

## Policy Brief

# The Certificate – Florida’s Postsecondary Workhorse

## FLORIDA

Organizations and institutions across the country have responded to President Barack Obama’s call to increase America’s level of educational attainment. Since 2009, at least ten college completion initiatives have been launched to support the national effort to regain America’s prominence in the world in this measure and boost our economic competitiveness. In a joint session of Congress, President Obama asked every American to commit to “at least one year or more of higher education or career training” to help meet his goal of once again having the highest proportion of college graduates in the world. The President’s call for more college graduates coupled with national philanthropic efforts led by the Lumina, Gates, Ford, Kellogg, and Kresge foundations has put higher education and educational attainment on the national stage while sparking debates in state legislatures and metro areas across the country on how best to improve postsecondary success.

Increasing educational attainment levels is not only about global competitiveness. It has been widely acknowledged that our nation is not keeping up with the demand for skills and training our future economy will require. Further contributing to this “skills gap” is the substantial number of jobs permanently lost as a consequence of changes brought forth by the recent recession. This accumulating need for a better equipped workforce has invigorated discussions around solutions that will provide students with clear pathways to acquiring the knowledge and skills needed for future employment and job creation.

The ongoing discussion around increasing the number of Americans with a postsecondary education tends to be narrowly defined to college *degrees* – not *certificates*. Florida awards a high number of postsecondary certificates relative to its population compared to other states, ranking fifth in the nation. This credential has been shown to provide an affordable alternative to a college degree for those looking for an advantage in the labor market. In our evolving economy, which places a premium on knowledge and technological skills, certificates represent an important part of Florida’s on-going effort to significantly increase the rate of its college educated workforce.

In this policy brief, we discuss the importance of the postsecondary certificate in Florida and why we believe the conversation around increasing degree attainment should be broadened to include it. In many cases, certificates have the potential to provide those who earn them a high-skill, high-paying occupation and the opportunity to pursue higher levels of education. More certificates are awarded today in Florida than any other postsecondary credential. Therefore, awareness of certificates and their potential benefits should be heightened among policymakers, parents, and those assisting with or making college-going decisions.

Florida College Access Network’s mission is to create and strengthen a statewide network that catalyzes and supports communities to improve college & career preparation, access, and completion for all students.



## What is a certificate?

A postsecondary certificate is most commonly associated with the completion of vocational (also referred to as career or technical) programs that include training for a particular occupation or skill set. According to the Florida Department of Education, a vocational certificate is an award earned for satisfactory completion of a job preparatory program of noncollege-level courses. The term “certificate,” however, is used in other contexts throughout the education field. For example, an industry-based certificate or certification is a credential typically earned by passing an exam or displaying competence in a defined program by a vendor or third-party.<sup>1</sup> There are also occupations, such as medicine, nursing, teaching, mental health counseling, accounting and others, which require the completion of a certificate or license to ensure standards and regulations are met, particularly when the best interests or safety of the public is of concern. There are also institutions that offer post-graduate certificates to students who have already earned a baccalaureate degree. This certificate type is generally presented as an option for graduates to complete additional non-credit programs for further training in a specific area. Higher education institutions offering massive open online courses (MOOC’s) have also begun awarding certificates to signify the successful completion of their courses. Postsecondary certificate programs are typically accessible to any student who has completed a high school diploma or equivalent.

The certificates that are the primary focus of this policy brief are the postsecondary credentials that are non-credit programs offered at the sub-baccalaureate level. Nationally, these certificates represent about 95-percent of all postsecondary certificates awarded by mostly two-year public higher education institutions or private, for-profit, non-degree granting business, vocational, technical and trade schools.<sup>2</sup> These certificates are typically designated by the length of time they take to complete by students enrolled in courses full-time. Certificates that take less than a year to complete are considered short-term, those that take between a year and two years are medium-term and those that take between two and four years are long-term.<sup>3</sup> In some cases, other types of credentials are mentioned or included as part of the certificate family because of the challenges associated with separating types of undergraduate certificates from the databases they are tracked in. Unlike other postsecondary degrees, there is no universally accepted definition for certificates used for measurement and classification purposes.

Certificates, like community colleges, are a distinct American invention. The first community colleges established in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century featured only traditional, lower-level liberal arts and general education courses; It wasn’t until their missions were expanded to include job training did community colleges see their popularity increase dramatically. The vocationalization of community colleges, as well as their low-cost, open access policies and close proximity within communities, has made two-year institutions especially relevant among low- and middle-income families throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into the 21<sup>st</sup>.<sup>4</sup> Moving forward, while most agree that enabling more people to pursue and complete a postsecondary education is necessary to meet the demands of future job openings, the role of certificates among other postsecondary credentials has been overlooked and sometimes disregarded despite their potential benefits. Nationally, certificates have gone from representing a 6-percent share of all postsecondary awards in 1980 to a 22-percent share today with more than one million students earning a

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<sup>1</sup> Industry-based certifications are commonly where the successful completion of a program signifies the recipient is proficient in a specific program, application or version of software (e.g. Microsoft Office, C++, Java programming).

<sup>2</sup> Carnevale, Anthony P, Stephen J. Rose and Andrew R. Hanson. 2012. Certificates: Gateway to Gainful Employment and College Degrees, Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.

<http://www9.georgetown.edu/grad/gppi/hpi/cew/pdfs/Certificates.FullReport.061812.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) divides certificates into these groups which is why they are so commonly referred to in this way.

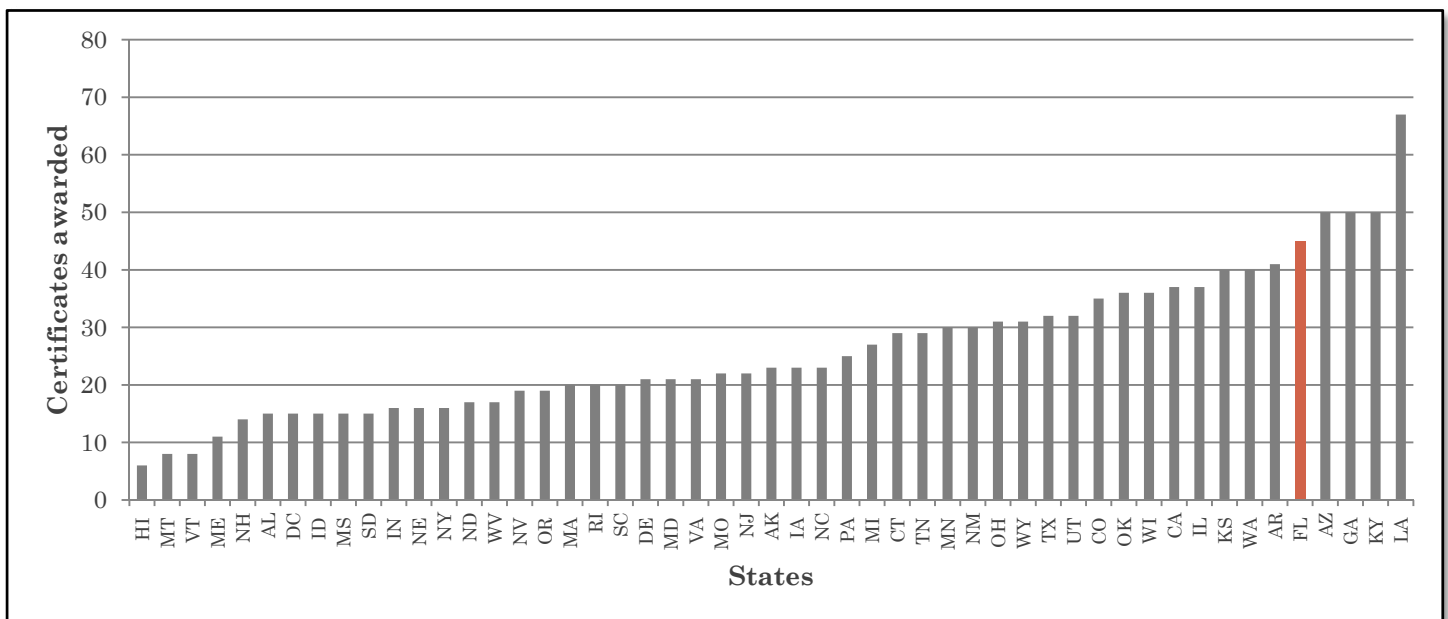
<sup>4</sup> For additional reading on the history of community colleges, see Brint & Karabel’s book *Diverted Dream: Community Colleges and the Promise of Educational Opportunity in America, 1900-1985*, as well as John Rury’s *Education and Social Change: Themes in the History of American Schooling*.

certificate annually. Certificates are now the second most commonly awarded postsecondary credential trailing only the bachelor’s degree after recently passing the associate’s and master’s degrees.<sup>5</sup>

### Certificates in Florida

Compared to other states in the nation, Florida awards a high number of certificates. According to a report by the Center on Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University, Florida produces the fifth most certificates in the nation relative to its population and has the eighth highest share of its workforce who holds a certificate. Generalizations about the relationship between states and their relative certificate production should not be made since states will vary on their credential production due to variables such as the nature of their economy, composition and presence of higher education systems and social expectations. Florida also ranks 11<sup>th</sup> of all states in its share of workers who reported a certificate as being their highest level of education (12-percent), which means our state both awards a high number of certificates and has a high presence of certificates in the labor force relative to other states in the nation.<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 1: Certificates awarded per 10,000 residents in United States: 2010**



Source: IPEDS and U.S. Census data gathered by the Center on Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University

Florida offers more certificate programs to complete than any other postsecondary award type. According to Florida TalentNet, there are 4,400 certificate programs offered by Florida postsecondary institutions across all sectors.<sup>7</sup> Figure 2 shows almost one-third of all postsecondary programs offered in Florida are for certificates. The high number can be attributed to the specialized areas of training this level of education is commonly associated with.

Outlined in Figure 3 are the associations or governing organizations from which certificate programs are offered. The Commission for Independent Education (CIE) is a licensure and regulatory agency housed

<sup>5</sup> Carnevale et al, *Certificates: Gateway to Gainful Employment and College Degrees*.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Florida TalentNet is a web-based inventory created by the Higher Education Coordinating Council which lists postsecondary training and education programs across all sectors. See page 11 in this brief to read more about this service. While Florida TalentNet does designate certificates from other postsecondary credentials, a small number of programs were found to be graduate certificates, also known as a specialist degree.

within the Florida Department of Education and its institutions are responsible for offering over two-thirds (68.1-percent) of certificates in our state. Institutions licensed to award postsecondary credentials by the CIE are private, for-profit institutions typically focused on training and education programs. There are currently more than 900 institutions licensed by the CIE which enroll more than 340,000 students, most of whom are ethnic minorities (53-percent) and over the age of 25 (62-percent). In total, CIE institutions offer 7,726 different postsecondary programs.

**Figure 2: Number of postsecondary programs offered by award type in Florida**

Type of postsecondary award	# of prgm's offered	% of total prgm's
Certificate	4,400	32.3%
Associate's	3,005	22.0%
Bachelor's	3,409	25.0%
Master's	2,104	15.4%
Doctorate	494	3.6%
Other	229	1.7%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>13,641</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Florida TalentNet

**Figure 3: Number of certificate programs offered by Governing Organization in FL**

Association/Governing Organization	# of cert's offered	% of total cert's
Commission for Independent Education (CIE)	2,997	68.1%
Division of Career and Adult Education (DCAE)	1,161	26.4%
Florida College System (FCS)	186	4.2%
Independent Colleges & Universities of Florida (ICUF)	56	1.3%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>4,400</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Florida TalentNet

The Division of Career and Adult Education (DCAE) within the Florida Department of Education exists to ensure students have access to programs linked to employment opportunities while meeting the needs of Florida's businesses and industries.<sup>8</sup> The DCAE is a dual delivery system with programs offered throughout 59 school districts located in 46 technical centers and 28 state and community colleges. Many of the programs offered by the DCAE articulate to higher levels of education, such as a postsecondary adult vocational (PSAV) certificate to an associate in applied science or associate in science program.<sup>9</sup> In 2010-11, more than 547,000 students enrolled in postsecondary programs delivered by the DCAE.<sup>10</sup> According to Complete College America, a national nonprofit working with states to increase the number of Americans with quality career certificates or college degrees, Florida is one of only three other states in the nation (Tennessee, Oklahoma and Ohio) with a statewide system of public, non-degree granting postsecondary institutions focused on vocational certificate production.<sup>11</sup>

Just over 4-percent of certificate programs offered in Florida are through the Florida College System (FCS), which represents the state's 28 public community and state colleges, and is statutorily responsible for responding to community needs for postsecondary academic and career education. FCS institutions enroll nearly one million students annually and offer 1,371 postsecondary programs throughout the state. Sixty-percent of Florida high school graduates who attend a postsecondary institution do so at an FCS institution, and 50-percent of students who enter a State University System institution do so directly from the FCS. In the 2010-11 academic year, more than 24-percent of all credentials awarded by FCS institutions were certificates.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The Division of Career and Adult Education was formally known as Workforce Education or the Workforce Education system.

<sup>9</sup> Click [here](#) for a list of DCAE statewide articulation agreements.

<sup>10</sup> 2010-11 Career and Adult Education Quick Facts, <http://www.fl DOE.org/workforce/pdf/1011QuickFacts.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Bosworth, Brian. 2010. *Certificates Count: An Analysis of Sub-baccalaureate Certificates*, Complete College America.

<http://www.completecollege.org/docs/Certificates%20Count%20FINAL%202012-05.pdf>.

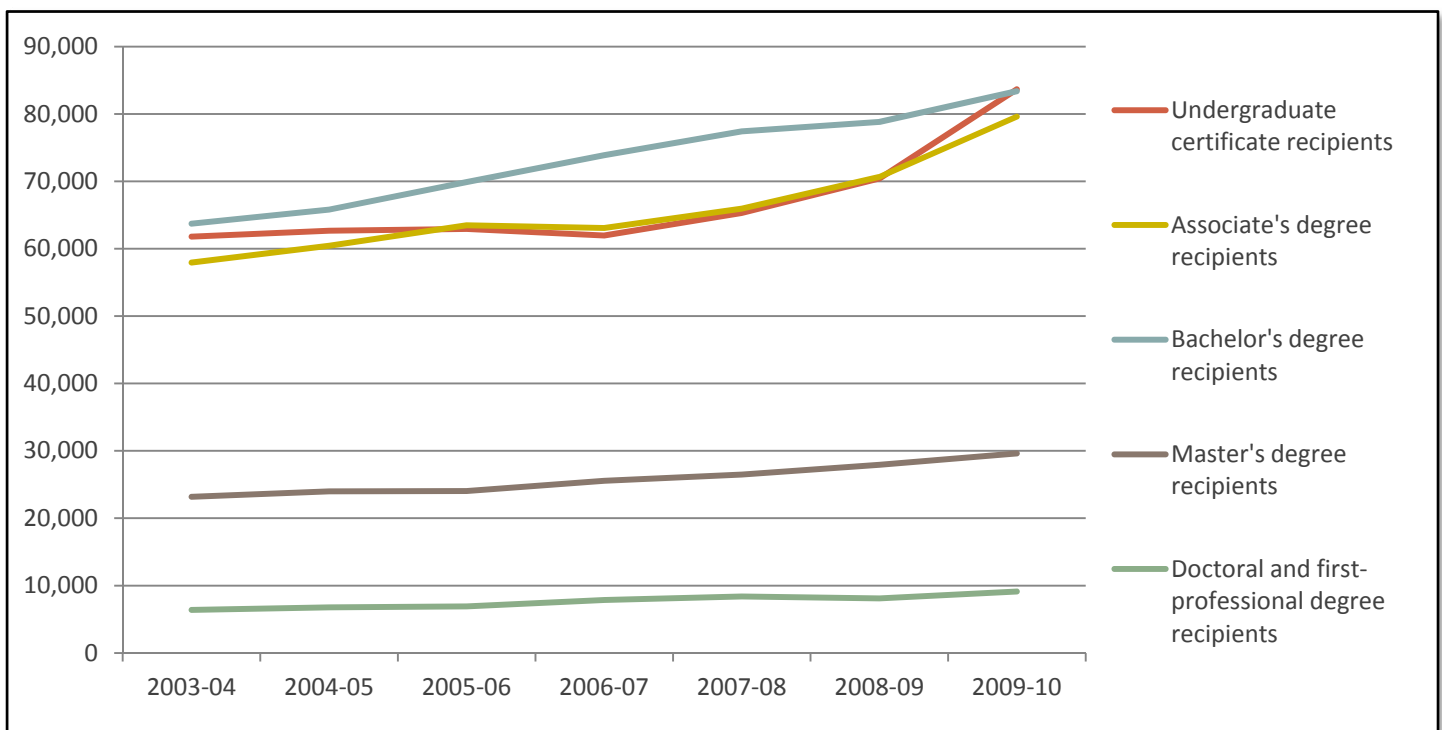
<sup>12</sup> Source for completion data is [2012 Florida College System Fact Book](#) and includes share of vocational and college credit certificates from all other degrees/certificates awarded.

The Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida (ICUF) is an association of 29 private, non-profit colleges and universities that provide a postsecondary education to over 135,000 students. Most of these institutions focus on baccalaureate and graduate education and award more than 31-percent of such degrees in the state. Only two ICUF institutions offer a two-year degree program and less than 4-percent of postsecondary programs offered at ICUF institutions are certificates.<sup>13,14</sup>

*Certificate Production Has Risen In Florida, Especially Among Private, For-Profit Institutions*

Nationally, the number of certificates awarded has increased to the point where they now trail only bachelor’s degrees among all postsecondary credentials.<sup>15</sup> In Florida, the 2009-10 academic year marked the first year that more certificates (83,670) were awarded than bachelor’s degrees (83,386). Figure 4 shows the level of certificates awarded in Florida stayed nearly the same from 2003-04 to 2006-07 until seeing steady increases beginning in 2007-08. While it is clear that the production for all postsecondary credentials has been consistently on the rise since 2006-07, the production of certificates has been particularly strong.

**Figure 4: Postsecondary awards granted in Florida: 2003-04 to 2009-10**



Source: The Institute for College Access & Success, College Insight (IPEDS data)

A closer look at where students are earning certificates provides insight related to postsecondary decisions taking place in Florida. Figure 5 displays the number of certificates granted by sector in Florida. The rise in undergraduate certificates earned after 2006-07 is almost entirely accounted for by private, for-profit institutions. Since 2003-04, undergraduate certificates awarded by such colleges and universities increased over 107-percent from 20,754 in 2003-04 to 43,025 in 2009-10, while the level of certificates awarded by public higher education institutions has decreased by 1.8-percent. During that

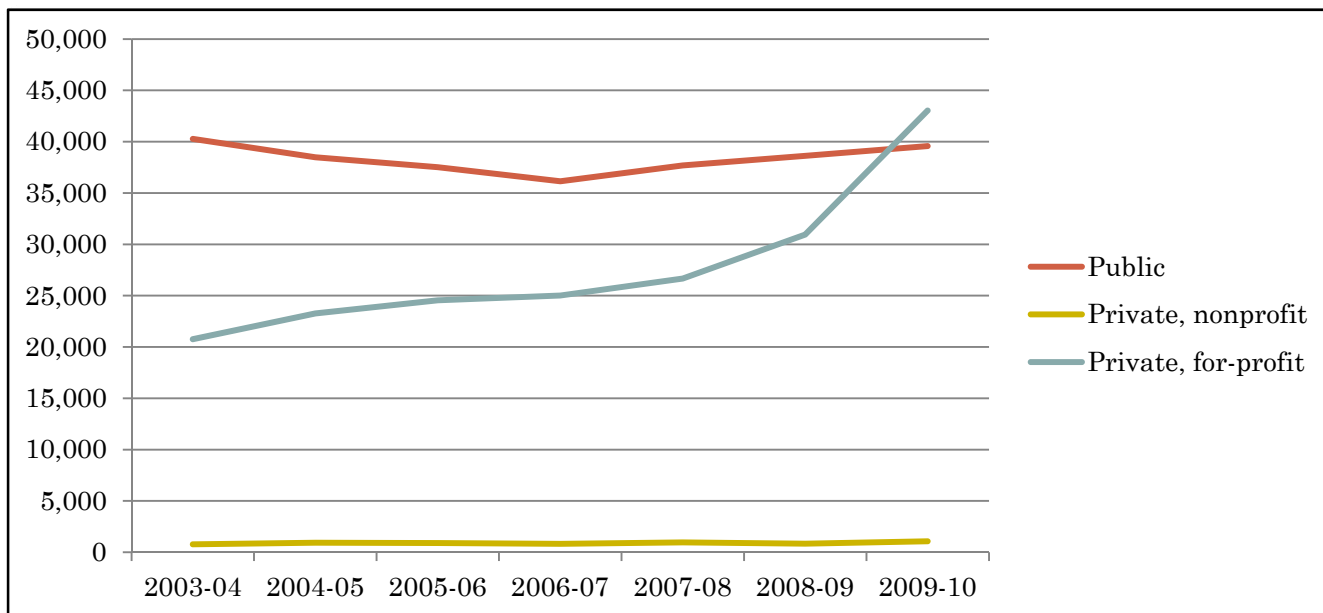
<sup>13</sup> 2010-11 ICUF Accountability Report, <http://www.icuf.org/newdevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/2010-11-ICUF-Accountability-Report4.pdf>.

<sup>14</sup> Information regarding organizations and associations that award postsecondary credentials in Florida was found in the Higher Education Coordinating Council’s Final Report, [http://www.fldoe.org/board/meetings/2011\\_12\\_19/commreport.pdf](http://www.fldoe.org/board/meetings/2011_12_19/commreport.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> Carnevale et al, *Certificates: Gateway to Gainful Employment and College Degrees*.

same period, the private nonprofit sector saw a 38.3-percent increase in certificates awarded; Most of these institutions have missions focused on 4-year and advanced degrees so it is generally expected that their certificate production in total numbers is far below the other sectors. After surpassing the production of certificates in public institutions in 2009-10, private, for-profit institutions now award over 51-percent of certificates awarded to students in Florida.

**Figure 5: Undergraduate certificates awarded by sector in Florida: 2003-04 to 2009-10**



Source: The Institute for College Access & Success, College Insight (IPEDS data)

The rise in private sector certificate and degree production has garnered national attention from higher education researchers, reformers and politicians. Private, for-profit institutions may receive federal support for non-degree vocational programs as long as they demonstrate they can follow guidelines put in place by the U.S. Department of Education.<sup>16</sup> Colleges must demonstrate that at least 35-percent of their graduates are actively repaying their student loans and they not exceed established debt-to-income and debt-to-discretionary income ratios. This past June, 193 vocational programs failed to meet the regulation’s benchmarks for their programs’ graduates.<sup>17</sup> Several Florida institutions were found to have failed these guidelines, which have concerned students, families and their elected officials.<sup>18</sup> A U.S. Congressional report on private, for-profit institutions showed that two based in Florida employed 4.5 times more staff members responsible for recruiting students than providing support services and listed substantially higher prices for tuition (up to 3 or 4 times more) compared to local public state colleges.<sup>19</sup>

The private, for-profit institutions defend their place in higher education, stating they provide flexible options to students who don’t have the ability to attend traditional colleges and universities, either because of the perceived cost or time constraints. While the for-profit sector does have a reputation for being on the forefront of technological and organizational innovation, such as offering online or distance

<sup>16</sup> To learn more about the Obama Administration’s “Gainful Employment” reforms for career college programs, click [here](#).

<sup>17</sup> Stratford, Michael. 2012. “193 Vocational Programs Fail ‘Gainful Employment’ Test.” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 26 June 2012. <http://chronicle.com/article/193-Vocational-Programs-Fail/132593/>.

<sup>18</sup> For a look at the institutions that didn’t meet federal gainful-employment guidelines, click [here](#).

<sup>19</sup> Sen. Tom Harkin’s report on for-profit colleges can be found [here](#).



education programs, their practices have come under scrutiny as of late for their low completion rates and reliance on Pell Grants and federal student loans.<sup>20</sup>

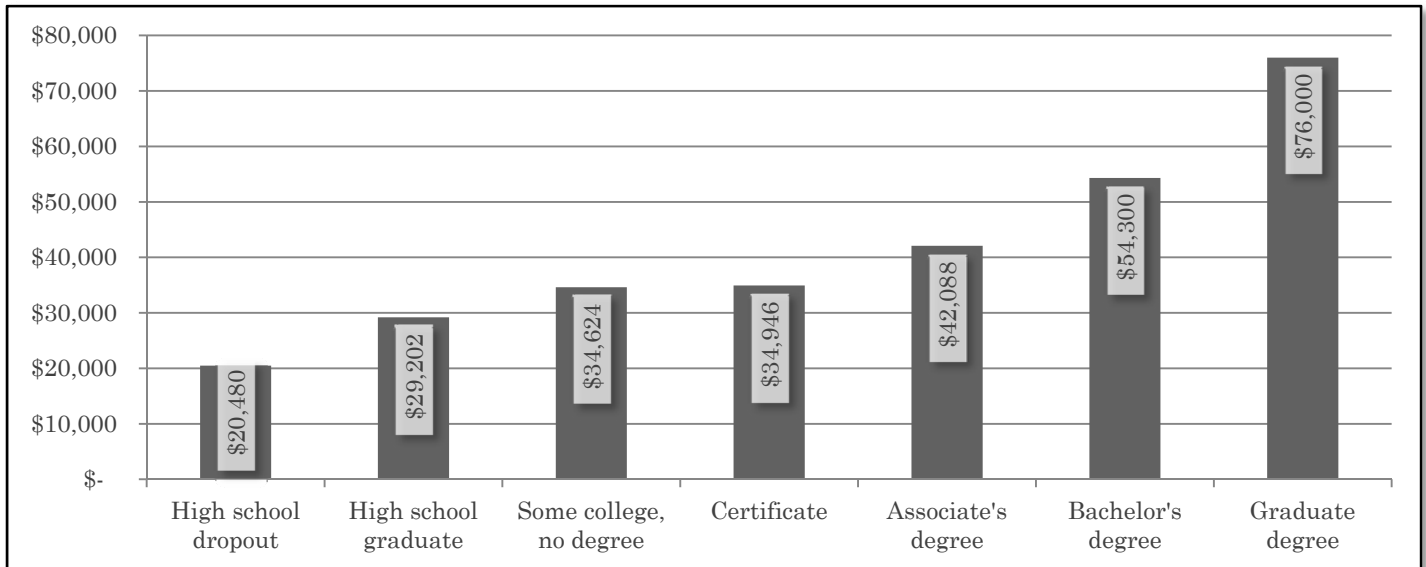
### Who Tends To Pursue Postsecondary Certificates?

A comprehensive study on postsecondary certificates by the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce revealed a great deal of information about those who tend to pursue such credentials.<sup>21</sup> Compared with other postsecondary credentials, a high percentage of certificate earners do so at an older age. Sixteen-percent of workers who earn certificates are older than 40 years of age, much higher than the 11-percent of associate’s degree earners and 6-percent of bachelor’s degree holders.<sup>22</sup> The study also shows certificate holders tend to come from households of low to moderate family income whose parent’s educational attainment level is below the bachelor’s degree level. Certificate attainment is also more concentrated among those from African-American and Latino racial/ethnic groups. In general, prospective students who choose to earn a certificate do so because of the relative length of time, cost and level of prerequisite education needed relative to other types of postsecondary credentials.

### The Benefits of Earning a Certificate

The current higher education reform efforts taking place in Florida reflect the national attention focused on the need for more Americans to earn a postsecondary education. Due to the rising cost of college in recent years, families are making college choices for different reasons today than in previous years. Families are decreasingly making college choices based on the ideal of “the college experience” and are increasingly showing preference toward financial indicators such as cost and potential future earnings.<sup>23</sup> While tuition prices in Florida are low when compared to other states in the country, the cost of tuition and fees at Florida public two-year (68.9%), public four-year (84.2%) and private nonprofit (39.8%) postsecondary institutions have all gone up considerably from 2004-05 to 2011-12.<sup>24</sup>

**Figure 6: Earnings of U.S. Workforce by Education**



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of SIPP data

<sup>20</sup> Carey, Kevin. 2010. “Why Do You Think They’re Called For-Profit Colleges?” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 25 July 2010. <http://chronicle.com/article/Why-Do-You-Think-Theyre/123660/>.

<sup>21</sup> Carnevale et al, *Certificates: Gateway to Gainful Employment and College Degrees*.

<sup>22</sup> The CEW report used Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) and National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) to track demographic data of certificate earners.

<sup>23</sup> Sallie Mae, Inc. and Ipsos. 2012. *How America Pays for College 2012: Sallie Mae’s National Study of College Students and Parents*. [https://www1.salliemae.com/about/news\\_info/research/how\\_america\\_pays\\_2012/](https://www1.salliemae.com/about/news_info/research/how_america_pays_2012/).

<sup>24</sup> College Board Advocacy & Policy Center. 2011. *Trends in College Pricing 2011*. Washington, D.C.: The College Board. [http://trends.collegeboard.org/college\\_pricing](http://trends.collegeboard.org/college_pricing).

Despite its rising cost, the successful completion of a college degree is strongly related to higher wages. The higher the level of education attained, the more workers are expected to make. Figure 6 shows where certificate holders rank in earnings among all other education levels. Research by the Florida Board of Governors supports these findings, as higher education levels within the State University System grant workers higher annual earnings, as well as higher levels of full-time employment rates.<sup>25</sup>

It's important to note the wage premium aforementioned and shown in Figure 6 does not persist across all postsecondary programs or areas of study. A worker with a bachelor's degree in counseling psychology earns on average an annual income of \$29,000 while a worker with the same degree but majoring in petroleum engineering can make \$120,000.<sup>26</sup> These differences exist throughout all postsecondary credentials – including certificates. Recent efforts by the Florida Legislature have reflected the need for better employment and earnings outcome data for degrees and certificates earned at postsecondary institutions. Beginning in 2013-14, a report prepared by the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) will be released that will include Department of Education data on the short-term (and eventually long-term) workforce outcomes for graduates.<sup>27</sup>

In line with these efforts connecting higher education with job placement, the Florida Department of Education Division of Florida Colleges recently made available an online portal called Smart College Choices featuring student employment and earnings data.<sup>28</sup> The portal is easy to navigate and allows users to find information on the outcomes of students who have completed programs at Florida College System institutions, such as the percentage who are employed, the percentage who have continued their education and wages they are earning. Some programs have estimated average annual incomes of more than \$50,000 for graduates, while others on the low end might expect to earn just over \$20,000. Further research on certificates shows some certificate programs exceed the salaries earned by workers who hold 2-year and 4-year degrees, especially in fields like electronics and computer/information services.<sup>29</sup> A *Miami Herald* article surveying certificate programs available at Miami Dade College and Broward College found programs costing as little as \$2,175 leading to high-paying jobs in fields such as web development, healthcare, and accounting.<sup>30</sup>

Two notable, rigorous studies conducted in the last year have added valuable research related to the potential economic returns of certificate earners in Florida. The Center on Education and the Workforce's report on certificates provided several useful findings. The first, referenced earlier, is that certificates vary significantly in their economic return. Despite the high levels of certificates Florida institutions produce, only 45-percent of certificate programs less than two years in length provide earnings returns greater than 20-percent of high school graduates – 40<sup>th</sup> among all other states. Certificate earners who experienced economic returns over high school completers were found to vary depending on whether the person worked in the field they earned their certificate in, what field of study the certificate program was in, as well as the certificate holder's gender, race and ethnicity. Another key finding is that certificates can be a “stepping-stone” to more education. Thirty-four percent of certificate holders were also found to have earned a 2-year degree or higher with a substantial number seeking a higher level of education after

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<sup>25</sup> The Board of Governors of the State University System of Florida. 2012. *Economic Contributions of the State University System of Florida in Fiscal Year 2009-10*. [http://www.flbog.edu/doc/economic\\_impacts\\_of\\_the\\_sus\\_of\\_florida\\_fy\\_2009-10\\_gov.pdf](http://www.flbog.edu/doc/economic_impacts_of_the_sus_of_florida_fy_2009-10_gov.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> Carnevale, Anthony P., Jeff Strohl and Michelle Melton. 2011. *What's It Worth: The Economic Value of College Majors*. <http://www9.georgetown.edu/grad/gppi/hpi/cew/pdfs/whatsitworth-complete.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> 2012-16 State of Florida Integrated Workforce Plan, [http://www.workforceflorida.com/Publications/docs/StatePlan\\_v8Draft.pdf](http://www.workforceflorida.com/Publications/docs/StatePlan_v8Draft.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> Florida Department of Education. 2012. *New Web Portal Empowers Students to Make Informed Decisions About College*. [http://www.fldoe.org/news/2012/2012\\_07\\_19-2.asp](http://www.fldoe.org/news/2012/2012_07_19-2.asp).

<sup>29</sup> Carnevale et al, *Certificates: Gateway to Gainful Employment and College Degrees*.

<sup>30</sup> Matas, Alina. 2012. “Two-year Degrees and Certificate Programs Can Give Job-hunters an Edge.” *The Miami Herald*, 02 July 2012. <http://www.miamiherald.com/2012/07/02/2875185/two-year-degrees-and-certificate.html>.



earning their certificate. It was also found when controlling for academic preparation, lower-income students earn certificates at a lower rate than those from high-income families. These results suggest there are many qualified, low-income individuals who could benefit from earning a credential by improving the awareness and visibility of such programs.

The second study, by economist Louis Jacobson, further analyzed the relationship between earnings and postsecondary education outcomes of students attending state and community colleges in Florida.<sup>31</sup> Using files from the Florida Department of Education data warehouse, the author found the median earnings of students earning certificates were \$8,700 higher than students who left college with 25 or more credits but no credential. Certificates were also found to have economic returns superior to some 2-year degrees, further supporting the evidence that reaching higher levels of education does not guarantee higher levels of earnings. The author’s findings also address a common scenario in higher education – when students accumulate a substantial number of credits without finishing.<sup>32</sup> Depending on the student and their credit levels, students can increase their earnings outcomes by completing the right certificate or degree program. The field (or program), as well as its successful completion, are factors that can substantially increase the economic outcome of certificate earners.<sup>33</sup>

### Employment Outlook for Certificate Holders in Florida

Because of the strong connection between jobs and certificates, a closer look at employment projections is more than appropriate. The Florida Department of Economic Opportunity regularly forecasts the future employment levels for industries and occupations in Florida. Figure 7 shows the total number of jobs projected to exist in the labor market by the level of education they require.<sup>34</sup> From 2011 to 2019, the number of jobs requiring a postsecondary adult vocational certificate increases by more than 391,000, over twice as much as any other educational level during that time span. Another noticeable trend from the chart is the growth of all jobs requiring a postsecondary credential. The demand for workers with postsecondary certificates increasing means a smaller share of the workforce will hold a high school diploma or less, meaning the value of a higher education will only increase as time goes on. Employment projections with required level of education for each of the 24 Workforce Regions in Florida can be found online at [floridacollegeaccess.org](http://floridacollegeaccess.org) in the data tools section under “Research & Data.”

**Figure 7: Florida Employment Projections by Level of Education: 2011-2019**

Level of Education	2011 Employment		2019 Employment		Change from 2011 to 2019	
	# of jobs	% of total jobs	# of jobs	% of total jobs	# of jobs	% change
Less than a High School Diploma	1,335,111	17.63%	1,482,772	17.33%	147,661	11.06%
High School Diploma or GED	1,459,775	19.28%	1,601,394	18.72%	141,619	9.70%
Certificate	2,770,376	36.59%	3,161,772	36.95%	391,396	14.13%
Associate Degree	1,004,035	13.26%	1,157,253	13.53%	153,218	15.26%
Bachelor’s Degree	743,870	9.82%	856,371	10.01%	112,501	15.12%
Master’s Degree or Higher	258,390	3.41%	296,513	3.47%	38,123	14.75%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>7,571,557</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>8,556,075</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>984,518</b>	<b>13.00%</b>

Source: Florida Department of Economic Opportunity

<sup>31</sup> Jacobson, Louis. 2011. “Improving Community College Outcome Measures.” *Challenge* 54(6): 93-117.

<sup>32</sup> Florida C.A.N.! has done a policy brief on the number of students who leave college without finishing which can be accessed here: <http://www.floridacollegeaccess.org/research/Research%20Briefs/2012/FCANAdultReturnersPolicyBrief2012Final.pdf>.

<sup>33</sup> See OPPAGA report for more on the completion rates of workforce education programs, <http://www.oppaga.state.fl.us/Reports/pdf/0442rpt.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup> For more information on the education requirement categories used by the Florida DEO, click [here](#).

The Department of Economic Opportunity also produces statewide and regional listings for fastest growing occupations. Figure 8 displays the top ten occupations with the highest mean entry hourly wages requiring certificates in fields projected to experience growth from 2011 to 2019.<sup>35</sup> The occupations listed here represent those projected to experience growth across the state.

**Figure 8: Occupations in Florida requiring certificates with projected growth by highest mean entry hourly wages**

Occupation Title	Projected Annual Openings	Mean Entry Hourly Wage (2011)	Mean Hourly Wage (2011)
Sales Representatives, Wholesale & Mfg, Tech. & Sci. Products	1246	\$22.70	\$41.77
Diagnostic Medical Sonographers	154	\$21.77	\$27.88
Network Systems and Data Communications Analysts	1409	\$21.46	\$34.54
Commercial Pilots	182	\$20.44	\$44.77
Radiologic Technologists and Technicians	427	\$19.19	\$25.27
Construction and Building Inspectors	283	\$18.13	\$25.96
Compliance Officers, Exc. Safety, Agri, Constr & Transp.	742	\$16.72	\$27.12
Industrial Machinery Mechanics	404	\$15.27	\$21.97
Paralegals and Legal Assistants	812	\$15.16	\$22.59
Insurance Sales Agents	1828	\$14.96	\$29.98

Source: Florida Department of Economic Opportunity

This information, paired with the educational program required, can empower students and families to make decisions that may yield a high-skill, high-paying job with a relative small amount of postsecondary education.<sup>36</sup> A new online portal developed by the Florida Higher Education Coordinating Council called Florida TalentNet can link education programs that can lead to high-skill, high-paying jobs to the institutions where they are offered across the state. This powerful tool is further discussed in the next section of this brief.

### The Future of Certificates in Florida

Despite the potential benefits they can provide to students who earn them, certificates are not entirely embraced and promoted by all. Some advocates of higher education access and equity have raised issues about the unintended consequences of vocationally-focused postsecondary institutions and the broader aspirations of higher education. Should its purpose be to democratize citizens and empower them to participate in a political system which represents them, or does higher education exist to prepare and train people to earn gainful employment and participate in the workforce? Should higher education aim to impart its students with knowledge, or be responsible for enabling students to be proficient with using some demonstrable skill(s)? Is it possible to do both?

While postsecondary access has expanded significantly in the last century with the advent of community colleges and emergence of sub-baccalaureate credentials, some evidence has suggested the aggregate effect has only accentuated, rather than reduced, existing patterns of social inequality.<sup>37</sup> Students from higher-income backgrounds today are still more likely to enroll in, and complete degrees at the more

<sup>35</sup> Fastest growing occupations on DEO listing must have a minimum 4,000 jobs in 2011. A chart of the fastest growing occupations can be found in the Florida C.A.N.! online data tools section [here](#).

<sup>36</sup> A list of targeted occupations requiring a career or technical education provided by the DEO is listed in the Florida C.A.N.! online data tools section [here](#).

<sup>37</sup> For additional reading on this topic, read Brint & Karabel's book *Diverted Dream: Community Colleges and the Promise of Educational Opportunity in America, 1900-1985*, as well as Josh Beach's *Gateway to Opportunity? A History of the Community College in the United States*.

prestigious institutions that afford their students better opportunities and earnings post graduation. Research has shown the poorest and most disadvantaged Americans tend to be educated at the newest and least prestigious postsecondary institutions.<sup>38</sup> Is it ethical to advocate for more students and families to choose earning a certificate if it means they do so over selecting a higher level of education?

States, especially ones with high unemployment rates and shrinking state revenues, don't have the luxury of making decisions based solely on principle. Elected officials are obligated to find reasonable solutions for problems their constituents face. One such problem facing Floridians is slow economic growth, which Governor Rick Scott has paid considerable attention to during the first portion of his tenure. His October 2011 letter to the state's public university presidents asked for more job-related outcome data for graduates.<sup>39</sup> Gov. Scott also signed a bill last spring to increase the accountability to Florida's 24 regional workforce boards which are responsible for placing and educating job seekers.<sup>40</sup>

The Florida Higher Education Coordinating Council (HECC), a cross-sector, legislative advisory board, has been grappling with the tough decisions and planning related to creating a coordinated system of education that aligns the postsecondary offerings with the state's workforce needs for the last two years. One thing they have found is that linking occupations to educational programs located throughout the state is no easy task. Occupational data tends to feature coding systems that don't have natural or intuitive linkages to educational programs. In that effort, the HECC has launched Florida TalentNet, an online portal designed to find educational programs offered by postsecondary institutions of all sectors in Florida. The inventory includes multiple levels of postsecondary programs from the technical certificate level up to doctorates. These programs can be browsed using several different categories which allow those using it to have flexibility while searching. This portal has been a success in two ways – its creation has resulted in some thoughtful discussions about ways to avoid program duplication among Florida's systems of higher education, and it has provided valuable information to students and families seeking postsecondary programs available locally. Along with the employment projections provided by the Department of Economic Opportunity, Floridians will have the ability to connect high-skill, high-wage jobs in their area or across the state, with the institution that can provide the education or training needed.

The rise in certificate production in Florida will likely continue into the future. Certificates are a part of the Higher Education Coordinating Council's plan to coordinate postsecondary offerings in the state that align with regional and state demand.<sup>41</sup> The Division of Florida Colleges has set a goal to increase the number of students earning a certificate or degree from 84,000 to 126,000 by the year 2015 and double overall degree production by 2019-20.<sup>42</sup> Such efforts at the state level reflect an acknowledgement by policymakers of both the value of certificates in helping to grow Florida's economy and the need for certificates to play a key role in postsecondary education reform efforts.

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<sup>38</sup> Nidiffer, Jana and Jeffrey Bouman. 2001. The Chasm Between Rhetoric and Reality: The Fate of the "Democratic Ideal" When a Public University Becomes Elite. *Educational Policy*, 15(3), 432-451.

<sup>39</sup> Peterson, Lindsay. 2011. "Scott's Letter to Universities Questions Focus, Job Training." *The Tampa Tribune*, 18 October 2011.

<http://www2.tbo.com/news/education-news/2011/oct/18/15/scotts-letter-to-universities-questions-focus-job-ar-272888/>.

<sup>40</sup> Tracy, Dan. 2012. "Scott Signs Workforce, Other Pro-business Laws." *Orlando Sentinel*, 28 March 2012.

[http://articles.orlandosentinel.com/2012-03-28/business/os-governor-signs-economics-bill-20120328\\_1\\_promotional-water-bottles-cape-a-bility-challenge-board-members](http://articles.orlandosentinel.com/2012-03-28/business/os-governor-signs-economics-bill-20120328_1_promotional-water-bottles-cape-a-bility-challenge-board-members).

<sup>41</sup> Higher Education Coordinating Council 2012 Work Plan. <http://www.floridahighereducation.org/doc/2012-003-HECC-Work-Plan.pdf>.

<sup>42</sup> Stepping Up: A Strategic Plan for The Florida College System, 2010-11 to 2015-16.

[http://www.fldoe.org/board/meetings/2012\\_05\\_09/WorkshopAgenda.pdf](http://www.fldoe.org/board/meetings/2012_05_09/WorkshopAgenda.pdf).

## Policy Implications

Researchers and labor economists agree the changing economy will require significantly more working-aged adults with a postsecondary degree or credential. In order to meet such demand in Florida, the Florida College Access Network has set a statewide goal to increase postsecondary degree attainment to at least 60% by the year 2025 (also known as Goal 2025). As this analysis suggest, high-quality postsecondary certificates continue to play a key role in workforce development in Florida and must be part of the strategy for reaching Goal 2025. In order to fully leverage the benefits certificates can offer in Florida’s higher education reform debate and to its graduates in the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy, the Florida College Access Network recommends the following:

### *Count Certificates Toward State Postsecondary Degree Attainment Goals*

A shortcoming facing the national movement toward increasing postsecondary degree attainment is that certificates have been largely left out of the calculation. Along with 2-year and 4-year college degrees, we should begin counting high-quality post-high school certificates toward postsecondary attainment goals. As the Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce has observed, popular surveys used to determine postsecondary completion simply don’t count certificates. This is because an equivalent doesn’t exist in other nations. If certificates with high economic returns were included among our other postsecondary credentials in such surveys, the United States would go from 15<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> in degree attainment among economically developed nations.<sup>43</sup> Beginning this year, improvements to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) Completion Survey will allow for better and more accurate counting of certificate earners at institutions.<sup>44</sup> The U. S. Census Bureau and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) should follow suit at the national and international levels respectively. Being that Florida produces certificates at such a high rate when compared to other states, we would stand to see an increase in our degree attainment measure as well.

### *Define “High-Quality Certificate”*

The Florida College Access Network does not advocate for counting all certificates simply for rankings purposes. Counting certificates deemed to be of high-quality, however, stands to be a benefit to completers and the state’s economy and should therefore be included as part of our degree productivity goals. The Lumina Foundation for Education defines a high-quality postsecondary credential as a degree or certificate that has well-defined and transparent learning outcomes which provide a clear pathway to further education and employment.<sup>45</sup> The Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce further illustrates the variance that exists among the outcomes of certificate earners and their relative value in the workforce. Because those who choose certificates are particularly motivated by their perceived value in the workforce, “high-quality certificates” should meet economic returns over high school completers and provide the opportunity to lead to gainful employment. Building broad-based agreement within states on the definition of “high-quality certificates” will go a long way in driving policy aimed at accelerating the production of such credentials.

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<sup>43</sup> Carnevale et al, *Certificates: Gateway to Gainful Employment and College Degrees*.

<sup>44</sup> Changes to the 2012-13 IPEDS Data Collection. <https://surveys.nces.ed.gov/ipeds/ViewContent.aspx?contentId=22>.

<sup>45</sup> Lumina Foundation’s Strategic Plan. [http://www.luminafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Lumina\\_Strategic\\_Plan.pdf](http://www.luminafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Lumina_Strategic_Plan.pdf).

## *Improve Student Advisement on the Potential Benefits of Certificates*

A re-occurring theme throughout the existing research on certificates is the lack of public awareness, particularly among parents and students, about the potential benefits of a postsecondary certificate. The information and research to inform and empower students and families to make the best postsecondary decisions that suit them already exists, but the content needs to be better marketed and embraced by our K-12 student support staff such as advisors and counselors. Students and families who are especially sensitive to the cost of college, academically underprepared or in need of additional training to enter or move up into the workforce could benefit tremendously from a school-based staff member, parent, or community-based service provider possessing the knowledge and research we have outlined in this brief.

## *Communities Should Develop Plans for Improving College and Career Readiness, Access, and Success*

As much as we may feel motivated or compelled to do our part in helping our country inch its way back atop of international degree attainment rankings, the real work happens close to home – where we work, where we live and where our children go to school. Making strides toward improving college and career readiness, access, and success at the state-level will be a result of a cumulative effect that takes place when progress is made at the local level. It is within Florida communities that the degree attainment rate can be accelerated using the collective will and action of those who are aware of these important issues, and engaging others who are not.

In this light, here are three ways this brief can be used in your community: (1) include career and technical education in your local community’s educational planning and framework discussions. Do the pathways for students pursuing a postsecondary credential include certificates? Too often the definition of “college” is limited to traditional notions of the term. This brief highlights the many ways a postsecondary certificate can lead to gainful employment and further education; (2) utilize this brief and the regional workforce projections found on our website ([www.floridacollegeaccess.org](http://www.floridacollegeaccess.org)) as a way to broaden the knowledge-base and raise awareness about Florida’s changing workforce and the need to broaden access to postsecondary education including certificate programs. Are others in your community aware that projections show more than one-third of the jobs that will exist in 2019 will require a certificate? The Appendix shows the minimum education requirements needed for jobs in 2019 for Florida and all workforce regions, providing a local means to start a conversation about the progress your community needs to make in order to meet future workforce demand; (3) take inventory of the institutions that provide career and technical education opportunities and the organizations that exist to support students to get into, and complete a certificate program. Are the needs of residents in your community being met by the collective efforts of these entities, or are there gaps present? Is college and career readiness a priority in your community? Are students being prepared for the skills they’ll need to be employed? Does your community offer programs or services that can support and encourage students to earn a certificate, such as financial aid assistance, mentoring, tutoring, transportation, child care, etc.? Do parents in your community have access to the information needed to make sound decisions about postsecondary education? Is your community engaged in and contributing toward the education reform conversation taking place in Florida? ■

*The views expressed in this policy brief were developed independently and do not reflect the opinions of the universities, agencies, and funders with which the leadership team and staff are affiliated.*

The Florida College Access Network’s mission is to create and strengthen a statewide network that catalyzes and supports communities to improve college & career preparation, access, and completion for all students. For more information, visit [www.floridacollegeaccess.org](http://www.floridacollegeaccess.org).

