



# The Learning Academy

at the University of South Florida



## 2019 Graduate Outcome Report

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# Dedication

*I would like to dedicate this report to Susan Richmond and Dr. Karen Berkman. It is through their tireless work and ingenuity that The Learning Academy was established, nourished, and grown. This report signals one step in the maturity of a program coming to fruition. Thanks to both, The Learning Academy has been led by passionate experts and guided by a value system that not only assumes competency and the best in individuals, but also imbues greatness into all those involved at any level. It is with that strong moral foundation in place that we know this legacy shall remain intact and continue to positively impact the inclusivity of our communities.*

# DESTINATIONS

## Overall Outcomes as of 2019

43%

of Total  
Graduate  
Outcomes  
Captured

Unique  
Survey  
Responders

54

2010-2018  
Graduate Years

Graduate Classes

9 at USF Tampa  
Campus, 1 at SPC  
Clearwater Campus

95%

Graduate  
Rate

Total  
Graduates

26

Total  
Students

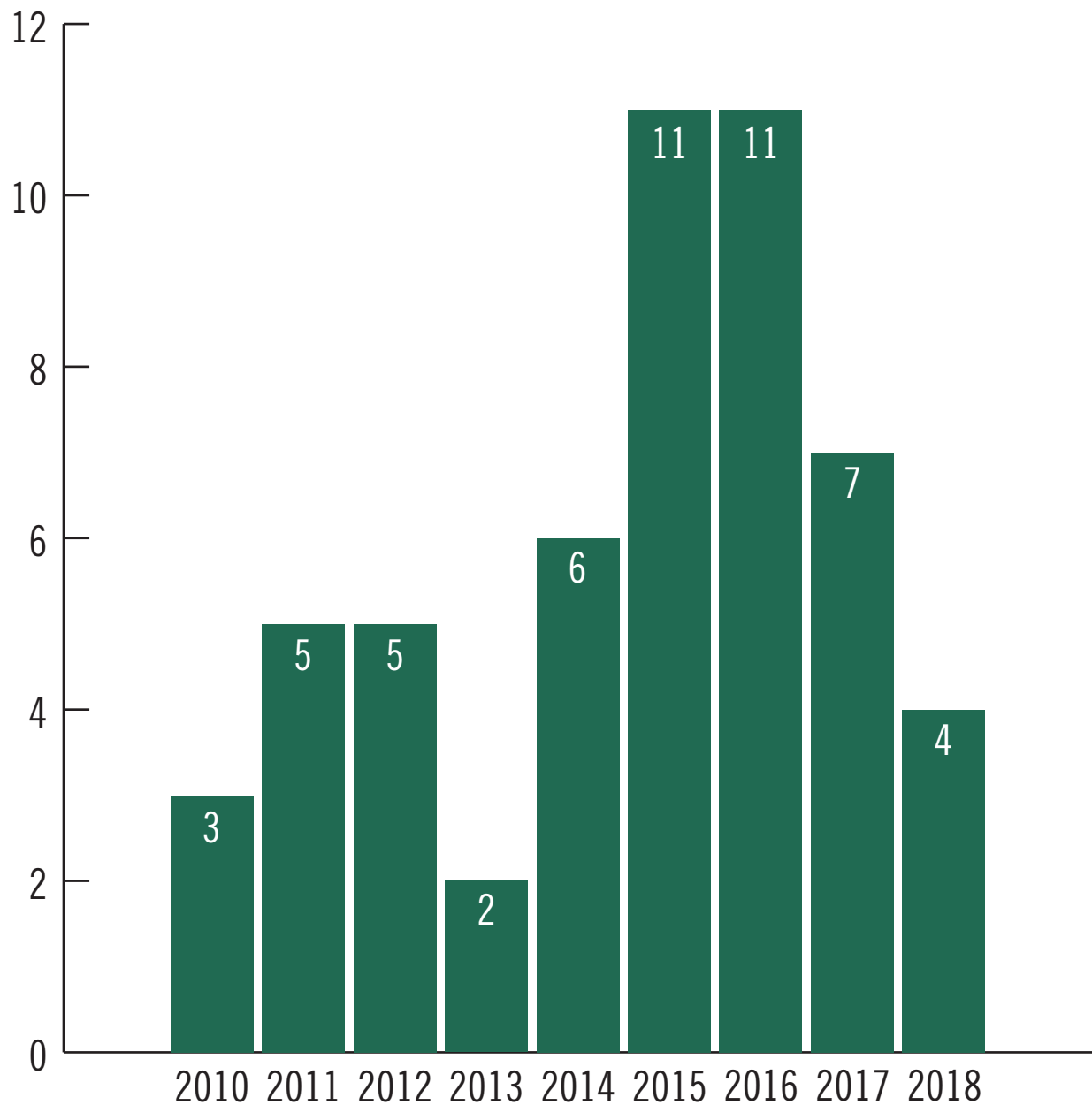
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The Learning Academy Graduate Outcomes Survey was implemented in 2017 with the goal of objectively measuring outcomes of program graduates. Prior, TLA staff knew through personal experience, and anecdotally, that positive outcomes were occurring but there was no tool in place to effectively capture it. This report marks the third consecutive year collecting the survey and the first year of compiling the data we have gathered over those first three years. Year-to-year we have been able to gather snapshots to help direct us in decision making and learning where our strengths and weaknesses as a program lie. This will be the first time we look at an overall outcome based on multiple collections and will produce the most robust and insightful look at our program's long-term outcomes. Over the three years we have been able to capture data from approximately 43% of all one hundred and twenty-six graduates. The most common challenge TLA has faced in collecting survey

data has been obtaining accurate contact information. About 50% of sent surveys are opened/received each year. In one year, TLA supplemented emails with phone calls to increase the reach. There are some instances of being unable to contact graduates due to not having any contact information or requests to entirely opt out of communication with TLA. The graduation rate for ten TLA cohorts remains at approximately 95%. TLA was replicated at St. Petersburg College Clearwater Campus during the 2018 and 2019 school years. Using these data, we are able to evaluate and compare our program outcomes at an individual, state, and national level – and throughout this destination report our outcomes will be compared to the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2, the standard for assessing employment-related outcomes for young adults with autism. A value we cherish at TLA is utilizing best practices, being a data-guided transition program, and always striving to improve.

# GRADUATE DEMOGRAPHICS:

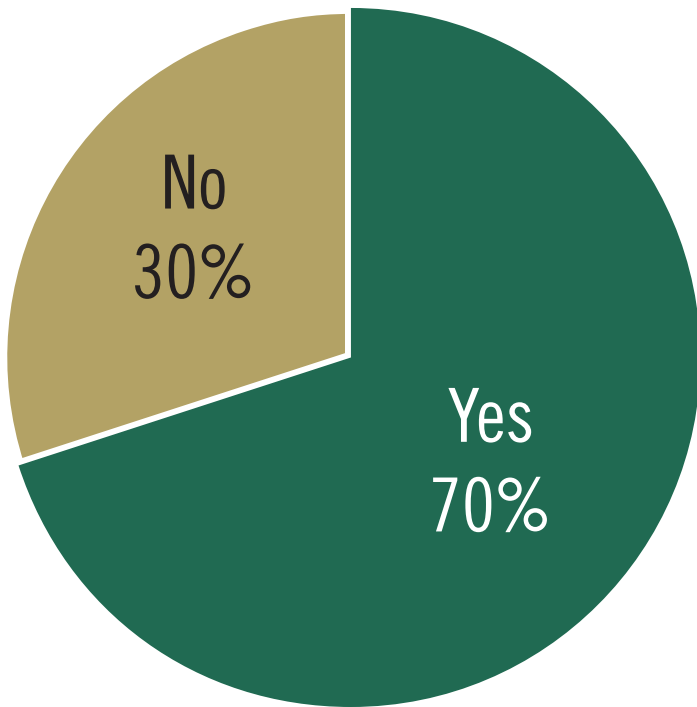
What year did you graduate from  
The Learning Academy?



Graduate classes are organized by year and range from 10 students (2010) to 21 students (2018). The 21 students in 2018 counts both the USF Tampa Campus and the SPC Clearwater Campus. The highest response rates have been obtained by the 2016 cohort: 11 of 14 graduates (79%) and the 2015 cohort: 11 of 15 graduates (73%). The lowest response rates obtained are by the 2013 cohort: 2 of 13 graduates (15%) and the 2018 cohort: 4 of 21 graduates (19%).

# CURRENT EMPLOYMENT

## Are you currently employed?



The National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 (NLTS-2) is currently the most recent, accurate, and perhaps only nationwide data source for autism outcomes related to employment. The NLTS-2 found that only 58% of young adults with autism ever worked after high school and at the offset of the study the

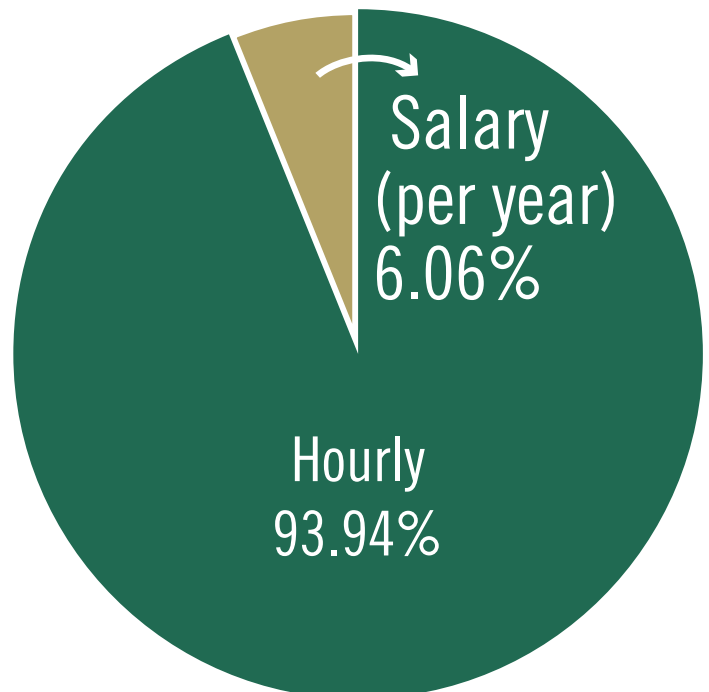
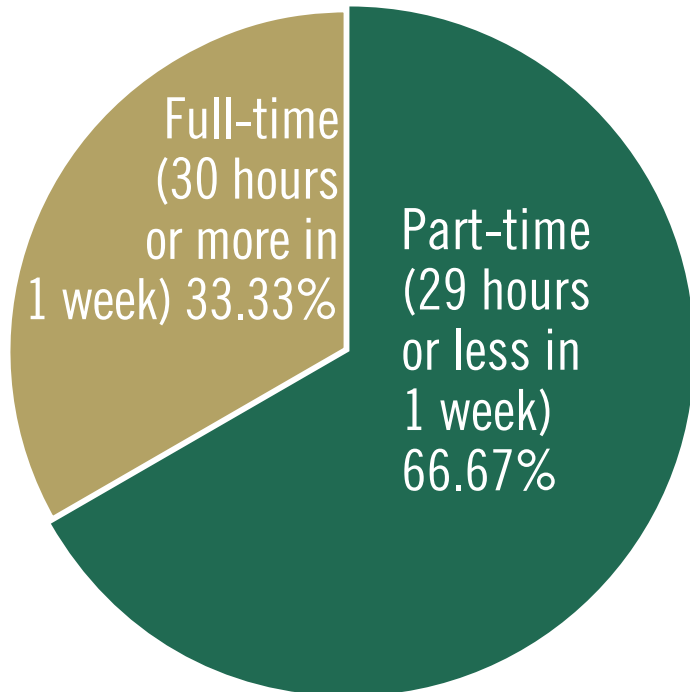
current employment rate was 32.5%. As of 2019, **70%** of all TLA graduates have reported *currently* being employed – over twice the national average. The percentage of graduates who have ever been employed since graduating is **74%**, which includes individuals not currently working. According to NLTS-2 findings, young adults with autism have held their current job for 23.5 months. On average, TLA graduates have been at their current job for **24.2 months**. Graduates reported working for their current employer for between 1 month and 6 years.



# HOURS & PAY

Do you work  
PT or FT?

Do you get paid  
hourly or salary?



Graduates who are currently working are asked several follow up questions detailing the specifics of their employment, including hours worked and compensation. The NLTS-2 found that only 21% of adults with autism worked full-time in their current or most recent employment. Of all currently working graduates, we have found that **one-third** of TLA graduates are full-time employees (33%). The NLTS-2 found that adults with autism worked an average of 23.2 hours per week at their current or most recent job. The average number of hours worked per week by currently employed TLA graduates is **24.2**. The range of reported hours worked for our graduates is between 2 and 45 hours per week.

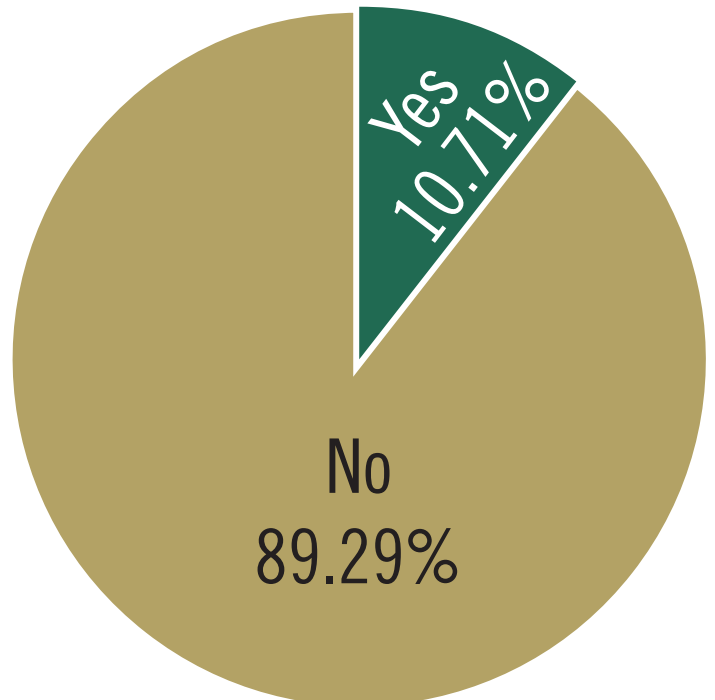
Minimum wages in the country currently fall between \$7.25 (21 states) and \$14.00 (Washington D.C.) per hour. Florida's minimum wage is currently \$8.46 per hour and ranks as the 27th highest in the nation, effectively representing the middle of the pack. The NLTS-2 found the average wage for adults with autism in their current or most recent job to be \$8.90. The average reported wage for a currently working TLA graduate is **\$10.62** – about 19% higher than the national average. The reported wages from currently working graduates ranged between \$7.02 and \$22.00 per hour. The individual who submitted \$7.02 indicated that was the average after taxes were subtracted. Approximately **94%** of currently employed graduates are hourly-compensated employees. Some graduate pay rates are unknown based on indeterminate answers provided on the survey.

# PROMOTIONS

## Have you been promoted at this company?

All currently employed graduates are asked if they have received a promotion at the company they are employed

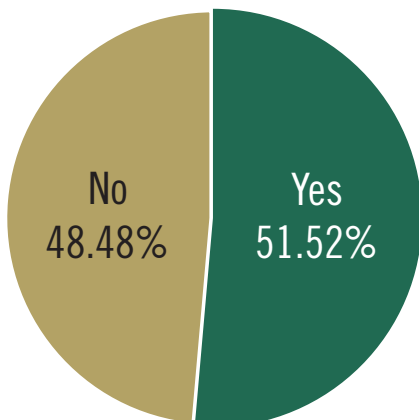
by. Our compiled response of approximately **11%** of graduates receiving a promotion from their current employer raises some alerts on how we collect this piece of information. A comparative question in the NLTS-2 measuring promotions includes only employees who have worked over 6 months at their current job and includes a promotion *or took on more responsibilities*. Under these conditions, the NLTS-2 found that 51.5% of young adults with autism achieved this goal at their current or most recent job. This signals us at TLA that we can re-approach the logic in our survey tool to include only those with longer term employment (i.e. over 6 months) as well as consider adding a similar qualification to mirror the NLTS-2 question (taking on more responsibility).



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# PREVIOUS EMPLOYMENT

## Is this the only job you have had since graduating from The Learning Academy?

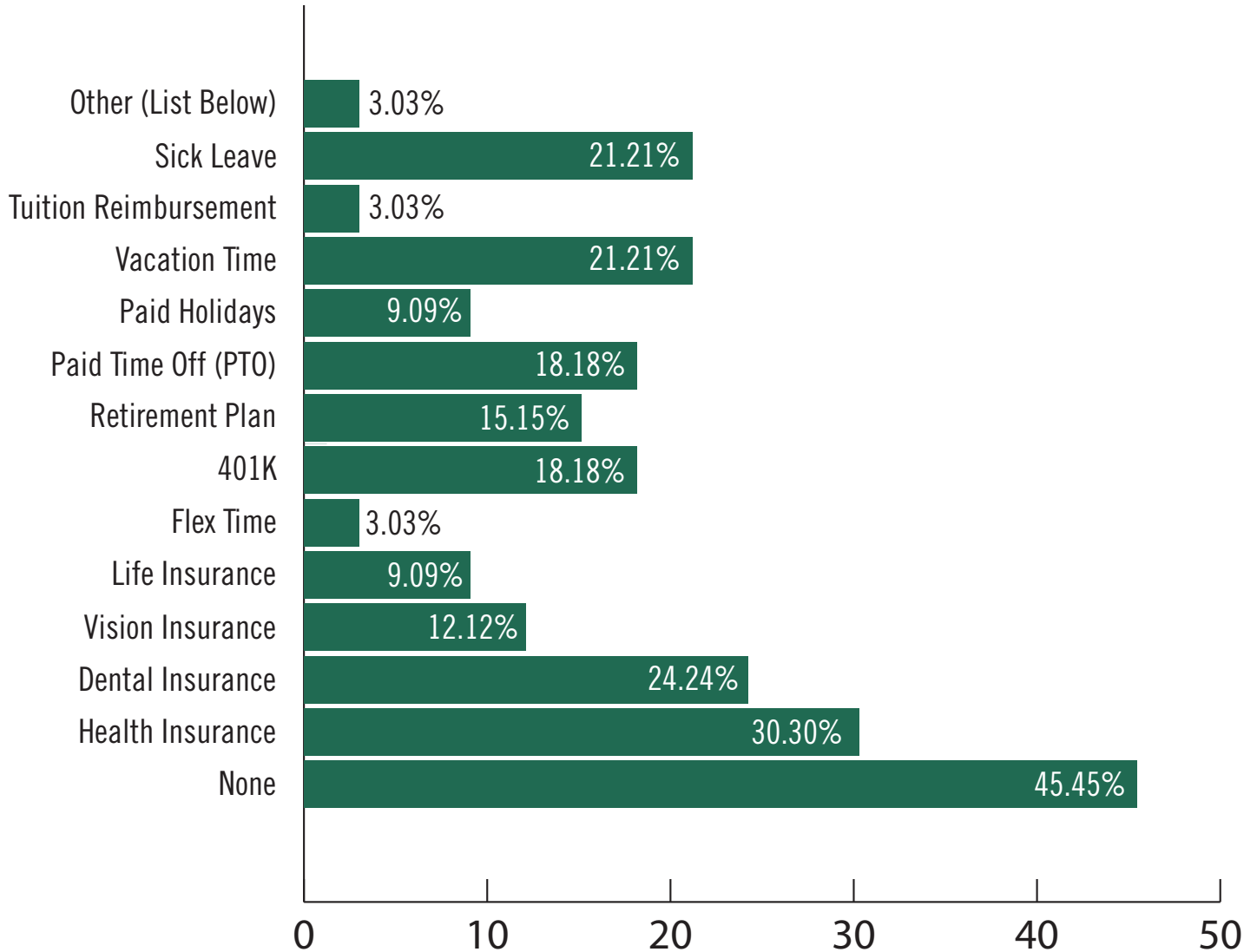


We recognize that everyone's employment path is different. Some find that one job and stay there for years, others hold multiple jobs that serve as stepping stones to a destination on the horizon. The NLTS-2 found that 37% of young adults with autism

held a job before their current job. When surveyed, about **48%** of working TLA graduates have held jobs prior to their current employment since graduating. A comparable question on the NLTS-2 asked how many jobs the individual held since graduating high school, their findings indicated 1.4 for young adults with autism. For TLA graduates, the average amount of previous jobs held since graduating is **2** (not including their current job). Previous jobs held by graduates ranged from 1 to 4 in survey history.

# BENEFITS

Please list, if any, your employment benefits:

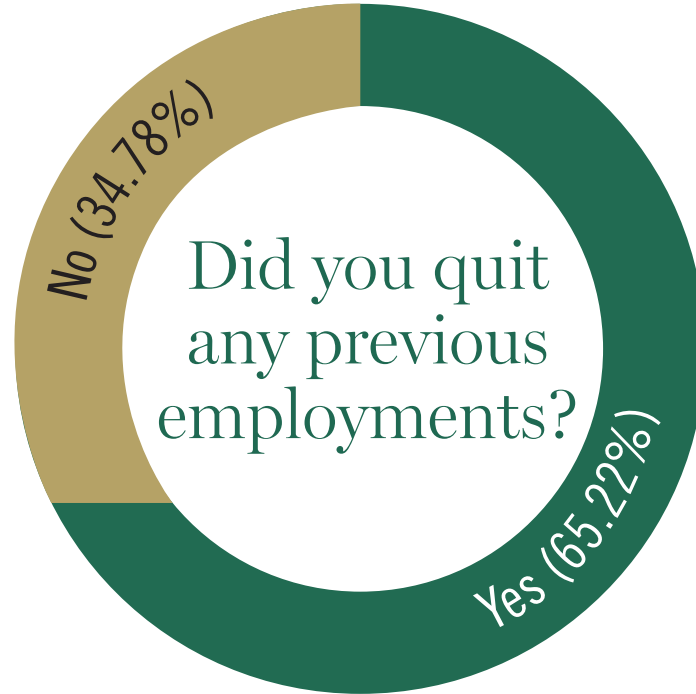


Working TLA graduates are surveyed on identifying a comprehensive list of benefits they may or may not receive. The benefits listed are “common” across many fields of work. This figure offers a breakdown of benefits received by currently working TLA graduates.

The most common, unfortunately, is receiving **no benefits**. Among received benefits, health insurance is the most common at 30% of currently working graduates. The most uncommon benefits received by graduates are flex time and tuition reimbursement, with one graduate responding “other” and indicating their employer was flexible with their scheduling. The disparity in benefits correlates with a low percentage of full-time workers. Individuals with disabilities are often caught in this “cycle” with fears of losing certain benefits, like Medicaid, that are associated with Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Income limits on these benefits may prevent some people from seeking full-time roles that would, by nature, come with more benefits (and risk).



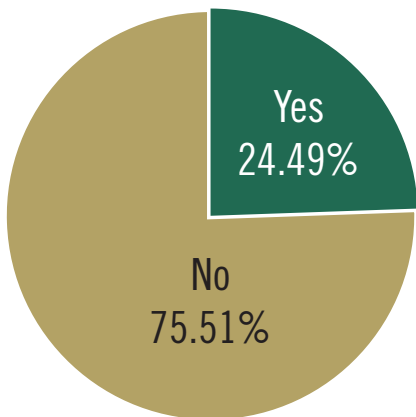
# END OF EMPLOYMENT



A reality of employment is that oftentimes it ends and can end for multiple reasons, including but not limited to quitting, getting fired, being laid off, or it being a temporary job that ends. Our survey asks graduates, either working or formerly working, if they have quit any previous employments and 65% have responded yes to quitting at least one job. The NLTS-2 collected data on young adults with autism ever being fired from a previous job and found about 24% have. Comparatively, the TLA survey finds that about **22%** of graduates who have worked have been fired previously.

# VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

Are you currently a job seeker through Vocational Rehabilitation?



TLA graduates are surveyed on whether or not they are currently job seekers utilizing services at Vocational Rehabilitation (VR). Most students have a relationship with VR prior to joining the program, as VR is the main payer of tuition to our program. We

found that about **24%** of graduates are job seekers at VR currently. This can include both employed and unemployed graduates. Graduates are often consumers at VR in order to obtain employment, retain employment, or because they are currently underemployed.

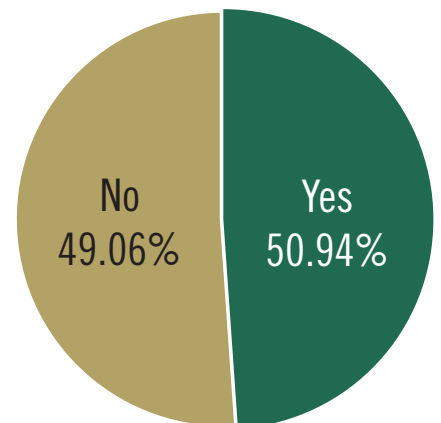
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# POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

After graduating from The Learning Academy, did you go to higher education like college, technical school, or vocational school?

Transition programs are traditionally a launchpad into “What’s next?” for young adults. The NLTS-2 found that about 40% of young adults with autism have ever attended postsecondary education after exiting high school. What we have found in our survey

outcomes is that about **51%** of TLA graduates have gone on to some form of postsecondary education after graduating.



# Of those TLA graduates who attended postsecondary education, institutions included:



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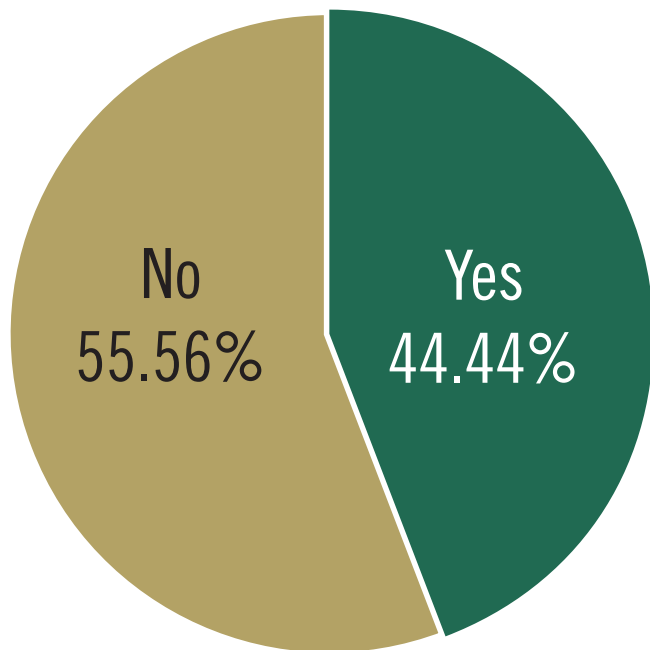
TLA graduate areas of study in postsecondary education included:

- A+ Computer Repair
- Art History
- Computer Engineering
- Computer Programming
- Computer Science and Information Technology
- Culinary Management
- Dog Training
- Film
- General Education

- Graphic Design
- Mathematics
- Medical Billing and Coding
- Merchandise Handler Training Program
- Multimedia Technology
- Oceanography
- PC Support
- Theology
- Veterinary Assistant

# GRADUATION FROM POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

## Did you graduate?



All TLA graduates are asked about the status of their postsecondary education, including information on graduating, degrees achieved, enrollment status, and projected graduation dates. The NLTS-2 found that about 43% of young adults with autism graduated from postsecondary. Our outcomes survey

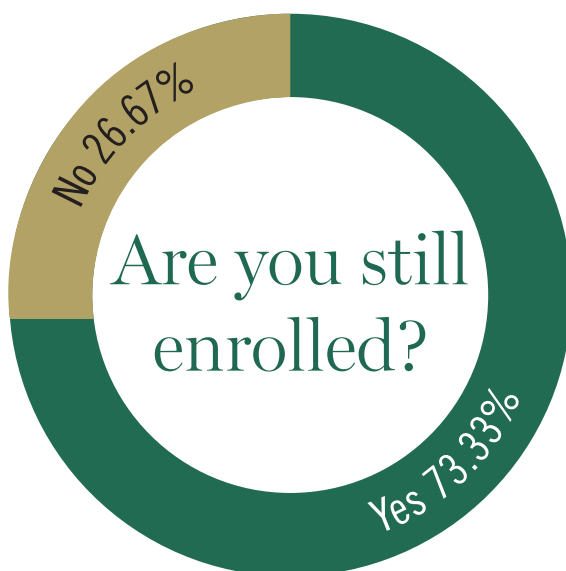
has similarly found that about **44%** of TLA graduates who went on to postsecondary education graduated.

TLA graduates earned degrees/certificates that included:

- Associate of Arts
- Associate of Science
- Bachelor's Degree
- Certificate of Completion
- CompTIA Certification
- Culinary Certification
- Veterinary Assistant Certification

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## ENROLLMENT



About **73%** of surveyed TLA graduates that attended postsecondary education but have not yet graduated reported they are still enrolled in their postsecondary program. Projected graduation dates for those still enrolled are 2019, 2020, and unknown. Of those graduates who are not still enrolled, **50%** report they have plans on returning to a postsecondary institution to finish their degree/certification.

# VOLUNTEERING

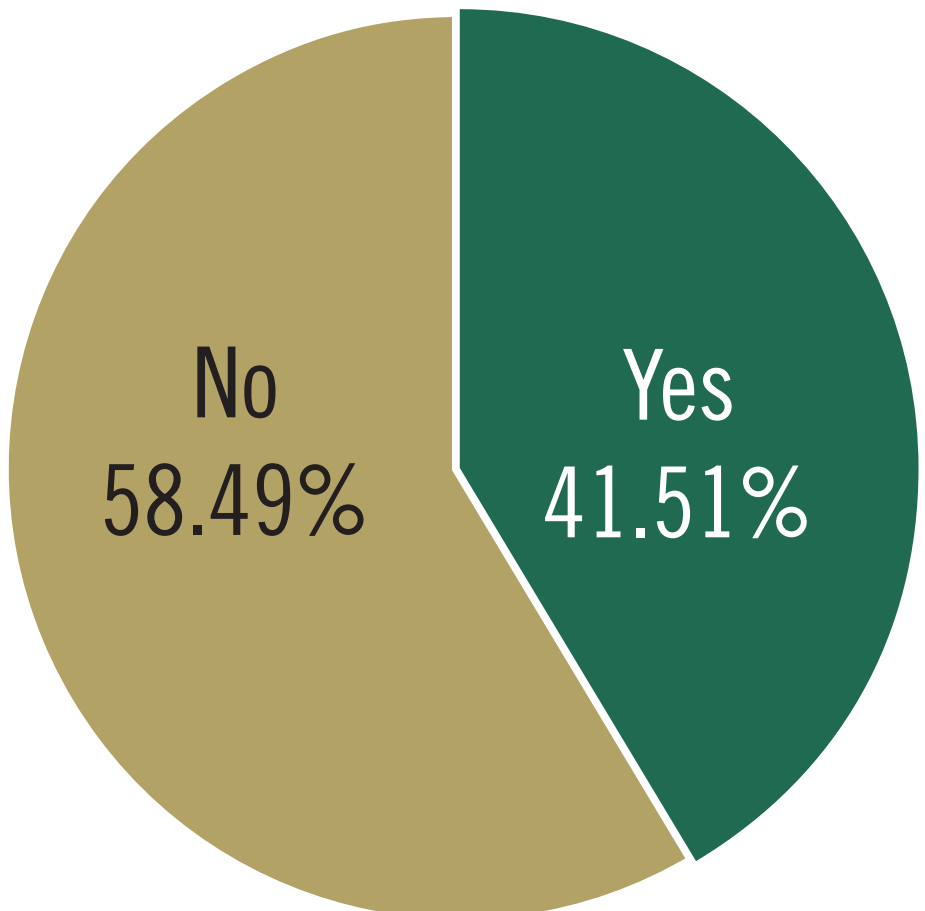
## After graduating from The Learning Academy, did you volunteer anywhere?

One component built into TLA's 30-week program is a 60-hour "Applied Learning Experience" or ALE. This affords students in the program an opportunity to get experience, typically in the field of their interest, doing a job. The ALE can be employment, internships, volunteering, and have even included college readiness courses or auditing current college courses at the University of South Florida. By getting students engaged, we often learned that relationships between the students and their ALE hosts continued. We wanted to capture more than employment and postsecondary outcomes, so we also asked about any volunteer experience the graduate has

done in hopes of getting robust profiles of activities that graduates are engaged in post-TLA. About **42%** of graduates have reported volunteering after graduation.

Reported volunteer sites include:

- All About Animals
- Best Buddies
- Big Cat Rescue
- Brookdale Tarpon Springs
- Dade City Animal Clinic
- Dr. Hohn D.D.S.
- Feeding America
- Florida Aquarium
- Florida Hospital Tampa
- Florida Railroad Museum
- Friends of Strays
- Goodwill
- Habitat for Humanity
- Hillsborough County Animal Shelter
- Humane Society
- Library
- Local Church
- Metz Culinary Management
- MOSI
- Multicultural Center
- New Life Community Church
- Pet Resource Center
- Specially Fit
- Tampa Bay Animal Shelter
- Tomlin Middle School
- University of South Florida



# COMMENTS + FEEDBACK

**“It was a good experience. I got to meet a lot of new friends, and was able to get a job, and live out on my own. I think it helped me out a lot.”**

**“It’s awesome and a big campus to walk around and explore.”**

*“I’m enjoying my new job. Learning Academy helped me a lot. I learned a lot about myself and the world.”*

***“After graduating I obtained a job at USF Champions Choice dining facility and remained there for close to four years.”***

*“The Learning Academy is the best school I have ever attended. They helped me find my career path. I am now working at a child care facility and I am going to work my way up to an ESL teacher. I would recommend the Learning Academy to anyone with ASD.”*

**“My first job was seasonal for the holidays at Bealls dept. store. Went to a Publix job fair and it is the job I have until now, permanent part time 30-32 hours per week. Also looking into going back to study at the local USF Sarasota/ Manatee campus. Study history.”**

**“The Learning Academy really helped me get my feet back on the ground and set me on the path to my current point in this journey.”**

*“The Learning Academy is a very great program to enroll at as they will help you understand how to apply for a job and professionalism.”*

*“My favorite part was I really liked my mentor Breanne, it was like hanging out with a real friend. Ms. Megan was also a lot of fun. It wasn’t like a boring class; it was actually fun.”*

***“Very clear objective difference in me before and after the Learning Academy. I held my janitor job for 2 years, but it just wasn’t for me. Holding a job for 2 years was a success, that was not something I could have done before. Learning Academy also helped me with social cues and talking without stealing the conversation - they haven’t gone away completely, but Learning Academy helped me become more self-aware of my own behavior patterns.”***

“TLA helped me out immensely, I still carry on all the lessons I learned. I have been way more successful in not just employment but life than I was before the Learning Academy.”

*“I was glad to have learned how to write a resume and learn about job interviewing skills in the Learning Academy. That has helped me in my College Experience class I am taking at SPC.”*

“It helped me find friends that I still talk to and it gave me a new lease on life.”

“I think the Learning Academy is good because it helped me find the job easily.”

*“The Learning Academy definitely got me out my shell, I had to go be in an environment I wasn’t used to, with people I wasn’t used to. It was very helpful to experience that and I am sure it got me where I am today. I am very grateful for the opportunity.”*

## DESTINATION SUMMARY

**~51%** of TLA graduates attended post-secondary education after graduating

~42% of TLA graduates reported volunteering after graduating

**70%**

of Learning Academy (TLA) graduates are currently employed

**~74%** of TLA graduates have been employed since graduation

The benefit most frequently received is health insurance (~30%)

TLA graduates reported **26** different unique volunteer locations

**~24%** of TLA graduates are job seekers at Vocational Rehabilitation

The average hourly wage for TLA graduates is **\$10.62**

TLA graduates report being currently employed for **29** different unique employers

TLA graduates have been working at their current job for an average of **24.2** months

One-third (**33%**) of TLA graduates are full-time employees

TLA graduates work an average of **24.2** hours per week

**~48%** of currently-employed TLA graduates held additional jobs since graduating

TLA graduates report attending **19** different post-secondary educational institutions and **18** different areas of study

# SNAPSHOT:

## 2019 Survey Year

Total Survey Responses **15** | 2010-2018 Graduate Years | **9** Graduate Classes

**95%**  
Graduate Rate

**124** Surveys Sent | Surveys Opened/Received **60 (48%)**

Survey Response Rate **25%**

Total Graduates **126** | Total Students **132**

The current survey was sent to one-hundred and twenty-four former Learning Academy (TLA) students from nine graduating cohorts. There are five graduates whom either TLA had no contact information for or whom requested to not be contact by TLA. Every survey year when bounced back messages are received, that bounced email address is deleted and TLA attempts to obtain updated contact info from the student. The graduation rate for nine cohorts stands at approximately 95%. Sixty of the sent surveys were opened (or received) by the graduates which amounts to approximately 48%. The response rate for the opened surveys is 25%. The average time taken to complete the survey was 2 minutes and 43 seconds. 87% of respondents completed the entirety of the survey. This snapshot portion of the report will look at one survey year of current and longitudinal outcomes regarding TLA graduates.



# SNAPSHOT SUMMARY

**75%**

of respondents are part-time employees

**100%**

of respondents are hourly-compensated

Two respondents  
work **40** hours  
or more per week

**~38%** of respondents are job seekers at Vocational Rehabilitation

**~38%** of respondents attended post-secondary education after graduating

Respondents have been working at their current job for an average of

**32** months

**~67%**

of respondents are currently employed

The average hourly wage for respondents is

**\$10.54**

Respondents worked an average of **22** hours per week

**0%** of respondents have previously been terminated from a job

**~67%** of respondents have previously quit a job

**100%** of those not yet graduated are still enrolled

**~46%** of respondents reported volunteering after graduating

**~38%** of currently employed respondents have held additional jobs

**25%** of respondents are full-time employees

The **benefits** most frequently received are dental and health insurance

**60%** of respondents graduated from a post-secondary institution



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