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# The State of Schools Report

Insights to Inform Higher Education and K-12 Leaders

GALLUP®

A collage of diverse people, including students and educators, engaged in various activities like learning, working, and interacting. The collage is composed of several diamond-shaped images. In the top left, a young girl in a pink shirt and blue overalls works on a colorful electronic circuit board. Next to her, a woman in a white lab coat smiles as she interacts with a young boy in a blue plaid shirt. To the right, a man in a light blue shirt is seen in profile, talking to a woman. In the center, a young girl with curly hair in a yellow shirt looks down intently. To her right, another young girl in a blue shirt smiles. In the bottom right of this section, an older man with grey hair and a dark vest smiles warmly. The background of the collage is a mix of teal and grey tones.

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# Key Findings

## How can educational institutions evolve to serve the learners of today and tomorrow?

In this report, we review the top insights from Gallup's education reports of 2023.

### K-12 Education

1. Parents are highly satisfied with their child's K-12 education, even as public satisfaction ties a record low.
2. America's students give their schools a B-.
3. "B-Flation" may be keeping parents from getting more involved in their child's education.
4. K-12 Teachers enjoy higher wellbeing than other professions — but also higher burnout and disrespect.
5. Engaging teachers through meaningful conversations is an effective strategy for teacher retention.

### Higher Education

1. Most adults see the value of higher education and view a college degree as a prerequisite for success.
2. Educational attainment has a meaningful statistical relationship with 50 economic and non-economic outcomes.
3. Next to financial reasons, mental health and emotional stress are the biggest barriers to enrollment.
4. Mental health and emotional stress are also the most common reasons enrolled students consider stopping out.
5. Many Black and Hispanic students in the U.S. face discrimination and other challenges while completing postsecondary programs.

# K-12 Education

## 1 Parents are highly satisfied with their child’s K-12 education, even as public satisfaction ties a record low.

Americans’ satisfaction with the quality of K-12 education in the U.S. fell six percentage points in the past year, matching the record low 36% on this measure, which Gallup has tracked for 24 years.<sup>1</sup>

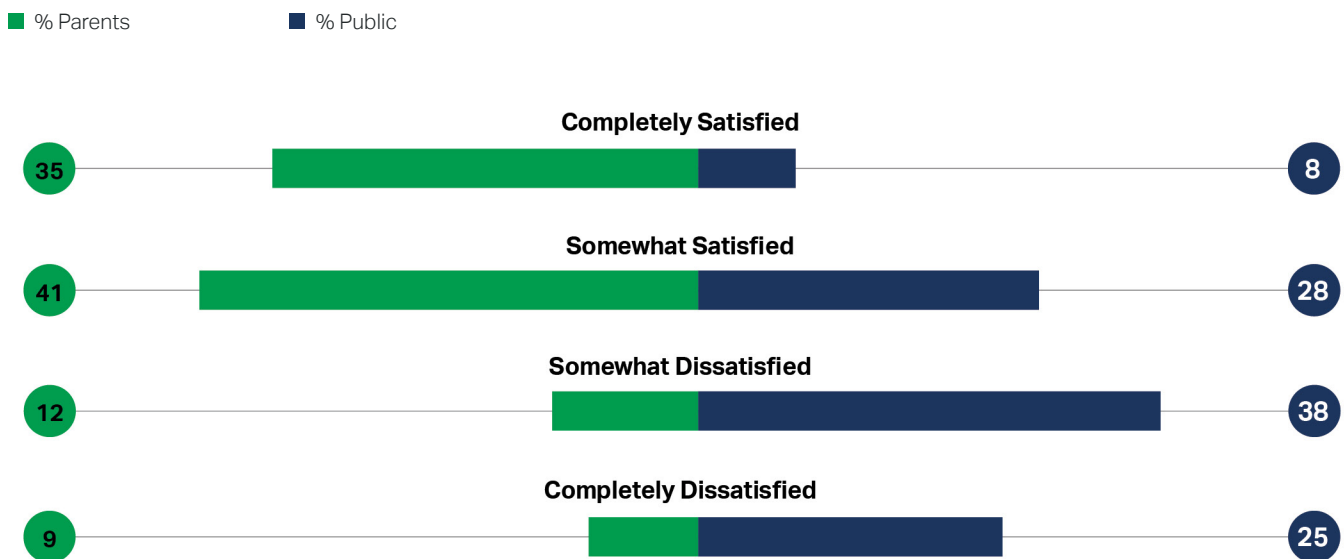
**Yet, parents of K-12 students remain largely satisfied with the quality of the education their oldest child is receiving, as 76% say they are**

“completely” or “somewhat” satisfied, significantly higher than the 67% low on that measure from 2013.

This gap — averaging 21 percentage points — between public and parent perceptions of K-12 education has existed since 1999, when Gallup started asking these questions.

### CHART 1

#### Parents Highly Satisfied With Their Child’s K-12 Education, Even as Public Satisfaction Ties Record Low



**In addition, most parents are happy with their child’s teachers.** Nearly three-quarters of parents say the performance of their child’s teacher is “excellent” (36%) or “good” (37%). Twenty percent rate their child’s teacher as “fair” and 7% rate them as “poor.”

<sup>1</sup> Brenan, M. (2023, August 31). *K-12 Education Satisfaction in U.S. Ties Record Low*. Gallup.com. Retrieved January 5, 2024, from <https://news.gallup.com/poll/510401/education-satisfaction-ties-record-low.aspx>

## ② America’s students give their schools a B-.

In spring 2023, the Walton Family Foundation and Gallup published [Report Card: Student Perspective on U.S. Schools](#), which captures how students feel about their schools. On average, students gave their schools a B- overall, **but worse grades on making them feel excited about their learning, teaching them about potential careers, and adapting to unique to student needs.**

TABLE 1

**Students often are given grades of A, B, C, D and “fail” on the quality of their work. What grade would you give your school when it comes to:**

	A Excellent	B Good	C Satisfactory	D Poor	F Fail	Average Grade
Your school overall	22%	44%	24%	7%	3%	B-
Respecting who you are, regardless of your race/ethnicity, gender and identity	48%	29%	13%	5%	5%	B
Keeping you physically safe	43%	32%	15%	6%	4%	B
Making you feel included	29%	35%	22%	9%	5%	B-
Exposing you to ideas and opinions that are different from your own	27%	37%	24%	7%	4%	B-
Using technology in new and exciting ways to help you learn	27%	36%	24%	8%	5%	B-
The quality of teaching	23%	43%	22%	8%	4%	B-
Supporting your mental health	22%	32%	24%	11%	11%	C+
Preparing you for your future	20%	41%	25%	9%	5%	B-
Teaching you in ways that adapt to your unique learning needs	19%	33%	27%	11%	10%	C+
Teaching you about potential careers	17%	35%	28%	13%	8%	C+
Making you excited about learning	13%	35%	28%	13%	11%	C+

## While Students Are Neutral About Their School, They're Positive About Their Mentors

In the Gallup-Walton Family Foundation [Voices of Gen Z report](#), 76% of Gen Z members agree they have a great future ahead of them, though only 44% report feeling prepared for their future — showing the need for more resources and experiences to help them thrive in the future.

Adult mentors play a key role in student optimism. Members of Gen Z who strongly agree they have such an adult or mentor in their life are more than twice as likely as those who do not strongly agree they have a great future ahead of them and will achieve their goals.

Young adults are more likely to report positive career outcomes if they say they had a successful career role model.

In 2021, the [Developing Careers of the Future: A Study of Student Access to, and Interest in, Computer Science](#) study found students who had a role model in computer science were approximately 10 times as likely to report interest in studying computer science long term.

In 2023, the [Gallup-Amazon Role Models Matter report](#) looked to better understand the impact role models have on young students as they begin exploring potential career paths.

This research found two-thirds (68%) of young adults who had someone with a successful career to look up to agree or strongly agree their current career is fulfilling, compared with those who were neutral or disagreed that they had a career role model.

Amazon and Gallup also asked young adults which career experiences they wish they had more of when in middle or high school.

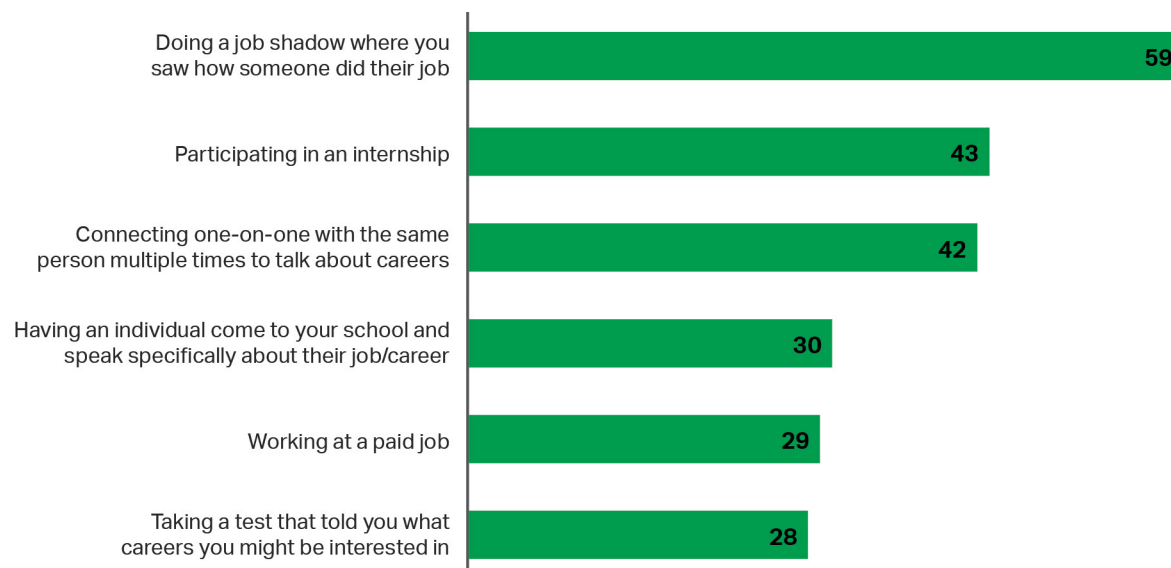
### CHART 2

#### Most-cited Experiences Adults 40 and Under Would Have Liked to Have More of in School

From the following list, which experiences would have been most beneficial to have more of in middle or high school to teach you about different career options available to you?

Select up to 3

% Selected choice



### 3 “B-flation” may be keeping parents from getting more involved in their child’s education.

A 2023 study with Learning Heroes and Gallup titled [B-flation: How Good Grades Can Sideline Parents](#) found that almost nine in 10 parents say their child is at or above grade level in reading (88%) and math (89%). This deviates sharply from other measures, such as standardized test scores, in which typically less than half of children are performing at grade level.

**The disconnect may be occurring at the report card.**

Parents rely on report cards more than any other source of information for how their child is doing in school. And 79% of parents say their child receives mostly B’s or better.

Parents and students may not receive a reality check before it’s too late. Sixty-one percent of parents are very or extremely confident their child will be well-prepared for college, while less than half of 12<sup>th</sup> graders meet college readiness benchmarks for reading (40%) or math (30%).

**The good news is that when parents recognize their child is not performing at grade level, they are concerned and are more likely to act.**

Ninety-seven percent of parents who know their child is below grade level in math are worried about their child’s math skills, compared with 22% of those who believe their child is at or above grade level.

**CHART 3**

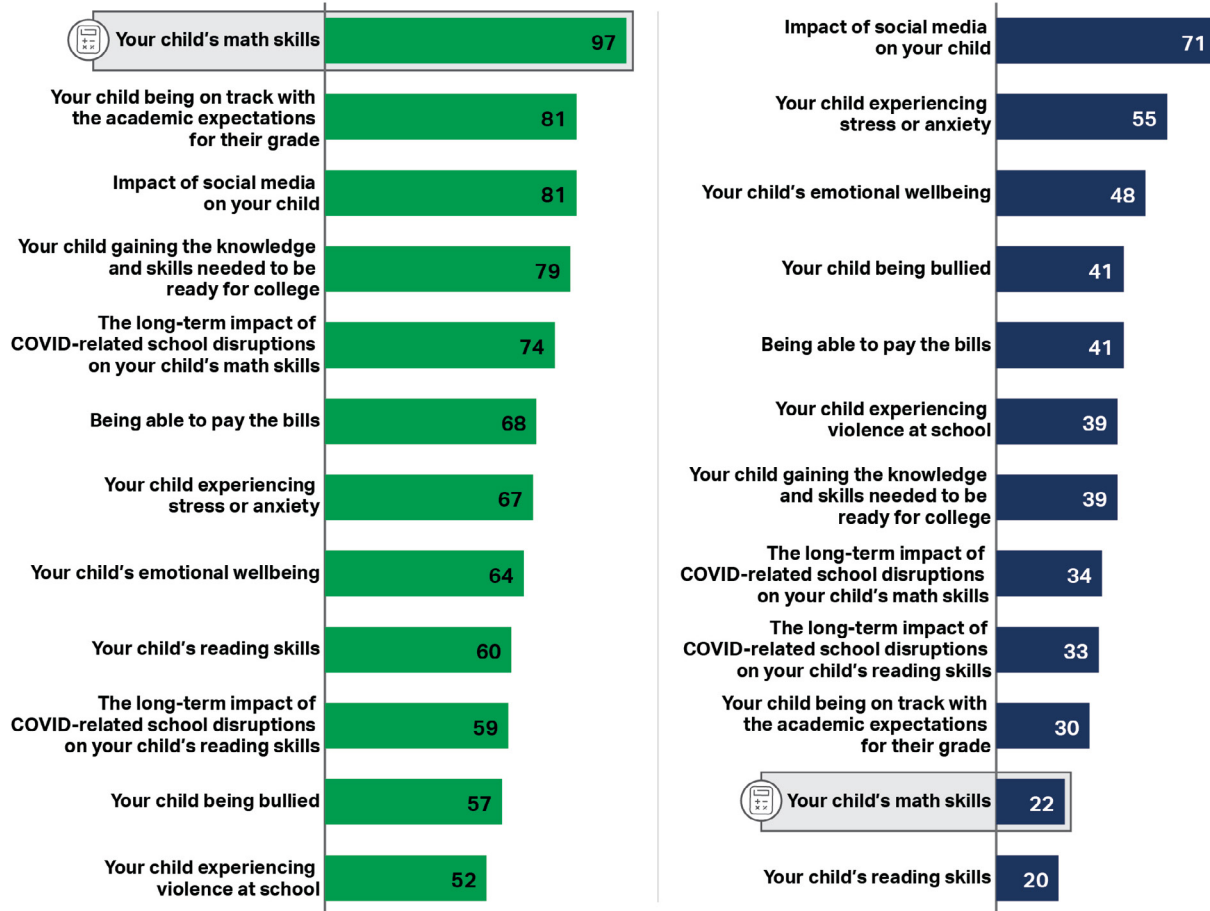
**Parents Who Say Their Child Is Below Grade Level in Math More Likely to Prioritize Those Academic Skills in List of Worries**

As a parent, to what extent are you worried about each of the following?

% Somewhat or extremely worried

■ Among parents who say their child is below grade level in math

■ Among parents who say their child is at or above grade level in math



4 K-12 teachers enjoy higher wellbeing than other professions — but also higher burnout and disrespect.<sup>2</sup>

Compared with employees working in other occupations, K-12 teachers are:

HIGHS	LOWS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• More likely to feel <b>connected to the mission and purpose of their work.</b></li><li>• More likely to be <b>thriving in their overall wellbeing.</b></li><li>• More likely to have a <b>best friend at work.</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Less likely to have the <b>materials and equipment they need to do their jobs.</b></li><li>• More likely to <b>experience frequent burnout.</b></li><li>• Less likely to feel <b>respected at work.</b></li></ul>

**Thirty-one percent of K-12 teachers are engaged at work**, which is on par with the average for the U.S. workforce overall (32%). But teaching has its own distinctive rewards, including a sense of purpose, camaraderie with coworkers and higher wellbeing in life overall.

2 [Link for more information](#)





Unfortunately, these benefits are not sufficient to attract and keep many teachers in the profession for the long term. As of 2022, teacher turnover increased four percentage points above pre-pandemic levels, reaching 10% nationally.<sup>3</sup> Although the causes are complex, compared with other professions, teachers are more likely to experience frequent burnout and less likely to feel respected at work. These two factors likely play a key role in teacher attrition.

## Burnout

39

**Thirty-nine percent of K-12 teachers say they experience burnout very often or always.**

Gallup's previous research into causes of employee burnout found that a lack of manager support and communication are key drivers of burnout.

Gallup's research also found that unfair treatment at work is highly correlated with burnout, which means that high disrespect and high burnout may be related.

## Disrespect

42

**Forty-two percent of K-12 employees overall said they were treated with disrespect — the highest rate among any industry.** Although this disrespect may be coming from students and not from coworkers or leaders, it likely takes a significant toll when experienced regularly.

Sixteen percent of K-12 employees indicated they had experienced violence at work within the past month.

### FORMER K-12 TEACHER PERSPECTIVES ON BURNOUT

*“It did feel, at times, like it was an emergency all the time.”*

*“The requirements that the state puts on teachers are kind of untenable.”*

*“There was a lot more expected of me than what was in the job description. I felt like I was wearing multiple hats all the time.”*

*“I’d go home, and I’d just collapse on the couch, and then I wasn’t energetic [enough] to interact with my family or do chores and stuff.”*

3 Diliberti, M. K., & Schwartz, H. L. (2023). *Educator Turnover Has Markedly Increased, but Districts Have Taken Actions to Boost Teacher Ranks: Selected Findings from the Sixth American School District Panel Survey*. Rand.org. Retrieved January 5, 2024, from [https://www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RRA956-14.html](https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA956-14.html)

**5 Engaging teachers through meaningful conversations is an effective strategy for teacher retention.**

According to an October 2023 NCES report, “86% of U.S. K-12 public schools reported challenges hiring teachers for the 2023-24 school year.”<sup>4</sup>

**In order to better understand the causes of teacher loss, Gallup studied 845 K-12 teachers from a 2019 Gallup workforce survey who also completed a Gallup survey in 2023. Over the course of this five-year period, Gallup found:**

34% left the workforce.



20% left K-12 for another occupation.



46% remained a K-12 teacher five years later.



**Teachers who remained in the industry during this same five-year period had strikingly different workplace experiences than those who left. Those who remained were:**

49% more likely to have received recognition or praise for doing great work in the past seven days.



61% more likely to have someone at work talk to them about their progress in the past six months.



44% of those who stayed in their roles were engaged, compared with 34% of those who left.



This suggests that frequent conversations focused on recent successes and future goals — meaningful, coaching conversations — can engage teachers enough to keep them at their jobs over the long term.

**School leaders can also magnify these results by creating a workplace culture that is recognition rich, and where peer mentorship and support are encouraged.**

<sup>4</sup> NCES (2023, October 17). *Most Public Schools Face Challenges in Hiring Teachers and Other Personnel Entering the 2023-24 Academic Year*. <https://nces.ed.gov/>. Retrieved January 5, 2024, from [https://nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/press\\_releases/10\\_17\\_2023.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/press_releases/10_17_2023.asp)

# Higher Education

## ① Most adults see the value of higher education and view a college degree as a prerequisite for success.

According to Gallup and Lumina's [The State of Higher Education 2023 report](#), 74% of adults say a two- to four-year degree is equally or more important in securing a successful career than it was 20 years ago.



61% of those who stopped out of a postsecondary program report they have recently considered reenrolling.



58% of all unenrolled Black adults (58%) and Hispanic adults (53%) report they have considered enrolling.



47% of U.S. adults who are not currently enrolled in a college degree or certificate program report they have considered enrolling in the past two years.



## Worth the Cost

The majority (71%) of currently enrolled bachelor's degree students strongly agree or agree that the degree they are receiving is worth the cost. Only 8% strongly disagree or disagree.<sup>5</sup>

### Key factors that predict a student's likelihood to believe their degree is worth the cost, in order of importance:

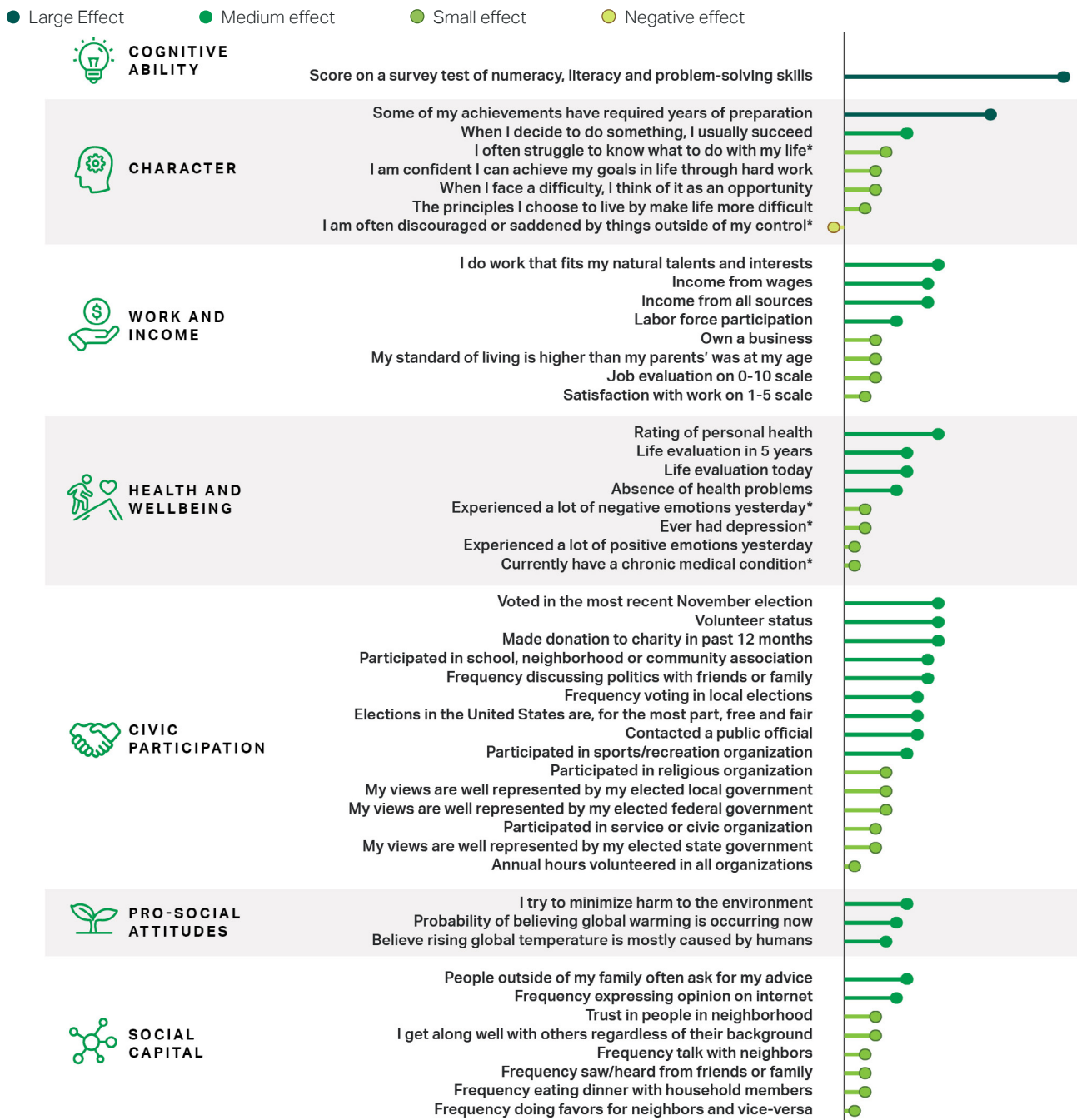
- 1 feeling prepared for life after college
- 2 the ability to express oneself freely on campus
- 3 the extent to which students have the opportunity to interact with people with different views
- 4 perceptions of physical safety
- 5 the extent to which professors care about students as people
- 6 perceptions of belonging
- 7 admissions selectivity of institution according to IPEDS

5 Marken, S., & Hrynowski, Z. (2023, June 1). *Current College Students Say Their Degree Is Worth the Cost*. Gallup.com. Retrieved January 10, 2024, from <https://news.gallup.com/poll/506384/current-college-students-say-degree-worth-cost.aspx>

## ② Educational attainment has a meaningful statistical relationship with 50 economic and non-economic outcomes.

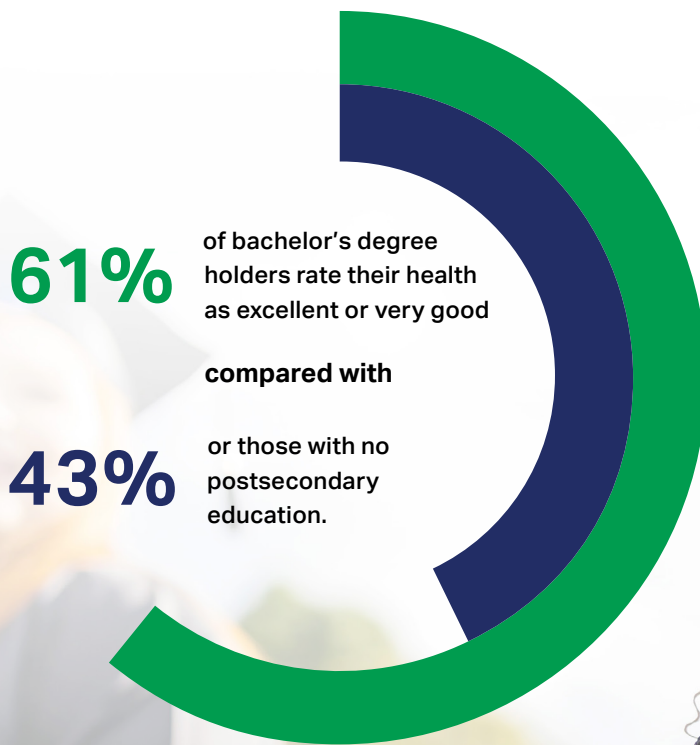
Many adults believe that education beyond high school is worth it. But is it really? In their 2023 report “[Education for What?](#)” Lumina Foundation and Gallup analyzed 52 economic and non-economic outcomes and found a positive relationship in 50 of them, after controlling for other factors like gender, age, race, ethnicity, marital status and political party affiliation.

**CHART 4**  
**Relationship Between Outcomes and Additional Postsecondary Education**



**College graduates earn about \$1 million more over the course of their working years than U.S. adults with no college degree, on average.** But the benefits of higher education go far beyond income. Postsecondary education also improves people’s wellbeing, such as better cognitive skills and health.

**Sixty-one percent of bachelor’s degree holders rate their health as excellent or very good, compared with 43% of U.S. adults who have not pursued education beyond high school.** The education-health link is apparent, even after controlling for other factors that are related to health, such as age, gender, race and ethnicity.



### ③ Next to financial reasons, mental health and emotional stress are the biggest barriers to enrollment.

Despite sustained high regard for a degree, college enrollment rates remain well below pre-pandemic levels. College enrollment rates were falling prior to the pandemic, but the sharp decline in enrollment post-pandemic has forced many higher education institutions to reevaluate what they offer, what they charge and how they operate.

Although the price of attending public and private four-year institutions has started to come down, falling about 10% since the start of the pandemic, financial concerns continue to be the most frequently identified barrier to students enrolling and remaining enrolled, according to Gallup and Lumina Foundation's [The State of Higher Education 2023 report](#).

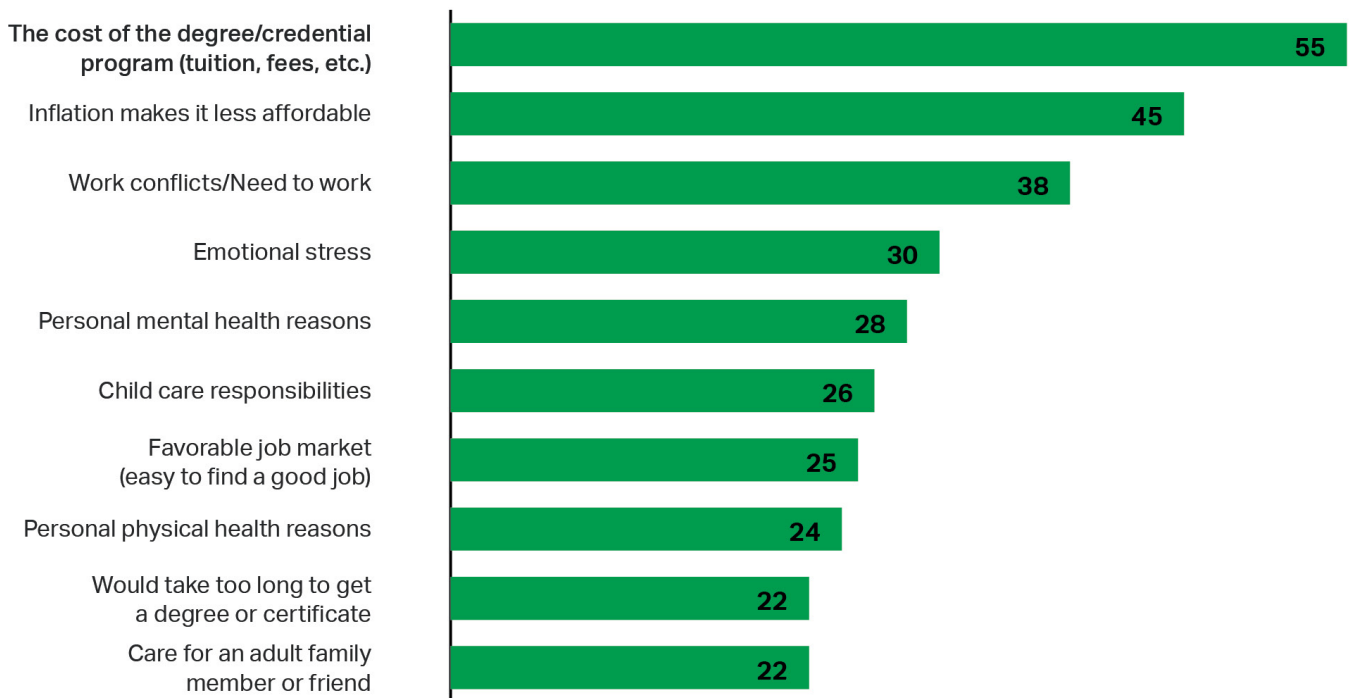
However, emotional stress and personal mental health reasons are also mentioned as barriers for more than one in four adults who have recently considered enrolling.

#### CHART 5

#### Top Reasons Why Unenrolled Adults Are Not Enrolled

Thinking now about some reasons why people may not enroll in a degree or certificate program, how important are each of the following as reasons why you are not currently enrolled?

% Very important



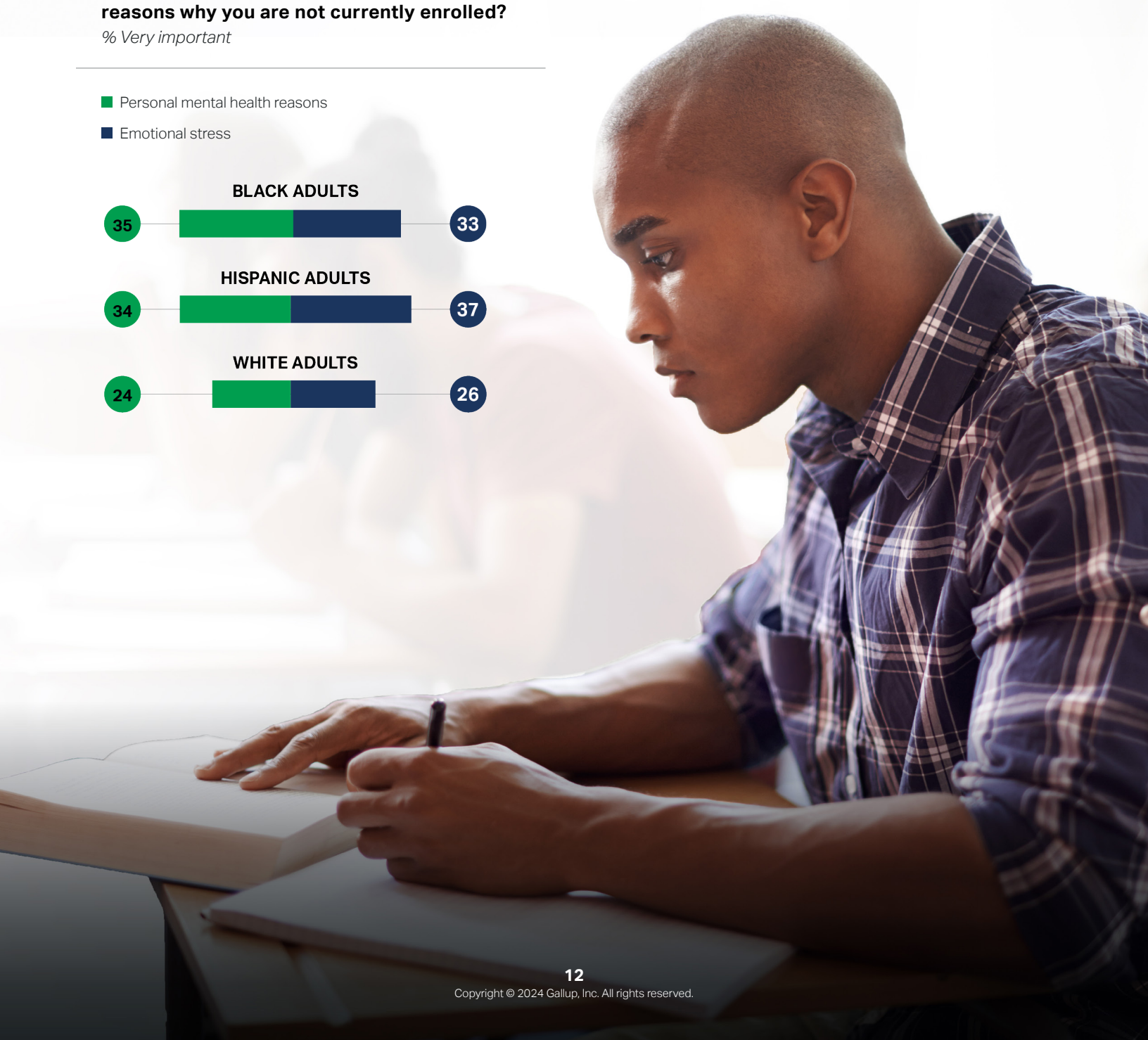
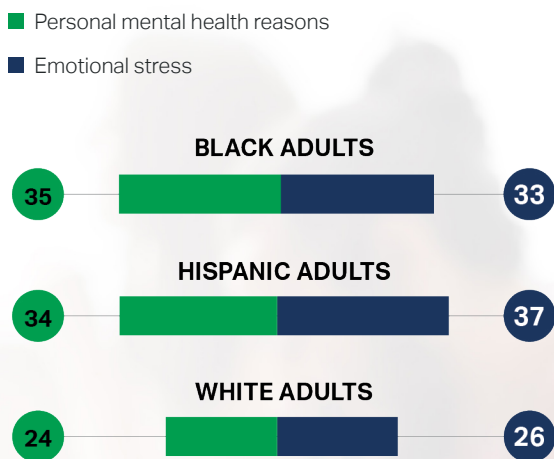
Emotional concerns are even more important for younger adults. Costs (54%) and inflation (48%) are the top barriers to enrollment among young, unenrolled adults, but emotional stress and mental health do not rank far behind. **More than four in 10 unenrolled adults between the ages of 18 and 24 say emotional stress (43%) and mental health (43%) are very important reasons they are not enrolled.**

While similar majorities across the largest race/ethnicity groups cite cost as a reason they are not enrolled, unenrolled Black and Hispanic adults are more likely than White adults to name a range of other factors as barriers, with personal mental health and emotional stress near the top.

**CHART 6**

**How important are each of the following as reasons why you are not currently enrolled?**

*% Very important*



④ Mental health and emotional stress are also the most common reasons enrolled students consider stopping out.

During the spring 2023 semester, 76% of U.S. college students reported experiencing enjoyment during much of the prior day. However, majorities also said they felt stress (66%) and worry (51%) during much of the previous day. Thirty-nine percent reported feeling loneliness and 36% said they felt sadness during a lot of the previous day.<sup>6</sup>

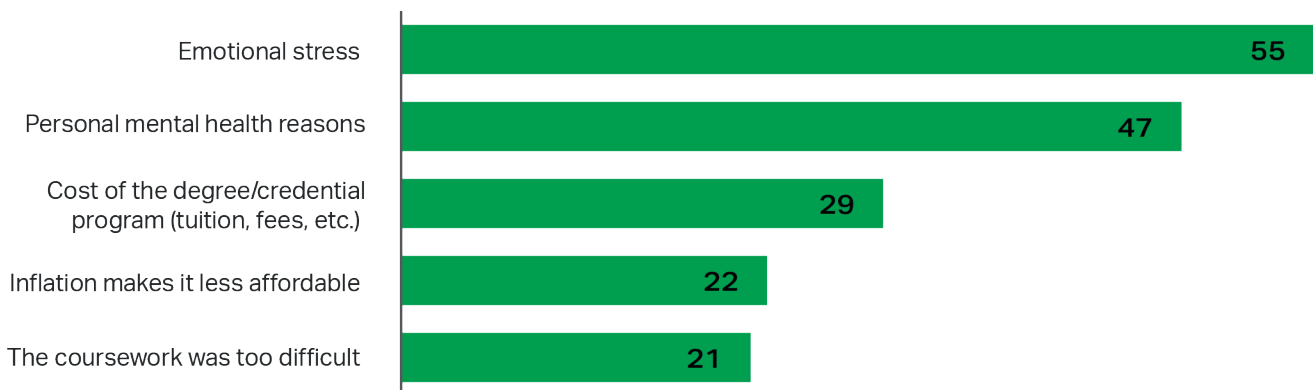
According to Gallup and Lumina Foundation’s [The State of Higher Education 2023 report](#), 41% of enrolled students said it was “very difficult” or “difficult” to remain enrolled in their program in 2022. Among those who have considered stopping out, 55% said they considered stopping their coursework due emotional stress.

**CHART 7**

**Top Five Reasons Students Considered Stopping Their Coursework**

Which of the following describes why you considered stopping your coursework?

% Among students who considered stopping out



Receiving financial aid and personal income remain essential factors in students’ ability to remain enrolled. However, students who recently considered stopping out are more likely to identify several factors as very important: Greater flexibility in course delivery, support from a school counselor or mental health professional, concern about losing your spot in the program if you took time off and change in college, program or major.

6 Hrynowski, Z., & Marken, S. (2023, August 10). *College Students Experience High Levels of Worry and Stress*. Gallup.com. Retrieved January 5, 2024, from <https://www.gallup.com/education/509231/college-students-experience-high-levels-worry-stress.aspx>



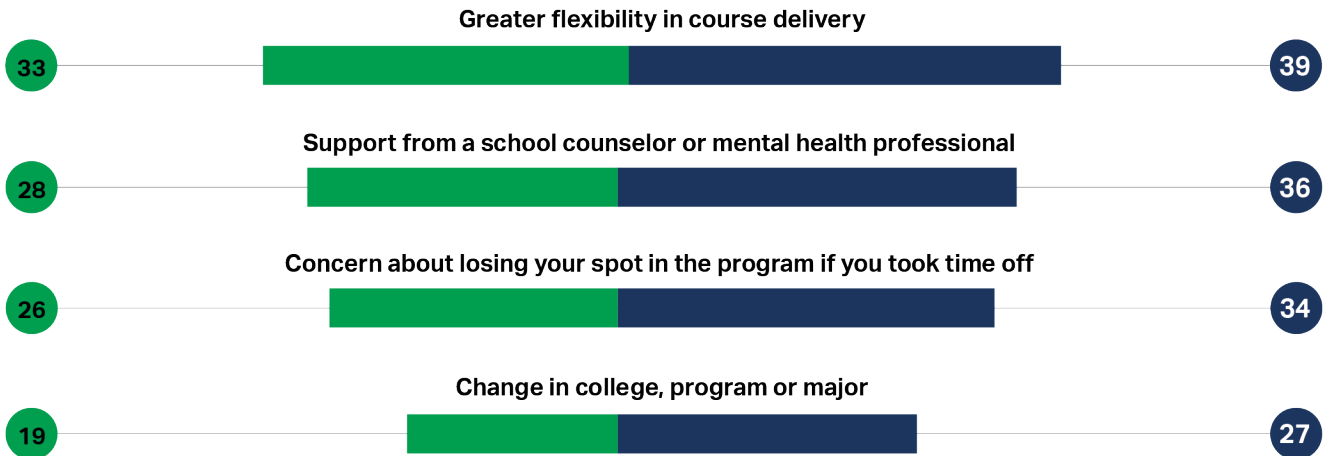
**CHART 8**

**How important are each of the following in your being able to remain enrolled in your program?**

% Very important

■ Did not consider stopping out

■ Considered stopping out



*“[I] had a hard time balancing what time should have been allocated for my life and what time should have been allocated for work and, you know, just for myself. And so, I would get to this point where I’d be trying to do multiple things and then my body would just shut down and I would just be, you know, having a mental breakdown.”*

- Katlyn E., White Female, 18-29, Stopped out

*“The reason I stopped taking courses was because I fell into a very, very deep state of depression. I was in a pretty abusive relationship at the time.”*

- Bianca F., Black Female, 30-44, Stopped out

*“Is [school] like worth going through all that stress sometimes? I just maybe sometimes wonder if it’s worth pursuing a college degree. Is it really worth the sacrifice on my mental health for it?”*

- Tony Y., Asian Male, 18-29, Currently enrolled

5 Many Black and Hispanic students in the U.S. face discrimination and other challenges while completing postsecondary programs.

According to Gallup and Lumina Foundation’s report Balancing Act: The Tradeoffs and Challenges Facing Black Students in Higher Education, six-year completion rates for any type of degree or certificate program are lower for Black students than for those in any other racial or ethnic group. Financial costs, discrimination and juggling multiple priorities cause many Black adults to stop out or never enroll in postsecondary education.

Similarly, Hispanic students struggled more than any other race or ethnicity to stay enrolled in post-high school education and training programs in 2022. Fifty percent of Hispanic students currently enrolled in a post-high school education program found it “very difficult” or “difficult” for them to remain in their program, compared with 40% of Black students and 37% of White students.

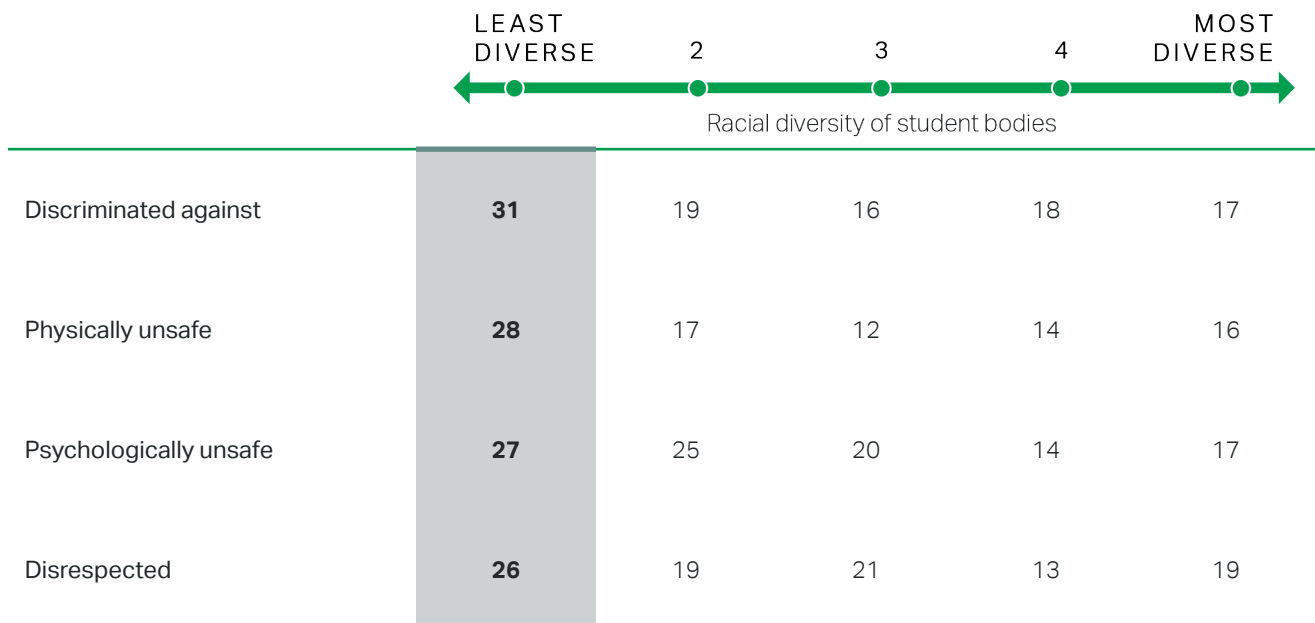
Black students in the least racially diverse programs are more likely to feel discriminated against or unsafe

Across all postsecondary institutions, 21% of enrolled Black students say they feel discriminated against “frequently” or “occasionally” in their program, versus 15% of all other students. The less diverse the student body is, the more likely Black students say they experience discrimination and feel physically and psychologically unsafe.

TABLE 2

How often do you feel any of the following at [school name] — frequently, occasionally, once or twice, or never?

% “Frequently” or “occasionally” among Black students



## Many Black Bachelor's Students Forced to Balance Studies With Other Duties

Black bachelor's students are twice as likely as other bachelor's students to have additional responsibilities as caregivers or full-time workers — 36% vs. 18%, respectively. And Black bachelor's students with competing responsibilities are also significantly more likely than those without similar responsibilities to say they have considered stopping their coursework in the past six months.

**15% VS. 8%**

15% of Black students are caregivers for adult family members or friends, vs. 8% of other students.

**11% VS. 7%**

11% of Black students are parents or guardians of children under 18, vs. 7% of other students.

**22% VS. 11%**

Overall, 22% of Black students have caregiver responsibilities, vs. 11% of other students.

**20% VS. 11%**

20% of Black students are employed full time, vs. 11% of other students.

*"I'm basically a single parent, and I don't really have much help when it comes to watching my child when I have to do things, so it can get in the way of a lot."*

- Bianca F., Black Female, 30-44

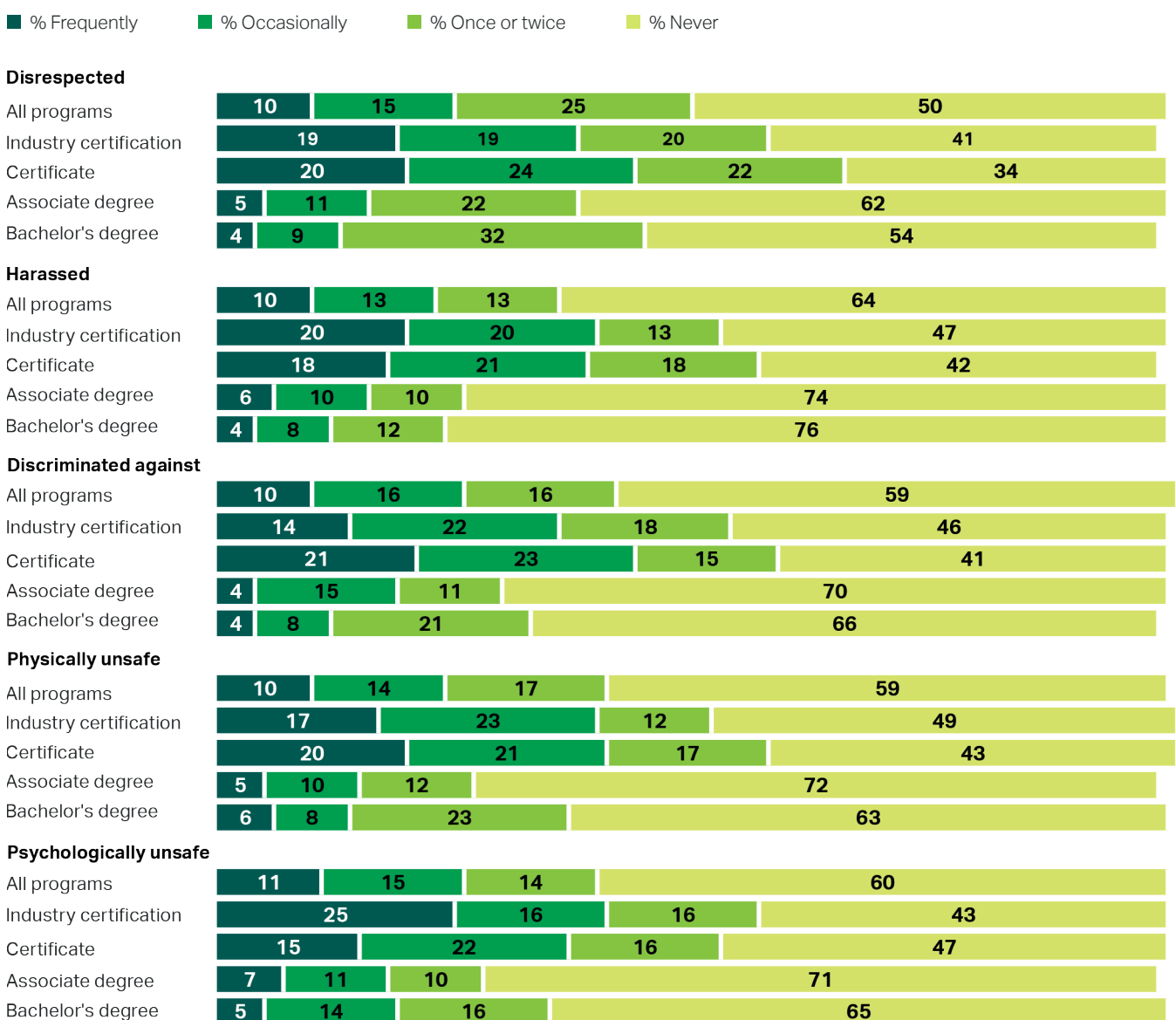


## Hispanic students report the most negative and discriminatory experiences in their secondary program.

The Lumina Foundation-Gallup study also showed that Hispanic students were more likely to feel discriminated against, harassed, disrespected and physically and psychologically unsafe at their institutions. About one in four Hispanic students currently enrolled in a post-high school education or training program said they “frequently” or “occasionally” experience each of these negative feelings — a higher rate than students of any other race or ethnicity.<sup>7</sup>

**CHART 9**

**How often, if ever, do you feel any of the following at [school name]?**



Note: Due to rounding, segments may total 100%, +/-1%.

<sup>7</sup> Ray, J. (2023, September 27). *Hispanic Students Feeling More Discrimination at School*. Gallup.com. Retrieved January 5, 2024, from <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/510323/hispanic-students-feeling-discrimination-school.aspx>

## How Gallup Can Help

Gallup works every day with school districts and institutions of higher learning to unlock their students' potential. By applying world-class data science to your unique institutional culture and needs, Gallup can help leaders identify which actions will lead to the greatest positive outcomes.

- ✓ **Build a strength-based culture that matches your school identity.** A 2023 review of external studies found that strengths-based programs in higher education led to increased student engagement, class attendance, retention and graduate rates. Gallup works with universities of all sizes to build and incorporate a customized, strengths-based approach that honors the university's culture, climate and desired outcomes.
- ✓ **Create engaged faculty and staff who deliver meaningful relationships with students.** Gallup Exceptional Workplaces are the gold standard for engagement around the world, leading to healthy, vibrant organizations that attract and retain great people. And when teachers are engaged, students are engaged, too.
- ✓ **Better understand your students, employees, parents, alumni, donors, community stakeholders and historic trends.** Institutional leaders collaborate with Gallup to answer their most pressing questions about the people they serve. Gallup also works with some of the world's leading educational institutions and nonprofits to provide thought leadership into the trends and issues facing educators today.

Start a conversation with Gallup to see how we can help bring your mission to life.



# Methodology

## Survey Methodology

Results from this report are based on five surveys with members of the U.S. Gallup Panel™ who are employed full-time or part-time, aged 18 and older, and living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia. The Gallup Panel is a probability-based longitudinal panel of U.S. adults whom Gallup selects using random-digit-dial phone interviews that cover landlines and cellphones. Gallup also uses address-based sampling methods to recruit panel members. The Gallup Panel is not an opt-in panel.

Survey Information		All Employees		K-12 Teachers	
Survey Name	Survey Dates	n Size	Margin of Error	n Size	Margin of Error
Q4 2023	Nov. 8-20, 2023	19,836	±1.0	1,106	±2.9
Q3 2023	Aug. 9-24, 2023	18,665	±1.1	1,109	±2.9
Q2 2023	May 11-25, 2023	18,871	±1.1	1,133	±2.9
Q1 2023	Feb. 6-20, 2023	18,943	±1.1	1,166	±2.9
2019 Workforce Survey	Sept. 3-16, 2019	-	-	845*	±3.4

Note: Margins of error represent percentage points above or below a 50% point estimate at a 95% confidence level.

\*There were 903 total K-12 teachers in the 2019 survey. However, current employment status for 58 of these respondents cannot be determined, so results represent 845 respondents.

## Engagement, Q12 Items, Burnout and Wellbeing (Thriving) Results

Results about engagement, Q12 items, burnout and wellbeing (thriving) are based on average results across four surveys fielded in 2023 (Q1 2023, Q2 2023, Q3 2023 and Q4 2023). Burnout results represent only full-time employees.

## All Other Survey Results

Unless otherwise specified, all other results from this survey are based on Gallup’s Q3 2023 survey of the American workforce.

## In-Depth Interviews

Qualitative insights and quotes in this report are derived from 10 in-depth interviews conducted with members of the Gallup Panel. All respondents were adults working in the U.S. who were previously employed as a K-12 teacher and left the K-12 teaching profession between 2019 and 2023. Respondents’ teaching experience ranged from 1.5 to 28 years, with an average of 14 years. Ages ranged from 28 to 56 years of age (average age=42 years) and 60% were female.

Interviews were conducted by trained Gallup research consultants in a semi-structured format. Interviews were recorded with the consent of respondents and transcribed using Zoom transcription. Qualitative analysis was conducted by Gallup research associates, who identified key themes and patterns across the interviews.

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