



VOLUME 3: PEOPLE

Technical Analysis Memo | Wabash County Comprehensive Plan

March 2021
IMAGINEONE85.ORG

Volume 3:
PEOPLE

Technical Analysis Memo | Wabash County Comprehensive Plan

MARCH 2021

The following report provides an analysis across three topics. People includes public health, placemaking, and education. This report and its accompanying presentations are a summary of the baseline conditions and trends in support of the Wabash County Comprehensive Plan. For questions on this report please contact the project manager for Imagine One 85, Kyle May, senior planner with planning NEXT, at kyle@planning-next.com.

CONTENTS

- 1. Public Health**
 - 1.1. [Public Health](#)
 - 1.2. [Health Factors and Outcomes](#)
 - 1.3. [Healthcare System](#)
 - 1.4. [Environmental Impacts to Public Health](#)
 - 1.5. [Existing and Model Public Health Programs](#)
 - 2. Placemaking**
 - 2.1. [Definition](#)
 - 2.2. [Projects and Programs](#)
 - 2.3. [Opportunity Areas](#)
 - 3. Education**
 - 3.1. [Education System](#)
 - 3.2. [Trends and Benchmarks](#)
 - 3.3. [Studies for Advancement](#)
-

1. PUBLIC HEALTH

The Public Health chapter reviews the state of public health in Wabash County and its connection to economic resiliency. First, health factors and outcomes are measured against the state and comparable counties. Then, an inventory and map of the health care facilities across the County are presented to understand their distribution and to identify potential for growth. This section also details environmental impacts on public health, recognizing several key components particularly relevant to Wabash. The final section presents existing public health programs in the County alongside model programs as examples for further exploration.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Health Factors in Wabash are better than nearly two-thirds of other counties in Indiana.** Areas of strength include Income Equality, Social Associations, Insurance Coverage, Mental Health Providers, and Vaccinations. Opportunity areas include Adult Smoking and Obesity, Post-Secondary Education, and Air Pollution.
- **County Health Outcomes are relatively low with respect to the state and comparable counties.** Premature death rates are increasing. Cancer, heart disease, accidents, chronic lower respiratory diseases, and diabetes mellitus contribute to this finding.
- **Residents have access to opportunities for active and healthy lifestyles.** Investments made in trails and blueways, particularly on the Wabash River Trail, promote an active lifestyle and provide recreation opportunities for residents. Healthy food access is provided through several Farmer's Markets and a variety of grocery stores that offer fresh produce.
- **6.7% of County residents do not have health insurance, and 20% of residents are age 65 and older.** By these measures, more than 25% of residents are especially vulnerable to significant health issues.
- **Health care facilities are clustered in the cities of Wabash and North Manchester, and they offer most services.** The county is home to a Critical Access Hospital, Primary Care Physicians, a mental health clinic, and a variety of specialists. The nearest Level II Trauma Center is located in Fort Wayne.

1.1 Public Health

An important but easy to overlook connection exists between many aspects of place and the health of community members. Factors ranging from natural resources to the built environment each contribute to individual and community health. Land use decisions, such as if and where to provide recreational amenities, or zoning regulations pertaining to pollution standards, establish key policies and programs that either enhance or inhibit residents' potential for healthy lifestyle choices. In turn, the health of the residents influences factors like employment and productivity within a community. Therefore, creating communities where people are more likely to be healthy also promotes communities that are more likely to be productive and resilient.

The relationship between health and place has become increasingly critical in light of the COVID-19 global pandemic. This plan is being constructed amid the most significant health crisis of the century, the full effects of which are yet to be realized. Early in the pandemic, Wabash County saw very few COVID-19 cases, reporting 0-3 new cases most days from March through September. A steep increase began in October, peaking on November 22, 2020 with 67 new cases, and generally declining since.¹ As of February 1, 2021, Wabash County reported 3,126 confirmed cases of COVID-19 (10% of the population) and 51 deaths.² The county fatality rate is 1.63%, just slightly higher than the state rate of 1.59%.³ More than 2,100 of Wabash residents between the ages of 19 and 64 have no health insurance, and nearly 20% of Wabash residents are age 65 and older⁴, suggesting that a

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/covid-cases-deaths-tracker.html>

² <https://bao.arcgis.com/covid-19/jhu/county/18169.html>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

significant portion of the population is considered high-risk for the virus. The county has 18 staffed and licensed hospital beds, with three ICU beds.⁵

Beyond the health effects, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought significant challenges to the economy and other systems in the county. In late March 2020, Wabash was included in a statewide “Stay at Home” order in which residents were asked to leave home only for “essential activities” and restaurants and bars were subjected to a carry-out only policy. Many small businesses were effectively forced to close during this time. In early April, school buildings were closed, and students transitioned to online learning. As the Stay-at-Home order was extended, the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs awarded the City of Wabash and the Town of North Manchester \$250,000 each in grant funds for local business that support a majority of low to middle income (LMI) jobs.⁶ With warmer weather, the state’s five-stage “Back on Track” Indiana plan began to allow for reopening of businesses, increased public gatherings, and loosening of restrictions. Additional grant funding continued to become available, but as the year went on and positivity rates began to rise again, restrictions – including a mask mandate – were added or reinstated.

While the COVID-19 pandemic posed new challenges in many areas, it also brought to light a variety of issues that already existed. National conversations about racial equity, gender disparities, education and broadband internet access are all relevant to Wabash County as well. The overall disruption caused by the pandemic has brought with it an opportunity to take stock and reevaluate some of the key systems and attitudes that underly these challenges.

DEFINITION

The CDC defines public health as “the science of protecting and improving the health of people and their communities” and “is achieved by promoting healthy lifestyles, researching disease and injury prevention, and detecting, preventing and responding to infectious diseases.”⁷

RELEVANCE TO A COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s (RWJF) County Health Rankings Model, Social and Economic Factors and the Physical Environment account for 50% of the total health factors that contribute to community health outcomes. While individuals bear significant personal responsibility, a variety of community aspects are also considered significant contributors to public health, such as

- **Housing** – Micro-environmental impacts to human health and development such as mold, lead, asbestos, and so on.
- **Land use** – Macro-environmental impacts like community walkability, separation of noxious / non-complementary uses, etc.
- **Transit** – Access to healthy lifestyles, food, health facilities, etc.
- **Active transportation** – Access to opportunities for walking, biking, etc.
- **Air & water quality** – Harmful pollutants in the air and drinking water.
- **Education** – Awareness of best health practices, opportunities, etc.
- **Employment** – Variety of health and safety risks associated with different jobs, including physical injury, mental health, etc.
- **Community safety** – The ability of children and other individuals to safely play, travel, gather, exercise, etc., in a community.

Each of these factors is influenced by policies and programs of the community, so as the County addresses each of these components in its plan, it will be imperative to consider their connection to overall public

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ <https://www.growwabashcounty.com/contact-us/covid-19-resources/>

⁷ <https://www.cdcfoundation.org/what-public-health>

health. Furthermore, the health of individuals corresponds to factors such as employment and productivity in the community; ensuring healthy citizens thereby enhances a myriad of other goals.

CONNECTION TO RESILIENCY

The COVID-19 pandemic and the associated economic disruption have underscored the connection between community health and many other aspects of a functioning society. Although resiliency is a subject in its own right, the live experiment of 2020 places the spotlight on resiliency in the context of public health. The threat of the coronavirus has had major impacts on the economy, education, healthcare, transportation, land use, housing, and a multitude of other topics, each of which is interconnected with the others.

First, the coronavirus pandemic has affected public health. With thousands of Wabash residents having been infected with the coronavirus and dozens having died from it, the effects of the coronavirus on the health of the community are evident.

The presence of the virus significantly affected businesses, the economy, and the education system. Stay-at-home orders shuttered some businesses and forced others to operate in unconventional ways, like restaurants that transitioned to take-out and delivery only. Capacity and social-distancing requirements limit the number of patrons in a business at a given time, reducing the sales potential. Teachers and students began a process of online teaching and learning that has been anecdotally difficult for all parties involved.

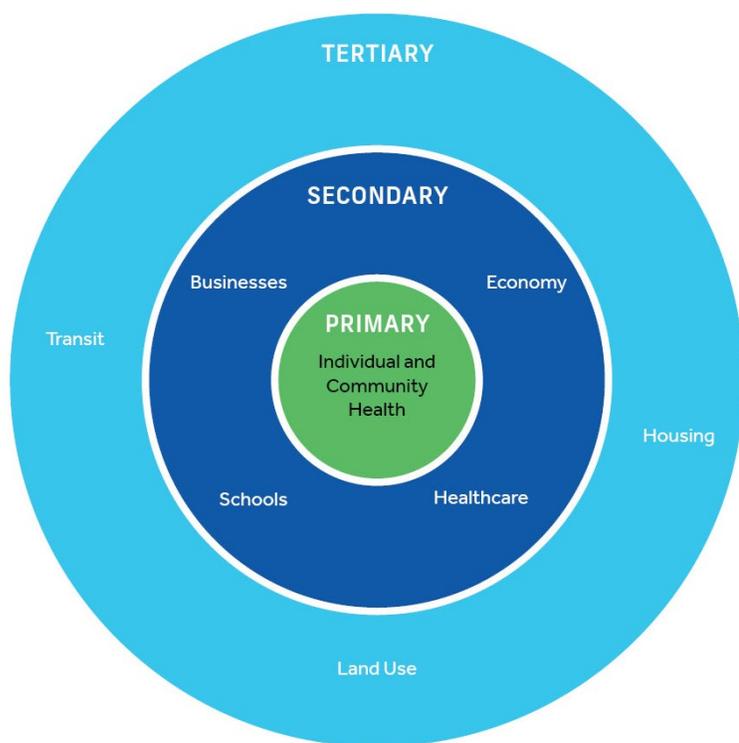
Furthermore, studies show that public transit demand decreased in many places across the United States as a result of the coronavirus and associated restrictions.⁸ The pandemic has also exposed the need for more areas and opportunities for people to congregate, recreate, and dine in outdoor spaces, thereby affecting established land use patterns.

A separate chapter will explore fiscal implications in greater depth.

1.2 Health Factors and Outcomes

Public health is an aggregate measure of individual health. To understand health at a community-wide level, both the factors that contribute to health and individual health outcomes are measured. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) provides a helpful model and nationwide data to understand these components of

Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic



⁸ <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0242476>

public health and to compare those in Wabash County to the State of Indiana and comparison counties. This section explores both the strong points and the opportunities areas for public health in the County.

COUNTY HEALTH RANKINGS MODEL

The RWJF County Health Rankings Model provides a framework for measuring the health of a county and comparing that against other counties across the country. The model assumes that individual health outcomes are the result of individual and community health factors that are influenced in part by government programs and policies. Overall public health is an average measure of individual health. See Figure 1 below.

POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

The policies and programs of local government influence factors that contribute to the health of a community. If these policies and programs are targeted to improve the specific needs of a population, they can help make their communities healthier and better places to live.

HEALTH FACTORS

Health factors influence how well and how long people live. They can be modified at an individual and/or community level, and they serve as predictors of health.

HEALTH OUTCOMES

The outcomes measured represent the current health of a county. These outcomes include both physical and mental well-being, and they contain both objective measurements as well as self-reported subjective elements.

County Health Rankings Model

Adapted from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's County Health Rankings & Roadmaps program

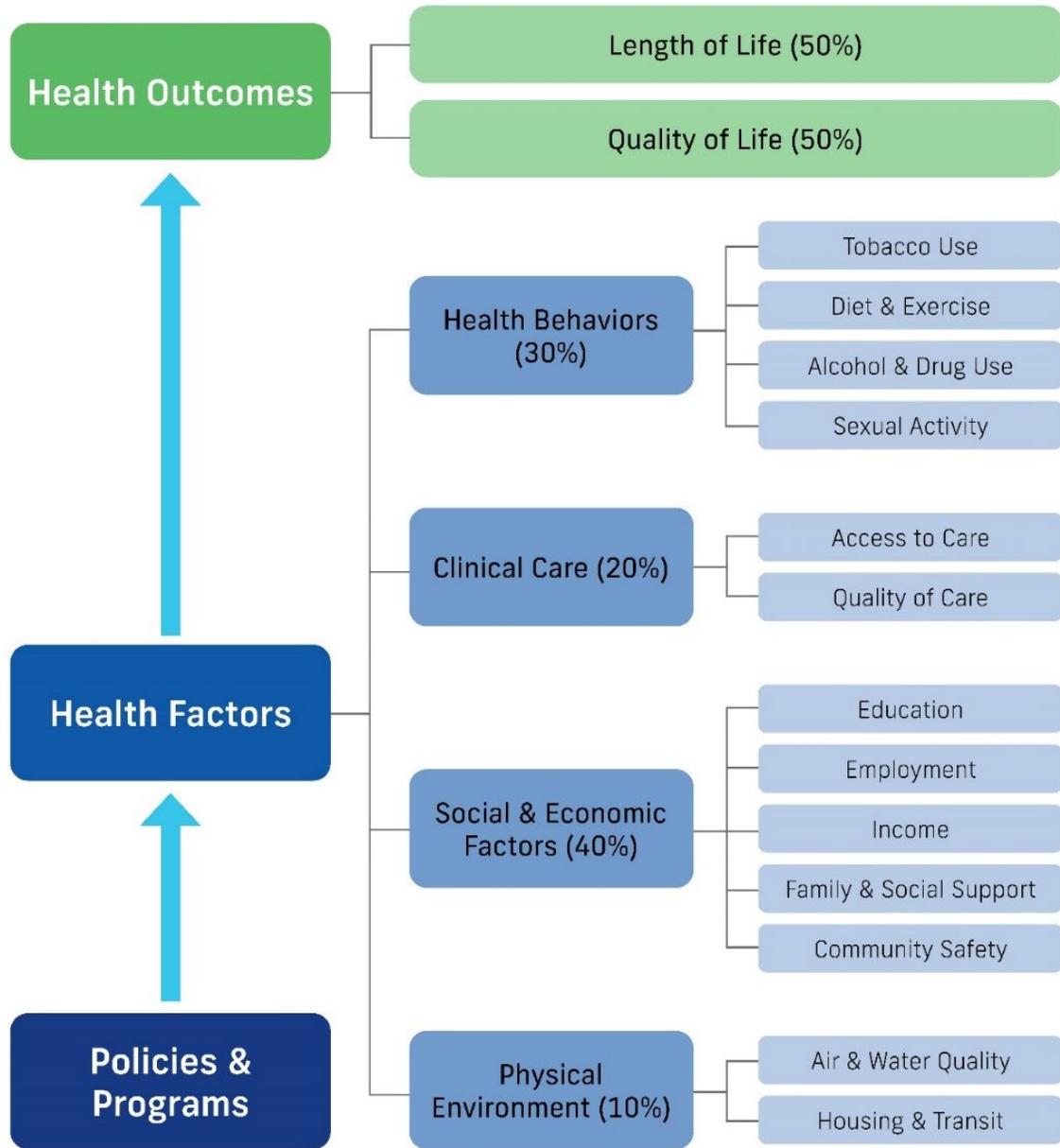


Figure 1: County Health Rankings Model

WABASH COUNTY HEALTH RANKINGS (2020)

Wabash is ranked 63 for Health Outcomes and 34 for Health Factors out of the 92 counties in Indiana.

The following summaries describe the key findings of the rankings report.

KEY FINDINGS

1. **Premature death rates are increasing and contribute significantly to the low rank in Health Outcomes.** Wabash reported 9,700 years of potential life lost before age 75 (per 100,000 population, age-adjusted). This figure is 16% greater than the state average and 76% greater than the top US performers. Leading causes of death under age 75 in Wabash include:

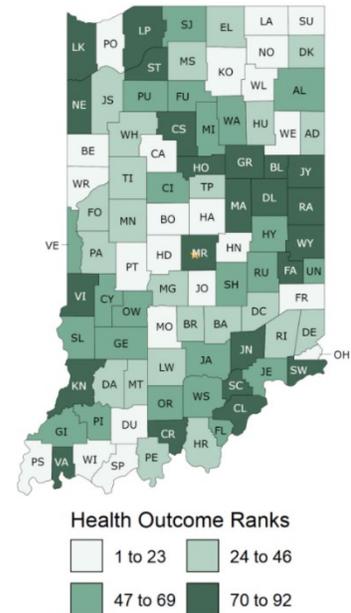
- malignant neoplasms (cancer),
- heart disease,
- accidents,
- chronic lower respiratory diseases, and
- diabetes mellitus.

Premature deaths not only reflect unfortunate health outcomes, but also correlate with losses in potential earnings.

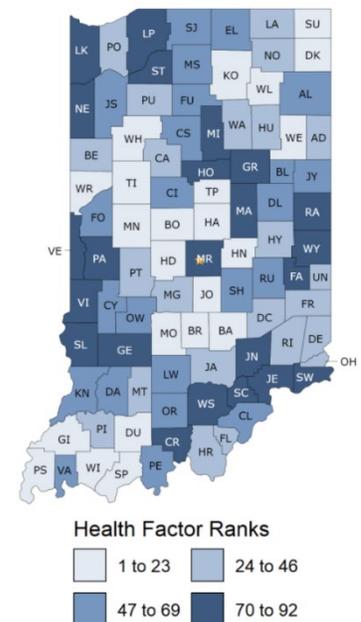
2. **Areas of strength in Health Factors include Income Equality, Social Associations, Insurance Coverage, Mental Health Providers, and Vaccinations.** Wabash County is in the top ten percent of US counties with respect to Income Inequality and Social Association measures (3.7 and 18.4 respectively). These numbers suggest that there is relative economic equality across households, and that people are socially well-connected. Furthermore, the percentage of uninsured residents in Wabash has declined over the last ten years and is considered an area of strength. The county also offers a high ratio of mental health providers to residents (1:420), and half of residents receive the flu vaccination.

3. **Areas of opportunity in Health Factors include Adult Smoking and Obesity, Post-Secondary Education, and Air Pollution.** One in five adult residents of Wabash smokes cigarettes, and more than one in three is obese. Adult obesity has also been increasing in the county over the last decade. These two health behaviors present opportunities for attention and improvement at a countywide level. Additionally, 53% of residents have attended some college, whereas 63% in Indiana and 73% in top performing counties have some post-secondary education. Finally, air pollution as measured by the average daily density of fine particulate matter is 12.5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$, more than twice that of top performing counties.

2020 Health Outcomes - Indiana



2020 Health Factors - Indiana



COMPARISON TO INDIANA AND THE US

Of the 30 measurements provided by the RWJF, Wabash County outperformed the state of Indiana in 19, trailed them in nine, and was equal in two. These comparisons suggests that residents of Wabash County are collectively healthier than Hoosiers overall. However, in a 2019 report by the United Health Foundation, Indiana ranks 40 out of 50 states for Health Outcomes. In two categories – Income Inequality and Social Associations – Wabash county performed within the top 10% of counties across the US.

COMPARISON TO SIMILAR COUNTIES

With respect to the comparison counties of Kosciusko, Allen, and Whitley, Wabash ranks lowest in Health Outcomes and third in Health Factors. Clinical Care is the county’s greatest comparative asset, and Length of Life is its most significant comparative challenge.

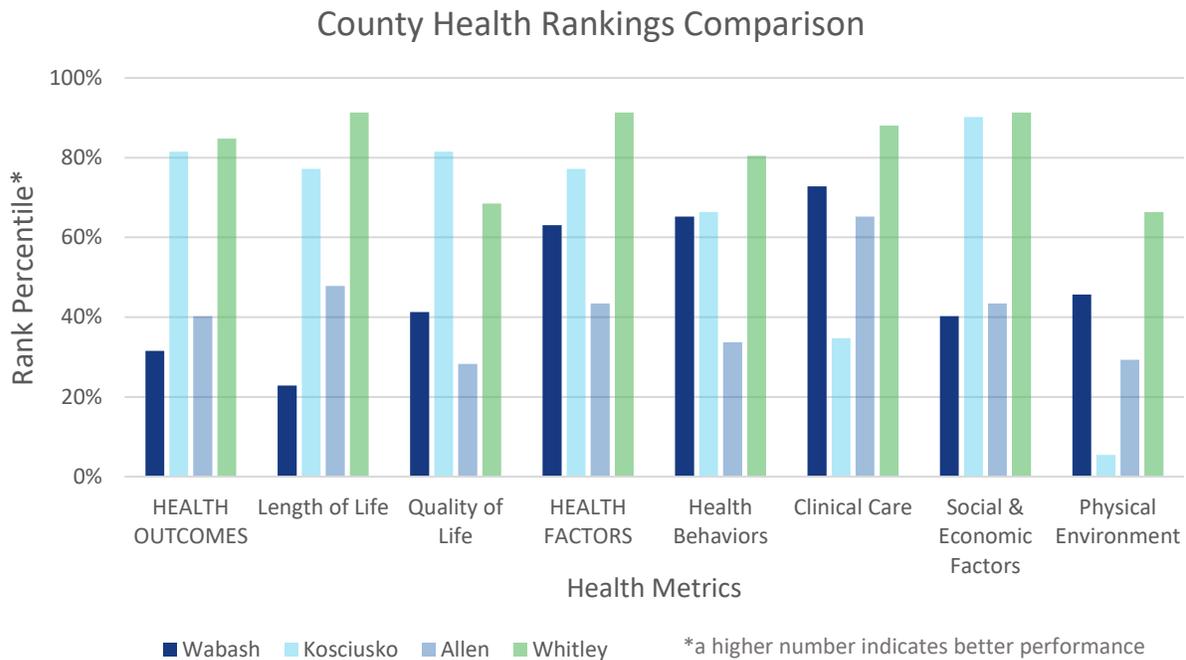


Figure 2: County Health Rankings

*Rank Percentile is a comparative measure against all counties in Indiana; **a higher number indicates better performance**. For example, Wabash is rated at 63% for Health Factors, meaning that it outperforms 63% of counties in the state for this metric.

HEALTH METRICS

The following table presents the measurements of Health Outcomes and Health Factors for Wabash County and the State of Indiana for 2020, adapted from the RWJF County Health Rankings.

Note: some measures are stated positively while others are stated negatively. Thus, a downward-pointing red arrow (↓) indicates a measure for which Wabash performed worse than Indiana, and an upward-pointing green arrow (↑) represents an indicator for which Wabash performed better than Indiana.

		Health Metrics			
		Wabash		Indiana	
Health Outcomes	Length of Life	Years of Potential Life Lost Rate	9,727	↓	8,306
	Quality of Life	% Fair or Poor Health	19	↑	20
		Average Number of Physically Unhealthy Days	4.2	=	4.2
		Average Number of Mentally Unhealthy Days	4.5	↑	4.7
		% Low Birthweight	8	=	8
Health Factors	Health Behaviors	% Smokers	20	↑	22
		% Adults with Obesity	35	↓	33
		Food Environment Index	8.1	↑	7.1
		% Physically Inactive	26	↑	27
		% With Access to Exercise Opportunities	69	↓	75
		% Excessive Drinking	16	↑	18
		% Driving Deaths with Alcohol Involvement	25	↓	20
		Chlamydia Rate	235.3	↑	514.2
		Teen Birth Rate	24	↑	27
	Clinical Care	% Uninsured	9	↑	10
		Primary Care Physicians Ratio	2,246:1	↓	1,511:1
		Dentist Ratio	2,406:1	↓	1,777:1
		Mental Health Provider Ratio	417:1	↑	623:1
		Preventable Hospitalization Rate	4,504	↑	5,006
		% With Annual Mammogram	44	↑	42
		% Vaccinated	50	↑	49
	Social & Economic Factors	High School Graduation Rate	87	↑	84
		% Some College	53	↓	63
		% Unemployed	3.5	↓	3.4
		% Children in Poverty	17	↑	18
		Income Ratio	3.7	↑	4.4
		% Single-Parent Households	31	↑	34
		Social Association Rate	18.4	↑	12.3
		Violent Crime Rate	51	↑	385
		Injury Death Rate	84	↓	77
	Physical Environment	Average Daily Air Pollution (in PM _{2.5})	12.3	↓	11.8
		Presence of Water Violation	No		
		% Severe Housing Problems	10	↑	13
		% Drive Alone to Work	86	↓	83
		% Long Commute - Drives Alone	23	↑	31

↑ represents a better measure than Indiana average

↓ represents a worse measure than Indiana average

1.3 Healthcare System

This section describes and maps the various types of healthcare facilities within the County.

HEALTHCARE FACILITIES

CRITICAL ACCESS HOSPITAL

Parkview Wabash Hospital is part of the regional Parkview Health Network that serves Northern Indiana and Northwestern Ohio, based out of Fort Wayne, IN. The system at large has over 300 locations with a comprehensive range of services. Parkview also operates two Samaritan helicopters, both of which provide trauma technology and crews trained in Advanced Life Support (ALS). All of Wabash county falls within the 100-mile service radius of these helicopters. Parkview Wabash offers the following amenities and services:

- 24-hr Emergency Services
- 18 Staffed Beds
- Cancer Care
- Heart Health
- Orthopedics
- Neurosciences
- Women’s Health
- HeartSmart CT Scan
- Outpatient Medication Infusion Services
- LifeBridge Senior Program

The Parkview Regional Medical Center in Fort Wayne is the only verified Level II Adult and Pediatric Trauma Center in its system, and it is the nearest verified trauma center to Wabash County. Furthermore, Parkview Wabash is part of Parkview’s Community Hospital Trauma Program. The hospital and staff are equipped to provide quick diagnosis of trauma and transfer when needed. The hospitals are approximately 50 miles apart, or one hour by car.

PRIMARY CARE

A variety of primary care providers operate in the City of Wabash and the Town of North Manchester.

- **Parkview Wabash Health Clinic – Family Medicine** provides general primary care and offers walk-in or urgent care services. Offices are located in both Wabash and North Manchester.
- **Lutheran Health Network – Wabash Clinic** offers family medicine, OBGYN, Cardiology, Pulmonology, and Optimum Performance Therapy.
- **American Health Network** is a family medicine practice in Wabash.
- **Indiana Pediatric Associates LLC** provides general pediatric care in Wabash.
- **Walnut Street Family Healthcare** is a general family practice office in North Manchester.
- **85 Hope Free Medical Clinic** offers free primary care to qualifying residents in Wabash and North Manchester.

MENTAL HEALTH AND DISABILITY SERVICES

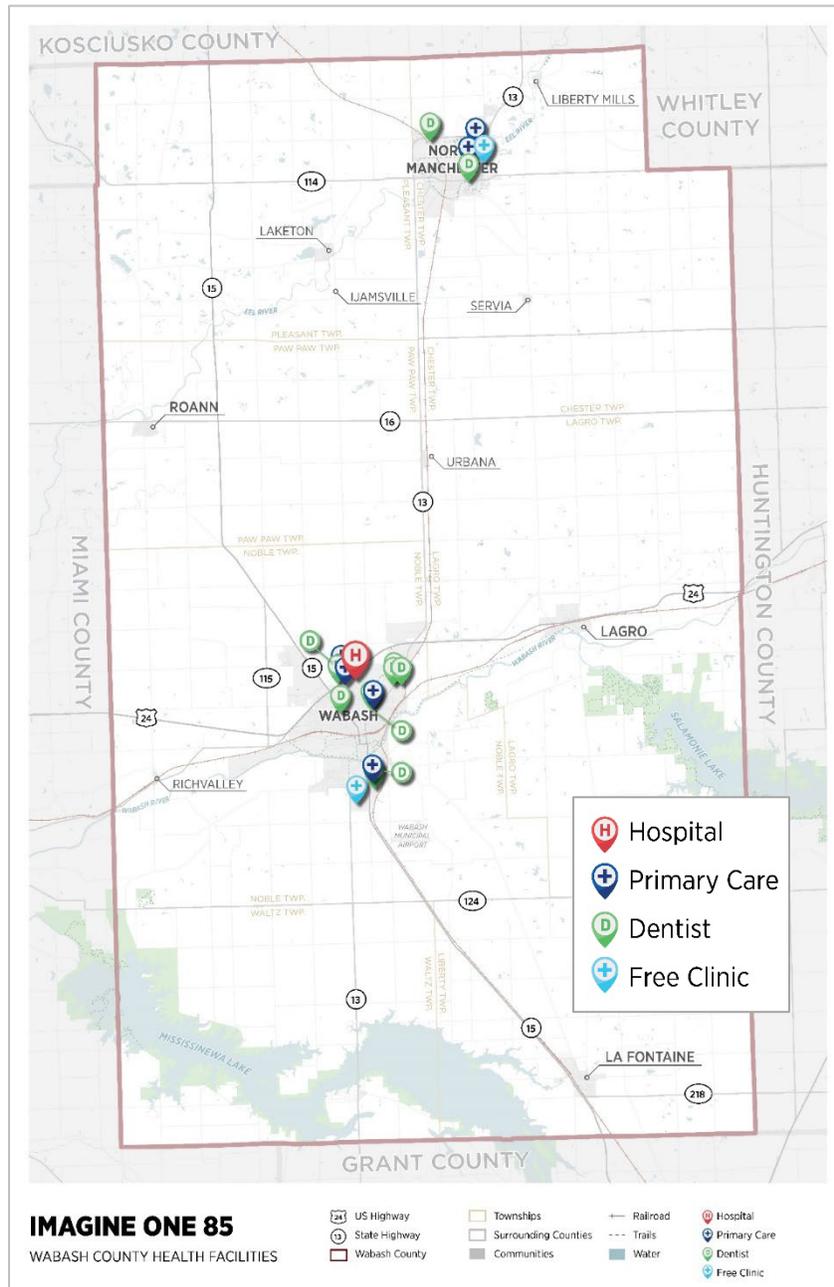
Mental health is a vital component of individual and community health. In Wabash County, the **Bowen Center** is the primary location for clinical mental health services and resources, including addiction recovery. The **Friends Counseling Center** also offers a variety of group and individual therapy and counseling services. In North Manchester, **Daniel’s Place** provides respite care and support services for individuals with physical and intellectual disabilities.

WALK-IN CLINICS

For patients with non-emergency but relatively urgent health issues, walk-in clinics provide quick access to medical care without requiring an appointment. **Parkview First Care** operates as a walk-in clinic in Wabash. The **85 HOPE Free Medical Clinic** serves Wabash County residents between the ages of 18 and 64 who are low-income and either uninsured or under-insured. They operate one location in Wabash and another in North Manchester and offer a variety of free services, including physical therapy, vaccines, mammograms, and lab testing.

SPECIALISTS

A variety of specialists operate within Wabash and North Manchester, including a variety of dentists and optometrists.



Map 1: Healthcare Facilities

1.4 Environmental Impacts to Public Health

This section aims to describe how a variety of environmental factors affect public health. These factors range from the micro – or household – level, to the macro – or natural environment – level. This section also identifies which environmental factors are most relevant in Wabash County.

ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

The World Health Organization (WHO) identifies a range of environmental factors that impact health:

- Air pollution, including indoors and outdoors
- Inadequate water, sanitation and hygiene
- Chemicals and biological agents
- Radiation, ultraviolet and ionizing
- Community noise
- Occupational risks
- Agricultural practices, including pesticide use, waste-water reuse
- Built environments, including housing and roads
- Climate change⁹

Among these factors, some are targeted at a macro-level, while others are more relevant on a micro-level.

In order to mitigate environmental risks, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Indiana Department of Environmental Management have established laws and regulations concerning hazardous substances. The City of Wabash has incorporated federal and state regulations into its Code of Ordinances to establish a minimum standard for environmental safety.¹⁰

MACRO-LEVEL CONSIDERATIONS – COMMUNITY AND MUNICIPALITY CONCERNS

The following considerations reflect the aspects of the natural environment or the community at large that influence public health. These factors need to be addressed at a municipal and collective level, not on an individual or household scale.

- **Water** – The Clean Water Act (CWA) regulates the discharge of pollutants into US waters and implements pollution control programs for industry. These efforts are meant to protect the health of individuals as well the environment.
- **Air** – The Clean Air Act (CAA) restricts the amount of certain air pollutants allowed in the air anywhere in the US and limits the amount of pollutants that chemical plants, utilities, and steel mills can emit. Localities may enact stronger laws, but they may not be weaker than federal guidelines.
- **Chemicals and Pesticides** – Although the EPA regulates the use of chemicals and pesticides, large scale farming operations that use synthetic fertilizers made from nitrogen and phosphorous contribute to air, soil, and water pollution. The high levels of these nutrients can damage ecosystems, and chemical runoff can cause toxic algae blooms in bodies of water, creating “dead zones” where nothing can live.¹¹ Wabash County may be particularly vulnerable to the dangers of chemical runoff due to the breadth of agriculture in the county and the vast water resources found in several stream corridors and two reservoirs.
- **Septic** – Septic systems are common in the county and require ongoing and proactive maintenance to uphold environmental and soil safety standards. Continued upkeep is and may become a greater challenge throughout Wabash.

⁹ <https://www.who.int/phe/infographics/environmental-impacts-on-health/en/>

¹⁰ https://library.municode.com/in/wabash/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=CICO_CH11ENPR_S11-12VAINPR

¹¹ <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/article/environmental-impacts-agricultural-modifications/>

MICRO-LEVEL CONSIDERATIONS – HOUSEHOLD CONCERNS

A wide range of harmful substances may be present in homes and buildings, and particularly among those built in or before the 1970s. A variety of programs exist to mitigate or remove the risks associated with these substances.

- **Radon** – Radon is a noxious gas that is harmless in low levels outdoors but is dangerous when concentrated indoors. Wabash County is identified by the EPA as a Radon Zone 1, meaning that the predicted average indoor radon screening level will be greater than 4 and will likely require mitigation.¹² The Lead and Healthy Homes Division (LHDD) of the Indiana Department of Health offers licensing for radon testers and mitigators across the state.¹³
- **Lead** – Exposure to lead, mostly in the form of lead-based paint and contaminated dust in deteriorating buildings, may cause significant health problems for children. Homes built before 1978, when the federal government banned consumer uses of lead-based paint, are more likely to have lead paint. The likelihood increases with the age of the home.¹⁴ The LHDD of the Indiana Department of Health works to screen, treat, and provide case management for children, as well as to remediate the environmental causes of lead poisoning. The Lead-based Paint Program was created to provide professionals who specialize in completely removing lead paint from residences.¹⁵
- **Asbestos** – Asbestos is a naturally occurring mineral that was used regularly in fire-resistant insulation and drywall in older homes. Exposure can cause cancer and other diseases.¹⁶ Asbestos was commonly used in construction from the early 1900s through the 1970s. Consumption peaked in the United States in 1973, and numerous forms of asbestos materials were banned later that decade. The LHDD also helps to educate on issues such as asbestos, and abatement measures can be taken to eliminate the presence of asbestos from homes.
- **Mold** – Molds occur naturally when spores land and grow on wet and damp spots inside a home or building. They may produce allergens and irritants, causing reactions and negative health effects in some individuals. Those with asthma are especially recommended to avoid contact with molds.¹⁷

Approximately 73% of homes in Wabash County were built in or before 1979. This figure suggests that many homes across the county could have constructed with materials containing asbestos and with lead-based paint. These factors are important considerations for renovation and remodeling of older homes and may affect a significant number of homeowners in the county.

1.5 Existing and Model Public Health Programs

This section explores the existing programs in Wabash County that encourage public health. It also provides some examples of model public health programs that may serve as inspiration for Wabash.

HEALTHY FOOD ACCESS

Wabash County is part of the **Northeast Indiana Local Food Network** which works with all 11 counties in Northeast Indiana to promote local food culture and entrepreneurship. This network offers a Farm to School program, in which schools can receive fresh produce directly from local farms, to promote fresher and healthier eating. It does not seem that the school districts in Wabash participate in this program.

¹² <https://www.epa.gov/radon/find-information-about-local-radon-zones-and-state-contact-information>

¹³ <https://www.in.gov/isdh/24346.htm>

¹⁴ <https://www.epa.gov/lead/protect-your-family-sources-lead>

¹⁵ <https://www.in.gov/isdh/26550.htm>

¹⁶ <https://www.asbestos.com/asbestos/>

¹⁷ <https://www.epa.gov/mold/mold-and-health>

The **Downtown Wabash Farmer's Market** operates from May through September on Saturday mornings. Local growers and merchants can come and sell their produce and products, providing residents with access to fresh and local foods in a centralized and convenient location downtown. The **North Manchester Farmer's Market** offers similar opportunities to growers and residents in the area from May to October. Both Farmer's Markets accept payment from the federal government food assistance programs (SNAP, WIC, and FMNP).



Downtown Wabash Farmer's Market

The County is also home to a variety of grocery stores that provide access to fresh and healthy foods, and that accept the government food assistance programs. Walmart, Kroger, Bechtol Grocery Co, and INGUARD Foods all have significant fresh food and produce sections that allow shoppers to make healthy choices.

ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

The **Wabash River Trail** is an effort to expand the trail system in Wabash and to provide opportunities for biking, jogging, walking, and access points for boating. The trail can be used for exclusively recreational purposes, but it may also encourage active transportation by connecting various locations within the County between which residents may travel by bike.



Safe Routes to School

The **Safe Routes to School** program seeks to make it safer and easier for students to walk and bike to school. State governments receive federal funds that they pass on to local governments and schools to support initiatives that promote safe walking and biking. Wabash County and/or the school systems may wish to explore the Safe Routes to School as a program to promote health, especially for in-town schools.

RADON TESTING AND MITIGATION

In 2019, the Indiana State Department of Health (ISDH) partnered with the American Lung Association to provide county health departments with **free radon test kits** to be used by individual homeowners. Other states have access to grant funding that allows them to provide financial assistance for radon mitigation efforts. For example, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment sponsors the **Low Income Radon Mitigation (LIRMA) Program**, in which individuals who meet income requirements are eligible for up to \$1,500 in assistance for radon mitigation.¹⁸

¹⁸ <https://cdphe.colorado.gov/low-income-radon-mitigation-assistance>

HEALTH EDUCATION

The Hamilton County Public Health department in Ohio supports a Health Promotion and Education division to increase physical activity, improve opportunities for healthy eating, and address a variety of other health related issues. They offer education, assessment, policy development, and environmental action. The [WeTHRIVE! Program](#) is a collaborative and community effort to educate and improve health in the county in areas such as Chronic Disease, Environmental Health, Injury Prevention, and Substance Abuse. This program mobilizes individual community members or institutions to promote health initiatives and could serve as a model for Wabash.

2. PLACEMAKING

The Placemaking section describes the quality of place characteristics in Wabash County. Next, it explains the connections between placemaking and other topic areas. Finally, this section describes recent placemaking efforts, identifies key assets in the county that contribute to its quality of place, and explores opportunities for future placemaking.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Wabash County has taken significant steps in placemaking to accentuate its natural and manmade assets.** The Stellar Communities Grant has enabled a number of valuable projects that improve the County’s quality of place. Visit Wabash County has also promoted the various communities through improved signage.
- **Placemaking efforts support other community priorities.** The Wabash River Trail, Downtown Wabash Farmers Market, and other examples promote values such as public health and economic development.
- **The COVID-19 Pandemic has highlighted the value of existing outdoor amenities and revealed a demand for more outdoor dining and gathering spaces.**

2.1 Definition

Placemaking is “a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value.”¹⁹ Placemaking highlights existing community assets and potential, and it encourages community members and stakeholders to take ownership of their communities. Placemaking is an inclusive term that incorporates physical projects (urban design, streetscape improvements, public art, etc.), as well as programs, activation, and education initiatives. By investing in the quality of place, communities are also contributing to positive economic outcomes;²⁰ the more desirable a place is to live, work, or visit, the more economic opportunities there will be for both internal and external investment.



¹⁹ <https://www.pps.org/article/what-is-placemaking>

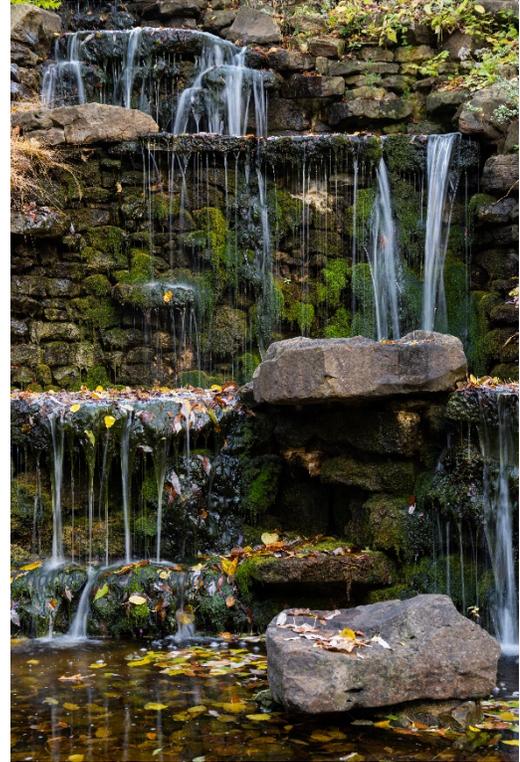
²⁰ <https://www.planning.org/knowledgebase/creativeplacemaking/>

QUALITY OF PLACE CHARACTERISTICS

Wabash County boasts a variety of characteristics that contribute to its quality of place, including both natural and manmade. To keep improving, the county has also identified characteristics to enhance and build up.

CURRENT QUALITY OF PLACE CHARACTERISTICS

- **Natural Assets and Outdoor Recreation** – Wabash County is home to two major reservoirs, rivers, waterfalls, and forests. The county is rich in natural beauty, a characteristic that makes it desirable even in the absence of improvements. By providing opportunities for outdoor recreation, such as hiking, biking, kayaking, canoeing, fishing, boating, etc., the county reveals the natural and accentuates its place characteristics.
- **Historical Assets** – Wabash County has embraced its heritage by emphasizing historical preservation. Museums, covered bridges, and other historical sites represent the historic charm for which Wabash is known.
- **Downtown / Main Street** – Both Wabash and North Manchester offer residents and visitors an engaging experience in their downtown and main street areas. Streetscaping efforts, public art, and a variety of vendors shape a lively community-oriented environment in centralized locations.



PLACEMAKING AND OTHER COMMUNITY VALUES

Efforts to improve the quality of a place and other community values are often mutually beneficial. The following examples suggest a number of areas that are impacted by placemaking, and that may influence placemaking as well.

- **Transportation** – Projects that improve transportation options may also impact the quality of place. Streetscape improvements like sidewalks, curb cuts, bike lanes, streetlights, and landscaping are not only functional improvements but also contribute to a sense of place. Amenities for pedestrians and cyclists, like bike racks, benches, and trash cans, encourage visitors to stay and enjoy public spaces and art.



Replace w /
streetscape image

- **Public Health** – Programs and activities aimed at getting people moving for the sake of their health, such as biking and running clubs, create a sense of community and place. Furthermore, projects that produce recreational amenities, like trails for walking, jogging, and biking, or other outdoor recreation facilities, create an environment in which people have more opportunities to exercise and thereby improve their health.
- **Economic Development** – Public events draw people to particular locations (such as a Downtown area) where they are introduced to local businesses and vendors. Visitors can be retained beyond the initial event that attracted them, bringing new business to the area. Amenities like trails are also meant to promote tourism. A study shared by the Wabash River Trail showed that 87% of trail vacationers have significant discretionary income and 81% stayed overnight in local accommodations.²¹ Trail visitors may boost dining and retail businesses as well, and in the long-term are considered a key catalyst in attracting new talent and businesses.



Dam to Dam Bike Ride

2.2 Projects and Programs

This section reviews the primary placemaking assets in Wabash County, including places, programs, physical elements, and organizations that contribute to the sense of place.

STELLAR COMMUNITIES GRANT 2014

In 2014, the City of Wabash was awarded a Stellar Communities Grant by a collaborative effort among the Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority (IHCDA), the Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA) and the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT). The grant supported nine initiatives that totaled approximately \$28 million. 55% of the cost was paid by the City, private investment, and other sources, and the grant award covered the rest. The following projects were undertaken to promote placemaking with the city.

- **Improvements to Eagles Theater** – The theater was originally constructed in 1906 and features a theater for live entertainment, a movie theater, recording studios, and a fully-restored grand ballroom.
- **Creation of an all-inclusive playground at John Drook Memorial Park** – The Friendship Hill Inclusive Playground is accessible to all ages and physical abilities, and it adds an engaging opportunity for kids in Downtown Wabash.



Eagle's Theater



Friendship Hill Playground

²¹ <https://wabashrivertrail.org/>

- **Downtown façade improvements** – The City gained access to \$1.3 million in matching funds that assisted with the restoration of 23 historic building facades, structures, and roofs in the Downtown area, promoting revitalization.²²
- **Continuing Streetscape improvements** – These improvements included removing overgrown trees and replacing them with fountain grass, lighting, flowerpots, benches, and other enhancements to the downtown area.
- **Continuing Wabash Riverwalk** – The Wabash Riverwalk Trail is a ¾ mile trail that runs along the north side of the river and connects to Downtown.
- **Charley Creek and Cultural Trails** – These trails run through Downtown and connect various points of interest and historical assets.
- **State Road 13/15 corridor improvements** – Improvements were made between Canal Street and the Wabash River to guide visitors into Wabash by improving pedestrian elements and storm systems.
- **Owner-occupied rehabilitation program** – This program assisted low-income homeowners with repairs that enabled seniors to age in place, improved energy efficiency, and eliminated hazards.
- **Creation of Rock City Lofts** – The senior affordable housing project renovated four historic buildings in Downtown Wabash across from the Historical Museum.



Downtown Wabash – Improved Facades

PLACES

The following places represent additional locations that contribute to the sense of place within Wabash County.

WABASH

- **Riverfront Plaza** – The Riverfront Plaza connects the downtown area with the river and aims to attract visitors and promote future development in the area.
- **Mammoth Park** – The beautification of the old Mammoth Building and addition of the Explore Downtown Wabash Mural have revitalized this primary gateway into downtown.
- **Market-Canal Alley Art Walk** – A formerly blighted alley has become a place of interest and rest, with added lighting, benches, landscaping, and a cable system that can support various installations.
- **Veterans Plaza** – This highly visible location at the only city-owned parking lot downtown contains new landscaping, seating, and a one-of-a-kind pergola. It has become one of the most popular places on First Fridays.
- **Honeywell Center** – The Honeywell Center was built in 1952 to be a hub for recreation in the community. It is home to the Ford Theater, Eugenia’s Restaurant, Clark Gallery, and banquet facilities.



Market-Canal Alley Art Walk

²² <https://www.indianalandmarks.org/2018/09/wabash-becomes-model-of-revitalization/>

NORTH MANCHESTER

- **Riverfront** – The Eel River borders the Town of North Manchester to the south.
- **Downtown** – The downtown and Main Street in North Manchester are home to historic sites, shops, entertainment, and community events.
- **Community Trail Network** – The Town applied for grant funding to create a river boardwalk that would link key locations within the community, including schools, parks, the library, and Manchester University. It would also create pedestrian bridges across the river and provide spectacular views.



Downtown North Manchester

ROANN

- **Covered Bridges** – Both Roann and North Manchester are home to historic covered bridges that have been restored to preserve a sense of history and rural character of the county.
- **Stockdale Mill** – More than 150 years old, the restored Stockdale Mill in Roann is once again operational and is now a museum.
- **Downtown** – Roann is home to a historic district and was recently designated an Indiana Main Street by Indiana Office of Community & Rural Affairs (OCRA).



Downtown Roann

LAGRO

- **Town Pavilion** – The new town pavilion in Lagro is situated near the Wabash River Trail and is a great place to hold local events.

PROGRAMS / EVENTS

The following programs promote community and create a sense of identity connected to place.

- **Trolley Tours** – Wabash Trolley Tours offer a unique perspective on the city and provide opportunities for people to interact with each other in new ways.
- **Liking for Biking Weekly Bike Rides** – The local bicycling club organizes weekly rides to enjoy the natural amenities and recreation opportunities within the city and county.
- **First Fridays** – Wabash celebrates the First Friday of each month with a free themed event downtown, organized by Wabash Marketplace.
- **North Manchester Harvest Arts Festival** – Each October, North Manchester hosts a full day of Fall themed games, food, and activities.



Town Pavilion, Lagro

- **Roann Covered Bridge Festival** – Roann celebrates its historic covered bridge with a three day festival each year.



Harvest Arts Festival



Performer on a First Friday

PUBLIC ART / PHYSICAL ELEMENTS

Public art and physical elements can contribute to a sense of place by adding points of interest, utility, and/or beauty.

- **Bike Wabash** – Locally designed and fabricated bike racks have been installed downtown to alleviate car parking congestion and encourage a healthy lifestyle.
- **Explore Downtown Wabash Mural** – Located in Mammoth Park, this mural is styled after a vintage postcard that depicts the intersection. It is a primary gateway to downtown.
- **Abraham Lincoln Statue** – “The Great Emancipator” statue is located outside the courthouse in Wabash and was commissioned by a Wabash native, Alexander New.
- **Parking Gabions** – These wirework structures serve as multi-functional sculpture-art and wayfinding markers, clearly signifying and beautifying one of two public parking lots in the downtown corridor.
- **Welcome to Wabash Billboards** – The Wabash County Chamber of Commerce is the primary partner responsible for billboards that welcome visitors to Wabash and highlight Arts & Entertainment, Dining, and Boutiques & Antiques.
- **Caboose Outdoor Exhibit** – The Wabash County Historical Museum serves as a primary partner for the Caboose Outdoor Exhibit, providing access to and education about a historical artifact.
- **Market Street Mural** – In the fall of 2020, the Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership and the Arts United of Greater Fort Wayne Inc launched the first Make It Your Own Mural Fest. Mexico City native and mural artist Claudio “Remix 1” Rico was commissioned to paint a mural located at 214 E. Main St., North Manchester.



Bike Wabash Custom Bike Rack

- **Roann Community Center Mural** –Roann was recently awarded a Main Street Designation by the Indiana Office of Community & Rural Affairs (OCRA). A grant from this organization and the participation of the Roann Heritage Group led to a new mural on the side of the Roann Community Building.



Market Street Mural, North Manchester



Roann Community Center Mural

ORGANIZATIONS

Several Organizations within the county are major contributors to placemaking initiatives.

- **Grow Wabash County** – A combination economic-development organization and Chamber of Commerce, Grow Wabash County supports placemaking efforts across the County.
- **Wabash Marketplace** – Wabash Marketplace is a non-profit organization that promotes growth in Downtown Wabash. By seeking to save buildings and promote the downtown through events like First Fridays, Wabash Marketplace contributes to creating a sense of place in Wabash.
- **Manchester Alive: Main Street Chamber Alliance** – Manchester Alive seeks to enhance the quality of life in the community by supporting entrepreneurs, small business, and community events.

2.3 Opportunity Areas

As Wabash County looks ahead, a variety of areas within the region may present strategic opportunities to pursue new placemaking initiatives. These projects are important because they contribute to a virtuous cycle: as a place improves, individuals tend to visit more and businesses invest, which in turn results in further improvements to the area. Placemaking is also a way to lean into authenticity; it does not create something totally new, but instead it accentuates existing features in a new way.

DOWNTOWNS

Downtowns and Main Streets are common opportunity areas for placemaking initiatives. Physical projects, like creating small parks, public art installations, and amenities like bike racks, benches, and streetscaping, encourage people to visit and stay. Downtowns offer the opportunity to concentrate, in which spaces benefit from having a variety of uses that mutually enhance one another (like a library, park, and restaurants all within walking distance).²³ Activation activities, like festivals and concerts, create a sense of liveliness and

²³ https://cdad-online.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/placemaking_guide.pdf

community, drawing people in to centralized locations and providing businesses with additional opportunities.

NEIGHBORHOODS

Neighborhoods can apply principles of placemaking to create a shared sense of identity and community. Small scale projects like community gardens or neighborhood parks contribute to sociability and interaction. Public art and signage may also help neighborhoods create a unifying and recognizable identity. Block parties and neighborhood gatherings offer opportunities for residents to come together and interact in their shared spaces.

GREEN CORRIDORS / TRAILS

Wabash County is rich in natural amenities and beauty. Investment in the Wabash River Trail is a great start to placemaking that capitalizes on the natural assets of the county. Additional opportunities exist to expand the trail and to enhance amenities along it, such as restroom facilities, benches, exercise stations, and bike repair stations. Initiatives to improve accessibility and visibility to the trails could contribute to expanded use and increased investment. Improvements to the trail also have the potential to connect Wabash to other amenities and to multiply the effects of placemaking by increasing access to points of interest.



Example Trail Signage

COMMUNITY GATEWAYS

The Wabash Public Art Plan, created by the Wabash Marketplace, identifies a number of community gateways that are considered strategic places for placemaking initiatives. These gateways are “entry points into the City of Wabash [that] give us a chance to make a lasting and positive first impression on visitors and to inspire pride in local residents.”²⁴ The plan notes that large-scale art pieces are best for these locations because they will typically be viewed while driving. The potential gateways include:

- State Road 15 North and 24 Intersection
- State Road 13 North and 24 Intersection
- State Road 13 South past the “Cut” (Vernon Street)
- State Road 15 South past the “Cut” (Airport Road)
- Secondary entry points include Alber, Stitt, and Vernon Street

Possible gateways in/to other communities include

- **North Manchester:** the intersections of Wabash Rd and E Main St, E Main St and Sycamore St
- **Lagro:** along U.S. 24 and Blue Star Highway 524 (and/or at the intersection)
- **Roann:** along IN-15 and IN-16 (and/or at the intersection)
- **LaFontaine:** along In-15 (at Kendall St.) and IN-218 (at Main St)

In recent years, Visit Wabash County has collaborated with communities across the county to install gateway signage that encourages visitors to explore the different areas. By identifying and focusing on locations such as these, and others like them, the county has a variety of opportunities to continue to strengthen the sense and quality of place for both visitors and residents.

²⁴ [wabash-public-art-plan_compressed.pdf \(wabashmarketplace.org\)](#)

LESSONS FROM COVID-19

The global COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted opportunities for communities around the world to improve their residents' experience of place. Shifting personal habits and new governmental guidelines regarding capacity and social distancing have altered the way that people interact with each other and with public spaces. In general, people are not gathering in large groups – particularly indoors – and are demonstrating preferences for outdoor activities. During 2020, there was a 50% increase in park visits at the two reservoirs in the county.

In view of these patterns, it has become clear that parks and outdoor amenities are particularly valuable assets when people are practicing social distancing and avoiding indoor gathering. Wabash County already has an abundance of natural assets; placemaking efforts that provide additional features for outdoor experiences would align with lessons learned through the pandemic.

Furthermore, outdoor dining has become a significant preference (or requirement) for many restaurants and their patrons. New York City notably provided opportunities for restaurants to expand dining onto sidewalks, curb lanes, and streets that are closed to traffic.²⁵ As Wabash moves forward during and after the pandemic, the County may wish to explore placemaking initiatives that allow for or create additional and expanded outdoor dining.

²⁵ <https://www1.nyc.gov/html/dot/html/pedestrians/openstreets.shtml>

3. EDUCATION

This section reviews the educational system within Wabash County. First, educational opportunities ranging from pre-K to post-secondary / vocational are identified and mapped. Further consideration is then given to understand trends in the County and to identify comparative measurements to use as benchmarks for the education system. Finally, this section provides a summary of the findings from the 2017 Studies for Advancement.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Wabash County is home to a complete continuum of learning opportunities.** Residents have options that range from pre-k and early childhood to post-secondary and alternative, technical, and vocational training. The presence of Manchester University in the County is a significant higher education opportunity for a county of its size.
- **Overall enrollment in schools has been declining and will continue as the County demographic changes.** The aging population and only a modest rate of in-migration of families with school-aged children contributes to this trend.
- **Current academic programs meet State requirements, but lower enrollment limits specialized or advanced learning opportunities and certain extracurricular activities.** Certain enrichment courses and extracurricular activities are unavailable in several schools.
- **Availability and affordability of childcare affects parents' participation in the workforce.** Limited access to childcare in Wabash presents significant economic challenges, including millions of dollars in lost wages and earnings.

3.1 Education System

The Education System section explores the wide range of educational offerings found within the County. Three public school systems serve the county: Manchester Community Schools, the Metropolitan School District (MSD) of Wabash County, and Wabash City Schools. Several private schools, a vocational school, post-secondary, and technical/vocational options are also present in the county. This section concludes with an analysis of how the workforce is affected by the availability – or lack thereof – of childcare in the county.

LIFELONG LEARNING

In addition to the foundational K-12 education system, lifelong learning opportunities are valuable to individuals and communities. Pre-kindergarten provides younger children with an early start to get acquainted with the school system. Higher education and alternative, technical, and vocational training centers are community assets and are key aspects of developing an effective workforce. Together, these segments of the education system provide a complete continuum of opportunities for residents of Wabash County. The graphic below illustrates the variety of specific educational opportunities and institutions within the County.

Lifelong Learning In Wabash County

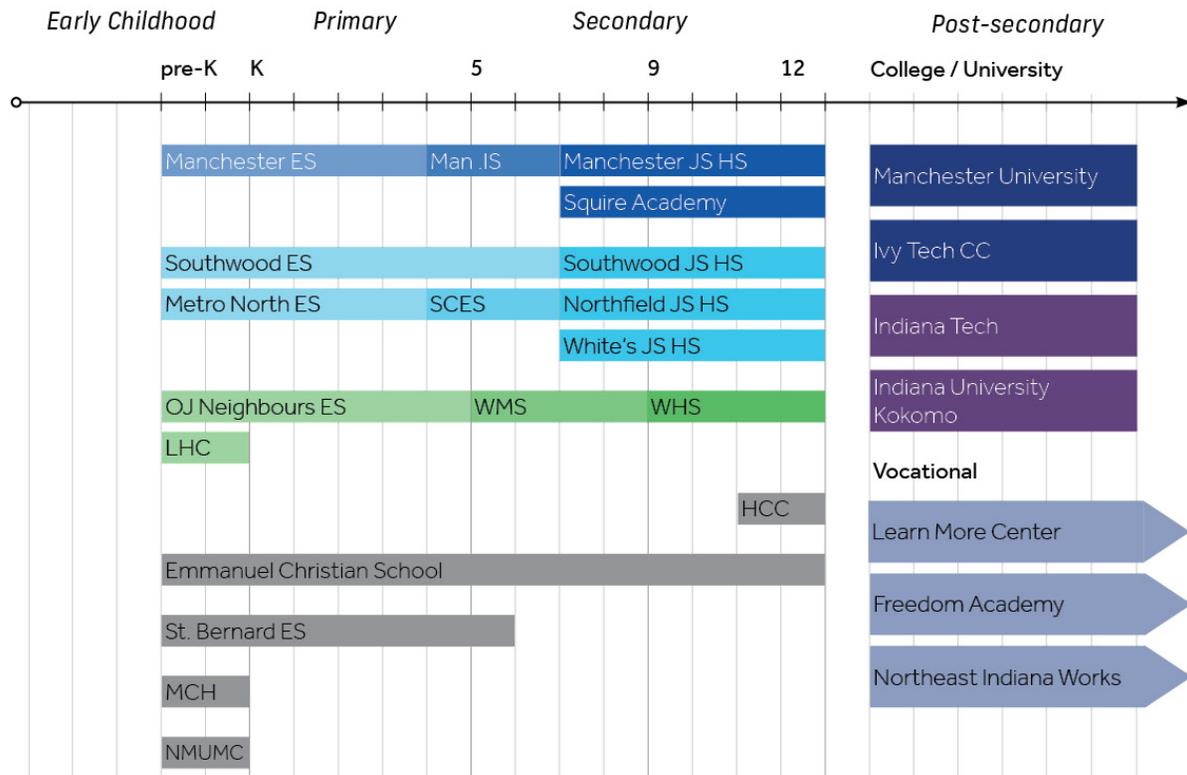


Figure 3: Lifelong Learning

PRE-KINDERGARTEN

Each of the three public school systems and the two private schools offer younger students the chance to enroll in pre-kindergarten at their elementary school locations, and Wabash City Schools offers additional enrollment at the L.H. Carpenter Early Learning Center.

At least two churches in the county offer private pre-k classes:

- Montessori Children’s House at Wabash Presbyterian Church and the
- Sycamore Pre-school at North Manchester United Methodist Church.

K-12 SCHOOLS

The following schools comprise the public school options within Wabash County, arranged by district:

- **Manchester Community Schools (MCS)**
 - Manchester Elementary School (Pre-K – 3rd)
 - Manchester Intermediate School (4th – 6th)
 - Manchester Jr - Sr High School (7th – 12th)
 - Squire Academy (7th -12th, alternative online courses)

- **MSD Wabash County (MSDWC)**
 - Metro North Elementary School (Pre-K – 3rd)
 - Sharp Creek Elementary (4th – 6th)
 - Southwood Elementary (Pre-K – 6th)
 - Northfield Jr./Sr. High (7th – 12th)
 - Southwood Jr./Sr. High (7th – 12th)
 - White’s Jr./Sr. High (7th – 12th, with residential facilities)
- **Wabash City Schools (WCS)**
 - OJ Neighbours Elementary School (Pre-K – 4th)
 - Wabash Middle School (5th – 8th)
 - Wabash High School (9th – 12th)

Private school options in the county include:

- St. Bernard Elementary School (Pre-K – 5th)
- Emmanuel Christian School (Pre-K – 12th)

School Choice

K-12 students in Indiana have several options when choosing which schools to attend. These statewide policies are applicable in Wabash County and affect students and residents alike. One community member shared the following observation during a Focus on the Future Workshop: “Every morning we see four different school buses visit little Roann, taking students in four different directions.”

Open Enrollment

Through Indiana’s Open Enrollment policy, students are eligible to transfer between public school districts based on a variety of possible arrangements, even if they do not change residences.²⁶ In Wabash County, both Manchester City Schools and MSD Wabash County recorded a net gain in public transfer students, whereas the Wabash City Schools reported a net loss. Given the geographic nature of their relationship – the Wabash City School district is surrounded by the MSD Wabash County district – it is not surprising that a significant number of students would transfer between these districts. While this policy allows for convenience and opportunity for students, it can be detrimental to districts with a net loss in transfers. State funding follows the student, so districts that lose students lose their associated funding and, over time, can become less desirable districts. On the other hand, districts that receive many incoming transfer students receive corresponding state funding and continue to become more desirable. Refer to Figure 4 on the following page for a map of new public transfers between school districts.

Indiana School Choice Scholarship Program

The Indiana Choice Scholarship Program, also referred to as a voucher program, provides scholarships to low and middle-income students to offset the cost of enrollment at participating private schools. Students must meet both income and academic eligibility requirements to apply. In 2019, more than 36,000 students participated in the program.²⁷

²⁶ <https://www.edchoice.org/engage/mapping-indianas-public-district-school-choice-transfers/>

²⁷ <https://www.edchoice.org/school-choice/programs/indiana-choice-scholarship-program/>

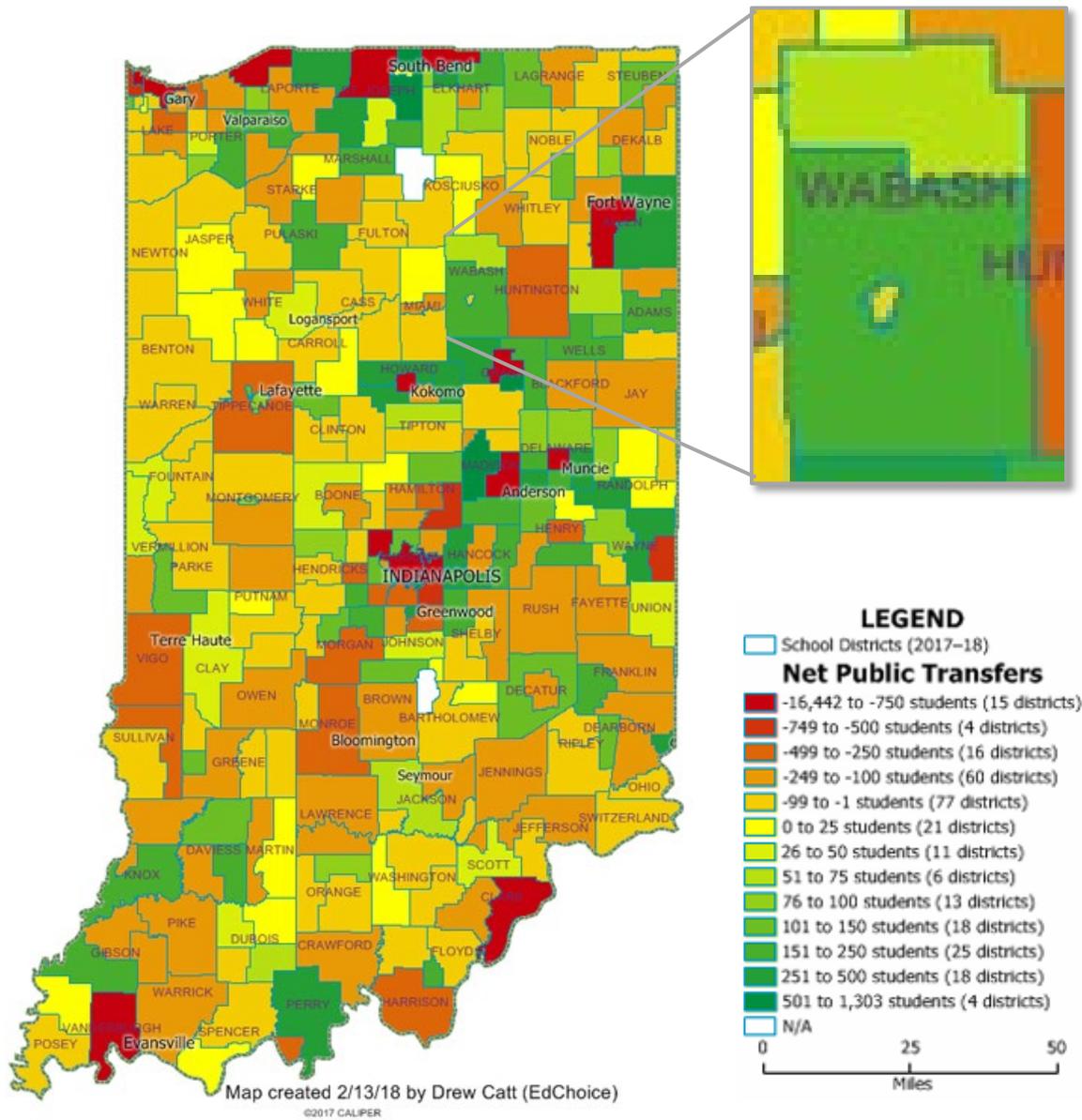


Figure 4: Indiana Public School Transfers

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

Wabash County is home to several higher education institutions.

- **Manchester University**

Manchester University enrolls 1,400 students in more than 70 undergraduate programs and several advanced or professional degree programs. Students come from 26 states and 19 countries, and nearly $\frac{3}{4}$ of students live on campus in North Manchester. 96% of graduates are employed, enrolled in full-time education, or have joined voluntary service within six months of graduation. From the class of 2016, most graduates accepted jobs at more than 100 employers. Others enrolled in graduate or professional programs at schools like Johns Hopkins and Penn State, studying in 31 different disciplines.

More than 80% of Enrolled Undergraduates come from Indiana, signifying the strong asset that Manchester University is to both the County and the State.

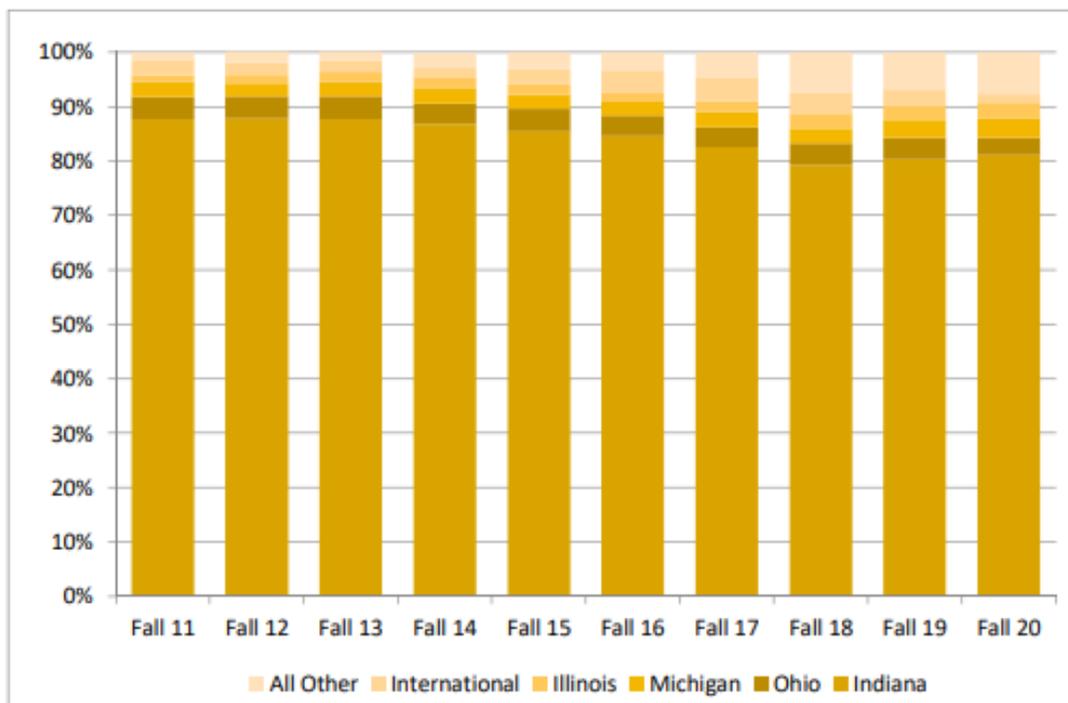


Figure 5: Undergraduate Enrollment by Geography

- **Ivy Tech Community College – Wabash**

Ivy Tech Community College offers a selection of courses at its Wabash campus, located in the Wabash County Community Learning Center. Students may pursue a variety of certificates and/or an associate degree. The full-service campus is located in Fort Wayne.

Residents of Wabash County may also reasonably pursue higher education at a number of locations outside of the county. These options include:

- **Indiana Tech – Warsaw**

Indiana Tech in Warsaw is home to a College of Professional Studies with undergraduate and graduate degrees and offers evening and weekend classes.²⁸

²⁸ <https://www.campusexplorer.com/colleges/995BD16A/Indiana/Warsaw/Indiana-Tech-Warsaw/>

- **Indiana University – Kokomo**
IU Kokomo campus has 8 schools and divisions with 60+ degrees and programs, educating both undergraduate and graduate students.
- **Vincennes University**
Vincennes University offers associates degrees in career fields and dual credit courses for Heartland Career Center students.

VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL TRAINING

In addition to the traditional educational pathways for primary and secondary school, Wabash County offers a variety of alternative learning opportunities, beginning in high school and continuing into adulthood.

- **Heartland Career Center (HCC)**
Juniors and Seniors at participating area high schools can enroll at HCC in one of 17 different career programs. Students can earn dual credits (for high school and college) while gaining valuable workplace training and competencies, thanks to a partnership among the career center, Vincennes University and Ivy Tech Community College. Hands-on training programs include:
 - Automotive Services
 - Construction Trades
 - Cosmetology
 - Criminal Justice
 - Culinary Arts and Hospitality
 - Electronics
 - Health Science
 - Agriculture
 - Media, Marketing, and Communications
 - Early-Childhood Education

Heartland students are eligible for all levels of high school diplomas, depending on their sending high school. The graduation rate for students concentrating in Career Technical Education (CTE) is 95%, higher than the national average and comparable to local high schools in Wabash County.

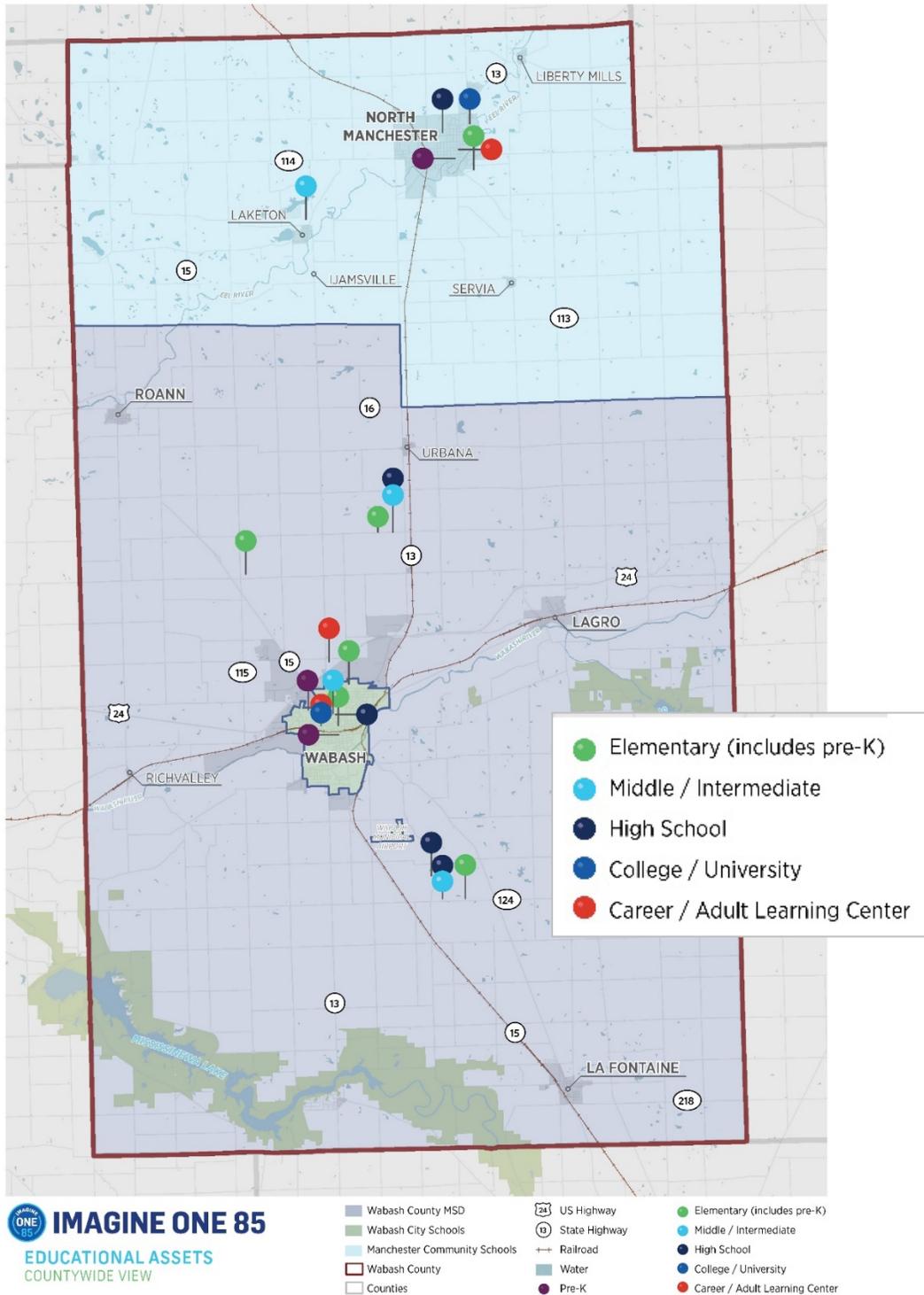
The career center gives students in the cosmetology program real-world practice by offering a variety of services to community members. HCC also operates a preschool in which the students gain experience in Early Childhood Education by working directly with the children in a teaching role.

Some students can also work toward certifications, such as Certified Nursing Assistant or Welder. By pursuing these certifications, the students may begin a career right after high school or obtain an advantage in the job market.

- **Learn More Center**
The Learn More Center provides Adult Basic Education, High School Equivalency Diploma, College Prep, Career Readiness, ESL, and Citizenship Courses. The programs there help students move on to college or career education. Two locations serve residents of Wabash County:
 - Town Life Center, North Manchester
 - Wabash County Community Learning Center, Wabash
- **Northeast Indiana Works**
Northeast Indiana Works is a non-profit workforce development organization that provides adult education and workforce development services. They operate in various locations throughout the region, including in the Wabash County Community Learning Center.
- **Freedom Academy**
The Freedom Academy focuses on adult education and workforce development. Although the

program is based in Fort Wayne, it occasionally offers classes at the Heartland Career Center.

- Indiana Kentucky Ohio Regional Council of Carpenters (IKORCC) – Warsaw**
 Residents of Wabash County may receive carpenter, millwright, and welding training at the IKORCC training facility located in nearby Warsaw.



Map 2: Education Institutions and Facilities

CHILDCARE AND THE WORKFORCE

The Workforce Development Study, completed in 2017, focused on the interaction between Early Childhood Education and the workforce. At the time of the study, the economy was considered strong and there was low unemployment. However, most members of the workforce have children under the age of six. Therefore, the availability and affordability of early childhood education affect recruitment and retention of workers.

The economic impact due to lack of access to childcare in Wabash is significant:

- \$7.8 million in wages lost due to absent employees (for salaried workers); overtime (for other employees); temporary workers or reductions in productivity
- \$4.9 million in earnings lost from turnovers and absences of hourly workers
- \$800 thousand in tax revenue lost due to childcare issues
- 186 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) employees lost²⁹

The study notes that the return on investment is highest in the first five years of a child's life (13:1). Combined with the realization that there is a low supply of high-quality early education in Wabash compared to the need, the study recommends several potential solutions:

- Employer – Child Care Partnerships
- Community Investment in the form of funding from employers, philanthropists, and grants.

Finding ways to provide quality, accessible, and affordable early childhood education and childcare will be integral to supporting the workforce in Wabash County.

3.2 Trends and Benchmarks

The Trends and Benchmarks section considers broader trends in the county that affect the educational system. It also explores and compares various measures of educational attainment across the three public school districts.

POPULATION AND ENROLLMENT

A demographic study across all three districts in Wabash County reveals that population is declining and will continue to do so into the immediate future. The projected fertility rate, the average number of children born to a woman over her lifetime, is below the replacement level needed for the population to remain static. Furthermore, current residents are migrating out of Wabash at a higher rate than new residents are moving in. The study suggests that enrollment will also continue to decrease across all three districts due to two main factors:

- an increase in empty nest households, and
- a modest rate of in-migration of young families with children.

The median age is also projected to increase by several percentage points, representing a shift toward fewer school aged children as well.³⁰

²⁹ Transform Consulting Group. "Investing in Today's and Tomorrow's Workforce." (Presentation). January 2019.

³⁰ McKibben Demographics. "2016-2017 Demographic Study for Manchester Community Schools, Wabash City Schools, and MSD of Wabash County." June 2017.

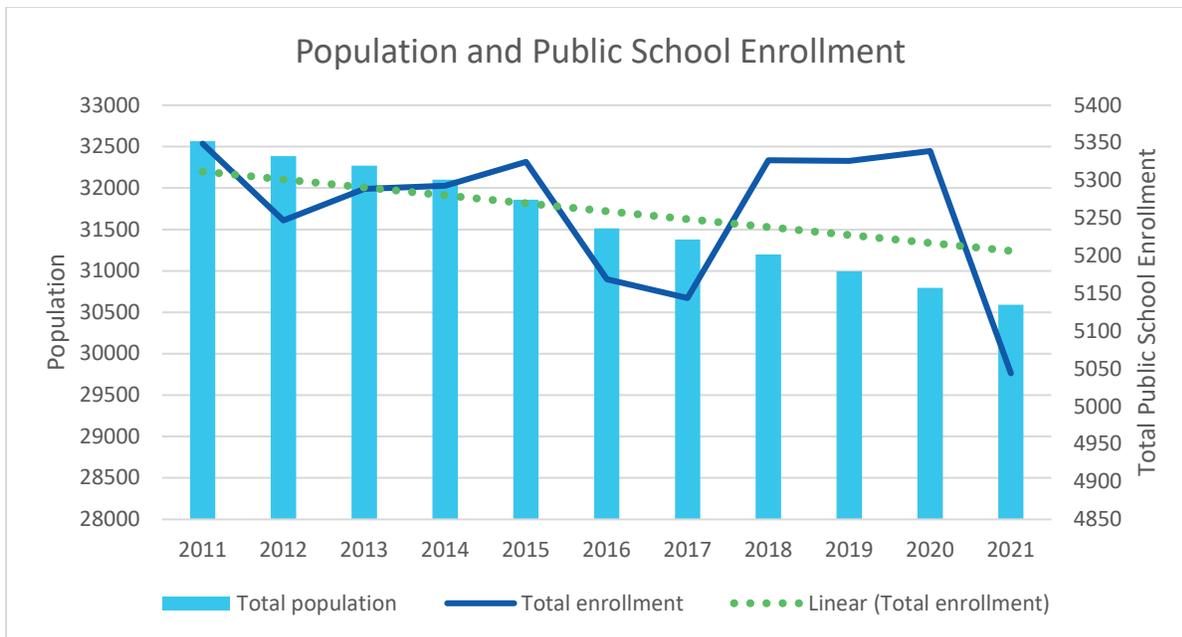


Figure 6: Population and School Enrollment

BENCHMARKS

A variety of qualitative and quantitative metrics are used to evaluate the strengths and opportunity areas of Wabash County’s education system. These metrics are organized around three themes: Course and Extracurricular Offerings, Academic Performance, and Structural and Financial Factors.

COURSE AND EXTRACURRICULAR OFFERINGS

School systems often stand out because of unique and enriching courses or activities that go beyond the standard core curriculum. In addition to state minimum requirements, each of the school systems offers some additional programming and assets, including:

- **Special Education** is instruction tailored to the individual learning needs of a student with a disability.
- **Gifted Education** provides higher achieving students with enrichment or accelerated learning opportunities.
- **English as a New Language** is offered to students whose first language is not English.
- **Advanced Placement (AP) Courses** are entry-level college courses for high school students. Students may earn college credit depending on two factors: the scores they receive on the standardized AP Exams and the policies of the college or university where they enroll.
- **Dual-Credit Courses** are college courses that are cross-listed at both a high school and a college. A passing grade earns the student both high school and college credit.
- **1:1 Technology** gives every student computer (or tablet) and internet access to complete assignments and to grow in technological proficiency.

Below are some of the specific details and unique assets offered in each of the school districts. The list is not intended to be exhaustive but to provide some examples of ways in which Wabash County offers a competitive education system.

- **Manchester Community Schools**
 - ~12 AP Courses
 - 16 Dual-Credit Courses
 - **World Experiences** – domestic and international travel-learning experiences for junior and senior high students
- **MSD Wabash County**
 - 9 AP Classes
 - **Elementary Robotics Program** – The schools offer a number of opportunities to focus on STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math) learning. Two robotics teams competed in a World Competition against local and international teams.
 - Professional Internship Program
- **Wabash City Schools**
 - 27 AP or Dual Credit Courses
 - Japanese Language and Culture Program
 - **Entrepreneurship Program** – In partnership with [InGuard](#) (an insurance and risk-management firm) and Grow Wabash County, the school offers [INCubatoredu](#), a full-year entrepreneurship curriculum that helps students develop their own product or service startup.
 - **Industrial Technology** – Beginning in middle school, students have hands-on opportunities to learn about design and construction, geared toward building employable skills and competencies.

Despite these assets, however, the relatively low enrollment numbers at the individual schools have presented a challenge to offering certain enrichment classes and extracurricular activities. One study notes that in 2017, the schools offered minimal course offerings in subjects like World Languages, Engineering, and Business. The study also found that some schools were no longer able to offer certain extracurricular activities, such as a marching band or soccer team.³¹ The addition of the Japanese Language and Culture program at Wabash City Schools represents a positive change, but the overall challenge of offering diverse enrichment courses and extracurricular activities will remain relevant until enrollment levels increase.

³¹ *Studies for Advancement*. Academic Audit prepared by Carol Lindquist, Ed.D. August 1, 2017

ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

The State of Indiana Department of Education tracks a variety of academic performance measures through standardized tests and graduation rates. These objective measurements provide one angle at which to look at educational attainment and performance. Common measures for comparison include state testing that occurs in third and tenth grades. The data provided is an aggregate of all schools within each district and was compiled from the Indiana Department of Education unless otherwise noted.

In addition to state standardized tests, many high school juniors and seniors take the SAT and/or ACT to test their aptitude and readiness for college. Most colleges and universities use scores from these tests to determine a student's eligibility for enrollment or scholarships. The number of students who take the SAT or ACT can serve as a loose approximation of the number of students who pursue at least a four-year degree after high school, given that 95% of four-year colleges require either one of these standardized tests for enrollment.³² Note that the data shown does not indicate how much, if any, overlap exists between students who took the SAT and those who took the ACT.

- **IREAD** (Indiana Reading Evaluation and Determination) – measures 3rd Grade reading foundations
- **ELA** (English and Language Arts) - includes reading, writing, speaking, and language
- **ISTEP** (Indiana Statewide Educational Testing for Progress) – measures students' mastery of basic topics, particularly English and Math
- **SAT** (Scholastic Aptitude Test) – tests Math and Reading/Writing as a measure of college readiness, with a greatest possible composite score of 1600
- **ACT** (American College Test) – covers Math, English, Reading, Writing and Science with a maximum score of 36

Acronym Definitions

Finally, graduation rates reflect what percentage of students in each cohort complete their studies and graduate.

	MCS	MSD WC	WCS	Indiana	US
IREAD Pass %	90.2	93.7	85.1	87.9	
3rd Grade ELA Proficient %	45.1	45.0	32.3	45.4	
10th Grade Passing both Math and ELA (ISTEP)	39.6	30.3	20.8	30.5	
% Graduates Taking SAT	52.9	47.5	96.9	56.9	
Average Composite SAT Score	1,079.7	1,037.5	994.4	987.9	1,060
% Graduates Taking ACT	8.4	10.4	4.2	22.1	52*
Average Composite ACT Score	19.6	21.4	26.5	21.8	20.8
Graduation Rate %	94.35	73.72	91.75	87.69	88**

*projected value <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=897>

** estimated for 2018 <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-high-schools/articles/see-high-school-graduation-rates-by-state>

Table 1: Academic Performance Measures

NOTE: **MSD Wabash County** includes White's Junior and Senior High School, a children's residential facility. Although the facility is part of the school district and offers a standard and accredited public school curriculum, the environment is not that of a traditional public school. Disaggregated data reveals that

³² <https://www.usnews.com/education/blogs/college-rankings-blog/2008/09/22/about-that-nacac-report-on-the-sat>

performance measures are significantly lower at White's than at Northfield and Southwood. The graduation rate at White's, for example, was 55.76% in 2020; Northfield's was 94.55% and Southwood's was 98.63%, some of the highest rates in the state. Similar disparities exist within the disaggregated data for other statistics as well.

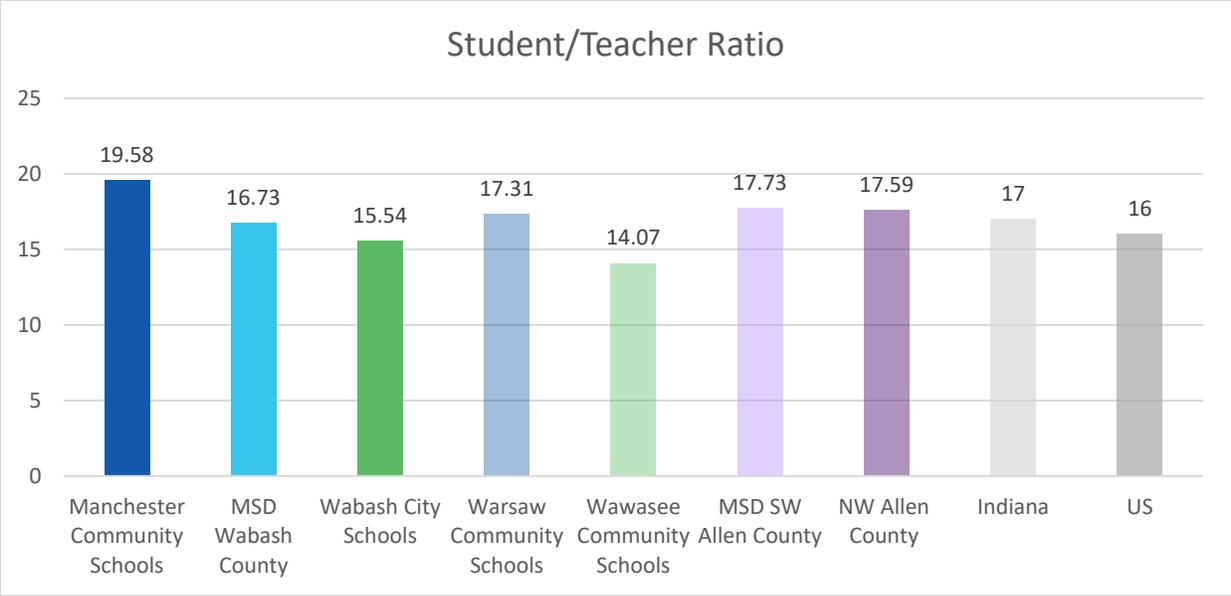
With respect to most academic performance metrics, students in **Manchester City Schools** performed very near or higher than the Indiana averages. Third grade reading and language arts proficiency were comparable to the state average levels, and the number of students who passed both Math and ELA in 10th grade was 9% higher than the state. SAT scores were higher than both the state and national averages, and the graduation rate of 94.35% is also significantly greater than state (87.69%) and national (88%) rates. More than half of students took the SAT and/or ACT, suggesting that a majority of students are at least interested in pursuing a four-year degree.

MSD Wabash County students also performed well academically, with respect to their county, state, and national peers. 93.7% of third graders passed the statewide IREAD reading test, nearly 6% higher than Indiana's 87.9% average. The number of 10th grade students who passed both Math and ELA on their state standardized tests was just 0.2% points below the state average; 30.3% compared to 30.5%. Average SAT and ACT composite scores were comparable to state averages as well, with around half of graduating students taking one or both exams. As noted above, the graduation rate for the district as a whole is significantly lower than other districts, but the graduation rates for the traditional high schools in MSD Wabash County are excellent; the weighted average for Northfield and Southwood is 96.88%.

Wabash City Schools posted lower scores in most areas than their peers. The percentage of third graders who passed the IREAD test, 85.1%, is very near the Indiana average of 87.9%. However, overall third grade ELA proficiency (32.3%) is 13% lower than the Indiana average and that of the other county schools. Similarly, only 20.8% of 10th graders passed both Math and ELA portions of the ISTEP, compared to approximately 30% in MSD Wabash County and nearly 40% in Manchester. Students who took the SAT scored very close to the Indiana average, and ACT test-takers were nearly 5 points higher than state and national averages. Wabash is unique in the county for offering free SAT tests to all juniors and seniors during the school day, so their percentage of graduates who take the test is exceptionally high (nearly 97%). The graduation rate of 91.75% in Wabash City Schools is above average and narrowly trails their peers in the County.

STRUCTURAL AND FINANCIAL FACTORS

Metrics such as student to teacher ratio and expenditures per student offer some insight into how schools compare to one another and what kinds of opportunities they provide for their students. A lower student to teacher ratio is considered an asset, suggesting that students receive more individualized input from teachers. Higher expenditures per student is also considered a positive metric, representing greater investment in a variety of factors that influence the child's educational experience.

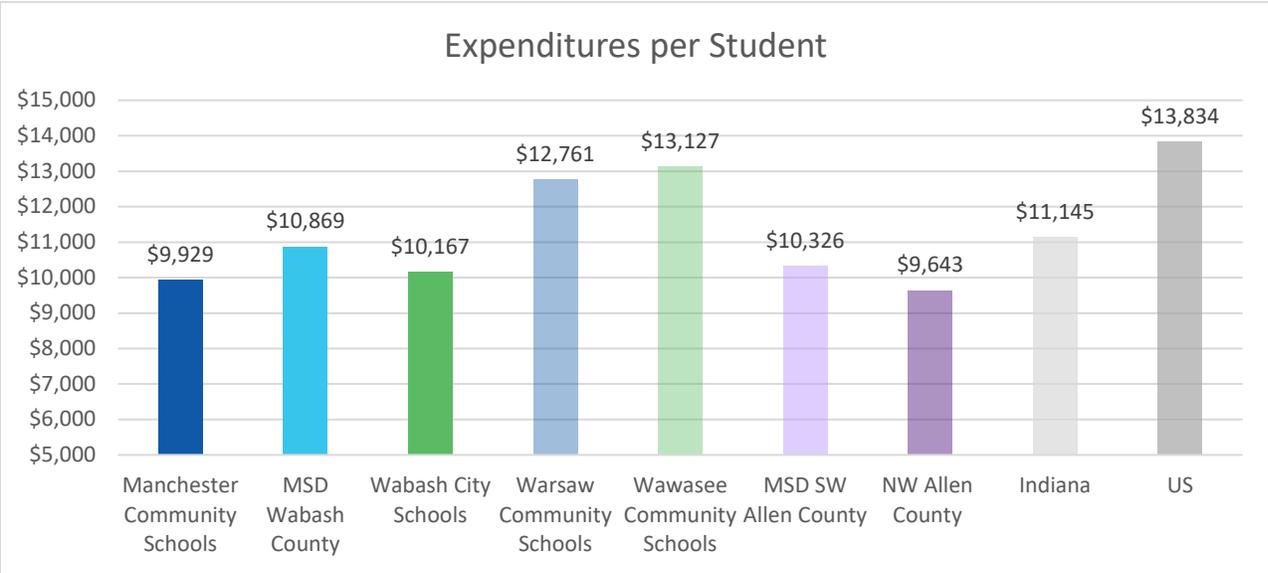


**note: a lower ratio is better*

Wabash City Schools has the lowest student to teacher ratio of the three districts in the County at 15.54. This number is below the Indiana average (17), the US average (16), and neighboring Warsaw Community Schools (17.31). The Wawasee Community School Corporation outperforms Wabash with the lowest and best student to teacher ratio in the sample: 14.07.

MSD Wabash County performs well in this metric also, with a student to teacher ratio of 16.73. Though slightly above the US average, it is below Indiana’s average and that of Warsaw Community Schools.

Manchester Community Schools has the highest student to teacher ratio in this sample: 19.58.

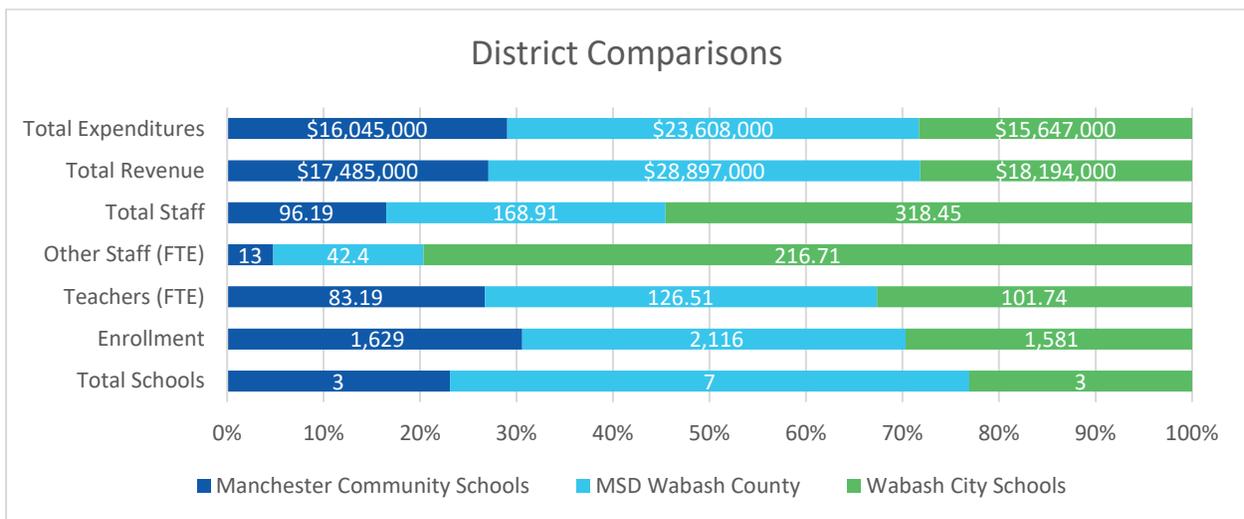


Expenditures per student for the three districts in the county fall within less than a \$1,000 range of each other. **MSD Wabash County** spends the most per student: \$10,869. **Wabash City Schools** is next, spending

\$10,167, followed by **Manchester Community Schools** at \$9,929 per student. The County schools are not far behind the Indiana average of \$11,145, but even the highest spending school in the County spends nearly \$3,000 less per student than the US average of \$13,834. Similarly, the schools in neighboring Kosciusko County spend nearly 20% more per student. On the other hand, per student expenditures in Wabash are comparable to expenditures in Allen County districts outside of Fort Wayne.

Although expenditures are lower than comparison districts, a 2017 Financial Report found that the schools are all run in fiscally responsible ways, so no blatantly obvious recommendations for cost savings through collaboration were found.³³

Additional statistics are included for reference in the figure below.



³³ Educational Services Company. "Financial Health Analysis for M.S.D Wabash County, Manchester Community Schools, Wabash City Schools." July 2017. Indianapolis, IN.

3.3 Studies for Advancement

In 2017, the Community Foundation of Wabash County (CFWC) initiated and executed a study of the shared interests among the three school districts in the county. The Lindquist Feasibility Study Plan outlined five key topic areas for each of the school corporations:

- Demographic Study,
- Facilities Study,
- Academic Audit,
- Wabash County Workforce Development Profile, and
- Analysis of Financial Strength.

Phase Two then offered any interested corporations access to the following services:

- Community Interest Survey,
- Facilitated Community Discussion of Facilities Study,
- Legal Analysis, and
- Consultant.

A variety of results and findings from these studies have been shared throughout this chapter. The [Population and Enrollment](#) section contains the results of the Demographic study, and a summary of the Workforce Development Profile can be found under [Childcare and the Workforce](#); therefore, they are omitted here. A number of findings from the Academic Audit and Financial Analysis are incorporated into the [Benchmarks](#) section, but a complete summary of their findings is shared below.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The Community Foundation of Wabash County synthesized the key findings of these studies into the following statements:

1. “County population has and will continue to decline. As the median age continues to increase, fewer children who will attend school will be born.”
2. “Currently, a majority of school transfers occur between county districts.”
3. “State funding levels are not keeping pace with state and federal program expectations.”
4. “Current academic programs in all three districts meet state requirements but offering specialized or advanced learning opportunities is increasingly difficult.”
5. “Future workforce needs differ from those in the Region and State, with a high proportion of jobs in the county requiring low skill levels whose compensation can threaten economic self-sufficiency.”
6. “School facilities are well-maintained but reflect the times they were built. Each district is challenged to find appropriate spaces for current and future educational needs.”
7. “Junior high school students have unique developmental needs that are not distinguished fully from what is provided to high school students.”³⁴

FACILITIES

An independent study of the school facilities across Wabash found that the facilities are generally well maintained and in good condition, although they reflect the times in which they were originally constructed. Each district has distinct assets and challenges with respect to capacity and infrastructure. Several individualized projects and estimated construction costs were provided in the 2017 study, offering guidance to improve efficiencies, safety, and general upkeep/maintenance.

³⁴ Community Foundation of Wabash County. “Studies for Advancement.” 2017. Presentation.

ACADEMICS

The academic audits of 2017 examined each school district with respect to their *capacity* to provide an appropriate education, the *access* of opportunities to all students, and the *equity* of participation and/or success among disparate groups. Each audit provides a detailed analysis of the school systems within these categories. Common strengths and assets across the Wabash County school districts include:

- 1:1 technology access for students
- Adequate instructional materials at all levels
- Additional programming such as
 - Special Education
 - Gifted Education
 - English as a New Language
 - Extra-curricular activities
- A variety of Advanced Placement (AP) and Dual-Credit courses

The analysis offers additional observations that reflect areas of opportunity across the three districts.

- Low enrollment in high schools limits the ability to provide certain extra-curricular opportunities, like a soccer team, marching band, a business course, and others.
- The schools would benefit from more exploratory courses, like world languages and engineering, that go beyond the minimal education requirements.
- Policies and programs generally group Junior High and High School students, not recognizing the unique needs of Junior High students.
- As is common in most educational systems, the students from lower socio-economic backgrounds fail standardized tests at a higher rate than other wealthier students.

All three of the audits recommend that the schools consider how their next steps and future projects will improve the following areas:

- Teacher Quality
- Course and Program Availability
- Extra-Curricular Activities
- Technology
- Instructional Budget
- Personalized Services
- Community Engagement

FINANCES

Financial audits for each of the school corporations in Wabash provided various insights for the individual schools. The following summary statements and recommendations come out of themes that emerged across all districts:

- All corporations have relatively lower class sizes and including aides would maintain or increase student teacher ratios while reducing costs.
- Health Insurance Plans should be reviewed.
- Debt should be review and refinancing considered.
- Transportation costs may be reduced through evaluating walk radius, door-to-door, and grade level transportation.
- All three corporations are being run in fiscally responsible ways, so there are no blatantly obvious recommendations for cost savings through collaboration.

- Countywide transportation may be feasible, or at least between MSD Wabash and Wabash City Schools.