



**Dubois County
Early Care and Education
Strategic Plan**

2024 - 2029

Vision

We will increase access to high-quality early care and education opportunities in Dubois County, Indiana.

Background

In response to a critical need for improved access to quality early care and education in the Indiana Uplands region, The Community Foundation of Bloomington and Monroe County (“CFBMC”) and Regional Opportunity Initiatives, Inc. (“ROI”) reached out to Transform Consulting Group (“TCG”) to engage the Indiana Uplands (Brown, Crawford, Daviess, Dubois, Greene, Martin, Monroe, Lawrence, Orange, Owen, and Washington Counties) in an early care and education coalition and capacity-building process. With grant funding from ROI, CFBMC and TCG met with stakeholders from each county to identify gaps and opportunities through the Design Thinking Process to address the need for accessible, affordable, high-quality early care and education and to create county-specific strategic plans.

This county strategic planning process informed collaborative sessions at the regional level, where we uncovered unique opportunities to support a broader collective impact across the Indiana Uplands. Building on our past success in regional community and economic development efforts and replicating the coalition and capacity-building process used by Monroe Smart Start in Monroe County, our region developed **Ready Early Learning in the Indiana Uplands**- a coordinated approach to sustainably improve early childhood education access, affordability, and quality. This county strategic plan outlines key goals and strategies identified throughout these planning processes and will be used to guide local and regional work to expand early care and education access and quality for the next five years.

Needs Assessment

Quick Facts			
3,774 Children under 6	2,346 (62%) Children under 6 in need of care	741 Known spots available for young children in early care and education programs	587 Spots for young children available in high-quality rated programs

Key Findings

- There are 3,774 young children in Dubois County, which is 9% of the population.¹
- An estimated 73% of children under age 6 need care because all adults in the home are working.²
- Only 52% of young children who need care have access. This is lower than the state’s average of 58%. Dubois County ranks 30 out of 92 counties in Indiana for the capacity to serve young children in need of care.³
- An estimated 19% of young children ages 5 and under in Dubois County are in poverty, higher than the state’s average (18%). This rate has increased since 2017 by 3 percentage points.⁴
- The average annual tuition cost of care for one child in Dubois County is \$7,925.⁵ A single parent with one child living in poverty would have to spend an estimated 39% of their income on child care at this average rate.⁶
- There are only 10 high-quality-rated early care and education programs in Dubois County with the capacity to serve 23% of children under 6 years of age who need care.
- Dubois County employers are losing an estimated \$12.1 million annually because of direct costs from absences and turnover due to lack of child care.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2018-2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, *Table B09001*.

² U.S. Census Bureau, 2018-2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, *Table S0101*.

³ Note: This is calculated from the number of children under 6 years in need of care because all parents in the home work PLUS children with no parents in the labor force that might want care in order to join the labor force, then multiply this by a 70% estimate to account for 30% of people who might not want formal care. Divide this total by the total capacity in programs.

Source: Brighter Futures Indiana, Data Center (January 2024); U.S. Census Bureau, 2018-2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Tables S0101 and B23008.

⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, 2018-2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, *Table B17024*.

⁵ Brighter Futures Indiana, Data Center (January 2024). Retrieved from <https://brighterfuturesindiana.org/data-center>.

⁶ Note: 2024 Health and Human Services Federal Poverty Guidelines report annual income for a single parent with one child living in poverty is \$20,440.

Goals

The Dubois County Early Care and Education Coalition has identified the following 4 goals to implement over the next 5 years:

Support the Early Care and Education (ECE) Workforce	Strengthen Community and Family Awareness & Collaboration
Improve Quality	Increase Capacity

Strategic Action Plan

Goal 1: Support the ECE Workforce

Strategies:

- Survey providers to understand their needs
- Fill gaps in workforce requirements to promote Paths to Quality (PTQ) advancement
- Find funding sources to support CPR and first aid training and background checks
- Pursue strategies to increase and sustain career wages for ECE professionals
- Support ECE educational advancement

Goal 2: Strengthen Community and Family Awareness and Collaboration

Strategies:

- Hire a leader to guide and facilitate strategic ECE work across the county
- Engage diverse stakeholders to form partnerships supporting strategic ECE work
- Promote and support early literacy
- Create a comprehensive communication plan with target messages for key stakeholders and audiences (e.g. multilingual communications resources, etc.)
- Form a unified coalition to inform ongoing ECE work

Goal 3: Improve Quality

Strategies:

- Adopt and promote county-wide quality standards
- Strengthen connectivity between ECE professionals
- Incentivize and recognize quality improvement

Goal 4: Increase Capacity

Strategies:

- Leverage partnerships between Head Start and local schools to ensure Head Start programs stay fully enrolled
- Identify facilities that could be used to accommodate expanded capacity through micro centers and other models
- Identify potential capacity-building projects
- Support ministries in becoming registered and participating in PTQ
- Braid and blend existing public funding through the schools and other sources to ensure all available early learning funds are being utilized fully

Strategic Plan - Timeline

This is a proposed overview of how the strategic plan will be implemented over the next 5 years, indicating the years in which specific strategies will be a focus of the coalition’s work. Some of the strategies will require action steps before the end of the year, and some strategies may take more than one year to complete. See the following implementation framework for a more detailed timeline.

Year 1 2024-2025	Year 2 2025-2026	Year 3 2026-2027	Year 4 2027-2028	Year 5 2028-2029
<p>Survey providers to understand their needs</p> <p>Fill gaps in workforce requirements to promote PTQ advancement</p> <p>Hire a leader to guide and facilitate strategic ECE work across the county</p> <p>Engage diverse stakeholders to form partnerships supporting strategic ECE work</p>	<p>Find funding to pay for CPR, first aid, and background checks</p> <p>Promote and support early literacy</p> <p>Adopt and promote county-wide quality standards</p> <p>Leverage partnerships between Head Start and local schools</p>	<p>Pursue strategies to increase and sustain career wages for ECE professionals</p> <p>Support ECE staff educational advancement</p> <p>Create a comprehensive communication plan with target messages for key stakeholders and audiences (e.g. multilingual communications resources, etc.)</p> <p>Identify facilities that could be used to accommodate expanded capacity through micro centers and other models</p>	<p>Form a unified coalition to inform ongoing ECE work</p> <p>Strengthen connectivity between ECE professionals</p> <p>Identify potential capacity-building projects</p> <p>Support ministries in becoming registered and participating in PTQ</p>	<p>Incentivize and recognize quality improvement</p> <p>Braid and blend existing public funding through the schools and other sources to ensure all available early learning funds are being utilized fully</p>

Strategic Plan - Implementation Framework

Goal 1: Support the ECE Workforce

Support the ECE Workforce Strategy 1: Survey providers to understand their needs		
Action Steps	Responsibility	Time Frame
Determine key research questions the survey should answer, such as exploring the barriers that keep families from pursuing early care and education		Year 1
Decide when and how to administer the survey		Year 1
Craft a survey within our local context and administer the survey, including incentives and timeframe to respond to the survey		Year 1
Distribute online surveys to solicit feedback from key stakeholders and answer identified research questions		Year 2
Review survey responses and develop additional action steps as needed based on feedback		Year 2

Support the ECE Workforce Strategy 2: Fill gaps in workforce requirements to promote PTQ advancement		
Action Steps	Responsibility	Time Frame
Identify best practices for ECE in national programs		Year 1
Explore 1:1 shadowing and mentoring opportunities with ECE staff with the highest PTQ rating		Year 1
Offer training supporting PTQ advancement during off-hours		Year 2
Create an awards system to support and recognize providers for quality care		Year 2
Identify programs willing to work towards increasing their PTQ level		Year 3
Provide networking and professional development		Year 1-5

opportunities to promote mutual support and learning		
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Support the ECE Workforce Strategy 3: Find funding to pay for CPR, first aid, and background checks		
Action Steps	Responsibility	Time Frame
Identify and establish relationships with key partners		Year 2
Connect with community partners to see if there is a willingness to donate training and services		Year 2
Research corporate partnerships and grant opportunities to help supplement the costs of CPR training, first aid training, and background checks		Year 2

Support the ECE Workforce Strategy 4: Pursue strategies to increase and sustain career wages for ECE professionals		
Action Steps	Responsibility	Time Frame
Identify and establish a county goal career wage for ECE workers		Year 3
Research other communities to identify models for increasing wages for the early learning workforce		Year 3
Support programs in accessing financial planning training and resources to enable higher wages for teachers and increased stability		Year 3
Explore government grants and subsidies at the state level that could support increased wages		Year 3

Support the ECE Workforce Strategy 5: Support ECE staff educational advancement		
Action Steps	Responsibility	Time Frame
Provide targeted professional development and training addressing the most urgent topics as identified in the provider survey		Years 3-5

Help more teachers get their Child Development Associate (CDA) credential		Year 4
Partner with local higher education institutions to offer training and other professional development experiences for ECE teachers		Year 4
Partner with local universities to consider scholarship opportunities for ECE staff to pursue their associate's or bachelor's degree		Year 4
Create a professional development network for early childhood professionals to meet, connect, and receive ongoing training		Year 5

Goal 2: Strengthen Community and Family Awareness and Collaboration

Strengthen Community and Family Awareness and Collaboration Strategy 1: Hire a leader to guide and facilitate strategic ECE work across the county		
Action Steps	Responsibility	Time Frame
Secure funding source for full-time or part-time county ECE leader		Year 1
Develop a job description		Year 2
Begin job search and interview process		Year 2
Hire a coalition leader and onboard		Year 2

Strengthen Community and Family Awareness and Collaboration Strategy 2: Engage diverse stakeholders to form partnerships supporting strategic ECE work		
Action Steps	Responsibility	Time Frame
Identify diverse stakeholder groups not currently engaged in the county's strategic ECE work who could provide valuable information or support such as school counselors, mental health professionals, former ECE workers, etc.		Year 1
Engage stakeholders to gather feedback on Dubois County's ECE strategy		Year 1

Partner with local child-friendly organizations (YMCA, libraries, etc) to partner on shared early learning goals		Year 1
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Strengthen Community and Family Awareness and Collaboration Strategy 3: Promote and support early literacy		
Action Steps	Responsibility	Time Frame
Identify the most effective reading approaches, programs, methods, and professional development approaches		Year 2
Plan targeted community events overlapping with families with young children to provide exposure to reading opportunities		Year 2
Create a plan to promote literacy-rich environments in Dubois County ECE programs		Year 3

Strengthen Community and Family Awareness and Collaboration Strategy 4: Create a comprehensive communication plan with target messages for key stakeholders and audiences (e.g. multilingual communications resources, etc.)		
	Responsibility	Time Frame
Identify key partners to target		Year 3
Create a communications plan		Year 3
Maintain up-to-date social media presence with continual resource updates, education on developmental milestones, etc.		Year 3
Develop a landing page to gather key ECE communications, information, and resources		Year 3

Strengthen Community and Family Awareness and Collaboration Strategy 5: Form a unified coalition to inform ongoing ECE work		
Action Steps	Responsibility	Time Frame

Develop the coalition’s mission, goals, fundraising, and marketing plan		Year 4
Build relationships with targeted community partners, employers and programs		Year 4
Brainstorm and create a logo and color scheme to build unity and awareness for the work		Year 4

Goal 3: Improve Quality

Increase Quality Strategy 1: Adopt and promote county-wide quality standards		
Action Steps	Responsibility	
Create a professional development network for early childhood professionals to meet, connect, and receive ongoing training		Year 2
Convene pre-k and K teachers and other stakeholders to review state standards, work with local experts, and develop county-wide quality standards		Year 2
Promote quality standards to key stakeholders including providers, families, and community leaders		Year 2

Increase Quality Strategy 2: Strengthen connectivity between ECE professionals		
Action Steps	Responsibility	Time Frame
Develop a Mentor Hub that matches mentors to professionals and provides toolkits, best practices, and more		Year 4
Host monthly educational meetings to connect, learn, and problem-solve		Year 5

Improve Quality Strategy 3: Incentivize and recognize quality improvement		
Action Steps	Responsibility	Time Frame
Identify and develop funding resources to support PTQ advancement		Year 5

Provide scholarships for teachers to attend conferences		Year 5
Recognize high-quality programs and individual teachers at an annual public ceremony		Year 5
Establish a scholarship system to support programs in paying for tuition costs for staff working toward their CDA credentials (or degree) and to help pay for background checks and other new hire requirements		Year 5

Goal 4: Increase Capacity

Increase Capacity Strategy 1: Leverage partnerships between Head Start and local schools		
Action Steps	Responsibility	Time Frame
Work with K-12 school partners to layer their funding streams to enroll more families, especially low-income families		Year 2
Utilize school social workers and counselors to promote and help enroll families in On My Way Pre-k and Child and Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) vouchers		Year 2
Establish a county-wide kindergarten readiness assessment in partnership with K-12 school partners		Year 2

Increase Capacity Strategy 2: Identify facilities that could be used to accommodate expanded capacity through micro centers and other models		
Action Steps	Responsibility	Time Frame
Explore existing facilities in the county that have potential to support capacity expansion		Year 3
Explore costs of needed renovation, equipment and furnishings		Year 3
Identify funding opportunities to address facility barriers to capacity expansion		Year 3

Increase Capacity Strategy 3: Identify potential capacity-building projects		
Action Steps	Responsibility	Time Frame
Study which types of capacity projects are needed (full-day or part-day, infant/toddler, unlicensed programs becoming licensed, etc.)		Year 4
Assess current programs to determine who has the ability to expand hours and what the barriers to expansion are		Year 4
Set goal to increase the types of care needed by specific amounts based on feedback		Year 4
Work with programs to reach the identified goals		Year 5

Increase Capacity Strategy 4: Support ministries in becoming registered and participating in PTQ		
Action Steps	Responsibility	Time Frame
Determine the number of ministry ECE programs that are interested in raising their PTQ level		Year 4
Identify barriers for programs to participate and advance in PTQ and strategies to help them overcome the barriers		Year 4
Create a resource fund to support new and existing programs in increasing their PTQ level		Year 5
Work with partners to reach the goal of increasing the amount of ministries registered and in PTQ		Year 5

Increase Capacity Strategy 5: Braid and blend existing public funding through the schools and other sources to ensure all available early learning funds are being utilized fully		
Action Steps	Responsibility	Time Frame
Identify vision and partners through a comprehensive planning process		Year 5
Define programs and potential accomplishments through braiding and blending public funding		Year 5

Explore financial options and identify funding sources and gaps		Year 5
Develop a coordinated financing plan		Year 5
Implement and track new financial plan		Year 5

Early Learning Design Team

The following organizations were involved in the development of this strategic plan:

- A Kids Place
- Building Blocks
- Dubois County Community Foundation
- Monroe Smart Start
- Southwest Dubois County Community School Corporation
- TRI-CAP