

U.S. Memo

Date: October 6, 2021
To: Express Employment Professionals
From: The Harris Poll
Subject: Lost Generation Survey – United States

The survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals between July 29 and August 2, 2021, among 2,099 U.S. adults ages 18 and older. Data were weighted where necessary by age by gender, education, race/ethnicity, region, income, household size, marital status, employment, and likelihood to be online to bring them into line with their actual proportions in the population.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including sampling error, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments. Therefore, The Harris Poll avoids the words “margin of error” as they are misleading. All that can be calculated are different possible sampling errors with different probabilities for pure, unweighted, random samples with 100% response rates. These are only theoretical because no published polls come close to this ideal.

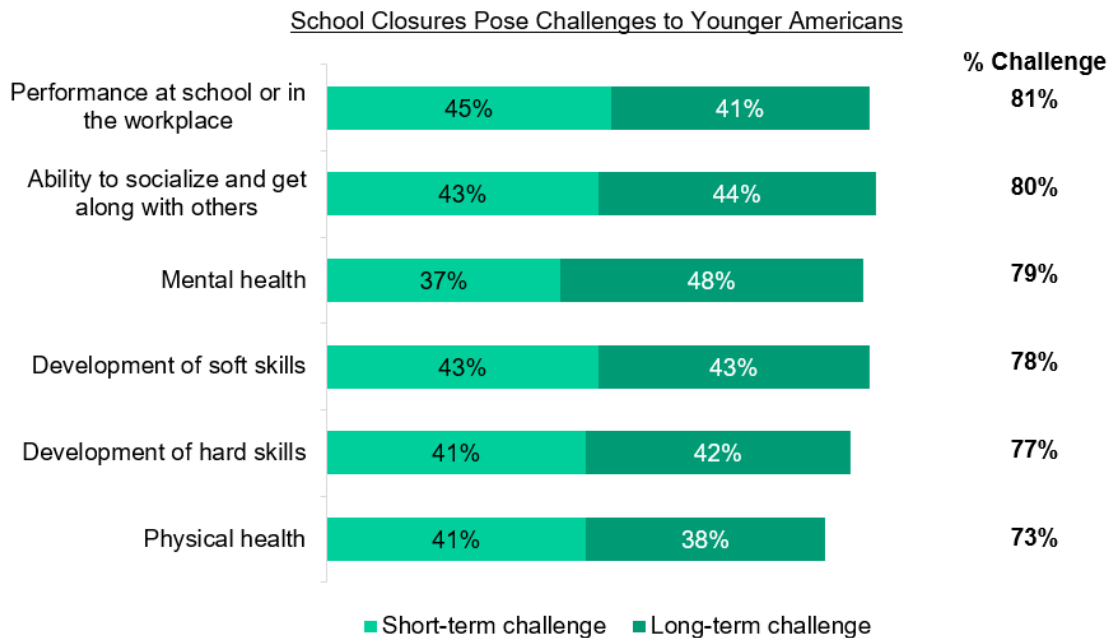
Respondents for this survey were selected among panel members who have agreed to participate in surveys. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to be invited to participate, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

COVID School Closures Pose Long-Term Challenges

The majority of Americans think school closures during the pandemic pose challenges to younger Americans’ health, development, and future performance at work; the U.S. could do more to help students recover from this time.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to alter how people work and learn, many Americans have already changed their plans. For current students, the onset of the pandemic spurred many to put their education on hold. Nearly 3 in 10 Americans (29%) know someone that delayed school¹ during the COVID-19 pandemic. Around one-quarter (23%) know someone that dropped out of higher education and 15% know someone that dropped out of primary/secondary school.

Changes to education are now posing challenges to the country’s youth. Around 8 in 10 adults think school closures (i.e., K-12 closures, college delays, remote schooling) during the COVID-19 pandemic pose challenges (long or short-term) to younger Americans’ performance at school or in the workplace, ability to socialize and get along with others, mental health, development of soft skills,² and development of hard skills.³ Nearly three-quarters say the same of their physical health. Notably, nearly half of adults think school closures pose *long-term* challenges to younger Americans’ mental health.



Despite widespread acknowledgement of these new struggles, only a slight majority (56%) believe the U.S. is taking the right steps to help students recover from school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

¹ Definition provided: (i.e., took a break from school but plan to return within a year or two)

² Definition provided: (i.e., less tangible skills associated with one’s personality that do not depend on acquired knowledge like etiquette, communication, and work ethic)

³ Definition provided: (i.e., specific knowledge and abilities required for a particular job function that can be measured like typing, computer programming, welding)

Workforce Preparation Is Mediocre

Few Americans think current students will be very prepared to enter the workforce and the majority think education needs to be better aligned with actual career options.

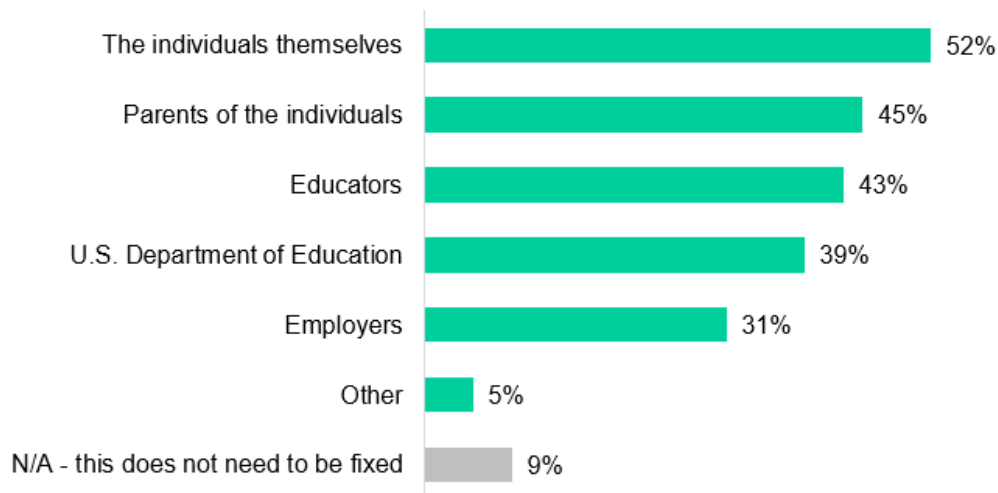
Americans are fairly split on how prepared current students will be to enter the workforce after completing their highest level of education. Slightly more than half of U.S. adults (55%) think they will be prepared, but only 12% say very prepared. Comparatively, in 2019, 73% of employed Americans said they felt prepared entering the workforce after their highest level of education. Additionally, around three-quarters of Americans agree the education system hasn't caught up with what skills are needed for today's workplace (76%) and that the education system has failed to evolve to meet the needs of the workforce (74%). To this point, the vast majority (85%) believe there needs to be more of a balance in education to match learning to actual career options.

Another Loss of the Pandemic: A Generation

Many anticipate a lost generation of students will pose problems for employers and that they will need to make changes to accommodate these new workers.

Slightly more than one-third of Americans (34%) think current students will have less of the skills necessary to be successful when they enter the workforce compared with current entry-level workers. Further, the vast majority (84%) think a "lost generation of students"⁴ will be a problem for employers in the U.S., including around one-third (34%) who think it will be a *large* problem. Nearly three-quarters of Americans (74%) believe society as a whole will suffer from the lost generation due to the COVID-19 pandemic. When thinking about who is responsible for fixing the "lost generation of students," Americans most commonly say the individuals themselves are responsible. This is followed by parents of the individuals, educators (e.g., teachers, school administrators, etc.), the U.S. Department of Education, and employers.

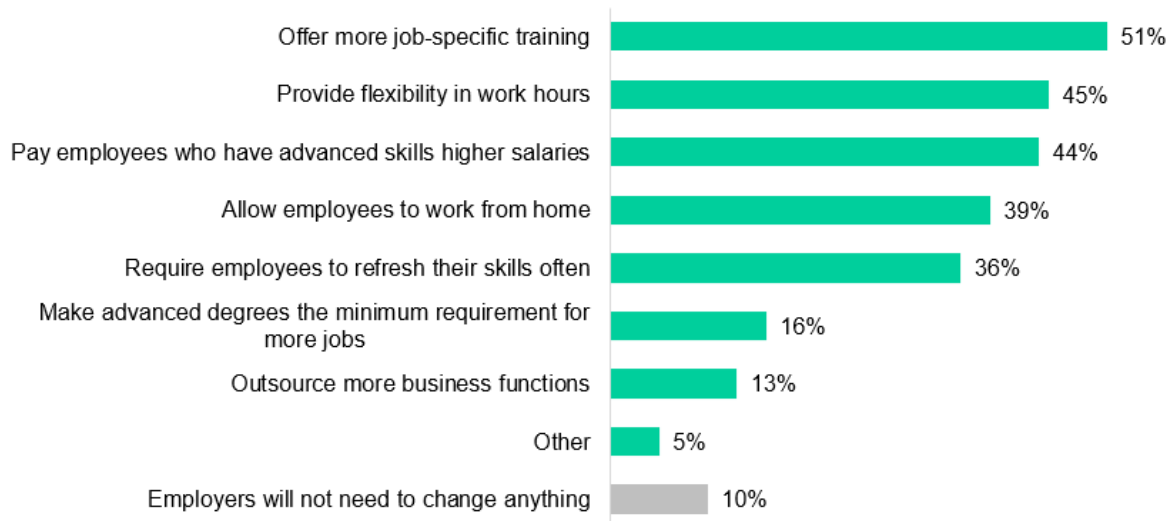
Who Is Responsible for Fixing the "Lost Generation of Students"



⁴ Definition provided: (i.e., a generation that does not have all of the skills necessary to be successful in today's workforce due to closures during the COVID-19 pandemic)

Although employers are not the top party responsible for fixing the lost generation, there is an expectation that they do something to accommodate these new workers. Nine in 10 Americans (90%) say employers will need to change something to accommodate the emerging generation of workers; most commonly, they'll need to offer more job-specific training, provide flexibility in work hours, and pay employees who have advanced skills higher salaries.

Changes Employers Will Need to Make to Accommodate the Emerging Generation of Workers



As employers adjust to the lost generation, they also face staffing issues as the COVID-19 pandemic has spurred an exodus from the workforce for various reasons. More than one-third of Americans (35%) know someone that left the workforce entirely during the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority (71%) agree that between people retiring earlier and the lost generation of students, the workforce is in trouble.

Continual Learning Is Essential to Stay Competitive

Americans are in agreement on the importance of employees refreshing their skills but are split as to whether it's the employees or employer's responsibility.

With the breadth of challenges that employers face, skill refreshment for current employees is more important than ever. Most Americans believe employees in general must “refresh” their hard skills to stay competitive in the current workforce (84%) and anyone who doesn't continue to learn in their career (e.g., staying up to date on new techniques, advancements, etc.) will be left behind in the workforce (78%).

While there is a general consensus on the importance of continual learning, Americans are split on who is responsible for driving this. Around half say it's the employee's responsibility to find training programs to refresh one's skills (51%) while others think it's the employer's responsibility (49%). Further, no one party is overwhelmingly responsible for identifying the skills necessary to advance in a career – 51% say employees are responsible for this but 49% say employers are responsible. Nonetheless, some people used time during the pandemic to further their education. Around 3 in 10 Americans know someone that went back to school⁵ (31%) or signed up for continuing education, beyond degree programs (30%) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

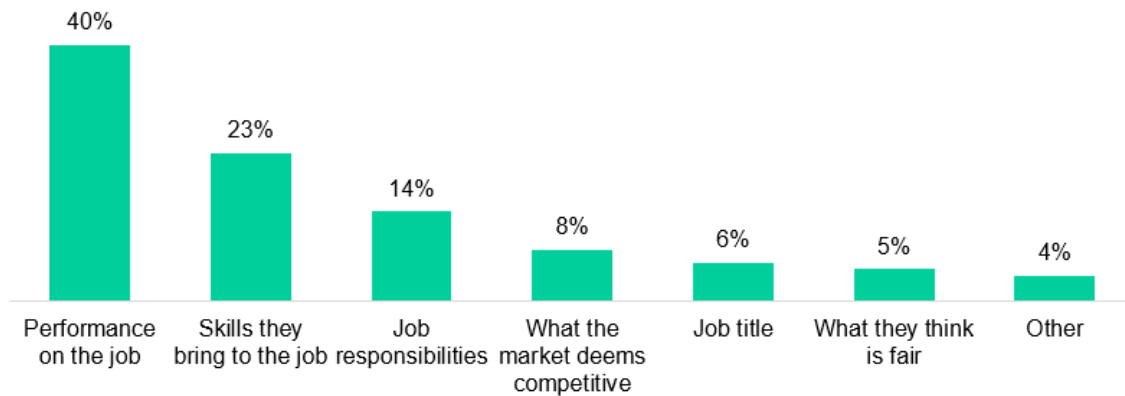
⁵ Definition provided: (i.e., enrolled in a college, trade, or graduate degree program after working for a period of time or previously dropping out)

The Parameters for Setting a Salary Change by Generation

Younger generations think employees should have a say in how much they're paid while older generations think this is the employer's job. Nonetheless, there is overwhelming agreement that employees who continually refresh their skills should make more than those who don't.

Americans most commonly say the top attribute an employee's salary should be based on is their performance on the job, which is followed by the skills they bring to the job. Boomers/Seniors are more likely than other generations to say an employee's salary should be based on their performance on the job (50% vs. 28%-38%) while Gen Z is most likely to say it should be based on what the employee thinks is fair (11% vs. 1%-7%).

Most Important Attribute an Employee's Salary Should Be Based on



Given that around half of Americans (51%) think current students will enter the workforce with different skills – either with less skills (34%) or more skills (17%) – than current entry-level workers have, nearly a third think they should either be paid more (32%) or less (30%) based on the skills they have when they enter the workforce. When it comes to deciding an employee's pay, nearly two-thirds (64%) believe it is an employer's responsibility to decide what a fair salary is. Notably, this increases by age with Gen Z the least likely to think this is the employer's responsibility (Gen Z: 46%, Millennials: 57%, Gen X: 62%, Boomers/Seniors: 77%).

While there is agreement that skills and performance in the workplace are important drivers of salary, how those skills are acquired seems less important. More than three-quarters (77%) agree you don't need a college degree to make a good living. Further, the majority (83%) agree employees who continually refresh their skills should make more money than those who do not.

Parent Perspective

Parents of children under the age of 18 share positive sentiments about current students' preparation for the workforce despite many knowing someone that dropped out of or delayed school during the pandemic.

Parents are more than twice as likely as those who are not parents to know someone that delayed school (45% vs. 21%), dropped out of higher education (35% vs. 16%), and dropped out of primary/secondary school (27% vs. 9%) during the COVID-19 pandemic. They are also more likely to think school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic pose challenges to younger Americans' development of soft skills (82% vs. 76%) and physical health (77% vs. 71%).

Despite this, parents have a particularly positive outlook about the future. They are more likely than those who are not parents to think:

- The U.S. is taking the right steps to help students recover from school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic (64% vs. 53%).
- Current students will be prepared to enter the workforce after completing their highest level of education (61% vs. 51%).
- Current students will enter the workforce with more of the skills necessary to be successful in today's workplace (26% vs. 13%).

Further, parents seem to see the value in advanced degrees:

- They are more likely to say employers will need to make advanced degrees the minimum requirement for more jobs in order to accommodate the emerging generation of workers (24% vs. 11%).
- They are less likely to agree you don't need a college degree to make a good living (73% vs. 79%).