

# EDUCATION & TRAINING

Maintain a plentiful, prepared and globally competitive workforce by implementing cutting-edge, collaborative education and training models

*An Investment in Knowledge Pays the Best Interest*

– Benjamin Franklin

## The Foundation

### Addressing Assets and Challenges

The cornerstone to individual prosperity and a competitive regional economy is an educational network that provides all students with high quality, accessible education and training. Many Erie County students are not developing the skills they need to ensure workforce competitiveness and a sound economic future. Educational attainment rates lag compared with Pennsylvania and in the United States, and some residents

are not able to access or afford the educational and training programs that would make them attractive to the region's employers. These educational challenges are a drag on regional economic competitiveness. Low numbers of highly skilled workers and a workforce that is not able to adapt to new skills will ensure that the region's struggles to overcome poverty, manufacturing decline and the job/skills mismatch will persist.

## The Future

### The Vision

The transformation of Erie's education system began with the idea of education as a seamless P-20W system: Pre-K to grade 20 (high school plus eight). Myriad efforts have worked in concert to ensure that all residents can access training and education programs that lead to family-sustaining employment. Direct communication between educators and employers results in more students prepared for jobs through pay-for-work internships, modular programs and certificate programs. Major developments have helped to support the system's transformation: Schools are open at all hours so students don't have to go home at the end of the school day; libraries and gyms stay open, continuing education and GED classes occupy classrooms, arts projects and rehearsals bring life to the hallways. The digital divide has been bridged so all students have the same access to online learning and internet resources.

### Principles

These are the principles that guide the implementation of projects related to Education and Training:

- Bring together educational institutions and business/industry to integrate educational and economic opportunities from an industry-driven perspective;
- Support the development of an educational system that provides training to develop workforce-ready skills, creativity, and a global perspective;
- Invest in state-of-the-art technical training resources;
- Help families to prioritize education and develop a habit of life-long learning; and
- Position schools and school districts as anchor institutions and community-resource hubs by strengthening connections with housing and neighborhood programs and other nonprofit efforts.

### Background

Trends suggest that a disproportionate number of Erie County children are subject to risk factors related to their ability to learn and succeed in school. For example, children in economically stressed families are more likely to have difficulty succeeding in school – and 28% of Erie County's children were living in poverty in 2013. Poverty is found throughout Erie County at a higher rate than in the state and the nation as a whole. Disparities in educational performance exist throughout the region, and high school graduation rates vary considerably by location and demographics. In 2010, a quarter of Erie County's Hispanics and Latinos and 18 percent of blacks did not graduate from high school, compared with nine percent of the County's white residents. The concentration of colleges, universities and technical schools adds value to the region and supports the local economy through the development of a skilled and educated workforce. However, college graduation rates for Erie County residents lag behind those of the state and nation.

### What the public said

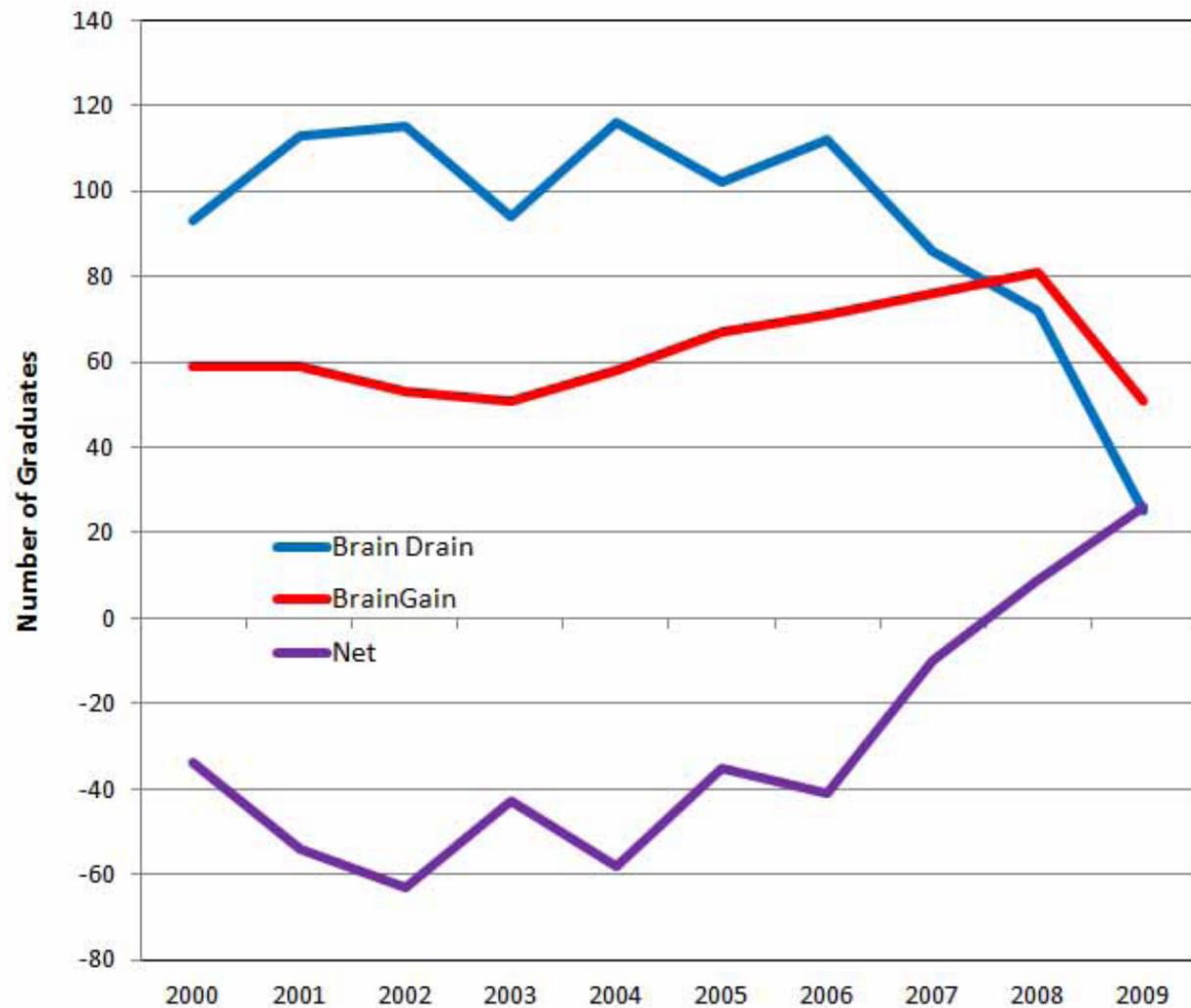
The educational system should be more integrated with daily life, said participants in public forums. "Turn schools into community resource centers," said one. Promoting schools as hosts for community events, adult programs and as community resource centers with high-speed internet service were prevalent themes in the forums. Students need to be prepared for work but also for life and the education system should help them with these skills, such as problem solving. Many participants noted the need for universal pre-K and pre-school. Adult education opportunities such as personal finance and other "soft" skills people need to help them get and hold onto jobs were also mentioned by a number of participants.



### Brain Drain/Gain in Erie County

Brain Drain occurs when a region's graduates leave the area to seek career paths elsewhere. Conversely, Brain Gain occurs when a region attracts young educated workers. Educated young workers migrate for opportunity, high pay or to settle areas with cachet or lifestyle choices. These workers are one indicator of the region's ability to fill critical positions and to promote workers as others retire.

This graphic and chart below, developed by James Kurre, Economic Research Institute of Erie, summarize Erie County's loss/gain of graduates from 2000 - 2009. While the region had a net brain drain over the period studied, 2000-2009, in the last two years examined there was a net gain. Business and engineering graduates showed the most significant drain; education had a net gain.



### Poverty, Educational Attainment and Earnings

Poverty Rate by Educational Attainment, Population Over 25 (2010)	
Less than high school graduate	26.1%
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	12.1%
Some college or associate's degree	8.6%
Bachelor's degree or higher	4.1%
Median Earnings by Educational Attainment, Population Over 25 (2010)	
Population (25 years and over) with earnings	\$ 30,414
Less than high school graduate	\$ 17,650
High school graduate (includes equivalency)	\$ 25,406
Some college or associate's degree	\$ 30,950
Bachelor's degree	\$ 40,093
Graduate or professional degree	\$ 55,513

Earnings potential, poverty status and educational attainment are related. In 2010, 26 percent of the population without a high school degree were living in poverty, while 4 percent of college graduates lived in poverty. Residents with no high school degree could expect to earn less than \$18,000 a year, while high school graduates could expect to earn more than \$25,000 a year and those holding a graduate or professional degree could earn more than \$55,000 a year. Source: Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness

## Recommendations

### Short-Term Priorities:

#### **Create seamless career pathways by creating purposeful education and training to strengthen the local workforce and ensure family-sustaining employment for all residents.**

Close collaboration between industry and educational/training organizations is critical to the success of the region in the development of programs that will produce the trained workforce that will support the growth of the region's key industries. Expand programs that provide a foothold in the workplace economy, including affordable post-secondary courses (such as college courses at physical and virtual sites throughout the county) and hands-on training and apprenticeships. In order to target programs toward the sectors most likely to create well-paying, skilled jobs, information about employer needs must be regularly collected, analyzed, and used by training organizations.

#### **Meet the needs of workers, business and educational institutions by rebuilding the NWPA Workforce Investment Board to coordinate and expand opportunities for career guidance, training and job placement.**

Job skills, training and the jobs/skills mismatch are among Erie's most pressing problems and the priority expressed by the public throughout Destination Erie. While the Northwest Pennsylvania Workforce Investment Board (WIB) is well-situated to be the key strategist responsible for leading a comprehensive approach to coordinate among the diverse organizations involved in job training and career guidance, it has gotten away from its core mission over the last few decades. The region should rebuild the WIB, ensuring that it has the funding and staff expertise and capacity necessary to lead efforts to develop a skilled workforce. The WIB should play a leadership role to:

- Seek federal and foundation grants to develop workforce training programs, particularly those targeted at low-income workers, displaced workers, new Americans, and new entrants into the workforce.
- Identify skill-set needs emerging in local companies and recruit the appropriate educational and training institutions to fill these needs.
- Facilitate interaction between businesses and public schools at all levels to spark interest in career paths among the region's youngsters and become a model for proactive skill development.

#### **Build a globally competitive workforce by developing a Global Education Curriculum and diversifying school staffing.**

Help area education institutions diversify their leadership and educational staffing and integrate a global perspective through curriculum enhancements, training, and inclusive staffing strategies. The resulting curriculum includes elements that teach students and workers languages, currency, geography, cultures, traditions, religion, global centers of excellence or specialization, and supply chains.

### Medium-Term Priority:

#### **Ensure Erie County children are ready to learn when they enter school by creating countywide access to high-quality early care and education.**

Establish a formal alliance of business leaders, early childhood professionals, K-12/16 educators, parents, support agencies, and related initiatives such as Erie Together and Success by 6®, focused on ensuring access to high quality early care and education for all children in Erie County. This group should create and deploy strategies to: (1) raise countywide awareness of the importance of high quality pre-Kindergarten programming on children's future success; (2) make high quality pre-Kindergarten programs affordable for families (this may include building Erie's Future Fund and/or identifying additional opportunities); (3) address any existing "gaps" in programming across the county, whether those gaps be geographic, capacity, or program-related; and (4) address transportation issues. This group should also maintain a close connection with state and federal legislators to both understand and help inform relevant legislation.

### Longer-Term Priority

#### **Provide residents of all ages with year-round access to services, amenities and activities that meet their educational needs by developing a countywide network of community partnerships among schools, universities, local nonprofits and government agencies.**

To deepen community relationships and create new connections between students/families and community organizations, schools and their partners should also continue to identify opportunities to provide students and their families with non-educational services in school settings. And, to keep students progressing academically throughout the year, Erie County should strengthen the role community facilities, including schools, play in providing a range of educational programs during after-school hours and summer months that focus on academics, social services/civic responsibility, health and nutrition, and the arts.