



NORTH CAROLINA

STATE SUMMARY
2025

North Carolina at a glance

THE STATE OPPORTUNITY INDEX combines research-backed strategies for improving education-to-career outcomes with benchmarking measures to track progress for all 50 states, giving policymakers and institutions a framework for strengthening the link between education and opportunity.

For each state, the Index reports the percentage of students who experience a positive return on investment and summarizes progress in five key areas for improving success beyond completion: Clear Outcomes, Quality Coaching, Affordability, Work-Based Learning, and Employer Alignment. States are grouped into four categories: Leading (at the forefront, demonstrating strong progress); Advanced (substantial progress); Developing (early stages of improvement); and Foundational (just beginning their journey).

Positive ROI

69%



State
Opportunity
Index

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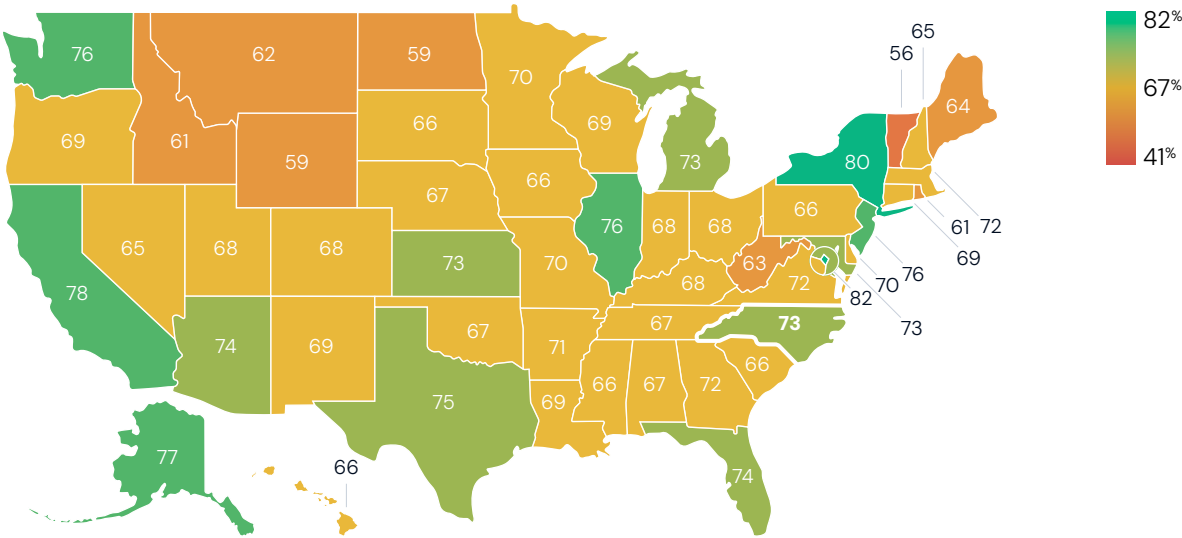
Positive ROI

North Carolina

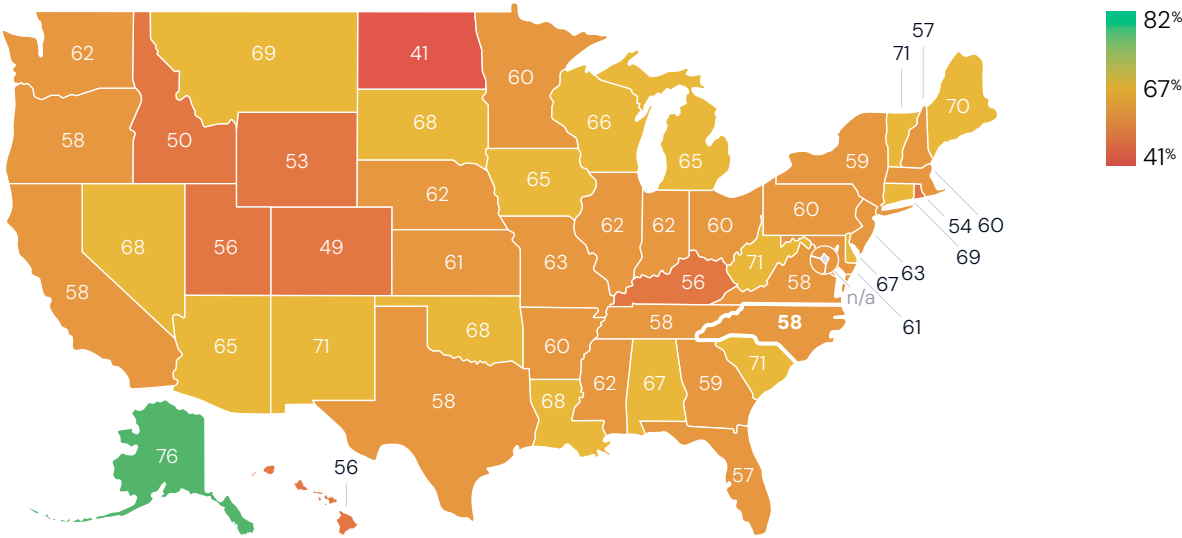
The positive ROI value for each state represents the estimated percentage of public college graduates whose earnings premium over high school graduates is enough to repay their total cost of a degree within 10 years.

	North Carolina	U.S.
Overall	69%	70%
Bachelor's	73%	73%
Associate	58%	60%

Percentage of graduates with positive 10-year ROI by state – bachelor's degrees



Percentage of graduates with positive 10-year ROI by state – associate degrees





Everyone should have access to accurate information on employment outcomes that can help them make informed decisions about education after high school. The Clear Outcomes measure is based on 10 critical elements that contribute to the capacity of state education-to-employment data systems to strengthen the connection between education and opportunity.

COLLECT

State data system elements	State description	Rating
1 Includes learner-level and program characteristic data for nondegree and noncredit postsecondary education and training programs	North Carolina has extensive collection of enrollment and credential outcomes data from nondegree and noncredit postsecondary education and training programs. The state's nondegree and noncredit postsecondary education and training collections include: (i) college-issued, for-credit nondegree credentials; (ii) college-issued, noncredit nondegree credentials; (iii) WIOA-eligible training providers; and (iv) other third-party credentials, namely apprenticeships. The state links college-issued, for-credit nondegree to employment outcomes through NC TOWER and college-issued, noncredit nondegree credentials to employment outcomes in a biennial report to the legislature. North Carolina is piloting data collection of occupational licensure.	LEADING
2 Examines earnings by occupation, pay rate, and work location	North Carolina collects occupation (SOC code) and pay rate (hours worked) on a voluntary basis but does not collect work location.	LEADING

INTEGRATE

State data system elements	State description	Rating
3 Integrates and delivers information on learner's earnings and employment after postsecondary education and training completion, and over time	North Carolina has integrated and published some key types of postsecondary education and employment data, namely: (i) public four-year institutions to employment, and (ii) community colleges to employment. Employment outcomes for public four-year institutions and community colleges, including college-issued, for-credit nondegree credentials, are available as open data files and a public interactive reporting tool through NC TOWER . Employment outcomes are disaggregated by race/ethnicity and gender. The state is in the process of integrating private four-year institutions-to-employment data through the North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities and the North Carolina Longitudinal Data Service.	ADVANCED
4 Integrates and delivers information on learner's earnings and employment after high school completion and over time	Through NC TOWER , the state links high school-to-employment outcomes with disaggregation by race/ethnicity and gender.	LEADING
5 Partners with national and multi-state initiatives to assess education-to-opportunity outcomes for graduates and non-graduates of postsecondary education and training programs who relocate or work outside the state	North Carolina partners with PSEO (data pending) and State Wage Interchange System.	ADVANCED

CATEGORY KEY

Extent to which elements are present in state data infrastructure.

● **Leading**
Fully present

● **Advanced**
Partially present

● **Developing**
In development

● **Foundational**
Not in development



PROVIDE

State data system elements	State description	Rating
6 Provides comprehensive and timely open data files containing anonymized education-to-opportunity statistics that anyone can access, download, and otherwise use	North Carolina has a customizable report builder for education-to-employment outcomes for (i) public four-year institutions; (ii) community colleges; (iii) nondegree credentials; and (iv) high schools with disaggregation by race/ethnicity and gender.	LEADING
7 Publishes robust, timely, and easily understandable interactive resources informing education-to-opportunity decision-making by learners, families, and institutions	North Carolina has a public interactive reporting tool through NC TOWER containing various education-to-opportunity statistics such as completion, employment rate, and earnings for (i) public four-year institutions; (ii) community colleges; (iii) nondegree credentials; and (iv) high schools with disaggregation by race/ethnicity and gender. Additionally, the North Carolina Community College System has produced an interactive resource featuring employment outcomes for community college career and technical education students.	LEADING
8 Gives researchers access to individual-level matched education-to-opportunity datasets	In 2025, the North Carolina Longitudinal Data Service will provide a data request form so that researchers can request individual-level matched education-to-opportunity datasets. North Carolina has published research and policy learning goals .	DEVELOPING

(...) IMPACT

State data system elements	State description	Rating
9 Enables learners and earners to access and utilize their own verified data, unlocking opportunities for college and career advancement	In 2022, North Carolina directed myFutureNC, Inc., in consultation with the State Education Assistance Authority, the Department of Public Instruction, the Community College System Office, and the University of North Carolina System Office, "to create an interconnected and interoperable realtime data system to facilitate communication, collection, and transition of student data between public school units, community colleges, and universities and to provide students access to their own data, including after the student leaves the institution." The state contracted with the College Foundation, Inc., to create this common digital transcript, and according to the latest report , the state hopes to launch the first version of the tool in July 2025. Future versions will address learner ownership.	DEVELOPING
10 Designates a unit with responsibility and dedicated, full-time capacity for generating education-to-employment insights to inform state policymaking and resource allocation decision-making	The North Carolina Longitudinal Data Service maintains access to integrated education-to-employment data and is developing publicly available resources and other tools for E2E stakeholders. There is clear evidence of sustainable funding, governance, and staffing as well as partnerships with higher education, workforce development, and economic development agencies. Additionally, the North Carolina Common Follow-up System provides information on the educational and employment outcomes of publicly supported educational, employment, and training programs essential for program planning, evaluation, and resource management.	ADVANCED

CATEGORY KEY

Extent to which elements are present in state data infrastructure.



Leading
Fully present



Advanced
Partially present



Developing
In development



Foundational
Not in development



FOUR-YEAR

DEVELOPING

TWO-YEAR

ADVANCED

Everyone should have access to coaching that helps them reflect on their talents and interests, choose a career goal, chart a path, and navigate challenges. Graduates who receive such guidance are more likely to land a job that requires a degree and feel satisfied with their career trajectory. The Quality Coaching measure is based on the percentage of two-year students and four-year senior students who reported receiving personalized guidance, timely labor market information, and support to create a plan and overcome barriers.

Personalized guidance		Four-year	Two-year
Percentage of students at public institutions who report receiving personalized coaching or guidance to help select the education that will help prepare them for a successful career.		36% DEVELOPING	50% DEV./ADV.
Timely labor market information		Four-year	Two-year
The average share of students at public institutions who receive timely labor market information, across the various types below, before enrolling or during their first year.		21% FOUNDATIONAL	39% DEVELOPING
Education-to-career paths that might be a good fit for student's strengths and interests		24%	45%
Job opportunities that a particular education program could lead to		26%	44%
Potential earnings in different careers related to student's education program		17%	35%
Career outcomes of students from their own institution		16%	31%
Support		Four-year	Two-year
The average share of students at public institutions who receive at least some support in setting goals and in overcoming obstacles.		75% ADV./LEAD.	74% ADV./LEAD.
Setting education and career goals and developing a plan to achieve these goals		74%	75%
Identifying and overcoming barriers		77%	74%
CATEGORY KEY			
When the margin of error crosses a category threshold, states are given a combined category.			
Leading ≥75%		Advanced 50% to <75%	Developing 25% to <50%
			Foundational <25%
National results		Four-year	Two-year
Personalized guidance		34%	45%
Timely labor market information		21%	33%
Support		71%	74%



Affordability

North Carolina

FOUR-YEAR

DEVELOPING

TWO-YEAR

LEADING

Quality post-high school programs should be within everyone's financial reach, allowing for equitable opportunities for success. The Affordability measure is based on how many hours a week the average student would need to work to cover the in-state net price (total cost of attendance minus any grants and scholarships), how many hours a student from a low-income family would need to work to cover their typical in-state net price, and the percentage of students that complete their degree on time – a critical factor in the cost of a degree.

Student hours of work needed	Four-year	Two-year		
Average student hours of work needed	FOUNDATIONAL 33 hours per week Average annual net price, four-year institutions: \$13,996	LEADING 6 hours per week Average annual net price, two-year institutions: \$5,897		
Low-income student hours of work needed	ADVANCED 15 hours per week Average annual net price for low-income students, four-year institutions: \$8,473	LEADING 3 hours per week Average annual net price for low-income students, two-year institutions: \$4,992		
CATEGORY KEY	Leading <10 hrs	Advanced 10 to <20 hrs	Developing 20 to <30 hrs	Foundational ≥30 hrs

On-time completion rate		Four-year		
On-time completion rate	ADVANCED			
	52%			
CATEGORY KEY	Leading ≥65%	Advanced 50% to <65%	Developing 35% to <50%	Foundational <35%



Work-Based Learning

North Carolina

FOUR-YEAR

DEVELOPING

TWO-YEAR

FOUNDATIONAL

All students should have access to quality work-based learning experiences, such as paid internships and apprenticeships, that are linked to higher earnings, greater job satisfaction, and lower underemployment. The Work-Based Learning measure is based on the percentage of two-year students and four-year senior students who reported participating in at least one of the following types of paid experiences: paid internship, paid apprenticeship, paid co-op, paid practicum, or paid undergraduate research experience.

Quality Work-Based Learning	Four-year	Two-year
Percentage of students at public institutions who participated in at least one of five types of quality paid work-based learning experiences	36% DEVELOPING Paid internship participation: 31% Percentage of students who participated in at least one of the five types of experiences (paid or unpaid): 65%	14% FOUNDATIONAL Paid internship participation: 10% Percentage of students who participated in at least one of the five types of experiences (paid or unpaid): 27%

CATEGORY KEY

When the margin of error crosses a category threshold, states are given a combined category.

● **Leading**
≥75%

● **Advanced**
50% to <75%

● **Developing**
25% to <50%

● **Foundational**
<25%

National results	Four-year	Two-year
Any quality paid work-based learning experience	43%	17%
Paid internship	37%	14%
Any work-based learning experience (paid or unpaid)	72%	33%



In addition to student self-reporting of apprenticeship participation, states have other sources of information on participation in registered apprenticeships via the U.S. Department of Labor. In North Carolina, **0.23 percent** of the state labor force is made up of active apprentices, for a total of **12,058 apprentices**. Across the country, this number ranges from 0.9 percent (Hawaii) to 0.12 percent (Oklahoma). In countries with leading apprenticeship systems, such as Germany, Switzerland, Australia, Canada, and England, apprentices constitute about 2.5–3.0 percent of the labor force, so all states in the U.S. have substantial room for improvement.



Employer Alignment

DEVELOPING

North Carolina

Students should have access to programs that lead to quality jobs and mobility, and employers should assess and advance individuals based on skills and experiences, not just degrees. The Employer Alignment measure is based on the percentage of terminal bachelor's degree holders aged 25–34 employed in a college-level job as well as the supply/demand ratio for a variety of high-demand, high-wage jobs in each state.

College-level employment

The percentage of bachelor's degree graduates who are employed in college-level positions

DEVELOPING

Supply/demand ratio

The overall ratio: the average of the entry-level supply/demand ratios for these nine opportunity occupational groups

FOUNDATIONAL

Information technology and business

Data analytics

LEADING

Finance and accounting professionals

FOUNDATIONAL

Finance and accounting support

FOUNDATIONAL

Information and cybersecurity

ADVANCED

Software development and engineering

LEADING

Health care

Health care technicians and technologists

FOUNDATIONAL

Nursing

FOUNDATIONAL

Manufacturing and engineering

Engineering

ADVANCED

Manufacturing/Trades technicians and technologists

FOUNDATIONAL

CATEGORY KEY

● **Leading**
≥75%

● **Advanced**
60% to <75%

● **Developing**
50% to <60%

● **Foundational**
<50%