



StriveTogether®

Every child. Cradle to career.

Cradle-to-Career Outcomes Playbook: Postsecondary Completion

Postsecondary completion is the true gateway to opportunity. Earning a degree, credential or certification from college, training or apprenticeship programs delivers tangible returns for individuals and communities. Whether through two- or four-year degrees, CTE or industry-recognized certifications, finishing the path one starts is what unlocks economic mobility and long-term stability.

Research shows completion dramatically boosts lifetime earnings and job security. Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce estimates that associate degree holders earn about \$400,000 more over their lifetimes than those with only a high school diploma, while bachelor's degree holders earn \$1.2 million more. Those who start but do

not finish often carry debt without the income gains to repay it. Completion also improves job stability and access to benefits such as health insurance, retirement savings and paid leave — key ingredients for economic resilience.

For students from low-income households, first-generation college-goers and Black and Latine communities, completion can be transformative. It's linked to upward mobility, better health and life satisfaction and even greater civic engagement. In short, enrollment opens the door, but completion is what propels learners forward — turning a training program into a paycheck, a classroom into a career and potential into lasting opportunity.

>>>>>> What does Postsecondary Completion mean?

Postsecondary completion refers to students successfully earning a degree, certificate or credential — marking the culmination of their educational pathway and preparation for the workforce. It is measured by the number of certificates, associate, bachelor's and graduate degrees awarded annually across the state's postsecondary system, as well as the rate at which students complete these programs within a set timeframe. These metrics are disaggregated by key factors such as race/ethnicity, gender, income (Pell Grant status), age, attendance status, transfer status and discipline to ensure a clear

understanding of who is completing programs and where gaps persist.

Completion also encompasses how efficiently students reach the finish line — tracking average time and credits to degree, as well as transfer rates from two-year to four-year institutions. Together, these measures provide a comprehensive picture of how well a state's postsecondary system supports all learners, including adults, part-time and first-generation students, in earning credentials that lead to meaningful economic and career outcomes.

>>>>>>> How to use the StriveTogether Outcomes Playbook: Postsecondary Completion

Mathematica's Education-to-Workforce Framework is the inspiration behind the Postsecondary Completion Playbook's organization and content. The playbook provides research-based guidance to help community leaders:

- Identify priorities
- Track key indicators to measure community-level progress
- Design strategies with stakeholders
- Build collective support for investments in postsecondary completion



>>>>>>> Essential Questions for Postsecondary Completion

The playbook addresses 14 essential questions to guide planning, offering actionable practices, policies and indicators for tracking progress. The essential questions are grouped into five focus areas:

Postsecondary Completion

1. To what extent are students completing their chosen postsecondary pathway, earning degrees and/or credentials of value?
2. Are students completing credentials of value after high school that set them up for success in the workforce?
3. Are students attending institutions with well-designed programs that help them efficiently move towards degree completion?

Postsecondary persistence

4. Are students experiencing sufficient early momentum in postsecondary education to be on track for on-time completion?
5. Do students have access to adequate support to enable them to succeed academically and in the workforce?
6. Are students attending institutions (either 2-year colleges, 4-year colleges or career training) offering quality pathways that lead to employment in quality jobs?
7. Do students attend postsecondary institutions that provide adequate financial aid and that are adequately funded to offer a quality educational experience?

Support networks that build social capital

8. Do students have strong, supportive relationships with professors, mentors and other influential adults?
9. Do students have access to paid, relevant internships, work-study programs, apprenticeship programs or other work-based learning opportunities?
10. Do students have effective, representative college and work-based learning educators?

Experiences and neighborhood conditions

11. Do families live in well-resourced neighborhoods?
12. Do families with children have access to public support (i.e., health care access, nutrition programs, economic support, etc.)?

Positive, supportive environments

13. Do students attend postsecondary institutions and programs with safe and inclusive environments?
14. Do students attend postsecondary institutions that prioritize their social, emotional and physical development and well-being?