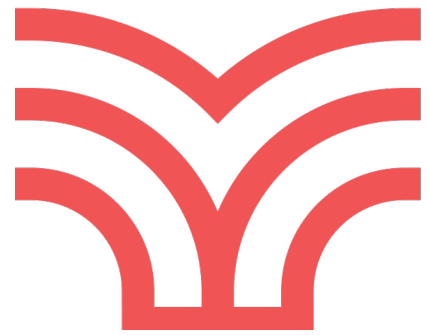




MIDWESTERN
HIGHER EDUCATION
— **COMPACT** —

Midwest Education Attainment and Returns on Investment

August 30, 2026

Dr. John Burczek Dreier, Vice President of Policy and Research

The Midwestern Higher Education Compact brings together leaders from 11 Midwestern states to strengthen postsecondary education and promote regional economic vitality.



MHEC leverages the knowledge and expertise of postsecondary leaders to generate collaborative solutions to challenges in higher education.



MHEC's contracts and programs save colleges, universities, and students in its member states valuable time and millions of dollars annually.



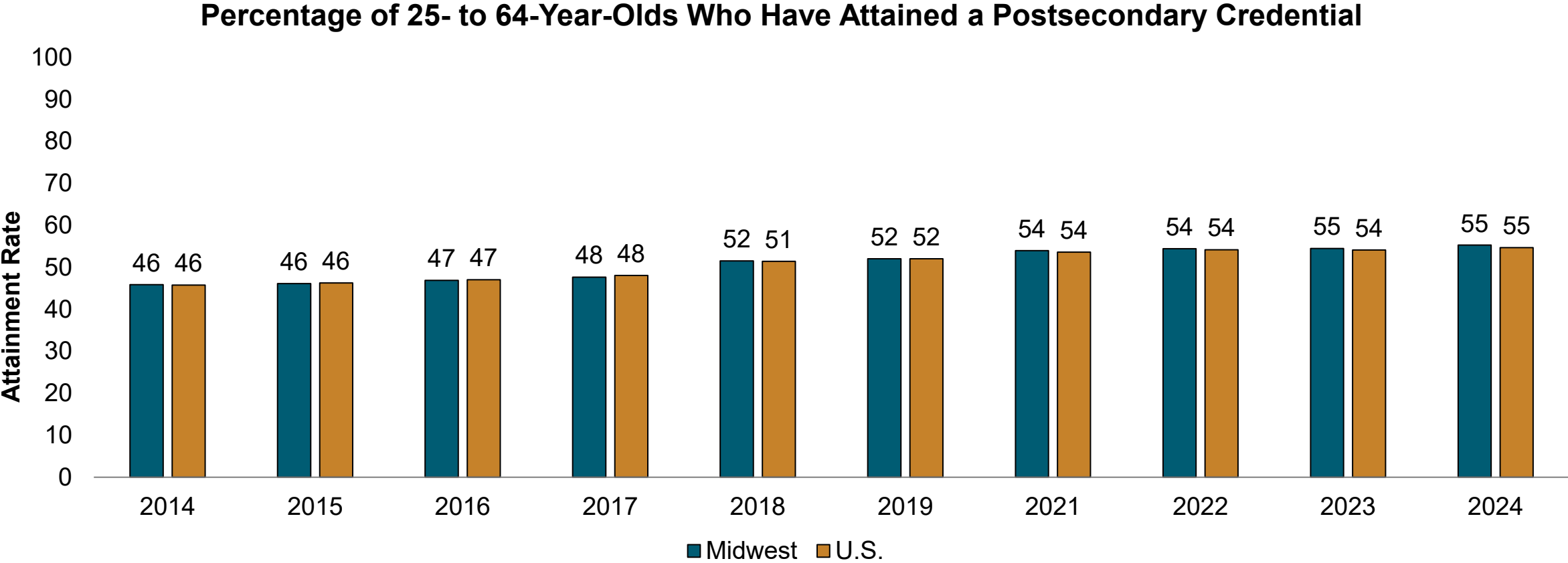
MHEC research and policy initiatives support workforce readiness and improve the quality, accessibility, and affordability of postsecondary education.

What is education attainment?

Highest education level achieved in the form of a credential, certificate, or degree.

- 60% of US adults ages 25-64 should have a post-school credential (Lumina Foundation 2025 Goal)
- States set their own specific attainment goals to align with their needs and priorities

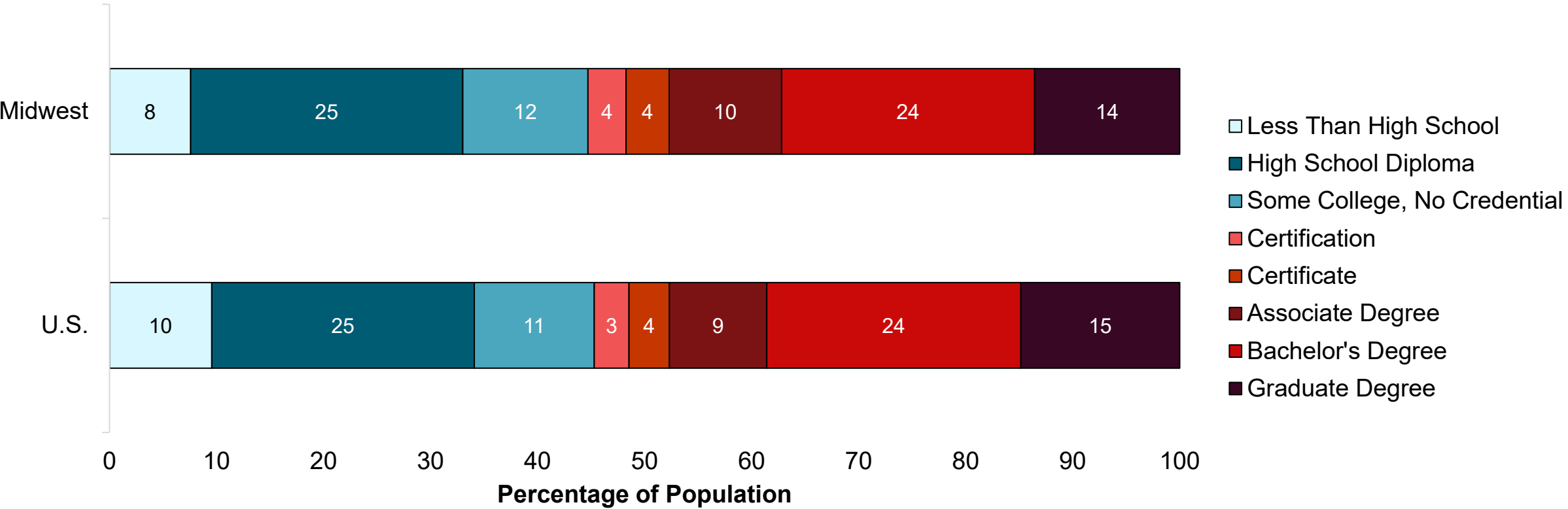
ATTAINMENT: Over the past decade, the Midwest’s postsecondary attainment rate has increased and is currently the same as the national attainment rate.



Source. Lumina Foundation. (2026). *A Stronger Nation*. Note. Estimates include U.S. residents of any citizenship or immigration status. The attainment estimates include postsecondary certificates. Since 2018, the attainment estimate includes industry-recognized certifications. 2020 estimates are not available due to sampling problems that occurred during the 2020 administration of the American Community Survey. Lumina’s methodology for short-term non-degree credentials includes only certificates and certifications that meet its value threshold of earning at least 15% above the national median annual wages of a high school graduate. The reported share of adults whose highest credential is a certificate or certification may thus be underestimated. Registered apprenticeship completion certificates outside of a postsecondary institution are not captured in Lumina’s attainment measure. Explore more on the [MHEC Interactive Dashboard](#).

ATTAINMENT: Midwest and U.S. residents have attained various types of postsecondary credentials, ranging from industry certifications and college certificates to bachelor's and graduate degrees; 45% of Midwest and U.S. residents do not have a credential beyond high school.

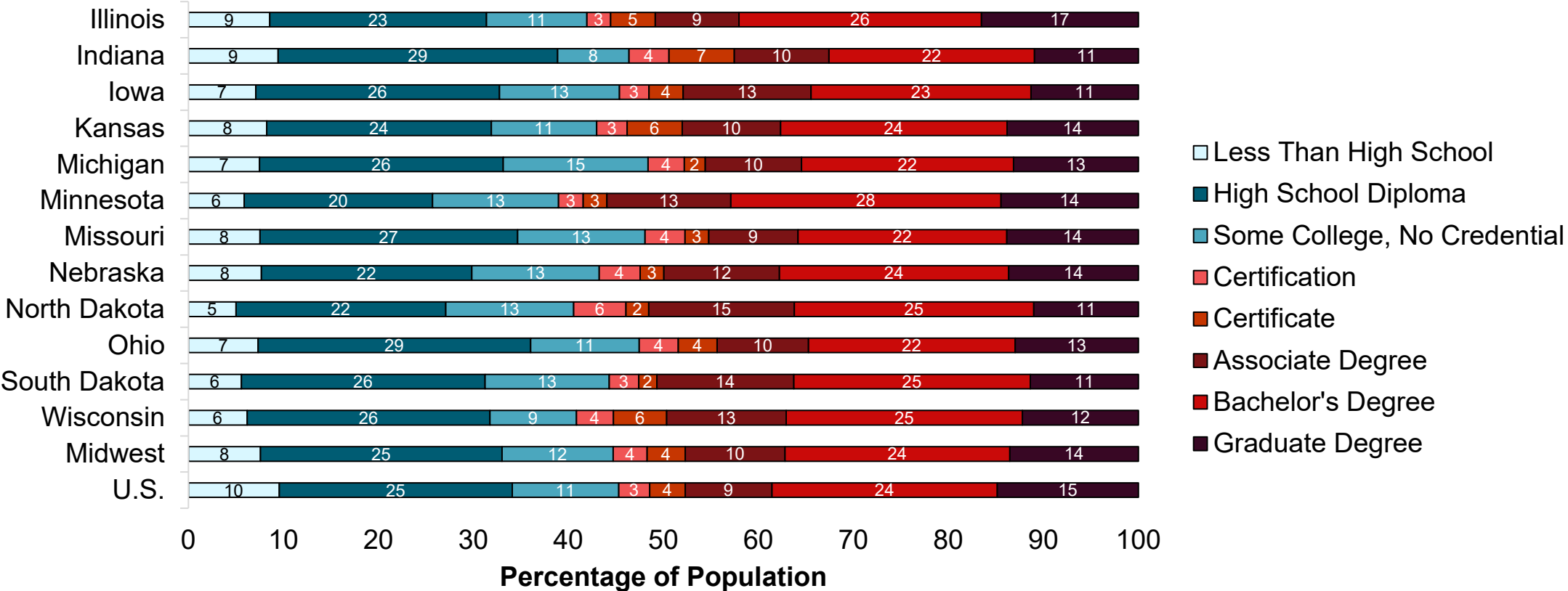
Educational Attainment Distribution of Residents Ages 25-64, 2024



Source: Lumina Foundation. (2026). *A Stronger Nation*. Note. Estimates include U.S. residents of any citizenship or immigration status. Lumina’s methodology for short-term non-degree credentials includes only certificates and certifications that meet its value threshold of earning at least 15% above the national median annual wages of a high school graduate. The reported share of adults whose highest credential is a certificate or certification may thus be underestimated. Registered apprenticeship completion certificates outside of a postsecondary institution are not captured in Lumina’s attainment measure. Explore more on the [MHEC Interactive Dashboard](#).

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Why focus on attainment?

Midwest Postsecondary Education Values and Opportunities

Partnering with Gallup to leverage existing national data collection from Lumina - Gallup State of Higher Education Study

MHEC positioned to help states gain Midwest and state-specific perspectives on:

1. Value and return on investment in postsecondary education
2. Motivation and enrollment decisions in credentials
3. Opportunities for Midwest states to help grow the pipeline of students into credentials and workforce

Watch for Gallup report to be issued this fall

Most Midwestern adults believe a college education would be worth it.

Among adults without a college degree or credential

Generally speaking, do you think the investment you could make in a four-year/two-year college education (cost, time to complete program) would be worth it (in terms of knowledge and skills gained, job prospects, and earning potential) for you?

% Yes, worth it

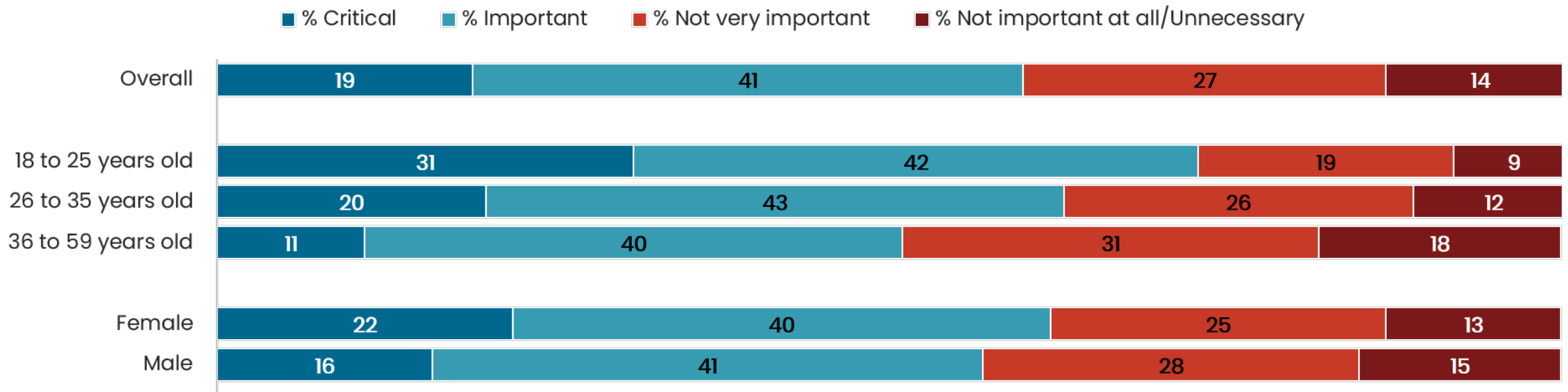
■ Currently enrolled ■ Stopped out ■ Never enrolled



Source: Gallup-MHEC Midwest Postsecondary Values and Opportunities (forthcoming). Midwest adults without a college degree or credential.

Six of 10 Midwestern adults say a college education is critical or important for their career goals.

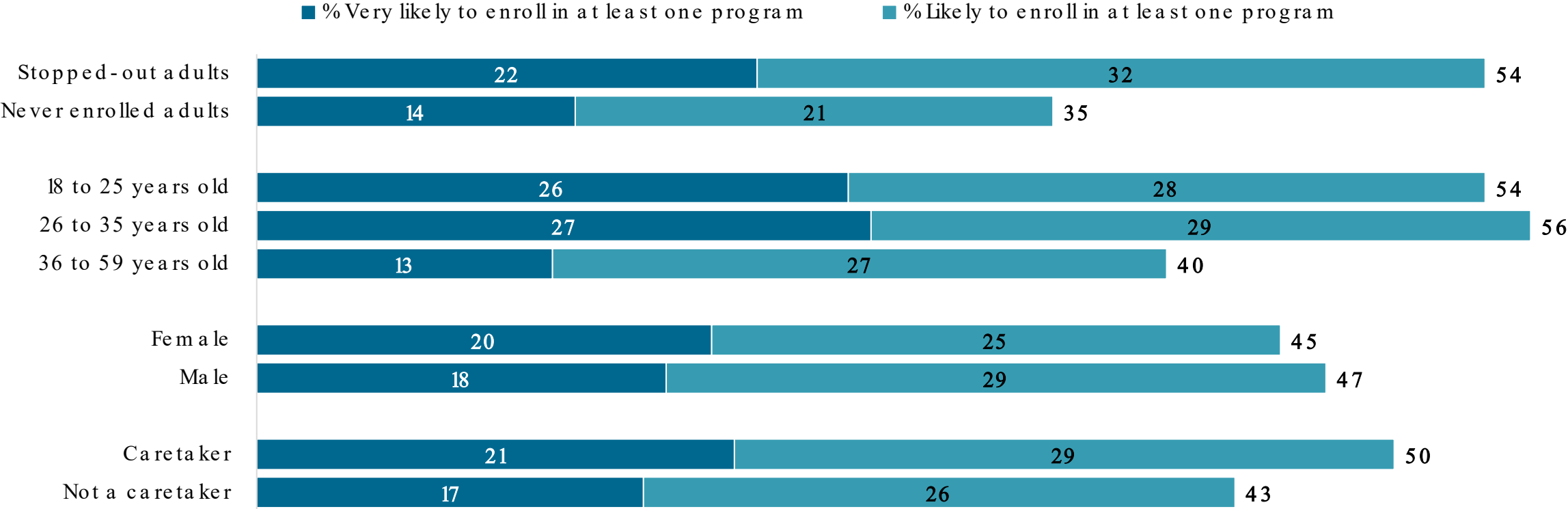
How important is a four-year college degree for you to reach your career goals?



Source: Gallup-MHEC Midwest Postsecondary Values and Opportunities (forthcoming). Midwest adults without a college degree or credential.

Midwestern adults are interested in enrolling in an industry or postsecondary credential.

Please indicate how likely you are in the next five years to enroll in a program for any of the following.

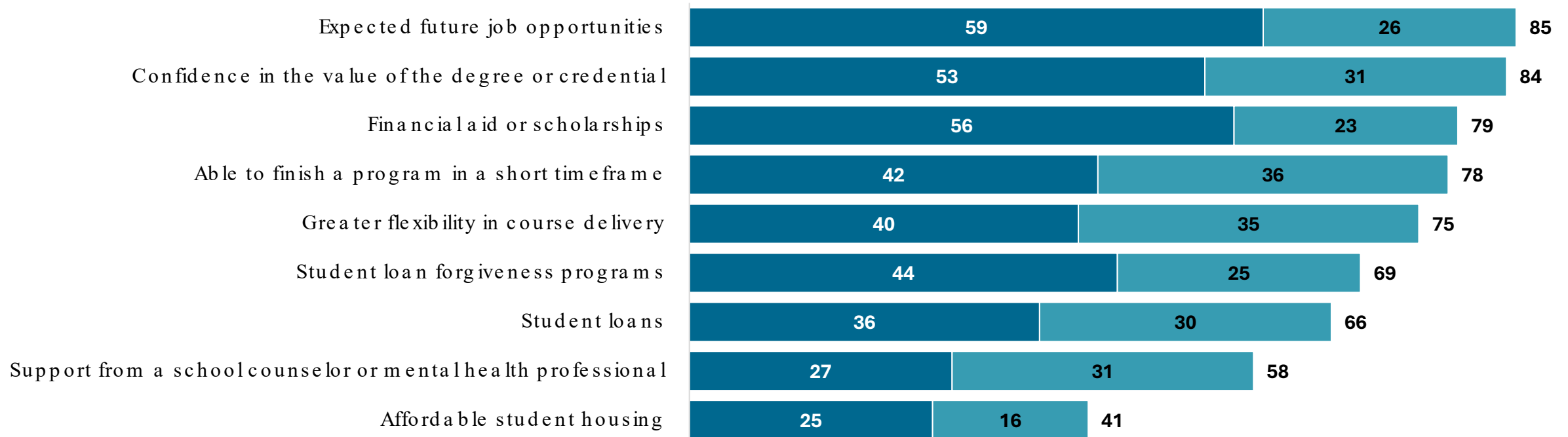


Source: Gallup-MHEC Midwest Postsecondary Values and Opportunities (forthcoming). Midwest adults not currently enrolled.

Factors influencing enrollment decisions of Midwestern adults who stopped out or never enrolled in a credential.

How important would each of the following be in getting you to enroll in a program in the next 12 months?

■ % Very important ■ % Moderately important

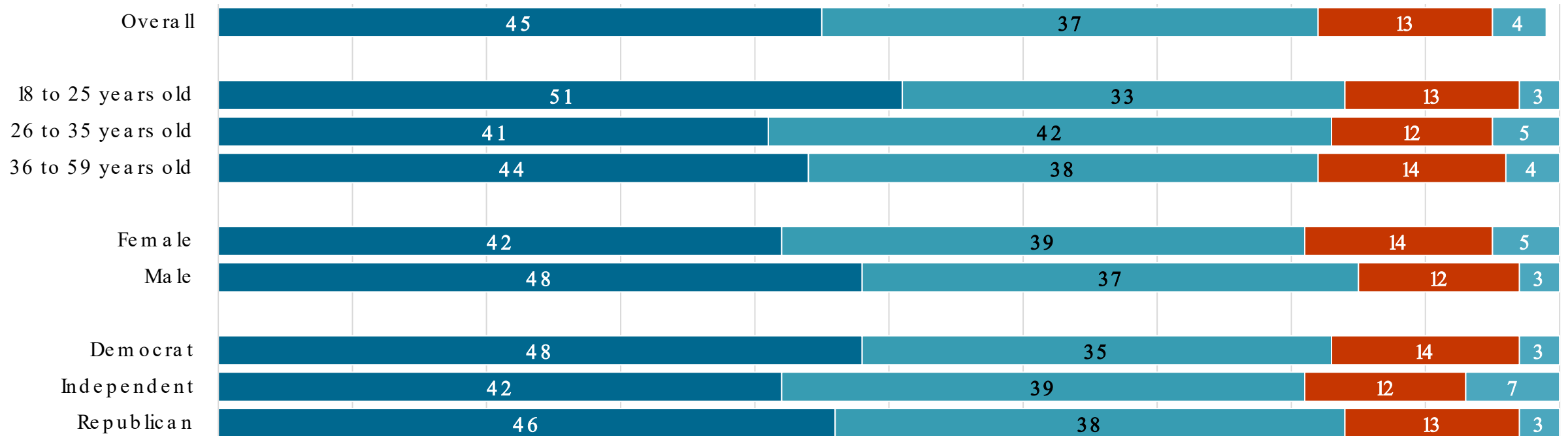


Source: Gallup-MHEC Midwest Postsecondary Values and Opportunities (forthcoming). Midwest adults not currently enrolled.

82% percent of Midwestern adults believe a bachelor's degree pays off within 10 years of graduation.

About how much time, in years, do you think it takes for a bachelor's degree graduate's investment in college to pay off once they leave college?

■ % 5 years or fewer ■ % 6 to 10 years ■ % 11 to 20 years ■ % More than 20 years



Source: Gallup-MHEC Midwest Postsecondary Values and Opportunities (forthcoming). Midwest adults without a college degree or credential.



Midwest adults see value in postsecondary education and are interested in pursuing post-high school credentials.

States and institutions need aligned strategies to convert interest into completion and workforce impact.

What are states doing on attainment?

Strategic Impact & Innovation Grants

\$3 million in grants provided to MHEC member states

Each MHEC member state eligible to apply for a \$250,000 Strategic Impact and Innovation Grant to pursue high-impact activities that:

- Align with MHEC's [strategic priorities](#)
- Are responsive to state needs in such areas as affordability, credential attainment, student success, and workforce alignment

Strategic Impact & Innovation Grants

The program encourages collaboration within states among institutions, systems, and sectors to:

Incubate: Develop and test innovative solutions that improve educational efficiency and outcomes

Launch: Implement coordinated, collaborative efforts to address pressing state-level challenges

Scale: Expand successful programs or policies statewide to increase impact and sustainability

State Workforce Alignment

- **Illinois:** Supporting multi-partner State Attainment Working Group with comprehensive economic and labor market analysis to help project Illinois' workforce needs in 2040 and to inform state's new postsecondary attainment goal announced 5/7/2026
- **Wisconsin:** Creating a Wisconsin College and Career Attainment Network that will support alignment of statewide postsecondary education and workforce development efforts announced 11/20/2025

Pathways through Education and Workforce

- **Michigan:** Bolstering state's efforts to ensure seamless pathways from work experience to bachelor's degree completion in applied programs, through both credit for prior learning and stackable credential pathways
[announced 4/6/2026](#)
- **North Dakota:** Providing all 11 North Dakota University System institutions with access to a career readiness and workforce alignment technology platform that will bridge K-12 and postsecondary career exploration efforts
[announced 12/8/2025](#)

Education to Workforce Systems Improvement

- **Nebraska**: Designing statewide Credential Registry and connected Talent Marketplace to make learning achievements transparent, comparable, and directly aligned to employer needs
announced 6/23/2026
- **Kansas**: Strengthening statewide data systems to meet the evolving needs of students, institutions, and the workforce through suite of targeted software solutions that will modernize internal operations and enhance service delivery
announced 5/1/2026
- **Missouri**: Modernizing three critical systems that connect Missouri's learners, institutions, and state operations
announced 7/28/2026

Enabling Access and Student Success

- **South Dakota:** Embedding dedicated case management positions at two locations where students are pursuing careers in high-demand health professions through a partnership between South Dakota State University and Black Hills State University
[announced 3/16/2026](#)

Connect with Us

Subscribe to MHEC's monthly newsletter

<https://mhec.org/subscribe/>

Follow MHEC on LinkedIn

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/midwestern-higher-education-compact>

MHEC Resources

- MHEC website: <https://mhec.org/>
- Each state has a member page (with multiple downloadable documents):
<https://mhec.org/about/member-states/>
- Interactive dashboard: <https://mhec.org/mhec-interactive-dashboard/>
- MHEC contracts: <https://mhec.org/what-we-do/contracts/>
- MHEC news: <https://mhec.org/news/>
- About MHEC: (statutory language, bylaws, ROI, strategic plan, annual report)
<https://mhec.org/about/>
- MHEC committees: <https://mhec.org/about/committees/>
- MHEC commissioners: <https://mhec.org/about/commissioners/>

Panel Discussion



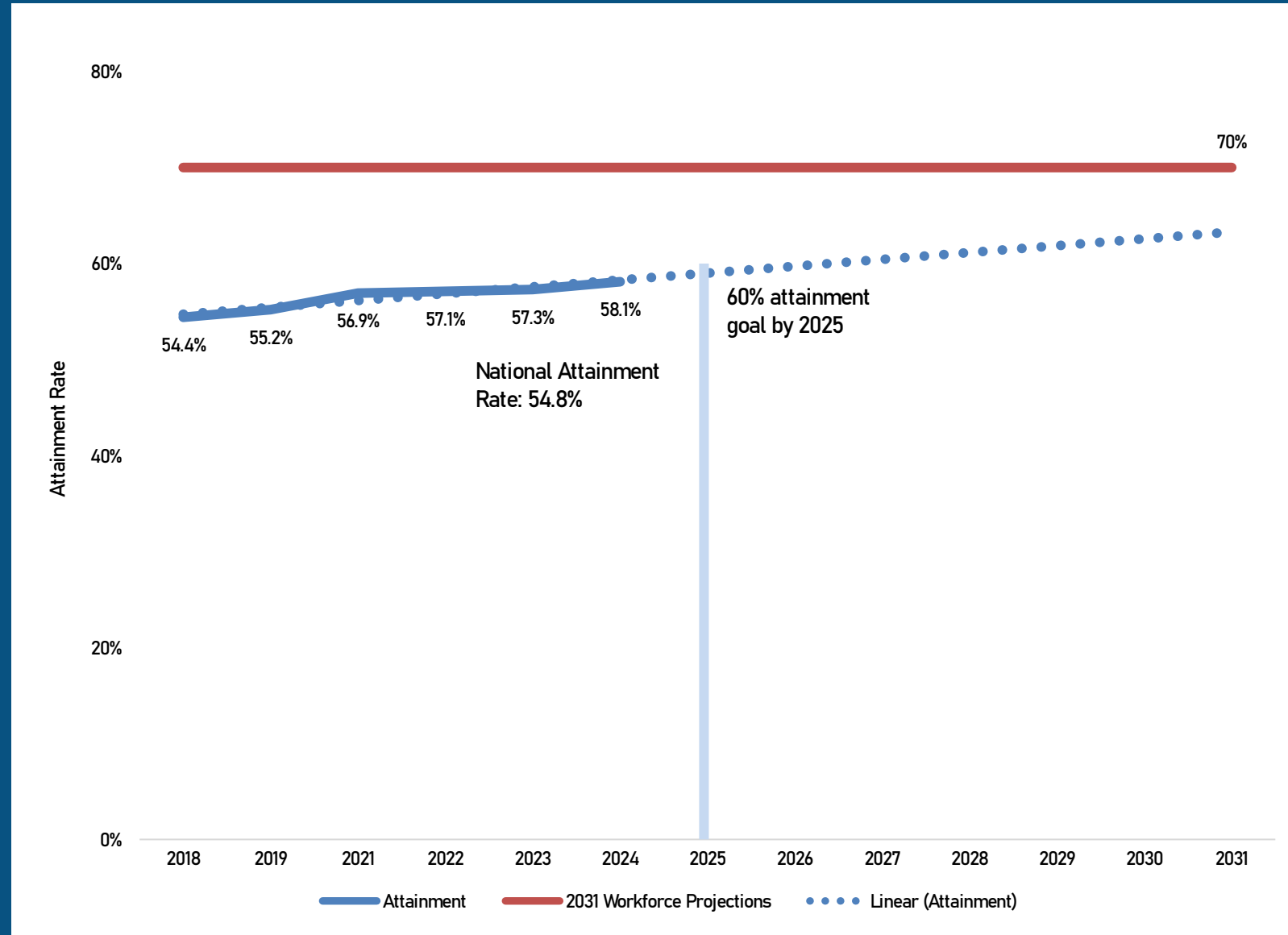
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

State Attainment Working Group

Emily Goldman
First Assistant Deputy Governor for Education
State of Illinois

Despite Progress, The Work Continues

While Illinois made significant progress toward the 2025 attainment goal, **70%** of Illinois jobs will require some postsecondary training beyond high school by 2031. A gap between attainment and workforce needs will persist if Illinois stays on the same growth trajectory.

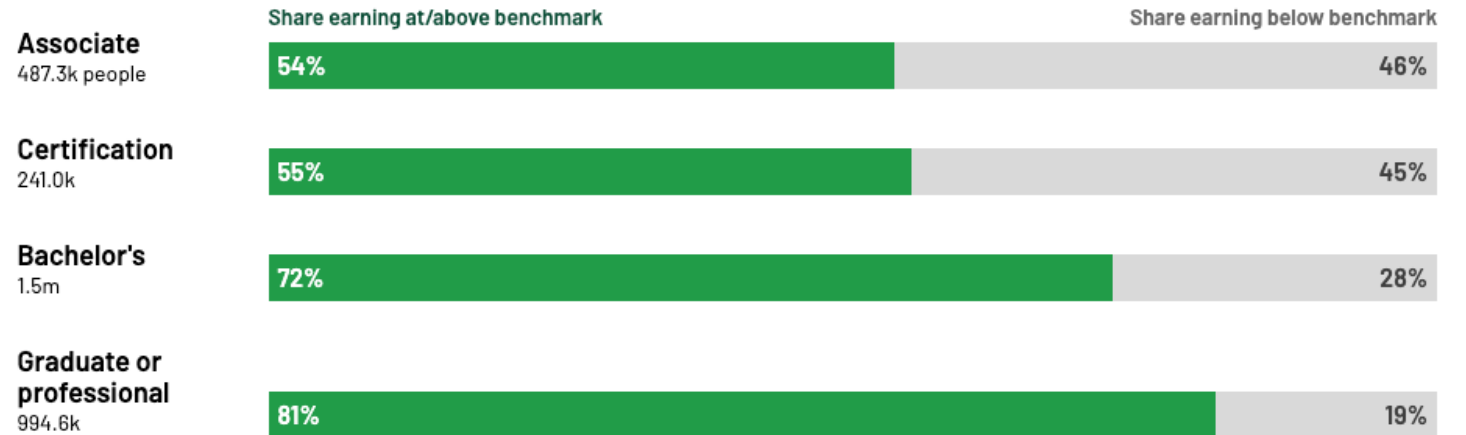


Not All Credentials Enable Economic Mobility

Just over half of adults in the IL labor force with an associates degree (54%) or post-high school certification (55%) are earning at least 15% more than the national median salary for high school graduates.

2024 Share of People Earning At or Above Benchmark in Illinois, within Credential Type

ages 25-64 among the labor force; benchmark reflects 15% more than the national median annual salary/wage of a high school graduate



Note: Certificate data unavailable. Demographic breakdowns are unavailable at the state level.

Cross-sector group tasked with recommending a value-centered state attainment goal that drives workforce alignment, economic mobility, and equity

Education and Workforce Members

- Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE)**
- Illinois Community College board (ICCB)**
- Illinois Dept. of Employment Security (IDES)**
- Illinois Dept. of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO)**
- Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC)
- Representatives of the IL Workforce Innovation Board (IWB)

**Working group co-chairs

Advisory Members

- Illinois Dept. of Human Services (IDHS)
- Illinois Dept. of Corrections (IDOC)
- Illinois Dept. of Public Health (IDPH)
- Representative of the Office of the First Lady
- Other agencies as determined by the GO

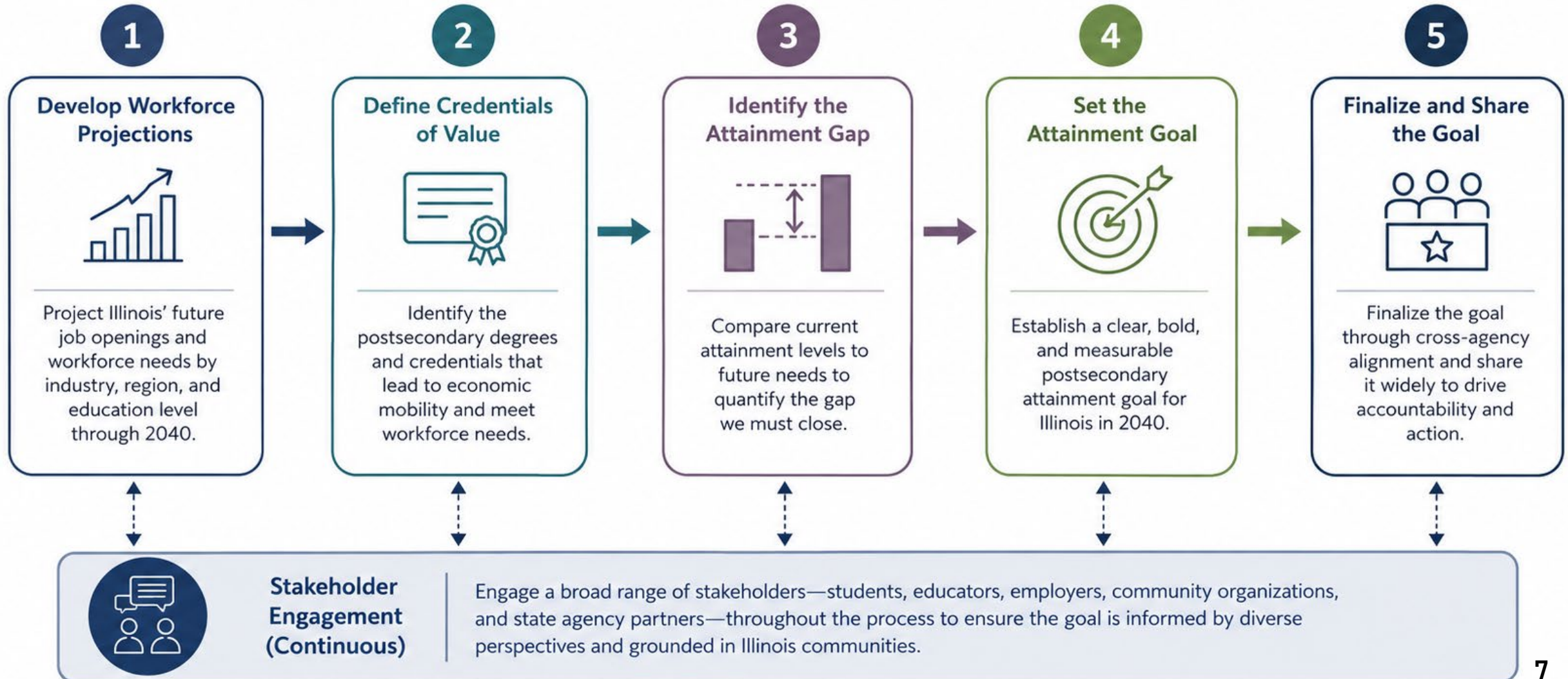
HCM Strategists Serving as Facilitation Consultant



Illinois State Attainment Working Group

Our Process for Setting a New Attainment Goal for 2040

A data-informed, stakeholder-driven process to set a bold and achievable goal for 2040.



Establishing Workforce Projections through 2040

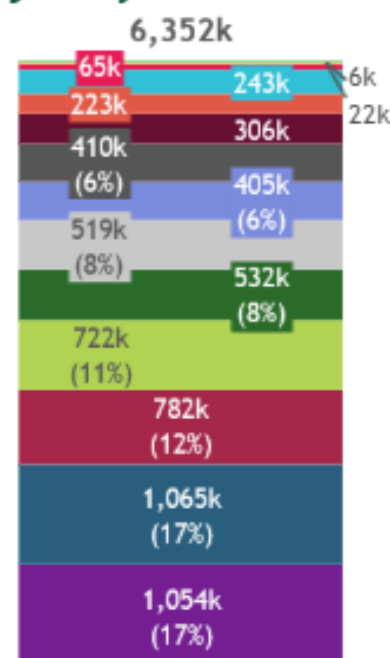
BCG

- ✓ Conducted key stakeholder interviews
- Project workforce demand through 2040
 - Job growth and replacement needs
 - Education and training requirements
 - Breakdowns by sector and region
 - Scenario stress-testing to account for expansion of AI and quantum, federal volatility, economic constraints, etc.

Five scenarios built into model			
SCENARIO	 AI ASSUMPTION	 ECONOMIC ASSUMPTION	WHAT THIS TESTS
Scenario 1 (Base AI / Moderate Economy)	●	●	Starting point for comparison
SCENARIO 2 (Transformative AI / Moderate Econ)	↑	○	AI up (faster adoption)
SCENARIO 3 (Gradual AI / Moderate Econ)	↓	○	AI down (slower adoption)
SCENARIO 4 (Base AI / Accel. Economy)	○	↑	Economic up (stronger growth)
SCENARIO 5 (Base AI / Constr. Economy)	○	↓	Economic down (weaker growth)
● Baseline (in base case) ○ No change vs. base ↑ Higher than base ↓ Lower than base			

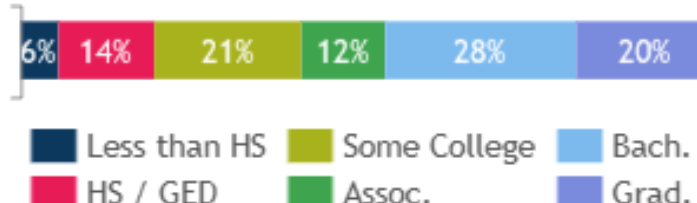
2040 Base/Moderate scenario | ~4% job growth projected from 2025, with Digital Tech and Healthcare seeing largest % growth

2040 Base AI / Moderate Econ. scenario Illinois jobs by career cluster¹



Degree credential mix across all jobs (excludes non-degree credentials)³

Cluster (in ascending order by job count)	% job growth from 2025	% of roles post-high school credential (% change from 2025) ²
Agriculture	-5%	36% (+4%)
Energy	6%	50% (+1%)
Arts & Ent.	1%	77% (+1%)
Digital Tech.	32%	96% (+4%)
Public Service	8%	79% (+6%)
Construction	8%	38% (+4%)
Education	7%	90% (-3%)
Fin. Services	0%	93% (+4%)
Adv. Manu.	-1%	41% (+4%)
Market. & Sales	-8%	56% (+9%)
Hospitality	9%	29% (+4%)
Supply Chain	0%	40% (+3%)
Healthcare	15%	76% (+3%)
Manage. & Entre	-1%	71% (+10%)
Total / Average	3.9%	62% (+5%)



Key takeaways:

- **Approx. 4% overall growth to 2040**, slightly below past 15 years' growth (5-7%) and lower than most other states' projected growth, due to demographic and AI headwinds
- **Digital Tech expected to grow fastest of any sector (+32%)**, while Marketing & Sales is experiencing largest net job decline (-8%)
- **% of roles requiring Associate's degree and above or credential projected to rise from 57% to 62%**, with biggest growth in Management & Entrepreneurship (+10 p.p.) and Marketing & Sales (+9 p.p.), as AI replaces lower skilled office roles
- **# of Bachelor's and Graduate's degrees projected to increase slightly**, with decline in HS/GED

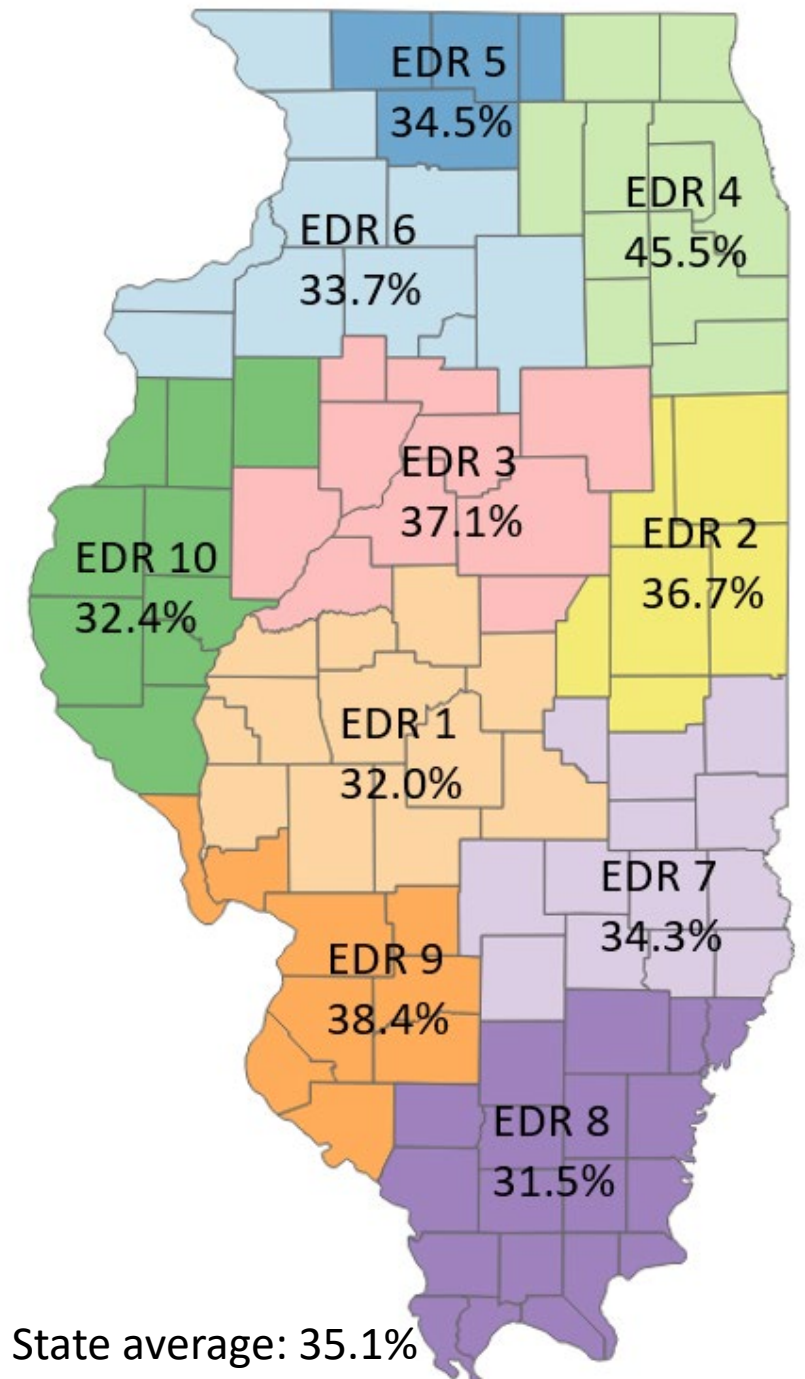
1. BLS / IDES 2025 employment data; BCG analysis. 2. Post-High School credential = Associate's, Bachelor's, or Graduate's Degree, or non-degree credential; terminology used to align with Lumina. Degree credential data per U.S. Census ACS 2019-2023 dataset with adjustment factor for time lag. Non-degree credential data per BLS ORS 2025 database; BCG Analysis. 3. May not sum to 100% due to rounding.

Understanding Regional Priorities

Degree attainment varies by economic development region and county. To ensure the approach reflects regional priorities, the working group is leading a statewide listening tour.

- 10 stops across each economic development region
Student survey and focus groups
- Sessions hosted by local colleges and universities
- Audience represents K-12, Higher Ed, Workforce Development, Employers, Community Organizations, Funders, Policymakers, and more

Degree Attainment: Percentage of residents (25 and over) with an Associate degree or higher



State Examples of Credentials of Value



- ✓ Conducted national landscape analysis and literature of existing value definitions
- ✓ Identified key considerations and potential metrics aligned to Illinois programs and data



Wage Premium

Ex. Lumina's 15% wage premium threshold when compared to median earnings of individuals with only a HS diploma.



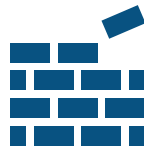
Community Needs

Ex. While Minnesota's credentials of value definition includes leading to family sustaining wages, there is an alternative to qualify if the credential meets essential community needs.



Occupation Alignment

Ex. Louisiana required credentials of value to align with a 3-, 4-, or 5-star job occupation rating defined by the Workforce Commission.



Stackable

Ex. Florida requires credentials of value to stack toward other credentials.



Next Steps

Sept. & Oct.

- Synthesis of Feedback
- Develop and Model a Value Definition

November

- Prepare Recommendations

December

- Submit recommendations to Governor

Jan./Feb.

- Announce new statewide attainment goal & strategies



Michigan College Credit for Apprenticeships Program + Scaling MiWorkforce Pathways to a BA

Brandy Johnson

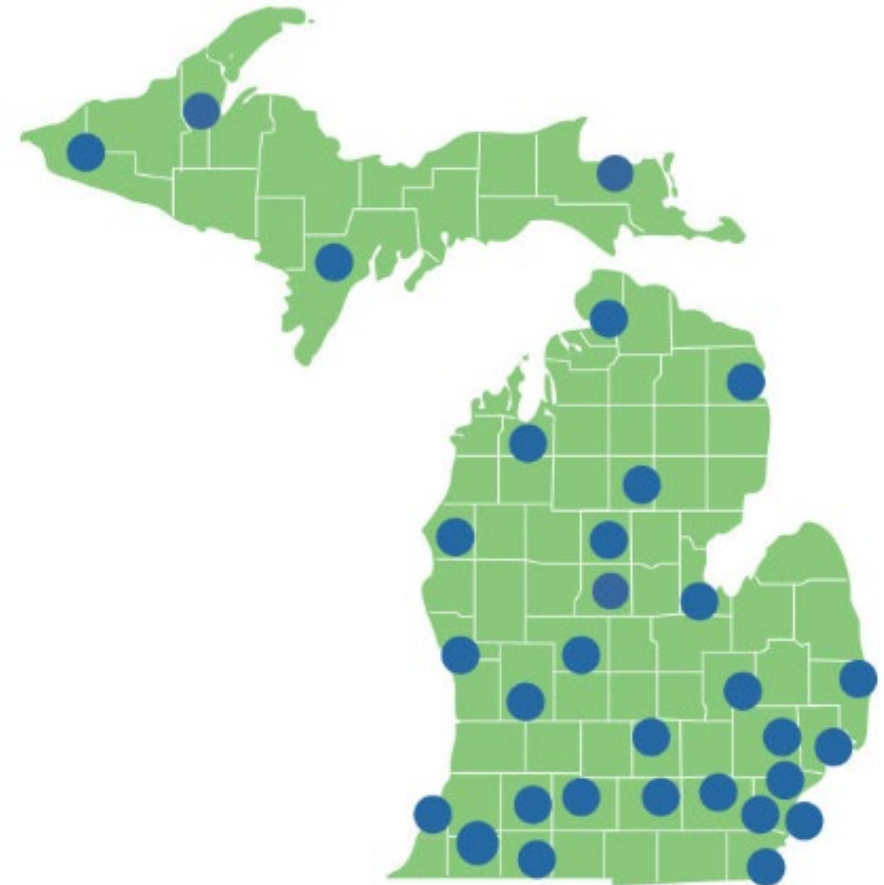
President

Michigan Community College Association

About MCCA



The Michigan Community College Association is the unified voice for Michigan's community colleges, empowering members to lead in the areas of student success, **talent development**, and community vitality.

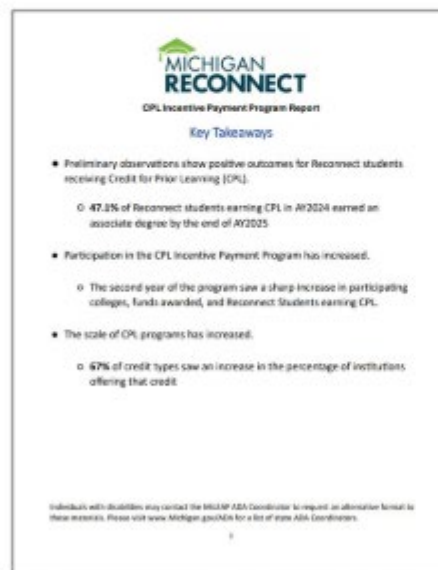


Student Success: Credit for Prior Learning

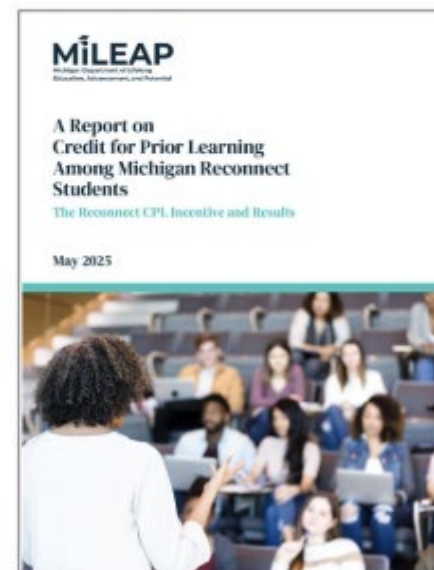


Credit for Prior Learning

Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) recognizes the college-level knowledge students gain outside of traditional classrooms, through military service, professional certifications, exams like CLEP or AP, and work or life experiences. CPL can reduce the time and cost to a credential, improve degree completion, and help adult learners progress more efficiently toward their goals. Through legislation passed in 2022 (PA 251), Michigan's community and tribal colleges are eligible for \$80 per credit hour in reimbursement for CPL awarded to Michigan Reconnect students. This page offers resources and state guidance to help colleges implement, report, and expand CPL on their campuses.



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Project Goal



**MICHIGAN
COLLEGE CREDIT
FOR APPRENTICESHIPS
PROGRAM**

Our goal is to **create clear pathways to associate degrees** at Michigan community colleges by **recognizing the rigorous learning** gained through **registered apprenticeship programs** to increase degree attainment, support career advancement, and build a stronger workforce for Michigan.

Partners



MICHIGAN COLLEGE CREDIT FOR APPRENTICESHIPS PROGRAM

Coordinating Partners



Program Evaluations (to date)



Project Activities



42 Credits

Iron Workers Core Curriculum

ACE Learning Evaluations

Coordinate with the American Council on Education (ACE) to conduct learning evaluations of up to 14 trade apprenticeship programs

College Credit Awards

Support Michigan community colleges to award credit for and document recommended equivalencies and establish efficient pathways to an associate degree that honor the learning in apprenticeship programs.

Marketing Materials

Partner with state and labor leaders to communicate associate degree opportunities to apprenticeship program completers.

Progress to Date



**MICHIGAN
COLLEGE CREDIT
FOR APPRENTICESHIPS
PROGRAM**

8 Apprenticeship Evaluations

28 Colleges

300+ Equivalencies Mapped



United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America

The Michigan Statewide Carpenters & Millwrights and the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners of America prepare highly skilled tradespeople through rigorous registered apprenticeship training grounded in craftsmanship, safety, precision, and hands-on experience. Apprentices develop expertise in carpentry, millwrighting, and floor covering through four-year programs that combine supervised on-the-job learning with related classroom instruction led by experienced journey-level instructors and coordinators at training facilities across Michigan. This training supports work across residential, commercial, industrial, and infrastructure projects, from building homes, schools, roads, and bridges to installing precision machinery, conveyor systems, turbines, generators, and high-quality floor coverings.

Through a partnership involving the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity (LEO), the Michigan Community College Association (MCCA), the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement and Potential (MiLEAP), and labor leaders, apprenticeship learning completed through the Michigan Statewide Carpenters & Millwrights is being connected to associate degree opportunities at Michigan community colleges. This statewide effort works to evaluate and recognize the technical knowledge and skills gained through apprenticeship training, helping apprentices and journeymen apply their experience as college credit embedded within clear degree pathways.

Earning an associate degree can help members of the Michigan Statewide Carpenters & Millwrights strengthen leadership, communication, and technical skills while creating opportunities for career advancement within the construction industry and related management, supervision, project coordination, and instructional roles. Use the search tools on this page to explore how Michigan Statewide Carpenters & Millwrights apprenticeship training may transfer to Michigan community colleges and learn more about pathways that can help you build on your training, earn a degree, and advance your career.

Building Student Awareness and Interest

MICHIGAN COLLEGE CREDIT FOR APPRENTICESHIPS PROGRAM

INTERNATIONAL IRONWORKERS

RAISE THE STEEL.

RAISE THE BAR.



42

COLLEGE CREDITS EARNED
THROUGH APPRENTICESHIP

Low/No

COST TO PARTICIPATE
IN THIS PROGRAM

Associate

DEGREE WITHIN
REACH

Develop

DURABLE AND
TRANSLATABLE SKILLS

You've walked steel high above Michigan and tied the rebar that holds it together. The MI College Credit for Apprenticeships Program recognizes those achievements by translating your apprenticeship learning into college credit, creating a clear pathway toward an associate degree while you continue advancing in your career.

WHERE IT TAKES YOU

- Foreman, superintendent, and project leadership roles — with credentials to back it up
- Estimating, safety, and inspection career paths
- Build the business skills to go out on your own. Ownership starts with a plan.
- Extend the life of your career when physical demands change over time

WHO IT IS DESIGNED FOR

- **Journeyworkers** — Translate years of experience into formal recognition, no matter when you completed your apprenticeship
- **Trade leaders** — Open doors to office, oversight, and ownership roles
- **Career changers** — Connect field expertise to an associate degree that opens the next door

Michigan Reconnect

Tuition-Free Community College for Working-Aged Adults 21+

- For the handful of courses that a student needs to complete their Associate Degree, the state will pay for it!
- EXTRA BONUS: For every credit that a college awards as credit for prior learning, the state reimburses the college \$80/credit creating a powerful incentive to participate.

**YOU'VE GOT
THE SKILLS,
WE'LL COVER
THE BILL.
TUITION
ON US.**

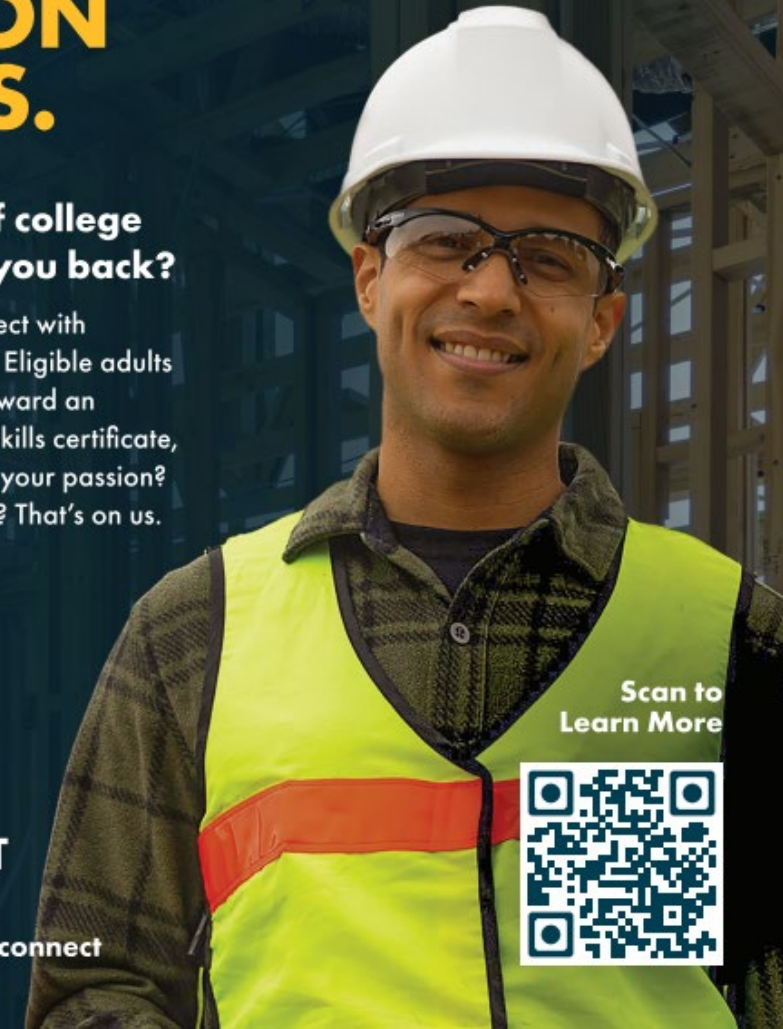
**Has the cost of college
been holding you back?**

Then it's time to connect with Michigan Reconnect! Eligible adults 21+ can now work toward an associate degree or skills certificate, tuition-free! Pursuing your passion? That's on you. Tuition? That's on us.



Apply today at
Michigan.gov/Reconnect

Scan to
Learn More



Scaling Stackable Credentials in MI – A Path from Apprenticeship → Associate Degree → BA relevant to Construction Trades

MiWorkforce Pathways

APPLIED BUSINESS MIWORKFORCE PATHWAY

GENERAL APPLIED SCIENCE MIWORKFORCE PATHWAY

HEALTHCARE MIWORKFORCE PATHWAY

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY MIWORKFORCE PATHWAY

MHEC Grant to Support Scaling of Michigan's MiWorkforce Pathways

April 6, 2026

The Midwestern Higher Education Compact (MHEC) has awarded a Michigan multi-partner collaborative a \$250,000 Strategic Impact and Innovation Grant. The grant will bolster the state's efforts to award credit for prior learning and ensure seamless pathways from work experience to bachelor's degree completion in applied programs.

Through strategic partnerships among Michigan's public and independent universities, community colleges, and state agencies, the Scaling Michigan's MiWorkforce Pathways initiative will establish transparent, scalable, and equitable models for translating prior learning into degree-applicable credit. It will also establish stackable credential pathways in relevant workforce programs for high-demand occupational fields where Michigan employers face persistent talent shortages, including health care and information technology.

Members of the collaborative include the Michigan Department of Lifelong Education, Advancement, and Potential (MiLEAP); Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity; Michigan Community College Association; Michigan Association of State Universities and Michigan Independent Colleges and Universities.

"Michigan's future depends on how well we help connect talent to opportunities," said Sarah Szurpicki, deputy director of the Office of Higher Education in MiLEAP. "This initiative will help more Michiganders turn what they already know into college credit, helping us reach our 60 by 30 attainment goal, strengthening our state's talent pipeline, and fueling career growth."

The initiative will leverage Michigan's prior investment in the Transfer Success Project, Michigan Transfer Network's Industry Credentials Database, the pre-existing MiWorkforce Pathways, and the Michigan College Credit for Apprenticeships program.

Project activities launch October 2026

Questions

Education Attainment Goal 2040

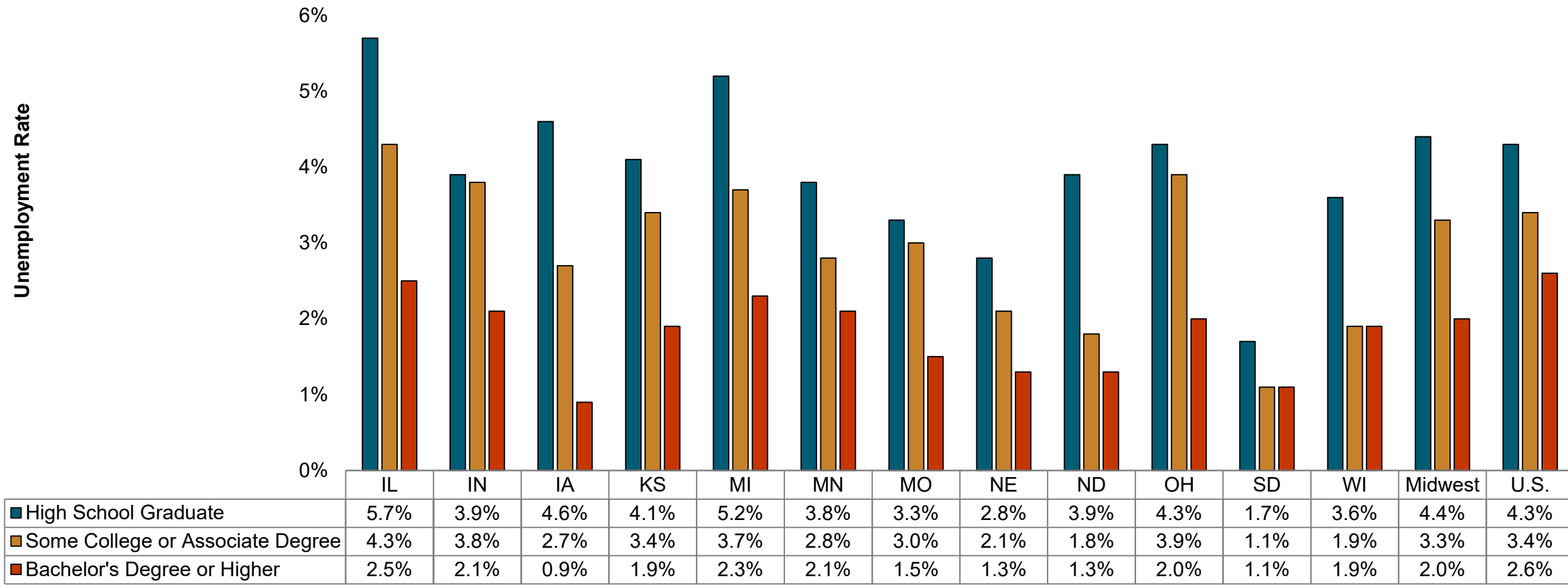
Lumina Foundation 2040 Goal: 75% of adults in the U.S. labor force will have a postsecondary degree or credential of value

As of 2024: 43.6% of the U.S. labor force had a postsecondary degree or credential of value

See Lumina's Stronger Nation for additional details: strongernation.luminafoundation.org/credentials-of-value

Unemployment: Unemployment rates in the Midwest were consistently lower among adults with at least some postsecondary education in 2024.

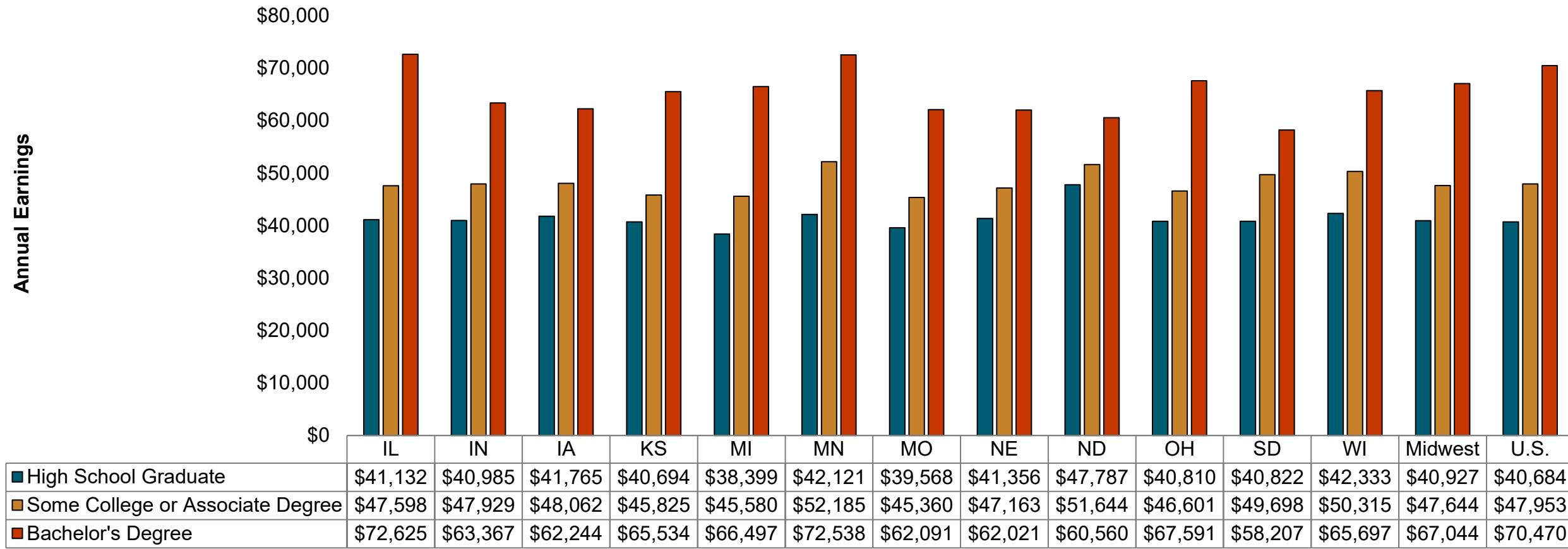
Average Annual Unemployment Rate by Educational Attainment, 2024



Source. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2025). *Employment status of the civilian noninstitutional population 25 years and older, by educational attainment*. Explore more on the [MHEC Interactive Dashboard](#).

Earnings: The median earnings of adults who completed some college credit or an undergraduate credential were consistently higher than the median earnings of high school graduates across all Midwestern states in 2024.

Median Earnings by Educational Attainment, 2024



Source. U.S. Census Bureau. (2024). *American Community Survey one-year estimates: Median earnings in the past 12 months by sex by educational attainment for the population 25 years and over*. Explore more on the [MHEC Interactive Dashboard](#).