



# ARE WE HELPING KIDS SUCCEED?

**A State of E Report on our Region's  
Cradle to Career Pathway**

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## This report is



- An overview of our region's Cradle-to-Career pathway
- A synthesis of public education data for our five counties
- A spotlight on a few examples of current progress

## This report aims to



- **Spark** conversations about supporting every child's success.
- **Inspire** personal investment in children's growth and education.
- **Reveal** how education is shaped by community factors, not just the classroom
- **Build** shared commitment to educational equity, knowing it benefits everyone
- **Drive** innovative solutions to strengthen lifelong learning opportunities.

## About For Evansville

For Evansville is a community-driven organization dedicated to creating a city where every child has the opportunity to thrive.

We empower focused collaboration by convening leaders and organizations to work together around a unified strategy. We amplify stories through films, podcasts, and events to inspire empathy and action.

Through leadership development, trust-building, and missional training, we guide individuals and communities to connect their values with impactful action, creating a unified movement to build a city where everyone can flourish.



## Education is more than a promise of individual opportunity— it's the engine that drives collective prosperity.

**A good education provides children with the tools to achieve economic mobility,** creating ripple effects that touch every corner of our community.

When kids can break free from poverty, the benefits extend beyond their personal lives:

- \* **crime rates drop**
- \* **public health improves**
- \* **economic mobility grows**

In fact, the connection between education and well-being is so profound that improving education outcomes has been linked to longer life expectancy and a more resilient city.

# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

## Cradle-to-Career Pathway

The Cradle to Career Pathway is a framework that highlights the key stages in a child's journey from early childhood through adulthood. It identifies critical milestones where support from families, schools, and the community can make a significant difference in a child's development, education, and future opportunities.

By focusing on these milestones, the pathway aims to ensure that every child has the resources, skills, and encouragement they need to succeed at each stage—starting with healthy development in early childhood, progressing through educational achievements, and culminating in a career that provides a living wage and economic stability.

*Every community has a cradle-to-career pathway*  
It's the journey all children take as they grow, learn, and prepare for adulthood.

*The key question is whether this pathway works for every child.*

## Promise Pathways

The Promise Pathways model in Evansville is inspired by the national framework pioneered by the Harlem Children's Zone, which addresses the complex challenges faced by children in under-resourced neighborhoods. In Evansville, neighborhood-based nonprofits have contextualized this model to reflect the unique needs of their communities and our region. Promise Pathways stand out by focusing on holistic, long-term change rather than isolated activities or interventions, serving as hubs for collaboration among a wide range of partners.

In addition to their unique focus, Promise Pathways excel in creating a collaborative ecosystem. As hubs for alignment and partnership, they bring together other youth-serving organizations, schools, families, and community stakeholders to work toward shared outcomes. By focusing on the needs of individual children, Promise Pathways help align resources and programs within a comprehensive network of support, amplifying the impact of all organizations involved. This ensures that every effort contributes meaningfully to the milestones most crucial to a child's success, creating a more effective and unified approach to child development.



Evansville Promise Neighborhood is a community-based initiative housed at the University of Evansville's Center for Innovation & Change. This collaborative project – brought to life through the coordinated work of 23 partners – brings together families, organizations, and schools to co-design solutions and pathways to success.

Located in an area of Evansville with the most potential for positive transformation, EPN focuses on building strong partnerships that unlock resources and empower residents to lead the change they envision for their community.



## The Promise Neighborhood Grant

In 2023, Evansville was awarded a \$30 million Promise Neighborhood grant from the U.S. Department of Education, making it **one of only three recipients nationwide**. This transformative five-year program (see above) will invest over \$62 million in total to support six schools and surrounding neighborhoods.

The initiative provides wraparound services, including education, workforce training, affordable housing, and family support, to help students excel academically and transition successfully to college and careers. With years of collaborative effort behind the application, local leaders emphasized the program's potential to drive economic growth, create jobs, and foster long-term community transformation.

**This report explores how our community's pathway functions and identifies ways to ensure all children have equitable access to the resources they need to thrive.**

## Evansville's Promise Providers operate based on four key pillars

### Kid-Centric

The needs and aspirations of children are at the heart of every decision, strategy, and program. This ensures that initiatives are designed to directly address the barriers children face, empowering them to succeed both now and in the future.

### Place-Based

Promise Providers focus on specific neighborhoods, tailoring approaches to their unique challenges and resources. By investing deeply in defined geographic areas, Promise Providers build strong relationships and foster collective impact within those communities.

### School-Integrated

Collaboration with local schools is essential. By aligning with the efforts of educators and administrators, Promise Providers ensure that children receive consistent support across both their educational and personal lives, creating a seamless network of care and opportunity.

### Cradle-to-Career

Promise Providers are committed to supporting children throughout their entire journey, from early childhood to adulthood. This long-term perspective allows for sustained, comprehensive strategies that address each stage of development, ensuring no critical milestone is overlooked.



## MEET AMARA & LAYLA

Throughout this report we will follow two children with similar beginnings but vastly different outcomes.



Amara's story is the **exception**: despite systemic barriers, she finds the right support at key moments, propelling her toward success.



Layla's story, however, reflects the **reality** for many. Facing the same challenges without the necessary support, she struggles to break through.



Where a child grows up shapes their future, making the difference between a path toward flourishing or a cycle of struggle. Through these two stories, we'll explore how educational equity can unlock potential and transform not only individual lives but the entire community.

## THE 7 MILESTONES

The difference between success and struggle for kids often comes down to key moments along what we call the cradle-to-career pathway—critical milestones that predict whether a child will flourish or falter.

**KINDERGARTEN READINESS**

**EARLY GRADE LITERACY**

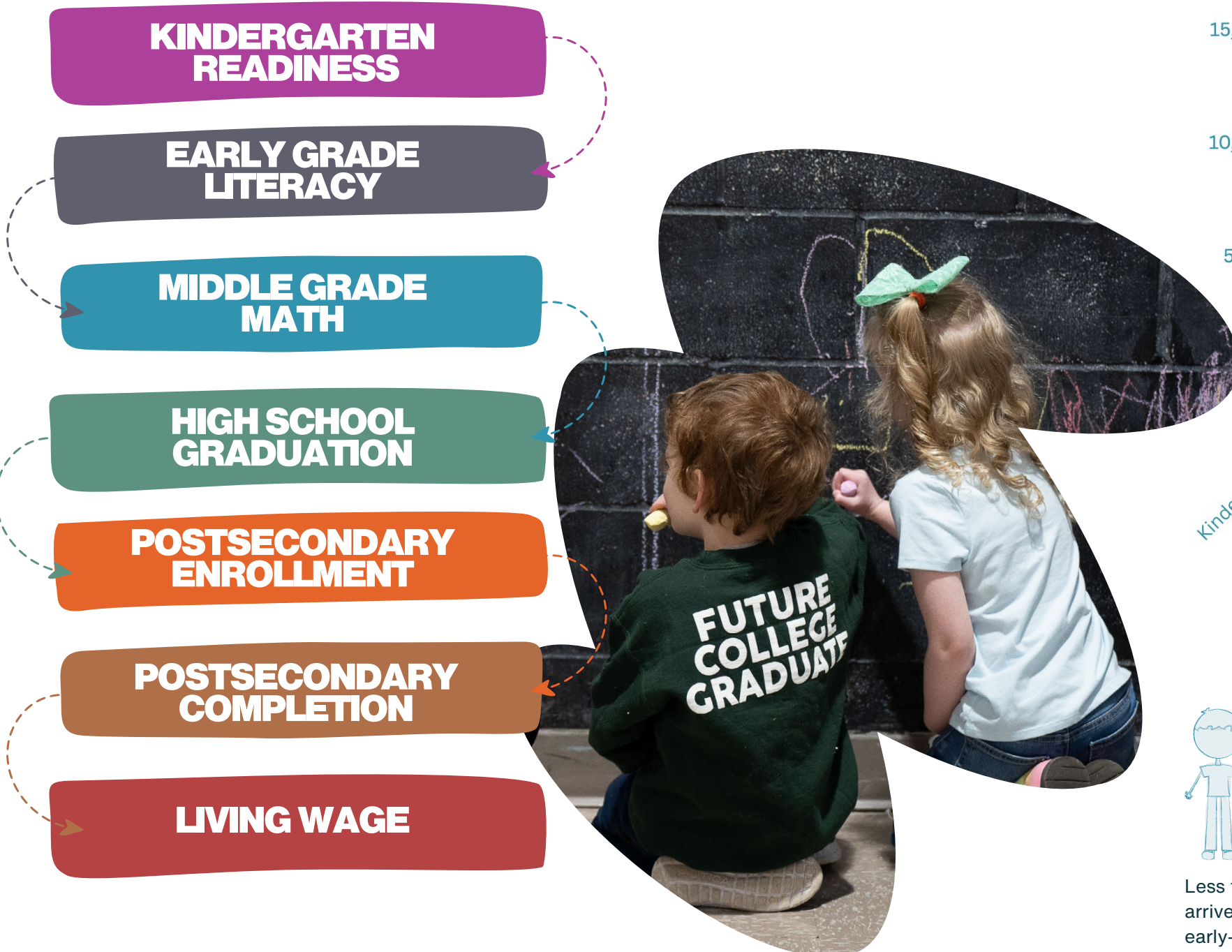
**MIDDLE GRADE MATH**

**HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION**

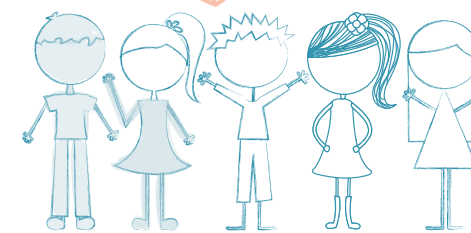
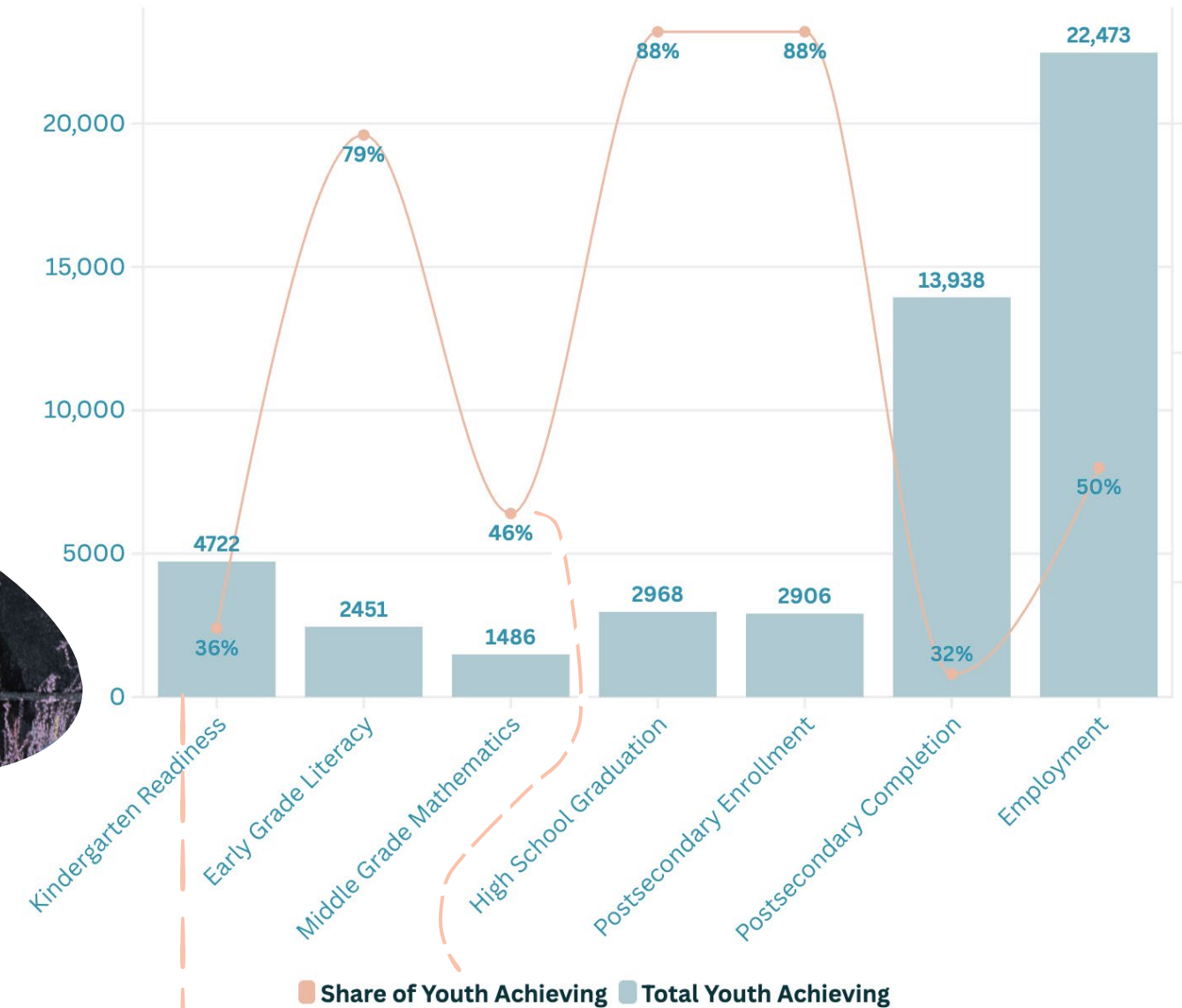
**POSTSECONDARY ENROLLMENT**

**POSTSECONDARY COMPLETION**

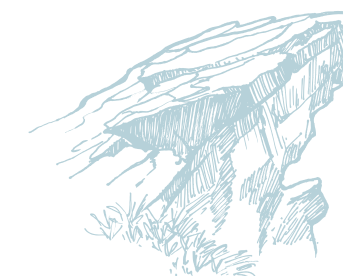
**LIVING WAGE**



**EVV Metropolitan Area Cradle to Career Outcomes**

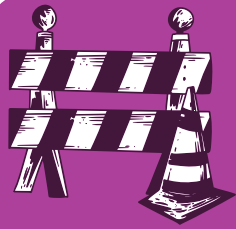


Less than two out of five kids (40%) arrive to Kindergarten with adequate early-learning exposure.



The “Middle-School Math Cliff” in the Evansville region is significantly impacting the flow of youth experiencing economic mobility through educational pathways.

What is the Math Cliff? Read more on page 18.



# KINDERGARTEN READINESS



Kindergarten readiness is a crucial stepping stone in a child's educational journey, playing a significant role in their success from early childhood all the way through their career. Here's why being ready for kindergarten matters so much:

### Cognitive Development:

Entering kindergarten ready gives kids the basics like ABCs and counting, setting them up to think critically and enjoy learning.

### Academic Achievement:

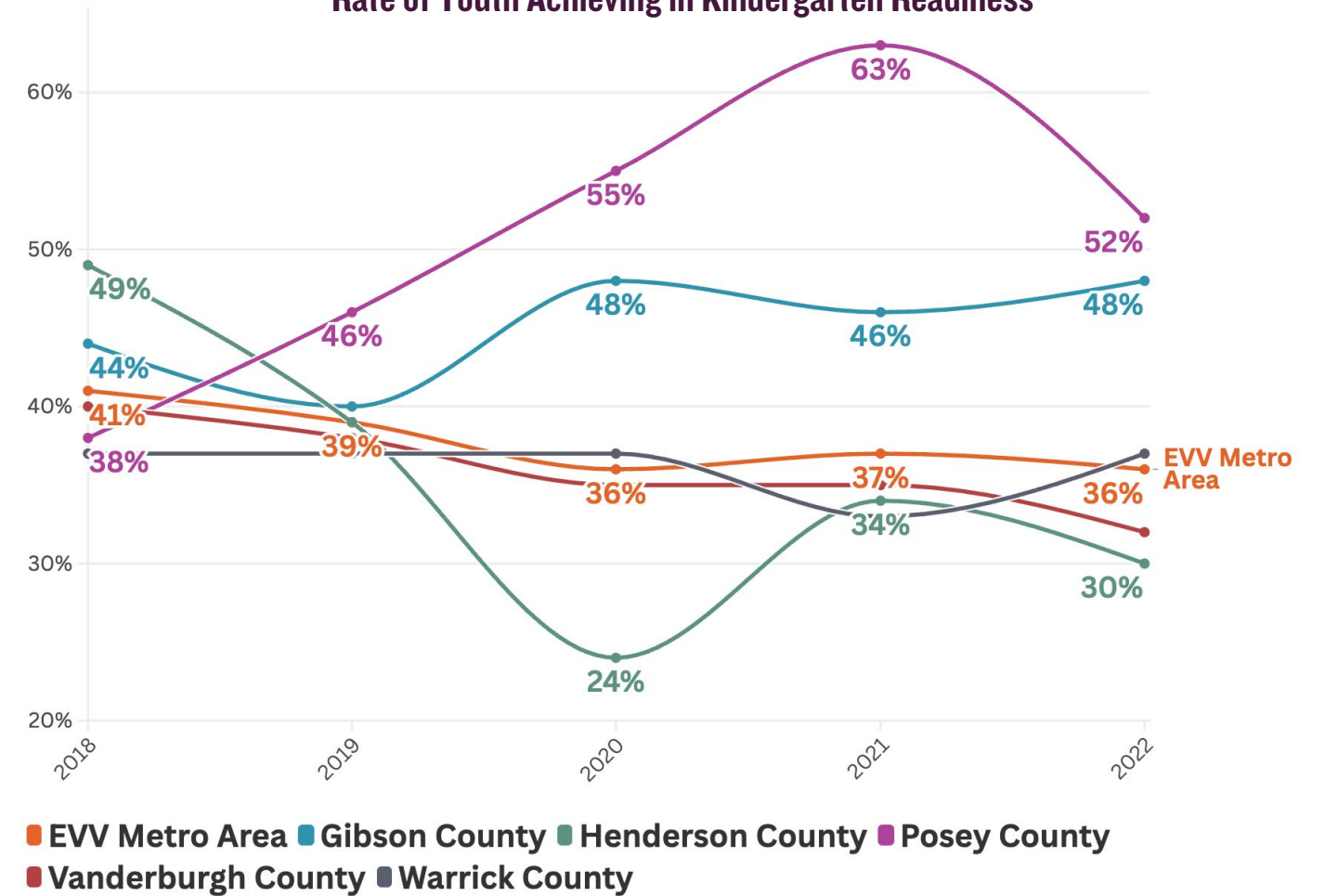
A strong start in kindergarten often leads to better reading and math skills, laying a foundation for long-term academic success.

### Social-Emotional Skills:

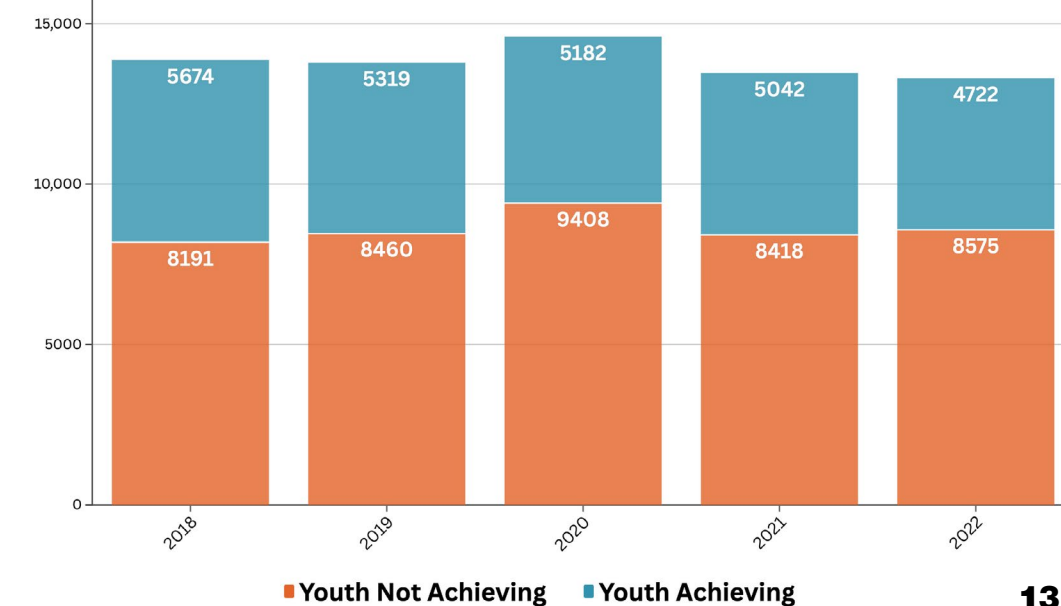
Being prepared means kids can play well with others, manage feelings, and follow instructions, helping them make friends and feel confident in class.



Rate of Youth Achieving in Kindergarten Readiness



Total Rate of Youth Achieving in Kindergarten Readiness in EVV Metro Area Over Time



### Observation

Rural counties have had larger increases in achievement rates than urban counties like Henderson and Vanderburgh.

**-3%**

The overall Kindergarten Readiness rate has **decreased** by an average of 3% each year from 2018 to 2022.

# HOW ARE AMARA & LAYLA DOING?

Amara's success highlights the power of support, while Layla's struggle reveals the impact of systemic barriers



## AMARA

### Pre-Kindergarten Resources

- Parent's employer makes Early Learning possible
- Parents & Grandparents regularly read to her
- Neighborhood friends & activities

### Key Outcomes

- Ability to form relationships with adults and friends
- Asks good questions
- Broader vocabulary
- Sense of place
- Problem solving
- Fine motor skills

## LAYLA

### Pre-Kindergarten Resources

- Childcare without learning opportunities
- Very few books in the house
- No community efforts in her neighborhood

### Key Outcomes

- Less prepared
- Spends more time catching up
- Has trouble making friends
- Fine motor skills need to develop (writing, drawing basic shapes)



# COMMUNITY STORIES



Eaglets is a kindergarten readiness program in the Jacobsville Neighborhood. It requires a high level of parent engagement, and Dream Center's Early Learning Pathway Coordinator works with parents to create the best environment and support for their child.

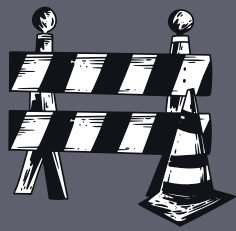
Last May, the Eaglets program held a graduation for their students. Each Eaglet got their own table with 6 guests to enjoy breakfast together before the ceremony.

"It was powerful to see some families have three generations present to watch their Eaglet walk across the stage. You could feel and see the pride they had," said Meredith Hagerty, Development Coordinator. "It was clear that Kindergarten Readiness and the importance of school was being instilled in each generation if it hadn't been already."



Potter's Wheel partners with Glenwood Leadership Academy for a four-week program (called Baby Bull Pups) in June to help students starting Kindergarten in the fall get comfortable with their school, classroom, and teacher. A team of certified teachers, a social worker, Potter's Wheel staff, and volunteers work together to build relationships and prepare students for Kindergarten.

Once Kindergarten begins, Potter's Wheel supports continued learning through after-school programs focused on phonics with Reaoniks, i-ready, and reading practice. "Our students are not where they were nor are they where they want to be, but they have potential!" says Academic Coordinator Kim Brantley. "We are going to do whatever it takes to see them achieve their goals."



# EARLY GRADE LITERACY



Early grade literacy is a cornerstone of a child's educational journey, deeply influencing their success from early childhood through their career. Here's why mastering literacy in the early grades is so vital:

### Cognitive Development:

Learning to read is key for brain development. Children with strong early literacy skills can better understand new information, building a solid foundation for future learning.

### Academic Achievement:

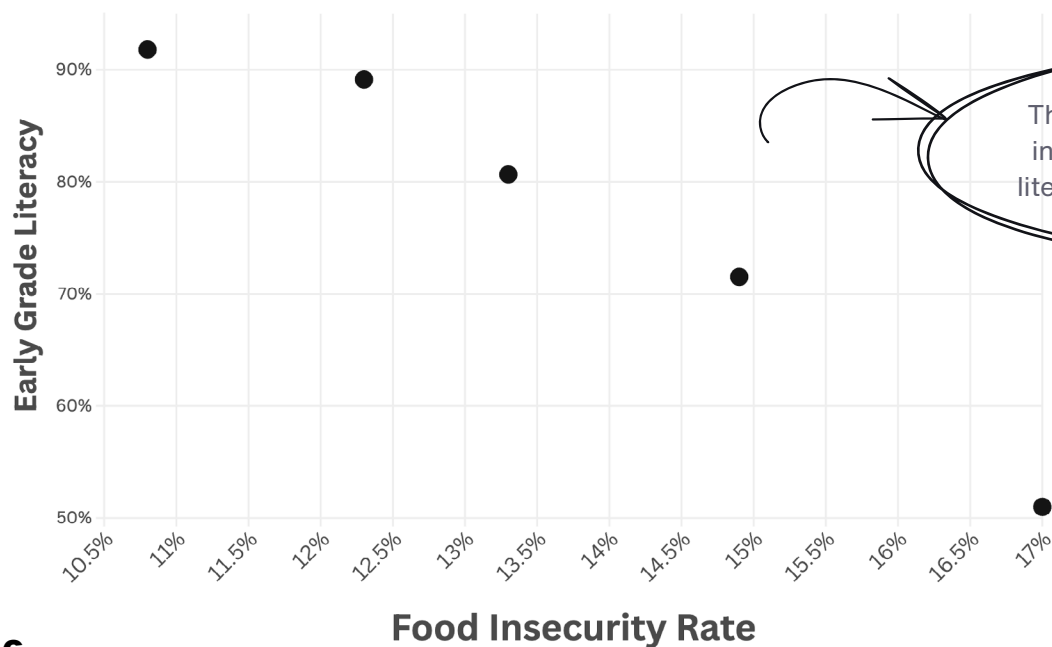
Reading well by third grade predicts academic success. Strong readers do better in other subjects like math and science because they understand instructions, giving them a lasting advantage.

### Long-term Outcomes

Early reading skills impact life beyond school. Children who read well early are more likely to finish high school, seek higher education, and find stable careers, making literacy key for long-term success.



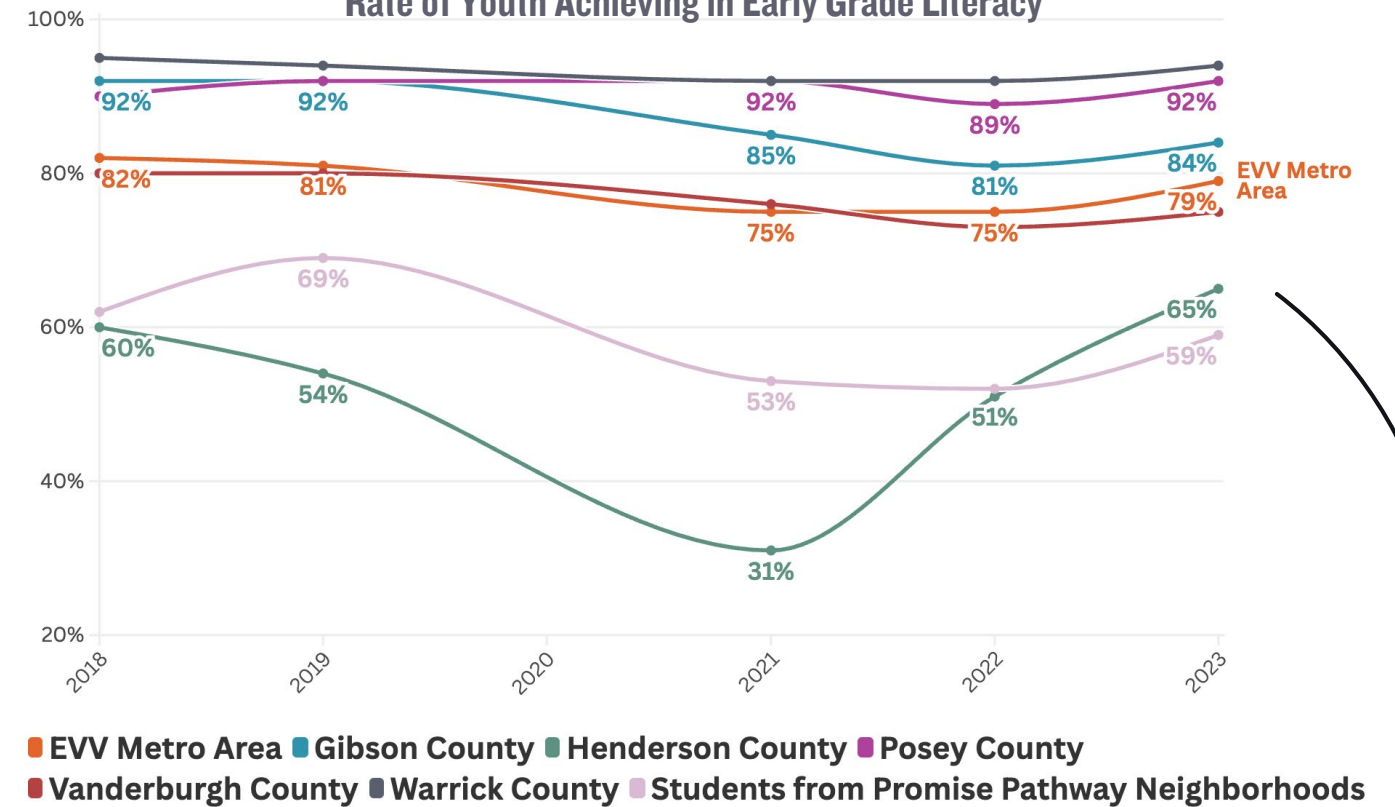
### How do food security rates compare to Early Grade Literacy?



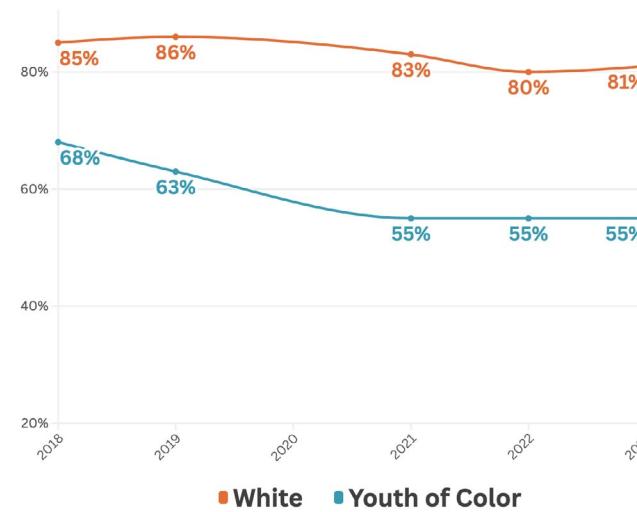
There is some evidence that food insecurity is linked to lower early literacy rates in EVV area counties.



### Rate of Youth Achieving in Early Grade Literacy



### White & Youth of Color Literacy Rates Over Time



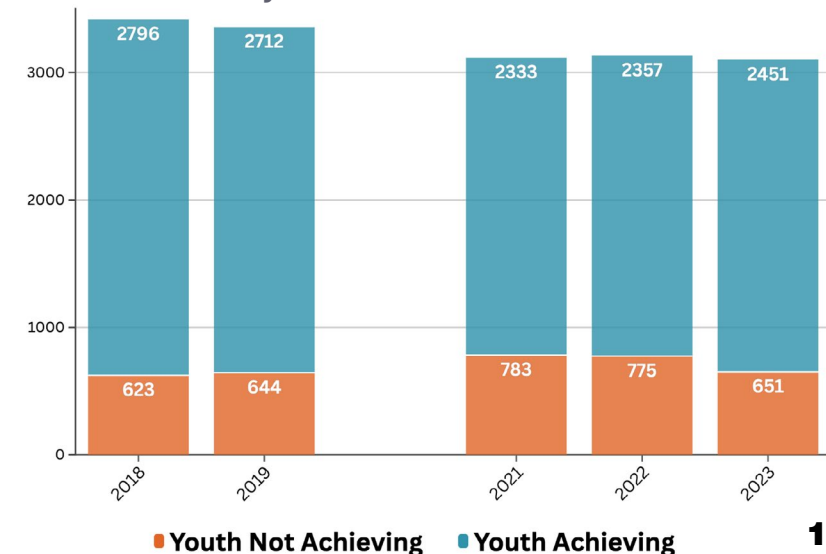
### Observation

Henderson County's achievement rate grew by 8% from 2018 to 2023. They also saw the hardest decline from 2019 to 2021 (-43%).

-1%

The overall Early Grade Literacy rate has **decreased** by an average of 1% each year from 2018 to 2023.

### Total Rate of Youth Achieving in Early Grade Literacy in EVV Metro Area Over Time



# HOW ARE AMARA & LAYLA DOING?

Amara's success highlights the power of support, while Layla's struggle reveals the impact of systemic barriers



## AMARA

### Early Grade Resources

- Lives close to her school, transportation doesn't prevent her from attending
- She was ready for kindergarten
- Picked up on reading faster, interested in books at home on her own
- Enrolled in after-school program where she spends time reading

### Key Outcomes

- Proficient in reading
- Better grasp on emotions

## LAYLA

### Early Grade Resources

- Parents work in the mornings - if she misses the bus, she misses school
- Not enrolled in an after-school program, not interested in reading at home
- Skips breakfast or eats a Pop-Tart on the way to school.

### Key Outcomes

- Less proficient in reading, making all subjects difficult
- Can't regulate emotions as well
- Has trouble focusing
- She is now 4x more likely to drop out of high school



# REAL COMMUNITY STORIES



A student who attended the Baby Bull Pups Program (see page 15) is now a 3rd grader. She is signed on to the Promise in the Southside Kids Zone, so Potter's Wheel has been able to follow her from the beginning of her academic journey. Her parents gave permission for her grades to be shared with Potter's Wheel, and she is now above grade level in reading.



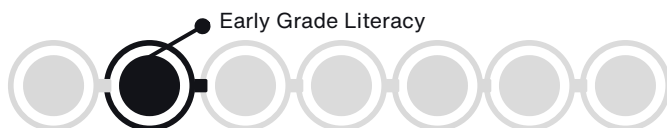
## What is the Promise?

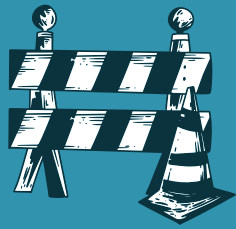
The PROMISE is a commitment to:

- Do whatever it takes to promote the overall success of every student in the Zone
- Prioritize the student's education by working closely with their school to provide exactly what they need to be successful
- Work closely with community partners to connect their family to all available resources
- 100% transparency about the ways they are supporting a child
- Be the family's biggest cheerleader

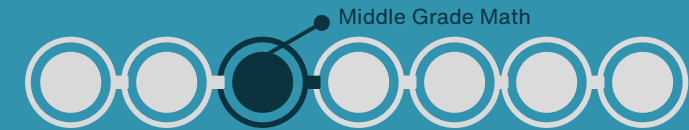
**4x** Compared to those reading proficiently, kids with poor reading skills are four times more likely to not graduate high school at all.

ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION REPORT





# MIDDLE GRADE MATH

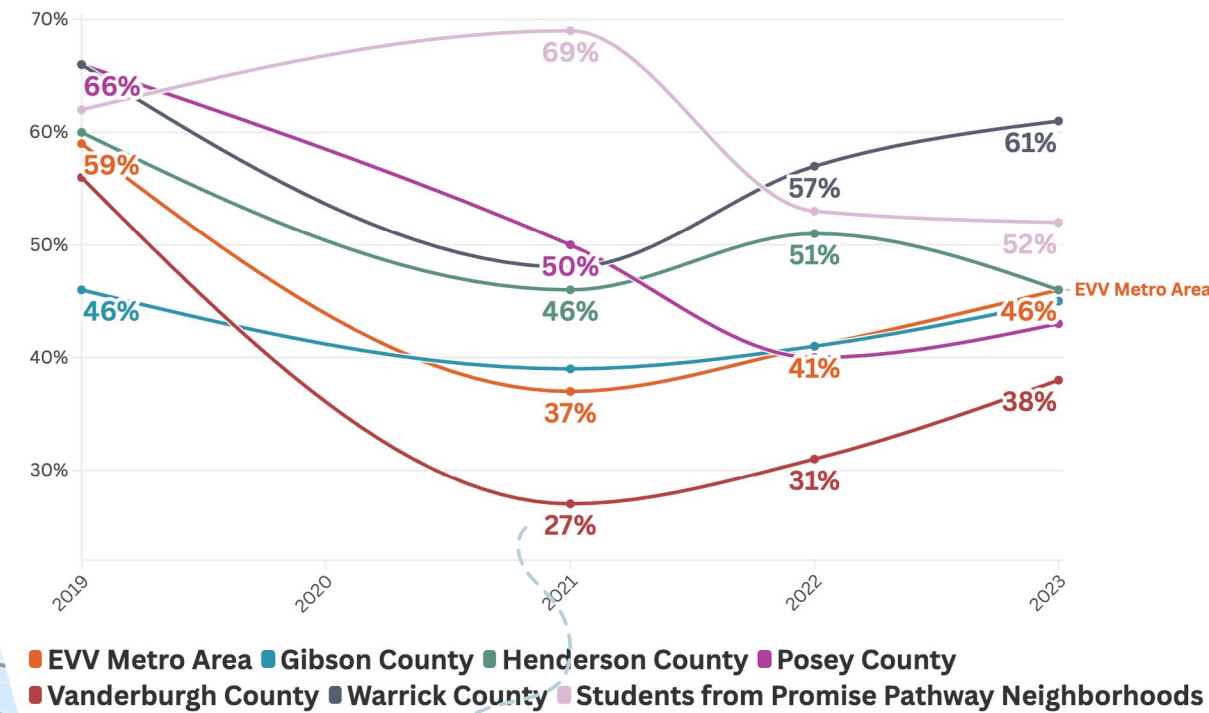


Middle school math is a crucial point in a student's education, shaping their success through high school and into their future careers. Here's why strong math skills at this stage are so important:

- Cognitive Development:**  
Middle school math builds thinking, problem-solving, and logic skills essential for advanced learning, daily life, and future careers.
- Academic Achievement:**  
Middle school math success strongly predicts high school achievement. Mastery of algebra and similar subjects lays the groundwork for advanced STEM courses, which are vital for many in-demand careers.
- College & Career Readiness**  
Strong middle school math skills are key for college readiness, influencing admissions and opening doors to careers in engineering, technology, finance, and healthcare.



## Rate of Youth Achieving in Middle Grade Math



**Observation**  
Vanderburgh County saw the largest decline from 2019 to 2021 of any county at a -51% drop. However, it has seen the largest post-COVID rebound at a 41% increase.

## THE MIDDLE GRADE MATH CLIFF

A sharp decline in math achievement is often seen in grades 5–8, leading to long-term struggles in STEM fields. Resource gaps and limited access to quality support worsen the issue for marginalized students. Without early intervention and engaging instruction, these challenges snowball, affecting confidence and success into high school and beyond.

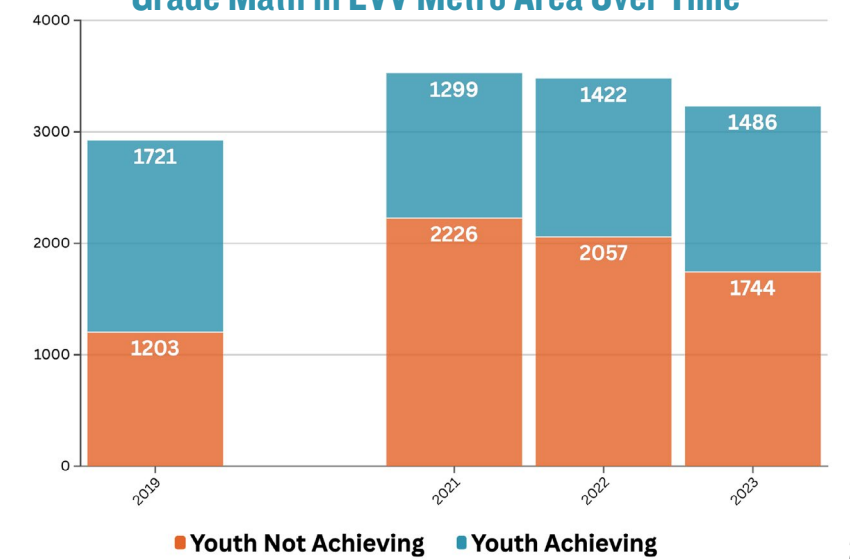
## THE ECONOMIC CASE FOR MIDDLE GRADE MATH

Investing in middle grade math education brings major economic benefits. A math-skilled workforce is key to a competitive economy, leading to better jobs, higher earnings, and overall growth.

**-5%**

The overall Middle Grade Math rate has **decreased** by an average of 5% each year from 2018 to 2023.

## Total Rate of Youth Achieving in Middle Grade Math in EVV Metro Area Over Time



# HOW ARE AMARA & LAYLA DOING?

Amara's success highlights the power of support, while Layla's struggle reveals the impact of systemic barriers



## AMARA

### Middle Grade Math Resources

- Math doesn't come easy for her, but her after-school program provides a tutor
- Tutor plants seeds of ambition for going to college

### Key Outcomes

- Enrolls in more advanced courses, despite needing tutoring
- Better/more options for college
- Starts dreaming about her career options

## LAYLA

### Middle Grade Math Resources

- School lends Layla a tablet for tutoring after school, but Layla does not have reliable internet at home
- Teachers focus on helping Layla pass, but don't have the time to help her hope and dream
- Placed in a remedial math class

### Key Outcomes

- Struggles in all STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) related subjects
- Gives up on her dream of becoming a doctor
- Less options for college



# REAL COMMUNITY STORIES



"In large, new spaces like Jr. High, students can sometimes struggle to keep pace with their peers, especially those who might have had different resources in early childhood and elementary school.

When I sit down one-on-one with our middle school students to do schoolwork, this is how the session usually goes:

- Student begins by saying "I don't know" or "I never learned this" or "I'm dumb."
- I ask them to go back to what they remember learning in class that day, and I help them fill in the gaps.
- Then we go back to the schoolwork, and I have the student walk me through their thoughts on each problem. We frequently revisit the material they learned in class.
- I try to be as encouraging as possible whether the student gets a question right or wrong, and I usually bring snacks or allow them to take breaks when the work becomes overwhelming.
- The student always gets almost all of the answers correct. I usually hear more comments like "I'm so smart" or "That was easy."

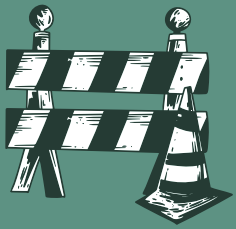
Working one-on-one with students gives them so much confidence and allows them to recognize the knowledge they already have. This just can't happen in a large classroom unfortunately, and teachers cannot reteach material that a student didn't learn in previous grades."

Isabelle Wakefield  
Middle School Student Success Coach & Program Leader  
Dream Center Evansville

Success in middle grade math can be the difference between a student who graduates from high school ready for college and a student who struggles and may not graduate at all. **Middle school is the last best chance** to identify gaps in students' knowledge and to fill those gaps in a meaningful way.

JOEL ROSE, CO-FOUNDER OF  
NEW CLASSROOMS





# HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION



High school graduation is a pivotal milestone in a student's educational journey, significantly impacting their future opportunities and success. Here's why achieving a high school diploma is so crucial:

## Academic Foundation:

Graduating high school means students have key skills in math, science, reading, and writing. These basics help them succeed in college and careers, making them ready for further education and job training.

## Economic Benefits:

High school graduates typically earn more and have better job prospects, leading to greater financial stability and a higher quality of life.

## Social & Emotional Development

High school helps students build essential social skills, time management, and resilience. It also offers chances for teamwork and leadership through extracurriculars, supporting personal growth and life readiness.



According to the U.S. Department of Education, high school graduates earn, on average, significantly more over their lifetime than those without a diploma.

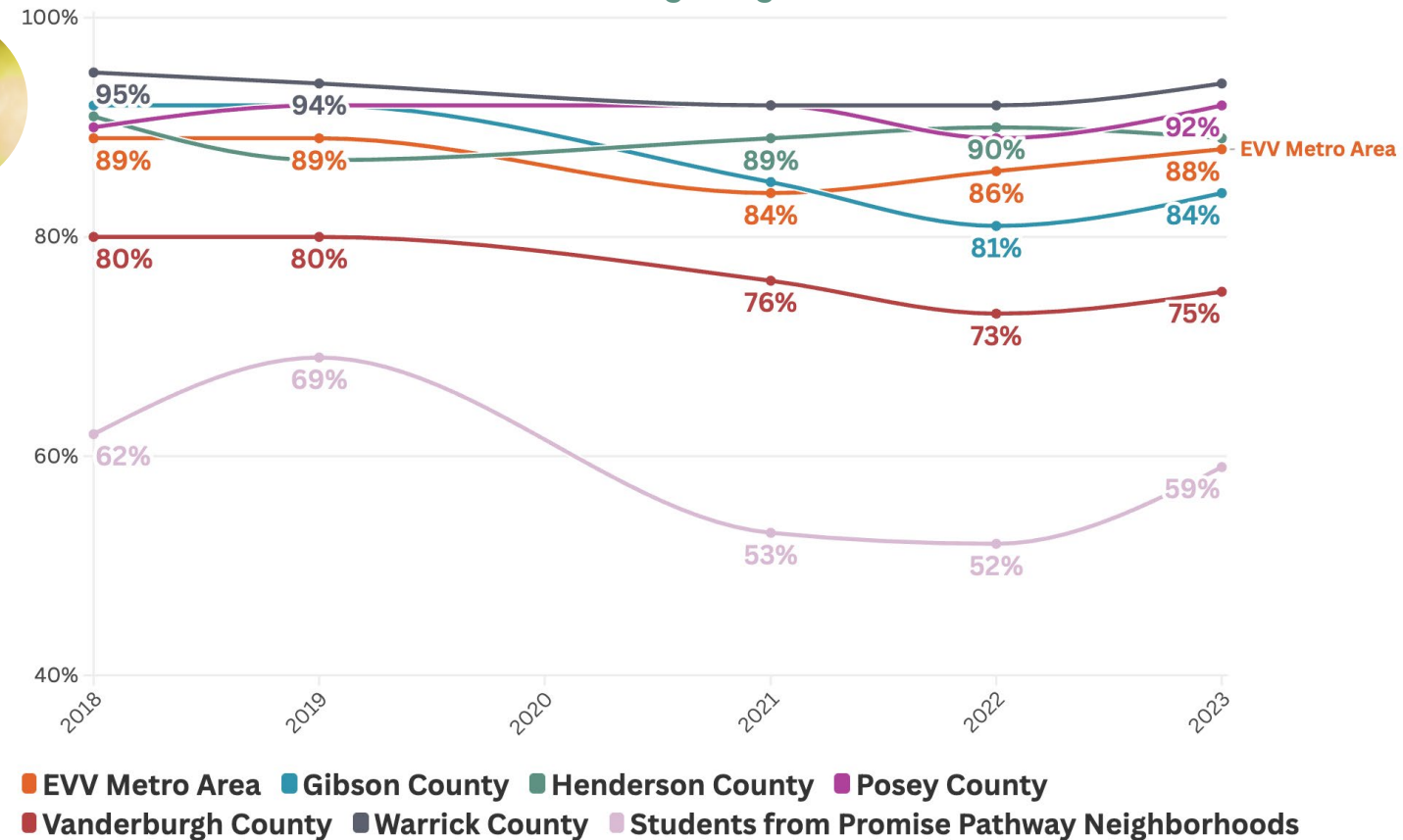


The Brookings Institution notes that "high school graduation is a critical milestone in the educational pipeline, influencing both individual success and the economic health of our society."

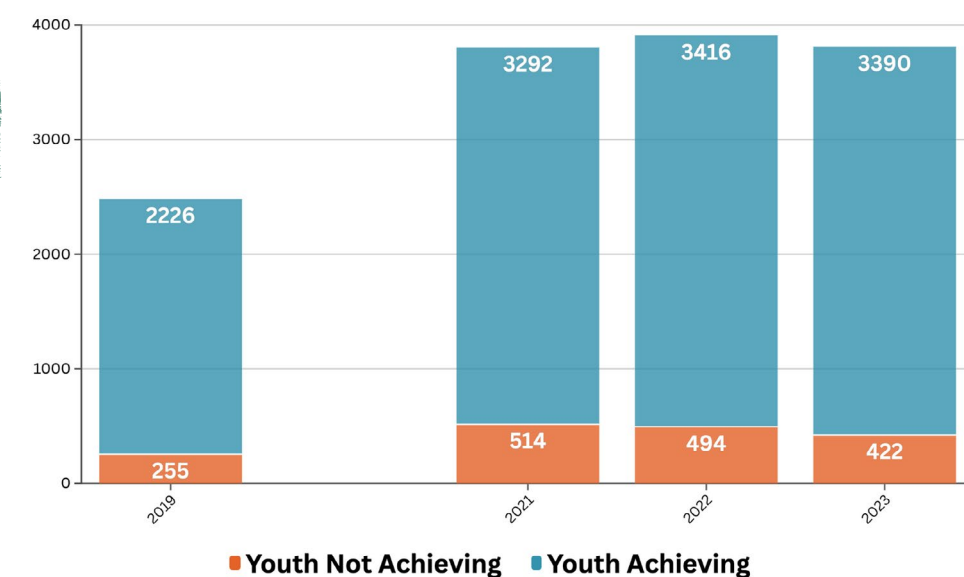
# 7%

The total number of youth achieving this outcome has **increased** by 7% post COVID-19.

### Rate of Youth Achieving in High School Graduation



### Total Rate of Youth Achieving in High School Graduation in EVV Metro Area Over Time



# HOW ARE AMARA & LAYLA DOING?

Amara's success highlights the power of support, while Layla's struggle reveals the impact of systemic barriers



## AMARA

### High School Graduation Resources

- Family is struggling financially, so she gets a job
  - Because of her long-term outlook, she gets a job that offers benefits and sets her up for the future
- The organization where she attended an after school program is aware of her family's situation and is helping where they can

### Key Outcomes

- Able to manage stress levels
- Able to maintain grades
- Graduates with good grades
- Submitted multiple post-secondary school applications

## LAYLA

### High School Graduation Resources

- Family is struggling financially, so she has to get a job
- Options are limited because she doesn't have a car
- Less flexibility in hours and long-term benefits

### Key Outcomes

- Grades suffer
- Peer to peer relationships suffer
- High School is no longer the most important thing, barely graduates



# REAL COMMUNITY STORIES

## MODERN YOUTH APPRENTICESHIP

A year ago, Maddy felt stuck. As a junior at Reitz High School, she dreamed of a career in healthcare but didn't know how to get started. That changed when she met Jasmine, a team leader at Deaconess and part of the Modern Youth Apprenticeship program—a partnership between Ivy Tech, EVSC, and Deaconess that offers students hands-on training and college credits through Work-Based Learning. Jasmine listened to Maddy's goals and connected her with Deaconess' Sterile Supply Program.



Now, as the program's first apprentice, Maddy is graduating with a full-time job and post-secondary credits. She's paving the way for future students and encouraging others to seize opportunities. "If you want to be in the medical field, start by getting in the building," Maddy advises. "Build connections, talk to people, and ask questions."

The program continues to grow, aiming to bring in more apprentices and expand partnerships with local businesses. Jasmine sees the impact firsthand. "This is a win for EVSC and the students in our community," she says. "Students graduate ready to join the workforce or continue their education."



Maddy has advice for adults who want to support young people: "Submerge them in the workplace—show the good and the bad. Listen to their interests, support their dreams, and don't push them toward something they don't want to do." Maddy's journey is proof of what happens when students are empowered to pursue their passions.

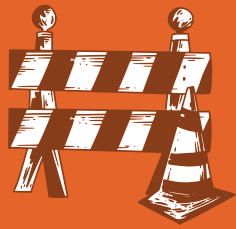
## Did you know?

**The EVSC was one of only three school systems in Indiana selected as a Modern Youth Apprenticeship (MYA) accelerator site.** This recognition is rooted in the EVSC's commitment to best practices, deep community and employer engagement, and the creation of sustainable systems that benefit students and industry partners alike. Through its Opt-In initiative, the EVSC ensures programs align student passions and abilities with meaningful career opportunities, preparing students for informed and successful futures.

"MYA can reshape what the high school experience looks like," explains B.J. Watts, Executive Director of Opt-In. For decades we have measured success in high school with a diploma. MYA will create a system and process that measures student success by the skills they have acquired and their readiness for sustained high wage employment and upward mobility."

*Excerpt from Evansville Regional Economic Partnership, Talent EVV*





# POSTSECONDARY ENROLLMENT



Postsecondary enrollment is a crucial step in a student's educational journey, significantly impacting their career prospects, personal growth, and overall quality of life. Here's why enrolling in postsecondary education is so vital:

### Economic Benefits:

Postsecondary education, like college or vocational training, greatly boosts earning potential and career options compared to just a high school diploma.

### Career Advancement

Postsecondary education provides specialized skills needed for high-demand careers and boosts competitiveness in today's job market. Many well-paying fields, like healthcare and technology, now require postsecondary credentials.



### NATIONAL DATA

Excerpt from *The National Student Clearinghouse Research*

Over spring 2023, undergraduate enrollment grew 2.5% (+359,000) and graduate enrollment grew 3.0% (+88,000)

The **community college sector** continues to experience the most significant gains in enrollment, increasing 4.7% (+17,000).

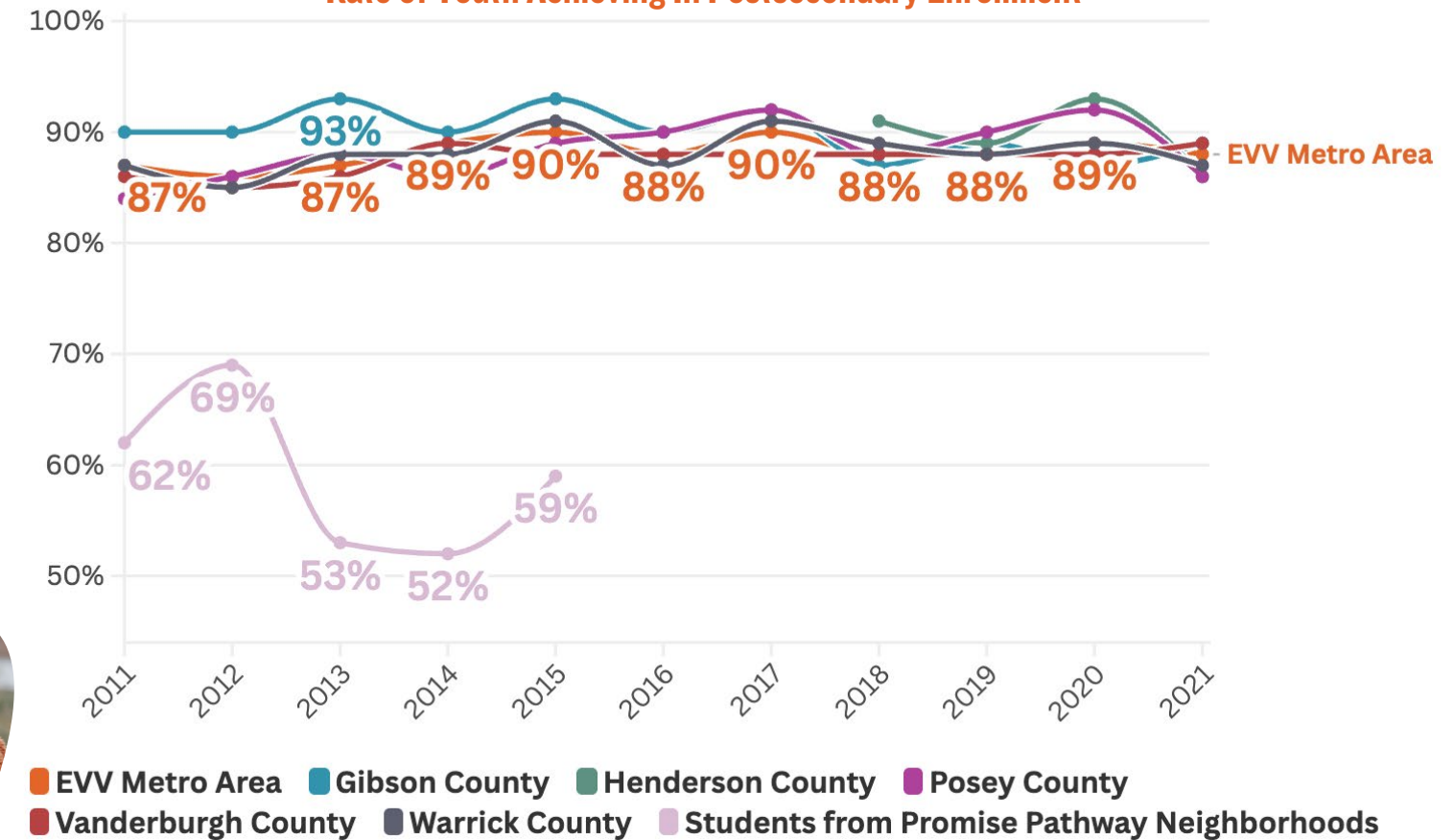
The number of **dual-enrolled high school students** (17 and younger) grew for the third year in a row (+10.0%, +101,000), accounting for 28.1% of undergraduate enrollment increases.



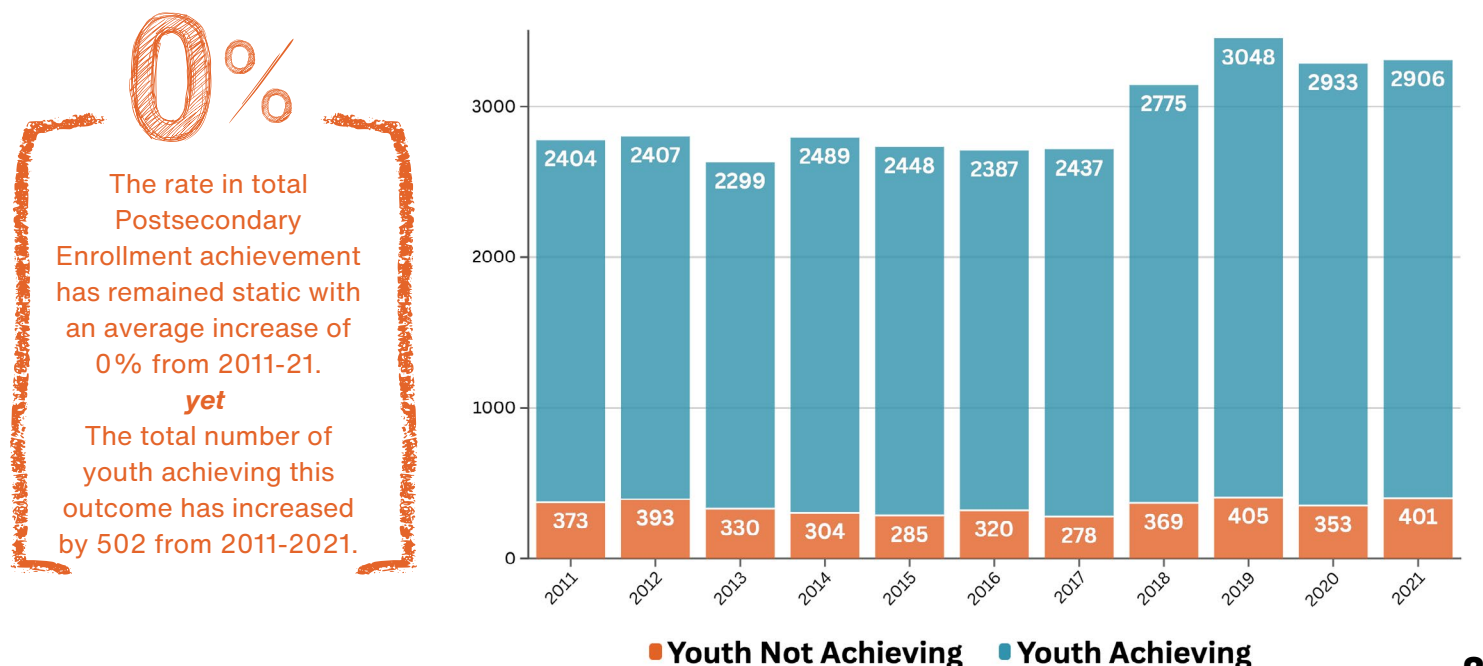
### Fields of Study

- Computer and information sciences logged another year of high growth (+9.9%, +57,000 at four-year institutions).
- Undergraduate enrollment in health professions grew across all institution types this spring, marking the first increase in this field in years.

### Rate of Youth Achieving In Postsecondary Enrollment



### Total Rate of Youth Achieving in Postsecondary Enrollment in EVV Metro Area Over Time



0%

The rate in total Postsecondary Enrollment achievement has remained static with an average increase of 0% from 2011-21. **yet** The total number of youth achieving this outcome has increased by 502 from 2011-2021.

## HOW ARE AMARA & LAYLA DOING?

Amara's success highlights the power of support, while Layla's struggle reveals the impact of systemic barriers



### AMARA

#### Postsecondary Enrollment Resources

- Receives financial assistance from her job
- Mentor helped with options and applications

#### Key Outcomes

- Accepted into community college
- She is the first person in her family to go to college

### LAYLA

#### Postsecondary Enrollment Resources

- School Advisor asks her about things she's good at or likes to do
  - Suggests short-term certification (earn while you learn) programs
- Current employer allows her to take on more hours after graduation

#### Key Outcomes

- Enrolls in a training program
- Does not have career goals for the future, focused on making ends meet



## REAL COMMUNITY STORIES



"A key part of my role is helping students envision success in college and careers. This summer, I collaborated with our team to organize a USI college tour, one of several we've offered. Students have also visited UE, Ivy Tech, and OCU. Thanks to supportive universities, any student in the Promise can join these tours, which inspire and prepare them for post-secondary education.

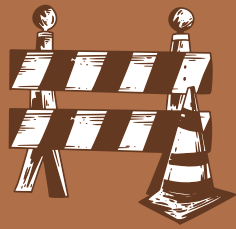
During the tour, USI staff guided students through campus buildings and programs, including dorms. Students asked questions like, "How do you eat on campus?" and "How do you pay for college?"—all of which were answered. Afterward, one student shared, "I hadn't really thought about college, but now I could see myself going here." It was a powerful moment of a student envisioning their future in higher education."

Elijah Farmer  
Academic Development Coordinator  
Dream Center Evansville



“*Postsecondary education is essential for individuals to thrive in the modern economy*”  
THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION “





# POSTSECONDARY COMPLETION



Completing postsecondary education is a critical milestone that significantly enhances a student's career prospects, personal development, and overall life satisfaction. Here's why achieving a postsecondary credential—whether it's a degree, diploma, or certificate—is so important:

**Job Security & Career:**  
Completing postsecondary education opens up more career choices, with many high-paying jobs requiring a degree. People with degrees also tend to have better job security, even during tough economic times.



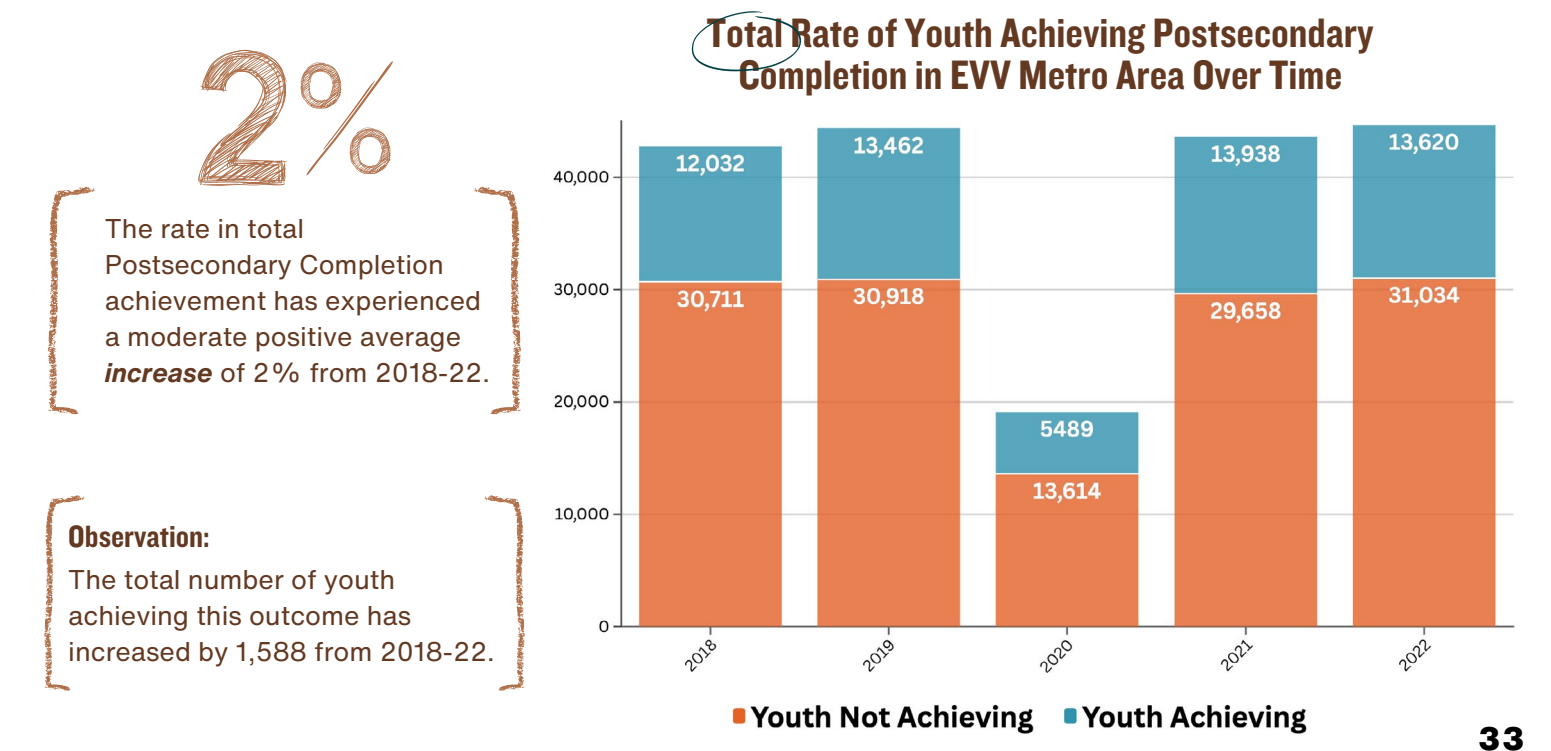
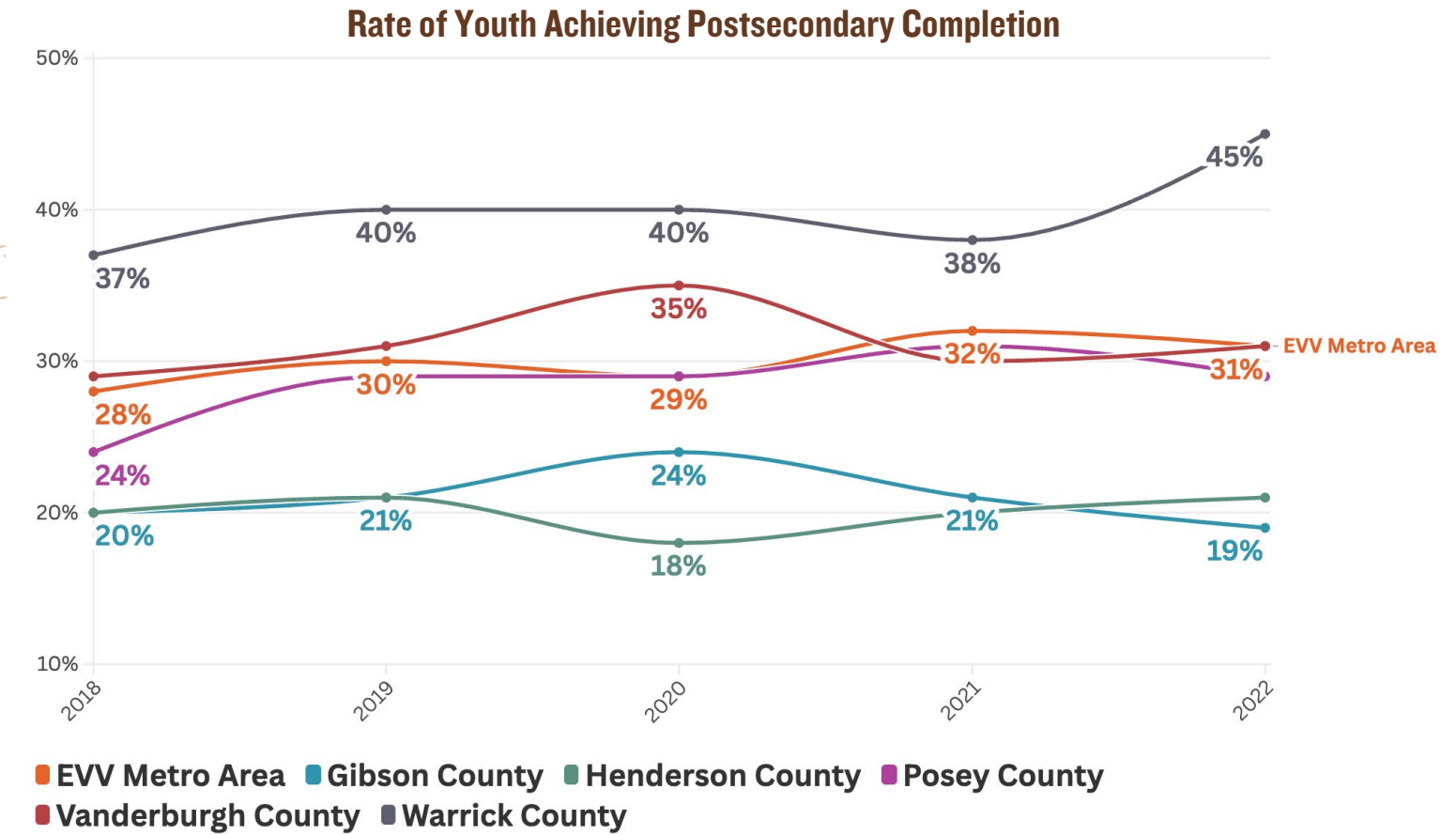
**Economic Benefits:**  
Postsecondary education boosts earning potential, leading to greater financial stability and a better quality of life.



**Social Mobility & Equity**  
Postsecondary education helps people move up in society, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Increasing graduation rates can reduce social and economic gaps.



**Community-wide Benefits**  
Higher education creates a skilled workforce, which boosts innovation and helps the economy grow. Communities with more educated people have stronger economies, lower crime rates, and better social connections.



# HOW ARE AMARA & LAYLA DOING?

Amara's success highlights the power of support, while Layla's struggle reveals the impact of systemic barriers



## AMARA

### Postsecondary Completion Resources

- Study/Tutoring habits formed in High School are already in place
- Gets connected with an internship
- Her high school job works around her new schedule

### Key Outcomes

- Internship gets her a foot in the door
- Because she is working, it takes her 5 years to complete
- Internship offers her a job upon completion

## LAYLA

### Postsecondary Completion Resources

- Gets a manager position at work to make more money
- Training program takes more time and effort than Layla was expecting

### Key Outcomes

- Drops out of the training program because she is making more money as a manager
- Sees training program as an extra expense



# REAL COMMUNITY STORIES



When Robert Lopez was a student at Bosse High School, college wasn't part of his plan. He prioritized his relationships with family and friends over academics and struggled to see how education could fit into his future. Adults in his life often emphasized the challenges of college—the expense,

the workload, and the difficulty—rather than the opportunities it could create. For Robert, high school felt like something to survive, not a stepping stone to something greater.

That perspective changed when Robert participated in the University of Evansville's High School Changemaker Challenge during his junior year. He and a friend developed a concept for a wetland education park that would collect and filter rainwater through native plants. The experience made education relevant to his passions and showed him how learning could lead to meaningful change. Encouraged by the challenge's project-based approach and the support of mentors, Robert began to see college as a way to make a difference in his community.

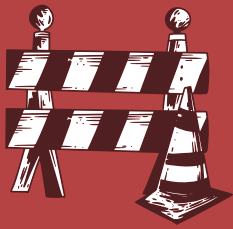
His path to college graduation wasn't easy—he graduated a year later than planned and faced moments of failure—but along the way, he learned to persevere, adapt, and grow through the process.

Reflecting on his journey, Robert credits the Changemaker Challenge and the mentors who believed in him for helping him develop a college-bound identity. "I realized that anyone can do this. College might be harder for some people, but it's possible for everyone," he says.

Today, Robert encourages other students to take chances on themselves and say yes to opportunities, even if they're unsure of their path. His advice to educators and mentors is equally powerful: "Understand each student and what motivates them. Give them big opportunities and let them grow into them. Be there to help them learn from failure."

Robert's story is a powerful reminder of what's possible when young people are encouraged to see their potential and pursue it. By connecting students to opportunities that align with their passions, our community can help more young people achieve post-secondary success and make meaningful contributions to the community around them.





# LIVING WAGE



The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics says people with education after high school usually earn more than those with just a high school diploma. Higher education leads to higher pay, which helps people earn a living wage and support their families.

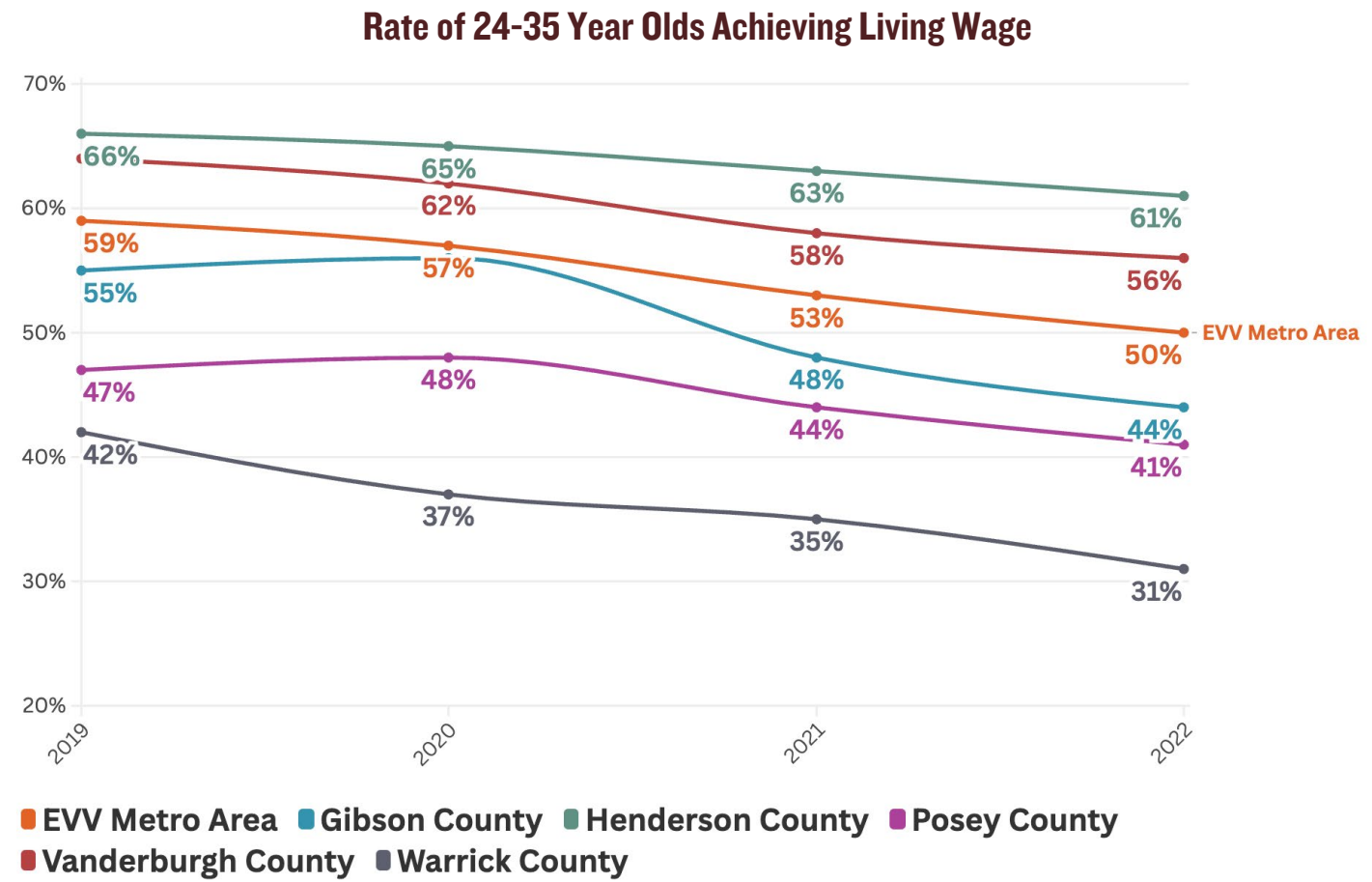
**Job Security & Stability:**  
Postsecondary education improves job stability and lowers the risk of unemployment. Unemployment rates drop as education levels rise, helping people keep steady jobs and income even in tough economic times.

**Access to Better Job Opportunities:**  
Careers in healthcare, technology, engineering, and finance often require special skills learned in college or training programs. Postsecondary education helps people get these high-demand jobs that provide a living wage.

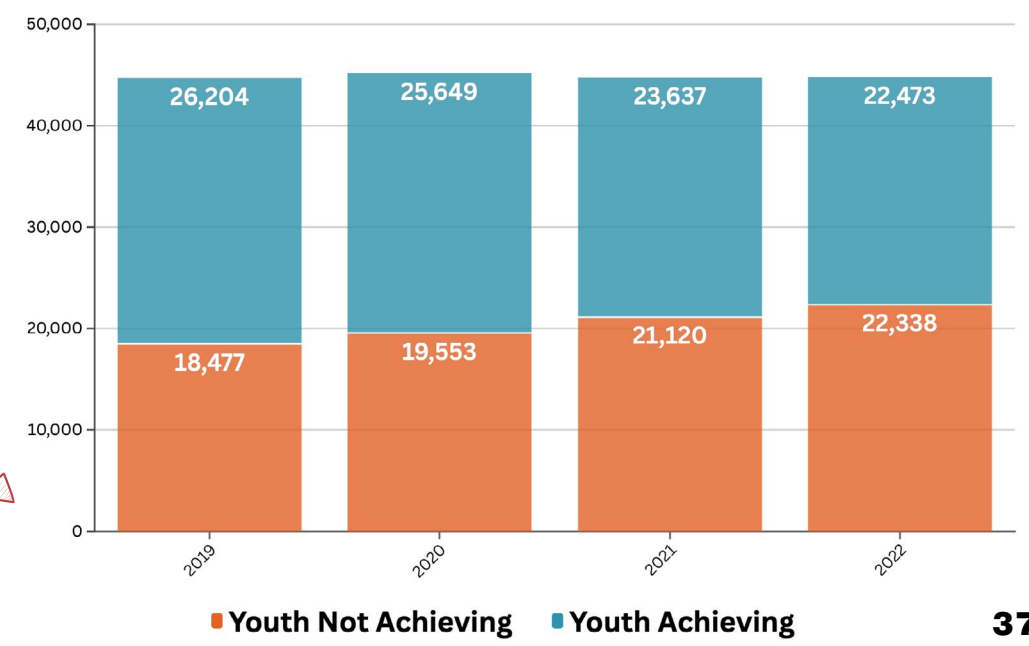
**Economic Mobility**  
Postsecondary education helps people move up the economic ladder. Earning a degree or certificate improves financial stability and breaks the cycle of poverty, giving everyone a chance to earn a living wage.



"As the economy continues to evolve, the demand for skilled workers with postsecondary education credentials is increasing. These credentials are **critical** for individuals seeking to earn wages that **support a decent standard of living.**"  
The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

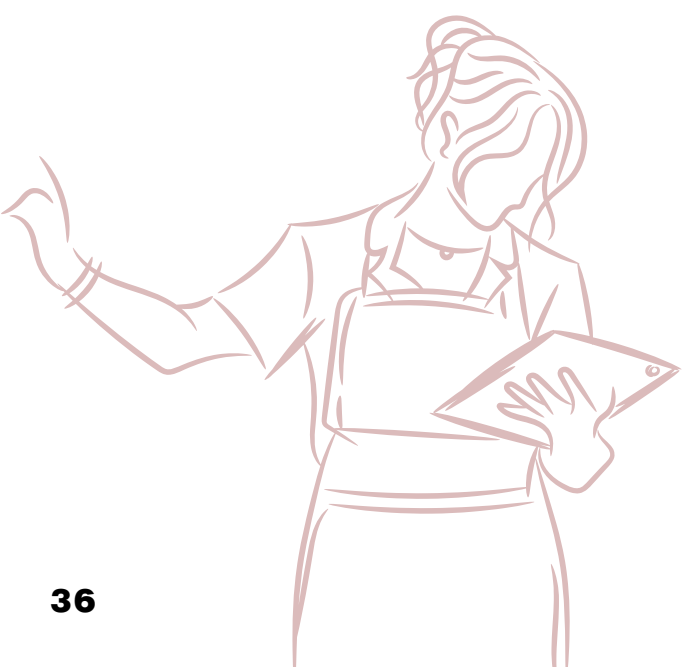


**Total Rate of Youth Achieving Living Wage in EVV Metro Area Over Time**



**-5%**  
The rate in total Living Wage achievement has experienced a steady **decrease** of 5% from 2019-22.

**3,731**  
The total number of youth achieving this outcome has fallen by 3,731 from 2019-22.



## HOW ARE AMARA & LAYLA DOING?

Amara's success highlights the power of support, while Layla's struggle reveals the impact of systemic barriers



### AMARA

#### Living Wage Resources

- Lands a job with higher pay and the promise of upward mobility
- Gets married to someone in her field

#### Key Outcomes

- She is able to buy a house in a middle income neighborhood
- Breaks the cycle of generational poverty in her family

### LAYLA

#### Living Wage Resources

- With her manager position and longer working hours, she makes enough to get by
- Moves into an apartment with her boyfriend

#### Key Outcomes

- She has a child, and her household income is barely enough to cover childcare expenses
- Lives paycheck to paycheck
- Continues the cycle of generational poverty in her family



## REAL COMMUNITY STORIES



“Not long ago, Jeremy, the Executive Director of the Dream Center, called me about a father—recently released from incarceration—who needed a stable job to get his family back on track.

For years, Jeremy and I had talked about what it could look like to create real opportunities for families like this. It wasn't about official agreements or signed partnerships. It was about aligning our shared belief: every kid in Evansville deserves the same shot at success. And sometimes, that starts with giving a parent the stability they need to lead their family forward.

We decided to take a chance.

Today, that father isn't just an employee; he's a vital part of our team. He shows up every day, works hard, and is grateful for the opportunity. But the impact hasn't been one-sided. His commitment and story have boosted our team culture, reminding all of us what we're really here to do. He embodies our belief that with the right support, people can change their lives—and the lives of those around them.

This partnership with the Dream Center has been about more than just jobs. It's about helping families move from survival to stability. And it's about reminding us all that life can be tough, but taking a chance on someone can change everything—for them and for us.

At Crosspoint Polymer Technology, we believe in creating a community where every child has a chance to succeed. And that starts with aligning with organizations like the Dream Center, who share that belief and act on it every day. When we come together, we don't just change one life—we create ripples of hope and opportunity across our entire city.”

Ryan Nunn  
HR Manager  
Crosspoint Polymer Technologies

Investing in postsecondary education is essential for ensuring that individuals can achieve economic stability and support their families.

THE URBAN INSTITUTE



# METHODOLOGY

This report follows National Center for Educational Statistic recommendations for summarizing educational outcome data for large geographies covering more than one school district. The scope of this project includes “systems level” outcome reporting for 7 cradle to career outcomes in the Evansville Metropolitan Statistical Area including

- Vanderburgh County,
- Henderson County,
- Warrick County,
- Gibson County, and
- Posey County.

**The following outcomes are given specific analysis:**

- Kindergarten Readiness
- Early Grade Literacy
- Middle Grade Mathematics
- High School Graduation
- Postsecondary Enrollment
- Postsecondary Completion
- Employment

**The following districts are represented in the sample data utilized for this study:**

- Warrick County School Corporation (10,122 Students)
- South Gibson School Corporation (2,110 Students)
- MSD of North Posey County (1,437 Students)
- North Gibson School Corporation (1,900 Students)
- Metropolitan School District of Mount Vernon (2,101 Students)
- Evansville Vanderburgh School Corporation (21,739 Students)
- Henderson County Schools (2,062 Students)
  
- **Total Students (K-12 | 41,471 Students)**

Data was sourced from 3 primary pools – (1) Indiana Department of Education, (2) Kentucky Department of Education, and (3) American Community Survey.

# THANK YOU

We are grateful for the incredible work of multiple community partners who supplied stories, photos, and feedback on this report.

We’re also grateful to John Benton with Flourishing Solutions for pulling all of this data and research together to help tell the story of Evansville.



**FOR EVANSVILLE**

[forevansville.org](http://forevansville.org)