

Indiana: Early Childhood Education

This brief was written by [Lauren Hall](#), a member of the Policy Circle’s Indiana State Leadership Council, in close partnership with [Early Learning of Indiana](#). The views expressed in how to improve the early learning sector are written by, and from the perspective of, Early Learning Indiana.¹

Introduction

Definition

The [Indiana Early Learning Advisory Committed](#) (ELAC) defines Early Care and Education (ECE) as “educational programs and strategies geared toward children from birth to age eight; this time period is widely considered the most vulnerable and crucial stage of a person’s life and focuses on guiding children through play.”²

Why it Matters

High-quality early childhood learning opportunities provide a multigenerational impact by empowering children to build the foundational skills necessary to flourish in kindergarten and beyond, while also enabling their parents to actively contribute to the labor force.

The centrality of the first five years of life to the very architecture of a human brain is not in dispute. The brain develops more rapidly during these years than at any other time, as neural pathways are formed and reinforced through responsive relationships or eroded as a result of adverse experiences.³ A brain’s plasticity decreases over time, becoming more capable of complex functionality but less adaptable, making any shortcomings in the initial wiring that takes place during these early years harder to overcome.

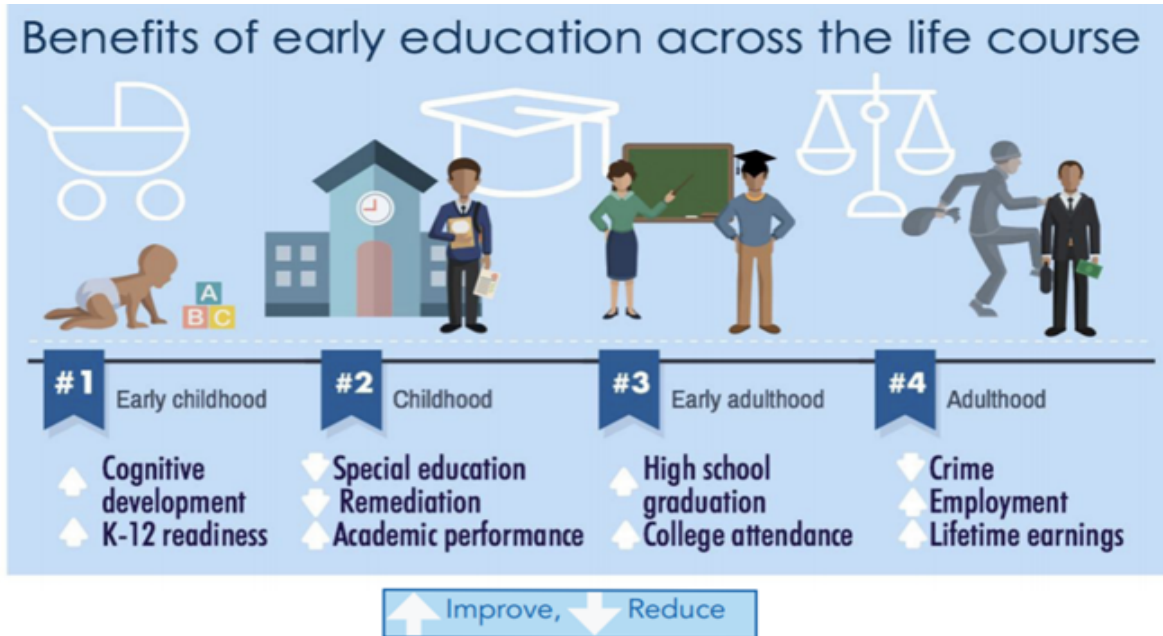
Approximately two-thirds of the half million Hoosier children under the age of six are estimated to be in need of care outside of their home as a result of all the adults in their household working. Given the rapid pace of development during this earliest life stage, in which more than a million neural connections are formed every second, it is vital for policymakers, communities, and citizens to prioritize ensuring children have the nurturing experiences required to optimize early brain development. The following illustration from the 2016 [Economic Impacts of Investing in Early Childhood Education in Indiana report](#) outlines the positive impacts and return on investment of investing in early childhood education.

[National long-term evaluation studies](#) have found that children who participate in high-quality ECE programs are 40% less likely to drop out of school and 50% less likely to be placed in special education.

¹ Early Learning Indiana, Modernizing Early Care and Education (2021)

² <http://providers.brighterfuturesindiana.org/pdf/glossary.pdf>

³ <https://www.npr.org/transcripts/545092982>

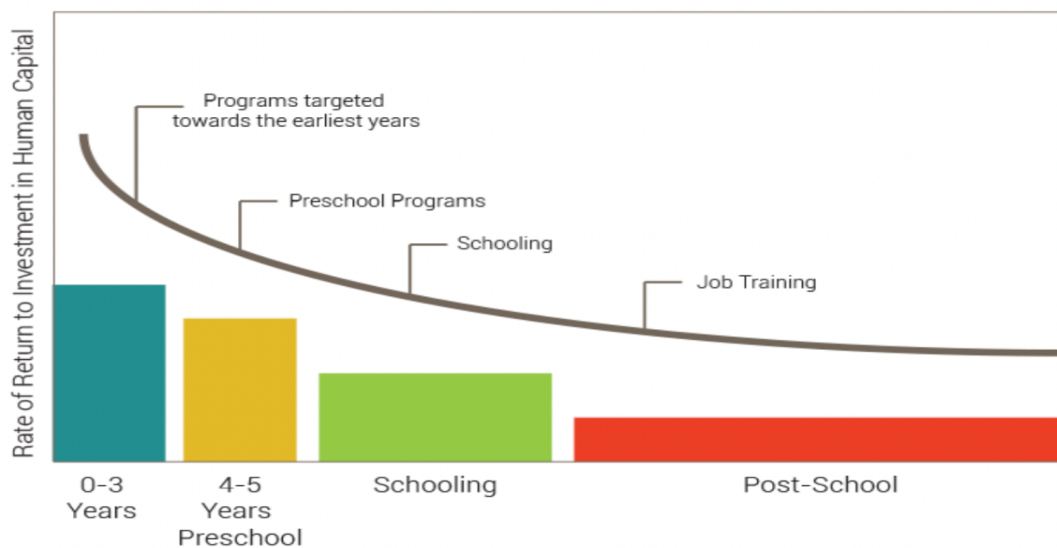


According to the governor-appointed [Indiana Early Learning Advisory Committee](#),

“Early childhood education is a proven long-term investment that stimulates economic growth and ensures future prosperity. Right now, every dollar put toward early childhood education is both an educational and economic stimulus for American families—creating jobs and enabling parents to earn while their children learn. Economists have found that high-quality early childhood education offers one of the highest returns of any public investment—more than \$7 for every dollar spent.”



RATES OF RETURN TO HUMAN CAPITAL Investment at different ages



SOURCE: J.J. HECKMAN, "SKILL FORMATION AND THE ECONOMICS OF INVESTING IN DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN." SCIENCE, 312(5782):1900-2, (JUNE 2006).

Given the promise of these multigenerational benefits, the potential value of an effective early learning sector—in which children are achieving or surpassing expected learning outcomes, and Hoosier parents are able to work—is evident. The factors preventing this promise from being fully realized are varied. Many of these issues stem from a foundational confusion about the purpose of early learning, a policy environment that is just beginning to understand the importance and complexity of early learning, a profound and persistent talent vacuum of early learning workers, and financial and operational models of early learning programs that are working at cross purposes.

History

The history of early childhood education (ECE) in Indiana can be traced through the development of organizations, policies, and practices that seek to ensure early learners have the care and support they need to be successful in school and life. Indiana’s first and largest early childhood education non-profit, [Early Learning Indiana](#) (formerly called Day Nursery), was founded in the late 19th century by a group of female reformers from the Hope Circle of the King’s Daughters Society who offered child care and food access to local families.

Early Learning Indiana’s growth over the past century reflects the broader trends in Indiana ECE from a small-scale, direct-support approach in local communities, to a large-scale, statewide approach led by organizations and coalitions that represent the diverse stakeholders who benefit from investment in ECE, primarily families, K-12 schools, post-secondary institutions, employers, and the government. Diverse organizational and civic leaders across Indiana have invested in the collective work required to cultivate a robust, coordinated ECE system overtime, including:

- 1) The [Child Care Answers](#) resource referral service for parents;
- 2) Ensuring that each of their child care centers earned national accreditation by the [National Association for the Education of Young Children](#) (NAEYC), which only 10% of centers nationwide are able to achieve and maintain;
- 3) The push for the Indiana General Assembly to establish [Early Learning Advisory Committee \(ELAC\)](#) in 2013⁴, which provides context on, and recommendations for how to improve, the state of Indiana ECE to the Governor’s Office and the Indiana Legislative Committee⁵;
- 4) The 2016 launch of [All IN 4 Pre-K](#) which leverages the voices and assets of families, community advocates, and business leaders to expand access to high-quality ECE across Indiana.⁶

In the late 1990s, the Child Care and Early Education Partnership, “a group of organizations working together in the Northeast Indiana ‘to develop awareness of and commitment to the importance of high quality early care and education for all children in the community,’” spurred the development of Indiana’s child care and ECE quality rating system, Paths to QUALITY.⁷

Momentum for this research-based approach to rating and developing ECE centers across the state grew so that in 2007 Indiana’s Bureau of Child Care (a division of the Family and Social Services Administration) contracted Purdue University to conduct a longitudinal study of Paths to

⁴ <https://www.in.gov/fssa/carefinder/4842.htm>

⁵ <http://www.elacindiana.org/big-goal-2020/>

⁶ “[The History of Early Learning Indiana](#)”

⁷ Child Care and Early Care Partnership Mission, 1996.

QUALITY standards. In 2008, Paths to QUALITY was piloted in a few Indiana counties and then continued with phased implementation throughout the state a year later.⁸

The cost of ECE was a barrier for many families. The United Way of Central Indiana, Early Learning Indiana and a broad coalition of statewide organizations supported the [On My Way Pre-K](#) program, which was made law in 2014 to provide grants to eligible, low-income 4-year-old children for qualified early education services. During the 2018-2019 school year, 2,915 children were enrolled, supported by \$8.3 million in state funding, over \$400,000 in local county match funds, as well as \$14.5 million in federal funding.⁹ Indiana is still considered one of only 6 states that does not have a fully-funded state-run Pre-K program.¹⁰

The Role of Government

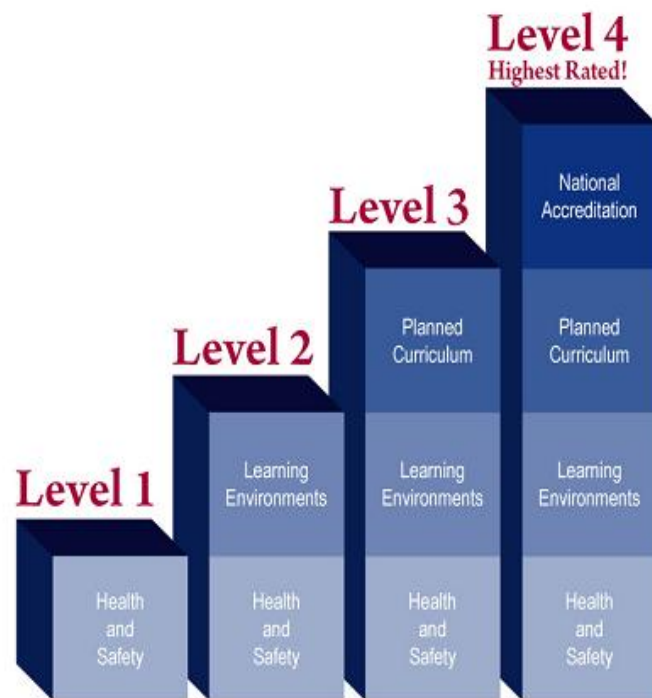
State Government

The [Family and Social Services Administration](#) (which has oversight of the early childhood education sector), the [Department of Education](#), and the [Commission for Higher Education](#) heavily impact existing ECE structures. [Governor Holcomb's 2022 Legislative Agenda](#) includes the creation of an Office of Kindergarten Readiness under the Department of Education in order to better connect the Department of Education with the Family and Social Services Administration. The governor and these agencies have the ability and authority to establish specific goals around school readiness, and to align processes and personnel in support of those goals.

Paths to QUALITY

[Paths to QUALITY](#) is Indiana's statewide, four-tier rating system for child care and early learning programs. The system intends to provide centers guidance on how to build quality improvements over time so they can earn national accreditation at the fourth level. The levels are:

- Level One: Health and safety needs of children met
- Level Two: Environment supports children's learning
- Level Three: Planned curriculum guides child development and school readiness
- Level Four: National accreditation (the highest indicator of quality) is achieved¹¹



⁸ <https://www.in.gov/fssa/pathstoquality/about-us/scientific-basis-for-ptq/>

⁹ http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Indiana_YB2019.pdf

¹⁰ http://nieer.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/YB2019_Indiana.pdf

¹¹ <https://www.in.gov/fssa/2554.htm>

Paths to QUALITY is linked to state funding levels through the [Child Care and Development Fund \(CCDF\)](#). For example, programs rated at level one receive at-market-rate for CCDF funds. Programs rated at level four receive 30% above-market rate for CCDF funds.

Across Indiana, there are nearly 3,000 programs participating in the Paths to QUALITY rating system, a majority (1,275) are Level 1 programs, 852 are Level 2, and 449 are Level 3, and 264 are Level 4.

The Early Learning Advisory Committee (ELAC)

[ELAC](#) was established in 2013 by the Indiana General Assembly (IC 12-17.2-3.7). Committee membership is appointed by the Governor and includes representation from the FSSA Office of Early Childhood and Out of School Learning (formerly The Bureau of Child Care), the Indiana Department of Education, Indiana Head Start State Collaboration Office, an early childhood education program, business sector, and faith-based community.

[ELAC is responsible for:](#)

- “Conducting periodic statewide needs assessments concerning the quality and availability of early education programs for children from birth to the age of school entry, including the availability of high quality prekindergarten education for low income children in Indiana.”
- “Identifying opportunities for and barriers to collaboration and coordination among federally and state funded child development, child care, and early childhood education programs and services, including governmental agencies that administer the programs and services.”
- “Assessing the capacity and effectiveness of two and four year public and private higher education institutions in Indiana for the support and development of early educators including professional development and career advancement plans and practice or internships with or prekindergarten programs.”
- “Recommending to the Division procedures, policies, and eligibility criteria for the Early Education Matching Grant program.”

To advance their goals, ELAC has seven active [workgroups](#) with over 150 community stakeholders from early childhood programs, higher education institutions, community partners, funders, and government (see figure below). Annually, ELAC conducts a comprehensive needs assessment on the state of early childhood education in Indiana and presents recommendations addressing those identified needs to the Governor’s Office and the Indiana Legislative Committee. Each annual report, along with many other resources, such as the impact of COVID-19 on Indiana’s child care system, can all be found at: <http://www.elacindiana.org/resources/>.

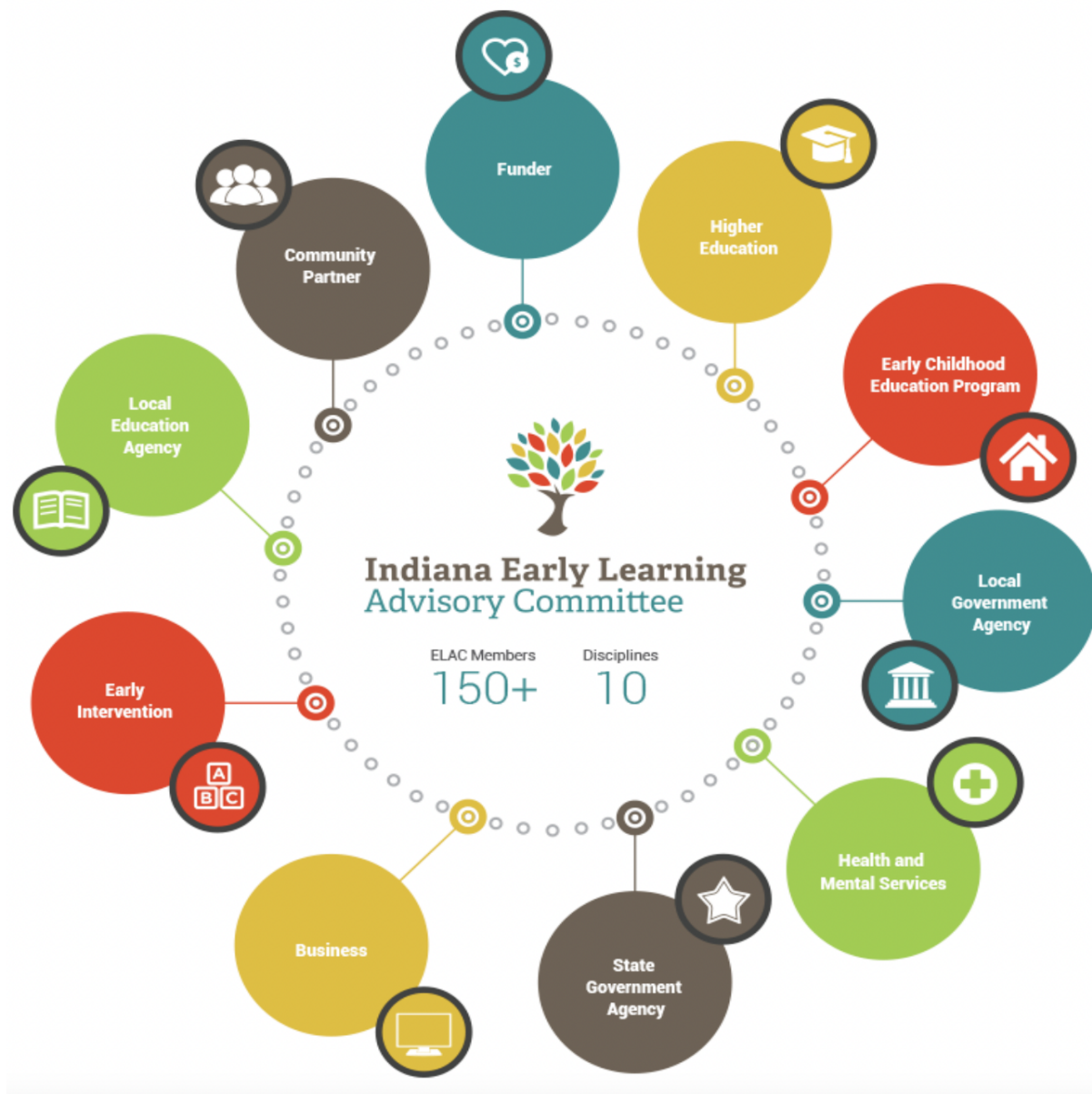
Legislation is in the works to [strengthen ELAC’s role](#) by giving it authority to establish child development and education goals, including for programs that receive state and/or federal funding, and to conduct “periodic statewide needs assessments concerning the quality and availability of early education programs”.

The Role of the Private Sector

Beyond providing the child care services families need, the **early learning sector** is responsible for meeting accountability standards and ensuring the highest quality environments, such as through talent attraction and retention of employees.

The **philanthropic community** is also uniquely positioned to see the intersections between early learning efforts and priorities from other sectors. Philanthropy can help align learning priorities with health outcomes, the K-12 system, workforce development objectives and other industry-specific activities, while also maintaining a focus on cross-cutting issues like impacts on racial disparities.

With an eye towards future talent pipelines as well as immediate workforce needs, the **business community** has a vested interest in early learning and child care that meets standards of accountability. Businesses are also in a position to consider how they may interact with the sector through employee child care benefits or other kinds of operational support.



Challenges & Areas for Reform

There are just over [500,000 children in Indiana](#) ages five and under. About 48% have no access to formal child care. [Early Learning Indiana estimates](#) 65% need care, though only about 130,000 (about 27%) are enrolled in known programs.

As of 2020, there is [\\$330 million in public funding](#) available to help families pay for early childhood education. This leaves a shortfall of \$789 million, equating to 71% of families with children in poverty without any funding to access ECE.

Indiana's [Early Learning Access Index](#) score includes four components: **Capacity, Quality, Affordability, and Choice**. Indiana scores 60.6 on a scale of 1 to 100, because Indiana has a moderate supply of early learning spots for children, relatively high marks for affordability and the range of choices available, and a general scarcity of high-quality offerings. Generally speaking, rural communities are less well served than urban centers. The following data is from [Early Learning Indiana's Closing the Gap reporting and analysis](#).

Capacity

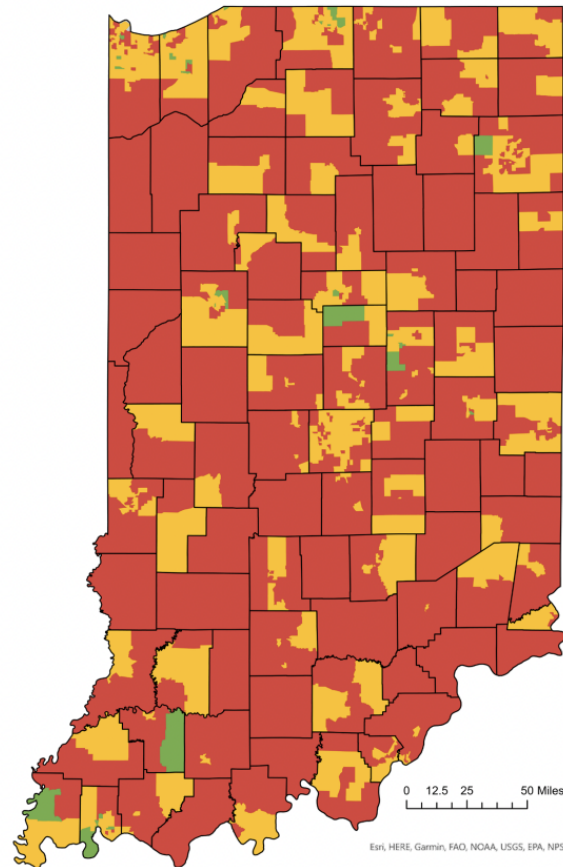
This rating gauges how well the supply of early care opportunities in a given area meet the demand. Across Indiana, families are in need of child care and support with their children's learning. Statewide, [Indiana's capacity rating is 55.8%](#). However, more than two-thirds of Hoosier counties have a rate that is less than 50%, which means over half of the children in these counties do not have an early care option available to them, as illustrated in the Early Learning Access Index figure. For example, in Indiana's largest county by population, Marion County, only half of all children in need of care are [enrolled](#) in a known program.

While some communities are better served, there is an insufficient supply of early learning opportunities statewide and inadequate market incentives to prompt the creation of additional high-quality supply, especially for infants and toddlers.

An important driver of capacity is the early learning workforce. This workforce is low-wage, but undeniably high-value. Compensation rates severely threaten the ability to attract effective teachers. Teacher preparation programs are costly, time consuming, and not producing desired results. Between 2016 and 2020, there

Early Learning Access Index Groups

- Inadequate
- Moderate
- Adequate



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates; Indiana Family and Social Services Administration, RCCS, 2021; Child Care Aware of America, National Data System, Indiana, 2021; Indiana Department of Education, INview, 2021

was a [26% decline in child care workers](#) in Indiana.

Focusing on the education-to-work pipeline may help. In Indiana, with the support of the Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation and in partnership with Ascend Indiana and Butler University, ELI has created [competency-based, job-embedded pathways](#) to early learning professions that are designed to accelerate the time to proficiency while reducing costs for participants. The first pathway, targeting Classroom Support Professionals, was piloted in 2021 and is being expanded throughout Central Indiana. A second pathway, targeting instructional leaders, is currently in development and will be available in 2022.

[New America's Early Childhood Education](#) team, with support from their [Partnership to Advance Youth Apprenticeship \(PAYA\)](#) team, are investing in, supporting, and researching early learning apprenticeship pilots and programs across the country. One of the most promising is the [Early Care & Education Pathways to Success \(ECEPTS\)](#) program in Oakland, California. Read more about New America's work in advancing the early learning talent pipeline by reading: [Strengthening Child Care and Early Education: Learning from COVID-19: A joint project of New America's Early and Elementary Education Policy Program and Better Life Lab](#), and [Transforming the Early Childhood Education Workforce](#).

Quality

[Throughout Indiana](#), 46.1% of all early learning options are high quality, which means they are a Level 3 or Level 4 program as determined by Paths To Quality (see additional context about PTQ on the following pages). The percentage of children who can be served by high-quality programs is 25.7%. Over four fifths of Indiana counties have less than 25% of the high-quality programming needed to serve children in their community, meaning that even children who do access an early care spot are not able to access a spot in a high-quality program.

Studies have consistently demonstrated that the magnitude of the outcomes achieved by early learning services is closely connected to the quality and intensiveness of the services provided. The quality of Indiana's early learning system, defined by the outcomes it is designed to achieve, is largely unknown. There is a general understanding that early learning should include clear targets around academic achievement and the development of other essential early skills for children, as well as goals for parental workforce engagement.

The government plays an important role in setting quality standards. The COVID-19 public health emergency has served as an accelerant to the trend of expanding the role of states in delivering early learning services. This has made the State responsible for setting health and safety standards, and the overall health of the entire sector, as evidenced by the [Paths to QUALITY](#) rating system for child care and early learning programs. The current rating system, however, is primarily based on program characteristics rather than children's learning outcomes. In 2021, Early Learning Indiana, in partnership with and with support from the National Institute for Early Education Research, Lilly Endowment Inc., and the State of Indiana, launched a statewide project to evaluate "measures of instructional practice and evidence of child achievement."¹² Results of this project can be used to revise current rating systems. Including early learning providers that must meet standards, as well as families and business community members who are directly

¹² E-mail correspondence from Maureen Weber, President & CEO, Early Learning Indiana, August 13, 2021.

affected by these standards and their outcomes, in conversations can make for meaningful and well-targeted objectives that are not overly costly or burdensome.

Affordability

[This measure has two components](#): a cost-to-income ratio and the percentage of area providers accepting public subsidies. The [annual tuition](#) for a high-quality ECE program costs about \$10,000 and the average daycare in Marion County costs over \$1,100/month. The overall cost-to-income ratio for child care in Indiana is 11.8%, but it varies by county. In Madison County, it approaches 16%. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services considers care affordable if it does not exceed 7% of a household's income. While more than 80% of licensed programs accept public vouchers, more than a quarter of these providers are not currently serving any children using public subsidy. Another component is that most [family or home-based child care providers](#) receive lower reimbursement rates than center-based child care.

[Workman 2018](#)'s Center for American Progress report notes that private tuition covers about 60 percent of the cost to run ECE programs, while government funding covers 39 percent, and philanthropy covers 1 percent.

Evaluating different funding strategies is essential to ensuring affordable care for those who need it. Excess American Rescue Plan funding can fortify the early learning industry, but these are one-time funds for long-term challenges that will require more systemic change. The Biden Administration's [Build Back Better agenda](#) includes universal pre-kindergarten and public funding that pays the balance for families whose child care payments exceed 7% of household income. The downside of this is that providers often have [less incentive to curb costs](#) when there are extensive public subsidies, meaning families who do not qualify for subsidies could see cost increases.

The [tax code may help](#), as it includes “a variety of policies that encourage work, benefit families with children, and offset the cost of child care”. The Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit offsets a portion of out-of-pocket child and dependent care expenses necessary for individuals to stay employed. This credit, however, is refundable, meaning taxpayers with little to no income tax liability don't really benefit; benefits tend to go more to middle- and high-income families. A second part of the tax code is Dependent Care Assistance Plans, when employers support employee child care needs, such as flexible spending accounts. Only 42% of workers are employed at a company that offers such plans, and they are generally higher-compensated employees at larger companies. A generous child-tax credit may be another option if parents are allowed to use it on child care if they so choose; [AEI's Michael Strain](#) argues that if there is no requirement for the money to be spent on child care, it will not increase overall prices in the industry by stimulating demand.

As a system, providers can operate more efficiently, but it is generally difficult to do so and achieve financial sustainability while also improving teacher quality. Policy measures that incentivize or reduce regulatory burdens can help providers reach administrative scale (such as by simplifying the licensing and accreditation structure into a single framework that enables

network providers to complete only one licensing application) and incorporate more technology (such as child care management systems) to lower operating costs. Adjusting [size limits and child-staff ratios](#) in classrooms may also help; results from a 2017 study found that increasing the ratio by one infant reduces the cost of care by between 9% and 20%.

Choice

Confronting the dilemmas of choice is contingent upon understanding parental preferences. Many factors contribute to a family's selection of an early care provider, but [this measure](#) is comprised of three important components impacting choice:

1. The availability of hard-to-find infant and toddler care;
2. Programs offering non-traditional hours; and
3. The overall variety of early learning offerings (i.e. at centers, ministries, family child care homes, etc.) in a given area.

Families fare somewhat well in terms of having a variety of programs from which to choose—the median score of variety in the type of early learning offerings available in Indiana counties is a .637 on a scale of 0 to 1. About one-third of programs statewide do not offer infant and toddler care and 14 counties have no high-quality infant and toddler care available. Just over a quarter of programs statewide offer non-traditional hours. Particularly for child care centers, shifting [the school day hours](#) to better align with the work day may help more parents work, which will heavily impact choice. Loans, grants, and technical assistance can also help the private sector step into an expanded role as providers.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, parents found innovative and cost-effective means of providing childcare, including childcare cooperatives. At the [local level](#) in particular, providers are best equipped to create the kinds of opportunities and options constituents want and need. States and municipalities can support parents by looking at regulations and removing barriers to community-based childcare.

Capitalizing on technology may also help evaluate and match supply and demand; for example, the Early Learning Marketplace, which Early Learning Indiana is set to launch in 2022, will be a digital space that will bring together supply and demand in real time.

Workforce Impact

One of the [largest barriers](#) to garnering, maintaining, and advancing in employment is lack of access to child care. Insufficient child care was named as one of the top outside factors most negatively impacting **employers' ability to attract and retain workers** in the Indiana Chamber of Commerce and its Institute for Workforce Excellence's 14th annual [employer workforce survey](#), conducted in 2021.

As Indiana Chamber of Commerce's Vice President for Education & Workforce Development [Jason Bearce notes](#), "We keep hearing more and more about these barriers in nearly every workforce discussion, especially the availability and affordability of child care and housing. It's become a serious problem across Indiana, and it's raised questions about the role employers are expected to play in meeting these needs for their employees. At the end of the day, it's pretty clear that businesses that want to grow and attract top talent have to be part of the solution."

Between 2015 and 2025, an increase of over 3,000 children aged five and below is expected in Indiana. Nearly 70% of married couples with children under 18 and 85% of single parents are in the labor force.¹³

In 2018, the Indiana Public Policy Institute estimated that disruptions in child care access cost Hoosier employers \$1.8 billion annually as a result of absenteeism, overtime pay, temporary coverage, and overall reductions in productivity. Additionally, the study found that nearly 3% of working parents leave their jobs annually to address child care needs, including a disproportionate number of women (Early Learning Indiana). As Indiana’s economic recovery continues amidst the ongoing COVID pandemic, the **workforce impact** cannot be ignored.

Tax credits and early learning savings accounts are also options that may encourage employer-based and other private investments. Based on employer capabilities and employee needs, options could include buying into provider networks, tuition support pools, or investing in on-site operations.

Racial Equity

Inequitable access to high-quality early learning opportunities reinforces existing racial and economic disparities. [The National Center for Education Statistics’ Preschool and Kindergarten Enrollment data](#) indicates that the more education a child’s parent has, the more likely they are to be enrolled in early learning, and white students represent the single largest racial/ethnic group of early learners.

In “[Education for All - An Audit of Racial Equity in Marion County OCTOBER 2021](#),” Ben Kleban used data from all students enrolled in public schools, charter schools, and private schools in Marion County. His review of “racial equity in educational opportunities reveals Black and Hispanic¹⁴ children born and raised in Marion County are likely to experience a disproportionate and chronic lack of access to a high-quality education from birth all the way through college.”

According to Kleban, recent research suggests that “enrollment in a high-quality early learning program can have a lasting positive impact on school and life outcomes,¹⁵ including improvements in academic achievement,¹⁶ educational attainment,¹⁷ employment, earnings,

¹³ Data provided by Early Learning Indiana

¹⁴ Note the term “Hispanic” is used throughout this report (vs. Latino or other terminology) because that was the racial group definition predominantly reflected in the public data sets analyzed by the author.

¹⁵ Elango, S., García, J. L., Heckman, J. J., & Hojman, A. (2015). Early Childhood Education Working Paper 21766. Cambridge: National Bureau of Economic Research. Retrieved from https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w21766/w21766.pdf

¹⁶ McCoy, D. C., Yoshikawa, H., Ziol-Guest, K. M., Duncan, G. J., Schindler, H. S., Magnuson, K., . . . Shonkoff, J. P. (2017). Impacts of early childhood education on medium- and long-term educational outcomes. *Educational Researcher*, 46(8), 474-487. Retrieved from <https://psycnet.apa.org/>

¹⁷ Stevens, K. B., & English, E. (2016). *Does Pre-K Work? The Research on Ten Early Childhood Programs—And What It Tells Us*. American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research. Retrieved from <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Does-Pre-K-Work.pdf?x91208>

criminal justice involvement, teen pregnancy, and health,¹⁸ but that nationally the quality of early childhood education programs attended by Black children is on average lower than that of programs attended by white children.”¹⁹ Preliminary evidence indicates the trend holds true for Indiana as well.

Black, Hispanic, and other Hoosier parents of color are especially in need of more, and more high-quality, early learning programs to enable them greater employment opportunities and economic mobility. The Business Equity For Indy’s (BEI) Learning and Talent Opportunities Task Force released a report in November of 2021–[Racial Gaps in the Education-to-Workforce Pipeline is Indiana’s Opportunity to Close Them](#)–which highlights this stark need.

[Business Equity for Indiana](#) (BEI) “is a joint effort of the Central Indiana Corporate Partnership, 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.”

The report examined public data from the U.S. Census, Indiana Management Performance Hub and other state agencies, and suggested four key recommendations to close the racial gaps in the education-to-workforce pipeline in Indiana (shown in the figure on the next page). [See the full report here.](#)

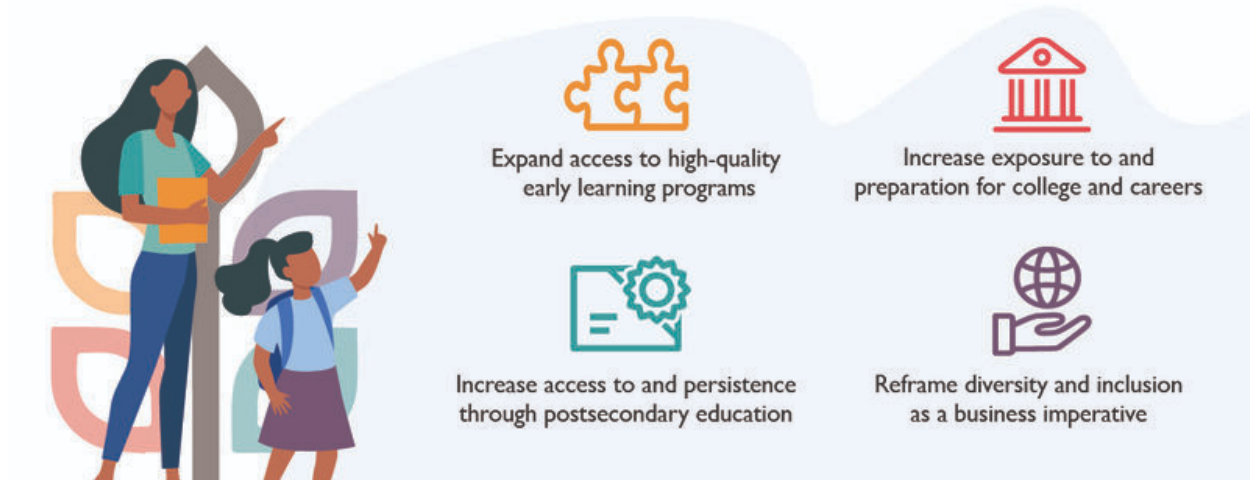
One idea is to develop a coordinated data system to include all providers of early childhood education. The National Early Childhood Data Collaborative has guidelines for states to follow. For example, North Carolina’s “Early Childhood Integrated Data System links together education, health, and social services data to inform and improve policy and practice statewide.”²⁰

¹⁸ Yoshikawa, H., Weiland, C., Brooks-Gunn, J., Burchinal, M. R., Espinosa, L. M., Gormley, W. T., . . . Zaslow, M. J. (2013). Investing in Our Future: The Evidence Base on Preschool Education. Society for Research in Child Development and Foundation for Child Development. Retrieved from <https://www.fcd-us.org/assets/2016/04/Evidence-Base-on-Preschool-Education-FINAL.pdf>

¹⁹ Friedman-Krauss, A., & Barnett, S. (2020). Access to High-Quality Early Education and Racial Equity. The State University of New Jersey, Rutgers Graduate School of Education. New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research. Retrieved from <https://nieer.org/policy-issue/special-report-access-to-high-quality-early-education-and-racial-equity>

²⁰ North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services. (2020). North Carolina Early Childhood Integrated Data System. Retrieved from NCDHHS: <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/north-carolina-early-childhood-integrated-data-system>

Recommendations to Close Racial Gaps in the Education-to-Workforce Pipeline in Indiana



Conclusion

At its core, a system designed to level the playing field for Hoosier children starts with a clear purpose and high expectations, commensurate with the life-changing anticipated results. It is built to enable those results, driving key inputs, like an effective workforce, while reducing distracting barriers, like multiple layers of compliance. It takes a rational approach to public funding, normalizing around the child, rather than the source of funding, to empower families with as many choices as possible. It demands operational efficiency while fostering innovation to ensure that scarce resources are optimized and that entrepreneurial talent is attracted to the work. And it has an unyielding focus on outcomes, in recognition of the extraordinarily high stakes.

For all Hoosier children, but especially the most vulnerable among us, the opportunity to access a truly high-quality early care and education environment, complete with nutritious food, meaningful relationships with caring adults, and opportunities to develop essential skills, has the potential to transform the very architecture of the brain. Embedded in that architecture are the seeds of all future learning—resilience, persistence, flexible thinking strategies, and effective communication skills—and all of the possibilities that such skills unlock.

Additional Resources

- [Early Learning Indiana's \(ELI\) "Closing The Gap: An Assessment of Indiana's Early Learning Opportunities" report](#)
- [National Institute for Early Education Research's \(NIEER\) "The State of Preschool Yearbook 2020" report](#)
- [Economic Impact of Lack of Adequate Child Care on Indiana's Workforce & Economy](#)
- [Indiana's Early Learning Development Framework is aligned to the 2014 Indiana Academic Standards](#), provides guidance on core skills and knowledge for 3-5 year olds.

- Some common evaluation tools used in high-quality ECE classrooms include: [Social Skills Improvement System](#) (SSIS) and [Classroom Assessment Scoring System](#) (CLASS). Learn more about evaluation and program improvement from [Indiana University's Early Childhood Center](#), and their [Program Performance Evaluation Plan](#)

Questions for Discussion

- Did you participate in any early learning programs? Why or why not? How do you think this shaped or influenced your professional and civic path?
- Consider the children in your life—your own, family members, or friends. What options are available for early learning? What are the biggest priorities when determining if, and which, early learning program to attend? What do you think most influences these decisions? What limits these decisions?
- What do you find most and least compelling about Early Learning Indiana's roadmap for improving Indiana's early learning sector?
- What other creative solutions can you come up with that could help expand the access, affordability, and quality of early learning in Indiana?
- Do you think the state needs to prioritize ensuring that low-income parents of young children have the support they need to engage in the workforce? If so, what are some additional approaches to doing this?