



BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS

an individual
career
pathway for
Gary youth

MULTIPLE EDUCATION PATHWAYS BLUEPRINT



LETTER FROM THE MAYOR



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

401 BROADWAY, SUITE 203
GARY, INDIANA 46402-1236



RUDOLPH CLAY
MAYOR

PHONE (219) 881-1301
FAX (219) 881-1337
www.gary.in.us/mayor

Dear Gary Citizens,

Just two years ago the City of Gary, the Northwest Indiana Workforce Board and the Gary Community School Corporation formed a partnership to address a critical problem facing our City—how to keep our young people in school and how to reconnect those who had already dropped out. The lack of a high school credential is preventing many of our citizens from the access to the training and education they need for good jobs and bright futures. Our inability to offer a skilled workforce hinders the City's prospects in attracting new business and new jobs.

We sought and received the input of leaders from all parts of our community who came together to form the Gary Education Leadership Council (GELC). With the support of the U.S. Department of Labor, under the skilled management of the Center of Workforce Innovations, the GELC has spent the past 19 months in research, review of Best Practices, discussion and deliberation. They have spoken with youth and adults, students and teachers, employers and residents.

The result is An Individual Career Pathways Plan for All Gary Youth, a Multiple Education Pathways Blueprint. The Blueprint is a true community response to the issue. We are most appreciative of those who took part in the effort.

There is a role for everyone in the City in supporting our students. As you review this Blueprint, give a thought as to how you can help the cause—or help an individual student in his or her individual pathway—and contact one of the persons listed inside.

Very Truly Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rudy Clay".

Mayor Rudy Clay
City of Gary

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	PAGE 4
THE SCOPE OF THE CHALLENGE	PAGE 7
SUPPORTIVE STUDIES	PAGE 9
MOBILIZING PARTNERS	PAGE 12
PORTFOLIO OF OPTIONS	PAGE 16
GOALS OF MEP BLUEPRINT	PAGE 18
I. Support and Unify the Educational Ecosystem	PAGE 18
II. Build and Expand the Work of Communities Organized for Families and WorkOne	PAGE 21
III. Unify Economic and Job Development with Educational Accomplishment	PAGE 22
IV. Recover Dropouts	PAGE 25
V. Collaboration Among Policymakers	PAGE 25
VI. Sustain the Gary Education Leadership Council	PAGE 27
SOURCES	PAGE 30
MEMBERS	PAGE 32

WHAT IS A MULTIPLE EDUCATION PATHWAYS BLUEPRINT?

An initiative of the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), the Multiple Education Pathways (MEP) Blueprint, is a community plan designed to prevent students from dropping out and recover students who have already dropped out. The initiative, pursued locally by the Northwest Indiana Workforce Board, chose seven mid-sized cities, including Gary, Indiana, and offered them the opportunity to assess the scope of the dropout challenge, the service and resource landscape and the strength of current high school reform efforts.

DOL recognizes the need for a more highly skilled and educated workforce to meet today's demands of an increasingly global marketplace. However, at a time when postsecondary training and education are increasingly important, one-third of all youth

entering ninth grade will leave high school without earning a diploma. Nationally, 11 percent of 16- to 24-year-olds have left school without a diploma or a GED. A strain on state and regional economies, the Alliance for Excellent Education believes the United States could reap \$45 billion in taxable income and recovered social service costs if the dropout rate in just one year were cut in half.

The Gary Education Leadership Council (GELC), formed by Mayor Rudy Clay, and leaders from the Northwest Indiana Workforce Board, the Center of Workforce Innovations, and the Gary Community School Corporation, brought together key individuals from Indiana Workforce Development, Indiana University Northwest, Ivy Tech Community College, and community based organizations, employers, and a community foundation, to lead the development of Gary's MEP Blueprint. The MEP Blueprint brings together an array of education and workforce assets and leverages resources to support options that will move struggling students and out-of-school youth through high school and on to postsecondary experiences or career pathways.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the process for developing the MEP Blueprint unfolded, leaders in Gary found solutions and successes in cities facing similar problems as well as a level of resolve, commitment and creativity and an appetite for change.

While examining data studies and reviewing focus group feedback, and during monthly meetings of the Gary Education Leadership Council, a daunting challenge to dropout prevention and dropout recovery was revealed. Poverty, high unemployment, lack of transportation, diminishing resources, and decreasing population are all factors contributing to Gary's 50.3 percent 4-year graduation rate. However, in the 2004 Quality of Life Indicators Report produced by the Northwest Indiana Quality of Life Council, economic development for Gary and Northwest Indiana depends largely on a well-educated, qualified and motivated workforce.

The Report noted workforce competitiveness begins with accessible, high quality early childhood education, strong literacy skills in English, basic mathematics and computer literacy, sound K-12 education, and post-secondary options that enhance and individual's ability to secure and perform in a changing economy. Further, leaders who contributed to the Quality of Life Indicators Report (many who serve as members of the Gary Education Leadership Council) cited inconsistency in education outcomes across the region and enthusiastically participated in the MEP Blueprint process. These individuals understood how crucial improving graduation rates and educational attainment levels are to accomplishing local and regional economic development and quality of life objectives.

In September 2008, to address the growing challenge of students at risk and students who had dropped out, the Gary Community Schools (GCSC) initiated "The Secondary Experience." A full slate of in-school programs to help students get back on track; recover credits; end social promotions; elevate literacy levels; plan for careers; and connect school with talents, interests and the curiosity of students, the program demonstrated a level of success. In late 2008, facing a \$23 million budget deficit and seeing opportunity, the Gary Community School Corporation Board reorganized to create a magnet school approach, which is scheduled for full implementation in August 2010. The magnet schools will bring together middle schools and high schools, each with an individual focus – Leadership/Military Academy/Gifted & Talented; Science/Technology/Engineering/Math (STEM); Career/Technical; and Visual/Performing Arts.

The MEP Blueprint shifts the impact away from failed schools, a limited workforce system and the concept of "dropout factories" to shared ownership of Gary's schoolchildren by the educational ecosystem, employers, workforce development experts, social service providers, economic developers, and policy makers. The result is an approach to making school relevant to the real world beyond the school walls by creating pathways towards prosperity, learning and economic development.

To bring this to life and build a qualified, motivated workforce, the Gary Education Leadership Council arrived at six industry or employment clusters with local employers prepared to commit to career awareness, exploration, internships, employment, and mentoring Gary youth and young adults. Each cluster connects to the region's 2008 State of the Workforce Report, the curricula and degree programs available through Northwest Indiana's post-secondary schools and the vision of its economic development plans.

THE SIX INDUSTRY OR EMPLOYMENT CLUSTERS:

1. MANUFACTURING AND LOGISTICS
2. CONSTRUCTION AND BUILDING TRADES
3. HEALTH CARE AND SUPPORTIVE SERVICES
4. BANKING AND FINANCIAL SERVICES
5. GREEN OR ENVIRONMENTAL JOBS
6. TEACHING AND EDUCATION

Because learning and succeeding in school are functions of many complex and often intractable social and environmental factors, the leadership of Gary's action-oriented supportive services network known as COFFY (Community Organizations for Families and Youth) initiated a city-wide data gathering project using KidTrax data system, connecting children and young adults with the services and supports they need to succeed. COFFY also articulated its plan to work with GCSC to provide comprehensive in-school counseling and services for a range of areas including substance abuse, mental health, teen pregnancy, housing, employment training, transportation, and youth services.

Local leaders anxious to see signs of educational progress in Gary viewed student success as more than merely achieving at grade level and graduating from high school. Leaders believed that progress must be defined by those basic measures plus motivation and qualifications in areas where students have talent, interests and skills that lead to rewarding employment or further post-secondary education.

Engaged partners were enthusiastic about unifying the dropout prevention and recovery work with urban redevelopment, economic development and identification of employment sectors where jobs exist or could be created that will keep successful students and graduates in Gary to contribute to local economic development and prosperity. Success was framed by educational achievement today combined with business and commercial activity in the future.



THE MEP BLUEPRINT IS INTENDED TO ACT AS A CATALYST TO:

- Diminish outmigration of successful learners and families
- Strengthen the workforce so that jobs can be created in Gary and the Northwest Indiana region and be filled with qualified, motivated workers
- Be the basis for a workforce that helps create a 21st century economy and jobs
- Become, over time, a comparative advantage that leads urban redevelopment by attracting and retaining businesses
- Contribute to a decrease in poverty and elevate the quality of life for all residents

As 2009 unfolded, the federal effort to stimulate the economy and reverse the rise in unemployment provided an extraordinary opportunity for the development of the MEP Blueprint. The plan unifies proven education practices with a focus on the economic and workforce needs of Gary and all of Northwest Indiana. While the challenge is great, the commitment to make a difference is even greater. Sweeping changes in the GCSC; a willingness by educators throughout the region to collaborate; and engagement by social service providers, employers, workforce development professionals, and economic developers brings promise to overcoming the challenges faced by Gary's youth and families. An *Individual Career Pathway Plan for All Gary Youth* points in the direction of prosperity, learning and economic development.

THE SCOPE OF THE DROPOUT PREVENTION AND RECOVERY CHALLENGE

THE COMMUNITY

At the outset of the community-wide effort to articulate a MEP Blueprint for Gary, community leaders confronted monumental challenges faced by many once-thriving industrial communities.

- Precipitous population decline of 45% in 36 years
1970 = 175,415
2006 = 97,057
- Unemployment rate in March 2009 of 9.4%
- Widespread poverty of 25.9%, including 37.9% under the age of 18
- Flight of successful graduates, employers and cultural institutions to surrounding communities
- Chronic challenges faced by under-educated/
under-employed young adults

“if i could have caught up with my credits, i would have stayed.”

Female, dropped out after 9th grade at age 16

THE EDUCATIONAL ECOSYSTEM

Gary's educational ecosystem, comprised of GCSC, seven charter schools, two alternative schools, a community college, and four 4-year post-secondary schools, is a victim of these community-wide circumstances and data supports this concept.

- 32.3% of the 18- to 24-year-old population has a high school diploma or equivalent
- 50.3% 4-year graduation rate
- 70% of GCSC students receive free or reduced lunch
- 6.8% of GCSC students enrolled in special education
- 50.4% of GCSC students passed the ISTEP exam in English
- 47% of GCSC students passed the ISTEP exam in math
- 35.7% of GCSC students passed the ISTEP English and math
- 21% decline in GCSC enrollment 2005 – 2008
- Difficulty retaining and attracting teachers. Average age is 54-years-old.

CHARTER SCHOOLS

Gary experienced a dramatic rise in charter schools between 2005-2009, and today there are seven schools chartered in Lake County. Critical funding follows these students to the charter schools, further reducing revenue with which to address the dropout issue.

- Estimated that 40% of GCSC middle school students residing in Gary attend charter schools
- Three Gary charter schools are on the 2008 watch list of underperforming schools in Indiana

COOPERATION

According to the Indiana Department of Education, in 2008 Gary had a total public school enrollment of 13,317 students including 2,170 enrolled in special education programs. An additional 389 school age students were being home schooled and 597 were enrolled in non-public schools. The IDOE further reported that a total of 597 students dropped out between 2003 and 2007. Facing an unrelenting scrutiny that comes with the school system being labeled a “dropout factory,” has created a defensive, often divisive, educational ecosystem.

Fortunately, Gary is a resilient community with fiercely loyal leaders in key sectors who have come together to form this MEP Blueprint. More than 80 leaders in the fields of education, economic development, workforce development, business, organized labor, social service, faith, philanthropy, and policy have contributed to the design of the MEP Blueprint, and new leaders are expressing interest. Addressing the dropout issue and a new way of framing the issue has moved Gary from a focus on dropouts to a positive commitment to creating schools that are relevant and offer the structures and supports necessary to move students from graduation to a career or post-secondary education.

“ i want a
diploma so
i can help
my kids ”

*Female, dropped
out after 11th
grade at age 17*

SUPPORTIVE STUDIES

DATA

Conducted by Dr. Robert Balfanz of the Center of Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins University, the study analyzed existing data on students entering sixth grade in 2000 and followed them until they left the school system after graduating or dropping out. The purpose was to ascertain if there are early indicators that predict graduation or dropout with a reasonable amount of certainty.

The Balfanz report show students with even one Off Track Indicator in grade six were less likely to graduate on time. In fact, less than 30 percent of these students graduated on time and many dropped out of school by the 2006-2007 school year.

OFF TRACK INDICATORS

- GPA below 1.75
- Failure in math and English
- Attended school for less than 168 days
- Received an out-of-school suspension
- Were significantly over age for grade

“ school should be a safe haven from abuse.”

Female, dropped out after 12th grade at age 16

FOCUS GROUPS

Two focus group studies were conducted with out-of-school youth, in-school youth and key stakeholders. The work, completed by the Center of Workforce Innovations and by Human Services Solutions, emphasized the following.

SCHOOL AS SANCTUARY

Forty-five former GCSD students ages 17- to -26-years-old were asked in May 2008 by the Center of Workforce Innovations how they would design their ideal schools or programs. These recent dropouts envisioned schools as a sanctuary that would provide security, education, inspiration, and access to jobs all in one place. They designed schools with flexible school hours, access to computers, greater limit-setting, increased accountability for students and adults, and increased support for their parents. They looked to their ideal schools for basics such as shoes, uniforms and even washers and dryers. This strong appetite for school to be the answer to life's challenges and the gateway to work and prosperity is a tremendous sign of the students' desire for better lives and stronger connections to the world of education.

ALL STUDENTS:

- Seek stability – frequent moves, missing class, losing supportive teachers and friends often leads to falling behind and dropping out
- Want a school program that is relevant to careers and future employment – they want to relate class to reality and want to integrate work and school
- Want to feel supported – they want access to counselors who understand their concerns and can help with family problems: a caring adult in their lives is a must
- Hope for support from the system, not just criticism
- Identified special programs/activities that can lead to success such as JROTC and the Visual and Performing Arts School

MOTIVATED PARENTS & TEACHERS

The extraordinary growth of charter schools and the waiting list of more than 200 for admission to the Thea Bowman Leadership Academy are seen as legitimate threats to GCSC. However, it is also an unmistakable signal that parents have a strong desire and motivation to take proactive steps to help their children learn. Harnessing that energy for all Gary schoolchildren must be a component of the MEP Blueprint.

PARENTS:

- Agree family involvement is essential to student success
- Think encouragement by school personnel at all levels is essential
- Perceive their own access to school personnel is often limited, either by lack of information as to how to access the system, or they feel intimidated by it
- Feel teachers lack support in professional growth and everyday classroom management

TEACHERS:

- Note the need for support in their work
- Feel they lack support in professional growth and everyday classroom management

SHARED OWNERSHIP

The fundamental dynamic exposed and addressed by the MEP Blueprint process was that no one public agency or system of agencies “owns” low graduation rates or dropout recovery. The dynamics necessary to shift from blame to support for GCSC arose from the process of engaging key partners in economic development, workforce development, social services, and education. The Gary Education Leadership Council took meaningful and positive steps in that direction. The MEP Blueprint process reinforced the need for shared responsibility, data, metrics and commitments by participants of time, financial, political, and social resources needed to achieve its goals.

ALL STAKEHOLDERS:

- Note a lack of adequate intervention services in the schools, including the availability of counselors and social workers as well as access to support services in the community
- Note the issue of deferred maintenance in many schools and a need for updated and better maintained surroundings and improved technology and equipment
- Feel the general lack of resources severely affects the learning environment, including equipment, technology, exposure to social and cultural activities, and the availability of extracurricular activities and field trips
- Perceive a lack of options within the system and a need for a broader range of activities and education programs
- Feel the fragmented delivery of services for out-of-school students at multiple sites may not be “youth friendly”

“i don’t
want to
work for
minimum
wage
the rest
of my
life.”

*Male, dropped
out after 10th
grade at age 16*

**“ a GED or
diploma is
just the
beginning.”**

*Female, dropped
out after 9th
grade at age 16*

MOBILIZING PARTNERS

Gary and Northwest Indiana’s educators, supportive services providers, funders, employers, economic development and workforce development experts were unanimous throughout the MEP Blueprint planning process that the key element for economic development and urban renewal in Gary is a well-educated, motivated and qualified workforce.

This is particularly so for the estimated 12,000 adolescents and young adults in the urban areas of Lake County, Indiana who are out of school, unemployed or in low-wage/low-skill jobs whose future is severely limited by the lack of a high school diploma and skills for high-demand/high-quality jobs.

The MEP Blueprint process provided a unique opportunity to engage community, business, public policy, and education leaders through the 70-member Gary Educational Leadership Council. Fundamentally, the MEP Blueprint has become a pathway for Gary as a community to help students succeed not only in school but in life as well and help Gary again become a contributing and resilient economic center for Northwest Indiana.

THE MEP BLUEPRINT IS BUILT ON THE PARTICIPATION AND COMMITMENT OF THE FOLLOWING PARTNERS:

1. **Employers, Economic and Workforce Developers**, including the Gary Chamber of Commerce, the Center of Workforce Innovations, the Northwest Indiana Forum, the Northwest Indiana Workforce Board, and its partners.
2. **Gary's Educational Ecosystem**, including the Gary Community School Corporation, seven Gary Charter Schools, two alternative schools, Ivy Technical Community College, Indiana University Northwest, Purdue University Calumet, Valparaiso University, and Indiana's charter school center at Ball State University.
3. **Social Service and Workforce Development Providers** who work with youth, adolescents, young adults and families to address the emotional, behavioral, health, learning, housing and financial barriers that prevent and inhibit children from learning and staying in school led by the Council of Organizations For Families and Youth (COFFY) and WorkOne – the Northwest Indiana Workforce Board.
4. **Local, State and Federal Policy Makers** who can bring necessary political focus, the will, and the tools to implement in-school and out-of-school reforms. If local, state and federal policy makers are coupled with private sector engagements that produce genuine community-school collaboration and investment the MEP Blueprint can succeed.
5. **Community Partners**, including the Gary Educational Leadership Council who has agreed that engagement and further work will be necessary with parents, family and faith-based organizations as facilitators and advocates for the concepts in the MEP Blueprint. Of particular importance is being aware of children in need of assistance, making referrals to the “system” of formal providers participating in the plan and encouraging all children and youth to envision a personal career pathway plan and embark on exploration and learning strategies to fulfill that plan.



These aforementioned partners arrived at the design of the MEP Blueprint with a shared understanding of their roles and responsibilities as presented in the following chart.

A CAREER PATHWAY PLAN FOR ALL GARY YOUTH

SECTOR	ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES
EDUCATIONAL ECOSYSTEM Gary Community Schools, charter schools, alternative schools, Ivy Tech Community College, Indiana University Northwest, Valparaiso University, Purdue University Calumet, Ball State University, Calumet College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop Career Pathway Plan for all students • Understand area workforce and economic development trends • Implement Core-40 and best practices • Collect and share data • Provide supportive transitions • Establish clear roles for education partners
SOCIAL SERVICE & LAW ENFORCEMENT COFFY Members, Gary Police Department and Juvenile Courts, Indiana Department of Children Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behavioral health, housing and nutrition • Out-of-school and summer programs • Develop/refer out-of-school youth to career pathway plan development
EMPLOYERS, LABOR UNIONS AND GARY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE Logistics/Manufacturing, Healthcare, Construction/Building, Banking/Financial Services, Teaching, Green/Energy Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in job awareness, exploration, shadowing programs • Provide job-related mentoring • Provide summer and after-school internships • Employment where possible • Use WorkKeys and Career Readiness Certificates • Advocate with policy makers on behalf of educators and workforce system
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEM Northwest Indiana Workforce Board, Inc., WorkOne Centers, Center of Workforce Innovations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workforce data and projections education • Provide job awareness, readiness, training, and remediation services • Convene all six sectors to maintain commitment to MEP Blueprint • Develop out-of-school dropout youth strategy
ECONOMIC DEVELOPERS Northwest Indiana Forum, Indiana Economic Development Corporation, Northwestern Indiana Regional Planning Commission, Quality of Life Council, Regional Development Corporation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote pro-jobs and business environment • Ongoing communications with educators, employers, workforce system and social service providers on current and future conditions • Advocate with policy makers on behalf of educators and workforce
POLICY MAKERS AND FUNDERS Elected and appointed municipal, state and federal officials, foundations, Lake Area United Way	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy for Gary children and their families • Supportive public policy, laws and regulations • Secure needed financing for all sectors • Data and best practice identification and support
FAITH COMMUNITY Five faith-based coalitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide moral voice to importance of education and Career Pathway Plans • Provide tutoring and mentoring for students and parents • Contribute to and utilize citywide data on student engagement
PARENTS AND PARENT ORGANIZATIONS City-wide PTA, parent organizations from alternative and charter schools, COFFY-sponsored parent groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand and support MEP Blueprint in schools and at home • Participate in school selection and Career Pathway Plan with their children • Read to their children and promote literacy at home • Understand workforce and economic development trends • Contribute and utilize data on student engagement

FOUNDATIONS FOR ACTION

The foundations for actions are the GCSC District Advisory Task Force, which was initially formed to develop The 2004-2009 School Corporation Strategic Plan; the Center of Workforce Innovations; the Strategic Skills Initiative, targeting key industries and occupations for skills development; the 2008 Northwest Indiana State of the Workforce Report; and the 2004-2005 Northwest Indiana Quality of Life Council recommendations.

Building on these foundations, the Gary Education Leadership Council is working in the following four sub-committees to identify problems and the solutions to remedy them.

1. **Gary High School Renewal Committee** - looking at the causes of poor student performance, inventory and analysis of existing programs and service gaps, identification of potential new strategies/initiatives/data support Secondary Experience monitoring of key indicators.
2. **Community Education Network Committee** - investigating existing higher education programs, strategies/engagements for change to increase not only enrollment in local higher education programs but graduation rates as well. This committee also addresses re-engagement of students who have dropped out.
3. **Strategic Skills Committee** - linking dropouts with programs to provide training and high school equivalency, meeting the needs of the workforce with individuals and students from GCSC, and working with post-secondary and skills training institutions.
4. **The Supportive Services Community** - participating throughout each of the above to address the barriers to success experienced by high-risk students.

**“if there was a
school for 19- to
24-year-olds, i would
have stayed.”**

*Female, left
school after 12th
grade at age 18*

PORTFOLIO OF OPTIONS

THE SECONDARY EXPERIENCE

In September 2008, the Gary Community Schools unveiled a set of ten specific strategies known as the “The Secondary Experience.” The objective was to implement best practices from work being done in the cities where Gary educators had studied and visited that met identified objectives and were possible with limited financial and human resources. The ten components included:

1. Collecting and utilizing school-based data to provide early indicators of students at-risk of dropping out by:
 - Identifying all students falling behind in Core-40 subjects
 - Classifying all students by credits earned
 - Participating with supportive services leaders in exploring the use of KidTrax data systems to foster connectedness between community supports and in-school activities and performance
2. Transforming schools into grades 7-12 magnet schools to allow students to pursue interests, talents and abilities in 2010.
3. Eliminating all social promotions and engaging students and their parents in developing a plan for credit recovery and intensive remedial education.
4. Implementing “double dose” classes for students falling behind in mathematics and language arts.
5. Implementing extended day strategies supported by Stimulus Title I and remediation funds.
6. Engaging employers and workforce specialists to provide career and job awareness, exploration, mentoring, and employment.

-
7. Implementing immediate instructional interventions and exploring the use of technology options to support teachers and counselors.
 8. Implementing reading and literacy classes at the high school level to provide remediation for those students not reading English at grade level.
 9. Providing after-school credit recovery and credit acquisition opportunities for all students classified as behind their grade level in credits earned.
 10. Developing an *Individual Career Pathway Plan* for all freshmen.

OLDEST & CLOSEST

An immediate strategy to arise from MEP Blueprint planning process was for the GCSC and its partners to intervene and rapidly identify its 2008-2009 students missing the least number of credits and who were oldest students at risk of “aging out.” It was estimated that roughly 10 percent of the students most likely to drop out were in this category. Intensive time and resources for students in need of assistance to secure credits or a satisfactory ISTEP score to graduate could produce momentum and early success.

JOBS FOR AMERICA'S GRADUATES (JAG)

Implemented in August, 2008, JAG's mission is to keep young people in school by providing work-based learning experiences. The activities lead to career opportunities or enrollment in postsecondary institutions, that lead to rewarding careers. Gary's program received a state award for excellence.

MAGNET SCHOOLS

Evidence is strong that Gary students do succeed when given the setting and supports necessary to take advantage of their talents, pursue their interests, and enhance their skills. Little more than half of GCSC students succeed in discovering the power of education at all of Gary's schools. That number skyrockets for students taking advantage of the offerings at the Gary Area Career Center and the Emerson School for Visual and Performing Arts. These students perform at or above state averages on the ISTEP examination and graduate on time. They find success in transitioning to post-secondary education or employment.

Planned for implementation in August 2010, the magnet schools will encourage students, parents and faculty to choose where their talent and interest lie in selecting one of the four schools that will offer:

- Core-40 curriculum enriched by focused instruction
- Grades 7 through 12 in all secondary schools
- School choice for students interested in pursuing specialized programs as follows:

West Side: Leadership/Military Academy/Gifted/Talented Focus

Low Wallace: Science/Technology/Engineering/Math (STEM) Focus

Roosevelt: Career/Technical Focus

Wirt: Visual/Performing Arts Focus

“I'd like basic classes and career type classes.”

Male, dropped out after 11th grade at age 18

GOALS OF MEP BLUEPRINT

I. SUPPORT AND UNIFY THE EDUCATIONAL ECOSYSTEM

Working in greater collaboration, the educational ecosystem can create better, more integrated instructional systems to support student success at each stage of their education, thus improving transitions between schools and making learning more career relevant.

As previously noted, the onus on low graduation rates and difficulty in dropout recovery has fallen heavily on the shoulders of the GCSC. While it will always be at the nexus of the issue, this is a crisis to which all stakeholders in Gary must respond.

A core recommendation of the MEP Blueprint is to expand the education collaborative that brings together all those responsible for Gary schoolchildren, recent graduates, dropouts, and young adults. The Gary Educational Leadership Council and its four sub-committees already do this in significant and powerful ways.

Missing, to some extent, is the responsibility of educators outside of GCSC and the owners of school charters who fail to prepare students to be ready to succeed when they re-enter GCSC, and the role for post-secondary institutions to expand their offerings of literacy, basic adult education and career and technical education for dropouts and young adults.

Recommended Interventions

1. Support for Administrators

Nurture an environment for school principals and assistant principals to create referral mechanisms and in-house services available to assist them in their decision making, and to identify, document and intervene with students and families confronting challenges to learning at grade level. In addition to professional development and exploration for best practices, provide executive coaching or counseling support for administrators and teachers to promote fruitful and positive interactions with students, parents and caregivers. Close attention to the issue of “burnout” is necessary, particularly at a time of unprecedented change and ambitious program implementation.

2. Support for Teachers

The GCSC faculty is comprised of predominantly experienced teachers who can benefit from technology and assistance in connecting with their students and making school relevant.

- **Instructional Technology:** Computer-based instructional learning tools to meet the needs of on-track and at risk students in subject, ISTEP and SAT preparation. Technology is an essential tool to make school relevant for 21st century students while providing them an opportunity to hone skills necessary in the workplace. Seek resources that combine in-class coaching with instructional software and technical support for teachers such as PLATO, Odyssey, WordSmart, etc.
- **Human Resources:** Introduce instructional human resource support through programs such as Teach for America, which will help teachers succeed in overcoming the daily challenges they face, and address the diminishing financial capacity of the school system.

3. Support for Students

- **Use Data to Understand Challenges:** Adopt practices or strategies that build on the collection of data on every student in GCSC to support social workers, graduation/transition coaches and guidance counselors with paid lay adult advocates as outreach workers to seek-out students who are falling behind or missing school to the risk of dropping out. Athletic coaches can also provide outreach services to their teams. Outreach will include contact with parents and guardians, clergy, public safety officials, and social support providers involved in the life of the child to understand and document challenges to be addressed.

**“ i felt
discon-
nected
from my
friends
at other
schools.”**

*Male, dropped
out after 10th
grade at age 17*

- **Ensure Reading at Grade Level and School Readiness:** Adopt practices or strategies that address basic literacy to ensure that students are reading at grade level through in-school remediation and out-of-school literacy volunteers, similar to “Every1Reads” in Louisville, Kentucky. Place heavy emphasis on early literacy and school readiness skill building so children will have a solid foundation for future success.

- **One-Stop Centers in Middle and High Schools:** Adopt practices or strategies that introduce in-school centers for students and parents to access employment and social service (substance abuse, mental health, childcare, pregnancy prevention, etc.) referrals and information.

- **One-Stop Centers for Out-Of-School Adolescents:** Develop strategies to introduce community-based centers for out-of-school students and their parents to access workforce development, employment and social service (substance abuse, mental health, childcare, family support services, etc.) referrals and information. The primary challenges are promotion, transportation and the financing necessary to make these centers safe, welcoming and appropriate for this difficult-to-engage population. Linking out of school adolescents to specific formal activities that parents or dropouts utilize is critical and one that should be developed between the Northwest Indiana Workforce Investment Board and COFFY.



II. BUILD ON AND EXPAND THE WORK OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS FOR FAMILIES AND YOUTH AND WORKONE

Through citywide and neighborhood-level collaboration, social and workforce development services can provide students with school-, work- and community-based supports so that the challenges they face are identified and addressed rapidly and effectively.

Gary is fortunate to have a dedicated, action-oriented and influential group of social service and workforce leaders committed to the needs of families and youth. United under the confederation known as Community Organizations for Families and Youth – COFFY – the social and workforce services capacity exists to take steps to address non-educational barriers to low graduation rates and dropout recovery.

Maximizing COFFY's and WorkOne's contributions to the MEP Blueprint requires both out-of-school and in-school plans to bring services to a critical mass of families. Financial and human resources are primary barriers to implementing successful programs. Removing the transportation and safety barriers to youth and families who seek access to services on a consistent basis is necessary.

Recommended Interventions

1. Opening GCSC school buildings to provide sufficient space and support for COFFY agencies to deliver counseling and supportive social services to children and their families on site, thus eliminating safety and transportation barriers.
2. Implement the nFocus KidTrax system of data collection in collaboration with the full educational ecosystem to connect all Gary children to local behavioral health, recreation, housing, employment, literacy, and education supports. This system will help determine where children are connected to supportive services and, more importantly, where they are not connected – adapt Louisville, Kentucky's "Every1Reads" strategies for outreach to youth and families.
3. Find ways for COFFY member agencies to increase their provision of literacy, basic adult education, ESL, and GED services, especially at a time when resources have forced reductions in such programs.
4. Collaborate with the Northwest Indiana Workforce Investment Board to conduct outreach to find, engage and support students who have dropped out of school.
5. Play an active role in developing and coaching youth to articulate their individual career pathway plans and the importance of graduation from secondary school as a means of achieving their goals.

“if i'd
had a
life skills
class
in 9th
grade,
i might
have
stayed.”

*Male, dropped
out after 10th
grade at age 18*

6. Collaborate with parents, guardians, public safety officials, juvenile court judges, and faith leaders in data collection, social support counseling, referrals, and career pathway plan conceptualization and education/career and technical educational planning.

7. Map all support services and connect it to data to understand what services youth and families are seeking and which ones are disconnected.

8. Advocate forcefully for financing these programs not as social services but as economic development, education and workforce preparedness programs.

9. Convey the concept of the MEP Blueprint in faith settings and emphasize the need for parents and caregivers to see educational accomplishment and graduation from high school as moral imperatives for children. Show the importance of President Obama's statement in his 2009 State of the Union Address that "students who drop out of school are not only giving up on themselves, they are also giving up on America."

III. UNIFY ECONOMIC AND JOB DEVELOPMENT WITH EDUCATIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENT

A fundamental goal of the MEP Blueprint is to pursue a vision of a promising economic future for Gary, the region and the success of its students and dropouts. It must be clear what these young people must do to gain access to the world of entry-level and skilled jobs and provide job opportunities for young people to launch their careers and contribute economically at home. Employers, workforce developers and economic development leaders - and dropouts - agree that Gary's many adolescents and young adults do not possess the foundation of skills needed to obtain and succeed in a high quality job with career or education prospects. Leaders agree that investing in career and technical education, soft skills and taking steps to help adolescents and young adults understand the skills needed and the possible economic rewards of work are critical education pathways.

Recommended Interventions

1. A focused commitment in collaboration with parents, teachers and school administrators to participate in a variety of career-oriented activities including job shadowing; career awareness; relevant curriculum development; and weekend, summer and entry-level employment.

2. Making a region-wide commitment to using Career Readiness Certificates for entry- and mid-level jobs and finding the resources to make WorkKeys, a job skills assessment system measuring real-world skills, uniformly available to adolescents and young adults to expose them to the math, reading, technical, and soft skills needed to work for Gary and Northwest Indiana businesses.

“without
a high
school
diploma,
i'm just
on hold.”

*Female, dropped
out of 9th
grade at age 16*

3. Making a community-wide commitment to publicizing, communicating and introducing parents, grandparents, politicians, teachers, young adults, and students to the jobs and salary data in the Northwest Indiana Workforce Investment Board's 2008 State of The Workforce Report. If young people and recent dropouts understood the following, school can quickly become relevant.

- There are almost 30,000 jobs in construction in Northwest Indiana
- The average annual wage for a construction worker exceeds \$51,000
- There are more than 50,000 jobs in health care in Northwest Indiana
- The average annual wage for a healthcare worker exceeds \$42,000
- There are almost 50,000 jobs in manufacturing in Northwest Indiana
- The average annual wage for a manufacturing job exceeds \$72,000

Sector Focus

Discussion of regional and local economic development opportunities indicates there are six concentrations where jobs can be created and students can prepare for entry- and mid-level employment.

These concentrations, or employment clusters, were determined largely by data collected and published in the 2008 Northwest Indiana Workforce Investment Board's State of the Workforce Report. It is important to consider that the global and regional economic picture changed in fundamental and extraordinary ways in the fall of 2008 and spring of 2009. While these sectors continue to represent areas where a local, qualified workforce is needed, other areas may drive future economic development.

1) Manufacturing and Logistics – This sector must continue to draw emphasis due to the region's historic excellence in manufacturing and its logistics network built as the foundation of Gary's steel economy. Manufacturing and logistics hold the greatest potential for near-term revival and growth for the city and Northwest Indiana. According to the 2008 State of the Industry Report for Logistics and Manufacturing from Ball State University, "job losses... have largely run their course" and that Indiana, according to the Ball State 2008 National Manufacturing and Logistics Report Card, now ranks fifth nationally for infrastructure, taxes, health care costs, quality of life and other measures. The prospects in the sector are for an end to declines in wages and employment, and with an economic turnaround for this sector to experience growth in Indiana.

The greatest concern is on "human capital" which the report says will be the primary geographic determinant for manufacturing expansion. Gary and Northwest Indiana are competing both within the state and globally to have a competitive workforce that can attract employers and high-wage jobs. A basic question that must be answered before creating programs for young people to aspire to jobs in these sectors is, "What will we be making, storing and shipping from here in five years?" The recommendation is to convene a meeting of Northwest Indiana and Gary





business leaders, industrialists, economists, bankers, transportation executives, and visionaries to answer this question and connect it to the MEP Blueprint through educational programs that make school success relevant to this industry.

2) *Construction and Building Trades* – With regional employment up by almost 14 percent in this sector since 2002, economic development leaders and employers see many opportunities in construction and the building trades for Gary adolescents and youth. In the summer of 2008, there were numerous openings for entry- and mid-level jobs in carpentry, roofing, paving, concrete, home renovation, electrical, plumbing, etc. This sector is also tied directly to “Green Collar” job creation. Numerous people commented on the potential for work in Gary to repair and renovate homes, buildings and infrastructure if an economic turnaround gains momentum. Frustration was evident about how difficult it is to introduce these opportunities to Gary’s youth and young adults and with the challenges of inadequate transportation to and from jobs, skills training sites and worksites. Re-engaging construction business leaders with parents, students and the schools is critical.

3) *Healthcare and Supportive Service* – As with construction and trades, health care and social assistance jobs are up almost 14 percent regionally since 2002, and of Gary’s “Hot 50 Jobs,” seven are direct-care providers and another four are administrative opportunities in this sector. Gary’s post-secondary education institutions provide training in the technical healthcare jobs. Gary’s youth and parents need to be introduced to these jobs. Math, science, reading and soft skills must become a focus in schools tied directly to these jobs with opportunities for job shadowing, internships and weekend and summer employment regarded as essential to the curriculum as ISTEP or SAT preparation.

4) *Banking and Financial Services* – Employers in Gary often seek candidates from outside for jobs in finance and business offices. Financial and banking institution leaders in Gary report facing a challenge in finding qualified candidates for entry-level and family-supporting jobs due to low math capabilities and a lack of soft skills for customer-facing jobs. With school reform and a renewed focus on mathematics education, banking and financial services is an important place to start in new local employment opportunities and retaining talented and motivated learners to work in business offices of small business, manufacturing, education, banks, insurance companies, and other financial services in Gary and the region. Participants in the development of this plan include leaders from employers who can provide career awareness and exploration, internships and entry-level opportunities.

5) *Green or Environmental Jobs* – Opportunities exist to vastly upgrade the energy efficiency of homes, apartments, buildings, factories, and warehouses to address the volatile cost of energy, its hardships on families and global warming. Trained workers are needed now in Gary

and the region to conduct energy audits and to install energy-saving measures or means of energy production. Engaging power, water, construction, and higher education to create the first group of “green collar” workers and some momentum in this area is critically important.

6) **Teaching and Education** – Gary, the region and indeed the nation are confronting a shortage of teachers at all levels, especially in subject areas such as mathematics, biology, chemistry, physics, and the health professions at the post-secondary level. Educators from the GCSC and all of the region’s post-secondary institutions have suggested a career path exploration and mentoring effort be mounted to interest students in education as a career choice.

IV. RECOVER DROPOUTS

The MEP Blueprint calls for Gary to launch a Dropout Recovery program to enable young people to earn money while they complete their high school requirements and train for careers in the workforce clusters – Education/Economic/Workforce Developers, the Educational Ecosystem, Social Service/ Workforce Development Providers, and Local/State/Federal Policy Makers – using successful programs in Boston, Houston, Dayton, and Philadelphia as models.

Recommended Intervention

The Northwest Indiana Workforce Investment Board, in collaboration with the MEP Blueprint partners, has proposed establishing a comprehensive Dropout Recovery outreach and training effort focused on out-of-school youth (16- to 24-years-old) led by regional and local community-based agencies that can offer outreach services, diversionary programs, adult basic and post-secondary education, job training, employment, and youth development. The goal would be to help high school dropouts to complete their high school diploma or earn their GED.

KEY ELEMENTS WILL INCLUDE:

- Targeted, aggressive outreach to recent dropouts
- Career specialists experienced in working with recent dropouts
- Create an Individual Career Pathway Plan for all Gary out-of-school youth
- Integration of basic education with practical job training
- A youth-friendly one-stop with intensive educational and support services
- Linkage to career awareness, training and job opportunities
- Incentives to reward incremental progress
- Business and industry involvement in program design and delivery

V. COLLABORATION AMONG POLICY MAKERS

For the MEP Blueprint to have an opportunity to succeed, political commitment, focus and advocacy is needed at the municipal, county, state, and federal levels. Policy makers must be consistently informed of the successes and challenges faced by the GCSC and the workforce

“ i want a diploma so i can help my kids.”

Female, dropped out after 11th grade at age 17



system. They must understand and be able to articulate the inextricable connection between education, economic development, jobs, and urban renewal. They must have knowledge of the data, challenges, success stories, and proposed solutions at their fingertips to fight for Gary's reputation and the tools needed to implement the MEP Blueprint.

One of the primary responsibilities of policy makers at every level is to ensure a sustained focus on building momentum and sustaining progress. They must draw on public and private resources wherever possible to create a thriving education, workforce and economic development system to meet the needs of schools, students, and families.

Recommended Intervention

Form a Policy Makers and Investors Collaborative for Dropout Prevention and Recovery that begins with public sector participants that includes members of the GCSC Board and other elected or appointed officials from justice, public safety, economic development, and municipal, county, state and federal legislative and executive offices.

GOALS OF THE COLLABORATIVE

- Understand the MEP Blueprint and school reforms
- Articulate what pieces they are able to contribute
- Identify and fight for tools and resources to adequately finance the MEP Blueprint
- Identify and recruit private sector partners to share responsibility for economic or advocacy aspects of the MEP Blueprint

VI. SUSTAIN THE GARY EDUCATION LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

The accomplishments and momentum created by the leaders in Gary and Northwest Indiana in 2008-2009 in articulating the MEP Blueprint would not have been possible without a functional organization, persistent leadership, financing, and resolute staff and consultants.

At the April 2009 Gary Education Leadership Council, when provided with the initial draft of the MEP Blueprint, champions for the cause of dropout prevention and recovery from each of the key sectors – education, social services, business, and economic development - spoke passionately about the need to sustain this work and make it different from other reports to address Gary's challenges.

Recommended Interventions

1. Sustain and refine the Gary Education Leadership Council. As an organizing structure, the Gary Educational Leadership Council and its four sub-committees, evolved over time into an entity that established it as a “brand” in Gary where transformational work was being done to address a core economic development issue. Simple features like monthly meetings on every third Friday, expectations that committees would report progress and guest presenters would reveal information and facilitate discussion making the Gary Educational Leadership Council a reliable and valuable source for participants to learn and be heard.

Critical refinements needed for the Gary Educational Leadership Council are the creation of:

- An Executive Committee of leaders with influence, access to resources, meeting space, and a support staff responsible for implementing and enforcing commitments made by various leaders to the MEP Blueprint. The Executive Committee should include senior leadership from COFFY, GCSC, the Gary Chamber of Commerce, the Center of Workforce Innovations, the Northwest Indiana Workforce Investment Board, the Legacy Foundation, and post-secondary institution administration.
- A formal group from the educational ecosystem comprised of post-secondary educators, GCSC senior staff and School Board, handpicked leaders from Gary charter schools. The educational ecosystem committee's roles would initially be to keep lines of communication open, tackle shared responsibilities with the workforce system for creating An Individual Career Pathway for all Gary Youth and forge supportive transitions for students and their families as they move from one setting to another within the educational ecosystem.
- A Policy Makers and Investors Collaborative of municipal, state and federal elected officials or their senior staff and Northwest Indiana private funders including the Legacy Foundation, United Way and the Knight Foundation Community Advisory

Committee. The role of this group would be to understand the MEP Blueprint, tackle policy barriers to dropout reduction or recovery, quantify and enhance financial resources, and advocate as one with Indianapolis or Washington in defense of those at-risk and those who seek re-entry.

2. Sustain and Enhance the MEP Blueprint team. The MEP Blueprint team consisted of leadership from the Northwest Indiana WIB/Center of Workforce Innovations, Project Director, critically important support staff from the Northwest Indiana Workforce Investment Board, the Education Liaison, and operational and research consultants. This group should be sustained intact for a minimum of 12 months to support and enhance the Gary Educational Leadership Council and complete several tasks it planned for 2009. Among those were engaging the faith community, creating jobs and implementing training and career awareness, exploration and mentoring programs, further outreach to families, youth and community organizations, etc.

Critical refinements to the MEP Blueprint team are:

- A formal assignment of a senior staff person within the GCSC to devote specific time to implement the MEP Blueprint and be accountable for increased participation in the “Secondary Experience,” thereby aiding the overall reductions dropouts and increased re-entry of recent dropouts.
- The establishment of staff with a similar role within the Center of Workforce Innovations to execute the dropout recovery plan described earlier in this report.

3. Explore Options for a Permanent Institutional Home. The DOL grant that initiated the MEP Blueprint was competitively secured by the Northwest Indiana Workforce Board, GCSC and the City of Gary. The grant itself was managed by Northwest Indiana Workforce Board Regional Operator, the Center of Workforce Innovations. While this has been a successful model for implementing and managing the funds from the DOL grant, it is now appropriate to consider a long-term institutional home for the MEP Blueprint.

Possibly the best example of an entity that emerged from roots similar to the Gary program, and which was presented at the March 2009 DOL gathering of all MEP Blueprint grantees, is the Office of Multiple Pathways within the School District of Philadelphia. That group blended funding from public and private sources to create an Office of Multiple Pathways to support a governing body similar to the Gary Educational Leadership Council. A near-term strategy would be to map the Office of Multiple Pathways organizational structure and explore how it could replicated and successful.

4. Secure Diversified Financing. There is unanimous agreement that the MEP Blueprint should secure diverse funding from state and federal sources with support from private charitable entities for specific components or programs. In most instances, investment by partner organizations in the infrastructure of the MEP Blueprint would be sought and secured as a principle strategy. Were the MEP Blueprint completed in early 2008, efforts to secure commitments would have been met with strong potential for success. The economic collapse of late 2008 has placed all key partners in a position of reducing staff, trimming commitments and focusing on core operations.

The most promising funding strategy is to seek operating funds from modest local investments and stimulus funding for education, workforce development and economic development through the state of Indiana and competitively from federal agencies.

5. Develop Links to National Dropout Prevention and Recovery Organizations. Gary's MEP Blueprint and emerging leadership role among communities understanding and confronting this national priority position it for a vibrant and active role with organizations that can assist with technical assistance, financing and exposure as a model community. Among these are America's Promise, the National Dropout Prevention Center, the National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities, the National Governors' Association Center for Dropout Prevention, and others.

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Center of Workforce Innovations MEP Blueprint Project Staff

MEMBERS OF THE GARY EDUCATION LEADERSHIP COUNCIL AND MEP BLUEPRINT PARTICIPANTS

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One Church/One School

Dr. JohnL Jackson
Gary Community School Corp.

Dr. Quentin Smith
Retired Educator

Linda Woloshansky
The Center of Workforce
Innovations

Dr. Victoria Chiatula
Gary Community School Corp.

Trent McCain
Attorney

Dr. Vernon Smith
State Representative and
Indiana University Northwest

Dr. Myrtle Campbell
Gary Community School Corp.

Hope Clark
Indiana Workforce Development

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Employment & Training
Administration

Gary Education
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Council



For further
information call
1-877-607-0680

