

**2024  
Parent Perception Survey  
of Post-High School  
Career Options**

Kansas State Department of Education



**HIREPATHS™**

Your Kids. Endless Career Options.

# Executive Summary

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## A Note from HirePaths Founder Kristin Brighton

Much has changed since the team at HirePaths worked with the Kansas State Department of Education to conduct a baseline parent perception study in 2019.

We're excited to see that parents in 2024 are more accepting of their children pursuing all types of post-secondary career preparation. They are also more open to their children pursuing careers that require different training than a traditional bachelor's degree. While we hope our work with HirePaths has contributed to this shift in public perception, we recognize the COVID-19 pandemic significantly changed how our society thinks, behaves and learns. The increasing cost of higher education also contributes to how families determine the best educational paths for their children.

We are more convinced than ever that HirePaths is needed to continue to inform families, educators and students about the array of opportunities available to assist in career exploration and training — and most of all, to ensure that students are exposed to the jobs Kansas will need them to fill in the future. While many kids we meet are very interested in glamorous jobs they see on YouTube and TikTok, we hope our efforts help introduce them to *real jobs real* Kansas businesses need to fill — jobs like an agronomist, an aviation sheet metal worker or a restaurant manager. These jobs are the economic lifeblood of our state.

Please reach out to me with any questions, ideas or interest in getting involved. There's so much work yet to do, and we'd love to include your business or organization in our campaign!



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kristin Brighton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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# Executive Summary

## PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF POST-SECONDARY OPTIONS

In the original 2019 study, we found that 62.7% of parents hope their child will attend a four-year college or university as their next step after high school. Our 2024 data shows that the percentage of parents who hope their child will go from high school directly to a bachelor's degree has dropped to 51.7% from 62.7%.\*

While the percentage who hope their child will choose a *community college* remained relatively flat at around 12%, the percentage who said they hope their child will attend a *technical college* jumped to 13% from 8%. Likewise, the percentage who said they hope their child would *become an apprentice* jumped to 5.8% from 3.5%.

Some other highlights demonstrate perception changes since the 2019 survey. The percentage of parents who hope their child will earn a bachelor's degree someday dropped significantly to 62.1% from 74.2%.

We also saw a drop in the percentage of parents who feel their child needs a bachelor's degree to be successful, to 18.8% from 24.4%.

**We see encouraging increases in parent perceptions about apprenticeships.** When asked how they'd feel if their child chose to learn a skilled trade through an apprenticeship, a much larger percentage of parents chose they'd be *happy* (40.1% compared to 35.5%) or *very happy* (18.3% compared to 8.8%).

### PARENTS HOPE THEIR CHILD GOES DIRECTLY TO COLLEGE AFTER HIGH SCHOOL



We also saw decreases in percentages of parents who chose *neutral*, *unhappy* or *very unhappy*.

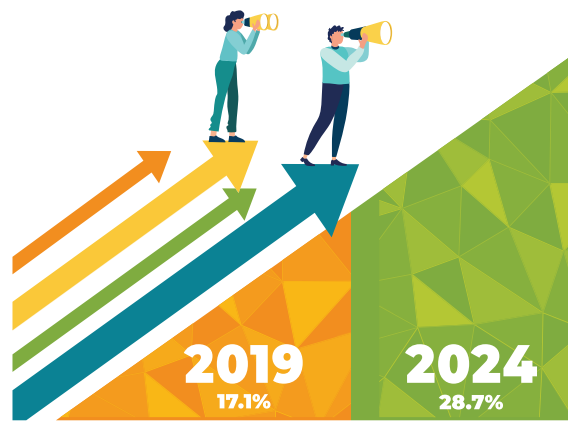
**Why are parents interested in apprenticeships for their children?** The top reason parents said they hope their child would become an apprentice was *to explore a career path he/she could grow into* (increasing to 39.5% from 35.6%). Parents also chose apprenticeships because they want their kids to *be able to financially support themselves*, with the percentage of respondents who chose this option increasing to 24.7% from 18.8%.

\*Note: Survey respondents were asked to answer the questions specifically about their oldest child age 18 or younger on the day the survey was taken.

**Perceptions of technical college improved.** Although the number of parents reporting they'd be *happy* if their child went to technical school decreased slightly (47.1% compared to 48.9%), the percentage that chose they'd be *very happy* jumped to 28.7% from 17.1%. Likewise, the percentage that chose *neutral* declined to 19.6% from 25.3%, and the percentages that chose *unhappy* or *very unhappy* also dropped (to 3.3% and 1.3%, respectively). Most of the reasons why parents felt the way they did about technical college didn't change significantly, although there were some gains in the percentage that felt *attending a technical college will help my child gain the skills necessary for his/her career*, which increased to 30% from 26.5%.

**Community colleges also received strong support,** with a slight drop in the percentages of parents who chose *happy* (49.1% from 53.5%) but a much greater percentage who chose *very happy* (30.3% from 21.9%).

The most common reason parents chose community college is they hope their child will attend a community college then later transfer to a four-year college/university. However, the percentage who chose this option decreased to 37.1% from 45.6%, which could show that fewer parents in 2024 see community college as a steppingstone to a four-year university, and instead as the only training needed to start their career. We can also see this in the increase in the number of parents who said they see community college as a way to *explore a career path he/she can grow into*, which grew to 25.3% from 20.4%.



**PARENTS FEEL VERY HAPPY IF THEIR CHILD ATTENDED A TECHNICAL COLLEGE**

**+11.6**

**PERCENTAGE POINTS**

**Parent attitudes about how they'd feel if their child enrolled in a four-year university were largely unchanged,** although the number decreased enough to require changing the headline from "Almost 90% of parents would be pleased" to "Nearly 85%."

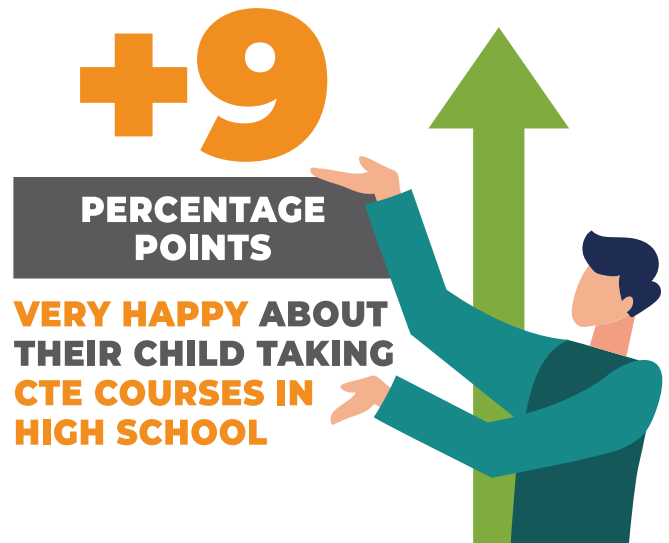
**When asked what they think their child would choose if asked about their plans after high school,** the number of parents who chose *I plan to enroll in a four-year college or university after high school* dropped to 44.5% from 52.2%. All other alternatives — from *not sure* through *I plan to work as an apprentice for a period of time to learn a skilled trade* — increased, except the percentage who said they *plan to enlist in the military*, which stayed about the same (2.2%).

**Parents are appreciative of high school career and technical training programs that allow students to earn dual high school and college credit.** The percentage of parents who reported they'd be *very happy* if their child pursued such career training in high school increased to 62.5% from 53.5%.

**Parents remain anxious about student loan debt.** Approximately 72% chose yes to the question, "Are you concerned about your child acquiring student loan debt to attend a formal education right after high school?" This percentage was up slightly from 71%.

**More parents are deterred by the cost of higher education than they were in 2019.** The number of yes responses

to, "Does the cost of higher education prevent you from wanting your child to enter a formal education program right after high school?" grew to 34.1% from 26%. Less than half (43.7%) chose no, which was a drop from the previous 52.5%.



## **PARENT PERCEPTIONS REGARDING FUTURE SUCCESS IN KANSAS**

Overall, the answers to the question, "Do you believe your child needs to leave Kansas after high school to be successful?" remained mostly the same, although the yes responses increased slightly to 10.4% from 10.1%.

## **PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF 10 HIGH-DEMAND JOBS**

Of the 10 jobs tested in 2019 and 2024, some had significant shifts in parent perception.

**Jobs that had a more positive perception** in 2024 included many of the skilled-trades professions, including electrician, welder, heavy tractor-trailer driver, construction worker and administrative office assistant.

**Jobs with decreases in positive perception** included many careers impacted by the pandemic, including registered nurse, medical technology assistant, elementary school teacher, computer support specialist and police officer.



*Thank you to participating school districts and the parents across the state who took the time to answer the questions on this survey.* Please see the full report for question-by-question responses and a demographic breakdown of participants.

## 2024 Survey Findings

A spring 2024 Kansas Department of Education survey of nearly 5,000 Kansans found that more than half of parents hope their child attends a four-year college or university after high school graduation. Respondents were instructed to answer all the survey questions about their oldest child who was on that day 18 years of age or younger.

Of the 2024 survey respondents, approximately 51.7% (**previously 62.7%**) said they *hope their child attends a four-year college or university as their child's next step right after high school*.

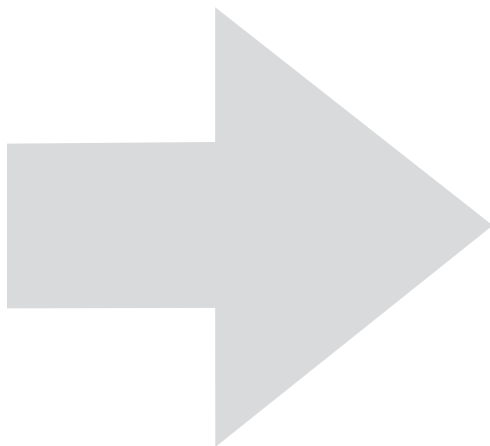
### ABOUT THE SURVEY

This study was created in partnership with the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) and HirePaths, a fund of the Kansas Rural Communities Foundation, a 501(c)3 organization. The HirePaths campaign is produced by New Boston Creative Group LLC. HirePaths educates and inspires parents about the spectrum of career options for their children after high school. This survey serves as benchmark data for that initiative. It was first completed in 2019 and again in 2024 to measure changes in parent perception. Data that differs considerably from 2019 to 2024 is noted in bold text.<sup>1</sup>



**51.7%**  
**HOPE THEIR  
CHILD ATTENDS  
A FOUR-YEAR  
COLLEGE**

<sup>1</sup>Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.



The survey gave participants other multiple-choice options as to what they hope their child does after high school, with 12.2% indicating they hope their child *attends a community college*, 13% (**previously 8%**) hoping their child *attends a technical college*, and 5.8% hoping their child *can serve as an apprentice to learn a trade*. Other options parents were given include *entering the military* (1.3%), and *being hired in an entry-level job* (1.5%). Another 14.5% (**previously 11.5%**) chose *none of the above accurately describes my current feelings*.

All respondents also were asked if they hope their child *someday* earns a bachelor's degree. For this question, 62.1% (**previously 74.2%**) chose *yes*, while 35.8% (**previously 24.9%**) chose *neutral*, and 2.1% chose *no*.

However, more than half of Kansas parents are open to the possibility that their child can be successful without a four-year degree. When asked, "Do you believe your child needs a bachelor's degree to be successful?" only 18.8% (**previously 24.4%**) of the whole chose *yes*, 21% chose *neutral* and 60.2% (**previously 52.9%**) *no*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>It should be noted that the results to this question were significantly different for respondents who completed the survey in Spanish, with 31.3% choosing *yes*, 41.8% (**previously 37.1%**) *neutral*, and 26.9% (**previously 30%**) *no*.

# An In-Depth Look at Parents' Feelings About Post-Graduation Options

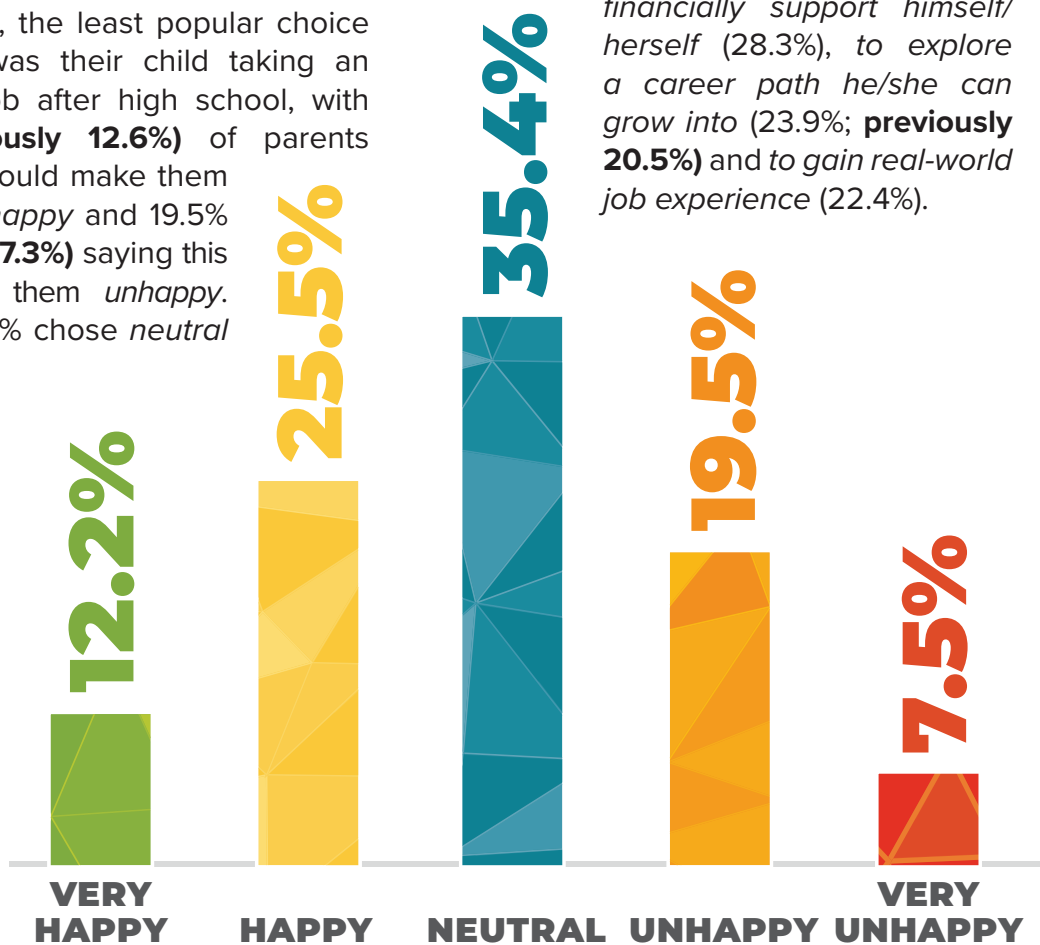
The survey offered a series of questions that looked at parents' feelings about different options their child will have after high school, including going straight into the workforce in an entry-level job, becoming an apprentice, or attending a technical college, community college or a four-year college or university.

## Entry-Level Jobs

By and large, the least popular choice of parents was their child taking an entry-level job after high school, with 7.5% (**previously 12.6%**) of parents saying this would make them feel *very unhappy* and 19.5% (**previously 27.3%**) saying this would make them *unhappy*. Another 35.4% chose *neutral*

on this question, with only 25.5% (**previously 18.9%**) choosing *happy* and 12.2% (**previously 4.5%**) choosing *very happy*.

On a later question that asked those who said they hope their child is hired for an entry-level job after high school why they feel this way, the top answers were so that *my child can financially support himself/herself* (28.3%), *to explore a career path he/she can grow into* (23.9%; **previously 20.5%**) and *to gain real-world job experience* (22.4%).



**ENTRY-LEVEL JOBS**  
are the least popular choice of parents

No one said they want their child to get a job to *save money for formal education*, and 20.9% (**previously 8.4%**) said that their child wants to *pursue a career path that requires on-the-job experience*.



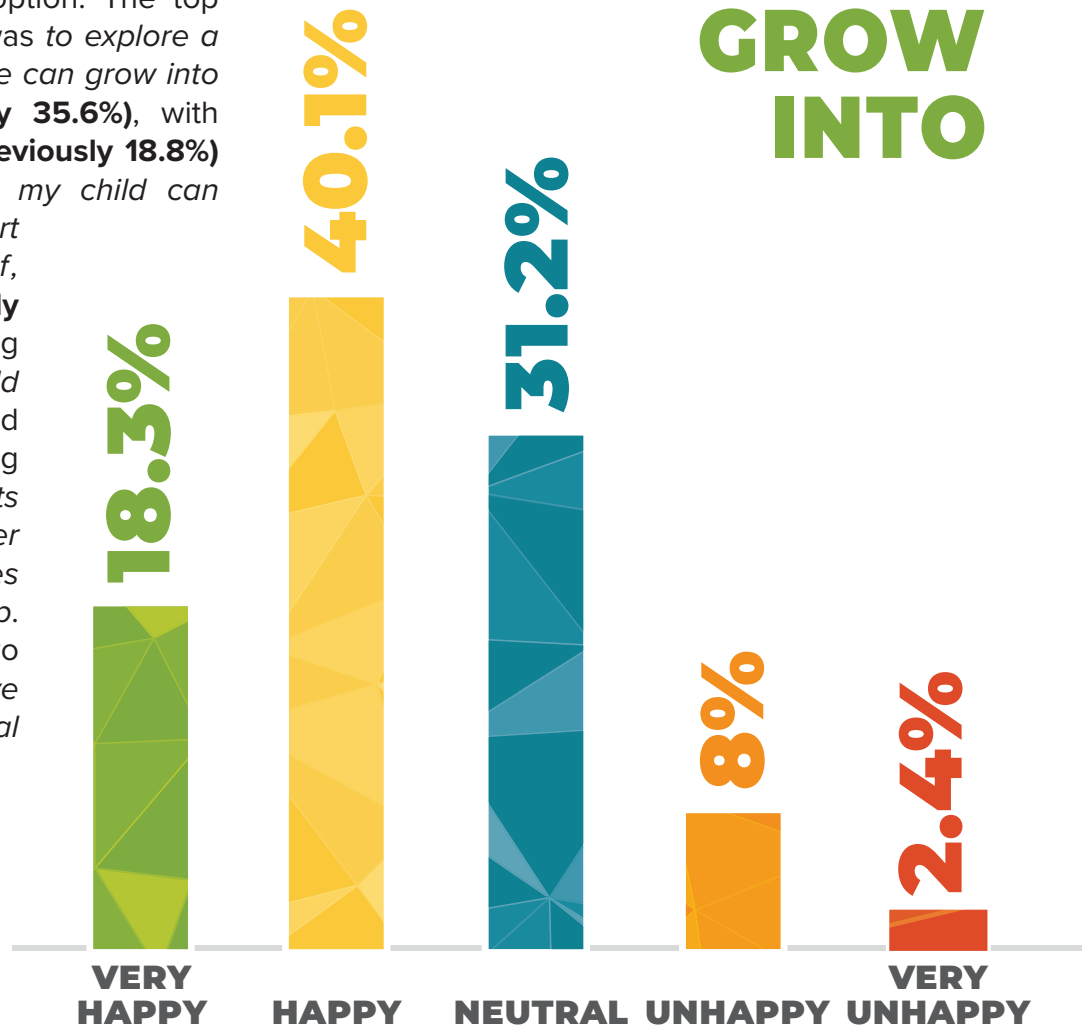
## Apprenticeships

Kansas parents had mixed feelings about their children pursuing apprenticeships, with the largest percentage (40.1%; **previously 35.5%**) choosing they'd be *happy* if their child became an apprentice, 31.2% (**previously 37.8%**) reporting they'd feel *neutral* if their child took this path, and 18.3% (**previously 8.8%**) indicating they'd be *very happy*. Of those who were less positive about apprenticeships, 8% (**previously 13.5%**) said they'd be *unhappy* and 2.4% said they'd be *very unhappy* if their child chose this path.

Those who indicated they hope their child will serve as an apprentice after high school were later asked why they chose that option. The top reason selected was *to explore a career path he/she can grow into* (39.5%; **previously 35.6%**), with another 24.7% (**previously 18.8%**) choosing *so that my child can financially support himself/herself*, 14.8% (**previously 20.5%**) choosing *to gain real-world job experience*, and 12.2% indicating that *my child wants to pursue a career path that requires an apprenticeship*. Receiving zero interest was *to save money for formal education* (0%).

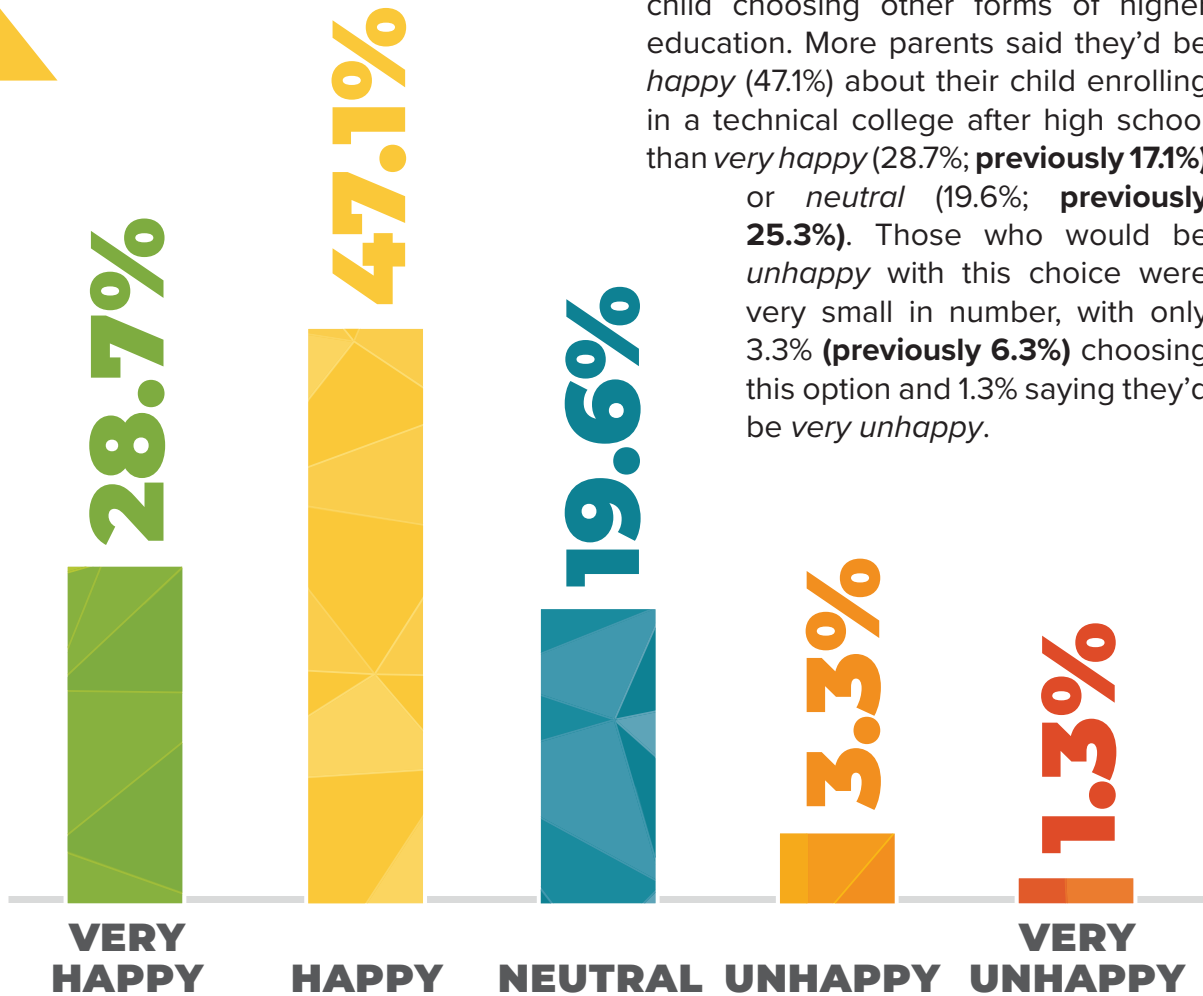


**39.5%**  
**WANT THEIR CHILD TO  
 EXPLORE A CAREER PATH  
 THAT HE/SHE CAN  
 GROW  
 INTO**



### Technical College

Parents were more positive about their child attending technical college, but not as positive as they were about their child choosing other forms of higher education. More parents said they'd be *happy* (47.1%) about their child enrolling in a technical college after high school than *very happy* (28.7%; **previously 17.1%**) or *neutral* (19.6%; **previously 25.3%**). Those who would be *unhappy* with this choice were very small in number, with only 3.3% (**previously 6.3%**) choosing this option and 1.3% saying they'd be *very unhappy*.



More than

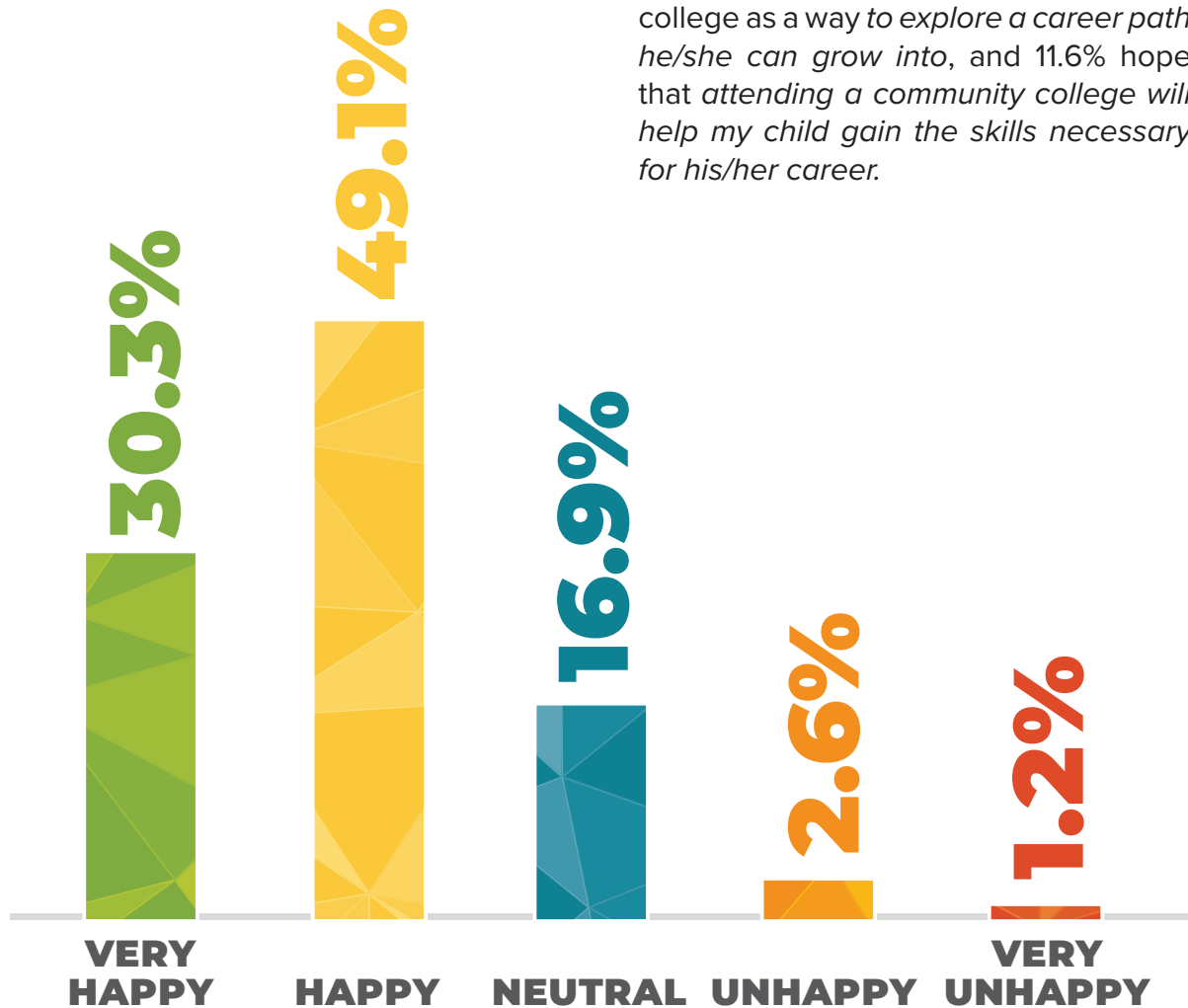
**75%** would be  
**PLEASED**  
if their child attended  
**TECHNICAL COLLEGE**

When those who said they hope their child will enroll in technical college after high school were later asked why they felt this way, the top response was *my child wants to pursue a career that requires the specialized training best provided at a technical college* (31.2%). Another 30% (**previously 26.5%**) said that *attending a technical college will help my child gain the skills necessary for his/her career*, 12.9% chose so that *my child can financially support himself/herself* and 17.9% chose to *explore a career path he/she can grow into*.

## Community College

Kansas parents feel very positively about community colleges, with 49.1% (**previously 53.5%**) indicating they'd be *happy* if their child went to a community college after high school, and 30.3% (**previously 21.9%**) *very happy*. Another 16.9% said they'd be *neutral* about this choice, 2.6% would be *unhappy* and 1.2% *very unhappy*.

The most common reason parents hope their child will attend a community college is *to help my child later transfer to a four-year college/university* (37.1%; **previously 45.6%**), which could indicate that fewer parents in 2024 see community college as a steppingstone to a bachelor's degree. Another 25.3% (**previously 20.4%**) see community college as a way to *explore a career path he/she can grow into*, and 11.6% hope that *attending a community college will help my child gain the skills necessary for his/her career*.



Parents feel very  
**POSITIVELY** about  
**COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

Nearly **85%** of parents would be **PLEASED**

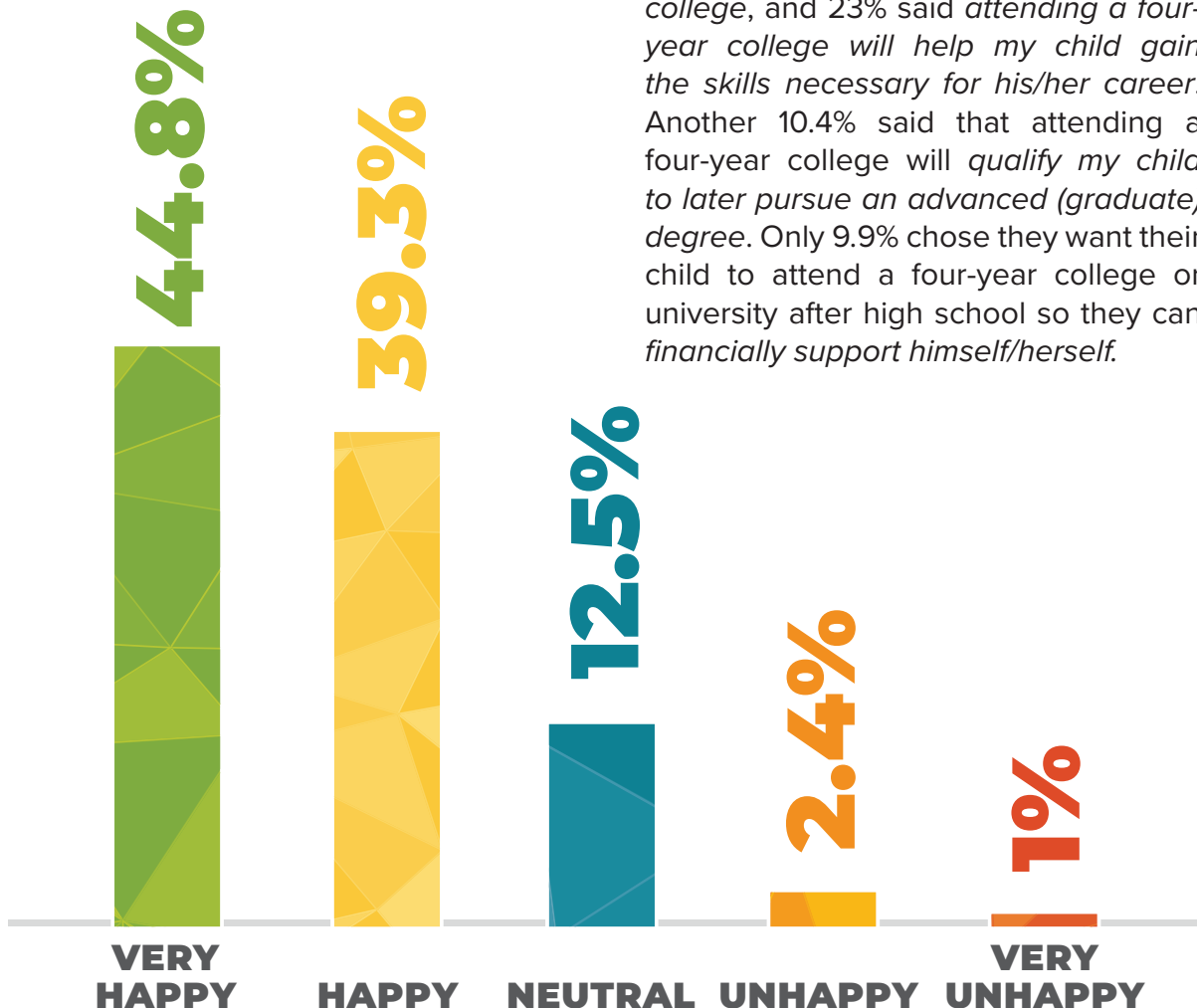


**Four-Year College or University**

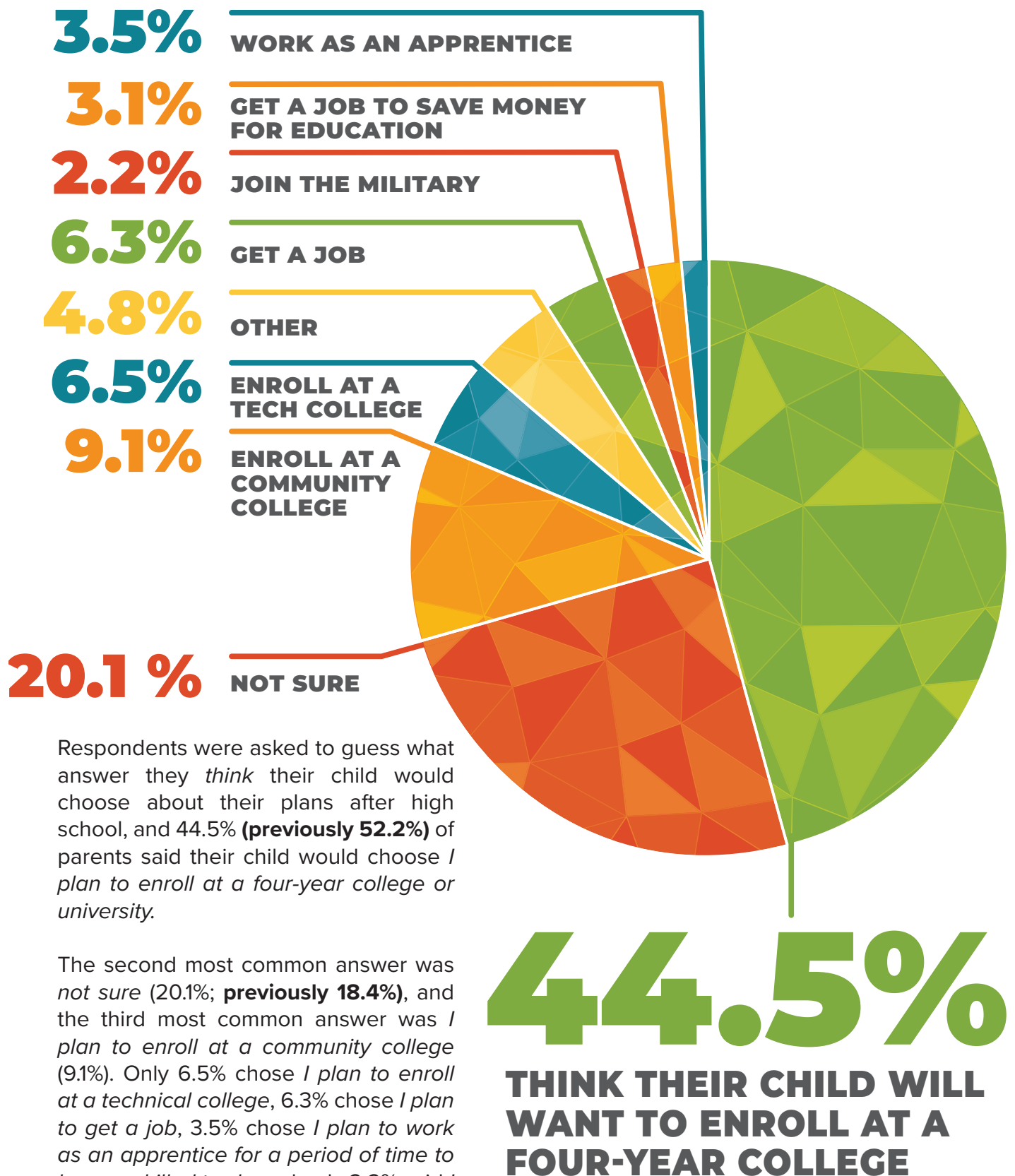
Their child's enrollment in a four-year college/university bachelor's degree program would please the largest percentage of Kansas parents, with 44.8% saying they'd be *very happy* (**unchanged from 2019**) if their child enrolled in a four-year college/university and 39.3% (**previously 42.6%**) selecting *happy*. Only 12.5% said they were *neutral* about this option, 2.4% would be *unhappy* and 1% *very unhappy* if their child enrolled in a four-year bachelor's degree program.

if their child attended a **FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE**

The reason why parents want their child to attend a four-year college? Their child's career interests. Slightly more than 27% (**previously 30%**) said they hope their child goes to a four-year college because their child wants *to pursue a career that requires the specialized training best provided at a four-year college*, and 23% said *attending a four-year college will help my child gain the skills necessary for his/her career*. Another 10.4% said that attending a four-year college will *qualify my child to later pursue an advanced (graduate) degree*. Only 9.9% chose they want their child to attend a four-year college or university after high school so they can *financially support himself/herself*.



## What They Think Their Child Wants



Respondents were asked to guess what answer they *think* their child would choose about their plans after high school, and 44.5% (**previously 52.2%**) of parents said their child would choose *I plan to enroll at a four-year college or university*.

The second most common answer was *not sure* (20.1%; **previously 18.4%**), and the third most common answer was *I plan to enroll at a community college* (9.1%). Only 6.5% chose *I plan to enroll at a technical college*, 6.3% chose *I plan to get a job*, 3.5% chose *I plan to work as an apprentice for a period of time to learn a skilled trade* and only 2.2% said *I plan to enlist in the military*.

## Perceptions of High School Dual-Credit Programs

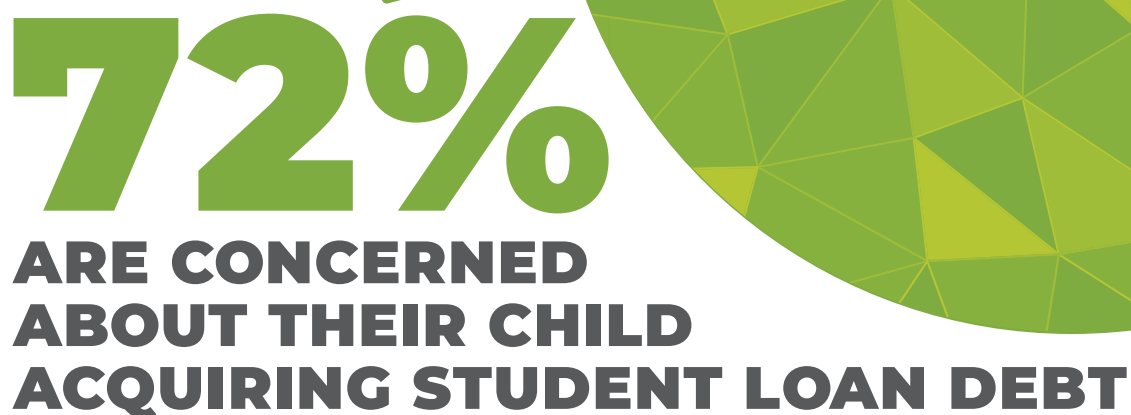
Parents greatly appreciate the opportunities students receive through career-training programs in high school that allow them to earn dual high school and college credit. When asked how they felt (or would feel) about their child pursuing such career training in high school, 62.5% (**previously**

**53.5%**) responded they were/would be *very happy*, 26% (**previously 31.8%**) were/would be *happy*, and 9.9% chose *neutral*. Only a very small percentage of respondents said their child's choice of such programs made them *unhappy* (1%) or *very unhappy* (0.6%).

## Impact of Higher Education Tuition Costs

Respondents were asked, "Does the cost of higher education prevent you from wanting your child to enter a formal education program right after high school?" The results showed that close to half of respondents aren't deterred by the price tag of higher education, with 43.7% (**previously 52.5%**) choosing *no*, 34.1% (**previously 26%**) *yes*, and 22.2% *neutral*.

However, this doesn't mean that parents are not worried about their child acquiring student loan debt. On the contrary, more than 72% chose *yes* to the question, "Are you concerned about your child acquiring student loan debt to attend a formal education program right after high school?" Nearly 10% (9.3%) chose the *neutral* response to this question, and only 18.8% chose *no*.

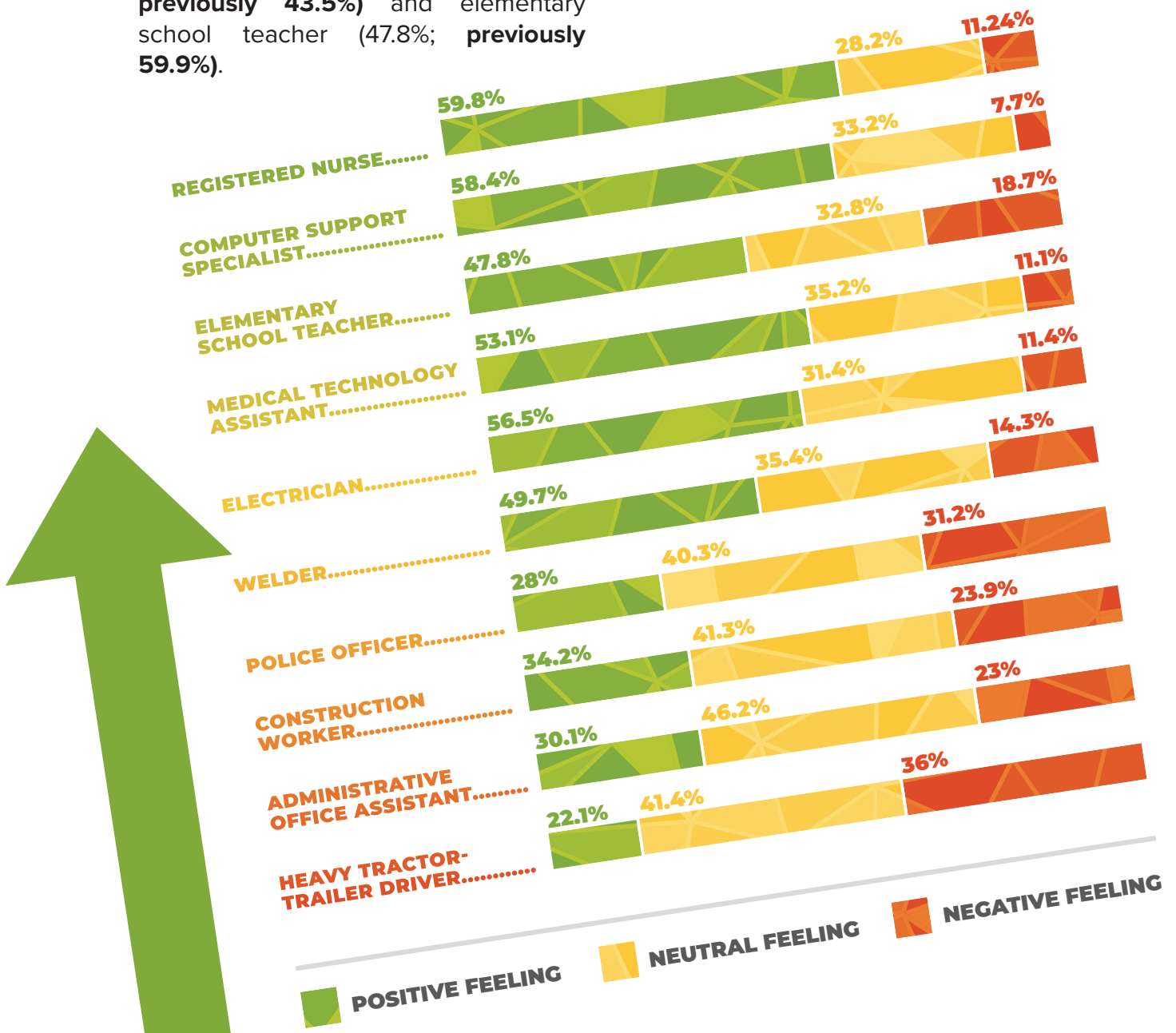


# Perceptions of 10 In-Demand Careers

The survey tested parents' perceptions of 10 in-demand careers in the state of Kansas to see whether they have a *positive, neutral or negative* feeling about their child pursuing employment in that field. Careers that received more *positive* responses than *neutral* or *negative* responses included registered nurse (59.8%; **previously 69.6%**), computer support specialist (58.4%; **previously 64%**), electrician (56.6%; **previously 53%**), medical technology assistant (53.1%; **previously 56.1%**), welder (49.7%; **previously 43.5%**) and elementary school teacher (47.8%; **previously 59.9%**).

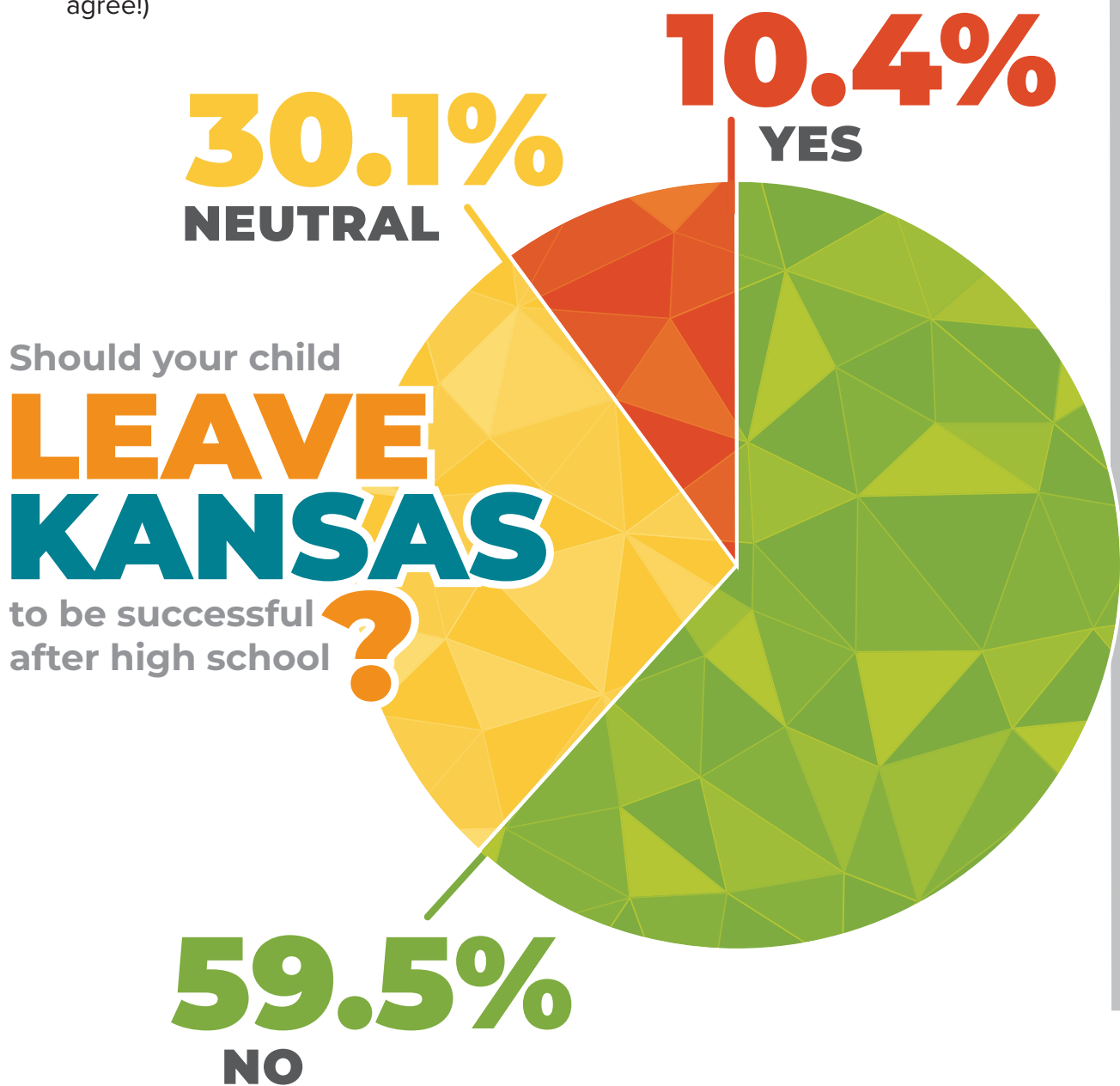
Careers that scored highest on *neutral* responses included heavy tractor-trailer driver (41.4%), construction worker (41.3%; **previously 44.4%**), and administrative office assistant (46.2%).

The careers that received the highest percentage of negative responses were police officer (31.2%; **previously 27.7%**) and heavy tractor-trailer driver (36%; **previously 45.8%**).



## Staying in Kansas After Graduation

Parents were asked if they felt their child should leave the state of Kansas after high school to be successful, and the good news for the state is that only 10.4% of parents chose **yes** (up from 10.1% in 2019) and 30.1% chose *neutral*. An overwhelming majority (59.5%) chose *no*, showing that most Kansas parents believe their children can establish successful lives and careers without leaving the state. (This begs the question as to whether their children would agree!)





## Details About the Survey and Its Participants

**METHODOLOGY** — The KSDE invited all school districts in the state to participate via email. The survey instrument was built in Qualtrics. Districts that chose to participate shared links to the survey with parents either through email or social media. The survey included a cover letter from KSDE explaining the project's goals.

**PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS** — In total, 4,897 respondents participated, of which all 4,897 participants reported having a child or children 18 years of age or younger. Nearly all respondents (99.4%) reported they live in Kansas.

**GENDER OF RESPONDENTS** — Of those who took the survey, 82.4% (**previously 79.3%**) were female and only 14.9% (**previously 18.1%**) were male, with 2.8% choosing *prefer not to answer* on the gender question.

**AGE** — Most of the participants were in their 30s or 40s, with 33.1% of respondents aged 30-39 and 46.5% aged 40-49.

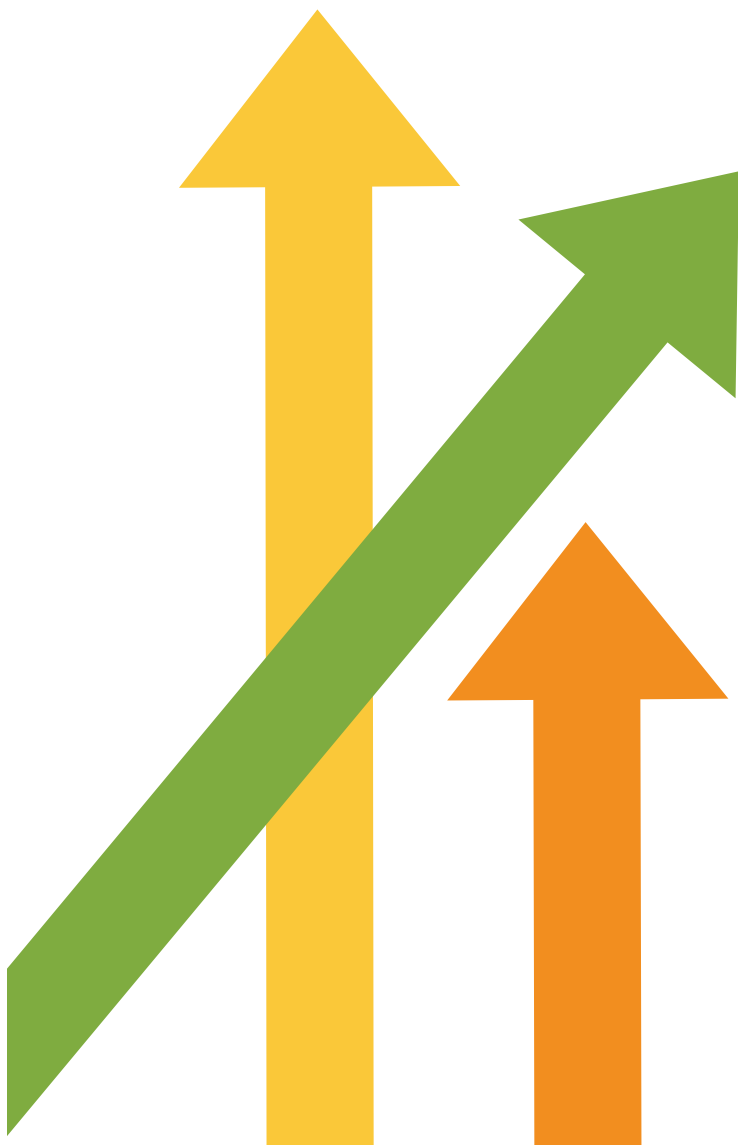
**EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT** — When asked what their highest completed level of education was, the most common answer was a *graduate degree* at 32.9% (**previously 26.5%**), with 29.3% reporting a *bachelor's degree*. Another 9.7% had *some post-high school but no degree*, 7.7% had a *post-high school certification or had completed a training program for work in a specific industry*, and 11.9% reported an *associate degree*. Only 7.2% chose *GED or high school degree*, and 1.4% did not have a high school diploma.

**RACE/ETHNICITY OF PARTICIPANTS** — Respondents primarily described themselves as *Caucasian/White* (83%; **previously 86.6%**), with 6.3% choosing *Hispanic or Latino/a*, 1.7% choosing *Multiracial*, 1.1% choosing *American Indian or Alaskan Native* and 1% choosing *Asian*. All other racial/ethnic groups accounted for less than 1% of the respondents, and 5.3% chose *prefer not to answer* on the question about race/ethnicity.

**AGE OF CHILD IN QUESTION.** Respondents were asked to answer questions specific to their oldest child who was age 18 or younger on the day the survey was taken. When the data was analyzed, researchers found most of the respondents answered questions in reference to a child age 11 or older. Only 27.3% reported they were answering questions in regard to a child age 10 or younger.

**GENDER OF CHILD IN QUESTION.** Parents answered questions about a male student 51.3% (**previously 46.7%**) of the time and a female student 44.8% (**previously 50.7%**) of the time. Another 3.9% chose *prefer not to answer regarding the gender of their oldest child*.

**RACE/ETHNICITY OF CHILD IN QUESTION.** When describing their oldest child (age 18 or younger), 77.9% (**previously 82%**) said the child would be best described as *Caucasian/White*, 7.2% *Hispanic or Latino/a*, 5% *Multiracial*, and 5.4% chose *prefer not to answer*. Slightly more than 1% said their child would be best described as *African American/Black* (1.3%) or *American Indian or Alaskan native* (1.3%).



Get Involved with

**HIREPATHS**

**HirePaths** is a public-private partnership created to help better align the expectations and skills of young people with the real needs of Kansas employers. We encourage families and educators to explore a range of careers and post-secondary opportunities with their kids.

If your company or organization would like to become involved in our program, please contact **Kristin Brighton** with HirePaths at 785-587-8185 or [kristin@newbostoncreative.com](mailto:kristin@newbostoncreative.com).



**HIREPATHS**<sup>™</sup>  
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