

Kentucky: Significant Educational Progress - A Preliminary Analysis of Newly Released Detailed Census 2000 Data by State

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Introduction

The Census 2000 data released September 25, 2002 contains detailed data by age and sex for each of the 50 states. This report looks at educational attainment by age. There are diverging educational trends across the United States with Southeastern states showing the most progress and Southwestern states showing educational decline among their younger adult population cohorts. States with lower educational levels are changing from Southeastern states to Southwestern states. These are also the two regions experiencing the most overall population growth in the United States. (Data tables and maps are attached.)

The Northeast is experiencing domestic out-migration and even with immigration to the region is declining in its population percentage compared to other regions. The West has flat domestic migration and significant immigration. Only the South as a region is experiencing domestic in-migration and also immigration. This analysis is based on 1990 to 1999 population estimates for the Census Bureau. The Census 2000 migration data has not been released yet.

Will the population shifts out of Northeast and the declining educational attainment in the West lead to the South emerging as the economic engine of the United States? Census 2000, when compared to earlier censuses, raises some significant questions as to where the future of the United States is headed.

Interestingly, across the United States, the population ages 35 to 44 in 1990, the older Baby Boomers who were born between 1946 and 1955, have higher educational levels at comparable ages than the population cohort, ages 35 to 44 in 2000, the younger Baby Boomers who were born between 1955 and 1964. For the two cohorts at the Bachelor's degree level, 27.0% compared to 25.9% and at the Graduate/Professional level 10.3% compared to 8.7%. Why is the

older Baby Boomer cohort better educated than the younger Baby Boomer cohort? One more question to think about. (Census 2000 data is presented with one decimal point but rankings are carried out a number of decimal points)

Kentucky: Brain Drain or Brain Gain

It appears the brain drain is occurring more in California and New York rather than in Kentucky. Both California and New York, according to 1999 population estimates, experienced significant domestic out-migration between 1990 and 1999. California and New York continued to grow due to immigration. Census 2000 indicates that both California and New York ranked below Kentucky, ranked 35th, 84.2%, in the percentage of adults, age 25 to 34, with a high school degree. New York ranked just below Kentucky at 36th, 84.1% and California ranked 50th at 75.2% with a high school degree.

Previously released Census 2000 data indicated the adult population, ages 25+, in Kentucky ranked 49th for high school graduation, 46th for associate degree, 47th for bachelor's degree and 38th for graduate/professional degree.

When detailed by age groups, Kentucky showed significant educational progress among our younger adult population. Additionally, a number of age groups are showing continual educational improvement over time. The continual educational improvement could be the result of adult education/GED's and/or in-migration of persons with higher educational levels.

Among those with a high school degree, the population cohort, ages 25 to 34, Kentucky ranked 35th with 84.2% having a high school degree, which is above the national average of 83.9%. Kentucky ranked 44th for ages 35 to 44, 49th for ages 45 to 64, and 50th for age 65+. In 1990, the age group 25 to 34 had a high school graduation rate of 79.2% and in 2000, the age group, now ages 35 to 44, had a high school graduation rate of 82.3% showing continual educational improvement.

When comparing the age group 25 to 34 with the age group 45 to 64 Kentucky shows dramatic educational improvement among Kentucky's younger population. Kentucky ranked first in the United States in the percentage point change, 9.0, with the age group ages 25 to 34, 84.2% with a high school degree compared to the age group 45 to 64, 75.2%. Kentucky is educating its younger population and the Census 2000 data proves it. Kentucky's older less educated population holds Kentucky's educational levels down but as this population ages out of the workforce, Kentucky's workforce becomes more and more competitive. To paraphrase a Southern Growth Policy Board Report, "Kentucky is half way home, but has a ways to go"! Kentucky is only ranked 35th in its young adult population, ages 25 to 34, with a high school degree but Kentucky is moving in the right direction and a lot better than the 49th high school ranking for the population ages 25+.

Kentucky, 35th, ranks above not just Arkansas, 40th; Alabama, 43rd; Mississippi, 45th; and Louisiana, 46th in the South but also North Carolina, 37th; Tennessee, 38th; Georgia, 39th; South Carolina, 41st; and Florida, 42nd. Additionally, 5 Western states, New Mexico, 44th; Arizona, 47th; Nevada, 48th; Texas, 49th; and California, 50th.

When comparing the difference between high school educational levels between ages 25 to 34 and ages 45 to 64, we see the diverging trends across the United States with 8 of the top 10 states being in the Southeast ranging from a 9.0 percentage point increase in Kentucky, ranked 1st, to a 4.0 percentage point increase in Alabama, ranked 10th. The United States increase was only 0.7 percentage points. The bottom 10 states all had percentage point decreases and all were in the West region, Texas was ranked 41st with a -1.1 percentage point decline and Nevada was ranked 50th with a -6.5 percentage point decline.

Among those with an associate degree only, the population cohort ages 25 to 34, Kentucky ranks 41st with 6.5% with an associate degree only. Kentucky ranks 39th for ages 35 to 44, 47th for ages 45 to 64 and 47th for age 65+. The Census does not ask about vocational or technical education training that doesn't give an associate degree. A measure of vocational or technical education beyond high school would be a useful addition to the Census which now only asks about some college or an associate degree. If vocational and technical training beyond high school were included these ranks could improve.

Among those with a bachelor's degree, the population cohort ages 25 to 34. Kentucky ranks 45th with 20.8% with a bachelor's degree. Kentucky ranks 46th for ages 35 to 44, 49th for ages 45 to 64 and 48th for age 65+.

Among those with a graduate/professional degree, the population cohort ages 25 to 34, Kentucky ranks 30th with 5.6% with a graduate/professional degree. Kentucky ranks 34th for ages 35 to 44, 38th for ages 45 to 64, and 46th of age 65+. Kentucky ranks highest in comparison to other states at the graduate/professional degree level. From an economic development perspective this is good news.

Additionally, at the Kentucky county level earlier Census 2000 data indicates that Southeastern Kentucky's larger counties are experiencing a significant growth in their population with a graduate/professional degree. Harlan County went from 3.1% with a graduate/professional degree to 4.5% between 1990 and 2000 and its state ranking went from 75th to 54th. Floyd County went from 3.0% to 4.8%,

from 87th to 43rd. Perry County went from 3.2% to 4.5%, from 73rd to 52nd. Pike County went from 3.4% to 4.6%, from 63rd to 50th.

Further analysis for Kentucky is needed at the county level for high school graduation rates, associate degree rates, bachelor's degree rates and graduate/professional degree rates detailed by age and sex. Questions need to be answered such as: What age groups are responsible for the increasing graduate/professional rates in Southeastern Kentucky? Is there a gender factor, as well, with more women with graduate and professional degrees?

Prosperous Islands in a Sea of Decline

Kentucky's educational progress, which earlier Census 2000 data indicated was occurring across the state, may serve Kentucky well. Kentucky's efforts toward statewide educational reform, workforce development, and economic development are keys to Kentucky's improving economic future. The continued economic development of the Golden Triangle between Louisville, Lexington, and Northern Kentucky is critical to Kentucky but the rest of the state is also making progress!

The concept of a number of key cities across the United States driving state economies is an important tool for economic development. However, if those cities are located in states experiencing educational decline, what are the long term prospects for their continued progress? In California, 75.2% of the population ages 25 to 34 have a high school degree, compared to 78.0% for ages 35 to 44, and 80.5% for ages 45 to 64, continuing decline. Kentucky is going in an opposite and healthier direction of educational progress.

A challenge for the Southwest will be investing in the education of their rapidly growing Hispanic and additional immigrant populations. Will they respond to the challenge or ignore it? Will their key cities be islands of prosperity in a sea of educational and economic decline? Kentucky must invest in their growing Hispanic and additional immigrant populations to avoid the educational failures occurring in the Southwestern states.

THIS PRELIMINARY REPORT IS A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT BETWEEN THE KENTUCKY STATE DATA CENTER, UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE AND THE OFFICE OF WORKFORCE RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS, KENTUCKY CABINET FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT.