



POST-SECONDARY: COSTS, OTHER BARRIERS IMPEDE SUCCESS

Issue Overview

As the Georgia economy continues to expand, trends in the job market continue to point to a need for an educated workforce to support this growth. It is widely touted that the state needs an additional 250,000 workers with a certificate, two-year, or four-year degree to fill the available positions that our economy will demand by 2025. In a nutshell, post-secondary completion remains one of the most important economic development issues facing the state.

Georgia's post-secondary completion rate, however, continues to slump below the state's need. Only 48% of Georgia residents have completed an associate's degree or beyond; however, economic forecasts predict that 60% of jobs will require at least this much education by 2020. The strongest and fastest growing industries in the state require post-secondary education, yet the pipeline from high school to the workforce is leaking. Less than 70% of college freshmen return to school for their second year. Moreover, five years after high school graduation, only 26% of students have earned a certificate or degree, and 57% have no post-secondary degree and are not currently enrolled in a post-secondary program.

To meet the economic needs of the state and its residents, Georgia must identify the barriers to completion facing post-secondary students.

Significance for Georgia

Georgia has experienced a rapid growth in the percentage of low-income students and families, especially amongst minority students, and these groups underperform in post-secondary retention and completion. One of the most significant barriers to the completion of higher education is cost, which is particularly relevant considering the rapidly growing proportion of low-income residents in Georgia. Costs associated with post-secondary completion include not only tuition, but also basic necessities such as food, housing, health care, and transportation while students attend classes.

With the cost of living expenses being, on average, higher than tuition itself and growing, the impact of these expenses on low-income students and families can be one of the main levers that pushes them out of the post-secondary education pipeline.

Action Steps

EdQuest Georgia best practice research indicates that clear pathways through the educational system are linked to employability and economic growth needs. These best practices also focus on removing barriers to post-secondary education completion, especially concerning needed resources and clear understanding of expectations. Georgia has multiple opportunities to excel in all these areas.

For Georgia to develop the workforce the state needs, and to sustain economic growth, more of our students, especially our growing low-income and minority populations, need to enroll or reenroll in and complete some form of post-secondary education. Understanding the true cost of higher education and developing strategies to help low-income students bear those costs can boost the state's educational attainment, an essential element in future economic development. While Georgia has developed some strategies to address the true costs of post-secondary education, these programs and strategies need to be expanded and resourced to achieve the impact that our economic development depends on.