

Understanding and Supporting the Next Generation of Learners

Today's learners are redefining what it means to succeed. Raised during uncertain times, they seek careers and education options that offer stability, purpose, and a clear return on investment. This fact sheet provides key insights, quotes, and data to help you better understand how to connect with and support them.



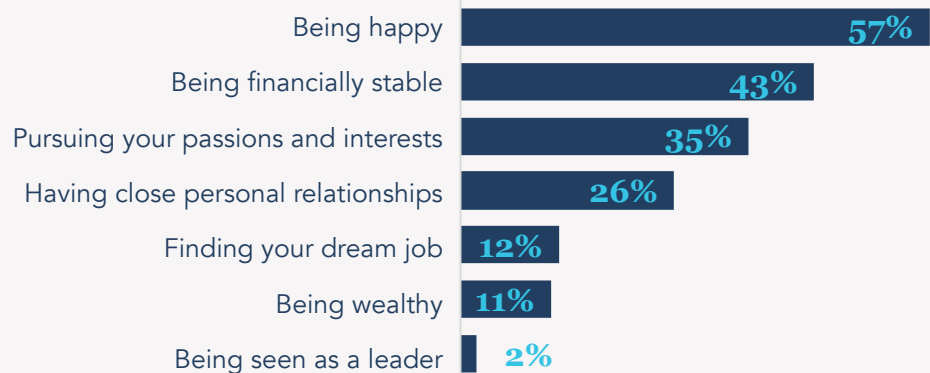
Learners Are Looking for Security and Meaningful Careers

Today's learners are focused on building lives that feel stable, purposeful, and achievable. They're looking for real jobs—and education options that help them reach that goal faster.

*“[I want to be] married, own a home, and have cats...**I want job stability. I want that in my future, that’s a big thing.** Going to school has helped me feel like I have a stable way of getting that. Owning a home, in an indirect way, helps me feel successful.” —Young Adult, Completed Pathway Program*

Today's learners say that being happy, financially stable, and having close personal relationships are the top factors that lead to a meaningful life, much higher than being wealthy, finding a dream job, or being seen as a leader.

In your opinion, which of the following elements are MOST important to living a “meaningful life”? (Select up to three.)



Learners say they would be more motivated to explore non-degree pathways programs if they knew they could lead to a secure and meaningful career.

Please select each of the following that is true for you, personally. I would be more likely to explore pursuing career education and training programs other than college for myself if I knew... Select all that apply.



They Need to See Themselves in the Story

While many people see the appeal of non-degree pathway programs, they still feel like options for someone else. That shifts when they see personal stories from people like them who've succeeded through a different path.

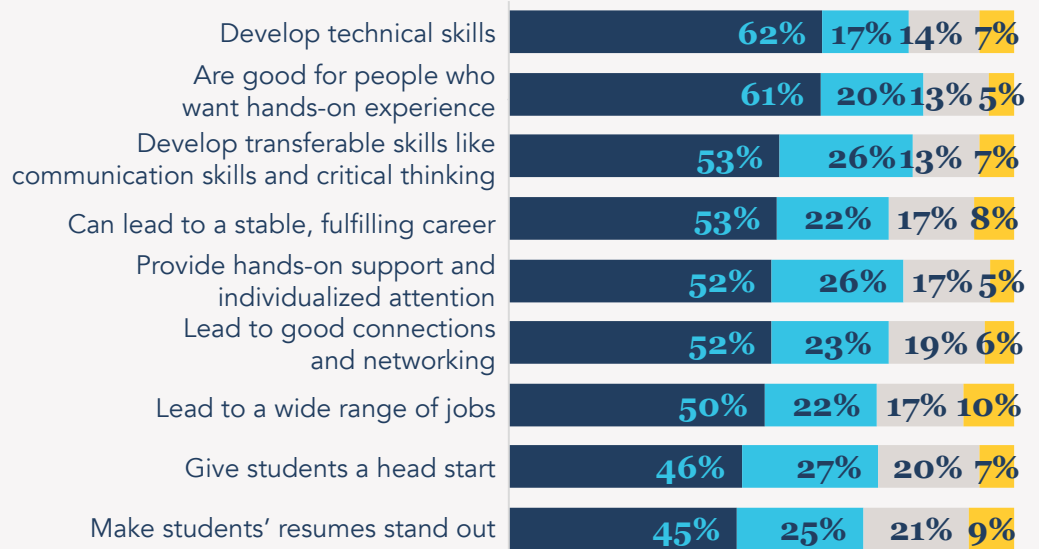
Learners agree that non-degree pathways could be very impactful for them personally.

*"I can gain skills that allow me to **make a good living.**"* —High School Learner

*"It could help me **get to the specific job I want faster.**"* —Young Adult, No Postsecondary Experience

Learners see a wide range of benefits they can get from non-degree pathways.

For each, please indicate how well you think it describes non-degree pathway programs.



■ Extremely well (7-6) ■ Well (5) ■ Neutral (4) ■ Not well (3-1)

Yet, many learners still see non-degree programs as being for “someone else”: specifically, for people who want to go into trades or don’t like traditional school.

*“[Pathway programs are] for people who are **hands-on**, who **don’t prefer to take the route of going to traditional college**, taking extra classes in something... where you’re trying a craft to go towards.” —Young Adult, No Postsecondary Experience*

*“I feel like [these programs are for] kids that—**no offense—care less about schoolwork**, and they just want to experience the real world and what it has to offer.” —High School Learner*

*“I think of [a] trade, like **plumber and carpenter**.” —High School Learner*

Success stories and conversations with people in their lives who have completed pathways programs help learners see the real benefits of pathways.

What would you need to see or hear to feel confident that education pathways could provide real benefits to people, businesses, and society? Select all that apply.

52% of learners

Real stories from other people who have found successful careers through education pathways

47% of learners

Conversations with someone in your life who has completed an education pathway program and was happy with the result

45% of learners

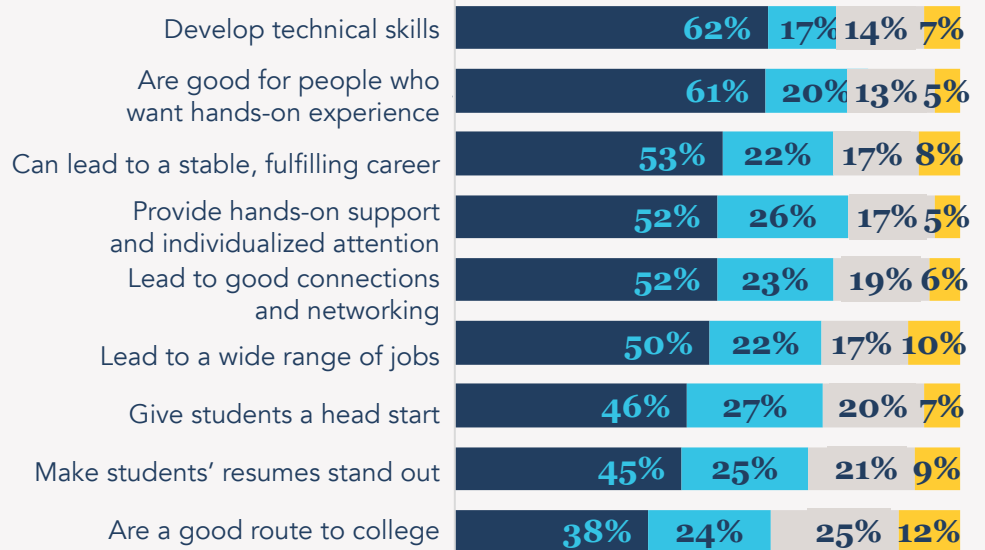
Real stories from employers who have hired people from education pathways

Pathways Build Confidence and a Sense of Purpose

Learners are initially drawn to pathways programs for their practical benefits—faster timelines, real-world skills—but those who complete them often experience something deeper. They gain confidence, a clearer sense of purpose, and a belief in themselves that can shape the rest of their lives.

When asked how well they think each of the statements describes non-degree pathway programs, benefits like developing technical skills, getting hands-on experience, and leading to a stable, fulfilling career are top of mind.

For each, please indicate how well you think it describes non-degree pathway programs.



■ Extremely well (7-6) ■ Well (5) ■ Neutral (4) ■ Not well (3-1)

But learners who have completed non-degree pathways told us that there were much broader, deeper, and more transformational benefits, and hiring managers' point of view validates the value of those benefits.

*“Trade school [gave me] an overwhelming amount of support and a huge community. The teachers that taught me [made me feel that] it's doable. It is just **very reassuring** and makes me **feel confident** in my vision and my dream.”* —Young Adult, Completed Pathway Program

*“**Communication skills**—everyone has to a certain degree, but active listening, empathetic listening, and validation in a professional way, in an advanced way, are something you don't get unless you're in the field.”* —Young Adult, Completed Pathway Program

*“I went there for three months and it gave me structure **and guided me on what I wanted to do after high school**. Plus, I was given some college credits when I started college for the time in technical school.”* —Young Adult, Completed Pathway Program

*“I felt **very confident** after graduation.”* —Young Adult, Completed Pathway Program

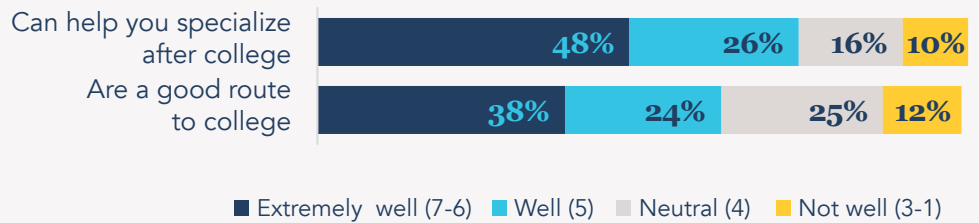
Clear, Flexible Pathways Help Learners See What's Possible

Pathways programs offer hands-on experience, job-ready skills, and credentials that count at any stage in someone's life or career.

Learners who complete pathways programs often use them as a complement to college, gaining skills before, after, or alongside a degree. When learners understand the flexibility and long-term career potential of pathways, they see them as a strategic choice, not a fallback.

Most see the value of pathways as a complement to college, but a quarter are uncertain if it can help you specialize after college, and 2-in-5 are uncertain if they can be a good route to college.

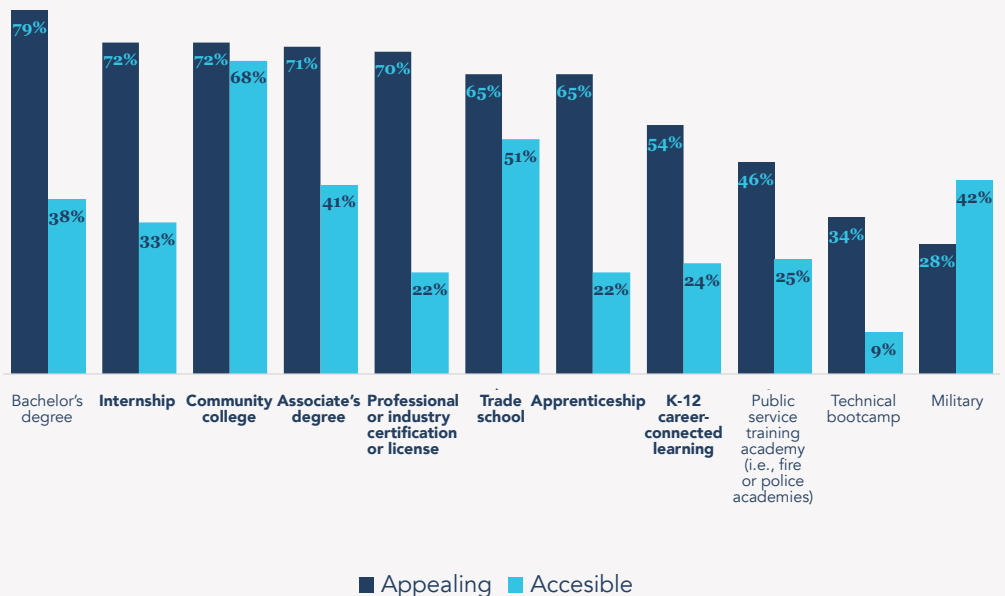
For each, please indicate how well you think it describes non-degree pathway programs.



When different kinds of programs are laid out clearly, learners find most of them appealing. However, there is a huge gap between what they find appealing and what they think is accessible and available to them.

*How **appealing** or **unappealing** do you find each of the following education options for yourself, your child, or another close family member?*

*Which of the following education options do you think are **easily available and accessible** to you, your child, or another close family member?*



Learners are also excited to see the wide variety of careers that education and training programs can lead to. It opens their eyes to the possibilities of what they could accomplish without a degree.

- Artist
- Chef
- Carpenter
- Content Creator
- Aesthetician or other beauty professional
- Retail Merchandiser
- Interior Designer
- Real Estate Agent
- Nurse
- Patient Care Technician
- Teacher's Assistant
- College and Career Specialist
- Aircraft Lunch and Recovery Specialists
- Aircraft Mechanics and Service Technicians
- Captain, Mate and Pilot of Ships
- Computer Programmer
- Data Analyst
- Software Engineer/ Developer
- Product Manager
- Product Designer
- Sales Manager
- Plumber
- Electrician
- Ai Technologist
- Solar Panel Installer
- Welder
- Dental Hygiene Technician
- X-Ray Technician
- Microchip Manufacturer
- Warehouse Logistic Manager
- Clerck in a Government Office
- Corthouse Stenographer
- Police
- Firefighter
- Military
- Quality Insurance Engineer

*“It was surprising to me. I wasn’t expecting that you wouldn’t have to go to college for all of the medical field. It’s **eye-opening that there are so many more possibilities** to get those [careers].”*
—High School Learner

*“I guess I didn’t consider that I can do nursing without college. **I feel like you have to go to college at least to get like a biology degree or something [to do] nursing.**”* —Young Adult, No Post-Secondary Experience

But despite their interest, learners still need to know practical steps and logistical information to help them get started navigating these programs.

*“I would want to know **how to get started** with education pathways and **how to get in touch with contacts** to learn more.”* —Young Adult Learner

What Motivates Learners To Consider Pathways Programs:

Show the variety of options available, both the kinds of programs and the careers they can lead to.

Show how programs will get them where they want to go.

Share testimonials: Let them hear from real people who have gone through programs and have these jobs.

Share clear outcome data.

Share the costs of programs and the length of time to complete them.

Promote opportunities for networking and professional connections.

Show them how to get started with very concrete steps.

Emphasize proximity and flexibility

By taking these steps, we can help more young people see pathways programs as smart, flexible routes to achieving their dreams.