

LOCAL

## Local mom to graduate from Gaston College with her daughter, how she got there



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### Key Points AI-assisted summary

- Inspired by her daughter's college application process, Melissa Poindexter decided to return to school after 36 years.
- Poindexter is now a nursing student at Gaston College and is on track to graduate with her daughter in May 2026.
- She participates in the TRIO program and ANSWER scholarship, which supports mothers returning to education.

When Melissa Poindexter's daughter, Brooklyn Thompson, began the process of applying to college, she could not decide on a school or program.

Poindexter said at the time, she reassured her daughter that it is always possible to change direction later on if something is not right.

That's when Thompson asked her, "Why haven't you gone back to school," Poindexter said.

Now, the mom of two is gearing up to start her final year as a nursing student at Gaston College. If everything goes as planned, she said, she and her daughter will graduate together with associates degrees in May 2026.

For 36 years, Poindexter said, her mother worked as a spinner in a textile mill in Gastonia.

Growing up, "My mom was in the textile mills for 36 years. I did not even have an option to go to school. I did not know how. I wasn't even really expected to graduate high school. I was expected to go to work and have a family," she said. "When my daughter was like, 'Why not?' I said, 'Why not?' That is when I decided it was time to go back."

Poindexter said the feeling of modeling this motivation to her children, Thompson and Madysun Poindexter, is empowering.

"It is empowering because I did not know that I would be able to do it," she said. "I know my mom always said, 'Do better than me,' but she never told me how to do better than her ... I just wanted to make sure that they knew there is always an option to get (education)."

At Gaston College, Poindexter is part of the school's TRIO program, which offers guidance and support to first generation students, low income students and students with disabilities.

She is also part of a program called ANSWER, a local non-profit that provides scholarships and mentoring for moms returning to school.

Finding a group of other moms and mentors who understand the struggle of balancing parenthood with school work has been instrumental in her success, Poindexter said.

In gatherings with other ANSWER scholars, Poindexter said she has found community.



ANSWER Scholars of the 2025-26 school year. Provided By ANSWER Scholarship

"We laugh together, we cry together," she said.

According to Susan Anderson, the founder of ANSWER scholarship, the program is open to single or married moms with school-aged children.

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ANSWER scholarship awards typically range from \$2,750 per year for a two-year associate degree to \$5,500 per year for four-year bachelor's degree. Renewal scholarships are awarded if the student maintains good grades and meets all of the requirements of selection criteria.

Anderson said when the program first started, there was no mentorship program, but leadership saw a need and filled it.

Today, moms in the group talk with their assigned mentor every two weeks and attend professional and personal development programs to help them gain skills for outside of the classroom.

Poindexter said the workshop sessions have made her feel confident to speak and carry herself in a conversation when public speaking was formerly difficult for her.

Her return to college inspired others in her family including her husband and mother to seek different careers for themselves. She said that if she could say anything to mothers considering a return to school it would be, "Just do it."

ANSWER will reopen for applications in November, and moms can apply online at [answerscholarship.org](https://answerscholarship.org).

