

# International Educational Attainment

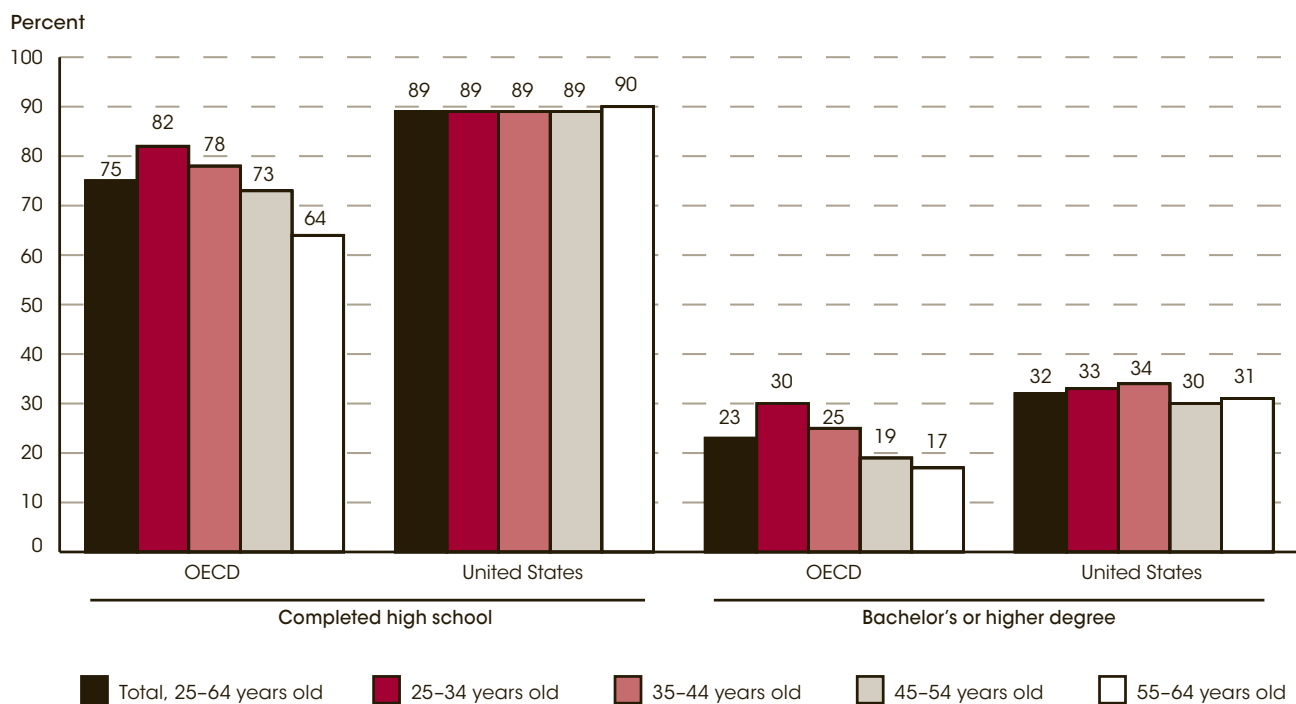
*The percentage of 25- to 64-year-olds who had earned a bachelor's or higher degree was higher in 2011 than in 2001 in the United States (32 vs. 28 percent) and across OECD countries (23 vs. 15 percent).*

In 2011, some 27 out of 33 OECD<sup>1</sup> countries reported that 70 percent or more of their adult populations (ages 25 to 64 years old) had completed high school. Among OECD countries, the percentages of high school

completers ranged from under 40 percent in Turkey, Portugal, and Mexico, to over 90 percent in the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic. Additionally, 21 countries reported that 20 percent or more of their adult populations had completed a bachelor's or higher degree. Among OECD countries, the percentages of bachelor's degree completers ranged from under 15 percent in Austria, Slovenia, Turkey, and Italy, to 30 percent and higher in Iceland, Israel, the United States, and Norway.

<sup>1</sup> The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is an organization of 34 countries whose purpose is to promote trade and economic growth. This indicator only discusses these 34 OECD countries. Attainment data refer to comparable degree levels, as classified by the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED). In 2011, Japan did not report data on high school graduation rates.

**Figure 1. Percentage of the population 25 to 64 years old in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries who attained selected levels of education, by age group: 2011**



NOTE: Educational attainment data in this figure refer to degrees classified by the OECD as International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) level 3 for high school and level 5A or 6 for bachelor's or higher degrees. The OECD average refers to the mean of the data values for all reporting OECD countries, to which each country reporting data contributes equally.

SOURCE: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Education at a Glance*, 2013. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2013*, tables 603.10 and 603.20.

In most OECD countries, higher percentages of the youngest adult age group (ages 25 to 34) than the oldest adult age group (ages 55 to 64) had completed high school in 2011. For example, the average percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds completing high school across countries was 18 percentage points higher than the average percentage of 55- to 64-year-olds completing high school (82 vs. 64

percent, respectively). Only in two countries, the United States and Estonia, did the youngest and oldest age groups have high school completion percentages that were not measurably different (89 vs. 90 percent and 86 vs. 87 percent, respectively). Additionally, there were seven other countries where 80 percent or more of 55- to 64-year-olds had completed high school: Switzerland, Norway,

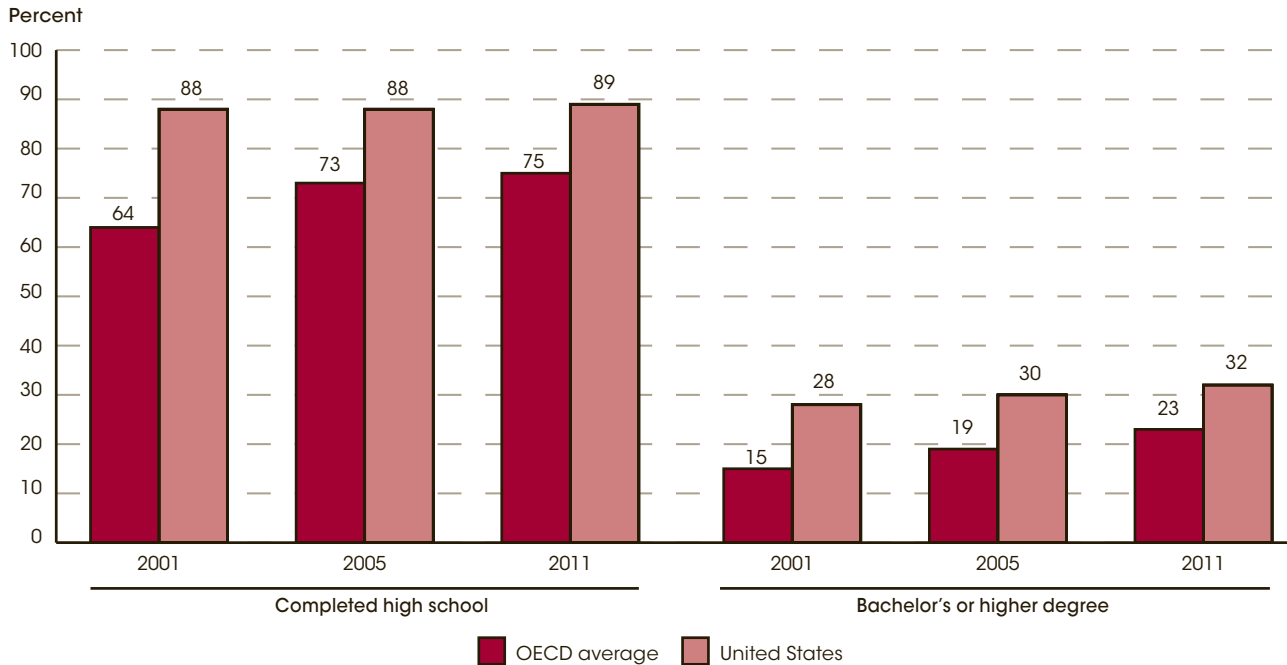
For more information, see the Reader's Guide and the Guide to Sources.

Canada, the Slovak Republic, Germany, the Czech Republic, and Poland.

The same general pattern of higher percentages of the youngest age groups attaining higher levels of education also applied to the attainment of bachelor's degrees in 2011. In OECD countries, a higher percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds than of 55- to 64-year-olds had attained

a bachelor's or higher degree in 2011. On average, 30 percent of 25- to 34-year-olds had a bachelor's degree in 2011, compared with 17 percent of 55- to 64-year-olds. In the United States, 33 percent of 25- to 34-year-olds and 31 percent of 55- to 64-year-olds had a bachelor's or higher degree. The United States had the highest percentage of 55- to 64-year-olds attaining a bachelor's or higher degree in 2011.

**Figure 2. Percentage of the population 25 to 64 years old in Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries who attained selected levels of education: Selected years, 2001, 2005, and 2011**



NOTE: Educational attainment data in this figure refer to degrees classified by the OECD as International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) level 3 for high school and level 5A or 6 for bachelor's or higher degrees. The OECD average refers to the mean of the data values for all reporting OECD countries, to which each country reporting data contributes equally.  
 SOURCE: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Education at a Glance*, 2002, 2007, and 2013. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2013*, tables 603.10 and 603.30.

All countries with data reported that the percentages of 25- to 64-year-olds who had completed a bachelor's degree or higher were higher in 2011 than they were in 2001. The percentages of 25- to 64-year-olds who had completed a high school education were higher in 2011 than they were in 2001, with the exceptions of Denmark, New Zealand, Norway, and Switzerland. The OECD average percentage of the adult population completing a high school education increased 11 percentage points, from 64 percent in 2001 to 75 percent in 2011. The percentage of adults in the United States who had completed high school increased from 88 to 89 percent during this period.

The OECD average percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds with a high school education increased 8 percentage points, from 74 percent in 2001 to 82 percent in 2011. In comparison, there was only a 1-percentage-point increase in the percentage of U.S. young adults with a high school education (88 vs. 89 percent) during this period.

The OECD average percentage of the adult population with a bachelor's or higher degree increased 8 percentage points between 2001 and 2011, from 15 to 23 percent. During the same period, the percentage of U.S. adults with a bachelor's or higher degree increased 4

percentage points, from 28 to 32 percent. Similarly, the OECD average percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds with a bachelor's or higher degree rose from 18 percent in 2001 to 30 percent in 2011, an increase of 11 percentage points. The comparable percentage for young adults in the United States increased 3 percentage points, from 30 to 33 percent. Thus, the relatively larger increases in the bachelor's or higher degree attainment rates for young

adults in many countries compared with the United States were reflected by a decreasing difference between OECD average and U.S. attainment rates. In 2001, there was a 12-percentage-point gap between the OECD average and the United States in the rate of attainment of a bachelor's or higher degree among 25- to 34-year-olds; by 2011, this gap had decreased to 3 percentage points.

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**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2013*, tables 603.10, 603.20, and 603.30

**Glossary:** Bachelor's degree, Educational attainment, High school completer, International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)