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How Educated We Are

New [data](#)

released by the Census Bureau Monday show the importance of education to Americans' long-term economic success — and the lingering disparities among members of various racial and ethnic groups.

The data look at the adult population, and as a result do not change dramatically from year to year. But they provide an excellent snapshot of where the country stands on various education measures.

In 2004, the bureau found that 85.2 of adults aged 25 and older had at least a high school diploma and that 27.7 of adults 25 and older had at least a bachelor's degree. Those numbers are up marginally from 2003, when the figures were 84.6 percent and 27.2 percent, respectively.

In looking at the figures for various racial and ethnic groups, there are very modest gains for all groups. More striking are the lingering differences among groups (the figures for white people exclude Hispanics who identify themselves as white):

Group	% High School Degree or Higher	% Bachelor's or Higher
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White	90.0	30.6
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Black	80.6	17.6
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Asian	86.8	49.4
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Hispanic	58.4	12.1
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Disparities are also evident by region:

Region	% High School Degree or Higher	% Bachelor's or Higher
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Northeast	86.5	30.9
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Midwest	88.3	26.0
South	83.0	25.5
West	84.3	30.2

There are seven states (and also the District of Columbia) where at least one-third of the population 25 years and older has at least a bachelor's degree. These areas (and their percentages) are:

- District of Columbia: 45.7
- Massachusetts: 36.7
- Colorado: 35.5
- New Hampshire: 35.4
- Maryland: 35.2
- New Jersey: 34.6
- Connecticut: 34.5
- Vermont: 34.2

And there are 20 states where not even a quarter of the adult population has earned a bachelor's degree. These states (and their percentages) are:

- West Virginia: 15.3
- Arkansas: 18.8
- Mississippi: 20.1
- Kentucky: 21.0
- Indiana: 21.1
- Alabama: 22.3
- Louisiana: 22.4
- Wyoming: 22.5
- Oklahoma: 22.9
- North Carolina: 23.4
- Idaho: 23.8
- Maine: 24.2
- Iowa: 24.3
- Tennessee: 24.3
- Michigan: 24.4
- Nevada: 24.5
- Texas: 24.5
- Ohio: 24.6
- Nebraska: 24.8
- South Carolina: 24.9

The Census Bureau always releases salary data along with the statistics on educational attainment, as a way to draw attention to the financial value of education. Average salaries of workers 18 and older area as follows:

- No high school degree: \$18,734
- High school diploma as highest degree: \$27,915
- Bachelor's degree: \$51,206
- Advanced degree: \$74,602

— [Scott Jaschik](#)

*The original story and user comments can be viewed online at
<http://insidehighered.com/news/2005/03/29/census>.*

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