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## EARNING A HIGH-SCHOOL DIPLOMA CAN BE WORTH \$9,000 A YEAR

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One in five U.S. high school students doesn't make it to graduation in four years. Staying in school, though, can be a profitable decision.

The median weekly paycheck for full-time U.S. workers was \$799 in the fourth quarter of 2014, the Labor Department said Wednesday, based on how much people say they usually earn. That's up 1.7% from a year earlier, slipping from 2.5% annual growth in the third quarter.

There was considerable variation based on gender, race and education. Women had median earnings of \$724 last quarter, \$158 less per week than men. Hispanics earned \$600 a week compared with \$621 for blacks, \$823 for whites and \$959 for Asians.

A full-time American worker, 25 years or older, who didn't graduate from high school had median weekly earnings of \$491 in late 2014. Someone with a high-school diploma, but no college education, earned \$664 a week. That earnings gap of \$173 per week translates into \$8,996 over the course of a year.

A much larger jump in earnings comes with a college education. Workers with a bachelor's degree, but no advanced diploma, earned \$1,131 a week, \$467 more than did their high school-only colleagues. That translated into \$24,284 more per year.

There's plenty of evidence that a college education pays for itself, with higher lifetime earnings offsetting the cost of attendance. But many college graduates have been taking jobs that don't require a degree and earn barely more than workers with only high-school diplomas, especially since the recession.

In any case, graduating from high school and/or college leads to better job security as well as higher earnings. The unemployment rate for Americans with less than a high-school diploma was 8.6% in December, compared with 5.3% for people who graduated from high school but didn't attend college. People 25 and older with a bachelor's degree or higher had a jobless rate last month of just 2.9%.