

Youth Employment

INDICATORS ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Updated: December 2015



Employment rates for youth (ages 16-24) have rebounded slightly since 2010, but mainly for those youth not in school. Rates of employment for those enrolled in high school or college have shown little change since the recent economic recession.

Importance

According to recent data, nearly all young adults (97 percent) have held a job between leaving high school and age 22.¹ For some youth, employment after high school is a transitional experience, in support of plans for (or concurrent with) post-secondary education. For other young people, employment marks their entry into the adult workforce, and the beginning of a difficult path toward economic self-sufficiency. In either case, this period is typically marked by multiple jobs of relatively short duration. In one recent cohort of youth (those born between 1980 and 1984), the average number of jobs held between ages 18 and 22 was 4.4, and the majority of jobs lasted one year or less. High school dropouts were less likely to have ever held a job than were youth with more education, and more of the jobs held by dropouts were likely to end in one year or less.²

Employment can provide valuable experience for youth. It teaches responsibility, develops organizational and time management skills, and can help youth save money for post-secondary education. Jobs can also help youth form good work habits, gain valuable work experiences, and become financially independent. Youth—especially those who are black, Hispanic, or economically disadvantaged—who have some employment experience while in school are less likely to drop out than those who do not work during high school. High school “school-to-career” programs with a work experience component can increase the likelihood of students’ enrolling in college after graduation.³ For those not enrolled in school, and often for students as well, employment is necessary for making ends meet.

However, employment can also interfere with academic achievement if work hours conflict with class schedules or interfere with a student’s ability to complete schoolwork. Work commitments also may lead students away from other (non-academic) beneficial school activities. According to studies, students who work more than 20 hours a week may have lower grade point averages and are more likely to drop out of school than those who work fewer hours.⁴ Students with jobs may experience stress due to pressure to perform well in both work and school settings. Overall, the negative effects of employment appear to be linked, not to whether students work, but how often and how long.^{5,6,7,8} Some studies show that longer work hours are more prevalent among minority and other disadvantaged students.

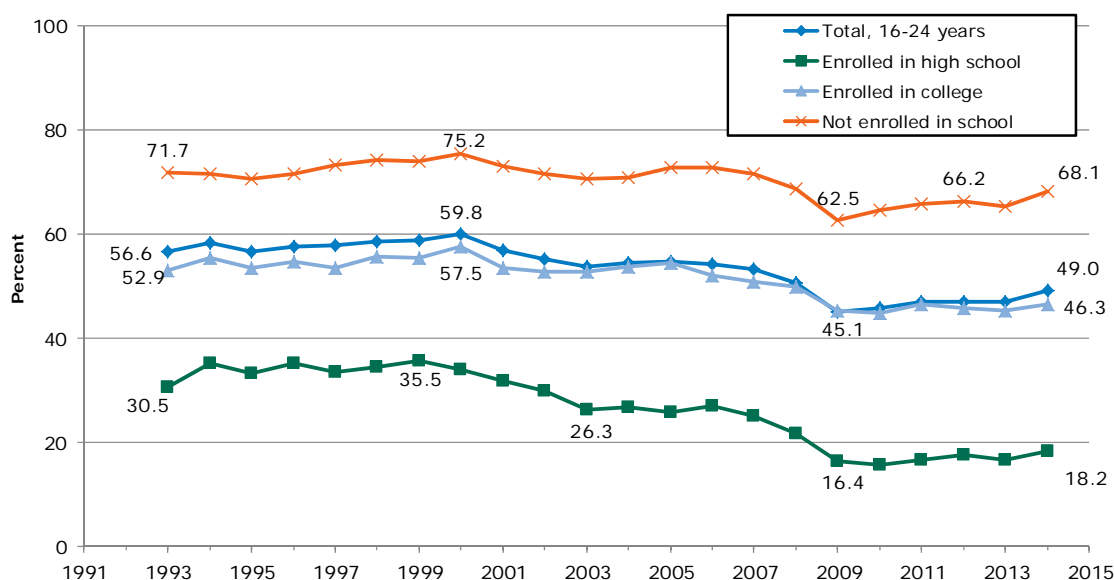
Trends

As of October 2014, 49 percent of all youth ages 16-24 were employed in any work, either full- or part-time. Youth enrolled in high school had an employment rate of 18 percent, while the rate for those in college, either full- or part-time, was 46 percent. (Figure 1)

Those not enrolled in school had an employment rate of 68 percent. (Figure 1) Thus, 32 percent of this group were not employed, down slightly from a peak of 37.5 percent in 2009. (Appendix 1) However, only 11 percent of youth not enrolled in school (in 2014) were considered “unemployed”; another 21 percent were not in the labor force.⁹

Figure 1

Percentage of Youth (Ages 16-24) Employed, Total and by School Enrollment:¹ 1993-2014



¹ A small number of individuals reported in High School are in Lower Grades

Note: Individuals reported as not enrolled in school includes individuals with high school diplomas or equivalent, bachelor's, masters, professional, and doctoral degrees.

Source: U.S. Department of Labor. Archived Bureau of Labor Statistics News Releases. (Various Years). Available at: http://www.bls.gov/schedule/archives/all_nr.htm#HSGEC

Between 1993 and 2000, employment among youth in all groups generally increased slightly, followed by a general decrease between 2000 and 2003. At that point, employment rates held steady until 2006, when they again began to decline. After a steep drop in youth employment overall in 2008 and 2009, employment has gone up for those youth not enrolled in school, from 63 to 68 percent between 2009 and 2014. Employment among high school students has increased only slightly since 2009 (from 16 to 18 percent), and has remained fairly steady for



college students. (Figure 1) While the rate of employment for white and Asian college students followed the general pattern, employment for black students followed a different pattern (rising between 2009 and 2013, decreasing slightly in 2014), while Hispanic student employment continued to rise, reaching 49 percent in 2014. (Appendix 1).

A number of factors may account for the recent decline in youth employment. Current economic conditions have reduced employment prospects for both students and others. Among students, there may be greater pressure and competition for achievement; for example, students are taking more advanced placement courses.¹⁰ Students are also taking more courses; the average number of Carnegie units (a standard measure of the amount of time spent on a subject) earned by public high school graduates rose from 22 in 1982, to 26 in 2004. More stringent academic requirements, often including community service work, have cut into the time otherwise available for paid work. Furthermore, college enrollment rates have been rising since 2001. With real wages for this age-group falling in recent years, workers may be motivated to enhance their earning power by acquiring further education.¹¹

A 2013 survey of young workers (ages 18-30), conducted by the Federal Reserve, provides additional insights. Among those respondents who were currently working, only 42 percent were in a job that was closely related to their field of study. One factor here may be inadequate job counseling: 24 percent reported that they had received no information about jobs or careers while in high school. There is also significant mismatch in employment, with 28 percent of respondents saying they are overqualified for their current job.¹²

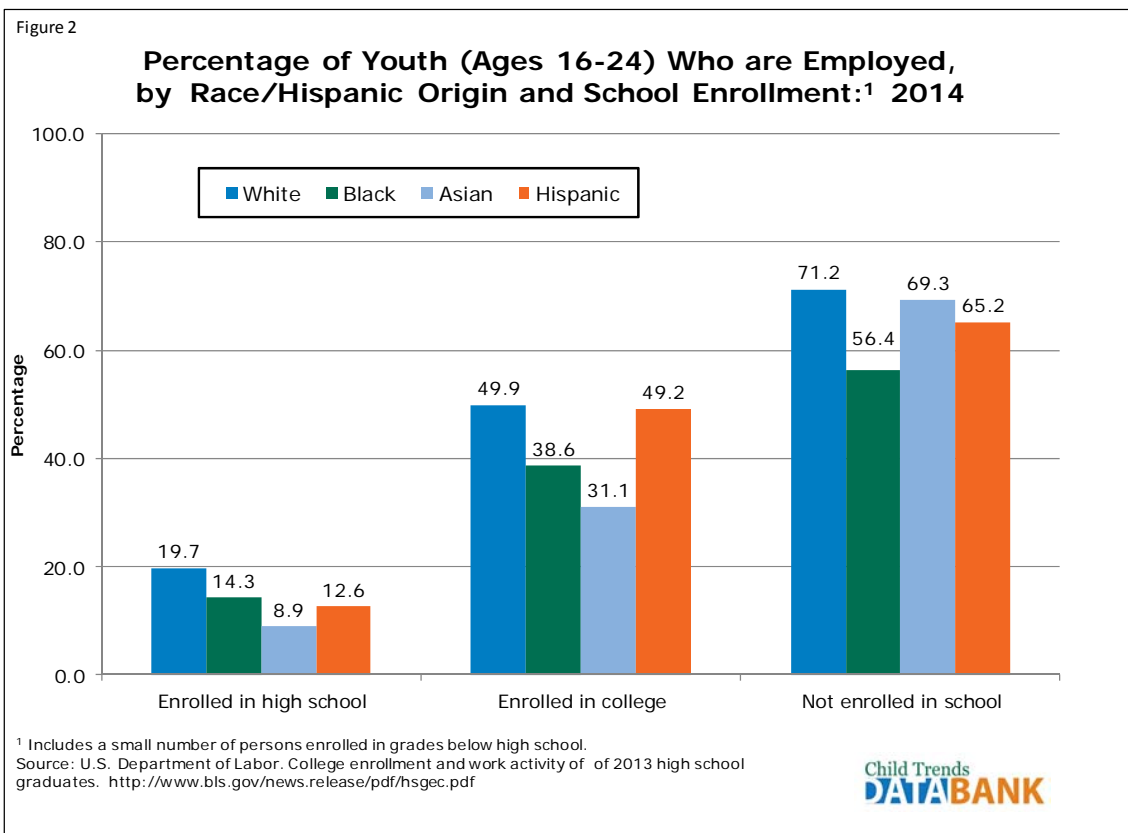
Working youth (ages 16-18) who lack a high school diploma and are not enrolled in school (about 30 percent of all “early high school leavers”) may be an important subgroup to reach with programs intended to boost economic self-sufficiency. As a group, they are disproportionately male, older, Hispanic, and not living with their parents. They are less likely to be engaged with federally-sponsored safety-net programs. Nevertheless, more than one-third of these youth contribute at least 20 percent to their households’ annual income.¹³

Differences by Gender

In October 2014, 20 percent of females enrolled in high school were employed, compared with 17 percent of males. College-enrolled women also had a higher employment rate than their male counterparts: 50 compared with 43 percent. However, among youth not enrolled in school, males had a higher employment rate (72 percent) than females (64 percent). (Appendix 1) This largely reflects their higher rate of participation in the labor force, because unemployment numbers in 2014 were similar for males and females.¹⁴

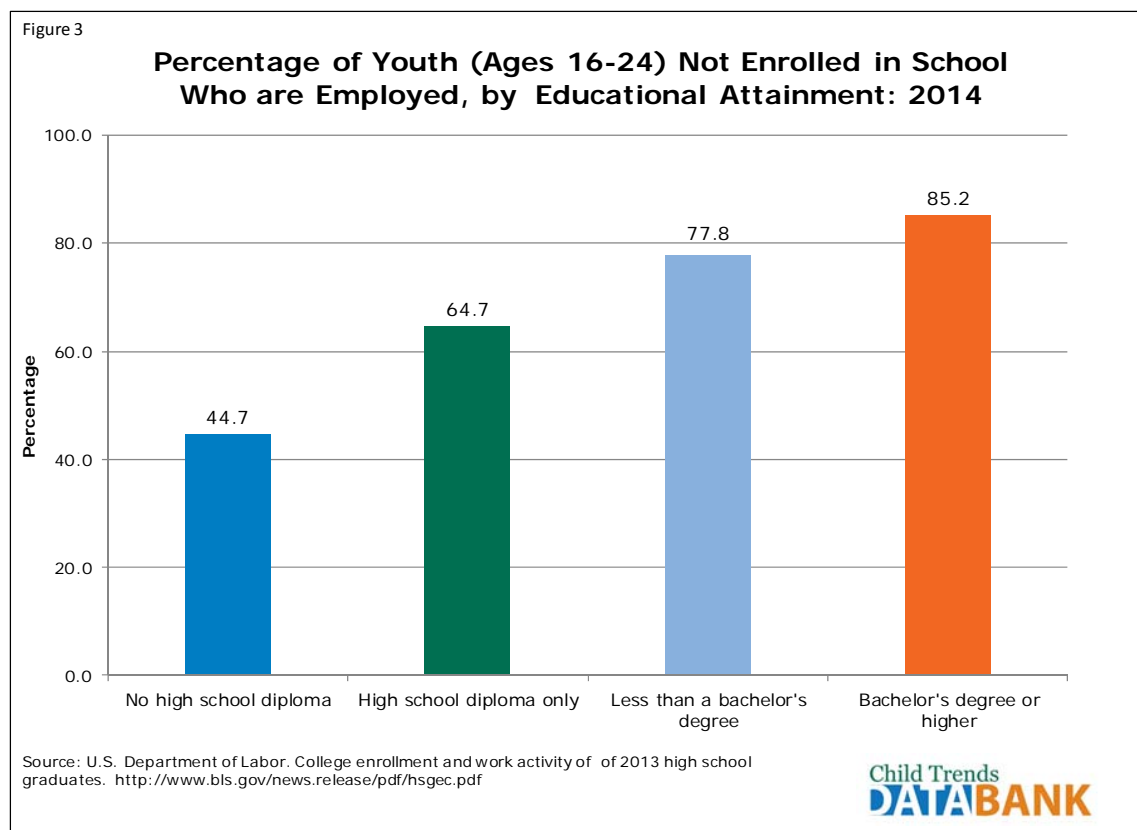
Differences by Race and Hispanic Origin¹⁵

In 2014, among youth enrolled in high school, white students had the highest employment rate (20 percent), followed by black and Hispanic (14 and 13 percent, respectively), and Asian students (9 percent). Among youth enrolled in college, employment was again highest among white students (50 percent), although Hispanic students had similar rates (49 percent). Black students had lower rates of employment (39 percent), and Asian youth had the lowest (31 percent). Among youth (ages 16-24) not enrolled in school, whites and Asians had the highest employment rate (71 and 69 percent, respectively); next were Hispanic (65 percent), and black youth (56 percent). (Figure 2)



Differences by Educational Attainment

The education a person receives affects their employment status; in addition, the gender gap in employment rates narrows with higher levels of education. In 2014, among youth (ages 16-24) not enrolled in school who did not graduate from high school, 45 percent were employed, either full- or part- time. The employment rate for high school graduates with no college attainment was 65 percent; for those with some college or an associate degree, 78 percent; and for those with a bachelor's degree or higher, 85 percent. (Figure 3)



Among those that had not graduated high school, the employment rate gap between males and females was 14 percentage points (51 percent for males, and 37 percent for females). For high school graduates, the gap was 15 points (71 versus 56 percent). For those with some college, the gap was eight points, and those with a bachelor's degree or more, one point (82 versus 74, and 86 versus 85 percent, respectively). The pattern of difference between males and females is much less consistent when looking at rates of unemployment rather than employment.¹⁶



State and Local Estimates

State-by-state figures for unemployed teens (16-19) are available at the KIDS COUNT Data Center from 2008 through 2014: <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/5051-unemployed-teens-age-16-to-19?loc=1&loct=1>

International Estimates

In 2008, estimated youth employment (the employment-to-population ratio, ages 15-24) globally declined from 55 percent in 1998 to 51 percent.

More information is available at: <http://unworldyouthreport.org/media/pdfs/WYR2011.pdf>.

National Goals

None.

What Works to Make Progress on This Indicator

Because the evidence for the value of employment for students (particularly high school students) is mixed—particularly when long work-hours are involved—this review is restricted to those programs and strategies aimed primarily at out-of-school youth.

- The following information is drawn from Heinrich, C. J., and Holzer H. J. (2010). *Improving education and employment for disadvantaged young men: Proven and promising strategies*. Institute for Research on Poverty. Discussion Paper no. 1374-10.
 - Career academies (CAs) are a form of career and technical education where students interested in a particular career take courses together and supplement their classroom education with summer and year-round employment. In an evaluation of CAs, participants had significantly higher monthly earnings, months worked, hours worked per week, and hourly wages than the control group.
 - The Youth Opportunity Program offers comprehensive services to both in-school and out-of-school youth to encourage schooling and employment.



Participation in this program was associated with gains in overall employment along with higher wages, especially among minorities and teens.

- The Job Corps program includes a residential component, in which youth receive intensive vocational training along with other life skills. Participants in the program saw improved earnings, mostly from older young adults 20-24.
- Career and technical education (CTE), formerly known as vocational education, has the potential to improve student's post-school employment outcomes. By law, "secondary-level CTE programs that receive federal funds must . . . demonstrate that they teach academic skills while simultaneously preparing youth for and adult learners to enter pathways to high-skill, high-paid, or high-demand occupations."¹⁷ Some studies show that students who take CTE courses are more likely to be in the labor force, and have higher earnings, than those who had just academic coursework.¹⁸
- "Sectoral employment" programs have been shown to increase the likelihood of employment, and to lead to higher wages and jobs that offer benefits. For more information on sector-focused training see a report from Public/Private Ventures:

http://www.issuelab.org/resource/tuning_in_to_local_labor_markets_findings_from_the_sectoral_employment_impact_study.

- Also see Hadley, A. M., Mbwana, M. S., and Hair, E. C. (2010). What works for older youth during the transition to adulthood: Lessons from experimental evaluations of programs and interventions. Child Trends Fact Sheet. Retrieved from <http://www.childtrends.org/?publications=what-works-for-older-youth-during-the-transition-to-adulthood-lessons-from-experimental-evaluations-of-programs-and-interventions-2>.
- And Lippman, L. H., Ryberg, R., Carney, R., & Moore, K. A. (2015). Key "soft skills" that foster youth workforce success: Toward a consensus across fields. Child Trends. <http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/2015-24WFCSoftSkills1.pdf>



Related Indicators

- Youth Neither Enrolled in School nor Working: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=youth-neither-enrolled-in-school-nor-working
- Educational Attainment (Youth): www.childtrends.org/?indicators=educational-attainment
- Volunteering: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=volunteering
- Children in Working Poor Families: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=children-in-working-poor-families
- Secure Parental Employment: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=secure-parental-employment
- After-School Activities (archived): www.childtrends.org/?indicators=after-school-activities

Definition

The Bureau of Labor Statistics defines employment as any paid work by anyone over 16 years old. Those who are jobless, available for work, and actively looking for jobs are classified as **unemployed**. Youth employment/unemployment refers to ages 16-24. Some youth are neither employed nor unemployed: e.g., those in the armed forces, those enrolled in school and not looking for work, parents taking exclusive care of young children, and “discouraged workers.”

Data Sources

Bureau of Labor Statistics. {various years} *College enrollment and work activity of high school graduates*. Available at: http://www.bls.gov/schedule/archives/all_nr.htm#HSGEC

Raw Data Source

U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey.

<http://www.census.gov/cps/>

<http://www.bls.gov/cps/>



Appendix 1 - Percentage of Youth (16-24) Employed, by School Enrollment Status, Gender, and Race/Hispanic Origin: Selected Years, 1993-2014

	1993	1995	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Total	56.6	56.6	59.8	56.8	55.2	53.6	54.4	54.5	54.0	53.2	50.6	45.0	45.7	46.8	46.8	46.9	49.0
Enrolled in any school	42.3	43.6	46.2	43.1	41.7	40.1	41.1	40.8	39.4	38.8	37.0	32.5	32.1	33.5	33.1	32.8	34.2
Enrolled in high school¹	30.5	33.2	33.8	31.8	29.7	26.3	26.6	25.8	26.8	24.9	21.7	16.4	15.7	16.5	17.4	16.6	18.2
Gender																	
Males	29.5	32.4	32.7	29.9	26.9	26.0	25.6	24.7	25.4	23.5	19.2	15.3	13.8	14.1	15.8	15.9	17.0
Females	31.7	34.2	35.0	34.0	32.8	26.7	27.6	27.0	28.3	26.4	24.3	17.6	17.8	19.1	19.1	17.3	19.6
Race/Hispanic Origin²																	
White	35.2	37.7	37.3	36.0	33.4	29.8	30.1	29.0	29.7	27.9	23.8	18.8	18.1	18.9	19.4	19.6	19.7
Black	12.7	17.5	20.5	16.7	16.2	14.8	14.0	12.1	18.6	14.0	14.7	8.8	8.2	10.1	12.4	9.1	14.3
Asian	-	-	-	-	-	11.4	11.9	20.4	14.0	16.3	16.4	6.3	5.9	7.6	6.9	3.6	8.9
Hispanic	20.7	21.2	19.9	23.1	17.6	17.1	19.4	17.7	16.1	18.2	13.2	10.4	9.4	9.7	10.4	12.5	12.6
Enrolled in college	52.9	53.3	57.5	53.3	52.6	52.7	53.6	54.3	51.9	50.8	49.8	45.1	44.7	46.3	45.6	45.1	46.3
Gender																	
Males	51.8	51.6	56.3	50.5	49.8	51.9	50.7	52.0	49.9	48.0	45.9	40.0	42.1	44.1	44.2	40.9	42.6
Females	53.9	54.9	58.4	55.7	54.9	53.4	56.1	56.3	53.6	53.2	53.2	49.5	47.0	48.3	46.7	48.7	49.6
Race/Hispanic Origin²																	
White	56.7	55.6	60.3	55.6	55.1	54.9	56.2	56.7	53.8	53.4	52.8	48.3	47.0	49.3	47.6	47.9	49.9
Black	34.5	41.4	47.3	44.5	41.2	41.8	45.0	44.2	43.2	42.7	39.1	34.5	38.7	37.1	39.8	40.1	38.6
Asian	-	-	-	-	-	40.9	37.0	43.5	41.7	33.4	32.7	29.5	33.3	28.9	36.3	29.1	31.1
Hispanic	54.4	48.7	66.8	56.8	54.8	54.0	56.2	51.6	56.6	56.6	49.2	46.0	44.2	43.9	45.3	47.0	49.2



	1993	1995	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Not enrolled in school	71.7	70.6	75.2	72.8	71.5	70.6	70.8	72.6	72.7	71.5	68.5	62.5	64.5	65.7	66.2	65.2	68.1
Gender																	
Males	80.2	78.8	80.5	77.9	77.7	75.9	76.9	77.8	78.1	77.1	71.2	64.6	67.1	69.3	69.3	67.7	72.2
Females	63.6	62.6	69.4	67.4	64.7	64.9	64.2	66.8	66.6	65.3	65.6	60.2	61.7	61.7	62.7	62.3	63.6
Race/Hispanic Origin²																	
White	75.2	73.7	78.3	75.5	74.7	74.4	73.5	75.1	75.5	74.1	71.8	66.0	68.0	68.6	70.1	68.3	71.2
Black	55.4	56.0	59.5	59.3	55.9	54.9	60.2	61.5	59.9	59.8	54.5	46.2	51.6	53.3	50.7	53.4	56.4
Asian	-	-	-	-	-	63.8	69.7	74.9	69.4	74.0	68.3	64.4	58.6	64.2	60.9	68.2	69.3
Hispanic	59.2	61.0	70.7	70.3	68.8	67.5	68.6	68.4	71.2	66.0	64.5	57.7	59.9	64.1	61.4	61.7	65.2
Educational Attainment																	
Less than high school	48.9	48.9	56.9	58.2	57.4	53.5	53.0	56.9	56.1	55.5	46.9	43.2	45.8	50.4	44.8	41.1	44.7
High school or GED	72.9	73.4	76.6	71.6	71.2	70.3	71.2	72.2	71.1	69.4	66.3	58.2	60.0	60.6	61.6	61.2	64.7
Some college or associate's degree	86.8	81.8	84.3	83.4	80.6	81.1	80.3	79.9	82.9	80.1	79.3	73.5	74.7	74.6	75.8	74.8	77.8
Bachelor's degree or more	91.0	88.2	91.0	89.6	86.8	86.2	87.3	90.0	87.8	89.2	87.7	85.7	85.0	85.8	87.3	86.9	85.2
Age-group																	
16-19	59.0	58.4	63.4	60.7	60.1	56.6	57.9	58.3	58.5	58.3	52.1	43.3	47.8	48.5	47.7	47.9	52.4
20-24	74.7	74.0	78.6	76.4	74.5	74.1	74.0	75.7	76.0	74.8	72.7	67.2	68.4	69.5	70.4	69.4	71.8

"-" Indicates data not available.

¹Includes a small number of persons enrolled in grades below high school.

²Hispanics may be any race, and estimates for whites, blacks, and Asians include Hispanics.

Source: U.S. Department of Labor. *College enrollment and work activity of high school graduates*. {Various Years}. http://www.bls.gov/schedule/archives/all_nr.htm#HSGEC



Endnotes

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¹⁴ Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2015). Op. cit.

¹⁵ Hispanics may be of any race. Estimates for whites, blacks, and Asians include Hispanics.

¹⁶ Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2015). Op. cit.

¹⁷ National Research Center for Career and Technical Education. (undated). Major research findings 2000-2007: Engagement, achievement, transition. Retrieved from <http://136.165.122.102/UserFiles/File/pubs/MajorResearchFindings2000-2007.pdf>.

¹⁸ Association for Career and Technical Education. (undated). Research demonstrates the value of career and technical education. Fact Sheet. Retrieved from <http://www.acteonline.org/content.aspx?id=9452>.