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STATE OF BLACK KANSAS CITY EQUALITY INDEX | Urban League presents study

## Report points out disparities for African-Americans VIDEO

Blacks in Jackson and Wyandotte counties are doing only three-fourths as well as whites.

By LYNN FRANEY  
The Kansas City Star

At this rate, it will take another four centuries before black and white Kansas Citians achieve true equality.

And that's too long, Gwen Grant, president of the Urban League of Greater Kansas City, said Tuesday as she presented the organization's first-ever State of Black Kansas City Equality Index.

"We must get busy today and close the gaps now," Grant told dozens of community leaders gathered for a news conference on the report, which was compiled by University of Missouri-Kansas City researchers.

Putting together a range of figures — employment rates, graduation rates, incarceration rates and good health — the study found that black residents of Jackson and Wyandotte counties are doing only three-fourths as well as white residents.

The Urban League found one way of measuring progress. The U.S. Constitution counted African-Americans as .60 of a white person, and with the equality index here at .73 of a white person, it will be the 25th century before parity is reached, Grant said.

Some key gaps identified by the study:

- Black people are three times more likely than white people in Jackson County to live in poverty.
- Black people die six years earlier than white people in Jackson and Wyandotte counties.
- Black students lag white students on test scores, with the median ACT score in the predominantly black, urban Kansas City School District at 16.9, compared with 22 in the predominantly white, suburban Blue Springs School District.
- The homicide rate for black males in Jackson County is 31.2 per 100,000, compared with 7.4 for white males.

Narrowing the gaps will take the combined attention of government officials, school and business leaders and community volunteers, Grant and other speakers said.

"We've got to bring it all together," Grant said.

Kansas City Police Chief Jim Corwin thanked Grant and the Urban League for initiating a dialogue on these serious matters. Putting more people in jail doesn't solve social problems, Corwin said, referring to the huge disparity in the percentages of black and white people behind bars.

Kansas City, Kan., Mayor Joe Reardon said he hopes the new Village West shopping development in western Wyandotte County will mean more jobs for black people in the county. The Unified Government of Kansas City, Kan, and Wyandotte County will use statistics from the State of Black Kansas City report in its new master plan being written over the next year, he said.

The master plan will provide a framework for making the county a better place to live, he said.

"There is a lot of work to be done," Reardon said.

Job creation would help drive improvements in many of the areas measured in the report, said Mathew Forstater, who leads the Center for Full Employment and Price Stability at UMKC. The center gathered statistics from the U.S. Census, state and local governments, school districts and other sources for the report.

But unfortunately, he added, new jobs often pop up in outlying areas, far from the large black populations of the central city.

That's why the Urban League hopes to work with the Kansas City Area Transportation Authority to make sure bus routes help central city residents get to the suburbs' full-time, better-paying jobs.

Downtown revitalization, too, holds out hope for more job creation for black Kansas Citians because those jobs are closer to where black people live, said Clyde McQueen, who leads the Full Employment Council.

Grant emphasized educational equality's importance in solving many of the social ills highlighted in the report. She said everyone must have high expectations for minority and nonminority children.

"If we are willing to work together, we can close the gaps and lift the least and the left behind," she said.

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