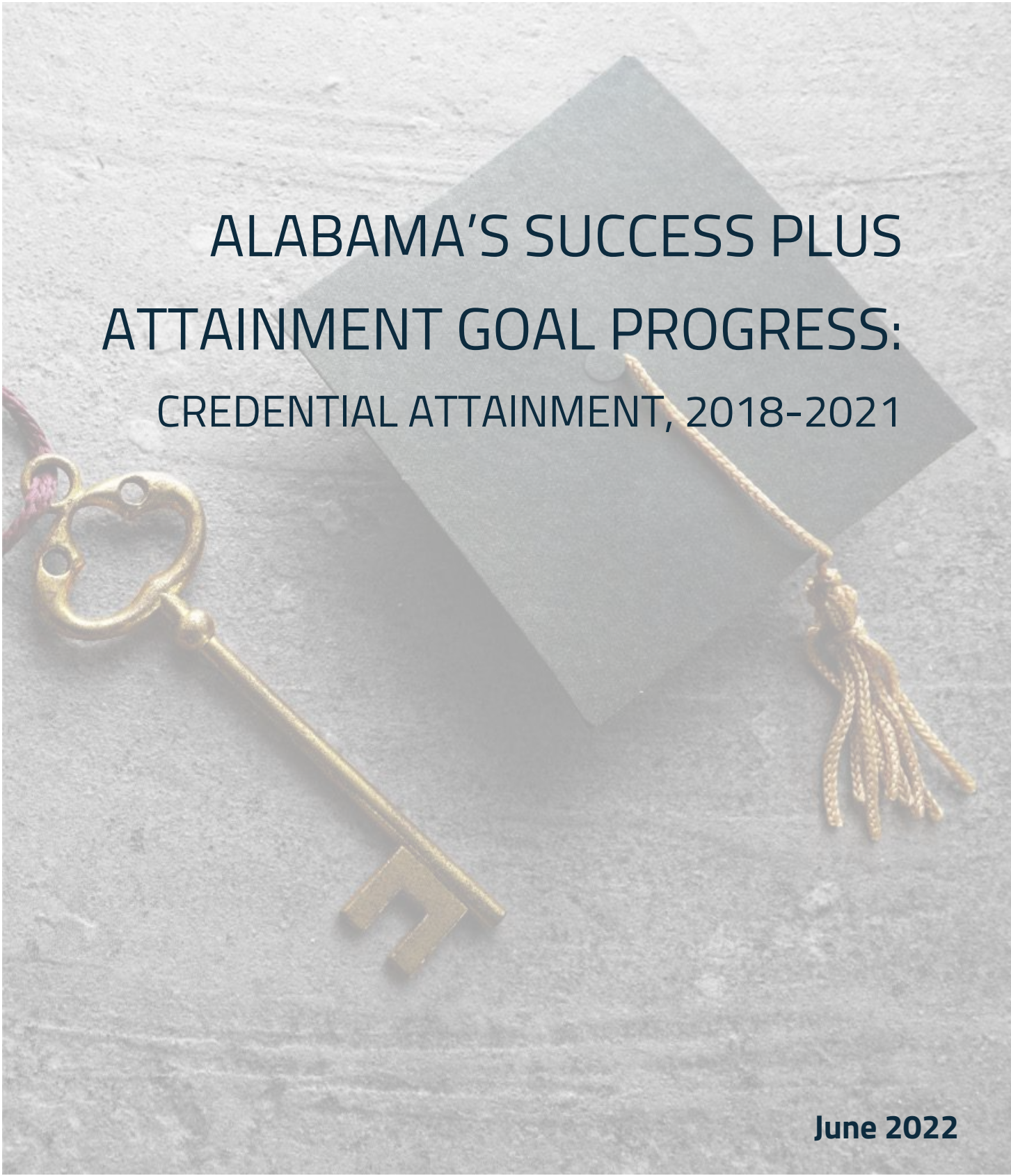


The background of the slide features a light gray, textured surface. In the center, a dark gray graduation cap (mortarboard) is positioned diagonally. To the left of the cap lies a large, ornate golden key with a heart-shaped bow. To the right of the cap, a golden tassel with multiple strands hangs down.

ALABAMA'S SUCCESS PLUS ATTAINMENT GOAL PROGRESS: CREDENTIAL ATTAINMENT, 2018-2021

June 2022

About this Report

This report was commissioned by the Alabama Governor's Office of Education and Workforce Transformation.

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Executive Summary

Alabama is just under halfway to a 2025 attainment goal of adding 500,000 newly credentialed Alabamians to the workforce. Since the announcement of the Alabama Workforce Council’s Success Plus plan by Governor Ivey in 2018, 214,725 Alabamians, ages 16-64, have attained their first post-secondary credential. These credentials include degrees, certificates, licenses, certifications, and completed apprenticeships.

214,725

**Newly credentialed
people, ages 16-64,
in Alabama,
2018-2021**

45.7%

**Percent of Alabamians with a post-
secondary credential in 2021,
ages 25-64**

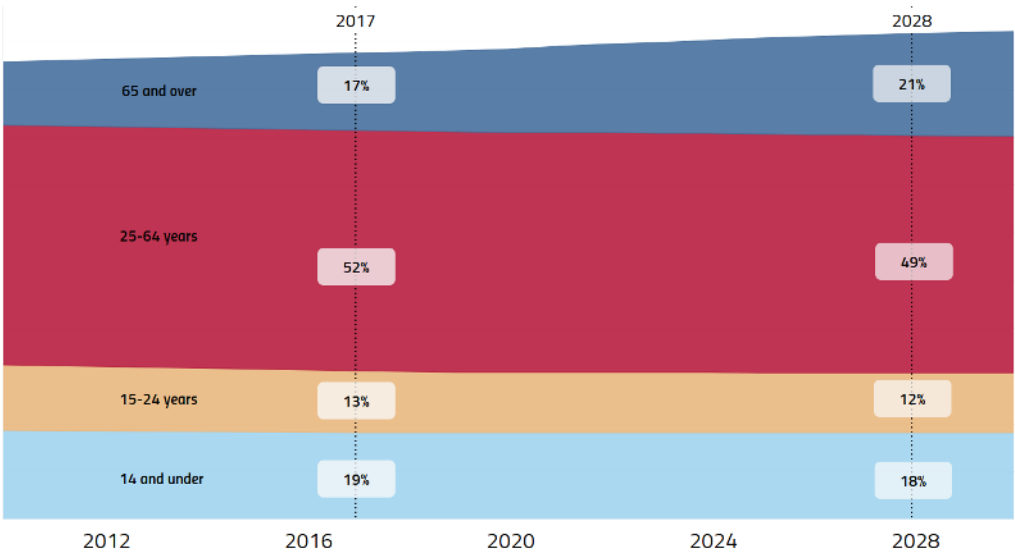


In 2021, 45.7% of the working age population, ages 25-64, had a post-secondary credential. This is an increase from 43%, the 2017 figure reported in the original Alabama Workforce Council Success Plus research.

Population Dynamics

The 25-64 age group is projected to constitute a minority of the state’s population (49%) by 2028. In response, the Alabama Workforce Council and Success Plus initiatives have aimed to support the credentialing and labor market entry of people younger than 25. Many of the first credentials counted in this report are earned by this age group.

Figure 1: Alabama population change, 2010-2030, with detail in 2017 and 2028
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022



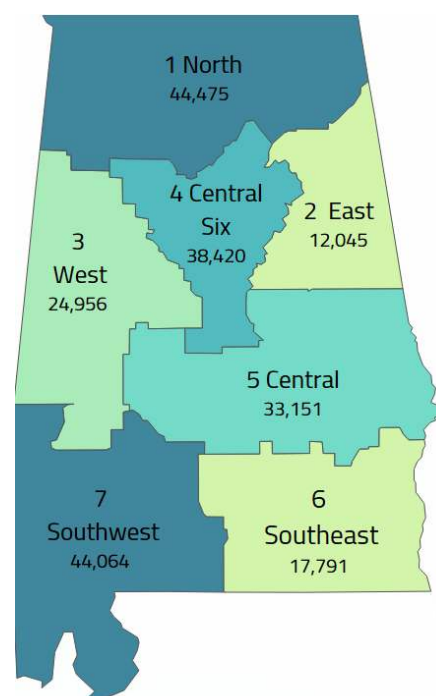
Regional Attainment

Each region in Alabama contributes to the Success Plus attainment goals. Figure 2 illustrates credential attainment for each workforce development region, not adjusted for population. Region 1 has the greatest number of first credentials attained and Region 6 has the fewest first credentials attained.

Regions 3 and 7 have higher credential attainment, relative to their populations, due to large numbers of out-of-state students completing four-year degrees at large universities.

This report, an important step in accounting for credential attainment across multiple education and training systems, aims to provide a clearer picture of the credential landscape and statewide progress toward attainment goals. The credential attainment numbers represent important progress toward Alabama's Success Plus goals.

Figure 2: First credentials attained in Alabama workforce regions, 2018-2021, ages 16-64



Dark colors indicate more attainments.
Lighter colors indicate fewer attainments.

The following agencies contributed to the findings of this report:

- Alabama Office of Education and Workforce Statistics (OEWS)
- Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE)
- Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE)
- Alabama Community College System (ACCS)
- Alabama Community College System, Adult Education
- Alabama Department of Commerce, Workforce Development Division (WIOA programs)
- Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs
- Alabama Department of Commerce, AIDT
- Alabama Office of Apprenticeship (AOA)
- Alabama Department of Labor, Alabama Career Center System (ALCC)
- Alabama Community College System, Alabama Technology Network (ATN)
- Alabama Department of Labor, Labor Market Information (LMI) Division
- Alabama Community College System, Ingram State Technical College
- Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services
- U.S. Department of Labor, Veterans Employment and Training Services (VETS)

Introduction

In 2018, Governor Ivey announced the Alabama Success Plus initiative recommended by the Alabama Workforce Council (AWC). The Success Plus credential attainment goal aims to add 500,000 newly credentialed people to the population by 2025. Since the announcement, industry and government partners from across the state have sought innovative solutions to increase the number of highly qualified workers with credentials. Many projects are in progress, aiming to include everyone in the state, especially 16 special populations identified by Alabama's 2020 WIOA Combined Plan.¹

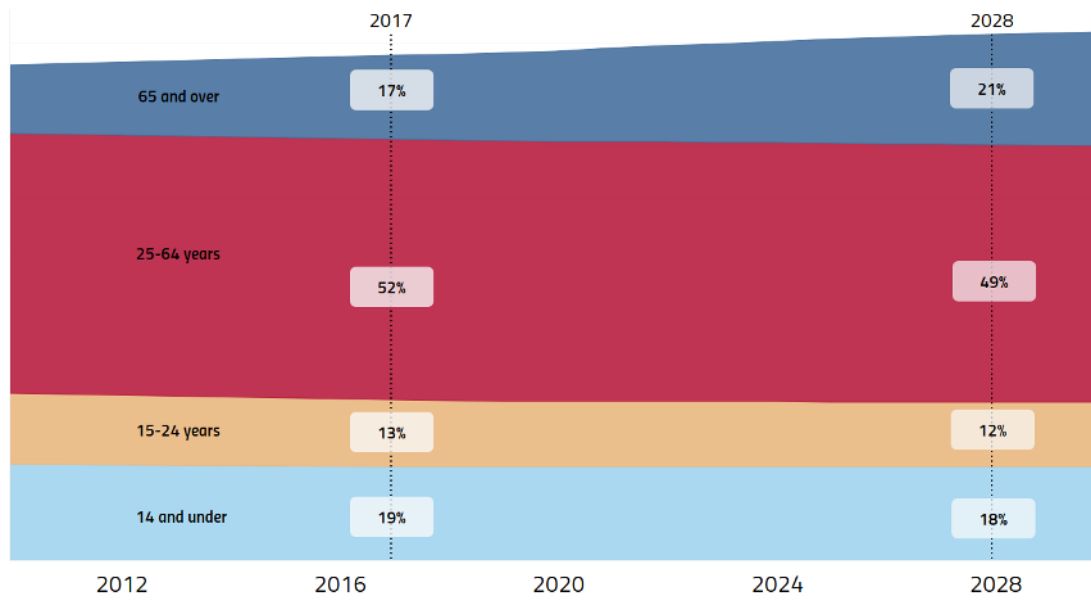
Approaching the four-year anniversary of Governor Ivey's original announcement of the Alabama Success Plus initiative, the Governor's Office of Education and Workforce Transformation requested a report on progress from Credential Engine and the Credential Count team at the Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness (CREC). This June 2022 report assesses progress toward the goals of the Alabama Success Plus initiative, including attainment by individuals of their first credential. First credential attainment was assessed statewide, by age group, and for each of the state's seven workforce development regions. This report also includes the percent of the entire working age population with a post-secondary credential in 2021 in order to consider overall credentialing levels in the context of broader population trends.

Long-term population dynamics will challenge businesses and state leaders nationwide, and these trends have informed the work of the Alabama Workforce Council and Success Plus initiatives. The proportion of the population 25-64 has been decreasing and this age group is projected to be a minority (49%) by 2028. Figure 3 illustrates the changing age distribution of the Alabama population by age group starting in 2010 and projecting trends to 2030.

An important aspect of Alabama's credential attainment efforts is the focus on credentialing for people younger than 25. This report accounts for progress by this group, as these younger Alabamians are essential to meeting overall credentialing goals set by state leaders.

¹ The 16 discrete special populations identified in the 2020 WIOA Combined Plan is included in the Appendix.

Figure 3: Alabama population change, 2010-2030, with detail in 2017 and 2028
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2022



A second phase of this research will assess credential attainment progress for 16 special populations that experience significant barriers to education and employment. A list of these special populations can be found in the Appendix. Also listed in the Appendix are the top five priorities for transforming the state's workforce development systems from the 2018 Success Plus strategic plan. These priorities, including a commitment to assessment and transparency, guide the state in pursuit of meeting employer demand for talent and are reflected in the final discussion and recommendations section of this report.

Approach to Measuring Credential Attainment, 2018-2021

Meeting the Success Plus goal to increase the credentialed population in Alabama involves moving people from an *uncredentialed* status to a credentialed status. For the purposes of this report, a person who is credentialed has attained a degree, certificate, industry certification, or professional license, or completed an apprenticeship.² Many people in Alabama already have one of these credentials. Our goal was to identify and count newly credentialed individuals.

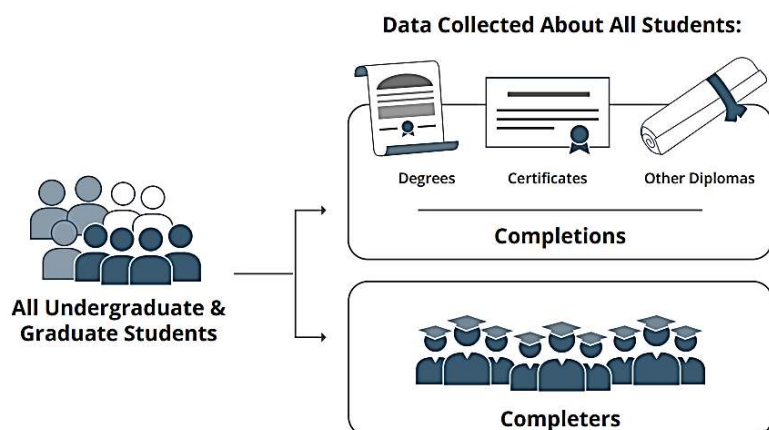
Figure 4: There are five main types of post-secondary credentials counted for this report.



Given the focus on measuring individuals who earned their first credential in the past four years, rather than all completions of degrees, certificates, and other programs in the state, this report relies on information on individuals and their education histories provided by federal and state education and workforce agencies. Figure 5 illustrates the difference

Figure 5: Different types of data collected for credential attainment: completions or completers

Source: National Center for Education Statistics. (2019). *Completions Brochure*. Publication No. 2019007. Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2019/2019007.pdf>



² Complete definitions of each credential type are included in the Appendix.

between information on completions (degrees and certificates attained) and on individual completers. The education history of completers helps us to identify which completers are gaining their first credential.

To acquire the information on completers and to identify newly credentialed individuals, CREC worked with the Office of Education and Workforce Statistics and 14 other state agencies in Alabama. Many of these agencies provided detailed information and insights into the status of the state's credentialing systems and resulting credentialed population. The complete list of agencies that collaborated in this research is included in the Appendix.

Accounting for first-time completions

Several state agencies were able to provide the details on individuals and their education histories necessary to assess progress toward the Success Plus postsecondary education attainment goal to increase the credentialed population. Information about individuals included the date of their credential attainment (or alternatively, the earliest credential attainment recorded in the system); credential type; location of the credentialing authority or training site; location of residence.³

Credentials from universities and colleges

The Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE) provided data for both completions and completers at **public** colleges and universities from January 2017 to June 2021. Students' counties of residence and age groups were included.⁴ Students who had a completion in 2017 were removed from the pool of completers. Then, only the first completion for each student was counted. To assess progress by region, students who were Alabama residents were assigned to one of the seven regional development districts by their county of permanent residence. Out-of-state students were assigned to a district by the location of their educational institution.

Completions for **private** universities and colleges are reported by the National Center for Education Statistics through the spring semester of 2020 (including 2018-2019 and 2019-

³ A complete list of agencies who contributed to this report is included in the Appendix.

⁴ All data from ACHE was anonymized; no direct or indirect personally identifying information was included.

2020). Narrowing the completion data to the individual completers is not possible using this data source. Instead, the number of first-time completers was estimated based on trends at public colleges and universities, with trends specific to the type of institution (two-year or four-year), the type of credential (degree or certificate), the region, and the year. These estimates of first-time completers were then applied to the completion totals from private universities and colleges with similar profiles to estimate first-time completions. For example, trends of completions of first bachelor's degrees in 2019 at public four-year institutions in Region 5 were used to estimate first-completions at private four-year institutions in the same year and region.

High School Career and Technical Education (CTE) credentials

The Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE) provided information on the number of students who finished high school with a Career and Technical Education (CTE) credential from 2018 to 2021.⁵ Credential completions reported below represent a student's first certification, license, or certificate of completion attained through CTE courses. These attainments are recorded by ALSDE, and reported here, when the student leaves the system, usually at graduation.⁶ For the purpose of assessing first-time credential completions for two key age groups (16–24 and 25–64), all high school students included in the data are assumed to be younger than 24 at the time of completion.

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) program credentials

Seven regional workforce boards implement federal WIOA programs. The published WIOA data includes key details for this report, including credential attainment for individual completers, age, previous education level, and workforce development region, as well as other details on a person's race or ethnicity and their employment, disability, and veteran statuses. Completers were counted if they earned either an occupational license or industry certification and did not already have a degree or academic certificate when they began.

Another category of attainment reported by WIOA programs are Measurable Skills Gained (MSG), which are trainings or completions that do not meet the WIOA definitions of specific

⁵ All data from ALSDE was aggregated; no individuals or identifying subgroups were included.

⁶ Students may leave the ALSDE school system by graduating with a diploma or certificate of completion, or by withdrawing prior to graduation. Most students graduate about age 18, although completions of any type may occur earlier or younger.

credentials. Alabama's Adult Education Program collects extensive data on MSGs in addition to the WIOA-defined credentials. The agency provided data for this research on both credentials and MSG programs completed by participants in Adult Education programs from January 2018 through June 2021 as well as participants' county of residence.⁷ For the region reports provided below, completers were assigned to a region based on their county of residence. Completers were counted if they lived in Alabama in the year they earned a first industry-recognized certification, certificate of completion, or occupational license.⁸

Registered Apprenticeships

The federal Office of Apprenticeship data includes the previous education level and age of each apprentice and the location of their apprenticeship program.⁹ Completers of apprenticeships were counted if their program was in Alabama and their initial level of education did not include another credential.

Results

This report aimed to answer four important questions. These questions and findings are reported below, followed by more detailed descriptions for each of the four questions.

What percent of the working-age population has a post-secondary credential beyond high school completion?

We found 45.7% of the 25-64 population had a credential beyond high school completion in 2021. We also calculated the percent of the populations of ages 18-24 and 18-64 with post-secondary credentials.¹⁰ Details are provided below in "[Percent of the Alabama population with a credential](#)".

⁷ Data from the ETA and from the Adult Education program is anonymized; no direct or indirect personal identifying information is included.

⁸ Certificates earned through the Adult Education programs are non-credit; although they are provided at community colleges, they are not reported to ACHE.

⁹ Data from the ETA is anonymized; no direct or indirect personal identifying information is included.

¹⁰ Population estimates by age include 18-64 (rather than 16-64) to increase reliability in federal data sources.

Did the state make progress toward the Success Plus goal of adding 500,000 credentialed adults to the population by 2025?

Yes. We found 214,725 first credentials completed from 2018 through 2021. This is significant progress toward the attainment goal; 43% of the final goal of 500,000. This includes people ages 16-64, which is different than the original Success Plus emphasis of ages 25-64. The choice to include ages 16 to 24 is based on the reality that the workforce includes people younger than 25. Additionally, many of the Success Plus initiatives and related programs target youth directly. Details are provided below in "[Attainment statewide](#)".

How much of that progress in attainment was in two age groups: 16-24 and 25-64?

We found people ages 16-24 attained 137,848 credentials and people ages 25-64 attained 38,240 credentials from 2018 to 2021.¹¹ Details are provided below in "[Attainment by age](#)".

How much of the attainment progress occurred in each region of Alabama?

We evaluated this question for the state's seven workforce development regions. We found 44,475 credentials attained in Region 1; 12,045 credentials attained in Region 2; 24,956 credentials attained in Region 3; 38,420 credentials attained in Region 4; 33,151 credentials attained in Region 5; 17,791 credentials attained in Region 6; and 44,064 credentials attained in Region 7. Details are provided below in "[Attainment in Alabama's seven workforce development regions](#)".

¹¹ Some of the data available to count credentials for the 16-64 age group was not available when counting the 16-24 and 25-64 age groups. This explains the difference in estimations for each age compared to the overall total attainment.

1. Percent of the Alabama population with a credential

In 2018, the Alabama Workforce Council's Attainment Committee reported that 43% of Alabamians ages 25-64 had a credential beyond high school in 2017. We found that in 2021, 45.7% of Alabamians ages 25-64 had a credential, an increase over the past four years.

To address the revised Success Plus goal of measuring the credential attainment of the entire working-age population (ages 16-64), we aimed to assess the 16-24 age group as well. With available information, we were able to account for the percent of the credentialed population for age groups 18-24 and 18-64.¹² In 2021, 21.1% of the population ages 18-24 had a credential, and 43.3% of the entire working-age population (ages 18-64) had a credential. We included people whose highest education level was a degree, certificate, industry certification, professional license, or an apprenticeship.

Table 1: Percentage of Alabama's population of people ages 18-64 that hold at least one credential in 2021

Age Group	Credentialed Population
18-24 Years	21.1%
25-64 Years	45.7%
18-64 Years	43.3%

We relied on several national data sets to establish the base population in each age category and baseline education attainment levels.¹ These national data sets are not available for the most recent years and do not include all credentials, so we supplemented that information with estimates derived from the statewide and age-based counts. We estimated all credential attainment in percentages for this assessment of the credential levels of the entire population.

¹² This report includes first-credentials attained in 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021 for ages 16 and above. However, data available for the education levels of the entire working-age population in Alabama is only available for population ages 18 and above. To calculate the above percentage, we assume people enter the labor force when they finish secondary school at age 18.

2. Attainment statewide

CREC counted the completion of degrees (either bachelor's or associate's degrees) and academic certificates from institutes of higher education, secondary school career technical education (CTE) credentials, occupational licenses and certifications, and apprenticeships. As described above, credential attainment was restricted to those that were likely the first or only credential that individuals had earned in years 2018 through 2021. It is still possible that the same person achieved multiple credentials across the categories in the past four years, though we attempted to minimize that possibility. Following this approach, described in detail below, we found 214,725 credentials attained from 2018 through 2021, almost halfway to the 2025 target of 500,000 newly credentialed people in Alabama.

Table 2: Credential attainment across Alabama, 2018-2021

Year earned	degrees	certificates	certifications	licenses	apprenticeships	Total
2018	42,757	8,946	10,157	55	259	62,174
2019	41,519	10,627	11,594	403	170	64,313
2020	42,068	8,529	4,851	539	189	56,179
2021 ¹³	18,850	4,831	7,898	433	50	32,062
Total	145,194	32,933	34,500	1,430	668	214,725

The estimate of degrees includes associate's and bachelor's degrees at public post-secondary two- and four-year institutions. During this period, the number of post-secondary degrees attained was above 40,000 annually, except for 2021. A lower estimate for 2021 reflects a partial academic year, not fewer completions. Completions data for private post-secondary institutions is only available until the 2019-2020 school year. Completions data for public post-secondary institutions includes the 2020-2021 school year, ending in the 2021 Spring semester.

Non-credit certificates include those obtained through high school CTE courses as well as those provided through the Alabama's Adult Education program. The non-credit certificate programs were limited to those directly related to a post-secondary occupation. Basic skills and secondary-level remediation certificates were excluded.

¹³ Data from ACHE and ALSDE for 2021 reflects completions for the 2021 spring semester only.

3. Attainment by age

The Success Plus goal is to add 500,000 credentialed workers to the state's population, ages 16-64, although other nationwide credentialing initiatives and data sources focus specifically on the 25-64 age group. The Success Plus goal was originally focused on add 500,000 credentialed workers to the state's workforce between the ages of 25-64. Due to Alabama's focus on credential attainment in an integrated talent development system, the goal was revised to include first-time credential attainment for all Alabamians aged 16-64. This section reports the attainment of three age groups: ages 16-64, ages 16-24, and ages 25-64.

Counting credential attainment for the 16-24 and 25-64 age groups requires data to describe completers by age. ACHE provided age group categories for completers of certificates and degrees. All students included in the data from ALSDE were 22 years or younger. ETA data for WIOA programs and Apprenticeships also include age-related descriptions of participants.

Data on private college and university attainments and the Adult Education program attainments was limited and could not be included in this age-based count. The limitations of this data result in lower counts overall than in the state-wide counts. In all, 176,926 credentials were identified by age of the people attaining them.

Ages 16-24

From 2018-2021, people ages 16-24 earned 137,848 credentials: 89,413 associate's or bachelor's degrees; 17,926 certificates; 29,748 industry certifications; 419 professional licenses; and completed 342 apprenticeships.

Most of the certifications attained by this age group come from high school CTE programs.¹⁴ Many of those programs were canceled or postponed during pandemic-related closures during the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years. As a result, attainment of industry certifications decreased dramatically from the previous two years.

¹⁴ CTE credentials are reported as attained when the student completes their secondary education. Secondary education is mandatory until age 16, and graduation may occur up to age 21. Students typically graduate at age 18, although completions of any type may occur earlier or later.

Table 3: Credential attainment by people ages 16-24 in Alabama, 2018-2021

Year earned	degree	certificate	certification	license	apprenticeship	Grand Total
2018	24,530	5,035	9,140	53	139	38,897
2019	24,702	5,505	9,696	184	77	40,164
2020	25,452	4,657	4,150	113	101	34,473
2021	14,729	2,729	6,762	69	25	24,314
Total	89,413	17,926	29,748	419	342	137,848

Ages 25-64

From 2018-2021, people ages 25-64 earned 38,240 credentials: 26,292 associate's or bachelor's degrees; 10,490 certificates; 72 industry certifications; 1,060 professional licenses; and completed 326 apprenticeships.

Table 4: Credential attainment by people ages 25-64 in Alabama, 2018-2021

Year earned	degree	certificate	certification	license	apprenticeship	Grand Total
2018	8,345	2,487	–	–	120	10,952
2019	7,532	4,074	11	458	93	12,168
2020	7,479	2,822	33	420	88	10,842
2021	2,936	1,107	28	182	25	4,278
Total	26,292	10,490	72	1,060	326	38,240

All data regarding certifications and licenses attained by the 25-64 age group comes from the ETA's WIOA program data. In 2018, the federal and state reporting systems were in transition, and credential attainment data is incomplete.

4. Attainment in Alabama's seven workforce development regions

The following section provides a description of credential attainment across Alabama's seven workforce development regions from 2018 through 2021. The estimates include attainments from all available data sources described above and all age groups combined.¹⁵

Figure 6: Working age population (ages 18-64) in each workforce development region.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Decennial Census.

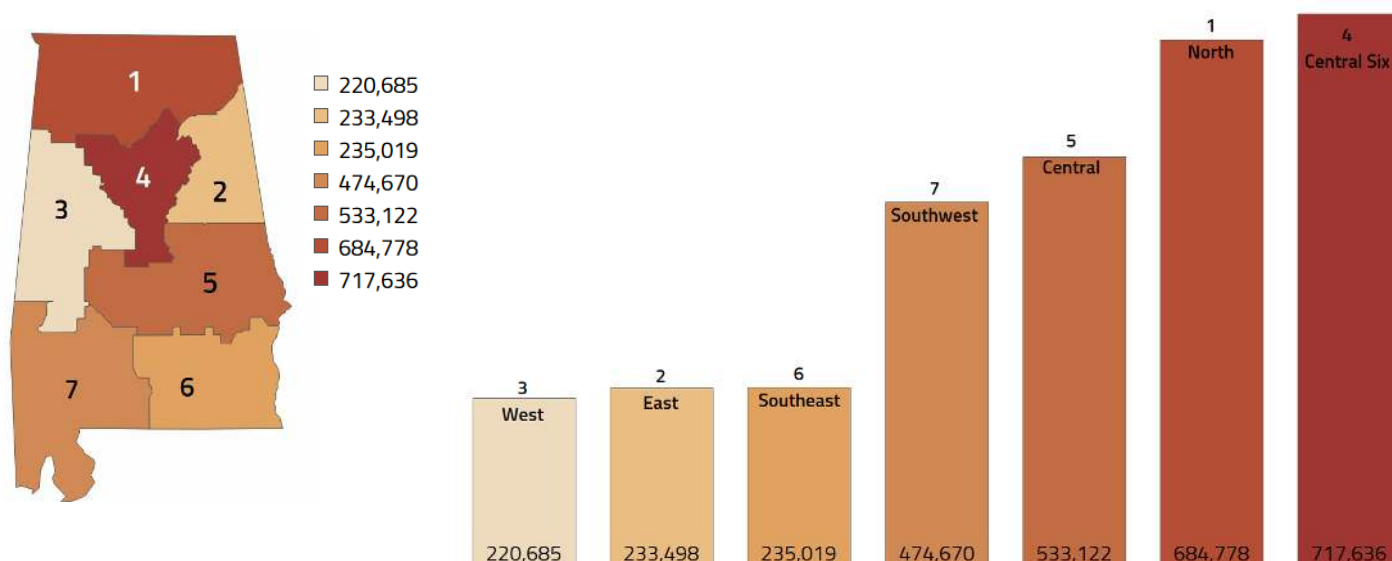
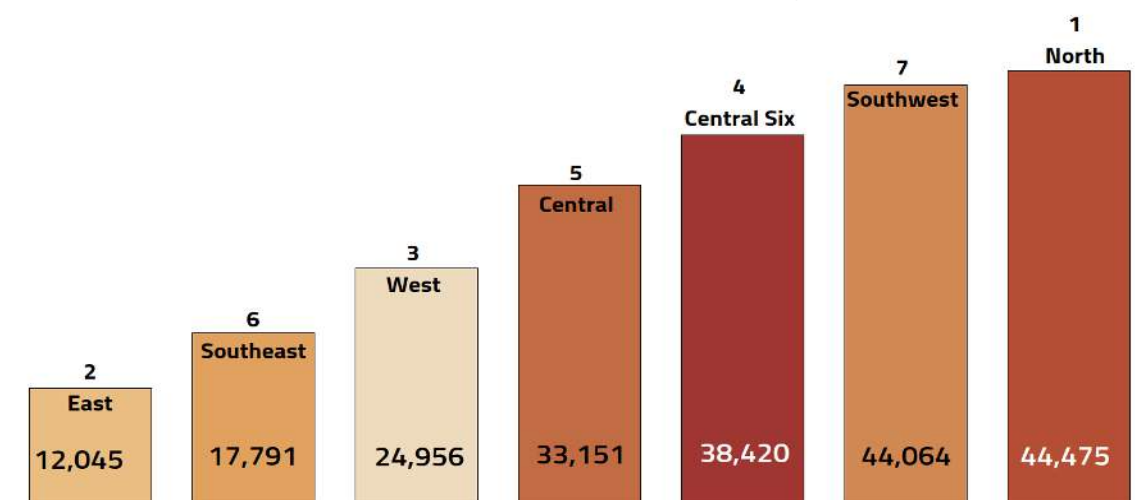


Figure 7: Newly credentialed people in each of Alabama's regions from 2018 to 2021.

The colors correspond to the populations Figure 6.



¹⁵ Population estimates are from the U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2020 5-Year Estimates

The map and graph in figure 6 both show the population of individuals in Alabama, ages 18-64. Colors indicate the relative size of the population in each region. Considering the working age population of a region gives context to the credential attainments. The bar graph in Figure 7 illustrates the number of first credentials attained in each region. The colors correspond to the map in Figure 6.

Region 1 (North) and Region 7 (Southwest) led the state in the number of credentials attained between 2018 and 2021.

North, Region 1: (population ages 18-64: 684,778)

Between 2018 and 2021, a total of 44,475 first credentials were attained in Region 1, 6% of the region's population ages 18-64. The greatest share of these credentials is from degrees (25,726), followed by certificates (9,775), and certifications (8,579).

Table 5: Credential attainment in Region 1, 2018-2021

Year Earned	degree	certificate	certification	license	apprenticeship	Grand Total
2018	7,606	2,302	2,428	*	90	12,426
2019	7,180	2,912	2,859	73	44	13,068
2020	7,161	2,674	1,422	70	63	11,390
2021	3,779	1,887	1,870	41	14	7,591
Total	25,726	9,775	8,579	184	219	44,475

East, Region 2: (population ages 18-64: 233,498)

Between 2018 and 2021, a total of 12,045 first credentials were attained in Region 2, 5% of the region's population ages 18-64. The greatest share of these credentials is from degree earners (7,457) followed by certificates (2,094) and certifications (2,314).

Table 6: Credential attainment in Region 2, 2018-2021

Year Earned	Degree	Certificate	Certification	License	Apprenticeship	Grand Total
2018	2,247	626	661	*	0	3,534
2019	2,159	634	712	52	0	3,557
2020	2,117	540	355	46	0	3,058
2021	934	294	586	82	0	1,896
Total	7,457	2,094	2,314	180	0	12,045

West, Region 3: (population ages 18-64: 220,685)

Between 2018 and 2021, a total of 24,956 first credentials were attained in Region 3, 11% of the region's population ages 18-64. The greatest share of these credentials is from degree earners (21,100) followed by certificates (1,682) and certifications (2,070).

Table 7: Credential attainment in Region 3, 2018-2021

Year Earned	Degree	Certificate	Certification	License	Apprenticeship	Grand Total
2018	5,392	401	528	0	10	6,331
2019	5,714	533	879	33	0	7,159
2020	6,263	518	292	38	14	7,125
2021	3,731	230	371	9	0	4,341
Total	21,100	1,682	2,070	80	24	24,956

Central 6, Region 4: (population ages 18-64: 717,636)

Between 2018 and 2021, a total of 38,420 first credentials were attained in Region 4, 5% of the region's population ages 18-64. The greatest share of these credentials is from degree earners (26,071) followed by certificates (5,817) and certifications (6,166).

Table 8: Credential attainment in Region 4, 2018-2021

Year Earned	Degree	Certificate	Certification	License	Apprenticeship	Grand Total
2018	7,708	1,676	1,767	6	76	11,233
2019	7,459	1,798	2,101	29	58	11,445
2020	7,740	1,595	909	48	74	10,366
2021	3,164	748	1,389	43	32	5,376
Total	26,071	5,817	6,166	126	242	38,420

Central, Region 5: (population ages 18-64: 533,122)

Between 2018 and 2021, a total of 33,151 first credentials were attained in Region 5, 6% of the region's population ages 18-64. The greatest share of these credentials is from degree earners (24,198) followed by certificates (4,862) and certifications (3,768).

Table 9: Credential attainment in Region 5, 2018-2021

Year Earned	Degree	Certificate	Certification	License	apprenticeship	Grand Total
2018	6,974	1,618	904	1	14	9,511
2019	6,915	1,614	1,451	53	10	10,043
2020	7,113	1,082	555	107	10	8,867
2021	3,196	548	858	127	1	4,730
Total	24,198	4,862	3,768	288	35	33,151

Southeast, Region 6: (population ages 18-64: 235,019)

Between 2018 and 2021, a total of 17,791 first credentials were attained in Region 6, 7% of the region's population ages 18-64. The greatest share of these credentials is from first-time degree earners (10,843) followed by certificates (3,368) and certifications (3,402).

Table 10: Credential attainment in Region 6, 2018-2021

Year Earned	Degree	Certificate	Certification	License	Apprenticeship	Grand Total
2018	2,908	818	1,058	2	0	4,786
2019	2,837	1,310	1,056	39	0	5,242
2020	2,760	823	385	89	0	4,057
2021	2,338	417	903	48	0	3,706
Total	10,843	3,368	3,402	178	0	17,791

No apprenticeships were recorded in Region 6 because the data only includes the location of the program, not the residence of the apprentice. Apprentices may live in Region 6, but no apprenticeship programs were listed there.

Southwest, Region 7: (population ages 18-64: 474,670)

Between 2018 and 2021, a total of 44,064 first credentials were attained in Region 7, 9% of the region's population ages 18-64. The greatest share of these credentials is from first-time degree earners (29,800) followed by certificates (5,459) and certifications (8,253).

Table 11: Credential attainment in Region 7, 2018-2021

Year Earned	Degree	Certificate	Certification	License	Apprenticeship	Grand Total
2018	9,921	1,505	2,811	46	69	14,352
2019	9,256	1,883	2,560	124	58	13,881
2020	8,915	1,352	951	141	28	11,387
2021	1,708	719	1,931	83	3	4,444
Total	29,800	5,459	8,253	394	158	44,064

Discussion & Recommendations

The requirements to be successful in the job market continue to evolve and the value of postsecondary credentials is growing. With 4,200 different credentials offered by institutions in Alabama, according to a 2021 report by Credential Engine, tracking and assessing progress is a challenge.ⁱⁱ

As a first step toward establishing a more cohesive statewide approach to evaluating progress and addressing barriers for learners and job seekers, Alabama's state agencies are seeking to better account for their own program participants. The credential attainment reported above, with first credentials attained in the last four years, represents important progress toward Alabama's Success Plus goals.

One of the most significant challenges for state agencies, education and training partners, and policymakers is understanding how individuals are progressing through education and career, especially when their pathways cross multiple systems. Efforts to account for the credentialing of the population are made more complex by population dynamics, including labor market participation and migration trends complicated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Experts in Alabama have recognized that the retention of graduates in the state, and hence their ability to fill jobs in demand, needs to be addressed to meet industry demand.ⁱⁱⁱ But policymakers are currently unable to track credentialed individuals through their careers, limiting their understanding of the successes and challenges that should inform future programming. These are some of the challenges the Governor's Office of Education and Workforce Transformation and their partners are working to address.

Questions remain about the credential attainment of specific groups of people across the state, including special populations who experience significant barriers to post-secondary education and credentialing opportunities in Alabama. Several agencies are currently working to produce data to describe the credential attainment of these populations.¹⁶ Providing this information by region will inform policymakers as they prioritize awareness and access for these populations.

¹⁶ See the Appendix for the list of WIOA Combined Plan 16 special populations.

These next steps depend on the continued leadership of the Governor's office, state agencies, and service providers. In particular, transparency is needed regarding the strengths and weaknesses of existing data collection, processing, and analysis systems. These strengths and weaknesses can most effectively be revealed by applying data to specific research questions that will inform public policymaking. This report, an important step in accounting for credential attainment across multiple education and training systems, aims to provide a clearer picture of the credential landscape and statewide progress toward attainment goals. The following recommendations are provided for consideration by the many contributors to the Success Plus initiatives.

Clearly articulate the contribution of key credentials in each of Alabama's seven workforce development regions

Each region in Alabama has unique challenges and opportunities to address in advancing the Success Plus initiatives. Each region has unique demographics, population dynamics, educational institutions, industries, and civic organizations. And each will have unique credentialing needs and resources. For example, what role do degrees play in first credential attainment in each of Alabama's workforce development regions?

The attainment of degrees at universities and colleges was the single greatest source of credential attainment in Alabama from 2018-2021 – statewide, and in each of the regions. Regions 1, 4, 5, and 7, have larger populations, the most academic institutions, and a high number of first-degree completions. Region 3, in contrast, has a smaller population, only six academic institutions, and yet also has a high number of first-degree completions.¹⁷

Region 3 benefits from large numbers of students entering the state to attend the University of Alabama. Degrees earned by non-resident students constitute 60% of the region's attainment. If these students stay in the state after completing their degree program, they contribute valuable skills to business and industry. If they leave, they take with them the skills developed during their time in Alabama.

¹⁷ See the appendix for details of degree attainment and number of post-secondary institutions in each workforce development region.

Different types of education and training institutions, credentials provided, and populations served, will inform credential attainment trends in each region. It is important to look beyond the numbers to assess how those trends contribute to the Success Plus attainment goals, including consideration of populations served and resulting benefits to individuals and businesses.

In understanding the contribution of degrees to the Success Plus goals, there are three immediate challenges. First, opportunities to attain degrees, particularly four-year degrees, are not equally distributed statewide. Second, people with degrees are highly mobile and degree completers are less likely than others to stay in the state after credential completion. Third, special populations with significant barriers to work and education may not have access to relevant degree programs. Retention of degree completers including in-state and out-of-state students, at universities and colleges across the state, would help to increase the credentialed workforce, especially as special populations gain equitable access to these credentialing systems.^{iv}

Continue gathering information on industry-recognized credentials

Industry-recognized credentials are increasingly important to state credentialing goals, but it is often difficult to find information on which of these credentials are most valuable to businesses and workers in the state. Creating a comprehensive inventory requires creating new data collection and sharing relationships and processes. For example, license and certification attainment is likely undercounted for the adult population in this report because there are few publicly available sources of information on attainment of these important professional credentials in Alabama.

National survey results estimate there are approximately 174,000 working-age people with either certifications or licenses in Alabama who do not have a degree.^v Relying on available in-state information to ensure precision, this report counts only 35,930 licenses and certifications attained. Most of these credentials were earned by youth from ages 16-24, as reported by ALSDE (see Tables 1 and 2). Information on adult attainment of licenses was not available.

License boards are an authoritative source of licensing activity, given their regulatory role.

Currently, the 69 licensing boards in Alabama report only limited information to the Department of Labor on the individuals who earn licenses. Another potential source of information on industry-recognized credentials are the training providers who work in cooperation with business and industry groups, including AIDT and the Alabama Technology Network. However, they do not collect data on individual training participants or the credentials they may gain. Another potential source of information on related training is the Alabama Community Colleges System, which is currently transitioning all community college data reporting to a common platform. In the meantime, data regarding the non-credit coursework, and any subsequent attainment of industry-recognized credentials, is limited and inconsistently collected.

Align state agencies around opportunities to advance data collection, storage, and sharing practices and provide resources for collaboration

Decision-makers in government and industry seek to understand the challenges and opportunities for each of the key credentials referenced in this report as they strive to improve training, credentialing, and employment systems and meet their shared goals. The continuing evolution of these systems will likely improve the ability to count and describe credentials attained, and the populations attaining them, in the coming years. Many of the agencies who contributed to this report, such as Alabama Community College System (ACCS), are currently transitioning to more comprehensive data systems to better track and assess the progress of the communities and constituents they serve.

By sharing best practices for data processing and by sharing information about program participation and results, as well as sharing data itself where possible, agencies that offer complementary services can better coordinate to ensure the success of their programs and participants. Eventually, collaboration and problem-solving efforts can lead to linking data systems between high school CTE programs, postsecondary coursework, Adult Education programs, and AIDT programs to inform agency leaders how the programs they provide serve Alabamians.

The state agencies who contributed to this report all expressed interest in collaborating with other agencies to improve programs and inform policy decisions. Many are actively participating in the development of a state longitudinal data system (SLDS), the Alabama

Terminal on Linking and Analyzing Statistics (ATLAS) on Career Pathways. Direct connections between agencies will expedite development of the ATLAS on Career Pathways and improve the agility of agencies to respond to changing circumstances.

The ATLAS on Career Pathways has the potential to answer important research questions in the future but must overcome siloed agency administrations and data systems. Because each agency has their own processes and systems for collecting and storing data, as well as their own IT and data analysis staff, the dispersion of valuable IT resources and data analysis expertise can limit opportunities for agencies to identify and address the challenges they experience related to processing data efficiently, navigating data sharing norms, and updating legacy systems.

Best practices for intra- and inter-agency alignment can be gleaned from comparable states. Nevada, South Carolina, Arkansas, and Oklahoma may provide useful comparisons and potential models for coordination between Alabama's agencies.^{vi} Other states, like Kentucky, Illinois, and Texas, can provide examples of leadership in specific areas, such as in data sharing and public access to data or in assessing the value of various credentials.

Fund data collection to assess and improve participation and outcomes for Alabama's most innovative and promising programs

Leaders in Alabama are committed to improving the economic outlook through innovation and informed decision-making and state agencies are implementing new programs to increase access to training and credentialing. For example, leaders are seeking to establish new business partnerships and the Alabama Office of Apprenticeship is adding guidance on expected skill gains to enhance apprenticeship programs, encouraging timely completion and more transparent results for employer sponsors.

Describing the value of these investments in education and credentialing programs requires mature data collection systems and analytic capabilities. Improving data systems and conducting assessments requires time, expertise, and additional resources beyond the current capacity of many state agencies.

A scan of best practices in program evaluation and data system development from

comparable states can inform the most effective approaches to funding and otherwise supporting data collection efforts, such as strategies for increasing employer participation while reducing employer burden in reporting. Laying the groundwork to evaluate the success of the most innovative programs will reinforce Alabama's role as a leader in credentialing.

Appendix

Alabama's 2020 WIOA Combined Plan Special Populations

Improving equitable access to high-quality jobs for the following discrete 16 special populations are an important aspect of Alabama's Success Plus goals by increasing access to credentialing opportunities and career pathways.

Table 12: Estimated population of 16 discrete populations in Alabama, 2021
Source: Alabama Office of Education and Workforce Statistics. 2021 *Special Population Estimates*.

Special Populations	Estimated Population, 2021
Displaced Homemaker	39,980
Low-Income	458,150
American Indian, Alaskan Natives, Native Hawaiians	19,857
People with Disabilities	253,175
Older Individuals (ages 65 or older)	649,002
Ex-Offenders/Formerly Incarcerated	115,651
Homeless Individuals	4,601
Youth Aged Out of the Foster System	210
English Language Learners/Low Levels of Literacy/Substantial Cultural Barriers	41,981
Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers	9,734
Individuals Nearing TANF Exhaustion	2,912
Single Parents	169,078
Youth with Parents in Military Active Duty	10,522
Unemployed/Underemployed	83,471
Long-Term Unemployed	144,815
Veterans	165,079

Priorities of the Success Plus strategic plan

Priority 1: Awareness

All Alabama residents understand the importance of earning certificates, credentials, and degrees and know how to find information and resources to get started or continue their education and training.

Priority 2: Access and Success

Alabama residents of all ages, backgrounds, and resources have access to education and receive the continuous support they need to complete certificates, credentials, and degrees.

Priority 3: Pathways

Pathways from education and training to high-demand jobs are defined. Programs, curriculum, and guidance along pathways encourage success, achievement, and opportunities for continuing education.

Priority 4: Leadership and Collaboration

Partners at the state, regional, and local levels work together to support efforts aimed at increasing post-secondary educational attainment in Alabama.

Priority 5: Assessment and Continuous Improvement

Progress toward Alabama's goal for post-secondary educational attainment is tracked and shared regularly, and adjustments are made to the plan and strategies to ensure success.

Definitions of each type of credential counted

Source: Credential Engine (2021). *Counting U.S. Post-secondary and Secondary Credentials*.

Degree

An award conferred by a college, university, or other postsecondary education institution as official recognition for the successful completion of a program of study. Primary degree levels include Associate's, Bachelor's, Master's, Doctoral, and specific professional degrees.

Certificate

An award conferred by a college, university, or other postsecondary education institution indicating the satisfactory completion of a non-degree program of study. Most certificates require no more than one year of full-time academic effort. Many certificates are occupational in nature. Some are described as certificates of completion.

Certification

An award by an authoritative body—such as an industry or professional association—to an individual who demonstrates designated knowledge, skills, and abilities in a particular occupation. Certifications are time-limited and renewable. An individual may take courses to prepare for a competency examination. Certification providers may allow other organizations to provide the courses and administer the tests that qualify a person for the certification. Verification that certification providers and their partners meet certain standards is provided by accreditation organizations.

License

Each state requires persons practicing specific professions and vocations to first obtain an occupational license from a state licensing board. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), "When implemented properly, occupational licensing can help protect the health and safety of consumers by requiring practitioners to undergo a designated amount of training and education in their field."

Apprenticeship

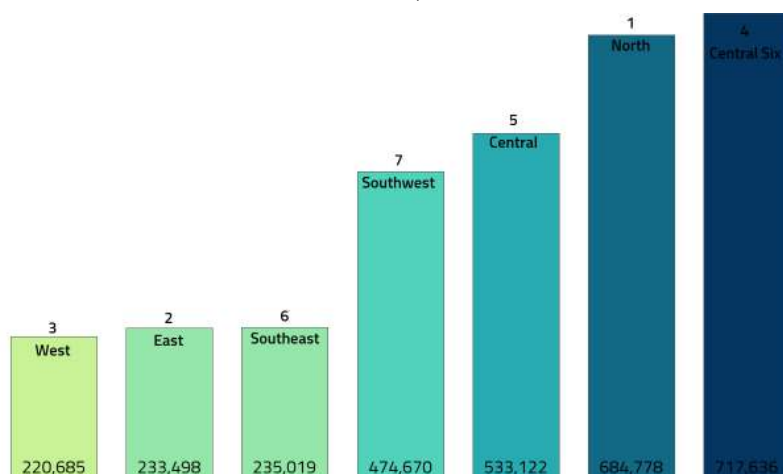
A program that establishes practitioners as qualified technicians in their chosen trade or profession through a combination of on-the-job training and classroom instruction. It is operationalized by a formal training contract between an employer and their employee and completion is recognized by a certificate of completion.

Details for degrees attained in Alabama's workforce development regions

The estimate of first-degree completions by in-state students are attributed to the region of their permanent residence. Completions by out-of-state students are attributed to the region of their university. It is important to consider the population of ages 18-64 in each workforce development region when assessing progress toward credential completions.

Figure 8: Population of ages 18-64 in Alabama workforce development regions, 2020

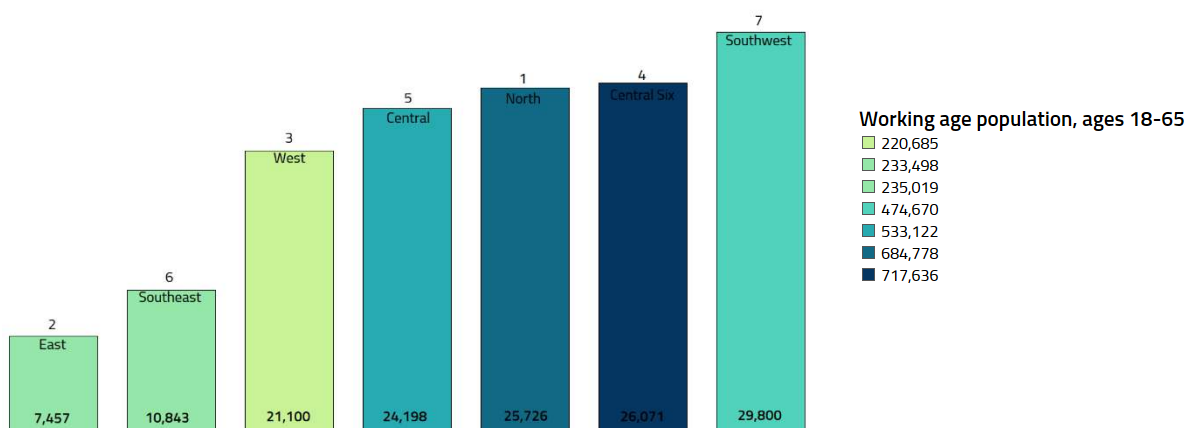
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Decennial Census



First-degree attainment in each workforce development region is not evenly distributed. Both regions 3 and 7 have high degree attainment relative to their working-age populations.

Figure 9: Degree attainment in Alabama workforce development regions, 2018-2021, ages 16-64.

Regions are same colors as in figure 8.



Agencies consulted in preparing this report

Table 13: Education and workforce development agencies that were consulted during this research

Contributing Agency	Shared credential attainment data used in this report	Will share Special Populations credential attainment data for the next phase of the project	Shared contextual information about the education and credentialing landscape in Alabama
Alabama Office of Education and Workforce Statistics (OEWS)			X
Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE)	X	X	
Alabama Commission on Higher Education (ACHE)	X	X	
Alabama Community College System (ACCS)			X
Alabama Community College System, Adult Education Programs	X	X	
Alabama Community College System, Alabama Technology Network (ATN)			X
Alabama Community College System, Ingram State Technical College		X	
Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services		X	
Alabama Department of Veterans Affairs			X
Alabama Department of Commerce, Workforce Development Division (WIOA programs)		X	
Alabama Department of Commerce, AIDT			X
Alabama Office of Apprenticeship (AOA)			X
Alabama Department of Labor, Alabama Career Center System (ALCC)			X
Alabama Department of Labor, Labor Market Information (LMI) Division		X	
U.S. Department of Labor, Veterans Employment and Training Services (VETS)		X	
Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama (PARCA)			X

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Endnotes

ⁱ The four additional data sources used to count the state's working-age population are:

- The American Community Survey 2019 1-Year Estimate (ACS) from the U.S. Census Bureau includes ages 18-24, 25-64, 18-64 and the highest level of degree attained for each group. The Lumina Foundation's *Stronger Nation* report also used this data source.
- The 2020 Decennial Census is a count of all people, ages 18 and older in 2020. It is the most accurate of all the sources, however the data for age subgroups and education is currently limited.
- The LMI Institute's State Certifications and Licenses database is a proprietary dataset of 5-year aggregated data for licenses and certifications held in 2021 from the Current Population Survey. It includes credential data specific to the 25-64 age group, including educational attainment. The 5-year aggregation increases the reliability of the population and attainment counts.
- Current Population Survey, March 2021 Supplement from the U.S. Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics is an annual estimate of people in all age groups, educational attainment levels, and certifications and licensures.

ⁱⁱ Credential Engine (2021). *Counting Post-Secondary and Secondary Credential Report*.

ⁱⁱⁱ Alabama Commission on Higher Education (2021). *Retain Alabama Survey Report*.

^{iv} Alabama Commission on Higher Education (2021). *Retain Alabama Survey Report*.

^v LMI Institute (2022). *State Certifications and Licenses Data* (2021) [Data set].

<https://www.lmiontheweb.org/state-certifications-and-licenses-data/online-tool/>

^{vi} Nevada, South Carolina, Arkansas, and Oklahoma have similar fiscal and population dynamics as Alabama.

- Nevada State Records Services: https://nsla.nv.gov/state_records_services
- South Carolina SC.GOV: <https://sc.gov/about-us>
- Arkansas Division of Information Systems:
<https://directory.arkansas.gov/agency/departments-and-shared-services/departments-of-information-systems-dis/>
- Oklahoma OMES Enterprise Program Management Office:
<https://oklahoma.gov/projects.html>