

Barriers to Completion: What Arizonans Say Kept Them from Pursuing or Attaining a Degree or Certificate After High School

Summary of Select Findings
Survey Conducted May 11–21, 2024

JULY 2024



Introduction/Agenda

The Everything to Gain campaign demonstrates the value of education and training after high school to individuals, families, and the Arizona economy. As part of the campaign, Education Forward Arizona polled Arizonans to get their perceptions. That poll, released earlier this year, showed overwhelming support across the board for the value of education and training after high school and the call from voters to create more opportunities for it.

This second poll was aimed at Arizonans who, for whatever reason, never pursued education or training opportunities after high school, and the findings show clear trends in what these Arizonans cited as the key barriers that they say stood in their way

Commissioned in partnership with Arizona Innovation Alliance

Brief on Poll 1

Arizonans were asked in November 2023 to share their opinions on education and training after high school. The results were the equivalent of a mandate. Ninety percent or more of Arizonans—Democrats, Independents and Republicans across racial, gender and socioeconomic lines, whether rural or urban—agreed that:

- Since not all students attend college, we must foster other postsecondary education opportunities that give students a chance to learn the skills necessary for success in a career and obtain industry certifications
- Every student should have access to a high-quality education regardless of their zip code
- It is important to provide job retraining and new career paths for adults as well as students just leaving high school

Access poll 1: [here](#)

Survey Methodology for Poll 2

In May, Education Forward Arizona conducted an online survey of Arizona residents ages 18 to 44 who have not completed education beyond high school.

600

Total Respondents

Key Findings

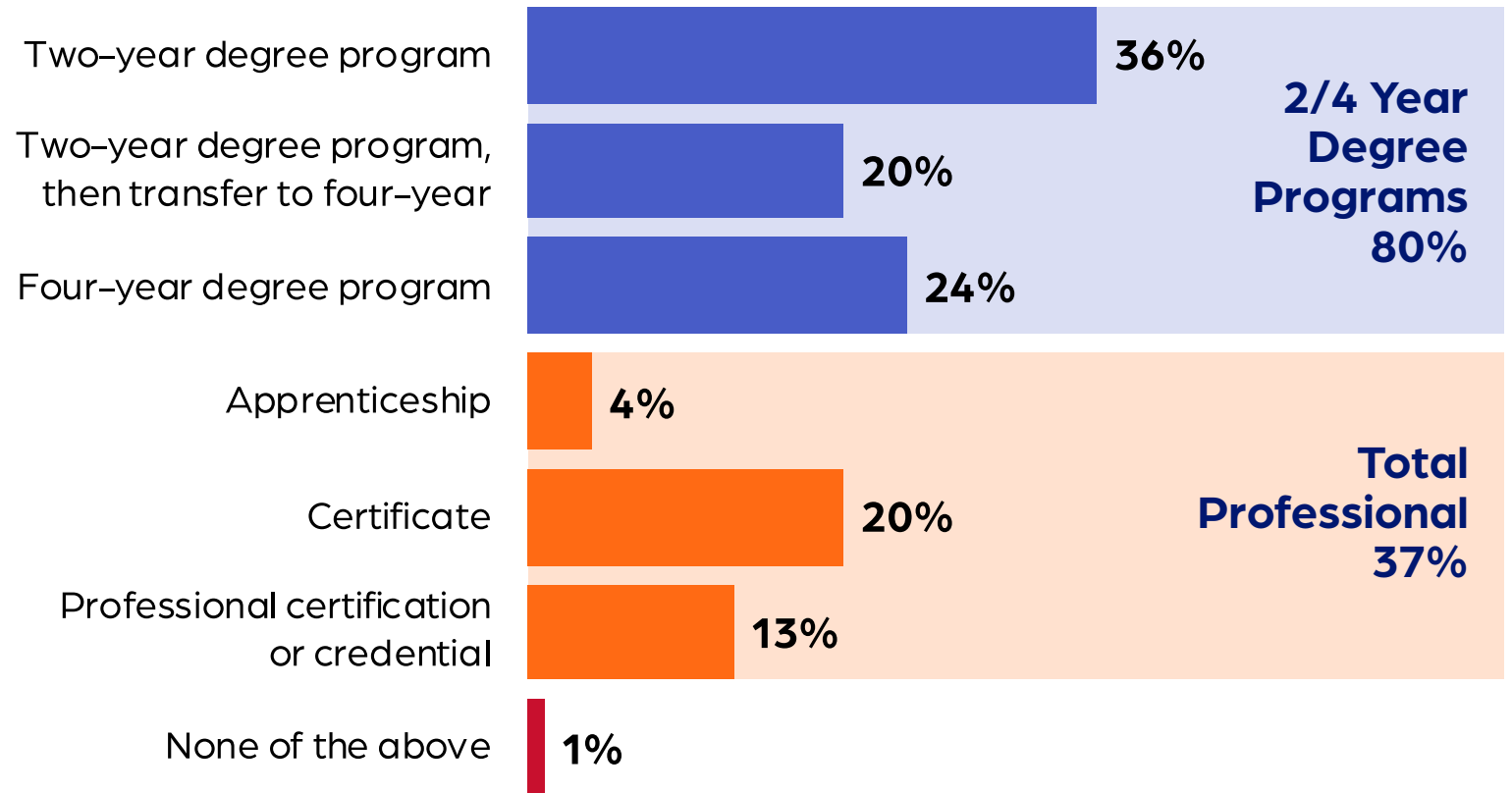
Respondent Profiles

Among the quarter of survey respondents who started education after high school but did not complete a program,

8 in 10

started a two-year or 4-year program at a college or university.

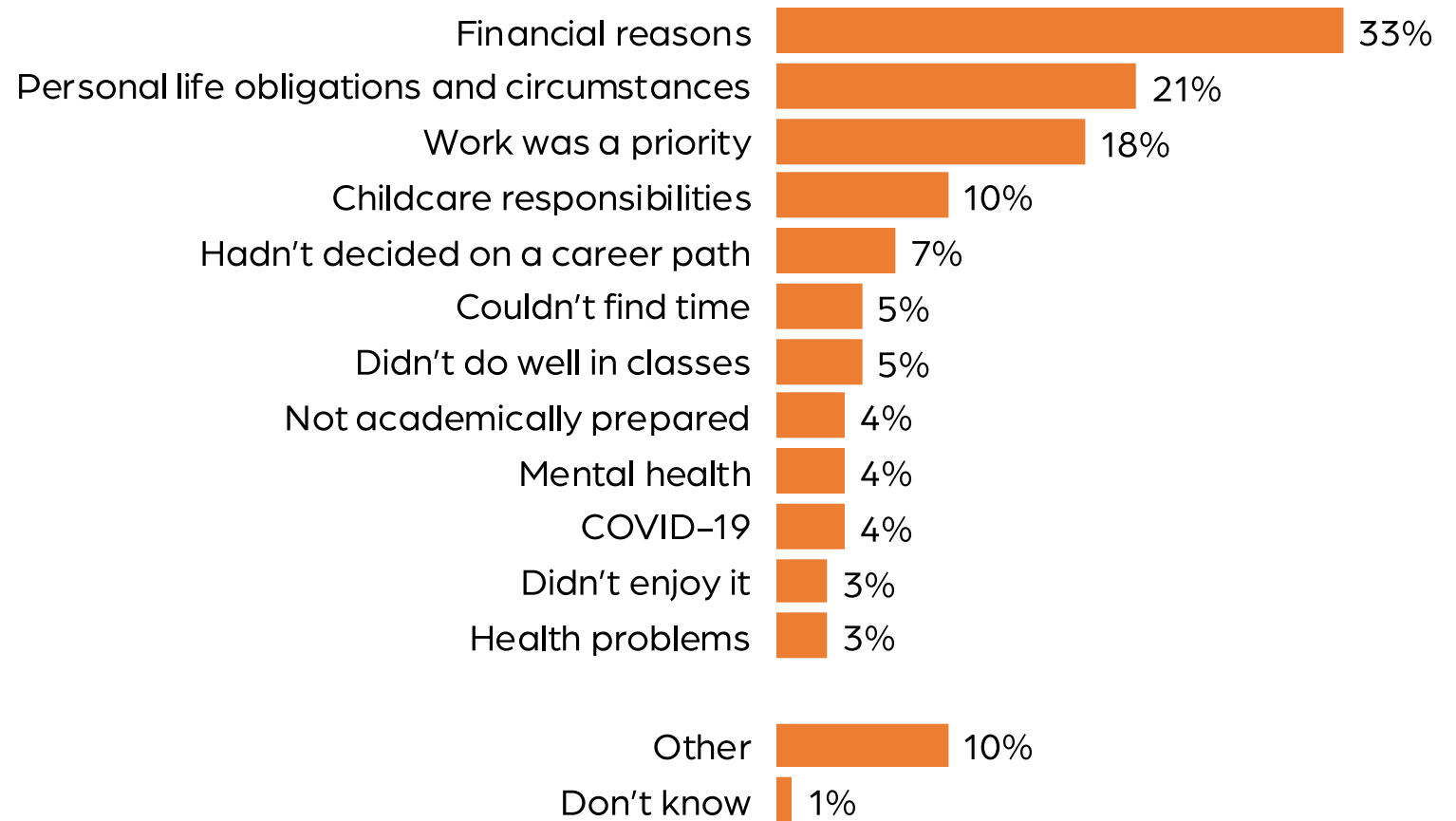
Which type or types of educational program have you started?



What Stands in Their Way

For survey respondents who started a program after high school, finances, personal issues, work, and childcare were most often cited as reasons for not completing.

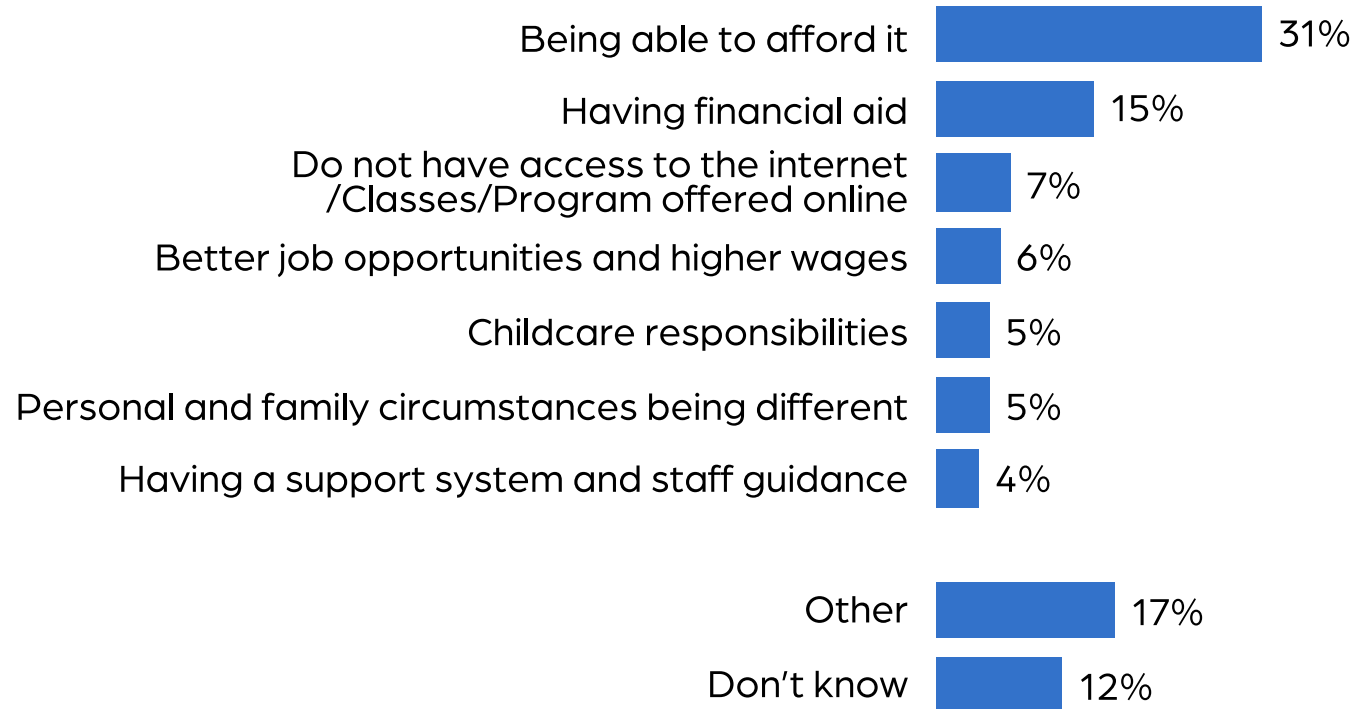
In a few words of your own, why did you not complete it?



Affordability and Financial Aid are Key Factors for Dropouts

A plurality of survey respondents identifies affordability and financial aid as key factors that would have made them more likely to finish their program.

Are there any specific circumstances you can think of that would make it possible for you to continue your education or training after high school?

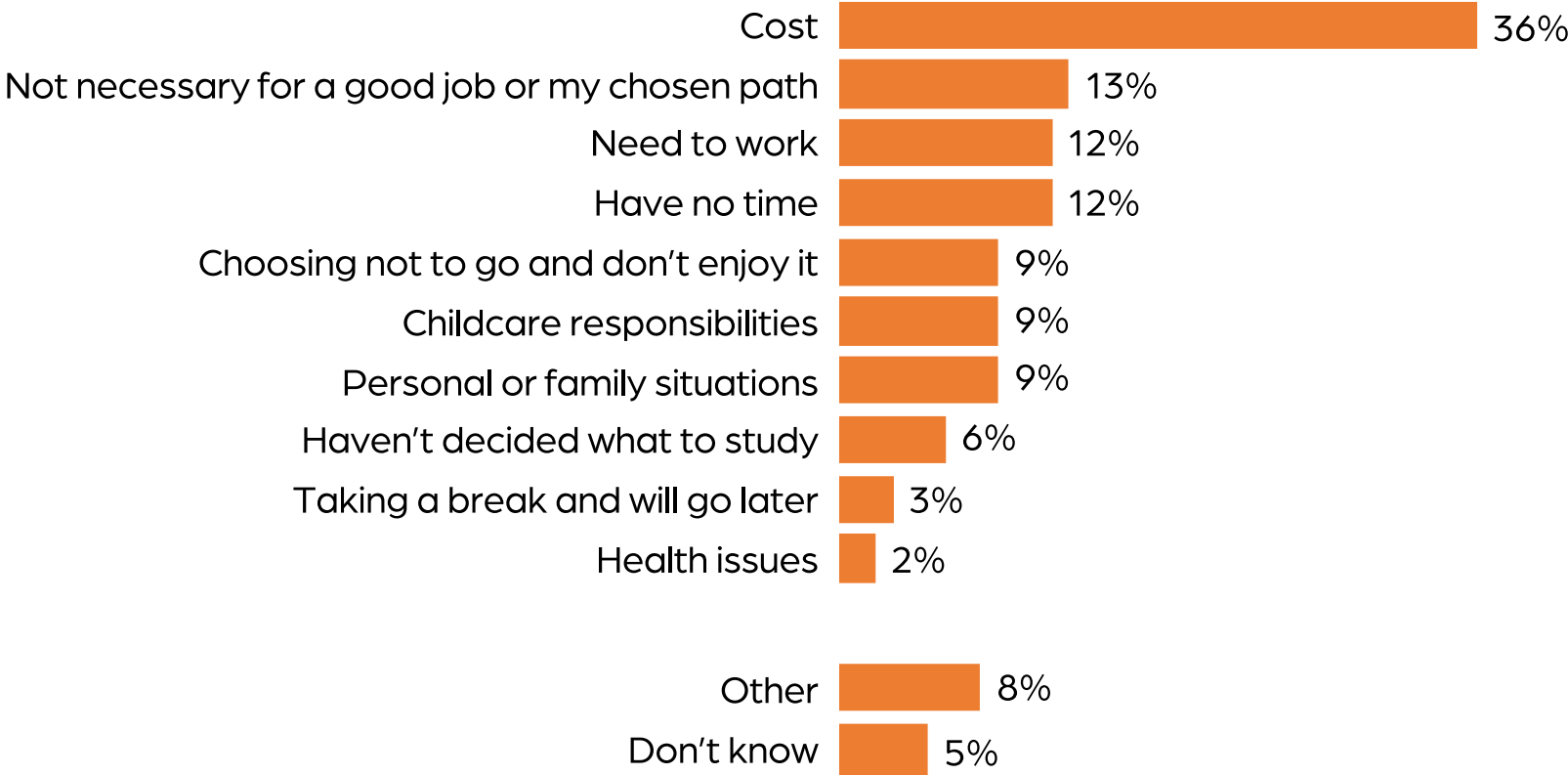


Cost Keeps Arizonans from Pursuing Education After High School

For respondents who have never enrolled, the cost of education beyond high school is cited as the leading reason.

Childcare responsibilities are a moderate issue overall, but when we break the data out by gender, childcare becomes a major challenge for Arizona women.

In a few words of your own, why have you chosen not to pursue education or training after high school?



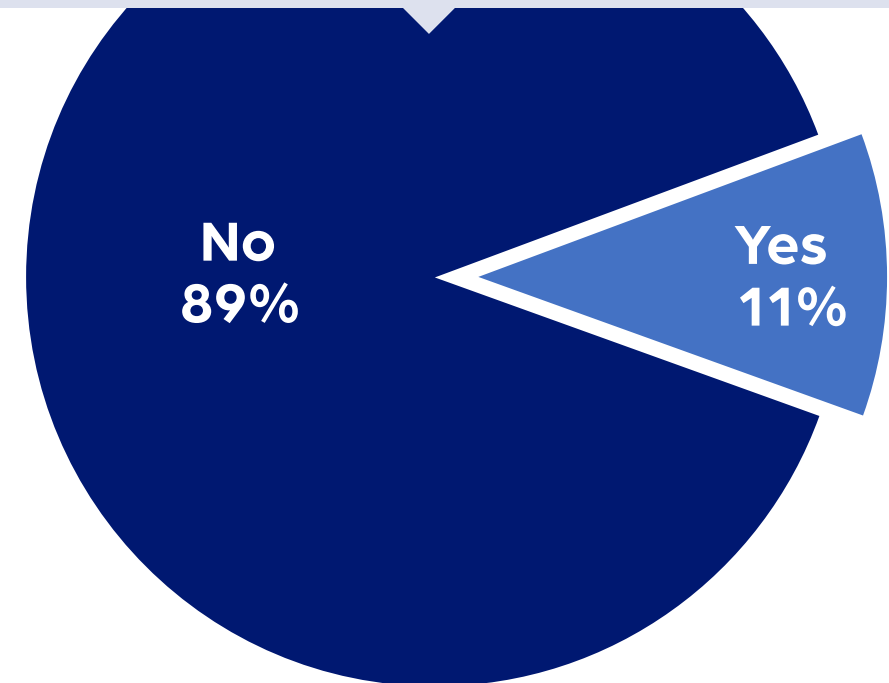
Local Access Was Not Cited as Key Barrier to Enrollment

What is notable about the barrier to enrolling in a program is that very few Arizonans surveyed see local accessibility* as a major issue.

However, this barrier is more prominent for rural Arizonans outside of major urban hubs such as Maricopa and Pima counties.

*Note: Accessibility in this context does not refer to financial accessibility.

Were you looking for a specific educational program that you couldn't find locally?



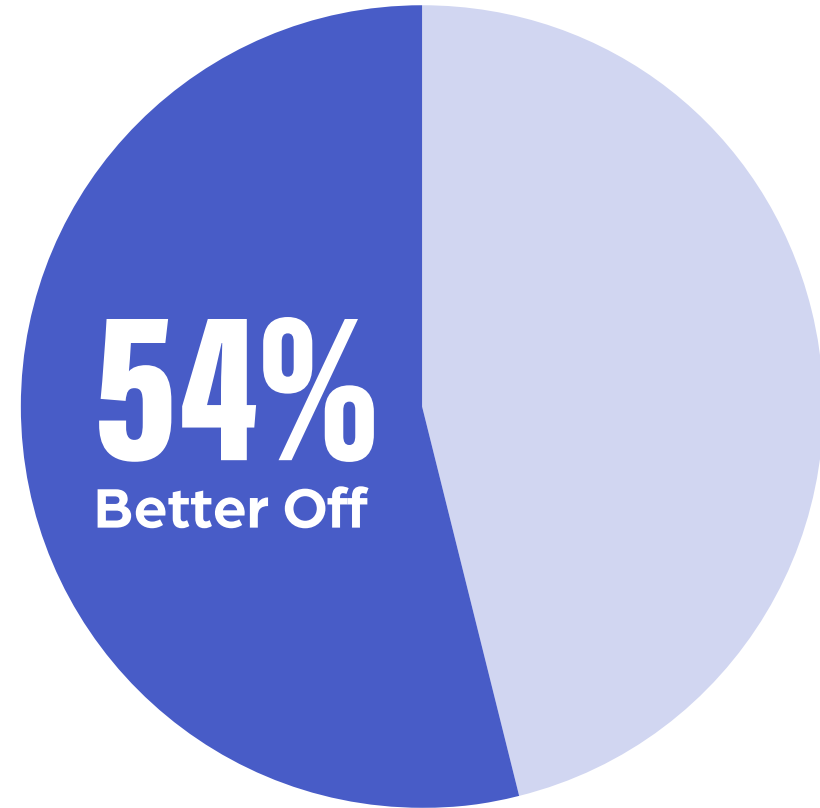
Belief That Education and Training After High School Improves Lives

Respondents believe that their lives would have been better if they had completed additional education right after high school.

Additionally, when thinking about going back to school or a trade program, respondents also believe it would also improve their lives today.

Respondents Say They'd Be Better Off With More Education/Training

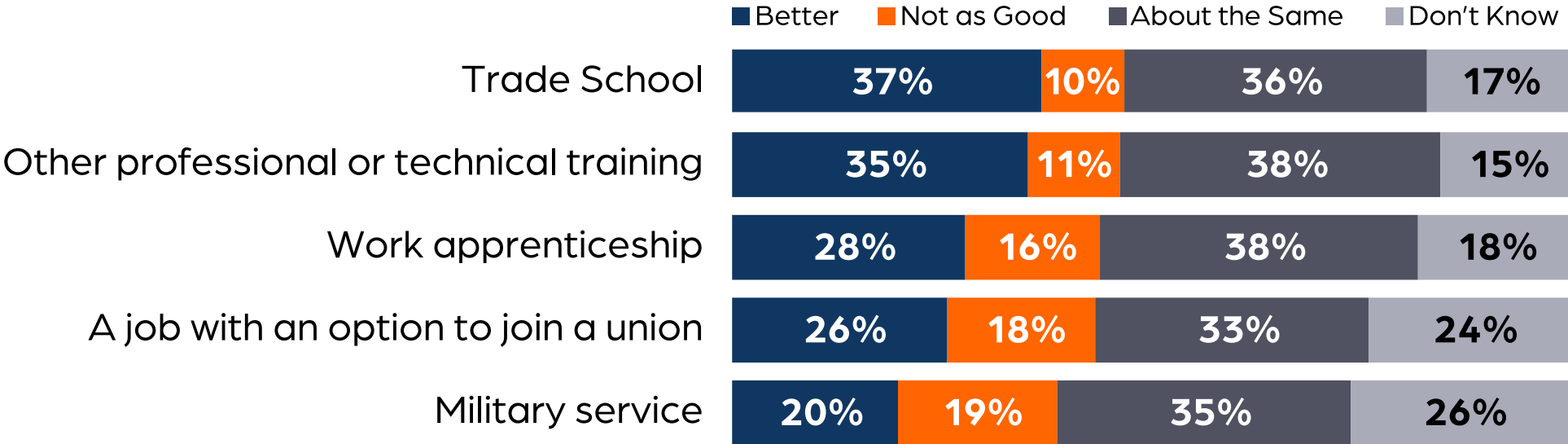
If you had been able to complete additional education or earn a credential after you finished high school, do you think that overall you would be better off, in the same place, or worse off than you are today?



Respondents Say They'd Be Better Off With More Education/Training

Two-thirds of respondents regard career education programs as a “better choice” or “about the same” as a college degree in putting people on a pathway to success.

For most people, in trying to achieve a successful livelihood, do you think each of these is a better choice than getting a bachelor's degree, not as good a choice, or about the same?



Respondents Say They'd Make More With More Education/Training

Half of respondents earning \$50K–\$75K think their income would increase to more than \$75K annually with additional education.



What Would Compel Arizonans Back to Education/Training Opportunities

5 (Strongly Agree)
 4
 3 (Neither)
 2
 1 (Strongly Disagree)
 Mean Score

I would like to enroll in some type of education or training beyond high school and earn a credential or degree in the future.



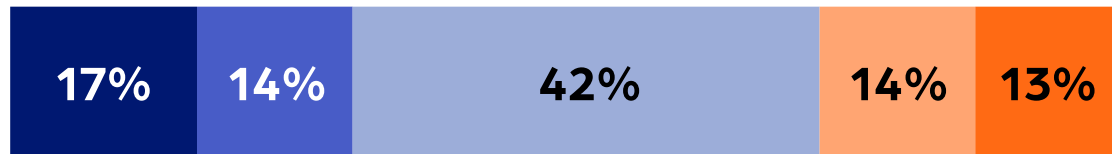
3.3

I would like to learn more about available options for education beyond high school.



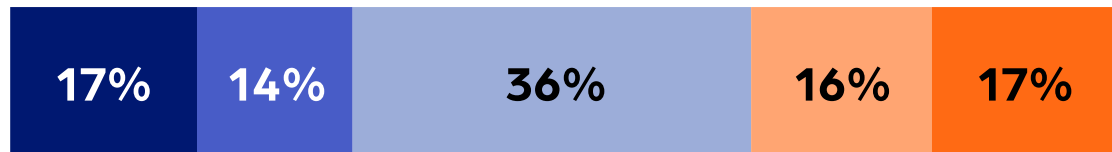
3.3

*I am comfortable with my decision not to continue my education or training beyond high school.



3.1

I do not need an education beyond high school to earn a living wage.



3.0

*Asked of respondents who started but did not complete post-secondary education n=164)

What Would Compel Arizonans Back to Education/Training Opportunities

Statement	4/5 (Agree)				
	All Resp.	Gender		Ages	
		Men	Women	18-34	35-44
I would like to enroll in some type of education or training beyond high school and earn a credential or degree in the future.	47%	49%	44%	48%	44%
I would like to learn more about available options for education beyond high school.	41%	43%	41%	44%	37%
I do not need an education beyond high school to earn a living wage.	31%	33%	30%	32%	31%
*I am comfortable with my decision not to continue my education or training beyond high school.	31%	34%	29%	32%	29%

*Asked of respondents who started but did not complete post-secondary education, n=164)

What Would Compel Arizonans Back to Education/Training Opportunities

Unsurprisingly, higher-income respondents express more interest in continuing their education, most likely because cost is not as severe a factor and they have a better understanding of the potential benefits.

Statement	4/5 (Agree)		
	All Resp.	Household Income	
		<\$50K	\$50K+
I would like to enroll in some type of education or training beyond high school and earn a credential or degree in the future.	47%	44%	53%
I would like to learn more about available options for education beyond high school.	41%	40%	47%
I do not need an education beyond high school to earn a living wage.	31%	27%	40%
*I am comfortable with my decision not to continue my education or training beyond high school.	31%	28%	38%

*Asked of respondents who started but did not complete post-secondary education, n=164)

What Would Compel Arizonans Back to Education/Training Opportunities

But when we narrow our focus further, Arizonans who were once enrolled in a program but did not complete it are more interested in returning to school.

In particular, there is greater interest among those who enrolled but did not complete their education program.

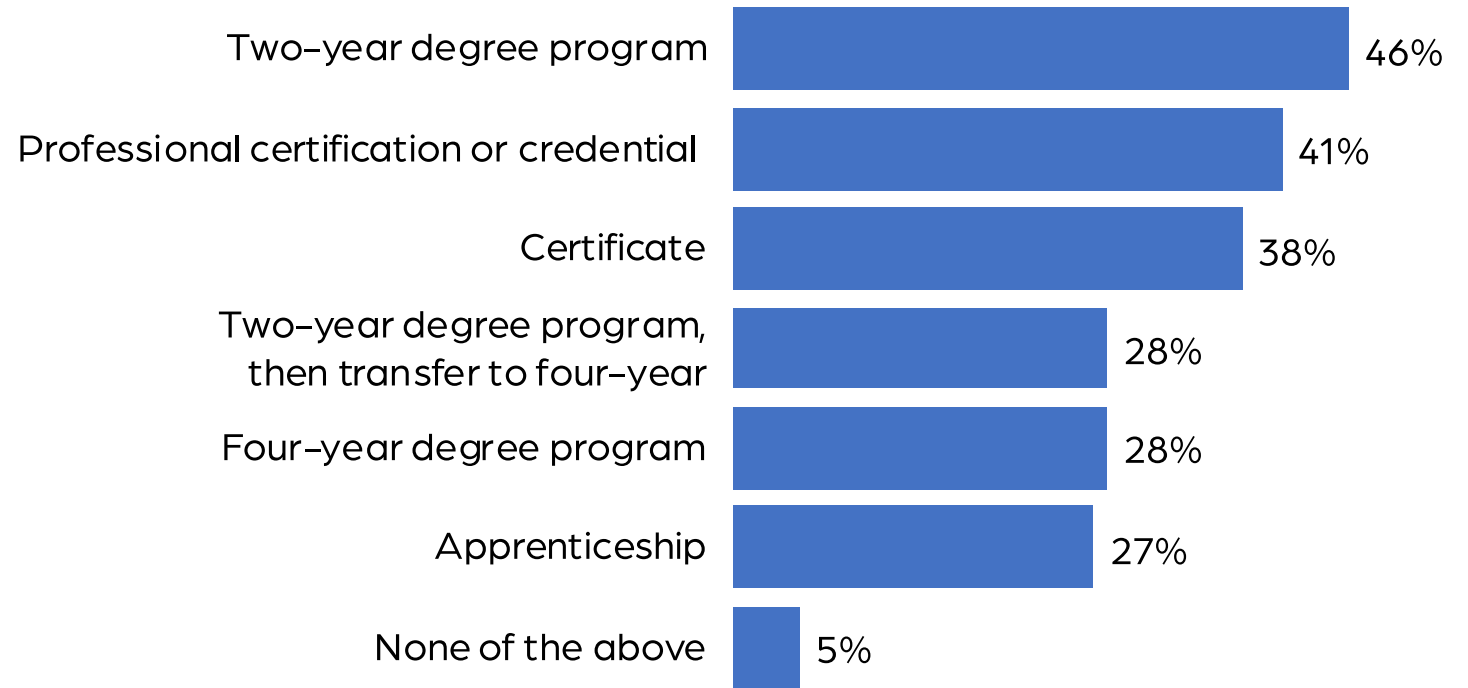
Statement	4/5 (Agree)		
	All Resp.	Started Post-Secondary Program	
		Yes	No
I would like to enroll in some type of education or training beyond high school and earn a credential or degree in the future.	47%	60%	41%
I would like to learn more about available options for education beyond high school.	41%	49%	38%
I do not need an education beyond high school to earn a living wage.	31%	29%	32%
*I am comfortable with my decision not to continue my education or training beyond high school.	31%	N/A%	31%

What Would Compel Arizonans Back to Education/Training Opportunities

Those who have never sought education beyond high school are more inclined to attend a two-year program or one to credential them for a specific profession.

Which type or types of educational program would you like to enroll in?

(Multiple Responses Accepted; Asked of respondents who have never enrolled in a post-secondary education program, n=279)



Arizonans Can't Afford the Opportunities They Think Would Benefit Them

While respondents said they would benefit from it, 60 percent also said that cost kept them from continuing education and training after high school.

- There are significant opportunity costs associated with continuing their education beyond high school.
- This remains true across all genders, ages, races, and income levels but is particularly evident for women and Arizonans outside of Maricopa County.

Arizonans Can't Afford the Opportunities They Think Would Benefit Them

Please indicate whether each of the following was a factor in your not completing education or training beyond high school:

Statement	4/5 (Major Factor)				
	All Resp.	Gender		Ages	
		Men	Women	18-34	35-44
It was too expensive, couldn't afford it	57%	53%	60%	59%	55%
I learn better in hands-on settings	51%	56%	48%	52%	50%
I did not know how to get started	38%	34%	42%	40%	35%
I did not know my options	34%	35%	34%	35%	33%
I wasn't academically prepared for the program I wanted to pursue	30%	30%	31%	29%	32%
I needed to work in my field right away, while I learned	28%	36%	23%	26%	31%
I couldn't find a program that fit into my schedule	28%	28%	29%	27%	29%
I couldn't find a program that was a good fit for my desired career path	27%	29%	25%	28%	25%
The program I was interested in would take too long to complete	24%	24%	24%	25%	24%
There was no location close to me	23%	25%	23%	26%	20%

Arizonans Can't Afford the Opportunities They Think Would Benefit Them

Please indicate whether each of the following was a factor in your not completing education or training beyond high school:

Statement	4/5 (Major Factor)					
	All Resp	Started Post-Secondary Program		County		
		Yes	No	Maricopa	Pima	All Other Counties
It was too expensive, couldn't afford it	57%	52%	59%	54%	62%	62%
I learn better in hands-on settings	51%	51%	51%	50%	50%	53%
I did not know how to get started	38%	32%	40%	38%	47%	32%
I did not know my options	34%	33%	35%	34%	38%	31%
I wasn't academically prepared for the program I wanted to pursue	30%	29%	31%	31%	32%	28%
I needed to work in my field right away, while I learned	28%	25%	30%	29%	30%	26%
I couldn't find a program that fit into my schedule	28%	32%	27%	27%	36%	25%
I couldn't find a program that was a good fit for my desired career path	27%	26%	27%	26%	30%	25%
The program I was interested in would take too long to complete	24%	29%	22%	24%	23%	25%
There was no location close to me	23%	17%	26%	22%	20%	30%

Arizona Mothers Face the Greatest Barriers

More women with children cited the cost of education beyond high school as a major barrier compared to their male counterparts.

Please indicate whether each of the following was a factor in your not completing education or training beyond high school:

Statement	4/5 (Major Factor)		
	All Resp.	Parents by Gender	
		Fathers	Mothers
It was too expensive, couldn't afford it.	57%	44%	62%

They also cite a greater impact by a lack of affordable childcare...

I did not have access to affordable childcare.	27%	22%	32%
--	-----	-----	-----

As well of the cost of basics needs like housing and food...

I couldn't afford to further my education <i>and</i> pay for my basic needs like housing and food.	56%	49%	63%
--	-----	-----	-----

Latinos and other BIPOC Communities Carry More Responsibility to Take Care of Family Members, Especially Mothers

Please indicate whether each of the following was a factor in your not completing education or training beyond high school

Statement	4/5 (Major Factor)				
	All Resp.	Race/Ethnicity			
		Whites	Latinos	All people of color	Men of Color
I need to work to financially support others such as children, parents, or grandparents.	44%	39%	53%	50%	50%

Statement	4/5 (Major Factor)		
	All Resp.	Parents by Gender	
		Fathers	Mothers
I need to work to financially support others such as children, parents, or grandparents.	44%	50%	65%

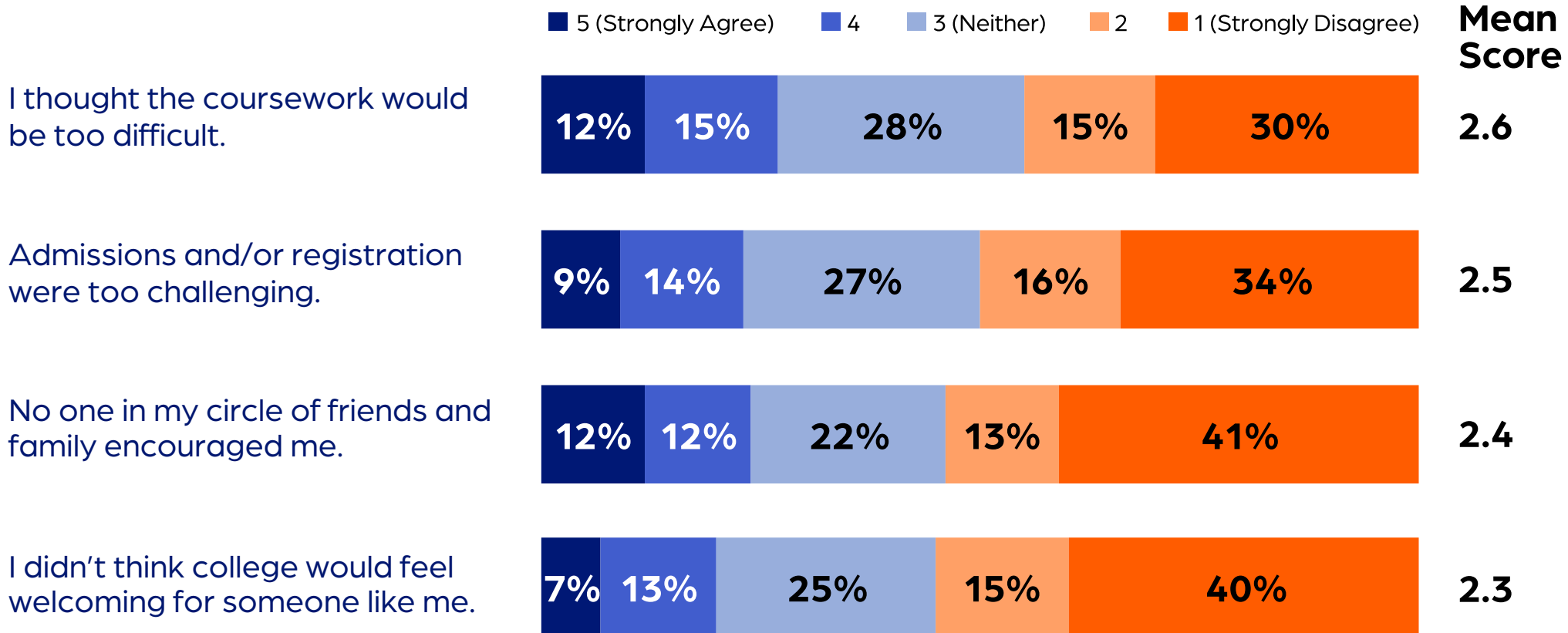
Traditionally Cited Obstacles are Less Significant

In higher education and workforce discussions, there are often narratives about why college and training aren't accessible for all communities.

However, Arizonans say that concerns about these traditional obstacles were less impactful in their decision not to continue their education after high school.

Traditionally Cited Obstacles are Less Significant

Please indicate whether each of the following was a factor in your not completing education or training beyond high school:



Perceived Significance of Various Obstacles

■ 5 (Strongly Agree)
 ■ 4
 ■ 3 (Neither)
 ■ 2
 ■ 1 (Strongly Disagree)

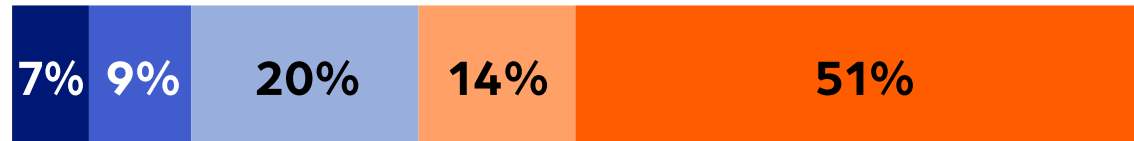
Mean Score

People like me don't do this.



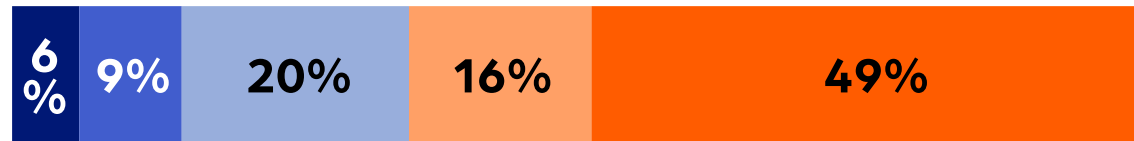
2.2

I was worried that I would not be treated well due to factors like my race, ethnicity, religion, gender, or financial circumstances.



2.1

I was worried that education would be politically biased and/or that I would not fit in due to my political views.



2.1

Family members, friends, or peers discouraged me from attending.



1.9

My high school counselor, a teacher, or coach discouraged me from attending.



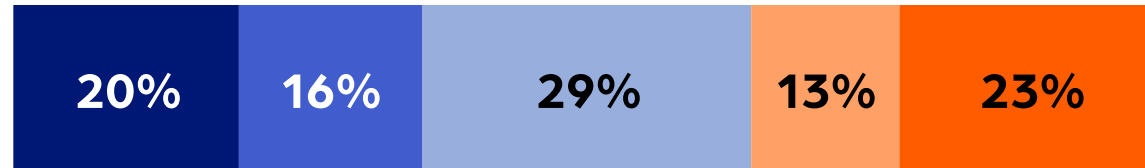
1.9

Perceived Significance of Various Obstacles

■ 5 (Strongly Agree)
 ■ 4
 ■ 3 (Neither)
 ■ 2
 ■ 1 (Strongly Disagree)

Mean Score

^I assumed I wouldn't be eligible for financial aid



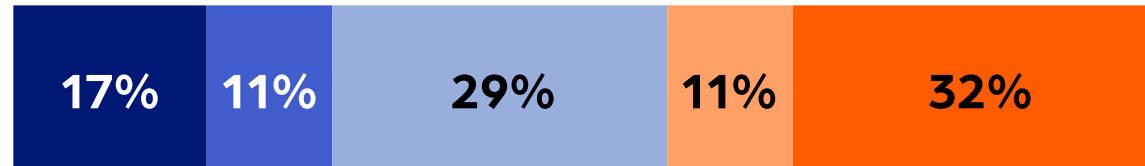
3.0

^Applying for financial aid was too complicated or unclear



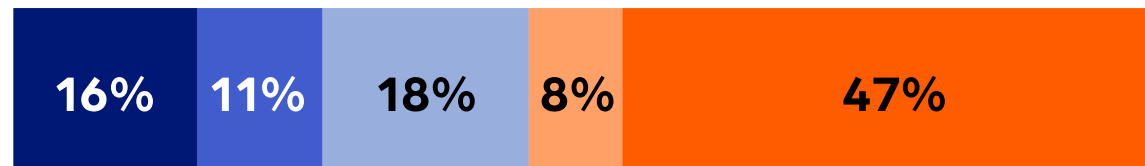
2.9

I am out of available financial aid



2.7

^I did not have access to affordable childcare



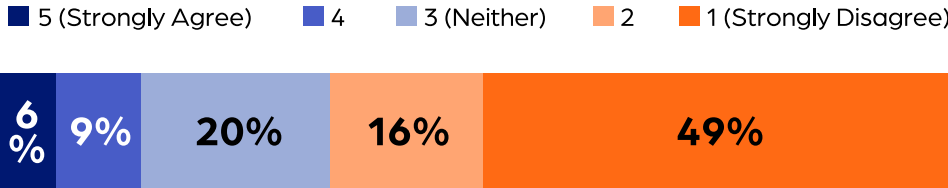
2.4

^Not Part of Split Sample

Political Climate Not Perceived as Significant Barrier

The current political climate encourages division over issues in education. But very few respondents report political bias as a factor for being discouraged from attending.

I was worried that education would be politically biased and/or that I would not fit in due to my political views.



Mean Score
2.1