KEY FINDINGS

- The U.S. ranks 14th in the world in the percentage of 25-34 year-olds with higher education (42%).

- The odds that a young person in the U.S. will be in higher education if his or her parents do not have an upper secondary education are just 29% -- one of the lowest levels among OECD countries.

- The U.S ranks 28th in the percentage of 4-year-olds in early childhood education, with a 69% enrolment rate.

- Across all OECD countries, 30% of the expenditure on higher education comes from private sources, while in the U.S., 62% does.

- Teachers in the U.S. spend between 1 050 and 1 100 hours a year teaching – much more than in almost every country.

The U.S.’s higher education attainment levels are quite high overall, but other countries are increasing attainment levels at a faster rate.

In the United States, 42% of all 25-64 year-olds have a tertiary (higher education) attainment, making it one of the most well-educated countries in the world. Only Canada (51%), Israel (46%), Japan (45%) and the Russian Federation (54%) have higher tertiary attainment levels among this age group (Table A1.3a). At the same time, a number of countries have now surpassed the U.S. in the percentage of younger adults with a tertiary attainment. The U.S. ranks 14th among 37 OECD and G20 countries in the percentage of 25-34 year-olds with higher education, at 42% - above the OECD average (38%), but far behind the leader, Korea (65%) (Chart A1.1).
Teachers in the U.S. spend much more time teaching than in other countries…

Compared to their peers in other countries, teachers in the U.S. spend a great deal of time in front of the classroom. On average, primary school teachers in the U.S. spend almost 1,100 hours a year teaching, while lower secondary teachers teach for about 1,070 hours, and upper secondary school teachers spend about 1,050 hours. With the exceptions of lower and upper secondary teachers in Argentina and Chile and lower secondary teachers in Mexico, teachers in the U.S. teach for many more hours than in other countries.
average: 782 hours for primary education, 704 hours for lower secondary, and 658 hours for upper secondary). Notably, while the number of hours of teaching per year tends to decrease with each education level in most OECD countries, the number of teaching hours in the U.S. is roughly the same in primary, lower secondary and upper secondary education (Table D4.2; Chart D4.2).

Depending on the school level, teachers in the U.S. spend between 53% and 57% of their total statutory working time teaching, on average. In comparison, across all OECD countries, teachers spend between 39% and 47% of their statutory working time teaching (Table D4.1). The remainder is typically spent on activities like lesson preparation, grading, in-service training, and staff meetings.

...while student-teacher ratios hover around the OECD average.

In general, the ratio of students to teaching staff in U.S. schools does not depart dramatically from the OECD average. In pre-primary education, the ratio is 14.6 (OECD average: 14.4), although the ratio of pre-primary students to all contact staff (11.4) is below the OECD average (12.3). In primary education, U.S. schools have a lower-than-average student teacher ratio of 14.5 (OECD average: 15.9).

Meanwhile, at the secondary level, the student-teacher ratio in the U.S. is higher-than-average for both lower secondary education (U.S.: 14.0; OECD average: 13.7) and in upper secondary education (U.S.: 15.0; OECD average: 13.8) (Table D2.2).