



| 2023 POST-GRADUATION
| READINESS REPORT

Education at a crossroads



Student pathways diverge



Amid growing skepticism about the value of 4-year degrees, fewer high school graduates are choosing college pathways, according to the latest data from YouScience®.

Student loan debt continues to be a polarizing political issue alongside the economy and foreign policy, and students are understandably cautious about signing up for debt that could take decades to pay off. They're living through difficult economic times with inflation and interest rates pricing them out of opportunities afforded to previous generations. For many, the return on investment isn't worth it, as revealed by a [Wall Street Journal/NORC poll](#) earlier this year. That study found that 56% of adults said a 4-year college is "not worth the cost," an increase from 40% in 2013.

In fact, postsecondary enrollment has been in [decline since the COVID-19 pandemic](#). So, what career or education pathways are students pursuing instead? Who is influencing them in their decision, and are they happy with their chosen pathway?



56% of adults say 4-year college is not worth the cost



To get the pulse of post-graduation pathway planning, YouScience surveyed more than 500 students from the classes of 2020-2023.



Key findings from the class of 2023

45%

less than half pursued a 4-year college pathway (down 7 percentage points compared to 2019-2022 grads)

30%

were not aware of career and technical education (CTE) programs

51%

ranked family as the greatest influence on which pathway to pursue

31%

are not sure they are where they want to be in their education or career path

65%

reported having 5 or fewer conversations with a teacher(s) or counselor(s) about their post-high school opportunities (up nearly 10 percentage points compared to 2019-2022 grads)

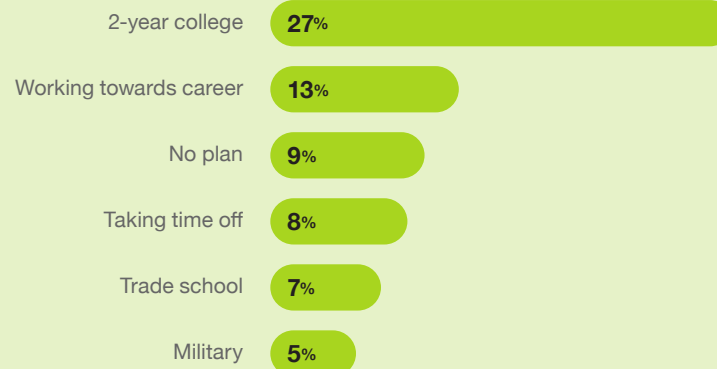


College enrollment declines

Analysis revealed that 55% of the class of 2023 chose not to pursue a 4-year college pathway, a 14.6% increase from the previous years (2019-2022). Instead, they chose other pathways or delayed a 4-year college degree.



Other pathways pursued by 2023 high school grads (other than 4-year college)





Trade and tech schools on the rise

One pathway on the rise is technical or trade schools, which 7% of respondents in our research chose to pursue. According to the [National Student Clearinghouse](#), several trade programs experienced increased student interest from Spring 2021 to 2022.

While increased enrollment in trade schools signals a potential change in the traditional postsecondary landscape, more needs to be done at the high school level to increase awareness, where many students have free access to these programs through CTE.

“I’m excited about the people that I’ll meet after high school, but I guess I’m nervous about what kind of jobs I’ll be able to find.”

—Luke C., High School Student





Missed opportunity

CTE courses in high school often provide students the ability to earn certifications and prove their skills and knowledge in career fields such as advanced manufacturing, cyber security, welding, and many more.

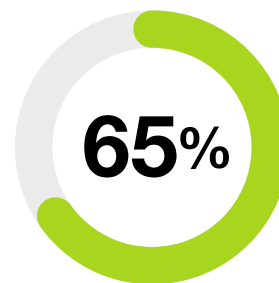


For students who don't want to pursue a 4-year college degree, trades are a viable alternative with plenty of job opportunities, as the [U.S. Chamber of Commerce](#) predicts a "massive shortage of skilled workers" in fields such as auto mechanics.

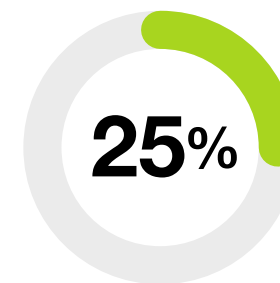
Unfortunately, our research revealed 30% of 2023 graduates reported not being aware of available CTE programs. This means many students aren't taking advantage of the free courses available in high school and are leaving school without the added skills that could enhance their resume for a job or potentially use it for college credit.

One reason for this lack of knowledge about CTE programs could be attributed to a breakdown in communication between students and educators. Our research revealed that 65% of 2023 high school graduates had only five or fewer conversations with teachers or counselors about their post-high school opportunities.

It's also important to note that 25% of 2023 graduates reported that their schools did not connect them or their classmates with local businesses to help them understand what local careers are available to them.



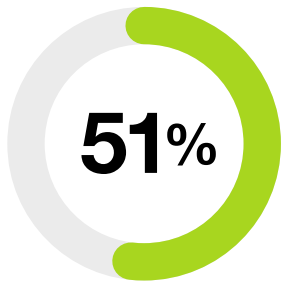
65% of 2023 grads had five or fewer conversations with counselors or educators about post-graduation options



25% of 2023 grads reported that their schools didn't connect them or their classmates with local businesses



Influence matters



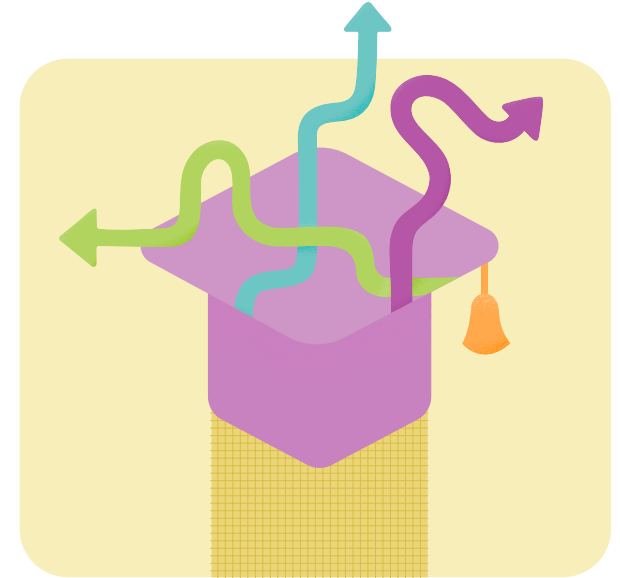
More than half (51%) of surveyed grads ranked family members as their greatest influence on pathway decisions

“We want to develop relationships, and sometimes we are able to in smaller and deeper ways. We try really hard to make sure we at least meet a few times with our kids.”

—David Parker, School Counselor

Without adequate information or educators’ counseling, students turned to family for guidance. More than half of respondents (51%) in our survey of the class of 2023 ranked family members as the greatest influence on which future pathway to pursue.

Family involvement is critical to student success, but if parents or guardians aren’t aware of CTE programs offered in high school, attach a stigma to those programs, or believe that college is the only option, it could be the reason why many students aren’t aware of these opportunities.





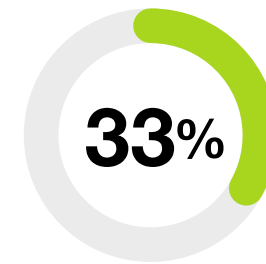
The need for aptitude discovery



Throughout middle and high school, students build toward their education or career goals by selecting courses that give them the foundation they need.

Far too often, though, students make those decisions without an understanding of their aptitudes, and it leads them to being unhappy or disengaged post-graduation.

While it's important to note that the class of 2023 is only just out of high school and still deciding the best path to take, our research shows nearly one-third (31%) are not sure they are where they want to be in their education or career path. This continues a trend as 34% of graduates from 2020-2022 also reported feeling unsure they're where they want to be in their education or career path.



Only one-third (33%) of the class of 2023, reported regular exposure to a variety of career options post-graduation

For the second consecutive year, 83% of the class of 2023 respondents stated that they would have been more engaged in their learning if they better understood their own aptitudes and how they matched to potential opportunities.

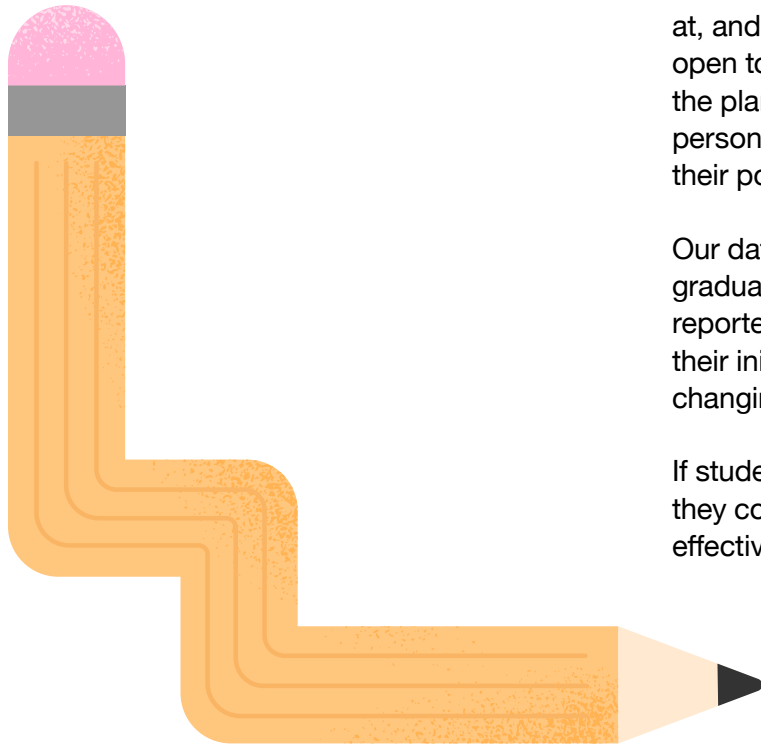
Unfortunately, only one-third (33%) of the class of 2023 reported that their schools regularly exposed them to a variety of career options to pursue following graduation. This uncovers a problem with how often students are being exposed to a wider variety of education and career options. Up next: our solution.



83% of 2023 grads said they would have been more engaged in learning had they understood their aptitudes and opportunities



What's the answer?





Students need ways to better understand their aptitudes so they can plan their personalized pathways sooner and more effectively.

When students understand what makes them unique, what they're naturally good at, and what career opportunities are open to them, they become more active in the planning of their future and can make personalized and intentional decisions about their post-graduation pathways.

Our data showed that 64% of students who graduated from high school from 2020-2023 reported changing their college major since their initial selection, and 45% reported changing their major two or more times.

If students were aware of their aptitudes, they could make more educated and effective decisions about their college major.

-  Changed major
-  Changed major 2+ times





Our suite of solutions

To help students discover their aptitudes and connection with teachers and classroom content, we suggest the following.



Aptitude and interest assessment

Utilize a science-based aptitude and interest assessment to help students discover their best-fit post-secondary education and career pathways.



Collaborative planning

Working in concert with family, educators, and counselors, students can apply their own aptitude knowledge to plan courses, obtain beneficial certifications in select CTE courses, and be better prepared to enter the workforce or pursue a degree suited for their skills.



Interdisciplinary teaching

In an interdisciplinary teaching approach, schools and districts work together in a teaming model to create personalized pathways through sequenced and integrated programs of study—all through the lens of relevant career clusters.



Career-connected learning

Connect students to real-world training, with a variety of available programs implemented on the state and local levels.



Education-to-career tools

Provide counselors and teachers the resources to help create personalized plans for postsecondary education and training based on student aptitudes and interests.



Industry-recognized certifications

Quantify student knowledge and skills through certifications.



Work-based learning, internships, and apprenticeships

Connect students with business and industry partners to gain real-world work experience.



About YouScience



“I strongly believe that together as educators, parents, and industry representatives, we can make a difference in the lives of our students. Our mission is to empower everyone to find intentional, individual success.”

Edson Barton
YouScience Co-Founder & CEO

YouScience® is the leading technology provider dedicated to solving the skills and exposure gap crisis for students and employers. Its end-to-end platform, YouScience® Brightpath, leverages proven research, artificial intelligence, and industry input to help students identify their aptitudes, validate their skills, and get matched with best-fit educational and career pathways.

YouScience is the preferred choice of individuals, parents, educators, and counselors to guide and support educational and career pathways. Currently more than 7,000 educational institutions and millions of users nationwide use YouScience to unlock potential and plan brighter futures.

