

New Survey Reveals Gen Z Youth Pursuing Nondegree Paths After High School Feel Confident and Workforce Ready

American Student Assistance and Jobs for the Future release new survey that examines non-college bound youth's perspectives on education and career plans

BOSTON, Oct. 17, 2023 /PRNewswire/ -- A new [survey](#) commissioned by American Student Assistance® (ASA) and Jobs for the Future (JFF) found that while young people who pursue nondegree pathways report having confidence in their future, there is a pervasive lack of awareness about these diverse pathways to success and how to judge their quality. In fact, two in three youth who did not pursue a nondegree education pathway indicated they would have considered this option if they had known more about it.

As [college enrollment](#) remains below pre-pandemic levels and survey after survey captures growing public skepticism about the value of college, ASA and JFF commissioned a survey – conducted by Morning Consult – of more than 1,100 high school graduates who have opted not to go to college directly after high school to better understand their decisions.

The survey explores the perceptions, feelings, and choices of three groups of students pursuing a nondegree postsecondary program, such as apprenticeships, bootcamps, certificate programs, industry certifications, and occupation licenses versus students who are not pursuing postsecondary education or training programs. The three groups of learners surveyed include: **Non-college youth:** Those neither enrolled nor graduated from a college (encompasses all survey respondents); **Pathway youth:** Those who pursued or are pursuing any nondegree postsecondary pathway (describes 558 of survey respondents); and **Non-pathway youth:** Those who didn't pursue or aren't pursuing any nondegree postsecondary pathway (describes 561 of survey respondents).

Among the key findings:

1. **Young people in nondegree pathways feel confident.** In comparison to the experiences and perceptions of youth who aren't on a defined pathway, 70 percent of "pathway youth" have high confidence in their post-high school plans. Nearly all (9 in 10) respondents are satisfied with the pathway they are pursuing or pursued. The top reasons for that satisfaction were the opportunity to engage in hands-on work and learn by doing, that pathways were faster to complete and provided them the education and training they needed to obtain a job in their desired field.
2. **Young people in nondegree pathways perceive that they are workforce-ready.** Nearly three in four (71%) of pathway youth respondents said they felt prepared for the workforce. Across these respondents, around one in three had pursued a certification (31%) or certificate (33%), and 20% had pursued a competency-based license.
3. **A higher proportion of pathway youth report being employed.** More pathway youth (65%) report working part- or full-time, compared to 51% of non-pathway youth.
4. **Information gaps persist for high school graduates.** Nearly 1 in 3 non-college youth (32%) report a lack of confidence in knowing the steps they need to take to transition into a post-high school career and education. Two in three (64%) non-pathway youth say they would have considered pathway programs if they knew more about them. They report several barriers to not pursuing pathway programs, including a lack of encouragement by the school to explore them. Non-college youth identified searching the web (87%) and watching online videos (81%) as the most preferred sources of information for their post-high school plans.

"A growing number of young people are interested in diverse postsecondary pathways that enable them to build a life and career on their own terms. But acquiring the skills needed to thrive in a dynamic workforce can be unclear and confusing for learners. It's the responsibility of policymakers, advocates, and educators to ensure young people have the information and opportunities necessary to build those skills," said Jean Eddy, President and CEO of ASA. "With this survey, we seek to learn from young people in order to better understand the support needed to help them with their future planning."

"It's clear many Gen Z youth are looking for faster, more affordable, and more relevant pathways to meaningful jobs that offer life-sustaining wages and are aligned to their aspirations and interests," said Maria Flynn,

President and CEO of Jobs for the Future. "As we transform education and workforce development systems by blurring the lines between high school, postsecondary education, and career training, helping young people access clear, accurate, and timely information about diverse education-to-career pathways is critical."

The complete survey findings can be found in a [new white paper](#), "Success, Redefined: How Non-Degree Pathways Empower Youth to Chart Their Own Course to Confidence, Employability, and Financial Freedom," released today by ASA and JFF. In addition to the survey findings, the white paper highlights direct accounts from four young people who have pursued a range of pathways after high school from on-line courses and certificates, to bootcamps and apprenticeship programs.

About American Student Assistance

American Student Assistance® (ASA) is a national nonprofit changing the way kids learn about careers and navigate a path to postsecondary education and career success. ASA believes all students should have equitable access to career readiness learning, starting in middle school, so they will be equipped to make informed, confident decisions about their futures. ASA fulfills its mission by providing free digital-first experiences, including Futurescape® and Next Voice™, and EvolveMe™, directly to millions of students, and through impact investing and philanthropic support for educators, intermediaries, and others. To learn more about ASA, visit www.asa.org/about-asa.

About Jobs for the Future:

Jobs for the Future (JFF) drives transformation of the U.S. education and workforce systems to achieve equitable economic advancement for all. www.jff.org

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