

YouthTruth

STUDENT SURVEY

A NATIONAL NONPROFIT



LEARNING FROM STUDENT VOICE

Class of 2022: Planning for the Future in Uncertain Times

What do high school seniors in the class of 2022 have to say about their future plans? How do plans – and opportunities – differ across student demographic groups? And what has changed for this year's graduates compared to the class of 2019, the last graduating class before the COVID-19 pandemic?

 youthtruthsurvey.org

 [@youth_truth](https://twitter.com/youth_truth)

Introduction

The graduating class of 2022 has lived more than half of their high school career during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hearing directly from these graduating seniors about their future plans – including how those plans have changed and how they perceive support from their schools – can help school systems, employers, institutions of higher education, and students themselves better navigate this formative transition during uncertain times.

What do high school seniors in the class of 2022 have to say about their future plans? How do plans – and opportunities – differ across student demographic groups? And what has changed for this year’s graduates compared to the class of 2019, the last graduating class before the COVID-19 pandemic?

This report presents insights about future plans from over 28,000 high school seniors from the class of 2022 and the class of 2019. Surprisingly, across the 22 survey questions explored, only three revealed differences between these two groups of students overall: expecting to attend a two-year college, participating in counseling about future career possibilities, and participating in counseling about how to pay for college.

Notably, however, differences abound for certain groups of students, including Hispanic or Latinx students, Black or African American students, LGBTQ+ youth, boys/men, and students attending high-poverty schools, among others. These trends raise questions and concerns about how schools and their partners can inspire all students and better support them to thrive in college, career, and beyond.

Key Findings

FINDING ONE | CHANGE IN PLANS page 4

1 in 4 seniors in the class of 2022 have changed their plans since the start of the pandemic.

FINDING TWO | DESIRE FOR COLLEGE page 6

Seniors in the class of 2022 who are Hispanic or Latinx, Black or African American, or boys/men are less likely to want to go to college compared to these groups in the class of 2019.

FINDING THREE | POST-SECONDARY EXPECTATIONS page 8

Nearly half of all seniors in the class of 2022 expect to attend a four-year college, yet differences by race, ability, language, school poverty level, and gender reveal concerning expectation gaps. Fewer seniors now consider two-year programs than in 2019.

FINDING FOUR | ADULT SUPPORT page 13

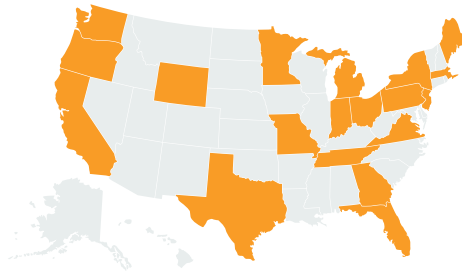
Fewer seniors in the class of 2022 report participating in career counseling and college financial counseling than in 2019, with significant drops for students who are Hispanic or Latinx, multi-racial, boys/men, and attending rural schools. Most seniors now have an adult they could ask for a recommendation, but this support is unevenly experienced.

FINDING FIVE | MAKING IT TO GRADUATION page 17

A higher proportion of seniors in the class of 2022 who are transgender, gender non-binary, prefer to self-describe their gender, or members of the LGBTQ+ community seriously consider dropping out as compared to their peers.

Survey Sample

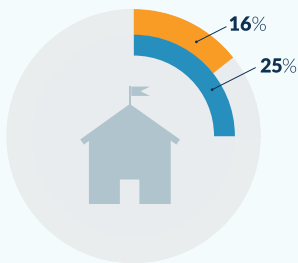
Throughout the fall and winter months of the 2021-2022 academic year, 22,219 high school seniors shared their perceptions of their school experiences and future plans through YouthTruth’s anonymous, research-based 15-minute online survey. The survey was administered in English and Spanish in partnership with 218 schools across 19 states.



While the majority of this report focuses on the experiences and future plans of the graduating class of 2022, the full set of data explored is drawn from survey responses from 28,240 high school seniors across two time periods: 2021-2022 and 2018-2019. Across both time periods, we analyzed findings from seniors at 271 high schools across 119 school systems.

We selected these two time periods to understand the experiences of today’s high school seniors and the ways in which their experiences are similar to or different from the experiences of the last graduating class before the pandemic.

PERCENTAGE OF HIGH POVERTY SCHOOLS



The student voices in this analysis are from a mix of urban (36 percent), suburban (46 percent), and rural settings (11 percent). Information was not available for the remaining seven percent. Sixteen percent of respondents attend high-poverty schools.

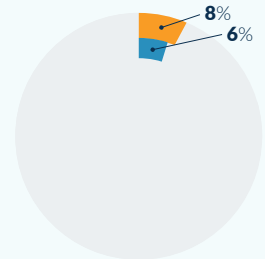
For the 94 percent of students who chose to self-identify their race/ethnicity, respondent demographics by race are shown right. The proportion of students who identify as a person of color in the 2022 dataset (the variable was not introduced until after 2019) is 36 percent (53 percent do not identify as a person of color, and 12 percent preferred not to say).

Methodology

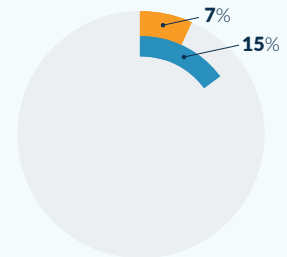
The survey data were examined using descriptive statistics and a combination of independent t-tests, chi-squares, and effect size testing. An alpha level of 0.05 was used to determine statistical significance, and effect sizes were examined for all analyses. Only analyses with at least a small effect size are reported. To explore change over time and differences between student demographic groups over time, a series of regressions were used, each controlling for student- and school-level characteristics across samples.

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS BY RACE

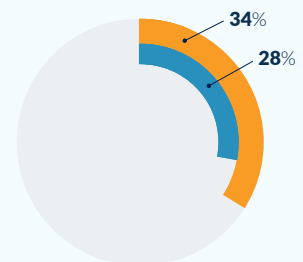
Asian or Asian American Respondents



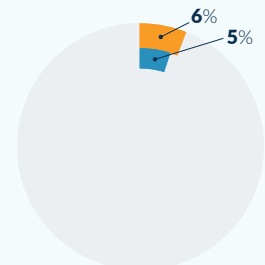
Black or African American Respondents



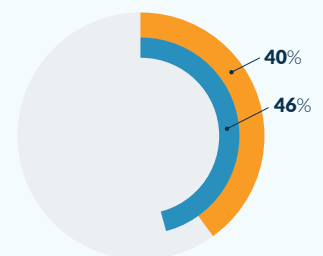
Hispanic or Latina/o/x Respondents



Multi-Racial Respondents



White Respondents



■ YouthTruth Sample ■ Nationally



1

1 in 4 seniors in the class of 2022 have changed their plans since the start of the pandemic.

When half of all seniors surveyed this year – 51 percent – report being moderately or significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is understandable that many students would rethink their post-secondary plans. Throughout the pandemic, national stories from outlets from [Time Magazine](#) to the [Chronicle of Higher Education](#) have profiled students, illustrating the range of pressures, opportunities, and challenges that can culminate in a need to change course.

Indeed, more than one in four seniors in the class of 2022 – 28 percent – say their plans have changed since the start of the pandemic, and this is disproportionately experienced by certain student groups.

1 in 4 high school seniors in the class of 2022 have changed their post-secondary plans since the start of the pandemic.



A higher percentage of seniors most affected by the pandemic, English Language Learners, students in the LGBTQ+ community, students of color, and Hispanic or Latinx students report changing plans for what to do after high school.

1

Finding One | Change in Plans



Have your plans for what to do after high school changed since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic?

(CLASS OF 2022 "YES")

BY COVID EFFECT

43% Significantly affected by the pandemic

23% Less significantly affected

BY ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNER STATUS

35% English Language Learner

26% Not English Language Learner

BY MEMBERSHIP IN THE LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY

34% LGBTQ+

26% Not LGBTQ+

BY PERSON OF COLOR

31% Person of Color

25% Not Person of Color

BY RACE/ETHNICITY

41% American Indian, Alaska Native, or Indigenous*

32% Hispanic or Latina/o/x

31% Black or African American

30% Multiracial or Multi-ethnic

30% Other race/ethnicity

29% Middle Eastern or North African

27% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

24% White

22% Asian or Asian American*

Forty-three percent of seniors who said they were significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic report that their plans have changed, a meaningfully higher proportion than the 23 percent of seniors reported being less affected by the pandemic.


Thirty-five percent of seniors who are taking classes to learn English (English Language Learners) report changing their plans, as compared to 26 percent of their non-English language learning peers.

Thirty-four percent of students who identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community report changing plans, as compared to 26 percent of their peers.

Nearly one in three of today's seniors who identify as a person of color report that their plans have changed, as compared to just one in four seniors who are not a person of color.

Nearly one in three of today's seniors who are Hispanic or Latinx report that their plans have changed, compared to just about one in four white students.

**Not a statistically significant difference at the effect size threshold used for this report.*

 Statistically significant difference

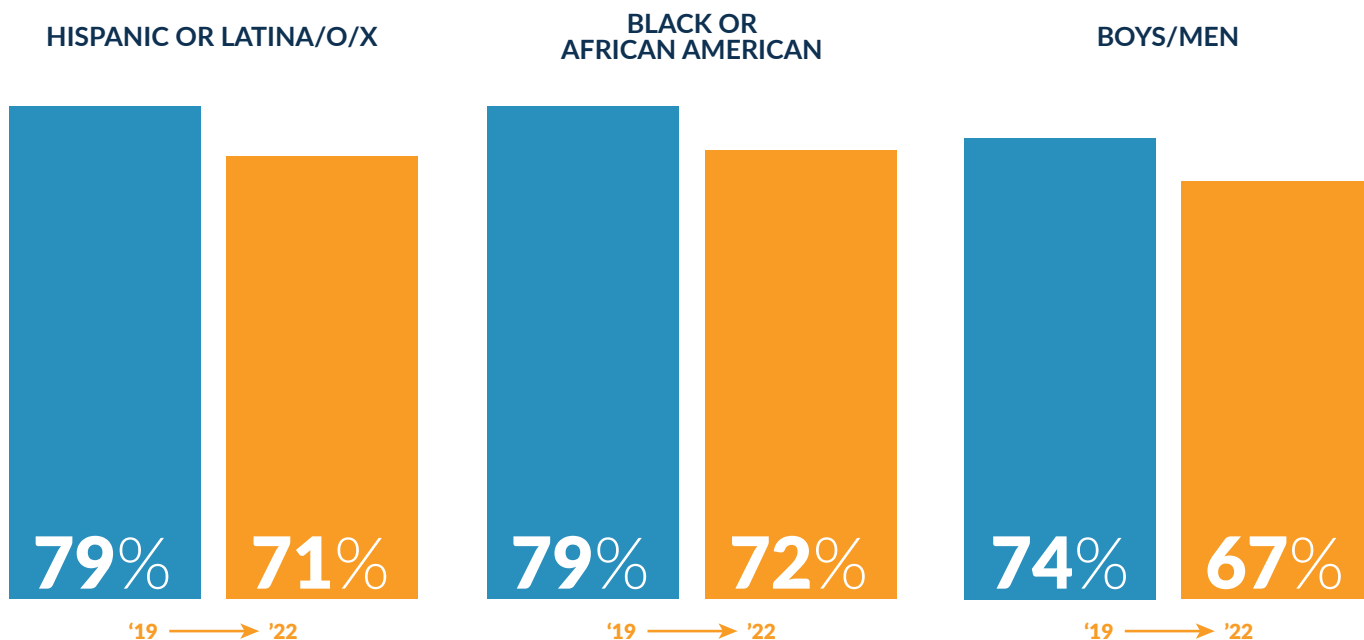


2

Seniors in the class of 2022 who are Hispanic or Latinx, Black or African American, or boys/men are less likely to want to go to college compared to these student groups in the class of 2019.

In late 2021, the National Student Clearinghouse [reported](#) that undergraduate enrollment had declined 7.8 percent since 2019. Mirroring this national downward trend in college enrollment is the student experience data from Hispanic or Latinx, Black or African American, or boys/men in the class of 2022: students in these groups are less likely to report wanting to go to college than seniors in these groups graduating just before the pandemic began.

Do you want to go to college? ("YES")



The proportion of Hispanic or Latinx seniors reporting they want to go to college decreased by eight percentage points from 79 percent in 2019 to just 71 percent in 2022. Just 72 percent of Black or African American seniors in the class of 2022 report wanting to go to college, compared to 79 percent of Black or African American seniors in the class of 2019. And the proportion of boys/men reporting they want to go to college decreased by seven percentage points, from 74 percent in 2019 to 67 percent in 2022.

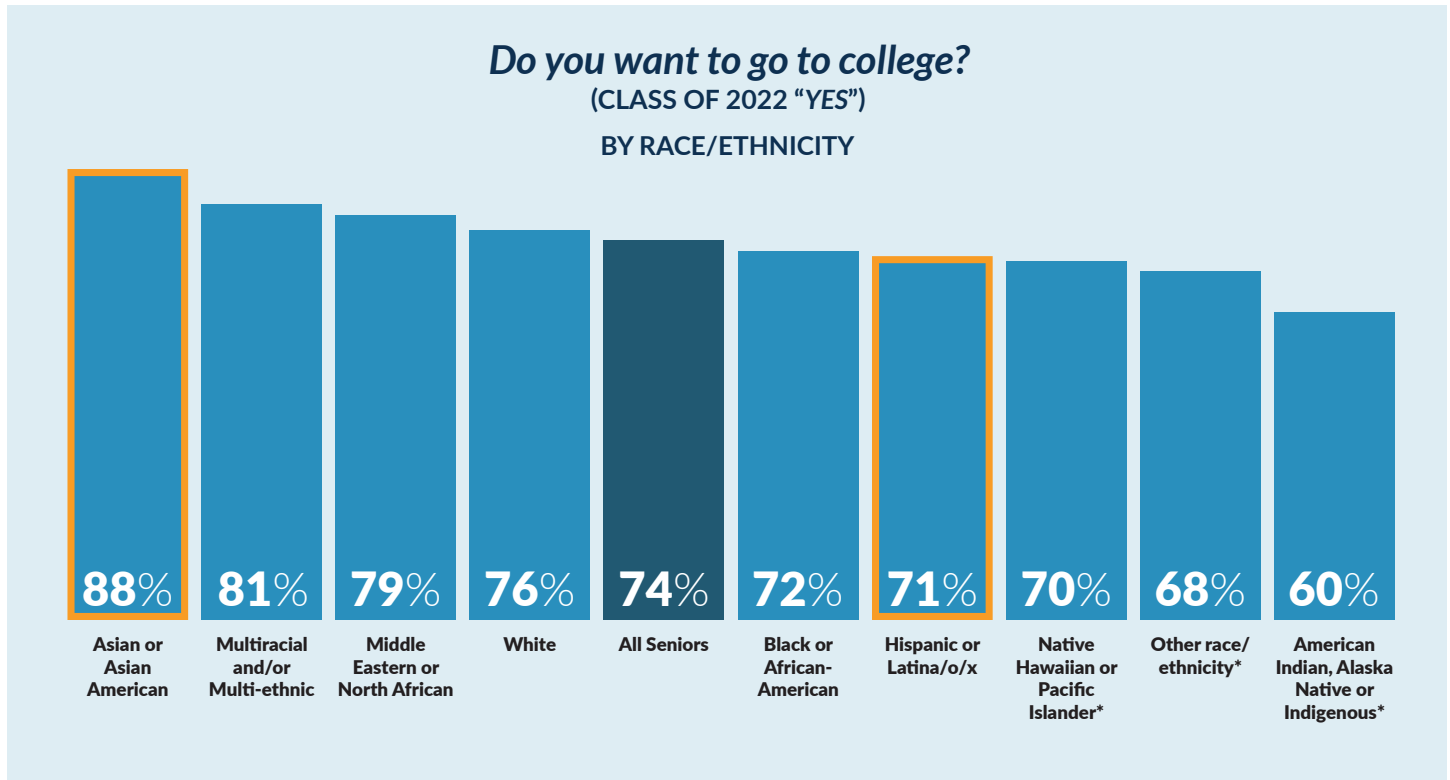
2

Finding Two | Desire for College




Overall, three out of four (74 percent) seniors in the class of 2022 report wanting to go to college, yet differences across student groups persist, and perceptions have changed for some groups over time.

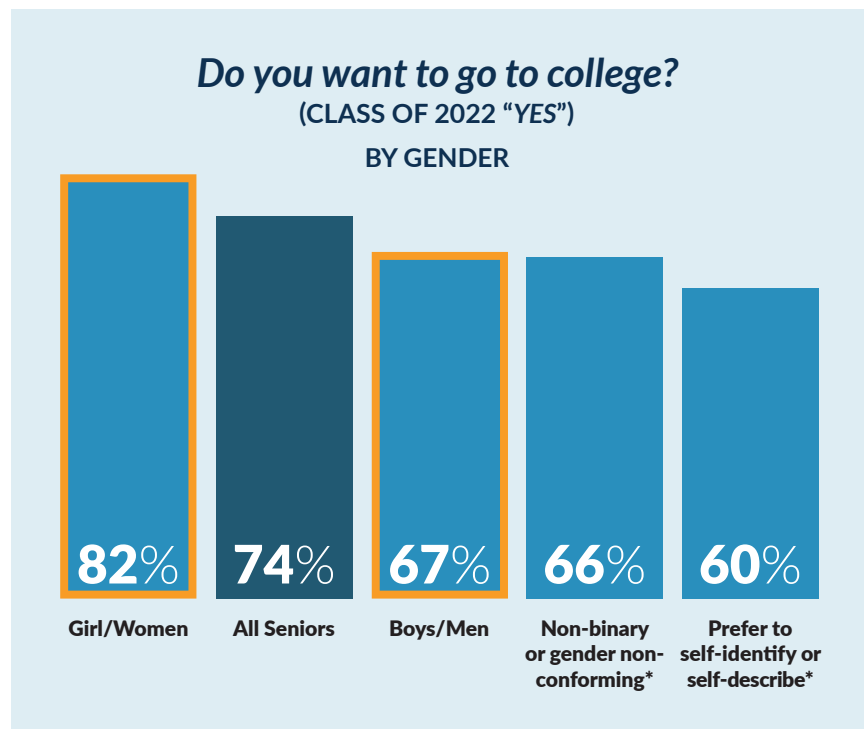
Compared to their peers, a lower proportion of today’s Hispanic or Latinx seniors – 71 percent – and a higher proportion of Asian or Asian American students – 88 percent – say they want to go to college.



Similarly, compared to their peers, a lower percentage of seniors in the class of 2022 who are boys/men – 67 percent – say they want to go to college, while a higher proportion of seniors who are girls/women – 82 percent – say they want to go to college.

**Not a statistically significant difference at the effect size threshold used for this report.*

 Statistically significant difference





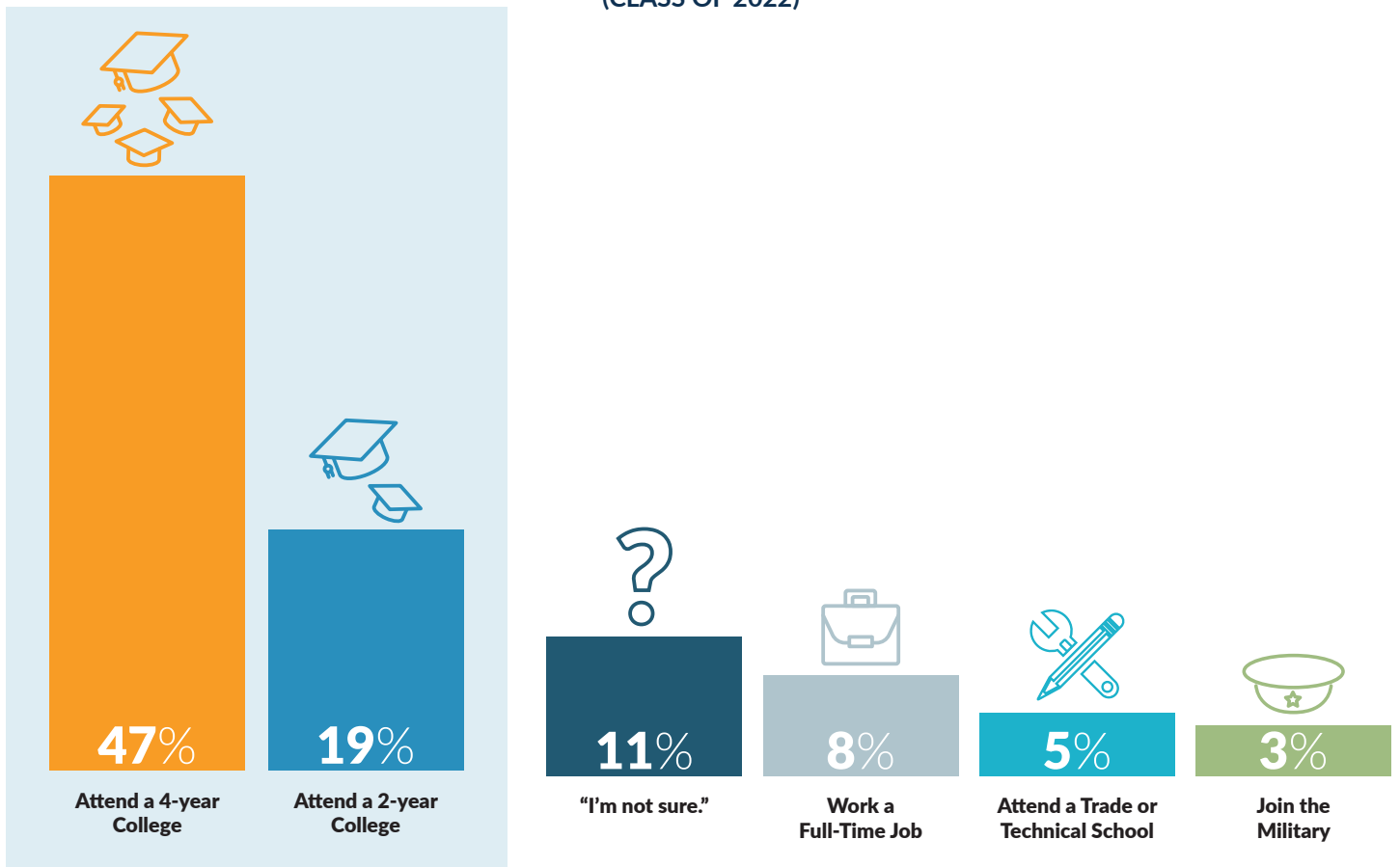
3

Nearly half of all seniors in the class of 2022 expect to attend a four-year college, yet differences by race, ability, language, school poverty level, and gender reveal concerning expectation gaps. Fewer seniors now consider two-year programs than in 2019.

While most of today's seniors – 74 percent – say they *want* to go to college, a smaller proportion – 66 percent – *expect* to attend a four- or two-year college. Overall, high school seniors in the class of 2022 are also less likely to report that they plan to attend a two-year college than did seniors in the class of 2019.

When asked, “After you finish high school, what do you expect to do next?” the majority of seniors in the class of 2022 report that they expect to attend a four-year college (47 percent) or two-year college (19 percent). About one in 10 (11 percent) are still not sure, eight percent plan to work a full-time job, six percent plan to do something other than the options listed, five percent plan to attend a trade or technical school, and four percent plan to join the military.

After you finish high school, what do you expect to do next? (CLASS OF 2022)



3

Finding Three | Post-Secondary Expectations



What differences do we see among students who do not plan to attend college this fall?

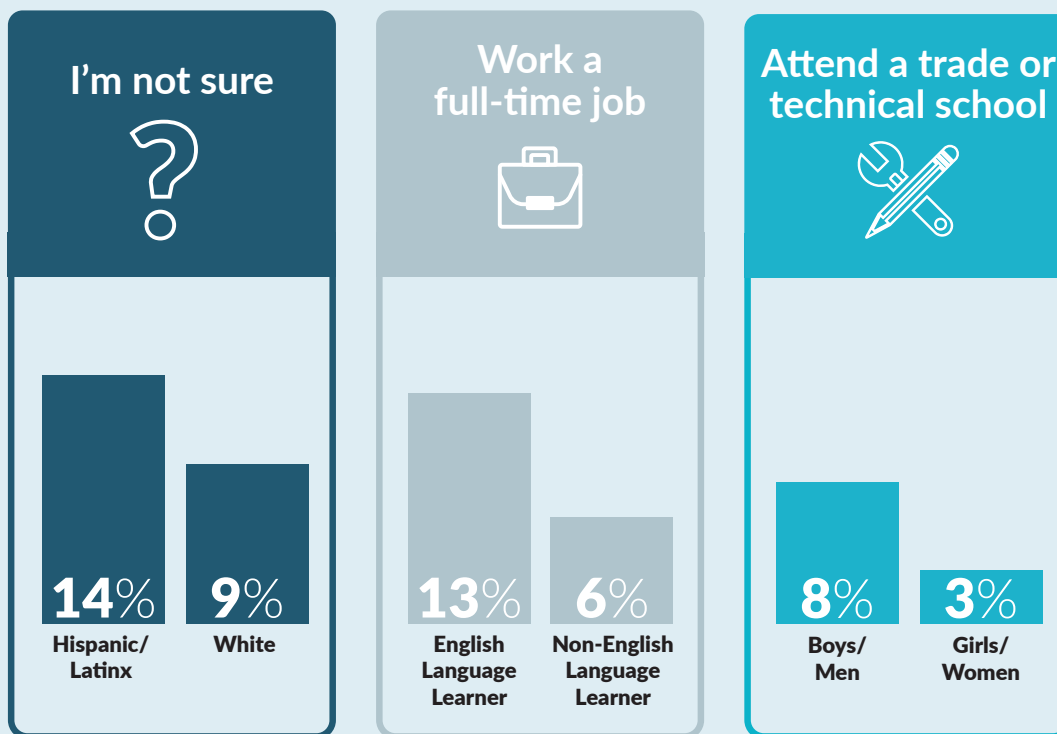
Uncertainty lingers, but not equally. Compared to their peers, a higher percentage of Hispanic or Latinx students – 14 percent – are *unsure about what they expect to do next*, while a lower percentage – just nine percent – of seniors who are white face such uncertainty.

Amid the strong job market and debate about the value of higher education – especially with COVID learning conditions still looming – eight percent of seniors in the class of 2022 are clear that their next step will be to [work a full-time job](#). A higher percentage of English Language Learners (13 percent) expect to work a full-time job, as compared to just six percent of today’s seniors who are not English Language Learners. Additionally, a higher percentage of seniors in the class of 2022 who are boys/men (10 percent compared to six percent of their peers) and a higher percentage of Hispanic or Latinx seniors (10 percent compared to just seven percent of their peers) expect to work a full-time job.

As recently [reported by NPR](#), while community college enrollment is down, skilled trade programs are seeing heightened interest. Yet in spite of [efforts to diversify](#) the skilled trade workforce, we still see that compared to their peers, a higher percentage of this year’s seniors who are boys/men (eight percent) and a lower percentage of girls/women (just three percent) expect to *attend a trade or technical school*.

After you finish high school, what do you expect to do next?

(CLASS OF 2022)



3

Finding Three | Post-Secondary Expectations



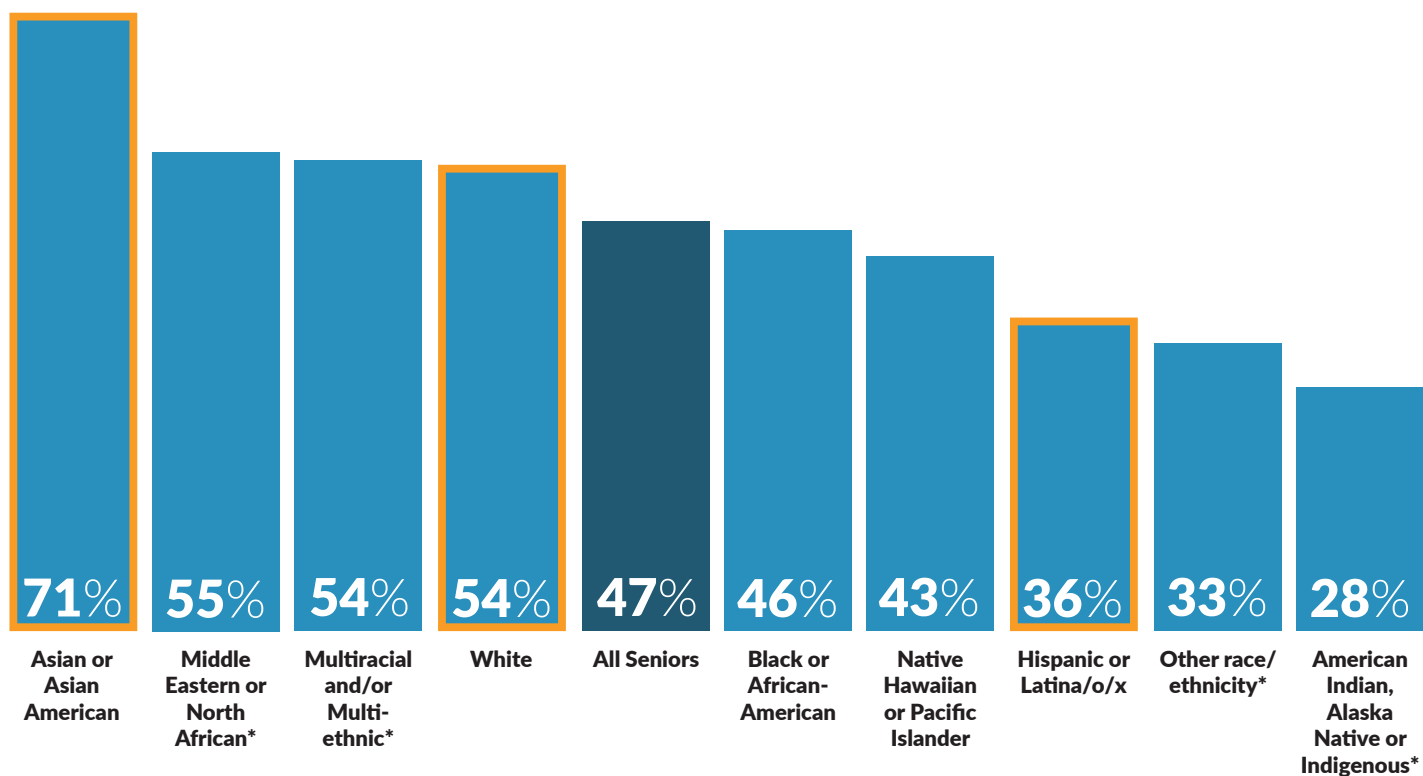
Disparities in college-going expectations for four-year colleges

Nearly half of seniors in the class of 2022 – 47 percent – report that they expect to attend a four-year college, yet differences by race, gender, language, ability, sexual orientation, and school poverty level reveal concerning expectation gaps.

A higher proportion of seniors in the class of 2022 who are Asian or Asian American (71 percent) or white (54 percent) expect to attend a four-year college as compared to their peers, while a lower proportion of seniors who are Hispanic or Latinx (36 percent) expect to attend a four-year college as compared to their peers, a sentiment that reflects [a disquieting trend](#) in higher education admissions.

After you finish high school, what do you expect to do next?

(CLASS OF 2022 “ATTEND A 4-YEAR COLLEGE”)



 Statistically significant difference

*Not a statistically significant difference at the effect size threshold used for this report.

3

Finding Three | Post-Secondary Expectations



A lower percentage of students who identify as a person of color – 44 percent – report that they expect to attend a four-year college, as compared to 51 percent of seniors this year who do not identify as a person of color.

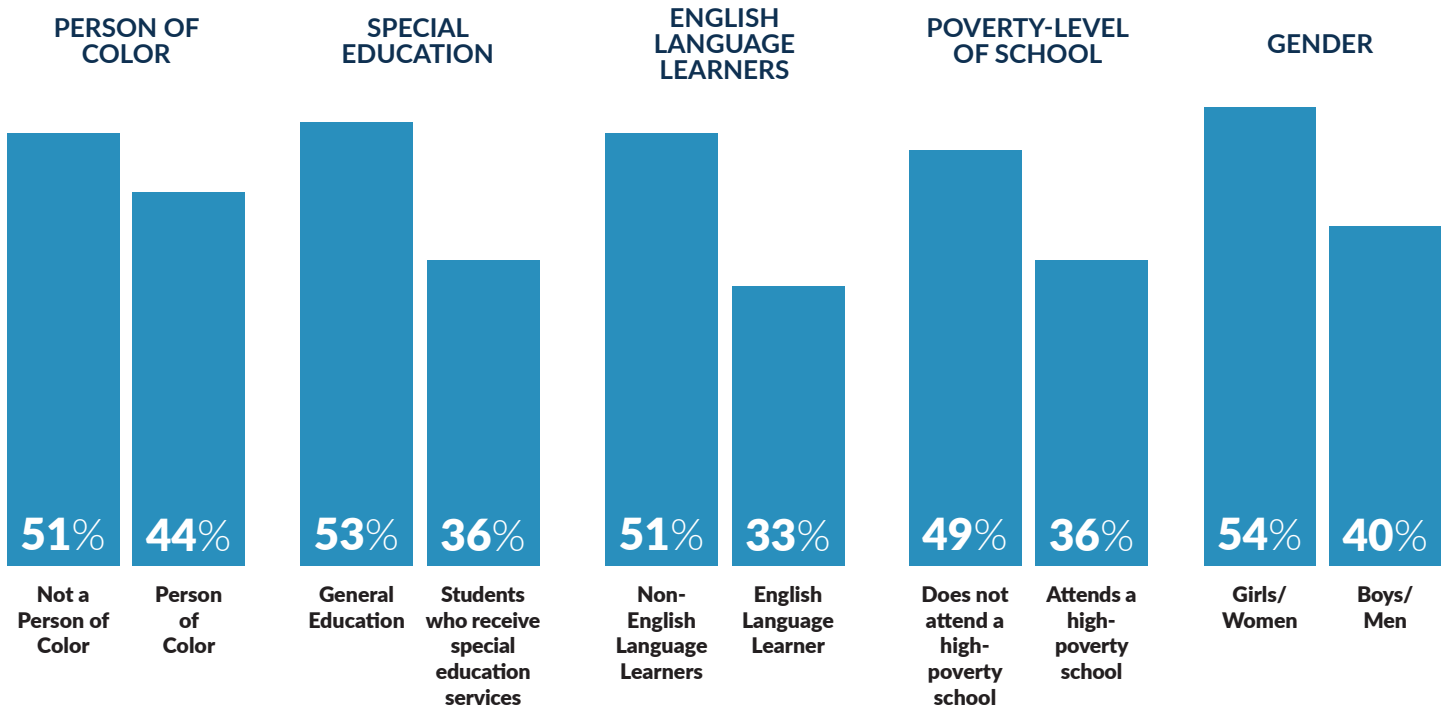
Just 36 percent of seniors who receive special education support report that they expect to attend a four-year college, as compared to 53 percent who do not receive special education services.

Just one in three seniors this year who are English Language Learners (33 percent) say they expect to go to a four-year college, as compared to half (51 percent) of seniors who are not English Language Learners.

About 1 in 3 seniors this year who attend a high-poverty school (36 percent) plan to attend a four-year college, as compared to half (49 percent) of seniors who do not attend high-poverty schools.

After you finish high school, what do you expect to do next?

(CLASS OF 2022 “ATTEND A 4-YEAR COLLEGE”)



Finally, a higher proportion of today’s seniors who are girls/women – 54 percent – expect to go to a four-year college compared to just 40 percent of boys/men, reflecting a [widening and worrisome gender](#) gap in college-going numbers. There were no significant differences in response to this question for students who are non-binary or gender non-conforming, those who prefer to self-describe/self-identify, or those who are transgender, likely due to lower respondent counts among those groups.

3

Finding Three | Post-Secondary Expectations



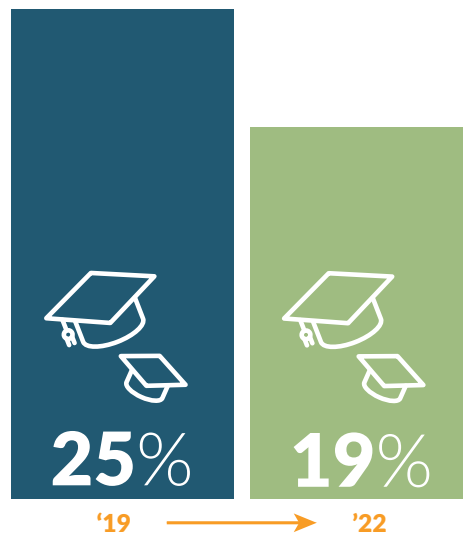
Disparities in college-going expectations for two-year colleges

Today's seniors are less likely to report that they expect to attend a two-year college than did seniors in the class of 2019. Just 19 percent of seniors this year report that they expect to attend a two-year college. This is down by six percentage points compared to the graduating class of 2019.

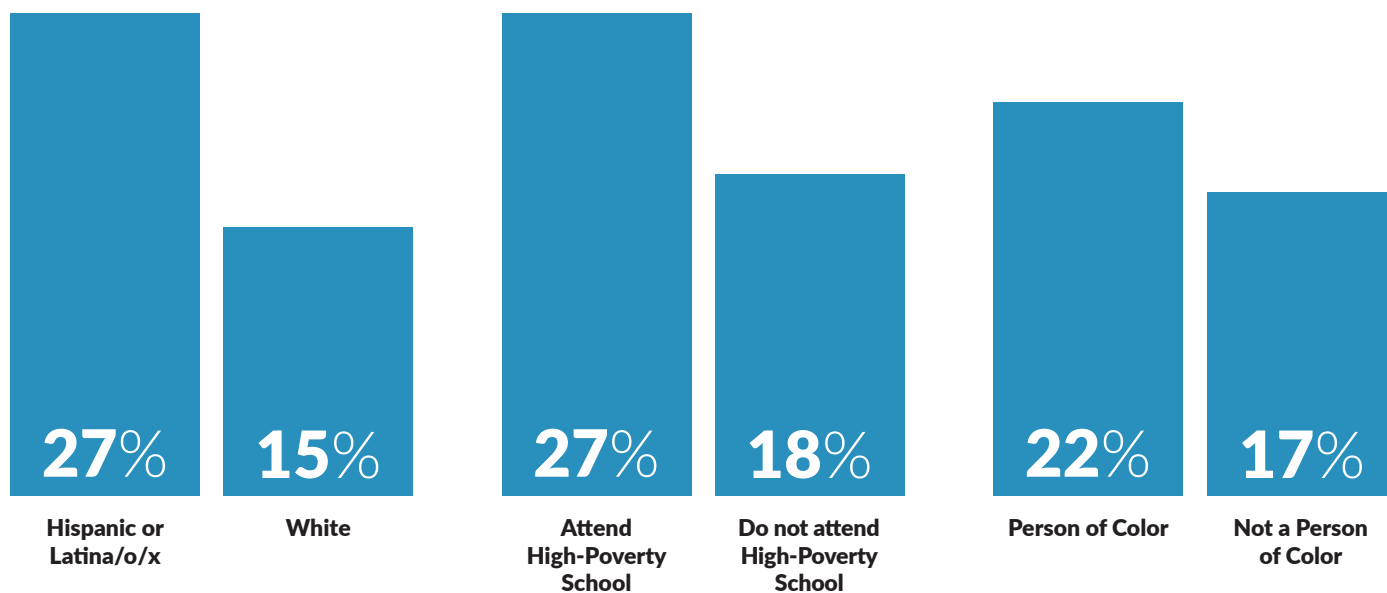
While two-year college plans have decreased overall, a higher percentage of seniors this year from some groups report plans to attend a two-year college compared to their peers.

A higher proportion of today's seniors who are Hispanic or Latinx – 27 percent – and a lower percentage of seniors who are white – 15 percent – plan to attend a two-year college. Twenty-seven percent of today's seniors who attend a high-poverty school plan to attend a two-year college after graduation as compared to just 18 percent of today's seniors who do not attend a high-poverty school. And 22 percent of students who identify as a person of color plan to attend a two-year college after graduation as compared to 17 percent of today's seniors who do not identify as a person of color.

After you finish high school, what do you expect to do next? (“ATTEND A 2-YEAR COLLEGE”)



After you finish high school, what do you expect to do next? (CLASS OF 2022 “ATTEND A 2-YEAR COLLEGE”)





4

Fewer seniors in the class of 2022 report participating in career counseling and college financial counseling than in 2019, with significant drops for students who are Hispanic or Latinx, multi-racial, boys/men, and attending rural schools. Most seniors now have an adult they could ask for a recommendation, but this support is unevenly experienced.

Less than half of today’s seniors – 43 percent – feel positively about their college and career readiness.* Seniors in the class of 2022 are less likely to report receiving counseling about *future career possibilities* and counseling about *how to pay for college* than did seniors in the class of 2019.

Just one in three seniors in the class of 2022 report receiving counseling about *future career possibilities* and just one in four received counseling about *how to pay for college*. These are significant declines compared to the class of 2019 despite high helpfulness ratings for these support services across both time periods.

This year, have you participated in counseling from your school about future career possibilities? ("YES")



This year, have you participated in counseling from your school about how to pay for college? ("YES")



For both seniors in the class of 2019 as well as seniors in 2022, the majority of students found these services helpful, with average helpfulness ratings of 3.8 and 3.9 out of five, respectively.

These meaningful declines may speak to the enormity of the job that is providing counseling services in a phase of covid recovery. With so much uncertainty about the future and ever-expanding caseloads, counseling resources are likely stretched [thinner than ever](#).

*This represents a composite of four questions about students’ college and career readiness. Students whose average rating across all questions was at least 3.5 out of 5 were categorized as feeling positively about their college and career readiness.

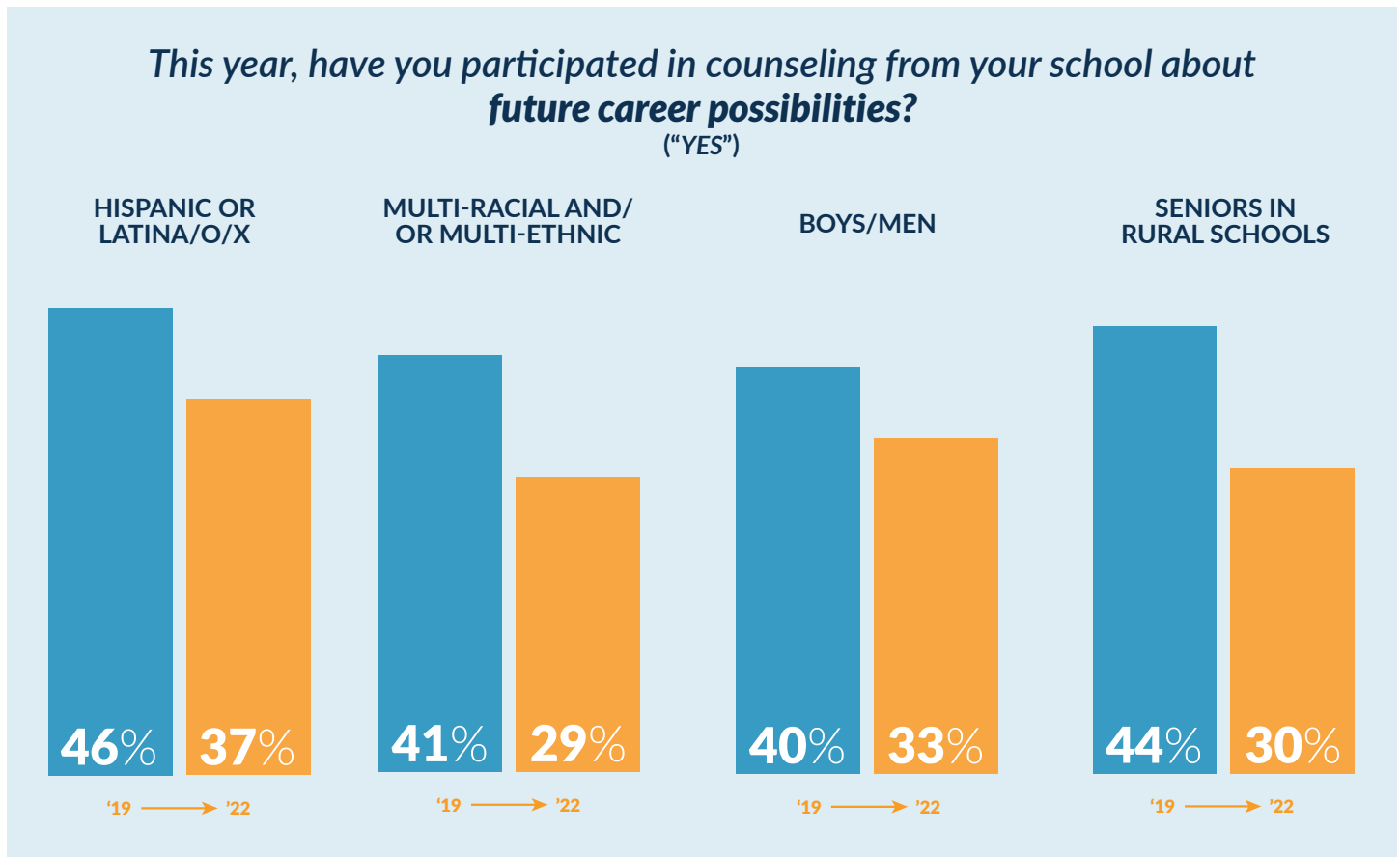
4

Finding Four | Adult Support



Which student groups have experienced significant declines in counseling about future career possibilities?

Seniors in the class of 2022 who are Hispanic or Latinx as well as seniors who are multi-racial and/or multi-ethnic are less likely now to report having received counseling about career possibilities from their school compared to seniors from these groups in the class of 2019. Additionally, in 2019, 40 percent of seniors who are men/boys reported participating in counseling about future possibilities. That has dropped to just 33 percent among boys/men in the class of 2022. Finally, seniors at rural schools are now less likely to report receiving counseling for their career as compared to seniors graduating from rural schools in 2019 – 44 percent in 2019 as compared to just 30 percent in the class of 2022.



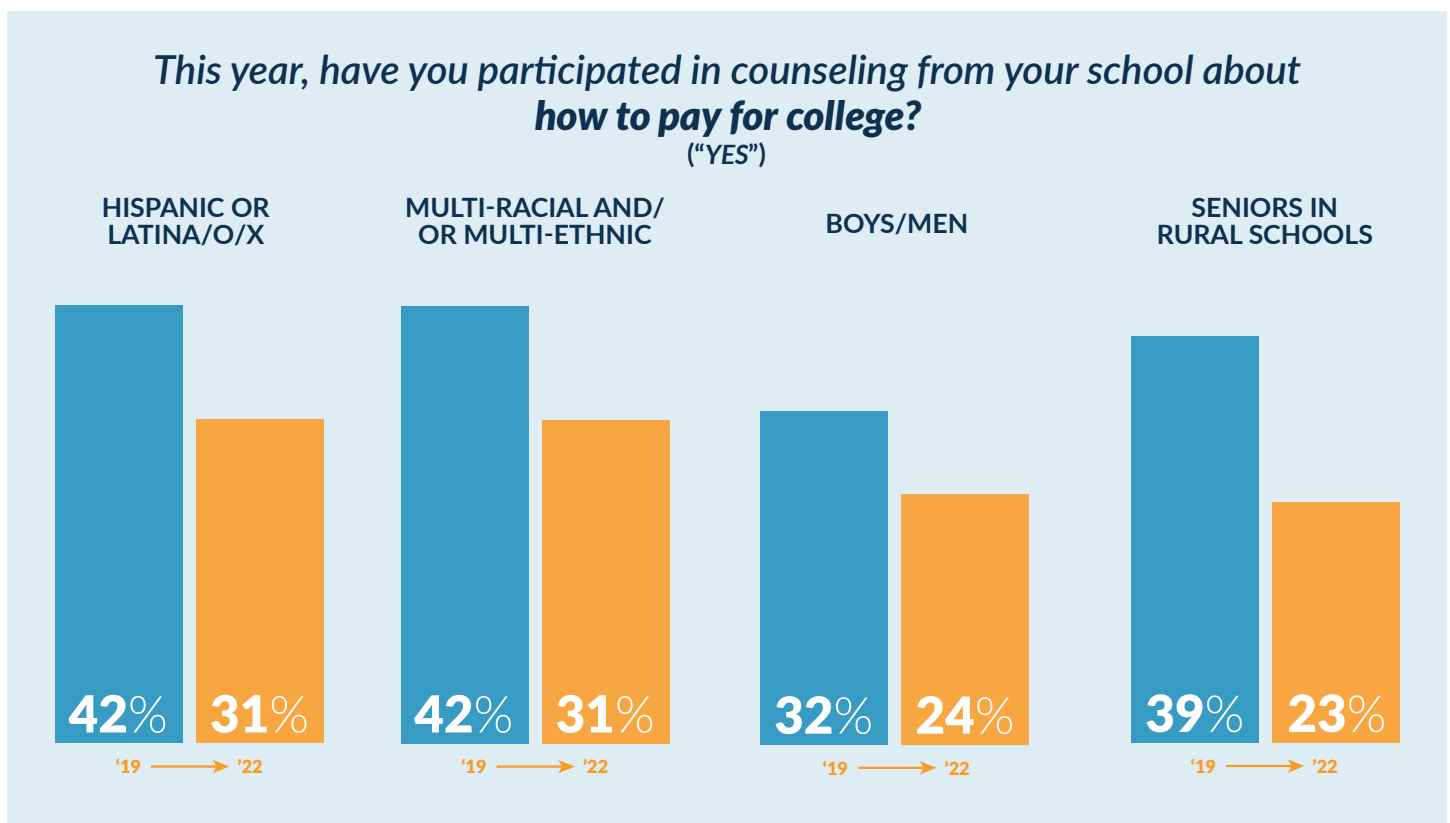
4

Finding Four | Adult Support



Which student groups have experienced significant declines in counseling about how to pay for college?

These trends for counseling about future career possibilities for Hispanic or Latinx students, multi-racial students, boys/men, and seniors attending rural schools extend to college financial counseling as well. Only 31 percent of seniors in the class of 2022 who are Hispanic or Latinx report participating in counseling about how to pay for college, compared to 42 percent in 2019. Only one in four of today's seniors who are multi-racial and/or multi-ethnic say they have received college financial counseling compared to one in three in 2019. Similarly, boys/men in the class of 2022 are less likely to have participated in counseling about how to pay for college as compared to the class of 2019 (24 percent now versus 32 percent in 2019). Finally, seniors at rural schools are now less likely to report receiving counseling about how to pay for college (23 percent) as compared to seniors attending rural schools in the class of 2019 (39 percent).



4

Finding Four | Adult Support

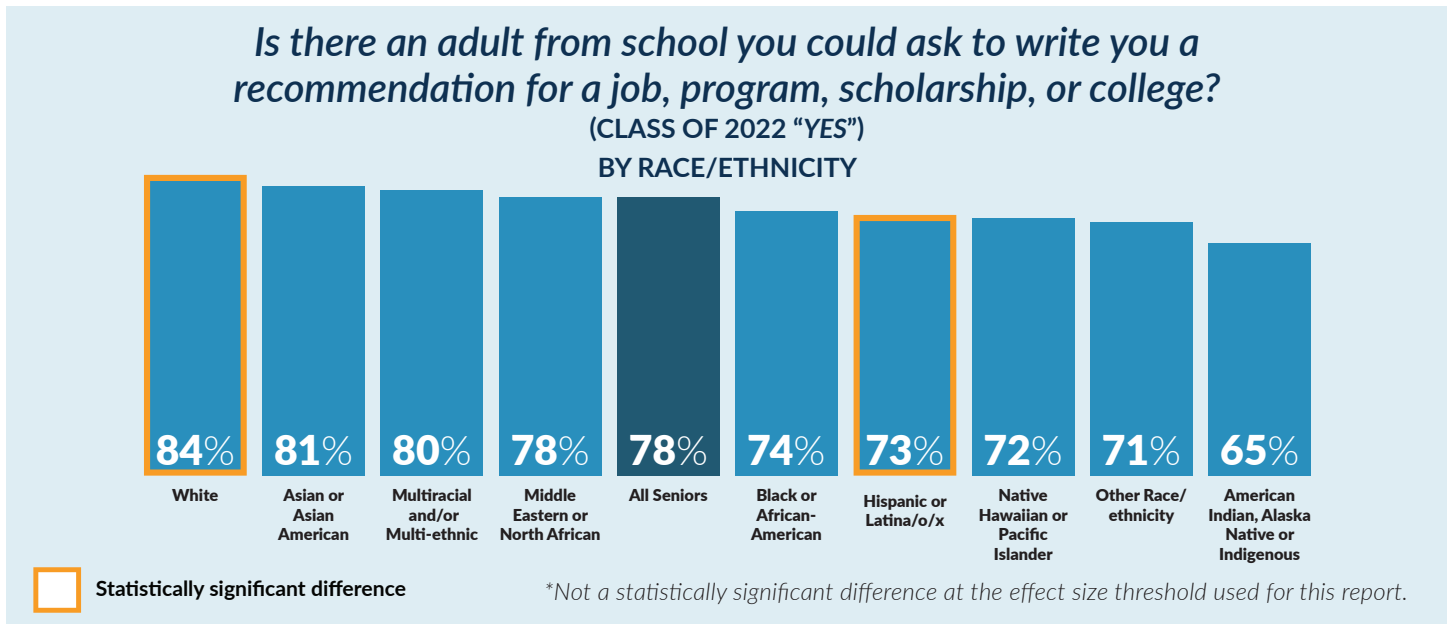


The power of a recommendation

The presence of a trusting adult at school [is shown](#) to support students' academic and life outcomes. And key relationships that [provide value](#) (such as connections to jobs or referrals) can be both buffers against dropping out and boosts to students as they explore post-secondary pathways. It is therefore heartening to see that most seniors in the class of 2022 – 78 percent – report that there is an adult from school who they could ask to write a recommendation for a job, program, scholarship, or college. However, there are differences across student demographic groups.

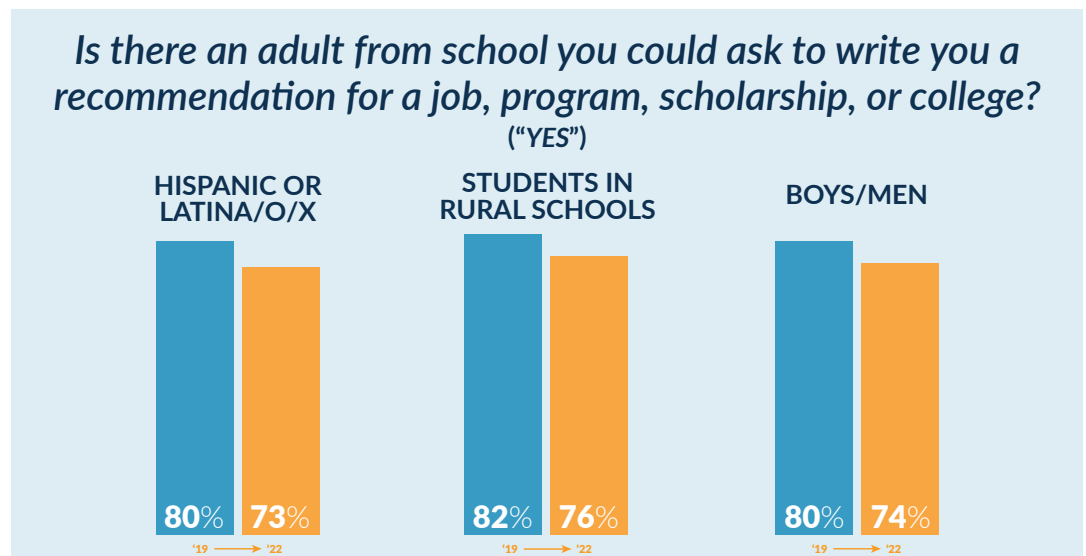
A significantly higher proportion of seniors in the class of 2022 who are white – 84 percent – and a lower proportion of Hispanic or Latinx students – 73 percent – report that there is an adult from school who could write them a recommendation as compared to students of other races or ethnicities.

In addition, a lower percentage of boys/men (74 percent versus 82 percent of girls/women), English Language Learners (69 percent versus 81 percent of non-ELL), and students at high-poverty schools (71 percent versus 79 percent of their peers) report having an adult at school who would write them a recommendation.



Changes over time?

Seniors in the class of 2022 who are Hispanic or Latinx, who are boys/men, and who attend rural schools are less likely to report having an adult who would provide endorsement as compared to seniors from these groups in the class of 2019.





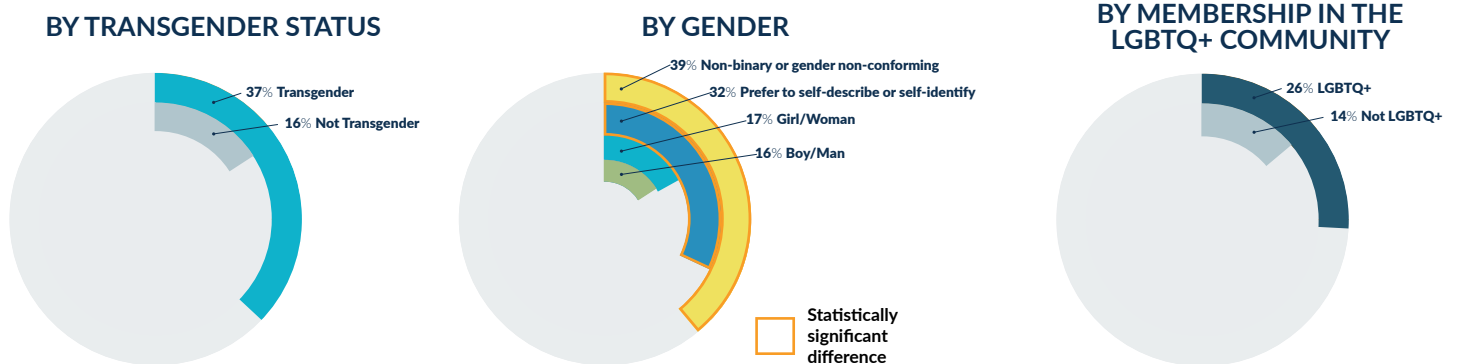
5

A higher proportion of seniors in the class of 2022 who are transgender, gender non-binary, prefer to self-describe their gender, or members of the LGBTQ+ community have seriously considered dropping out as compared to their peers.

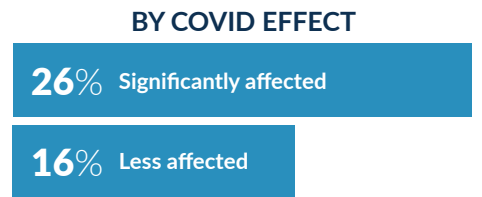
While the US has seen [some gains](#) in graduation rates overall, not all students make it to their senior year, let alone to graduation. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that this analysis only examines the perspectives of those students who were still present in school and able to share their perspectives during their senior year.

Overall, 18 percent of seniors in the class of 2022 report that they've seriously considered dropping out of school. However, meaningful differences across student groups illustrate the [formidable barriers](#) that some students, particularly LGBTQ+ youth, face to making it across the podium.

Have you ever seriously considered dropping out of high school? (CLASS OF 2022 "YES")



There are also meaningful differences by students' gender identities. A higher percentage of students who are transgender – 37 percent – report that they've seriously considered dropping out as compared to students who do not identify as transgender, at just 16 percent. Additionally, a higher percentage of students who are non-binary or gender non-conforming – 39 percent – and students who prefer to self-describe or self-identify their gender – 32 percent – report having seriously thought about dropping out of school, compared to just 17 percent of girls/women and 16 percent of boys/men. Finally, just over one in four of today's seniors who are members of the LGBTQ+ community – 26 percent – report that they've seriously considered dropping out of school as compared to just 14 percent of their peers, a gap that reminds us that these students in particular have, in other [research](#), reported experiencing being "pushed out" of school.



We also see the COVID effect on students' thoughts about dropping out. Twenty-six percent of today's seniors who report being significantly affected by the pandemic report thoughts of seriously dropping out, compared to 16 percent of seniors who were less affected.

Conclusion


Which students in the Class of 2022 want to go to college, a trade or technical school, to work, or to the military – and which students will be able to realize their aspirations? The insights from this year’s seniors shed light on what it has meant to navigate high school and to prepare for one’s future during a pandemic. And how these students are tackling their own futures is, of course, important to our collective future.

Particularly striking is the extent to which students’ sense of preparedness for the future has changed from 2019 to 2022 for certain groups of students, while much less has changed in the aggregate. The trends presented here around Hispanic or Latinx students, LGBTQ+ youth, and boys/men among others raise important questions for educators, college counselors, higher education admissions officers and institutions, policymakers and funders.

As we enter another season of high school graduations, a return to tradition will surely mark a time of celebration for many students, families, and schools. At the same time it is an important moment to pause and recognize that this is a wholly unusual season, making it even more critical that we tune into the voices and experiences of those for whom our education system is designed: students.

ABOUT YOUTHTRUTH

YouthTruth is a national nonprofit that harnesses student and stakeholder perceptions to help educators accelerate improvements. Through validated survey instruments and tailored advisory services, YouthTruth partners with schools, districts, and education funders to enhance learning for all students. To learn more about the research that informs our work, please visit www.youthtruthsurvey.org/resources.

 youthtruthsurvey.org

 [@youth_truth](https://twitter.com/youth_truth)

YouthTruth
— STUDENT SURVEY —
A NATIONAL NONPROFIT