

ALIGN SOUTHERN INDIANA FOUR COUNTY COALITION

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION



Community Foundation of Southern Indiana
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REPORT



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Objectives

LEI GIFT VIII

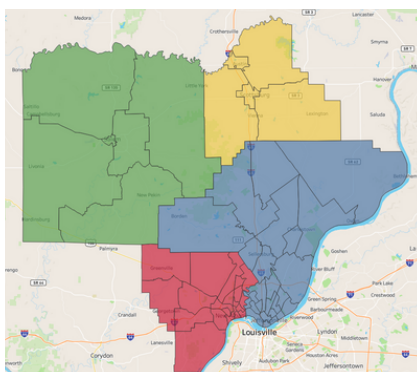
In response to the Lilly Endowment Inc. call for regional proposals for the Giving Indiana Funds for Tomorrow Phase VIII (GIFT VIII), the Community Foundation of Southern Indiana (representing Clark and Floyd Counties), Scott County Community Foundation, and Washington County Community Foundation Inc. joined forces to conduct community outreach and understand the priorities of their residents. They collaborated with Align Southern Indiana (ASI), a partner of the four county region since 2017.

Between February and March 2024, six (6) information gathering and planning sessions were held in Washington, Clark, Floyd, and Scott counties and included 102 residents representing a cross-section of stakeholders—community foundation board members, staff, donors, residents, early learning providers, educators (K-12), higher education administrators, workforce administrators, and other nonprofit services, alongside directors and staff from Washington County Community Foundation and Align Southern Indiana.

Attendees at each of the six planning sessions participated in a brief asset-identification and mapping exercise, identified community strengths, and discussed challenges and opportunities.

Population change was a common topic at each session, with communities experiencing similar needs or challenges. Proud of their communities, residents spoke about **achieving and sustaining a higher quality of life** not just for themselves but for potential new residents too. Moreover, in these six sessions across the four-county region, residents expressed the strong need to **support growth in programs and services that benefit their neighbors, friends, and families living in poverty** and within ALICE levels (Asset Limited, Income Challenged, Employed)—**approximately 42% of the region's population** as of 2021.

Citizen priorities:
Children and their care
Housing affordability
Living wages for workers
Jobs with growth opportunity



■ Clark County
■ Floyd County
■ Scott County
■ Washington County

Four county region and
census tracts

Community Voices

With no firm timeline for the state to address ECE recommendations or pass comprehensive reform measures, Clark, Floyd, Scott, and Washington Counties continue to struggle with the immediate implications of inadequate ECE access and quality, and high costs of ECE relative to income levels. It is beyond the scope of this report to increase the number of ECE places available in the region and to staff them adequately. Nor can we mandate legislative change, reduce the cost of early learning, or increase the wages of working families to better afford ECE. It is, however, possible to increase the quality of service offered by ECE providers in the region.

Acknowledging the positive long-term and lasting effects of investing in early childhood education and prioritizing improving ECE ecosystem quality, the proposed project supports ASI's long-term aspiration of kindergarten readiness for every child in the four-county region. By improving the quality of existing ECE options, including those for disadvantaged families who face the most challenge finding affordable and quality programs for their children, we can set our region's pre-K children on a pathway to lifelong success. We can build sustainability and quality into the ECE ecosystem by investing in a systems-approach to quality that offers services for ECE providers, children and their families.

My children stayed with a friend while I went to work. Many times I would go to drop them off and my friend wouldn't answer. I would have to call into work without someone for that shift.

I didn't just want a place for my kids to be babysat and watch TV all day. I wanted them to learn. I was fortunate enough to be able to take them to a center that is focusing on early learning and including families in the learning.

A parent talks about her struggles finding adequate early childhood education options

Our children deserve a fair opportunity to meet developmental growth targets that are essential for future success. To create a brighter future for all in our region, to lift families from poverty, and to create greater economic opportunities for all, our best opportunities lie in prioritizing investment in high quality, comprehensive early childhood education.



Expert Perspectives

Early Childhood Education: The Facts

Children entering kindergarten less ready to grow and learn than their peers have poorer academic outcomes from elementary to high school. Research shows that lower socioeconomic status (i.e., living in poverty or within ALICE levels) exacerbates disparities in a child's development and kindergarten readiness. With 42% of residents in Clark, Floyd, Scott, and Washington Counties living in poverty or within ALICE levels, the region's families and children struggle with the immediate and long-term consequences of inadequate access, affordability, and quality in early childhood education (ECE).

Missing a critical milestone for linguistic, social, emotional or cognitive development can delay a child's ability to process information and set off a chain reaction of educational delays.

From birth to age five, children need to achieve specific and critical developmental goals in wellbeing, language, cognitive, motor, physical health and growth, and learning. Meeting these goals—which determine “kindergarten readiness”—can be supported at home with family as well as in ECE settings.

When a child enters kindergarten “ready” in these areas of social, physical, linguistic, emotional, and cognitive development, they are ready to learn, to read, and to continue moving forward to successive academic outcomes—most specifically, third grade reading competency. In defining kindergarten as “when a child learns to read,” education research draws a clear connection to third grade reading competency “when a child reads to learn.”

For children living in poverty and not reading proficiently by third grade, the likelihood of dropping out of high school is even greater (32%) than their peers who also struggle to read proficiently and who have never been poor (22%). This link between kindergarten readiness and high school completion is of profound significance because extensive research shows high school completion as a cornerstone indicator of long-term life success outcomes, such as extended academic achievement, good health, and increased earning potential.

A child struggling to read by third grade—regardless of socio-economic status—rarely catches up academically. Further, they are four times more likely to drop out of high school than their peers.



Regional Facts & Figures

Capacity, Quality, Affordability

Capacity indicates how many of the children needing care can be served within **existing** programs.

Highlights:

- Clark, Scott, and Washington counties lie **below the state average for capacity**
- All four counties saw a decrease in Capacity from 2022 to 2023
- Scott County serves more children with fewer programs indicating a comparative burden on its programs

Quality programs are defined as those participating at the highest levels of Paths to QUALITY™, Indiana’s quality rating and improvement system.

Highlights:

- The Quality rating is affected by a child’s distance to the quality care (using a 10-mile radius) so Scott County’s significantly higher Quality level might be impacted by its size and zoning.
- Even where Quality programs exists, capacity and access remain issues of concern.

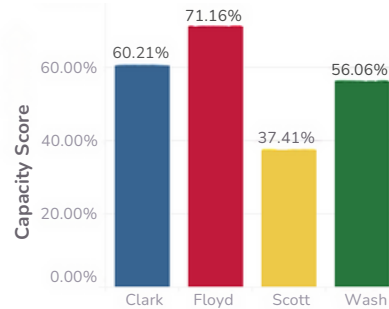
Affordability weighs the cost of care against median family income and the availability of subsidized care.

Highlights:

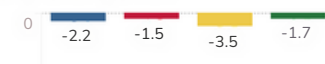
- Scott County decreased in Affordability while the rest of our service area increased.
- While the Cost-to-Income ratio for all four counties falls below the state average this is not fully representative of each family’s cost burden.

INDIANA AVERAGE CAPACITY:

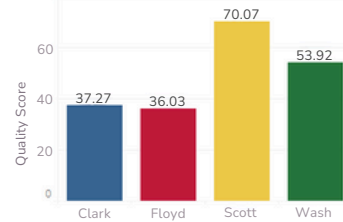
61.3%



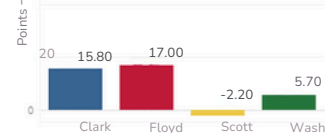
Capacity Change Year on Year



ECE Quality Score

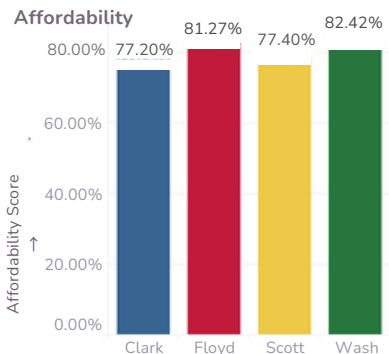


Quality Change Year on Year

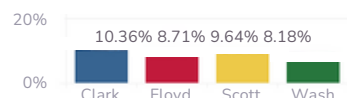


INDIANA AVERAGE % OF INCOME:

10.4%



What percent of income do families pay for childcare?



Proposed Activities



Residents live, work, and attend school beyond county borders. Proposed activities are collective, cross-county approaches to ensure all children in the four-county area from birth to age five receive quality and impactful ECE programming that can better prepare them for kindergarten.

Early childhood education happens best in high quality learning environments. 50% of all ECE in our region is home-based. Supporting all ECE providers of all kinds is essential. And ECE success is vastly improved with family support and reinforcement in the home environment of ECE learning models. Students with highly involved families in the ECE years see increased academic outcomes throughout High School. Our planned activities include boosting high quality training for all ECE providers, offering screenings and assessments for ECE providers to track the progress of their learners, and offering helpful parental guidance to bolster a child's learning in the home setting.



Quality Programs

Dramatically increase the number of ECE providers engaging in an inclusive three-year program to improve literacy, adult/ student interactions, and physical learning environment spaces



Assessments

Use a comprehensive developmental screening system to monitor the progress of children in achieving developmental milestones in areas of communication, gross motor, fine motor, problem solving, and personal-social interactions to avoid developmental delays.



Interactions

Deploy an evidence-based professional development program to help ECE providers improve language environments by measuring conversational turns—the back-and-forth verbal interactions between a child and an adult. These interactions are an indicator of social-emotional competencies which lead to kindergarten readiness.



Next Steps

Creating a culture of care and resources around Early Childhood Education

From our interactions with community residents, business owners, educators, and many other community stakeholders, it is clear that the well-being and education of our youngest citizens is of high importance to all. It is not clear, though, the right steps to take in improving the current status quo.

We offer this report and the adjoining data and resources so that residents, decision-makers, and early childhood education advocates across our four-county region have access to clear evidence and data-driven suggestions about the criticality of early childhood education in achieving a future where:

- all children have a fair opportunity to meet developmental growth targets that are essential for future success
- we can ensure a brighter future for all in our region
- families are lifted from poverty
- greater economic opportunities are available for all





**Efforts to improve early child
development are an investment,
not a cost.**

With gratitude to the staff, directors and boards of:

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(Clark County & Floyd County)
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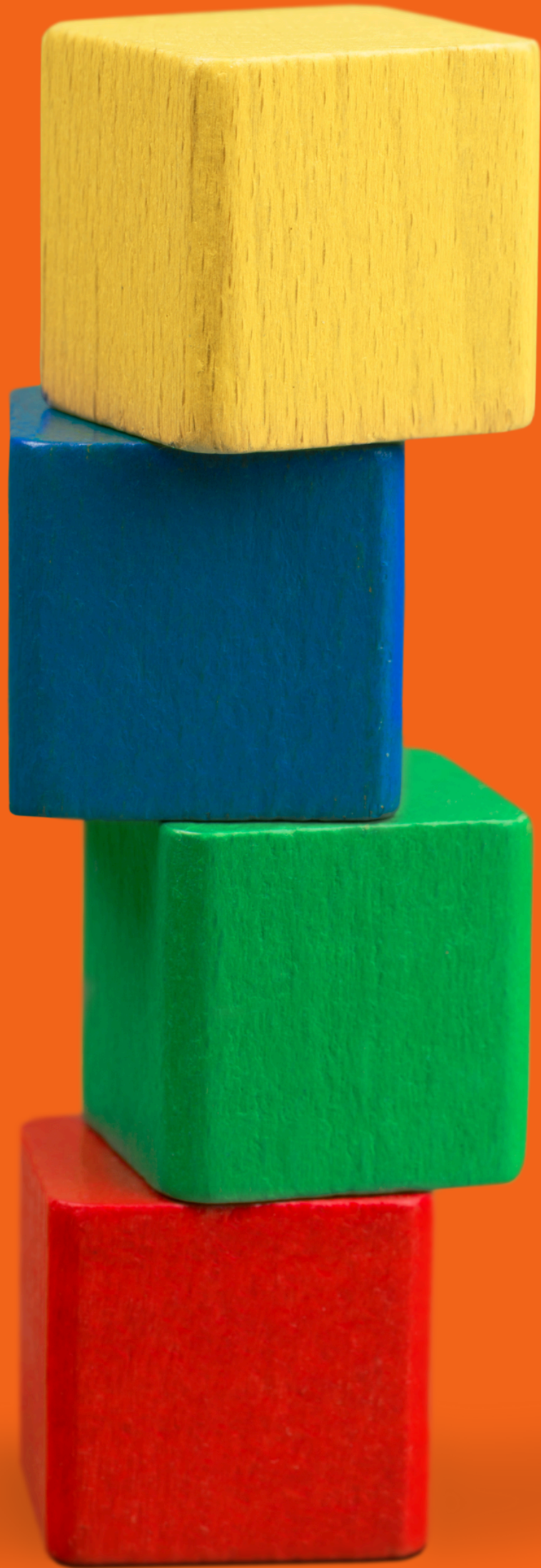
Align Southern Indiana
300 Lafollette Station, Suite 161
Floyds Knobs, IN 47119

Building Blocks
101 NW 1st St #118
Evansville, IN 47708

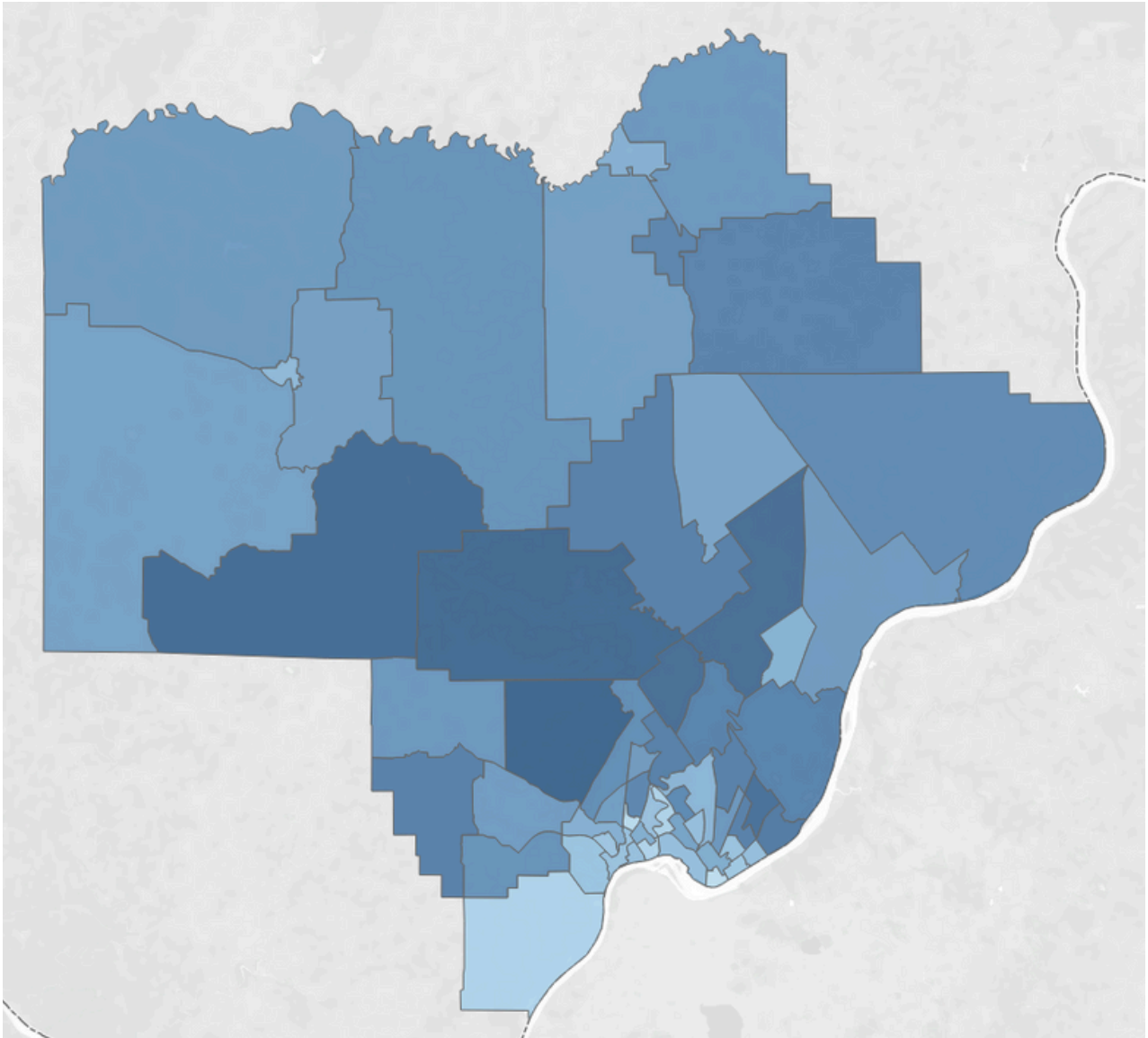
**We thank the Lilly Endowment, Inc. for their
ongoing support of Indiana's Community
Foundations and for the GIFT VIII planning
grant funds provided to produce this report.**

DATA & REFERENCES

The following pages contain helpful data, demographics, and references to find out more about Early Childhood Education across our four-county region.

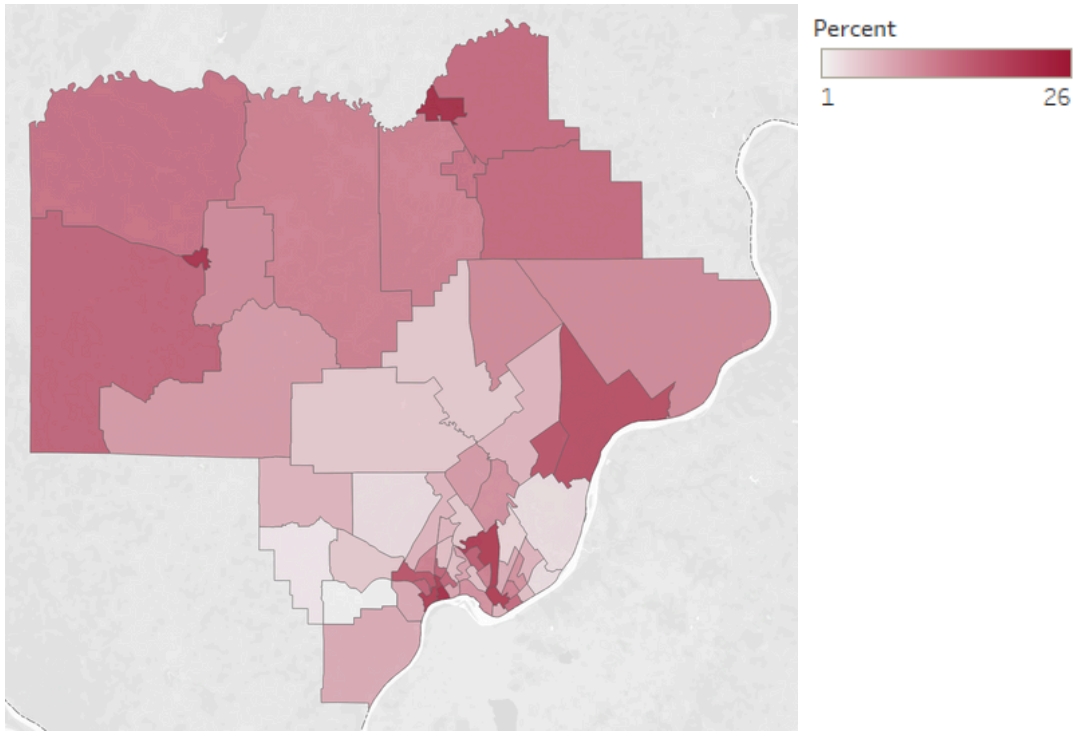


Population

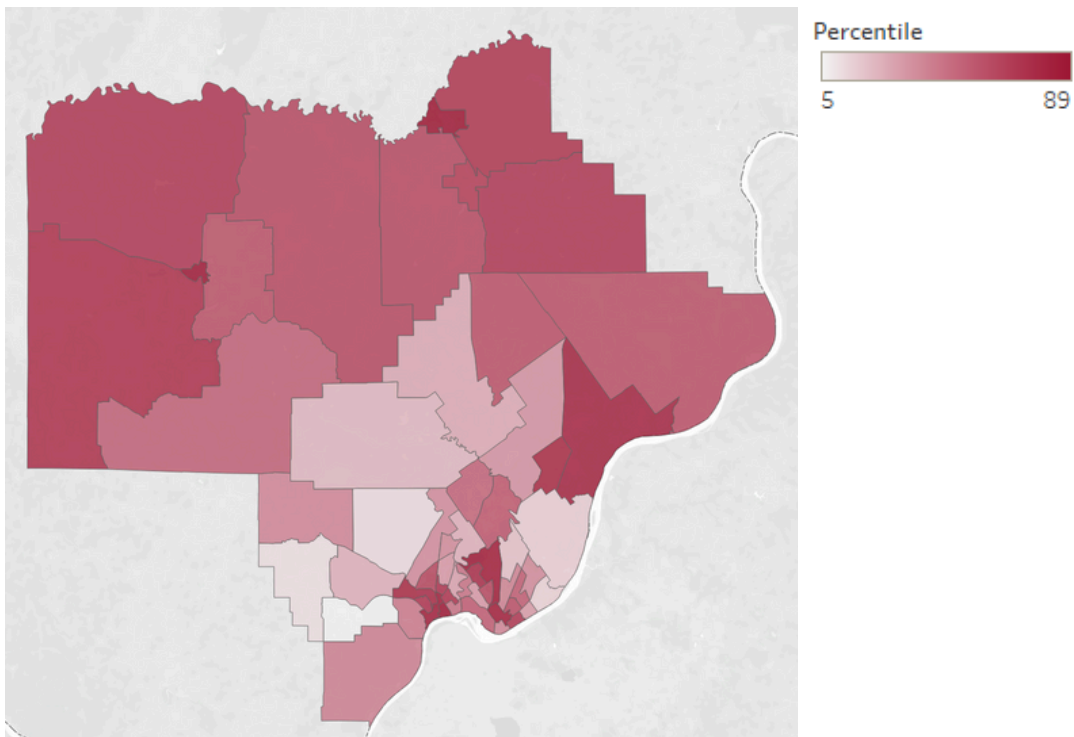


Graduation Rates

Little intro about overall education in this area before going into ECE specifically



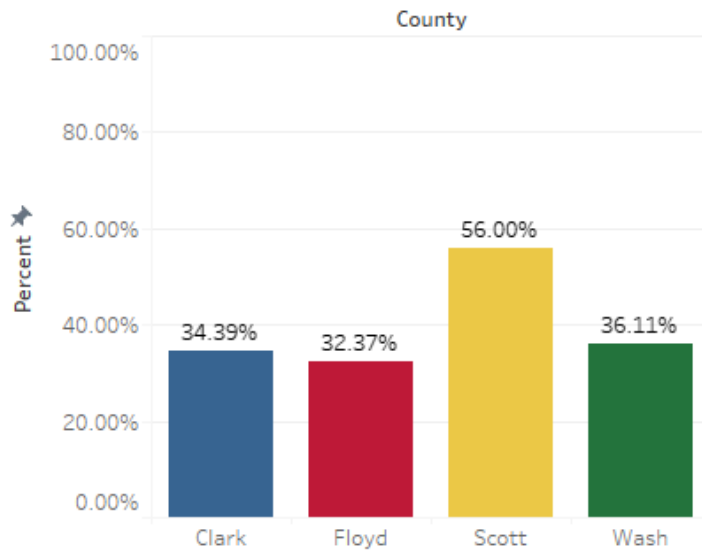
% Individuals age 25 or over with less than a high school degree



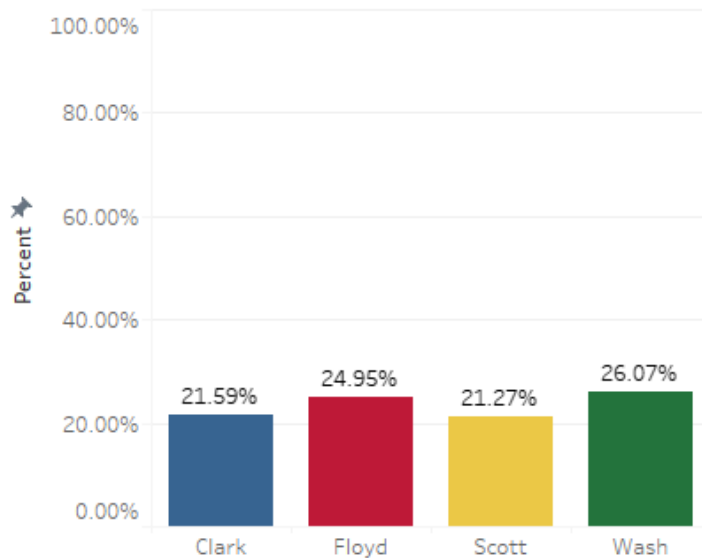
% Individuals age 25 or over with less than a high school degree (percentile)

High Quality Program Capacity

What percent of programs are high quality?



What percent of children are receiving high quality care?



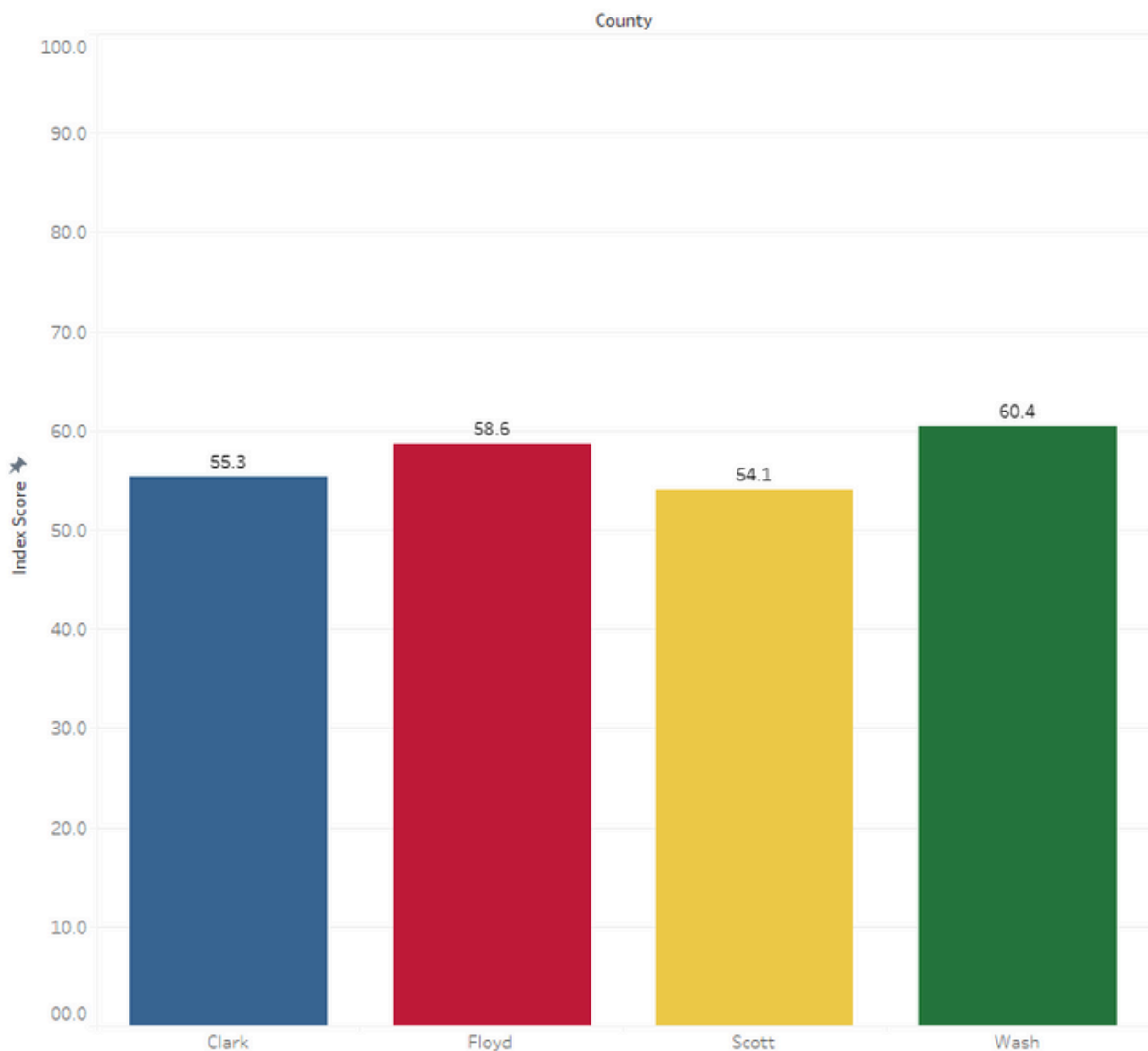
Access

- Indiana Overall: “When taking into account Capacity, Quality, Affordability and Choice, overall access has slightly increased over the past three years, from 60.6 in 2021 to 63.5 in 2023 based on our index of these four factors. Statewide access remains moderate, with variation at the county level ranging from 26.6 to 74.2”
- Highlights:
 - The four counties researched are below average for overall access, even if not quite as bad as counties scoring in the 20s.
 - This is the main score that combines all previous indicators (weights found in Closing the Gap)

INDIANA AVERAGE:

63.5%

Early Learning Indiana Access Index



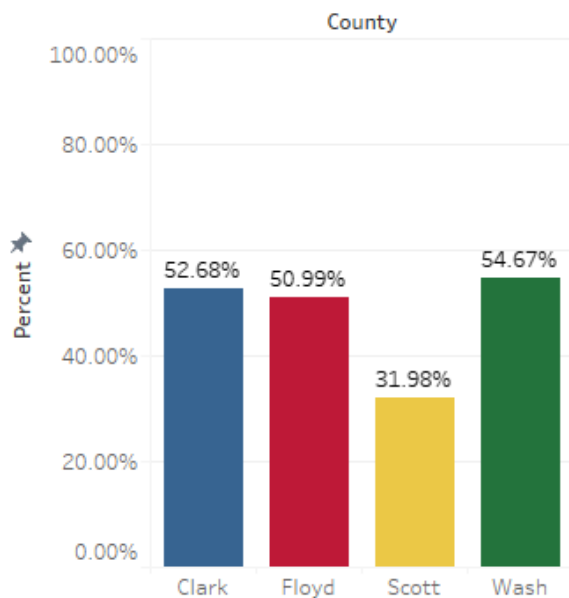
Choice

Choice is higher when there is a broad availability of programs serving infants and toddlers, programs operating during nontraditional hours and a variety of program types, or auspices.

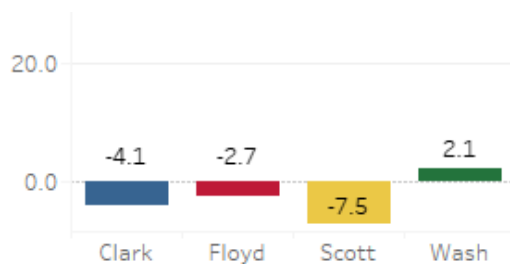
Highlights:

- Clark, Floyd, and Scott counties decreased in choice availability from 2022 to 2023.
- The Auspice Score of each county is good compared to other counties in Indiana. It is a 0-1 scale, and all of ours are over .8. This means there is a relatively good variety of programs, even if there are not many of them.

Choice

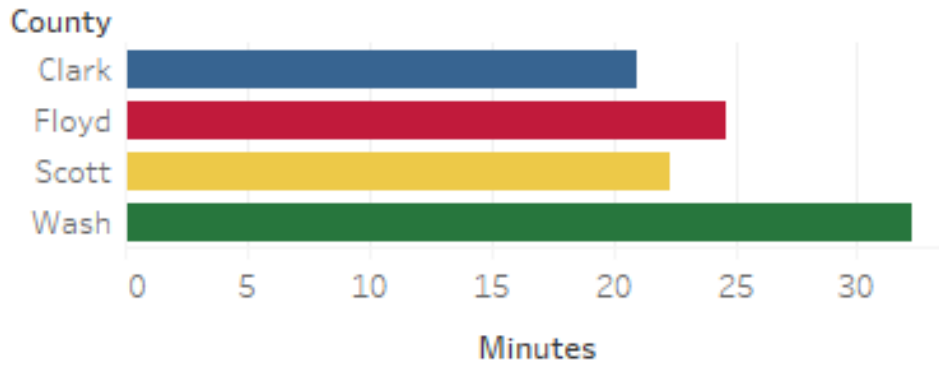


Choice Change YoY

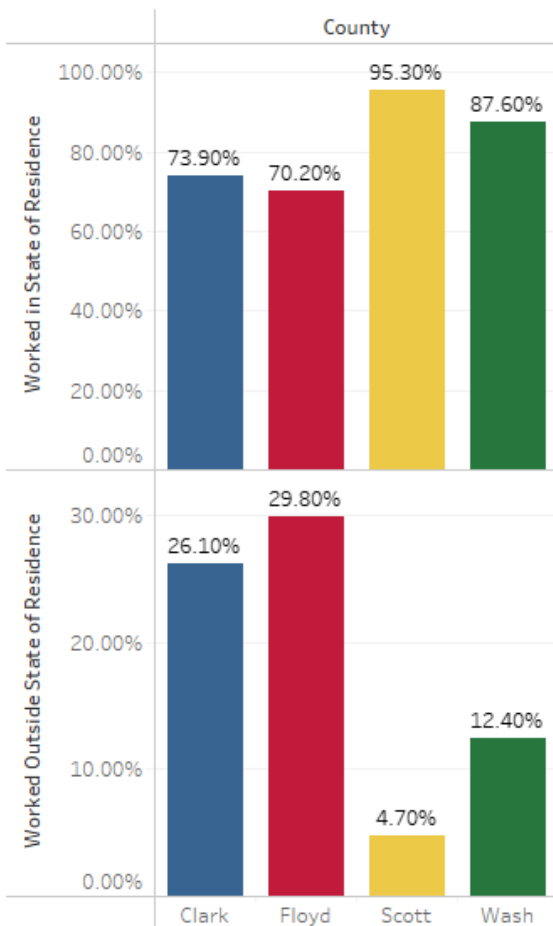


Commutes

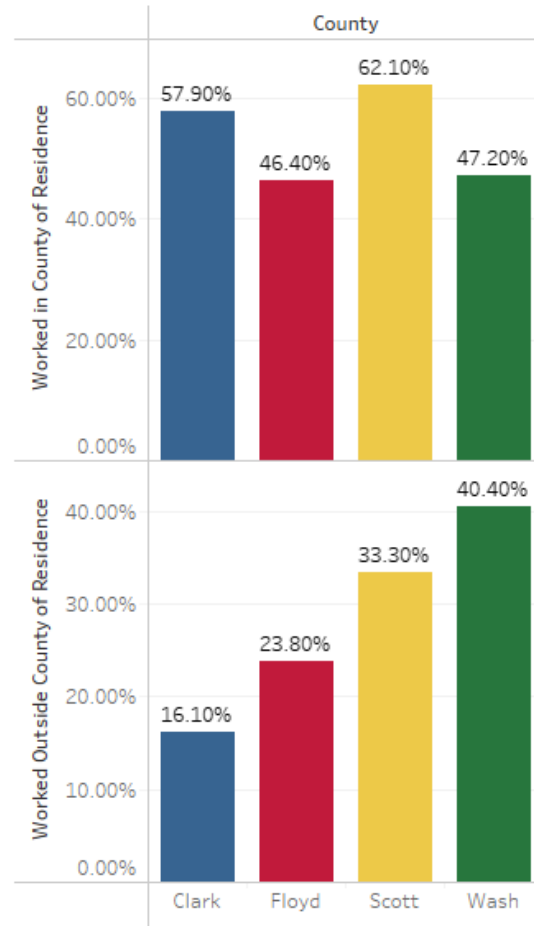
Average Travel Time to Work



Cross-State

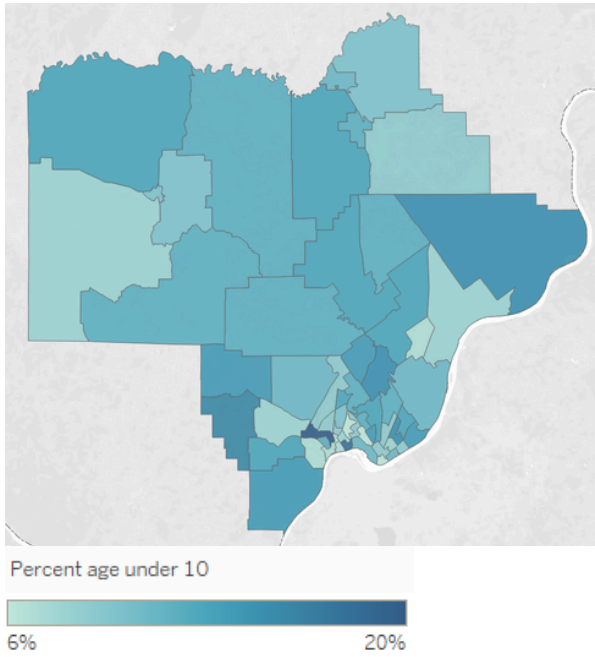


Cross-County

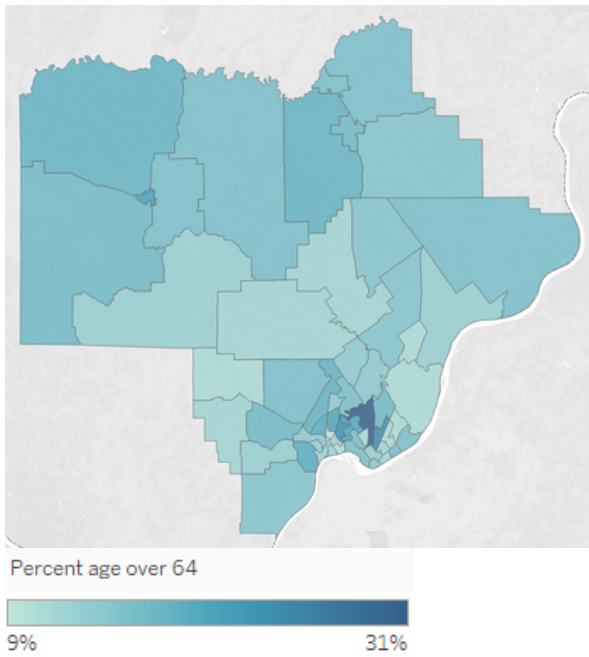


Population Statistics

Under 10 Years Old

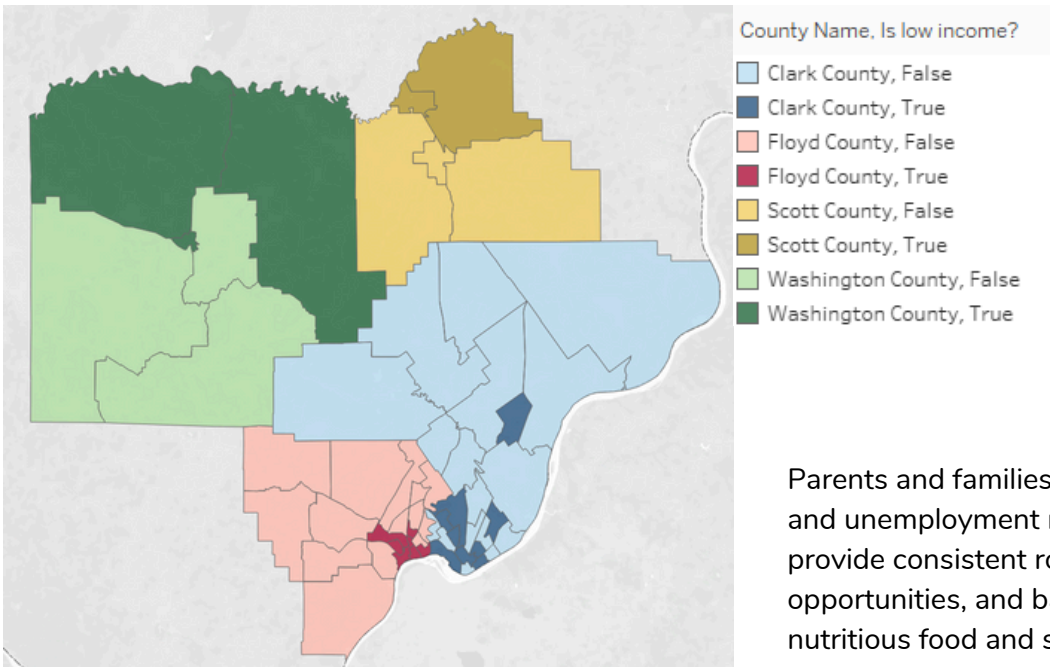


Over 64 Years Old



Economic Indicators

Low Income

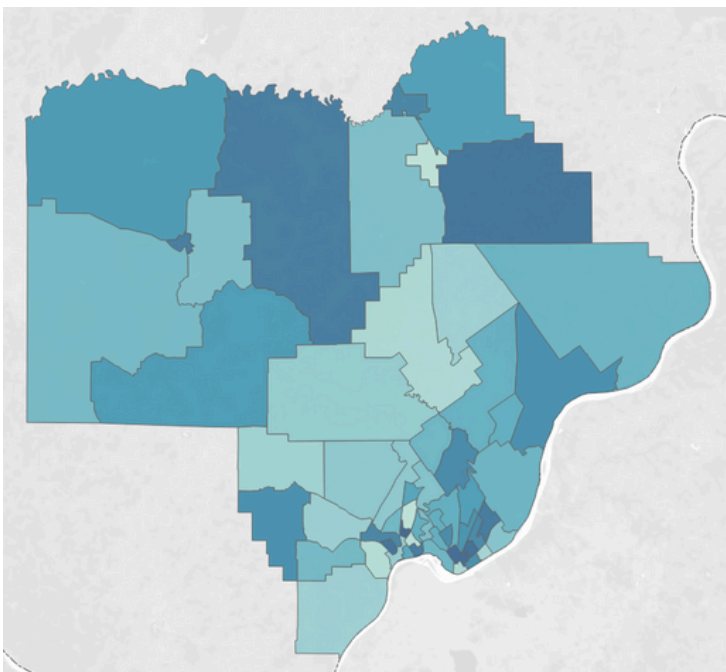


Parents and families facing low income and unemployment may struggle to provide consistent routines, educational opportunities, and basic needs such as nutritious food and safe housing for their children. The stress associated with these economic burdens can disrupt family dynamics, leading to reduced parental engagement and increased emotional challenges for the entire family.

Expanding access to quality childcare can help alleviate these challenges, enabling parents to pursue a wider range of job opportunities while ensuring their children are cared for in a supportive environment.

Unemployment in this region ranges from some of the lowest rates in the nation (**2nd** percentile) to some of the highest (**93rd** percentile), so targeted, local approaches to this issue are likely to be the most effective.

Unemployment



Unemployment (percent) (percentile)

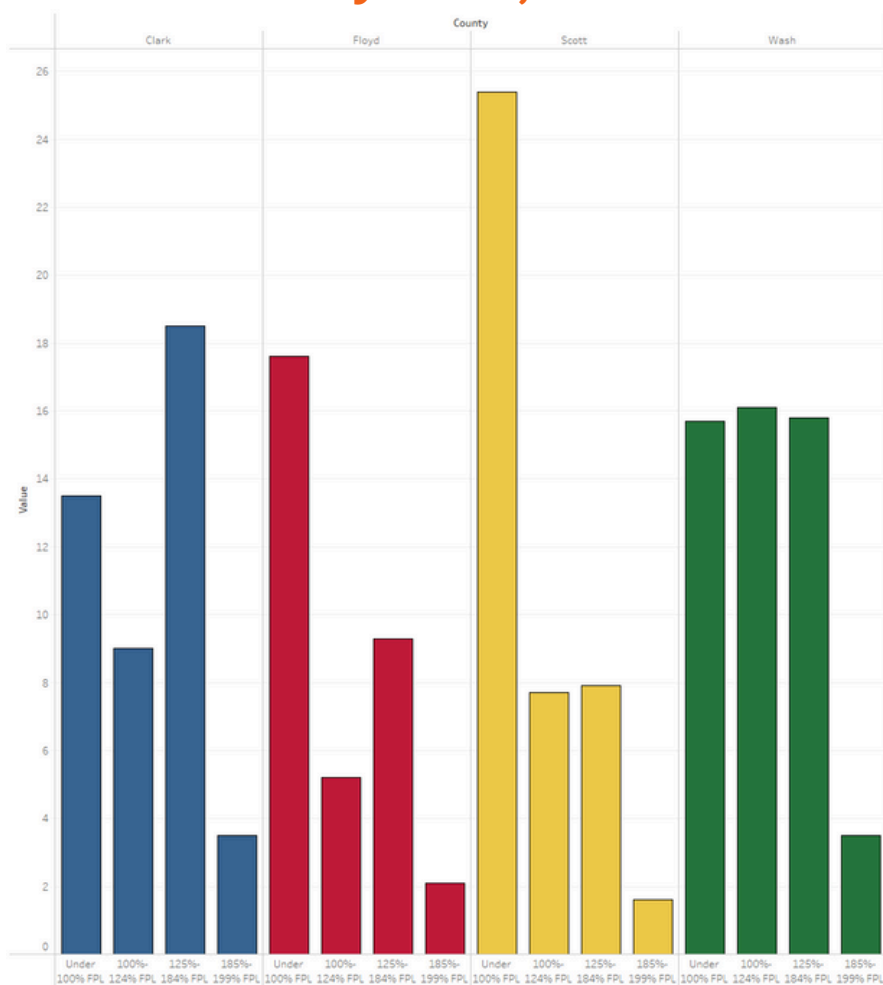


2

93

Economic Indicators

Federal Poverty Level, Children Under 6



The first bar for each county represents all children living below 100% of the poverty line (deep poverty), while subsequent bars represent incremental ranges of 25%.

The 200% poverty threshold is often used to determine eligibility for many social services, so discussions about poverty typically focus on individuals and families within this range.

Observations

- Scott County has the most significant concentration of children in deep poverty. This suggests severe economic challenges that need targeted interventions.
- Washington County has a broad poverty issue affecting children, not concentrated at one specific level, unlike Scott.
- Every county shows fewer children in the 185%–199% FPL range, likely because families in this bracket are on the cusp of financial stability, with the 200% FPL threshold often defining that stability. This range tends to be more transitory, as families may either move above the 200% level or slip back into deeper poverty due to economic challenges.

Implications

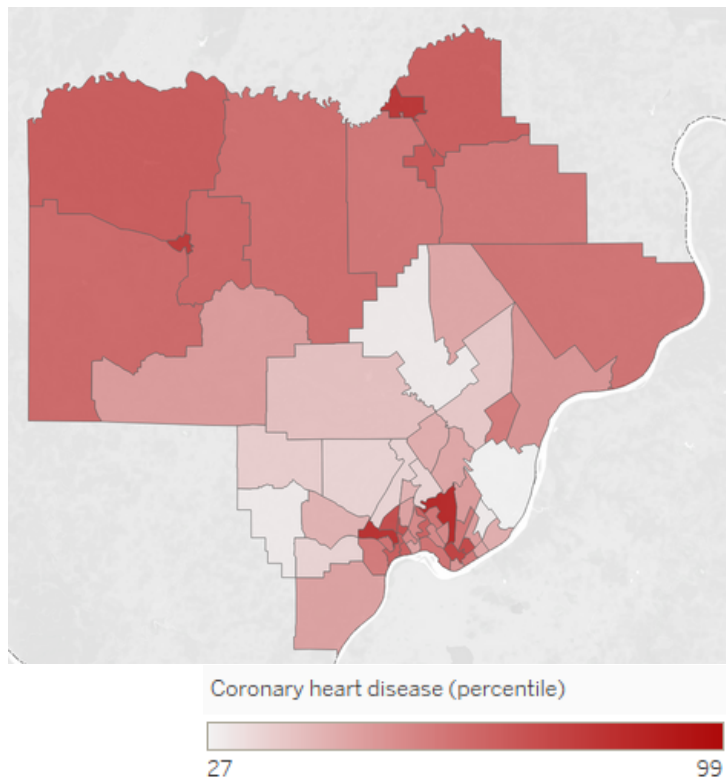
- Scott County: Needs urgent, targeted support for families experiencing deep poverty (housing, food assistance, healthcare, etc.).
- Clark and Floyd Counties: Interventions could focus on families just below and slightly above the poverty line to ensure upward mobility and access to social services.
- Washington County: Programs addressing broader poverty, such as job training, childcare support, and transportation access, could benefit families across poverty brackets.

Health Indicators

Heart Disease

Cardiovascular issues are a leading cause of death in the United States, and these four counties experience this issue to varying degrees. While some census tracts rank below the national average, 38 out of 57 census tracts (**67%**) report above-average coronary heart disease rates, with some ranking as high as the 99th percentile nationally.

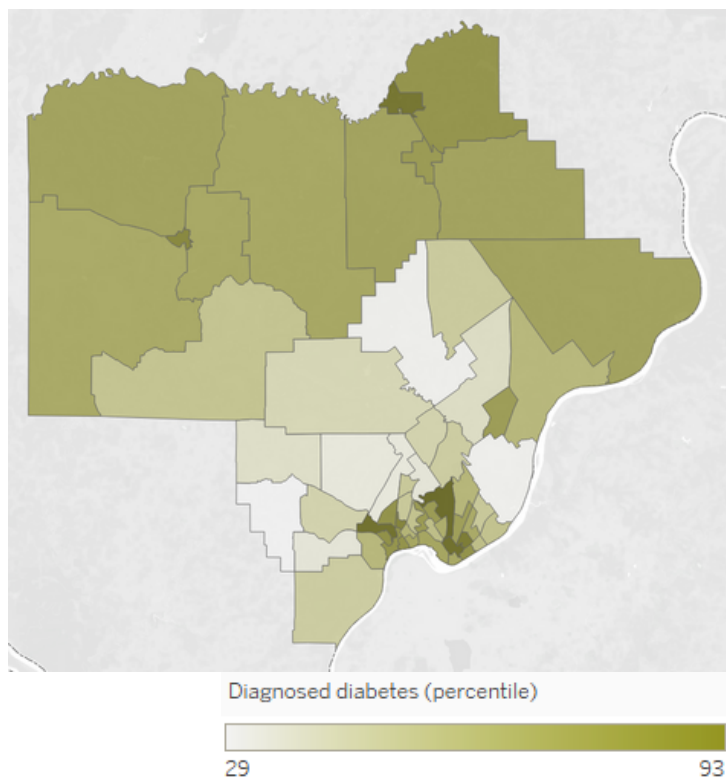
Communities with higher rates of heart disease often face systemic challenges that limit access to healthcare and preventative services. In these four counties, these challenges are exacerbated by high rates of uninsured and undereducated individuals and families, which contribute to low health literacy and elevated healthcare costs. These burdens are further compounded in communities struggling with poverty, creating a cycle of health inequity.



Diabetes

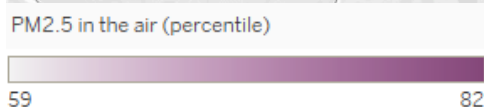
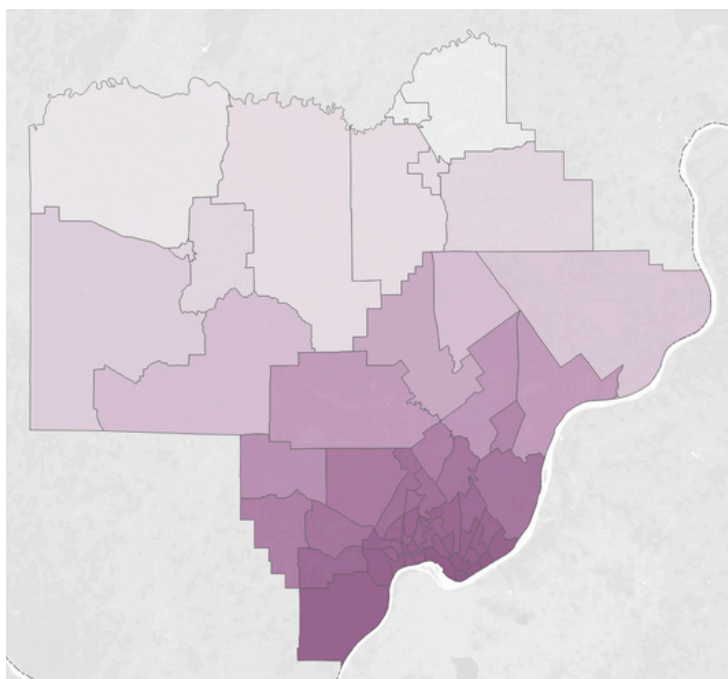
Communities with higher rates of diabetes often face challenges with accessing affordable, nutritious foods and preventative care—both of which are crucial for a child’s physical and cognitive development.

In some census tracts within these counties, diabetes rates rank as high as the **93rd** percentile nationally. This highlights an urgent need for greater availability of nutritious food options and robust, accessible healthcare services, as diabetes is frequently comorbid with other diseases and health issues, further compounding its impact on individuals and families.



Health Indicators Continued

Particulate Matter



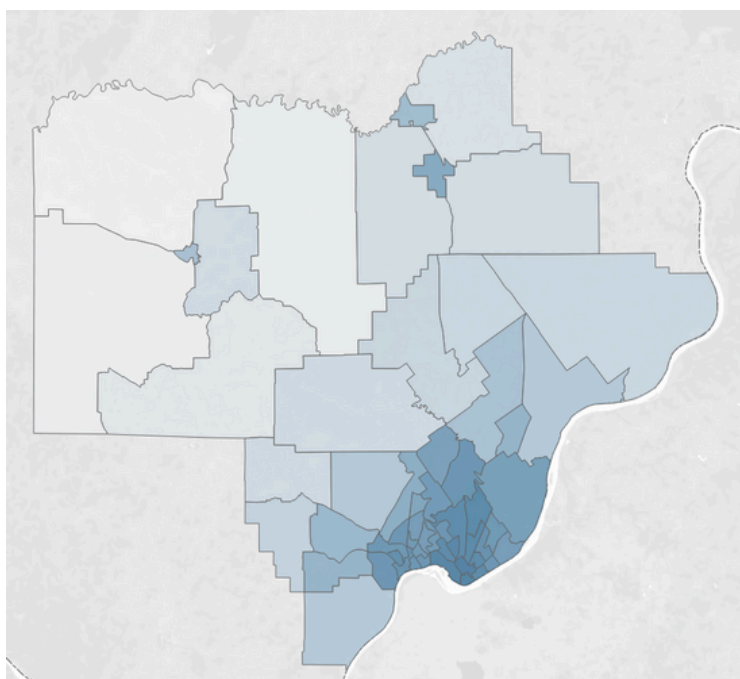
Exposure to environmental triggers, such as poor air quality, can disproportionately affect young children, who are still developing their respiratory systems.

These maps highlight the clear concentrations of particulate matter - local air pollutants that can affect our lungs - that exist near larger cities and transportation routes, with the darkest areas nearest Louisville.

Addressing environmental issues and improving access to health resources can foster healthier environments that support immediate well-being and long-term development.

PM2.5 refers to particulate matter that is 2.5 micrometers or smaller. These particles are small enough to concentrate in the lungs at really high rates, leading to a wide range of health issues, including asthma. Those closest to Louisville rank as high as the **82nd** percentile for PM2.5 nationally.

Unsurprisingly, diesel particles in these counties are most often found in census tracts containing town centers and near the Louisville metro area. These areas have the highest concentration of vehicles (and traffic where vehicles may be idling), with some ranking as high as the **89th** percentile nationally.

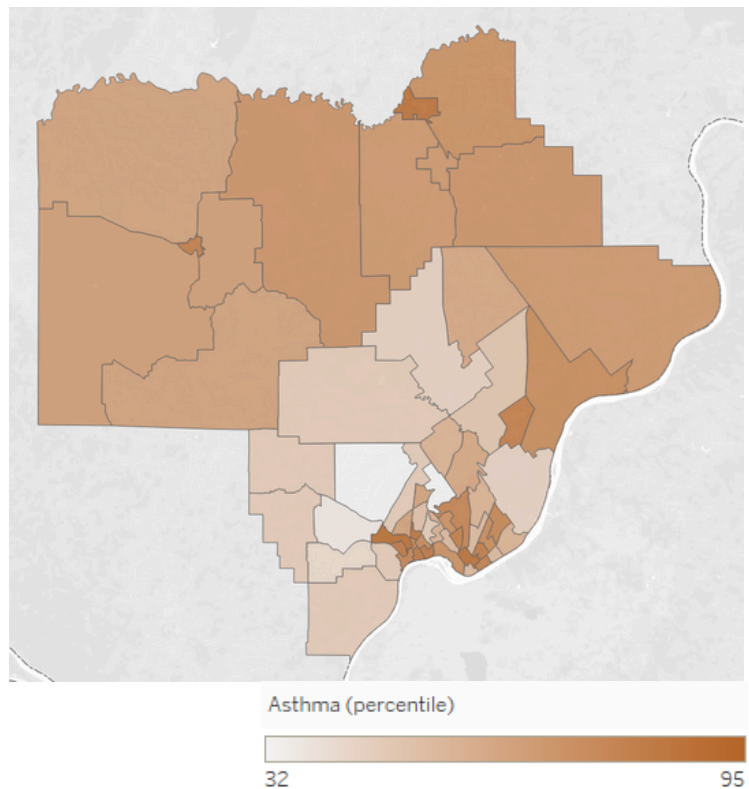


Health Indicators Continued

Asthma

High rates of asthma in a community can adversely impact early childhood development, as children with asthma may face limited participation in physical activities and increased healthcare needs.

Some tracts in this area rank as high as the **95th** percentile for asthma rates, with the highest-ranking tracts primarily located near the Louisville metro area or in more densely populated towns. These patterns are consistent with poorer air quality, often attributed to traffic proximity and industrial activities.



Life Expectancy

United States: 78.80 years

Indiana: 77.00 years

Clark County: 69.90 – 80.59 years
(75.33 average)

Floyd County: 70.09 – 82.00 years
(76.18 average)

Scott County: 67.20 – 78.20 years
(73.48 average)

Washington County: 70.09 – 77.59 years
(74.98 average)

