



2024 Higher Education Outlook

The Annual Student/Parent College Search Survey:

How students and parents make post-secondary education decisions.

Contents

3

Introduction

6

What post-secondary education options are students thinking about?

8

Who's in the Driver's Seat? Parents' Influence Can't be Ignored.

10

Why Students Pursue Post-Secondary Education – and What's Most Important to Both Them and Their Parents

12

Digital Marketing Channels are the Most Effective for Reaching Students and Parents

14

The Student and Parent Search Journey

15

We're Enrollment Marketing Experts – We're Here to Help





Introduction

There are a lot of challenges facing post-secondary education.

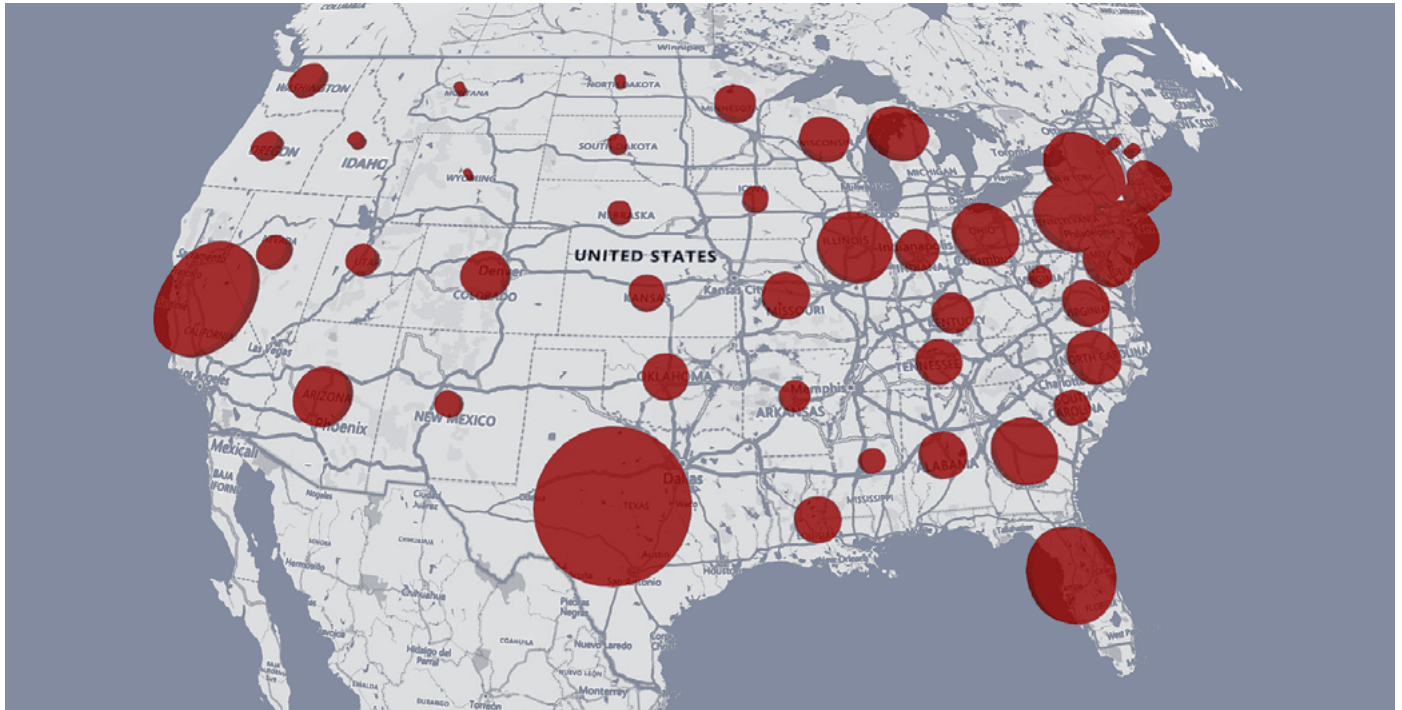
From a looming [demographic enrollment cliff](#) to rising costs and interest rates, prospective students are scrutinizing their options more closely than ever before.

And students aren't the only ones. Parents of today's GenZ youth are side-by-side with the student in the buyer's seat when it comes to such a large commitment of time and money. We know that high school students don't do anything without checking with their friends, their social media followers, and dozens of influencers. In other areas of their lives, teens couldn't care less what their parents think. But when it comes to higher education, parents are their most trusted advisors.

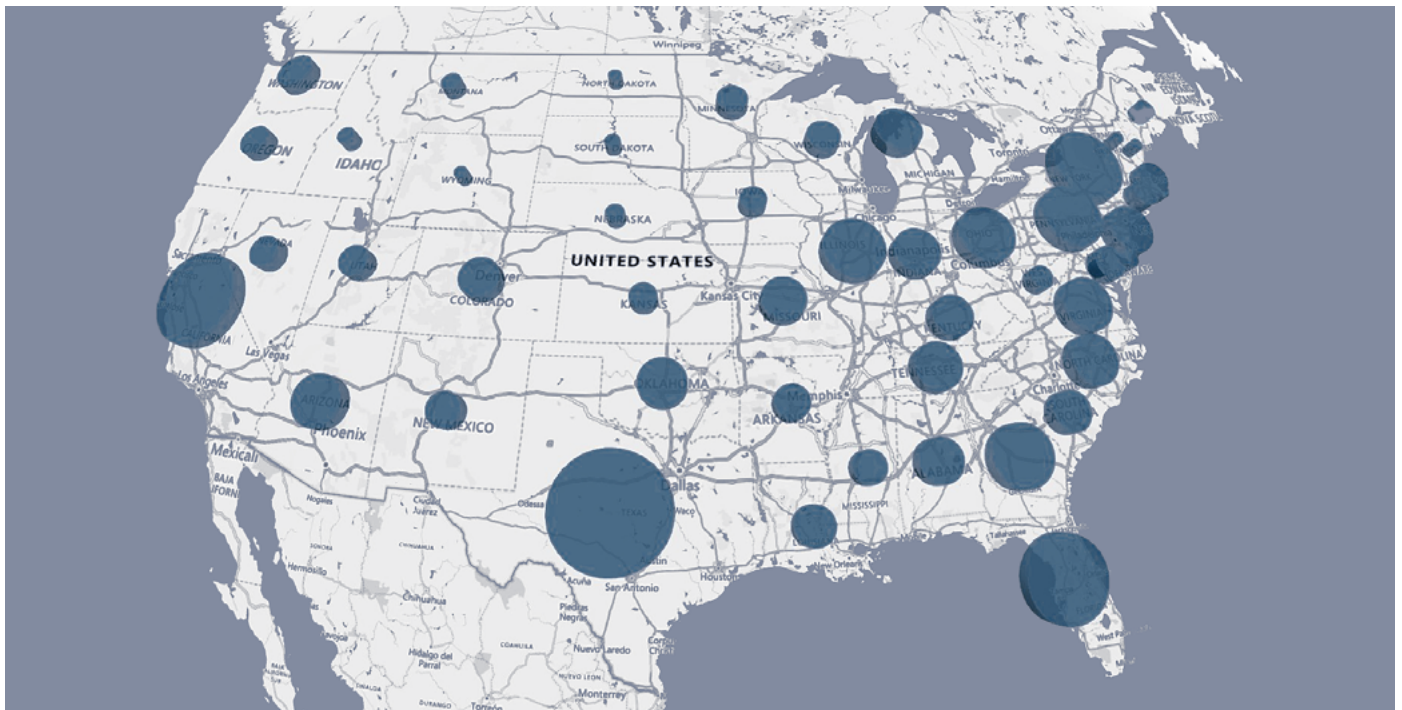
That's why Advance Education conducted a nationwide survey of both teens and parents of teens from their freshman year in high school through their first year in college. The survey was conducted June-July 2023. Read on to learn what students and their parents are looking for from institutions and the right marketing channels to reach them.

RESPONDENTS

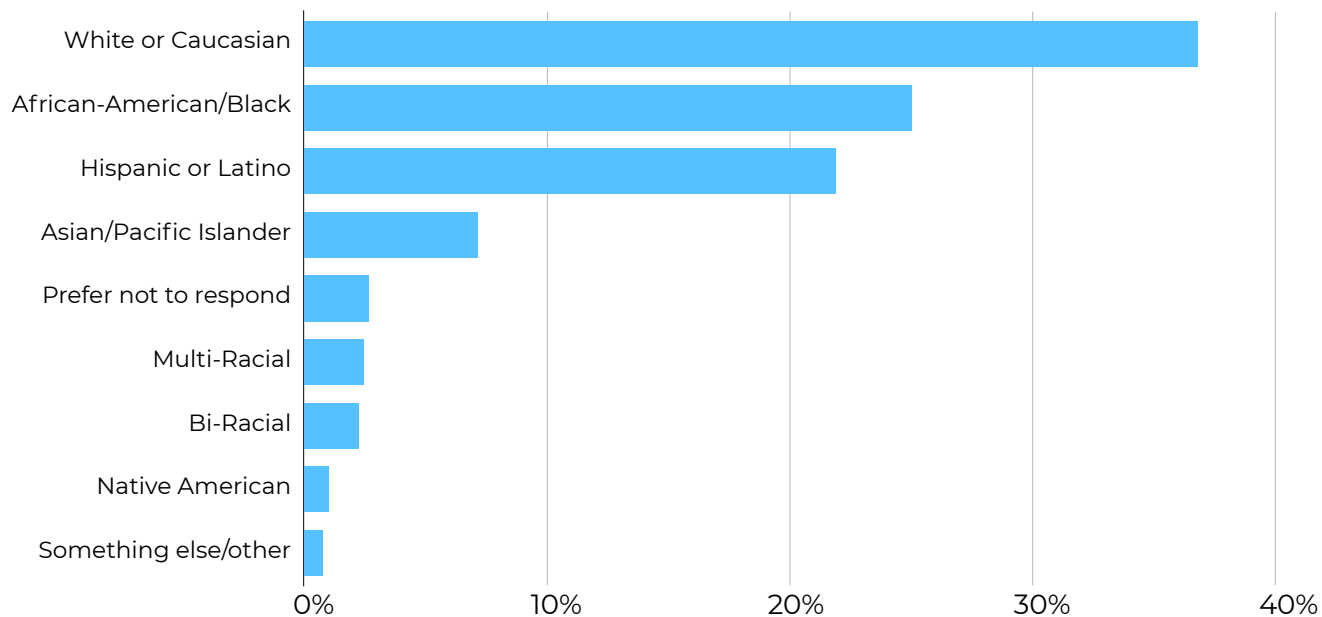
STUDENT RESPONDENTS – 1818 from 50 states and Washington DC.



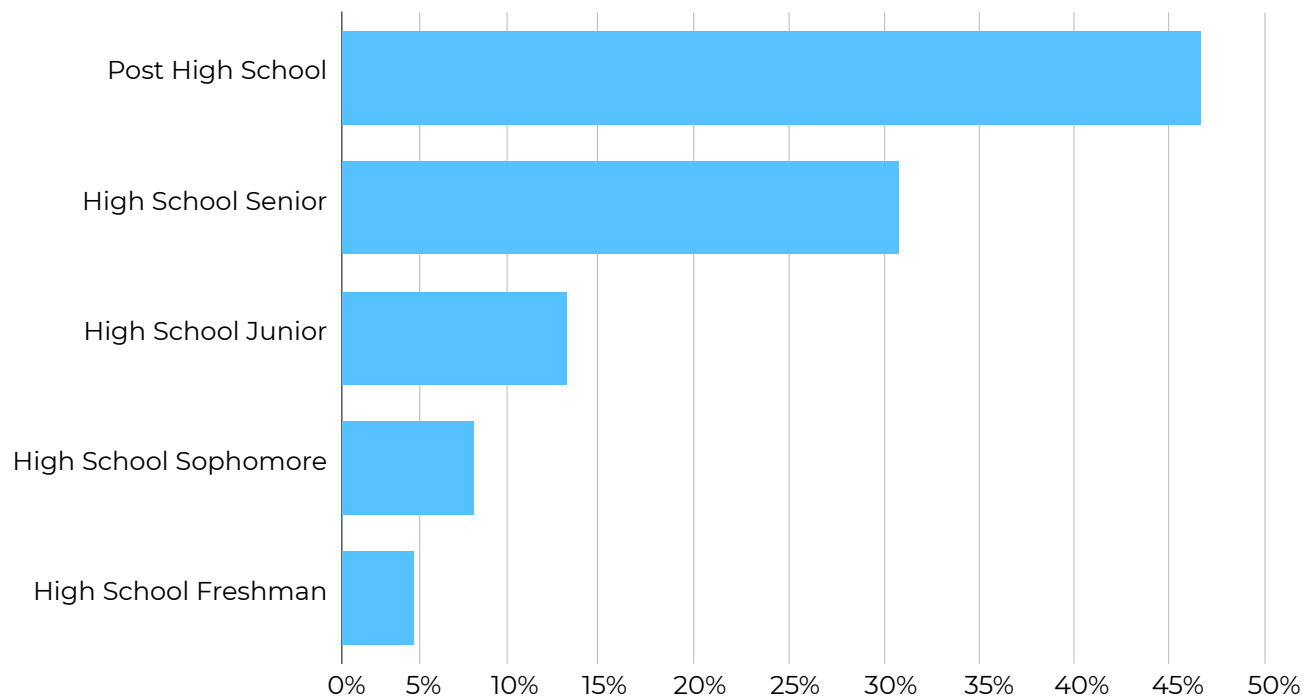
PARENT RESPONDENTS – 2051 from 50 states and Washington DC.



ETHNICITY

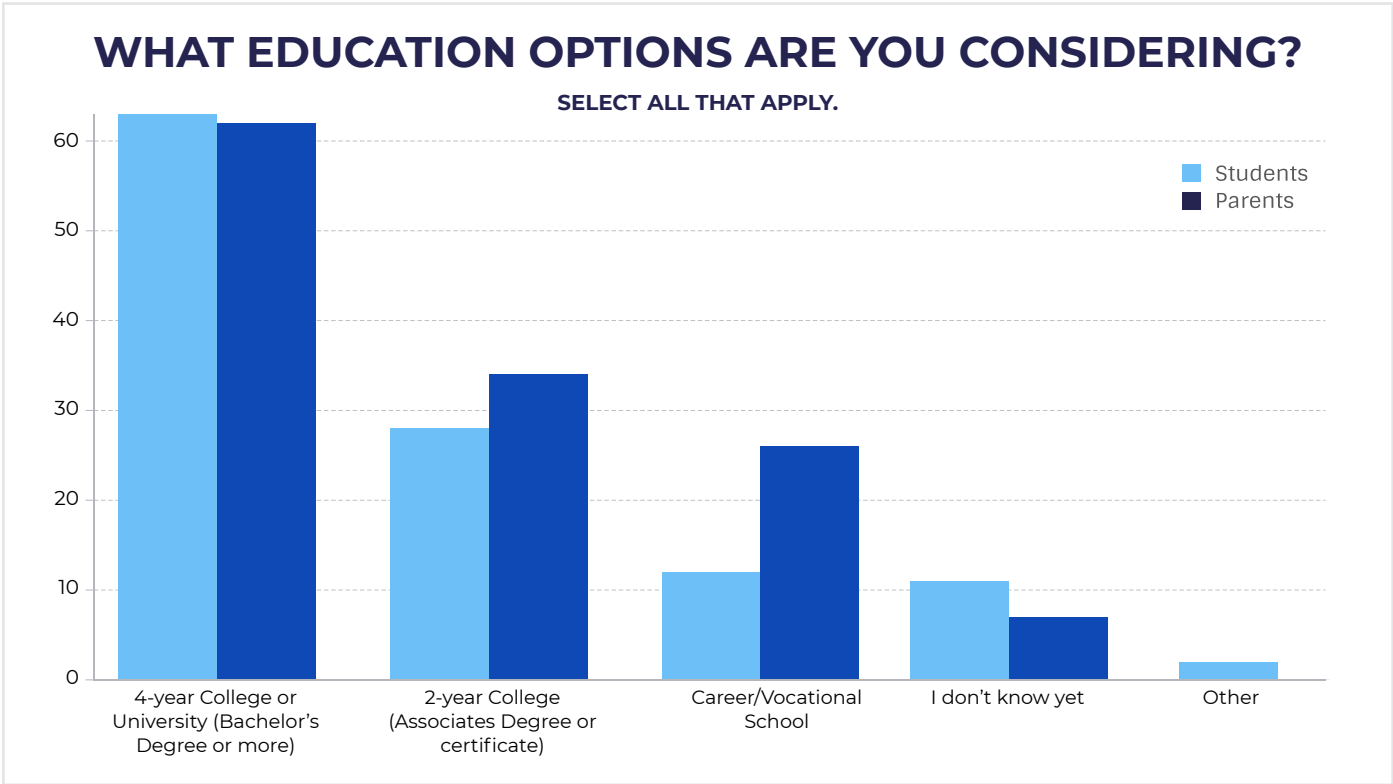


CLASS OF SPRING/SUMMER 2023



What post-secondary education options are students thinking about?

That’s the fundamental question, and what surprises most admissions and marketing departments is that both parents and students start thinking and searching for post-secondary opportunities as early as their freshman year of high school.



According to the 2022 Census, adults with a bachelor’s degree hold steady at nearly 38%. However, nearly two-thirds of parents and high school students are considering four-year degree programs. Parents appear to be more open to community college and vocational options than their students.

2X’s as many parents are investigating vocational education options than their high school kids. This is a great opportunity for community college and vocational schools to reach students by marketing to the parent.

Schools with certificate, associate, and vocational programs should take note of the variance between parent and student. Parents aren’t just influencers in the college search process. Their influence varies from highly influential to actual decision maker.

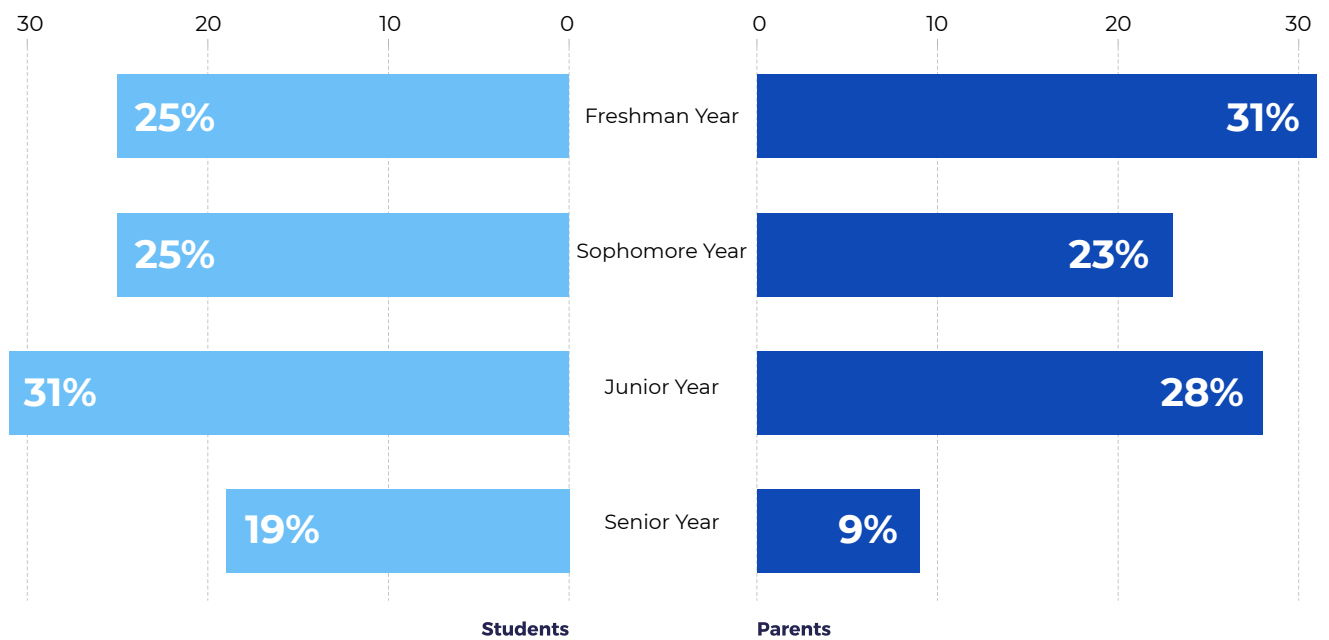
An effective marketing strategy includes direct-to-parent campaigns with ads, social media, content, search and email targeted directly at this group. Knowing what parents value in addition to students is essential to successfully recruiting new students for every education marketer.



More than 50% of Students and Parents are Searching for Options by their Sophomore Year.

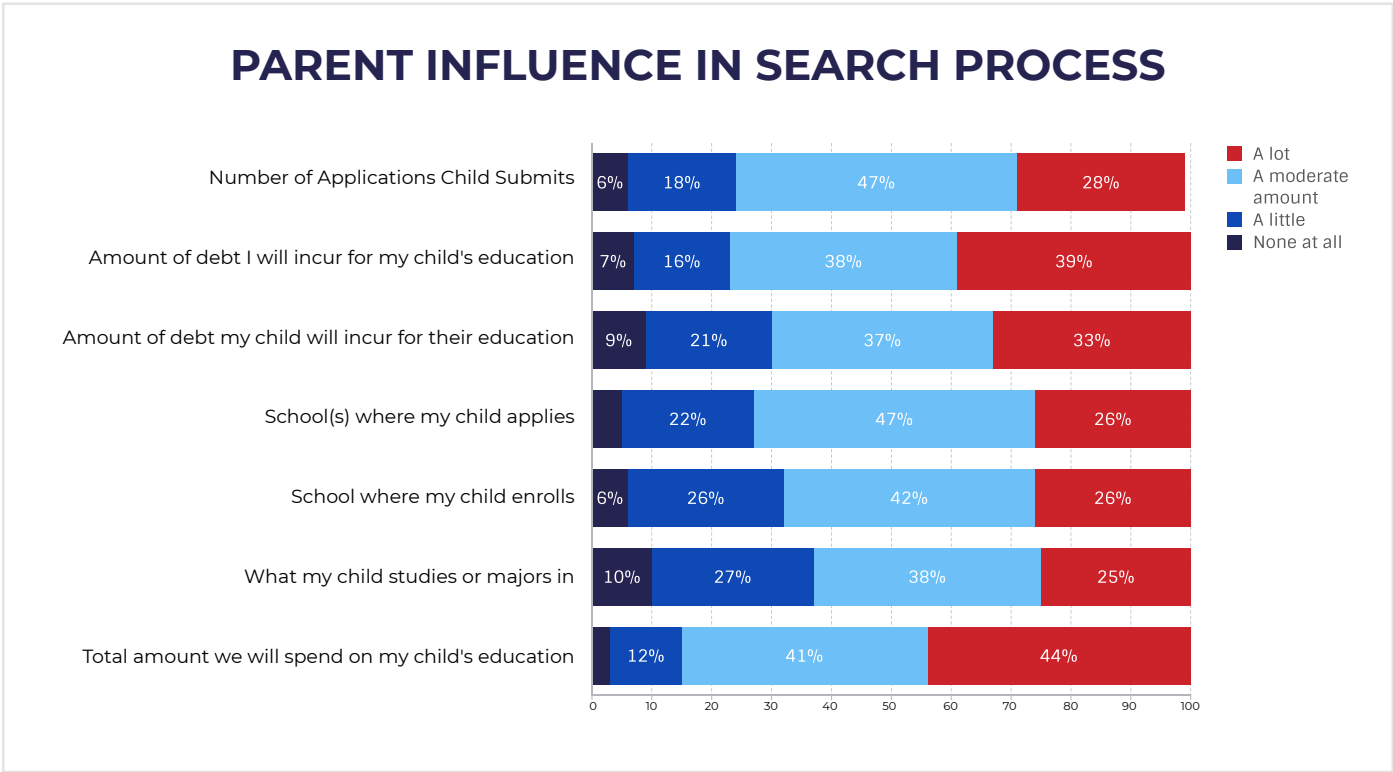
Are you marketing to them?

WHEN DID YOU BEGIN YOUR SEARCH?



Who's in the Driver's Seat? Parents' Influence Can't be Ignored.

There are a lot of influencers in a teenager's life. When it comes to the education journey, none is as important as the parent. They may not care what their parents think about their wardrobe or music, but most students will rely on the parent's perspective before they even apply to a school.



No matter what they ultimately do with their lives, students are listening to their parents' opinions about their future. The four most dominant areas of influence are:

1. **Higher Education Costs and Financing**
2. **Where to Apply**
3. **Where to Enroll**
4. **What to Major In**

The costs of post-secondary education are challenging for parents and students to consider. College will have the biggest financial impact in a student's life so far. For parents, it may be the largest purchase they make besides their home mortgage.

More than 70%
of parents influence
where students
apply and ultimately
enroll.

Colleges and vocational marketers will capture the attention of both groups if they can provide easy-to-consume resources that speak to their audience in their language. While parents have more experience with complicated financial matters, curating information they need to know about loans, scholarships and college costs could build trust and keep them on your website to learn more.

The Case for Clarity in Content Marketing for Students

Most students don't have much financial experience. They will benefit from easy-to-digest guides that visually break info down to walk them through the issues. They are hearing friends and influencers talk about the future impact of student loans, and they need help quantifying the post-secondary investment with clear and simple instructions on how to pay for it. Curating resources about work-study, scholarships, loans and cost calculators can help to demystify the college cost issue and build trust with the student.

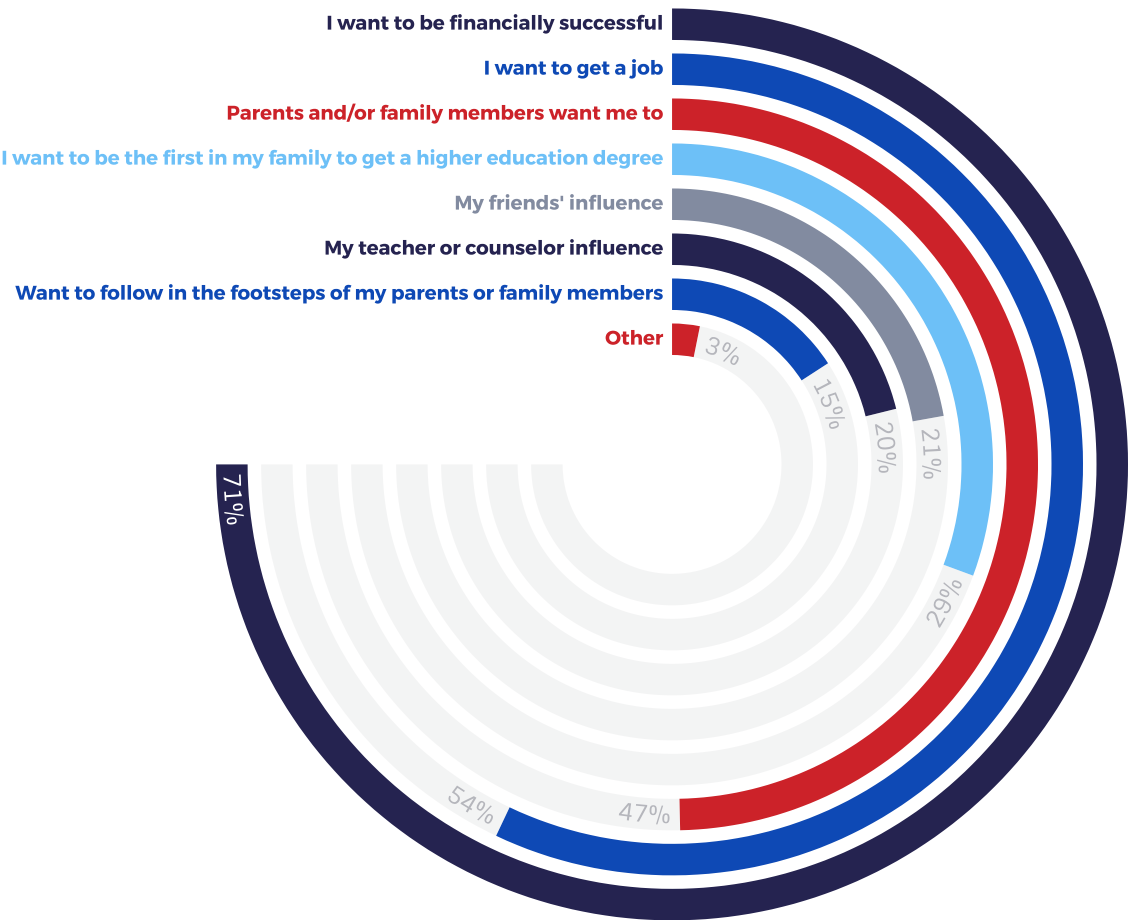




Why Students Pursue Post-Secondary Education

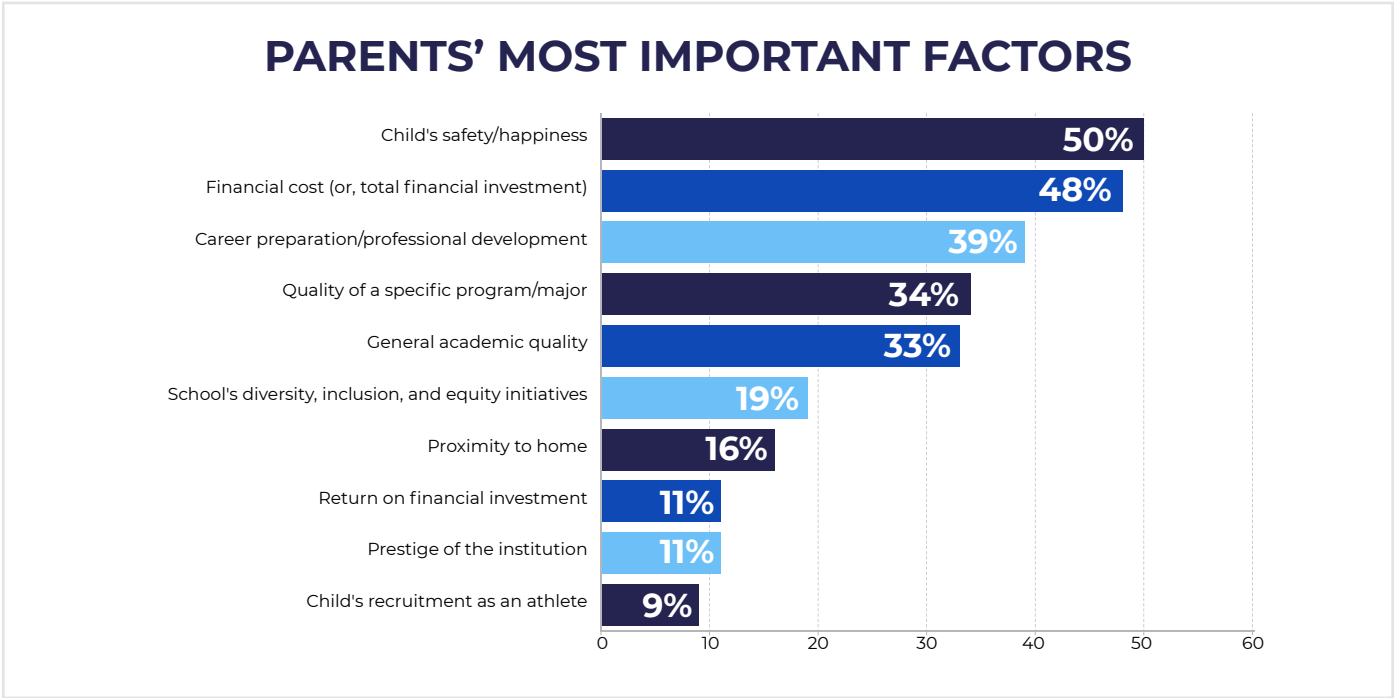
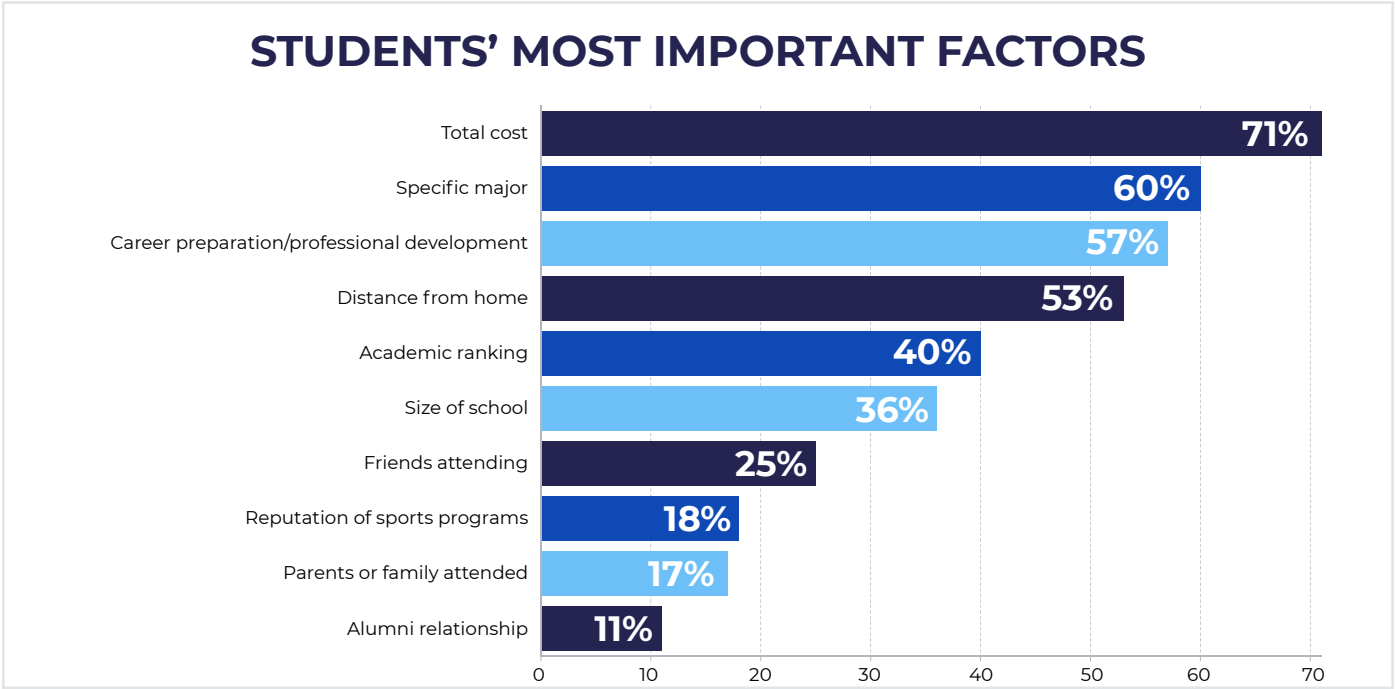
and what's most important to both them and their parents

Understanding what motivates each student's post-secondary search is key to building a marketing strategy that connects and drives action. At every stage of the student decision journey, schools of all types should remember that students' top concerns are financial security (71% of respondents) and finding employment (54% of respondents).



If schools are going to increase their enrollment numbers, they must demonstrate how they have what it takes to give students what they want and need. Campus amenities, student life and new facilities may look good in the brochures, but our survey indicates students are more concerned about getting an education that prepares them for a prosperous career and financial success.

Here are the most important factors that influence parents and students about which school is right for them.



Respondents were able to choose their most important factors from the list – top 3 for parents and top 5 for students. Concerns about cost, major and career readiness dominate the top of the list for both groups.

Digital Marketing Channels are the Most Effective for Reaching Students and Parents

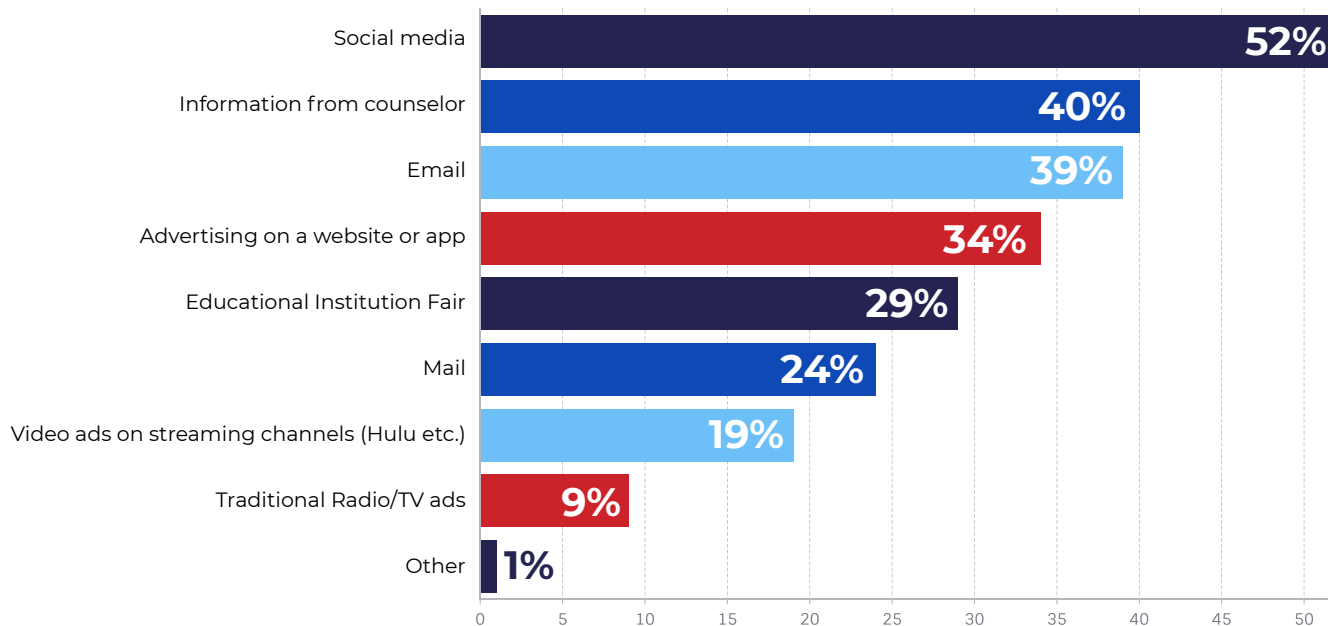
Students

It should be obvious to most higher education marketers that students live in their digital worlds. They are siloed into small communities, oblivious to messaging that doesn't speak their language or visually grab their attention. Even so, many schools spend large portions of the marketing budget on mass-media and mail that go unnoticed by students.

While digital marketing (social media, digital ads, email, digital video advertising) is most influential, students report one “old-school” information source that makes a difference in their decisions – the school counselor. Vocational, two-year and four-year institutions would do well to market both online and in person to this highly valuable influencer segment.



MOST EFFECTIVE STUDENT MARKETING CHANNELS

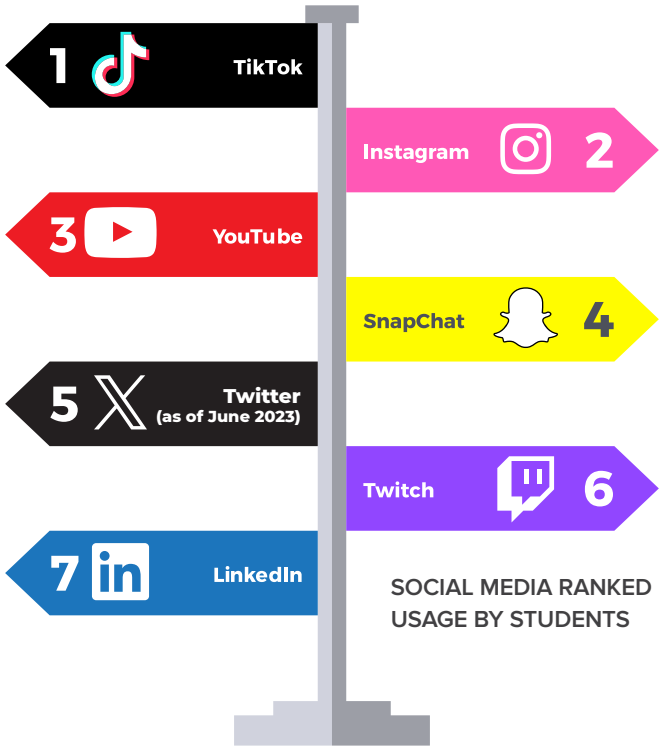


Student Social Media Channels

Obviously, students live on social media. They get their news, sports and everything in between there. Until they are well into the college search process, some don't have email accounts. If they do, they may never check them until prompted by parents or teachers. Most education marketers realize today's students live in this world, but few create content specifically tailored to each channel.

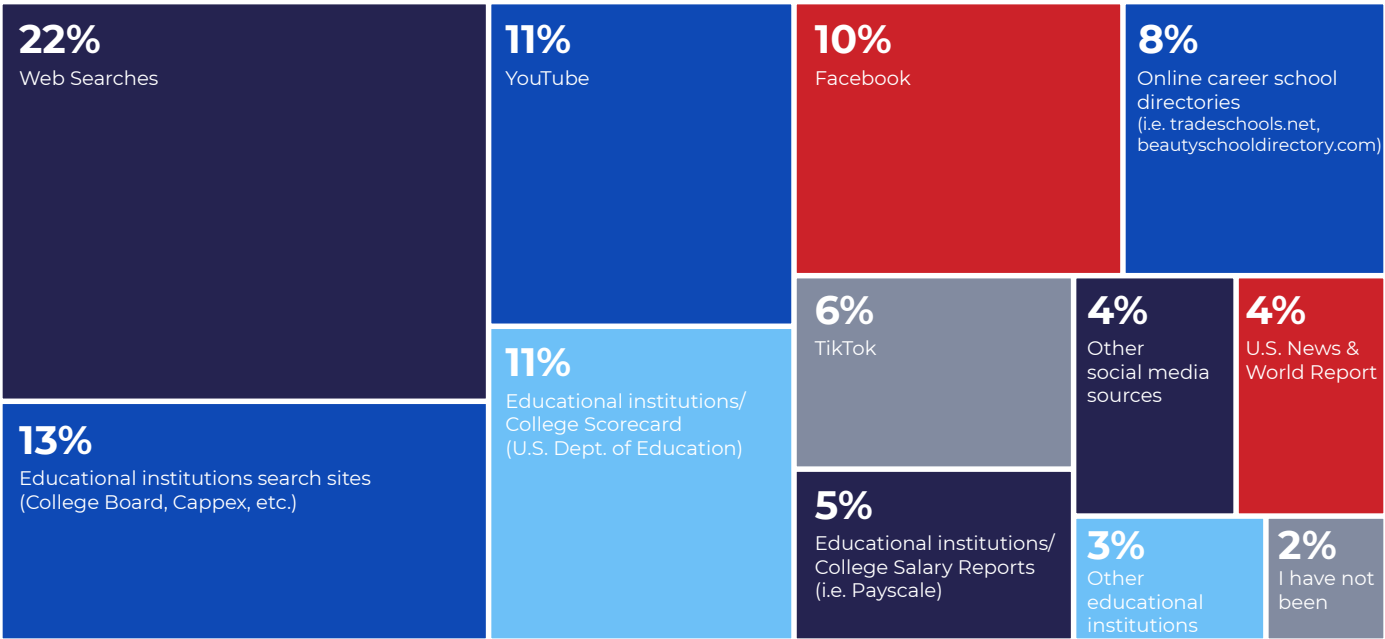
Parents

We polled parents about the online digital sources they use in their higher education search process beyond an institution's own website. Social media channels Facebook, YouTube and TikTok combined account for the most consumption. Searching the web and utilizing both paid and organic search engine results pages ranks just behind at 22%.



MOST EFFECTIVE PARENT DIGITAL SOURCES

BEYOND A SCHOOL'S OWN WEBSITE

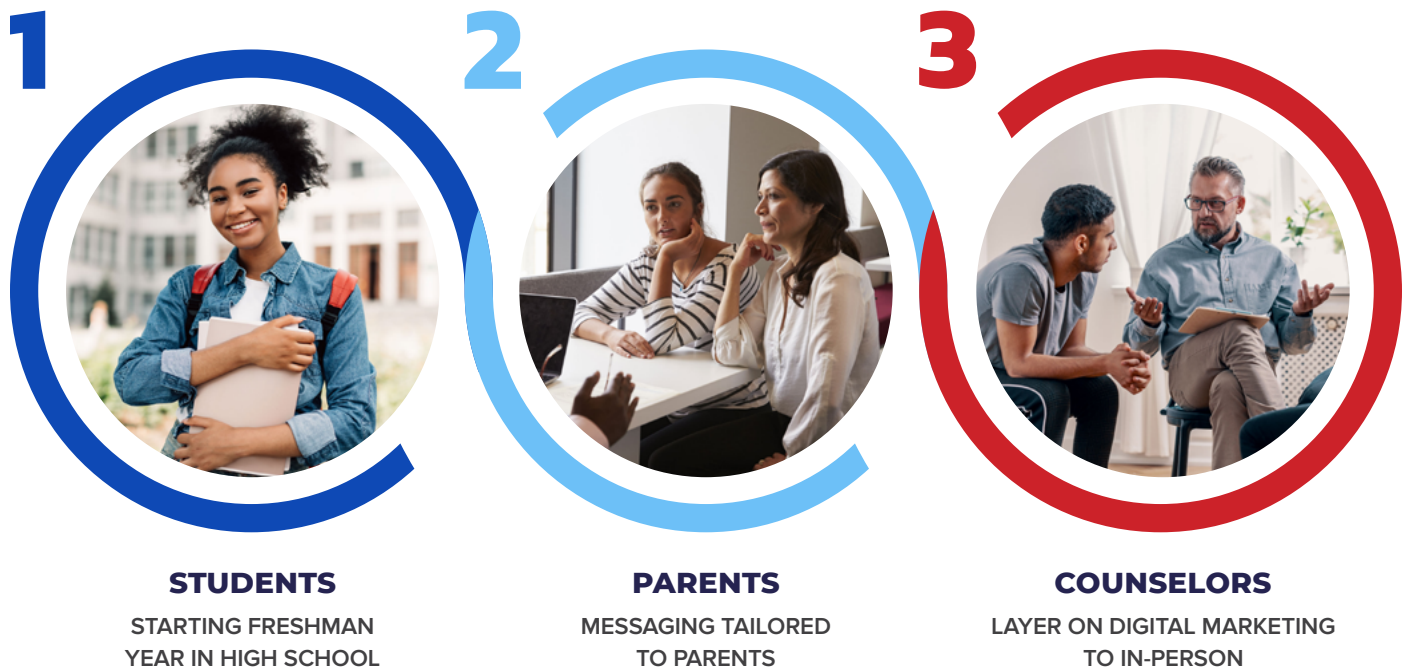




The Student and Parent Search Journey

Searching for “what’s next” after high school is a journey that every high school student begins. More than 50% of them start that journey in their freshman or sophomore years. Over 80% are actively on that path by their junior year. Even though 63% of the US population doesn’t have a four-year degree, vocational and community colleges have seen multi-year enrollment declines and aren’t capturing their share of high-school graduates.

The secret to survival and success for all post-secondary institutions is two-fold. First, market directly to the right groups.



Second, ensure you are speaking to each group in a way that relates to them. Provide content, guides and experiences tailored and segmented to their needs directly. Students and parents speak a different language even though they might need the same basic information.

We're Enrollment Marketing Experts

and we're here to help

Advance Education is a digital marketing agency specializing in enrollment marketing for higher education, community colleges, and vocational schools. With partnerships with traditional four-year universities, community colleges, and technical and career schools, we help institutions level up marketing strategies for student recruitment, as well as alumni outreach.

- 1 Market intelligence and student assessments help us build the perfect targets for your enrollment goals.
- 2 Creative that connects, intrigues and inspires fuels the science of marketing strategy.
- 3 Never-satisfied, results-oriented optimization is what keeps our campaigns on top, delivering continuous ROI aligned with your goals.

“

I have learned a lot from you and your team in the short time we have worked together. **You have changed the way we do business.** Thanks for all that you have done for this campus.



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