

Policy Brief

A Stronger Nation Through Higher Education

ILLINOIS

In Illinois, about 41 percent of the state's nearly 7 million working-age adults (25-64 years old) hold at least a two-year degree, according to 2008 Census data. This compares to a national average of around 38 percent. Attainment rates in Illinois are increasing modestly, even though the proportion of degree-holding young adults—those 25-34 years old—mirrors that of the overall adult population. If Illinois continues to increase attainment at the rate it did over the last decade (2000-2008), the state will have a college-attainment rate of 51 percent in 2025—still short of the Big Goal of 60 percent.

However, this gap can be closed. The key is to begin increasing degree production, and to continue to increase it each year until 2025. By increasing production by 9,367 associate or bachelor's degrees each year between now and 2025—an annual increase of 5.4 percent—Illinois will reach the Big Goal.

One excellent place to begin looking for these additional graduates is in the ranks of Illinois residents who have completed some college without earning a degree. In 2008, 1.5 million Illinois residents fit into this category—representing more than 22 percent of the state's adult population. If only a small portion of this group could be enticed to return to college to complete either a two- or four-year degree, it would go a long way to helping Illinois reach the goal of 60 percent higher education attainment.

Also, by looking at the geographic distribution of college graduates within the state (see chart on the following page), policymakers and other stakeholders can begin to

work strategically and systematically to close achievement gaps. They can target counties and regions that show the greatest need and focus their efforts on those specific areas.

How do we know that Illinois' economy will demand more college graduates? A recent analysis by the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce provides the answer. According to the center's analysis of occupation data and workforce trends, 64 percent of Illinois' jobs will require postsecondary education by 2018. Between now and 2018, Illinois will need to fill about 2 million vacancies resulting from job creation, worker retirements and other factors. Of these job vacancies, about 1.3 million will require postsecondary credentials, while only 733,000 are expected to be filled by high school graduates or dropouts.

It will be impossible to reach the Big Goal without significantly increasing college success among the groups that can accurately be called 21st century students, including working adults, low-income and first-generation students and students of color.

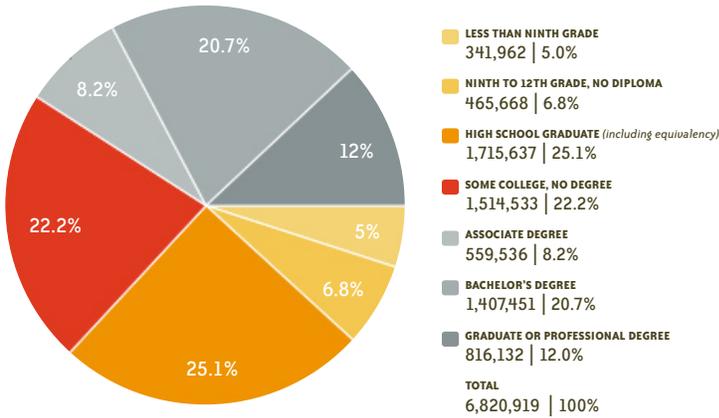
Attainment gaps among racial and ethnic groups have persisted in Illinois for decades, and the most recent degree-attainment rates for the state continue to reflect such gaps (see bar graph on next page). Closing these attainment gaps is clearly a challenge, but it is one that can and must be met.

ILLINOIS

Attainment Data

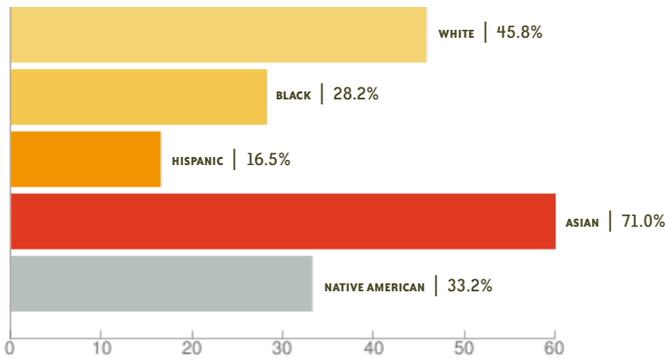
» LEVELS OF EDUCATION

% of Adults (25-64)



» BY POPULATION GROUP

Degree attainment rates among adults (25-64)



» DEGREE BY COUNTY

% of Adults (25-64) with a two- or four-year degree.

Adams	33.7	Logan	27.8
Boone	28.0	McDonough	48.6
Bureau	26.0	McHenry	41.5
Champaign	55.2	McLean	50.6
Christian	22.2	Macon	30.9
Clinton	34.1	Macoupin	27.4
Coles	34.6	Madison	35.3
Cook	41.4	Marion	25.9
DeKalb	39.7	Monroe	40.6
DuPage	55.5	Montgomery	24.8
Effingham	39.2	Morgan	28.4
Fayette	22.5	Ogle	28.2
Franklin	27.7	Peoria	39.7
Fulton	25.1	Perry	26.8
Grundy	29.4	Randolph	22.2
Henry	33.1	Rock Island	33.8
Iroquois	25.5	St. Clair	36.1
Jackson	48.0	Saline	28.5
Jefferson	26.7	Sangamon	41.4
Jersey	30.3	Shelby	30.2
Jo Daviess	31.4	Stephenson	30.7
Kane	41.1	Tazewell	38.6
Kankakee	29.3	Vermilion	25.3
Kendall	41.8	Whiteside	26.3
Knox	28.5	Will	40.9
Lake	49.4	Williamson	32.6
LaSalle	28.4	Winnebago	30.8
Lee	27.1	Woodford	41.8
Livingston	23.1	Other counties	28.8*

*This percentage is an average for the 45 Illinois counties with less than 20,000 residents



Making college accessible and affordable for all Illinois students.