

**News****County residents who complete high school fare better economically**[Print Page](#)

***Finish high school in Luzerne County and you'll earn an annual average of \$8,658 more than if you dropped out. There's also a much better chance you'll actually have a job, and one that keeps you above the poverty threshold.***

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Finish high school in Luzerne County and you'll earn an annual average of \$8,658 more than if you dropped out. There's also a much better chance you'll actually have a job, and one that keeps you above the poverty threshold.

Overall, the county data reflects the state data showing that finishing high school and going on to higher education positively correlates with higher salaries and better job opportunities, according to a Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children report released Thursday.

While that wasn't ground-breaking news, the difference a few years of education make was more startling. High school dropouts make an average of \$16,850, graduates \$25,508 and with some college or an associate degree the average salary moves to \$31,066. Completing a bachelors degree earns an average of \$40,333 and a graduate or professional degree holder gets \$54,536. Those Luzerne County numbers are thousands of dollars lower than the state average, however.

Poverty rates drop according to the level of education people obtain, and in all but one category, some college or associate degree, the county numbers are lower than the state. Locally, 16.9 percent of high school dropouts are living below the poverty line. That drops almost in half with the completion of high school, to 9.0 percent, and down to 3.0 percent with a bachelor's degree.

A higher percentage of Luzerne County dropouts are unemployed, 10.9 percent, than the state average of 10.1 percent. With a high school degree, the unemployment rate drops to 3.8 percent, and with a bachelor's to 1.8 percent.

However, local students have a better graduation rate than the state average, with 91.76 percent of the 2006-07 class graduating, almost 2 percent higher than Pennsylvania overall.

The numbers didn't surprise Mary Ghilani, director of career services at Luzerne County Community College, who said the changing job market demands workers with more skills and education.

"It takes more than a (high school) diploma to get not only a good paying job, but a family sustaining job," said. "Over last three or four years we've been seeing a lot of those adult students coming back to school because they either are not happy in their careers, they've been downsized or lost their job or they can't make enough in their current job."

Associate degrees and skills training opens some doors, she said, but with a bachelor's or higher degree the job opportunities open much wider.

Hanover Area's Bob Biscontini, chairman of school counseling, said he believes students understand how additional education leads to better jobs, pay and opportunities. However, they sometimes get caught up enjoying high school and delay applying for college or are too busy trying to deal with life situations to go straight from high school to college.

"I think they know that, they hear it from us often enough," he said. "A lot of kids just have stuff in the way."

To give some of those students a push, he said Hanover Area aggressively works with students on setting up plans for after college and will even give students the applications to fill out.

At Greater Nanticoke Area, Superintendent Anthony Perrone said he would do anything to get his students to go on to higher education, but realizes the economic problems in the community. According to the state, 45.2 percent of GNA students were considered low income in 2006-07.

"Right now, the way the economy is, if you have technical skills you might have a better chance to get a job than someone with a four-year liberal arts degree," he said.

For information on the report, visit [www.papartnerships.org/droppingbackin](http://www.papartnerships.org/droppingbackin).

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