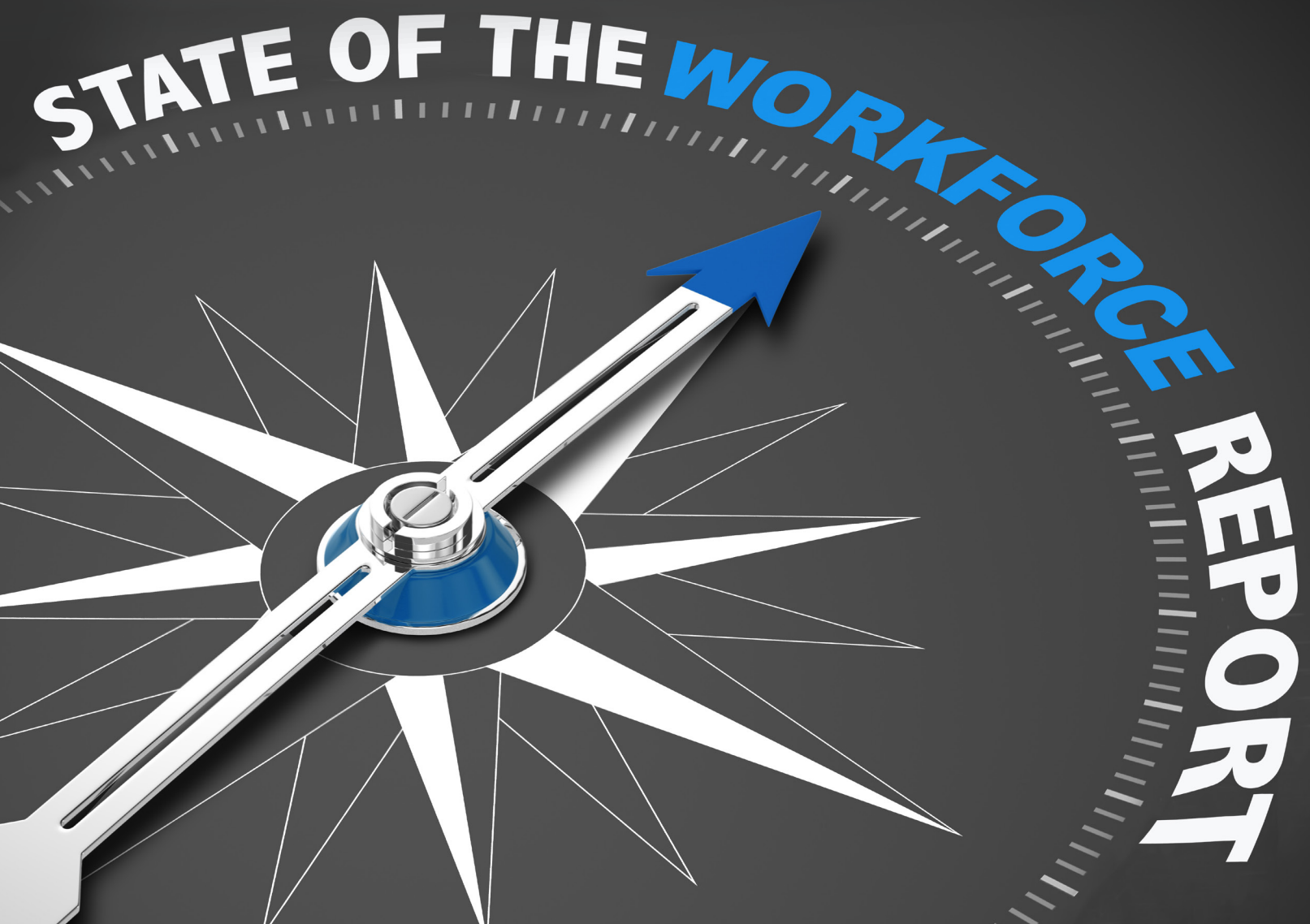




Playing to our strengths as a
21st Century Talent Region



Navigating Beyond 2020

ABOUT YOUR NORTHWEST INDIANA WORKFORCE BOARD

The Northwest Indiana Workforce Board (NWIWB) is comprised of business, education, labor, community, and economic development leaders responsible for the strategic vision of workforce development and governance of WorkOne Centers in Northwest Indiana. They are also responsible for managing connections to key resources in the areas of workforce, education, and entrepreneurship. The board works to determine current and future skill needs together with economic developers, employers, and economists. The board represents Jasper, Lake, La Porte, Newton, Porter, Pulaski, and Starke counties.

MISSION:

To mobilize and integrate the leadership, services, and resources of the community to support workforce development.

This is achieved by:

- > Strategically planning and developing policy for workforce development
- > Overseeing regional workforce development system
- > Developing and allocating resources for workforce development
- > Participating in related economic development activities

VISION:

To have a workforce that is highly skilled, motivated and diverse, earning sustainable or higher wages and actively engaged in skill advancement and life-long learning.

GOALS:

- > Increase skills of current workforce to align with economic development strategies and key industry sectors
- > Improve employer access to qualified workers and awareness of training resources
- > Ensure youth in NW Indiana are positioned for continued education/learning and workforce success
- > Encourage and support an entrepreneurial spirit
- > Assure compliance and efficient operations of a workforce development system



BOARD MEMBERS

CHAIR

Barbara Sacha

Labor Relations Manager
ArcelorMittal, Burns Harbor

VICE CHAIR

Gary Olund

President & CEO
Northwest Indiana Community
Action, Crown Point

SECRETARY

Jim Clarida

Business Manager
IBEW Local 531, LaPorte

TREASURER

Karen Kopka

Director, Human Resources
American Licorice Company, LaPorte

STAFF TO THE BOARD

Lisa Daugherty

President & CEO
Center of Workforce Innovations

Mike Barnes

Chief Workforce Officer
Indiana Department of Workforce
Development

Debi Baughman

VP, Branch Training Director
Horizon Bank, LaPorte

Frank Cardello

Chief Financial Officer
Packaging Logic, LaPorte

Adam Collins

Plant Manager
Galfab, Winamac

Kevin Comerford

Director of Professional Development
Construction Advancement Foundation,
Portage

George Douglas

Consultant
Indiana Beverage, Valparaiso

Tony Ferracane

Vice President, Human Resources
Community Healthcare Systems, Munster

Matt Franklin

VP, TV Operations
Lakeshore Public Media, Merrillville

Louie Gonzalez

Chancellor
Ivy Tech Community College,
East Chicago

Sherri Green

Adult Education Supervisor
Merrillville School Corporation

Kristine Lukowski

Employee Relations Senior Specialist
Cargill, Hammond

Mike MacDonald

Consultant
Pangere Corporation, Gary

Travis McDowell

President
Metal Fab Engineering, Winamac

Justin Mount

Manager of Major Accounts
Indiana American Water, Gary

Anna Ortega

Director, Human Resources
NiSource, Merrillville

Arlene Pearson

Chief Human Resources Officer
Edgewater Systems, Merrillville

Shanita Starks

Deputy Chief of Staff
City of Gary

Africa Tarver

Director of Planning &
Development
City of Hammond

Martina Tovar

Area Supervisor,
Vocational Rehabilitation
Family & Social Services
Administration, East Chicago

Lori Tubbs

President
McColley Bennet Commercial
Advantage, Merrillville

Brenda Walters

Human Resources Director
Wastequip, Winamac

CHIEF ELECTED OFFICIALS BOARD

CHAIR

Commissioner

Kyle Conrad

Newton County

Commissioner

Kendell Culp

Jasper County

Commissioner

Kyle Allen Sr.

Lake County

Commissioner

Joseph Haney

LaPorte County

Commissioner

Laura Shurr-Blaney

Porter County

Mike Tiede

Pulaski County

Commissioner

Charles Chesak

Starke County

About the State of the Workforce Report Series

The Northwest Indiana Workforce Board presents the State of the Workforce Report biannually as part of its ongoing series of updates to the community on the availability of talent to meet the current and future needs of our region's employers.

This year's report is particularly timely as the region, state, and nation recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and associated economic impact. Due to the pandemic, we have seen challenges across all aspects of the workforce system including workers, employers, and educators. The hardships faced across the economy dwarf those felt during the Great Recession over a decade ago. Nonetheless, Northwest Indiana is positioned well for economic growth. Regional initiatives such as the recently created 21st Century Talent Region and the Ignite the Region economic development plan will help chart a path to come back from the pandemic stronger. The Northwest Indiana Workforce Board will continue its leadership on talent issues as we work with our highly-respected K-12 system and our first-rate higher education institutions to ensure that the talent base is created to fuel regional development.

The report that follows presents data and implications of the data in addressing five key questions for our region:

Who is Available for Work?

Where Do Our Workers Work Now?

How Prepared is Our Workforce?

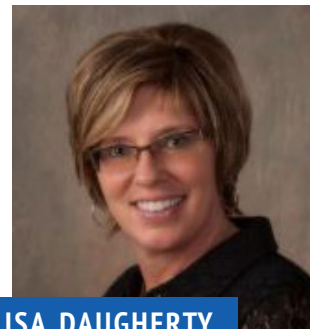
What Do Our Workers and Families Earn?

How Equal is Opportunity?



BARBARA SACHA

*Chair, Northwest Indiana
Workforce Board*



LISA DAUGHERTY

*Staff to the Northwest Indiana
Workforce Board*



REGIONAL TALENT SUPPLY

As with previous reports, we began our analysis this year by looking at the overall population and the changing dynamics from the previous report. An ongoing challenge for the region has been population decline, and this trend has continued since the last report. Lake County accounts for a majority of the regional population, but continues to see its population fall, down 1.8% since 2009. In total, four of the region's seven counties: Lake, Newton, Pulaski, and Starke, have experienced aggregate population decline over the past decade.

The overall region population decline does mask increases among the three individual counties, led by Porter County. Intra-region relocation, as well as outside migration, has led Porter to a 4.1% increase over the same period. La Porte and Jasper counties have experienced similar, though more muted changes as well.

Looking forward, the region's population is expected to grow, despite projections that the overall Chicago Metro Area will see population decline over the next decade. According to information from the Greater Northwest Indiana Association of Realtors, the number of residential properties



purchased in the region in 2020 grew by 11% from the previous year. While this does not necessarily mean there was an increase in new arrivals to the region, it is a positive trend given it took place during the pandemic. The region's projected growth is slight and dwarfed by overall state and national growth, but it does suggest that local initiatives and development may be reversing the population decline trend of the previous decade.

In addition to population decline, the region's labor force participation has declined, further contributing to the smaller pool of workers available to employers. Over the past decade, the percentage of residents engaged with the labor force has declined almost 2%. Coupled with the overall population decline, this amounts to a significantly smaller available workforce. We

must continue efforts to change this as a region because the labor force of the region continues to shift older.

As has been identified in previous reports, the makeup of the workforce in the region has been changing, with older workers making up a larger share of the workforce. This trend has continued since the last report. From 2009 to 2019, the percentage of the workforce over 55 grew by 7% and 38% of all workers in the region fall into this category. A much smaller share, 30%, of all workers are below 34 years of age.

The labor force continues to decline, conspicuously faster than the declines in the state and the nation. It will be important over the coming years to implement new strategies aimed at attracting talent and engaging the talent that is already here.

COVID CONSIDERATIONS

The pandemic has led to many changes in the talent supply of the region. Early in the pandemic, the region experienced an unemployment rate of nearly 20%. Since the April 2020 spike, regional employment has recovered but unemployment remains higher than the state and pre-pandemic levels.

The region's labor force experienced a similar spike, rising early on in large part due to the increase of unemployment claims as self-employed and non-traditional workers became eligible for benefits. However, as state and federal aid dries up, and many older workers or those with underlying health concerns may opt-out of returning because of exposure concerns, the region's labor force can be expected to remain depressed. While widespread vaccination will help, the older nature of the workforce of the region may lead to long-term labor force issues in Northwest Indiana. Such a change will make pursuing new strategies to engage disconnected populations even more important.

A frequent response we hear from employers is the difficult time they have finding talent. One area we can look at to boost the available population is those currently disconnected from the labor force. As we can see on the next page, as the education level declines, so does labor force participation. To better meet the needs of employers, we need to get these groups re-engaged.

Who is Available for Work?



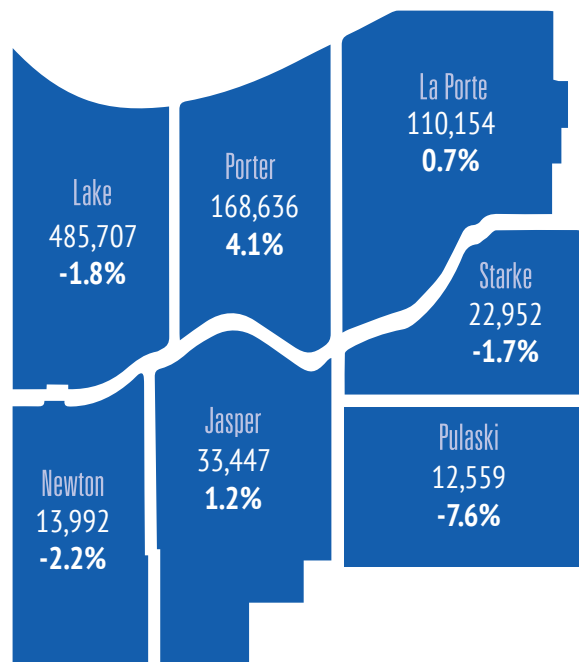
2019 NWI POPULATION: 847,447

Chicago MSA – 9.5 million

Indiana – 6.7 million

USA – 324.7 million

COUNTY POPULATION CHANGE SINCE 2009



NWI's total population has fallen over this same time period.

0.5%

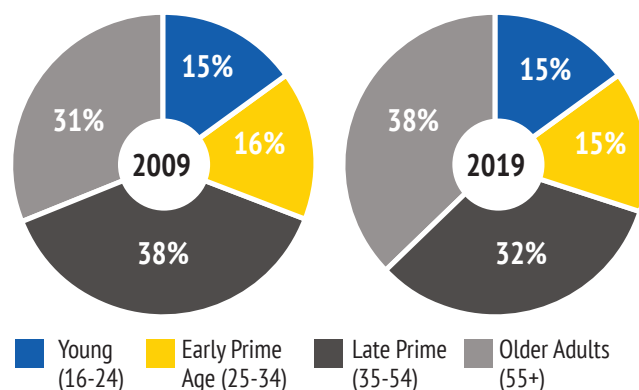


2019 Labor Force Participation Rate (16-64)

Rate Change since 2009

	2019 Labor Force Participation Rate (16-64)	Rate Change since 2009
Jasper	72.5%	-5.4%
Lake	73.1%	-0.5%
La Porte	67.8%	-4.9%
Newton	71.3%	7.1%
Porter	73.1%	-2.8%
Pulaski	71.5%	-2.3%
Starke	68.3%	-0.6%
NWI Total	72.2%	-1.8%
Indiana	75.0%	-0.7%
United States	74.4%	-0.2%

LABOR FORCE BY AGE GROUP



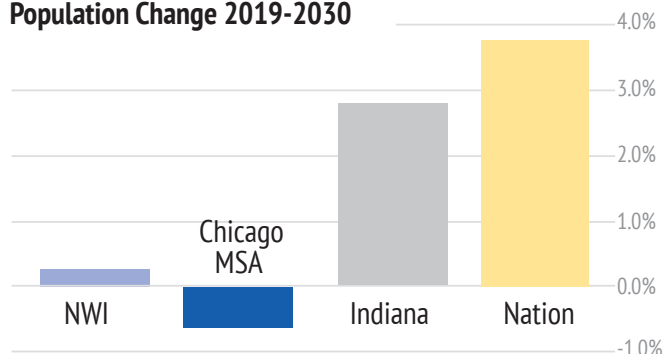
LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION BY EDUCATION-2019

	Less than HS Diploma	High School Diploma	Some College/ Associates	Bachelors or Higher	Total
NWI	53.1%	69.6%	79.0%	87.0%	75.3%
Jasper County	56.3%	72.3%	79.3%	88.5%	75.5%
Lake County	55.3%	70.3%	80.0%	87.5%	76.2%
La Porte County	44.3%	64.1%	76.7%	85.1%	69.9%
Newton County	50.3%	73.0%	73.4%	88.1%	71.9%
Porter County	53.4%	70.4%	78.7%	86.6%	77.1%
Pulaski County	52.0%	73.0%	77.1%	89.6%	74.6%
Starke County	52.3%	70.6%	73.9%	85.1%	71.0%

POPULATION PROJECTION

Projected Percent

Population Change 2019-2030



SECTORS, OCCUPATIONS, AND LOCATIONS OF WORK



Northwest Indiana workers have long been accustomed to mobility, and for this year's report, that remains true. Net commuters out of the region increased in 2018 and are up 8.6% compared to 2009. Quality of life, great transportation, exceptional schools, and policies at the state level such as lower taxes have made NWI a destination for residents leaving the Chicago area.

New transportation options, such as the South Shore double track and Southlake Corridor expansion make the trip even easier. While this daily out-migration could be viewed as a loss for the region, it provides a huge asset for attracting employers who can use this talent base while improving the quality of life for workers by reducing lengthy commuting times.

Increases in the availability of remote work arrangements make parts of the region an attractive destination as well, given the broadband infrastructure available to many region residents. However, there are still many parts of the region that are not currently covered by affordable, high-speed internet. These areas may be locked out of these opportunities.

The industrial distribution of employment in the region has not changed much since the last report. Healthcare remains the largest employer in the region followed by manufacturing and government employment. Looking to the future, employment in healthcare and manufacturing are expected to

continue to diverge. Healthcare is expected to grow by 9% over the next 10 years, while manufacturing is expected to continue to decline.

Many of the region's largest employers are household names, and many of these companies fall into the largest industries highlighted above. The list of the region's largest employers is made up of healthcare providers, steel producers, casinos, energy distributors, and education providers.

The most common occupations in the region are a direct reflection of the top industries in the region. The list is made of some industry specific occupations, such as nurses and retail sales people. In addition, there are many cross-cutting occupations that are employed across industries, such as janitors, and office clerks. Perhaps because high availability of jobs in these occupations, compensation for a majority of these occupations do not provide a livable wage for region residents. As we will discuss in more detail later in the report, this results in many residents being left out of economic success.

COVID CONSIDERATIONS

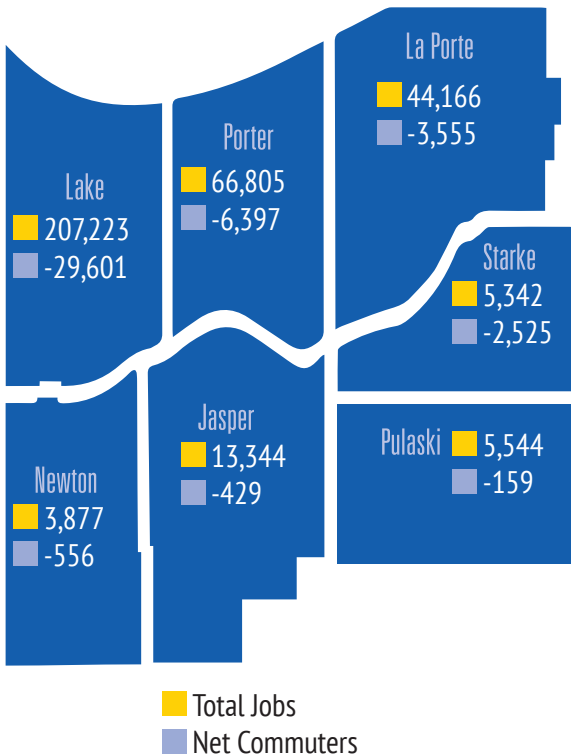
The extent of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic quickly becomes clear when looking at our occupational and industrial distribution. Industries that long served as the backbone of regional productivity saw demand for their products and services dry up. In some cases, their doors were even forced to close. The region has long been a manufacturing hub. However, for many companies operating in the primary metal, automotive, and energy sectors, demand decreased as the economy shut down. This is especially troubling for our region due to the integrated nature of steel manufacturing, and manufacturing overall. In Northwest Indiana, nearly 50% of all manufacturing jobs are in primary metal or metal product manufacturing. A slowdown at the top sends ripples down the entire supply chain.

Other industry clusters, such as the HEART (Hospitality, Entertainment, Accommodation, Retail, and Tourism), were forced to close or had to substantially change the way they do business. As we look at the region's top occupations, this becomes especially troubling as those most affected are prevalent in these industries. While a final accounting of the total number of businesses to close is not yet clear, what is known is that unemployment will likely remain elevated in this cluster as there are fewer businesses employing workers from the same sized labor pool. Programs such as Next Level Jobs will be imperative to assist residents in gaining the skills to transition to other occupations and industries.

The pandemic was not all bad for employers in the region. Despite the restrictions and disruptions in operations, many companies took it as an opportunity to reassess their current situations. According to data from the Indiana Economic Development Corporation, a state agency that provides support to new and expanding companies in the state, there were a number of businesses making investments in the region, both new and existing. Northwest Indiana is an attractive place for businesses. Despite the pandemic, these companies created nearly double the amount of new jobs as those who did so in the previous year.

Where Do Our Workers Work Now?

NWI 2018 NET COMMUTERS: -43,222



TEN MOST COMMON OCCUPATIONS - 2020

	Jobs	Median Hr. Wage
Fast Food and Counter Workers	13,105	\$10.41
Retail Salespersons	10,752	\$11.06
Office Clerks, General	8,840	\$15.34
Registered Nurses	8,491	\$39.17
Cashiers	8,483	\$10.81
Waiters and Waitresses	6,338	\$9.60
Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	6,096	\$13.38
Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	5,837	\$14.72
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	5,687	\$22.06
Stockers and Order Fillers	5,114	\$11.35

KEY EMPLOYMENT PROJECTIONS 2019-2029

INCREASE



Transportation Equipment
3,415–4,366



Outpatient Healthcare
19,471–22,905



Administrative Service
13,887–15,563



Food & Beverage Establishments
29,883–32,849



Healthcare
49,336–53,997

DECREASE

Manufacturing
45,890–43,697



Retail
38,981–37,291

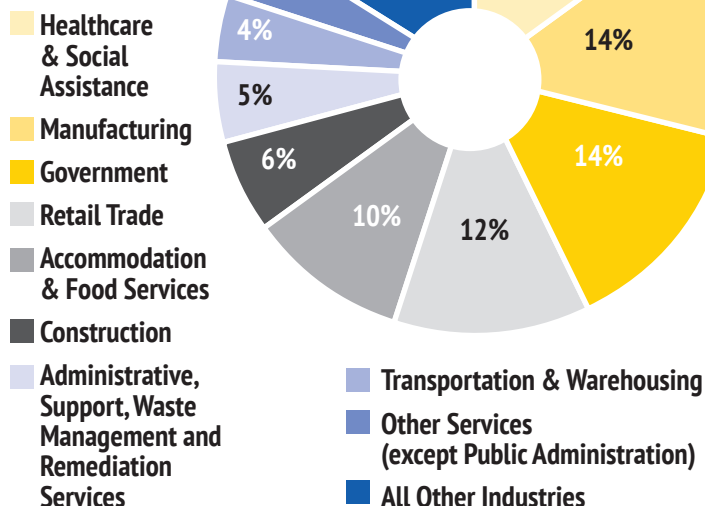


NWI'S TOP EMPLOYERS

Employer

Ameristar Casino Hotel East Chicago
Arcelormittal Indiana Harbor
Blue Chip Casino Hotel And Spa
BraunAbility
Community Hospital
Eastern Express Inc
Franciscan Health
Horseshoe Hammond
IU Health
Methodist Hospitals
Nisource Inc
Northwest Health
Purdue University Northwest

EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY - 2020



PREPARATION OF THE WORKFORCE FOR CURRENT & FUTURE JOBS



Northwest Indiana students are offered more opportunities for higher education during high school than ever before, and they are increasingly taking advantage of it. In 2018, more than half of HS students in each county earned dual credit with the exception of La Porte County. Leading the way were Jasper County (81%) and Pulaski County (76%). This coursework sets students up for success after graduation, whether it be in a Bachelor's or Associate's degree program, industry-recognized credential training, or directly into the workforce.

Despite these gains in post-secondary education at the high school level, that success has not translated to higher education enrollments. The number of students enrolling in regional

institutions of higher education has been dropping for several years and hit a new low in 2019. That year's total enrollments of 42,942 represent a 24% decline from just six years earlier. This is not strictly a regional issue though as rates have similarly dropped in the state overall. This is a troubling trend as simultaneous declines in labor force participation rates among this age group suggest more residents are disengaging.

However, there is good news at the post-secondary level. Despite the decline in enrollments, students at regional colleges and universities have had significantly higher completion rates. Indiana University Northwest and Purdue Northwest nearly matched the overall state non-main campus

change by increasing their on-time completion rates by 15.5% and 14.5%, respectively. More students completing their degrees on time means employers have access to more potential employees, and students are able to avoid higher education expenses.

In terms of awards earned, Bachelor's degrees continue to be the largest category in 2018, accounting for 48% of total awards that year. Perhaps in recognition of the increased demands of employers to match skills, though, the number of awards through industry-recognized certificate programs has risen over the past few years and stands at almost a quarter of all awards in the region.

COVID CONSIDERATIONS

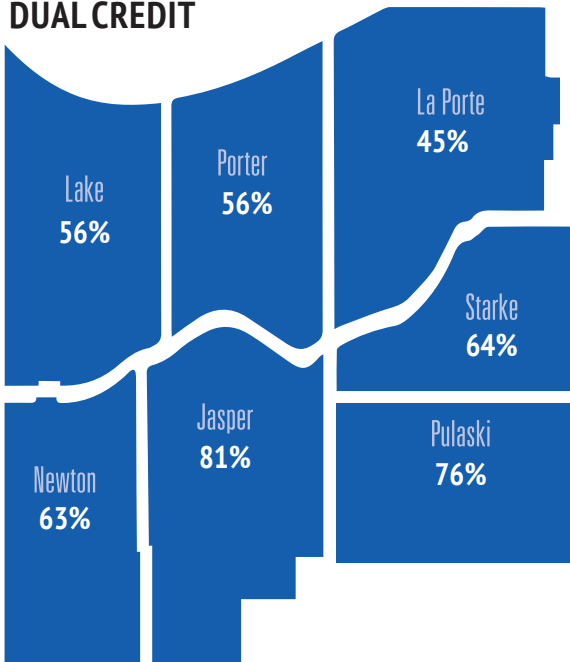
One of the biggest developments of the pandemic has been the rapid adoption of remote learning arrangements to keep students engaged while outside the walls of the school building. While the final results of the 2020-2021 academic year are not available, the student experience was drastically different than in the past.

Post-Secondary enrollments were another measure impacted by the pandemic. Anecdotally, many students, especially new to post-secondary education, elected to forgo remote learning in favor of a gap year. This trend is expected to result in further enrollment declines which will impact our regional colleges and universities should they not find new ways to reach students.

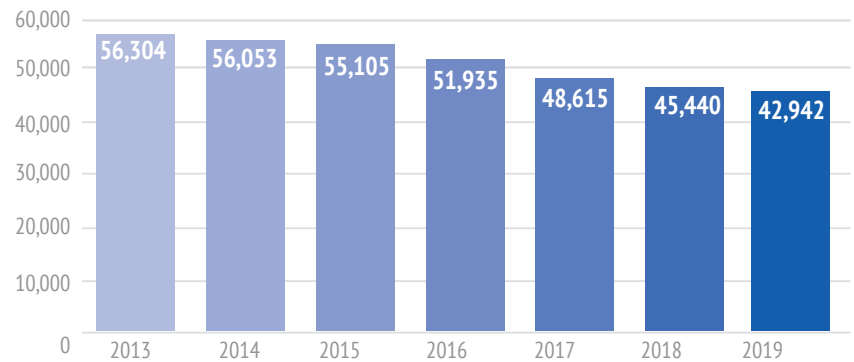
The pandemic also offers new opportunities: high unemployment, increased financial resources, and new remote learning options serve to make education past high school available to an even larger population of region residents.

How Prepared is Our Workforce?

PERCENT OF 2018 COLLEGE GRADUATES EARNING DUAL CREDIT



NWI COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY ENROLLMENT

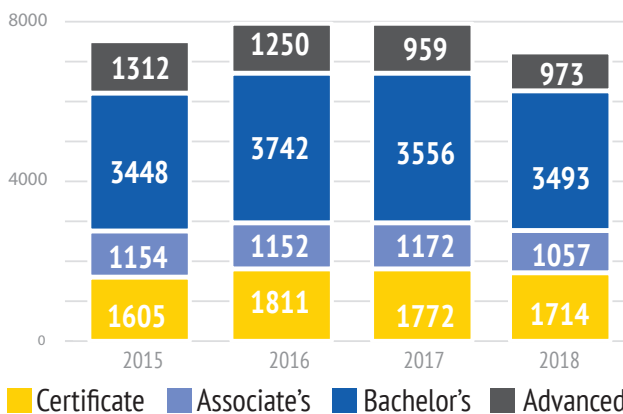


COLLEGE COMPLETION RATES - 2018

Campus	On Time Completion Rate	5 year Change	6 Year Completion Rate	5 year Change
Indiana Public 2 yr	15.7%	8.8%	36.9%	9.1%
Ivy Tech Lake County	7.5%	*	27.2%	*
Ivy Tech Michigan City	14.3%	*	33.3%	*
Ivy Tech Valparaiso	6.9%	*	37.7%	*
Indiana Public 4 yr (Non-Main Campus)	29.1%	16.5%	52.6%	7.6%
Indiana University Northwest	22.2%	15.5%	44.7%	4.0%
Purdue Northwest	24.6%	14.5%	51.4%	7.6%

*Data not available.

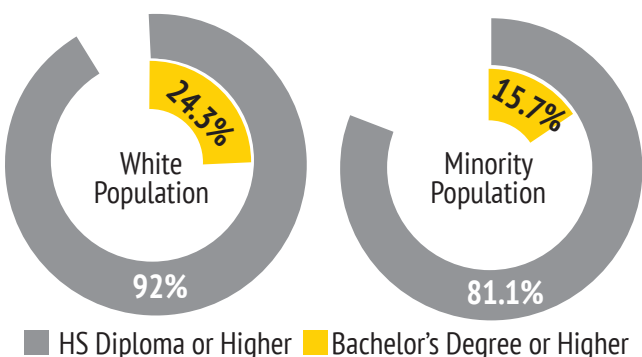
AWARDS FROM NWI COLLEGES & UNIVERSITIES



NWI POPULATION BACHELOR'S DEGREE BY FIELD - 2019

Science, Engineering and Related Fields	42,260	41%
Business	23,810	23%
Education	14,172	14%
Arts, Humanities and Others	22,516	22%

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT BY RACE - 2019



NWI POPULATION LEVEL OF EDUCATION - 2019

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-64
No Diploma	17% 12,895	10% 10,160	9% 9,792	9% 19,853
High School Diploma or Equivalent	39% 28,859	30% 31,239	30% 32,485	38% 86,942
Some College, No Degree	33% 24,366	26% 26,670	23% 24,327	22% 49,829
Associate's Degree	3% 2,326	9% 9,470	13% 13,399	10% 21,773
Bachelor's Degree	7% 5,519	19% 19,501	17% 18,455	14% 32,849
Graduate or Higher	1% 424	6% 6,459	8% 8,345	8% 17,149

BUILDING SKILLS & CREDENTIALS TO INCREASE FAMILY INCOMES

Northwest Indiana boasts more diversity than the rest of the state economically, demographically, and geographically. This diversity translates to many advantages in the region compared to the state and the broader Chicago region. Despite these advantages, opportunity has not been equally available to region residents. As has been noted in the past, more than 20% of households in Northwest Indiana earn over \$100,000 a year, and regional median household income rose an astonishing 16% over the past ten years.

Despite these gains, however, too large a portion of the population has been passed over by this prosperity. Over that same ten-year span, the regional poverty rate barely budged, dropping by only one-tenth of one percent. An even greater number, while not classified as in poverty, are struggling to get by. These workers trapped in low-wage



jobs, with limited financial assets and limited economic opportunity, defined as ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) families by the United Way, are only one emergency away from falling into poverty. These ALICE and poverty families are spread all across our region.

Economic opportunity is closely tied to work status as well as education. Higher levels of education and a “good” job have a direct link to economic prosperity in our region. By a “good” job, we refer to full-time employment that pays a living wage in an industry or occupation that provides opportunity for advancement. As we see in Northwest Indiana, both of these factors have a marked impact on financial well-being.

The poverty rate for families in the region stood at 10.4% in 2019. Education and good job opportunities make a difference in economic well-being. Families in which the householder has a high school diploma have a 3% lower poverty rate. For families in which the householder works full-time, this employment drops poverty rate an astonishing 7%.

While these links between education, good jobs, and economic well-being are well established, far too many region residents have not been able to gain solid footing. In our analysis, we found that poverty in the region is concentrated among minority families at more than three times the rate as white families and almost double the regional total.

COVID CONSIDERATIONS

The recovery after the great recession was uneven in the region, both geographically and among population groups. After many years of slow wage and employment growth for the bottom half of region residents, the previous few years saw these groups experience the fastest growth according to data from the Federal Reserve. The arrival of the pandemic and associated response, however, has reversed this trend, with lower income groups often holding front-line service occupations in shuttered businesses.

One of the most important factors to consider through the pandemic has been the distribution of hardship. Professionals and other high-wage white-collar workers were some of the most insulated from the effects of the pandemic. Benefiting from remote work policies, these occupations experienced the lowest levels of layoffs and have experienced a relatively quick return to more normal employment levels.

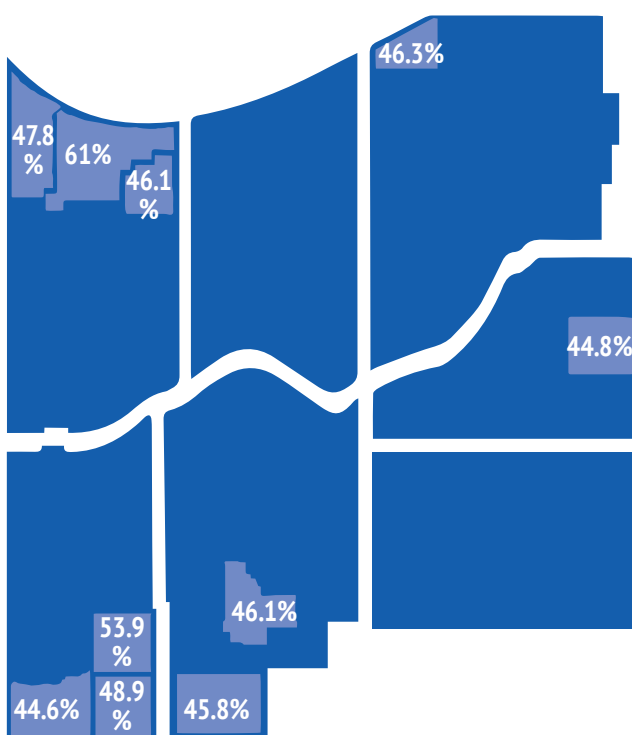
The occupations most likely to experience layoffs, furlough, or a reduction in hours due to the pandemic are those rooted in serving customers in a static, generally brick and mortar location. These occupations, such as those in the restaurant, tourism, hospitality, and retail industries, are some of the most prevalent in our region. Those same occupations are some of the lowest paying, offering far from living wages to those holding these jobs.

Dubbed the “K” shaped recovery, analysis of the pandemic economic impact and recovery to date has found that one of the most reliable indicators of pandemic experience has been the pre-pandemic economic standing. Those at the higher end of income have bounced back more quickly, while those at the lower end of income have struggled to even approach pre-pandemic levels.

As the economy returns to more normal operation. These industries and the occupations they employ will come back more slowly, and put job holders more at risk of exposure as they directly serve the public. Others may not be able to find work as their previous employer is no longer in business.

How Equal is Opportunity?

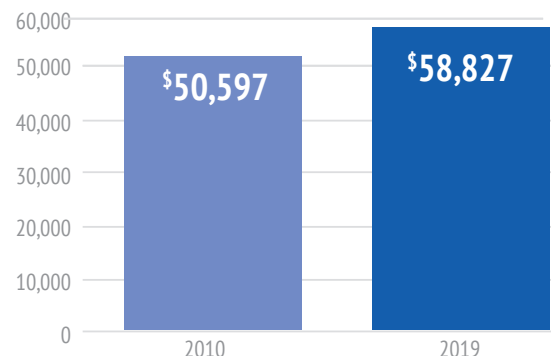
PERCENTAGE OF TOWNSHIP RESIDENTS BELOW ALICE SURVIVAL BUDGET



NWI POVERTY RATES

	2010	2019
Families	10.5%	10.4%
Families with Householder working Full-time	3.4%	3.3%
Families when Householder has more than HS Diploma	8%	7.8%

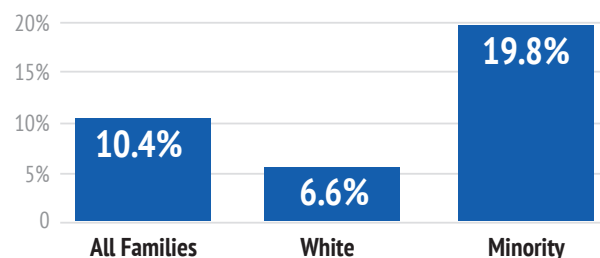
NWI MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME



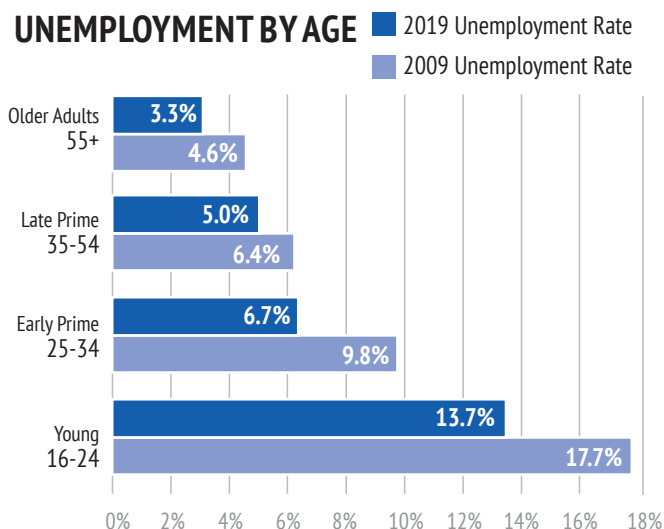
OCCUPATIONS BY FIELD

	2010 Median Hourly Earnings	2019 Median Hourly Earnings
Fast Food and Counter Workers	\$8.31	\$10.41
Retail Salespersons	\$9.19	\$11.07
Office Clerks, General	\$11.19	\$15.34
Registered Nurses	\$28.99	\$39.14
Cashiers	\$8.55	\$10.81
Janitors and Cleaners, Except Maids and Housekeeping Cleaners	\$10.71	\$13.31
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	\$19.16	\$21.99
Waiters and Waitresses	\$9.11	\$9.60
Laborers and Freight, Stock, and Material Movers, Hand	\$11.10	\$14.70
Stockers and Order Fillers	\$9.75	\$11.35

2019 NWI POVERTY RATES BY RACE



UNEMPLOYMENT BY AGE



MINORITY WORKFORCE BY FIELD

	Percentage of Region Workforce Minority	Average Annual Compensation
Manufacturing	25.9%	\$74,161
Retail Trade	27.4%	\$27,813
Transportation and Warehousing	28.4%	\$59,560
Management of Companies & Enterprises	26.8%	\$87,078
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	38.1%	\$32,067
Health Care and Social Assistance	33.7%	\$49,909
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	42.2%	\$28,800
Accommodation and Food Services	36.8%	\$16,513
Total	25.79%	\$46,004

Bright Opport

Throughout this year's review of Northwest Indiana's workforce, we have attempted to tell the story of where the region is since our last report and provide an outlook for the future. The years since our last report have been a roller coaster ride, with both highs and lows.



unities Ahead

The region ended 2019 in a strong position. The population decline that had been plaguing the region has leveled out, and there is the potential for growth on the horizon. More residents who wanted to work were able to, and individuals and families were finally experiencing income growth that had eluded the region throughout much of the recovery since the Great Recession.

Northwest Indiana's high schools, colleges, and universities also earned high marks. At the high school level, students are graduating more ready than ever to take the next step into the workforce or post-secondary education. At the college and university level, more than ever, students that begin their education are finishing with a degree or certificate, paving the way for higher wages and economic prosperity. Our institutions have also started new, cutting-edge programs to meet employer skills needs while allowing students to stay in the region.

On the other end of the spectrum, 2020 presented the region with a number of challenges that were in many ways, more trying than those of the Great Recession. During the onset and initial response to the pandemic, unemployment in the region rose to highs not seen before. Every industry experienced layoffs and unemployment, though some were hit harder than others. Many first line service industries, such as retail, food service, accommodation, and recreation, faced severe unemployment and business closures. Many people who held jobs in these close contact industries are still unemployed or fearful of returning to work.

Almost overnight traditional means of education were also turned upside-down. The pandemic changed the way education was delivered at all levels; K-12, post-secondary, and even adult education providers had to move out of the schoolhouse and into the digital classroom. While not without its growing pains, region educators were able to take this transition in stride, and anecdotally, student performance was not severely affected.



CONCLUSION

Despite all of the workforce and economic calamity of the past year, there is reason for optimism. Northwest Indiana stands well positioned to meet the needs of the economy of the future and prosper. The region has a number of opportunities to propel ourselves into the future, including:

Creating a Region Prosperous for All Residents

As we discussed throughout this report, there have been many communities and people left out of the growth and prosperity of the region. The pandemic has further highlighted the disparities in economic and educational opportunity across the region.

By committing to an equity agenda that ensures all residents have access to education, training, and good jobs, we can provide a hand up to those that have previously been left behind. One of the goals is to increase the educational outcomes for those that have traditionally been left behind. Achieving this goal will improve the region for all that call it home.

Infrastructure for a Workforce of the Future

The pandemic has also created new opportunities in education as well. While disruptive, the closure of education institutions and shift to remote learning has made an education accessible to a larger number of residents. We have also seen the development of hybrid courses in which students attend both in person and virtually. Should some of these changes become permanent, more region residents will be able to advance their skills in a manner that serves them best.

The pandemic has opened up additional resources to make higher education more attainable for all residents. Increases in federal, state, and local programs have helped to offset the cost or entirely pay for workers to advance their skills and move into better jobs. Looking ahead, these resources will help to transition workers at businesses that closed permanently into occupations.





New Opportunities for Work

Northwest Indiana's strengths make it an attractive candidate for business expansion and new development. As mentioned earlier, despite the pandemic, new and existing employers added nearly twice as many jobs as the previous year before the pandemic. This creates an opening for our communities to leverage that attractiveness with an eye to the future, attracting businesses and industries that provide good jobs with pathways for advancement.

The pandemic has also accelerated the development and adoption of new ways of work. Remote and hybrid work arrangements are more available than ever and open up more work opportunities for residents. It is now possible for residents to enjoy the low cost of living and high quality of life provided by the region while working for companies across the region.

Local Focus, Regional Progress

We are not dominated by one central city within the region. Unlike other regions in the state, Northwest Indiana is made up of many communities contributing to the region as a whole. While this creates some challenges, they are outweighed by the many benefits. Our region offers many different ways of living and different priorities.

Because of the groundwork laid before the pandemic through initiatives such as the Ignite the Region plan, Lake Area United Way's Level Up program, and our designation as a 21st Century Talent Region, Northwest Indiana was better able to manage the pandemic effects through coordination and cooperation between communities and organizations. New lines of communication have been opened and resources are more available. As we look ahead, we are confident that these connections will serve to fuel our region's recovery.



CENTER OF
WORKFORCE
INNOVATIONS

Prepared by:
Center of Workforce Innovations
2804 Boilermaker Court, Suite E
Valparaiso, IN 46383
219.462.2940

www.cwicorp.com

