

# The Gap Between Financial Knowledge and Real-World Readiness

High school students are preparing for financial independence without the confidence to manage it



**161,900+**  
High School Juniors and Seniors Surveyed  
(June 2025 - February 2026)

## The Big Picture

Financial Engagement vs. Financial Preparedness

### Engagement

**93%** have or plan to have a bank account

**74%** have or plan to get a credit card

**71%** plan to attend college

### Preparedness

**57%** feel unprepared to manage these accounts

**62%** feel unprepared to manage credit

**86%** feel unprepared to evaluate student loan offers

### The Preparedness Paradox:

Students are about to make major financial decisions without the knowledge to navigate them.

## Top Stats: The Numbers That Matter

### 01 The Credit Card Crisis



**74%**

of students have or plan to get a credit card within a year

**BUT**

**62%**

feel unprepared to check credit scores and maintain good credit

**29%** feel "not at all" or "just a little" prepared

**33%** feel "only somewhat" prepared

### 02 The Student Loan Knowledge Gap



**71% plan to attend college immediately after high school**

**BUT**



**27% say they'll use federal student loans**



**60%** actually depend on student loans (industry data)

Preparedness Breakdown:

**74%** feel unprepared to fill out the FAFSA

**79%** feel unprepared to calculate how much to borrow

**84%** feel unprepared to develop a repayment plan

**86%** feel unprepared to evaluate loan offers



### 03 The Investing Intimidation Factor



**84%**

are likely to invest in the future

**BUT**

**70%**

find investing intimidating

**31%** find investing "quite/extremely" intimidating

**39%** find investing "somewhat" intimidating

Family Conversations:

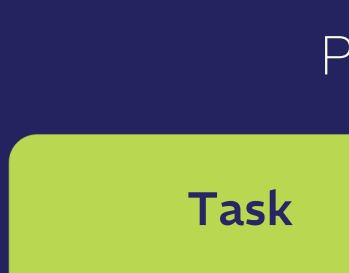
**20%** have NEVER with family about investing

**21%** talk about investing with family often/always

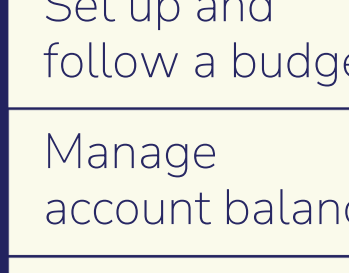
**59%** talk about investing with family occasionally/sometimes

### 04 Banking Basics: The Fundamentals Gap

Account Ownership:



**45% have savings account (+48% plan to open)**



**49% have checking account (+40% plan to open)**

**BUT**

Preparedness for Basic Tasks

Task	Not/Little Prepared	Somewhat Prepared
Set up and follow a budget	23%	36%
Manage account balances	22%	35%
Check and maintain credit	29%	33%



**9 in 10** students have or will soon have bank accounts, but only **4 in 10** feel prepared to manage them effectively.

## The Good News

Students Want Financial Education

**95%** believe financial education can improve their lives

**78%** say it will improve their lives "a lot" or "a ton"

**17%** say it will improve their lives "some"

**95%** say now is the right time (or past the time) to learn

**75%** say "it's the right time"



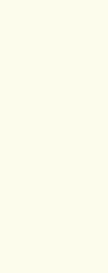
**20%** say "it's too late" (wish they started earlier)

**5%** say "it's too early"

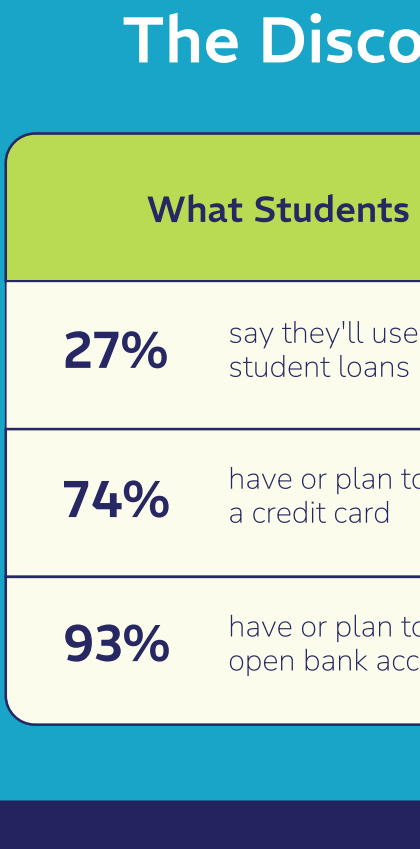


"Three quarters of students agree: NOW is the time for financial education. And 1 in 5 wish they'd started even earlier."

## The Critical Gaps - Where Students Need Help



Most Unprepared Areas (% feeling not/little/somewhat prepared):



- Evaluate student loan offers: 86%
- Develop loan repayment plan: 84%
- Calculate borrowing amount: 79%
- Fill out the FAFSA: 74%
- Manage credit: 62%
- Budget and save: 59%
- Manage bank accounts: 57%

## The Disconnect: Plans vs. Reality

What Students Plan	What They'll Actually Need
<b>27%</b> say they'll use federal student loans	<b>60%</b> will actually use loans at some point
<b>74%</b> have or plan to get a credit card	<b>62%</b> feel unprepared to manage credit
<b>93%</b> have or plan to open bank accounts	<b>57%</b> feel unprepared to manage bank accounts

## Call to Action

The Bottom Line:

America's teenagers are financially engaged but educationally underprepared.

### 3 Key Takeaways:

- The Credit Concern:** 3 in 4 students will have a credit card within a year, but 6 in 10 don't know how to manage their credit responsibly
- The Student Loan Surprise:** Students are dramatically underestimating their loan needs (27% expect vs. 60% reality) and 86% feel unprepared to evaluate offers
- The Education Opportunity:** 95% of students recognize financial education's value and say NOW is the time — meeting this demand is critical

**161,900 students told us they need financial education. How many will we reach?**



Source

Everfi State of Teen Financial Literacy 2026

Methodology

Pre-course survey responses from high school juniors and seniors participating in Everfi financial education programs (June 2025 - February 2026)

Sample

133,000 Financial Literacy, 13,000 Financing Higher Education, 14,000 Investing, 1,900 Modern Banking