

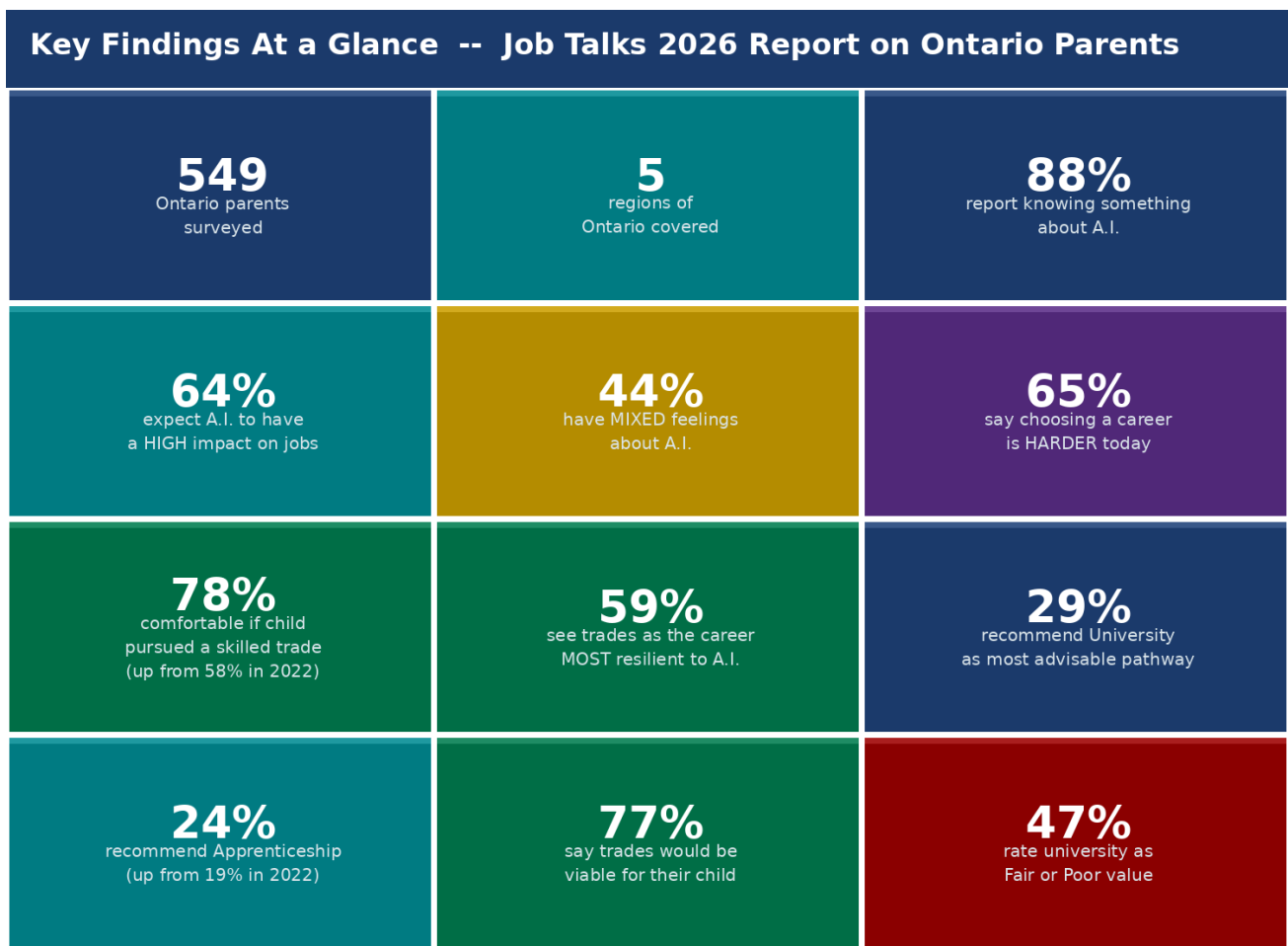
PARENTS, PATHWAYS & THE A.I. REVOLUTION

Job Talks 2026 Report on Ontario Parents

Summary Report

Published by Job Talks in partnership with Q.i Value Systems

Released: April 2026 • Fieldwork: November–December 2025
N = 549 Ontario parents of high school students (Grades 7–12)



For research method, full findings, and segmentation analysis, see the sections that follow.

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A. Introduction

This report presents the findings of the Job Talks 2026 Report on Ontario Parents -- a comprehensive investigation into how parents of high school students across Ontario are thinking about careers, education, and the future in the age of Artificial Intelligence. Although fieldwork was completed in November and December 2025, the findings are being released in April 2026 and speak directly to the choices and challenges facing families right now -- in Ontario and across Canada.

Job Talks is an Ontario-based research and media production company with a focus on understanding and promoting skilled trades careers and pathways. Its educational programs reach tens of thousands of young Ontarians and their families each year. This research is part of Job Talks' ongoing commitment to providing evidence-based guidance to parents, caregivers, and educators, and the students they support.

The survey was designed and conducted in partnership with Q.i Value Systems (Q.i), an Ontario-based research and strategic consulting firm specializing in values-based market intelligence and consumer insight. Q.i has an established track record of working with government, educational institutions, and private sector clients on questions of labour markets, education, and social policy.

This study builds directly on the Job Talks 2022 Parents Study, which first revealed a growing openness among Ontario parents to skilled trades and alternative educational pathways. Since 2022, the landscape has shifted considerably -- most notably with the rapid rise of Artificial Intelligence as a force reshaping careers, education, and the economy. This 2026 report tracks those shifts and explores how parents are responding to the challenges and opportunities of this new era.

While the sample is drawn from Ontario, the questions it addresses -- about A.I., the skilled trades, university value, and career pathways -- are shared by families, educators, and policymakers across the country. The study is intended to be of value to a wide range of stakeholders, including:

- Provincial governments and education and training authorities across Canada
- Skilled trades associations and apprenticeship bodies
- Universities, colleges, and polytechnic institutions
- Parent and teacher organizations
- Business leaders and workforce strategists
- Career counsellors and guidance professionals
- Media organizations and public policy influencers

While the sample of 549 interviews is focused rather than large-scale, the survey explored many important and far-reaching questions. It is offered here in the hope that its findings will prompt further investigation and have a meaningful impact on decision-makers in education, training, and workforce development -- not only in Ontario but across Canada.

B. Objectives

Research serves three broad purposes: to help decision-makers understand what is actually happening in the world around them; to help them anticipate what is likely to happen next; and to provide evidence-based guidance for achieving their objectives.

The focus of this study was on parents of high school children in Ontario. Parents were invited to share their own perceptions, their knowledge of their child's personality and aptitude, and their views on their child's career intentions and post-secondary options.

The core aim was to provide insight into parents' decision-making regarding their child's career and future study choices. The study examined many factors that influence this process -- including the child's own personality and aptitudes, the parent's occupation and financial circumstances, the impact of the A.I. revolution, and perceptions of different educational pathways including university, apprenticeship, and college.

The Parent

The survey gathered detailed information on parents' demographics, work status and occupation, career satisfaction, and the career they would choose if starting over. Parents were asked whether they knew what their child wanted to do after high school, whether they supported those plans, and what career advice they would give young people today. They shared their views on what constitutes a good job, the relative importance of various job considerations, and whether it is easier or harder for a child today to decide on a career path.

The Child

The survey captured information on the high school student's sex, age, grade, personality, and aptitude. Parents were asked whether their child knew what they wanted to do after high school, how and where they planned to study or train, and whether the parent felt their child had higher or lower career expectations than they themselves once had. Parents also shared salary expectations and specific job recommendations for their child.

Attitudes Toward Artificial Intelligence

The study examined awareness of A.I., parents' free-association responses, their emotional reactions, and their sense of A.I.'s likely impact on future jobs and careers. Parents were asked which occupations they believed were most and least at risk from A.I., and how they felt schools should evolve to prepare students for an A.I.-driven world.

Attitudes Toward the Skilled Trades

The survey explored awareness of the skilled trades, whether parents viewed the trades as a viable option for their own child, their level of comfort with a skilled-trades career choice, the reasons behind their comfort or discomfort, and their preferred channels for receiving information about careers and educational pathways.

C. Research Method

549 online, self-completion interviews were conducted among male and female parents of children in Grades 7 to 12, resident in Ontario.

Although online surveys tend to under-represent lower-education brackets and those not connected online, the sample was broadly representative of parents of high school children across the province.

Results were analyzed across five regions of Ontario:

- East Ontario (13%)
- Hamilton / Niagara (9%)
- Greater Toronto Area (GTA) (49%)
- Southwest Ontario (19%)
- North Ontario (9%)

Because Northern Ontario and the Hamilton/Niagara region would not have been proportionally large enough at natural sample sizes for separate statistical analysis, the number of interviews for these two smaller regions was boosted to 50 interviews per region.

A semi-structured questionnaire was used, combining structured quantitative questions with 11 open-ended qualitative questions that captured respondents' answers in their own words. The actual questions are included throughout this report alongside the relevant findings.

Timing

Fieldwork was conducted in late November and early December 2025. Results were analyzed and are being released in April 2026.

D. Details of the Sample



Region

East Ontario	69 (13%)
Hamilton / Niagara	52 (9%)
GTA	270 (49%)
Southwest Ontario	106 (19%)
North Ontario	52 (9%)
TOTAL	549

Community Type

Downtown area of a major city	148 (27%)
Suburbs of a major city	239 (44%)
Small city or large town	92 (17%)
Small town or village	40 (7%)
Rural area / in the country	30 (5%)

Sex

Male parent	238 (43%)
Female parent	311 (57%)
Boy/male child	301 (55%)
Girl/female child	247 (45%)

Age of Parent

Parents' ages ranged from approximately 29 to 60 years, with an average age of 45. For analysis, parents were grouped into two cohorts: younger (aged 29–38) and older (aged 39–60).

29 to 35	10.8%
36 to 40	17.3%

41 to 45	26.2%
46 to 50	22.0%
51 to 55	16.2%
56 to 60	7.5%
Average age	45 years

Age and Grade of Child

All children were in Grades 7 to 12; average age 15.1 years. In households with more than one high school-age child, parents focused on their oldest child -- which means the sample skews toward higher grades, with Grade 12 representing 26% of children.

Age 11–15	301 (55%)
Age 16–19	248 (45%)
Grade 7	10%
Grade 8	14%
Grade 9	13%
Grade 10	18%
Grade 11	19%
Grade 12	26%

1 Career Plans & Pathways

Does the Child Know What They Want to Do After High School?

Parents were asked whether their child knew what he/she/they wanted to do after completing high school.

Yes	27%
Sort of	39%
No, not really	27%
No, not at all	6%
I don't know what my child wants to do	1%

Two thirds of parents said their child knew -- or sort of knew -- what they wanted to do after high school: 27% answered yes definitively, and 39% said their child sort of knew. One third said their child did not know, either not really (27%) or not at all (6%). Parents of older children in Grades 10–12 were significantly more likely to report that their child had a clear sense of direction.

Parents' General Career Advice to Young People

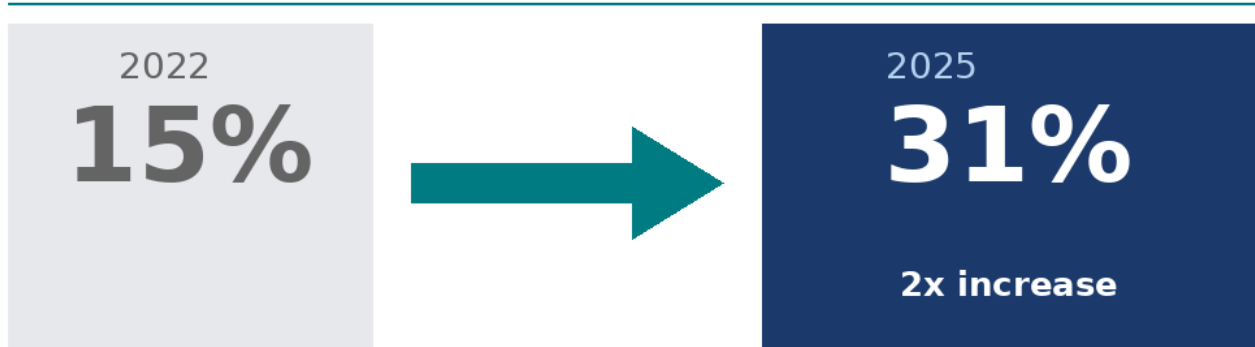
Parents were asked: "In general -- what career advice or job guidance would you give to young people who are about to leave high school?"

This open-ended question produced a rich variety of responses, falling into two broad categories: recommendations about specific occupations, and general life and career guidance.

STANDOUT FINDING

In 2022, approximately 15% of parents recommended the skilled trades to their children. In this 2026 study, 31% recommend trades or practical hands-on occupations -- more than double. This shift reflects a new pragmatism in the wake of the A.I. revolution.

Parents Recommending the Skilled Trades



A. Occupation-Specific Recommendations

- Skilled trades and practical occupations: 31% (up from ~15% in 2022)

- Healthcare (nursing, health science, pharmacy, paramedic, physiotherapy, medicine): 22%
- Computers, IT, and A.I. (coding, data analysis, cyber security, software engineering): 22%
- Business (finance, banking, management, entrepreneurship): 11%
- Engineering and STEM: 10%
- Education and teaching: 4%
- Law: 4%
- Military and police: 2%

B. General Life and Career Advice

- Follow your passion and do what you love: 25%
- Choose a career that is future-proof and resistant to A.I. disruption: 12%
- Stay positive, work hard, be patient and open-minded: 11%
- Try different things; take your time to find your fit: 10%
- Get a good education (university or college): 10%
- Develop many skills and embrace continuous learning: 7%
- Choose a career with good benefits, salary, and security: 6%
- Be smart about personal finances; avoid unnecessary debt: 3%

What Makes a Good Job in the Future?

Parents were asked: “Considering the changes in the world today, what will make a ‘good job’ in the future?”

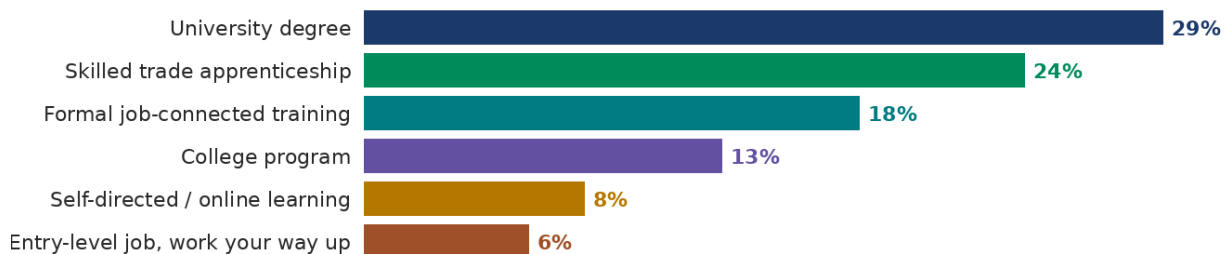
Responses pointed to three leading clusters: technology and A.I. (39%), healthcare (28%), and the skilled trades (27%). Beyond specific occupations, the key criteria associated with a good job were: good money and benefits (10%), a job that makes you happy (5%), and a good work environment with work-life balance (4%).

The Most Advisable Educational Pathway to a Good Job

KEY SHIFT SINCE 2022

In 2022, 19% of parents recommended a skilled trade apprenticeship as the most sensible/advisable post-secondary option. After three years, support has grown to 24%.

Most Advisable Educational Pathway to a Good Job (% of parents)



Support for skilled trade apprenticeships was strongest among parents in rural communities (47%), Southwestern Ontario (39%), those currently employed in the trades (60%), and parents of boys (28% vs. 20% for girls). Support for university was strongest among GTA parents (39%), university graduates (41%), and those earning \$150,000+ per year (39%).

The Importance of Various Job Considerations

Parents were asked to rate 16 job considerations for their child’s future career (beyond earnings). Ranked from most to least important by the percentage rating each as “Very Important”:

1. Being happy with their job	79%
2. Having work-life balance	76%
3. Having a job that is secure	74%
4. Having good health benefits	71%
5. Staying active and healthy	68%
6. Having a pension	66%
7. Maintaining or exceeding their current standard of living	62%
8. Being useful to society	50%
9. Having a job that isn’t stressful most of the time	50%
10. Having the opportunity to work in their province/region	49%
11. Having a mentor/role model early in their career	45%
12. Doing what they went to school or were trained for	40%
13. Having the ability to advance quickly	38%
14. Spending less time using screens	34%
15. Spending less time sitting at a desk	30%
16. Having the opportunity to work from home	22%

The very low ranking of ‘working from home’ (22%) is a notable finding. When it comes to their children’s futures, Ontario parents prioritize happiness, security, health, and work-life balance far above location flexibility.

Is it Harder or Easier to Choose a Career Today?

Nearly two thirds of Ontario parents (65%) felt it is more difficult and complicated for young people today to choose a career path. Their responses were grouped into six main categories: job market challenges including too many choices (47%), A.I. and technology disruption (32%), economic pressures including cost of living and education (30%), decision-making difficulties such as lack of motivation or guidance (20%), education and qualifications concerns (15%), and the accelerating pace of change (12%).

It’s harder, more difficult and complicated these days	65%
About the same	27%
It’s easier these days	8%

Career Hopes, Expectations, and Salary

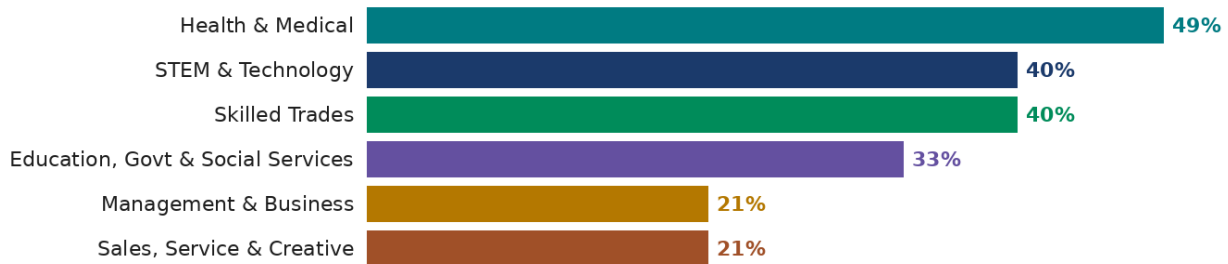
38% of parents believed their child has higher career hopes and expectations than they themselves once had; 41% said about the same; 22% said lower. Parents who believed their child had lower expectations were significantly more likely to feel negatively about A.I., to be dissatisfied with their own career, to be budgeting carefully, and to live in a small town or rural community.

On salary, parents estimated a reasonable annual salary for someone in their early-to-mid twenties to be around \$57,000. Statistics Canada reports the median annual wage for Canadians aged 25 to 34 at \$55,650 -- suggesting parents' instincts are broadly accurate for entry-level earning potential. However, this median does not account for the wage premium available in skilled trades and healthcare occupations, where starting wages often exceed the median considerably.

What Jobs Would Parents Recommend for Their Child?

Parents were asked what two or three jobs or careers they would propose for their child. The top six occupational groupings were:

Top Career Fields Recommended by Ontario Parents for Their Children



Recommended More for Sons

- Skilled Trades: 35% (sons) vs. 19% (daughters) -- 1.8× more likely
- Engineering: 20% vs. 9% -- 2.2×
- Electrician: 10% vs. 2% -- 5×
- Construction: 6% vs. 1% -- 6×

Recommended More for Daughters

- Healthcare: 51% (daughters) vs. 24% (sons) -- 2.1× more likely
- Nursing: 15% vs. 1% -- 15×
- Veterinarian: 10% vs. 1% -- 10×
- Teaching: 16% vs. 7% -- 2.3×

Importantly, most careers are being recommended for both boys and girls by both mothers and fathers. Career differences reflect parental perceptions of aptitude and interest rather than blanket exclusion.

Perceived Value of a University Education

Ontario parents are divided on the value of a university education. 48% rate it as Good or Excellent value -- a solid plurality endorsement. At the same time, 47% rate it as Fair or Poor value, a proportion too large to dismiss as a fringe view. Only 4% were unsure.

Rating	% of Parents	Combined
Excellent value	19%	48%
Good value	29%	
Fair value	27%	47%
Poor value	20%	
Not sure	4%	

Those most likely to rate university as Poor value tended to work in the skilled trades, live in smaller communities, be dissatisfied with their own career, or be comfortable with their child pursuing a trade. But dissatisfaction with university value is not limited to trades-oriented families -- it runs across income levels and regions.

These results suggest that universities face a meaningful and growing perception challenge. In an era when knowledge itself is increasingly accessible -- through online platforms, open courseware, and A.I.-assisted learning -- the value of a degree is less self-evident than it once was. The question universities must answer more convincingly is not whether their graduates learn, but whether what they offer justifies the time and cost relative to the alternatives now available to young people. This is not a critique of university education itself; it is a signal that the case for it needs to be made more clearly and more specifically than ever before.

2 Parent Profiles & Perspectives

Household Income

The average declared combined household income for parents in the sample was \$105,000 per year, with the GTA slightly higher at \$110,000.

Under \$25,000	3%
\$25,000 to \$39,999	6%
\$40,000 to \$59,999	11%
\$60,000 to \$79,999	12%
\$80,000 to \$99,999	16%
\$100,000 to \$124,999	15%
\$125,000 to \$149,999	11%
\$150,000 or more	21%
Average household income	\$105,000 per annum

Financial Status

Because claimed income is not always the best predictor of financial behaviour and attitudes, Q.i used its validated 7-point Financial Status scale. 22% of parents described themselves as Well off or Fairly well off; 15% described themselves as just surviving or really struggling.

Financial Status	% of Sample	Avg. HH Income
Well off / affluent	4%	\$175,000
Fairly well off / comfortable	18%	\$125,000
Reasonably comfortable (can't be extravagant)	35%	\$116,000
Have to budget reasonably carefully	19%	\$91,000
Have to budget very carefully	10%	\$79,000
Just surviving from month to month	12%	\$64,000
Really struggling / sometimes go hungry	3%	\$40,000

Education Level

Education levels varied significantly by region and by sex. University graduate rates were highest in the GTA -- 40% of GTA parents held a bachelor's degree and a further 23% held a higher degree, meaning 63% of GTA parents had a university-level credential in total. Eastern Ontario also had above-average graduate rates at 36%.

In Southwestern Ontario, by contrast, the proportion of parents whose highest level of education was high school was significantly higher than the provincial average -- 23% versus 14% across the rest of the province.

Elementary school	<1%
High school	14%
Post-high-school diploma	2%
Post-high-school trade qualification or apprenticeship	5%
College diploma or degree	28%
University degree	34%
Master's degree / doctorate or equivalent	16%

College graduation rates showed a different regional pattern. Women in Ontario were considerably more likely than men to hold a college credential -- 36% of female parents compared with 18% of male parents. College graduates were particularly concentrated in Northern Ontario (42%) and the Hamilton/Niagara region (46%), both well above the provincial average of 28%.

Employment and Work Status

85% of parents were working -- either full-time (72%) or part-time (13%). 90% of male parents worked full-time, compared with 59% of female parents. 6% of the sample were full-time homemakers.

Working full-time	72%
Working part-time	13%
Not working but looking for work	4%
Full-time homemaker	6%
Retired / receiving disability / other	3%

Of those working, 41% worked for a large company, 27% of women worked for government, and 12% of the total sample was self-employed. The percentage working from home (hybrid model) was highest in the GTA (45%) and lowest in Northern Ontario (77% never work from home) and rural areas (88%).

Occupation

Parents' occupations were grouped into seven broad categories:

Management and Business	37%
Education, Government and Social Services	15%
Sales, Service and Creative Fields	13%
STEM and Technical	13%
Skilled Trades, Transport and Production	12%
Healthcare	10%
Primary Industries and Other	3%

Career Satisfaction

71.5% of working parents rated their satisfaction with their career choice at 7 or above out of 10, and could be described as ranging from basically to very satisfied. 8.5% rated their satisfaction at 4 or below -- broadly dissatisfied. The remaining 20% were lukewarm, rating their satisfaction at 5 or 6 out of 10. The average level of satisfaction was 7.3 out of 10.

Career satisfaction was significantly higher among parents who were affluent, working in STEM or management, self-employed, university-educated, and positive about A.I. Parents in the skilled trades reported above-average career satisfaction.

The Career Parents Would Choose if Starting Over

Parents were asked: "If you had the choice to start again, or if you needed to change and find a new occupation, what occupation, job, career or field of work would you choose now?"

52% of respondents said they were fundamentally happy with their career choice and would not want to change. The remaining 48% -- roughly 262 parents -- said they would consider switching occupations if they had the chance.

Among those open to a change, responses were diverse. The most commonly mentioned alternative fields were Education or Teaching (24%), Healthcare (21%), Management/Business (19%), STEM/Technology (18%), and the Skilled Trades (12%). The trades figure is particularly notable: it represents a meaningful share of parents -- including many currently working in white-collar roles -- who see hands-on skilled work as an attractive alternative path.

The picture of where people wanted to leave is equally revealing. The highest rates of career dissatisfaction and desire to switch were found among those currently in Healthcare (62% would consider leaving), Sales, Service and Creative fields (56%), and Management/Business (55%). Even within the trades, 54% of those currently working in that sector said they would consider a change -- though many of these parents said they would simply move to a different trade rather than leave the sector entirely.

There was also notable cross-sector aspiration. Those currently in STEM were drawn to the trades (21%), while parents in Management/Business gravitated toward Education (39%). These patterns suggest that career satisfaction is not simply about income -- it is also about meaning, physical engagement, and a sense of lasting contribution.

The fact that 12% of parents open to a career change would choose the skilled trades -- including many currently in professional or office-based roles -- reinforces a broader finding of this study: the skilled trades are gaining status, not losing it.

3 Parents & Artificial Intelligence

Awareness of A.I.

Yes, I know a lot about it	39%
Yes, I know a bit about it	49%
Yes, I've heard of it but don't know much about it	11%
No, I've never even heard of it	1%

88% of Ontario parents report knowing something about Artificial Intelligence -- either a lot (39%) or a bit (49%). A further 11% had heard of A.I. but didn't know much about it. Only 1% of parents -- just six people in the entire sample -- had never heard of it at all. Awareness was effectively universal across all demographic groups, but depth of knowledge varied considerably: parents working in STEM/Technical fields (66%), those who were well-off or affluent (52%), and university graduates (47%) were significantly more likely to say they knew a lot about A.I.

What A.I. Means to Parents: Free-Association Responses

Parents were invited to share what comes to mind when they think of Artificial Intelligence. Responses were grouped as follows:

- Positive associations -- 57%: usefulness and efficiency, revolutionary and world-changing, exciting and innovative, time-saving and productivity-enhancing.
- Negative associations -- 58%: job losses and unemployment, dangers and ethical misuse, loss of human connection, privacy and data concerns. (Note: respondents could select more than one category, so totals exceed 100%.)
- Factual associations -- 26%: descriptions of A.I. applications, ChatGPT, robotics, automation, and machine learning.
- Neutral responses -- 15%: uncertainty, mixed feelings, or acknowledgement that the parent is still learning about A.I.

Emotional Response to A.I.

Parents were presented with a list of 16 emotions (8 positive, 8 negative) and asked to select all they experienced when thinking about A.I. Overall, about 53% of all emotions selected were negative and 47% were positive -- reflecting the genuine ambivalence many parents feel.

Top Positive Emotions

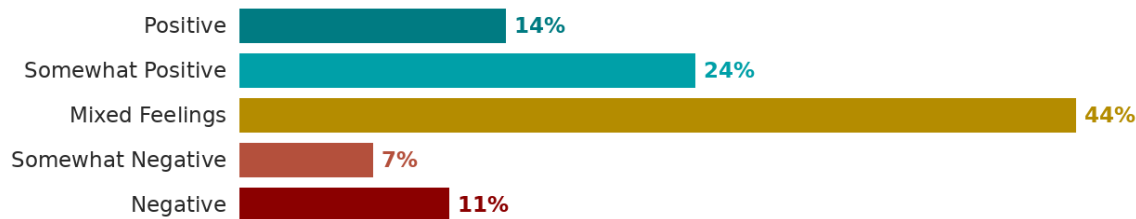
Curious / intrigued	42%
Optimistic / hopeful	31%
Excited	24%
Inspired	19%
Grateful / thankful	17%

Top Negative Emotions

Concerned / worried	49%
Mistrust	32%
Fear / dread	26%
Confused / uncertain	22%
Stressed / anxious	21%

Overall Attitude Toward A.I.

Overall Attitude Toward A.I. (N=549 Ontario Parents)



44% of Ontario parents have genuinely mixed feelings about A.I. -- they see both promise and peril. 38% tilt toward the positive, and 18% lean negative. These orientations have significant downstream effects on parents' views about careers, education, and their children's futures, as the segmentation in Section 5 makes clear.

The Perceived Impact of A.I. on Future Jobs and Careers

Parents were asked to rate the expected impact of A.I. on the future jobs and careers of Canadians on a scale of 1 to 10. The average rating was 7.1 out of 10.

High impact (rated 7 to 10 out of 10)	64%
Moderate impact (rated 5 to 6 out of 10)	27%
Minimal impact (rated 1 to 4 out of 10)	8%
Average impact rating	7.1 / 10

Occupations Most at Risk from A.I.

Parents were asked what jobs they believed are most at risk of being replaced by A.I. 12% said they simply didn't know, 8% predicted "everything" would be impacted, and 2% cited mundane or repetitive tasks. The remaining parents named specific fields. The results below are ranked by number of mentions (base: 549 parents):

#1 Computers, I.T., and software development	67 mentions
#2 Data analysis and data processing	65 mentions
#3 Customer service and call centres	65 mentions

#4 Administrative, clerical, and office work	63 mentions
#5 Accounting and tax preparation	42 mentions
#6 Factory and assembly-line workers	34 mentions
#7 Artists, illustrators, and graphic designers	33 mentions
#8 Banking, finance, and insurance	33 mentions
#9 Teachers and educators	30 mentions
#10 Medical and healthcare (including diagnosis and radiology)	27 mentions

Other notable mentions included programmers and coders (28), cashiers (21), writers and journalists (21), retail workers (21), and drivers (21). It is striking that the top four categories are all white-collar or knowledge-economy roles -- consistent with the broader finding that parents see A.I. as a greater threat to desk-based work than to hands-on occupations.

Occupations Least at Risk from A.I.

Parents were asked which jobs will be least at risk as a result of A.I. The skilled trades were the most frequently mentioned category by a considerable margin. The results below are ranked by number of mentions and approximate percentage (base: 549 parents):

#1 The skilled trades (plumbing, construction, electrical, welding, HVAC, mechanics)	294 mentions
#2 Healthcare (doctors, nurses, paramedics)	284 mentions
#3 Farming, food production, and food preparation	62 mentions
#4 Education and teaching	57 mentions
#5 Police, security, and public safety	33 mentions
#6 First responders (ambulance and fire services)	30 mentions
#7 Law and the legal system (including judges)	27 mentions
#8 Manual labour and physical work	26 mentions
#9 Executives, leaders, and decision-makers	21 mentions
#10 Transportation, distribution, and supply chain	18 mentions

Within the skilled trades category, the most frequently cited specific occupations were plumbers (38 mentions), construction workers (29), electricians (26), mechanics (16), carpenters (10), and HVAC technicians (7). Healthcare followed closely, led by doctors (93 mentions), medical professionals broadly (60), and nurses (49). The proximity of trades and healthcare at the top -- with all other categories a considerable distance behind -- underscores how clearly Ontario parents see human physical presence and judgment as the core protection against A.I. displacement.

STANDOUT FINDING

The skilled trades are identified by nearly 59% of Ontario parents as the occupational category least at risk from A.I. -- the single most-cited 'safe harbour' career category in the entire survey.

How Should Schools Evolve in an A.I. Era?

Parents had a great deal to say on this subject. Their recommendations were grouped into five main categories:

- A.I. education recommendations -- 60%: integrate A.I. literacy into the curriculum, teach students how to use A.I. as a tool, teach critical evaluation of A.I. content, and address the ethics, dangers, and risks of A.I.
- Preparation and planning -- 28%: evolve and update the curriculum, offer computer science and IT courses, retrain teachers, and embrace technology as a core part of schooling.
- General advice -- 27%: emphasize critical thinking and problem-solving, give more attention to practical and manual skills, include trades in the curriculum, and start technology education earlier.
- Concerns about A.I. education -- 17%: worry about cheating, over-reliance on A.I., and the erosion of foundational skills.
- Other miscellaneous suggestions -- 4%.

4 The Skilled Trades

Awareness of the Skilled Trades

Yes, I know a lot about them	19%
Yes, I know quite a bit about them	32%
Yes, I know something about them	35%
No, I don't know much about them	12%
No, I know nothing about them	2%

86% of parents claimed to know either a lot (19%), quite a bit (32%), or at least something (35%) about the skilled trades. Only 14% said they knew little or nothing. Parents who knew little were shown a list of skilled trade examples before proceeding to the remaining questions.

Would the Skilled Trades Be Viable for Their Child?

Yes, definitely	29%
Yes, possibly	48%
No, not really	15%
No, not at all	7%
Don't know	2%
Combined: Viable (Definitely + Possibly)	77%

77% of Ontario parents felt a career in the skilled trades was a viable option for their child -- either definitely (29%) or possibly (48%). Support was highest among parents currently working in the trades (100%), those in STEM/Technical fields (88%), parents earning under \$60k per year (87%), male parents (82%), and parents of boys (81%).

22% of parents felt the skilled trades were not really (15%) or not at all (7%) a viable option for their child. While this group was in the minority, they clustered in identifiable ways: negative views were significantly higher among parents in management or business roles (33%), those earning \$150,000 or more per year (31%), younger parents aged under 45 (26%), university graduates (26%), mothers (25%), parents living in the GTA (25%), and parents of daughters (25%). These patterns suggest that resistance to trades as a career pathway is most concentrated among high-income, highly-educated, urban parents -- groups for whom the professional and university track remains the default mental model for their children's futures.

How Comfortable Are Parents with Their Child Pursuing the Skilled Trades?

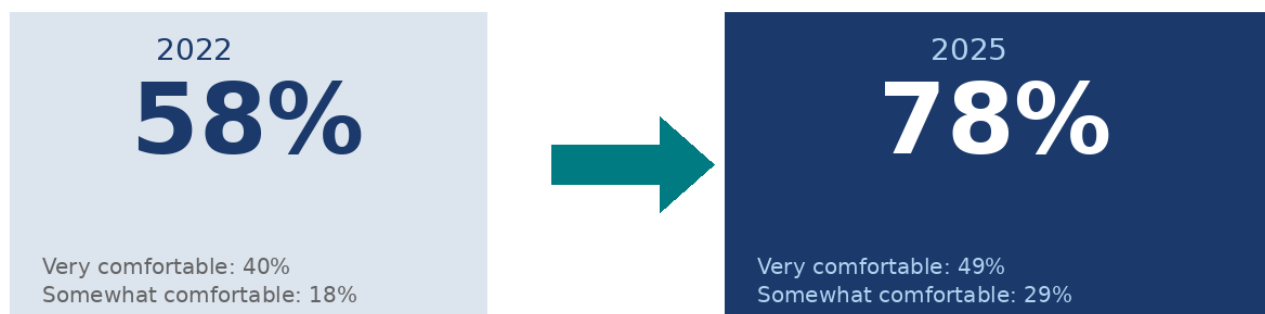
Response	2022	2025	Change
Very comfortable: I would be very supportive	40%	49%	+9
Somewhat comfortable: I would be fine with their choice	18%	29%	+11
Combined Comfortable (Top 2 Box)	58%	78%	+20

Response	2022	2025	Change
Neutral / mixed feelings: it's up to my child	28%	15%	-13
Somewhat uncomfortable	11%	4%	-7
Very uncomfortable	4%	3%	-1
Combined Uncomfortable (Bottom 2 Box)	15%	7%	-8

78% of Ontario parents said they would be very or somewhat comfortable with their child pursuing a skilled trade -- up from 58% in the 2022 Job Talks study. This 20-point shift in three years is remarkable and represents one of the most striking findings of the entire survey. Discomfort fell from 15% to just 7%, while the proportion taking a neutral position also dropped, from 28% to 15%.

The combined comfortable total was similar for male and female parents (79% vs. 77%), though more mothers said 'very comfortable' (54% vs. 42% of fathers), while more fathers said 'somewhat comfortable' (37% vs. 23% of mothers).

Parents Comfortable with Child Pursuing a Skilled Trade



Reasons for Comfort

Parents who were comfortable or very comfortable with their child pursuing a skilled trade were asked why. Their reasons fell into several consistent themes:

- High demand and strong job security
- Good pay and financial stability
- Resilience to A.I. and automation -- 'A.I.-proof'
- A respected and personally fulfilling career
- Well-suited to the child's hands-on aptitude and interests
- Family tradition in the trades

Reasons for Discomfort

Parents who expressed discomfort or uncertainty about a trades career for their child were also asked to explain their hesitation. The most common reasons were:

- Physical demands and safety concerns
- Perceived lower social status compared with university-educated professions
- Belief that an academically capable child should pursue university
- Concern that trades limit future options and earning potential
- The child is not interested or suited to hands-on work

Best Channels for Keeping Parents Informed

Parents were asked which channels they prefer for receiving information about careers and educational pathways while their child is in high school. The full ranking of 11 options tested was:

Email newsletters from child’s school board	50%
In-person student-parent events hosted by school board	48%
A website with up-to-date information	47%
Virtual student-parent events hosted by school board	38%
A mobile app with up-to-date information	28%
Printed material	25%
A YouTube channel	17%
A Facebook page	14%
Pre-recorded webinars	13%
An Instagram channel	10%
A TikTok channel	7%

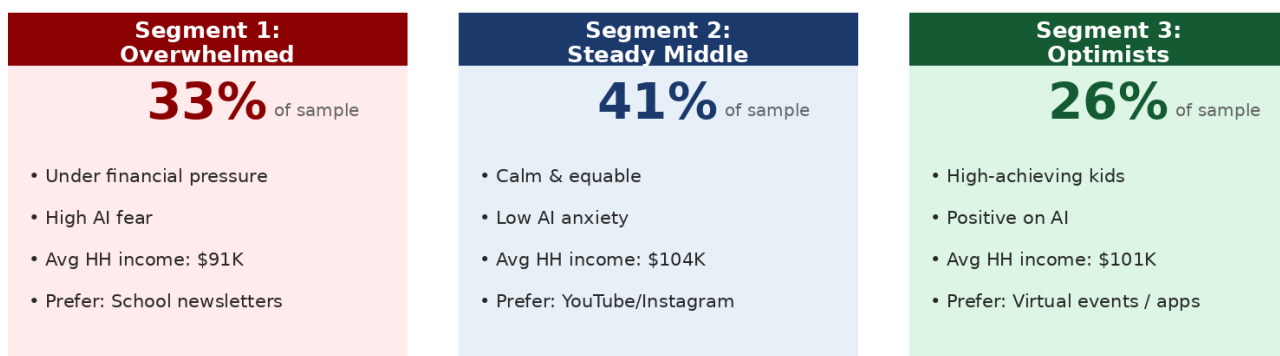
The strong preference for school-based channels -- email newsletters (50%), in-person events (48%), and websites (47%) -- confirms the central role of schools and school boards as trusted intermediaries for career information. Digital-only channels such as social media rank considerably lower across the full sample, though they are more valued by specific segments.

5 Segmentation: Three Ways Parents See the Future

As the results of this survey were analyzed, it became increasingly clear that the key to making sense of the findings was understanding who Ontario parents are -- and how the differences between them shape not only their own lives but the lives, aspirations, and futures of their children.

Q.i conducted a formal statistical segmentation analysis using a combination of child-related, parent-related, A.I.-related, and skilled-trades-related variables, processed through SPSS and R-based analytical tools including discriminant analysis and cross-validation. Three distinct and statistically robust segments of Ontario parents were identified.

The segmentation model correctly classified 97.2% of original grouped cases. Cross-validation yielded a classification accuracy of 89.7%, confirming the robustness of the three-group solution.



Segment 1: The Overwhelmed

33%

of all Ontario parents surveyed

The Overwhelmed are anxious and struggling -- more likely to be in a lower education bracket and to feel deeply concerned about the future. Their children reflect many of their parents' concerns.

- Lowest average household income across the three segments: \$91,000
- 20% are just surviving from month to month
- 74% of this segment are mothers; 23% have completed only high school
- 25% are not currently employed
- 74% of children described as sometimes stressed, anxious, or overwhelmed
- 82% feel concerned or worried about A.I. (vs. 25% in Segment 2 and 45% in Segment 3)
- 71% rate university as Fair or Poor value
- 36% believe their child has lower career hopes than they themselves had
- Preferred information channel: school board email newsletters (68%)

The Overwhelmed are under pressure from multiple directions simultaneously. This segment requires targeted, accessible, and reassuring communication -- and practical, affordable pathways to better futures for their children.

Segment 2: Steady Middle

41%

of all Ontario parents surveyed

The Steady Middle is the largest segment -- mainstream, comfortable with the status quo, and showing low anxiety about A.I. and the future.

- Average declared household income: \$104,000
- 39% work in Management, Business, or STEM/Technical roles
- 29% describe themselves as well-off or comfortable (similar to Segment 3)
- Children described as normal and well-adjusted; only 22% report child stress (vs. 74% in Segment 1)
- Very low A.I. anxiety: only 25% feel concerned (vs. 82% in Segment 1); average 0.9 negative emotions selected
- Most likely to view university as Good or Excellent value (63%)
- Least likely to recommend the skilled trades as a career direction
- Preferred information channel: YouTube / Instagram (32%)

The Steady Middle are well-resourced and emotionally equable. Their children are well-adjusted. This group is largely at ease with the future -- or at least not alarmed by it.

Segment 3: The Optimists

26%

of all Ontario parents surveyed

The Optimists are the smallest but most energized segment -- distinguished by high-performing children, positive attitudes toward A.I., and strong confidence in the future.

- Average declared household income: \$101,000
- 29% are well-off or comfortable (similar to Segment 2)
- 39% work in Management, Business, or STEM/Technical roles
- 85% of children described as doing well academically (vs. 35% in Segment 2 and 45% in Segment 1)
- Children stand out on creativity (63%), sociability (79%), self-confidence (74%), and athleticism (65%)
- 59% feel curious/intrigued about A.I., 56% feel optimistic/hopeful, 35% feel inspired
- Average 2.6 positive emotion selections for A.I. (vs. 1.5 in Segment 1 and 0.9 in Segment 2)
- Prefer digital channels: 51% virtual student-parent events, 38% mobile apps

The Optimists are parents well-positioned for the future. Their children are talented, curious, and capable. They are likely to be early adopters of new career pathways and digital educational resources.

E. Conclusions and Recommendations

This survey of 549 Ontario parents of high school students provides a detailed and nuanced portrait of how families are thinking about careers, education, and the future -- at a moment of extraordinary transformation driven by Artificial Intelligence, shifting labour markets, and rising economic pressures.

We highlight here the most important conclusions and the most actionable recommendations for the stakeholders this study was designed to serve. We strongly encourage readers to engage with the full report, not only the conclusions presented below.

1. The A.I. Revolution Is Real -- and Parents Know It

88% of Ontario parents report knowing something about Artificial Intelligence -- either a lot (39%) or a bit (49%). The average perceived impact of A.I. on future jobs and careers is 7.1 out of 10, with 64% rating it a 7 or higher. Most parents anticipate that A.I. will fundamentally reshape the labour market within their children's working lifetimes.

At the same time, parents are divided in how they feel about this. 44% have mixed feelings, 38% lean positive, and 18% lean negative. These attitudinal differences have profound downstream consequences: parents who are positive about A.I. tend to have more confident, better-prepared children with clearer career plans; parents who are fearful tend to have children with higher stress levels, lower career expectations, and less certainty about their futures. The Overwhelmed segment -- 33% of all Ontario parents -- shows this most clearly: 82% of them feel concerned or worried about A.I., and their children carry that anxiety.

Recommendation: Education systems, career counsellors, and employers have a responsibility not only to inform young people about A.I. -- but to help parents understand and navigate A.I. constructively. Parental attitude toward A.I. may be one of the most powerful determinants of a child's career trajectory. Fostering informed optimism -- rather than fear -- should be a priority.

2. The Skilled Trades Are Having Their Moment -- But Pockets of Resistance Remain

One of the most striking findings of this study is the dramatic rise in parental support for the skilled trades. In the 2022 Job Talks study, approximately 15% of parents recommended the trades. In this 2026 study, 31% recommend trades or practical hands-on occupations -- more than doubling in three years. 78% of parents would now be comfortable with their child pursuing a trade, up from 58% in 2022. 77% see trades as a viable option for their child. The skilled trades are also seen by nearly 59% of Ontario parents as the occupational category least at risk from A.I.

Yet resistance to the trades as a career pathway remains concentrated in specific groups. Parents in management or business (33%), those earning \$150,000 or more per year (31%), university graduates (26%), and GTA parents (25%) are significantly more likely to rule out the trades for their child. These are also the parents most likely to be advising others -- in workplaces, in school communities, and in public discourse. Their attitudes represent the last significant barrier to full normalization of the skilled trades as a first-choice career pathway.

Recommendation: This is a pivotal moment for the skilled trades sector. The case for trades as a respected, well-paying, A.I.-resilient career pathway is already being made -- largely by parents themselves. The sector should build on this momentum by investing in compelling, modern communications; repositioning apprenticeship as rigorous, technology-integrated, on-the-job training; and partnering actively with schools, colleges, and polytechnics to create

accessible pathways. Communications targeted specifically at high-income, university-educated, and urban parents may have the highest impact on closing the remaining gap.

3. University Is No Longer the Default

Only 29% of Ontario parents now recommend university as the most advisable pathway to a good job, while 47% rate it as Fair or Poor value. Meanwhile, support for apprenticeships and formal training have grown substantially. At the same time, 48% of parents still view university as Good or Excellent value. The data point to a sector at a crossroads -- still valued by nearly half of parents, but no longer the unquestioned first choice it once was.

Recommendation: Ontario's post-secondary institutions -- universities, colleges, and polytechnics -- should recognize that they are now operating in a more competitive and more discerning market. Demonstrating real-world, employment-relevant value is essential. Employer partnerships, co-op programs, and work-integrated learning will be increasingly important in demonstrating that value to parents and students alike.

4. A Divided Province: Three Segments, Three Realities

The segmentation analysis reveals that Ontario parents do not speak with one voice. The Overwhelmed (33%), the Steady Middle (41%), and the Optimists (26%) describe three meaningfully different experiences of parenting in Ontario today. The Overwhelmed segment is of particular concern -- one in three Ontario parents of high school children is financially stretched, deeply anxious about A.I., losing confidence in the education system, and worried about their children's wellbeing.

Recommendation: Government, schools, and community organizations should prioritize accessible, affordable, and non-judgmental support for families in the Overwhelmed segment. This includes better career guidance in smaller communities and lower-income schools; mental health supports for anxious young people; and practical, affordable pathways to skilled, well-paying careers.

5. Gender Differences in Career Guidance Are Alive -- But Not Absolute

Significant gender differences in parental career recommendations persist. Healthcare and caring professions are recommended at dramatically higher rates for daughters; engineering, construction, and trades at dramatically higher rates for sons. And yet most careers are being recommended for both sexes by both mothers and fathers. Career differences reflect parental perceptions of aptitude and interest, not blanket exclusion.

Recommendation: Career educators should continue to challenge limiting assumptions while respecting genuine differences in interest and aptitude. The goal is not enforced equal outcomes, but equal access to information, encouragement, and opportunity for every young person.

6. Schools Must Evolve -- and Parents Know It

Parents are clear that schools need to change in an A.I. era. 60% recommended integrating A.I. education into the curriculum as a core subject. Parents also want critical thinking and creativity over rote learning,

more practical and trades-focused pathways, and better career guidance. At the same time, parents continue to see schools and school boards as their primary trusted source of career and education information -- email newsletters (50%), in-person events (48%), and school websites (47%) rank as the three most preferred channels -- a responsibility not to be taken lightly.

Recommendation: Schools and school boards should invest in updated, A.I.-informed career guidance curricula; stronger partnerships with employers in trades, technology, and healthcare; and regular, accessible parent communications delivered through the channels parents prefer to use -- starting with email newsletters and in-person events, which together reach the broadest cross-section of Ontario families.

7. Parental Experience Shapes Children's Futures

Across virtually every dimension of this survey, parents' own attitudes and experiences -- toward A.I., the trades, university, and their own careers -- are strongly associated with their children's outlook, wellbeing, and career clarity. Parents who approach the future with curiosity and optimism tend to have children who share that orientation.

The career satisfaction and starting-over data make this connection concrete. 71.5% of working parents are satisfied with their career choice, but 48% said they would consider changing occupations if given the chance -- and 12% of those open to switching said they would choose the skilled trades. Notably, the careers parents most want to recommend to their children closely mirror the careers they themselves wish they had chosen. An engaged, reflective parent is not just a support system -- they are one of the most powerful career development assets a young person can have.

Recommendation: Invest in parent-facing resources alongside student-facing ones. Career guidance programs, school board communications, and trades outreach campaigns should be designed to engage and inform parents directly -- not as a secondary audience, but as a primary one.

A Final Thought

This survey was conducted at a genuine inflection point in Ontario's labour market and educational landscape -- one that resonates well beyond provincial borders. The findings suggest that parents across Canada are, on balance, adapting thoughtfully to a changing world -- more open to trades, more aware of A.I., more pragmatic about university, and more focused on what will actually make their children happy and secure. The challenge for policy-makers, educators, and industry leaders is to match the intelligence and good sense of these parents with equally thoughtful, evidence-based, and accessible supports.

— End of Report —

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