

Four Years and 12 Percentage Points to Go

As the value of higher education is questioned, the clock is ticking for Indiana to meet 2025 goal

By Indiana Commissioner for Higher Education Teresa Lubbers

It's been over a year since the Indiana Commission for Higher Education released its fourth strategic plan, [Reaching Higher in a State of Change](#). At the time, we truly did not anticipate how applicable the title would be as the COVID-19 pandemic made lasting impacts on Indiana's economy and postsecondary education system.

As we approach Indiana's 2025 goal – that at least 60 percent of Hoosiers have education and training beyond high school – the Commission has released its [first annual report card](#) to track progress toward fulfilling the plan's key metrics and action items. Currently, the state's attainment rate is at 48.3 percent, meaning we have less than four years left to close an 11.7 percentage point gap.

What does this goal mean for Indiana? Educational attainment is directly tied to Indiana's future workforce needs. Two million Hoosiers need additional training to compete in the 21st Century workforce, and there will be over 1 million job openings in Indiana due to retirements and the creation of new jobs by 2025. A strong talent pipeline must be in place for Indiana to remain economically competitive.

The nation shares our 60 percent educational attainment goal and is 8.1 percentage points away from reaching it. I encourage you to dig into Lumina Foundation's [Stronger Nation tool](#) to join us in tracking Indiana's progress toward achieving its 2025 goal. Users can explore Lumina's data to see how Indiana, its metro areas and counties are doing, with breakdowns for degree attainment by race, ethnicity and age.

However, there has been a significant decline in the state's college-going rate – down six percentage points in five years. In fact, it's at the lowest point in more than 10 years, and we anticipate seeing an additional decline with the most recent graduating class. The data isn't limited to those students attending four-year institutions. It also includes students enrolled in certificate programs and two-year institutions.

Indiana isn't alone. The [National Student Clearinghouse Research Center](#) shows a nationwide one-year decline of 3.5 percent in college-going rates.

If Indiana's college-going rate continues to decline, and if we don't improve educational pathways and training in our adult population, it will be impossible for the state to reach its attainment goal by 2025. Previously, a strong economy was identified as a reason for fewer Hoosiers going into college. However, the ongoing attitude that a college degree doesn't hold value for Hoosiers is a contributing factor that cannot be overlooked.

Education beyond high school is a powerful force to address income disparities, close equity gaps and provide economic mobility to our citizens. The Commission and Indiana's higher education institutions are committed to increasing the value proposition by ensuring that higher education is affordable, career-relevant and more responsive to the needs of consumers.

Teresa Lubbers is the Indiana Commissioner for Higher Education and chair of the Governor's Workforce Cabinet.

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