

# Horizon Education Alliance

## At a Glance

The Horizon Education Alliance identifies and provides evidenced-based programming to regional schools and organizations in an effort to expand opportunities and improve the lives of Elkhart County, Indiana residents.

## Origin/Implementation

Elkhart County was perhaps the hardest hit area of Indiana during the 2009 recession; unemployment reached 20 percent, exceeding the national average. The downturn was so great, in fact, that President Obama visited the economically devastated county. “In response to the recession, more than 200 community leaders came together and identified education as the single most effective strategy for strengthening Elkhart County.” In 2012, Horizon Education Alliance, or HEA, a non-profit organization, was launched with a few innovative ideas and start-up funding secured from within the community. Today, HEA is a foundation with a \$1.5 million dollar budget, a bold vision, and a highly committed board of directors. All seven public school superintendents along with multiple business and community leaders participate in HEA in order “to launch and examine the outcome of innovative, evidence-based education programming for local residents from birth to adulthood.”

Bringing these stakeholders to the table was an early accomplishment. From that point, HEA’s founding director Brian Wiebe knew that sustained conversations between industry and education – not only at the board

level – was deeply important. For example, opportunities were established that allow business owners to talk with school principals and teachers. This led to educators touring local businesses with an eye toward developing lessons that connect curricula to real world applications. In this way, HEA facilitates communication and efforts among multiple stakeholders who share similar goals but who may not be accustomed to collaborating with one another or speaking the same language.

In addition to creating an environment for cross-sector collaboration, HEA identifies and examines proven programs from around the world. When deemed to be a good fit for Elkhart County, HEA recommends and initially funds these programs to schools or community organizations. While HEA does not run the programs per se, it does ensure that they are implemented with fidelity and that results are measured. As explained by Director Brian Wiebe, “We establish the relationship with

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*“We believe that innovation happens through collaboration, that our collective intelligence is greater than our individual capabilities. We are more process oriented than product oriented; our role is to help find and implement innovative solutions and processes that will improve the lives of all citizens in Elkhart County.”*

*– HEA Director Brian Wiebe*

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the national partner and stay close to the initiative early on. Once the superintendent or non-profit executive says yes to an initiative, we connect him or her to the national partner or philanthropist but stay engaged through continued monitoring and observation. Eventually funding might need to be assumed by the school or organization. The long term goal is that the system owns it and ultimately pays for it.”

HEA’s “birth to adulthood” programs are organized into three broad categories: Foundations for Learning, 21st Century Success, and Cultural Change. While the focus is on finding and offering research-proven education

initiatives, HEA's overarching goal is to "transform [Elkhart] county into a world-class place to learn, live, work and play."

A staff of 15 facilitates the work of HEA, including five retired school administrators who were brought on board as independent contractors shortly after the organization launched. These administrators coordinate multiple initiatives, and because of their extensive experience in the county's schools, they bring credibility and energy to the education initiatives HEA supports. Director Wiebe credits much of HEA's success to the work these retired school administrators do. In addition to these five positions, HEA staffs ten part-time and full-time employees including a research director and an assistant director.

In hindsight, Director Wiebe believes that the success of a foundation such as HEA is predicated on several key factors working together: vision, the ability to get multiple stakeholders to the table, privately funded financial resources, a feasible staffing model, proven programs and initiatives that are attractive and attainable, a process for measuring the progress and effectiveness of the programs, and the ability to change out programs that are not working.

## Results/Impact

HEA collaborates with its partners to collect quantitative and qualitative data on the effectiveness of the programs they initiate through a monitoring and evaluation plan that measures short-term results and long-term impact.

The HEA Impact Committee, established in August 2015, identifies shared community metrics and tracks population-level data for Elkhart County in order to measure progress towards their goals and vision. In addition to the positive impact many programs have had on students and the community, HEA sites cultural change as a significant result. "Since 2012, HEA has convened hundreds of community leaders from business, education, and non-profits to serve on committees, coalitions and roundtables with the goals of driving the cultural change necessary to transform our community."

## Contact

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## About IN-PIN

With backing from the Center of Excellence and Leadership of Learning (CELL) at the University of Indianapolis and in cooperation with the Indiana Department of Workforce Development, the Department of Education and the Commission for Higher Education; the Indiana Pathways Innovation Network is coordinated by the National Center for College and Career Transitions (NC3T), an organization experienced in all aspects of college and career pathways development.

The IN-PIN is designed to identify and share promising practices and replicable strategies that help support the development and implementation of college and career pathways systems. By bringing together leaders from forward-thinking schools, adult and postsecondary institutions, business organizations, workforce development providers, and non-profit organizations effective and innovative pathways can be designed or expanded to increase learner achievement and address workforce demands.

By joining the IN-PIN, organizations can accelerate their efforts to develop scalable and sustainable solutions that strengthen connections between education, employers, and economic development in order to prepare today's students for tomorrow's careers. There is no cost to join the IN-PIN. Visit [www.pinmembers.com](http://www.pinmembers.com) and click on the PIN tab to join.

