



2022 PARENT SURVEY

How to reach parents in 2022: **College Marketing Insights**

ADVANCE EDUCATION WHITEPAPER

Abstract

The landscape for higher education marketing is changing rapidly, as enrollments drop and attitudes towards college are shifting.[i] While we are in the middle of a period of transformation, we need to re-examine our efforts to reach prospective students and their parents with effective messaging. In addition, evolving trends in the communications preferences of both parents and prospective students require us to manage marketing channels differently to capture the interest of our target prospects where they are most receptive to information on higher education.

Advance Education surveyed parents of high school students in June 2022 to inform college marketers on how to reach parents today. This follows up on our January 2022 survey of high school students. The results show some similarities and differences in parental preferences, giving enrollment professionals more insight into how to reach these critical decision-makers to attract new students to their institutions.



Where do you most notice college advertising and posts?

Which factors would influence you to schedule an in-person college visit?

How much influence do you have over your child's college selection process?

Who's paying for tuition when the time comes?

How far from home are you comfortable with your student going for college?

What kind of institution do you prefer for your student to begin their higher education?

Which learning experience do you prefer for your student?

When researching info about colleges, where do you (or did you) start?

What factors are most important to you when making a college decision?



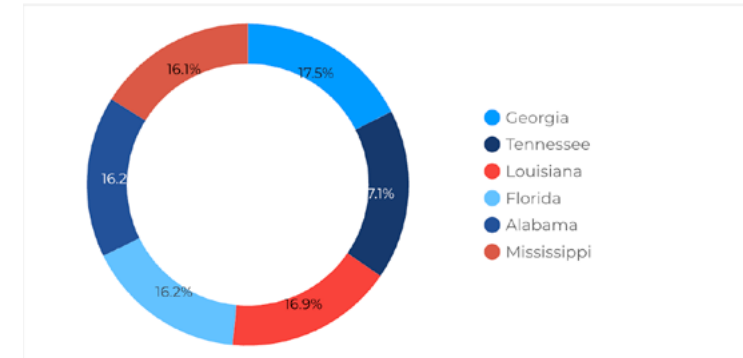
OUR PARTICIPANTS

Parents of High School Students in the Southeast

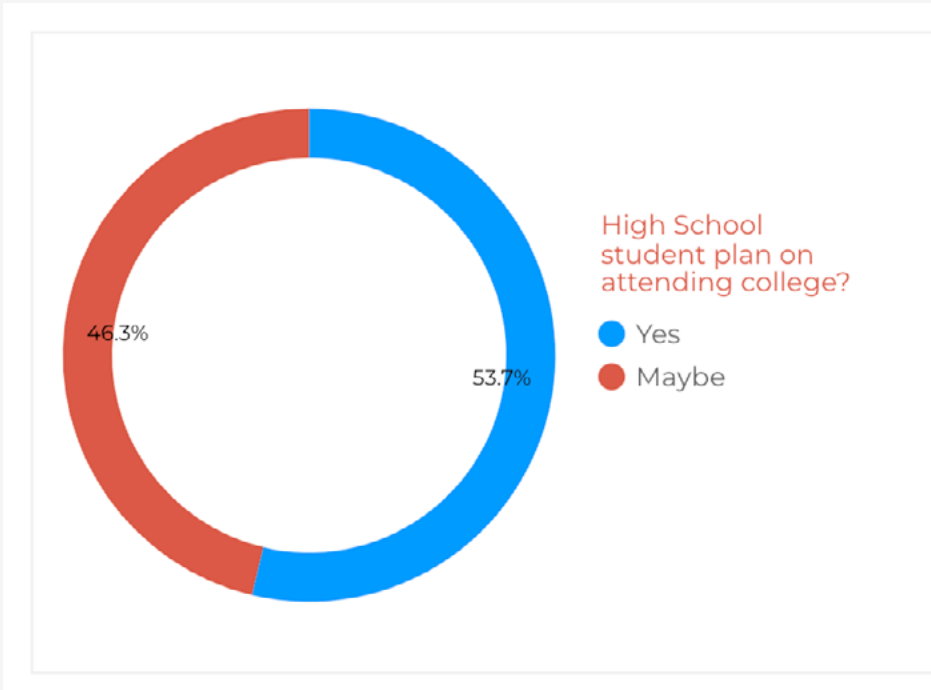
Our June 2022 survey of parents of high school students elicited responses from 1422 parents of teens in all high school grades. The survey respondents were from Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee.

Two-thirds of the parents were in the age group of 30-44, 26% were between 45 to 54, and less than 7% were 55-64. Their children range in age from 13-18+, with 77% planning on going to college. The information we can gather from the answers given by this set of parents can help us understand how best to reach parents of college-aspirant children in the Southeast region.

Parents 1,000	Counties 290	Zip Codes 685
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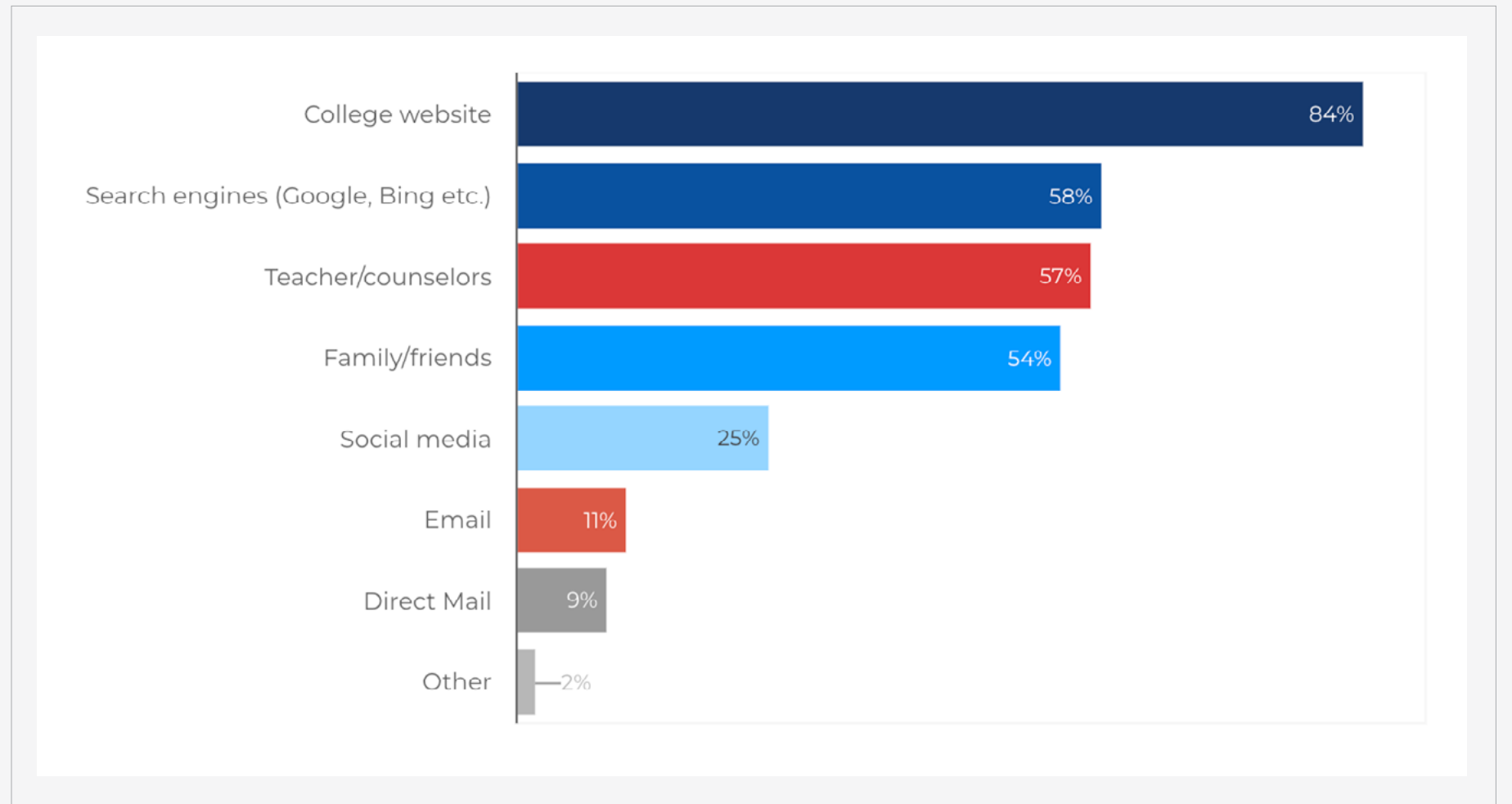
State	Parents	Parents
1. Georgia	175	17.5%
2. Tennessee	171	17.1%
3. Louisiana	169	16.9%
4. Florida	162	16.2%
5. Alabama	162	16.2%
6. Mississippi	161	16.1%
Grand total	1,000	100%



Where Do Parents Start When Researching Colleges and Universities?

The overwhelmingly popular place to begin college research is on the **college's website**. Eighty-four percent of parents selected "college website," which closely tracks the results from our January poll of students themselves.

The following two most popular choices were **"search engines"** and **"teachers/counselors,"** with 58% and 57% respectively choosing these options. These two answers were also runners-up in the student survey, though "search engines" were a closer second in the student survey at 75%. For parents, a very close fourth place is **"family/friends"** at 54%, which also tracks student results.



MARKETING INSIGHT

This result, correlating closely with marketing insights for teens, further emphasizes the importance of the highest quality website, filled with excellent content. In addition, SEO and SEM are crucial for website discovery through search engines and advertisements.

Where Do Parents Notice College Advertising?

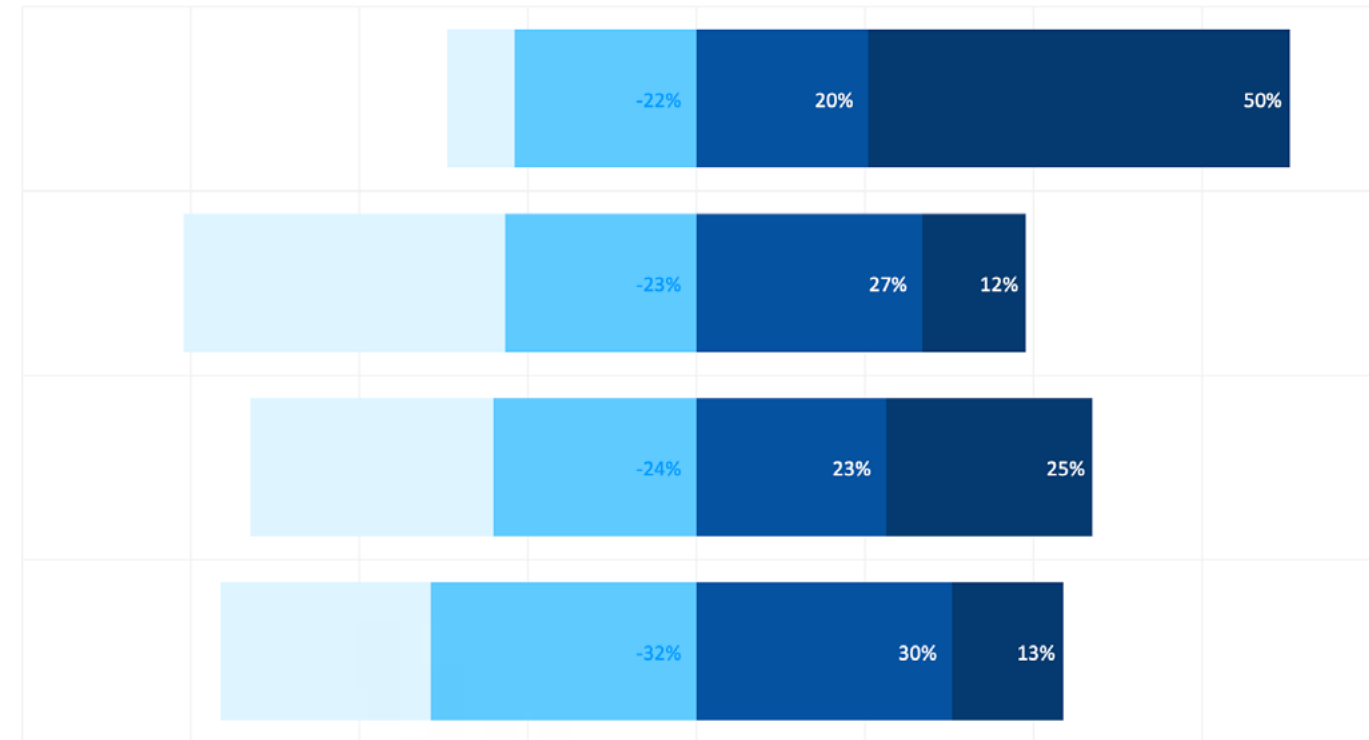
We asked parents to rank where they most noticed college advertising, and **half the respondents chose social media as their first choice.** While direct mail received the subsequent most first-place responses from a quarter of respondents, more than a quarter ranked it as their last choice. Email, while the first choice for only 13% of parents, was the 2nd or 3rd choice for two-thirds of parents. Coming in dead last is streaming TV, with only 12% ranking it number one and almost 40% rating it least noticed.

Student responses to a similar question yielded different results, with the top spot occupied by email, with about a third of respondents choosing it. Social media was not far behind, with 30% of students saying they most notice schools there.



MARKETING INSIGHT

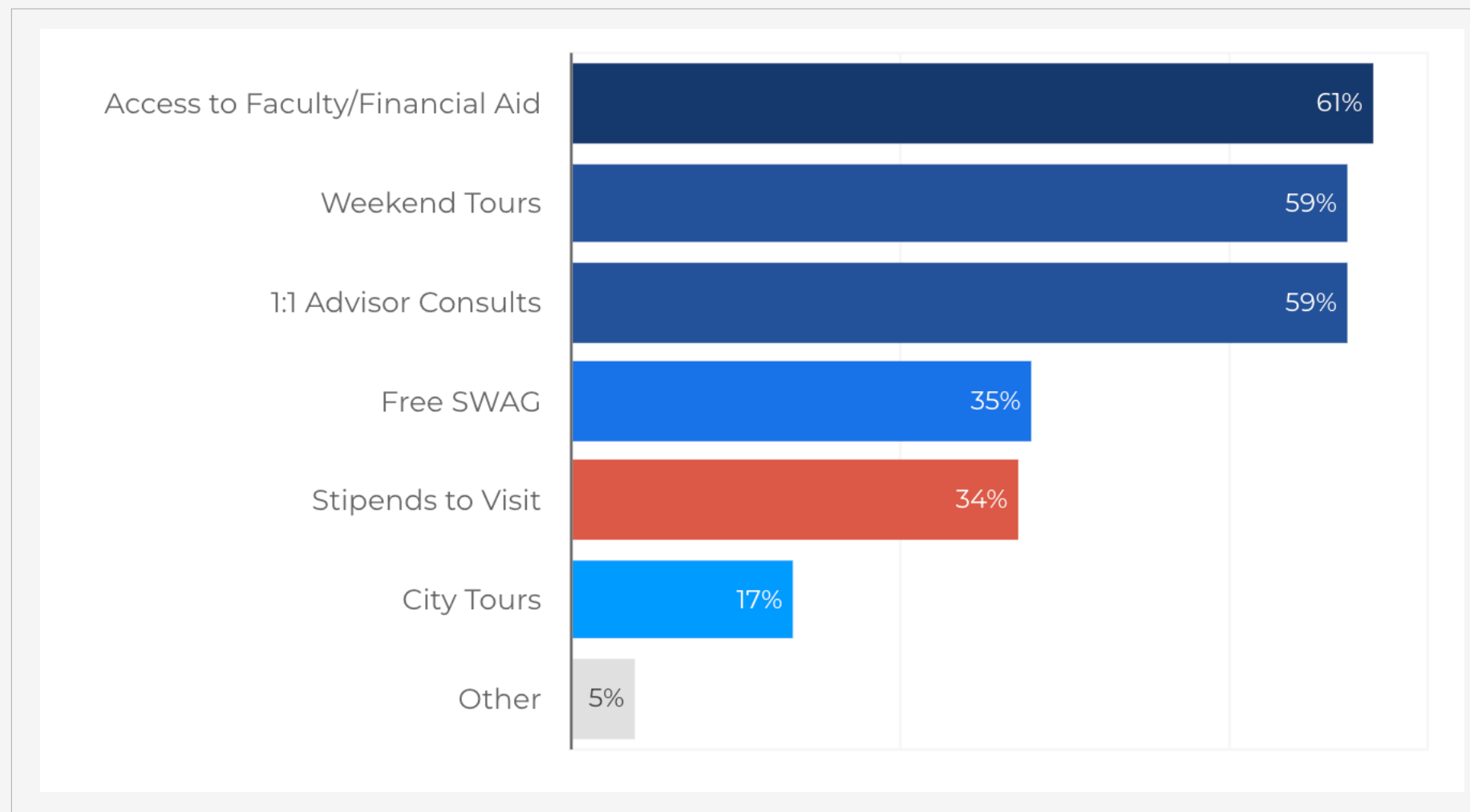
Social media should be the primary placement for ads targeting parents, with attention to emails aimed at parents as well. Because students also ranked social media and email in their top two slots, emails and social media ads targeting students should be part of the strategy but will likely carry different messaging. Direct mail is rapidly losing its hold as a cost-effective strategy to reach parents or students, but it is not dead yet. Streaming TV advertising may not have hit its stride just yet, and this channel may rise in importance in the future.



Rank / % Total				
Platform	1	2	3	4
Direct Mail	25%	23%	24%	29%
Streaming TV	12%	27%	23%	38%
Email	13%	30%	32%	25%
Social Media	50%	20%	22%	8%

What Influences Parents to Schedule a College Visit?

Parent respondents could pick more than one answer to this question, with **61% choosing "access to faculty and financial aid."** Recruiters can easily act on the following popular factors: "weekend tours" and "1:1 Advisor Consults." "Free swag" and "stipends to visit" were also selected frequently, with about a third of respondents choosing these as factors that could influence them.

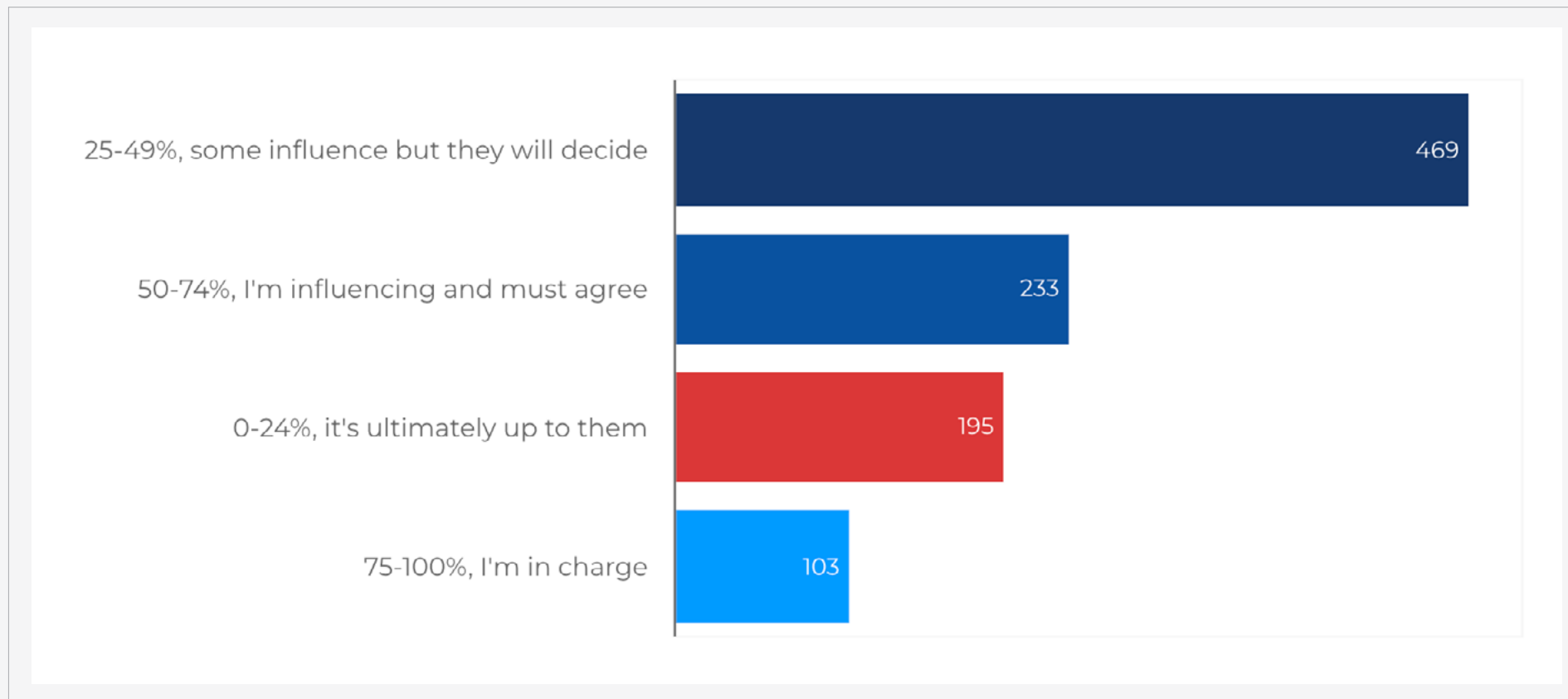


MARKETING INSIGHT

Admissions departments need to schedule more weekend tours, make financial aid advisor consultations readily available to prospects, and work to create more opportunities to expose visitors to faculty through events and open houses. Investing in good swag and, if possible, stipends to visit can also benefit admissions efforts.

How Much Influence Do Parents Have Over College Selection?

Almost half of parents feel they influence college choice, yet the student will make the final decision. About 23% of survey respondents felt they have an influence and must ultimately agree to the college choice. However, almost 20% of parents said that it is ultimately up to the student, and just 10% said they are in charge of the college selection process for their children.

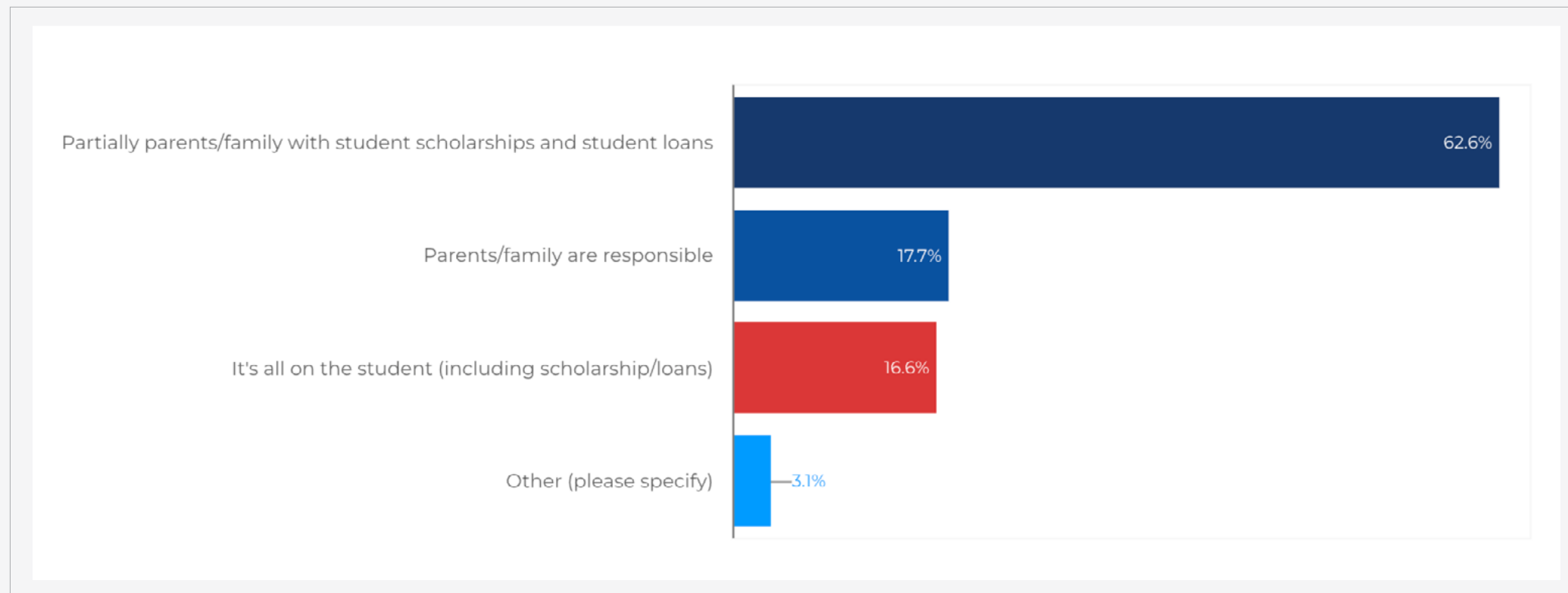


MARKETING INSIGHT

Because 80% of parents will have between some and total influence over the selection of a college, it is crucial for college marketers to reach this audience with appropriate content. If you add together parents who must agree to the school choice with those in charge of the process, a third of parents have significant power over the selection. If you don't convince the parents of the value of your institution, you stand to lose enrollments.

Who's Paying for College?

Sixty-two percent of parents responded that the **parents would partially cover college costs**, along with student scholarships and loans. About 17% of parents said the student is responsible, and another 17% said the parents and family are responsible for paying for college.



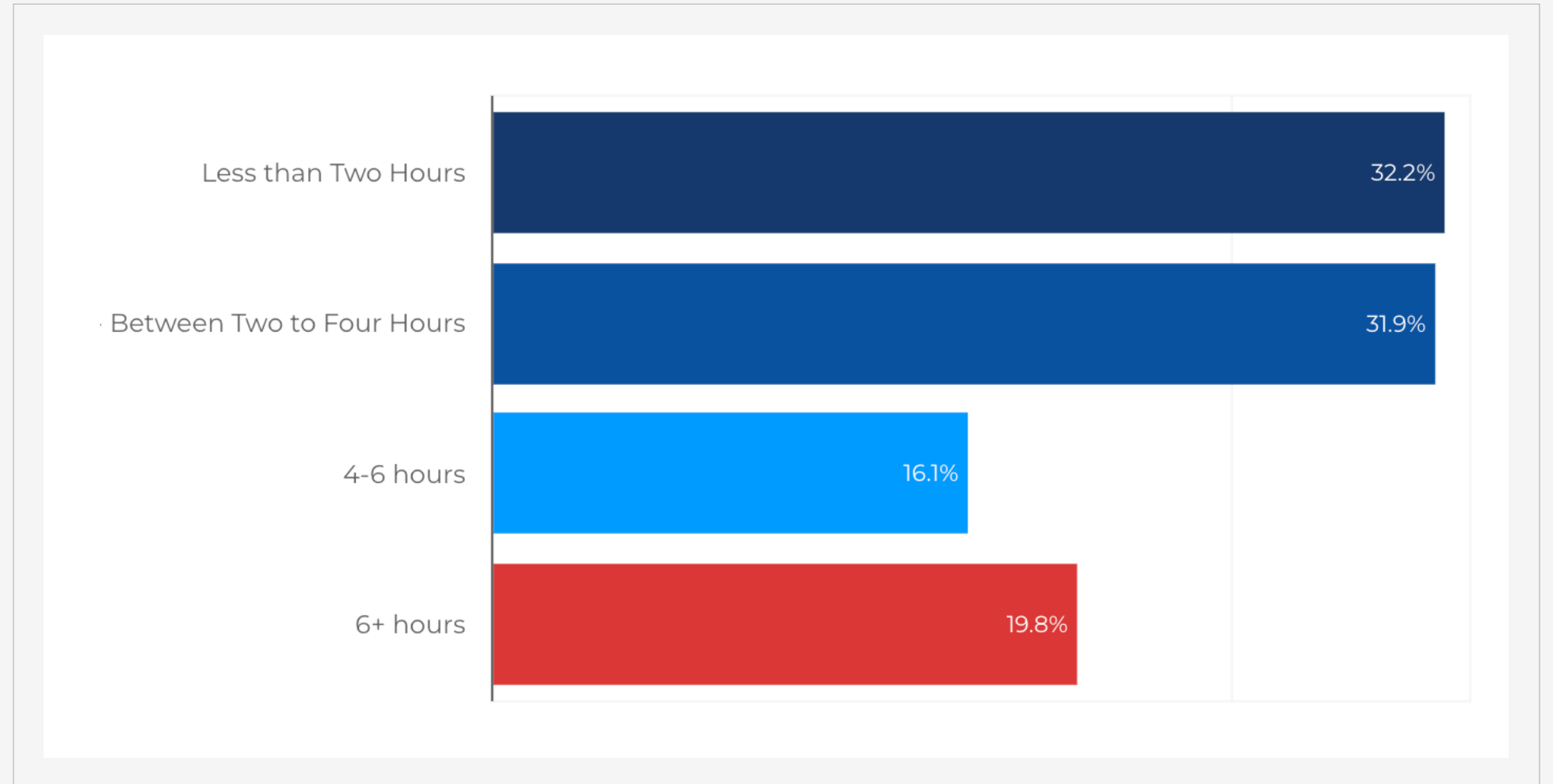
MARKETING INSIGHT

Financial aid in the form of scholarships plus student loans remains vital to parents and students, with the concern about affordability continuing. Ensure that your financial aid process and information are clearly and prominently featured on your website, and attend to parent concerns throughout your messaging and interactions.

How Far from Home Do Parents Want Their Kids to Go for Higher Education?

About a third of parents will feel comfortable with their kids in **a school under two hours away, and another third are fine with their student being 2-4 hours away.** However, less than 20% would be comfortable with their student over six hours away.

One study of college distance from student's home revealed that 72% of students attend college in their own state, and 86% are enrolled in a college in their region.[ii] It also revealed that students with lower SAT scores or lower family incomes tend to enroll in schools closer to home than their peers with higher scores or incomes. The pandemic may have shifted the trends towards keeping students closer to home, with uncertainties about travel top-of-mind for the past couple of years.

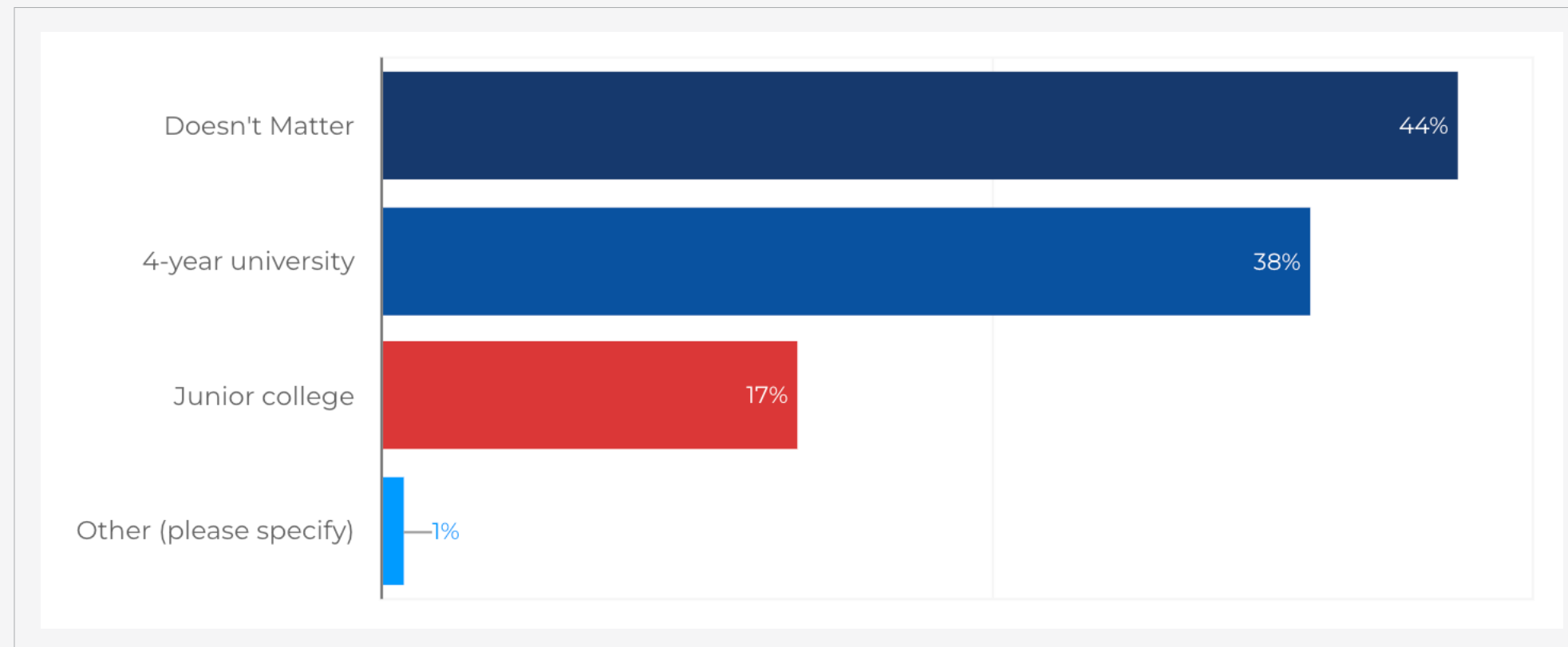


MARKETING INSIGHT

Geography matters. Especially when trying to attract low-income or first-time college students, marketers should focus much of their attention on nearby areas. Depending on your school location, advertisements and outreach targeted to areas within four hours of your institution should be a priority.

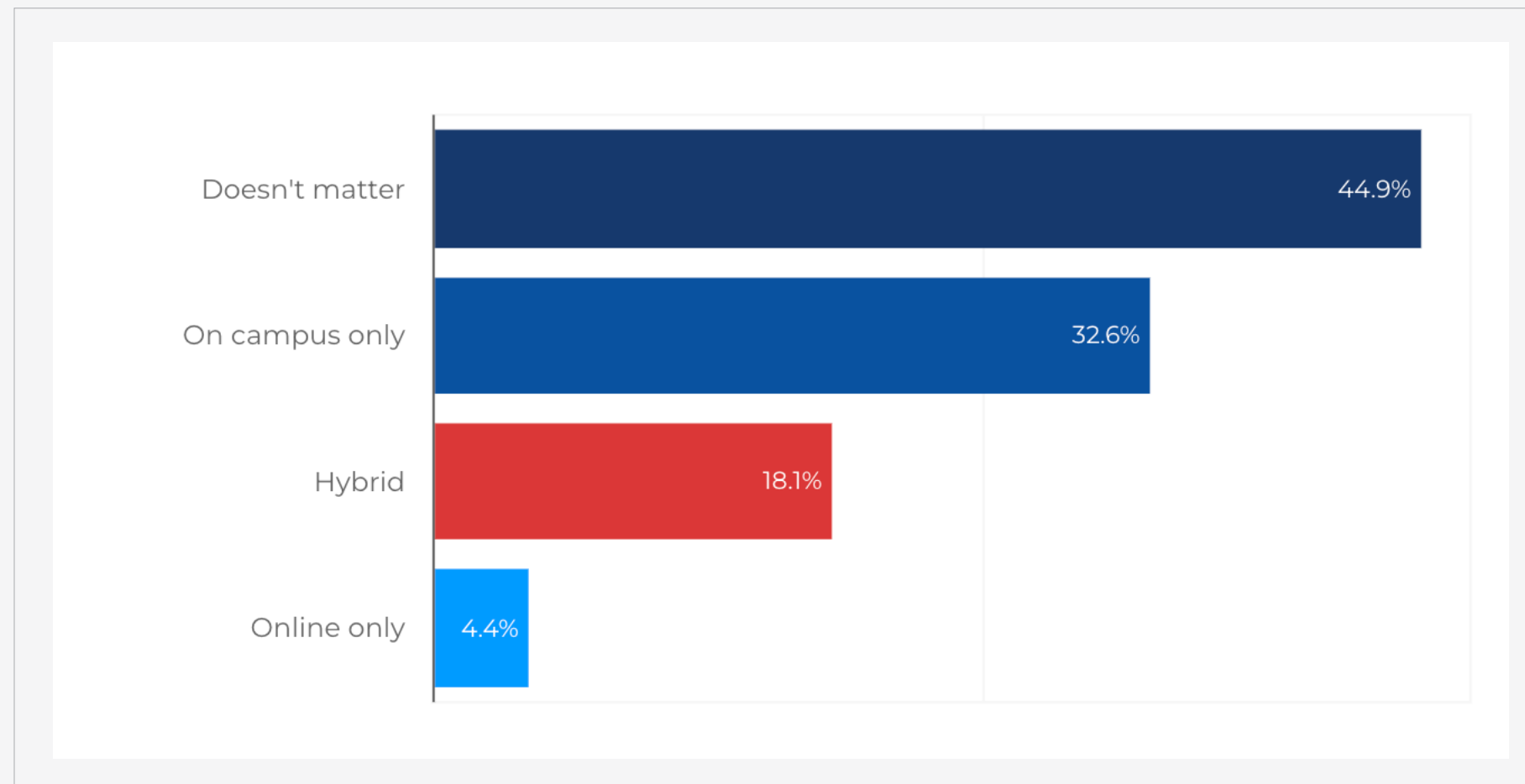
What Kind of School Do Parents Prefer?

While more parents are flexible about whether their student attends a 2-year or 4-year institution, those who state a preference **prefer a 4-year college**. However, perceptions of college options will change throughout the research phase of college selection. For instance, if your community college offers strong programs that allow students to easily transfer to 4-year colleges later, parents who are cost-conscious and want to be closer to their students to provide support may be swayed by your advertising.



Do Parents Want In-Person or Online Higher Education for Their Children?

Forty-five percent of parents say it doesn't matter whether a school is online, on-campus, or hybrid. Yet a third of parents prefer an in-person experience for their students. Online only was the least popular option for parents of high school students; therefore, this group may be less of a target for online program marketing.

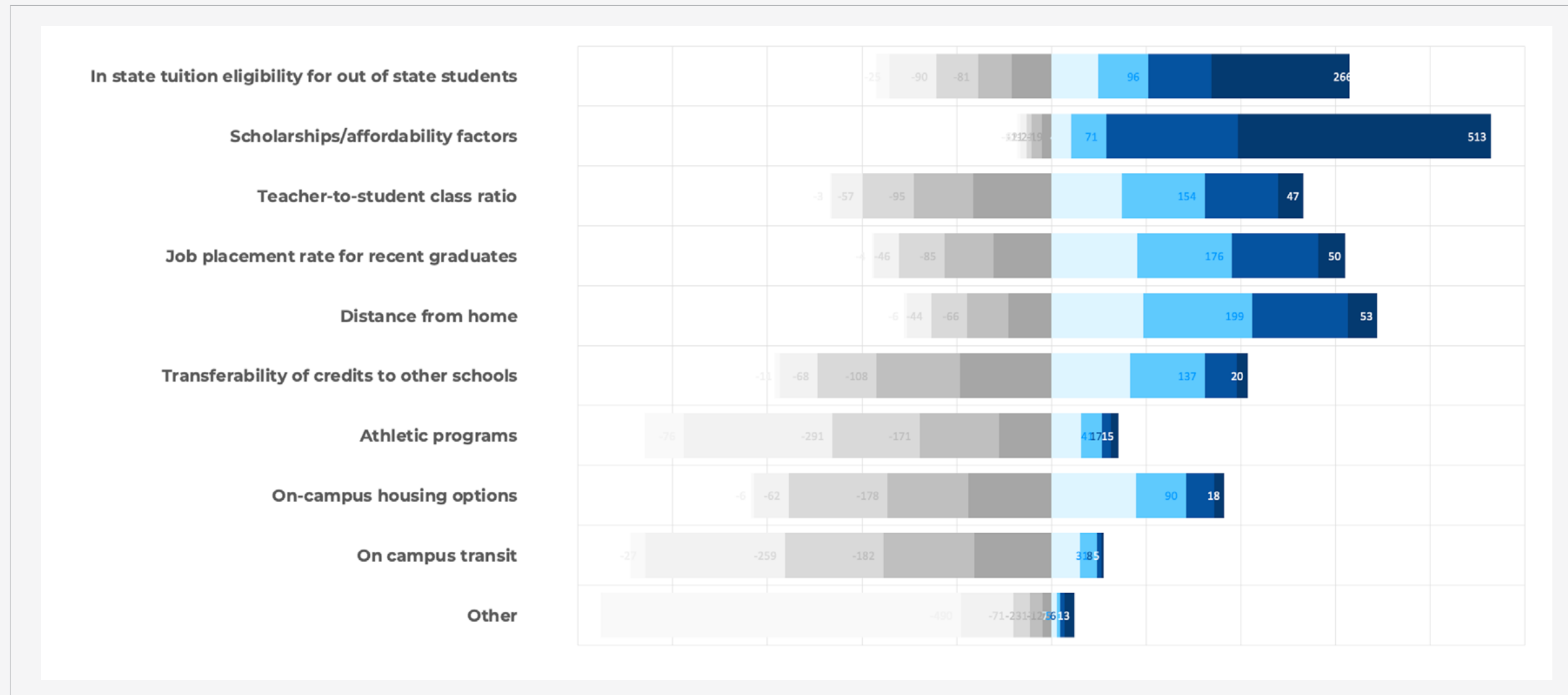


MARKETING INSIGHT

While more parents are flexible on format, a large segment values in-person college much more for their high school students. Hybrid elements have their place, but parents have seen mixed results from the online education necessary during the pandemic. They don't want their teens to be limited to online college study.

What Are the Most Important Factors When Making College Decisions?

Affordability is the most critical factor for half of the parents surveyed, with another quarter ranking it as the 2nd most crucial issue in college decisions. This tracks with student responses in January that cost carries significant weight in their choice. A distant second place factor is the availability of in-state tuition for out-of-state students, reinforcing concerns about cost.



Teacher-to-student ratio, graduate job placement rates, and distance from home all had some influence, with many parents ranking these in the number two through five slots. As an older study found, even though students and parents don't state that distance from home is very important in their choice of school, the statistics reflect that distance is a significant factor for a majority of students.[iii] Credit transferability, athletic programs, on-campus housing, and on-campus transit were all seen as less weighty in the decision.

Recent research from the National Center for Education Statistics found that students are more likely to attend college if they believe their family can afford to pay for it.[iv] Since parents will communicate their views about affordability to their children, ensuring that parents understand the actual cost of college—rather than just the “sticker price”—is essential.



MARKETING INSIGHT

Continuing concerns about affordability, financial aid, scholarships, and payment options are top-of-mind for parents. While schools may approach this issue from different angles, the issue of cost should influence many parts of your recruitment strategy.

Question	Scale / Responses									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
In state tuition eligibility for out of state students	266	122	96	90	89	76	65	81	90	25
Scholarships/affordability factors	513	268	71	40	39	19	21	11	12	6
Teacher-to-student class ratio	47	136	154	130	123	145	110	95	57	3
Job placement rate for recent graduates	50	160	176	159	122	107	91	85	46	4
Distance from home	53	174	199	167	138	78	75	66	44	6
Transferability of credits to other schools	20	58	137	144	134	167	153	108	68	11
Athletic programs	15	17	41	58	73	103	155	171	291	76
On-campus housing options	18	51	90	152	148	150	145	178	62	6
On campus transit	5	8	31	53	124	143	168	182	259	27
Other	13	6	5	7	10	12	17	23	71	490

Reaching Parents vs. High School Students

Parents clearly need outreach and nurturing by admissions departments because of their strong influence over enrollment decisions for their children. Although many of the concerns parents state are similar to what students report, the channels for marketing vary, as do the messages that advertisements, emails, and other communications should contain.

Works Cited

[i] Saul, Stephanie. "College Enrollment Drops, Even as Pandemic's Effects Ebb," The New York Times, May 26, 2022.

[ii] Mattern, Krista, and Wyatt, Jeffrey. "Student Choice of College: How Far Do Students Go for an Education," Journal of College Admission, Spring 2009

[iii] Ibid.

[iv] National Center for Education Statistics. "Students Are More Likely to Attend College if They Believe Family Can Afford to Pay," January 12, 2022

[JTR1]I recommend we omit this question. Admissions departments have no choice in which type of school they market, so I don't think it will be as useful to them.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Parents have a formidable influence** on college choice for college-bound high school students. Less than 20% leave the choice to students alone.
- **Social media advertising and email** are the most likely places to get parents' attention.
- **Cost is top-of-mind**, so consider how you communicate price and scholarship information carefully as part of your overall marketing strategy.
- **80% prefer a school less than 6 hours away** from home for their kids, two-thirds prefer less than 4 hours, and one-third would like their students to be less than 2 hours away. Market your school heavily in the region surrounding your location.
- **SEO/SEM is crucial** for parents researching colleges. Your website needs optimization so that your institution comes up in search not just for your school's name but for relevant terms related to the programs you offer.
- **Your website is central** to all your marketing, as it is the first place parents *and* students look when they begin to think about college. Devote attention and resources to making sure it represents your institution well.



Let's grow your student enrollment, **together.**

We believe any effective marketing campaign begins with thoughtful and powerful storytelling. Our first goal as a marketing partner is to understand your story and what makes you special.

Once we understand who you are, we can build a strategic marketing plan to tell your story in the best way on the best platforms to reach your ideal audience. Compelling stories paired with a strategic plan drive great results, and we have a track record of doing just that.

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.

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Thank You.

