

Educational Attainment

INDICATORS ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH



Among 25- to 29-year olds, the proportions who have attained a high school education, some college, or a bachelor's degree are all rising, according to long-term trends. However, despite progress, in 2013, only a third of this population had a bachelor's degree or higher.

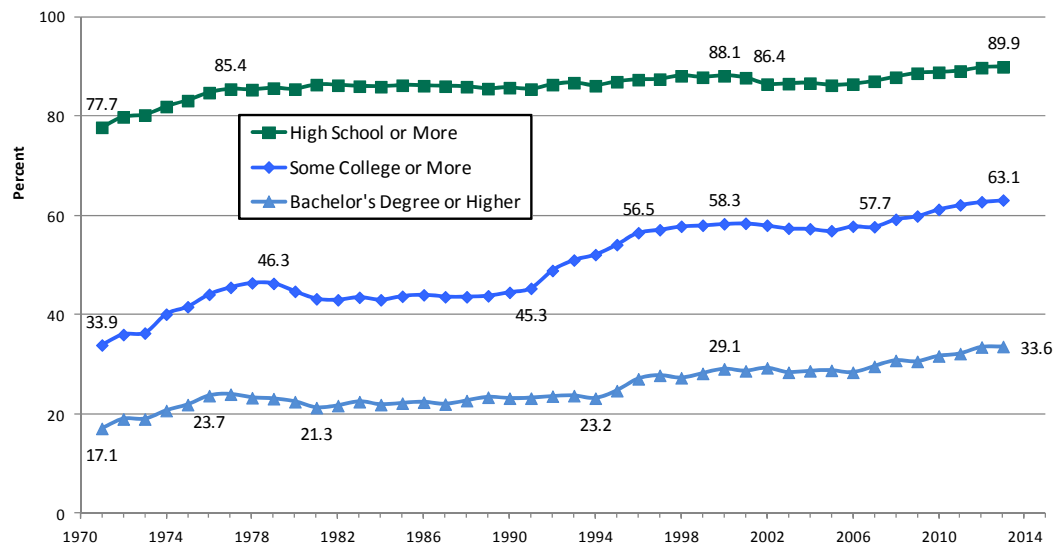
Importance

Educational attainment is a powerful predictor of well-being. Young adults who have completed higher levels of education are more likely to achieve economic success than those who have not. In addition to qualifying one for a broader range of jobs, completing more years of education also protects against unemployment.^{1,2} Further, higher levels of educational attainment often lead to higher wages and income: in 2012, Americans with bachelor's degrees or higher earned a median income that was more than 65 percent higher than that of their peers with only high school diplomas. In the past few decades, earning differentials by education level have been increasing, especially among women and black workers.³ Adults with higher levels of education also report being in better health and having higher levels of socio-emotional well-being. They are also less likely to divorce, or be incarcerated.^{4,5,6,7}

Trends

The educational attainment of 25- to 29-year-olds generally increased between 1971 and 2000. The largest increases occurred in those who attained a B.A. degree or higher, and those completing at least some college. Among 25- to 29-year-olds in 2000, 58 percent had completed at least some college, up from 34 percent in 1971 (a 72 percent increase), and 29 percent had attained a B.A or higher, up from 17 percent (a 70 percent increase). Since 2000, progress has been somewhat slower. In 2013, 90 percent of 25- to 29-year-olds had completed high school or more. The proportion who had completed at least some college was 63 percent, up from 58 percent in 2000 (an eight percent increase). Thirty-three percent held a bachelor's degree or higher, up from 29 percent in 2000 (a 15 percent increase). (Figure 1)

Figure 1
Percentage of Young Adults Ages 25 to 29, With at Least a High School Diploma, With at Least Some College, and With at Least a Bachelor's Degree, 1971-2013

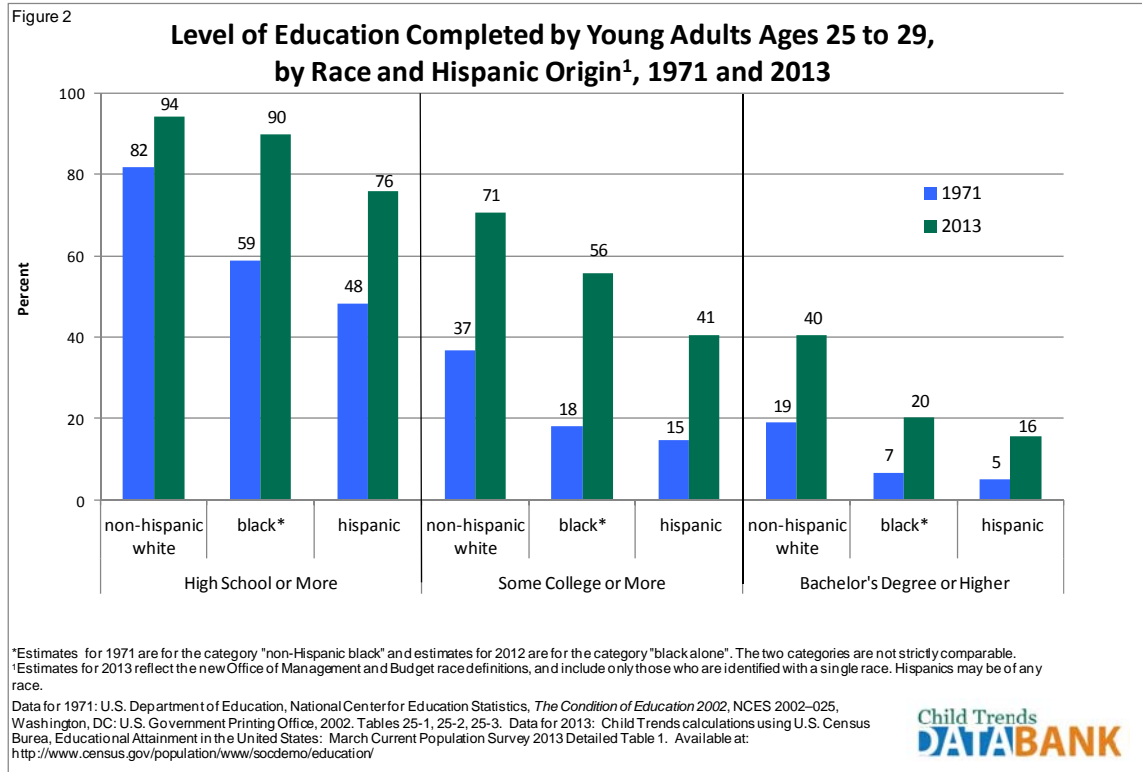


Sources: Data for 1971-2001: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, The Condition of Education 2002, NCES 2002-025, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2002. Tables 25-1, 25-2, 25-3. Data for 2002-2013: Child Trends' calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, Educational Attainment in the United States: Detailed Tables: Table 1. <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/educ-attn.htm>.

Differences by Race and Hispanic Origin⁸

In 2013, white young adults (ages 25-29) were more likely than black and Hispanic young adults to have completed higher levels of education. However, gains by blacks over the last 30 years have nearly erased the black-white gap for high school completion: 94 percent of whites and 90 percent of blacks in this age group had completed high school in 2013. Hispanics have also gained in educational attainment since the 1970s, but have not completely closed the gap with whites: 76 and 94 percent, respectively, had at least a high school level of education, in 2013. (Figure 2)

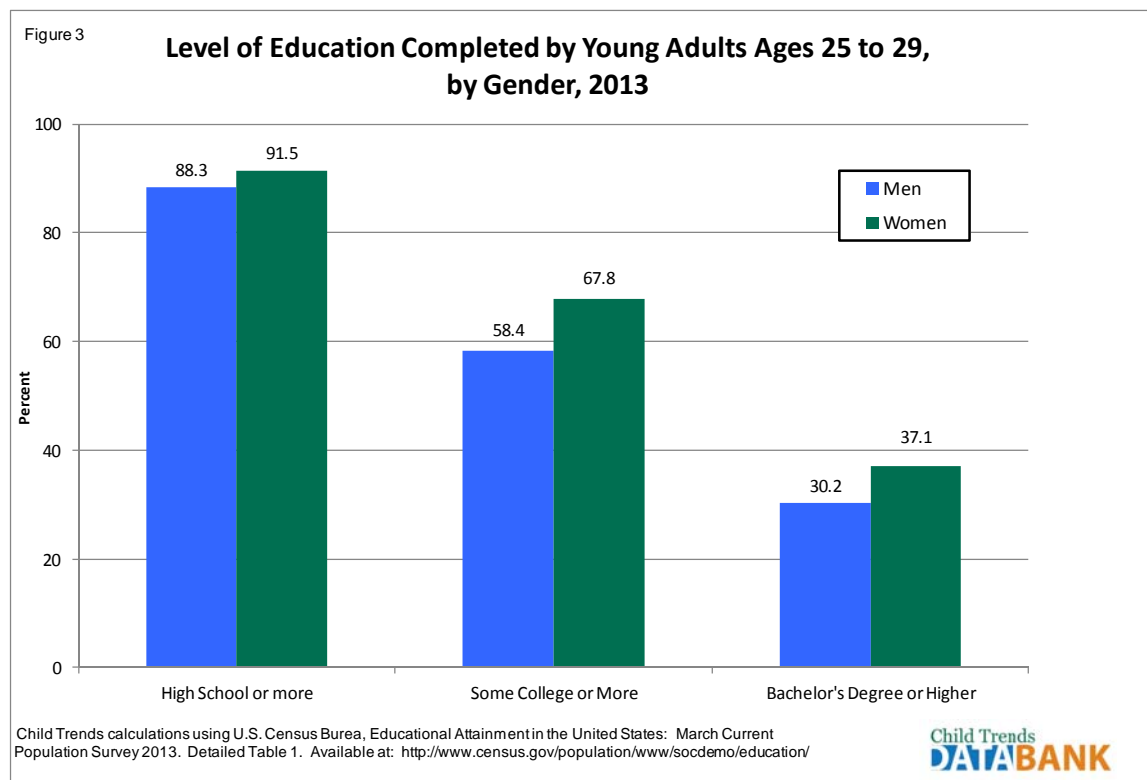
When it comes to rates of higher educational attainment, gaps by race/Hispanic origin are wider. In 2013, among young adults (ages 25 to 29), the percentage of whites who had attained at least a bachelor's degree (40 percent) was two-and-a-half times that of Hispanics (16 percent), and twice that of blacks (20 percent). (Figure 2)



Some of the education gap between white and Hispanics at this age group can be attributed to recent Hispanic immigrants, who tend to have attained lower levels of education in their home countries.⁹ In addition, numbers reported here do not include incarcerated young adults; at least some of the narrowing race gap may be accounted for by increasing incarceration rates among black and Hispanic males with low educational attainment, especially high school dropouts.^{10,11}

Differences by Gender

In 2013, women were more than twice as likely to have completed a bachelor's degree or higher than they were in 1971. (Appendix 1) Women now exceed men in the proportion attaining each level of education, with the widest gap among those who have completed at least some college. In 2013, 92 percent of women ages 25-29 had completed high school, compared with 88 percent for men. Sixty-eight percent of women had completed some college, compared with 58 percent of men, and 37 percent of women had received at least a bachelor's degree, compared with 30 percent of men. The actual gap is likely wider than this estimate, given the high incarceration rate for males who did not finish high school. (Figure 3)



State and Local Estimates

- 2000-2012 state-level estimates for young adults who are enrolled in or have completed college are available at the KIDS COUNT Data Center:

<http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/acrossstates/Rankings.aspx?ind=77>



- 2000-2012 state-level estimates for high school graduates age 25-29 who have completed a bachelor's degree or higher are available at <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/acrossstates/Rankings.aspx?ind=78>
- Detailed state-level estimates of educational attainment are also available through the American Community Survey: <http://factfinder2.census.gov>.

International Estimates

International estimates for Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries are available by gender for those completing secondary and tertiary education from *Education at a Glance, 2014*, Indicator A1, at <http://www.oecd.org/edu/eag.htm>

National Goals

- The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 authorizes competitive grants to achieve improved education results across a “K-20” spectrum that encompasses college success.
- The Lumina Foundation has set a goal to increase the proportion of Americans with high quality degrees, certificates, or other credentials to 60 percent by 2025. More information is available here: <http://goal2025.org/>
- Additionally, the *Healthy People 2020* initiative has set a goal to increase the proportion of high school students who graduate within four years, from 74.9 percent in 2007-08, to 82.4 percent in 2019-20.

More information is available at:

<http://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topicsobjectives2020/objectiveslist.aspx?topicId=2> (goal 5.2)



Related Indicators

- Student Absenteeism: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=student-absenteeism
- High School Dropout (status): www.childtrends.org/?indicators=high-school-dropout-rates
- Youth Neither Enrolled In School nor Working: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=youth-neither-enrolled-in-school-nor-working
- Parental Education: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=parental-education
- Parental Expectations for Children’s Academic Achievement: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=parental-expectations-for-their-childrens-academic-attainment

Definition

This indicator defines educational attainment as the highest grade or degree completed, as reported in the March Current Population Survey (CPS). Before 1992, educational attainment was measured in the CPS as the number of years of completed schooling. “Completed high school” includes both those with high school diplomas as well as those with high school equivalency certificates. “At least some college” includes those with associate’s degrees or professional certificates. All estimates refer only to the civilian, non-institutionalized population.

Data Sources

- Data for 2002-2013: Child Trends’ calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, Educational Attainment in the United States: Detailed Tables: Table 1. <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/educ-attn.htm>.
- Data for 1971-2001: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, The Condition of Education 2002, NCES 2002–025, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2002. Tables 25-1, 25-2, 25-3.

Raw Data Source

Current Population Survey
www.census.gov/cps/



Appendix 1 - Among 25- to 29-Year-Olds, Percentage Attaining Various Levels of Education, by Race/Hispanic Origin, and Gender: Selected Years, 1971–2013

	1971	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
High School or More¹	77.7	83.1	85.4	86.2	85.7	86.9	88.1	86.4	86.5	86.6	86.2	86.4	87.0	87.8	88.6	88.8	89.0	89.7	89.9
Gender																			
Male¹	79.1	84.5	85.4	85.9	84.4	86.3	86.7	84.7	84.9	85.2	85.0	84.4	84.9	85.8	87.5	87.4	87.5	88.4	88.3
Female¹	76.5	81.7	85.5	86.4	87.0	87.4	89.4	88.1	88.2	88.0	87.4	88.5	89.2	89.9	89.8	90.2	90.7	91.1	91.5
Race/Ethnicity²																			
Non-Hispanic White	81.7	86.6	89.2	89.5	90.1	92.5	94.0	93.0	93.7	93.3	92.8	93.4	93.5	93.7	94.6	94.5	94.4	94.6	94.1
White alone	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	85.7	85.9	85.7	86.1	86.5	87.6	88.4	88.5	88.9	89.6	89.5
Non-Hispanic Black	58.8	71.1	76.7	80.5	81.8	86.8	86.8	87.6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Black alone	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	87.6	87.9	86.5	85.6	87.4	87.5	88.8	88.9	87.7	88.6	89.8
Asian alone	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	97.2	96.1	95.4	96.7	97.2	95.6	95.3	93.4	95.1	95.7	94.7
Hispanic	48.3	53.1	57.9	61.0	58.2	57.2	62.8	62.4	61.7	62.4	63.3	63.2	65.0	68.4	68.9	69.4	71.5	75.0	75.8
Some College or More¹	33.9	41.6	44.7	43.7	44.5	54.1	58.3	58.0	57.4	57.3	56.9	57.8	57.7	59.2	59.9	61.2	62.1	62.7	63.1
Gender																			
Male¹	38.5	47.4	47.6	44.2	43.7	52.3	55.1	54.5	53.8	53.4	52.3	53.3	52.5	53.9	54.7	54.7	56.8	57.7	58.4
Female¹	29.4	36.0	41.9	43.3	45.3	55.8	61.5	61.6	61.1	61.3	61.5	62.4	63.0	64.8	65.3	66.8	67.7	67.7	67.8
Race/Ethnicity²																			
Non-Hispanic White	36.7	44.3	48.0	46.4	48.3	59.8	64.1	65.8	65.5	64.7	64.5	66.2	65.6	67.1	68.2	69.3	69.8	69.2	70.6
White alone	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	57.1	56.9	56.9	57.8	57.9	59.6	60.1	61.6	62.5	62.1	62.9
Non-Hispanic Black	18.2	27.5	32.4	34.4	36.1	45.1	52.7	53.4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Black alone	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	50.2	51.4	48.5	49.6	49.6	50.7	53.3	53.9	54.6	58.7	55.7
Asian alone	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	81.3	83.0	81.0	81.5	80.9	80.5	79.5	78.1	80.4	81.7	81.7
Hispanic	14.8	21.8	23.1	26.9	23.3	28.7	32.8	30.9	31.1	32.3	32.7	31.7	33.9	35.9	34.5	36.8	38.8	41.0	40.5



	1971	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Bachelor's Degree or Higher¹	17.1	21.9	22.5	22.2	23.2	24.7	29.1	29.3	28.4	28.7	28.8	28.4	29.6	30.8	30.6	31.7	32.2	33.5	33.6
Gender																			
Male¹	20.4	25.1	24.0	23.1	23.7	24.5	27.9	26.9	26.0	26.1	25.5	25.3	26.3	26.8	26.6	27.8	28.4	29.8	30.2
Female¹	13.8	18.7	21.0	21.3	22.8	24.9	30.1	31.8	30.9	31.4	32.2	31.6	33.1	34.9	34.8	35.7	36.1	37.2	37.1
Race/Ethnicity²																			
Non-Hispanic White	18.9	23.8	25.0	24.4	26.4	28.8	34.0	35.9	34.2	34.5	34.5	34.3	35.5	37.1	37.2	38.6	39.2	39.8	40.4
White alone	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	28.3	28.9	28.9	28.3	29.8	31.1	31.3	32.7	33.1	33.7	34.3
Non-Hispanic Black	6.7	10.5	11.5	11.6	13.4	15.4	17.9	18.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Black alone	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	17.2	16.9	17.4	18.6	18.9	20.6	18.9	19.0	19.6	22.7	20.1
Asian alone	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	61.7	61.4	61.5	60.8	61.0	59.5	59.4	55.5	56.1	60.7	59.1
Hispanic	5.1	8.8	7.7	11.1	8.2	8.9	9.6	8.9	10.0	10.9	11.2	9.5	11.6	12.4	12.2	13.5	12.8	14.8	15.7

"-" Data not available

¹Included in the totals but not shown separately are those from other racial/ethnic categories.

²Estimates for 2002-2005 reflect the new Office of Management and Budget race definitions, and include only those who are identified with a single race. Hispanics may be of any race.

Sources: Data for 1971-2001: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, The Condition of Education 2002, NCES 2002-025, Washington, DC: U.S.

Government Printing Office, 2002. Tables 25-1, 25-2, 25-3. Data for 2002-2013: Child Trends' calculations using U.S. Census Bureau, Educational Attainment in the United States:

Detailed Tables: Table 1. <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/educ-attn.htm>.



Endnotes

¹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2012). *Digest of education statistics, 2011*. Figure 23. Available at: <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d11/>

² Caspi, A., Wright, B.E., Moffit, T.E., and Silva, P.A. (1998). Childhood predictors of unemployment in early adulthood. *American Sociological Review*, 63 (3), 424-451.

³ Child Trends Analysis based on U.S. Department of Education. (2014) The condition of education. Table 502.30. *Median annual earnings of full-time year-round workers 25 to 34 years old and full-time year-round workers as a percentage of the labor force, by sex, race/ethnicity, and educational attainment: Selected years, 1995 through 2012*. Retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/current_tables.asp

⁴ Ross, C. E., & Wu, C. (1995). The links between education and health. *American Sociology Review* 60, 719-745

⁵ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2002). *The condition of education 2001*, NCE 2001-072. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. <http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/>

⁶The National Marriage Project. (2004). *Ten important research findings on marriage and choosing a marriage partner – helpful facts for young adults*. Information Brief. <http://marriage.rutgers.edu/Publications/pubTenThingsYoungAdults.pdf>

⁷ American Human Development Project & United Way (undated). *Goals for the common good: Exploring the impact of education*. Retrieved November 12, 2009, from http://measureofamerica.org/file/common_good_forecaster_full_report.pdf.

⁸ Hispanics may be any race. Estimates for whites and blacks in this report do not include Hispanics or those indicating multiple races.

⁹ Fry, R. (2002). *Latinos in higher education: Many enroll, too few graduate*. Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center. Available at: <http://www.chavezcenter.org/pdf/education/latinos-in-higher-education.pdf>.

¹⁰ Western, B. and Pettit, B. (2002). Beyond crime and punishment: Prisons and inequality. *Contexts*, 1(3), 37-43.

¹¹ Heckman, J. J., LaFontaine, P. A. (2010). The American high school graduation rate: Trends and levels. *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 92(2), 244-262. doi: 10.1162/rest.2010.12366.