



To: Emily Lockwood, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

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Re: Youth Identity Formation Among Black, Hispanic and Low-Income White Young People Related to Education and Work: Key Findings from Youth Survey

This analysis is based on an online nationwide survey conducted in September 2019 that integrated and expanded upon our qualitative findings from the focus groups and in-depth interviews. The survey was conducted among 3,545 young people ages 15 to 21, including:

- 495 white females and 583 white males
- 486 Black females and 451 Black males
- 499 Hispanic females and 398 Hispanic males
- 158 Asian-Pacific Islander females and 146 Asian-Pacific Islander males
- 26 Native American females and 23 Native American males
- 109 females and 46 males who identify with two or more ethnic groups

Introduction and Overview

This survey provided an important opportunity to quantify the qualitative results from our focus groups and in-depth interviews, and allowed us to further explore issues related to identity formation, education and work goals, and how young people perceive opportunities and challenges related to race and gender.

The overall story emerging from these survey results validates what we saw and heard in our qualitative research, which is that many of today's young people feel that they are (mostly) all right. Many young people express a high degree of confidence that they can, and will, achieve their post-secondary education and career goals, a degree of confidence that is fairly high among Black, Hispanic, and white young people alike. Notably, however, the level of optimism does decrease along with their self-reported household income level.

Many young people do say they face challenges, especially young Black and Hispanic people, and those from lower-income households. For example, 39 percent of the young people in our survey report having negative experiences in high school, a proportion that is fairly consistent across gender, race and income subgroups. In addition, Black young people report receiving less support from teachers about their job and career goals compared to young people overall.

These survey results nevertheless suggest that most young people are both adept at recognizing these challenges, and proficient at seeking support from other people to help navigate them. Many young Black and Hispanic youth report getting advice or guidance from a person or people in their life about how to navigate society as a person of color, and most young people in general benefit from people in their lives who help them accomplish their goals.

In addition, fully three quarters (75%) of young people say they feel very clear (42%) or somewhat clear (33%) about their job and career goals. Nearly half (46%) say they both know what they want to do for their work or career and *also* know the specific steps they need to take to get there. Moreover, almost three-quarters (74%) of young people indicate they intend to pursue some type of post-secondary education after high school (or within the next few years if not currently attending high school), despite being very concerned about student debt.

To be sure, these survey data reveal obstacles to youth success. At the same time, however, they also show that many young people are confident about their ability to overcome those obstacles.

An Optimistic Outlook for the Future

A majority of young people express optimism about their future, with approximately nine in ten (89%) respondents indicating they are optimistic overall. Two-thirds (66%) say they are extremely (33%) or very (33%) optimistic that they can achieve the kind of life they want, while another 23 percent say they are somewhat optimistic. This high overall level of optimism can be found among both male (89%) and female (90%) respondents, as well among Black (90%), Hispanic (91%), Asian-Pacific Islander (85%), and white (89%) respondents.

However, significant age and race differences emerge when looking at the intensity measures. For example, 74 percent of Black young people indicate feeling *extremely* or *very* optimistic that they can achieve the kind of life they want, compared to just 48 percent of Asian-Pacific Islander young people. The breakouts below show the proportion of *extremely* or *very* optimistic responses by race and gender:

- Black female 75%
- Black male 73

- Hispanic female 67
- Hispanic male 68

- White female 63
- White male 67

- Asian-Pacific Islander female 45
- Asian-Pacific Islander male 52

- Multiple race/ethnic¹ female 68
- Multiple race/ethnic male 63

The results for being *extremely* or *very* optimistic also show important differences by age, with young people ages 15 to 16 expressing higher levels of optimism than older youth:

- Male ages 15 to 16 75%
- Female ages 15 to 16 72
- Male ages 17 to 18 73
- Female ages 17 to 18 64

¹ “Multiple race/ethnicity” refers to respondents who identify equally with two or more races or ethnic groups.

- Male ages 19 to 21 61
- Female ages 19 to 21 64

While these age results suggest that experiences later in their young lives might dull their hope for the future to some degree, it is notable that only nine percent of young people ages 19 to 21 indicate they are only a little optimistic (6%) or not optimistic at all (3%).

Additional breakouts below show the proportion of *extremely* or *very* optimistic responses by age and race (ranked by level of optimism within each age cohort):

- Black ages 15 to 16 78%
- White ages 15 to 16 77
- Hispanic ages 15 to 16 74
- Multiple race/ethnic ages 15 to 16 63
- Asian-Pacific Islander ages 15 to 16 57

- Black ages 17 to 18 75
- Multiple race/ethnic age 17 to 18 70
- Hispanic ages 17 to 18 69
- White ages 17 to 18 66
- Asian-Pacific Islander ages 17 to 18 51

- Black ages 19 to 21 71
- Multiple race/ethnic ages 19 to 21 66
- Hispanic ages 19 to 21 63
- White ages 19 to 21 57
- Asian-Pacific Islander ages 19 to 21 43

The finale set of breakouts below show the proportion of *extremely* or *very* optimistic responses by race and income, showing a decrease in optimism by income level within each racial/ethnic group:

- Black - High Income 82%
- Black - Middle Income 74
- Black - Low Income 71

- Hispanic- High Income 78
- Hispanic - Middle Income 68
- Hispanic - Low Income 62

- White - High Income 83
- White - Middle Income 66
- White - Low Income 49

Challenges to Overcome

While most Black and Hispanic young people exhibit considerable optimism about their future, they nevertheless report facing challenges that their white counterparts do not. For example, 64 percent of Black male and 69 percent of Black female respondents report there are certain things about being a Black male, or Black female, that they need to navigate, or deal with in certain ways. In addition, sizable proportions of Black (25%), Hispanic (20%), and Asian-Pacific Islander (14%) young people say their race limits them in education and work.

Getting Guidance and Support Along the Way

Fortunately, many young people of color report getting advice or guidance from a person or people in their life about how to navigate their race and gender in a society with structural inequalities. For example, 65 percent of Black female respondents report getting advice or guidance about how to be Black and female in the world, while 61 percent of Black male young people report getting advice about how to be Black and male in the world. This kind of advice and guidance occurs less frequently for Hispanics and Asian-Pacific Islander young people, however. A lower 47 percent of Hispanics and 40 percent of Asian-Pacific Islander young people report getting guidance related to their race and gender.

Many Hispanic and Black young people also report that they have people in their lives who help them accomplish their goals. For example, 61 percent of Black respondents indicate their parent or guardian helps them accomplish their goals. On the other hand, 21 percent of Black respondents say their parent or guardian gets in the way of them accomplishing their goals. Hispanic respondents report similar levels of support (63% say their parent or guardian helps versus 18% who say they get in the way).

Along similar lines, far more Black and Hispanic young people see their teachers, friends, school counselors and other family members as helping them accomplish their goals than see them as getting in their way.

Clear Plans for the Future

Fully three quarters of young people feel very clear (42%) or somewhat clear (33%) about their job and career goals. Focusing solely on those who feel *very* clear about their goals, Black young people (47%)—especially Black females (50%)—are more likely than average to indicate feeling very clear about their job and career goals. Not far behind are Hispanics, with 43 percent feeling very clear about their job and career goals (and another 33% feeling somewhat clear), results that are generally consistent across gender and age.

The results among white respondents vary significantly by gender, with 46 percent of white males feeling very clear about their job and career goals, compared to just 36 percent among white females. Asian-Pacific Islander young people are least likely to feel very clear about their job and career goals (26%), especially Asian-Pacific Islander females (20%) and Asian-Pacific Islander young people under 19-years-old (19%).

At the same time, only seven percent of respondents indicate that their career goals do not feel clear *at all*, results that are largely consistent by gender (6% male; 8% female), by race (8% white; 5% Black; 8% Hispanic; 10% Asian-Pacific Islander), and by age (8% ages 15 to 16; 7% ages 17 to 18; 7% ages 19 to 21).

Strong Intentions for Post-Secondary Education

A majority (60%) of respondents think they will seek some type of higher education after high school (or, if not currently attending high school, in the next two or three years). More than a third (36%) plan to attend a four-year college or university, 14 percent plan to attend a two-year community or junior college, and another 10 percent plan to attend a technical school, vocational school, trade school, or career school to get a degree or certificate.

The proportion of respondents planning to attend college is especially high among young people ages 15 to 16, with over half (54%) intending to attend a four-year college or university after high school. Black (58%), Hispanic (51%) and white (52%) respondents in this age range all express similar expectations for college after high school. However, this expectation drops considerably when young people reach ages 17 to 18. Among respondents ages 17 to 18, only 40 percent expect to attend a four-year college or university after high school (or in the next few years). This drop off from ages 15 to 16 to ages 17 to 18 is especially prominent among Black and Hispanic young people—the proportion of Black respondents who expect to attend a four-year college or university decreases 22 points from 58 percent to 36 percent; among Hispanics it drops 15 points from 51 percent to 36 percent.

Diverse Career Preferences

The career preferences of these young people are amazingly diverse. Asked to select their first choice for the main type of job or career they want to do in the future, only one category—health care (12%) was selected by more than ten percent of our survey respondents.

bs like doctor, nurse, medical/dental assistant, chiropractor, pharmacist, therapist, etc.)	12%
thematics (jobs like IT services, computer science, statistics, etc.)	7
od Industry (jobs like restaurant owner, server, host/hostess, dishwasher, restaurant cashier, chef, cook, busser, bartender, etc.)	6
ntertainment, (jobs like acting, directing, etc.)	6
nce (jobs like banking, accounting, financial advising, entrepreneurship, etc.)	5
obs like store clerk, travel agent, sales agent/representative, cashier, grocery stocker, etc.)	5
strative Support (jobs like bookkeeping, billing, office manager, data entry, office assistant, receptionist, etc.)	5
(jobs like yard work, housekeeper, janitorial, handyman, car wash attendant)	4
Engineering (jobs like architect, civil engineer, mechanical engineer, etc.)	4
ining, or Library (jobs like being a teacher or a librarian)	3
related Jobs (blogger, YouTuber, influencer)	3
alism or Media (author, online or print newspaper writer/reporter, magazine writer, editor, news producer)	3
jobs like biologist, veterinarian, genetics, etc.)	2
id/or Social Service (jobs like social worker, police officer, clergy/religious work, etc.)	2
e lawyer, paralegal, judge, etc.)	2
ts Management (jobs like a professional athlete, sports agent, etc.)	2
where you are a member of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, or Coast Guard)	2
Installation, or Maintenance (skilled jobs like carpenter, HVAC technician, auto mechanic, etc.)	2
-school, daycare, or nursery school teacher/assistant, full- or part-time nanny)	2
ce (jobs like chemist, physicist, astronomist, etc.)	2
s (jobs involving things like anthropology, sociology, political science, etc.)	2

ad Marketing (ad sales, PR, promotions)	1
es and Recreation (camp counselor, lifeguard, swim instructor, movie theater/bowling alley/amusement park job, coach, referee, rec center job)	1
g (jobs making things like car parts, clothes, air conditioners, furniture, etc.)	1
ng, or Forestry (jobs like agriculture worker, animal breeder, logger, conservationist, etc.)	1
Jobs (babysitting, dog walking, pet sitting, house sitting, tutoring)	1
alet, food delivery, Lyft/uber/taxi driver, Instacart)	1
n (jobs like truck driver, pilot, air traffic controller, bus/train operator, etc.)	1
	6
	8

While young people's career selections are generally diverse across demographic subgroups, some key demographic difference emerge. For example, female respondents are significantly more likely to choose a health care career (18%) compared to males (6%). These diverging gender preferences for a career in health care are consistent across Black, Hispanic, Asian-Pacific Islander and white respondents, although Black and white respondents differ significantly in the health care career preferences by age. Specifically, Black respondents ages 15 to 16 are significantly more likely to choose health care (18%) than are Black respondents ages 19 to 21 (8%). Conversely, white respondents ages 19 to 21 are significantly more likely to choose health care (12%) than are younger white respondents age 15 to 16 (6%).

Notably, over one third (34%) of Asian-Pacific Islander males prefer to work in computers/mathematics (25%) or engineering/architecture (10%), compared to only 11 percent of young people overall (and just 9% of Asian-Pacific Islander female respondents) who want to work in computers/mathematics or engineering/architecture. Interestingly, six percent of Asian-Pacific Islander females indicate a desire to pursue a career in writing, journalism or media (which is twice the amount for overall young people overall), whereas not a single Asian-Pacific Islander male respondent out of 146 in the survey expressed a preference for this type of career.

Native Americans report another significant difference, with 16 percent expressing a desire to pursue a career in arts, design and entertainment, nearly three times the six percent of young people overall who indicate a preference for this career.

Flexible Career Plans

A sizable proportion of young people envision flexible career and work paths. For example, a quarter of young people see themselves having one main job and *also* having some kind of side job or work. Over one-quarter (27%) of young people expect they will have a series of different careers over the course of their lives, rather than just one main career.

Respondents ages 19 to 21 are more likely than younger respondents to envision more career flexibility. For example, 27 percent of respondents ages 19 to 21 see themselves as having a side job compared to 21 percent among respondents ages 15 to 16. Likewise, 30 percent of respondents ages 19 to 21 expect to have a series of different careers over the course of their lives, compared to 21 percent among respondents ages 15 to 16.

Income levels do appear to impact these young people's intention to hold a side job, although perhaps not as greatly as one might expect. For example, 29 percent of respondents from lower-income households say they plan to also have some kind of side job, just six percentage points higher than the 23 percent of respondents from higher-income households who say the same. It is notable that

in our qualitative research, many youth reported that they expected to have a main career to earn a good living while they also pursue a passion or interest they hold.

Talking About Life Goals

Nearly three quarters of young people report talking to someone about their life goals, with female respondents (78%) more likely than male respondents (70%) to report talking to someone about their life goals. In addition, Black and white female respondents are some of the most likely subgroups to report having these conversations (80% and 82% respectively), while Asian-Pacific Islander males (63%) are among the least likely to do so.

Age matters as well, with younger respondents ages 15 to 16 being more likely to report talking to someone about their life goals than are respondents ages 19-21 (81% versus 71%). These results suggest that opportunities for such discussions may diminish after high school, a drop off that is more pronounced among Hispanic and white young people:

- Hispanic: 14-point drop off (ages 15 to 16: 82% yes; ages 19 to 21: 68% yes)
- White: 15-point drop off (ages 15 to 16: 86%; ages 19 to 21: 71%)

These age differences may in part be related to it being easier for younger people ages 15 to 16 to talk to their parents given most are still living at home, combined with more young people perhaps having their life goals more figured out by age 18. For example, among respondents ages 15 to 16, 93 percent indicate this conversation is with their parents. By contrast, 80 percent and 65 percent of respondents ages 17 to 18 and ages 19 to 21 respectively indicate this conversation is with their parents.

As young people age, however, their spouse or partner becomes a substitute discussant for parents. Among respondents ages 15 to 16, nine percent indicate this conversation is with their spouse or partner. By contrast, 23 percent and 38 percent of respondents ages 17 to 18 and ages 19 to 21 respectively indicate this conversation is with their spouse or partner.

Note, however, that female young people are more likely than are male young people to tap their partner or spouse (31% among female respondents versus 21% among male respondents). By contrast, there are only minimal gender differences when it comes to young people talking to their parents (76% female; 75% male). Similarly, female respondents are 10 percentage points more likely to talk to their friends about life goals than are male respondents (53% female versus 44% male), a difference that is especially prominent among Black respondents (10-point spread), white respondents (11-point spread), and Asian-Pacific Islander respondents (15-point spread).

In addition, Asian-Pacific Islander (26%) and white (22%) young people are significantly more likely to say that they talk to a school counselor about their life goals than are Black (17%) or Hispanic (15%) young people. A similar, albeit somewhat less stark pattern emerges when looking at the results for conversations with teachers (white 23%; Asian-Pacific Islander 21%, Black 20%; Hispanic 17%). Notably, within Asian-Pacific Islander respondents, Asian-Pacific Islander females are significantly more likely to talk to teachers (23%) and counselors (30%) than are Asian-Pacific Islander males (17%/22%).

Barriers to Sharing

Importantly, nearly one quarter (23%) of survey respondents report not talking to anyone about their life goals. Male respondents are more likely than female respondents to report the absence of these conversations—especially male respondents who are Hispanic or Asian-Pacific Islander. In

addition, young people from lower-income households are significantly more likely to report not having these conversations than are young people from higher-income households.

In the survey, we randomly asked 30 respondents who report not having these conversations to list one or two reasons they do not talk to anyone about their life goals. Frequently cited reasons include a desire to keep their plans to themselves, a fear of failure or negative judgement, a belief that no one would care anyway, or a reluctance to talk about their life goals until they have a clear idea what those life goals are. The verbatim comments below are especially illustrative:

"No nobody wants to." — Black male, age 15

"I feel like my goals are unimportant, or I won't achieve them." — South Asian female, age 16

"My parents think being a youtuber is silly and I won't make stable income from it."
— South Asian male, age 18

"Fear of failure." — South Asian male, age 18

"I'm scared of how they would think about it." — Black male, age 21

"People can judge or be mean based on what you want to do with your life."
— white female, age 20

"Unsure of what I want to do." — Hispanic female, age 21

"My life goals are just that. MY life goals. I do not feel the need to share my life goals because that isn't ensuring or helping me achieve them anymore or any less."
—Black and Native American female, age 21

"Because no one cares about me." — Black female, age 21

Supporters in Their Lives

Many young people report receiving support from different people in their lives, with most of the support coming from friends and family. For example, more than four in five (81%) young people feel their friends and parents/guardians understand them as a person. Less frequently cited sources of support are summarized below, with each tier ranked in order based on how frequently young people cite these individuals as supporters. In this ranking, friends and parents/guardians occupy the top/most frequently cited tier of supporters, following by other family members in the second tier of supporters, and so on. These tier listings also note distinctions by race and gender, although one overarching is that fewer Asian-Pacific Islander young people say the people in their lives understand and support them.

Top tier of supporters

- Your parent or guardian (more frequently cited by white young people)
- Friends (more frequently cited by white young people)

Second tier of supporters

- Other adult family members (more frequently cited by white young people)

Third tier of supporters

- Partner, spouse, or girlfriend/boyfriend (more frequently cited by Black and Hispanic young people)
- Most teachers at school (more frequently cited by male respondents, especially white and Black young people)
- School counselor(s) (more frequently cited by Black young people)
- Adult(s) at school who is not a teacher or school counselor (more frequently cited by male respondents, especially Black males)
- Different adults you know outside of school (more frequently cited by male respondents, especially white males)

Fourth tier of supporters

- Sports coach(es) (more frequently cited by male respondents)
- Co-workers
- Your boss, manager or supervisor
- Pastor, priest, rabbi, imam, or another religious leader (more frequently cited by Black young people)

Talking to Parents about Life After High School

Nearly three in four young people (73%) report that their parent or guardian regularly talks to them (or did talk to them if they are no longer in high school) about their next steps after high school. White, Black, and Hispanic young people report similar occurrences of parent conversations, while Asian-Pacific Islander are significantly less likely to say these conversations happen.

While the plurality (41%) of young people report that in these conversations they and their parents/guardians talk in equal amounts, nearly a third (32%) say their parents/guardians do most of the talking in these conversations. By contrast, just 25 percent of young people say they do most of the talking in these discussions.

Male respondents are significantly more likely to say their parents/guardians do most of the talking (37%) compared to female young people (27%). Asian-Pacific Islander young people are more likely to report that their parent does/did most of the talking (41%),

Most of these conversations (73%) revolve around going to college or getting more education, especially among young people ages 15 to 16 (82%). Female respondents are significantly more likely than are male respondents to report having this conversation about education (78% to 69%). Among Black and Hispanic young people, 70 percent and 71 percent respectively report having conversations with their parents about college.

Factoring in both race and gender leads to stark differences. For example, 86 percent of white females report talking to their parents about education options compared to only 66 percent and 67 percent of Black and Asian-Pacific Islander males respectively.

White young people (58%) are more likely than Black (50%) and Hispanic (53%) to report having a conversation with their parents about finding their career, but fewer subgroup differences emerge when the topic turns to getting a job (a topic of conversation for 54 percent of young people and their parents).

Despite some variation by topic and demographics, the vast majority (83%) of young people say

these conversations are very (53%) or somewhat (30%) helpful. Notably, similarly high proportions of white, Black and Hispanic young people view these conversations as helpful.

Going it Alone

While young people often indicate they value support from others in their lives, more than half (53%) think it is ultimately going to be *mostly up to them* to achieve the kind of job or career they want. By contrast, about a third (37%) believe they will need help from other people.

Interestingly, differences by race, gender, and income on this question are minimal, although the proportion who says it is going to be mostly up to them increases among older young people, with 56 percent of young people ages 19 to 21 feeling this way compared to 48 percent among young people ages 15-16. We find this age pattern intriguing given our focus groups among older participants ages 26 to 29. In those focus groups, many of these older participants had come to recognize that achieving their work and career goals required them to rely *more* on other people, not *less*. As such, we wonder if this pattern would have been confirmed quantitatively if our survey sample had included those throughout their 20s.

Navigating Their Career Path

Nearly half (46%) of these youth respondents say they know what they want to do for their work or career *and* also know the specific steps they need to take to get there, while another 28 percent say they know what they want to do for their work or career but are not sure about the specific steps they need to take to get there. Less than a quarter (22%) are not sure about what they want to do for their work or career, with 15 percent saying they have a good idea about the steps they can take to explore and learn about different options that would be a good fit, and another seven percent who are not sure about the steps they can take to explore and learn about different options that would be a good fit.

I know what I want to do for my work or career, and I also know the specific steps I need to take to get there	
I know what I want to do for my work or career, but I am <u>not</u> sure about the specific steps I need to take to get there	
I am <u>not</u> sure about what I want to do for my work or career, but I have a good idea about the steps I can take to explore and learn about different options that would be a good fit for me	
I am <u>not</u> sure what I want to do for my work or career, and I am also <u>not</u> sure about what steps I can take to explore and learn about different options that would be a good fit for me	
Unsure	

Focusing solely on those who say they know what they want to do for their work *and* also know the specific steps they need to take to get there, this belief tends to be higher among male respondents (49%) than female respondents (43%).

Seeking Information and Guidance on How to Get There

Nearly two thirds (63%) of young people say they have an extremely or very good idea of where to look for information to learn how they can achieve their future job, work or career goals, whereas only nine percent of young people report not having a very good idea of where to look for information.

Native American young people express particularly high levels of confidence here, with 72 percent indicating they have an extremely or very good idea of where to look for information. Black young people—both female (67%) and male (65%)—say they have an extremely or very good idea of where to look for information. White young people diverge somewhat by gender, with white males (70%) more likely than females (62%) to say they have an extremely or very good idea of where to look for information. Gender differences among Hispanic young people are minimal, with Hispanic males (63%) just somewhat more likely than Hispanic females (60%) to say they have an extremely or very good idea of where to look for information.

By contrast, under half of Asian-Pacific Islander young people (47%)—and fewer female Asian-Pacific Islander respondents (44%)—indicate they have an extremely or very good idea of where to look for information to learn how they can achieve their future job, work or career goals. At the same time, however, only 13 percent of Asian-Pacific Islander respondents report not having a very good idea of where to look for information (9%) or no idea whatsoever where to look for information (4%).

Just over three quarters (76%) report having looked for information, advice or help with job, work, or career, with female respondents (79%) more likely than males to say they have looked for information. By contrast, Asian-Pacific Islander male respondents (66%) are one of the least likely groups to seek information.

Among those who have looked for information, advice or help with job, work, or career, the most popular source for information is online (60%)—with Google and other search engines being the dominant online resources cited. Teachers represent the second most frequently cited resource (43% of young people cite them as a resource). Asian-Pacific Islander respondents (48%), white respondents (47%) and Hispanic respondents (43%) are more likely to look to teachers for information than are Black (38%) or Native American (29%) young people.

The third most frequently cited resource is in-person visits to an organization or club (40%), followed by school counselors (39%), job fairs (33%), library (16%), and other vocational services at school (13%). Female respondents more frequently seek out information from school counselors (42% among female compared to 35% among males). Asian-Pacific Islander young people appear especially interested in using job fairs to look for information, with 42 percent reporting doing so compared to 33 percent overall.

Respondents feel largely positive about their information searches, with most searches (68%) focused on how long it takes to get the education/certification to have the job they are researching, followed by how much those programs cost (52%) and how long they take. Other popular searches include pay scales in different jobs (44%), current job openings (37%), and tests that match skills to certain careers (30%).

Giving Information, Advice or Help to Others

Just over half (53%) say they have given someone they know information, advice or help with job, work, or career. Black (58%) and Hispanic (57%) young people are more likely to report sharing information and advice, while Asian-Pacific Islander (47%) and Native American (46%) are less likely. The vast majority (80%) of information given is shared with friends, although 37 percent say they have given career advice to parents.

In our online focus groups, participants there greatly appreciated opportunities to offer career and education advice to others. Results in this survey mirror those in the online focus groups, with 85 percent of survey respondents describing these sharing experiences as positive—and over half (54%) describing these experiences as *very* positive. These results are largely consistent across race, gender and age, although young people ages 15-16 are especially enthusiastic about these experiences (93% report positive experiences).

Connections Valued Over Social Capital

We asked the young people in our survey to review a list of phrases—“Connections,” “Networks,” “Mentors,” and “Social Capital”—and assess how helpful it is to have each in terms of their career or future career. The results among these respondents indicate that young people are more likely to value “Connections” over “Networks,” and value “Mentors” over “Social Capital.” These perceptions remain largely consistent by race and gender, although age is an exception.

	extremely or very helpful	extremely or very helpful among very low household incomes	extremely or very helpful among higher household incomes
	74%	68%	82%
	66	60	77
	65	58	72
	46	42	60

Young people ages 15 to 16 are significantly more likely to see Mentors as extremely or very helpful (73%) compared to those ages 19 to 21 (59%). In addition, young people who grew up in higher income households are significantly more likely to view all four components as helpful to their career.

Notably, however, these income differences are significantly more pronounced among white young people (e.g., 59% of whites with lower household incomes see Networks as extremely or very helpful versus 85% for whites with higher household incomes), but less noticeable (albeit still present) among Black and Hispanic young people.

Positive Experiences with High School Teachers

A strong majority of young people (61%) feel that their high school teachers have (or had) their best interest at heart, compared to just 23 percent of young people who feel like their high school teachers did not have their best interest at heart.

While these results are generally consistent by race and gender, young people from higher-income households are significantly more likely to feel like their high school teachers have (or have had) their best interest at heart. For example, 75 percent of young people from higher-income households feel like their high school teachers have (or have had) their best interest at heart, compared to 49

percent of young people with very low household incomes — a gap of more than 25 percentage points.

Most young people can report positive experiences with teachers, with seven in ten (70%) indicating that they have (or have had) relationships or experiences with high school teachers that were especially positive. By contrast, just 19 percent of young people report that they did *not* have a positive experience with their high school teachers. These positive high school teacher experiences remain consistent across most race and gender subgroups, with the exception of Native American young people who are significantly less likely (44%) to report having had a positive high school teacher experience than the 70 percent of young people overall.

Young people report that their high school teachers offered them support or guidance in a variety of areas, including school work (71%), college or future education (57%), personal issues (45%), job or career (36%), and sports (17%). However, Black (30%) and Hispanic (35%) young people report receiving significantly less support with their job or career compared to white young people (41%).

Most young people (63%) report having at least one teacher who really supported them in high school, with 40 percent reporting having more than one really supportive teacher. Young people point to a wide variety of high school teachers who support (or supported) them, including those who teach English, math, science, history, and the arts.

Significant demographic differences emerge when it comes to levels of high school teacher support, however. Hispanic young people are less likely to have more than one really supportive teacher (35%) compared to Black (41%) or white (44%) young people. Income definitely plays a role here as well, with higher income young people being more likely to report having more than one really supportive teacher. For example, over half (53%) of young people from households with higher incomes report having more than one really supportive teacher, compared to 34 percent of young people with very low household incomes.

Negative Experiences with High School Teachers

While young people describe many positive experiences with their high school teachers, approximately two in five young people (39%) nevertheless have (or had) notably negative relationships or experiences with their high school teachers. Notably, the proportion of young people reporting having negative experiences is consistent across gender, race and income subgroups.

In an open-ended question asking about these negative experiences, young people described teachers who were unfair, rude, mean, or just generally disinterested in teaching. Some illustrative quotes are provided below:

“The teacher constantly shut down when anyone was misbehaving, took it out on the whole class, eventually gave up on her job.” — South Asian female, age 16

“I have this illness and they were rude to me about it they weren’t understanding and they’d make fun of me and single me out in front of everyone.” — white female, age 20

“Just them being mean for no reason at all.” — Native American female, age 18

“Some don’t care to teach.” — Hispanic female, age 20

Career Preparation in High School

About three quarters of young people say their high school is (or was) doing extremely well (21%), very well (25%), or somewhat well (27%) in preparing them to be successful at the work or career they have or will have.

Notably, both Black male and female young people report similar levels of career preparation in high school (50% say their high school does extremely or very well at career prep). Gender differences emerge among Hispanic and white young people, however, with Hispanic (42%) and white females (37%) less likely than Hispanic (51%) and white (56%) males to say their high school does extremely or very well preparing them for their work or career.

In addition, the results diverge sharply by income. For example, 67 percent of young people from households with higher incomes say their high school does extremely or very well preparing them for their work or career, compared to only 36 percent of young people with lower household incomes.

About half of young people (51%) report receiving support services or counseling for future work or career possibilities, results that are generally consistent for Black, Hispanic and white young people. Male respondents are somewhat more likely to receive support, a pattern that is especially pronounced among Asian-Pacific Islander respondents. Over half (51%) of Asian-Pacific Islander male young people report receiving support, while just 39 percent of female Asian-Pacific Islander young people say the same. Likewise, young people from higher income households report more support (59%) than young people from lower income households (50%).

Having these support services or counseling for future work or career possibilities makes a very strong impact on young people. Among young people who report receiving this kind of career support, the vast majority (85%) describe this support as having a positive impact on their future career—with nearly half (44%) reporting these services having a *very* positive impact.

High School Voc Tech (or Vo-Tech) Programs

Just over half of Black (56%), Hispanic (54%) and white (55%) young people say their high schools have (or had) career, vocational, technical or internship programs where they could get hands-on experiences with different jobs or industries. While young people from higher income schools are somewhat more likely to report these programs in their high school, still over half (53%) of lower income young people report their high schools having these programs.

A majority of students (57%) say that they take advantage of these programs, but two in five (40%) do not. Participation rates are similar for Black, Hispanic and white young people, although young people from lower income households participate at lower rates than young people from higher income households.

Importantly, these programs appear to make a major difference in the career trajectories of young people. Among young people who had participated in career, vocational, technical or internship programs, 81 percent feel they were extremely helpful (52%) or very helpful (29%) in terms of helping them choose their career path or learn more about careers they would or would not want to pursue.

"I thought that these programs gave me insight and a sense of direction. I also like that these programs were available 24 hours a day 7 days a week." — Black female, age 16

"I have learned good skills and how to work with others." — Black male, age 16

*“I got to shadow a veterinarian and observe surgeries and other animal healthcare procedures.”
— white female age 17*

“I got to see how the real business world works. I got to talk with people who do what I want to do as a career and it inspired me.” — Hispanic male, age 17

*“It gave you experience for the future, and helped you know if it was something you enjoyed.”
— Native American female, age 20*

Participating in these career, vocational, technical or internship programs not only causes young people to *feel* these programs helped them choose their career path, they also impact young people’s sense of optimism and confidence that they will ultimately achieve their goals. For example, well over half (58%) of voc tech participants indicate that their job or career goals feel very clear to them, whereas just 39 percent of young people who attended a high school with these programs—but who did *not* participate in them—feel this way. Likewise, nearly two thirds of program participants (65%) know what they want to do for their work or career—and *also* know the specific steps they need to take to get there—while less than half (46%) of non-participants possess the same level of clarity. Finally, young people who participated in voc tech programs are significantly more likely to feel extremely optimistic about achieving the kind of life they want (45%), compared to only 32 percent among young people who did not participate.

College Largely Seen as Worth It

Thinking about the potential benefits and potential downsides of going to college, more than four times as many young people (72%) believe going to college is or would be personally worth it, compared to those who do not think going to college is worth it (16%). While Black, white, Hispanic and Asian-Pacific Islander young people generally share this view, the differences by gender are striking. For example, 78 percent of Black females think college is worth it compared to 64 percent of Black males. Similar patterns emerge among Hispanic females (78%) and Hispanic males (68%), white females (78%) and white males (70%), and Asian-Pacific Islander females (80%) and Asian-Pacific Islander males (70%).

Income plays a significant role here as well. Eighty-five percent (85%) of respondents from higher-income households believe college is worth it, compared to 75 percent among respondents from middle-income households and 64 percent of respondents from lower-income households.

Strong majorities view college as extremely or very valuable at preparing them for a career with skills, knowledge, or experiences (73%), as well as helping them identify their strengths and weaknesses (71%), exposing them to new kinds of people or ideas (70%), helping them find a job or career (69%), and encouraging them to think creatively (69%).

Black, white and Hispanic young people generally agree on the value of college, although Black young people (67%)—and Black males in particular (63%)—are significantly less likely than white young people (79%) or Hispanic young people (72%) to see college as extremely or very valuable at preparing them for a career with skills, knowledge, or experiences.

More young people (74%) know someone who went to college and who was happy with that decision, than know someone who went to college and who regretted that decision (49%). However, approximately the same proportion of young people (61%) know someone who decided *not* to go to

college and who was happy with that decision, as the proportion who know someone who decided not to go to college and who regretted that decision (60%).

College Debt Weighs Heavily

Despite believing strongly in the benefits of a college education, three quarters (75%) of young people are concerned—extremely concerned (33%), very concerned (22%), or somewhat concerned (20%)—about having college debt. These high levels of concern cut across race, age, and gender—and are even prevalent among young people with higher household income levels.

Among those who are attending college (or who have already attended college), 60 percent feel very weighed down by student debt. Nearly a third (29%) report feeling weighed down a huge amount, with another 32 percent saying they feel weighed down a fair amount. Notably, only 15 percent of college attendees do not feel weighed down by student debt at all.

Nearly two thirds of Black young people (65%) and Hispanic young people (62%) feel weighed down by a huge or fair amount of debt, compared to 58 percent of white young people. Notably, nearly an equivalent percentage of young people from lower-income households (63%) and young people from higher-income households (62%) feel weighed down by a huge or fair amount of debt.

A Caveat Related to Survey Findings about Asian-Pacific Islander and Native American Young People

As noted above, this survey includes Asian-Pacific Islander and Native American young people. While their inclusion yields valuable insights into these two populations, their relatively smaller sample sizes limits our ability for analysis of these groups. In addition, our initial qualitative research did *not* include Asian-Pacific Islander and Native American young people, thereby painting an incomplete picture of young people of color across the U.S.

Nevertheless, these survey results suggest there is an important opportunity for continued and targeted research to learn more about the unique experiences of Asian-Pacific Islander and Native American young people, and how they compare and contrast with what we have learned from about young people who identify as Black, Hispanic and white.

Conclusion

Stepping back, we are deeply grateful that over 3,500 young people carved out time and effort to answer detailed questions about their lived experiences, their expectations, and their hopes for a good life and career.

Yet, we continue to see evidence that these exploratory conversations about job, work and career can be transformative for young people. With these survey results, we now have quantitative rather than just qualitative evidence about the transformative nature of exploring these issues: 72 percent of survey respondents described their experience answering these survey questions about their future job, work and career as positive, with nearly half (46%) saying their experience was *very* positive. By contrast, only four percent described their survey experience as negative (and just one percent very negative)—a ratio of 18 positive experiences to one negative experience.

Given the transformative nature of these experiences, we recommend facilitating more opportunities for young people to explore these issues, whether the exploration is done taking a survey like this, or in a discussion among peers (which our focus groups suggest is an even more powerful experience). These opportunities could be especially important for young people who are unable to talk to friends,

family, and other adults about their hopes and dreams, or whose high schools do not offer support services or counseling for future work or career possibilities, or high school that lack career, vocational, technical or internship programs where students can get hands-on experiences with different jobs or industries.