



2024 High School Students' Perceptions of College Financing

Understand the expectations, experiences, and challenges prospective college students have with the financial aid process and paying for college

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Introduction

The rising cost of higher education has brought the value of a college degree under increasing scrutiny. As families and prospective students weigh the substantial financial burden, more are asking: *Is the investment worth it?*

Our research reveals several key trends shaping the decision-making process of today's college-bound students. A staggering 89 percent of 12th graders reported interest in colleges first identified during their final year of high school, highlighting the importance of timely recruitment strategies. Financial considerations dominate the search process, with 70 percent of students citing the potential for Loan Repayment Assistance Programs (LRAPs) as an influential factor in their decision.

These findings underscore the critical need for proactive, personalized financial aid counseling. With 63 percent of 11th graders naming aid as the top factor in their search, colleges must communicate available options, eligibility criteria, and key deadlines. Despite the challenges posed by cost concerns and complex financing options, opportunities exist for institutions to differentiate themselves. This report details these trends, providing staff in admissions and financial aid with practical takeaways to navigate the evolving college recruitment and retention landscape. By understanding prospective students' financial concerns and evolving priorities, institutions can develop targeted strategies to remain competitive in a market where affordability and value are paramount.

Top 10 Findings

- 89%** of 12th graders apply to a college or university that they become interested in 12th grade.
- 68%** of students would consider enrolling at a college that offered them a Loan Repayment Assistance Program (LRAP).
- 68%** of 11th graders are interested in out-of-state institutions.
- 66%** of 12th graders become interested in new colleges they have not previously considered.
- 65%** of 12th graders will rule out institutions based on the sticker price.
- 65%** of students who are concerned about taking out loans to pay for their college education.
- 63%** of 11th graders list financial aid as the top factor in the reasons why they became interested in a college or university.
- 57%** of 11th graders choose cost as the reason to lose interest in colleges and universities.
- 57%** of 12th graders choose financial aid and scholarships as the number one reason not to finish college applications.
- 46%** of 12th graders will leave applications unfinished.

11th Grade: A Time for Discovery and Alignment

Narrowing college options

As 11th graders begin their college planning, they consider multiple factors that will influence their final decision. Understanding the average number of colleges they are interested in, their perceptions of financial aid, and their anticipated difficulty financing college can help shape effective recruitment and aid strategies.



Key Findings

- On average, 11th graders are interested in four colleges. However, this number varies by student background. Continuing-generation students are interested in five colleges, compared to three for first-generation students. Asian students are considering the most options, with an average of 6 colleges.

4

Average number of institutions 11th graders are interested in

BY GENERATION STATUS

Continuing generation	5
First generation	3

BY ETHNICITY

Asian	6
Black	4
Hispanic	4
White	4

Ready to explore: What drives college search?

Understanding the factors that drive interest in colleges among 11th-grade students is crucial for effective recruitment and aid strategies. Our data sheds light on the top considerations for this crucial demographic and what it means for financial aid and enrollment professionals.



Key Findings

- For 63 percent of students, financial aid availability is their top consideration. Affordability also plays a major role, with 43 percent of students prioritizing transparent tuition and fees, affordable rates, and flexible payment plans.
- Four out of 10 students seek institutions offering their desired college majors.
- One in three students consider career placement when selecting a college.

REASONS STUDENTS BECOME INTERESTED IN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES IN 11TH GRADE

Financial aid or scholarships available	63%
Athletic programs*	47%
Cost (affordable)	43%
Availability of desired academic program	38%
Career placement	34%
Visited the campus and liked it	23%
Overall atmosphere	22%
Close to home	21%
Location (the town, the city, the area)	19%
Good chance of being admitted	17%
Diversity	14%
To make my family happy	14%
Information learned at high school college fair	14%
Facilities and amenities	13%
Fine arts programs	11%
Rankings published in magazines or college planning websites	11%
Size	11%
To be with friends	11%

*only for prospective student-athletes



Shifting interests: 11th graders reassessing college options

By 11th grade, 62 percent of students are no longer interested in some of the colleges they initially considered. This shift underscores the dynamic nature of college planning, with students continually refining their options based on emerging factors and priorities.



Key Findings

- Nearly two-thirds (62%) of 11th graders reported becoming no longer interested in some colleges they were initially interested in.
- First-generation students (53%) were less likely to lose interest in initially desired colleges than continuing-generation students (65%). First-generation students may have fewer preconceived notions and be more open to a wider range of options.
- Affordability is a major factor in shaping students' evolving college lists, with 70 percent of students who ruled out institutions based on sticker price reported losing interest in colleges.

62%

of 11th graders are no longer interested in some of their colleges

No longer interested in some colleges by generation status



No longer interested in some colleges by sticker price



Why 11th graders lose interest in colleges

What factors lead students to cross certain colleges off their list? Our data highlights the key reasons, from affordability and academic fit to location and shifting interests.



Key Findings

- Cost was the number one reason (57%). Concerns about scholarship eligibility (22%) and acceptance (24%) also factored in.
- A lack of desired majors was a deal-breaker for 37 percent of students.
- The location of a college, whether due to distance from home (23%) or dislike of the surrounding area (23%), played a significant role. Safety (20%) was also a factor.

REASONS 11TH GRADERS LOSE INTEREST IN COLLEGES

Cost: Too expensive	57%
They did not have my major	37%
Learned more and lost interest	26%
Worried would not be accepted	24%
Location: did not like the city or town	23%
Location: too far from home	23%
Did not think would be eligible for any scholarships	22%
Safety issues	20%
Visited campus and did not like it	19%

Practical implications



Make financial aid communications clear: Make it easy for students and families to understand the true cost of attendance. Leverage tools like net price calculators and provide personalized financial aid counseling. Clearly outline the available aid types, deadlines, and how to apply.



Showcase academic programs: Highlight specific majors, specializations, and opportunities for research, internships, and other hands-on learning. Use video testimonials and detailed curriculum information to bring programs to life.



Use location-specific marketing: Tailor recruitment messaging based on location. For colleges in urban areas, highlight internship and career opportunities. Rural or suburban colleges might focus on a close-knit community and access to outdoor activities. Address safety concerns head-on and showcase support services.



Provide immersive experiences: While not all students can visit campus, leverage technology to provide immersive experiences. Virtual tours, interactive admissions events, and personalized video communication can help students envision themselves at your college.



12th Grade: Insights into the College Application Process

Why do students apply to a college? Why do they leave applications unfinished? Most importantly, what can we do to help them?



Key Findings

- On average, 12th graders started 5 college applications.
- First-generation students started fewer applications than their continuing-generation peers (5 vs. 8).

5

average college applications started

Average college applications started by generation status

5

First generation

8

Continuing generation

Uncovering the barriers to college application completion

While many 12th graders start the college application process with enthusiasm, a surprising number don't see it through to completion. Our data reveals that nearly half of all 12th graders (46%) leave at least one application unfinished, with racial and ethnic disparities, family involvement, financial concerns, and sticker shock all playing a role.



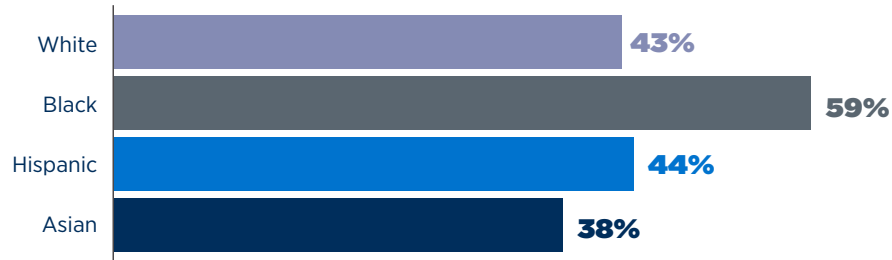
Key Findings

- **Nearly half of all 12th graders do not finish all the college applications they start.**
- **Racial and ethnic disparities:**
 - Black students were the most likely to leave applications unfinished (59%), followed by Hispanic students (44%).
 - In contrast, Asian students had the highest completion rate (62%).
- **Family involvement:** The level of family involvement significantly impacted application completion rates. Students with very involved families had the highest completion rate, while those with uninvolved families had the lowest
- **Financial concerns:** Financial difficulties and concerns about loans were prominent factors in unfinished applications.
 - Students who found college financing difficult were likelier to leave applications unfinished (58%).
 - Similarly, concerns about taking out loans and the negative impact of these concerns on college planning were associated with higher rates of unfinished applications.
- **Sticker shock:** Most students who left applications unfinished ruled out institutions based on the sticker price (59%).

46%

of students left at least one unfinished college application.

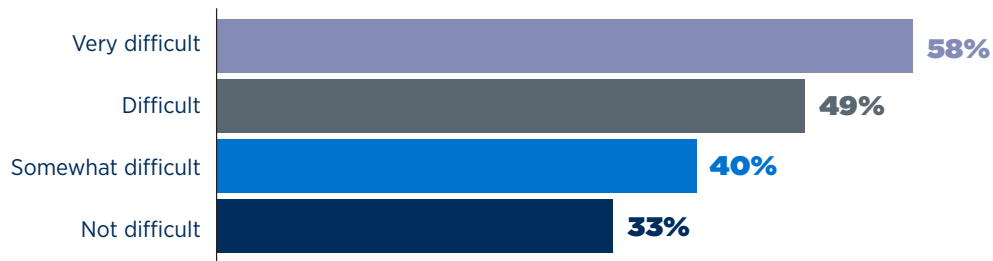
Left at least one unfinished application by ethnicity



Left at least one unfinished application by family involvement in college planning



Left at least one unfinished application by financing difficulty



Left at least one unfinished application by borrowing concerns



Left at least one unfinished application by sticker price



Left at least one unfinished application by the importance of financial aid/scholarships in choosing a college/university



The roadblocks to application completion

Our data highlights the primary reasons students abandon their applications, from cost and complexity to fit and communication.



Key Findings

- **Cost is the top deterrent:** The most common reason for not finishing applications was that the college was too expensive (57%).
- **Application complexity and information accessibility:** The length and difficulty of the application process deterred one-third of students, while one-quarter struggled to find the necessary information on the college’s website.

ROADBLOCKS TO FINISHING COLLEGE APPLICATIONS

Cost (it was too expensive)	57%
The application was too difficult or too long	34%
Did not think would qualify for scholarships or financial aid	29%
Learned more and decided it was not a good fit	28%
The college website was difficult to navigate	25%
The vibe of the school was not a good fit	22%
Visited the college and lost interest	15%
Did not like the communications received from the college	12%

What drives student applications

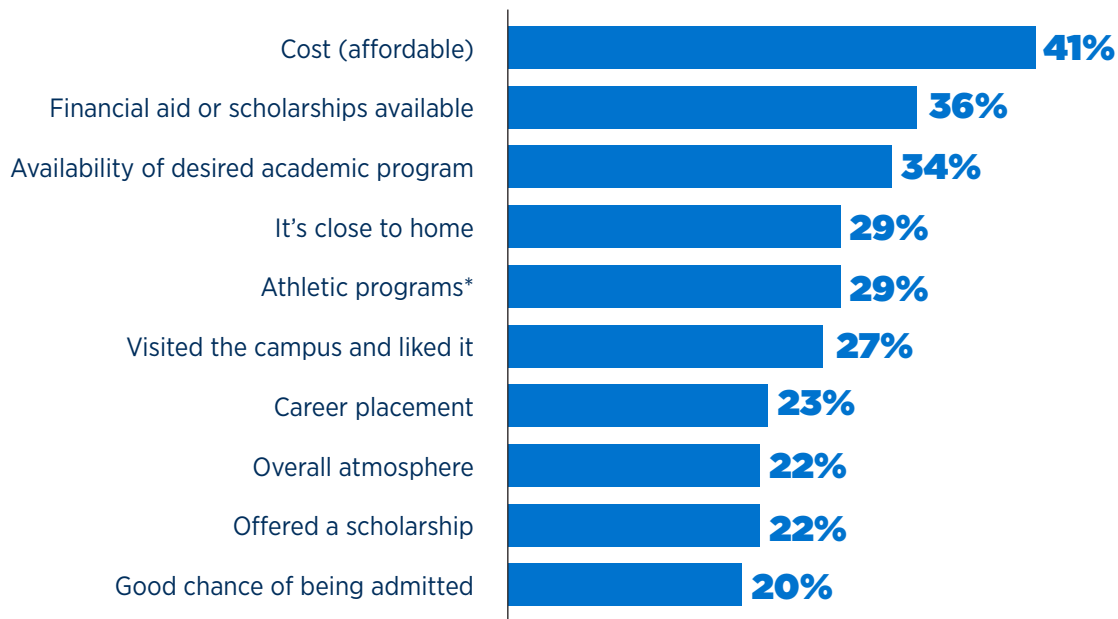
When it comes to applying to college, students weigh a multitude of factors. While the importance of each consideration may vary from student to student, some themes emerge as particularly influential in the initial decision to apply.



Key Findings

- The top reasons for applying to a college include affordability (41%), availability of financial aid/scholarships (36%), and the presence of the student’s desired academic program (34%).
- Many students apply after visiting a campus they liked (27%) or due to positive perceptions of the overall atmosphere (22%).
- Career placement rates (23%) and scholarship offers (22%) also play a role, indicating that students consider both the collegiate experience and post-graduation outcomes when choosing where to apply.

Top ten reasons for applying



*Only for prospective student-athletes

New options in 12th grade



Key Findings

- Two-thirds of 12th graders reported becoming interested in a college during their senior year that they had not previously considered.
- Nearly 90 percent of 12th graders reported applying to a college they became interested in during their senior year.

66%

Became interested in a new college during 12th grade

89%

Applied to a college or university that they became interested in during 12th grade

Practical implications



Extended recruitment and targeted communications

- **Extend the recruitment window:** Be prepared to recruit and engage students well into the spring semester of 12th grade. The application window is longer than ever.
- **Target communications:** Tailor communications about financial aid, scholarships, and academic programs to students who are still actively comparing college options. Highlight what sets your institution apart.
- **Welcome late applicants:** Ensure students who apply and are admitted late feel welcome. Offer support with the enrollment process and connect them with summer orientation or other pre-matriculation programs.



Proactive re-engagement

- **Follow up with prospects:** Proactively re-engage students who have expressed interest but have not applied. Follow-up from admissions can sway these prospective students.
- **Re-engage incomplete applicants:** Reach out to students who started applications but did not finish, offering support to complete the process.
- **Intervene early:** Identify students at risk of leaving applications unfinished early and intervene proactively. Offer support and resources to students struggling to complete applications.



FAFSA Completion: A Critical Step on the Path to College Affordability



Key Findings

- Three-quarters of students completed the FAFSA.
- First-generation college students completed the FAFSA at a slightly higher rate (76%) than their continuing-generation peers (73%).
- Students with very involved parents had the highest FAFSA completion rate (84%), but even among students with uninvolved parents, two out of three (67%) still completed the FAFSA.
- Nearly 80 percent of students ruled out institutions based on sticker price, but 59 percent also reported they would not rule out colleges based on initial cost, suggesting a nuanced understanding of affordability.

74%
of students completed the FAFSA

FAFSA completion by first-generation status



FAFSA COMPLETION BY FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN COLLEGE PLANNING

Very involved	84%
Somewhat involved	81%
Not involved at all	67%

FAFSA COMPLETION BY THE STICKER PRICE

Ruled out institutions based on the sticker price	77%
Will NOT rule out institutions based on the sticker price	59%

Barriers to FAFSA completion

Understanding the reasons behind non-completion is important. Our data highlights the barriers preventing students from accessing potential financial aid.

Reasons for not completing the FAFSA



Practical implications



Simplification and advocacy

- Advocate for a more streamlined FAFSA to reduce barriers. Explore ways to simplify the aid process.
- Simplify FAFSA completion and the broader financial aid process.



Education and awareness

- Clear messaging about aid types and eligibility to combat misconceptions.
- Educate middle school students and families about financial aid to dispel misconceptions early.
- Educate students and families about responsible borrowing and financial management.



Targeted support and outreach

- Provide targeted FAFSA completion support to first-generation students and those with uninvolved parents.
- Target outreach and FAFSA completion support to Asian students and other underrepresented groups.
- Support first-generation students in navigating financial aid.



Collaboration and data-driven strategies

- Collaborate with high schools on FAFSA completion workshops and initiatives.
- Analyze institutional data on FAFSA non-completion to develop targeted support and outreach initiatives.

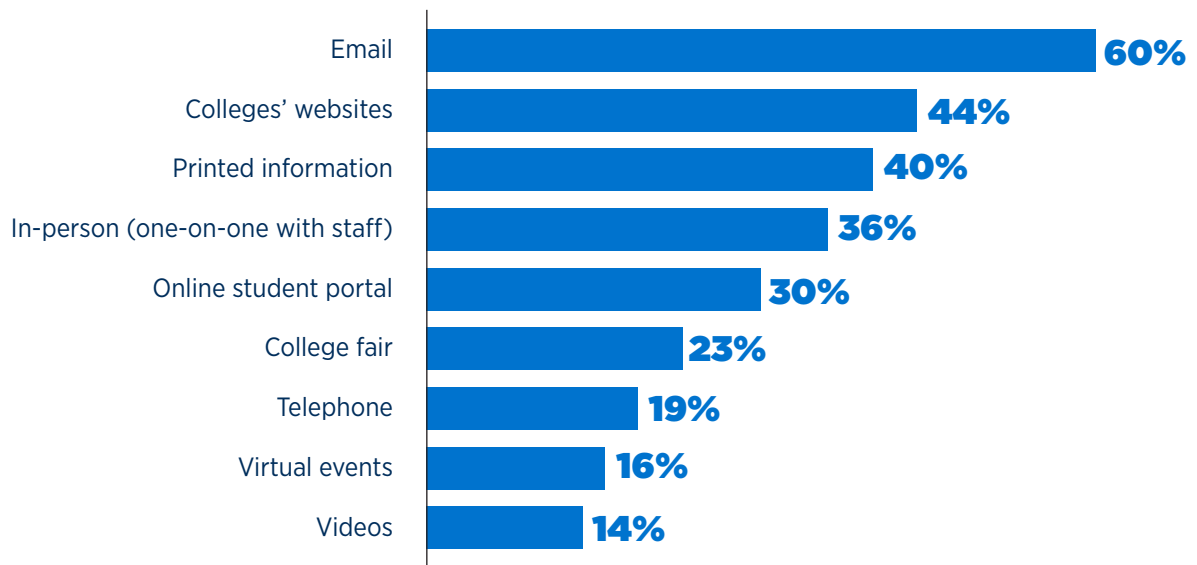


Cracking the Code: How Students Want to Learn About Financial Aid

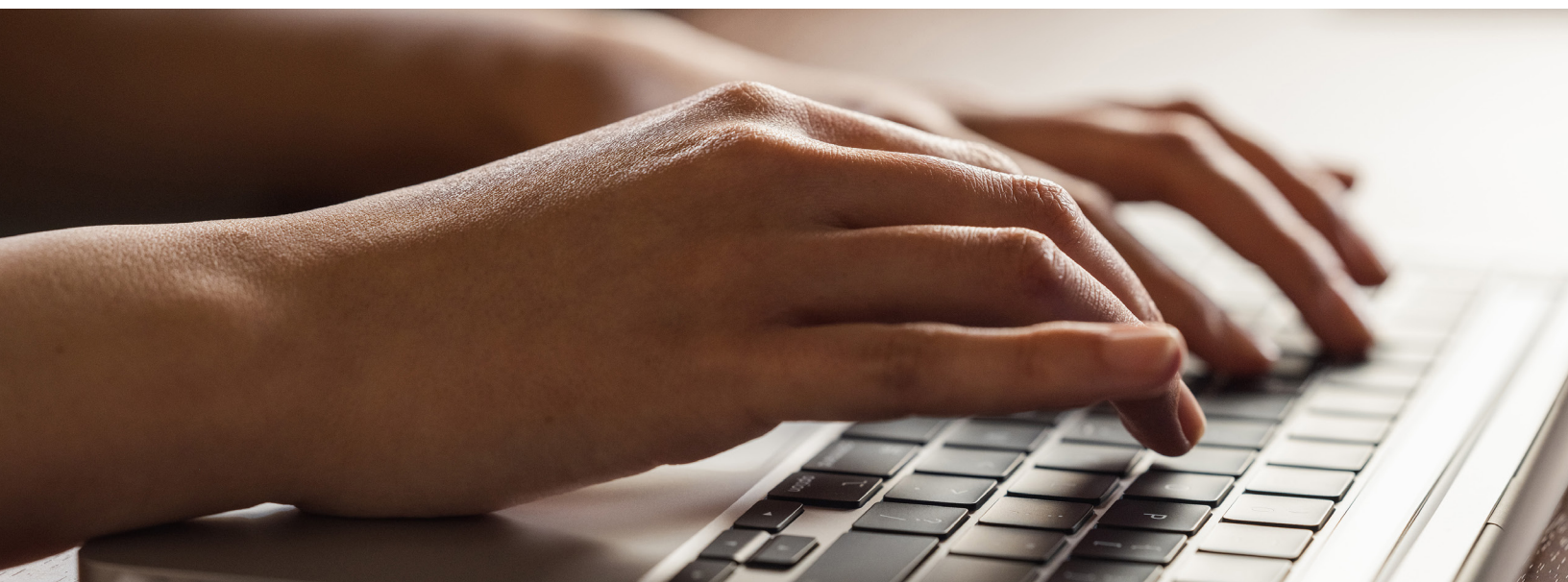
Prospective students want clear, timely information to navigate the complex funding process of higher education. But are colleges using the communication channels that applicants prefer?

Our data illuminates this question, revealing a gap between colleges' current methods of sharing financial aid information and students' preferred channels.

Preferred channels and tools to learn about financial aid and scholarships*



*There were no significant differences between 11th and 12th graders' channel preferences.



Practical implications



Multichannel outreach

- Leverage a mix of digital, personalized videos, in-person, and print channels to reach students where they are, given demographic differences.
- Invest more in college fairs and targeted direct mail campaigns to reach students where they prefer.
- While digital is key, in-person visits and events still hold value for building relationships with prospective students.



Targeted communication

- Avoid a one-size-fits-all approach. Consider students' backgrounds, the role of parents, and financing challenges when determining communication channels.
- Do not underestimate the power of a well-timed, personalized text about financial aid.
- Personalize email communications about financial aid and consider drip campaigns to keep students informed.



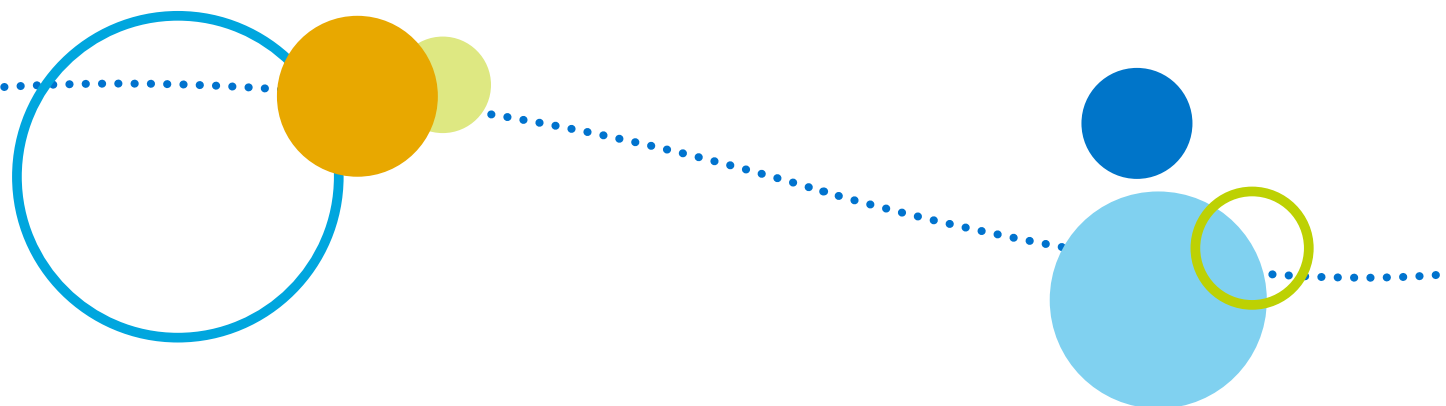
Digital optimization

- Ensure online student portals are user-friendly and provide clear, easily accessible financial aid information.
- Make financial aid information prominent and easy to navigate on your website.
- If using these channels, ensure they offer high-value and engaging content to increase their appeal.



Net price calculators

- Enhance net price calculators to provide personalized cost information to prospective students.
- Develop strategies to address student concerns and encourage progression through the application funnel.

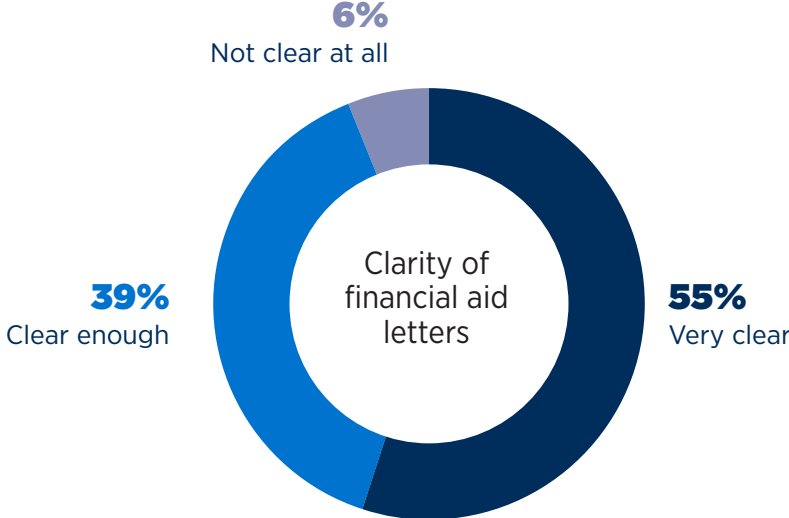
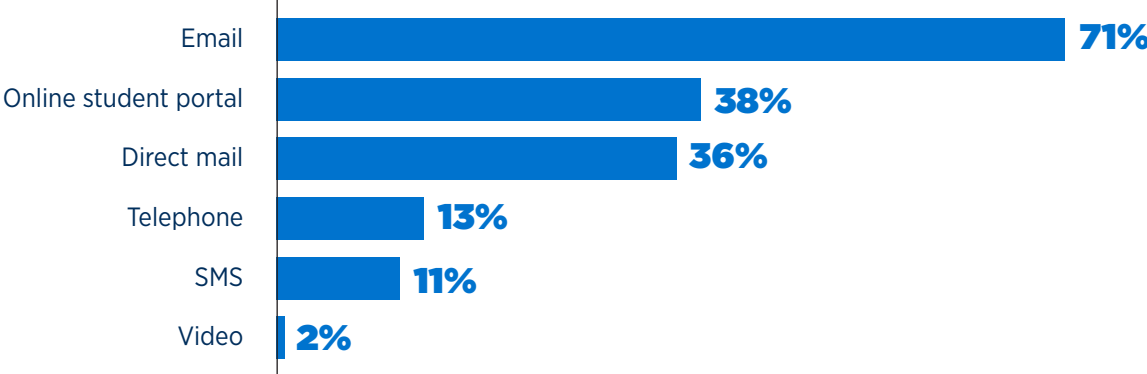


Delivering Financial Aid Offers: A Look at Colleges' Current Practices

Prospective students want clear, timely information to navigate the complex funding process of higher education. But are colleges using the communication channels that applicants prefer?

Our data illuminates this question, revealing a gap between colleges' current methods of sharing financial aid information and students' preferred channels.

Channels used to deliver financial aid offers, according to the students



Satisfaction With Information About Financial Aid and Scholarships

As higher education costs continue to rise, financial aid and scholarships are increasingly critical in making college accessible. But how satisfied are students with the information they receive from colleges about these vital resources?



Key Findings

- When asked about their satisfaction with the financial aid information they've received from colleges, 12th graders reported higher satisfaction levels (36%) than their 11th-grade counterparts (21%).

Satisfaction with information about financial aid and scholarships

SATISFACTION LEVEL	12TH GRADE	11TH GRADE
Very satisfied	36%	21%
Somewhat satisfied	53%	72%
Somewhat dissatisfied	9%	7%
Very dissatisfied	3%	0%

Practical implications



Clear and accessible communication

- Provide realistic financial aid projections to manage student and parent expectations.
- Use plain language and avoid jargon to ensure all students understand their aid packages.
- Ensure communication is accessible and clear for international students and all racial/ethnic backgrounds.



Leveraging digital channels

- Using digital is key. Prioritize email and online portals as primary channels for delivering financial aid information.
- Experiment with video and other interactive digital formats to make financial aid information more engaging and accessible.

Where Students Turn for Financial Aid Information

For most students, financial aid is not just a factor in the college decision—it's **the** factor. Eligible students may rule out dream schools as unaffordable or take on excessive debt without understanding their aid options. How are prospective students getting the information they need to navigate the aid labyrinth?

Top 10 information sources to learn about financial aid, scholarships, and college costs*

1. Colleges' websites **95%**
2. Emails, letters, brochures, etc. from colleges **95%**
3. Parents, friends, and/or relatives **89%**
4. High school counselor **87%**
5. FAFSA website **85%**
6. Cost calculator on a college website **84%**
7. Information learned during an in-person tour/campus visit **83%**
8. Social media **82%**
9. College planning websites **80%**
10. Scholarship estimator on a college website **80%**

*There were no significant differences between 11th and 12th graders' preferred sources to learn about financial aid, scholarships, and college costs

Leveraging AI in financial aid research

Artificial intelligence (AI) can revolutionize how students learn about financial aid and scholarships. AI-powered tools can provide personalized guidance and recommendations to students based on their profiles, academic qualifications, and financial needs. Chatbots and virtual assistants can offer 24/7 support, answering common questions and directing students to relevant resources.



Key Findings

- Only one in five students currently use AI to learn about financial aid and scholarships.
- Most students (54%) reported being satisfied with the information they received from AI tools. This suggests that AI generally provides useful guidance to support students' financial aid research.

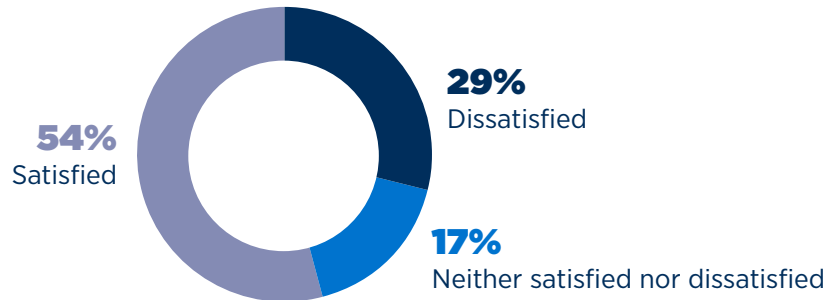
18%

used AI to learn about financial aid and scholarships

Used AI to learn about financial aid and scholarships by grade level



Satisfaction with information received about financial aid, scholarships, and costs using AI



Practical implications



Use of AI

- With 29 percent of students reporting dissatisfaction, there is a clear need to refine and improve the algorithms powering AI financial aid tools. This could involve fine-tuning the tools to provide students with more accurate, personalized, and relevant information.
- Elevate institutional knowledge about those AI tools and use cases of financial aid research utilizing that knowledge, sharing information with students through existing channels, and toggling the issue of access/awareness of AI for first-generation students.



Enhance transparency

- AI tools should clearly explain how recommendations are being generated and which factors are being considered. Transparency is key to building trust with users and helping them understand the guidance they are receiving.



Supplemental support

- Offer application boot camps, financial aid webinars, and other resources to support first-generation students.
- Partner with high schools to provide workshops, info sessions, and individualized counseling for first-generation students.
- Provide free or low-cost counseling services for prospective students.

- Ensure college staff and faculty can offer basic application and aid guidance.
- Offer clear online guides, video tutorials, and in-person workshops to help students and families complete the FAFSA.



Digital access and communications

- Prioritize clear, accessible information on college websites.
- Create a dedicated page with resources and advice for first-generation students and their families.
- Leverage email and social media to proactively communicate about financial aid deadlines, options, and requirements.
- Personalize communications whenever possible.
- Share engaging content, answer questions, and provide bite-sized tips on the college search and aid process.

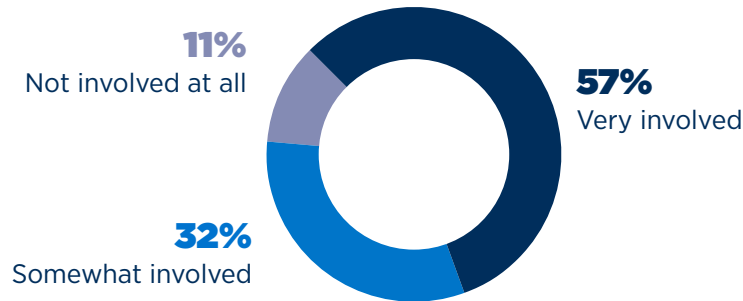
Family Involvement in College Planning

Family support is pivotal as students navigate the complex college planning process. Our data reveals that families are highly involved in college planning, with nearly 80 percent of students reporting family involvement. However, the nature of this involvement shifts as students progress from 11th to 12th grade, reflecting the evolving needs and timelines of the college planning process.

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT	12TH GRADE	11TH GRADE	ALL
Involved in general	78%	80%	78%
Talking to student about how they are going to pay for college	78%	76%	77%
Helping student decide where to attend	68%	72%	70%
Reading about the colleges student is considering	69%	70%	69%
Driving student to campuses to visit	68%	66%	67%
Looking for colleges for student to check out	64%	65%	65%
Helping student with college applications	60%	68%	64%
Calling or emailing the schools to get information for student	48%	56%	52%
Meeting with high school counselor	48%	55%	51%
Attending college fairs in student's high school	41%	52%	46%

Family involvement in navigating financial aid

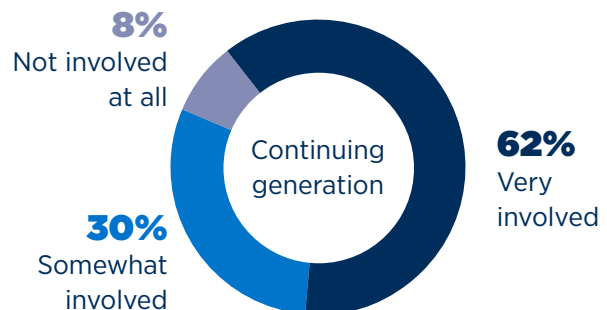
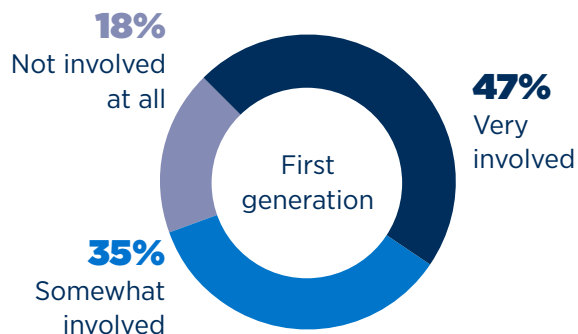
When navigating the complex world of financial aid, families play a crucial role in supporting their students. Our data sheds light on the varying levels of family involvement in the financial aid review process, highlighting key demographic differences that can shape this involvement.



Key Findings

- Nearly six in 10 families review college financial aid information; only one in 10 are uninvolved.
 - First-generation college families tend to be less involved in the financial aid review process, with 47 percent reporting they are very involved, compared to 62 percent of continuing-generation families. This difference may be attributed to first generation families potentially feeling less familiar with the nuances of the financial aid system.
- Students who completed all college applications are more likely to have families more involved in the aid review process.
- Students who will not rule out schools based on initial cost tend to have more involved families in the financial aid review process.
- Students who think paying for college will be difficult tend to have families less involved in the aid review process.

Family involvement in navigating financial aid by generation status



Practical implications



Equity-minded outreach

- Implement targeted outreach programs to engage with first-generation and minority families who may be less familiar with the college process.
- Offer culturally relevant workshops, webinars, and one-on-one counseling sessions to demystify the financial aid and college planning systems.
- Collaborate with community organizations and high school counselors serving low-income and first-generation students to provide early awareness programs and support.



Clear and accessible communication

- Ensure all communication, including websites, emails, award letters, and key documents, is clear, concise, jargon-free, and culturally relevant.
- Provide translation and bilingual support as needed.
- Ensure that materials are translated into other languages depending on your student population.
- Adopt flexible communication strategies, including in-person meetings, phone calls, mailings, emails, and online portals, to reach families with varying technology access levels.



Technology to enhance transparency and understanding

- Prominently display user-friendly net price calculators on websites to clarify affordability beyond the sticker price.
- Leverage other technology tools to help families understand complex aid information and make informed choices.



Dedicated support for diverse families

- Designate staff to liaise with families from underrepresented groups, providing personalized support and connecting them with relevant resources.
- Establish feedback mechanisms to hear directly from families and refine outreach strategies accordingly.

Financial Aid in Focus: Students' Perceptions

Importance of financial aid and scholarships

Financial aid and scholarships are critical in the college decision-making process for both 11th and 12th graders. Our data underscores the significant weight students place on aid considerations as they navigate their higher education options.



Key Findings

- For 12th graders, four out of 10 list financial aid as a top consideration, and nearly 80 percent have it among their top five considerations.
- Eleventh graders also place significant importance on financial aid with 37 percent reporting it as a top factor and 44 percent placing it among their top five considerations.
- The data also reveals that a notable percentage of 11th graders (37%) report that financial aid is not a factor.

Importance of financial aid and scholarships in college planning

FACTOR	12TH GRADE	11TH GRADE
They are the top factor	41%	37%
They are among the five top factors	37%	44%
They are something they will take into consideration	15%	17%
They are not a factor at all	7%	37%

Student perceptions of college financing difficulty

The perception of college financing varies among 11th and 12th graders, with most students in both grade levels viewing the process as difficult. However, our data suggests that 12th graders may have a more nuanced view of college financing than their junior counterparts.



Key Findings

- The majority of both 12th and 11th graders found financing education at least somewhat difficult, with over 85 percent of both groups reporting difficulty.

Financing difficulty by grade

DIFFICULTY	12TH GRADE	11TH GRADE
Very difficult	26%	25%
Difficult	32%	36%
Somewhat difficult	29%	34%
Not difficult	13%	5%

Beyond sticker shock

The importance of transparency and education about the distinction between sticker and net prices cannot be overstated. While the sticker price may seem prohibitively expensive, the actual cost of attendance (net price) can be significantly lower once scholarships, grants, and other aid forms are factored in. But the key is, do students and families know that?



Key Findings

- Most 12th graders and 11th graders reported ruling out institutions based on the sticker price.

65%

of 12th graders have ruled out institutions because of price

Ruled out institutions based on the sticker price



Practical implications



Transparency and clear information: By providing families with clear information about the distinction between sticker price and net price, colleges can empower them to play a more supportive role in the college process. This is particularly crucial for students whose families may be less involved or less familiar with the nuances of college financing.

- Clear, transparent information about tuition, fees, financial aid, and scholarship opportunities is crucial.
- Institutions should ensure this information is easily accessible on their websites and through other channels, with particular attention to reaching first-generation students and families.
- User-friendly net price calculators should be prominently featured on college websites to give students a more accurate estimate of their individualized costs.

Students' Perceptions of Borrowing to Pay for College

For many prospective college students, the prospect of borrowing to finance their education looms large. As higher education costs continue to rise, concerns about taking on debt can significantly shape application decisions and perceptions of affordability.

We now explore the depth of students' concerns about borrowing and how these fears intersect with other key factors in the college planning process. From the level of family involvement to the perceived difficulty of financing an education, we'll examine the complex dynamics at play.

71%

say borrowing concerns affect college planning



BORROWING CONCERNS BY FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN COLLEGE PLANNING

Very involved	55%
Somewhat involved	59%
Not involved at all	83%

BORROWING CONCERNS BY IMPORTANCE OF FINANCIAL AID AND SCHOLARSHIPS

They are the top factor	68%
They are among the five top factors	65%
They are something they will take into consideration	55%
They are not a factor at all	34%



Key Findings

- **Loan concerns and family involvement**
 - o Two-thirds of students express concerns about taking out loans, highlighting the widespread anxiety around educational debt.
 - o A significant majority of students (71%) report that their concerns about borrowing for college are negatively impacting their college planning process.
- **Family involvement**
 - o Students with less involved families (83% not involved at all) were more likely to express loan concerns, suggesting that family guidance may play a role in mitigating anxieties around borrowing.
- **Importance of aid and scholarships**
 - o For 68 percent of concerned students, scholarships and aid are the top factors in college considerations, underscoring the crucial role of aid in making college affordable.
 - o While 65 percent of concerned students rank aid among their top five factors, 55 percent consider aid a factor, indicating varying levels of reliance on aid packages.

Students' perceptions of borrowing to pay for college



Key Findings

- **Prevalence of borrowing**
 - Eight out of 10 of students plan to borrow to fund their education, with 12th graders (76%) slightly less likely than 11th graders (86%) to anticipate borrowing.

Planning to borrow

81%
All Students

76%
12th Grade

86%
11th Grade

Impact of loan repayment assistance programs (LRAPs) on college decisions

LRAPs provide financial support for graduates repaying student loans if they enter lower-paying fields or experience economic hardship. They have the potential to influence students' college decisions significantly.



Key Findings

- A substantial majority of students (71%) report interest in receiving an LRAP as part of their financial aid package, and two-thirds say that the offer of such a program would influence their college decision.
- Among students for whom financial aid and scholarships are the top factor or among the top five factors in their college decision, interest in LRAPs is extremely high. Nearly three-quarters (72%) of those for whom aid is the top factor would be interested in receiving an LRAP, and the majority (70%) say that the offer of such a program would influence their college choice.
- Among students who have ruled out institutions based on the sticker price, interest in LRAPs is particularly high. Seven out of 10 of these price-sensitive students would be interested in receiving an LRAP, and a similar number (69%) say that the offer of such a program would influence their college choice.
- Among students who find it very difficult to finance college, interest in LRAPs is extremely high. Nearly 80 percent of these students would be interested in receiving an LRAP, and the same number also say that the offer of such a program would influence their college choice.
- While most students who find it difficult or somewhat difficult to finance college still express strong interest in LRAPs (70% and 65%, respectively, are interested, and 67% and 53%, respectively, would be influenced in their college decision), this interest decreases as perceived financing difficulty decreases.
- Among students who have concerns about taking out loans, interest in LRAPs is particularly high. Three-quarters of these debt-averse students would be interested in receiving an LRAP, and 72 percent say that the offer of such a program would influence their college choice.

LRAP impact



LRAP impact by grade

I would be interested in receiving such a program as part of my financial aid package.



Being offered a program like this would influence my decision of which college to attend.



LRAP impact by importance of financial aid and scholarships

I would be interested in receiving such a program as part of my financial aid package.



Being offered a program like this would influence my decision of which college to attend.



I would be interested in receiving such a program as part of my financial aid package.



Being offered a program like this would influence my decision of which college to attend.



LRAP impact by financing difficulty

I would be interested in receiving such a program as part of my financial aid package.



Being offered a program like this would influence my decision of which college to attend.



LRAP impact by borrowing fears

I would be interested in receiving such a program as part of my financial aid package.

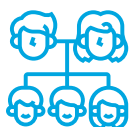


Being offered a program like this would influence my decision of which college to attend.



Practical implications

- Given widespread borrowing plans and concerns, financial aid offices should provide education about responsible borrowing, debt management, and the long-term implications of loans as early as possible, ideally starting in 11th grade.
- One-on-one counseling can help students create borrowing plans aligned with their financial situation and future goals. Discussing expected family contribution, scholarship prospects, and types of loans (federal vs. private) is crucial.
- Encourage family involvement in the financial aid process, particularly for students anticipating lower borrowing amounts. Offer resources and workshops to educate families about the aid process and their role in supporting students.
- Providing accessible resources and workshops on financial literacy can empower students (particularly those without family guidance) to make informed borrowing decisions. Partnering with high schools to offer these resources earlier in the college prep process may also be beneficial.
- Communicating total costs, available aid, and projected debt upon graduation can help students make informed decisions. Avoiding sticker shock and promoting a full understanding of financial commitment can reduce borrowing concerns.



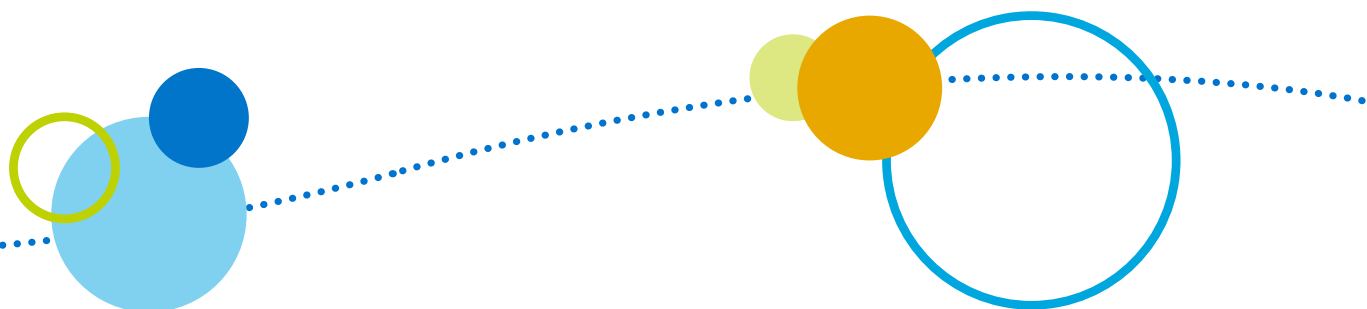
Student segments and recruitment strategies

- LRAPs can be a major differentiator for institutions seeking to attract students who are highly focused on financial aid, those who are cost-conscious, financially anxious, and debt-averse students and families. Prioritize the promotion of these programs to aid-driven recruits. Proactively promote these programs as affordability solutions.



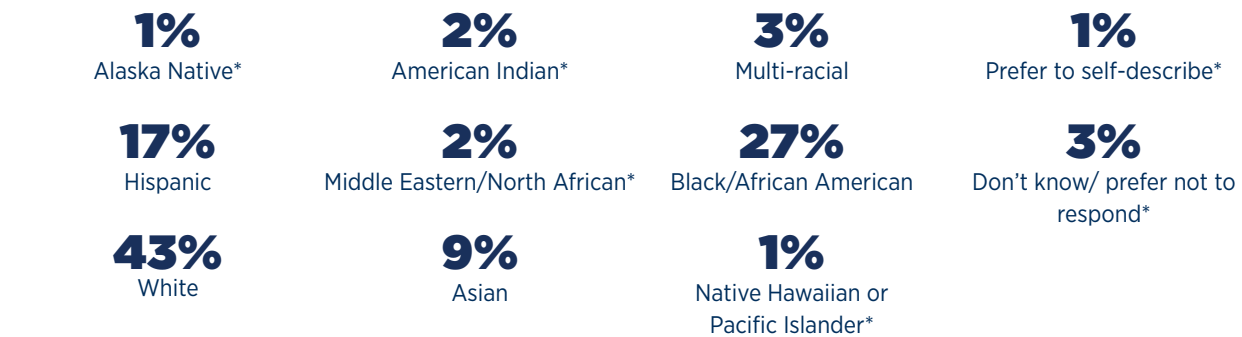
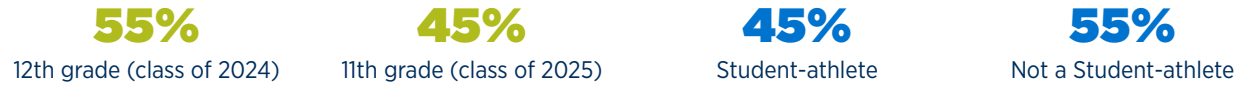
Nuanced communication and aid strategies

- Tailor strategies to students' priorities, emphasizing program benefits like career outcomes for those less focused on aid.
- Highlight the affordability and long-term financial security that LRAPs provide, even for students less concerned about upfront costs.
- Emphasize the financial relief and security that LRAPs offer to all students, not just those struggling to afford college.
- Position LRAPs as debt relief and long-term financial safety net, holding appeal even for students less focused on debt.

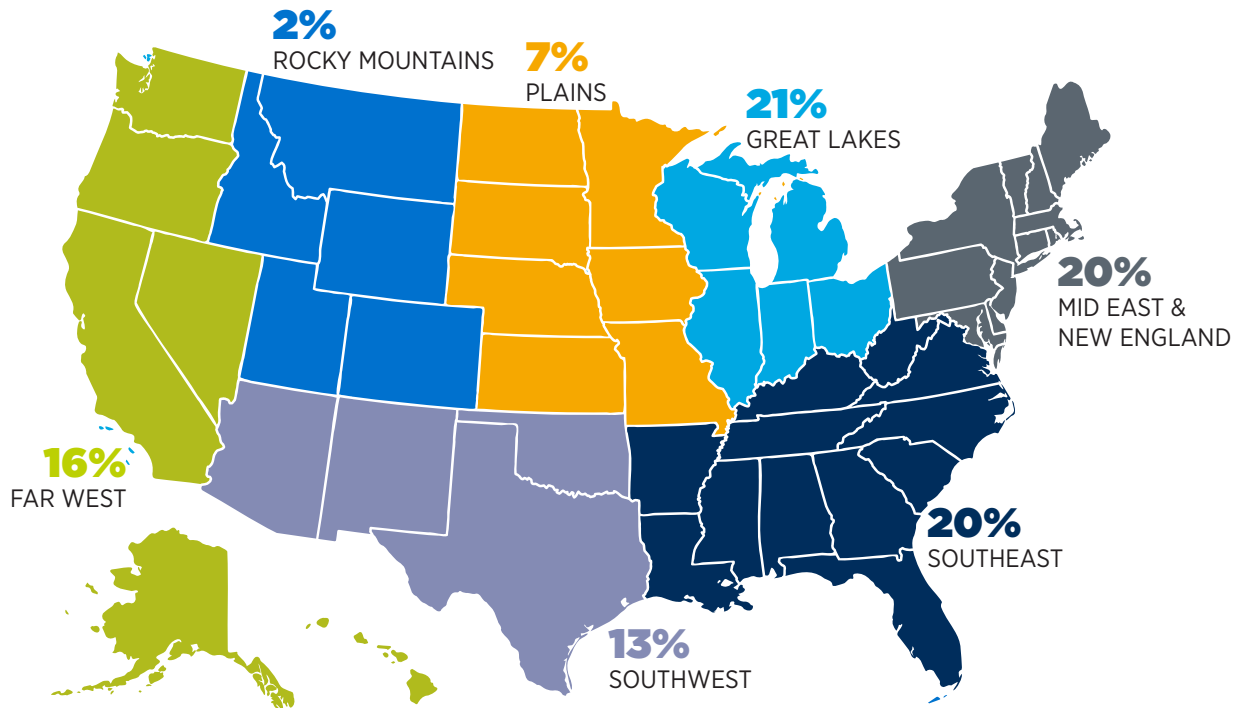


About the Study

2,176 high school students were surveyed in May-June of 2024



* Not reported



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