

NEWS RELEASE

Coulter says Post-Secondary Attainment Effort Key to Oakland County's Economic Future

- Employment, good wages, and quality of life are tied directly to post-secondary attainment.
- There are inequities in educational attainment in Oakland County not only along race and ethnic lines, but also where residents live that must be addressed.
- The Oakland80 report makes five key recommendations to accelerate post-secondary attainment in the county.

May 8, 2023, Pontiac, Mich. – Sixty-nine percent of Oakland County adults have a post-secondary degree or certificate, County Executive Dave Coulter revealed today in the inaugural Oakland80 report at the Oakland County Economic Outlook news conference at Oakland University. The county is progressing toward his administration's goal of having 80 percent of adult residents with a post-secondary attainment by 2030, but more must be done to make that achievement equitable.

"Higher education and training are the foundations for getting good jobs with higher wages, ensuring that all of our residents succeed and thrive," Coulter said. "Achieving this goal also helps Oakland County attract employers who see the value in our skilled and talented workforce."

Eighty-two percent of Oakland County residents with post-secondary education are employed, compared to 70 percent of residents without a degree, according to the Oakland80 report, compiled by the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce (CSW). Residents without post-secondary education are twice as likely to be unemployed as those with a post-secondary degree or education.

There are inequalities, however, in the county's post-secondary attainment. Substantially fewer Oakland County residents of color have post-secondary attainment. Only 42 percent of black residents and 47 percent of Latino/Latina residents have a college degree or certificate.

There also are disparities based on where a resident lives in Oakland County. Residents in the Pontiac/Waterford area have a post-secondary attainment rate of 38 percent. Residents in West Oakland County have a below county average attainment rate of 53 percent while the Farmington/Southfield area is at 58 percent. The areas with the highest post-secondary attainment rates in the county are Birmingham, Bloomfield, Troy, and Rochester at 76 percent.

The Oakland80 report also compares post-secondary attainment for men and women and by age group. To dive into the report, [click here](#).

The Oakland80 team and committees worked with CSW to identify five key strategies to boost post-secondary attainment in Oakland County and make it more equitable:

- **Accelerate exposure to career exploration.**

- “While the potential for early exposure exists in Michigan, given the regionality of its implementation, students’ experiences vary significantly based on their district. To help address this, Oakland County can look to introduce or develop supports that can more consistently standardize experiences across all county districts, especially those with lower post-secondary attainment.”
- **Support transitions from high school to post-secondary**
 - “Providing more consistent support around Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion is one of many types of support that could be developed and offered to students as they transition from high school. Additional supports that have proven to be effective at preparing students to successfully transition into a post-secondary setting include summer immersion programs that provide SAT prep and job shadowing, enhanced college advising in high school for students with a disability, and summer bridge programming.”
- **Optimize adult financial aid utilization.**
 - “Adult job seekers are not the only group in the workforce system with limited knowledge of the availability of financial aid. This lack of knowledge can lead staff to direct residents towards shorter-term job training and educational opportunities, thus failing to leverage federal funding sources that could subsidize longer length training capable of propelling job seekers towards family-sustaining employment. Providing staff with consistent and current FAFSA information can be achieved in many various, non-time-consuming ways.”
- **Attract and retain students and talent.**
 - “In Oakland County, residents who are not a U.S. citizen or are a citizen by naturalization have higher rates of post-secondary educational attainment than those born in the United States... Oakland County can increase its economic competitiveness as well as its post-secondary attainment rates by adopting strategies to welcome and retain international talent. Similarly, Oakland County can incorporate actions to attract and retain other priority populations that may be overlooked, such as returning military personnel and veterans.”
- **Close equity gaps that exist in education and employment**
 - “Disparities deeply rooted in our education and workforce systems continue to be barriers to success. In Oakland County, Black residents and those identifying their race as ‘Other’ have the lowest post-secondary attainment rates. Latino/Latina residents are not completing high school at the same rate as other residents, and they have 15 percent lower postsecondary attainment than the county-wide average. There are gender gaps between residents of the same race—for example, 16 percent more Asian men have a master’s degree compared to Asian women. Closing equity gaps (demographic, geographic, economic, and those pertaining to physical and learning disabilities) is critical to ensure all learners and workers achieve educational and labor market success.”

Oakland Community College and Oakland Schools are among Oakland County’s partners collaborating to expand post-secondary attainment in Oakland County.

“OCC is partnering with Oakland Schools to help students in middle school and their families understand the opportunities community college can provide in helping them reach their academic and career goals,” said Peter Provenzano, chancellor of Oakland Community College. “We also plan to expand our dual enrollment and early college programs, where students can begin to access college credits while in high school.”

Oakland80 is helping to drive Gov. Gretchen Whitmer’s 60 by 30 initiative to ensure 60 percent of working-age Michiganders have a professional certificate or college degree by 2030.

“We are well on our way to achieving our Oakland 80 goals,” Coulter said. “All of us must work together – education, business, labor, workforce and social service partners – to get there.”