

The Education Index

EdAssist® has a long-established history of tracking workforce education trends, with its annual Education Index serving as a benchmark for how employees build skills, advance their careers, and pursue financial mobility. In 2026, **Bright Horizons**® will partner with The Harris Poll to examine the workforce dynamics shaping talent retention and growth, with multiple data releases throughout the year focused on how education programs drive opportunity for employees and deliver measurable value for employers.

EdAssist™
by Bright Horizons



The mobility cliff: when upskilling doesn't advance careers

New data shows a disconnect between education opportunities, manager support, and actual career advancement.

Findings summary

Employee workforce education programs are in the spotlight and new research shows they're not doing all they could be.

Even as employees are driven to build skills, and as the number of workforce education programs expand to support them, the **potential isn't translating into career growth**. Respondents to the 2026 Bright Horizons Education Index say despite the importance of up-to-date skills, they're on their own when managing their education. Without clear pathways, there's no direction on how these programs work, who to go to for help, or even where to apply newly-earned skills toward advancement. The result is **lost potential, education investments falling short of their promise, and missed opportunities** to fill critical roles with newly upskilled employees.

Employees want to stay — but only if they can grow.

- ▶ **77%** would prefer to remain with their current employer if clear internal advancement opportunities exist, over finding a job at a new company
- ▶ **80%** want employer confirmation that they are building the right skills for career progression
- ▶ **64%** say career advancement is a top priority today

They'll need direction on how to get started and clarity on how to progress.

- ▶ **83%** are motivated to learn new skills to advance their careers
- ▶ **47%** do not know where to begin when it comes to developing the right skills for career advancement
- ▶ **71%** wish their employer provided clear steps to reach the next role/job level

Nearly 4 in 5 agree 

(79% agree, 36% strongly agree) they would choose a job at a company that **invested in their continuing education** over one that did not.

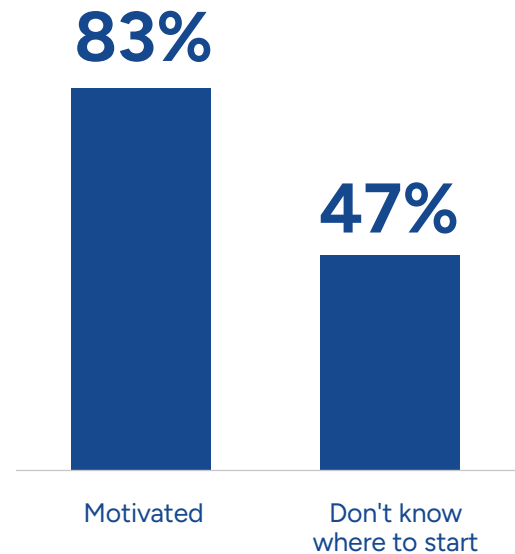
They'll require consistent start-to-finish guidance from managers.

- ▶ Employees with actively involved managers are significantly **more likely to advance after completing training** (43% vs. 28%)
- ▶ While 64% say their manager is actively involved in guiding their skill development, only 33% report having had conversations about **building relevant skills** in the past year, up from 28% in 2024

Impact will depend on how education is applied.

- ▶ **79%** would choose a job at a company that invests in continuing education over one that does not
- ▶ Among those who have taken a course/class related to job skill development, 50% say they **developed new skills** that helped them with their current role, while 40% report their new skills helped advance their career

While a **strong majority of employed adults** (83% motivated, 46% very motivated) are motivated to learn new skills to advance in their career, many (47%) **don't know where to start** in developing such skills to advance their career.



Research method

The research was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll between June 4 – 8, 2026, among 3,047 adults ages 18 and older — among whom 1,496 are employed full or part time (“employed adults”). Data are weighted where necessary by age, gender, region, race/ethnicity, household income, education, marital status, size of household, and political party affiliation to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population.

Respondents are selected among those who have agreed to participate in our surveys. The sampling precision of Harris online polls is measured by using a Bayesian credible interval. The sample data is accurate to within ± 2.5 percentage points using a 95% confidence level. This credible interval will be wider among subsets of the surveyed population of interest.

All sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability sampling, are subject to other multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including, but not limited to coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments.

Contact us to learn more.



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