The Independence Promise

Independence County
ForwARd

ForwARd is a public-private partnership established by the Arkansas Department of Education, the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation and the Walton Family Foundation to serve their shared strategic interests to achieve an order of magnitude increase in student achievement, wage growth, and economic prosperity for the state of Arkansas.

In this capacity, ForwARd serves as a convener, catalyst, trusted partner, and truth teller inspiring leadership and engaging residents working together to improve educational outcomes for students and adults that connect with opportunities for meaningful employment contributing to economic prosperity of themselves and their communities.
About Independence County

- Population: 36,804 (2010 Census)
- Square mileage: 772
- County seat: Batesville
- School Districts: 4 Primarily Located + 2 Secondarily Located
- Sales Tax Rate: 10.00%
- Economic Development Tax: No
- Food Tax: No
- Lodging Tax: Yes
- Largest Industries: Agriculture/Poultry, Advanced Manufacturing, Healthcare, and Education
About IMPACT

- Anchor Organizations: The Batesville Area Chamber of Commerce, Lyon College, & UACCB
- Facilitator: BACC
- Hubs: (4) – Economic Prosperity, Educational Excellence, Tourism, & Healthy Living and Wellbeing
- Objectives: 120+
- Work Method: Grassroots/Resident Engagement in Project Clusters
- Review Year: 2020
What Can Business + Education Solve Together?

7 in 10

- Arkansas students cannot read at grade level by the end of 3rd grade.
- Jobs currently available in Arkansas are low-skill, low-wage jobs.
- Arkansas 4-year-olds are not enrolled in a Pre-K program.
- Inmates in Arkansas State Prisons do not have a high school diploma.
- Only 7 in 10 of today’s jobs will still be here by the 2030’s.

Our economy is rapidly changing, becoming more automated and technological. We must develop a more highly educated workforce if we are to compete successfully in this new economy and eliminate the 70/30 split.
Independence County Public Education Foundation

Mission

• Support the IMPACT Educational Excellence plan goals and objectives and celebrate students, faculty, staff, etc. achievements.

Priorities

• Independence Promise Program
• Early Childhood Education
• Workforce Development
• Community Calendar of Educational Offerings
• Arkansas Scholars Banquet

An Independence County high school student furthers her education by taking nursing training courses at UACCB during her school day.
Table of Contents

1. Piloting the Program
2. Fundraising
3. Advocacy
4. Outcome
5. Additional Resources
Piloting the Program

What are the most important priorities for education in Arkansas?

HIGH QUALITY TEACHERS

Customize the Pathway
Using Local Input to Inspire Action

- ForwARd Together Conversations confirmed that early career training and education opportunities were a priority and had the potential to make the greatest IMPACT on students who were labeled as low performing or at risk for departing their high school prior to graduating.

- Financial barrier was the most cited cause of lack of participation in early career training and education opportunities at UACCB and Lyon College during ForwARd Together Conversations.

- Through the IMPACT planning process, the community identified a scholarship program supported by area businesses and philanthropy as a goal for educational excellence.
Preparing for IMPACT

• The Public Education Foundation’s mission is to support the IMPACT Educational Excellence goals, so they began a feasibility study for an Independence Promise program, based on Southside School District’s My Future Story Program already in place.

• The Program would differ from others in the state in that it would pay EARLY (while still in high school) for students to enroll in career training and general education courses when a student had a career plan for their future.

• By the end of 2017, the board had identified the project as feasible and it’s primary priority for 2018.
Academic Committee

• An academic committee was assembled of both UACCB and Lyon College to discuss tuition discounts and fee waivers and with all high schools to collaboratively discuss eligibility, application, and guidelines for the scholarship.

• The Scholarship Guidelines were developed and completed by the end of Spring 2018.

• An online application form was developed and housed on the IMPACT website for students. Flyers were developed for dissemination of the opportunity to students and their families, but most were referred to the scholarship by their high school career counselor or coach.
Fundraising
Funding the Promise

• Utilized a community event (awards ceremony) that was already taking place annually and asked if we could show a video about the program.

• Placed pledge cards on each table and had volunteer staff to pick them up shortly after the video.

• Members of the Foundation Board made visits with large donors prior to the event and asked for 5-year commitments. It was attractive to the businesses that they could announce their donation at the event, publicly.

• That event alone raised $187,000 worth of commitments for the next 5 years.
Pilot Results

- During the first semester of the program launch, more than 150 Independence County high school students earned a collective 648 of college credit and achieving a 94 percent course completion rate.

- Enrollment at UACCB was reportedly up over 6%, a fact that the college attributes in part to the Independence Promise and greater student access to their programs earlier than before.
Advocacy
SB - 343

• In partnership with our district representative, we began looking at ways to scale the pilot program state-wide.
  • Met with several legislators regarding the Arkansas Lottery Scholarship.
  • Found a funding stream with excess Lottery dollars.
  • ForwARd’s policy recommendations aligned due to ForwARd Together Conversations.
  • Traveled the state in 2018 visiting with communities and educators garnering feedback and support.
  • Worked with our district representative, several colleges, associations, and the Bureau of Legislative Research to propose a bill creating the Arkansas Concurrent Challenge Scholarship.
  • Advocated and shared testimony at Senate and House Education Committee meetings.
Outcome

• SB – 343 NOW ACT 456
  • Governor Asa Hutchinson signed ACT 456 into law in March 2018.
  • The Scholarship will pay $125 each for up to two courses a semester at any accredited Arkansas institution that is offering a minimum of a 50% tuition discount to the junior or senior student for early career training or general education courses aligned with their academic success plan.
  • Development of rules and regulations as well as release are underway currently through ADHE.

In April in Independence County, a ceremony was held to commemorate the signing of ACT 456 and the completion of a very large IMPACT educational excellence plan goal.
Resources
Additional Resources

- Independence Promise Flyer
- Independence Promise Scholarship Guidelines
- Independence Promise FAQs
- Program Fundraising Video
- ACT 456