

Racial Gaps in the Education-to-Workforce Pipeline and Indiana's Opportunity to Close Them

November 9, 2021

From: **Business Equity for Indy
Learning + Talent Opportunities
Taskforce**



TABLE OF CONTENTS

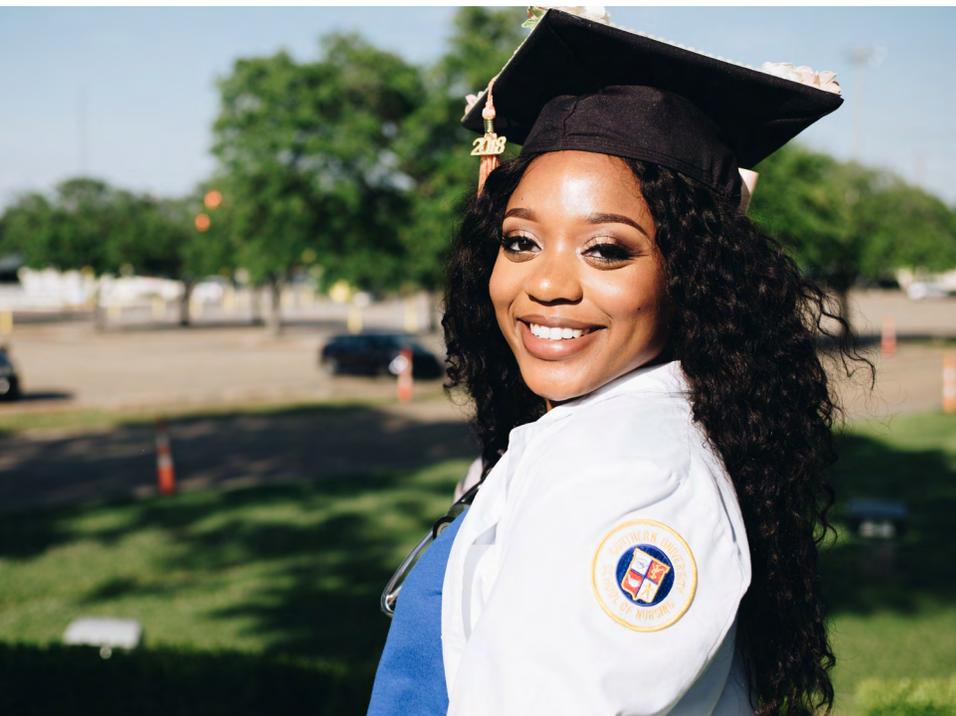
ABOUT BUSINESS EQUITY FOR INDY	1
INTRODUCTION	2
A CRISIS — AND AN OPPORTUNITY	2
ACKNOWLEDGING ROOT CAUSES	2
<i>Falling Behind in K-12</i>	3
<i>High Rates of Waiver Diplomas</i>	4
<i>Declining College Enrollment</i>	5
<i>Lack of STEM College Graduates</i>	6
<i>Shortfall to Finish</i>	6
THE CONSEQUENCES	7
A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR ALL HOOSIERS	8
<i>Early Learning: Expand Access to High-Quality Early Learning Programs</i>	8
<i>K-12: Increase Exposure to and Preparation for College and Careers</i>	9
<i>Postsecondary: Increase Access to and Persistence through Postsecondary</i>	9
<i>First Step: Reframe Diversity and Inclusion as a Business Imperative</i>	10
PAVING THE WAY FORWARD	11

ABOUT BUSINESS EQUITY FOR INDY

[Business Equity for Indy \(BEI\)](#) is a joint effort of the Central Indiana Corporate Partnership and the Indy Chamber, in collaboration with the Indianapolis Urban League, to grow a more inclusive business climate and build greater equity and economic opportunity for the Indy Region's Black residents and people of color.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM REPORT

- Black and Hispanic residents of our city and state experience significant gaps in education and employment opportunities and outcomes compared to white residents at every stage of the education-to-workforce pipeline. These gaps are more pronounced for Black children and adults.
- Education and employment gaps hinder individuals' ability to prosper, businesses' ability to thrive and the vitality of our community. Employers also struggle to fill knowledge- and skill-based positions with the diverse talent they need.
- No single institution or sector is responsible for racial disparities in education and employment outcomes. Rather, they are community-wide challenges involving a myriad of issues with roots in the history of race in America. Successfully remedying these disparities will take sustained and intentional actions from all sectors in our community.
- There are a variety of actions employers can take to make meaningful improvements in education and employment outcomes for Indiana's Black population. This report provides options for small, medium and large employers, as well as accompanying policy recommendations.



INTRODUCTION

The following report is based on an analysis of education and workforce data conducted by Business Equity for Indy's Learning and Talent Opportunities Taskforce. Indiana's Management and Performance Hub, Commission for Higher Education and Department of Education provided the data for the analysis based on a series of questions posed by the Taskforce and related data requests. This report highlights pervasive disparities in education outcomes for Black and Hispanic children and adults in Indianapolis and Indiana and the troubling consequences.

Racial disparities impact both Black and Hispanic individuals, but these disparities are more pronounced for Black students and adults. While the Taskforce's initial recommendations focus specifically on supporting the success of Black individuals, Phase Two of the Taskforce's work will delve more deeply into education and training programs supporting the success of Hispanic people in Indianapolis.

A CRISIS — AND AN OPPORTUNITY

Our city and state face a crisis that, if unaddressed, will hinder individuals' ability to prosper, businesses' ability to thrive and the vitality of our community. The number of Black and Hispanic¹ residents in Indianapolis and across our state who have the education and training required for good-paying, 21st Century jobs is insufficient to meet the needs of employers seeking to improve their diversity.

Consider that in Marion County, of the 3,077 Black students who graduated high school in 2012-2013, just 442 graduated from an Indiana public postsecondary institution in six years with either a two- or a four-year degree. And of the 595 Black Marion County high school graduates who graduated from one of Indiana's public postsecondary institutions in 2014-2015, only 339 remained working in Indiana five years later.

The small number of Black postsecondary graduates in Indiana poses a challenge to businesses, which increasingly depend upon a diverse workforce to compete in a global economy, remain profitable and produce relevant goods and services.² For all the desire to fill good jobs, board positions and community leadership roles with diverse talent, employers will struggle to do so with a limited pool of candidates who have the requisite education and training.

And it's not just employers who suffer the consequences of an exceedingly limited diverse talent pipeline. Without an integrated and aligned education and workforce development system that better serves them, Black and Hispanic people will increasingly be locked out of opportunities. This affects the social fabric of our community and the economic well-being of our state. The situation also risks becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy: if Black and Hispanic residents lack opportunity in Indiana, attracting new diverse talent to our city and state becomes an even bigger challenge.

The hopeful news is this: there are existing and promising new solutions that, if scaled and implemented with fidelity, would make a dent in improving academic outcomes and closing opportunity gaps. Progress requires cross-sector collaboration, and business leaders must be key partners in driving this change. Programs such as Modern Apprenticeship – which provides employers opportunities to recruit and train diverse talent beginning in high school – can support companies in committing to action.

ACKNOWLEDGING ROOT CAUSES

Disparities in educational access and outcomes begin in early childhood, persist throughout K-12 and higher education, and result in profound socioeconomic disparities in adulthood. While it's clear that Indiana's education and workforce development systems are not serving Black and Hispanic students as well as they should, it is equally evident that no single school, college or sector is responsible for these disparities. Rather, they are

¹ In this report, we will use Black and Hispanic to refer to diverse individuals. These are the terms used to describe these subgroups by the U.S. Census and by the State of Indiana.

² State of renewal: Charting a new course for Indiana's economic growth and inclusion.

community-wide challenges involving a myriad of issues – from food insecurity, to lack of access to livable wages, to trauma and gun violence – all with roots in the history of race in America. What’s clear is that the status quo is unacceptable, and that we must drive change in a collaborative, cross-sector fashion.



“Where you live shouldn’t determine how long you live or the quality of education available to you. As a major employer, Lilly has a responsibility to help address the inequities we see in the communities where we live and work. Whether by donating funds, supplies, or time through employee volunteer hours, Lilly is committed to being part of the solution to close these gaps. Together, we must listen to and work with community leaders and organizations to improve the health and education outcomes of people of color, particularly Black Americans.”

-Tiffany Benjamin, President, Lilly Foundation & Head of Social Impact, Eli Lilly & Company

To do this, we must address five key factors that are contributing to the crisis.

- **Falling Behind in K-12:** Too few Black and Hispanic students are achieving academic mastery in core subjects like math, English/language arts and science. Racial disparities in academic outcomes existed long before COVID-19, but the pandemic has acutely impacted Black and Hispanic students and widened longstanding opportunity gaps.
- **High Rates of Waiver Diplomas:** Black and Hispanic students disproportionately earn waiver diplomas to graduate from high school. Students with a waiver diploma who enroll in college are more likely to need remediation and less likely to persist than students who did not require a diploma waiver.³ Consequently, they are less likely to qualify for jobs that pay a livable wage or jobs in Indiana’s high-wage, high-demand industries.

- **Declining College Enrollment:** College enrollment rates for Black and Hispanic high school students are lower than for white students. What’s more, college enrollment rates are dropping statewide, and Black students are seeing the largest declines. While more students are pursuing certificates, these credentials – absent additional, continuing education or training – do not pave the way for the same earnings potential as two- or four-year degrees.
- **Lack of STEM College Graduates:** Too few Black and Hispanic college students earn Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) degrees. This compounds the wage crisis, as STEM degrees are linked with good-paying jobs.
- **Shortfall to Finish:** Only a fraction of students who enroll at Indiana’s public colleges and universities complete their degree, and outcomes are especially poor for Black and Hispanic students. This leads to lower incomes for Black and Hispanic Hoosiers and exacerbates wealth gaps, especially when people incur college debt but do not obtain a degree.

Falling Behind in K-12

Black and Hispanic students start falling behind their white peers in elementary school, and lack of access to high quality early learning programs is a contributing factor. Among the factors resulting in K-12 education disparities: There are far too few Black and Hispanic teachers in public schools. Only 12% of Indianapolis teachers are Black, and 3% are Hispanic, compared with 34% and 21% of Black and Hispanic students, respectively.⁴ This is particularly problematic for Black students, since research shows that Black students who have even one Black teacher during elementary school are more likely to graduate high school and consider college,⁵ pointing to a need to improve diversity in our educator pipeline.

Black and Hispanic K-12 students have lower proficiency scores than white students in core subjects such as math, English/language arts and science. These gaps are noteworthy, given the critical importance of basic skills mastery to the ability to qualify for high-wage, high-demand jobs in Central Indiana’s advanced industries.

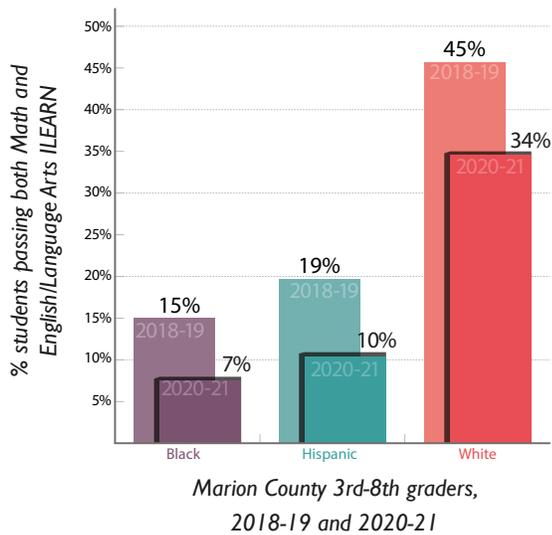
³ [Indiana College Readiness Report 2021](#).

⁴ [Education for All - An Audit of Racial Equity in Marion County](#), Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation, 2021

⁵ [The Long-Run Impacts of Same-Race Teachers](#), Institute of Labor Economics, 2017

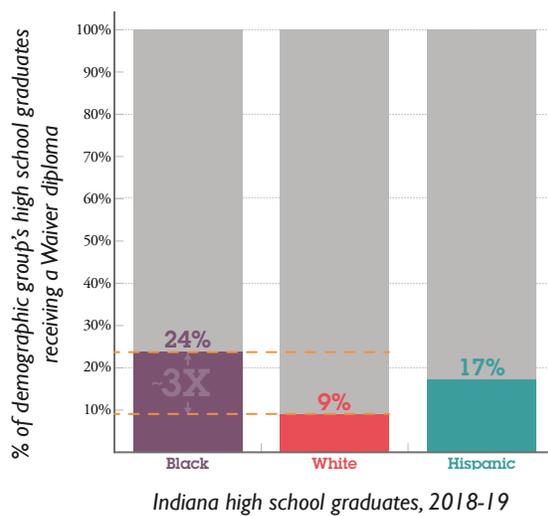
The learning disruptions and shift to eLearning caused by COVID-19 negatively affected student outcomes across the board, but Black and Hispanic students were disproportionately impacted by learning losses caused by the pandemic. This is true not only within Indianapolis' largest district – Indianapolis Public Schools – but across the city's township schools, as well.

Black and Hispanic students faced disparities in academic outcomes prior to COVID-19, but the pandemic has widened the opportunity gap.



than double the rate for Black students in both Indiana and Marion County in 2018-2019. Recent data show that high school graduates who earn the most rigorous academic diplomas are more likely to enroll and persist in college.⁷ This is significant, because bolstering Indiana's talent pipeline requires having a workforce with education and training beyond high school.

In Indiana, Black high school graduates were nearly three times as likely as white graduates to receive waiver diplomas.

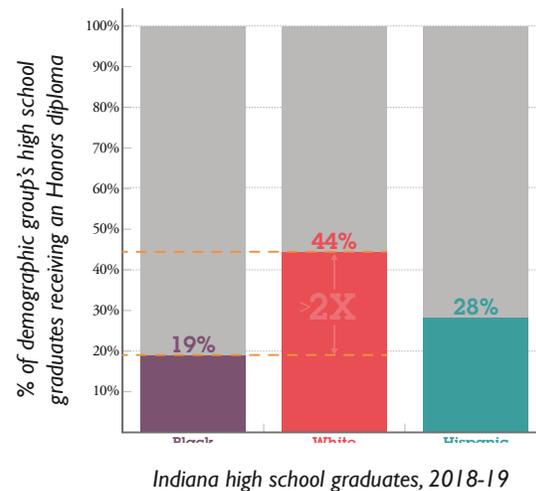


High Rates of Waiver Diplomas

A higher percentage of white students (90%) in Indiana graduated high school in 2018-2019 compared with Black graduates (79%) and Hispanic students (86%). Black students in Marion County also were nearly three times as likely as white students to receive a waiver diploma, which high schools have the authority to grant under Indiana statute for students who cannot successfully pass the Graduate Qualifying Exam by the 12th grade.⁶

What's more, Black and Hispanic students are significantly less likely to earn an Honors diploma than their white peers. The percentage of white graduates earning an Honors diploma was more

The percentage of white high school graduates earning an Honors diploma was more than double that of Black students in Indiana.



⁶ [Diploma Requirements](#)

⁷ [Indiana College Readiness Report 2020](#)

Declining College Enrollment



“Providing opportunity for all Hoosiers to pursue the path of higher learning is one of the most important ways we can move Hoosiers and the state forward.”

-Teresa Lubbers,
Indiana Commissioner for Higher Education⁸

Similar to other states across the country, Indiana’s college enrollment rates are at their lowest point in recent history and are declining across the board. Enrollment rates among Black and Hispanic high school graduates have reached a 10-year low, and the enrollment gap between Black and white students is growing.

Recent research from the Indiana Commission for Higher Education highlights some of the drivers behind this trend. Chief among them is the cost of college – both realities and misconceptions about the growing price tag that make postsecondary enrollment feel out of reach to many Hoosiers. At the same time, the perceived value of a college degree is declining, especially as a tight labor market lures many into the workforce right out of high school with the promise of \$15/hour wages.

As enrollment in two- and four-year programs has decreased, more Hoosiers have pursued certificates, which are short-term education pathways in fields ranging from business to healthcare to the trades. The number of individuals earning a certificate from one of Indiana’s public postsecondary institutions grew from close to 2,972 in 2009-2010 to 11,961 in 2019-2020.

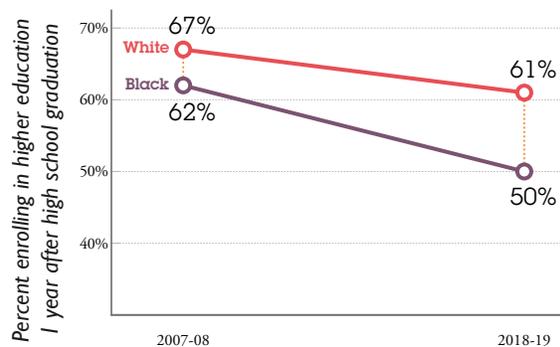
The uptick in certificates awarded is encouraging in the sense that five years after graduation, those who obtain certificates have an annual median wage that is about \$6,800 more than those with only a high school diploma. However, median wages for certificate holders five years after graduation – at \$35,832 – fell below the livable wage of \$37,600 per year in Indiana.⁹ Certificate holders also make about \$12,000 less than two- or four-year degree holders, who earn an annual median wage of at least \$48,000 five years after graduation.

⁸ Indiana College Readiness Report 2020

⁹ State of renewal: Charting a new course for Indiana’s economic growth and inclusion.

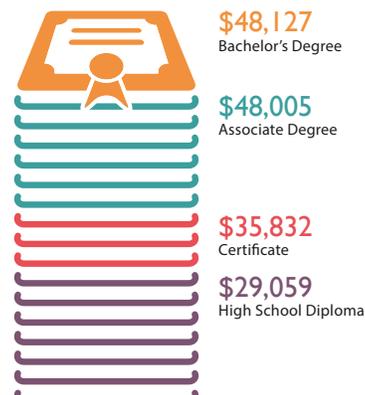
It bears acknowledging that the Indiana Commission for Higher Education in partnership with the Indiana Governor’s Workforce Cabinet has recently strengthened requirements that those receiving state aid for certificate programs pursue only certificates that lead to high-demand jobs, so over time, the disparities in median wages based on credential type may shrink. But based on the wage information available today, it is evident that workers who have at least an associate degree earn significantly more than a livable wage, which leads to greater financial stability and lifetime earnings.

College enrollment rates for Black high school graduates in Indiana plummeted by 12 percentage points over the last decade. For white high school graduates, enrollment fell, but by half as much – six percentage points, meaning the enrollment gap is widening.



Indiana high school graduates, 2007-08 to 2018-19

As college enrollment has declined, there’s been a growth in short-term certificates, which has increased earning potential, but not by as much as two- and four-year degrees.



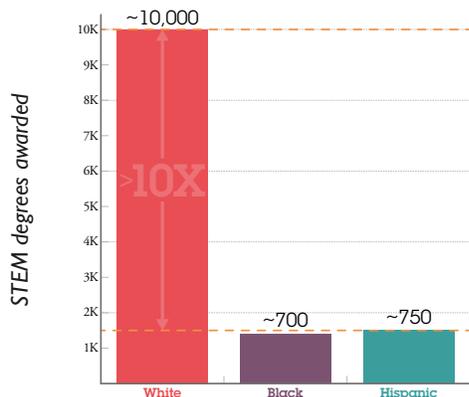
Median earnings five years after graduation from an Indiana public postsecondary institution (2014-2015)

Lack of STEM College Graduates

Although there is a general shortage of Black and Hispanic college graduates, gaps are particularly acute in STEM fields. Of Asian students who graduated from an Indiana public postsecondary institution in 2019-20, 31% earned a degree in STEM. By comparison, STEM graduates composed only 12% of all Black graduating students and 17% of all white graduating students. There was also a large gender gap, with 31% of male graduates earning a STEM degree compared to 10% of female graduates.

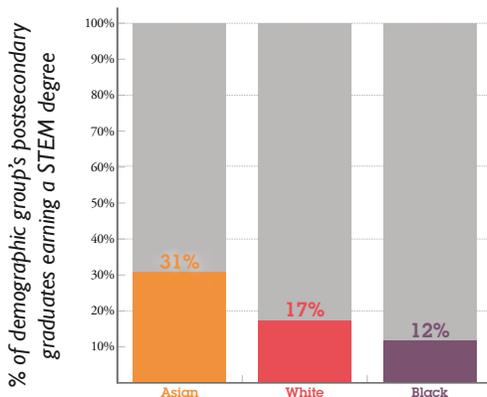
As STEM careers continue to be linked to higher wages, it is imperative to increase the percentage of Black and Hispanic students completing these degrees, or risk worsening the racial pay gap.

In 2019-20, Indiana's public postsecondary institutions awarded about 10,000 STEM degrees to white individuals but only 750 to Hispanic and 700 Black individuals.



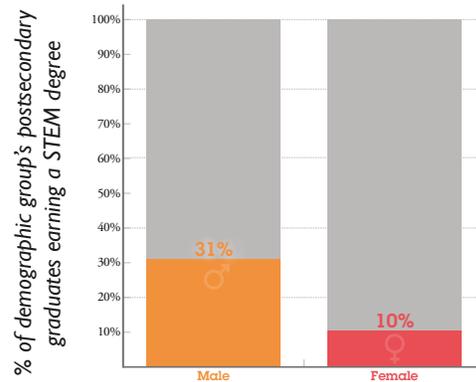
STEM degrees awarded to Indiana public postsecondary graduates, 2019-20

Asian and white students obtain STEM degrees at higher rates than Black students.



Graduates from Indiana public postsecondary institutions, 2019-20

There is a large gender gap in STEM degree completion.



Graduates from Indiana public postsecondary institutions, 2019-20

Shortfall to Finish

For all demographic groups in Indiana, the total number of degree and certificate completions is increasing, and on-time completion rates are rising. But despite improvements, too few Black and Hispanic students complete higher education. Of Indiana's 2012-13 high school cohort, only 11% of Black students and 16% of Hispanic students completed a college degree at a public institution in the state, compared to 25% of white students.

Additionally, on-time completion rates remain troublingly low. Of 2015-2016 Black high school graduates in Marion County, only 253 who enrolled in Indiana's public postsecondary institutions graduated from a four-year institution on time, and only 14 graduated from a two-year institution on time. This translates to a 31% on-time 4-year completion rate and a 3% on-time 2-year completion rate. These outcomes mirror national trends among community colleges, which, compared with four-year institutions, serve a greater share of students from low-income households who must balance education with demanding obligations such as work and childcare.

Societal circumstances that disproportionately affect Black and Hispanic students have contributed to low postsecondary completion rates among these groups.

Indiana's Black high school students in the 2012-13 cohort graduated from Indiana's public postsecondary institutions within six years¹⁰ at about half the rate of white high school students.



THE CONSEQUENCES: Reduced Opportunities, Slower Economic Growth, and a Small Pool of Black and Hispanic Talent

Black and Hispanic people face the most personal and severe consequences of inequitable outcomes at every stage of the education and workforce development pipeline. There is a 15 percentage-point gap in postsecondary attainment rates between Black and white residents in Marion County, and there are significant racial disparities in median wages earned one, three and five years after graduation from an Indiana public secondary or postsecondary institution. Poor educational outcomes also have a direct impact on Indianapolis' talent pipeline, with the funnel of Black and Hispanic talent shrinking the further students get from high school graduation. As a result, employers struggle to fill knowledge and skill-based positions with the talent they need.

¹⁰ Indiana calculates these rates by allowing high school students one year after graduation to enroll in college and another six years to complete either a two- or four-year degree.

There is a 15 percentage-point gap in postsecondary attainment rates between Black and white residents in Marion County.

It requires providing support at each stage of the education path – from early childhood through postsecondary education – and investing in the workforce of the future.



Adults over age 25 in Indianapolis with a Bachelor's Degree or higher

There are racial disparities in median wages earned after graduation from public postsecondary institutions in Indiana.



Median wages three years following graduation with a Bachelor's degree from an Indiana public postsecondary institution

Equitable access to meaningful education and employment will give our state, communities and all Hoosiers more opportunities to flourish. What's more, employers will reap the benefits of a workforce that better reflects an increasingly diverse society and consumer base, and educational institutions will engage and enroll more students. The following are our summary recommendations for how employers of all sizes can support the success of Black children and adults in three areas: early learning, K-12, and postsecondary. Recognizing that the education and employment challenges impacting African Americans extend beyond the workplace and into schools, colleges and the broader community, we also recommend policy solutions to complement proposed action steps for employers. A more detailed set of recommendations for employers and policymakers can be found [here](#).

A BRIGHTER FUTURE FOR ALL HOOSIERS

To grow Indiana's economy, we need collective action aimed at strengthening families and improving the earnings potential for all adults, regardless of race, ethnicity or socioeconomic status. Ensuring Black students receive equal access to high-quality educational opportunities is a foundational step toward increasing the current pool of Black college graduates and fulfilling our city and state's need for a more diverse talent pool.

Early Learning: Expand Access to High-Quality Early Learning Programs

Access to high-quality early learning is critical for ensuring children from low-income households are provided with a strong academic foundation by the time they enroll in Kindergarten. In Indianapolis today, there is an insufficient number of available high-quality seats in early learning centers, and the cost of high-quality programs can be an impediment for some families. Indiana's employers can help bridge this gap by establishing an early learning benefit program stratified by family income. An example of a benefit is an Education Savings Account that works similarly to a Health Savings Account. Providing early learning benefits

will help grow the demand for early learning programs, in turn helping to grow the supply of high-quality providers. Easier access to high-quality learning has the added benefit of supporting working parents and enabling them to be full-time participants in Indiana's workforce.

Key Policy Recommendations

The State of Indiana should fund and develop a statewide coordinated early learning data system that includes information about all current early education providers. This will enable families to find high-quality providers with greater ease. In addition, all providers should be required to participate in Indiana's Paths to Quality rating system. This would help to increase the supply of high-quality learning programs.

K-12: Increase Exposure to and Preparation for College and Careers for Middle and High School Students

Indiana's businesses can be critical partners with schools to connect Black students with early opportunities to engage in on-the-job experience that will help students meet new Indiana high school graduation requirements, expose students to an array of career pathways, and help students make the connection between what they are learning in K-12 classrooms with future employment opportunities.

Structured programs such as the [IU Health Fellowship](#), [OneAmerica's Pathways](#), the [Ascend Indiana/EmployIndy Modern Apprenticeship \(MAP\)](#), and [Purdue Polytechnic High School](#) provide work-based learning starting in high school. In addition to career skills and college credits, these programs also impart practical life skills such as interview preparation and resume preparation. Students can also earn a paycheck.

When it comes to employer-to-student engagement, employers and schools understandably may not know where to start. Partnering with intermediaries like [Ascend Indiana](#), [EmployIndy](#), [Junior Achievement](#), [Project Lead the Way](#) and the [Indiana Chamber of Commerce](#), who provide programming and technical assistance, can simplify this process and give employers a turnkey approach through existing work-based programs.

Indiana's employers also can partner with schools to give middle and high school students early exposure to careers in their industry. Employers should provide schools with detailed career descriptions so that teachers and school counselors can understand the coursework and postsecondary education or training requirements needed for specific jobs and provide concrete direction to students. Existing programs facilitate these employer-to-student engagements and show promise for expansion. For example, [Junior Achievement's JobSpark](#), which is currently available to eighth grade students in Indianapolis, could be extended to additional grade levels and adopted by more of Indiana's business community.

Key Policy Recommendations

Career exposure and work-based learning experiences are powerful ways employers can engage with K-12 students and schools. However, more must be done to address low academic proficiency levels among Black students. To that end, we recommend that community leaders in Indianapolis, in partnership with the Indiana Department of Education, establish a Marion County Commission focused on identifying evidence-based mechanisms to significantly improve the academic proficiency of Black and Hispanic K-12 public school students. The work of this Commission could build upon the recommendations included in this report and in the [Racial Equity Audit report](#) issued by the Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation in October 2021.

Postsecondary: Increase Access to and Persistence Through Postsecondary Education

One of the biggest barriers to postsecondary enrollment is cost. Employers can play a critical role in helping to defray the cost of postsecondary education for Black students from low-income families by (1) raising awareness of state-funded college scholarships, particularly the 21st Century Scholars program, and (2) by contributing to employee's college savings accounts.

Students enrolled in [21st Century Scholars](#) are more likely to attend college than their peers, and the college-going rate among this group of income-qualifying scholarship recipients has remained

high and steady.¹¹ Administered by the Indiana Commission for Higher Education, 21st Century Scholars is one of the nation's most generous scholarships based on income, but the most recent data show less than half of eligible students apply.¹² Factors like not signing up on time, a general misunderstanding of the application process, and failure to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) contribute to low application rates.

Employers can raise awareness of the importance of FAFSA completion by amplifying the Indiana Commission for Higher Education's three annual communications campaigns and supporting non-profits like [Indy Achieves](#), which provides support to school counselors as well as to families whose students qualify for the 21st Century Scholars program. Employers can also address the needs of lower-income families whose children don't qualify for the program through contributions to employees' 529 savings accounts (we recommend a state tax credit for employers that provide this benefit). In addition, given the power of mentoring in helping students successfully navigate a path to college and careers, employers should commit to providing every Black high school student in Indianapolis with a mentor by supporting existing programs such as [Starfish Initiative](#) and the Indianapolis Urban League's [Project Ready](#), and by allowing employees up to 5 hours of paid time per month to volunteer as mentors.

Employers can also support the upskilling of their existing workforce through tuition assistance benefit programs that, at a minimum, support the efforts of employees to earn an associate degree and high-quality industry credentials. To lower barriers to access, employers can ensure tuition assistance benefit programs are structured to provide funding on an upfront basis (versus reimbursed upon completion). The [Cook Group provides a model](#) for this type of program.

Key Policy Recommendations

- *Redesign 21st Century Scholars and Increase Funding:* The state should identify ways to make it easier for students to enroll and participate in the program, as well as increase funding levels to match enrollment increases.
- *Mandate FAFSA Completion:* The state should make FAFSA completion mandatory as part of the high school Graduation Pathways requirements.
- *529 Tax Credit:* Create a tax credit for employers making direct contributions into employees' 529 plans.
- *Examine College and Career Counseling Systems:* Create a statewide commission to examine K-12 college and career counseling systems with an eye to ensuring every student, especially students from low-income households, receive customized college and career advising that helps them navigate financial aid and job application hurdles and sets them up for success after high school.

Fundamental First Step: Reframe Diversity and Inclusion as a Business Imperative

Cultivating a diverse, inclusive culture is a business imperative if we are to address racial disparities and grow the Black talent pipeline. It requires employers to view diversity and inclusivity as a core Human Resources function, rather than solely as a corporate social responsibility effort. Building a culture of inclusivity and belonging starts with awareness. A comprehensive adverse impact analysis identifies racial and other disparities that might live within an organization, from hiring practices to promotions and wages. For organizations that identify wage disparities, employers can commit to closing gaps through adjusted compensation or by upskilling and providing opportunities for career advancement. Viewing diversity as a holistic, organization-wide responsibility will ensure alignment across talent acquisition, employee development, retention and career advancement efforts.

¹¹ [Indiana College Readiness Report 2020](#)

¹² [Most Eligible Students Don't Apply To Be 21st Century Scholars](#), NPR (WFYI), June 2019

Key Policy Recommendations

The Indianapolis business community should develop a formal infrastructure focused on addressing racial inequities over the long-term. Key functions would include identifying existing programs that can be scaled, building new programs where there are service gaps, and tracking progress that our city is making in addressing racial disparities in education, health, employment and other outcomes.

Increase Data Transparency

Increasing access to educational opportunity for Black and Hispanic students begins by understanding current outcomes. As a starting point, the state should adopt a public-facing version of the BEI Talent Pipeline analysis and update it annually. It will be especially important to ensure transparency around postsecondary outcomes and median wages over one, three, five, and 10 years post-graduation tied to degrees and certificates. Data should be disaggregated by race/ethnicity, gender and socioeconomic status.

PAVING THE WAY FORWARD

Two Indiana employers offer examples of how to create a more diverse workforce of the future by engaging students starting in high school.

Ascension St. Vincent creates pathways for diversity in healthcare



“We need people on our teams that can connect with the patients that come through our doors. That means recruiting a diverse workforce to mirror the diverse communities we serve. And it means partnering with schools and institutions to pave a pathway for anyone who wants a career in the healthcare industry.”

*Michelle Mitchell,
Manager of Programs for Workforce Development*

Ascension St. Vincent’s mission is to provide compassionate, personalized care to people of all backgrounds. The diversity of the patients they serve means that their workforce must be trained to eliminate biases and honor all cultures and differences. This emphasis on diversity, equity and inclusion is not only reflected in the way they treat their patients, but also in how they recruit and mentor future employees.

As a strategy to grow their future workforce, Ascension St. Vincent partners with local organizations and academic institutions to provide targeted internships and scholarships. For example, through the Surgical Tech Apprenticeship Program, students aged 16 and older earn a livable wage while learning career-relevant skills. Students in the program gain tiered credentials, and as they move to higher-level certifications, they qualify to become full-time employees.

“We’re patient-centered, but student-focused,” said Michelle Mitchell, Manager of Programs for Workforce Development at Ascension St. Vincent. “We know the future of our workforce depends on our ability to embrace our differences. And we give these students the opportunity to gain confidence in what can be a difficult work environment. This can empower them for a future in healthcare.”

To increase the chances that students complete the program, Ascension St. Vincent has resources to assist students with the cost of books and scrubs, and also partners with organizations that help students with transportation and childcare.

“We aim to make it as accessible as possible for students to attain their certifications,” Mitchell said. “This is part of our effort to eliminate barriers and provide opportunities for all.”

OneAmerica trains high school students for high-impact job positions



“This past year raised urgent awareness about diversity, equity and inclusion and further accelerated us into action at OneAmerica. We all have to play a part in building Indiana’s diverse talent pipeline, and we’re tapping into community partners and our own team to find ways to do so. We’re hopeful that these efforts will allow us to hire a workforce that more deeply reflects the communities we serve.”

*Eduardo Nieto, Human Resources Director HRBP,
Enterprise Operations*

For the first year, OneAmerica – a national mutual insurance company headquartered in Indianapolis – is collaborating with Ascend Indiana and EmployIndy on Modern Apprenticeship (MAP), a three-year program for high school students that complements classroom education with paid, on-the-job training. This sets students up for career success, including by providing industry-recognized credentials, and helps engage a diverse range of students.

By working with students in a holistic way that takes their school schedule, extracurriculars and personal interests into consideration, MAP is a realistic pathway to a sustainable income. And OneAmerica is already seeing the benefits of developing relationships with these students.

“We’re training high school students for high-impact positions that have a limited candidate pool,” said Eduardo Nieto, OneAmerica’s Human Resources Director HRBP, Enterprise Operations. “We’re noticing these young people have a remarkable level of empathy, which allows them to connect with our customers in meaningful ways. It’s a win-win for us.”

Eduardo is hopeful about the future of MAP at OneAmerica and its ability to bring more diversity into the workforce.

“We see this program as an immense opportunity,” Nieto said. “Though this is our first year partnering with MAP, we are already planning to do more of this foundational work in the future.”

