

Educational attainment of the labor force and jobless rates, 2003

Thomas J. Krolik

States differ rather widely in the educational attainment of their workforces. The Current Population Survey (CPS), a monthly sample survey of 60,000 households, provided data on the labor force ages 25 and older in 2003 for four categories of educational attainment—those with less than a high school diploma; those with a high school diploma but no college; those with some college or an associate degree; and those with a bachelor's degree and higher.

Labor force composition

In 2003, Texas had the greatest share of persons with less than a high school diploma in its labor force (17.3 percent), followed by California (14.7 percent). Of the 13 States where persons without a high school diploma accounted for a greater share of the labor force than the U.S. average of 10.2 percent, 8 were located in the South and 4 were in the West. All four of the States along the Mexican border were included in this group. Two Great Plains States—Minnesota and North Dakota—had the smallest shares of persons in this least educated category, each less than 5 percent. (See table 1.)

The share of the workforce with a bachelor's degree and higher was greatest in Massachusetts (43.5 percent). Maryland and New Jersey were the only other States in which those who completed college constituted more than 40 percent of the labor force. However, in the District of Columbia, these highly

educated workers accounted for about 55 percent of the labor force. Of the 17 States in which the share of labor force participants with a bachelor's degree and higher was above the U.S. average of 32 percent, nearly half were located in the Northeast region of the country. At the other extreme, fewer than 1 in 4 labor force participants in Arkansas, Indiana, Mississippi, Nevada, West Virginia, and Wyoming were college graduates. In every State of the East South Central and West South Central divisions, persons with a bachelor's degree and higher made up less than 30 percent of the labor force.

The proportion of labor force participants who completed high school but never attended college ranged from 21.8 percent in California to 43.5 percent in West Virginia. Shares of the workforce with some college or an associate degree ranged from slightly more than 21 percent in New Jersey and Pennsylvania to just more than 36 percent in Wyoming. For both of these intermediate educational attainment groups, the District of Columbia had lower shares than any State: only 19.3 percent were high school graduates with no college, and 16.4 percent had some college or an associate degree.

Unemployment rates

Nationwide, the unemployment rate for persons 25 years and older with less than a high school diploma was 8.8 percent in 2003. The jobless rates for these

persons were above the U.S. average in 25 States and the District of Columbia and below it in 24 States. The Pacific division States in which unemployment was highest for persons 25 years and older also reported the highest rates for the least educated group: Alaska, Oregon, and Washington each recorded rates of more than 12 percent. Of the 12 other States in which persons who never completed high school had jobless rates of at least 10 percent, 4 were located in the East North Central division and 3 were in the Mountain division. In the District of Columbia, persons with less than a high school diploma had an unemployment rate slightly higher than 15 percent. Meanwhile, New Hampshire (3.9 percent) and Delaware (4.6 percent) reported the lowest jobless rates for the least educated worker group; both States had overall rates well below the national average. (See table 2.)

College graduates 25 years and older had a slightly higher than 3-percent unemployment rate in the United States. The range of jobless rates across States for this group was the narrowest of the educational attainment categories. Mississippi and South Dakota, at 1.2 percent each, registered the lowest jobless rates for college graduates. Six other States—half of which were located in the low unemployment West North Central division—had rates below 2 percent for the most educated category. Oregon, by a wide margin, reported the highest jobless rate for college graduates, 4.8 percent. The next highest rates were

Census divisions

New England: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont; **Middle Atlantic:** New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania; **South Atlantic:** Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia; **East South Central:** Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee; **West South Central:** Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas; **East North Central:** Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin; **West North Central:** Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota; **Mountain:** Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Wyoming; **Pacific:** Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, Washington.

Thomas J. Krolik is an economist in the Division of Local Area Unemployment Statistics, Office of Employment and Unemployment Statistics, Bureau of Labor Statistics.
E-mail: Krolik.Thomas@bls.gov

Table 1. Educational attainment of civilian labor force 25 years and older by State, 2003 annual averages

[Percent distribution]

Area	Less than a high school diploma	High school graduates, no college	Some college or associate degree	Bachelor's degree and higher
United States	10.2	30.5	27.4	32.0
Alabama	10.6	34.1	27.9	27.4
Alaska	6.0	30.9	34.0	29.1
Arizona	12.2	25.8	31.6	30.4
Arkansas	11.0	37.3	29.1	22.6
California	14.7	21.8	28.9	34.7
Colorado	8.8	25.3	26.4	39.6
Connecticut	6.9	29.9	23.7	39.4
Delaware	9.1	34.9	25.0	31.0
District of Columbia	9.1	19.3	16.4	55.1
Florida	10.0	30.5	29.0	30.5
Georgia	12.7	32.3	26.5	28.5
Hawaii	5.6	30.3	31.1	33.0
Idaho	8.6	31.7	34.2	25.4
Illinois	9.1	30.3	27.6	33.0
Indiana	8.9	39.6	26.7	24.8
Iowa	6.2	34.6	29.5	29.7
Kansas	6.6	29.3	29.8	34.4
Kentucky	9.2	37.6	27.2	25.9
Louisiana	14.0	35.6	25.0	25.4
Maine	6.0	38.0	27.3	28.7
Maryland	8.3	27.8	23.2	40.7
Massachusetts	6.6	28.2	21.7	43.5
Michigan	6.9	33.9	31.4	27.8
Minnesota	4.7	25.6	33.6	36.0
Mississippi	12.1	33.3	31.7	22.8
Missouri	6.5	31.8	30.1	31.5
Montana	5.8	33.8	30.2	30.2
Nebraska	6.5	32.0	32.5	29.1
Nevada	13.0	33.2	28.9	24.9
New Hampshire	5.5	30.8	26.6	37.1
New Jersey	8.3	30.6	21.1	40.1
New Mexico	11.9	30.6	30.6	26.8
New York	10.1	31.0	22.9	36.0
North Carolina	11.8	31.7	27.6	28.8
North Dakota	4.8	30.7	35.2	29.4
Ohio	7.1	37.5	26.2	29.1
Oklahoma	8.7	32.8	29.8	28.7
Oregon	9.3	27.0	34.8	29.0
Pennsylvania	6.8	39.8	21.3	32.1
Rhode Island	11.1	30.1	24.3	34.5
South Carolina	11.0	33.5	27.9	27.6
South Dakota	6.0	34.5	31.6	27.9
Tennessee	9.8	35.3	25.4	29.4
Texas	17.3	27.1	27.2	28.4
Utah	8.4	26.9	34.3	30.4
Vermont	6.0	34.9	23.2	35.9
Virginia	9.1	28.3	24.8	37.8
Washington	7.3	25.8	32.8	34.1
West Virginia	9.1	43.5	25.1	22.2
Wisconsin	6.4	35.3	30.4	27.9
Wyoming	6.0	35.2	36.1	22.7

posted by California, Colorado, and Massachusetts, all 3.9 percent, followed by Washington, 3.8 percent, and New Jersey and New York, 3.7 percent each.

Unemployment rates tend to be lower

for the more educated worker groups. However, this generalization did not hold for all States in 2003. Most notably, only college graduates had distinctly lower unemployment rates than

any other educational groups in Delaware and New Hampshire; differences among those States' rates for the three lesser educated categories were not statistically significant at a 90-percent con-

Table 2. Unemployment rates by educational attainment of the civilian labor force 25 years and older by State, 2003 annual averages

[Percent]

Area	Total	Less than a high school diploma	High school graduates, no college	Some college or associate degree	Bachelor's degree and higher
United States	4.8	8.8	5.5	4.8	3.1
Alabama	4.2	11.0	5.1	3.3	1.7
Alaska	6.3	12.3	8.8	5.6	3.2
Arizona	4.5	9.9	4.4	3.8	2.9
Arkansas	4.3	7.8	5.0	3.3	2.7
California	5.6	8.6	6.7	5.4	3.9
Colorado	4.9	8.1	4.9	5.3	3.9
Connecticut	4.4	8.0	6.0	4.0	2.7
Delaware	3.4	4.6	3.5	4.0	2.8
District of Columbia	6.2	15.3	8.4	8.4	3.4
Florida	4.2	7.2	4.3	4.5	2.7
Georgia	3.8	5.4	5.0	3.4	2.0
Hawaii	3.5	6.2	4.9	2.3	2.2
Idaho	4.5	11.0	4.9	3.8	2.9
Illinois	5.6	11.4	6.5	5.8	3.1
Indiana	4.1	9.6	4.1	4.1	2.1
Iowa	3.4	8.3	4.0	3.3	1.8
Kansas	4.2	9.3	5.5	3.6	2.6
Kentucky	4.4	6.2	5.3	4.3	2.6
Louisiana	5.1	8.6	6.1	3.8	3.0
Maine	4.0	9.5	4.9	3.3	2.4
Maryland	3.4	5.4	4.0	3.3	2.5
Massachusetts	4.9	8.8	5.3	5.4	3.9
Michigan	6.2	11.6	7.9	5.7	3.5
Minnesota	4.0	7.3	5.2	4.3	2.5
Mississippi	4.9	8.0	5.5	5.7	1.2
Missouri	4.5	9.5	5.1	4.6	2.6
Montana	3.6	11.7	4.5	2.7	1.8
Nebraska	2.9	10.6	2.6	2.8	1.5
Nevada	4.5	6.6	4.7	4.0	3.3
New Hampshire	3.4	3.9	4.2	3.5	2.6
New Jersey	4.9	9.5	5.2	5.2	3.7
New Mexico	5.0	7.5	5.8	5.5	2.6
New York	5.3	10.3	5.2	5.5	3.7
North Carolina	5.1	10.0	5.8	4.9	2.6
North Dakota	2.7	9.8	3.9	3.2	1.7
Ohio	4.9	10.0	5.9	4.4	2.8
Oklahoma	4.5	7.8	4.7	4.3	3.4
Oregon	6.7	12.4	6.6	6.8	4.8
Pennsylvania	4.6	7.4	5.4	5.2	2.5
Rhode Island	4.6	9.2	5.1	4.1	3.1
South Carolina	5.1	10.6	5.4	5.0	2.7
South Dakota	2.8	7.4	3.1	2.8	1.2
Tennessee	4.7	8.3	5.3	5.5	2.0
Texas	5.5	7.9	6.0	5.4	3.5
Utah	4.1	9.2	4.2	4.4	2.4
Vermont	3.7	6.4	4.2	4.1	2.6
Virginia	3.0	6.8	3.3	2.8	2.1
Washington	6.2	12.4	6.8	6.9	3.8
West Virginia	4.9	9.9	5.4	4.2	2.5
Wisconsin	4.6	10.4	5.7	3.8	2.7
Wyoming	3.0	10.1	3.4	2.1	1.8

confidence level. In 11 States, jobless rates for persons with some college or an associate degree appeared to be higher than for those who just completed high school, although in no State was such a difference statistically significant. For a handful of States, having a bachelor's

degree appeared to confer no significant reduction in group joblessness beyond having some college or an associate degree.

The inability to discern clear patterns of incremental jobless rate declines as educational attainment increased may

have resulted partly from the relatively small CPS sample sizes. However, local labor market conditions, demographic differences, and the interaction between the two likely contributed to the variation across States in aggregate jobless rates by educational attainment. □