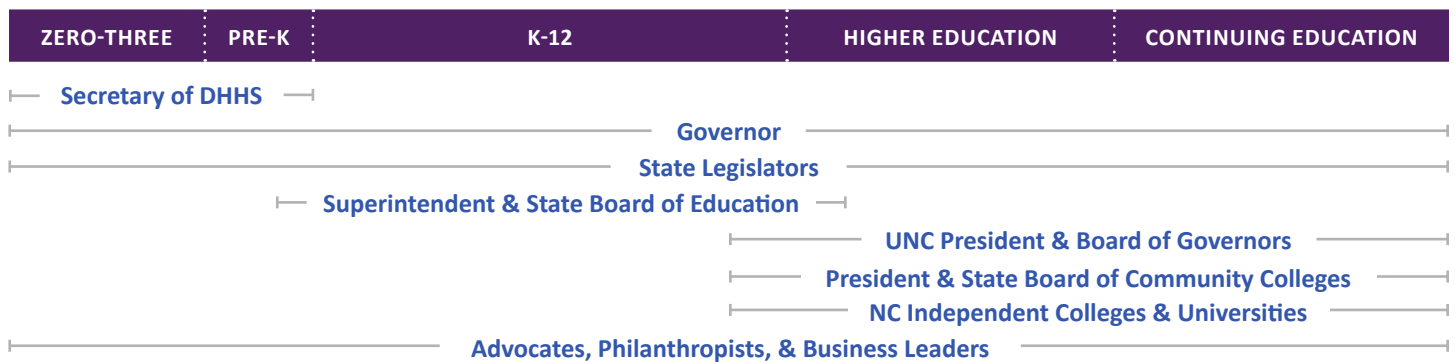


THE EDUCATION POLICY LANDSCAPE IN NORTH CAROLINA

North Carolina has a proud history and tradition of providing high-quality educational opportunities at all levels for residents across the state – from early childhood to higher education and workforce training.

FIGURE 1
THE EDUCATION CONTINUUM IN NORTH CAROLINA

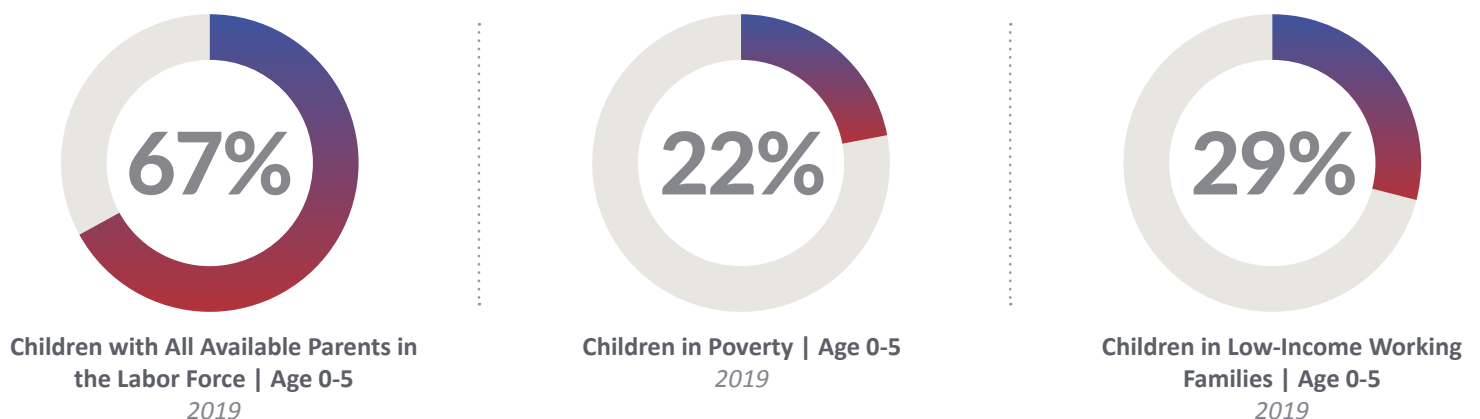


EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

State leaders made historic investments in programs to support young children in North Carolina including Smart Start, a public-private partnership established in 1993 (and expanded statewide in 1997) to coordinate education and healthcare services for children aged birth to five. Another major investment was the NC Pre-K program, originally established in 2001 as the More at Four program, which serves over 29,000 eligible four-year-old children in the state. Numerous studies have proven the effectiveness of these programs in boosting both short- and long-term student success, especially for dual language learners and students from low-income households. These investments have paid great dividends for North Carolina over many years by producing a steady pipeline of high-achieving students who find success in their education journeys and become productive members of their communities.

FIGURE 2
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION NEEDS IN NORTH CAROLINA

Source



K-12 EDUCATION

North Carolina also has a track record of supporting K-12 education in the state for many years and across multiple administrations. Throughout the 1990s and mid-2000s, students in North Carolina posted some of the largest student achievement gains in the country and the state received national attention as a leader in innovative education policy. State-level efforts that contributed to these gains included initiatives to strengthen the workforce of both educators and school leaders as well as multiple rounds of revisions to strengthen state standards. However, in recent years the advantage that North Carolina students previously held over their peers when it comes to student achievement has narrowed, as shown by the results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) eight grade math test.

Looking at the data for the most recent year of that same assessment broken down by student subgroups, it is clear that significant achievement gaps persist for Black and Hispanic students in North Carolina.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Thanks in large part to the fact that leaders in North Carolina have prioritized higher education policy for many years, the state has developed an infrastructure that provides students across the state with some of the most high-quality and affordable postsecondary options in the country.

The story of higher education in North Carolina starts early: in 1795, the University of North Carolina became the first public university in the nation to welcome students on campus. The state also has a long history of prioritizing affordability in higher education, as evidenced by the following language included in the 1868 North Carolina Constitution and later amended in 1971:

“The General Assembly shall provide that the benefits of The University of North Carolina and other public institutions of higher education, as far as practicable, be extended to the youth people of the State free of expense for tuition”

● 1868 Constitution Text

● 1971 Revisions

[Source](#)

FIGURE 3

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT OVER TIME | NAEP EIGHT GRADE MATHEMATICS

[Source](#)

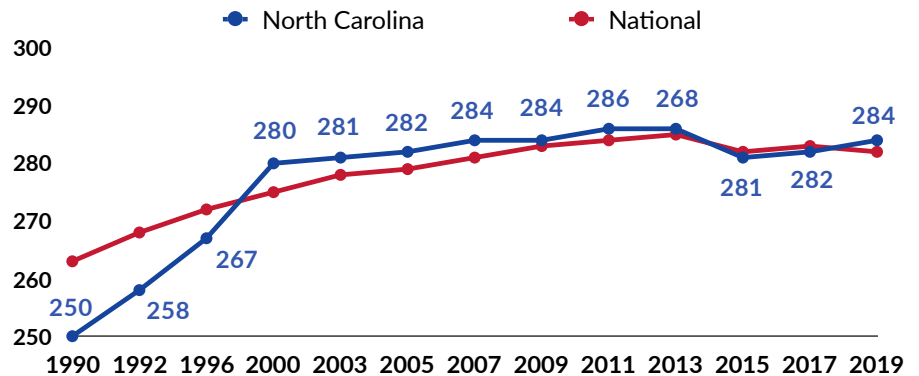
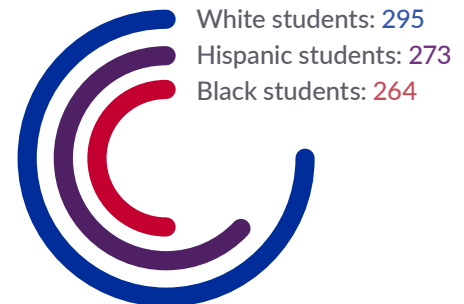


FIGURE 4

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT BY SUBGROUP | NAEP EIGHTH GRADE MATHEMATICS 2019

[Source](#)



Because of the longstanding prioritization of higher education policy on the state level, North Carolina developed a comprehensive public university system, a robust network of independent institutions, and a significant number of community colleges. One especially notable feature of North Carolina's higher education landscape is the breadth of the state's community college sector – *only five states have more community colleges per student than North Carolina*, and those top five all have significantly lower populations compared to NC.

Higher education leaders across North Carolina have worked to develop policy strategies that are aligned with statewide goals – one example is the development of the [Career and College Promise program](#), which allows students in North Carolina to get a head start on their higher education journeys through programs such as Early College High Schools. Providing structured pathways into higher education can be a powerful strategy to help students overcome barriers related to access.

Higher education leaders have also worked to develop both the [Comprehensive Articulation Agreement](#) (CAA) and the [Independent Comprehensive Articulation Agreement](#) (ICAA) – frameworks that establish clear pathways for transfer students to succeed in higher education.

THE MYFUTURENC STATE ATTAINMENT GOAL

As North Carolina state leaders consider strategic responses to the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, they should consider the fact that after the most recent (2008) major economic recession, [over 95 percent](#) of the jobs created during the recovery were filled by workers who had earned a higher education degree or certificate. The need to promote higher education has become more urgent because of the pandemic, but the increasing importance of education beyond high school has been clear for a number of years.

In order to address the economic and moral imperative to increase postsecondary attainment across the state, a number of stakeholders came together to develop consensus around a statewide attainment goal: 2 million North Carolinians would attain a high-quality credential or degree by 2030.

HIGHER EDUCATION ACCESS POLICY

Many of the policy conversations at this first meeting will be framed around the basic question of access: which students are able to pursue a postsecondary education, and how do they get there?

Student Subpopulations

A “traditional” college student is generally considered to be someone who enrolls in college full time immediately after graduating from high school, is financially dependent on their parents, and does not work while attending college. However, a nationwide demographic breakdown of the current higher education population shows that many students do not fit that traditional definition.

FIGURE 5

CURRENT, PROJECTED, AND TARGETED ATTAINMENT LEVELS IN NORTH CAROLINA

[Source](#)

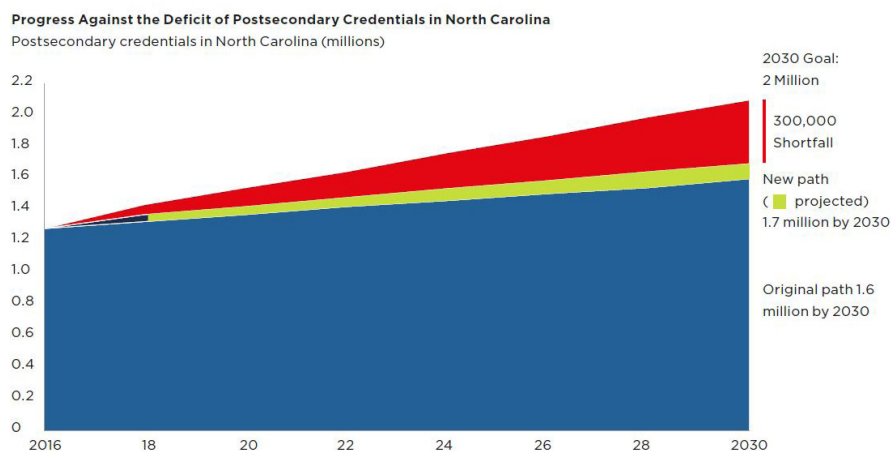
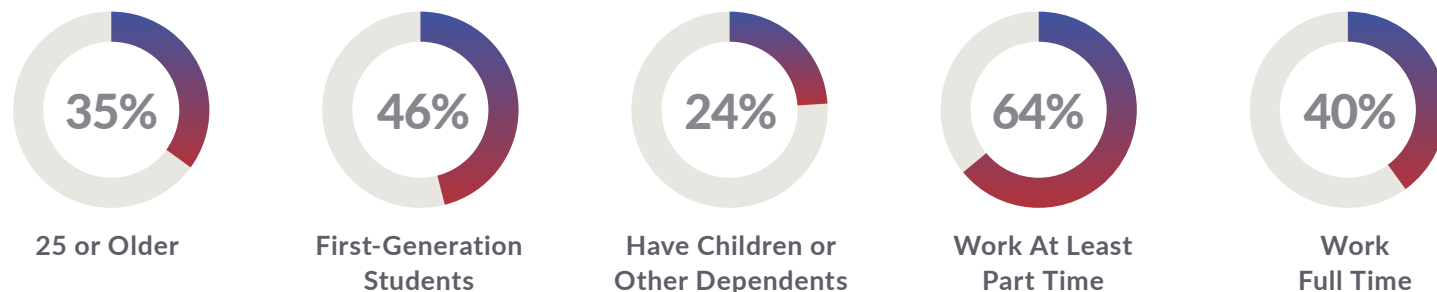


FIGURE 6
CHARACTERISTICS OF TODAY'S HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT POPULATION

[Source](#)

The average college student is 26 years old.



When it comes to the percentage of nonwhite students that enroll in higher education, there are gaps between the enrollment rates of different student subgroups. Enrollment percentages of white and Asian students in North Carolina are higher than the percentages for Black and Hispanic students.

FIGURE 7
IHE ENROLLMENT PERCENTAGES FOR 18-24-YEAR-OLD STUDENTS | 2018

[Source](#)

