

BRIEF 5: POSTSECONDARY DEGREE OUTCOMES

Postsecondary degree holders see stronger employment outcomes over time.

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 earn a postsecondary degree**, tracking median annual wages and employment stability rates across six years after expected high school graduation.

Key Finding 1

Across all postsecondary degree types, college graduates out-earn direct-to-career peers beginning four years after expected high school graduation, establishing a consistent postsecondary wage premium.

This trend is supported by the DC Alumni Early Career Outcomes Survey (May 2025), which indicated that among DC public school alumni: **65%** of those with a bachelor's degree earn a living wage, compared to **29%** of alumni who only completed career education or apprenticeships, and **17%** of alumni who only completed high school.

This earnings premium is particularly strong for students classified as economically disadvantaged: those with an associate's degree out-earn direct-to-career peers by about **\$13,000 at three years** after expected high school graduation – a gap that grows to about **\$20,000 by five years** after graduation.

Among economically disadvantaged students, bachelor's degree holders earn a median wage of **\$48,160** six years after expected high school graduation, compared to **\$28,962** for those who went directly into careers – a gap of more than **\$1,500 per month**.

Key Finding 2

Postsecondary degree attainment is also associated with **greater employment stability over time.**

By six years after expected high school graduation, **85%–86%** of both associate’s degree holders and bachelor’s degree holders have achieved employment stability.

By comparison, only **73%** of those who went directly into careers achieve employment stability by six years after expected high school graduation.

Additional Context



"Employment stability" is defined in this analysis as an individual having earnings across three consecutive quarters, based on data from employment records.



"Living wage" refers to the MIT Living Wage Calculator's estimate for a single adult with no dependents living in DC – approximately \$55,587 annually.



[DC Alumni Early Career Outcomes Survey](#): To understand the post-high school experience of young people who graduate from the District’s public and public charter school system, ETEP conducted the Alumni Early Career Outcomes Survey, which asked questions about education, employment, and quality-of-life outcomes for recent alumni. The survey focused specifically on alumni five to seven years after high school graduation, meaning they graduated in the classes of 2017-2019.



Across all postsecondary degree types, median wages for college graduates surpass those of direct-to-career peers beginning four years after expected high school graduation, establishing a consistent postsecondary wage premium overall. This premium does not hold uniformly across industries, however – see Brief 8: “Industries where wages remain flat even with additional educational attainment” for an analysis of these flat-wage industries.

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:

Stable Employment Rate Among Those Who Pursue Postsecondary Education

[LINK](#)