

Licking County 2025 Emerging Workforce Study



Prepared in partnership by GROW Licking County CIC, Ohio Means Jobs Licking County and the Licking County Foundation

Executive Summary

This study aims to identify the priorities and concerns of Licking County high school students in deciding their career options. Data was gathered from juniors from 11 schools participating in Career Xpress, a professional development seminar hosted by Ohio Means Jobs LC on March 11 and 12, 2025.

Students were asked to identify if they intended to apply for college (enrollment), apply for jobs (employment) or enlist in the military (enlistment) and asked specific questions about their chosen option, as well as general questions about their priorities and intentions after that were the same across all three groups.

Key Findings

- **College Remains the Norm** - Students strongly slant toward college (Figure 1), and there are major differences in the concerns and intentions between college-bound students and job-bound students.
- **Job-Seekers Stay, Degree-Seekers Leave** - Job-bound students were more than twice as likely to wish to remain in Licking County, and college-bound students were almost four times more likely to intend to leave the state of Ohio (Figure 10).
- **Substance Over Prestige** - College-bound students slanted towards STEM degrees (Figure 6) and a bachelor's or higher (Figure 7), and ranked major program quality as their top concern (96%), with affordability (75%) second (Figure 8).
- **Job-Seekers Need Support** - Job-bound students had varied interests (Figure 3), expressed desires for financial assistance and professional development (Figure 4), and rated location, benefits and culture as important considerations (Figures 5).
- **Concerns Differ Between Groups** - college-bound students ranked financial security, housing and familial responsibilities as their top worries, while job-bound students listed grades, transportation and familial responsibilities (Figure 8).
- **Priorities Converge** - Both groups shared similar priorities for their desired careers - with work-life balance, freedom to pursue interests and job security ("feeling my job won't disappear someday") being top picks for both groups (Figure 11).
- **Students Are Trendsetters** - A notable trend across both groups is that responses related to "having friends or family doing what I do" were consistently ranked very low by students (Figures 8 and 11).

Implications for Educators

Get Employers on Campus - the strong slant towards college attendance and concern for financial security demonstrate the need for students to be aware of high-paying, career-oriented jobs in their area. Continuing and furthering the good work of job fairs, employer class presentations, internship programs and work experience can help rectify this gap.

Put Major Programs Front and Center - college-bound students identified “having a good program for my major” as far and away the most important quality in deciding schools, and ranked prestige as very low. Program-specific site visits from local, affordable schools can be beneficial in meeting these desires and also reducing brain-drain.

Professional Skills Matter - students flagged professional development support - i.e. resume writing, mock interviews, job search training, etc. - as beneficial and desired.

Elevate the Associate’s - Students in both groups ranked their interest in CTE or Associate’s Degrees as low, even among employment-minded students. Students may benefit from understanding the ROI, benefits and opportunities given by these degrees

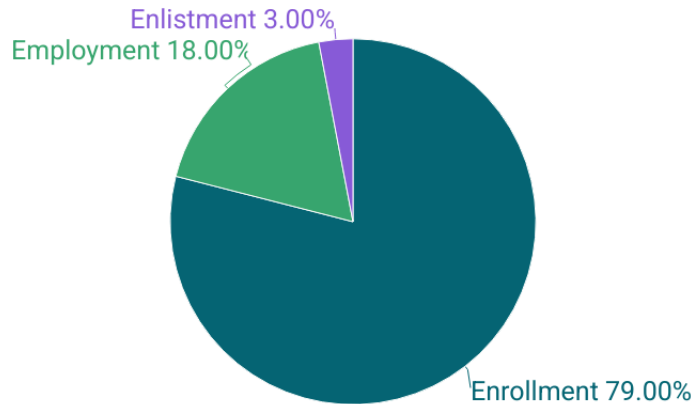
Engage in the Community - student’s intentions to leave the area were extremely concerning. Engaging students with regional community organizations and amenities through field trips, events and volunteer opportunities, can help perceptions. Special consideration should be given to underscoring the cost of living relative to average income in Licking County.

Bring in the Branches - concerning among the results was an extremely low response rate for students viewing the Armed Forces as a part of their goals. This highlights the potential impact of having recruiter presenters to show the benefits and opportunities of military service.

Survey Results

Figure 1 - Respondent Type

Question 1 - Even if you aren't sure, which of the following three do you feel most likely to pursue after you graduate?



Key Insight: students continue to mostly view a **college education** as necessary for their future goals

Question 1 - Even if you aren't sure, which of the following three do you feel most likely to pursue after you graduate?

Single option - randomized order

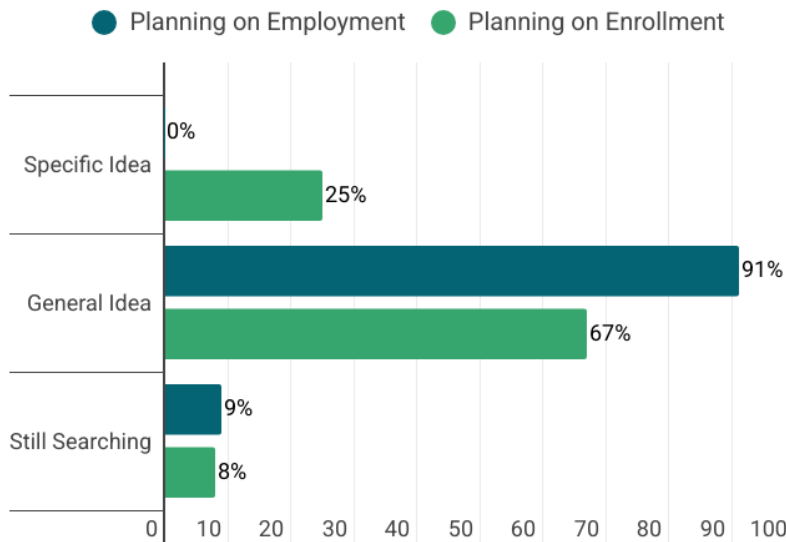
- Employment** - start applying for jobs or apprenticeships or work for yourself
- Enrollment** - Go back to school, apply for a college or university, community college, or career center
- Enlist** - Apply to join the military

The strong slant towards college-oriented respondents underscores the persistent trend in viewing higher education as a means of social mobility. Paradoxically, these students would be the same ones that would express the greatest apprehension about financial burden.

Due to the very small number of students expressing interest in the Armed Forces, their field-specific responses were excluded from the analysis. However, this does flag a concerning lack of regard for the military, which, for many students, is a means of economic mobility, personal growth and education.

Figure 2 - Clarity on Goals by Type

Question 2: How do you feel about what you want to do after you graduate high school?



Key Insight: students are thinking more about **directions** than **roles**, and this trend is most pronounced for **non-college-bound students**

Question 2 - How do you feel about what you want to do after you graduate high school?

Single option - listed order

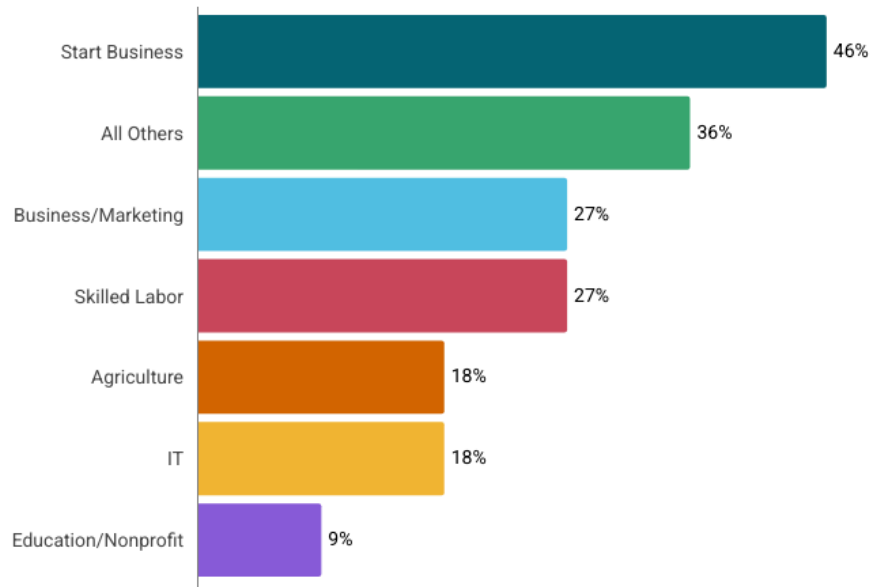
- I have a very specific, clear idea of what I want to be doing after high school.
- I have an idea of what direction I want to go after high school, but I'm still figuring out the details
- I have no idea what I want to do after high school yet

Results shown in Figure 2 demonstrate that most students have a general direction they wish to go in, but not a specific role just yet. This slant is most pronounced in job-seeker students, who notably had zero respondents claiming to have specific roles in mind.

This underscores the impact of job site visits and class speakers from employers and academics to put a face to the industry and give shape to the concepts of what careers look like.

Figure 3 - Jobs of Interest

Question 1 (Job-Bound): What sort of jobs are you interested in applying for? Check all that apply



Key Insights: LC Students have **widely varying goals** and **entrepreneurship** is a strong interest

Question 1 (Job-Seeker Section) - What sort of jobs are you interested in applying for?

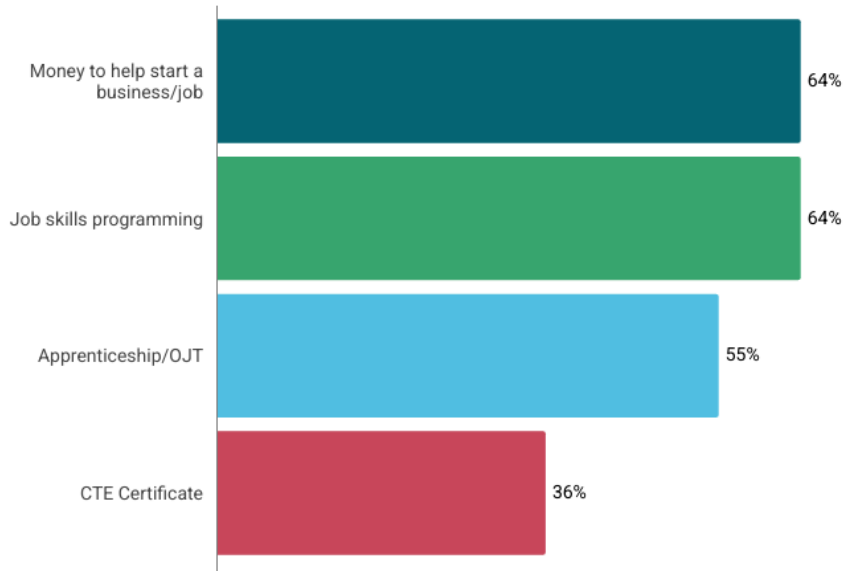
Multiple option - randomized order

- Business, marketing, or management
- Health or medical field
- Education or working with my community, like with a nonprofit organization
- Skilled labor, like a technician or in manufacturing
- Agriculture, working in a farm setting
- Technology, like IT or programming
- Starting my own business
- Childcare
- Other [insert]

Results identify entrepreneurship as a leading interest among students, and varied interests across the field. Given the abundance of manufacturing employment opportunities in Licking County, the 27% selecting “skilled labor” is disproportionately low.

Figure 4 - Job-Seeker Aid

Question 2 (Job-Bound): Which of the following do you think would be helpful to get the job you want? Check all that apply.



Key Insights: Job-bound students are looking for **professional** and **financial support** to get the job they want, and are **skills-minded**

Question 2 (Job-Seeker Section) - Which of the following do you think will be helpful to get the job you want?

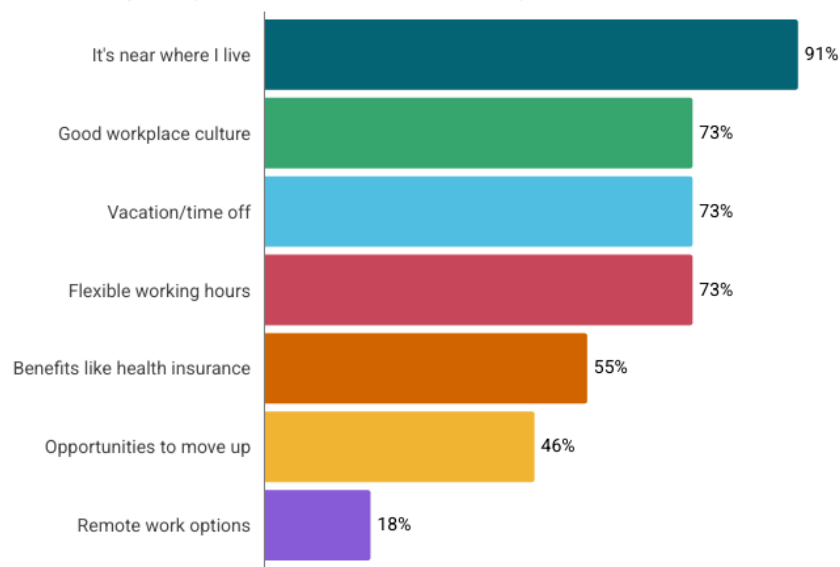
Multiple options - randomized order

- Going to a career center or community college to get a certificate
- Attending an apprenticeship or training program
- Money to help start a business or job
- Workshops or training on how to apply for jobs, make a resume, etc.

Ranking of on the job training and apprenticeships (55%) as preferable to CTE or equivalent certificates (36%) shows an appetite for these opportunities. Furthermore, professional development (i.e. resume workshops) and access to financial opportunities highlight the importance of these types of programming.

Figure 5 - Job Qualities

Question 3 (Job-bound): What are the sort of things you want at your job? Check all that apply.



Key Insights: Commute, benefit quality and workplace culture are the top interests of students

Question 3 (Job-Seeker Section) - What are the sort of things you want at your job?

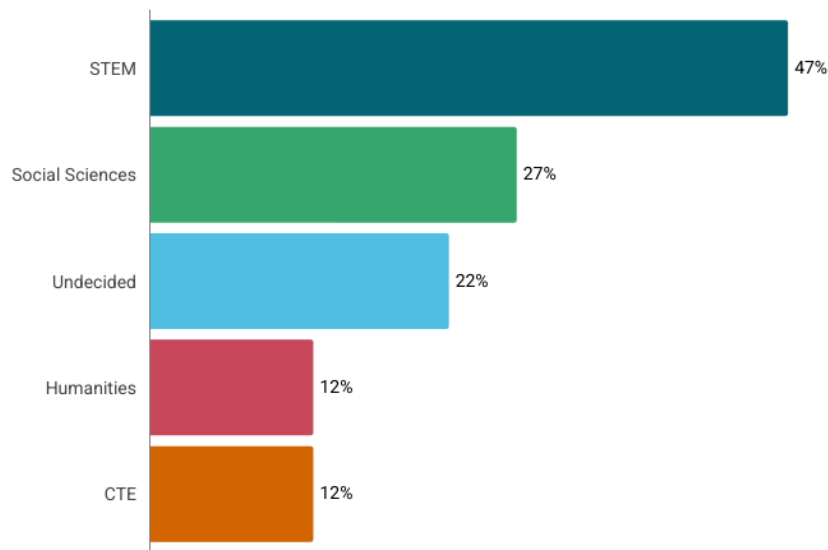
Multiple options - randomized order

- Flexible working hours
- Remote work options
- Benefits like health insurance
- Vacation time/time off
- The option to move up in the company
- Good workplace culture
- Near where I live

Locality is of high importance to students seeking jobs - these same students are the most likely to self-report desiring to stay in Licking County or Ohio, showing a community-based mindset. This reinforces the notion of employment-oriented programming being protective against brain-drain, and strong desires around benefits and employer culture show these are important for employers to highlight. Remote work options low response rate is notable.

Figure 6 - Majors of Interest

Question 1 (College-Bound): What type of major are you interested in? Check all that apply



Key Insights: degrees in **STEM** are of top interest for college-bound students, yet interests remain **widely varied**

Question 1 (College-Bound Section) - What type of major are you interested in?

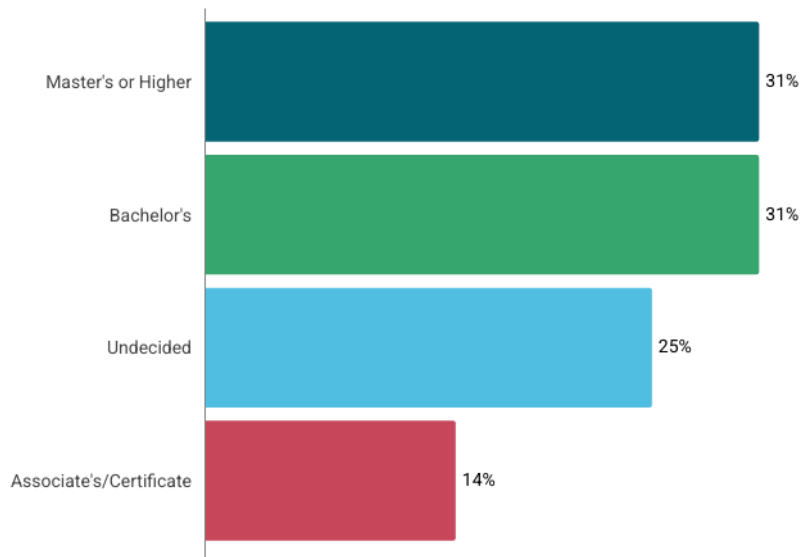
Multiple options - randomized order

- STEM - degrees like engineering, science, math, computer science, and technology
- Social sciences - degrees like economics, political science, history, sociology, or psychology
- Humanities - degrees like music, art, or philosophy
- Career/Technical - certificates for jobs like welding, construction, or public safety
- I haven't decided

Results indicate a strong interest in STEM degrees - nationally, 21% of diplomas awarded are in STEM fields, while 47% of students are interested in them.

Figure 7 - Degrees of Interest

Question 2 (College-Bound): what is your end goal for your degree?



Key Insights: College-bound students are primarily interested in **bachelor's or higher** degrees

Question 2 (College-Bound Section) - What is your current end goal for your degree?

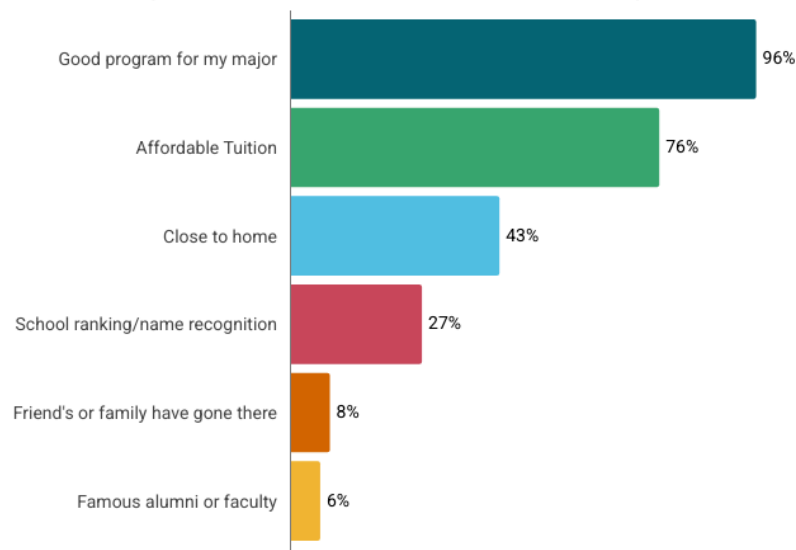
Single option - listed order

- Certificate
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree or higher
- I'm not sure

Students continue to demonstrate a high interest in four-year and graduate degrees. This interest did not vary significantly across degree type or other characteristics.

Figure 8 - College Qualities

Question 3 (College-Bound): What are the things you look for in applying to a school? Check all that apply.



Key Insights: Today's college applicants are looking for **program quality** and **affordability** above secondary concerns like **prestige**, **location** or **alumni**

Question 3 (College-Bound Section) - What are the things you look for in applying to a school?

Multiple options - randomized

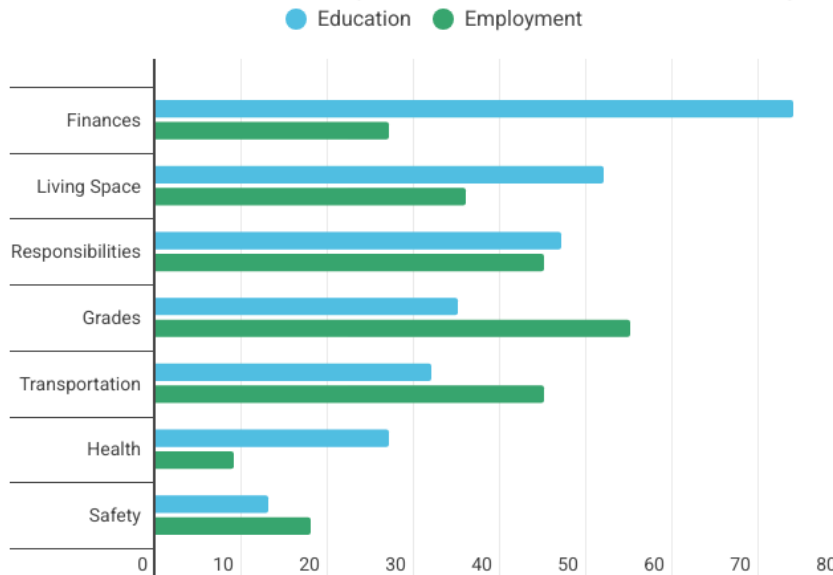
- Name recognition or being ranked as a top school
- Close to home
- Affordable tuition or offered financial aid
- Has a good program for my major
- Friends or family go/have gone there
- Famous alumni or faculty

Interest in program quality above school prestige is especially pronounced in the results and implies students are focused on skills and ROI for their degrees after graduation. This highlights an opportunity for college recruits to have program specificity when engaging with interested students, as well as cost benefits of staying in Ohio schools (in-state vs. out of state tuition).

Echoed in Figure 10, less than half of students noted they prefer their school to be near home.

Figure 9 - Anticipated Challenges

Question 6 - What are some challenges you think might come up while pursuing your goals? Check all that apply



Key Insights: the college-bound see **finances (85%)** as their greatest challenge, while employment-bound students foresee **grades (55%)** and **transportation (45%)**, while **housing (52%)** and **familial responsibilities (47%)** concern both

Question 6 - What are some challenges you think might come up while pursuing your goals?

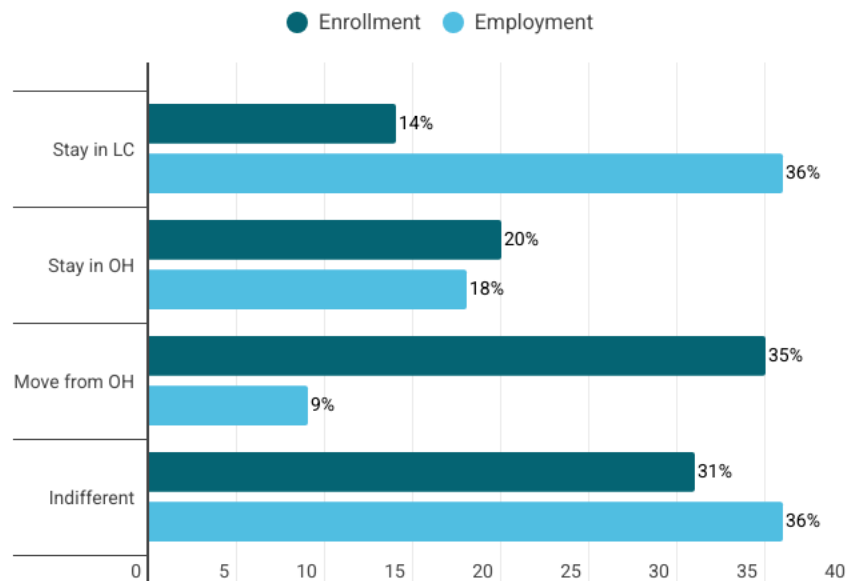
Multiple options - randomized order

- Finances - Money for things like tuition or starting up at a job
- Transportation - Having a car or getting from place to place
- Safety - Fear for my well-being or leaving home
- Health - Managing my physical or mental well-being
- Responsibilities - My family, community, or friends
- Grades - My grades in high school
- Living space - Finding a house, apartment, or somewhere to live

In general, college-bound students foresaw a higher number of challenges than job-bound students. A notable disparity is that college-bound students found finances to be a serious challenge, flagged by 85% of respondents, while job-bound students only flagged it at 27%. Grades were the only category among job-bound students to be flagged by more than half of respondents, at 55%.

Figure 10 - Living Area Preference

Question 7 - Long-term, where do you hope to end up living?



Key Insights: College-bound students are **nearly four times more likely** to wish to move out of state, while job-bound students are over **twice as likely** to wish to stay local

Question 7 - Long-term, where do you hope to end up living?

Single option - listed order

- I want to stay in Licking County
- I want to stay in Licking County, but would move for a good opportunity
- I want to stay in Ohio, but maybe not Licking County
- I want to move to another state or country as a part of my goals
- I have no strong preference on where I live, as long as I'm meeting my goals

As noted previously, job-bound students show much higher desires to stay local, while college-bound are much more likely to desire to leave. This trend is not correlated with job or degree preferences. The notable share of each group indifferent to their living situation presents an opportunity to demonstrate the benefits of staying local.

Figure 11 - Important Qualities

Question 8 - What draws you to the goals you told us about, compared to the other options? Rank 1 (Not Important at all) to 5 (Very Important)



Key Insights: Licking County students are **trendsetters**, and are more concerned about the **stability** and **quality** of careers rather than doing what others around them are doing

Question 8 - Last question! What draws you to the goals you told us about, compared to the other options?

Five point Likert for each listed option - options in randomized order; likert sorted as follows: (not important at all, not very important, somewhat important, important, very important)

- | | |
|---|--|
| -How meaningful/impactful my work will be | -How much money I will make |
| -Having pride in what I do | -Having freedom to pursue my own interests |
| -Having friends or family doing something similar | -Not having to borrow money or have student debt |
| -Feeling my job/career is stable and won't vanish one day | -Being competitive in finding a job |
| -Having a good work-life balance | -Having a clear path/structure to follow |

There was no notable variance between job-bound and college-bound students, and order did not change for either group, with two exceptions - college-bound students were slightly more likely to be fearful of jobs vanishing, possibly due to AI, and job-bound students were more slightly more likely to rate family and friends being in their field as important, likely due to having familial employment connections.