

Pathways Matter to Families

What Parents and Young Adults Believe and Want to Know About Education to Workforce Pathways

Our K-12 and postsecondary education systems are built and sustained on the premise that they will prepare students for a successful future. When that future comes, though, too often high school graduates discover that they lack the knowledge and the skills needed to succeed in college and/or a career. It doesn't end there: too many college graduates find themselves unprepared for the demands of the contemporary workforce. And too many parents find a lack of quality information about educational opportunities available in high school and college inhibits them from helping their children chart a path that leads to success.

How can high-quality pathways help students meet their college and career goals?



High-quality pathways expand opportunities for students, giving them a head start on achieving future goals. Students who begin high-quality pathways in high school can often graduate with college credits, hands-on workplace skills, industry credentials and work experience. Even better, they can start (and finish) their postsecondary education sooner, earning the degrees and credentials they will need for success in their career.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

HIGH SCHOOL

COLLEGE

CAREER

Strong, coherent policies can make it significantly easier for students and families to navigate along a pathway that enables students to build relevant skills, gain valued experiences and earn valued credentials across K-12, postsecondary and workforce systems. **Unfortunately, many states' education to workforce systems are still collections of misaligned and disconnected policies— with wide variations in the quality of implementation—that serve neither students nor employers well.**

About the Research

Given the importance of communicating effectively with students and parents about the quality of pathways and the learning opportunities included in them, we engaged 1,141 parents and young adults to understand:

- How they characterize learning opportunities, career interests and aspirations;
- How they perceive education to workforce pathways and experiences;
- What kinds of information they receive—and whether it matches the information they need and want; and
- How different information and messages impact their attitudes.

The perceptions of young adults—the very people for whom pathways and educational opportunities are created—are particularly important. They illustrate where the reality of their own educational experiences may diverge from their parents' perceptions about program and pathway quality.

What do students, parents and young adults currently experience?

It is imperative that policymakers understand what students and families know and believe about education to workforce pathways—as well as what specific kinds of information they value and where they get it. High-quality pathways that expand opportunities for students cannot be established without informing, engaging and empowering the very people these policies and programs serve.

Findings



Parents and young adults clearly prioritize important career outcomes but have doubts about whether they will be achieved.



Parents and young adults agree that developing “real-world” skills, gaining work experience and completing career-focused coursework will set learners up for success after high school—but there is likely a significant gap between what parents believe schools are providing and what they are actually delivering.



Schools may be unwittingly reinforcing the false narrative that pathways are still an “or” decision between separate tracks (college vs. career) of unequal value.



There is an information gap in how parents and young adults evaluate the quality of CTE pathways and the information schools currently provide.



There may be a circular process of too little and too low-quality information that hinders parents’ and students’ ability to advocate for opportunities that meet their learning needs.

“I don’t think there are enough resources out there for the children (financial aid workshops, community college information, job fairs, trade school information) that give them the **different options that are available after high school.**”

– Parent of High Schooler

“I’m not at all satisfied. I feel like I’m **doing nothing with my life.**”

– Young Adult

“I just feel like I got the **bare minimum** set of skills. Enough to get by but **not enough to stand out.**”

– Young Adult

“They need to get to know the kids and try to **see what they would be good at.** They need to help make sure they **take the right classes,** help them apply for **grants and scholarships,** and **give them options** other than college- like technical schools, military, and other trades.”

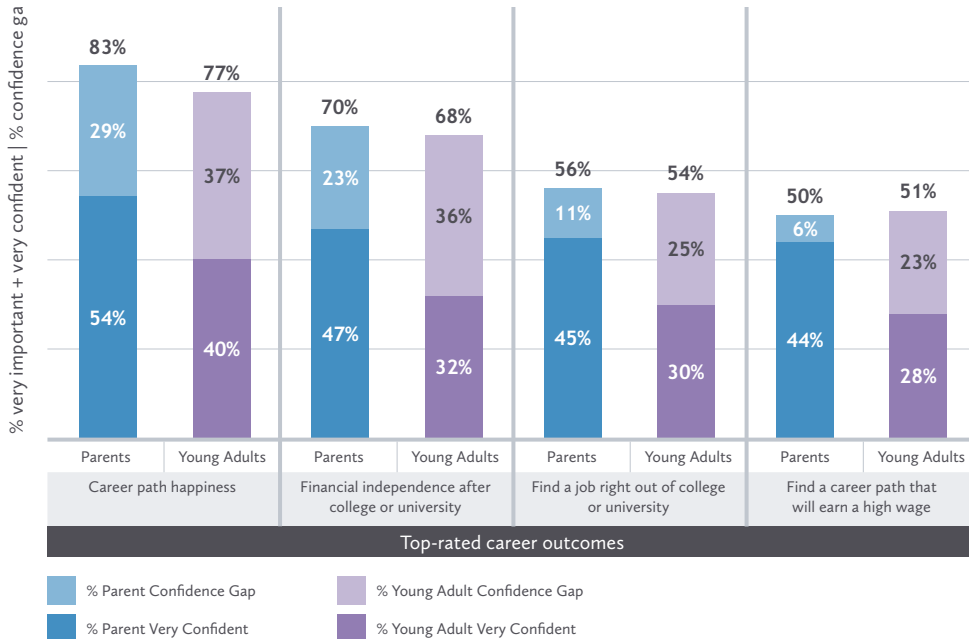
– Parent of Young Adult

A Closer Look

Parents and young adults report significant gaps in confidence in their ability to achieve the career outcomes they rate as very important.

SURVEY QUESTION:

How confident are young adults that they will achieve important career outcomes?



What is a confidence gap?

A confidence gap is the difference between the percentage of respondents that rate a career outcome as “very important” and the percentage that are “very confident” they will achieve that outcome.

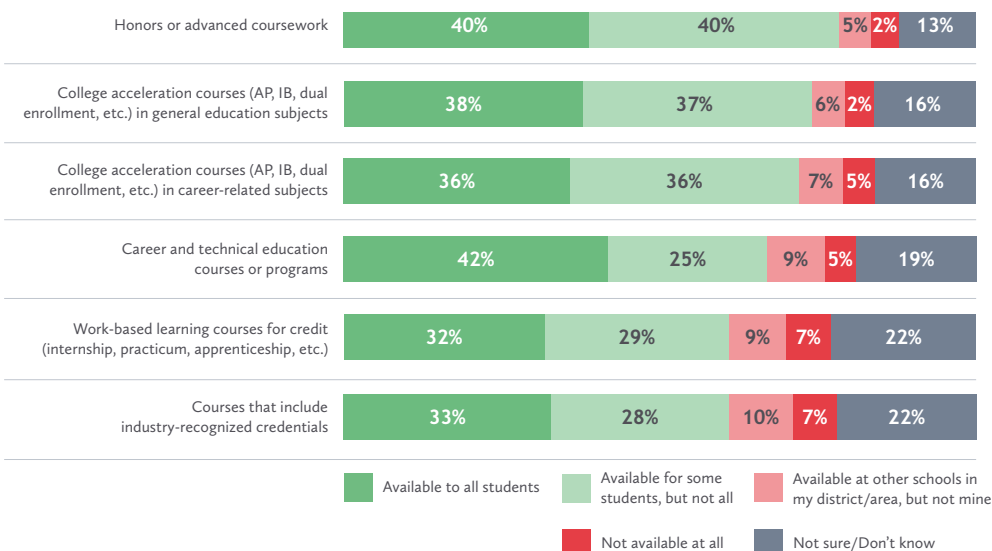
Confidence gaps might imply:

- A lack of trust in education systems to prepare students to achieve their goals
- Uncertainty about labor market opportunities
- Disconnects between degree attainment and employment potential
- Lack of clarity about career path “happiness”
- Young adults may be “savvier consumers” than parents

Parents and young adults report gaps in awareness of and access to critical pathway experiences—especially those they rate as most important.

SURVEY QUESTION

How available are critical pathway experiences in your community?



“I did not even know that these programs were an option in high school. It would have been nice to actively learn about different careers rather than just hearing about them.”

– Young Adult

Solutions



Answer parent and student questions about pathway outcomes. Establish a clear vision, shared definitions and success metrics for high-quality pathways—and collect and share the data associated with them.



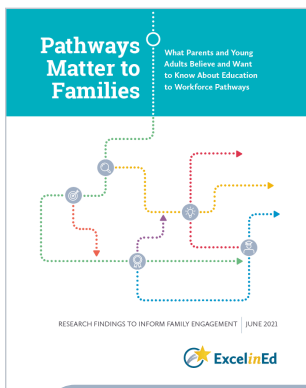
Empower students and families with comprehensive information about pathways—in language that resonates with them.



Ensure every student—and family—receives high-quality pathway navigation support.



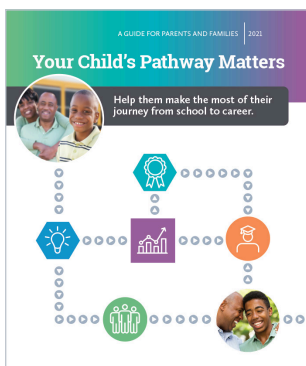
Resources



READ THE FULL REPORT

Pathways Matter to Families is intended to help state policymakers and education leaders better assess how they can empower students and families in their state by providing the types of support and information that parents and students need to successfully navigate available pathways.

Using the findings and solutions presented in this report, policymakers can coordinate efforts among key stakeholders—including educators, employers, intermediaries, government agencies and community members—to develop comprehensive policies and resources that create opportunities and support students in meeting their career goals, no matter what route their educational journey takes.



READ THE PARENT GUIDE

Your Child's Pathway Matters is designed to help parents and families identify the information, questions and support they can use to help their child make pathway decisions—and succeed on their journey.

When empowered with information about pathway experiences and quality, students and families can advocate for high-quality offerings in their communities.