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

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Introduction

Released September 25, 2002, Census 2000 contains detailed data by age and sex for each of the 50 states. The following data reveals a variety of noteworthy trends regarding educational attainment by age.

- An emphasis on education is paying off in Kentucky; Kentucky is experiencing brain gain, not brain drain, in its younger adult population. Since 1990, Kentucky has made the largest jump of any state in the percentage of high school graduates in the 25-34 age group. For the first time, Kentucky, at 84.2%, has a higher percentage of people in this age group with a high school diploma than the national average of 83.9%.
- Educational progress permeates the Southeast, while the West is characterized by educational decline. Kentucky and the entire Southeast region of the United States are poised to overtake the Northeast as the economic engine that drives the nation. The Southeast is the only region experiencing domestic in-migration and immigration, according to 1990-1999 population estimates by the Census Bureau. By contrast, the Northeast is experiencing domestic out-migration; even with immigration, the Northeast continues to decline in its population percentage. The West has flat domestic migration and significant international immigration.
- Kentucky's highest rankings are among those with graduate/professional degrees and Southeastern Kentucky is experiencing the most improvement. For the population aged 25+, Kentucky ranked 37th in the percentage of people with a graduate/professional degree. Additionally, at the county level in Kentucky, earlier Census 2000 data indicated that Southeastern Kentucky's more populous counties were experiencing significant growth in their population with a graduate/professional degree.
- Kentucky's efforts toward statewide education reform at all levels, workforce development, and economic development are succeeding. Kentucky's younger age cohort, aged 25-34, has shown that they value education through increased gains in attainment. Educational advancements of the mature adult workforce have improved through domestic in-migration and the continued education of adults. These educational achievements provide the fundamental foundation for a better-educated workforce and it is widely recognized that a better-educated workforce attracts skilled jobs that fuel economic development.

Southeast as the Economic Engine of the Future

Regionally, the Northeast is experiencing domestic out-migration; even with immigration, the Northeast continues to decline in its population percentage when compared with other regions. The West has flat domestic migration and significant international immigration. Only the South is experiencing domestic in-migration and also immigration. This analysis is based on 1990-1999 Census Bureau population estimates, as the Census 2000 migration data has not been released.

Will the population shifts out of the Northeast and the declining educational attainment in the West lead to the South emerging as the economic engine of the United States? Census 2000 emphasizes diverging educational trends across the United States. For example, among their younger adult population cohorts, Southeastern and Southwestern states are moving in opposite directions. Specifically, educational progress permeates the Southeast while the Southwest is characterized by educational decline. More important is the shift in lower educational levels, which rather than being isolated in the Southeast region has now transferred to the Southwest. (Data tables and maps are attached.) Also, these two regions experienced the most overall population growth in the United States between 1990 and 1999.

Across the United States, the older Baby Boomers (born between 1946 and 1955) have a higher educational level at comparable ages than the younger Boomers (born between 1955 and 1964). In 1990, 27.0% of the population aged 35-44 had a bachelor's degree compared with 25.9% in 2000. The percent of persons aged 35-44 who held a graduate/professional degree declined from 10.3% in 1990 to 8.7% in 2000.

Kentucky: Brain Drain or Brain Gain?

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

Previously released Census 2000 data indicated Kentucky's adult population, ages 25+, ranked 49th for high school graduation, 46th for associate degree, 47th for bachelor's degree and 38th for graduate/professional degree. It is noteworthy to mention that the data from Kentucky showed a significant improvement in percentage change between 1990 and 2000 (number one in high school graduates, number one in associate degrees and number four in bachelor's degrees) without a corresponding dramatic increase in rank.

When comparing the age group 25-34 with the age group 45-64, Kentucky showed marked educational improvement among its younger population. Nine percentage points separated those age groups (84.2% compared to 75.2%). Most strikingly, this percentage point differential ranked Kentucky a dramatic first in the U.S regarding high school educational attainment gains. In fact eight of the top ten states were in the Southeast, while many Western and Midwestern states had percentage point declines. As Kentucky's older, less-educated population ages out of the labor pool, its workforce becomes more competitive.

To paraphrase a benchmark Southern Growth Policy Board report, "Kentucky is half way home, but has a ways to go!" Kentucky's gains largely stemmed from significant educational progress among the younger adult population. Kentuckians aged 25-34 are more likely to have a high school degree than persons nationwide, 84.2% compared to 83.9%. In this category Kentucky ranked 35th; this rank was lower for ages 35-44 (44th), ages 45-64 (49th), and age 65+ (50th). Additionally, a number of age groups are showing continuous educational improvement over time. This educational improvement may result from in-migration and adult Kentuckians seeking additional educational opportunities. In 1990, the age group 25-34 had a high school graduation rate of 79.2% and in 2000, the age group, now ages 35-44, had a high school graduation rate of 82.3% showing continual educational improvement. Kentucky is educating its younger population and the Census 2000 data proves it.

Historically, the educational attainment of Kentucky has ranked near the bottom with other Southeastern states; however, Census 2000 data indicates that Kentucky's younger adult population has surpassed a majority of Southeastern states as well as many Southwestern states.

The Census does not seek information about vocational or technical education training that does not result in an associate degree. However, of those aged 25-34 in Kentucky, 6.5% reported an associate degree as their highest

level of educational attainment (41st). Kentucky ranked 39th for those aged 35-44, 47th for those aged 45-64, and 47th for those aged 65+. A measure of vocational or technical education beyond high school would be a useful addition to the Census. This scenario may offer a more accurate description of post-secondary education for Kentuckians with less than a bachelor's degree.

Among those with a bachelor's degree, the population cohort aged 25-34 in Kentucky ranked 45th (20.8%). Kentucky ranked 46th for those aged 35-44, 49th for those aged 45-64, and 48th for those aged 65+.

Among those with a graduate/professional degree, the population cohort aged 25-34, Kentucky ranked 30th (5.6%). Kentucky ranked 34th for those aged 35-44, 38th for those aged 45-64, and 46th for those aged 65+. Kentucky looks best at the graduate/professional level. From an economic development perspective this is good news.

Additionally, at the county level in Kentucky, earlier Census 2000 data indicated that Southeastern Kentucky's more populous counties were experiencing 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 is needed at the county level by detailed age and gender. Questions need to be answered such as: What age groups are responsible for the increasing graduate/professional rates in Southeastern Kentucky? Are women more likely to have graduate/professional degrees than men?

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 education reform at all levels, 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 the Commonwealth, 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, younger workers are less likely to have a high school degree (75.2% of the population ages 25-34) than their older counterparts (78.0% for ages 35-44 and 80.5% for ages 45-64). Kentucky is going in a healthier direction, where the younger workers are better educated.

A challenge for the Southwest will be investing in the education of their rapidly growing Hispanic and other 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 its growing Hispanic and other immigrant populations to avoid the educational difficulties occurring in the Southwestern states.

THIS PRELIMINARY ARTICLE 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.