

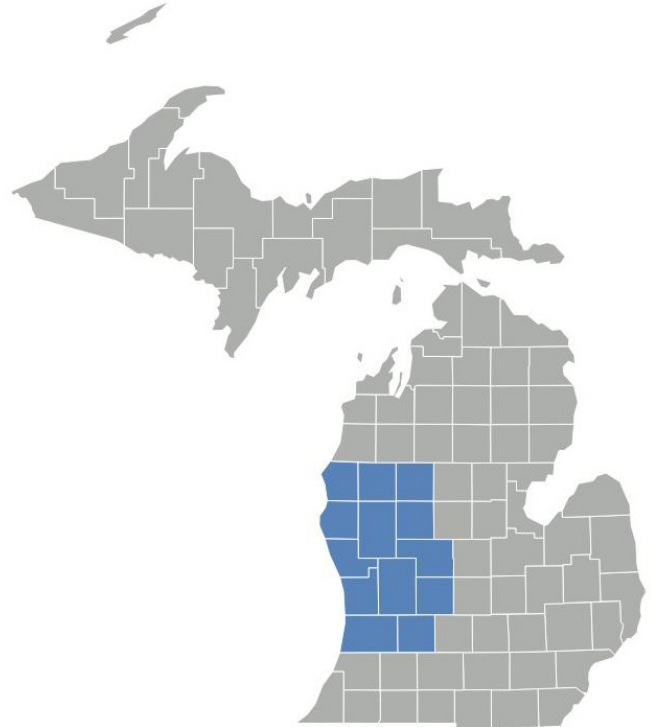
Michigan Poverty & Well Being Map: West Region

The West region includes: Allegan, Barry, Ionia, Kent, Lake, Mason, Mecosta, Montcalm, Muskegon, Newaygo, Oceana, Osceola, and Ottawa counties. Learn more about the map at poverty.umich.edu.

West Michigan Region Should Invest in Addressing Poverty in Lake County

As a region, West Michigan appears to be thriving with lower rates of poverty and higher median incomes than the state overall. However, the regional statistics mask outcomes in some counties that lag behind not only other counties in the region but the entire state. Lake County has the highest child poverty rate in the state, 32%, which is nearly 2 times higher than the state average of 17.6% and close to 2.5 times higher than the rate for the region of 13.3%. Lake County also has the lowest median income in the state, \$40,382 versus \$63,202. Not only are residents of Lake County poorer, but many above the poverty line are still struggling to make ends meet. Lake County has the highest proportion of households that pay more than 30% of their income on housing and the highest proportion of ALICE households, defined as Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed. Residents in Lake County may be employed, but they do not earn incomes high enough to afford basic necessities. To close the economic disparities in the region and ensure that all can prosper, it will be necessary to invest in education and workforce development.

Educational disparities contribute to the economic disparities in the region. The counties in the region that have lower levels of poverty and economic insecurity, like Ottawa and Kent, have the greatest proportion of residents with a bachelor's degree in the region and the state overall. In contrast, Lake County has not only the lowest percentage of residents with post-secondary education in the state, but it also has the highest proportion with less than a high school education and consistently has drop-out rates that are 2 to 3 times the regional average.¹ Other counties in the region, namely



	State	Region
Population	10,062,512	1,619,257
Median Income	\$63,202	\$65,788
Below Poverty Level (<18)	17.6%	13.3%
Below Poverty Level	13.0%	10.7%
ALICE	25.9%	23.8%
ALICE + Poverty Rate	39.0%	34.5%
Receiving Food Stamps/SNAP	12.6%	10.0%
Housing Cost Burdened	31.3%	27.9%
Without Health Insurance	7.1%	7.3%
Single Parent Households	25.2%	20.9%

Montcalm and Osceola, also have populations with lower levels of post-secondary education and elevated rates of high school drop-out.² Low levels of high school completion contribute to low levels of post-secondary educational enrollment and limits economic mobility in these counties.

However, the problem is not limited to students finishing high school and advancing to college. Low levels of proficiency in reading, writing, and math are likely driving these trends. School districts in Lake, Montcalm, Osceola, and Oceana counties are underperforming in SAT reading, writing, and mathematics benchmarks indicative of college preparedness.³ Comparatively, both the Ottawa Area Intermediate School District and the Kent Intermediate School District have a [higher percentage of students](#) reaching SAT benchmarks compared to others in the state of Michigan.⁴

Additionally, these educational disparities start early. Examining student proficiency rates in English and mathematics for third to eighth graders, students in the West Shore Intermediate School District (ISD), which encompasses much of Lake County, perform worse than students statewide.⁵ Currently, English Language Arts proficiency rates are about 20% lower for third- to eighth-grade students in the West Shore ISD than the statewide average and math proficiency rates are nearly 40% lower when compared to the rest of the state. This lack of proficiency is starker when compared to the Ottawa ISD, which covers Ottawa County. Students in West Shore ISD have proficiency rates in ELA that are over 40% lower and proficiency rates that are 50% lower than those in Ottawa ISD.⁶ Investments in all levels of education must be made to spur college readiness and increase educational attainment in Lake County and other lagging counties in the region.

References

1 Social Explorer. "American Community Survey (ACS) 2015-2019 (5-Year Estimates)"

2 Social Explorer. "American Community Survey (ACS) 2017-2021 (5-Year Estimates)"

3 MI School Data. "College Readiness (Includes SAT Data, 2021-22". State of Michigan. <https://www.mischooldata.org/college-readiness/>

4 MI School Data. "College Readiness (Includes SAT Data, 2021-22". State of Michigan. <https://www.mischooldata.org/college-readiness/>

5 MI School Data. "Grades 3-8 State Testing (Includes PSAT Data) Proficiency, 2021-2022." State of Michigan. <https://www.mischooldata.org/grades-3-8-state-testing-includes-psat-data-performance/>

6 MI School Data. "Grades 3-8 State Testing (Includes PSAT Data) Proficiency, 2021-22." State of Michigan. <https://www.mischooldata.org/grades-3-8-state-testing-includes-psat-data-performance/>