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DESPITE EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS SINCE 1970, MANY AMERICANS STILL LACK OPPORTUNITY FOR UPWARD MOBILITY, NEW DATA SHOWS

“Historical Report of Opportunity” shows modest national gains despite worrisome trends; poverty and income inequality worse today than 1970

BOSTON, MA – The opportunity for upward mobility—measured by key economic, educational and community conditions—experienced modest national growth of 13 percent between 1970 and 2010, yet progress has been uneven over time and varies from state to state, according to new data from Opportunity Nation and Measure of America.

“A Historical Report of Opportunity,” the first statistical measure of national opportunity levels for the past four decades, uses publicly available data to provide a holistic picture of how the climate for opportunity has changed in all 50 states and Washington, D.C.

The analysis uses data from 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000 and 2010, enabling comparisons of ten key indicators: unemployment rate; median household income; poverty rate; income inequality; preschool enrollment; on-time high school graduation; post-secondary completion; disconnected youth rate; violent crime rate; and access to medical doctors.

The data shows that overall much of the growth in opportunity is fueled by increases in preschool enrollment and post-secondary education. Yet troubling negative trends, such as a rise in poverty since 2000 and increasing youth disconnection (16-24 years old not in school or working) since 1990 impede upward mobility.

“Our country’s relatively modest progress is not nearly enough to ensure that Americans—particularly teens and young adults—have access to the critical economic, education and community supports that promote upward mobility,” said Mark Edwards, executive director of Opportunity Nation. “It also prompts a closer look at states that have helped youth embark on meaningful educational and career pathways – the key to thriving communities and economies that benefit all of us.”

KEY NATIONAL FINDINGS INCLUDE:

- 1990 - 2000 saw the greatest increase in national opportunity – more than 10 times the increase in opportunity than the second-best decade, 1980 - 1990
- The poverty rate increased by 12 percent between 1970 and 2010
- Income inequality increased nearly 30 percent at the national level between 1970 and 2010, and also in each of the 50 states and Washington, D.C.
- Post-secondary completion rates (the percentage of adults with at least an associate’s degree or higher) grew 105 percent over the past four decades
- The rate of disconnected youth has increased since 1990, affecting nearly 15 percent of young adults in 2010

KEY STATE FINDINGS INCLUDE:

- Only two states, Nevada and Michigan, experienced declines in opportunity from 1970 - 2010
- Virginia is the state with the greatest absolute gains in opportunity from 1970 - 2010

- States with consistently high overall opportunity scores in the Historical Report include New Hampshire and Connecticut.
- Four states have consistently struggled with low opportunity scores: Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and New Mexico.

“This historical report on opportunity depicts how interconnected and crucial these conditions are for fostering access to opportunity,” said Sarah Burd-Sharps, co-director of Measure of America. “There are many rich stories that can be derived from the data about which factors promote opportunity.”

About Opportunity Nation:

Opportunity Nation is a bipartisan, national campaign comprised of more than 300 businesses, educational institutions, nonprofits and civic organizations working together to expand economic mobility and close the opportunity gap in America. We advocate policy change that expands opportunity and catalyzes private sector and community actions to help more Americans, particularly young people, get their fair shot at the American Dream.

About Measure of America:

Measure of a America, a Project of the Social Science Research Council, provides easy-to-use yet methodologically sound tools for understanding well-being, opportunity, and inequality in America and for stimulating fact-based conversations about issues we all care about: health, education and living standards.

For more information, please visit: www.opportunitynation.org and www.measureofamerica.org

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