



# A STRONGER NATION

In Alabama, postsecondary learning builds the talent that helps us rise



A policy brief from Lumina Foundation

# Alabama



The need to increase postsecondary attainment — the number of Americans who hold degrees and other high-quality credentials — has never been clearer. State leaders are responding to the growing global demand for talent by setting goals and enacting policies to increase attainment. Like Lumina Foundation, states have come to understand the scope of the effort required. Much is left to be done, but real progress is being made through the efforts of those who are committed to assuring that millions more Americans benefit from postsecondary education.

Lumina began reporting the attainment rate (associate degree and higher) in 2008. That year, the rate in Alabama stood at 31.6 percent. In 2014, the most recent year for which data are available, the rate reached 36.7 percent.

However, the degree attainment rate doesn't tell the whole story. Lumina has always said that other postsecondary credentials — including certificates and certifications — should count toward national and state goals for attainment, with one important caveat. To count, non-degree credentials should be of high quality, which we define as having clear and transparent learning outcomes leading to further education and employment.

This year, for the first time, we have nationally representative data on the number of Americans who hold high-quality postsecondary certificates; we now feel confident we can count these credentials toward attainment goals. In states, we are able to use estimates from the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce on the number of residents who hold high-quality certificates as their highest earned credential. In Alabama, 3 percent of residents between the ages of 25 and 64 hold a high-quality certificate. This brings the state's overall postsecondary attainment rate to 36.7 percent.

As the data in this report make clear, increasing overall attainment is not the only challenge Alabama faces. There are also significant gaps in attainment that must be closed. While current systems work very well for many students, more postsecondary credentials must be earned by Americans who, by definition, are *post-traditional* learners. Compared with current students, they will be older; more will be African-American, Hispanic and Native American; and they will have lower incomes. Most will be first-generation students. The data in this report show the extent of the attainment gaps in Alabama by race and ethnicity.

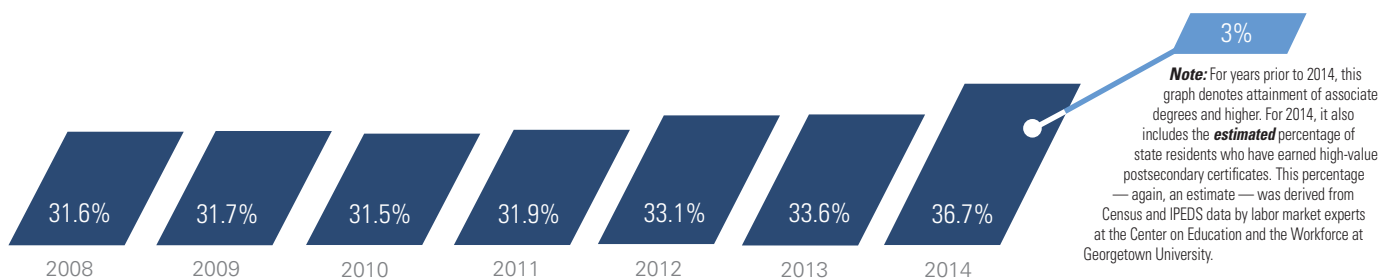
To date, 26 states have responded to the need to increase attainment by setting state attainment goals that meet Lumina's criteria for rigor and efficacy (i.e., the goal is quantifiable, challenging, long term, addresses gaps, and is in statute and/or a strategic plan). Our analysis shows that Alabama has not set a goal that meets Lumina's criteria; we urge state leaders to do so.

There is much more that states can do to increase attainment. It begins with assuring that all prospective students, including working adults, have access to affordable programs that lead to quality credentials. State policies such as outcomes-based funding can encourage colleges and universities to direct resources to approaches that increase student success. States can also help assure that students get full recognition for *all* of their learning — whether it was obtained in an institution, in the military or on the job — and can apply it to further education and credentials.

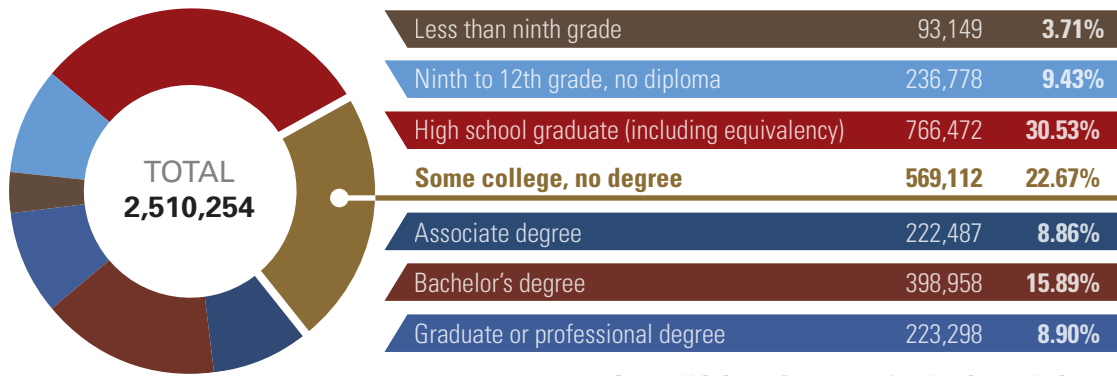
Lumina is working with state leaders from around the nation to expand postsecondary opportunity and success. More information on that work, including our full state policy agenda and additional data, is available on Lumina's Strategy Labs website (<http://strategylabs.luminafoundation.org/>).

## Tracking the trend

Percentage of the state's working-age population (25-64) with a quality postsecondary credential



## Levels of education for Alabama residents, ages 25-64

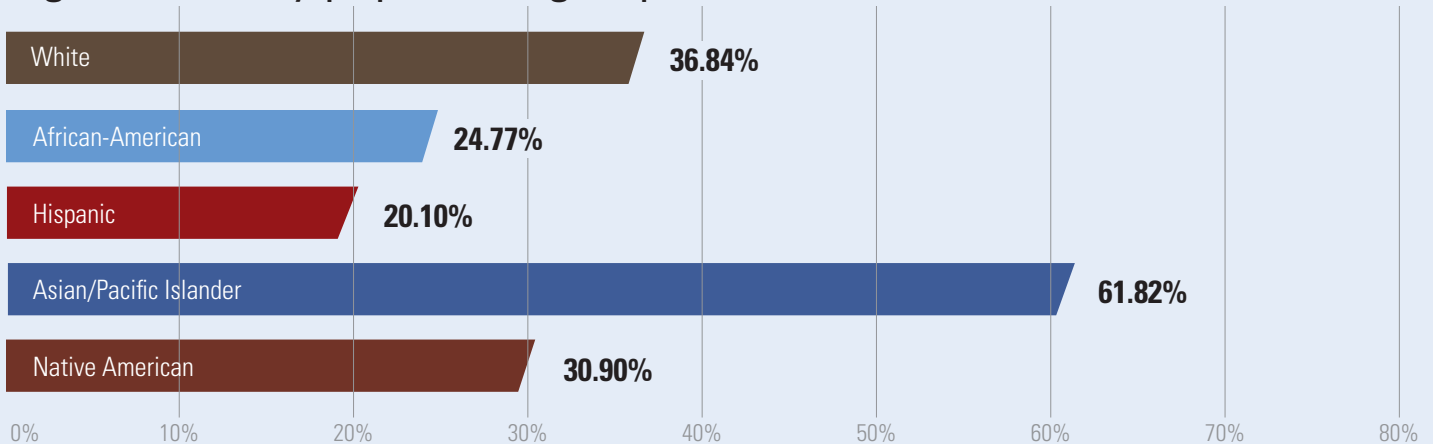


Estimated attainment of certificates: **3%**

**Note:** The accompanying pie chart does not account for residents who have earned high-value postsecondary certificates. The percentage above – admittedly, an *estimate* – aims to fill that gap. To calculate this percentage, labor market experts at the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce used Survey of Income Program Participation 2008 Wave 12 data (2012) and data from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) 2014.

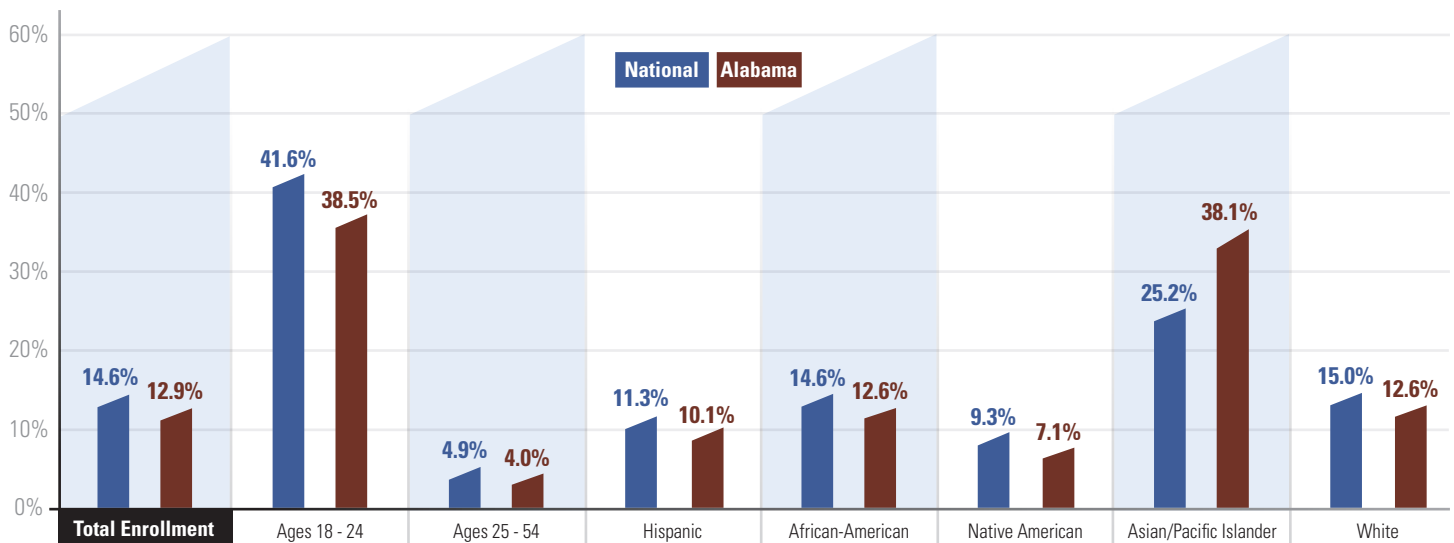
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey

## Degree-attainment rates among Alabama residents (ages 25-64), by population group



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012, 2013, and 2014 American Community Survey One-Year PUMS Files

## College enrollment among Alabama residents, ages 18-54



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey One-Year Public Use Microdata Sample

Note: These percentages reflect the enrollment of non-degree-holding students, ages 18-54, at public and private, two-year and four-year postsecondary institutions

## Percentage of Alabama residents (ages 25-64) with at least an associate degree, by county

Autauga	32.70	Clarke	21.04	DeKalb	21.52	Jefferson	40.88	Mobile	30.98	Talladega	21.51
Baldwin	38.51	Clay	16.95	Elmore	31.74	Lamar	20.04	Monroe	20.86	Tallapoosa	26.68
Barbour	21.42	Cleburne	17.90	Escambia	19.60	Lauderdale	30.53	Montgomery	38.77	Tuscaloosa	36.48
Bibb	18.06	Coffee	34.96	Etowah	25.83	Lawrence	20.21	Morgan	28.88	Walker	20.45
Blount	23.01	Colbert	27.54	Fayette	24.80	Lee	42.88	Perry	16.83	Washington	17.60
Bullock	19.27	Conecuh	16.69	Franklin	17.80	Limestone	32.41	Pickens	16.75	Wilcox	18.46
Butler	23.71	Coosa	15.23	Geneva	20.73	Lowndes	19.32	Pike	30.74	Winston	22.23
Calhoun	26.02	Covington	26.19	Greene	15.63	Macon	25.15	Randolph	19.84		
Chambers	21.03	Crenshaw	22.09	Hale	22.04	Madison	48.70	Russell	26.91		
Cherokee	22.04	Cullman	28.38	Henry	27.62	Marengo	25.54	St. Clair	25.27		
Chilton	21.84	Dale	29.51	Houston	31.37	Marion	21.71	Shelby	50.21		
Choctaw	23.96	Dallas	21.38	Jackson	22.17	Marshall	26.59	Sumter	22.91		

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2010-14 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates*



Lumina Foundation is an independent, private foundation committed to increasing the proportion of Americans with degrees, certificates and other high-quality credentials to 60 percent by 2025. Lumina's outcomes-based approach focuses on helping to design and build an equitable, accessible, responsive and accountable higher education system while fostering a national sense of urgency for action to achieve Goal 2025.