



# 2023 Prospective Family Engagement Report

A survey of 12,000+ family members  
of prospective college students

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# Introduction

What can institutions do to increase engagement with families of prospective students?

Parents and guardians are the biggest influencers on enrollment for students. Nearly all are invested and involved in the college search process with their students.

**But are colleges and universities really engaging them?** Are they communicating the right information, with the right frequency, across the right channels? Are they helping families navigate the long and complex college search process—especially those families who did not attend college? And are they providing the information families need about financing a college education and why it's a sound investment?

These are just some of the questions that RNL, Ardeo Education, and CampusESP examined in this survey of 12,000 family members of prospective college students. These findings show their preferences, experiences, and concerns. They provide enrollment managers with actionable insights to increase engagement with parents and strategically harness the influence they have with students.



# 10 Key Findings on Family Engagement

-  **80%** OF PARENTS SAY MONEY PAID ON A STUDENT'S TUITION IS A WORTHWHILE INVESTMENT.
-  **89%** OF PARENTS SAY A FAMILY PORTAL HELPED THEM ADVISE AND SUPPORT THEIR STUDENT'S ENROLLMENT PROCESS.
-  **88%** OF FAMILIES ARE OPEN TO HEARING FROM INSTITUTIONS WEEKLY.
-  **68%** ARE OPEN TO HEARING FROM THE INSTITUTION WHEN IT HAS SOMETHING IMPORTANT TO COMMUNICATE.
-  **40%** THINK INSTITUTIONS SHOULD BE TEST-OPTIONAL.
-  **39%** SAY SCHOLARSHIPS AND FINANCIAL AID ARE THE TOP FACTOR IN THE COLLEGE DECISION.
-  **75%** OF FAMILIES THINK THEIR BORROWING FEARS WILL AFFECT THEIR STUDENTS' COLLEGE PLANNING NEGATIVELY.
-  **68%** WILL RULE OUT AN INSTITUTION BASED ON STICKER PRICE.
-  **45%** OF FAMILIES SAY THEY HAVE THE LOGIN INFORMATION FOR THEIR STUDENT'S COLLEGE APPLICATION.
-  **TOP 5** TOPICS PROSPECTIVE FAMILIES WANT INFORMATION ABOUT ARE **COST; ACADEMIC INFORMATION; ADMISSION REQUIREMENTS, APPLICATION PROCESS AND TIMELINE; AND FINANCIAL AID AND SCHOLARSHIPS.**

## About the study

Forty U.S.-based institutions invited 12,088 parents, family members and other adults who care for high school students to complete the survey.

# Planning for College

## Out of state and distance

**Families who would consider letting student attend an out-of-state institution.**

**2022: 81%**

**2023: 73%**

### MORE LIKELY TO SUPPORT OUT OF STATE

- Families with incomes of >\$150,000
- Continuing-generation families
- Families in the Northwest and Midwest
- Families of student-athletes
- Families of 11th-grade students

### LESS LIKELY TO SUPPORT OUT OF STATE

- Families with incomes of <\$150,000
- First-generation families
- Hispanic families
- Families in the West
- Families of 12th-grade students

**How far are parents or other adults who care for prospective students willing to let their students travel to go to college?**

DISTANCE	2022	2023
Fewer than 25 miles	5%	4%
26-50 miles	4%	4%
51-100 miles	5%	8%
101-250 miles	11%	20%
251-500 miles	13%	18%
501 miles or more	62%	46%

### MORE LIKELY TO SUPPORT FARTHER

- Families with incomes of >\$100,000
- Continuing-generation families
- Families in the West and Midwest
- White families

### MORE LIKELY TO WANT CLOSER

- Families with incomes of <\$150,000
- First-generation families
- Families in the South
- Hispanic, Black, and Asian families

While nearly three-quarters of the families surveyed would consider letting their students attend college out of state, that number did drop significantly from 2022. It is also interesting to note that, while the number of families willing to let students travel more than 100 miles to attend college is almost the same as 2022, there was a sharp drop in the number willing to let students travel more than 500 miles to attend a school.

# Online education

Families who would consider student attending college entirely online

**2022: 10%**

**2023: 12%**

## MORE LIKELY TO CONSIDER ATTENDING COLLEGE ENTIRELY ONLINE

- Native American families
- Families with incomes <\$60,000
- First-generation families
- Families in the South and the West

## LESS LIKELY TO CONSIDER ATTENDING COLLEGE ENTIRELY ONLINE

- Asian and White families
- Families with incomes >\$100,000
- Continuing-generation families
- Families in the Northeast and Midwest

# Perceptions of entrance exams

PERCEPTION	2022	2023
All should be test optional	48%	40%
Institutions that require tests are better	27%	22%
There is no difference	25%	38%

There has been a significant increase in the number of families who do not see a difference between institutions that are test-optional and those that require entrance exams.

## MOST LIKELY TO THINK ALL TESTS SHOULD BE OPTIONAL

- Black families
- First-generation families
- Families with students in 11th and 12th grades
- Families of student-athletes

## MOST LIKELY TO THINK TESTS ARE BETTER

- Asian and White families
- Continuing-generation families
- Families with incomes of more than \$150,000

## MOST LIKELY TO THINK THERE IS NO DIFFERENCE

- Black and Hispanic families
- First-generation families
- Families with students in 10th grade
- Families with incomes of less than \$100,000



## Recommendations

- **Determine preferences for distance early.** If you are trying to increase out-of-state enrollment or students from distant markets, determine which families are open to letting their students attend college farther from home. Be sure to also emphasize the educational benefits of your institution and campus safety. For local markets, share the benefits of staying closer to home and why your institution is a great fit for local/in-state students.
  - **Offer strong virtual and in-person tours.** Live campus tours are often a moment of truth for many students and families, so it's critical to have a strong live experience and to also push families to take a live tour. However, strong virtual tours remain important for engaging families who may not have resources to travel or increasing interest with families who are considering your institution but may not have you ranked as high as other institutions.
  - **Create opportunities for families to meet with current students who live locally.** This is especially effective if you can connect families to those who also have students who attended the same high school.
  - **Develop extra resources for families with first-generation students, have lower levels of household income, or are from underrepresented groups.** Emphasize inclusivity and diversity in authentic ways that will feel more genuine (such as videos that highlight student support services). Remove jargon or unclear language from your communications so first-generation students and their families can easily understand how to apply for admission, submit aid applications, and review programs of study.
  - **Be transparent about cost and financing options.** This is especially true for out-of-state students. Include net-cost calculators showing the actual cost to families with clear and easy-to-follow instructions on how to use them and interpret the results. For awarding offers, consider personalized financial aid videos that explain financial awards in clear, easy-to-understand terms.
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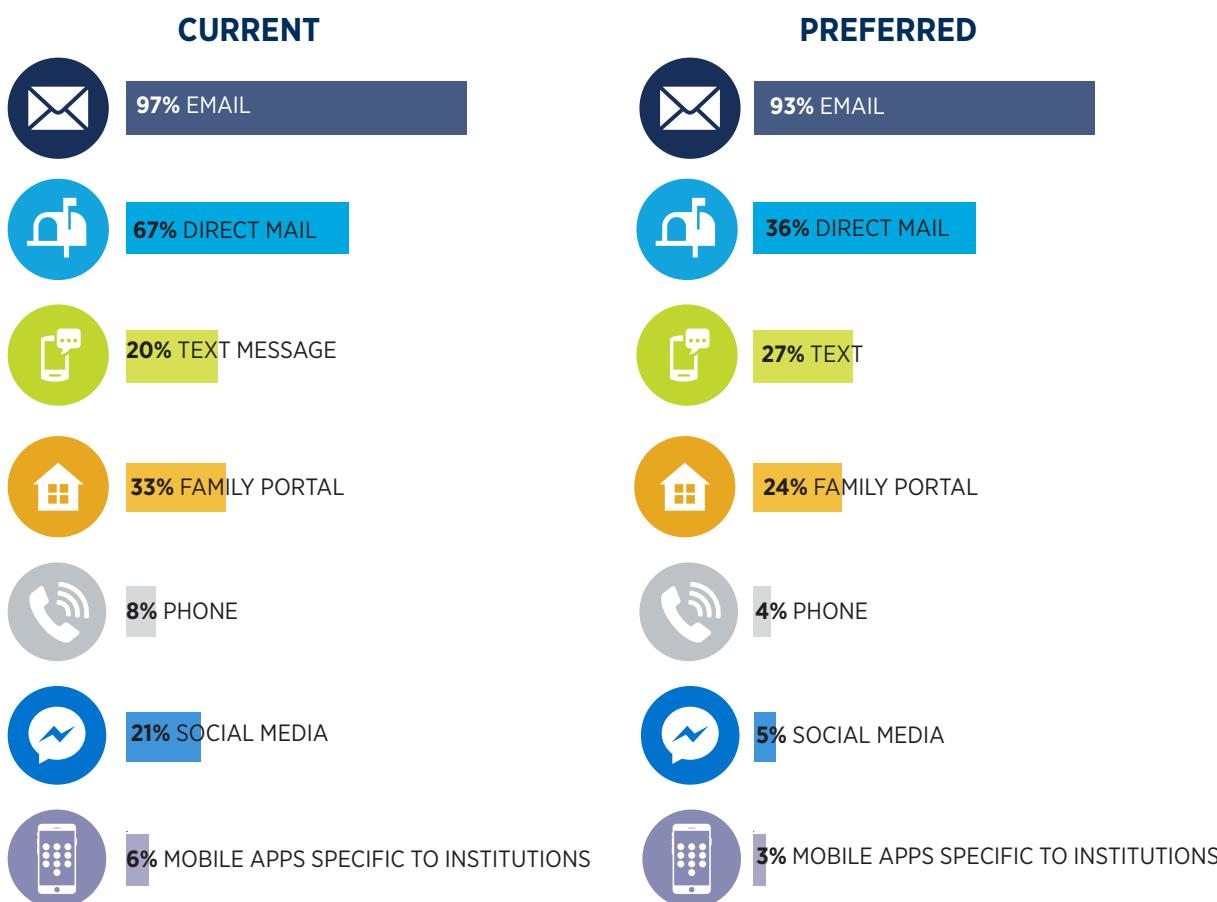
# Communication From Colleges and Universities

## Frequency and channels

Families were asked what channels colleges are universities are currently using to communicate with them, and were also asked to choose their top preferred channels to receive information about college planning from colleges and universities.

PREFERRED COMMUNICATION FREQUENCY	2022	2023
Every day	1%	1%
At least once a week	17%	19%
Whenever they have important information to share	68%	68%
At least once a month	12%	10%
They should only communicate with the student	2%	2%

## Communication channels



## Preferred channels by income

LESS THAN \$59,999	\$60,000 TO \$99,999	\$100,000 OR MORE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Most likely to choose telephone and text messages</li><li>Least likely to choose social media, apps specific to institutions, and the parent portal</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Most likely to choose direct mail, email, telephone, and text messages</li><li>Least likely to choose social media and apps specific to institutions</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Most likely to choose direct mail, email, the parent portal, social media, and apps specific to institutions</li><li>Least likely to choose telephone and text messages</li></ul>

## Preferred channels by first-generation status

FIRST-GENERATION FAMILIES	CONTINUING-GENERATION FAMILIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Most likely to choose the telephone and text messages</li><li>Least likely to choose email, social media, apps specific to institutions, and the parent portal</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Most likely to choose direct mail, email, the parent portal, social media, and apps specific to institutions</li><li>Least likely to choose telephone and text messages</li></ul>

## Preferred channels by current grade of student

10TH GRADE	11TH GRADE	12TH GRADE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Most likely to choose direct mail</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Most likely to choose direct mail, text messages, and social media</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Most likely to choose the parent portal, telephone, and text messages</li></ul>

## Recommendations

- Communicate relevant information frequently.** It is important that institutions consider the content families are interested in receiving instead of simply sending out messages because it's time to send a message. Create content and messaging schedules that provide helpful, engaging messages that align with what families want to learn at that point in the search process.
- Go with omnichannel outreach, but understand how preferences change.** It's clear that families use a variety of channels, but the ones they prefer for communicating with colleges can change over time, by first-generation status, or by income. A balanced and strategic communication plan will mix traditional channels such as email and direct mail with digital ones such as text messaging and social media. Also consider the powerful impact of personalized communications such as one-on-one calls and personalized videos.

# Social media

## How are parents using social media for college planning?

FAMILIES WHO HAVE SEEN INFORMATION ABOUT COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES ON SOCIAL MEDIA.

2022: 20%

2023: 21%

PLATFORM	USE PLATFORM		FOLLOW INSTITUTIONS ON	
	2022	2023	2022	2023
Facebook	71%	74%	34%	36%
Instagram	60%	65%	28%	32%
YouTube	53%	60%	9%	9%
LinkedIn	45%	47%	7%	7%
Pinterest	38%	40%	1%	2%
Twitter	34%	35%	12%	11%
Snapchat	22%	20%	2%	1%

## SOCIAL MEDIA USE BY ETHNICITY

FACEBOOK	ASIAN	BLACK	HISPANIC	NATIVE AMERICAN	WHITE
Use	66%	73%	69%	66%	76%
Follow institutions	26%	28%	30%	37%	40%

INSTAGRAM	ASIAN	BLACK	HISPANIC	NATIVE AMERICAN	WHITE
Use	52%	65%	66%	59%	67%
Follow institutions	23%	28%	32%	25%	35%

YOUTUBE	ASIAN	BLACK	HISPANIC	NATIVE AMERICAN	WHITE
Use	60%	64%	58%	50%	58%
Follow institutions	16%	12%	9%	7%	7%

## SOCIAL MEDIA USE BY INCOME

FACEBOOK	<\$30,000	\$30,000 - \$59,999	\$60,000 - \$99,999	\$100,000 - \$149,999	\$150,000 OR MORE
Use	56%	63%	65%	79%	74%
Follow institutions	26%	32%	34%	38%	39%
INSTAGRAM	<\$30,000	\$30,000 - \$59,999	\$60,000 - \$99,999	\$100,000 - \$149,999	\$150,000 OR MORE
Use	60%	59%	63%	64%	69%
Follow institutions	27%	24%	31%	31%	37%
YOUTUBE	<\$30,000	\$30,000 - \$59,999	\$60,000 - \$99,999	\$100,000 - \$149,999	\$150,000 OR MORE
Use	60%	64%	58%	50%	58%
Follow institutions	16%	12%	9%	7%	7%

## Family portal

CURRENT

**33%**

PREFERRED

**24%**

Looking at these results by income and generation status, lower-income and first-generation families are less likely to prefer the parent/family portal. These results are most likely due to the fact that they don't know the portal exists; they don't know how to use it or the benefits it can offer; or they lack the technology to access it.

PARENT PORTAL	<\$30,000	\$30,000 - \$59,999	\$60,000 - \$99,999	\$100,000 - \$149,999	\$150,000 OR MORE
Preferred	21%	20%	22%	24%	27%

PARENT PORTAL	FIRST GENERATION	CONTINUING GENERATION
Preferred	19%	25%

FAMILIES WHO DID USE THE PARENT PORTAL OVERWHELMINGLY FOUND IT HELPFUL.

**89%**

**OF FAMILIES SURVEYED THOUGHT THE PARENT PORTAL HELPED THEM ADVISE AND SUPPORT THEIR STUDENTS.**

**Most likely to think the parent portal helps them advise and support their student.**

**FIRST-GENERATION FAMILIES**

**FAMILIES OF STUDENT-ATHLETES**

## Recommendations

- **Promote your parent portal and teach parents how to use it.** Family portals provide a dedicated destination for all the information families and their student may need throughout the enrollment process. Deadlines and application process details are helpful reminders, and content about the institution, financial aid, or campus life can help the entire family feel comfortable through the process. Technology that tailors the experience based on expressed interests and the student's stage in the enrollment process also provide families with the information they want when they need it, keeping students on track.

### **Top information topics for families (all grades)**

- |          |  |           |   |
|----------|--|-----------|---|
| <b>1</b> | Cost (tuition, fees, room, board, etc.)    | <b>7</b>  | Updates to student's academic and financial records             |
| <b>2</b> | Academics (programs, majors, minors, etc.) | <b>8</b>  | Housing   |
| <b>3</b> | Admission requirements                     | <b>9</b>  | Safety precautions  |
| <b>4</b> | Application process and timeline           | <b>10</b> | The strength of the academic programs (ratings, rankings, etc.) |
| <b>5</b> | Financial aid and scholarships             |           |   |
| <b>6</b> | Account services and paying tuition        |           |   |

### **10th grade (Top information topics for families)**

- |          |  |           |   |
|----------|--|-----------|---|
| <b>1</b> | Cost (tuition, fees, room, board, etc.)    | <b>7</b>  | Updates to student's academic and financial records               |
| <b>2</b> | Academics (programs, majors, minors, etc.) | <b>8</b>  | Housing   |
| <b>3</b> | Admission requirements                     | <b>9</b>  | Community life and activities                                     |
| <b>4</b> | Application process and timeline           | <b>10</b> | Options to finance college education (financial aid, loans, etc.) |
| <b>5</b> | Financial aid and scholarships             |           |   |
| <b>6</b> | Safety precautions                         |           |   |

## **11th grade** (Top information topics for families)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>1</b> Academics (programs, majors, minors, etc.)</p> <p><b>2</b> Admission requirements</p> <p><b>3</b> Cost (tuition, fees, room, board, etc.)</p> <p><b>4</b> Application process and timeline</p> <p><b>5</b> Housing</p> <p><b>6</b> Safety precautions</p> | <p><b>7</b> Financial aid and scholarships</p> <p><b>8</b> Updates to student's academic and financial records</p> <p><b>9</b> Food services and dining</p> <p><b>10</b> The strength of the academic programs (ratings, rankings, etc.)</p> |
|---|--|

## **12th grade** (Top information topics for families)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p><b>1</b> Cost (tuition, fees, room, board, etc.)</p> <p><b>2</b> Academics (programs, majors, minors, etc.)</p> <p><b>3</b> Admission requirements</p> <p><b>4</b> Application process and timeline</p> <p><b>5</b> Financial aid and scholarships</p> | <p><b>6</b> Updates to student's academic and financial records</p> <p><b>7</b> Account services and paying the tuition bill</p> <p><b>8</b> Housing</p> <p><b>9</b> Safety precautions</p> <p><b>10</b> What makes the institution different</p> |
|---|---|

## **Recommendations**

- **Align your content with the enrollment journey of families and students.** These information topics show how the information needs of students progress through high school. They also show that cost is a key topic very early in the process. Make sure your campaigns address the key concerns and interests students and families have at that time, so as they move from general information to applying to making an enrollment decision, you keep them informed, engaged, and excited about becoming a student at your institution.
- **Collaborate with advocates for family engagement.** Identify key stakeholders who can help you craft communications and establish calendars of relevant content and messaging that will help guide parents through the search process and also make them enrollment influencers for your institution.

# What information have parents yet to see or receive?

## Most significant gaps in access to information

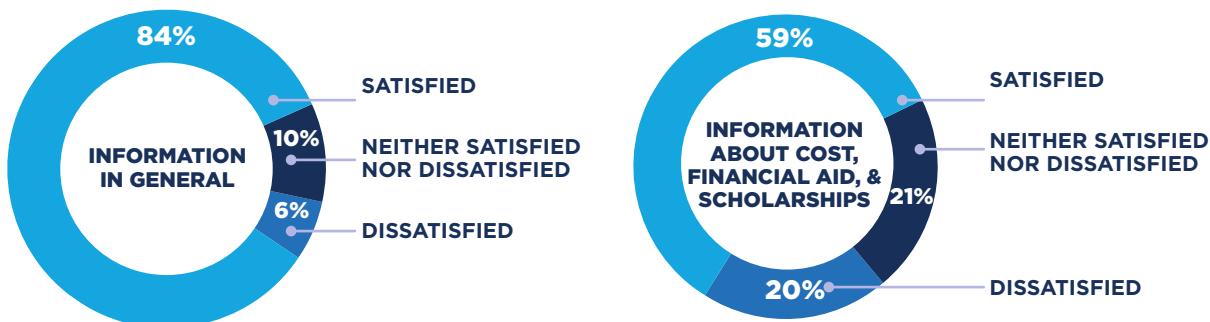
- 1 Updates to their student's academic and financial records
- 2 Account services and paying the tuition bill
- 3 Safety precautions
- 4 Food services and dining
- 5 Housing

## More likely not to have seen/received information for every single one of these topics

- 1 Families of color
- 2 Families with incomes lower than \$100,000
- 3 First-generation families

When families start bumping in with the “regular” processes of the institution, there’s almost always a drag or resistance that enters the process. Families take notice of this, which showed in these results.

## Satisfaction with communication



## **More likely to be satisfied with the information about the cost, financial aid, and scholarships**

- 1** Families with incomes of under \$60,000
- 2** First-generation families
- 3** Families of students in 12th grade

## **More likely to be dissatisfied with the information about cost, financial aid, and scholarships**

- 1** Families with incomes of over \$60,000
- 2** Continuing-generation families
- 3** Families of students in 10th and 11th grades

## **Recommendations**

- **Assess your communications from the perspective of a parent.** Put yourself in the shoes of a family member of a student, especially a family member who did not attend college. Would you understand your admissions information? Financial aid communications? Be able to find relevant information for admission, aid, housing, and paying tuition? Make sure these communications are clear and easy to find, as well as why they are important so that families will know to read them.

## **College Planning Experiences**

### **Most important experiences for families**

- 1** Experience during an on-campus visit (either self-guided or guided)
- 2** The quality of the school's communication with parents and families
- 3** Information (digital content) about the school or program the student is considering
- 4** Meeting an admissions staff member (in person, virtual meeting, or phone call)
- 5** Meeting a faculty member in the program the student is considering (in person, virtual meeting, or phone call)
- 6** Meeting with a coach (in person, virtual meeting, or phone call)\*
- 7** Meeting a current student's parent or family member at the university (in person, via virtual meeting, or a phone call)
- 8** Experience with, or information received from, a high school counselor
- 9** Experience (or information received) at a college fair
- 10** Experience during a virtual visit

\*Only asked families of prospective student-athletes

## Families who are most likely to say these experiences are important to their student's college planning

### MEET AN ADMISSIONS STAFF MEMBER:

- Families of 12th-grade students

### MEET A CURRENT UNIVERSITY STUDENT'S PARENT OR FAMILY MEMBER (IN PERSON VIRTUAL MEETING, OR PHONE CALL):

- Families with incomes <\$60,000
- First-generation families

### MEET WITH OR RECEIVE INFORMATION FROM A HIGH SCHOOL COUNSELOR:

- Families with incomes <\$100,000
- First-generation families
- Families of 11th-grade students

### EXPERIENCE OR RECEIVE INFORMATION AT A COLLEGE FAIR:

- Families with incomes <\$100,000
- First-generation families
- Families of 10th-grade students

### EXPERIENCE DURING A VIRTUAL VISIT:

- Families with incomes <\$60,000
- First-generation families

## Campus visits and virtual tours

ATTITUDES AND EXPERIENCE	CAMPUS VISIT	VIRTUAL TOUR
Important in helping families decide where their student should apply/attend	98%	69%
Have experienced	84%	43%
Satisfied with the experience	92%	60%

Campus visit participation and satisfaction is almost identical as results from our 2022 study. For virtual tours, participation has decreased significantly but satisfaction rose slightly.

### PARTICIPATED IN IN-PERSON CAMPUS VISITS



### SATISFIED WITH IN-PERSON CAMPUS VISITS



## PARTICIPATED IN VIRTUAL CAMPUS TOURS



## SATISFIED WITH VIRTUAL CAMPUS TOURS



There were significant differences in campus and virtual tour participation by ethnicity, income, and first-generation status. Participation in both increased by family income level and also among continuing-generation families.

### PARTICIPATION BASED ON ETHNICITY

TOUR TYPE	ASIAN	BLACK	HISPANIC	NATIVE AMERICAN	WHITE
Campus	70%	80%	72%	86%	90%
Virtual	51%	48%	39%	41%	43%

### PARTICIPATION BASED ON INCOME

TOUR TYPE	<\$30,000	\$30,000-\$59,999	\$60,000-\$99,999	\$100,000-\$149,999	\$150,000 OR MORE
Campus	51%	65%	78%	88%	93%
Virtual	36%	38%	39%	42%	47%

### PARTICIPATION BASED FIRST-GENERATION STATUS

TOUR TYPE	FIRST GENERATION	CONTINUING GENERATION
Campus	68%	88%
Virtual	35%	45%

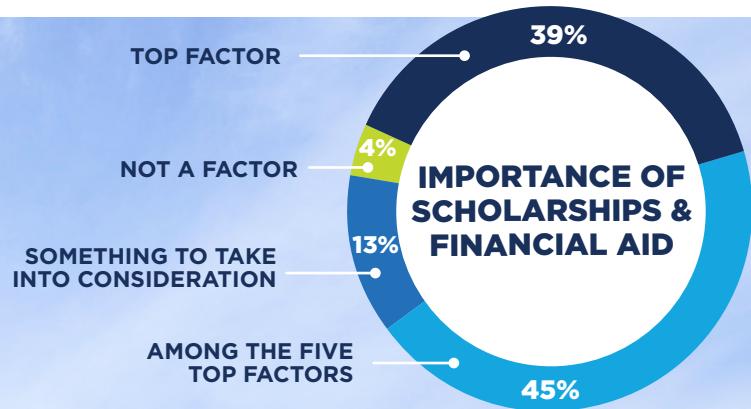
## Recommendations

- **Have systematic strategies to increase participation in campus and virtual tours.** Campus tours are overwhelmingly helpful to families, and a strong majority also find virtual tours helpful in the college planning process. Yet participation is very uneven for different groups of families. Look for ways to help more families to attend campus visits or, if that is not practical, to provide virtual tour experiences that will still help them with college planning for their students. Be sure all information on tours is clear about the application process, financial aid, campus housing, and other key pieces of the enrollment process.
- **Offer parent orientation programs and family support groups.** Orientation programs tailored to parents can help them understand their role in their student's college education and the resources and services available to support them. Family support groups provide extra support for parents and a community of like-minded family members going through the college planning process. Enabling them to share information and support each other can increase their affinity to your institution.

# College Financing

## Importance of financial aid and scholarships

How important are financial aid and scholarships in helping your student choose a college or university?



The importance of financial aid and scholarships varied significantly among different family groups. Black and Hispanic families as well as first-generation families were more likely to list financial aid as a top factor in their college decision. Financial aid and scholarships were also more important to families with lower household income.

### IMPORTANCE OF FINANCIAL AID AND SCHOLARSHIPS BY ETHNICITY

IMPORTANCE	ASIAN	BLACK	HISPANIC	NATIVE AMERICAN	WHITE
Top factor	41%	63%	52%	39%	29%
Among five top factors	41%	30%	38%	46%	50%
A factor	15%	5%	8%	11%	16%
Not a factor	3%	2%	2%	4%	5%

### IMPORTANCE OF FINANCIAL AID AND SCHOLARSHIPS BY INCOME

IMPORTANCE	<\$30,000	\$30,000-\$59,999	\$60,000-\$99,999	\$100,000-\$149,999	\$150,000 OR MORE
Top factor	63%	61%	52%	42%	24%
Among five top factors	28%	36%	42%	48%	48%
A factor	7%	3%	5%	8%	21%
Not a factor	2%	0%	1%	2%	7%

## IMPORTANCE OF FINANCIAL AID AND SCHOLARSHIPS BY GENERATION STATUS

IMPORTANCE	FIRST GENERATION	CONTINUING GENERATION
Top factor	56%	35%
Among five top factors	37%	46%
A factor	6%	15%
Not a factor	1%	4%

## IMPORTANCE OF FINANCIAL AID AND SCHOLARSHIPS BY ATHLETIC STATUS

IMPORTANCE	STUDENT-ATHLETE	NOT A STUDENT-ATHLETE
Top factor	56%	35%
Among five top factors	37%	46%
A factor	6%	15%
Not a factor	1%	4%



# Paying for college

HOW DIFFICULT DO YOU THINK PAYING FOR YOUR STUDENT'S COLLEGE EDUCATION WILL BE?	2022	2023
Very difficult	19%	30%
Difficult	26%	28%
Somewhat difficult	39%	30%
Not difficult	16%	12%

The number of families choosing difficult or very difficult jumped from 45 percent to 58 percent this year. Again, there were significant variations by family population, with families of color, those with lower household incomes, and first-generation students much more likely to say paying for college would be very difficult.

## DIFFICULTY PAYING FOR COLLEGE BY ETHNICITY

DIFFICULTY	ASIAN	BLACK	HISPANIC	NATIVE AMERICAN	WHITE
Very difficult	24%	37%	39%	33%	25%
Difficult	31%	27%	29%	27%	29%
Somewhat difficult	28%	26%	25%	30%	32%
Not difficult	17%	10%	7%	10%	14%

## DIFFICULTY PAYING FOR COLLEGE BY FAMILY INCOME

DIFFICULTY	<\$30,000	\$30,000-\$59,999	\$60,000-\$99,999	\$100,000-\$149,999	\$150,000 OR MORE
Very difficult	53%	42%	40%	34%	17%
Difficult	22%	31%	30%	32%	26%
Somewhat difficult	21%	23%	27%	27%	36%
Not difficult	4%	4%	3%	7%	21%

## DIFFICULTY PAYING FOR COLLEGE BY GENERATION STATUS

DIFFICULTY	FIRST GENERATION	CONTINUING GENERATION
Very difficult	40%	27%
Difficult	29%	28%
Somewhat difficult	25%	31%
Not difficult	5%	13%

## Sticker price

IMPORTANCE OF STICKER PRICE	2022	2023
Ruled out institutions based on the sticker price	58%	68%
Will NOT rule out institutions based on the sticker price	42%	32%

More than two-thirds of families in this year's survey have ruled out at least one institution because of the sticker price, an increase of 10 points over 2022. Interestingly, families were more likely to rule out public institutions based on price and also more likely to do so for institutions with more than 10,000 students.

TYPE	RULED OUT BASED ON THE STICKER PRICE
Public institutions	73%
Private institutions	61%

ENROLLMENT SIZE	RULED OUT BASED ON THE STICKER PRICE
Under 5,000	65%
5,000-9,999	57%
10,000-19,999	75%
20,000+	72%

## Recommendations

- **Make it easy for families to determine their cost to attend.** More than 80 percent of families have financial aid and scholarships as one of the top factors if not the top factor for attending an institution. In addition, nearly 60 percent of families say paying for college will be difficult. That means it's very important to connect them to net-price calculators that show their true cost of attending, and then make sure financial aid offers clearly convey the cost of attending. Also communicate all the financing options students and families have such as loans, payment options, and work study.

## Tuition as an investment in the student's future

DO YOU THINK THE MONEY YOU WILL PAY FOR YOUR STUDENT'S TUITION IS A WORTHWHILE INVESTMENT IN THEIR FUTURE?	2022	2023
Yes	83%	80%
No	2%	3%
Undecided	16%	17%

### MORE LIKELY TO SAY TUITION IS A WORTHWHILE INVESTMENT

- Hispanic and Black families
- Families with incomes <\$100,000
- Families of students in 11th and 12th grades
- Families with students enrolling in private institutions
- Families with students enrolling in institutions with a total undergraduate enrollment of under 20,000 students

### MORE LIKELY TO BE UNDECIDED IF TUITION IS WORTHWHILE

- First-generation families
- Native American families
- Families of students in 10th grade
- Families with students enrolling in public institutions
- Families with students enrolling in institutions with a total undergraduate enrollment of over 20,000 students

## Recommendations

- **Communicate value frequently and convincingly.** Employment outcomes, educational outcomes, and alumni testimonials are just some of the ways you can show students that a college education is valuable. National trend data can also be useful for conveying the earning potential of those with college degrees compared to those who do not have a bachelor's degree.

## Borrowing Plans

LOAN TYPE	PLANNING ON TAKING THEM	UNSURE, MAY OR MAY NOT CONSIDER THIS TYPE OF LOAN	NO PLANS FOR THIS TYPE OF LOAN
Student loans	29%	35%	36%
Parent loans	13%	31%	56%

With one-third of families unsure whether they would need a student or parent loan, it's clear that institutions need to communicate early about financial awards as well as costs early in the search cycle. Likewise, families who do plan to borrow need help understanding how much they will need in loans, as 35 percent did not know how much they would need to borrow.

## AMOUNT PLANNING TO BORROW



**Most families also have concerns about student loans, which negatively impacts their college planning.**

**71%**

**HAVE CONCERN  
ABOUT LOANS**

**74%**

**SAY LOAN CONCERN  
NEGATIVELY IMPACT  
COLLEGE PLANNING**

## More likely to have borrowing concerns and say concerns are having a negative impact on planning

- 1 Black, Hispanic, and Native American families
- 2 Families with incomes <\$150,000
- 3 First-generation families

Providing early information about career outcomes, average starting salaries, average loan and repayment amounts, and resources to help with repayment can help overcome these concerns. Those with higher borrowing concerns need more information and education about student loans, average borrowing amounts, loan payments, and average starting and 10-year salaries. This type of data and communication will help them better understand the return on their investment and help manage expectations about their ability to repay student loans.

## Recommendations

- **Offer financial education workshops and one-on-one information resources.** Workshops can help families gain a better understanding and quell some of the anxiety around financing a college education. Be sure these workshops are understandable to those who have not gone through college financing before, and include strategies to develop financial plans to cover the cost of college. In addition, one-on-one resources such as information sessions with staff, short instructional videos, live chat, open house hours, and other resources can lower the barriers and provide more access to critical information to assist in timely decision-making.

# Loan Repayment Assistance Programs

Some institutions offer families a Loan Repayment Assistance Program (LRAP) to help cover the repayment of student and parent loans. The program provides a safety net for graduates whose income may not allow them to cover the cost of repaying their loans. The amount of assistance varies based on the student's income after graduation (typically, incomes less than \$50,000 qualify).

**56%**

**SAID BEING OFFERED AN LRAP WOULD IMPACT WHERE THEIR STUDENT DECIDES TO ENROLL.**

## More likely to say an LRAP would impact their decision:

- 1** Families with incomes lower than \$100,000
- 2** First-generation families
- 3** Families of prospective student-athletes

Some of the families most concerned about student debt are also most likely to value the offer of loan repayment assistance. Families of prospective student-athletes also value the offer. Like other critical financial aid information, the more timely the communication about LRAP, the better for families. Similarly, institutions that offer help with loan repayment need to ensure that families understand how the program works and how it benefits their students—and ensure that information about loan repayment is available throughout the communication cycle.

**67%**

**WOULD LIKE TO RECEIVE SUCH A PROGRAM AS PART OF THE STUDENT'S FINANCIAL AID PACKAGE.**

**64%**

**ALL OTHER THINGS BEING EQUAL, WOULD FAVOR AN INSTITUTION THAT OFFERED AN LRAP.**

## More likely to agree:

- 1** Asian, Black, and Hispanic families
- 2** Families with incomes <\$150,000
- 3** First-generation families

Most families would be interested in loan repayment assistance, and 64 percent said they would favor an institution that offered LRAP over one that didn't. In addition, families of students of color, lower-income families, and first-generation families said they are most likely to be interested in receiving a loan repayment assistance program from their institution.

# About the Study

## Respondents' demographics

U.S. RESIDENCY	
U.S. residents	96%
International residents	4%
FAMILY REGION OF RESIDENCE	
Midwest	11%
Northeast	15%
South	44%
West	30%
PARENTS/ADULTS' YEAR OF BIRTH	
1964 or earlier	8%
1965-1980	82%
1981-1996	8%
1997 or later	2%
ETHNICITY (MULTIPLE SELECT)	
Asian/Pacific Islander	6%
Black or African American	15%
Hispanic or Latino	22%
Native American or American Indian	4%
White	62%
Multiracial	2%
FAMILY INCOME	
Less than \$30,000	8%
\$30,000 to \$59,999	11%
\$60,000 to \$99,999	11%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	23%
\$150,000 or more	43%
HIGH SCHOOL GRADE	
10th (graduating class of 2025)	7%
11th (graduating class of 2024)	8%
12th (graduating class of 2023)	85%
FIRST-GENERATION STATUS	
First generation	20%
Continuing generation	80%

## Participating institution characteristics

- 40 institutions participated
- Families were invited to participate between the first week of February and the first week of April 2023
- Personally identifiable data was not collected
- Families were not incentivized to complete the survey

### PROPORTION OF RESPONSES BY INSTITUTION TYPE AND ENROLLMENT SIZE

TYPE OF INSTITUTION		TOTAL UNDERGRADUATE ENROLLMENT FROM IPEDS	
Public institutions	96%	Under 5,000	27%
Private institutions	4%	5,000-9,999	15%
Two-Year institutions*	2%	10,000-19,999	12%
		20,000 or more	45%

\*not reported

## Interested in participating in the 2024 study?

If you want your institution to participate in this study in 2024, please contact Raquel Bermejo (**Raquel.Bermejo@Ruffalonl.com**). Participation is free and open to all institutions.

# About the Sponsors



RNL is the leading provider of higher education enrollment, student success, and fundraising solutions. The firm serves more than 1,900 colleges and universities through data-driven solutions focused on the entire lifecycle of enrollment and fundraising, assuring students find the right program, graduate on time, secure their first job in their chosen field, and give back to support the next generation. With a deep knowledge of the industry, RNL provides institutions the ability to scale their efforts by tapping into a community of support and resources.

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CampusESP is a strategic family engagement platform that enables institutions to inform the greatest influencers in students' lives—their parents. From impacting enrollment, to student success, to annual giving—keeping parents effectively engaged has proven to be critical for institutions looking to better support their institutional goals. With CampusESP, institutions can increase their numbers and satisfy the needs of parents, all while reducing administrative burden and hours on their staff.

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Ardeo Education Solutions is a public benefit company dedicated to increasing access to the life-changing impact of higher education. Ardeo has worked with more than 200 colleges and universities to improve access and increase enrollment. Our Loan Repayment Assistance Programs (LRAPs) remove the fear of student loan debt with this powerful promise: if income after graduation is modest, our program will help repay federal student, private alternative, and parent PLUS loans.

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## How can you increase engagement with parents?

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