

BRIEF 3: DIRECT-TO-CAREER OUTCOMES

Direct-to-career pathways result in lower wages, slower wage growth, and less industry access.

About This Series

To build a clear picture of the opportunities and supports driving economic mobility, the Office of Education Through Employment Pathways (ETEP) is releasing public-facing dashboards and briefs on education and employment outcomes for DC residents who work in the District, attended DC public schools, and participated in District-funded programs. These outcomes reflect residents whose education records could be matched to employment records – meaning the data does not yet include some residents, such as those working for the federal government or outside the District. This series will help District residents, program providers, policymakers, agency leaders, and educators better understand the impact of education and workforce programs on residents' employment outcomes.

About This Brief

This analysis examines employment outcomes for DC public high school graduates based on whether they pursued postsecondary education or **went directly into a career**, tracking median annual wages and employment stability across six years after expected graduation.

Key Finding 1

Early wage levels for direct-to-career individuals are soon outpaced by the accelerating growth seen among their peers with degrees.

Direct-to-career students start at a median annual wage of **\$19,400** one year after high school graduation. Wages then stay largely flat, growing by only about **\$1,700** a year on average and reaching just **\$29,234** by six years after graduation.

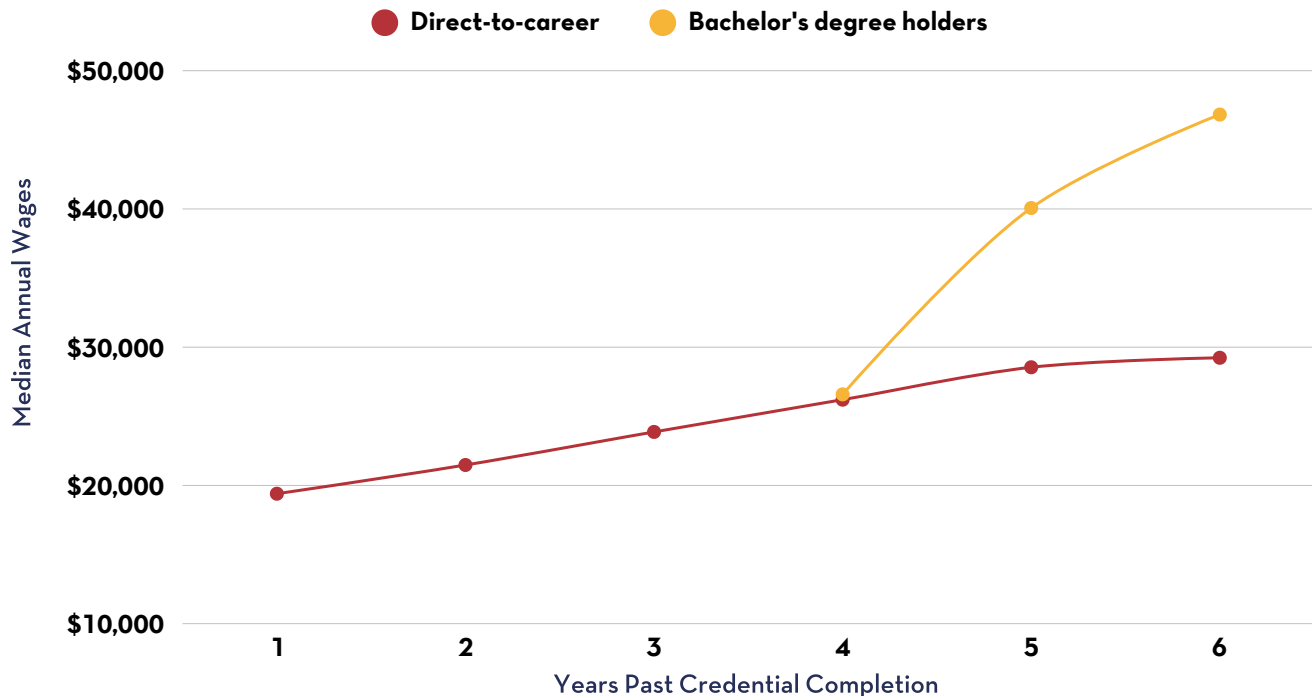
Bachelor's degree holders, by contrast, see accelerating growth – rising from **\$26,586** four years after expected high school graduation to **\$46,828** at six years.



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Median Annual Wages in Years Past Expected High School Graduation



Key Finding 2

Direct-to-career individuals **remain concentrated in lower-wage industries**, and gains in employment stability **lag behind** credentialed peers.

Direct-to-career individuals are concentrated in lower-wage industries – including Administrative & Support, Waste Management & Remediation Services, and Accommodation & Food Services – where median wages for workers without a college credential range from **\$22,634 to \$37,568**.

Direct-to-career individuals also experience less employment stability than their credentialed peers, starting at **62%** one year after high school and reaching only **73%** by six years – an **11-point gain** over five years.

By comparison, **83%–86%** of associate's and bachelor's degree holders achieve employment stability by year six.



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Additional Context



“Employment stability” is defined in this analysis as an individual having earnings across three consecutive quarters, based on data from employment records. Earnings that are not available through this source (e.g., federal employment, self-employment) do not appear in this dataset.



Definitions of industries in this analysis:

- Retail Trade: Sale of goods and services directly to consumers.
 - Examples: Clothing stores, electronics retailers, grocery stores
- Administrative & Support, Waste Management, & Remediation Services: Routine support activities for the day-to-day operations of other organizations.
 - Examples: Employment agencies, janitorial services, waste collection
- Accommodation & Food Services: Provision of lodging and/or meals, snacks, and beverages for immediate consumption.
 - Examples: Hotels, restaurants, cafes

Explore the Dashboard

Use the interactive dashboards to explore these findings.

Key Finding 1:

Median Annual Wages Among Those Who Pursue Postsecondary Education

[LINK](#)

Key Finding 2:

Industries of Employment Among Those Who Pursue Post-Secondary Education 6 Years After Expected High School Graduation

[LINK](#)

Stable Employment Rate Among Those Who Pursue Postsecondary Education

[LINK](#)

Employed Individuals by Education Level 6 Years After High School Graduation

[LINK](#)