

TALKING TALENT

Regional Forums Focus on People

By Tom Schuman

The biannual *Indiana Vision 2025* Report Card is an important update of Indiana's progress on key measures relative to the 49 other states. The subsequent statewide outreach/listening tour is no less critical as it provides the pulse of what is taking place in communities and regions to help move the state forward.

Six traditional regional stops (Evansville, Fort Wayne, Hammond, Indianapolis, Sellersburg and South Bend) brought more than 300 leaders together in 2017. Additional sessions took place in Bloomington, Crawfordsville, Kokomo, Richmond and Terre Haute to support planning efforts in those areas.

This fourth round of forums (in 2012 after the *Indiana Vision 2025* plan was introduced and following Report Card releases in 2013 and 2015) brought at least one significant change from past events.

"We heard a near unanimous focus on talent and workforce issues," says Indiana Chamber President and CEO Kevin Brinegar. "In the past, there was more diversity with various infrastructure needs and other topics at the forefront. Today, not surprisingly, talent is top of mind."

John Burnett and Jack Hess helped facilitate the sessions. They are partners in CivicLab, part of the Community Education Coalition in Columbus, and dedicated to advancing community collaborations across Indiana and around the country. Much of that effort is in the talent and workforce fields.

The duo shares their perspectives on the Report Card results and the forums.

Key data takeaways

Jack Hess: "Particularly in education, I think we know we have a way to go around attainment. The report certainly confirmed that. It showed we're making great progress, but maybe not the progress we need to be making relative to the nation as a whole."

"I was taken aback by the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) data, particularly the science and technology degrees conferred (third in the nation) but percent of population with degrees (42nd). Forty percent (degrees) vs. 10% (population with those degrees). Those were some surprising facts, yet present some great opportunities looking forward."

John Burnett: "I would echo Jack's comments. Indiana at 41.1% and the nation at 45.8% (in population with at least an associate degree or high-quality credential) in education attainment. If we really focus in on those credentials and high-quality certificates, it not only can help us statistically but help more people be better prepared for economic success – providing connections to those employing people in manufacturing, health care, information technology to name a few."

Large STEM gap

Hess: "Part of it is probably structural – the kinds of industries (Indiana has are) not requiring as many STEM jobs. Indiana is kind of

new to the career pathways game, making the pathways a lot more visible and understood. We are accelerating the efforts more quickly. We have to focus (on students) much earlier than we have been – have to go back almost to when making transitions from elementary school to middle school and middle school to high school."

Burnett: "That also connects to the Dynamic and Creative Culture part of the Report Card as well. A lot of people employed in large companies tends to cause folks to navigate to those employment opportunities rather than creative start-ups."

"Those two things are definitely tied. A lot of your entrepreneurial start-ups tend to be in STEM areas. The lower amount of start-ups is a causal factor affecting those STEM rates."

Regional reflections

Burnett: "The topic turned to talent in a very significant way. Attraction, development, engagement. Bringing new people to the region and ensuring talent is being developed. That's always a short-term need that gets expressed, particularly in low unemployment times, but it's encouraging how thoughtful the business community is



Ron Christian, 2017 Indiana Chamber board chairman, gives a local perspective at the regional forum in Evansville, where a large media contingent reported on the latest Report Card findings.



being in thinking about the long term, the early learning pathways network. It's heartwarming for people to talk about longer-term need for human potential."

Hess: "Regionalism also came up. Investments (by Lilly Endowment, the Regional Cities Initiative) are changing the way people are thinking and the spirit in the way they approach regionalism. We are trying to get the incentives aligned. Before, incentives encouraged competition among cities and regions; now, incentivizing regions to work together has clearly made a difference.

"It has communities finding their comparative strengths and their roles within a region. Net migration – everyone has a concern. When 53 of 92 counties are losing population from 2015 to 2016, that's definitely a wake-up call. Rural Indiana is shrinking and the workforce is falling. That brings economic and tax base concerns, but also concern about loss of leadership, philanthropy, social capital as well."

Burnett: "We wrote a 10-year report on the work of EcO (network of successful regional education and economic development efforts in southeast Indiana). The thing that surprised even us a little bit was the percentage of investment (from external sources) was nearly equaled by communities and the region. The investments into economic opportunities for education, nearly all of it is sustainable at very high levels – education pathways, technology labs, all things building on each other."

CivicLab's related work

Hess: "Cities are realizing they have to develop a comprehensive approach to talent – they've got to attract it, develop it and try to engage it. They just can't do one of those three things. They have to do all three. We're seeing branding campaigns, not just trying to attract tourists, but talent, young talent and residents. That has been a fundamental shift. Most of the strategic economic plans all have pillars for people and place. They are taking place in a comprehensive way, not a set of individual tactics."

Burnett: "We're seeing the continued bringing together of the public, private and social sectors to work together to address the tough challenges that all regions in Indiana and beyond face. I'm not sure communities have always thought about the importance of that – not only quality of job but quality of the education system. And quality of place – we heard a lot about housing and other quality of life infrastructure."



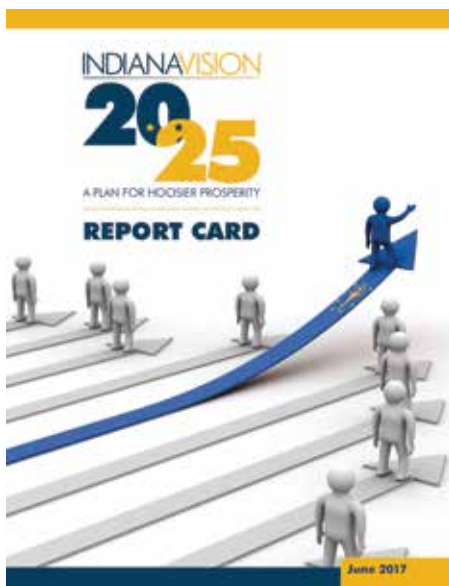
Jack Hess, left, moderates a panel of young professionals at the South Bend regional forum.

Opportunities and challenges

Hess: "The thing that encourages me the most is the regions where we had the opportunities to engage with next generation talent and lead discussions about why they're there, why the place they are in matters. There was so much pride for the communities

earlier than we're currently doing. There was so much high-quality energy around those panels."

Burnett: "The spirit of regionalism, recognizing that people have to work together more and more. That spirit was alive and well in every one of the forums held and that was terrific. On the concern part, that would be to continue to foster growth and development of those collaborations. That is going to be key, as is the way in which talent is attracted, developed and engaged. On the people piece, early learning, we hear about it everywhere we go – not only in Indiana but around the country."



and their different quality of life initiatives going on.

"There are lighter, more flexible, less expensive ways of engaging people and place together that seemed to make them excited, which should be really good news for communities of all sizes. The overwhelming consensus from the groups is we need to figure ways to get next generation talent connected to communities and business much

Next steps

For the Indiana Chamber, progress continues toward achieving as many of the goals in the *Indiana Vision 2025* plan as possible. The organization's public policy committees and advocacy team use the vision as the blueprint for actions and initiatives.

The Indiana Chamber Foundation, which coordinates the *Indiana Vision 2025* plan, also focuses on programs that support goal achievement. Current efforts include partnering with K-12 schools on college and career readiness counseling and connecting educators and businesses in working toward workforce solutions.

Communication about *Indiana Vision 2025* and its priorities continues through each issue of *BizVoice*, the Chamber's monthly Policy Issue Conference Calls, new EchoChamber podcast series and more.

Sponsors of the *Indiana Vision 2025* forums in 2017 were Duke Energy, Indiana Michigan Power, NIPSCO and Vectren.