



Family Voices:

Building Pathways From
Learning to Meaningful Work



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Introductory Letter

For more than a century, Carnegie Corporation of New York has worked to ensure that America's public education system fulfills its most fundamental promise — to enable every young person to thrive on a pathway of learning to meaningful work as an educated member of our democracy.

The increasingly complex challenges facing our society require schools to prepare students with a deep mastery of the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in a rapidly changing global economy. Our efforts to advance that vision are grounded in research, lessons from the field and a commitment to ensuring that everyone with a stake in student success has a meaningful voice in shaping educational policy and practice.

To that end, we commissioned a nationwide survey to better understand families' aspirations for their children and how well they think our education system is preparing young people for life after high school. The results are sobering, revealing a disconnect between the opportunities families want for their children and the postsecondary pathways available to them.

While attending a four-year college remains the gold standard for many families, nearly half of parents of current middle and high school students wish that more postsecondary options existed. And even among parents who hope their children will earn a bachelor's degree, 40% are interested in skills- and work-focused training opportunities such as internships or apprenticeships. The message from the data is clear: We need to expand and strengthen postsecondary pathways so that young people are exposed to the world of work before graduating from high school and have access to a robust array of career-related learning opportunities afterwards.

The survey also highlights barriers that prevent many young people from pursuing a preferred postsecondary path, with four in 10 students directly entering the workforce instead. While cost is a major hurdle, absent other barriers, families often manage to overcome it. Non-financial barriers, such as a lack of information about available programs or local access to a desired program, are more often insurmountable. We need to provide better guidance to students as they consider next steps after high school, and we need a seamless education system that supports students at critical transition points from high school to postsecondary learning and to their first good job.

A high school education is no longer sufficient to ensure economic security. The nation's longstanding focus on making college accessible to all has had the unintended consequence of leaving behind those students who are either unable or uninterested in pursuing a traditional college path.

This survey identifies gaps in our education system and suggests strategies to address them. We hope policymakers and education leaders use its findings to build a cradle-to-career education system that prepares all our nation's young people for the bright futures they deserve.



LaVerne Evans Srinivasan
*Vice President, National
Program, and Program
Director, Education*

Carnegie Corporation of New York

Executive Summary



In the United States, the pathway families expect their child to follow through their senior year of high school is well-established. Though the quality and availability of course offerings and resources vary across communities and school districts, the progression of a child's educational journey is relatively linear compared to the variety of options they will choose from after graduation.

To gain a fuller understanding of what influences families' perceptions and decisions regarding their child's postsecondary futures, Carnegie Corporation of New York and Gallup partnered to ask families: What hopes do you have for your child, what will best help them achieve those hopes and what barriers might they face?

In response to what they most hope their child will do after graduating high school, parents separated into two large groups: About half of parents said they want their child to attend a four-year college, and the other half preferred their child do something else.

Among parents of recent high school graduates, 46% said their child pursued a postsecondary option other than the one their parent preferred. While some of this difference can be attributed to a lack of alignment between a child's ideal pathway and their parent's, nearly two-thirds of parents said their child faced one or more barriers to that pathway, such as a lack of financial resources, information or availability.

Despite financial barriers being the most-cited obstacle to parents' ideal pathway for their child, these types of challenges also seem to be the least likely to deter a child from ultimately pursuing that path. The *Family Voices* study finds that while finances were the most prevalent challenge for families and created a significant barrier to the pathways parents want for their child, parents were more likely to overcome a lack of funding than a lack of information or availability. Moreover, these non-financial barriers were disproportionately likely to impact Black children, increasing the likelihood that they would not achieve the aspirations their parents have for them compared to White and Hispanic children.

Among postsecondary parents who wanted their child to pursue postsecondary education or training but whose child did not take that path, 49% said their child entered the workforce immediately after high school.

Though a system where nearly half of children pursue a postsecondary avenue other than the one their parent prefers is notable on its own, it is perhaps made more noteworthy by the pathways these children are taking instead. Among parents who wanted their child to pursue a postsecondary education or training program but whose child did not, **nearly half (49%) said their child took a paid job instead of pursuing an alternate educational option.** Research suggests these children are more likely to be unemployed than their peers who earn a college degree, and will earn less over the course of their lifetime.

Community colleges are often marketed as just that: An alternative for parents who aspire for their child to pursue postsecondary education but whose child may not be able to afford or otherwise access a four-year college. However, just 8% of parents said community college is the postsecondary option they prefer for their child — about half the percentage who said they prefer their child participate in an apprenticeship, technical training program or other program that combines academic aspects with on-the-job training.

More than 40% of parents who prefer their child attend college also expressed interest in career or skill-building learning experiences for their child.

Despite community colleges offering degrees that integrate many aspects of non-college technical training and apprenticeship programs, parents do not seem to believe that a two-year college delivers the same level of quality that they associate with the training programs themselves. When asked how well a variety of postsecondary options prepare children to succeed in their careers, 20% said community college provides “excellent” preparation — about half the percentage who said the same about technical or vocational training and apprenticeships. Similarly, more parents said apprenticeships and specialized technical training programs provide “excellent” career preparation than said the same about four-year universities. These findings suggest that many parents have positive opinions of programs other than the ones they prefer for their child, particularly those centered around experiential learning.

In addition to holding generally positive perceptions about the value of experiential learning programs, about half of all parents said they would be interested in non-college alternatives such as internships, apprenticeships and service-learning for their children. Even among parents who prefer college, more than 40% said they would be interested in these programs. Parents’ stated interest in these programs was notably higher than the percentage of parents who said their child pursued them.

The challenge, then, seems not to be parents' perception of the value experiential learning programs provide; rather, parents often said they know comparatively little about these options. Even if they did know about them, at least one-third of parents were unsure if these programs were available in their area. However, if parents' knowledge and access to such programs were to increase, many parents whose children enter the workforce upon graduation — but express interest in alternatives — may opt to redirect their child toward an experiential education track.

These findings also speak to a general sentiment parents have about their overall experience with the postsecondary system.

Though parents see the pathways available to their child as acceptable, it does not mean that many do not want — or need — more options, as well as the information and accessibility required for these options to be viable. An overall increase in parents' knowledge of experiential learning programs, coupled with institutional support to make them available to a greater segment of the population, would likely decrease the percentage of children who enter the workforce after graduation despite their parents' preferences against it.

While 84% of parents of current students said they are “satisfied” with a four-year college, two-year college or technical training program as options for their child, 45% said they wish there were more options available for their child.

Introduction

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic introduced new considerations and challenges into the way America works and learns. Families across the country had to make decisions about how — or whether — their children would achieve the hopes and aspirations their parents had for them. Families faced with diminished income, shuttered schools, canceled programs and sudden illness or loss were forced to find ways to overcome these barriers or help their child pivot to a new, unanticipated plan.

While the global pandemic may have shone new light on the obstacles children face in navigating their post-high school plan, U.S. households contended with many of these same challenges before the pandemic. Job and income loss, unexpected illness, unavailable programs, institutional inequalities and less-than-ideal learning conditions have always impacted American families, and they pose significant hurdles to children's ability to achieve their goals.

To better capture the experiences and aspirations of families navigating the postsecondary landscape, Carnegie Corporation of New York and Gallup partnered to launch the *Family Voices* study, which included a nationally representative survey of nearly 3,000 parents. Approximately half of the respondents were parents of children currently enrolled in middle or high school, and the other half were parents of children under age 25 who were no longer enrolled in secondary school. The project sought to understand the postsecondary pathways parents aspire to for their children — rather than only the pathways they feel are within reach — and the barriers they face. The study also gauges parents' knowledge of non-college pathways for their children as well as their perceptions of the quality and availability of those alternatives.

The study finds that 46% of parents whose children have graduated from high school — most before the pandemic — said their child pursued a pathway other than the one their parent preferred and potentially planned for. Deficiencies in information about, or the accessibility of, postsecondary pathways seemed to be the most disruptive barriers, even if parents cited financial challenges more frequently.

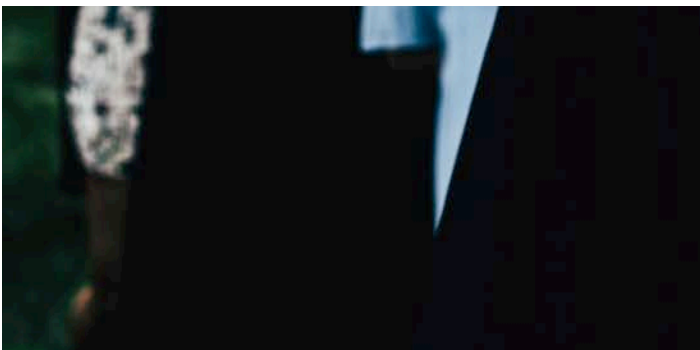
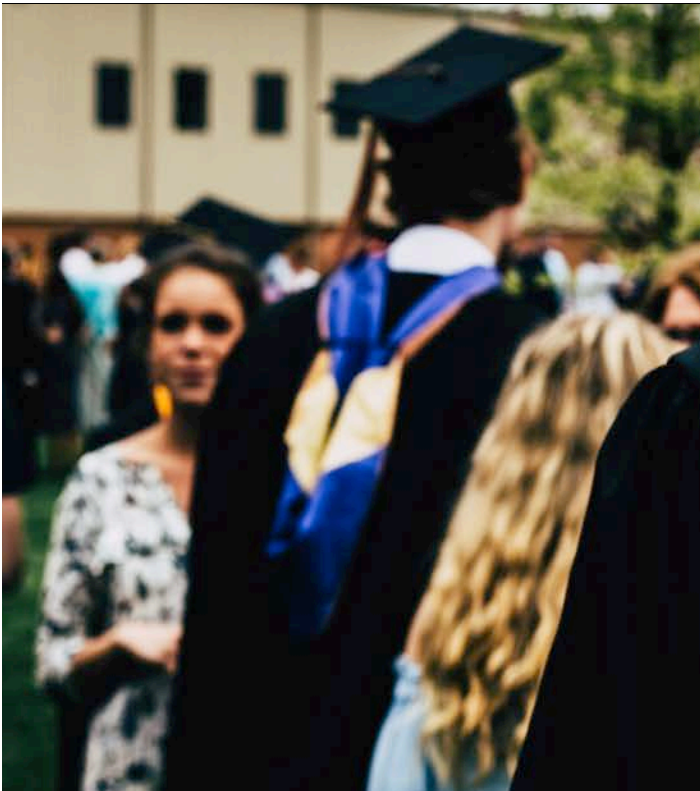
The study also reveals that while 84% of parents of current students would be “satisfied” to send their child to college or a technical training program, 45% said they wish there were more options available to their child. About half of parents — including those who want their child to go to a four-year college — expressed interest in four specific alternatives to college or technical training, though parents had varying levels of awareness of whether each option was available to them.

The *Family Voices* study highlights opportunities to develop and promote alternative postsecondary education pathways to be accessible to more students and meet a broader range of education and career goals. Addressing these opportunities could help students take stock not only of what is but of what could be — and break down the barriers that currently stand in their way.



While parents saw the pathways available to their child as acceptable, **it does not mean that many do not want — or need — more options.**

The State of the Postsecondary Landscape



Which pathways do parents prefer?

About half (54%) of parents of children between the ages of 11 and 25 said that if there were no limitations on their child's opportunities after high school, they prefer or would have preferred their child pursue a four-year college degree. An additional 8% would prefer their child earn a two-year degree. The remaining 38% said they would prefer their child pursue an option other than higher education.

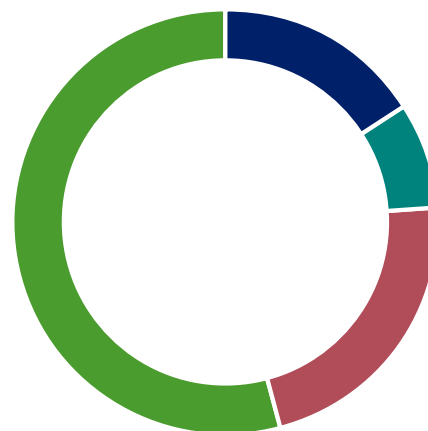
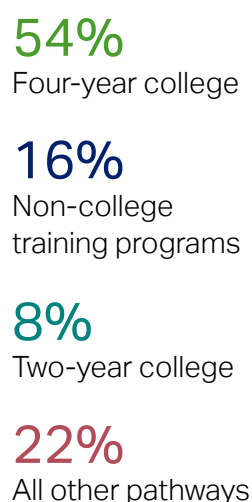
Though more parents said they prefer college for their child than any other alternative, there is evidence that Americans believe the value of higher education is declining. In June 2019, Gallup found that just over half of Americans (51%) said a college education is “very important,” a 19-point decrease from the 70% of U.S. adults who said the same in 2013, though it is worth noting that the percentage who said college is “fairly important” increased by 13 points to 36%.¹ Further, amid rising tuition costs, nearly three-quarters of Americans (73%) said higher education is not affordable for those who need it.²

But while Americans may be less positive now than in the past about the importance and accessibility of higher education, they remain more likely to aspire to this pathway than all others combined — a sentiment that was particularly strong among several segments of parents.

CHART 1:

Please think about your ideal situation; if there were no obstacles or limitations, what would/did you most want your child to do immediately after he or she finishes/finished high school?

% Among all parents



*“Non-college training programs” and “All other pathways” are composite groups. For a complete listing of all data by subcategory, please see the appendix.

¹ Marken, S. (2019, December 30). *Half in U.S. now consider college education very important*. Gallup.com. <https://www.gallup.com/education/272228/half-consider-college-education-important.aspx>

² Marken, S. (2020, January 7). *About a quarter of U.S. adults consider higher ed affordable*. Gallup.com. <https://www.gallup.com/education/272366/quarter-adults-consider-higher-affordable.aspx>

Who prefers four-year college?

If there were no barriers or obstacles to their child doing so, just over half of parents (54%) said they would most want their child to pursue a bachelor's degree after high school. While U.S. parents overall were about evenly divided on this option, parents' political party and education, as well their child's race, had a noticeable impact on their likelihood to prefer four-year college.

CHART 2:

Please think about your ideal situation; if there were no obstacles or limitations, what would/did you most want your child to do immediately after he or she finishes/finished high school?

% Among parents who prefer their child attend a four-year college by ...

Overall



Parent's Political Party



Educational Attainment of Parent



Race of Child



Urbanicity of Child's School District



67% of parents of Black children

said they preferred their child pursue a bachelor's degree — **16 percentage points higher** than parents of White children and 11 points higher than parents of Hispanic children.

One of the strongest predictors of college preference was a parent's political party identification. Seventy percent of parents who identify as Democrats said they would prefer their child pursue a bachelor's degree, compared to 46% of Republicans and 48% of political independents. This finding is in line with national Gallup research, which finds that Republicans are significantly less likely than Democrats or independents to say that a college education is "very important" and to have confidence in higher education in general.³

Parents' own experience with college also has a significant influence on whether they aspire for their child to follow the same path. About two-thirds (66%) of parents who obtained at least a bachelor's degree said they want their child to pursue a four-year education — more than 20 percentage points higher than parents who did not complete a four-year degree.

Still, the corollary of this finding is that about one-third of parents who went to college do not want their child to do the same. Much of this is influenced by other demographic characteristics of bachelor's degree holders; for example, Republican degree holders were far less likely than Democrat degree holders to want their child to go to college.

About two-thirds (67%) of parents of Black children preferred their child attend a four-year college, a notably higher percentage than parents of White (51%) and Hispanic children (56%). Additionally, parents living in cities (56%) and suburbs (62%) were significantly more likely to want their child to pursue a bachelor's degree than those who live in towns (41%) or rural areas (46%).

Despite some differences in college preference across income groups, household income was not a significant predictor of whether a parent aspires for their child to attend college. Rather, these differences are better explained by factors such as education, political party and urbanicity.

3 Marken, S. (2019, December 30). *Half in U.S. now consider college education very important*. Gallup.com. <https://www.gallup.com/education/272228/half-consider-college-education-important.aspx>



Nearly half of parents wanted something other than four-year college for their child.

Just under half of parents (46%) said they would prefer their child pursue something other than a bachelor's degree, even if there were no impediments to them doing so. About half of parents not wanting their child to pursue a bachelor's degree said they still want their child to pursue another type of postsecondary education or skills training program.

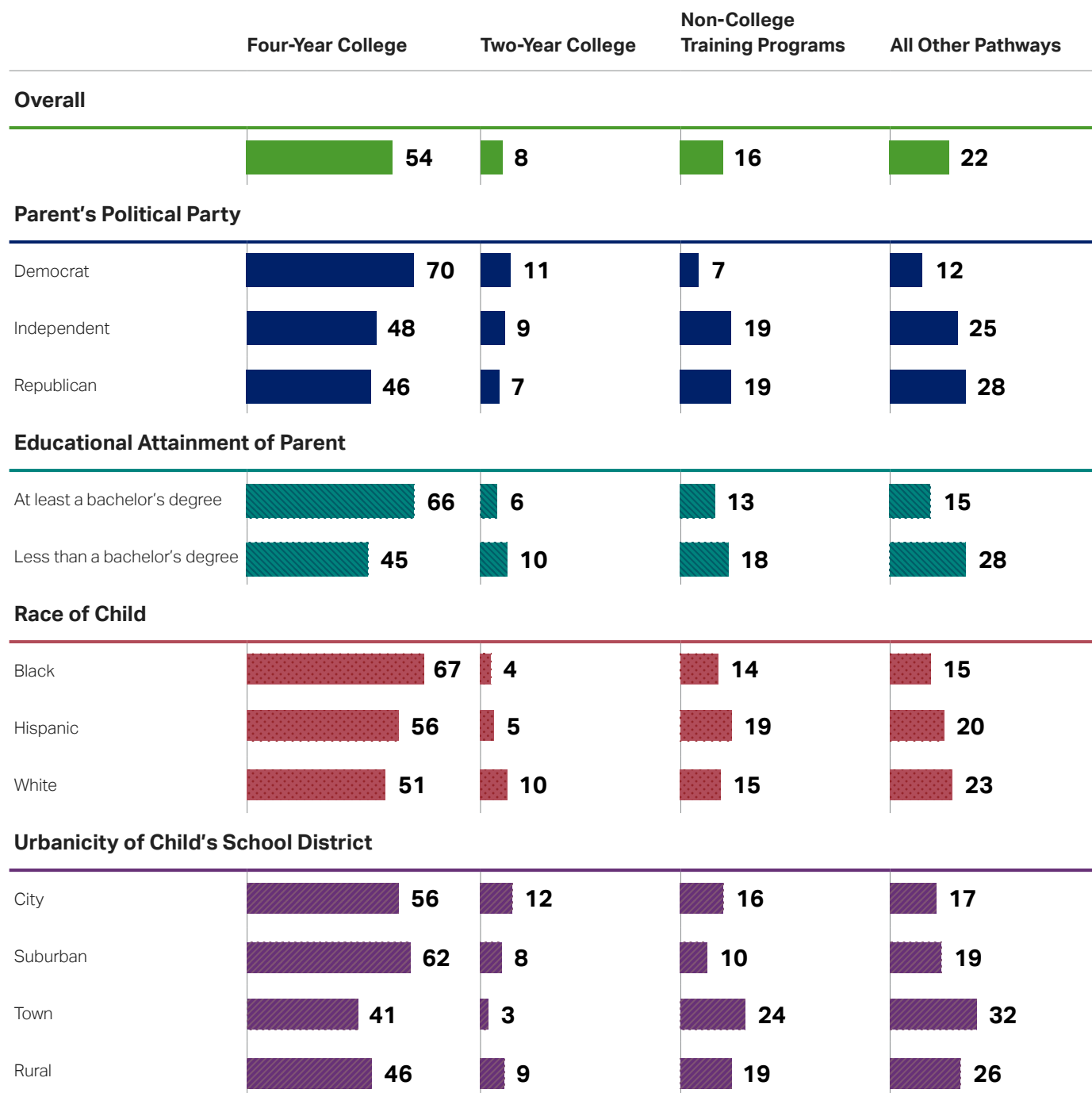
Eight percent of all parents said they would prefer their child attend a two-year or community college over any other pathway, including four-year college, while 16% prefer non-college training programs.

CHART 3:

Please think about your ideal situation; if there were no obstacles or limitations, what would/did you most want your child to do immediately after he or she finishes/finished high school?

% Among all parents

PARENTS WHO PREFER THEIR CHILD PURSUE ...



Note: Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

A parent's own experience with community college increased the likelihood of preferring this pathway for their child: Parents who attended a community college were nearly twice as likely as bachelor's degree holders to prefer their child pursue an associate degree. That said, community college graduates were not particularly likely to want their child to follow this pathway: 11% of associate degree holders said their first preference would be for their child to obtain a two-year degree. This percentage was about one-quarter the percentage of associate degree holders who would prefer their child attend a four-year college (41%).

Parents of White children were more than twice as likely to prefer two-year college for their children as parents of Black or Hispanic children. However, national enrollment statistics show that Black and Hispanic undergraduates are more likely to begin their postsecondary education at community colleges than White students.⁴

Sixteen percent of parents stated they want their child to opt for a non-degree skills-training program outside of four-year or two-year college. These programs include training for a trade or vocation, such as plumbing or automotive repair (4%); specialized technical skills, such as information technology or installing and maintaining solar panels (4%); apprenticeships (2%); or another option that combines classroom-based learning with on-the-job training (5%).

Many two-year colleges offer associate degrees that focus on developing skills specific to a career path, such as paralegal or dental hygienist programs. Parents who prefer their child develop skills outside of a community college may be interested in programs for which two-year degrees are not available or may not see two-year college as the ideal path to developing skills that lead to good jobs in their communities. Whatever the reason, parents were about twice as likely to say they want their child to complete a skills-training program than to say they prefer a two-year degree.

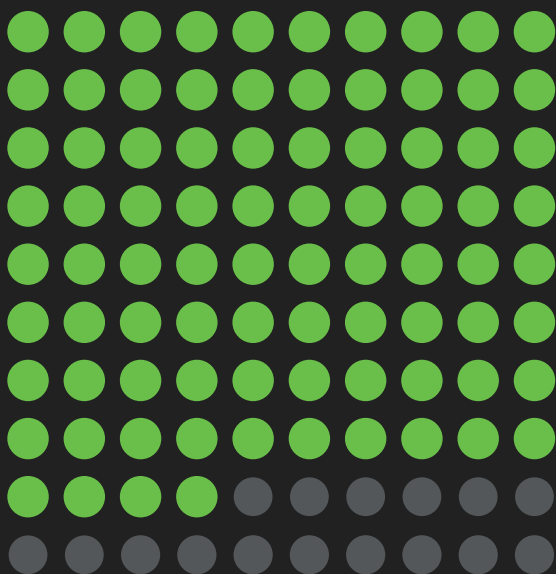
In many cases, parents who were less likely to prefer their child pursue a four-year college degree were significantly more likely to prefer a skills-training program. This group includes parents whose children attend schools located in towns (24%) or rural (19%) school districts, as well as Republicans (19%) and political independents (19%).

The remaining 22% of parents preferred their child pursue an option other than postsecondary education or training, such as a paid job, military service, volunteer work, joining a family business or starting their own business.

⁴ *Community college FAQs*. (n.d.). Community College Research Center. Retrieved February 24, 2021, from <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Community-College-FAQs.html>



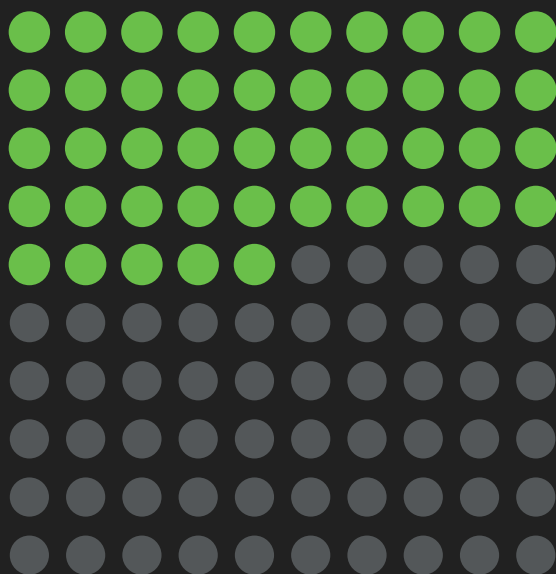
Parents were about **twice as likely** to say they want their child to complete a **skills-training program** than to say they prefer a two-year degree.



While **84% of parents of current students** said ...

- **a four-year college**
- **a two-year college**
- **training to learn a trade or technical skill**

... were satisfactory options for their child,



45% of these parents said they wish there were more postsecondary options available to them.

Parents were satisfied with existing college and training opportunities, but nearly half **wanted more options.**

Though parents cited challenges in preparing their child for postsecondary activities, the *Family Voices* study finds that most were generally “satisfied” with the options available to them, particularly the three broad categories of four-year college, two-year college and skills-training programs. However, the study also suggests that satisfaction may not be the best metric to identify gaps in the postsecondary system, as nearly half of parents (45%) also said that they wish there were more options available beyond those traditional pathways.

When asked whether they were satisfied with four-year college, two-year college and training programs to learn a trade or technical skill, 84% of parents of current students said they were satisfied with these three general options, while the remaining 16% said that they would prefer something different.

While most of these parents were satisfied overall, parents also expressed interest in ensuring that they have reviewed all the options available to them and increasing the variety of those options.

To a lesser extent, parents of high school graduates also expressed this desire. Among parents of high school graduates who were satisfied with the four-year degree, two-year degree or training program their child pursued, 32% said they wish there were more options available to their child.

Parents having fuller knowledge of the options available becomes particularly important when their child cannot or does not pursue the pathway their parent prefers and, likely, has researched and prepared for — an experience reported by nearly half of postsecondary parents in the *Family Voices* study.

Barriers to Postsecondary Pathways

While every parent has an ideal pathway they would prefer their child take, 65% of all parents said their child faces or faced one or more barriers to that pathway. And although personal and institutional barriers are not the only reasons children opt to pursue pathways other than their parent's ideal, these were cited more frequently by parents who said their child did not pursue the pathway they preferred.

Among parents of postsecondary students who said they wanted their child to pursue a bachelor's degree, an associate degree or technical training, 39% said their child did not pursue the pathway they preferred. The *Family Voices* data suggest that this is largely due to the types of financial, information and availability barriers they faced.



Nearly two-thirds of children

faced barriers to their parent's preferred pathway.

In examining the barriers children encounter following high school, the *Family Voices* survey asked parents about a variety of limitations that presented obstacles to the specific pathway they preferred for their child.

One-third of parents (34%) cited funding as a barrier, making it the most-commonly cited barrier and more than twice as prevalent as the next-most frequent barrier. Despite the yawning gap in cost between four-year college and an associate degree or training programs, the parents who prefer each of these pathways were similarly likely to say they are limited by financial resources.

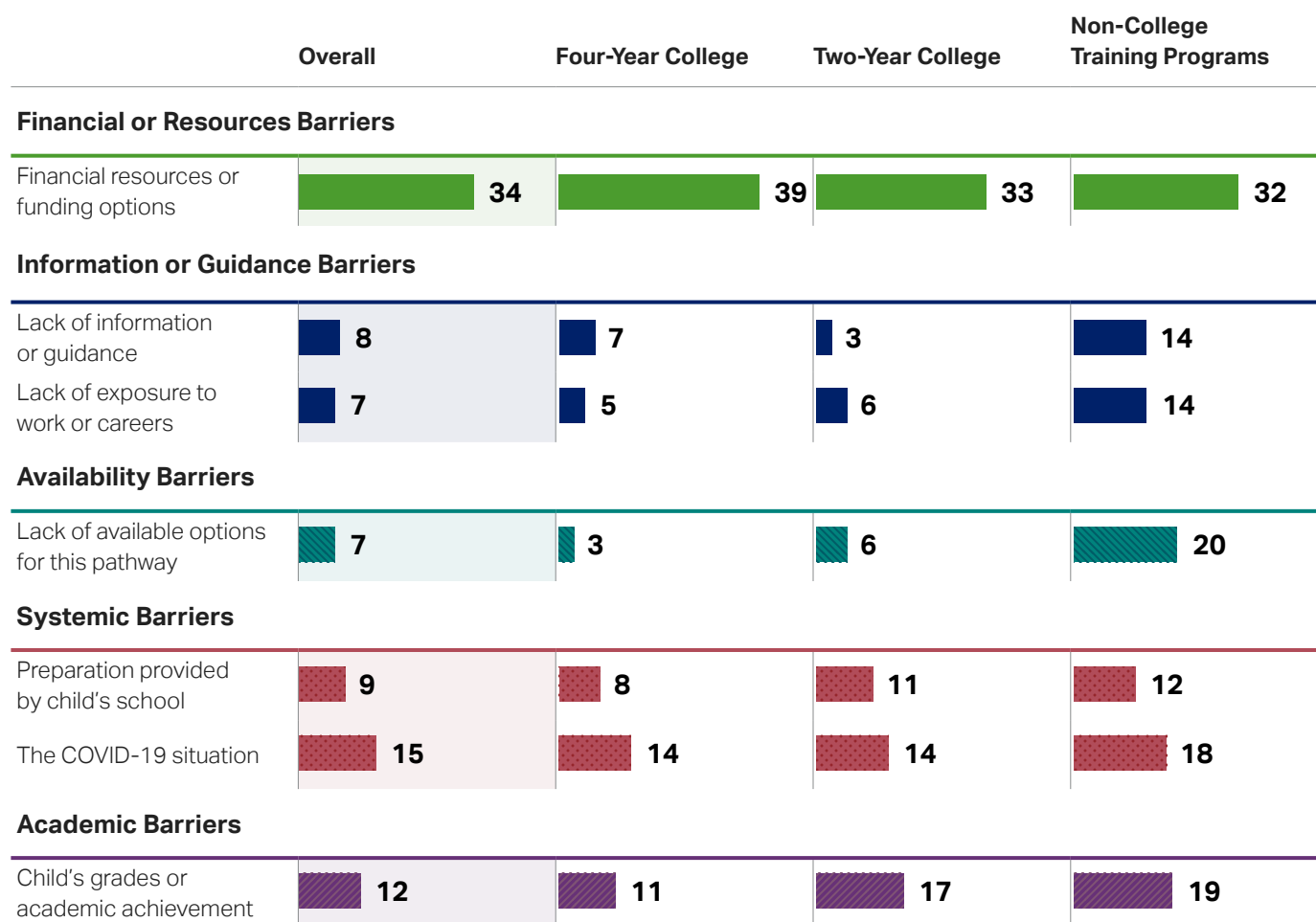
The COVID-19 pandemic, poor academic preparation, insufficient information and lack of availability were also frequently cited. These non-financial barriers were often particularly high among parents who do not want their child to attend a four-year college.

CHART 4:

Please indicate which of the following is/was a barrier to your child taking this "ideal" pathway immediately following high school. Please select all that apply.

% Among all parents

PATHWAY PREFERENCE





While parents who prefer training programs were about as likely to say they were limited by financial resources as parents who prefer four-year college, parents who prefer training programs were **twice as likely to say they lacked needed information** or guidance, and **nearly seven times as likely** to say these programs were not available to their child.

While 15% of all parents said COVID-19 posed a barrier to their child's postsecondary plans, this figure was greatest among parents of current high school students (32%).

About one-third of parents who wanted their high school student to attend college (32%) said COVID-19 posed a barrier, as did 36% of those who preferred their child pursue a training program.

Parents who said COVID-19 posed a barrier to their high school student's plans were about 10 percentage points more likely to say funding was also a barrier than parents whose child had not been impacted by the pandemic.

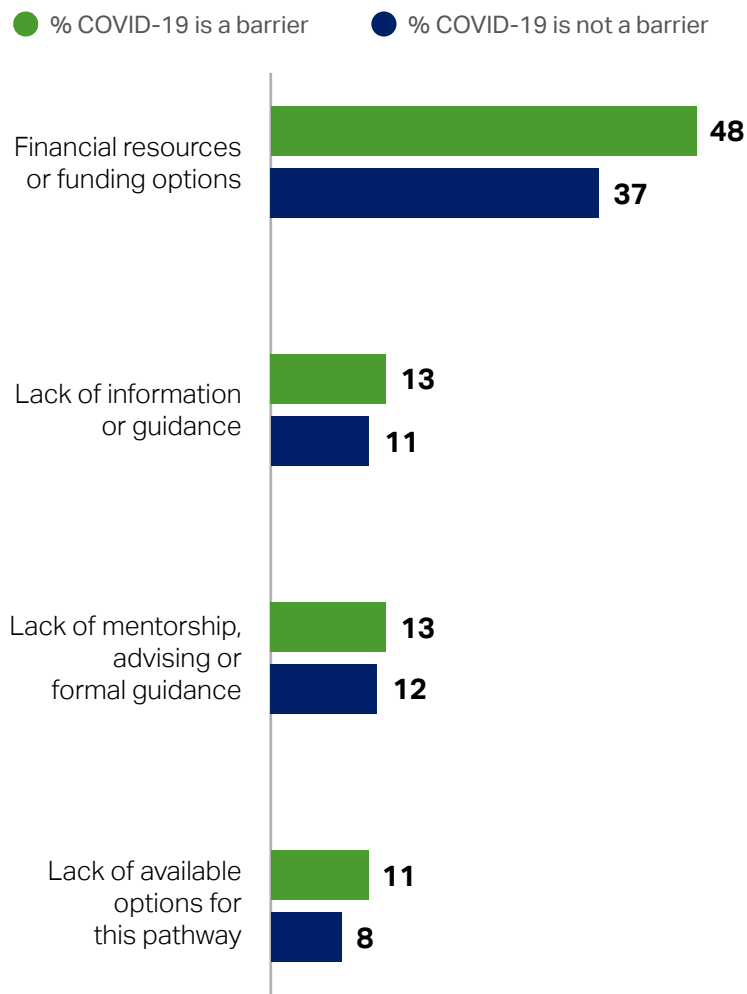
However, COVID-19-related barriers did not appear to significantly increase the likelihood that children would be impeded by a lack of information or availability, suggesting that these challenges will persist at similar levels once the pandemic has subsided, and will continue to have an outsized impact on students who do not plan to pursue a bachelor's degree.

Overall, between 7% and 8% of parents said that lack of information, advising and available options jeopardized their child's ability to pursue their parent's ideal pathway. However, parents who prefer that their child pursue a skills-training program were nearly seven times as likely as those who prefer a bachelor's degree to say there is a lack of these programs available to them, and they were twice as likely to say they lacked the necessary information or guidance about them.

CHART 5:

Please indicate which of the following is a barrier to your child taking this "ideal" pathway immediately following high school.

% Among parents of current high school students





Lack of information
and availability were
greater obstacles
**than financial
challenges.**

Parents whose child encountered non-financial obstacles to their parent's preferred pathway were more likely to say their child did not pursue that pathway than parents whose child faced no barriers or those who only faced financial impediments.

Among parents who preferred their child pursue a four-year degree, two-year degree or non-college training program and whose child faced no barriers to that pathway, 86% said their child ultimately pursued it. For parents whose child faced financial barriers to their ideal pathway, that percentage dropped to 57%. This sharp decline aligns with the national debate around the affordability of two- and four-year colleges, including recent proposals to make community colleges⁵ and four-year public universities⁶ tuition-free for some students.

5 *Plan for education beyond high school* | Joe Biden. (n.d.). Joe Biden for President: Official Campaign Website. Retrieved February 24, 2021, from <https://joebiden.com/beyondhs/>

6 Epstein, J. (2020, March 15). Biden adopts free public college plan in response to Sanders. *Bloomberg*. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-15/biden-adopts-free-public-college-plan-in-response-to-sanders>

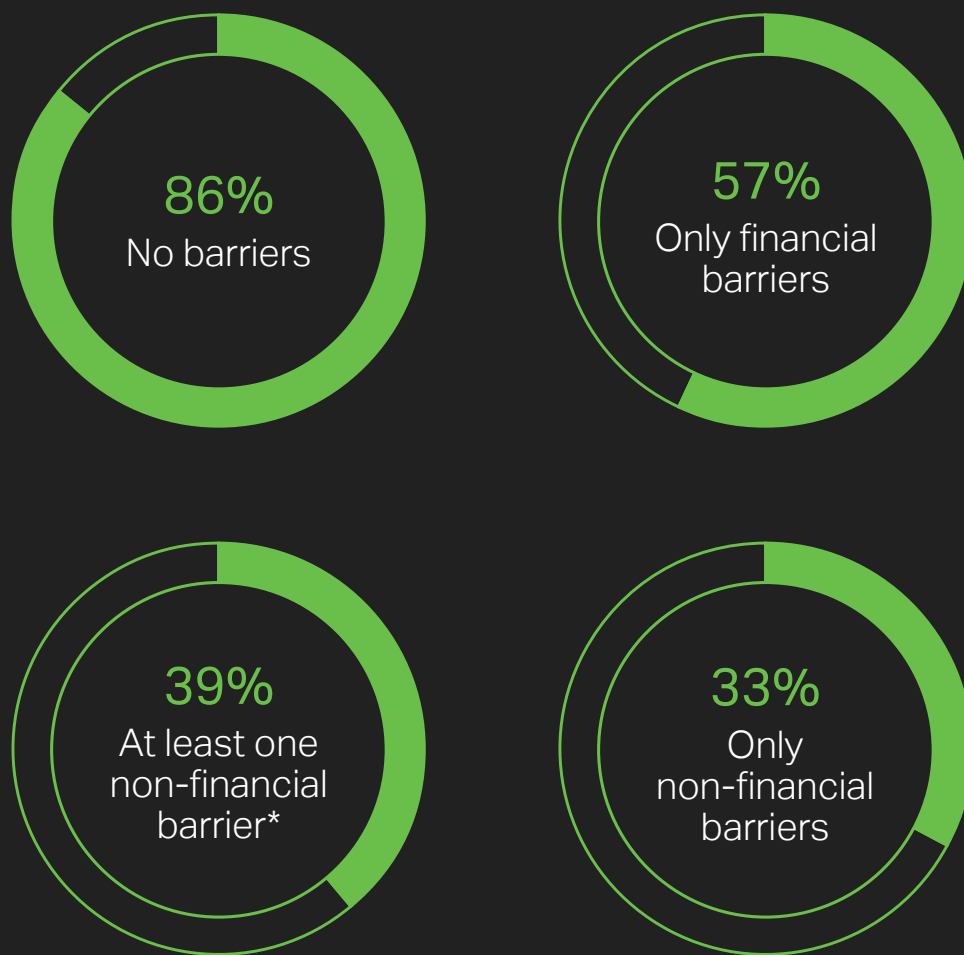
While financial challenges on their own significantly impacted a child's likelihood to pursue their parent's ideal postsecondary program, about six in 10 families were able to overcome these obstacles.

However, when faced with barriers related to a lack of information, availability, guidance and preparation, children were notably less likely to realize their parent's aspirations for them, whether or not they also faced financial barriers.

CHART 6:

Please think about your ideal situation; if there were no obstacles or limitations, what did you most want your child to do immediately after he or she finished high school? Please indicate which of the following was a barrier to your child taking this "ideal" pathway immediately following high school. Please select all that apply.

% Of postsecondary children who pursued their parent's ideal pathway based on the barriers they faced, among children of parents who preferred four-year college, two-year college or training programs



* With or without financial barriers

When combined with additional challenges, finances become an even more pressing problem for parents and children. Thirty-nine percent of parents whose child faced non-financial barriers to their ideal pathway — with or without the presence of a financial barrier — said their child pursued it. This finding suggests that children who face additional hurdles beyond those related to cost or student loan debt are about 32% less likely to pursue the pathway their parent prefers than those who are only deterred by financial barriers.

Just one-third of parents (33%) whose child faced only non-financial barriers to their preferred path said their child pursued it — six percentage points lower than those whose child faced both kinds of barriers, and 24 points lower than those whose child only faced financial barriers.

These data indicate that while financial challenges on their own significantly impact a child's likelihood to pursue their parent's ideal postsecondary program, about six in 10 families are able to overcome these obstacles.

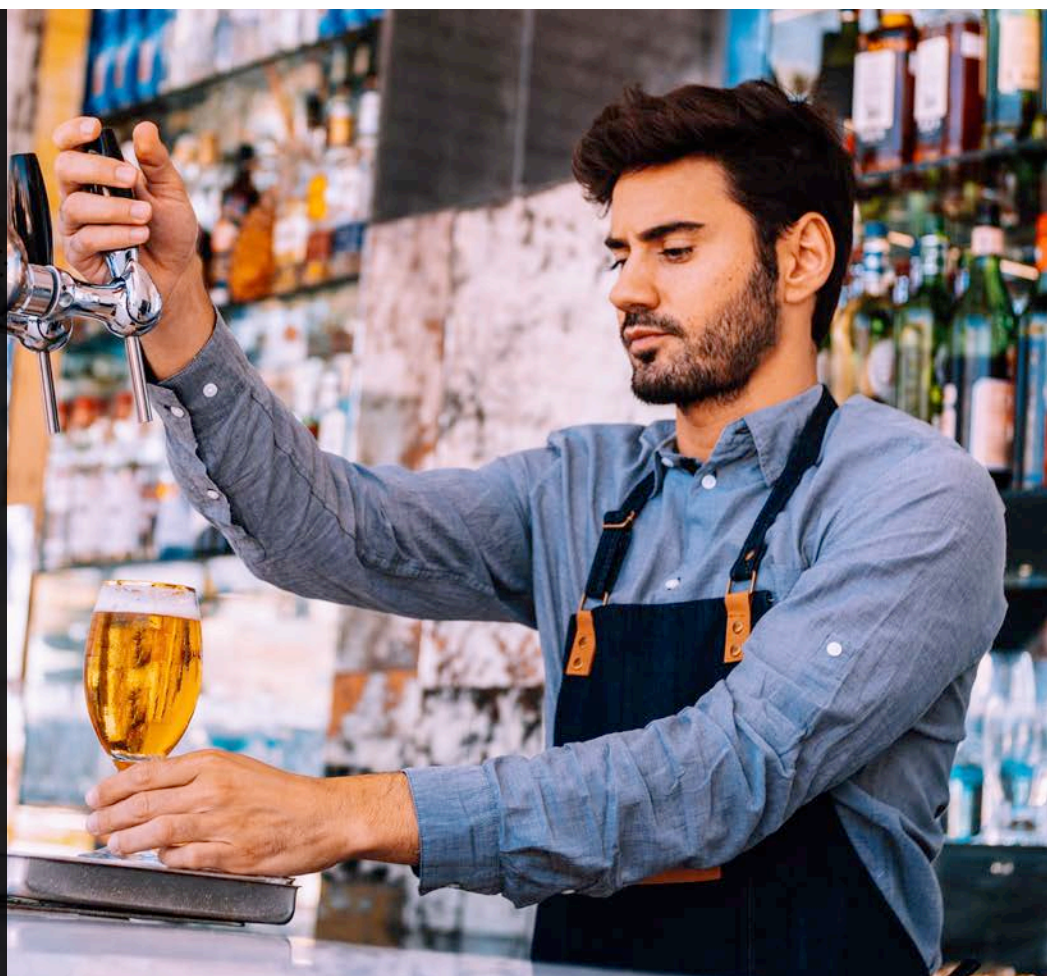
However, when faced with barriers related to a lack of information, availability, guidance and preparation, children are notably less likely to realize their parent's aspirations for them, whether or not they also face financial barriers.

This finding is particularly important because nearly half of parents who preferred their children pursue four-year college, two-year college or a training program upon graduation, but whose child did not pursue that pathway, said their child instead entered the workforce immediately after high school.

49% of students

did not redirect to another non-preferred postsecondary education pathway;

instead, they entered the workforce.



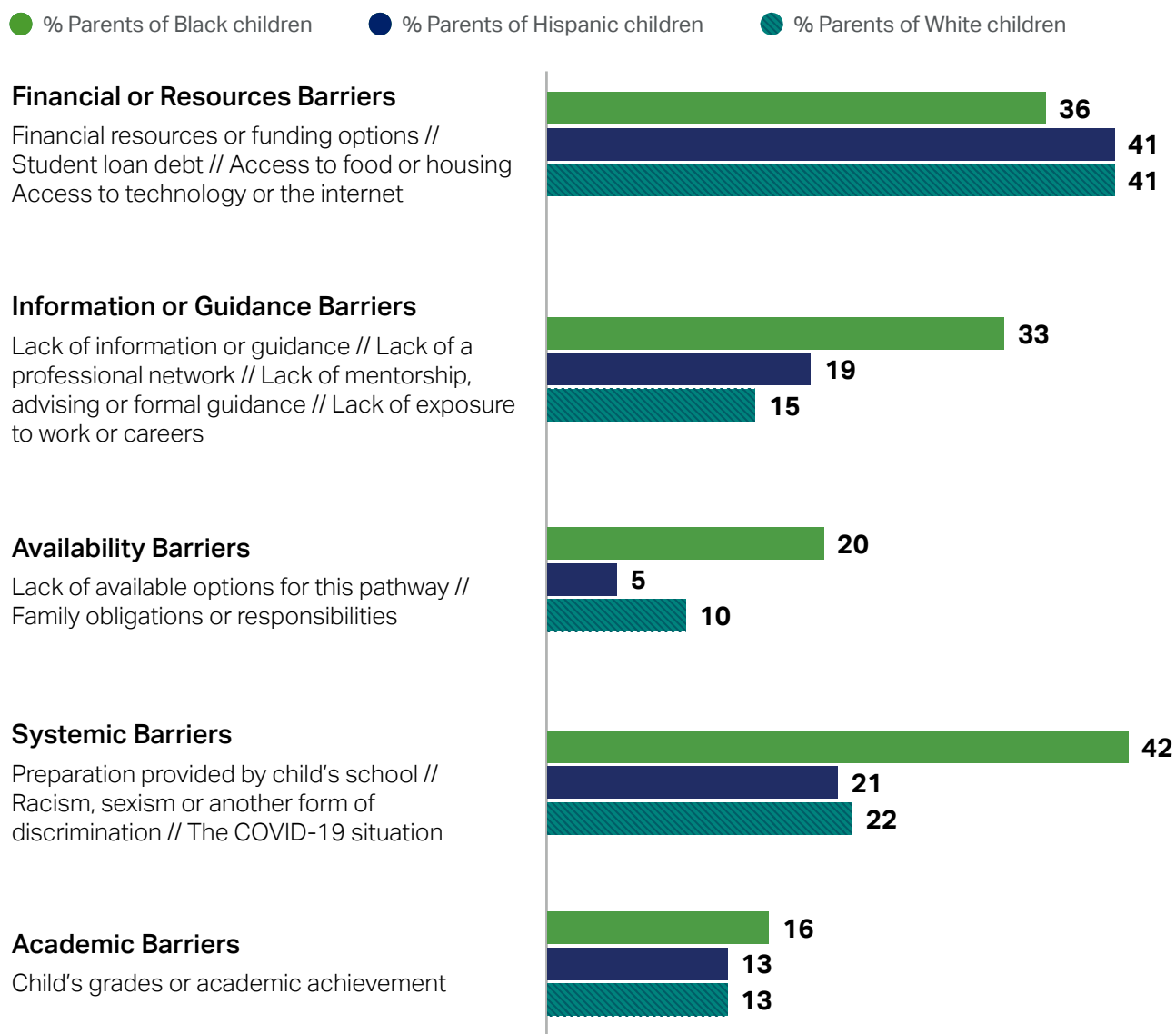
Not only are non-financial barriers more likely to deter a child from pursuing the path their family prefers, many of these barriers disproportionately affect Black children. There was no statistical difference between the likelihood of Black, Hispanic and White children facing financial barriers to their parent's ideal postsecondary pathway; however, parents of Black children were twice as likely as parents of White children to say that a lack of information or availability is a barrier to their child.

Taken together with the outsized impact these types of barriers appear to have, the increased frequency with which Black children are confronted by information and availability barriers likely decreases the probability that they will realize their parent's aspirations compared to their White and Hispanic peers.

CHART 7:

Please indicate which of the following is a barrier to your child taking this "ideal" pathway immediately following high school.

% Citing at least one barrier among parents who prefer four-year college, two-year college or training programs



About 40% of parents who wanted their child to attend college or postsecondary training said

their child did not do so.

The tangible consequence of these barriers is that many graduating high school seniors will not be pursuing the postsecondary plan they had anticipated and prepared for. Nearly four in 10 parents of post-high school children who prefer four-year college, two-year college or training programs (39%) said their child pursued a pathway that differed from their ideal.

CHART 8:

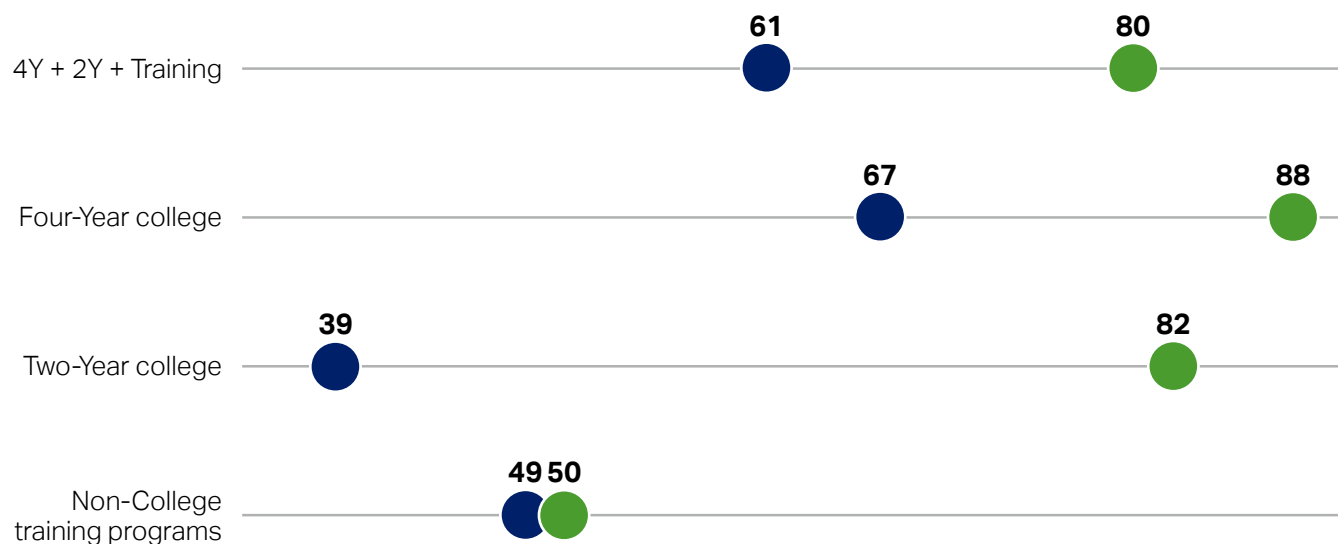
What would/did you most like/want to see your child do immediately after he or she finishes/finished high school?

Which of the following best describes the path your child took or currently plans to take immediately following high school?

% Of children who plan to take or took their parent's preferred postsecondary pathway among children whose parent prefers four-year college, two-year college or training programs

● % Current students ● % Postsecondary children

PATHWAY PREFERENCE





Only 20% of parents of current high school students said **their child does not plan to follow their parent's ideal path**, suggesting that many high school graduates are forced to pivot away from the pathway they had been planning to pursue.

While 67% of children whose parent aspired for them to attend a four-year college did so, one in three did not. As 9% of children whose parent preferred a bachelor's degree enrolled in a community college instead, this means that just over one in four children who were unable to attain their parent's aspiration redirected into a two-year alternative. Children of these parents were more likely to enter the workforce immediately after high school than to attend a community college, which is one of the outcomes community college is explicitly positioned as an alternative to.

Similarly, less than half (39%) of parents who wanted their child to pursue an associate degree said their child enrolled in a community college after high school.

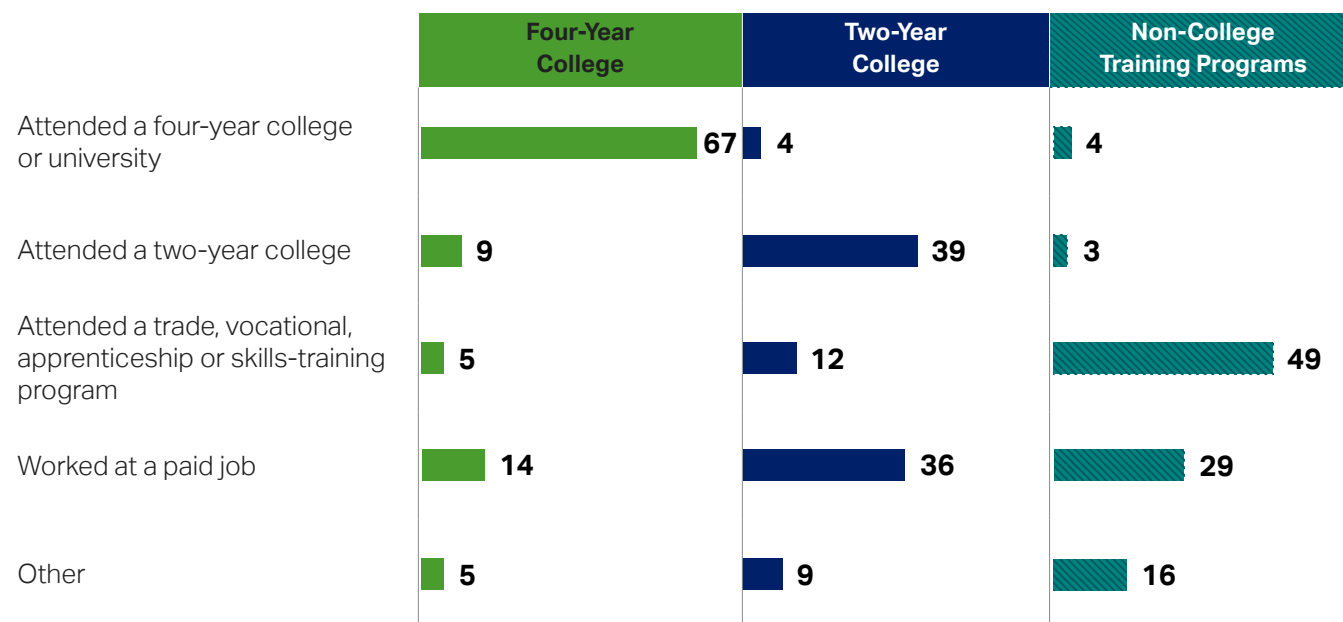
Almost as many of these parents said their child immediately entered the workforce (36%) as said their child pursued an associate degree.

CHART 9:

Which of the following best describes the path your child took immediately following high school?

% Among parents of postsecondary children

PATH TAKEN BY CHILDREN WHOSE PARENT PREFERRED ...



Note: Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

* For a complete listing of the "Other" composite group data by subcategory, please see the appendix.

The relatively small percentage of children who pivot from four-year to two-year college is notable because two-year college is often touted as an intermediary step toward a bachelor's degree to students for whom a bachelor's degree is just out of reach. The Community College Research Center estimates that 80% of students who enroll at a community college intend to obtain a bachelor's degree eventually.⁷ For those who cannot obtain a four-year degree, even if they complete their first two years at a community college, a two-year degree is similarly pitched as a more accessible, affordable pathway to the middle class, particularly as compared to the outcomes of Americans who only hold a high school diploma.

The data also show that about half (49%) of parents who preferred their child enroll in trade, skills and apprenticeship programs said their child did so. It is worth noting that this percentage is similar to the percentage of current secondary students whose parents want them to pursue a training program and who plan to do so. Two factors suggest this may be more than just a misalignment of preferences between parents and their child.

First, students whose parent preferred they pursue a training program but did not enroll after high school also did not enroll in alternative programs that would improve their career outlooks, such as community college; rather, more than half (55%) went directly into the workforce without any postsecondary education or certification. Second, as has already been noted, these parents were disproportionately likely to say there was no such program available to them, or they lacked the information and guidance needed for their child to pursue one of these programs.

Taken together, each of these major segments of parents — those who prefer four-year college, those who prefer two-year college and those who prefer vocational, skills-training or on-the-job training programs — faced different challenges but often experienced similar results: Between 33% and 61% of their children did not pursue the pathway they preferred, and rather than pivoting to an alternative education or training program, nearly half (49%) of those children entered the workforce immediately upon graduation.

⁷ *Community college FAQs*. (n.d.). Community College Research Center. Retrieved February 24, 2021, from <https://ccrc.tc.columbia.edu/Community-College-FAQs.html>



Parents said
**experiential pathways
provide better
career preparation
than college**

and were more likely
to say so as they
learned more about
these alternatives.

Two factors that may be driving these children directly to the workforce, rather than an alternative postsecondary education or training program, are the same reasons that many of these students do not attain their first choice: They do not have enough information about viable alternatives, or the alternatives are not available to their families.

The *Family Voices* survey asked parents to assess their knowledge of a variety of postsecondary pathways, as well as their satisfaction with the availability of them. With the exception of four- and two-year college, many parents said they know little about these programs, and few were “very satisfied” with their availability.

These data shed additional light on why, when forced to pivot away from their first preference, many parents are unable to guide their child toward an alternative to finding a paid job.

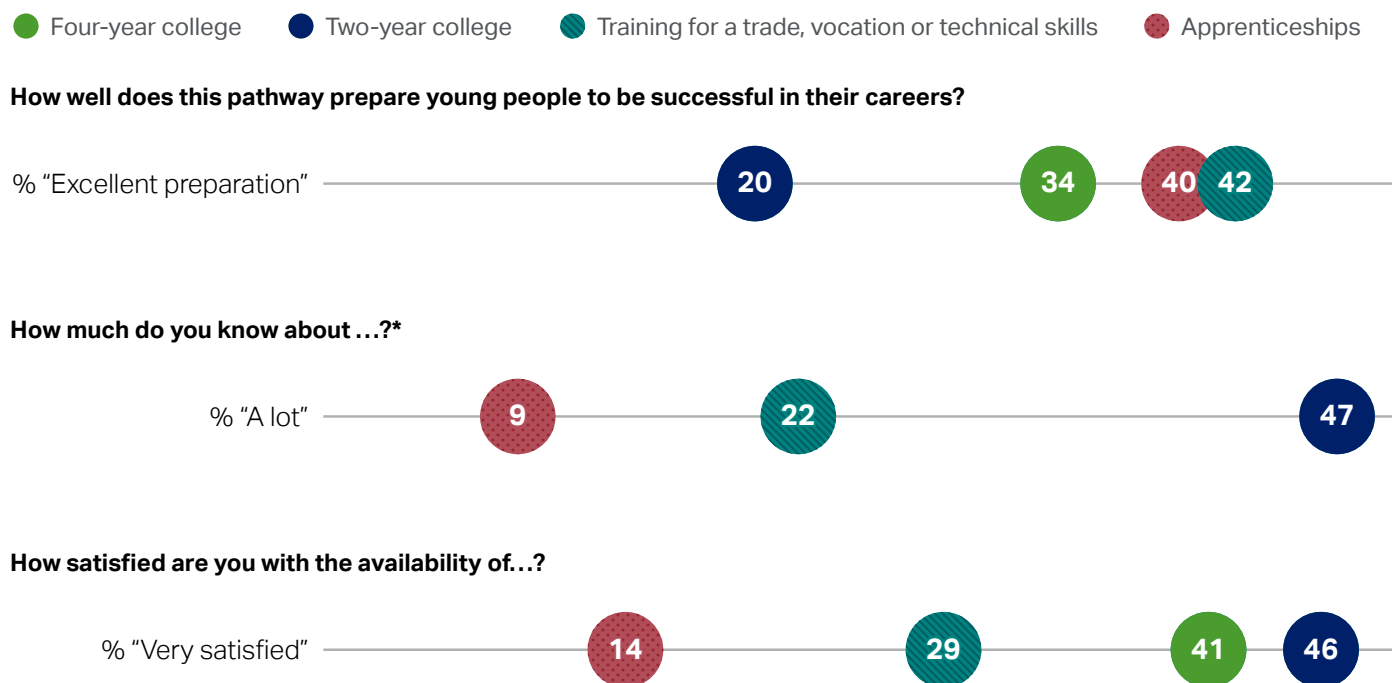
One exception to this is community college. The vast majority of parents (85%) said they know “some” or “a lot” about this option, and parents were more likely to be satisfied with its availability than any other pathway.

However, fewer parents prefer their child pursue an associate degree than prefer skills-training programs, and few parents whose child did not pursue four-year college or skills-training programs said they turned to community college instead.

This outcome may occur because, despite the ubiquity of community colleges, parents do not believe that a two-year degree prepares children for success: 20% of parents said community college provides “excellent” career preparation, a significantly lower percentage than those who said the same of four-year college, technical training and apprenticeships.

CHART 10:

Parents rate experiential training programs highest in career preparation, but know less about them



* The four-year college pathway was not included on this question.

Conversely, though parents overall said they know comparatively little about technical training programs and apprenticeships, they were about twice as likely to say these programs provide “excellent” preparation as they were to say the same about community college. These programs also garnered higher ratings than four-year college.

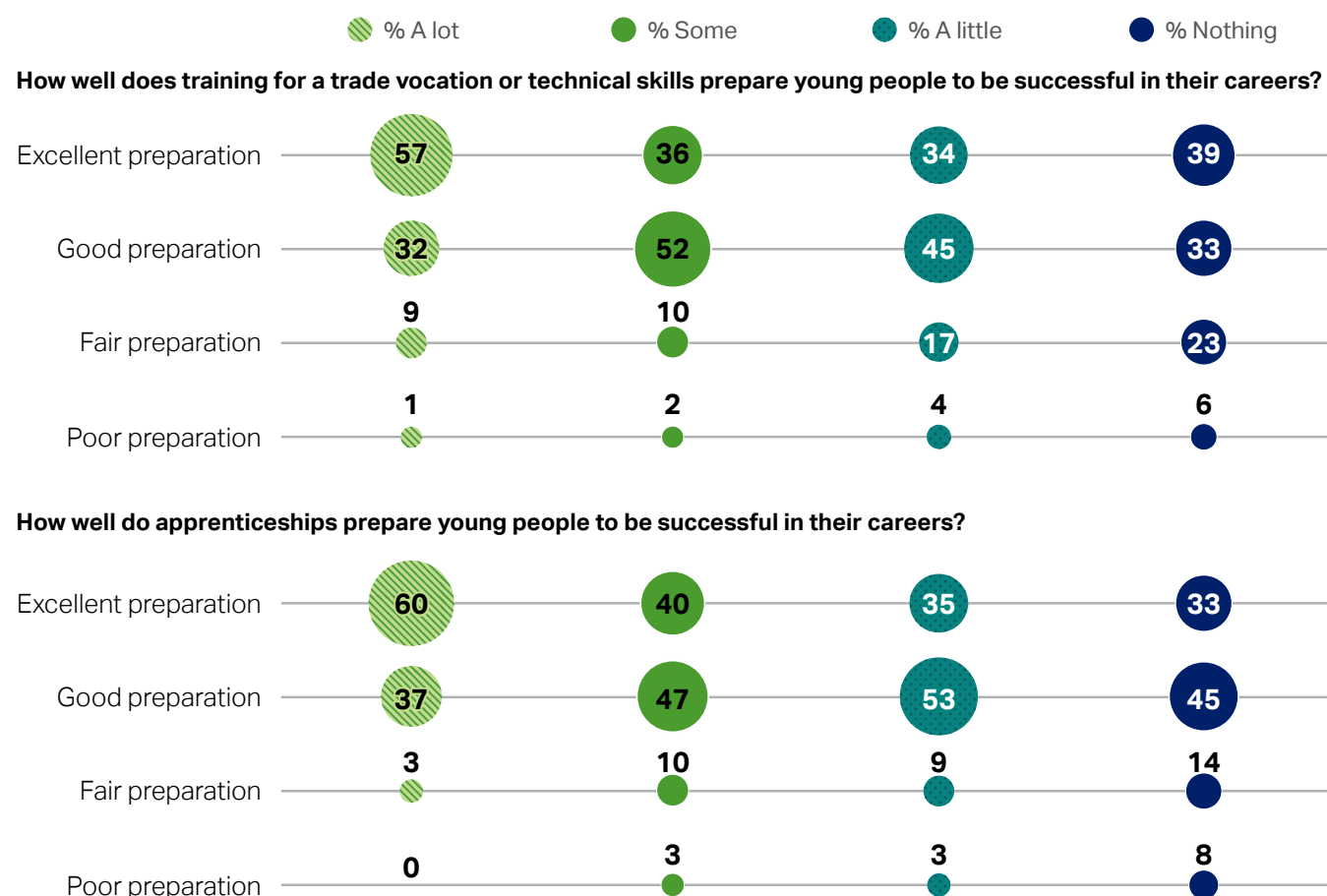
Moreover, parents who know more about these alternatives were noticeably more positive about them. This finding was true not only for parents who prefer these pathways — and would therefore be more positive about the benefits of them than those who do not — but also for parents who prefer something other than a technical training program for their child.

Increasing both the availability of these programs and information around them would benefit parents who already prefer these pathways but whose child is unable to take them due to a lack of knowledge or availability. Raising the profile of technical training and apprenticeships may also provide attractive alternatives to parents whose child would otherwise enter the workforce immediately after high school, as well as parents looking for an experiential complement to more traditional educational pathways.

CHART 11:

How much do you know about training or certification for a trade vocation or technical skills?

% Among parents who do not prefer training programs



Roughly half of parents expressed broad interest in

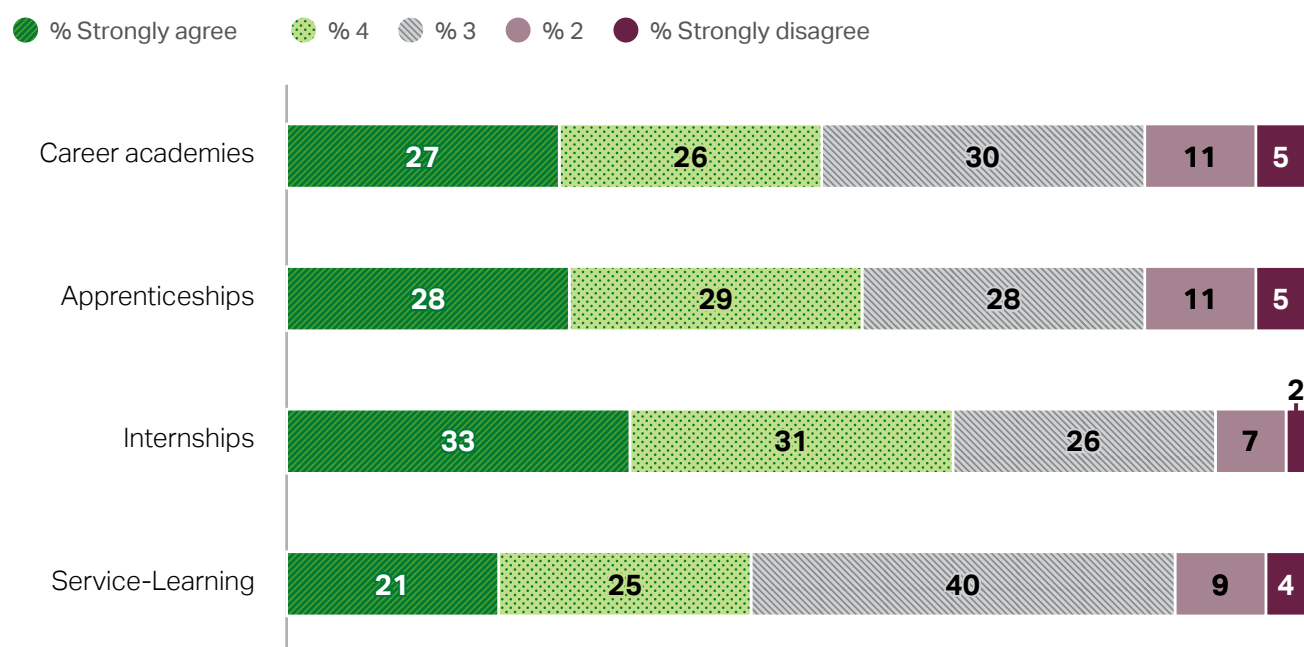
experiential learning alternatives.

Parents' stated interest in several experiential learning pathways provides additional evidence showing that as parents learn more about non-college alternatives, they tend to have more favorable opinions of — if not an outright preference for — these programs. After reading brief descriptions of each, roughly half of parents agreed or strongly agreed that they would be interested in career academies, apprenticeships, internships and service-learning programs as a pathway for their child.

CHART 12:

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I am or would have been interested in ____ as a pathway for my child.

% Among all parents



Note: Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

These data reflect not just the opinions of parents looking for a college alternative, but also those who prefer their child attend a four-year college: At least 40% of parents who want their child to obtain a bachelor's degree expressed interest in each of these four experiential pathways.

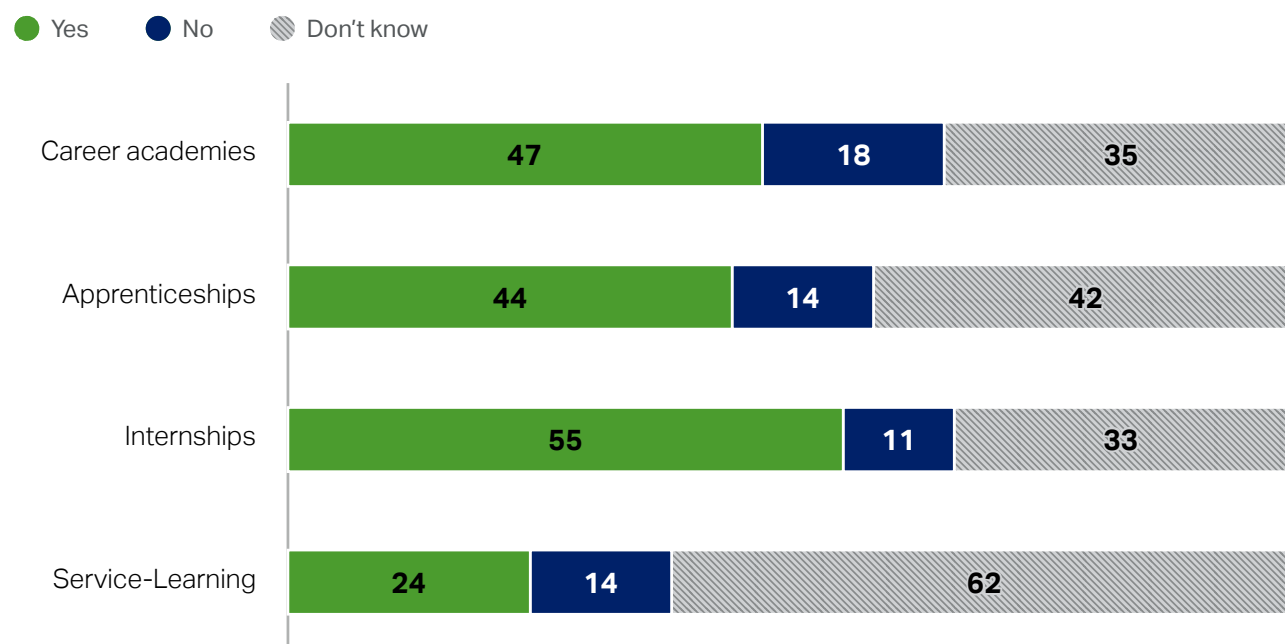
As a result, while these parents may still believe that four-year college is the ideal pathway for their child, they acknowledge not only the value that these programs provide generally but also that these types of experiences would benefit their child. Prior Gallup research finds that these types of experiences are beneficial to students' lives after graduation, as college graduates who had a relevant job or internship during their undergraduate experience are twice as likely to be engaged in their post-graduation employment.⁸

Again, the challenge for these programs to overcome is not perception or interest but rather availability and information. When asked whether these programs were available in their community, at least one-third of parents did not know.

CHART 13:

To the best of your knowledge, are _____ or any similar programs available in your community?

% Among all parents



Note: Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

⁸ Gallup, Inc. & Purdue University. (2014). *Great jobs, great lives: The 2014 Gallup-Purdue Index report*. <https://www.gallup.com/services/176768/2014-gallup-purdue-index-report.aspx>

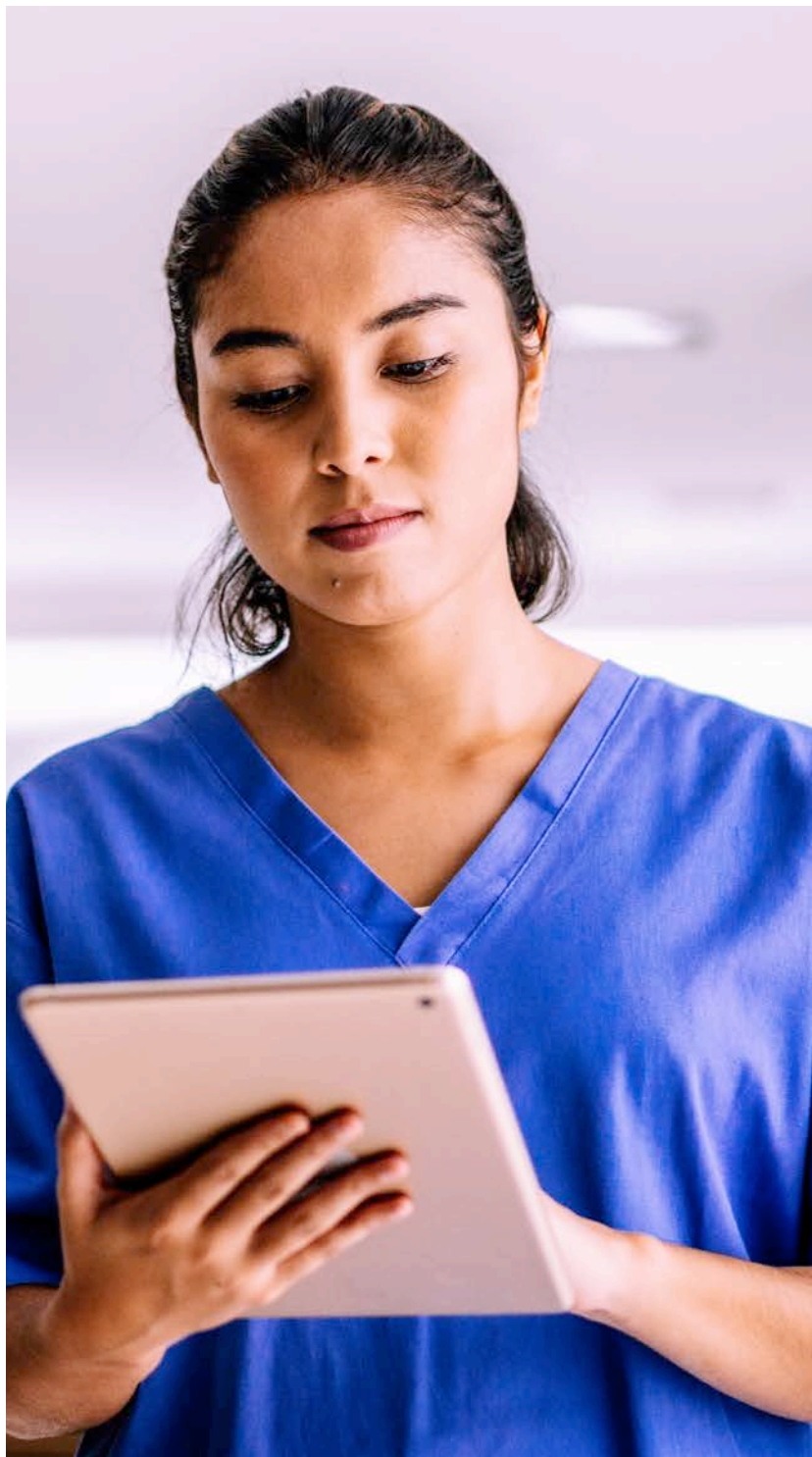


When asked whether these programs were available in their community, **at least one-third of parents** did not know.

Implications

For more than half of American parents, a bachelor's degree remains the ideal postsecondary pathway for high school graduates. That said, the *Family Voices* study finds that about one-third of children whose parents want them to attend college do not do so. And while an associate degree is often seen as an alternative for those who cannot access four-year college, the study suggests there are gaps in this mission of community college and the perceptions of the parents it is designed to appeal to.

Moreover, the data also reveal that parents had higher opinions of the preparatory value of experiential learning programs than four- and two-year colleges, and many expressed interest in these types of experiences for their own child's postsecondary journey — even among parents who prefer their child attend a four-year college.



These findings are complemented by Americans' changing perceptions of the value of a college degree. According to a 2018 study conducted by Gallup and Strada Education Network, 55% of four-year degree holders attended university to secure a good job, while 20% did so due to "family or social expectations."⁹ And a 2017 New America poll found that 21% of U.S. adults strongly agreed that there are many good-paying jobs that do not require a college degree; meanwhile, 50% said that American society does not respect people who did not go to college.¹⁰

Further, parents in the *Family Voices* study were more likely to say a variety of skills-based training approaches provide "excellent" preparation for careers than they were to say the same for a bachelor's or associate degree. This finding does not suggest that colleges are likely to give way to skills-based or technical training programs; rather, it provides a road map for these institutions to tailor their value proposition to students.

Parents cited unique gaps and barriers within all three postsecondary education pathways:

- Parents who prefer their child attend a four-year college were less likely to cite a lack of information about or availability of this pathway than others, though its perceived value to children's future careers lagged experiential learning opportunities.
- Parents who prefer a two-year degree cited roughly the same types and magnitude of barriers as those who prefer four-year college, though community college is often positioned as a more accessible alternative to a bachelor's degree. Additionally, these parents were less positive about the quality of their preferred choice, and their children were about as likely to enter the workforce as they were to enroll at a community college.
- While parents overall were more likely to say that training programs provide excellent career preparation than four- or two-year college, parents who prefer their child complete a training program were two-to-three times more likely to face information and availability barriers than those who prefer four-year college.

While the barriers may differ, parents of these three postsecondary persuasions face a similar trend: **If their child does not pursue the path they prefer, there is about a 50% chance that their child will immediately enter the workforce.** Research shows that children who enter the workforce immediately upon graduation from high school earn less than the median associate degree and bachelor's degree holders,¹¹ and they have consistently higher unemployment levels than college graduates.¹²

It is critical that the people and systems responsible for preparing families for postsecondary success is not only committed to breaking down the barriers highlighted by this research but also primes children and their parents to pivot to alternatives if they are not able to realize their preferred pathway, and integrates key experiential elements that will better prepare children to succeed in their careers.

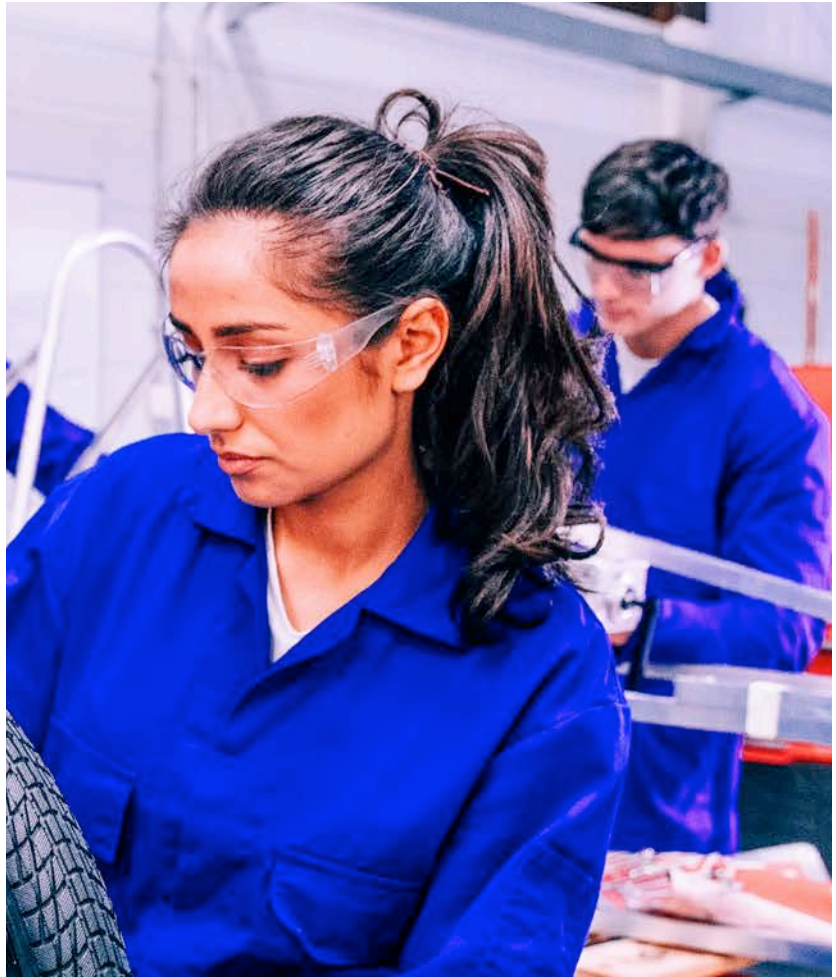
9 Gallup, Inc. & Strada Education Network. (2018, January). *Why higher ed? Top reasons U.S. consumers choose their educational pathways*. <https://news.gallup.com/reports/226457/why-higher-ed.aspx>

10 *Explore the data*. (n.d.). New American. Retrieved February 24, 2021, from <https://www.newamerica.org/in-depth/varying-degrees/explore-data/>

11 *Learn more, earn more: Education leads to higher wages, lower unemployment*. (2020, May). U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. <https://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2020/data-on-display/education-pays.htm>

12 *Unemployment rates for persons 25 years and older by educational attainment*. (n.d.). U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Retrieved February 25, 2021, from <https://www.bls.gov/charts/employment-situation/unemployment-rates-for-persons-25-years-and-older-by-educational-attainment.htm>

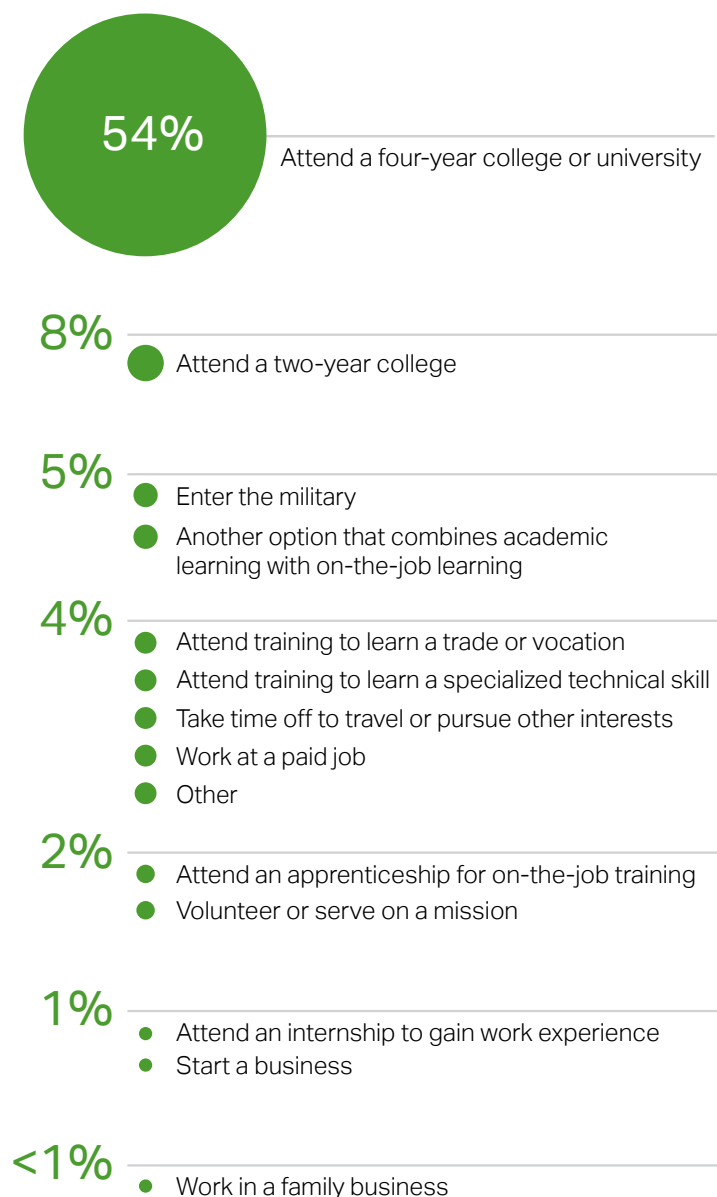
Appendix A



APPENDIX CHART 1:

Please think about your ideal situation; if there were no obstacles or limitations, what would/did you most want your child to do immediately after he or she finishes/finished high school?

% Among all parents



APPENDIX CHART 2:

Please think about your ideal situation; if there were no obstacles or limitations, what would/did you most want your child to do immediately after he or she finishes/finished high school?

% Among parents who prefer their child attend a four-year college by ...

Overall



Classification of Child's School



Parent's Political Party



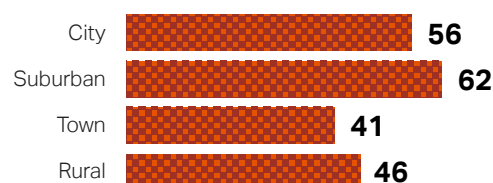
Educational Attainment of Parent



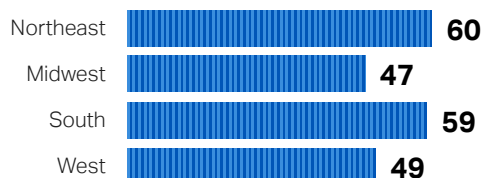
Race of Child



Urbanicity of Child's School District



Census Region



Annual Household Income

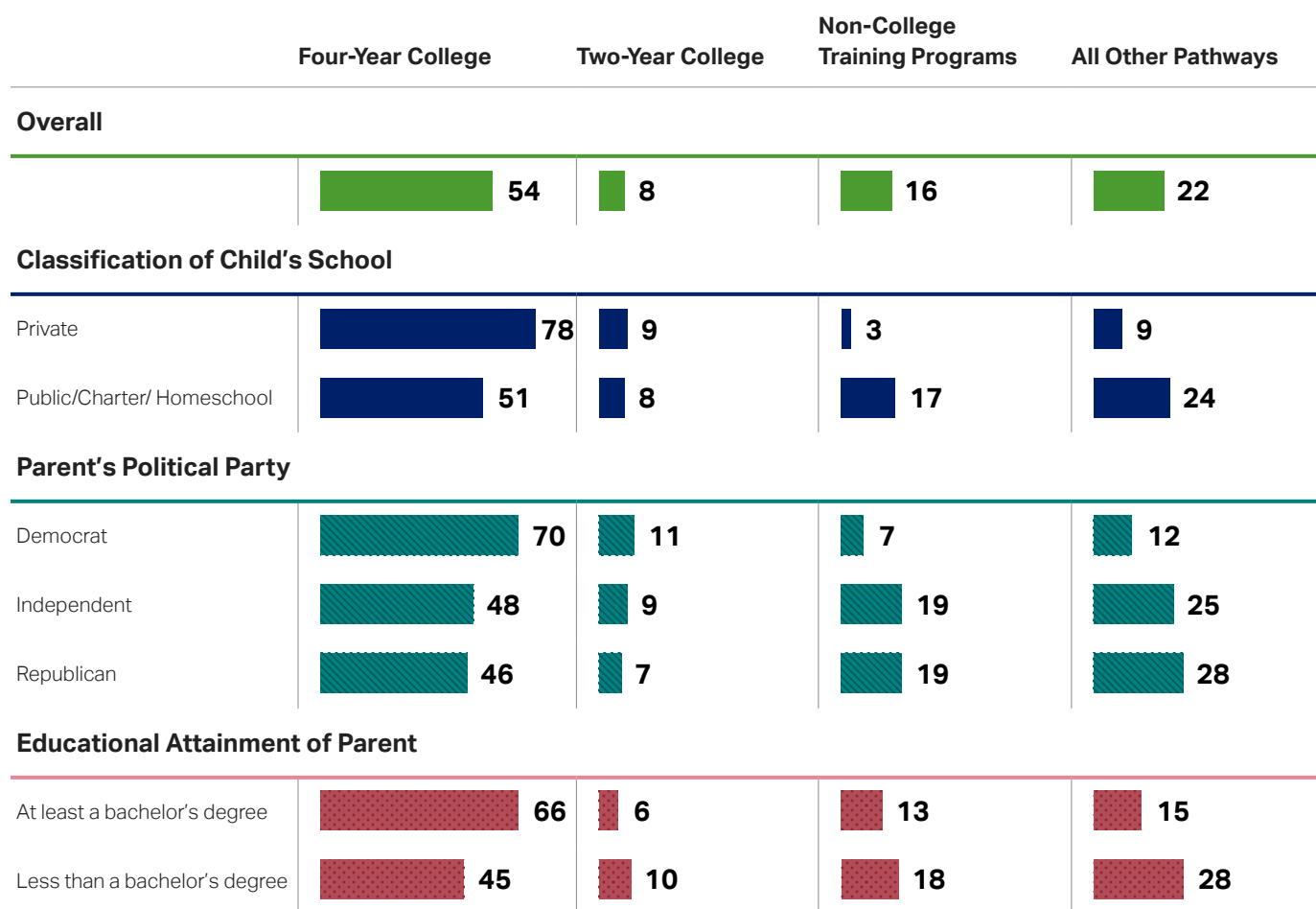


APPENDIX CHART 3:

Please think about your ideal situation; if there were no obstacles or limitations, what would/did you most want your child to do immediately after he or she finishes/finished high school?

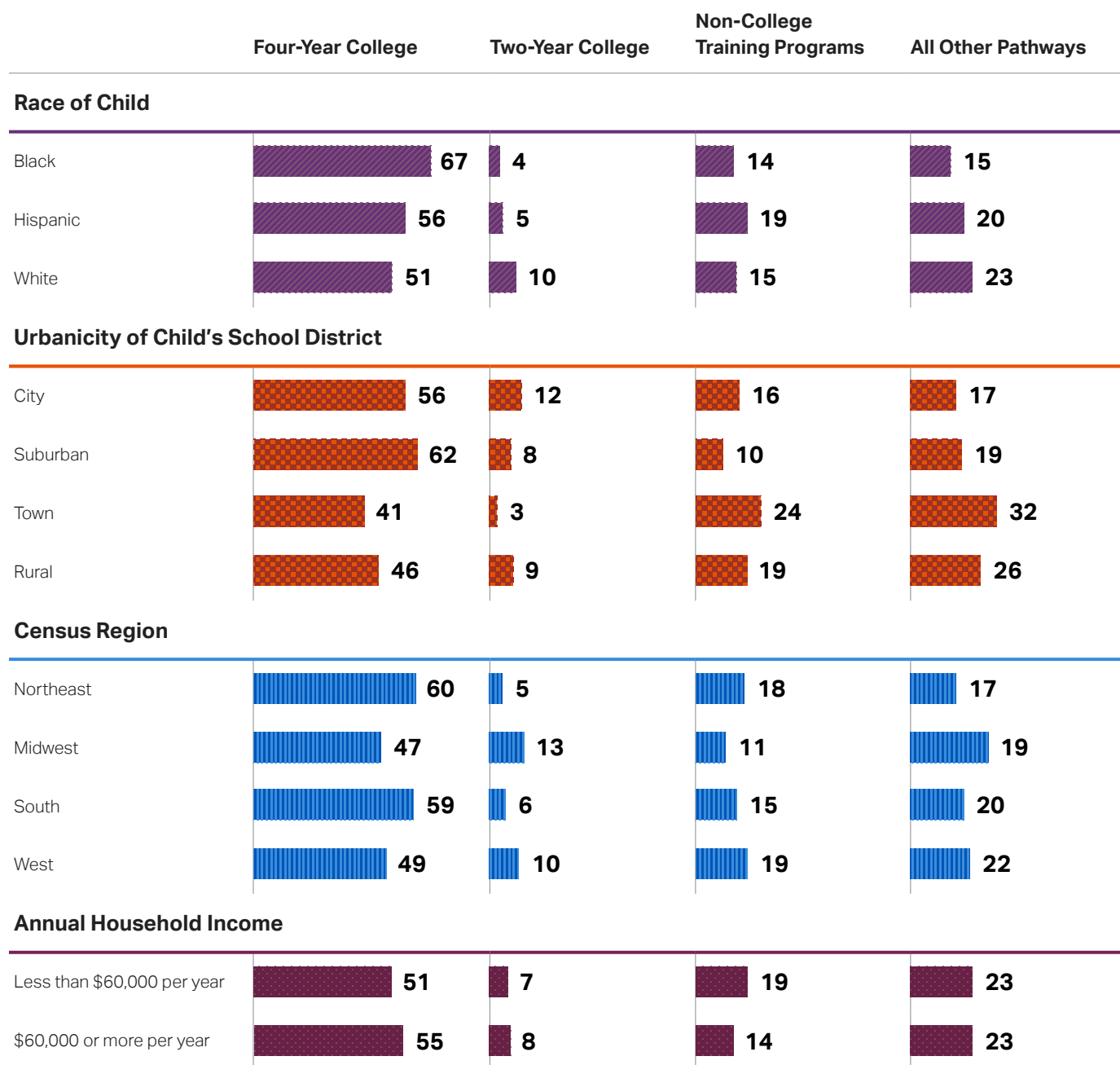
% Among all parents

PARENTS WHO PREFER THEIR CHILD PURSUE ...



APPENDIX CHART 3 (CONTINUED):

PARENTS WHO PREFER THEIR CHILD PURSUE ...



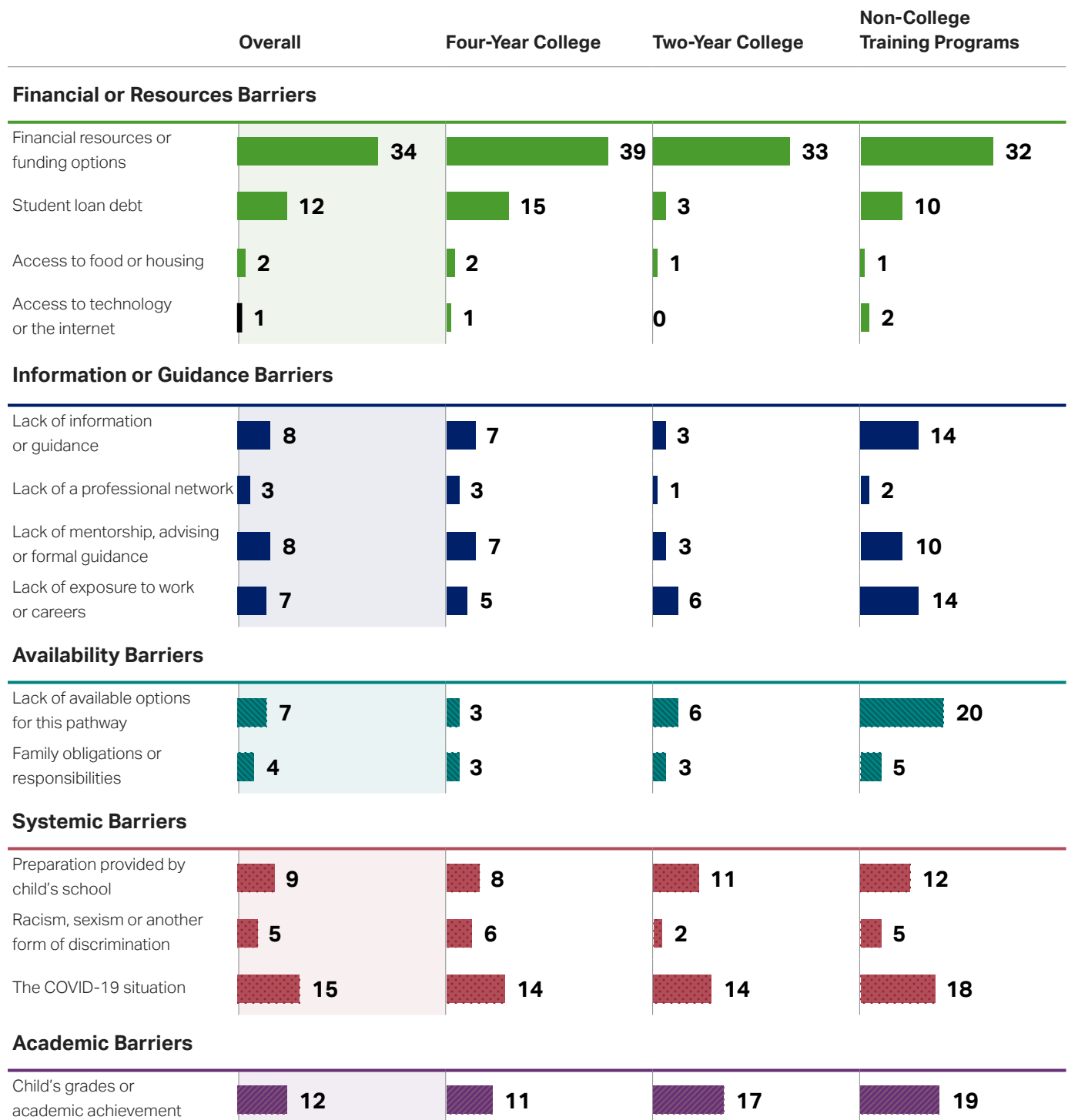
Note: Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

APPENDIX CHART 4:

Please indicate which of the following is/was a barrier to your child taking this “ideal” pathway immediately following high school. Please select all that apply.

% Among all parents

PATHWAY PREFERENCE

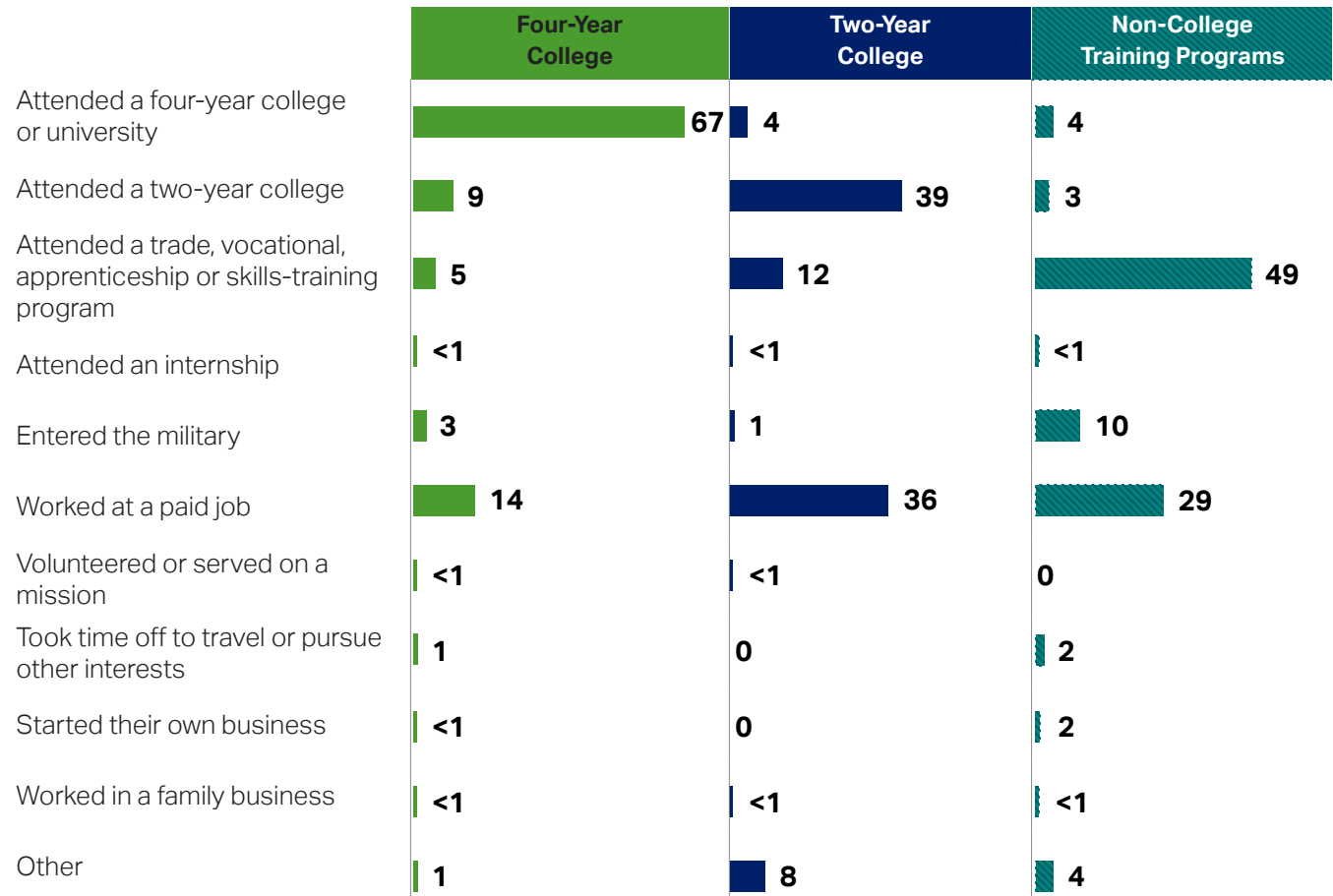


APPENDIX CHART 5:

Which of the following best describes the path your child took immediately following high school?

% Among parents of postsecondary children

PATH TAKEN BY CHILDREN WHOSE PARENT PREFERRED ...



Note: Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

APPENDIX CHART 6:

Among all parents

	How much do you know about ____? % "A lot"	How satisfied are you with the availability of ____? % "Very satisfied"
Four-year college or university/Bachelor's degree	**	41
Two-year community college/Associate degree	47	46
Training/certification for a trade vocation or technical skills	22	29
Apprenticeships	9	14
Internships	17	14
Service-learning programs	4	8
Work-study programs	14	11
Earning college credits by attending college/ community college classes while in high school	40	27
Career counseling or job placement support	**	9
Opportunities for my child to build professional networks	**	10
Exposure to the work-world during middle or high school	**	11
Advising about college and other postsecondary education options during high school	**	16

** Pathway was not included in "How much do you know about ____?" section of the survey.

Note: Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

Appendix B



The Carnegie-Gallup *Family Voices* study is based on a self-administered web-based survey conducted Nov. 9 to Dec. 8, 2020, with a random sample of 2,952 U.S. adults who are members of the Gallup Panel™ and current parents of children between the ages of 11 and 25.

The Gallup Panel is a probability-based panel of U.S. adults who Gallup selects using address-based sampling methods and random-digit-dial phone interviews that cover landlines and cellphones. Gallup weights the obtained samples to correct for nonresponse. Nonresponse adjustments were made by adjusting the sample to match the national demographics of gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education and region. Demographic weighting targets were based on the most recent Current Population Survey figures for the aged 18 and older U.S. population of parents.

For results based on the full sample of 2,952 parents, the margin of sampling error is $\pm 1.8\%$ at the 95% confidence level, accounting for the design effect of weighting.

For results based on the 1,594 parents of current students, the margin of sampling error is $\pm 2.5\%$ at the 95% confidence level, accounting for the design effect of weighting.

For results based on the 1,358 parents of postsecondary children, the margin of sampling error is $\pm 2.7\%$ at the 95% confidence level, accounting for the design effect of weighting.

Margins of error for subgroups are higher. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls. For questions about how this survey was conducted, please contact the Gallup Panel at galluppanel@gallupmail.com.

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GALLUP®

World Headquarters

The Gallup Building
901 F Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

t +1.877.242.5587

f +1.202.715.3045

www.gallup.com