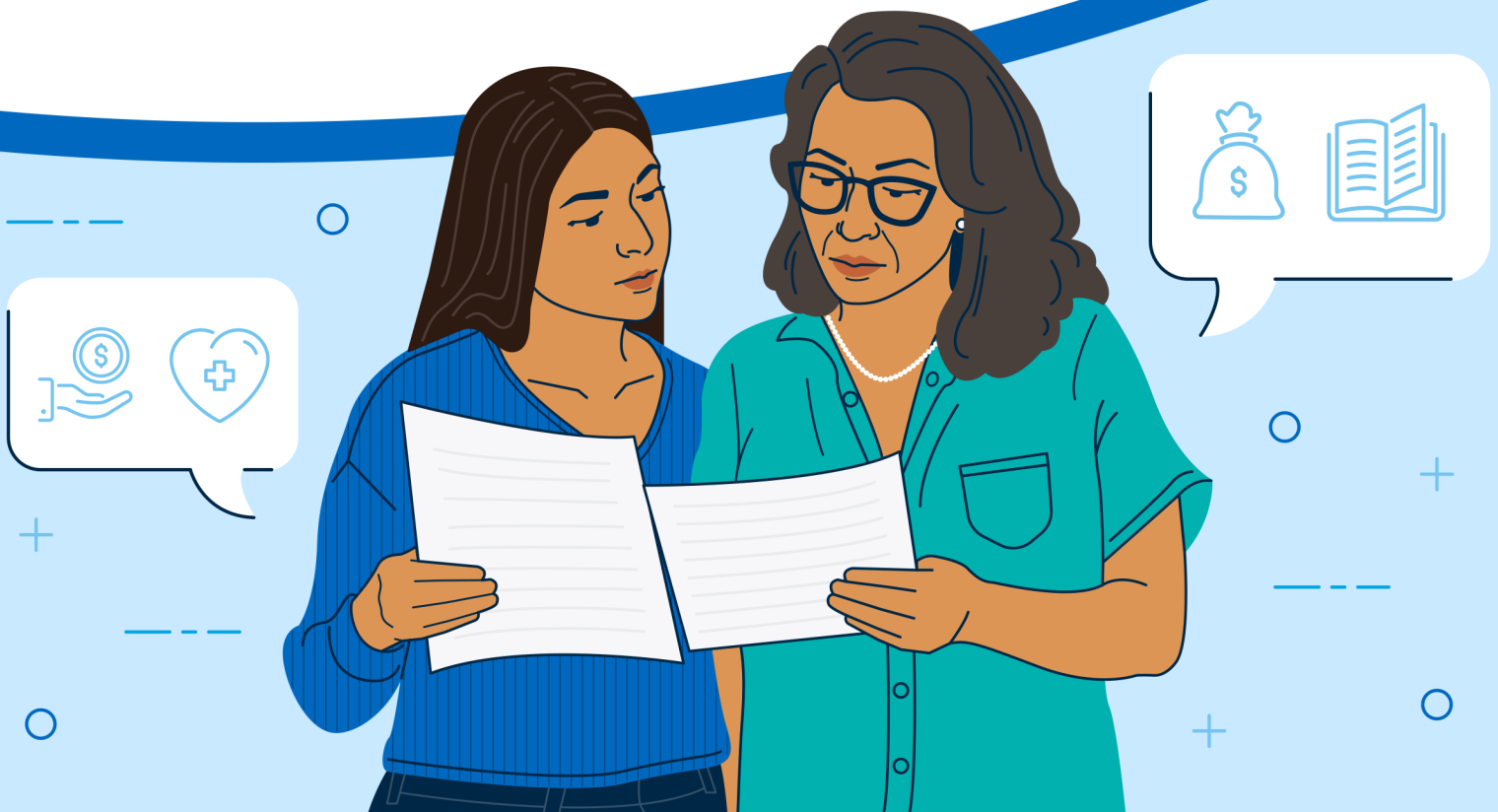


INSIGHT PAPER

2024 Parent Survey: Understanding Top Parent Concerns in College Search

Insights and Recommendations for Enrollment Leaders



Project Director

Lizzy Donaher

Contributing Consultant

Michael Koppenheffer

Survey Research Consultants

Pamela Kiecker Royall, PhD

Anne Dodson

Marquan Hamilton

Cover Design

Kelsey Stoneham

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Executive Overview

▶ Robust Parent Communications Benefit Families and Colleges



Three out of four parents want colleges to communicate with them directly. However, many institutions fall short in developing a robust parent outreach strategy. As concerns about the value of higher education continue to rise, it's more important than ever for colleges to address parent concerns early and often throughout the recruitment process. Not only is proactive communication welcomed by parents, but it also promotes student engagement: EAB testing has shown that students who are not responding to outreach campaigns have a 47% greater likelihood of applying when their parent contact information is identified proactively for direct parent outreach.

Direct Parent Outreach Is Welcomed by Parents and Boosts Student Engagement

73% of parents want direct communications from colleges

47% Greater likelihood of student non-responders to apply when their parent contact info is identified proactively

▶ Focus of This Report: Key Shifts in Parent Perceptions of Cost and Value



EAB conducts biennial parent surveys to help college enrollment teams understand how to best communicate with parents. This insight paper highlights key changes since our 2022 study, focusing on parent perceptions of cost and value. Part 1 shares key findings in perceptions of cost, Part 2 helps colleges understand how to best articulate value, and Part 3 explores top parent concerns beyond cost.

About the 2024 Parent Survey

1,620

Parents, guardians, and other primary caregivers surveyed

33

Questions asked

Questions Explored:

- What are the top concerns and priorities for their child's college search?
- How have perceptions of college cost and value shifted?
- How have communication preferences changed?
- How do concerns and preferences vary across demographics?

For more details about the survey and participant profile, refer to p. 25 of this report.



Understanding Cost Perceptions

PART

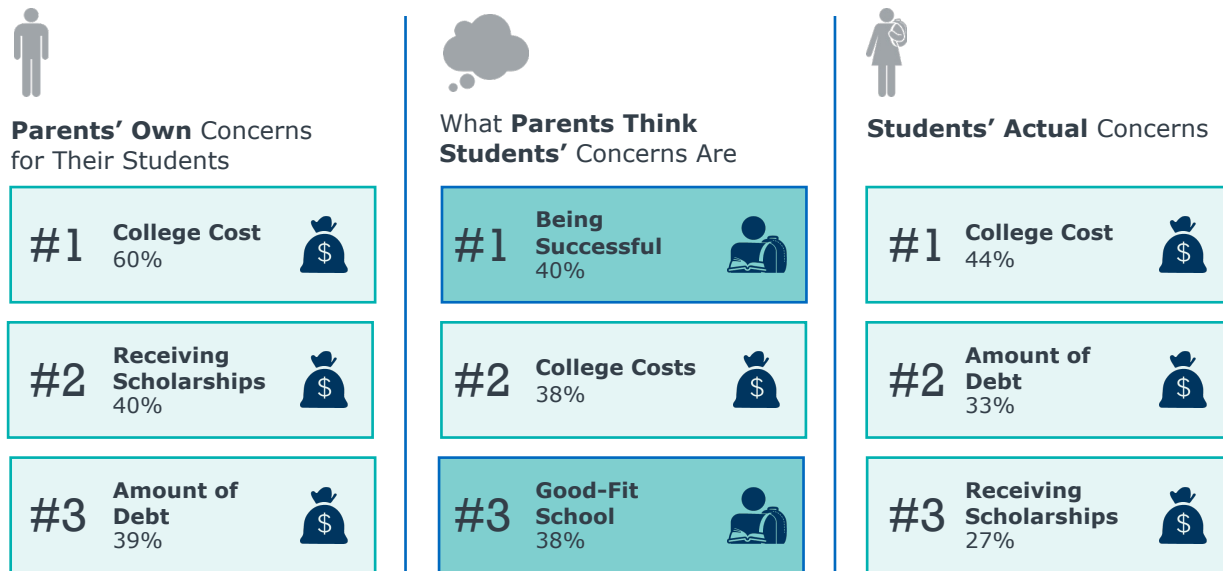
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Parents Underestimate Their Students' Cost Concerns

Student and Parent Concerns Align on Cost—More Than Parents Realize

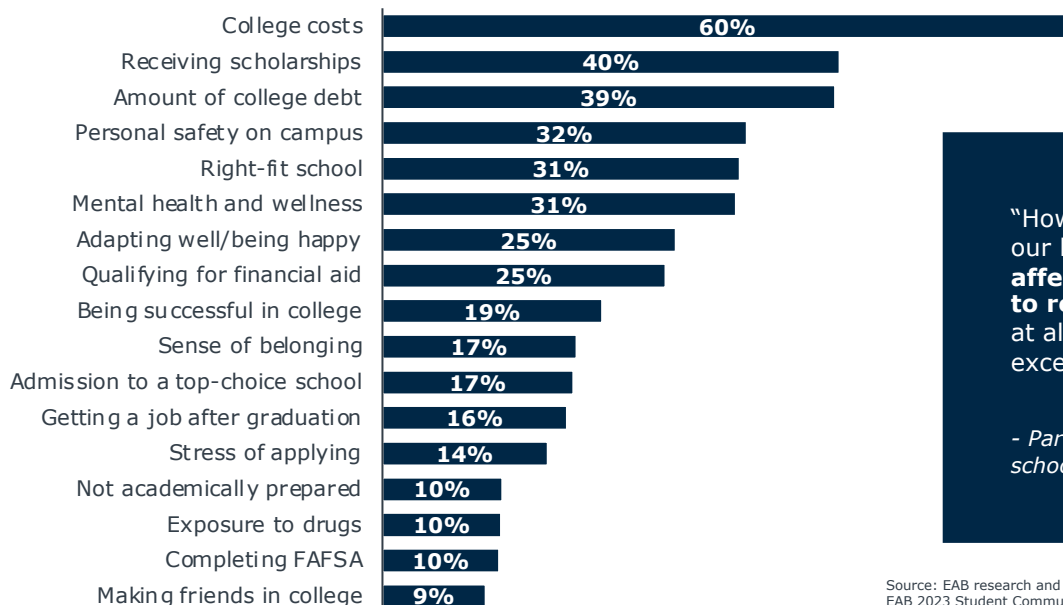
We asked parents about their top concerns related to their students attending college and their perceptions of their students' concerns. While parents' top three concerns were all financial, they believed their students' worries included a mix of success, cost, and fit. However, data from our 2023 Student Communication Preferences survey reveals that students' concerns closely match those of their parents. This indicates that parents underestimate the degree to which their children internalize their cost fears. To address this disconnect, colleges should encourage families to have open, and sometimes tough, conversations about college finances.

What Are Your Top Concerns About College?



Expanded List: Parents' Top Concerns for Their Student About College

Responses with 10% or More; Parents Could Select Up to 5 Responses; n = 1,524



“How will sending our kids to school **affect our ability to retire** on time or at all due to excessive costs?”
- Parent of a high school student

Source: EAB research and analysis, student responses from EAB 2023 Student Communication Preferences Survey.

FAFSA Issues Caused Major Disruptions in 2024

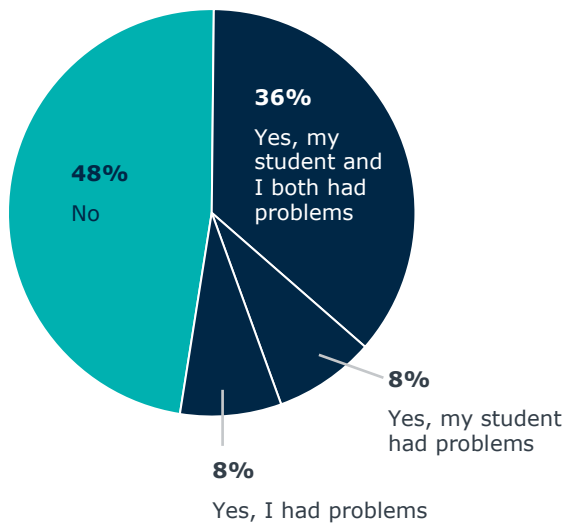
Families Encountered Obstacles When Submitting the FAFSA and Delays in Receiving Awards

One major factor in parents' experiences with college finances in 2024 was, unsurprisingly, the troubled FAFSA rollout. The majority of families of seniors (52%) reported problems submitting the FAFSA, which aligns with National College Attainment (NCAN) data showing that FAFSA submissions were down almost 11% nationally in 2024 compared to 2023.¹ NCAN data also indicates that historically underrepresented student populations were hit hardest, with high schools with lower-income and a higher percentage of minority students showing a 12% decline in completions.

Families in our survey also reported widespread delays in receiving their aid packages due to this year's FAFSA challenges: just under half of parents (49%) reported they did not receive their award in time to make a decision. This aligns with EAB data showing a 3% decline in deposits nationally in July 2024 compared to 2023.

Q: Did you or your student have problems submitting the FAFSA?

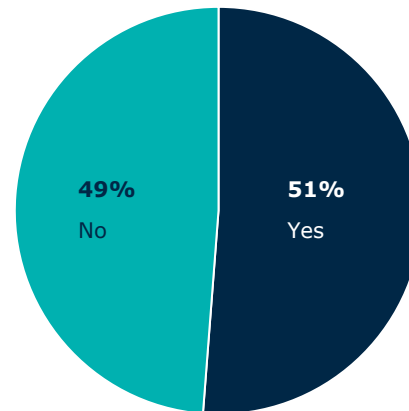
Asked of parents of seniors who completed the FAFSA and submitted it between January and April 2024
n = 537



52% of families had issues submitting the FAFSA

Q: Did you receive your student's aid award in time to make a decision?

n = 537



49% of families did not receive their aid award in time to make a decision

1) As of July 2024

Source: <https://www.ncan.org/page/FAFSAtracker>, EAB research and analysis.

Not Understanding Cost Is a Major Source of Anxiety

Small Gains in Understanding College Cost

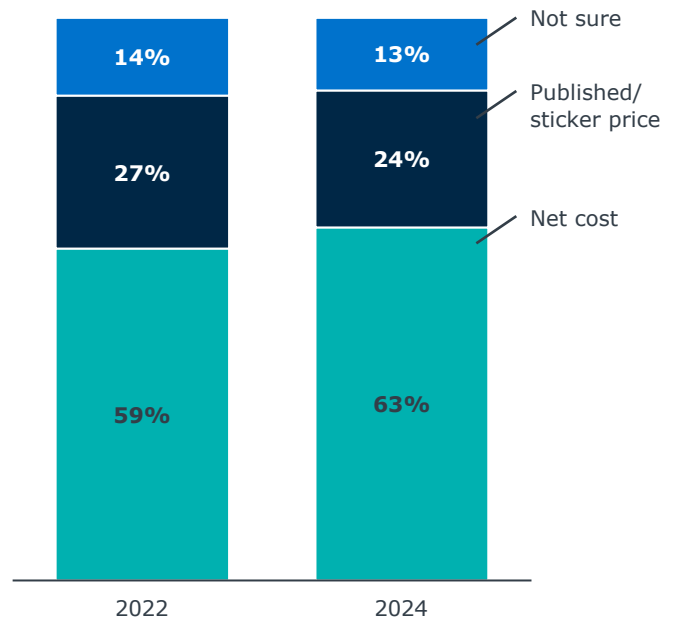
To better understand parents' perceptions and concerns around cost, we asked whether they consider net cost or sticker price when evaluating college expenses. Sixty-three percent of parents now think about net cost, up from 59% in our 2022 survey. This modest gain may be attributed to increased national discussions about college finances following the problematic 2024 FAFSA rollout.

Continued Anxiety About Knowing Cost

Despite this small improvement, the complexity of college cost remains a major source of anxiety for many families. Fifty-eight percent of parents said that understanding how much college would actually cost was a concern. In addition, anxieties about understanding cost did not vary significantly according to income or race/ethnicity. These findings suggest that colleges should make efforts to further clarify costs for families, particularly in light of the 2024 FAFSA issues.

More Parents Are Considering Net Cost Than in 2022

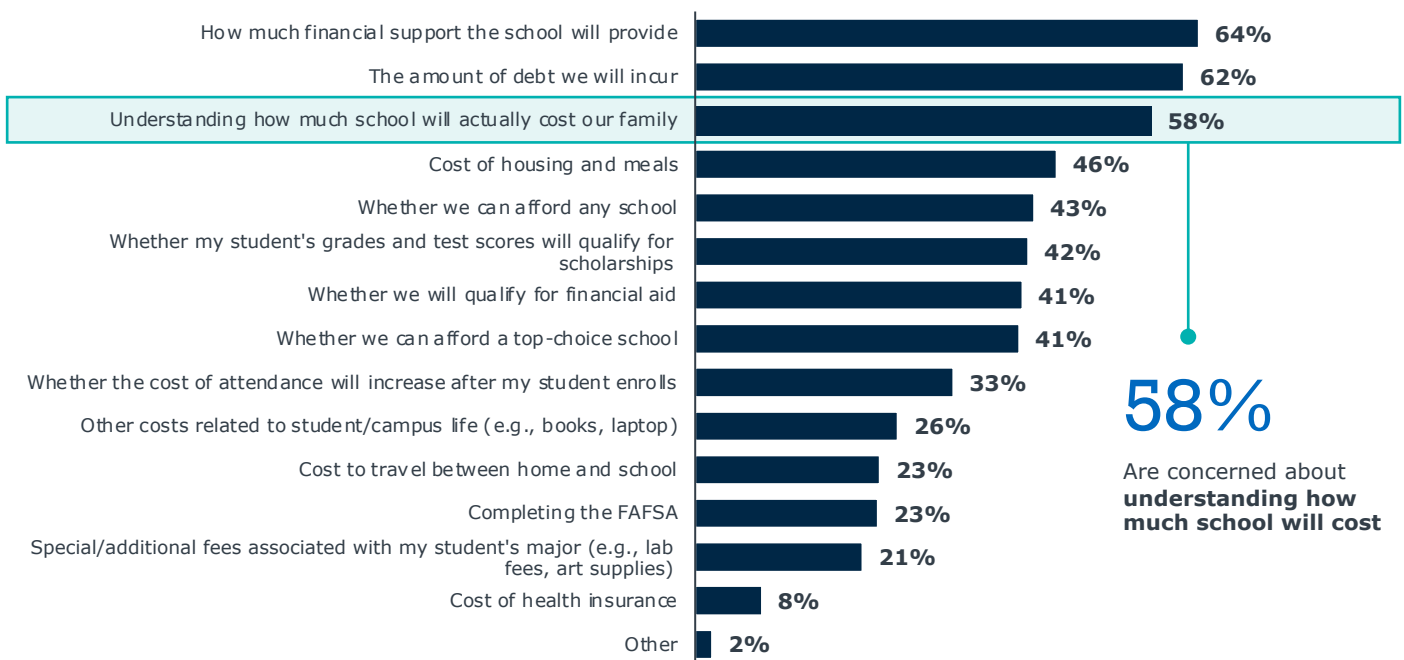
Q: When you think of cost of college, what do you consider?; n = 1,524



Understanding Cost Remains a Major Source of Anxiety

Q: What concerns do you have about the cost of your student's education?

Asked of parents who indicated concern about college costs or the amount of debt they may incur; n = 1,063



Source: EAB research and analysis.

For Many Families, “Affordable” Means No Debt

Rising Aversion to Debt

Our survey indicates that today’s parents are especially wary of student loans. Our 2024 survey included a new question about how parents define “affordable” and “manageable” college costs. Parent responses fell into two groups: those who felt that “affordable” and “manageable” were synonymous and those who saw the terms as distinct in meaning. Among parents who felt “affordable” and “manageable” were not meaningfully different terms, about half (48%) defined an “affordable/”manageable” education as one with no debt while 60% defined it as one with little debt.

For parents who distinguished between “affordable” and “manageable” costs, 60% said an “affordable” education meant no debt, and 61% said “manageable” costs meant little debt. Across the multiple response options there is a clear takeaway: at least half of families say that “affordable” or “manageable” college costs involve little to no debt.

Given that little to no debt is often unrealistic for most families, this finding is significant. Trends in parents’ own college finances can help shed light on their aversion to debt: parents of today’s high school students likely attended college between 1985 and 1995, a period when student loan debt soared from \$21 billion to \$186 billion. Many of these parents are still repaying their own loans, making them extremely wary of taking on new student loans or asking their student to do so.

An Indicator of Value

#1

Graduating **with low or no student debt** is now parents’ top indicator of college value

Understanding Parents’ Definitions of “Affordable” and “Manageable” Costs

Q: What do “affordable” and “manageable” mean to you in terms of college cost?

“Affordable and Manageable Mean the Same Thing”

n = 908

48% say “**affordable/ manageable**” means taking on **no debt**

60% say “**affordable/ manageable**” means taking on **little debt**

“Affordable and Manageable Mean Different Things”

n = 534

60% say “**affordable**” means taking on **no debt**

61% say “**manageable**” means taking on **little debt**



Articulating Value

PART

2

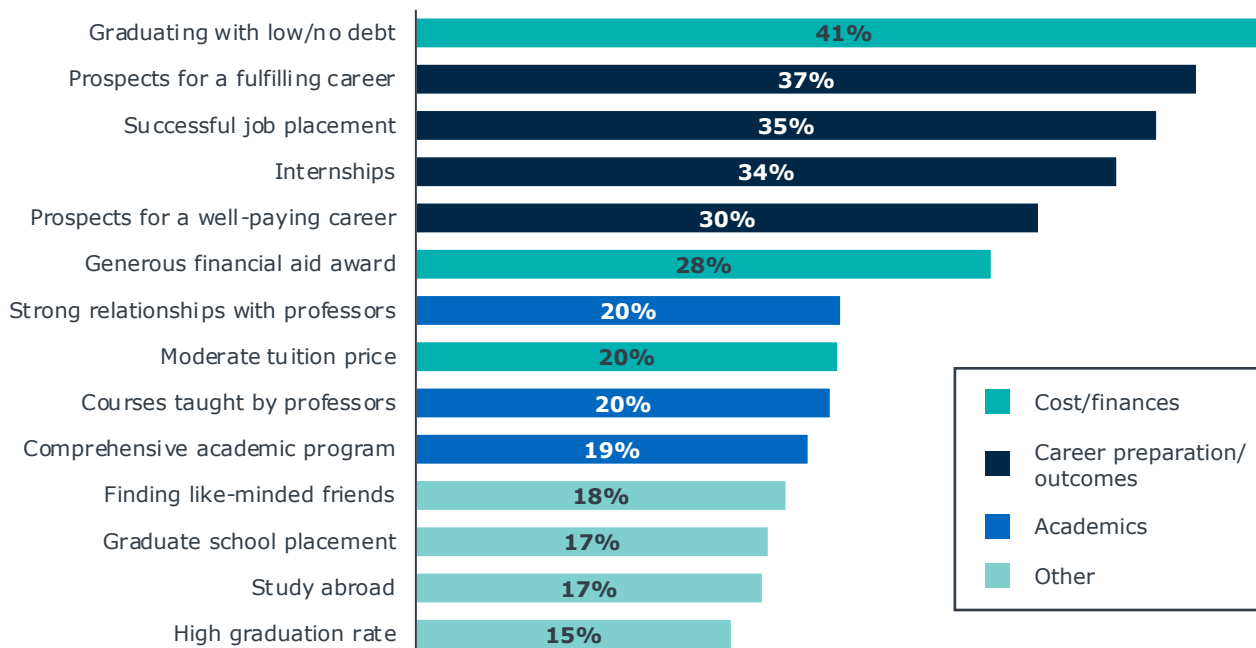
Career Outcomes Are Central to Perceptions of Value

Career Outcomes and Preparation Rank Highly in Perceptions of Value

While addressing parents' rising aversion to debt is challenging, conveying your institution's benefits is essential to demonstrating value. As shown below, graduating with low or no debt was parents' top indicator of value in 2024, a shift from our 2022 survey when it ranked below factors related to career outcomes. However, it's important to note that career outcomes and preparation, shown in navy blue below, still rank almost as highly as graduating with low or no debt. As shown in the chart at the bottom of the page, families with income >\$150k ranked internships as the top indicator of value. These findings highlight the importance of showcasing career preparation and outcomes in your marketing efforts.

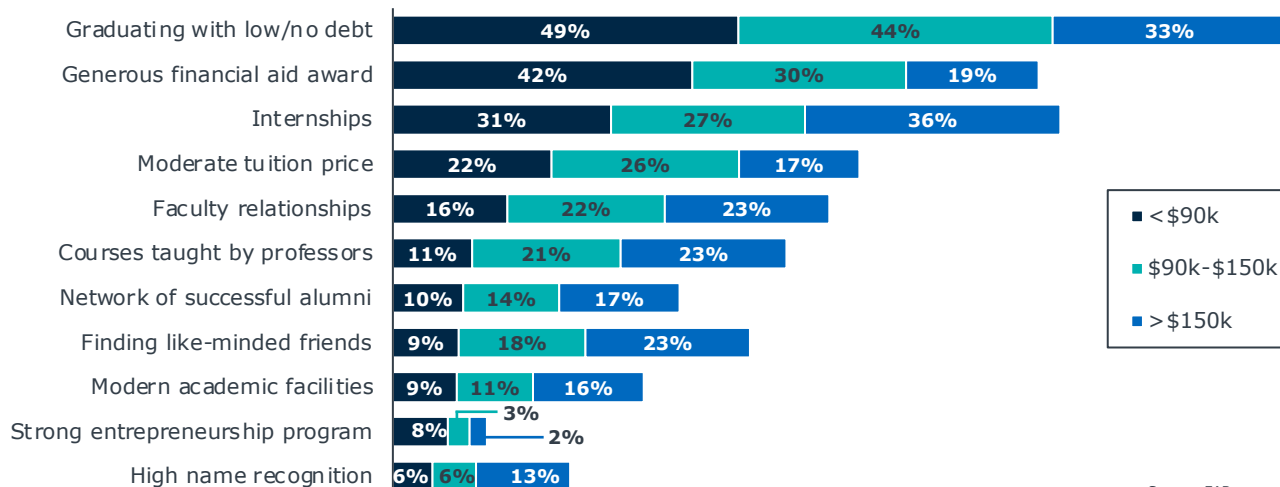
While Low/No Debt Is the Top Indicator of Value, Career-Related Factors Closely Follow

Q. What characteristics best represent the value of higher education for your student?, Responses ≥15%; n = 1,524



Indicators of Value By Income

Responses with Statistically Significant Differences



Source: EAB research and analysis.

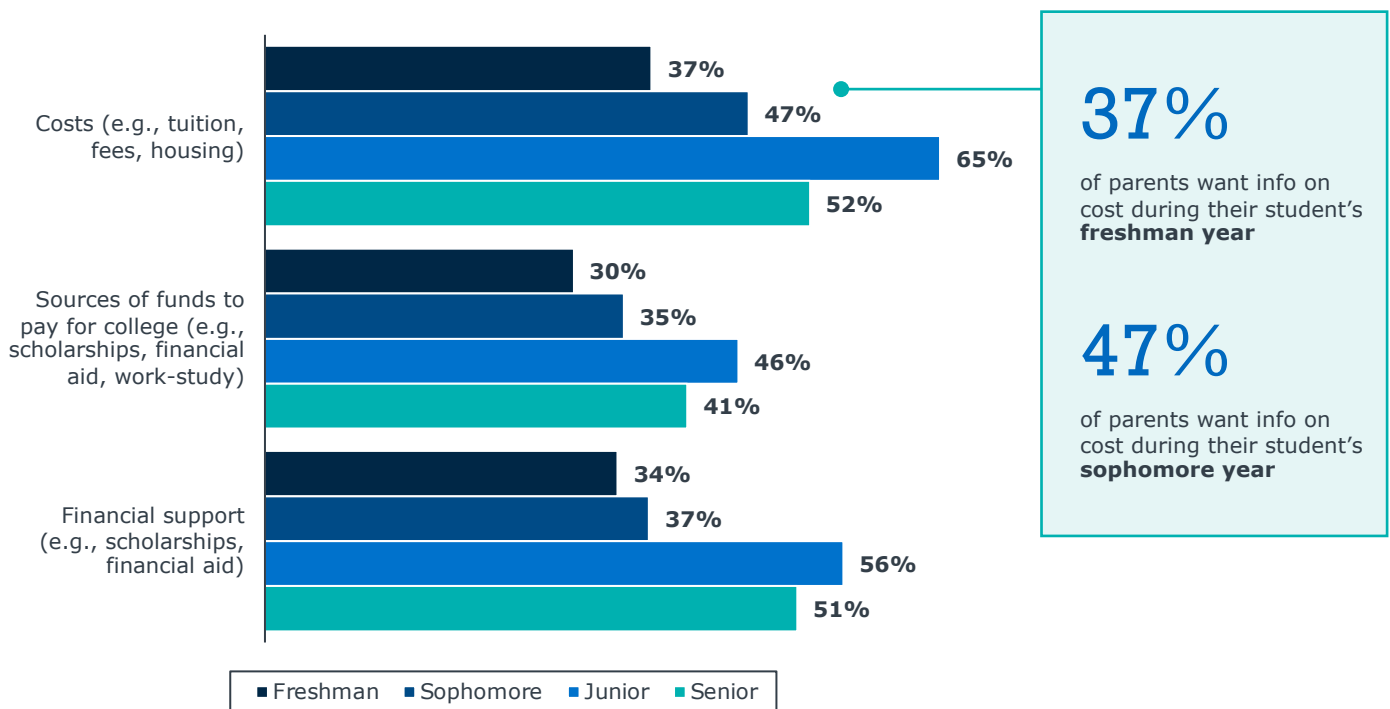
Many Parents Welcome Early Outreach About Finances

Half of Parents Want Colleges to Send Info on Cost by Their Student's Sophomore Year

One important way that colleges can help address cost and value concerns is through early and direct communication with colleges. Forty-seven percent of parents want cost information by their child's sophomore year, and more than a third want it by freshman year. Proactive communication with parents can help you build affinity and address concerns. Lower-income families, in particular, are eager for early information about paying for college, as shown in the chart at the bottom of the page.

Many Parents Appreciate Early Info on Cost and Financial Support

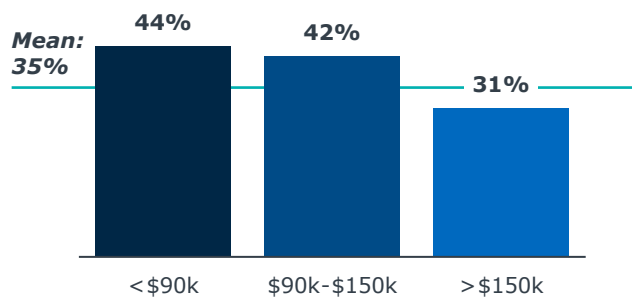
Q. Please indicate when during your student's high school years you would like to have the following information. Parents Could Select Multiple Responses; n = 1,524



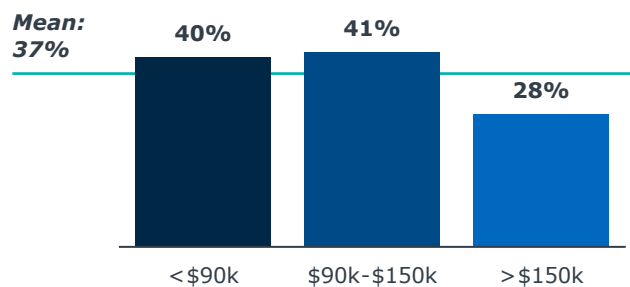
Lower-Income Families Appreciate Earlier Communications About Ways to Pay for College

Percentage of Parents Who Want Info on a Topic in Sophomore Year

Sources of funds to pay for college (e.g., scholarships, financial aid, work-study)



Financial support (e.g., scholarships, financial aid)





Addressing Concerns Beyond Cost

PART

3

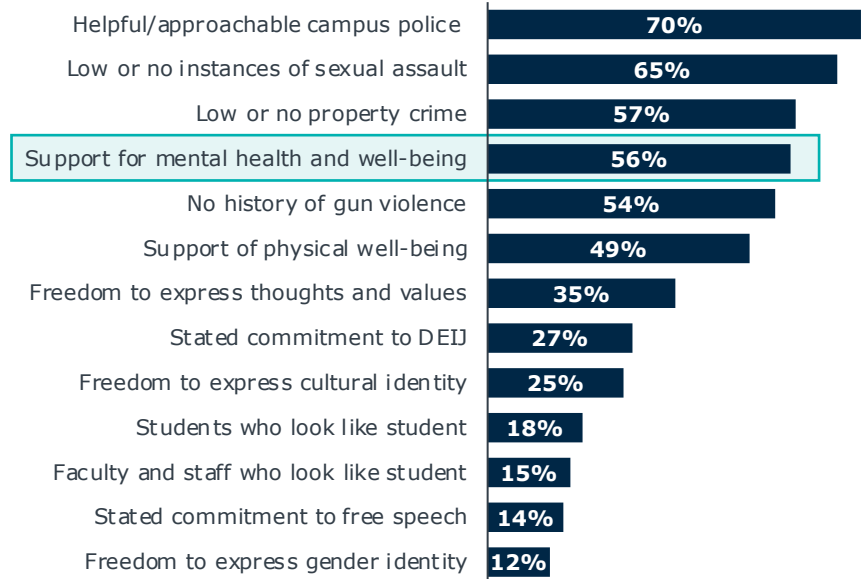
While Safety Is a Top Concern, Perceptions Vary

Mental Health as a Top Concern

As shown in the chart on p. 6, students' personal safety is parents' top college concern after cost and debt. To further understand perceptions of safety, we asked parents how they defined the term. While top answers included expected factors such as helpful campus police and low instances of sexual assault and crime, mental health was also a top factor, cited by 56% of parents. This finding aligns with students' own perceptions of safety: in our 2024 First-Year Experience survey, 61% of first-year college students said that their definition of safety included support for mental health. This parent data reinforces the need for colleges to market the mental health support services they provide amid rising mental health concerns post-pandemic.

Q. When you think about your student's safety, what are you considering specifically?

Asked of parents who indicated safety was important; n = 760

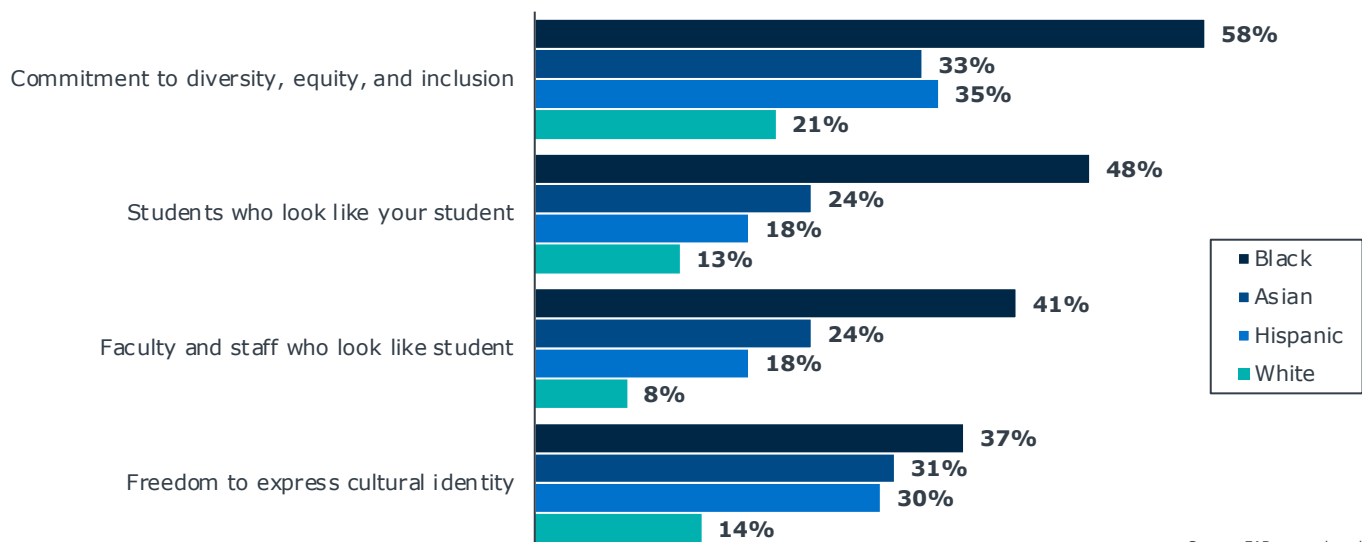


More Parents of Color Associate a Sense of Belonging with Safety

Definitions of safety varied somewhat according to parent race/ethnicity. Among Black parents, the second-most cited definition of safety was commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, named by 58%. Parents of color rated several other factors related to sense of belonging with safety more often than White parents did, including students and faculty who look like their student and freedom to express cultural identity. These findings reinforce the importance of featuring a wide variety of student voices in promotional materials and emphasizing a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Q. When you think about your student's safety, what are you considering specifically?

Significant differences by parent's race/ethnicity



Source: EAB research and analysis.

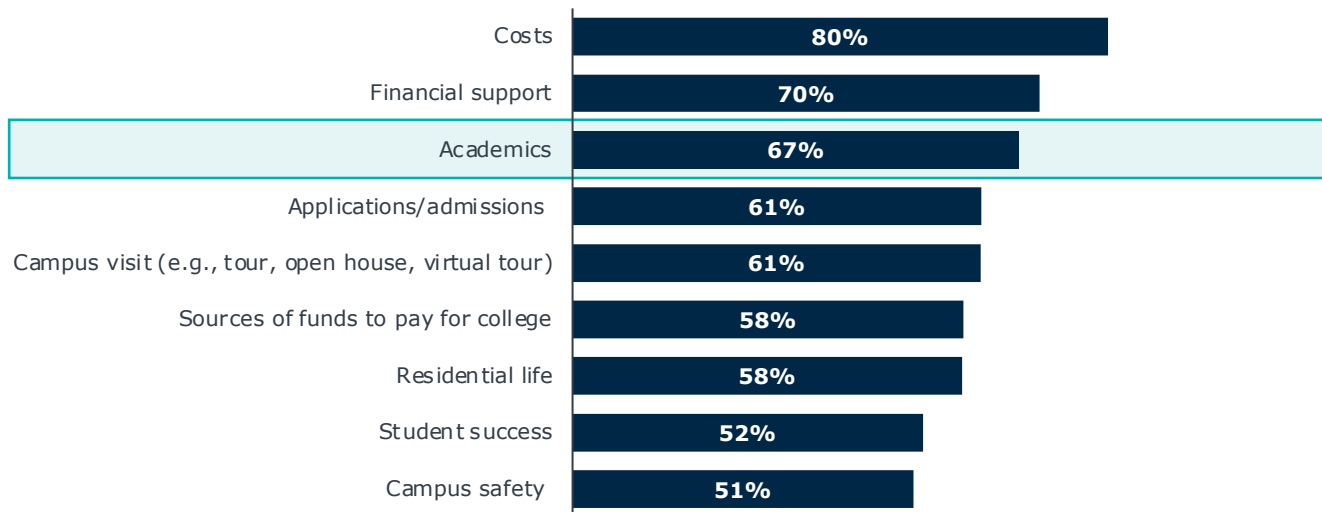
Parents Are Very Interested in Info on Academics

Academics Remain a Top Area of Interest, Especially Given Student Preparedness Worries

Behind cost and finances, academics is the topic that parents most want to hear about in communications from colleges, as shown in the top chart. Information about majors and minors is also parents' most-searched-for information on college websites, as shown in the bottom chart. While academics have consistently been named as a topic of high interest in our past parent surveys, it's worth noting the unique concerns that students and parents have about academic preparation post-pandemic. EAB's First-Year Experience Survey found that students' self-reported academic readiness for college is lower among historically underrepresented groups, and academic advising and tutoring are the most frequently used support services in the first year of college across all student populations. These findings suggest that schools should not only promote general academic information but also highlight academic support services to address families' concerns about academic preparation.

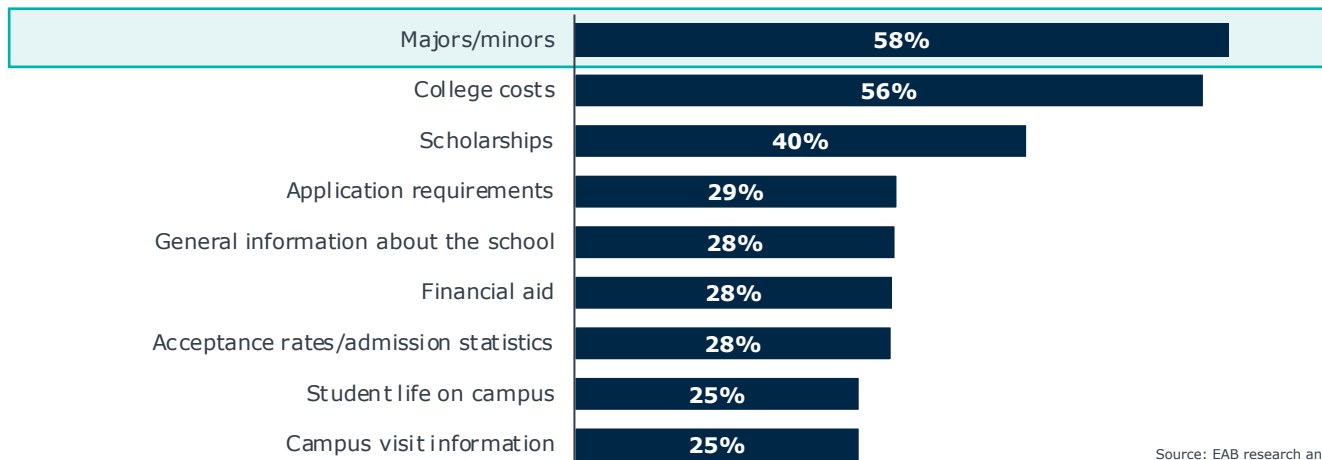
Parents Appreciate Communications About Academics

Q: Indicate the topics/information you would most like to have about the colleges and universities your student is considering. Responses with >50% shown; n = 1,524



Information on Majors/Minors Is the Most Sought-After Material on College Websites

Q: What information are you most interested in finding on a college website? Participants could select up to 5 topics n = 853



Source: EAB research and analysis.



Key Takeaways and Additional Resources



Key Takeaways and Recommendations

1

Build robust parent communications.

Seventy-three percent of parents want direct communication from colleges.

While EAB data shows that parents welcome outreach from colleges and that it improves student engagement, many institutions have limited dedicated parent communications. Build a comprehensive and coordinated approach for reaching parents across channels including email, mail, and web.

2

Identify and reach parents early.

Half of parents want outreach from colleges by their child's sophomore year, with a third of parents wanting outreach by their child's freshman year. Using approaches like Enroll360's consumer database match can help you identify and contact parents before their students have inquired.

3

Encourage families to have open conversations about cost.

The #1 college concern for both parents and students is cost; however, parents underestimate their students' cost concerns. While there are no easy answers to parents' college cost concerns, sharing information about career outcomes and academics alongside cost can help you convey the value of the education your institution provides.

4

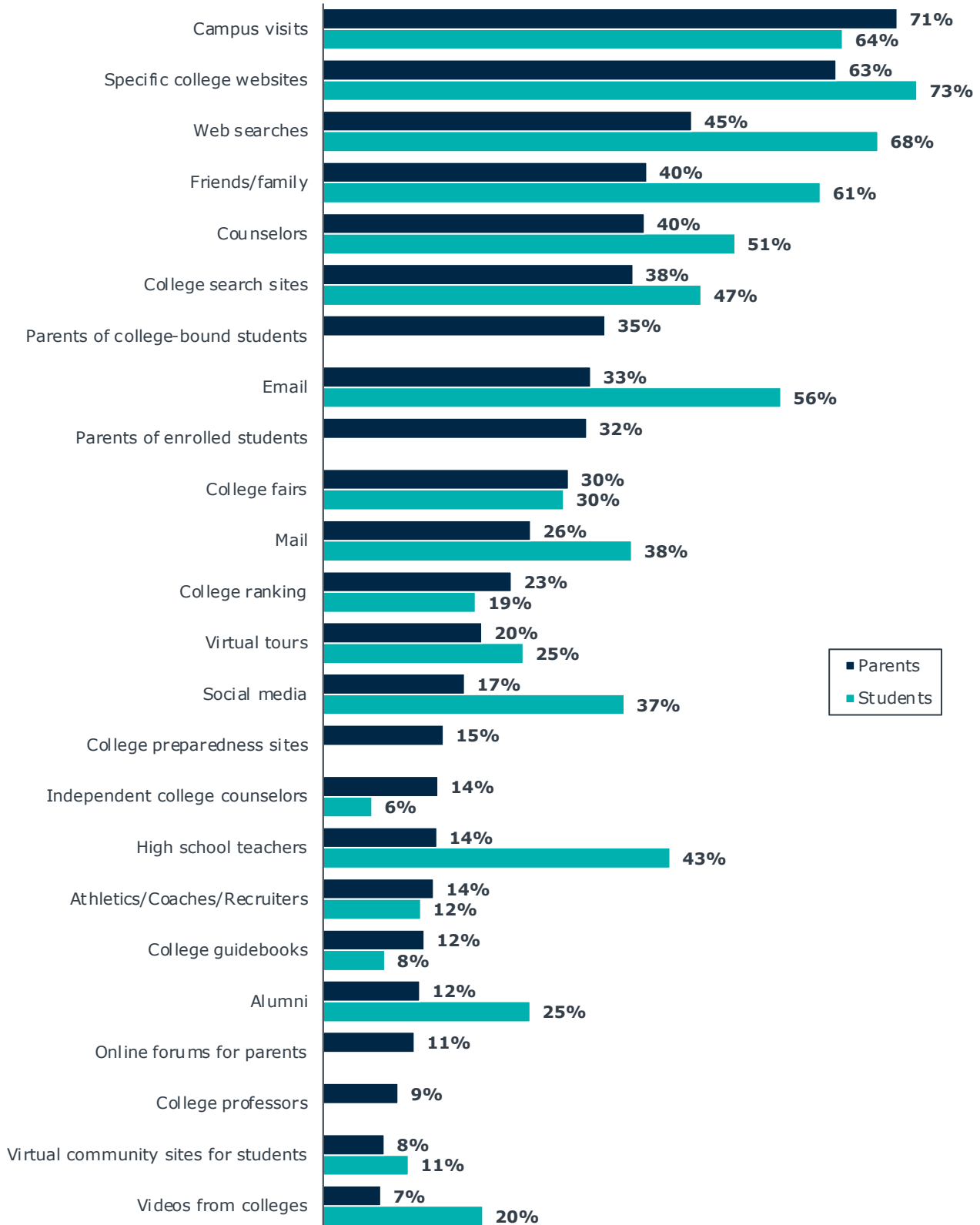
Prioritize conveying a sense of belonging in your marketing.

Fifty-eight percent of Black parents say that a safe campus includes support for diversity, equity, and inclusion. Help students and their families feel that they will be welcome and supported on your campus by representing students from a wide variety of backgrounds and highlighting the diverse range of clubs, mentoring options, and support services you offer.

Parents' and Students' Preferred Sources of Information

Q. What sources of information were most helpful when learning about schools?

Student Responses from EAB 2024 First-Year Experience Survey



Parents' Preferred Information Sources by Channel

Q: How would you prefer to receive information on the following topics? (Select all that apply.)

	Email	Mail	Website	Print	Social Media	Text	Webinar	No Preference
General information about the school (e.g., location, size)	32%	33%	47%	30%	22%	14%	19%	26%
Student life (e.g., clubs, organizations, activities)	29%	27%	36%	23%	32%	14%	19%	33%
Residential life (e.g., housing, food services)	39%	35%	50%	32%	27%	15%	32%	40%
Academics (e.g., faculty, classrooms/labs, majors/minors)	45%	46%	59%	43%	29%	21%	35%	42%
Sources of funds to pay for college (e.g., scholarships, financial aid, work-study)	49%	50%	44%	44%	24%	29%	44%	29%
Athletic teams	12%	11%	13%	9%	16%	13%	5%	11%
Student support services (e.g., tutoring, counseling, mental health and wellness)	35%	30%	38%	24%	22%	20%	29%	30%
Job readiness (e.g., job search prep, career planning, employer partnerships)	33%	29%	34%	25%	20%	20%	26%	27%
Applications/admissions (e.g., application deadlines, admission requirements)	54%	49%	51%	42%	28%	42%	35%	23%
Costs (e.g., tuition, fees, housing)	63%	61%	63%	52%	22%	34%	45%	40%
Financial support (e.g., scholarships, financial aid)	61%	58%	48%	45%	23%	37%	53%	32%
Campus safety (e.g., campus police, housing security, emergency alerts)	36%	30%	37%	29%	25%	25%	21%	36%
Student success (e.g., graduation rates, alumni success stories, job placement)	35%	32%	40%	28%	24%	19%	22%	38%
National rankings	14%	12%	16%	12%	11%	6%	7%	14%
Campus visit (e.g., tour, open house, virtual tour)	51%	43%	53%	30%	34%	34%	26%	32%
Diversity of campus community (students, faculty, and staff)	15%	12%	19%	11%	15%	8%	13%	18%
Experiential learning (e.g., study abroad, internships, co-ops)	24%	23%	32%	22%	20%	10%	22%	22%

Parents' Preferred Topics by Student's High School Year

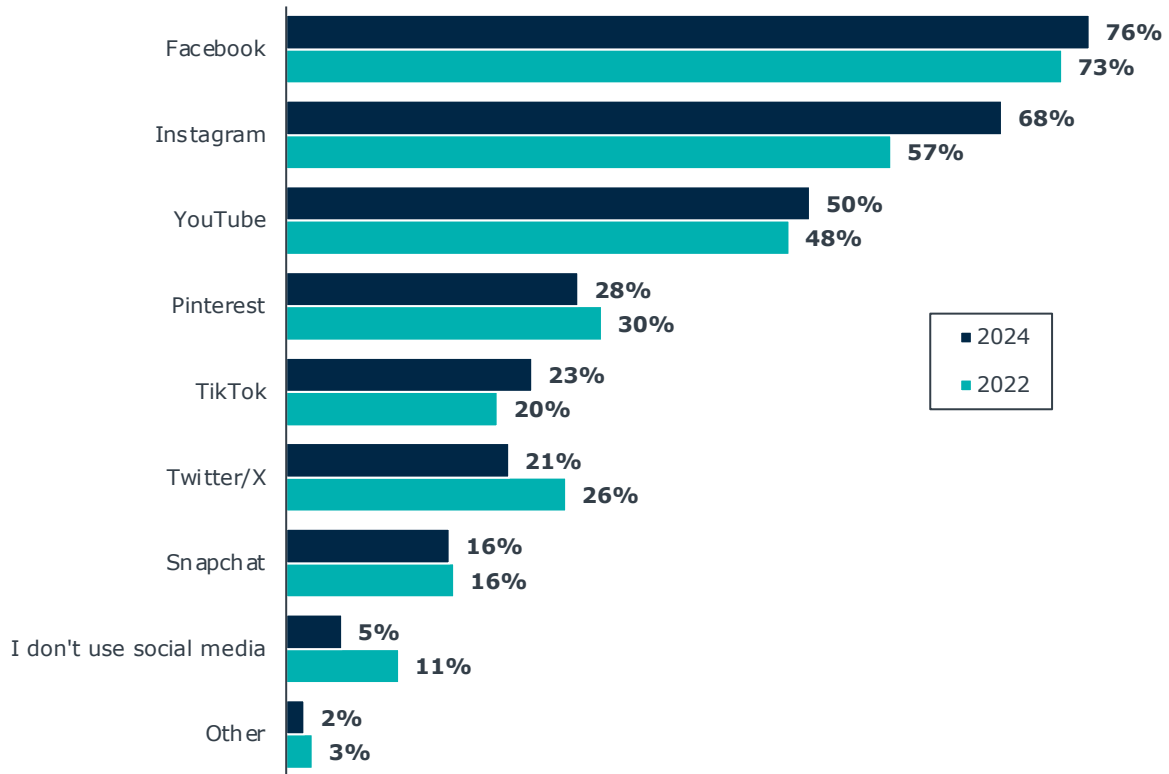
Q. Considering the topic(s) of interest to you, please indicate when during your student's high school years you would like to have the information. (Select all that apply.)

	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior
Costs (e.g., tuition, fees, housing)	37%	47%	65%	52%
Financial support (e.g., scholarships, financial aid)	34%	37%	56%	51%
General information about the school (e.g., location, size)	30%	40%	38%	25%
Sources of funds to pay for college (e.g., scholarships, financial aid, work-study)	30%	35%	46%	41%
Academics (e.g., faculty, classrooms/labs, majors/minors)	27%	39%	56%	43%
Student support services (e.g., tutoring, counseling, mental health and wellness)	21%	21%	34%	39%
Campus visit (e.g., tour, open house, virtual tour)	20%	37%	53%	37%
Student success (e.g., graduation rates, alumni success stories, job placement)	18%	27%	41%	36%
Student life (e.g., clubs, organizations, activities)	17%	21%	34%	36%
Campus safety (e.g., campus police, housing security, emergency alerts)	16%	18%	36%	40%
Athletic teams	16%	14%	13%	12%
Applications/admissions (e.g., application deadlines, admission requirements)	15%	26%	54%	40%
Diversity of campus community (students, faculty, and staff)	15%	13%	18%	15%
Residential life (e.g., housing, food services)	13%	20%	43%	44%
Job readiness (e.g., job search prep, career planning, employer partnerships)	12%	16%	31%	36%
National rankings	12%	13%	17%	13%
Experiential learning (e.g., study abroad, internships, co-ops)	11%	15%	31%	29%

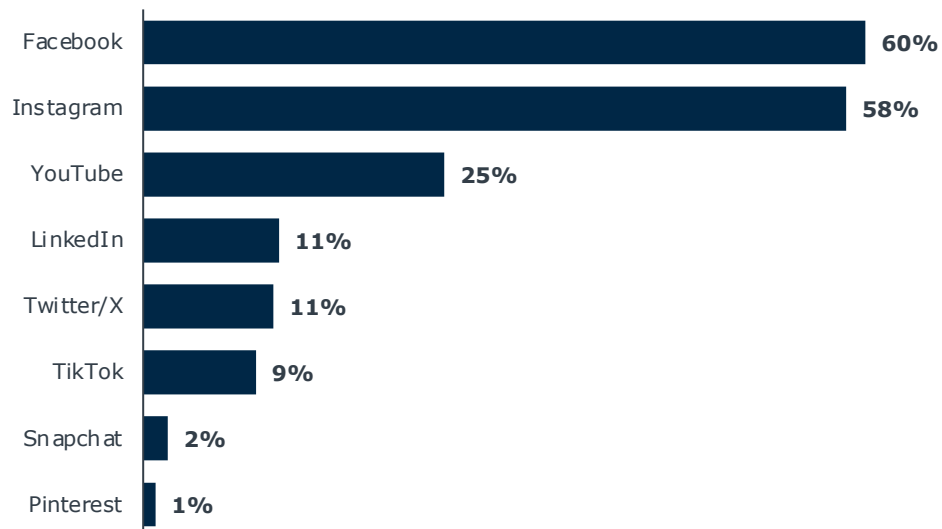
Parent Social Media Usage

Q: Select all of the social media you currently use

2024 vs. 2022



Q: Have you interacted with a college or university (followed, liked a post, watched a video, shared) on any of the following social media? (Select all that apply.)



Research Overview

About the 2024 Parent Survey

EAB's University Research Partners collected responses from parents of current high school students in May and June of 2024. The goal of this research was to learn more about families' communication preferences and priorities with respect to their student's college search and enrollment decision. The results include responses from 1,620 participants.

Participant Profile

Relationship to Student	Percentage
Mother or female guardian	78%
Father or male guardian	22%
Other	<1%

Parent Ethnicity	Percentage
African/African American/Black	13%
Asian (Central/South/East/Southeast)	5%
Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander	1%
Hispanic or Latinx/o/a	18%
Middle Eastern or West Asian	1%
Native American or Alaskan Native	1%
White/Caucasian	66%
Other	2%

Region	Percentage
Northeast	18%
Southeast	29%
Midwest	16%
Southwest	18%
West	19%

Household Income	Percentage
\$90,000 or less	30%
\$90,001-\$150,000	29%
More than \$150,000	41%

Gender Identity of Student	Percentage
Female	60%
Male	39%
Nonbinary or other	1%





Student Ethnicity	Percentage
African/African American/Black	15%
Asian (Central/South/East/Southeast)	7%
Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander	1%
Hispanic or Latinx/o/a	19%
Middle Eastern or West Asian	1%
Native American or Alaskan Native	2%
White/Caucasian	67%
Other	3%

Student's Graduation Year ¹	Percentage
2024	46%
2025	42%
2026	24%
2027	9%

1) Parents could select multiple years for multiple children.

Unlock Every Recruitment Advantage with **Enroll360**

Enroll360 Solutions to Outperform the Market at Every Stage of the Funnel

 Cultivate	 Apply	 Aid	 Yield		
<i>Tailored partnerships that work in concert to generate unmatched search, recruitment, and yield results.</i>					
What Makes Enroll360 Solutions Different	Comprehensive Suite of Services	+	High-Touch Service Model	+	Strategies Rooted in Research and Testing

Enroll360 Products to Elevate Student Awareness and Engagement

Audiences Build awareness and influence and grow applications with leads from our expansive ecosystem.	Tours Engage Gen Z in immersive virtual tours that tell your brand story and build affinity.	Match Enroll students from all backgrounds with our unique "reverse admissions" model.	Transfer Facilitate the transfer process and boost enrollment with best-in-class technology and marketing.
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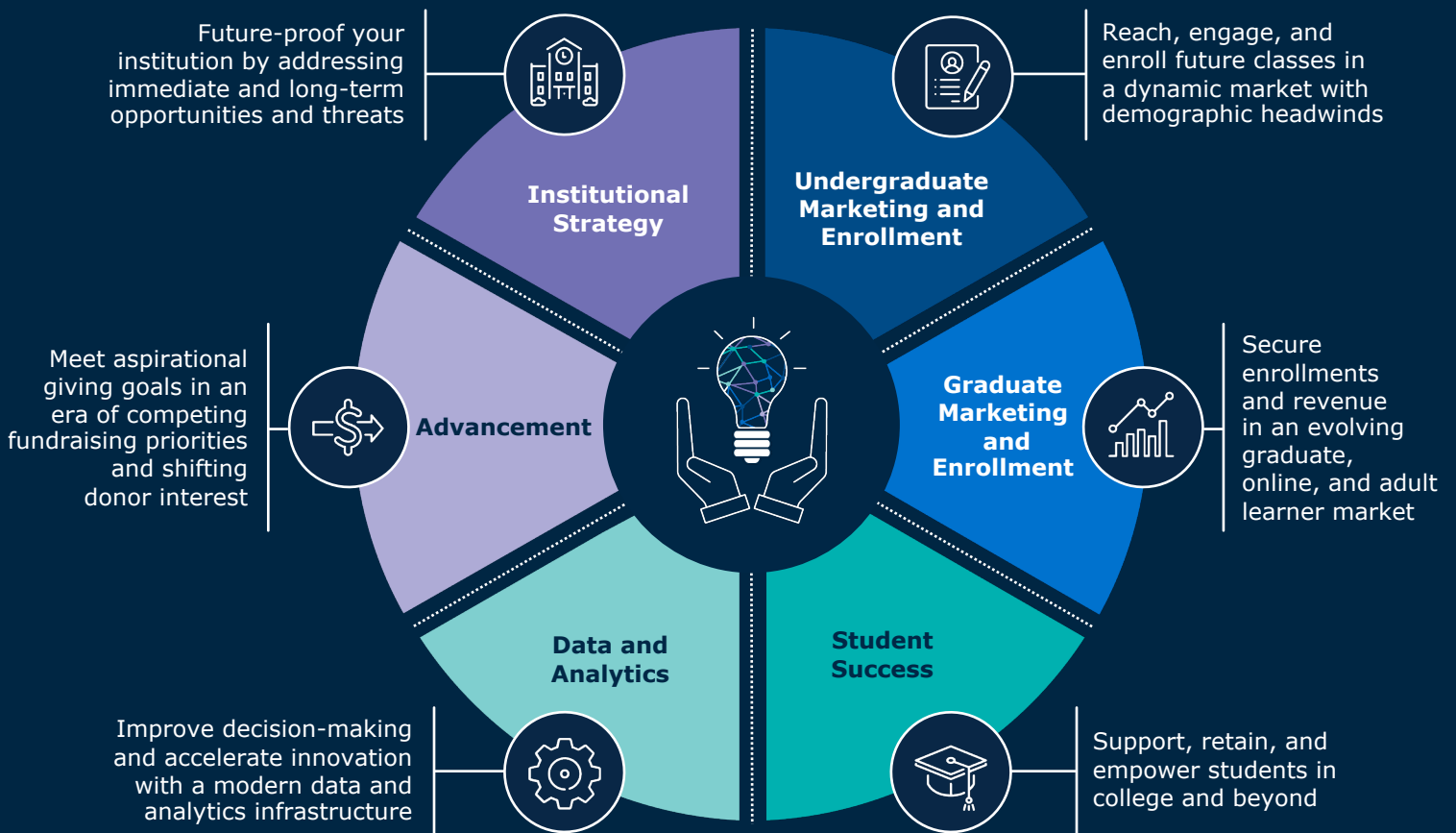
Powered by the Leading Student-Facing Platforms



To speak with an expert or schedule a diagnostic conversation, email eabenrollmentcomm@eab.com.

Learn more at eab.com/Enroll360.

**Insight-powered Solutions for Your Top
Priorities and Toughest Challenges**



We partner with **2,800+** institutions to accelerate progress, deliver results, and enable lasting change.

95%+ of our partners return to us year after year because of results we achieve, together.



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ABOUT EAB

At EAB, our mission is to make education smarter and our communities stronger. We work with thousands of institutions to drive transformative change through data-driven insights and best-in-class capabilities. From kindergarten to college to career, EAB partners with leaders and practitioners to accelerate progress and drive results across five major areas: enrollment, student success, institutional strategy, data analytics, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). We work with each partner differently, tailoring our portfolio of research, technology, and marketing and enrollment solutions to meet the unique needs of every leadership team, as well as the students and employees they serve. Learn more at eab.com.