

## A stronger nation through higher education — and North Carolina's role in that effort

In North Carolina, about 37 percent of the state's nearly 5 million working-age adults (25-64 years old) hold at least a two-year degree, according to 2008 Census data. This compares to a national average of around 38 percent. Attainment rates in North Carolina are increasing modestly, even though the proportion of degree-holding young adults — those 25-34 years old — mirrors that of the overall adult population. If North Carolina continues to increase attainment at the rate it did over the last decade (2000-2008), the state will have a college-attainment rate of 47.5 percent in 2025 — far short of the Big Goal of 60 percent.

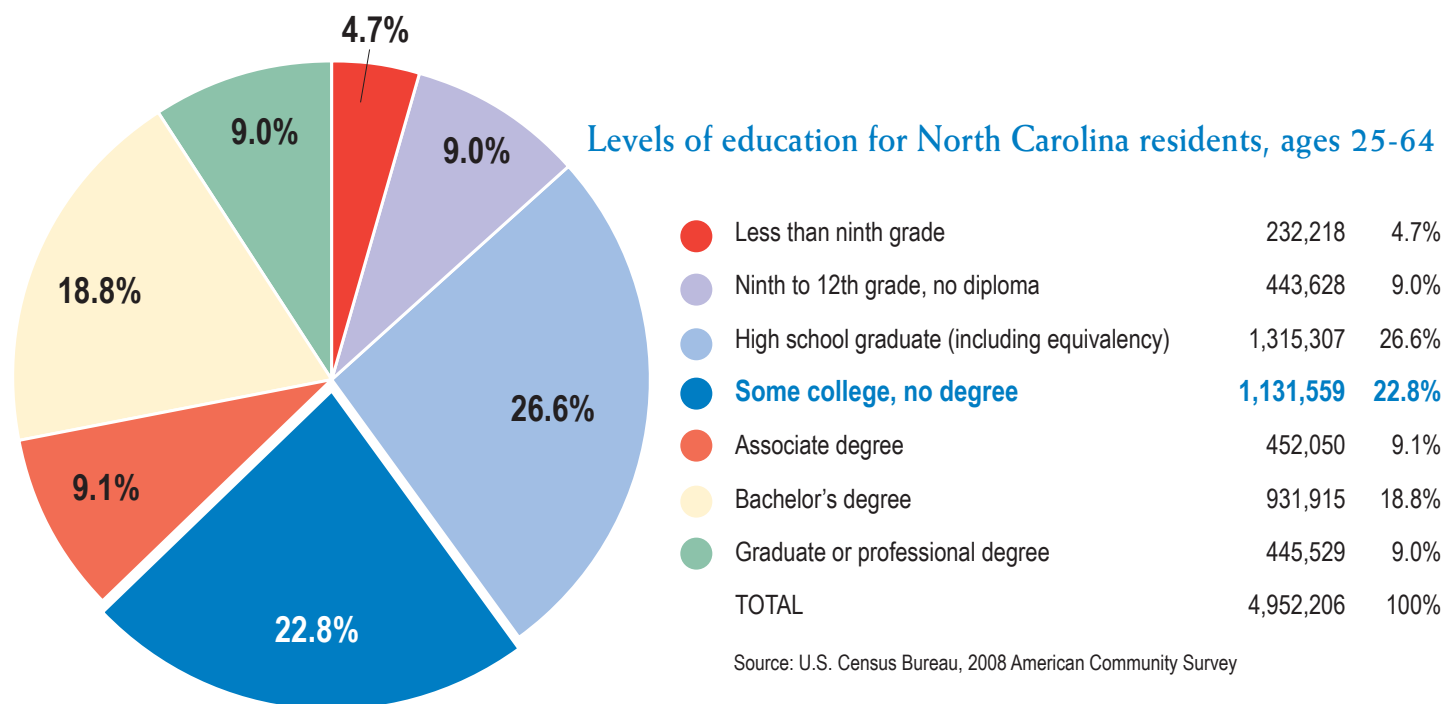
However, this gap *can* be closed. The key is to begin increasing degree production, and to continue to increase it each year until 2025. By increasing production by 9,440 associate or bachelor's degrees each year between now and 2025 — an annual increase of 7.1 percent — North Carolina will reach the Big Goal.

One excellent place to begin looking for these additional graduates is in the ranks of North Carolina residents who have completed some college without earning a degree. In 2008, 1.1 million North Carolina residents fit into this

category — representing nearly 23 percent of the state's adult population. If only a small portion of this group could be enticed to return to college to complete either a two- or four-year degree, it would go a long way to helping North Carolina reach the goal of 60 percent higher education attainment.

Also, by looking at the geographic distribution of college graduates within the state (see chart on reverse), policymakers and other stakeholders can begin to work strategically and systematically to close achievement gaps. They can target counties and regions that show the greatest need and focus their efforts on those specific areas.

How do we know that North Carolina's economy will demand more college graduates? A recent analysis by the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce provides the answer. According to the center's analysis of occupation data and workforce trends, 59 percent of North Carolina's jobs will require postsecondary education by 2018. Between now and 2018, North Carolina will need to fill about 1.4 million vacancies resulting from job creation, worker retirements and other factors. Of these

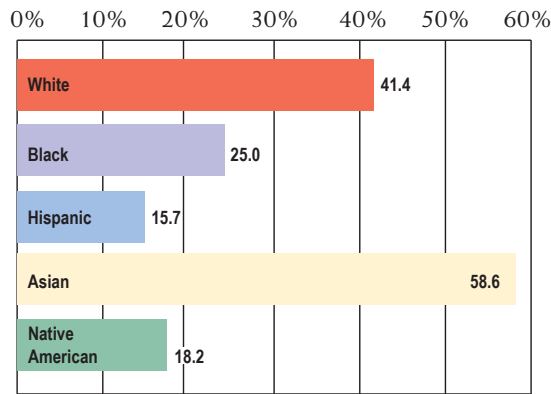


job vacancies, 833,000 will require postsecondary credentials, while only about 585,000 are expected to be filled by high school graduates or dropouts.

It will be impossible to reach the Big Goal without significantly increasing college success among the groups that can accurately be called 21st century students, including working adults, low-income and first-generation students and students of color. Closing attainment gaps among racial and ethnic groups is a particular challenge in North Carolina, as in other states. The current higher education attainment rates in North Carolina are displayed in the accompanying bar graph.

These gaps have persisted for decades, and closing them is obviously a big challenge. Still, it can and *must* be done. It will require concerted and strategic efforts over many

### Degree-attainment rates among North Carolina adults (ages 25-64), by population group



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey

years — efforts based on solid evidence about what works to increase attainment. Information about successful strategies to increase the number of students who complete higher education is available on Lumina Foundation’s Web site. The site also provides specific information about North Carolina’s degree-attainment rates at [www.luminafoundation.org/state\\_data/](http://www.luminafoundation.org/state_data/). From there, you can find links to data from all 50 states.

Still more information is available at a Web-based resource created by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS). The NCHEMS Information Center provides detailed comparative data for all states and counties, as well as other contextual information that can help higher education policymakers and analysts make sound policy decisions. We urge you to visit the site ([www.higheredinfo.org](http://www.higheredinfo.org)).

### Percentage of North Carolina adults (25-64) with a two- or four-year degree, by county:

Alamance	30.2	Columbus	24.4	Harnett	28.2	Moore	38.6	Scotland	25.3
Alexander	22.2	Craven	32.3	Haywood	32.9	Nash	29.9	Stanly	27.4
Anson	15.0	Cumberland	33.8	Henderson	38.5	New Hanover	48.1	Stokes	18.2
Ashe	22.6	Currituck	25.0	Hertford	25.5	Northampton	22.2	Surry	24.5
Beaufort	29.3	Dare	38.5	Hoke	25.9	Onslow	28.8	Transylvania	35.2
Bladen	21.8	Davidson	26.7	Iredell	32.7	Orange	63.4	Union	36.6
Brunswick	28.8	Davie	32.7	Jackson	36.3	Pasquotank	28.7	Vance	19.4
Buncombe	41.9	Duplin	19.0	Johnston	30.0	Pender	26.3	Wake	57.3
Burke	26.1	Durham	51.4	Lee	27.6	Person	25.0	Watauga	45.2
Cabarrus	36.1	Edgecombe	18.8	Lenoir	23.6	Pitt	41.2	Wayne	26.8
Caldwell	22.3	Forsyth	41.4	Lincoln	26.0	Randolph	21.1	Wilkes	21.8
Carteret	34.6	Franklin	24.3	McDowell	26.4	Richmond	23.6	Wilson	27.5
Caswell	19.0	Gaston	28.7	Macon	31.3	Robeson	19.4	Yadkin	22.7
Catawba	29.4	Granville	26.0	Madison	28.0	Rockingham	21.4	Other counties	24.8*
Chatham	41.4	Greene	18.0	Martin	23.9	Rowan	25.9		
Cherokee	27.6	Guilford	41.2	Mecklenburg	50.6	Rutherford	27.1		
Cleveland	24.8	Halifax	21.8	Montgomery	22.7	Sampson	20.0		

\*This percentage is an average for the 19 North Carolina counties with fewer than 20,000 residents.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2008 American Community Survey

Lumina Foundation for Education is committed to enrolling and graduating more students from college — especially low-income students, students of color, first-generation students and adult learners. Our goal is to increase the percentage of Americans who hold high-quality degrees and credentials to 60 percent by 2025.

Lumina pursues this goal in three ways: by identifying and supporting effective practice, through public policy advocacy, and by using our communications and convening power to build public will for change. For more details on the Foundation, visit our Web site at [www.luminafoundation.org](http://www.luminafoundation.org).

