State Opportunity Index



North Dakota

State Summary 2026

North Dakota at a glance

THE STATE OPPORTUNITY INDEX is a framework for measuring and improving education-to-career outcomes. For each state, the Index reports the percentage of graduates 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).

North Dakota is among 22 states Advanced in Clear Outcomes (17 states are Leading). Quality Coaching for associate students is Advanced (no states are Leading). Affordability at associate degree institutions improved from Developing to Advanced, placing the state among 13 in this category (35 states and jurisdictions are Leading). To learn more about progress in other states, visit strada.org/state-opportunity-index.

Clear Outcomes		ADVANCED
Quality Coaching	BACHELOR'S	DEVELOPING
	ASSOCIATE	ADVANCED
Affordability	BACHELOR'S	FOUNDATIONAL
	ASSOCIATE	ADVANCED
Work-Based Learning	BACHELOR'S	DEV./ADV.
Employer Alignment		DEVELOPING

State Opportunity Index

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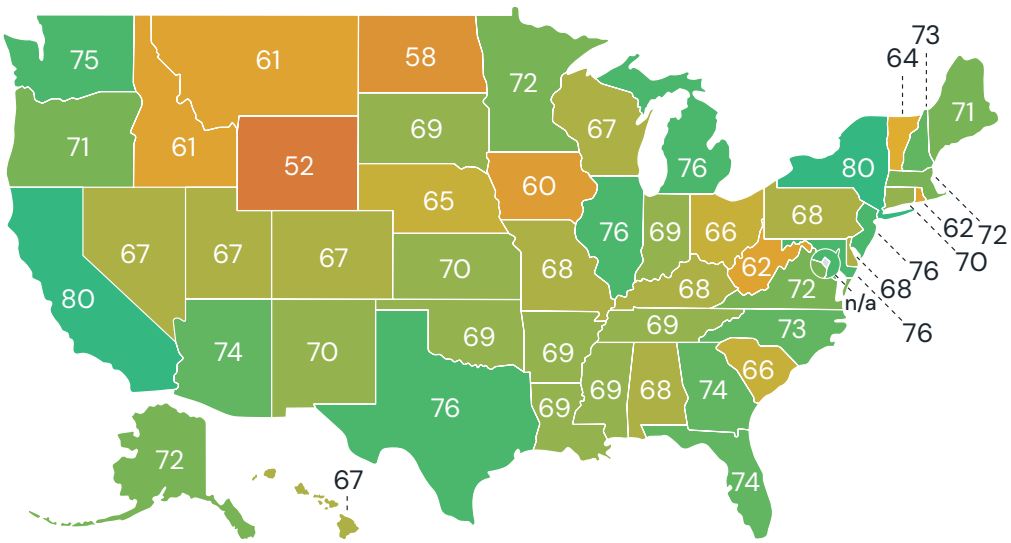
In cases in which the margin of error crosses a category threshold, states are given a combined category.
References for "unavailable" refer to states in which there was insufficient data to assign a rating at this time.

Positive ROI

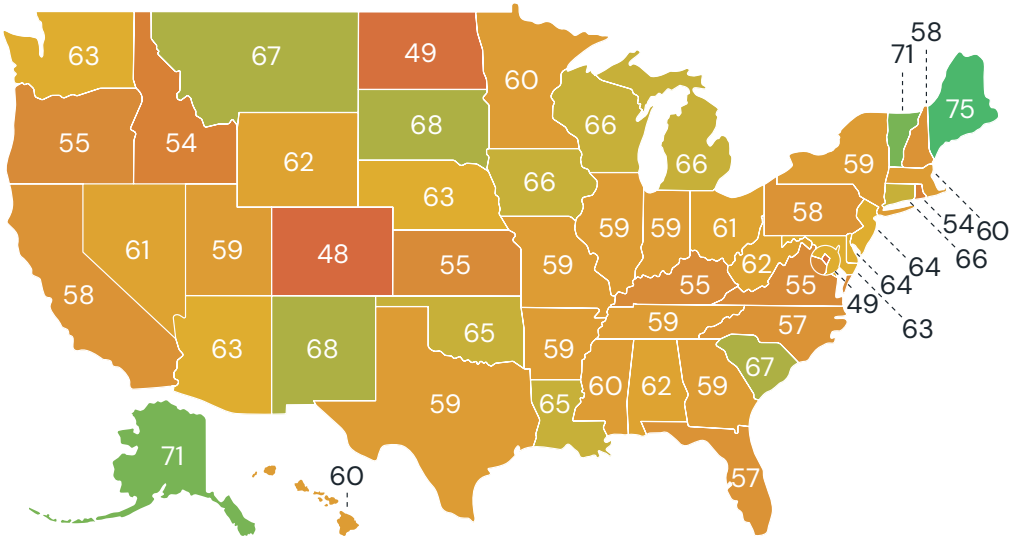
	North Dakota	National
Overall	55%	70%
Bachelor's	58%	73%
Associate	49%	60%

All students who invest their time and money in earning a degree should be financially better off because of it. 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.

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



Clear Outcomes

ADVANCED

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 clarify education pathway outcomes in order to inform personal, public, and private sector investments.

North Dakota improved from Foundational to Developing in integrating high school completion and employment data (element 4), and from Advanced to Leading in partnerships for outcomes data outside the state (element 5) and interactive resources (element 7). North Dakota also is one of 11 states that are Leading in verified data for learning mobility (element 9).

COLLECT

State data system elements	State description	Category
1. Includes learner-level and program characteristic data for nondegree and noncredit postsecondary education and training programs	North Dakota collects enrollment and credential outcome data for: (i) WIOA-eligible training providers and (ii) third-party credentials, namely apprenticeship and industry certification. The state integrates administrative data on employment and earnings with WIOA-eligible training providers.	DEVELOPING
2. Examines earnings by occupation, pay rate, and work location	North Dakota does not collect any of the three enhanced elements, and Strada's research did not demonstrate an emerging collection policy.	FOUNDATIONAL

INTEGRATE

State data system elements	State description	Category
3. Integrates and delivers information on learners' earnings and employment after postsecondary education and training completion, and over time	North Dakota integrates administrative employment and earnings data with its (i) public four-year institutions and (ii) community colleges. The state publishes these employment outcomes as open data files and a public interactive reporting tool through Insights of North Dakota. These postsecondary education-to-employment data are disaggregated by gender. North Dakota does not integrate and publish data on private four-year institutions to employment.	ADVANCED
4. Integrates and delivers information on learners' earnings and employment after high school completion and over time	North Dakota is in the process of integrating administrative records on employment and earnings with high school completion records.	DEVELOPING
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 Dakota partners with PSEO (data pending), the Multi-State Data Collaborative, and the State Wage Interchange System.	LEADING

Category Key

Extent to which elements are present in state data infrastructure

- **Foundational** — Not in development
- **Developing** — In development
- **Advanced** — Partially present
- **Leading** — Fully present

Clear Outcomes

ADVANCED

North Dakota 2026

PROVIDE

State data system elements	State description	Category
6. Provides comprehensive and timely open data files containing anonymized education-to-opportunity statistics that anyone can access, download, and otherwise use	North Dakota publishes open datasets containing enrollment and completion outcomes for public four-year institutions and community colleges, but does not publish open datasets containing employment outcomes.	DEVELOPING
7. Publishes robust, timely, and easily understandable interactive resources informing education-to-opportunity decision-making by learners, families, and institutions	North Dakota publishes an interactive resource containing employment outcomes for public four-year institutions and community colleges. The state publishes a separate interactive resource containing employment outcomes for WIOA-eligible training providers.	LEADING
8. Gives researchers access to individual-level matched education-to-opportunity datasets	North Dakota's SLDS provides authorized external researchers individual-level matched education-to-opportunity datasets upon request. The state clearly documents the request and review process and publishes its research priorities as well as reports from completed projects.	LEADING

IMPACT

State data system elements	State description	Category
9. Enables learners and earners to access and utilize their own verified data, unlocking opportunities for college and career advancement	North Dakota continues to enhance its digital credential infrastructure. The state published an Awarding Service available to all public educational institutions. It also maintains a Digital Credential Publishing Application for all high school students as an LER, using verified credentials. The Digital Credential "wallet" supports learners and earners to store and publish their transcripts, degrees, and industry-recognized credentials for educational institutions or employers. The wallet is accessible through the PowerSchool login, connected to the North Dakota Education portal. It leverages open-source, interoperable data standards including Open Badges 3.0 and Comprehensive Learner Records 2.0.	LEADING
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	North Dakota's SLDS is a collaborative effort involving the Department of Career and Technical Education, Department of Commerce, Department of Public Instruction, Job Service North Dakota, Workforce Development Council, North Dakota University System, and other stakeholders. The Department of Information Technology operates the SLDS, and a cross-agency committee governs the system. The SLDS maintains ready access to integrated E2E data for analysis and publishes resources for E2E stakeholders on insights.nd.gov.	ADVANCED

Category Key

Extent to which elements are present in state data infrastructure

- **Foundational** — Not in development
- **Developing** — In development
- **Advanced** — Partially present
- **Leading** — Fully present

Quality Coaching

North Dakota 2026

BACHELOR'S **DEVELOPING** ASSOCIATE **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. The Quality Coaching measure is based on the percentage of associate students and bachelor's senior students who reported receiving personalized guidance, timely labor market information, and support to create a plan and overcome barriers.

This is the first report with available Quality Coaching data for **North Dakota's** bachelor's and associate degree institutions. Bachelor's degree institutions are rated Developing overall and associate degree institutions are rated Advanced, with rates of students receiving labor market information by the end of their first year outpacing national rates at both levels.

	Bachelor's		Associate	
	State	National	State	National
PERSONALIZED GUIDANCE				
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	DEVELOPING **36%**	**35%**	DEVELOPING **37%**	**45%**
TIMELY LABOR MARKET INFORMATION				
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	DEVELOPING **40%**	**26%**	DEV./ADV. **46%**	**35%**
Education-to-career paths that might be a good fit for students' strengths and interests	47%	34%	51%	45%
Job opportunities that a particular education program could lead to	38%	21%	37%	31%
Potential earnings in different careers related to students' education program	44%	30%	57%	40%
Career outcomes of students from their own institution	30%	17%	39%	23%
SUPPORT				
The average share of students at public institutions who receive at least some support in setting goals and in overcoming obstacles	ADV./LEAD. **70%**	**72%**	ADV./LEAD. **76%**	**73%**
Setting education and career goals, and developing a plan to achieve these goals	71%	71%	72%	73%
Identifying and overcoming barriers	69%	73%	80%	73%

Category Key

- **Foundational** <25%
- **Developing** 25% to <50%
- **Advanced** 50% to <75%
- **Leading** ≥75%

Affordability

North Dakota 2026

BACHELOR'S **FOUNDATIONAL** ASSOCIATE **ADVANCED**

A quality postsecondary education should be within everyone's reach, with clear, predictable, and manageable costs. 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.

Affordability at **North Dakota's** bachelor's degree institutions remains categorized as Foundational overall. At the associate degree level, North Dakota improved from Developing to Advanced overall, largely due to declining net prices.

	Bachelor's		Associate	
	State	National	State	National
STUDENT HOURS OF WORK NEEDED				
Average student hours of work needed	FOUNDATIONAL **38 hours per week** Average annual net price: $15,755	**26 hours per week** Average annual net price: $15,270	DEVELOPING **20 hours per week** Average annual net price: $10,300	**8 hours per week** Average annual net price: $8,089
Low-income student hours of work needed	DEVELOPING **20 hours per week** Average annual net price for low-income students: $10,290	**12 hours per week** Average annual net price for low-income students: $9,813	LEADING **9 hours per week** Average annual net price for low-income students: $6,785	**4 hours per week** Average annual net price for low-income students: $6,678

Category Key

- **Foundational** ≥30 hrs
- **Developing** 20 to <30 hrs
- **Advanced** 10 to <20 hrs
- **Leading** <10 hrs

Bachelor's	
State	National
ON-TIME COMPLETION RATE	
DEVELOPING **41%**	**47%**

Category Key

- **Foundational** <35%
- **Developing** 35% to <50%
- **Advanced** 50% to <65%
- **Leading** ≥65%

Work-Based Learning

BACHELOR'S DEV./ADV.

All students should have access to paid, immersive work-based learning experiences that connect education to career. The Work-Based Learning measure is based on the percentage of bachelor's 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. For students at associate degree institutions, participation is reported when data are available, but states are not categorized.

This is the first report with available work-based learning data for students at **North Dakota's** bachelor's and associate degree institutions. Participation in paid work-based learning for students at bachelor's degree institutions is on par with national averages.

	Bachelor's		Associate	
	State	National	State	National
QUALITY WORK-BASED LEARNING				
Percentage of students at public institutions who participated in at least one of the five types of quality paid work-based learning experiences	DEV./ADV. **43%**	**43%**	**28%**	**14%**
Paid internship participation	33%	35%	25%	10%
Percentage of students who participated in at least one of the five types of experiences (paid or unpaid)	71%	71%	45%	30%

Category Key

- **Foundational** <25%
- **Developing** 25% to <50%
- **Advanced** 50% to <75%
- **Leading** ≥75%

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

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 Dakota, 0.49 percent of the state labor force is made up of active apprentices, for a total of 2,109 apprentices. Across the country, this number ranges from 0.86 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

Students should have access to programs that lead to quality jobs and employers should be able to find the talent they need to fill high-wage roles. 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 set of high-demand, high-wage jobs in each state.

College-level employment in **North Dakota** is 54 percent, compared to 60 percent nationally. North Dakota improved from Foundational to Advanced in its overall supply/demand ratio, making it one of nine states categorized as Leading or Advanced in this element. The state also improved from Foundational to Advanced in its ratio for nursing, and from Foundational to Leading in its ratio for manufacturing/trades technicians and technologists.

COLLEGE-LEVEL EMPLOYMENT			
The percentage of bachelor's degree graduates who are employed in college-level jobs		54%	DEVELOPING
SUPPLY/DEMAND RATIO			
The overall ratio: the average of the entry-level supply/demand ratios for these nine opportunity occupational groups			ADVANCED
Information technology and business	Data analytics		LEADING
	Finance and accounting professionals		ADVANCED
	Finance and accounting support		FOUNDATIONAL
	Information and cybersecurity		LEADING
	Software development and engineering		LEADING
Healthcare	Healthcare technicians and technologists		FOUNDATIONAL
	Nursing		ADVANCED
Manufacturing and engineering	Engineering		LEADING
	Manufacturing/Trades technicians and technologists		LEADING

Category Key

- **Foundational** <50%
- **Developing** 50% to <60%
- **Advanced** 60% to <75%
- **Leading** ≥75%

State Opportunity Index

North Dakota 2026

Appendix

Student Survey Responses

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Appendix // **Survey Data Tables**

The following tables provide student responses for questions included in the 2026 State Opportunity Index survey.

	Bachelor's		Associate	
	State	National	State	National
SAMPLE SIZE				
Respondents, 2026	195	36,564	14	17,000
Respondents, 2025–26 combined	266	77,803	96	32,005
VALUE				
To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement, "My education will be worth the cost"?				
Strongly disagree	3%	4%	–	7%
Somewhat disagree	10%	9%	–	6%
Neither agree nor disagree	5%	9%	–	8%
Somewhat agree	44%	38%	–	28%
Strongly agree	39%	40%	–	52%
Thinking about how your education supports your career goals, how satisfied are you with how well your institution prepared you for the workforce? *(1: Not at all satisfied ... 10: Extremely satisfied)*				
Average (1-10)	7.5	7.2	–	7.8
QUALITY COACHING				
Before choosing your major or program of study, how did you receive information on careers, salaries, job opportunities, etc.? *(Select all that apply)*				
One-on-one meeting with faculty or advisor	20%	22%	–	22%
Career fair, group workshop, orientation session, or in a class	32%	30%	–	23%
National job boards *(LinkedIn, GlassDoor, Indeed, Idealist)*	23%	28%	–	25%
College career portal *(Handshake, Symplicity)*	16%	20%	–	12%
Career assessment tools *(MyMajors, Career Coach)*	17%	14%	–	14%
Labor market tools *(Lightcast, O*NET, state workforce websites)*	6%	6%	–	7%
AI-based tools *(ChatGPT, Perplexity, CareerVillage, Roadtrip Nation)*	7%	13%	–	13%
Conversations with friends and family members	57%	52%	–	47%
Conversations with alumni, mentoring services, scholarship groups, etc.	22%	18%	–	13%
Email or newsletter	11%	16%	–	14%
Other	9%	5%	–	9%
None of these	8%	9%	–	12%
I have not yet chosen a program of study.	0%	1%	–	1%

	Bachelor's		Associate	
	State	National	State	National
WORK-BASED LEARNING				
During your time in college, have you participated in any of the following? *(Select all that apply)*				
Micro-Internship: short-term work experience, typically lasting four weeks or less, on a specific, employer-defined project	18%	23%	–	7%
Project-Based Learning Activity: real-world, employer-designed projects built as assignments within academic courses	30%	30%	–	12%
Service Learning: courses that combine academic instruction with community service, addressing a real-world need	21%	24%	–	12%
Externship: a short-term experience where a student shadows a professional to observe day-to-day duties to learn about a specific career field	23%	21%	–	10%
During your time in college, have you participated in any of the following? *(Select all that apply) [Paid or unpaid]*				
Internship: fixed-term position lasting longer than four weeks performing entry-level tasks for an employer	39%	47%	–	11%
Apprenticeship: paid job combining on-the-job training under an experienced mentor with classroom learning	5%	5%	–	4%
Co-op program: degree program that alternates periods of academic courses with paid work experiences	11%	4%	–	2%
Student teaching, practicum, clinical hours: closely supervised performance of professional responsibilities in a workplace setting	20%	20%	–	14%
Undergraduate research: experience outside of a course, typically working directly with a faculty member in a lab, on a project, or on a research team	23%	25%	–	6%
In-state participation: Student participation in at least one of the five paid experiences in the same state as their institution (paid internship, paid apprenticeship, paid co-op program, paid student teaching, practicum, clinical hours, paid undergraduate research)	36%	32%	–	10%
Did you get credit or a record on your transcript for any of your experiences? *(Select all that apply) [Shown to those who reported the work-based learning experience in question]*				
Internship: fixed-term position lasting longer than four weeks performing entry-level tasks for an employer	60%	52%	–	52%
Apprenticeship: paid job combining on-the-job training under an experienced mentor with classroom learning	47%	33%	–	41%
Co-op program: degree program that alternates periods of academic courses with paid work experiences	66%	47%	–	47%
Student teaching, practicum, clinical hours: closely supervised performance of professional responsibilities in a workplace setting	64%	62%	–	65%
Undergraduate research: experience outside of a course, typically working directly with a faculty member in a lab, on a project, or on a research team	49%	56%	–	38%

	Bachelor's		Associate	
	State	National	State	National
STUDENT WORK				
During the school year, how many hours do you spend in a typical seven-day week working for pay?				
Less than 10 hours per week	14%	16%	–	7%
10 to 19 hours per week	44%	30%	–	16%
20 to 29 hours per week	23%	18%	–	18%
30 hours or more per week	10%	14%	–	34%
Does not typically work while taking classes	9%	22%	–	24%
Do you consider yourself a student who works or a worker that goes to school?				
A student who works	80%	65%	–	44%
A worker who goes to school	12%	13%	–	32%
Does not work	9%	22%	–	24%
Did you have an on-campus job at any point during the time you were enrolled in your current program? If so, what type of job(s) have you had? *(Select all that apply)*				
Academic and Research: Research assistant, lab assistant, or teaching assistant (TA) for a professor	14%	13%	–	3%
Specialized Campus Services: Library assistant, IT help desk technician, or fitness center attendant	8%	9%	–	3%
Peer-Based Roles: Tutor, Resident Assistant (RA), student government or student club role, peer advisor, or orientation leader	10%	12%	–	4%
Retail and Customer Service: Bookstore associate, convenience store clerk, or campus apparel shop worker	6%	5%	–	2%
Food Service and Hospitality: Dining hall staff, campus cafe barista, or catering assistant for university events	14%	7%	–	2%
Administrative and Office Support: Departmental office assistant, front desk receptionist for an academic building, or admissions office worker	8%	10%	–	4%
Other	10%	5%	–	2%
I never had an on-campus job.	46%	57%	–	86%
Did you have an off-campus job at any point during your time you were enrolled in your current program? If so, what type of job(s) have you had? *(Select all that apply)*				
Administrative and Professional Support: Office assistant at a local business, medical receptionist, or clerical worker	4%	8%	–	8%
Community and Public Service: Public schools, libraries, government agencies, community-based organizations	14%	11%	–	8%
Freelance and Gig Economy: Freelance writer, graphic designer, social media manager, rideshare driver	4%	8%	–	6%
Food Service and Hospitality: Waiter/waitress, bartender, cook, barista, food delivery driver	24%	24%	–	20%
Healthcare and Social Services: Caregiver for the elderly, home health aide, non-certified medical assistant	13%	10%	–	15%

	Bachelor's		Associate	
	State	National	State	National
Did you have an off-campus job at any point during your time you were enrolled in your current program? If so, what type of job(s) have you had? *(continued)*				
Personal and Household Services: Babysitter/nanny, pet sitter, dog walker, house cleaner	6%	8%	–	6%
Retail and Customer Service: Retail sales associate, cashier at a grocery store, customer service representative at a business	20%	21%	–	21%
Professional Services: Bank teller, clerical assistant at a law firm, office receptionist, administrative assistant	3%	5%	–	5%
Seasonal or Recreational: Summer camp counselor, ski resort employee, lifeguard at a public pool, tour guide at a local attraction	7%	9%	–	4%
Skilled Labor and Trades: Warehouse worker, mover, construction laborer, auto detailer, landscaping worker	12%	6%	–	11%
Other	5%	7%	–	11%
I never had an off-campus job.	27%	27%	–	25%
AFFORDABILITY				
Were you granted college credit for courses or work experience before enrolling at your institution? *(Select all that apply)*				
College courses taken while in high school *(Dual Enrollment, Concurrent Enrollment, Dual Credit, Early College Credit)*	58%	36%	–	19%
Advanced Placement classes or International Baccalaureate program in high school	29%	29%	–	8%
I transferred from an academic program at a two-year college, and I received transfer credit.	8%	17%	–	8%
I transferred from an academic program at a four-year college, and I received transfer credit.	8%	10%	–	12%
I took classes at another college but was not enrolled in a degree or credential program *(continuing education, summer classes, or extramural coursework)*, and I received credit.	8%	9%	–	7%
College credit for prior work or military experience *(Credit for Prior Learning, Prior Learning Assessment)*	1%	3%	–	3%
I did not bring any credits into my institution.	15%	21%	–	50%
POST-GRADUATION PLANS				
Which of the following best represents your plans within six months after graduation?				
I plan to work full time, but have not yet secured a position.	54%	46%	n/a	n/a
I plan to work full time at the job I had while I was enrolled.	7%	8%	n/a	n/a
I have accepted a new full-time job.	18%	11%	n/a	n/a
I plan to work part time.	0%	3%	n/a	n/a
I plan to pursue additional education, but have not yet been admitted.	6%	14%	n/a	n/a
I have been admitted to a program for additional education.	4%	10%	n/a	n/a
I have other plans.	3%	3%	n/a	n/a
I don't know what I plan to do after graduating.	7%	5%	n/a	n/a

	Bachelor's		Associate	
	State	National	State	National
How likely are you to remain in your institution's state after graduation?				
Very unlikely	25%	12%	n/a	n/a
Unlikely	25%	19%	n/a	n/a
Likely	30%	35%	n/a	n/a
Very likely	19%	34%	n/a	n/a
Which of the following best represents your career plans after you complete your current program?				
I plan to continue working for the same employer I have now.	n/a	n/a	–	21%
I plan to look for work with a new employer but in the same career.	n/a	n/a	–	23%
I plan to look for work in a new career.	n/a	n/a	–	56%
NONDEGREE CREDENTIALS				
Have you ever earned, or are you currently earning one of the following credentials relating to career-focused skills? *(Select all that apply)*				
Occupational license issued by a government agency *(teaching license, nursing license, cosmetology license)*	11%	7%	–	11%
Certificate or badge *(from a postsecondary program)*	16%	13%	–	17%
Industry-recognized credential *(Healthcare, IT, Skilled Trades and Manufacturing, Business and Professional Services, Hospitality and Culinary, Public Safety and Legal, Creative and Communications)*	7%	8%	–	13%
Some other type of career-focused credential	6%	3%	–	4%
I don't know.	17%	18%	–	18%
None of the above	48%	56%	–	46%

	State	National
EXTERNAL AFFORDABILITY METRICS		
State appropriations per student FTE, public four-year institutions, FY2025 *(Source: SHEEO SHEF Annual Report)*	$7,928	$11,166
State appropriations per student FTE, public two-year institutions, FY2025 *(Source: SHEEO SHEF Annual Report)*	$8,111	$11,096
FAFSA completion rate, high school class of 2026 (through July 1, 2026) *(Source: NCAN)*	52%	59%
150% completion rate, first-time full-time students, bachelor's degree institutions, 2023-24 *(Source: College Scorecard)*	60%	64%
150% completion rate, first-time full-time Pell recipients, bachelor's degree institutions, 2023-24 *(Source: College Scorecard)*	51%	53%

If we get this right, here's what the future could look like: A young person or adult explores options with a career coach. They have data on jobs and earnings by program. They know costs up front, and public options are affordable and accessible. They engage in paid work-based learning, building skills and clarifying goals. By completion, they don't just hold a credential (or a few).
They have a good job, experience, and momentum toward a better future.

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