



# With Their Whole Lives Ahead of Them



Myths and Realities About Why So Many Students Fail to Finish College

## WITH THEIR WHOLE LIVES AHEAD OF THEM



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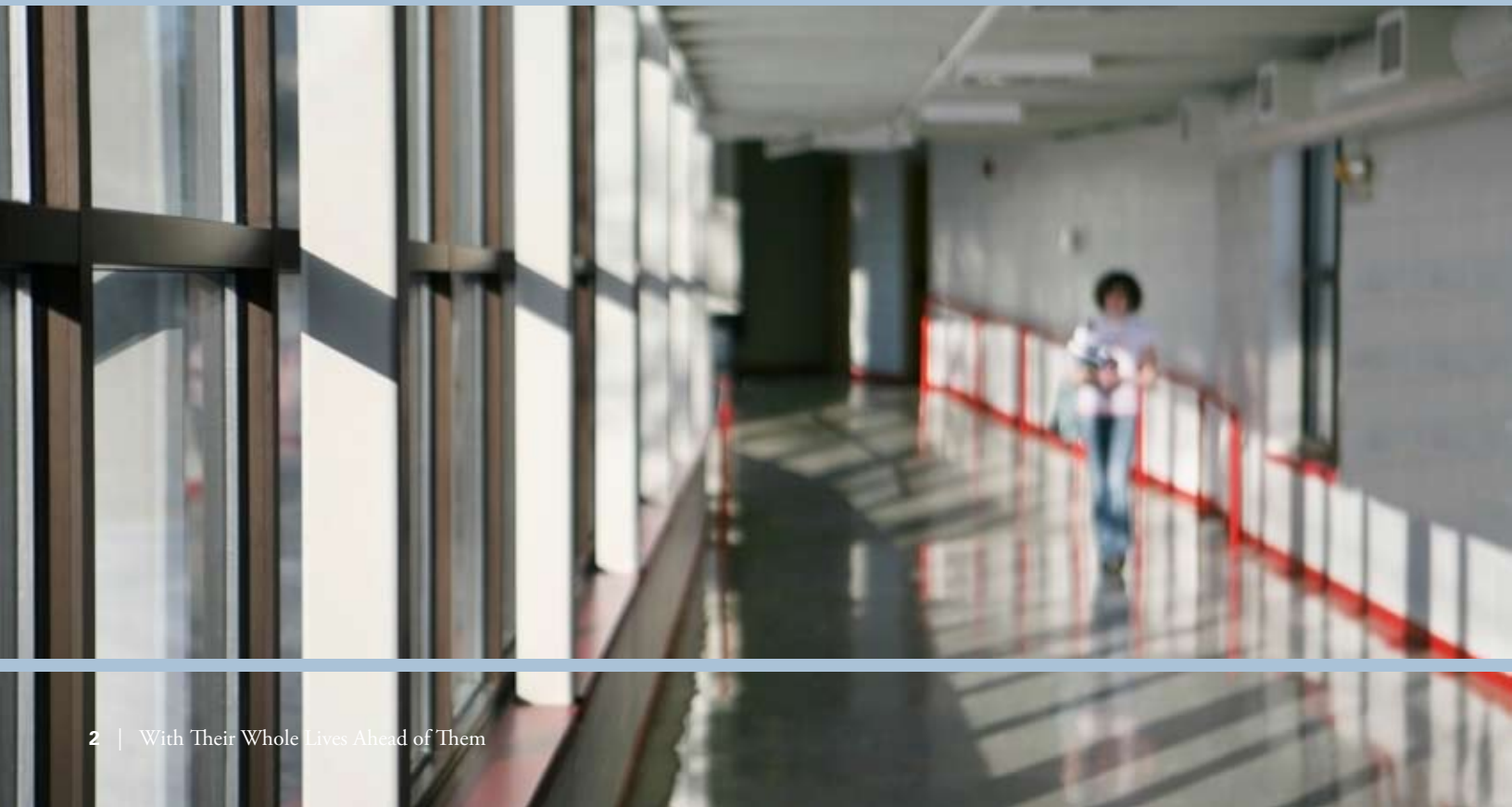
INTRODUCTION.....	2
MYTH AND REALITY NO. 1 .....	5
MYTH AND REALITY NO. 2 .....	9
MYTH AND REALITY NO. 3 .....	12
MYTH AND REALITY NO. 4 .....	15
SO WHAT WOULD HELP?.....	18
ABOUT THE STUDY .....	22
FULL SURVEY RESULTS.....	23
CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE .....	44
OUR THANKS .....	47
ABOUT THE BILL & MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION .....	47
ABOUT PUBLIC AGENDA.....	48

## INTRODUCTION

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- > According to the U.S. Department of Education, only 20 percent of young people who begin their higher education at two-year institutions graduate within three years.<sup>1</sup> There is a similar pattern in four-year institutions, where about 4 in 10 students receive a degree within six years.<sup>2</sup> And these bleak statistics on national college completion rates are averages. In some institutions, the numbers are even gloomier.

This is clearly a personal disappointment for the students and their families, but increasingly, experts and leaders see it as a threat to U.S. international competitiveness and a phenomenon that perpetuates economic insecurity and inequality. In 2009, President Barack Obama set a goal for the United States to “have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world.” More specifically, he called for measures that would ensure that an additional 5 million Americans would complete “degrees and certificates in the next decade.”<sup>3</sup>



## WHY DO STUDENTS LEAVE SCHOOL WITHOUT FINISHING?

The question bedeviling many of those concerned about higher education and the economy is why so many college students drop out. Some 2.8 million students enroll in some form of higher education each fall, in two- and four-year programs and in public, private, online, and for-profit institutions.<sup>4</sup> These young people are motivated enough to start college, and somehow they manage to find sufficient resources to enroll, but getting a college ID card, buying the books and showing up for class doesn't mean they are poised to complete a degree. What exactly goes wrong?

Several thought-provoking studies have looked at the question in recent years and advanced many possible explanations: rising tuition costs, poor academic preparation and study skills, minimal student support and advisory services in higher education, too many young people going to college even though they really do not want to, and too many professors and advisers complaining because, as they see it, completion is the student's responsibility.<sup>5</sup> Leaders debate different ways to tackle the problem. Some want to provide more financial support and better services for students. Others focus on revamping higher education policies and programs in ways that would encourage more young people to complete a degree or certificate.

“With Their Whole Lives Ahead of Them” asks young Americans why so many college students drop out. This study is designed to test the assumptions many of us make about college students today and why so many of them fail to graduate. It also helps to identify solutions that young people themselves say would help most. With underwriting from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Public Agenda surveyed more than 600 young adults, ages 22 to 30, who had at least some higher education coursework. We asked those who started college but did not complete a degree why they left, and we compared their views, experiences and responses with those of students who had successfully completed a two- or four-year college program. More detailed information about how we conducted the study can be found at <http://www.publicagenda.org/theirwholivesaheadofthem/methodology>.

1 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, IPEDS 2006–2007, Graduation Rate File.

2 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1996/01, Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study.

3 [http://www.whitehouse.gov/the\\_press\\_office/Excerpts-of-the-Presidents-remarks-in-Warren-Michigan-and-fact-sheet-on-the-American-Graduation-Initiative/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Excerpts-of-the-Presidents-remarks-in-Warren-Michigan-and-fact-sheet-on-the-American-Graduation-Initiative/).

4 “Digest of Education Statistics,” Institute of Education Sciences, 2008.

5 See, for example: Bowen, Chingos and McPherson, *Crossing the Finish Line: Completing College at America's Public Universities*, Princeton University Press, 2009. Also: Hess and Schneider, “Diplomas and Dropouts: Which Colleges Actually Graduate Their Students (and Which Don't),” American Enterprise Institute, June 3, 2009.



## TODAY'S COLLEGE STUDENTS: NOT NECESSARILY WHAT YOU EXPECT

As background to the survey findings, it may be helpful to begin with a clearer picture of “college students” today. Many of us envision young people living in college dorms, going to school full-time, attending ball games and fraternity parties, maybe working a few hours a week or in the summer to bring in a little spare cash. In high school, perhaps, they dreamed about going to a particular school, filled out application after application and waited eagerly for the acceptance letter to arrive. The facts, though, show quite a different picture:

- Among students in four-year schools, 45 percent work more than 20 hours a week.<sup>6</sup>
- Among those attending community colleges, 6 in 10 work more than 20 hours a week, and more than a quarter work more than 35 hours a week.<sup>7</sup>
- Just 25 percent of students attend the sort of residential college we often envision.<sup>8</sup>
- Twenty-three percent of college students have dependent children.<sup>9</sup>

## HOW SHOULD HIGHER EDUCATION RESPOND?

Given these realities, it's not surprising that when Public Agenda surveyed young people about what led them to leave college early—and what would help them to return and finish—we got some surprising answers. “With Their Whole Lives Ahead of Them” offers firsthand testimony from young people about the barriers they face trying to earn a degree or credential. It is testimony that, we believe, poses a moral challenge to higher education and the country as a whole. If we truly aim to help this new group of nontraditional students fulfill their aspirations, college and university officials, state and federal policy-makers, employers, foundations and other advocates trying to ramp up college completion need to take a fresh, clear-eyed look at their current assumptions and practices. The findings here reveal gaps in the higher education system that serve to undercut the efforts of students who need to work and go to school at the same time. They raise serious questions about long-standing policies that seem profoundly ill suited to students who simply cannot afford to go to school full-time for several years. They powerfully suggest the need for innovative responses that would help more young Americans continue their education, but in better-organized and more cost-effective programs. The results of this research pose a challenge.

Here is the story as young people themselves tell it. >

6 U.S. Department of Education, 2007–2008 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study; in Viany Orozco and Nancy K. Cauthen, “Work Less, Study More & Succeed: How Financial Supports Can Improve Postsecondary Success,” Demos, 2009.

7 Ibid.

8 U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2008, National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, authors own retrieval of information.

9 Ibid.



## MYTH AND REALITY NO. 1

**MYTH NO. 1:** Most students go to college full-time. If they leave without a degree, it's because they're bored with their classes and don't want to work hard.

**REALITY NO. 1:** Most students leave college because they are working to support themselves and going to school at the same time. At some point, the stress of work and study just becomes too difficult.

The number one reason students give for leaving school is the fact that they had to work and go to school at the same time and, despite their best efforts, the stress of trying to do both eventually took its toll. More than half of those who left higher ed before completing a degree or a certificate say that the “need to work and make money” while attending classes is the major reason they left. Balancing work and school was an even bigger barrier than finding money for tuition. Those who dropped out are almost twice as likely to cite problems juggling work and school as their main problem as they are to blame tuition bills (54 percent to 31 percent).

The problem often begins in the first year. Of those who fail to graduate, more than 6 in 10 report that the statement “I had to work as well, and it was too stressful trying to do both” described their first year of school; more than a third say it describes their first year “a lot.”

In contrast, nearly half of those who graduated (48 percent) say this statement doesn't describe their first year in school at all.<sup>10</sup>

Few former students say they left college because they were bored or found that college “just isn't for them.” Only about 1 in 10 students who have left college say a major reason they quit was that they didn't like sitting in class or thought the classes were too difficult.

### WORK IS THE TOP REASON YOUNG ADULTS GIVE FOR NOT RETURNING TO COLLEGE ONCE THEY LEAVE.

More than a third (36 percent) of those who left school say that even if they had a grant that fully paid for tuition and books, it would be hard to go back. And twice as many of them say the need “to work full-time”

<sup>10</sup> A recent Pew Hispanic poll found a similar trend among Hispanic students—74 percent of Hispanic students aged 16–25 said they do not go to school because “I need to help support my family.” See <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/115.pdf>.

(56 percent) and “family commitments” (53 percent) are major reasons they can’t go back, compared with 26 percent who say they would “not be able to afford college.” In the focus groups, young people often described their predicaments. A young woman in Seattle said, “Yeah, I think [working and going to school] was hard. You want to work so that you can help pay off [your tuition and loans] so you don’t have this accumulating debt. I think, for me, it always got in the way. I didn’t have enough time in the day to get everything done.”

A young woman from the Phoenix area who had dropped out but recently returned to classes told us, “It’s very hard because I go to school three nights a week. I work from 8 to 5. I don’t get home until 9:30, 10 at night... I also think my dedication to my classes could be better if I didn’t work as much.” A young man in Erie, Pennsylvania, who hoped to return to school described his fears that he might never get a diploma: “The reason why I’m set back is because I got a wife, kids. My wife’s doing her thing. Once she’s done with that then she can stay at home and take the side job, whatever that she’s doing. Then I can do my thing at school, and then once I’m done we’ll have the jobs.”

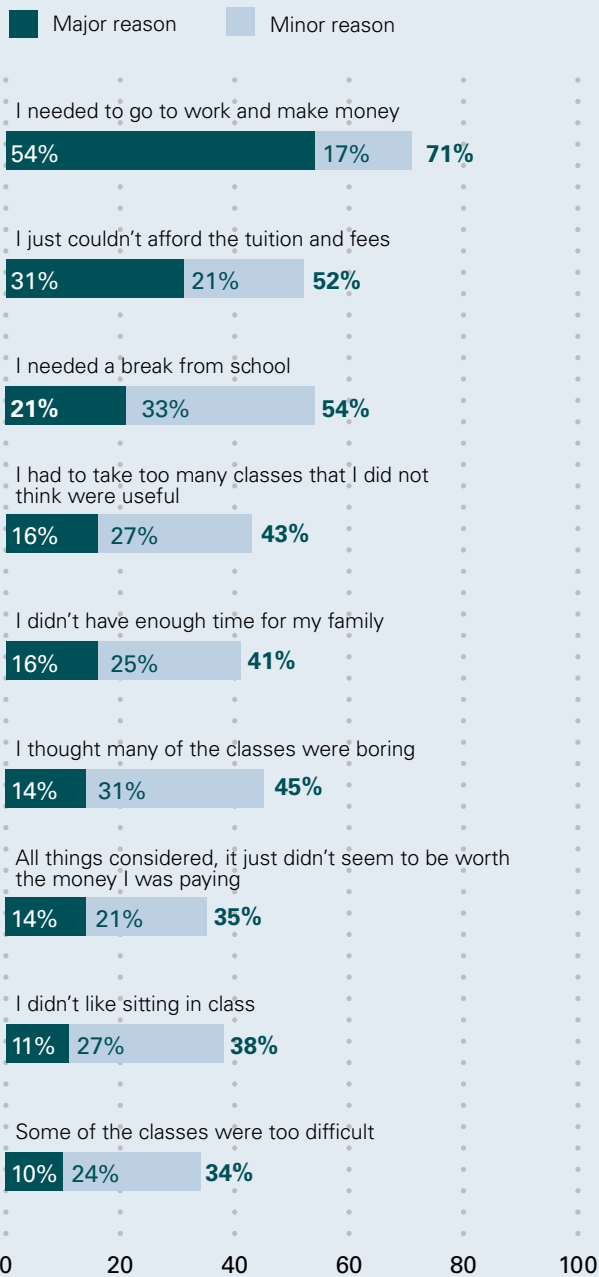
Many of the young people we interviewed believed that they could not afford not to work for the time it would take to complete a degree. They had to have a paying job to make ends meet. Far from being slackers, as some people imagine, they were often assuming responsibilities and financial burdens that traditional full-time college students do not have to shoulder. It is a test of maturity and perseverance that more affluent students are usually not required to face.

Such responses to our survey are a bracing reminder that the world of higher education has changed markedly over the years. For many students today, the experience of “going to college” is a far cry from that of the stereotypical “Joe College” so often seen in the movies and on television. For these students, the balancing act is not between going to class and attending football games and frat parties; it’s more likely between going to class and punching a clock in order to pay the rent. Theirs is a dilemma that relatively few government or higher education programs readily address.



Having to work is the top reason young adults give for why they left school.

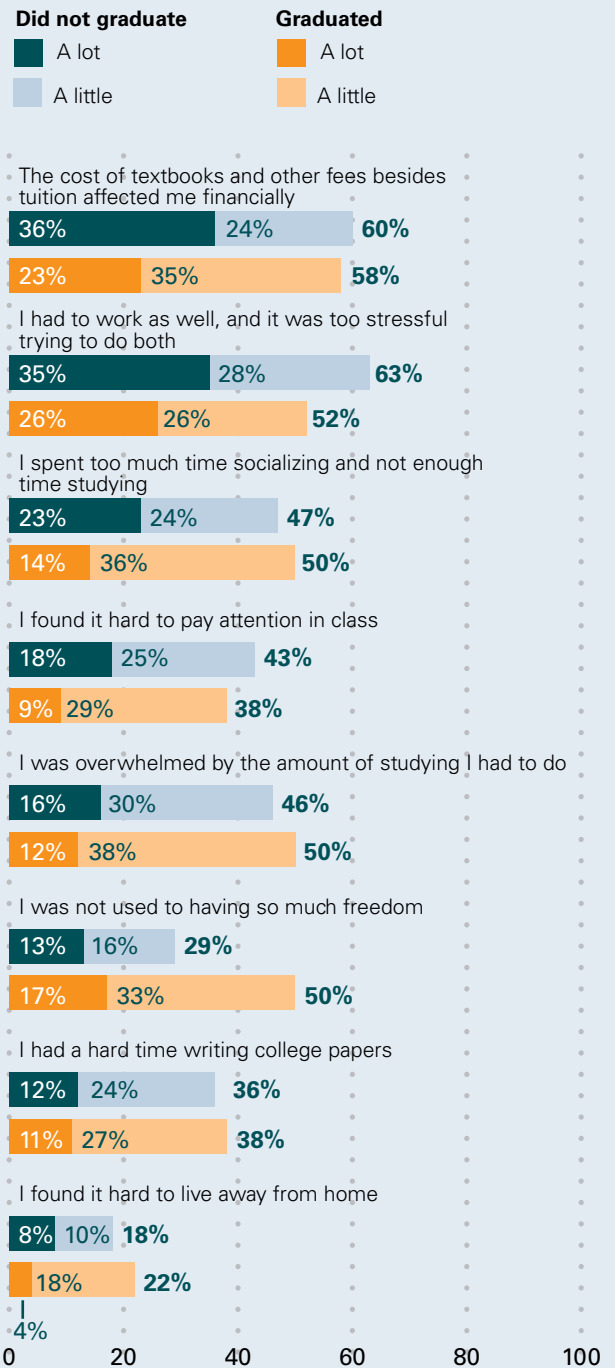
Percent who say the following is a reason why they did not complete their program:



Base: 22–30-year-olds who did not complete their postsecondary education.

Those who did not complete had trouble balancing work and school in their first year of higher education.

Thinking about your first year in school, please tell me if the following describes you:



Base: 22–30-year-olds with some postsecondary education.

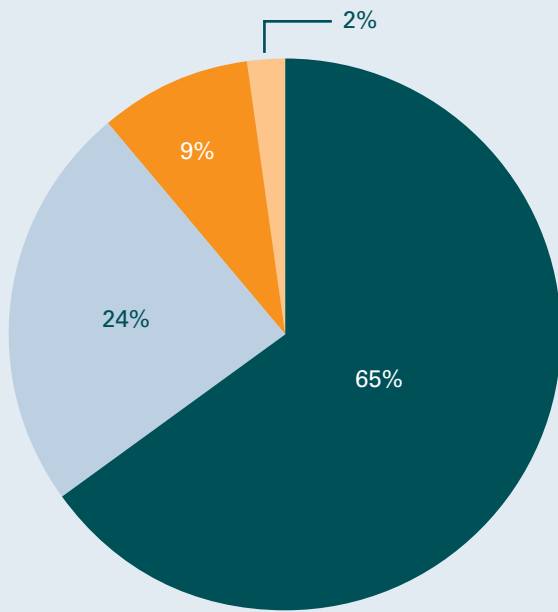
Note: Question wording in charts may be slightly edited for space. Full question wording is available in the Full Survey Results at the end of this report. Percentages may not equal 100 percent owing to rounding or the omission of some answer categories.

# MYTH AND REALITY NO. 1

Most students who have dropped out of school have thought about going back...

How much thought have you given to going back to school—a lot of thought, some thought or no thought at all?

- A lot of thought
- No thought at all
- Some thought
- Don't know

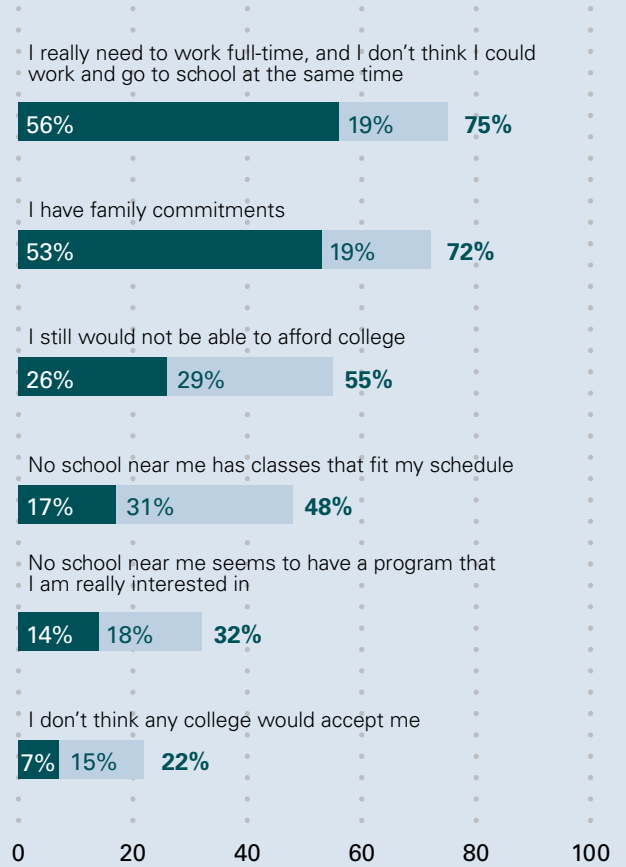


Base: 22–30-year-olds who did not complete their postsecondary education.

...and say work and family responsibilities are what makes it difficult to go back.

Percent who say the following is a reason why it would still be hard for them to go back to school:

- Major reason
- Minor reason



Base: 22–30-year-olds who left school and said that even if tuition and books were paid for, it would be hard to return.



## MYTH AND REALITY NO. 2

**MYTH NO. 2:** Most college students are supported by their parents and take advantage of a multitude of available loans, scholarships, and savings plans.

**REALITY NO. 2:** Young people who fail to finish college are often going it alone financially. They're essentially putting themselves through school.

According to one recent analysis, college costs have risen more than 400 percent in the last 25 years, while the median family income has increased less than 150 percent.<sup>11</sup> And even though the pressure of having to balance the demands of a job and school is the major reason young people say they drop out of college, it would be misleading to dismiss the role of rising college costs and stagnant family incomes. National statistics show that young people who leave college without a degree are more likely than their peers to come from less

privileged backgrounds and to live in more precarious economic circumstances.<sup>12</sup> This study revealed that these students often bear the full responsibility of paying for school: Nearly 6 in 10 students in our study who left higher education without graduating say that they had to pay for college costs themselves, rather than being able to count on help from their families. In contrast, more than 6 in 10 of those who completed their degrees say they had help from parents or other relatives to cover the costs of school.

11 The National Center for Public Policy and Education, "Measuring Up 2008" report; in Viany Orozco and Nancy K. Cauthen, "Work Less, Study More, & Succeed: How Financial Supports Can Improve Postsecondary Success," Demos, 2009.

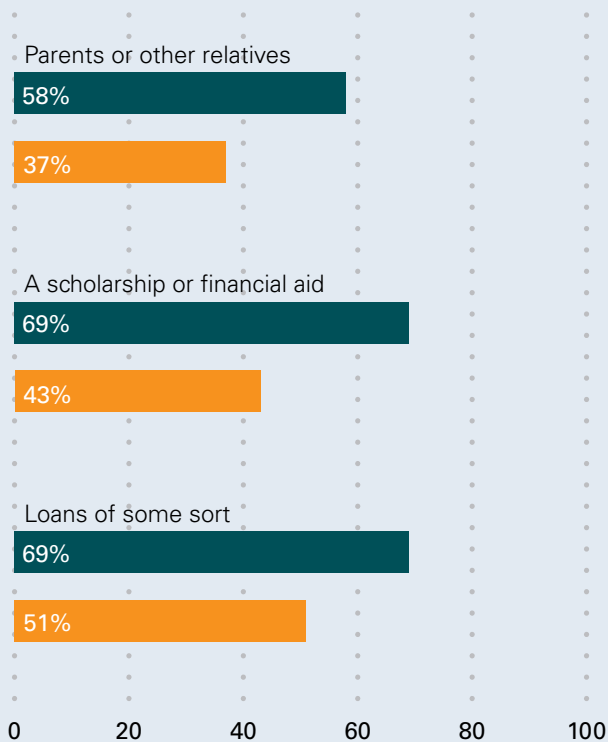
12 "Employment and Earnings Report," Bureau of Labor Statistics, August 2009.

## MYTH AND REALITY NO. 2

Those who left school are more likely to have paid for school themselves...

Percent who did not have the following to help pay for post secondary education:

■ Did not graduate ■ Graduated

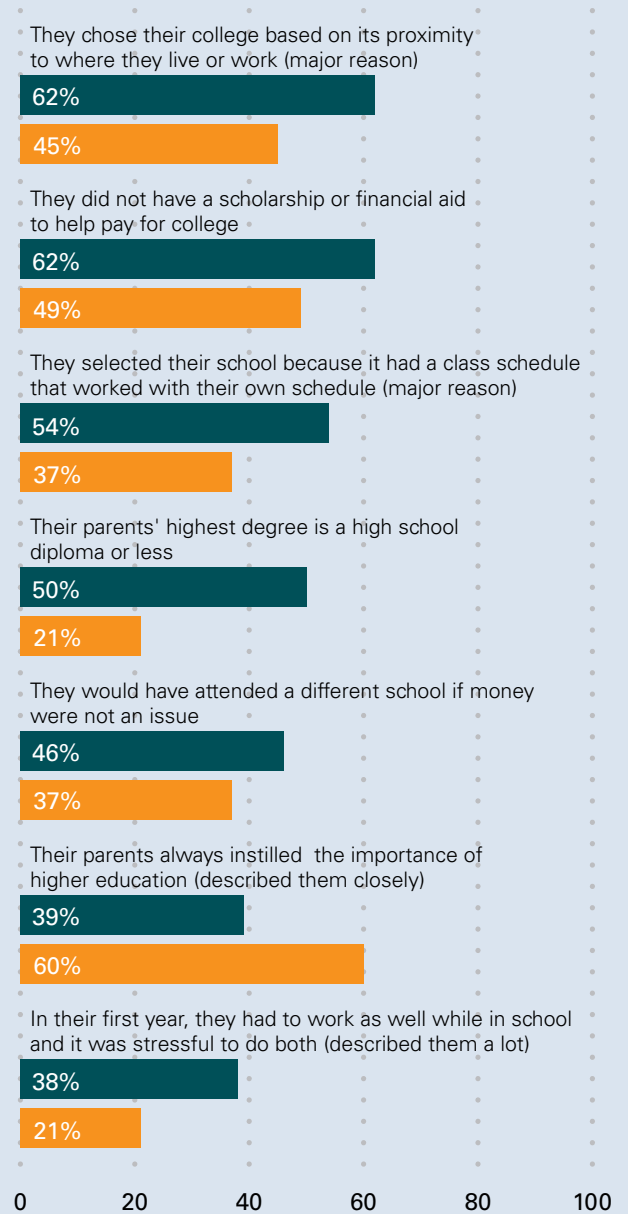


Base: 22–30-year-olds with some postsecondary education.

...and those without parental support differ in many ways from students who have support.

Percent of students who say:

■ Students whose parents or other relatives did not help pay for college ■ Students whose parents or other relatives helped pay for college

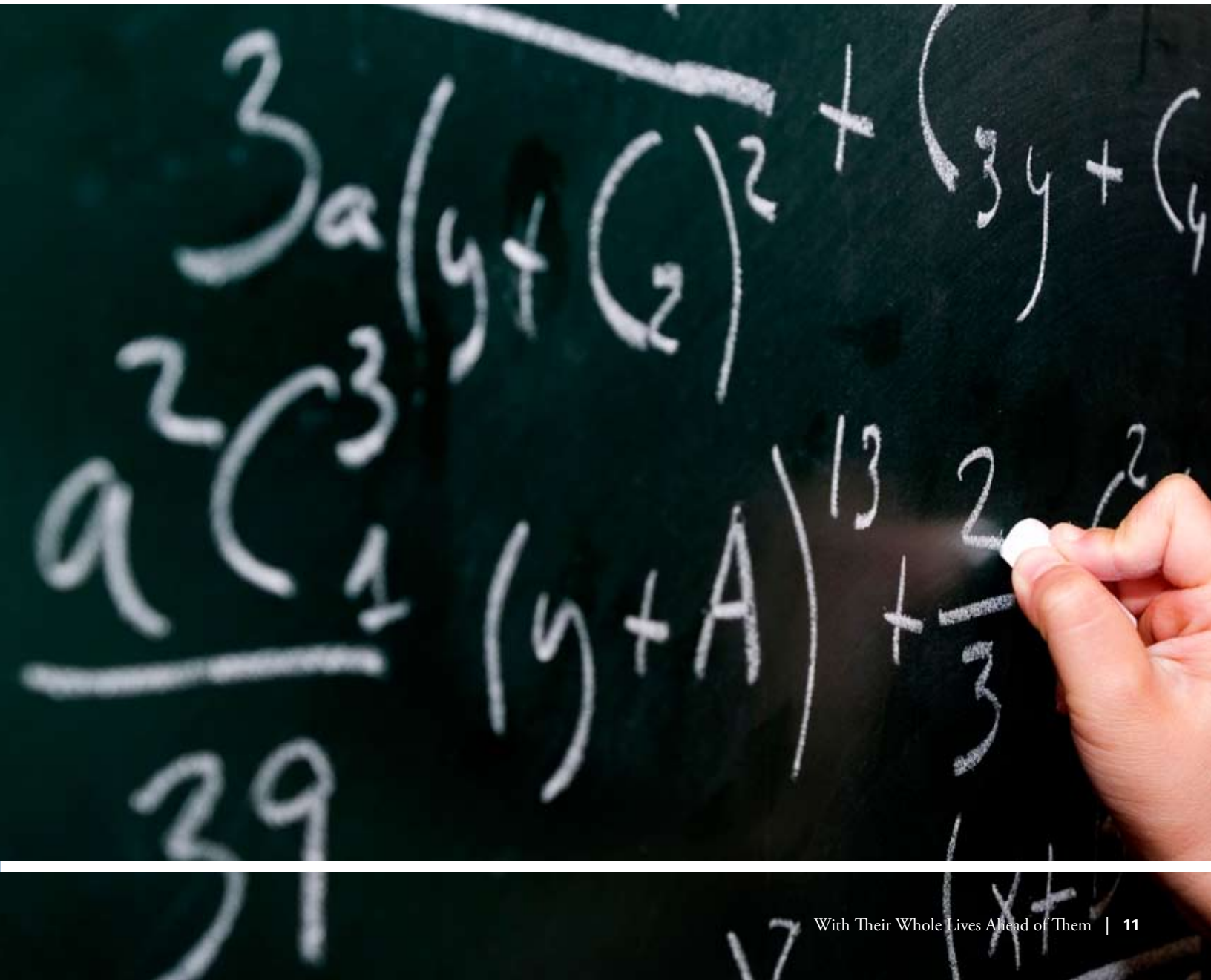


Base: 22–30-year-olds with some postsecondary education.

Young people who fail to finish college are also substantially less likely to have received scholarships or financial aid, loans or even good advice about how to get help. About 7 in 10 of those who leave school report that they did not have scholarships or financial aid, compared with about 4 in 10 of those who graduate. The majority of students (62 percent) who told us that they alone were responsible for paying for college (regardless of whether they dropped out) report that their high school guidance counselors did a poor or only fair job of helping them to understand the college application process. Among

students who had financial support from their parents, less than half said the same.

Unfortunately, about 3 in 10 of those young people who leave school without getting a diploma report that they have college loans—money that has to be repaid even though they do not have the financial leg up that a college degree affords. In many respects, they have the worst of both worlds—no diploma, but college loans to repay.







### MYTH AND REALITY NO. 3

**MYTH NO. 3:** Most students go through a meticulous process of choosing their college from an array of alternatives.

**REALITY NO. 3:** Among students who don't graduate, the college selection process is far more limited and often seems happenstance and uninformed.

In recent years, the media have been awash with “can you believe it?” stories about the college selection and application process and the stress it engenders in affluent families. According to the coverage, families are organizing summer vacations around visiting colleges. High school students are filling out dozens of applications, sometimes with a “coach” whose job it is to help them present themselves at their best. A cottage industry of publications, Web sites and experts offers advice on selecting the right college and getting into it.

But according to this survey, many young Americans—and especially those who fail to get a diploma—barely go through any college selection process at all. Their options may be quite limited because they do not have the financial resources to go away to school and/or they are able to consider only those options that mesh with their job schedules and family responsibilities. In many

instances, college selection is more constrained and happenstance than deliberate choice.<sup>13</sup> Among those who did not complete college, two-thirds say they selected their school primarily for its convenient location, nearly 6 in 10 because its schedule worked with theirs and 57 percent because the tuition and fees were affordable. A third based their choice on the academic reputation of the school and only a quarter on recommendations from friends and family.

Given that students who drop out of college are far more likely to come from families in which neither parent has a college degree, the minimal role played by recommendations from friends and family may not be surprising. Perhaps most notable is that when respondents who dropped out of college were asked about the most important reason they chose their school, a third named convenience or proximity to their home.

<sup>13</sup> Research has shown that many students focus their entire college search within the enclave colleges of the traditional feeder patterns—largely public, two-year or nonselective and somewhat selective four-year colleges. See, for example: Nagaoka, Roderick and Coca, “Barriers to College Attainment: Lessons from Chicago,” The Consortium on Chicago School Research at the University of Chicago, January 2009.

Those who did not complete are more likely than those who completed college to have selected their school based on convenience rather than academics.

Percent who say the following is a major reason why they selected their school:

DID NOT GRADUATE		GRADUATED	
It was conveniently located to where I lived or worked	66%	I thought going to this school would help me get a good job soon after I graduated	57%
It had a class schedule that worked with my schedule	59%	The tuition and fees were affordable	56%
The tuition and fees were affordable	57%	I could specialize or major in the exact subject I was interested in	54%
I thought going to this school would help me get a good job soon after I graduated	54%	The overall academic reputation of the school	54%
I could specialize or major in the exact subject I was interested in	54%	It was conveniently located to where I lived or worked	45%
I was sure that I wouldn't have any problems getting admitted	43%	I was sure that I wouldn't have any problems getting admitted	39%
The school offered me a scholarship or financial aid	41%	The school offered me a scholarship or financial aid	38%
The overall academic reputation of the school	33%	It had a class schedule that worked with my schedule	36%
Recommendations from friends or family members	25%	Recommendations from friends or family members	29%
I wanted to live away from home	11%	I wanted to live away from home	22%

Base: 22–30-year-olds with some postsecondary education.

In Seattle, a woman who had left college said, “I just picked [the school] that was close to where I lived and that a couple of my friends were going to.” In Phoenix, a man told us, “It was ASU [Arizona State University] that I chose, partly because of cost and partly just because of proximity, because ASU is really the easiest school for me to get to from where I live.”

For students who successfully complete their degrees, the selection process is dramatically and substantively

different: Their top reasons for choosing their school include that the school offered a desired program or major, the belief that going to the school will help them secure a good job and the school’s academic reputation. Tuition and fees are important considerations for any college student today, but among those who dropped out, the selection process seems more a matter of chance or location, not the pursuit of a specific goal or future career.







## MYTH AND REALITY NO. 4

**MYTH NO. 4:** Students who don't graduate understand fully the value of a college degree and the consequences and trade-offs of leaving school without one.

**REALITY NO. 4:** Students who leave college realize that a diploma is an asset, but they may not fully recognize the impact dropping out of school will have on their future.

This survey leaves little doubt that young Americans who dropped out of college often faced the double-edged challenge of working to make a living and going to school at the same time. What's more, many seem to have drifted into college without a specific goal or purpose beyond hoping for a "better job" or a "better future." But do those who fail to graduate have the same urgency about getting a degree as those who do graduate? Do they see the attainment of a degree as something essential to their future, something that requires whatever sacrifice and effort may be required?

This study and others have shown persuasively that most young people acknowledge that having a college degree will pay off in the end. Most also say they have received a fair amount of encouragement to go to college from family, school and other sources.<sup>14</sup> Yet the findings here suggest that young people who leave college before

finishing are somewhat less likely to hold these views passionately. That is, as a group they are less likely to strongly agree that their parents always instilled in them the importance of college, less likely to strongly agree that people who have a college degree make more money and less likely to say they would still go to college if they knew they could get a good job without a degree.

And, again, although most young people who drop out say that going to college was their plan even in high school, the numbers are slightly weaker than for those who successfully completed their degrees. Students who fail to graduate are 16 percentage points less likely to say that they always knew they would continue to college and 15 points less likely than those who completed college to say that their teachers and counselors probably thought they would go to college immediately after high school.

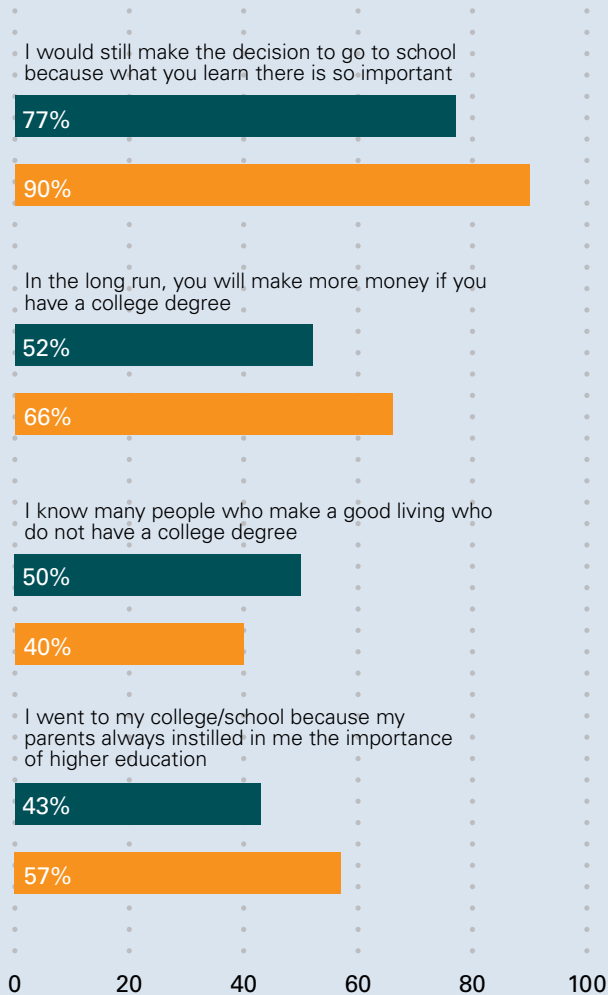
<sup>14</sup> "Life After High School," Public Agenda, 2004.

## MYTH AND REALITY NO. 4

Majorities say higher education is important, but those who left school are more likely to be less sure...

### Percent who agree strongly that:

■ Did not graduate ■ Graduated

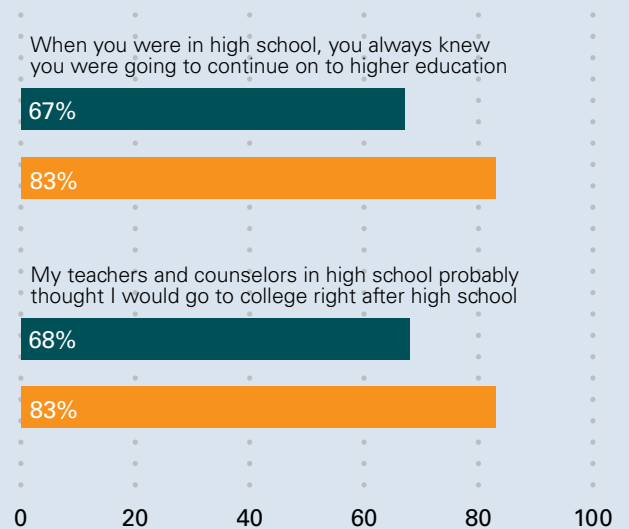


Base: 22–30-year-olds with some postsecondary education.

... and say they were less sure when they were in high school about going.

### Percent who agree that:

■ Did not graduate ■ Graduated



Base: 22–30-year-olds with some postsecondary education.



The differences here are subtle. Students who drop out of college are only slightly less likely to endorse the benefits of higher education or to say that attaining a degree has always been their plan. In some respects, this may be a natural outcome of having left college—after all, one needs to believe that he or she still has a good future ahead. Nevertheless, though these response variations are relatively small, they may play a role in a

student's ultimate decision to leave school. For someone who is scrambling to work and attend classes at the same time and has taken on the burden of paying part or all of his or her own way, even a small amount of uncertainty could be the tipping point. Or, as an old Spanish expression has it, it could be the drop of water that finally makes the glass overflow.



## SO WHAT WOULD HELP?

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- > Much of the broad national discussion about raising college completion rates has focused on making loans more available and keeping tuition costs in line. But the vast majority of young people who made the decision to leave college without a degree (or, in effect, had the decision made for them by circumstances) point first to options that would give them more flexibility in schedules and help them mitigate the challenge of working and going to school at the same time. Eight in 10 of those who did not complete college supported two proposals that they believe would make college graduation feasible: 1) making it possible for part-time students to be eligible for more financial aid (81 percent said this would help “a lot”); and 2) offering more courses in the evening and on weekends so that they could continue working while taking classes (78 percent said this would help “a lot”).



Of course, there's little doubt that changes in costs and an expansion of the availability of financial aid would be enormously helpful to nearly all college students—those who complete their programs as well as those who struggle to do so. When young adults were asked to name which among our list of proposals would be most likely to help them and people like them, 25 percent of those who dropped out and 40 percent of those with degrees suggest as their top priority cutting the cost of college by a quarter.

## WOULD A COLLEGE EVER DO THAT?

Nearly two-thirds of young Americans who left college without finishing say that they have given a lot of thought to returning. In the focus groups, almost to a person, these young people talked about their aspirations and the hopes for their lives. A woman in Erie, Pennsylvania, described her dream: “I want the 8 to 5 [job], no weekends. I want the set schedule. I want the job that's indoors, nicer, and the majority of the time, if you want to move up in a job like that, you got to have a degree.” A young woman in Seattle who aspired to become a teacher but had left school before getting her degree said, “I have to finish school. I'm already working with kids. I've worked in a day care for over six years. I have the experience. I just need to go back to school.” Nearly every young person we talked to shared his or her desire to do more in life. Yet despite their dreams, many were working in jobs that didn't seem to offer any way to get where they want to go.

This study revealed some eminently practical steps that schools could take to benefit this group, beyond simply offering more and bigger loans to help pay tuition costs. Having enough money for tuition and books is step one, to be sure, but by itself that step may not provide the breathing space that many of these young people need to stay the course. Numerous responses suggest that one set of solutions might revolve around making part-time attendance more viable by giving those students better access to loans, tuition assistance and health care—benefits and services that are frequently available only to full-time students.

There may also be implications for employers. Are there ways that businesses can help part-time workers to pursue higher education, perhaps by providing access to health benefits or by offering more predictable working hours so that would-be students can more easily schedule their classes? Part-time work is often seasonal or otherwise vulnerable to the business cycle and other economic ups and downs. Would more secure part-time employment options be a game changer for some students?

In a focus group in Erie, Pennsylvania, several young women gasped in disbelief when the moderator listed child care as one of many possibilities for solutions to the college dropout problem. Of course that would help, several immediately agreed. “Would a college ever do that?” most of them asked. A woman in Seattle who had dropped out of college said, “The one [school] I was at, they have a huge waiting list for the day care. It was just really difficult to get in.... It was all really complicated to get it subsidized, at least where you weren't paying \$300 a week, plus whatever you're paying for tuition.”

Those who did not complete favor proposals that would make college more affordable and more convenient.

How would the following help someone whose circumstances are similar to yours were after high school in getting a college degree? Percent who say the following will help a lot:

DID NOT GRADUATE		GRADUATED	
Allow part-time students to qualify for financial aid	81%	Cut the cost of attending college by 25 percent	83%
Offer more courses in the evenings, on weekends or in the summer so people can work while attending school	78%	Make sure students learn good study habits in high school so they're prepared for college work	79%
Cut the cost of attending college by 25 percent	78%	Have more programs for students who are interested in hands-on learning, apprenticeships and non classroom work	73%
Have the government offer more college loans	76%	Allow part-time students to qualify for financial aid	72%
Provide day care for students who need it	76%	Offer more courses in the evenings, on weekends or in the summer so people can work while attending school	72%
Make sure students learn good study habits in high school so they're prepared for college work	73%	The opportunity to talk with advisers who know all about the different college and job-training programs so you can make a good choice	71%
Have more programs for students who are interested in hands-on learning, apprenticeships and nonclassroom work	69%	Have the government offer more college loans	66%
Provide health insurance to all students, even those taking classes part-time	69%	Improve teaching so the classes are more interesting and relevant	64%
The opportunity to talk with advisers who know all about the different college and job-training programs so you can make a good choice	68%	Provide day care for students who need it	59%
Improve teaching so the classes are more interesting and relevant	67%	Provide health insurance to all students, even those taking classes part-time	55%
Put more classes online	57%	Put more classes online	53%
Make the college application process easier	50%	Make the college application process easier	43%

Base: 22–30-year-olds with some postsecondary education.

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## MAYBE I WON'T GRADUATE, BUT MY CHILDREN WILL

What is clear from these results is that it would be a mistake of the highest order to write off these young people because they dropped out of college. Nearly all young adults understand the value of knowledge and know-how in today's world. Even though many hedge their bets, given what's happened in their own lives, most do grasp the economic facts of life: Attaining a college degree can change your life. Most strive to complete school; most would like to return to school, but the realities of their lives become insurmountable

obstacles. Perhaps the most poignant evidence of how these young people really feel about college is this: Even though they themselves left before finishing—and chances are that many of those we spoke to will never return to higher education—fully 97 percent of young American parents who dropped out of college say that they will encourage their own children go to college. Given their aspirations and their clear message that some distinctly practical and attainable changes could genuinely enhance their prospects, the ball is now in our court. As a society, are we willing to act on what they have to say? ■



## ABOUT THE STUDY

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- > “With Their Whole Lives Ahead of Them” is based on a survey of a nationally representative sample of 614 22-to-30-year-olds with at least some post-secondary education. Interviews were conducted from May 7 to June 24, 2009, using both landline and cellular telephones, and respondents had the choice of completing the interview in English or Spanish. The margin of error for the report is plus or minus 4.8 percentage points. However, it is higher when comparing subgroups or question items that weren’t asked of all respondents. The survey was preceded by five focus groups conducted in sites across the country.

For more information about the study’s methodology, visit <http://www.publicagenda.org/theirwholelifesaheadofthem/methodology>.

Results of less than 0.5 percent are signified by an asterisk. Results of zero are signified by a dash. Responses may not always total 100 percent owing to rounding. Combining answer categories may produce slight discrepancies between numbers in these survey results and numbers in the report.



	Total	Did not complete a PSE Program	Completed PSE	In Progress
	n=614 %	n=200 %	n=281 %	n=133 %
<b>S1. Overall, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the way things are going for you and your family today?</b>				
Satisfied	80%	59%	90%	78%
Dissatisfied	19%	41%	9%	22%
Don't know/Refused	*	*	1%	—
[Note: There is no Q1-7.]				
<b>Q8. What are you studying now, or what did you study previously?</b>				
Business administration/Accounting/Marketing		19%	18%	16%
Education/Early childhood education/Child care		9%	6%	11%
Liberal arts		8%	5%	2%
Art/Fine arts/Performing arts		7%	4%	2%
Nursing		7%	5%	6%
Health care		6%	5%	14%
Computer science/Information technology		6%	6%	3%
General studies		6%	3%	2%
Science		4%	6%	2%
Psychology		4%	3%	1%
Criminal justice/Criminology		4%	1%	4%
Engineering		3%	4%	3%
Social sciences (anthropology, geography, history, political science and sociology)		2%	4%	2%
Religious studies		2%	*	—
Cosmetology		1%	*	3%
Culinary arts		1%	1%	2%
Environmental studies		1%	1%	—
Communication		1%	8%	2%
Counseling		1%	—	1%
Economics/Finance		—	4%	5%
Law		*	2%	3%
Social work		—	1%	5%
Agriculture		—	*	5%
Skilled trades		*	*	—
Other		7%	10%	7%
Don't know		5%	1%	4%

# FULL SURVEY RESULTS

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<b>Q9. Being as realistic as you can, which do you think is more likely to happen in the next 10 years?</b>				
I will be on track toward a successful career	88%	79%	91%	95%
I am not sure if I will be closer to a successful career	10%	18%	7%	4%
Don't know	2%	3%	1%	1%
<b>Q10. I am going to read you a list of statements that describe what some people say about going to college. Please tell me if you agree or disagree with each statement.</b>				
<b>In the long run, you will make more money if you have a college degree</b>				
Strongly agree	64%	52%	66%	77%
Somewhat agree	22%	27%	19%	21%
Somewhat disagree	8%	13%	7%	2%
Strongly disagree	4%	6%	4%	*
Don't know	2%	2%	2%	—
<b>College is not for everyone—some people just don't like school</b>				
Strongly agree	50%	54%	47%	51%
Somewhat agree	39%	34%	42%	37%
Somewhat disagree	6%	6%	6%	6%
Strongly disagree	5%	5%	5%	5%
Don't know	*	—	—	1%
<b>I know many people who make a good living who do not have a college degree</b>				
Strongly agree	41%	50%	40%	31%
Somewhat agree	37%	30%	37%	46%
Somewhat disagree	14%	12%	16%	12%
Strongly disagree	7%	6%	6%	10%
Don't know	1%	1%	1%	1%
[Note: There is no Q11.]				
<b>Q12. Please tell me which comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right.</b>				
In this economic climate, it is really essential to have a college degree	54%	36%	61%	60%
Because of the economic climate, everyone is having a hard time getting a job, so having a college degree doesn't really help that much	45%	62%	37%	36%
Don't know	1%	2%	1%	3%

	Total	Did not complete a PSE Program	Completed PSE	In Progress
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Q13. Please tell me which comes closer to your own view, even if neither is exactly right.				
If there were plenty of good jobs available without an advanced degree, I probably would not have gone to school after high school	14%	21%	9%	13%
I would still make the decision to go to school because what you learn there is so important	86%	77%	90%	87%
Don't know	1%	1%	1%	—
[Note: There is no Q14.]				
Q15. Do you think that currently, the vast majority of people who are qualified to go to college have the opportunity to do so, or do you think there are many people who are qualified to go but don't have the opportunity to do so?				
Have the opportunity to go	34%	25%	39%	34%
Do not have the opportunity to go	62%	70%	57%	64%
Don't know	3%	4%	3%	2%
Q16. In your circle of friends, do you think most people are really impressed by someone who graduates from college, is it something they look down at, or is it just something routine and expected?				
Most people are really impressed	33%	42%	25%	37%
Something they look down at	3%	2%	4%	2%
Just something routine and expected	62%	52%	69%	58%
Don't know	2%	3%	2%	2%
Q17. Which of the following applies to you? For my career goals...				
My degree is all I need	29%	23%	42%	9%
I need another degree besides the one I have	61%	66%	46%	89%
I don't even need my degree	9%	10%	12%	1%
Don't know	1%	*	*	1%
Q18. Here are some statements that may or may not describe your own reasons for continuing your education after high school. Please tell me how close each comes to describing you.				
I went there because I really enjoy being in school				
Very close	32%	26%	35%	31%
Somewhat close	36%	32%	34%	46%
Not too close	11%	13%	10%	11%
Not close at all	21%	28%	20%	13%
Don't know	—	—	—	—

# FULL SURVEY RESULTS

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I went there because my parents always instilled in me the importance of higher education				
Very close	51%	43%	57%	48%
Somewhat close	26%	28%	23%	28%
Not too close	9%	13%	8%	7%
Not close at all	14%	17%	11%	17%
Don't know	—	—	—	—
I went there because I really didn't know what I wanted to do after high school				
Very close	22%	25%	20%	19%
Somewhat close	23%	29%	23%	15%
Not too close	14%	12%	15%	14%
Not close at all	41%	33%	42%	51%
Don't know	*	*	—	—
I went there because the career I want specifically requires it				
Very close	50%	42%	49%	62%
Somewhat close	22%	22%	23%	18%
Not too close	10%	12%	9%	10%
Not close at all	18%	23%	18%	10%
Don't know	*	*	—	—
I went there because most of my friends were going				
Very close	9%	10%	9%	9%
Somewhat close	13%	7%	18%	7%
Not too close	17%	13%	17%	22%
Not close at all	60%	68%	55%	63%
Don't know	*	*	—	—
I wanted to learn more about the world, and college is the place to do it				
Very close	31%	23%	33%	34%
Somewhat close	35%	35%	34%	37%
Not too close	13%	15%	13%	10%
Not close at all	21%	26%	19%	18%
Don't know	*	—	*	1%



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<b>Q19. If you attended more than one school, please think about the first one you attended. To start, which type of school was that? Was it a...? [Base: Those who attended more than one type of school after high school.]</b>				
Trade or vocational school or program	9%	12%	7%	10%
Two year or community college (associate's degree)	53%	56%	52%	53%
Four-year college (Bachelor of Arts or Science degree)	38%	32%	41%	36%
Don't know	*	—	*	—
<b>Q20. Was this a public or a private school?</b>				
Public	79%	90%	74%	78%
Private	20%	9%	26%	21%
Don't know	1%	1%	*	2%
[Note: There is no Q21.]				
<b>Q22. Which comes closer to your view: [Base: Those who waited a year or more to begin school.]</b>				
It would have been easier for me overall to have started classes immediately after high school	50%	59%	30%	57%
Waiting before starting classes was the right choice I would not have been ready for it	49%	40%	70%	43%
Don't know	1%	1%	—	—
[Note: There is no Q23.]				
<b>Q24. There are many reasons you might have picked the school you picked. Still thinking about the first school you went to after high school, please tell me if each of the following is a reason why you selected this school.</b>				
<b>The overall academic reputation of the school</b>				
Major reason	46%	33%	54%	43%
Minor reason	27%	29%	27%	27%
Not a reason at all	27%	38%	19%	30%
Don't know	*	*	*	—
<b>Recommendations from friends or family members</b>				
Major reason	26%	25%	29%	21%
Minor reason	32%	22%	33%	42%
Not a reason at all	42%	54%	37%	37%
Don't know	*	—	1%	—
<b>It was conveniently located to where I lived or worked</b>				
Major reason	53%	66%	45%	51%
Minor reason	20%	12%	22%	24%
Not a reason at all	27%	21%	32%	25%
Don't know	—	—	—	—

# FULL SURVEY RESULTS

	Total	Did not complete a PSE Program	Completed PSE	In Progress
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<b>The tuition and fees were affordable</b>				
Major reason	57%	57%	56%	60%
Minor reason	23%	23%	23%	24%
Not a reason at all	19%	20%	20%	16%
Don't know	—	—	—	—
<b>I could specialize or major in the exact subject I was interested in</b>				
Major reason	54%	54%	54%	54%
Minor reason	22%	22%	23%	22%
Not a reason at all	23%	24%	23%	24%
Don't know	*	*	—	—
<b>It had a class schedule that worked with my schedule</b>				
Major reason	44%	59%	36%	45%
Minor reason	23%	17%	26%	22%
Not a reason at all	33%	25%	37%	32%
Don't know	*	*	—	—
<b>I wanted to live away from home</b>				
Major reason	19%	11%	22%	25%
Minor reason	27%	18%	35%	19%
Not a reason at all	54%	70%	44%	56%
Don't know	—	—	—	—
<b>I was sure that I wouldn't have any problems getting admitted</b>				
Major reason	41%	43%	39%	41%
Minor reason	30%	24%	33%	32%
Not a reason at all	29%	33%	28%	27%
Don't know	—	—	—	—
<b>The school offered me a scholarship or financial aid</b>				
Major reason	38%	41%	38%	32%
Minor reason	18%	13%	21%	17%
Not a reason at all	44%	46%	41%	51%
Don't know	—	—	—	—

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The school had a sports program or other non-academic program that was important to me				
Major reason	15%	13%	18%	13%
Minor reason	17%	12%	18%	20%
Not a reason at all	68%	75%	64%	67%
Don't know	*	*	—	—
I thought going to this school would help me get a good job soon after I graduated				
Major reason	56%	54%	57%	55%
Minor reason	25%	23%	27%	21%
Not a reason at all	20%	23%	16%	24%
Don't know	—	—	—	—
Q23R. In your own words, what would you say is the main reason you chose this school? [Recorded verbatim response]				
Convenient/close to home/work	25%	32%	22%	26%
Offered the major/program I want	14%	14%	14%	13%
Good/quality education/teachers/reputation	10%	5%	11%	12%
Liked it/felt right for me/atmosphere	10%	6%	15%	6%
Location	9%	10%	7%	11%
Affordable	8%	10%	6%	9%
Family members/friends attend(ed)/family connection/parents' choice	5%	4%	7%	1%
To better myself/my job opportunities	5%	7%	3%	7%
Have a scholarship/"free ride"	4%	3%	6%	3%
Where I was accepted/only option	4%	5%	1%	7%
Other	3%	3%	2%	2%
As a stepping-stone to a four-year/another college	2%	—	3%	3%
Good sports program/to play a sport	2%	2%	3%	—
Q25. Still thinking about that first year in school, please tell me if this describes you a lot, a little or not at all.				
I was overwhelmed by the amount of studying I had to do				
A lot	14%	16%	12%	14%
A little	34%	30%	38%	32%
Not at all	52%	54%	50%	54%
Don't know	—	—	—	—

# FULL SURVEY RESULTS

	Total	Did not complete a PSE Program	Completed PSE	In Progress
	n=614 %	n=200 %	n=281 %	n=133 %
<b>I had a hard time writing college papers</b>				
A lot	11%	12%	11%	9%
A little	24%	24%	27%	18%
Not at all	64%	63%	61%	73%
Don't know	—	—	—	—
<b>I found it hard to live away from home</b>				
A lot	6%	8%	4%	5%
A little	15%	10%	18%	13%
Not at all	79%	80%	78%	82%
Don't know	*	—	*	—
<b>I had to work as well, and it was too stressful trying to do both</b>				
A lot	29%	35%	26%	27%
A little	28%	28%	26%	32%
Not at all	43%	37%	48%	41%
Don't know	—	—	—	—
<b>I spent too much time socializing and not enough time studying</b>				
A lot	18%	23%	14%	20%
A little	30%	24%	36%	24%
Not at all	52%	53%	51%	56%
Don't know	*	*	—	—
<b>I found it hard to pay attention in class</b>				
A lot	12%	18%	9%	12%
A little	27%	25%	29%	24%
Not at all	61%	57%	61%	64%
Don't know	—	—	—	—
<b>I was not used to having so much freedom</b>				
A lot	15%	13%	17%	14%
A little	28%	16%	33%	32%
Not at all	57%	71%	50%	54%
Don't know	—	—	—	—

	Total	Did not complete a PSE Program	Completed PSE	In Progress
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The cost of textbooks and other fees besides tuition affected me financially				
A lot	28%	36%	23%	30%
A little	31%	24%	35%	33%
Not at all	41%	40%	42%	37%
Don't know	—	—	—	—
Q26. Still thinking about your first year in school, did you take any remedial courses or not?				
Yes	16%	20%	10%	25%
No	83%	78%	90%	75%
Didn't go to college/was in a vocational/technical school or program (VOL)	*	*	—	—
Don't know	1%	1%	*	—
Q27. Thinking overall about the first school you went to after high school, how would you rate each of the following:				
The advisers in helping you decide what classes to take				
Excellent	25%	28%	23%	25%
Good	34%	28%	39%	33%
Fair	26%	27%	26%	25%
Poor	13%	14%	10%	16%
Don't know	1%	1%	2%	1%
The school in offering courses that were interesting to you				
Excellent	35%	34%	34%	39%
Good	45%	44%	47%	42%
Fair	18%	19%	18%	17%
Poor	2%	3%	2%	2%
Don't know	*	*	—	—
The financial aid advisers in helping you understand how to get loans and scholarships				
Excellent	19%	21%	20%	14%
Good	31%	30%	32%	31%
Fair	25%	23%	24%	30%
Poor	15%	17%	12%	18%
Don't know	7%	6%	9%	5%



# FULL SURVEY RESULTS

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	n=614 %	n=200 %	n=281 %	n=133 %
<b>The remedial classes in preparing you for future college work [Base: Those who have taken any remedial courses.]</b>				
Excellent	40%	45%	32%	43%
Good	35%	31%	48%	29%
Fair	17%	19%	12%	18%
Poor	8%	5%	8%	10%
Don't know	—	—	—	—
<b>Q28. If money was not an issue, would you have enrolled in the same school you did, or would you have enrolled in a different school?</b>				
Same school	57%	53%	62%	51%
Different school	41%	44%	37%	46%
Don't know	2%	3%	1%	3%
[Note: There is no Q29 or Q30.]				
<b>Q31. Did you have any of the following to help pay for school after high school?</b>				
<b>A scholarship or financial aid</b>				
Yes	45%	31%	56%	39%
No	54%	69%	43%	61%
Don't know	*	—	*	—
<b>Loans of some sort</b>				
Yes	45%	31%	49%	54%
No	55%	69%	51%	46%
Don't know	—	—	—	—
<b>Parents or other relatives</b>				
Yes	55%	42%	63%	53%
No	45%	58%	37%	47%
Don't know	—	—	—	—
<b>Q32. Did your parents or other relatives pay for all of your tuition, some of it, only a little, or did they pay for some other costs of school but not for tuition? [Base: Those whose parents or other relatives helped pay for school.]</b>				
All	35%	41%	36%	28%
Some tuition	35%	29%	33%	47%
Only a little	14%	18%	12%	13%
Some other costs of school but not for tuition	15%	11%	18%	12%
Don't know	1%	—	1%	—

	Total	Did not complete a PSE Program	Completed PSE	In Progress
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<b>Q32B. Are you responsible for paying off your loans, or are your parents the ones who will pay them off? [Base: Those who had loans to help pay for school.]</b>				
I am paying off the loans	86%	91%	82%	92%
My parents are paying them off	7%	6%	10%	—
Both/neither (VOL)	6%	2%	6%	8%
<b>Q33. Thinking about any loans you took out for school, would you say... [Base: Those who had loans to help pay for school, who have completed their program and are personally responsible for paying back loans.]</b>				
You have a long way to go before your loans are paid off	33%	26%	35%	40%
You think they will be paid off in the next few years	45%	52%	42%	46%
They are already paid off	20%	22%	22%	8%
They will never be paid off (VOL)	1%	—	*	6%
Don't know	*	—	*	—
<b>Q34. Thinking over your high school years, would you say that you worked hard to learn as much as you should have, or do you think you could have paid a lot more attention and worked harder?</b>				
Worked hard to learn	34%	29%	36%	37%
Could have paid a lot more attention and worked harder	64%	70%	62%	63%
Don't know	1%	1%	2%	*
<b>Q35. When you were in high school, did you always know you were going to continue on to higher education?</b>				
Yes, I always knew was going to continue on to higher education	77%	67%	83%	76%
No	23%	33%	17%	24%
Don't know	*	*	—	—
[Note: There is no Q36.]				
<b>Q37. Which of these two statements do you think is most accurate about your experience?</b>				
My teachers and counselors in high school probably thought I would go to college right after high school	78%	68%	83%	76%
My teachers and counselors probably thought I was not going to college after high school	21%	29%	16%	23%
Don't know	1%	2%	*	1%
<b>Q38. How would you describe your friends in high school? Would you say that nearly all of them studied hard in school, most of them studied hard or only a few of your friends studied hard in school?</b>				
Nearly all of them studied hard	16%	9%	20%	14%
Most of them studied hard	46%	41%	48%	46%
Only a few of them studied hard	37%	48%	30%	39%
None studied hard (VOL)	1%	2%	1%	—
Don't know	1%	*	1%	1%

# FULL SURVEY RESULTS

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<b>Q39. For each description that I read, please tell me if you think it applied to you in high school or not.</b>				
<b>A very good student</b>				
Definitely applied to me	46%	38%	48%	53%
Somewhat applied to me	44%	47%	44%	39%
Did not apply to me	10%	14%	7%	8%
Don't know	—	—	—	—
<b>A bit of a teacher's pet</b>				
Definitely applied to me	12%	11%	10%	18%
Somewhat applied to me	31%	26%	35%	30%
Did not apply to me	56%	62%	54%	51%
Don't know	1%	*	1%	—
<b>A good athlete</b>				
Definitely applied to me	30%	30%	30%	30%
Somewhat applied to me	33%	28%	36%	34%
Did not apply to me	37%	42%	35%	36%
Don't know	—	—	—	—
<b>Someone who liked to have a good time</b>				
Definitely applied to me	48%	50%	49%	42%
Somewhat applied to me	42%	37%	43%	45%
Did not apply to me	10%	13%	8%	11%
Don't know	—	—	—	—
<b>A bit of a daydreamer</b>				
Definitely applied to me	22%	26%	18%	27%
Somewhat applied to me	38%	38%	39%	34%
Did not apply to me	40%	35%	43%	38%
Don't know	—	—	—	—
<b>Someone who did not like sitting in class</b>				
Definitely applied to me	23%	28%	20%	23%
Somewhat applied to me	32%	30%	33%	32%
Did not apply to me	45%	41%	47%	44%
Don't know	*	1%	—	1%

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<b>A bit of a troublemaker</b>				
Definitely applied to me	11%	17%	6%	14%
Somewhat applied to me	18%	19%	17%	18%
Did not apply to me	71%	63%	77%	66%
Don't know	—	—	—	—
<b>Q40. Which of these comes closer to describing your own experiences with the counselors in your high school?</b>				
The counselors usually made an effort to really get to know me and to treat me as an individual	47%	52%	44%	48%
I usually felt I was just another face in the crowd	48%	42%	52%	48%
I never had any experiences with counselors in high school (VOL)	2%	4%	1%	3%
Don't know	1%	1%	2%	1%
<b>Q41. How would you rate your high school counselors in the following areas? [Base: Those who had experiences with counselors.]</b>				
<b>Helping you think about different kinds of careers you might want to pursue</b>				
Excellent	14%	19%	10%	17%
Good	22%	24%	23%	18%
Fair	33%	31%	37%	28%
Poor	29%	25%	29%	34%
Don't know	2%	2%	2%	3%
<b>Helping you decide what school was right for you</b>				
Excellent	13%	17%	11%	15%
Good	17%	14%	20%	16%
Fair	32%	36%	33%	26%
Poor	35%	32%	34%	41%
Don't know	2%	2%	2%	2%
<b>Explaining and helping you with the application process</b>				
Excellent	18%	20%	18%	18%
Good	25%	25%	26%	21%
Fair	25%	29%	26%	19%
Poor	29%	24%	29%	37%
Don't know	2%	2%	1%	5%

# FULL SURVEY RESULTS

	Total	Did not complete a PSE Program	Completed PSE	In Progress
	n=614 %	n=200 %	n=281 %	n=133 %
Helping you find ways to pay for college, like financial aid or scholarship programs				
Excellent	15%	21%	12%	13%
Good	22%	20%	24%	20%
Fair	26%	25%	28%	23%
Poor	33%	32%	32%	38%
Don't know	4%	2%	4%	5%
Q42. Now I am going to read some statements that may or may not describe your high school teachers as well as the teachers you had after high school. For each of the following, please tell me if it applies more to your high school teachers, more to teachers you had after high school or whether they were about the same.				
I could talk to them easily when I had a question about what was being taught				
High school teachers	26%	31%	25%	22%
Teachers you have had after high school	20%	18%	19%	24%
About the same	53%	48%	55%	53%
Don't know	1%	2%	—	1%
I felt I could go to them if I had a personal problem that was affecting my schoolwork				
High school teachers	34%	34%	32%	37%
Teachers you had after high school	20%	17%	22%	22%
About the same	40%	39%	42%	39%
Don't know	3%	6%	3%	1%
They really had a skill in making the subject matter come alive				
High school teachers	18%	26%	13%	20%
Teachers you had after high school	37%	31%	42%	33%
About the same	43%	40%	44%	43%
Don't know	1%	2%	—	1%
They helped me understand why what we were learning in class was relevant to me				
High school teachers	16%	26%	9%	20%
Teachers you had after high school	42%	30%	49%	42%
About the same	41%	42%	41%	38%
Don't know	1%	2%	*	*



	Total	Did not complete a PSE Program	Completed PSE	In Progress
	n=614 %	n=200 %	n=281 %	n=133 %
<b>Q43. Thinking about the last school you attended, for each of the following, please tell me if it is a reason why you did not complete your program. [Base: Those who did not complete a postsecondary program.]</b>				
<b>I just couldn't afford the tuition and fees</b>				
Major reason		31%		
Minor reason		21%		
Not a reason		46%		
Don't know		2%		
<b>I thought many of the classes were boring</b>				
Major reason		14%		
Minor reason		31%		
Not a reason		52%		
Don't know		2%		
<b>I needed a break from school</b>				
Major reason		21%		
Minor reason		33%		
Not a reason		44%		
Don't know		2%		
<b>All things considered, it just didn't seem to be worth the money I was paying</b>				
Major reason		14%		
Minor reason		21%		
Not a reason		62%		
Don't know		2%		
<b>I had to take too many classes that I did not think were useful</b>				
Major reason		16%		
Minor reason		27%		
Not a reason		55%		
Don't know		2%		
<b>Some of the classes were too difficult</b>				
Major reason		10%		
Minor reason		24%		
Not a reason		63%		
Don't know		2%		

# FULL SURVEY RESULTS

	Total	Did not complete a PSE Program	Completed PSE	In Progress
	n=614 %	n=200 %	n=281 %	n=133 %
<b>I didn't like sitting in class</b>				
Major reason		11%		
Minor reason		27%		
Not a reason		60%		
Don't know		2%		
<b>I needed to go to work and make money</b>				
Major reason		54%		
Minor reason		17%		
Not a reason		28%		
Don't know		2%		
<b>I didn't have enough time for my family</b>				
Major reason		16%		
Minor reason		25%		
Not a reason		57%		
Don't know		3%		
[Note: There is no Q44.]				
<b>Q45. How much thought have you given to going back to school—a lot of thought, some thought or no thought at all? [Base: Those who did not complete a postsecondary program.]</b>				
A lot of thought		65%		
Some thought		24%		
No thought at all		9%		
Don't know		2%		
<b>Q46. Would you say you have seriously looked into a specific school, have not yet looked but plan on doing so soon or are not going to look into a particular school or program anytime soon? [Base: Those who have thought about going back to school.]</b>				
Seriously looked at some specific schools		38%		
Have not yet looked but plan on doing so soon		37%		
Not going to look into a particular school or program anytime soon		23%		
Already chosen/accepted into a school (VOL)		1%		
Don't know		1%		

	Total	Did not complete a PSE Program	Completed PSE	In Progress
	n=614 %	n=200 %	n=281 %	n=133 %
Q47. Suppose that you didn't have to pay tuition because you got a grant that covered the tuition and books. Would it be hard for you to go back to school or would it be pretty easy to do if that's what you really wanted? [Base: Those who did not complete a postsecondary program.]				
Hard to go back		36%		
Pretty easy to do		57%		
Don't know		5%		
Q48. For each of the following, is this a reason why it would still be hard for you to go back to school? [Base: Those who say it would be hard go back to school.]				
I still would not be able to afford college				
Major reason		26%		
Minor reason		29%		
Not a reason at all		43%		
Don't know		2%		
I have family commitments				
Major reason		53%		
Minor reason		19%		
Not a reason at all		26%		
Don't know		2%		
I really need to work full-time, and I don't think I could work and go to school at the same time				
Major reason		56%		
Minor reason		19%		
Not a reason at all		23%		
Don't know		2%		
I don't think any college would accept me				
Major reason		7%		
Minor reason		15%		
Not a reason at all		75%		
Don't know		2%		
No school near me has classes that fit my schedule				
Major reason		17%		
Minor reason		31%		
Not a reason at all		48%		
Don't know		3%		

# FULL SURVEY RESULTS

	Total	Did not complete a PSE Program	Completed PSE	In Progress
	n=614 %	n=200 %	n=281 %	n=133 %
No school near me seems to have a program that I am really interested in				
Major reason		14%		
Minor reason		18%		
Not a reason at all		67%		
Don't know		2%		
[Note: There is no Q49.]				
Q50. Would you say that you ended up choosing your current job more by chance, or was it something you had been hoping to do for quite some time? [Base: Those who did not complete a postsecondary program and are current employees.]				
Chose current job more by chance		61%		
Hoping to do for quite some time		37%		
Don't know		1%		
[Note: There is no Q51.]				
Q52. Would you say that in your current job situation there's plenty of room for you to grow and move up, or there's room to move up but only if you get more education, or there's not much room to move up? [Base: Those who did not complete a postsecondary program who are currently employed.]				
There's plenty of room for you to grow and move up		50%		
There's room to move up but only if you get more education		23%		
There's not much room to move up		28%		
Q53. For each of the following, please tell me how much you think this would help someone whose circumstances are similar to yours after high school in getting a college degree.				
Have the government offer more college loans				
A lot	71%	76%	66%	80%
A little	22%	16%	28%	15%
Not much	3%	2%	3%	2%
Not at all	3%	3%	4%	1%
Don't know	1%	3%	—	2%
The opportunity to talk with advisers who know all about the different college and job-training programs so you can make a good choice				
A lot	72%	68%	71%	80%
A little	23%	23%	25%	18%
Not much	1%	2%	1%	*
Not at all	2%	4%	2%	1%
Don't know	1%	3%	*	—

	Total	Did not complete a PSE Program	Completed PSE	In Progress
	n=614 %	n=200 %	n=281 %	n=133 %
<b>Cut the cost of attending college by 25 percent</b>				
A lot	82%	78%	83%	84%
A little	13%	15%	13%	11%
Not much	1%	1%	2%	1%
Not at all	2%	3%	2%	2%
Don't know	1%	3%	*	2%
<b>Allow part-time students to qualify for financial aid</b>				
A lot	76%	81%	72%	79%
A little	19%	13%	23%	18%
Not much	1%	1%	1%	1%
Not at all	3%	2%	4%	2%
Don't know	1%	3%	*	—
<b>Make the college application process easier</b>				
A lot	46%	50%	43%	49%
A little	34%	32%	36%	33%
Not much	8%	7%	7%	10%
Not at all	11%	9%	14%	8%
Don't know	1%	3%	—	—
<b>Put more classes online</b>				
A lot	53%	57%	53%	47%
A little	29%	27%	29%	32%
Not much	8%	4%	10%	10%
Not at all	8%	7%	9%	10%
Don't know	2%	5%	—	—
<b>Provide health insurance to all students, even those taking classes part time</b>				
A lot	61%	69%	55%	67%
A little	25%	17%	32%	21%
Not much	5%	4%	4%	8%
Not at all	7%	7%	8%	5%
Don't know	1%	3%	1%	—



# FULL SURVEY RESULTS

	Total	Did not complete a PSE Program	Completed PSE	In Progress
	n=614 %	n=200 %	n=281 %	n=133 %
Provide day care for students who need it				
A lot	66%	76%	59%	68%
A little	23%	14%	29%	23%
Not much	2%	3%	2%	1%
Not at all	6%	5%	7%	7%
Don't know	2%	3%	2%	1%
Make sure students learn good study habits in high school so they're prepared for college work				
A lot	77%	73%	79%	79%
A little	18%	19%	17%	21%
Not much	1%	2%	1%	—
Not at all	3%	4%	3%	1%
Don't know	1%	3%	—	—
Offer more courses in the evenings, on weekends or in the summer so people can work while attending school				
A lot	74%	78%	72%	75%
A little	21%	16%	23%	21%
Not much	2%	2%	*	4%
Not at all	2%	2%	3%	—
Don't know	1%	3%	1%	—
Improve teaching so the classes are more interesting and relevant				
A lot	67%	67%	64%	74%
A little	24%	21%	27%	22%
Not much	4%	4%	4%	3%
Not at all	4%	7%	3%	2%
Don't know	1%	3%	*	—
Have more programs for students who are interested in hands-on learning, apprenticeships and nonclassroom work				
A lot	71%	69%	73%	72%
A little	23%	22%	24%	22%
Not much	2%	2%	1%	4%
Not at all	2%	4%	1%	—
Don't know	1%	4%	—	2%

	Total	Did not complete a PSE Program	Completed PSE	In Progress
	n=614 %	n=200 %	n=281 %	n=133 %
<b>Q54. And out of the different options you say would have helped someone like you 'a lot,' which one option do you think would help THE MOST? [Base: Those who said more than one option in Q53 would help "a lot"]</b>				
More government loans for college	9%	14%	6%	10%
The opportunity to talk with advisers who know all about the different college and job-training programs so you can make a good choice	8%	6%	10%	7%
Cut the cost of attending college by 25 percent	35%	25%	40%	38%
Allow part-time students to qualify for financial aid	6%	13%	4%	5%
Make the college application process easier	*	—	1%	—
Put more classes online	4%	7%	3%	1%
Provide health insurance to all students, even those taking classes part-time	4%	5%	3%	7%
Provide day care for students that need it	6%	12%	3%	5%
Make sure students learn good study habits in high school so they're prepared for college work	9%	3%	12%	9%
Offer more courses in the evenings, on weekends or in the summer so people can work while attending school	7%	5%	8%	8%
Improve teaching so the classes are more interesting and relevant	4%	4%	4%	3%
Have more programs for students who are interested in hands-on learning, apprenticeships and nonclassroom work	5%	6%	5%	4%
Don't know	1%	1%	1%	1%
<b>D10. How important is it to you that your children, or children in your care, go to college? All in all, would you say it is... [Base: Those who have children in the household.]</b>				
Very important	82%	77%	84%	88%
Somewhat important	16%	20%	14%	12%
Not too important	1%	1%	—	—
Not at all important	*	—	1%	—
Don't know	1%	1%	1%	—

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

	<b>Sample %</b>
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	47%
Female	53%
<b>Highest Education</b>	
Some college	
Dropout	29%
Technical/vocational school in progress	2%
Two-year community college in progress	6%
Four-year undergraduate in progress	5%
Technical/vocational school	6%
Two-year or community college	7%
Four-year undergraduate college or university	29%
Graduate school in progress	8%
Graduate school	9%
<b>Education participation (not necessarily completion)</b>	
Trade or vocational school	25%
Two-year or community college	59%
Four-year college or university	66%
Formal apprenticeship	19%
Military	7%
<b>Time before matriculation to postsecondary education</b>	
Within six months	54%
Within one year	11%
Within one to two years	8%
Within two to four years	17%
Later	9%
<b>Current student enrollment type</b>	
Full-time student	49%
Part-time student	31%
Just taking a class here and there	19%
<b>Employment status</b>	
Full-time	61%
Part-time	16%
Retired	1%
Not employed	19%
(VOL) Homemaker	1%
(VOL) Student	2%
(VOL) Disabled	1%

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

	Sample %
<b>Marital status</b>	
Married	36%
Living as married	4%
Divorced	2%
Separated	2%
Widowed	*
Never married/Single	55%
<b>Number of children in household</b>	
Zero	60%
One	21%
Two	12%
Three or more	7%
<b>Current living arrangement</b>	
At home with my parents	14%
Dorm or other college housing	1%
Share a place with roommates	14%
Own place	60%
Other	11%
<b>Total household income in 2008</b>	
Under \$15,000	12%
\$15,000 to under \$25,000	12%
\$25,000 to under \$35,000	15%
\$35,000 to under \$50,000	19%
\$50,000 to under \$75,000	16%
\$75,000 or more	21%
<b>Household size in high school [Base: Those who do not currently live with their parents.]</b>	
One–two	5%
Three	18%
Four	34%
Five	25%
Six or more	17%
<b>High school home [Base: Those who do not currently live with their parents.]</b>	
Single-family house	86%
Other kind of dwelling	14%
Town house	2%
Duplex or two-family home	2%
Condominium	1%
Apartment	5%
Trailer or mobile home (VOL)	1%
Other	4%

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

	Sample %
<b>Family financial situation when living at home [Base: Those who do not currently live with their parents.]</b>	
Generally had extra money each month	47%
Made ends meet, but usually didn't have money left over each month	41%
Had trouble getting by each month	10%
Don't know/refused	2%
<b>Parents' education</b>	
A high school diploma or equivalent	28%
A technical or vocational certificate	8%
Two-year associates degree	9%
Four-year bachelor's degree	23%
Graduate degree	22%
Something else (SPECIFY)	1%
None/Both parents have less than high school diploma (VOL)	6%
Don't know/Refused	3%
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	
White	67%
Black	11%
Hispanic	12%
Asian	6%
Other	3%
Don't know/Refused	3%
<b>Urbanicity</b>	
Metro	86%
Nonmetro	14%
<b>Census Region</b>	
Northeast	18%
Midwest	24%
South	35%
West	23%



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