



March 22, 2009

A big goal higher ed

In the next decade, the U.S. -- and Indiana -- will face a shortage of college-educated workers.

By Jamie Merisotis

In Indiana, only 28 percent of the state's 3.1 million working-age adults hold at least a two-year postsecondary degree. The U.S. rate is 39 percent. To achieve the American dream for Hoosiers and grow the state's economy, that rate needs to increase to 60 percent by 2025, explains Jamie Merisotis of Lumina Foundation for Education. To reach this education level, he says we must expand adult learning opportunities, inform students about college requirements and improve affordability.

Gov. Mitch Daniels argued that we need to "put the children first" in his State of the State address in January and pledged to put more money into classroom teaching. A month later, President Barack Obama upped the ante when he announced a "big goal" of ensuring that the United States once again has the highest proportion of college graduates in the world.

As Indiana residents are well aware, manufacturing jobs are rapidly disappearing, and the remaining jobs that don't require advanced skills or knowledge can no longer promise Americans a middle-class lifestyle. To have a shot at the American dream, workers must equip themselves with the tools necessary to compete. A college education offers the best opportunity to do so.

The payoff of graduating from college is dramatic. Research shows that Americans with college degrees earn more, save more and produce more in their lifetimes. They're happier and healthier, and they're more likely to vote, support charity, and take on leadership roles in their communities.

As the nation's largest private foundation with the sole mission to improve access and success in education beyond high school, Lumina Foundation for Education wants to help return the United States to a position of global leadership by increasing the proportion of Americans who hold high-quality two- and four-year degrees from the current rate of 39 percent to 60 percent by the year 2025.

Lumina's recent report, "A Stronger Nation Through Higher Education," makes the need to achieve such a big goal clear. In Indiana, only 28 percent of the state's 3.1 million working-age adults hold at least a two-year degree. A 60 percent postsecondary education attainment rate in Indiana today would represent nearly 1.9 million degree holders -- more than double the number reflected in the last Census.

To get there, we must tackle the education gap on a number of fronts. We must expand adult learning opportunities, particularly at community colleges, which serve many unemployed workers looking to retrain and develop skills. Community colleges must also consider realigning their programs to meet the needs of today's students, many of whom don't have two uninterrupted years to dedicate to school. Ivy Tech Community College, for example, has a College for Working Adults that allows students to take two courses in an accelerated eight-week term and provides them with access to expanded tutoring, child care and other services, so most can finish their programs in less than two years. Similar efforts are being considered to support students still in high school.

Strategically, we must inform students of all ages about the academic, financial and other requirements of college (through programs like LearnMore Indiana), significantly improve college affordability through increased financial aid, and enhance student learning outcomes -- making sure

that a college degree provides graduates with the skills and knowledge to be successful in today's constantly evolving job environment.

Higher education institutions, state officials and education organizations must also work together to increase postsecondary completion levels, with a particular focus on low-income students, first-generation students, students of color and adults. In Indiana, nearly 670,000 working-age adults -- 21 percent of those in the work force -- have already earned some college credit. But without a degree, these individuals do not fully benefit from what they already have invested in their education.

And finally, we must improve productivity in the current higher education system to ensure that existing resources are effectively and efficiently spent. This includes exploring alternative models for delivering high-quality education using technology and new providers to help us do more, better, faster.

In today's ever-changing global economy, postsecondary education is critical to individual success and to the nation's -- and Indiana's -- continued economic prosperity and social stability.

Additional Facts

HIGHER EDUCATION RATES

Percentages of Indiana residents, ages 25-34, at various education levels:

- » **5.1: 41,869** hold graduate degrees.
- » **18.3: 151,615** hold bachelor's degrees.
- » **7.7: 63,988** hold associate's degrees.
- » **23.2: 192,059** have some college but no degree.
- » **32.4: 267,831** have a high school diploma or GED.
- » **10.4: 86,094** attended grades 9-12 but have no diploma.
- » **2.8: 23,411** did not attend school beyond ninth-grade.
- » **63.1:** Hamilton County had the highest percentage of residents with college degrees.
- » **37.2:** Marion County had the fourth-highest percentage with college degrees.

U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Higher education rates

LEARN MORE

For more information, go to: www.luminafoundation.org, www.learnmoreindiana.org and www.ivytech.edu.