

The State That Works: Promote Families and Protect Children*

Policy Goal: To put the family at the center of Indiana's effort to improve the social and economic prospects of all Hoosier children, with a special focus on children facing life's greatest challenges.

Policy Steps:

- Issue an executive order requiring all relevant state agencies to draft a Family Impact Statement when they adopt new rules and regulations
- Hold an annual summit, hosted by the Governor and First Lady, on the latest cutting-edge research and practices on the socioeconomic well-being of families
- Promote adoption by lifting means testing for school scholarships for families that adopt and/or provide care for foster children
- Enhance inter-agency and state-local coordination on child services issues to ensure a complete continuum of care
- Enlist our teachers and our law enforcement officials i child protection by partnering with our schools and other local entities to review and enhance training
- Promote early intervention programs that identify and target services to at-risk youth

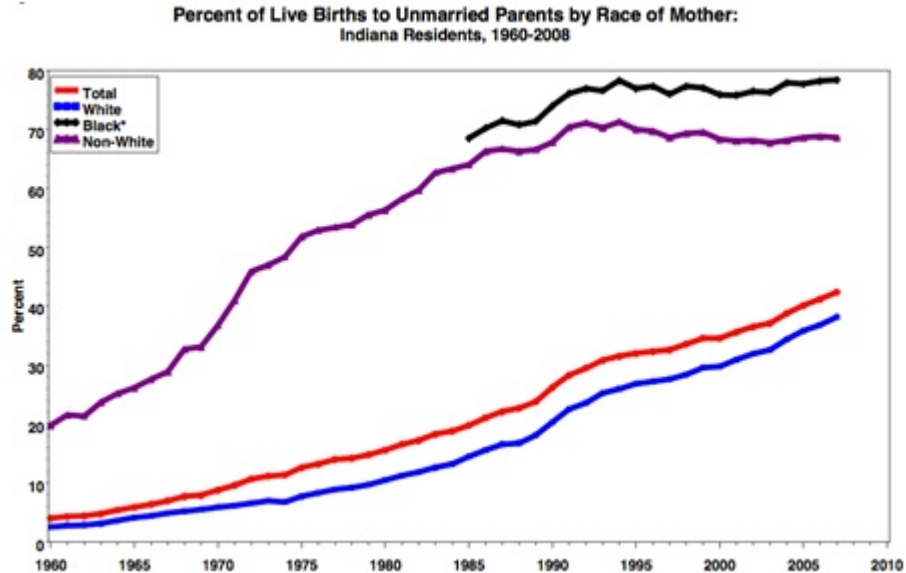
Rationale:

Decades of social science research that is supported across the political spectrum confirms that one of the greatest causes of poverty and inequality is the number of children born to unmarried parents. In fact, in Indiana a child is 85 percent less likely to live in poverty if they live with their married parents.^[1] That's undoubtedly why, in a 2011 speech, Governor Daniels said that "I want every child in Indiana or America to grow up to the age of maturity in an intact family. Because...almost every social problem and economic problem, for that matter, that breaks our hearts, tends to start right there."^[2]

It is widely accepted in the scholarly literature on poverty and social development that the sure-fire way for a young person to avoid poverty, or what we call "the success equation," is quite simple: graduate from high school, work full time or go to college, and wait until you're married before having a child. No governor or state agency anywhere in America has made the success equation the basis of its anti-poverty strategy. By using it as a framework, Indiana would be the first.

Nothing in this approach to preventing poverty is intended to diminish our support for the heroic job single parents do raising their children every day in Indiana. Nor is this approach meant as a judgment of our friends and neighbors who have had to make difficult life choices resulting in divorce. Rather, this approach is intended for a simple purpose: to speak honestly with today's children and young adults about the surest way to avoid poverty.

Like the rest of the country, Indiana has seen an explosion in the past generation of births to unmarried mothers, whose children will be statistically much more likely to end up poor and prone to a number of social and educational dysfunctions.



Today, 41.5 percent of births to women over 18 in Indiana are to unmarried mothers. The unmarried birth rate problem is no longer primarily a matter of teen pregnancies, as it was back in days before welfare reform. Instead, unmarried mothers today are more likely to be in their 20s.

Why does this matter? A large body of social science research has shown that children born to unmarried mothers are also much more likely to drop out of high school and to be out of work. In other words, the three parts of the equation – finish school, work, have children after marriage. Any successful effort to reduce poverty and increase opportunity for Hoosier children has to seriously consider the importance of the family as the chief incubator of the good habits leading to school completion and work.

New York Times reporter Jason DeParle wrote in July 2012 that America is “becoming a society of family haves and family have-nots, with marriage and its rewards evermore confined to the fortunate classes.” DeParle cites the body of research referenced above, noting that scholars have found that changing family structures account for up to 40 percent of measured growth in inequality.

To reverse these trends in Indiana, we will aspire to make the greatest progress in the country in each of the three parts of the equation: (1) children in two-parent homes, (2) graduation rates, (3) full-time work or college.^[3] So long as we view poverty and lack of opportunity as material deprivation alone, we will do a disservice to our state’s children. Family, school, and work all go together, and it’s time Indiana’s agencies led the way in integrating all three.

We propose to take two initial steps to promote a family-focused agenda that works together with our continued efforts to boost graduation rates and create new career and vocational pathways for more young Hoosiers.

First, because of the central role the family plays in children's long-term outcomes, a new executive order would require all relevant agencies^[4] to draft a Family Impact Statement before they adopt new rules and regulations. These statements will be rooted in an evidence-based understanding of the role that families play in school, work, and life. The family impact statement will require agencies to answer questions including (but not limited to) the following:

- Does the proposed regulation increase or decrease family income?
- Does the proposed regulation support or inhibit family formation?
- Does the proposed regulation respect or inhibit the right of parents to raise their children?

Once successfully adopted, these statements will give state government an important tool to ensure that its actions are encouraging strong, healthy families in Indiana.

Second, we propose to hold an annual summit, hosted by the Governor and First Lady, that brings together leading researchers and practitioners to help us better understand the social and economic effects of family formation, and to assess our progress as a state. The summit would be geared to helping us understand the implications of new research and practices for both public policy and civil society initiatives.

While we must support and promote Hoosier families, we must also take steps to support those who care for our most vulnerable children. Those who are being served in the foster care system or have been adopted have already faced or are facing tremendous challenges in their young lives. Many have had very little structure, stability, or education. It is imperative that these children and their families have the widest range of educational options available to ensure the child is placed in the best academic environment to meet their specific needs.

As part of this policy, we will seek to accomplish the following changes:

- All income restrictions for school scholarships for adoptive parents will be removed
- The parents in consultation with the child's team will select the best school for the student
- The scholarship amount will be at the highest possible amount provided by the state of Indiana, which is currently 90 percent of the average per student statewide expenditure

It is estimated that nearly 5,000 students would be eligible to receive this type of scholarship when this policy change is implemented. It should be noted that some of these students might have already been eligible as they may have met the law's current requirements.

For children who are the victims of abuse or neglect, we must continue to strengthen and improve the Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS). DCS was created by Governor Daniels in 2005 to turn around Indiana's failing children and family services system. Indiana previously ranked at the bottom of almost every category of child protection, but with the changes made by Governor Daniels and his administration, we are now nationally

recognized as a model for child protection reforms in other states.^[5]

Indiana currently ranks third in timeliness of adoption, third in permanency, and 10th in placement stability. We have seen a more than 50 percent decline in residential placements and a 7 percent decline in the use of foster care. We have also experienced a nearly 28 percent increase in “in-home” placements and a more than 108 percent increase in placements with relatives. In addition, adoptions have increased 70 percent.

Lawmakers have also provided more opportunities for contact with families with the investment in family case managers. In 2011, 95.7 percent of children received a monthly visit by a DCS family case manager compared to only 10.4 percent in 2005. We have significantly more children achieving permanency with DCS completing a record number of adoptions (1,787) in 2011. In addition, more than 98 percent of children leave the Indiana child welfare system with a safe, permanent family.^[6]

We need to continue moving in the right direction when it comes to our most vulnerable children. More can be done. Some initial steps can be taken to provide what is ultimately in the best interest of children, including training to identify abuse and neglect earlier, and better coordination of all units of government.

First, to increase the cooperation and communication among agencies and those that deal with children's services, we propose a task force led by the Governor and to include all critical state agency department heads (FSSA, DCS, DOC, ISDH, etc.), the Attorney General, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Indiana Supreme Court, the Indiana Prosecuting Attorneys Council, and other selected members to provide the needed coordination among agencies and a forum to address any issues in the process. The task force will allow agencies to ensure that effective services are available and accessible when the child needs them, and that there is a continuum of care always available to our children. This task force will also review issues related to the DCS hotline, and ensure that state and local lawmakers are working together to address any issues related to the hotline. We will be committed to evidence-based practices where children receive services that produce results for them.

Second, we will enlist our teachers and our law enforcement personnel to assist in our efforts to protect children. We propose a joint effort with our schools and other local entities to review current training procedures for child protection and enhance training programs that would assist to identify more children earlier who are victims or at risk of becoming victims.

Third, we will insist on organizing services in a way that supports the efforts of fragile families. DCS will be positioned to lead the country in evidence-based services so that families working through tough circumstances can receive the support they need. The State will rigorously measure and insist on performance in both speed to permanency (adoption) and in supporting fragile families so the children do not need to be removed in the first place.

Finally, we need to support and, where appropriate, expand programs—like Youth First in Evansville and the Westfield Youth Assistance Program in Hamilton County—that seek to

prevent juvenile delinquency before it happens. These programs bring local mayors, public safety officials, judges, school leaders, and faith-based institutions together to identify at-risk youth and encourage the youth and their parents to participate in a variety of services, like counseling, tutoring, and truancy-diversion programs that are designed to put our kids on the track to success. There are some truly innovative services being developed for our kids in programs like this, and they deserve to be supported, highlighted and replicated as much as possible across the state.

Healthy families mean healthy children, healthy communities, a thriving economy and strong state and nation. Investments in families, in children and in prevention of child abuse and neglect, support healthy child development and stronger family relationships. Lowering the number of children affected by abuse and neglect will reduce childhood poverty and improve the health, well-being and safety of all Hoosier families.

[1] <http://www.heritage.org/childpoverty/indiana>

[2] Mitch Daniels, speech to Indiana Family Institute, September 7, 2011.

[3] We have announced specific strategies relating to graduation rates and full-time work or college, so this white paper will focus exclusively on the first part of the three-part equation.

[4] Of course, not all agencies adopt rules that have a direct or indirect impact on families, so the family impact statement would not impact all agencies identically.

[5] "Indiana Child Welfare: Improving Practice to Improve Outcomes." The Annie E. Casey Foundation
<http://www.aecf.org/~media/Pubs/Topics/Child%20Welfare%20Permanence/Other/IndianaChildWelfare/IndianaChildWelfareImprovingPractice.pdf>.

[6] <http://www.fosteringconnections.org/tools/assets/files/Older-Youth-brief-2011-Final.pdf>.

*First appeared as a white paper in 2012 as Governor Pence was articulating his first legislative agenda.