

**PHASE ONE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE BUSINESS EQUITY FOR INDY  
LEARNING AND TALENT OPPORTUNITIES TASKFORCE**  
November 9, 2021

### Overarching Comments

- The primary assignment for the Business Equity for Indy (BEI) Learning and Talent Opportunities Taskforce was twofold: (1) develop actionable recommendations for CICIP and Indy Chamber members that could make a meaningful difference in addressing education inequities in Indianapolis, (2) develop policy recommendations for the BEI Policy Taskforce regarding challenges or opportunities that should be addressed by the state or city.
- Racial disparities in education, training and early career outcomes are a community-wide concern with their roots in the history of race in America, are not the fault of any one institution, and must be addressed by all sectors and partners working together.
- Racial disparities impact both Black and Hispanic individuals in Marion County. These disparities are more pronounced for Black students and adults. However, as the latest census data show, the Hispanic population is growing rapidly and should not be ignored. Therefore, the Taskforce's Phase One recommendations are focused specifically on supporting the success of Black individuals. Phase Two of the Taskforce's work will focus on improving education outcomes for Hispanic individuals.
- The Taskforce's recommendations are intended to build upon existing initiatives and programs to avoid reinventing the wheel or launching a program that cannot easily be sustained.
- We want to ensure meaningful engagement for CICIP and Indy Chamber members and other employers that don't just feel good, but can make a genuine difference.
- CICIP and Indy Chamber members consist of small, medium and large employers. Our recommendations provide options that allow all employers to participate.
- Recognizing that low K-12 academic achievement levels for Black students span all districts and schools in Indianapolis, the Taskforce focused its recommendations to support students in all public schools in Marion County – including all 11 public school districts and 50+ public charter schools.

### Taskforce Focus Areas

After months of analysis and discussion, the Taskforce identified the following focus areas to support the success of Black individuals in Marion County ages 0 to 25:

1. **Early Learning.** Expand access to high-quality early learning programs
2. **K-12.** Enhance exposure to and preparation for college and careers for middle and high school students
3. **Post-Secondary.** Increase access to and persistence through postsecondary education

## Recommendations for Employers

The following summarizes Taskforce members' recommendations for employers to engage in the three identified focus areas.

### Foundational Recommendation

#### Problem Statement

- The BEI Talent Pipeline analysis clearly demonstrates that racial inequities are evident across the talent continuum, spanning educational access, attainment and early career outcomes, including median wages. These inequities are particularly acute for Black children and adults.
- Employers must shift their mindset from Corporate Social Responsibility to Human Resources when it comes to growing the Black talent pipeline. This would necessitate that companies invest in the following recommendations as part of an overall talent acquisition, development and retention strategy.

#### Action Steps

- Employers, including businesses, K-12 schools, colleges and universities, and early learning centers, should conduct comprehensive racial equity audits and adverse impact analyses to identify any inequities within their own organizations over the lifecycle of an employee (e.g., hiring practices, access to leadership development programs, compensation setting, promotion practices).
  - Where disparities exist, employers should utilize market data and comparable analysis to develop more equitable human resources practices (e.g., utilizing salary bands for compensation setting).
  - Employers should commit to closing wage gaps through adjusted compensation, or, where skills gap exist, through upskilling and other career advancement opportunities.
- Employers should require staff who interface with Black individuals for the delivery of education and training programs to complete unconscious bias training. This can help reinforce and strengthen equitable human resources policies and implementation practices.
- Studies demonstrate it is inordinately challenging to break the cycle of poverty, which is intergenerational. Employers can play a role in combatting poverty by committing to locate some of their business operations in lower-income neighborhoods and hiring local talent. There are spillover effects within households: children whose parent(s) earn a livable wage are more likely to come to school well-fed and receive additional support at home to help these children succeed in school. One recent model is the Cook Group [partnership](#) with Goodwill Industries in Indianapolis.

## **Early Learning: Expand access to high-quality early learning programs**

### Problem Statement

- Access to high-quality early learning is critical for ensuring children from low-income households are provided with a strong academic foundation when they enroll in Kindergarten. In Marion County today, there is an insufficient number of high-quality seats available, and the cost of high-quality programs can be an impediment for some families. A lack of early learning programs also impacts the ability of employees with children to remain in the workforce.

### Action Steps

- **PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION.** Employers of all sizes should establish an early learning employee benefit program, stratified by family income, that improves the affordability and accessibility of high-quality early learning. An early learning employee benefit program could consist of some or all of the following:
  - a. An Education Savings Account (structured like a Health Savings Account) providing an employer contribution to match (partially or fully) an employee's contribution to their child's early learning program.
  - b. Reserved seats at local early learning programs.
  - c. Investment in on-site or near-site early learning programs.
  - d. Back-up care services.
  - e. Early learning tuition scholarships.

Each of these benefit options would help grow demand for or help underwrite the costs to operate early learning programs, in turn helping to grow the supply of high-quality providers. Easier access to high-quality early learning programs has the added benefit of supporting working parents and enabling them to work full time.

- Utilizing Early Learning Indiana's information resources, help disseminate information about high-quality early learning programs to employees.
- Support Early Learning Indiana in partnering with trusted community-based organizations in neighborhoods with high percentages of Black families to provide culturally relevant information about high-quality early learning programs.

## **K-12: Enhance exposure to and preparation for college and careers for middle and high school students**

### Problem Statement

- Too few Black K-12 students demonstrate proficiency in core subjects such as reading, math and science, and these academic challenges are compounded by non-school factors such as food insecurity, the digital divide, insufficient mental health supports, and exposure to gun violence and other trauma.
- Low proficiency in core subjects such as math and science are of significant concern, given the critical importance of a well-prepared STEM workforce for

- high-wage, high-demand jobs in Central Indiana’s advanced industries (as defined by Brookings in the [GPS study](#) released by CICP).
- Because of Indiana’s new Graduation Pathways requirements, some form of work-based learning is required for all high school students in Indiana. Not every student currently receives exposure to Central Indiana’s advanced industries.

### Action Steps

- **PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION.** Employers of all sizes should provide career awareness and exposure experiences beginning in middle and extending into high school. **Discussions of careers should include a concrete description of the secondary coursework and postsecondary education or training needed to qualify for these careers**, so that students and schools can translate career aspirations into reality by ensuring students are enrolling in the necessary coursework in middle and high school.
  - To maximize scale and efficiencies, employers should partner with intermediaries such as Junior Achievement to expand initiatives such as [JA JobSpark](#) for 8<sup>th</sup> grade students to serve other grades.
  - Example from Missouri: <https://mochamber.com/workforce/missouri-math-and-science-coalition/>
- **PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION.** Employers of all sizes should provide experiential, work-based learning opportunities to students starting in middle school and extending into high school. Work-based learning can span a spectrum that includes job shadowing, interview preparation, skill-based resume preparation, paid and unpaid internships, and modern youth apprenticeships starting in high school.
  - Sample model programs: [IU Health/IPS Fellowship](#), One America’s [Pathways Program](#), the Ascend Indiana/Employ Indy [Modern Apprenticeship Program](#) (MAP), and [Purdue Polytechnic High School](#).
  - To avoid overwhelming employers and schools when it comes to this kind of employer-to-student engagement, employers should establish one primary point of contact for schools.
  - Employers are encouraged to work through intermediaries like [Ascend Indiana](#), [EmployIndy](#), [Junior Achievement](#), [Project Lead the Way](#) and the [Indiana Chamber of Commerce](#) that provide programming and technical assistance for both employers and schools to support work-based learning programs. Intermediaries can provide employers with a turnkey approach.
- To help ameliorate the non-school factors impacting K-12 students, employers of all sizes should implement the recommendations developed by the BEI Impediments to Health Taskforce (addressing access to healthcare, food insecurity, infant/maternal mortality, and mental health services) and also lend their support to organizations such as [United Way of Central Indiana](#) and neighborhood-based community centers helping to address basic needs for low-income households such as housing and energy assistance.

## Post-Secondary: Increase access to and persistence through postsecondary education

### Problem Statement

- Too few Black students successfully enroll in college. This is driven in part by the following factors:
  - Low completion of FAFSA forms, without which students can't qualify for state or federal financial aid.
  - Low enrollment in and persistence through the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Scholars program, a state-funded college scholarship program for students from low-income families.
    - Participation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Scholars program can be challenging for both families and schools, raising questions about program design and transparency of information.
  - A lack of adult role models who can help guide students through the college and financial aid application process.
  - Limited capacity of college/career counselors within schools.
  - Limited college scholarship funding for students who don't qualify for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Scholars Program.
  - Indiana's general lack of a college-going culture, which discourages students from applying to college.
- Too few Black students persist in college and successfully graduate. Non-tuition expenses such as books, transportation and childcare present barriers to completion.
- Too few employees take advantage of employer tuition assistance benefits to earn additional degrees or credentials, in part driven by policies requiring expense reimbursement upon completion of training. This can serve as a barrier for low-to-middle income employees. In addition, not every employer offers a tuition assistance benefit program.

### Action Steps

- **PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION.** Help defray the cost of post-secondary education for students and adults from lower-income households by:
  - Raising awareness of the importance of FAFSA completion, through:
    - Amplification of the [Indiana Commission for Higher Education's](#) annual FAFSA completion campaigns through employer social media channels and internal employee communications.
  - Providing financial literacy and other support to encourage FAFSA completion.
    - Employers should disseminate the free FAFSA toolkit created by [INvestEd](#), an Indiana nonprofit.
    - Employers should support and expand existing FAFSA completion and other financial literacy programs.
    - Large employers can deploy their HR departments to assist families with high school students with FAFSA completion.

- Raising awareness of Indiana’s [21<sup>st</sup> Century Scholars Program](#) through supporting and expanding 21<sup>st</sup> Century Scholars awareness and support programs (e.g., [Indy Achieves](#)).
- Partnering with the Indiana Commission for Higher Education to improve the design of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Scholars Program, e.g., through Six Sigma project teams loaned by employers.
- Providing direct contributions into [529 plans](#) for the children of employees, stratified by family income.
- Creating an employer-seeded [Children’s Savings Account](#) pilot to provide a college fund for lower middle-class families whose children don’t qualify for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Scholars program.
- **PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION.** Every Black high school student in Indianapolis should be paired with a mentor who can help them navigate the transition to college and careers. To help achieve this objective, employers of all sizes should:
  - Support and expand existing mentoring and tutoring initiatives and programs, such as the [Indianapolis Urban League’s Project Ready](#), and [Starfish Initiative](#).
  - Allow employees up to 5 hours per month of paid time to volunteer as a mentor or tutor with a local mentoring organization focused on postsecondary attainment.
- **PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION.** Help create a college-going culture in Marion County and in Indiana by amplifying the Indiana Commission for Higher Education’s annual Education Value and [College GO!](#) campaigns through employer social media channels and internal employee communications.
- **PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION.** To support the upskilling of the existing workforce, employers should:
  - Establish an employee tuition assistance benefit program that at a minimum supports the efforts of employees to earn an Associate’s Degree and high-quality industry credentials.
  - To lower barriers to access, ensure tuition assistance benefit programs are structured to provide funding on an upfront basis (versus reimbursed upon completion) and without a clawback for employees who leave and join a different employer. Model employer programs include those offered by [The Cook Group](#) and the Indianapolis Airport Authority.
- Partner with Indiana’s higher education institutions to support evidence-based college persistence programs, such as: Ivy Tech Community College’s new Career Coaching and Employer Connections ([CCEC](#)) program (which is modeled after the Georgia State University advising program); [Indy Achieves](#) (which is also modeled after the Georgia State University advising program); [CUNY ACE](#) (Accelerate, Complete, and Engage); and [Inside Track](#) coaching.
  - See further explanation of these models here: <https://ticas.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Evidence-Based-Completion-Programs-at-Four-Year-Postsecondary-Institutions.pdf>

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Taskforce has developed the following complementary policy recommendations that align with its three focus areas.

### **Early Learning: Expand access to high-quality early learning programs**

- Early Learning Data System: Fund and develop a statewide coordinated early learning data system that includes all providers of early education. This will assist families in identifying high-quality providers.
- Mandate Paths to Quality System: Mandate participation in Indiana's Paths to Quality early learning quality rating system to increase the supply of high-quality early learning programs. Provide technical assistance to support improvements in early learning programs and help programs earn higher quality ratings.
- Increase Rigor of Paths to Quality System: Strengthen the rigor of the Paths to Quality system to include objective measures of children's Kindergarten readiness.

### **K-12: Enhance exposure to and preparation for college and careers for middle and high school students**

- Basic Academic Skills Proficiency: Establish a Marion County Commission in partnership with the Indiana Department of Education that is focused on identifying evidence-based mechanisms to significantly improve the academic proficiency of Black K-12 students enrolled in public schools (both district and charter). The Commission can use as a starting point the "Racial Equity Audit" report on academic outcomes in Marion County released in October 2021 by the Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation.
- Waiver Diplomas: The state should analyze the increase in the number of waiver diplomas, and the impact of waiver diplomas on postsecondary success and median wages over 1, 3, 5 and 10 years. Ensure the results of this analysis are made publicly available by the Indiana Department of Education or Commission for Higher Education for transparency purposes, and updated once annually. Ensure the data are disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender and socioeconomic status and reported at the school and district level.
- Teacher Pipeline: To help grow the supply of Black and Hispanic teachers, the state should increase public funding for scholarships and stipends to offset the cost of obtaining an Education degree for Black and Hispanic students.
- Addressing the Digital Divide: The Marion County Dedicated eLearning Network Pilot, funded by the City of Indianapolis (with CARES Act funding), Lilly Endowment and Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation, is being implemented during the 2021-22 school year. The pilot should be scaled countywide to permanently eradicate the digital divide and address the education, training, and workforce development internet access needs of low-income families.

## **Post-Secondary: Increase access to and persistence through postsecondary education**

- **21<sup>st</sup> Century Scholars:** Redesign the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Scholars Program to allow multiple opportunities for students to enroll in the program, including in high school, and to improve access to information for low-income families. As participation grows, the state will need to allocate more funding to support all eligible students at full scholarship levels.
- **FAFSA Completion:** Mandate FAFSA completion for all high school students as part of Graduation Pathways requirements.
- **529 Tax Credit:** Create a tax credit for employers making direct contributions into 529 plans for the children of employees.
- **K-12 College and Career Counseling:** Create a statewide commission to examine the K-12 college and career counseling system and develop recommendations to enhance the ability of schools and employers to provide customized college and career advising to every student, with an emphasis on students from lower-income households.
- **Certificates and Credentials:**
  - The state should track and report to the public on an annual basis both postsecondary outcomes and median wages over 1, 3, 5 and 10 years tied to certificates and other credentials. Ensure the data are disaggregated by type of certificate/certification/credential, disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender and socioeconomic status, and reported at the school and district level.
  - Expand state financial aid and other training funds for short-term credentials (certifications and certificates) that align with high-wage, high-demand jobs. Both Virginia and Iowa provide models for short-term credential financial aid.
  - Support stackable credentials that allow credentials earned in high school (certifications) to stack into postsecondary.
- **Non-Tuition Support:** Expand non-tuition support for first-generation college students, such as transportation, childcare, housing, food access, internet access.
- **Federal Pell Grants:** Extend eligibility to include the cost of master's degrees, to help grow the pipeline of first-generation students (including students of color) who earn degrees beyond a Bachelor's degree and can enter higher-paying professions.

## **Data Analysis and Transparency**

- The state should adopt a version of the BEI Talent Pipeline and update it annually. The report should be available through the Management Performance Hub or the Governor's Workforce Cabinet.
- The state should expand the capacity of the Management Performance Hub to ensure there is a sufficient number of staff to fulfill data requests from within and outside of state government. The MPH should regularly publish longitudinal state education, employment and wage data and ensure it is disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender, age, and socioeconomic status across all 92 counties.

## Develop the Infrastructure Necessary to Address Racial Disparities

- Marion County is program rich and systems poor. The community lacks transparency about how many Black students and other students of color are being served by existing publicly and privately funded programs, the scale of services provided compared to the overall need or demand, whether there is duplication of services, and whether service gaps exist. A formal infrastructure for implementing the recommendations of this and the other BEI Taskforces, assessing impact, and developing new recommendations as necessary, should be established by Indianapolis business and other community leaders.

## About the BEI Learning and Talent Opportunities Taskforce

The Learning and Talent Opportunities Taskforce launched in December 2020 and held its first meeting in January 2021. In March 2021, the Taskforce identified the following deliverables:

- A data visualization tool describing access, academic achievement, post-secondary enrollment/ completion, early career placement and wage outcomes for Black individuals statewide and in Marion County.
- A landscape scan listing existing, effective programs and initiatives impacting the issue areas that fit within the Taskforce's scope (i.e., a program repository).
- A menu of recommended initiatives or programs that employers can support and/or implement.
- Policy recommendations to address systemic and programmatic barriers.

From March through October 2021, the Taskforce collected and analyzed data from the State of Indiana, conducted a survey to identify programs currently operating in Marion County and created a program repository, and conducted a dozen meetings with a variety of community stakeholders to share the Taskforce's preliminary data analysis and recommendations for input and feedback. The recommendations contained within this document reflect these activities and were shaped by the stakeholder discussions. A separate program repository was developed and is housed on the BEI website.

## Taskforce Members: 2021

- Claire Fiddian-Green, President & CEO, Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation (Co-Chair)
- Adrienne Sims, VP Talent Management, OneAmerica (Co-Chair)
- Laura Atkinson, Senior Director of Human Resources, Ascension St. Vincent
- Tiffany Benjamin, President, Eli Lilly & Co. Foundation
- Connie Bond-Stuart, Regional President, Central and Southern Indiana, PNC Bank
- Ryan Brady, Vice President, Glick Philanthropies
- Courtney Brown, Vice President for Impact and Planning, Lumina Foundation
- Angie Carr-Klitzsch, President and CEO, EmployIndy

- Sue Ellspermann, President and CEO, Ivy Tech Community College (active from January-August 2021)
- Lorenzo L. Esters, Chancellor, Ivy Tech Community College Indianapolis (active from July 2021)
- Malcolm Gabriel, Global Leader – Culture, Talent & Inclusion, Corteva (active from January-August 2021)
- Ryan Gall, Executive Director, Victory College Prep (active from September 2021)
- Amber Maynard, Global Inclusion, Diversity & Equity Consultant, Corteva (active from September 2021)
- Aleesia Johnson, Superintendent, IPS
- Jason Kloth, President and CEO, Ascend Indiana
- Danny Lopez, Vice President of External Relations and Corporate Communications, Pacers Sports & Entertainment
- Sara Morris, Strategic Giving – Education and Community, The Heritage Group
- Molly Puga, Supply Chain Strategy Director, Cummins (active from October 2021)
- Jamal Smith, Director of Government Affairs and Strategic Partnerships, IU Health
- Melissa Smith, HR Manager, EnerDel
- Jennifer Stansberry, Manager of Governance and Board Affairs, Citizens Energy Group (active from September 2021)
- Sara VanSlambrook, Chief Impact Officer, United Way of Central Indiana
- Maureen Weber, President & CEO, Early Learning Indiana
- Shannon Williams, Senior Vice President of Community Engagement, The Mind Trust
- Staffing Support: Sarah Hawkins, Senior Program Officer, Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation; Dr. Emi Whitesell, Director of Learning & Evaluation, Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation; Ariyan Hines, Program Associate, Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation; Chad Timmerman, Consultant, Ascend Indiana; Kate Broshears, Vice President, Ascend Indiana; Molly Chavers, BEI Project Manager; Amanda Bell, Director – Technical Training, Training Center of Excellence, OneAmerica.