LAGRANGE COUNTY TOGETHER

THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR OUR COMMUNITIES

OUR VOICE.
OUR VISION.
OUR FUTURE!

VOLUME 3: PEOPLE

Technical Analysis Memo | Comprehensive Plan
for the Communities of LaGrange County

DRAFT | OCTOBER 2021

VOLUME 3

PEOPLE

TECHNICAL ANALYSIS MEMO | COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
FOR THE COMMUNITIES OF LAGRANGE COUNTY

OCTOBER 2021

The following report provides the initial analysis of two topics: education and placemaking. This report and its accompanying presentation are the third in a series of four analysis memos that provide a summary of the baseline conditions and trends in support of the LaGrange County Comprehensive Plan Update. For questions on this report, please contact the project manager for LaGrange County Together, Logan Stang, planner with planning NEXT, at logan@planning-next.com.

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1. EDUCATION

This section reviews the educational system within LaGrange County. First, educational opportunities ranging from pre-K to post-secondary / vocational are identified and mapped. Further consideration is then given to understand trends in the County and to identify comparative measurements to use as benchmarks for the education system.

KEY FINDINGS

- **The educational picture of LaGrange County is complex, in large part due to the alternative practices of the large Amish community**. Smaller, private schools and ending formal education after eighth grade are among the characteristics that distinguish Amish schooling from the traditional public school model. These practices render conventional statistics insufficient to fully explain the educational landscape in the county.
- **LaGrange County offers quality education opportunities for primary and secondary school students but lacks strong post-secondary institutions.** The three public school districts effectively prepare students for college, but there are no accredited universities or career readiness programs based in the county.
- **High school graduates are highly likely to earn a college or career degree.** Although many students in the county do not enroll in or graduate from high school, those that do graduate obtain college or career degrees at higher rates than peers in other counties and across the state.

1.1 EDUCATION SYSTEM

The Education System section explores the range of educational offerings found within the County. Three public school systems serve the county: Lakeland School Corporation, Prairie Heights Community School Corporation, and Westview School Corporation. Dozens of private schools among the Amish population are located within the county, and several vocational and technical training options are available for LaGrange County residents.

Preschool

Prekindergarten options provide the youngest students with the advantage of an early education and give parents valuable childcare opportunities. At least three private entities offer preschool and daycare services in LaGrange County.

- **LaGrange UMC Preschool** is run by the United Methodist Church in the Town of LaGrange and serves students from three years old to kindergarten enrichment.
- **Vistula Head Start** is open to students from ages three to five who meet financial need requirements. The organization provides a full-day daycare program for students whose parents work.
- **Precious Gifts Preschool** in Topeka employs five care takers and serves as a childcare service.

The Lima-Brighton Elementary and Wolcott Mills Elementary schools of the Lakeland School Corporation also offer preschool programming for three to five year old students.

Public Schools

LaGrange County is divided into three public school districts: Lakeland School Corporation, Prairie Heights Community School Corporation, and Westview School Corporation. The following list includes the schools and corresponding grade levels in each district. (See page 23 for a map of the schools and school districts).

Lakeland

- Lakeland Primary School (K-2)
- Lakeland Intermediate School (3-6)
- Lakeland Jr./Sr. High School (7-12)

Prairie Heights

- Prairie Heights Elementary School (K-4)
- Prairie Heights Middle School (5-8)
- Prairie Heights High School (9-12)

Westview

- Meadowview Elementary School (K-4)
- Shipshewana-Scott Elementary School (K-4)
- Topeka Elementary School (K-4)
- Westview Elementary School (5-6)
- Westview Jr./Sr. High School (6-12)

Amish and Private Schools

In addition to the three public school districts, LaGrange County is home to 75 small, private schools for Amish students. [1] All of these schools serve children ranging from first to eighth grade, with only one serving kindergarten to eighth grade. The student body size at Amish schools is typically less than 50 students and averages around 35. When schools reach a maximum capacity, they create a new school and divide the students between them.

The Westview School Corporation has about half Amish and half non-Amish (English) students in its K-8 grade levels. Most of the Amish, however, choose to end their formal schooling after eighth grade. [2]

Technical/Vocational

Technical and vocational training programs provide high school students and adult learners with non-traditional opportunities to develop skills and college or career readiness. Several organizations in LaGrange County provide motivated individuals with the opportunities to develop in a variety of ways.

[1] https://inview.doe.in.gov/

[2] https://www.fwbusiness.com/fwbusiness/article_3850033d-f1ce-586e-899b-7e3243702948.html

IMPACT INSTITUTE

The **Impact Institute**, located in Kendalville, IN, is a cooperative based in Noble County that provides vocational programs and adult education to residents in five counties and thirteen school corporations. Junior and Senior high school students from each of the three public school districts in LaGrange County are eligible to enroll in one of fourteen college and career readiness programs. The programs range from Automotive Service Technology and Culinary Arts to Design Technology and Primary Health Care. Some of the programs also offer dual credits where high school students can earn credit toward college degrees.

The Adult Education Services of the Impact Institute include:

- Preparation for High School Equivalency (GED) or Diploma,
- Adult Basic Education,
- Literacy Services,
- English Language Acquisition,
- End of Course Assessment (ECA), and
- Occupational Skills Training.

FREEDOM ACADEMY

The **Freedom Academy** is a private workforce development training organization that holds courses in 11 counties in Northeast Indiana, including LaGrange County. They offer certificate programs in Advanced Manufacturing, Healthcare, and Professional Services, as well as several non-certification trainings. The Freedom Academy is affiliated with the LaGrange County Community Foundation, the LaGrange County Chamber of Commerce, and each of the three school corporations located in the county.

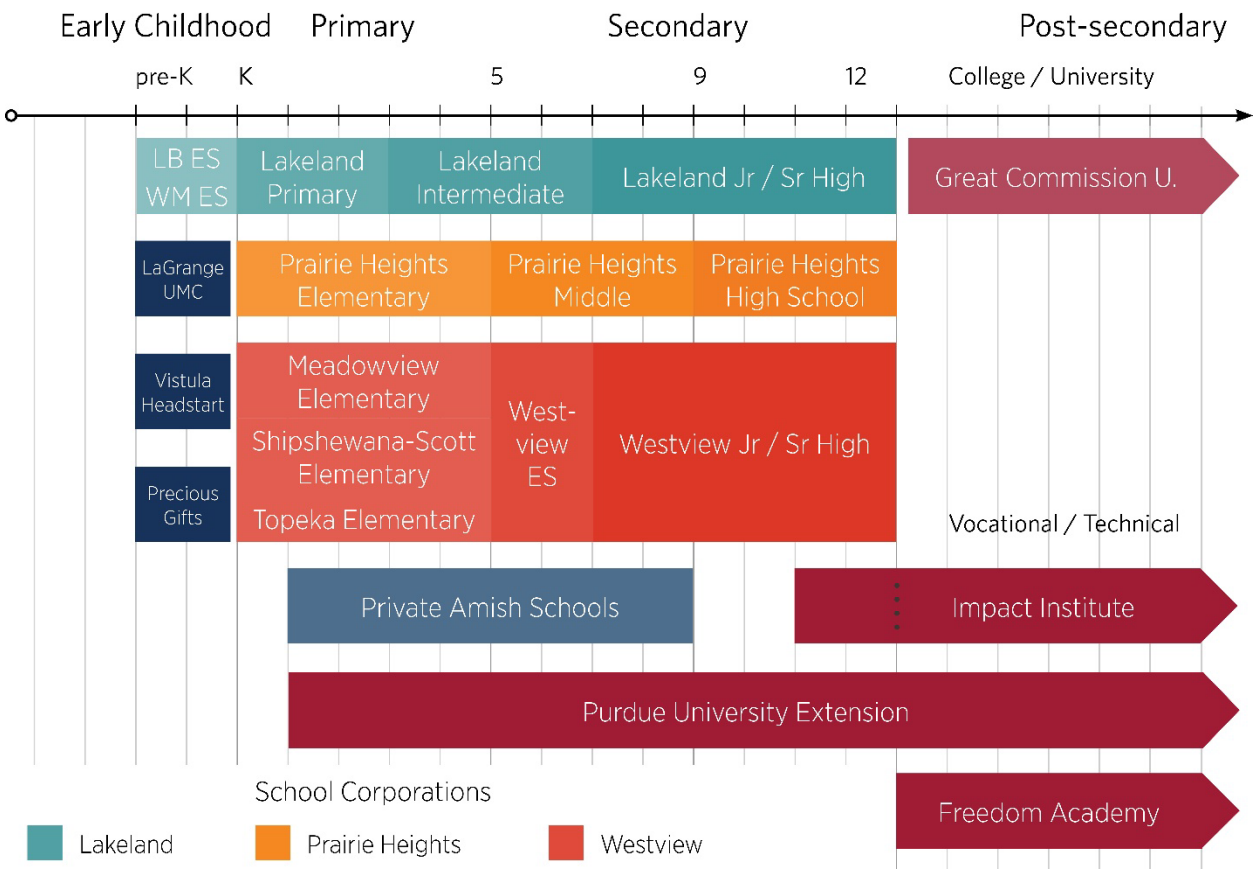
PURDUE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

A **Purdue University Extension** office is located in the town of LaGrange, offering programs in Agricultural and Natural Resources, Health and Human Sciences, Economic and Community Development, and 4-H Youth Development. 4-H programs begin for students in first grade through high school, and adult enrichment and learning opportunities are available to residents of all ages. Although the extension office does not offer college level coursework, its presence in the county provides a substantial value to the community and a connection to one of the largest and best ranked universities in the state.

Post-Secondary

Post-secondary educational opportunities are limited in LaGrange County. The **Great Commission University** was established in 2020 at the former Howe Military Academy. This chartered university offers enrollment for English as a Second Language, Undergraduate, and Graduate students and emphasizes coursework in religion. Though currently not accredited, it aims to gain accreditation status

Lifelong Learning In LaGrange County



as a Christian post-secondary institution.[3] The school has yet to offer in-person classes and has faced some challenges to its intentions to enroll mostly foreign students.

Outside LaGrange County borders, there are 27 higher-education institutions within 50 miles. Options within reasonable driving distance for residents, however, are more limited. **Indiana Tech** in Kendalville and **Indiana University South Bend** in Elkhart are among the nearest and most reasonable options for LaGrange County residents seeking higher education but not wishing to relocate.

[3] https://www.kpcnews.com/newssun/article_812c9da3-77c4-5a9e-88b2-890c3a9bb525.html

1.2 TRENDS AND BENCHMARKS

The Trends and Benchmarks section considers broader trends in the county that affect the educational system. It also explores and compares various measures of educational attainment across the three public school districts.

Enrollment

Enrollment in LaGrange County and across Indiana is affected by several statewide school choice policies. As a result of these policies, K-12 students have several options when deciding which school to attend and are not required to attend the school associated with their legal residence.

OPEN ENROLLMENT

Through Indiana's **Open Enrollment** policy, students are eligible to transfer between public school districts based on a variety of possible arrangements, even if they do not change residences. [4] In LaGrange County during the 2020-2021 school year, both the Westview and Prairie Heights districts recorded a net gain in public transfer students, whereas the Lakeland district reported a net loss. While this policy allows for convenience and opportunity for students, it can be detrimental to districts with a net loss in transfers. Because state funding follows the student, districts that lose students also lose their associated funding. This interaction has the potential to become a negative cycle, where a district loses students and therefore money, which makes it a less desirable district overall, thus leading to an even further decrease in students. On the other hand, districts that receive many incoming transfer students receive corresponding state funding and continue to become more desirable.

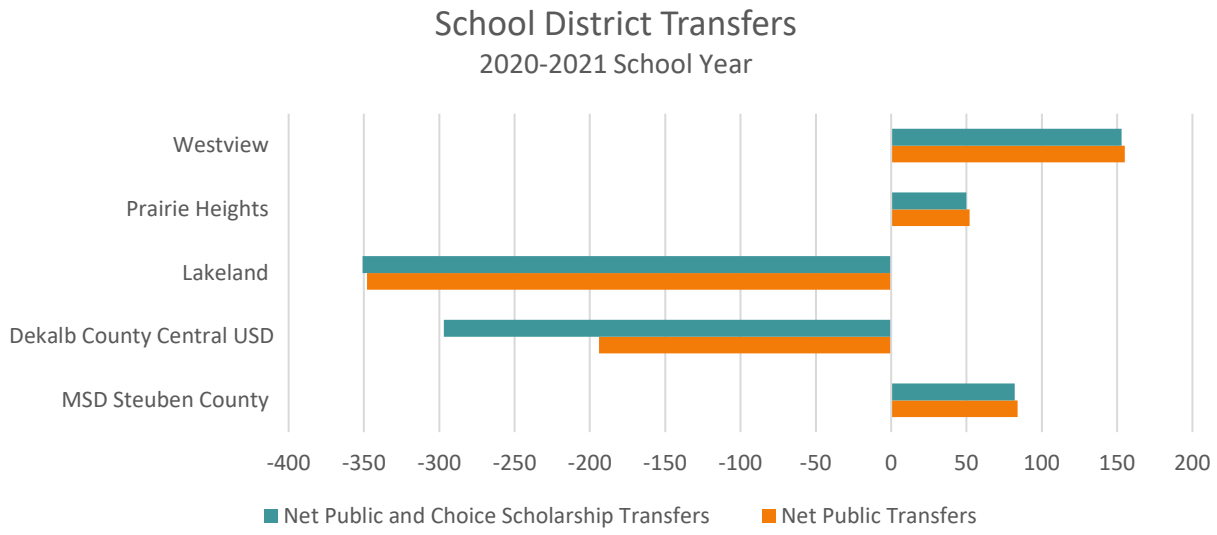
INDIANA SCHOOL CHOICE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

The **Indiana Choice Scholarship Program**, also referred to as a voucher program, provides scholarships to low and middle-income students to offset the cost of enrollment at participating private schools. Students must meet both income and academic eligibility requirements to apply. During the 2019-2020 school year, more than 36,700 students participated in the program statewide.[5] In LaGrange County, however, less than 10 students took advantage of this program, given that there are not any participating private schools within the county.

SCHOOL TRANSFERS

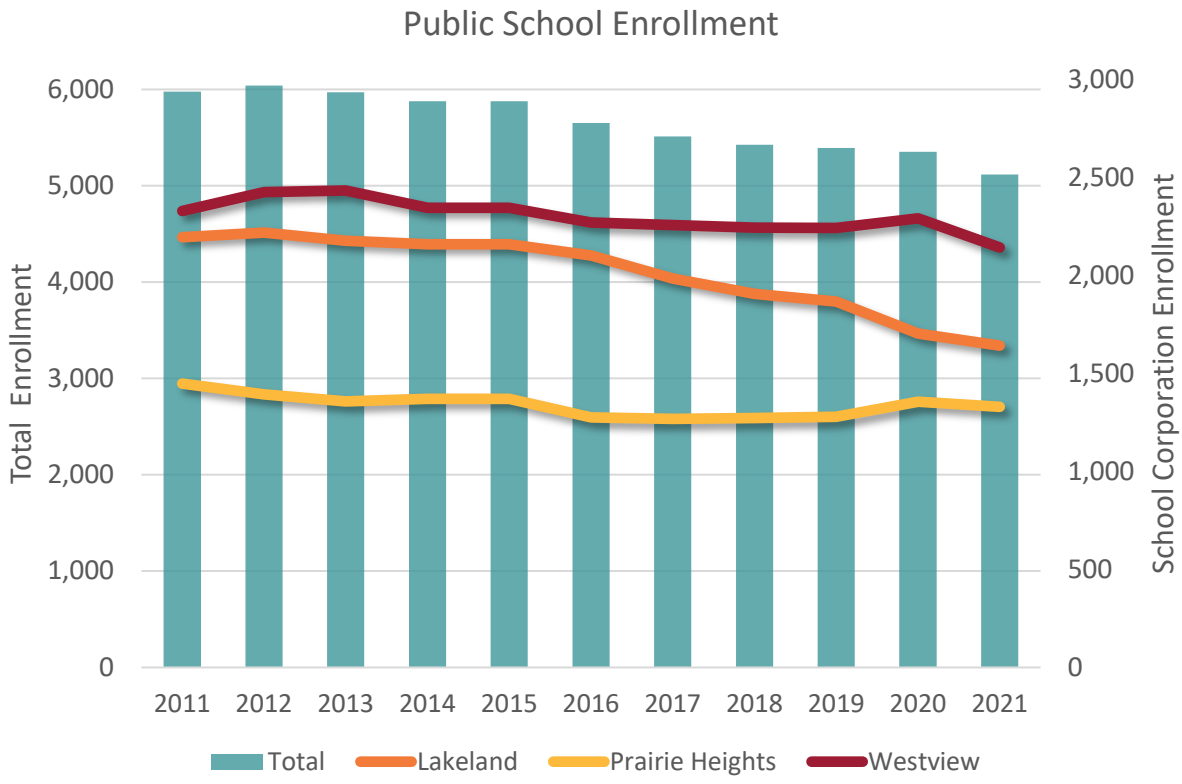
Given these opportunities to change school districts, several hundred students in LaGrange County enroll in schools outside their district of residence each year. For the 2020-2021 school year, the Lakeland school district saw a negative net transfer of 350 students. Westview recorded a net gain of approximately 150 students, and Prairie Heights saw a net gain of 50 students.

[4] https://www.edchoice.org/engage/mapping-indianas-public-district-school-choice-transfers/
[5] https://www.edchoice.org/school-choice/programs/indiana-choice-scholarship-program/

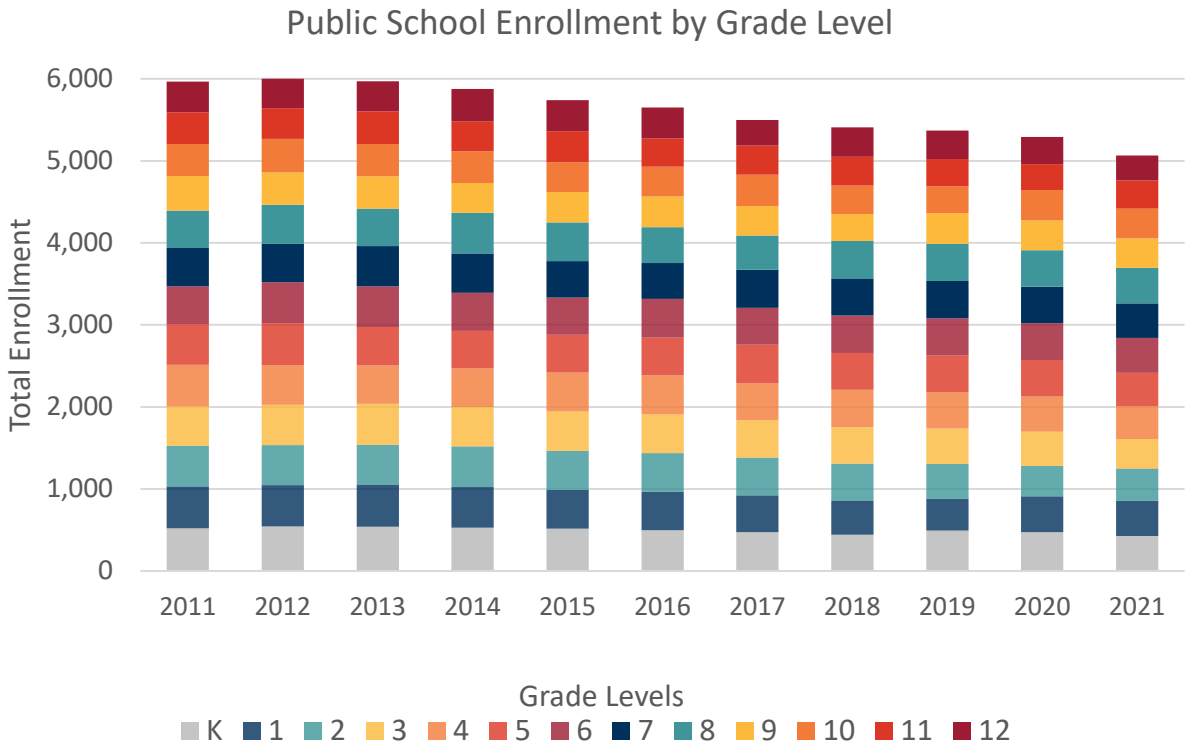


TOTAL ENROLLMENT

Total public school enrollment in LaGrange County is 5,117 in 2021, a 14% decrease since 2011. Each of the school districts has experienced a decline in enrollment over this period, with the only net positive growth occurring between 2011 and 2012.



Since 2011, both the Prairie Heights and Westview districts have declined by 8% in enrollment, whereas the Lakeland district has declined by 25%. An analysis of grade level enrollment shows that the decline in enrollment is relatively consistent across grade levels.

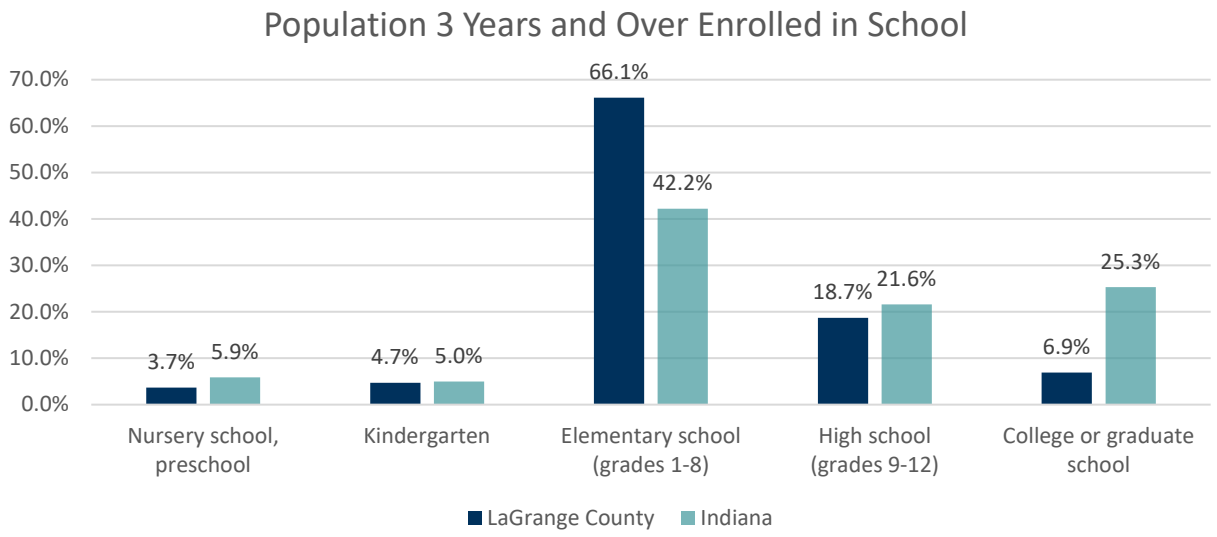


A cohort analysis, however, tracks the number of students who enroll in a particular grade level and follows that set of students through successive grades. Although the available data does not account for outmigration (students moving to other school districts), a simple cohort analysis in LaGrange County reveals that between 36% and 42% of students who enrolled in kindergarten from 2006 to 2009 were not enrolled in 12th grade with the rest of their cohort (2018-2021). In other words, a maximum of 64% of students who enrolled in kindergarten continued their schooling through the 12th grade. In the state of Indiana during that same time, 95% or more of each Kindergarten cohort enrolled in 12th grade. Given that approximately 45% percent of LaGrange County residents are Amish – most of whom complete their formal education at 8th grade – these statistics align with the educational norms of a significant portion of the population.

Table 1 – LaGrange Kindergarten Cohort Enrollment

KG Cohort		9th Grade			12th Grade		
Year	**Enrollment**	**Year**	**Enrollment**	**% of Cohort**	**Year**	**Enrollment**	**% of Cohort**
2006	555	**2015**	373	67%	**2018**	356	64%
2007	600	**2016**	377	63%	**2019**	346	58%
2008	523	**2017**	359	69%	**2020**	330	63%
2009	517	**2018**	330	64%	**2021**	304	59%

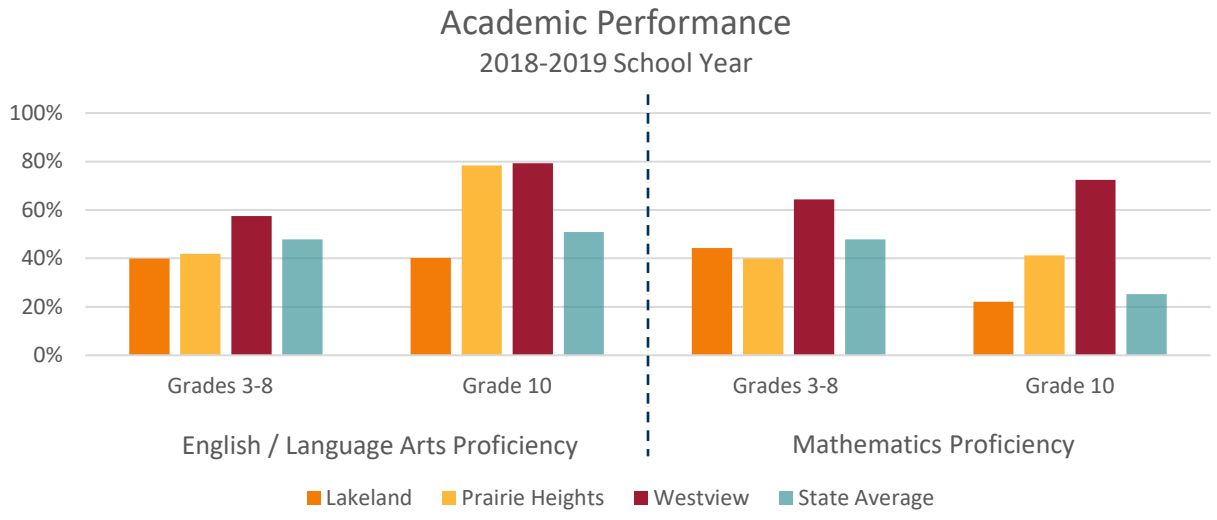
Sixty-six percent of all students in LaGrange County are enrolled in primary school (grades 1-8), whereas only 42% of students in the state are enrolled at that level. Conversely, college or graduate school students make up only 7% of all students in LaGrange County compared to 25% in the state.



Academic Performance

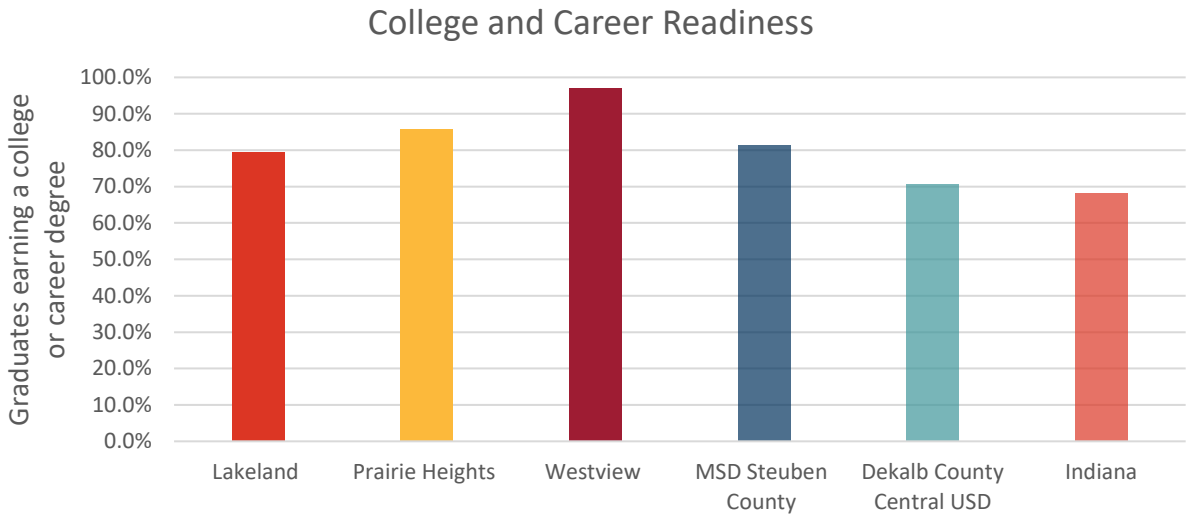
Statewide standardized tests provide a uniform metric for evaluating student performance. Assessments in English / Language Arts, Mathematics, and Reading measure the percentage of students who perform at or above grade-level expectations for each discipline.

Academic performance in English / Language Arts and Mathematics varies greatly across the school districts in LaGrange County. Students in the **Westview** schools consistently perform higher than the state average and students in their neighboring districts. **Prairie Heights** students in grades 3-8 tend to perform slightly below the state average, whereas tenth graders typically perform higher than the state average. Students in the **Lakeland** district consistently demonstrate lower proficiency in these disciplines than their peers in the county and state.



In Third Grade Reading Proficiency, however, students in each of the school districts tested within three percentage points of the state average of 87.3% (Lakeland – 86.5%; Prairie Heights – 90.0%; Westview – 84.9%). Similarly, the number of students who graduate in four years is slightly higher than the state average of 87.0% in all districts across LaGrange County (Lakeland – 88.1%; Prairie Heights – 90.0%; Westview – 91.7%).

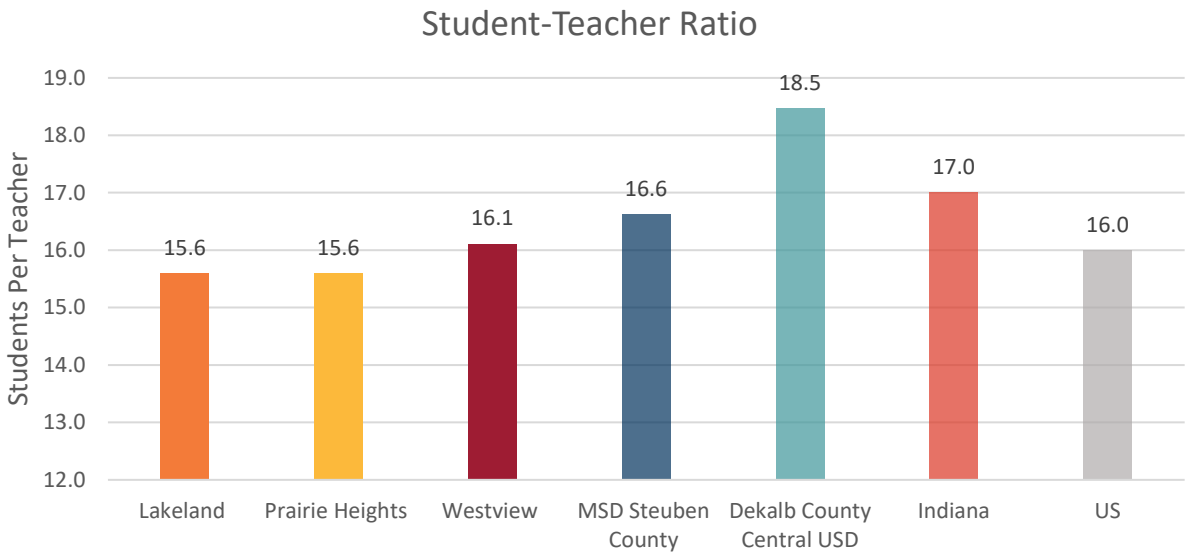
Finally, the number of graduates from LaGrange County who achieve a college or career degree is notably higher than the state average. Although many students do not continue their education through high school, most of those who *do* enroll in high school graduate within four years and become substantially more credentialed than their peers across the state. The educational attainment metrics in LaGrange County tell a complex story that reflects the diversity of approaches to life and schooling in the county.



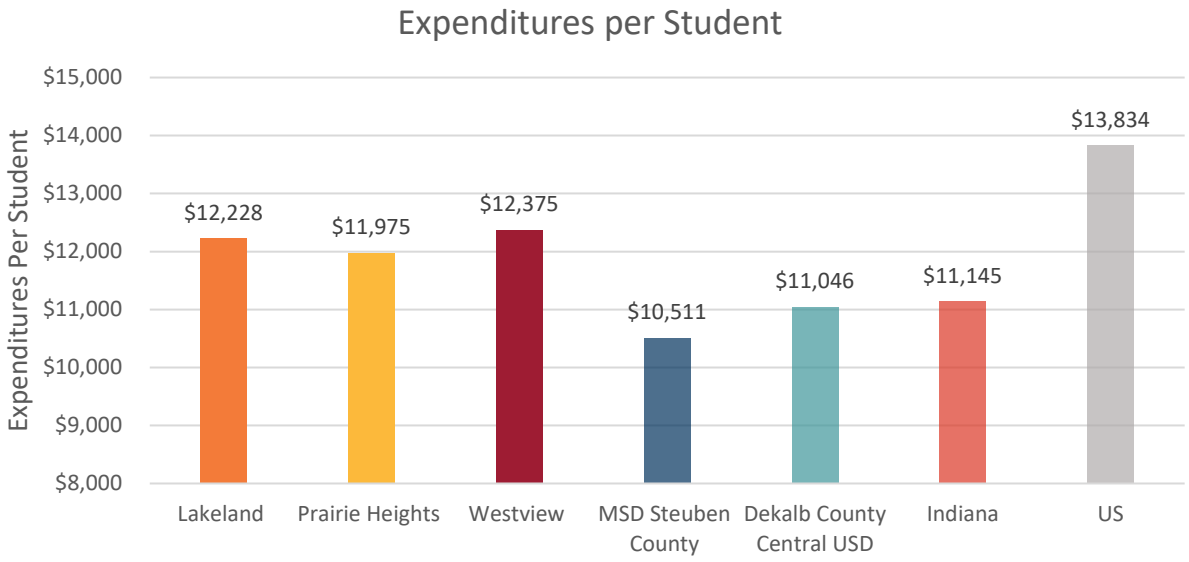
School Corporation Metrics

Metrics such as student-teacher ratio and expenditures per student offer some insight into how schools compare to one another and what kinds of opportunities they provide for their students. A lower student to teacher ratio is considered an asset, suggesting that students receive more individualized input from teachers. Higher expenditures per student is also considered a positive metric, representing greater investment in a variety of factors that influence the child's educational experience.

The student-teacher ratio in each of the LaGrange County school districts is relatively low, with the ration being between 15.6 and 16.1 students per teacher. Near the national average of 16, the schools in LaGrange County have a slightly better student-teacher ratio than districts in neighboring counties (16.6 and 18.5) and the average in Indiana (17.0). These low student-teacher ratios are a strength for the schools in LaGrange County.

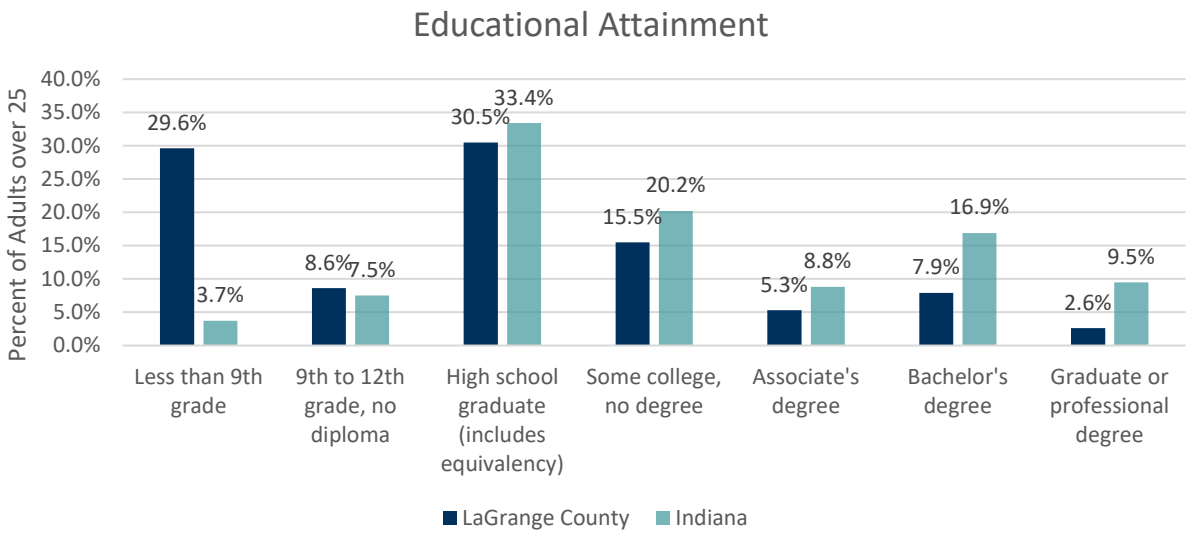


Similarly, schools in LaGrange County spend more per student than schools in neighboring counties and across the state. Ranging from $11,975 in Prairie Heights to $12,228 and $12,375 in Lakeland and Westview respectively, these school districts invest in their students between 7% and 11% more than the average district in Indiana ($11,145). However, spending in these districts is lower than the US average of $13,834.



Educational Attainment

Educational attainment refers to the level of education of adults over the age of twenty five. Educational attainment in LaGrange County is lower than in the state, once again reflecting the tradition of the large Amish population to complete formal schooling at eighth grade. As noted above, however, those students who complete high school are as likely to obtain a higher education degree as their peers.



2. PLACEMAKING

The Placemaking section describes the quality of place characteristics in LaGrange County, including the amenities, attractions, and experiences that make it unique. Next, it explains the connections between placemaking and other topic areas. Finally, this section describes recent placemaking efforts, identifies key assets in the county that contribute to its quality of place, and explores opportunities for future placemaking.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Natural resources and Amish culture are the major defining features of the county**. Expansive farmland, dozens of lakes, and thousands of acres of open space combined with Amish cultural influence are the prominent characteristics in LaGrange.
- **Regular and annual events contribute to a strong sense of place**. The Shipshewana Trading Post's weekly flea market and auctions and the LaGrange Corn School festival are signature features of the county.
- **Trails and hospitality are key areas of opportunity for placemaking.** Increasing trail connections and developing a stronger hospitality network would serve both residents and visitors.

2.1 DEFINITION

Placemaking is "a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value."[6] Placemaking highlights existing community assets and potential, and it encourages community members and stakeholders to take ownership of their communities. Placemaking is an inclusive term that incorporates physical projects (urban design, streetscape improvements, public art, etc.), as well as programs, activation, and education initiatives. By investing in the quality of place, communities are also contributing to positive economic outcomes;[7] the more desirable a place is to live, work, or visit, the more economic opportunities there will be for both internal and external investment.

Quality of Place Characteristics

Quality of place characteristics refer to those defining features of a place – whether natural or manmade – that express its character and contribute to its quality. The following characteristics describe some of LaGrange County's most notable and distinguishing qualities:

- **Rural and agricultural** – 94% of land in LaGrange County is zoned for agriculture, most of which is used for farming or parks and open space. The county has the largest number of certified organic farms in Indiana and has over 160,000 acres of farmland.[8] Due to many small scale farms, LaGrange County also has the most diverse crop production in Indiana.
- **Lakes and water resources** – LaGrange County is home to 64 lakes; many of these resources allow residents and visitors alike to enjoy recreational opportunities.[9,10] They can engage in

[6] https://www.pps.org/article/what-is-placemaking
[7] https://www.planning.org/knowledgebase/creativeplacemaking/
[8] https://lagrangecountyedc.com/core-industries/
[9] https://visitshipshewanain.com/lakes/
[10] https://www.lagrangechamber.org/about-lagrange-county

activities such as water skiing, swimming, fishing, canoeing, boating, etc., year-round. The number and accessibility of water features in LaGrange is a standout feature in Indiana and in the region.

- **Amish influence** – LaGrange County's population is approximately 44% Amish.[11] The Amish work largely in woodworking and recreational-vehicle manufacturing, and the community is a major source of entrepreneurship and business-ownership in the county. Over 2 million tourists visit the area each year, largely drawn by the Amish attractions which are among the top five in Indiana.[12]

Placemaking and Other Community Values

Efforts to improve the quality of a place and other community values are often mutually beneficial. The following examples suggest a number of areas that are impacted by placemaking and that may influence placemaking as well.

- **Transportation –** Projects that improve transportation options may also impact the quality of place. Streetscape improvements like sidewalks, curb cuts, bike lanes, streetlights, and landscaping are not only functional improvements but also contribute to a sense of place. Amenities for pedestrians and cyclists, like bike racks, benches, and trash cans, encourage visitors to stay and enjoy public spaces and art.
- **Public Health –** Programs and activities aimed at getting people moving for the sake of their health, such as biking and running clubs, create a sense of community and place. Furthermore, projects that produce recreational amenities, like trails for walking, jogging, and biking, or other outdoor recreation facilities, create an environment in which people have more opportunities to exercise and thereby improve their health. LaGrange is home to Indiana's largest fish and wildlife area and hundreds of acres of county parks, providing opportunities for seasonal hunting, fishing, hiking, paddling, and more, which encourages visitors and residents to be active.[13]
- **Economic Development** – Public events draw people to particular locations (such as a Town Center) where they are introduced to local businesses and vendors. Visitors can be retained beyond the initial event that attracted them, bringing new business to the area. Amenities like trails are also meant to promote tourism. A recent study showed that 87% of trail vacationers have significant discretionary income and 81% stayed overnight in local accommodations.[14] Trail visitors may boost dining and retail businesses as well, and in the long-term are considered a key catalyst in attracting new talent and businesses.

[11] https://lagrangecountyedc.com/living-here/
[12] https://explorelagrangecountyin.com/about/
[13] https://lagrangecountyedc.com/living-here/
[14] https://wabashrivertrail.org/

2.2 PLACES, PROGRAMS, AND PUBLIC ART

The following examples of place, programs, and public art reflect some of the predominant quality of place characteristics in the County, and several are the direct result of intentional placemaking efforts.

LaGrange

- **LaGrange County Courthouse**
  The LaGrange County Courthouse was built in 1878-79 on Detroit Street in LaGrange and was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1980. The courthouse is one of several buildings in the Town of LaGrange and throughout the county that reflect the county's history.

- **Corn School Festival**
  The Corn School festival is one of the oldest street festivals in Indiana, hosted the first week of October in downtown LaGrange. With carnival rides, vendors, parades, and awards, the festival draws thousands of attendees.[15]

[15] https://explorelagrangein.com/annual-events/corn-school/

- **Make It Your Own Mural Fest – Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership**[16]
  In the fall of 2020, the Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership and the Arts United of Greater Fort Wayne Inc launched the Make It Your Own Mural Fest to bring public art to the 11 counties in the region. Indiana native Amy Buchs painted a quilt with a Lonestar design as a backdrop to two grazing cattle, representing the strengths of the Amish, maker, and farming communities.

Shipshewana

- **Shipshewana Trading Place (Auction and Flea Market)**
  The Midwest's largest flea market, the Shipshewana Trading Place is a major destination in the county and the region. Global and local vendors sell all kinds of goods, a restaurant and food courts provide dining options, and ten different rings host a variety of auctions, including a weekly horse auction.[17]

- **Menno-hof Amish and Mennonite Cultural Center**
  The cultural center is one of the main tourist attractions that allows visitors to learn more about Amish culture and history.[18]

[16] https://neindiana.com/mural-festival/about
[17] https://shipshewanatradingplace.com/flea-market/
[18] https://lagrangecountyedc.com/living-here/

- **Blue Gate**
  Shipshewana boasts the famous Blue Gate Amish Restaurant and Bakery, Music Hall, Performing Arts Center, and Garden Inn. The Blue Gate offers authentic Amish dining and carriage rides, and their venues host local and national performances.

- **The Michiana Events Center (The MEC)**
  The MEC is a large event venue that serves the region of Michiana. Its Coliseum has 6,000 seats to host concerts and shows; the 100,000 square foot trade show area hosts expos, trade shows, and events. The venue also hosts bull riding tours, monster truck rallies, rodeos, auctions, and much more.

- **Blue Gate Carriage**
  Blue Gate Carriage offers visitors a unique opportunity to experience the traditional form of Amish transportation in a horse drawn buggy.

- **Shipshewana "Walldogs"**
  The Walldogs are a collection of artists who visit small communities and paint murals that depict local history. In 2014, they chose Shipshewana and painted sixteen murals throughout the town.[19]

[19] https://visitshipshewanain.com/walldog-murals/

Topeka

- **Topeka Livestock Auction & Restaurant**
  This auction house provides a variety of auction, consultation and appraisal services in Topeka and the surrounding area. The associated restaurant is always open during sales and offers grab-and-go options.

Wolcottville

- **Cook's Bison Ranch**
  This 83-acre farm offers guided wagon rides, souvenirs at the Buffalo Treasures Gift Shop, and several dining options. They also outfit and guide a variety of hunting packages.[20]

Unincorporated

- **Duff Lake Fen at Pine Knob Park**
  In 2015, The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program and the LaGrange County Parks and Recreation Department began an acquisition and restoration project of the Duff Lake Fens. After several years, the area has been significantly restored to a unique wildlife habitat and a natural area for public access and recreation. [21] Several improvements have been proposed, including an additional 9200 feet of trail and boardwalk, a fishing platform, small pavilion, and a restroom.[22]

[20] https://www.cooksbisonranch.com/ranch-tours
[21] https://www.fws.gov/midwest/news/DuffLakeRestoration.html
[22] https://www.lagrangecounty.org/index.php/docs-downloads/1153-04-25-2019-minutes/file

- **Pigeon River Fish and Wildlife Area**
  The Pigeon River FWA was established in 1956 when the Mongo, Nasby, and Ontario reservoirs were given to the state. Since that time, the State has acquired a total of nearly 12,000 acres of land, 529 acres of lakes and impoundments, and 17 miles of river. The area is home to diverse wildlife and offers numerous outdoor recreation opportunities.[23]

- **The Welcome to Lima Township mural** is located in Howe and captures the significance of agricultural practices throughout the county.

2.3 OPPORTUNITY AREAS

Existing quality of place characteristics provide a foundation on within the county.

Trails

The Pumpkinvine Nature trail is a major community asset that highlights the natural beauty of the county and promotes active recreation. A recent grant of nearly one million dollars to extend extension the trail through downtown Shipshewana suggests that there is the will and momentum to expand the trail network in the county.

[23] https://www.in.gov/dnr/fish-and-wildlife/properties/pigeon-river-fwa/

Neighboring Elkhart County has more than 140 miles of trails and/or bike routes that draw visitors and residents to the different towns across the county. Noble County has over 30 miles of trails,[24] and Steuben County has a 7.5 mile multi-purpose trail as well as dozens of miles of other trail options. By expanding the trail network, LaGrange County has a significant opportunity to provide connections among its various communities and to nearby locations outside the county. These connections are valuable for residents who bike for pleasure and for transportation, as well as for visitors.

A recent study by the Outdoor Industry Association found that 26% of American adults started or resumed biking outside during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, 65% of those respondents indicated that they are likely to continue this new or revived hobby.[25] In addition to the increase in biking among the Amish community in LaGrange, these statistics suggest that investing in bicycle infrastructure would make LaGrange an even more appealing place to residents and visitors alike.

Economic Impact
"Americans spend more on bicycling each year than they do on airline travel. Trail-based tourism is a major economic driver in many small communities, supporting local small businesses through annual revenues of millions of dollars per trail in direct consumer spending in many cases."[26]

Hospitality

LaGrange County brings in approximately two million visitors a year. There may be opportunities to capitalize on the presence of these visitors by creating new, interesting, and welcoming spaces related to hospitality, such as restaurants, cafes, and hotels or bed and breakfasts. Of the $126.5 million in visitor spending during 2017, 28% was spent on Food and Beverage and 13% on Lodging.[27] In 2019, about 22% of total traveler spending in the US was spent on lodging; given the lower percentage in LaGrange County, there seems to be substantial opportunity for growth in this area.

Resources and Grants

Indiana's Office of Community & Rural Affairs (OCRA) has a variety of resources connected to placemaking. The state sponsors **Community Liaisons** (CL) to assist local communities in accomplishing their goals. The liaisons share funding opportunities and other resources for community and economic development projects and provide technical assistance for OCRA programs.

The OCRA is currently offering a **Historic Renovation Grant Program** to "support the preservation and rehabilitation of historic properties to further incentivize downtown economic development as well as enhance the design and overall appearance of downtown commercial corridors."[28] There may be opportunities in LaGrange for placemaking through preservation and renovation of historic assets.

[24] http://visitnoblecounty.com/wakingbiking-trail/
[25] 2021 Special Report: New Outdoor Participant (COVID and Beyond) - Outdoor Industry Association
[26] resourcehandler.ashx (railstotrails.org)
[27] "Tourism Matters in LaGrange County." LaGrange County CVB.
[28] https://www.in.gov/ocra/historic-renovation-grant-program/

Speakman House
In 2018, a $100,000 dollar grant was awarded to preserve the Speakman House, a Greek Revival residence built in Aurora in 1846. The project is intended to become a tour and event space, and potentially a bed and breakfast.

The State of Indiana also works alongside the National Main Street Center to designate certain communities as **Indiana Main Streets**. These communities must demonstrate an ethic of historic preservation and use historic preservation as a tool for economic development.[29] The OCRA recently revised its approach to designating Indiana Main Streets by adding an introductory level for organizations with more limited capacity. Shipshewana is already recognized as an Indiana Main Street, and there may be additional opportunities within the county for similar accreditation in other towns.

[29] https://www.in.gov/ocra/mainstreet/faqs/