

Fox Cities LIFE Study update puts focus on diversity

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Jonathan Wesener's family discusses his bullying at Edgar High School and tragic death by suicide. Wm. Glasheen/Post-Crescent Media

APPLETON - The Fox Cities LIFE Study [has been updated](#) to take a deeper look at diversity and inclusion and workforce participation, according to the organizations that fund the quality of life study.

The United Way Fox Cities, the Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region and the Fox Cities Chamber of Commerce and Industry released the updates Thursday morning, highlighting data that focuses on three of four priority areas in the Fox Cities.

"We listened carefully to the feedback from our community partners who evaluated the LIFE Study with us last summer and they raised some very good questions and asked for more extensive information around a couple of the areas of community life," said Curt Detjen, president and chief executive officer of the Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region. "We know the LIFE Study is used extensively by community leaders ... and it's important to provide meaningful information to help them build the programs and initiatives that are really going to make a difference."

RELATED: [2016 LIFE Study: Teen suicide, bullying rates alarming](#)

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The study includes more than 200 indicators about demographic, economic, social and health issues in the Fox Cities. The 2016 data was used to determine community priorities, which include poverty, youth health, student performance and youth safety.

A total of 10 new data charts have been created. They include information on workforce participation, youth depression and suicide-related behavior, grade three reading proficiency, economically disadvantaged students, graduate rates and bullying.

Key takeaways include:

Students who identify as racial or ethnic minorities reported considering and attempting suicide [at higher rates](#), especially those who identify as American Indian or Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders.

Among students who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual, [more than 45 percent](#) have considered suicide.

More than 40 percent of the students who identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual reported being bullied [online](#) and [in school](#).



(Photo: Getty Images/iStockphoto)

More than one-third of American Indian and Hawaiian or Pacific Islander students reported bullying, compared to 25 percent of white and black or African American students.

The gap in third-grade reading proficiency [remains significant](#) between white students and students of racial and ethnic minorities, despite gains made from 2012 to 2015.

Students who identify as racial or ethnic minorities [are more likely](#) to come from more economically disadvantaged homes than their white peers.

[Graduation rates](#) over a six-year period declined for all groups, except students who identify as black or African American and for those who identify as two or more races.

[Workforce participation](#) is higher than the national average in Calumet, Outagamie and Winnebago counties.

The LIFE Study has traditionally been updated every five years. However, the funding groups decided to host the study online and provide additional information to make it more of a living study than a static one.

"We know that better community outcomes and better-advised solutions will be available if we can provide more real-time updated information to help all of us make better decisions. Publishing the LIFE Study on the web allows for more frequent updates and sharing, and that should benefit all of us," Detjen said.

Furthermore, continuing to evaluate the data demonstrates the community's desire to move forward, which can help attract businesses and workers to the area, said Bob Mundt, president and chief executive officer of the Fox Cities Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The organizations are trying to determine how often the data will be updated. However, the overall goal of using the data to facilitate conversations and to drive change remains the same.

"Part of the role of sponsoring agencies was to hold up this data as a mirror to the community at-large, so collectively as a community we own these issues," said Tony Gonzalez, vice president of community development for United Way Fox Cities.

More information can be found at foxcitieslifestudy.org.

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