

EDUCATION INDEX: WORKFORCE EDUCATION AND EQUITY IN THE WORKPLACE

New Data Reveals What it Will Take to Make Real Progress on
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion



What will it take to make real progress on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)?

New research offers important clues.

After more than a year of financial insecurities created by furloughs and job losses, data from Bright Horizons' Education Index: "Workforce Education and Equity in the Workplace," the first of a series of reports that will explore issues related to education, show **working Americans placing a high priority on learning** to ensure their futures.

Conducted by Kelton Global, the survey of 1,017 working adults living in the U.S. showed that 87% of all respondents said learning new skills is important for success down the line.¹ For underrepresented groups who have historically had fewer opportunities to earn higher-learning degrees, the priority to further education remains high – nearly all **Black (90%) and Hispanic/Latino (91%) workers believe such advances will be important for them to succeed in the future.**



EDUCATION IS AN EQUALIZER IN THE AGE OF DEI

Degrees have been growing in importance since the post-war years of the 20th century. “Americans,” wrote the Washington Post, “have come to see college as a requirement.”² Indeed, by 2027, data show that 70% of jobs will require them.³ Survey respondents place a premium on education and believe it is the cornerstone of their professional achievement.

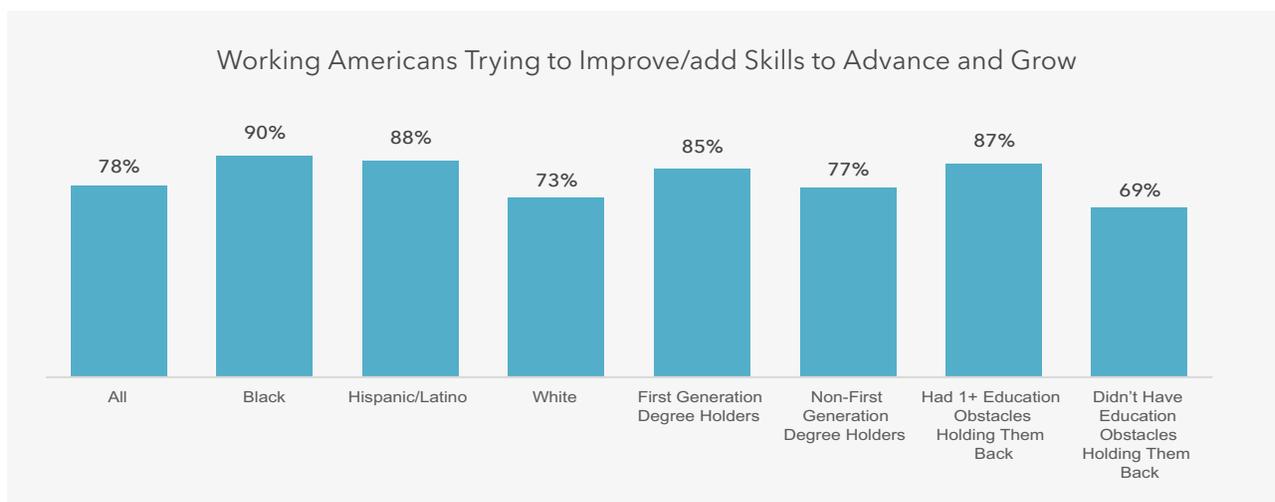
- ▶ **87%** believe learning new skills is important for their success down the line
- ▶ **77%** of workers say it is a critical factor for success
- ▶ **56%** agree their education background is key for advancing in their current jobs

Yet Hispanic and Black adults are as much as 50% less likely than white adults to have graduated from college.⁴ The lack of degrees keeps them from advancement and even being seen in the hiring pool for growth-potential roles, perhaps explaining why employees in these groups are especially likely to see degrees and other credentials as key for their growth.

- ▶ **87%** of Black workers and **80%** of Hispanic/Latino workers say completing a certificate will be important for future success – versus **62%** of white workers
- ▶ **81%** of Black workers and **79%** of Hispanic/Latino workers say a degree will be important for future success – versus **50%** of white workers

Such disadvantaged workers see education as an equalizer for both their personal and professional futures.

- ▶ **34%** of Black workers are driven to continue their education to improve their job security, versus **25%** of white employees
- ▶ **34%** of Black workers want to continue their education to set positive examples for their families, versus **23%** of white workers
- ▶ Black (**22%**) and Hispanic/Latino (**20%**) workers were significantly more likely than their white counterparts (**13%**) to be motivated to earn the same opportunities as their coworkers



HITTING EDUCATIONAL WALLS

Despite this strong desire for education, less than half of employees say they have been able to actually pursue educational goals in the last five years.

What's holding them back? Obstacles seem to come down to money and time.

- ▶ **30%** call money the top barrier
- ▶ **28%** say it's a shortage of time
- ▶ **28%** say they have too much going on at work and in their personal lives to take on any new challenges

The struggle is even greater for employees in underrepresented groups, with 44% of Black employees saying they had trouble affording education, versus 29% of white employees.

Plus, they're not getting the guidance they need at work.

- ▶ **54%** believe there are few opportunities to advance their careers in their current jobs
- ▶ **50%** say their current job offers them few opportunities for education programs
- ▶ **48%** say their employer is not good at motivating employees to seek education programs
- ▶ **41%** of American workers agree that there are few opportunities to learn new skills in their current job

The obstacles feel even weightier for those without any advanced education.

- ▶ **56%** of those without degrees believe there are few opportunities for education programs, versus **45%** who have degrees
- ▶ **48%** of workers without degrees believe there are few opportunities to learn new skills, versus **35%** of those with degrees

Among those reporting less formal education than their colleagues (such as a four-year degree), 65% say their employer offers few opportunities to advance, as compared to 52% of people who have more formal education.

Additionally, employees who have faced obstacles to education are less likely than their more-educated colleagues to say their employers are good at motivating employees to seek education programs (49% vs. 55%) or offer a lot of opportunities to advance (41% vs. 51%).

Women Are Looking For Equity, Too

Despite a pervasive interest in continued learning, many working Americans find that **the costs and time commitment hold them back**. Women, in particular, are **struggling to take advantage of education opportunities**, with nearly two-thirds (61%) saying they have not been able to participate in an education program in the past five years, while just over half (51%) of men report the same.

The inability to afford these programs, in particular, is a **more prevalent issue for working women** (36%) than working men (22%).

And when it comes to employers encouraging employees to pursue education opportunities, working women are more likely than their male counterparts to say their **employers are not good at motivating employees to seek out education programs** (51% vs. 44%).

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Low- or no-cost tuition assistance programs can make a difference. As costs for degrees continue to skyrocket – and as rapidly evolving skills become a source of concern for organizations and workers – employees across demographics are increasingly looking to employers for assistance.

- ▶ **60%** of American workers expect employers to offer education assistance benefits
- ▶ **59%** of employees say benefits should allow them to delay payment/costs until they can afford them
- ▶ **57%** expect a broad range of options

Such benefits have only grown in importance, with more than half of all employees believing that education assistance benefits (54%) and career development programs (56%) are more important today than they were a year ago.

The increased urgency of education assistance and career development is even more evident to Black (69% and 70%, respectively) and Hispanic/Latino (62% and 61%, respectively) employees than white employees (49% and 52%, respectively).



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THE PANDEMIC PUSHED EDUCATION TO THE FOREFRONT

While COVID-19 hindered some education plans, it also created a renewed interest in education for American workers – and showed them why it's so important.

Coming out of the pandemic, **nearly half (45%)** of American workers state that their education became even more important for their growth in the past year. **Black (55%)** and **Hispanic/Latino (54%)** employees feel this more strongly than **white (41%)** workers, and those who have had at least one obstacle holding them back from continuing their education (49%) report this more than those who have not (42%).

With its surging importance, it's no wonder that half of American workers are becoming more interested in pursuing education programs as they look ahead. Roughly one in two (49%) American workers grew more interested in education programs over the past year alone, something that is more pronounced for **Black (60%)** and **Hispanic/Latino (57%)** workers than **white (46%)** employees. Though much could be at play when it comes to rising interest in education opportunities for American workers, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a clear and key driver. **Three in four American workers** agree that improving (75%) and diversifying (74%) professional skills is more important than ever as a result of the pandemic. Underrepresented workers feel the pandemic is pushing education to the forefront even more, with Black and Hispanic/Latino workers more likely to believe that improving (86% and 85%, respectively) and diversifying (86% and 80%, respectively) their skillset is more crucial than ever before, as compared to their white peers (71% and 69%, respectively).

CALCULATING THE BENEFITS – FOR EMPLOYEES AND EMPLOYERS

The benefits of continued education stretch beyond employees meeting their goals. While many workers see learning as the pathway to personal betterment, they also see it as a way to improve their performance on the job, thus benefiting their organizations.

Among those who have already begun or finished an education program in the past five years:

- ▶ **42%** wanted to improve their job performance
- ▶ **33%** were driven by a desire to contribute at a higher level
- ▶ **31%** wanted to bring more value to their organizations

Many of those who have started or finished programs also seek the kind of professional solid ground that can drive loyalty and job choices:

- ▶ **41%** of employees are motivated by the prospects of earning a pay raise
- ▶ **40%** want to strengthen their job security
- ▶ **30%** want to set a positive example for their families

Those considering future education programs have similar goals to those who have already begun or finished a program, with pay raises (36%), improved job performance (32%), job security (28%), bringing more value to their organization (28%), earning a promotion (27%), contributing at a higher level (25%), and setting a positive example for their families (25%) topping the list.

American Workers Have Pursued Education Programs Because They Wanted to...



EDUCATION BENEFITS – THE UPSHOT

What can employers take away from this? After months of uncertainty, the survey data reveals a workforce hungry for the stability that new skills and learning opportunities will provide. But education, a requirement for most jobs of the future,⁵ has been a historic barrier for Black and Hispanic/Latino employees. For them, the desire for learning is especially high.

While careers would most certainly benefit from education, there is more than just personal success at stake. In an era in which 80% of employees want to work for a company that values DEI,⁶ education has the potential to differentiate organizations. However, for this to happen, access to education needs to be equal across groups. This is where employers need to step in.

Employers who choose to invest in the upskilling and reskilling of all employees – regardless of race, gender, or education background – will not only prepare their workforce for the future, but will simultaneously remove barriers and provide opportunities for diverse employees to develop the critical skills to advance their careers and step into high-demand roles with job security, ultimately improving the overall talent pool and building a stronger organization.

The Opportunity To Be The First

The most recent data on first-generation college students shows that, nationally, 56% of undergraduates were first-generation college students, and 59% of these students were also the **first sibling in their family to go to college**. First-generation students tend to lack the professional, financial, and psychological support of “legacy” students, so it makes sense why they – many of whom come from underrepresented groups – **are more committed to education opportunities** that are presented to them.

49%

of first-generation students say their **education goal was a pay raise**, versus 29% of students who came from a family of higher learners

85%

of first-generation degree holders are trying to **build skills in order to improve and grow**, versus 77% of “legacy” students



About the Bright Horizons Education Index: Workforce Education and Equity in the Workplace

The Bright Horizons Education Index is a series of research reports that will explore issues related to education. The inaugural report, “Workforce Education and Equity in the Workplace,” is an internet-based survey conducted by Kelton Global from May 14 to May 23, 2021. The sample consisted of 1,017 working adults living in the U.S. The survey was conducted with a margin of error of +/- 3.1%.

ENDNOTES

¹ Digest of Education Statistics, National Center for Education Statistics, [2018 tables and figures](#)

² Paul Glastri, “[How Americans have come to see college as a requirement.](#)” The Washington Post, September 14, 2018

³ Goldie Blumenstyk, [The Edge](#), The Chronicle of Higher Education, January 22, 2020

⁴ Digest of Education Statistics, National Center for Education Statistics, [2018 tables and figures](#)

⁵ Goldie Blumenstyk, [The Edge](#), The Chronicle of Higher Education, January 22, 2020

⁶ Susan Caminiti, “[Majority of employees want to work for a company that values diversity, equity and inclusion, survey shows.](#)” CNBC, April 30, 2021



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