



52% of High Schoolers Feel Pressure to Decide Future Too Soon

Affording the Cost of Higher Education and Struggles With Mental Health Will Have Big Impacts on Post-Grad Plans

Feb. 24, 2022 (Seattle, WA) - According to a new survey from BestColleges.com, half of high school students nationwide (52%) feel pressured to make decisions about their future too soon. The survey of 1,000 actively enrolled high schoolers also found that students believe affording further education or training (32%) and mental health struggles (31%) will have the biggest impact on their immediate post-graduation plans.

<https://www.bestcolleges.com/research/students-feel-pressure-to-decide-future/>

According to the students, other factors that will significantly impact post-graduation plans include difficulty with decision making (26%), personal life events (19%), and dealing with circumstances caused by COVID-19 (18%).

About 1 in 4 (22%) students who do not plan to pursue higher education immediately after graduation reported that affording the costs of further education would have the biggest impact on their plans. Only a slightly higher percentage of these students credited mental health struggles (27%) and difficulty making decisions (26%) as factors that have a big impact on their post-graduation plans.

"Colleges and universities are facing a steady decline in enrollment but cost doesn't seem to be a significant factor for current high school students," said Venable. "What's impacting those who aren't college-bound is more complex than one or two obvious factors and will likely continue to evolve in the coming years."

When asked what they have considered doing after high school, the majority of students reported that they have thought about pursuing a college degree or certification (67%) or

working (66%). Over half (52%) have considered taking time off either informally or by participating in a gap year program.

When asked about their concrete plans for the year immediately following graduation, only about half of students (48%) reported that they are planning to pursue a college degree or certification. Nearly a quarter of students (23%) plan to work at a new job or their current job, and 16% plan to take time off either informally or by participating in a gap year program.

"Institutions may soon need to embrace a reality in which joining the workforce is students' first priority, with school coming second, rather than the other way around," said Melissa Venable, Ph.D., education advisor for BestColleges.com. "Integrating work experience and formal education, as well as creating more opportunities and support for students to enroll part-time while they are working, could better serve these students as they prepare for life after graduation."

While 53% of students report they're optimistic about their future after high school, 33% of students neither agree nor disagree that they are optimistic, and 14% are not optimistic. High schoolers with at least one parent with a college degree were more likely to say they are optimistic about their post-graduation future (57%) compared to those whose parents do not have a college degree (47%).

Most students report they've looked to family (72%) and friends (51%) for guidance about what life will be like after high school. Almost half (45%) of high schoolers have sought or received advice about post-graduation life from school faculty or staff, and a third of students (33%) have turned to the internet or other media like books or television for information. Still, more than a third (39%) say they are unsure about what they want for their future.

Methodology

The survey was conducted from January 31-February 4, 2022. Student respondents were fielded by Lucid LLC. Survey participants included 1,000 currently enrolled high school students nationwide. Respondents were 16-19 years of age. The respondents for the survey were screened by various quality checks, including systems like Relevant ID, and responses were manually reviewed to ensure consistency and accuracy.

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