

Meeting the Nation's 2020 Goal: State Targets for Increasing the Number and Percentage of College Graduates with Degrees

In his first joint address to Congress on February 24, 2009, President Obama set a goal that the nation should once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world by the year 2020. To reach this goal, the U.S. Department of Education projects that the proportion of college graduates in the U.S. will need to increase by 50 percent nationwide by the end of the decade. Translated into additional degree-holders, eight million more young adults will need to earn associate's and bachelor's degrees by 2020. To achieve this ambitious goal, the higher education system must undertake far-reaching reforms to widen college access, improve college readiness, ensure quality, and accelerate college completion. Colleges and universities in every state have a vital role and a unique opportunity today to help America again lead the world in college attainment.

The table below shows the total number of college graduates that each state would need to achieve to be on target to reach the 2020 goal, with the corresponding degree attainment rate. States start at different baselines in college attainment in 2009, and the table displays a range that each state can use to benchmark progress toward its college completion targets. If every state makes its contribution at the midpoint of the ranges shown, the United States will again lead the world in college attainment by the end of the decade. States with a check mark have already set attainment goals, although target dates and target age groups vary.

Note: Young adults account for the majority of college graduates, and attainment rates among young adults age 25-34 are often used in key international comparisons. The 25-34 age range used below represents this international benchmark, but older and younger graduates outside of the range will add to our success as a nation. Figures in the "College Graduates as of 2020" column include the additional eight million graduates needed as well as the projected growth rate in degree attainment.

Degree Attainment in the Population (Age Range 25-34)					State Has Set Goal
State	College Graduates as of 2009		College Graduates as of 2020		
Alabama	189,731	(31%)	262,000 - 337,000	(47% - 60%)	✓
Alaska	29,566	(30%)	57,000 - 75,000	(45% - 60%)	
Arizona	302,963	(32%)	506,000 - 631,000	(48% - 60%)	
Arkansas	105,953	(28%)	150,000 - 216,000	(42% - 60%)	✓
California	1,999,839	(38%)	3,650,000 - 3,880,000	(56% - 60%)	
Colorado	300,119	(42%)	445,000 - 468,000	(60% - 63%)	✓
Connecticut	186,441	(46%)	295,000 - 339,000	(60% - 69%)	
Delaware	43,462	(38%)	65,000 - 68,000	(57% - 60%)	
District of Columbia	70,479	(65%)	54,000 - 88,000	(60% - 98%)	
Florida	839,048	(36%)	1,480,000 - 1,630,000	(54% - 60%)	
Georgia	484,701	(35%)	785,000 - 886,000	(53% - 60%)	
Hawaii	77,506	(42%)	118,000 - 123,000	(60% - 63%)	✓
Idaho	67,066	(33%)	107,000 - 130,000	(49% - 60%)	✓
Illinois	782,298	(44%)	1,100,000 - 1,220,000	(60% - 66%)	✓
Indiana	292,770	(35%)	452,000 - 514,000	(53% - 60%)	
Iowa	164,680	(45%)	213,000 - 241,000	(60% - 68%)	
Kansas	150,109	(41%)	220,000 - 226,000	(60% - 62%)	✓
Kentucky	183,607	(32%)	272,000 - 336,000	(49% - 60%)	✓

Louisiana	173,762	(29%)	265,000 - 363,000	(44% - 60%)	
Maine	56,244	(38%)	96,000 - 101,000	(57% - 60%)	✓
Maryland	336,954	(45%)	582,000 - 660,000	(60% - 68%)	✓
Massachusetts	454,377	(54%)	562,000 - 760,000	(60% - 81%)	
Michigan	433,940	(36%)	768,000 - 858,000	(54% - 60%)	
Minnesota	338,453	(49%)	488,000 - 599,000	(60% - 74%)	
Mississippi	116,345	(30%)	161,000 - 212,000	(46% - 60%)	✓
Missouri	293,942	(38%)	465,000 - 485,000	(57% - 60%)	✓
Montana	44,415	(38%)	64,000 - 68,000	(57% - 60%)	
Nebraska	100,554	(44%)	131,000 - 143,000	(60% - 66%)	
Nevada	108,576	(28%)	179,000 - 254,000	(42% - 60%)	✓
New Hampshire	67,621	(46%)	122,000 - 139,000	(60% - 69%)	
New Jersey	506,656	(46%)	751,000 - 864,000	(60% - 69%)	
New Mexico	76,230	(28%)	102,000 - 145,000	(42% - 60%)	
New York	1,287,249	(49%)	1,670,000 - 2,050,000	(60% - 74%)	
North Carolina	463,644	(38%)	796,000 - 840,000	(57% - 60%)	
North Dakota	41,296	(51%)	46,000 - 58,000	(60% - 76%)	
Ohio	548,800	(37%)	845,000 - 905,000	(56% - 60%)	
Oklahoma	152,430	(31%)	214,000 - 274,000	(47% - 60%)	
Oregon	194,437	(38%)	326,000 - 346,000	(57% - 60%)	
Pennsylvania	661,561	(44%)	986,000 - 1,080,000	(60% - 66%)	
Rhode Island	57,374	(43%)	96,000 - 104,000	(60% - 65%)	
South Carolina	207,075	(35%)	313,000 - 355,000	(53% - 60%)	✓
South Dakota	41,999	(42%)	55,000 - 58,000	(60% - 64%)	
Tennessee	272,439	(32%)	421,000 - 521,000	(49% - 60%)	
Texas	1,124,625	(32%)	1,880,000 - 2,380,000	(47% - 60%)	
Utah	164,387	(38%)	224,000 - 235,000	(57% - 60%)	✓
Vermont	31,145	(46%)	55,000 - 63,000	(60% - 68%)	✓
Virginia	463,203	(44%)	749,000 - 824,000	(60% - 66%)	✓
Washington	378,951	(41%)	655,000 - 676,000	(60% - 62%)	✓
West Virginia	64,515	(29%)	85,000 - 117,000	(43% - 60%)	
Wisconsin	280,744	(40%)	458,000 - 462,000	(60% - 60%)	✓
Wyoming	24,976	(35%)	31,000 - 36,000	(53% - 60%)	
National	15,839,257	(39%)	26,200,000 - 27,000,000	(58% - 60%)	

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau: American Community Survey (ACS), Education Attainment Ages 25-34, Three-Year Averaged Estimates for 2007-2009; and U.S. Census Bureau: 2020 Population Projections.

✓ = State has already established an attainment goal (target dates and target age groups vary).

Methodology: To be first in the world in the proportion of college graduates with an associate's degree or higher, the U.S. must increase the national attainment rate by 50 percent from its current level by 2020. This would lift the nation as a whole to a 60 percent college attainment rate. The current college attainment rate is 39 percent as measured by the ACS (while international comparisons use the Current Population Survey (CPS), CPS does not yield state-by-state data). While some states with low college attainment rates will need to at least double their attainment rates, states with higher attainment rates are nearer to the national attainment goal of 60 percent and thus do not need as much of an increase. The table above shows two scenarios—on the one hand, a state's attainment rate if it increased its current attainment rate by 50 percent; and on the other, the achievement of a statewide attainment rate of 60 percent. The resulting number of degree holders is calculated by applying the 60 percent rate and the 50 percent increase to the Census projections of the adult population aged 25-34 in 2020. The national projection is calculated in the same way rather than as a sum of the numbers.