

In North Carolina, postsecondary learning builds the talent that helps us rise

A policy brief from Lumina Foundation



North Carolina

he need to increase postsecondary attainment — the number of Americans who hold degrees and other highquality credentials — has never been clearer. State leaders are responding to the growing global demand for talent by setting goals and enacting policies to increase attainment. Like Lumina Foundation, states have come to understand the scope of the effort required. Much is left to be done, but real progress is being made through the efforts of those who are committed to assuring that millions more Americans benefit from postsecondary education.

Lumina began reporting the attainment rate (associate degree and higher) in 2008. That year, the rate in North Carolina stood at 36.9 percent. In 2014, the most recent year for which data are available, the rate reached 40.3 percent.

However, the degree attainment rate doesn't tell the whole story. Lumina has always said that other postsecondary credentials including certificates and certifications — should count toward national and state goals for attainment, with one important caveat. To count, non-degree credentials should be of high quality, which we define as having clear and transparent learning outcomes leading to further education and employment.

This year, for the first time, we have nationally representative data on the number of Americans who hold high-quality postsecondary certificates; we now feel confident we can count these credentials toward attainment goals. In states, we are able to use estimates from the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce on the number of residents who hold high-quality certificates as their highest earned credential. In North Carolina, 5 percent of residents between the ages of 25 and 64 hold a highquality certificate. This brings the state's overall postsecondary attainment rate to 45.3 percent. As the data in this report make clear, increasing overall attainment is not the only challenge North Carolina faces. There are also significant gaps in attainment that must be closed. While current systems work very well for many students, more postsecondary credentials must be earned by Americans who, by definition, are *post-traditional* learners. Compared with current students, they will be older; more will be African-American, Hispanic and Native American; and they will have lower incomes. Most will be firstgeneration students. The data in this report show the extent of the attainment gaps in North Carolina by race and ethnicity.

To date, 26 states have responded to the need to increase attainment by setting state attainment goals that meet Lumina's criteria for rigor and efficacy (i.e., the goal is quantifiable, challenging, long term, addresses gaps, and is in statute and/or a strategic plan). Our analysis shows that North Carolina has not set a goal that meets Lumina's criteria; we urge state leaders to do so.

There is much more that states can do to increase attainment. It begins with assuring that all prospective students, including working adults, have access to affordable programs that lead to quality credentials. State policies such as outcomes-based funding can encourage colleges and universities to direct resources to approaches that increase student success. States can also help assure that students get full recognition for *all* of their learning — whether it was obtained in an institution, in the military or on the job and can apply it to further education and credentials.

Lumina is working with state leaders from around the nation to expand postsecondary opportunity and success. More information on that work, including our full state policy agenda and additional data, is available on Lumina's Strategy Labs website (http:// strategylabs.luminafoundation.org/).

Tracking the trend

Percentage of the state's working-age population (25-64) with a quality postsecondary credential



Note: For years prior to 2014, this graph denotes attainment of associate degrees and higher. For 2014, it also includes the estimated percentage of state residents who have earned high-value postsecondary certificates. This percentage — again, an estimate — was derived from Census and IPEDS data by labor market experts at the Center on Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University.

Levels of education for North Carolina residents, ages 25-64

	Less than ninth grade	218,106	4.19%	Estimated
	Ninth to 12th grade, no diploma	406,426	7.81%	attainment of
TOTAL 5,200,788	High school graduate (including equivalency)	1,299,871	24.99%	certificates: 5%
	Some college, no degree	1,181,373 22.72%	22.72%	0 /0
	Associate degree	521,773	10.03%	
	Bachelor's degree	1,043,853	20.07%	
	Graduate or professional degree	529,386	10.18%	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey

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



College enrollment among North Carolina residents, ages 18-54



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey One-Year Public Use Microdata Sample

Note: These percentages reflect the enrollment of non-degree-holding students, ages 18-54, at public and private, two-year and four-year postsecondary institutions

Percentage of North Carolina residents (ages 25-64) with at least an associate degree, by county

Alamance	32.51	Catawba	33.58	Franklin	31.28	Jones	25.23	Pamlico	32.33	Surry	28.35
Alexander	22.56	Chatham	43.05	Gaston	29.85	Lee	31.26	Pasquotank	29.60	Swain	27.12
Alleghany	28.22	Cherokee	29.33	Gates	24.66	Lenoir	26.27	Pender	33.47	Transylvania	37.75
Anson	18.50	Chowan	31.75	Graham	25.02	Lincoln	32.77	Perquimans	26.25	Tyrrell	14.05
Ashe	31.00	Clay	29.66	Granville	28.75	McDowell	25.19	Person	26.55	Union	43.35
Avery	27.16	Cleveland	29.28	Greene	22.73	Macon	32.45	Pitt	42.44	Vance	22.14
Beaufort	29.45	Columbus	24.55	Guilford	43.45	Madison	31.26	Polk	38.87	Wake	59.07
Bertie	19.27	Craven	32.87	Halifax	21.93	Martin	26.48	Randolph	25.80	Warren	22.34
Bladen	23.91	Cumberland	35.29	Harnett	30.99	Mecklenburg	51.09	Richmond	25.23	Washington	21.84
Brunswick	34.58	Currituck	29.94	Haywood	37.20	Mitchell	32.14	Robeson	21.52	Watauga	47.66
Buncombe	45.35	Dare	37.26	Henderson	37.09	Montgomery	25.50	Rockingham	23.74	Wayne	29.52
Burke	29.42	Davidson	29.70	Hertford	25.05	Moore	45.69	Rowan	29.24	Wilkes	24.43
Cabarrus	39.27	Davie	36.95	Hoke	31.79	Nash	28.52	Rutherford	28.65	Wilson	28.75
Caldwell	24.35	Duplin	19.78	Hyde	17.65	New Hanover	48.90	Sampson	21.40	Yadkin	27.27
Camden	37.09	Durham	53.62	Iredell	37.73	Northampton	22.98	Scotland	24.28	Yancey	27.73
Carteret	36.98	Edgecombe	20.21	Jackson	40.51	Onslow	29.48	Stanly	28.29		
Caswell	19.85	Forsyth	42.38	Johnston	33.73	Orange	64.17	Stokes	24.56		
Buncombe Burke Cabarrus Caldwell Camden Carteret	45.35 29.42 39.27 24.35 37.09 36.98	Dare Davidson Davie Duplin Durham Edgecombe	37.26 29.70 36.95 19.78 53.62 20.21	Henderson Hertford Hoke Hyde Iredell Jackson	37.09 25.05 31.79 17.65 37.73 40.51	Montgomery Moore Nash New Hanover Northampton Onslow	25.50 45.69 28.52 48.90 22.98 29.48	Rockingham Rowan Rutherford Sampson Scotland Stanly	23.74 29.24 28.65 21.40 24.28 28.29	Wayne Wilkes Wilson Yadkin	29.52 24.43 28.75 27.27

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010-14 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates



Lumina Foundation is an independent, private foundation committed to increasing the proportion of Americans with degrees, certificates and other high-quality credentials to 60 percent by 2025. Lumina's outcomes-based approach focuses on helping to design and build an equitable, accessible, responsive and accountable higher education system while fostering a national sense of urgency for action to achieve Goal 2025.