

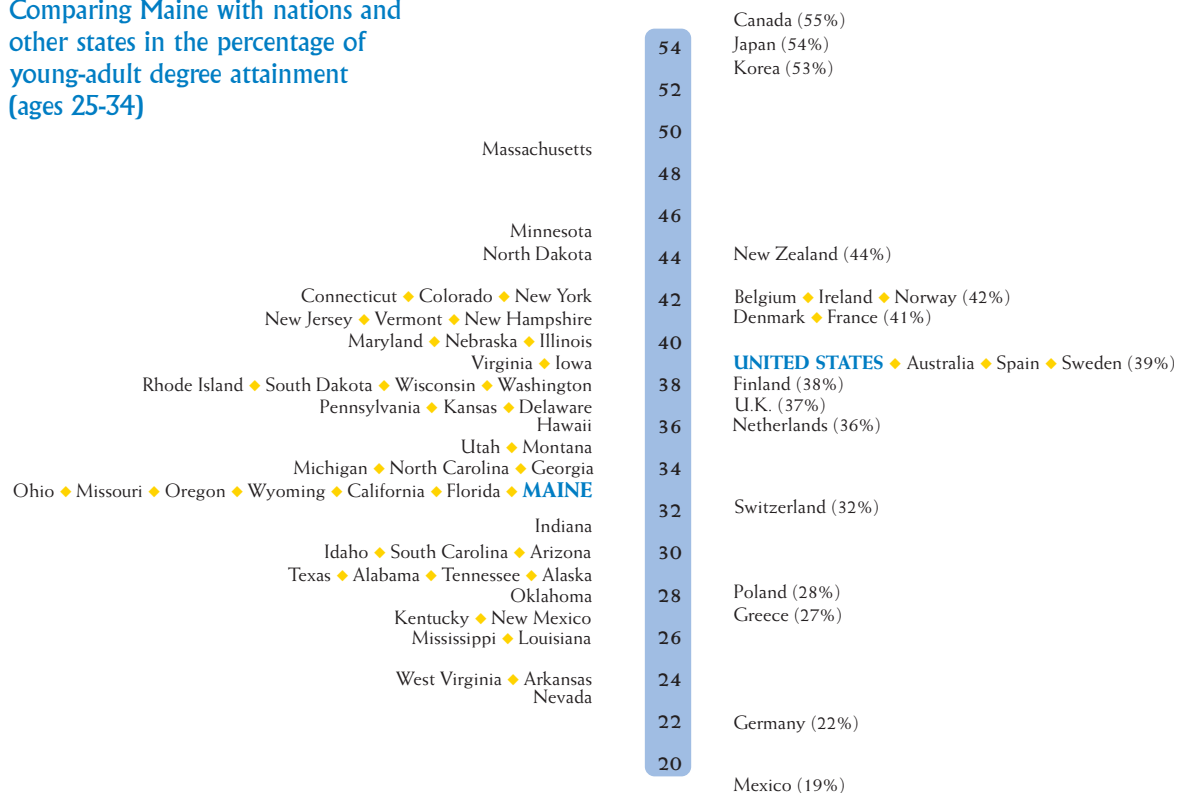
A stronger nation through higher education — starting right here in Maine

The United States has long been the world's most prosperous and successful nation, in part because our people have typically been the world's best educated. Roughly 39 percent of Americans hold a two-year or four-year degree. That attainment rate, which has held steady for four decades, led all other nations for much of that period.

No longer.

Our nation now ranks 10th among industrialized nations in the percentage of young adults (25- to 34-year-olds) with college degrees. Today, the leading countries boast young-adult populations in which more than half of the members are degree holders. Even more disturbing: Attainment rates in these other countries continue to climb while ours remains stagnant (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1:
Comparing Maine with nations and other states in the percentage of young-adult degree attainment (ages 25-34)



Dangerous stagnation is evident in another area as well: Rates of college attainment among our nation's underserved students — first-generation students, low-income students and students of color — are significantly lower than those of other students. These achievement gaps have endured for decades, and they're now *widening* — an ominous trend when one considers current demographic trends.

At Lumina Foundation for Education, we have embraced a single, specific goal that will help us address these problems. Our Big Goal is this: to increase the higher education attainment rate in the United States to 60 percent by the year 2025.

We are under no illusions. We know this is an ambitious goal, one that will require concerted and consistent effort over a period of many years by a wide range of stakeholders, including the higher education community, foundations, business leaders and policymakers — both in Washington and here in Maine.

We also feel very strongly that it is a goal we *must* meet. In fact, as ambitious as the Big Goal seems, we believe it is the minimum required to meet three compelling national needs:

- Closing attainment gaps for groups of students who have long been underrepresented in higher education.
- Reaching international benchmarks for college attainment and thus returning the United States to a world-class level of competitiveness.
- Meeting the ever-growing need for a well-prepared and adaptable workforce.

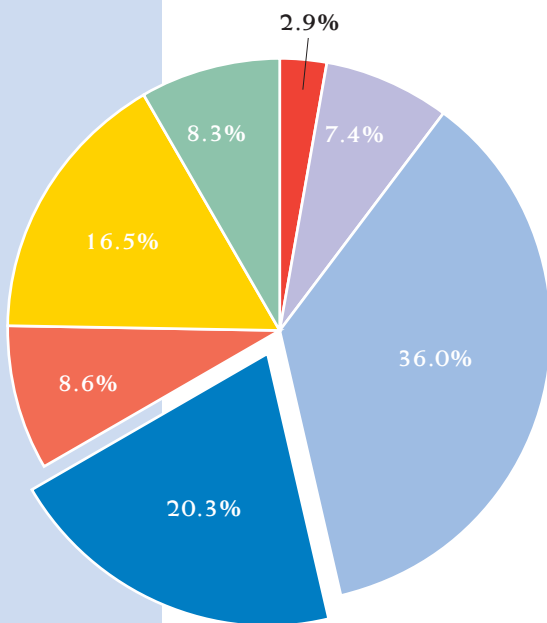


FIGURE 2:
Levels of education for Maine residents 25-64 years old

● Less than ninth grade	19,754	2.9%
● Ninth to 12th grade, no diploma	51,053	7.4%
● High school graduate (including equivalency)	246,881	36.0%
● Some college, no degree	139,317	20.3%
● Associate's degree	58,912	8.6%
● Bachelor's degree	113,303	16.5%
● Graduate or professional degree	57,031	8.3%
TOTAL	686,251	100%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

If we as a nation are to meet these critical needs, every state must do its part to increase college attainment among its residents. Here in Maine, only 33 percent of the state's 686,000 working-age adults (25-64 years old) hold at least a two-year degree, according to 2000 Census data (Figure 2). This percentage is far below our goal of 60 percent degree attainment. In fact, a 60 percent rate in Maine today would represent more than 411,000 degree holders — a huge increase over the number reflected in the 2000 Census data (about 229,000). Without doubt, it will take a sustained, shared effort to reach the goal here in Maine.

Still, though the challenge is significant, it's far from insurmountable — because we're not starting from zero. First of all, here in Maine, 139,000 working-age adults — 20 percent of those in the workforce — have already earned some college credit. If we focus first on these residents — those who have some college but have not yet earned a degree — we can begin to turn the tide fairly quickly.

Also, by looking geographically at attainment rates (see Figure 3), policymakers and other stakeholders can begin to work strategically and systematically to close the achievement gap. They can target the counties and regions that show the greatest need and then provide support in those specific areas. They can work directly in those communities and regions to foster effective partnerships among local businesses, K-12 systems and postsecondary institutions.

In short, there are concrete steps to take here in Maine that can boost the number of Americans who earn college degrees. These are steps we *must* take, and we must take them together. Lumina's goal is far too ambitious for us to reach solely through our efforts. It will require broad-based strategies that address issues of college affordability, educational quality, student support and social equity. These strategies can only be successful if committed partners work in concert to improve both public policy and institutional practice.

One such partner, the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), has created a Web-based resource that can be of great value to all who seek to help in this vital effort. The NCHEMS Information Center provides detailed comparative data for all states and counties as well as other contextual information that can help higher education policymakers and analysts make sound policy decisions. We urge you to visit the site (www.higheredinfo.org).

We also invite you to visit our own Web site, where we offer more detailed information about Maine's degree-attainment rates at www.luminafoundation.org/research/state_data/maine.html, as well as links to corresponding data from other states.

We hope this information helps you in the crucial task of improving the nation's college-attainment rates. We at Lumina welcome your partnership in this effort, and we stand ready to help in any way we can.

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FIGURE 3:

Percentage of Maine counties' young adults (ages 25-34) with a two- or four-year degree

1	Cumberland	46.0%	9	Aroostook	26.8%
2	Penobscot	33.4%	10	Lincoln	25.9%
3	York	33.4%	11	Androscoggin	24.7%
4	Hancock	32.1%	12	Knox	24.7%
5	Sagadahoc	29.2%	13	Piscataquis	23.9%
6	Franklin	28.9%	14	Oxford	23.2%
7	Waldo	28.3%	15	Washington	20.4%
8	Kennebec	27.9%	16	Somerset	17.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

Lumina Foundation for Education is committed to enrolling and graduating more students from college — especially low-income students, students of color, first-generation students and adult learners. Our goal is to increase the percentage of Americans who hold high-quality degrees and credentials from 39 percent to 60 percent by 2025. Lumina pursues this goal in three ways: by

identifying and supporting effective practice, through public policy advocacy, and by using our communications and convening power to build public will for change. For more details on the Foundation, visit our Web site at www.luminafoundation.org.

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