



# HIGHER EDUCATION MATTERS 2022-2030

A Statewide Strategic Agenda for Kentucky  
Postsecondary Education



## From the CPE President

In accordance with Kentucky Revised Statute 164.020, we are pleased to present “Higher Education Matters: A Statewide Strategic Agenda for Kentucky Postsecondary Education, 2022-2030.”

This agenda advances a bold vision for increased economic growth and vitality in the Commonwealth through improvements in the education and skill levels of our workforce. It establishes strategic priorities to drive higher education innovation and improvement, and key performance indicators to monitor progress toward an ambitious educational attainment goal – for 60% of working-age Kentuckians to have a high-quality postsecondary credential by the year 2030.

The previous iteration of this agenda, “Stronger by Degrees,” promoted high-impact practices that enabled us to reimagine developmental education and infuse workplace essential skills into select degree programs. “Higher Education Matters” will accelerate the adoption of high-impact practices that further improve teaching and learning, ensure the quality and relevancy of postsecondary credentials, and invite non-traditional and historically excluded individuals onto our campuses in greater numbers.

A critical focus of “Higher Education Matters” is creating equitable higher education opportunities for low-income Kentuckians and underrepresented people of color. The COVID-19 pandemic reminded us how easily academic momentum can be stalled by unemployment,

poor physical or mental health, food and housing insecurity and the lack of reliable broadband access. We must ensure that at-risk students are provided access to life-changing postsecondary credentials, as well as the academic, social and emotional supports to succeed. Doing so is both an economic and moral imperative.

As Kentucky recovers from the global pandemic, we will continue to deal with its aftereffects. This strategic agenda provides a framework that is fixed enough to provide focus and stability, while flexible enough to respond to future crises.

This plan was not created in a vacuum. It relies on the contributions of countless constituencies and committees. I would be remiss if I did not thank the hundreds of individuals -- including CPE board members, higher education leaders, faculty members, students, K-12 educators, legislators, employers and partners -- that provided valuable insight and direction throughout the development process.

This agenda is not CPE’s strategic plan; it belongs to each and every one of us. Kentucky will rise or fall based on our collective, united efforts to enable all citizens to reach their highest potential. We have a lot of ground to cover, but together we can navigate the path toward a more equitable and prosperous Commonwealth.

# Kentucky's Public Postsecondary System

## Vision

Kentucky will be a national leader in building a strong, sustainable and equitable economy through increased educational attainment and affordable, high-quality postsecondary programs.

## Mission

Kentucky's postsecondary education system drives innovation, enhances public health and well-being, breaks cycles of generational poverty and improves quality of life by preparing students to be lifelong learners and excel in a diverse, knowledge-based economy.

## Values

Inclusion, equity and diversity  
Transparency and accountability  
Institutional collaboration  
Comprehensive student support

Business and community partnerships  
Quality and excellence  
Affordability and accessibility  
Innovation

# Higher Education Matters

*Higher education strengthens the economy, creates wealth, reduces inequality, breaks cycles of generational poverty, improves health and well-being and preserves democracy.*

This strategic agenda for Kentucky postsecondary education is built on a simple, enduring premise: higher education matters to our state and its people.

Higher education empowers individuals to reach their highest potential and achieve personal and professional fulfillment. It improves collective health and well-being through a steadfast commitment to public service. It advances knowledge and discovery, ignites innovation and fuels our economy.

Research studies enumerate its benefits to individuals and society. On average, college graduates earn more money, have lower rates of unemployment, enjoy better health, live longer and are more active citizens and volunteers. States with high levels of educational attainment -- like DC, Massachusetts, and Colorado -- generate higher tax revenues, create more jobs and spend fewer resources on public assistance, disease, addiction and incarceration.

Despite these findings, the value of college is now a matter of debate. Media stories portray recent college graduates as underemployed and overburdened with debt. Editorials encourage young people to forgo college and learn a trade. (Ironically, most of these trades now require some postsecondary education).

These voices have undermined the public's faith in higher education, at a time when a college credential is more important than ever. Since America's Great Recession, 99% of all new jobs created require some level of postsecondary education and training, but less than half of

Americans between the ages of 25-34 have the necessary credentials to fill these jobs.

We must restore the value proposition to higher education. Kentucky's future prosperity and quality of life depend on it.

This agenda is Kentucky's plan to create a more inclusive, innovative higher education system that serves students of all ages, backgrounds and beliefs. It reaffirms our goal for 60% of Kentucky adults to have a postsecondary credential by the year 2030, and builds on unprecedented gains in degree production over the last decade.

It responds to the suggestions and concerns of hundreds of Kentuckians -- higher education faculty and administrators, K-12 educators, board members, legislators, employers and others -- who worked with us on its development. Based on trend analysis, research and stakeholder feedback, this agenda identifies the strategic priorities that will focus our efforts over the next decade, with equity as a cross-cutting priority. They are affordability, transitions, success, talent and value.

This agenda includes common objectives that will guide system-wide progress. The statewide strategies included in this document will be led by CPE, in conjunction with its partners. Public institutions will develop campus-level strategies that respond to each objective. All strategies will be reviewed and revised every three years.

CPE and campuses will set numeric targets for Key Performance Indicators, which also will be updated on a three-year cycle. Additional contextual metrics will help us monitor progress and adjust strategies as needed, but targets will not set for these metrics.

Kentucky's higher education institutions will pursue these objectives, strategies and targets as a system, united by common challenges and enhanced by individual strengths.



## Kentucky's 60 X 30 Goal: Our North Star

*Kentucky will increase the percentage of its adult population with a high-quality postsecondary credential to 60% by the year 2030.*

In ancient times, sailors used the North Star as a navigational guide due to its fixed position in the sky. Today, the North Star has come to symbolize any guiding principle or purpose. During prosperity or adversity, it is a steadfast point on which we set our sights.

For Kentucky's postsecondary system, the 60x30 goal is our North Star. The previous strategic agenda, "Stronger by Degrees," established this statewide educational attainment goal back in 2016. With its adoption, Kentucky joined 45 other states and the Lumina Foundation in efforts to raise the education and skill levels of our workforce to meet current and future demands for talent.

Since 2009, Kentucky has made phenomenal progress toward the goal, increasing educational attainment by 18.9 percentage points, outpacing a 10-point national gain. Only two other states, Arizona and Louisiana, made more progress than Kentucky during this timeframe. At 49.4%, Kentucky's attainment rate is fast approaching the national average of 51.9%.

Much of this progress is due to increases in short-term credentials, which include certificates and industry certifications. The state's current short-term credential attainment rate is 13.3%, of which 9.2% are certificates and 4.1% are industry certifications. Since 2014-15, short-term credentials awarded by KCTCS (unduplicated count) have risen 53% (not including diplomas).

However, Kentucky is facing some strong headwinds in the decade to come, which threaten to blow us off course. These include:

- **A declining number of high school graduates.** In its report, "Knocking at the College Door," the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education projects that the number of high school graduates in Kentucky will peak during the year 2025 at 52,120. By 2030, that number will fall to 44,508, a 14.6% decline. Combined with declines in the college-going rate of high school graduates over the last decade, this decrease almost certainly will result in lower postsecondary enrollments, unless institutions focus on enrolling more working-age adults and out-of-state students.
- **Falling adult enrollments.** Unfortunately, postsecondary enrollment among adults between the ages of 25-64 has decreased 17.6% since 2011-12. The good news is that after reaching a low of 77,456 in 2015-16, that number has been rebounding, although most of this growth is at the graduate level. Kentucky will need aggressive recruitment efforts focused on adults pursuing their first postsecondary credential in the decade ahead.
- **Unequal rates of attainment.** There are significant disparities in educational attainment linked to race and ethnicity that must be addressed, especially since the state's population is growing more diverse. The educational attainment rate is 28.6% for Black Kentuckians and 26.7 for Hispanic/Latinx Kentuckians, compared to 36.1% for White Kentuckians. These gaps must be closed.

In the decade ahead, CPE will provide more detailed projections to monitor progress toward the 60% attainment goal, including annual average increases needed in statewide degree production.

# STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Building on previous agendas, “Higher Education Matters” is a blueprint for accelerating change and improvement in Kentucky’s public postsecondary system. The strategic priorities identified in this plan represent our primary issues and top concerns as we face head-on the demographic, economic and technological forces reshaping higher education in Kentucky.



## Focus on Equity: Cross-Cutting Priority

*Kentucky will ensure all students have equitable access to higher education and the necessary tools to complete their programs prepared for life and work.*

Since its founding, America has been known as a land of opportunity, where hard work and perseverance lead to prosperity. Yet, in reality, our nation has not provided a level playing field for all of its citizens.

Inequities in Kentucky's educational systems have exacerbated disparities in employment, income, and health. These opportunity gaps prevent all Kentuckians from reaching their full potential.

The educational attainment rates of Kentuckians historically underrepresented in postsecondary institutions trail White Kentuckians by a considerable margin. While 36.1% of White Kentuckians (ages 25-64) have a college degree, only 28.6% of Black, 26.7% of Hispanic/Latinx and 25.4% of Native Americans/Alaskan Natives do.

Demographers predict that the United States will become a minority majority nation by the year 2045. Currently, 87.5% of Kentucky residents identify as White, but by 2040, that percentage is projected to fall to 77%. Kentucky's ability to meet our 60 x 30 attainment goal hinges on our ability to enroll and graduate a more diverse student body, requiring us to create more inclusive, welcoming and supportive educational spaces.

To address this challenge, the Council on Postsecondary Education has adopted one of the most comprehensive diversity, equity and

inclusion policies in the nation. The policy requires campuses to propose actions to increase minority enrollment, retention and completion, as well as improving cultural competence among members of the campus community. Campuses set targets annually, and failure to reach quantitative and qualitative goals limits their ability to offer new academic programs.

Additionally, the state's performance funding model places a premium on degrees awarded to underrepresented minority and low-income students. Since its adoption, Kentucky has made significant headway in closing opportunity gaps, but more improvement is needed.

Kentucky will no longer accept an educational system that produces inequitable results for individuals of similar talents, aspirations and abilities. Because of the urgency of this challenge, equity has been identified as a cross-cutting priority of this agenda. There are no specific statewide objectives and strategies proposed for equity, because equity is a critical component of every other strategic priority.

As we implement the statewide strategies set forth in this agenda, each action will be examined through an equity lens. For every key performance indicator, we will disaggregate results to ensure improvement rates are equitable among targeted student populations.

Through an unwavering focus on diversity, equity and inclusion, Kentucky's postsecondary system will work to ensure that income, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or geography is never a barrier to college success.

## Affordability

*Kentucky will ensure postsecondary education is affordable for all Kentuckians.*

Over the last two decades, federal and state disinvestment in public higher education has shifted the majority of college costs to students and their families. In 2000, Kentucky subsidized 66% of operational costs for public postsecondary institutions, with tuition and fees covering the remaining 34%. By 2020, the state's share of funding was down to 32%, with 68% borne by students.

Consequently, increases in college costs have become a serious burden for many Kentucky families. While the cost of living has steadily increased, real wages have remained flat. Declining amounts of college savings mean student borrowing is at an all-time high. Student loans now comprise the largest chunk of U.S. non-housing debt, more than credit cards or auto loans.<sup>1</sup>

At a time when postsecondary education and training is essential to long-term economic security, college is becoming financially inaccessible to our most vulnerable populations. If left unchecked, declines in college access will lead to greater income inequality, making it difficult for everyday Kentuckians to get ahead.

In a national survey conducted by the Citizens Financial Group, 70% of current college students said worries about college affordability had a moderate to high impact on their enrollment plans for the fall 2021 semester.

Responding to rising concerns from students, parents and elected officials, CPE elevated college affordability to one of six strategic priorities Kentucky's public postsecondary system will pursue over the next eight years.

To this end, the state's higher education system will build on the success achieved over the last decade to increase college access and affordability.

We will work with elected leaders to increase state funding for postsecondary education and student financial aid, so rising costs are not passed on to students.

We will work to limit increases in tuition and fees, while exploring collaborative purchasing agreements and efficiency measures to keep ancillary costs in check.

We will work in partnership with P-12 educators, advisors, counselors and other stakeholders to help incoming students understand the complexities of college pricing, and the role of grants, scholarships and responsible borrowing in managing costs. The published cost of attendance stops many students and families in their tracks. Providing greater transparency around out-of-pocket costs will ensure sticker shock does not prevent students from applying.

We also will focus on decreasing the time it takes to earn a credential, since additional semesters mean additional cost. Early postsecondary opportunities and improved advising are strategies that can help students graduate on time.

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<sup>1</sup> (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/camilomaldonado/2018/07/24/price-of-college-increasing-almost-8-times-faster-than-wages/?sh=77da242f66c1>)



# Affordability

## Objective 1: Reduce financial barriers to college enrollment and completion.

### State-level Strategies:

- 1a. Work with campuses, stakeholders and other state leaders to increase access to grants and scholarships for low- and middle-income students.
- 1b. Moderate increases in tuition and mandatory fees at Kentucky's public colleges and universities.
- 1c. Increase opportunities for institutional collaboration to reduce campus expenditures and limit increases in college costs.

## Objective 2: Improve the public's understanding of how to pay for college.

### State-level Strategies:

- 2a. Provide informational resources and advising strategies for counselors, teachers and community partners on paying for college.
- 2b. Coordinate and support efforts to increase the number of Kentuckians who complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).
- 2c. Establish state-level networks for high school counselors and other college access professionals to share effective practices, build expertise and develop common outreach and messaging for Kentucky students.

## Key Performance Indicators:

### Unmet Financial Need (State & Campus-Level)

A student's average unmet financial need by academic year. Unmet financial need is defined as the cost of attendance minus the sum of expected family contribution and all federal, state and local government, or institutionally funded scholarships or grants received by students.

### Time to Degree (State & Campus-Level)

Total number of academic years enrolled before credential completion.

### FAFSA Completion (State-Level)

Percent of recent high school graduates who matriculated to a Kentucky public postsecondary institution and completed a FAFSA application.

## Transitions

### *Kentucky will ensure more students successfully transition to college prepared to succeed.*

Over the decade, the U.S. saw little movement in the percentage of high school seniors enrolling directly in postsecondary programs, which remained around 66%.<sup>2</sup> Kentucky, on the other hand, experienced a steep decline in its in-state college-going rate, falling from 55% in 2014 to 50.5% in 2019.

As we approach 2022, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to disrupt the postsecondary plans of thousands of Kentuckians. Some are delaying college to help make ends meet, or to care for parents or relatives who are ill. For many rural and low-income students, a lack of reliable broadband access made it difficult to remain engaged in remote learning. For these individuals, the financial, physical and emotional toll of COVID will linger long after the virus recedes.

While these circumstances are beyond our control, there are actions higher education can take to provide extra guidance to students. We can remove tripwires that cause individuals to stumble on the path to college, particularly if they are first-generation or historically underserved by postsecondary institutions. We can simplify complicated admission processes, for instance, and help demystify financial aid applications like the FAFSA.

The rise of early college experiences in high school show tremendous promise. Dual credit and enrollment, Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB) and similar programs allow students to earn college credit while still in high school, giving them a jump-start on postsecondary education. The challenge is to expand access to students of varying socioeconomic backgrounds and ability levels, and ensure credits count toward degree requirements and not just as electives.

It is unrealistic to expect high school guidance counselors to help every student navigate the maze of college admission requirements and decisions. With its partners, Kentucky's postsecondary system will work to expand dedicated college coaches and advisors to every school district in the Commonwealth, and create resources that walk students and their parents step-by-step through the planning and application process.

Colleges and universities must do their part to enroll and retain students through those critical first months. We will work to increase the recruitment of individuals historically excluded or underrepresented in higher education, including working-age adults balancing careers and families. We will streamline and digitize admission processes and materials to the greatest extent possible. Predictive analytics can help pinpoint at-risk students and better target intervention strategies.

Such actions will go a long way toward creating smoother educational transitions, from cradle to career.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cpa>

# Transitions

## Objective 3: Increase students' readiness to enter postsecondary education.

### State-level Strategies:

- 3a. Expand access to high-quality early postsecondary opportunities.
- 3b. Develop digital resources to help students explore career interests and college options.
- 3c. Partner with public K-12 schools and postsecondary institutions to provide outreach to students to help them prepare and plan for college.

## Objective 4: Increase enrollment in postsecondary education.

### State-level Strategies:

- 4a. Enhance college recruitment strategies through partnerships with postsecondary institutions and other stakeholders, with attention to underrepresented minority, adult and low-income students.
- 4b. Work with education providers to streamline and simplify postsecondary admission processes.

## Key Performance Indicators:

### Undergraduate Enrollment (State & Campus-Level)

Total unduplicated number of students enrolled in undergraduate, postsecondary programs.

### College-Going Rate (State-Level)

Percent of recent Kentucky high school graduates who attend any in-state or out-of-state postsecondary institution in the summer, fall or spring after high school graduation.

## Success

### ***Kentucky will ensure more students earn high-quality degrees and credentials.***

Kentucky's colleges and universities made impressive gains in retention and completion over the last decade. The six-year graduation rate rose from 47.6% to 56.4% at public universities, while the three-year graduation rate at KCTCS jumped 13.3 points to 33%.

However, while institutions are narrowing completion gaps at a historic pace, more progress is needed to close them. The six-year graduation rate of Black, Latinx, indigenous and mixed race students currently stands at 44%, and the three-year rate is 24.3%.

Increasing degree production for *everyone* is an overriding concern of this agenda, but we are not prioritizing quantity over quality. High-quality credentials equip students to thrive in a rapidly evolving world that demands critical thinking, ingenuity, flexibility and teamwork. From certificates to doctorates, we must ensure students master the content, skills and mindsets necessary for future success and fulfillment. The challenge is producing quality credentials at a pace commensurate with our overarching attainment goal.

In the years ahead, Kentucky higher education will double down on the widespread adoption of high-impact practices that research has proven to be effective. As we begin this agenda, CPE is launching the Kentucky Student Success Collaborative, a one-of-a-kind center dedicated to the advancement of innovative strategies and best practices. This entity will increase our

capacity to engage and unite campuses in more sustained, comprehensive improvement efforts.

We will continue to improve transfer from two-year to four-year institutions by helping students and practitioners understand how credits apply to specific degree programs across the state. We will promote credit for prior learning and accelerated programs to make our institutions friendlier for working-age adults, an underserved market that is critical to creating a more competitive workforce and reaching our 60x30 goal.

Just as technology is revolutionizing the way we work, it is transforming teaching and learning. Digital classrooms, global online collaborations, and personalized learning software are only the beginning. Combined with face-to-face instruction, technology can accelerate and deepen learning in profound ways. But we cannot harness this powerful tool if educators lack training and resources, or if broadband access is not universally accessible and affordable.

Finally, we intend to make internships, apprenticeships, service and other forms of work-based learning a mandatory curricular experience. Students should be able to connect classroom learning to the world of work, and articulate these connections to employers. More robust employer partnerships will increase the relevance and responsiveness of academic programs, and ensure students are able to secure meaningful employment in their field of study.

# Success

## Objective 5: Increase persistence in and timely completion of postsecondary programs.

### State-level Strategies:

- 5a. Share, implement and evaluate emerging, promising and proven practices supporting student success and college completion.
- 5b. Identify and promote efforts to ensure “on-time” program completion.
- 5c. Work with campuses and other state and national partners to close opportunity and success gaps for historically underserved students of color and students from low-income backgrounds.
- 5d. Work with education providers to limit barriers to enrollment and completion for adult learners and other students balancing the competing demands of work, life, family and school.

## Objective 6: Maximize transfer of academic and experiential credit.

### State-level Strategies:

- 6a. Work with campuses to reduce barriers that prevent the seamless transfer of credit.
- 6b. Promote transfer opportunities and program pathways.

## Objective 7: Ensure academic offerings are high-quality, relevant and inclusive.

### State-level Strategies:

- 7a. Work with campuses to ensure the essential competencies and outcomes outlined in the Kentucky Graduate Profile are embedded in all academic programs.
- 7b. Work with campuses to ensure academic and co-curricular offerings are equity-focused and inclusive.

## Key Performance Indicators:

### Undergraduate Degrees Conferred (State & Campus-Level)

Total number of degrees and credentials awarded by public universities and KCTCS institutions.

### Graduation Rate (State & Campus-Level)

The percent of first-time, full-time undergraduate credential-seeking students who receive a bachelor's degree within six years at public universities, or an associate degree or credential within three years from their KCTCS institution of entry.



### **KCTCS to Four-Year Transfer (Campus-Level)**

Percent of first-time, full-time, associate or credential seeking students entering in the fall semester who transfer to any four-year public postsecondary institution in Kentucky within three years of entry.

### **Second-Year Persistence (State-Level)**

Percent of first-time, degree- or credential-seeking students enrolled in the previous summer or fall who are still enrolled the following fall at any postsecondary institution in Kentucky or, in the case of KCTCS students, have successfully completed a postsecondary credential.

### **First-Year to Second-Year Retention (Campus-Level)**

Percent of first-time, degree or credential-seeking students enrolled in the summer or fall who return to the same institution to continue their studies the following fall.

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## Talent

### ***Kentucky will increase talent and innovation to support our communities, employers and economy.***

A primary purpose of postsecondary education is to produce adaptive, highly skilled workers to fuel the economy. In the recent past, a high school education was sufficient to secure gainful employment capable of supporting a family. However, automation and outsourcing are rendering these jobs obsolete. Two out of three high-wage jobs created in the U.S. since 2008 demand postsecondary experience.

A 2021 report by the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce estimates that the state has 90,000 to 100,000 job openings in any given month, and 65% to 85% of these vacancies require training, credentialing or degrees beyond high school. Data from the Chamber's Talent Pipeline Management (TPM) program show that only 30% of the state's jobs require a high school diploma or less, corroborating this finding.

At 56.3%, Kentucky currently has one of the lowest workforce participation rates in the nation. Poor health, substance use disorders and childcare shortages are partly to blame, but the lack of requisite skills and credentials is a large and growing part of the problem.

Kentucky must expand postsecondary access to undereducated, working-age adults to fill critical work shortages in healthcare, STEM fields, early childhood development and other high-demand areas. Work-based education opportunities,

tuition assistance and public-private partnerships like UPS's Metropolitan College can put adults to work while they gain valuable credentials that move them up the career ladder.

Endless debates pitting technical training against liberal arts education miss the larger point: today's graduates need both. We must ensure liberal arts graduates gain technical and vocational proficiencies, just as community and technical college graduates gain exposure to the humanities and liberal arts.

CPE's recent partnership with the Quality Assurance Commons put essential employability skills front and center. We will capitalize on this momentum by incorporating and evaluating essential employability skills throughout all postsecondary programs and credentials.

Besides talent production, higher education institutions drive economic development through basic and applied research. Innovations originating in laboratories are driven to the marketplace, spawning new companies and creating products and processes that improve our lives. This agenda will focus on strategies to ensure these efforts are aligned with the state's emerging and existing industries.

Finally, Kentucky's postsecondary system will continue its mission of regional stewardship by working with community partners to exchange knowledge and expertise for the mutual benefit of the Commonwealth.

# Talent

## Objective 8: Improve the career outcomes of postsecondary graduates.

### State-level Strategies:

- 8a. Work with campuses to include a work-based learning or other career-relevant experience in all undergraduate programs.
- 8b. Work with colleges and universities to strengthen campus-based career advising and development.
- 8c. Facilitate meaningful partnerships between employers, community partners and education providers to improve the career outcomes of postsecondary programs.

## Objective 9: Increase research and service to support strong communities and economies.

### State-level Strategies:

- 9a. Identify high-growth, high-demand and high-wage industries by region, and target postsecondary programs for increased enrollment in those areas.
- 9b. Encourage targeted research, the development of signature academic programs and expanded community engagement supporting Kentucky's high-need, priority areas.

## Key Performance Indicators:

### Graduates Working or Pursuing More Education (State-Level)

Percent of certificate, associate and bachelor's degree graduates working in Kentucky or pursuing additional education one year after graduation.

### Graduate/Professional Enrollment (State & Campus-Level)

Number and percent of bachelor's recipients enrolling in graduate/professional programs at any Kentucky postsecondary institution within one year of completion.

### Graduate/Professional Degrees State & Campus-Level)

Total number of graduate/professional degrees awarded in an academic year.

### Educational Attainment (State-Level)

Percent of Kentuckians age 25-64 with a postsecondary credential (certificate or higher).

## Value

***Kentucky will improve public understanding that postsecondary education is key to greater opportunity and economic growth.***

Even before the pandemic, Americans were questioning the value of higher education. The extent of this skepticism varies according to socioeconomic status, political party affiliation, geographic region and other factors.

A 2021 survey asked adults whether college was definitely or probably still worth it. Overall, only 27% of respondents believed college was definitely worth it; another 33% said it probably was. While only half of low-income respondents said college was worth it, three-quarters of wealthy Americans did. Democrats expressed the strongest belief in college's worth (70%), followed by Republicans (53%) and Independents (52%).

Negative beliefs about the value of college, however widespread, are based more on feeling than fact. College's return on investment in strict financial terms depends on how much you paid for your degree and the marketability of your chosen field. Some students reap greater financial rewards than others. But to promote the belief that college is no longer a wise investment is a grave disservice to parents and students everywhere. While a postsecondary credential does not guarantee economic security, the lack of a credential most certainly limits earning potential and perpetuates poverty in our communities.

In September 2021, CPE released a study showing that among Kentucky's high school class of 2011, postsecondary graduates were earning substantially more money than high school graduates by 2019, despite fewer years of full-time work. The typical community college or university graduate recouped their higher

education investment in about three to five years, depending on the credential earned. Over the course of a 30-year career, bachelor's degree graduates in Kentucky make \$1 million more than high school graduates, while those with associate degrees make nearly half a million more.

Although anecdotes about college loan debt regularly feature students owing upwards of \$100,000 or more, the average bachelor's degree graduate in Kentucky borrows between \$25,000 and \$33,000 for their degree. About half of public college and university undergraduates graduate with no student loan debt.

The Council on Postsecondary Education will launch a statewide communications and public awareness campaign to counteract negative messages about the value of college. We will educate individual students about the benefits of a college credential, and inform policy makers about how higher education increases tax revenue, decreases unemployment and entitlement program expenditures, improves health outcomes and produces a myriad of benefits that can't easily be quantified, like increased volunteerism and voting.

Part of this effort is helping Kentuckians understand that college is not only a four-year, residential undergraduate degree. While that experience may not be for everyone, there are a multitude of college options in our state, many technical in nature, that allow students to pursue careers in the skilled trades, from short-term certificates to applied associate degrees.

It is our hope that increasing higher education's value proposition will lead to greater investment from both our General Assembly and the private sector. More profoundly, it will restore our belief in higher education's ability to put Americans on a path to future prosperity and fulfillment.

## Value

### Objective 10: Increase public belief in the power of postsecondary education.

#### State-level Strategies:

- 10a. Conduct a public awareness campaign and develop communications strategies to promote college going and elevate the importance of higher education to Kentucky's residents and economy.

### Objective 11: Build support for greater investment in postsecondary education.

#### State-level Strategies:

- 11a. Communicate higher education's return on investment and the need for increased state and federal support.
- 11b. Seek funding from foundations and other external sources to support Strategic Agenda priorities.

### Key Performance Indicators:

#### State General Fund Appropriations (State-Level)

Percent change in net general fund appropriations for full-time equivalent students, excluding state financial aid or state monies for debt service.