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South Dakota Lags in Educational Attainment

MADISON, S.D. – A recent analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data confirms that educational attainment across South Dakota lags the region and the nation, with the state’s pool of postsecondary degrees skewed toward lower-level credentials.

Researchers at the South Dakota Board of Regents examined data from the Census Bureau’s 2013 American Community Survey to create a general portrait of educational attainment in the state. They found that, across all categories from associate to graduate degrees, South Dakota’s educational attainment rates are among the lowest in the region and also fall below national averages.

In 2013, just over 37 percent of working-age South Dakotans held an associate’s degree or higher. About one-quarter of them had a four-year degree or higher, and only 7.1 percent held a master’s degree or higher. The national averages for these same degree categories were 37.7 percent (associate), 29.6 percent (bachelor), and 11.2 percent (master).

“These data should be concerning to all of us, since postsecondary education provides a pathway to higher paying and skilled positions,” said Jack Warner, the regents’ executive director and CEO. “While degree production has improved across the public university system, South Dakota still has significant ground to make up. It will be important to increase degree production, and especially bolster the number of graduate degrees, to develop the highly skilled workforce, research innovation, and technology transfer needed for successful economic development.”

Among South Dakotans with a college degree, more than 30 percent hold an associate degree, compared to the national rate of 21.4 percent. “Graduate degree holders, in contrast, account for a disproportionately small share of South Dakota’s total degree holders: 19.1 percent, compared to 29.7 percent for the nation,” the report said.

A link to the full Board of Regents’ report can be found at
https://www.sdbor.edu/theboard/agenda/2015/June/21_BOR0615.pdf.