

How prepared are high school graduates for their next step?

In the 2018–2019 school year, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that the **graduation rate for public high school students had risen to 86%** — the highest on record since it was first measured in 2010–2011.¹

While graduation rates are a critical measurement for success, they don't capture the whole picture for students. To better understand students' perceptions on how prepared they felt after high school graduation, how they made their decisions, and how they feel about where they landed, we surveyed more than 500 students who graduated high school between 2019–2022.

What students think

Our analysis revealed that **there's still great uncertainty after high school graduation when it comes to college and career**, as evidenced by:



reported feeling moderately, slightly, or not at all prepared.



changed their college major at least two times.



reported not feeling sure they are where they want to be in their chosen education or career pathway.



were not following any educational or career pathway.

More than half (62%) of the students surveyed **believe that high school should prepare them for their future careers**. And their answers revealed other significant gaps:



reported their schools regularly exposed them to a variety of career options to pursue following graduation.



reported having 5 or less conversations with a teacher(s) or counselor(s) about their post-high school opportunities.



felt they would have been more engaged in their learning if they better understood their own aptitudes and potential career opportunities.



are still not sure they are where they want to be — regardless of their current education or career.



reported lacking confidence or only being slightly confident in their chosen career or education, while another **33%** felt only moderately confident.

¹ Public High School Graduation Rates, National Center for Education Statistics, May 2021, <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/coi/high-school-graduation-rates>



Our analysis also found that **natural biases are still prevalent** among students when making education or career decisions with the top decision-making influences being: family members, friends, and peers. Though teachers and counselors came in third on the list, nearly a third of students surveyed reported **never having a conversation with a teacher(s) or counselor(s) about their post-high school opportunities**. And only 16% of graduates reported taking an aptitude assessment to help prepare them for “what’s next.”

It’s clear that high school graduates want more opportunities for career exposure and exploration before they get their cap and gown.

What you can do

Help students find their “why” to close career exposure gaps.

Aptitude-based college and career guidance, like YouScience Discovery, helps students connect the dots between what they’re learning in the classroom and real life. They can confidently build a better post-high school plan that helps them lean into their natural abilities rather than relying on interests alone.

With aptitude-based guidance, you break through students’ biases to help them discover opportunities they may have never heard of or considered. And you broaden your students’ horizons by giving them the tools they need to define what a successful future looks like for them.