

**PHASE ONE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE BUSINESS EQUITY FOR INDY  
LEARNING AND TALENT OPPORTUNITIES TASKFORCE**  
Updated April 7, 2022

### Taskforce Focus Areas

The Business Equity for Indy Learning and Talent Opportunities 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.** Increase 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: Conduct racial equity audits and adverse impact analyses**

- 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.

#### **Early Learning Recommendation: 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

- 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.

### **K-12 Recommendation: Increase 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

- 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 turnkey solutions for employers and schools.

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

### **Problem Statement**

- Too few Black students successfully enroll in college. This is driven in part by low completion of Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) forms, without which students can't qualify for either state or federal financial aid, and Indiana's general lack of a college-going culture, which discourages students from applying to college.
- 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**

- 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 by disseminating the free FAFSA toolkit created by [INvestEd](#), an Indiana nonprofit.
- To support the upskilling of the existing workforce, employers should:
  - Establish an employee tuition assistance benefit program that supports the efforts of employees to earn additional postsecondary degrees and credentials.
  - To lower barriers to access, ensure tuition assistance benefit programs are structured to provide funding on an upfront basis (versus reimbursed upon completion). Model employer programs include those offered by [The Cook Group](#).