

# POSTSECONDARY COMPLETION REPORT: 2009-2011 North Carolina Public High School Graduates

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Individual educational attainment and barriers to attainment are not readily captured by a single indicator. Educational attainment is a process with multiple key steps. After completing high school, individuals must enroll in college and persist in their enrollment until degree completion. In a series of four data briefs, we use National Student Clearinghouse data to better understand key transition points and the college-going behaviors of North Carolina public high school graduates from 2009-2016. Specifically, we will examine:

1. **Access:** How many students are going to college?
2. **Persistence:** How many students are still enrolled in postsecondary after their first year?
3. **Success:** How many students persist in their postsecondary enrollments to successfully complete a degree or credential?
4. **Postsecondary Pathways and Barriers to Opportunity:** What are the most common pathways through postsecondary? What are the potential barriers to success suggested by pathways that end in stop-out or dropout?

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In this report, we focus on the details related to success among North Carolina high school graduates who enroll in a postsecondary program, examining degree completion within six years among 2009-2011 high school graduates and how this varies by the student's enrollment and demographic characteristics.

*All data and tables in this report are derived from the authors' evaluation of NC DPI data matched with the National Student Clearinghouse.*

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# POSTSECONDARY COMPLETION REPORT: 2009-2011 North Carolina Public High School Graduates

## DATA BRIEF

### Key Findings

Of the 268,327 students who graduated from a North Carolina public high school between 2009 and 2011, 180,672 enrolled in a postsecondary program prior to May 15, 2012. This data brief focuses on six-year completion outcomes among these students.

- 92,317, or 51 percent, received a postsecondary degree or credential within six years of their first postsecondary enrollment.
- The most commonly earned first degree was a bachelor's degree (73 percent), followed by an associate degree (20 percent) and a nondegree credential (7 percent).
- Most bachelor's degree earners completed their degree within four or five years (88 percent). Time to degree was more varied for associate degree and nondegree credential earners.
- Eleven percent of degree earners completed an additional, higher level degree within six years (e.g., associate degree followed by a bachelor's degree).

### Completion by Enrollment Characteristics

- Students who enrolled on time were more than twice as likely to receive a degree within six years (56 percent) compared to those who delayed enrollment (22 percent).
- Among students who first enrolled at a four-year institution, students who began at a UNC system school or a four-year public, out-of-state institution had the highest six-year degree attainment rates (72 percent).
- Among students who first enrolled at a two-year institution, students who began at an NC community college had the highest six-year degree attainment rates (30 percent).
- Enrolling full time at least once is strongly associated with degree completion: 67 percent of exclusively full-time students earned a degree within six years compared to 51 percent of students who had mixed part- and full-time enrollments and just 7 percent of students enrolled exclusively part time.
- Ten percent of students who were not enrolled one year after their first enrollment earned a degree within six years compared to 66 percent of students who were retained (enrolled at same school) and 52 percent of students who changed schools.

### Completion by Demographic Characteristics

- Graduates from the state's more urban regions were more likely to earn a bachelor's degree or higher.
- Compared to economically advantaged students, economically disadvantaged students had lower six-year degree completion rates (33 percent versus 58 percent) and were more likely to earn an associate degree or nondegree credential.



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- While female students were more likely than male students to earn a degree within six years (55 percent versus 47 percent), there were few differences in the types of degrees earned among female and male graduates.
- Degree attainment rates within six years of postsecondary enrollment were highest among Asian students (65 percent), followed by White (59 percent), Hispanic (45 percent), American Indian (35 percent), and Black students (34 percent).
- Among students who completed a degree, Asian graduates were the most likely to have earned a bachelor's degree or higher (83 percent), followed closely by Black graduates (82 percent). Although this represents a large share of degrees earned among Black students, this group's lower overall degree attainment rate still means that a smaller share of Black students earned bachelor's degrees compared to most other racial/ethnic groups.

## Next Steps

Of the 180,671 North Carolina high school graduates who first enrolled in a postsecondary program prior to May 15, 2012, slightly more than half—51 percent or 92,317—had earned a postsecondary degree or nondegree credential within six years after enrollment. This leaves 88,354 students who began a postsecondary program and did not earn a degree or credential within six years. What are the potential barriers to success for these students?

In our next and final data brief, we will explore some of the most common pathways through postsecondary, including pathways that culminate in degree attainment and those that end in dropout or stop-out (temporarily leaving higher education), to identify potential barriers to success for North Carolina's high school graduates. Last, we will review how various indicators of postsecondary access and success—the college-going rate, first-year persistence, and six-year attainment—can compound or narrow disparities across groups over time.



# Introduction

## KEY FINDINGS:

- Fifty-one percent of 2009-2011 high school graduates who began a postsecondary program earned a postsecondary degree within six years.
- The most commonly earned first degree was a bachelor's degree (73 percent), followed by an associate degree (20 percent) and a nondegree credential (7 percent).
- Most bachelor's degree earners completed their degree within four or five years (88 percent). Time to degree was more varied for associate degree and nondegree credential earners.
- Eleven percent of degree earners completed an additional, higher level degree within six years (e.g., associate degree followed by a bachelor's degree).

Following enrollment and first-year retention and persistence, students must continue in their studies to degree completion. The degree attainment rate represents the share of degree- or credential-seekers who complete a program of study. In this data brief, we focus on six-year outcomes for 2009-2011 North Carolina public high school graduates and calculate a single statewide completion rate, regardless of institution or intensity of first enrollment.<sup>1</sup> Six-year outcomes capture “on-time” graduation for bachelor's degree seekers (within 150 percent of normal time) and represent 300 percent of normal time for individuals who are enrolled in associate degree or nondegree credential programs.<sup>2</sup>

## Who Is Included?

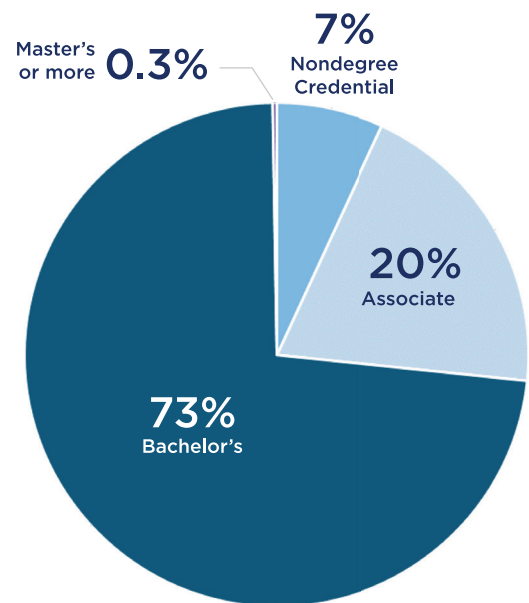
This data brief focuses on six-year completion outcomes among the 180,672 students from the 2009-2011 North Carolina public high school graduating classes who first enrolled in a postsecondary program prior to May 15, 2012. Eighty-five percent of these graduates enrolled on time, meaning they began a postsecondary program in the fall semester immediately following high school graduation. Thirteen percent did not enroll on time but enrolled within two years of graduation and just over 1 percent had very delayed first enrollment, enrolling two or more years after high school graduation.<sup>3</sup>

## Degree Attainment

Among the 2009-2011 high school graduates who began a postsecondary program prior to May 15, 2012, 92,317 or just over half (51 percent) received a postsecondary degree or credential within six years of their first postsecondary enrollment.<sup>4</sup> Most of these graduates (79 percent) received their degree or credential from the same institution at which they initially enrolled.

The most commonly earned first degree was a bachelor's degree (73 percent) followed by an associate degree (20 percent) and a nondegree credential (7 percent). A small number of students earned a master's degree or higher (0.3 percent) as their first postsecondary award (**Figure 1**).<sup>5</sup>

FIG. 1: **FIRST DEGREE EARNED BY INDIVIDUALS COMPLETING A DEGREE WITHIN SIX YEARS**  
(2009-2011 NC High School Graduates)



Note: Percentages do not add due to rounding.

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## Time to Degree

**Figure 2** shows the average share of postsecondary enrollers who earned a degree or credential by years since first enrollment.<sup>6</sup> Two years after first enrolling in a postsecondary institution, just 3 percent of students had earned a postsecondary degree or credential.<sup>7</sup> This share increased to 7 percent after three years and to 32 percent after four years, largely due to high levels of bachelor's degree completion within four years. Postsecondary completion rates did not surpass the halfway mark until after six years since first enrollment (51 percent).<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 3** displays the time from enrollment to degree award by type of degree earned among the 51 percent of graduates who earned a postsecondary degree or nondegree credential within six years. Overall, most degree earners completed their first degree four years after first enrollment (48 percent), followed by five years (28 percent), largely reflecting the high share of graduates whose first degree was a bachelor's degree (73 percent, as shown in **Figure 1**). Patterns of time to degree varied significantly by the first type of degree earned.

- Students who earned a nondegree credential had the greatest variation in time to degree. Nondegree credential earners were the most likely to complete a degree in less than one year (11 percent) and were equally as likely to earn their credential in six years of first enrollment (12 percent). Similar shares of nondegree credential earners graduated in two years (21 percent), three years (22 percent), and four years (20 percent).
- Associate degree earners were similarly varied in their time to degree, though few individuals completed their degree in less than one year. The most common time to degree for associate degree completers was three years (28 percent) followed by four years (24 percent).<sup>9</sup> Except for the small number of students who first earned a master's degree or higher, associate degree completers had the highest share of graduates completing in six years (13 percent).<sup>9</sup>
- Most bachelor's degree earners completed their degree in four years of first enrolling (57 percent) or in five years (31 percent). Just 9 percent of students who completed a bachelor's degree within six years took six years to earn their degree and less than 3 percent earned their degree in less than three years.<sup>10</sup>
- Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of the 245 students whose first degree within six years was a master's degree or higher completed their degree in five to six years of first enrollment.

## Nondegree Credentials:

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, nondegree credentials include:

**Certifications:** occupational credentials awarded by a certification body, such as a professional association or certifying board (e.g. medical technician certification).

**Licenses:** occupational credentials awarded by a government agency that constitute legal authority to do a specific job (e.g. medical license).

**Postsecondary educational certificates:** education credentials awarded by an educational institution based on completion of all requirements for a program of study. Postsecondary educational certificates below a bachelor's degree are typically awarded in occupational fields (e.g. culinary arts).

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 2017. Adult Training and Education: Results from the National Household Education Surveys Program of 2016.

FIG. 2: **DEGREE ATTAINMENT RATE BY YEARS SINCE FIRST ENROLLMENT** (2009-2011 NC High School Graduates)

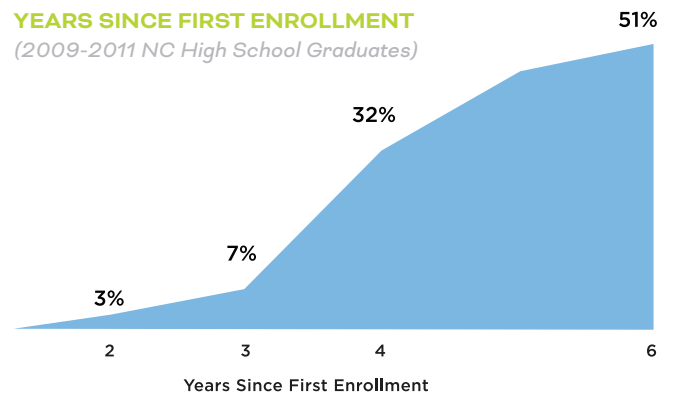
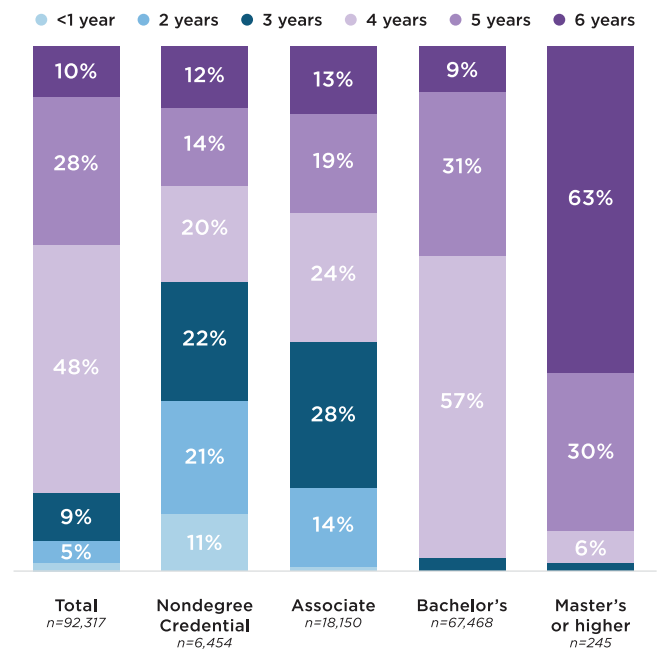


FIG. 3: **TIME TO DEGREE BY TYPE OF DEGREE EARNED WITHIN SIX YEARS** (2009-2011 NC High School Graduates)



Note: Labels are not displayed for values less than or equal to 3%.



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## First Versus Highest Degree Earned

Many students earned additional postsecondary credentials after their first postsecondary award.

**Table 1** displays the highest degree earned within six years of first enrollment by the first degree earned. Of the 92,317 students who earned any postsecondary degree or credential within six years of enrolling in postsecondary, 9,808 or 11 percent went on to earn a higher degree within six years.<sup>11</sup>

- The largest number—4,230—completed a bachelor’s degree and subsequently earned a master’s degree or higher within six years. This represents 6 percent of all graduates who first earned a bachelor’s degree.
- 3,846 students completed an associate degree and subsequently completed an additional degree, most typically a bachelor’s degree. This represents 21 percent of all graduates who first earned an associate degree.
- Nondegree credential earners had the highest rate of subsequent degree completion: 27 percent or 1,732 students who first completed a nondegree credential subsequently completed a higher degree within six years. The most common highest degree earned was an associate degree (22 percent), though 5 percent went on to complete a bachelor’s degree or higher.

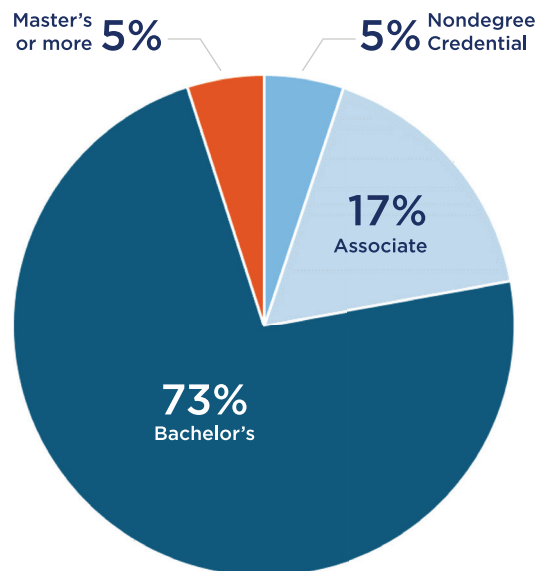
**Figure 4** highlights the highest degree earned by individuals completing a degree within six years. Compared to the distribution of first degrees, nondegree credentials (5 percent) and associate degrees (17 percent) made up a relatively smaller portion of highest degrees. Bachelor’s degrees comprised 73 percent of both first and highest degrees. The only degree share to increase between first and highest was the share of graduates with a master’s degree (0.3 to 5 percent).

The remainder of this data brief provides a deeper dive into differences in degree completion by student enrollment and demographic characteristics. Specifically, we focus on the six-year degree attainment rate and the **highest** degree completed within six years.

TABLE 1: HIGHEST DEGREE EARNED IN SIX YEARS BY FIRST DEGREE EARNED (2009-2011 NC High School Graduates)

		FIRST DEGREE EARNED				
		TOTAL	Nondegree Credential	Associate	Bachelor’s	Master’s or more
HIGHEST DEGREE EARNED	TOTAL	92,317	6,454	18,150	67,468	245
	Nondegree credential	4,722	4,722			
	Associate	15,720	1,416	14,304		
	Bachelor’s	67,304	306	3,760	63,238	
	Master’s or more	4,571	10	86	4,230	245

FIG. 4: HIGHEST DEGREE EARNED BY INDIVIDUALS COMPLETING A DEGREE WITHIN SIX YEARS (2009-2011 NC High School Graduates)



## Enrollment Characteristics

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### KEY FINDINGS:

- *Students who enrolled on time were more than twice as likely to receive a degree within six years (56 percent) compared to those who delayed enrollment (22 percent).*
  - *Among students who first enrolled at a four-year institution, students who began at a UNC system school or a four-year public, out-of-state institution had the highest six-year degree attainment rates (72 percent).*
  - *Among students who first enrolled at a two-year institution, students who began at an NC community college had the highest six-year degree attainment rates (30 percent).*
  - *Enrolling full time at least once is strongly associated with degree completion: 67 percent of exclusively full-time students earned a degree within six years compared to 51 percent of students who had mixed part- and full-time enrollments and just seven percent of students enrolled exclusively part time.*
  - *Ten percent of students who were not enrolled one year after their first enrollment earned a degree within six years compared to 66 percent of students who were retained (enrolled at same school) and 52 percent of students who changed schools.*
- 

**Table 2** on the next page provides enrollment characteristics of 2009-2011 high school graduates who sought and achieved degrees within six years of first enrollment. More specifically, this table includes the numbers and shares of students who received a degree within six years. Among those who graduated, the table includes the share of students who received their degree at their institution of initial enrollment compared to another school, as well as the highest degree they earned within the six-year period.



TABLE 2: **SIX-YEAR ATTAINMENT RATE, AWARDING INSTITUTION, AND HIGHEST DEGREE EARNED BY ENROLLMENT CHARACTERISTICS**  
(2009-2011 NC High School Graduates)

	Total Enrollments	Among Enrollers		Among Graduates					
		Degree within 6 Years		Awarding Institution		Highest Degree Earned in 6 Years			
		Number of Graduates	Attainment Rate	First School Attended	Different School	Nondegree Credential	Associate	Bachelor's	Master's or higher
<b>All Students</b>	<b>180,671</b>	<b>92,317</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>5%</b>
First Enrollment Status									
On-Time	154,339	86,395	56%	80%	20%	4%	16%	75%	5%
Within 2 Years	24,208	5,414	22%	72%	28%	16%	39%	43%	2%
2+ Years Delay	2,124	508	24%	72%	28%	21%	34%	39%	6%
First Enrollment Status									
Full-Time	129,590	79,278	61%	82%	18%	3%	13%	79%	6%
Part-Time	21,020	4,301	20%	65%	35%	21%	46%	31%	1%
Not Reported	30,061	8,738	29%	60%	40%	13%	43%	42%	2%
Enrollment Intensity Across All Enrolled Semesters									
Exclusively Full-Time	71,745	48,172	67%	83%	17%	2%	6%	86%	6%
Exclusively Part-Time	12,043	843	7%	70%	30%	33%	60%	6%	0%
Mixed Full- and Part-Time	79,124	40,360	51%	74%	26%	7%	26%	63%	4%
Not Reported	17,759	2,942	17%	89%	11%	25%	61%	14%	1%
First College of Enrollment									
<b>Any 4-Year</b>	97,601	67,439	69%	84%	16%	1%	4%	88%	6%
<i>UNC</i>	69,413	49,726	72%	87%	13%	1%	4%	89%	6%
<i>4-Year Private, In-State</i>	13,774	8,472	62%	73%	27%	2%	6%	86%	7%
<i>4-Year Public, Out-of-State</i>	6,427	4,648	72%	78%	22%	1%	5%	86%	8%
<i>4-Year Private, Out-of-State</i>	7,987	4,593	58%	78%	22%	1%	8%	84%	8%
<b>Any 2-Year</b>	83,070	24,878	30%	66%	34%	16%	51%	32%	1%
<i>NCCC</i>	78,855	23,848	30%	68%	32%	16%	52%	31%	1%
<i>2-Year Public, Out-Of-State</i>	2,603	697	27%	48%	52%	11%	45%	42%	1%
<i>2-Year Private (any)</i>	1,612	333	21%	8%	92%	17%	44%	39%	0%
Institutional Level of Enrollment (across all enrolled semesters)									
Exclusively 4-Year	75,830	58,721	77%	89%	11%	0%	1%	92%	7%
Mixed 2- and 4-Year	44,609	22,155	50%	52%	48%	5%	34%	60%	1%
Exclusively 2-Year	60,232	11,441	19%	81%	19%	32%	68%	0%	0%
Year 2 Enrollment Status									
Retained (same school)	119,547	78,786	66%	89%	11%	4%	15%	76%	5%
Changed Schools	17,970	9,388	52%	8%	92%	5%	22%	69%	3%
Not Enrolled Year 2	43,154	4,143	10%	50%	50%	31%	38%	30%	1%



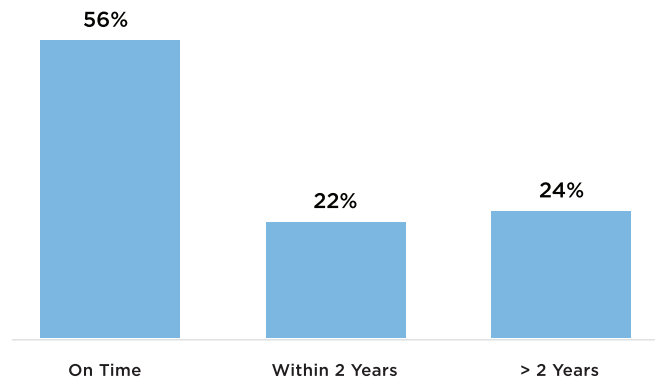


## Enrollment Timing

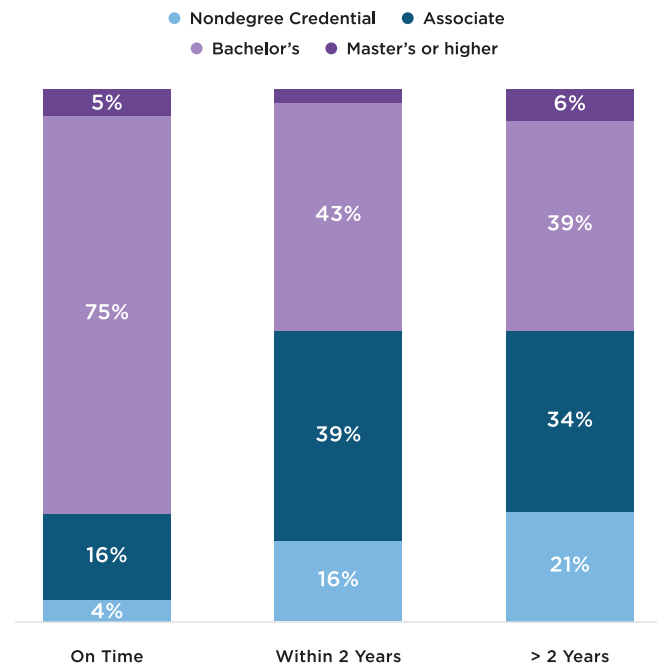
**Figure 5** shows how degree attainment varied by timing of first postsecondary enrollment. Students who enrolled on time were more than twice as likely to receive a degree within six years (56 percent) compared to those who delayed enrollment less than two years (22 percent) and those who delayed more than two years (24 percent).

Among graduates who were on-time enrollers, 80 percent had earned a bachelor's degree or more within six years, compared to just 45 percent of delayed enrollers (**Figure 6**). The higher share of nondegree credentials and associate degrees among graduates with delayed enrollment likely reflects the higher share of first enrollments at two-year institutions among delayed enrollers.<sup>12</sup>

**FIG. 5: POSTSECONDARY DEGREE ATTAINMENT WITHIN SIX YEARS BY ENROLLMENT TIMING**  
(2009-2011 NC High School Graduates)



**FIG. 6: HIGHEST POSTSECONDARY DEGREE EARNED WITHIN SIX YEARS BY ENROLLMENT TIMING**  
(2009-2011 NC High School Graduates)



Note: Labels are not displayed for values less than or equal to 3%.

FIG. 7:  
**POSTSECONDARY  
 DEGREE ATTAINMENT  
 WITHIN SIX YEARS  
 BY INSTITUTION OF  
 FIRST ENROLLMENT**  
 (2009-2011 NC High  
 School Graduates)

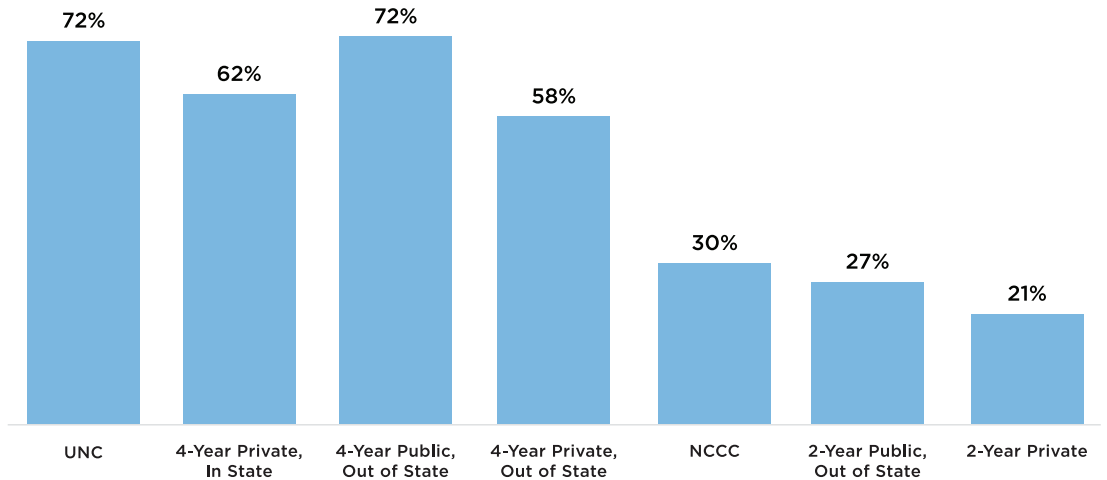
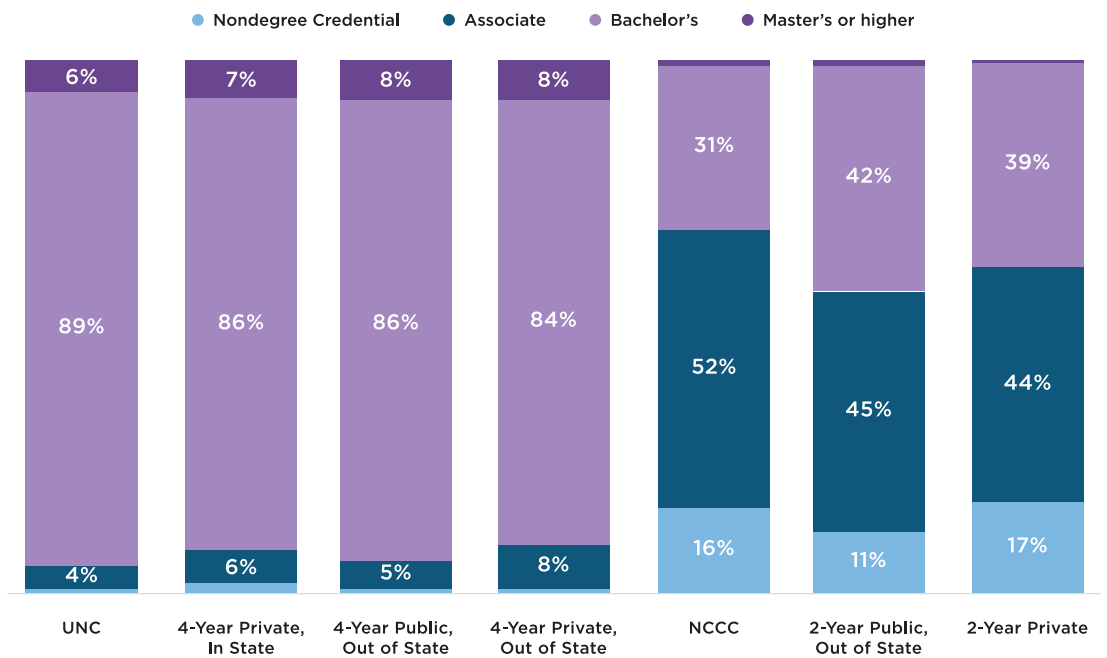


FIG. 8: **HIGHEST  
 POSTSECONDARY  
 DEGREE EARNED  
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 BY INSTITUTION OF  
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 (2009-2011 NC High  
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## Institution Type

### First Enrollment

Degree attainment within six years by institution of first enrollment is shown in **Figure 7**. On average, more than twice as many students who first enrolled at a four-year institution completed a degree compared to students who began at a two-year institution: 69 percent versus 30 percent, a difference of 39 percentage points. Attainment was highest among students who initially enrolled at a four-year public institution, whether out of state (72 percent) or at a UNC system school (72 percent). Among students who began enrollment at a two-year institution, students who first enrolled at an NC community college had the

highest degree completion rates (30 percent), followed by those who began at a two-year public, out-of-state institution (27 percent) and those at a two-year private institution (21 percent).

The highest degree earned by most graduates who first enrolled at a four-year institution was a bachelor's degree or higher (**Figure 8**). For example, 95 percent of students who initially enrolled at a UNC system school completed a bachelor's degree or higher within six years. Degree distribution among graduates who first enrolled at a two-year institution were more varied, highlighting the key role of community colleges in the bachelor's degree attainment process.<sup>13</sup>



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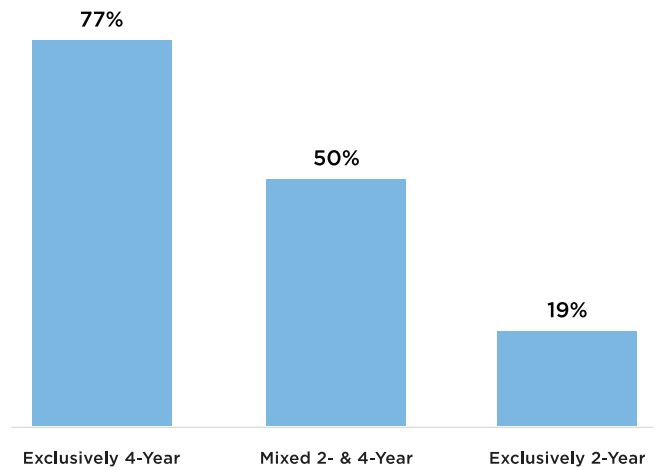
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## Enrollment Throughout College

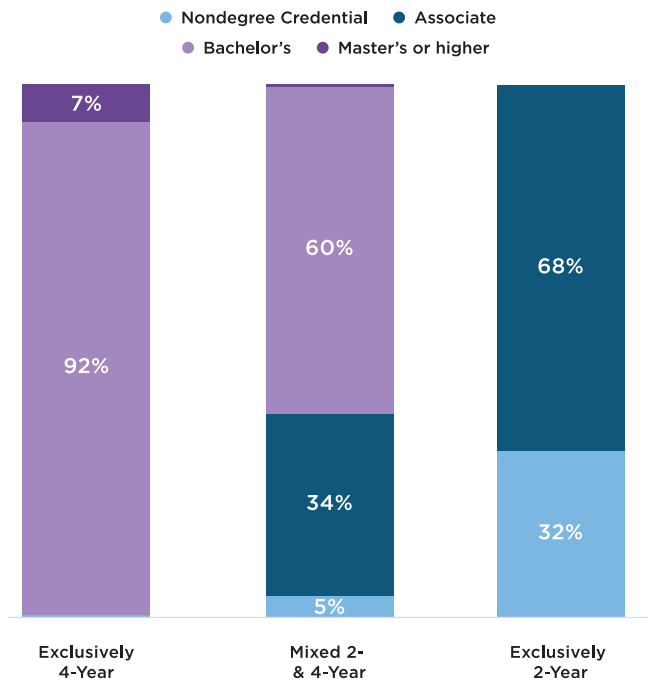
The differences in degree attainment between four- and two-year institution types is further illustrated in **Figure 9**. The share of students who received any degree was highest among those who were exclusively enrolled in four-year institutions throughout college (77 percent). This was nearly four times the degree attainment rate of those who were exclusively enrolled in two-year institutions (19 percent). Among students with mixed status, meaning they enrolled at both two- and four-year institutions over their college career, 50 percent earned a degree or credential within six years.

Virtually all graduates who were exclusively enrolled in four-year institutions earned a bachelor's degree or higher (**Figure 10**). Similarly, all degrees attained by students who were exclusively enrolled at two-year institutions were associate degrees (68 percent) or nondegree credentials (32 percent). Among those with mixed enrollment status, 61 percent earned a bachelor's degree or higher as their highest degree, while 39 percent earned an associate degree or nondegree credential.

**FIG. 9: POSTSECONDARY DEGREE ATTAINMENT WITHIN SIX YEARS BY INSTITUTION TYPE THROUGHOUT COLLEGE**  
(2009-2011 NC High School Graduates)



**FIG. 10: HIGHEST DEGREE EARNED WITHIN SIX YEARS BY INSTITUTION TYPE THROUGHOUT COLLEGE**  
(2009-2011 NC High School Graduates)



Note: Labels are not displayed for values less than or equal to 3%.



## Enrollment Intensity

### First Enrollment

Full-time students were three times as likely to receive a degree than students whose first postsecondary enrollment was part time: 61 percent versus 20 percent (Figure 11). The six-year degree attainment rate for students whose first enrollment status was not reported was 29 percent.

Figure 12 shows that graduates who first enrolled full time were most likely to attain a bachelor's degree or higher within six years (85 percent). In contrast, 67 percent of graduates who first enrolled part time earned an associate degree (46 percent) or nondegree credential (21 percent) as their highest degree. This is, in large part, because the students captured in this sample are all relatively recent high school graduates, regardless of enrollment timing, and students who first enrolled full time were mostly enrolled in four-year institutions.<sup>14</sup> It also may reflect that an evaluation period longer than six years may be necessary to fully understand the outcomes of students who enroll part time.

FIG. 11: POSTSECONDARY DEGREE ATTAINMENT WITHIN SIX YEARS BY INTENSITY OF FIRST ENROLLMENT (2009-2011 NC High School Graduates)

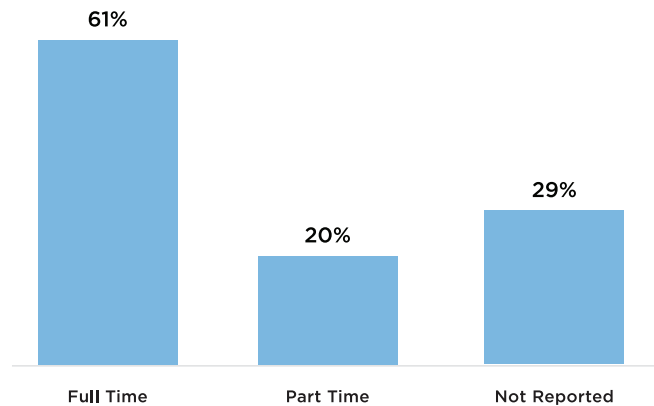
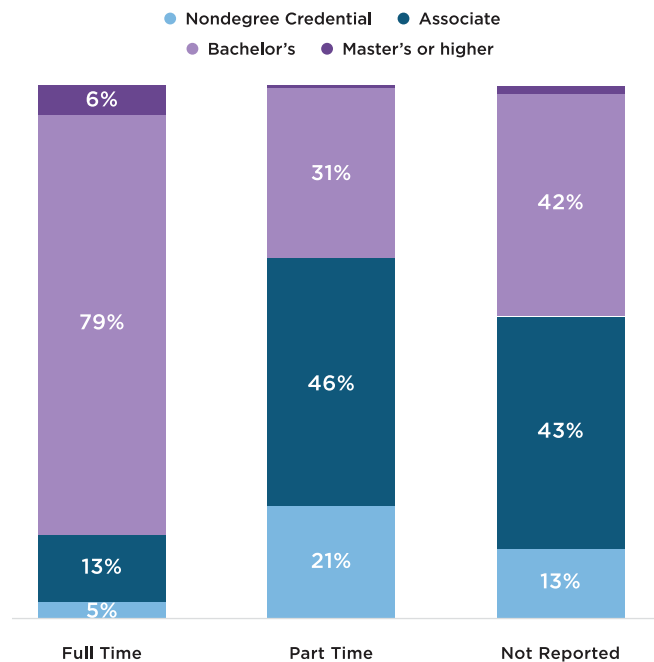


FIG. 12: HIGHEST DEGREE EARNED WITHIN SIX YEARS BY INTENSITY OF FIRST ENROLLMENT (2009-2011 NC High School Graduates)



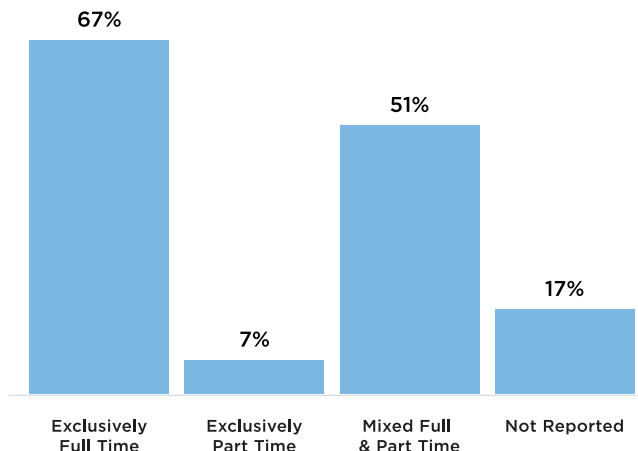
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## Enrollment Throughout College

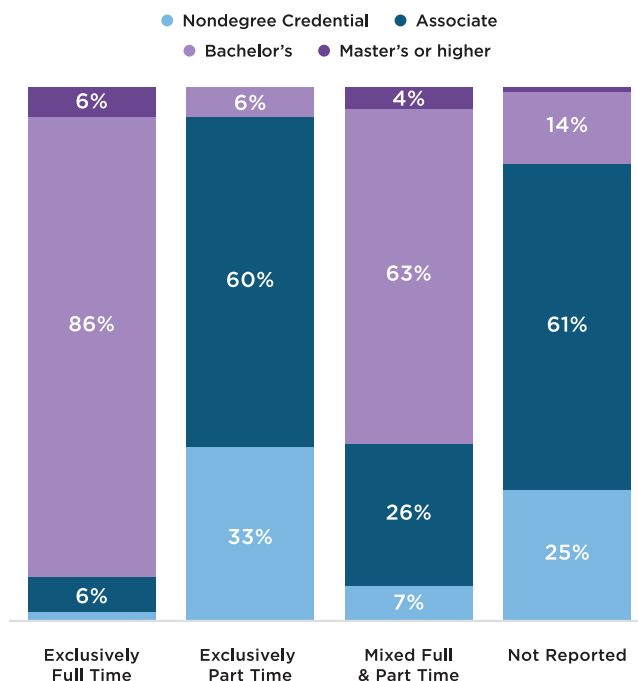
The importance of full-time enrollment status to timely degree completion is further highlighted when examining enrollment intensity patterns throughout college (**Figure 13**). The share of students who received a degree within six years was over nine times higher among students who were enrolled full time throughout college compared to those who were enrolled part time throughout college (67 percent versus 7 percent). The degree attainment rate among those who had mixed part- and full-time status throughout college was 51 percent, indicating the importance of enrolling full time at least once during college for degree completion. Finally, 17 percent of students without reported enrollment intensity information received a degree.

Ninety-two percent of graduates who were enrolled exclusively full time completed a bachelor's degree or higher within six years, 6 percent received an associate degree, and 2 percent earned a nondegree credential (**Figure 14**). In contrast, 6 percent of degree earners who had been enrolled exclusively part time attained a bachelor's degree or higher. More than half of exclusively part-time enrollers (60 percent) earned an associate degree and an additional 33 percent earned a nondegree credential. Degree attainment patterns among students with mixed enrollment status throughout college were similar to those of exclusively full-time graduates: 67 percent earned a bachelor's degree or more, 26 percent an associate degree, and 7 percent a nondegree credential.

**FIG. 13: POSTSECONDARY DEGREE ATTAINMENT WITHIN SIX YEARS BY INTENSITY OF ENROLLMENT THROUGHOUT COLLEGE**  
(2009-2011 NC High School Graduates)



**FIG. 14: HIGHEST DEGREE EARNED WITHIN SIX YEARS BY INTENSITY OF ENROLLMENT THROUGHOUT COLLEGE**  
(2009-2011 NC High School Graduates)



Note: Labels are not displayed for values less than or equal to 3%.

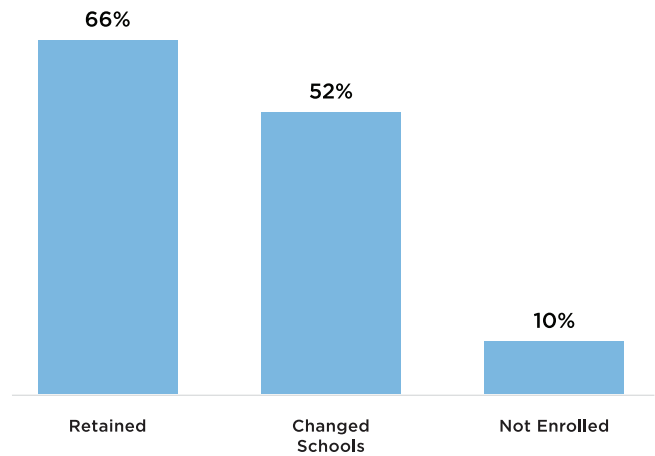


## Enrollment Status One Year After Initial Enrollment

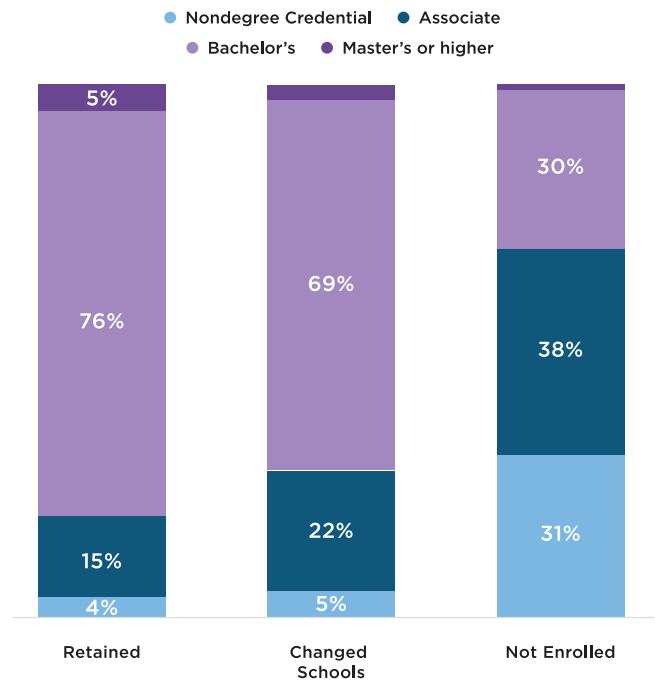
**Figure 15** shows differences in degree attainment among those who were retained at their institution of first enrollment, persisted at a different institution (changed schools), or were not enrolled in a postsecondary institution one year after their first enrollment. Degree attainment was highest among students who were retained in their second year (66 percent) followed by those who changed schools (52 percent). Degree attainment was lowest among those who stopped out and were not enrolled one year later (10 percent), suggesting the importance of continuous enrollment in postsecondary education for timely degree completion.

**Figure 16** shows that graduates who were retained (81 percent) or changed schools (72 percent) after one year were more likely to earn a bachelor's degree or higher within six years while the most common degree earned by students who stopped out was an associate degree or nondegree credential (69 percent).

**FIG. 15: POSTSECONDARY DEGREE ATTAINMENT WITHIN SIX YEARS BY ENROLLMENT STATUS ONE YEAR AFTER FIRST ENROLLMENT**  
(2009-2011 NC High School Graduates)



**FIG. 16: HIGHEST DEGREE EARNED WITHIN SIX YEARS BY ENROLLMENT STATUS ONE YEAR AFTER FIRST ENROLLMENT** (2009-2011 NC High School Graduates)



Note: Labels are not displayed for values less than or equal to 3%.



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POSTSECONDARY



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## Demographic Characteristics<sup>15</sup>

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Graduates from the state's more urban regions were more likely to earn a bachelor's degree or higher.
- Compared to economically advantaged students, economically disadvantaged students had lower six-year degree completion rates (33 percent versus 58 percent) and were more likely to earn an associate degree or nondegree credential.
- While female students were more likely than male students to earn a degree within six years (55 percent versus 47 percent), there were few differences in the types of degrees earned among male and female graduates.
- Degree attainment rates within six years of postsecondary enrollment were highest among Asian students (65 percent), followed by White (59 percent), Hispanic (45 percent), American Indian (35 percent), and Black students (34 percent).
- Among students who completed a degree, Asian graduates were the most likely to have earned a bachelor's degree or higher (83 percent), followed closely by Black graduates (82 percent). Although this represents a large share of degrees earned among Black students, this group's lower overall degree attainment rate still means that a smaller share of Black students earned bachelor's degrees compared to most other racial/ethnic groups.

**Table 3** on the next page shows the demographic characteristics of 2009-2011 high school graduates who sought and achieved degrees within six years of first enrollment. As with Table 2 earlier in this document, this table provides numbers and shares of students who received a degree within six years. Among those who graduated, the table provides the share of students who received their degree at their institution of initial enrollment compared to another school, as well as the highest degree they earned within the six-year period.



TABLE 3: **SIX-YEAR ATTAINMENT RATE, AWARDING INSTITUTION, AND HIGHEST DEGREE EARNED BY ENROLLMENT CHARACTERISTICS**  
(2009-2011 NC High School Graduates)

	Total Enrollments	Among Enrollers		Among Graduates					
		Degree within 6 Years		Awarding Institution		Highest Degree Earned in 6 Years			
		Number of Graduates	Attainment Rate	First School Attended	Different School	Nondegree Credential	Associate	Bachelor's	Master's or higher
<b>All Students</b>	<b>180,671</b>	<b>92,317</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>73%</b>	<b>5%</b>
<b>Prosperity Zone</b>									
North Central	42,761	23,570	55%	80%	20%	3%	12%	79%	6%
Northeast	10,113	4,475	44%	78%	22%	8%	21%	67%	4%
Northwest	11,297	6,029	53%	78%	22%	6%	25%	64%	5%
Piedmont-Triad	32,197	16,207	50%	80%	20%	6%	18%	72%	5%
Sandhills	16,190	6,738	42%	77%	23%	7%	21%	67%	4%
Southeast	16,565	7,833	47%	79%	21%	8%	22%	65%	4%
Southwest	40,844	21,777	53%	79%	21%	4%	14%	77%	5%
Western	10,687	5,685	53%	79%	21%	7%	22%	67%	5%
<b>Economic Disadvantage</b>									
Economically Disadvantaged	49,779	16,470	33%	78%	22%	8%	25%	64%	3%
Not Economically Disadvantaged	130,892	75,847	58%	79%	21%	4%	15%	75%	5%
<b>Sex</b>									
Female	99,664	54,626	55%	79%	21%	5%	17%	73%	5%
Male	81,007	37,691	47%	80%	20%	5%	17%	73%	4%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>									
American Indian	2,031	718	35%	74%	26%	14%	26%	57%	4%
Asian	4,888	3,166	65%	84%	16%	2%	14%	78%	6%
Black	49,023	16,767	34%	79%	21%	5%	13%	78%	4%
Hispanic	7,999	3,617	45%	79%	21%	7%	28%	62%	3%
White	112,440	66,059	59%	79%	21%	5%	18%	72%	5%





## Prosperity Zone<sup>16</sup>

**Figure 17** shows the differences in degree attainment by the prosperity zone of the student's high school. Degree attainment rates within six years of high school graduation were highest among students from the North Central prosperity zone (55 percent) followed closely by students from the Northwest, Southwest, and Western prosperity zones (53 percent). The lowest attainment rates were among students from the Sandhills (42 percent) and Northeast (44 percent) prosperity zones.

**Figure 18** shows the distribution of highest degree earned within six years among graduates by prosperity zone:

- Graduates from the Northeast and Southeast prosperity zones were the most likely to earn a nondegree credential (8 percent); North Central graduates were the least likely to earn a nondegree credential (3 percent).

FIG. 17: **POSTSECONDARY DEGREE ATTAINMENT WITHIN SIX YEARS BY PROSPERITY ZONE**  
(2009-2011 NC High School Graduates)

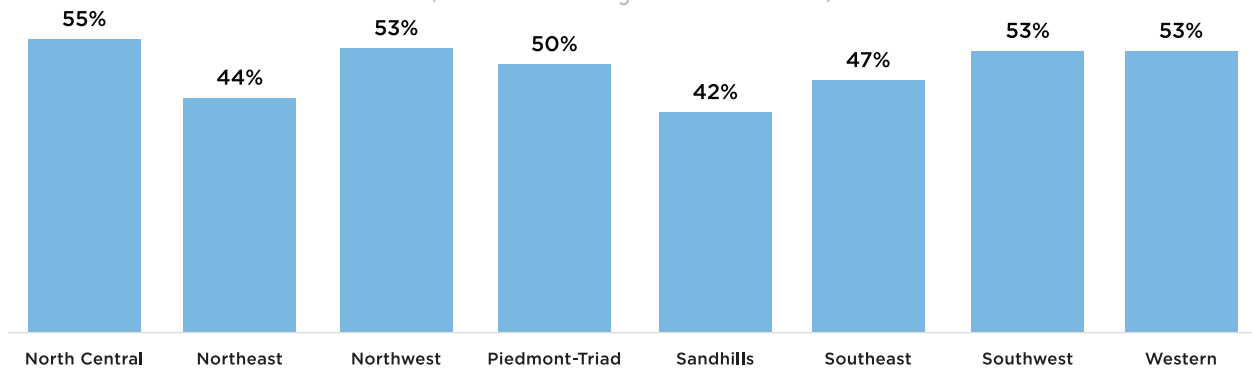
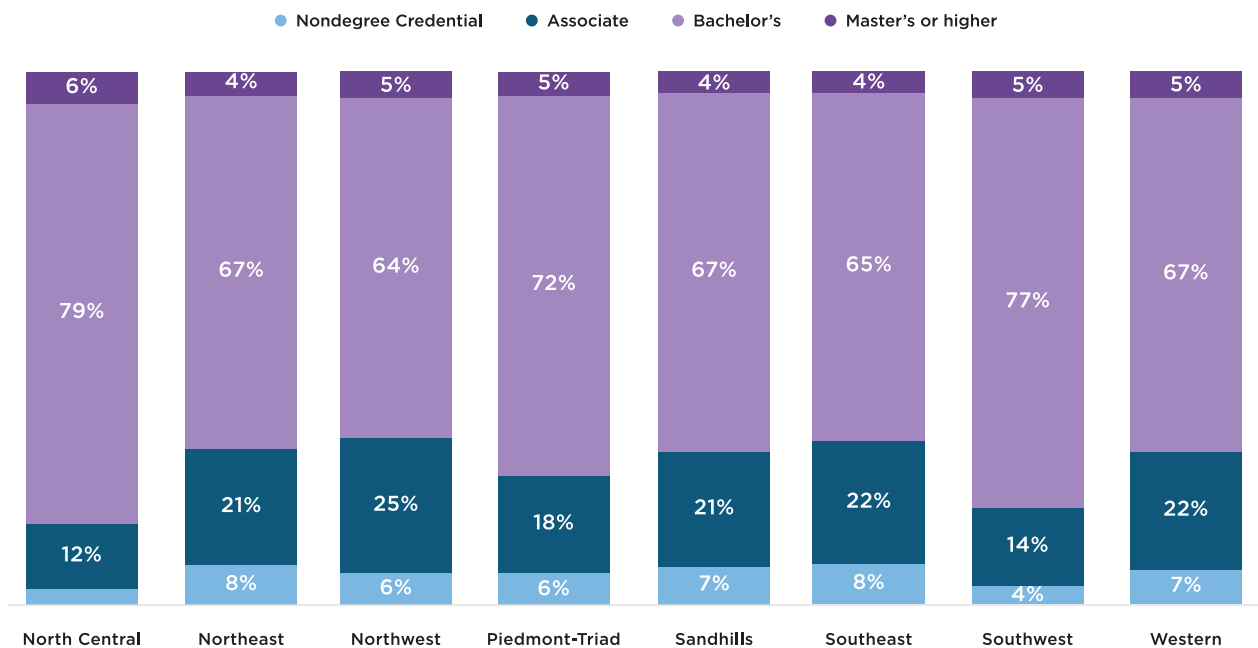


FIG. 18: **HIGHEST DEGREE EARNED WITHIN SIX YEARS BY PROSPERITY ZONE**  
(2009-2011 NC High School Graduates)



- Graduates from the Northwest prosperity zone had the highest rate of associate degree attainment (25 percent) while graduates from the North Central (12 percent) were the least likely to earn an associate degree.
- Graduates from the North Central prosperity zone were the most likely to have earned a bachelor's degree or higher (85 percent) followed closely by graduates from the Southwest (82 percent).

Differences in the types of degrees completed by graduates may, in part, reflect local job markets and demands for specific skills. For example, bachelor's or master's degree attainment is highest in the state's largest urban areas—the Triangle (North Central) and Charlotte (Southwest)—where many jobs are professional services occupations that require a bachelor's degree or higher. In other regions, the local labor market may require more individuals with postsecondary nondegree credentials and associate degrees.

### Economic Disadvantage<sup>17</sup>

The share of students who earned a postsecondary degree within six years was 25 percentage points higher among students from more economically advantaged backgrounds compared to those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (58 percent versus 33 percent; see **Figure 19**). Economically disadvantaged degree earners were more likely than economically advantaged graduates to earn a nondegree credential (8 percent versus 4 percent) or an associate degree (25 percent versus 15 percent) as their highest degree (**Figure 20**). Economically advantaged degree earners were more likely to attain a bachelor's degree or higher (80 percent) within six years than economically disadvantaged degree earners (67 percent).<sup>18</sup>

FIG. 19: **POSTSECONDARY DEGREE ATTAINMENT WITHIN SIX YEARS BY ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE**  
(2009-2011 NC High School Graduates)

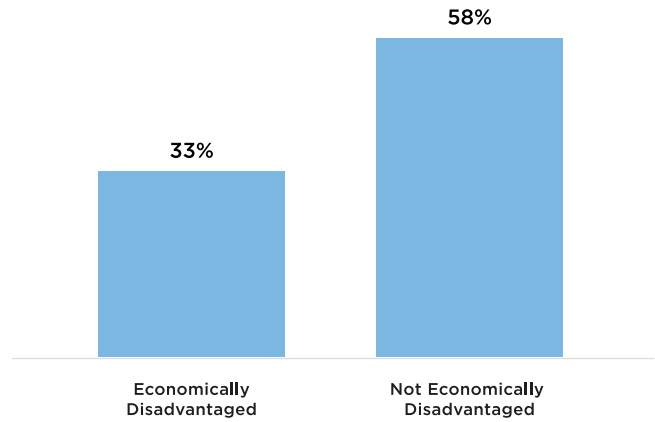
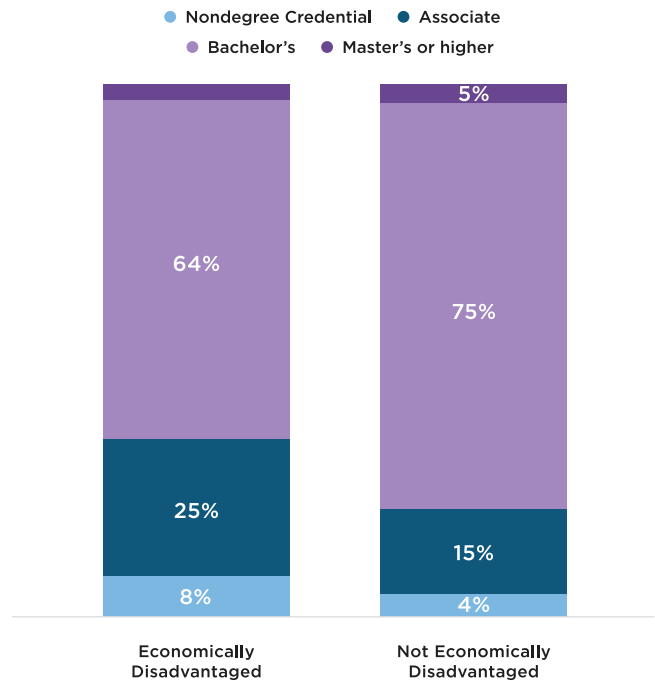


FIG. 20: **HIGHEST DEGREE EARNED WITHIN SIX YEARS BY ECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE**  
(2009-2011 NC High School Graduates)



Note: Labels are not displayed for values less than or equal to 3%.



## Sex

**Figure 21** presents degree attainment rates by sex. As with the postsecondary success indicators in previous briefs, a larger share of female students received degrees compared to male students (55 percent versus 47 percent).<sup>19</sup> While there was an eight-percentage point gap in overall degree attainment rates by sex, the distribution of degrees earned by male and female graduates were nearly identical (**Figure 22**).

FIG. 21: **POSTSECONDARY DEGREE ATTAINMENT WITHIN SIX YEARS BY SEX** (2009-2011 NC High School Graduates)

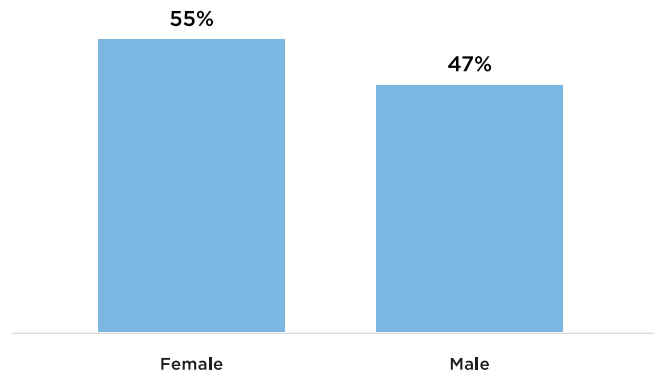
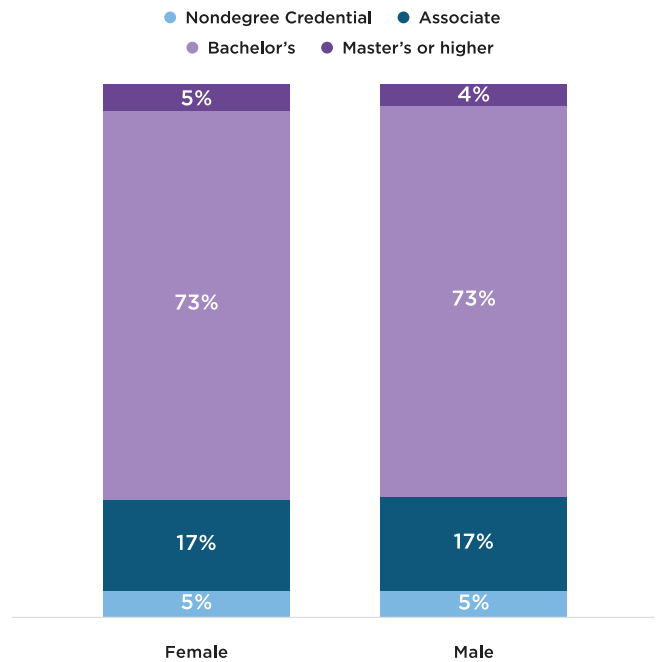


FIG. 22: **HIGHEST DEGREE EARNED WITHIN SIX YEARS BY SEX** (2009-2011 NC High School Graduates)



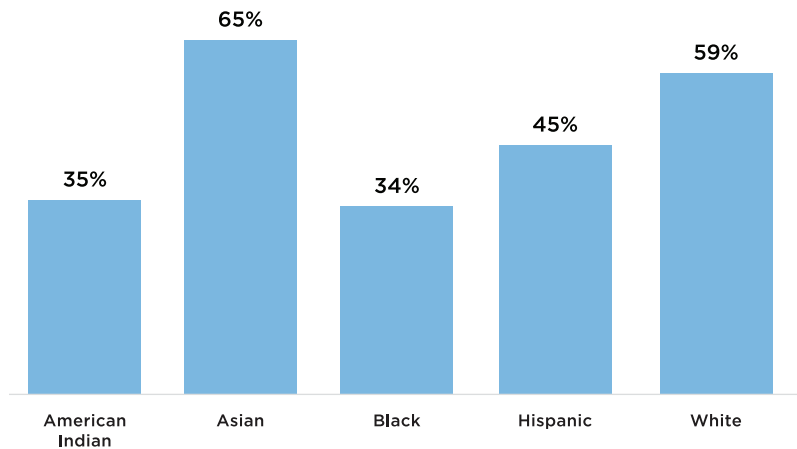
## Race/Ethnicity

**Figure 23** shows the differences in degree attainment by racial/ethnic identification.<sup>20</sup> Degree attainment rates within six years of high school graduation were highest among Asian students (65 percent), followed by White (59 percent), Hispanic (45 percent), American Indian (35 percent), and Black students (34 percent). The difference between the highest (Asian) and lowest (Black) degree attainment rates was 31 percentage points.

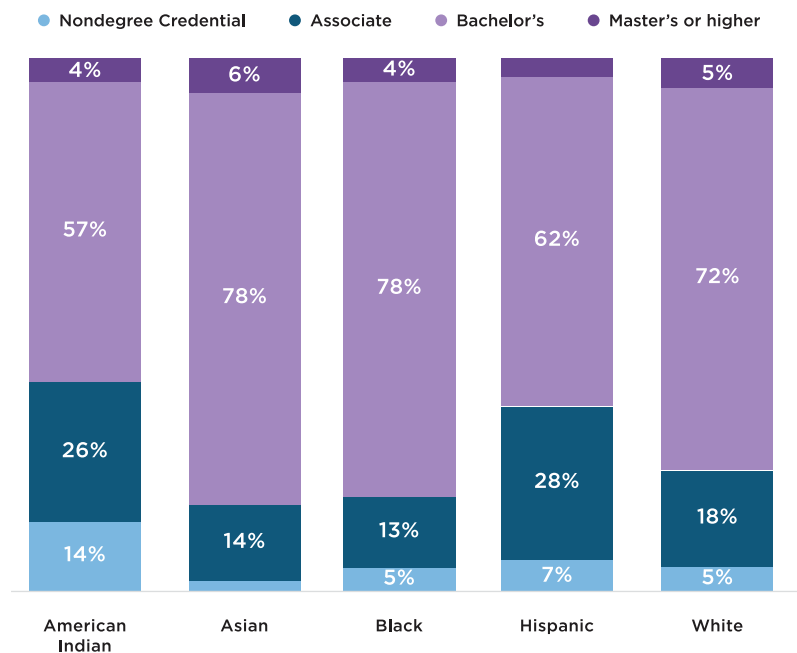
These patterns did not replicate for highest degree earned within six years (**Figure 24**).

- American Indian graduates had the highest share earning a nondegree credential (14 percent). This was twice as high as the next highest group (7 percent for Hispanic graduates).
- Hispanic and American Indian graduates had the highest rates of associate degree attainment (26 percent for both groups), eight percentage points higher than the next highest rate (18 percent for White graduates).
- Asian graduates were the most likely to earn a bachelor's degree or higher (83 percent) followed closely by Black graduates (82 percent) and then White (76 percent), Hispanic (64 percent), and American Indian (60 percent) graduates. Importantly, although a large share of degrees earned among Black students were bachelor's degrees or higher, this group's lower overall degree attainment rate means that a smaller share of Black students earned these degrees compared to most other racial/ethnic groups.

**FIG. 23: POSTSECONDARY DEGREE ATTAINMENT WITHIN SIX YEARS BY RACE/ETHNICITY (2009-2011 NC High School Graduates)**



**FIG. 24: POSTSECONDARY DEGREE ATTAINMENT WITHIN SIX YEARS BY RACE/ETHNICITY (2009-2011 NC High School Graduates)**



Note: Labels are not displayed for values less than or equal to 3%.

## Next Steps

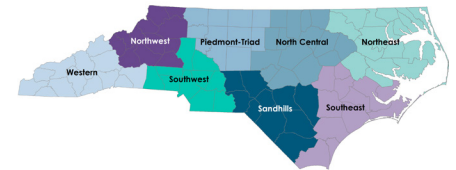
Of the 180,671 North Carolina high school graduates who first enrolled in a postsecondary program prior to May 15, 2012, slightly more than half—51 percent or 92,317—earned a postsecondary degree or nondegree credential within six years after enrollment. This leaves 88,354 students who began a postsecondary program and did not earn a degree or credential within six years. What are the potential barriers to success for these students?

In our next and final data brief, we will explore some of the most common pathways through postsecondary, including pathways that culminate in degree attainment and those that end in dropout or stop-out, to identify potential barriers to success for North Carolina's high school graduates. Last, we will review how various indicators of postsecondary access and success—the college-going rate, first-year persistence, and six-year attainment—can compound or narrow disparities across groups over time.



## References

- Previous data briefs evaluated outcomes for all North Carolina public high school graduates between 2009 and 2016. Because this data brief is focused on completion within six years of initial enrollment, this analysis excludes any individual who first enrolled after May 15, 2012, as these graduates would not have had six years elapse since their first enrollment and May 15, 2018, the date the data were submitted to the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC) for matching. In total, there were 180,672 North Carolina public high school graduates from 2009 to 2011 whose first postsecondary enrollment was prior to May 15, 2012. This includes all students with on-time enrollments and most students with delayed (within two years) enrollments. This evaluation excludes 23,128 individuals from these high school cohorts who enrolled in a postsecondary institution after May 15, 2012. These included:
  - 4,777 graduates from 2009 who enrolled two or more years after graduation;
  - 13 graduates from 2010 who did not enroll on-time but enrolled within two years and 6,793 graduates who enrolled two or more years after graduation; and
  - 5,120 graduates from 2011 who had delayed enrollments within two years of graduation and 6,425 graduates who enrolled two or more years after graduation.
- This report uses postsecondary enrollment and graduation records from the NSC to examine the postsecondary outcomes of North Carolina high school graduates. The NSC is a nonprofit organization that provides postsecondary enrollment data and verification for more than 3,750 colleges and universities in the United States. Collectively, these institutions serve 97% of all students nationwide and 98% of students in North Carolina. Though overall coverage is high, the NSC data does not capture students enrolled in the for-profit sector as well as it captures students enrolled in public and nonprofit institutions. Degree coverage is less robust than overall enrollment coverage. In a 2017 report, researchers estimated that the NSC database captured 93% of the enrollment records for the cohort of students who began postsecondary in fall 2011 but just 84% of degrees. (Shapiro et al.) This suggests that the estimates of completion rates reported here may be slightly lower than the true completion rates, especially among institutional sectors with lower participation in the NSC's DegreeVerify service, namely private nonprofit and private for-profit institutions. Source: Shapiro, Doug, Afet Dundar, Faye Huie, Phoebe Khasiala Wakhungu, Xin Yuan, Angel Nathan, and Ayesha Bhimdiwala. December 2017. *Completing College: A National View of Student Completion Rates—Fall 2011 Cohort* (Signature Report No. 14). Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.
- There were 268,327 students who graduated from a North Carolina high school between 2009 and 2011. Two-thirds of these graduates were enrolled in a postsecondary program prior to May 15, 2012.
- In total, 176,105 individuals who graduated from North Carolina public high schools between 2009 and 2016 had earned a postsecondary degree or nondegree credential as of May 15, 2018. This represents 23% of all high school graduates over this period and nearly one in three (32%) high school graduates who had ever enrolled in a postsecondary program. This number includes individuals who took more than six years to earn their degree and individuals who first enrolled after May 15, 2012. These attainment rates will steadily rise: many of the 2009-2016 graduates who first enrolled after May 15, 2012 have not been enrolled long enough to earn a degree.
- These were generally students who participated in accelerated professional programs, such as six-year pharmacy programs in which students complete undergraduate studies and a Doctorate of Pharmacy in six years.
- 2, 3, 4, and 6 years were selected as markers because they represent the 100% and 150% completion time for two-year institutions (2, 3) and four-year institutions (4, 6).
- Completion within two years would represent graduation in 100% of normal time for nondegree credential and associate degree seekers.
- Completion rates rose another six percentage points to 57% after eight years since first enrollment for the 2009 graduates who enrolled on-time.
- Three and four years to complete an associate degree represent 150% and 200% of normal time, respectively.
- Time to bachelor's degree receipt is more concentrated between 100% of normal time (4 years) and 150% of normal time (6 years) than other credentials. Among students who enrolled prior to May 15, 2010, less than two percent earned a bachelor's degree in three years or less and just six percent took seven (3.4%), eight (1.9%), or nine years (0.5%) to complete.
- Many students who completed their first degree within six years may still be pursuing a higher degree six years after their first enrollment. Understanding the time to higher-level professional degrees such as MDs, JDs, and PhDs would require a longer time frame than six years following first enrollment. Similarly, students who complete an associate degree while enrolled part-time may take longer than two years to complete their first degree; if they go on to pursue a bachelor's degree they may only be partway through their degree at the six-year mark. Some of these patterns of pathways to degree completion will be explored in the final data brief in this series; other aspects could be evaluated in future research or may require additional years of matched data from the NSC to fully understand.
- Thirty-nine percent of North Carolina public high school graduates who enrolled on-time began at a two-year institution. Among delayed enrollments, this proportion nearly doubled: 77% of students who delayed two years or less began at a two-year institution and 70% of students who delayed enrollments more than two years began at a two-year program. Source: Tippett, Rebecca, and Nicole Kahn. 2018a. *Postsecondary Enrollment Report: 2009-2016 North Carolina Public High School Graduates*. Chapel Hill, NC: myFutureNC Commission.
- According to a recent report from the NSC, nationally, half of bachelor's degree graduates "attend community colleges along the way and one-fifth [earn] an associate degree first" Source: Shapiro, Doug, Afet Dundar, Phoebe Khasiala Wakhungu, Xin Yuan, and Autumn T. Harrell. 2015. *Transfer and Mobility: A National View of Student Movement in Postsecondary Institutions, Fall 2008 Cohort* (Signature Report No. 9). Herndon, VA: National Student Clearinghouse Research Center.
- Tippett and Kahn (2018a).
- Prior evaluations in this series (Tippett and Kahn 2018a, 2018b) discussed postsecondary access and persistence by academic readiness. This evaluation was limited to 2014-2016 high school graduates with ACT scores; earlier cohorts did not have mandatory ACT testing and we are not able to provide detail on college completion by academic readiness in this report. Tippett, Rebecca, and Nicole Kahn. 2018b. *Postsecondary Persistence Report: 2009-2016 North Carolina Public High School Graduates*. Chapel Hill, NC: myFutureNC Commission.
- North Carolina's eight prosperity zones were created as part of the 2014 legislation (HB 1030) that also created the public-private partnership Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina (EDPNC). The main goal of the prosperity zones is to promote enhanced collaboration and cooperation between state, local, and regional entities. Each zone has a dedicated EDPNC representative and ranges in size from 10 to 17 counties each. Regional schools designated as Juvenile Justice and Residential schools were not included in the prosperity zone analysis.



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