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Iowa Ranks Among the Least Educated States in the Country

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Education levels are on the rise in the United States. According to newly released estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey, 79.9 million American adults - 35% of the nation's 25 and older population - have a bachelor's degree or higher. As recently as five years ago, fewer than 33% of American adults had a bachelor's degree.

A college education has long been a key driver of upward economic mobility in the United States. However, enrollment costs at colleges and universities have soared in recent years, making a four-year postsecondary education prohibitively expensive for many working- and middle-class families.

Cost is not the only factor to consider before attending college. The chosen career path is another. For some business owners and those pursuing a career in the trades, the military, law enforcement, or public safety, a bachelor's degree may not be necessary. Regardless of personal considerations, in some parts of the country, Americans are far less likely to have a four-year college degree than in others. (Here is a look at the highest paying jobs you can get without a college degree.)

In Iowa, an estimated 30.5% of adults 25 and older have a bachelor's degree or higher, below the 35% share nationwide and the 13th lowest among all states.

Nationwide, median earnings among workers with a bachelor's degree stood at \$61,073 in 2021, compared to \$35,019 among working adults with no more than a high school diploma. Due in part to lower-than-average bachelor's degree attainment rates, the median earnings among all working adults in Iowa is \$44,644 a year, less than the comparable national median of \$45,943.

All income and education data in this story is from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2021 American Community Survey. Annual unemployment rates are from the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Rank	State	Adults with a bachelor's degree or higher (%)	Median annual earnings, all working adults, 2021 (\$)	2021 unemployment rate (%)
1	West Virginia	24.1	39,449	5.0
2	Mississippi	24.8	37,148	5.6
3	Arkansas	25.3	37,936	4.0
4	Louisiana	26.4	40,562	5.5
5	Kentucky	27.0	40,448	4.7
6	Alabama	27.4	40,362	3.4
7	Nevada	27.6	41,237	7.2
8	Oklahoma	27.9	40,163	3.8
9	Indiana	28.9	42,955	3.6

Rank	State	Adults with a bachelor's degree or higher (%)	Median annual earnings, all working adults, 2021 (\$)	2021 unemployment rate (%)
10	Wyoming	29.2	41,898	4.5
11	New Mexico	30.1	39,826	6.8
12	Tennessee	30.5	41,181	4.3
13	Iowa	30.5	44,644	4.2
14	Idaho	30.7	40,800	3.6
15	Ohio	30.7	43,794	5.1