

# **Executive Summary**

## **Families**

*Births to teenage mothers have declined slightly in the county*

- Since the late 1990s births to teenage mothers' ages 10 to 17 are down in Kershaw, but the teen birth rate per 100 females in the county is still generally above the state average.

*Out-of-wedlock births in the county are increasing but are still below the state average*

- Births to unwed mothers as a percentage of total births are currently in the low-40 percent range in Kershaw, a few percent below the state average of 45.3 percent. The percentage of single-parent families in the county is also below the state norm. Higher percentages of single-parent families, which are prevalent among African Americans, cause a significant parenting strain generally placed on the mother that often manifests itself in lack of nurturance, discipline, teaching and language use for children during their formative years. The end result of inadequate parenting behaviors is generally a lack of educational attainment for children and poverty.

*Youth poverty rates in the county are below the state average*

- According to the best available estimates, about 19.5 percent of children in Kershaw live in poverty compared to the state average of 21.2 percent.
- County poverty rates for minority children (30.8 percent) are triple the rate of white children (10.3 percent). This can be largely attributed to the prevalence of out-of-wedlock births and single-parent families among minorities.

*The senior population is growing in the county*

- Given aging of "Baby Boomers," the senior population is expanding in Kershaw.
- Kershaw has a slightly higher percentage of seniors in poverty compared to the state average. About 14.1 percent of the county's seniors were in poverty in 2000.

## **Housing and Public Transit**

*Fewer homeowners and renters in the county are financially burdened in comparison to many rural counties in the state*

- Lower relative county poverty rates and stable new home construction values in Kershaw likely contribute to growth in home ownership in the county.

*Homeless totals are rising in the county and the state with very limited shelter options locally*

- Given gradually increasing poverty rates, the best estimates show homeless totals are on the rise in Kershaw and the state. There is only one transitional shelter in the county.

*Suburban growth and other factors offer increased potential for public transportation ridership*

- Population growth in western Kershaw and Columbia provide more opportunities for the current commuter shuttle in the county.
- Several other factors offer increased potential for public transit ridership in the county, though many likely depend on additional funding from the state or the county.

## **Education**

*Standardized test scores in the county are generally above the state average*

- Kershaw County School District's standardized test scores on the PACT and SAT are better than the state average and are competitive with similar districts in the state. Kershaw's ACT test scores are slightly below the state average.

*Public school graduation rates have improved in the county*

- Kershaw County School District's graduation rate has been close to 70 percent in recent years and is competitive with the state average.
- African-American males have the highest percentage of dropouts in the county and the state.

*The percentage of public school students in the county entering post-secondary education is about the state average*

- An estimated 48.5 percent of district students in recent years have entered post-secondary training directly after high school, a total that is competitive with the state norm. Maintaining and potentially increasing the percentage of students who go on to advanced training is critical in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century "knowledge economy."

*High relative family poverty rates among minorities curtail student achievement*

- Research shows there is a direct correlation between a child from a low-income family and that child's lack of school readiness. Issues contributing to family poverty include single-parent families, and lower educational and income levels. Family poverty is especially prevalent among minorities in the county and the state. Educational statistics bear this out as a relatively high percentage of African-American males demonstrate a lack of readiness for the first grade in the county and state. A potential solution to this dilemma is expansion of early childhood education programs.

**Economy**

*Current job totals in the county are similar to year 2000 levels*

- Job losses in the lower-skilled, lower-wage manufacturing sector in the county since 2000 have been offset by non-manufacturing employment gains in health care, distribution and retail among other sectors. The trend of lower-skilled manufacturing job losses has also occurred in other rural counties in the state and Southeast.
- Job losses and an increasing number of county residents looking for work has caused Kershaw's unemployment rate to rise during the decade, but the percentage is slightly below the state average. Estimates show the county's unemployment rate for African Americans and other minorities is significantly higher than the rate for whites.
- County commuting patterns show an increasing number of Kershaw residents commuting to work daily in Richland and Lexington counties. Suburban growth in the western end of Kershaw is reflected in growing county population estimates through the decade.

*Per capita income growth in the county is about equal to the state and U.S. averages*

- In recent years, percentage income growth in Kershaw is on par with state and national increases. Income levels in the county are slightly above the state average but below the U.S. norm.

**Health**

*Inadequate prenatal care and low birth-weight rates in the county track below the state average*

- The rate of low birth-weight births in Kershaw was below the state average from 2002-'06

*HIV and STD case rates in the county are below the state average*

- Similar to the state, the vast majority of HIV and STD cases in Kershaw involves African Americans and is the result of unprotected heterosexual sex.

*Hospitalizations and costs associated with the uninsured are rising in the county and the state*

- Kershaw's uninsured inpatient hospital discharges nearly doubled from 2003-'07 and associated costs from these hospitalizations increased by 136 percent during the timeframe. These totals exceeded state average increases.