

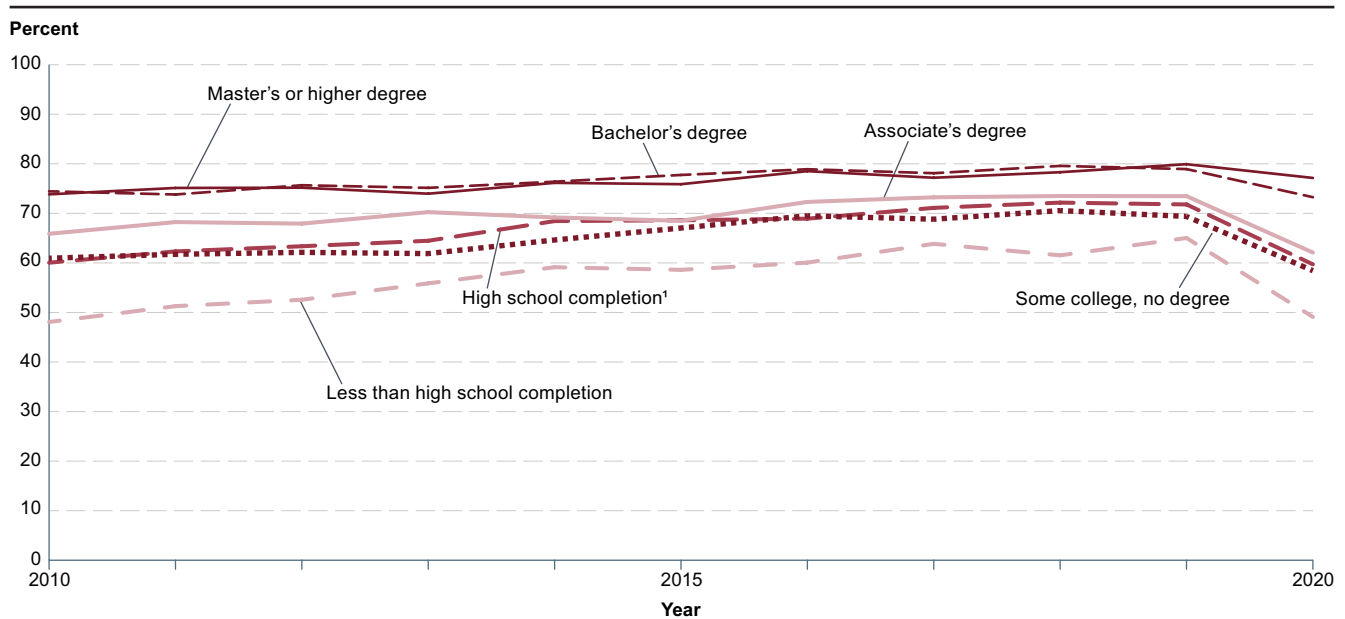
Annual Earnings by Educational Attainment

For 25- to 34-year-olds who worked full time, year round, higher educational attainment was associated with higher median earnings. This pattern was consistent for each year from 2010 through 2020. For example, in 2020, the median earnings of those with a master's or higher degree were \$69,700, some 17 percent higher than the earnings of those with a bachelor's degree (\$59,600). In the same year, the median earnings of those with a bachelor's degree were 63 percent higher than the earnings of those who completed high school (\$36,600).

This indicator examines the annual earnings of 25- to 34-year-olds who worked full time, year round (i.e., worked 35 or more hours per week for 50 or more weeks per year). Many people in this age group recently exited formal education. They may be entering the workforce for the first time or transitioning from part-time to full-time work. In 2020, some 66 percent of 25- to 34-year-olds who were in the labor force¹ worked full time, year

round. This percentage was generally higher for those with higher levels of educational attainment. Levels of educational attainment refer to the *highest* levels of education attained. For example, 73 percent of labor force participants with a bachelor's degree worked full time, year round in 2020, compared with 60 percent of those who completed high school² in this age group.

Figure 1. Percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds in the labor force who worked full time, year round, by educational attainment: 2010 through 2020



¹ Includes equivalency credentials, such as the GED.

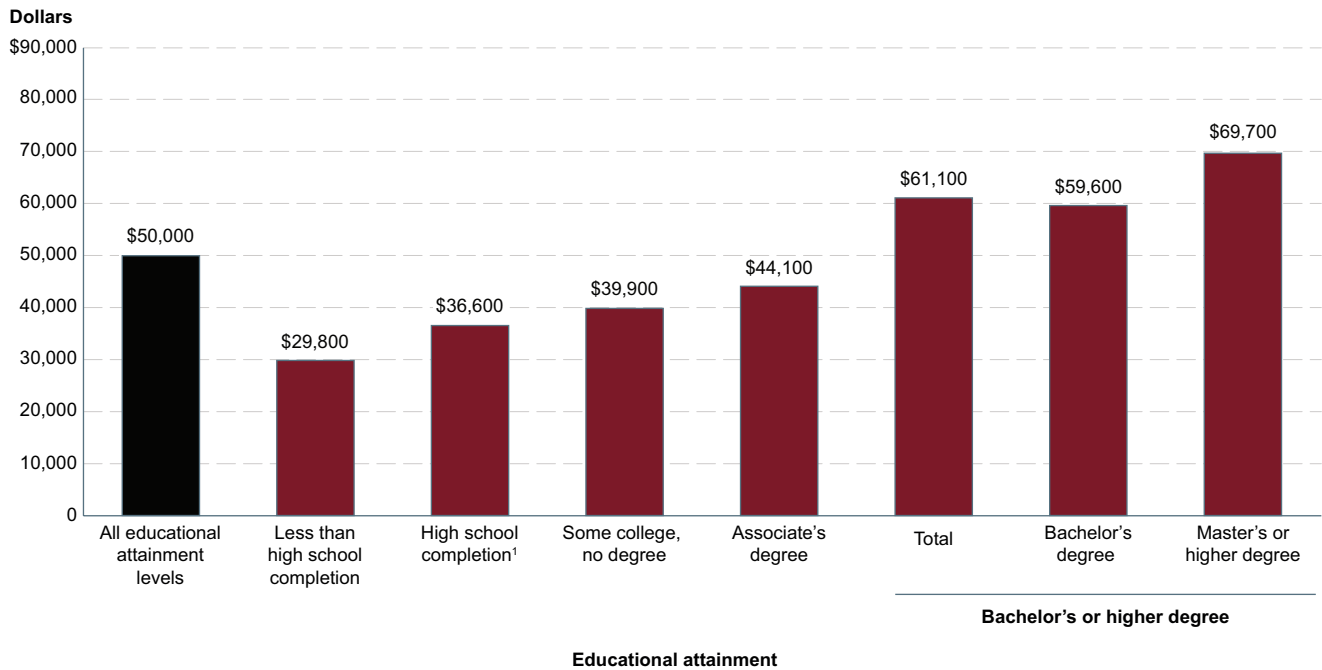
NOTE: Data are based on sample surveys of the noninstitutionalized population, which excludes persons living in institutions (e.g., prisons or nursing facilities) and military barracks. Full-time, year-round workers are those who worked 35 or more hours per week for 50 or more weeks per year. The labor force refers to the population who reported working or looking for work in the given year. Caution should be used when comparing 2019 and 2020 estimates to those of earlier years due to the impact that the coronavirus pandemic had on interviewing and response rates. For additional information about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement data collection, please see <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/techdocs/cpsmar21.pdf>.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2011 through 2021; and previously unpublished tabulations. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 502.30.

Changes over time in the percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds in the labor force who worked full time, year round varied by level of educational attainment.³ Among those with an associate's degree, the percentage who worked full time, year round was lower in 2020 (62 percent) than in 2010 (66 percent), although there was no consistent pattern of change throughout the period. In contrast, the percentage increased between 2010 and 2020 among those with a master's or higher degree (from 74 to 77 percent). For other attainment levels, the percentages were not measurably different between 2010 and 2020. In 2020, the percentages who worked full time, year round were 49 percent among those who completed less than high school, 60 percent among those who completed high school, 58 percent among those with some college but no degree, and 73 percent among those with a bachelor's degree.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic brought major disruptions to American society, which had a direct

impact on jobs and employment. Therefore, it is important not only to examine the longer-term trends but also to consider the difference between employment data in 2020 and 2019, the year immediately before the pandemic. Compared with the 2019 percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds working full time, year round, the 2020 percentage was lower at most individual levels of educational attainment. The one exception was for those with a master's or higher degree, where there was no measurable difference between the percentages in these two years. The drop from 2019 to 2020 was larger for all attainment levels below a bachelor's degree than for those with a bachelor's or higher degree. For example, in 2020, the percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds working full time, year round who completed less than high school (49 percent) was 16 percentage points lower than in 2019 (65 percent). The percentage for those with a bachelor's degree in 2020 (73 percent) was 6 percentage points lower than in 2019 (79 percent).

Figure 2. Median annual earnings of full-time, year-round workers ages 25–34, by educational attainment: 2020

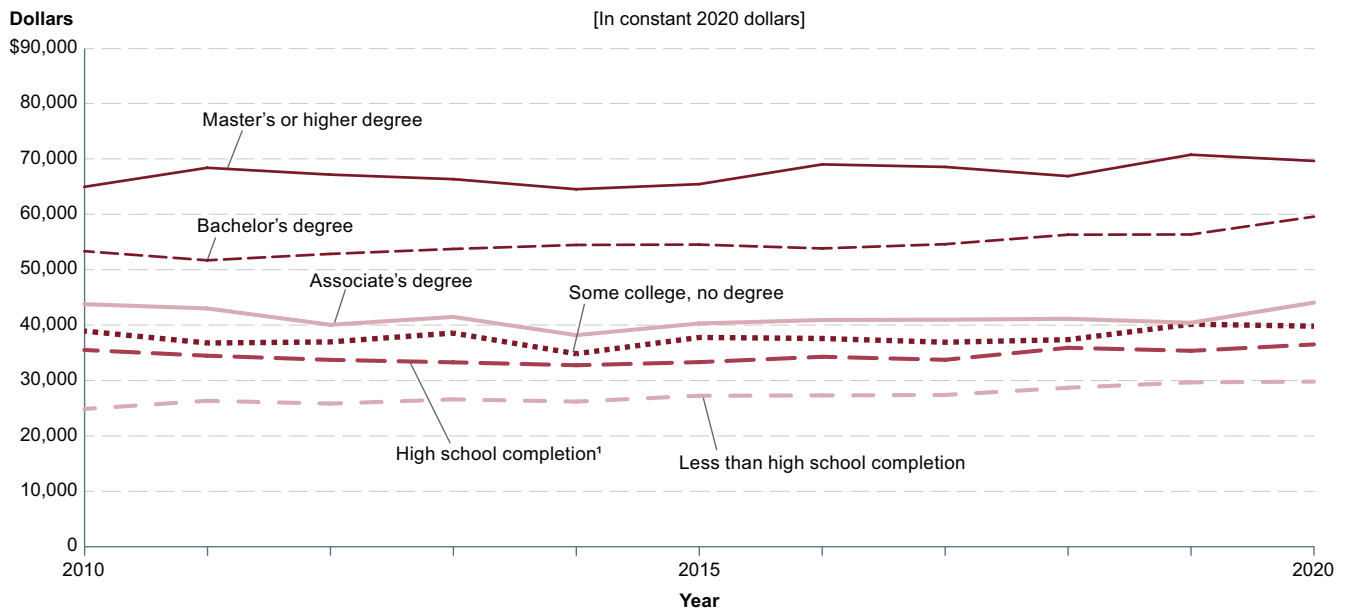
¹ Includes equivalency credentials, such as the GED.

NOTE: Data are based on sample surveys of the noninstitutionalized population, which excludes persons living in institutions (e.g., prisons or nursing facilities) and military barracks. *Full-time, year-round* workers are those who worked 35 or more hours per week for 50 or more weeks per year. Caution should be used due to the impact that the coronavirus pandemic had on interviewing and response rates. For additional information about impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement data collection, please see <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/techdocs/cpsmar21.pdf>.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2021. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 502.30.

For 25- to 34-year-olds who worked full time, year round, higher educational attainment was associated with higher median earnings. This pattern was consistent for each year from 2010 through 2020. For example, in 2020, the median earnings of those with a master's or higher degree were \$69,700, some 17 percent higher than the earnings of those with a bachelor's degree (\$59,600). In the same year, the median earnings of those with a bachelor's degree

were 63 percent higher than the earnings of those who completed high school (\$36,600). The median earnings of those who completed high school were 23 percent higher than the earnings of those who completed less than high school (\$29,800). This pattern of higher earnings associated with higher levels of educational attainment also held for both males and females, as well as for those who were White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian.⁴

Figure 3. Median annual earnings of full-time, year-round workers ages 25–34, by educational attainment: 2010 through 2020

¹ Includes equivalency credentials, such as the GED.

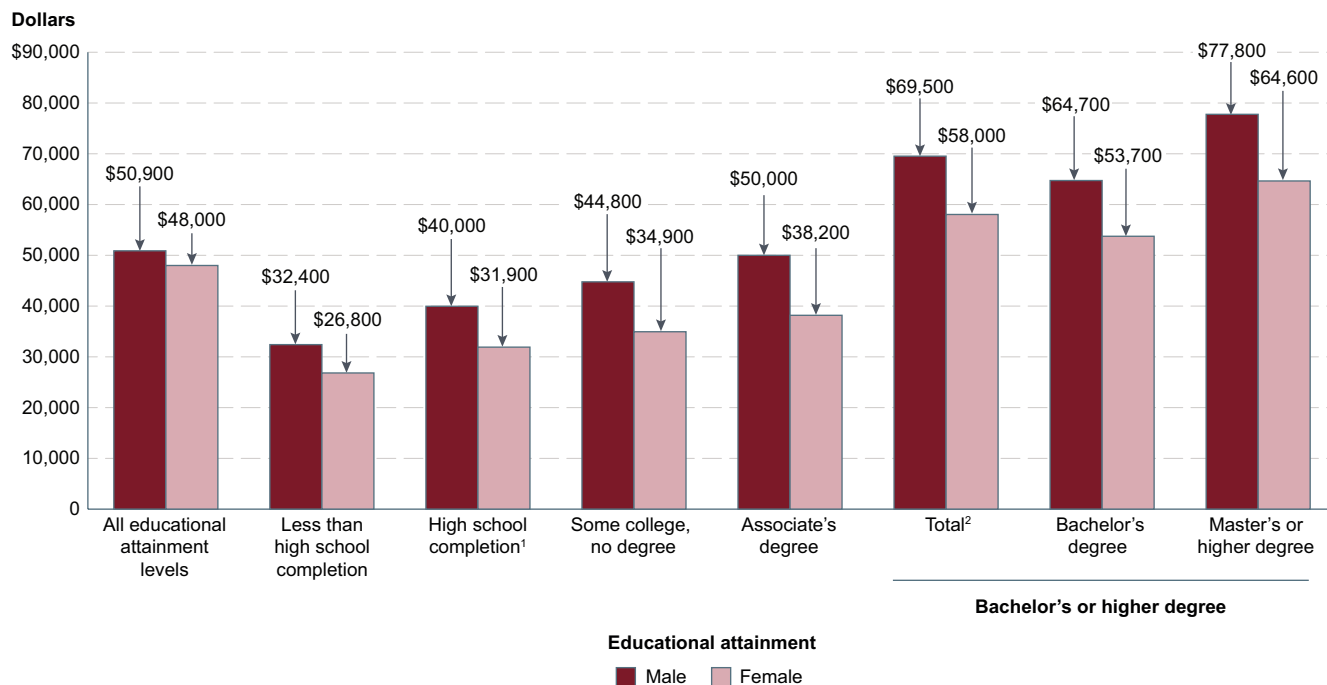
NOTE: Data are based on sample surveys of the noninstitutionalized population, which excludes persons living in institutions (e.g., prisons or nursing facilities) and military barracks. *Full-time, year-round* workers are those who worked 35 or more hours per week for 50 or more weeks per year. Earnings are presented in constant 2020 dollars, based on the Consumer Price Index (CPI), to eliminate inflationary factors and to allow for direct comparison across years. Caution should be used when comparing 2019 and 2020 estimates to those of earlier years due to the impact that the coronavirus pandemic had on interviewing and response rates. For additional information about the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement data collection, please see <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/techdocs/cpsmar21.pdf>.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2011 through 2021; and previously unpublished tabulations. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 502.30.

Earnings increased between 2010 and 2020 for some but not all educational attainment levels. Specifically, the median earnings (in constant 2020 dollars)⁵ of 25- to 34-year-olds who worked full time, year round increased between 2010 and 2020 for those who completed less than high school (from \$24,900 to \$29,800), those with a bachelor's degree (from \$53,400 to \$59,600), and those with a master's or higher degree (from \$65,000 to \$69,700). However, the median earnings were not measurably different in 2020 than in 2010 for those who completed high school, those with some college but no degree, or those with an associate's degree.

Because the earnings of 25- to 34-year-olds increased for some but not all attainment levels, the difference in median earnings between some attainment levels also

changed. For example, the difference in median earnings (in constant 2020 dollars) between those who only completed high school and those who completed less than high school was smaller in 2020 (\$6,700) than in 2010 (\$10,700), favoring those who completed high school in both years. In contrast, the difference in median earnings between those with a bachelor's degree and those who completed high school was larger in 2020 (\$23,100) than 2010 (\$17,900), favoring those with a bachelor's degree. These changes reflect two factors. One was that median earnings among high school completers were not measurably different in 2020 compared with 2010. The other was that, over the same time period, earnings did increase both for those who completed less than high school and those with a bachelor's degree.

Figure 4. Median annual earnings of full-time, year-round workers ages 25–34, by educational attainment and sex: 2020

¹ Includes equivalency credentials, such as the GED.

² Represents median annual earnings of full-time, year-round workers ages 25–34 with a bachelor's or higher degree.

NOTE: Data are based on sample surveys of the noninstitutionalized population, which excludes persons living in institutions (e.g., prisons or nursing facilities) and military barracks. *Full-time, year-round* workers are those who worked 35 or more hours per week for 50 or more weeks per year. Caution should be used due to the impact that the coronavirus pandemic had on interviewing and response rates. For additional information about impact of the coronavirus pandemic on the Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement data collection, please see <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/techdocs/cpsmar21.pdf>.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Survey (CPS), Annual Social and Economic Supplement, 2021. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 502.30.

In 2020, the median earnings of 25- to 34-year-old males who worked full time, year round were higher than the corresponding median earnings of their female peers at most levels of educational attainment. The exception was for those who completed less than high school, where there was no measurable difference in median earnings between males and females. For example, the median earnings of males with a master's or higher degree (\$77,800) were 20 percent higher than those of their female peers (\$64,600). The median earnings of males with an associate's degree (\$50,000) were 31 percent higher than those of their female peers (\$38,200).

Among 25- to 34-year-olds who worked full time, year round, differences in earnings between racial/ethnic groups were more common at the bachelor's or higher degree levels. For example, Asian (\$69,500) and White (\$60,000) full-time, year-round workers with a bachelor's degree had higher median earnings than their peers who were Black (\$50,000), Hispanic (\$49,900), and of Two

or more races (\$49,300). Among those with a master's or higher degree, those who were Asian (\$84,800) and White (\$69,700) had higher median earnings than those who were Hispanic (\$59,200) and Black (\$53,300). At the other end of the spectrum of educational attainment, the median earnings of those who completed less than high school were not measurably different between those who were White (\$33,400) and their Hispanic (\$29,800) and Black (\$27,200) peers. In addition, among those who completed high school, there were no measurable differences in median earnings between those who were Asian (\$38,800) and those who were of Two or more races (\$39,700), Hispanic (\$34,000), and Black (\$34,000). Among those who completed high school in this age group, there was also no measurable difference between the median earnings of those who were Asian (\$38,800) and those who were White (\$39,700). However, the median earnings of White high school completers were higher than the earnings of their Hispanic and Black peers.

Endnotes:

¹ The labor force consists of all civilians who are employed or seeking employment. Some 85 percent of 25- to 34-year-olds were in the labor force in both 2019 and 2020.

² Refers to those with only a high school diploma or an equivalency credential such as a GED.

³ Caution should be used when comparing 2019 and 2020 estimates to those of earlier years due to the impact that the coronavirus pandemic had on interviewing and response rates. For additional information about the impact of the coronavirus

pandemic on the Current Population Survey Annual Social and Economic Supplement data collection, please see <https://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/cps/techdocs/cpsmar21.pdf>.

⁴ Data for other racial/ethnic groups were not analyzed separately.

⁵ Constant dollars are based on the Consumer Price Index, prepared by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor.

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2021*, table 502.30

Related indicators and resources: [Earnings and Employment \[Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups\]](#); [Employment and Unemployment Rates by Educational Attainment](#); [Employment Outcomes of Bachelor's Degree Holders \[web-only\]](#); [Post-Bachelor's Employment Outcomes by Sex and Race/Ethnicity \[The Condition of Education 2016 Spotlight\]](#)

Glossary: Associate's degree; Bachelor's degree; Constant dollars; Consumer Price Index (CPI); Educational attainment (Current Population Survey); Employment status; High school completer; High school diploma; Master's degree; Median earnings; Racial/ethnic group