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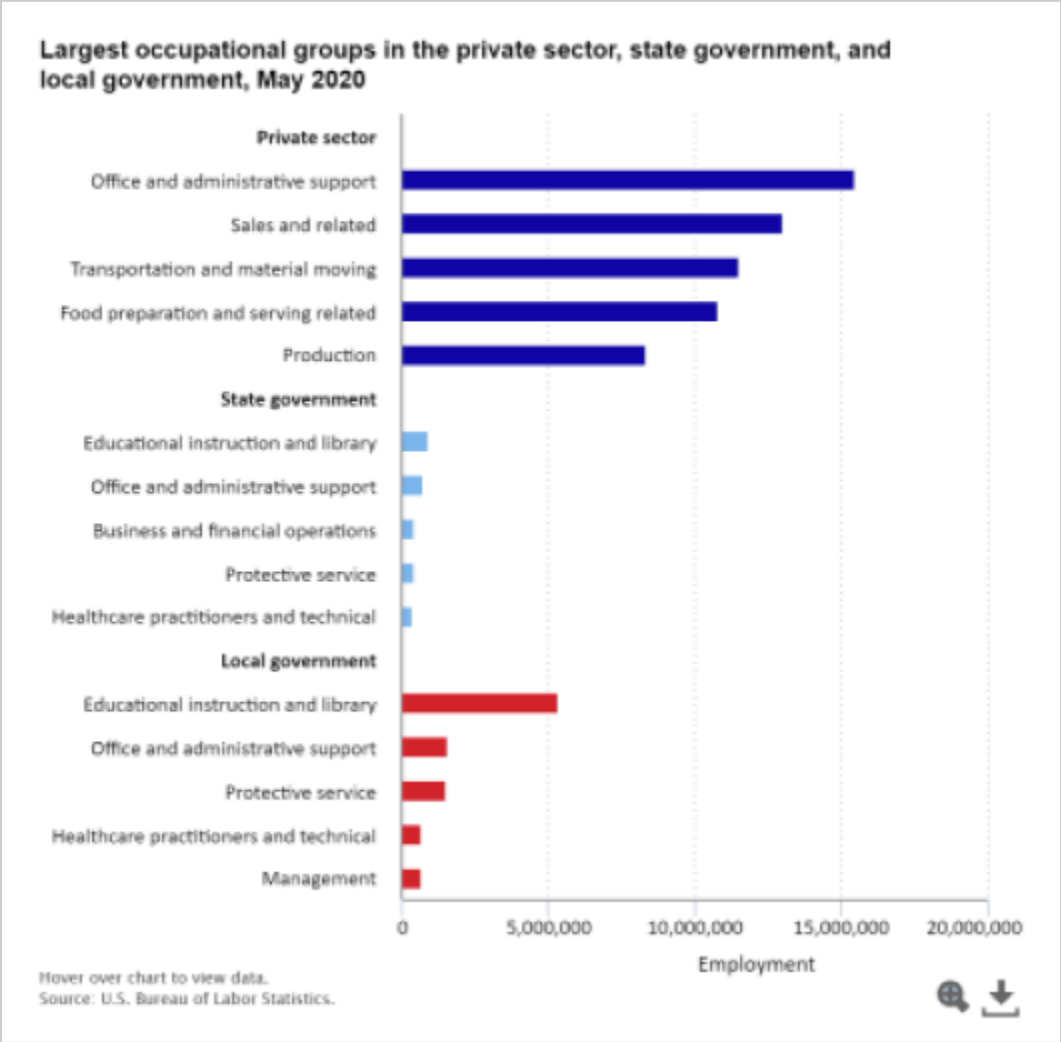
# Occupational Employment And Wages In State And Local Government

**Audrey Watson**

During the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, job losses in large private sector industries such as food services and drinking places received a lot of attention. State and local government also had high job losses. From March 2020 to March 2021, employment fell by 5.1 percent in state government and 6.5 percent in local government, compared with a 4.3-percent decrease in the private sector. The types of jobs in state and local government differ from those in the private sector, as do wages. This Spotlight on Statistics compares the occupational mix and wages in the private sector, state government, and local government.

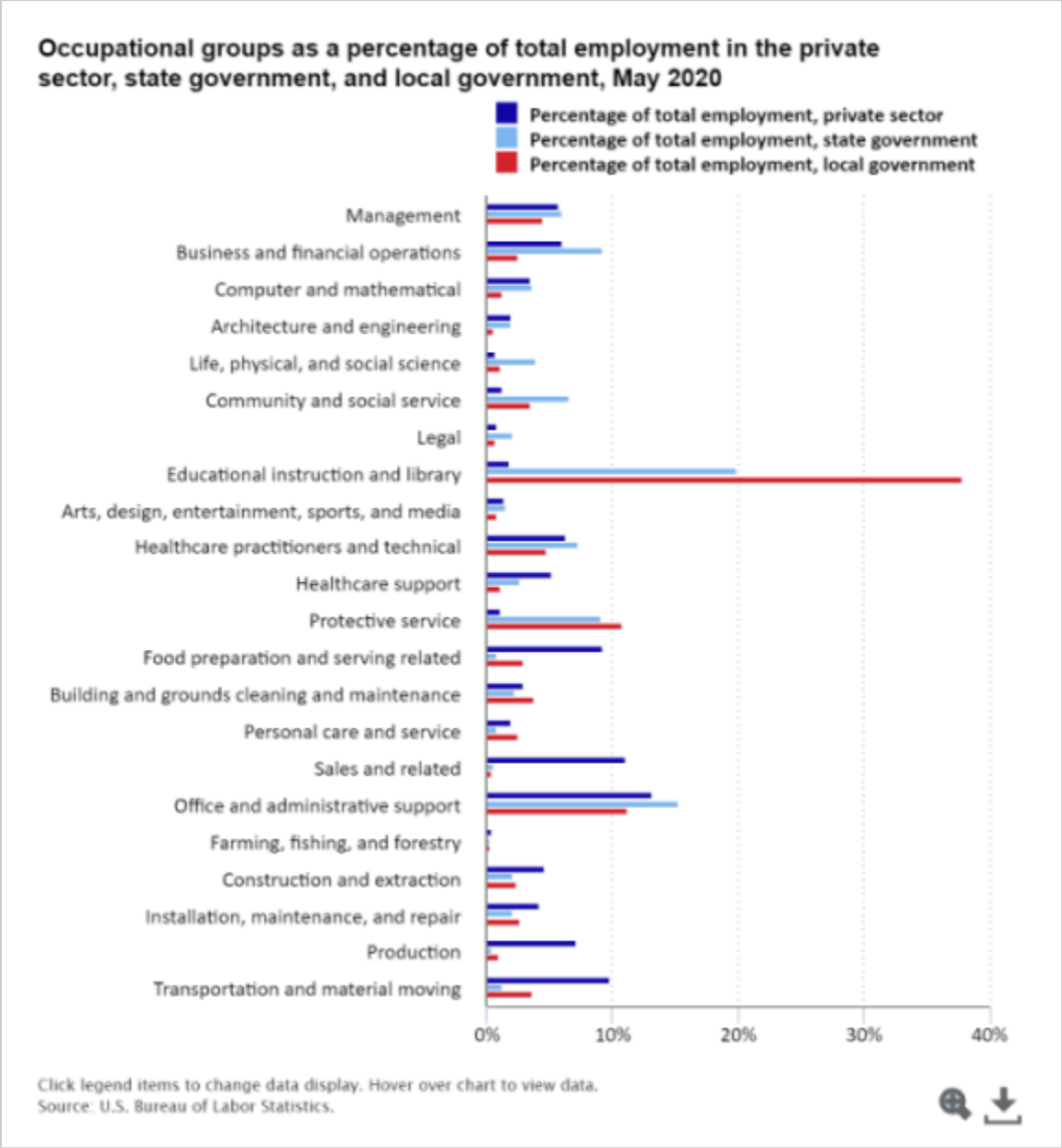
# Educational instruction and library was the largest occupational group in state and local government

There were nearly 118 million private sector jobs in May 2020, representing 85 percent of U.S. employment. State government had 4.6 million jobs (3.3 percent) and local government had 14.1 million jobs (10.1 percent). Office and administrative support (15.5 million), sales and related (13.0 million), and transportation and material moving (11.5 million) were the largest occupational groups in the private sector. Educational instruction and library was the largest occupational group in both state government (917,480) and local government (5.3 million), followed by office and administrative support (703,020 in state government and 1.6 million in local government). Protective service was the third-largest occupational group in local government with 1.5 million jobs and was among the largest occupational groups in state government (416,640) in May 2020.



# Educational instruction and library occupations made up over a third of local government jobs

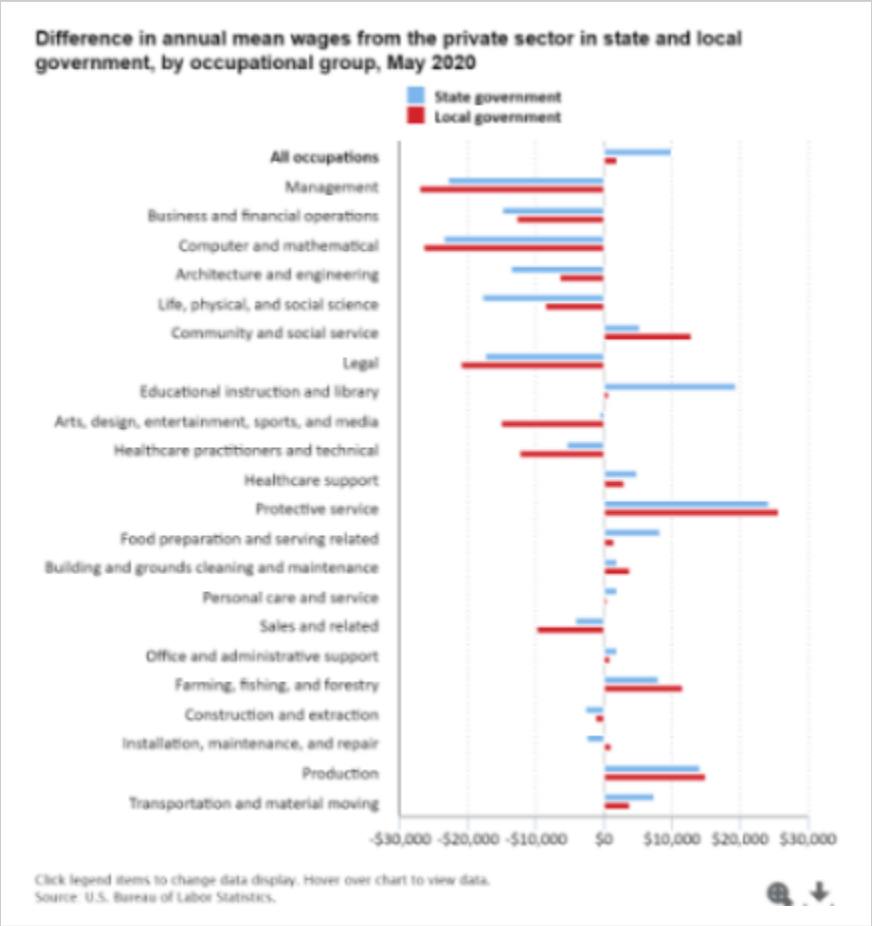
Educational instruction and library occupations made up 20 percent of state government employment and nearly 38 percent of local government employment, compared with less than 2 percent of private sector employment. State and local government also had higher shares of protective service and community and social service occupations than the private sector in May 2020. Sales and related, food preparation and serving related, production, and transportation and material moving occupations accounted for a greater proportion of employment in the private sector than in state and local government. Life, physical, and social science occupations made up less than 1 percent of jobs in the private sector, but nearly 4 percent of employment in state government.



# Higher state and local government wages reflect differences in occupational mix

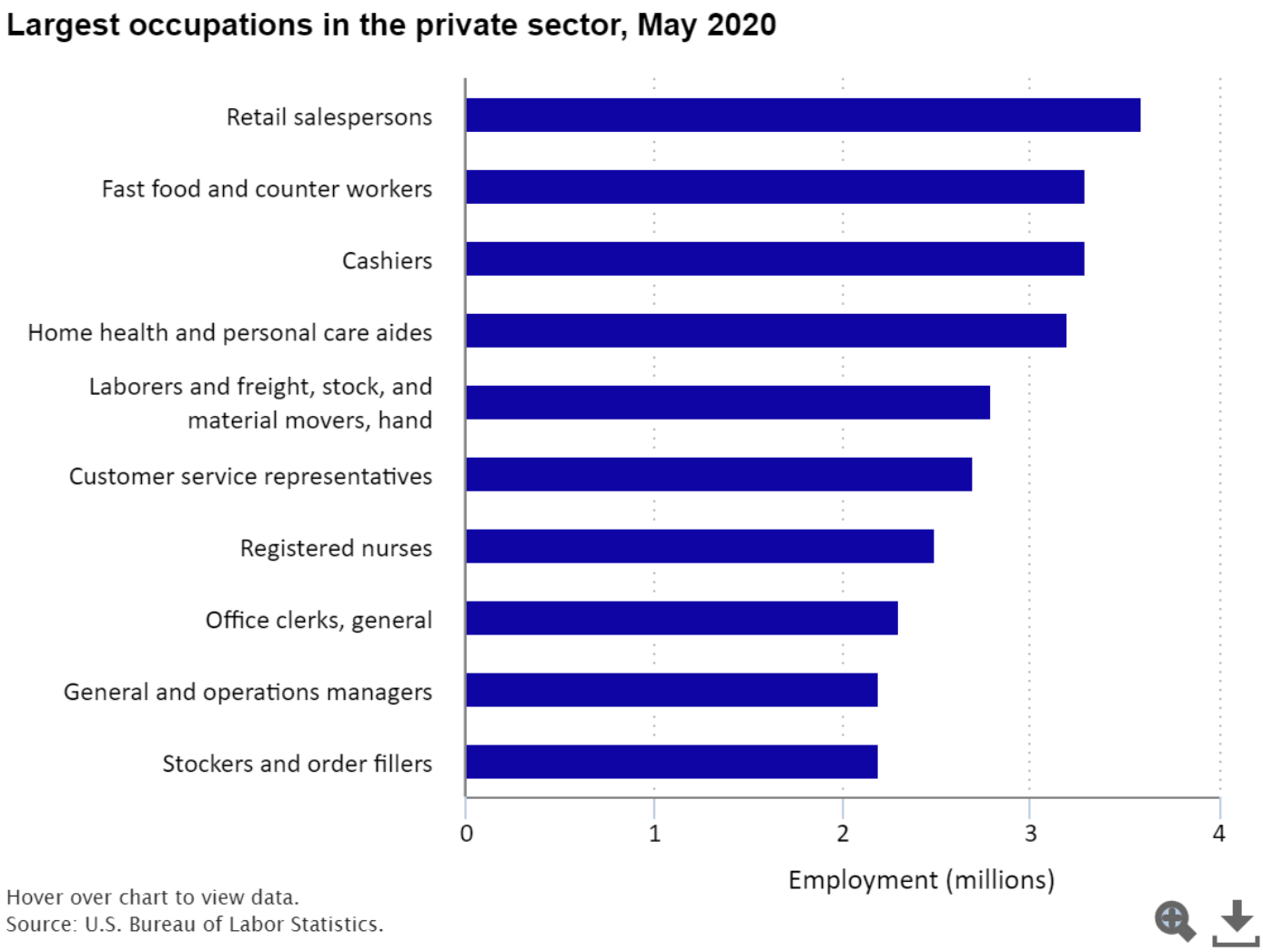
In May 2020, annual mean wages were $9,980 higher in state government than in the private sector, while annual mean wages in local government were $1,980 above the private sector. The higher average wage in state and local government largely reflects differences in the occupational mix, including higher shares of occupations that typically require postsecondary education for entry, rather than higher wages for individual occupations. Compared with the private sector, state and local government had lower mean wages for high-paying occupational groups such as management, legal, and computer and mathematical occupations, and also smaller employment shares of low-paying groups such as food preparation and serving related and healthcare support occupations.

Wage differences for the groups also reflect differences in the mix of detailed occupations within the group. For example, higher wages for protective service occupations in state and local government can be attributed to the fact that law enforcement workers made up the majority of protective service employment in the public sector, while security guards made up three-quarters of protective service employment in the private sector. The large wage difference for educational instruction and library occupations in state government reflects the fact that state government had a much higher share of postsecondary teachers.



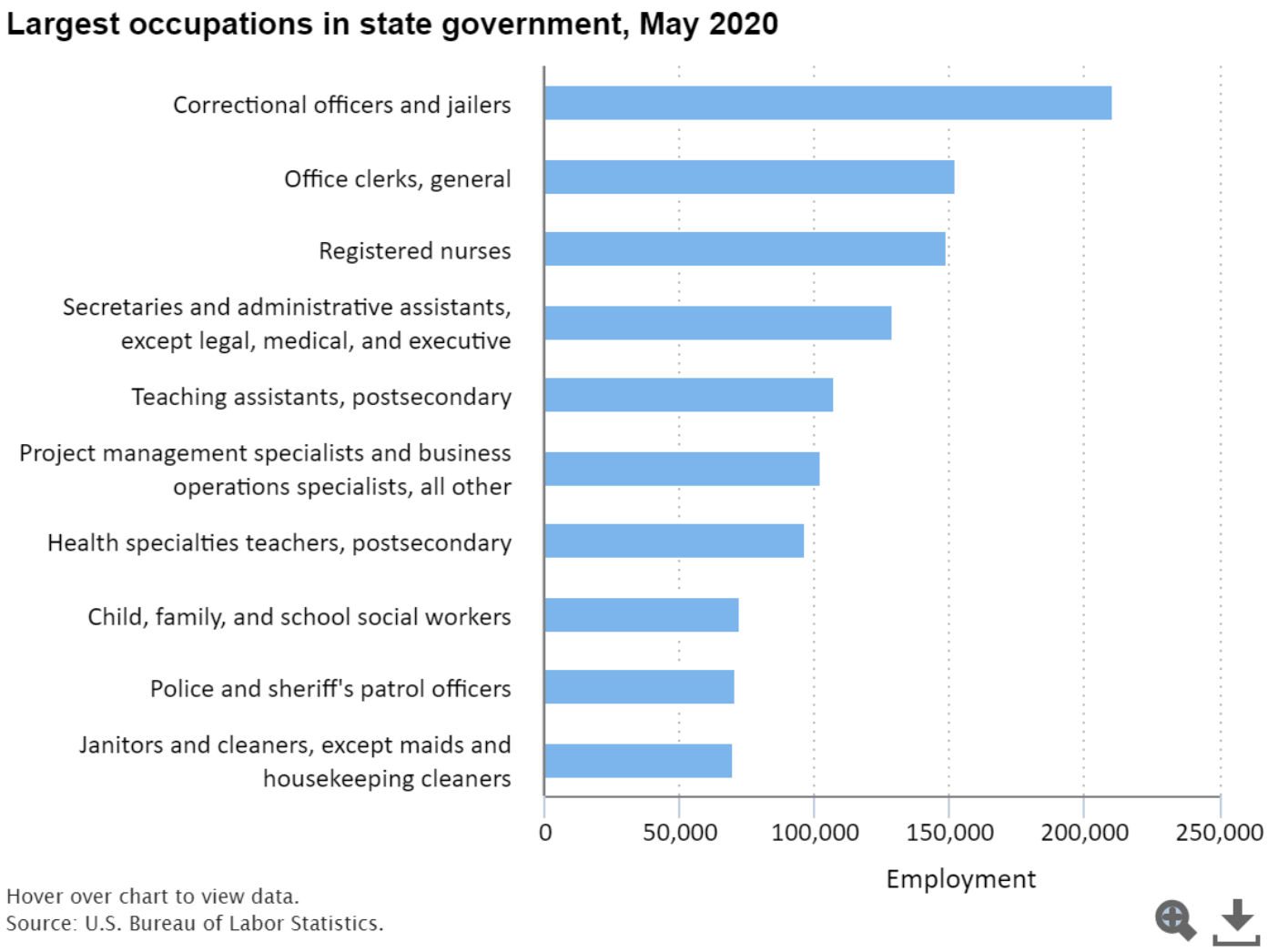
## Retail salespersons was the largest private sector occupation

Retail salespersons (3.6 million) was the largest occupation in the private sector in May 2020, followed by fast food and counter workers (3.3 million), cashiers (3.3 million), and home health and personal care aides (3.2 million). The 10 largest private sector occupations made up nearly a quarter of total employment in the private sector. Only 2 of the 10—registered nurses and general and operations managers—had annual mean wages above the U.S. average of $56,310; these are also the only two that typically require postsecondary education for entry.



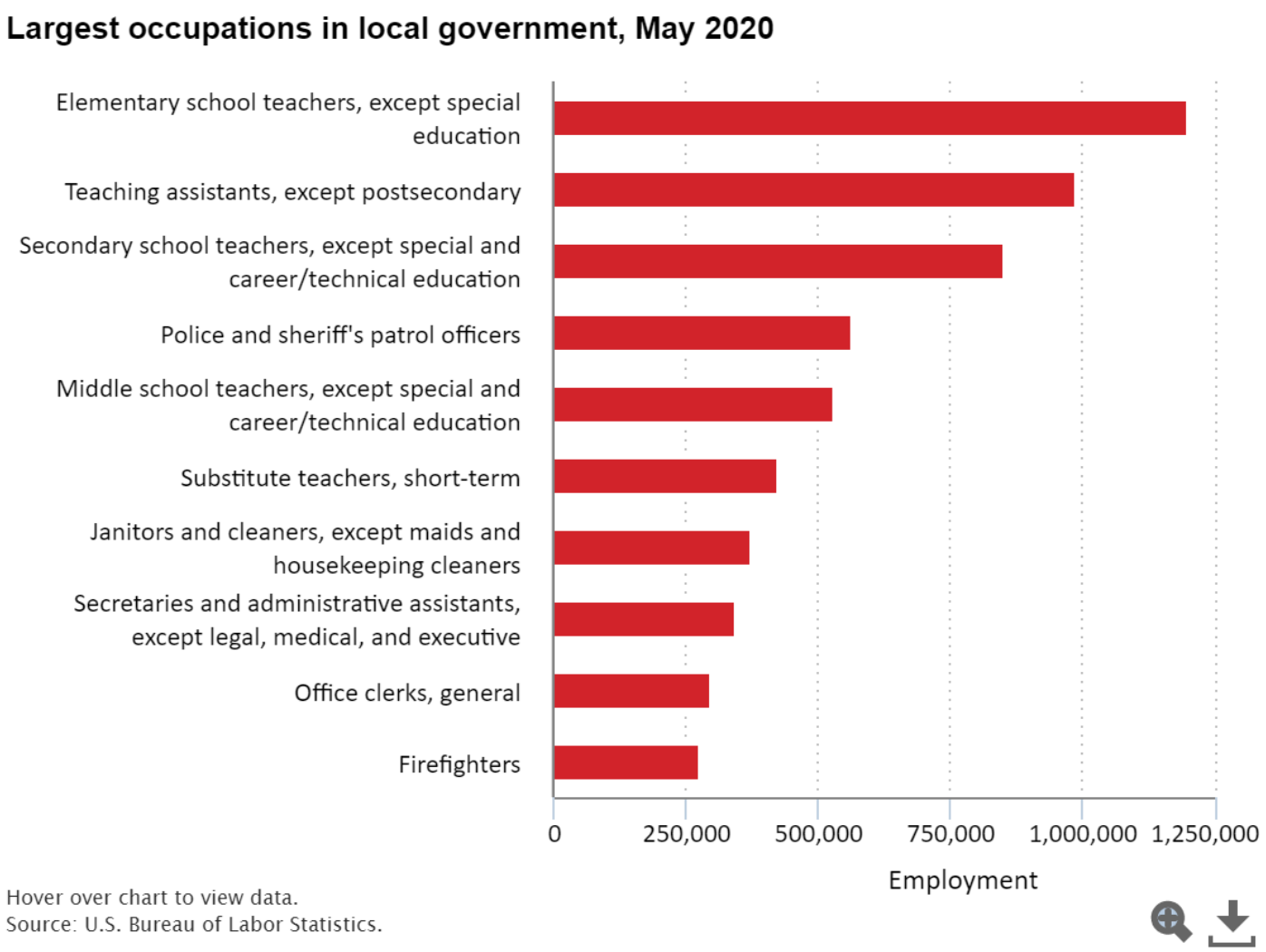
## Correctional officers and jailers was the largest occupation in state government

Correctional officers and jailers (210,500) was the largest occupation in state government in May 2020. The largest state government occupations also included two related to postsecondary education—postsecondary teaching assistants (107,370) and postsecondary health specialties teachers (96,560)—as well as child, family, and school social workers (72,420) and police and sheriff's patrol officers (71,010). Similar to the private sector, the 10 largest state government occupations made up about 25 percent of total state government employment. Four of the 10 largest state government occupations had above-average wages: postsecondary health specialties teachers (which typically requires a doctoral or professional degree for entry); registered nurses and project management specialists and business operations specialists, all other (both typically requiring a bachelor's degree); and police and sheriff's patrol officers (which typically require a high school diploma or equivalent).



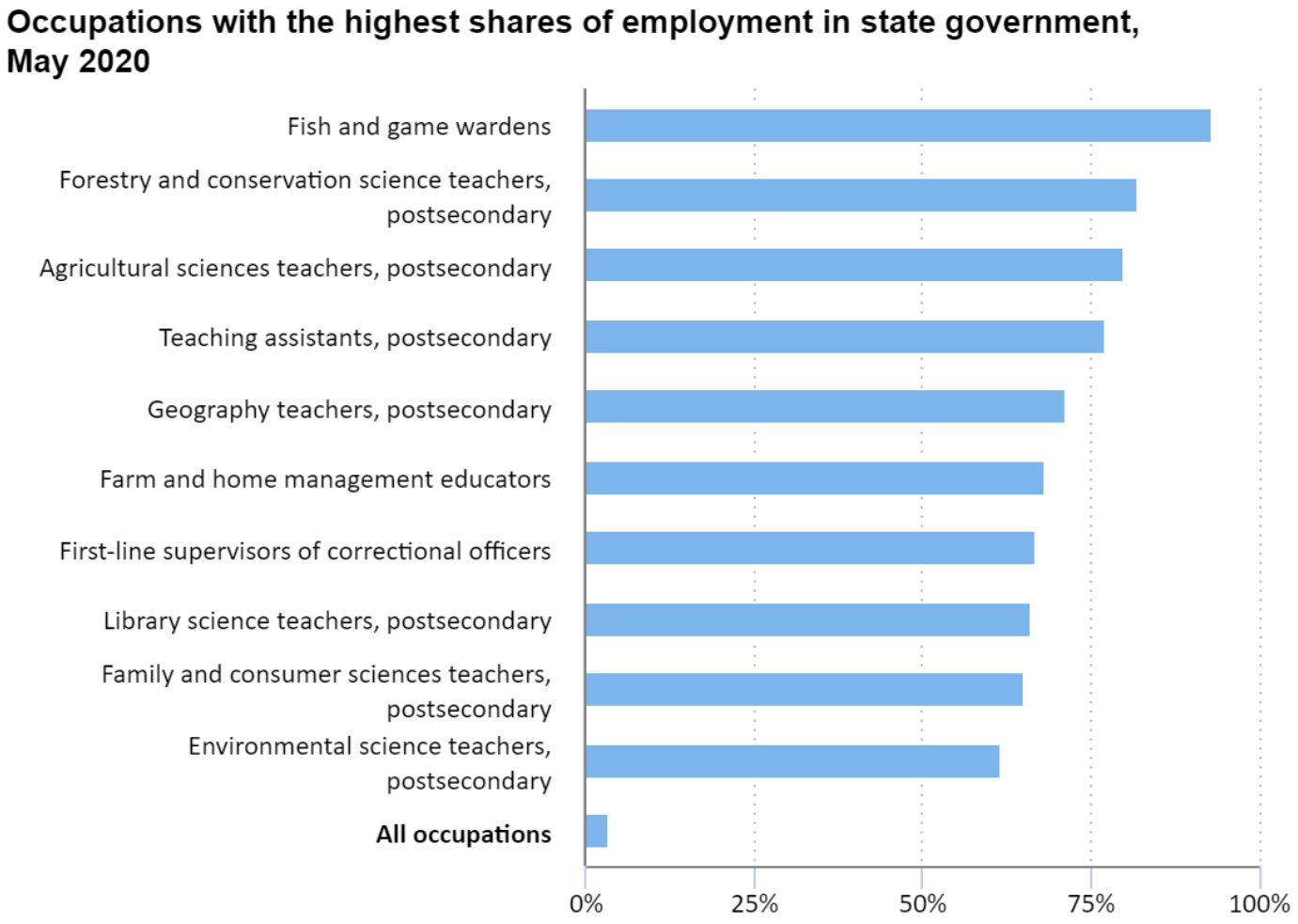
# Teachers and teaching assistants were the largest occupations in local government

The largest occupations in local government were dominated by teachers and teaching assistants in May 2020. Elementary school teachers, except special education (1.2 million) was the largest occupation in local government, followed by teaching assistants, except postsecondary (986,790) and secondary school teachers, except special and career/technical education (850,200). Police and sheriff's patrol officers (563,940) was the largest local government occupation not related to education. The 10 occupations shown made up 42 percent of local government employment. Five of the 10 had mean wages above the U.S. average of $56,310, including elementary, middle, and secondary school teachers (which typically require a bachelor's degree for entry); firefighters (which typically require a postsecondary nondegree award); and police and sheriff's patrol officers.



## Several postsecondary teaching occupations were concentrated in state government

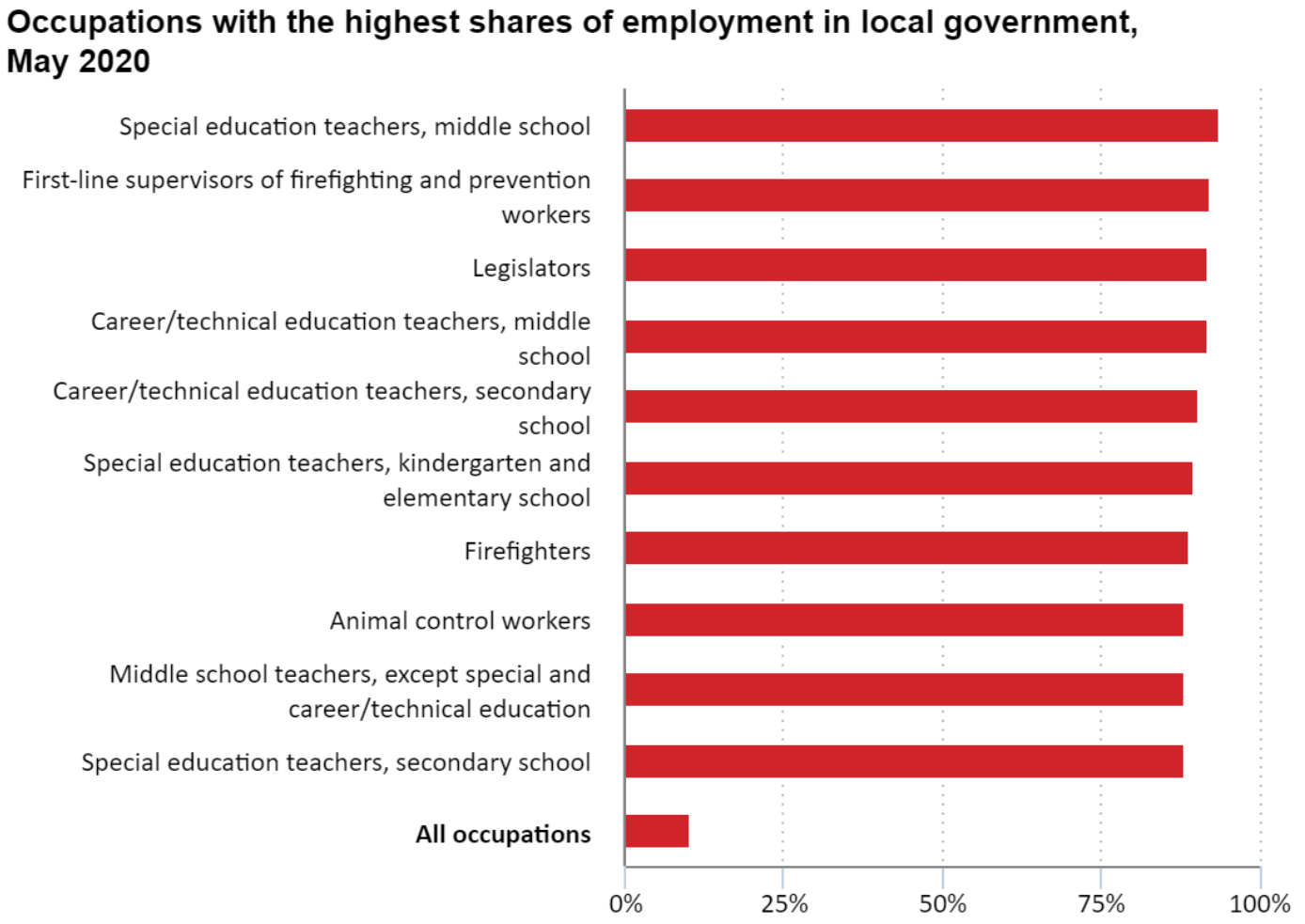
Although state government made up only about 3 percent of overall employment, it accounted for the majority of jobs in some occupations. In May 2020, 93.2 percent of fish and game wardens, 82.0 percent of forest and conservation science postsecondary teachers, and 80.1 percent of agricultural sciences teachers were employed in state government. Several other postsecondary teaching occupations were concentrated mainly in state government, including postsecondary teaching assistants (77.4 percent), postsecondary geography teachers (71.3 percent), and postsecondary library science teachers (66.3 percent). Farm and home management educators (68.4 percent) and first-line supervisors of correctional officers (66.9 percent) were also found primarily in state government.




Hover over chart to view data.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

# Special education teachers were among the occupations most concentrated in local government

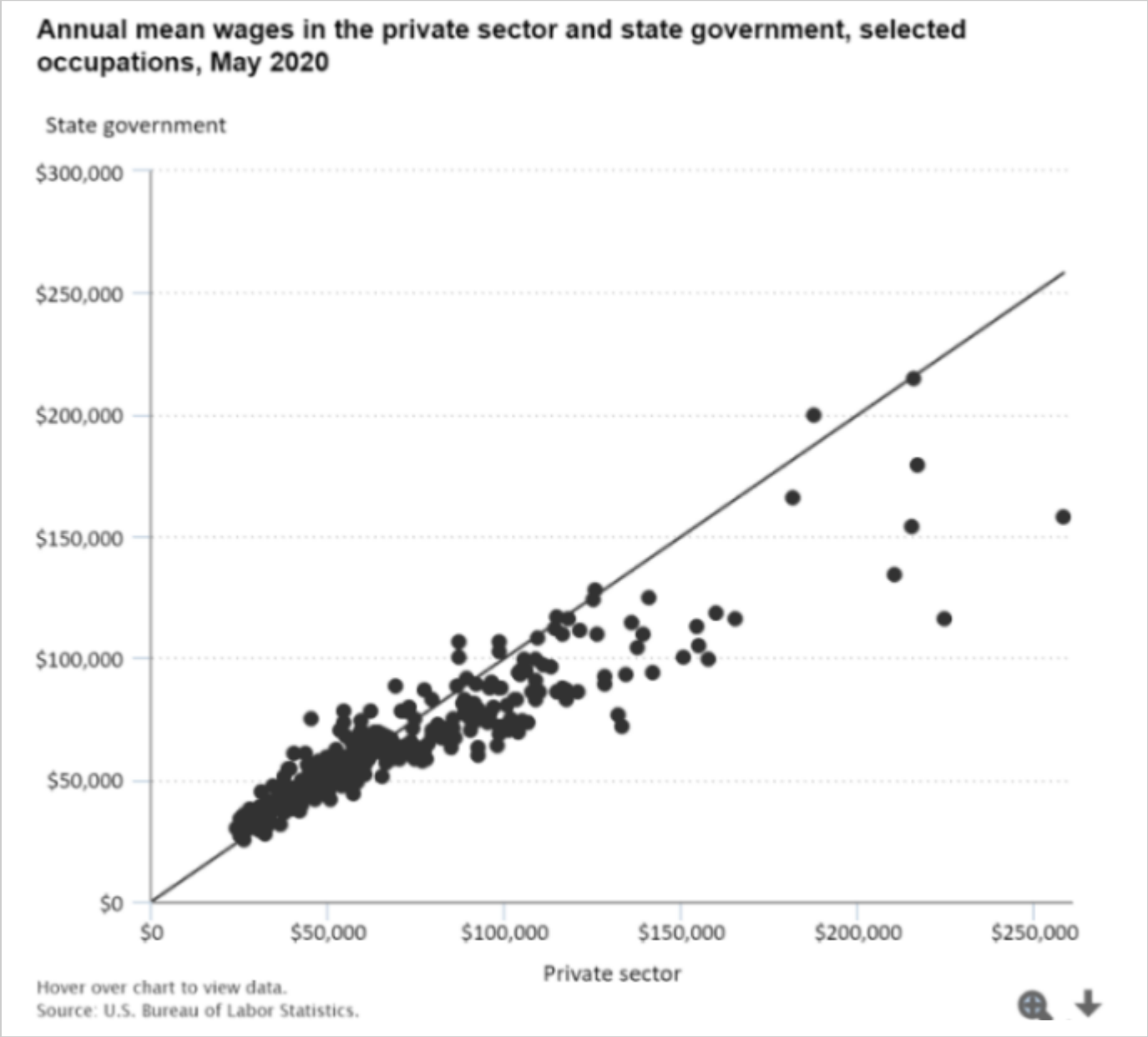
Special education and career/technical education teachers dominated the list of occupations most concentrated in local government. In May 2020, 93.9 percent of middle school special education teachers, 89.7 percent of kindergarten and elementary school special education teachers, and 88.2 percent of secondary school special education teachers were employed in local government. Local government also accounted for over 90 percent of middle and secondary school career/technical education teachers. Aside from teaching occupations, the occupations most concentrated in local government included first-line supervisors of firefighting and prevention workers (92.2 percent), legislators (92.1 percent), and firefighters (89.1 percent).




Hover over chart to view data.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

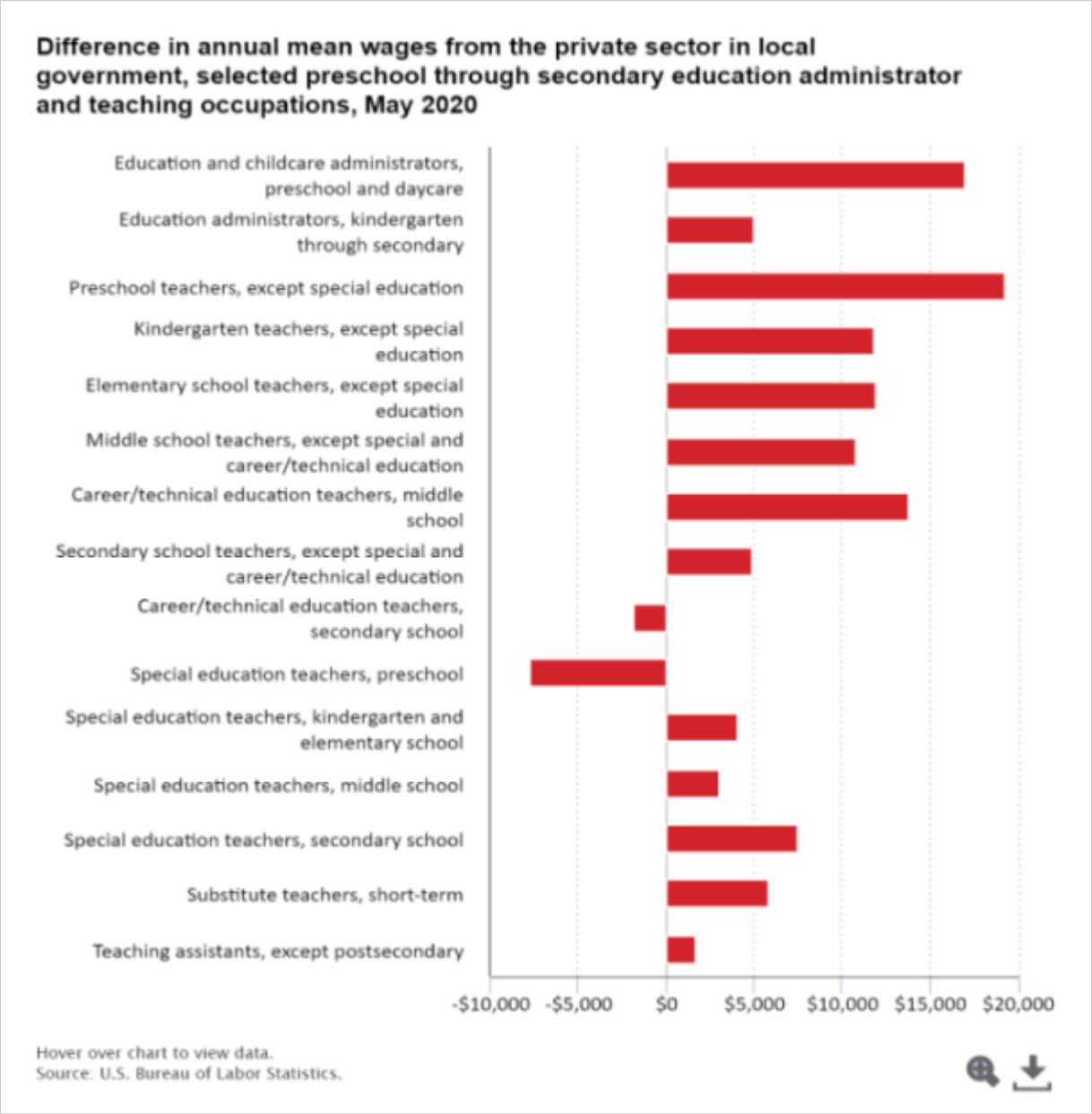
## State government paid more for lower paying occupations and less for higher paying ones

Compared with the private sector, state government showed evidence of a more compressed wage structure, with higher wages for lower paying occupations and lower wages for higher paying ones. In May 2020, 121 of the 330 occupations with 1,000 or more jobs in both the private sector and state government had significantly higher wages in state government. Among lower paying occupations (annual mean wages of $50,000 or less in the private sector), 77 out of 113 paid significantly more in state government. However, among higher paying occupations (annual mean wages of $100,000 or more in the private sector), 53 out of 60 paid significantly less in state government, and none paid significantly more. Local government wages showed a similar, but less pronounced pattern.



# Local government had higher wages for most preschool through secondary teaching occupations

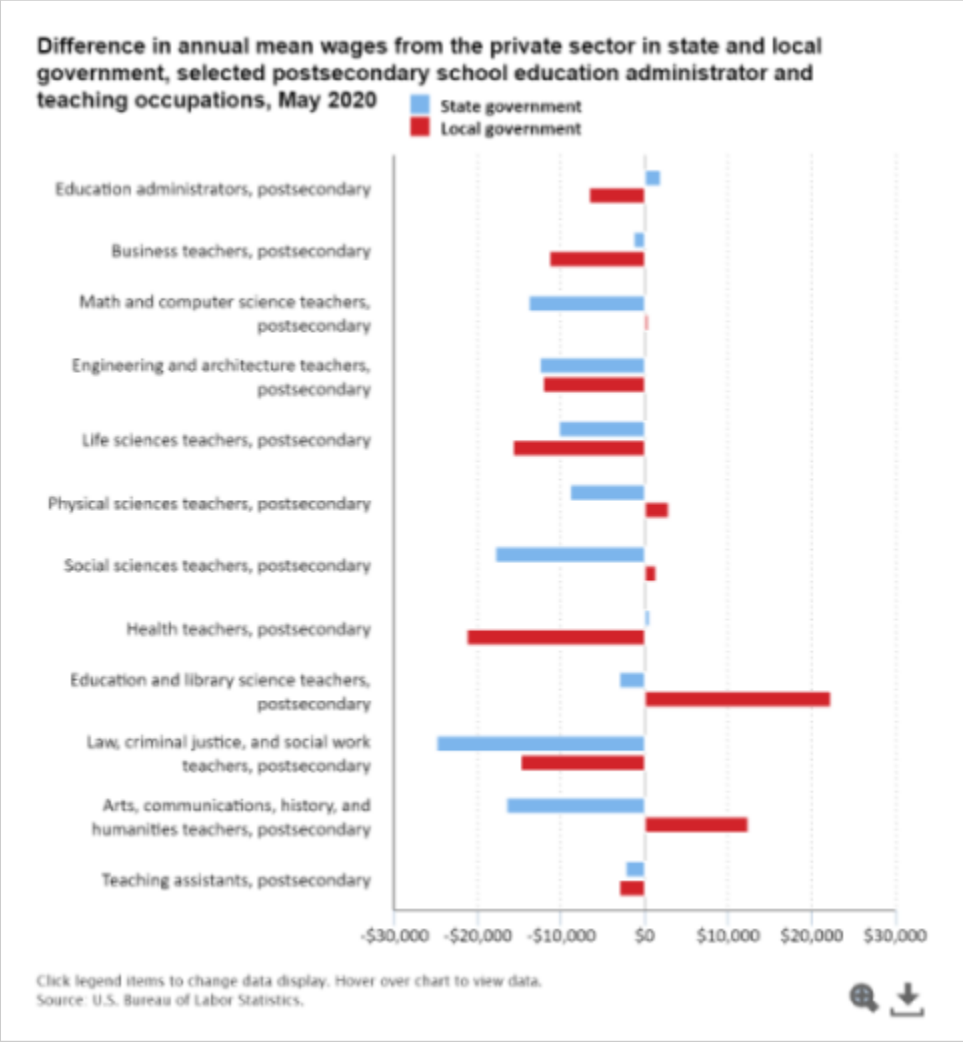
Local government and private sector wages differed only slightly overall in the educational instruction and library group in May 2020. Local government had higher mean wages, however, for most education administrator and teaching occupations at the preschool through secondary school levels. For example, preschool teachers, except special education, earned an average of $19,320 more in local government than in the private sector, and elementary school teachers, except special education, earned an average of $11,900 more. Differences between local government and private sector wages were not appreciably different for secondary school career/technical education teachers, preschool special education teachers, or middle school special education teachers.



## Postsecondary teachers generally had lower wages in state government

Although preschool through secondary teaching occupations generally earned less in the private sector, the picture is different at the postsecondary level. Postsecondary teaching assistants and most types of postsecondary teachers had lower mean wages in state government than in the private sector. For example, law, criminal justice, and social work postsecondary teachers earned an average of $24,800 less in state government than in the private sector in May 2020. This is partly because state government had significantly lower wages for both law teachers and social work teachers, and partly because state government had a lower share of law teachers, the highest paying of these occupations.

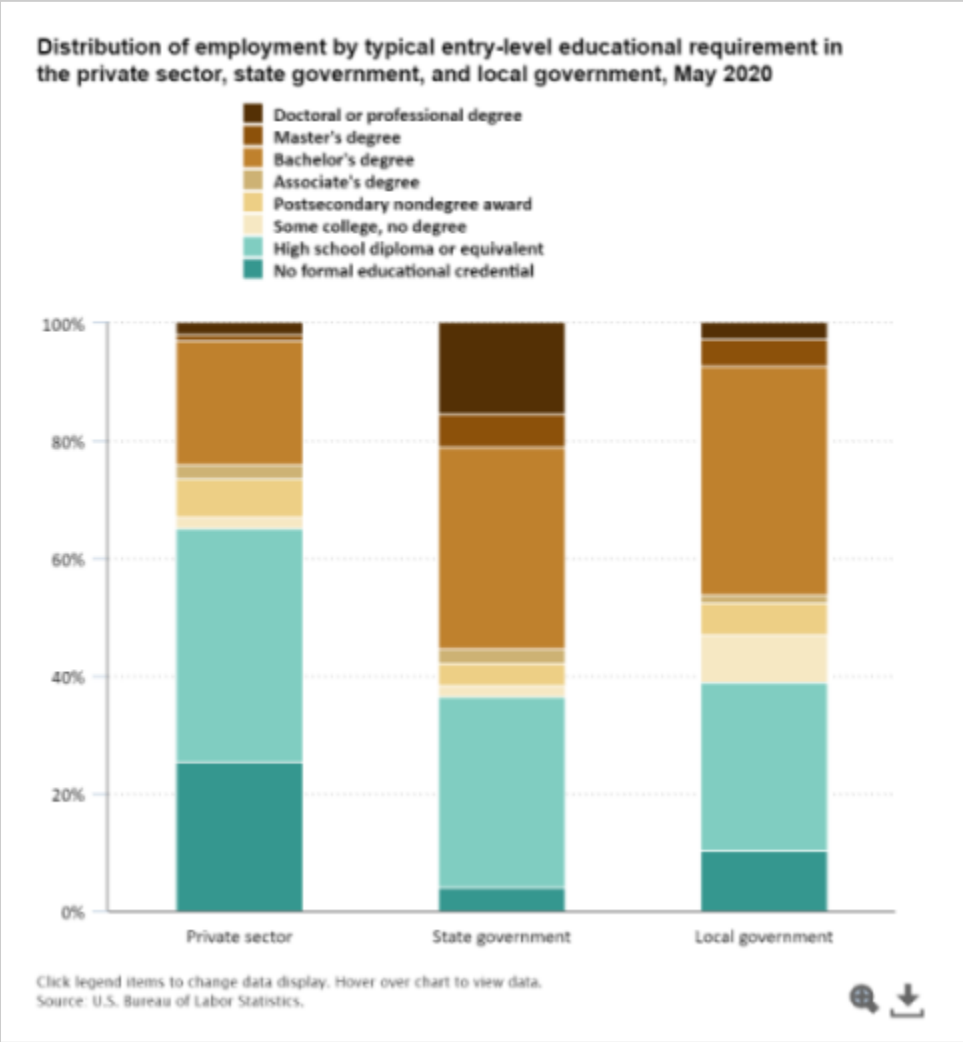
In local government, the differences in annual mean wages for postsecondary teachers were more varied. For example, postsecondary health specialties teachers earned $21,270 less on average in local government as compared with the private sector, but postsecondary education and library science teachers earned $22,410 more.



## Occupations requiring postsecondary education made up most state and local government employment

Occupations typically requiring postsecondary education for entry made up over 63 percent of state government and 61 percent of local government employment, compared with 35 percent of private sector employment in May 2020. Occupations typically requiring a bachelor's degree for entry made up a higher employment share in both state government (34.1 percent) and local government (38.9 percent) than in the private sector (20.9 percent). This category includes teachers at the kindergarten through secondary levels, which are concentrated in local government. In state government, 15.4 percent of employment consisted of occupations typically requiring a doctoral or professional degree for entry, reflecting in part the high concentration of postsecondary teachers in state government.

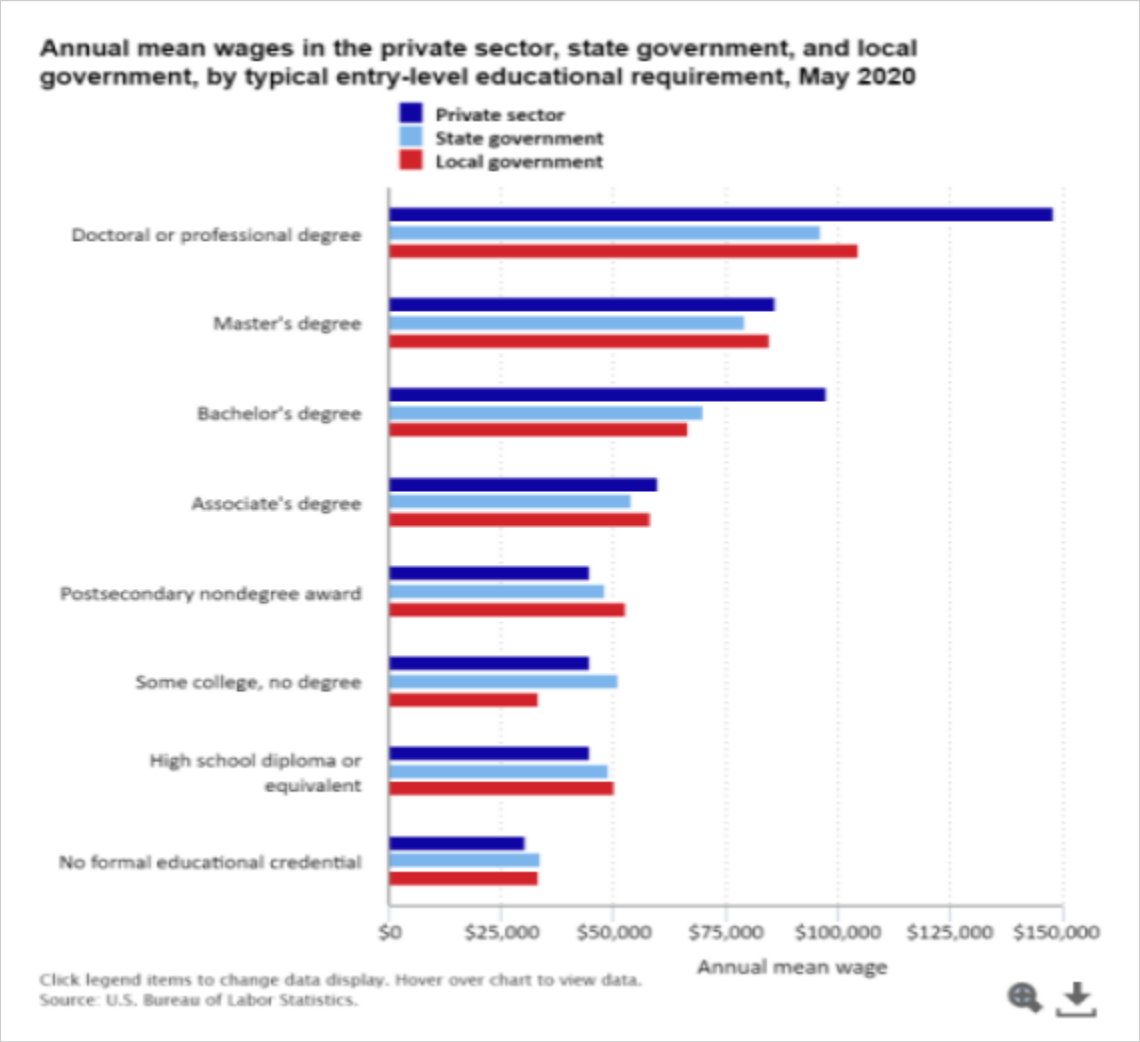
Occupations typically requiring no formal educational credential for entry, such as cashiers and fast food and counter workers, made up a quarter of private sector jobs, but only 4 percent of state government and 10 percent of local government employment.



## State and local government paid less in occupations requiring at least an associate's degree

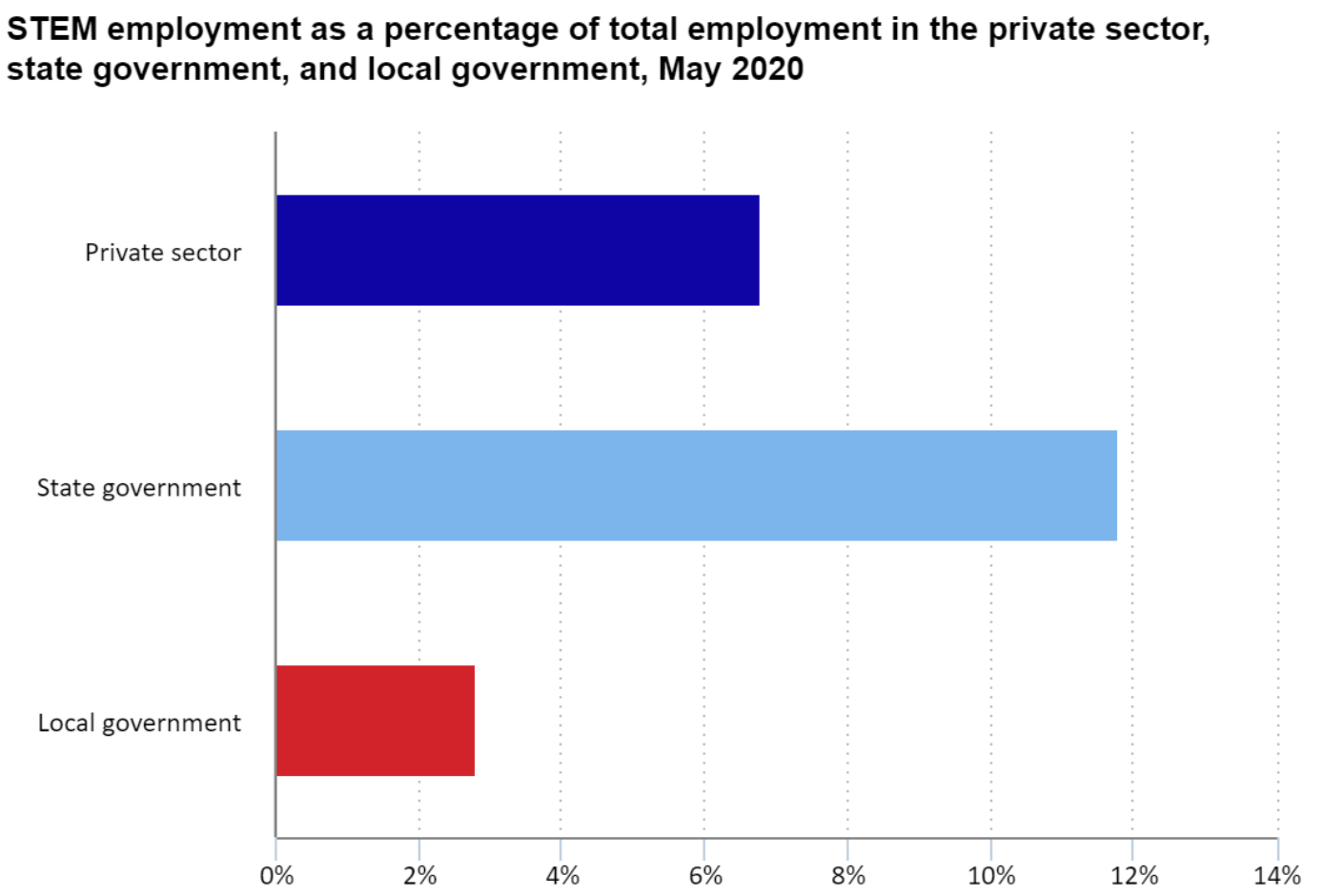
For occupations typically requiring an associate's degree or higher for entry, average wages were lower in state and local government than in the private sector. This reflects differences in the occupational mix within each education category, as well as wage differences for specific occupations. For example, occupations typically requiring a doctoral or professional degree for entry paid $51,930 less on average in state government than in the private sector in May 2020, and $43,780 less in local government as compared with the private sector. Within this education category, state and local government had higher shares of postsecondary teachers and lower shares of dentists, physicians, and surgeons.

For occupations typically requiring less than an associate's degree for entry, state and local government had higher mean wages than the private sector—with one exception. Among occupations typically requiring some college, but no degree, local government wages were $11,720 lower than wages in the private sector on average. Teaching assistants, except postsecondary—the lowest paying occupation in this educational category—represented 86 percent of local government jobs in this category, compared with 11 percent in the private sector.



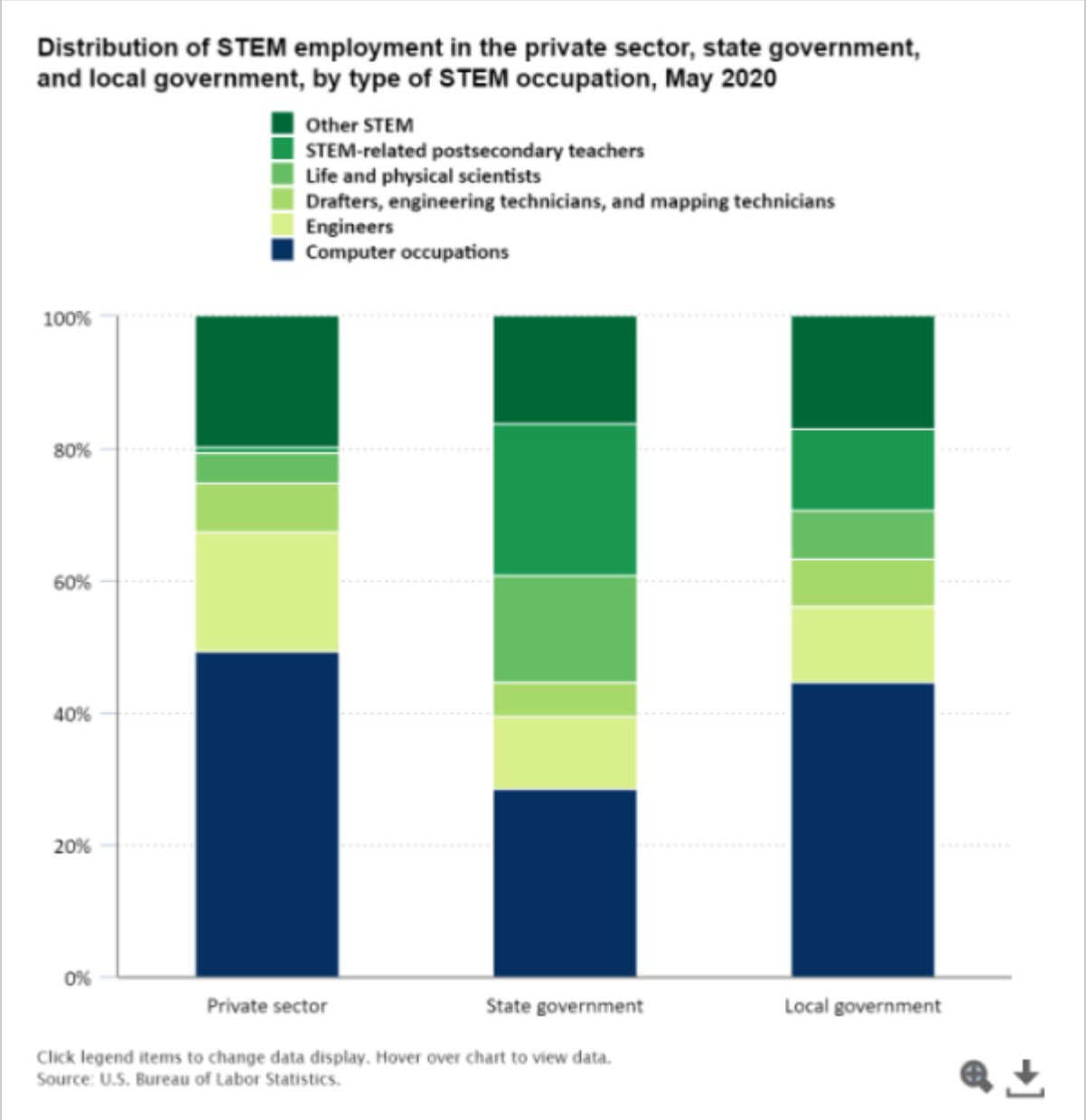
## State government had a higher share of STEM jobs than the private sector

State government had a higher share of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) occupations than the private sector, and local government had a lower share. STEM occupations made up about 7 percent of private sector employment in May 2020, compared with nearly 12 percent of state government employment and less than 3 percent of local government employment.



## State government had a lower proportion of computer occupations within STEM

In addition to having different overall STEM shares, each ownership had varying mixes of STEM jobs. In May 2020, computer occupations made up a higher share of STEM jobs in the private sector (49.2 percent) and local government (44.6 percent) than in state government (28.4 percent). STEM-related postsecondary teachers accounted for 22.9 percent of STEM jobs in state government and 12.3 percent in local government, compared with less than 1 percent in the private sector. Life and physical scientists made up 16.2 percent of state government STEM employment, compared with 7.6 percent of STEM jobs in local government and 4.8 percent in the private sector.



## For more information

Audrey Watson is an economist in the Division of Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics, U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Email: watson.audrey@bls.gov.

This Spotlight on Statistics uses May 2020 estimates by public/private ownership from the Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS) program. OEWS estimates are published annually and measure occupational employment and wage rates for wage and salary workers in nonfarm establishments in the United States. The survey does not include the self-employed and owners, partners, and proprietors of unincorporated businesses. More information about the survey is available in the frequently asked questions, technical notes, and Handbook of Methods chapter. National occupational employment and wage estimates by ownership are available from the main OEWS data page.

Because of the OEWS survey methodology, the May 2020 OEWS estimates do not fully reflect the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Private sector and most local government data used in the May 2020 estimates were collected in six semiannual survey panels for May 2020, November 2019, May 2019, November 2018, May 2018, and November 2017. Data for state government and Hawaii's local government, except for schools and hospitals, are based on a November 2019 census. A census of public- and private-owned hospitals is taken over a 3-year period. For more information, see the OEWS COVID-19 impact statement.

This Spotlight uses unpublished special tabulations of OEWS private, state government, and local government data by typical entry-level educational requirement and for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) occupations. Data by typical entry-level educational requirement are based on education and training categories assigned to each occupation by the BLS Employment Projections program. A downloadable Excel file of May 2020 OEWS data by typical entry-level educational requirement for all ownerships combined, including a list of the typical entry-level educational requirements assigned to each occupation, is available from the additional OEWS data sets page.

"STEM" is defined in this Spotlight to consist of 98 occupations, including computer and mathematical, architecture and engineering, and life and physical science occupations; managerial and postsecondary teaching occupations related to these functional areas; and sales occupations requiring scientific or technical knowledge at the postsecondary level. A downloadable XLSX spreadsheet with May 2020 OEWS STEM data for all ownerships combined, including a list of occupations in the STEM definition, is available from the additional OEWS data sets page. This is only one of many possible definitions of STEM. The Standard Occupational Classification Policy Committee has provided guidance on options for defining STEM under the 2018 SOC.

March 2020–March 2021 job losses represent 12-month national employment changes, not seasonally adjusted, from the BLS Current Employment Statistics program.