

² In the survey coding structure, the level designations among various occupations are not synonymous: for example, the first level of attorneys equates to the third levels of engineers, accountants, and most other professional and administrative occupations. Classification of employees in the occupations and work levels surveyed is based on factors detailed in definitions which are available upon request.

³ For a broader-based picture of wage and compensation trends in the United States, see the *Employment Cost Index*, a BLS quarterly news release.

What happened to the high school class of 1985?

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Almost 3.3 million youths either graduated from high school or dropped out between October 1984 and 1985.¹ The proportion of graduates who enrolled in college set a record.² Graduates who did not attend college were typically in the labor force, and their unemployment rate was 11 percentage points lower than the 36-percent rate recorded for those who dropped out of high school and entered the labor force. The differing labor market experiences for these three groups highlight the fact that youth with educational deficiencies typically encounter work-related problems which may last for the rest of their lives.

Going on to college

Reflecting the declining school-age population of the "baby-bust" generation, the high school graduating class of 1985 was smaller than those in recent years. A total of 2.7 million young people graduated from high school, down half a million from the peak reached in the mid-1970's. (See table 1.) Despite the smaller number, the proportion of seniors going on to college has been rising gradually over the past few years. It reached a record 58 percent in 1985, after hovering between 50 and 55 percent for most of the 1970's and early 1980's. (See table 2.)

Sex. In recent years, college enrollment rates for men and women just out of high school have drawn closer together, eliminating the wide differences that existed in the early 1970's. By 1985, enrollment rates for men and women were 59 and 57 percent, respectively. The rate for men had returned to the high levels recorded during the early 1970's—the tail end of the Vietnam-era's military draft—while that for women was at its highest level ever.

Once enrolled in college, men and women have roughly the same labor force participation rates—around 44 percent. Despite substantial increases in tuition and other college expenses, this overall participation rate has changed little

since the late 1970's. Grants, loans, family contributions, and summer earnings have continued to enable a majority of full-time students to stay out of the labor force during the school year.³ (See table 3.)

Race. A large gap still exists in the proportion of black and white high school graduates who go on to college. In October 1985, the proportion of enrolled black seniors was 42 percent, compared with 59 percent for whites. Despite some improvement over the last few years, the black proportion was still well below their 46- to 48-percent range during the 1970's.

Large differences by race also persist with regard to labor force participation. Only 31 percent of the black college enrollees were in the labor force, compared with almost 47 percent of the whites. One reason for this difference was that a higher proportion of black students were enrolled in 2-year institutions, which are, on average, less expensive than 4-year colleges and universities.⁴

Not going on to college

About 1.1 million members of the class of 1985 did not enroll in college. Their overall rate of labor force participation was 82 percent, somewhat lower than that prevailing during the past decade. Participation rates for men in this category were higher than those for women, and rates for whites were higher than those for blacks and Hispanics.

The incidence of unemployment for these high school graduates in the labor force has drifted upward during the 1980's. In 1985, about 1 of 4 were looking for work, compared with around 1 of 6 during the 1970's. Thus, despite a shrinking youth population and less competition for entry-level positions, young people who end their formal education with a high school diploma still have a hard time finding jobs. In part, this may result from the increasing demands of employers for better educated workers, given the higher educational level of the work force and a surplus of college graduates in some fields.⁵

High school dropouts

A total of 612,000 youths dropped out of high school between October 1984 and 1985. This was about the same number as in the previous 2 years, but lower than in the 1970's, reflecting mainly the declining teenage population.

Male dropouts were much more likely to be labor force participants than the women, a fourth of whom had family responsibilities. One study showed that many of the young women who dropped out of high school as sophomores in 1980 gave such family-related reasons as marriage or plans to marry (31 percent), pregnancy (23 percent), and the need to support a family (8 percent).⁶

Leaving school before graduation particularly affects the labor force participation of black youth. While 72 percent of the white dropouts were in the labor force, only 52 percent

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Table 1. School enrollment and labor force status of 1985 high school graduates and 1984-85 school dropouts 16 to 24 years old by sex, race, and Hispanic origin, October 1985
[Numbers in thousands]

Characteristic	Civilian noninstitutional population	Civilian labor force				
		Number	Participation rate	Employed	Unemployed	
					Number	Percent of labor force
Total, 1985 high school graduates	2,666	1,610	60.4	1,292	318	19.8
Men	1,286	785	61.0	626	159	20.3
Women	1,380	825	59.8	666	159	19.3
White	2,241	1,383	61.7	1,177	206	14.9
Black	333	191	57.4	95	96	50.3
Hispanic origin	141	86	61.0	61	25	29.1
Enrolled in college	1,539	683	44.4	593	90	13.2
Men	754	327	43.4	280	47	14.4
Women	785	356	45.4	313	43	12.1
Full-time students	1,418	577	40.7	494	83	14.4
Part-time students	122	106	86.9	99	7	6.6
White	1,332	620	46.5	552	68	11.0
Black	141	44	31.2	29	15	(2)
Hispanic origin	72	37	(2)	32	5	(2)
Not enrolled in college	1,127	927	82.3	699	228	24.6
Men	532	458	86.1	346	112	24.5
Women	595	469	78.8	353	116	24.7
White	909	763	83.9	625	138	18.1
Black	192	147	76.6	66	81	55.1
Hispanic origin	69	49	(2)	29	20	(2)
Total, 1984-85 high school dropouts ¹	612	413	67.5	266	147	35.6
Men	321	261	81.3	163	98	37.5
Women	291	152	52.2	103	49	32.2
Single	220	117	53.2	78	39	33.3
Other marital status	72	36	(2)	26	10	(2)
White	458	330	72.1	214	116	35.2
Black	132	69	52.3	39	30	(2)
Hispanic origin	106	73	68.9	40	33	(2)

¹ Data refer to persons who dropped out of school between October 1984 and October 1985. In addition, 80,000 persons 14 and 15 years old dropped out of school during this period.
² Data not shown where base is less than 75,000.

NOTE: Detail for the above race and Hispanic-origin groups will not sum to totals because data for the "other races" group are not presented and Hispanics are included in both the white and black population groups. Because of rounding, sums of individual items may not equal totals.

of the black dropouts were. This was a much wider spread than for the graduates not enrolled in college.

Reflecting their relatively low skill and experience levels, recent dropouts have extremely high unemployment rates, nearly 36 percent in 1985. This jobseeking rate has averaged 35 percent thus far in the 1980's, compared with a 27-percent average in the 1970's. In this respect, the jobless picture for dropouts has paralleled the upturn in the unemployment rate for workers in general, although at much

higher levels.

Not surprisingly, dropouts also tend to come from families with lower income levels than high school graduates. For example, just 16 percent of dropouts are members of families with annual incomes of more than \$30,000, compared with 31 percent of high school graduates not enrolled in college, and 56 percent of high school graduates enrolled in college.

Looking down the road at adulthood, the earnings situation can be bleak for those who do not complete high school. As shown below, median earnings for high school dropouts who work all year at full-time jobs lag behind their better-educated peers throughout their working lives.

Table 2. Percent of recent high school graduates 16 to 24 years old enrolled in college, by year of graduation, sex, and race, selected years, October 1970-85
[Numbers in thousands]

Year	Total graduates	Percent enrolled in college				
		Total	Men	Women	White	Black ¹
1970	2,757	52	55	49	52	48
1975	3,186	51	53	49	51	46
1980	3,089	49	47	52	50	43
1981	3,053	54	55	53	55	43
1982	3,100	51	49	52	52	37
1983	2,964	53	52	53	55	39
1984	3,012	55	56	54	58	40
1985	2,669	58	59	57	59	42

¹ Data prior to 1977 refer to black and other workers.

	Age 16 to 24	Age 25 to 64
Total, year-round, full-time median earnings, 1984	\$11,537	\$20,752
Less than 4 years of high school	9,551	14,776
4 years of high school	11,331	18,350
1 to 3 years of college	11,897	21,079
4 years or more of college	16,470	27,777

The exceptionally high unemployment rates and poor earnings prognosis for dropouts suggest that a lack of liter-

Table 3. Labor force status of recent high school graduates and dropouts 16 to 24 years old, selected years, October 1970-85

[Numbers in thousands]

Year	High school graduates						High school dropouts		
	Enrolled in college			Not enrolled in college			Civilian labor force	Labor force participation rate ¹	Unemployment rate ²
	Civilian labor force	Labor force participation rate ¹	Unemployment rate ²	Civilian labor force	Labor force participation rate ¹	Unemployment rate ²			
1970	509	35.7	16.1	1,027	77.2	18.1	427	60.0	25.5
1975	641	39.7	11.7	1,281	81.2	19.9	462	62.6	34.0
1980	662	43.4	12.5	1,339	85.0	19.0	485	63.8	31.5
1985	683	44.4	13.2	927	82.3	24.6	413	67.5	35.6

¹ Labor force as a percent of population.

² Unemployed as a percent of labor force.

acy is a serious problem for unemployed youth. The study by the National Center for Education Statistics shows that about one-third of the the sophomores who had dropped out of high school reported their reason as poor grades, or that "school was not for me."⁷

—FOOTNOTES—

¹ Data in this report are derived primarily from information collected in the October 1985 Current Population Survey (CPS), conducted and tabulated for the Bureau of Labor Statistics by the Bureau of the Census. Most data relate to persons 16 to 24 years of age in the civilian noninstitutional population in the week ending Oct. 12, 1985. Because it is a sample survey, estimates derived from the CPS may differ from the actual counts that could be obtained from a complete census. Therefore, small estimates or small differences between estimates should be interpreted with caution. For further information on sampling reliability, see *Students, Graduates, and Dropouts, October 1980-82*, Bulletin 2192 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1983).

For the most recent report on this topic, see Anne McDougall Young, "Fewer students in work force as school age population declines," *Monthly Labor Review*, July 1984, pp. 34-37.

² Figures for recent high school graduates 16 to 24 years old and enrolled in college include only those in schools that grant academic degrees. However, there are sizable numbers of students in "special schools," offering business, health, trades, technology, and cosmetology programs, among others. The U.S. Department of Education estimates that there were 1.8 million 16- to 24-year-olds in these schools in 1982. For further information, see *Participants in Postsecondary Education: October 1982*, Bulletin 84-309 (National Center for Education Statistics, November 1984).

³ See *Packaging of Grants, Loans, and Earnings for Financing Postsecondary Education*, Bulletin 83-220b (National Center for Education Statistics, February 1984), pp. 1-6.

⁴ For additional information on school enrollment by race and data on tuition and other costs, see *Digest of Education Statistics, 1985-86* (Center for Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, 1986), pp. 109 and 158.

⁵ Jon Sargent, "An Improving Job Market for College Graduates: The 1986 Update of Projections to 1995," *Occupational Outlook Quarterly*, Summer 1986, pp. 3-7.

⁶ Samuel S. Peng, *High School Dropouts: Descriptive Information from High School and Beyond*, Bulletin 83-221b (National Center for Education Statistics, November 1983), pp. 1-9.

⁷ Peng, *High School Dropouts*, pp. 4-6.