

BRIEF 8: FLAT-WAGE INDUSTRIES

Industries where wages remain flat even with additional educational attainment.

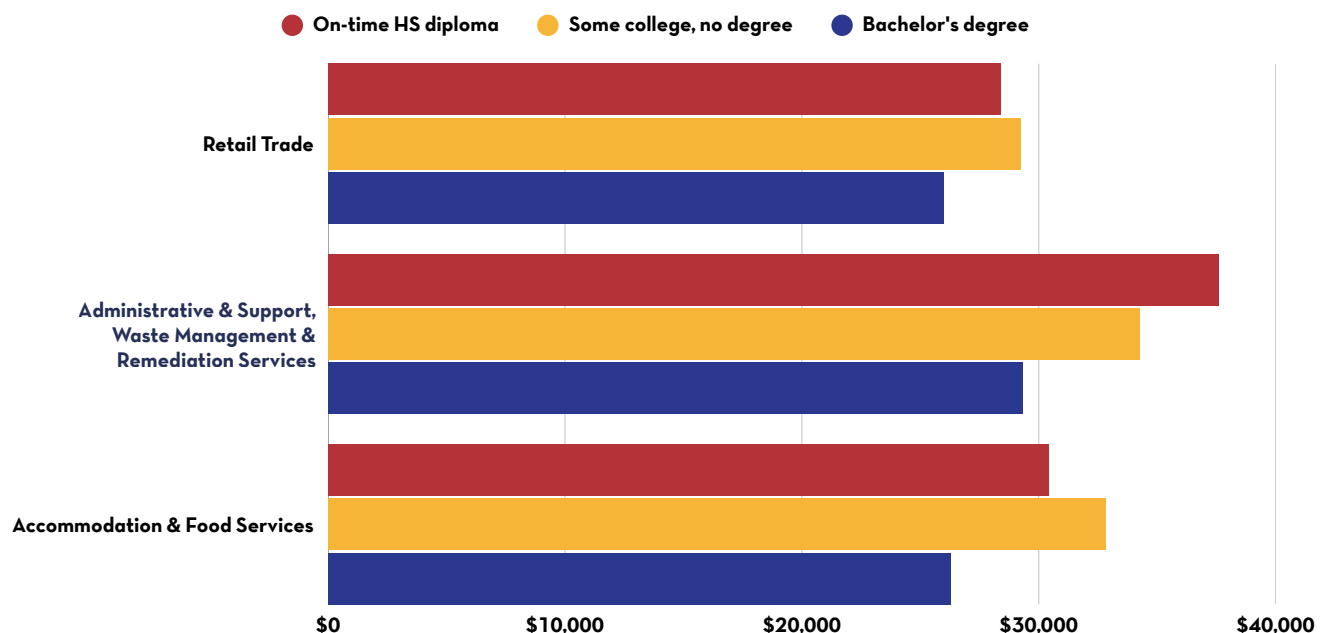
About This Series

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 **wages by educational attainment for former DC public high school students in three common industries – Retail Trade; Administrative & Support, Waste Management, & Remediation Services; and Accommodation & Food Services**. In these industries, more education isn't linked to higher pay: earnings stay relatively flat across attainment levels, suggesting work experience, tenure, and occupational advancement may matter more for wage growth than formal education alone.

Median Earnings By Highest Educational Attainment





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Key Finding 1

In Administrative & Support, Waste Management, & Remediation Services, **wages do not rise** with additional education – and may even decline.

Graduates whose highest credential is an on-time high school diploma earn a median of **\$37,568** in this industry.

Those with some college but no degree earn **\$34,245** – less than high school diploma holders in the same industry.

Bachelor's degree holders working in this industry earn just **\$29,294** – the lowest of the three groups, and roughly **22% less** than high school diploma holders in the same field.

Key Finding 2

Accommodation & Food Services shows a similar but slightly distinct pattern: Individuals see modest gains from some college, yet **earn among the lowest wages** in the sector for bachelor's degree holders.

On-time high school diploma holders in this industry earn median wages of **\$30,416**.

Some college with no degree yields only an **8% increase** over the high school diploma baseline, at **\$32,802**.

Bachelor's degree holders earn **\$26,290** in this industry.

Key Finding 3

Retail Trade follows the same pattern as Accommodation & Food Services, with a **small earnings advantage** for some college, but lower earnings for bachelor's degree holders than on-time high school completers.

On-time high school diploma holders in this industry earn median wages of **\$28,400**.

Some college leads to less than a **\$1,000** increase in earnings, at **\$29,212**.

Bachelor's degree holders earn **\$25,996**, among the lowest wages of any credential level or industry in this analysis.

Additional Context



Time and experience in an industry may matter as much as, or more than, educational attainment. This data reflects wages six years after expected high school graduation, when associate's and bachelor's degree holders have only recently entered the workforce after finishing school – their wages may rise within these industries as they gain more time in them. More years of data could help answer this question.



For analyses of DC's rising-wage industries and how many DC public high school alumni these industries employ, see Briefs 7 "Industries where additional educational attainment translates into higher wages." and 9 "DC alumni are employed most often by industries that do not reward additional educational attainment."



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, 2, and 3:

Employed Individuals by Education Level 6 Years After High School Graduation

[LINK](#)