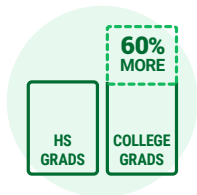


Education Pays: Key Takeaways for Students and Families

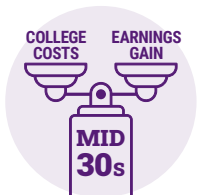
College is a big decision, but it remains a strong investment in a rapidly changing economy. National data analyzed by College Board show college graduates see higher earnings, greater opportunities, and more stability—especially when they make informed choices about where to enroll and what to study.



WHAT THE DATA SHOW

College graduates earn roughly 60% more than high school grads.

- ▶ They are less likely to be unemployed than high school graduates.
- ▶ They are more likely to work in jobs with health insurance and retirement benefits.
- ▶ 40% of mid-career college graduates earn more than \$100,000 per year—compared to 13% of high school graduates.



THE LONG-TERM PAYOFF

The typical college graduate earns enough to make up for the cost of their degree by their early- to mid-30s.

- ▶ The longer college graduates stay in the workforce, the more their earnings advantage over high school graduates grows.
- ▶ College drives social mobility, with graduates from lower-income backgrounds earning as much as higher-income peers who attended similar colleges.



PATHWAYS MATTER

Financial outcomes vary significantly depending on what you study, where you study, and degree completion.

- ▶ Median early career yearly earnings range from about \$44,000 for performing arts graduates to over \$80,000 for engineering and computer science.
- ▶ Colleges with higher graduation rates tend to produce graduates with higher earnings.
- ▶ Pathways to advanced degrees can increase long-term earnings potential.

Make the Most of College Planning:

- 1 Check out majors that not only align to interests, but to career pathways and goals.
- 2 Explore the right fit academically, financially, and socially. Focus on college completion, not just college enrollment.
- 3 Compare acceptance rates, graduation rates, and net price, not just sticker price.

College isn't the only path. But for many students, completing a degree remains one of the strongest pathways to opportunity, stability, and long-term success. Learn more about how to plan for college at bigfuture.org/college-plan.

Education Pays 2026

College Board's *Education Pays* report tracks earnings and employment patterns by education level. Get more findings at research.collegeboard.org/trends/education-pays.