

What Is the Issue and Why Does It Matter?

State policy and education leaders continue to establish and revise postsecondary attainment goals to close education and employment opportunity gaps, meet workforce demands and improve living standards for their citizens. Projections that 65 percent of job vacancies by 2020 will require education training beyond high school serve as additional motivation for policy leaders to raise their states' attainment rates.¹ Lumina Foundation's national attainment goal of 60 percent by 2025 further reinforces the need to increase the number of Americans with college credentials.

Nearly every state has or is considering a postsecondary educational attainment goal above 55 percent, and current averages fall as low as 33 percent.

In recent years, nearly every state set, or is revising or adopting, an educational attainment goal.² Most states are aiming for 55 to 65 percent of their citizens to earn a postsecondary credential by 2025, and nearly all face challenges to meet their objectives. In 2015, the national average attainment rate for ages 25-64 was 45.8 percent, which included workforce-relevant certificates. State attainment percentages ranged from 32.9 to 55.2 percent.³

Despite the uphill climb, several states are pursuing strategies to make progress toward their attainment goals, including efforts to close gaps across student populations. Among Americans ages 25-64 with an associate degree or higher, the attainment rates range from 21.3 percent for Hispanics to 61.2 percent for Asians and Pacific Islanders.⁴ In addition, most states will need a sizeable percentage of adults to earn college degrees to meet a 60 percent attainment rate by 2025.⁵ Clearly, states must address the needs and improve the success of underserved and underrepresented populations to meet attainment goals and workforce demands in the coming years.

The following sections of this Policy Snapshot provide summary information for 2017 legislation related to attainment goals and plans, as well as policy actions from previous years. The second section illustrates the role that governors, legislators and higher education agencies play in setting and advancing educational attainment objectives. The policy examples from 2017 and prior years highlight various strategies states are employing that include strengthening partnerships between education and workforce agencies, reporting progress toward the goals, attending to achievement and skills gaps, and recommending implementation plans to reach the goals.

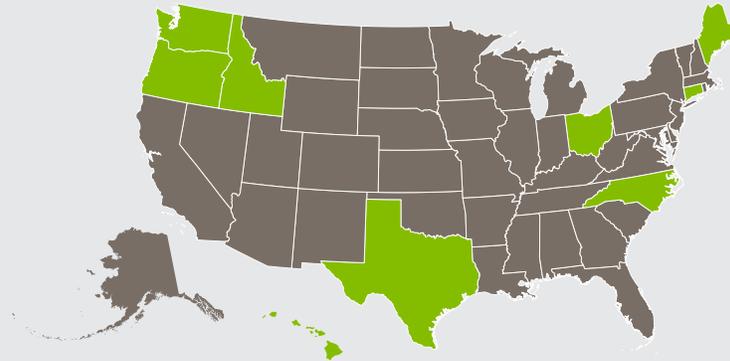


How Many States Considered Legislation in 2017?

Based on a review of 2017 legislative activity concerning attainment goals, plans and metrics, as of Sept. 25, 2017:

- At least 9 states introduced legislation.
- At least 20 legislative actions were proposed.
- Of the bills that were introduced, four were enacted, eight failed and eight are pending.

Which States Have Considered Legislation in 2017?



State	Legislation	Status
Connecticut	S.B. 969	Failed
Hawaii	H.B. 1154	Pending
	H.B. 1591	Pending
	H.B. 1594	Pending
	S.B. 135	Pending
	S.B. 1020	Pending
	S.B. 1162	Pending
Idaho	H.B. 190	Failed
Maine	L.D. 1518	Failed
	L.D. 43	Failed
	L.D. 1638	Enacted
North Carolina	S.B. 257	Enacted
Ohio	H.B. 49	Enacted
Oregon	H.B. 2311	Enacted
	H.B. 2587	Failed
Texas	H.B. 17	Failed
	H.B. 3610	Failed
	H.B. 3768	Failed
Washington	H.B. 1840	Pending
	S.B. 5666	Pending

Note: The legislative actions in **Hawaii** and **Washington** carried over from the 2017 session and are pending until further action in 2018. All the Hawaii bills proposed a University of Hawaii System Promise Program to provide students with scholarships as a strategy to increase completion rates and meet the state’s attainment goal. In **North Carolina**, the enacted state appropriations bill, S.B. 257, requires a newly established board to recommend postsecondary attainment goals. The language was originally included in H.B. 917, which failed in process.

Examples of 2017 State Legislation

Legislation in Maine, Ohio and Oregon was enacted during 2017 sessions, while the Washington bills are pending until further action is taken in 2018.

 **Maine:** [L.D. 1638](#) expands the responsibilities of the State Workforce Investment Board to support an attainment goal of increasing the percentage of working-age adults holding a high-value certificate, degree or credential to 60 percent by 2025, with a focus on meeting future workforce needs. The board must track and report the state's progress toward the goal.

 **Ohio:** Under the 2018-19 budget bill, [H.B. 49](#), the chancellor of the Ohio Department of Higher Education is required to annually report on the progress toward the state's attainment goal of increasing the percentage of adults with a postsecondary credential to 65 percent by 2025.

 **Oregon:** [H.B. 2311](#) revises Oregon's 40-40-20 educational attainment goals to include an additional adult population. The legislation requires the Higher Education Coordinating Commission, in collaboration with the State Workforce Investment Board, to establish educational attainment goals for adults who are not enrolled in a K-12 school, higher education institution or postsecondary training program. These goals must be associated with current and projected job opportunities for adults and designed to promote labor market success.

 **Washington:** Companion bills, [H.B. 1840](#) and [S.B. 5666](#), establish the Washington Promise Program that offers a tuition waiver for eligible students enrolled in community and technical college associate or certificate programs. The program's purpose is to encourage more citizens to complete degrees and certificates that lead to further education and job opportunities. The legislation indicates that improving higher education affordability will allow Washington to make progress toward the attainment goal of 70 percent of adults having a postsecondary credential by 2023.

Previous Legislative and Policy Activity

In addition to the legislative examples presented above, several states set or amended attainment goals in 2015 and 2016, and supported efforts to meet these education and workforce objectives. The following examples represent some of the actions by governors, legislators, and higher education boards and agencies:

 **Arkansas:** A critical component of the Arkansas Department of Higher Education's [master plan](#) for higher education is to reach the goal of a 60 percent postsecondary attainment rate by 2025. The plan also aims to reduce the educational attainment gap by increasing the number of postsecondary credentials by 40 percent over 2013-14 academic year levels. The master plan identifies supporting goals and implementation strategies to meet the 2025 goal.

 **Iowa:** In 2016, the governor signed [Executive Order 88](#) that set a goal for 70 percent of the state's workforce to have education or training beyond high school by 2025 as part of the [Future Ready Iowa](#) initiative. The executive order also created the Future Ready Iowa Alliance to develop and recommend a strategic plan to accomplish the attainment goal.

 **Kentucky:** The Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education's 2016-21 [strategic agenda](#) promotes a goal to raise the state's educational attainment level to 60 percent by 2030 for citizens ages 25-64. The agenda identifies objectives, strategies and metrics to improve college readiness and enrollment, and to produce more certificates and degrees aligned with workforce needs. In addition, the agenda recognizes the need to close college participation and completion gaps for underrepresented students, including low-income, minority, rural and nontraditional adult populations.

 **Louisiana:** [H.C.R. 200](#), adopted in 2015, requested that the board of regents review and consider revising the [Master Plan for Public Postsecondary Education](#) to meet a goal — established in 2011 — of increasing educational attainment. The resolution urges the board to focus on improving student enrollment, persistence and completion — particularly for minorities, returning adults and veterans.

 **Minnesota:** The 2016-17 higher education budget bill, [S.F. 5](#) (Article 3, Section 6), established a goal for at least 70 percent of residents ages 25-44 to hold postsecondary degrees or certificates by 2025. The budget bill required the Office of Higher Education, in collaboration with other agencies, to measure and report progress toward the attainment goal. The office also must utilize benchmarks of 30 percent or higher, and 50 percent or higher, to report progress by race and ethnicity groups.

 **Oklahoma:** [Executive Order 2016-41](#) established a goal of 70 percent of residents ages 25-64 to complete education training beyond high school by 2025. The order charges a team representing education, workforce and commerce agencies with developing a strategic plan to accomplish that goal. The plan should include actions to increase postsecondary education and training attainment, reduce skills and achievement gaps, and assess whether postsecondary credentials align with high-demand job needs.

 **South Dakota:** Through a 2016 [resolution](#), the South Dakota Board of Regents adopted a statewide attainment goal of 65 percent of citizens, ages 25-34, holding a postsecondary credential or degree by 2025. Later that year, the governor signed an [executive proclamation](#) establishing a goal that mirrors the one approved by the regents. The executive action recognized that the state's economic vitality depends on more skilled workers with a wide range of credentials to meet workforce needs. Further, the governor indicated that providing support for students to pursue postsecondary opportunities should focus on reducing socioeconomic, ethnic and racial achievement and attainment gaps.

Resources

[Challenges and Opportunities in Achieving the National Postsecondary Degree Attainment Goals](#)

[Lumina Foundation's Goal 2025](#)

[Lumina State Policy Agenda](#)

[Addressing Equity Gaps in State Goals for Postsecondary Education Attainment](#)

ENDNOTES

1. Anthony P. Carnevale, Nicole Smith and Jeff Strohl, *Recovery: Job Growth and Education Requirements Through 2020* (Washington, DC: Georgetown Center on Education and the Workforce, June 2013), https://cew-7632.kxcdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Recovery2020.FR_Web_.pdf
2. Jimmy Clarke, “Attainment Goals Are Critical,” presented at Washington Student Achievement Council, slides 5-6, (Olympia: HCM Strategists, April 19, 2017), <http://www.wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2017.04.19.04.Attainment%20Goals%20are%20Critical.pdf>.
3. “A Stronger Nation: Learning beyond high school builds American talent,” Lumina Foundation, accessed Sept. 25, 2017, <http://strongernation.luminafoundation.org/report/2017/#nation>.
4. Ibid.
5. Sarah Pingel, Emily Parker and Lauren Sisneros, *Free Community College: An approach to increase adult student success in postsecondary education* (Denver: Education Commission of the States, November 2016), <https://www.ecs.org/ec-content/uploads/Free-Community-College-An-approach-to-increase-adult-student-success-in-postsecondary-education-.pdf>.

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About Postsecondary Legislative Tracking

The Postsecondary and Workforce Development Institute at Education Commission of the States tracks legislation on multiple issues related to college readiness and higher education. The team follows the bill’s status from introduction through its final action, summarizes key provisions and assigns topics. The policy tracking helps keep an eye on trends, innovative policy approaches and the overall landscape of higher education legislative activity. This information is leveraged for several purposes, including Policy Snapshots that offer a brief background on a topic, a visual take on recent bills and summaries of selected state legislation.

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