



The Vermont High School Class of 2022

Postsecondary Plans

Executive Summary

Every two years VSAC conducts a survey of all high school seniors. This research brief presents findings from the Vermont Class of 2022, the most recent Senior Survey, and compares these data to that from the Classes of 2012 and 2018. This allows comparison of aspiration data from a decade ago as well as a recent class prior to the pandemic.

The purpose of the study was to gather information about seniors' post-high school plans, to determine what proportion of the class planned to pursue further education or training in the fall of 2022 and to consider changes in aspiration over time. Based on our previous research, we examined students' postsecondary aspirations through the lens of two key demographic factors: students' gender and parent educational attainment.

These trend data demonstrate:

- a significant decline overall in students' intentions to pursue additional training or education after high school compared to prior years
- a widening of the gap in aspiration by both gender and parent education attainment since 2018
- a decline in the percentage of students reporting that their parents wished for them to continue their education. This decline differs significantly by gender and parent educational attainment and over time.

Analyses of the data for the Class of 2022 also show the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' perceptions on their learning, and—for at least some students—their postsecondary plans. Lastly, we present findings about students' postsecondary plans, both those who planned to continue their studies immediately after high school and those who planned to enter the workforce.

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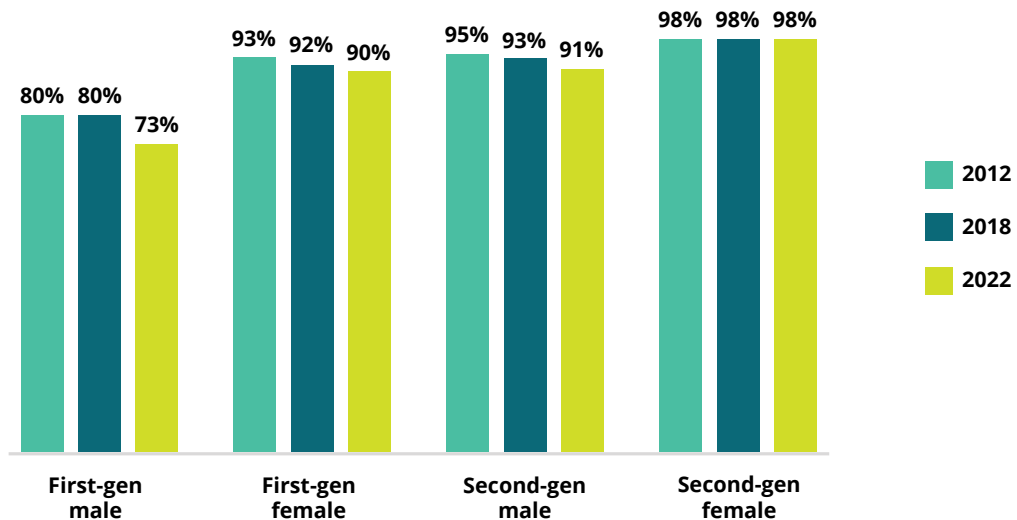


Ever Thought to Enroll After High School

For the Class of 2022, 89% of high school seniors reported that at some point they had thought they would continue their education after high school. This is slightly lower than in 2012 and 2018, when 92% and 91% of the classes, respectively, reported having thought to continue their education immediately.

We define first-generation students as those whose parent/guardian(s) have not completed a four-year degree. Second-generation students are those who have at least one parent with at least a bachelor's degree. First-generation male students have traditionally been less likely to report ever having considered going to college after high school (Figure 1), but first-generation male students in the Class of 2022 (73%) were significantly less likely than in previous cohorts to ever aspire. In contrast, our data suggest that second-generation female high school seniors have consistently and universally believed they would continue their studies after high school.

Figure 1. Ever aspired, by gender and parent educational attainment: 2012, 2018 & 2022



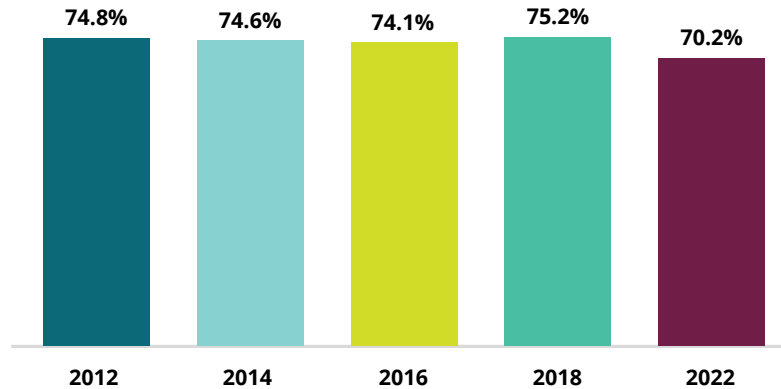
Plans to Continue Education or Training

The Senior Survey takes place in the spring of senior year and collects information on whether seniors planned to go to school in the fall or to pursue other activities such as working, joining the military, etc.

The aspiration rate is defined as the percentage of students who report that they plan to continue their studies or training in the fall after graduating high school. The aspiration rate has been consistent, hovering at about 75% since the Class of 2008.

However, the Class of 2022 aspiration rate declined significantly from 2018, the last time we conducted the survey and prior to the pandemic (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Percent of high school graduates who planned to continue education or training in the fall

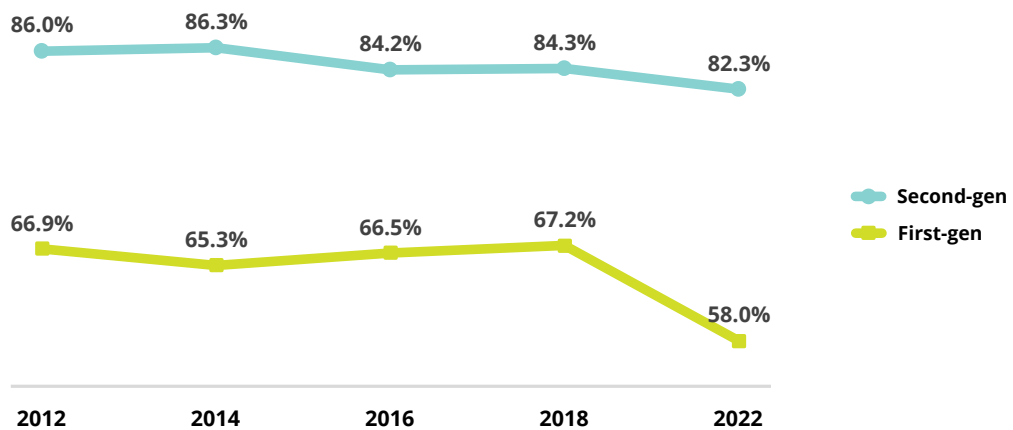


Aspiration Rate: First- and Second-Generation Students

Our previous research has shown that parental education attainment is an important correlate to student education outcomes like postsecondary aspiration (Figure 3). There has been a consistent and sizable gap in aspiration rates between first- and second-generation students over time.

However, for the Class of 2022 there was a 24-percentage point difference in aspiration rates between first- and second-generation high school seniors, the widest gap in the past decade.

Figure 3. Aspiration rate by parents' educational attainment

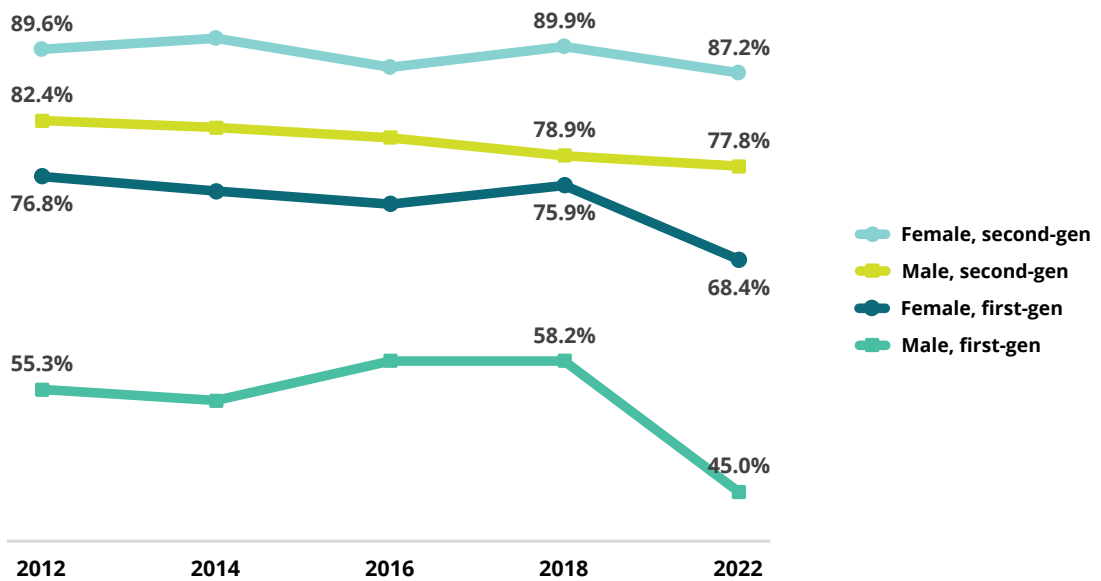


Aspiration Rate: Differences by Gender in First- and Second-Generation Students

Our previous findings have shown significant gender differences in postsecondary aspiration, with a higher percentage of female seniors (regardless of parent education) planning to continue their studies immediately after high school, compared to their male counterparts (VSAC, 2014). The gender gap in aspiration was higher among first-generation seniors (a difference of 23 percentage points) than among second-generation seniors (a difference of 9 percentage points).

As with previous cohorts, first-generation male students in the Class of 2022 had the lowest aspiration rate of all students (Figure 4). They showed the steepest decline in aspiration since 2018—45% of first-generation male students planned to continue their studies in the fall of 2022, down from 58% in 2018.

Figure 4. Aspiration rate by gender and parents’ educational attainment

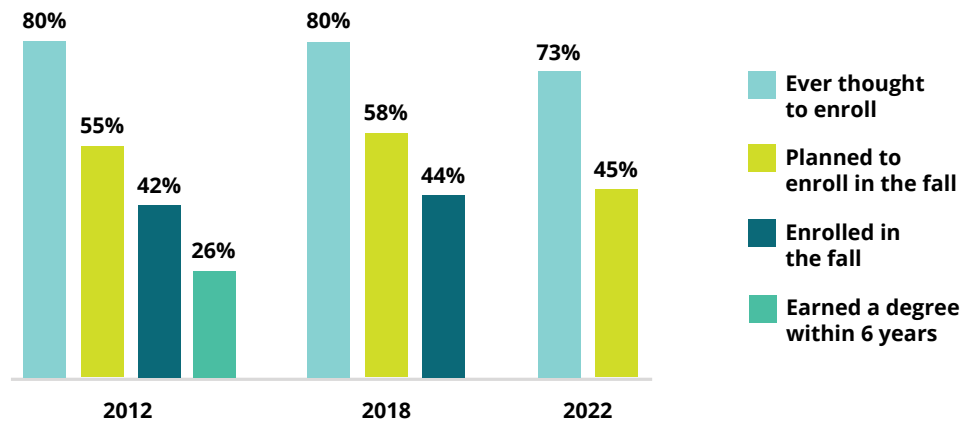


Postsecondary Outcomes: First-Generation Male Students

Findings from the Classes of 2012 and 2018 to date show a similar pattern of post-secondary outcomes for first-generation male students (Figure 5). Eight out of 10 first-generation male students report having thought of continuing their education immediately after high school; but by the time these students had become seniors in high school, the percentage planning to enroll dropped by over 20 percentage points. Our previous data suggest that roughly 4 out of 10 first-generation male students enrolled at a two- or four-year college in the fall after high school. Finally at the end of six years, 26% of first-generation male students had completed an associate or a bachelor's degree.

First-generation male students in the Class of 2022 were less likely to report that they ever thought of continuing their education than previous cohorts. They were also less likely to report that they planned to continue their education in the fall after graduating from high school. Given these findings, these students are poised to have significantly lower post-secondary enrollment and degree attainment rates than previous Senior Survey classes.

Figure 5. Postsecondary outcomes for first-generation male students

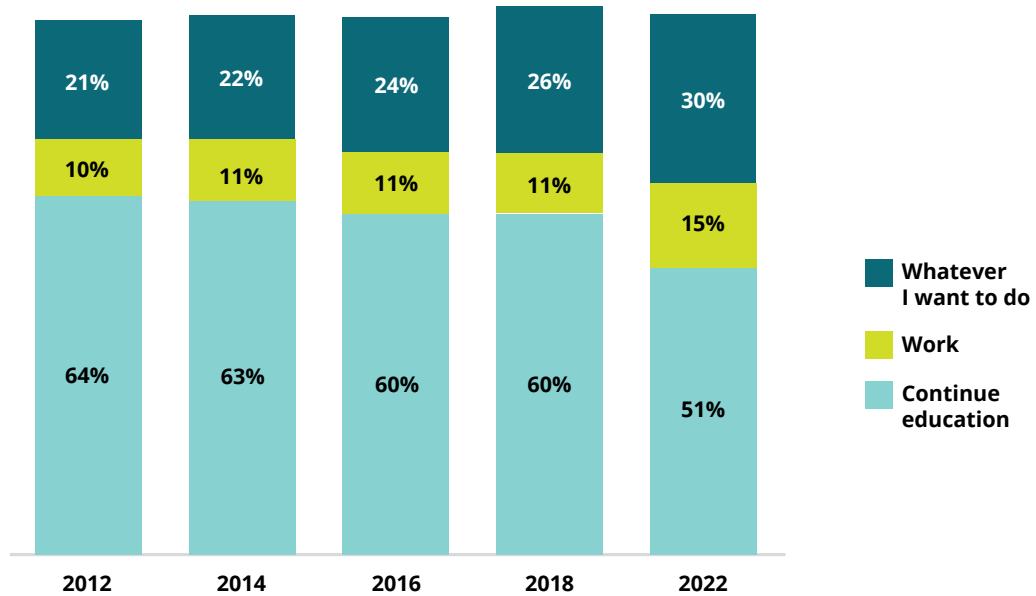


Perception of Parents' Aspiration for Students' Fall Plans

Students reported their parent's opinions on their postsecondary plans—should the student continue their education, enter the workforce, or whether parents would support whatever decision the student made.

Students' perceptions of what their parents feel they should do in the fall following high school graduation have been shifting over time. However, the percentage of students that reported they felt their parents wanted them to continue their education declined significantly from 60% in 2018 to 51% in 2022. The percentage who reported their parents wanted them to work or that their parents would support whatever they wanted to do increased significantly over that same period (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Students report what their parents feel they should do in the fall

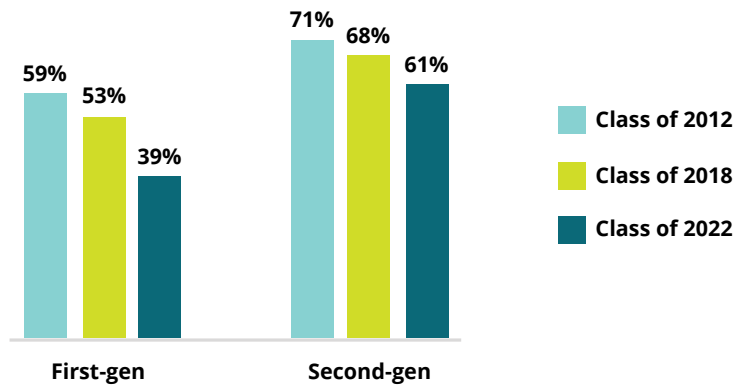


Perception of Parents' Aspiration for Students' Education, by Parents' Educational Attainment

Our research suggests that the proportion of students reporting that their parents wanted them to continue their education has been declining over time, regardless of parental education attainment, but that significant differences exist between first- and second-generation students (Figure 7).

Further, the decline in parent aspiration for education among first-generation students is double that among second-generation students from 2018 to 2022.

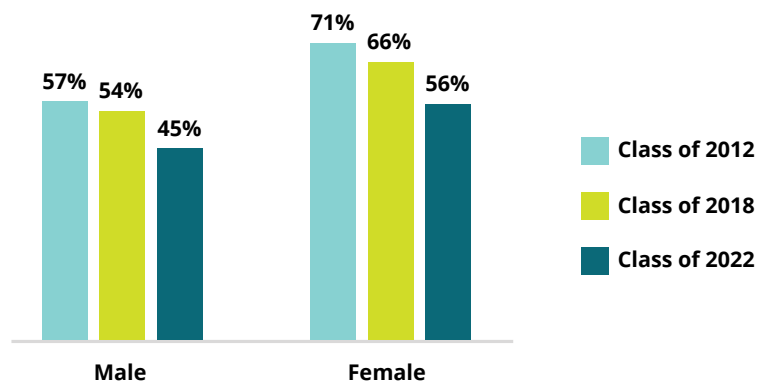
Figure 7. Percent of students reporting that their parents want them to continue their education, by first-generation status



Perception of Parents' Aspiration for Students' Education, by Gender

There were gender differences in students' perception of what their parents wanted them to do after high school (Figure 8). These gender differences are consistent over time and show that male students are less likely to report their parents want them to continue their studies after high school compared to female students. Our data further suggest that the percentage of students reporting their parents want them to continue their studies is declining over time.

Figure 8. Percent of students reporting that their parents want them to continue their education, by gender



Regional Differences in Aspiration by Parent Education Level

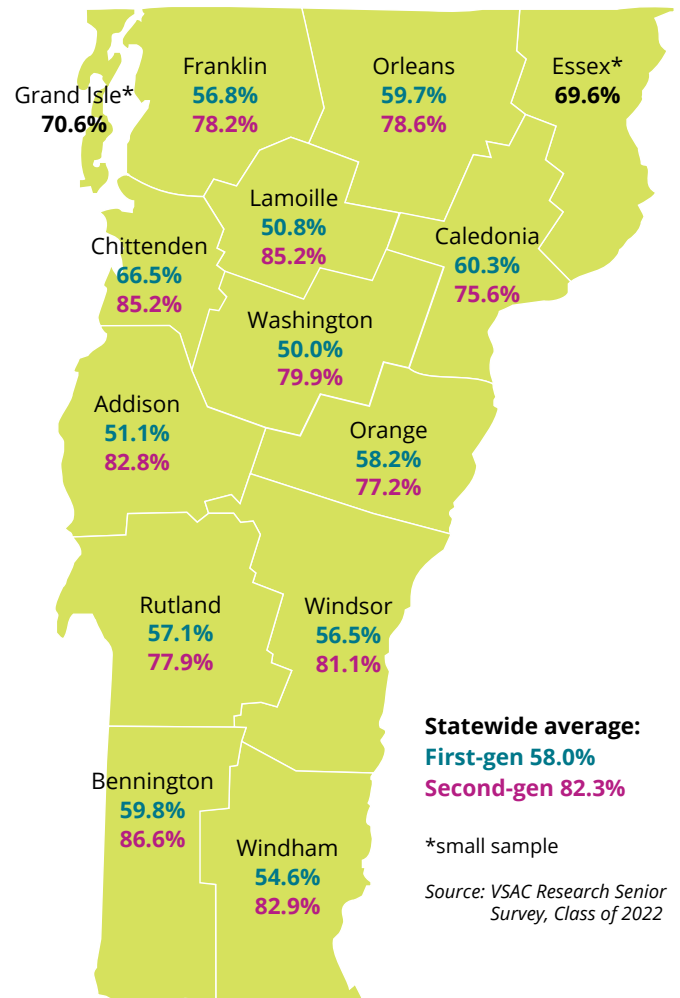
Aspiration rates differed significantly across Vermont’s fourteen counties, as shown in Table 1. Chittenden County had the highest aspiration rate in 2022 (79%) and ranked first in 2012 and 2018 as well. Rutland (64%) and Orange (64%) counties had the lowest aspiration rates in 2022. The counties with the sharpest declines from 2018 to 2022 were Franklin and Washington (a decline of 9 percentage points each between the two survey years), followed by Caledonia, Lamoille, and Windsor (each with a decline of 8 percentage points).

Differences in aspiration rates by parent educational attainment at the county level also persist, as shown in Figure 9.

Table 1. Vermont aspiration rates by county, Classes of 2018 & 2022

	2018	2022
Addison	72.3%	69.0%
Bennington	75.8%	73.5%
Caledonia	74.9%	67.0%
Chittenden	81.1%	78.5%
Essex	66.7%	69.6%
Franklin	74.5%	66.0%
Grand Isle	67.9%	70.6%
Lamoille	76.8%	68.8%
Orange	69.0%	64.4%
Orleans	70.9%	65.1%
Rutland	69.2%	64.3%
Washington	76.1%	67.1%
Windham	68.0%	66.0%
Windsor	75.5%	67.9%
Vermont	75.2%	70.2%

Figure 9. Class of 2022 aspiration rates by county & parental education level



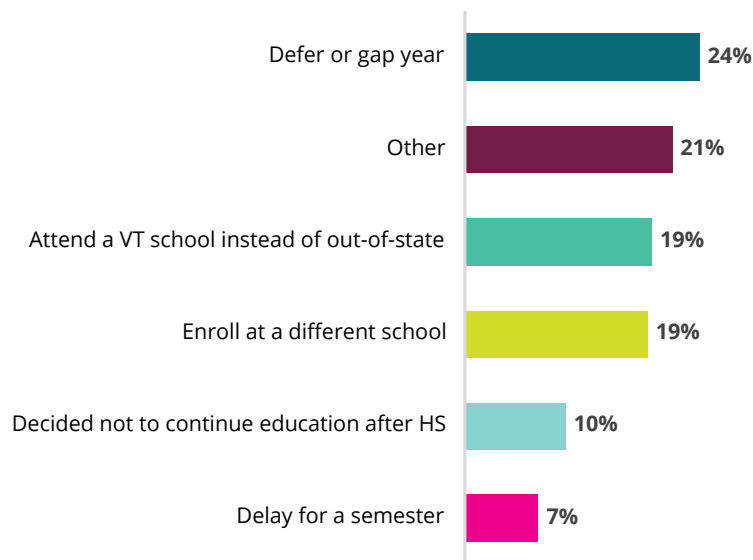
Effects of COVID on Learning and Education Plans

The Class of 2022 began high school in the fall of 2018, before the start of the COVID pandemic; they were enrolled during the height of the pandemic and graduated while the pandemic was still ongoing. One quarter of all students (27%) reported not learning as much as before the COVID-19 crisis and not keeping up with schoolwork (24%) as much as before the COVID-19 crisis. Nearly one in five seniors (19%) reported that the pandemic had also affected their post-high school plans.

As shown in Figure 10, most students who reported a change in postsecondary plans due to COVID reported they intended to enroll at a different school than originally planned (19%) or attend a Vermont school instead of an out-of-state institution (19%). Second-generation students (24%) were significantly more likely than first-generation students (14%) to report planning to enroll at a different school. Ten percent of seniors who changed their plans reported that the pandemic had led them to decide not to continue their education after high school; first-generation students (16%) were more likely than second-generation students (7%) to decide not to go on.

Nearly one in four (24%) reported they decided to defer or take a gap year. Previous findings (VSAC, 2015) suggest there is a risk to taking an intentional gap year: more than half of students who took a gap year in 2012 (57%) had failed to enroll by the fall of 2013.

Figure 10. How postsecondary plans changed, among students who reported COVID-19 changed their plans

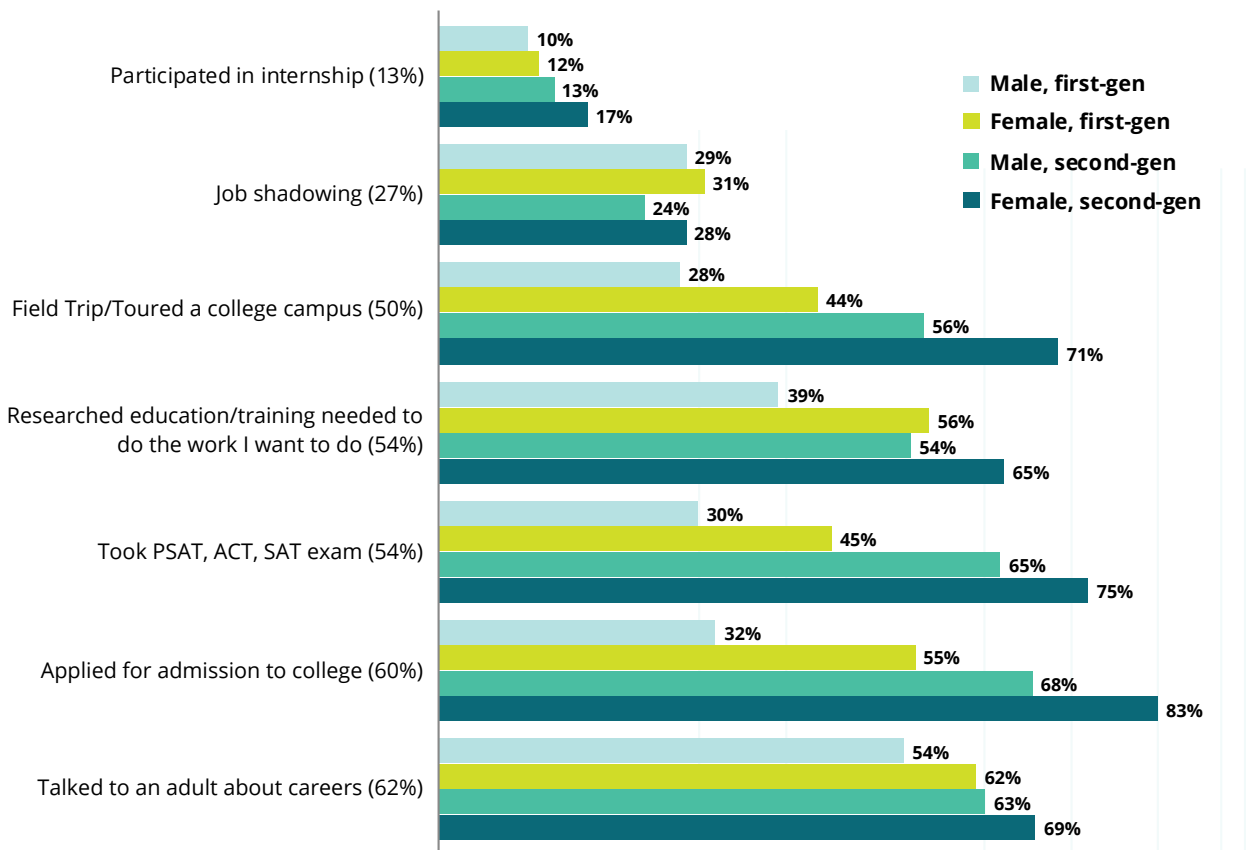


Preparing for Life After High School

More than two thirds (68%) of all seniors surveyed reported having a good idea about the type of additional training or education they needed to get the job they wanted. The remainder of seniors were either unsure of their job goals (18%) or unsure of the training required for the job they wanted (14%).

Nearly all seniors (96%) reported having spoken to their parents about what they wanted to do after high school, most of these conversations beginning when students were in high school (60%). In addition to talking to their parents, we offered a list of other actions that many students could take in preparation for life after high school (Figure 11). Our findings suggest that there were significant differences in the reporting of these activities by gender and parent education attainment. Female students were more likely to report having done a variety of these activities compared to male students, and first-generation male students were least likely in most instances to report having participated in these types of activities.

Figure 11. Percentage of seniors who prepared for life after high school



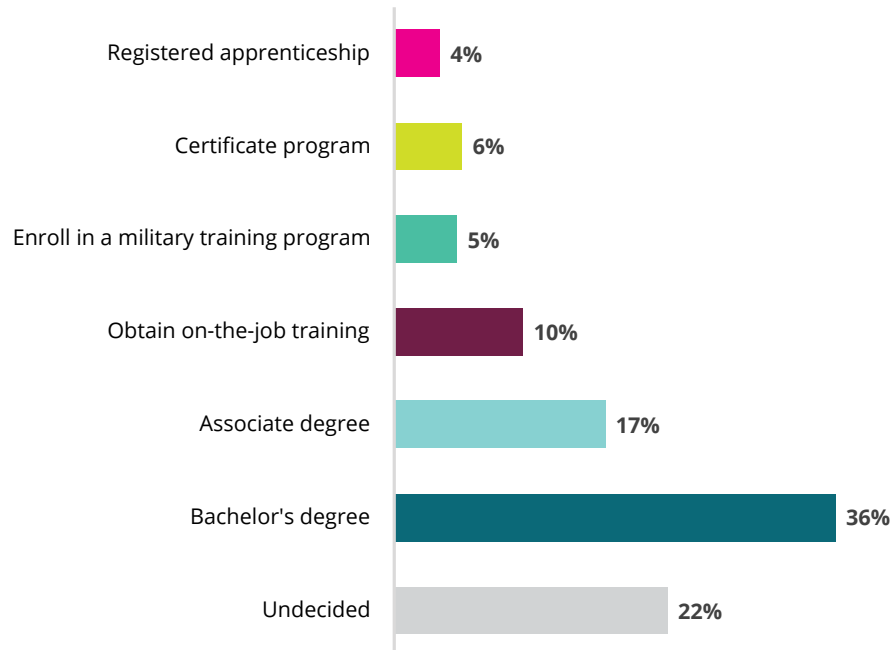
Career-Seeking Students

Three out of ten seniors reported they did not intend to continue their studies immediately in the fall of 2022. Most of these students planned to get a job after graduation (63%). Nearly two-thirds of these career-seeking students (62%) reported they had a full-time job and 19% reported having a part-time job already lined up for after leaving high school.

The most important reason seniors gave for entering the workforce was wanting to work to support themselves (39%) or needing to work to support themselves (19%). Many seniors (12%) felt they did not need to continue their education to get the job they wanted; 8% of these seniors reported they needed a break from school and 6% reported that being unsure of their plans and goals was the most important reason for planning to enter the workforce.

Nearly half (48%) of all seniors that did not plan to enroll in the fall of 2022 did plan to pursue their studies in the future. Their intentions for how they would do that varied considerably (Figure 12). Twenty-two percent were undecided about what kind of job training or education plans they would attempt in the future, but more than half thought they would pursue either an associate (17%) or bachelor's (36%) degree, and 6% reported considering a certificate program.

Figure 12. Future education plans for seniors not planning to enroll immediately after high school



Education-Seeking Students

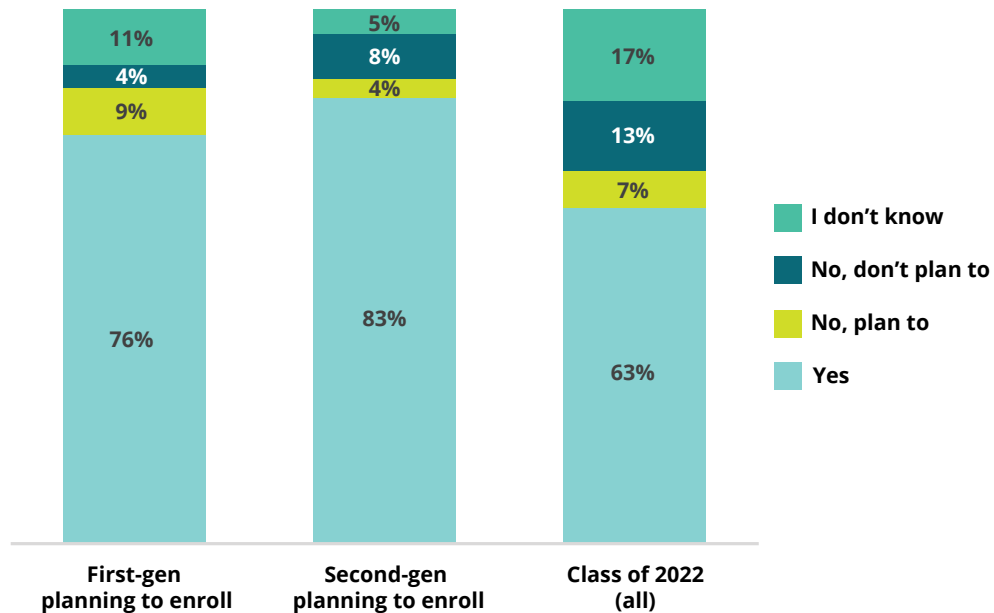
Overall, 63% of all seniors had completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) by the time they had completed the survey. Among seniors who planned to enroll in the fall of 2022, 81% reported they filed a FAFSA. However, first-generation students planning to enroll were less likely to report having applied than second-generation students who planned to enroll (Figure 13).

Education-seeking students reported taking other steps to help pay for college, such as applying for grants and scholarships (67%), saving money (60%), and planning to take out student loans (42%). Most expressed slight to moderate concern about their ability to pay for college (58%), 18% were either very or extremely concerned about paying for college.

In addition, most students (87%) planned to work while they attended school. Half of these students planned to work 20 hours a week or more, a strategy that our previous research suggests is associated with lower postsecondary enrollment rates (VSAC, 2015).

In terms of planned enrollment characteristics, 92% of continuers planned to enroll full-time; 85% planned to pursue a four-year degree. Most students planning to continue their studies planned to do so at a public institution (56%); 87% at a four-year institution and 58% at a school located outside of VT.

Figure 13. Have you completed a FAFSA?



Discussion

This research brief presents data on Vermont high school seniors' postsecondary aspiration rates for the Class of 2022 with comparisons to the Classes of 2012 and 2018. Our findings suggest some troubling trends in aspiration that may impact the college enrollment patterns of the Class of 2022. There are national data that suggest the college-going rate of recent high school graduates has declined during the pandemic, falling from 69% in the fall of 2018 to 62% in the fall of 2021 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). There is also evidence that rates of immediate college enrollment, which have been found to differ by income, have widened during the pandemic (National Student Clearinghouse, 2022). The noted declines in Vermont's aspiration rates could signal corresponding declines in future postsecondary enrollment and training rates that mimic those nationally.

Appendix: Data and Methodology

The data used in this report comes from the Senior Survey. Every two years VSAC conducts a non-random survey of Vermont high school seniors attending public and private high schools. Student participation was voluntary but encouraged. Schools receive reports comparing their school results to the overall state results, so most make the effort to collect the information as completely as possible.

In 2022, 3,959 of 5,573 graduating seniors (71% of all high school seniors) took part in the survey. Most students (92%) completed an online survey deployed using Qualtrics software (Qualtrics, Provo, UT). The survey was launched on a day chosen by the high school's administration and took place as early as April and as late as graduation practice. Students received an email that included a unique link, inviting them to complete the online survey; typically, as many as three reminder emails were sent to students who did not complete the survey initially. A few schools chose to administer a four-page, paper-pencil survey distributed to students in their schools by school staff that chose the day of the survey's administration. If students were not present on the day the paper survey was administered, no effort was made to contact them again.

Only data from students who graduated (as confirmed by graduation rosters) were included in the analysis. Data from adult graduates, GED recipients, residents of other states and foreign exchange students who obtained a high school diploma are not included in these analyses.

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