



# WHAT MOTIVATES OUR WORK



## WHY ATTAINMENT MATTERS

Our drive to establish an ambitious attainment goal is rooted in projections for the future of our state. Our state's economy is changing rapidly, and in many cases those changes are happening faster than our education systems are able to match. Some projections estimate that as many as 50% of the occupations available today will be gone by 2050 (Walden, 2017b). But these occupations are not so much disappearing as they are *transforming*. By 2024, there will be almost 100,000 *more* new jobs than there will be similar growth in the entire working-age population, with many of those jobs requiring at least some form of higher education experience (Bartlett & Howze, 2018; Tippett, 2017; Tippett, 2018).

The wave already has begun: between 1991 and 2015, North Carolina experienced a net loss of 6,000 high-quality blue collar jobs (in areas such as manufacturing, transportation, construction, and retail), but a net surge of 196,000 skilled services jobs (in areas such as finance, business, education, healthcare, and government services; Sims & Siddiqi, 2018). By 2018, employers who struggled to fill vacancies cited lack of technical skills and lack of education among applicants as primary reasons why (cited in Brown-Graham & Moga Bryant, 2018). In the near future, the healthcare and social assistance sector, North Carolina's largest industry by employment, is projected to add 135,000 jobs, with healthcare support and healthcare practitioner/technical occupations leading the way (Bartlett & Howze, 2018). While not every job added will require skills beyond high school, it is becoming clear that many will (D'Amico & Chapman, 2018)—and

that, relative to our current attainment trajectory, there will be more such jobs than there will be North Carolinians to fill them (Figures 1 and 2).

FIGURE 1: **OVERALL PROJECTED NC WORKFORCE NEEDS (2020) BY DEGREE TYPE VS CURRENT (2016) DEGREE DISTRIBUTION**<sup>5</sup>

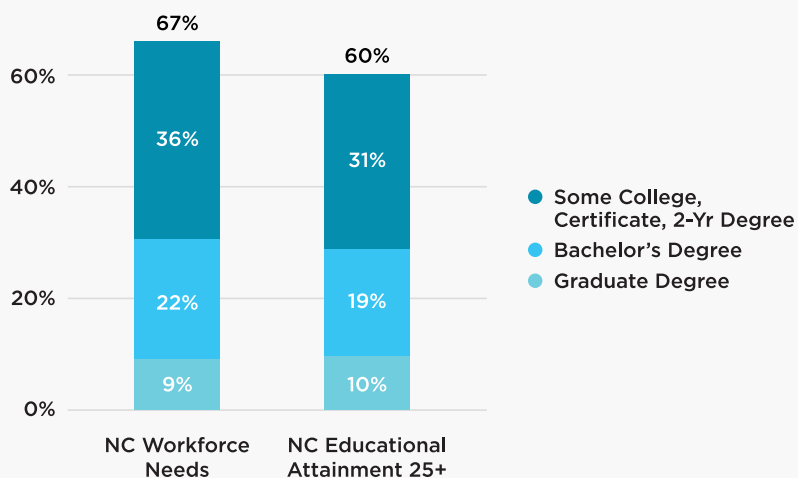
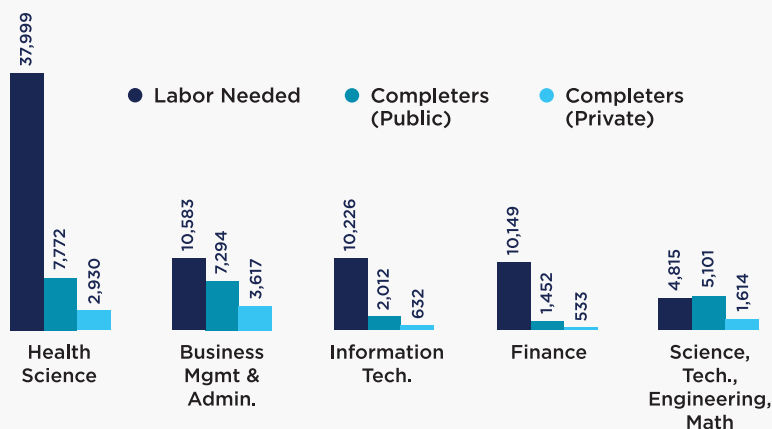


FIGURE 2: **CURRENT LABOR NEED IN HIGH-SKILL SECTORS VS DEGREE PRODUCTION (2018)**<sup>6</sup>



Add to this challenge the fact that even the majority of jobs that do *not* require postsecondary education already are being filled by people with postsecondary experience (Sims & Siddiqi, 2018), and the importance of elevating the proportion of residents with a high-value postsecondary credential or higher degree becomes clear. Already, North Carolina imports talent (with about 60% of the state's adults with an Associate's degree or

5. Cited in D'Amico & Chapman, 2018; Sources: Carnevale et al., 2013a; Carnevale et al., 2013b; US Census Bureau, 2016.

6. Cited in Brown-Graham and Moga Bryant (2018); Source: NC LEAD (Labor and Economic Data and Analysis), 2018, based on an analysis of data provided by the US Census Bureau, the Conference Board, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the National Center for Educational Statistics (IPEDS). Note: Multi-year averages (Labor supply/demand: 2014 through 2016; education program completers: 2010-2015).



higher coming from out of state; Tippett, 2017), and a sizable proportion of North Carolina employers report they are not able to hire the workers they need, citing in particular lack of employability skills, technical skills, and overall education as the main reasons why (NCWorks Commission, 2018).

At the regional level, unemployment rates are lowest in North Carolina counties with higher proportions of residents who hold postsecondary degrees (Walden, 2017a). At the individual level, the prospects for being well-paid increase dramatically as an individual's attainment level rises—from 13% of workers with no high school diploma to about two-thirds of workers with a Bachelor's degree or higher—as do the prospects for better health and civic participation (Sims & Siddiqi, 2018).

## **WHERE ARE WE NOW? ATTAINMENT IN NORTH CAROLINA TODAY**

Postsecondary attainment can be defined in many different ways. As will be discussed in greater detail in a later section, the most comprehensive and useful definition from the perspective of economic competitiveness includes all types of postsecondary degrees and credentials. Using this definition, the current estimated attainment rate for North Carolinians between the ages of 25 and 44 is a little less than 50%—that is, about 50% of the population in that age range has a two-year degree, four-year degree, or some form of marketable credential. That rate positions North Carolina at about the midpoint relative to all other states (Dyke & True, 2018)—not low, but not remarkable, either, and certainly not reflective of where a state that has long prioritized education ought to be (Table 1).



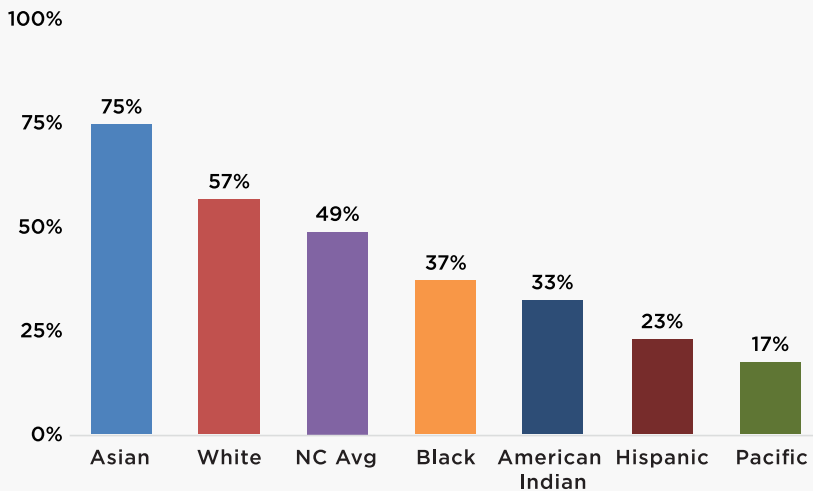
TABLE 1: ATTAINMENT IN NORTH CAROLINA RELATIVE TO OTHER STATES (2016)

	Attainment Rate*
State with Highest Attainment (MA)	60%
States at 75th percentile (MD and KS)	53%
<b>North Carolina (50th percentile)</b>	<b>49%</b>
States at 25th percentile (AK, NM)	45%
States with Lowest Attainment (NV, WV)	35%

\*25- to 44-year olds

Perhaps even more disconcerting, the attainment rate varies—sometimes significantly so—by race and ethnicity. For example, while Asian and White residents consistently outpace the state attainment average, Black, Hispanic, and Native residents consistently fall below that average (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3: NORTH CAROLINA ATTAINMENT BY RACE/ETHNICITY (2016)<sup>7</sup>



Gaps exist among men and women, too, with far more women (55%) than men (47%) holding an Associate’s degree or higher (Tippett & Kahn, 2018c).<sup>8</sup>

7. Dyke & True, 2018

8. Among 2009, 2010, and 2011 high school graduates



# THE NORTH CAROLINA EDUCATION CONTINUUM

In keeping with our overall desire to see greater coordination across education sectors, we recognize that postsecondary attainment does not exist in a vacuum; it is the end result of a much longer process that begins at birth.

Therefore, to develop strategies for raising postsecondary attainment statewide and in a thoughtful way that corresponds to current and projected economic opportunities, we first need a better understanding of the entire education continuum, from early childhood through postsecondary, to help us identify where our current education efforts are working well, as well as where we need to focus the most energy and attention.

## OUR SUCCESSSES ALONG THE CONTINUUM

On one of our first Listening Tour stops, participants reminded us that, while the state needs to embrace the change and growth proposed by myFutureNC, that change and growth should not come at the expense of dismantling all of the good work made possible by our current education structures. We listened, and many of the policy briefs commissioned by myFutureNC helped us to catalog those successes and get a better understanding of the breadth and depth of North Carolina's progress over the past several years. In addition to the high-level bright spots we outlined in the previous section, the policy briefs and other resources remind us of our state's long and successful history of good work in each education sector. We highlight only a few here:

### EARLY CHILDHOOD AND PRE-KINDERGARTEN

- By the end of 2018, over 183,000 children from birth through preschool (plus an additional 59,000 school-age children) were served across over 6,000 child care facilities in North Carolina—75% of which were eligible for subsidized care (DCDEE, 2018).
- The statewide NC Pre-K Program has enrolled about 30,000 students from lower-income families every year since 2009 (Muschkin, 2018).

### ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY

- Every year, North Carolina's elementary and secondary schools educate more students. In 2000-01, public and private schools served about 1.4 million students; during the 2016-17 school year, that total climbed to over 1.8 million, with traditional public schools serving



nearly 1.5 million of them. An additional 95,000 were served by charter schools, and private schools and home schools served an additional 228,000 students.

- Across time, initial elementary student scores on North Carolina assessments in mathematics and reading (3<sup>rd</sup> grade) have increased, with each cohort of student demonstrating slightly higher proficiency than the cohort before it (Lauen & Tomberlin, 2018).
- The proportion of students who graduate from high school has increased steadily over the past several years, rising from about 74% in 2010 to nearly 87% in 2017 (Edmunds, 2018).
- The number of students taking college-level courses before graduating from high school has almost tripled over the past three years (from just over 3% in 2014 to nearly 9% in 2017; Edmunds, 2018).

## POSTSECONDARY

- Eighty-one percent of students who enrolled in postsecondary education immediately after completion of high school persist into their second year of postsecondary education (Tippett & Kahn, 2018b).
- More students than ever before are transferring from two-year to four-year colleges (more than 12,000 in 2016, compared to only 3,400 in 1986; D'Amico & Chapman, 2018).
- Fifty-one percent of our high school graduates in the Classes of 2009 through 2011 earned a postsecondary degree within six years of enrollment, with Bachelor's degrees making up the bulk of those degrees (73%), followed by Associate's (20%) and other credential (7%; Tippett & Kahn, 2018c).
- Eleven percent of those degree earners completed an additional, higher degree within six years (Tippett & Kahn, 2018c).

## OUR EDUCATION CONTINUUM CHALLENGES

Alongside all of those successes, however, and behind many of those numbers are a host of students who, every day, continue to slip through the cracks and fall off the continuum. In order to improve attainment across North Carolina, we must identify and address these slippages. The following challenges are just some of the motivations for the work of myFutureNC:



## EARLY CHILDHOOD AND PRE-KINDERGARTEN

- NC Pre-K typically only enrolls about one-half of all eligible students from lower-income families, primarily due to a cap on its state-funded enrollment slots. As a result, among all Kindergarten enrollees in 2016, only about 56% demonstrated adequate Kindergarten-entry literacy skills (Muschkin, 2018).

## ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY

- During the Listening Tour, parents and educators both identified steadily-growing parent disengagement across the elementary and secondary years, with reasons ranging from feelings of being out of place in a setting in which they did not experience success to challenges related to language barriers (Antoszyk et al., 2018c). Parent disengagement can contribute directly to student disengagement.
- The impressive growth across years in early-grade mathematics and reading scores slows as students enter middle school, and that slowing has increased over time. In addition, the gaps in reading proficiency between white students and minority students typically remain about the same or close only slightly between 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and the gaps in mathematics proficiency grow—in some cases, to the point of doubling (Lauen & Tomberlin, 2018); similar trends are present for students with disabilities and students from economically disadvantaged or second language backgrounds (Tomberlin, 2018)
- Though it has risen slightly over time, the proportion of high school students who meet or exceed state-defined college- and career-readiness levels on state tests still hovers around the 50% mark, and the gaps across different subgroups of students are very wide, with little sign of closing (Edmunds, 2018).
- Listening Tour participants consistently identified three elementary and secondary transitions as particularly difficult for students and families:
  - » Preschool to Kindergarten (social, emotional, and academic adjustments)
  - » Grade 2 to Grade 3 (entry into the first high-stakes testing year)
  - » Grade 8 to Grade 9 (middle school to high school; Antoszyk et al., 2018c).

## POSTSECONDARY

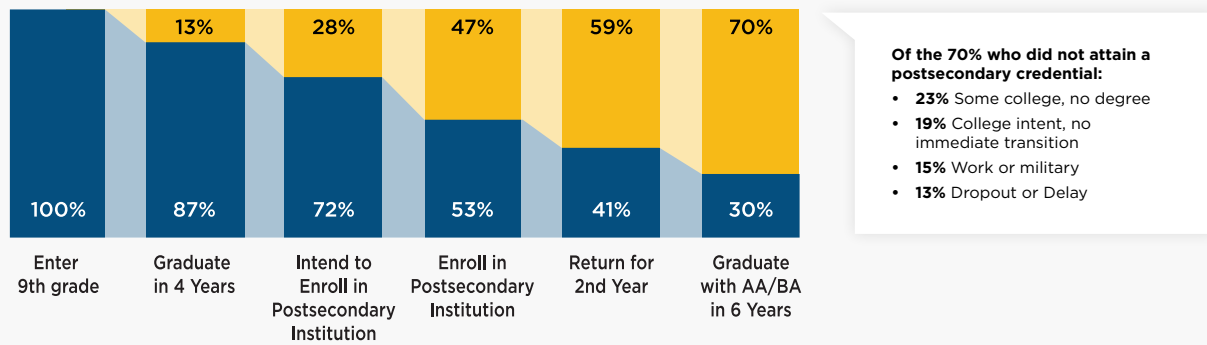
- Just over half (54%) of respondents to the EducationNC survey conducted in parallel with the Listening Tour identified the transition from high school to community college or technical training as the transition for which students and families need the most guidance; almost the same percentage (52%) identified



the transition from high school to four-year college as the area of second-greatest need (EdNC, 2018).

- Those concerns are supported by the dramatic drop-off of students along the postsecondary portion of the continuum. For every 100 9<sup>th</sup> graders, there are 87 high school graduates, of whom 72 express a desire to pursue postsecondary schooling (Tippett, 2018). Of those who graduate, only 67 end up enrolling, and only 51 persist into a second year. Of the 51 who start a second year, only 34 end up earning a degree or credential within six years of first enrollment (Tippett & Kahn, 2018e; Figure 4).

**FIGURE 4. HIGH SCHOOL TO POSTSECONDARY COMPLETION PIPELINE LEAKAGE**



- In addition, the proportion of high school graduates who express postsecondary intent varies widely across districts (Tippett, 2017), indicating that postsecondary aspirations are not consistent across the state.
- Postsecondary enrollment rates peaked in 2009-10 but have declined ever since (Tippett & Kahn, 2018a).
- Over the past several years, only 50% of high school students who delay postsecondary enrollment (that is, those who enroll after taking a break for work or other pursuits) persist into a second year. Persistence is most challenging for less academically-prepared students, lower-income students, students from outside of the Triangle area, male students, and most racial or ethnic minority groups (Tippett & Kahn, 2018b).
- The greatest share of post-sec dropouts occur in the first year (Tippett & Kahn, 2018b).
- Students who delay enrollment are only half as likely to receive a degree within six years as those who enroll on time (22% versus 56% percent; Tippett & Kahn, 2018c)





As these outcomes make clear, the time is now for North Carolina to renew its commitment and energy to increasing educational attainment. In the sections that follow, we outline our proposal for an attainment goal for our state. In support of that goal, we also propose benchmarks and indicators that can help us track our progress toward that goal, as well as Focus Areas and Priorities that we believe can guide all individuals and communities across the state as we work together to create the conditions necessary for preparing our residents to contribute to a better, stronger, and more vibrant North Carolina.

