

REACHING A POSTSECONDARY ATTAINMENT GOAL: A MULTISTATE OVERVIEW

Introduction

In response to disappointing results on national and international assessments of student learning and a decline in the United States' standing in international education attainment rankings, both President Obama and the Lumina Foundation announced ambitious national postsecondary attainment goals in 2009.¹ The purpose of these goals was to raise awareness of the need to bolster economic competitiveness by increasing the number of Americans earning some form of credential beyond a high school diploma.



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FIG. 1: **NUMBER OF STATES WITH POSTSECONDARY ATTAINMENT GOALS, BY YEAR (2008-17)**



Source: Data compiled by HCM Strategists



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The federal initiative called on the country to increase the number of 25-34 year olds with an associate or bachelor's degree to 60 percent by 2020. The Lumina Foundation also set a 60 percent target, but it identified a broader range of ages (25-64) and credentials (including high-quality certificates), and set 2025 as the target year.²

This push from the federal level, along with Lumina's grant-making and advocacy, led to a flurry of state activity. Aside from Hawai'i, which first set its target in 2008, and South Carolina, which set its goal in 2009, state attainment goals were largely absent until 2010. Since that time, however, **all but nine states — California, Delaware, Michigan, Mississippi, Nebraska, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia — have set postsecondary attainment goals** that have been formally adopted by a statewide leadership group.

While most states used similar criteria in their goals, the 41 state-level attainment goals vary in a number of ways, including the definition of postsecondary attainment, time frame, and ambition. Some states have chosen to focus on young people (e.g. 25-34 year olds) and to focus only on associate and bachelor's degrees; other states focus on working-age adults aged 25-64 and include high-quality certificates. On average, states are hoping to grow their attainment levels by roughly 18 percentage points over a period of 10 years. States have targeted anywhere from eight to 40 percentage points in growth.

Setting meaningful attainment goals is just the first important step in the process. The following pages outline how states have approached this important and challenging task — with a deeper focus on lessons learned from Tennessee, Virginia, and Maine — and offer recommendations for North Carolina policymakers.



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Why the Push for Increased Postsecondary Attainment?

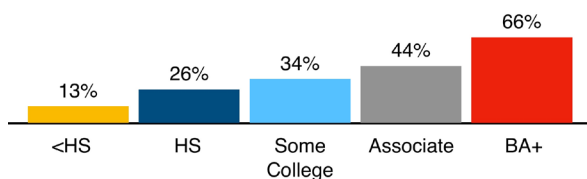
In a globalized economy, some education beyond high school has increasingly become a prerequisite for a family-sustaining wage. Jobs that paid well and required a high school diploma were once plentiful in industries like manufacturing. But global competition—particularly the movement of manufacturing jobs offshore—has dramatically changed the economic fortunes of high school graduates in America, and particularly in North Carolina. The earnings advantage enjoyed by those with a college degree has grown over time, in part because the labor market opportunities for high school graduates have declined.³

There is significant evidence that postsecondary credentials provide economic benefits for both individuals and the larger economy. After accounting for the cost of tuition, the average four-year college graduate will earn \$800,000 more than his or her peer with only a high school diploma over their careers.⁴

At the same time, less-educated individuals will face lower compensation and a scarcity of jobs as they compete in the workforce. Between January 2010 and January 2016, the U.S. economy added 11.5 million jobs, with **99 percent of those jobs going to individuals with at least some college education.**⁵

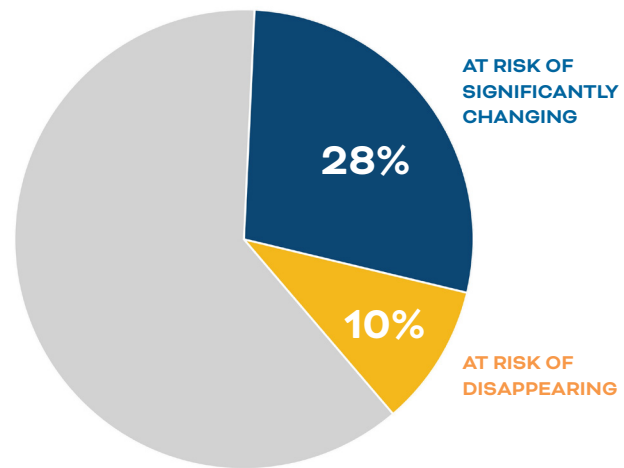
Research from Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce has shown that while there are still many good jobs that pay well and do not require a bachelor's degree, they tend to require more education and postsecondary training than in the past, including associate degrees and certificates.⁶ The following chart outlines the share of workers with "good jobs" (i.e. those that pay at least \$35,000 for individuals under the age of 45 and at least \$45,000 for workers aged 45 and older). The rates rise as the level of education increases and the differences are stark — only 13 percent of individuals with less than a high school diploma have jobs that meet this definition of "good jobs."

FIG. 3: **SHARE OF WORKERS WITH GOOD JOBS IN NC (2013-15)**



Source: Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce

FIG. 2: **38% RISK OF JOB AUTOMATION IN U.S.**



OECD (2018, OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers, Ljubica Nedelkoska and Glenda.

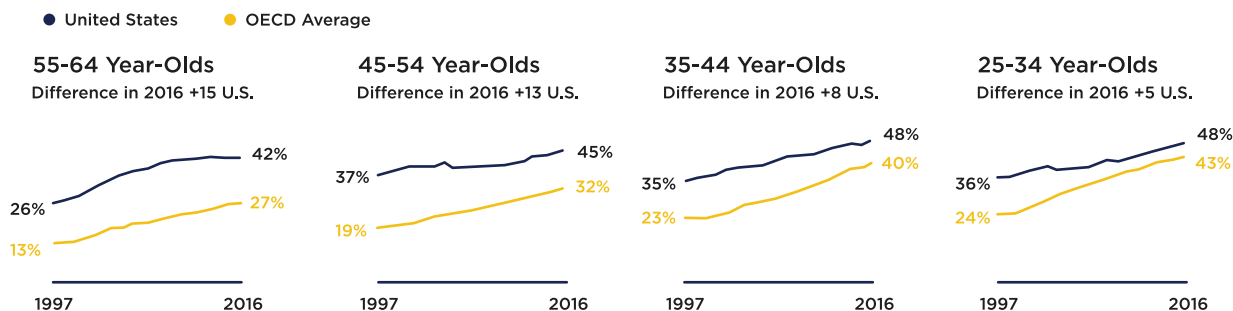
“Good jobs” are not uniform across or within states and it is critical that states analyze local contexts when developing plans for educational attainment. North Carolina had a net loss of 6,000 “good” blue collar jobs, such as those in manufacturing, transportation, construction, and retail, between 1991 and 2015, but the state added 196,000 “good” skilled services jobs, including financial, business, education, healthcare, and government services, during that same period.⁷

Education also has positive effects beyond the direct connection to improving workforce outcomes. Numerous studies have found that it can reduce crime, improve health outcomes, and increase civic participation, among other things.⁸

Advances in technology and increased economic competition from abroad are likely to accelerate these trends. **A recent report from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) found that 38 percent of jobs in the United States are at risk of automation in the coming years.**⁹ While only 10 percent of those jobs are expected to disappear entirely, another 28 percent will likely shift significantly, requiring employees to learn new skills to adapt. Workers most at risk of automation are also unlikely to receive the on-the-job training needed to transition into updated roles.

Meanwhile, other nations have made significant strides in raising their educational attainment, eroding the United States’ traditional advantage in that area. According to the OECD, between 1997 and 2016 the U.S.’s traditional advantage in postsecondary attainment over its international peers narrowed significantly among 25-34 year olds. In 1997, the U.S. attainment rate was 12 percentage points higher than the OECD average among young workers; by 2016, that gap had narrowed to five percentage points.¹⁰ **While the U.S. has continued to grow its attainment rate among young people, it has not done so quickly enough to maintain its advantage over other developed economies.**

FIG. 4: **SHARE OF ADULTS WITH POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION AMONG U.S. & ADVANCED ECONOMIES (1997-2016)**



Source: OECD

In 2016, the U.S. still ranked as the third-most educated country among 55-64 year-olds. However, among 25-34 year-olds, it is ranked 10th in the world.¹¹ **Given the interconnectedness of the global economy today, these numbers are a stark reminder that young people will face significant competition from a highly educated global workforce for the jobs of the future.** Further, it will be important that individuals who do not earn a credential at a young age have the requisite support and opportunities to increase their skills and educational attainment in adulthood.

FIG. 5: SHARE OF ADULTS WITH POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION AMONG ADVANCED ECONOMIES (2016)

55-64 Year-Olds	45-54 Year-Olds	35-44 Year-Olds	25-34 Year-Olds
1. Israel 47.6	1. Canada 55.7	1. Canada 62.8	1. Korea 70.0
2. Canada 46.2	2. Israel 49.0	2. Korea 59.8	2. Canada 60.6
3. United States 41.9	3. Japan 47.8	3. Japan 55.1	3. Japan 60.1
4. Japan 39.7	4. Finland 45.6	4. Israel 54.8	4. Lithuania 54.9
5. United Kingdom 37.6	5. United States 44.9	5. United Kingdom 51.6	5. United Kingdom 52.0
6. Finland 37.0	6. United Kingdom 42.0	6. Finland 51.4	6. Luxembourg 51.4
7. Estonia 36.1	7. Norway 40.4	7. Luxembourg 51.2	7. Australia 49.3
8. Australia 35.0	8. Australia 40.0	8. Sweden 49.3	8. Switzerland 48.8
9. Norway 33.0	9. Iceland 39.9	9. Australia 48.8	9. Norway 48.6
10. Switzerland 31.6	10. Switzerland 37.9	10. Norway 48.7	10. United States 47.5
11. Sweden 30.8	11. Korea 37.8	11. Iceland 48.5	11. Israel 47.4
12. Lithuania 30.7	12. Estonia 37.5	12. United States 48.3	12. Sweden 47.2
27. Korea 19.7			

Source: OECD

While competition from abroad is a very real threat to the American workforce, North Carolina will also face competition from other states. North Carolina sits in the middle of the pack among all states with a total postsecondary attainment level of 47.4 percent, placing it as the 24th most educated state in the country (see Fig. 6).¹² It ranks higher at certain levels of attainment, including 19th for the share of adults aged 25-64 with a graduate or professional degree and 16th for the share with an associate degree.

A National Review of Statewide Postsecondary Attainment Goals

States have approached setting statewide postsecondary attainment goals in a number of ways. The table on the following page provides a brief summary of the attainment goals set in 41 states. Some notable considerations for North Carolina include:

Age Ranges

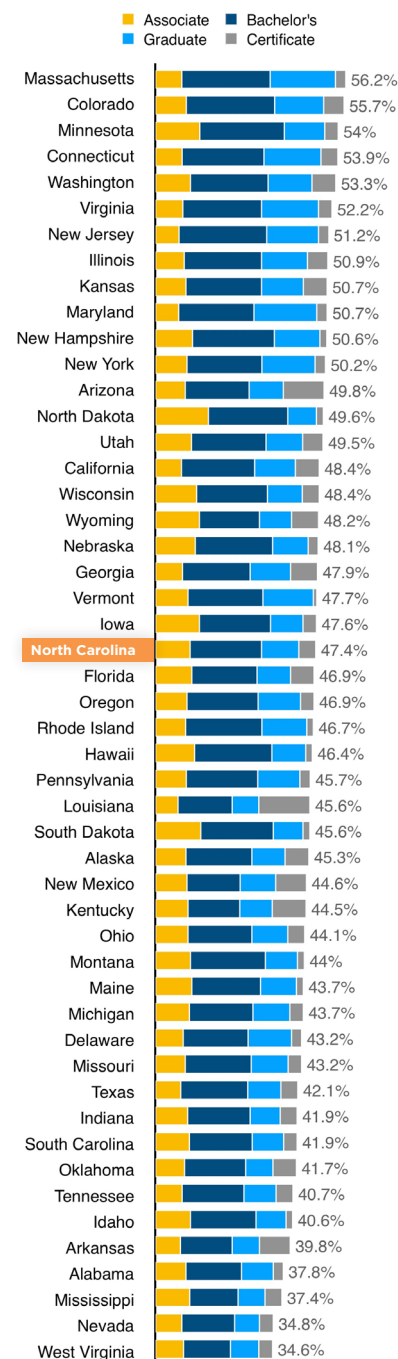
Though most states have set their goals to target 25-64 year-olds, five states have targeted their goals to 25-34 year-olds (**Colorado, Idaho, Massachusetts, South Dakota, and Texas**) and two states have targeted 25-44 year-olds (**Minnesota and Washington**).

Credential Definitions

Generally, states set targets that have included any level of postsecondary attainment, including high-quality certificates. However, there are exceptions. **South Carolina** includes only a bachelor's degree or higher, excluding both associate degrees and certificates, and **Hawaii** includes two- and four-year degrees, but excludes certificates.

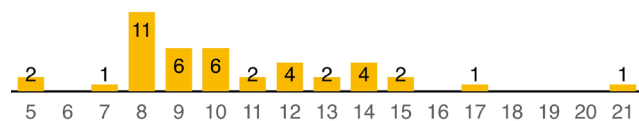
States differ in how they define high-value certificates and some states have no definition. Data on certificate completion are limited, as the primary source for attainment data (the American Community Survey of the US Census) does not include certificates in its traditional measure of educational attainment. The Lumina Foundation has estimated certificate attainment, counting only certificates whose holders are employed in the field in which they received their credential to ensure that their attainment rates only count credentials that have economic value.¹³ When citing data on certificate attainment, this report uses Lumina Foundation data and, therefore, follows that definition.

FIG. 6: EDUCATION ATTAINMENT BY STATE (2016)



Source: Lumina Foundation

FIG. 7: NUMBER OF STATES BY TIMEFRAME OF POSTSECONDARY ATTAINMENT GOAL



Source: HCM Strategists & Hunt Institute

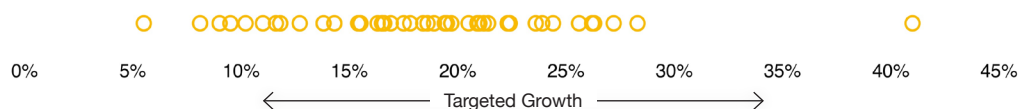
Timelines

The timelines that states have set to reach their postsecondary attainment goals vary widely from five years (**Arkansas and Nevada**) to 21 years (**South Carolina**). Most states tend to fall in the 8-10 year range with an average of about 10 years. Notably, there is little relationship between the overall growth targeted and the number of years states have allotted to reach their goals.

Targeted Growth

On average, states are looking to grow their postsecondary attainment levels by about 18 percentage points. While there is significant variation across states, about half of the states range from 16 to 24 percentage points and only a handful have targeted growth of 25 percentage points or more. Oregon is an outlier, where a goal of 80 percent attainment by 2025 translates to an ambitious 41 percentage point increase.

FIG. 8: DISTRIBUTION OF STATES BY TARGETED GROWTH IN POSTSECONDARY ATTAINMENT GOAL



Source: HCM Strategists & Hunt Institute

Subgroups

To date, most states have not set specific targets for subgroups, but a number of them have referenced the need to close attainment gaps that exist between various races and ethnicities, as well as economically advantaged and disadvantaged populations. **Minnesota**, for example, notes that reaching their goal “will likely be difficult without achieving attainment rates that are comparable across all race and ethnicity groups.”¹⁴ **Connecticut** also committed to cutting the attainment gap between whites and minorities in half by 2025.¹⁵ Additionally, **Texas** has set specific and measurable targets for underserved populations that will help narrow gaps.¹⁶ This is both an equity issue and a practical issue. Without closing these gaps, it will be exceedingly challenging to achieve attainment goals.

Interim Targets

Interim targets have been set in a dozen states as a means of tracking states’ progress toward meeting their goals. Some states have chosen to set annual linear targets, while others have identified specific benchmark years between the year their plan was set and the target year. In recognition that outcomes need to be improved at all levels of education if the state is to meet its attainment goal, Arizona has developed targets across the education continuum. In addition to its attainment goal, the state has set six targets on the following: quality early learning, third grade



P-12



POST-SECONDARY



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FIG. 9: POSTSECONDARY ATTAINMENT GOALS, BY STATE

Targeted Growth = Attainment Goal - Attainment Level in Year Target Set

State	Year Created - Target Year	Attainment in Year Created	Attainment Goal	Attainment (2016)	Current Attainment Gap
Hawai'i	2008 ● 2025	● 42.3%	● 55%	● 46.4%	● 8.6%
South Carolina	2009 ● 2030	● 23.5%	● 29%	● 27.8%	● 1.2%
Kansas	2010 ● 2020	● 40.5%	● 60%	● 50.7%	● 9.3%
Utah	2010 ● 2020	● 39.7%	● 66%	● 49.5%	● 16.5%
Georgia	2011 ● 2025	● 36.4%	● 60%	● 47.9%	● 12.1%
Louisiana	2011 ● 2025	● 28.2%	● 46%	● 45.6%	● 0.4%
Oregon	2011 ● 2025	● 39%	● 80%	● 46.9%	● 33.1%
Idaho ¹	2012 ● 2020	● 35%	● 60%	● 40.6%	● 22.9%
Illinois	2012 ● 2025	● 42.5%	● 60%	● 50.9%	● 9.1%
Indiana	2012 ● 2025	● 34.4%	● 60%	● 41.9%	● 18.1%
Massachusetts ³	2012 ● 2020	● 50.5%	● 60%	● 53.2%	● 2.7%
Colorado ¹	2013 ● 2025	● 48%	● 66%	● 55.2%	● 10.8%
Maryland	2013 ● 2025	● 46%	● 55%	● 50.7%	● 4.3%
Missouri	2013 ● 2025	● 37.6%	● 60%	● 43.2%	● 16.8%
Montana	2013 ● 2020	● 39%	● 60%	● 44%	● 16%
Tennessee	2013 ● 2025	● 33.8%	● 55%	● 40.7%	● 14.3%
Washington ²	2013 ● 2023	● 44.2%	● 70%	● 54.9%	● 15.1%
Rhode Island	2014 ● 2025	● 43.1%	● 60%	● 46.7%	● 13.3%
Arkansas	2015 ● 2025	● 39.5%	● 60%	● 39.8%	● 20.2%
Connecticut	2015 ● 2025	● 53.5%	● 70%	● 53.9%	● 16.1%
Minnesota ¹	2015 ● 2025	● 54.3%	● 70%	● 58.1%	● 11.9%
Nevada	2015 ● 2020	● 35.6%	● 60%	● 34.8%	● 25.2%
New Hampshire	2015 ● 2025	● 49.5%	● 65%	● 50.6%	● 14.4%
Texas ¹	2015 ● 2030	● 36.6%	● 60%	● 42.9%	● 17.1%
Virginia	2015 ● 2030	● 51.1%	● 70%	● 52.2%	● 17.8%
Alaska	2016 ● 2025	● 45.3%	● 65%	● 45.3%	● 19.7%
Arizona	2016 ● 2030	● 49.8%	● 60%	● 49.8%	● 10.2%
Florida	2016 ● 2025	● 46.9%	● 55%	● 46.9%	● 8.1%
Iowa	2016 ● 2025	● 47.6%	● 70%	● 47.6%	● 22.4%
Kentucky	2016 ● 2030	● 44.5%	● 60%	● 44.5%	● 15.5%
Maine	2016 ● 2025	● 43.7%	● 60%	● 43.7%	● 16.3%
New Mexico	2016 ● 2030	● 44.6%	● 66%	● 44.6%	● 21.4%
North Dakota	2016 ● 2025	● 49.6%	● 65%	● 49.6%	● 15.4%
Ohio	2016 ● 2025	● 44.1%	● 65%	● 44.1%	● 20.9%
Oklahoma	2016 ● 2025	● 41.7%	● 70%	● 41.7%	● 28.3%
South Dakota ¹	2016 ● 2025	● 49.4%	● 65%	● 49.4%	● 15.6%
Wisconsin	2016 ● 2027	● 48.4%	● 60%	● 48.4%	● 11.6%
Alabama	2017 ● 2025	● 37.8%	● 65%	● 37.8%	● 27.2%
New Jersey	2017 ● 2025	● 51.2%	● 65%	● 51.2%	● 13.8%
Vermont	2017 ● 2025	● 47.7%	● 70%	● 47.7%	● 22.3%
Wyoming	2017 ● 2025	● 48.2%	● 60%	● 48.2%	● 11.8%
California				● 48.4%	
Delaware				● 43.2%	
Michigan				● 43.7%	
Mississippi				● 37.4%	
Nebraska				● 48.1%	
New York				● 50.2%	
North Carolina				● 47.4%	
Pennsylvania				● 45.7%	
West Virginia				● 34.6%	

1. Attainment goal is specifically for 25-34 year-olds.
2. Attainment goal is specifically for 25-44 year-olds and includes bachelors and above only.
3. Attainment goal is specifically for 25-34 year-olds and includes associate and above only.
4. Attainment goal is specifically for bachelor's and above only.

Source: HCM Strategists & Hunt Institute

reading, eighth grade math, high school graduation, opportunity youth, and postsecondary enrollment.¹⁷ Though Florida has not set specific goals, the Florida Chamber of Commerce has created a dashboard that tracks similar data that it considers fundamental to increasing postsecondary attainment.¹⁸

Lessons from Tennessee: A Systemwide Approach

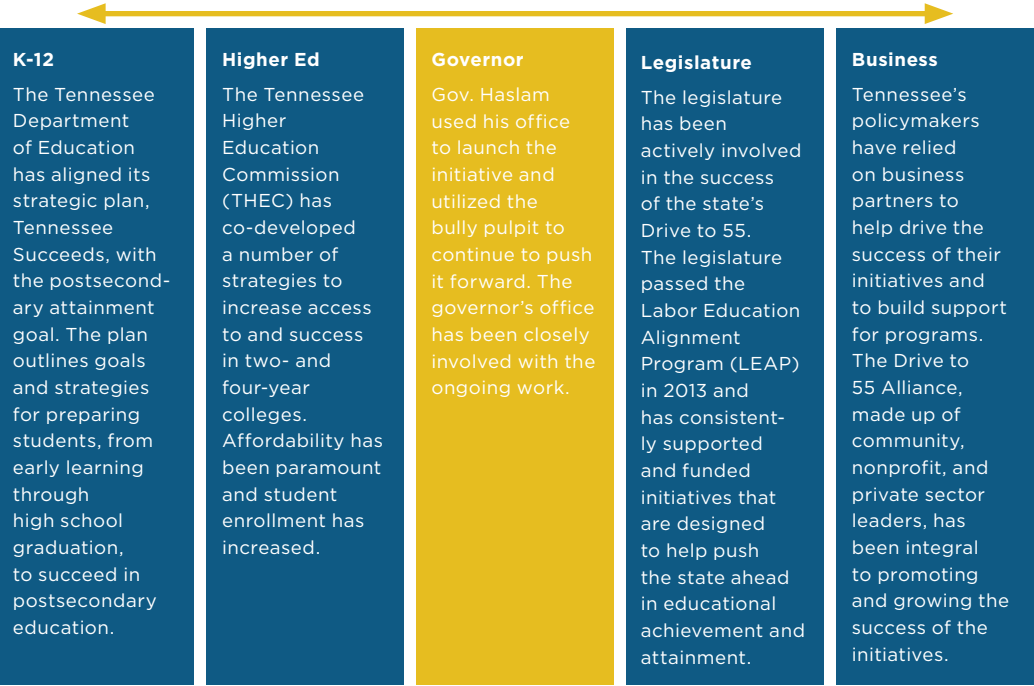
The executive branch in Tennessee has been deeply focused on higher education policy for the past 15 years. Democratic Governor Phil Bredesen made it a priority when he took office in 2003 and his successor, Republican Governor Bill Haslam, built upon that momentum after assuming office in 2011.

In January of 2010, the state legislature passed, and Governor Bredesen signed, the *Complete College Tennessee Act of 2010*. The bill required the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC) to create a statewide master plan for public higher education, unified the state’s 13 independent colleges, improved credit articulation and transferability, and implemented an outcomes-based funding formula, among other changes.¹⁹

Governor Haslam first announced the *Drive to 55* initiative in 2013 with the aim to increase the percentage of adults with a postsecondary credential to 55 percent by 2025.²⁰ At the time, the state’s overall attainment rate was 33.8 percent, which excluded high-quality certificates since there was no accurate estimate of certificate attainment in 2013. The Lumina Foundation has since begun calculating that figure, which it estimates at 5 percent in Tennessee. After accounting for certificates, the state needs to grow its attainment rate by roughly 14 percentage points by 2025.²¹

Tennessee has taken a collaborative and multi-faceted approach to its effort to boost statewide attainment. **Success has not come from a single entity, but from a coordinated approach with strategy alignment and additional funding to support implementation.**

SYSTEMWIDE COORDINATION



QUICK OVERVIEW: TN

Year Target Set: 2013

Year of Target: 2025

Attainment Target: 55%

Current Attainment: 40.7%

Cert.: 5.0%

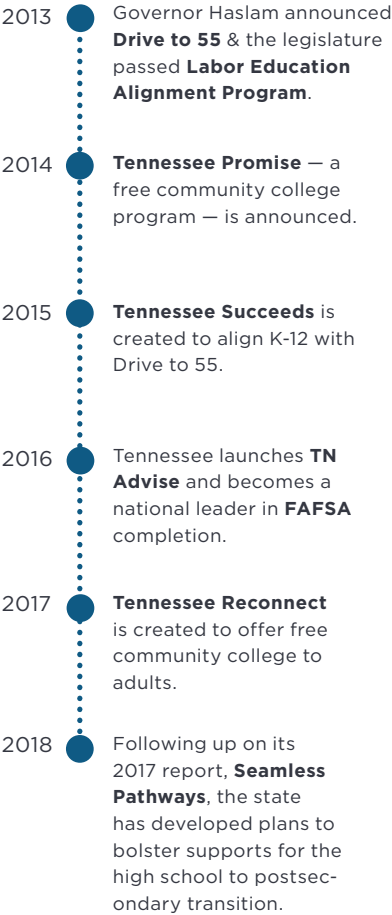
AA: 8.0%

BA: 18.2%

Grad./Prof.: 9.5%

Current Gap: 14.3%

TENNESSEE TIMELINE



Tennessee has committed funds to support its ambitious plans. After adjusting for inflation, higher education appropriations per full-time equivalent student increased by 30 percent between 2012 and 2017.²² This increased investment and focus has led to sustained progress. In his 2018 State of the State address, Governor Haslam announced that the state was on track to reach its goal two years ahead of its 2025 target.²³

Financial Support for Students

- **Tennessee Promise** is a scholarship program that offers high school graduates the opportunity to earn an associate degree or postsecondary certificate tuition- and fee-free at public community colleges and technical schools. As a last-dollar program, it provides financial assistance after other grants and federal aid have been awarded, which has reduced the financial burden on the state. The initiative has successfully helped students access federal funds, incentivized postsecondary enrollment, and provided an average \$1,090 per student in fall 2016.²⁴
- **Tennessee Reconnect** offers adults who have not earned a college degree or certificate tuition-free community or technical college, regardless of income or past academic performance. More than two million Tennesseans are eligible for this program. Advisors are available for adult students at colleges, along with eight regional “community navigators” who provide free advising, career exploration tools, assistance in understanding financial aid and college costs, and support in choosing a major.²⁵ These advisors are available to students throughout enrollment.
- **College entrance exams** are required for all high school students in Tennessee. The ACT and/or SAT are offered to all students free of charge, which research has found significantly increases college access for low-income students.²⁶ Districts can also take advantage of programs through the Tennessee Department of Education that offer ACT preparation courses and ACT retake opportunities at no cost to the student.²⁷ In order to provide extra incentive for schools, the state incorporated students’ results into the school accountability system.

Student Support

- High school juniors and seniors at schools participating in **AdviseTN** receive college counseling. This pilot program currently has capacity for up to 10,000 students.²⁸
- Tennessee has created a statewide framework for school counselor standards and prioritized student access to school counselors by requiring a ratio of one counselor for every 500 students in grades K-6 and one counselor for every 350 students in grades 7-12, compared to a one to 386 ratio in North Carolina’s K-12 schools.²⁹ The state’s *Comprehensive School Counseling Model of Practice and Student Standards (Policy 5.103)* will go into effect in the fall of 2018 and will further bolster student supports.
- Tennessee has prioritized increased access to early postsecondary opportunities with the intention of helping students enter postsecondary education better prepared and lowering the cost of postsecondary credentials. These opportunities include Advanced Placement courses and dual enrollment, among other smaller programs.³⁰
- The state was awarded a federal Institute for Education Sciences grant to increase access to a statewide longitudinal data system for students and school counselors to allow students to make more informed decisions about their postsecondary and career plans. The data system is also designed to identify successful strategies and interventions to inform the state’s programs going forward.³¹



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Public Engagement

Tennessee's positive results have partially been thanks to its robust public engagement. **Complete Tennessee**, a nonprofit advocacy organization, has led much of that work through three initiatives:

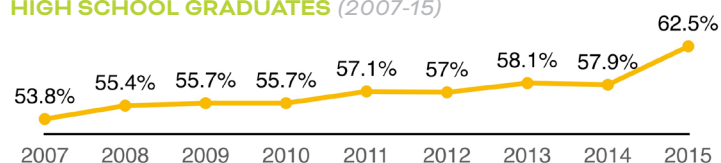
- **Engagement:** The organization actively promotes the *Drive to 55* initiative and engages the public to identify locally relevant information and needs. In 2017, Complete Tennessee conducted a statewide listening tour across nine regions, engaging elected officials, community and business leaders, and education stakeholders. This qualitative information has also been instrumental for state leaders.³²
- **Advocacy and Accountability:** Complete Tennessee has also served as an independent source for data and information on the state's progress. Each year, the organization releases a detailed report with county-level and institution-specific data and actively collaborates across the state to raise awareness.³³
- **Leadership Development:** The organization seeks to build leadership capacity across the state so that each region can develop solutions and programs that are tailored to their local context.³⁴

Private Sector Engagement

The state has also found success thanks to its private sector partnerships through the **Drive to 55 Alliance**. The Alliance has provided a platform for education leaders to actively engage with business leaders on how best to ensure that the education system is developing the workforce that Tennessee's businesses need. To support the initiative, Alliance members have identified four ways they can contribute:³⁵

- **Promotion:** The Alliance has promoted the Tennessee Reconnect program and sought to reengage non-credentialed adults into postsecondary education by leveraging its members' employees and robust communication networks.
- **Workforce Alignment:** Alliance members attend regional meetings to assist in identifying regional workforce demands and help publicize those needs in order to build public awareness.
- **Facilitation:** The Alliance has served as a connector between the state's community and technical colleges and workforce and community members to offer job placement and internships, among other support. The Alliance has recognized the importance of regular communication between postsecondary and business leaders to maintain relevant programming at community and technical colleges.
- **Mentor Recruitment:** *Tennessee Promise* offers all students mentors who help guide them as they transition from high school and persist through college. The Alliance has worked to recruit mentors who support between 5-10 students per year, meeting with each student twice and regularly communicating with both students and parents/guardians.

FIG. 10: COLLEGE-GOING RATE OF TENNESSEE
HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES (2007-15)



Source: Tennessee Higher Education Commission



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Progress

The state has achieved success across education levels in Tennessee:

- Tennessee has made completion of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) a requirement for its scholarship programs. As a result, the state has had the highest completions rates in the nation for the past three years, boosting access to postsecondary education for low-income students and maximizing federal financial aid. In 2017, 73.5 percent of Tennessee's seniors completed their applications, which was about 12 percentage points higher than the rate in second-place Delaware.³⁶ As of April 27, 2018, Tennessee continued to lead the nation in FAFSA completion with 74 percent of students.³⁷
- Remedial coursework bears financial costs for students, schools, and taxpayers. It also increases the time to completion and the chances that a student may drop out. Tennessee has sought to decrease the need for remedial coursework at the postsecondary level by offering it in high school. Over the past five years, the share of community college freshmen requiring remedial coursework has dropped from 67 to 52 percent.³⁸
- Between Fall 2014 and Fall 2016, enrollment among first-time freshmen increased by 13 percent overall, 30 percent at community colleges, and 32 percent at technical schools.³⁹ *Tennessee Promise* community college students were also more likely to re-enroll for their second year than non-Promise students — 58 percent to 42 percent.⁴⁰
- After the creation of *Tennessee Promise* in 2015, college attendance jumped 4.6 percentage points. That increase was larger than the growth in the previous seven years combined.⁴¹
- A positive sign that Tennessee has been able to improve postsecondary affordability is the significant decrease in student loan take-up that has occurred in recent years. Between Fall 2014 and Fall 2015, 17 percent fewer students originated student loans and the average federal student loan amount declined by 12 percent.⁴²

Lessons from Maine & Virginia: Private Sector Leadership

The private sector has been critical in leading a bipartisan charge for developing attainment goals in many states and has offered ongoing partnership with policymakers. While not all states will have the same level of private sector leadership, Virginia and Maine provide a valuable lesson on what the private sector can offer.

Virginia

Virginia is one of the highest-ranked states in degree attainment, currently ranking sixth in the country. Not content to remain stagnant, the state has set a target of 70 percent attainment by 2030 — 60 percent associate degree or higher and 10 percent postsecondary certificate, industry certification, state licensure, or apprenticeship.⁴³ The business community understands the link between a well-educated workforce and economic success, and it has been a vocal advocate for increasing postsecondary attainment. The website for Growth4VA, a bipartisan coalition of business, education, and political leaders, reflects this ambitious approach, noting that “Virginia can and should be known nationally and internationally as the TOP STATE FOR TALENT.”

The Virginia Business Higher Education Council (VBHEC), a nonprofit, nonpartisan business-led partnership with higher education that was founded in 1994, led the initial push for increasing educational attainment in 2009 by creating bipartisan support among policymakers for its *Grow by Degrees* campaign.⁴⁴ Both parties' gubernatorial candidates that year promised to significantly increase degree attainment thanks to a push by the VBHEC in partnership with

QUICK OVERVIEW: VA

Year Target Set: 2015

Year of Target: 2030

Attainment Target: 70%

Cert.: 10%

AA+: 60%

Current Attainment: 52.2%

Cert.: 4.0%

AA: 8.2%

BA: 23.2%

Grad./Prof.: 16.8%

Current Gap: 17.8%

Cert.: 6.0%

AA+: 11.8%



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the public and not-for-profit institutions. Governor Bob McDonnell won that race and followed through on his promise to prioritize educational attainment by creating the Governor's Commission on Higher Education Reform, Innovation and Investment.⁴⁵

In 2011, bipartisan support led to the unanimous passage of *Preparing for the Top Jobs of the 21st Century: The Virginia Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2011* (TJ21).⁴⁶ The bill sought to elevate the status of higher education in Virginia, which unlike K-12 education is not mentioned in the state constitution, and to develop a sustainable framework for fully funding colleges and universities going forward. TJ21 also set the state's first attainment goal — an additional 100,000 two- and four-year degrees from public colleges over 15 years.

In 2014, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), the coordinating body for Virginia's decentralized institutions of higher education, built on the work of TJ21 and developed the *Virginia Plan for Higher Education*.⁴⁷ The plan was approved by the General Assembly in March 2015 and the current postsecondary targets were set three months later in July. The plan's ambitious goals call for a further 11.8 percentage point jump in the attainment of associate degrees and higher and an increase of 6 percentage points in other postsecondary credentials.

Through the VBHEC, the business community has continued to be a critical partner in this effort, with Growth4VA leading the public information campaign. To generate political will, the organization has worked to provide elected officials with the information they need to stand firmly in support of higher education. In addition to providing data on the economic benefits of the higher education system, the VBHEC commissioned a bipartisan public opinion poll, which found overwhelming support for higher education among Virginians across demographics and political affiliations.⁴⁸

Maine

Like Virginia, much of the impetus for postsecondary attainment goals came from the private sector. Maine had a number of programs already working independently to increase postsecondary attainment, but there was no single entity that was coordinating across sectors and organizations. To address this problem, six organizations from business, advocacy, and higher education formed MaineSpark. As the core committee, these six organizations share leadership of a coalition of more than 45 partners.⁴⁹

In September 2017, the coalition announced a goal of 60 percent postsecondary attainment by 2025, which is about 16 percentage points higher than Maine's current 43.6 percent attainment level. Shortly after the announcement, the Maine legislature adopted the goal and directed the State Workforce Board to provide the legislature with annual reports on the state's progress.⁵⁰

MaineSpark has identified four tracks that span the education continuum. Each partner works in one or more of the tracks, focusing its efforts on providing aligned services and resources.

- **Strong Foundations** is focused on children from birth through grade six.
- **Future Success** is focused on students from grade six through postsecondary education.
- **Adult Promise** is focused on adults who are returning to complete degrees or change careers.
- **New Opportunities** is focused on attracting out-of-state talent into the Maine workforce.

Maine has grown its capacity in recent years by building a coalition of policymakers, educators, community members, and business leaders that supports increasing postsecondary attainment, but there is work to be done. In particular, the state will need to better define high-value credentials, create data systems that work together, and build support for allocating resources to programs that will be needed to achieve the state's ambitious attainment goal.

QUICK OVERVIEW: ME

Year Target Set: 2016

Year of Target: 2030

Attainment Target: 60%

Current Attainment: 43.6%

Cert.: 2.0%

AA: 10.8%

BA: 20.3%

Grad./Prof.: 10.6%

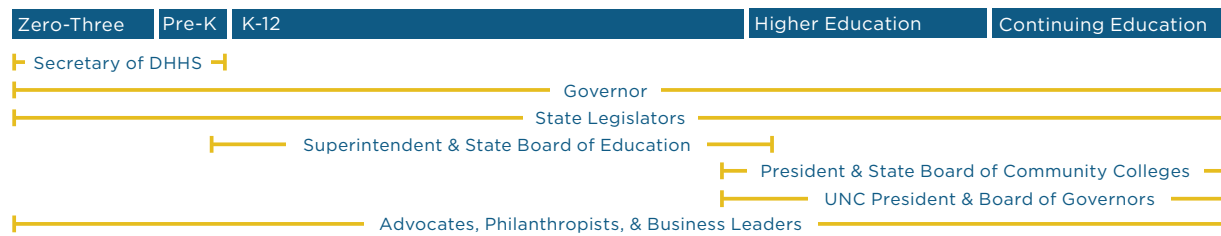
Current Gap: 16.4%



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THE EDUCATION CONTINUUM IN NORTH CAROLINA



Considerations and Next Steps for North Carolina

Most states have already set postsecondary attainment goals and have gained experience building coalitions and developing effective strategies. Successful states have worked across stakeholders — including higher education leaders, the governor, legislators, K-12 leaders, business leaders, and advocacy/philanthropy partners — to develop consensus around a shared goal and a policy agenda that spans the education continuum.

Though North Carolina has a unique set of circumstances that will inform its work on setting a postsecondary attainment goal, there are many lessons to be learned from other states.

Build a Foundation for Success

Progress cannot be made at the postsecondary level if robust foundations are not first developed. Coordination from birth through higher education is critical. Postsecondary attainment goals are just one part of a larger strategic plan that should have the buy-in of all relevant stakeholders.

The success of each step of the education continuum is contingent upon the success of the previous step, with each building on the last. Strong coordination across sectors needs to occur both in the strategic planning stage as well as during implementation. Some policymakers and practitioners, such as governors and legislators, are uniquely positioned to have an impact across the continuum, while others are more specifically focused on one portion of it, such as higher education leaders.

Despite these discrete focus points, there is also critical overlap that, if optimized, will smooth transitions and increase opportunities for students. Colleges and universities benefit from high schools offering early postsecondary opportunities, such as Advanced Placement, dual enrollment, and early college programs. High schools benefit from middle schools offering rigorous coursework and advanced opportunities, like in North Carolina where districts are now eligible for grant funding to offer expanded career and technical courses to students in grades six and seven.⁵¹ Students, community colleges, and universities benefit from clear credit transfer standards, such as North Carolina's Comprehensive Articulation Agreement.⁵² These types of complementary and foundational benefits begin with early learning and continue through workforce training.

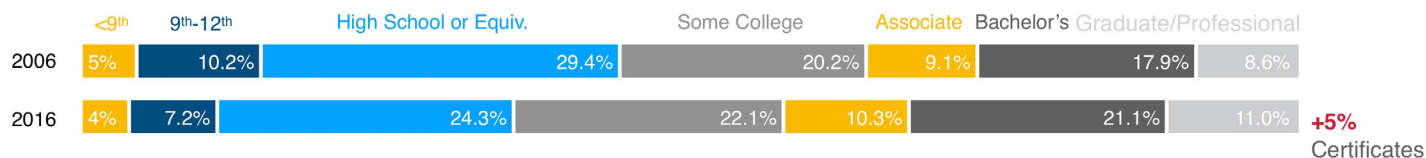
Each stakeholder needs to embed this coordination and aspiration toward attainment goals in their strategic planning and prioritize regular communication and investment in working across the continuum. Tennessee, for example, has incorporated its attainment goal into both its K-12 and higher education strategic plans. Many state groups, including Tennessee's *Drive to 55* Alliance, MaineSpark, and the Virginia Business Higher Education Council, have independent bodies that serve to promote, build consensus around, and maintain accountability for the state's progress toward its postsecondary attainment goal. A similar body in North Carolina would be beneficial.



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FIG. 11: **EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT IN NORTH CAROLINA** (2006-2016)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey

Establish an Ambitious, Measurable, and Relevant Goal

States need to set targets that are both ambitious and attainable so that real progress can be made toward high standards that move states forward.

The postsecondary attainment goal should become a driving force for state agencies as they endeavor to increase student achievement and attainment. This goal should be both ambitious and measurable, with clearly defined outcomes that are regularly measured and reported to key stakeholders and to the public.

The goal also needs to be relevant to the state context, based on its unique demographics, circumstances, and workforce demands. Some states have chosen to disaggregate their goal by types of credentials, with specific targets for certificates, associate degrees, and/or four-year and graduate degrees depending on their projected workforce needs. North Carolina has progressed in recent years, in part thanks to in-migration of educated workers, but the state will need a concerted effort in order to meet future workforce demands and to help young North Carolinians flourish.

Focus on All Students

While increasing the total level of postsecondary attainment is important, it is imperative that policymakers focus specifically on subgroups that have historically had lower attainment rates.

North Carolina's population is growing more diverse every year. Between 2000 and 2015, Hispanic enrollment in North Carolina's public schools more than tripled and its Asian enrollment grew by 83 percent.⁵³ During the same period, white student enrollment declined and, for the first time, dropped below 50 percent of total enrollment. As those trends continue into the future, it will be especially difficult for the state to achieve a meaningful attainment goal without focusing specifically on subgroups that have traditionally had lower attainment rates, including black, Hispanic, and rural students.⁵⁴

In addition, the state is the beneficiary of significant in-migration of highly educated individuals. According to the UNC Carolina Population Center, 51 percent of working-age adults in North Carolina, and 60 percent of adults in the state with an associate degree or higher, were born outside of the state.⁵⁵ While this is a boon to the economy, it is critical that native North Carolinians are not left behind. Similarly, high levels of postsecondary attainment are not equally shared among rural and urban areas. Urban areas tend to attract highly educated individuals, while many rural counties struggle to retain their young people.

Some states have used postsecondary goal-setting as an opportunity to focus on closing attainment gaps. Connecticut, for example, included cutting the achievement gap in half in its

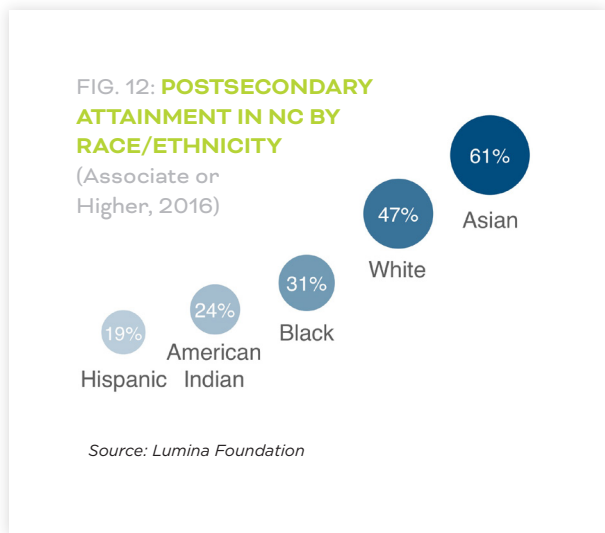
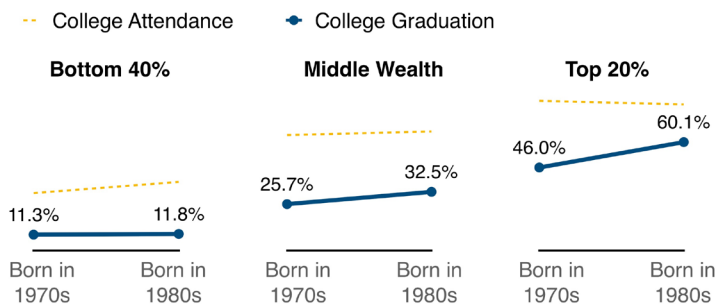


FIG. 13: SHARE OF NATIONAL COHORTS ATTENDING & GRADUATING COLLEGE BY AGE 25



Source: Pfeffer, Fabian T., "Growing Wealth Gaps in Education"

plan, and Virginia calls for annual improvement.⁵⁶ Colorado's plan seeks to "eliminate disparities in postsecondary access, progress, and completion between resident underserved students and resident non-underserved students."⁵⁷ As other states have found, a targeted initiative will be required to close attainment gaps and move the state as a whole forward.

Focus on Access and Affordability

Postsecondary systems need to offer all students, regardless of background, access to higher education and an affordable path to degree completion.

Many states have successfully increased college attendance rates among low-income students through a variety of programs. However, recent research has found that despite increasing rates of attendance among low-income students, college graduation rates have mostly been stagnant (see chart on right).⁵⁸ At the same time, graduation rates among middle-income and wealthy students have jumped significantly, worsening the college attainment gap among the country's students.

Improving access to postsecondary education requires students to graduate high school on time, academically prepared for postsecondary education, and informed about post-graduation options. All students, especially first-generation postsecondary attendees, need robust early college and career advising, which creates awareness of the financial aid and college application processes and fosters a college-going culture. Early postsecondary and work-based learning opportunities in middle and high school expand opportunities after graduation and offer valuable exposure to the rigors of postsecondary education and the workplace. Universal ACT/SAT testing and FAFSA completion initiatives have also been found to help low-income and first-generation students access postsecondary education.⁵⁹

States can improve **affordability** by providing sustainable and stable funding to public colleges and universities and by providing students with the resources they need to thrive once enrolled in postsecondary education. In an era of tight state budgets, policymakers should be reminded of the long-term fiscal benefits of postsecondary education. A report from the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston estimated that **each dollar spent by the government on a college graduate yields \$7.46 in fiscal benefits from increased tax income and reduced social program expenditures over the course of the graduate's lifetime.**⁶⁰



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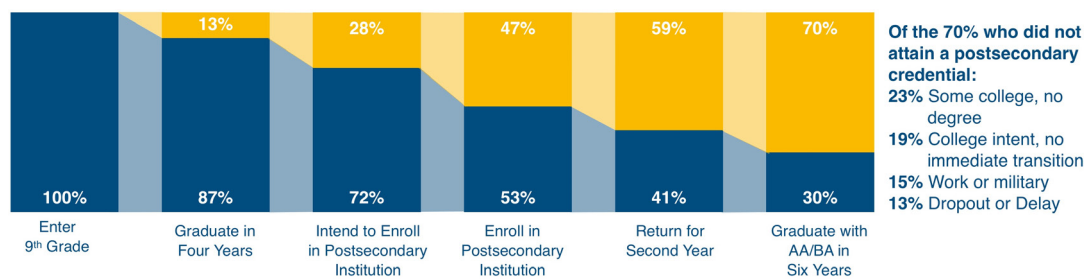


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FIG. 14: NORTH CAROLINA HIGH SCHOOL TO CREDENTIAL PIPELINE



Source: Tippet, Rebecca; Carolina Demography

Support Students across the Continuum

The entire education continuum needs to better support all students to increase retention, persistence, and completion.

Student support initiatives are critical to helping students persist and graduate with postsecondary credentials, especially underrepresented and low-income students. These supports need to occur in high schools as well as colleges and universities. As the data above indicate, there has been some success nationally at enrolling more low-income students in postsecondary education, but little success at helping those students persist through completion. In North Carolina, only 30 percent of all ninth graders will hold an associate or bachelor's degree six years after high school.

Failure to get more students to and through college stems from a lack of student preparation and support across the continuum. Though 87 percent of North Carolina's high school students graduate on time, 47 percent failed to meet any of the ACT's college-ready benchmarks. Regardless, postsecondary institutions can do more to track student progress, identify those who are at risk of falling off track, and intervene to keep all students on track to graduate.⁶¹

Leverage Data and Improve Cross-Agency Coordination

Statewide longitudinal data systems are critical for improving institutional coordination, public communication, and policy decision making.

Various government agencies have long collected records of student inputs and outputs in a variety of disconnected databases. In recent years, however, statewide longitudinal data systems (SLDS) have proliferated around the country. Many states now have systems in place to link student data across the education continuum.⁶² A well-developed system that connects data from early childhood through K-12, higher education, and the workforce can provide valuable insights at the student, institutional, and system levels. These insights are critical for improving policies that lead to better student transitions, academic outcomes, and cost efficiencies.

In North Carolina, the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has used a federal grant to develop a P-20W (preschool, grade 20 and higher, and workforce) Statewide Longitudinal Data System, connecting data from the DPI, the University of North Carolina System, the North Carolina Community College System, North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities, Inc., and the North Carolina Department of Employment Security.⁶³ This robust data system should be used to rigorously evaluate pilot policies and interventions prior to scaling.

Institutions across the country are also using these data to develop early warning data systems that identify students at risk of falling off track, allowing advisers to intervene in real time. These



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systems should also be used to provide the public with timely information and help students and parents make informed decisions about, for example, what schools and fields of study offer the best post-graduation opportunities.

Prioritize Engagement

In order to build consensus and buy-in, states need to develop a brand around attainment goals and actively promote them to the general public and across stakeholder groups.

States that have had the most success building awareness of and support for postsecondary attainment goals have prioritized clear and widespread communication. A good public relations strategy will generate public awareness of both the attainment goal and build buy in around the programs that are launched in conjunction with the attainment effort. Tennessee has received significant attention — both locally and nationally — in part thanks to its communication and branding strategy.



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Coordinating BoardTennessee Higher Education Commission **THEC**

15 members (13 voting members)

- 8 appointed by governor with legislative confirmation
- 3 appointed by legislature
- 4 ex officio members (3 voting)

System BoardsUniversity of Tennessee Board of Trustees **UTBT**

11 members

- 10 appointed by governor with legislative confirmation
- 1 ex officio members (Commissioner of Agriculture)

Tennessee Board of Regents: 13 community colleges and 27 colleges of applied technology **TBR**

18 members (17 voting members)

- 14 appointed by governor with legislative confirmation
- 4 ex officio members (3 voting)

Institution BoardsSix boards at four-year universities (Austin Peay State University, East Tennessee State University, University of Memphis, Middle Tennessee State University, Tennessee State University, Tennessee Technological University) **IB**, each with:

10 members (9 voting members)

- 8 appointed by governor with legislative confirmation
- 3 appointed by alumni association
- 1 faculty member
- 1 student member (non-voting)

Advisory Boards of the University of TennesseeFour boards (University of Tennessee, Knoxville; University of Tennessee at Martin; University of Tennessee at Chattanooga; and University of Tennessee Health Science Center) **AB**, each with:

7 members

- 5 appointed by governor with legislative confirmation
- 1 faculty member
- 1 faculty member
- 1 student member

Other Government AgenciesTN Student Assistance Corporation **TSAC**TN Department of Education **TDOE**TN Department of Economic and Community Development **TECD**TN Department of Labor and Workforce Development **TLWD****Nonprofit Partners**Complete TN **CompleteTN**Drive to 55 Alliance **Driveto55**tnAchieves **tnAchieves**Regional Edconomic Development Initiative **REDI**Ayers Foundation **Ayers Foundation****Programming****K-12 Education**• **TN Succeeds***K-12 Strategic Plan***TDOE**• **SAILS***Early remediation program***TDOE TBR**• **GEAR UP TN***College-going culture development***TDOE THEC**• **Advise TN***College-advising for high schoolers***TDOE THEC****Postsecondary Education**• **TN Promise***Scholarship program for HS grads***TSAC**• **TN Reconnect***Scholarship program for adults***TSAC**• **Mentorship***Support for TN Promise recipients***tnAchieves REDI Ayers Foundation**• **TN LEAP***Industry-relevant technical training***TDOE TLWD**• **Early College Opportunities***Advanced Placement, dual enrollment, etc.***TDOE THEC TBR**• **TN Transfer Pathways***Support for transfer students***TBR**• **Outcomes-Based Funding***Additional funding based on outcomes***THEC**• **Apprenticeships & Work-Based Learning***Real-world experience for students***TLWD TECD****Advocacy & Nonprofit Support****Across the Programming****CompleteTN Driveto55 tnAchieves**

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