



ETEP

OFFICE OF EDUCATION THROUGH
EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS

DC Alumni Early Career Outcomes Survey

*Examining alumni perspectives on the impact
of high school college and career preparation
programming*

Executive Summary

To understand the experiences of young people who graduate from the District’s public and public charter school system, the Office of Education Through Employment Pathways (ETEP) conducted the Alumni Early Career Outcomes Survey, as part of the larger Charter Growth Fund 2024 National Alumni Survey¹. Due to intentional collaboration with community partners and school leaders, the District’s alumni respondents represented the largest collective of alumni voices in this national survey, with almost 500 alumni. This survey posed questions about education, employment, and quality-of-life outcomes for alumni who graduated from DC public and public charter schools in the classes of 2017-2019.

This report, the third in a series of survey briefs, focuses on respondents’ perspectives on the impact of college and career preparation programming on feelings of preparedness for life after high school. In particular, the survey highlighted the following themes:

- Alumni respondents who participated in career-oriented experiences in high school are significantly more likely to feel well-prepared for career. This impact was particularly significant among Black and Hispanic alumni respondents.
- Alumni indicate work-based learning programs and financial aid as the two most impactful supports they received during high school. Furthermore, work-based learning programs are noted most prominently as experiences alumni *wish* they had received, closely followed by financial literacy.

Implications

These findings reinforce the impact of college and career preparation programs, particularly for Black and Latino alumni. Alumni respondents who had these experiences before high school graduation expressed increased confidence as alumni step into the next stage of their journey after high school. The survey feedback highlights a notable opportunity for the District to establish multiple and layered college and career readiness opportunities throughout the DC education experience, which could result in more students engaging in these programs and feeling heightened confidence as they explore careers, build skills, and understand educational pathways. Importantly, the District has made significant investments in expanding opportunities in this space since these classes of alumni graduated.

¹ Charter Growth School Fund, 2024 Early Career Outcomes Survey.

Introduction

Background and Purpose

In fall 2024, ETEP executed the Alumni Early Career Outcomes survey in collaboration with CityWorks DC and Bain & Company, as a part of a national survey that included more than 2,600 high school alumni from the classes of 2017–2019.² ETEP plans to administer this survey every other year to deepen understanding of alumni experiences and decisions. This is the third brief in a series of publications focused on understanding insights from DC alumni responses.

Through conducting this survey, ETEP aims to deepen understanding of the paths that alumni have taken after high school and the factors that shaped their post-secondary and employment outcomes. This survey is also an example of ETEP’s responsiveness to community member feedback. During the development of ETEP’s research agenda, community members shared the importance of hearing directly from young adults about holistic measures of success.³ This qualitative feedback provides important context to the quantitative data gathered through the Education Through Employment Data System and will inform coordination with schools, District agencies, and community partners.

Survey Respondents

Nearly 500 alumni from public high schools throughout the District responded to the survey in fall 2024. Respondents received a \$15 gift card incentive for their participation. To be eligible for the survey, respondents needed to have graduated from a DC public or public charter school between 2017 and 2019 and be employed at least part-time, working 20 hours per week. Full-time advanced degree students who were not currently employed were also eligible to participate.

In terms of survey responses, it is important to understand several limitations of the survey. ETEP reached out to both DC Public Schools (DCPS) and public charter school (PCS) alumni, but DCPS alumni accounted for 82% of respondents. Although approximately 41% of the graduating classes of 2017–2019 pursued post-secondary degrees, alumni who pursued a two-year or four-year degree accounted for 75% of respondents. In addition, Black, Hispanic, and Latino alumni were underrepresented among survey respondents, while white alumni were overrepresented.

² Bain and Company, 2024 Alumni Early Career Outcomes Fact Base.

³ Office of Education Through Employment Pathways, [Community Engagement Findings Report](#).

Figure 1. Distribution of survey respondents by highest degree attained

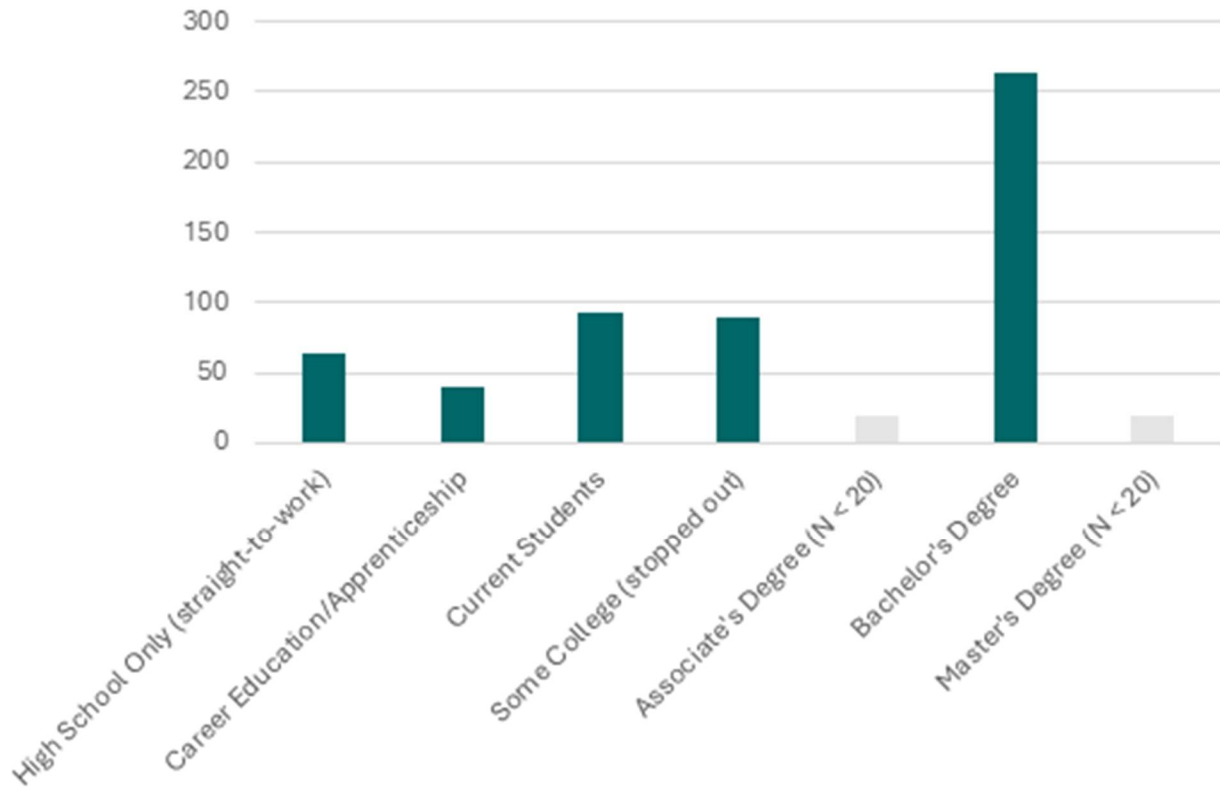
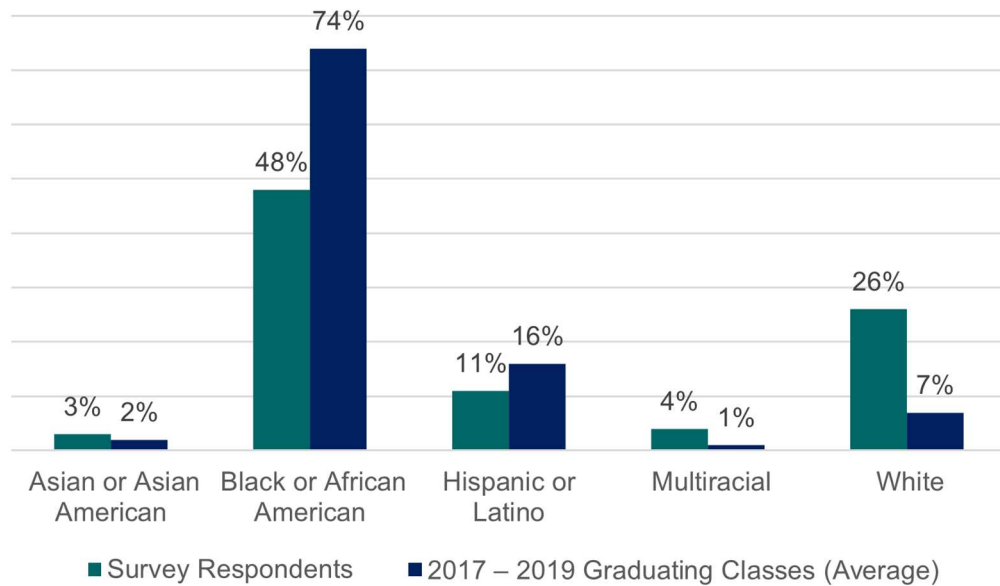


Figure 2: Distribution of survey respondents by race compared to graduating class average



Across all subgroups, findings are shared following the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) student privacy and data suppression policy.⁷ Any subgroup with 10 or fewer respondents reflected in the data was omitted from the findings highlighted in this brief. The findings also do not reflect outcomes for subgroups where less than 20 participants provided data, as meaningful insights could not be drawn from this small sample size.

This information builds on the second brief of this series, which focused on the factors that most impact student decision-making around post-high school pathways. To dive deeper into these results, along with the survey methodology, please read the first pieces in the series at dme.dc.gov/etep.

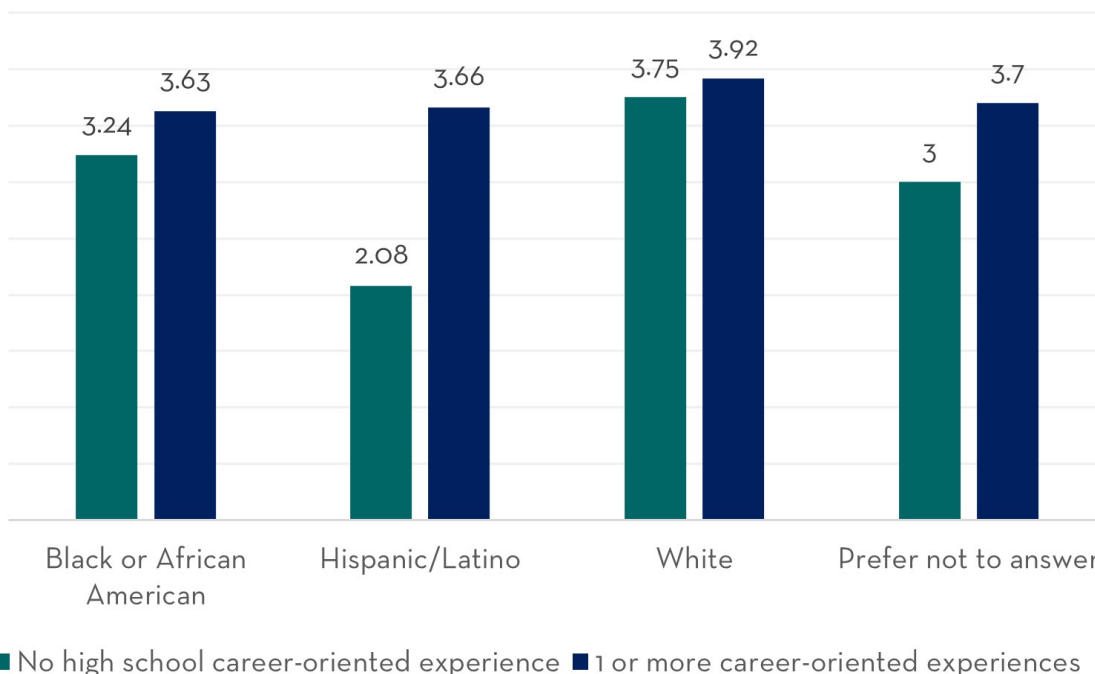
Key Insights

Theme #1: Alumni respondents who participated in career-oriented experiences in high school were significantly more likely to report feeling well-prepared for career. This impact was particularly significant among Black and Hispanic alumni respondents.

Examining DC alumni's reflections on their level of career preparedness reveals that those who participated in career-oriented experiences had a higher self-reported level of career readiness compared to their peers who did not participate in any such programs. For the purposes of the survey, career-oriented experiences could include a range of opportunities, including work-based learning, career counseling, or Career and Technical Education, among other options. As shown in Figure 3, the impact was especially strong for Black and Hispanic/Latino alumni, who showed career readiness gains ranging from roughly 0.4 - 1.6 points on a 5-point scale compared to peers who didn't engage with college and career-focused programs.

Alumni who had access to any such career-oriented experiences were more likely to say their high schools helped them better understand career paths available and associated educational next steps.

Figure 3. Average alumni response on a scale from 1 - 5, by race, on whether they agree that their high school helped them understand careers and job opportunities they could pursue



Implications

As demonstrated in these findings, access to multiple, layered career-oriented experiences in high school can help students explore careers, build skills, and understand which educational pathways may be available and aligned with their interests. Black and Hispanic/Latino students saw a more pronounced benefit from engaging with at least one college and career-oriented opportunity in high school through dual enrollment, CTE, or internships, for instance, compared to white alumni. Across all demographics, those who reported feeling most prepared engaged in five or more career-oriented experiences during high school.

These findings also reinforce insights from [Brief 2](#), which highlighted that Black alumni are not accessing the same opportunities as their peers after obtaining their bachelor's degrees, both in terms of median wages and jobs that will put them on a strong career path, as this may in part be driven by a lack of access to professional networks and understanding of career opportunities. Findings suggest that targeted support for Black and Hispanic/Latino students is particularly impactful to drive their success with navigating post-secondary decision-making and labor market outcomes.

It is helpful to note that several programs aimed to build career skills and direct experience were significantly expanded in recent years due to investments by Mayor Bowser focused on reimagining student pathways into high-wage careers. These programs, including internships,

Career and Technical Education, and apprenticeships, were not available at the same scale when this group of alumni respondents were in high school.

These findings align closely with the DC Policy Center’s report, “Building Career Assets for Lifelong Success,”⁴ which found a strong correlation between how many career-asset building opportunities students engaged in and higher incomes among DC’s high school alumni. Similar to in this survey, these experiences could include internships, career-focused coursework, or other work-based learning opportunities. This finding held across all levels of education, and particularly for those who attained associate’s degrees or certifications.⁵

Theme #2: Alumni reported that work-based learning and financial aid were the most impactful experiences and supports they received during high school. When asked what they wished they had access to, work-based learning was also the most cited experience, closely followed by financial literacy.

Through an open-response question, work-based learning experiences were overwhelmingly reported as the most common response when asked about the high school programs, opportunities, or experiences that set alumni up for career success. This was followed by financial aid support, which was the second most common response although it had approximately half the mentions of work-based learning. Multiple other experiences were also cited, albeit somewhat less frequently, including Career and Technical Education (CTE), networking, college exposure, career counseling, and dual enrollment.

When asked what they wish they had accessed in high school, alumni similarly most commonly stated work-based learning opportunities would have been most impactful. This was closely followed by an interest in financial literacy courses.

Implications

This feedback indicates the perceived value of work-based learning among DC high school alumni, both for those who accessed it and those who did not. The significant number of students who wish they had participated in work-based learning raises questions about how to expand access to these types of programs and to address common barriers, such as scheduling and program entry requirements. It is also helpful to note that since the surveyed alumni graduated, DC has launched the School Year Internship Program and the Advanced Internship Program, both of which offer expanded opportunities for high school youth to engage in work-based learning.

⁴ DC Policy Center. November 2024. Retrieved from Building career assets for lifelong success - DC Policy Center.

⁵ DC Policy Center. November 2021. Retrieved from DC high school alumni reflections on their early career outcomes - DC Policy Center.

The interest in financial literacy aligns with proposed changes to [DC's graduation requirements](#), as OSSE has proposed adding financial literacy as a graduation requirement as of October 2025. These proposed changes have been informed by extensive public feedback that similarly indicates an interest in students accessing financial literacy coursework prior to graduation.

Next Steps

In continuing to adapt high school programming, it is critical to hear directly from young people about their experiences and the paths that they have taken after high school. Findings from this series, as well as ongoing engagement with students, families, and community partners, will inform the development of policies and practices that can more effectively address disparities in post-secondary outcomes across demographics.

As future data on student and graduate outcomes become available, the Office of Education Through Employment Pathways (ETEP) will continue to support the District's strategy in aligning educational offerings with both student aspirations and market demand to set students on a path to economic mobility and prosperity.

Acknowledgments

This work would not have been possible without the support we received from school leaders and community partners in distributing and publicizing the survey. We would like to provide a special thank you to the partners listed below.

- CityWorks DC
- Department of Employment Services - Office of Youth Programs
- Department of Human Services
- District of Columbia Post-secondary Success Collaborative
- District of Columbia Public Charter Schools
- District of Columbia Public Schools
- Mikva Challenge
- Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE)
- University of the District of Columbia
- Workforce Investment Council

Appendix

Figure 4. Rankings of preparedness among alumni by the number of career program experiences in high school

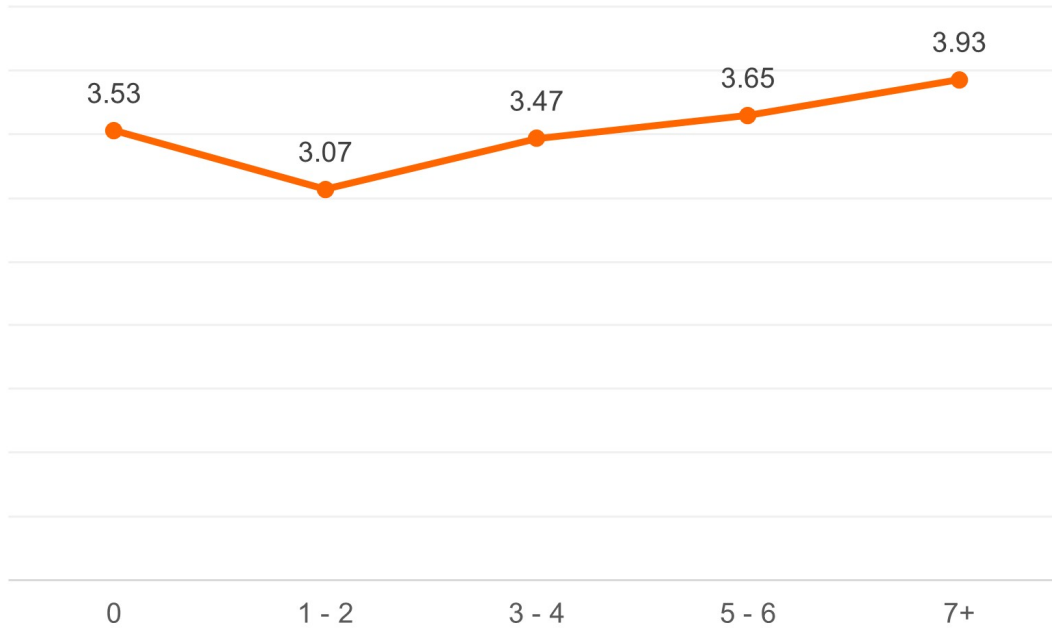


Figure 5. Experiences during high school that alumni identified as most impactful

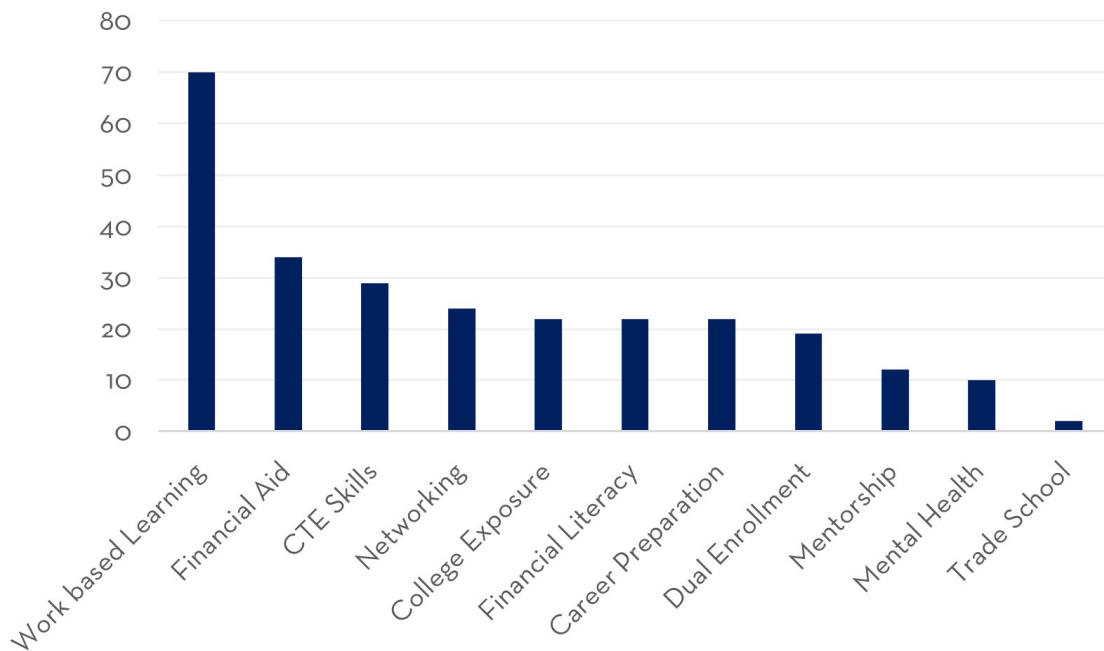


Figure 6. Experiences alumni wished they had during high school

