

# Improving College Access and Success: Indiana's Strategies Getting Results

Indiana, like other manufacturing-based states in the past, had a history of sending very few students to college. In 1986 less than 39% of Indiana students went directly to college after high school – ranking the state 40<sup>th</sup> in the country. With high-wage, low-skill manufacturing jobs in abundance, convincing parents, students, families and even educators that a college education would be necessary was a challenge.

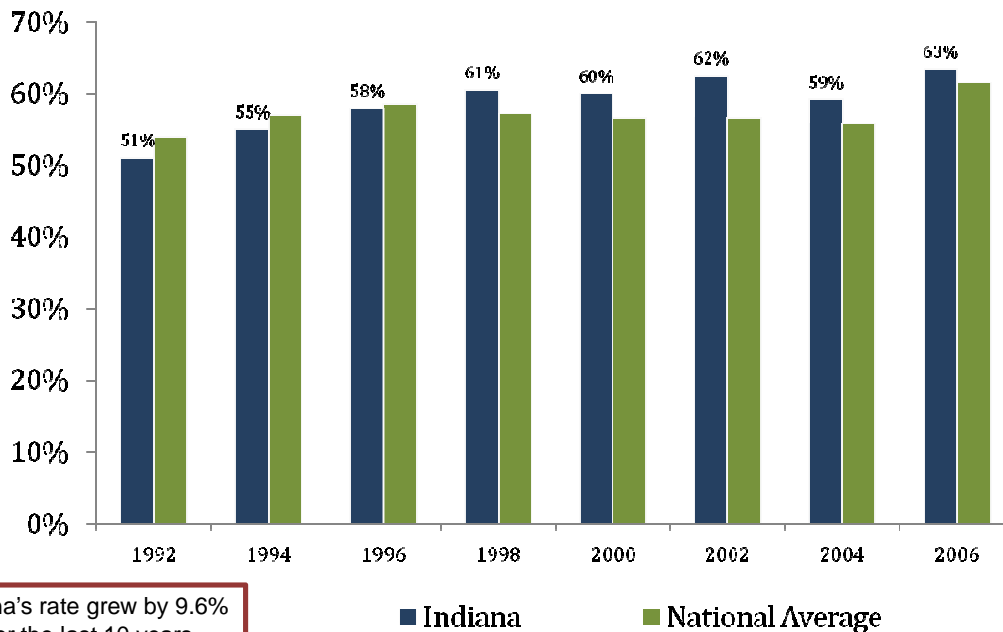
The state approached this challenge on several fronts, recognizing that multiple strategies would be necessary to change attitudes, beliefs and ultimately actions.

Key state strategies include:

- agreeing on a core curriculum that best prepares students for college and workforce success (Core 40)
- financial incentives for students to complete more rigorous coursework (Core 40, AHD bonuses)
- elimination of financial barriers for low-income students (Twenty-first Century Scholars)
- efforts to help students see college as a possibility (AP, PSAT)
- aggressive distribution of college and career information (Learn More Indiana, KnowHow2GoIndiana, College Success Coalition)

Indiana's multi-pronged approach has reaped results. Today more than 63% of Indiana's students go directly to college, placing us among the nation's top college-going states.

## College-Going Rate of Recent High School Graduates



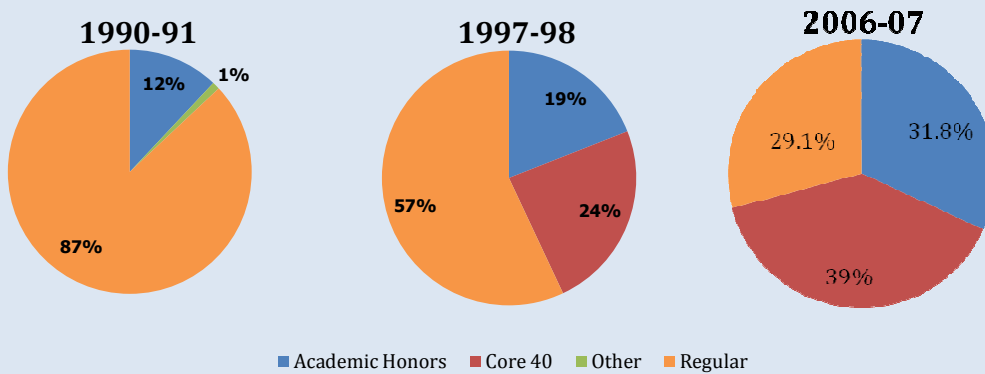
Indiana's rate grew by 9.6% over the last 10 years, while the national rate grew by 5.2%.

## Key Strategies:

**Indiana Core 40** – Indiana’s business, higher education and K-12 leaders came together more than a decade ago to speak with one voice about what courses students need for success in college and the workforce. Called Core 40, Indiana has been effective at moving more students into this rigorous curriculum. Students taking Core 40 enter and graduate from college at significantly higher rates than students without this preparation. Indiana, as other states, also has found that rigorous course-taking in high school can overcome a variety of socio-economic disadvantages, including poverty and low levels of parental education.

### Core 40 and Honors Diplomas

Today more than 70% of high school graduates complete Core 40 or go beyond and earn a Core 40 with Academic Honors Diploma.



Recognizing that the expectations for success in college, entering the workforce, military training and apprenticeship programs have converged, Indiana’s Education Roundtable committed to move more of Indiana’s students out of the general diploma track and into the more rigorous Core 40 curriculum. After nearly two years of study, public input and discussion, the Roundtable passed in fall 2004 a series of key resolutions focused on aligning Indiana’s high school diploma requirements with the knowledge and skills students need to succeed in college and the workforce.



The resolutions called for: improving diploma requirements; making Core 40 the default curriculum for all students; the addition of a Core 40 with Technical Honors diploma; requiring Core 40 completion for admission to the state’s four-year universities and to receive state financial aid to attend 4-year universities.

The State Board of Education acted in February 2005 on the Roundtable’s resolution and adopted improvements to the course and credit requirements for a high school diploma effective with students entering high school in 2006 (Graduating

Class of 2010). The Indiana General Assembly took action to make Core 40 the required curriculum for all students with an opt-out provision and a requirement for admission to Indiana four-year public Universities by passing legislation April 2005. These requirements affect students entering high school in 2007 (Graduating Class of 2011).

**Financial Aid Incentives and Diploma Recognition** – Indiana restructured state college financial aid policies to provide incentives for students to complete Core 40 and Academic Honors course requirements. Students who graduate high school with a general diploma can receive grants of up to 80% of approved tuition and fees, students who graduate from high school with Core 40 and a GPA of at least 2.0 on a 4.0 scale can receive grants of up to 90% of approved tuition and fees; students graduating with Core 40 with Academic Honors or Core 40 with Technical Honors and a GPA of at least 3.0 on a 4.0 scale can receive grants of up to 100% of approved tuition and fees. Diploma recognition emblems also were added to recognize students who complete these more rigorous requirements.

**21st Century Scholars Program** – Indiana created the Twenty-first Century Scholars program in 1990 to:

- eliminate the financial barrier to college;
- challenge students to work hard academically;
- challenge students to stay in school and out of trouble;
- give students another reason to stay on track for high school graduation; and
- help students take the steps necessary to get to and through college.

Students must pledge to graduate with an Indiana high school diploma from a high school recognized by the Indiana Department of Education; achieve a cumulative high school GPA of at least 2.0 on a 4.0 scale; not use illegal drugs or alcohol or commit a crime; apply for admission to an eligible Indiana college, university or proprietary school as a high school senior; and apply on time for federal and state financial aid. In return, Indiana pledges to provide up to four years of undergraduate college tuition assistance to any participating Indiana college or university.

21st Century Scholars differs from other “merit-based” scholarships in a significant way: it provides clear and early signals to students of why they should prepare for a college education, accompanied with supports and information that help make that possibility a reality. Parent involvement and support is also a key component of this successful program.

**Advanced Placement (AP) and PSAT** – In the early 1990’s the state of Indiana implemented additional efforts to increase the number of students going on to college including paying AP exam fees (math, science, English) and paying the exam fee for students to take the PSAT. The number of students participating in AP has doubled since 2000, and around 60% of high school juniors take the PSAT each year.

**Career and College Communication** – Beginning with efforts to assist families with understanding college admission test information, the state undertook a comprehensive effort to provide students and families with more relevant and frequent communication about college – including why it’s important and how to get there.

For more than 25 years, Learn More Indiana (previously ICPAC) has served as a statewide communication effort to support the state’s goal of raising the educational attainment of Hoosiers. Learn More Indiana provides information—focused on academic success, planning and paying for college, exploring careers, and more—in print, in person, through partnerships and on the Web to get more Hoosiers to and through college.

This effort is made possible through a partnership of the Indiana Commission for Higher Education, the Indiana Department of Education, the Indiana Department of Workforce Development and the State Student Assistance Commission of Indiana, with additional support from Indiana’s colleges and universities, USA Funds Inc. and the Lumina Foundation for Education—all working together to provide information that supports learning.



## **Indiana's College Success Coalition—College Access Challenge Grant**

Community members across Indiana are coming together for a common purpose—to increase students' and families' awareness and knowledge of the steps necessary to get to and through college. Regional "College Success Coalitions" are forming as part of an outreach effort by Learn More Indiana made possible by a federal College Access Challenge Grant from the U.S. Department of Education. The grant is helping expand the network of individuals and organizations supporting students and families to college success. To date, there are already more than 500 coalition members statewide.

The Coalition brings together organizations, businesses and individuals to work together in local communities to focus on college access, opportunity and success efforts for students. The Coalition aims to help more students know the steps it takes to get to college and succeed. Coalition members work together to:

- **Communicate:** Raise awareness among students and their families about available opportunities and resources.
- **Convene:** Meet new people in the community through networking opportunities.
- **Collaborate:** Share ideas, coordinate events, and discuss ways to enhance communities. Strengthen your relationships among business leaders and community organizations.

As part of Coalition efforts, members around the state took part in a "Cash for College" push in early 2009. Efforts centered on families filling out the FAFSA—on time and correctly—by the state's March 10<sup>th</sup> deadline. These strategies included:

- **Online step-by-step FAFSA Videos**—available at [www.learnmoreindiana.org/cashforcollege](http://www.learnmoreindiana.org/cashforcollege), provide easy-to-understand instructions for completing the FAFSA. Seven short videos walk students and families through each section of the FAFSA and provide answers to commonly asked questions. The website also provides additional information on paying for college.
- **FAFSA Friday**—This push gives families the opportunity to get additional help filling out the FAFSA before the March 10 deadline. Learn More Indiana hosts the statewide webinar. During the event, college financial aid advisors are available via live chat to answer questions pertaining to the FAFSA.
- **College Goal Sunday** – Celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> year, to provide Hoosiers with assistance through the maze of college financial aid, Indiana created College Goal Sunday. College Goal Sunday is a program that helps college-bound Indiana students complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). In 2009, Indiana's College Success Coalition helped College Goal Sunday in its efforts to provide on-site help from financial aid experts, primarily Indiana colleges and universities. College Goal Sunday is a charitable collaboration involving the State Student Assistance Commission, 21st Century Scholars, Indiana Student Financial Aid Association, and Learn More Indiana. The program is currently co-funded by Lilly Endowment, Lumina Foundation for Education, and USA Funds, three Indiana-based non-profits with particular interest in higher education.

As a result of Indiana's increased attention to the number of FAFSA filers, the number of FAFSAs filed in Indiana by the March 10 deadline has increased by 41%. Nearly 7,000 videos were watched during FAFSA Friday 2009, with 252 families logged in to chat and ask questions of college financial aid advisors.

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