

Pathways After High School

Understanding Where Graduates Go After High School

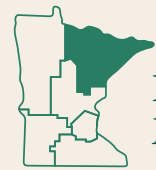
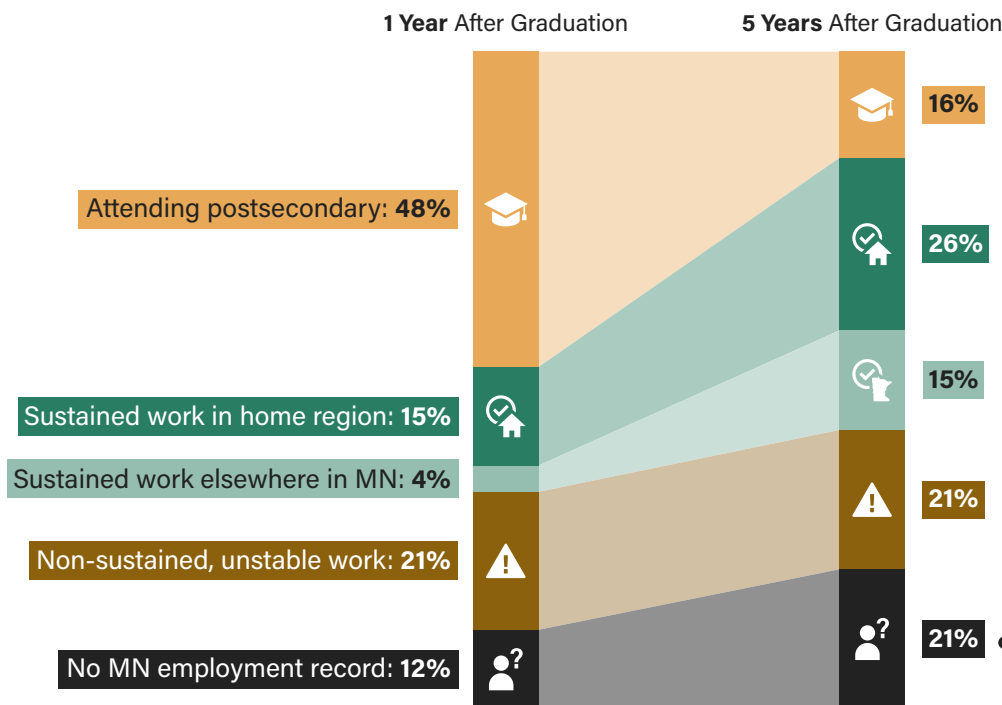
About the Project

This report follows Northeast Minnesota high school graduates for over a decade after graduation, tracking their paths through college, the workforce, or both. When examining the graduates, three distinct pathways emerged: completing college, entering the workforce directly, and persistent disconnection from both. Understanding these separate pathways — not just outcomes — is key to regional workforce planning.

Trajectories After High School Graduation

In the first year after graduation, most students are still in school — nearly half are enrolled in college. By year five, that balance has flipped: college enrollment drops sharply as graduates move into the workforce. Sustained regional employment grows from 15% to 26%, making it the largest single category by year five. The share with no Minnesota employment record nearly doubles, to one in five graduates.

Status of Northeast MN Graduates After High School



**Northeast
Minnesota**

POPULATION

327,179 (2025)

NUMBER OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS

~30

NUMBER OF COLLEGES

~10

NUMBER OF GRADUATES ANALYZED

49,816 (2008–2023)



No Minnesota employment record

By ten years after high school, nearly a third of Northeast graduates have no Minnesota employment record. Northeast Minnesota shares a metro area with Superior, Wisconsin, so some are likely working just across the border. But among graduates without a college credential, this group grows every year and is concentrated among students who can be identified while still in high school — for them, it more often signals real disconnection from work.

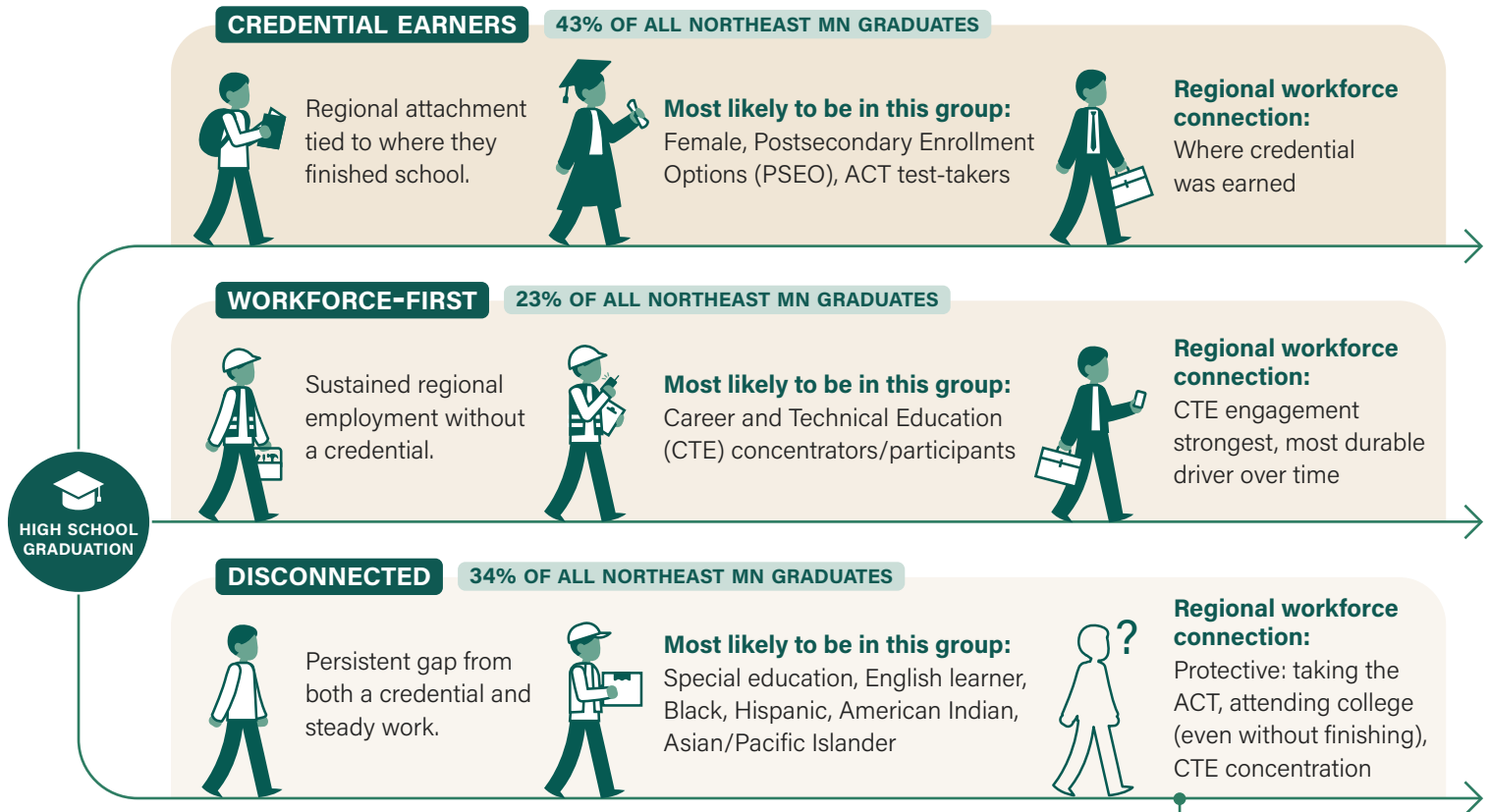


Northeast Minnesota's path from high school to the workforce isn't broken, but it isn't balanced either.

For some, the road to a stable job is clear. For others, the barriers are structural — and easy to miss if you're only looking at one moment in time.

The Pathways

Beyond outcomes, we examined which characteristics were most associated with each pathway — who earns a postsecondary credential, who finds steady regional work without one, and who experiences long-term disconnection, along with what protects against it.



These pathways aren't separate stories — they connect. The same barriers that lower the odds of earning a credential for some groups also raise disconnection risk later, showing up twice rather than resolving. But CTE engagement is the throughline: linked to regional attachment for credential earners and non-credential earners alike, and to lower odds of long-term disconnection.

Policy Takeaway

Strengthening regional postsecondary access and CTE programs may do more for retention than any other factor. In Northeast Minnesota, simply taking the ACT or attempting college — even without finishing — is linked to lower odds of long-term disconnection. Connecting students to these experiences while still in high school could reach them before disconnection sets in.

Local Disconnection

Disconnection isn't about graduates leaving — most are already here. Nearly three-quarters of non-credential earners with non-sustained employment work within Northeast Minnesota.

The opportunity isn't recruitment; it's helping people already working locally move into steadier jobs.



Explore the other four regional reports:
ruralmn.org/pathways-after-high-school



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