The background of the slide features a large, faint, circular seal of the State of Illinois. The seal contains the text "THE STATE OF ILLINOIS" at the top and "1818" at the bottom. In the center of the seal is a depiction of a Native American man holding a bow and arrow, with a sheaf of wheat and a bundle of cotton on either side.

Higher Education Value Campaign

2022 H. Kent Weldon Conference for Higher Education

Francesca Brady, Senior Vice President, VOX Global

Charlee Beasor, Associate Commissioner for Communications and Outreach

Tuesday, April 12, 2022

REACHING HIGHER IN A STATE OF CHANGE



Completion

Completion has remained a foundational goal for the Indiana Commission for Higher Education for the past decade.



Equity

Educational equity means that life circumstances or obstacles should not dictate opportunity to succeed.



Talent

Learners need the skills and competencies to be successful on the job today and tomorrow.

KEY METRICS

The Commission will track success for *Reaching Higher in a State of Change* key metrics:

- ▶ **Educational Attainment** – Progress toward at least 60% of Hoosiers having a quality credential beyond a high school diploma
- ▶ **Career Relevance & Preparation** – Progress toward 100% of postsecondary programs requiring an internship, work-based learning, research project or other student engagement experience that has career relevance ★
- ▶ **Economic Impact** – Progress toward Indiana becoming a leading Midwest state for median household income

CAREER RELEVANCE METRIC

CAREER RELEVANCE IN COLLEGE

61% of alumni reported having an internship or work-based learning experience as part of their program of study (2020 Gallup-Indiana Survey)



REQUIRED EXPERIENCE

**78
PERCENT**

of Indiana's public associate and baccalaureate degrees require a career relevant experience



CAREER EXPERIENCES

Career relevant experiences give graduates what they need:

- Critical thinking
- Problem solving
- Professionalism
- Work ethic (NACE)



A student engagement experience with career relevance is one that:

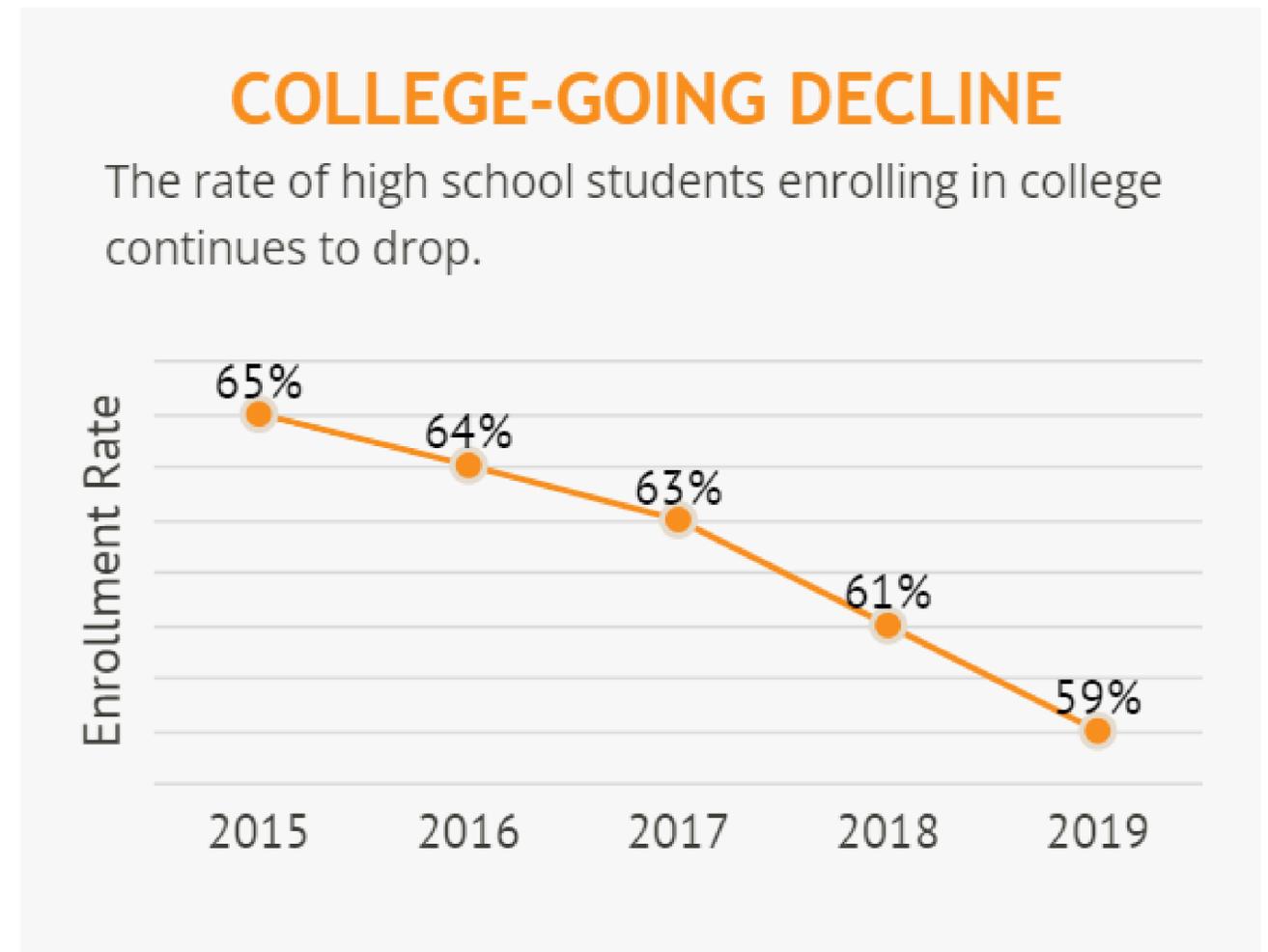
- ▶ Is rooted in an authentic real-world context and involves students in intentional reflection on that experience.
- ▶ Occurs within traditional classroom environments, in beyond-the classroom settings either on or off campus, or in virtual/online modalities.

- ▶ Places an emphasis on the development of multiple career readiness competencies defined by NACE:

- ▶ Critical thinking/Problem Solving
- ▶ Oral/Written Communication
- ▶ Teamwork/Collaboration
- ▶ Digital Technology
- ▶ Leadership
- ▶ Professionalism/Work Ethic
- ▶ Career Management
- ▶ Global/Intercultural Fluency

COLLEGE READINESS CONCERNS

- ▶ Indiana's college-going rate continues to decline, slipping below 60% since before we began tracking
- ▶ More Hoosiers than ever are questioning the value of postsecondary education
- ▶ The pandemic has created new barriers for students and adults enrolling in postsecondary education
- ▶ As fewer Hoosiers enroll, equity gaps widen



EDUCATION VALUE

Campaign

RESEARCH FINDINGS & MESSAGING STRATEGY

H. Kent Weldon Conference for Higher Education

April 12, 2022

THE CHALLENGE

Enrollment in education beyond high school – including two- and four-year degree programs and shorter-term credentials – *declined for the fifth consecutive year in 2019*, marking the largest year-to-year drop to 59%. And that is pre-pandemic, meaning 2020 numbers are likely to look worse.

As outgoing Indiana Commissioner for Higher Education Teresa Lubbers noted in a recent report about the enrollment decline,

“The ongoing attitude that a college degree doesn’t hold value for Hoosiers is a contributing factor that cannot be overlooked.”

THE OBJECTIVE + RELEVANCE FOR YOU

Help most high school students and adult learners see that post-high-school education *is worth it and accessible* to them to *drive consideration and enrollment*.

This matters because having a well-educated populace is critical to *having a thriving society*, from measures to democratic and civic engagement to overall physical and economic well-being.

METHODOLOGY

We undertook a multi-stage research process to unearth key insights about the college enrollment decline in Indiana.

Research

Reviewed **24 research pieces** on the topic.

Conducted **105 interviews** with audience members and experts on the topic.

Developed insights about relevant behavioral science heuristics.

Analyzed **1.4 million tweets, posts, threads and news articles** about the topic.

Plan

Conducted a **TORCH ideation session** to develop creative insights based on our knowledge of the audiences.

Presented **several creative concepts and tactics** to the client team and homed in on the top ideas for testing.

Test

Held focus groups with **40 high school students, parents and adult learners** and **10 in-depth-interviews** with educators.

Fielded a survey reaching **1,254 Indiana residents** to get quantitative insights from our audiences.

Deliver

Developed **a plan with key findings, language strategy/message recommendations** and communications and tactical ideas for starting a movement to address Indiana's enrollment decline.

WHAT GROUPS DID WE SURVEY?

We allowed natural fall out of demographics like age, ethnicity, and political affiliation to accurately reflect Indiana's population.

GEN POP	ADULT LEARNERS	PARENTS	STUDENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Indiana resident• Between 18-65 years old• No specifications about pre-existing college views	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Indiana resident• Between 18-65 years old• Completed high school but no further education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Indiana resident• Between 18-65 years old• Has a child / children between the ages of 16-18 living at home• Mix of postsecondary graduates and non-graduates	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Indiana resident• Between 16-18 years old• Currently in high school

WHAT WE HEARD

BELIEF IN THE VALUE OF COLLEGE IS ON THE DECLINE

The tone of discussion around whether college is “worth it” has grown more negative in the last two years.

The volume of these conversations also has grown. There is a heavy focus on costs, value and the perceived decline in the standard of higher education.

Yabaaa Dabaa Doo
@FutbolML

College is not worth the money and time. Give some basic education and start working. I don't know why they are so eager to waste 4 precious years of their lives in doing absolutely nothing and just wasting parent's hard earned money.

2:10 PM · Dec 6, 2020

Eudaimonics · 6 hr. ago · edited 5 hr. ago
Buffalo, NY

If you want to work any office job, you pretty much need a degree.

That being said you can make pretty good money in various office positions even with an English or History degree.

If it's worth the cost is another story altogether. If you go to some expensive private school and have massive debt for an ok paying job, it's probably not worth it.

If you go to a public university, then generally it will be worth it.

If you work in STEM, chances are it's going to be a good investment.

However, there's plenty of trades and other professions where you can make good or decent wages. Anything from mechanics to construction or even government jobs.

Still if you don't know how to market your skills, you might be stuck in lower wage jobs degree or no.

37 Retweets 5 Quote Tweets

alberta roberta
@robdyrdyke

i wish I could go back and tell my 17 y.o. self that learning career skills outside of postsecondary school is fun and also a hell of a lot cheaper

3:29 PM · Jul 27, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

4 Quote Tweets 52 Likes

PragerU
@prageru

Since 1963, college tuition has increased by 1600%.
Student loan debt is over \$1.5 trillion nationwide.
Besides medicine, law, and hard sciences, most majors don't guarantee employment after graduation.
So is it worth going to college? WATCH 📺

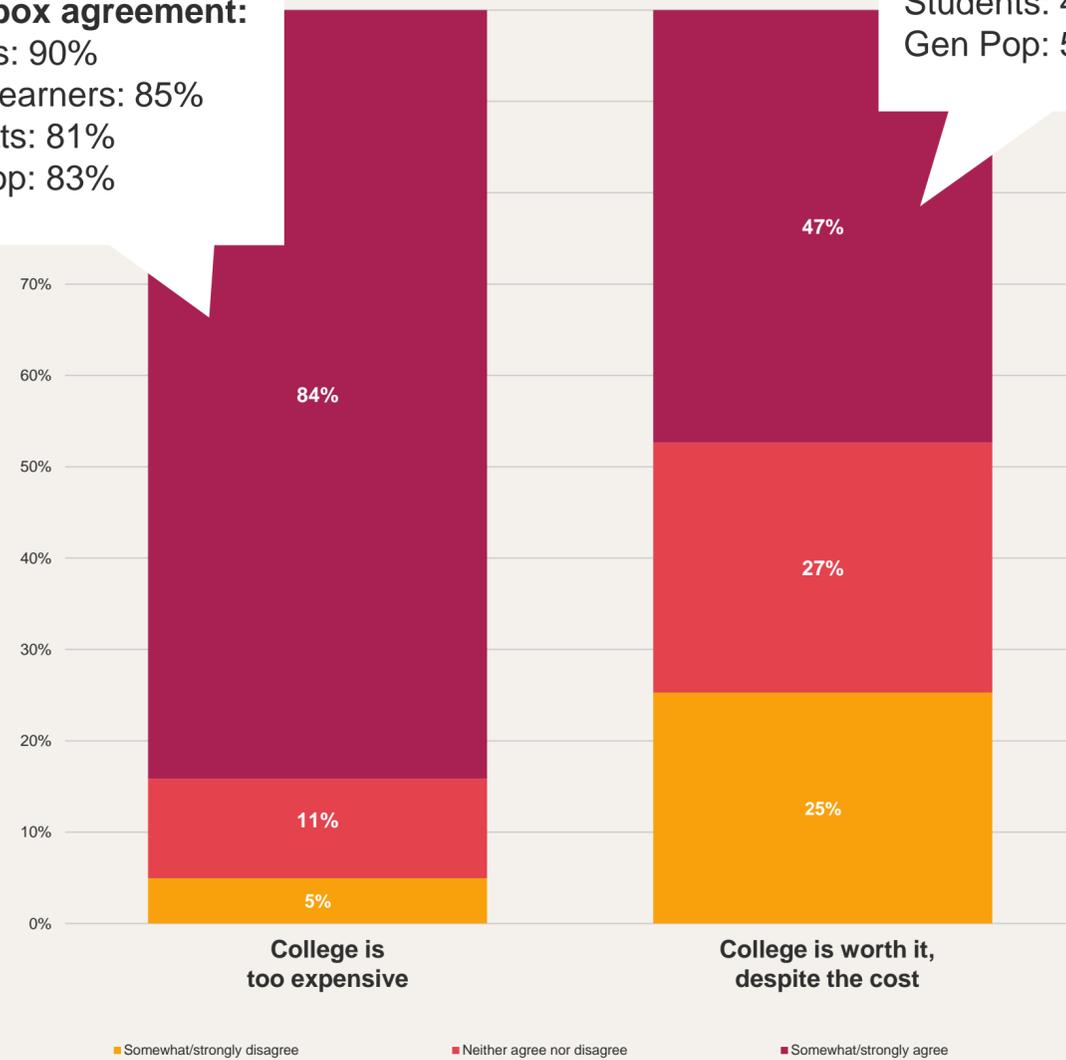
12:37 PM · Jun 8, 2021

37 Retweets 5 Quote Tweets 86 Likes

THE REASONS WHY WILL COME AS NO SURPRISE

College is too expensive

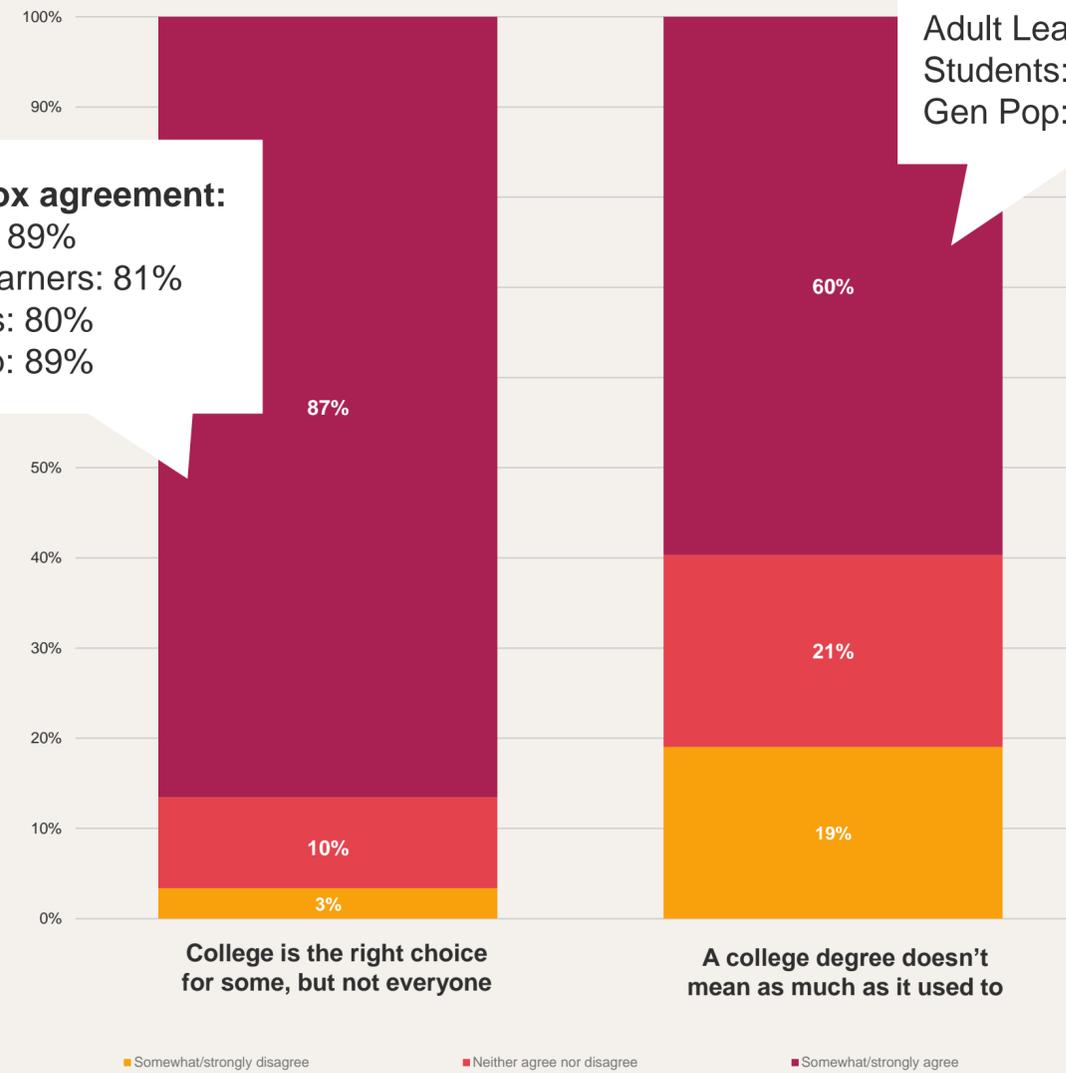
Top 2 box agreement:
 Parents: 90%
 Adult Learners: 85%
 Students: 81%
 Gen Pop: 83%



Top 2 box agreement:
 Parents: 60%
 Adult Learners: 46%
 Students: 43%
 Gen Pop: 53%

College isn't necessary

Top 2 box agreement:
 Parents: 89%
 Adult Learners: 81%
 Students: 80%
 Gen Pop: 89%



Top 2 box agreement:
 Parents: 61%
 Adult Learners: 58%
 Students: 43%
 Gen Pop: 60%

HOOSIERS DON'T BELIEVE THAT COLLEGE IS WORTH IT

College is too expensive

“As soon as they can start working and making money, they’re going to go that route. Our kids start doing that stuff — and they think they’ve got the world by the neck. They can start saving money and when they get their driver’s license, they can buy a pickup.”

Teacher

“Cost is a big concern, and probably rightfully so. I feel the media blows it up too. Teenagers pay attention to the news and are coming in worried about a lot of things.”

Teacher

“College is ridiculously expensive and there aren’t enough options. It’s a way to keep poor people poor.”

Adult Learner

College isn’t necessary

“I look at my friend that’s mega thousands in debt. She got another degree thinking it would help her in her job, money-wise, and it didn’t do anything.”

Adult Learner

“You can do a lot of careers and not go to college. Sometimes it’s worth it, but for what I want to do, it isn’t.”

High School Student

“Again, I do not feel that college or universities have an educational curriculum that can benefit me in ways to justify the significant number of years I would then be in debt paying off that education. Simply put, in today’s society, there are a multitude of ways to bring in decent income that in no way rely on traditional education.”

Adult Learner

THIS TRANSLATES TO LOW CONSIDERATION AMONG TARGET AUDIENCES

Indiana sees another statewide drop in college enrollment
 Four-year institutions saw a 1.3% drop while two-year schools saw a 7.1% decline.

College Enrollment For Hoosier High Schoolers Is Still Going Down. It Will Likely Get Worse.
 APRIL 26, 2021
 JEANIE LINDSAY

Indiana Sees Another Statewide Drop in College Enrollment
 Fall enrollment at Indiana's public colleges has declined again statewide, with only Indiana and Purdue universities' flagship campuses and some Ivy Tech Community College sites reporting gains.
 By Associated Press | Nov. 1, 2021, at 3:20 p.m.

Adult Learners	27%	Would probably/definitely consider enrolling in a 4-year Bachelor's degree at some point in the future
Students	50%	
Parents	71%	Would probably/definitely consider recommending that their child/someone enroll in a 4-year Bachelor's degree at some point in the future
Gen Pop	73%	

"I do not feel that colleges or universities have an educational curriculum that can benefit me in ways to justify the significant number of years I would then be in debt paying off that education."
Adult Learner

"I'm not interested in a career that involves that type of schooling."
High School Student

"I don't want to spend four more years in college just to rack up student debt and be broke by 30."
High School Student

"I don't have any career goals that I would want to spend years and my life's savings to go back to school."
Adult Learner

**SO, HOW DO WE MOVE THE
NEEDLE AND INCREASE
POSTSECONDARY ATTAINMENT?**

WHY THIS STRATEGY

We know that *the current conversation around education beyond high school isn't moving the needle* – particularly among skeptics. To resonate and break through, *we need to change the conversation*. That starts with meeting our audiences where they are today. Acknowledging and recognizing their beliefs, rather than delivering a message that contradicts those beliefs, is critical to *getting them to listen and engage* in the first place.

The recommendations that follow are informed by research with the General Population, Parents and Adult Learners and a High School Student sample. They work across audiences, including those who have not pursued education beyond high school.

And while they change how we talk about college – the way into the conversation – the goal remains the same: to increase attainment. We can do that by speaking in language that resonates and is relevant to our hardest to convince audience.

WHERE WE ARE TODAY

Audiences fundamentally believe that they'll be better off if they continue to pursue education after high school.

But we often present the facts as if we're entering a college debate. This causes our audiences to shut down.

Instead, we need to connect with them on an emotional level. *Less college debate, more dinner party.*



THE WAY FORWARD

To resonate and break through, **we need to connect emotionally with our audiences.** That means:

Reframing
THE WHAT
and **THE WHY**

+

Bringing
THE HOW
to the forefront

REFRAMING THE WHAT AND THE WHY

**You can't
convince people
to agree with you.**

**You have to show
them that they
already do.**

The “what” and the “why” are tightly linked with college. And college has a lot of baggage. It’s also one postsecondary option, among others, that the state of Indiana supports.

To get them listening, we need to align our message to how they’re thinking about postsecondary education: it’s about choice, individualism, and many paths to success.

BRINGING THE HOW TO THE FOREFRONT

You can't tell people what they need to do – especially as the government.

You need to show them that it's possible.

Cost is the primary barrier to college enrollment and audiences say they don't know "how" to take advantage of the opportunities available to them. It feels like the onus is on them to find support. They need someone in their corner helping them through the process.

Emphasizing the "how" is critical to opening more Hoosiers up to the possibility of college.

NARRATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

Pillars:

Relevant

Valuable

Accessible

Tone

SUPPORT THEIR FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF IN INDIVIDUALISM AND CHOICE

Audiences want education after high school to feel like a choice that's theirs to make. This is particularly true of high school students, who are set on forging their own path.

To keep them listening, use language that aligns with their education mindset: it's individualistic and, ultimately, up to them.

If you say	They react	Instead say	Why it works	
<p>✗ No matter what your life plans and goals are, higher education is the one thing that can give you the power to accomplish whatever you set out to do.</p>	<p><i>“Seems like a 100% guaranteed thing and it’s not. For half the people I know, it did not. They aren’t even working in the field they went to school for. Their lives are a mess.”</i> - Adult Learner</p> <p><i>“I didn’t like that you need a college degree to get a better job. No, you don’t.”</i> - Adult Learner</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Wherever you want to go, there’s no one way to get there. ✓ No one’s journey is the same. ✓ After high school, you decide what comes next, and there are endless paths you could take. 	<p><i>“I like the emphasis on how many options you have, how many different routes college can be – it can be a trade school or online courses.”</i> - High School Student</p> <p><i>“It struck my interest to know there are different routes I can take.”</i> - Adult Learner</p>	<p>87% Believe “education is a personal choice that looks different for everyone.”</p>

DISPEL THE “COLLEGE = 4 YEARS, \$200+K” MYTH

They think of college in a narrow way (4-years, on campus, elite), so to make it feel less daunting and get them to see it as an option that makes sense in the context of their own life, we need to broaden their view of what college can be.

That’s why language that brings to life all the different formats and timelines people can make college a reality resonates; it also gets them to connect the dots, understanding these options would be less expensive than a 4-year, on-campus experience.

Because they say	Language to use	Why it works
<p><i>“College to me was just an elite platform – if you could even get there.”</i></p> <p>- Adult Learner</p> <p><i>“When I think of college, I think of going off to school, staying there for 4 years. If that’s not a big time commitment, then I don’t know what is.”</i></p> <p>- Student</p> <p><i>“College has been ridiculously expensive. There aren’t enough options and if you do go, you’re in debt for the rest of your life.”</i></p> <p>- Adult Learner</p> <p><i>“A lot of kids think it’s the kind of schedule where you have to be there at the same time every day. They don’t know you can pick your schedule and have a job.”</i></p> <p>- Teacher</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ While a 4-year, in-person may be right for some, others are looking for something faster and more flexible. ✓ Opportunities meet the needs of people at all stages of their lives – including short-term, online, and part-time options. 	<p><i>“It’s very positive that there are options for everyone. It doesn’t have to be 4-years or a huge financial commitment.”</i></p> <p>- Teacher</p> <p><i>“I liked hearing the different options. My family and I always talked about the value of work, so it was hard to grasp the idea of taking time off work to go to college. A little bit of school every week would have been better for me.”</i></p> <p>- Adult Learner</p> <p><i>“I liked the emphasis on how many different routes college can be.”</i></p> <p>- High School Student</p> <p><i>“I do plan to do an online business degree later. I don’t need to go to a brick-and-mortar building.”</i></p> <p>- High School Student</p>

BROADEN THE CONVERSATION BEYOND JUST COLLEGE

If we're not explicit about the range of options, they may default to think we're just promoting college.

Critically, broadening the conversation helps to address the cost barrier: when we speak to a range of options – including trade school and certificate programs – our message becomes more approachable, as those options are viewed as lower cost and more accessible.

If you say	They hear	Instead say	Then they hear
<p>× Higher education</p>	<p>“College is what you think of when you hear ‘higher education.’” - Adult Learner</p> <p><i>“High school kids think of it as college – they don’t necessarily think about trade school or other options.”</i> - Teacher</p>	<p>✓ Education opportunities beyond high school</p>	<p><i>“You always have other options – you don’t have to go to college.”</i> - High School Student</p> <p><i>“Sounds like they want to give everybody the opportunity.”</i> - Parent</p>
<p>× [if you focus on just college degrees]</p>	<p>“I don’t think it has to be college. Clear it up to say extra training rather than just college.” - High School Student</p> <p><i>“A lot of major companies said they aren’t looking for college stuff anymore. People can add worth to their company but couldn’t afford college. They just want people that are going to better their company.”</i> -Adult Learner</p>	<p>✓ You can choose from options like career certifications, trade school, a 2-year associate degree, or 4-year Bachelor's degree</p>	<p><i>“So there are other forms of higher education that are more easily obtainable. They're more affordable and don't take as much time. They're more flexible.”</i> - Adult Learner</p> <p><i>“Trade schools and certification programs allow people to have access to them.”</i> - Adult Learner</p>

Pillars:

Relevant

Valuable

Accessible

Tone

THEY DISMISS THE HARD SELL ON WHY COLLEGE MATTERS

Many know friends and family who've found equal success taking different paths. They all also know not every job requires a college degree, so feel that pushing that path is unproductive – and potentially dangerous given the debt students can accrue

The facts won't set us free.

Audiences get emotional when we focus on the data – which is reflected in the frequency with which they disliked the below phrases in the survey.

If you say	They respond
<p>× People with a college degree make about 1 million dollars more over the course of their lifetime than someone without one</p>	<p><i>"I know what I want to do and I'm going to make more money and I don't need an entire education to do it."</i> - High School Student</p>
<p>× ...and have 50% increase in job security than those with a high school diploma</p>	<p><i>"I don't like that you need a college degree to get a better job. No, you don't need college."</i> - Adult Learner</p>
<p>× In 2020, 60% of jobs required education beyond high school</p>	<p><i>"You don't need a college degree to get a good job. I know someone who didn't go to college making the same as someone who did."</i> - Parent</p>

Arguing quality of life falls flat.

They don't believe that college is the only way to achieve better outcomes – instead, they associate outcomes like “stability,” “benefits beyond a salary,” and “creating a safety net” with BOTH college and non-degree programs.

"I know an adult who invested in college, and they have a ton of student loans and can't do anything different with their life."
Parent

"Right now, I see people with college degrees in the same position as people without a degree."
Parent

"There are lots of jobs that provide health insurance that you don't need a degree for. Walmart does. Like, really, any warehouse does."
Adult Learner

"I have a lot of friends that went to college and can't afford a house."
Adult Learner

A HARD SELL ON EDUCATION'S LONG-TERM VALUE INVITES PUSHBACK

They are ready with anecdotes of people they know or have heard of who've achieved these same metrics without a formal education.

And focusing on long-term benefits – be it financial returns or more stability – can feel too far in the future to be relevant or motivate action today, particularly for high school students; they're more concerned about what it means for them in the now.

If you suggest education leads to ...	With language like ...	They push back
<i>A higher earning potential</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ It can mean a higher earning potential. ✗ People with a college degree make about 1 million dollars more over the course of their lifetime than someone without one. ✗ A career path with higher pay and benefits 	<p><i>“You don’t have to have a degree to make that kind of money. I mean there’s other trades out there that people do and people on social media make millions and a lot of them didn’t even finish school.”</i></p> <p>- <i>Adult Learner</i></p>
<i>Job security</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ ...and have 50% increase in job security than those with a high school diploma ✗ Future-proof your job prospects 	<p><i>“There’s a lot of cases that you graduate college and don’t get into the career field you want, and you don’t have astounding success.”</i></p> <p>- <i>High School Student</i></p> <p><i>“High school students don’t care as much about that.”</i></p> <p>- <i>Teacher</i></p>
<i>Stability (a safety net, benefits, etc.)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✗ It can also mean more stability ✗ Roles that require education beyond high school also tend to be ones with benefits beyond a salary, like health insurance and paid time off. ✗ ...comfortably pay for expenses 	<p><i>“There are a whole lot of jobs that offer paid time off that don’t require college.”</i></p> <p>- <i>Parent</i></p> <p><i>“Benefits like paid time off – I’m not sure that’s something they’re [my students] thinking about right now.”</i></p> <p>- <i>Teacher</i></p>

A SOFTER PITCH ABOUT FUTURE “OPPORTUNITIES” FALLS FLAT TOO

They appreciate the positivity and less hardline approach that speaking definitively about higher earning potential or quality of life, but language like “opportunities will await you” is hard to grasp. They don’t see how they’ll get to that future state in the first place.

If you say	They react
<p>× That means no matter who you are, there are opportunities awaiting you</p>	<p><i>“Opportunities aren’t a sure thing. Vague – too far in the future Yeah there’s a future, but I need to know what I’m looking at now.”</i></p> <p>- Adult Learner</p> <p><i>“If you say expand opportunities, it’s like great, but how do I do that?”</i></p> <p>- Adult Learner</p>

FOR AUDIENCES, IT'S ABOUT GETTING THEIR "FOOT IN THE DOOR"

For an audience that feels like many opportunities are closed to them, the idea of education "opening doors" is immensely resonant.

It feels like an immediate, tangible benefit – a "step 1" – compared to "opportunities" or "stability," which are harder to grasp.

It also aligns with the idea that there are many pathways to take—and education can help you get on the one that's right for you.

Language to use	In their own words
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ No matter what you pick, you're becoming a stronger candidate for what's next, helping get your foot in the door to the career – and life – you want✓ Education beyond high school can help open doors✓ Education after high school expands what you're eligible for in the first place	<p><i>"Getting your foot in the door is step 1."</i> - Parent</p> <p><i>"Opening doors is like something that's encouraging me to walk through and for me to have an opportunity."</i> - Teacher</p> <p><i>"It opens doors. My college degree opened doors to bigger better opportunities. It provides different avenues to different careers."</i> - Parent</p> <p><i>"Once you get your foot in the door, you can keep going and move up."</i> - Adult Learner</p> <p><i>"I like that it opens doors. Opens doors to more options."</i> - Teacher</p> <p><i>"The more skills you have, the more doors you can knock on."</i> - Adult Learner</p>

SHOW THE DOORS WILL STAY OPEN, PROVIDING LONG-TERM FLEXIBILITY

What resonates across the board is the promise of flexibility and having the option to change your mind in the future. In other words, education beyond high school gives you more control over your future.

Language to use	In their own words
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Education can help open doors, and leave them open, providing you with flexibility and control, now and into the future.✓ You learn not just how to do one job, but how to apply a skillset to many jobs. That gives you the flexibility to make a change if you want down the line.	<p><i>“I talk a lot about this with my students. Just because you make a decision now doesn’t mean it’s what 30-year-old you wants. But you want to make sure you have lot of options.”</i></p> <p>- Teacher</p> <p><i>“It’s true – the more skills you have, the more attractive you are to prospective employers. You can’t ever have too many skills.”</i></p> <p>- Adult Learner</p> <p><i>“I like that they talked about flexibility and training to prepare students to go down one path and if they realize that’s not right for them, they have the flexibility to change.”</i></p> <p>- Teacher</p>

Pillars:

Relevant

Valuable

Accessible

Tone

HIGHLIGHTING RESOURCES IS A GOOD START TO THE COST CONVERSATION

With cost as the primary barrier to enrollment, any opportunity to raise awareness of available “scholarships, grants, and aid” is helpful.

Lexicon Spotlight:

“Manageable” feels more credible than “affordable.”

If you say	They react	Instead say	Why it works
✗ Scholarships, grants, and aid can make the cost of your education in Indiana more affordable .	<i>“What’s affordable for me is not affordable for other people.”</i> - <i>Adult Learner</i>	✓ Scholarships, grants, and aid can make the cost of your education in Indiana more manageable .	<i>“I’m not sure it can be affordable, so manageable feels better.”</i> - <i>High School Student</i> <i>“If it’s more manageable then it’s less of a weight you have to pay off.”</i> - <i>High School Student</i>

IT'S NOT ENOUGH TO JUST SAY SCHOLARSHIPS EXIST

People recognize that scholarships and aid exist, but they are not sure how to make those resources work for them. Many brought up tedious application processes, confusion over what scholarships they're eligible for, and difficulty filling out the FAFSA.

*"I applied to 82 scholarships – and nothing."
Adult Learner*

*"My first thought was if they offer assistance, how can I get it? It's not easy to get."
Adult Learner*

*"Just because they exist doesn't mean they are available. It just means they exist."
Teacher*

*"Having someone to help you and display your options for you would be nice"
Student*

*"Scholarships are only meant for special people."
Adult Learner*

HIGHLIGHT THERE'S SOMEONE TO HELP NAVIGATE THE PROCESS

All agree there's a general lack of support in navigating the process. There's also high enthusiasm about the idea of more support from mentors and counselors who can help make scholarships, grants, and aid – and thus education – feel more accessible.

Language to use	In their own words
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ But making education a reality also means having the support to get started – and along the way.✓ From finding programs that will help lead to the career you want to connecting you with the right financial assistance opportunities, there are mentors, counselors, and people who've been there before, who can help you navigate the process.	<p><i>“Having a counselor or somebody helping you display options for you would be nice. I could always talk to somebody about something like that.”</i></p> <p>- High School Student</p> <p><i>“We never learned about anything about important things like this. It would have been helpful learning about it in high school or maybe if a teacher had talked about it.”</i></p> <p>- Adult Learner</p>

	Principles	Do Say	Don't Say
<i>The What: Relevant</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support individualism and choice. • Focus on “many paths,” not just college. • Dispel the “4 years, \$200K” myth. • Showcase flexibility and affordability of all options. • Avoid the notion of lifelong learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓“There are many paths you can take, depending on what's right for you.” ✓“You can choose from options like career certifications, trade school, a 2-year Associate degree, or a 4-year Bachelor's degree.” ✓“Many programs can be completed in as little as 2 to 3 semesters and are designed so you can balance them part-time or in the evenings along with a job.” ✓“With many programs, you can learn at your own pace, taking as much or as little time as you need – and some programs are entirely online.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> x “Higher education is the one thing that can give you the power to accomplish whatever you set out to do.” x “Choose education today, so you aren't held back tomorrow.” x “Employers across industries are demanding ongoing education.” x “Lifelong learning is needed to keep up and prevent yourself from falling behind.”
<i>The Why: Valuable</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start by talking about the benefits of <i>all</i> education opportunities before pivoting to college. • Avoid a hard sell on long-term value, which invites pushback. • First talk about what education means for today, then pivot to what it means for tomorrow. • Highlight that education opens doors and keeps them open. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓“No matter what you pick, you're becoming a stronger candidate for what's next, helping get your foot in the door to the career – and life – you want.” ✓“Education can help open doors, and leave them open, providing you with flexibility and control, now and into the future.” ✓“You learn not just how to do one job, but how to apply a skillset to many jobs. That gives you the flexibility to make a change if you want down the line.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> x “People with a college degree make about 1 million dollars more over the course of their lifetime than someone without one.” x “Roles that require education beyond high school also tend to be ones with benefits beyond a salary, like health insurance and paid time off.” x “That means no matter who you are, there are opportunities awaiting you.”
<i>The How: Accessible</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge that cost is a challenge. • Highlight resources available to start the conversation. • Let audiences know there are people to help them navigate resources. • When talking about success stories, show the real struggle. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓“College can sound like an expensive choice, especially when you could instead be working and earning a paycheck.” ✓“Scholarships, grants, and aid can make the cost of your education in Indiana more manageable.” ✓“From finding programs that will help lead to the career you want to connecting you with the right financial assistance, there are mentors, counselors, and people who've been there before, who can help you navigate the process.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> x “Scholarships, grants, and aid can make the cost of your education in Indiana more affordable.” x “You can comfortably pay for expenses, like student loans, while saving for the future.” x “Each year, Hoosiers with financial obligations, family responsibilities, and other challenges find success—providing an example for others.”

ELEVATOR PITCH & TONE

Option 1: After high school, *you decide what comes next* – and there are endless paths you can take. But whatever you want to pursue, *education can help open doors and expand options*, today and tomorrow.

Option 2: Wherever you want to go, *there's no one way to get there*. Education can *help open doors*, and leave them open, providing you with flexibility and control now and in the future.

The Three O's of Tone:

- ***Be outright:*** Acknowledge skepticism, tell it like it is.
- ***Be optimistic:*** Positive framing works in our favor.
- ***Be open-minded:*** Avoid judgment of any path.

Pillars:

Relevant Valuable Accessible

Tone

BE OUTRIGHT AND TELL IT LIKE IT IS, ADDRESSING SKEPTICISM HEAD ON

High school students are being inundated with messaging about college daily, many adult learners have had negative experiences with formal education in the past, and even parents note that the state of education isn't the same as it used to be.

So, using relatable language that demonstrates we understand their perspective feels refreshing and will keep them listening.

What it looks like	Why it works
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ If you aren't sure education after high school is right for you, you're not alone.✓ Rightfully so, [college] can sound like an expensive choice, especially when you could instead be working and earning a paycheck.	<p><i>"We must acknowledge that school is expensive. Being honest is important."</i></p> <p>- Teacher</p> <p><i>"When you say 'it's going to be hard' – I believe you. It makes it relatable."</i></p> <p>- Adult Learner</p>

BE OPTIMISTIC: POSITIVE FRAMING DOES THE MOST WORK FOR US

We're better served focusing more on doors opening WITH education beyond high school than doors closing beyond it.

You say	They react	+Instead say	Why it works
<ul style="list-style-type: none">× Choose education today, so you aren't held back tomorrow.× Employers across industries are demanding ongoing education.	<p><i>"The future is unpredictable. You could be set up one way today and its completely different tomorrow."</i></p> <p>- Adult Learner</p> <p><i>"The word 'demanding' is off-putting. It's a little harsh."</i></p> <p>- Adult Learner</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Education can help open doors and leave them open.	<p><i>"You want to make sure that kids get the message that there are options and that their future can be bright."</i></p> <p>- Teacher</p> <p><i>"It's going to give you more opportunities."</i></p> <p>- Adult Learner</p>

BE OPEN-MINDED: IT'S CRITICAL WE AVOID JUDGEMENT OF ANY PATH

Suggesting that those who don't pursue education will eventually "fall behind" or lead a "simpler" life was seen as judgmental.

Not to mention, it also contradicts their anecdotal experience of friends and family who've succeeded without formal education.

Instead, emphasize choice, individualism, and many pathways that will help them create their own definition of success.

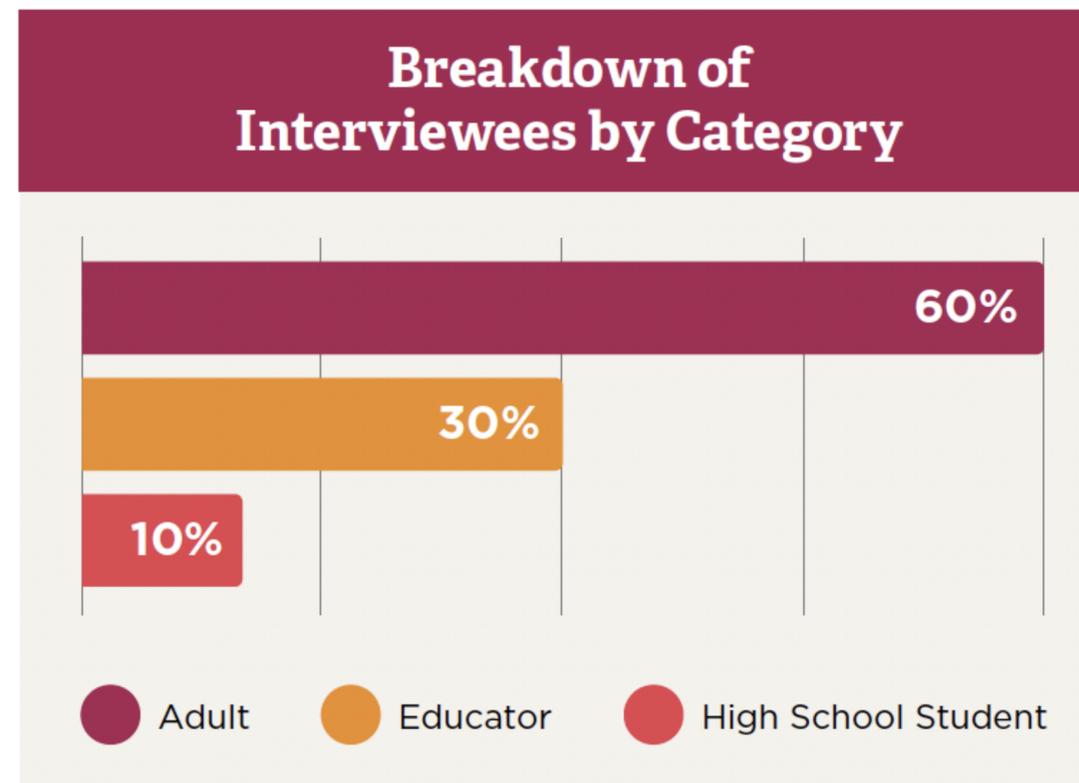
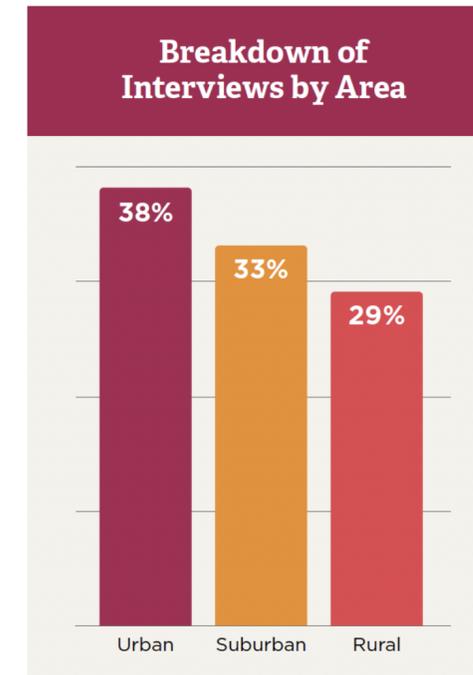
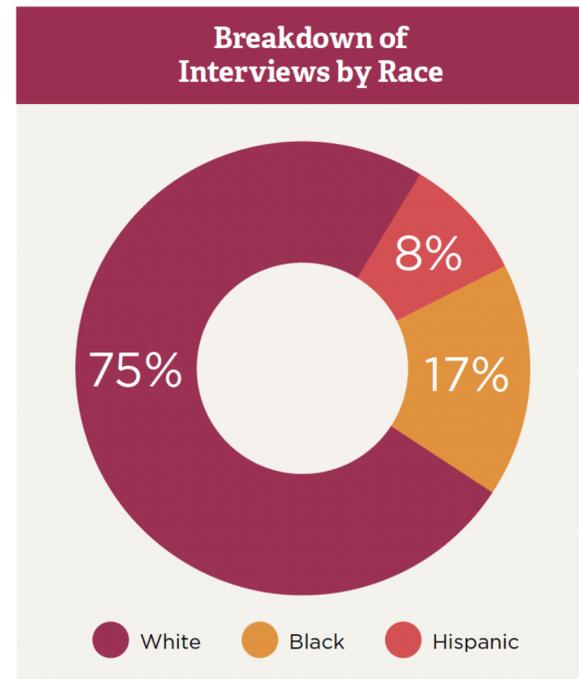
You say	They react	+Instead say	They react
<ul style="list-style-type: none">× Lifelong learning is needed to keep up and prevent yourself from falling behind.× Education allows for a career, rather than simply getting a job to earn a paycheck.	<p><i>"It's negative for them to say we as people are falling behind because if we don't continue our education."</i></p> <p>- Parent</p> <p><i>"There is nothing wrong with having a regular job. You don't want to talk crap about one thing to make another thing more positive."</i></p> <p>- Adult Learner</p>	<p>✓ No matter what you pick, you're becoming a stronger candidate for what's next.</p>	<p><i>"I liked that you can be a better candidate for jobs when you have more education."</i></p> <p>- Adult Learner</p>

APPENDIX

EXPERT IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Name	Title	Organization	Location
Tim Nowak	East Indy Achievement Zone Director of Youth Services	John H. Boner Community Center	Central Indiana
Sue Ellspermann	President	Ivy Tech	Central Indiana
Kate Lee	Executive Director of Education & Workforce	South Bend Regional Chamber	Northwest Indiana
Brienne Hooker	Executive Director	Jasper Newton Foundation	Northwest Indiana
Emily Werner	Probation Officer	Dubois County Courts	Southwest Indiana
Fred Jackson	Outreach Coordinator	Indiana Commission for Higher Education	Northwest Indiana
Maggie Stevens	CEO	Foster Success	Central Indiana
Karra Herring	Chief Equity, Inclusion & Opportunity Officer	State of Indiana	Central Indiana
Lauro Zuniga	Padre Estrella	Indiana Commission for Higher Education	Northeast Indiana
Kathy Huffman	Director of the EcO Network	Community Education Coalition	Southeast Indiana
Wendy Dant Chesser	President and CEO	One Southern Indiana	Southeast Indiana
Andy Terrell	One Stop Coordinator	WorkOne Southern Indiana	Southeast Indiana
Dennis Bland	President	Center for Leadership Development	Central Indiana
Seana Murphy	Consultant	CICF/The Learning Tree	Multiple Service Areas
De'Amon Harges	Founder	The Learning Tree	Multiple Service Areas

INTERCEPT INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS



The background features a large, faint, circular seal of the State of Indiana. The seal contains the text "SEAL OF THE STATE OF INDIANA" around the top and "1816" at the bottom. The central image of the seal depicts a landscape with a rising sun over mountains, a river, and a plow, symbolizing the state's agricultural and educational heritage.

Indiana Commission for Higher Education

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