



2025 POST-GRADUATION READINESS REPORT

Life beyond high school:

How students are rethinking
college, career, and success.





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Introduction

Millions of students graduate high school each year with a diploma in hand—but too many step into this next phase of life feeling unprepared for the challenges ahead. As the graduation celebrations come to a close each year, a deeper crisis is emerging: growing numbers of students are uncertain about their pathway beyond high school. Many are feeling unsure about making hard decisions in the real-world, and are lacking the tools they need to succeed.

The 2025 Post-Graduation Readiness Report from YouScience, now in its third year, shines a light on what is happening in the lives of students as they transition out of the K-12 education system—and offers a clear blueprint for positive change. Drawing from a national survey of more than 500 recent graduates from the Classes of 2021 through 2024, and analyzing trends across six graduating classes from 2019 to 2024, this report reveals an urgent need to rethink how we prepare students for life beyond high school.





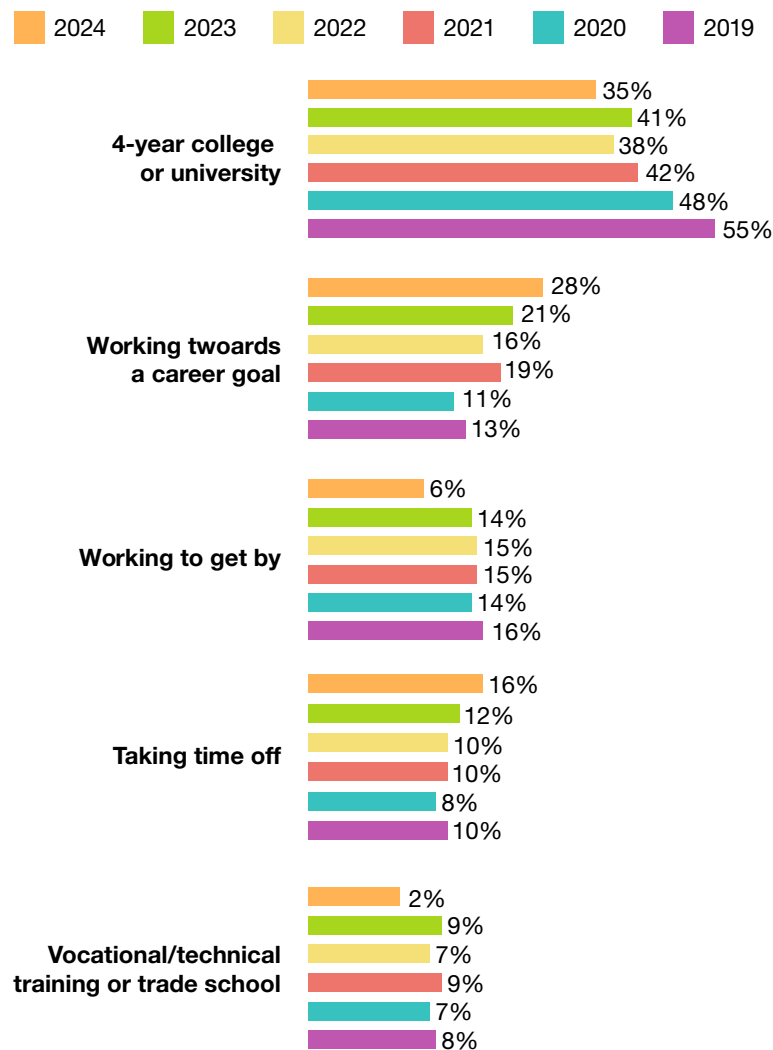
The path after high school is shifting

While the K-12 educational system has made some important shifts, data shows that student intentions and plans for life after high school are changing faster. As a result, too many graduates are left navigating their futures with a high school diploma, but lack important guidance and sufficient tools.

Data shows that the traditional four-year college pathway, that has been foundational for decades, is steadily losing momentum. Fewer graduates are choosing four-year college, opting instead to enter the workforce. **Among the graduating Class of 2024, only 35% reported pursuing a four-year degree—a sharp drop from 55% among the Class of 2019.** Meanwhile, the percentage of students working directly toward a career goal after high school is on the rise, reflecting a shift toward more practical, skills-based pathways.

These findings underscore the urgent need for earlier, more personalized career exploration and planning for all students—and a more nuanced understanding of how different groups navigate their post-graduation decisions. Most planning tools today offer only a narrow glimpse of a student's potential, missing the opportunity for true whole-self understanding. It's time for a new approach, one that supports earlier, more personalized career exploration for every student.

Pathways by graduation year





Readiness gaps emerge between male and female graduates



Females are more likely to pursue four-year college pathways.



Males are significantly more likely to have no post-graduation plan.



In the 2025 survey, 14% of males vs. 8% of females reported having no plan after high school.



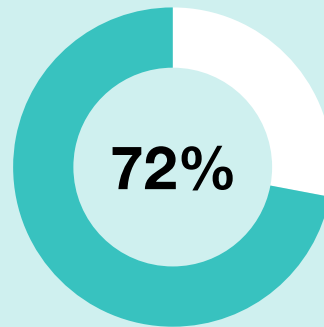


Students don't feel ready for life after high school

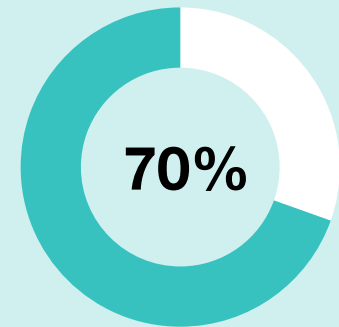
Even as students choose new paths after graduation, their sense of readiness remains alarmingly low. **Nearly 72% of graduates report feeling only moderately, slightly, or not at all prepared for life after high school—a clear signal that most are entering adulthood without a strong foundation.** Confidence is just as fragile, with almost 70% of these students having little to no confidence in their post-graduation plans, setting the stage for uncertainty and missed opportunities.

These numbers are consistent across graduating classes. In fact, the [2022 survey](#)¹ found that 75% of students felt unprepared for their future—nearly identical to the 72% reported in the 2025 survey. This persistent gap underscores a pressing need: as students' pathways rapidly evolve, education must move just as quickly to equip them for the complex choices that shape their lives.

Based on the data, students who lack confidence in their next steps are more likely to delay further education, switch career paths multiple times, or exit the workforce altogether. Without targeted interventions that develop decision-making skills, activate self-awareness and discovery, and encourage career exploration early on, many young adults will continue to face challenges as they transition out of the K-12 education system. This affects them individually, but also has negative implications for the U.S. economy and the workforce of the future.



of graduates reported feeling only moderately, slightly, or not at all prepared.



of graduates reported lacking strong confidence in their post-graduation plans.



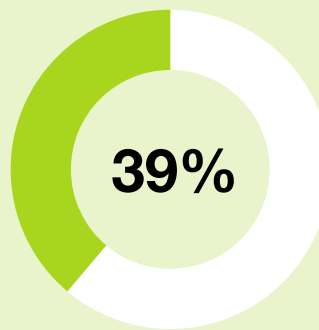
Students engage more when they understand their aptitudes

Understanding their own strengths makes a profound difference in how students engage with school—and their future. Yet today, too many students are missing this critical data about themselves.

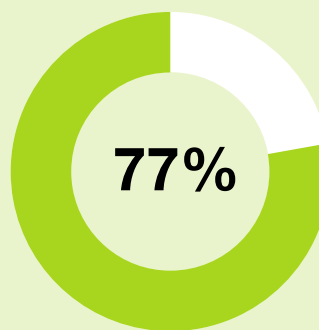
77% said they would have been more engaged if they had better understood their aptitudes and career options in high school. When students understand their aptitudes and how these can be leveraged in careers, they are more likely to be engaged and ready for life beyond high school.

Why? Because most students are being guided toward low-value, interest-only college and career tools that fail to reveal their true potential. These shallow tools do little more than scratch the surface, leaving students without the deep self-awareness data they need to make informed decisions about their futures.

Helping students discover their whole self—their aptitudes, interests, and personality combined—is not just better for students' postsecondary planning but impacts their feelings of [self-worth](#). This approach is a strategic investment in their future success. When students see how their natural abilities align with real-world careers, their academic work gains relevance, their motivation increases, and their long-term planning becomes more intentional.² Closing this gap between potential and perception is one of the most powerful ways educators and policymakers can transform student engagement.



of graduates reported receiving no help in discovering their aptitudes



of graduates say they would have been more engaged if they better understood their aptitudes/career options



College and career readiness assessments are critical—yet underutilized

As students chart increasingly diverse paths after graduation, the need for personalized guidance has never been greater. One finding stands out: **students consistently identify college and career readiness assessments, along with one-on-one counseling, as the most impactful preparation experiences.**

This includes taking career and technical education courses, earning industry-recognized certifications that directly align to their coursework, and participating in ‘out-of-school’ work opportunities, such as internships or apprenticeships. Early exposure to varied CTE programs and work exploration is key. Providing these opportunities bridges the gap between classroom learning and career readiness. As many hands-on experiences as possible foster practical skills and deeper career insights for students. Missing out on such experiences harms student progression.

Early aptitude discovery, coupled with students’ self-reported interests, and personalized counseling aren’t optional enhancements; **they are foundational to building true post-graduation readiness.** If education leaders and policymakers are serious about closing the readiness gap, scaling access to these tools must be a top priority.

What experiences best prepared students for the future?

Readiness assessments
based on aptitudes and interests

44%

Career counseling

43%

Work-based learning
opportunities

37%



Students want real-world connections in the classroom

As students reflect on what would have better prepared them for life after graduation, one message comes through loud and clear: **they want stronger, more visible connections between what they learn in the classroom and the careers they can pursue after high school.**

In the survey, students were asked: “Which of the following could your school have done to help you feel more prepared to make decisions about your future career or education?”

The top three ways students said schools could have helped align closely with the experiences students also ranked as most impactful for their preparedness:

50% said schools could have offered more work-based learning opportunities

45% said they needed more career counseling or guidance

41% said schools should have helped them better understand their aptitudes

These findings emphasize a critical point: students aren’t asking for more information—they’re demanding a fundamentally different learning experience. They want school to be tangible, connected, and directly aligned with their futures. This gap between what students need and what they receive is a significant opportunity to rethink and revamp how education prepares them for life after high school.





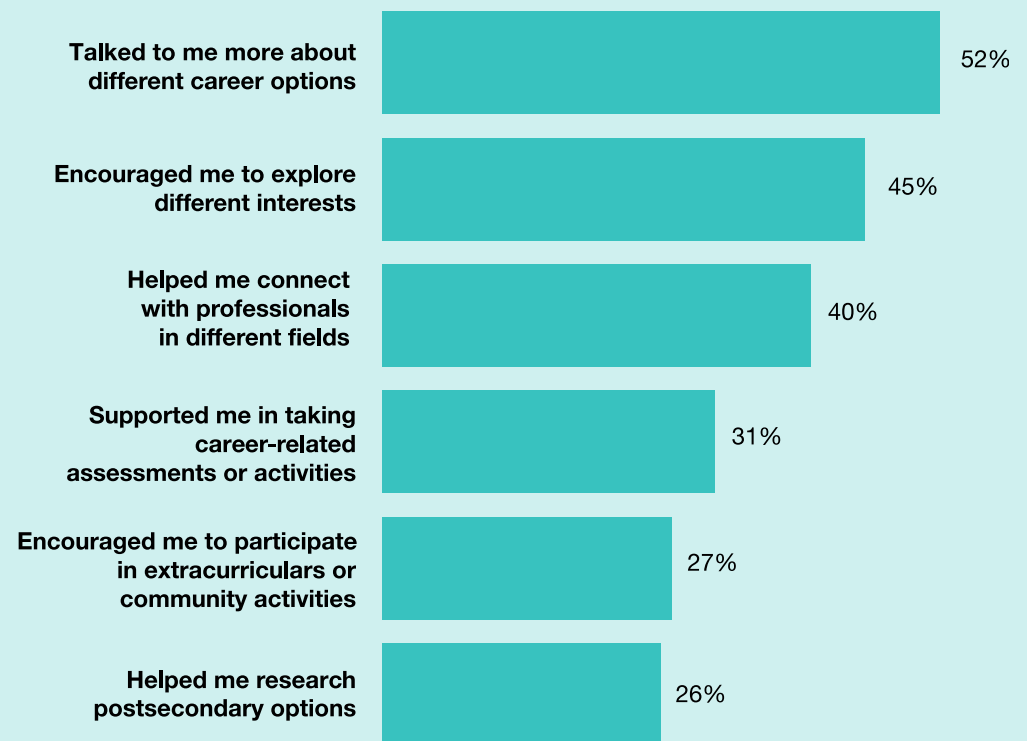
Early family conversations shape future confidence and career choices

While schools are essential to student preparation, families play an equally critical role—and many students feel that support is lacking. When asked, “Which of the following could your parents or guardians have done to help you feel more prepared to make decisions about your future career or education?,” students consistently pointed to one core need: **open conversations and encouragement.**

Talking about options and encouraging exploration is the number one way parents and guardians could have better supported their children’s preparation for life after high school. This underscores the vital influence parents and guardians have—not just through logistical help, but by sparking awareness, building confidence, and helping students envision a broader range of future possibilities.

Students don’t expect their parents and guardians to have all the answers, but they look to them for help exploring careers and opening doors. Educational, workforce, community, and political leaders can play a critical role by equipping families with the tools and language to start meaningful conversations early. When we encourage discussions around students’ aptitudes, interests, and career options, parents and guardians become more confident guides. In turn, students are more likely to make informed and intentional decisions about their futures.

What graduates wish guardians had done





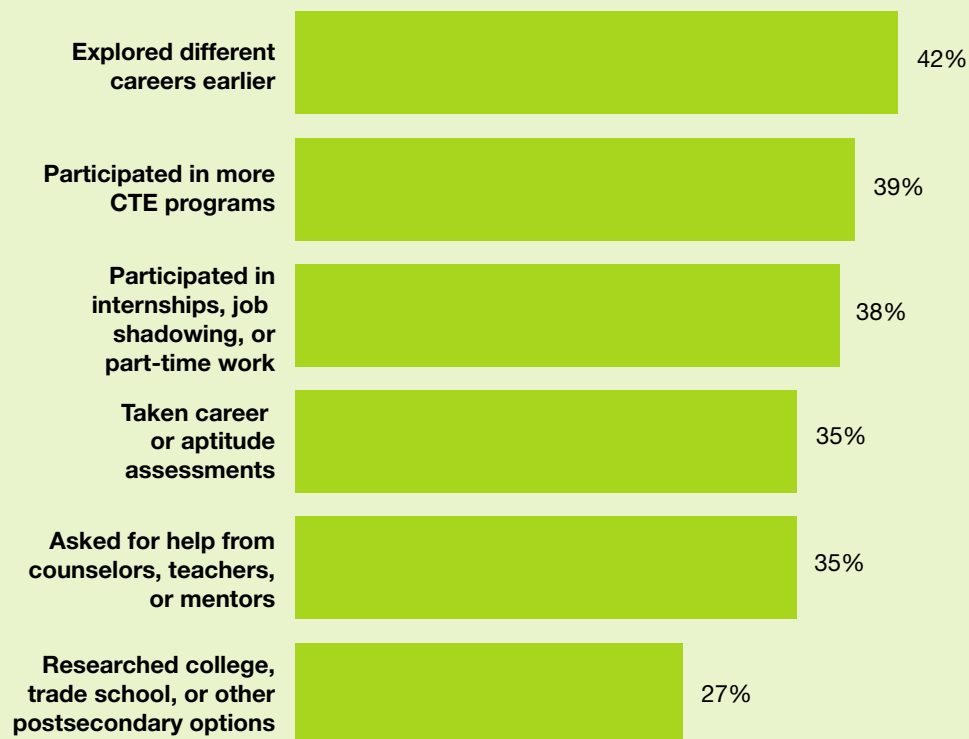
Students recognize they could have done more to prepare themselves

As students reflect on their post-graduation journeys, many recognize that their own actions—or inactions—played a role in their sense of unpreparedness. When asked, “Looking back, what could you have done to better prepare yourself for making decisions about your future career or education?” students pointed overwhelmingly to the need for earlier and deeper exploration.

The most common regret students cited was not exploring different career options sooner. Many wished they had engaged more with CTE opportunities, internships, and real-world learning experiences while still in school. Across the board, over 40% of students said they wished they had participated in more CTE programs.

While schools and families play critical roles in student preparation, personal initiative matters too. Students recognize—often too late—that early action, exploration, and asking for guidance can make a meaningful difference in shaping confident, successful pathways after graduation.

What graduates wish they had done





STUDENT PERCEPTIONS:

What students wish schools had done

- **Career exploration and real-world exposure:** “I wish my school had more hands-on programs. I fell in love with mechanics my junior year but my school has zero programs encouraging union or laborious careers.”
- **Personalized guidance and support:** “They could have matched my natural abilities to a practical career path.”
- **Real-world and life skills education:** “They could’ve taught me how to do my taxes.”
- **Broader options and flexibility:** “I think they could have made education related to different career paths with useful things for the real world.”
- **Communication and follow-through:** “They were more concerned with us graduating than what we were going to do after graduating.”

What students wish parents had done

- **Communication and involvement:** “Help me analyze the advantages and disadvantages of different professions, and then connect me with people in those careers to inspire me.”
- **Emotional and motivational support:** “If they allowed me more choices and were more encouraging.”
- **Exposure to opportunities:** “My parents could have better prepared me by assisting me in gaining connections with professionals in my field of study.”
- **Practical guidance and life skills:** “If they showed me how to buy a house or APR or how to file a tax.”
- **Respect for autonomy and encouragement of exploration:** “They could have not pressured me to become a doctor. They could have supported me and encouraged me to figure out what the best career choice was for me.”

What students wish they had done themselves

- **Research and planning earlier:** “Definitely could’ve done way more research and a lot earlier.”
- **Active exploration and experience-building:** “I wish I had more experience in my future career so I knew better what I wanted to do and how to do it.”
- **Personal responsibility and motivation:** “If I would’ve put more effort into finding better options, my outcome would’ve been different.”
- **Confidence and mindset:** “I should have trusted myself sooner when it comes to my interests and talents.”
- **Skill development and self-assessment:** “Participate in more relevant vocational education, seek teachers’ advice, and join extracurricular activities that can help me.”



Students are unsure about their majors and often change their minds

While fewer students are choosing traditional four-year college pathways, those who do often struggle to find clear direction. Among college-going students, only 56% reported declaring a major. **Of those who declared, 42% have already changed their major**—many more than once. In fact, half of students who switched majors said they changed two or more times.

Students are willing to adapt and recalibrate—but this often comes at a significant cost. Every change in direction often means more time in school, more debt, and greater uncertainty. Closing this gap requires earlier, more personalized career exposure, stronger aptitude discovery, and a systematic approach to helping students make informed, confident choices about their future pathways.

56%

of those attending college have declared a major

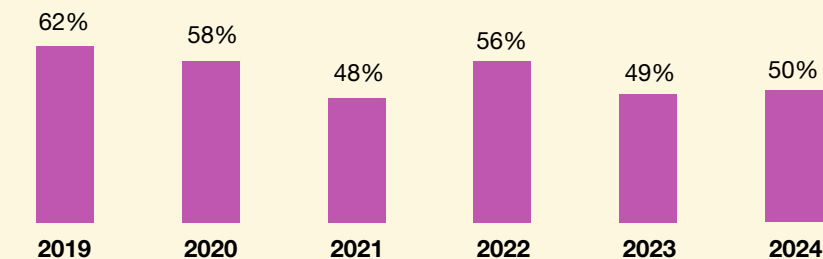
42%

of those who have declared a major have changed it

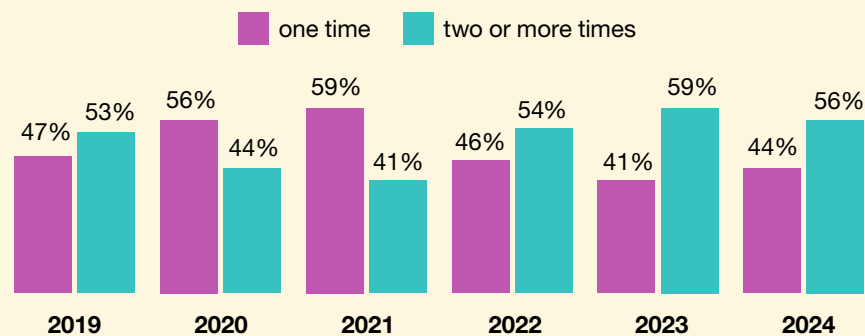
50%

of those who have changed their major have done so 2+ times

College major declarations by high school graduating class



Number of major changes by high school graduating class





Students are ready for more, but we must give them the tools

The future of our economy, communities, and workforce depends on how well we prepare today's students for tomorrow's opportunities. The 2025 Post-Graduation Readiness Survey findings reveal a powerful truth: students are capable, motivated, and eager to build their futures—but they cannot do it alone.

We stand at a pivotal moment. By connecting education to real-world exploration, empowering families to foster broader career awareness, and engaging industry to open doors to opportunity, we can transform readiness from a diploma into a launchpad for lifelong success.

The blueprint for action for education leaders, policymakers, and business leaders:

- **Incorporate aptitude and interest discovery** early in education to help students find their natural talents and their best-fit pathways.
- **Invest in career exploration programs and industry partnerships** that expose students to real-world opportunities across diverse sectors.

- **Forge strong family-educator partnerships** to align academic choices with career goals.
- **Implement interdisciplinary, career-connected teaching models** that link learning directly to workforce needs.
- **Expand career-connected learning opportunities** that develop practical, transferable skills.
- **Promote industry-recognized certifications** that validate student capabilities and open professional doors.
- **Develop and scale work-based learning experiences**, including internships, apprenticeships, mentorships, and industry engagement programs.

The question is no longer whether students are ready. It's whether we have the vision, the courage, and the commitment to provide them with the resources, experiences, and support they deserve to succeed.

The stakes are high. The opportunity is real. And the time to act is now.

Explore how **YouScience®** helps turn readiness into real outcomes by uncovering each student's aptitudes and interests, certifying their skills, and connecting learning to real-world opportunities that lead to future career success.

Learn more at
[**youscience.com/demo-request.**](https://youscience.com/demo-request)

Together, we can reimagine readiness and build a future where every student thrives.



About the report

The 2025 Post-Graduation Readiness Report is the third annual study examining how recent high school graduates are navigating life after graduation. In 2025, YouScience surveyed more than 500 students from the graduating classes of 2021 through 2024, gathering insights on their current post-graduation pathways, their sense of preparedness, and the decisions shaping their futures.

This report builds on findings from prior surveys conducted in 2022 and 2023, which captured the experiences of graduates from the classes of 2019 through 2023. Together, this multi-year research provides a critical view into evolving trends in college enrollment, workforce entry, and student confidence—and offers a blueprint for how education, business, and policy leaders can better support the next generation.

About YouScience

YouScience® is the leading education technology company dedicated to empowering individuals with the data and credentials needed to succeed in school, career, and life. Its award-winning platform, Brightpath, is the only College & Career Readiness solution built for both compliance and impact—powered by scientifically backed aptitude discovery, industry-recognized certifications, and meaningful career connections.

By leveraging cutting-edge research, artificial intelligence, and industry collaboration, YouScience helps individuals uncover their unique talents, validate their skills, and connect with in-demand educational and career pathways.

YouScience is the preferred choice of individuals, parents, educators, and counselors to guide and support educational and career pathways, currently serving more than 13,400 educational institutions and millions of users nationwide.





1. https://resources.youscience.com/rs/806-BFU-539/images/2022_PostGradReadiness_Report_Pt1.pdf
2. https://resources.youscience.com/rs/806-BFU-539/images/GOSA_Full_Report.pdf