



# EDUCATION

# STRENGTHENING OUR EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS

**“Together we will provide and increase access to affordable, high-quality child care, and early childhood education, while continuing to enhance the county’s K-12 educational programs.”**

One of the key drivers of economic and social growth within a community is their high-quality educational programs and facilities. Educated communities are often targeted by developers and industries looking to relocate because the workforce is typically better aligned with higher wages jobs. While education on any level is important, the base of a well-educated community begins with early education (preschool) and primary, intermediate, and secondary education (K-12). The continual improvement and expansion of programs can not only increase educational attainment in Scott County, but can also open additional career pathways for students to explore. These programs, combined with training to assist teachers in identifying mental and behavioral issues, can assist schools in supporting students for lifelong success.

Supporting educational programming within the community can lead to more successful students and ultimately improve the quality of life for residents within Scott County. More educated populations often have higher wages, diverse backgrounds through learning, and are more likely to pursue their passions outside of the workplace. Educational programming is not limited to just schools but can be expanded to local libraries, daycares, youth sports leagues, and even senior centers. Learning does not stop after high school and providing the opportunity for adults and seniors to continually learn new skills or hobbies is another important facet of education.

## WHY IS THIS GOAL IMPORTANT TO SCOTT COUNTY?

- Economic diversification and growth require a sound educational base and diverse vocational training options.
- A higher percentage of Scott County residents (44.2%) stop their education with a high school diploma when compared to the state (33.5%) and nation (27.1%).
- Early education and K-12 programs are a critical factor in the early development of children, and this is directly correlated with their future success.
- In 2017, 70% of Scott County children with both parents in the labor force did not enroll in a registered, licensed, or state-rated child care program.
- Attracting and retaining talented staff is a concern for residents of Scott County with children currently enrolled in school.

## HOW CAN WE MOVE THIS GOAL FORWARD?

Many organizations and groups are working towards improving education within Scott County. The following action items work towards developing educational programs for all ages and stages of development. Some of these items are currently being addressed by one or more organizations while other action items were identified as gaps that need to be addressed. Two catalyst projects were identified for Educational Programs that will build momentum, address critical and immediate needs, and create a sound base for future action steps.

### Action Items

1. **Develop partnerships to expand affordable high-quality education for all children under the age of five.**
2. **Support infrastructure and facility improvements for Scott County Schools to ensure they can attract new talent, support new students, and adapt to online teaching strategies.**
3. Encourage all early childhood providers to include a program that addresses social and emotional skill development areas.
4. Identify best practices and program options that addresses the five early childhood developmental areas (adaptive, motor, cognitive, communication and social-emotional).
5. Expand and sustain the kindergarten readiness pilot program.
6. Work with teachers and school staff to establish ways of identifying and addressing student behavior issues stemming from stress and mental fatigue.
7. Encourage more parental involvement in youth activities throughout the county.
8. Achieve 100% registration of children under five years of age in the Dolly Parton Imagination Library.
9. Evaluate the feasibility of building an early childhood education center that can house programs, childcare, and health services.
10. Increase the number of and enrollment in quality daycare/preschool options that are available to all children in Scott County.
11. Identify funding sources for increased youth and senior programming, including senior mentorship programs connecting them to youth in the community.
12. Provide information to parents about how to find and choose a quality childcare or early childhood education program, including guidance on state certification and Indiana's Paths to Quality program.

Catalyst  
Project

Catalyst  
Project

### CATALYST PROJECT - ACTION ITEM 1: Develop partnerships to expand affordable high-quality education for all children under the age of five

Childhood education is a critical factor in the early development of children and directly contributes to their future success. Quality programming at a young age provides a base for education throughout life and also a base for social interactions and experiences which may not be possible at home. It is important to not only provide quality early childhood education and programming within Scott County but also ensure that it is accessible for all families. Supporting the expansion of programming throughout the county and encouraging parents to become more involved in their children's early learning can set the stage for success down the road. This can occur through existing providers or through the education of trained providers and development of new facilities, such as an early childhood center. It can also include providing technical assistance to local providers to find grant funding and developing partnerships to expand needed services.

#### WHY IS THIS PROJECT IMPORTANT TO SCOTT COUNTY?

Quality early childhood education programs are often limited in rural communities and can be expensive for families. Expanding access to quality programming and supporting existing providers can help reduce costs and increase enrollment within the county. Early education facilities and programs provide critical development skills and provide safe environments for children whose parents work and are unable to be home throughout the day. Increasing the quality and number of options can help change the negative view Scott County residents current have on access to early education programs in the county.

The success of students in elementary school is often directly tied to the education they received prior to entering, which is a reason quality programs may be highly competitive in rural communities. Growing the number of quality programs which provide a comprehensive approach to child education, and meet health and safety requirements, is important if Scott County wishes to increase the educational success of youth within the community.

#### WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO ACHIEVE?

- Expand quality educational options for young children within Scott County through partnerships with schools, local governments, and community organizations.
- Improve affordability and accessibility of educational programming.
- Increase the number of licensed and registered child care facilities within the county by providing technical assistance for existing and new providers.
- Better prepare children for kindergarten in order to set the stage for future success.

#### WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

1. **Immediate: Progress the actions outlined in the Early Childhood Committee Strategic Plan for 2022.**
2. **Immediate: Assist existing and new local childhood education providers in applying for local and state grants to assist in expansion or new facilities and programs.**
3. **Short: Evaluate local zoning regulations that may limit in-home providers from operating.**
4. **Short/Mid: Create a technical assistance program to help providers understand and meet state standards required to become a licensed in-home child care center.**
5. **Mid/Long: Create a training program within the high schools and/or Mid-America Science Park for those interested in entering the child care field or starting a child care business.**

## WHO ARE THE POTENTIAL PARTNERS?

**Scott County Early Childhood Committee:** The committee can lead efforts in ensuring providers are fully addressing the developmental needs of children and identify gaps in needed services within Scott County.

**Local Child Care Providers:** Individual providers can identify challenges and barriers impacting their ability to expand programming and work with local governments and organizations on how these can be overcome.

**Scott County Schools & Education Providers:** The school districts within the county and/or Mid-America Science Park can help provide facilities and technical assistance for expanding early childhood educational training and child care programming in the county.

**Scott County Community Foundation:** The community foundation can assist in and lead coordination efforts between entities within Scott County who will be part of this catalyst project and work to assist in identifying funding and technical resources for existing facilities and programs.

**Local Governments:** These entities can help provide assistance to existing programs and identify ways zoning regulations and other factors at the local level may be impeding the creation of new child facilities.

## WHERE HAS THIS BEEN DONE SUCCESSFULLY?



Source: Scott County School District 2

Parents rely on their child care providers to ensure their child is safe, healthy, and learning. In order to improve the quality of programs across and give families an easy tool to identify quality child care providers, the state has introduced Paths to QUALITY, a system that provides an accountability measure for funding and creates an alignment between the different factors impacting child care. Paths to QUALITY validates child care programs and provides incentives and awards for success,

with four levels of attainment. These levels range from basic care of a child being met, to a program which meets and exceeds national accreditation. While these programs are already known to many within the community, it can be difficult for providers to meet criteria due to facilities, funding, or technical issues. Supporting local providers and their attempts to meet state standards can help increase options available and improve overall quality of care.

**CATALYST PROJECT - ACTION ITEM 2:** Support infrastructure and facility improvements for Scott County Schools to ensure they can attract new talent, support new students, and adapt to online teaching strategies.

Schools are often a major draw for new residents to a community, with highly rated schools attracting families and talent from outside a community. Continually attracting a talented workforce and making necessary upgrades to classrooms, sports facilities, and other building amenities can improve learning conditions and create healthy teaching environments. Supporting improvements within Scott County schools relies on cooperation between many organizations and can also occur outside of the classroom. Local governments can work with schools to improve broadband networks, aid online learning, improve pedestrian connections and safety for students walking to school, develop quality of place amenities, and support diverse housing options in order to attract and retain a skilled workforce and new students.

### WHY IS THIS PROJECT IMPORTANT TO SCOTT COUNTY?

Schools are a major influence to the economic, cultural, and social aspects of a community. They are where the majority of youth spend their time during the day, rallying points for the community to gather for cultural and sporting events, and are sources of pride in a community. While schools provide many benefits, their main goal is to educate students and prepare them for their next steps in life. High quality facilities, curriculum, and teaching strategies which match or exceed national trends can be the key to a student's success in school and when entering the workforce.

Improvements to Scott County Schools can include infrastructure and facilities updates which ensure the safety of both students and lead to the attraction of a high-quality workforce. Improving facilities could include things like new cafeteria equipment and lunches, better lighting and airflow in the classroom, or the addition of lab equipment. These improvements can also be used in the attraction of talent and even teachers. Staff who are able to communicate well with students and help guide not only their education, but their growth as adults, are major assets to any school district. Staff members can help influence a student's decisions after high-school and guide their career pathway.

### WHAT ARE WE TRYING TO ACHIEVE?

- Increase the competitiveness of Scott County schools through adapting to new technology and upgrading outdated facilities for learning and extra-curricular activities.
- Attract new residents and a talented workforce to Scott County.
- Expand programs and opportunities for arts and extra-curricular options for students.
- Develop unique facilities which attract and accommodate new students and families.
- Better broadband infrastructure to serve schools and online education.

### WHAT ARE OUR NEXT STEPS?

1. Promote coordination between school districts and local government on prioritizing facility improvements and how they can be addressed through partnerships and outside funding sources.
2. Determine facility improvements needed to achieve national standards in terms of classroom/lab equipment, sports facilities, counseling space, and extra-curricular activities.
3. Identify local partnerships (non-profits, economic development corporation, chamber of commerce, etc.) to pool resources for needed facility and programming improvements.
4. Partner with local artists and others to create or expand arts programming within the schools.

## WHO ARE THE POTENTIAL PARTNERS?

**Scott County Schools:** The school districts within the county can take the lead approach on identifying potential facility projects and continually update curriculums to ensure Scott County students are receiving the highest level of education possible.

**Scott County Community Foundation:** The community foundation can assist each school district in identification of outside funding opportunities and serve as a link between the schools and partnerships with local community organizations.

**Local Governments:** These entities can provide assistance to school districts for this catalyst project through the expansion of public utilities needed for facility expansion and acquisition of land for future needs.

### WHERE HAS THIS BEEN DONE SUCCESSFULLY?



Years of research has found that school facilities impact teaching and learning in multiple ways. While the major issues with outdated facilities in schools are typically a lack of instructional space, noise levels, air quality, lighting, and classroom temperature all play a role in advancing or inhibiting a student's ability to learn. Updates to school facilities can create a safer environment and improve a student's retention of material in the classroom.

These types of improvements can often be costly for the district to complete but there are many cases of local governments stepping in

to help cover costs through funding such as TIF for facility updates and equipment purchases. An example of this type of support includes Ivy Tech Princeton Instructional Center, where the Gibson County Redevelopment Commission gave Ivy Tech \$600,000 in TIF funding to build 12 new welding labs. These labs have expanded the school's ability to take on new students and has vastly improved their learning environment. Scott County could look at similar avenues when making needed adjustments and updates to create conducive learning environments for students.