

Gen Zers Envision a Bright Future Ahead but Feel Ill-Prepared for it, New Gallup Survey Finds

Voices of Gen Z study shows engagement in the classroom is key indicator of optimism and preparedness, yet nearly every measure of engagement declined YoY

Washington, D.C., August 21, 2024-- Gallup and the Walton Family Foundation today released the [Voices of Gen Z study](#), an annual survey designed to better understand Gen Z's unique perspectives, which reveal ambitions and challenges that are unique among this generation. This nationally representative, multiyear study of thousands of members of Gen Z between the ages of 12 and 27 gives policymakers and researchers an invaluable resource for not only understanding this generation's needs, but for making data-driven decisions to address them.

The findings show that Gen Zers are filled with optimism about what lies ahead, as nearly **8 in 10** Gen Zers agree they have a great future ahead of them. However, only about half (51%) feel prepared for that future.

For Gen Zers in middle and high school, the most important predictor of whether they feel excited about and prepared for their future is the extent to which they feel engaged at school. Nearly every measure of engagement, based on eight different criteria, declined from 2023 to 2024.

The largest drops were in students' being interested in and challenged by what they are learning. More than **4 in 10** Gen Z students do not agree they have learned anything interesting in the past week and over half don't have the opportunity to do schoolwork that aligns with their interests or talents.

The students who are most engaged in school are more than four times as likely as the least-engaged students to strongly agree they have a great future ahead of them and are 10 times more likely to strongly agree they feel prepared for the future. Students who are engaged report feeling like what they are learning in the classroom is interesting, challenging and allows them to leverage their natural talents. Importantly, 60% of Gen Z K-12 students say that when they feel most engaged with what they are learning, it is because their teacher made the topic interesting or exciting.

The Voices of Gen Z study also found that mental health continues to pose a challenge to many Gen Zers and is strongly correlated with overall life evaluation and the outlook on their future. Those with excellent mental health are more than three times as likely to feel prepared for their futures than those with only fair mental health, and about seven times as likely to feel prepared as those who have poor mental health.

“Gen Zers are giving us the roadmap for success: stronger student-teacher bonds, more relevant learning experiences and greater exposure to career opportunities. The more we can do to realize

their vision for K-12 education, the better our system will be,” said Walton Family Foundation Education Program Director Romy Drucker.

Regardless of whether Gen Zers’ goals are to pursue a college education or a non-college pathway after graduation, most do not feel very prepared for their future endeavors. About one-quarter of Gen Z high school students feel they are very prepared to apply to (26%) or succeed (24%) in college. Career prospects are only marginally higher: 29% of Gen Z high school students believe they will be very prepared in the future to succeed in their careers.

The exception to this is when middle and high school students have opportunities to learn job-related skills in school. This leads them to be more confident in their ability to succeed in the future. However, about one-third or less of students say their schools offer opportunities to learn job-related skills, practice applying or interviewing for jobs, or work on projects related to a career they may want.

Similarly, while more than **4 in 10** (43%) Gen Z K-12 students hope to pursue something other than college after high school, fewer than **1 in 4** have had a lot of conversations about non-college pathways such as apprenticeships and internships (23%), careers that don’t require a degree (19%), or entrepreneurship (13%).

“Gen Z K-12 students are feeling unprepared for their future and given only about a quarter are having meaningful conversations about non-college pathways, it’s clear as to why,” said Stephanie Marken, Gallup senior partner for U.S. survey research. “While a postsecondary path makes sense for many, it’s not the right path for all immediately upon high school **graduation**, and what we’re learning from this research is that students are lacking a complete picture of the options available to them upon high school completion.”

METHODOLOGY

Results are based on a Gallup Panel™ web survey conducted April 26-May 9, 2024, with a sample of 4,157 12- to 27-year-olds living in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The Gallup Panel is a probability-based panel of U.S. adults who are randomly selected using address-based sampling methodology. Gallup also recruits using random-digit-dial phone interviews that cover landline and cellphones.

Within the overall sample, 2,364 12- to 19-year-old children were reached through adult members of the Gallup Panel who indicated they had at least one child 18 or younger living in their household; Panel members whose child completed the survey in 2023 were asked to have the same child complete the survey again, even if they were 19 years old. The remaining 1,793 18- to 27-year-old respondents are members of the Gallup Panel.

For the total sample of 4,157 Gen Z respondents, the margin of sampling error is ± 2.1 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. For the sample of 2,317 children still enrolled in K-12 school, the margin of sampling error is ± 2.7 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. For the sample of 1,840 Gen Z youth who are no longer enrolled in K-12 school, the margin of sampling error is ± 3.1 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. Margins of error for subgroups are higher.

All reported margins of sampling error include computed design effects for weighting. In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of public opinion polls.

About the Walton Family Foundation

The Walton Family Foundation is, at its core, a family-led foundation. Three generations of the descendants of our founders, Sam and Helen Walton, and their spouses work together to lead the foundation and create access to opportunity for people and communities. We work in three areas: improving education, protecting rivers and oceans and the communities they support, and investing in our home region of Northwest Arkansas and the Arkansas-Mississippi Delta. To learn more, visit waltonfamilyfoundation.org and follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

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