



# Pathways to Progress

2025-29 STRATEGIC PLAN

**Climbing higher to find new ways to connect Hoosiers and the employers who need them**



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## Ascending Together

Now is the time to power — and empower — the workforce of the future

Since 2016, Ascend Indiana, an initiative of the Central Indiana Corporate Partnership (CICP), has worked in tandem with CICP and our partners in industry, education, government and philanthropy to help meet Indiana's talent needs. We forge connections by listening — striving to understand both what the labor market needs and what motivates workers to meet those needs.

Over the years, we've earned our partners' trust, and we've connected thousands of young Hoosiers with Indiana internships and career opportunities through the Ascend Network. As we move forward, we're scaling up to do more for both job seekers and employers.

Armed with nearly a decade's worth of insights and data, we're broadening our mission to fully support — and impact — Indiana's residents and their efforts to find meaningful careers with Indiana employers. As a result of our new

strategic plan, we will bridge gaps, amplify programs and discover ways we can all do more.

**This guide reveals our vision and a roadmap for the future.**



## Our vision

All Hoosiers and all employers are equipped to thrive in Indiana's evolving economy.

## Our mission

Ascend Indiana enables a modern workforce ecosystem.



The Ascend Indiana team helps make connections, research possibilities and find solutions that connect Hoosiers to the employers who need them. Reach out to us at [info@ascendindiana.com](mailto:info@ascendindiana.com), 317-464-5412 or via our website.



## My Path to Ascend Indiana

A career isn't a destination. It's a journey, and each of us follows a different path.

The path I chose, and the opportunities that opened up to me along the way, took me places I could never have expected. My path led to my passion for workforce development and my approach to our work at Ascend Indiana. It begins with a teenager and a car in Lafayette, Indiana, circa 1991.

### Shop class hero

As a senior at Lafayette Jefferson High School, I had a lot going on. I'd just returned from a year in Maryland and I didn't see college in my future. I decided to close out my high school career on the shop track, now known as career and technical education. My path: automotive mechanics. I'd racked up enough gen ed credits to graduate on time, so I was free to spend my whole senior year rebuilding a Ford Mustang Mach 1.

### Certified to win

That year, one of my teachers suggested I earn an Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) certification and become a shop mechanic. Why not? I thought. I earned a \$500 scholarship and pursued my ASE at Lincoln Tech in Indianapolis, then located at 16th Street and Indiana Avenue.

Nine months later, I returned to Lafayette. I needed a job, and I already knew about a big employer in town: Subaru Isuzu Automotive (now Subaru of Indiana Automotive). Though I'd never set foot in the plant, I drove by its massive campus every day. I thought someone at Subaru might like to hire an ASE-certified mechanic and stopped in and applied for a job. I accepted a temporary assignment working on the assembly line, installing front seats.

### Proximity to opportunity

As humans, proximity can influence the choices we make. I chose the automotive industry because it was familiar. Later, I chose a career in human resources, in part because of a Purdue University education program in my workplace. When Purdue's Organizational Leadership and Supervision program launched on the Subaru campus in the early '90s, I was one of the first to enroll. Soon after, I took an associate relations role at Subaru, connecting with employees on the manufacturing floor, ensuring they understood policies and were being treated fairly. I liked the work and was later promoted to manager.



## Driven by continuous learning

As my human resources career began to take off, I continued to take classes in the Purdue program — and I kept my education going. I earned my associate degree in organizational leadership and supervision at Purdue, then my bachelor's degree in human resources management and my MBA. Subaru covered it all. On the job, I learned from Japanese colleagues and other mentors about the value of constructive criticism and lifelong learning — wisdom I still draw upon today.

## Connected to success

On my journey, educators, work-based learning and a company that invested in my growth all played a role in my success. So did touchpoints with the right people and programs at the right times. At Ascend Indiana, we want to create more of those touchpoints. We want to bring students, industry and educators together. It's the best way to prepare for the future.

Back in the '90s, when I drove the Mach 1 out of the shop garage, I had no idea my path would lead to a grad degree and a fulfilling career. But it did. I'm driven to help others find their way, too.



Brad Rhorer, President and CEO  
Ascend Indiana



# 34%

Share of high school students who reported being aware of any opportunities within their age group

Source: "High School Work-based Learning: Best Practices Designed to Improve Career Readiness Outcomes for Today's Youth," American Student Assistance, 2022

**"Certification, educators and a company that invested in my growth all played a role in my success. So did touchpoints with the right people and programs at the right times."**



## Starting Strong

Building on our strengths to do more for Indiana's workforce

Since its 2016 launch, Ascend Indiana has connected Hoosiers with career and internship opportunities, collaborated with employers to develop talent solutions that meet high-demand workforce needs and delivered research that has enabled systems-level change that positively impacts people throughout Indiana.

This success stems largely from the connections and networks we've built and maintained over the years. Our 34-member board includes human resources leaders from some of Indiana's leading corporations, universities and health care systems. It also includes key Central Indiana nonprofits and nearly two dozen industry leaders committed to addressing the state's talent and workforce challenges. (See a full board listing on pages **39-40**).

To help connect students to careers, we've developed deep relationships with Indiana colleges and universities. Unique collaborator agreements help us reach hundreds of thousands of students, with a special focus on students from underrepresented backgrounds.

State agencies are Ascend partners, too. We work closely with the Indiana Economic Development Corporation, the Indiana Department of Workforce Development, the Commission for

Higher Education and the Indiana Department of Education. This ensures our work aligns with state priorities and we're well positioned to share consistent information on workforce development trends, opportunities and challenges.

### Building talent solutions

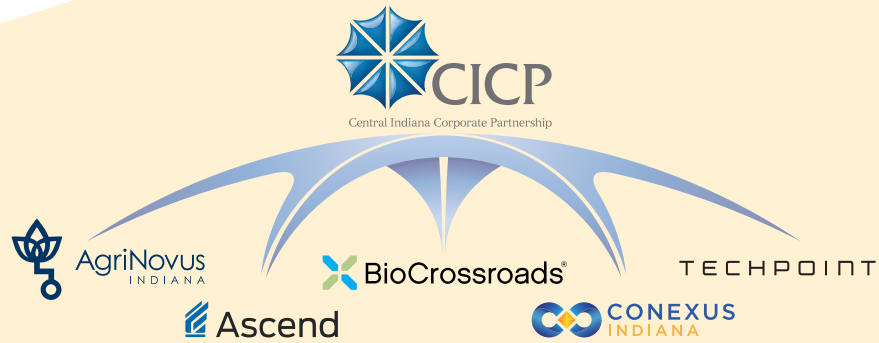
Working closely with employers, we've offered strategic consulting services to help organizations solve complex workforce problems. We've worked alongside employers who needed to fill roles and partnered with educational institutions to build custom talent pipelines. See a case study about Community Health Network's Behavioral Health Academy on page **25**.

### Connecting Hoosiers and employers

The centerpiece of our work has been the Ascend Network, an online platform that has matched more than 6,000 young Hoosier professionals with internships and careers. The Ascend Network is a cloud-based platform that uses both algorithms and human advisors to match college students, recent graduates and other Hoosiers to Indiana employers. You'll see success stories throughout this report, especially on pages **7, 17** and **25**.

### Bringing people and data together

Through our research arm, we've analyzed Indiana's economy and labor market, generating insights to help create a modern workforce ecosystem.



## A common thread

Ascend Indiana is the workforce development initiative of the **Central Indiana Corporate Partnership**. We're the common thread that weaves through and helps to strengthen all CICP-branded initiatives, which span the advanced industries and include the hundreds of partners who are part of **AgriNovus Indiana, BioCrossroads, Conexus Indiana** and **TechPoint**. The photos and stories in this report reflect our sister initiatives. We're a resource for many, including CICP, Indiana and the Hoosiers who live and work here.

## THE ASCEND NETWORK

### What's it all about?

**Advantage.** The Ascend Network and the Ascend team are focused solely on Indiana businesses and Hoosier talent. We're unique in our singular focus, our nonprofit mission and personalized support for job seekers.

**Opportunity.** The Ascend Network features career and internship opportunities from hundreds of Indiana employers. It's free to early-in-career job seekers and other Hoosiers seeking jobs.

**Collaboration.** We work with higher education institutions to engage students and match them to careers or internship opportunities in the Network, with a focus on underrepresented populations.

**Career mentoring.** We offer job seekers opportunities to meet with career mentors, who can help them with interview skills, resume-building advice and networking techniques.

**Engaging employers.** We recruit Indiana businesses to use the platform, helping them create job postings that appeal to early-in-career job seekers.

## 6,311 total connections

(as of September 2024)

### NETWORK

# 3,432

Connections to internships and jobs

### SERVICES

# 2,879

Connections to training and jobs

INSPIRED + HIRED

## Star Catcher

The Ascend Network puts employers in touch with Indiana's best and brightest

**“My internship was a great way to start my career. I got to be in charge of something, and it felt like I was actually needed.”**

— FAVOUR DOUMBIA  
IT System Intern and Analyst,  
CleanSlate Technology  
Group, 2022-2024

Ascend Indiana helped a talented and hardworking Indiana student, Favour Doumbia, land an Indiana-based internship that led first to a full-time job, then to a high-flying government cybersecurity post. “It was a great way to start my career,” Doumbia said. “I got to be in charge of something, and it felt like I was actually needed.”

All this was accomplished with the help of Ascend's online job matching platform, the Ascend Network. Doumbia learned about it from another program participant whose own internship led to a full-time job.

“I applied and put in my resume,” Doumbia said. “It was pretty easy. I took a test, got matched with my top five company matches, then interviewed with them and chose the best fit for me.”

During the interview process, Doumbia found herself immediately attracted to the honest and up-front style of Anna Pullman Rainbolt, director of IT operations for CleanSlate Technology Group. “I told her not to undersell herself,” Pullman Rainbolt recalled.

“I liked that,” Doumbia said. “She was already mentoring me.”

Doumbia became an IT system analyst intern for CleanSlate, then transitioned into a full-time position as an IT system analyst upon graduation. The company helped her to further her training by, among other things, letting her spend Fridays during her internship studying for various technical certifications. Later, as a full timer, her flexible work hours allowed her to both serve in the Indiana National Guard and obtain a Master of Science, Cybersecurity and Trusted Systems degree from Purdue University.

Though the goal is to keep Indiana workers in-state, Doumbia recently departed for Maryland to work for the U.S. Department of Defense in cybersecurity. It's certainly a dream job, but it doesn't mean she's leaving the state for good. “As my professors would say, ‘Don't think of your next role as the place you'll stay forever,’” she said. “I haven't ruled out coming back to Indiana.”

Losing Doumbia has felt “like a mom letting her child go on to the next big thing,” Pullman Rainbolt said. Yet she plans to keep using the network to locate bright interns who can help grow the company as they expand their own skills.



# 3,432

Young professionals who've  
found jobs and internships via  
the Ascend Network

# 799

Indiana employers that  
collaborate with Ascend Indiana

*(as of September 2024)*



The Ascend Network helped  
IT whiz Favour Doumbia  
connect with her future  
mentor and employer  
Anna Pullman Rainbolt at  
CleanSlate Technology Group.

## A State of Change

New opportunities and continuing challenges have amplified the demand for skilled workers

Unprecedented opportunities and persistent challenges create the need for an expanded approach to workforce development. Indiana has gained sustained momentum as a global leader in emerging industries such as microelectronics, renewable energy and battery manufacturing. Our state is already thriving in advanced manufacturing and logistics, the life sciences and other industries.

But leaders in our state's top industries — and throughout the nation — continue to struggle with finding enough talent to meet the market's needs. That's why the Central Indiana Corporate Partnership launched Ascend Indiana in the first place — to help close the gap between the jobs that are available and the Hoosiers prepared to fill them.

**Here are some of the reasons we're struggling to meet Indiana's talent needs:**

### **Low employment participation rate.**

Today, the percentage of Hoosiers who are in the workforce — our workforce participation rate — hovers around 62%<sup>1</sup>. By 2030, experts

expect the overall labor participation rate to fall to 60.4%<sup>2</sup>. That could mean 100,000 fewer Hoosiers contributing to our future workforce.

**Students without a plan — or with a plan to leave.** Many students graduate from high school without a clear plan. They may never pursue postsecondary education, whether that's college, certificate programs or trade school. Meanwhile, students who attend college in Indiana tend to leave the state after they graduate. Nearly 40% of graduates from Indiana colleges and universities move out of state within a year of graduation and more than half leave within five years<sup>3</sup>.

**An education disconnect.** Industries are evolving at a record pace, and the skills needed to thrive in those industries change just as rapidly. By 2031, 72% of jobs in the United States will require training or education beyond high school. Yet in Indiana today, only 39% of adults ages 25 and older hold an associate degree or higher<sup>4</sup>, and only 53% of high school graduates pursue further education<sup>5</sup>.

**Industries are evolving at a record pace, and the skills needed to thrive in those industries change just as rapidly.**

1 Department of Workforce Development, *Monthly Indiana Employment Reports*, 2024

2 "A look at the future of the U.S. labor force to 2060: Spotlight on Statistics," U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (bls.gov), 2016

3 "Indiana's Leaking Talent Pipeline," Indiana Chamber of Commerce, 2022

4 "After Everything: Projections of Jobs, Education and Training Requirements through 2031," Georgetown University Center on Education and Workforce, 2023

5 "A Stronger Nation: Learning Beyond High School Builds American Talent" report and website, Lumina Foundation, accessed Sept. 9, 2024



73%

College graduates who start out underemployed and remain so 10 years after completing college

3.5x

Likelihood of these graduates to be underemployed compared with those who start out in a college-level job

72%

Jobs in the U.S. that will require education or training beyond high school by 2031

Sources: "Talent Disrupted," Strada Education Foundation and the Burning Glass Institute, February 2024; Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce



CONEXUS



INSPIRED + HIRED

## Crafting talent

Vivian Galey, the first female high school student in the nation to earn the National 3D Printing Certification from Stratasys, became an expert in additive manufacturing in high school. At Perry Central High School's Commodore Manufacturing, a school-based enterprise in Leopold, Indiana, she helped local companies solve actual workplace engineering issues and designed a product on her own. In 2022, Galey was named to Conexus Indiana's Rising 30 cohort. She now holds an internship at Indiana Furniture through Vincennes University's Career Advancement Program while she pursues an engineering degree at the University of Evansville.



# A burgeoning need

Indiana's emerging industry growth and advances into emerging industries have created opportunities. But with an aging population, a 62.5% workforce participation rate and evolving labor needs, a continuing talent shortfall seems inevitable. Just look at the stats.

## \$28.7 billion

Investment of companies committed to locate or expand in Indiana

Source: **Indiana Economic Development Corporation**

## \$1.4 billion

Toyota's investment in electric vehicle production at its Princeton, Indiana, plant

Source: **Toyota USA**

## 58%

Indiana jobs that require skills or training beyond high school but don't require a degree

Source: **National Skills Coalition**

## 40.6%

Hoosiers age 25-64 holding an associate degree or higher

Source: **Lumina Foundation**

## 48%

Indiana college students graduating on time

Source: **Indiana Commission for Higher Education, Indiana College Completion Dashboard**



## \$11 billion

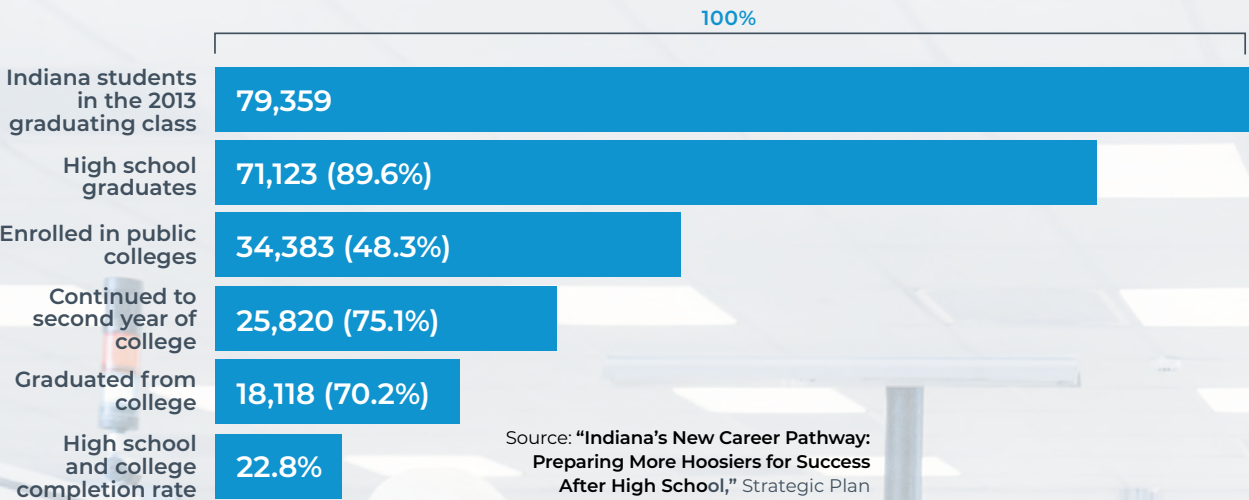
Cost to build Amazon Web Services data center

Source: **Amazon**



# Our leaky talent pipeline

Here's an example to show how the cohort of Indiana high school students who graduated in 2013 fared in progressing from high school through college and beyond.



Source: "Indiana's New Career Pathway: Preparing More Hoosiers for Success After High School," Strategic Plan Executive Summary, CEMETS iLab Indiana, September 2024

72%

Jobs in the U.S. that will require education or training beyond high school by 2031

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce

64,000

People employed by the life sciences industry in Indiana

Source: A Strategic Roadmap for Advancing Indiana's Life Sciences Industries, TEconomy Partners, 2024

# Paving the Way for the Workforce of the Future

What we'll do and how we'll do it

Ascend Indiana is many things: an amplifier, a connector, a convener, a thought leader. We're also a path builder. Our strategic plan is a blueprint for how we'll work with our partners to build pathways that lead to a stronger workforce.

## WHAT WE'LL DO

### Improve alignment within Indiana's labor market

Ascend has built a strong foundation, connecting people with career opportunities and providing thought leadership to companies and public sector partners. But we want — and need — to do more to provide solutions that reach more people and impact more employers around the state.

We've broadened our mission to enable a modern workforce ecosystem by serving as a link between organizations, people and programs to ensure all Hoosiers and all employers are equipped to thrive in Indiana's evolving economy.

#### We plan to:

#### Collaborate for change.

We'll increase our role as a connector, bringing organizations together to scale proven programs. We'll also help to develop new ideas, policies and initiatives that will create meaningful pathways for students and job seekers.

#### Build work-based-learning pathways.

Work-based learning and youth apprenticeships are an important focus of our plan. They're important because they provide young Hoosiers with real-world work experience and employability skills. They open their eyes to career possibilities.

#### Open more doors via the

**Ascend Network.** We've built and pressure-tested a robust online tool, the Ascend Network, to connect talent to career and internship opportunities. But the Network has the potential to become much more: the go-to resource for Hoosiers, businesses and workforce development professionals who deliver talent programs and services.

**Do more with data.** One of the biggest pain points within the education and workforce ecosystem is the lack of easy-to-access data. We plan to change that by gathering quantitative and qualitative data that sheds light on the career readiness of early-in-career Hoosiers, as well as employer and career trends, industry growth projections, degree-seeking trends and more.



## Ascend Indiana stakeholders

In the state of Indiana, Ascend Indiana partners with and helps create solutions for:

- K-12 students and parents
- K-12 educators and counselors
- Postsecondary students
- Postsecondary influencers and decision makers
- Government and public sector partners
- Policymakers
- Industry partners
- Nonprofits and foundations that support and fund our work

↓ 48.5%

Odds of underemployment for college grads who had at least one internship vs. those who had no internships

79%

College graduates who start out in a college-level job who remain in a college-level occupation five years after graduation

Source: "Talent Disrupted," Strada Education Foundation and the Burning Glass Institute, February 2024



Ascend Indiana is many things: an amplifier, a connector, a convener, a thought leader. We're also a path builder.

## Introduction

### HOW WE'LL DO IT

#### Impact through partnership

To create a more cohesive workforce landscape, we'll intentionally engage industry, education, government and community organizations more closely and intentionally than ever before.

#### To reach this goal we plan to:

**Gain a deep understanding of what's happening in the ecosystem.** We'll convene partners from across Indiana's advanced industries to identify the current state, successes, opportunities and barriers. Specifically, we'll build on our past efforts to develop new and more robust relationships with workforce development stakeholders, including government, industry, K-12 and postsecondary education and workforce intermediaries. We'll leverage these relationships and provide a foundation for information exchange, sharing best practices and creating new strategies.

**Deepen partnerships with state agencies.** We'll support Indiana's education and workforce priorities by deepening our relationships with state agencies and using our expertise and workforce development tools to support and enhance the state's programmatic offerings. We are deepening our relationships with the Indiana Economic Development Corporation, the Department of Workforce Development, the Commission for Higher Education, and the Department of Education. We'll seek ways to collaborate to ensure our work aligns with state priorities, and we'll be an important resource to keep these groups informed about workforce development trends, opportunities and challenges.

**Do more with local and regional partners.** We'll continue to collaborate with local workforce boards and regional community organizations to understand their regional workforce data, assets and gaps. We'll facilitate the sharing of best practices among regions and discover new ways to support local and regional partners.





## Leveraging research

In 2022, we published and shared our **“Evolving Labor Market” report** data analysis and recommendations with education, corporate and government leaders. Our recommendations led to many of the updated education and workforce policies passed in the 2023 Indiana legislative session, including:

- Automatic enrollment in the 21st Century Scholars program
- Requiring all high school seniors to file the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form
- Limiting the number of waiver students that high schools can include in their public graduation rate.



### INSPIRED + HIRED

## A breakthrough for biomedical technicians

In 2018, Ascend Indiana partnered with Roche Diagnostics and the University of Indianapolis to create Roche Academy, a custom talent pipeline for biomedical equipment technicians. These technicians are critical to Roche's operations, maintaining critical lab equipment and providing customer service across Roche's 32 geographic service regions. Through the partnership, the university recruits biology and chemistry students to join the Roche Academy, where they complete a Roche-customized curriculum path and summer internship experience focused on the hands-on, life science and engineering skills necessary for employment at Roche. In exchange, Academy students successfully completing the program receive financial and educational incentives, including a job offer from Roche upon graduation. Since its inception, 69 students have participated in the program, 40 of whom Roche has hired.



### THE ASCEND NETWORK





INSPIRED + HIRED

## Leading the Way

We're looking closely at programs that reach students in high school. Wolverine Enterprises connects 90% of its juniors and seniors to local employment opportunities through paying jobs.

**“Wolverine gives students experience in different fields and helps them decide what they’d like to pursue professionally.”**

— MICHAEL SOLLIDAY  
Wolverine Enterprises CEO,  
2022-2023

Michael Solliday is a 19-year-old college sophomore, but his résumé already boasts a job title more experienced workers would covet: CEO.

Solliday earned that celebrated post thanks to Wolverine Enterprises LLC, a school-based enterprise at White River Valley High School in Switz City, Indiana. White River Valley’s recently retired superintendent, Bob Hacker, Ed.D., spearheaded the program when he learned that approximately two-thirds of the high school’s graduating seniors entered college, but only 28 percent made it into their second year. Many of the rest drifted back to Greene County with few prospects for the future.

Extensive surveys of students, parents, educators and business leaders spotlighted the vital factors missing from their education. “The feedback talked about how they needed more hands-on training, skills acquisition and business experience,” Hacker said. Those competencies became cornerstones of the Wolverine Enterprises program.

Approximately 90 percent of the school’s juniors and seniors participate in the project, which maintains six different private enterprises that students, who are paid for their work, oversee. Those businesses earned \$62,000 during the 2023-24 school year. Students can earn certifications, too.

As CEO of Wolverine’s logistics team, Solliday developed leadership and communication skills that he uses today. He’s pursuing a degree in computer science, a minor in computer information systems and a certificate in cybersecurity at the University of Southern Indiana, and he works as an IT intern at Greene County General Hospital.

“I hope every school in Indiana develops some form of this platform because it’s really beneficial for students,” Solliday said. “Wolverine gives students experience in different fields and helps them decide what they’d like to pursue professionally. For instance, I realized I’m less interested in running an entire business and more interested in IT.”

He’s also realized that Indiana is full of businesses in need of his services and opportunities to accomplish his professional goals. “I love Indiana,” Solliday said. “There’s no reason to go to any other state.”

A young man with short dark hair and black-rimmed glasses is sitting at a desk in what appears to be a computer lab or office. He is wearing a dark blue polo shirt with a logo on the left chest and khaki shorts. His hands are clasped in his lap, and he is smiling at the camera. In the background, there are several computer monitors on desks.

# 90%

Juniors and seniors  
who take part in the  
Wolverine program

---

# \$4 million

Grant funding secured to support  
the Wolverine program in the past  
four years

At Wolverine Enterprises,  
Michael Solliday sharpened his  
business skills in mentoring,  
communication and succession  
planning. He also learned what  
he did and didn't like to do.

## Building Talent Pathways

New strategies for talent pathways could show students the way to bright careers — and connect employers to the workforce of the future

The State of Indiana is part of a national movement to bring work-based learning experiences to students. Changes proposed by Indiana officials would make high school more flexible and career focused, bridging the gap between school and work in new ways — and at a scale we've never seen before.

### An infrastructure to support work-based learning

Establishing high-quality work-based learning programs is complicated. It involves the collaboration and commitment of both schools and local industry to develop opportunities that benefit both the student and the employer.

We plan to support the work-based learning movement by helping align what students learn with the skills they need to be successful in the workplace. Our goal is to create consistent work-based learning experiences statewide to ensure quality and to simplify employers' participation.

#### To achieve these goals we plan to:

##### Do our homework.

- **Home in on hot spots.** We'll conduct an inventory of work-based learning programs across the state, noting hot spots that could serve as models and areas where there's a dearth of work-based learning programs.

- **Understand needs.** Working with our partners, we'll leverage workforce analyses and convene business, academic and public sector leaders to identify relevant roles, validate competencies and understand training needs in different industries.

##### Build and share blueprints.

We'll develop blueprints of desired competencies and skills for specific industries. Then we'll share those blueprints, helping make work-based learning experiences more consistent across the state.

##### Show companies how to get involved.

- **Develop employer toolkits.** We'll equip employers with toolkits, best practices and ongoing support. We'll ensure employers are co-developers of talent, helping them deliver meaningful experiences that result in skills toward a student's career success.
- **Help them fund work-based learning programs.** We'll help employers by exploring ways to fund work-based learning experiences. For example, Indiana students may be able to use Career Scholarship Accounts to pay for apprenticeships, career-related coursework and/or certification. EARN provides matching funds — 50% of a student's hourly rate — to employers who hire a high school or post-secondary student for a qualified, high-quality work-based experience.



- **Shore up youth apprenticeships.** We'll mobilize companies and industries to lead differently in the education and training system by exploring youth apprenticeship models and the role companies can play.
- **Seek and include them.** Through regional partnerships with workforce intermediaries and chambers of commerce, we'll forge new connections and support for small- and medium-sized businesses.

## Showing them the way

**Career pathways** based on industries will help:

- 1 **Equip** businesses to deliver high-quality work-based learning opportunities.
- 2 **Fuel** robust career navigation services by giving educators real-time info.
- 3 **Align** career and technical education pathways with work-based learning.





# Competencies and skills

What's the difference?

## Competencies

A competency can include a certain level of skill, but it also comprises a person's attitudes, aptitudes, values and behaviors. For example, competencies for a role in the advanced manufacturing industry might include understanding manufacturing concepts through interaction with industry, conducting tasks safely and efficiently and using analytical skills to evaluate data.

## Skills

Skills are typically applied in a specific setting and lead to a desired outcome or result. They're narrower in scope than competencies and more specific to a task or role. Hard skills might be operating a forklift or knowing a computer language. Soft skills are more about how people do their work. Organization, time management and conflict resolution are considered soft skills.



# What is work-based learning?

There are three key components of work-based learning programs, as defined by the U.S. Department of Education:

1. Alignment of classroom and workplace learning
2. Application of academic, technical and employability skills in a work-based setting
3. Support from classroom or workplace mentors

Examples include experiences and exposure through apprenticeships, on-the-job training, internships and job shadowing.

Source: "K-12 Work-Based Learning Opportunities: A 50-State Scan of 2023 Legislative Action," Center for American Progress, April 2, 2024



CONEXUS



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## A head start in advanced manufacturing and logistics

Catapult Indiana is a Conexus Indiana program that allows students and others to explore real-world problems and build skills in advanced manufacturing and logistics. While participating in the 160-hour program, students learn through classroom work and hands-on simulations. In 2023, Ascend Indiana partnered with Conexus to explore how to scale up the program in Marion County. With the support of Indianapolis American Rescue Plan Act funding and partnerships with community-based organizations to drive recruitment and deliver supportive services for students, 155 students have completed the Marion County program and 48 have been hired.





## Scaling the Network

Ascend Indiana is expanding the reach and broadening the scope of the Ascend Network to connect more Hoosiers to career pathways, internships and jobs across the state

Over the years, the Ascend Network has become a valued resource, connecting thousands of potential employees to employers statewide.

Over the years, the Ascend Network has become a valued resource, connecting thousands of potential employees to employers statewide. It will continue to serve this important function for postsecondary students and un- and under-employed adults. At the same time, we'll expand the Network's impact by enabling education, nonprofit and government partners statewide to use it to serve students and job seekers in new ways, including:

**Welcoming K-12 to the Network.** We'll expand access to high-quality work-based learning opportunities for high school students by enabling K-12 educators to use the Ascend Network to serve students. This will help address information gaps and provide data related to the quality of different opportunities and student outcomes.

Another benefit of enhancing the Network for K-12 is a central location for employers to offer work-based learning. Many employers will likely partner with multiple school districts, and using the same system will improve opportunities for both students and employers.

**Inviting career services connections.** We'll create efficiencies by empowering career services and workforce intermediaries to leverage the Network platform to better support students and underserved individuals, helping more potential workers identify, apply for and connect to jobs.

**Integrating with other career platforms.** The variety of tools focused on connecting people to jobs and internships can lead to confusion for both job seekers and employers. We'll explore integrating the Network with other Indiana-focused career navigation and internship resources (for example, Work and Learn Indiana) to streamline the experience for everyone.

**Adding accessibility.** We'll let more people know about the Network and how it can help them, including college students, recent graduates and K-12 students. We'll continue to focus on serving students from historically underserved backgrounds, including people of color, those from low-income backgrounds and first-generation college students.

# 519:1

Student to counselor  
ratio in Indiana

# 250:1

Recommended student to  
counselor ratio

Source: **American School Counselor  
Association**, 2022-2023

## Helping students find their way

We want to provide equal opportunities for all Hoosiers, with a focus on underrepresented communities. To reach that goal, more Indiana students need advisors to help them discover pathways to high-growth careers. A dearth of robust career advising may be one reason too few Hoosiers are prepared for jobs that provide self-sustaining wages and benefits.



INSPIRED + HIRED

## Connecting talent to opportunity

Brent Dulaney, a junior at Indiana University Indianapolis, has parlayed his early interest in biomedical sciences into a health science degree program and a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity with Louis Stokes Alliances for Minority Participation (LSAMP). When Dulaney began searching for research opportunities in college, he was guided by an Ascend Indiana career mentor named Bob to the opportunity with LSAMP. There, he'll study bone cell biology and bone regeneration, as well as hold a paid Life-Health Sciences Internship in the pulmonary research field at IU Indianapolis. "Prior to Ascend Indiana, I've only had a couple of jobs," Dulaney said. "Bob was always there to give me advice, help with my resume and make sure I hit every box."



ASCEND

## INSPIRED + HIRED

## Double Exposure

An innovative talent pipeline and dual master's degree program has produced high-quality licensed behavioral therapists across the state

**“Before the BHA program, Community Health Network’s behavioral health offerings were ‘very segmented.’”**

— KATHLEEN BRANNEN  
MSW, LCSW, LCAC  
Community Health Network  
Program Manager

Community Health Network’s Behavioral Health Academy, a talent pipeline and employer-led training program for licensed therapists, has more than exceeded its founders’ expectations. Created during Indiana’s opioid crisis, the original goal of the dual master’s degree program was to grow the state’s supply of health professionals trained and licensed in both addiction and mental health counseling. In four years, the Community BHA has not only grown, but it has also been replicated at more than 15 school sites, producing graduates who are prepared to meet the needs of Indiana communities.

### Preparing the pipeline

Several elements aligned to facilitate the creation of the BHA program: the need for more mental health workers in the wake of the opioid crisis; the engagement of Ascend Indiana board member and Community Health Network Foundation President and CEO Joyce Irwin, who had worked with Ascend to launch a talent pipeline for nurses; and grant funding from the Richard M. Fairbanks Foundation. The Ascend team helped bring it all together.

Before the BHA program, Community Health Network’s behavioral health offerings were “very segmented,” said Kathleen Brannen, MSW, LCSW, LCAC, who provided feedback in the development of the BHA and served as the program’s manager from December 2021 until June 2024.

“If someone had an addiction, they had to go to addiction services and only received treatment for that. If they had a mental health problem, they had to go to a mental health counselor.” For a long time, this was the standard of care in Indiana, Brannen said. Yet health care professionals found that there was a need for both types of care. People often experienced both mental health and addiction issues at the same time, and they weren’t being treated fully.

The Ascend team understood this challenge. “Our big takeaway was the need for a substance use curriculum,” said Erica Viar, Ascend Indiana’s vice president of consulting.



# 15

School sites that have replicated Community Health Network's Behavioral Health Academy since 2021

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# 24

Ascend Indiana's collaborator agreements with postsecondary institutions as of September 2024



Tiffany Hatfield, LCSW, LCAC, a graduate of the Indiana University School of Social Work who completed the Community Behavioral Health program in 2021, has had a successful start to her therapy career and recently returned to serve as BHA program manager.



## Building the program

Armed with a clear sense of Community Health's needs, Ascend launched a request for proposal, seeking an education partner to come alongside Community and build the new program together.

## Social work programs

Indiana University Indianapolis and the University of Indianapolis turned out to be a good fit. Next, teams from Ascend, Community and the chosen schools worked together to design the program in a collaborative way. Together, they created a new program that would offer a dual license in both social work and clinical addictions counseling (what behavioral health professionals call "co-occurring focus"). They also built in incentives for students such as paid stipends and robust internship and practicum experiences.

The initial planning work could be challenging, because it required the schools of social work to adapt their curriculum to meet dual licensure, Erica said. "The Ascend team did a lot to pave the way for alignment between our team and the academics in the room," said Eric Comstock, director of clinical services, adult mental health and addictions for Behavioral Health Services at Community Health Network. "We couldn't have built the program without them."

Now almost every behavioral health program in the state of Indiana offers dual licensure, said Jennie Voelker, LCSW, director of clinical services, youth behavioral health services and the BHA for Community Fairbanks Behavioral Health.

## Sharing the model

The BHA has broadened its purview to include other types of therapy degrees and is in the process of launching a bachelor's level program. It also has expanded throughout the state of Indiana, growing more quickly than its founders anticipated and attracting national attention.

Recently the federal government chose the program as a pilot site for Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics. The national attention and partnership could continue to transform the BHA in "really awesome ways, with more evidence-based practices and more comprehensive care," Brannen said.

Voelker is proud of Brannen and other graduates of the program, many of whom have gone on to hold leadership positions. "We're not only training the future workforce," Voelker said. "We may be training the future leadership of behavioral health statewide."

The BHA's new program manager, Tiffany Hatfield, LCSW, LCAC, is a case in point. "The BHA program prepared me for leadership," Hatfield said. "It gave me confidence in my skills and created a network of peers, partners and opportunities. It has really set me up for this next step in my career."

### "The BHA program prepared me for leadership."

— TIFFANY HATFIELD,  
LCSW, LCAC  
Community Health Network  
Behavioral Health Academy  
Program Manager

# Community mental health center partners

These Behavioral Health Academy mental health center partners host students with the hope of hiring them after graduation:

## **Community Fairbanks Behavioral Health**

Throughout Indiana

## **Parkview Behavioral Health**

Northeast Indiana

## **Sandra Eskenazi Mental Health Center**

Indianapolis

## **Oaklawn Psychiatric Center**

Elkhart and St. Joseph counties

## **Regional Mental Health Services**

Northwest Indiana

## **Porter-Starke Services**

Northwest Indiana

## **Aspire Indiana Health**

Central Indiana

## **Adult & Child Health**

Central Indiana

## **Southwestern Behavioral Healthcare**

Southwestern Indiana

# Partner universities

The Community BHA program has been replicated throughout the state of Indiana. Students in the program come together for calls each Friday to share evidence-based practices and role play therapy sessions, sharing real-time feedback they can pair with classroom learning and apply in their internships, so when they graduate they “hit the ground running.”

1. Indiana University School of Social Work (IU Indianapolis, Direct, IUFW, IUSB, IUNW)
2. University of Indianapolis Phylis Lan Lin School of Social Work and Counseling
3. Ball State University Department of Social Work
4. Martin University Community Psychology Graduate Program
5. Butler University Mental Health Counseling Program
6. Purdue Fort Wayne Department of Counseling and Graduate Education
7. Purdue Northwest School of Education and Counseling
8. Indiana Wesleyan University Master of Social Work
9. Marian University Master's in Counseling
10. University of Southern Indiana Master of Social Work
11. Grace College Master of Clinical Mental Health Counseling
12. St. Mary's Master of Social Work







## Doing More With Data

One of the biggest pain points within the education and workforce ecosystem is the lack of easy-to-access data about students, job seekers and employer needs. We aim to change that.

We know that consistent and robust data will move the needle within the education and workforce ecosystem. That's why we're intensifying our efforts to compile, analyze and share data in new ways. In addition to capturing data from the Ascend Network, we're conducting research on timely workforce topics and ramping up our research and analysis of Indiana's economy and labor market. We know that by unleashing the power of data, we can do more to impact the education and workforce trajectory for hundreds of thousands of students statewide, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds.

### We plan to:

**Develop and share State of the Advanced Industries Workforce reports.** Building on the success of our previous Supply and Demand reports, we will publish a State of the Advanced Industries Workforce report every three years in partnership with the Central Indiana Corporate Partnership (CICP) and our sister organizations, AgriNovus, BioCrossroads, Conexus Indiana and TechPoint. This will allow us and others to develop programming to address our findings and time to assess programs after implementation.

**Conduct research on timely workforce topics.** As we develop the State of the Advanced Industries Workforce report, we'll undoubtedly uncover opportunities and challenges that require further investigation. For example, recent state policy changes have put a spotlight on the disconnect between the Indiana Department of Education's forthcoming policy to encourage students to pursue work-based learning and the scarcity of high-quality work-based learning experiences. We're exploring the possibility of conducting an analysis of work-based learning opportunities in Indiana to understand the kinds of opportunities Hoosier students are looking for. We'll share that info with employers to help them clarify their role in creating quality experiences.

# 3 out of 4

Indiana employers leaving  
jobs unfilled



Source: **Indiana Chamber** 2022

## 62.5%

Indiana's labor force  
participation rate

Source: **Indiana Department of Workforce  
Development**, September 2024

## 45.3%

Indiana college students  
graduating on time

Source: Indiana Commission for  
Higher Education, **Indiana College  
Completion Report**, 2022

## 66%

Indiana college students  
graduating within six years

Source: Indiana Commission for  
Higher Education, **Indiana College  
Completion Report**, 2022

Over time, our insights could make a positive impact on the education and workforce trajectory for thousands of students statewide, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds.

**Develop a data repository.** To further assert our role as Indiana’s workforce thought leader, we’ll create a consistent understanding of workforce data and its implications to ecosystem stakeholders by developing a data repository. The new repository will consolidate data from various sources into a centralized location so we can inform businesses, educators, state officials and others about what’s happening with job seekers so they can align their efforts with what the market is doing.

We’ll compile data that will allow us to measure the effectiveness of work-based learning experiences. We’ll also glean data from the Ascend Network, collaborator agreements, publicly available data sources and qualitative insights. We’ll disseminate discoveries about the latest workforce trends by publicly sharing the data in meetings, white papers, on our website and social media, ultimately driving systems- level change.

**Leverage our Network.** As mentioned on page 6, the Ascend Network connects early-in-career job seekers with good and promising jobs and internship opportunities in Indiana. Yet the Network can do much more than that. It’s a rich source of data that can:

- Inform outreach to job seekers
- Inspire programs for young adult audiences
- Create more targeted employment strategies as we work with industry partners and workforce development organizations.

The data in the Network will anchor our data repository, helping us develop predictive insights on pathways students are taking — from school to the workforce. We also plan to track work-based learning experiences and measure outcomes.

**Industry insights** We’re gathering, analyzing and sharing data with a special focus on needs across Indiana’s advanced industry sectors:

- Advanced manufacturing and logistics
- Agbiosciences
- Biosciences
- Technology





## Data power

What data can do to move the needle for our workforce

# 86%

College grads employed in college-level occupation five years after graduating who were still in a college-level job 10 years out

Source: "Talent Disrupted," Strada Education Foundation and the Burning Glass Institute, February 2024

### What data can show us

Insights on young adults and job seekers

Competencies employers seek

Pathways students could take and pathways students are taking now

Gaps in skills and education

Work-based learning successes and outcomes

### What we can share

White papers, articles, documents and guides

Best practices

Labor market research

Recommendations

Case studies and success stories

Model programs

### What data can help *all of us* create

Employment strategies

Alignment among employers, educators and job seekers

Curriculum and training

Targeted industry programs

Pathways students could take

Programs for job seekers

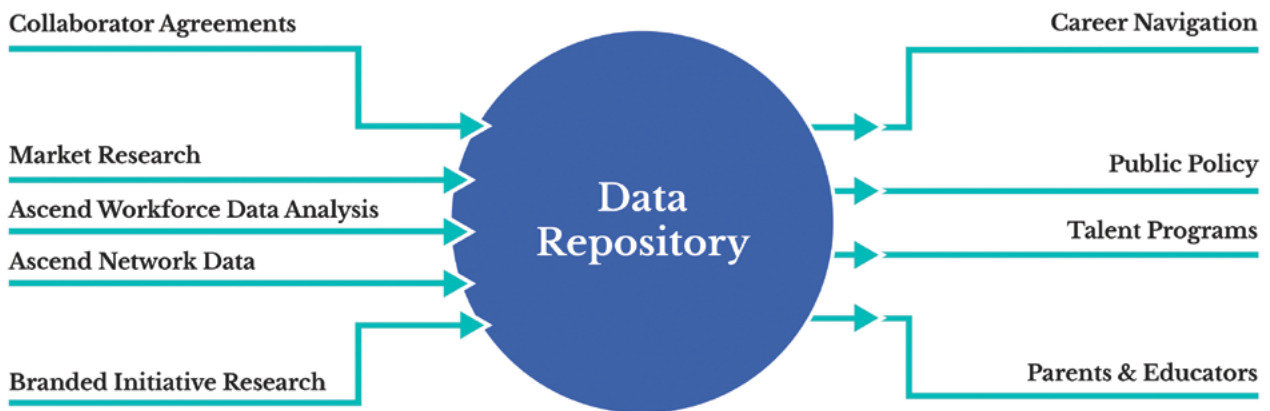
Branding, marketing and communications strategies

Public awareness and events



## A data-driven future

We're increasing our focus on gathering and compiling data to shed light on career readiness among early-in-career Hoosiers, as well as employer and career trends, industry growth projections, degree seeking trends and more. The goal? To analyze data for insights on pathways, competencies and jobs and share it with others — and back through the system — building a stronger network for us all.



# \$1 billion

Indiana's investment in Regional Economic Acceleration and Development Initiative (READI) Grants to build communities that attract talent and propel investment in Indiana's quality of place, quality of life and quality of opportunity

Source: **Indiana Economic Development Corporation**

# \$813 million

Amount Indiana manufacturers have invested in new technologies through the Manufacturing Readiness Grants program

Source: **Conexus Indiana**





INSPIRED + HIRED

## Cultivating tech excellence

TechPoint's Xtern program gives Indiana employers access to highly-skilled tech talent. The program recruits students from 20+ campuses to foster the next generation of tech builders. Students live on a campus together and share their experiences working for companies with their peers. Xtern is a built-in marketing opportunity to help companies expose their brand to college students. It offers students housing and provides professional development and social activities that create the best summer internship experience.



TECHPOINT



# Opening Job Seekers' Eyes

Showing future workers possibilities in Indiana is a critical first step

When career exploration begins early in a young person's life, it can make a big impact. Knowing what's possible can spark curiosity and help students build skills and connect their interests to future career paths.

Our issue in Indiana is that job seekers simply don't know what's possible — they aren't aware of all the career opportunities available to them in our state. This lack of awareness contributes to the reasons for Indiana's startling brain drain and workforce challenges.

**Raising awareness is a critical first step. Here's how we plan to do it:**

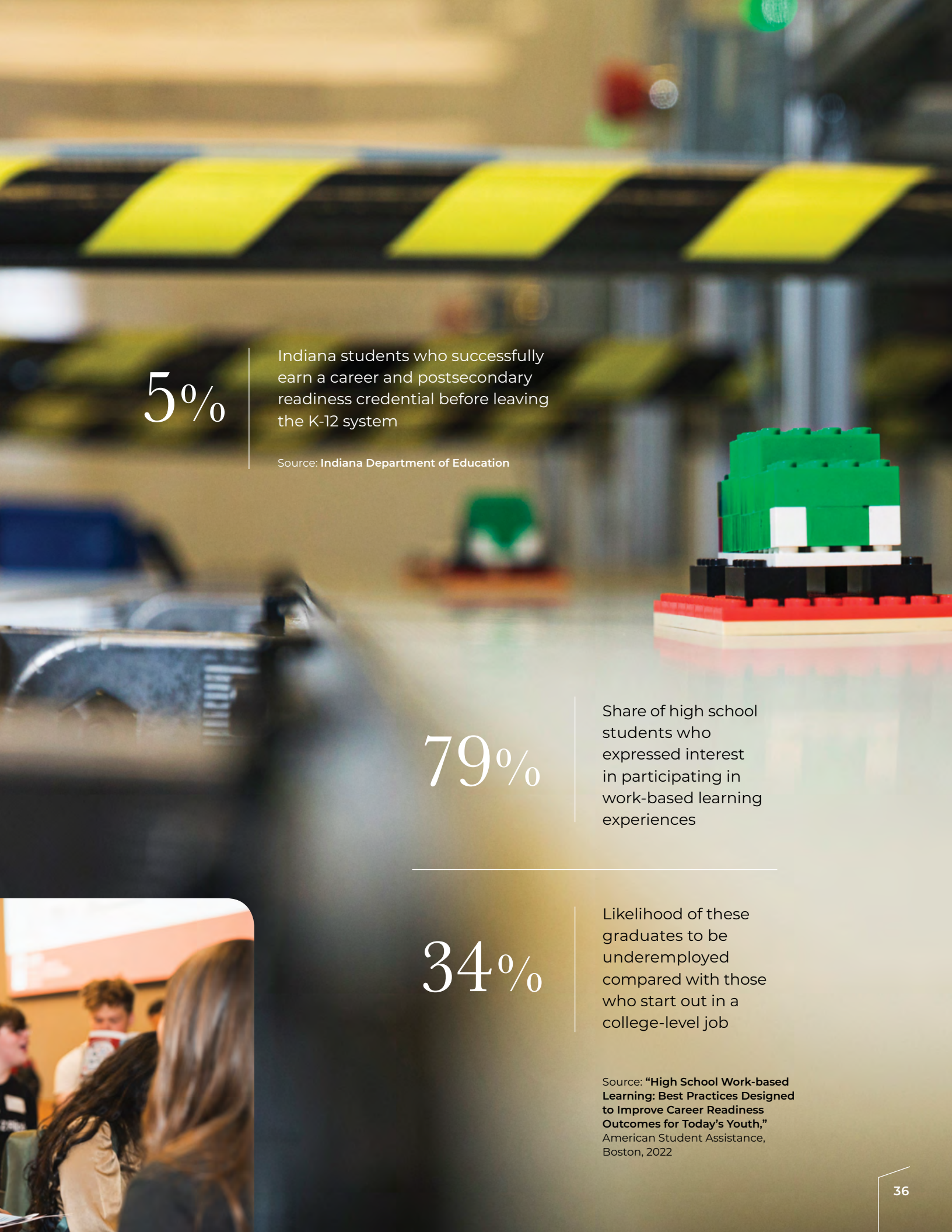
## Make it easy to connect.

- **Launch a new job board.** We'll create a unified, open-source job board for everyone in Indiana, including high school students, gathering all opportunities, and advanced industry opportunities in particular, in one place.
- **Share real-time info, tips and tools.** We'll provide real-time information about career pathways to educators and career counselors. We'll create toolkits and reinforce best practices.
- **Build a more accessible network.** By upgrading and improving the Ascend Network, we'll provide a seamless experience for a broader array of students, employers and others.

## Do more to support schools.

- **Help educators show students the way.** We'll help educators and other influencers provide more robust career navigation to students by sharing real-time information and resources about career pathways, occupations and competencies.
- **Align career and technical education with employer needs.** We'll help ensure career and technical education programs align with the skills, pathways and work-based learning experiences employers have identified.
- **Find funding for students.** We'll explore partnerships and other ways to fund work-based learning experiences for students, including career scholarships.
- **Elevate K-12.** We've always focused on young job seekers — typically college students and people just beginning their careers. Our new approach includes even younger Hoosiers: We're actively building new relationships and partnerships in the K-12 space.

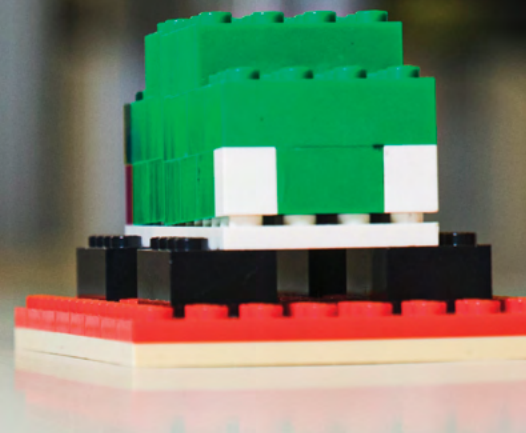




5%

Indiana students who successfully earn a career and postsecondary readiness credential before leaving the K-12 system

Source: Indiana Department of Education



79%

Share of high school students who expressed interest in participating in work-based learning experiences

34%

Likelihood of these graduates to be underemployed compared with those who start out in a college-level job

Source: "High School Work-based Learning: Best Practices Designed to Improve Career Readiness Outcomes for Today's Youth," American Student Assistance, Boston, 2022







### Scale up to do more for everyone.

- **Highlight career opportunities.** To educate and inform students and job seekers, we'll launch programming that highlights career opportunities in Indiana's advanced industries.
- **Create educational materials.** We'll develop and produce educational materials and amplify existing events and public education campaigns to highlight Indiana career pathways for all job seeker audiences.
- **Provide statewide support.** We'll help schools and businesses collaborate to make work-based learning experiences meaningful, offering curriculum support and helping to ensure consistent experiences across the state. In this way, we'll help prevent talent challenges before they begin.
- **Replicate what's working.** We'll create new talent programs on a statewide scale by replicating strong programs and enhancing existing ones, including youth apprenticeship pilot programs and strong models across the state.
- **Spread the word.** To raise awareness, we'll launch and support existing public education campaigns, provide educational resources and host events.

## The brain drain is real

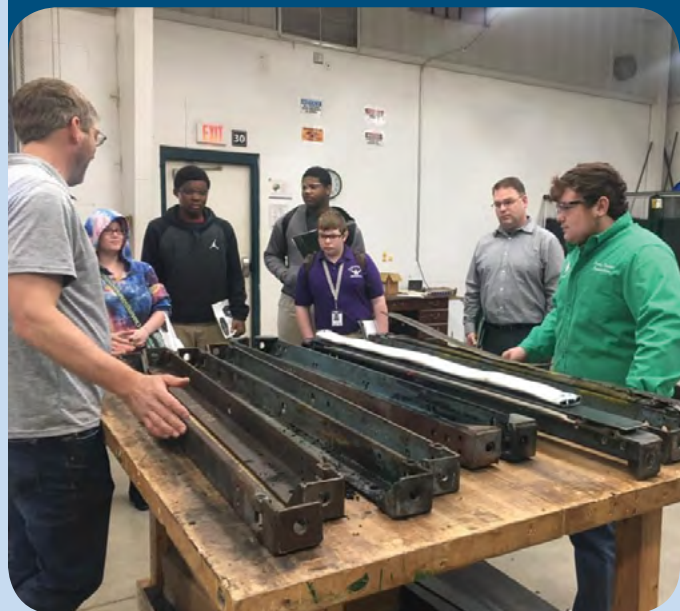
61%

Graduates from Indiana colleges and universities employed in the state one year post graduation

55%

Drop in retention of Indiana graduates after five years

Source: "Indiana college graduates and the question of brain drain," INContext, July–August 2024







AGRINOVUS



INSPIRED + HIRED

## Adventures in agbioscience

Cameron Weber, a senior biology major at Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology in Terre Haute and an AgriNovus Indiana Field Atlas ambassador, is gaining first-hand experience for their future career while working as a Corteva Agriscience Greenhouse Assistant in Salinas, Puerto Rico. The job involves learning about plant breeding and crop management and developing professional skills along the way. Weber, who stumbled across the Puerto Rico job opening on Corteva's website, advises young professionals to "find a company whose values align with yours by looking at company websites for job openings or reaching out to current employees on LinkedIn." Field Atlas is another way to explore careers and companies in agbioscience. Students can take a career placement quiz and check out current job openings.



## Our Visionary Leaders

Our board members are committed to addressing the state's talent and workforce challenges. It includes human resources leaders from some of Indiana's leading corporations, universities and health care systems, Central Indiana nonprofits and nearly two dozen industry leaders.



**Cindy Adams**  
Ascension St. Vincent  
System Chief Nursing  
Officer



**Andrew Ball**  
Henriott Group  
Co-CEO



**Latoya Botteron\***  
Central Indiana  
Corporate Partnership  
President & CFO



**Bridget Boyle\***  
Roche Diagnostics  
Global Practice Lead -  
Executive Recruiting  
& Pipelining



**Jim Danko**  
Butler University  
President



**Molly Dodge**  
Ivy Tech  
Community College  
Senior Vice President of  
Workforce & Careers



**Marlene Dotson**  
Indiana Latino  
Institute  
President & CEO



**Eric Dozier**  
Eli Lilly and Company  
Executive Vice President,  
Human Resources &  
Diversity



**Jason Eckerle**  
PNC Bank  
Regional President,  
Central & Southern  
Indiana



**Jay Gladden**  
Indiana University  
Indianapolis  
Interim Executive  
Vice Chancellor/Chief  
Academic Officer



**Kristin Glazner**  
Wabash National Corp.  
Senior Vice President,  
General Counsel &  
Human Resources  
Officer



**Dan Hasler**  
Purdue University in  
Indianapolis  
Chief Operating Officer



**Michael Huber**  
Indiana University  
Vice President for  
University Relations



**Liz Huldin**  
Catalytic Talent  
President & CEO



**Joyce Irwin\***  
Community Health  
Network Foundation  
President & CEO



**Dena Jacquay\***  
Parkview Health  
Chief Administrative  
Officer



**Melina Kennedy**  
Central Indiana  
Corporate Partnership  
CEO



**Dottie King**  
Independent Colleges  
of Indiana  
President & CEO



**Joseph Loftus**  
Barnes & Thornburg,  
LLP  
Partner



**Tony Mason\***  
Indianapolis Urban  
League  
President & CEO



**Fred Payne**  
United Way of  
Central Indiana  
President & CEO



**Dan Peterson**  
Cook Group Inc.  
Vice President, Industry  
& Government Affairs



**Chris Pohl**  
OneAmerica  
Sr. Vice President &  
CHRO



**Steve Pratt**  
Deloitte Consulting  
LLP  
Principal, Life Sciences



**Brad Rhorer**  
Ascend Indiana  
President & CEO



**Jim Schacht**  
Cummins  
Vice President



**Ozan Selcuk**  
Leaf Software  
Solutions  
CEO



**David Shane**  
LDI, Ltd.  
Former President  
& CEO



**Adrienne Sims**  
IU Health  
Senior Vice President –  
Chief Human Resources  
Officer



**Carlos Taylor**  
Gregory S. Fehribach  
Center at Eskenazi  
Health  
Program Manager



**Teresa Wade**  
CFA Staffing  
Founder & Owner



**Christy Wilson**  
The Heritage Group  
Vice President of Talent  
Strategy

\*Executive Committee member





## Connecting to Create

Strong relationships throughout the state give us a solid foundation to build upon.

**Employers:** We've developed 800+ relationships with Indiana employers through our consulting services and The Ascend Network. In the coming years, we'll focus on geographic expansion and small- and mid-sized employers and initiate collaborations with industry partners to develop competencies and programs that serve more Hoosiers than ever before.

**Academics and educators:** Our education partners include colleges, universities and school districts throughout the state.

**Students:** The Ascend Network has put us in touch with 6,000+ early-in-career job seekers, and we're eager to connect with thousands more.

**Government:** Since our founding, we've worked closely with Indiana State government officials and entities like the Indiana Department of Workforce Development, the Indiana Department of Education and the Governor's Workforce Cabinet.

**Nonprofits:** Philanthropic supporters and community organizations support our goals and expand our reach.

**CICP:** As part of the Central Indiana Corporate Partnership, our sister organizations AgriNovus Indiana, BioCrossroads, Conexus Indiana and TechPoint give us insights and access to their deep bench of industry partners. This increases our understanding of the state's needs and opportunities in different advanced industry sectors.

See a full listing of Ascend Indiana partners on our **Partners** page at [ascendindiana.com](https://ascendindiana.com)



## Follow us on social media

 [linkedin.com/company/ascend-indiana/](https://www.linkedin.com/company/ascend-indiana/)

 [facebook.com/AscendIndiana/](https://facebook.com/AscendIndiana/)

 [@ascendindiana](https://www.instagram.com/ascendindiana)

 [@AscendIndiana](https://twitter.com/AscendIndiana)

 [ascendindiana.com](https://ascendindiana.com)

## Be Part of the Solution

You can help us build pathways to a stronger workforce in Indiana. Here are a few ways to get involved.

### HOW YOU CAN HELP

#### **Know what we need.**

Stay informed about our state's economy and how you can help keep it vibrant and growing.

#### **Build pathways in your community.**

Learn more about work-based learning opportunities and what they can do for students, businesses and our state. Talk to your local connections and find out how to get involved.

#### **Inspire future workers.**

Talk to young people about future careers and opportunities in Indiana. Show them examples to inspire them. Mentor them and help them make connections.

#### **Use the Network.**

Encourage job seekers and employers to use the Ascend Network — or use it yourself. Get started at [ascendindiana.com](https://ascendindiana.com).

#### **Connect with us.**

Reach out to us at [info@ascendindiana.com](mailto:info@ascendindiana.com), 317-464-5412 or via our **website**. We're eager to make connections with leaders and changemakers in education, business, philanthropy and the public sector. Let us know how you'd like to get involved.

