

# How Educated Are Alaskans?

More high school graduates than U.S., fewer college graduates

By **ERIC SANDBERG**

**E**ducational attainment levels in Alaska and nationwide have been on a 75-year climb, and while the broad patterns have been similar, gains have varied by time period and demographic group.

Overall, Alaskans age 25 and older are more likely than their national counterparts to have graduated from high school and attended college, but are slightly less likely to have a degree.

About 92 percent of Alaska's current population graduated from high school, 5 percentage points higher than the U.S. overall. (See Exhibit 1.) About 36 percent have at least an associate degree versus 38 percent nationwide, and for bachelor's degrees and above it's 28 percent and 30 percent, respectively. And while Alaskans are slightly less likely to have master's degrees, rates for doctorates and other professional degrees are in line with the rest of the country.

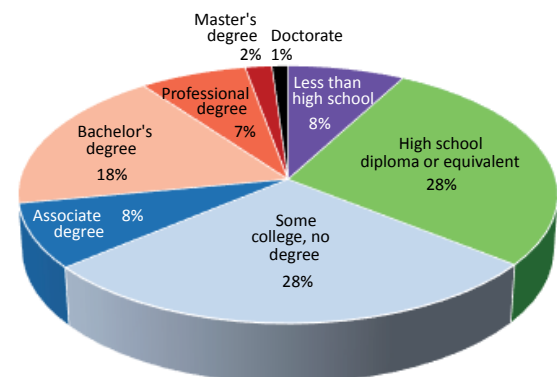
## Major education shifts in the early 20th century

For many years, younger and more educated generations replaced those who were older and less educated.

Before the early 20th century, most Americans who completed primary school (grades 1 to 8) didn't continue their education, and typically only students from wealthier families attended secondary school (grades 9 to 12)

*Although Alaska lost its No. 1 ranking for high school graduates in the early 2000s, it remains in the top five states.*

## 1 Most Alaskans Went to College ALASKA, 2015



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 to 2015 American Community Survey

as preparation for college.

That changed with what historians call the "high school movement," a large-scale effort to build secondary schools for the broader population, and the United States became a world leader in mass secondary education. In 1910, about 9 percent of 17-year-olds in the U.S. graduated high school, and by 1940, that jumped to 49 percent.

Because few people continued beyond primary school,

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# 2 High School Diploma and College Degree Percentages by State\*

AGE 25 AND OLDER, 1940 TO 2015, WITH STATE RANKING IN PARENTHESES

	1940		1950		1960		1970	
	%HS+	%Bachelor's+	%HS+	%Bachelor's+	%HS+	%Bachelor's+	%HS+	%Bachelor's+
<b>UNITED STATES</b>	<b>24.1% (-)</b>	<b>4.6% (-)</b>	<b>33.4% (-)</b>	<b>6.0% (-)</b>	<b>41.1% (-)</b>	<b>7.7% (-)</b>	<b>52.3% (-)</b>	<b>10.7% (-)</b>
<b>West</b>	<b>34.1% (-)</b>	<b>6.1% (-)</b>	<b>44.4% (-)</b>	<b>7.7% (-)</b>	<b>50.9% (-)</b>	<b>9.6% (-)</b>	<b>62.3% (-)</b>	<b>13.2% (-)</b>
<b>ALASKA</b>	<b>26.0% (20)</b>	<b>5.3% (11)</b>	<b>45.2% (4)</b>	<b>7.3% (7)</b>	<b>54.7% (2)</b>	<b>9.5% (7)</b>	<b>66.7% (2)</b>	<b>14.1% (3)</b>
Arizona	29.0% (12)	6.2% (4)	37.7% (15)	7.4% (5)	45.7% (17)	9.1% (11)	58.1% (16)	12.6% (12)
California	36.9% (2)	6.7% (2)	46.1% (3)	8.1% (3)	51.5% (6)	9.8% (5)	62.6% (7)	13.4% (8)
Colorado	31.7% (8)	5.9% (6)	42.5% (9)	8.1% (2)	52.0% (5)	10.7% (2)	63.9% (4)	14.9% (2)
Hawaii	20.5% (41)	5.3% (12)	31.2% (35)	6.1% (22)	46.1% (16)	9.0% (12)	61.9% (8)	14.0% (5)
Idaho	30.1% (10)	4.4% (26)	42.9% (8)	5.5% (31)	48.6% (8)	7.2% (28)	59.5% (11)	10.0% (29)
Montana	29.1% (11)	4.8% (18)	39.8% (12)	6.1% (21)	47.8% (11)	7.5% (24)	59.2% (13)	11.0% (22)
Nevada	34.8% (4)	6.5% (3)	45.0% (5)	7.3% (8)	53.3% (3)	8.3% (19)	65.2% (3)	10.8% (25)
New Mexico	23.3% (31)	4.4% (25)	34.1% (26)	6.9% (15)	45.4% (18)	9.8% (5)	55.2% (21)	12.7% (10)
Oregon	32.7% (6)	5.4% (10)	42.1% (10)	6.6% (17)	48.4% (9)	8.5% (16)	60.0% (9)	11.8% (18)
Utah	36.6% (3)	6.1% (5)	49.0% (1)	7.6% (4)	55.8% (1)	10.2% (3)	67.3% (1)	14.0% (4)
Washington	33.3% (5)	5.5% (7)	43.7% (6)	7.2% (10)	51.5% (6)	9.3% (9)	63.5% (5)	12.7% (11)
Wyoming	32.7% (7)	5.1% (14)	43.2% (7)	7.1% (12)	52.1% (4)	8.7% (15)	62.9% (6)	11.8% (17)
<b>Midwest</b>	<b>24.7% (-)</b>	<b>4.2% (-)</b>	<b>34.5% (-)</b>	<b>5.5% (-)</b>	<b>41.8% (-)</b>	<b>6.9% (-)</b>	<b>53.7% (-)</b>	<b>9.6% (-)</b>
Illinois	24.1% (29)	4.5% (23)	34.1% (27)	5.9% (26)	40.4% (33)	7.3% (26)	52.6% (31)	10.3% (26)
Indiana	24.5% (24)	3.8% (40)	35.1% (22)	5.2% (36)	41.8% (28)	6.3% (39)	52.9% (28)	8.3% (45)
Iowa	28.5% (14)	4.1% (34)	37.5% (16)	5.0% (38)	46.3% (15)	6.4% (37)	59.0% (14)	9.1% (36)
Kansas	28.2% (16)	4.6% (22)	39.2% (13)	6.0% (25)	48.2% (10)	8.2% (20)	59.9% (10)	11.4% (20)
Michigan	24.5% (26)	4.0% (37)	34.0% (28)	5.3% (35)	40.9% (30)	6.8% (32)	52.8% (29)	9.4% (32)
Minnesota	24.8% (23)	4.2% (32)	34.7% (24)	5.6% (30)	43.9% (19)	7.5% (24)	57.6% (17)	11.1% (21)
Missouri	22.0% (36)	3.9% (38)	29.8% (40)	5.0% (40)	36.6% (40)	6.2% (41)	48.8% (38)	9.0% (38)
Nebraska	28.7% (13)	4.3% (31)	38.4% (14)	5.1% (37)	47.7% (13)	6.8% (32)	59.3% (12)	9.6% (31)
North Dakota	22.3% (34)	3.5% (42)	30.2% (38)	4.5% (44)	38.9% (36)	5.6% (45)	50.3% (36)	8.4% (43)
Ohio	25.4% (21)	4.4% (27)	35.6% (21)	5.7% (29)	42.0% (27)	7.0% (30)	53.2% (27)	9.3% (34)
South Dakota	24.9% (22)	3.8% (41)	34.0% (29)	4.9% (41)	42.1% (26)	5.7% (43)	53.3% (26)	8.6% (41)
Wisconsin	22.1% (35)	3.9% (39)	33.0% (32)	5.4% (34)	41.6% (29)	6.7% (34)	54.5% (25)	9.8% (30)
<b>Northeast</b>	<b>23.5% (-)</b>	<b>4.9% (-)</b>	<b>34.6% (-)</b>	<b>6.6% (-)</b>	<b>41.0% (-)</b>	<b>8.1% (-)</b>	<b>52.9% (-)</b>	<b>11.2% (-)</b>
Connecticut	24.5% (25)	4.8% (17)	36.1% (20)	7.0% (14)	43.9% (19)	9.5% (7)	56.0% (20)	13.7% (7)
Maine	28.5% (15)	3.3% (45)	37.0% (17)	4.8% (42)	43.3% (22)	5.5% (47)	54.7% (23)	8.4% (44)
Massachusetts	30.4% (9)	5.4% (9)	41.5% (11)	7.2% (11)	47.0% (14)	8.8% (14)	58.5% (15)	12.6% (13)
New Hampshire	26.5% (18)	4.3% (30)	36.2% (19)	6.0% (24)	42.9% (23)	7.1% (29)	57.6% (18)	10.9% (24)
New Jersey	22.5% (33)	5.0% (15)	33.8% (30)	6.8% (16)	40.7% (32)	8.4% (17)	52.5% (33)	11.8% (16)
New York	22.9% (32)	5.5% (8)	34.7% (25)	7.4% (6)	40.8% (31)	8.9% (13)	52.7% (30)	11.9% (15)
Pennsylvania	20.9% (38)	4.2% (33)	31.2% (34)	5.4% (32)	38.1% (37)	6.4% (37)	50.2% (37)	8.7% (40)
Rhode Island	20.9% (39)	4.5% (24)	30.7% (37)	5.8% (28)	35.0% (41)	6.6% (36)	46.4% (41)	9.4% (33)
Vermont	27.6% (17)	4.1% (35)	36.6% (18)	5.9% (27)	42.8% (24)	7.3% (26)	57.1% (19)	11.5% (19)
<b>South</b>	<b>20.0% (-)</b>	<b>4.0% (-)</b>	<b>26.0% (-)</b>	<b>5.3% (-)</b>	<b>35.3% (-)</b>	<b>7.1% (-)</b>	<b>45.1% (-)</b>	<b>9.8% (-)</b>
Alabama	15.7% (49)	2.9% (50)	21.1% (48)	3.6% (50)	30.4% (46)	5.7% (43)	41.3% (45)	7.8% (48)
Arkansas	14.9% (51)	2.2% (51)	21.2% (47)	3.1% (51)	28.9% (50)	4.8% (51)	39.9% (48)	6.7% (51)
Delaware	23.4% (30)	5.2% (13)	33.8% (31)	7.3% (9)	43.4% (21)	10.1% (4)	54.6% (24)	13.1% (9)
D.C.	40.7% (1)	11.0% (1)	47.8% (2)	13.0% (1)	47.8% (11)	14.3% (1)	55.2% (22)	17.8% (1)
Florida	26.2% (19)	4.9% (16)	34.8% (23)	6.3% (19)	42.6% (25)	7.8% (23)	52.6% (32)	10.3% (27)
Georgia	17.2% (47)	3.3% (46)	20.4% (50)	4.5% (45)	31.9% (44)	6.2% (41)	40.6% (47)	9.2% (35)
Kentucky	15.5% (50)	2.9% (49)	21.9% (44)	3.8% (49)	27.6% (51)	4.9% (50)	38.5% (49)	7.2% (49)
Louisiana	17.5% (46)	3.5% (43)	21.6% (45)	4.7% (43)	32.3% (42)	6.7% (34)	42.2% (42)	9.0% (37)
Maryland	20.6% (40)	4.8% (19)	30.9% (36)	7.0% (13)	40.0% (34)	9.3% (9)	52.3% (34)	13.9% (6)
Mississippi	15.9% (48)	3.0% (48)	21.5% (46)	3.8% (48)	29.8% (49)	5.6% (45)	41.0% (46)	8.1% (46)
North Carolina	18.7% (42)	4.1% (36)	20.5% (49)	5.0% (39)	32.3% (42)	6.3% (39)	38.5% (50)	8.5% (42)
Oklahoma	24.2% (28)	4.7% (20)	33.0% (33)	6.2% (20)	37.5% (39)	7.9% (22)	51.6% (35)	10.0% (28)
South Carolina	18.2% (43)	4.7% (21)	18.6% (51)	5.4% (33)	30.4% (47)	6.9% (31)	37.8% (51)	9.0% (39)
Tennessee	17.9% (44)	3.1% (47)	24.3% (43)	4.1% (47)	30.4% (47)	5.5% (47)	41.8% (43)	7.9% (47)
Texas	24.5% (27)	4.4% (29)	29.9% (39)	6.0% (23)	39.6% (35)	8.0% (21)	47.4% (40)	10.9% (23)
Virginia	21.3% (37)	4.4% (28)	28.2% (41)	6.3% (18)	37.9% (38)	8.4% (17)	47.8% (39)	12.3% (14)
West Virginia	17.6% (45)	3.4% (44)	24.4% (42)	4.3% (46)	30.5% (45)	5.2% (49)	41.6% (44)	6.8% (50)

\*For 1940 and 1950, Alaska and Hawaii territories are included in the ranking.

	1980		1990		2000		2015	
	%HS+	%Bachelor's+	%HS+	%Bachelor's+	%HS+	%Bachelor's+	%HS+	%Bachelor's+
<b>UNITED STATES</b>	<b>66.5% (-)</b>	<b>16.2% (-)</b>	<b>75.2% (-)</b>	<b>20.3% (-)</b>	<b>80.4% (-)</b>	<b>24.4% (-)</b>	<b>86.7% (-)</b>	<b>29.8% (-)</b>
<b>West</b>	<b>74.5% (-)</b>	<b>19.3% (-)</b>	<b>78.6% (-)</b>	<b>22.7% (-)</b>	<b>80.5% (-)</b>	<b>26.2% (-)</b>	<b>85.3% (-)</b>	<b>31.0% (-)</b>
<b>ALASKA</b>	<b>82.5% (1)</b>	<b>21.1% (3)</b>	<b>86.6% (1)</b>	<b>23.0% (12)</b>	<b>88.3% (1)</b>	<b>24.7% (21)</b>	<b>92.1% (5)</b>	<b>28.0% (27)</b>
Arizona	72.4% (15)	17.4% (20)	78.7% (20)	20.3% (23)	81.0% (32)	23.5% (25)	86.0% (36)	27.5% (31)
California	73.5% (11)	19.6% (9)	76.2% (28)	23.4% (10)	76.8% (42)	26.6% (13)	81.8% (51)	31.4% (15)
Colorado	78.6% (3)	23.0% (2)	84.4% (3)	27.0% (4)	86.9% (8)	32.7% (3)	90.7% (14)	38.1% (3)
Hawaii	73.8% (9)	20.3% (6)	80.1% (13)	22.9% (13)	84.6% (18)	26.2% (14)	91.0% (12)	30.8% (18)
Idaho	73.7% (10)	15.8% (26)	79.7% (16)	17.7% (35)	84.7% (17)	21.7% (36)	89.5% (22)	25.9% (39)
Montana	74.4% (8)	17.5% (18)	81.0% (11)	19.8% (25)	87.2% (6)	24.4% (22)	92.8% (1)	29.5% (21)
Nevada	75.5% (7)	14.4% (34)	78.8% (18)	15.3% (47)	80.7% (33)	18.2% (47)	85.1% (42)	23.0% (46)
New Mexico	68.9% (22)	17.6% (17)	75.1% (33)	20.4% (22)	78.9% (37)	23.5% (25)	84.2% (47)	26.3% (37)
Oregon	75.6% (6)	17.9% (15)	81.5% (9)	20.6% (21)	85.1% (14)	25.1% (19)	89.8% (19)	30.8% (19)
Utah	80.0% (2)	19.9% (8)	85.1% (2)	22.3% (15)	87.7% (4)	26.1% (15)	91.2% (10)	31.1% (16)
Washington	77.6% (5)	19.0% (11)	83.8% (4)	22.9% (13)	87.1% (7)	27.7% (10)	90.4% (16)	32.9% (12)
Wyoming	77.9% (4)	17.2% (22)	83.0% (5)	18.8% (28)	87.9% (2)	21.9% (34)	92.3% (4)	25.7% (41)
<b>Midwest</b>	<b>68.0% (-)</b>	<b>14.7% (-)</b>	<b>77.1% (-)</b>	<b>18.4% (-)</b>	<b>83.5% (-)</b>	<b>22.9% (-)</b>	<b>89.5% (-)</b>	<b>28.4% (-)</b>
Illinois	66.5% (32)	16.2% (25)	76.2% (28)	21.0% (20)	81.4% (30)	26.1% (15)	87.9% (31)	32.3% (13)
Indiana	66.4% (33)	12.5% (46)	75.6% (31)	15.6% (46)	82.1% (26)	19.4% (44)	87.8% (32)	24.1% (44)
Iowa	71.5% (18)	13.9% (38)	80.1% (13)	16.9% (41)	86.1% (11)	21.2% (39)	91.5% (9)	26.7% (36)
Kansas	73.3% (13)	17.0% (23)	81.3% (10)	21.1% (19)	86.0% (12)	25.8% (17)	90.2% (17)	31.0% (17)
Michigan	68.0% (25)	14.3% (36)	76.8% (25)	17.4% (37)	83.4% (23)	21.8% (35)	89.6% (21)	26.9% (35)
Minnesota	73.1% (14)	17.4% (20)	82.4% (6)	21.8% (16)	87.9% (2)	27.4% (11)	92.4% (2)	33.7% (11)
Missouri	63.5% (38)	13.9% (38)	73.9% (38)	17.8% (33)	81.3% (31)	21.6% (37)	88.4% (28)	27.1% (33)
Nebraska	73.4% (12)	15.5% (27)	81.8% (8)	18.9% (27)	86.6% (9)	23.7% (24)	90.7% (15)	29.3% (22)
North Dakota	66.4% (33)	14.8% (31)	76.7% (26)	18.1% (31)	83.9% (21)	22.0% (33)	91.7% (7)	27.7% (29)
Ohio	67.0% (30)	13.7% (41)	75.7% (30)	17.0% (40)	83.0% (24)	21.1% (40)	89.1% (26)	26.1% (38)
South Dakota	67.9% (26)	14.0% (37)	77.1% (24)	17.2% (39)	84.6% (18)	21.5% (38)	90.9% (13)	27.0% (34)
Wisconsin	69.6% (21)	14.8% (31)	78.6% (21)	17.7% (35)	85.1% (14)	22.4% (30)	91.0% (11)	27.8% (28)
<b>Northeast</b>	<b>67.1% (-)</b>	<b>17.2% (-)</b>	<b>76.2% (-)</b>	<b>22.8% (-)</b>	<b>81.6% (-)</b>	<b>27.5% (-)</b>	<b>88.1% (-)</b>	<b>34.2% (-)</b>
Connecticut	70.3% (20)	20.7% (4)	79.2% (17)	27.2% (2)	84.0% (20)	31.4% (4)	89.9% (18)	37.6% (5)
Maine	68.7% (23)	14.4% (34)	78.8% (18)	18.8% (28)	85.4% (13)	22.9% (28)	91.6% (8)	29.0% (23)
Massachusetts	72.2% (17)	20.0% (7)	80.0% (15)	27.2% (2)	84.8% (16)	33.2% (2)	89.8% (20)	40.5% (2)
New Hampshire	72.3% (16)	18.2% (14)	82.2% (7)	24.4% (8)	87.4% (5)	28.7% (9)	92.3% (3)	34.9% (9)
New Jersey	67.4% (27)	18.3% (13)	76.7% (26)	24.9% (6)	82.1% (36)	29.8% (6)	88.6% (27)	36.8% (6)
New York	66.3% (35)	17.9% (15)	74.8% (34)	23.1% (11)	79.1% (26)	27.4% (11)	85.6% (38)	34.2% (10)
Pennsylvania	64.7% (37)	13.6% (42)	74.7% (35)	17.9% (32)	81.9% (28)	22.4% (30)	89.2% (25)	28.6% (25)
Rhode Island	61.1% (41)	15.4% (28)	72.0% (41)	21.3% (18)	78.0% (40)	25.6% (18)	86.2% (35)	31.9% (14)
Vermont	71.0% (19)	19.0% (11)	80.8% (12)	24.3% (9)	86.4% (10)	29.4% (8)	91.8% (6)	36.0% (8)
<b>South</b>	<b>60.2% (-)</b>	<b>15.0% (-)</b>	<b>71.3% (-)</b>	<b>18.7% (-)</b>	<b>77.7% (-)</b>	<b>22.5% (-)</b>	<b>85.2% (-)</b>	<b>27.7% (-)</b>
Alabama	56.5% (43)	12.2% (48)	66.9% (47)	15.7% (45)	75.3% (46)	19.0% (45)	84.3% (45)	23.5% (45)
Arkansas	55.5% (47)	10.8% (50)	66.3% (48)	13.3% (50)	75.3% (46)	16.7% (50)	84.8% (44)	21.1% (49)
Delaware	68.6% (24)	17.5% (18)	77.5% (23)	21.4% (17)	82.6% (25)	25.0% (20)	88.4% (29)	30.0% (20)
D.C.	67.1% (29)	27.5% (1)	73.1% (39)	33.3% (1)	77.8% (41)	39.1% (1)	89.3% (24)	54.6% (1)
Florida	66.7% (31)	14.9% (30)	74.4% (37)	18.3% (30)	79.9% (35)	22.3% (32)	86.9% (34)	27.3% (32)
Georgia	56.4% (44)	14.6% (33)	70.9% (42)	19.3% (26)	78.6% (38)	24.3% (23)	85.4% (41)	28.8% (24)
Kentucky	53.1% (51)	11.1% (49)	64.6% (50)	13.6% (49)	74.1% (50)	17.1% (48)	84.2% (46)	22.3% (48)
Louisiana	57.7% (42)	13.9% (38)	68.3% (44)	16.1% (43)	74.8% (49)	18.7% (46)	83.4% (48)	22.5% (47)
Maryland	67.4% (27)	20.4% (5)	78.4% (22)	26.5% (5)	83.8% (22)	31.4% (4)	89.4% (23)	37.9% (4)
Mississippi	54.8% (48)	12.3% (47)	64.3% (51)	14.7% (48)	72.9% (51)	16.9% (49)	82.3% (49)	20.7% (50)
North Carolina	54.8% (49)	13.2% (44)	70.0% (43)	17.4% (37)	78.1% (39)	22.5% (29)	85.8% (37)	28.4% (26)
Oklahoma	66.0% (36)	15.1% (29)	74.6% (36)	17.8% (33)	80.6% (34)	20.3% (42)	86.9% (33)	24.1% (43)
South Carolina	53.7% (50)	13.4% (43)	68.3% (44)	16.6% (42)	76.3% (43)	20.4% (41)	85.6% (39)	25.8% (40)
Tennessee	56.2% (45)	12.6% (45)	67.1% (46)	16.0% (44)	75.9% (44)	19.6% (43)	85.5% (40)	24.9% (42)
Texas	62.6% (39)	16.9% (24)	72.1% (40)	20.3% (23)	75.7% (45)	23.2% (27)	81.9% (50)	27.6% (30)
Virginia	62.4% (40)	19.1% (10)	75.2% (32)	24.5% (7)	81.5% (29)	29.5% (7)	88.3% (30)	36.3% (7)
West Virginia	56.0% (46)	10.4% (51)	66.0% (49)	12.3% (51)	75.2% (48)	14.8% (51)	85.0% (43)	19.2% (51)

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Decennial Censuses, 2011 to 2015 American Community Survey

# 3

## High School Diplomas and College Degrees by Age and Sex

ALASKA AND THE UNITED STATES, 1940 TO 2015

		High school diploma or above									
		Alaska					United States				
	Year	Total	25-34 yrs	35-44 yrs	45-64 yrs	65 yrs +	Total	25-34 yrs	35-44 yrs	45-64 yrs	65 yrs +
<b>Total</b>	1940	26%	—	—	—	—	24%	—	—	—	—
	1950	46%	59%	50%	31%	15%	34%	50%	38%	26%	18%
	1960	55%	61%	61%	45%	19%	41%	58%	52%	33%	19%
	1970	67%	77%	68%	59%	29%	52%	71%	62%	48%	27%
	1980	83%	92%	85%	72%	49%	66%	84%	77%	62%	39%
	1990	87%	90%	93%	81%	60%	75%	84%	86%	73%	53%
	2000	88%	91%	91%	90%	67%	80%	84%	85%	83%	65%
	2015	92%	93%	94%	93%	84%	87%	89%	88%	88%	81%
<b>Men</b>	1940	23%	—	—	—	—	22%	—	—	—	—
	1950	43%	56%	46%	28%	15%	33%	49%	36%	24%	16%
	1960	53%	60%	60%	43%	16%	39%	56%	50%	31%	17%
	1970	66%	78%	69%	56%	26%	52%	72%	61%	46%	24%
	1980	83%	92%	87%	71%	45%	67%	84%	77%	61%	37%
	1990	87%	90%	93%	82%	59%	76%	83%	85%	73%	53%
	2000	88%	90%	90%	90%	67%	80%	82%	83%	83%	66%
	2015	92%	92%	94%	93%	86%	86%	87%	86%	87%	82%
<b>Women</b>	1940	31%	—	—	—	—	26%	—	—	—	—
	1950	52%	64%	55%	36%	16%	36%	52%	40%	27%	19%
	1960	57%	62%	64%	48%	24%	43%	60%	53%	35%	21%
	1970	67%	75%	68%	63%	33%	53%	71%	63%	49%	29%
	1980	82%	91%	84%	72%	52%	66%	84%	76%	62%	40%
	1990	86%	90%	92%	80%	61%	75%	85%	86%	73%	53%
	2000	88%	92%	91%	89%	68%	81%	86%	87%	83%	65%
	2015	92%	94%	95%	94%	83%	87%	91%	89%	89%	80%
<b>Male degree holders per 100 female degree holders</b>	1940	138.5	—	—	—	—	86.3	—	—	—	—
	1950	136.0	136.3	128.8	140.8	214.0	85.2	87.1	86.2	85.1	72.5
	1960	124.8	129.4	121.1	123.2	110.9	86.5	90.7	89.5	84.5	67.1
	1970	119.7	122.5	123.5	112.8	102.9	87.8	96.7	92.0	86.2	60.4
	1980	116.8	114.3	126.1	116.1	88.3	90.7	98.8	97.2	89.0	62.8
	1990	112.9	109.0	116.7	120.2	84.0	91.0	96.6	97.2	92.6	67.3
	2000	106.2	106.0	102.9	113.6	86.3	90.9	96.5	95.0	94.0	71.4
	2015	107.9	111.7	107.7	107.9	101.1	91.8	97.9	95.9	93.1	79.6

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau decennial censuses; and 2011 to 2015 American Community Survey

the U.S. Census Bureau didn't collect educational attainment data for the adult population in the early 20th century. The only educational statistic available was on literacy. With the growth of high schools in America, the Census Bureau began collecting educational attainment information in the 1940 Census. That year, 24 percent in the U.S. had diplomas and 5 percent had a college degree.<sup>1</sup> (See Exhibit 2.)

The next few decades brought great change, including a G.I. bill to help returning World War II veterans pay

<sup>1</sup>Except where otherwise specified, "college degree" in this article refers to a bachelor's or higher. Associate degrees are included in "some college," as are other nondegree awards and certifications.

for college, the extension of higher education to more people, and a more robust economy to provide jobs for graduates. By 1970, the percent with a diploma or degree had doubled, and growth has continued at a steady clip since.

### Regional patterns and migration

Over time, regional variations have narrowed for high school diploma rates but widened for college degrees. In 1950, the West outpaced the rest of the country in high school education, with 44 percent high school graduates compared to 26 percent for the South. Now both regions are about even, and the national leader,

		Bachelor's degree or above									
		Alaska					United States				
	Year	Total	25-34 yrs	35-44 yrs	45-64 yrs	65 yrs +	Total	25-34 yrs	35-44 yrs	45-64 yrs	65 yrs +
<b>Total</b>	1940	5%	—	—	—	—	5%	—	—	—	—
	1950	8%	7%	10%	7%	3%	6%	8%	7%	5%	4%
	1960	9%	10%	10%	10%	4%	8%	11%	9%	7%	4%
	1970	14%	18%	14%	11%	5%	11%	15%	13%	9%	6%
	1980	21%	23%	25%	16%	10%	16%	23%	20%	13%	8%
	1990	23%	18%	29%	25%	13%	20%	23%	27%	19%	11%
	2000	25%	21%	23%	30%	17%	24%	28%	26%	26%	15%
	2015	28%	26%	30%	28%	28%	30%	33%	33%	29%	24%
<b>Men</b>	1940	5%	—	—	—	—	5%	—	—	—	—
	1950	7%	7%	9%	7%	3%	7%	9%	8%	6%	4%
	1960	10%	11%	11%	9%	3%	10%	15%	12%	8%	4%
	1970	16%	20%	16%	12%	5%	14%	19%	17%	11%	6%
	1980	23%	24%	28%	19%	10%	20%	26%	24%	17%	10%
	1990	24%	17%	29%	28%	14%	23%	23%	30%	24%	14%
	2000	24%	19%	21%	31%	19%	26%	26%	26%	29%	20%
	2015	25%	21%	26%	26%	31%	30%	29%	31%	29%	30%
<b>Women</b>	1940	6%	—	—	—	—	4%	—	—	—	—
	1950	8%	8%	10%	7%	3%	5%	6%	6%	5%	3%
	1960	9%	8%	9%	10%	4%	6%	8%	6%	6%	3%
	1970	12%	16%	11%	11%	6%	8%	12%	9%	7%	5%
	1980	19%	22%	20%	13%	10%	13%	20%	15%	9%	7%
	1990	22%	19%	29%	22%	12%	18%	23%	24%	15%	9%
	2000	25%	24%	25%	30%	15%	23%	29%	26%	24%	12%
	2015	31%	31%	35%	30%	26%	30%	37%	36%	29%	19%
<b>Male degree holders per 100 female degree holders</b>	1940	149.2	—	—	—	—	145.8	—	—	—	—
	1950	144.3	129.4	135.0	186.1	207.3	134.1	146.3	128.2	129.4	125.8
	1960	156.8	182.2	157.4	129.4	107.6	154.7	185.5	175.5	126.1	109.8
	1970	151.3	148.4	173.7	138.5	112.0	148.8	151.3	186.1	141.7	93.0
	1980	143.9	124.1	171.6	166.6	99.3	138.6	127.0	157.1	166.5	91.6
	1990	120.4	98.9	119.3	151.1	104.3	119.0	101.0	119.4	146.7	110.3
	2000	101.1	85.4	89.2	116.6	110.0	104.5	88.7	97.7	116.9	120.9
	2015	88.8	74.5	80.9	93.7	114.4	92.9	79.7	84.8	95.2	120.0

the Midwest, is only 4 percentage points higher. At the same time, the Northeast outpaced the rest of the country for college degrees, with 34 percent of adults having degrees in 2015 and a larger gap on other regions compared to previous decades.

Alaska has generally been ahead of the rest of the nation, largely due to a younger population and successive in-migrations. A young cohort of soldiers and their spouses moved to Alaska with the Cold War military build-up, and that generation boosted Alaska into the top five states nationally for high school graduates. Statehood in 1959 ushered in professional workers, teachers, and other college graduates, and by 1970, Alaska ranked second among states for college graduates, after Colorado. (The District of Columbia has

always ranked higher than any state for college education.)

## Some gains hit a ceiling, and one age group lost ground until recently

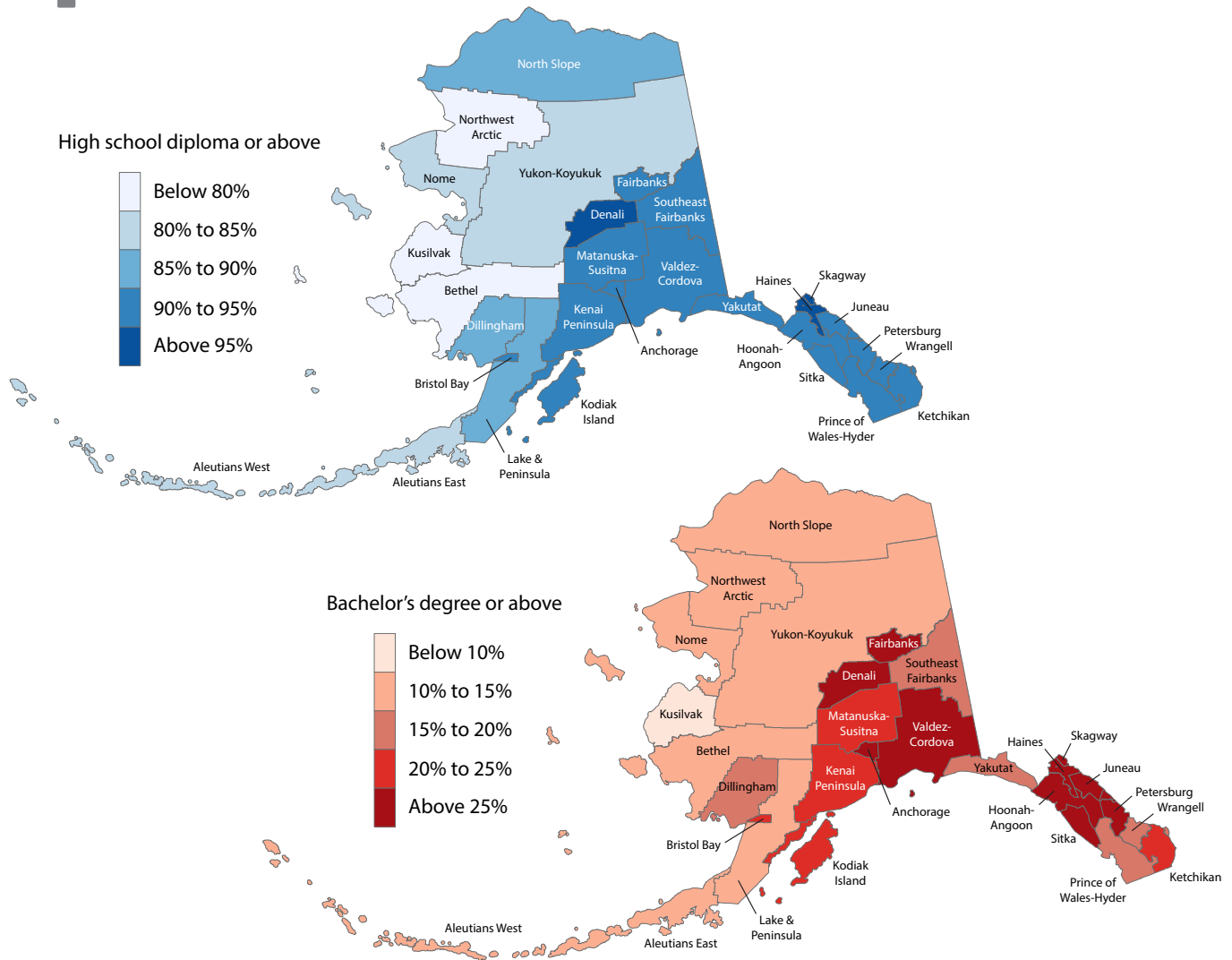
In the 1970s, construction of the Trans-Alaska Oil Pipeline and a booming economy brought many college-educated baby boomers into the state. The percentage of Alaska adults with a college degree jumped by 7 points that decade, to 21 percent in 1980. The national percentage rose 5 points, to 16 percent.

After 1980, however, the 25-to-34-year-old group in Alaska lost ground with college degrees while the U.S.



# 4 Educational Attainment by Area

## ALASKA, 2015



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 to 2015 American Community Survey; and Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Research and Analysis Section

rate continued to grow. (See Exhibit 3.) Through 1980, Alaska was even with or slightly ahead of the national average, but after the educated boomers aged out of that group, the generations that followed didn't keep pace with national trends. Alaskans between 25 and 34 registered lower rates of college completion in the 1990 and 2000 censuses, and although their degree rate resumed growing by 2015, by then the U.S. rate had opened a 7 percentage point gap over Alaska.

As those who were 25 to 34 in 1980 aged, their lower degree rates rippled into the older cohorts. By 2000, the college degree rate for 35-to-44-year-olds in Alaska was below the national average, and more recently, the U.S. edged ahead for 45-to-64-year-olds. In 2015,

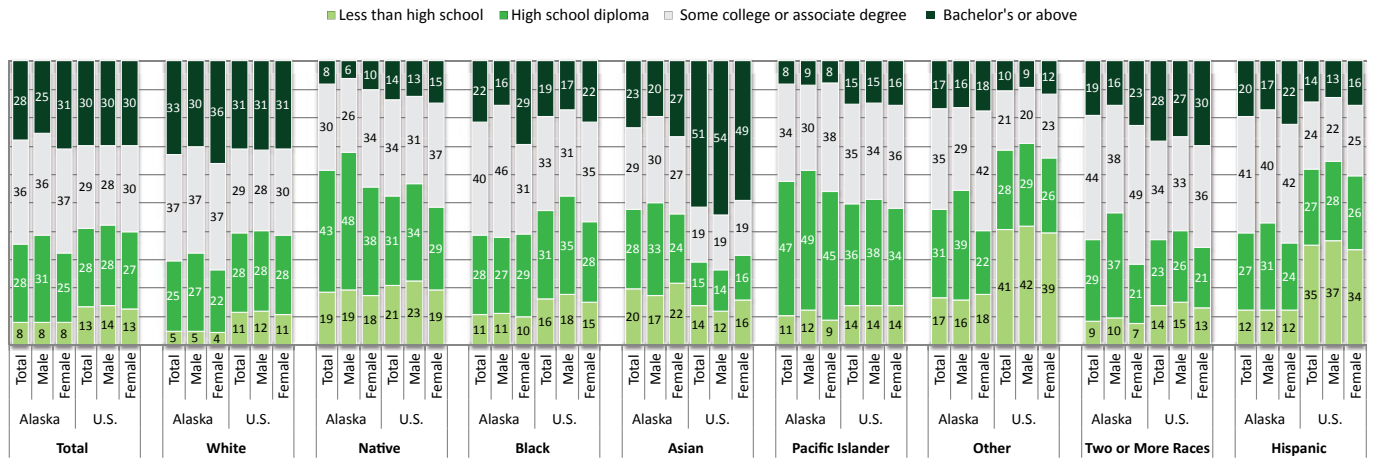
Alaska only topped the U.S. for college degrees among those 65 and older — many of whom are boomers.

The 25-to-34-year-old group also reached a peak for its high school graduation rate in 1980 and that hasn't changed much since. In 1950, 59 percent of Alaskans in that age range were high school graduates. The percentage jumped to 92 percent by 1980 and then varied by just one or two percentage points per decade.

These changes are largely why the educational gap between younger and older adults has narrowed over time. For high school diplomas, the gap between Alaskans 25 to 34 and those 65 and older fell from 44 percent in 1950 to 9 percent in 2015, similar to the

# 5 Educational Attainment by Race

PERCENTAGES, RACE ALONE, AGE 25 AND OLDER, ALASKA AND THE UNITED STATES, 2015



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 to 2015 American Community Survey

national gap. But the generational gap has gone the opposite direction for college graduates, with Alaska's senior citizens now more likely to have college degrees than those under 35, a break from both national and historical trends.

## Women earn a higher share of college degrees

The educational gaps between men and women have shifted back and forth over the years. Most recently, men closed the high school graduation gap while women began graduating from college at a higher rate.

In the 1940s and 1950s, women outpaced men for high school diplomas in Alaska and nationally. As the diploma became more common, rates for both men and women converged as they rose. In Alaska, significantly more women had a diploma in 1950 (52 percent for women and 43 percent for men), but the genders were about even by the 1970s and have remained there since. National trends are similar, although in the 25-to-34 age group, U.S. women have opened a 4 percentage point graduation gap over men.

For college degrees, rates in Alaska and nationwide both swung toward men initially and then toward women more recently. In the mid-20th century, college degrees were rare among adults, with both genders equally unlikely to have one. The G.I. Bill and post-war job market shifted attainment toward men, and by 1960, the state and the nation peaked at around 155 male college graduates for every 100 female graduates. Through the 1960s and 1970s, that gap narrowed as social changes

brought more women into college and the job market.

In 1990, the percentage of both genders under 35 with college degrees was about equal in the state and the nation. But a quarter-century later, the percentage of Alaska women with a degree in this age range has risen to 31 percent while men have lagged at 21 percent. The number of male college graduates under 35 is only 75 for every 100 who are female, a large shift from previous generations and a wider gap than nationally.

## Significant differences across the state

Educational attainment varies widely across Alaska. (See Exhibit 4.) Urban areas, places along the road system, and Southeast have higher educational attainment rates, and remote parts of Western Alaska have the lowest rates.

Overall, Southeast Alaska has the highest high school graduation rates, with all parts of the region topping 90 percent. Skagway is highest at 97 percent, and Haines is second at over 95 percent. Road-connected parts of Alaska also have high numbers, led by Denali Borough at 95 percent.

Historical access to education explains much of the disparity. Before the 1976 settlement of the *Molly Hootch* case, which directed the state to build high schools in remote villages, rural students had to attend boarding schools or move to an urban area for high school. Migration also played a role, as areas with a large pool of jobs that require a degree tend to

pull in people from elsewhere.

While Western Alaska still trails the rest of the state, rates have grown considerably since settlement of the *Hootch* lawsuit. The gap between the highest and lowest boroughs and census areas shrunk from 57 percent in 1980 to 19 percent in 2015. Kusilvak Census Area has the lowest rate of high school graduation at 78 percent, but in 1970, it was under 10 percent.

Juneau, with a high number of state and federal employees, has the highest proportion of college graduates in the state, at 39 percent. The capital city has held the top spot since at least 1960, when numbers were first available, and likely longer. It also has the largest percentage of adults with a graduate or professional degree, at 14 percent.

Skagway, Sitka, Anchorage, Haines, Denali, and Fairbanks also have adult populations that are over 30 percent college graduates.

## Some convergence by race over time

Better access has narrowed Alaska's racial educational gaps over time, but the discrepancies are still large for college graduation. (See Exhibit 5.) Differences between men and women are also apparent within racial groups.

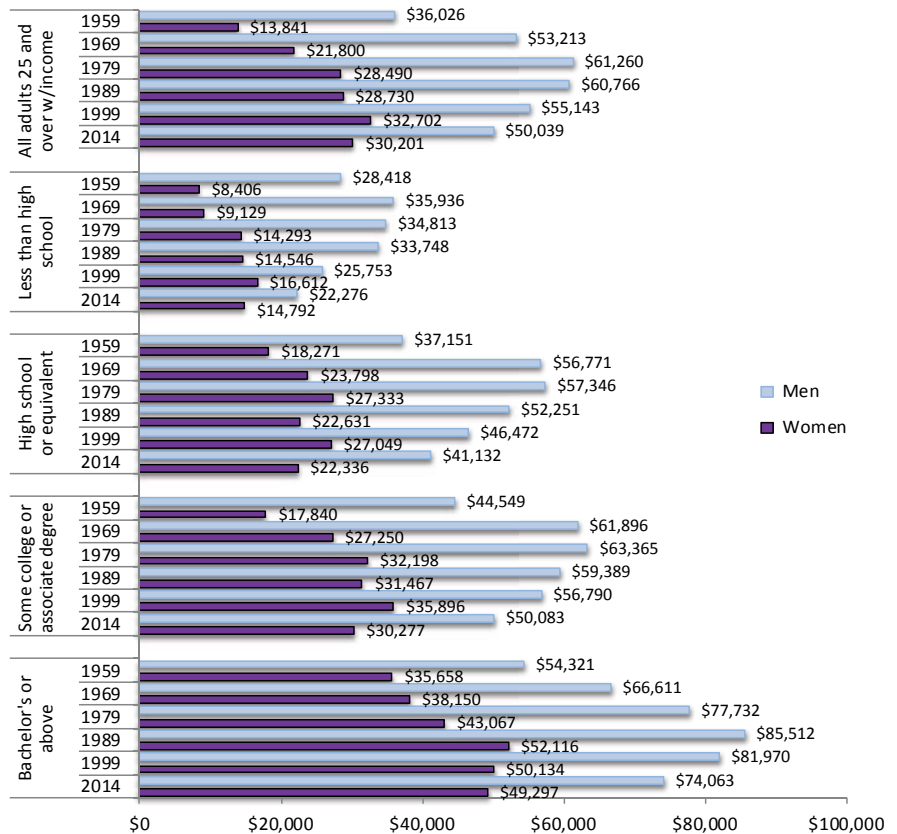
White Alaskans have the highest diploma and college degree percentages at 95 percent and 33 percent, respectively, which are higher than the national numbers. White women in Alaska have the highest college degree rate at 36 percent.

Alaska Natives, many of whom live in areas with less access, have increased their educational attainment levels in recent decades. About 82 percent of Native adults have graduated high school, nearly double the rate of 46 percent in 1980. College degree attainment has also doubled among Natives over the past 25 years, to 8 percent.

Asian Americans are the most educated demographic group in the United States, with over half of adults having a bachelor's degree or higher. Asian American men are highest at 54 percent. In Alaska, people of Asian descent are highest among minority groups, with 23 per-

# 6 Income by Education and Sex

## ALASKA, 25 AND OLDER, 1959 TO 2014



Note: Median personal income. All amounts are adjusted to 2014 dollars.  
Source: IPUMS-USA, University of Minnesota, [www.ipums.org](http://www.ipums.org)

cent having a bachelor's degree or higher.

For high school graduation, Pacific Islanders and black/African American Alaskans share the highest percentage among minority groups, at 89 percent. Pacific Islanders have increased their rate by 14 percentage points since 2000. Meanwhile, blacks have made the largest gains in college degree attainment among minorities, up by more than 7 percentage points.

## Income is higher with more education, but down for all levels

Educational attainment has a major effect on income. Tracking the median, or 50th percentile, gives a good picture of middle income and how it has changed. Exhibit 6 shows Alaska's median personal incomes for men and women 25 and older by educational attainment since 1959, adjusted to 2014 dollars. Most censuses asked for personal income in the previous year, which



means the year before the decennial census was listed.

Median personal incomes grew significantly for all educational levels for both genders between statehood and the new oil economy of the 1970s and 1980s. This was especially true for college-educated men, whose median incomes grew by more than \$30,000 between 1959 and 1989.

Although Alaska's personal income is still higher than the nation overall, inflation-adjusted income has dropped for all education levels since then. Declines began earlier for men with lower levels of education, and women's incomes have declined across the board more recently.

College-educated men and women have had the highest median personal incomes throughout the entire study period, but the gap among those with lower levels of education has widened recently because those without a degree have sustained larger drops in income. In 1969, median income for Alaska men with a diploma was around 85 percent of what men with

a college degree earned, which fell to about 56 percent by 2014. For men who didn't graduate from high school, median incomes fell from around 54 percent of college-educated men's income to 30 percent.

Women's incomes didn't grow as much during the oil boom, nor did they fall as much as men's in subsequent years, but the income-by-education gap among women has grown larger than among men. Women with high school diplomas make around 45 percent of what college-educated women make, down from 63 percent in 1979.

The gender gap has closed some over time, but more recently it has been through income decline among men rather than growth for women. In recent decades, women with higher levels of education have still made less than less-educated men.

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## GENDER GAP

Continued from page 12

teachers (\$42,000), and pharmacists (\$101,000).

### Age matters for wage parity

Men also out-earn women at every age, and the wage gap increases by age group. (See Exhibit 11.) For teenagers between 16 and 18, the earnings ratio is 95 percent, although wages are low for both genders. At these ages, workers are mostly limited to low-paying summer jobs, largely in food preparation and serving or sales. It's also the only age group with more female workers than males. Among older workers, men are generally 52 to 53 percent of workers.

For older workers, the wage gap increases with shifts in their hours, education, and occupational choices. Women's earnings peak and then plateau between the ages of 40 and 50, while men's peak between 50 and 60.

While the wage gap shrunk or held steady for most age groups over the past decade (see Exhibit 12 on page 12), it increased by 3 percentage points in the 60-to-69 group, where the gap is also largest. That age group is also the fastest growing. The number of older workers more than doubled between 2005 and 2015, from 14,887 to 30,812.

Older men tend to work in construction and extraction (\$59,000), management (\$115,000), and transportation and material moving occupations (\$50,000). Older women work largely in office and administrative support (\$35,000) and educational instruction and library occupations (\$33,000).

Older workers have maintained similar occupation concentrations as in the past, but for some of the occupations — such as those in construction and extraction, educational instruction and libraries, and office support — older men's average wages increased more than women's.

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