



# A STRONGER NATION

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

A policy brief from Lumina Foundation

# Arkansas



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 Arkansas stood at 26.5 percent. In 2014, the most recent year for which data are available, the rate reached 29.8 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 Arkansas, 9 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 38.8 percent.

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

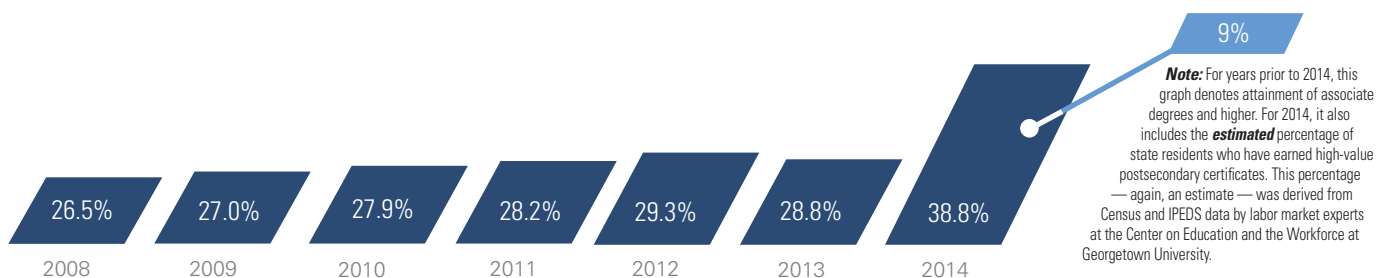
To date, 26 states have responded to the need to increase attainment by setting state attainment goals that meet Lumina's criteria for rigor and efficacy (i.e., the goal is quantifiable, challenging, long term, addresses gaps, and is in statute and/or a strategic plan). Arkansas is one of those 26 states.

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.

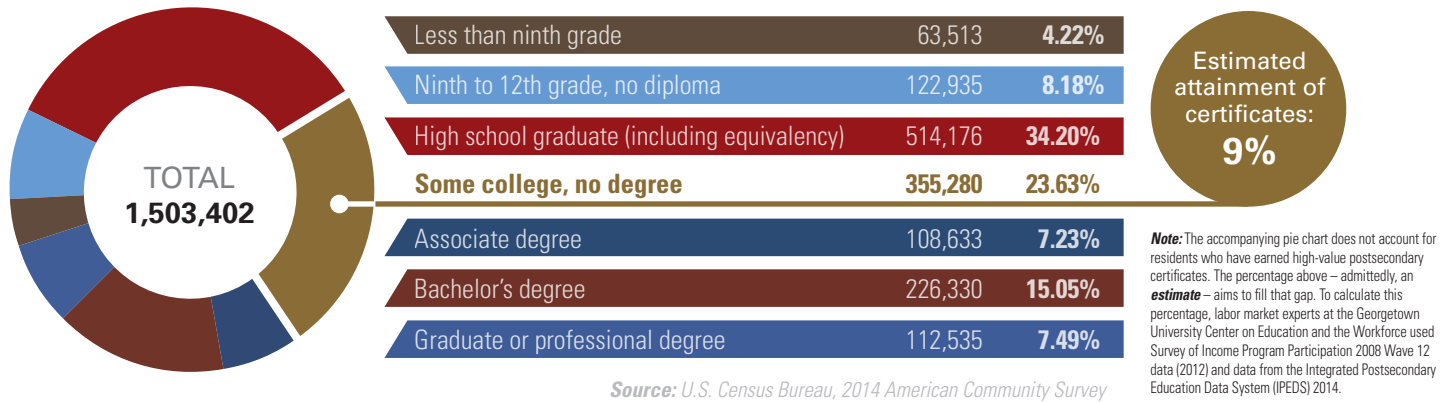
Lumina is working with state leaders from around the nation to expand postsecondary opportunity and success. More information on that work, including our full state policy agenda and additional data, is available on Lumina's Strategy Labs website (<http://strategylabs.luminafoundation.org/>).

## Tracking the trend

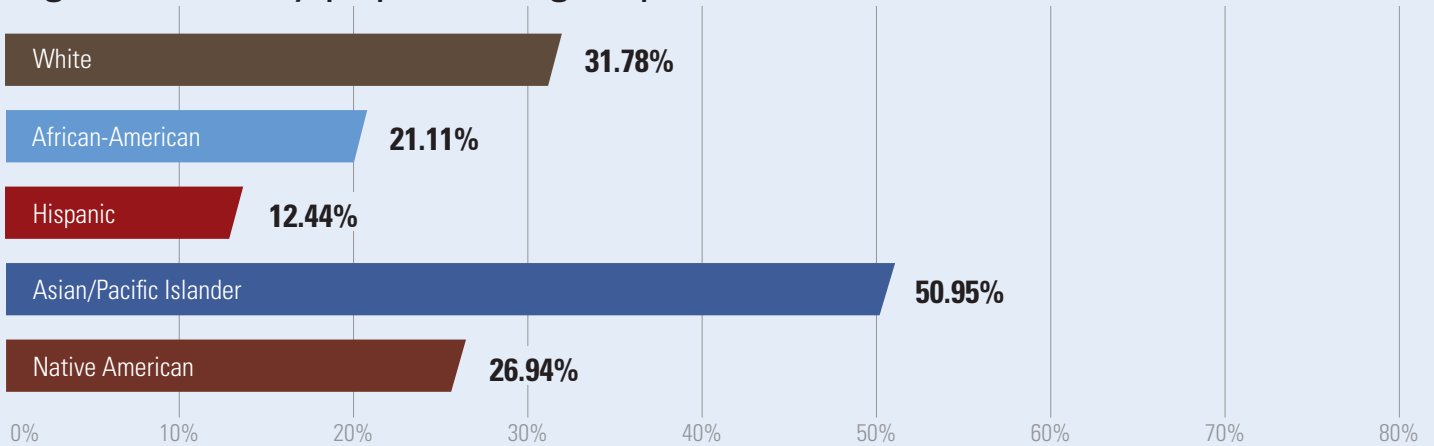
Percentage of the state's working-age population (25-64) with a quality postsecondary credential



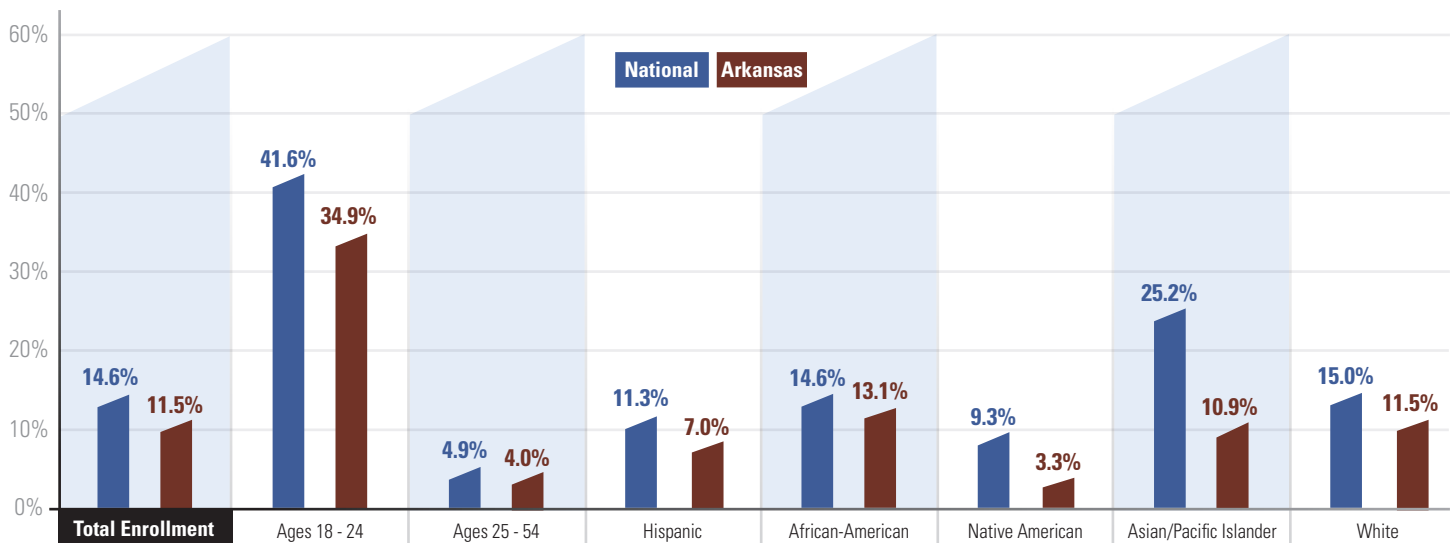
## Levels of education for Arkansas residents, ages 25-64



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



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



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

Arkansas	21.16	Columbia	31.47	Grant	23.82	Lincoln	13.30	Perry	22.09	Sebastian	28.81
Ashley	18.73	Conway	23.37	Greene	22.11	Little River	18.55	Phillips	25.34	Sevier	13.25
Baxter	27.54	Craighead	33.53	Hempstead	21.75	Logan	19.47	Pike	21.64	Sharp	18.89
Benton	37.13	Crawford	25.17	Hot Spring	24.79	Lonoke	30.10	Poinsett	14.77	Stone	25.31
Boone	24.20	Crittenden	23.15	Howard	21.73	Madison	13.46	Polk	21.82	Union	27.92
Bradley	18.31	Cross	18.92	Independence	23.25	Marion	18.14	Pope	27.68	Van Buren	16.58
Calhoun	20.01	Dallas	20.97	Izard	21.62	Miller	19.81	Prairie	18.85	Washington	36.04
Carroll	24.20	Desha	16.12	Jackson	14.64	Mississippi	20.79	Pulaski	40.04	White	28.49
Chicot	14.77	Drew	27.94	Jefferson	24.11	Monroe	19.84	Randolph	25.49	Woodruff	15.11
Clark	32.29	Faulkner	36.56	Johnson	21.02	Montgomery	24.40	St. Francis	18.24	Yell	16.20
Clay	15.52	Franklin	21.43	Lafayette	16.84	Nevada	19.37	Saline	32.45		
Cleburne	23.34	Fulton	20.25	Lawrence	19.84	Newton	18.90	Scott	19.05		
Cleveland	26.33	Garland	29.36	Lee	12.61	Ouachita	26.17	Searcy	23.03		

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.