

Parental Expectations for Their Children's Academic Attainment

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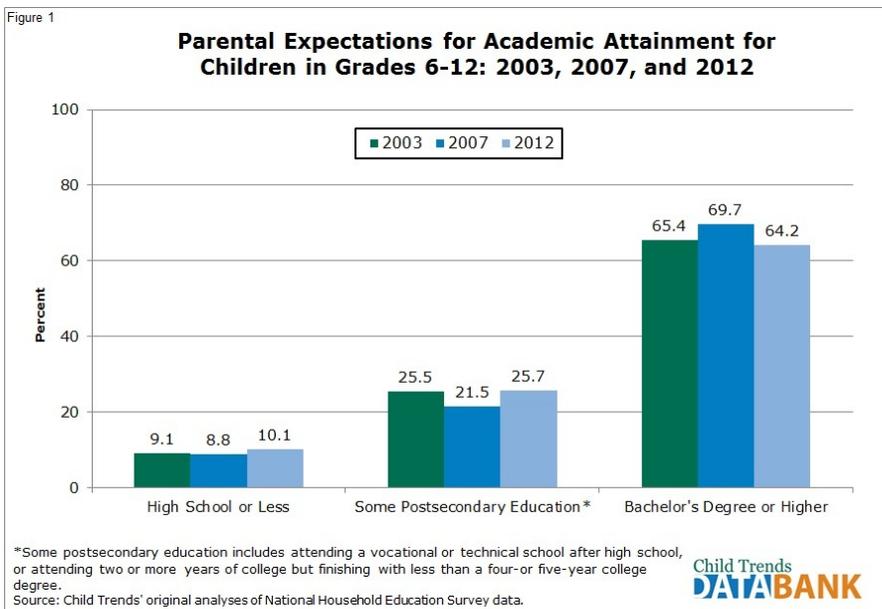
Less than half of parents with annual incomes of less than \$30,000 expect their child will attain a four-year-college degree, compared with nearly eight in ten parents with incomes over \$75,000.

Importance

Expectations parents have for their children's school attainment influence their children's expectations and achievement, and early expectations tend to persist throughout the child's school years.^[1] Research has shown that parental expectations for children's academic achievement predict educational outcomes more than do other measures of parental involvement, such as attending school events.^{[2],[3],[4],[5]}

Parents' expectations influence child outcomes through multiple pathways. Parental expectations are more likely to affect their children when parent-child relationships are characterized by closeness and warmth.^[6] Parental expectations directly affect the amount of parent-child communication about school.^[7] In addition, families with high educational aspirations for their children provide more out-of-school learning opportunities for them.^{[8],[9]} Students who reported their parents expected them to attend college had better attendance and more positive attitudes toward school, according to one study.^[10] Parental expectations also affect the child's own aspirations and expectations; for instance, studies suggest that parents' expectations for their children's academic attainment have a moderate to strong influence on students' own goals for postsecondary education. Further, both sets of expectations are moderated by characteristics of the parent, child, and community (see below).^{[11],[12]}

Trends



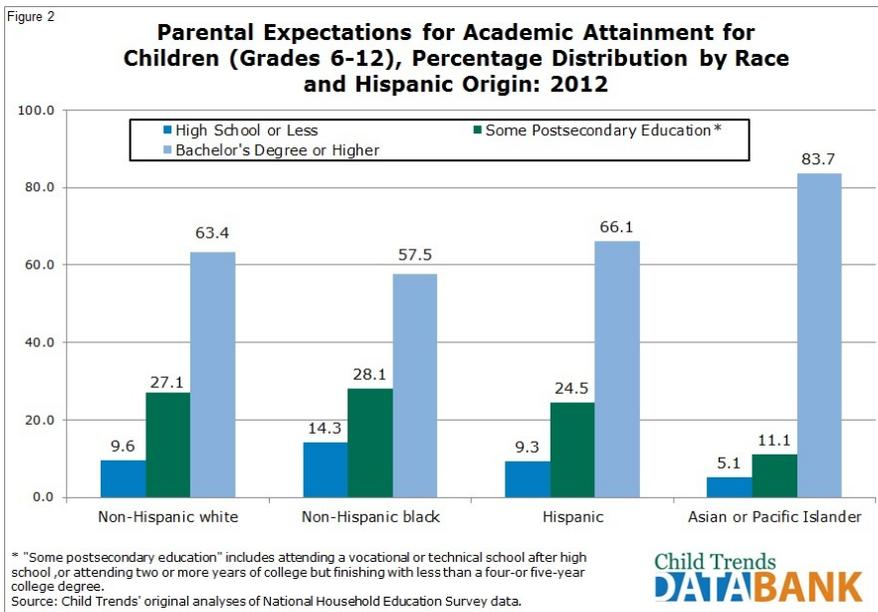
Overall, prior research has

indicated that the great majority of parents expect their children to graduate from high school and complete at least some postsecondary education.^[13] In 2012, about two-thirds of parents with students in grades six through 12 expected their child would attain a bachelor's degree or higher (64 percent). About one in four (26 percent) expected their child would achieve some postsecondary education short of a bachelor's degree; and about one in ten (ten percent) expected their child would receive a high school diploma or less. Between 2003 and 2007, parents' expectations rose modestly, but by 2012 they had fallen. Between 2007 and 2012 there was a decrease in the proportion of parents expecting their child to earn a bachelor's degree or higher (from 70 to 64 percent), an increase in those expecting "some" postsecondary education (from 22 to 26 percent), and a small change in the share of parents expecting children to earn a high school diploma or less (from nine to ten percent). (Figure 1)

Differences by Gender

Overall, parents have higher academic expectations for girls than they do for boys, and this gender difference becomes apparent as early as sixth grade.^[14] In 2012, more than two-thirds (69 percent) of parents of girls expected them to get a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with six in ten (59 percent) parents of boys. This gender gap grew slightly between 2003 and 2012. (Appendix 1)

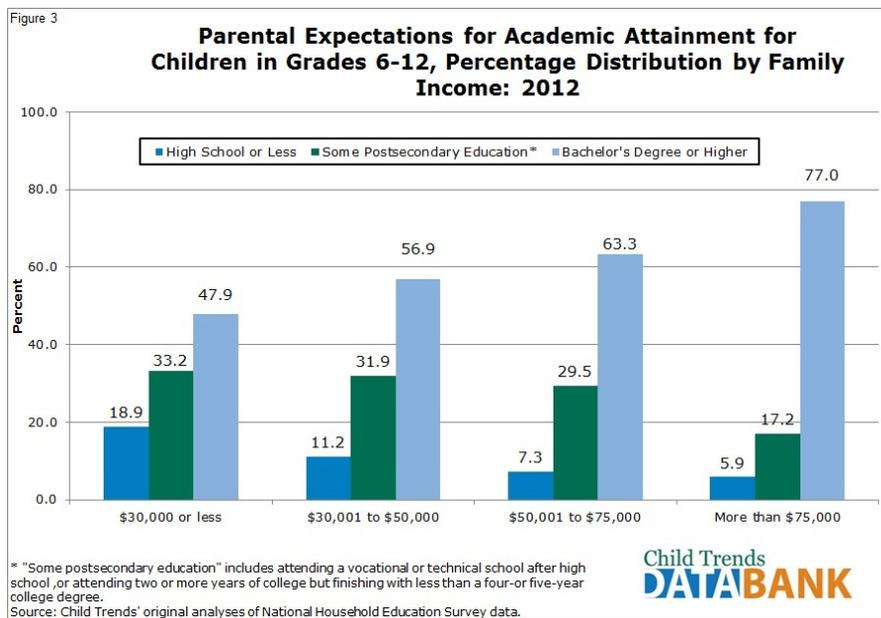
Differences by Race and Hispanic Origin^[15]



The proportion of parents

with the highest expectations for attainment (bachelor's degree or more) is greatest among Asian/Pacific Islanders (84 percent in 2012), followed by Hispanics and whites (66 and 63 percent, respectively – not significantly different), and blacks (58 percent). (Figure 2) Between 2007 and 2012, parental expectations for attainment at the bachelor's degree level or above decreased by nine percentage points among whites, by six percentage points among Asian/Pacific Islanders, and by five percentage points among blacks, while they remained the same among Hispanics. (Appendix 1)

Differences by Household Income Level



Only about half of low-

income parents (those with annual incomes of \$30,000 or less) expect their children to

attain a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with seven out of nine parents earning \$75,000 or more. Likewise, low-income parents are more than three times as likely as the wealthiest parents to expect their child to do no more than finish high school (19 and 6 percent, respectively). ([Figure 3](#)) When broken down by parents' own level of education, parental expectations follow a similar pattern. ([Appendix 1](#))

Differences by Immigrant Status

Compared with U.S.-born parents, immigrant parents have higher expectations for their children's educational attainment. Among immigrant parents, 72 percent of those with native-born children, and 73 percent of those with foreign-born children, expect their child to earn a bachelor's degree or higher. Among native-born parents with native-born children, the comparable figure is 61 percent. ([Appendix 1](#))

Differences by Student's Grade Level

Parents' educational expectations for their child are conditioned in part by the level of schooling the child has already attained. Parental expectations that a child will get a bachelor's degree or higher decline with the child's age, while expectations that a child will receive only some post-secondary education rises. Sixty-seven percent of parents of sixth- through eighth-graders have expectations of a bachelor's-degree-or-higher for their child, compared with 62 percent of parents of ninth- through twelfth-graders). ([Appendix 1](#))

Differences by Student's Current Grades

Not surprisingly, parents' expectations for their child's academic future are related to their perception of his or her current performance in school. Eighty-four percent of parents who said that their children are currently earning "mostly As" have expectations that they will earn a bachelor's degree or more, compared with 12 percent of parents who said their children earn "mostly Ds and Fs." Only three percent with parents whose children are in the "mostly As" group expect their child will get no more than a high school diploma, whereas 55 percent with children in the "mostly Ds and Fs" group have this expectation. ([Appendix 1](#))

Differences by Number of Activities Parents and Child Share

Parents who are more involved in their children's lives, as measured by the number of shared activities, are more likely to hold higher expectations for their child's education. Visiting a library together, attending a concert or play, visiting an art gallery, museum, or historical site, or going together to a zoo or aquarium were listed as the kinds of activities parents and children might have shared in the past month. Among parents who counted three or four such activities, 74 percent expected their child to achieve a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 57 percent among parents who did not share any such activities with their child in the past month. More striking, only seven and nine percent of parents who shared at least one activity with their child expected that they would not attain more than a high school diploma, compared with 12 percent of parents who shared no activities in the past month. ([Appendix 1](#))

State and Local Estimates

None available.

International Estimates

None available.

National Goals

None.

Related Indicators

- [High School Dropout Rates](#)
- [Reading Proficiency](#)
- [Mathematics Proficiency](#)
- [Science Proficiency](#)
- [Writing Proficiency](#)
- [Parental Involvement in Schools](#)

- [Parental Education](#)

Definition

Parents of children in grades 6 through 12 were asked how far they expect their child to go in his or her education. The response categories were: 1) to receive less than a high school education, 2) to graduate from high school, 3) to attend a vocational or technical school after high school, 4) to attend two or more years of college, 5) to finish a four- or five-year college degree, and 6) to earn a graduate degree or professional degree beyond a bachelors. The responses were combined into three categories: 1) high school or less, 2) some postsecondary education, and 3) college graduate or higher. Respondent was one parent (usually the child's mother), or "the most knowledgeable adult."

Data Source

Child Trendsâ€™ original analysis of the National Household Education Surveys.

Raw Data Source

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Household Education Surveys Program, Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey.

<http://nces.ed.gov/nhes/>

[Appendix 1 - Percentage Distribution of Parental Expectations of Academic Attainment for Children in Grades 6 through 12: Selected Years, 2003-2012](#)

	High School or Less			Some Postsecondary Education ¹			Bachelor's Degree or Higher		
	2003	2007	2012	2003	2007	2012	2003	2007	2012
Total	9.1	8.8	10.1	25.5	21.5	25.7	65.4	69.7	64.2

Gender

Male	11.5	11.0	12.7	26.7	23.2	28.0	61.8	65.8	59.3
Female	6.6	6.5	7.4	24.3	19.7	23.3	69.2	73.8	69.3

Race/Ethnicity

Non-Hispanic white	8.1	6.8	9.6	25.8	21.0	27.1	66.1	72.2	63.4
Non-Hispanic black	10.5	13.2	14.3	25.8	24.4	28.1	63.7	62.4	57.5
Hispanic	11.2	10.7	9.3	24.8	22.8	24.5	64.1	66.5	66.1
Asian or Pacific Islander	4.4	4.8	5.1	16.0	5.8	11.1	79.6	89.4	83.7

Current Grade Level

Sixth through eighth grade	8.8	8.5	8.3	23.0	19.0	24.5	68.2	72.5	67.2
Ninth or tenth grade	11.0	10.3	11.7	26.9	20.8	26.6	62.2	68.9	61.7
Eleventh or twelfth grade	7.5	7.8	11.4	28.2	26.0	26.8	64.3	66.2	61.8

Household Income

\$25,000 or less²	17.2	19.3	18.9	31.9	30.8	33.2	50.9	49.9	47.9
\$25,001 to \$50,000²	11.0	11.8	11.2	33.0	28.4	31.9	56.0	59.8	56.9
\$50,001 to \$75,000	5.2	6.2	7.3	25.1	23.9	29.5	69.8	70.7	63.3
More than \$75,000	3.6	2.2	5.9	13.7	11.2	17.2	82.7	86.5	77.0

High School or Less	Some Postsecondary Education ¹	Bachelor's Degree or Higher
2003	2007	2012
2003	2007	2012

Parental Education³

Less than a high school degree	27.5	29.7	19.5	28.9	21.2	31.1	43.7	49.1	49.3
High school degree/equivalent	16.5	17.1	21.1	39.6	34.2	40.2	43.9	48.7	38.7
Some college/technical vocational degree	7.1	6.7	7.6	30.6	30.2	32.2	62.3	63.1	60.1
Bachelor's degree or more	1.6	2.6	2.5	10.1	8.3	9.9	88.3	89.1	87.6

Student's Average Grades Across All Subjects

Mostly A's	2.9	3.2	3.4	11.1	7.4	13.0	85.9	89.4	83.6
Mostly B's	7.2	7.9	8.2	28.9	25.6	30.0	63.8	66.5	61.8
Mostly C's	17.8	16.6	21.5	44.4	41.3	48.4	37.9	42.2	30.2
Mostly D/F's	33.7	28.4	55.0	41.8	39.5	33.0	24.6	32.1	12.0
Child's Immigrant Status									
Native-born with native-born parents	9.0	8.9	10.9	27.3	23.0	28.3	63.8	68.1	60.9
Native-born with a foreign-born parent	6.2	6.2	7.4	19.5	12.7	20.3	74.3	81.2	72.3
Foreign-born	10.9	9.6	10.3	13.6	16.0	17.1	75.5	74.4	72.6
Type of School									
Public	9.5	9.4	10.4	26.7	22.4	26.9	69.7	68.2	62.7
Private (not church-related)	2.3	2.8	-	12.0	9.0	14.2	85.7	88.2	78.9
Private (church-related)	9.1	10.1	6.0	14.5	17.2	10.7	76.4	72.7	83.3
				High School or Less	Some Postsecondary Education ¹		Bachelor's Degree or Higher		
	2003	2007	2012	2003	2007	2012	2003	2007	2012
Urbanicity									
Urban, inside urbanized area	7.8	9.0	-	22.8	20.2	-	69.4	70.8	-
Urban, outside urbanized area	10.0	8.8	-	28.9	19.3	-	61.1	71.9	-
Rural, not urban	12.6	8.6	-	31.9	28.6	-	55.5	62.8	-
City	-	-	11.5	-	-	23.1	-	-	65.4
Suburb	-	-	7.9	-	-	23.1	-	-	69.0
Town	-	-	12.0	-	-	32.5	-	-	55.5
Rural	-	-	11.2	-	-	30.9	-	-	57.9
Parent-Student Educational/Cultural Activities⁴									

No activities	12.8	12.4	12.4	30.2	25.9	30.2	57.0	61.7	57.4
One activity	8.8	6.9	8.7	27.2	19.7	24.5	64.0	73.5	66.8
Two activities	4.4	6.0	8.6	17.8	19.2	20.2	77.8	74.8	71.3
Three or four activities	4.2	6.9	6.7	15.4	14.2	18.9	80.4	79.0	74.5

Note: Respondent was one parent (usually the child's mother), or "the most knowledgeable adult."

¹"Some postsecondary education" includes attending a vocational or technical school after high school, or attending two or more years of college but finishing with less than a four- or five-year college degree.

²Division was at \$30,000 instead of \$25,000 in 2012.

³Refers to most educated parent.

⁴NHES measured four forms of educational and cultural activities that students and parents may have shared within the past month: 1) visiting a library, 2) attending a concert or play, 3) visiting an art gallery, museum or historical site, and 4) visiting a zoo or aquarium.

Source: Child Trends' original analyses of National Household Education Survey data.

Endnotes

[1]Entwisle, D. R., Alexander, K. L., and Olson, L. S. (2005). First grade and educational attainment by age 22: A new story. *American Journal of Sociology* , 110 (5), 1458-1502.

[2]Redd, Z., Guzman, L., Lippman, L., Scott, L., and Matthews, G. (2004). *Parental expectations for children's educational attainment: A review of the literature*. Prepared by Child Trends for the National Center for Education Statistics.

[3]Fan, X. (2001). Parental involvement and students' academic achievement: A growth modeling analysis. *The Journal of Experimental Education*, 70 (1): 27-60.

[4]Jeynes, W.H. (2005). A meta-analysis of the relation of parental involvement to urban

elementary school student academic achievement. *Urban Education*, 40(3): 237-269.

[5]Jeynes, W.H. (2007). The relationship between parental involvement and urban secondary school student academic achievement: a meta-analysis. *Urban Education*, 42(1): 82-110.

[6]Moore, K. A., Whitney, C., and Kinukawa, A. (2009). Exploring the links between family strengths and adolescent outcomes. *Child Trends Research Brief*. Available at: www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Child_Trends-2009_04_16_RB_FamilyStrengths.pdf

[7]Singh, K., Bickley, P.G., Keith, T.Z., Keith, P.B., Trivette, P., and Anderson, E. (1995). The effects of four components of parents' involvement on eighth-grade student achievement: Structural analysis of NELS:88 data. *School Psychology Review*, 24(2).

[8]Catsambis, S., and Garland, J.E. (1997). *Parental involvement in students' education during middle school and high school*. Report #18. Baltimore, MD: CRESPAR, Johns Hopkins University.

[9]Entwisle, D. R., et al. Op. cit.

[10]Astone, N.M., and McLanahan, S.S. (1991). Family structure, parental practices and high school completion. *American Sociological Review*, 56: 309-320.

[11]Redd, Guzman, et al. Op. cit.

[12]Lippman, L., Guzman, L., Dombrowski Keith, J., Kinukawa, A. Schwalb, R., and Tice, P. (2008). *Parent expectations and planning for college: Statistical analysis report*(NCES 2008-079). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC.

[13]Ibid.

[14]Child Trends' analysis of NHES data.

[15]Hispanics may be of any race. Whites and blacks in this report do not include Hispanics.

Suggested Citation:

Child Trends Databank. (2015). *Parental expectations for their children's academic attainment*. Available at: <http://www.childtrends.org/?indicators=parental-expectations-for-their-childrens-academic-attainment>

Last updated: October 2015