

Executive Summary: School Readiness Report

The School Readiness Report, published by Success By 6 and United Way of Central Indiana, takes a close look at the factors that affect young children's readiness for school in both Marion County and the state of Indiana. The report includes data about community services and family situations that have an impact on early learning. It's also a call for advocacy. The report argues that the achievement gap begins at birth. Because children are born learning, it affirms, there is much that the community can and should do to close that gap: High-quality early childhood experiences can be the great equalizer. The report challenges Indiana citizens to understand issues that affect children's readiness for school, to make early learning a priority, and to advocate for more consistent, reliable information about the state of young children in the county and state.

According to the most recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau, there are 72,520 children under the age of 5 living in Marion County. More than 25 percent of those children live in poverty. Almost 40 percent do not live in two-parent households. And more than 15 out of every 1,000 children in Marion County experience abuse and neglect. The proportion of low-income children receiving child care subsidies, which enable parents to work and provide for their children's early education, has been dropping for several years. State administrative changes in 2006 stopped the decline but available assistance is still substantially below levels earlier in the decade. All of these factors have a negative effect on school readiness.

Not all the news in our state and county is grim. Of every 100 3- and 4-year-old children, 62 participate in early education programs, which have been shown to help prepare them for school. The percentage of immunized children under the age of 3 has increased, and the rate of births to teenage mothers has dropped.

These figures tell only part of the story. The report points to a great need for more consistent reporting on children's physical well-being, motor development, social and emotional development, and other factors. It recommends that data on family reading, health insurance, well-child visits, high-quality child care and other key issues be collected in Indiana and factored into the big picture — as well as the decisions we make in the future.

Innovative programs in Central Indiana, such as the Healthy Families program, have helped lay the foundation for school readiness. Out-of-state programs offer new ideas that could be implemented or expanded in our state. National home-based education and intervention programs such as Parents and Teachers and the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters have strengthened student performance in Missouri and Arkansas. In Rhode Island, the Covering Kids and Families program has dramatically improved access to primary and secondary health care for young children. (Rhode Island's rate of uninsured children is the lowest in the country.) The report notes two more popular initiatives that are working in other states: voluntary quality rating systems for child care, which Indiana is exploring now, and state-supported pre-kindergarten programs, which have been shown to return up to \$17 for every dollar invested.

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United Way of Central Indiana

Serving six Central Indiana counties, United Way of Central Indiana (UWCI) helps sustain vital human services by working exclusively with proven human service agencies that direct life-changing opportunities. UWCI also helps reduce the needs of future generations by helping ensure that kids enter school ready to learn and graduate from school ready to earn. For more information, go to www.uwci.org.

Success By 6

Success By 6 is an early childhood development initiative that works to ensure that all children from birth to age 6 have the positive and enriching experiences necessary to begin school prepared to succeed. Success By 6 is a partnership between United Way of Central Indiana, the City of Indianapolis and the Annie E. Casey Foundation. For more information, go to www.successby6indy.org.