

Building Jay County's Future

Enhancing Early Childhood Education

The early years of life are critical to the development of a child. In Jay County, we want to ensure that each child receives the developmental supports they need to grow into healthy adults. Access to affordable, quality Early Care and Education (ECE) also makes it possible for adult care givers to work, improve their standard of living, and fill local employers' talent needs.

We will **support children, families, child care professionals, and employers by providing high quality child care so adults can work, employers have the talent they need, and children are kindergarten ready.**

Background

Children receive a wide variety of benefits from a strong system of early education. These benefits include:

- ***Expanding Brain Capacity*** - From birth to age 5, a child's brain develops more than at any other time in life, and early brain development has a lasting impact on a child's ability to learn and succeed in school and life. Early experiences affect the development of brain architecture, which provides the foundation for all future learning, behavior, and health.
- ***Developing Social and Emotional Skills*** - Socializing with people other than family is an important part of childhood education. Learning how to regulate ones emotions and behavior and how to interact with others, be it peers or teachers, can enhance the education process in the future and lead to better outcomes as an adult.

- ***Understanding the Process of Learning*** - If children aren't exposed to a positive learning experience, they can lose their natural enthusiasm. As a result, these children could have a tough time in elementary school and beyond. Early childhood education professionals know how foster learning through play in a fun and exciting way. Once children figure out that learning can be exciting and rewarding, they can accept the challenges that the process brings and enjoy being active learners.
- ***Improving Concentration*** - Young children have short attention spans. Early childhood education programs give them the opportunity to discover new environments, experiences, and connections while working on their ability to focus. By the time children go to kindergarten, they know how to listen, participate in group tasks, follow directions, and concentrate on individual projects.

Communities benefit if they develop strong systems of Early Care and Education (ECE). Besides being highly beneficial for children and their parents, ECE can lead to higher incomes, higher labor rate participation, better health and a lower crime rate.

Children in Jay County

According to a 2018 report¹, there are nearly 1,900 children ages 0-5 in Jay County. Of these, 59% live in a household where all parents work and need care.

But the economics of child care present a challenge. It costs an average of nearly \$6,000 per year for high-quality early education for one child with infant and toddler care being even more expensive. This presents a budgeting challenge for most families – but the problem is particularly acute for a family in poverty and for what United Way calls ALICE families—Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed. One in four children in Jay County live in a family with income below the poverty level. Federal programs such as Head Start help offset the cost for a small number of children in poverty as do Child Care Development Fund vouchers for families up to 127% of the poverty level. Many ALICE families make a little too much household income to qualify for any subsidies. Even if they could afford care, families have a hard time finding openings in the limited number of child care facilities.

Earlier studies have found child care to be a critically important issue. A recent report for the State of Indiana² reiterated the importance of early childhood education.

¹ *Feasibility Study for an Early Childhood Education Center in Jay County*, Transform Consulting Group, June 2018

² *Closing the Gap: An Assessment of Indiana's Early Learning Opportunities* Early Learning Indiana, August 2021

Access to high-quality early learning opportunities is foundational to a child's success in kindergarten and beyond, a family's ability to achieve self-sufficiency and a community's economic resiliency.

As noted in the report, access to child care is not uniform statewide or even countywide, but varies greatly from community to community. Some communities are well sourced in terms of capacity and quality but lack affordability or choice. Other communities have greater scores for choice and affordability, yet lack sufficient capacity or quality. Overall, the report concluded that nearly every community in the state has opportunities to improve access.

As part of the Jay County Vision 2020 listening sessions³, the following themes emerged:

- Jay County has several established institutions that are committed to early childhood education. These include, but are not limited to Jay School Corporation, The Portland Foundation, Jay County Government, and Head Start. These and other organizations have made significant investments and impacts and are driving forward to increase the number and quality of educational opportunities.
- There is a need to communicate with families and caregivers about the importance of early childhood education and the resources available to them.
- There are a few programs operating in Jay County that are providing care and services to children aged zero to five. There are also some operating out of Kokomo, Muncie, and Indianapolis that serve Jay but are needed closer to home.
- If a large enough facility were available, it might be shared by multiple organizations building cost savings and convenience for beneficiaries.
- There is some desire for a forum where local, county, regional, state, and federal resources for Jay County early childhood education can come together to share information and create strategies to achieve common goals.
- A dedicated and coordinated effort is needed to maximize the potential for early childhood education in Jay County. Regular and ongoing meeting forums, combined information resources, a one-stop-shop location, and updated resource pamphlets for families all require project and organization management. Creating a full-time early childhood education coordinator position could take on these responsibilities.

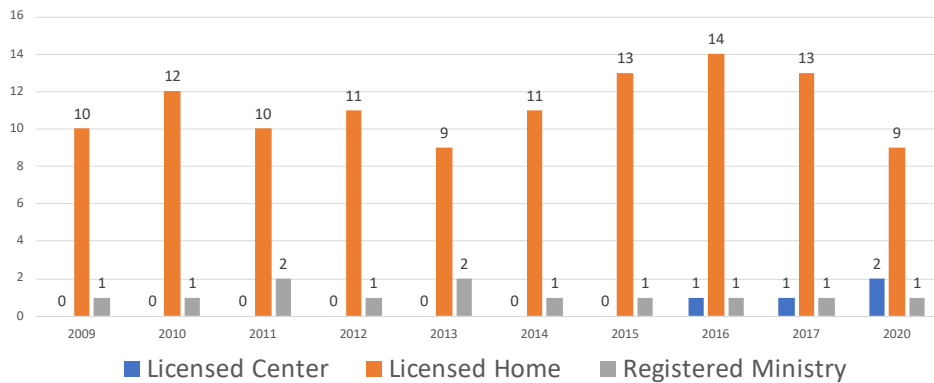
³ *Jay County Vision 20/20 Early Childhood Education Community Listening Sessions*, Indiana Communities Institute, Ball State University and Indiana Youth Institute, May 2017.

Early Childhood Education In Jay County

According to the Kids County Data Book (Published through the Indiana Youth Institute), in 2020 there were 12 child care facilities in Jay County – 2 licensed centers, 9 licensed homes and one registered ministry. The number of known facilities had declined to 8 by June 2022. Data for these facilities over time is shown below:

Child Care Facilities in Jay County

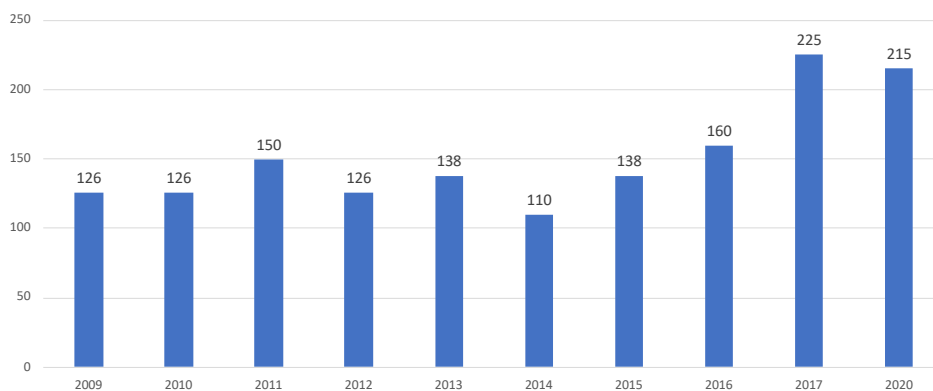
Source: Kids County Data Book



Note: Data unavailable for 2018 and 2019

Capacity of Child Care Facilities – Jay County

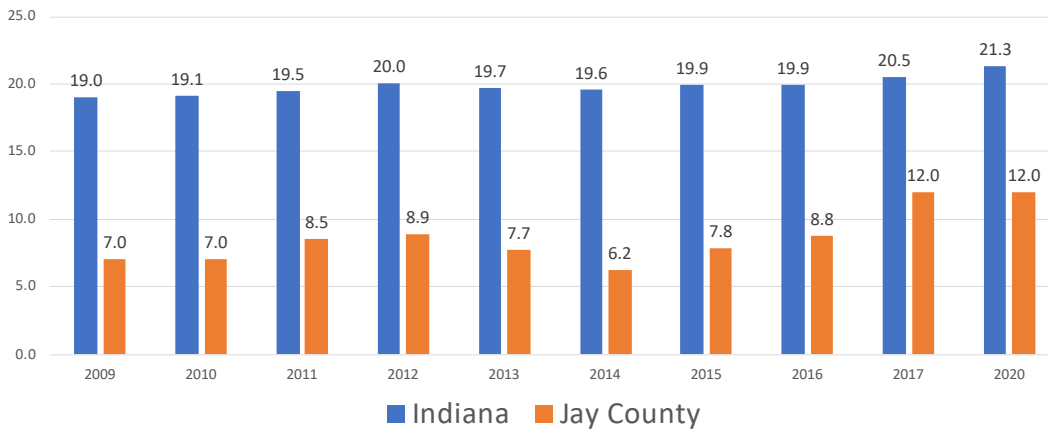
Source: Kids County Data Book



Note: Data unavailable for 2018 and 2019

Licensed Child Care Slots per 100 Children

Source: Kids County Data Book



Note: Data unavailable for 2018 and 2019

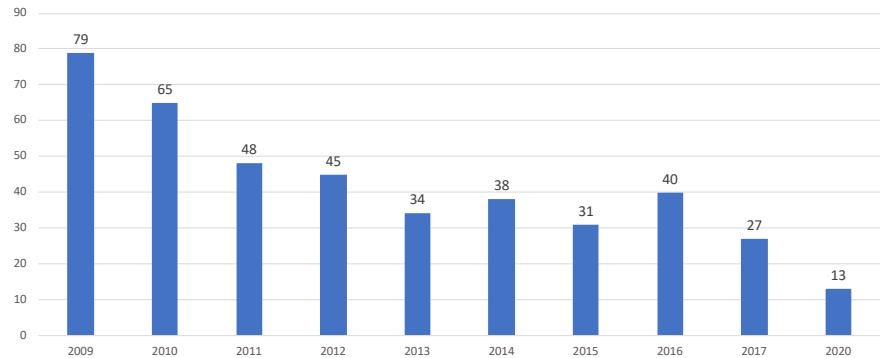
Despite the improvements in capacity noted above, the number of child care slots per 100 children in Jay County lags behind the rest of the State of Indiana. While there were 21.3 child care slots per 100 children in the State of Indiana, in Jay County the rate was only 12.0.

Financial assistance is available for certain families who wish to enroll their child in a preschool program. The Child Care and Development Fund is a federal program that helps low-income families obtain child care so that they may work, attend training, or continue their education. The purpose of CCDF is to increase the availability, affordability, and quality of child care.

It appears, however, that the use of this financial assistance is declining in Jay County. As the adjacent graph shows, the number of children who receive child care vouchers has steadily declined in the last ten years. While the most recent decline may be attributed to the pandemic, the trend was downward before that time.

Children Receiving Child Care Vouchers– Jay County

Source: Kids County Data Book



Note: Data unavailable for 2018 and 2019

The Goals for Jay County

In Jay County, we want to create a strong system in which **families have access to child care so adults can work and so children can learn.**

To do this, we will:

- Create a child-care-for-all center and consider co-locating family services in or near the facility.
- Address the needs of child care providers expressed in the Fall 2021 survey⁴ and their future needs.

THE METRICS: What are the shared metrics we want to improve?

- Number of children enrolled at the center
- Paths to Quality (PTQ) Level
- Number of thriving child care providers.
- Number of child care seats available.
- ECE staff retention.

In addition, Jay County ECE wants to help programs **continuously improve their operating costs/effectiveness and level of quality they provide.**

⁴ See *Jay County Employee Child Care Survey Results* and *Jay County Employer Child Care Survey Results*, both October 4, 2021 by the Jay County Development Corporation

To do this and to foster further development of the ECE system, we will:

- Form a cross-sector Early Childhood Coalition to sustain and improve access, affordability, and quality of ECE.
- Explore ways to engage employers in investing time, talent, and treasure in the ECE ecosystem.
- John Jay Center for Learning (JJCL) will create a pipeline of ECE talent by offering programs to achieve the Child Development Associate (CDA) certification. JJCL is exploring ways to offer courses to high school students and adults.

Measures of Success:

- Increase in funding from all sources to support child care.
- Increase number/level of programs on PTQ.
- Number of employers supporting the ECE eco system
- Amount of dollars, volunteer hours.
- Number of CDA grads.

How will this improve the quality of life in Jay County?

- More adults are enabled to work or pursue educational goals because of having child care.
- Wages, benefits, and working conditions for child care professionals improve to attract and retain talent needed.
- Jay County children have the support and opportunities they need to thrive and achieve success in school and life.
- The stories residents and others tell to describe Jay County are positive.

A Note of Appreciation

We wish to thank the following community leaders who served as members of our Steering Committee or on one of our task forces. Your contributions were greatly appreciated, and will help us to improve the quality of life for everyone in Jay County

- Chad Aker – President, Jay County Commissioners
- John Boggs – Mayor, City of Portland
- Carol Bradshaw - Forward STEPS Manager, Second Harvest Food Bank of East Central Indiana
- Michael Brewster – Jay County Coroner, Portland Police Department
- Amanda Bullion – Purdue Extension
- Ray Cooney – Editor, The Commercial Review
- PJ Corwin – Executive Director, Youth Service Bureau
- Jason Craig - Substance Misuse Prevention and Mental Health Promotion, Region 5 Regional Prevention Coordinator
- Gerry Cyranowski – Regional VP of Clinical Services, Meridian Health Services
- Randy Davis - Founder, A Better Life-Brianna’s Hope
- Chad Dodd - Principal, Jay County High School
- Dwane Ford – Sheriff, Jay County
- Julie Gregg – Principal, East Elementary School
- Jeremy Gulley – Superintendent, Jay County School Corporation
- Tammy Hanlin – Chair, The Portland Foundation
- Rusty Inman – Executive Director, John Jay Center for Learning
- Virgil Jones - Jay County Drug Prevention Coalition
- Rex Journey – Jay County Commissioner
- Allison Keen – Youth Educator, Purdue Extension
- Justin Littman – Family Case Manager Supervisor, Department of Child Services
- John Moore – Board Member, The Portland Foundation
- Krista Muhlenkamp – Board Member, The Portland Foundation
- Michele Owen – Executive Director, Family Alliance
- Chynna Ratliffe - Jay County Drug Prevention Coalition
- Kimbra Reynolds - Executive Director, Jay County Drug Prevention Coalition
- Travis Richards - Executive Director, Jay County Development Corporation
- Jane Ann Runyon – Executive Director, United Way of Jay County
- Christy Shauver – Director of Community Development, Jay County Development Corporation
- Mitch Sutton – Police Chief, City of Portland
- Annie Van Horn – Director of Special Education, Jay School Corporation
- Jenni VanSkyock – Program Manager, IU Health Jay Hospital Outpatient Behavioral Health
- Jon Vanator - President, IU Health Jay Hospital
- Tashia Weaver – Family Resource Center Coordinator, Strengthening Indiana Families

