



# A STRONGER NATION

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

A policy brief from Lumina Foundation



# Tennessee

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 Tennessee stood at 31.3 percent. In 2014, the most recent year for which data are available, the rate reached 39.3 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 Tennessee, 5 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 39.3 percent.

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

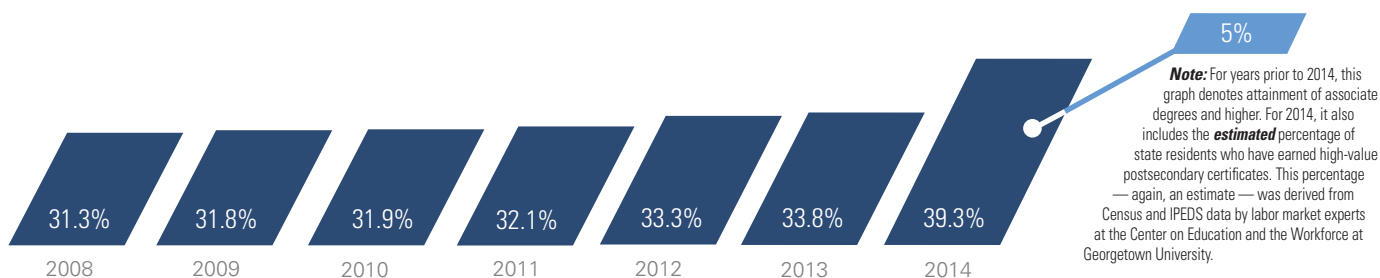
To date, 26 states have responded to the need to increase attainment by setting state attainment goals that meet Lumina's criteria for rigor and efficacy (i.e., the goal is quantifiable, challenging, long term, addresses gaps, and is in statute and/or a strategic plan). Tennessee is one of those 26 states.

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.

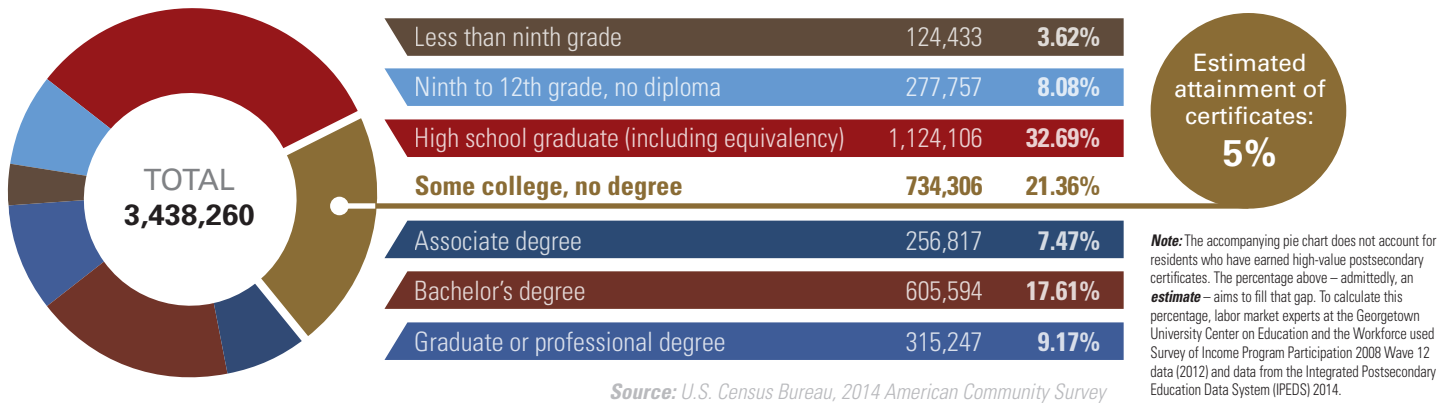
Lumina is working with state leaders from around the nation to expand postsecondary opportunity and success. More information on that work, including our full state policy agenda and additional data, is available on Lumina's Strategy Labs website (<http://strategylabs.luminafoundation.org/>).

## Tracking the trend

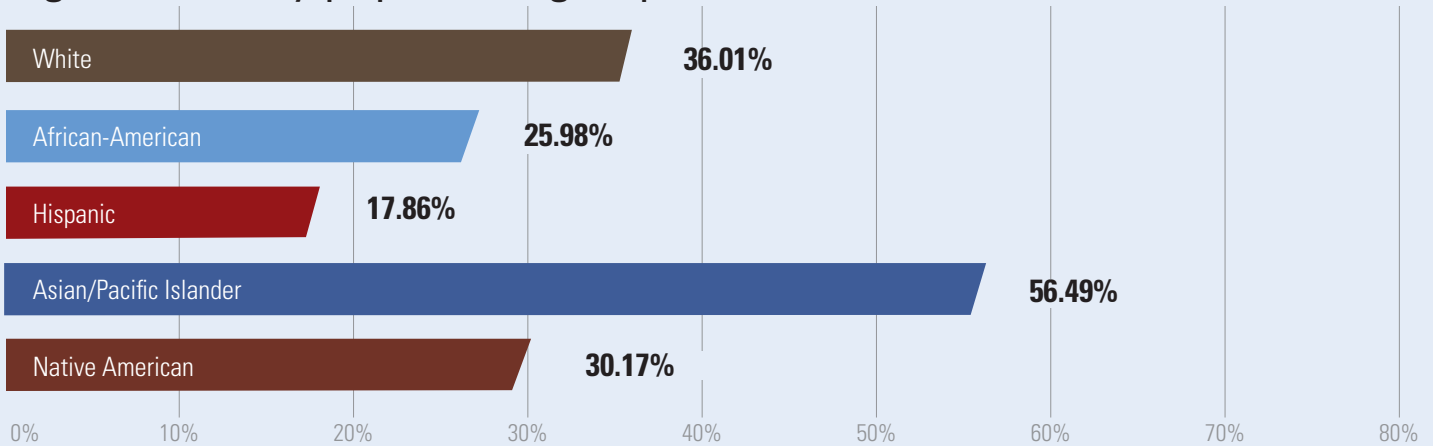
Percentage of the state's working-age population (25-64) with a quality postsecondary credential



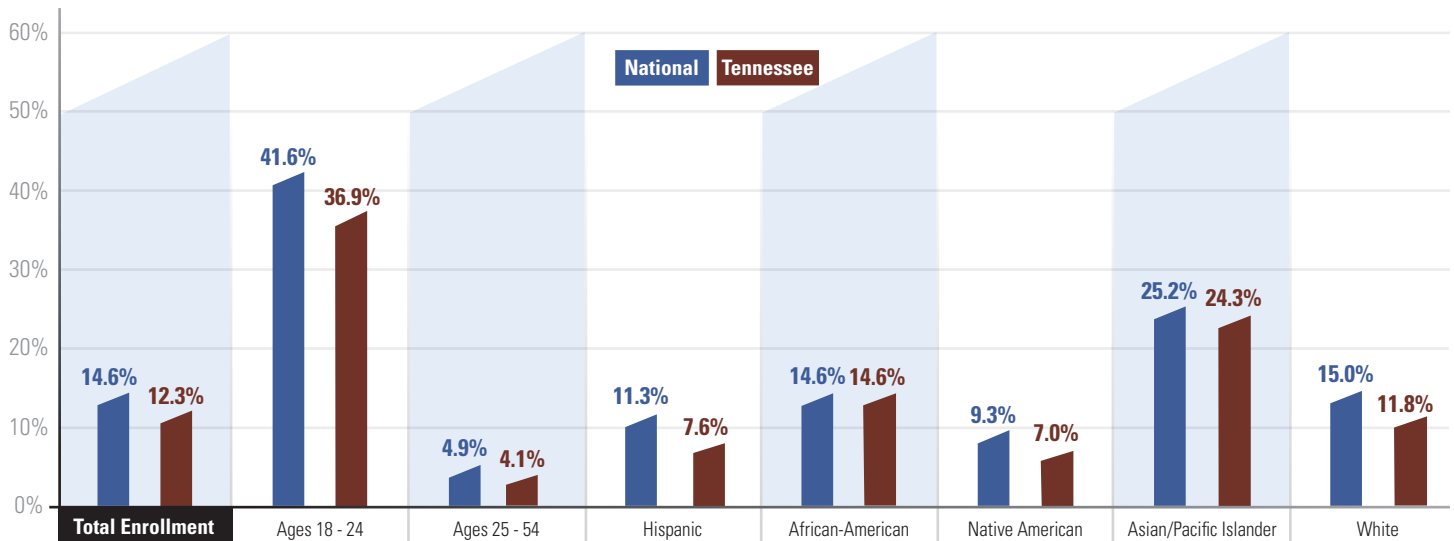
## Levels of education for Tennessee residents, ages 25-64



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



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



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

Anderson	30.46	Crockett	19.07	Hamilton	37.83	Lauderdale	15.68	Morgan	13.67	Stewart	21.45
Bedford	19.12	Cumberland	23.60	Hancock	14.90	Lawrence	20.36	Obion	20.51	Sullivan	31.16
Benton	16.19	Davidson	44.64	Hardeman	13.02	Lewis	21.71	Overton	17.95	Sumner	34.01
Bledsoe	17.15	Decatur	21.05	Hardin	17.89	Lincoln	24.15	Perry	19.09	Tipton	24.54
Blount	31.87	DeKalb	18.50	Hawkins	21.37	Loudon	30.89	Pickett	19.99	Trousdale	18.38
Bradley	29.38	Dickson	20.72	Haywood	16.20	McMinn	25.46	Polk	18.40	Unicoi	22.37
Campbell	15.41	Dyer	29.43	Henderson	22.14	McNairy	19.06	Putnam	29.17	Union	14.16
Cannon	17.90	Fayette	30.20	Henry	20.87	Macon	16.98	Rhea	16.86	Van Buren	15.61
Carroll	21.52	Fentress	16.40	Hickman	17.00	Madison	32.91	Roane	27.19	Warren	19.51
Carter	24.87	Franklin	26.11	Houston	17.35	Marion	19.97	Robertson	26.16	Washington	39.48
Cheatham	27.53	Gibson	23.13	Humphreys	20.87	Marshall	21.75	Rutherford	38.78	Wayne	14.31
Chester	26.14	Giles	21.41	Jackson	16.29	Maury	29.14	Scott	18.46	Weakley	26.00
Claiborne	20.23	Grainger	18.59	Jefferson	23.41	Meigs	13.99	Sequatchie	24.10	White	19.36
Clay	16.60	Greene	22.99	Johnson	16.39	Monroe	17.79	Sevier	23.49	Williamson	63.86
Cocke	15.65	Grundy	15.25	Knox	46.59	Montgomery	34.60	Shelby	37.71	Wilson	37.88
Coffee	26.16	Hamblen	22.69	Lake	9.26	Moore	21.26	Smith	17.77		

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.