

The background image shows two construction workers on a roof. They are wearing yellow long-sleeved shirts, blue jeans, and white hard hats with blue accents. They are both wearing safety harnesses. The worker on the left is leaning forward, and the worker on the right is also leaning forward, appearing to be working together on a task. The roof has a dark, textured surface. In the background, there are green trees and a satellite dish on a building.

Skilled Trades Education in High Schools: Perspectives from Voters, Parents, and Students

Surveys funded by Harbor Freight Tools for Schools and conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago (2026)

Voter Survey (12/4-31/2025): 2,080 registered voters in the United States

Parent Survey (12/9/2025-1/2/2026): 2,174 parents of public high school students in the United States

Student Survey (12/15-2025-1/21/2026): 1,767 public high school students ages 13 to 18 in the United States

Key takeaways (1/2)

- **Broad agreement that skilled trades¹ education is in demand and should be offered in high school:** 95% of voters believe American students would benefit from more opportunities to study the skilled trades in high school, and 8 in 10 parents say the same about their own child.
- **A shared sense that skilled trades education opportunities are being lost – and that’s a problem:** Nearly 8 in 10 voters (79%) and nearly three-quarters of parents (72%) say it’s a major problem that schools have reduced or eliminated skilled trades classes.
- **Skilled trades rise to the top when it comes to funding priorities:** Voters rank skilled trades as the #1 elective funding priority and parents do the same – ahead of STEM, healthcare, business, physical education, or the arts.
- **Overwhelming support for increased government investment:** More than 8 in 10 voters and three quarters of parents favor more federal funding for skilled trades education, with strong, bipartisan backing across Republicans, independents, and Democrats.

1. Skilled trades emphasize the expert use of tools and materials to build or repair products and structures. While not an exhaustive list, the large majority of skilled trades occur in these broad fields of trades: construction, welding, automotive, and manufacturing.

Key takeaways (2/2)

- **Student demand is real, but access is constrained:** 30% of students have taken a skilled trades class, and 51% of students whose schools do not offer trades say they would be interested in taking one – signaling an unmet demand. One in six students report trying to enroll in a skilled trades class at their school but being unable to because the class was full.
- **Students in trades classes are more engaged, confident, and clear on their future:** Students who have taken skilled trades classes are more likely to enjoy school, see their learning as useful for life, feel confident collaborating and problem-solving, and say school has helped them to prepare for college and understand career options – outperforming peers who have not taken these classes.
- **AI anxiety cuts across groups:** A majority of voters (56%) and nearly half of parents (49%) are extremely or very concerned about AI's impact on jobs, while nearly 3 in 10 students say AI has already made them reconsider their future career path – heightening interest in hands-on, AI-resilient career pathways.



Voters



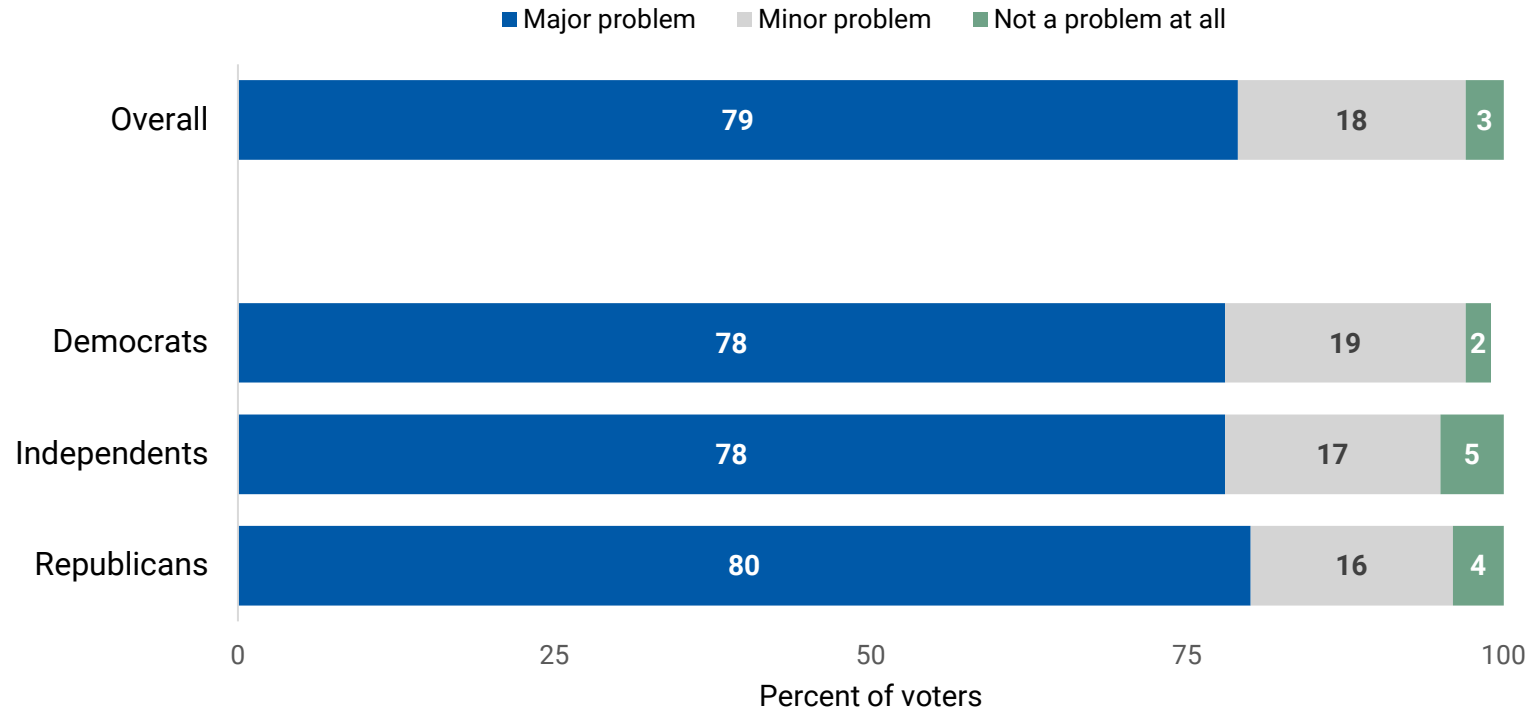
Voters agree that skilled trades classes would make American students more prepared for a career and want to prioritize funding for them

- **95% of voters** believe having more opportunities to study skilled trades in high school would better prepare American students for a career, including 71% who think it would make them **much more prepared**.
- **Voters across parties agree that skilled trades should be the top funding priority:** 90% of voters say high schools and districts should prioritize funding for skilled trades classes, including half who classify it as a very high priority. This view is shared across Republicans, Democrats, and independents alike.

Voters overwhelmingly see a major problem in the reduction of skilled trades education

Across party lines, **79% of voters say it is a major problem that some high schools have reduced or eliminated skilled trades classes** – especially concerning given that 91% of voters value teaching real-world skills and 95% believe having more opportunities to study skilled trades in high school would better prepare students.

Most voters see reduced skilled trades classes as a **major problem**

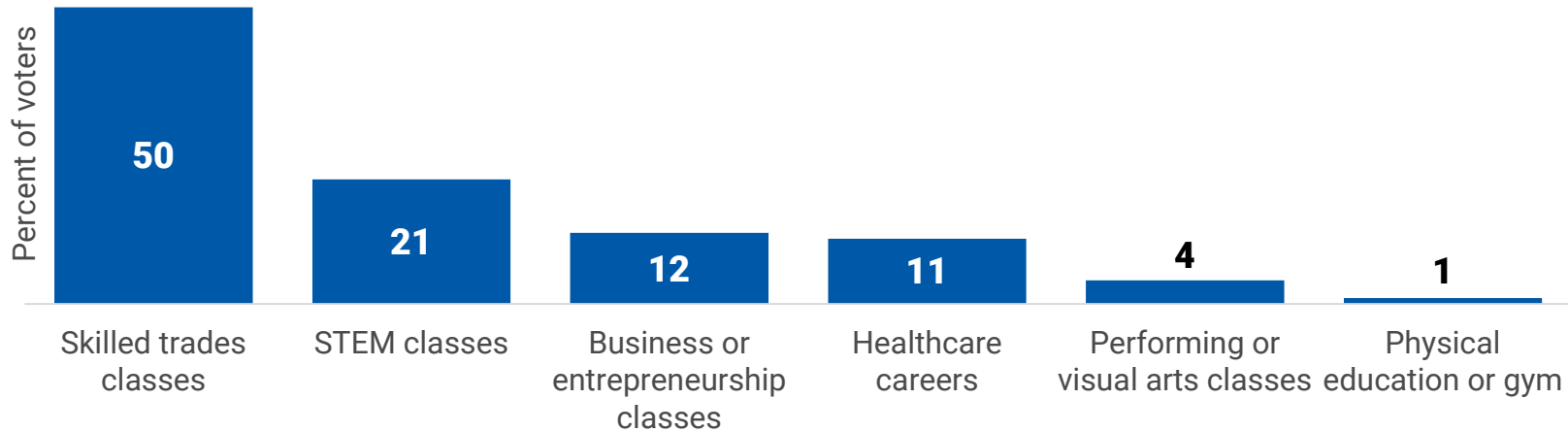


Question: In your opinion, how much of a problem is it that some high schools have removed or reduced the availability of skilled trades classes?

Voters rank skilled trades classes as the top priority for high school electives

Skilled trades dominate funding priorities by a wide margin: Half of voters say skilled trades classes should be the top priority for additional high school funding – more than double the next closest category (STEM electives) and far surpassing healthcare, business-related courses, arts, or physical education.

Most voters want skilled trades classes to be the **top priority** for additional high school funding



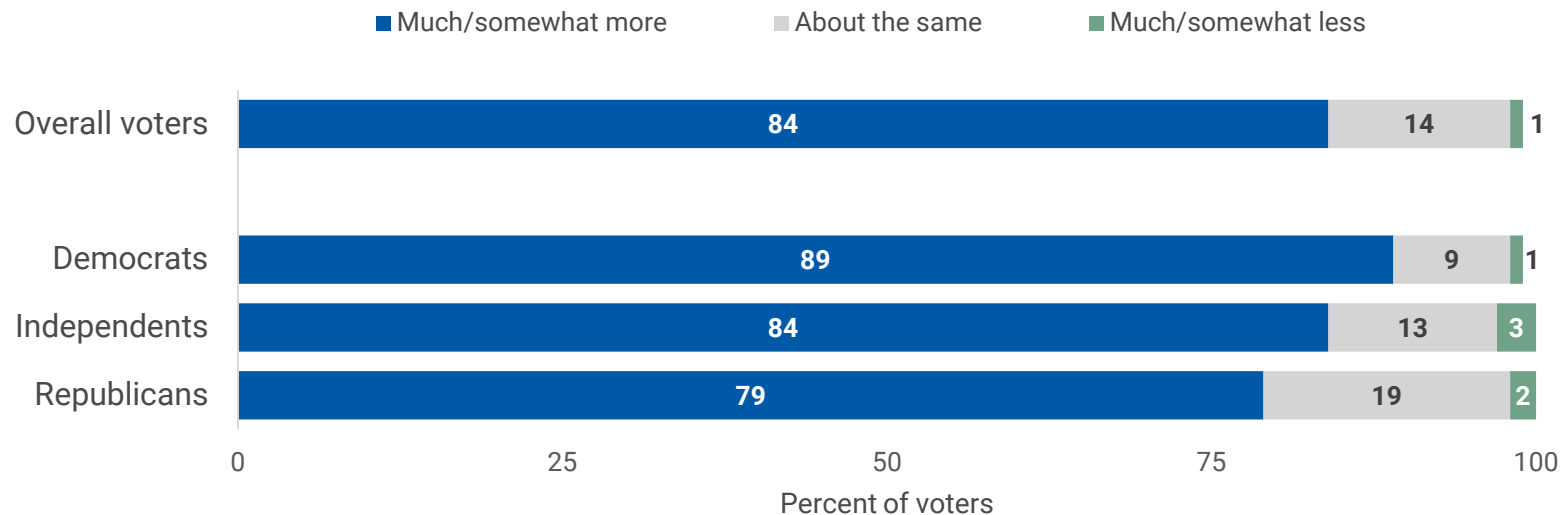
Question: Which of the following elective classes should high schools prioritize first for funding with additional state and local resources?

Overwhelming support for more focus and investment in skilled trades education

Voters overwhelmingly support increased government funding for skilled trades education: **More than 8 in 10 (84%) voters say government should provide more funding for skilled trades education and programs, including 43% who want much more funding.**

Voters believe elected officials are not doing enough and want them to step up: **An even larger share (86%) say elected officials should do more to support skilled trades and hands-on learning in high school, with a majority (51%) calling for much more action.**

Most voters support **increased funding** by the government to support skilled trades education



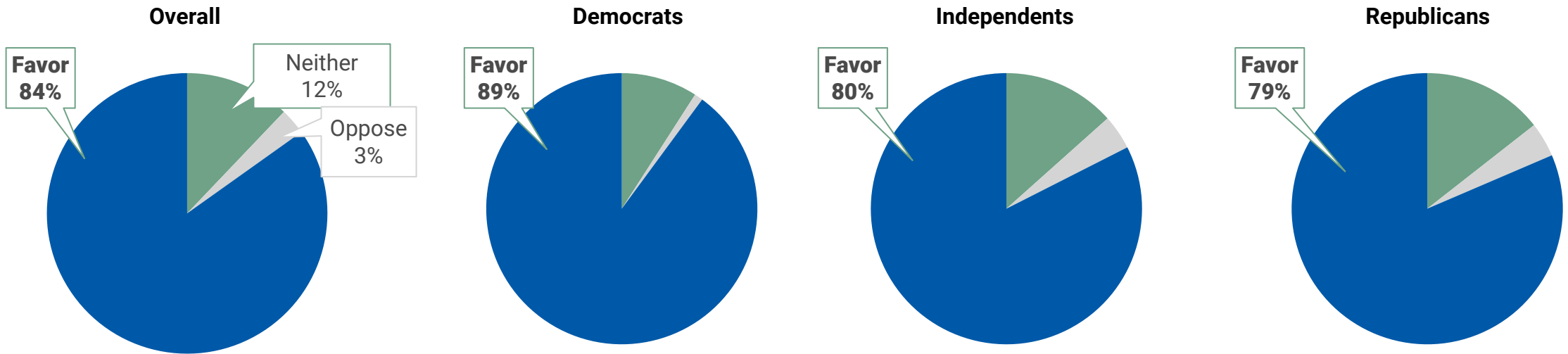
Question: Should government provide more funding, less funding, or about the same amount of funding as it does now to support skilled trades education and programs?

Voters across party lines support funding for skilled trades classes at all levels

Support is deeply bipartisan with minimal opposition: A large majority of voters (84%) favor additional *federal* funding for skilled trades classes – including 50% who strongly favor the idea. The support cuts across Republicans (79%), independents (80%), and Democrats (89%) alike.

Voters favor increased funding not just federally, but locally as well: 81% of voters say they would support a *local* bond to fund skilled trades and other career-focused classes in high schools, including half (50%) who strongly favor such a measure.

Most voters support **increased federal government funding** to support skilled trades education in high school



Question: Do you favor, oppose, or neither favor nor oppose a federal program to allocate additional funding to train high school students and others in the skilled trades?

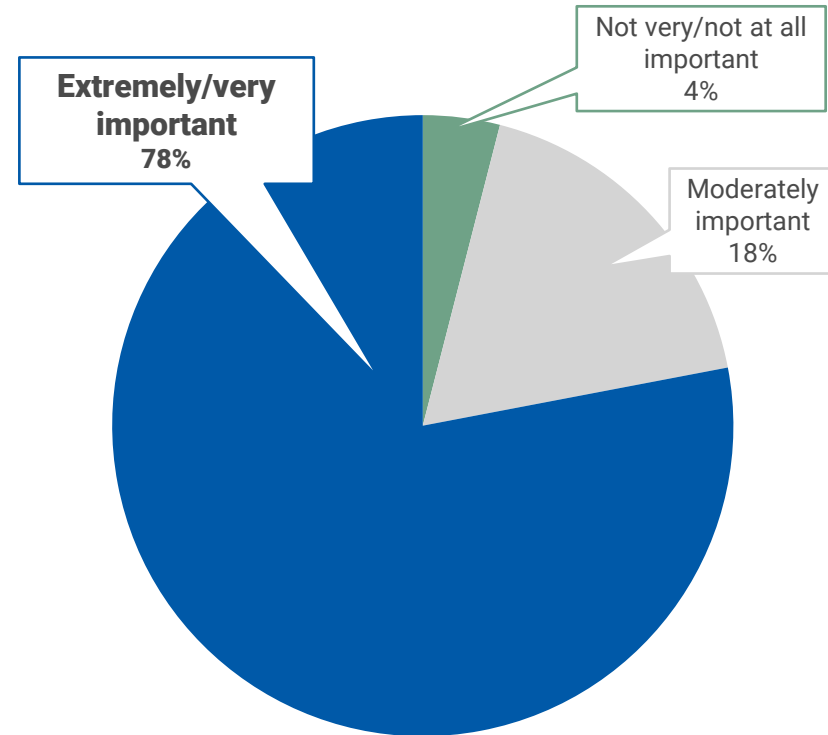


Parents

Parents place a high level of importance on skilled trades classes

Most parents say skilled trades classes are important: More than three-quarters of parents say it is extremely or very important for high schools to offer skilled trades classes, a view that's unchanged since 2019.

At the same time, they're concern about shrinking access: Like voters, nearly three-quarters of parents (**72%**) say it is a major problem that some high schools have reduced or eliminated skilled trades offerings.



72% of parents say it is a **major problem** that high schools have removed or reduced the availability of skilled trades classes.

Question: How important is it that high schools offer classes in skilled trades in addition to traditional academic subjects?

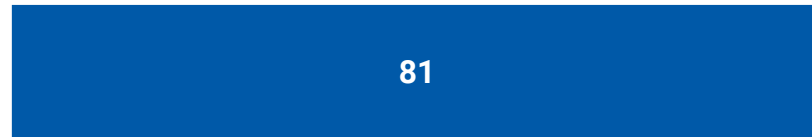
Widespread support for children interested in skilled trades courses

Most parents would encourage child to take skilled trades classes: 8 in 10 parents would encourage their child to take a skilled trades course if they were interested in doing so. Only 6% would discourage their child, and 14% would let their child make their own decision.

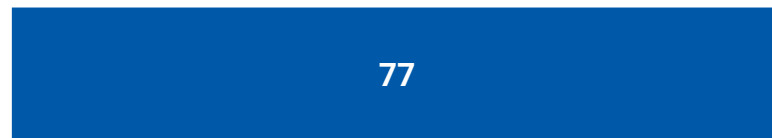
Parents support skilled trades for boys and girls: Parents of female children are just as likely as parents of male children (78% vs. 76%) to say skilled trades classes prepare their child for a career. **Few parents would discourage their child from taking a skilled trades course** if they had interest in it.

Most parents think having the opportunity to study skilled trades would better **prepare children for careers**

American students



Your child



0 25 50 75 100

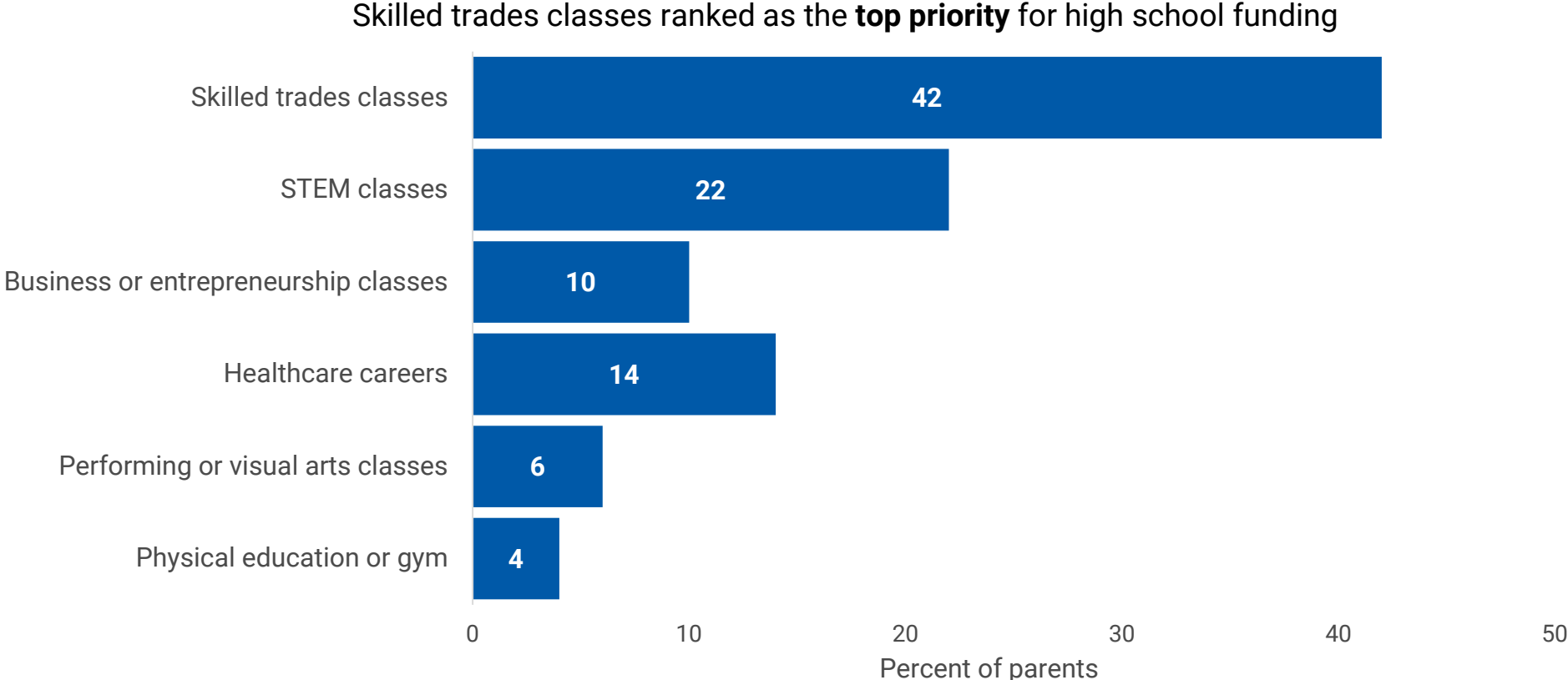
Percent of parents who say much/somewhat more prepared

Question: Would having more opportunities to study the skilled trades in high school make [American students/your child]...?

8 in 10 parents say having more opportunities to study the skilled trades in high school would make their own child more prepared for a career, highlighting strong parent support even as access to these classes remains limited in many schools.

Parents prioritize skilled trades over other high school electives

Parents overwhelmingly see skilled trades as the top investment priority over other elective options: When asked to choose, more parents select skilled trades as the top funding priority than STEM, healthcare careers, business, arts, or physical education.

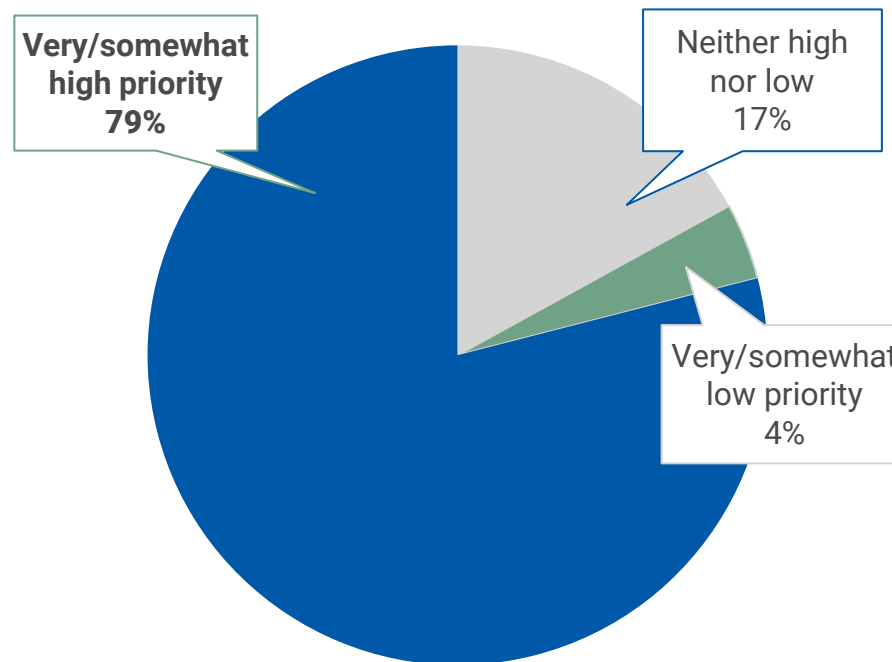


Question: Which of the following elective classes should high schools prioritize first for funding with additional state and local resources?

Parents want schools and districts to make funding skilled trades a high priority

Most parents want to prioritize skilled trades classes: Nearly 8 in 10 parents say schools and districts should make funding skilled trades classes a high priority.

Like voters, parents strongly support increased government funding for high school skilled trades education: 73% want the government to provide more funding for these classes, and 75% favor a federal program to expand skilled trades education in high schools.



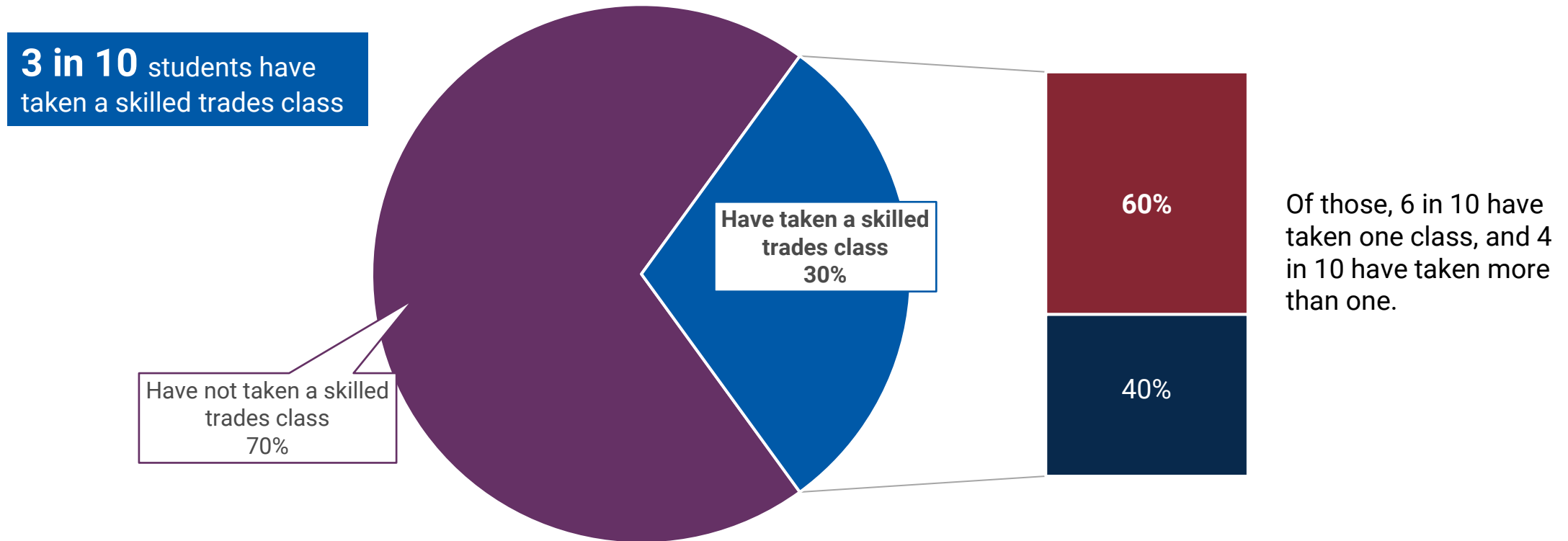
Question: Should high schools and school districts make funding for skilled trades classes a...?



Students

High levels of student interest in skilled trades classes

Many students have taken skilled trades classes, and they often return to them: 3 in 10 students have taken a skilled trades class. Of those students, 40% have taken more than one.



Limited access to high school trades classes

42% of students say their school either doesn't offer trades classes or they are unaware of any being available. Capacity constraints further limit access.



51% of students are interested in taking skilled trades classes.



One third of kids who want to take skilled trades classes are unable to do so either because their school does not offer them or because there are not seats available.



16% of students have tried taking a skilled trades class but have been unable to due to lack of seats or full classes.



35% of students who have tried and were unable to take a class say it has happened more than once.



14% of students have been placed on a waitlist for a skilled trades class, with Black (**23%**) and Hispanic (**17%**) students experiencing significantly higher rates than white students (**9%**).

Students who take skilled trades classes are more engaged and confident

Skilled trades students report more positive experiences at school: High school students who have taken a skilled trades class are more likely than those who have not to say they are receiving a high quality education (75% vs. 61%), that they often learn something new at school (60% vs. 49%), find what they learn at school useful (59% vs. 38%), or that they use lessons learned in class to solve problems outside of school (35% vs. 17%).

Skilled trades students find more enjoyment at school: Those students who take a skilled trades class are more likely to say they enjoy being in school in general (75% vs. 67%), and **88%** say they enjoy being in their skilled trades class compared to only **11%** who say they do not.



Questions: In general, how much do you enjoy being in school? Would you say the quality of education you are receiving at school is...? How often would you say you learn something new in school? How useful would you say the things you learn in school are for life after high school? How often do you use lessons you learned in class to solve problems outside of school?

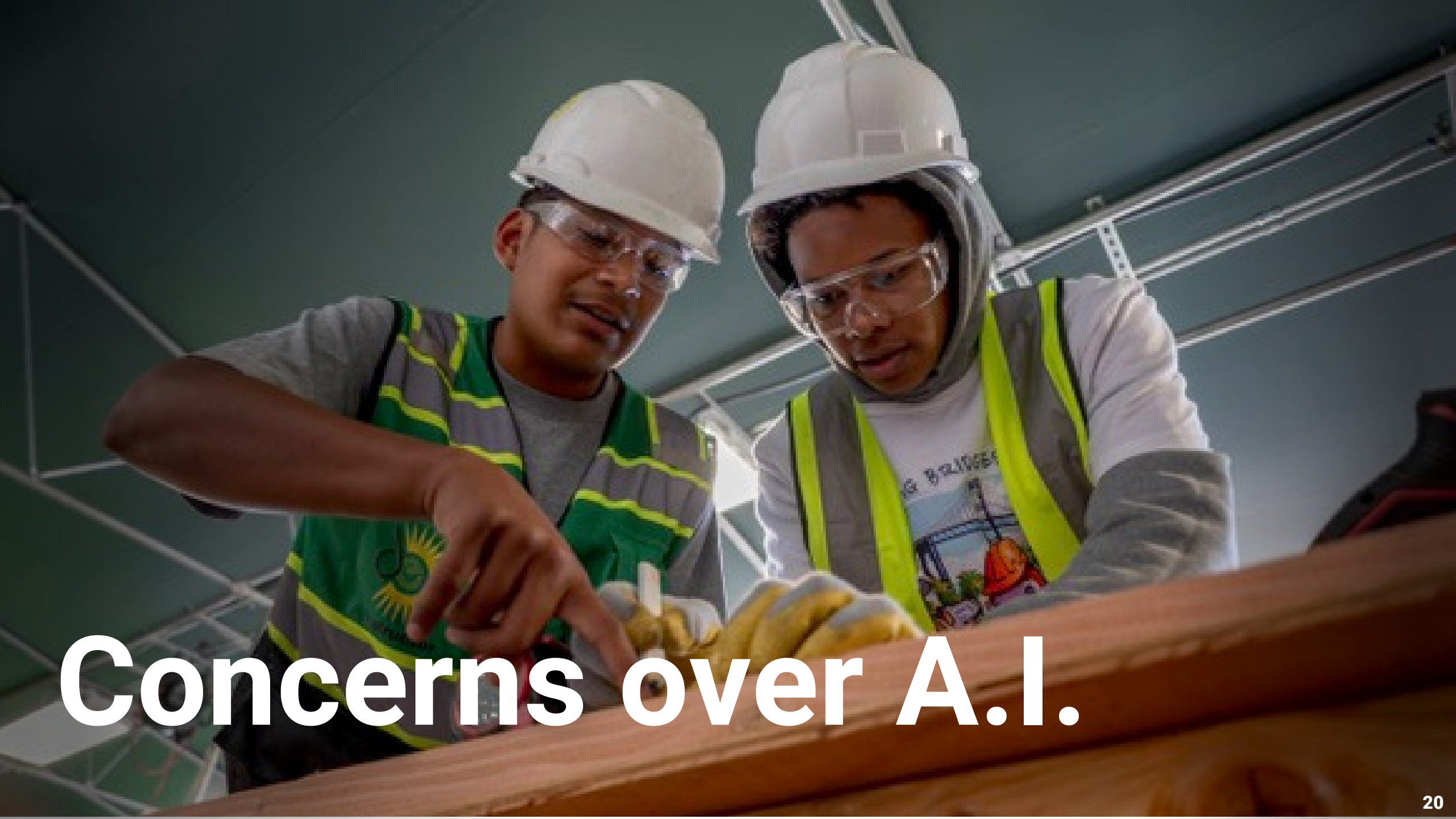
Those in skilled trades classes feel more college- and career-ready and more often report key professional skills

Skilled trades students report higher confidence in the abilities they will need in college and on the job: Trades students are more likely to feel comfortable working with adults (62% vs. 45%) and collaborating with others (61% vs. 48%). **More also say they understand the steps they need for the career they want** (68% vs. 54%), and **understand which careers match their interests** (66% vs. 52%).

Skilled trades students are more likely to feel that school has helped them **develop the skills and knowledge they need for college** (48% vs. 37%).



Questions: How much has your school helped you do the following? How comfortable are you with each of the following? Would you say your school has helped you develop all, most, some, few, or none of the skills and knowledge you would need for college?



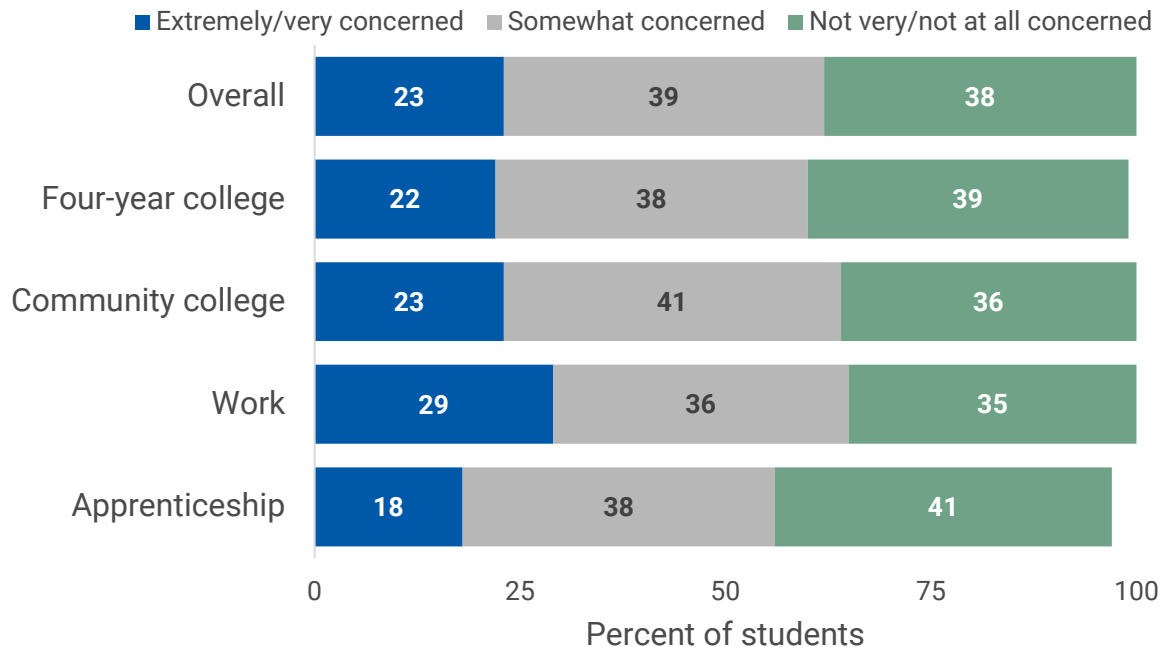
Concerns over A.I.

Student concern about artificial intelligence

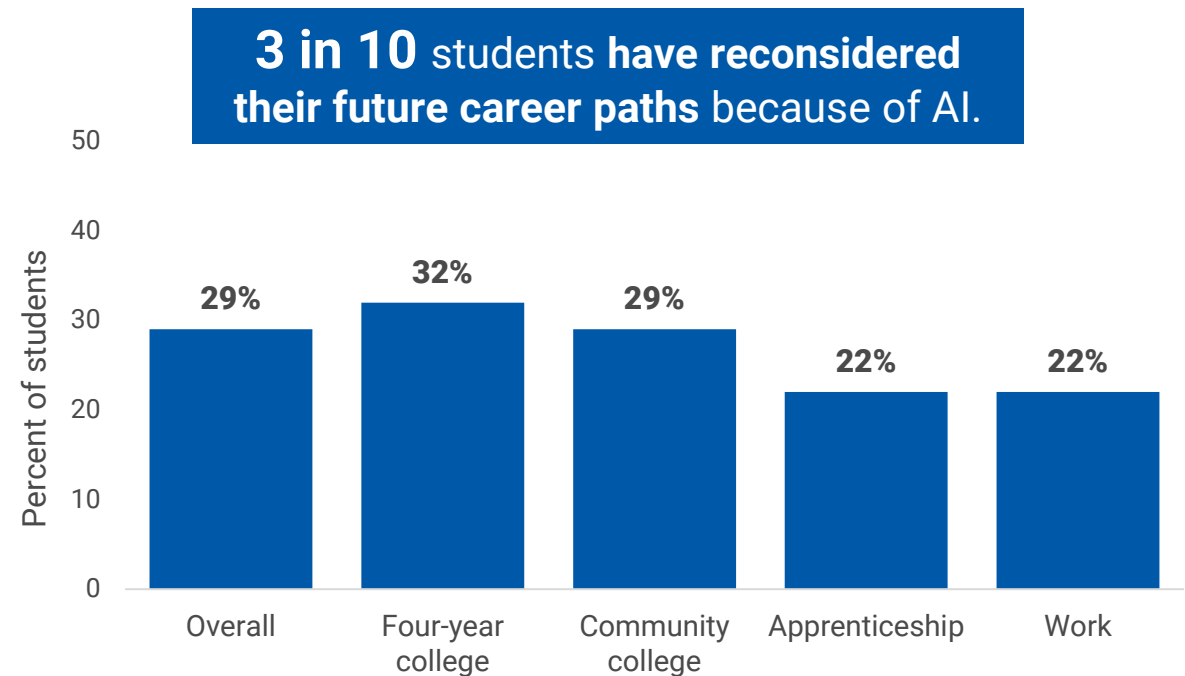
Many students express worries about how AI might affect job opportunities: **6 in 10 high school students are at least somewhat concerned** that AI will decrease their job opportunities, including about a quarter (23%) who are very or extremely concerned. Concerns are similar regardless of specific post-high school plans.

Some are even reconsidering their career plans: Overall, **3 in 10 high school students have reconsidered their future career paths** because of advances in AI, with similar shares across those planning on college, work, or apprenticeship.

Most students are at least somewhat concerned about AI decreasing job opportunities



Question: How concerned are you about the possibility that Artificial Intelligence or AI will decrease your job opportunities?

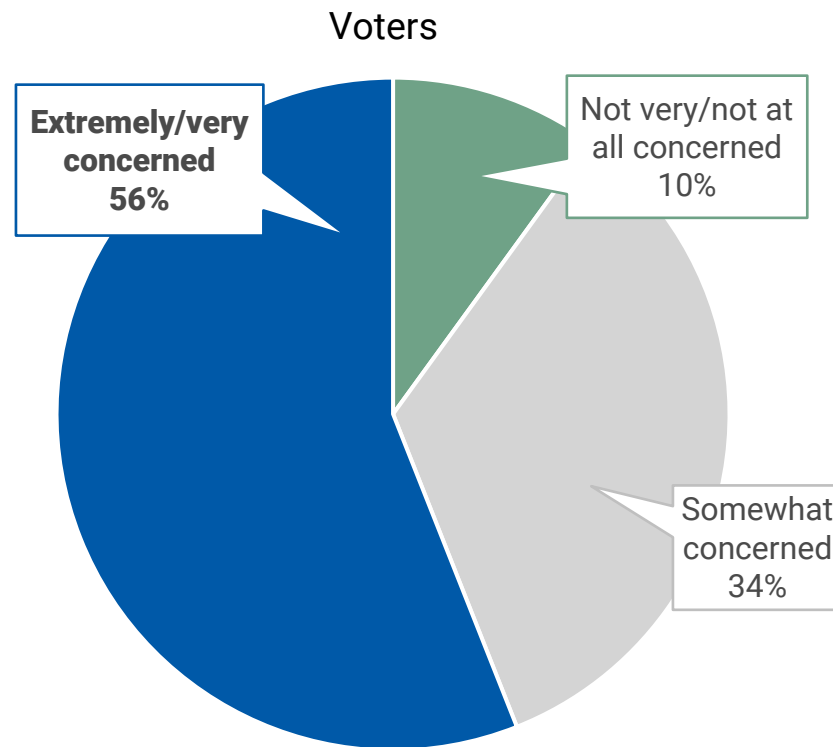


Question: Have recent advances in Artificial Intelligence or AI made you reconsider your potential future career path?

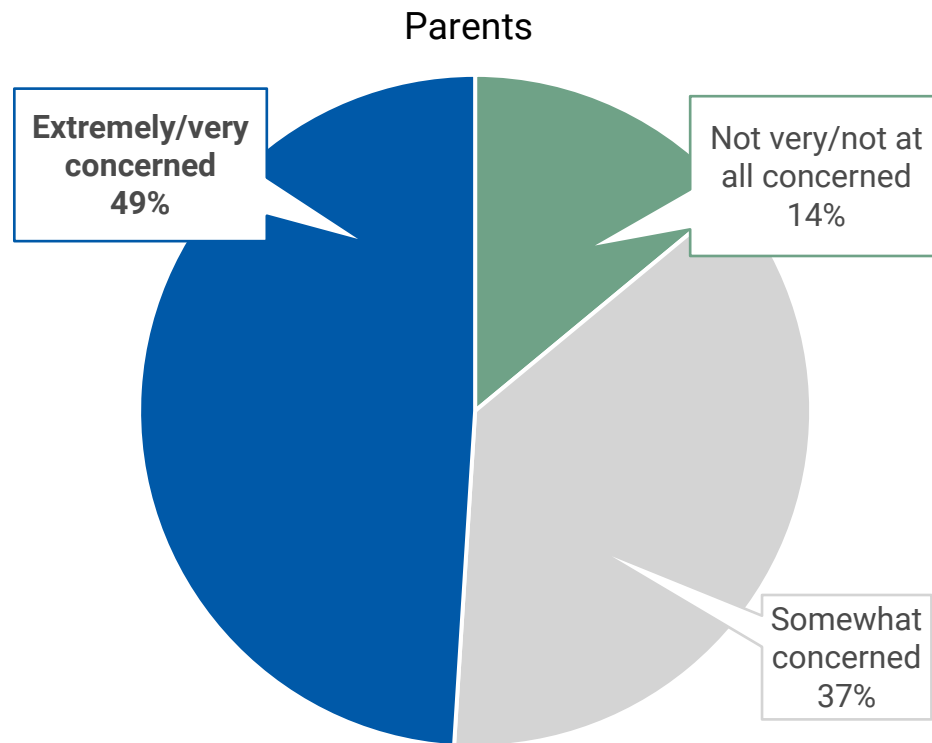
Widespread concern about AI's impact on jobs

Most voters are concerned about the impact of AI in the job market: 56% are extremely or very concerned about the possibility of AI decreasing job opportunities in the near future.

Parents are also highly concerned about their children's job prospects: About half of parents (49%) are extremely or very concerned that AI will reduce job opportunities for their child. And 55% believe AI use in the workplace will lead to fewer job opportunities for their child.



Question: How concerned are you about the possibility that Artificial Intelligence or AI will decrease job opportunities in the next 5 years?



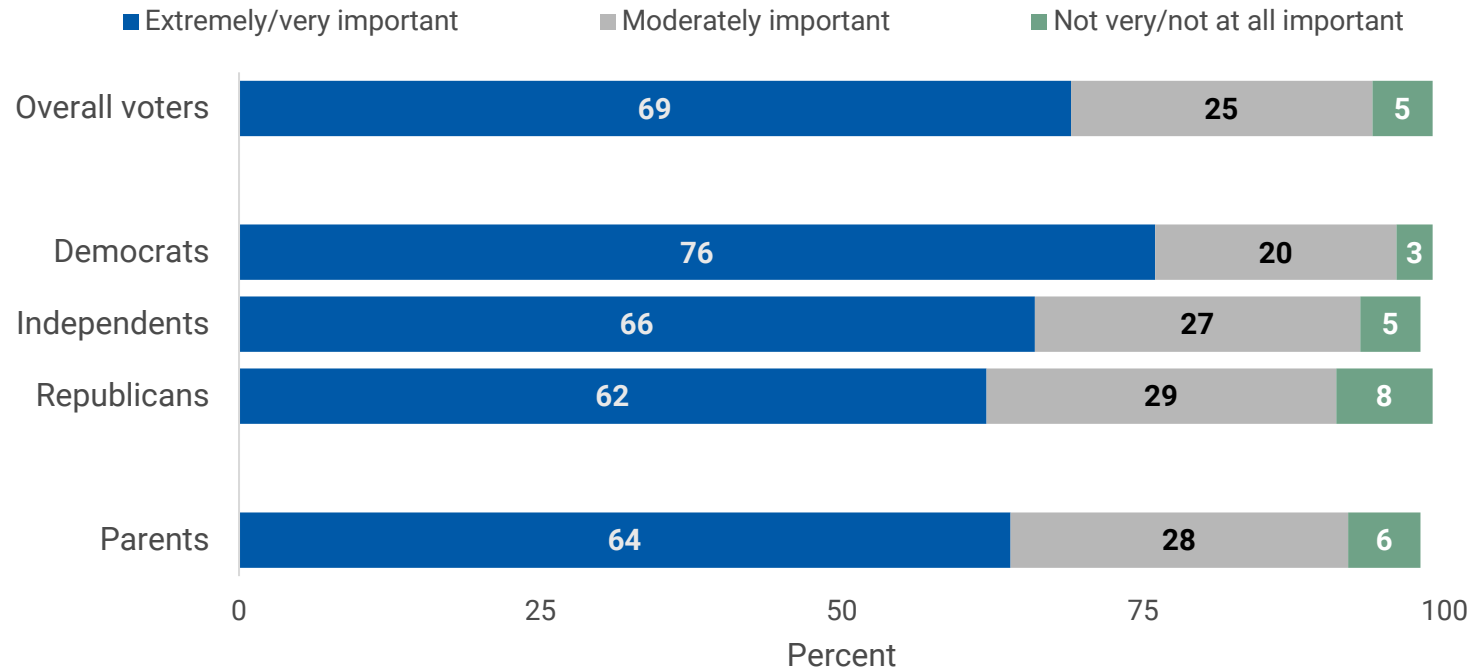
Question: How concerned are you about the possibility that Artificial Intelligence or AI will decrease the job opportunities for your child?

Broad agreement on funding AI-resilient career training

Strong support for government funding in fields that are less likely to be impacted by AI: A large majority of voters (69%) believe it is important for the government to provide funding for career training in fields that are less likely to be impacted by AI.

Most parents also share this view: 64% of parents believe it is important for the government to fund AI-resilient career training.

Most believe it is **important for the government to fund** AI-resilient career training



Question: How important do you think it is for the government to provide funding for career training in fields that are less likely to be impacted by artificial intelligence?

Conclusion

- **Students, parents, and voters agree – high school skilled trades education is in demand:** Parents say it's important for high schools to offer skilled trades classes (78%), and voters overwhelmingly value teaching real-world skills (91%). Student demand is strong: 30% of students report having taken a skilled trades class, and roughly half of those whose schools don't offer such classes say they would be interested in taking one.
- **Broad agreement that reducing trades classes in high school was a mistake:** Nearly 8 in 10 voters (79%) and nearly three-quarters of parents (72%) say it's a major problem that schools have reduced or eliminated skilled trades classes.
- **Trades courses build real-world and workplace skills, and make learning feel more relevant:** Students with trades experience report higher confidence in problem-solving, greater comfort collaborating with others and working with adults, and are more likely to say school has prepared them for college and helped them understand steps toward their future career.
- **AI anxiety is high, and demand for AI-resistant career training is on the rise:** A majority of voters (56%) and nearly half of parents (49%) are extremely or very concerned about AI's impact on jobs, while nearly 3 in 10 students say AI has already made them reconsider their future career path – heightening interest in hands-on, AI-resilient career pathways.
- **Overwhelming support for increased government investment:** More than 8 in 10 voters and three-quarters of parents favor more federal funding for skilled trades education, and 81% of voters would support a local bond to fund skilled trades and other career-focused classes. 86% of voters say they want their elected officials to do more to support trades education in high school.

Methodology

About this study

The findings in this report come from three surveys conducted by NORC at the University of Chicago with funding from Harbor Freight Tools for Schools. Staff from NORC at the University of Chicago and Harbor Freight Tools for Schools collaborated on all aspects of the study. Details on each survey can be found below.

Survey of Voters:

- Survey conducted December 15, 2025–January 21, 2026 among U.S. registered voters 18 and older representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia.
- Interviews conducted with 2,080 voters drawn from AmeriSpeak®, NORC’s nationally representative, probability-based panel; surveys completed online in English.
- Margin of sampling error: ± 2.9 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, including design effects.

Survey of Parents of High School Students

- Survey conducted December 9, 2025–January 2, 2026 among parents or guardians of public high school students ages 13 to 18 representing the 50 states and the District of Columbia.
- Interviews conducted with 1,078 parents drawn from AmeriSpeak®, NORC’s nationally representative, probability-based panel; surveys completed online in English. And additional 1,096 additional interviews provided by Dynata.
- Margin of sampling error: ± 3.2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, including design effects.

Survey of High School Students

- Survey conducted December 15, 2025–January 21, 2026 among U.S. public high school students ages 13 to 18 representing all 50 states and D.C.
- Interviews conducted with 602 students drawn from AmeriSpeak®, NORC’s nationally representative, probability-based panel; surveys completed online in English. An additional 1,165 additional interviews provided by Dynata.
- Margin of sampling error: ± 3.1 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, including design effects.