# EDUCATION AT A GLANCE 2020

B)) OECD

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# **United States**

COUNTRY

## Highlights

- One in two young people have a tertiary qualification in the United States. In 2019, 50% of 25-34 year-olds had a tertiary degree in the United States, higher than the OECD average of 45%.
- Tertiary-educated adults benefit from a strong earnings advantage in the United States. In 2018, 25-64 year-olds with a tertiary degree earn 71% more for full-time, full-year work than those with upper secondary education, well above the OECD average of 54%.
- Young people in the United States with lower educational attainment may be more vulnerable to the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019, 10% of young adults with below upper secondary education in the United States were unemployed compared to 2% of tertiary-educated young adults.
- The United States invests more in education than most other OECD countries. In 2017, it spent USD 17 993 per student on primary to tertiary educational institutions, compared to the OECD average of USD 11 231. Relative to gross domestic product (GDP), its total spending on primary to tertiary institutions is the sixth highest among OECD countries.
- **Private funding is significant at tertiary level in the United States.** In 2017, 65% of total expenditure in tertiary education came from the private sources, more than double the OECD average of 29%.
- Although there are wide variations across the United States, teachers in public institutions, on average, earn less than their peers with tertiary qualification. In 2019, average actual salaries of teachers in public institutions at primary and secondary levels ranged between 62-68% of the earning of tertiary-educated workers.

# The rising demand for tertiary education

- The expansion of tertiary education is a worldwide trend. Between 2009 and 2019, the share of 25-34 year-olds with a tertiary degree increased in all OECD and partner countries. In the United States, the share increased by 9 percentage points during this period, similar to the average increase across OECD countries (9 percentage points). Even though the percentage point increase in the United States between 2009 and 2019 was similar to the OECD average, a higher percentage of young adults attained tertiary education in the United States compared to the OECD average. In 2019, 50% of 25-34 year-olds had a tertiary degree in the United States compared to 45% on average across OECD countries (Figure 1).
- From the gender perspective, younger women are more likely than younger men to achieve tertiary education in all OECD countries. In the United States, 55% of 25-34 year-old women had a tertiary qualification compared to 46% of their male peers, while on average across OECD countries the shares are 51% of younger women and 39% of younger men.

- Educational attainment remains relatively high in the United States: 93% of 25-34 year-olds had attained at least upper secondary education in 2019 compared to 85% on average across OECD countries. However, the national figure conceals wide variation across states. In 2018, the attainment rate for 25-34 year-olds varied within the United States from 89% in New Mexico to a high of 96% in Vermont. Variations in attainment at the subnational level generally increase after the end of compulsory education as students select alternate pathways for study or decide to enter the labour market. While 46% of 25-34 year-olds had attained tertiary education in 2018 on average in the United States, this varied from a high of 76% in the District of Columbia to a low of 32% in New Mexico. This 44 percentage-point gap in tertiary attainment among young adults is the highest across all countries with available data, together with the United Kingdom.
- The most common tertiary qualification among adults in the United States is a bachelor's degree, which was held by 24% of all 25-64 year-olds in 2019, compared to 18% on average across OECD countries. Short-cycle tertiary degrees were also more common in the United States: 11% of 25-64 year-olds had attained this level, compared to 7% across OECD countries.
- In the United States, the average age of first-time entrants to tertiary education in 2018 was 20 years, lower than the OECD average of 22 years. Structural factors, such as admission procedures, the typical age at which students graduate from upper secondary education, or cultural perceptions of the value of professional or personal experiences outside of education may explain the differences in the average age of entry to tertiary education across countries.
- If current entry patterns continue, it is estimated that 49% of young adults will enter tertiary education for the first time in their life before the age of 25 on average across OECD countries (excluding international students). In the United States, 44% of young adults will enter tertiary education by that age and 53% of them will enter at bachelor's or equivalent level.
- Young people can face barriers to labour market entry as they transition from school to work, but higher educational attainment increases their likelihood of being employed and is associated with higher incomes. On average across OECD countries, the employment rate in 2019 was 61% for 25-34 year-olds without upper secondary education, 78% for those with upper secondary or postsecondary non-tertiary education as their highest attainment and 85% for those with tertiary education. In the United States, the shares are 57% for below upper secondary, 74% for upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary and 85% for tertiary attainment.
- Having a tertiary degree also carries a considerable earnings advantage in most OECD and partner countries. In the United States, in 2018, 25-64 year-olds with a tertiary degree with income from full-time, full-year employment earned 71% more than full-time, full-year workers with upper secondary education compared to 54% on average across OECD countries (Figure 1). Those with a master's or doctoral degree or equivalent in the United States had one of the highest earning premiums across OECD countries: earning 121% more than those with an upper secondary education compared to 89% on average across OECD countries.
- International student mobility has been expanding quite consistently in the past twenty years. In 2018, 5.6 million tertiary students worldwide had crossed a border to study, more than twice the number in 2005. In the United States, the share of foreign or international students increased from 4% in 2014 to 5% in 2018. This figure is lower than the OECD average of 6%. It is at the doctoral level that the United States attracts the most internationally mobile students with 25% of the total number of students, which is well above the OECD average of 22%.
- Meanwhile, less than 1% of American tertiary students are enrolled abroad in 2018 compared to 2% in total across OECD countries (Figure 1). English-speaking countries are the most attractive student destinations overall in the OECD area, with Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States receiving more than 37% of all internationally mobile students in OECD and partner countries. Among students leaving the United States to study, the most popular destination country is the United Kingdom.

 Beyond the economic and employment outcomes, higher educational attainment is related to greater social benefits. For example, those with a tertiary education are more likely to feel they have a say in what their government does. In 2016, on average across OECD countries participating in the International Social Survey Programme, 41% of tertiary-educated adults agreed with this sentiment compared to 28% of those with below upper secondary education. In the United States, 49% of tertiary-educated adults feel this way compared with 24% of those with below upper secondary education.



#### Figure 1. Snapshot of tertiary education

**Note:** Only countries and economies with available data are shown. The years shown in parentheses is the most common year of reference for OECD and partner countries. Refer to the source table for more details.

Source: OECD (2020), indicator A1, A3, A4 and B6. See Education at a Glance Database http://stats.oecd.org/for more information and Annex 3 for notes (<u>https://doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en</u>).

# **Starting strong**

- In many OECD countries, ECEC begins for most children long before they turn 5 and there are universal legal entitlements to a place in ECEC services for at least one or two years before the start of compulsory schooling. In the United States, the starting age of compulsory education varies at the subnational level (ages 5-8). Typically, compulsory education begins at age 6, the first year of primary education. About 66% of 3-5 year-olds in 2018 are enrolled in ECEC programmes and primary education in the United States, compared to 88% on average across OECD countries (Figure 2). The enrolment rate for 5-year-olds in pre-primary or primary education is 90% in the United States which is below the OECD average of 95%.
- Between 2005 and 2018, average enrolment rates for 3-5 year-olds across OECD countries have gradually increased from 75% to 88%. In the United States, however, enrolment rates have remained stable at 66% over this period. This national average conceals subnational differences. In 2018, more than 75% of 3-5 year-olds were enrolled in ECEC and primary education in Connecticut (75%) and the District of Columbia (86%), compared to less than 50% in Rhode Island.

- The workforce is at the heart of high-quality early-childhood education and care: stimulating environments and high-quality pedagogy are fostered by better-qualified practitioners and high-quality interactions between children and staff facilitate better learning outcomes. In that context, lower child-staff ratios are found to be consistently supportive of staff-child relationships across different types of ECEC settings (NICHD, 2002). In the United States, the ratio of children for every full-time equivalent (FTE) teacher working in pre-primary education (ISCED 02) in 2018 is 12 compared to 14 on average among OECD countries (Figure 2).
- Sustained public financial support is critical for the growth and quality of ECEC programmes. In 2017, annual total expenditure in pre-primary settings averaged USD 9 435 per child in the United States, slightly higher than the average across OECD countries (USD 9 079) (Figure 2).



# Figure 2. Snapshot of early childhood education and care

**Note:** Only countries and economies with available data are shown. Annual expenditure per child is shown in equivalent USD converted using PPPs. The years shown in parentheses is the most common year of reference for OECD and partner countries. Refer to the source table for more details.

Source: OECD (2020), indicator B2. See Education at a Glance Database <u>http://stats.oecd.org/</u> for more information and Annex 3 for notes (<u>https://doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en</u>).

# Investing in education

- Annual expenditure per student on educational institutions from primary to tertiary level provides an indication of the investment countries make in each student. In 2017, the United States spent more on primary to tertiary educational institutions per full-time student than the OECD average, investing a total of USD 17 993 per student compared to USD 11 231 on average across OECD countries (Figure 3).
- The way education is provided influences how resources are allocated between levels of education and between public and private institutions. In 2017, the United States spent USD 13 511 per student at non-tertiary level (primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education), USD 3 512 higher than the OECD average of USD 9 999. At tertiary level, the United States

invested USD 33 063 per student, USD 16 736 more than the OECD average (Figure 3). Expenditure per student on private educational institutions is higher than on public institutions on average across OECD countries. This trend is also the case in the United States, where total expenditure on public institutions from primary to tertiary level amounts to USD 16 646 per student, compared to USD 26 302 on private ones.

- Among OECD countries, the United States spent the sixth highest proportion of its gross domestic product (GDP) on primary to tertiary educational institutions. In 2017, the United States spent on average 6.1% of GDP on primary to tertiary educational institutions, which is 1.2 percentage points higher than the OECD average. Across levels of education, the United States devoted a slightly above average share of GDP at non-tertiary levels and an above average share at tertiary level (Figure 3).
- Between 2012 and 2017, expenditure per student from primary to tertiary education increased by an average annual growth rate of 1.3% across OECD countries. In the United States, expenditure on educational institutions grew at an average rate of 1.5% a year, while the number of students remained fairly stable. This resulted in an average annual growth rate of 1.4% in expenditure per student over this period.
- Tuition fees for both national and foreign students in public institutions in the United States are among the highest for a bachelor's programme across countries with available data. In the United States, in-state students attending public institutions were charged USD 8 804 per year in 2016/17 for a bachelor's degree, which is 29% more than they paid on average in 2007/08. While loans may reduce the upfront cost, students are required to repay the cost of their education once they start work. Of students who received loans in the United States, the average total of loans to bachelor's students was USD 29 910 in 2015/16.
- Tuition fees in the United States differ by type of institution. In 2017/18, independent private institutions charged national students about USD 29 500 per year on average at the bachelor's level, more than three times the average fee in public institutions.
- Capital costs represent a higher than average share of expenditure on primary to tertiary
  institutions in the United States. At primary, secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary level,
  capital costs account for 9% of total spending on educational institutions, 2 percentage points
  above the OECD average. At the tertiary level, capital costs represent 10%, the same as the
  average across OECD countries of 10%.
- Compensation of teachers and other staff employed in educational institutions represents the largest share of current expenditure from primary to tertiary education. In 2017, the United States allocated 74% of its current expenditure on primary to tertiary education to staff compensation, the same as the average across OECD countries (74%). Staff compensation tends to make up a smaller share of current expenditure on tertiary institutions due to the higher costs of facilities and equipment at this level. In the United States, staff compensation represents 65% of total current expenditure on tertiary institutions compared to 81% at non-tertiary levels. On average across OECD countries, the share is 67% at tertiary level and 77% at non-tertiary level.



# Figure 3. Snapshot of the financial resources invested in educational institutions

**Note:** Only countries and economies with available data are shown. Expenditure in national currencies is converted into equivalent USD by dividing the national currency figure by the purchasing power parity (PPP) index for GDP. The years shown in parentheses is the most common year of reference for OECD and partner countries. Refer to the source table for more details.

Source: OECD (2020), indicator C1 and C2. See Education at a Glance Database <u>http://stats.oecd.org/</u> for more information and Annex 3 for notes (https://doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en).

# Working conditions of school teachers

- The salaries of school staff, and in particular teachers and school heads, represent the largest single expenditure in formal education. Their salary levels also have a direct impact on the attractiveness of the teaching profession. In most OECD countries and economies, statutory salaries of teachers (and school heads) in public educational institutions increase with the level of education they teach and also with experience. On average, statutory salaries of teachers with maximum qualifications at the top of their salary scales are 78-80% higher than those of teachers with the minimum qualifications at the start of their career at pre-primary (ISCED 02), primary and general lower and upper secondary levels. In the United States, maximum salaries are 76-80% higher than minimum salaries at each level of education.
- In the United States, the statutory salaries of teachers with the most prevalent qualifications are higher than on average across OECD countries. For example, the statutory starting salary of a teacher is USD 41 119 per year at the primary level, compared to USD 33 914 on average across OECD countries. The difference between starting salaries and those after 15 years of experience is also larger for primary teachers in the United States (USD 20 026) than on average across OECD countries (USD 12 887). Similar patterns hold true for pre-primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education.
- Teachers' statutory salaries can also vary significantly across subnational entities within each country, especially in federal countries where salary requirements may be defined at the subnational level. That is the case in the United States. The starting salary of a primary school

teacher varied by 81% (USD 27 016) across subnational entities in the United States, ranging from USD 33 445 in Oklahoma to USD 60 461 in New York. In the United States, there was no clear pattern in the extent of the variation of statutory salaries across subnational entities at different levels of education and stages of teachers' careers. At the lower secondary level, the variation was the smallest for starting salaries, ranging from USD 34 789 to USD 58 203 (a difference of 67%, or USD 23 414) and the largest for salaries at top of the salary scale, ranging from USD 43 654 to USD 109 709 (a difference of 151%, or USD 66 055).

- Between 2005 and 2019, the statutory salaries of teachers with 15 years of experience and the
  most prevalent qualifications increased between 5-7% at primary and general lower and upper
  secondary levels on average across OECD countries, despite a decrease of salaries following the
  2008 financial crisis. In the United States, salaries of teachers decreased by 7% at the primary
  level but increased by respectively 8% and 2% at lower and upper secondary levels.
- Teachers' actual salaries reflect their statutory salaries and additional work-related payments. Average actual salaries depend also on the characteristics of the teaching population such as their age, level of experience and qualification level. In the United States, teachers' average actual salaries amount to USD 54 088 at the pre-primary level (higher than the OECD average of USD 38 677), USD 55 118 at the primary level (higher than the OECD average of USD 43 942), USD 57 722 at the general lower secondary level (higher than the OECD average of USD 46 225) and USD 60 220 at the general upper secondary level (higher than the OECD average of USD 49 778) (Figure 4).
- Teachers' average actual salaries remain lower than those of tertiary-educated workers in almost all countries, and at almost all levels of education. Teachers' average actual salaries at pre-primary (ISCED 02), primary and general secondary levels of education are 80-94% of the earnings of tertiary-educated workers on average across OECD countries and economies. In the United States, the proportion ranges from 61% at pre-primary level and 62% at primary level to 65% at lower secondary level and 68% at the upper secondary level (Figure 4).
- Teachers in the United States have strong financial incentives to become school leaders: school heads' average actual salaries are also among the highest across OECD countries at all levels of education. At the lower secondary level for example, school heads in the United States on average earned USD 99 079 per year compared to USD 73 404 on average across OECD countries. Average actual salaries of school heads at this level is USD 41 357 higher than that of teachers at the same level. There are also large subnational variations in average actual salaries of school heads in the United States. For example, average actual salaries of upper secondary school heads in 2019 ranged from USD 75 354 in South Dakota to USD 145 482 in New Jersey, a difference of 93% or USD 70 128.
- The average number of teaching hours per year required of a typical teacher in public educational institutions in OECD countries tends to decrease as the level of education increases, from 993 hours at pre-primary level (ISCED 02), to 778 hours at primary level, 712 hours at lower secondary level (general programmes) and 680 hours at upper secondary level (general programmes). In the United States, teachers are required to teach 1 011 hours per year at pre-primary level, 1 004 hours per year at primary level, 966 hours at lower secondary level (general programmes) and 966 hours at upper secondary level (general programmes).
- Large proportions of teachers in many OECD countries will reach retirement age in the next decade, while the size of the school-age population is projected to increase in some countries, putting many governments under pressure to recruit and train new teachers. In the United States, 16% of primary teachers are considered young teachers (under the age of 30), which is higher than the OECD average of 12%. On average across OECD countries, the proportion of young teachers decreases at other levels of education, to 10% in lower secondary education and 8% in upper secondary education. In the United States, the proportion of young teachers remains the same at

lower secondary level as at the primary level (16%) and is 12% at upper secondary level (Figure 4). Between 2005 and 2018, the proportion of young teachers at upper secondary level decreased by 3 percentage points in the United States, whereas it fell by 4 percentage points on average across OECD countries during this period.



## Figure 4. Snapshot of teachers' working conditions

**Note:** Only countries and economies with available data are shown. Teachers' salaries are shown in equivalent USD converted using PPPs. The years shown in parentheses is the most common year of reference for OECD and partner countries. Refer to the source table for more details.

**Source:** OECD (2020), indicator D3, D4 and D5. See Education at a Glance Database <u>http://stats.oecd.org/</u> for more information and Annex 3 for notes (<u>https://doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en</u>).

# Participation and outcomes of vocational education and training

- Vocational education and training (VET) programmes attract a diverse range of students, including those seeking qualifications and technical skills to enter the labour market, adults wishing to increase their employability by developing their skills further, and students who may seek entry into higher education later on.
- VET is an important part of upper secondary education in most OECD countries. In the United States, secondary vocational programmes are generally not comparable to the vocational programmes in the current international classification (ISCED 2011), but in practice, are more similar to the pre-vocational programmes in the former classification (ISCED 1997). The lack of comparability largely results from the requirement on secondary education qualifications: In the United States, students who take secondary vocational courses are also required to complete a full complement of academic programmes required for a general secondary qualification; students are not awarded a vocational qualification. Also, the students often take small numbers of introductory vocational courses in different disciplines, which is more consistent with the prevocational concept than with a full vocational program preparing a student for a specific career.

## The impact of COVID-19 on education

- The global 2020 COVID-19 pandemic has sent shockwaves around the world. In a first effort to
  contain the virus, many countries have imposed a lockdown and schools and/or universities have
  closed for several months across all OECD and partner countries. From mid-February until the end
  of June, OECD countries had experienced 14 weeks of effective school closure in some form on
  average. In the United States, the closures (either recommended or mandated) were localised from
  late February 2020 (UNESCO, 2020).
- School reopening in the context of the pandemic is contingent on the capacity to maintain a safe distance of 1-2 metres between pupils and staff. Countries with smaller class sizes may find it easier to comply with new restrictions on social distancing. In the United States, the average class size at primary level is 21 students in public institutions, which is the same as the OECD average of 21. In public lower secondary institutions, there are 26 students per class in the United States, compared to 23 students per class on average across OECD countries. However, the need to reduce class size may depend on other factors such as physical space, the availability of rooms and staff, and personal decisions by students and staff on whether to return to school (Figure 5).
- While there is uncertainty about the likely overall impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education expenditure, public funding for education may stagnate or fall as government funds are injected into the economy and the health sector (Al-Samarrai, Gangwar and Gala, 2020). In 2017, public spending on primary to tertiary education as a share of government expenditure in the United States was 12%, higher than the OECD average of 11% (Figure 5).
- As unemployment rises, private funding of education may also be at risk. The impact may be most severe in those countries and levels of education that rely most heavily on household expenditure, in particular early childhood education and care and tertiary education. In pre-primary education (ISCED 02), private sources accounted for 25% of total expenditure in the United States in 2017, higher than the OECD average of 17%. At tertiary level, 65% of total expenditure comes from the private sources, compared to 29% on average across OECD countries.
- A decrease in the share of international students may have repercussions on the funding model of some higher education institutions, as foreign students often may pay higher tuition fees than domestic ones. The differences in tuition fees between national and out-of-state/foreign students in the United States are also among the largest in the OECD. International and foreign students pay USD 16 050 more per year in tuition for a bachelor's programme in a public institution than national students (USD 8 804).
- Unemployment may increase as the economy struggles to cope with the reduced activity that resulted from the lockdown. Those with lower educational attainment are the most vulnerable, as they are the most unlikely to benefit from remote working. In 2019, before the pandemic hit, 10% of young adults with below upper secondary education in the United States were unemployed compared to 2% of tertiary-educated 25-34 year-olds (Figure 5). In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, the unemployment of young adults without an upper secondary education increased by 5.7 percentage points between 2008 and 2009 in the United States compared to 2.6 percentage points among those with tertiary education.



# Figure 5. Snapshot of indicators relevant to the impact of COVID-19 on education

**Note:** Only countries and economies with available data are shown. The years shown in parentheses is the most common year of reference for OECD and partner countries. Refer to the source table for more details.

**Source:** OECD (2020), indicator A3, D1, D2, and C4. See Education at a Glance Database <u>http://stats.oecd.org/</u> for more information and Annex 3 for notes (https://doi.org/10.1787/69096873-en).

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On 15 May 2020, the OECD Council invited Costa Rica to become a Member. While Costa Rica is included in the OECD averages reported in this note, at the time of its preparation, Costa Rica was in the process of completing its domestic procedures for ratification and the deposit of the instrument of accession to the OECD Convention was pending.

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