Public Viewpoint: COVID-19 Work and Education Survey

Interested But Not Enrolled: Understanding and Serving Aspiring Adult Learners

Sept. 16, 2020
Public Viewpoint

A regular survey of 1,000 American adults that is representative of the population on the basis of:
• Age.
• Gender.
• Educational attainment.
• Race/ethnicity.
• Nine geographic census regions.
• 17,000-plus responses from March 25 to Sept. 3.

Other survey research incorporated in findings:
• Strada-Gallup Education Consumer Survey: 10,000-plus responses from March 30 to May 28.
• Aspiring Adult Learner Survey: 1,007 responses from August to September 2019.
Key Questions

• Who are aspiring adult learners?

• How has their interest in education changed in 2020?

• What do they care about and need most at this time?
Who are aspiring adult learners?
Understanding the Aspiring Adult Learner

- Ages 25-44.
- Do not have a two- or four-year college degree.
- Seriously considering or planning to enroll in additional education.
6 out of 10 were highly interested in pursuing education immediately after high school

Immediately after leaving high school, how interested were you in pursuing additional education?

- Extremely/very
- Somewhat
- Not very/not at all

Online survey with Heart+Mind Strategies August-September 2019. Base: Americans ages 25-44 with no postsecondary degree or credential who are considering enrolling in education, n=1,007.
Only 1 in 3 adults without degrees had a positive experience with education the last time they were enrolled.

My most recent experience with education was...

Positive (33%)
Neither positive nor negative (39%)
Negative (28%)

Two-thirds of this group have been enrolled in college at some point.
How has interest in education changed for aspiring adult learners in 2020?
Aspiring adult learners say that COVID-19 has made them more likely to enroll in education

How has the coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis affected your interest in enrolling in an education or training program? Would you say you are:

- 21% Less likely to enroll
- 42% More likely to enroll

In 2020, aspiring adult learners’ interests have shifted toward nondegree pathways.

**2019**

- Degree: 50%
- Nondegree: 50%

**2020**

- Degree: 32%
- Nondegree: 68%

In 2020, aspiring adult learners are less confident in the value of education.

- Additional education will be worth the cost:
  - 2019: 77%
  - 2020: 59%

- Additional education will make me an attractive job candidate to potential employers/will get me a good job:
  - 2019: 89%
  - 2020: 64%

What do adults without degrees care about most at this time?
In 2020, adults without degrees are more focused on paying bills and taking care of immediate needs

Thinking about the potential benefits of the additional education [you are considering], please rate each of the following benefits based on how important each is to you personally. (% most important)

- Better quality of life: 29% (2019) vs 35% (2020)
- Pay bills/take care of immediate needs: 16% (2019) vs 33% (2020)
- Qualify for good jobs: 16% (2019) vs 15% (2020)
- Find something I love: 14% (2019) vs 13% (2020)
- Give me a more flexible schedule: 25% (2019) vs 4% (2020)

In 2020, adults without degrees place greater emphasis on feeling like a good parent, spouse, or partner.

Select the most important feeling or emotional consequence to you personally.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feeling/Consequence</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feel less stress and in control</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel like a good parent/spouse/partner</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel driven, confident, and prepared</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel a sense of purpose and direction</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although basic needs are high, adults without degrees still prioritize finding a job or career they love.

How much do you worry about the following:

- Finding a job and career I love: 44%
- Having enough to eat: 46%
- Paying rent or mortgage: 47%
- Health and safety: 50%
- Having a steady paycheck or source of income: 50%

Adults without degrees need more information:
Fewer than 1 in 3 have a very good understanding of career and education pathways

How well do you feel you understand the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Understand very well</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The most valuable skills I should develop through education and training</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of time to complete an education program</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cost of tuition, books, and other expenses</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial aid, scholarships, or loans</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career paths that fit my strengths</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key findings

1. **Confidence in the value of education has fallen among aspiring adult learners.** Compared to 2019, adults considering enrolling in education are 18 percentage points less likely to believe it will be worth the cost and 25 percentage points less likely to believe additional education will get them a good job.

2. **In 2020, interest has shifted toward nondegree pathways.** In 2019, half of adults considering enrolling in education expressed a preference for nondegree pathways, but in 2020 that share has grown to 68 percent.

3. **Compared to 2019, in 2020 adults without degrees are more likely to cite the ability to pay bills and take care of immediate needs as the primary benefit of education.** Focus also has shifted from education as a means to greater self-confidence to education as a way to better support loved ones.

4. **Adults without degrees place finding a job or career they love among their priorities, along with basic needs.** Worry about finding a satisfying career ranks nearly as high as worries about needs such as having enough to eat or paying rent.

5. **Adults without degrees need more information about education and career pathways.** Fewer than 1 in 3 say they understand available career pathways, valuable skills, and details about potential education programs “very well.”
Learn more at StradaEducation.org/PublicViewpoint or email consumervoice@stradaeducation.org
Methodology

• Public Viewpoint is a regular tracking survey of education consumers’ perceptions of COVID-19’s impact on postsecondary education and work in the United States, completed by Heart+Mind Strategies on behalf of Strada Center for Consumer Insights.

  • Online survey of Americans ages 18 and above.
  • Representative of the general population in age, gender, geographic region, educational attainment, and race/ethnicity.
  • Current database size from March 25 to Sept. 3: n = 17,117.

  • A theoretical margin of error based on a probability sample of size 1,000 would be +/- 3.1 percent at 95 percent confidence. This is not a probability-based sample, and a margin of error cannot be estimated. Based on experience, we believe the sampling error would be at least this number.

• The 2020 wave of the Strada-Gallup Education Consumer Survey is a nationally representative survey using both mail and web data collection modes. The survey was conducted from March 30 to May 28; n=10,361.

• The survey of Aspiring Adult Learners is a nationally representative online survey of adults ages 25-44. The survey was conducted by Heart + Mind Strategies on behalf of Strada Center for Consumer Insights from August to September 2019.

• Please contact Strada Center for Consumer Insights with questions or information requests at consumervoice@stradaeducation.org or learn more at StradaEducation.org/PublicViewpoint.