

# Current Population Reports

Population Characteristics

## Educational Attainment in the United States: March 1995

By Jennifer Day and Andrea Curry

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Educational attainment is one of the most important influences on economic well-being. More education tends to be reflected in greater socio-economic success for individuals and the Nation. This report provides information on basic educational trends and attainment levels across many segments of the U.S. population. The findings are based on data collected in the Current Population Survey (CPS) conducted by the Bureau of the Census in March 1995.

### Trends in Educational Attainment

The educational level of the adult population continued to rise in 1995, following a general trend that has been noted in the Current Population Survey data since educational attainment was first estimated in 1947. In March 1995, over four-fifths (81.7 percent) of all adults age 25 or older reported completing at least high school, the highest proportion in the history of the survey. The level of high school completion in 1995 reached a peak not only for the entire population but also for each sex and for Whites and Blacks. For Hispanics, a detectable statistical difference last occurred in 1990.

As with high school completion, the proportion of people who have completed a Bachelor's degree is

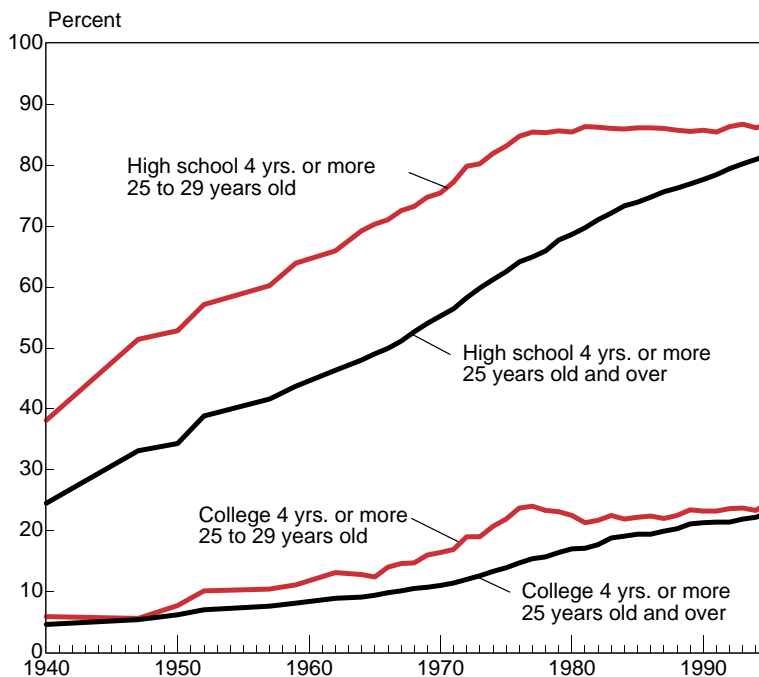
also at a record-high. Over one-in-five adults (23.0 percent) age 25 or older have attained at least a Bachelor's degree.

Figure 1 documents the overall increasing trend of the proportions of persons having completed high school and those completing a college degree for both the population age 25 and over, and for persons ages 25 to 29. The long-term rise in educational attainment for the general adult population is driven principally by the replacement of older less-educated people by younger people who have completed substantially more education.

This figure also indicates that the increase in attainment among

younger persons (ages 25 to 29) has slowed considerably, and may be leveling off. The proportion of 25 to 29 year olds who had completed high school in the 1995 survey was no different from that recorded a decade earlier (86.0 percent). While there has been some variation over this period, yearly point estimates have been in the range of 85-86 percent. Similarly, the estimated proportion of younger persons completing a Bachelor's degree has been in the low 20's since the mid-1970's. Yet, given the very large differences in education between young and old age groups (table A), the attainment level of the total adult population will continue to rise for some time, as

Figure 1.  
**Percent of Persons Who Have Completed High School or College: Selected Years 1940 to 1995**



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey.

### Defining Educational Attainment

A single question which asks for the highest grade or degree completed is used to determine educational attainment. Prior to 1992, educational attainment was measured only as years of completed schooling.

younger, more educated, age groups replace older, less educated, age groups, even if attainment levels for young persons remain constant.

### Educational Attainment in 1995

Traditionally, differences in educational attainment have been noted across many different dimensions; in 1995 this continued to be true. Tables A and B show three basic measures of educational attainment: high school graduate or more; some college or more; Bachelor's degree or more. These

measures are presented for the population ages 25 and older, cross-classified by a series of socio-demographic factors, in order to illustrate some of these differences.

**Age:** For each educational measure shown in table A, attainment levels are lowest for the oldest age group, and rise across successively younger groups. Only the youngest age group (ages 25 to 34) deviates from this pattern, primarily because some of these individuals have not completed their schooling, particularly at the postsecondary level. Whereas just over half (56.8 percent) of those age 75 and above

have completed high school, 88.4 percent of persons ages 35 to 44 have attained this level. In terms of postsecondary schooling, 11.2 percent of the population age 75 and older, as opposed to 26.6 percent of persons ages 35 to 44, have at least a Bachelor's degree.

**Gender:** Overall, educational attainment levels are higher for men than for women for two of the three measures shown in table A. In terms of high school completion, there is no statistical difference between men and women (81.7 vs. 81.6 percent). Differences are present at the college level, where 26.0 percent of men but only 20.2 percent of women have a Bachelor's degree or more. About 45.9 percent of women and 49.8 percent of men have completed some college or more.

In the younger age group (25-29), gender differences in educational attainment disappear for the population with a Bachelor's degree or more. Moreover, younger women demonstrate higher levels than younger men of some college attainment or more, and no difference in high school completion (figure 2). Given the differences in education between young and old age groups, however, gender differences in overall educational attainment are expected to slowly decline.

**Race:** Comparison of high school completion rates among Whites, Blacks and persons of other races shows sizable differences. Among Whites, 83.0 percent are high school graduates or more, statistically different from the 73.8 percent recorded for Blacks and the 75.4 percent for persons of other races, (which includes Asians and Pacific Islanders, and American Indians, Eskimos and Aleuts). However, there is no significant difference between the high school graduation rates of Blacks and persons of other races.

During the past decade, dramatic gains in the proportion of Black students obtaining a high school degree have decreased the large Black/White educational difference. For the population 25 and over, the Black/White differential in the

Table A.  
**Summary Measures of the Educational Attainment of the Population, Ages 25 and Over: March 1995**

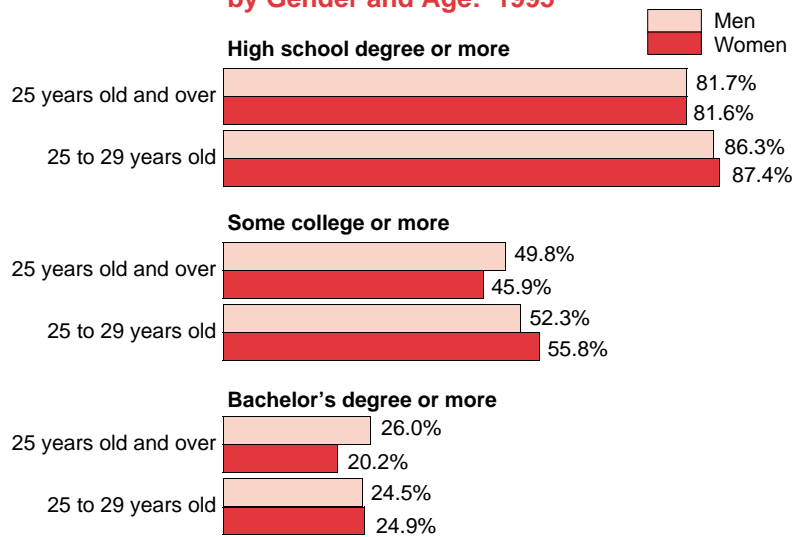
(Numbers in thousands)

Age, sex, race, region, residence, and Hispanic origin	Number of persons	Percentage with		
		High school graduate or more	Some college or more	Bachelor's degree or more
All persons .....	166,438	81.7	47.8	23.0
Age group:				
25 to 34 years old .....	41,388	87.1	53.2	25.0
35 to 44 years old .....	42,335	88.4	55.0	26.6
45 to 54 years old .....	30,693	86.2	53.8	21.9
55 to 64 years old .....	20,755	77.2	39.9	19.0
65 to 74 years old .....	18,214	68.9	32.5	14.2
75 years or older .....	13,053	56.8	26.6	11.2
Sex:				
Male .....	79,463	81.7	49.8	26.0
Female .....	86,975	81.6	45.9	20.2
Race:				
White .....	141,113	83.0	49.0	24.0
Black .....	18,457	73.8	37.5	13.2
Other .....	6,869	75.4	49.5	28.5
Hispanic origin: <sup>1</sup>				
Hispanic .....	14,171	53.4	27.1	9.3
Non-Hispanic .....	128,707	85.9	51.1	25.4
Marital status:				
Never married .....	23,926	83.3	52.2	28.2
Married spouse present .....	105,558	84.6	50.3	25.1
Married spouse absent .....	6,339	68.8	36.0	12.3
Separated .....	4,546	71.2	35.7	10.6
Widowed .....	13,343	59.1	25.8	9.3
Divorced .....	17,273	84.0	47.1	17.3
Region:				
Northeast .....	33,580	83.4	46.3	26.3
Midwest .....	38,534	83.9	46.4	21.7
South .....	58,380	78.4	45.5	21.2
West .....	35,945	82.9	54.2	24.2
Metropolitan residence:				
Metropolitan area .....	132,752	82.9	50.3	25.0
Nonmetropolitan area .....	33,686	76.9	37.8	14.8

<sup>1</sup>May be of any race.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey.

Figure 2.  
**Differences in Educational Attainment  
by Gender and Age: 1995**

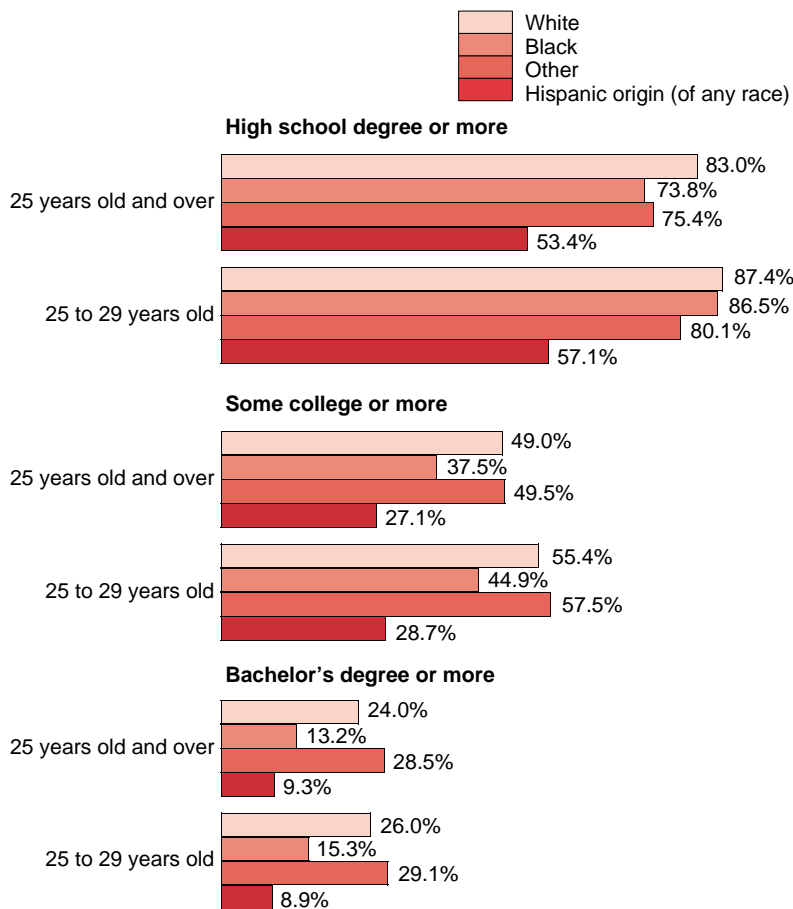


Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey.

proportion of high school graduates decreased from 15.7 percent in 1985 (59.8 percent of Blacks and 75.5 percent of Whites age 25 and over had completed a high school) to about 9 percent in 1995.

The gap in high school completion between White and Black populations has narrowed in the 25-29 age group. While the level of high school attainment has remained relatively unchanged for the younger White population (about 87 percent) during the past 10 years, the proportion of Blacks ages 25-29 with a high school degree has changed (from 80.6 in 1985 to 86.5 in 1995). Currently among these younger persons, there is no statistically significant difference between White and Black high school attainment (figure 3).

Figure 3.  
**Differences in Educational Attainment by  
Race, Hispanic Origin, and Age: 1995**



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey.

High school attainment levels of the other races population in this age group presents a different trend. The proportion of 25 to 29 year olds in the other races population with at least a high school degree is notably lower today (80.1 percent) than it was in 1990 (85.8 percent) and significantly lower in 1995 than those for both the White and Black populations.

At the college completion level, differences by race for persons ages 25 and over are evident — with the highest levels reported by persons of other races: 28.5 percent have a Bachelor's degree or more, compared with 24.0 percent of Whites, and 13.2 percent of Blacks.

**Hispanic origin:** At all three levels of attainment shown, persons of Hispanic origin (who may be of any race) have the lowest proportions of completed education, in comparison to Whites, Blacks, and other races. A contributing factor may be the large proportion of foreign-born Hispanics with less than a high school education. Just over one-half (53.4 percent) of Hispanic adults are high school graduates or more, over one-fourth (26.7 percent) have completed some college, and about one in eleven (9.3 percent) have completed a Bachelor's degree or more.

Compared to a decade ago, the Hispanic origin population has experienced some gains in educational attainment. The proportion of the population ages 25 and over with a high school degree or more increased almost 6 percent from the 1985 level (at 47.9 percent), and the proportion who had some college increased almost 8 percent. There has been no significant difference in the proportion with a Bachelor's degree or more.

**Marital Status:** Differences in educational attainment across marital statuses reflect to a large extent differences in the age composition of marital status groups. For example, the high level of high school completion among never married persons (83.3 percent) reflects the fact that this group is relatively young. Conversely, the low level among widowed persons (59.1 percent) is in part because this group consists primarily of older persons. A similar pattern is seen in college completion.

**Region:** Among the four Census regions (Northeast, Midwest, South and West) the proportion of persons who completed high school ranges from 78.4 in the South to 83.9 in the Midwest. The percentage in the South is significantly lower than in the other three regions. In terms of college attainment, the West is highest in the completion of some college or more (54.2 percent), and the Northeast is highest in the completion of a Bachelor's degree or more (26.3 percent). The data also show that attainment levels are higher for each of the three measures in metropolitan areas than in nonmetropolitan areas.

**Labor force:** The first panel of table B shows that, among employed persons, educational attainment is quite high, with 89.4 percent of those employed reporting high school completion and 28.7 percent having completed a Bachelor's degree. For all three summary measures, attainment is higher for the employed than for the unemployed population, who in turn generally have higher attainment

Table B.

### Educational Attainment by Labor Force Status and Occupation: March 1995

(Numbers in thousands)

Occupation	Number of persons	Percentage with		
		High school degree or more	Some college or more	Bachelor's degree or more
Civilian labor force, 25 years and over				
Employed . . . . .	105,163	89.4	56.4	28.7
Not employed . . . . .	5,193	77.4	41.3	15.2
Not in the labor force . . . . .	55,309	67.1	31.5	12.7
Occupation of employed persons, 25 to 64 years old . . . . .				
Executive, admin., and managerial . .	15,161	97.5	77.2	49.0
Professional specialty occupations . .	16,645	99.3	93.6	76.5
Technicians and related support occ. . .	3,402	98.6	78.7	31.1
Sales occupations . . . . .	11,010	94.2	59.7	29.5
Administrative support occupations including clerical . . . . .	14,963	96.5	54.5	14.4
Private household occupations . . . . .	582	61.5	20.4	5.7
Other service occupations . . . . .	11,562	80.7	37.4	8.4
Farming, forestry, and fishing . . . . .	2,446	70.1	31.2	12.1
Precision prod., craft, and repair . . . .	11,530	83.6	36.0	6.6
Machine operators, assemblers, and inspectors . . . . .	6,668	72.6	23.1	3.9
Transportation and material moving . . .	4,314	79.8	29.9	5.8
Handlers, equip. cleaners, helpers, and laborers . . . . .	3,171	73.3	23.6	4.9

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey.

Table C.

### Mean 1994 Earnings by Educational Attainment, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin, for Persons Ages 18 and Over

Characteristic	Total	Not a high school graduate	Some high school graduate	Associate degree	Bachelor's degree	Advanced degree
Total .....	\$25,852	\$13,697	\$20,248	\$22,226	\$37,224	\$56,105
Male .....	\$32,087	\$16,633	\$25,038	\$27,636	\$46,278	\$67,032
Female .....	\$18,684	\$9,189	\$14,995	\$16,928	\$26,483	\$39,905
White .....	\$26,696	\$13,941	\$20,911	\$22,648	\$37,996	\$56,475
Black .....	\$19,772	\$12,705	\$16,446	\$19,631	\$30,938	\$48,653
Hispanic Origin <sup>1</sup> ..	\$18,568	\$13,733	\$17,323	\$21,041	\$29,165	\$51,898

<sup>1</sup>May be of any race.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey.

than those persons who are not in the labor force.

**Occupation:** The second panel of table B also shows great variation in educational attainment, even across a small set of summary occupational categories. While 99.3 percent of the workers in

professional specialty occupations have completed high school, 61.5 percent of private household workers have achieved this level of education. With respect to higher education, 76.5 percent of persons in professional specialty occupations have completed a Bachelor's degree or more, the highest level



across the major occupational groups. For many occupations, however, fewer than ten percent of the workers have completed college; this includes categories such as precision production workers and machine operators.

**Earnings:** As shown in table C, earnings are higher at each progressively higher level of education.

This relationship holds true not only for the entire population, but across each subgroup (gender, race, and Hispanic origin). Within each specific educational level, earnings differ by gender, race and Hispanic origin. This variation may result from a variety of factors, such as occupational composition, age structure, or labor force experience.

## State Estimates

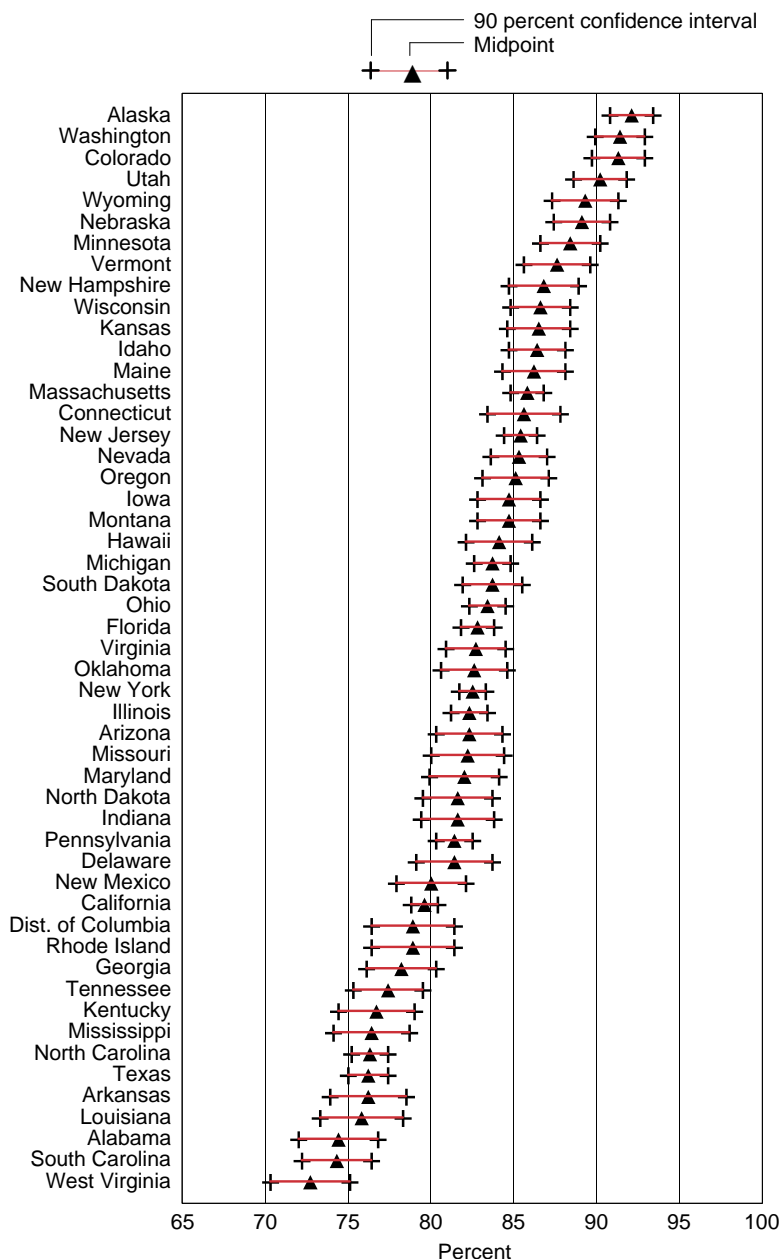
When using the state estimates provided from the CPS, users must keep in mind the sampling variability associated with these estimates, which is somewhat higher than for estimates based on the nation as a whole. Because of this, year-to-year estimates may fluctuate simply due to the changes in sample in that area over time, as well as the fact that the population weighting is not controlled in the higher-order cross-classifications of the control factors. While one cannot make precise statements about exact rank or changes in rank over time, the data do provide a general indication of the relative level (that is, high, no difference, or low) of educational attainment across states.

Alaska, Washington, Colorado, and Utah have the highest percent of high school graduates, all at least 90 percent (figure 4). Although Alaska has the highest point estimate at 92.1 percent, its value is not statistically different from the group of 3 states immediately below it in a ranked list.<sup>1</sup> Many of the states with lower rates of high school completion are in the South. West Virginia with the lowest point estimate at 72.7 percent, is not statistically different from South Carolina, Alabama or Louisiana, which are ranked immediately above it.

The pattern is somewhat different with regard to levels of Bachelor's degree completion. Washington D.C., ranked first at 38.2 percent, is significantly higher than any of the fifty states. Colorado, at 33.3 percent, is the next highest point estimate, but is not statistically different from Massachusetts, Connecticut, or Vermont. At the bottom of the list, West Virginia, with the smallest point estimate of 12.7 percent, is not statistically different from Arkansas.

<sup>1</sup> Each state estimate should be evaluated using the 90 percent confidence interval around each midpoint. Thus, the estimate for Alaska at 92.1 percent ( $\pm 1.3$ ) is not statistically different from ordered point estimates down through Utah, at 90.2 percent ( $\pm 1.6$ ).

Figure 4.  
**Percent of High School Graduates for  
Persons Age 25 and Over, by State:  
March 1995**



Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Survey.

### Source of Data

Most estimates in this report come from data obtained in March 1995 from the Current Population Survey (CPS). Some estimates are based on data obtained from the CPS in earlier years and from decennial censuses. The Bureau of the Census conducts the survey every month, although this report uses only March data for its estimates.

### Accuracy of the Estimates

All statistics are subject to sampling error, as well as nonsampling error such as survey design flaws, respondent classification and reporting errors, data processing mistakes, and undercoverage. The Census Bureau has taken steps to minimize errors in the form of quality control and edit procedures to reduce errors made by respondents, coders and interviewers. Ratio estimation to independent age-race-sex-Hispanic population controls partially corrects for bias attributable to survey undercoverage. However, biases exist in the estimates when missed persons have characteristics different from those of interviewed persons in the same age-race-sex-Hispanic group.

Analytical statements in this report have been tested and meet

statistical standards. However, because of methodological differences, use caution when comparing these data with data from other sources. Contact Tom Moore, Demographic Statistical Methods Division, at 301-457-4215 or on the Internet at [tmoore@census.gov](mailto:tmoore@census.gov) for information on (1) the source of the data, (2) the accuracy of the estimates, (3) the use of standard errors, and (4) the computation of standard errors.

### More Information

A package of tables showing more detailed characteristics is available. These tables contain tabulations on educational attainment for 1995 for persons 15 years old and over, by age, sex, race, Hispanic origin, marital status, household relationship, education of spouse, labor force status, occupation, income, earnings, and region of residence. Summary data are also presented for all states and large metropolitan areas, as well as detailed data for the 25 largest states and 15 largest metropolitan areas. Historical data for selected years are shown for educational attainment of persons 25 years old and over, percent of persons 25 years old and over who have completed high school or college, and mean earnings of all

workers 18 years old and over by educational attainment.

These tables are available on paper for \$27.50 (PPL-48) or floppy disk for \$20 (PE-46) from Population Division's Statistical Information Staff at 301-457-2422; the data are also on INTERNET (<http://www.census.gov>); look for Educational Attainment.

### Contacts:

Statistical Information Staff  
[pop@census.gov](mailto:pop@census.gov)  
301-457-2422

Jennifer Cheeseman Day  
[jday@census.gov](mailto:jday@census.gov)  
301-457-2464

Andrea Curry  
[acurry@census.gov](mailto:acurry@census.gov)  
301-457-2464

### User Comments

The Census Bureau welcomes the comments and advice of data and report users. If you have any suggestions or comments, please write to:

Chief, Population Division  
U.S. Bureau of the Census  
Washington, DC 20233

or send email to:  
[pop@census.gov](mailto:pop@census.gov)