

# Canada Memo

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

*The survey was conducted online within Canada by The Harris Poll on behalf of Express Employment Professionals between August 4 and August 9, 2021, among 1,008 Canadian adults ages 18 and older. Data were weighted where necessary by age by gender, education, region, race, household size, marital status, and language 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.*

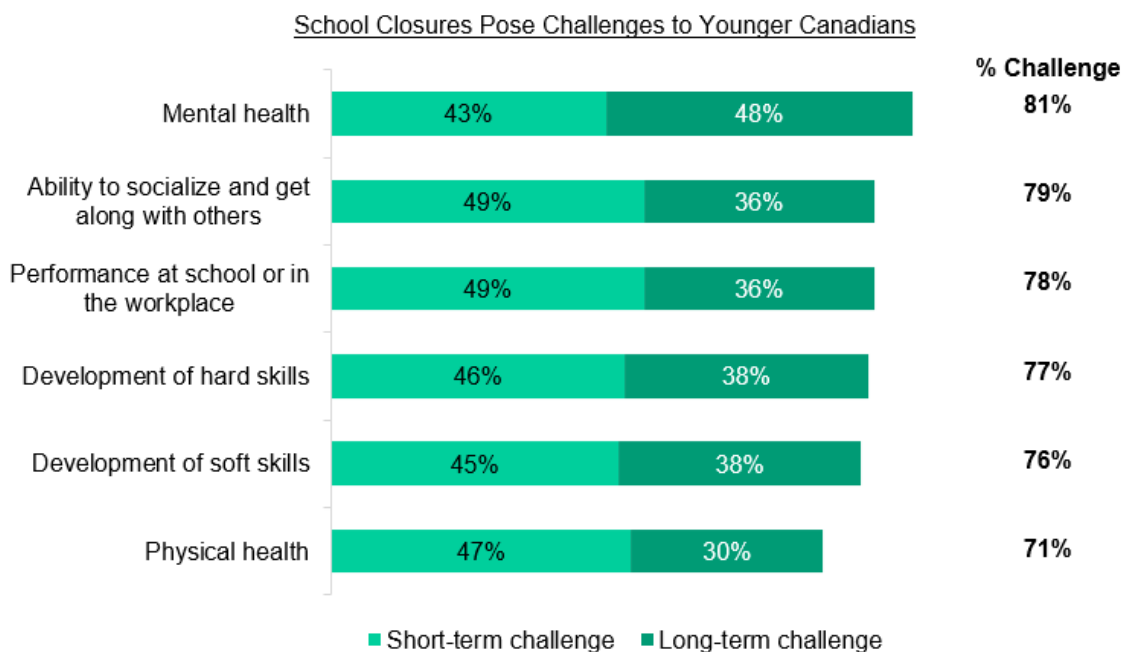
*Respondents for this survey were selected among panel members who have agreed to participate in surveys. Because the sample is based on those who agreed to be invited to participate, no estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated.*

## COVID School Closures Cause Learning Delays and Pose New Challenges

***The majority of Canadians think school closures during the pandemic pose challenges to younger Canadians' well-being, and nearly half worry about their mental health in the long run.***

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to alter how people work and learn, many Canadians have already changed their plans. For current students, the onset of the pandemic spurred many to put their education on hold. Nearly a quarter of Canadians (22%) know someone that delayed school<sup>1</sup> during the COVID-19 pandemic, including around 3 in 10 parents who know someone that delayed school (29%). Further, slightly more than 1 in 10 Canadians (13%) know someone that dropped out of higher education and 9% 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, university delays, remote schooling) during the COVID-19 pandemic pose challenges (long or short-term) to younger Canadians' mental health, ability to socialize and get along with others, performance at school or in the workplace, development of hard skills,<sup>2</sup> and development of soft skills.<sup>3</sup> Many say the same of their physical health. Notably, nearly half of adults think school closures pose *long-term* challenges to younger Canadians' mental health.



Despite widespread acknowledgement of these new struggles, only a slight majority (57%) believe Canada is taking the right steps to help students recover from school closures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

<sup>2</sup> Definition provided: (i.e., specific knowledge and abilities required for a particular job function that can be measured like typing, computer programming, welding)

<sup>3</sup> 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)

## Education System Disconnected from the Workforce

**Very few Canadians think current students will be very prepared to enter the workforce as three-quarters believe the education system is behind on what skills are needed to work.**

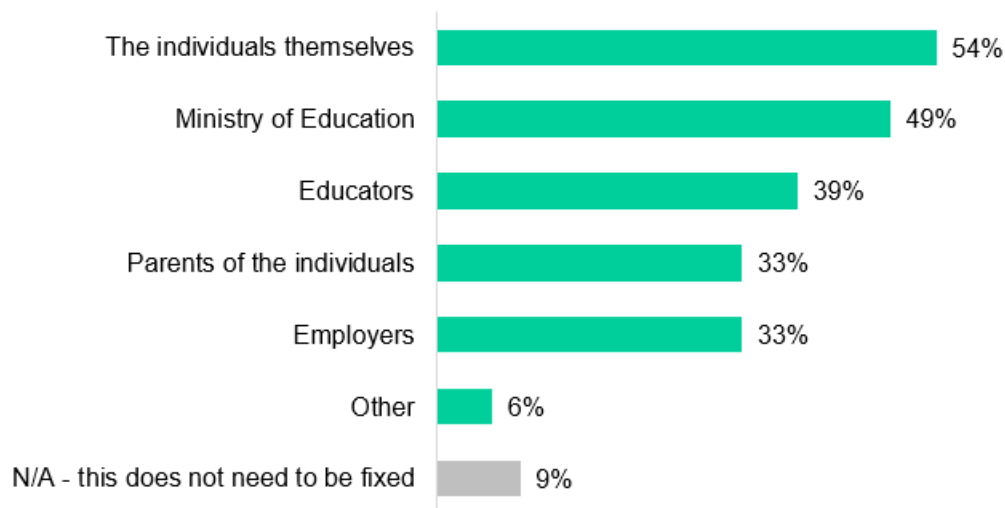
Canadians are fairly split on how prepared current students will be to enter the workforce after completing their highest level of education. Slightly more than half of Canadian adults (52%) think they will be prepared, but only 7% say *very* prepared. Comparatively, in 2019, 65% of employed Canadians said they felt prepared entering the workforce after their highest level of education. Additionally, around three-quarters of Canadians agree the education system hasn't caught up with what skills are needed for today's workplace (75%) and that the education system has failed to evolve to meet the needs of the workforce (73%). To this point, the vast majority (89%) believe there needs to be more of a balance in education to match learning to actual career options.

## A Lost Generation Impacts Society – Particularly Employers

**A lost generation of students may pose problems for employers; there is no one party responsible for fixing this but employers will need to accommodate these workers.**

Two in 5 Canadians (40%) 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, more than 4 in 5 (82%) think a "lost generation of students"<sup>4</sup> will be a problem for employers in Canada, including around a quarter (26%) who think it will be a *large* problem. Two-thirds of Canadians (67%) 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," Canadians most commonly say the individuals themselves are responsible. This is followed by the Ministry of Education, educators (e.g., teachers, school administrators, etc.), parents of the individuals, and employers.

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



<sup>4</sup> 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. More than 9 in 10 Canadians (92%) 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 allow employees to work from home.

#### 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. Nearly a quarter of Canadians (24%) know someone that left the workforce entirely during the COVID-19 pandemic. Two-thirds (66%) agree that between people retiring earlier and the lost generation of students, the workforce is in trouble.

#### **Continual Learning in the Current Workforce Is Vital**

***The importance of continual learning is clear, and some Canadians furthered their education during the pandemic.***

With the breadth of challenges that employers face, skill refreshment is more important than ever. Most Canadians believe employees in general must “refresh” their hard skills to stay competitive in the current workforce (88%) 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 (82%).

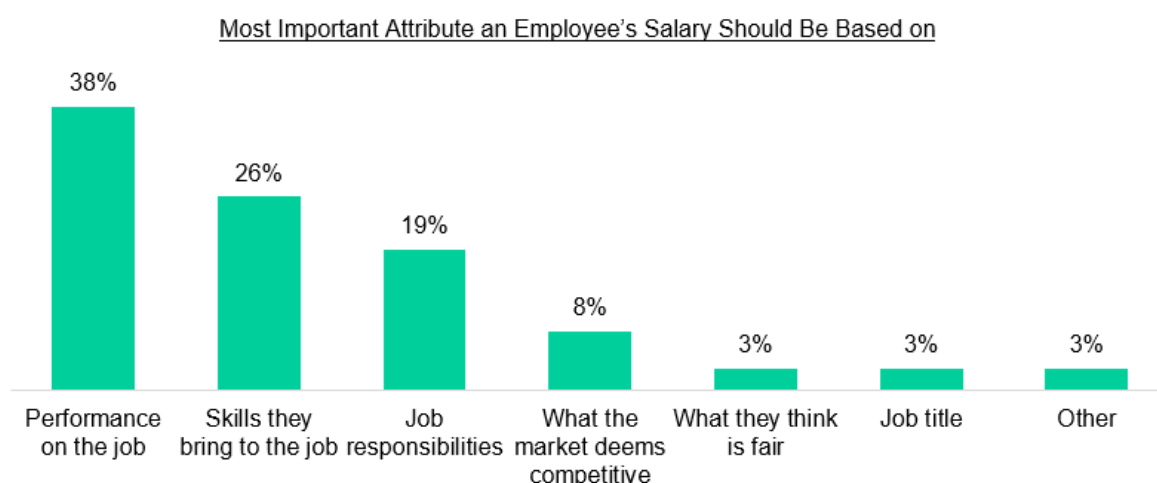
While there is a general consensus on the importance of continual learning, Canadians are split on who is responsible for driving this. Around half say it’s the employee’s responsibility to find training programs to refresh one’s skills (53%) while others think it’s the employer’s responsibility (47%). Further, no one party is overwhelmingly responsible for identifying the skills necessary to advance in a career – 50% say employees are responsible for this but the other half (50%) say employers are responsible; employed Canadians are more likely than those who are not employed to say this is their responsibility (54% vs. 45%).

Nonetheless, some people used time during the pandemic to further their education. Around a quarter of Canadians know someone that went back to school<sup>5</sup> (24%) or signed up for continuing education, beyond degree programs (24%) during the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, employed Canadians are more likely than those who are not employed to know someone that did each of these (went back to school: 31% vs. 17%; signed up for continuing education: 34% vs. 14%).

### Skills Are More Important than Degrees When Setting a Salary

***Many Canadians say a college degree isn't necessary to make a good living; an employee's performance on the job and skills are the top factors a salary should be based on.***

Canadians 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.



Given that around half of Canadians (51%) think current students will enter the workforce with different skills – either with less skills (40%) or more skills (11%) – than current entry-level workers have, nearly a third think they should be paid less (32%); 1 in 5 (20%) think they should be paid more.

When it comes to deciding an employee's pay, the majority (71%) believe it is an employer's responsibility to decide what a fair salary is. Notably, this increases by age with younger adults the least likely to think this is the employer's responsibility (18-34: 57%, 35-44: 67%, 45-54: 71%, 55+: 82%). Also, Canadians who are not employed are more likely than those who are employed to say this is the employer's responsibility (76% vs. 67%). 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 two-thirds (70%) agree you don't need a college degree to make a good living. Further, the majority (84%) agree employees who continually refresh their skills should make more money than those who do not.

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