



# EDUCATION MATTERS Southern Indiana

*An initiative of the community foundations of  
Clark, Floyd, Harrison, Scott and Washington Counties*



## **COMMUNITY ROUNDTABLE EVENTS CLARK, FLOYD, HARRISON, SCOTT & WASHINGTON COUNTIES**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*JULY 2013*

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OVERVIEW

The *Education Matters* initiative was organized by the community foundations that serve Washington, Scott, Harrison, Clark, and Floyd counties to try to increase the number of working adults in our region who started but never completed some form of post-secondary education – education that extends beyond high school. In Southeast Indiana, only 25% of the workforce has an associate's, bachelor's or professional degree, compared to 38% nationally. Yet one in four of the community's adult workers has earned some college credits. That is over 40,000 people in the five county region.

These communities are committed to do something to change these alarming statistics. Success can take many forms, and the leaders of Southern Indiana are committed to taking strategic steps to move the needle for this population. This effort will provide positive impact for the residents, the workforce, the communities as a whole, and the state. *Education Matters* is designed to take ownership of this initiative and aspires to positively change the lives of individuals, families, and the community's future. This report is designed to present the best and brightest ideas to make in-roads toward a more educated community. The individuals and institutions collaborating on the progress of *Education Matters* so far have identified barriers to educational attainment of adults and suggested four potential solutions to begin addressing this issue.

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The initiative began when the community foundations brought together business, political, education, and community leaders at events held in April 2013 in Washington County, Scott County, and New Albany (Clark/Floyd and Harrison counties) and asked for help addressing the educational attainment numbers in Southern Indiana. Over 150 individuals heard presentations from experts at the Lumina Foundation, One Southern Indiana, Indiana University Southeast, and Ivy Tech Community College about the educational attainment crisis in the region. The speakers emphasized that the success of Education Matters can strengthen our workforce, economy, and attractiveness to lure and keep businesses here – hiring Southern Indiana workers. The community foundations believe we can have the greatest immediate impact by focusing on this small section of individuals who started but never completed some form of postsecondary education.

Among the most pressing concerns for colleges and universities across the United States is student recruitment and retention (Tinto, 2012). Indicative of this concern is a spate of national college completion initiatives (e.g., Goal 2025, American Graduation Initiative, Complete College America) focusing attention on the need to help more students complete a postsecondary credential. Adult students (25 years and older) are a particularly important group with respect to recruitment and retention because they now comprise more than 45% of higher education enrollment (Bash, 2003, Kasworm, 2003). Furthermore, these adult learners persist at lower rates than that of traditional age students (Justice & Dornan, 2001; National Adult Attitudes Report, 2008, Soares, 2013). In Southeast Indiana, only 25% of the workforce has an associate's, bachelor's, or professional degree, compared to 38% nationally. Yet, one in

four of our community's adult workers have earned some college credits. For a variety of reasons, these southern Indiana residents started college but never completed their education. Information about the effects of adult-focused programs is very limited and there have been numerous calls for research on the subject (Kratzer, 2009; Wlodkowski, Mauldin, & Gahn, 2001). Therefore, the community foundations that serve in Clark, Floyd, Harrison, Scott and Washington counties of southern Indiana established the Education Matters initiative to convene community leaders for exploration of ways to increase educational attainment in the five county consortium engaged in this initiative.

The goal of *Education Matters* is to help adult workers who started, but never completed, some form of postsecondary education. This represents roughly 40,000 people in Southern Indiana. In April 2013, the community foundations brought together business, political, education, and community leaders and asked for help addressing the educational attainment numbers in Southern Indiana. A group of more than 150 individuals heard presentations from the Lumina Foundation, One Southern Indiana, Indiana University Southeast, and Ivy Tech Community College regarding the roughly 1 in 4 people in Southern Indiana who started but never completed some form of postsecondary education. This initiative can strengthen our workforce, economy, and attractiveness to lure and keep businesses here - hiring Southern Indiana workers. But it will take more than just the community foundations.

Following the April forums, a series of Community Roundtables were held in late June, 2013 to explore actionable ideas from the leaders of each community. These groups were charged with examining several areas of critical focus for the *Education Matters* Initiative. Specifically, the community leaders considered why the initiative matters to the community,

what each member could do personally to advance adult education attainment, areas for potential collaboration to reach greater attainment, and establishment of what action items would commence following the roundtable. In order to address these varied issues with greater focus, the community leaders utilized a collaborative process to consider strategic action items that would directly impact the educational attainment of adults with some college and no degree living in the region. Attendees were asked to consider an examination of both successful and dropout students as a useful way to develop successful recruitment and retention strategies. Analyzing the confluence of factors that promote and detract from the ability of adult learners to persist at two-year and four-year institutions addresses the nuances of each community's specific challenges to increase educational attainment.

The community leaders were briefed on the differences between adult learners and traditional students, to help them focus their discussion. With the decline in birth rates in all major developed countries, it is active older adults who must continue the workforce by being trained and retrained (Canja, 2002). The changing global economy requires a more knowledge-based workforce, which elicits the need for a more educated citizenry. The background, educational goals, and learning style of adult learners differentiate them from their traditional counterparts. Many adult students have various responsibilities including marriage, children, employment, civic, and social responsibilities (Kasworm, 2003; Wlodkowski et al., 2001) that limit their ability to engage in academic degree programs. They often return to higher education to improve the prospect of advancing their career, increasing earning potential in the workforce, and/or fulfill a long held personal goal. With the decline of the economy and the reduction of manufacturing jobs, more adults are returning to the academic setting to learn

specialized technical, business, and professional skills. By 2018, 63% of jobs will require some form of postsecondary training (Carnevale et al., 2010). Thus, it is imperative for community initiatives and institutions of higher education to understand the unique needs and characteristics that shape this growing student base in order to recruit, retain, and graduate more adult learners.

The five counties committed to the Education Matters initiative identified needs specific to their communities. Because of the regional demographic similarities, many common themes came to the surface during the Community Roundtables. Below is a non-exhaustive list of shared interests and strategic areas of attention from the roundtable events.

**Community Leaders identified four critical ways adults could be supported to be more successful through the Education Matters initiative:**

1. *Establish a college going culture in Southern Indiana (Awareness Campaign for Education Matters initiative)*

Through the leadership of *Education Matters* and local leaders in each community this initiative would create a college going culture by advancing public awareness of the current reality of 40,000 working adults with some college and no degree. It would facilitate active partnerships involving employers, K-12 education, postsecondary education, local and state government, community based organizations, business, media, and other stakeholders.

*Education Matters* would promote progress in educational achievement in local media by recognizing educational attainment of adult learners. News articles highlighting advocates and local success stories of returning adults would include PSAs facilitated by community leaders, interns, and retired teachers. This public relations effort would help adults conquer

their fears and establish a path to degree completion. Stories would include themes of the inspiration of one's own children and creation of a better future because an adult returned to finish a degree, as well as workplace advancement and added earning power as a result of finishing college.

*Education Matters* would initiate a Community Awareness Campaign for the five counties by constructing a more comprehensive *Education Matters* website. This process would be aimed at conceptualizing and constructing content that was specific to the needs of this adult learner population. This could help identify those interested in returning and create a file from which to recruit individuals back to local institutions with programs suited to their needs. Once students re-enrolled they would then have access to a network of resources to guide them through the challenges of managing academics and other competing responsibilities. The website content could also facilitate creation of publications, brochures, and presentations for local businesses and organizations that adopt this cause. This could also facilitate campus and business partnerships to house "Degrees at Work" - teaching courses at workplaces where there are large numbers of individuals that would like to participate.

2. *Coordinate effective guides and mentors for adults Pursuing post-secondary degrees or certifications*

Each county would initiate a College Coach/Peer Mentor program to pair returning adults with an advocate that would assist from enrollment through graduation. These individuals will be comprised of community leaders and other successful adult learners that have been through the process. This project would include a structured set of

guidelines that provides a framework for Coaches/Mentors and Students to facilitate a collaborative partnership to aid in educational achievement.

College Coach/Peer Mentor program would include guidance with:

- a. Career advice and exploration (matching programs with careers)
- b. Help with any prerequisite courses or testing to gain admission
- c. What to expect in college courses (evening, online, weekend, etc.)
- d. Time management (how to balance competing responsibilities, i.e. children, work, community)
- e. Stress management (managing academic requirements)
- f. Budgeting (advice to fit college costs into an overall budget)
- g. What classes fit your lifestyle and career goals (suggestions unique to each adult's needs)
- h. General support and encouragement (accountability and cheerleading to complete the goal)

### 3. Develop a comprehensive database of financial aid assistance

Adults need to modify and re-balance their roles if they return to academics to finish degrees or certification. Budgeting and strategic assistance to manage competing financial responsibilities is essential to initial and long-term success in college. Otherwise, they may experience the same result of receiving some additional college credit but no associate's or bachelor's degree. Critical item number three would commit each county to identifying, compiling, and disseminating all financial assistance available to those considering a return to academics. This would include scholarships, grants, loans, and innovative approaches (transportation, childcare, internet access) to financing one's education. Tuition assistance has also been demonstrated as a successful predictor of adult student persistence to



graduation. Community leaders would continue expansion of collaborative efforts to identify employers that commit to tuition assistance and/or flexible work scheduling. The *Education Matters* consortium would present these options on the website, in print publications, and to the mentors to advance awareness of resources and potential funds available to the 40,000 adults with some college and no degree in the five counties.

4. *Provide convenient adult learner friendly programs with an advisor that helps facilitate a fast path to graduation*

Institutions would continue to improve integration of advising, academic tutoring, and financial aid resources into the initial enrollment process to create a one-stop shop. Creating and sharing common curriculum materials both on paper and online with all communities involved is essential to establishing a clear “fast path” to graduation. Adults need to know exactly what they are responsible for in the initial advising appointment so that they can manage their competing responsibilities. Providing professional training to instructors and facilitators and enhancing the communication among participants at both the administrative level, as well as the instructional level is essential to adult student retention and success. *Education Matters* would strive to keep consistent and cohesive collaboration so that the institutions could provide leadership and designated instructors/advisors for adult friendly programs in each participating county.

Institutions would provide all adult learners with orientation to online and face-to-face course options. They should provide a computer lab with technical support for learning and consider creative methods of equipping adults with appropriate technical skills and equipment to be successful in these academic programs. Collecting formative data from

students on both satisfaction and achievement as they complete common modules would also ensure long-term success of the initiative and the programs they feed into.

Each institution would promote and increase night, weekend, and online options for adult learners. These institutions would also consider accelerated terms of 5 to 8 weeks alongside the possibility of On Demand or Competency-based credit. Through collaboration with Ivy Tech, Indiana University Southeast, and Purdue Technology Campus, a Metropolitan College or Metroversity would be created to house dual enrollment courses and programs. This would further the collaboration and articulation agreements to establish streamlined transfer of courses from one institution to the next. This consistent and expansive evaluation of transfer credit would also be accompanied by greater acknowledgement of Prior Learning Assessment Credit (PLA) (see Appendix 2). PLA credits are designed to recognize mastery of college level learning outside of the college confines and pull it in for academic credit. These practices have been shown to speed completion and improve graduation rates while acknowledging college level learning.

The four strategies listed above will not occur overnight or without a heightened level of community collaboration. Reconsidering current methods of recruitment, retention, and advocacy for adults will be essential to this initiative's success. Respecting the diversity of experience, responsibility, and knowledge that adults bring to the classroom creates a sense of community and belonging necessary for retention. Warmth, accessibility, enthusiasm, and care for these individuals will produce an inclusive yet professional environment for adult learners to

thrive. Acknowledgement of the barriers that prohibit adult participation including time, support, intimidation, and financial aid can make a significant difference in making adults feel welcomed and confident in their ability to complete degrees. Greater success for this population is achieved by addressing the four critical items above and exhibiting a community-wide commitment to our present workforce. If our children are our future, this adult workforce is our present, and communities must do everything possible to enhance opportunities for adults with some college and no degree to greater levels of educational attainment. These goals can be met through the *Education Matters* initiative.