



SKILLED CAREERS COALITION

MARKET AND OPINION RESEARCH THIRD QUARTER 2024

THE PROBLEM

For too long, society has presented only two options for those looking to build meaningful, fulfilling and lifelong careers: college or the military.

As young adults near high school graduation, they approach a perceived fork in the road. And it's no wonder — colleges and universities spend between \$700 million and \$1.2 billion annually on marketing¹, and the military spends roughly the same (\$1.14 billion) to recruit high school students post-graduation².

Yet, those two options don't appeal to — or work for — millions of high school students. Meanwhile, millions of people build meaningful and fulfilling lives for themselves and for their families through a career in the skilled trades.

The fact is, demand is high and growing for careers such as electricians, machinists, and plumbers, as well as for those who build, maintain, and repair the infrastructure that supports the entire U.S. economy.

The skills gap is already slowing down projects, driving up consumer costs and limiting the ability of American companies to adapt quickly to major changes brought on by new technology.

CHALLENGES

1 of 5

For every five skilled workers that exit, only one person enters the skilled workforce.³

2.4M

Unfilled manufacturing careers by 2028 with a negative economic impact of \$2.5 trillion⁴

10K

Every day, 10,000 Baby Boomers reach retirement age, fueling the "Silver Tsunami."⁵

OPPORTUNITIES

58M

As of 2023, the U.S. had 58 million youth and young adults between the ages of 10-24.⁶

19M

Projected jobs created for U.S. government investment in skilled industries by 2031⁶

507K

Projected new jobs in logistics and transportation by 2032⁷

The interest in exploring a skilled career remains low among youth, while the benefits to pursuing a skilled career are advantageous:

LESS TIME IN SCHOOL

A bachelor's degree typically takes four-plus years to complete versus a trade school, which can take two years or less.⁸

LOWER TUITION COST

The average American spends \$127,000 to earn a bachelor's degree and only \$33,000 to earn a degree from a trade school.⁹

JOBS IN HIGH DEMAND

The demand is high and growing for skilled talent. It is estimated that by 2028 there will be 3 million job openings in the skilled trades.¹⁰

HIGHER EMPLOYMENT RATES

People with career and technical education are slightly more likely to be employed than those with academic credentials and significantly more likely to be working in their fields of study.¹¹

¹ <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/commercial-for-college-advertising-in-higher-education>

² <https://www.rebuildlocalnews.org/federal-government-advertising-spending-has-doubled-to-1-8-billion-since-2018>

³ <https://www.ishn.com/articles/110888-baby-boomers-retiring-leaving-many-open-trades-positions>

⁴ <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/pages/manufacturing/articles/future-of-manufacturing-skills-gap-study.html>

⁵ <https://www.census.gov/data/datasets/time-series/demo/popest/2020s-national-detail.html>

⁶ <https://peril.umass.edu/?view-article&id=1749>

⁷ <https://www.bls.gov/emp>

⁸ <https://www.accreditedschoolsonline.org/resources/trade-school-vs-college>

⁹ <https://intercoast.edu/articles/trade-schools>

¹⁰ <https://www.peopleready.com/peopleready-skilled-trades-joins-generation-1a-movement-to-rebuild-the-skilled-trades-workforce>

¹¹ <https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2018/04/25/605092520/high-paying-trade-jobs-sit-empty-while-high-school-grads-line-up-for-university>

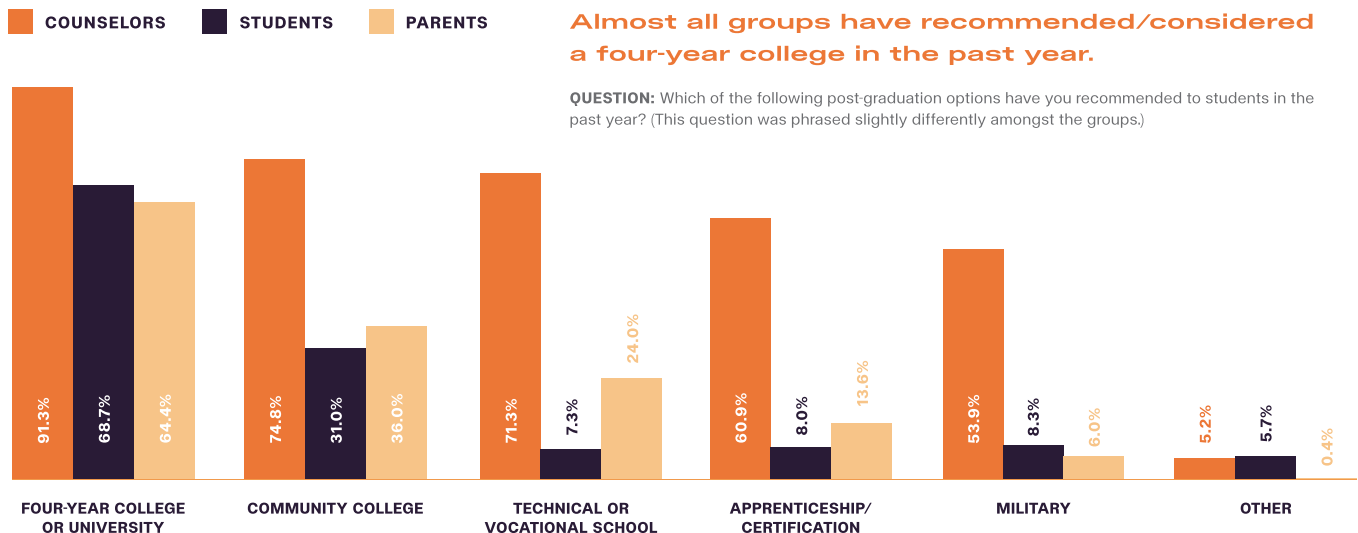
OUR RESEARCH

So why is a skilled career not presented as an equally meaningful third option? Especially now, as our country faces a critical shortage of skilled talent today and in the years to come.

In June 2022, Skilled Careers Coalition (SCC) conducted an online survey and series of focus groups in partnership with the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). Students, parents, and counselors shared their perceptions and opinions on skilled trades to better understand and address this growing issue.

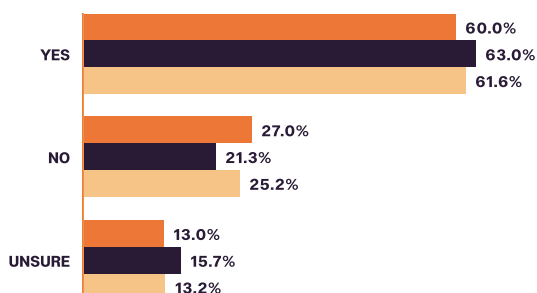
In speaking with each of the groups, we uncovered corresponding and overlapping ideas about education and a successful and fulfilling career. Unsurprisingly, college was a focus, and all groups stated that having a four-year degree leads to future success. While skilled trade workers were seen as critical and the backbone of America, the perception of skilled trades as a successful and fulfilling career choice was muted.

KEY THEMES ACROSS ALL GROUPS



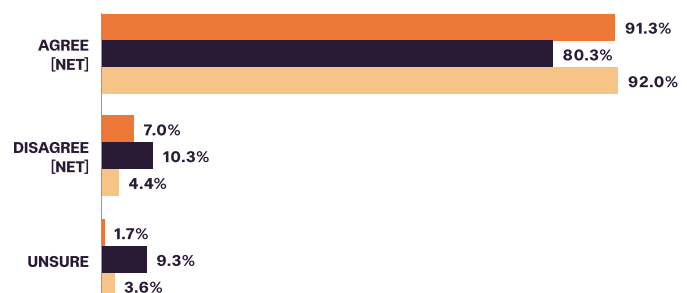
All groups think society views those with a college degree as more successful than those who pursue other options.

QUESTION: Do you think society views those with a traditional college degree as more successful than those who pursue any other option?



All three groups agree that skilled trades workers are just as important as first responders and service members.

QUESTION: Agree or disagree: Skilled trades people keep our country running, from making sure we have fresh drinking water to fixing heating systems to building hospitals and highways. Skilled trade workers are just as important to America's future as first responders like police and firefighters or people who join the military.



STUDENTS

While more than 69% of students say it is outdated thinking to assume a four-year degree is the best pathway to success, only 15% are considering a technical/vocational school or apprenticeship after high school.

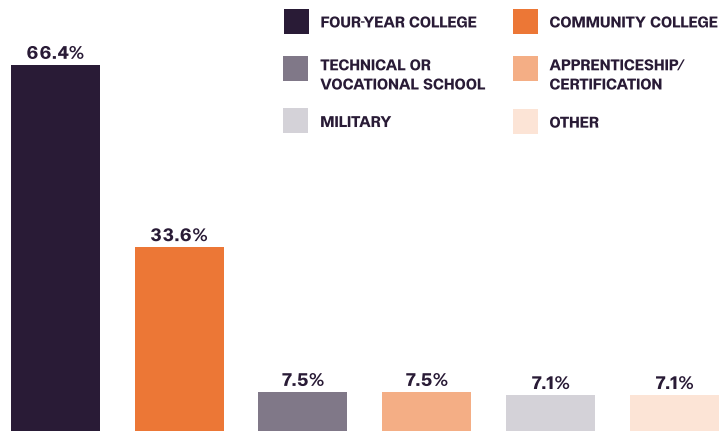
Half say there is more pressure on high school students to attend four-year colleges over other post-graduation options. Among those who think there is more pressure on high school students to attend college, 36% say it's because college is viewed as the "successful" path.

For students evaluating their career paths, financial security is the top motivator, closely followed by pursuing work in a field that genuinely interests them and enjoying their daily job. In seeking career advice, students place the most trust in guidance from family, followed by friends and school counselors.



Only about 15% of students say they are considering technical or vocational school or apprenticeship; 34% are considering community college.

QUESTION: Which of the following post-graduation options are you considering? Select all that apply.

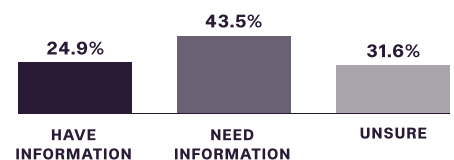


More than 69% of students say it is outdated thinking to assume a four-year degree is the best pathway to success.

Over 40% of students say they need more information on technical or vocational school.

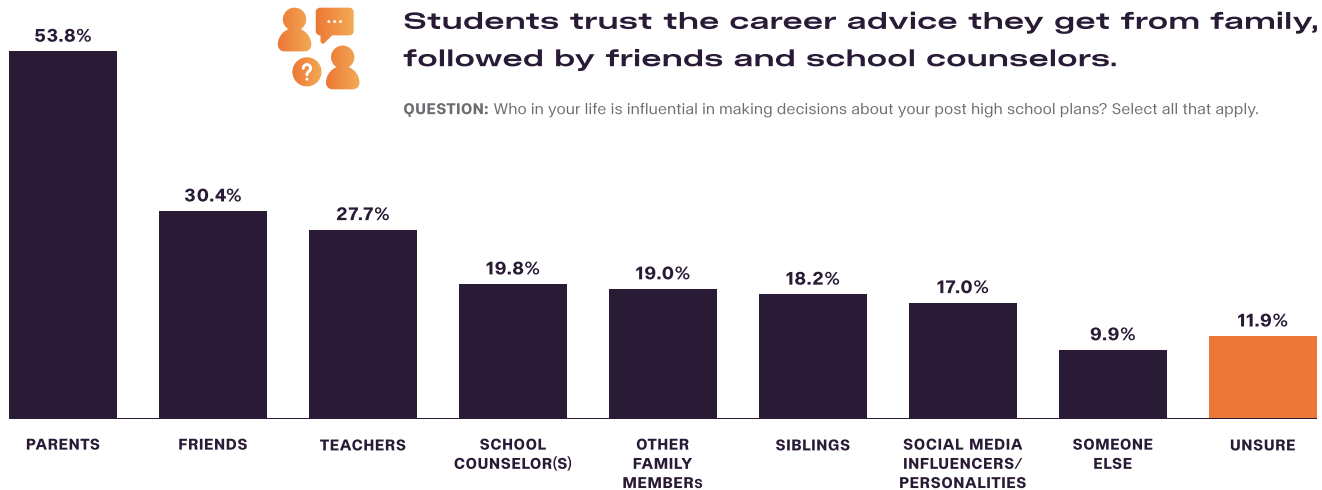


QUESTION: Please indicate if you have enough information about starting the process for technical or vocational school or if you think you need more information.



BRITTANY
11TH GRADE

"I think most of us as teenagers go to college because society says it's the right thing. But then eventually we end up choosing a career or a job that we don't necessarily like. And it's something we don't take into consideration because we're blinded by societal norms."



DAYNA
10TH GRADE

“My family immigrated here, so they basically were forced into skilled trade, and they didn't really have a good outcome. So they're forcing me to go to college.”

ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

55%

A majority (55%) of students have had a conversation about a career in skilled trades as an option rather than college.

76%

A large majority (76%) of students believe a career in skilled trades can easily lead to owning a business and entrepreneurial success.

Income matters the most to students when considering their future career, followed closely by work-life balance, then helping others and independence.

Students love key aspects of skilled trade careers, including job stability, less debt, high quality of life, and high-income potential.

PARENTS

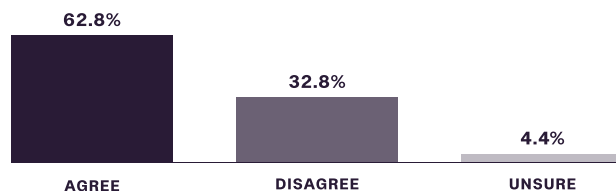
While the vast majority of parents do not have a negative impression of skilled trades and reportedly would support their child pursuing a skilled trade, more than two-thirds still expect their child to attend college.

Additionally, 80% of parents believe they have the greatest influence on their child's decision-making process. Despite parents having information about career and educational paths to varying degrees, only 51% have had a conversation about a career in the skilled trades as an option with their child.



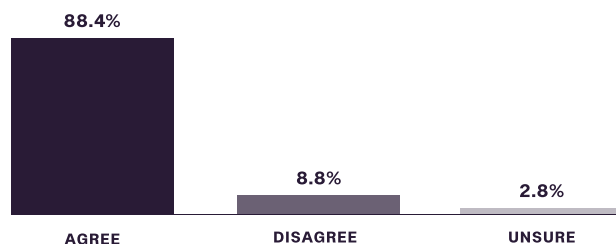
63% agree that attending and graduating from a four-year college is the best pathway to a successful career.

QUESTION: Agree or disagree: attending and graduating from a four-year college is the best pathway to a successful career.



Parents trust the advice for their child from school counselors (88%) and other family (85%) much more than their child's friends (59%).

QUESTION: Agree or disagree: I trust the advice given to my child by their school counselors about their post-graduation plans.



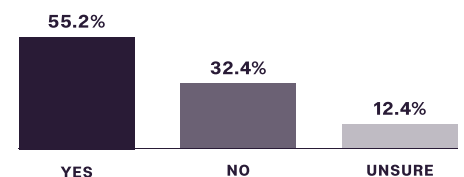
More than two-thirds of parents expect their child to attend college.



55% say there is more pressure on high school students to attend four-year colleges over other post-graduation options.

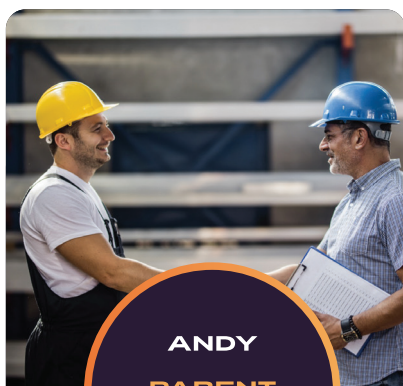


QUESTION: Do you think there is more pressure on high school students to attend four-year colleges over other post-graduation options?



**ANDREW
PARENT
10TH GRADE**

"[College is] more what the schools will promote. They don't ... promote the skilled trades. I don't see them giving much of an option unless the child brings it up."



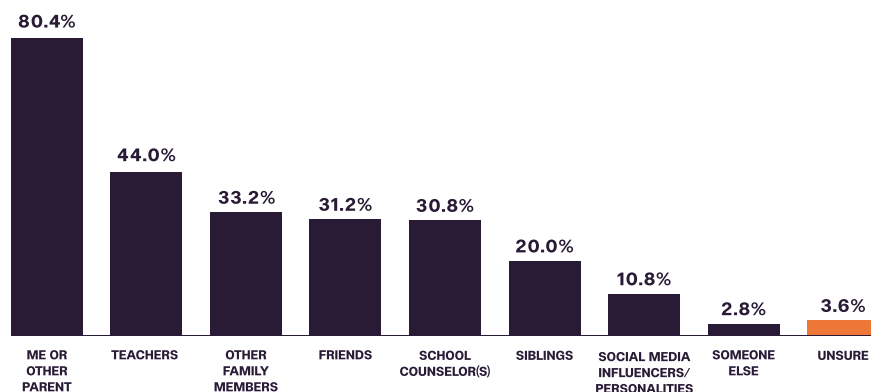
**ANDY
PARENT
12TH GRADE**

"We need guidance counselors to start pushing trades as an option instead of four-year colleges."



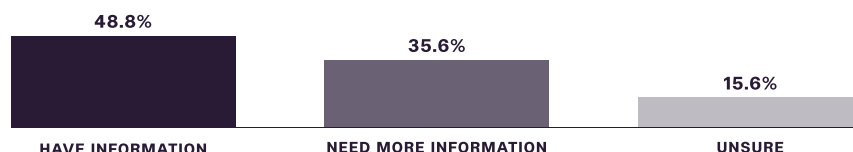
The majority of parents (80%) say they are the most influential in their child's decision making.

QUESTION: Who in your child's life is influential in the decision-making about your child's post high school plans? Select all that apply.



Yet, less than half report having enough information about starting the technical or vocational school process for their child.

QUESTION: Please indicate if you have enough information about starting the process for technical or vocational school for your child or if you think you need more information.



ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

91%

A large majority (91%) of parents agree that a career in skilled trades can easily lead to owning a business and entrepreneurial success.

84%

Skilled trades equal a stable career, less time in school, less debt, and overall good quality of life, according to 84% of parents.

Parents are mostly providing emotional and financial support to their children in preparation for their post-college life.

Parents say later in life people just care about the money they make (86%) and quality of life (83%) over the prestige of a college degree.

SCHOOL COUNSELORS

Counselors view the skilled trades positively, and nearly 60% disagree with the statement that students who go to a four-year college will have better career opportunities than those who pursue technical or vocational school. Counselors want to help students find success and achieve their goals. However, more than half agree that they counsel too many individuals to properly understand what path is best for their students (54%). Despite their positive perceptions about skilled trades, counselor workload remains a high barrier to effectively assessing each student and sharing all postsecondary options.

Counselors do not need a lot of persuasion about skilled trades. They need general support in their jobs and resources to help their students.

54%

agree that they counsel too many students to properly understand what path is best for their future.

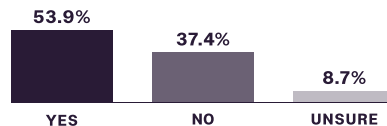
90%

agree that they need to start sharing more information with students and their parents about skilled trades.



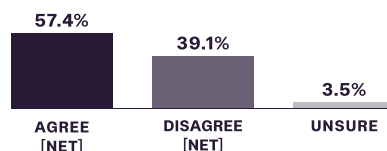
More than half say they need additional resources to help students who are interested in pursuing skilled trades.

QUESTION: Do you need additional resources to help students who are interested in pursuing skilled trades or vocational programs?



57% agree their workload does not allow them to accurately assess students and help them with their needs.

QUESTION: Agree or disagree: My workload does not allow me to accurately assess students and help them with their needs.



ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

>76%

More than 76% want representatives from skilled trades to be present on their campus for career fairs and other events to talk with students.

While four-year college is the top recommended option for post high school, community college, technical and vocational school, and apprenticeships also rank high.

>72%

More than 72% of counselors want to hear from organizations that offer skilled trade training and job opportunities.

Counselors want to help students find success, achieve their goals, and have work/life balance while in high school. Almost none cite getting them into four-year college as the definition of success.

AMY

COUNSELOR

"In my community, they start hitting these kids with college [in] elementary school. ... Four year college or university is always the ultimate goal. And anything less than that is something that you have to accept that you failed."

FINANCIAL FREEDOM, ENTREPRENEURIALISM AND LIFELONG SATISFACTION AND SUCCESS



**Reimagining
skilled careers as
a meaningful and
fulfilling career path
for younger generations**

ABOUT SKILLED CAREERS COALITION

Skilled Careers Coalition (SCC) is on a mission to bring the youth of today to the skilled careers of tomorrow by revolutionizing this critical sector of the American workforce. A dramatic paradigm shift is taking place in both employment and education. With industries and organizations operating in silos, SCC is driving the connectivity needed between parents, youth, educators, businesses, and brands to build a dynamic ecosystem that harnesses the talent needed to close the ever-widening skills gap. To empower students and educators to navigate the skilled careers landscape, Skilled Careers Coalition is producing engaging content and valuable resources.

METHODOLOGY

From June 15 to July 2, 2022, Probolsky Research conducted an online survey among high school counselors, high school students, and parents of high school students in the United States.

A total of 665 respondents (115 high school counselors, 300 high school students, and 250 parents of high school students) were surveyed (margin of error +/- 3.9%). Interviews were conducted using research panels and were offered in both English and Spanish languages. Security measures

precluded individuals from completing the survey more than once and allowed only the designated respondent to complete the survey. Respondents were able to use their computer, tablet, or smartphone to participate.

Probolsky Research applies methodology that ensures the demographic proportions of survey respondents match the demographic composition of high school counselors, high school students, and parents of high school students in the United States.

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