



A STRONGER NATION

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

A policy brief from Lumina Foundation



Alaska



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 Alaska stood at 36.3 percent. In 2014, the most recent year for which data are available, the rate is again 36.3 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 Alaska, 7 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 43.3 percent.

As the data in this report make clear, increasing overall attainment is not the only challenge Alaska 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 Alaska by race and ethnicity.

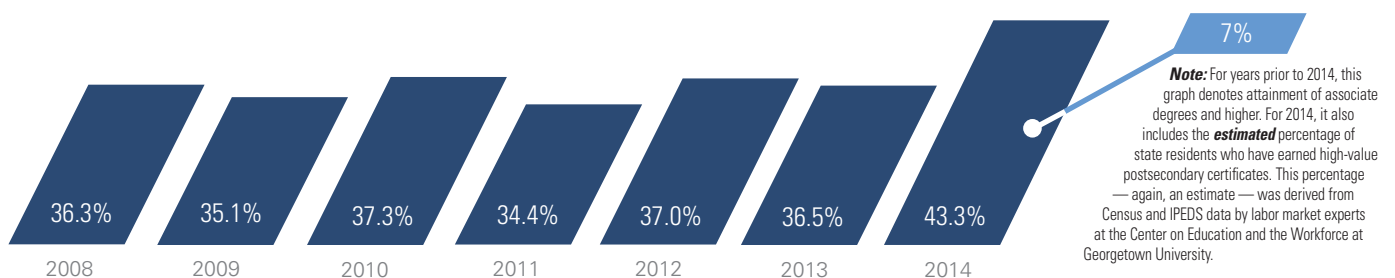
To date, 26 states have responded to the need to increase attainment by setting state attainment goals that meet Lumina's criteria for rigor and efficacy (i.e., the goal is quantifiable, challenging, long term, addresses gaps, and is in statute and/or a strategic plan). Our analysis shows that Alaska 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.

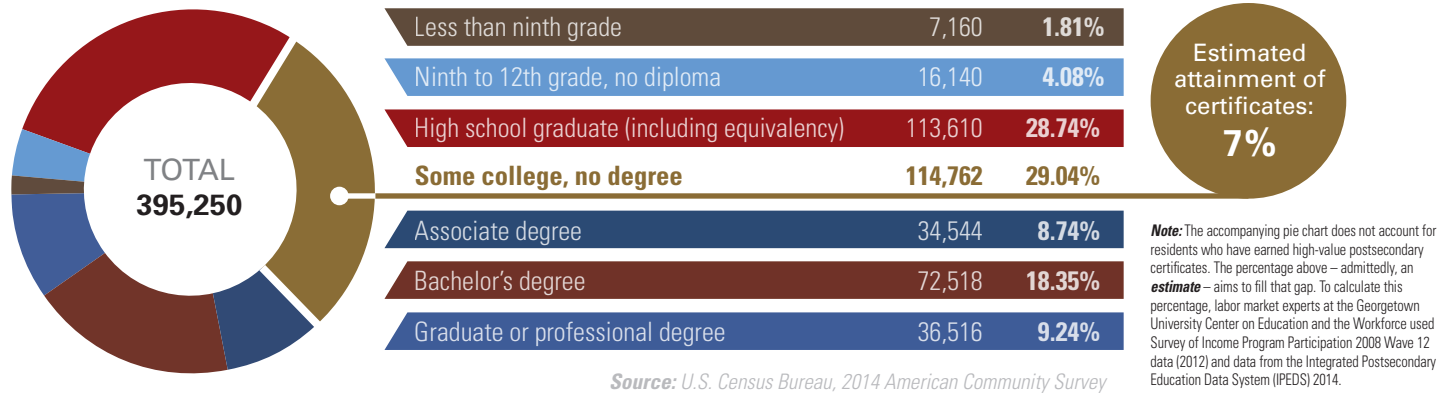
Lumina is working with state leaders from around the nation to expand postsecondary opportunity and success. More information on that work, including our full state policy agenda and additional data, is available on Lumina's Strategy Labs website (<http://strategylabs.luminafoundation.org/>).

Tracking the trend

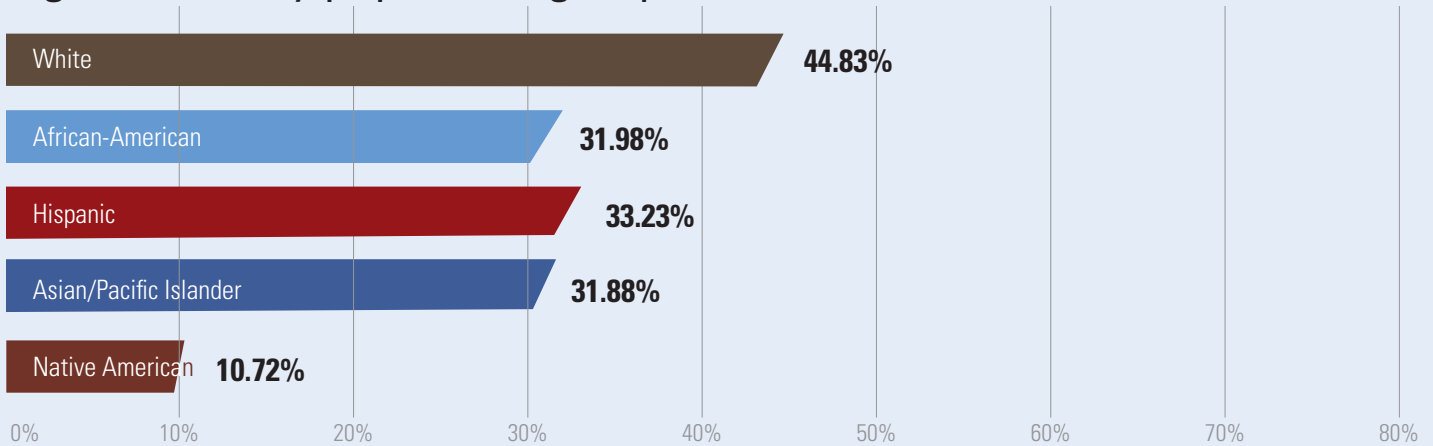
Percentage of the state's working-age population (25-64) with a quality postsecondary credential



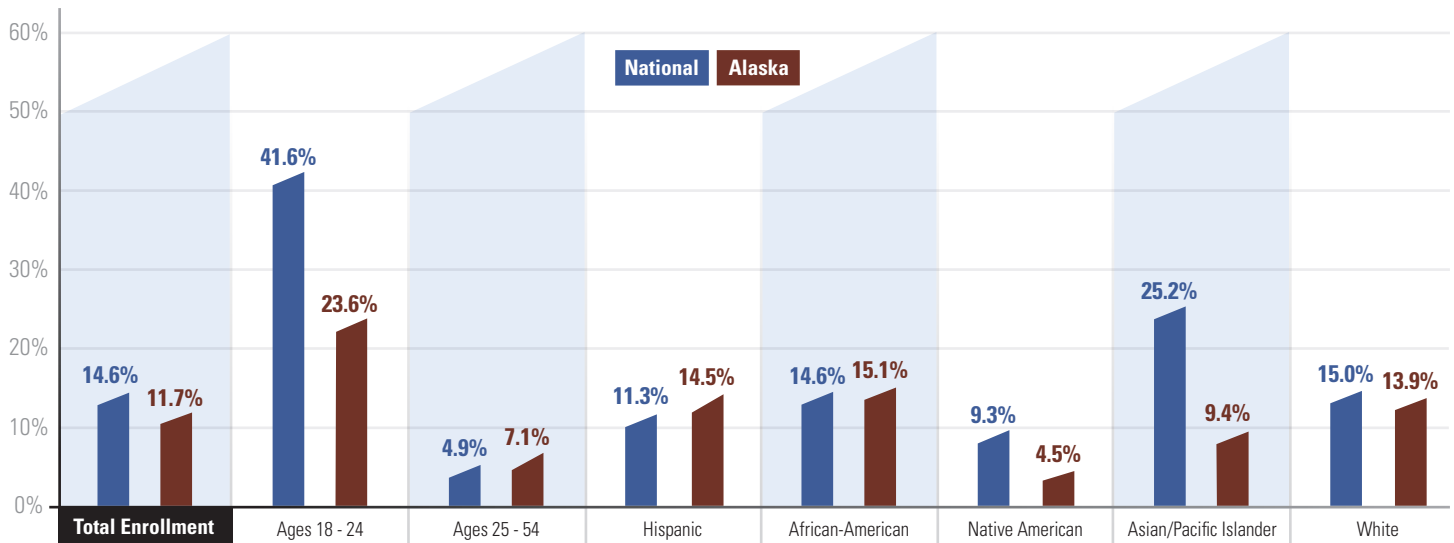
Levels of education for Alaska residents, ages 25-64



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



College enrollment among Alaska 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 Alaska residents (ages 25-64) with at least an associate degree, by borough

Aleutians East Borough	18.97	Juneau City and Borough	44.05	Prince of Wales-Hyder Census Area	20.98
Aleutians West Census Area	20.47	Kenai Peninsula Borough	30.68	Sitka City and Borough	42.50
Anchorage Municipality	42.38	Ketchikan Gateway Borough	31.33	Skagway Municipality	40.03
Bethel Census Area	15.75	Kodiak Island Borough	32.81	Southeast Fairbanks Census Area	32.01
Bristol Bay Borough	27.45	Lake and Peninsula Borough	19.24	Valdez-Cordova Census Area	32.90
Denali Borough	39.69	Matanuska-Susitna Borough	31.08	Wade Hampton Census Area	7.63
Dillingham Census Area	22.94	Nome Census Area	19.00	Wrangell City and Borough	26.40
Fairbanks North Star Borough	40.20	North Slope Borough	21.56	Yakutat City and Borough	25.68
Haines Borough	38.29	Northwest Arctic Borough	15.58	Yukon-Koyukuk Census Area	16.05
Hoonah-Angoon Census Area	35.79	Petersburg Borough	34.56		

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.