, problem-solving process to prepare the greater Walla Walla region for future growth, change, and challenges, in order to enhance the quality of life for everyone. The region includes Columbia and Walla Walla counties and northeastern Umatilla County, Oregon. Learn more at www.wwcommunitycouncil.org.

Blue Mountain Community Foundation connects people, charitable causes, and community needs to improve the quality of life for all in the Blue Mountain area through philanthropy. Learn more at www.bluemountainfoundation.org.

Sherwood Trust, founded by Donald & Virginia Sherwood, is a private foundation that serves the Walla Walla Valley as a catalyst to build the community's capacity and will to achieve the highest, sustainable quality of life for everyone. Learn more at www.sherwoodtrust.org.

Walla Walla County Department of Community Health improves the quality of life for its community through disease prevention, health promotion and public health protection programs. Learn more at web01.wwchhs.org.

Washington State Budget & Policy Center is an organization that conducts research to advance the well-being of all Washingtonians. Learn more at www.budgetandpolicy.org.

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INTRODUCTION

The Blue Mountain Region (BMR) sits in the southeast corner of Washington state and spans across the border into northeastern Umatilla County, Oregon. The region is home to a diverse and growing population and economy, which includes world-class institutions of higher education, bountiful agriculture, award-winning wineries, innovative small businesses, and a strong sense of family and community.

In the fall of 2015, Community Council – in collaboration with Blue Mountain Community Foundation, Sherwood Trust, and Walla Walla County Department of Community Health (**Box 1**) – partnered with the Washington State Budget & Policy Center to explore trends in the BMR to deepen their understanding of the most pressing issues facing children, families, workers, and communities.

This report summarizes the work of Community Council and its partners.

BOX 1: PROJECT PARTNERS

COMMUNITY COUNCIL seeks to foster a civic culture that inspires a citizen-driven, consensus-based problem-solving process to prepare the greater Walla Walla region for future growth, change, and challenges, in order to enhance the quality of life for everyone. The region includes Columbia and Walla Walla counties and northeastern Umatilla County, Oregon.
www.wcommunitycouncil.org

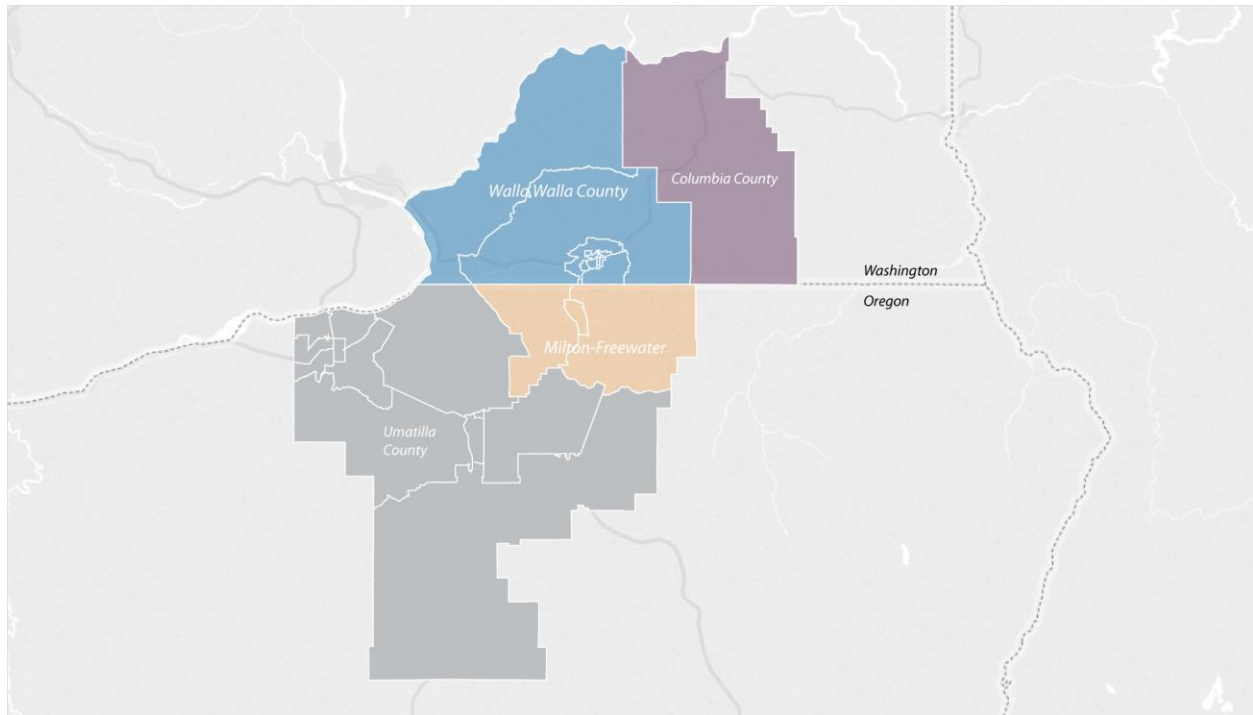
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FIGURE 1. BLUE MOUNTAIN REGION OF WASHINGTON & OREGON



GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The goal of this project was to produce and use data to provide a deeper understanding of the people and conditions in the BMR (Figure 1), in order to identify policies and programs that will improve social and economic well-being in areas of interest, such as economic security, health, education, environment, and crime. Specifically, the partnership aimed to:

- Identify a set of illustrative indicators in each domain to provide a preliminary understanding of pressing issues facing children, families, workers, and communities in the BMR;
- Produce a product that will advance the work of the BMR stakeholders toward achieving their long-term goals; and
- Work with BMR stakeholders to identify next steps on how the information produced can be used to advance priorities in the BMR that will result in improved conditions for children, families, workers, and communities in the region.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

The mission of Community Council is to facilitate a citizen-driven, consensus-based problem-solving process to prepare the greater Walla Walla area for future growth, change, and challenges. In collaboration with its regional partners, Community Council worked with the Budget & Policy Center to identify a process that would deepen their understanding of regional trends.

The process identified is rooted in principles and a framework that believe in the use of data to drive better results for kids, families, and communities. However, our collaboration is unique in that it puts community voice and engagement at the center of interpreting what story emerges from the data, and – more importantly – how residents of the community want that story to change.

Our process was as follows:

- **Identify the starting point for a community data story.** At the request of the project partners, Budget & Policy Center used [The Progress Index](#) – a communications and analytical tool to measure the well-being of communities – as a starting point for building a community data story.

[The Progress Index](#) was created by Budget & Policy Center and asks a series of “kitchen-table” questions essential to community well-being, such as: *Do we have enough good jobs in our region? Are children entering school prepared to succeed? Is the air we breathe and water we drink safe? How many children are living in poverty? What are crime trends in our region?* In response to these questions, *The Progress Index* uses a set of indicators to provide communities with an initial understanding of how well they are doing on key areas of social and economic well-being, and a platform to ask deeper questions as communities determine for themselves what additional questions they have and/or that are deemed most important.

- **Conduct “data walks” with the community.** The next phase of the project was to use data from *The Progress Index* to engage community members convened by Community Council and their partners in a “data walk”. A data walk is a simple, but powerful way of engaging community members on what the data says about the well-being of their community. More importantly, it gives people the opportunity to make sense of the data as experts living the day-to-day experience in their communities.

Two data walks were conducted – one during the day on December 17, 2015, and one in the evening on February 25, 2016. More than 190 people attended, representing a broad swath of the community, including: students, business leaders, community-based organizations, academics, families, and people of color. The second event was held in the evening to be accessible to people who work during the day. It also provided free childcare as well as Spanish interpreters and bilingual materials.

- [Use findings to build community capacity and to inform local strategic planning efforts and community conversations.](#) Community Council and its partners are using the findings to inform several local planning efforts, and will continue engaging residents of the BMR to identify priorities for the region. In addition, the project partners want to identify the technological and human resource capacities needed to effectively and consistently monitor community conditions and trends to inform meaningful community conversations.

The following section summarizes the findings from *The Progress Index* data used to provide a preliminary snapshot of the BMR, followed by the results of the community data walks.

PROJECT RESULTS

STARTING THE STORY: BASIC TRENDS IN THE BLUE MOUNTAIN REGION

Below is a summary of the data used for the BMR data walks we conducted with community members. This data provided participants with a point of departure to discuss what was meaningful to them about their community, and what they desire for their community in the future. A summary of the participants' reactions to the data follows this section.

The Population of the Blue Mountain Region is Growing More Diverse, with Latinos Driving Population Growth [INFOGRAPHIC 1]

The population in the BMR has grown by six percent since 2000, although growth is not distributed evenly across the region. The majority of population growth is in Walla Walla County, while growth in Columbia County and Milton-Freewater has been relatively flat.

The population of BMR is diverse, with most of the population reporting their race as white (74 percent). However, there is a large (22 percent) and growing Latino population in the region, which is driving population growth. Notably, the BMR has a moderate degree of residential segregation, with distinct divisions between where Latino and white residents live.

HOW IS THE POPULATION OF THE BLUE MOUNTAIN REGION CHANGING?

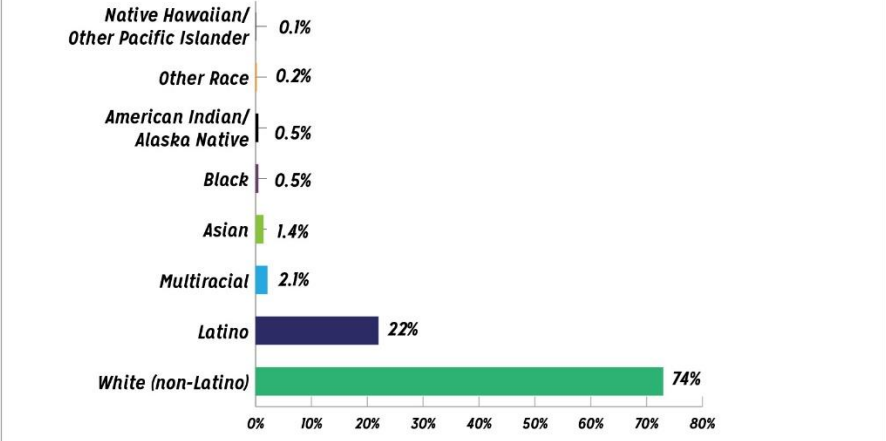
Narrative:

RACE & ETHNICITY: Most people (74%) in the Blue Mountain Region identify as white (non-Latino) racially. One in five people (22%) identify as Latino. The Latino population is driving population growth in the region.

MAP: There are distinct areas where Latino residents live, with an especially high concentration in Milton-Freewater. There is a notable dividing line between where Latino and white residents live surrounding downtown Walla Walla.

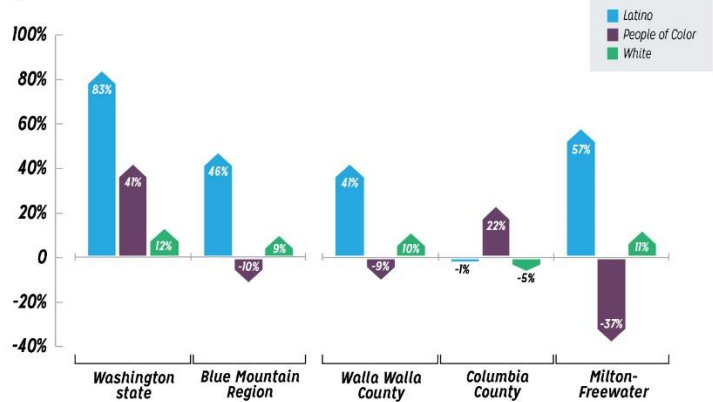
ONE IN FIVE PEOPLE IN THE BLUE MOUNTAIN REGION IDENTIFIES AS LATINO

Population by Race and Ethnicity, Blue Mountain Region, 2014



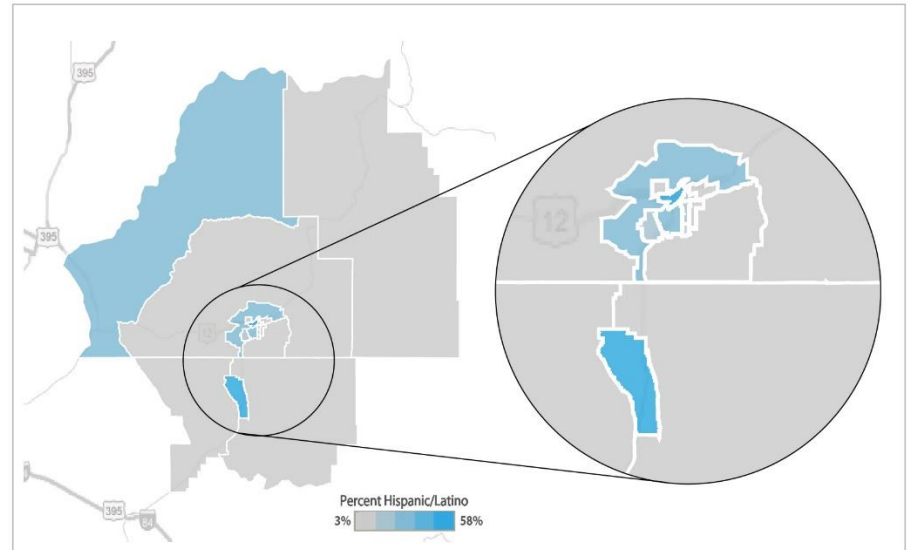
THE LATINO POPULATION IS DRIVING GROWTH IN THE BLUE MOUNTAIN REGION

Percent Change in Population by Race & Ethnicity, Washington State & Blue Mountain Region 2000 to 2014



*Race and ethnicity data in the 2000 Census is not mutually exclusive, therefore white includes people that identify as white (non-Latino) and Latino in this trend data.

PERCENT LATINO BY CENSUS TRACT, BLUE MOUNTAIN REGION, 2014



Sources: B&PC analysis of 5-Year American Community Survey Data, 2010-2014. B&PC analysis of 2000 Decennial Census & 5-Year American Community Survey Data, 2010-2014. Note: state penitentiary population was excluded from the population counts.

Economic Hardship is High throughout the Blue Mountain Region

[INFOGRAPHIC 2]

Various measures exist to estimate what it takes to meet basic needs and how basic needs vary across a state or region. Most of those measures agree that, with few exceptions, it takes *at least* 200 percent of the federal poverty line (FPL) (\$20,160 for a family of three – one parent and two children – in 2016) to meet basic needs in most regions of Washington state, and in many areas (e.g., Seattle, Spokane, Vancouver) much more than that.

The BMR has higher rates of economic hardship than the state overall. Four of every ten residents (40 percent) have an income below 200 percent FPL, a rate that is higher than the state as a whole (30 percent) and remains persistently high, even since the economy started to recover when the Great Recession ended in 2009.

The Latino population in the BMR has a higher rate of poverty (100 percent FPL) than their white neighbors, 29 percent compared to 15 percent, respectively. BMR residents born outside of the U.S. that have obtained citizenship are much less likely to live in poverty than their peers who are non-citizens – in fact, they have lower rates of poverty than their native-born peers. While economic hardship is high throughout the region, it is especially concentrated in areas where there is a higher concentration of Latino residents.

Note: Data in income below 200% FPL is not available for race, ethnicity, nativity, or census tract. Trend data in infographic 2 uses 200% FPL as an economic benchmark; 100% FPL is used to highlight racial, ethnic, and geographic disparities for people living in poverty.

DO PEOPLE IN THE BLUE MOUNTAIN REGION HAVE ECONOMIC SECURITY?

Narrative:

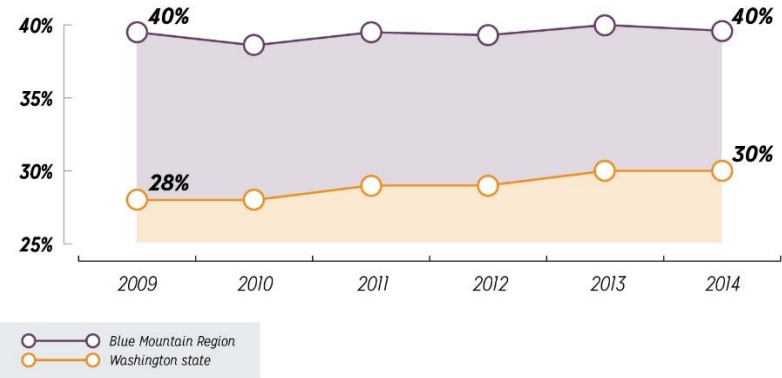
TREND: People living in the Blue Mountain Region have higher rates of economic hardship than Washingtonians overall.

RACE, ETHNICITY, & IMMIGRATION STATUS: Latino people have high rates of economic hardship compared to their white peers. People born outside of the U.S. who have obtained citizenship have lower rates of economic hardship than people yet to obtain citizenship, as well as those born in the U.S.

MAP: Economic hardship is high throughout the region, but especially in Milton-Freewater, as well as the center of the Latino community near downtown Walla Walla.

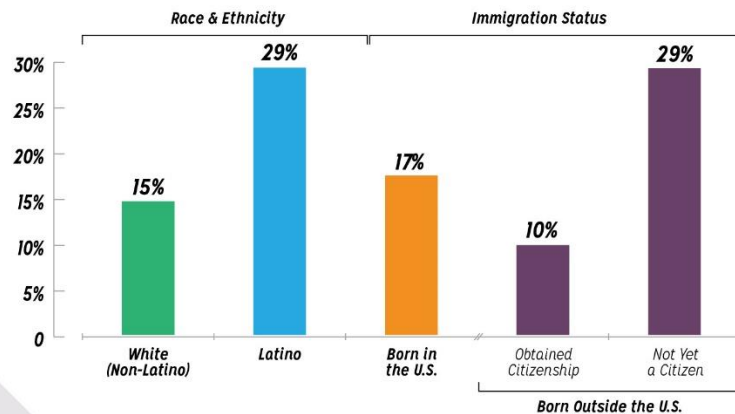
PEOPLE IN THE BLUE MOUNTAIN REGION HAVE HIGHER RATES OF ECONOMIC HARDSHIP THAN STATE AVERAGE

Percent of People Living Below 200% of the Federal Poverty Line, Blue Mountain Region 2014

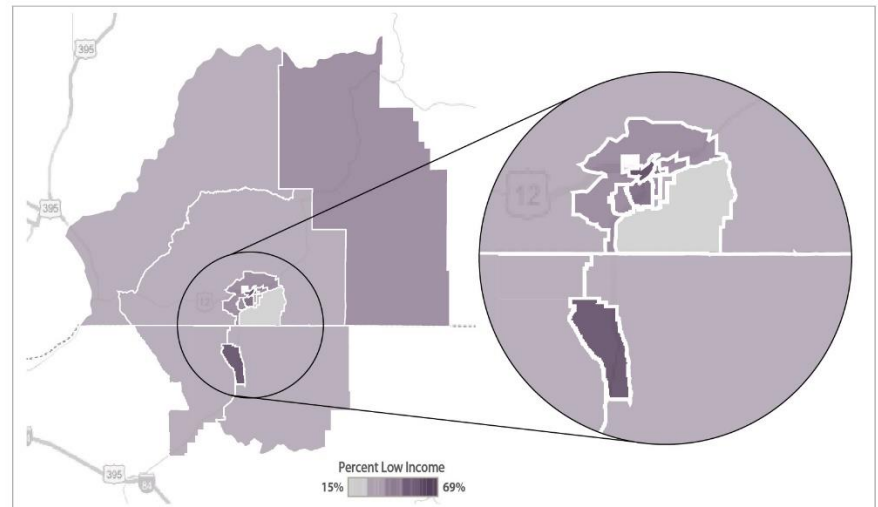


LATINO PEOPLE HAVE HIGH RATES OF ECONOMIC HARDSHIP AS DO PEOPLE BORN OUTSIDE OF THE U.S. WHO ARE YET TO OBTAIN CITIZENSHIP

Percent of People Living Below 200% of the Federal Poverty Line by Race, Ethnicity, & Nativity, Blue Mountain Region, 2014



PERCENT OF PEOPLE LIVING BELOW 200% OF THE FEDERAL POVERTY LINE BY CENSUS TRACT, BLUE MOUNTAIN REGION, 2014



Source: B&PC analysis of 5-Year American Community Survey, 2010-2014

Cost-of-Living is Increasing Faster than Household Incomes, Making it Harder to Get Ahead

[INFOGRAPHICS 3 & 4]

The cost-of-living has increased dramatically in the BMR since 2000, and income has not kept pace. In Walla Walla County, the cost-of-living has increased 55 percent since 2000, and 52 percent in Columbia County. Median household income, however, has only risen 33 percent in Walla Walla County and 23 percent in Columbia County over the same time period.

Child care and health care are the main drivers of increased cost-of-living over time in the BMR. Incomes have not kept up partly because of stagnant wages and incomes for the state as a whole – few of the top industries in the region today pay an average annual wage that allows a family of three to meet basic needs on one income. In Columbia County, for example, there are no top industries in which the average annual wage would allow a family with two young children to meet their basic needs on one income. In Walla Walla County, there is only one industry (manufacturing) where the average annual wage covers basic needs on one income, and in Umatilla County there are two industries (government and health care/social services).

In 2000, a young family earning a median income was able to not only meet basic needs, but also to get ahead. Today, a young family would not even meet basic needs with a median income. Child care for two young children costs over one-third of monthly median income. Notably, child care is considered a “burden” that puts families at financial risk when the cost exceeds 10 percent of household income. When child care and housing are considered together, the combined cost can exceed over half of a young family of three’s monthly resources, making it very hard to meet basic needs and get ahead.

This trend has serious consequences for the well-being of the BMR region. Research increasingly shows that children who lack economic security – even for a short period of time – experience lifelong impacts. And families that do not have enough food or stable housing can experience levels of stress so high that it becomes “toxic” to their well-being. Economic security of children and families is foundational to healthy communities.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO MEET BASIC NEEDS IN THE BLUE MOUNTAIN REGION? DO JOBS PAY ENOUGH TO MEET BASIC NEEDS?

Narrative:

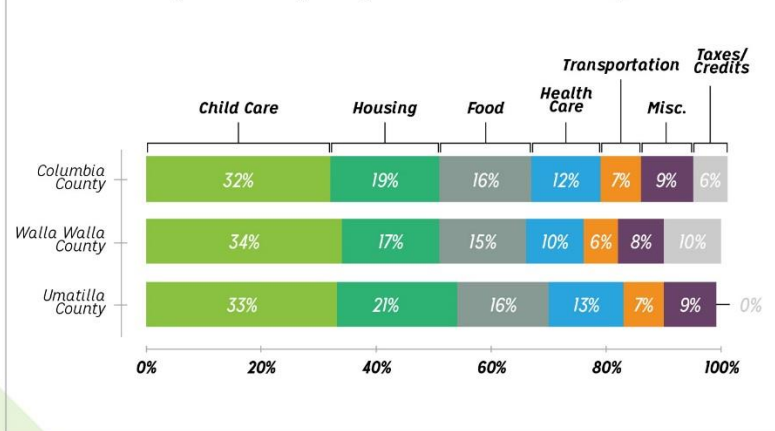
COST OF LIVING: The cost to meet basic needs for a young family varies across the Blue Mountain Region: In Walla Walla County it costs \$50,908 for a family of three to meet basic needs, followed by \$42,218 in Columbia County and \$36,476 in Umatilla County.

BIGGEST EXPENSES: Child care and housing are the two biggest expenses for families in the region.

WHAT JOBS PAY: Few of the top industries in the region pay an average annual wage that allows a family of three to meet basic needs on one income. In Columbia County, there are no industries in which the average annual wage would allow a parent of two young children to meet their basic needs. In Walla Walla, there is only one industry (Manufacturing) where the average annual wage covers basic needs, and in Umatilla there are two (Government and Health Care/Social Services).

CHILD CARE AND HOUSING TWO BIGGEST EXPENSES FOR FAMILIES IN BLUE MOUNTAIN REGION

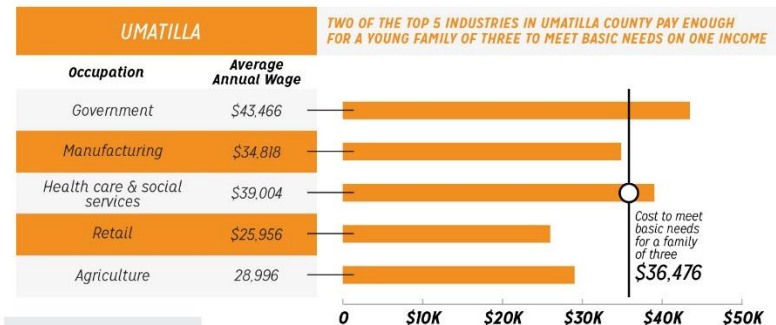
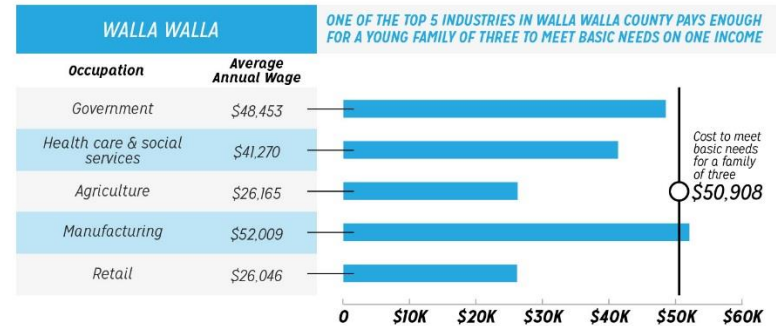
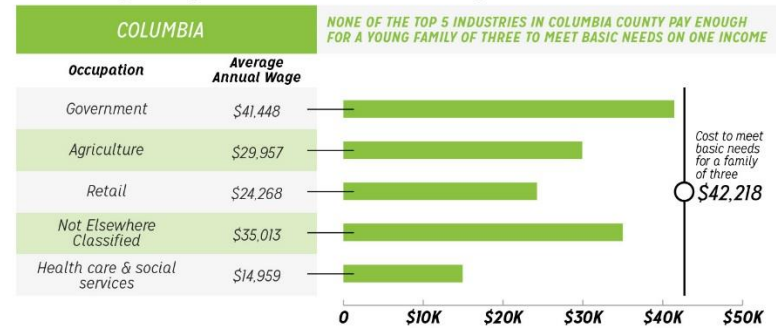
Basic-Needs Budget for a Young Family of Three, Blue Mountain Region, 2014



Sources: The 2014 Self-Sufficiency Standard for Washington and Oregon. Census of Quarterly Employment & Wages, 2014 & 2014 Self-Sufficiency Standard for Washington and Oregon.

FEW INDUSTRIES PAY AN AVERAGE ANNUAL WAGE THAT COVERS BASIC NEEDS FOR A FAMILY OF THREE ON ONE INCOME

Top Five Industries and What they Pay vs. What it Costs to Meet Basic Needs for a Young Family of Three, Blue Mountain Region 2014



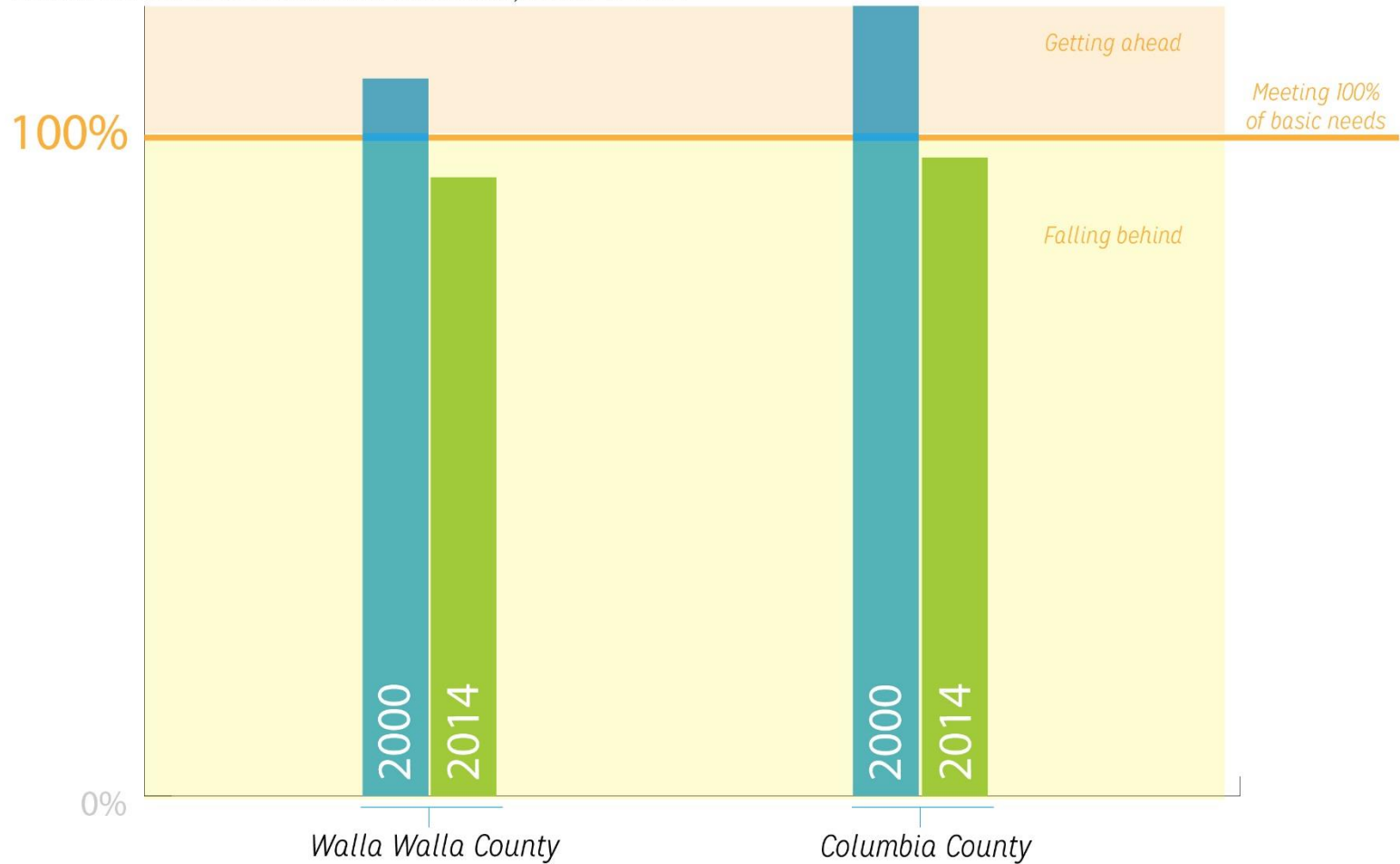
○ Cost to meet basic needs

ARE RESIDENTS OF THE BLUE MOUNTAIN REGION ABLE TO GET AHEAD?

It has become harder for young families to get ahead in the Blue Mountain Region. In 2000, median household income covered 109 percent and 120 percent of basic needs for a parent with two young children in Walla Walla and Columbia Counties, respectively. In other words, the median household income allowed for a young family to not just meet basic needs, but get ahead. By 2014, median household income covers less than what is needed for a young family to meet basic needs in each county. (Basic needs = housing, food, child care, medical care, transportation, taxes, and a small amount for miscellaneous spending).

Note: Data on basic needs is available for Milton-Freewater for 2008 and 2014, but not 2000. See sources for information on Milton-Freewater.

Share of median household income covering basic needs for a young family of three
Walla Walla and Columbia Counties, 2000 & 2014



Source: B&PC analysis of 2001 and 2014 Self-Sufficiency Standard data, 2000 Decennial Census data, and 2014 American Community Survey data

Education Outcomes Vary Throughout the Region, with Large Achievement Gaps by Race & Ethnicity

[INFOGRAPHIC 5, 6, & 7]

Kindergarten Readiness. The Washington Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills assessment is given to children entering elementary school to gauge how ready they are for kindergarten. The assessment for Washington state measures children in six areas of readiness: social-emotional, physical, cognitive, language, literacy, and math. In Washington state, slightly over four in ten (44 percent) children are ready in all six areas of readiness. Rates vary by district/school and race/ethnicity: Prescott and College Place school districts have high rates of readiness (especially Vista Hermosa), but the majority of schools in the BMR fall below the state average. Latino children are less likely than their white peers to enter kindergarten prepared in all six areas of readiness (28 percent and 37 percent, respectively).

Note: Oregon administers a different kindergarten readiness assessment than Washington state, making it difficult to compare students across state lines in the Blue Mountain Region.

Reading proficiently by the end of third grade. Reading proficiently by the end of third grade is an important benchmark for future success in school. Up to third grade, students are learning to read; after third grade they are reading to learn. Just over half (52 percent) of students in Washington state are meeting reading standards by the end of third grade. In the BMR, a few schools exceed the state average, but most fall below it. Latino children trail their white peers in reading in most schools, with the exception of Freewater Elementary in Milton-Freewater, where they have slightly higher rates (26 percent) than white students (23 percent).

Graduating from high school within four years. The on-time graduation rate (within four years) for Washington state is 78 percent. The majority of students attending high schools in the BMR region are close to or exceed this rate. Latino students trail their white peers in each county, with the exception of Columbia County.

ARE CHILDREN IN THE BLUE MOUNTAIN REGION READY FOR KINDERGARTEN?

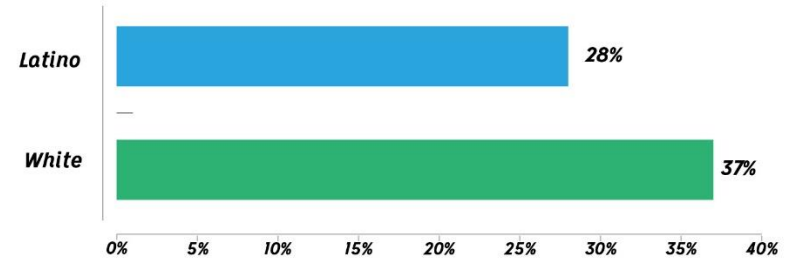
Narrative:

The percent of children who are ready to enter kindergarten varies by school district and school.

Latino children are less prepared to enter kindergarten than their white peers, but both groups have low rates of readiness (data for Walla Walla public schools only).

LATINO STUDENTS LESS PREPARED TO ENTER KINDERGARTEN THAN THEIR WHITE PEERS IN BLUE MOUNTAIN REGION

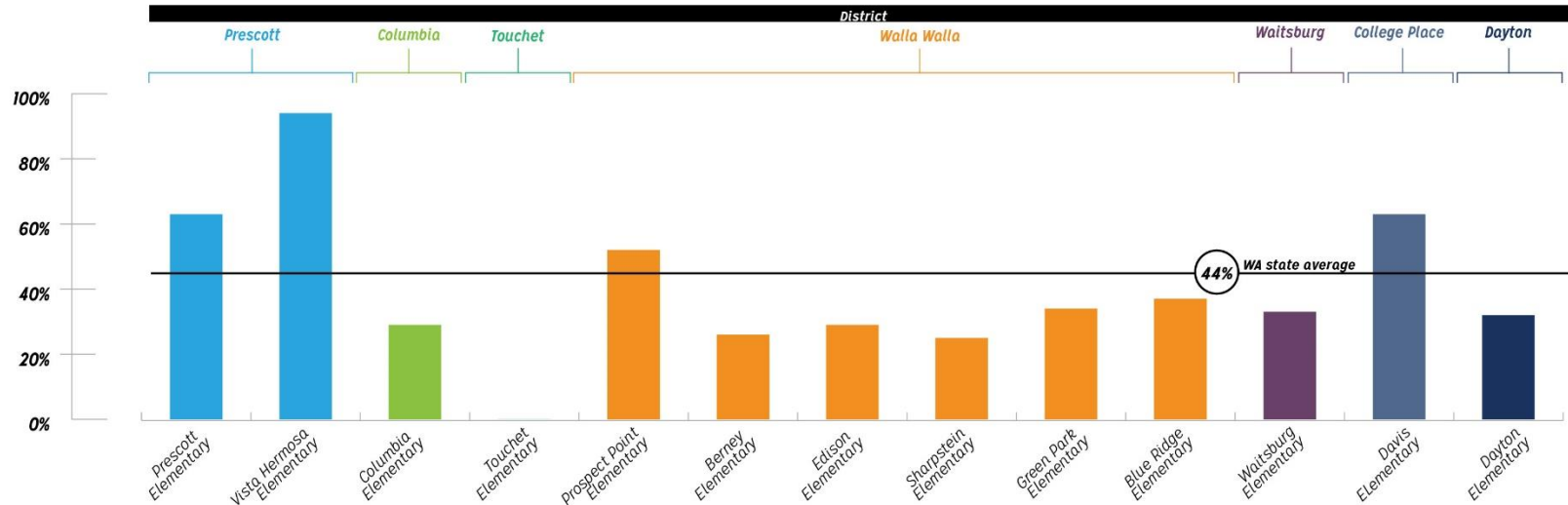
Percent of Students Prepared to Enter Kindergarten in All Six Areas of Readiness by Race & Ethnicity*, Walla Walla Public Schools, 2015-2016



*Only data for the Walla Walla School District was available.

THE PERCENT OF CHILDREN WHO ARE READY TO ENTER KINDERGARTEN VARIES A LOT BY DISTRICT & SCHOOL

Percent of students prepared to enter kindergarten in all six areas of readiness*, Blue Mountain Region, 2015-2016



*Kindergarten readiness data for Dixie School District in Walla Walla County and Freewater, Ferndale, & Grove Elementary Schools in Milton-Freewater not available

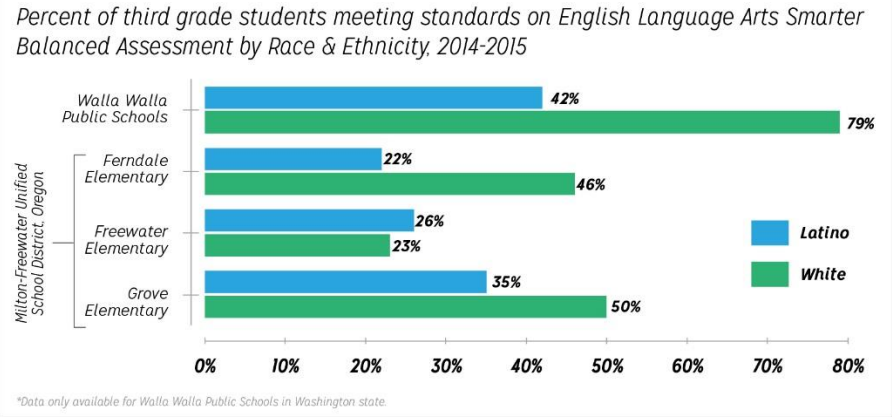
Source: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, WAKIDS data, 2015-2016

ARE THIRD GRADERS IN THE BLUE MOUNTAIN REGION MEETING READING STANDARDS?

Narrative:

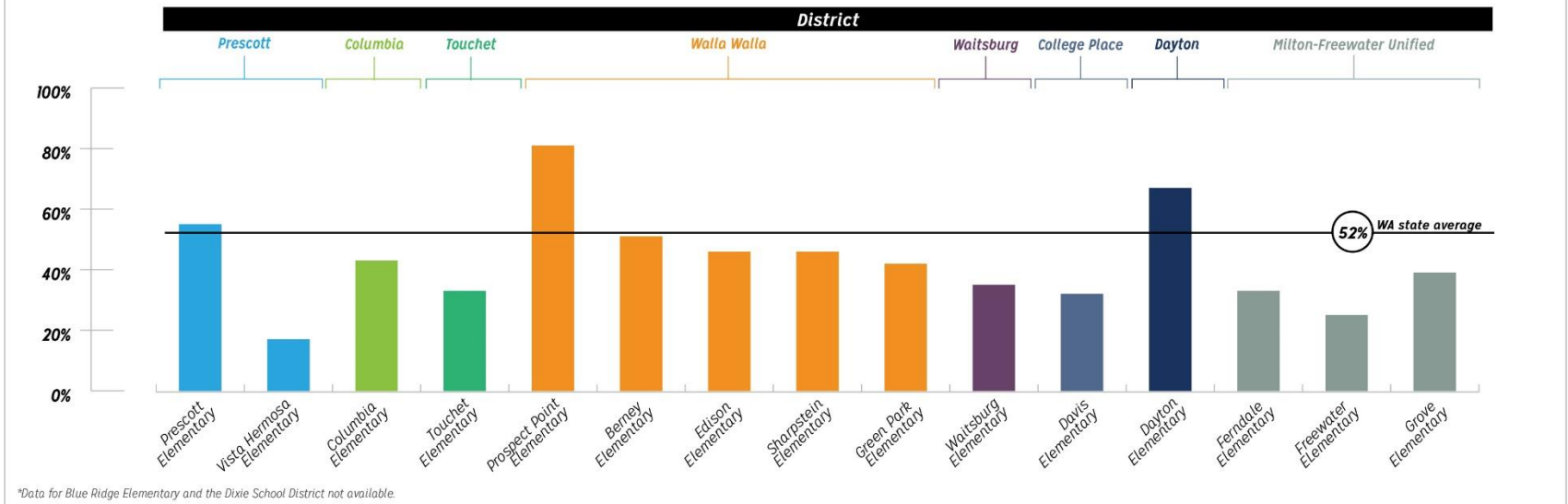
The percent of third grade students meeting reading standards in the Blue Mountain Region varies a lot by district and school. Latino students are less likely to meet reading standards in third grade than their white peers.

LATINO STUDENTS LESS LIKELY TO MEET READING STANDARDS THAN THEIR WHITE PEERS IN BLUE MOUNTAIN REGION



THE PERCENT OF 3RD GRADE STUDENTS MEETING READING STANDARDS VARIES A LOT BY DISTRICT & SCHOOL

Percent of third grade students meeting standards on English Language Arts Smarter Balanced Assessment, 2014-2015



Sources: OSPI report card data available at <http://reportcard.ospi.k12.wa.us>

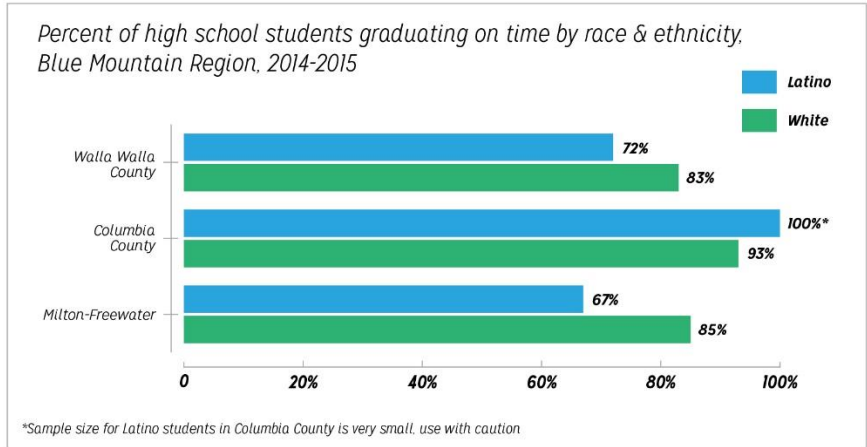
ARE STUDENTS IN THE BLUE MOUNTAIN REGION GRADUATING ON-TIME* FROM HIGH SCHOOL?

*Within 4 years

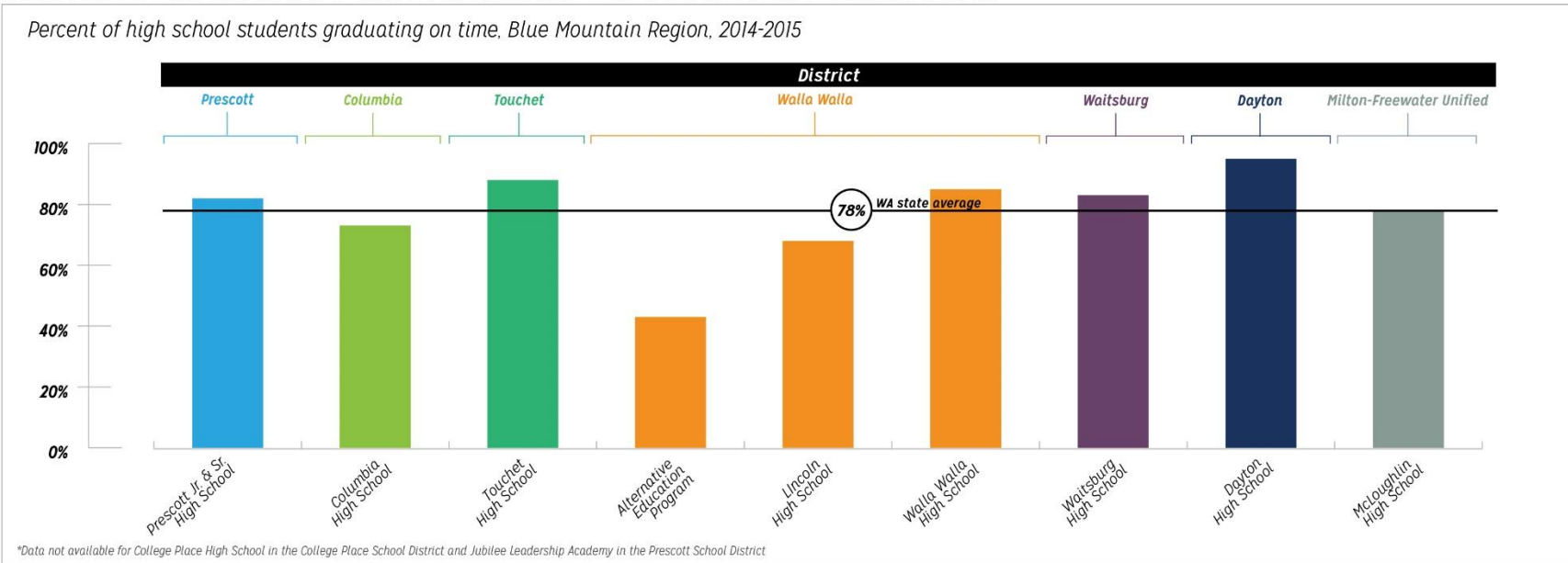
Narrative:

High school graduation rates vary by district and school in the Blue Mountain Region. Latino students are less likely to graduate than their white peers in the region; Columbia County is the exception, but the number of students overall is very small compared to Walla Walla County and Milton-Freewater.

LATINO STUDENTS LESS LIKELY TO GRADUATE THAN THEIR WHITE PEERS IN BLUE MOUNTAIN REGION



HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION RATES VARY BY DISTRICT AND SCHOOL IN THE BLUE MOUNTAIN REGION



Source: OSPI Graduation & Dropout Statistics 2014-2015 available at <http://www.k12.wa.us/DataAdmin/default.aspx> & Oregon Department of Education available at <http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?id=2644>

Health Infrastructure in the Region is Strong; Outcomes Differ by Race, Ethnicity & Community

[INFOGRAPHICS 8 & 9]

Health and quality of life vary considerably across the BMR. Among the 39 counties in Washington state, Walla Walla ranks high on many factors affecting health, especially access to medical services, the benefits of the physical environment (e.g., clean air, safe water), healthy lifestyles (e.g., physically active, non-smoking), and the rate of health insurance coverage. Columbia County ranks high on physical environment – number one in Washington state – and access to medical services, but does not rank as high as Walla Walla in other key health domains. Compared to the 36 counties in Oregon, Umatilla ranks low across most factors affecting health of residents.

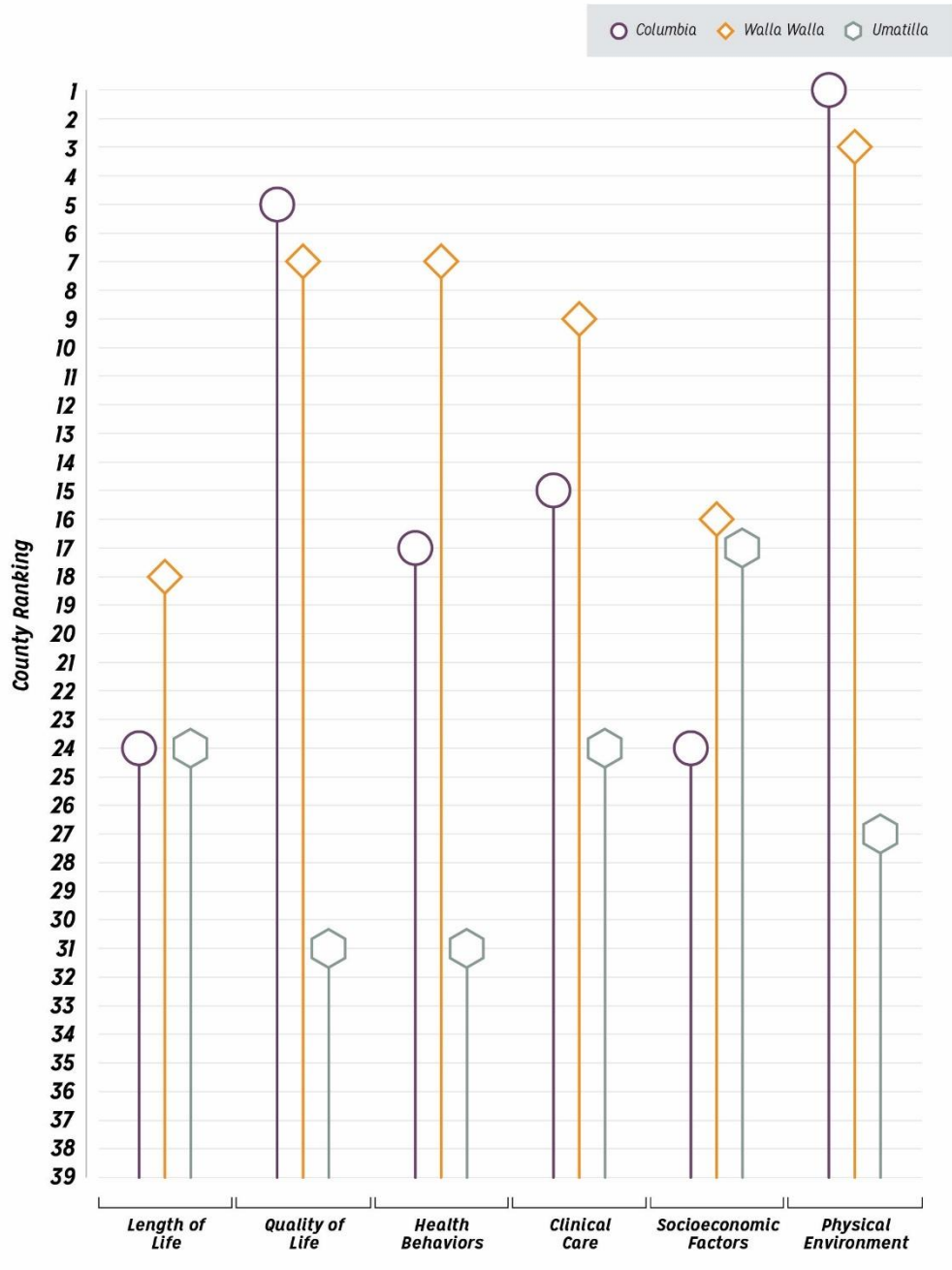
While health care coverage in the BMR is high for the state, especially among children, disparities in coverage are striking. There are relatively low rates of insurance coverage in Milton-Freewater, as well as in the lower income neighborhoods surrounding downtown Walla Walla – all areas where Latino residents are more likely to live. Latino residents are three times as likely to lack health insurance compared to their white peers. Among BMR residents born outside of the U.S., those with citizenship are more likely to have insurance, while those yet to obtain citizenship are most likely to lack health insurance coverage.

DOES BLUE MOUNTAIN REGION SUPPORT GOOD HEALTH & QUALITY OF LIFE?

Narrative:

Walla Walla County is in the top half of counties for healthy places to live in Washington state, while Columbia County is less healthy overall. Both counties score very high for quality of the physical environment. Umatilla County is in the bottom half of counties for Oregon.

County health rankings for Columbia, Walla Walla, and Umatilla Counties 2015



Source: Robert Wood Johnson Foundation County Health Rankings 2015 available for download at <http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/>

DO PEOPLE IN THE BLUE MOUNTAIN REGION HAVE HEALTH INSURANCE?

Narrative:

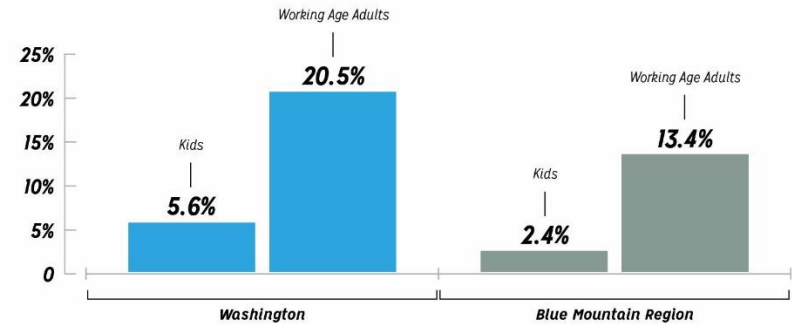
AGE: Almost all children in the Blue Mountain Region are covered by health insurance. Adults in the region have higher rates of insurance coverage than the state average.

RACE, ETHNICITY, & IMMIGRATION STATUS: Latino people in the Blue Mountain Region are less likely to be insured than their white peers. Among people born outside of the U.S., those who have obtained citizenship are more likely to be covered than those who are yet to obtain citizenship.

MAP: There are distinct areas in the region that lack health insurance coverage. They overlap with areas of high economic hardship.

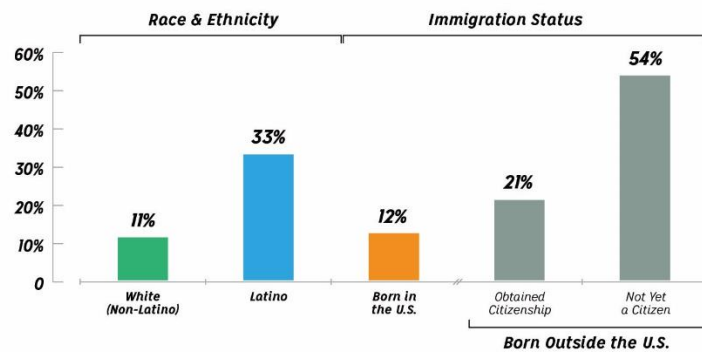
ALMOST ALL CHILDREN IN THE BLUE MOUNTAIN REGION ARE COVERED BY HEALTH INSURANCE. ADULTS IN THE REGION HAVE HIGHER RATES OF INSURANCE THAN THE STATE AVERAGE.

Percent of People Uninsured by Age, Blue Mountain Region & WA, 2014

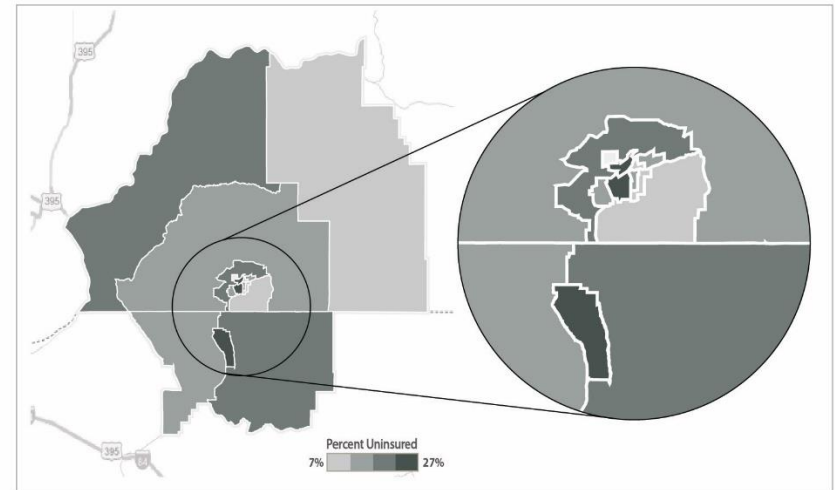


LATINO PEOPLE IN THE BLUE MOUNTAIN REGION ARE LESS LIKELY TO BE INSURED THAN THEIR WHITE PEERS. AMONG PEOPLE BORN OUTSIDE THE U.S., THOSE THAT HAVE OBTAINED CITIZENSHIP ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE COVERED.

Percent of People Not Covered by Health Insurance by Race, Ethnicity & Nativity, Blue Mountain Region, 2014



PERCENT OF PEOPLE UNINSURED BY CENSUS TRACT, BLUE MOUNTAIN REGION, 2014



Source: B&PC analysis of 5-Year American Community Survey, 2010-2014

Crime is Declining in the BMR, but a High Concentration of Gangs is in the Region

[INFOGRAPHIC 10]

Similar to Washington state overall, crime in the BMR has largely been on the decline for the last 20 years. Property crimes are, by far, the most common type of crime in the BMR. More specifically:

- The majority of crime in Columbia County is for theft (70 percent) and burglary (30 percent);
- The majority of crime in Walla Walla County is for theft (45 percent), destruction of property (19 percent), and assault (14 percent); and
- The majority of crime in Milton-Freewater is for theft (36 percent), destruction of property (17 percent), and assault (7 percent).

Note: The larger share of crimes against society for Milton-Freewater is due to a difference in the way WA and OR collect code crime data.

Data on gang activity is extremely difficult to obtain, but a 2011 study conducted by the Washington state Department of Commerce found a high share of gangs relative to the population size of the region. While there were no gangs found in Columbia County, anywhere from two to 10 gangs were estimated to be active in Walla Walla County.

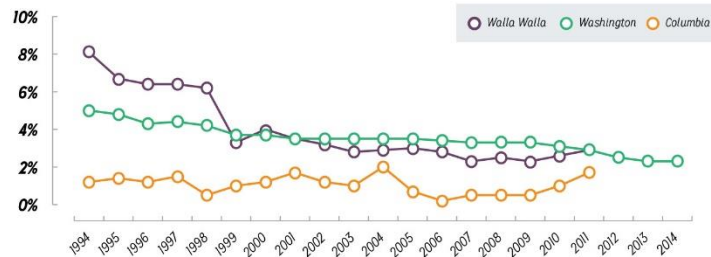
WHAT IS CRIME LIKE IN THE BLUE MOUNTAIN REGION?

Narrative:

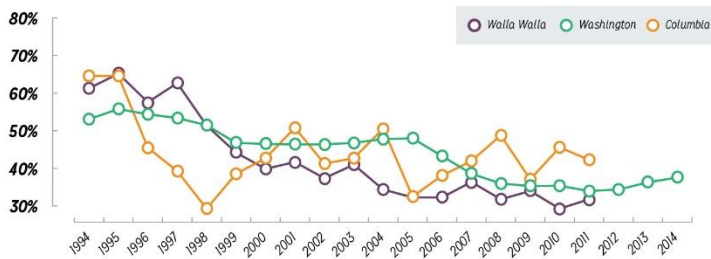
Violent crime and property crime in the Blue Mountain Region varies, but has largely been declining over time. There is little data on gangs in Washington state, but a 2011 report found a high share of gangs in Walla Walla given its population size.

Property crimes are the most common crimes in the Blue Mountain Region.

Violent crime per 1,000 residents in Columbia & Walla Walla Counties, 1994-2014
(Trend data for Milton-Freewater not available)



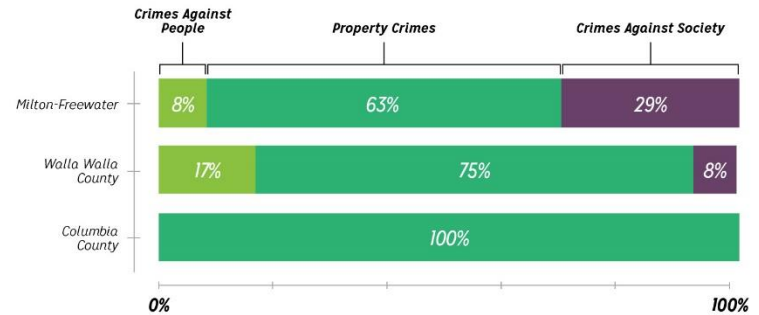
Property crime per 1,000 residents in Columbia & Walla Walla Counties, 1994-2014.
(Trend data for Milton-Freewater not available)



The erratic trend line for crime in Columbia County is due to the very small population, where small changes in the number of crimes have a bigger impact on the rate than in Walla Walla.

PROPERTY CRIMES ARE THE MOST COMMON TYPE OF CRIME IN THE BLUE MOUNTAIN REGION

Crime by Type of Offense 2014



Majority of crime in Columbia County is for theft (70%) and burglary (30%)

Majority of crime in Walla Walla County is for theft (45%), destruction of property (19%), and assault (14%)

Majority of crime in Milton-Freewater is for theft (36%), destruction of property (17%), and assault (7%). The larger share of crimes against society for Milton-Freewater is due to a difference in the way WA & OR collect codes crime data.

GANGS ARE VERY MOBILE AND EXPANDING IN WASHINGTON - WALLA WALLA HAS A HIGH NUMBER FOR THE SOUTHEAST REGION

Number of Gangs by Jurisdiction, Washington State 2011



Sources: Washington State Statistical Analysis Center - Crime Stats Online available at <http://wa-state-ofm.us/crimestatsonline/> and Oregon Uniform Crime Reports 2014 available at http://www.oregon.gov/OSP/CJIS/pages/annual_reports.aspx. Department of Commerce (June 2011) Statewide Gang Response Mapping available at http://www.commerce.wa.gov/Documents/Statewide_Gang_Response_Mapping.pdf

BUILDING A BETTER BLUE MOUNTAIN REGION: COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES, STRENGTHS, & ASPIRATIONS

Two community “data walks” were held in the city of Walla Walla – on December 17, 2015 and February 25, 2016 – to review the trends, conditions, and variation in the infographics above. The data walks gave residents of the BMR an opportunity to review what existing data systems say about them and their communities, and more important, how they want that data to change. It also gave community members the opportunity to discuss strengths in the region to create the changes they want to see, what additional information would be helpful as they move forward, and what additional community members and entities need to be at the table to build a better BMR.

Participants in the data walks were asked to consider the following questions as they reviewed the infographics:

- *Does this data jive with your understanding of the people who live in the Blue Mountain Region? Were there any surprises?*
- *What explains the trends you are seeing? What additional information do you need to explain these data?*
- *What is missing from the story the data is telling? What else do you want to know?*
- *How do you want this data to change? What results do you want to see in your community?*

Following the data walk exercise, participants were led through a group discussion and exercise that asked groups to:

- *List the top three ways they want to see the story about their community change;*
- *List the top three pieces of the story that were missing and essential to providing a complete picture – good and bad – about their community;*
- *List the top three strengths the BMR has to create the change they want to see; and*
- *Identify who else needs to be at the table next to ensure a complete story is told about their community.*

Table 1 summarizes participants’ responses from the data walk exercise.

TABLE 1: DATA WALK SUMMARY

Note about summary: The following is a summary of the group exercises conducted in Walla Walla during a daytime meeting on December 17, 2015, and an evening meeting February 25, 2016. The comments and perspectives represented here should be interpreted as the perspectives of the people who attended the meeting, and not the perspectives of the overall Blue Mountain Region. In addition, these are comments based on the information that was provided during the data walk, and therefore not necessarily exhaustive of all the issues impacting the region.

1. Top three ways you want the story to change (based on data that was seen):

Desired Changes	Times Mentioned	Summary
Lower cost-of-living	20	The increase in cost-of-living came up repeatedly. Meeting participants cited the high cost of child care, in particular, as a major issue they want addressed. But overall cost-of-living (housing, health care) was a major concern.
More living-wage jobs & higher income	19	As concerning as cost-of-living was the availability of living-wage jobs and stagnant incomes. The importance of living-wage jobs was mentioned specifically in the context of retaining young people and families, having strong economic growth in the future, and overall health of the region. There is a strong desire to bring more high-skill/high-wage jobs to the region, especially in technology and manufacturing.
Eliminating divide/gaps in opportunity between Whites & Latinos	16	There was a very strong emphasis on equity in the comments, and participants overwhelmingly acknowledged the differences in the data between whites & Latinos. Meeting participants expressed a desire to eliminate opportunity gaps in education and economic security for Latino residents, including those who are non-citizens.
Increased educational opportunities from birth through higher education	6	Recognition that educational opportunities – from early learning through K-12 and into higher education – can be improved. There was acknowledgment that funding for education is problematic. Also an interest in learning from what is working to address what is not working in education system.
Better understanding of size and influence of gangs in region	6	Strong desire from community to better understand the size and impact of gangs in the region, and how they impact community perceptions and well-being.

2. Top three data points/issues/information that are missing from data shared:

Missing data/information	
<u>General Comments</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More trend data • More comparisons – with state & region • More neighborhood detail 	
Population/Demographics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>More data broken down by age <u>AND</u> race</i> • <i>Generational analysis</i> • <i>Data on veterans</i> • <i>Data broken out by sex</i> • <i>Data on undocumented residents</i> • <i>More geospatial analysis down to block group</i>
Income & Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Distributional data</i> • <i>Retirement income</i> • <i>Drivers on the cost-of-living</i> • <i>Homeownership</i> • <i>Free & reduced-price lunch</i>
Cost-of-living	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Child care – quality & availability</i> • <i>Housing affordability</i> • <i>Number of people on public assistance</i> • <i>Information on impact of second homes on region</i>
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Drugs & alcohol</i> • <i>Obesity</i> • <i>People with mental illness</i> • <i>Child & family hunger</i> • <i>Homeless population</i>
Crime	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Trend data and more specific crime data</i> • <i>Age-related data on crime</i> • <i>Gang-related data</i> • <i>Children & families of incarcerated people</i> • <i>Impact of penitentiary in community</i> • <i>Domestic violence</i>
P-20 Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Preschool – quality & availability</i> • <i>Comprehensive education P-20 data</i> • <i>Why does Vista Hermosa have high success rates?</i> • <i>Why do some Latino students do well?</i>
Economic Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Impact of wine industry on region</i> • <i>Impact of tourist dollars on region</i> • <i>Business: population ratio</i>
State Budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>How state money flows into Walla Walla</i> • <i>Taxes in WA and OR</i>

3. Top three strengths BMR has to build on:

Strengths	Times Mentioned	Summary
Collaborative nature of community and social capital	27	Meeting participants overwhelmingly cited the collaboration, sense of community, positivity of residents, and local expertise as its top strength. People are deeply committed to the BMR community.
High quality of life, culture, and environmental amenities	26	Meeting participants highlighted the great quality of life, attributed to the weather and beautiful environment; small-town feel of the region, yet big city sophistication; low crime; and strong sense of community.
Strong institutions – education, health care/medical, and foundations	22	The abundance of educational opportunities and schools – especially the universities and community colleges – were cited as the strongest institutions. Health care facilities and foundations (philanthropy) were a strong second.
Diverse economy	2	The existence of agriculture, wine, tourism, and government jobs were cited as major strengths to build on in the region.

4. Who else needs to be at the table?

Groups who need to be at the table	Times Mentioned	Summary
Latino community & other people of color	16	There is a desire from meeting participants to have members of the Latino community at the table – many commented that this is essential to see the change they want in the region. And there was a desire to reach out to smaller racial and ethnic populations that contribute to the region’s diversity.
Broader representation of institutions (e.g., business, gov’t officials, policy experts, schools, foundations, health care providers, law enforcement)	16	Overall interest in having greater representation from the community at-large. High level of interest in a community-driven approach to problem-solving.
People with low incomes/ low education	10	Having the perspectives of people with low incomes – including lower-wage workers, migrant workers, homeless, and unemployed – would be valuable.
Families with children, working & non-working	6	Significant interest in getting the perspectives of children (young children and young adults) on the region, as well as families with children (both working and non-working). Strong interest in the well-being of generations in the BMR.
People who work during the day and could not attend	4	Several noted that the meeting time made it hard for people with day jobs to attend.
Students	2	Interest in bringing students’ perspectives and ideas to the table, especially as it relates to keeping talent and youth in the region.

DISCUSSION

The community engagement in the data walks and the rich discussion that followed yielded invaluable information for Community Council as it advances its work. A few key insights:

- **Data is more than just numbers.** “What gets measured is what matters” is an adage that remains true in high-level decision-making. Being clear on the quantitative needles that need to be moved in order to achieve the results a community wants creates a “north star” to guide planning efforts and ensure successful outcomes.

Numbers matter. But they are also limited.

Even the best quantitative data systems tell an incomplete story about the people and communities they represent. Under the best of circumstances, data is illustrative – even sometimes powerfully predictive and explanatory – of major issues people should pay attention to. At worst, however, data can be misinterpreted, misused, or just plain wrong – sometimes doing more harm than good. For this reason, communities should look beyond the numbers to develop a more qualitative sense of their communities. Stories are also data, and the experiences of the people represented by the numbers can serve as a “check and balance” to make sure the numbers are accurate, as well as provide a richness and depth of understanding to tell a more complete and robust story about the well-being of a community.

The data walks conducted by Community Council and its partners served as a powerful way to engage residents of the BMR and give them ownership over the story being told about their community, the strengths of the region, and what they want to change.

- **Look for the bright spots.** Data systems are set up and analyzed to largely identify problems and what’s not working – rarely do we use data to identify what is working. During the data walks, BMR residents identified several “bright spots” in the data about their community – high kindergarten readiness in the Prescott School District; dropping crime rates; and high rates of insurance coverage for children in the region. Focusing on the bright spots in communities gives residents the opportunity to learn what is working and try to build on community strengths to address what is not working.
- **Be mindful of who is and isn’t in the room.** Communities across Washington state are increasingly representative of the larger, diverse world in which we live. That is an asset,

as diversity of people and ideas has historically proven to be an essential ingredient for long-term innovation, progress, and success.

That said, history has also been less than kind to people who have not had the privilege of – and in most cases have been systemically prevented from – being in positions of power and influence to create the change they would like to see. This is especially true for people of color, women, children, the LGBTQ community, and families with lower incomes. Given that each of these groups are a large – and in the case of people of color, growing – portion of our communities, ensuring their experiences, stories, and voices are given equal weight and influence at every stage of decision-making is critical to the current and future well-being of any region.

Participants in the data walk discussions identified many groups whose voices are essential in moving the discussion with Community Council forward – including the Latino community, people with low incomes, families with children (both working and non-working), and greater representation from institutions like law enforcement, higher education, medical and social service providers, and philanthropy. One of the brightest spots of this project was to see the overwhelming desire from data walk participants to have all these groups at the table to build a stronger, more inclusive BMR region.

CONCLUSION: BRINGING DATA TO ACTION

No one person or entity can transform a community on its own. Whether it be improving graduation rates, bringing more living-wage jobs to a region, ensuring all children have access to high quality child care, or eliminating the opportunity gap for people of color – it takes strong vision, coordinated resources, and trusting partnerships to create the change we want to see.

Measurably improving the lives of the people living in the BMR is more likely to be successful if partners are aligned around a shared set of results that they have identified as essential for the well-being of the region. Grounding efforts in shared, community-driven results serves as a north star for local planning, can be used to identify strengths and gaps in community capacity, and serves as a framework for measuring progress toward defined goals. When everyone is aligned around the same set of results, putting plans into action is streamlined and the chances for success increase.

This project is a small, but mighty contribution to a much larger effort of the Community Council to facilitate a community-driven, consensus-building agenda for the residents of the

Blue Mountain Region. The story emerging from the data walks – combined with the knowledge, expertise, and commitment of BMR residents – has provided a strong foundation upon which the Community Council can build to facilitate change in the region.

We recommend the following immediate “data-to-action” items as you continue the journey of building a better BMR:

- **DATA-TO-ACTION ITEM #1: Share the results of this report with data walk participants and groups identified as essential to building the BMR story.** The strong relationships of Community Council and its partners, as well as the participants in the data walks, provide a natural starting point for dissemination of this report and a foundation for future community engagement. These relationships should be nurtured and mined for bringing additional people to the table, especially those identified in the data walk process (see [Table 1, Question #4](#)).
- **DATA-TO-ACTION ITEM #2: Bake equity and inclusion into the DNA of the process and outcomes.** The data walk highlighted sizable gaps in opportunity for the Latino community in the BMR, and the community discussion confirmed that having the Latino community at the table is essential to building a better BMR. Eliminating gaps in opportunity for Latinos, as well as other racial and ethnic groups in the region that are not well-represented in the data, will require an inclusive approach that builds equity into the earliest stages of any effort. People of color and other historically marginalized groups should have equal representation in an advisory and decision-making capacity to ensure gaps are closed and all residents of the BMR have the opportunities they need to succeed.
- **DATA-TO-ACTION ITEM #3: Convene an entity to create a shared vision, results, and measures for the BMR.** In collaboration with BMR residents, organizations, institutions, and businesses, Community Council and its partners should coordinate work toward a regional community vision and toward the results residents want to achieve. They also should coordinate measures to track progress toward those results. Results-based leadership, accountability, and facilitation are tools the community can use to ensure a consensus-based, community-driven process that has a high likelihood of success (see [resources page in Appendix for more information on these tools](#)).

- **DATA-TO-ACTION ITEM #4: Create an easily accessible, community-defined indicators platform – including stories – that all partners are disciplined in using to achieve shared results.** Easily accessible, agreed-upon quantitative indicators should be updated as much as possible and used to answer the following questions – How much are we doing? How well are we doing? And what difference are we making in the lives of people in the BMR? Ideally, partners agree on the high-level, “population” indicators they would all like to move the needle on (e.g., graduation rates, poverty rates, share of living wage jobs), and also can articulate and measure how individual entities are contributing to moving the needle via the programs they specialize in (e.g., tutoring for at-risk students, job training for parents with low incomes, economic development within a neighborhood) to understand and maximize each other’s contributions. When choosing an indicators platform – whether it be an interactive website, Tableau dashboard, or other agreed-upon tool – the following principles should be followed:
 - » **Is it a valid indicator?** An indicator of progress is considered valid when it measures progress toward our goals accurately.
 - » **Is it a reliable indicator?** An indicator is considered reliable when the data collection methods used to measure it align with statistical principles of quality.
 - » **Is the indicator available on a consistent basis?** In order to measure progress over time, an indicator needs to be available on a consistent, ongoing basis, preferably annually or more frequently.
 - » **Can we measure equity?** Ideally, each indicator can be disaggregated to analyze how important groups within the population are doing compared to one another.
 - » **Is there a degree of consensus?** There should be some level of agreement among key stakeholders that the indicators are the best available to track the issue.

In addition to using quantitative data, community residents should be the primary authors of the story represented by the numbers: Does it make sense? What explains the trends and conditions in the data? What additional information is needed to understand the root causes underlying those trends and conditions? And equally important to acknowledge are the stories, experiences, and perspectives of residents as data in their own right, which are essential to creating successful policies and programs for any community.

- **DATA-TO-ACTION ITEM #5: Create continuous feedback loop with BMR residents, and include them in advisory and decision-making capacities.** One of the best ways to ensure a successful, community-driven effort is to give residents ample opportunity to share, and let them know that they have been heard. Too often, we seek input without letting people know that their feedback mattered. Creating a continuous feedback loop will build trust with the community, create transparency in the process, and increase the chances for success over time.

APPENDIX

Resources

Indicator & Measurement Frameworks

Washington State Budget & Policy Center (budgetandpolicy.org)

The Progress Index (<http://budgetandpolicy.org/policy-areas/progress-index>)

Results-based Leadership, Accountability, & Facilitation Tools

Book

Friedman, Mark (2005) Trying Hard is Not Good Enough: How to Produce Measurable Improvements for Customers and Communities: FPSI Publishing

Websites

Implementation Guide to Results-Based Accountability: www.raguide.org

Fiscal Policies Institute: www.resultsaccountability.com

Limitations & Use of Data

The information in this report covers a wide range of topics, but is by no means exhaustive. By covering such a breadth of issues, we necessarily sacrifice some of the complexity needed to fully understand those issues. In addition, some of the data used in this report is subject to errors and bias inherent in survey methodology, sampling, and reporting. Tremendous effort was made to ensure the reliability and validity of the indicators chosen for the report and infographics.

We encourage users of this data to ask more questions with residents of the BMR to develop a deeper understanding of community well-being. Engaging in conversations with communities of color is especially important, as the data presented by race and ethnicity – while useful in highlighting disparities in outcomes – provide a limited understanding of the people they represent. Working with communities of color to understand what the data mean for the diverse populations of BMR should be a priority.

ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION COUNTY HEALTH RANKINGS 2015 (Infographic 8 detail)	WA	Columbia County	Walla Walla County	Umatilla	OR
LENGTH OF LIFE		24	18	24	
Years of potential life lost before age 75 per 100,000 population (age-adjusted)	5,506	6,442	5,882	7,165	5,958
QUALITY OF LIFE		5	7	31	
Percentage of adults reporting fair or poor health (age-adjusted)	14%	17%	15%	20%	14%
Average number of physically unhealthy days reported in past 30 days (age-adjusted)	3.6	4.1	3.3	4.5	3.7
Average number of mentally unhealthy days reported in past 30 days (age-adjusted)	3.3	3.3	2.8	3.8	3.3
Percentage of live births with low birthweight (< 2500 grams)	6.3%	3.8%	5.5%	6.3%	6.1%
CLINICAL CARE		15	9	24	
Percentage of population under age 65 without health insurance	16%	17%	18%	21%	17%
Ratio of population to primary care physicians	1203:1	3995:1	825:1	2259:1	1105:1
Ratio of population to dentists	1327:1	1344:1	1417:1	1871:1	1363:1
Ratio of population to mental health providers	409:1	576:1	476:1	577:1	299:1
Number of hospital stays for ambulatory-care sensitive conditions per 1,000 Medicare enrollees	39	25	32	32	38
Percentage of diabetic Medicare enrollees ages 65-75 that receive HbA1c monitoring	86%	87%	86%	85%	85%
Percentage of female Medicare enrollees ages 67-69 that receive mammography screening	62%	56%	67%	56%	62%
HEALTH BEHAVIORS		17	7	31	
Percentage of adults who are current smokers	16%	15%	13%	22%	16%
Percentage of adults that report a BMI of 30 or more	27%	32%	27%	33%	27%
Index of factors that contribute to a healthy food environment, 0 (worst) to 10 (best)	7.5	6.9	7.3	7.2	7.3
Percentage of adults aged 20 and over reporting no leisure-time physical activity	18%	24%	18%	24%	16%
Percentage of population with adequate access to locations for physical activity	89%	66%	81%	65%	89%
Percentage of adults reporting binge or heavy drinking	17%	15%	14%	15%	16%
Percentage of driving deaths with alcohol involvement	40%	*	36%	27%	31%
Number of newly diagnosed chlamydia cases per 100,000 population	357	175	323	325	345
Number of births per 1,000 female population ages 15-19	29	30	31	55	31
SOCIAL & ECONOMIC FACTORS		24	16	17	
Percentage of ninth-grade cohort that graduates in four years	79%	*	78%	69%	69%
Percentage of adults ages 25-44 with some post-secondary education	68%	62%	65%	51%	67%
Percentage of population ages 16 and older unemployed but seeking work	7%	10%	7%	8%	8%
Percentage of children under age 18 in poverty	19%	26%	23%	23%	22%
Ratio of household income at the 80th percentile to income at the 20th percentile	4.4	5.1	4.8	4.4	4.6
Percentage of children that live in a household headed by single parent	29%	33%	31%	40%	31%
Number of membership associations per 10,000 population	9.3	17.5	8.9	10.8	10.5
Number of reported violent crime offenses per 100,000 population	301	146	257	230	249
Number of deaths due to injury per 100,000 population	59	50	72	72	66
PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT		1	3	27	
Average daily density of fine particulate matter in micrograms per cubic meter (PM2.5)	11	10.7	10.5	9.9	8.9
Percentage of population potentially exposed to water exceeding a violation limit during the past year	0%	0%	0%	1%	19%
Percentage of households with at least 1 of 4 housing problems	18%	13%	17%	16%	20%
Percentage of the workforce that drives alone to work	73%	65%	71%	80%	72%
Among workers who commute in their car alone, the percentage that commute more than 30 minutes	33%	25%	12%	16%	26%

Source: Robert Eood Johnson County Health Rankings 2015 available at <http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/>