

Wages back up push for education

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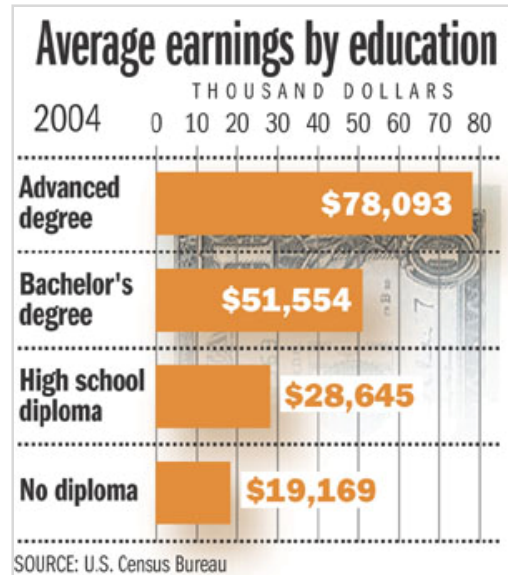
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If you think college costs a bundle, check out this payback:

A bachelor's degree will earn you an average \$51,554, versus the \$28,645 a year you'll fetch with only a high school diploma.

And for those who don't mind finishing a few extra years of college, know this: Advanced-degree holders made an average \$78,093 in 2004.

On the other end are those without a high school diploma, who earned an average \$19,169 a year.



That's according to "Educational Attainment in the United States: 2005," which is part of the U.S. Census Bureau's current population survey. The report was released today.

The message is at the heart of what the Governor's Office and Utah System of Higher Education are trying to tell Utah eighth-graders: Take school seriously, get into college or some kind of post-high school training and support yourself for life. It's called the Utah Scholars program, part of the national State Scholars Initiative, being piloted in Provo, Park City, Granite and Jordan district schools.

"You're not going to be able to support yourself and a family with a high school degree, bottom line. These are low-skilled jobs, and they come and go," Higher Education Commissioner Rich Kendell said. "The only protection from the future is you've got to get an associate's degree or journeyman's training or licensed or skilled ... or into a field of high demand — nursing, pharmacy or accounting — and you'll be a self-sustaining adult."

Utah Scholars encourages students to take four years each of English and math courses, 3 1/2 years of social studies, three years of science and two years of a foreign language. Those who do will be recognized at graduation and may qualify for additional financial aid from the federal government.

"Kids have got to get the message and need to start preparing in the eighth grade — or earlier," Kendell said.

The census report also shows that in Utah:

- 92.5 percent of the population over age 25 report they have at least a high school diploma. That's second highest in the country, behind Minnesota, which posts 92.7 percent. The lowest is Texas, with 78.2 percent.
- 29.8 percent of people over 25 have bachelor's degrees or higher, 16th in the country. The District of Columbia leads with 46.9 percent; West Virginia trails, posting 15.1 percent.

Nationally, the report notes:

- 85 percent of that age group completed at least high school; 28 percent had at least a bachelor's degree.
- Caucasians were most likely to have high school diplomas — 90 percent — compared to 81 percent of blacks and 59 percent of Hispanics.

The Utah State Office of Education has reported similar gaps in achievement. It says it wants to boost ethnic minority graduation rates.

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