

RESILIENT



PRESENTED BY:

THRIVE
WEST CENTRAL

REGIONAL RECOVERY AND RESILIENCY PLAN

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LETTER FROM RYAN KELLER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THRIVE WEST CENTRAL



Dear West Central Indiana,

The past two years have been nothing short of challenging for West Central Indiana. The COVID-19 pandemic changed our way of life and completely uprooted our understanding of who we were as a region. Thrive West Central was able to see firsthand the way in which businesses, schools, organizations, and people needed dedicated help during this time of economic crisis.

It was through this need that Resilient was created. It is my hope that this plan will serve as a future guide for supporting those facing adversity and future crises, both within West Central Indiana and outside of it. In its entirety, this plan details the many challenges the region has faced and will continue to face. Through our Economic Recovery Surveys, public forums, and supplemental research, we were able to recognize top areas of concern for our region while also addressing

the previous concerns brought forward by the community through organizations such as West Central 2025.

West Central Indiana is facing a turning point. As we look to the future and strive for resilience and prosperity, we begin to focus on seizing opportunities in areas identified through the Resilient planning process: workforce development, healthcare, quality of life, and education. This will be achieved by addressing the fundamental challenges created or exacerbated by the pandemic and acknowledging previous struggles with population decline that threaten our region. By building on our region's strengths and enhancing other aspects to better the lives of our residents, West Central Indiana will begin to see improvements in the well-being of citizens and in our region's ability to experience growth in population attraction and development.

Making this plan was no small task. With over two years of work put in, I must express my sincere appreciation for my team and all those who made this effort possible. All six counties, including local community leaders and organizations, worked tirelessly to bring together their respective communities to work towards resilience. Thank you to everyone who had a part in the making of Resilient.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ryan J. Keller". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ryan Keller
Executive Director of Thrive West Central

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



RESILIENT



**DESCRIPTION OF
THE REGION**

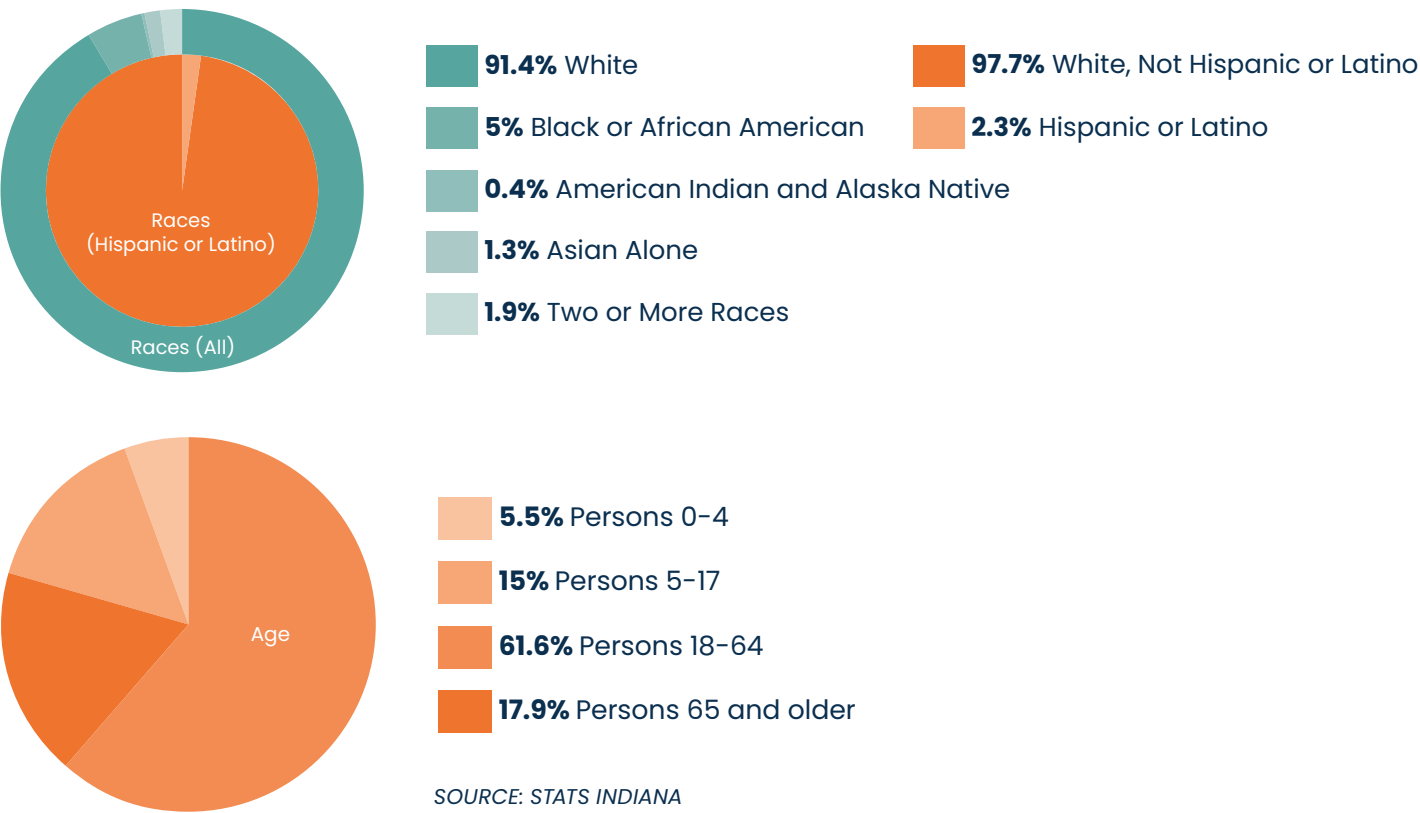
WEST CENTRAL INDIANA

Along the Illinois/Indiana border, Clay, Parke, Putnam, Sullivan, Vermillion, and Vigo County make up West Central Indiana. With state parks, nationally renowned sports establishments, distinguished educational institutions, historic downtowns, rural farmlands, and most importantly, the people who are proud to call this place home, all 6 counties have their own distinct atmospheres that complement each other within the region. West Central Indiana is dedicated to regionalism and a shared drive for community and economic development.

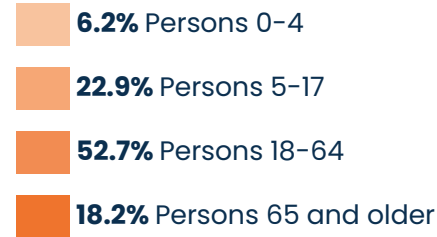
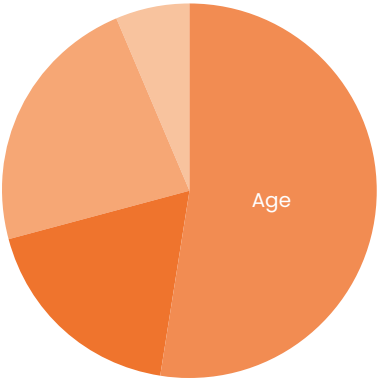
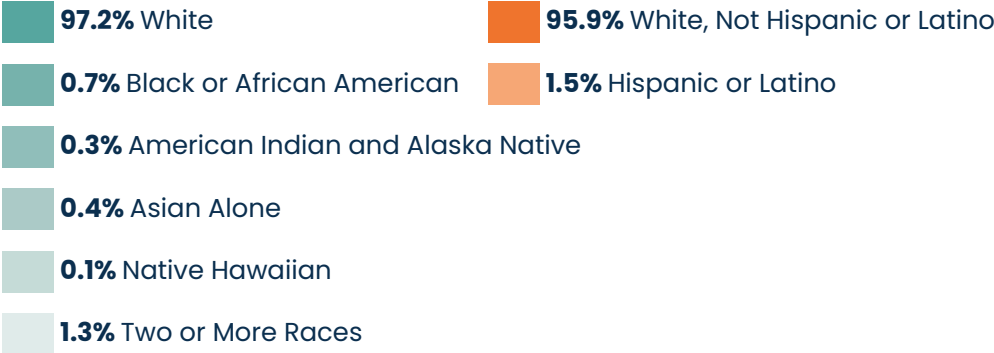
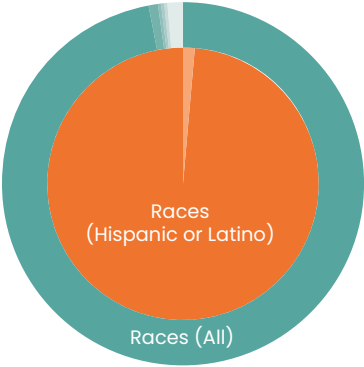
It is this rich environment that allows for continuous growth and entrepreneurial opportunities. Each county encompasses a wide range of local and chain businesses that support the region. Counties such as Vigo and Putnam offer bustling small cities centered around college life, while other counties like Sullivan have invested in their downtowns to become havens for the individuals who reside there. However, these urban areas are not all that is offered in the region. Rural communities that thrive off their farmlands and vast greenery host a large portion of West Central Indiana’s population. Healthcare, agriculture, manufacturing, food service, retail, and education are all top areas of employment that allow individuals to find ample opportunities and emphasize the region’s talents. This has driven the counties’ shared goal for economic development, making West Central Indiana a place of quality employment and a great place to live.

West Central Indiana is transforming by the day. A new energy of innovation, entrepreneurship, collaboration, and commitment to success and continuous improvement is changing the course of Indiana’s western communities. The vision is simple: create a place where people want to spend their most precious resource – time. Communities are working together to develop their best attributes, creating a regional environment where people want to live and visit. West Central Indiana has defined an even better approach, developing new opportunities to highlight the region’s best assets, from unique businesses to state-of-the-art higher education facilities to tourism attractions. However, we also recognize areas of opportunity to better enhance that vision and believe this plan of action will aid us in future crises and challenges.

WEST CENTRAL INDIANA *Population Estimate: 223,101 (2020)*

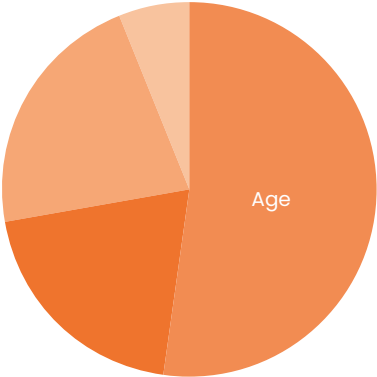
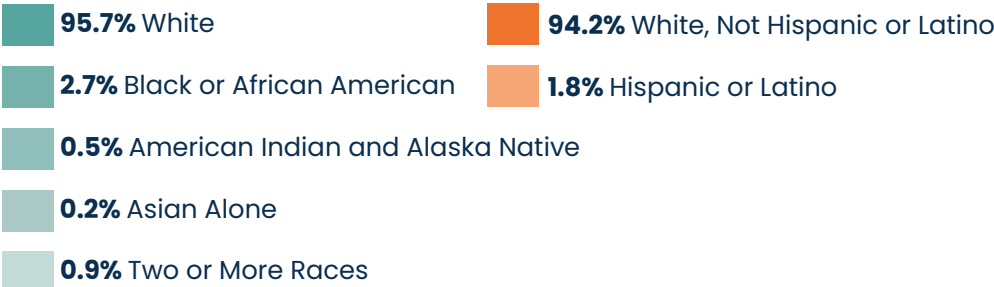
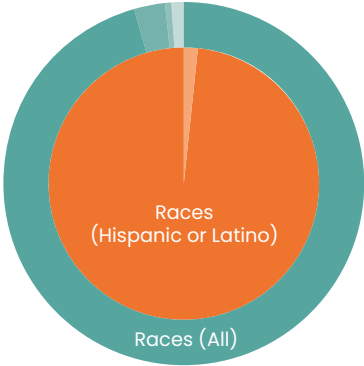


CLAY COUNTY *Population Estimate: 26,466 (2020)*



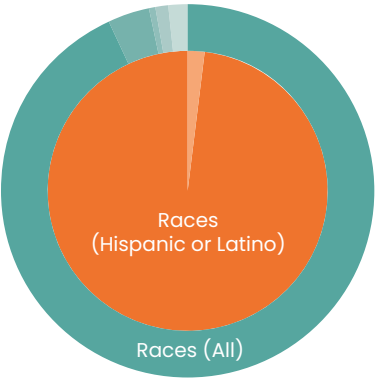
SOURCE: US CENSUS BUREAU QUICKFACTS

PARKE COUNTY *Population Estimate: 16,156 (2020)*

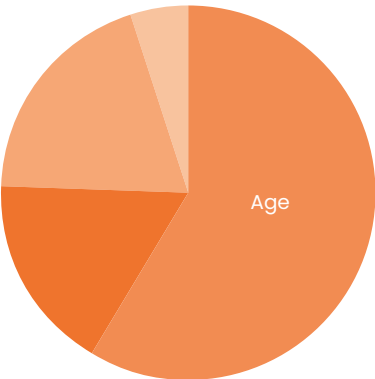


SOURCE: US CENSUS BUREAU QUICKFACTS

PUTNAM COUNTY *Population Estimate: 36,726 (2020)*



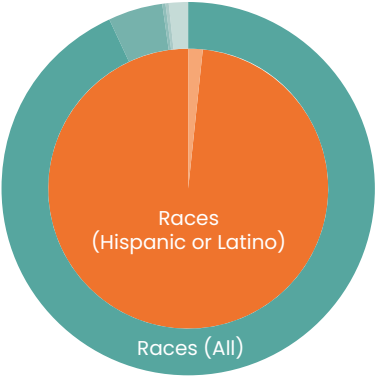
- 1.5% Two or More Races
- 1.2% Asian Alone
- 0.4% American Indian and Alaska Native
- 3.8% Black or African American
- 93% White
- 91.4% White, Not Hispanic or Latino
- 2% Hispanic or Latino



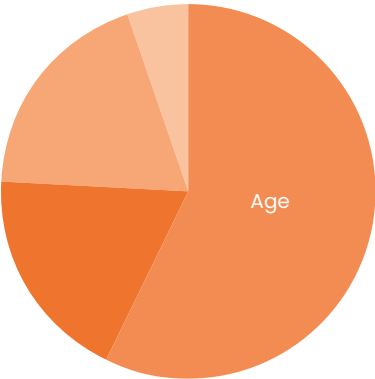
- 4.9% Persons 0-4
- 19.3% Persons 5-17
- 58.7% Persons 18-64
- 17.1% Persons 65 and older

SOURCE: US CENSUS BUREAU QUICKFACTS

SULLIVAN COUNTY *Population Estimate: 20,817 (2020)*



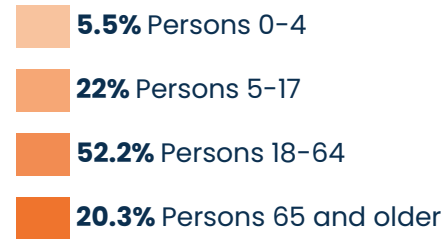
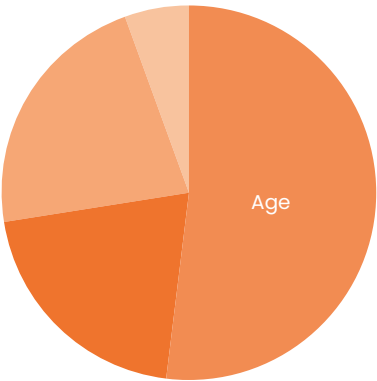
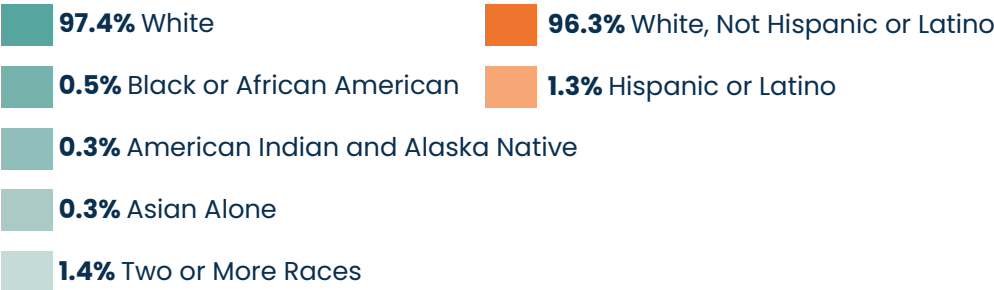
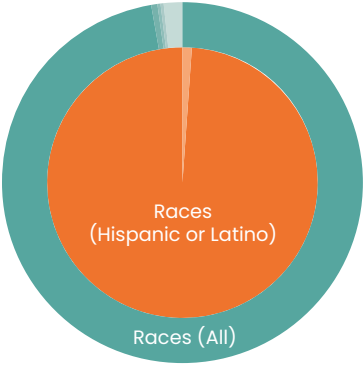
- 1.4% Two or More Races
- 0.3% Asian Alone
- 0.3% American Indian and Alaska Native
- 4.9% Black or African American
- 93.1% White
- 91.6% White, Not Hispanic or Latino
- 1.8% Hispanic or Latino



- 5.1% Persons 0-4
- 19% Persons 5-17
- 57.4% Persons 18-64
- 18.5% Persons 65 and older

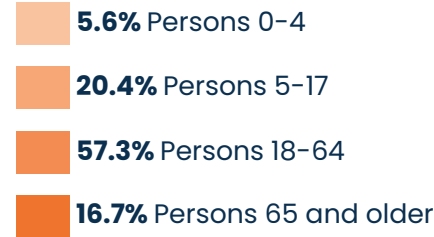
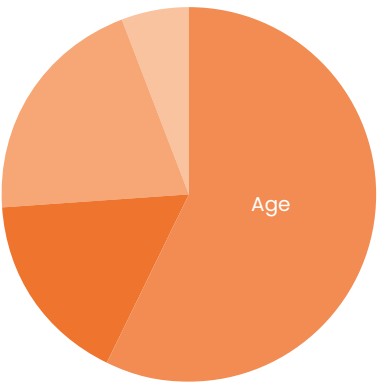
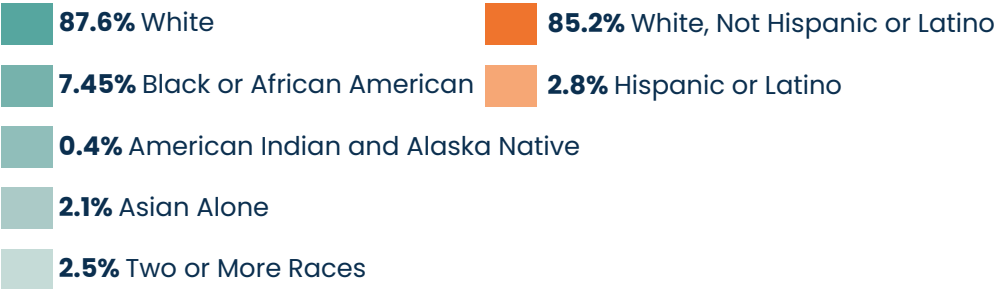
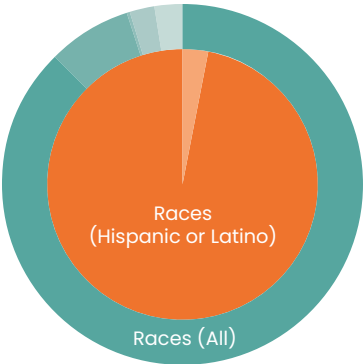
SOURCE: US CENSUS BUREAU QUICKFACTS

VERMILLION COUNTY *Population Estimate: 15,439 (2020)*



SOURCE: US CENSUS BUREAU QUICKFACTS

VIGO COUNTY *Population Estimate: 106,153 (2020)*



SOURCE: US CENSUS BUREAU QUICKFACTS

RESILIENT



**CHALLENGES
& VISION OF
RESILIENT**

To achieve economic resiliency, a region must identify both challenges and opportunities across the board. In 2018, the Terre Haute Chamber of Commerce developed West Central 2025. This process coordinated discussion about regional representation throughout West Central Indiana and created an action-oriented network of individuals and groups who are familiar with each other's assets and can work to advance opportunities for regional development. Through West Central 2025, regional stakeholders conducted a SWOT analysis depicting West Central Indiana's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats on a local and regional level. This analysis determined the following areas that the region must improve to drive further economic growth and community development:

- Talent Attraction
- Talent Development
- Talent Connection

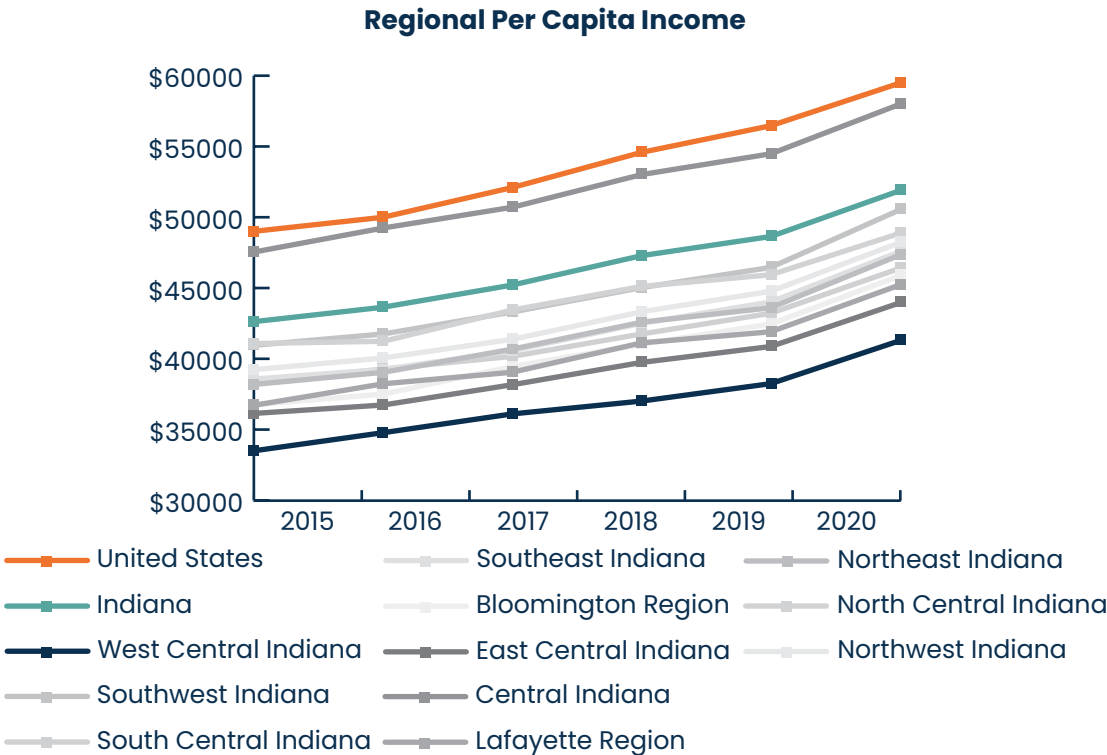
During 2020, the region, along with the rest of the world, experienced unprecedented hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This global pandemic challenged the way in which all citizens in the region interacted with one another and altered everyday life. As stores closed, restaurants shut down, businesses moved to at-home formats, industry work was cut in half, and education was forced to adapt, preexisting problems in the region were exacerbated or seen in a new light. The pandemic also brought forth new struggles in themes relating to the workforce, education, health, and our overall quality of life while also exposing weaknesses in the framework of the region's underlying economic- and community-related vulnerabilities.

Building upon this regional framework, Resilient focuses on the major regional challenges that were caused and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, with a specific focus on issues pertaining to population decline and lagging economic growth. To address this, the region began to look at all facets of life and to actively seek ways to improve them for the individuals living in West Central Indiana. We also sought to identify key strengths that will serve as the building blocks for resiliency. To build a regional economy that can withstand future crises, West Central Indiana must be capable of maintaining economic growth through retaining and attracting a diverse, productive population.

The data depicted below illustrates our region's current challenges regarding population decline and economic growth.

POPULATION GROWTH DEMOGRAPHICS

For the past two decades, West Central Indiana has had the lowest per capita personal income of any region in Indiana.



COMPONENTS OF POPULATION CHANGE (2010–2020)

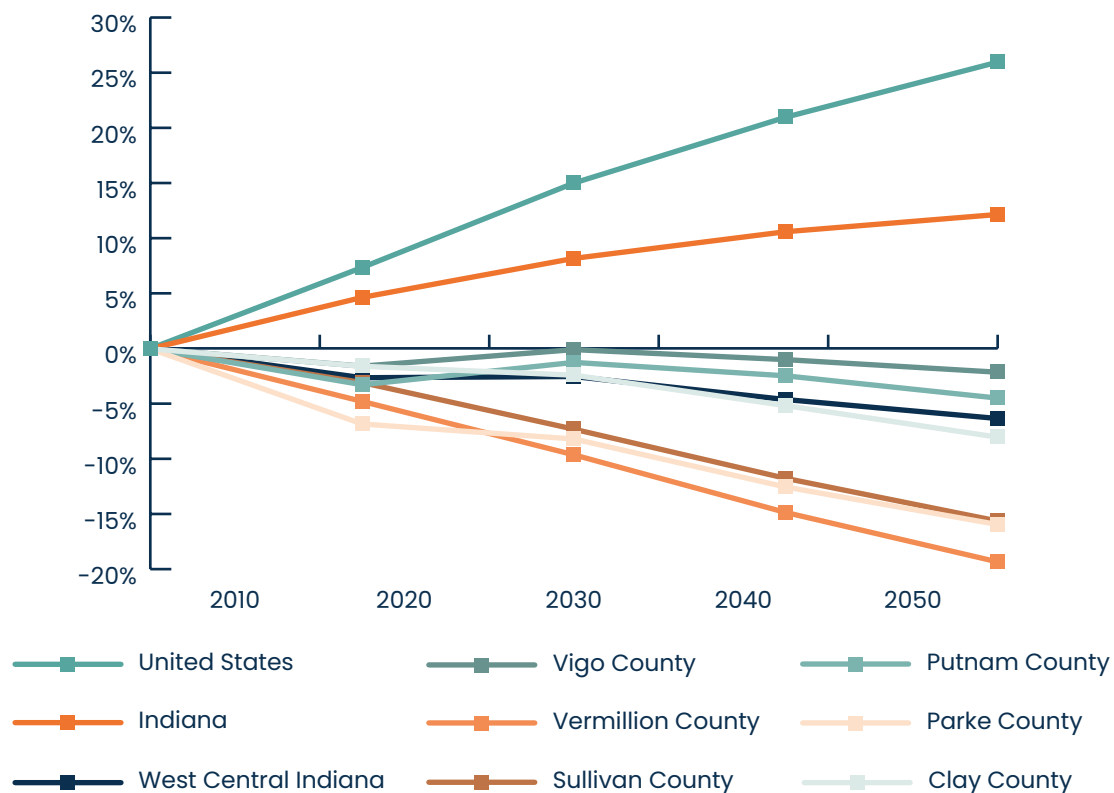
The primary driver of population decline in the region over the past 10 years is domestic out-migration. Residents are choosing to leave West Central Indiana for other parts of the state or the country, and this is not being offset by international migration to the region or so-called “natural increase” as we see in the state as a whole.

County	Total Births	Total Deaths	Net Nat- ural Pop- ulation Change	Total Interna- tional Migration	Total Domestic Migration	Net Mi- gration	Residual	Net Pop- ulation Change
Clay County	3,266	3,120	146	5	-798	-793	-3	-650
Parke County	2,021	1,688	333	11	-829	-818	7	-478
Putnam County	3,726	3,640	86	402	-957	-555	-3	-472
Sullivan County	2,287	2,441	-154	-27	-713	-740	-1	-895
Ver- million County	1,690	2,178	-488	104	-498	-394	1	-881
Vigo County	12,774	11,955	819	1,610	-3,626	-2016	-45	-1,242
West Central Indiana	25,764	25,022	742	2,105	-7,421	-5,316	-44	-4,618
Indiana	849,083	637,936	211,147	109,031	-47,210	61,821	-2,065	270,903

SOURCE: US CENSUS BUREAU

POPULATION ESTIMATES

On our current trajectory, West Central Indiana is projected to continue steadily losing population over the next 30 years, declining by nearly five percent by 2050, unless we reverse the trend.

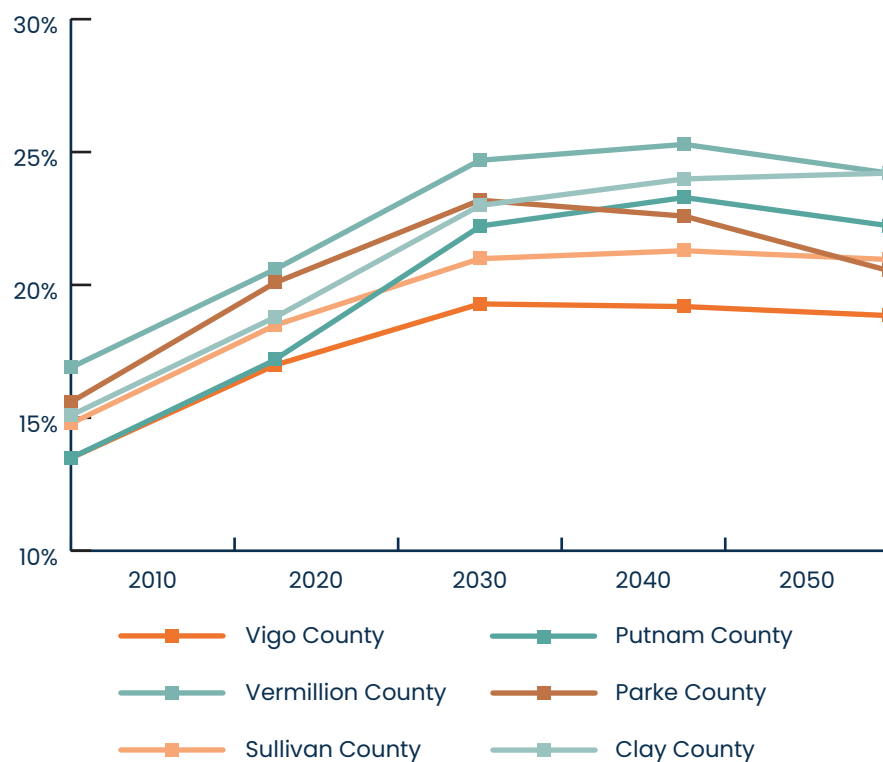


SOURCE: INDIANA BUSINESS RESEARCH CENTER, US CENSUS BUREAU

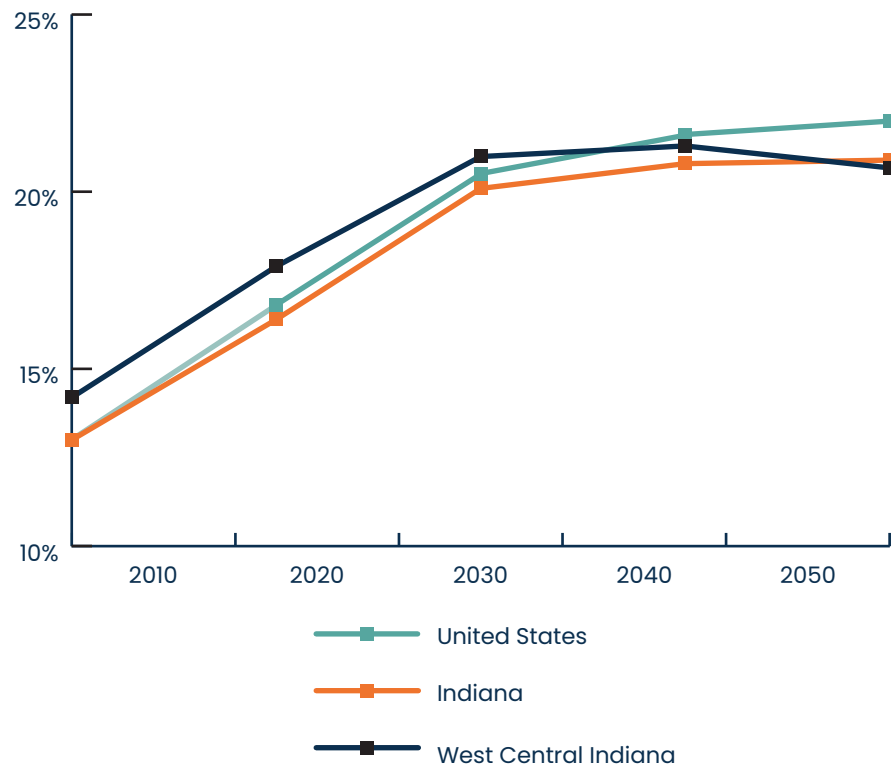
POPULATION ESTIMATES BREAKDOWN

While experiencing overall decline, our region's population is projected to become disproportionately older, peaking at 21.3 percent of the total population in 2040. This demographic shift presents both unique challenges and opportunities that we will discuss in the Transportation and Aging Care sections.

Senior Population Estimates (65+)



SOURCE: INDIANA BUSINESS RESEARCH CENTER, US CENSUS BUREAU



SOURCE: INDIANA BUSINESS RESEARCH CENTER, US CENSUS BUREAU

RESILIENT



DESCRIPTION OF
RESILIENT

Thrive West Central announced the launch of Resilient in December 2020. Resilient is meant to address systemic issues and challenges caused or enhanced by the COVID-19 pandemic and to provide communities with resources to address these challenges. Resilient was made possible through a \$400,000 Economic Development Administration (EDA) CARES Act Recovery Assistance grant.

Thrive spent eight months engaging and conversing with a diverse group of stakeholders to gain a clear picture of the regional challenges and opportunities posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. This comprehensive data collection and analysis process culminated in this publication, which will serve as a guide for communities as they look to emerge from the pandemic and prepare for future economic crises.

The next steps will center on preliminary recommendations, building collaborative, focused coalitions, and establishing success metrics along with an implementation plan. The data generated through Resilient was also included in West Central Indiana's application for the Indiana Economic Development Corporation's READI grant program, with the hope of securing funding for bold projects and initiatives which would also aid in the region's overall economic recovery.

METHODOLOGY AND TIMELINE

Over the course of 12 months starting in December 2020, Thrive West Central collected data, engaged with community members, and determined next steps for the region.

RESILIENT TIMELINE

DECEMBER 2020 – MARCH 2021: LAUNCH OF RESILIENT AND FIRST SURVEY

Thrive West Central held a virtual press conference to announce the launch of Resilient and released their initial COVID-19 Economic Recovery Survey.



MARCH – APRIL 2021: DEVELOPMENT OF SECOND SURVEY AND FORUM STRATEGY

Thrive West Central analyzed the data from the first survey and identified gaps and trends pertaining to regional recovery and resiliency. Thrive used the most salient conclusions from their analysis of the first survey to develop a second, more detailed survey and questions for the public forums.

APRIL – JUNE 2021: DEPLOYMENT OF SECOND SURVEY AND COMMUNITY FORUMS

Thrive West Central hosted one in-person and one virtual focus group in each of the six counties and distributed the second Economic Recovery Survey. Both in-person and virtual forums consisted of two facilitators to ask questions and prompt discussion and two note takers to keep an anonymous record of the comments made during the forums.

JUNE – SEPTEMBER 2021: REVIEW OF EXISTING DATA, COLLECTION OF ADDITIONAL DATA, DEVELOPMENT OF FINALIZED OUTLINE

Thrive West Central collected and organized data from both surveys and the public forums to identify the main themes that would be the focus of Resilient. In addition, Thrive conducted secondary research to supplement the results of the forums and surveys. Thrive identified the following overarching themes upon analysis of the data:

- Workforce and Business Development
- Healthcare
- Quality of Life and Needs
- Education



OCTOBER 2021 – MARCH 2022: WRITING, REVISION, AND DESIGN

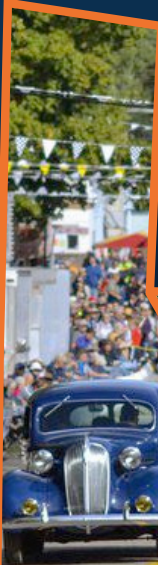
Thrive West Central reviewed multiple drafts before approving the final plan and corresponding implementation guide.



APRIL – JUNE 2022: LAUNCH, EDUCATION, AND ADOPTION

Through this cohesive, collaborative effort, Resilient lays the foundation for communities within West Central Indiana to overcome the impacts caused by COVID-19 and prepare for future economic crises.

RESILIENT



**PURPOSE &
GOALS OF
RESILIENT**



GOAL #1

To identify the most pressing resiliency-related challenges and opportunities in our region, and to spur formal acknowledgment of and action towards addressing these issues.



GOAL #2

To identify public, private, and nonprofit resources that local/regional leaders can utilize in pursuit of addressing these issues.



GOAL #3

To provide a unified framework for how communities in our region can pursue and build resiliency and prosperity.

RESILIENT



**OVERARCHING
THEMES**

Through the Resilient data collection and analysis process, we identified four main themes of resiliency-related challenges in West Central Indiana:



WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT



HEALTHCARE



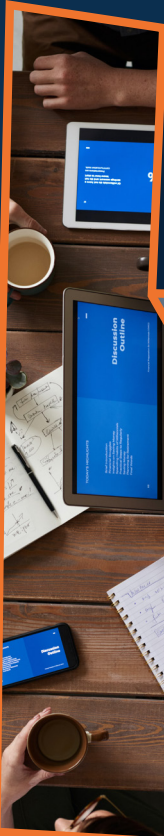
QUALITY OF LIFE AND COMMUNITY NEEDS



EDUCATION

We deeply explored these four main themes of Resilient, thus revealing sub-themes that painted a clearer picture of gaps in resiliency in West Central Indiana. Through the Resilient plan, communities within our region will see common challenges we face and begin developing strategies and leverage our assets to create resilience to prepare for future economic growth and crises. All identified sub-themes were noted as challenges during the pandemic; however, many of the sub-themes were prevalent within West Central Indiana before the start of the pandemic but were enhanced or felt more acutely due to COVID-19.

RESILIENT



**WORKFORCE
& BUSINESS
DEVELOPMENT**

Throughout the Resilient data collection process, workforce and business development was immediately identified as a major theme. The COVID-19 pandemic suddenly pushed uncertainty into the hearts of business owners and employees, as on March 23, 2020, the state-wide stay-at-home mandate “Hunker Down Hoosiers” was issued, urging Hoosiers to stay at home for nearly two weeks to slow the spread of COVID-19. What was supposed to be two weeks turned into a month as Indiana’s stay-at-home order was extended to May 1, 2020. Even when the executive order ended, public health mandates were still placed on businesses to control capacity to limit the amount of people within stores and restaurants. Pandemic-related restrictions also affected businesses in manufacturing, agriculture, and education. Many employees in the region were required to complete routine temperature and health checks and faced disruptions due to mandatory quarantines and changes to schedules. While all of these were necessary to keep workers and consumers safe, the impact on these workforces is undeniable. This experience forced businesses to pivot and adapt to the environment as new information was released daily. Counties saw record high unemployment rates, with some reaching over 16% unemployment, local businesses had to shut their doors to in-person shoppers, busy downtowns saw significantly less traffic, and our sense of normalcy was unexpectedly altered.

As workforce and business development was identified as a main theme, the following sub-themes were recognized through discussions at the focus groups and responses from the surveys:

- Business Resources and Development
- Broadband Development and Digital Inclusion
- Talent Retention and Attraction
- Training and Education
- Childcare

BUSINESS RESOURCES AND DEVELOPMENT

OVERVIEW

West Central 2025 identified a variety of regional assets designed to spur business growth and development in West Central Indiana. Specifically, these assets included the region’s Chambers of Commerce, entrepreneurial hubs, and economic development organizations that help distribute business resources and spur business development. While these organizations were in place and active prior to the pandemic, focus groups, surveys, and supplemental research still identified business resources and opportunities for development as a major challenge in the region.

IMPACT OF COVID-19

During COVID-19, many businesses were forced to close their doors and had to pivot in order for their business to survive. The original Economic Recovery Survey showed 43.43% of respondents stated that their employer’s economic situation worsened since the start of the pandemic, while 39.65% stated that their organization stayed the same. Through this response, industries that were hit hardest by the pandemic included Education, Food/Hospitality, Marketing/Communications, Transportation, and Non-Profits/Charities.

Sector	Worsened	Stayed the Same	Improved
Education	68.8%	25%	6.3%
Food/Hospitality	68.42%	15.79%	15.79%
Marketing/Communication	66.7%	0%	33.3%
Transportation	66.7%	33.3%	0%
Non-Profit/Charitable	49.1%	37.7%	13.2%

COVID-19 made it impossible to conduct business as normal. Through the focus groups, it was identified that each county in the region felt the strain from the pandemic in different ways. For example, stakeholders from Parke County noted that COVID-19 put tremendous stress on their local businesses as it caused the cancellation of the 2020 Covered Bridge Festival. The Parke County Covered Bridge Festival is Indiana’s largest festival with over ten locations with food and vendors and welcomes millions of visitors from across

the state and the nation. In Parke County's focus group, one mentioned that some businesses were 90% dependent on that festival. Additionally, other counties within the region noted that challenges stemmed from the public's lack of knowledge on where to go for information regarding the latest updates on the pandemic and related policies and procedures.

Throughout the focus groups, many stakeholders identified local, state, and federal organizations that distributed information and provided resources to local businesses amid the pandemic. Frequently mentioned local resources included the following:

- Chambers of Commerce
- West Central Indiana Small Business Development Center
- United Way of the Wabash Valley
- Wabash Valley Community Foundation
- Local economic development organizations

Frequently mentioned state and federal organizations included the following:

- Indiana Small Business Development Corporation (ISBDC)
- Small Business Administration (SBA)
- Feeding America
- Indiana Association of County Commissioners

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the key role that West Central Indiana's local business development organizations had in ensuring that individuals and businesses were able to obtain the most up-to-date information pertaining to CDC guidelines concerning safely reopening, funding opportunities, and any additional information and resources they could use during this time of uncertainty. While each county within West Central Indiana brings unique perspectives and assets, the region was able to work with different organizations across county lines to ensure all had access to the information they needed to keep their doors open.

Specifically, those who responded to the Economic Recovery Survey identified the following four factors as areas where their organization needed the most help:

- marketing and connecting people to their business
- access to capital
- access to key supplies and products
- technical skills training for me and my staff

One of the main sources of pandemic relief funding for Indiana communities amid the pandemic came from the Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA), which redirected Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds towards COVID-19 relief efforts. Through analyzing phase 1 and 2 of OCRA's COVID-19 Relief Program, Thrive West Central found that West Central Indiana received fewer funds compared to other areas in the state in both nominal terms and funding per population (OCRA, 2020). This lack of funding could be attributed to the region's lack of need for COVID-19 relief funds, lack of awareness and understanding regarding such funds, and/or lack of capacity to apply.

Thrive's supplemental research also identified that West Central Indiana's lenders approved 250 small businesses for 7(a) loans for more than 10-year periods with an average of more than \$530,000, well above the state average. The region still came in last in the state for number of loans approved (SBA, 2020), suggesting small businesses may face barriers when it comes to tapping into this programming or similar financial options.

In addition to these funding opportunities, businesses across the country were encouraged to apply for Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loans, an additional funding source made possible through the CARES Act, to help with operating expenses and to retain employees. These loans were used by many businesses to pay, hire, or rehire employees who had been furloughed at the beginning of the pandemic. Like other funding sources, West Central Indiana fell below statewide averages in terms of the number of loans approved (even when adjusting for population) and the amount of loan funding awarded. This suggests that businesses in the area were either not in need of these funds as much as other areas or that there was a lack of awareness of the opportunities available. The following statistics display the number of PPP loans received by each county as well as the total value and average loan size (Paycheck Protection Program Loans, 2020).

Location	Total Loans	Total Loan Value	Average Loan	Loans Approved Per 10,000 in 2019 Population
Clay	802	\$35,336,005	\$44,060	--
Parke	267	\$16,975,338	\$61,283	--
Putnam	828	\$43,111,115	\$52,004	--
Sullivan	408	\$22,284,541	\$54,619	--
Vigo	2,509	\$195,764,225	\$78,056	--
Vermillion	256	\$14,419,806	\$56,327	--
West Central Indiana	5,070	\$327,891,030	\$64,545	232.24
Indiana	191,988	\$14,000,000,000	\$72,674	257.70

This data reinforces that it is important to ensure that businesses have the resources they need in order to access capital. If individuals and businesses do not know where these resources are or how to access the tools they need to successfully pivot, West Central Indiana will be faced with challenges that it could have easily adapted to otherwise. In moving forward, it is imperative that the region raises awareness about where individuals and businesses can access information and resources needed to achieve stability and success, even in an economic crisis.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY

- Develop a plan to attract angel investors to West Central Indiana.
- Convene local Chambers of Commerce, the regional ISBDC, and other relevant regional organizations to develop an inventory of all regional workforce and business development resources, determine gap needs, and create an external communications strategy that will assist businesses and workers in engaging with existing resources.
- Exploit Thrive West Central Indiana's revolving loan program through facilitated community round tables and a comprehensive marketing strategy, in partnership with business development organizations and financial institutions within the region. Pursue opportunities to expand the revolving loan fund and broaden its reach.
- Convene local banks for a discussion on methods by which to make financial capital more easily accessible to small businesses, including the possibility of creating a regional small business grant program.

BROADBAND DEVELOPMENT AND DIGITAL INCLUSION

OVERVIEW

Broadband has been at the top of the conversation since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. As there are many rural communities located in West Central Indiana, reliable broadband access is a pressing need. The state of Indiana recognized the importance of broadband connectivity and enacted Next Level Connections, the state's broadband grant program. The state awarded over \$79 million in the past two rounds of the program and the third-round plans to invest \$270 million in funding towards improving broadband access and adoption. West Central Indiana knew that broadband access was important to function in the 21st Century; however, COVID-19 dramatically heightened the need for reliable internet, and not all areas of West Central Indiana were prepared to transition smoothly into this new reality. Through the Resilient data collection and focus groups, broadband continued to be at the center of discussions as it is now woven into many aspects of everyday life. 56.8% of respondents identified "lack of or limited access to high-speed internet" as a community issue.

It is important to note the difference between Broadband Development and Digital inclusion. The FCC defines broadband internet as "a minimum of 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload speed that is provided via multiple types of technology including fiber optics, wireless, cable, DSL, and satellite (Verizon, 2021)." Digital inclusion refers to the activities necessary to ensure all individuals and communities can connect

to affordable and reliable broadband services, utilize devices that can connect to the internet, and access digital literacy training. Without reliable broadband and access to tools and resources needed to connect, students, employers and employees, and individuals were denied access or struggled to adapt to the new sense of normalcy that was created to counteract the pandemic.

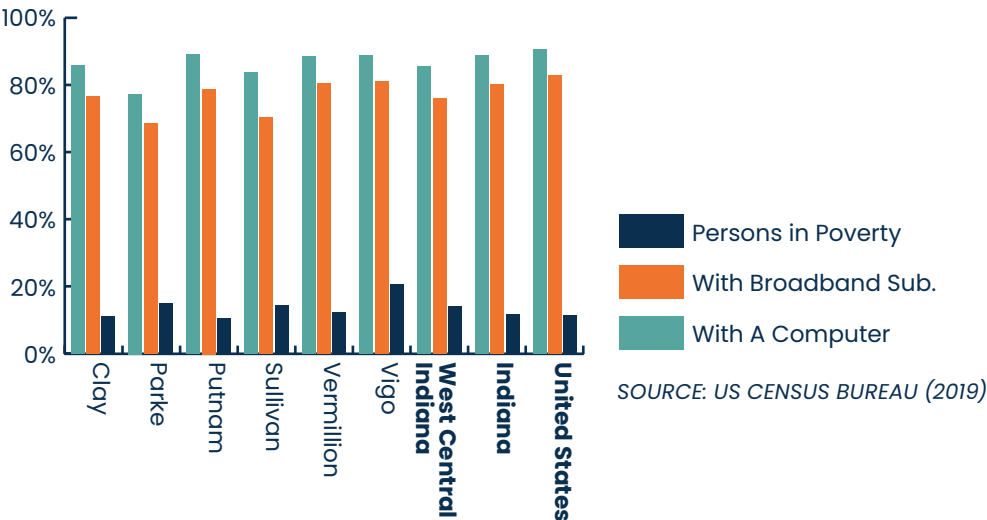
Through Resilient, it was apparent that reliable broadband access was a necessity during the COVID-19 pandemic. Particularly in workforce development as businesses closed their doors. Many employers and employees turned to conducting business online and pivoted to a virtual setting and social media to promote new business structures.

IMPACT OF COVID-19

The Resilient focus groups highlighted how digital technology and high-speed internet were beneficial during the pandemic as individuals and organizations were able to utilize virtual programs like Zoom, Google Meet, and Microsoft Teams to conduct business meetings, church services, e-learning, and more. As businesses learned to adapt, working from home allowed employees and businesses a certain degree of flexibility. The focus groups highlighted how virtual meetings were positive due to more people being able to attend, less travel time between meetings, greater efficiency of the meetings, expanded communications, reach of resources in other communities, and engagement with more people outside the community. With an increased use in digital technology, the pandemic allowed people to live and work in separate places (e.g., live in Terre Haute and work in Indianapolis).

While digital technology and broadband were positively received throughout the region, gaps were identified in regard to connectivity throughout the region and digital inclusion. Across each focus group, broadband was found to be lacking in many parts of the region due to the area being largely rural as well as affordability when it comes to broadband services. The focus groups noted that the rural parts of West Central Indiana struggle connecting with devices and had to utilize other sources including cell phone hotspots or local businesses and libraries’ free Wi-Fi. In addition, it was also noted that poor connectivity and lack of broadband could have a negative impact on low-income families who may not have access to the internet and technology, highlighting the need for affordable and reliable broadband for residents. It is also important to note that the focus groups stated that broadband has been positively received, many would like to find a balance between in-person and virtual as many believe face-to-face interaction is important.

To understand barriers that currently exist to full internet connectivity within the region, Thrive West Central conducted supplemental research into broadband access in each county. The data from the table below highlights the connectivity gap that exists within each county in the region.



West Central Indiana lies behind both state and national averages in terms of internet connectivity, which also correlates with an above-average poverty rate.

COVID-19 forced businesses and employees into a situation where they had to adapt and adapt quickly.

Reliable broadband access is a tool that would have allowed businesses and employees to easily transition to a virtual work setting. Since not all individuals within the region were able to access this, this gap hampered COVID-19 recovery efforts. If nothing is done to increase the connectivity within the region, businesses and employees will run into similar obstacles in future related crises.

CASE STUDY

In March 2021, Pike County, Indiana conducted a survey of nearly 700 households to gather information on broadband access and affordability throughout the county. Through the survey, the county was able to collect precise data on locations with and without internet service, the frequency at which various types of broadband were utilized, internet speeds, and how much county residents currently pay and would be willing to pay for internet service. This will allow the county to target its investments in broadband and its efforts to seek state and federal funding.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY

- Leverage the West Central Digital Inclusion Alliance to identify the most pressing digital inclusion/digital literacy needs in the region and develop pilot programs to address these needs that can be scaled if proven successful.
- Conduct a regional broadband survey to evaluate the state of broadband availability, affordability, and quality across the region, with an eye towards helping private providers and local units of government make smarter, more targeted investments in broadband capabilities.
- Develop relationships with non-traditional internet providers (e.g., StarLink) and evaluate the possibility of investing public and private resources in bringing these providers to West Central Indiana to fill gaps that other ISPs cannot.
- Pursue funding from the Indiana Next Level Broadband program, the USDA Reconnect program, and other public sources of broadband funding as available.
- Develop taskforces within each county to begin the process of becoming a Broadband Ready Community.
 - Within West Central Indiana, the City of Brazil, Parke County, and Vermillion County are already established as Certified Broadband Ready Communities. To regionalize this effort, the remaining counties within the region are encouraged to complete this process.
- Develop strong relationships with the Indiana Broadband Office and broadband providers to fully capitalize on the Broadband Ready Community designation.

TALENT RETENTION AND ATTRACTION

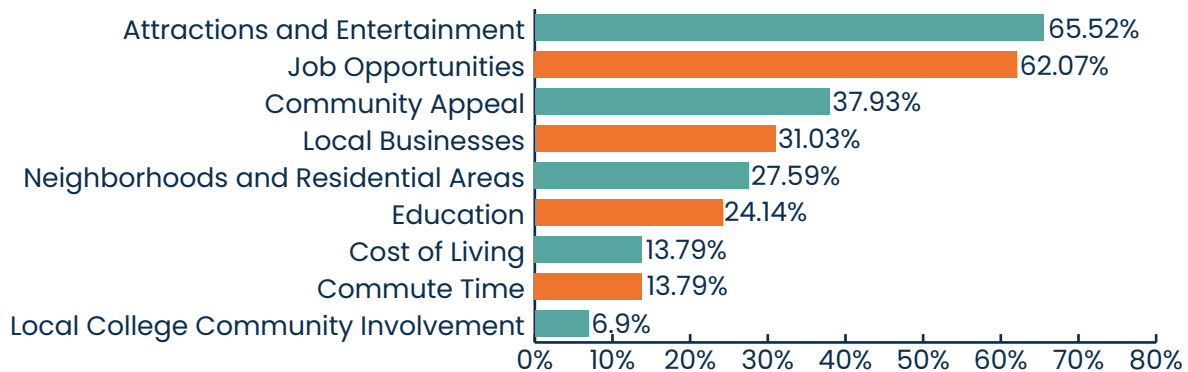
OVERVIEW

West Central Indiana is home to approximately 25,000 college students from five higher education institutions including DePauw University, Indiana State University, Ivy Tech Community College – Terre Haute, Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, and Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College. Many of these college students come from outside West Central Indiana and have been calling this region home for at least two to four years. In a SWOT analysis conducted by West Central 2025, regional stakeholders listed higher education as a key strength, while lack of a skilled workforce and population decline were noted as weaknesses and threats. The region has found that the challenge comes in retaining talent post-graduation.

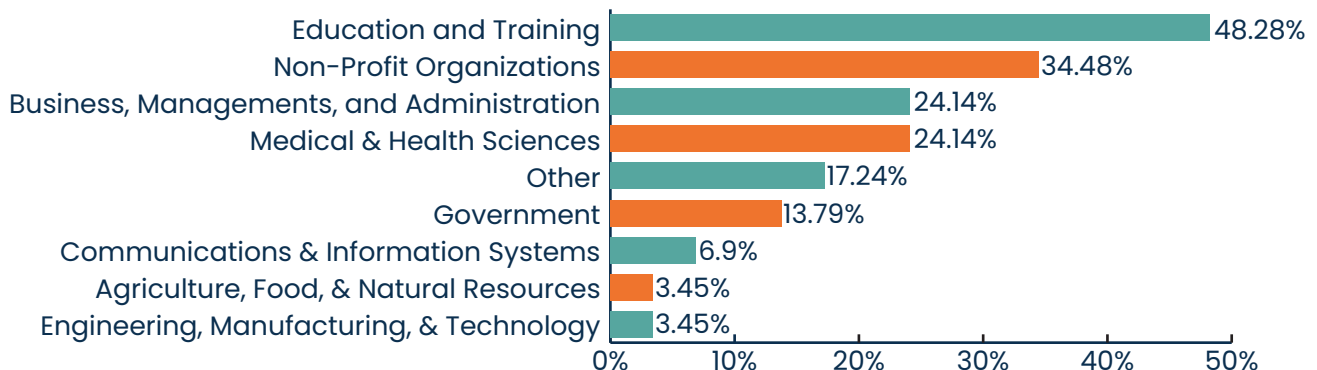
West Central Indiana's 21st Century Talent initiative identified collaborative partnerships and strategies to help move the region towards its overarching Talent Attraction goal to halt projected population decline and move the projected loss to a negligible number by 2025.

According to a report by the Lumina Foundation, the higher education attainment rate in Indiana is 36.73%, while the rate in West Central Indiana is 30.40%, meaning less than 1 in 3 adults in West Central Indiana earns at least a two-year degree. The Lumina Foundation tracks educational attainment for all 50 states by tracking the post high school attainment of Americans ages 25 to 64. With higher education being such a strong asset within the region, the assumption would be that West Central Indiana would perform well in this area, but instead, the talent is not staying, and the talent is not achieving.

In 2018, college students in West Central Indiana were asked to participate in the West Central Indiana Graduate and Undergraduate Survey that would assess their feelings towards West Central Indiana and the likelihood of staying in the region following college graduation. Students were asked how likely they were to settle in West Central Indiana after college on a scale of 0 – 100, with 0 being not likely at all and 100 being very likely. The average answer was 56. This number rose to 71 when participants were asked about Indiana overall as opposed to just West Central Indiana. Respondents indicated that the main reasons they did not plan to stay in West Central Indiana were a lack of job opportunities and a lack of attractions and entertainment. The following percentages reveal the rankings of how college and graduate students would improve the West Central Region to improve talent attraction and retainment:



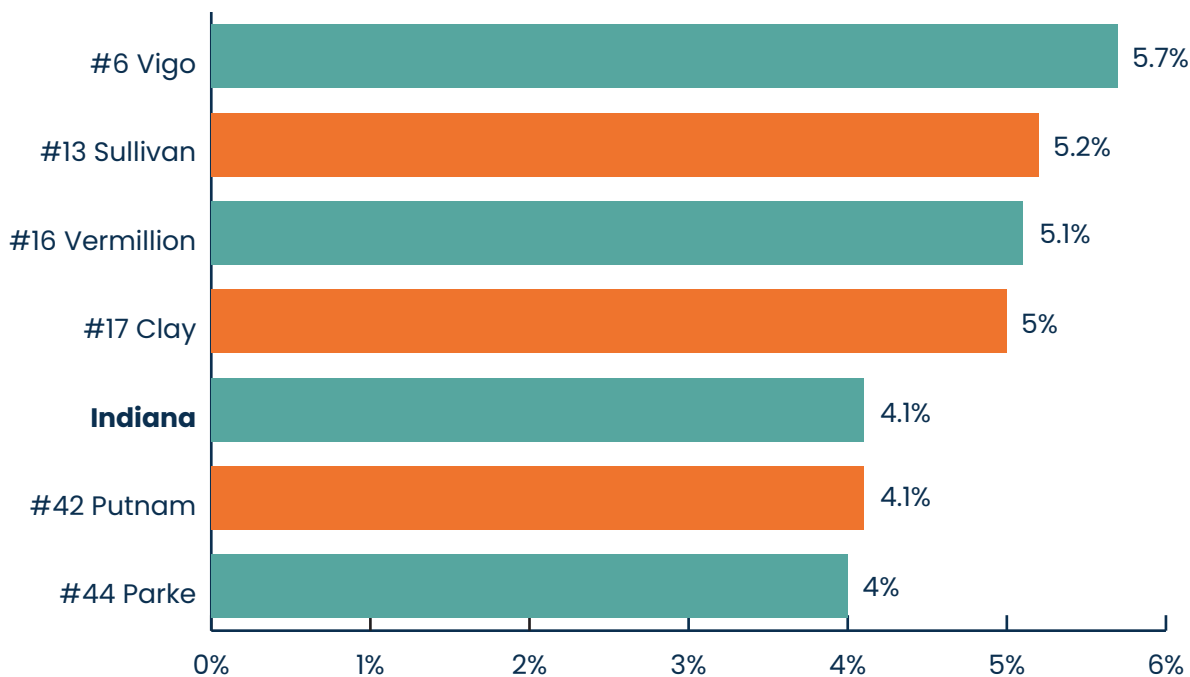
In addition to this, students were asked how confident they were in finding relevant work in the region. Using the same scale as above, the average answer came to 54, showing a split in opinions among students. To take this data further, the survey then asked what industries students were interested in working in. The answers were as follows:



Despite these attitudes towards our region, students did also point out that there are benefits to staying in West Central Indiana. Participants ranked cost of living, education, and commute time from home to work as top characteristics that make West Central Indiana a place they would consider staying.

IMPACT OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic brought new challenges to talent attraction and retention as well as new information to light on what the region needs to retain top talent. Pandemic restrictions forced many assets to the region that functioned to attract talent and tourists to shut down as well. All higher education institutions sent their students home to conduct their studies virtually, sending many talented students outside of the region. At the onset of the pandemic, the region saw record breaking unemployment rates as the economy shut down and employees were sent home. In April 2020, Indiana's unemployment rate reached 16.9%. Data collected from Hoosiers by the Numbers for Economic Growth Region 7 (West Central Indiana) showed four of the six counties within the region had unemployment rates ranking higher than the state average in June 2021.



Across each focus group, community members highlighted how individuals are lacking both hard and soft skills needed for jobs that are available. In addition, attendees discussed the need for emphasis on a wide variety of careers within the region to retain talent. While all agreed that careers in STEM are important, some fear the specific push for it leads students away from West Central Indiana to bigger areas and does not allow them to understand the possibilities for their future. Regional leaders in education expressed a need to teach kids about the possibilities within the arts or skilled trades professions. By enhancing the experience of our students and allowing them to find a rewarding career within West Central Indiana, we can improve our talent retention percentages.

CASE STUDY

To address statewide concerns regarding attracting and retaining top talent, Purdue University launched the “Brain Gain Initiative” in 2018. Their strategy includes utilizing Tmap, an Indiana startup focused on connecting job candidates with appropriate opportunities, to target Purdue alumni, inviting them to relocate back to Indiana to fill high-quality professional roles. In 2021, Hamilton County launched a similar county-wide initiative and has identified more than 5,000 individuals who are interested in relocating to the area.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY

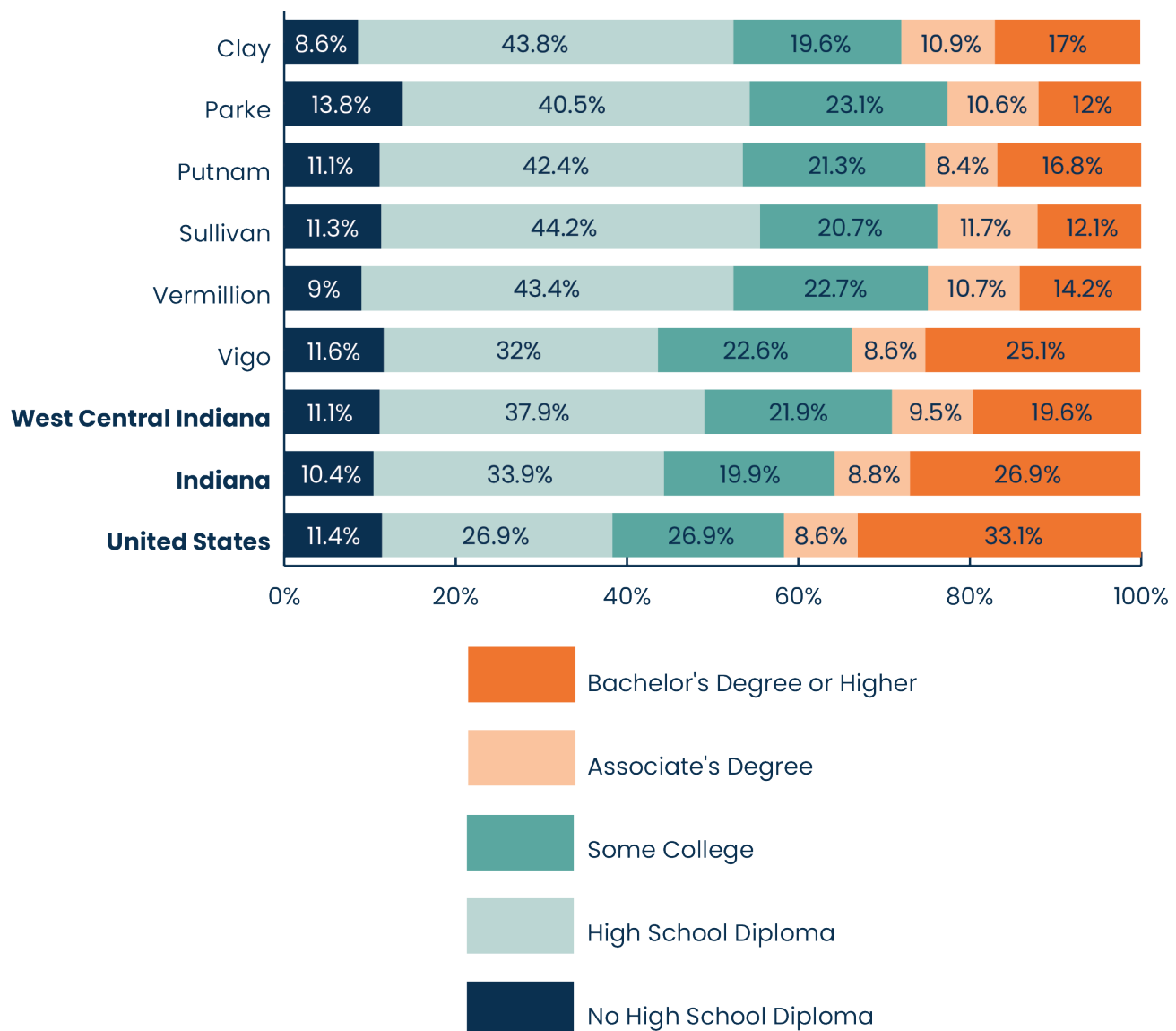
- Work with the 21st Century Talent designation task force and data collected in coordination with Resilient to formulate a Workforce Needs Assessment for the region.
 - Identify educational stakeholders (K-12/Higher Education) for gap needs and talent pipeline consultation.
 - Work with West Central Education Alliance to continue to expand internships, externships, apprenticeship, and certification opportunities for students as well as build relationships among businesses and organizations within the region.
- Advance educational offerings to promote future workforce development opportunities
 - Provide increased programs and opportunities through innovative technology and state-of-the-art facilities
- Explore opportunities to partner with higher educational institutions and their alumni associations as a channel to attract talent back to the region.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

OVERVIEW

Training and education are an important aspect to workforce development within the region and crucial to talent development in West Central Indiana. Specifically, this section targets those individuals who are about to enter the workforce or planning to continue their education as traditional college students and adult learners.

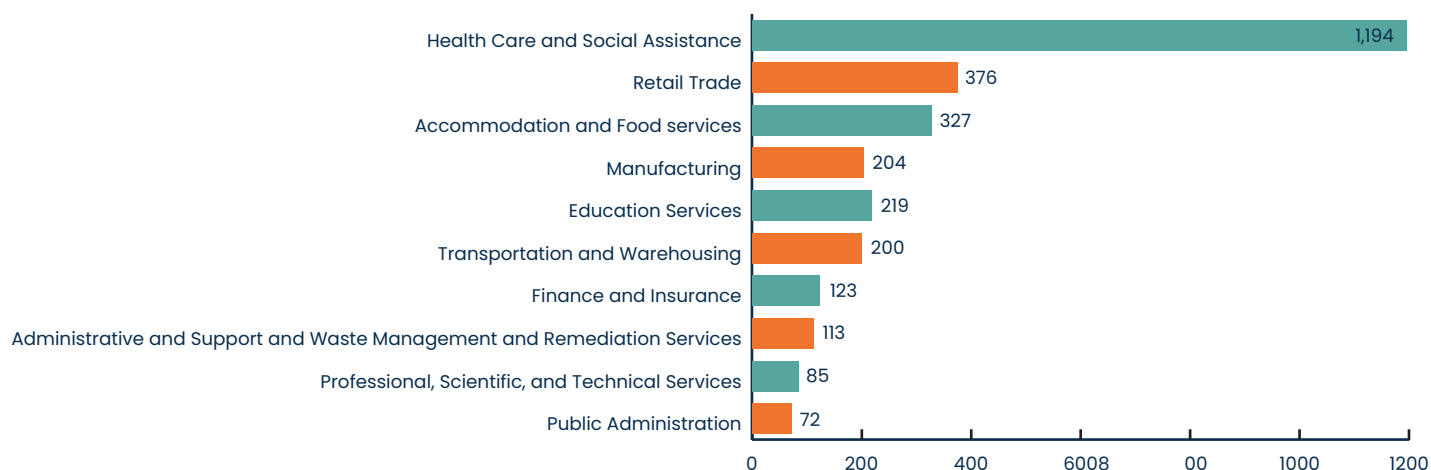
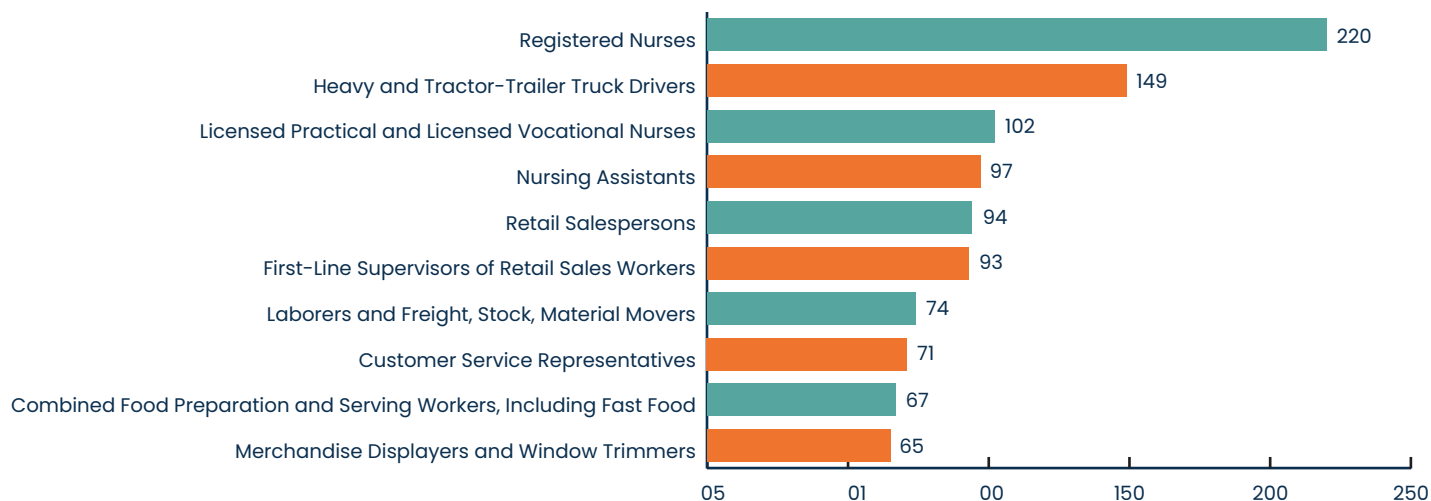
To understand the current state of the region, Thrive West Central conducted supplemental research on education attainment within the region:



SOURCE: 2019 AMERICAN COMMUNITY SURVEY

While West Central Indiana exceeds state and national averages in the proportion of adults that have a high school diploma, some college education, or an associate degree, the region lags in the prevalence of bachelor's and graduate degrees. The region also has a High School graduation rate of 79.02%, lower than the state of Indiana's rate of 87.69%

During 2020, Hoosiers by the Numbers, a data collection source from the Indiana Department of Workforce Development, examined the economic growth opportunities for the region through the growing job market and demand. This report identified the following as the top 10 occupations and industries and the number of job advertisements observed during the 3rd quarter of 2021.



SOURCE: HOOSIER BY THE NUMBERS

This understanding of advertised jobs and fields of work shows a mix of traditional and untraditional routes. Throughout the forums, many individuals identified a recent struggle among high school and college age students. Many are not taught the large array of possibilities in West Central Indiana. Some even felt that high school students are made to believe there are no options outside of achieving a traditional bachelor's degree. Individuals in the forums expressed a desire to see students more encouraged to pursue passions in fields relating to the arts, agriculture, or skilled trades. West Central Indiana has the potential to see opportunities for growth in the working population by enhancing the current offerings and understanding of education within the region.

IMPACT OF COVID-19

The Resilient surveys and focus groups brought new information to light in terms of the need for workforce development training and continuing education for those within the region. Each focus group within the region mentioned that prospective employees often lack soft skills pertaining to interpersonal communication, responsibility and dependability, work ethic, and critical/creative thinking necessary for success in the workforce. One focus group attendee stated, "Good attitudes are valued over actual skills – skills can be taught." Focus group participants also noted that drugs and alcohol are other challenges employers are facing as many individuals fail to pass a drug test when applying for jobs (see pp. 41-45 for more information on challenges with substance use in the region).

Focus group participants noted that individuals seeking employment often are missing basic skills like addressing a letter, computer skills, or basic math skills. The Economic Recovery Survey noted that 42.7% of respondents stated that workers without appropriate skills training is a community issue. Additionally, the second survey recorded the following job market preparations participants believe would benefit the region:

- 20 respondents stated enhanced (soft) skill/workforce training
- 14 respondents stated alternate (non-college) career path development
- 11 respondents stated better connections to employers/communities

Within one focus group, participants stated a potential solution is changing the mindset of required education, stating that you do not need a four-year college degree. This individual promoted the need to highlight trade schools and other career pathways.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY

- Create an inventory of higher education assets for the region to better understand resources available.
 - SWOT Analysis assessing every school's offerings
 - Include features such as athletic programs, education programs, AP vs. Dual Credit Courses, extracurricular activities, technology available, infrastructure needed, population estimates, etc.
- Further develop the 21st Century Talent Designation task force in the region to include more business leaders, utilizing K-12 and higher education asset inventory lists, with a focused approach utilizing specific metrics.
- Further develop the 21st Century Talent Designation to reach established goals by 2025.
 - Create collaborative strategies for talent retention.
 - Engage West Central Education Alliance, workforce building programs, and adult development initiatives.
 - Build potential partnerships between organizations.
- Further develop the West Central Education Alliance.
 - Utilize Duke Energy Education Grants to develop a College and Career Pathways program for high school juniors and seniors in order to create an understanding of varying pathways for students in the area.
 - Develop adult education programs to further workforce training initiatives.
 - Create an understanding of varying pathways for students in the area.
 - Incentivize degree obtainments for those considering careers in the required field.
 - Educate youth in West Central School systems about the possibilities of careers outside of college degrees.

CHILDCARE FACILITIES

OVERVIEW

Childcare capacity is a challenge across the state and nation, and West Central Indiana is no exception. Families struggle to access reliable, affordable, high-quality care for their children. Per data from the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration, West Central Indiana has the lowest concentration of licensed childcare centers among regions in the state but has the highest concentration of in-home centers per household. The same trend applies when looking at childcare spots available per child.

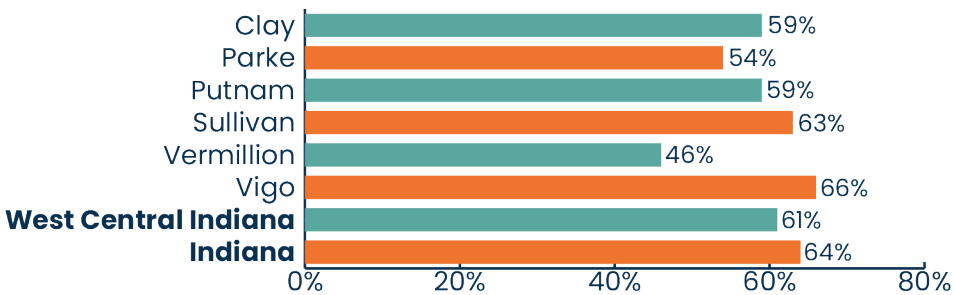
According to the Economic Policy Institute, the average annual cost of infant care in Indiana for 2020 was \$12,612, equaling a total of \$1,051 per month. This puts formal childcare out of reach for many families, forcing them to instead rely on a patchwork of family and friends to meet their needs, or keeping caregivers out of the workforce entirely. Indiana University's Public Policy Institute and Early Learning Indiana estimated in 2018 that Indiana loses out on nearly \$1.8 billion in economic activity every year due to inadequate childcare.

IMPACT OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic created new challenges for the region's workforce. As many employees were sent home during the height of the pandemic, families were placed in a new environment as home and work life overlapped. Childcare facilities were forced to close their doors and many individuals who relied on these facilities to take care of their children faced the once-unthinkable task of simultaneously juggling work and caregiving. Our focus groups found that many who were not in a position to perform their jobs remotely—

including those in the healthcare, service, or manufacturing industries, for example—had to leave their jobs or were unable to find new work because of the need to provide care for young children.

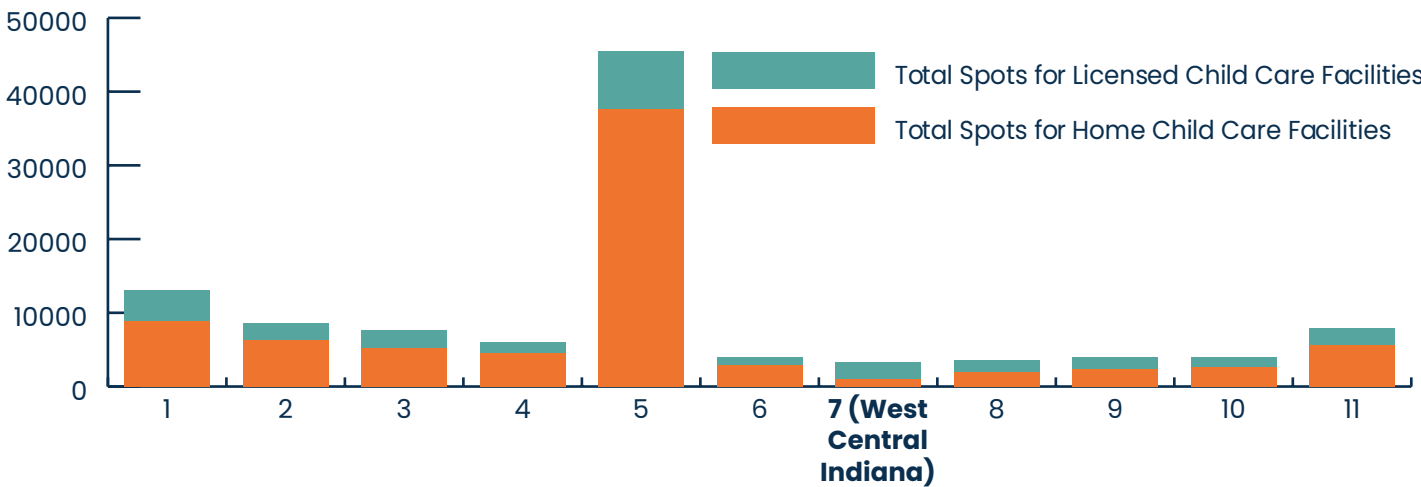
When looking at children ages 6 and under specifically, it is easy to see a gap in programs available for working parents. In 2020, the following percentages were estimated for the region for children who needed care due to all parents working (FSSA, 2020):



To meet the care needs for these high percentages, communities must be able to offer an adequate number of childcare options, especially with the extenuating circumstances of COVID-19. There are many different types of formal childcare programs that parents can seek, aside from family and friends. These can be faith-based programs, preschool, and basic childcare centers. The following chart demonstrates the lack of available programs available during 2020 in the region.

Known Early Care and Education Programs Available						
County	Family Child Care	Child Care Center	Head Start Program	Ministry	Preschool Program	Total Programs
Clay County	7	1	2	4	1	15
Parke County	11	0	1	2	0	14
Putnam County	8	3	3	3	3	20
Sullivan County	9	0	1	2	0	12
Vermillion County	6	1	2	1	2	12
Vigo County	134	11	3	4	14	166
West Central Indiana	175	16	12	16	20	239
Indiana	2,604	687	286	690	460	4,727

SOURCE: INDIANA EARLY LEARNING ADVISORY COMMITTEE



With this data, Thrive West Central is able to assess the way in which West Central Indiana compares to other Indiana regions when it comes to childcare centers. West Central Indiana currently has the highest number of children ages 4 and under per spot in a licensed childcare center with a total of 12.1 children per available spot. This indicates a dire need for increased licensed childcare centers in our region. However, West Central Indiana does have the lowest number of children ages 4 and under per spot in an at-home childcare center with a total of 5.38 per available spot. Combined, West Central Indiana has the 3rd best ratio for children and spots available in the state.

In addition to general childcare facilities, there is a need in counties to offer high-quality programs that promote early childhood development and learning. During the Resilient forums, participants identified a lack of quality childcare programs as a struggle. Furthermore, many programs in the region have long waitlists or are completely unavailable due to the number of children currently enrolled. A high-quality program meets specific needs set in place by the state of Indiana. Childcare centers that are seeking accreditation are given different levels based on their offerings to children. The state of Indiana's levels are as follows:

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

Levels 3 and 4 of these standards are considered high-quality by the state. Once these requirements are met, childcare centers are given the certification of their official rank. The following graph breaks down the different levels offered within each county (FSSA, 2020).

County	Levels				Not participating
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	
Clay County	1	2	5	2	5
Parke County	4	1	2	2	5
Putnam County	4	1	1	1	13
Sullivan County	4	0	0	0	8
Vermillion County	3	0	1	0	8
Vigo County	55	5	40	29	37
West Central Indiana	71	9	49	34	76
Indiana	1,122	219	1,045	469	1,872

In Sullivan County, there are no high-quality programs available, while there are only two or less available in Putnam and Vermillion Counties.

CASE STUDY

In 2018, Becker County, Minnesota, launched the Rural Childcare Innovation Project, a process designed to identify and implement community-based solutions to the area's childcare crisis. Outcomes included a detailed gap analysis of the number of childcare slots needed for children ages 5 and under, training and certification opportunities for providers, and community efforts to equip providers with necessary supplies at the onset of the pandemic. The initiative also fundamentally changed the way community leaders saw childcare businesses, viewing them as essential community infrastructure.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY

- Working with the United Way of the Wabash Valley and Chances and Services for Youth, utilize data collected over the last 24 months to shine light on the gap needs in childcare.

- Utilize the data to inform stakeholders in the region of the issues/opportunities.
- Help organizations working with this data reach their goals in a collaborative way/faster and more efficiently.
- Demonstrate the economic impact and business case for why accessible, high-quality childcare matters.
- Create a taskforce of business leaders and childcare providers from each county to evaluate and pursue available resources for expanding childcare opportunities in the region and to provide recommendations on best practices for employers who want to become more family-friendly and improve workforce attraction, attendance, and retention.

RESILIENT



HEALTHCARE

In March of 2020, the lives of American citizens changed in the most extreme way. Beginning in California, states began issuing stay-at-home orders due to the increasing cases of COVID-19. Because of this, many states had to shut down their essential services. Schools, hospitals, shelters, health facilities, public transportation, and more either shut down or limited the public's access to slow the spread of COVID-19. Although originally intended to improve public health, these actions created detrimental effects on the health of the nation's citizens, making access to care a concern for many.

Indiana, like many other states, worked to understand the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on Hoosiers. This included using funding from the CARES Act, enhancing Indiana's 211 phone service that helped Hoosiers across the state find the local resources they need, creating strategic campaigns with the goal of getting Hoosiers to "mask up," and assisting local businesses and healthcare systems to best serve the public. However, while many states tried to meet the diverse needs of their citizens, challenges still arose in society and exposed areas in which communities need to improve.

Healthcare is a wide topic that covers many smaller subcategories relating to mental health, aging care, transportation, physical care, pediatrics, etc. All counties within West Central Indiana deserve and need this access to public healthcare that allows them to live safely and comfortably. During the Resilient process, all counties identified an overarching need for increased access to care and more resources across West Central Indiana. While each county has a dedicated health center, many are still required to travel to Terre Haute, Indianapolis, or Greencastle for specialized care. During the pandemic, COVID-19 overwhelmed hospitals all over making it difficult for people to get healthcare that wasn't COVID-19 related. Non-emergency surgeries were either canceled or postponed, and many were advised not to visit medical facilities unless it was a dire emergency. Many hospitals, including ones in West Central Indiana, had to develop strategies for creating extra space to house patients, medical equipment, and essential workers. All of these hindered the public's access to basic healthcare, which was reflected in the regular emphasis on the topic during public forums.

Challenges related to healthcare access were compounded by the nature of the region's rural communities and the lack of awareness of the resources provided by our region. During the focus groups, individuals from all counties identified a lack of awareness for many of the health resources available to their citizens. There are many healthcare facilities in the area and many other organizations dedicated to aspects of health; however, their reach and marketing is not targeting the more rural areas of West Central Indiana. This has caused a gap in care for many.

Through the understanding created by the various Resilient surveys and forums about healthcare and public health in West Central Indiana, Thrive West Central identified the following sub-themes as among the most pressing regional healthcare challenges:

- Mental Health
- Substance Use
- Broadband and Telehealth
- Access (Transportation)
- Aging Care Factors

While all identified sub-themes were noted as challenges during the pandemic, many of the sub-themes were prevalent within West Central Indiana before the start of the pandemic but were enhanced due to COVID-19.

MENTAL HEALTH

OVERVIEW

One of the biggest issues identified from COVID-19 was a lack of understanding regarding mental health challenges and resources, as well as a lack of resources for those struggling with their mental health. This issue affected everyone including families, students, children, young adults, and the elderly. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many were faced with feelings of isolation, fear of the unknown, panic, depression, grief, and general anxiety. Naturally, these feelings had negative effects on mental health overall. In 2020, according to SAMHSA's survey outlining mental health in the state, Indiana citizens' mental health fell below average. In the United States, 79.6% of adult surveys answered that they had a positive view on the future outcome where only 72.0% of those in Indiana felt positive. When child/family units were surveyed, the Unit-

ed States averaged a 74.6% where Indiana residents averaged only 68.0%. Mental health is a challenge across the nation, and Indiana residents appear to be struggling to an even greater degree.

The COVID-19 pandemic changed people's daily routines and stripped individuals of social interaction, creating a national incident that most had never seen before, making it difficult to cope. When asked during surveys and focus groups about mental health during the pandemic, many participants reacted with general disdain over how much COVID-19 changed their daily lives and left them feeling hopeless, scared, and confused. Besides just their own lives, the constant news of increasing death and infections fed into the already negative feelings. Finding positive news stories and outlooks about the future became a daily struggle for most. During this time, many experienced feelings of burnout, significantly impacting the way they interact in their social lives, at work, and with their families. This has created issues in everyday life including people's inability to work, learn, and participate in everyday society. COVID-19 took away most of the social interaction for individuals, leading to a prolonged inability to connect.

IMPACT OF COVID-19

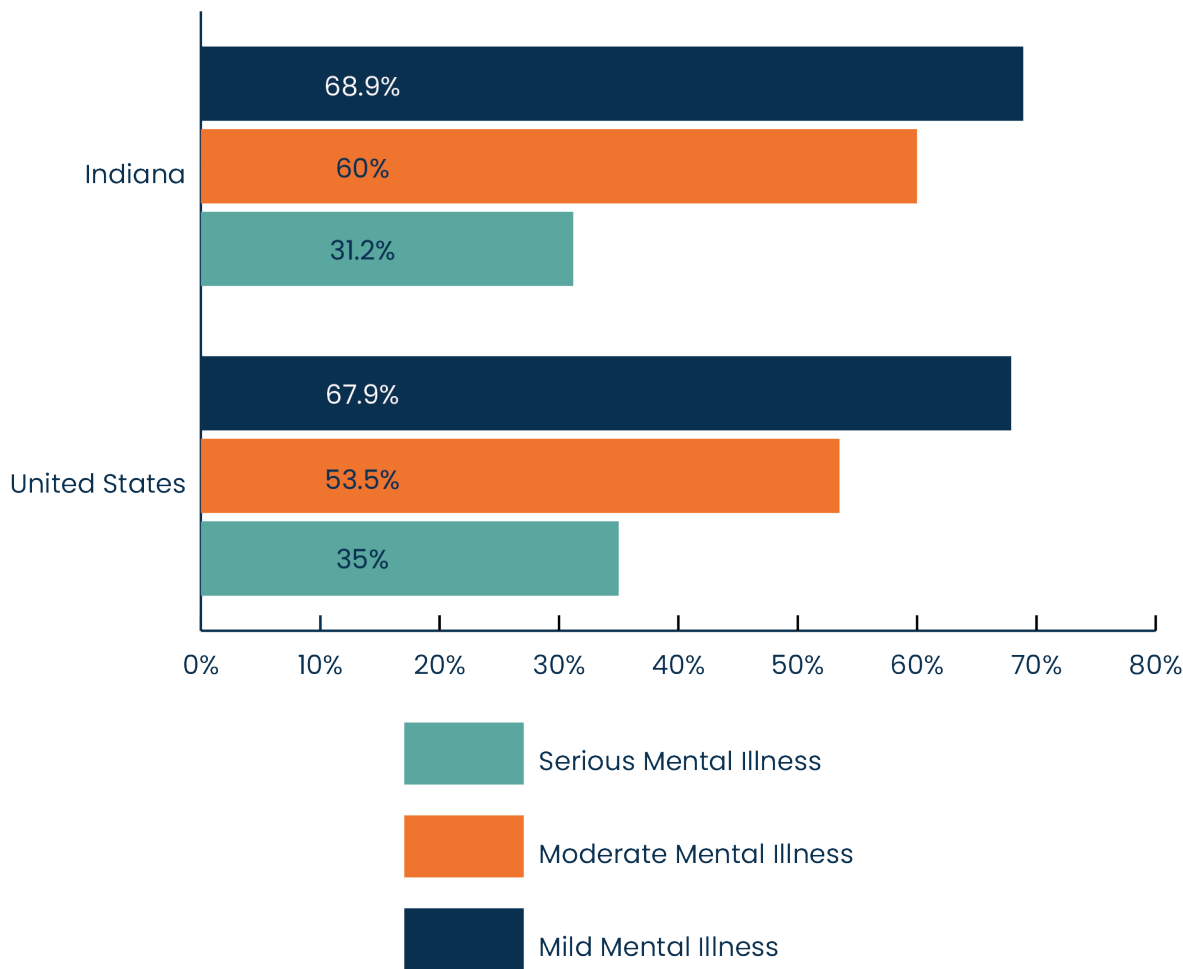
In focus groups, mental health was identified early on as a top issue, with one question specifically asking, "What resources exist to support those struggling with mental health issues in your community? What can be done to better address mental health concerns, especially in the context of a pandemic?" This question arose from the concern expressed in the Economic Recovery Survey. From this question, many ignited conversations into varying topics, all pertaining to an overarching theme of mental health. These conversations included discussions about the feeling of burnout among many adults in their jobs, lack of social interaction, lack of access to local mental health facilities, and overall stress put on those dealing with a global pandemic.

In the 2nd survey for Resilient, participants were asked for ways in which mental health resources could be improved in the future. Overwhelmingly the top 3 responses were easier (cheaper) access to existing options, better education/awareness, and more general options. Mental health was also identified as the number 1 social service survey participants felt they needed more of because of COVID-19. Participants were given options such as food assistance, childcare services, and housing assistance, yet mental health care was identified as the most needed service.

Despite the frequency of concerns, the COVID-19 pandemic opened the floodgates for conversations about mental health. Many who never considered it a serious threat are now open to discussions about it and are beginning to understand its importance. Many participants remarked how things have begun to start moving in the right direction. While communal needs were not met, mental health services expanded greatly. The conversations surrounding mental health became so vital that national legislation was passed that allowed for social workers and mental health professionals who had not received a telehealth certificate to do sessions online to decrease risk for all parties involved and to meet the large need for mental health care during the pandemic. Nationwide, temporary legislation was passed to create flexibility for telehealth technology, which revised Medicaid and Medicare policies and made licensing requirements for states more flexible so that providers could deliver services across state lines (HRSA, 2020).

When providing these populations mental health access and care, many facilities tried to extend their services to be compatible with the needs of their respective counties. However, like the rest of the nation, there was an extreme shortage of mental health and social workers to help assist with the enhanced need for care. This caused many individuals to struggle when receiving appointments. Many facilities had waitlists lasting weeks and were not able to run at their normal capacity. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, access to mental health care was a challenge in Indiana. In 2018-2019, the Kaiser Mental Health Report for Indiana reported that 7.3% (367,000) of adults reported that there was an unmet need for mental health treatment in their communities. In the U.S., only an average of 6.2% of adults reported an unmet need for treatment. The Kaiser Mental Health report also examined the number of adults in Indiana who have not received treatment based on the level of their mental illness. Indiana averages a higher percentage in both mild and moderate mental illness than the United States.

Adults with Mental Illness in Past Year Who Did Not Receive Mental Health Treatment (2018–2019)



SOURCE: KAISER MENTAL HEALTH REPORT INDIANA

As the region moves forward, it will be hard to ignore the future effects on mental health that COVID-19 has caused. To prepare for future crises like COVID-19, the region will have to increase its access to mental health care. This includes the hiring of more mental health professionals and more social workers in health-care settings.

These are the ways in which we, as a region, can begin to move forward. COVID-19 exposed the glaring struggles with mental health in the various counties. Individuals in the region need options for how they can understand and treat their mental health. Most mental health facilities in the region are located solely in Vigo County. This means that those in surrounding counties must drive 40+ minutes to receive the vital care they need. When future crises hit, this concern must be addressed as it is an essential aspect of West Central Indiana citizen's healthcare.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY

- Promote local continuity of care in mental health.
 - Support a collaborative approach to mental health as a region.
- Create an outline plan for developing a one-stop-shop mental health network for all six counties.
- Establish a 24-hour Emergency Crisis Center for mental health related crises to provide faster and specialized care
 - Relieve current bed-count burden on many hospitals
 - Minimize transportation from medical facility to psychiatric health facility
- Engage state and local elected officials on providing enhanced levels of funding for relevant mental health programs/resources.
- Engage healthcare providers on feasibility and best practices for lowering barriers to mental health care.

SUBSTANCE USE

OVERVIEW

During the COVID-19 pandemic, national, state, and local organizations reported increased substance use and drug overdoses. With extenuating circumstances, struggles with mental health, and external pressures, some turned to increased substance use to cope with fear of the pandemic.

This use of substances can affect individuals' work, education, families, lifestyles, and overall health. The American Psychological Association published an article in 2021 examining increased levels of substance use during the pandemic. They reported that in the early stages of the pandemic, the nation saw an 18% increase in overdoses; unfortunately, this trend continued as states across the U.S. saw increases in concerns relating to substance use disorders. Substance use within West Central Indiana has long been an ongoing challenge; the COVID-19 pandemic shined a light on its preexisting status and enhanced it.

IMPACT OF COVID-19

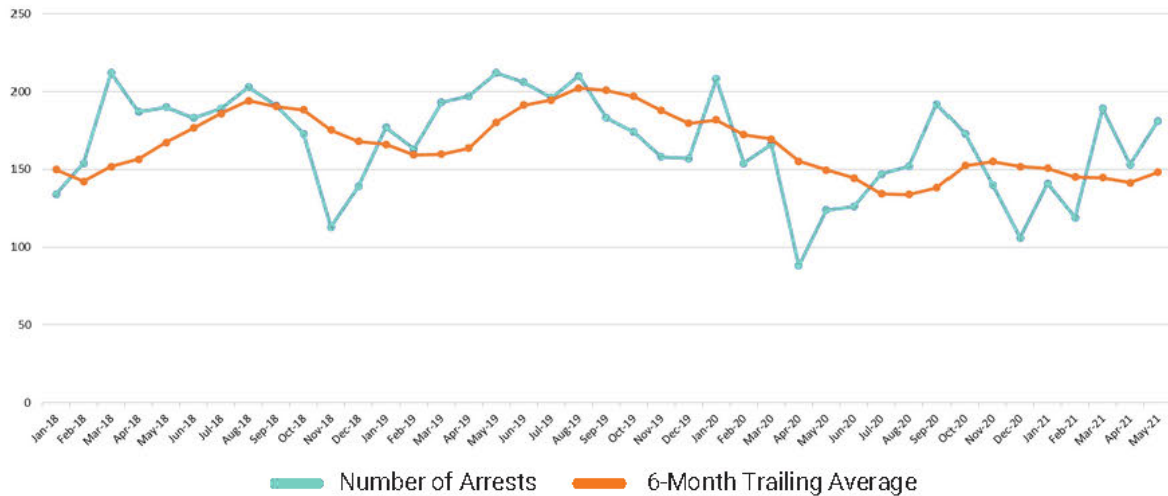
Unfortunately, substance use disorders have a strong correlation with mental health, another sub-theme identified within Resilient. However, it is important to note that not all those who struggle with addiction suffer from mental disorders and vice versa. In April of 2020, the National Institute of Drug Abuse reported high rates of substance use disorders and anxiety disorders. These include generalized anxiety, panic disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Substance disorders also show high rates of occurrence among individuals suffering with mental disorders such as depression, bipolar disorder, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), borderline personality disorder, and antisocial personality disorder. This becomes important while discussing the effects the pandemic had on substance use. As individuals struggled with health during the pandemic, it is hard to ignore the correlation in increased substance use. As a region, to understand this challenge and begin to help those who struggle, we must acknowledge the region's need for increased care and understanding for substance use and mental health care.

In 2021, United Way of the Wabash Valley (UWWV) published their Substance Use Disorders Council Measurement Report. This report details the ongoing challenge with substance use in West Central Indiana. In the report, UWWV examines different areas in which substance use disorders were relevant. This includes incarceration, quality of life, arrests, child homes, student use, and community investment.

As a part of their report, UWWV analyzed data on drug use in households and its effects on child removal cases through the Department of Child Services. In 2020, a total of 295 out of 400 children were removed from homes due to parent's drug/alcohol use. From this statistic, the region can begin to understand the increased risk for future long-term health conditions and negative life outcomes that children can experience when exposed to environments with illegal substance use. When a national survey on drug use and health was conducted in 2017, it found that 12% of Indiana's children under the age of 17 lived with a parent who had a substance use disorder. The UWWV translated that to estimate that 3 or 4 children per classroom in the Wabash Valley have a parent struggling with substance use, increasing the risk of their children to be maltreated.

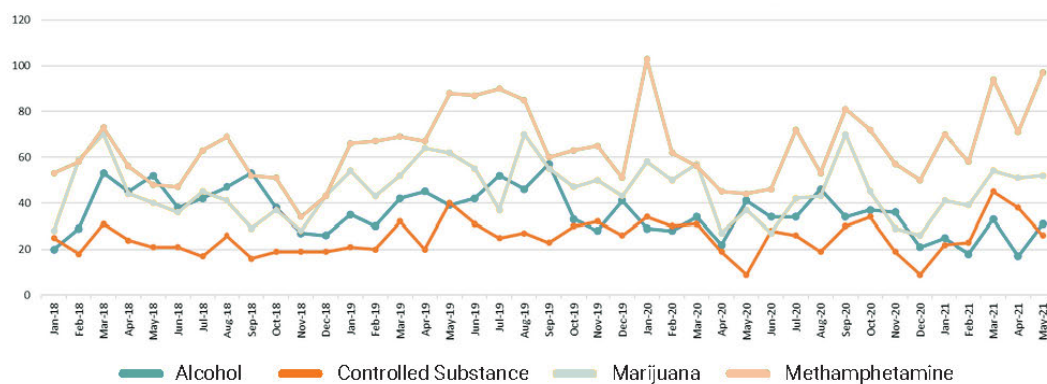
UWWV also investigated how substance use in the Wabash Valley impacts incarceration and arrests in West Central Indiana. The report states that nationally, 85% of those who pass through criminal justice system struggle with a form of substance use. Of this demographic, 50% meet the criteria for a diagnosed substance use disorder. The following chart shows the trends calculated for substance use related arrests in West Central Indiana and a breakdown of the specific substances being used.

Number of Monthly Substance Use Related Arrests (UWWV Service Counties of Clay, Parke, Sullivan, Vermillion, and Vigo)



Source: Indiana Management Performance Hub Arrest Dashboard - <https://www.in.gov/mph/projects/arrests-dashboard/>

Number of Monthly Arrests by Substance (UWWV Service Counties of Clay, Parke, Sullivan, Vermillion, and Vigo)



Source: Indiana Management Performance Hub Arrest Dashboard - <https://www.in.gov/mph/projects/arrests-dashboard/>

SOURCE: UNITED WAY OF THE WABASH VALLEY

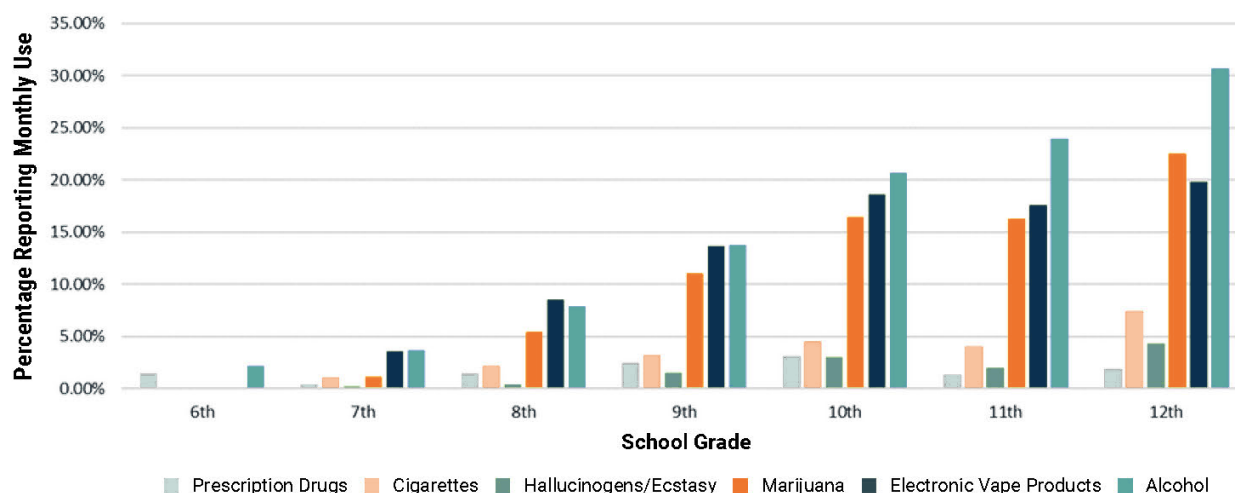
When looking at West Central Indiana statistics relating to substance use arrests, the UWWV notes that during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a decline in arrests. However, their research leads them to believe that this was not due to an actual decline in substance use but instead because of increased isolation and lack of use in public places. As seen in the 2nd chart, the use of methamphetamine in West Central Indiana saw a steady increase in use beginning in November of 2020.

Drug use within all counties was examined in the focus groups conducted, specifically when discussed with hiring concerns in the region. Many employers expressed struggles hiring individuals during the pandemic due to the inability to pass general drug tests. The specific drugs employers were referring to were not disclosed, but the prevalence in society is present. This challenge creates difficulties for economic growth due to its threat to the regional workforce.

Some within the county reported that they believe some substance use disorders begin in school settings. In their report, the UWWV includes extensive research on the use of substances for different grade levels. The chart below encompasses the Indiana Youth Survey (INYS) 2020 report for Region 6. This region includes all counties in West Central Indiana in addition to Hendricks, Monroe, Morgan, and Owen Counties.

Percentage of Students Reporting Substance Use in the Last 30 Days

Indiana Youth Survey - Region 6



Source: 2020 Indiana Youth Survey - https://inys.indiana.edu/docs/survey/indianaYouthSurvey_2020.pdf

SOURCE: UNITED WAY OF THE WABASH VALLEY

In almost every school setting, alcohol was reported as having the highest percentage of use among students. The following two substances that were heavily identified in school settings were electronic vape products and marijuana. While it is unclear whether use of these substances increased amid the pandemic, its lasting effects on older populations contributed to the overall crisis that was identified as a challenge during the pandemic.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY

- Engage with the United Way of the Wabash Valley's Substance Use Disorders Council and their current programs/investments:
 - Substance Use Risk Education and Programming
 - E-Intervention Initiative
 - Jail Mentoring
 - Peer Recovery Specialists
 - Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP)

BROADBAND AND TELEHEALTH

OVERVIEW

Due to pandemic restrictions and related concerns, people have often needed or wanted access to medical facilities without leaving their home since the onset of COVID-19. Because of this, telehealth services became increasingly popular in West Central Indiana, the state, and the nation. Larger hospitals began hosting patients via video conference calls instead of risking exposure during an on-site visit. While this allowed for more accessible healthcare, it revealed West Central Indiana's struggles with broadband connectivity. This connection is vital as it allows individuals in need of medical care to receive it in a safe way.

IMPACT OF COVID-19

While telehealth is not a new concept, its popularity grew considerably during COVID-19. Many people's yearly check-ups and physicals had to be done through a virtual screen. Mental healthcare was also conducted mostly through telehealth. Larger communities in West Central Indiana were able to access telehealth options much easier while those in rural communities continued to struggle to receive care. During the focus groups, many participants commented on their gratefulness for telehealth, but they also ac-

knowledge how this life-saving tool is only available for those with strong broadband connections.

There is ample funding available for broadband in rural communities. However, due to the nature of the geography of the communities and their size, it can be difficult to obtain. Those in the focus groups expressed confusion over how broadband funding is achieved. Many are unaware of the opportunities available and how such funds would be implemented. With low population density and large landscapes, rural broadband has challenges separate from broadband in more urbanized areas that require dedicated teams to address. The communities not only lack this funding but do not always have the resources or necessary guidance to pursue it. This makes obtaining the increased broadband access impossible for some.

Even for those who had adequate connections, telehealth still faced challenges the region must aim to overcome. Telehealth is not just inaccessible with bad connection, but it also requires a high standing socioeconomic status. To complete an appointment, individuals need a device to have their appointment, privacy in their own home, and enough free time to complete a 30 minute to 1 hour session. This is a luxury many during COVID-19 could not afford due to other extenuating circumstances.

Telehealth also posed a big challenge for insurance companies and healthcare workers. With a different format, providers found it difficult to determine proper costs for telehealth visits. While this format proved to be incredibly useful for patients, hospitals had to make considerations about if it was financially stable for their establishments. Healthcare workers saw challenges as many carriers would not offer the same level of reimbursements as in-person appointments to hospitals and healthcare centers to make it a viable option. While inaccessible to some, the rise of telehealth was a positive aspect to this need for more accessible healthcare. While in-person appointments were sparse, patients from various hospitals and care facilities were encouraged to use online portals and video meetings to receive care. In forums, multiple counties expressed that they saw an increase in people seeking out certain areas of care due to the confidentiality of telehealth. Telehealth allowed individuals with compromised immune systems to still access the healthcare services they needed. Non-COVID-19 patients were desperate to still receive their vital care, and telehealth served as a solution to continue receiving care.

When asked if individuals received telehealth care, out of 68, a resounding 45 replied yes that they had sought out and received telehealth care. This majority, combined with the feedback from forums in which many described telehealth as a main source of medical care, exposes the great need for public access to broadband so that telehealth services may continue and become more available.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY

- Promote continuation of care via telehealth when possible (advancing continuity of care in the rural areas of the region) – General Healthcare and Psychiatric Care.
 - Broadband consideration
 - Patients' technology proficiency consideration

TRANSPORTATION

OVERVIEW

Although many West Central Indiana residents do not live in immediate proximity to medical facilities, access to reliable transportation is a vital amenity – especially for older adults and other populations who need frequent access to healthcare resources and social services. While there are currently a few transportation options available for West Central residents who are unable to drive themselves, these options often work better in theory than in practice and too frequently fail to provide vital assistance to those in need.

Per data from the Census Bureau, 6.7% of West Central Indiana households do not own at least one car. While this number does not sound overly concerning on the surface (and is below the national average of 8.5%), participants at the public forums indicated that those without personal transportation were disproportionately likely to require various forms of healthcare and social services, and many older residents are unable or unwilling to drive even if they own a vehicle. Additionally, with West Central Indiana being largely rural, that percentage holds more impact than it would in a more urban region.

For those who cannot drive themselves, transportation options exist but are limited. Terre Haute locals can access the Terre Haute City Bus at a variety of locations, while residents in the rest of the region must contact their respective rural transit provider and/or aging and disabled transit provider (if applicable) to schedule a trip. The providers in each county are:

County	Rural Transit	Aging and Disabled
Clay	None	Clay County Senior Center
Parke	Thrive West Central	Thrive West Central
Putnam	Area 10 Agency on Aging	Area 10 Agency on Aging
Sullivan	Ride Solutions	Ride Solutions
Vermillion	Thrive West Central	Thrive West Central
Vigo	Thrive West Central	Thrive West Central

While these providers are available to all who need transportation, awareness of these options among regional residents is poor, and those who do attempt to schedule a ride sometimes have challenges with securing a timely response.

In addition, Medicaid-eligible residents can schedule non-emergency medical transportation through Southeastrans, which contracts with local vendors across the state to provide rides to older adults. However, Southeastrans has struggled with maintaining vendor relationships in recent years, making it a somewhat unreliable and inconsistent/inconvenient service for those who require Medicaid-funded medical transit. Both Medicaid-funded and non-Medicaid transit providers in the region struggle with accessibility issues, specifically for residents who are confined to a wheelchair.

IMPACT OF COVID-19

The early days of the COVID-19 pandemic had the dual effect of (1) making all forms of in-person interaction (including on public transportation) a challenge, and (2) increasing the extent to which older adults and other vulnerable populations needed various forms of assistance. As such, the pandemic's impact on transportation usage across the region was somewhat mixed. Rural transit and aging/disabled ridership numbers decreased from 2019 to 2020 in Clay and Putnam Counties, while the number of unduplicated riders who accessed Thrive's transit services increased in all relevant counties (although the total number of trips dropped slightly). Clearly, there remains a need for reliable transportation alternatives across the region. However, a continued lack of awareness about such alternatives coupled with a lack of drivers/vehicles in rural areas means that existing transit services are not meeting the full extent of the demand for transportation. Going forward, transportation providers must develop a unified strategy to address existing challenges and promote awareness of how residents (and their loved ones) can properly utilize these vital services.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY

- Increase coordination for rural services among transportation providers.
- Expand information, education, and outreach for rural transportation opportunities throughout the region.
- Expand rural transportation options to Clay County.
- Expand rural transportation and medical transportation options to metropolitan areas.
- Increase coordination for rural transportation services among healthcare providers.
- Increase coordination and financial contributions to support rural transportation initiatives.

AGING CARE

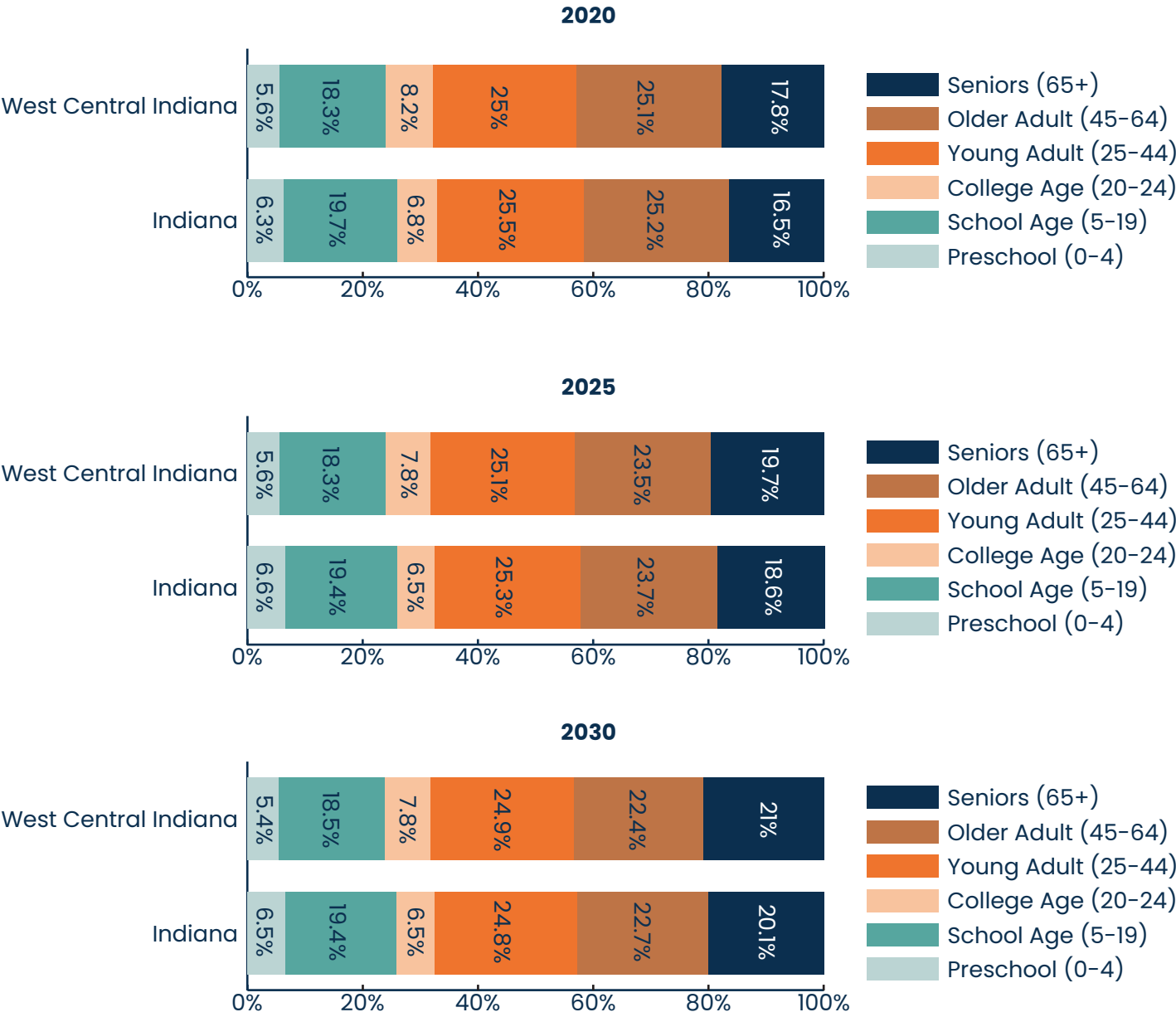
OVERVIEW

The COVID-19 pandemic posed a threat for all. However, its effects were particularly worrisome for the aging population. Individuals aged 65+ and older, and those with pre-existing health issues, were more likely to

get severely ill from the virus. According to the CDC, more than 81% of COVID related deaths occur in people over age 65 (CDC).

The healthcare landscape before COVID held opportunities for improvement. Geriatricians in the area were and remain few and far between. Practices comprised of many older individuals are often the result of a long-time practice with an intentional focus on the special healthcare needs of an aging population.

The portion of Indiana’s population that is 60 and older is growing more rapidly than other age groups of the population. According to the Policy Academy State Profile, “almost 23 percent of Indiana’s population will be 60 and older by the year 2030, an increase of almost 27 percent from 2012 (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and U.S. Administration on Aging, 2012).” The U.S. Census Bureau estimates 17.8 percent of our 221,757 regional population is 65 and older. By the year 2030, our region is projected to see a shift in the age demographic displayed in the graph below, which mirrors the State’s projection.



SOURCE: STATS.INDIANA.EDU

West Central Indiana’s supply of services or resources for an aging population is capable of sustaining this demographic at the current level. Over the next 10 years, the demographics of the region will shift from a population that is less than 60 years old to a population that is greater than 60 years old without changing the overall total population. With the shift in demographics, our region should expect to see a demand increase requiring products, services, and resources as well as trends associated with an aging population.

Older individuals and their families often delay long-term planning for care needs that may arise due to age or illness. This may be due to cultural issues or perceived financial barriers. Many in the community are not aware of the funding options for in-home services available from State and Federal-funded programs through Thrive's Area Agency on Aging (AAA) or the available private-pay options for individuals who do not qualify for State or Federal-funded programs. The result is often that individuals seek assistance in a moment of crisis due to a major medical event, loss of a spouse, or lack of primary caregiver support.

Accessing services through the AAA begins with a thorough options counseling session to uncover any unmet needs and assist the individual and their circle of support (family/friends/medical professionals) with accessing the services to best meet their needs using existing resources and those available through state and federal funding. There is a wide variety of services and funding available to assist; however, the processes involved take time, which can delay the delivery of urgently needed services. Indiana is piloting an expedited Medicaid Waiver approval process that could deliver services within days versus weeks; however, there are financial and other requirements that may create obstacles. Outreach and education for pre-planning are the most effective means of ensuring that the aging population in Indiana can lead rich lives while aging in place.

IMPACT OF COVID-19

COVID restricted in-person access to routine and urgent health care needs. Health providers had to pivot quickly to deliver care via telehealth or, less often, video meetings. Routine healthcare came down to the most basic, with specialty follow ups or non-emergent evaluations put on hold. Even when given the opportunity for in-person care, many individuals declined, preferring to remain safely ensconced in their homes away from potential infection.

For that same reason, many individuals receiving in-home services for personal caregiving or homemaker assistance chose to cancel those services, fearing infection from the caregivers coming into the home. Widely available vaccinations for COVID assuaged the fears of many who would again allow caregivers in the home because they themselves were vaccinated. Others have continued to hold off the receipt of in-home services because they are not able to obtain assurances that each caregiver entering the home has been vaccinated. There are not enough caregivers to meet the existing needs of individuals willing to accept caregivers in their homes.

COVID has negatively impacted all sectors of the workforce. Specifically, caregivers left the workforce due to concern about infection or lack of work as discussed above. Caregiving agencies are finding that caregivers are not returning to the workforce in numbers adequate to meet the caregiving needs of the community.

Transportation options for older and disabled individuals in this largely rural community have never been abundant. COVID may have impacted the use of available transportation at its peak; it certainly did not result in any innovations expanding transportation options. The state contract for Medicaid medical transportation is built upon subcontractors to accept requested ride requests. Individuals widely report this system is unreliable, resulting in missed appointments and even drop-offs with no pick-ups.

CASE STUDY

Prioritizing a healthier lifestyle among its aging population and seeing an opportunity to attract more retirees, the City of Alexandria, Minnesota, directly surveyed seniors to understand their needs and then developed an action plan surrounding two main pillars: transportation and health/community services. Alexandria became the first rural city in the country to receive AARP's "Age-Friendly Community" designation. Through these and other efforts to improve the quality of life, the City of Alexandria grew its population over age 65 by nearly 12% and its overall population by roughly 22% from 2010-2019.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY

- Implement collaborative efforts for recruitment and retention of caregivers.
- Develop a working roundtable of health care providers to focus on the healthcare needs of our older and disabled population, considering national standards for best practice and excellence in outcomes.

- Pursue opportunities such as the AARP Age-Friendly Community, an effort that would engage elected officials, partner organizations and local leaders to work together on age-friendly community assessment, planning and implementation of changes enhancing the community experience of older individuals.
- Educate individuals to have a better self-awareness of their current and anticipated health needs as they age to reduce readmissions to hospitals and nursing facilities.
- Increase education and outreach in collaboration with primary care physicians to inform the greater public of existing resources to assist with pre-planning to age in place.
- Create a Quality of Life plan to prepare for the census predicted aging population.

RECOMMENDED OVERARCHING HEALTHCARE NEXT STEPS FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY

- Analyze county silos during a public health crisis.
 - Each community could/did react differently.
- Determine opportunity/or not for public health collaboration amongst contiguous counties for continuity of health for all citizens within the region.
- Re-engage Better Health Wabash Valley, a regional healthcare stakeholder group with the goal of positively changing the healthcare metrics of the region to lower overall healthcare costs for employers.
 - Determine their current goals/metrics.
 - Help align resources for successful implementation of programming.
 - Determine change of needs based on new pandemic concerns.
 - Determine overall public health crisis – analysis of what the region did well and what can be improved upon in the event of another health crisis or resurgence.

RESILIENT

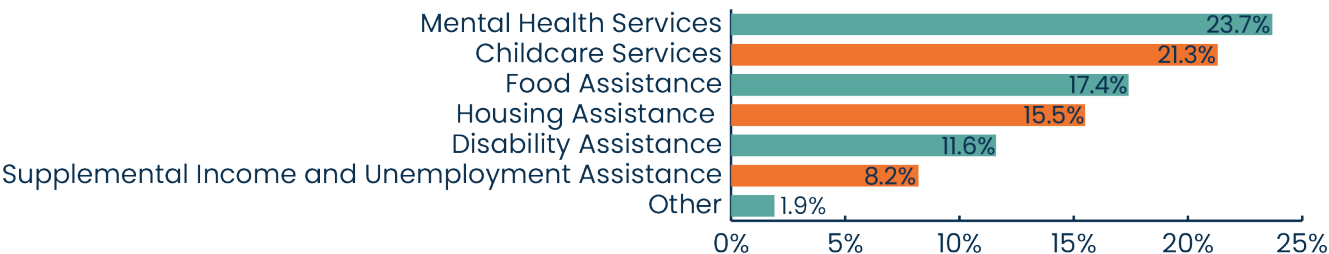


**QUALITY OF LIFE
& COMMUNITY
NEEDS**

Quality of life for many across the county took a hit during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the region, this struggle was no different. In 2020, at the beginning of the pandemic, all were challenged as their normal way of life was altered. The pandemic enhanced the needs of many communities within our region. Programs and assistance offered by local government and community organizations were utilized to aid in providing normalcy to those within the region. Programs pertaining to financial, education, recreational, medical, and other areas of concern saw increased demand from the public within West Central Indiana and the state. To be a sustainable community, West Central Indiana must address the quality of life offered to individuals during a time of crisis. A good quality of life encompasses a variety of needs of individuals. Health, happiness, comfort, entertainment, economics, culture, and more are all considered facets within a good quality of life.

Due to the nature of COVID-19, many individuals across West Central Indiana found themselves in need of many essential services that contribute to the region’s overall quality of life. These services are programs and assistance provided through various organizations within the region or local/state governments. As many have used them before, their need became even greater during the pandemic. This included programs such as unemployment during pandemic or an increased need for childcare assistance. During the COVID-19 pandemic, certain demographics found themselves more at risk for exposure and death than others. These included those with disabilities, those with compromised immune systems or other health conditions, elderly populations, pregnant women, economically challenged communities, etc. All these groups are aided by social services offered throughout West Central Indiana.

Through the various forums and surveys conducted for Resilient, it was apparent how much life had changed for the communities in West Central Indiana and the impact it had on our region’s quality of life. In each county, specific focuses were identified that allow for a better understanding of recovery strategies. In 2020, counties had to respond differently based on the needs of their citizens as lockdowns and stay-at-home orders were placed. This created changes in everyday life that have continued to affect the region. With an increased need for food pantries, social services, broadband, housing, transportation, and more, the forums and survey proved to be effective as individuals discussed the many challenges they faced as COVID-19 threatened their quality of life. From this, the need for enhanced services within our community was identified. During Resilient’s 2nd survey, the following were identified as services needed within the region:



It was during COVID-19 that people’s reliance on these programs truly came to light. Participants from all counties revealed in forums that they know of or have a direct connection to individuals who used social services during the pandemic. This can include programs such as food stamps, shelter in the Housing Authorities in the region, and Disability Assistance.

With this lack of care, many suffered in numerous ways. Individuals with families may have had to take off increased days at work to watch their children or guide them through online schooling. Those in recent need of affordable housing may have been unable to find it. This need for social services was also discussed through various forums. Participants from all counties touched on the essential services that were lacking in West Central Indiana.

As the region begins to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, the lasting effects of limited services will remain. Individuals are still in need of childcare, housing assistance, food assistance, and more.

Despite the need for expanded services in all counties, many during the forums remarked at how wonderful it was to see their communities come together and attempt to bridge the gaps. Participants gave examples of restaurants in local communities offering free food to school-aged children, donations poured in, volunteers offered to help those in need, and many more. Despite much of the negatives during COVID-19,

many communities came together to help aid in the need for social services in West Central Indiana.

During Resilient, participants were asked during the survey and forums about the current quality of life in West Central Indiana. With Quality of Life being a main theme, the following were identified as sub-themes:

- Food Insecurity
- Housing
- Transportation (Trails and Recreation)
- Broadband Development and Digital Inclusion
- Homelessness

While all identified sub-themes were noted as challenges during the pandemic, many of the sub-themes were prevalent within West Central Indiana before the start of the pandemic but were exacerbated due to COVID-19.

FOOD INSECURITY

OVERVIEW

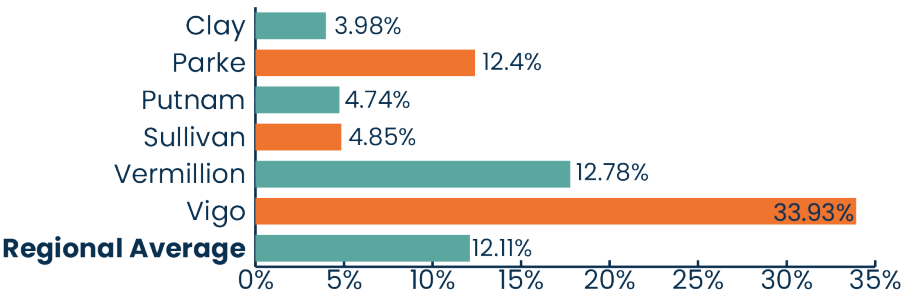
During the Resilient surveys and forums, the challenge of food insecurity among the West Central population was a frequent topic of discussion. These discussions addressed the many underlying factors driving food insecurity in the region, including financial burdens, food deserts, lack of assistance at food pantries, feelings of pride, health, and transportation challenges. There is a need in West Central Indiana to not only help aid those in food insecurity but the region’s attitudes towards it.

IMPACT OF COVID-19

Food insecurity is a sensitive topic that many are hesitant to discuss. Food insecurity is defined as a lack of access to an adequate, nutritious food supply. It has the potential to affect individuals of all different ages, races, genders, and incomes. Through the initial Economic Recovery Survey, Thrive West Central identified food insecurity as a general topic of concern amid the pandemic but determined that more research was necessary to fully understand the scope of the problem.

When asked in the 2nd Resilient survey what social services are needed within their respective regions, food assistance was identified as the 3rd most needed service after mental health and childcare services.

From the discussions at the regional forums, it was understood that there are many reasons individuals experienced increased food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic. It became alarmingly clear how many counties in West Central Indiana live in large food deserts and lack access to grocery stores or other shops with healthy food options. Those in the forums remarked how these individuals have been forced to rely on gas stations or variety stores (Dollar General, Family Dollar, etc.) for food, which typically do not offer the fresh, healthy food options to meet nutritional needs. The following data points from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s “Food Atlas” represent the percentage of population within the respective counties that have low access to grocery stores. While the data represents the population in 2015, it shows a need that has been present in West Central Indiana for some time. It was through COVID-19 that this challenge was intensified.



Access to grocery stores is a particularly pressing problem in Vigo County, which (as of 2015) had the highest proportion of residents with low access to a grocery store of any county in the state.

Along with the topic of food deserts, many families and individuals in the area do not have adequate transportation. To reach the areas needed where there are grocery stores and healthy food options, those in the region need access to cars or public transportation. With much of West Central Indiana being rural, this is difficult. Households in rural locations must often make long grocery store trips to nearby counties or towns to get all the needed food for a specific amount of time. At the height of the pandemic, many grocery stores were out of necessary food due to supply and demand shortages as well as communal paranoia about what a lock-down would entail. For those in rural locations who are unable to go to an adequate grocery store when they want, this made food even scarcer, increasing the already present challenge of food insecurity.

The following data from Feeding America displays the projected percentages of individuals and children in each county who are food insecure. As a region, West Central Indiana has a higher proportion of food insecure individuals (including children) than both the state and country.

County	2020 Child Projected	2020 Projected	2021 Child Projected	2021 Projected
Clay	21.7%	15.9%	19.3%	14.7%
Parke	21.3%	16.0%	18.8%	14.8%
Putnam	19.1%	14.4%	16.0%	12.9%
Sullivan	21.2%	16.0%	18.1%	14.5%
Vermillion	24.5%	17.5%	21.2%	15.9%
Vigo	24.6%	18.7%	21.6%	17.2%
West Central Indiana (average)	22.06%	16.42%	19.16%	15%
Indiana	19.5%	14.8%	16.6%	12.9%
United States	19.9%	13.9%	17.9%	13.3%

SOURCE: STATS.INDIANA.EDU

During all county forums, participants expressed how there had been an increase in individuals relying on and visiting food pantries to get their daily meals. In the summer of 2020, Terre Haute Catholic Charities conducted a survey to understand the need for food services in the area due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Question 2 of the survey asked, "Because of coronavirus or COVID-19, how challenging will it be to make ends meet over the next 3 months?" The answers were as follows:

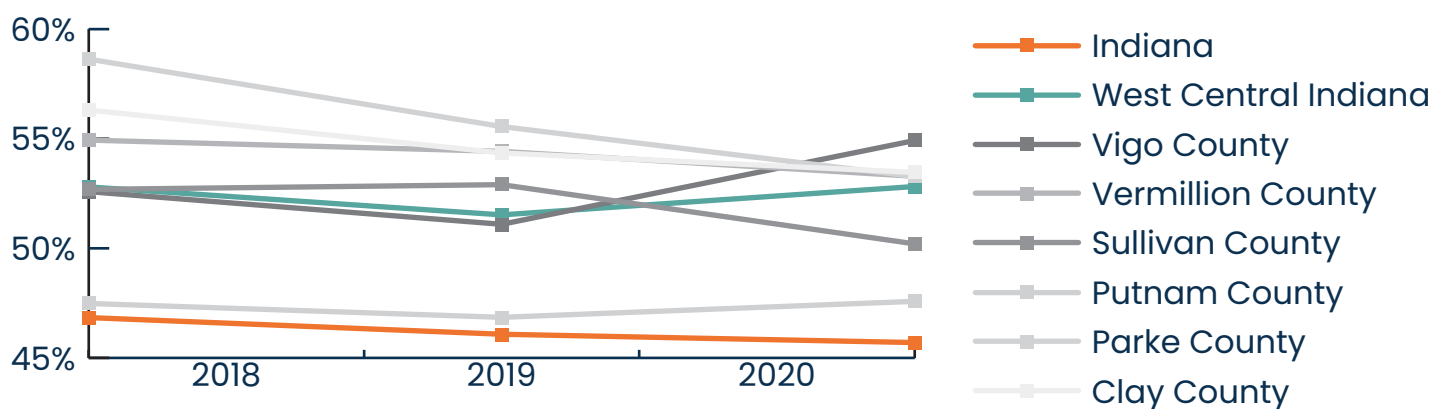
- A little more challenging than usual: 34% (594)
- A lot more challenging than usual: 60% (1,062)
- No more challenging than usual: 6% (104)

The COVID-19 pandemic added stressors to individuals and families when it came to meeting basic needs, food being one. The survey then also asked, "Not including today, have you or anyone in your household EVER gotten free groceries from a food pantry, food bank, church, or other place that helps with free food?" The responses were as follows:

- Yes, my first time was AFTER the start of the coronavirus crisis (after March 1, 2020): 33% (475)
- Yes, my first time was BEFORE the start of the coronavirus crisis (before March 1, 2020): 37% (530)
- No, I have never received free groceries before: 29% (413)

Students were another population hit heavily with food insecurity concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic.

All schools in the region currently offer free or reduced lunch programs that give kids who face food insecurity at home the meals needed to meet their nutritional needs. The following data from StatsIndiana displays current and past metrics for free and reduced lunches in West Central Indiana:



SOURCE: STATS INDIANA

Both before and during the pandemic, West Central Indiana had a higher proportion of students receiving free and reduced lunches than the state as a whole.

When educational leaders from the region attended forums, many discussed the procedures taken to provide extra food to students during the pandemic. For example, in Vigo County, a backpack program was set up to help feed children on weekends. Vigo County School Corporation was not the only school to implement this type of programming. Across the six counties, many increased their meal programs and provided students with extra food for their families to help aid in food insecurity.

The challenge of food insecurity poses a future threat for events similar to the COVID-19 pandemic. While many communities rallied to help – donating food and/or volunteering at pantries and schools, the issue still is there. Many individuals in our community struggle with food insecurity and will continue to. West Central Indiana requires an increase in sustainable food options for citizens. This includes more grocery stores and healthier eating options for those in food-scarce locations.

CASE STUDY

In light of the logistical challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, food banks and charitable organizations across the country have adopted more mobile and convenient methods of delivering food to families in need. For example, the Northern Illinois Food Bank has been delivering food directly to schools to allow for children to pick up on days they are in the classroom, while Feeding America Riverside/San Bernadino (which spawns a large, partially rural service area) has created a home delivery program that functions similarly to a service like Uber Eats. For more information, read examples from the Feeding America and Food Bank News websites.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY

- Equip food pantries, churches, and other charitable organizations with methods to provide easier access among food insecure households (increasing pick-up locations, remote delivery, etc.).
- Identify opportunities to increase grocery store prevalence and access to fresh, healthy foods across the region, specifically in Vigo County.
- Engage school districts in discussions on how to provide better outcomes for students on free and reduced lunches.
- Evaluate which COVID-era meal/snack programs are worth keeping permanently.

HOUSING

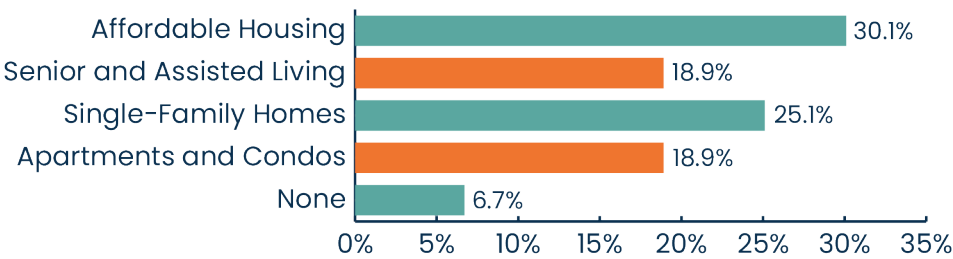
OVERVIEW

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the region was aware of its shortage in housing. However, this issue created more enhanced challenges when facing the COVID-19 pandemic. Older houses in need of upkeep continued to stay in decrepit condition. Contractors and construction crews struggled to be able to keep up with demand due to supply shortages and increased prices for materials. Within the focus groups, participants discussed that the housing market was becoming a challenge prior to the pandemic and COVID-19 escalated it. The housing market during the pandemic was one of the toughest people had witnessed in years. While it was in some ways the perfect time to sell a house, many were struggling to buy houses as inventory levels sank and prices soared above the asking amount, multiple bids were placed on one home, and properties were selling at incredibly fast rates. The change in climate with the housing market exposed the need within West Central Indiana for housing, specifically certain types of housing. Within communities, certain demographics find themselves in need of housing that some counties are unable to adequately offer such as low-income housing, assisted living facilities, apartments, and middle-class housing options.

IMPACT OF COVID-19

Through forums and surveys responses, it became apparent that a great need for more housing options was made even clearer as a result of the pandemic. While COVID-19 itself did not cause this need, it exposed that many underserved communities faced challenges that trickled down to expose longstanding issues within society.

The responses from the 2nd Resilient survey indicated the following as areas in which additional housing in the West Central was needed:



The housing market also posed a threat as many individuals considered low-income struggled to afford housing due to the high demand and value.

The following data from the Terre Haute Area Association of Realtors demonstrates how the housing market evolved over the course of the pandemic:

Timeframe	Active Listings	Sold Listings	Median List Price	Average List Price	Median Days on Market
Jan 1, 2020–Jan 30, 2020	--	92	\$84,700	\$105,588	47
As of August 2, 2021	226	--	\$122,450	\$190,146	40

As West Central Indiana grows, it is important that housing for all socioeconomic standings, ages, families, and lifestyles is available. With housing increasing in cost, college students, single families, assisted living, and affordable housing are unable to afford and keep up with the market. Both in forums and surveys, individuals expressed varying wants for housing. No type of housing particularity stood out as the greatest need in West Central Indiana. With different experiences, standings, and views, individuals who participated expressed increased needs for low-income housing, housing for young professionals and first-time families, and assisted living houses where all among the types of housing requested by individuals. Housing specifically for those groups that meet their financial goals and expectations will help to improve the

markets in communities and provide a more prosperous quality of life for them. Corporations who are seeking to bring new individuals to the region are also in need of more adequate and affordable housing. During the forums, some explained how businesses throughout the counties are being forced to house new employees in apartment buildings as they are unable to find houses at steady prices. Not only is this hard for the companies forced to do this, but it does not promote a quality of life for those coming to West Central Indiana for the first time.

CASE STUDY

In 2019, Regional Opportunity Initiatives (which covers an 11-county region in South Central/Southwest Indiana) published a housing study that provided an analysis of the existing regional housing market and recommendations for the development of additional workforce housing. These recommendations include increasing housing variety to create options for young professionals and providing technical assistance to not-for-profit developers who may be able to work in areas with an insufficiently robust private market for development.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY

- Take inventory of housing market in the six-county region through conducting a comprehensive regional housing study.
 - Utilize Terre Haute Community Plan housing addendum.
 - Assess other county’s demographics, housing market, income, demand, zoning, etc.
- Institute Thrive West Central’s Homes for the Future Pilot Program.
 - Provide way to fund future homebuilding efforts in the region.

TRAILS AND RECREATION

OVERVIEW

During the COVID-19 pandemic, outdoor recreation became increasingly popular among individuals in West Central Indiana. With the outdoors being labeled as safe or low-risk for COVID-19 exposure, walking and hiking became many people’s number one activity and for some was the only time they left their houses. Individuals in the county began exploring the extensive trail system offered by Indiana and the West Central Region. Accordingly, the pandemic created a need to (1) expand West Central Indiana’s network of regional trails and (2) draw attention to existing trails and other outdoor recreation amenities.

IMPACT OF COVID-19

The Next Level Trails Grant Program began in 2018. While the original intent of this program was not to combat challenges brought forth due to COVID-19, as communities needs changed, many counties, cities, and towns pivoted their grant proposals and applications to combat this issue. As trails became a vital tool to expand outdoor recreation opportunities, many applicants geared their projects towards combating COVID-19. The following chart demonstrates the funding that has been made available for trails in Indiana.

	Regionally Significant Project	Locally Significant Project
Grant Round 1 (2019)	\$19,844,839 awarded	\$5,067,881 awarded
Grant Round 2 (2021)	\$24,466,862 awarded	\$5,095,045 awarded
Grant Round 3 (2021–2022)	\$25 million available	\$2 million available
Total	\$69,311,701	\$10,162,926

During the 2nd round of the Next Level Trails Grant Program, Parke County’s Parke Trails Alliance was awarded \$5,000,000 million in grant funding to create a trail that would further the Visionary Trails Program set forth by the state of Indiana. This program, developed in 2016, was designed to increase trail access across Indiana. The COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted this need for accessible trails across the state and within West Central Indiana. This trail is a part of a regional trail that will extend to Vigo County and Vermil-

lion County, creating a large loop that pedestrians and hikers in West Central Indiana can utilize.

In the focus groups, participants were asked what made them proud to live in their respective county. Many discussed West Central Indiana's vast outdoor offerings. Camping, hiking, and water recreation were all aspects of the region that individuals showed pride in. However, it was also remarked how there is a lack of public knowledge about these amenities. Individuals in the forums cited trails as potential growth opportunities in tourism and viewed them as to improve the quality of life for respective counties.

CASE STUDY

Since 2011, Fort Wayne Trails has worked to develop an integrated system of trails and outdoor recreation amenities in Allen County, Indiana. Their work includes creating and implementing strategic plans for trail development in the area, deploying standardized wayfinding and navigation tools for current and future trail-users, and supplementing local public funding for trail development through fundraising efforts and establishing partnerships with local businesses. Currently, there are over 125 total miles of trails in the Fort Wayne area.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY

- Through the Crossroads Trails Regional Council, clearly define a vision and plan for trail development in the region.
- Advance the trails system in West Central Indiana to further trail connectivity within the region, with a specific emphasis on completing:
 - The Tri-County Loop in Vermillion, Vigo, and Parke Counties
 - The Fort-to-Fort Trail in Knox, Sullivan, and Vigo Counties
 - The National Road Heritage Trail in Vigo, Clay, and Putnam Counties
- Develop a comprehensive wayfinding system for trails and outdoor amenities across the region.

BROADBAND DEVELOPMENT AND DIGITAL INCLUSION

OVERVIEW

West Central Indiana is home to many rural communities. Throughout 2020, the communities found themselves lacking the broadband connection needed to adapt to a stay-at-home lifestyle. Many children and adults saw their bedrooms and living spaces become home offices and classrooms. However, due to locations, individuals were unable to maintain the steady broadband connection needed to work and learn at the same levels they would in a school or office environment where broadband is guaranteed.

IMPACT OF COVID-19

In the initial survey sent out, respondents were asked what the top issues in their communities were. The top answer selected was "Lack of or Limited Access to High-Speed Internet" with 113 selections or 56.8% of answers.

This understanding of connectivity gaps and challenges in the region were then cemented through the various forums. During this time, participants were asked "How has your relationship with the internet/digital technology changed during the pandemic? Are there areas of your life (professional or personal) that have been greatly enhanced by an increased reliance on digital technology? What about areas that have worsened or made more difficult?" From this, those attending the forum discussed how lack of broadband access hindered several categories such as healthcare, religious services, businesses, educational facilities, homes, and overall communities. While larger areas in counties such as Terre Haute in Vigo County and Greencastle in Putnam County have a much larger broadband reach, small towns in the region do not have strong connections. This has been a critical concern for leaders within the counties before the pandemic as it limits those within rural communities. With COVID-19, the reliance on the internet to complete daily activities from home, the need for accessible broadband became even greater, helping communities to see the immediate need for improved broadband access across Indiana.

As COVID-19 halted daily operations, many became extremely reliant on stable broadband connections to get their daily tasks complete. This included people who began working from home and e-learning. Without

this ability, their way of life would have ceased. However, this is when broadband connections were tested for many. During the public forums, participants even said that broadband was not consistent throughout the cities and counties where it is arguably needed most. County leaders reported that citizens would drive to parking lots of public libraries to use broadband to access the internet. Families were also forced to drive their kids to parking lots of public areas with Wi-Fi so that they could participate in their online classes.

However, this lack of internet did not just affect work and education, without accessible broadband, individuals were left with no way to enjoy their usual activities. Being stuck inside, many relied on the internet to connect them with friends, entertainment, religious services, etc. Many reported feeling isolated from other counties since some areas were able to have a strong connection and others weren't. This lack of connection also contributed to poor mental health in the region. A lack of access and connection to a community can hinder people's professional and personal lives. Additionally, a lack of access to a stable broadband connection has hindered continued growth as many communities are still left without better broadband access.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY

- Develop communications strategy to assist households in their understanding of broadband funding opportunities, such as the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program and the Emergency Connectivity Program.
- Expand region's public libraries' reach to provide internet services to those located in rural areas (i.e., mobile units, expand locations, etc.).

HOMELESSNESS

OVERVIEW

The homeless population was also a challenge for West Central Indiana. While no county identified a specific rise in the homeless population, concerns were raised about their mental health and the care that facilities were able to offer. Many individuals experiencing homelessness need mental health care but are unable to receive it. While this topic was prevalent before COVID-19, the identification of mental health overall brought increased attention to this important topic among the homeless population.

The homeless population and their quality of life were challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic. During the county-wide forums, individuals stated their concern for not just the living conditions available for people experiencing homelessness but also their access to outside resources.

IMPACT OF COVID-19

Many individuals experiencing homelessness saw their situation worsen during the COVID-19 pandemic. Shelters saw increased numbers of individuals who sought out their services. Not only did this make space limited, but it increased the chances of exposure for those utilizing the shelters. In addition to this increased risk of exposure, many individuals who are experiencing homelessness also did not have access to the supplies needed to stay safe during the pandemic. This included not having access to masks, medicine needed for COVID-19 recovery, and regular healthcare.

In the summer of 2021, Vigo County conducted a community-wide survey to address the population of individuals experiencing homelessness. From this survey, it was determined that the biggest need for those experiencing homelessness is mental health care. This survey also determined that there are an estimated 367 individuals experiencing homelessness in Vigo County itself. While no other surveys like this have been conducted in other West Central Indiana counties, it is important to continuously look at each region's available resources for those experiencing homelessness. Currently, many individuals seek out Vigo County for their specialized resources. Over the course of the pandemic, REACH services were able to house an estimated 100 individuals in the region experiencing homelessness.

The challenge of homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic warranted a page for education on the CDC's website. As a region with a substantial homeless population, the healthcare of those experiencing homelessness was a vital topic in deciding plans for the region. The CDC provides recommendations for how a person experiencing homelessness can work to avoid exposure. This page details common FAQs

from individuals and communities who fear their homeless population are at increased risk.

Some counties questioned what constituted as an individual experiencing homelessness. Individuals from forums explained how there are people and families who are not technically “homeless” but live in homes that have subpar conditions. One story even specified that there are individuals with families living in dirt-floor garages. While individuals are not what would be considered individuals experiencing homelessness, they are still not receiving a quality of life from housing that is sufficient for meeting basic needs.

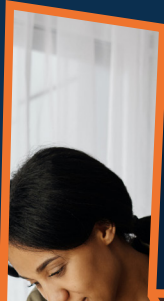
RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY

- Develop regional analysis of homeless population.
 - Homelessness count, resources, gap needs analysis
- Take Inventory of current organizations and programs developed to assist those experiencing homelessness.
 - Develop a needs assessment.
 - Determine plan to supplement and identify gaps within region.

RECOMMENDED OVERARCHING QUALITY OF LIFE NEXT STEPS FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY

- Develop a comprehensive understanding of the social services among stakeholders and residents of the region that can be utilized in West Central during crises.
 - Create a plan for the expansion of programs.
 - Engage local organizations in the conversation to learn what resources are available within the region.
- Create a plan for mental health, workforce, and overall safety/work alongside Better Health Wabash Valley and regional law enforcement to determine infrastructure and programming needs, including funding.

RESILIENT



EDUCATION

In March of 2020, schools all over the country saw one of the most unique challenges faced by the American education system. With the threat of COVID-19 spreading through school systems, many school corporations made the decision to move to online formats and have students learn from the safety and comfort of their own homes. While this decision ultimately protected students from increased exposure in mass groups, it also exposed challenges within the school system. During the spring 2020 semester, students of all different age groups and grades faced unique problems pertaining to technology, their school's quality, mental health, learning loss, educational attainment, etc. For younger children who had not yet gained the independence needed, they relied heavily on parents to help guide them in the new online format. For middle, elementary, and high school students, their bedrooms became classrooms where all social interactions and extracurricular activities were stripped away. College students arguably saw the biggest change as their classes moved online and their campuses shut down completely forcing many to evacuate dorm halls and see a complete disturbance of their current way of life.

While most classes in West Central Indiana resumed to in-person formats during the 2020 – 2021 school year, the lasting and continued effects of the pandemic were still present. As schools have attempted to return to normal through a mix of in-person and online formats, students and teachers still experienced struggles as the pandemic has continued. Based on discussions held in the Resilient surveys and forums as well as a general understanding of struggles within the region and Indiana, Thrive West Central identified the following sub-themes pertaining to education:

- Learning Loss
- School Quality
- Student Health
- Broadband Development and Digital Inclusion

During the Resilient process, Thrive West Central and relevant partners struggled to obtain accurate data on the current state of schools and educational facilities within West Central Indiana. This can be attributed to the ongoing nature of the challenges faced by schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to this, organizations are still observing and studying the effects of the pandemic on students, school corporations, teachers, and the overall education system. However, during the attempt to acquire data on West Central Indiana's schools, it became apparent there is a lack of knowledge in the offerings of our different school corporations. As the region moves forward, it would be highly beneficial to conduct a SWOT analysis of West Central Indiana's schools. This would include analyzing the different offerings of each county, corporation, and individual schools. Assessing the different sports programs, technological advances, rankings, counseling services, education programs, extracurriculars, capacities, etc., would allow for the region to create a comprehensive understanding of our schools and allow them to further assess how our school system can work to become resilient in the face of adversity and economic crisis.

CASE STUDY

Indiana school districts such as MSD of Pike Township and Smith-Green Community Schools have utilized SWOT analyses of their district's resources to guide future strategic planning efforts, with a specific emphasis on enhancing student performance and creating innovative learning environments. Both plans used multiple SWOT analyses from area-specific departments/committees to gain a holistic sense of the needs of each district.

LEARNING LOSS

OVERVIEW

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools all over the county, state, and region had to hastily move to online formats that altered the way students learned and participated in classes. With no in-person discussions, tests, lectures, and assignments, there was much confusion from both students and teachers as they had to adjust to this new way of communication. No one knew how things would play out, much less what drastic measures would be taken nationwide.

It has become apparent in West Central Indiana that all students experienced some form of learning loss due to COVID-19. On a nationwide scale, NBC News reported that students lost an estimated 10% of their normal classes. In addition, many are still experiencing learning loss or the long-term effects of it. Students in the area have cited reasons for learning loss to be attributed to general confusion and change of atmo-

sphere, lack of understanding for technology with both students and faculty, lack of educational resources, and other extenuating circumstances relating to mental health.

Due to the recent nature of the many challenges that are present with learning loss, regional data on its impact is unavailable. However, the Indiana Department of Education has begun extensive work to understand the impact this lack of learning will have on students state-wide.

IMPACT OF COVID-19

There was a significant loss of learning for students during and after the pandemic. Professors and teachers could not teach as effectively as before, students were under tremendous external and internal pressures, and unfortunate situations led to an overall lack of learning. Students reported difficulties about their availability within home environments, challenges dealing with broadband and internet connections, lack of communication with teachers, and lack of support in their studies. In Indiana, during COVID-19, students have lost an estimated 209 days in math and 332 days in reading. The following chart has the Indiana Department of Education’s rankings of the learning loss impact for grades 1 -12 and the estimated time to make up for this loss.

Grade	Composite
1	Significant
2	Significant
3	Significant
4	Significant
5	Moderate
6	Moderate – Significant
7	Moderate
8	Moderate
9	Minor/No
10	Minor/No
11	Minor/No
12	Minor/No

Significant	Recovery time > 1 year
Moderate	Recovery time < 1 year
Minor/No	Minimal recovery time

SOURCE: INDIANA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

By missing the spring 2020 semester of traditional learning, not to mention the following 2020 – 2021 school year that consisted of hybrid or all-online classes, students had a learning gap. The gap only continued to grow as expectations were slow to change for students in the following semesters. With students, teachers, and professors losing their foundation for sustainable learning and growth, the COVID-19 pandemic’s impact on learning loss exposed a fundamental failure within the system.

While many professors and teachers tried to stay in contact with students, students felt that the lack of in-person meetings and discussions made it difficult to ask questions and get the individual attention and help needed to effectively learn. With the new responsibility to only speak with students through email, many teachers felt a new overwhelming pressure. During the community forums, it was remarked how professors felt their entire schedule had to shift to accommodate the schedule of students. Without the scheduled meeting times set up through normal in-person classes, teachers were unable to eloquently teach masses of students where questions would be heard and answered by a large group.

However, students also reported frustration towards many professors and teachers and stated that they felt many did not keep up with the communication needed to learn, therefore resulting in a lack of learning in former in-person classes. Students were unable to attend lectures and access assigned materials, and instead had to rely on email communication as opposed to the usual in-person conversations. While teachers did adjust guidelines and adopted forgiving grading approaches, many students still found it incredibly difficult to learn and communicate with the given circumstances.

Students also faced external distractions that created an additional challenge for at-home learning resulting in a further lack of learning. Being at home as opposed to a dedicated classroom is a very different environment that students struggled to adapt to. Students lost their extracurricular activities, sports recreation, social lives, work, and also had external stressors that contributed to a lack of focus and ability to concentrate in online classes. Many students saw their parents furloughed or laid-off, saw a change in financial situations, or saw siblings go through the same situation.

While students in high levels of education such as high school and college were able to handle themselves and adapt, younger children without the ability to work on their computers depended on both parents and teachers in their learning experience. The state of Indiana reported a concerning drop in specific areas of focus. According to the results from the 2020 -2021 ILEARN exam, the Indiana Department of Education reported that 40.5% of students are at or above proficiency standards in English, and 36.9% are at or above proficiency in mathematics. Only 28.6% of students statewide in grades 3 through 8 are proficient in both English and math. That's a drop from 37.1% the last time the test was administered in 2019.

When looking at how learning is lost in West Central Indiana, it is important to look specifically at college students. College courses are built upon each other and are designed to be taken at the same time and sequentially built upon from previous classes. When the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted many students' spring 2020 semester and all subsequent semesters, learning loss created gaps in many college students' schedules, knowledge, and overall education. That gap, made worse by having over half a semester of online learning, general anxiety, confusion, personal struggles, and fear towards the COVID-19 virus, meant that students had more on their minds than their studies. Students still tried to prioritize their studies, but it was made increasingly difficult to keep up and stay on track for their majors and areas of focus. This situation then transferred into many students' summer and fall semesters too.

The issue of learning loss due to the COVID-19 pandemic has become a challenge that Indiana legislators are looking at on a strategic level. In 2021, lawmakers worked to provide for schools that were facing increased challenges due to learning loss. During the summer of 2021, \$150 million was made available to schools across Indiana. Many of these schools, encompassing kindergarten through grade 12, applied to fund local initiatives geared towards making up for learning loss. While all areas of education were affected, many schools are specifically looking to create programs geared towards STEM programs due to the increased gaps in subjects pertaining to math and science.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY

- Support educators in establishing processes, procedures, and tailored curricula for remote and online learning.
 - Expectations of teachers and professors
 - Expectations of students
- Develop foundation for online services for students.
 - Make services such as counseling, tutoring, students' activities available online and accessible.

SCHOOL QUALITY

OVERVIEW

The quality of schools within West Central Indiana was brought to the forefront during the COVID-19 pandemic. As schools moved online, their abilities and capacities were tested. The following charts detail the different rankings given to the individual schools and districts in West Central Indiana in 2020. None of the region's school districts were given an "A" in the most recent rankings. These rankings are not meant to compare schools and counties, but instead create an honest dialogue about the needs of our region regarding education. Each school has its unique strong points and weaknesses that make it a vital part of West Central Indiana.

High-quality schools are vital to a strong region not only because of the individual learning outcomes for children, who go on to be members of our communities and workforce, but also for attracting and retaining talent to the region who are looking for the best education they can secure for their children.

CLAY COUNTY

Clay Community Schools: B

School	State Grade	Grades Served
High School		
Clay City High School	B	Grade 9 – Grade 12
Northview High School	B	Grade 9 – Grade 12
Middle School		
Clay City Middle School (combined with Clay City high School)	B	Grade 7 – Grade 8
North Clay Middle School	C	Grade 6 – Grade 8
Elementary School		
Clay City Elementary School	B	Kindergarten – Grade 6
East Side Elementary School	B	Pre-K – Grade 5
Forest Park Elementary School	D	Pre-K – Grade 5
Jackson Township Elementary School	A	Kindergarten – Grade 5
Meridian Elementary School	A	Pre-K – Grade 5
Staunton Elementary School	A	Kindergarten – Grade 5
Van Buren Elementary school	A	Pre-K – Grade 5

PARKE COUNTY

North Central Parke Community School Corporation: C

School	State Grade	Grades Served
High School		
Parke Heritage High School	A	Grade 9 – Grade 12
Middle School		
Parke Heritage Middle School	C	Grade 6 – Grade 8
Elementary School		
Rockville Elementary School	C	Pre-K – Grade 5
Turkey Run Elementary School	C	Pre-K – Grade 5

Southwest Parke Community School Corporation: C

School	State Grade	Grades Served
Middle School/High School		
Riverton Parke Jr./Sr. High School	B	Grade 7 – Grade 12
Elementary School		
Montezuma Elementary School	C	Pre-K – Grade 6
Rosedale Elementary School	C	Pre-K – Grade 6

PUTNAM COUNTY

Cloverdale Community Schools: B

School	State Grade	Grades Served
High School		
Cloverdale High School	A	Grade 9 – Grade 12
Middle School		
Cloverdale Middle School	B	Grade 5 – Grade 8
Elementary School		
Cloverdale Elementary School	B	Pre-K – 4th Grade

Greencastle Community School Corporation: C

School	State Grade	Grades Served
High School		
Greencastle High School	B	Grade 9 – Grade 12
Middle School		
Greencastle Middle School	C	Grade 6 – Grade 8
Elementary School		
Tzouanakís Intermediate School	C	Grade 3 – Grade 5
Deer Meadow Primary School	C	Pre-K – Grade 2
Ridpath Primary School	C	Kindergarten – Grade 2

North Putnam Community School Corporation: B

School	State Grade	Grades Served
High School		
North Putnam High School	A	Grade 9 – Grade 12

School	State Grade	Grades Served
Middle School		
North Putnam Middle School	B	Grade 6 – Grade 8
Elementary School		
Bainbridge Elementary School	C	Pre-K – Grade 5
Roachdale Elementary School	B	Pre-K – Grade 5

South Putnam Community School Corporation: B

School	State Grade	Grades Served
High School		
South Putnam High School	B	Grade 9 – Grade 12
Middle School		
South Putnam Middle School	C	Grade 6 – Grade 8
Elementary School		
Central Elementary School	B	Kindergarten – Grade 5
Fillmore Elementary School	A	Pre-K – Grade 5

SULLIVAN COUNTY

Northeast School Corporation: B

School	State Grade	Grades Served
Jr./Sr. High School		
North Central Jr./Sr. High School	A	Grade 7 – Grade 12
Elementary School		
Northeast North Elementary School	B	Kindergarten – Grade 6
Northeast East Elementary School	A	Pre-K – Grade 6

Southwest School Corporation: B

School	State Grade	Grades Served
High School		
Sullivan High School	A	Grade 9 – Grade 12
Middle School		
Carlisle Middle School	A	Grade 6 – Grade 8

School	State Grade	Grades Served
Sullivan Middle School	C	Grade 6 – Grade 8
Elementary School		
Carlisle Elementary School	A	Pre-K – Grade 5
Sullivan Elementary School	B	Pre-K – Grade 5

VERMILLION COUNTY

North Vermillion Community School Corporation: C

School	State Grade	Grades Served
Jr./Sr. High School		
North Vermillion Jr./Sr. High School	C	Grade 7 – Grade 12
Elementary School		
North Vermillion Elementary School	B	Pre-K – Grade 6

South Vermillion Community School Corporation: C

School	State Grade	Grades Served
High School		
South Vermillion High School	B	Grade 9 – Grade 12
Middle School		
South Vermillion Middle School	C	Grade 6 – Grade 8
Elementary School		
Central Elementary School	B	Pre-K – Grade 5
Ernie Pyle Elementary School	C	Pre-K – Grade 5
Van Duyn Elementary School	D	Pre-K – Grade 5

VIGO COUNTY

Vigo County School Corporation: B

School	State Grade	Grades Served
High School		
Terre Haute North Vigo High School	B	Grade 9 – Grade 12
Terre Haute South Vigo High School	A	Grade 9 – Grade 12
West Vigo High School	A	Grade 9 – Grade 12

School	State Grade	Grades Served
Booker T. Washington High School	N/A	Grade 9 – Grade 12
Middle School		
Honey Creek Middle School	B	Grade 6 – Grade 8
Otter Creek Middle School	C	Grade 6 – Grade 8
Sarah Scott Middle School	C	Grade 6 – Grade 8
West Vigo Middle School	D	Grade 6 – Grade 8
Woodrow Wilson Middle School	B	Grade 6 – Grade 8
Elementary Schools		
Benjamin Franklin Elementary School	B	Kindergarten – Grade 5
Davis Park Elementary School	C	Kindergarten – Grade 5
DeVaney Elementary School	N/A	Kindergarten – Grade 5
Dixie Bee Elementary School	A	Kindergarten – Grade 5
Farrington Grove Elementary School	A	Kindergarten – Grade 5
Fayette Elementary School	A	Kindergarten – Grade 5
Fuqua Elementary School	B	Kindergarten – Grade 5
Hoosier Prairie Elementary School	B	Kindergarten – Grade 5
Lost Creek Elementary School	B	Kindergarten – Grade 5
Meadows Elementary School	C	Kindergarten – Grade 5
Ouabache Elementary School	B	Kindergarten – Grade 5
Riley Elementary School	A	Kindergarten – Grade 5
Rio Grande Elementary School	A	Kindergarten – Grade 5
Sugar Creek Consolidated Elementary School	B	Kindergarten – Grade 5
Sugar Grove Elementary School	B	Kindergarten – Grade 5
Terre Town Elementary School	B	Kindergarten – Grade 5
West Vigo Elementary School	B	Kindergarten – Grade 5

IMPACT OF COVID-19

During the COVID-19 pandemic, each individual school's quality and capacity was put to the test. Working to meet the unique needs of the students and teachers from their homes, schools were not able to offer their usual amenities and found themselves having to adapt all facets of their foundations. The grades above reflect the way in which schools were able to handle and adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic for their students. There are many factors that determine this grade. It is important to remember that each school faces different challenges, especially when discussing socioeconomic status, accessibility, and resources. Schools with lower grades may have faced a larger challenge due to their size, socioeconomic status, and

funding opportunities.

Each school's individual grade is also determined by the student's ability to learn within a classroom. In 2020, many students' classrooms were unconventional as most were their own living rooms. This additional challenge, without the ability to provide a normal school experience, can impact a student's learning outcome, therefore impacting the school overall grade. To move forward and work towards higher grades within the region, school corporations must collectively find ways to improve each individual school and ensure that students have equal opportunities and access to counseling, extracurricular activities, learning opportunities, and technology.

In 2019 and 2021, the Hulman Field Air National Guard Base did an analysis of the Vigo County School Corporation and the Clay Community Schools Corporation. Both organizations serve the children whose parents work directly in the base. This analysis looked at every school within the corporations to give cumulative color-coded rankings in areas such as academic performance criteria, school climate criteria, and service offering criteria. The rankings were as follows:

Red ≤ 33.3% < Yellow < 66.7% ≤ Green (percentile)

These areas of concentration were then broken down further into sub-categories such as graduation rate, suspension rate, student to counselor ratio, etc. The Vigo County School Corporation and Clay Community School Corporation did not rank highly when averaged together. With 12 categories for ranking in total, the area's schools received 6 red, 5 yellow, and 1 green in 2019. In 2021, they received 8 red, 2 yellow, and 2 green. This analysis also determined the following as additional areas of need for the two school corporations:

- Pre-K
- Mental Health Support
- Growth Measure

While this analysis is only of two school corporations within West Central Indiana, the results arguably reflect the region. Data from the Resilient surveys and forums show that many schools struggled in the same areas.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY

- Convene regional superintendents and school board members for discussions on data-driven approach to boosting school quality.

STUDENT HEALTH

OVERVIEW

While the health of all residents within the region is important, forum and survey participants identified student health as a particularly pressing challenge amid the pandemic.

In March of 2020, schools across the country halted in-person classes. Classes were moved to online formats, forcing students to go to school from their own living spaces. This created feelings of isolation, loneliness, fear of the unknown, and many other stressors that led to declining mental health in West Central Indiana's student population.

While no specific questions were asked about student's health during the public forums, every county discussed it at length when the topic of mental health came up. The student population throughout the region suffered greatly. With online formats, many were not able to see their friends or teachers, and students were not permitted to participate in their usual stress-reducing activities like club meetings, after school events, etc. This created a crisis in student health that has affected not only our region but all of Indiana.

IMPACT OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately had negative effects on students. In March of 2020, nearly every school in the country made the decision to move classes online. This forced students to take their classes and complete their schoolwork within their own home and robbed many students of their end-of-the-year

activities including proms, graduations, and more.

With increased isolation, financial stressors, and a hit to their routine schedules, studies have found that young kids' and teens' mental health has greatly suffered during the pandemic. The Ann and Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital in Chicago even reported that 71% of parents believe the pandemic has taken a toll on children's mental health, 69% believe it is the worst thing to happen to their child, and a startling 67% wish they had been more vigilant of their child's mental health from the beginning of the pandemic. From these statistics, the top stressor for children in school was identified as social isolation. The Kaiser Family Foundation found that 3.7 million adolescents depend on educational settings for their primary source of mental health care, suggesting that the pandemic's interference with schools made accessing the appropriate treatment difficult for many students struggling with mental health.

When teachers attended the forums and took the survey, they expressed the same concerns. They conveyed a compassionate need to increase student health and mentorship opportunities.

In response to this student health crisis, many schools expanded their counseling services to online formats. Telehealth counseling became vital for many students during this time. However, with many mental health facilities having waitlists that lasted weeks, school counseling services were many individuals' only option. School counseling services also struggled to meet the needs of students due to limited mentors, counselors, and therapists available for school use.

Even with a big focus on mental health, this was not the only challenge students and school-aged children faced during the pandemic. In 2020, the Indiana Department of Child Services reported there was a decline in calls made to the child abuse and neglect hotline. However, they do not believe this is due to a true decline in abuse and neglect in households. Without the everyday interaction between teachers and students, school employees did not have the face-to-face interaction needed to assess whether a call should be placed. DCS reports that they believe that neglect and abuse rates are alarmingly higher than their numbers suggest due in part to pandemic-related stressors.

Given the prevalence of higher education institutions in the region, the health of college students was also a frequently cited area of concern. With the online class format, many students moved back home and thus experienced increased mental health struggles relating to depression, anxiety, and stress. Those participating in the forums applauded the colleges' fast thinking as counseling services available for students were made accessible online and available in various states. Others applauded the way colleges began partnerships with local mental health facilities to offer their students more guidance. However, as the issues students were dealing with shifted, many schools struggled to ensure that all students were able to receive the help needed. With a limited amount of counselors accounting for hundreds and/or thousands of college-aged students, their mental health has suffered as students struggle to make an appointment. Even with many classes returning to in-person learning during the 2020 – 2021 school year, many students are still not able to return to normal, causing continued stress, anxiety, and depression.

Many college students who worked part-time either saw substantial changes in their work schedules or were laid off from their positions indefinitely. For these students, part-time jobs were essential as many used their wages to pay for crucial expenses such as school, housing, food, and general entertainment. This added stressor, which was further compounded by the fact that most college students did not qualify for unemployment or received any stimulus packages from the government, contributed to an overall decline in mental health among college students. The financial burdens faced by students created increased stress that many were experiencing for the first time. To add to this, many students were confined to dorm rooms or forced to move back home to their parents' houses. Students were put in situations where they were forced to sustain themselves in new ways that challenged every aspect of their lives. Their finances, mental health, living situations, and overall education faced challenges that at the time were completely unknown. Being forced to maintain their grades during this time proved almost impossible for many.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY

- Promote initiatives for student health.
 - Increase available counselors at K-12 schools and colleges in the area.
 - Work to create partnerships with colleges and mental health facilities in the area.
- Find ways to assist students in external stressors.

- Establish student crisis fund.
- Promote college degrees for mental health related career fields within colleges in West Central Indiana.
 - Incentivize and encourage retention among college-aged students.
 - Aid in shortage of mental health workers in the state of Indiana and West Central Region.

BROADBAND DEVELOPMENT AND DIGITAL INCLUSION

OVERVIEW

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, many schools within West Central Indiana began implementing one-to-one devices within their classrooms through Chromebooks and utilizing e-learning days to keep students engaged in times when school could not be in session. During this time, a slow realization was discovered that while students were given the devices to access their studies and participate outside school, not all of them could utilize their devices to the fullest potential without access to the internet. This led many students to utilize free public Wi-Fi from local businesses or their local libraries.

When COVID-19 caused schools to send students home, many of the school corporations were able to transition into e-learning in March of 2020. All schools within the region remained virtual through the end of the spring 2020 semester. With students and staff online, this created regional reliance on reliable broadband access. For our rural communities, the lack of broadband access developed a barrier that many would continue to struggle with well into the 2020-2021 school year.

According to data from the Indiana Department of Education, 5,317 students within West Central Indiana had access to computers without internet access, and between 11 to 33% of students in each school district did not have access to a computer or internet during the 2020-2021 school year.

Corporation	Number of Kids (Not Based on Enrollment)	Enrollment	# w/o Computer	# w/ Computer, w/o Internet	% No Computer or Internet
Clay Community Schools	5,861	4,052	512	474	17
Greencastle Community School Corporation	2,681	1,737	37	285	12
South Putnam Community Schools	1,549	1,073	62	175	15
North Putnam Community Schools	1,971	1,289	58	230	15
Cloverdale Community Schools	1,702	1,041	29	301	19
Northeast School Corporation	1,746	783	154	134	16

Corporation	Number of Kids (Not Based on Enrollment)	Enrollment	# w/o Computer	# w/ Computer, w/o Internet	% No Computer or Internet
Southwest School Corporation	2,412	1,755	202	606	33
Vigo County School Corporation	21,964	13,674	676	2,632	15
South Vermillion School Corporation	2,489	1,652	96	177	11
North Vermillion School Corporation	914	730	41	83	14
North Central Parke Community School Corporation	2,213	1,187	515	89	27
Southwest Parke Community Schools	1,328	1,027	144	131	21

IMPACT OF COVID-19

E-learning was a relatively new concept. As stated above, many schools within the region had already begun implementing online learning during the winter months to avoid weather cancellations. COVID-19 made it apparent that e-learning is a vital tool for students, teachers, and school corporations to have at their disposal to keep students learning when they cannot physically be in school. However, given the rural nature of the region, many students and teachers struggled to connect, hindering their ability to participate in video calls, download and upload assignments, and stay connected. During the public forums, many individuals told stories about families in their towns and regions who had to travel to public library parking lots for a stable broadband connection.

Focus group participants discussed both advantages and drawbacks of e-learning. Many organizations switched to digital platforms along with schools to share experiences such as virtual field trips, guest speakers, online games, and more. However, students across the country have expressed a general sense of displeasure with virtual learning. Many students have reported poor connections leading to less class engagement and less focus on assignments. During forums, some parents discussed the trouble they experienced while children were engaged in virtual learning. Often, families with both parents working from home and multiple children attending school virtually found their internet systems unable to accommodate the high level of traffic. Additionally, one focus group stated their concerns about students' mental health due to isolation caused by virtual learning.

Through this experience, reliable broadband access was identified as a critical need for West Central Indiana. The ability to successfully switch to a virtual learning environment was critical to the continuing education of students within the region. To prepare for the future, West Central Indiana needs to improve reliable broadband access throughout the region, while also identifying how best to balance e-learning and in-person learning in the future.

CASE STUDY

In response to a high volume of families in need of safe, reliable locations for their children to participate in e-learning, The Mind Trust, and Indianapolis-based non-profit that “works to ensure high-quality education for all kids,” provided grants to several community centers to provide free, facilitated learning communities for children to participate in virtual classes. These communities ensured that children had access to reliable internet and met the needs of working parents who required dependable childcare.

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY

- Develop regional map of free public Wi-Fi locations/mobile hotspot routes and make available for students and families.
- Partner with community centers and other public facilities with Wi-Fi to determine options for expanding internet access for students who may not have access at home for e-learning or homework.
- Provide for uniform adoption of 1:1 technology policy in each regional school district within the next 5-10 years.

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**RECOMMENDED
NEXT STEPS**

WORKFORCE AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

BUSINESS RESOURCES AND DEVELOPMENT

- Develop a plan to attract angel investors to the West Central Indiana region.
- Develop an inventory of all regional workforce and business development stakeholders alongside a collaborative communications strategy, and determine gap needs within the region.
 - Create an external communications strategy allowing businesses and workers a way to engage efficiently with the programs.
- Exploit Thrive West Central Indiana's revolving loan program through facilitated community round tables and a comprehensive marketing strategy, in partnership with business development organizations within the region.
- Develop a small business grant program in coordination with local financial institutions and regional business organizations.

BROADBAND DEVELOPMENT AND DIGITAL INCLUSION

- Coordinate efforts to increase collaboration among regional stakeholders and groups through the development of a regional Digital Inclusion Alliance to enhance digital inclusion within the region.
 - Align pre-existing resources to further develop digital literacy and determine where additional resources are required.
- Conduct Broadband Access survey to identify broadband deserts within the region.
- Develop taskforces within each county to begin the process of becoming a Broadband Ready Community.
 - Within West Central Indiana, the City of Brazil, Parke County, and Vermillion County are already established as Certified Broadband Ready Communities. In an effort to regionalize this effort, the remaining counties within the region are encouraged to complete this process.
- Develop strong relationships with the Indiana Broadband Office and broadband providers to fully capitalize on the Broadband Ready Community designation.

TALENT RETENTION AND ATTRACTION

- Work with the 21st Century Talent designation task force/data collected in coordination with the Resilient study to formulate a workforce needs assessment for the region.
 - Identify educational stakeholders (K-12/Higher Education) for gap needs/pipeline consultation.
 - Work with West Central Education Alliance to continue to expand internships, externships, apprenticeship, and certification opportunities for students as well as build relationships among businesses and organizations within the region.
- Advance educational institutions offerings to promote future workforce development opportunities.
 - Provide increased programs and opportunities through innovative technology and state-of-the-art facilities.

TRAINING AND EDUCATION

- Create a pilot grant incentive program for builders within the region (Thrive West Central Create an inventory of higher education assets for the region to better understand resources available.
- Further develop the 21st Century Talent Designation task force in the region to include more business leaders, utilizing K-12 and higher education asset inventory lists, with a focused approach utilizing specific metrics.
- Further develop the 21st Century Talent Designation's suggested goals.
 - Create collaborative strategies for talent retention.
 - Engage Regional Education Alliance, workforce building programs, adult development initiatives.
 - Build potential partnerships between organizations.

- Further develop the West Central Education Alliance.
 - Utilization of Duke Energy Education Grant to develop countywide College and Career Pathways program for high school juniors and seniors in order to create an understanding of varying pathways for students in the area.
 - Develop adult education programs to further workforce training initiatives.
 - Create understanding of varying pathways for students in the area.
 - Incentive degree obtainments for those considering careers in the required field.
 - Educate youth in West Central School systems about the possibilities of careers outside of college degrees.

CHILDCARE FACILITIES

- Working with the United Way of the Wabash Valley and Chances and Services for Youth, utilize data collected over the last 24 months to shine light on the gap needs in childcare.
 - Utilize the data to inform stakeholders in the region of the issues/opportunities.
 - Help organizations working with this data reach their goals in a collaborative way/faster and more efficiently.
- Create a workforce/childcare taskforce consisting of regional stakeholders.
 - This group will not only be tasked with addressing workforce issues throughout the region but will also host conversations with current and prospect businesses around childcare, shift times, etc., to better gauge the need within industries and prepare for future workforce investments in the region.
- Work with organizations, businesses, and Institutions of Higher Education to create more viable options for childcare within the region.

HEALTH CARE

MENTAL HEALTH

- Promote local continuity of care in mental health.
 - Support a collaborative approach to mental health as a region.
 - Utilize synopsis of the See You in Terre Haute Plan to apply a one-stop-shop mental health network for all six counties.
- Establish a 24-hour Emergency Crisis Center for mental health related crises to provide faster and specialized care
 - Relieve current bed-count burden on many hospitals
 - Minimize transportation from medical facility to psychiatric health facility

SUBSTANCE USE

- Engage with the United Way of the Wabash Valley's Substance Use Disorders Council and their current programs/investments.
 - Substance Use Risk Education and Programming
 - E-Intervention Initiative
 - Jail Mentoring
 - Peer Recovery Specialists
 - Rural Communities Opioid Response Program (RCORP)

BROADBAND AND TELEHEALTH

- Promote continuation of care via telehealth when possible (advancing continuity of care in the rural areas of the region) - General Healthcare and Psychiatric Care.
 - Broadband consideration
 - Patients' technology proficiency consideration

ACCESS (TRANSPORTATION)

- Engage public with Thrive West Central's transportation services.

- Establish resources to aid in public's understanding of public transportation.
 - Bus routes
 - Local car services
 - Biking routes

AGING CARE FACTORS

- Engage public with Thrive West Central's aging services.
- Develop comprehensive list of aging care services for West Central Indiana.
 - Assisted living facilities
 - Healthcare guidance

OVERALL HEALTHCARE

- Analyzation of county silos during a public health crisis.
 - Each community could/did react differently.
 - Analyze the silos, determine opportunity/or not for public health collaboration amongst contiguous counties for continuity of health for all citizens within the region.
- Quality of Life – Continuation of focus on trails and outdoor recreation/promotion of assets which promote activity and overall wellness.
 - Understand trail and outdoor assets within the region (known and unknown).
 - Promote inventory of assets (e.g. expansion of trails app to include all outdoor amenities within the region).
- Re-engage Better Health Wabash Valley, a regional healthcare stakeholder group with the goal of positively changing the healthcare metrics of the region to lower overall healthcare costs for employers.
 - Determine their current goals/metrics.
 - Help align resources for successful implementation of programming.
 - Determine change of needs based on new pandemic concerns.
 - Determine overall public health crisis – analysis of what the region did well and what can be improved upon in the event of another health crisis or resurgence.

QUALITY OF LIFE

FOOD INSECURITY

- Develop a comprehensive plan for facing challenges related to food insecurity.
 - Engage local food pantries to analyze the needs in specific counties.
- Further initiate discussions with schools and their free/reduced lunch programs to gauge metrics in West Central Indiana.

HOUSING

- Take inventory of housing market in the six-county region.
 - Utilize Terre Haute Community Plan housing addendum.
 - Assess other county's demographics, housing market, income, etc.
- Institute Thrive West Central's Homes for the Future Pilot Program.
 - Provide way to fund future homebuilding efforts in the region.

TRAILS AND RECREATION

- Further develop Thrive West Central's "Crossroads Trails" app.
- Advance the trails system in West Central Indiana to further trail connectivity within the region as well as to further the state's Visionary Trails System.
- Develop wayfinding strategy directly geared towards college-aged students.
 - Create better comprehension among college-aged students of what the West Central Region has to offer.
 - Promote pride and belonging in West Central Indiana.

BROADBAND DEVELOPMENT AND DIGITAL INCLUSION

- Develop strong relationship with the Indiana Broadband Office and broadband providers to fully capitalize on the Broadband Ready Community designation.
- Devise communications strategy to assist households in their understanding of broadband funding opportunities.
 - Engage Thrive West Central to market opportunities to rural communities in the region.
 - Emergency Broadband Benefit Program
- Promote expansion and creation of public spaces with accessible Wi-Fi and broadband.
 - Expand region's public libraries' reach to provide their services to those located in rural areas (i.e. mobile units, expand locations, etc.).

HOMELESSNESS

- Develop regional analysis of homeless population.
 - Homelessness count, resources, gap needs analysis
- Establish comprehensive list of all facilities and resources available for those experiencing homelessness.
- Take Inventory of current organizations and programs developed to assist those experiencing homelessness
 - Develop a needs and gaps assessment
 - Determine plan to supplement and identify gaps within region

OVERALL QUALITY OF LIFE

- Develop a comprehensive understanding of the social services utilized in West Central during crises.
 - Create a plan to the expansion of programs.
 - Engage local organizations.
- Create overarching plan for mental health, workforce, and overall safety/work alongside Better Health Wabash Valley and regional law enforcement to determine infrastructure and program-ming needs, including funding.

EDUCATION

LEARNING LOSS

- Establish process and procedures for remote and online learning.
 - Expectations of teachers and professors
 - Expectations of students
- Develop foundation for online services for students.
 - Make services such as counseling, tutoring, students' activities available online and accessible.

SCHOOL QUALITY

- Improve current resources available for all students in West Central Indiana
 - Create centers dedicated to future workforce development and expanded learning opportunities

STUDENT HEALTH

- Promote initiatives for student health.
 - Increase available counselors at colleges in the area.
 - Work to create partnerships with colleges and mental health facilities in the area.
- Find ways to assist students in external stressors.
 - Establish student crisis fund
- Promote college degrees for mental-health-related career fields within colleges in West Central

Indiana.

- Incentivize and encourage retention among college-aged students.
- Aid in shortage of mental health workers in the state of Indiana and West Central Region.

BROADBAND DEVELOPMENT AND DIGITAL INCLUSION

- Create an inventory of K-12 educational assets for the region to better understand resources available.
 - Work alongside the region's school corporations and community assets such as public libraries to enhance digital literacy.
- Develop regional map of free public Wi-Fi locations/mobile hotspot routes and make available for students and families.
- Work with county leaders to expand broadband in rural areas.

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APPENDICES

FIRST SURVEY QUESTIONS & FORUM QUESTIONS

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QUESTIONS

- ★ During the pandemic, who did you turn to for business-related advice and guidance? To your knowledge, what organizations or resources in our region are available to provide you with help in growing and developing your business? What is one way in which you would like to change, expand, or grow your business, but are not sure how to do so?
- ★ How has your relationship with the internet/digital technology changed during the pandemic? Are there areas of your life (professional or personal) that have been greatly enhanced by an increased reliance on digital technology? What about areas that have worsened or made more difficult?
- ★ Have you or someone close to you experienced food insecurity during the pandemic (if you are comfortable sharing)? Was this an issue prior to the pandemic, or did it arise because of economic hardship caused by the pandemic? What did you/they do to seek assistance? What is needed in your community to better combat food insecurity moving forward?
- ★ To your knowledge, how has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the housing market in your area? Were these trends already occurring before the pandemic?

(Questions cont'd on back)

AGENDA

Welcome to the Resilient Regional Recovery Forum
Thrive West Central

Take the Survey

<https://thrivewestcentral.formstack.com/forms/resilientwestcentral>

Forum Questions & Discussion
Community

Thank You for Your Input!

Presented by:

THRIVE
WEST CENTRAL

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QUESTIONS

- ★ What resources exist to support those struggling with mental health issues in your community? What can be done to better address mental health concerns, especially in the context of a pandemic?
- ★ What skills (hard- and soft-) do you look for in a prospective employee, and which of these skills do employees in our region tend to lack (i.e., where is the “gap”)? How, if at all, has COVID-19 impacted workforce development within your industry and/or organization?
- ★ Are you proud to be from your county and/or West Central Indiana? If so, why? If not, why not? How has COVID-19 changed your perception of your county/West Central Indiana? How do you think people who do not live here perceive West Central Indiana? What can be done to improve this perception?

TAKE THE SURVEY

<https://thrivewestcentral.formstack.com/forms/resilientwestcentral>

Presented by:

THRIVE
WEST CENTRAL

REGIONAL STAKEHOLDERS

- Regional Organization Leaders
 - West Central Indiana Defense Network
 - United Way of the Wabash Valley
 - Wabash Valley Community Foundation
 - Clay County Chamber of Commerce
 - Parke County Chamber of Commerce
 - Putnam County Chamber of Commerce
 - Sullivan Chamber of Commerce
 - Terre Haute Chamber of Commerce
 - Vermillion County Chamber of Commerce
 - Partnership Parke County
- Governments
 - Clay County
 - Clay County Commissioners (Paul Sniders, President)
 - Clay County Council (Larry Moss, President)
 - City of Brazil (Brian Wyndham, Mayor)
 - Brazil City Council (Shane Litz, President)
 - Parke County
 - Parke County Commissioners (Jim Meece, President)
 - Parke County Council (Jon Pratt, President)
 - City of Rockville (Brandy Asher, Clerk-Treasurer)
 - Rockville Town Board (David Brown, President)
 - Putnam County
 - Putnam County Commissioners (Rick Woodall, President)
 - Putnam County Council (Stephanie Campbell, Vice President)
 - City of Greencastle (William A. Dory, Mayor)
 - Greencastle City Council (Adam Cohen, President)
 - Sullivan County
 - Sullivan County Commissioners (Robert Davis, President)
 - Sullivan County Council (Jerry Payne, President)
 - City of Sullivan (Clint Lamb, Mayor)
 - Sullivan City Council (John Ellington, President)
 - Vermillion County
 - Vermillion County Commissioners (Tim Yocum, President)
 - Vermillion County Council (Ashley Jones, President)
 - City of Clinton (Jack Gilfoy, President)
 - Clinton City Council (John Moore, President)
 - Vigo County
 - Vigo County Commissioners (Mike Morris, President)
 - Vigo County Council (Aaron Loudermilk, President)
 - City of Terre Haute (Duke Bennett, Mayor)
 - Terre Haute City Council (Earl Elliott, President)
- Nonprofits
- Higher Education Leadership
 - DePauw University
 - Indiana State University
 - Ivy Tech Community College – Terre Haute
 - Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology
 - Saint Mary-of-the-Woods College
- School Corporation Leadership
 - Mark Baker, Superintendent, Northeast School Corporation (Sullivan County)
 - Dave Chapman, Superintendent, South Vermillion Community School Corporation
 - Jeff Fritz, Superintendent, Clay Community Schools
 - Phil Harrison, Superintendent, Southwest Parke
 - Dr. Rob Haworth, Superintendent, Vigo County School Corporation
 - Jeffrey Hubble, Superintendent, Greencastle
 - Greg Linton, Superintendent, Cloverdale

- Dan Nelson, Superintendent, North Vermillion Community School Corporation
- Mike Schimpf, Superintendent, North Central Parke Community Corporation
- Nicole Singer, Superintendent, North Putnam
- Corey Smith, Superintendent, South Putnam
- Chris Stitzle, Superintendent, Southwest School Corporation (Sullivan County)
- Business Organizations
- Business/Corporate
- Working Team
 - Thrive West Central
 - West Central 2025
 - Wabash River RDA

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TIMELINE

NOVEMBER - DECEMBER 2020: DISCOVERY

- Revise, finalize, and distribute initial survey

JANUARY - MARCH 2021

- Review initial survey results; draft addition survey(s)
- Develop focus group strategy

APRIL - JUNE 2021: DATA COLLECTION

- Implement focus group and distribution strategy for surveys

JULY - SEPTEMBER 2021: CONTENT

- Categorize and organize data, establish trends and additional factors, measure survey success, determine if surveys and focus groups met or exceed expectations

OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2021: WRITING AND REVISION

- Draft and revise the regional plan document including content writing

JANUARY - MARCH 2022: DISCOVERY

- Brand the final document and creative visuals

APRIL - JUNE 2022: LAUNCH

- Plan logistics for press conference to announce final plan; facilitate meeting to establish next steps and implementation

RESILIENT FORUM TIMES, LOCATIONS, AND DATES

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REGIONAL FORUMS

- ★ **APRIL 29, 2021: SULLIVAN COUNTY FORUM (IN PERSON)**
Sullivan Civic Center | 5:30 – 7:00 p.m.
- ★ **APRIL 30, 2021: SULLIVAN COUNTY FORUM (VIRTUAL)**
Zoom Meeting ID: 847 5510 2440 Passcode: 048836 | 2:00 – 3:30 p.m.
- ★ **MAY 6, 2021: CLAY COUNTY FORUM (IN PERSON)**
Clay County YMCA (Brazil) | 5:30 – 7:30 p.m.
- ★ **MAY 7, 2021: CLAY COUNTY FORUM (VIRTUAL)**
Zoom Meeting ID: 837 5614 8042 Passcode: 394282 | 2:00 – 3:30 p.m.
- ★ **MAY 13, 2021: VIGO COUNTY FORUM (IN PERSON)**
West Vigo Conference Center at West Vigo Elementary | 5:30 – 7:00 p.m.
- ★ **MAY 18, 2021: VIGO COUNTY FORUM (VIRTUAL)**
Zoom Meeting ID: 884 7739 7615 Passcode: 175136 | 2:00 – 3:30 p.m.
- ★ **MAY 20, 2021: PUTNAM COUNTY FORUM (IN PERSON)**
Tiger Pointe Country Club | 5:30 – 7:00 p.m.
- ★ **MAY 25, 2021: PUTNAM COUNTY FORUM (VIRTUAL)**
Zoom Meeting ID: 843 3812 1338 Passcode: 269323 | 2:00 – 3:30 p.m.
- ★ **MAY 25, 2021: VERMILLION COUNTY FORUM (IN PERSON)**
Newport Public Library | 5:30 – 7:00 p.m.
- ★ **JUNE 3, 2021: VERMILLION COUNTY FORUM (VIRTUAL)**
Zoom Meeting ID: 862 9626 0128 Passcode: 626194 | 2:00 – 3:30 p.m.
- ★ **JUNE 3, 2021: PARKE COUNTY FORUM (IN PERSON)**
Parke Heritage High School Student Community Center | 5:30 – 7:00 p.m.
- ★ **JUNE 8, 2021: PARKE COUNTY FORUM (VIRTUAL)**
Zoom Meeting ID: 873 4377 3004 Passcode: 446062 | 2:00 – 3:30 p.m.

SECONDARY DATA SOURCES

- U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts
- STATS Indiana
- Indiana Business Research Center
- Office of Community and Rural Affairs COVID-19 Response Program (OCRA)
- Small Business Administration (SBA)
- Federal Paycheck Protection Program
- 2019 American Community Survey
- Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA)
- Indiana Early Learning Advisory Committee
- Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)
- Indiana Department of Education
- Bureau of Economic Analysis
- <https://telehealth.hhs.gov/providers/policy-changes-during-the-covid-19-public-health-emergency/>

PHOTO CREDITS

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GRAPH DATA

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	Year					
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
West Central Indiana	\$33,540.17	\$34,824.17	\$36,155.67	\$37,065.33	\$38,300.83	\$41,349
Northwest Indiana	\$39,267.29	\$40,095.57	\$41,416.43	\$43,366.71	\$44,817.29	\$48,261
North Central Indiana	\$41,110.40	\$41,270.20	\$43,488.20	\$45,155.40	\$45,981.20	\$48,918.60
Northeast Indiana	\$38,211.73	\$39,072.36	\$40,717.45	\$42,625.00	\$43,647.27	\$47,388.20
Lafayette Region	\$36,764.67	\$38,282.33	\$39,102.00	\$41,178.83	\$41,963.67	\$45,278.25
Central Indiana	\$47,571.78	\$49,269.11	\$50,736.11	\$53,045.11	\$54,513.22	\$58,015.89
East Central Indiana	\$36,182.22	\$36,778.78	\$38,216.44	\$39,794.78	\$40,922.00	\$44,015
Bloomington Region	\$36,794.75	\$37,541.38	\$39,492.75	\$41,069.88	42,509.50	\$45,924.25
Southeast Indiana	\$38,594.60	\$39,273.70	\$40,602.10	\$42,544.60	\$44,058.50	\$47,624.60
South Central Indiana	\$38,340.50	\$39,322.67	\$40,217.67	\$41,802.17	\$43,267.83	\$46,447.83
Southwest Indiana	\$40,985.78	\$41,789	\$43,3432.11	\$45,068.67	\$46,498	\$50,572.89
Indiana	\$42,650.00	\$43,672.00	\$45,244.00	\$47,321.00	\$48,678.00	\$51,926
United States	\$49,019.00	\$50,015.00	\$52,118.00	\$54,606.00	\$56,490.00	\$59,510

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County	Year				
	2010	2020	2030	2040	2050
Clay County	26,890	26,466	26,246	25,504	24,735
Parke County	17,339	16,156	15,920	15,165	14,576
Putnam County	37,963	36,726	37,497	37,032	36,265
Sullivan County	21,475	20,817	19,910	18,952	18,120
Vermillion County	16,212	15,439	14,653	13,805	13,079

County	Year				
	2010	2020	2030	2040	2050
Vigo County	107,848	106,153	107,777	106,795	105,564
West Central Indiana	227,727	221,757	222,003	217,253	213,339
Indiana	6,483,802	6,785,528	7,014,880	7,171,702	7,272,579
United States	308,745,538	331,449,281	355,101,000	373,528,000	388,922,000

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Senior Population Estimates (65+)					
County	2010	2020	2030	2040	2050
West Central Indiana	14.2%	17.9%	21.00%	21.30%	20.68%
Clay County	15.1%	18.8%	23.00%	24.00%	24.22%
Parke County	15.6%	20.1%	23.20%	22.60%	20.55%
Putnam County	13.5%	17.2%	22.20%	23.30%	22.21%
Sullivan County	14.8%	18.5%	21.00%	21.30%	20.97%
Vermillion County	16.9%	20.6%	24.70%	25.30%	24.22%
Vigo County	13.5%	17.0%	19.30%	19.20%	18.86%
Indiana	13.0%	16.4%	20.1%	20.8%	20.9%
United States	13.0%	16.8%	20.5%	21.6%	22.0%

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	Percent with a computer	Percent with Broadband Sub.	Percent of Persons in Poverty
Clay	85.6%	76.4%	11.3%
Parke	77.2%	68.5%	15.1%
Putnam	88.8%	78.7%	10.5%
Sullivan	83.5%	70.2%	14.4%
Vermillion	88.3%	80.3%	12.2%
Vigo	88.6%	81%	20.8%
Indiana	88.7%	80.1%	11.9%
United States	90.3%	82.7%	11.4%

EGR (Indiana Region)	Total Spots in Licensed and Home Child Care Facilities	Total Spots for Home Child Care Facilities	Total Spots for Licensed Child Care Facilities
1	13,034	8,870	4,164
2	8,631	6,341	2,290
3	7,673	5,261	2,412
4	6,002	4,568	1,434
5	45,492	37,626	7,866
6	3,983	2,879	1,104
7 (West Central Indiana)	3,314	1,051	2,263
8	3,543	2,026	1,517
9	3,999	2,398	1,601
10	3,975	2,583	1,392
11	7,869	5,563	2,306
TOTAL	107,515	79,166	28,349

County	Year	Total Free and Reduced Lunch	Total Reported Enrollment	Percentage Free and Reduced Lunch
Clay County	2018	2,360	4,190	56.32%
	2019	2,274	4,183	54.36%
	2020	2,214	4,141	53.47%
Parke County	2018	1,320	2,251	58.64%
	2019	1,230	2,214	55.56%
	2020	1,168	2,192	53.28%
Putnam County	2018	2,672	5,626	47.49%
	2019	2,582	5,512	46.84%
	2020	2,581	5,423	47.59%
Sullivan County	2018	1,651	3,133	52.70%
	2019	1,669	3,154	52.92%
	2020	1,611	3,210	50.19%

County	Year	Total Free and Reduced Lunch	Total Reported Enrollment	Percentage Free and Reduced Lunch
Vermillion County	2018	1,371	2,495	54.95%
	2019	1,321	2,427	54.43%
	2020	1,307	2,453	53.28%
Vigo County	2018	7,812	14,858	52.58%
	2019	7,696	15,068	51.08%
	2020	8,232	14,986	54.93%
West Central Indiana	2018	17,186	32,553	52.79
	2019	16,772	32,558	51.51%
	2020	17,113	32,405	52.81%
Indiana	2018	522,888	1,116,556	46.83%
	2019	514,915	1,117,590	46.07%
	2020	507,739	1,111,333	45.69%

NOTES

REPORT PREPARED BY:

