

Data Brief

Recent Gains, Future Challenges: A Closer Look at Degree Attainment in Florida

FLORIDA

The path to upward mobility and economic success in Florida and the U.S. as a whole is increasingly dependent on postsecondary degrees or credentials. In the wake of the shift since the 1970s from an industrial to a knowledge economy, the workforce has increasingly shed physical and repetitive jobs in favor of jobs requiring strong communications, problem-solving and technological skills that lead to increased quality, efficiency and innovation.

Although a student's chosen field of study will impact his or her earning potential and economic outcomes can vary greatly, it is nevertheless generally true that the higher the education level a person achieves, the more likely he or she is to be employed, earn a living wage and less likely to be dependent on public assistance. Throughout much of the 20th Century, a high school diploma was sufficient to secure a good job and a decent wage, but that is no longer the case for most workers. Workforce projections not only tell us those days are behind us, but that the demand for the higher-level skills that postsecondary education and training develops will only increase in the years to come. State and national workforce projections predict that over 60% of Florida jobs will require some form of postsecondary education or training by the year 2020, yet currently, only 38% of working-age Floridians holds an associate's degree or higher.

According to a report by the Florida-based LeRoy Collins Institute, demographic changes make forward-looking interventions even more necessary. As Baby Boomers retire and pave the way for new job opportunities, our state's economic prosperity will rest on our ability to develop the talent level of our future generations. Failing to make progress will have an effect on our economy that will be more difficult to correct as time progresses.

It is for these reasons that the Florida College Access Network has set a goal to increase our state's level of degree attainment for working-age Floridians to 60% by the year 2025. In this brief, we take a closer look at our state's progress toward reaching the goal by examining key trends that we hope will be used to inform discussions on policies and strategies for boosting educational attainment at the state and local levels.

Accompanying this brief is an interactive data dashboard that allows users to investigate more closely a variety of indicators related to degree attainment, including historical trends on attainment levels by racial/ethnic group and age range at the county, state and national levels. The data featured on the dashboard and located in this brief is offered to inform the thoughtful discussions taking place throughout the state as communities and policy makers grapple with the challenges inherent in boosting education attainment. Raising postsecondary attainment levels is a complex task not just in Florida but throughout the country, as factors like migration, demographic changes, K-12 education, degree production and policy changes at the local, state and national levels add layer upon layer to our ability to directly impact and measure the inputs and outcomes of our state's postsecondary education system.

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.

Key Trends

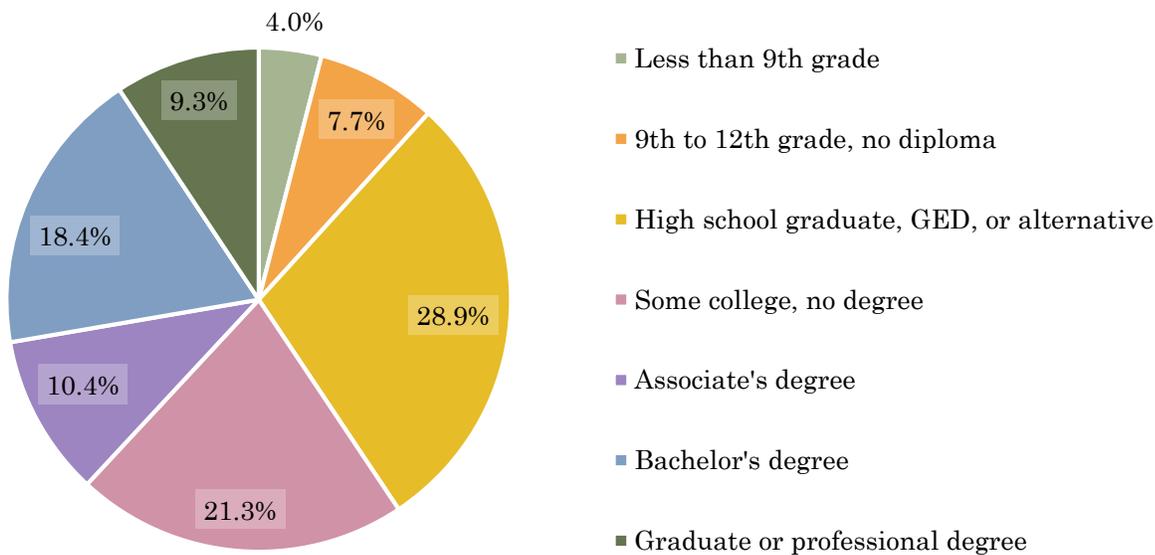
1. Degree Attainment (25-64 yr. olds):
↑ 1% to 38% in 2012, 5.7% since 2000
2. Disparities among Racial/Ethnic Groups:
↓ Whites (41.6%), Blacks (25.9%), Hispanics (31.2%)
3. Gender Gap (25-34 yr. olds):
↓ Men = 32.5%, Women = 43.4%
4. BA, AA, certificate production:
↑ 26.5% since 2008
5. Metro degree attainment:
↓ Only 1 of 8 largest metros in Florida rank top 50 in U.S. in attainment



Educational Attainment of Floridians Improving, Yet Still Lags the Nation

In 2012, just over 38% of Floridians ages 25 to 64 held an associate's degree or higher. Florida's degree attainment rate places the state below the national average, which stands at 39.4%. The main difference between the educational attainment profile of Florida and the rest of the country is our slightly lower attainment rates at the bachelor's degree level and our higher proportion of working-aged adults holding an associate's degree as their highest level of education attained. One area in which our state has considerable room for improvement is working-aged adults with some college, but no degree. In 2012, this comprised 21.28% of Floridians ages 25 to 64, which is only down 1.6% from the year 2000 despite the state's degree attainment rate increasing 5.7% during the same span.¹ Conversely, a positive trend during the same time period is a decrease in the number of adults holding a high school diploma or less, which is down 4.1% from 44.7% in 2000 to 40.6% in 2012, likely due to our state's progress with increasing high school graduation rates.

Chart 1: Highest Level of Education Attained by Floridians Ages 25 to 64 Years Old: 2012



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012 American Community Survey 1-year Estimates

Historical Trends

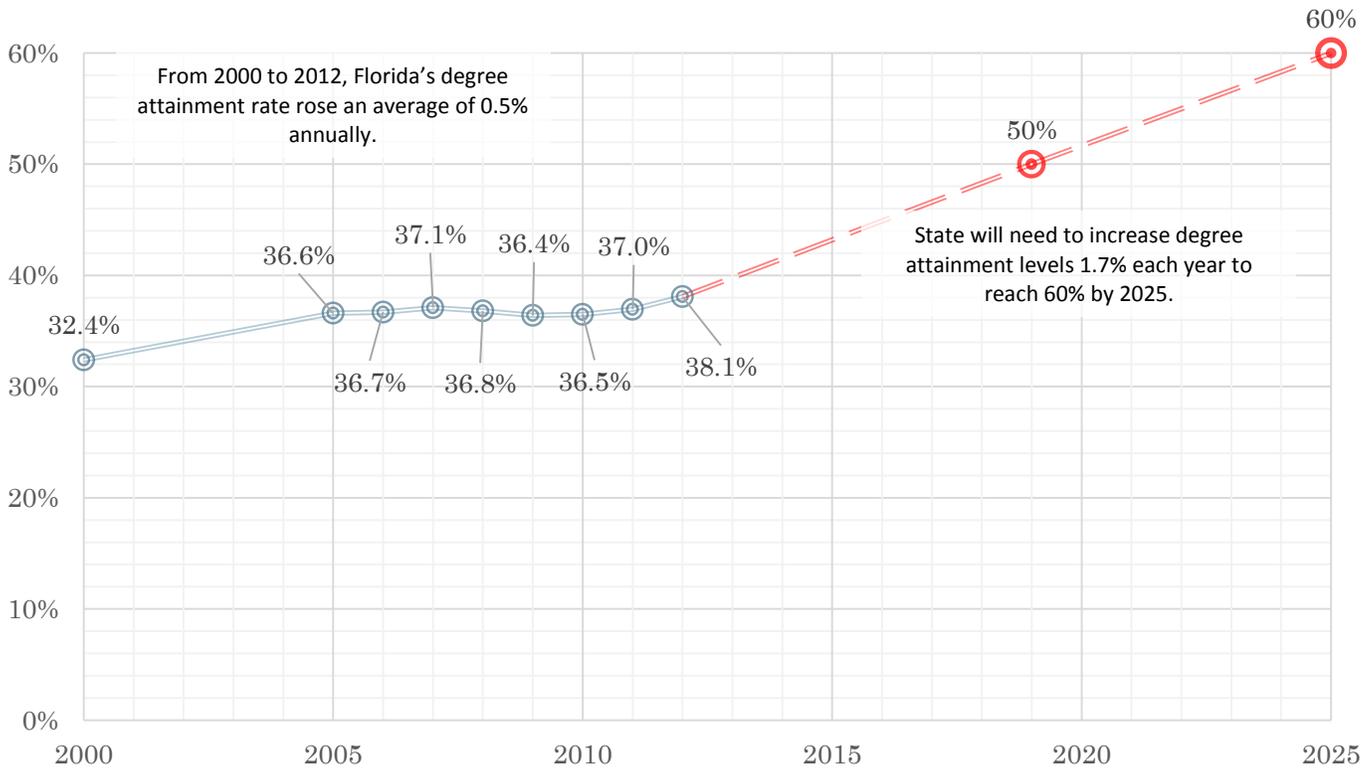
From 2000 to 2012, Florida has increased its degree attainment rate 5.7%, from 32.4% to 38.1%. Progress for the nation as a whole was nearly identical during the same span, increasing 5.6% from 33.8% to 39.4%. Although this trend is positive, the slow growth – a little less than 0.5% annually on average – is well below that of most other economically developed nations and one of the reasons why the U.S. is losing ground in the proportion of college educated workers. Although the U.S. ranked first in degree attainment as recently

¹ For more on working-aged adults in Florida with some college, but no degree, see our 2012 policy brief on adult near-completers: http://www.floridacollegeaccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/2012_2.pdf. Also note that the source that collects educational attainment data, the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey, does not capture residents who earn postsecondary certificates.

as 1990, our nation now ranks 5th in the world in its share of adult postsecondary educated workers and only 14th with respect to young adults.²

Achieving the 60% degree attainment goal by the year 2025 will require building more quickly upon the gains that Florida has made in recent years. In recent years, our degree attainment rate has increased by 0.1% in 2010, 0.5% in 2011 and 1.1% in 2012. Moving ahead, our state will need to increase degree attainment levels at a rate of 1.7% annually to reach the 60% goal (see Chart 2). Notably, as described below, including high-quality certificates in this measure will boost these numbers, but at least for the time-being, we do not have a reliable means to include them.

Chart 2: Percent of Floridians Ages 25 to 64 with Associate’s Degree or Higher: 2000-12 with Projections to 2025



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 1-year Estimates and 2000 Census Summary File. Projections to 2025 based on calculations made by the Florida College Access Network.

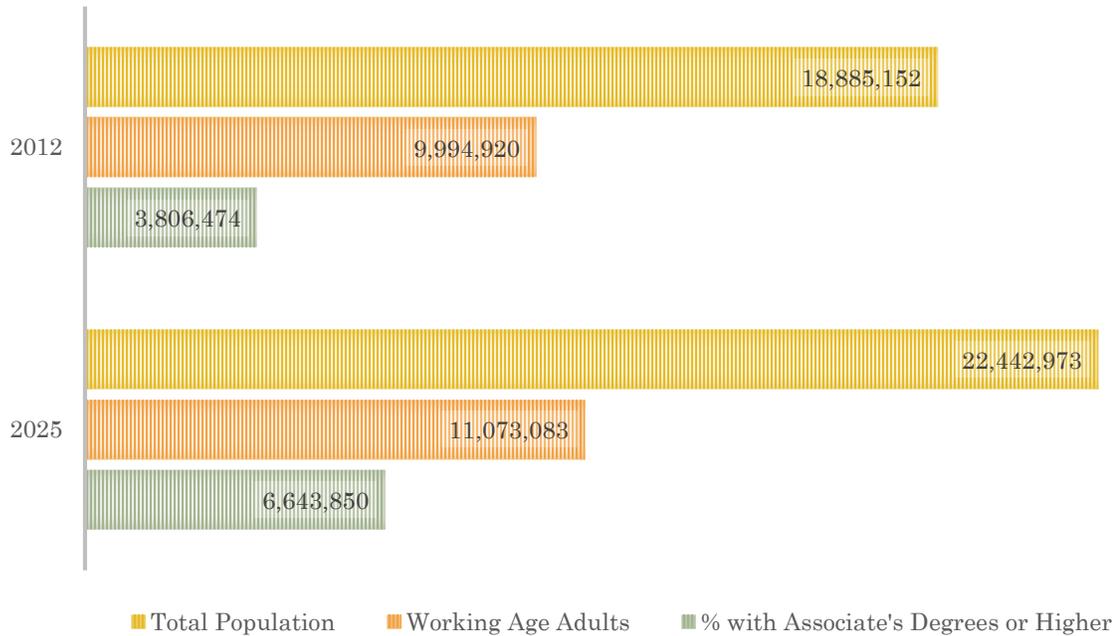
Florida Will Need to Attract, Award or Count 3.8 Million More High Quality Postsecondary Credentials by 2025

Efforts to increase degree attainment levels are not only dependent upon improving outcomes for today’s working-age adults, but for future Florida residents as well. From 2012 to 2025, the number of Floridians ages 25 to 64 are projected to increase by just over 1 million (10.8%) to 11 million. For our state to reach the 60% attainment goal by the year 2025, 6.6 million working-aged Floridians will need to hold a high-quality postsecondary degree or credential, which is 2.8 million more than are currently reflected (see Chart 3).

² The Executive Office of the President, “Increasing College Opportunity for Low-income Students: Proposing Models and a Call to Action,” January 2013, http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/white_house_report_on_increasing_college_opportunity_for_low-income_students_1-16-2014_final.pdf.

The ability to accurately count the number of Floridians with industry-recognized certifications – an ability we do not currently enjoy – would positively impact the state’s attainment rate. The mechanism for estimating the number of residents in Florida with a postsecondary credential, the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, only reflects associate’s degrees or higher. The Florida College Access Network includes high-quality postsecondary certificates in our definition of postsecondary credentials, including industrial certifications and other labor market credentials. This is because research at the state and national levels shows that the postsecondary certificate can provide a step up in the labor force and a pathway to higher levels of education. Indeed, in some cases, postsecondary certificate holders have been shown to earn more than recent graduates with associate’s or bachelor’s degrees in some fields of study.³

Chart 3: Degree Attainment Levels for Floridians Ages 25-64 in 2012 with 2025 Projections



Sources: 2012 population and educational attainment data reflect U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey 1-year Estimates. 2025 population projections done by Florida Bureau of Economic and Business Research, “% with Associate’s Degrees or Higher” in 2025 a calculation by the Florida College Access Network.

The best study to date on state-level certificate attainment was a 2012 report by Georgetown University’s Center on Education and the Workforce, which estimated that 12.5% of Florida workers held a certificate as their highest level of education attained – one of the highest rates in the nation.⁴ Counting such certificates would increase Florida’s degree attainment rate from 38% to 50.5%. However, because this data is not currently available on an annual basis or at the county level, researchers have generally refrained from including it in degree attainment calculations. Another conundrum researchers face is distinguishing certificates that immediately qualify the holder for well-paying employment and those with negligible economic value; for example, the Georgetown study found that only 45% of Florida certificates had economic value beyond a high school diploma. These obstacles will likely change over time, as the U.S. Census has undergone pilot testing to collect data on certificate earners.⁵ Thus, for the time being we do not include certificates in our attainment rate calculations, but look forward to the day when we can.

³ For more data on the workforce outcomes of college graduates in Florida, visit beyondeducation.org or read its accompanying report titled “Higher Education Pays: Measuring the Economic Security of Florida’s Postsecondary Graduates.”

⁴ Carnevale, Anthony P, Stephen J. Rose and Andrew R. Hanson, “Certificates: Gateway to Gainful Employment and College Degrees,” Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2012, <https://cew.georgetown.edu/certificates>.

⁵ Ewert, Stephanie and Robert Kominski, “Measuring Alternative Educational Credentials: 2012,” U.S. Census Bureau, January 2014, <http://www.census.gov/prod/2014pubs/p70-138.pdf>.

Florida Colleges and Universities Increase Degree Production by 26.5% Over Last Five Years

A key indicator in raising our state’s degree attainment rate is degree production, which represents the number of degrees and certificates awarded by Florida colleges and universities.⁶ Recent trends are encouraging, at least up until the last academic year. In the last five years, Florida colleges and universities have awarded 57,902 more certificates, associate’s and bachelor’s degrees, an increase of over 26.5% from 218,859 in 2008-09. That represents an annual growth rate of 5.3%, a very encouraging trend. In a Florida C.A.N.!, brief published in 2010, we estimated that it would take an annual growth rate of 5.7% to reach the 60% goal by 2025. As illustrated in Chart 4, degree production exceeded 5.7% in four of the past five academic years. Driving much of the degree production growth from 2007-08 to 2012-13 is associate’s degrees, thanks to an increase in completions produced by the Florida College System (FCS). FCS institutions represented 19 of the top 20 associate’s degree-producing institutions in the state in 2012.

Chart 4: Degrees Awarded at Florida Postsecondary Institutions: 2007-08 to 2012-13

Academic Year	Bachelor's Degrees	Associate's Degrees	Undergraduate certificates	Total	% Change
2012-13	94,304	100,910	81,547	276,761	1.1%
2011-12	90,979	102,559	80,283	273,821	6.3%
2010-11	85,946	87,068	84,596	257,610	6.6%
2009-10	83,145	79,179	79,447	241,771	10.5%
2008-09	79,946	70,450	68,463	218,859	5.7%

Source: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System

Pasco, Miami-Dade Counties Lead Degree Attainment Increases in Florida Since 2000

As a state, Florida’s 67 counties are quite diverse. They vary significantly in population and other demographic traits such as average age and racial diversity. Florida counties also vary in their levels of educational attainment (see Chart 5). In 2012, degree attainment levels ranged from a high of 54.3% (Alachua) to a low of 12.8% (Hardee) compared to the state average of 38.1%. In fact, 53 of Florida’s 67 counties have attainment rates lower than the state average. However, these 53 counties only represent about half of the state’s working-age population. By comparison, the more populated counties tend also to be the higher educated. For example, there are 20 counties in Florida with degree attainment rates of less than 20%, but together, they comprise only 2.9% of the state’s working-age population.

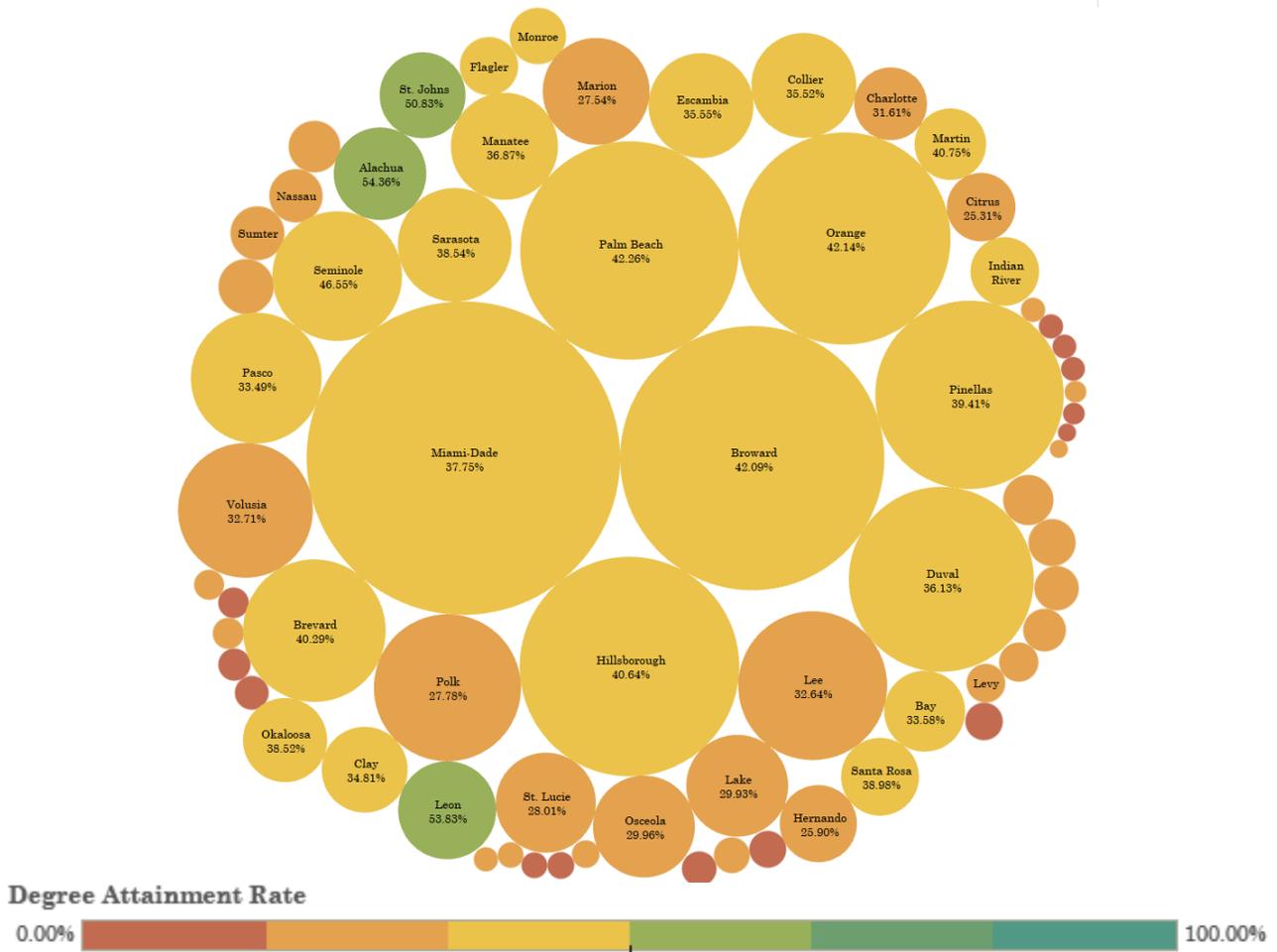
From 2000 to 2010, the state’s degree attainment rate rose 4.1% from 32.4% to 36.5%. The increase during that decade was largely driven by increases in Miami-Dade (up 7.1%), Pasco (up 8.4%), Broward (up 5.4%), Hillsborough (up 5.3%) and Polk (up 5%) counties. Readers of this brief who are interested in taking a closer look at the educational attainment rates in their respective region(s) can refer to the accompanying dashboard to this data brief.⁷

⁶ Graduate or advanced degrees are not included in this table because students receiving these degrees have prior college degrees earned that would count toward the state’s degree attainment rate.

⁷ To view the Florida College Access Network’s Degree Attainment data dashboard, visit this link:

https://public.tableausoftware.com/views/FloridaCollegeAccessNetworkCoreMetrics/DegreeAttainment?:embed=y&:display_count=yes&:showVizHome=no

Chart 5: Degree Attainment Rates in Florida Counties for Adults Ages 25 to 64: 2012



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates. Color shows percent of residents in county with an associate's degree or higher, size shows estimate of 25 to 64 year olds in a county.

Florida Metro Areas at a Tipping Point?

Research shows that the share of workers with high educational attainment is the major source of variation in economic growth among cities.⁸ They not only earn more than lesser educated workers, they are more productive and increase the earnings of other workers in the city, as well. Cities with high proportions of college graduates have also been shown to attract more college graduates. As the trend progresses, it perpetuates a gap between cities that is more difficult to reverse over time. For these reasons, a report released by the LeRoy Collins Institute on Florida's economic potential titled *"Tougher Choices: Shaping Florida's Future,"* emphasizes the urgency for increasing the number of college educated workers in our cities.

As seen in Chart 6, Florida has eight of the top 100 most-populated metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) in the country, but only one ranks in the top 50 in terms of degree attainment. That MSA, Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford, barely made the cut at 49th. Focused and intentional efforts are imperative if we are to significantly boost educational attainment in the state's metro areas to fuel economic development.

⁸ Dewey, James and David Denslow, "Tougher Choices: Shaping Florida's Future," LeRoy Collins Institute, February 2014, <http://collinsinstitute.fsu.edu/sites/collinsinstitute.fsu.edu/files/Tougher%20Choices%20FINAL%202014.pdf>.

Chart 6: Degree Attainment Rates by Florida Metropolitan Statistical Area for Adults Ages 25 to 64: 2012

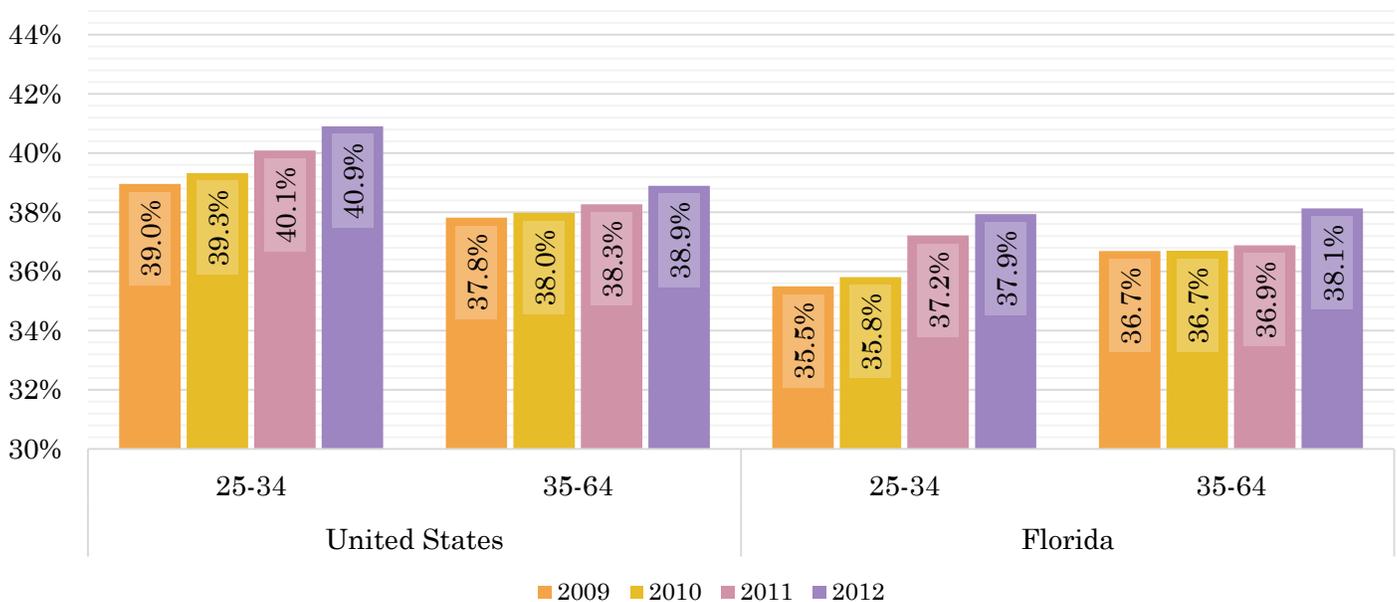
Florida Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA)	Percent with at least an associate degree	Degree Attainment Rank (top 100 U.S. MSAs) ¹	Average Population (2010-12)	Population Rank (top 100 U.S. MSAs) ¹
Orlando-Kissimmee-Sanford	40.1%	49	2,179,420	26
Miami-Ft. Lauderdale-Pompano Beach	39.9%	52	5,677,408	8
Palm Bay-Melbourne-Titusville	39.6%	55	545,202	96
Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater	38.2%	69	2,819,382	18
North Port-Bradenton-Sarasota	37.6%	71	710,883	73
Jacksonville	37.6%	72	1,362,650	41
Cape Coral-Fort Myers	31.8%	91	632,499	85
Lakeland-Winter Haven	27.9%	95	609,775	88

Source: A Stronger Nation through Higher Education, Lumina Foundation. ¹Rankings based on 100 most populous metropolitan regions in the continental U.S.

As Florida Gets Older, Will it Get Wiser?

Much has been said in the media about Florida’s aging population. By 2030, it is predicted that approximately 26% of Floridians will be ages 65 or older.⁹ But as the state grows older, will it become wiser (and more skilled)? According to the Florida Legislature Office of Economic and Demographic Research, between now and 2030, most of the sizable “baby boom” generation will have retired and there will be more vacant jobs than workers to fill them, placing pressure on the state to find qualified workers to keep pace with demand. The ability to create and keep high-skilled jobs in Florida will be constrained without a highly educated supply of workers to fill them.

Chart 7: Degree Attainment Rates by Age Range in Florida and U.S.: 2012

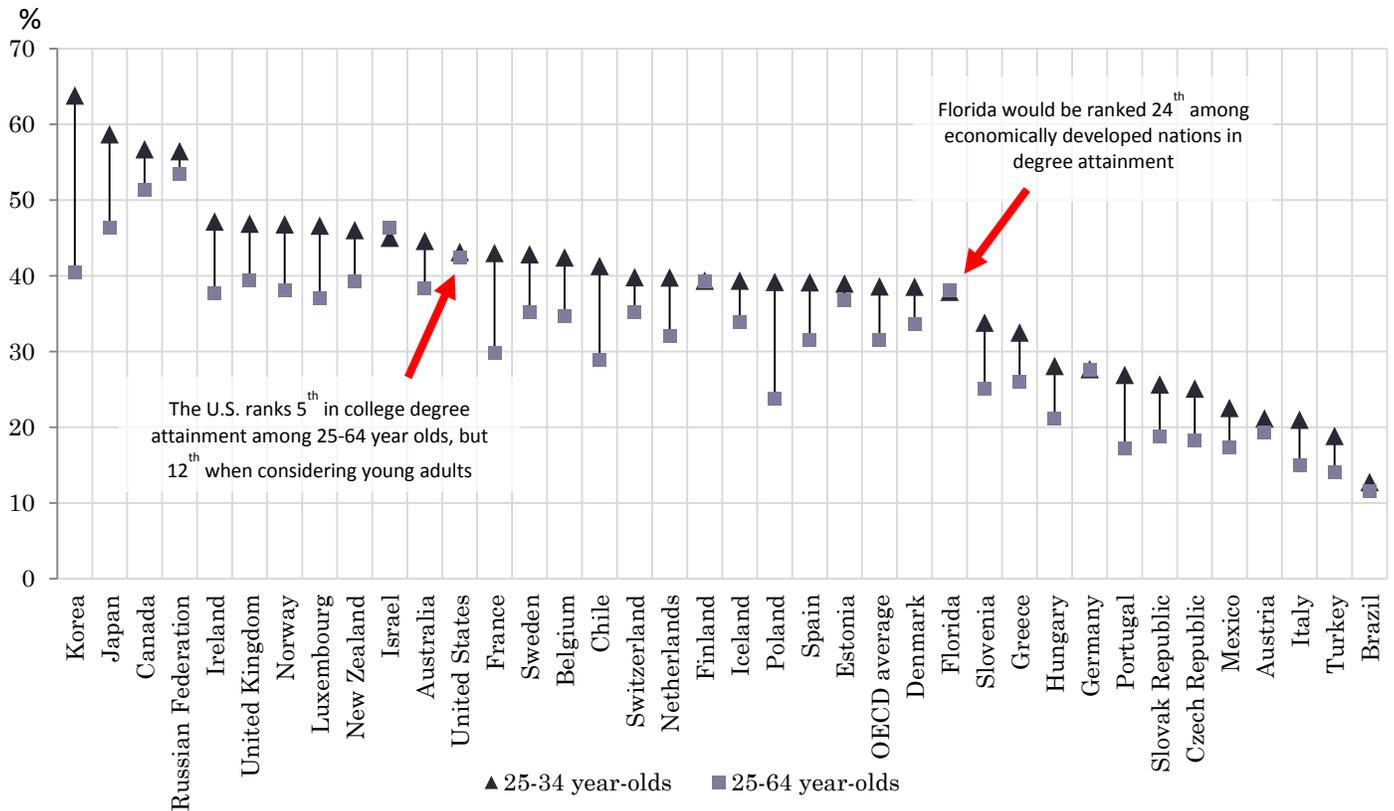


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012 American Community Survey 1-year Estimates

⁹ The Florida Legislature Office of Economic and Demographic Research, “Demographic Overview & Population Trends,” November 2013, http://edr.state.fl.us/Content/presentations/population-demographics/DemographicTrends_11-6-13.pdf.

Chart 7 illustrates recent degree attainment rates of Floridians by age range. Note that 38.1% of Floridians ages 35 to 64 in 2012 had at least an associate’s degree or higher, compared to only 37.9% of younger adults ages 25 to 34. Compare this decreasing trend in education attainment for younger generations to other developed countries, where younger generations have made substantial gains in degree attainment rates. This is why the U.S. now ranks 12th in the world in degree attainment among its young adult population, a fall from 1990 when it ranked 1st. As Florida is projected to become the third most populous state within the next two years, increasing our state’s degree attainment rate would go a long way to help the country as a whole remain globally competitive (see Chart 8).

Chart 8: Degree Attainment Rates for Working-age and Young Adults for Economically Developed Nations and Florida



Source: OECD, Education at a Glance Report

Gender Gap Raises Critical Questions for State

In the year 2000, working-aged adults of both sexes had virtually the same degree attainment rates – 32.6% for men and 32.2% for women. This is no longer the case, as women ages 25 to 64 charged ahead over the past decade to a 40.4% attainment rate in 2012 compared to 35.7% for men (see Chart 9). Women’s advances in degree attainment (up 8.2%) were more than double that of men’s (up 3.1%) from 2000 to 2012. The gap appears to be widening, as well.

Chart 9: Degree Attainment Rates by Sex and Age Range in Florida: 2000 and 2012

	Males			Females			Gender Gap	
	2000	2012	change	2000	2012	change	2000	2012
25 to 34 years:	29.8%	32.5%	2.7%	35.6%	43.4%	7.8%	5.8%	10.9%
35 to 44 years:	31.7%	37.3%	5.6%	34.4%	43.8%	9.4%	2.8%	6.6%
45 to 64 years:	35.0%	36.5%	1.5%	28.9%	37.5%	8.6%	-6.1%	1.0%
25 to 64 years:	32.6%	35.7%	3.1%	32.2%	40.4%	8.2%	-0.4%	4.7%

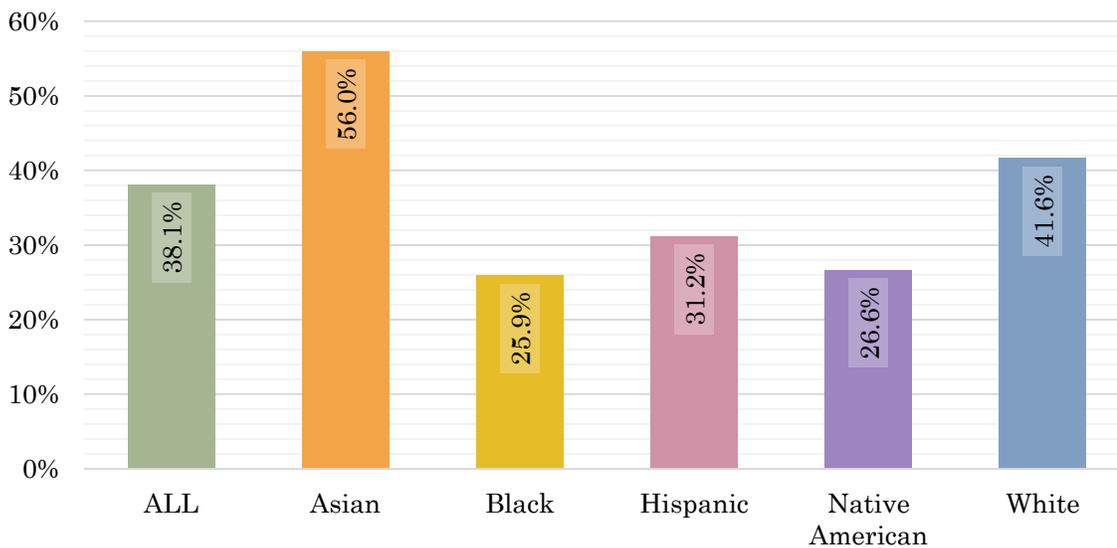
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012 American Community Survey 1-year Estimates

In 2000, males ages 45 to 64 were more educated than their female peers. However, the trend began to reverse for the younger age group, with women ages 25 to 34 and 35 to 44 experiencing higher attainment rates than men. In 2012, this is even more pronounced – young adult women ages 25 to 34 now have degree attainment rates 10.9% higher (43.4%) than their male peers (32.5%). In terms of raw numbers, despite there being 15,935 fewer young adult women than men in Florida in 2012, they held 123,219 more postsecondary degrees. What is the reason for this shift? Why are younger generations of Floridian males not keeping pace on education attainment with their female peers? It turns out that the gender gap is not a phenomenon unique to Florida, as the rest of the country is experiencing the same trend. As described in the College Board’s “Education Pays” report, women have been making gains in degree attainment across all racial and ethnic groups over the last 10 to 15 years.¹⁰ Nationally, men ages 25 to 64 (36.7%) have attainment rates 5.4% lower than women (42.1%), with young men (35.9%) lagging young women (46%) by 10.2%.

Gaps Persist in the Attainment Rates of Racial/Ethnic Minorities

The social and economic benefits to be gained by increasing degree attainment cannot be realized without improving outcomes for all Floridians. In this vein, particular attention must be paid to closing attainment gaps for racial and ethnic minorities, which have increased at slower rates than their White peers over the last three decades.¹¹ As our state grows more diverse over time, making progress in closing these gaps will be critical for future generations of Floridians and the prosperity of the state as a whole.

Chart 10: Degree Attainment Rates (ages 25-64) by Racial/Ethnic Group in Florida: 2012



Source: Lumina Foundation Stronger Nation Report; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010-12 American Community Survey PUMS File. Represents share of working-aged adults with an associate’s degree or higher.

Since 2010, the degree attainment rates of working-aged Floridians by race and ethnicity have changed only marginally. Degree attainment rates rose for Asian (0.6%), White (0.9%), and Black (0.9%) residents of Florida, while rates for Hispanics stayed the same and rates for Native Americans decreased 1%. In 2012, significant attainment gaps among racial and ethnic groups in Florida remain (see Chart 10).

¹⁰ For more historical data on educational attainment rates of racial and ethnic groups by sex, see Figure 2.9 in the College Board’s “Education Pays” report: <http://trends.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/education-pays-2013-full-report.pdf>

¹¹ To see bachelor’s degree attainment rates for Florida adults by racial/ethnic group by county since 1940, view this interactive map created by the Chronicle of Higher Education: <http://chronicle.com/article/Attainment-Interactive/125995/>.

Digging Deeper: A Look at Educational Attainment by Floridians' Place of Birth

Florida is a unique state in that the majority of our residents have migrated from other states or countries. In fact, among residents ages 25 and older, only 20.4% were born in Florida. Almost 80% of Florida adults ages 25 and older come from somewhere else. Over the last 40 years, the vast majority of population growth in Florida has been attributed to net migration, meaning the total number of people who move to Florida is higher than the number of people who move out. Because population growth is a critical component of the state's economy, can the educational attainment of people migrating to Florida inform our state's efforts for reaching Goal 2025?

Chart 11: Place of Birth by Educational Attainment in Florida, 25 Years and Older: 2012

Highest Level of Education Attained (25 years and older)	Population Estimate	Educational Attainment Rate	Population w/ some college or higher	Median Age (total population)	Percent of total adults ages 25+
Total:	13,127,624		56.0%	41.1	100%
Less than high school graduate	1,860,966	14.2%			
High school graduate (includes equiv.)	3,915,878	29.8%			
Some college or associate's degree	3,915,609	29.8%			
Bachelor's degree	2,207,281	16.8%			
Graduate or professional degree	1,227,890	9.4%			
Born in state of residence:	2,673,287		52.6%	20.6	20.4%
Less than high school graduate	375,237	14.0%			
High school graduate (includes equiv.)	891,453	33.4%			
Some college or associate's degree	836,729	31.3%			
Bachelor's degree	388,970	14.6%			
Graduate or professional degree	180,898	6.8%			
Born in other state in the U.S.:	6,850,644		61.2%	53.2	52.2%
Less than high school graduate	631,568	9.2%			
High school graduate (includes equiv.)	2,023,923	29.5%			
Some college or associate's degree	2,206,328	32.2%			
Bachelor's degree	1,259,364	18.4%			
Graduate or professional degree	729,461	10.7%			
Native; born outside the U.S.:	450,883		53.6%	41.1	3.4%
Less than high school graduate	84,364	18.7%			
High school graduate (includes equiv.)	124,697	27.7%			
Some college or associate's degree	137,778	30.6%			
Bachelor's degree	69,244	15.4%			
Graduate or professional degree	34,800	7.7%			
Foreign born:	3,152,810		47.8%	46.8	24.0%
Less than high school graduate	769,797	24.4%			
High school graduate (includes equiv.)	875,805	27.8%			
Some college or associate's degree	734,774	23.3%			
Bachelor's degree	489,703	15.5%			
Graduate or professional degree	282,731	9.0%			

Source U.S. Census Bureau, 2012 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimate. Population estimates and educational attainment rates reflect population 25 years and older. Median age reflects total population.

Chart 11 shows the educational attainment levels of Floridians ages 25 and older by place of birth. The highest share of Florida residents was born in other states, mostly from the Midwest and Northeast regions of the country. This group represents 6.8 million, or 52.2%, of all Florida residents ages 25 and older. Those born in other states also represent the most highly educated group in Florida, with 61.2% having attended college or earned an associate's degree or higher. The second largest group is comprised of Floridians who were born outside of the United States, which describes 24% of adults ages 25 and older. About 75% of

adult Floridians born outside the U.S. are from Latin America and comprise the least educated group by place of birth, with 47.8% having at least some college or higher. Floridians born in state are the smallest group, representing 20.4% of adults over 25 years old, 52.6% of whom have at least some college or higher.

The educational attainment levels of Floridians by place of birth offer an intriguing and insightful perspective on our state's efforts to increase education and skill levels. The Florida population of adults born in other states is propping up the state's degree attainment rate, being the only group exceeding the state average. The Florida Office of Economic and Demographic Research projects that 90% of the state's population growth from now until 2030 will be the result of net migration.¹² Florida's future economic well-being won't just depend on our ability to make improvements to our state's K-20 systems, but also our ability to increase pathways to postsecondary education and training serving those moving here from other states and countries.

Discussion & Recommendations

The intention of this data brief is not to provide the answers, but to inform discussions and highlight the questions that can ultimately result in policies and strategies at the state and local levels to improve education outcomes. Education change has proven over time to be a challenging undertaking, but data can help communities and institutions dig deeper, shine a light on the issues, and discover both gaps and opportunities for improvement.

The talk around globalization and international competitiveness may seem to be overstated by some, but make no mistake about it – Florida is a global state. Florida attracts global business, enrolls throngs of international students at our colleges, and is a global economic competitor. In 2013, the gross domestic product of Florida's economy topped over \$800 billion for the first time, which would place Florida's economy as the 18th largest in the world if it were a country.¹³

There is a strong connection between postsecondary education and economic success, and yet the value of postsecondary education extends beyond economics, for individuals and communities alike. A high-quality college degree or credential is also associated with better health, higher levels of civic engagement, and improved quality of life for people and the communities in which they live.¹⁴

Moving forward, however, connecting individuals to these opportunities will continue to provide challenges to communities, as the portrait of the “college student,” typically viewed as a recent high school graduate living on campus and attending school full time, has changed significantly over the past several years. An increasing number of Florida's students are adults in their 20s and 30s or older, many of whom hold down jobs, support families, attend a wide variety of postsecondary institutions, and represent diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Increasing degree attainment will ultimately require strategies, programs, and policies that take these trends into account.

Based on the data presented in this brief, the Florida College Access Network proposes the following recommendations to increase the percentage of working-age adults who hold a high-quality postsecondary degree or credential to 60% by the year 2025:

1. *Use data effectively to inform state and local policies and strategies.* The data provided in this brief, as well as in the accompanying online dashboard, is a resource to illuminate where room for improvement

¹² The Florida Legislature Office of Economic and Demographic Research, “Florida's Economic Future & the Impact of Aging,” March 2014, http://edr.state.fl.us/Content/presentations/economic/FlEconomicFuture&theImpactofAging_3-17-14.pdf.

¹³ Florida Chamber of Commerce, “Did You Know: Florida's Economy is an \$800 Billion Powerhouse,” June 2014, <http://www.flchamber.com/article/know-floridas-economy-800-billion-powerhouse/>.

¹⁴ Baum, Sandy, Jennifer Man and Kathleen Payea, “Education Pays 2013: The Benefits of Higher Education for Individuals and Society,” The College Board, November 2013 <<http://trends.collegeboard.org/sites/default/files/education-pays-2013-full-report.pdf>>.

exists.¹⁵ Data is too often used in unproductive ways, resulting in hyperbole, finger-pointing and demonstrative expression of “the facts.” Data is essential to our efforts in increasing degree attainment for all Floridians, but it can also lead to unconstructive activities such as inferring causation and oversimplifying issues. The effective way to use data is to expand one’s knowledge, identify gaps, set clear goals, benchmark outcomes, and measure progress and engage in a cycle of inquiry where questions are raised and policy and/or programmatic changes can be made at the student, institutional and state levels so improvements can be realized.¹⁶

2. *Provide incentives to keep more of our graduates in state.* The newly launched website beyondeducation.org and accompanying report “*Higher Education in Florida Pays: Measuring the Economic Security of Florida’s Postsecondary Graduates*” outlines the economic and workforce outcomes of Florida public postsecondary education graduates. In reporting the economic outcomes of graduates, the primary method to compile data utilized a process by which student records and unemployment insurance (UI) wage data are matched. Because UI wage data are only reported for workers within a state, the wages of graduates who work outside Florida cannot be captured.¹⁷ “*Higher Education in Florida Pays*” reports each public college and universities’ “match rate” to indicate which institutions have reportable wages. Therefore, we can infer institutions with low match rates have a high percentage of graduates who leave Florida to work or pursue increased training opportunities.

In general, public universities granting baccalaureate degrees have the lowest match rates relative to all other public institutions, with the University of Florida (UF) (31%) and Florida State University (FSU) (40%) being the lowest. These two institutions awarded over 16,000 bachelor’s degrees combined in 2012-13. Graduates of “flagship” institutions are less likely to be found in a state’s UI system due to moving out of state for work or furthering their educations.¹⁸ Thus, incentivizing more of these highly talented graduates to remain in Florida is a worthwhile undertaking.

3. *Expand our understanding and awareness of Florida’s postsecondary options.* Resources created to better inform college-going decisions such as the White House’s College Scorecard, the Chronicle of Higher Education’s College Reality Check, the College Board’s Big Future and others play an important role in helping students navigate the options that exist in the pursuit of finding the “best fit” with the help of various measures and preferences. According to Florida TalentNet, our state offers over 6,500 postsecondary credentials of over a dozen different types at over 400 colleges, universities and technical centers. These degrees and credentials come from a mix of public, nonprofit, and for profit institutions, vary in cost, and student outcomes vary widely. Though the resources previously mentioned have advanced our capabilities to make better informed college choices, reaching the 60% degree attainment goal by 2025 will depend on our ability to further develop our understanding and leverage all of our state’s postsecondary offerings.
4. *Money matters.* In the current landscape of higher education, the cost of college discourages many from pursuing an education beyond high school and is a significant barrier to completion for many students.

¹⁵ To view the Florida College Access Network’s Degree Attainment data dashboard, visit this link:

https://public.tableausoftware.com/views/FloridaCollegeAccessNetworkCoreMetrics/DegreeAttainment?:embed=y&:display_count=yes&:showVizHome=no.

¹⁶ An exemplary framework for using education data in this manner has been developed by the research partners of the College Readiness Indicator System (CRIS) initiative. To learn more about this model and how it can benefit local efforts, see page 16 of “Essential Elements in Implementation” a guide within the 6-part CRIS Resource Series: <http://annenberginstitute.org/publication/CRIS-resource-series>.

¹⁷ For a full explanation of the wage matching methodology described here, refer to page 1 of the “Higher Education Pays in Florida” report: <http://www.collegemeasures.org/post/2014/01/Higher-Education-Pays.aspx>.

¹⁸ Schneider, Mark, “Measuring the Economic Success of College Graduates: Lessons from the Field,” *American Institutes for Research*, June 2014, http://www.air.org/sites/default/files/downloads/report/Measuring%20the%20Economic%20Success%20of%20College%20Graduates_Mark%20Schneider.pdf.

Efforts to increase degree attainment must address this reality. The adage that college pays is one that can no longer be made without further explanation. Making college-going decisions even more difficult is the fact that the information about college costs and the offerings of financial aid can depend on a student's individual circumstances. Moreover, the financial aid process can be intimidating and disillusioning to many students and families. Floridians now carry over \$61 billion in federal student debt alone, which is not a negative by itself as long as students have the ability to pay their loans.¹⁹

5. *Adults with some credit but no degree.* Our state has increased the share of working-aged adults with an associate's degree or higher from 32.4% to 38.1% from 2000 to 2012, but the percent with some college but no degree has remained roughly the same (22.9% in 2000 compared to 22.3% in 2012). Florida C.A.N.'s analysis in 2012 revealed that over 112,000 students left Florida public institutions after completing half of their program during a three year period. Likewise, U.S. Census Bureau data shows 1.9 million Florida adults ages 25 and older have at least one year of college experience but no degree.²⁰ The good news is that a number of initiatives have emerged to address this issue in the last three years, including Project Win-Win, Credit Where It's Due, Finish Up, Florida and the newly launched Complete Florida initiative. Learning how these programs can benefit students throughout the state, as well as how local efforts may enhance the resources and wrap-around services available to adults, has the potential to add a dynamic approach to making progress in reaching our goal. ■

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.



¹⁹ The Domestic Policy Council & the Council of Economic Advisers, "Taking Action: Higher Education and Student Debt," June 2014, http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/student_debt_report_final.pdf.

²⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, 2012 American Community Survey 1-year Estimates.