

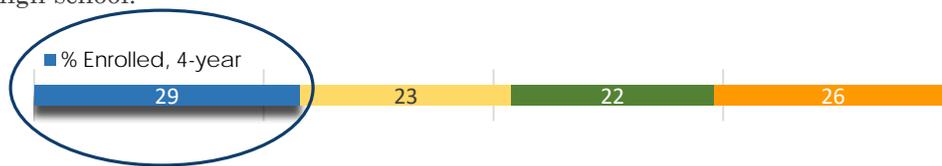
First Fall Four-Year College Enrollees: Earnings and Livable Wages after Six Years

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This brief is the third in BERC's *Launching into Adulthood series*, which examines the trajectories of Baltimore graduates over six years. A partnership with Baltimore's Promise and the Maryland Longitudinal Data System made it possible to examine both college and earnings outcomes for Baltimore City Public Schools (City Schools) graduates. We chose a single class, graduates in 2009, to examine college experiences and workforce activity.

In this brief we focus on the 29% of City Schools graduates who enrolled immediately into a 4-year college the fall after high school.



Graduates Who Enrolled in a 4-Year College in the Fall

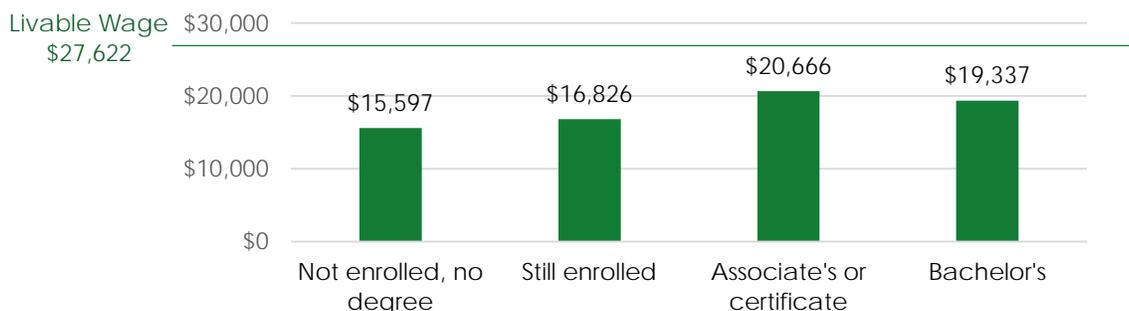
College Completion. After six years, 32% had completed bachelor's degrees with an additional 1% completing associate's degrees. (See Figure 1.) Over one-quarter (28%) were still enrolled. Finally, 39% did not complete a degree and were no longer enrolled, and on average, they remained enrolled for almost three years (34 months). Notably, 88% of all fall 4-year-enrolled graduates worked at least some of the time that they spent enrolled.

Figure 1. Percent of graduates enrolling in 4-year colleges in the fall after high school who completed degrees, were still enrolled, or had left college after six years (class of 2009).



Earnings. The median annual income in year six for graduates who had completed a bachelor's degree was \$19,337. For those with associate's degrees or certificates, it was \$20,666. For graduates who were still enrolled in college, median annual income was \$16,826, and for those who were no longer enrolled but had not completed a degree, median annual income was \$15,597. (See Figure 2.)

Figure 2. Median annual earnings for graduates enrolling in 4-year colleges in the fall after high school, by degree completion status after six years (class of 2009).



Livable Wage. For graduates with bachelor’s degrees who were working in Maryland, 24% were earning a [livable wage](#) after six years. (See Figure 3.) Among those with associate’s degrees, 18% were earning a livable wage. For those who were still enrolled it was 24%, and among those with some college but no degree, 16%. The average share who earned a livable wage across all four groups was 20%.

Figure 3. Percent earning a livable wage among graduates enrolling in 4-year colleges in the fall after high school, by degree completion status after six years (class of 2009).



Conclusions

One-third of students who enrolled in a 4-year college in the fall after graduation had completed a college degree within six years. Nationally, about 54% of first-time 4-year college enrollees complete a degree in the same time frame.ⁱ Yet City Schools graduates are not comparable to peers nationally, as most were eligible for free and reduced-price meals in school. A better comparison shows that between 21% and 29% of 24 year olds from families in the lower half of the income distribution complete degrees,ⁱⁱ in which case Baltimore graduates were just as likely to complete degrees as their peers nationally. Although two-thirds did not have a degree, 28% were still persisting in college.

Just as [for the cohort overall](#), the median annual income for graduates whose highest attainment was an associate’s degree was slightly higher than for those with a bachelor’s. Again, we surmise that attending a 4-year college may have incurred a short-term opportunity cost. Further, the fact that a smaller share of those with associate’s degrees earned a livable wage (18% vs. 24%) suggests that the full range of salaries and wages for those who completed a bachelor’s degree is more favorable. It is important to note that research nationally has found that differences in earnings between those with and without bachelor’s degrees are much smaller at younger ages. At older ages (e.g., age 40-44), however, those with bachelor’s degrees earn substantially more than those without.ⁱⁱⁱ

Future research should explore the college persistence or transfer patterns among those who enrolled and identify high school or college-level factors that prevented students from completing degrees.

For details about the data source and methodology [see Launching into Adulthood Methodology brief](#).

We are grateful for support from Baltimore’s Promise, which allowed BERC to complete this research.

ⁱ National Center for Education Statistics. (2017). [IPEDS] Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System: Graduation and retention rates. Washington, D.C.: IES/NCES.

ⁱⁱ Cahalan, M., & Perna, L. (2015). Indicators of Higher Education Equity in the United States: 45 Year Trend Report. Pell Institute for the Study of Opportunity in Higher Education.

ⁱⁱⁱ Carnevale, A.P., Rose, S.J., Cheah, B. (2013). The college payoff: Education, occupations, lifetime earnings. The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.