

Fact Sheet: Educational Attainment — It Pays and Enhances Quality of Life

The profound benefits of a college or vocational degree are motivating more us to pursue a higher education. Researchers and reporters alike hunger for statistics supporting the anecdotal evidence of this and other education-related trends. While the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is the statistical agency charged specifically with publishing such data, the Census Bureau also publishes a wealth of educational attainment data. The Bureau conducts many of the surveys NCES uses to glean these statistics. This fact sheet describes the various surveys the Census Bureau uses to collect and tabulate education data.

Current Population Survey (CPS)

Key fact: Annual Social and Economic Supplement to CPS focusing on national estimates of educational attainment by detailed demographic and socioeconomic characteristics.

- National-level estimates only.
- Statistics released annually.
- Sample of about 100,000 addresses.
- Survey asks respondents 15 and older about their highest degree or level of school completed. (Those age 3 to 14 are asked about school enrollment.) Prior to 1992, respondents reported the highest grade they had attended and whether or not they had completed that grade.
- Respondents are also asked detailed information on the exact number of years of school completed to supplement information on degrees received.
- Data provided by a wide range of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, including age, sex, race, Hispanic origin, marital status, household relationship, nativity, labor force status, occupation and industry.
- Provides a consistent historical time series of many decades in length, with data back to 1947.
- Statistics for 2011 released in February 2012.

American Community Survey (ACS)

Key fact: A nationwide survey designed to provide reliable and timely demographic, social, economic and housing data for local areas every year.

- Single-year educational attainment estimates for all areas of 65,000 or more population, including counties, cities and all congressional districts, as well as for the nation and all states. Data pertaining to 2010 released in September 2011.

- Three-year estimates available for all areas of 20,000 or more population.
- The ACS also provides five-year estimates for the nation's smallest areas, such as census tracts and block groups.
- Statistics released annually.
- Sample of about 3 million addresses each year.
- Questionnaire asks for information about the highest degree or level of school completed of respondents 3 years old and older. People currently enrolled in school are requested to report the level of the previous grade attended or the highest degree received.
- Question added in 2009 on the specific major(s) of any bachelor's degree respondent has received; results were published for the first time in 2010. Data provided by a wide range of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics.
- Replaces decennial census "long form," providing the kind of data annually that previously was available only once a decade.

Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP)

Key fact: Longitudinal survey that permits analysis of the relationship between fields of study of formal degrees and economic status, as well as amount of time it takes to complete degrees.

- Provides national-level data only.
- Statistics issued periodically; most recent published data pertain to 2009.
- About 62,000 addresses were in the initial sample for the 2008 SIPP panel.
- Data provided on earnings and occupation by field of degree, as well as average years taken to complete vocational, associate, bachelor's and advanced degrees, by demographic characteristics.
- Data were first collected in 1984.

Other sources of education-related data collected by the Census Bureau

- **Schools and Staffing Survey:** Permits detailed analyses of the characteristics of schools, principals, teachers and students. Data published by National Center for Education Statistics.
- **Teacher Follow-Up Survey:** Information on teacher attrition rates in public and private schools. Also provides data on the characteristics of teachers who leave the profession and why they depart. Data published by National Center for Education Statistics.
- **National Survey of College Graduates:** Longitudinal survey designed to provide data on the number and characteristics of experienced individuals with education and/or employment in science and engineering living in the U.S. Data published by the National Science Foundation.
- **Private School Survey:** Provides data on the characteristics of private schools, such as religious orientation, length of school year, grade levels offered and

number of students and teachers. Data published by National Center for Education Statistics.

- **Public Education Finances — 2007:** Provides data on revenues, expenditures, debt and assets of elementary and secondary public school systems; tables include spending on instruction, special education, school lunches, transportation, salaries, support services and building maintenance; most prominently, contains data on per pupil spending by state.