Identifying Opportunity Occupations in the Nation’s Largest Metropolitan Economies

Opportunity occupations are jobs that pay workers at least the national annual median wage, adjusted for differences in local consumption prices, and are generally accessible for a worker without a bachelor’s degree. This study focused on the 100 largest metropolitan economies in the U.S.

The national annual median wage in May 2014 was roughly $35,500. To adjust for variation in local costs, we lower the wage to $30,600 in the McAllen, TX metro and raise the wage to $43,500 in the Bridgeport, CT metro.

Top Opportunity Occupations

These 9 occupations rank in the top 15 opportunity occupations using three different measures of educational attainment.

- Registered Nurses
- Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers
- Bookkeeping and Accounting Clerks
- Retail Sales Supervisors
- Maintenance and Repair Workers
- Police and Sheriff’s Patrol Officers
- Licensed Practical and Vocational Nurses
- Secretaries and Administrative Assistants
- Electricians

Top 10 & Bottom 10 Metros for Opportunity Occupations

Using one measure of educational attainment, roughly 27% of all employment can be classified as an opportunity occupation. The share ranges from over 36% in the Kansas City metro to under 16% in the McAllen metro.

Regional Educational Attainment Preferences

For a given occupation, employer preferences for educational attainment vary. This means that an occupation can represent real opportunity for a worker without a bachelor’s degree in one metro but not in another.

* These percentages represent the share of online job ads requesting less than a bachelor’s degree.

For more information, read Identifying Opportunity Occupations in the Nation’s Largest Metropolitan Economies, written by Keith Wardrip, Kyle Fee, Lisa Nelson, and Stuart Andreason and published by the Federal Reserve Banks of Philadelphia, Cleveland, and Atlanta, September 2015. You can find the report at www.philadelphiafed.org/community-development/publications/special-reports. The views expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia or the Federal Reserve System.