

# Educational Attainment Report

September 1, 2021



## Executive Summary

There is an urgent need to increase educational attainment across North Carolina. This is both an economic development concern and an educational equity opportunity for our great state. Education is the gateway to economic prosperity and, simply put, it is an imperative that when accomplished, will be transformative.

The business landscape is forever changed from the disruption of the pandemic. Even pre-COVID-19 the state faced a skills gap crisis, and now the urgency for action has been further accelerated in order to meet the state's educational attainment goal of 2 million by 2030. More jobs are requiring higher levels of skills and education, and individuals without it are more likely to be unemployed in down economies. In addition, low-income and first-generation college students have been especially hit hard this past year. The personal hardships and instability our students and families have endured has derailed their progress towards completing - let alone starting - their degree or credential. Therefore, it is critical that our systems adjust in response, to realize better outcomes that shape opportunity for increased mobility for all.

## Measuring Our Progress

myFutureNC tracks the postsecondary attainment of North Carolinians ages 25-44, as well as performance from Pre-K to college and career. Based on the most recent data available, in 2019 North Carolina had an estimated 1,450,249 adults 25-44 with a high-quality degree or credential; this is **44,000 below where the state needed to be at this time, to be on target to the 2 million by 2030 goal.**



## COVID-19 Impact

Early numbers indicate too many high school graduates face a real risk of not completing higher education as a result of the COVID-19 impact.

- Disproportionate impacts on students of color, students from low-income backgrounds and first-generation students further elevate the need to close the attainment gap
- Academic readiness continues to be a significant leak in the educational attainment pipeline
- FAFSA completions and postsecondary applications and enrollment have declined year-over-year
- Decrease in labor market participation further impacted by increase in the number of disconnected youth and adult learners without a credential or degree

### Data Disruptions

myFutureNC is monitoring the pandemic impact on data across the education continuum, from Pre-K to career, with specific attention to the 18 educational attainment indicators shown on the myFutureNC state dashboard. There are delays in the availability of National Student Clearinghouse, 2020 Census, and American Community Survey data.

The alarming trend of students not transitioning from high school to postsecondary education comes at a time when a college degree or credential is a key lever to economic mobility. Helping students find their way now is critical to long-term opportunity and prosperity for both the student and North Carolina.

## Our Focus



**Academic  
Readiness**



**College &  
Career Access**



**Postsecondary  
Completion**



**Labor Market  
Alignment**

To close the educational attainment gap in North Carolina by 2030, myFutureNC is working to ensure that students have the information, resources, and opportunities they need to prepare for, enroll in, and succeed in college and credentialing opportunities that align with business and industry needs. Our progress will be strengthened by additional attention to two key foundations for success: broadband access, affordability, and adoption; and analysis of attainment data.

### myFutureNC Collaboratives

myFutureNC engages state leaders and local communities to support opportunities for growth, utilizing data such as county attainment profiles. We are a state-led organization but the work must be locally driven. As such, we support local collaboratives in setting goals and implementing strategies to increase attainment.

- **Adult Learners and Opportunity Youth** | Recognizing North Carolina's declining labor market participation rate, myFutureNC is bringing added focus to the need to bring back disconnected youth and adult learners into the education pipeline.
- **College and Career Ready Graduates (CCRG)** | Partnering with K-12 and community colleges on a college readiness initiative to ensure any needed remediation occurs in high school
- **FAFSA Initiatives** | NC First in FAFSA aims to increase the number of students leveraging student aid through a statewide FAFSA Tracker, First in FAFSA Challenge and expanded connections to reach underrepresented populations
- **Local Educational Attainment Collaboratives** | The ncIMPACT Initiative at the UNC School of Government and myFutureNC launched a two-year pilot program that supports the first cohort of 15 local educational attainment collaboratives across North Carolina that seek to significantly increase the number of students successfully completing a postsecondary credential or degree
- **NC Workforce Credentials** | Partnering with education and workforce leaders to define and incentivize high-quality, non-degree credentials recognized by employers that help workers in North Carolina obtain in-demand living wage jobs
- **NC10** | Partnering with CREED, Hunt Institute, and EdNC, to explore ways to increase enrollments and completions at Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Minority Serving Institutions

### Our Actions

- **Convene & Engage** | The work of myFutureNC combines actionable data tools and information to aid in decision making at the state and local levels. Our efforts also support communities to implement and spread practices that accelerate educational attainment outcomes. We catalyze action by building awareness, and convening, engaging, and equipping stakeholders with data, tools, resources, and best practices.
- **Data & Tools** | Developed in partnership with Carolina Demography, the myFutureNC [State Attainment Dashboard](#) shows North Carolina's progress towards the state's overall 2030 goal for postsecondary educational attainment, as well as 18 educational performance indicators. [County Attainment Profiles](#) contain data unique to each of North Carolina's 100 counties, designed to empower and support educational attainment efforts at the local level. The next set of profiles will include an interactive county explorer tool.
- **Advocacy & Recommended Actions** | We put goals into action by making [policy recommendations](#) and committing to and advocating for strategies to close the educational attainment gap.