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Technical information: (202) 691-6378 • cpsinfo@bls.gov • www.bls.gov/cps
Media contact: (202) 691-5902 • PressOffice@bls.gov

COLLEGE ENROLLMENT AND WORK ACTIVITY OF 2009 HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES

In October 2009, 70.1 percent of 2009 high school graduates were enrolled in colleges or universities, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported today. This was a historical high for the series, which began in 1959. Recent high school graduates not enrolled in college in October 2009 were more likely than enrolled graduates to be in the labor force (70.0 compared with 42.1 percent).

Information on school enrollment and work activity is collected monthly in the Current Population Survey (CPS), a nationwide survey of about 60,000 households that provides information on employment and unemployment. Each October, a supplement to the CPS gathers more detailed information on full-time and part-time school enrollment status, level of education, and enrollment status a year earlier. Additional information about the October supplement is included in the Technical Note.

Recent High School Graduates and Dropouts

Of the 2.9 million youth age 16 to 24 who graduated from high school in January through October 2009, 2.1 million (70.1 percent) were enrolled in college in October 2009. The college enrollment rate of recent high school graduates has been trending up; in October 2008, 68.6 percent of recent high school graduates were enrolled in college. For 2009 graduates, the college enrollment rate was 73.8 percent for young women and 66.0 percent for young men. The college enrollment rate of 2009 Asian graduates (92.2 percent) was higher than for recent white (69.2 percent), black (68.7 percent), and Hispanic (59.3 percent) graduates. (See table 1.)

The labor force participation rate (the proportion of the population working or looking for work) for recent high school graduates enrolled in college was 42.1 percent. The participation rates for male and female graduates enrolled in college were about the same (40.8 percent and 43.2 percent, respectively).

Among recent high school graduates enrolled in college in October 2009, 91.6 percent were full-time students. Recent graduates enrolled as full-time students were about half as likely to be in the labor force (38.7 percent) than their peers enrolled part time (79.3 percent).

About 6 in 10 recent high school graduates who were enrolled in college attended 4-year institutions. Of these students, 30.9 percent participated in the labor force, compared with 59.2 percent of recent graduates enrolled in 2-year colleges.

Recent high school graduates not enrolled in college in the fall of 2009 were more likely than enrolled graduates to be in the labor force (70.0 compared with 42.1 percent). The unemployment rate for recent high school graduates not enrolled in school was 35.0 percent, compared with 23.7 percent for graduates enrolled in college.

Between October 2008 and October 2009, 383,000 young people dropped out of high school. The labor force participation rate for recent dropouts (48.5 percent) was lower than for recent high school graduates not enrolled in college (70.0 percent). The jobless rate for recent high school dropouts was 55.1 percent, compared with 35.0 percent for high school graduates not enrolled in college.

All Youth Enrolled in High School or College

In October 2009, 58.1 percent of the nation's 16- to 24-year-olds, or 21.9 million young people, either were enrolled in high school (9.6 million) or in college (12.2 million). The labor force participation rate of youth enrolled in school fell from 42.0 to 38.5 percent from October 2008 to October 2009, and the unemployment rate rose from 11.9 to 15.6 percent. (See table 2.)

In October 2009, college students continued to be more likely to participate in the labor force than high school students (51.4 compared with 22.1 percent). About 87 percent of college students were enrolled full time. Those attending full time had much lower labor force participation rates than part-time students. Female college students were more likely to be in the labor force (54.8 percent) than their male counterparts (47.4 percent).

The unemployment rate for high school students, at 25.8 percent in October 2009, was about twice the rate for college students (12.2 percent). Unemployment rates for black (46.9 percent) and Hispanic (40.4 percent) high school students continued to be higher than for white students (22.6 percent).

All Youth Not Enrolled in School

In October 2009, 15.8 million persons age 16 to 24 were not enrolled in school. The labor force participation rate of youth not enrolled in school fell from 79.9 percent in October 2008 to 78.4 percent in October 2009. Among youth not enrolled in school in October 2009, men continued to be more likely than women to participate in the labor force—83.8 compared with 72.3 percent. Labor force participation rates for not-enrolled men and women were highest for college graduates and lowest for those with less than a high school diploma. (See table 2.)

The unemployment rate for not-enrolled youth age 16 to 24 rose from 14.2 percent in October 2008 to 20.3 percent in October 2009. Among the educational attainment categories, unemployment rates for youth not in school were highest for those without a high school diploma—31.8 percent for young men and 31.0 percent for young women in October 2009. In contrast, the jobless rates for young male and female college graduates were 13.6 and 6.5 percent, respectively. Black youth not enrolled in school had an unemployment rate of 33.0 percent in October 2009, higher than the rates for their white (17.9 percent), Asian (20.0 percent), and Hispanic (23.1 percent) counterparts.

Technical Note

The estimates in this release were obtained from a supplement to the October 2009 Current Population Survey (CPS), a monthly survey of about 60,000 households that provides information on the labor force, employment, and unemployment for the nation. The survey is conducted monthly for the Bureau of Labor Statistics by the U.S. Census Bureau. Data in this release relate to the school enrollment status of persons 16 to 24 years of age in the civilian noninstitutional population in the calendar week that includes the 12th of October. Updated population controls for the Current Population Survey are introduced annually with the release of January data. Additional information about population controls is available on the BLS Web site at www.bls.gov/cps/documentation.htm#pop.

Information in this release will be made available to sensory impaired individuals upon request. Voice phone: (202) 691-5200; Federal Relay Service: (800) 877-8339.

Reliability of the estimates

Statistics based on the CPS are subject to both sampling and nonsampling error. When a sample, rather than the entire population, is surveyed, there is a chance that the sample estimates may differ from the "true" population values they represent. The exact difference, or sampling error, varies depending on the particular sample selected, and this variability is measured by the standard error of the estimate. There is about a 90-percent chance, or level of confidence, that an estimate based on a sample will differ by no more than 1.6 standard errors from the "true" population value because of sampling error. BLS analyses are generally conducted at the 90-percent level of confidence.

The CPS data also are affected by nonsampling error. Nonsampling error can occur for many reasons, including the failure to sample a segment of the population, inability to obtain information for all respondents in the sample, inability or unwillingness of respondents to provide correct information, and errors made in the collection or processing of the data.

A full discussion of the reliability of data from the CPS and information on estimating standard errors is available at www.bls.gov/cps/documentation.htm#reliability.

Concepts

The principal concepts used in connection with the school enrollment series are described briefly below.

School enrollment. Respondents were asked whether they were currently enrolled in a regular school, including day or night school in any type of public, parochial, or other private school. Regular schooling is that which may advance a person toward a high school diploma or a college, university, or professional degree. Such schools include elementary schools, junior or senior high schools, and colleges and universities.

Other schooling, including trade schools; on-the-job training; and courses that do not require physical presence in school, such as correspondence courses or other courses of independent study, is included only if the credits granted count towards promotion in regular school.

Full-time and part-time enrollment in college. College students are classified as attending full time if they were taking 12 hours of classes or more (or 9 hours of graduate classes) during an average school week and as part time if they were taking fewer hours.

High school graduation status. Persons who were not enrolled in school at the time of the survey were asked whether they had graduated from high school. Those who had graduated were asked when they completed their high school education. Persons who had not graduated, that is, school dropouts, were asked when they last attended a regular school. Those who were enrolled in college at the time of the survey also were asked when they graduated from high school.

Recent high school graduates. Persons who completed high school in the calendar year of the survey (January through October) are recent high school graduates.

Recent high school dropouts. Persons who were not enrolled in school at the time of the survey, attended school a year earlier, and did not have a high school diploma are recent dropouts.

Table 1. Labor force status of 2009 high school graduates and 2008-09 high school dropouts 16 to 24 years old by school enrollment, educational attainment, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, October 2009

(Numbers in thousands)

Characteristic	Civilian noninstitutional population	Civilian labor force						Not in labor force
		Total	Percent of population	Employed		Unemployed		
				Total	Percent of population	Number	Rate	
Total, 2009 high school graduates ¹	2,937	1,482	50.5	1,062	36.1	421	28.4	1,455
Men	1,407	724	51.5	513	36.5	211	29.1	683
Women	1,531	758	49.5	549	35.8	210	27.7	772
White	2,281	1,204	52.8	894	39.2	310	25.8	1,077
Black or African American	425	174	41.0	102	24.0	72	41.3	251
Asian	115	42	36.7	28	24.0	15	(²)	73
Hispanic or Latino ethnicity	459	215	46.9	146	31.9	69	31.9	243
Enrolled in college	2,058	867	42.1	662	32.1	205	23.7	1,192
Enrolled in 2-year college	813	482	59.2	357	43.9	125	25.9	332
Enrolled in 4-year college	1,245	385	30.9	305	24.5	80	20.8	860
Full-time students	1,885	729	38.7	558	29.6	172	23.5	1,156
Part-time students	173	137	79.3	104	60.1	33	24.2	36
Men	928	379	40.8	294	31.7	84	22.2	550
Women	1,130	488	43.2	367	32.5	121	24.8	642
White	1,579	689	43.6	540	34.2	148	21.5	890
Black or African American	292	99	33.8	68	23.3	31	31.0	193
Asian	106	37	35.1	25	24.0	12	(²)	69
Hispanic or Latino ethnicity	272	106	39.0	81	29.9	25	23.2	166
Not enrolled in college	879	616	70.0	400	45.5	216	35.0	263
Men	478	345	72.2	219	45.7	127	36.7	133
Women	401	270	67.4	181	45.2	89	32.9	130
White	702	516	73.4	354	50.4	162	31.4	187
Black or African American	133	75	56.6	34	25.6	41	54.8	58
Asian	9	5	(²)	2	(²)	3	(²)	4
Hispanic or Latino ethnicity	186	109	58.5	65	34.9	44	40.4	77
Total, 2008-09 high school dropouts ³	383	186	48.5	83	21.8	103	55.1	198
Men	205	125	60.9	56	27.5	69	54.9	80
Women	179	61	34.2	27	15.2	34	(²)	117
White	276	147	53.4	76	27.4	72	48.7	129
Black or African American	80	33	41.6	4	4.8	30	(²)	47
Asian	5	1	(²)	1	(²)	-	-	4
Hispanic or Latino ethnicity	115	52	45.1	20	17.2	32	(²)	63

¹ Data refer to persons who graduated from high school in January through October 2009.

² Data not shown where base is less than 75,000.

³ Data refer to persons who dropped out of school between October 2008 and October 2009.

NOTE: Detail for the above race groups (white, black or African

American, and Asian) do not sum to totals because data are not presented for all races. Persons whose ethnicity is identified as Hispanic or Latino may be of any race. Because of rounding, sums of individual items may not equal totals. Updated population controls are introduced annually with the release of January data. Dash represents or rounds to zero.

Table 2. Labor force status of persons 16 to 24 years old by school enrollment, educational attainment, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, October 2009

(Numbers in thousands)

Characteristic	Civilian noninstitutional population	Civilian labor force						Not in labor force
		Total	Percent of population	Employed		Unemployed		
				Total	Percent of population	Number	Rate	
Total, 16 to 24 years	37,616	20,764	55.2	16,945	45.0	3,820	18.4	16,851
Enrolled in school	21,854	8,411	38.5	7,098	32.5	1,314	15.6	13,443
Enrolled in high school ¹	9,612	2,125	22.1	1,576	16.4	548	25.8	7,488
Men	4,965	1,055	21.3	760	15.3	295	28.0	3,910
Women	4,647	1,069	23.0	817	17.6	253	23.6	3,578
White	7,225	1,757	24.3	1,359	18.8	398	22.6	5,468
Black or African American	1,608	266	16.5	141	8.8	125	46.9	1,342
Asian	335	30	8.9	21	6.3	9	(²)	305
Hispanic or Latino ethnicity	1,805	314	17.4	187	10.4	127	40.4	1,491
Enrolled in college	12,242	6,287	51.4	5,521	45.1	766	12.2	5,955
Enrolled in 2-year college	3,512	2,129	60.6	1,772	50.4	358	16.8	1,383
Enrolled in 4-year college	8,729	4,158	47.6	3,750	43.0	408	9.8	4,571
Full-time students	10,680	4,967	46.5	4,331	40.6	635	12.8	5,713
Part-time students	1,562	1,320	84.5	1,190	76.2	130	9.9	242
Men	5,710	2,707	47.4	2,286	40.0	421	15.5	3,003
Women	6,531	3,579	54.8	3,235	49.5	345	9.6	2,952
White	9,461	5,145	54.4	4,569	48.3	576	11.2	4,316
Black or African American	1,630	680	41.7	562	34.5	119	17.4	949
Asian	777	254	32.8	229	29.5	25	9.9	522
Hispanic or Latino ethnicity	1,501	792	52.8	690	46.0	102	12.9	709
Not enrolled in school	15,762	12,353	78.4	9,847	62.5	2,506	20.3	3,409
16 to 19 years	3,134	2,067	65.9	1,357	43.3	710	34.4	1,068
20 to 24 years	12,627	10,286	81.5	8,491	67.2	1,796	17.5	2,341
Men	8,274	6,937	83.8	5,341	64.6	1,596	23.0	1,337
Less than a high school diploma	1,731	1,267	73.2	864	49.9	403	31.8	464
High school graduates, no college ³	3,870	3,193	82.5	2,400	62.0	793	24.8	677
Some college or associate degree	1,784	1,610	90.3	1,328	74.5	282	17.5	174
Bachelor's degree and higher ⁴	890	867	97.4	749	84.1	118	13.6	23
Women	7,488	5,416	72.3	4,506	60.2	910	16.8	2,072
Less than a high school diploma	1,299	644	49.6	444	34.2	200	31.0	655
High school graduates, no college ³	3,125	2,147	68.7	1,671	53.5	476	22.2	978
Some college or associate degree	1,894	1,539	81.2	1,374	72.6	164	10.7	356
Bachelor's degree and higher ⁴	1,170	1,087	92.9	1,017	86.9	70	6.5	83
White	12,330	9,913	80.4	8,140	66.0	1,773	17.9	2,417
Black or African American	2,438	1,679	68.9	1,126	46.2	553	33.0	759
Asian	348	280	80.5	224	64.4	56	20.0	68
Hispanic or Latino ethnicity	3,503	2,631	75.1	2,023	57.7	608	23.1	872

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

² Data not shown where base is less than 75,000.

³ Includes persons with a high school diploma or equivalent.

⁴ Includes persons with bachelor's, master's, professional, and doctoral degrees.

NOTE: Detail for the above race groups (white, black or African American, and Asian) do not sum to totals because data are not presented for all races. Persons whose ethnicity is identified as Hispanic or Latino may be of any race. Because of rounding, sums of individual items may not equal totals. Updated population controls are introduced annually with the release of January data.