

EDDIE  
**MELTON**  
— FOR —  
**MAYOR**  
GARY 2023

# Education Innovation Policy

March 2023



# EDUCATION INNOVATION POLICY

## for Gary, Indiana

### INTRODUCTION

Centering the educational needs of our residents will be one of my highest priorities as Mayor. From our littlest neighbors to our adult lifelong learners, ensuring our residents are met with the resources and relationships that cultivate a well-nourished community is part of what builds a thriving city.

My Education Innovation policy will incorporate state law, public-private partnerships, community leadership, mentorship and elected leadership to meet learners where they are, regardless of age.

We can't expect our city to produce a workforce positioned to lead the jobs of the future if we are not first addressing the fundamental education of that workforce. A mayor who brings to the table strong leadership for education reform will reposition us and place Gary on a more prosperous trajectory.

Gary residents of all ages have historically faced and continue to face structural barriers to receiving an education—a right guaranteed by the Indiana state constitution. In a global, knowledge-based economy, a good education is a prerequisite to compete for current and future jobs.

Gary must implement a vision for education that meets the needs of all Gary residents and spurs economic development that's strategically aligned with industry and high-demand occupations as well as providing the skills required to earn a living wage – all without ever needing to leave or relocate out of Gary city limits.

# OVERVIEW

## Education Innovation Policy

- A. Local Governance Initiative
- B. Creation of the Office of Education Innovation, a student success and academic excellence partnership
  - a. Education roundtable with K-12, higher education, workforce development agencies
  - b. Education success dashboard with specific academic interventions
  - c. The Gary Summer Learning Labs
  - d. School-based youth mentoring programs
  - e. Restorative Justice programs
  - f. Communities In Schools model
- C. The Gary Children’s First Initiative – Quality Early Childhood Education programs
- D. The Gary Promise Program – City-wide postsecondary access and success initiative
- E. Gary National Alumni Network
- F. Working for Gary – Regional education / workforce alignment initiative

# The Office of Education Innovation

**A**s Mayor of Gary, I will create an Office of Education Innovation to build an integrated system of education and workforce development that prepares a generation of talent that meets the future needs of our city and remains competitive in a knowledge-based economy. This Office will lead specific initiatives to create the conditions for a prosperous, growing, and economically viable Gary. My top priorities within this initiative include:

## **Education Leadership Roundtable**

Convening educational leadership in Gary is an essential component of creating solutions. Involving the heads of our schools, higher education institutions and workforce development agencies will allow us to understand the scope of problems facing our youth while also building a coalition of leaders to quickly implement solutions. Collaboration among educational partners will allow us to develop innovative channels of support and resources in a manner that also protects taxpayers' pockets in the long run.

## **Student Success and Academic Excellence Partnership**

The Office of Education Innovation will develop public-private partnerships and draw additional funding to create a city-wide dashboard monitoring academic success. The dashboard will indicate where there are early warning signs for problems and convene a board of education experts to recommend specific interventions for those problems, ensuring that students are (a) ready for school, (b) are reading by 3rd grade, (c) are demonstrating proficiency and growth and can exceed state testing standards, (d) can earn a high school credential and (e) are prepared to succeed in postsecondary, career or military opportunities following high school graduation.

## **The Gary Summer Learning Labs**

To improve student learning outcomes and ensure our students stay on track toward high school graduation, we must provide quality summer learning programs. Additionally, providing a learning environment that also doubles as a space for meals and safety will significantly enhance students' quality of life during the summer months.

Research shows that a significant percentage of student learning gaps occur due to unproductive use of the summer months. Along with young violence prevention efforts, our city's launch of a summer learning initiative will give students a competitive edge once they return to school in the fall.

This program would be funded through philanthropic and state funding.

### **The Gary School-Based Youth Mentoring Initiative**

Research shows that a quality mentoring relationship between youth and adults can have a resoundingly positive impact on young people's lives. Youth who have mentors are proven to have better educational, vocational, and psychosocial outcomes than their unmentored peers. For all its benefits, unfortunately, one in three young people will grow up without ever having a positive mentor.

Mentorship is often one program component involving other elements, such as tutoring, life skills training, and coaching. The supportive, healthy relationships formed between mentors and mentees are both immediate and long-term and contribute to a host of benefits for both mentors and mentees.

Community engagement with our civic and social organizations, including sororities and fraternities, will offer them a way to directly impact the lives of our youth while also fulfilling their missions to give back.

We know children thrive when stable, consistent, and meaningful relationships with caring adults surround them, with benefits that include increased high school graduation rate, healthier relationships and lifestyle choices, better attitude about school, enhanced self-esteem and self-confidence, improved behavior, both at home and at school and stronger relationships with parents, teachers, and peers. Ensuring as many as our young people as possible are matched with a mentor will be an investment in both our youth and our community as we continue to build for the future.



### **Expanding Restorative Justice**

Exclusionary disciplinary practices deprive our students of quality instruction, but our schools must implement the tactics and maintain the tools necessary for creating a healthy and safe learning environment. With the expressed intent to reduce the number of students that are suspended, expelled, and arrested for non-violent offenses by School Resource Officers, as Mayor, I will charge the Office of Education Innovation with the task of developing a restorative justice system for Gary Schools in partnership with behavioral and mental health professionals.

The goal is to create parameters so that each school can decrease disciplinary issues and increase school attendance and time-on-task while also teaching students about conflict mediation and holding them accountable for poor decisions made at school.

### **Communities in Schools**

The national model for Communities in Schools is one worth replicating here in Gary. As part of our Office of Education Innovation, we will adopt our own Communities in Schools model tailored to Gary to empower students and their families to achieve better educational success and a higher quality of life.

Communities in Schools' evidence-based model connects students to caring adults and community resources to transform how they see and experience the world around them. By surrounding students with a network of trust they can turn to no matter where they are in their journey, we can empower students to confront and overcome personal challenges and structural barriers, allowing them to take charge of the future they want for themselves, their communities and one another.



# The Gary Children's First Initiative

The Children's First initiative will focus on providing parents with the resources and support to nurture a child's healthy development between ages 0-5, including expanding access to prenatal and postnatal healthcare, launching a community-based early literacy initiative in partnership with local physicians to ensure families have monthly access to books and are reading to their children; and expanding the number and percentage of affordable, high-quality early childhood education centers by partnering with local businesses to provide child care benefits and other charitable investors to support early childhood education.

Gary parents struggle to find accessible, affordable, quality childcare. In the State of Indiana, only 32% of childcare programs are designated as "high quality," yet the parental investment for childcare averages approximately \$9,000 per year, the equivalent of paying in-state tuition at a public university. As a result, our parents in Gary face even fewer options to access life-changing early childhood education opportunities.

In Gary, there are approximately 10,000 children under 6, and an estimated 67% don't have access to a quality early childhood education center.

Providing Gary residents with increased access to high-quality education for our children before they turn five will yield significant medium- and long-term benefits for our city. According to the National Education Association (NEA), children in quality early childhood education programs are:

- Less likely to repeat a grade,
- Less likely to be identified as having special needs,
- More prepared academically for later grades,
- More likely to graduate from high school,
- Higher earners in the workforce

Building a network of affordable early childhood education centers also impacts Gary's economy. The research is clear: when our residents need access to affordable childcare, our businesses experience higher turnover and absenteeism, and lower productivity. Businesses also find it more difficult to recruit skilled talent. According to Early Learning Indiana, employees miss, on average, 13 days or more than 2.5 weeks of work due to childcare challenges.

Ensuring Gary's babies, toddlers and preschool-aged children are well taken care of offers parents the peace of mind to show up for their families and their careers. We must make an early investment in our youth to prepare them to be the leaders we desire them to be.

### **The Gary Promise Program**

Like any promise program, the Gary Promise will provide teens and young adults with additional resources to pursue opportunities in higher education, while also incentivizing Gary residency. The Gary Promise program will support the postsecondary aspirations of students who have lived in the city for at least 2 years and have graduated from one of our public schools. Additional support will be provided to those with longer residencies and performance in high school.

The Gary Promise will be a last-dollar program that will require early-enrollment, on-time completion of the FAFSA, and require students to use existing federal and state grant aid before receiving Gary Promise funds to help cover the total cost of college. My administration will work to build public-private partnerships to attract philanthropic, corporate, and other grant-funded investments to launch this early-promise program that will slow population decline, increase education attainment rates, strengthen our workforce, and boost our local economy.

Promise programs are known to contribute to revitalizing economically distressed communities, increase public school enrollment, securely attach families to our communities, and create a circle of economic improvement that attracts new residents and businesses to our city. Promise programs have been especially valuable in communities like Gary, which face significant out-migration of middle-class families and residents, industry loss, concentrated poverty, and the economic shift from high-paying occupations to low-wage service jobs.

The Gary Promise program will benefit all students and their families by intentionally deploying more messaging around college awareness, preparation, college-going, and program eligibility, including completing the FAFSA and being admitted to a public higher education institution. Studies suggest that even programs that support community college enrollment have the potential to strengthen the local workforce since students enrolling in—and graduating from—these institutions tend to remain in the region.





## **Gary Schools National Alumni Network**

Too often, our talented and successful Gary Schools alumni are faced with hurdles to give back to the schools and community that made them who they are. By creating a national alumni network, we can not only cultivate a database of former Gary students who are now professionals making an impact nationally but also create pathways for them to give back to their hometown.



### **“Working For Gary” Workforce Development Initiative**

A high-quality competency-based credential, like those earned by the construction trades industry, can give our residents a competitive edge in the labor market while providing higher than median wages. For too long, we have undervalued the benefits of work-based learning, internships, and apprenticeship programs that directly prepare our residents for the jobs of the future.

Not all students and residents will want to seek a four-year credential. Creating multiple career pathways is essential to the vitality of our region. My office will focus on aligning high-demand occupations in high-growth industries to sector-based talent development strategies that leverage work-based learning to accelerate the building of competency-based credentials in lucrative and diversified middle-skills fields.



Students in Gary demand career pathways that lead to a good job or launching a career. Therefore, my office will partner with the Gary School Corporation to expand the Gary Career Center and lead system innovation initiatives to align our student’s academic interests and workforce experiences with desired career opportunities in the region. By partnering with the Center for Workforce Innovation, we will reach the funding we need for these programs.

As Mayor, I will expand the use of work-based learning opportunities not only as a talent pipeline development strategy for employers but also as an integrated competency-based system of learning that allows Gary residents to gain valuable work experience in their desired field of interest while also earning a living wage to meet both education and living expenses.



I plan on creating a robust workforce development and career pathway system that utilizes internships and apprenticeships. What is clear in America is that we have a work-based culture, but we have yet to develop a work-based education system. Our greatest opportunity of developing an equitable work-based talent development system is

to align the competitive advantages of our community colleges and two-year degree-granting programs with demand-driven talent pipeline development strategies of local employers and work-based learning experiences.

Employers often need help finding the necessary talent to expand and grow their businesses, and they consistently report that finding trained talent with sufficient experience and soft skills is the greatest challenge to developing talent pipelines. Apprenticeships and other work-based-learning programs would allow students to gain the specific soft- and hard skills needed, combined with the work experience demanded by employers, while also achieving core academic goals related to degree completion.

Studies have found that employer-based apprenticeships are less costly than hiring a full-time, entry-level employee. However, with professional apprenticeships, employers attract job seekers that want to develop specific skills in demand by the company. More than 60% of U.S. employers reported that cost savings were a bottom-line benefit of hosting apprentices and that their value typically exceeded their cost, sometimes exceeding the production value of a full-time entry-level employee.

Additionally, education and workforce development are proven to benefit public safety in a community. Some of the most effective strategies for reducing violent crime in our U.S. cities are rooted in efforts aimed at educating and reconnecting economically disenfranchised communities, particularly male residents who experience high rates of unemployment and community disengagement.

Explicitly, focusing on increasing male education attainment rates and workforce participation in high-poverty neighborhoods will increase family engagement and yield higher returns on public investment in our community crime prevention efforts.

As Mayor, I plan on intentionally targeting education efforts in neighborhoods that have chronic unemployment, low rates of educational attainment, high rates of family disruptions, and limited access to meaningful work opportunities. It is the role of the Mayor to strategically prioritize municipal investments for both economic development and community-based crime prevention strategies.



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