A Report of The Coalition for Racial Justice

Racial Equity in Iowa City and Johnson County

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Contact the Coalition for Racial Justice at coalition.racial.justice@gmail.com. Use this e-mail address to:

- Find out more about the coalition or this report
- Schedule a presentation about racial equity and/or request a racial equity toolkit for your group or organization
- Be included in the Community Racial Justice Mailing List, which provides information about local racial justice efforts and events

Visit the Coalition’s website: http://racialjusticecoalition.com or Facebook page: www.facebook.com/RacialJusticeCoalition

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About The Coalition: In June 2010, the Consultation of Religious Communities (CRC) of Johnson County established a community task force on Race, Poverty and Public Safety in response to numerous reports received by its affiliated religious leaders about problems faced by African Americans in Iowa City. The group reorganized in Spring 2012 and changed its name to The Coalition for Racial Justice to serve as a broader community coalition. The Coalition is committed to joining together to promote racial justice through action, education and empowerment. The Coalition has organized several actions toward achieving racial equity since its inception, including co-sponsoring the “Iowa City Million Hoodie March” on March 26, 2012

Racial Equity in Iowa City and Johnson County

The Iowa City/Johnson County area rightly boasts of being a vibrant community that offers a high quality of life. But there is also growing concern about whether everyone has equal access to the rich opportunities our community offers. Most notably, as the racial and ethnic demographics of Iowa City/Johnson County change, many question whether we are becoming a more inclusive community or whether we are, in fact, becoming a “tale of two cities” in which residents fare very differently depending on their race and ethnicity.

This Report presents data, broken down by race/ethnicity, on education, juvenile justice, adult criminal justice, economic well-being, housing, and representation in community leadership. To create the Report, we gathered existing data from multiple sources to take a statistical snapshot of families and youth in our community. We chose these areas of focus because of the roles they play in shaping individuals’ opportunities and well-being.

This Report does not attempt to provide ready explanations for why racial disparities exist, nor do we believe that eliminating disparities will happen overnight. But we do believe the Report can help members of the community better understand the extent of racial disparities and that it can provide benchmarks to assist us in measuring community progress toward racial equity. As the Annie E. Casey Foundation’s “Race Matters” toolkit explains, “It is easier to change what we measure rather than what we don’t.”

We hope the Report fosters dialogue among residents, elected leaders and other local officials, and community organizations. Our goal is for people of all races and from all sectors to work together to create a community that is a model for achieving racial equity and inclusion.

What We Learned

- Significant and troubling racial disparities exist in our community in education, juvenile justice, adult criminal justice, economic well-being, housing, and representation in community leadership. The report reveals that children and adults in the greater Iowa City area experience different opportunities and quality of life depending on the color of their skin or ethnic background.

How We Can Move Forward Together

- Convene a Racial Justice Roundtable of people from key sectors to address racial disparities in our community.
- Implement Racial Equity Impact Assessment tools used by other communities to assess programs, policies, practices and budgets, and formulate concrete strategies to eliminate any inequities based on race or ethnic background in public policy and organizational practices.
• Honor the leadership of people of color and work to increase their civic participation in public commissions, boards, and meetings. Engage people of color in forging solutions to issues that disproportionately affect them.
• Assure access to local funding opportunities, community awards, and leadership development opportunities for organizations led by people of color.

Who Should Use This Report

- Community members interested in racial justice
- Elected and appointed municipal, county, and school district leaders and staff
- Teachers, school administrators and staff
- Law enforcement agencies, court, and justice system leaders and staff
- Human service agencies, organizations and personnel
- People who use or administer public assistance programs
- Professionals involved in housing, planning, and economic development
- Members of the business and labor communities
- News and media organizations
- Faith organizations

How to Use This Report

The Report provides quick access to data showing racial disparities in key aspects of community health and offers suggestions for moving forward to change the disparities. It is organized into sections for easy reference. Find these sections in the following order:

• Changing demographics, racial equity, and a model for addressing inequities

• What we learned and how we can move forward together
  - Racial disparities in K–12 education
  - Racial disparities in juvenile justice
  - Racial disparities in adult criminal justice
  - Racial disparities in employment and business ownership
  - Racial disparities in housing
  - Racial disparities in community leadership

• Index of sources cited in this report

• Further reading
Changing Demographics, Racial Equity, and Models for Addressing Inequities

Changing Demographics

Johnson County is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse. The 2010 Census found that 17 percent of Johnson County’s population was comprised of people of color, up from 11 percent in 2000. Coralville is the most racially diverse municipality: 23.5 percent of Coralville residents were people of color in 2010, compared with 14.6 percent in 2000. People of color comprised 20.3 percent of Iowa City residents in 2010, compared with 14.2 percent in 2000. And 12 percent of North Liberty’s population were people of color in 2010, compared with 5.9 percent in 2000.

Young people show greater racial/ethnic diversity than older residents. Twenty percent of the county’s population is under the age of 18. People of color make up 26 percent of the under-18 population and 15 percent of the over-18 group (U.S. Census, 2010). Students of color made up nearly one-third (32.86 percent) of students enrolled in the Iowa City Community School District in 2010-11. [ICCSD EEO and AA Plan Update, 2011]

Racial Equity

Much of this report focuses on the notion of racial equity. But what does that mean?

The Minneapolis Foundation defines racial equity as a condition where “race and ethnicity no longer adversely shape an individual’s or group’s experience with power, access to opportunity, treatment and outcomes.” A Racial Equity approach uses data to assess how different groups are faring in a community and to evaluate the success of programs designed to improve those conditions. So in a community that is not only racially diverse but also racially equitable the data would show that:

- Students of all races would graduate from high school at the same rate; they would be represented in AP classes, be suspended, and participate in extracurricular programs at the same rates, etc.
- People of all races would have equal access to employment and housing opportunities.
• People of all races would be arrested, charged, convicted, and incarcerated at the same rates.
• One’s racial identity would no longer predict, in a statistical sense, how a person fares. [Center for Assessment and Policy Development]

This report shows that in our community, none of these indicators of racial equity exist:

• Students of different races do not graduate from high school at the same rate, do not participate in AP classes and extracurricular activities at the same rate, and do not face disciplinary action at the same rate.
• People of different races do not enjoy equal access to employment and housing opportunities.
• People of different races experience different rates of police contact, arrest, conviction, and incarceration.
• And racial identity is statistically a strong predictor of individuals’ overall prospects for success in our community.

Given these findings, the question becomes, why is this so?

Statistics represent human lives: a child, a family, a classroom, a neighborhood. People reading this report will have different interpretations of the data depending on their points of view. Research shows that a person’s interpretation of racial equity data is strongly influenced by her or his own racial and cultural background. [The Equity Project, not dated] In our experience, we’ve encountered a range of different explanations for racial disparities based on individuals’ personal perspectives including:

• **An individual, color-blind explanation** that argues individuals cause their own circumstances through their own behavior. This approach believes that disparities are primarily the result of individual choices, not outside influences like access to societal resources or opportunities. For example, the statement, “You do the crime, you do the time” would explain disparities in incarceration rates.

• **A social class explanation** that argues disparities result from poverty. Families’ and individuals’ lack of adequate income is seen as the cause of different outcomes in education, criminal justice, and health. The role of race or racism is denied. For example, a person may look at educational disparities and conclude, “It’s about class, not race.”

• **A racial group explanation** that attributes disparities to stereotypical beliefs about racial groups’ innate characteristics and culture. For example, “Those children don’t do well in school because their parents don’t value education.”

• **An institutional explanation** that attributes racial disparities to a particular institution’s policies and practices. This explanation would suggest that disparities in, say, high school graduation rates could be addressed simply by changing school district policies and practices, without regard to the role the rest of the community’s opportunities and institutions play in a student’s success.

• **A structural/systemic explanation** that asserts that racial disparities result from complex interactions between individual behavior, institutional policies, and historical legacies. This explanation acknowledges that racial disparities may result even when policy-makers and staff have good intentions or implement seemingly “colorblind” policies. From this perspective, if data show racial disparities result from existing policies and practices, then a collaborative process needs to be conducted in conjunction with the people most affected to identify the root causes of the racial disparities and develop intentional efforts to reduce them.
While it may be difficult to arrive at a shared understanding of what causes racial inequity, the Coalition for Racial Justice believes strongly that **addressing inequity is the shared responsibility of everyone.** We believe that emphasizing a structural analysis and using data to measure outcomes are the most effective tools in building the diverse, inclusive, and equitable community in which we strive to live.

**Models for Achieving Racial Equity**

Our community is not alone in experiencing racial inequities. And if we choose to address them forthrightly, together, we will not be alone in the undertaking. Other communities have faced similar challenges and devised strategies to reduce racial inequity. Some have documented their efforts to set and achieve meaningful, measurable goals. We can learn from their experience.

One example is Seattle’s Race and Social Justice Initiative. This initiative seeks boldly “to end institutional racism and race-based disparities in City government.” We have adapted elements of the Seattle initiative’s approach in Steps to Move Forward. Seattle has committed itself to a multi-year effort to end racial inequity in the community and challenges community members to “Imagine a city where:

- Every schoolchild, regardless of language and cultural differences, receives a quality education and feels safe and included.
- Race does not predict how much you earn or your chance of being homeless or going to prison.
- African-American, Latinos and Native Americans can expect to live as long as white people.”

In working together to foster racial equity in our community, we do not have to start from zero. We can study other communities’ approaches and adapt them to our own circumstances. And when we achieve successes, we can share them with others as they embark on their journeys toward racial equity. Members of the Coalition for Racial Justice are available to provide information about the models and tools that have been developed and to facilitate discussions about conducting racial equity impact assessments in our community.
What We Learned and How We Can Move Forward Together

K–12 Education

Johnson County’s school-age population is significantly more diverse than its adult population. And while we rightly boast of our excellent schools—including our nationally recognized City and West high schools—African American and Latino students are not full and equal participants in the benefits of K–12 education. These students are at greater risk of not graduating from high school and of experiencing the lifelong disadvantages associated with not graduating. Creating racial equity in our public school system must be a top priority for our community.

What We Learned

• **Diverse student population** — K–12 student population is more diverse than in the community at large, with minority enrollment of approximately 33 percent in 2012–13. [ICCSD Enrollment Report 2012–13]

• **Graduation rates** — Statewide data show significant racial disparities, with African American and Latino students graduating at lower rates than white and Asian American students. [Iowa Department of Education]

• **Advanced placement courses** — Participation in advanced placement courses shows racial disparities, with white and Asian American students making up higher percentages of AP students than their representation in the overall student population (76.2 percent white, 12.2 percent Asian American); black and Latino students make up lower percentages of AP students than their representation in the overall student population (5.2 percent black, 15.3 percent Latino). [ICCSD course enrollment data, 2010–11]

• **Special Education** — Black and Latino students are significantly overrepresented in special education programs based on their proportion of the overall school population (29.3 percent black, 15.3 percent Latino); white and Asian American students are underrepresented in special education programs (51 percent white, 1.3 percent Asian American). [ICCSD Enrollment Report, 2012–13]

• **Suspensions and police referrals** — In-school suspensions, out-of-school suspensions, and police referrals all show significant overrepresentation of black students; overrepresentation of Latino students; and underrepresentation of white and Asian American students, based on their proportions of the student population. For example, white students comprise 35.8 percent of police referrals compared to 44.8 percent black students and 17.9 percent Latino students. [ICCSD Safety and Climate Report, 2009–10 and 2010–11; ICCSD Annual Progress Report, 2009–10 and 2010–11]
**How We Can Move Forward Together**

- **Encourage the Iowa City Community School District** to continue its work to address racial disparities in K–12 education and strengthen its efforts:
  - How does the ICCSD use racial/ethnic data and racial equity assessment tools to monitor the impact of policies on racial equity?
  - How is the district working with parents and families of students of color to understand and address barriers to their children’s success?
  - Has the district identified root causes of racial disparities in suspensions, including a exploration of the role of implicit bias as some other school districts have done?
  - What policies govern how students are assigned to special education programs or channeled into alternative education settings, and why are students of color disproportionately represented?
  - How do our schools currently work with local law enforcement agencies, and to what extent are police officers involved in school disciplinary actions?
  - How is the district using data to evaluate its success in recruiting and retaining teachers and administrators of color?
  - How will racial equity be integrated into the district’s Diversity Policy?
Juvenile Justice

Treatment of youthful offenders differs according to their race, with black and Latino youths being significantly more likely than white youths to be detained. Juvenile detention is associated with lower high school graduation rates and greater criminal recidivism.

What We Learned:

- **Arrest rates** — Black and Latino youths in Johnson County experience significantly higher rates of arrest and detention than white youths. In fact, Johnson County led the state in the disparity of juvenile arrests for black youths, who were nine times more likely than white youths to be arrested in 2009. This trend improved in more recent years, but black youths in Johnson County were still almost six times more likely to be arrested than white youths in 2011. [Iowa Division of Criminal and Juvenile Justice Planning; National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice, University of Iowa]

- **Curfew ordinance** — Iowa City’s curfew ordinance for juveniles 17 and younger affects minority youths disproportionately. Young people of color make up 26 percent of Johnson County’s 10–17-year-old population, but represent more than a third of curfew ordinance citations and warnings. Curfew violations rank No. 2 as a cause of juvenile arrests in Iowa City, at 22 percent of juvenile charges. [ICPD Annual Report, 2011]
• **Adverse effects** — Juvenile detention has been found to have a strong relationship with failure to graduate from high school. In one national study, only 12 percent of those who had served time in a juvenile detention center went on to graduate from high school or earn a GED. [*John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, 2006*]

**How We Can Move Forward Together:**

- **Conduct fact-finding** to ascertain community approaches to key juvenile justice issues:
  - How do local institutions involved in juvenile justice—law enforcement agencies, juvenile courts, schools—assess the impacts of their policies and practices on youths of different races?
  - What strategies do local law enforcement agencies have in place to reduce disproportionate contact with minority youths, how are community members involved in the development of these strategies, and how is progress measured?
  - What are city councils and the Johnson County Board of Supervisors doing to hold law enforcement agencies accountable for reducing disparities in treatment of youths of different races?
  - What are local law enforcement agencies doing to recruit and retain minority officers, and what types of training do officers receive to understand the role of implicit bias and promote racial equity?

- **Ensure robust community input** into law enforcement practices, policies, and programs through community policing and effective and accessible complaint procedures related to individual officer behaviors as well as departmental practices.

**Adult Criminal Justice**

Racial disparities in criminal justice are a national phenomenon, yet Iowa stands out for the disproportionately high number of African American inmates in its prison population. Johnson County’s average daily jail census shows an even greater disparity. Data reported by the Iowa City Police Department show disproportionate traffic stops and non-traffic arrests of African American individuals. People of color represent a disproportionately low number of police officers and other ICPD employees.

**What We Learned:**

- **Disproportionate arrests** — Black/African American residents make up 4.8 percent of Iowa City’s population but accounted for 28 percent of non-traffic arrests by Iowa City Police in 2011. Almost 13 percent of traffic stops involved black drivers. [*ICPD*]

- **Disproportionate incarceration** — Black inmates made up 42 percent of the Johnson County Jail’s average daily population in 2010, and 26 percent of Iowa’s prison population in 2011. [*Johnson County Sheriff; Iowa Department of Corrections*]

- **Underrepresentation in policing** — Black and Latino officers together made up just 6 percent of Iowa City’s police force in 2011 and held no positions in other job classifications within the Iowa City Police Department. [*City of Iowa City Employment Opportunity Report, 2011*]
How We Can Move Forward Together:

• In order to ensure the availability of reliable data to monitor racial disparities, establish **uniform data collection and reporting** on race and ethnicity for Johnson County’s several law enforcement agencies.
• **Ensure easy public access** to data on law enforcement contacts, traffic stops, arrests, and incarceration in Johnson County.
• **Conduct fact-finding** to ascertain basic data and information on key issues regarding criminal justice and the perception of criminal justice in our community:
  - What factors help explain racial disparities in traffic stop data and how do Johnson County traffic stop data compare with national statistics?
  - Does local media coverage disproportionately feature people of color accused of crimes, and what policies and practices do local news organizations have to ensure that coverage accurately reflects the racial makeup of those accused of crimes?

**Employment and Business Ownership**

A great majority—nearly 81 percent—of Johnson County residents whose income falls below the federal poverty level are white, according to the 2010 American Community Survey. At the same time, only 16 percent of white households have poverty-level incomes compared with about 40 percent of African American and 26 percent of Asian families. Poverty is an outcome of multiple factors, including lack of access to employment and other economic opportunities, life situations, and lack of resources across generations.

People of color do not enjoy the same economic opportunities as white individuals in Johnson County. They experience higher unemployment and have lower income. Business ownership is low among black and Latino residents. In a racially and ethnically equitable community, people of color would experience about the same rates of unemployment, poverty, and business ownership as white people.

What We Learned:

• **Employment disparity** — Johnson County’s black, Latino, and multiracial residents experience significantly higher unemployment than people of other races. Unemployment among African Americans in 2011 was 12.1 percent; 5.9 percent among Latinos; and 19.6 percent among multiracial residents, compared with an overall unemployment rate of 4.3 percent. [Iowa Workforce Development, 2011]
• **Income disparity** — Significantly higher proportions of African American and Asian residents of Johnson County reported poverty-level incomes in 2010. About 40 percent of black residents and 26 percent of Asian residents fell below the federal poverty level, compared with 16 percent of white residents. [U.S. Census American Community Survey, 2010]
• **Business ownership disparity** — Of Johnson County’s 9,323 registered businesses in 2007, 4.1 percent were owned by Asians/Asian Americans; 1.8 percent were owned by African Americans; and 1.6 percent by Latinos. [U.S. Census Bureau, State & County Quick Facts]
How We Can Move Forward Together:

- **Conduct fact-finding** to identify barriers to people of color in income, employment, and business ownership:
  - What barriers to employment exist for people of color and how are these barriers being addressed as an issue that harms our community rather than just an individual problem?
  - In what sectors have minority business owners been successful, and how does the local business community support the entrepreneurial aspirations of people of color?

**Housing**

The quality and affordability of housing in stable neighborhoods play key roles in families’ economic and social well-being. In fact, the Urban Institute includes residential segregation, neighborhood affluence, and home ownership among the most significant factors in determining racial and ethnic equity. [Urban Institute, 2012] Despite a variety of programs funded by both local and federal governments to support housing availability and affordability, there is a growing racial divide in Johnson County communities. This divide is a function of both regional housing markets and housing policies at the city and regional scales.
What We Learned:

- **Home ownership** — Home ownership in Johnson County skews toward white residents, who make up a greater percentage of home owners and a lower percentage of home renters than their share of the overall population. People of color, conversely, make up a lower percentage of home owners and a higher percentage of home renters than their share of the overall population. [U.S. Census, 2010]
- **“Subsidized” housing** — Johnson County’s largest municipality, Iowa City, carries out numerous programs to support the goal of increasing housing availability, affordability, and quality. These include 81 Public Housing Units and 1,250 Housing Choice Voucher (“Section 8”) units. [Iowa City Housing Authority Annual Report, 2012]
  - Not all programs report statistics on the racial and ethnic makeup of participants, so it is difficult to assess the racial equity impact of housing programs.
  - Much of the media coverage regarding housing focuses on a single program, so-called “Section 8” rental vouchers, as representative of racial and class divisions in Iowa City.
- **Program participation** — For those programs where we do have race/ethnicity data, African American and Latino families participate at significantly higher rates than their share of the population. For example, of the 1,250 families participating the Housing Choice Voucher program, 34 percent are headed by African Americans. [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Community Development Block Grant Performance Profile, Iowa City, 2008; Iowa City Housing Authority Annual Report, 2012]
- **Concentration of low-income housing** — Planners and policy makers in the Iowa City area have used housing policy to alter concentrations of low-income housing. Although not always explicitly acknowledged, racial tensions have played a significant role in these discussions, especially with regard to the southeastern part of Iowa City. Policy initiatives have included:
  - Iowa City’s creation of a Scattered Site Housing Task Force in 2003, and the Task Force’s subsequent 2005 report. [October 11, 2005, memo from Matthew J. Hayek to Iowa City City Council]
  - The Johnson County Urbanized Area Policy Board’s creation of an Affordable Housing Sub-Committee, and the Sub-Committee’s subsequent 2010 recommendations. [September 9, 2010, memo from John Yapp to Kelly Hayworth et al.]
  - Iowa City’s adoption of an Affordable Housing Location Model in 2011, which banned new subsidized rental units in certain areas of the city. [Kristopher Ackerson, “In the Right Place,” Planning, March 2013].
  - The Iowa City Community School District’s adoption of a Diversity Policy in 2013. Schools in the Iowa City Community School District vary dramatically in terms of their percentages of students eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL), which is a surrogate measure for poverty. These FRL differences reflect differences in the socio-economic composition of neighborhoods.

How We Can Move Forward Together:

- **Adopt a consistent set of racial and ethnic data** collection across all housing-related programs in order to better understand their impacts on racial equity.
- **Initiate a dialogue** among the public and municipal housing program officials to discuss implementation of Racial Equity Impact Assessments so that housing policies achieve their stated goals.
- **Work to ensure** that community dialogues about housing address the growing racial divide.
• **Conduct fact-finding** to assess news coverage of housing issues, with the aim of broadening coverage to include the full range of community investments in housing.

**Community Leadership**

Overcoming racial disparities in our community will take courageous and intentional leadership. Increased racial and ethnic diversity among elected leaders and in public institutions will serve as an important indicator of success in our community’s journey toward racial equity.

**What We Learned:**

- **Employment in city government** — Iowa City, our community’s largest municipality, reported just 25 people of color among its 459 public employees in 2011, which translates to 5.4 percent. People of color made up 20.3 percent of Iowa City’s population in 2010. [U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2011]
- **Employment in county government** — Johnson County reported just four people of color among its 258 employees—1.5 percent—in 2011. People of color made up 17 percent of Johnson County’s overall population in 2010. [U.S. Equal Opportunity Employment Commission, 2011]
- **Elected leaders** — None of Iowa City’s, Coralville’s, or Johnson County’s current elected leaders are people of color. The Iowa City School Board includes one person of color.

**How We Can Move Forward Together:**

- **Identify and address** formal and informal barriers to people of color seeking elected and appointed positions in local government.
- **Identify and support** local efforts to increase the civic participation of people of color.
- **Urge elected leaders** to adopt resolutions and action plans affirming local governments’ commitment to racial equity in the workplace and to elimination of racial disparities in public services and programs.
- **Initiate community dialogue** to include the experiences of people of color in discussions to identify the impacts of proposed policies, budgets, and governing practices.
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- Graduation rates — Iowa Department of Education
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- Special education disparity — Enrollment Report 2012–13, Iowa City Community School District.

On Juvenile Justice:
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- Curfew ordinance — Annual Report 2011, Iowa City Police Department.

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- Business ownership disparity — State & County Quick Facts, U.S. Census Bureau.

On Housing:
- Housing program participation — Community Development Block Grant Performance Profile, Iowa City, 2008, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development; Annual Report 2012, Iowa City Housing Authority.

On Community Leadership
Further Reading on Racial Disparities and Racial Equity

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- Equity Project (The) at Indiana University (nd). Glossary of Equity Terms: http://www.indiana.edu/~equity/glossary.php
• Iowa Department of Public Health. Iowa Cancer Health Disparities http://www.idph.state.ia.us/hpcdp/common/pdf/ia_cancer_health_disparities.pdf
• Multnomah County, Oregon. Equity and Empowerment Lens: http://web.multco.us/diversity-equity/equity-and-empowerment-lens
Contact the Coalition for Racial Justice at coalition.racial.justice@gmail.com to:

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