

Surveying Employers: Exploring Education Assistance and Payroll Deduction

December 2021, By **Danica Mitchell**



The Employee Benefits Survey

In September of 2021 WA529 conducted a survey that was sent to employers enrolled or interested in payroll deduction with the GET program. The purpose was to gain insight into how employers and organizations are assisting their employees' efforts to prepare for future education expenses for themselves or a child or grandchild.

The web-based survey was distributed via a link sent out to email addresses listed for current and past participants in the GET employee payroll deduction program, as well as employers who have expressed interest in joining the program. A total of 2,208 employers received a link to the survey. Individual responses were collected anonymously and kept confidential.

WA529 received a total of 27 responses. Due to the small response size, the survey findings cannot be generalized for all surveyed employers. However, the findings are an important source of information and should be utilized by WA529 to identify opportunities to improve services and program features.

Key Findings:

- Over half of the organizations who responded to the survey say they offer a way to help employees save for their own education expenses or future education expenses for a child or grandchild
- Of the organizations that currently offer ways for employees to save, all say payroll deduction is an option
- Most organizations say they offer some form of employee education assistance
- Of the organization that currently offer education assistance to their employees, most say it is in the form of tuition assistance

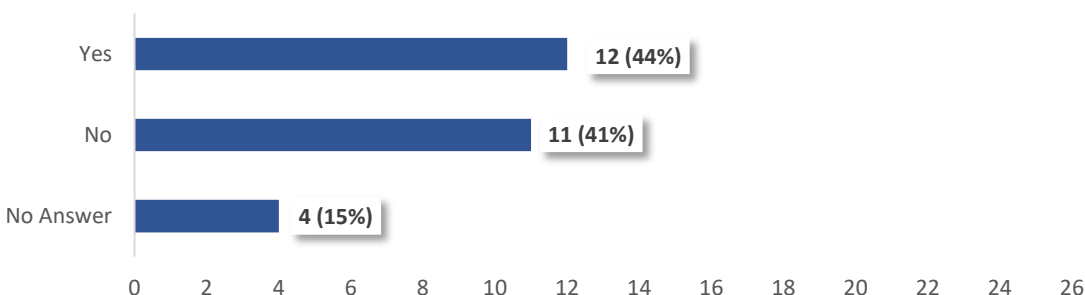
WA529, a division of the Washington Student Achievement Council, operates two 529 college savings plans: The Guaranteed Education Tuition (GET) Program and the DreamAhead College Investment Plan (DreamAhead).

GET is a 529 prepaid college tuition program.

DreamAhead is an investment-based 529 savings plan.

Do organizations offer a way for employees to save for education expenses?

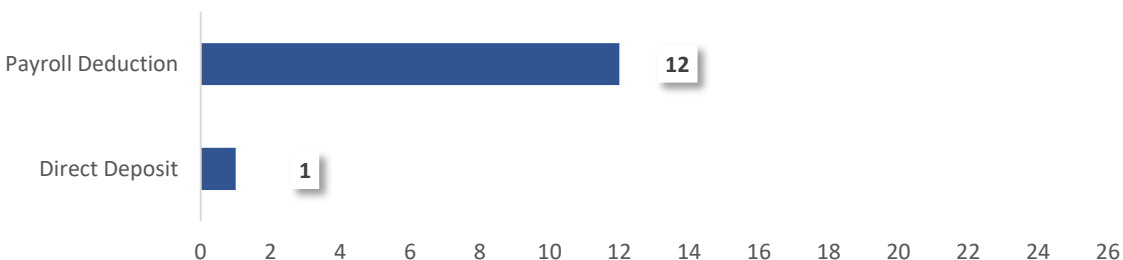
Figure 1. Over half of the organizations who answered the question say they offer a way to help employees save for their own education expenses or future education expenses for a child or grandchild.



Source: Washington Student Achievement Council, WA529 Analysis of Employee Benefits Survey, September 2021.

Of those that answered the question if they offer a way to help employees save for their own education expenses or for future education expenses for a child or grandchild, twelve (12) said that they do (figure 1).

Figure 2. Of the organizations that currently offer ways for employees to save, all say payroll deduction is an option.



Source: Washington Student Achievement Council, WA529 Analysis of Employee Benefits Survey, September 2021.

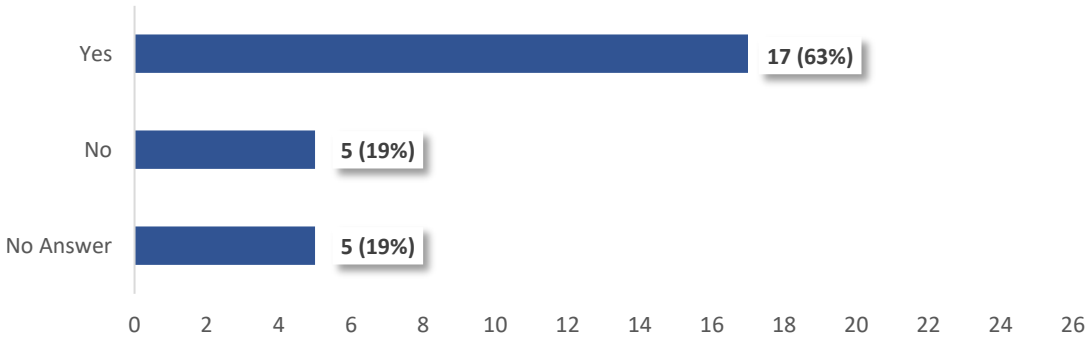
When asked to elaborate on what is offered, all answered payroll deduction (figure 2). Though one answer said both payroll deduction and direct deposit are being offered.

There were some that answered no they do not currently offer savings options for their employees (11). When we explore their interest in offering savings options in the future, we can see that relatively few are interested. Three organizations indicated they are extremely or very interested in offering savings options to their employees. Five organizations said they are moderately interested.

The survey also asked if organizations offer an employer match for employee contributions to a 529 or other education savings plan. All that responded (12) said they do not offer an employer match.

Do organizations offer some form of employee education assistance?

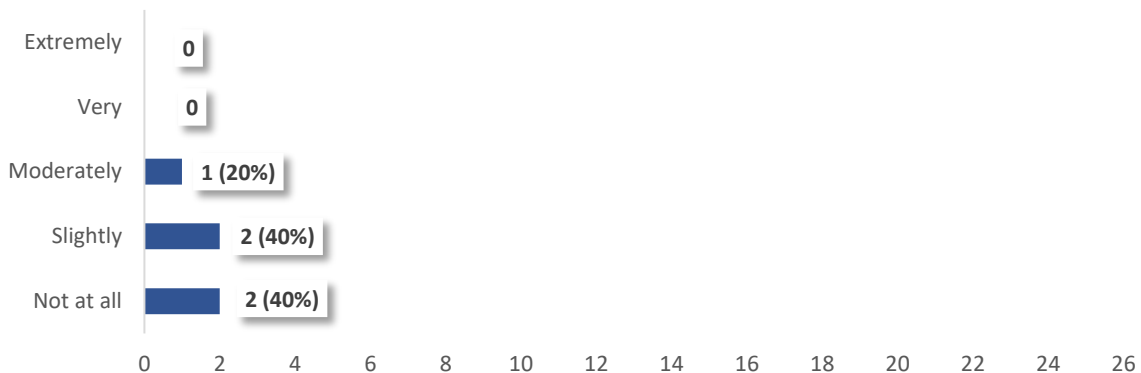
Figure 3. Most organizations offer some form of employee education assistance.



Source: Washington Student Achievement Council, WA529 Analysis of Employee Benefits Survey, September 2021.

When asked if they offer some form of employee education assistance, most organizations said they do. Seventeen organizations said they offer education assistance to their employees (figure 3). Of those that offer education assistance, most (16) said it is in the form of tuition assistance. When examining the results further we can see that three of those who offer tuition assistance also offer a scholarship program and loan repayment support.

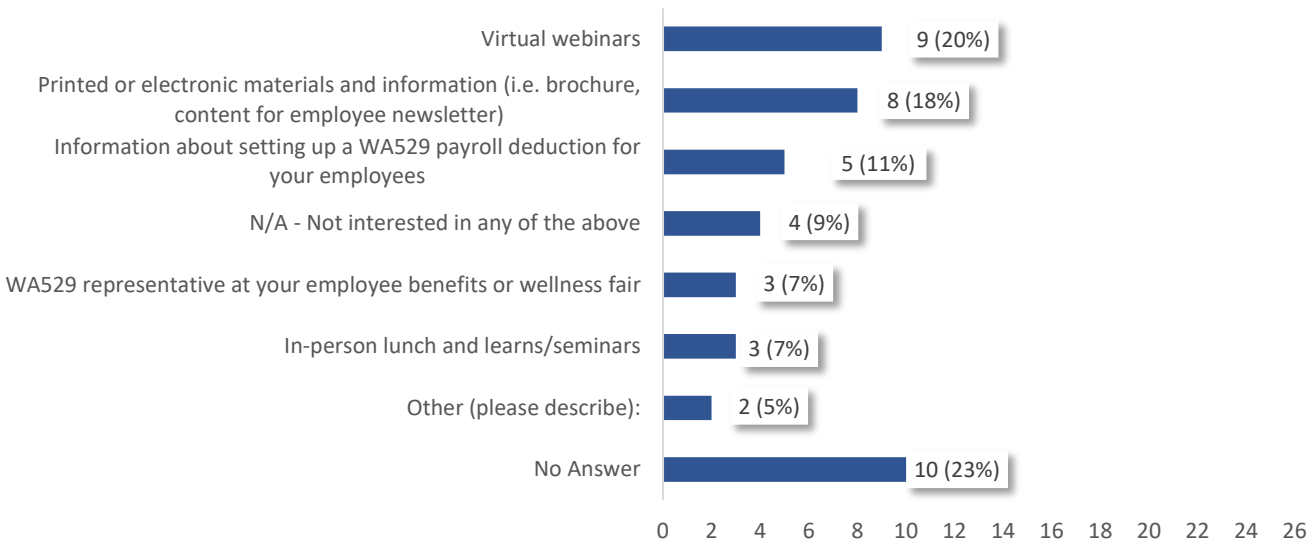
Figure 4. Of those that said they do not currently offer employee education assistance, most said they are not likely to offer it in the future.



Source: Washington Student Achievement Council, WA529 Analysis of Employee Benefits Survey, September 2021.

Are organizations interested in receiving/providing free college savings resources to their employees?

Figure 5. Of the organizations that responded to the survey, most indicate they are interested in receiving/providing free college savings resources to their employees.



Source: Washington Student Achievement Council, WA529 Analysis of Employee Benefits Survey, September 2021.

Most organizations who responded to this question (76%) indicate they are interested in receiving or providing some sort of college savings resource to their employees. When we examine what organizations are interested in receiving/providing, the top two resources are printed or electronic materials and information (such as brochures or content for the employee newsletter) and virtual webinars (figure 5).

Conclusion

Hearing from employers provides WA529 with some insights into how organizations are helping their employees with their education expenses or future education expenses for a child or grandchild. While the findings of this survey cannot be generalized due to the small response size, they do provide valuable information. Of the employers that took the time to respond to the survey, most are offering a way for their employees to save for education expenses. The findings also show that most organizations are offering some form of education assistance to their employees, and that they are interested in receiving materials and webinars from us to provide to their employees as well. These and future survey findings will provide WA529 with a roadmap for implementing improvements to program services, features, and marketing efforts.