

Salaries and Wages of Baltimore City Graduates Six Years after Earning a High School Diploma

Rachel E. Durham & Faith Connolly

April 2018

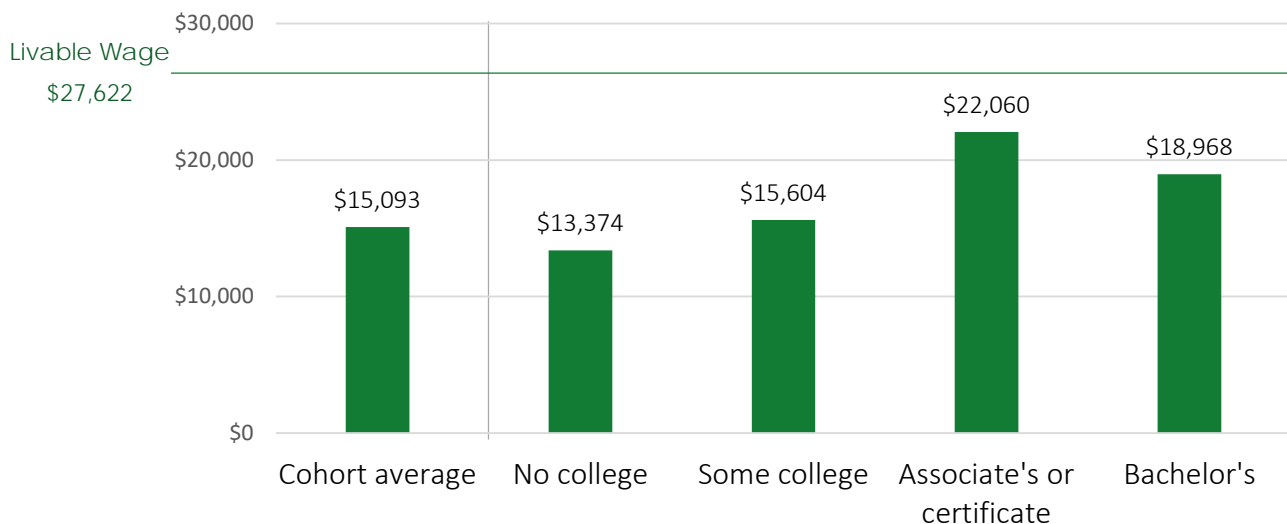
This brief is the second in BERC’s *Launching into Adulthood* series, which examines the trajectories of Baltimore graduates over six years. BERC established a partnership with Baltimore’s Promise and the Maryland Longitudinal Data System, which has made it possible to examine both college and earnings outcomes among Baltimore City Public Schools graduates.

The question addressed in this brief is, how much were graduates earning six years after high school graduation? Was it enough to make a livable wage? And how many of those who went to college and completed degrees were earning a livable wage? We chose a single class, graduates in 2009, to examine college experiences and workforce activity six years later.

Median Earnings

The median income for all graduates after six years was \$15,093. (See Figure 1.) For those who had completed a bachelor’s degree, it was \$18,968, and for those with an associate’s but no bachelor’s degree, \$22,060. Among graduates who enrolled in college but had not completed a degree, median income was \$15,604. For those who never enrolled in college, it was \$13,374. (See Figure 1). In contrast, the livable wage threshold -- the minimum annual amount one adult needs to cover basic household expenses -- was \$27,622. ([Livable wage is for Baltimore and adjusted annually.](#))

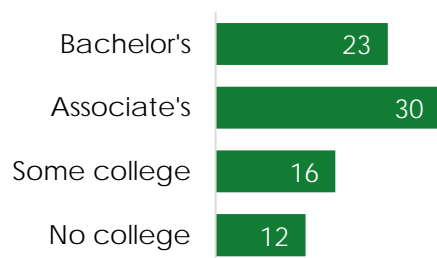
Figure 1. Median annual income six years after high school for all graduates, by college completion status (class of 2009).



Earning a Livable Wage

Another measure of economic well-being after six years is the percent of graduates who earned a *livable wage*. (See Figure 2.) Among graduates with a bachelor’s degree, 23% earned a livable wage in year six. Among those whose highest attainment was an associate’s degree, 30% earned a livable wage. Among graduates who had some college but had not completed a degree, 16% earned a livable wage, and for those who never enrolled, 12% earned a livable wage.

Figure 2. Percent of all graduates earning a livable wage, by college completion status (class of 2009).



Conclusions

For the cohort overall, 16 percent were earning a livable wage, and among those with degrees, median annual income was approximately \$20,000 six years after high school. However, those with college degrees were twice as likely as those with no college to earn a livable wage. Graduates who had completed associate's degrees earned slightly more than those with a bachelor's, yet we surmise that attending a 4-year college may have incurred a short-term opportunity cost of having stayed in college longer and starting at an entry level position later.

Researchⁱ on U.S. employment has found that in recent years, young adults are taking longer to reach full employment. Specifically, fewer 18 to 24 year-olds worked full time in 2012 than in 1980. Similarly, the age at which workers reach median salary levels has increased from age 26 to age 30. This trend is even more salient for African-American workers, who do not reach median salary until age 33. Some of these trends are related to the recent economic recession, but they are also due to more young adults' obtaining postsecondary education and occupational training during early adulthood.ⁱⁱ

Future research should explore how graduates' earnings are related to employment stability, frequency of job changes, and industry of work.

For details about the data source and methodology [see Launching into Adulthood Methodology brief](#).

We are grateful for support from Baltimore's Promise, which allowed BERC to complete this research.

^{i, ii} Carnevale, A. P., Hanson, A. R., & Gulish, A. (2013). Failure to Launch: Structural Shift and the New Lost Generation. Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce.