

# The College Completion Agenda 2012 Progress Report



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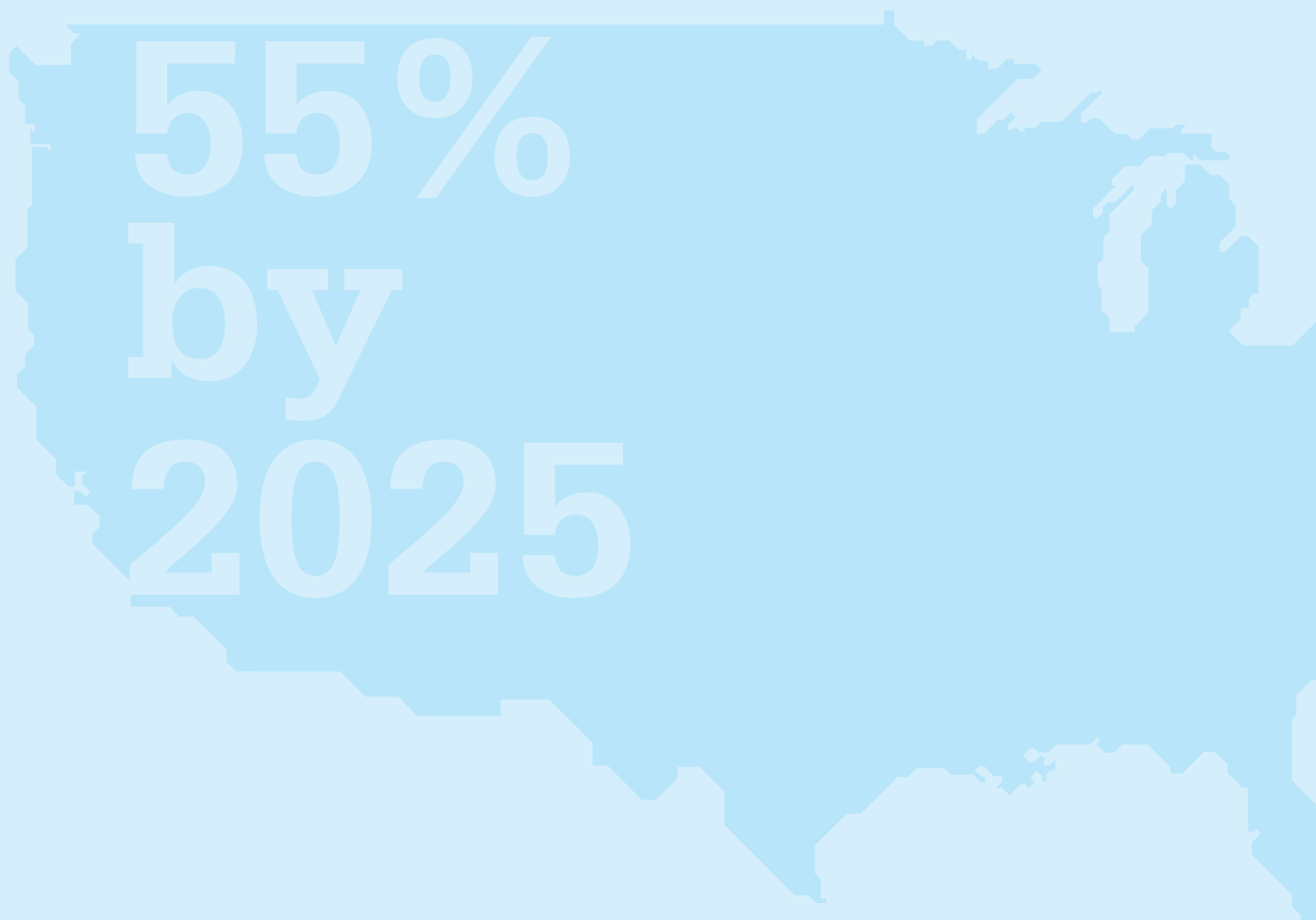
The Advocacy & Policy Center extends special appreciation to the College Board Commission on Access, Admissions and Success in Higher Education and its chairman, Chancellor William “Brit” Kirwan, for providing the framework for the College Completion Agenda. The Commission members continue to be esteemed partners of the College Board in championing college completion.

# **The College Completion Agenda**

## 2012 Progress Report

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College Board Advocacy & Policy Center

**The Goal:** Increase the proportion of 25- to 34-year-olds who hold an associate degree or higher to 55 percent by the year 2025 in order to make America the leader in education attainment in the world.



## One

Provide a program of voluntary preschool education, universally available to children from low-income families.

## Two

Improve middle and high school college counseling.

## Three

Implement the best research-based dropout prevention programs.

## Four

Align the K–12 education system with international standards and college admission expectations.

## Five

Improve teacher quality and focus on recruitment and retention.

## Six

Clarify and simplify the admission process.

## Seven & Eight

Provide more need-based grant aid while simplifying the financial aid system and making it more transparent. Keep college affordable.

## Nine

Dramatically increase college completion rates.

## Ten

Provide postsecondary opportunities as an essential element of adult education programs.

## Introduction

At the end of 2008, the College Board's Commission on Access, Admissions and Success in Higher Education issued its action agenda for increasing the proportion of Americans with college credentials. The commission's report, *Coming to Our Senses: Education and the American Future*, called for an increase in the proportion of the nation's young adults — those ages 25 to 34 — who hold a two- or four-year college degree to 55 percent by 2025. It also identified 10 priority areas across the education spectrum — from preschool education to dropout prevention to college affordability — to be tracked over time and evaluated for progress.

The college completion agenda is a national agenda. Many prominent organizations and foundations have come together, along with the U.S. Department of Education, to raise awareness of the need for a better-educated population and to find ways to increase college completion. The College Board advances this agenda and is unique in representing thousands of secondary and postsecondary institutions and engaging this membership behind its goal.

A little more than four years after the commission's report was released, there are some signs of improvement. While it is still far from certain that we will achieve "55 by '25," the College Board Advocacy & Policy Center's *College Completion Agenda 2012 Progress Report* shows that some of the primary indicators have moved in the desired direction. According to U.S. Census data from 2011, 43.1 percent of Americans ages 25 to 34 hold a two- or four-year college degree, an increase of two percentage points from the 2009 figure.

Examining a smaller subset of young adults, the Pew Research Center for Social and Demographic Trends announced in 2012 that record shares of Americans ages 25 to 29 have a high school credential (including GEDs) and at least a bachelor's degree.<sup>1</sup> Ninety percent of those in that age range have completed high school, up from 86 percent in 2006, and fully one-third have bachelor's degrees or higher. The Pew Center points out that these increases have occurred despite demographic changes in our country that were predicted to produce a decline in education attainment. In addition, bachelor's degree attainment for males, blacks, and Hispanics, while lower than the overall national average, is rising.

Another newly released report provides a fuller — and more positive — picture of college completion than we have had previously.<sup>2</sup> Advances in the ability to track students in order to take account of those who begin at one college but

complete at another show higher graduation rates than reported before. The report finds that, for students who entered postsecondary education for the first time in the fall of 2006, 54.1 percent had earned a college credential six years later. Failure to properly count those who completed somewhere other than their original institution would show a rate of only 42 percent. Thus, researchers' ability to follow increasingly mobile students enables a more accurate picture of completion.

The push toward improved college completion and attainment has to some extent been driven by comparisons with international data that seem to show the United States falling behind much of the rest of the developed world. *The College Completion Agenda 2011 Progress Report* presented data from 2008 that placed the United States 12th of 36 nations in terms of the percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds with an associate degree or higher, and data from 2009 show that the U.S. fell to 16th. Between those years, the percentage of American adults in that age range with a postsecondary degree declined from 41.6 to 41.1, while most of the comparison countries made gains.

Yet, according to the most recently released international figures, the United States' rank has improved to 14th. And, when one examines associate degrees separately from bachelor's degrees, the picture becomes an even more positive one. Analyses that separate the attainment of two-year degrees from the attainment of bachelor's degrees and above show that the United States is not as far behind in the latter.<sup>3</sup> Where the U.S. has been lagging internationally is in sub-baccalaureate attainment. But here, too, we find a reason for optimism: The number of associate degrees awarded annually is increasing at a rapid pace. This trend is visible from the 1990s to the 2000s, leading to an increase of almost 100,000 associate degrees from 2010 to 2011. As one expert has pointed out, improving completion rates at our community colleges — which enroll millions of low-income, first-generation and nonwhite students — contributes to educational equity.<sup>4</sup>

Despite these advances, the U.S. still has much ground to cover to align the many aspects of our education system toward increased postsecondary attainment, particularly for groups historically underrepresented in higher education. This year's *College Completion Agenda Progress Report* includes numerous indicators that are not showing the rapid advancement to which we aspire. Further, the U.S. is still emerging from a serious economic recession that, while encouraging many to pursue higher education, depressed incomes for many of those trying to afford it. This report highlights selected indicators from the commission's 10 areas of recommendation. Many more indicators can be found on the College Completion Agenda website: [completionagenda.collegeboard.org](http://completionagenda.collegeboard.org).

# A greater degree of achievement

From 2008 to 2010, our nation made significant progress in the overall number of degrees earned, with the greatest increases occurring in associate and bachelor's degrees.

In 2010  
our nation earned

# 257,772

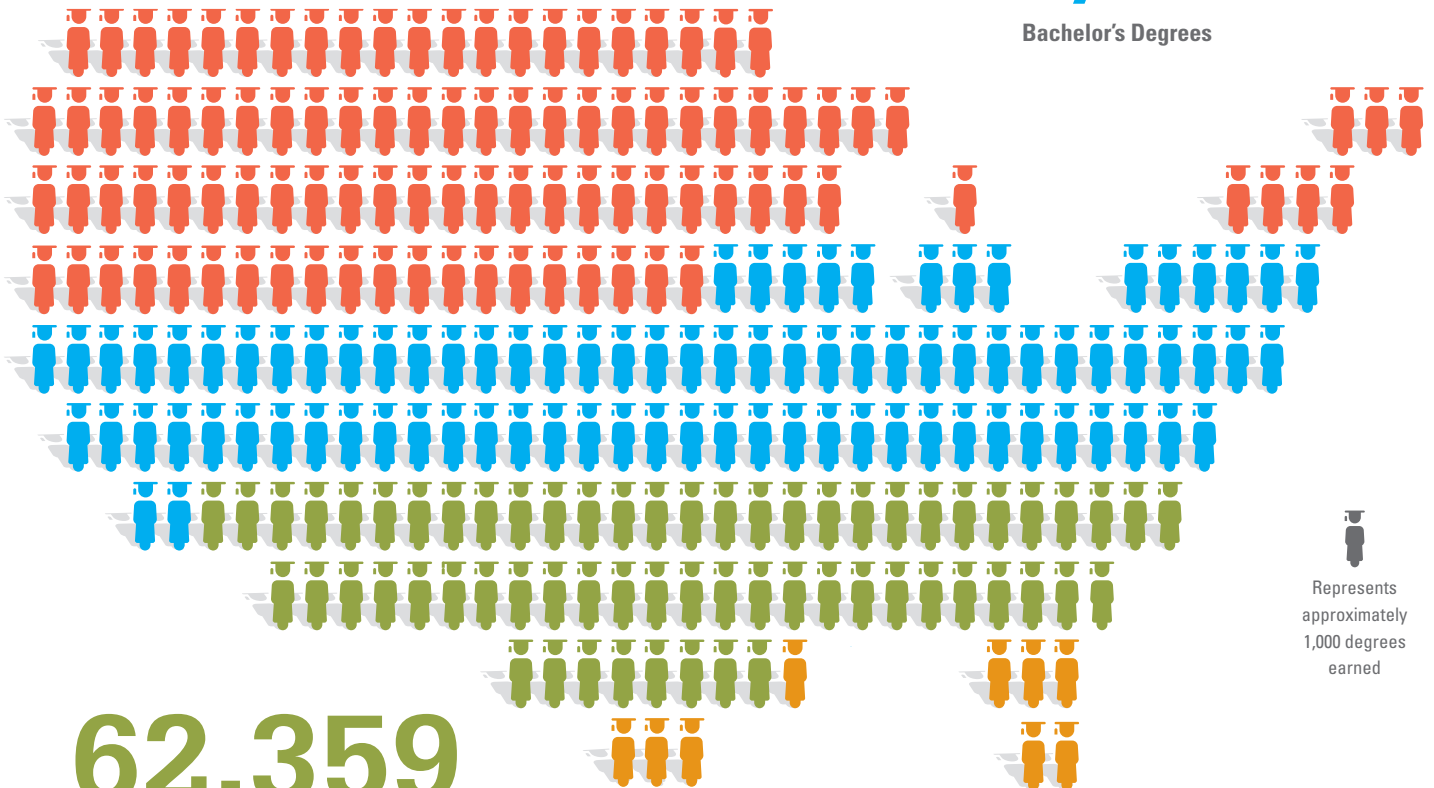
more degrees  
than in 2008

## 99,288

Associate Degrees

## 86,945

Bachelor's Degrees

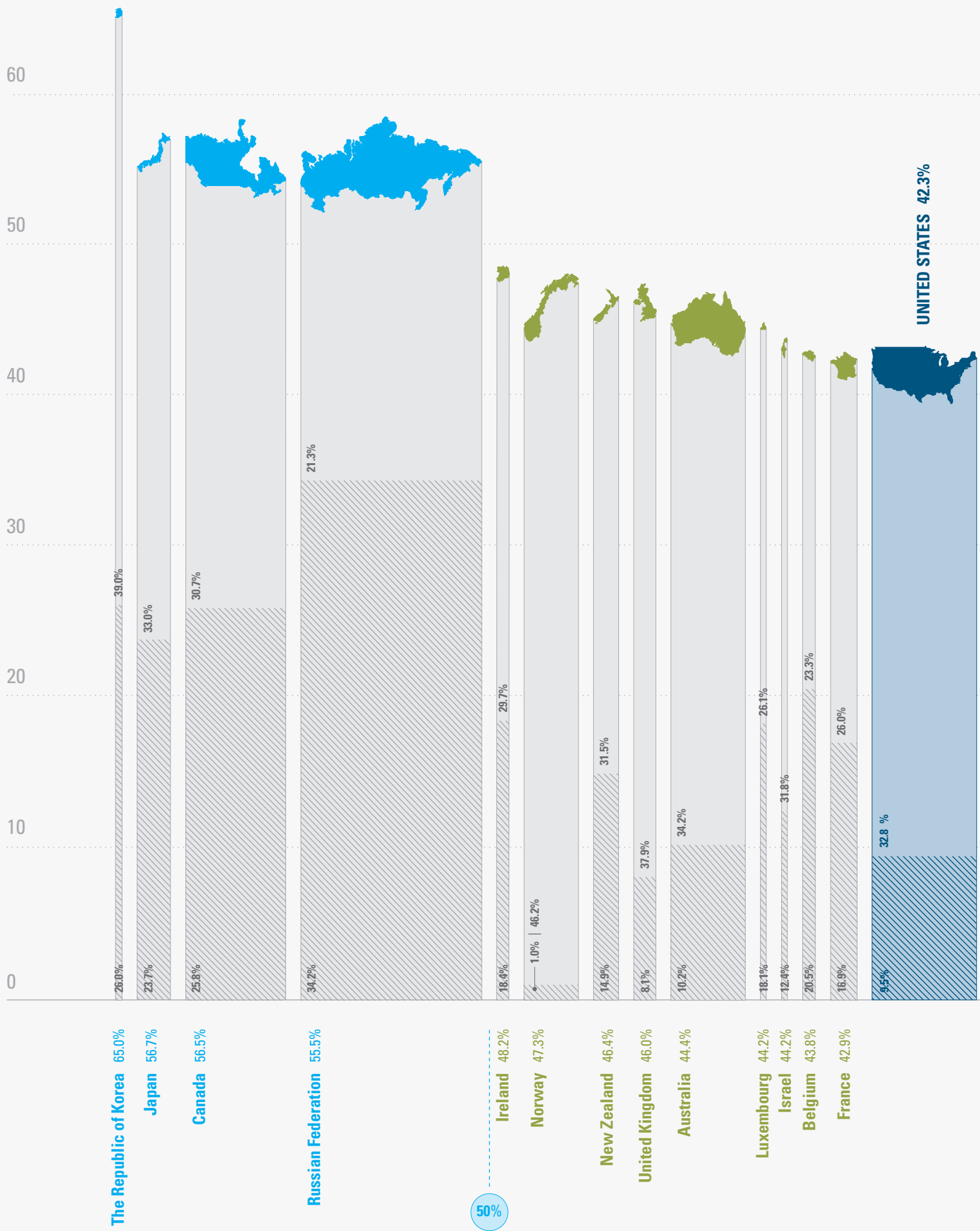


## 62,359

Master's Degrees

## 9,180

Doctoral Degrees





# Global attainment landscape

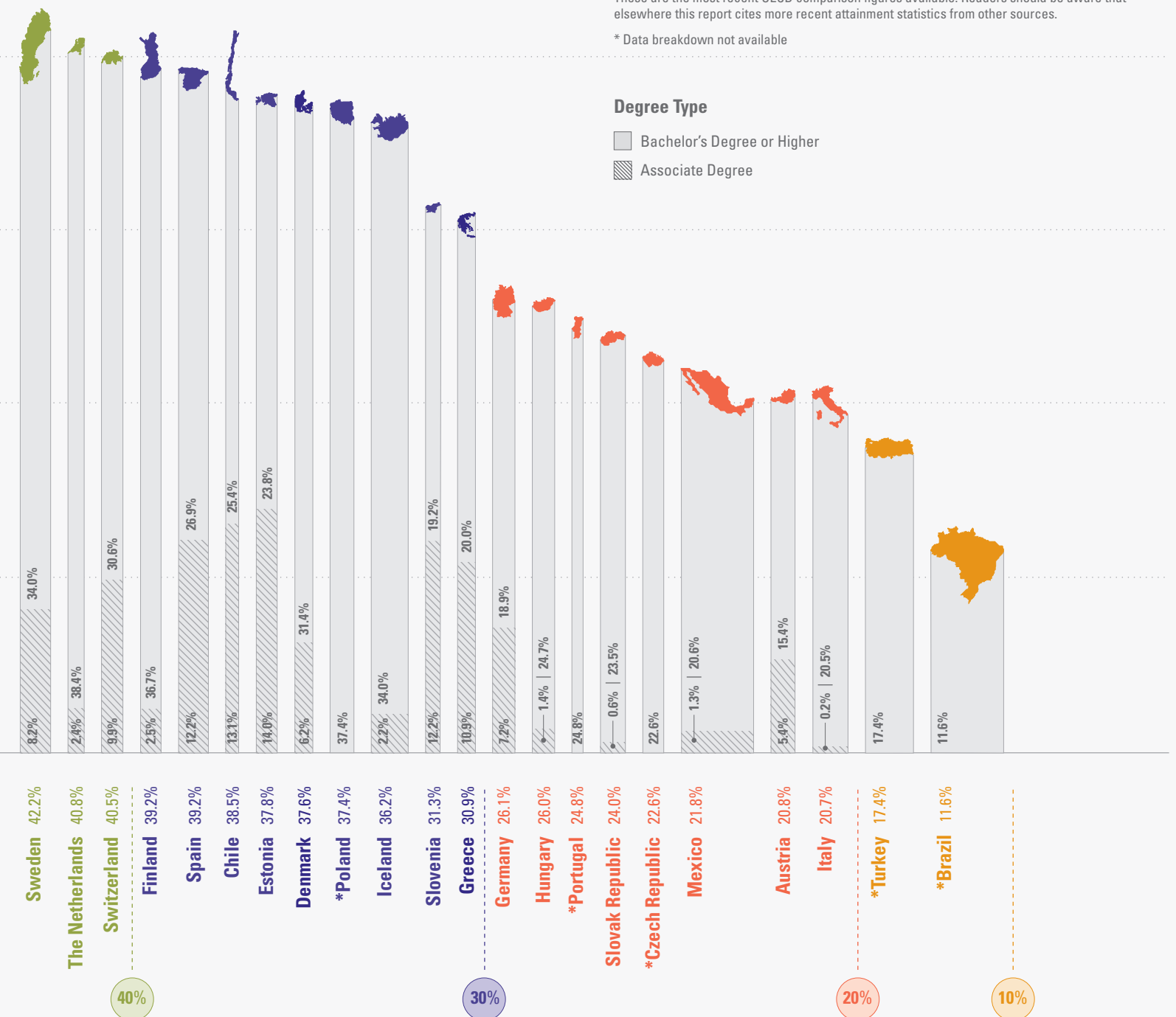
Data from 2010 show the United States placing 14th of 36 countries in terms of the percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds with an associate degree or higher. When looking at attainment of bachelor's degrees and above for this age group, the United States ranks 11th.

## Percentage of 25- to 34-Year-Olds with an Associate Degree or Higher, 2010

Source: Organisation for Economic and Co-operation and Development, 2012

Notes: Total attainment figures were calculated from non-rounded statistics. These are the most recent OECD comparison figures available. Readers should be aware that elsewhere this report cites more recent attainment statistics from other sources.

\* Data breakdown not available



# One

Provide a program of voluntary preschool education, universally available to children from low-income families.

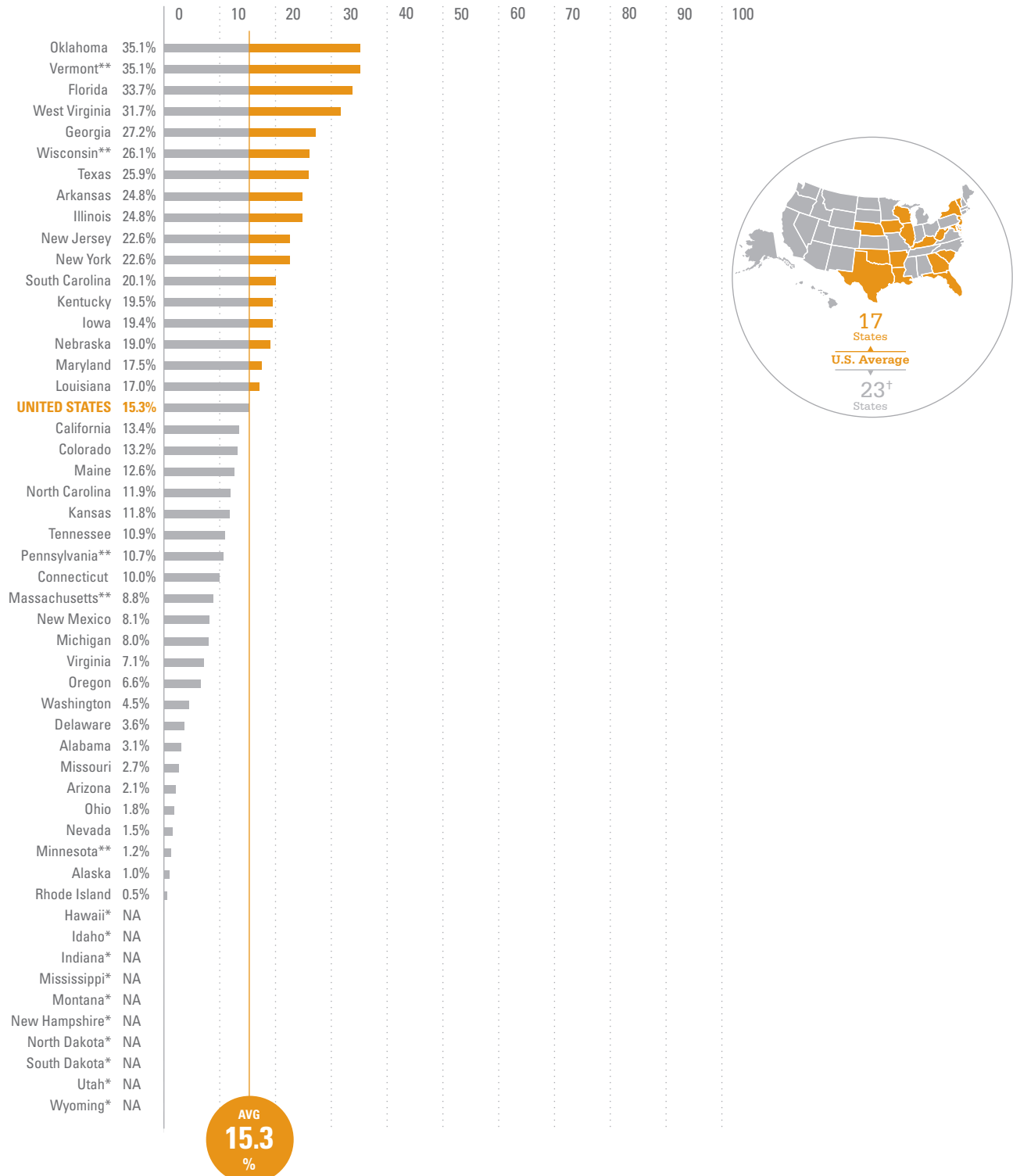
**WE RECOMMEND** that states provide a program of voluntary, high-quality preschool education, universally available to 3- and 4-year-old children from families at or below 200 percent of the poverty line.

In 2010, one in five children under 18 lived in poverty; the rate was double for those living with single mothers.<sup>5</sup> We know that poor students are less likely to do well in school, and college enrollment rates of low-income high school graduates in 2010 were considerably lower than those for students from high-income families (52 percent versus 82 percent).<sup>6</sup> Thus, preschool education, particularly for children of low-income families, is a vital first step on the path to equitable college readiness.

Data on the overall percentage of young children enrolled in preschool show only small increases in participation. Participation in Head Start programs, in particular, is fairly flat.

## Percentage of 3- and 4-Year-Olds Enrolled in State-Funded Pre-K Programs by State Rank, 2010

Source: National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers Graduate School of Education, The State of Preschool, 2010  
Note: The District of Columbia is not included.



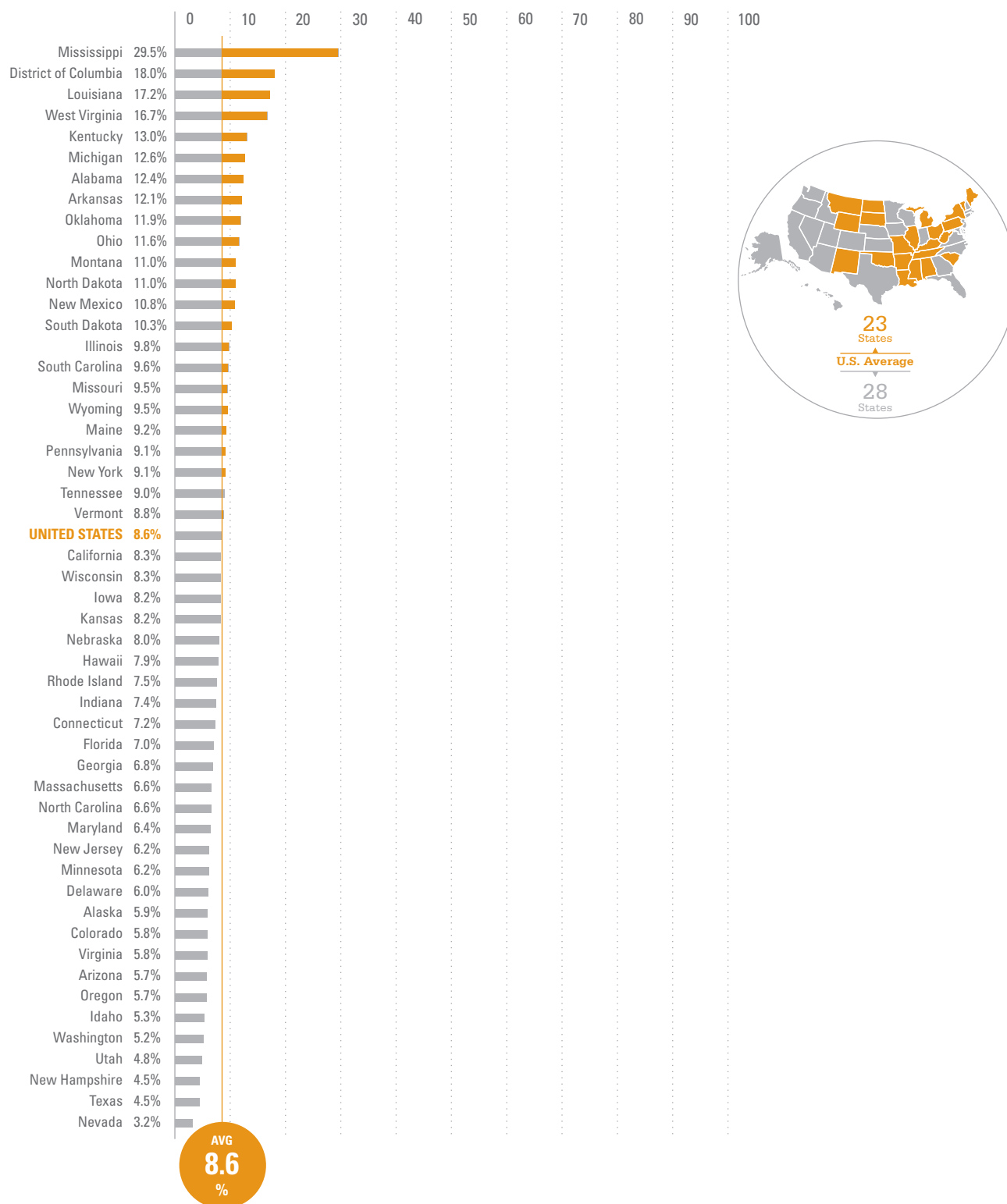
† Indicator data not available for all states.

\* No state-funded program.

\*\* At least one program in these states did not break down total enrollment figures into specific numbers of 3- and 4- Year-Olds served. As a result, the figures in this table are estimates.

## Percentage of 3- and 4-Year-Olds Enrolled in Head Start Programs by State Rank, 2010

Source: National Institute for Early Education Research, Rutgers Graduate School of Education, The State of Preschool, 2010



# Two

## Improve middle and high school college counseling.

**WE RECOMMEND** that states and localities move toward professional norms for staffing middle and high school counseling offices and that colleges and universities collaborate actively to provide college information and planning services to all students (with a special focus on low-income students).

It is now widely recognized that college readiness includes academic as well as nonacademic factors. In addition to mastering an academically rigorous curriculum, students need an understanding of the procedural aspects of applying and transitioning to college, and of the behaviors and dispositions they need to be successful once in college. Particularly as school personnel are increasingly focused on implementation of the Common Core State Standards and their associated assessments, it is vital that we not forget the importance of the nonacademic elements of readiness. Follow through on these elements is particularly important for low-income and first-generation students; research by the College Board Advocacy & Policy Center shows that even while low-income students are engaging in more college-preparatory activities than before, these activities are not translating into a greater likelihood of applying or enrolling, relative to their higher-income peers.<sup>7</sup>

School counselors are the best-positioned professionals to assist students in all of these aspects of college readiness. Counselors monitor whether students are completing a college-preparatory sequence of courses, and they provide critical knowledge about colleges, the application process and financial aid, all of which can help students and their families determine the best college match. Counselors also ideally work with outside partners who can provide additional college-preparation and -planning services, even in the summer months.

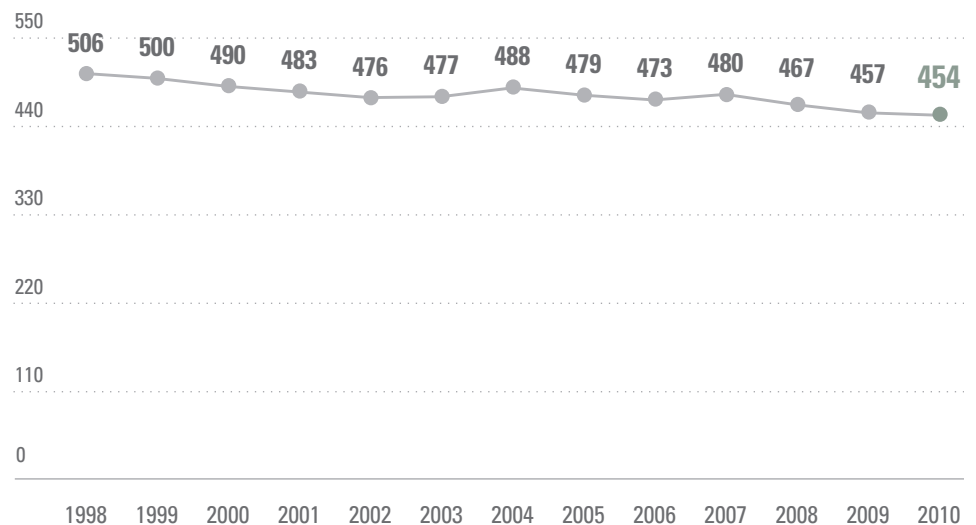
The College Board Advocacy & Policy Center's 2012 national survey of school counselors found that most counselors have a strong belief in their ability to improve student outcomes.<sup>8</sup> It is perhaps not surprising, then, that new

evidence indicates that an additional high school counselor drives the four-year college enrollment rate up substantially in that high school in the following year.<sup>9</sup> Yet, student-to-counselor ratios continue to be far too high (only five states have student-to-counselor ratios under 300 to 1), and only about one-quarter of all secondary schools require that counselors who are responsible for college counseling participate in related professional development.<sup>10</sup> The College Board survey also found that the majority of school counselors with a graduate degree in counseling said their graduate training did not adequately prepare them in college and career readiness counseling. In particular, counselors cited the need for more knowledge of, and training in, college affordability planning.

### National Student-to-Counselor Ratio, 1998–2010

Source: NCES Common Core of Data, State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education, 1998–2010

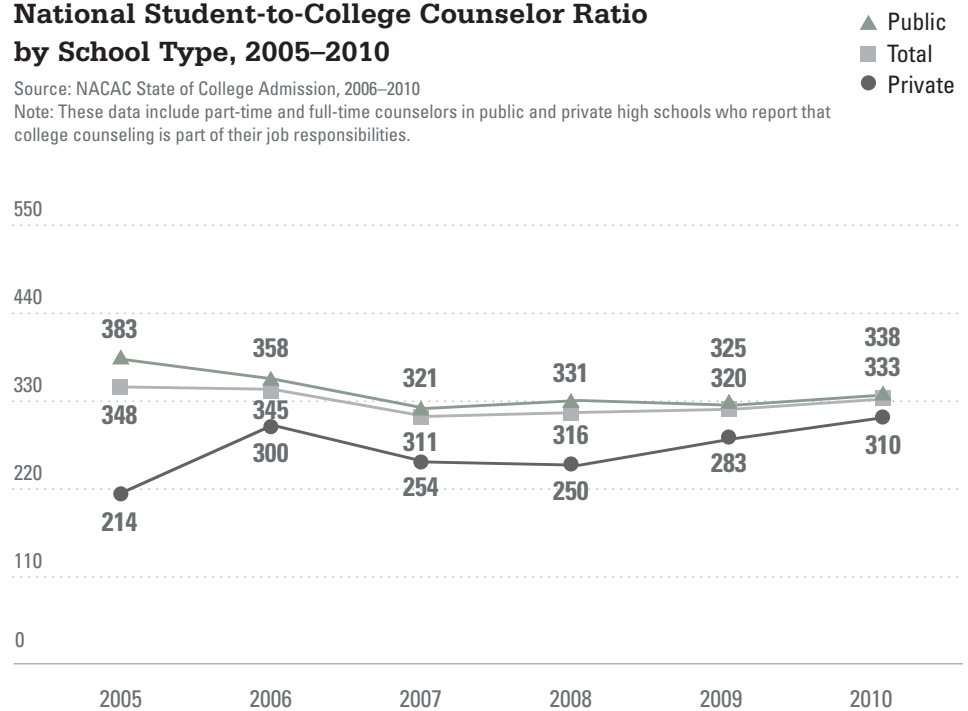
Note: These data include all elementary and secondary school counselors in public schools only.



### National Student-to-College Counselor Ratio by School Type, 2005–2010

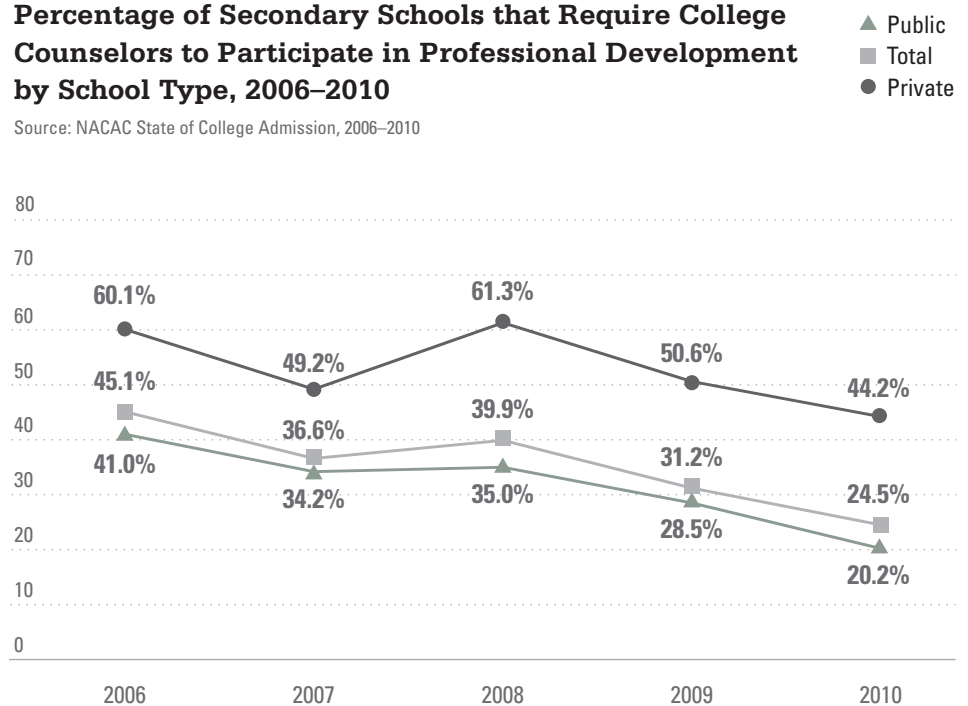
Source: NACAC State of College Admission, 2006–2010

Note: These data include part-time and full-time counselors in public and private high schools who report that college counseling is part of their job responsibilities.



### Percentage of Secondary Schools that Require College Counselors to Participate in Professional Development by School Type, 2006–2010

Source: NACAC State of College Admission, 2006–2010



# Three

Implement the best research-based dropout prevention programs.

**WE RECOMMEND** that states and local education agencies adopt targeted interventions (starting in elementary and middle schools) focused on early warning signs of students in danger of dropping out, to identify such students and put an “educational safety net” under them.

High school graduation and dropout rates have long been measured in multiple ways, making it difficult to track progress and make comparisons across the country. The averaged freshman graduation rate (AFGR) estimates the proportion of public high school freshmen who graduate in four years. In 2009, the AFGR was 75.5 percent, the highest ever.<sup>11</sup> While this figure is moving in the right direction, the fact is that about one-quarter of U.S. high school students are not graduating in four years (if ever), and African American, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaska Native students have high school graduation rates approximately 10 percentage points lower than the national average.

In 2008, the U.S. Department of Education issued regulations requiring the use of the adjusted cohort graduation rate (ACGR) by the 2010-11 school year. The ACGR measures the proportion of first-time ninth-graders who graduate in four years, after adjusting for student transfers in and out. This approach will provide a more accurate measure of graduation on time, and across schools and districts. Unfortunately, some states have been late in adopting this methodology, so we cannot yet report ACGR data.

With regard to dropout rates, the status dropout rate provides the percentage of 16- to 24-year-olds who have not earned a high school diploma or GED and are not enrolled in school. Thus, it indicates the proportion of American young people without a high school credential. The event dropout rate provides the



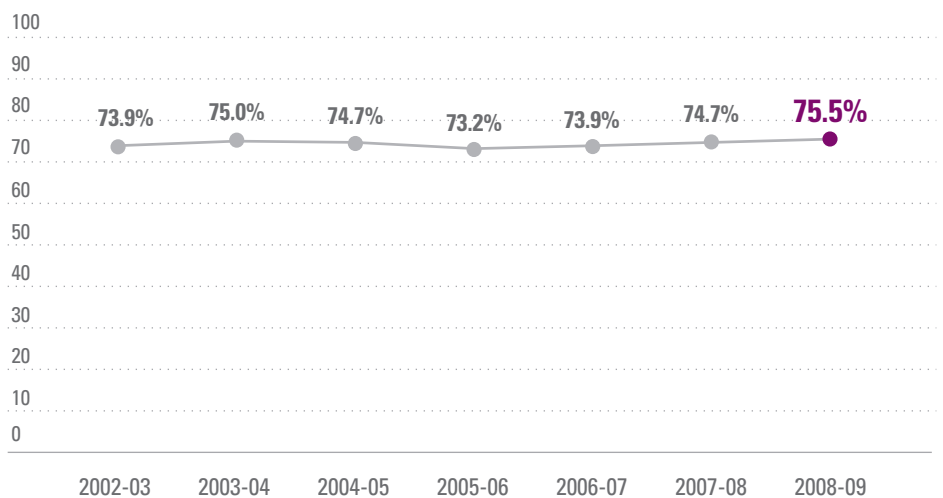
percentage of high school students who leave between the beginning of one school year and the beginning of the next without earning a high school credential. The national status dropout rate has declined fairly steadily from 1999 to 2010, overall and also for African Americans and Hispanics.<sup>12</sup> Yet the event dropout rate was slightly higher in 2009, at 4.1 percent, than it was in 2003, at 3.9 percent.

As the 2012 *Building a Grad Nation* update reports, the nation is making progress.<sup>13</sup> High school graduation rates are improving, and the number of “dropout factory” high schools has declined. Greater attention is being paid to reducing chronic absenteeism and to increasing the incidence of early-warning and intervention systems. Yet at the current rate of improvement, we will only have achieved a national graduation rate of 80 percent by the class of 2020, which is still far too low.

### Public High School Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate, School Years 2002-03 through 2008-09

Source: NCES, Public School Graduates and Dropouts from the Common Core of Data: School Year 2008-09

Note: This is based on the percentage of public high school students who enter school as freshmen and graduate in four years.



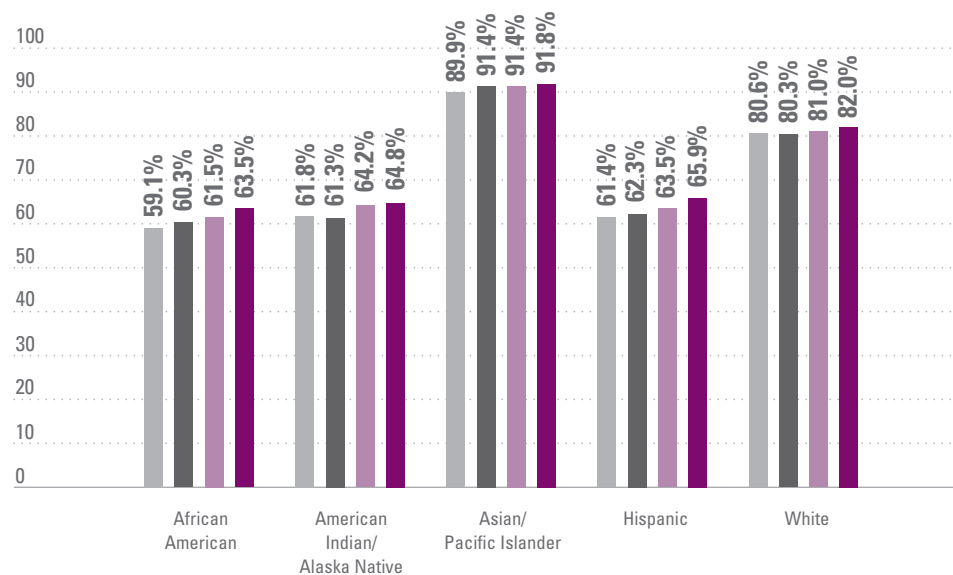
## National Average Graduation Rates for Public High School Students by Race/Ethnicity, 2006–2009

Source: NCES, Public School Graduates and Dropouts from the Common Core of Data, 2008–2009

Note: This is based on the percentage of public high school students who enter school as freshmen and graduate in four years.

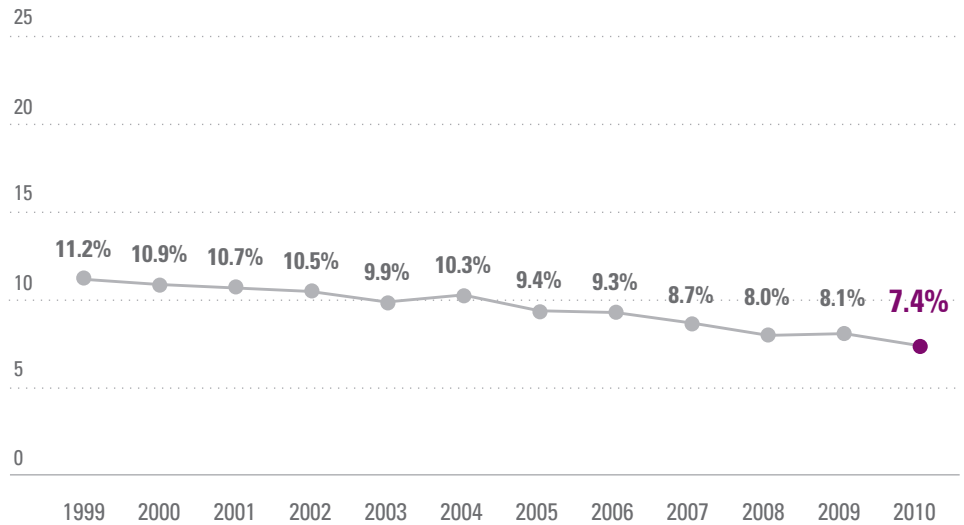
Note: Race categories exclude Hispanic origin unless specified.

● 2009  
● 2008  
● 2007  
● 2006



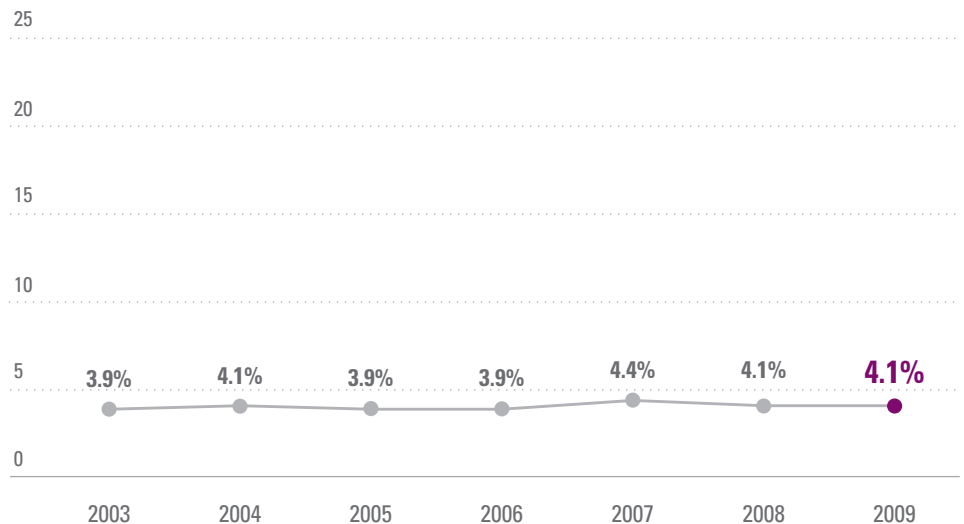
### National Status Dropout Rates — Excluding Institutional Populations, 1999–2010

Source: NCES, Condition of Education, 2010



### National Event Dropout Rates of Public High School Students in Grades 9–12, 2003–2009

Source: NCES, Public School Graduates and Dropouts from the Common Core of Data: School Year 2007–08, 2012



# Four

Align the K–12 education system with international standards and college admission expectations.

**WE RECOMMEND** that governors, legislators and state education agencies work to provide a world-class education to every American student by aligning high school programs with international benchmarks tied to the demands of college and career.

There is much to be excited about as 46 states implement the rigorous Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and their related assessments.<sup>14</sup> The CCSS are a significant milestone in U.S. education reform, in that for the first time we have substantial agreement about what students should learn in school. The standards also seek to eliminate the gap in knowledge and skills between high school and college, and are on a par with the standards of countries such as Finland and New Zealand, whose students consistently outperform their U.S. counterparts.

Curricular rigor in American schools is increasing in other ways as well. Data from the College Board's *8th Annual AP® Report to the Nation* show increases in the percentage of high schools offering Advanced Placement® courses in the four core subject areas, as well as increases in the percentages of students taking AP Exams and scoring a 3 or higher.<sup>15</sup> Minority and low-income students are underrepresented in AP course- and exam-taking, but the absolute number of participants from these subgroups is increasing along with overall participation. In addition, significant percentages of high school students continue to take advantage of dual enrollment programs, through which they can take college courses and earn early college credit. Participation in such programs is associated with better high school and college outcomes.<sup>16</sup>

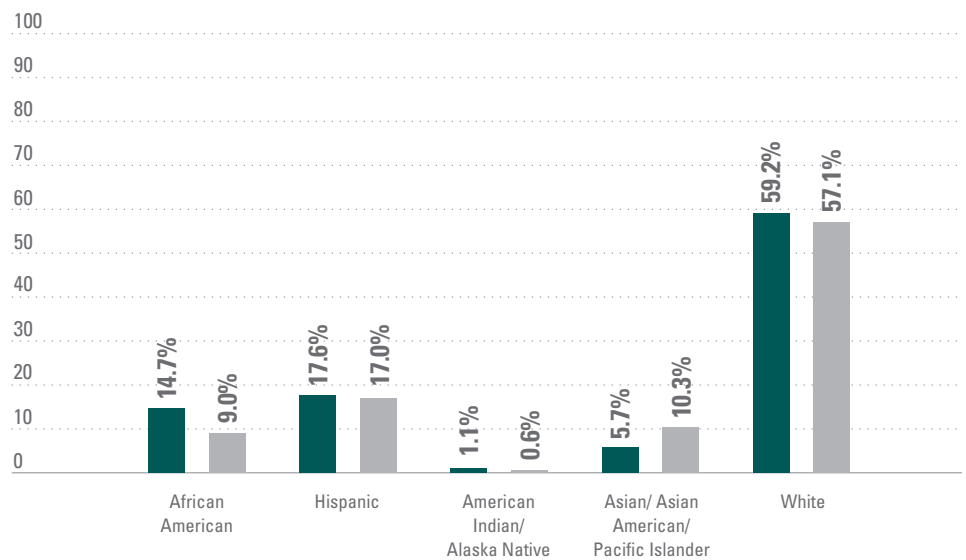
Of course, we can only know whether our education system is truly aligned if we have data systems that can be used to track students from elementary to secondary to postsecondary institutions, within and across states. Thus, it is extremely encouraging that the number of states with P–20 longitudinal data

systems is increasing steadily. This development — along with a common way of reporting high school graduation rates and the ability to better track college students as they swirl from one institution to another — will carry the country a long way toward a better understanding of where we need improvement.

### Public High School Students and AP Examinees by Race/Ethnicity for the Class of 2011

Source: The College Board, *The 8th Annual AP Report to the Nation*, 2012

- Overall Student Population
- AP Examinee Population



# Five

Improve teacher quality and focus on recruitment and retention.

**WE RECOMMEND** that states, localities and the federal government step up to the crisis in teaching by providing market-competitive salaries, creating multiple pathways into teaching, and fixing the math and science crisis.

In 2012, we see a rather mixed picture of indicators of teacher quality. In many states, much is being made of new teacher performance evaluation systems that take into account student achievement. However, state support for teacher development and certification is weak. A majority of states do have professional development standards for teachers, but fewer than half finance professional development for all districts, and only 16 states require their districts and schools to set aside time for teacher development.<sup>17</sup> A minority of states (24) provide financial incentives for teachers to earn national board certification.<sup>18</sup>

Implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), their related assessments and essential pedagogical changes will all require considerable and high-quality professional development. Many states included plans for CCSS professional development in their applications for federal Race to the Top grants. For example, Maryland has invested Race to the Top funds in regional summer professional development academies that focus on the transition to the Maryland Common Core State Curriculum, as well as state STEM initiatives. These academies reached thousands of educators in the summers of 2011 and 2012, and will continue through 2014. Strong efforts such as these are needed now to create a foundation of supportive policy, funding and practices so that the entire potential of the Common Core can be realized.

## States that Finance Teacher Professional Development for All Districts, 2012

Source: "Quality Counts," *Education Week*, 2012

### YES

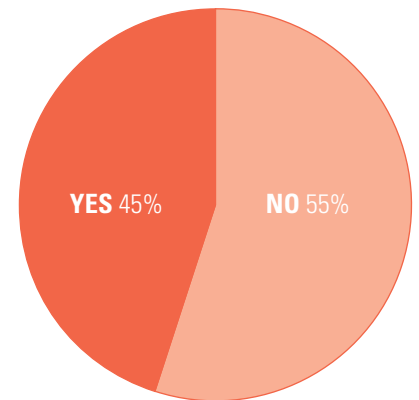
Alabama  
Arkansas  
Delaware  
Florida  
Georgia  
Hawaii  
Iowa  
Kentucky  
Maine  
Maryland  
Massachusetts  
Michigan  
Minnesota  
Montana  
Nebraska  
Nevada  
North Dakota  
Pennsylvania  
Rhode Island

South Carolina  
Virginia  
West Virginia  
Wisconsin

### NO

Alaska  
Arizona  
California  
Colorado  
Connecticut  
District of Columbia  
Idaho  
Illinois  
Indiana  
Kansas  
Mississippi  
New Hampshire

New Jersey  
New Mexico  
New York  
Ohio  
Oklahoma  
Oregon  
South Dakota  
Tennessee  
Texas  
Vermont  
Wyoming  
Louisiana  
Missouri  
North Carolina  
Utah  
Washington



## States that Require Districts/Schools to Set Aside Time for Teacher Professional Development, 2010

Source: "Quality Counts," *Education Week*, 2010

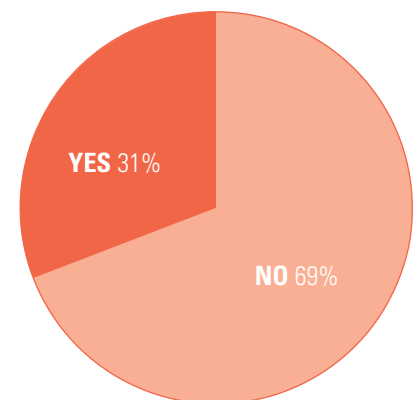
### YES

Alabama  
Arkansas  
Connecticut  
Delaware  
Georgia  
Kentucky  
Louisiana  
Michigan  
Montana  
Nebraska  
New York  
North Dakota  
South Carolina  
Tennessee  
Vermont  
West Virginia

### NO

Alaska  
Arizona  
California  
Colorado  
District of Columbia  
Florida  
Hawaii  
Idaho  
Illinois  
Indiana  
Iowa  
Kansas  
Maine  
Maryland  
Massachusetts  
Minnesota  
Mississippi  
Missouri

Nevada  
New Hampshire  
New Jersey  
New Mexico  
North Carolina  
Ohio  
Oklahoma  
Oregon  
Pennsylvania  
Rhode Island  
South Dakota  
Texas  
Utah  
Virginia  
Washington  
Wisconsin  
Wyoming



# Six

Clarify and simplify  
the admission process.

**WE RECOMMEND** that public and private institutions of higher education continue to uphold the highest professional standards in admission and financial aid, and collaborate to make the admission process more transparent and less complex.

The extent to which the college admission process is clear and easy to navigate influences the proportion of students applying. If it is opaque, it may have a discouraging effect, particularly on students who come from families that have no experience with the process. Nationally, we continue to see disparities in the rate of immediate transition to college among students from families of different income levels, between males and females, and among students of different races and ethnicities. For example, Hispanic high school graduates continue to be less likely than black, white or Asian students to transition immediately to college.<sup>19</sup> What is perhaps most disappointing in the data is that there is no clear upward trend over the last decade. In 2000, 63.3 percent of high school graduates attended college in the fall after high school graduation and, in 2010, 68.1 percent did so. However, we had reached a higher level of immediate transition in 2009, with 70.1 percent attending college.

The College Board's Task Force on Admissions in the 21st Century, convened in 2007, issued a report in 2010 on complexity in the college admission process.<sup>20</sup> A major finding of the report was that the more colleges students applied to, the more stressful the experience was for them, and the primary stressor was that different applications had different requirements. There has been some progress toward helping anxious seniors who apply to many colleges; nationally, the percentage of four-year colleges with online applications has steadily increased over time, and almost one-quarter now accept the common, or universal, application. One-third of states offer a statewide common application for their own four-year public postsecondary institutions.

It is important that the college application and admission process be transparent and straightforward, because increasing the number of colleges to which a student applies increases the probability of being accepted at an institution that

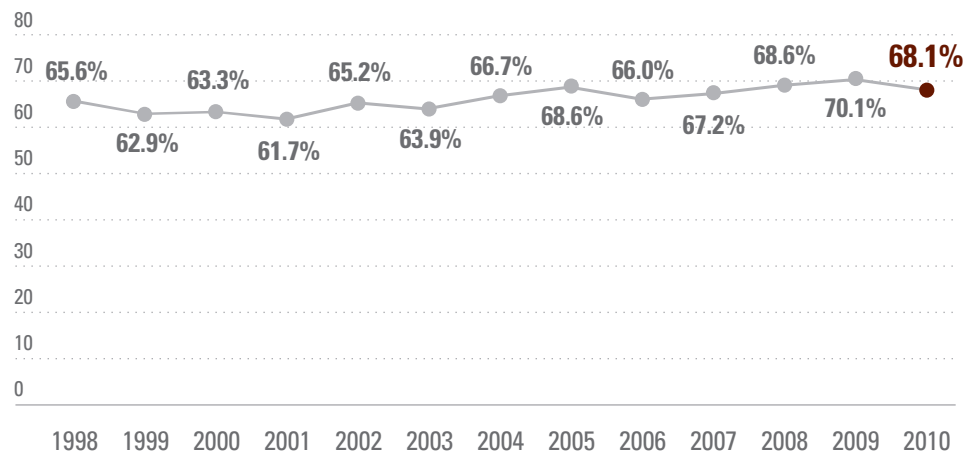


is financially accessible and a good match.<sup>21</sup> Lower-income students tend to apply to fewer colleges than their higher-income counterparts, and College Board research has found that simply increasing the number of colleges to which a student applies from one to two can significantly increase the probability of enrolling in a four-year college.<sup>22</sup> The College Board's Task Force report also found that first-generation and lower-income students were less likely to receive help from their parents and more likely to rely on high school counselors and teachers for help with the application process. These findings have implications for the training and professional development of high school staff in college admission counseling, as emphasized earlier.

### Percentage of High School Completers Enrolled in Two- or Four-Year Colleges Immediately Following High School Completion, 1998–2010

Source: NCES, Condition of Education, 2012

Note: High school completers refer to those who received a high school diploma or equivalency certificate. This indicator provides data on high school completers ages 16–24, who account for about 98 percent of all high school completers in a given year.

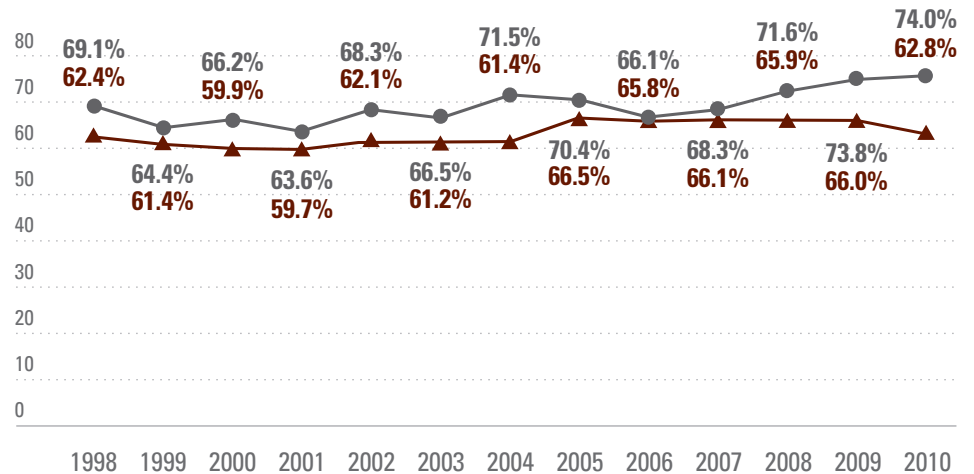


### Percentage of High School Completers Enrolled in Two- or Four-Year Colleges Immediately Following High School Completion by Gender, 1998–2010

▲ Male  
● Female

Source: NCES, Condition of Education, 2012

Note: High school completers refer to those who received a high school diploma or equivalency certificate. This indicator provides data on high school completers ages 16–24, who account for about 98 percent of all high school completers in a given year.



# Seven & Eight

Provide more need-based grant aid while simplifying the financial aid system and making it more transparent. Keep college affordable.

**WE RECOMMEND** that federal and state officials encourage increased access by providing more need-based grant aid, by making the process of applying for financial assistance more transparent and predictable, and by finding ways to inform families, as early as the middle school years, of aid amounts likely to be available to individual students.

**WE RECOMMEND** restraining growth in college costs and prices, using available aid and resources wisely, and insisting that state governments meet their obligations for funding higher education.

To reach our college completion goals, more students and their families need financial assistance with ever-rising tuition. Such financial assistance includes federal grants and loans as well as state and institutional grants, among other types. Over the last decade, total financial aid per full-time equivalent student has increased tremendously; both grant aid and loans have increased.<sup>23</sup> Also, the number of students receiving Pell Grants — the central source of federal financial aid for low- and moderate-income students — more than doubled, from 4.3 million to 9.4 million students. With this enormous increase in Pell Grants and additional increases in financial aid to veterans, federal grant aid has risen tremendously, by 185 percent, over the most recent decade.

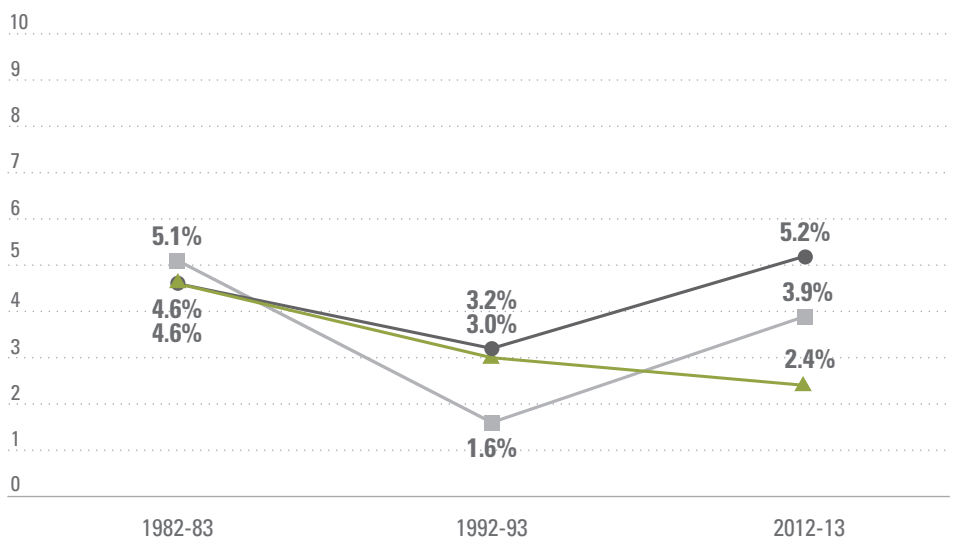
Thus, more students — especially lower-income students — are receiving more aid. But does that translate into greater college affordability? As the College Board's recent *Trends in College Pricing* points out, college prices have been rising more rapidly over the last three decades than the prices of other goods

and services that are used to compute inflation in the overall U.S. economy.<sup>24</sup> Further, the press has been recently focused on rising student debt loads.

The data presented in *Trends in College Pricing* show that the estimated average net price paid by full-time students in public four-year colleges is higher in 2012-13 than five years ago. But for students in public two-year and private four-year institutions, average net prices (adjusted for inflation) are actually lower now than five years ago, despite rising tuition. In addition, while tuition has continued to climb, the average annual percentage increase is smaller for private four-year institutions than in the previous two decades. Increases at public institutions (both two year and four year) have been larger, likely in response to the reduction by many states in appropriations for higher education per full-time-equivalent student. Still, the good news is that even with rising tuition coupled with family incomes hard hit by the recession, Pell-eligible students who attended public two-year colleges found that, on average, their tuition and fees were entirely covered by their grants.

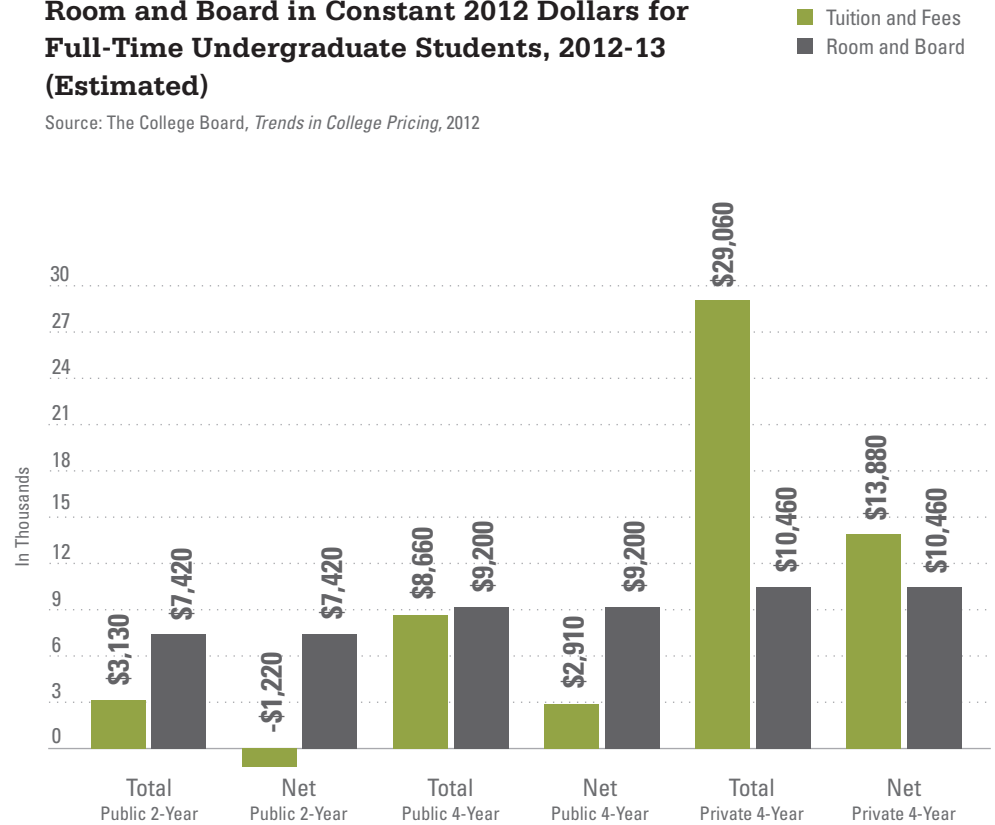
### Average Annual Percentage Increases in Inflation-Adjusted Published Prices by Decade, 1982-83 to 2012-13

Source: The College Board, *Trends in College Pricing*, 2012



### Average Total and Net Tuition and Fees and Room and Board in Constant 2012 Dollars for Full-Time Undergraduate Students, 2012-13 (Estimated)

Source: The College Board, *Trends in College Pricing*, 2012



# Nine

Dramatically increase college completion rates.

**WE RECOMMEND** that institutions of higher education set out to dramatically increase college completion rates by improving retention, easing transfer among institutions, and implementing data-based strategies to identify retention and dropout challenges.

College graduation rates appear to be barely increasing, if at all. The three-year graduation rate for students in two-year colleges was 29.9 percent in 2010, up just slightly from the previous year. The two-year graduation rate for these students remains very low, at only about 20 percent. The average six-year graduation rate for students seeking bachelor's degrees in four-year institutions was 58.8 percent in 2010, just one-half a percentage point above the previous year.

As explained in the introduction, these indicators are constrained (among other ways) in that they measure completion only for students who enroll in and graduate from the same institution. Researchers are finding new methods of tracking students from one institution to another to enable counting completions for a larger portion of the student population. Also as described in the introduction, the absolute number of degrees awarded annually is rising rapidly, particularly with regard to associate degrees.

There are currently numerous national, state, and institution-led efforts focused on improving college completion rates, such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Completion by Design initiative, Lumina Foundation's Achieving the Dream initiative and Complete College America. A common element is the use of state- or institution-level data to identify major points of student failure and dropout, and to design targeted strategies to prevent such loss. There has also been significant attention by researchers, policymakers and practitioners to the challenge of incoming college students' remedial needs. Experimentation with new types of remedial interventions has yielded some promising results.<sup>25</sup>

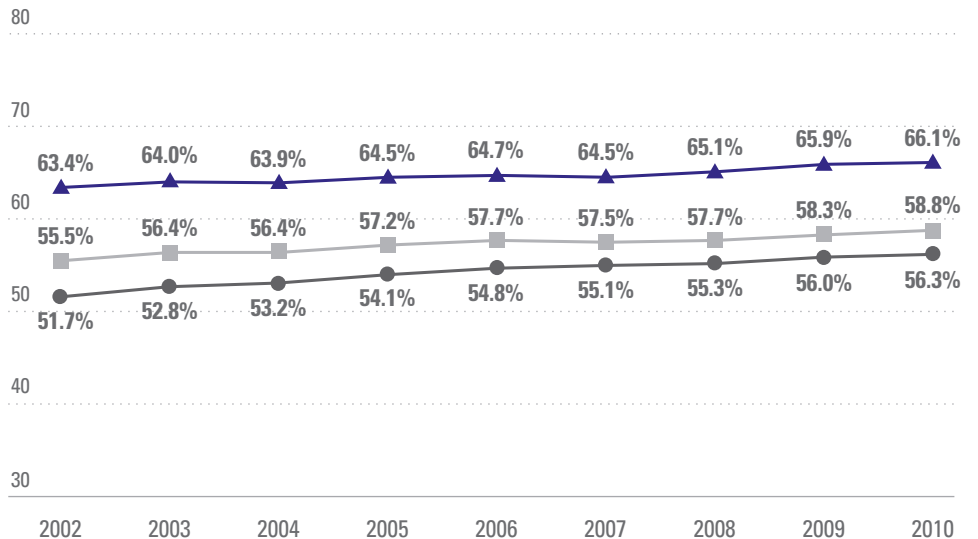
Finally, new research suggests that the earlier students decide upon a college major or program, the more likely they are to persist and complete, which has strong implications for improving career exploration and guidance.<sup>26</sup>

It is clear that the majority of America's high school graduates have heard the message that a college credential is indispensable to a middle-class life. Yet too few of them reach that goal. This results in a sizable amount of wasted human potential, and signifies that the American Dream is not being realized by all.

### National Six-Year Graduation Rates of Bachelor's Degree-Seeking Students, 2002–2010

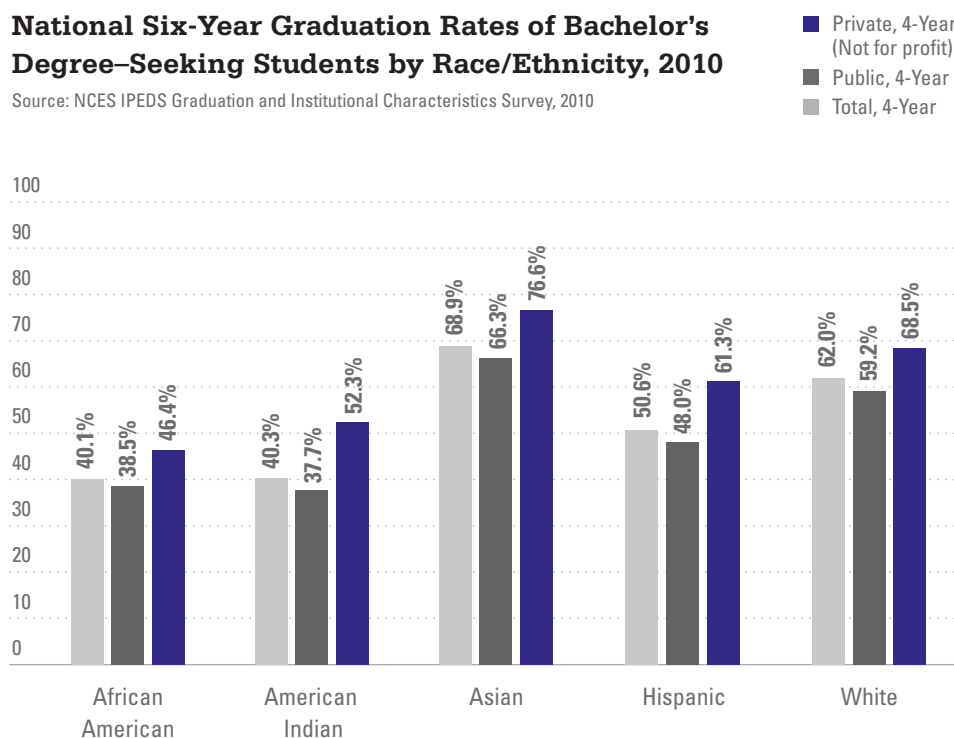
Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation and Institutional Characteristics Survey, 2008

▲ Private, 4-Year  
(Not for profit)  
● Public, 4-Year  
■ Total, 4-Year



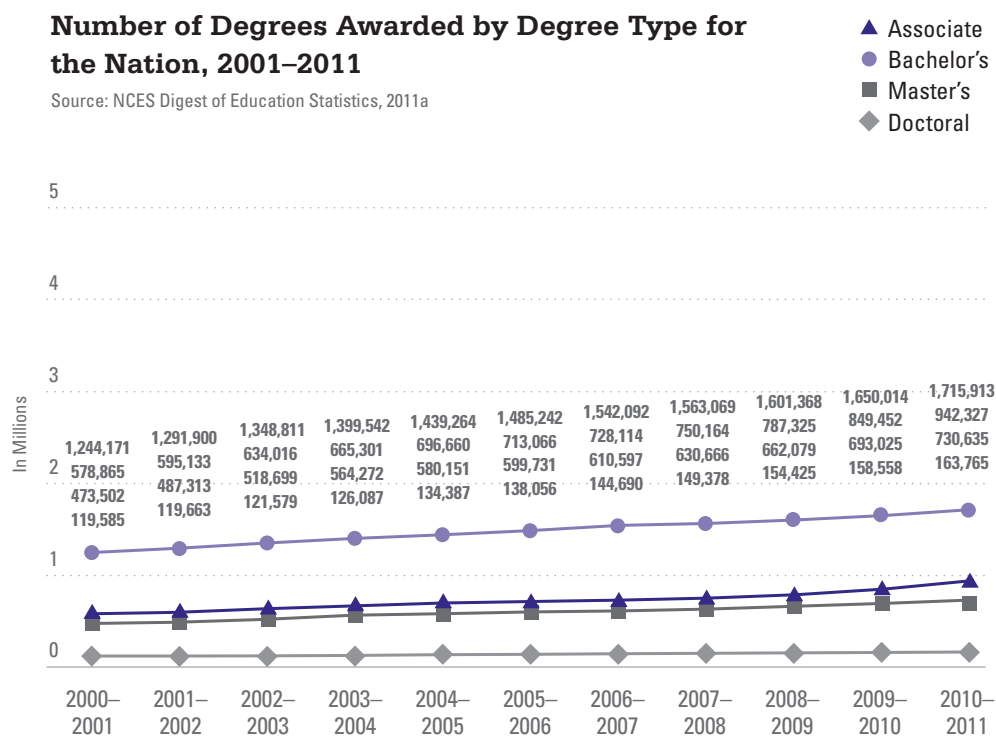
### National Six-Year Graduation Rates of Bachelor's Degree-Seeking Students by Race/Ethnicity, 2010

Source: NCES IPEDS Graduation and Institutional Characteristics Survey, 2010



### Number of Degrees Awarded by Degree Type for the Nation, 2001–2011

Source: NCES Digest of Education Statistics, 2011a





# Ten

Provide postsecondary opportunities as an essential element of adult education programs.

**WE RECOMMEND** a renewed commitment to adult education opportunities, one that supplements existing basic skills training and General Educational Development opportunities with a new “honors GED,” and better coordination of federal and state efforts to provide adult education, veterans benefits, outreach programs and student aid.

While we work on improving completion for those enrolled in college, we must not forget that 15 percent of Americans ages 25 to 34 do not have a high school diploma, and this statistic is twice as large for Hispanics within the same age range. Those within our population who do not even have a high school credential have little chance of obtaining satisfying and self-supporting work.

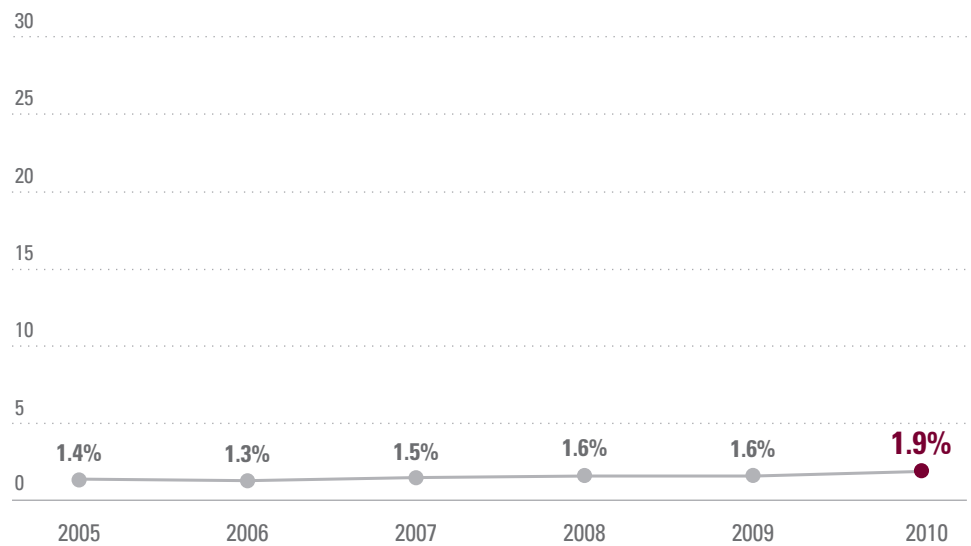
A small percentage of these adults do attempt to take the General Educational Development (GED) test in order to earn a high school equivalency certificate or diploma, and the percentages who were GED candidates and who passed the GED have been increasing slowly over the past five years.<sup>27</sup> State by state, it is discouraging to note that the states with the highest percentages of 25- to 34-year-olds without a high school diploma — Nevada, California and Texas — are also among the states where the fewest such individuals are passing the GED. The GED testing program is currently being revised to align with the Common Core State Standards.

Adult basic education must not end with the GED but should propel students further. Recent efforts to help low-skilled adults earn postsecondary credentials by combining basic skills education with occupational training are showing promise. The Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) program, first developed in Washington State, provides concurrent and integrated academic and technical preparation for adults who place into basic skills education. Multiple studies have found that I-BEST students are more likely to

earn college credits and a college credential, and show gains on the basic skills assessment, than similar students in colleges that did not offer the program. Thus there are proven new ways to help the nation's lower-skilled adults gain postsecondary credentials and improved prospects in employment.<sup>28</sup>

### National Percentage of Adults Ages 25–34 with No High School Diploma Who Attained a GED, 2005–2010

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2006–2010 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates; American Council on Education 2005–2010 Annual Statistical Reports



## Going Forward

In the coming months, the College Board Advocacy & Policy Center will release a series of briefs on selected topics from the *College Completion Agenda*. These briefs will provide policymakers and the public with additional and deeper insights on some of the key issues to further inform the national conversation on our challenges and provide recommendations to help reach our goal. The Advocacy & Policy Center is committed to continuing this work in support of a more prosperous future for all Americans.

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## About the College Board

The College Board is a mission-driven not-for-profit organization that connects students to college success and opportunity. Founded in 1900, the College Board was created to expand access to higher education. Today, the membership association is made up of over 6,000 of the world's leading educational institutions and is dedicated to promoting excellence and equity in education. Each year, the College Board helps more than seven million students prepare for a successful transition to college through programs and services in college readiness and college success — including the SAT® and the Advanced Placement Program®. The organization also serves the education community through research and advocacy on behalf of students, educators and schools.

For further information, visit [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org).

The College Board Advocacy & Policy Center was established to help transform education in America. Guided by the College Board's principles of excellence and equity in education, we work to ensure that students from all backgrounds have the opportunity to succeed in college and beyond. We make critical connections between policy, research and real-world practice to develop innovative solutions to the most pressing challenges in education today.

This report can be downloaded at [completionagenda.collegeboard.org](http://completionagenda.collegeboard.org).  
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