

Improving Opportunities for Children in New Mexico: An Academic Perspective

Thomas A. Massaro MD, PhD
Chief Medical Officer, School Health Officer
New Mexico Department of Health
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Introduction

There are great challenges for children today, and, at the same time, there are great opportunities.

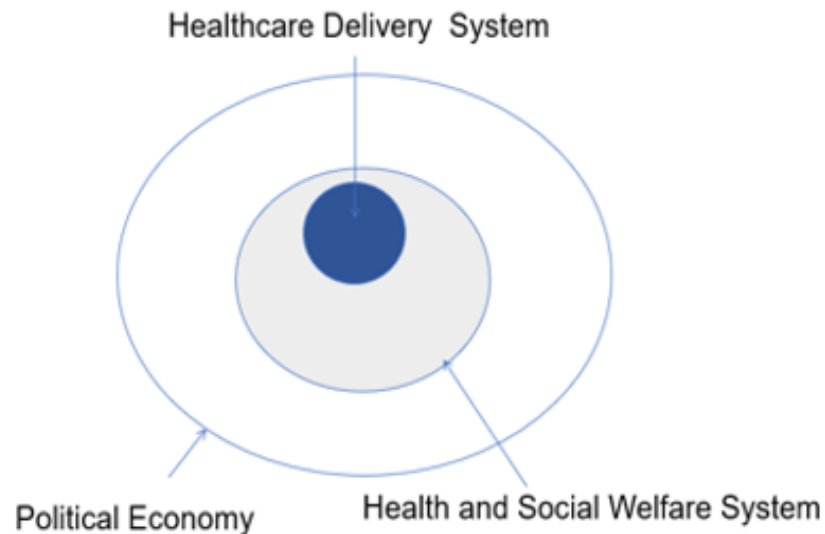
This presentation aims to balance challenges with opportunities from a high-level perspective by:

- Describing the malalignment across the healthcare delivery, the public health, and the social welfare systems;
- Reviewing recent literature on child welfare and reducing health inequities in children and adolescents; and
- Providing a conceptual framework for improving the health status of children in New Mexico.

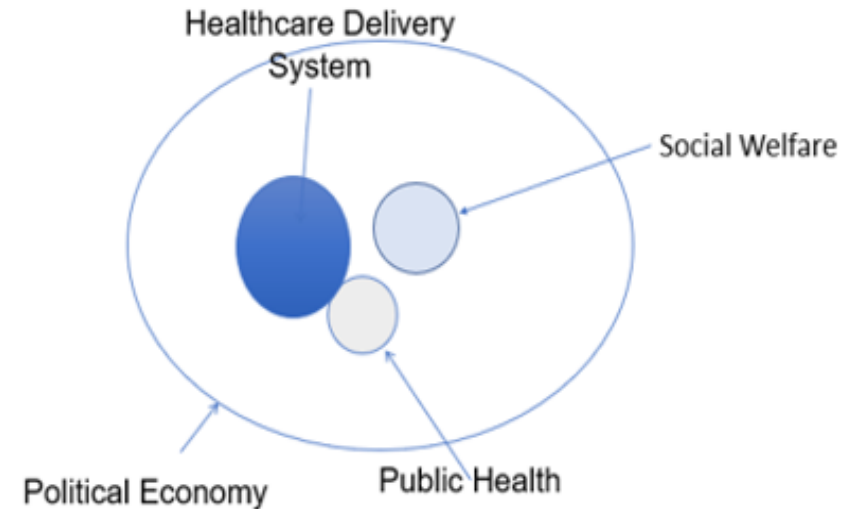


Comparative Social and Health Systems Analysis

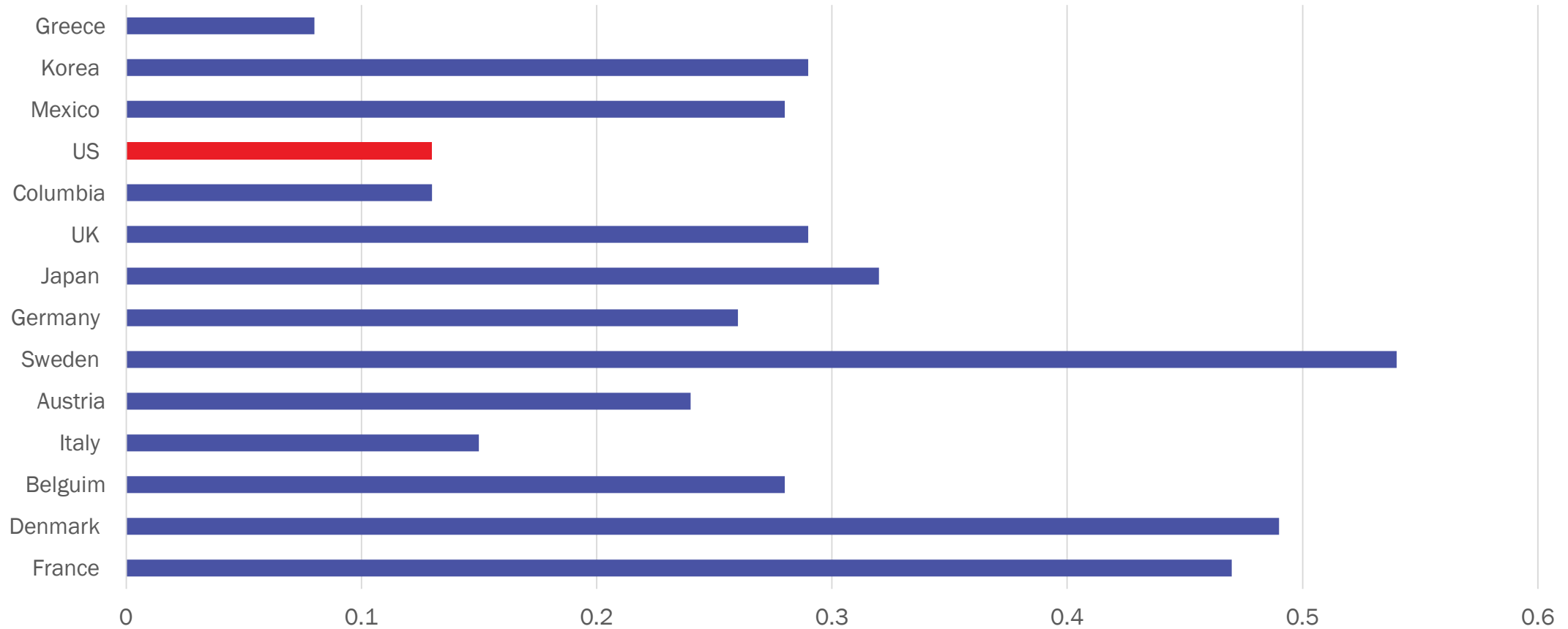
Many Developed Countries



The United States



The U.S. Spends More on Health and Relatively Less on Social Services than Most (35/38) OECD Countries



Source: % GDP Government Social / % GDP Government Health Services, OECD Health Data (2021)

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Pediatricians are Fundamentally Optimists

- We may be at a tipping point
- The inequities which were ruthlessly exposed during the pandemic appear to have struck a chord with the general public. There appears to be a growing consensus that we must deal with inequities. An inequitable society is an inefficient one.
- In general, people have a soft spot for children and are often willing to do more for kids (Are they more worthy?) than for adults.
- So, perhaps a value system that can link the health delivery, the public health, and the social welfare systems in striving to provide a truly equitable society for its children is a possible common goal.

Nuances on the Concept of Equity for Children

- Amartya Sen has written extensively on equity. He was the first of four Noble Prize-winning economists to address this issue directly.
- For him, in an equitable society, individuals have “the freedom to achieve”. This “capability” oriented approach reflects a person’s freedom to choose a living situation and a life focus for themselves.
- It contrasts with a “functioning” approach which may focus on a particular component of life, resources, income, etc. The functioning approach is reflected in our adult-focused, health systems-oriented, attention to the “social determinants of health”, i.e., housing, income, transportation, food insecurity, education, etc.

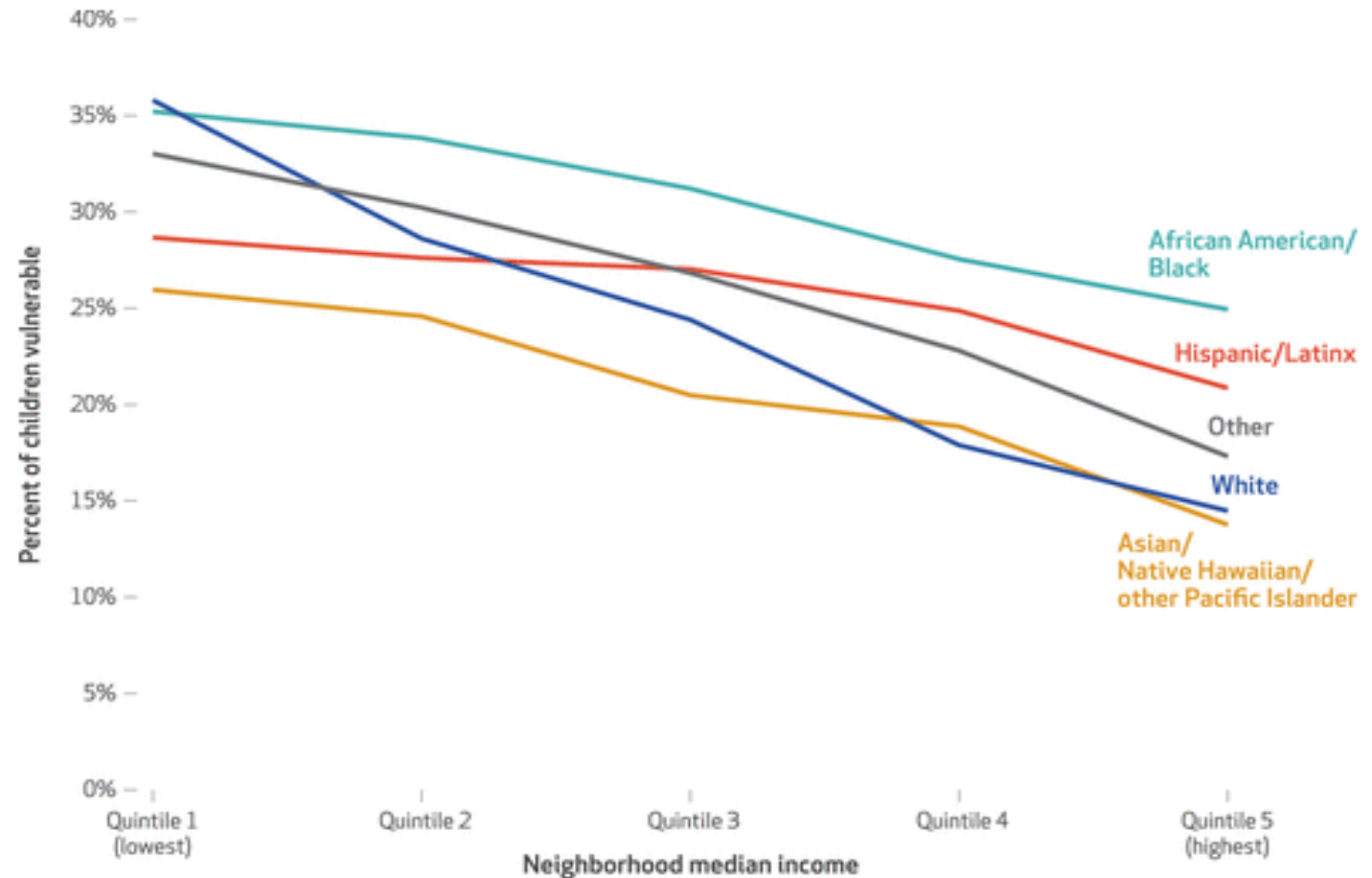


Nuances on the Concept of Equity for Children

- The “capability” approach may be more appropriate when we talk about equity and equality for children. It is not that kids are not influenced by the neighborhood they live in, or the resources their family might have, but for the society to be fully equitable to all children, it must give them a freedom to choose who and what they want to be “when they grow up” whether it be an Olympic skate boarder, an astronaut or an artist.
- That concept has historically been difficult to operationalize, but recently a relevant measurement tool has been developed which seeks measures how much freedom a child has in influencing her living situation when she reaches adulthood. Can she choose from several options?
- Providing freedom for her to achieve is the most equitable situation and the best opportunity we can provide. And it is likely the most efficient.

Inequality Begins in Early Life

Teachers evaluated “population-level health development and school readiness” in 183,717 kindergartners and demonstrate a distinct income-related vulnerability or outcome gradient. Bottom line: it is important to begin to influence health equity in early childhood.



Source: Halfon, N., et al, “Measuring Equity from the Start: Disparities in the Health Development of US Kindergartners” *Health Affairs* 39 (10), 2020, p 1702-08.

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The Child Opportunity Index Links Sen's Definition of Equity to Children's Health

- It builds on a positive definition of children's health: the ability of children to achieve healthy development in all areas (physical, cognitive, emotional, and social) and to reach their full potential.
- It measures the "Ability to Achieve" as defined by Sen and the many others who accept his general approach.



Source: Institute of Medicine, National Research Council, Children's health, the nation's wealth: assessing and improving child health, Washington (DC): National Academies Press; 2004

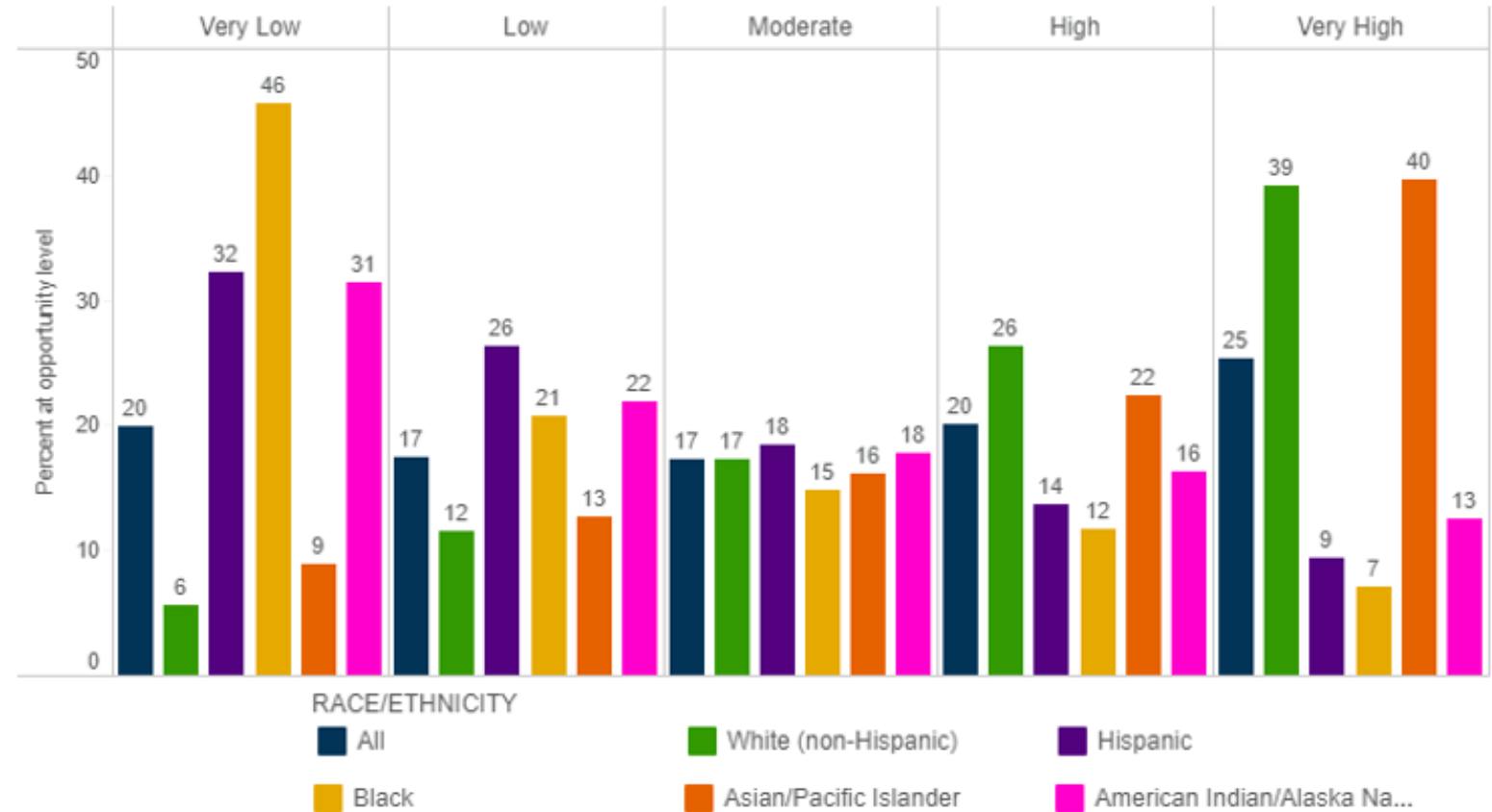
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Inequality in Opportunity

The opportunity to reach one's full potential varies across neighborhoods and racial/ ethnic backgrounds.

Percent of Children at Each Neighborhood Opportunity Level in Albuquerque, by Race/Ethnicity



Source: <https://www.diversitydatakids.org/research-library/data-visualization/raciaethnic-patterns-child-opportunity>

Inequality in Opportunity

Compared to 100 other large metro areas in the U.S., Albuquerque ranks low for equitable neighborhood opportunity levels for minority populations.

Albuquerque Neighborhood's Child Opportunity Scores, by Race/Ethnicity, Ranked Against 100 Large U.S. Metro Areas

Race/Ethnicity	Score	Rank
Black	35	#29
Hispanic	30	#68
Asian/Pacific Islander	58	#83
White	56	#86

(comparison data is not available for American Indian/Alaskan Native)

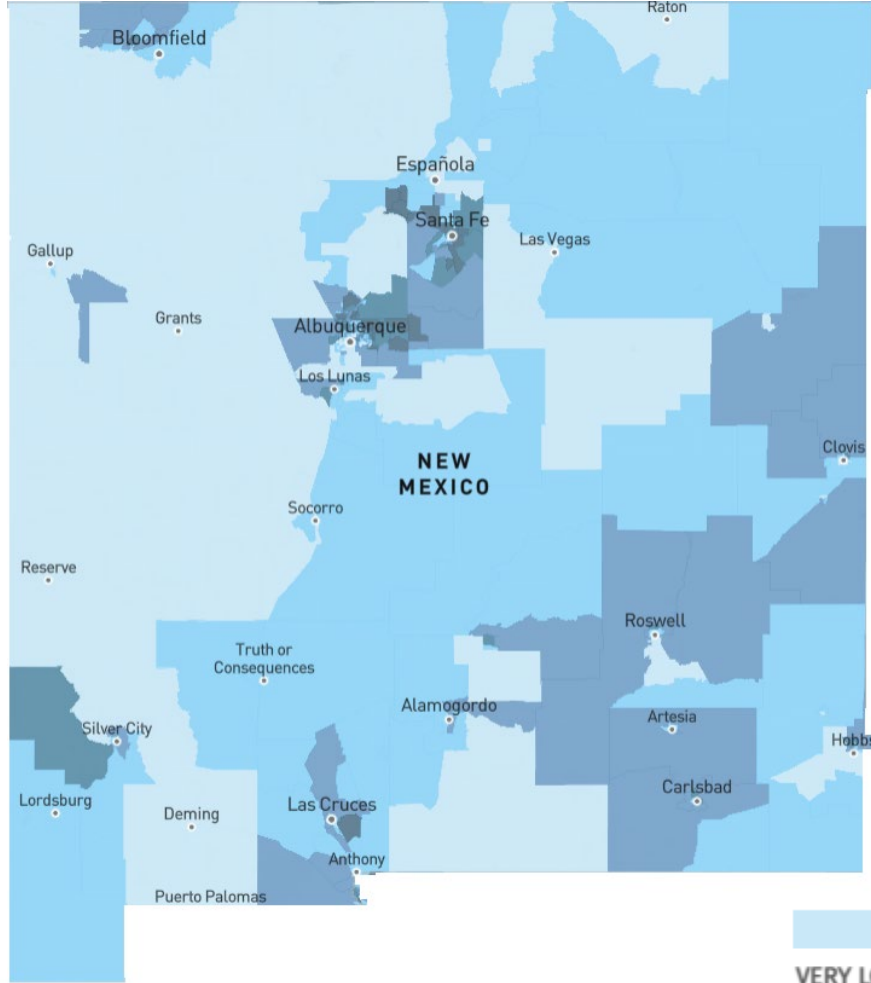
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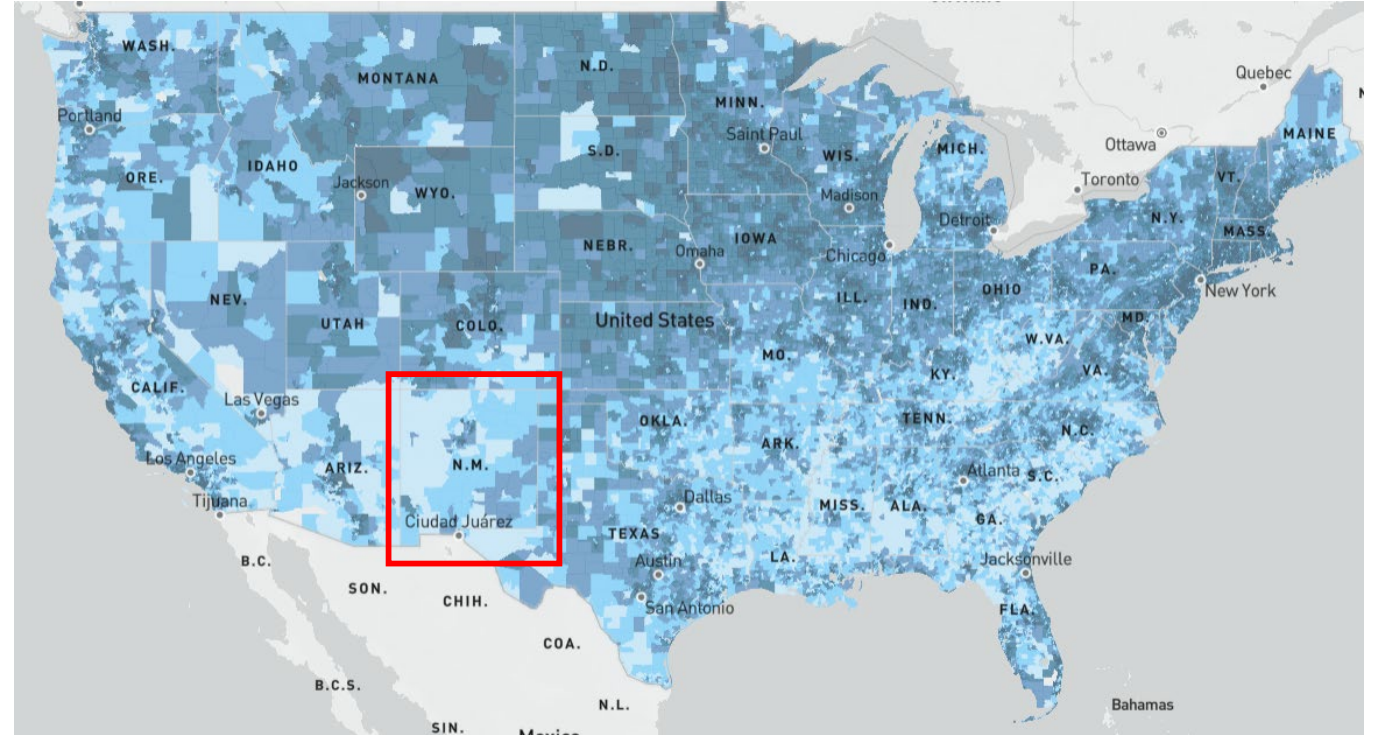
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Inequality in Opportunity

Overall New Mexico Child Opportunity Levels



Overall U.S. Child Opportunity Levels



Source: <https://www.diversitydatakids.org/maps/#/explorer/0/15/10,15//xc/n/1.0.14/37.875/-88.929/3.46/>

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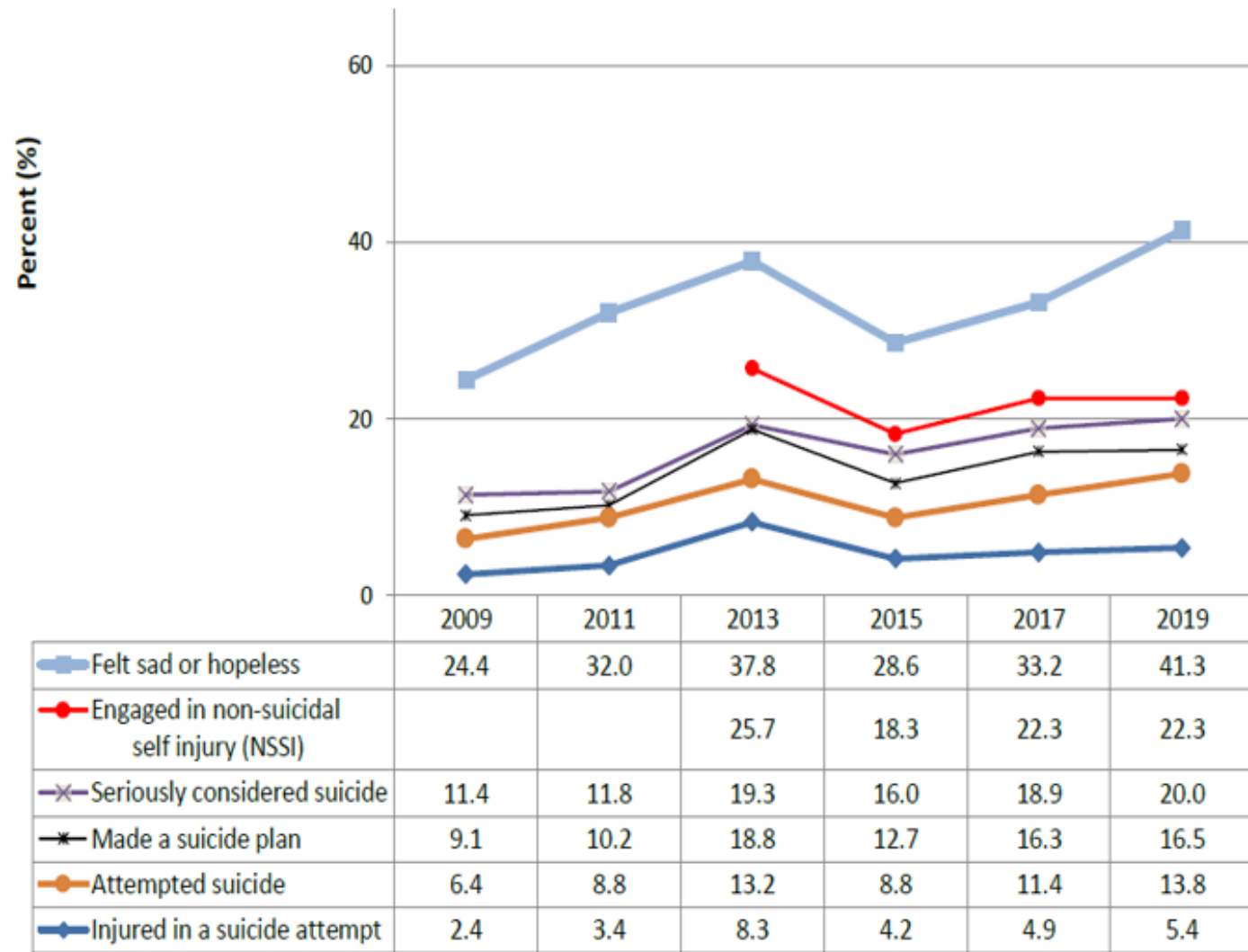
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Young People Today may not Believe they have “Freedom to Achieve”

Youth Risk and Resilience Study

- San Miguel County
- Grades 9-12
- 2009-2019

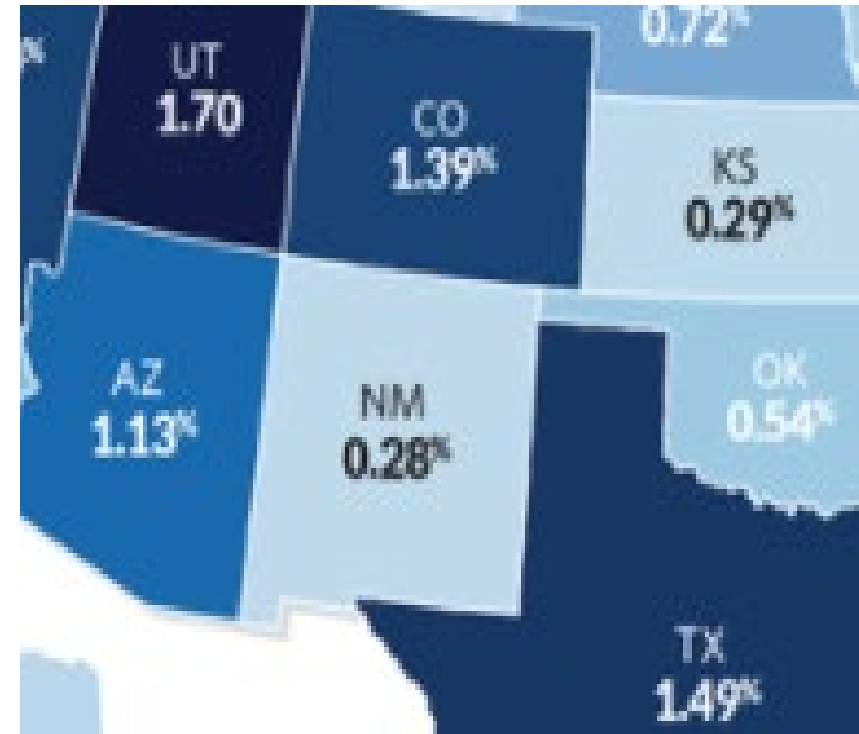
These general trends are shown in virtually all counties across NM.



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2020 Census Data Suggest Perhaps Fewer Opportunities to Achieve in New Mexico

- In 2020 Census overall growth rate in US was 0.55%/ year
- Five states bordering on NM grew an average of 1.25% / year.
- New Mexico grew at 0.28%/year



A Roadmap to Health for Children and Youth

Principles

- **Children First** – Children in Every Policy and Children Prioritized in National, State and Local Agendas
- **Engage All Parts of Society** - Including Communities, Parents, Businesses, Religious Organizations, etc. in Children’s Agenda
- **Power of Prevention** – Upstream Programs and Interventions Take Precedence. Invest in and Minimize Risk for All Children
- **Lifecourse Equity** – Addressing the Cumulative Effects of Positive and Negative Experiences on Long-Term Functioning and Health
- **Implementation Support** – Building Sustainable Programs and Child-friendly Infrastructure. Invest in All Levels of Education.