



2019 Parents' Role in College Planning Report

How colleges and universities
can engage parents during
the enrollment process



ENROLLMENT





INTRODUCTION

Aligning your parent communications with parental expectations

Three out of four parents say they are “very involved” in the college search process. Yet only slightly more than half say they have received communications from colleges directed at them. In a time when families are taking a hard look at the investment of a college education, institutions need to make sure they engage the ultimate enrollment influencers: the parents of college students.

This survey from RNL, CampusESP, and TeenLife brings to light many factors that can affect how institutions communicate with, market to, and recruit traditional students. We see that the more education a parent has, the more likely he or she will believe that a college education is the most important factor in determining their child’s success after high school. This survey also highlights when to engage with families and how to turn complex concepts, like financial aid, into easy-to-understand selling points for your institution.

The results of this survey are intended to provide insight into the thought patterns, beliefs, and behaviors of high school parents in order to help you improve your institution’s engagement strategies for marketing and recruiting traditional students.

ABOUT THE STUDY

1,313 parents completed an online survey in May 2019.

GRADE OF CHILDREN



GENDER



EDUCATION LEVEL OF PARENTS



ETHNICITY

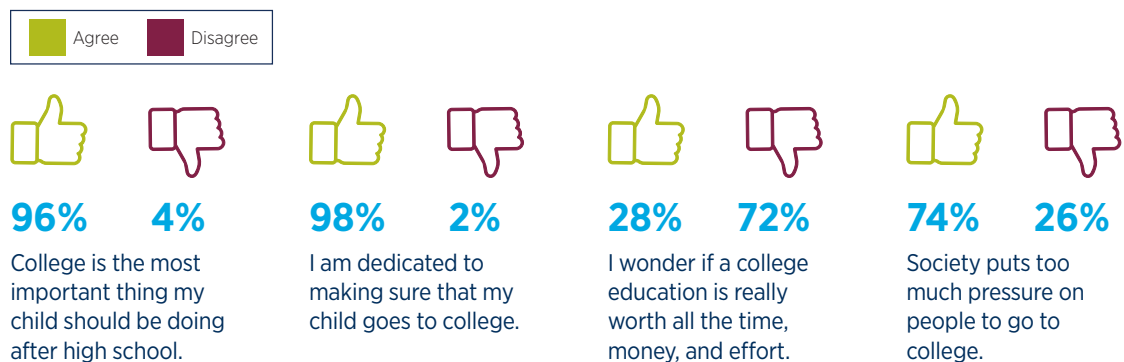


REGION



PARENTS' SUPPORT OF THEIR CHILDREN'S COLLEGE PLANS AND VALUE OF COLLEGE EDUCATION

- Most parents think that college is the most important thing their children should be doing after high school, and they are dedicated to making sure their children attend college.
- About one-fourth wonder if a college education is worth the time, money, and effort; however there is a big difference between parents who don't have a college education and those who do.
- The more education the parent has, the more likely he or she will disagree with the statement: "I wonder if a college education is worth all the time, money, and effort."



Key differences by ethnicity

I WONDER IF A COLLEGE EDUCATION IS REALLY WORTH ALL THE TIME, MONEY, AND EFFORT

| STATEMENT | ASIAN | BLACK | HISPANIC | WHITE |
|-----------|-------|-------|----------|-------|
| Agree | 24% | 23% | 33% | 28% |
| Disagree | 76% | 77% | 67% | 72% |

SOCIETY PUTS TOO MUCH PRESSURE ON PEOPLE TO GO TO COLLEGE

| STATEMENT | ASIAN | BLACK | HISPANIC | WHITE |
|-----------|-------|-------|----------|-------|
| Agree | 49% | 50% | 52% | 57% |
| Disagree | 51% | 50% | 48% | 43% |

Key differences by grade level of child

COLLEGE IS THE MOST IMPORTANT THING MY CHILD SHOULD BE DOING AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

| STATEMENT | 8TH GRADE | 9TH GRADE | 10TH GRADE | 11TH GRADE | 12TH GRADE |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|
| Agree | 91% | 93% | 96% | 95% | 97% |
| Disagree | 9% | 7% | 4% | 5% | 3% |

I AM DEDICATED TO MAKING SURE THAT MY CHILD GOES TO COLLEGE

| STATEMENT | 8TH GRADE | 9TH GRADE | 10TH GRADE | 11TH GRADE | 12TH GRADE |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|
| Agree | 97% | 99% | 96% | 96% | 98% |
| Disagree | 3% | 1% | 4% | 4% | 2% |

I WONDER IF A COLLEGE EDUCATION IS REALLY WORTH ALL THE TIME, MONEY, AND EFFORT

| STATEMENT | 8TH GRADE | 9TH GRADE | 10TH GRADE | 11TH GRADE | 12TH GRADE |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|
| Agree | 33% | 30% | 29% | 27% | 24% |
| Disagree | 67% | 70% | 71% | 72% | 76% |

SOCIETY PUTS TOO MUCH PRESSURE ON PEOPLE TO GO TO COLLEGE

| STATEMENT | 8TH GRADE | 9TH GRADE | 10TH GRADE | 11TH GRADE | 12TH GRADE |
|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|
| Agree | 62% | 57% | 56% | 51% | 53% |
| Disagree | 38% | 43% | 44% | 49% | 47% |



Parents are committed to college even if they question its value

Nearly all parents agree that college is important to the success of their children. But more than half believe there is too much pressure on students to go to college, and nearly 30 percent question whether college is worth the investment. It's important for institutions to make sure they convey ROI to parents to keep them engaged and committed to the process.

SCHOOL ACTIVITIES/CLUBS

Top clubs that will affect college planning



ORCHESTRA, BAND, OTHER
MUSIC PERFORMING ACTIVITIES

44%



COMMUNITY SERVICE
PROJECTS

27%



SPORTS

20%



FAITH AFFILIATED
GROUPS

12%

START OF COLLEGE PLANNING



START OF COLLEGE PLANNING AND PARENTS' EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT LEVEL

| BEGIN PLANNING | NO COLLEGE EDUCATION | GRADUATED FROM A 2-YEAR COLLEGE | GRADUATED FROM A 4-YEAR COLLEGE | GRAD SCHOOL |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------|
| Prior to student's freshman year | 34% | 25% | 32% | 37% |
| Student's freshman year | 16% | 19% | 20% | 15% |
| Student's sophomore year | 15% | 15% | 22% | 26% |
| Student's junior year | 27% | 35% | 25% | 19% |
| Student's senior year | 8% | 6% | 1% | 3% |

START OF COLLEGE PLANNING AND PARENTS' ETHNICITY

| BEGIN PLANNING | ASIAN | BLACK | HISPANIC | WHITE |
|----------------------------------|-------|-------|----------|-------|
| Prior to student's freshman year | 41% | 50% | 24% | 33% |
| Student's freshman year | 20% | 14% | 12% | 18% |
| Student's sophomore year | 18% | 18% | 19% | 22% |
| Student's junior year | 20% | 12% | 38% | 25% |
| Student's senior year | 2% | 6% | 7% | 3% |

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN COLLEGE PLANNING



3 out of 4 parents

are very involved in the college planning process.

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN COLLEGE PLANNING AND PARENTS' EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

| INVOLVEMENT | NO COLLEGE EDUCATION | GRADUATED FROM A 2-YEAR COLLEGE | GRADUATED FROM A 4-YEAR COLLEGE | GRADUATE DEGREE |
|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| Not involved at all | 0% | 0% | 0% | 3% |
| Somewhat involved | 67% | 14% | 28% | 19% |
| Very involved | 33% | 86% | 72% | 79% |

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN COLLEGE PLANNING AND ETHNICITY

| INVOLVEMENT | ASIAN | BLACK | HISPANIC | WHITE |
|-------------------|-------|-------|----------|-------|
| Somewhat involved | 31% | 9% | 25% | 24% |
| Very involved | 69% | 91% | 75% | 75% |

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT AND STUDENT'S GRADE LEVEL

| INVOLVEMENT | 9TH GRADE | 10TH GRADE | 11TH GRADE | 12TH GRADE |
|---------------------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|
| Not involved at all | 1% | 0% | 1% | 0% |
| Somewhat involved | 36% | 34% | 19% | 22% |
| Very involved | 63% | 66% | 80% | 78% |

HOW ARE PARENTS HELPING THEIR CHILDREN DURING COLLEGE PLANNING?

| PARENTAL ASSISTANCE | NOT INVOLVED AT ALL | SOMEWHAT INVOLVED | VERY INVOLVED |
|---|---------------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Attending a college night at my child's high school or other local college fair | 12% | 24% | 65% |
| Helping my child fill out financial aid forms | 22% | 16% | 63% |
| Selecting a few colleges and/or universities for my child to consider | 10% | 29% | 61% |
| Scheduling and attending campus visits | 10% | 31% | 59% |
| Completing college cost or scholarship calculators on a school specific site | 18% | 27% | 55% |
| Researching options on specific college/university websites | 12% | 39% | 49% |
| Helping my child fill out applications | 20% | 37% | 43% |
| Contacting the college regarding financial aid | 27% | 35% | 37% |
| Researching options on websites that aren't specific to a school | 33% | 31% | 35% |
| Emailing admissions or financial aid representatives from a specific school | 37% | 27% | 35% |
| Talking with my child's high school counselor | 14% | 57% | 29% |
| Texting admissions or financial aid representatives from a specific school | 55% | 31% | 14% |

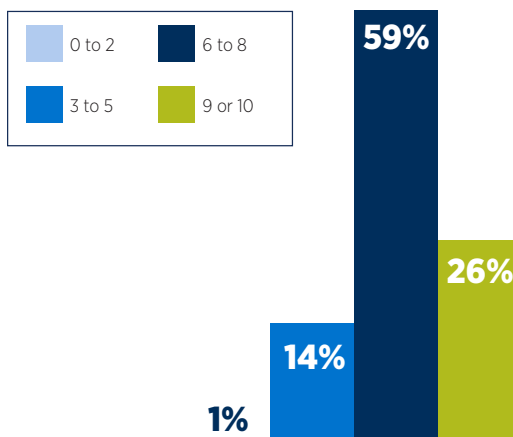
MOST USEFUL AREAS OF COLLEGES AND WEBSITES FOR PARENTS

| WEBSITE AREA | I CHECK AND FIND IT HELPFUL |
|---|-----------------------------|
| Admission requirements | 96% |
| Information about academics (majors and minors) | 96% |
| Visit scheduling form | 90% |
| Residential life/housing information | 88% |
| Orientation schedule | 88% |
| Application form | 87% |
| Information about outcomes (graduation and placement rates) | 84% |
| Financial aid scholarships | 82% |
| Email links to connect with admissions/financial aid | 82% |
| Campus calendar | 81% |

Communication from colleges

Over half (54 percent) of the parents surveyed had received communications from colleges directly addressed to them. Parents were asked to rate the overall experience with the communications they have received from colleges on a scale of 0-10, with 10 being the highest rating.

HOW PARENTS RATE QUALITY OF COMMUNICATION EXPERIENCE WITH COLLEGES? (0=worst, 10=best)



Half of parents not receiving communications directed to them

How and when colleges communicate with parents greatly affects how those parents—and consequently their children—respond. However, only 54 percent of parents said they received communications from colleges directly addressed to them. This indicates many institutions are missing an opportunity to reach parents when and where it matters most. Whether you're already communicating with parents, the results on these pages may provide valuable insight into how you can channel communications to impact recruitment strategies.

Communication channels from colleges

For those parents who had received communications from colleges, nearly all had received emails and direct mail from colleges, while less than half had received a phone call and only one-fourth had received a text message.

COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED BY PARENTS



95%

Email



94%

Direct mail



38%

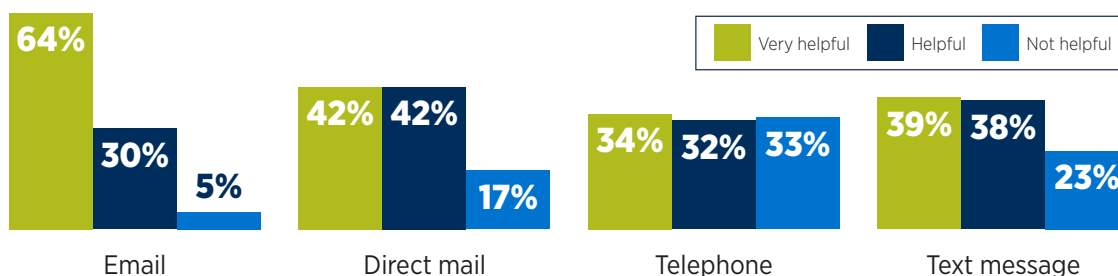
Telephone



24%

Text message

RATING FROM PARENTS WHO HAVE RECEIVED COMMUNICATIONS BY...



Of those who received communication in **each channel**, nearly all of them thought emails were very helpful.

Phone call topics with colleges

We saw earlier that 38 percent of parents received phone calls from colleges. Here are the topics of those phone calls:

63%

Admissions in general

54%

To plan a visit

23%

About child's financial aid offer

15%

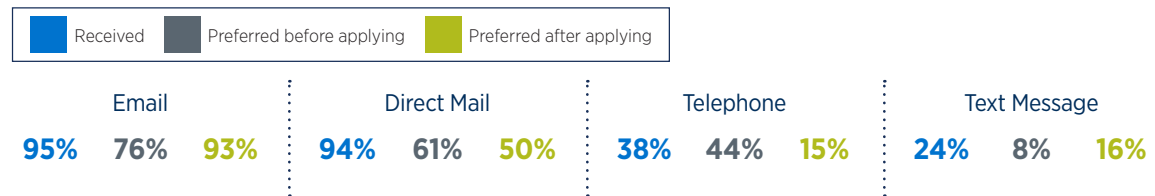
To get materials child was missing in application

Note: These fields do not add up to 100 percent because respondents could choose multiple fields for several call purposes. These percentages are calculated from the 38 percent who received phone calls.

Communication preference before and after application

What method of communication with colleges do you prefer (as a parent) before your student applies?

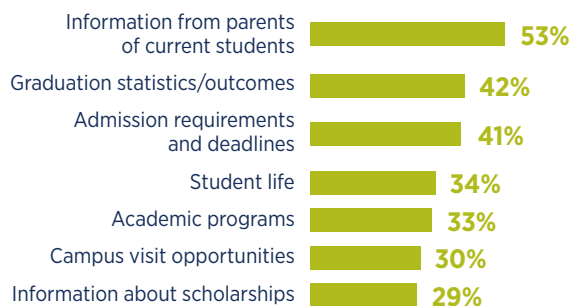
When do parents prefer to receive communications? We asked if they preferred to receive communications before their children applied or after they submitted an application. Comparing received and preferred channels before application and after application:



AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT WHEN COLLEGES COMMUNICATE WITH PARENTS

When we asked parents what areas colleges could improve upon when communicating with them, over half responded that they would like to receive information from parents of current students, more graduation statistics and information about outcomes, and clearer information about admission requirements and deadlines.

INFORMATION THAT WOULD IMPROVE COMMUNICATIONS PARENTS RECEIVE



OPPORTUNITY ALERT

When asked how communication from colleges could be improved, more than half of the parents in this survey indicated they'd like to hear from parents of current students. Tap into testimonials, graduation statistics, and career outcomes when reaching out to high school parents.

INFORMATION PARENTS SAID WOULD IMPROVE COMMUNICATIONS EXPERIENCE BY ETHNICITY

| TYPE OF COMMUNICATION | ASIAN | BLACK | HISPANIC | WHITE |
|--|-------|-------|----------|-------|
| Admission requirements and deadlines | 57% | 37% | 51% | 41% |
| Graduation statistics/outcomes | 57% | 45% | 41% | 41% |
| Academic programs | 47% | 42% | 37% | 30% |
| Campus visit opportunities | 45% | 37% | 44% | 28% |
| Information about scholarships | 37% | 29% | 40% | 27% |
| Student life | 37% | 44% | 39% | 32% |
| Information from parents of current students | 37% | 58% | 64% | 52% |

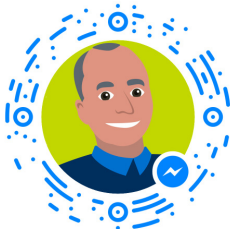
SOCIAL MEDIA

Half of parents surveyed said they have used social media for college planning. White parents were the most likely to have used social media, while Asian parents were the least likely.

SOCIAL MEDIA USE FOR COLLEGE PLANNING BY ETHNICITY



FACEBOOK WAS THE MOST POPULAR PLATFORM USED BY PARENTS



How can AI help you connect with parents in a personalized fashion?

Artificial intelligence (AI) has transformed personalization in communication, and colleges and universities have a great opportunity to use it for communicating with parents and students. Solutions such as AI chatbots can deliver personalized communication at scale—freeing up your precious resources for connections that truly require the human touch. RNL is already working with institutions to implement our AI chatbot, AL. [See how it works at RuffaloNL.com/AL](https://RuffaloNL.com/AL).

FINANCIAL AID PROCESS

Financing difficulty

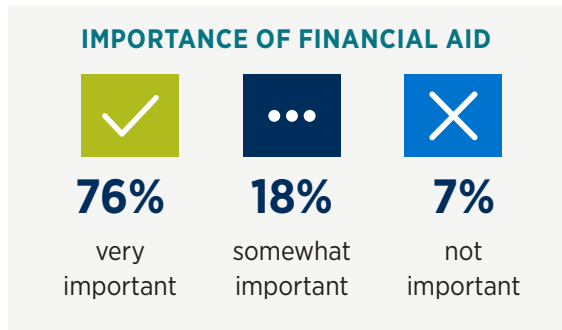
When asked how difficult it would be to finance college, 85 of parents said it would be at least somewhat difficult.

FINANCING COLLEGE WILL BE...

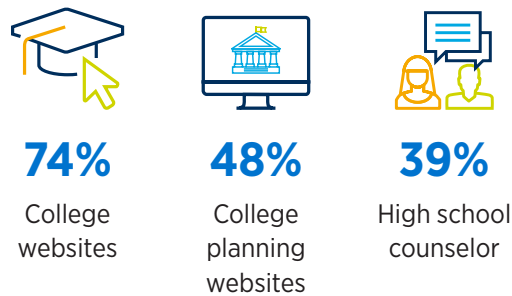


DIFFICULTY BY GRADE LEVEL OF STUDENT

| FINANCING COLLEGE WILL BE... | 8TH GRADE | 9TH GRADE | 10TH GRADE | 11TH GRADE | 12TH GRADE |
|------------------------------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|
| Very difficult | 23% | 28% | 26% | 31% | 27% |
| Somewhat difficult | 65% | 61% | 52% | 50% | 58% |
| Not difficult | 12% | 11% | 22% | 20% | 15% |



MOST TRUSTED SOURCES OF INFORMATION FOR FINANCIAL AID/SCHOLARSHIP INFORMATION



RANKING BY ETHNICITY

| MOST TRUSTED SOURCES FOR INFO | ASIAN | BLACK | HISPANIC | WHITE |
|-------------------------------|-------|-------|----------|-------|
| College websites | 82% | 79% | 74% | 72% |
| College planning websites | 47% | 61% | 57% | 45% |
| High school counselor | 37% | 60% | 49% | 34% |

RANKING BY COLLEGE EDUCATION OF PARENT

| MOST TRUSTED SOURCES | NO COLLEGE EDUCATION | GRADUATED FROM A 2-YEAR COLLEGE | GRADUATED FROM A 4-YEAR COLLEGE | GRADUATE DEGREE |
|---------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| College websites | 73% | 78% | 76% | 70% |
| College planning websites | 49% | 51% | 49% | 46% |
| High school counselor | 59% | 45% | 37% | 25% |

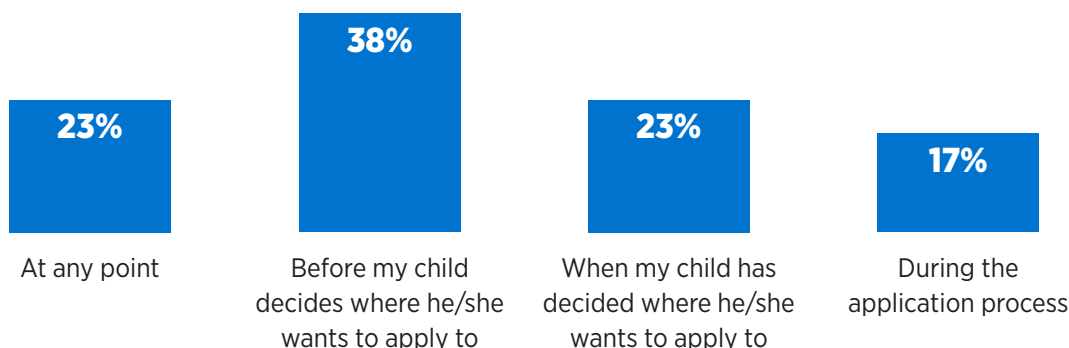
Preferred timing for information regarding financial aid and scholarships

When asked when they would like to receive information on financial aid and scholarships, one-fourth of parents said they welcomed information at any point. Hispanic parents were more likely to choose this option, while Asian parents were the least.

Nearly 40 percent of respondents prefer information regarding financial aid and scholarships before their child decides where he or she wants to apply, with significantly more Asian parents choosing this option.

Nearly one-fourth of parents prefer information regarding financial aid and scholarships when their child decides where to apply, and 17 percent of respondents prefer that information during the application process.

PREFER TO RECEIVE INFORMATION ON FINANCIAL AID AND SCHOLARSHIPS



PREFER TO RECEIVE INFORMATION ON FINANCIAL AID AND SCHOLARSHIPS

| PREFERENCE | ASIAN | BLACK | HISPANIC | WHITE |
|--|-------|-------|----------|-------|
| At any point | 17% | 23% | 28% | 23% |
| Before my child decides where he/she wants to apply to | 45% | 36% | 34% | 38% |
| When my child has decided where he/she wants to apply to | 17% | 25% | 24% | 22% |
| During the application process | 21% | 16% | 14% | 17% |



COMMUNICATE EARLY AND OFTEN

When it comes to paying for college education, parents are—more often than not—very involved, according to a 2018 RNL survey of high school seniors. What's more, price sensitivity is at the highest level in history. Engaging with parents early, often, and through multiple channels throughout a prospective student's process keeps families informed not only about the cost of college and how to pay for it, but also of the value your school delivers.

PREFERRED CHANNEL TO RECEIVE FINANCIAL AID OFFER


55%

Email


30%

Direct mail


10%

 Log in to a
website

3%

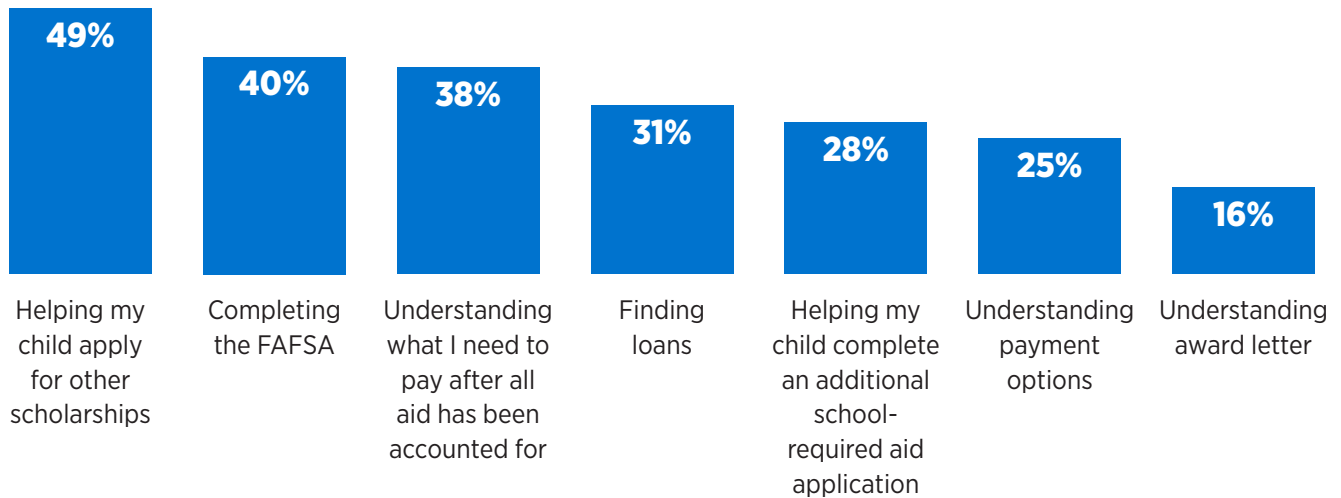
Over the phone


1%

 Personalized
video

Most confusing portions of the financial aid process

Parents were asked to indicate any area of the financial aid process that they found confusing. Nearly half indicated finding other scholarships for their children, while 40 percent found the FAFSA and understanding their net price confusing.



MOST CONFUSING PORTIONS OF FINANCIAL AID PROCESS BY COLLEGE EDUCATION OF PARENT

| ACTIVITY | NO COLLEGE EDUCATION | GRADUATED FROM A 2-YEAR COLLEGE | GRADUATED FROM A 4-YEAR COLLEGE | GRADUATE DEGREE |
|---|----------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| Completing the FAFSA | 46% | 43% | 40% | 37% |
| Helping my child complete an additional school-required aid application | 23% | 35% | 30% | 28% |
| Helping my child apply for other scholarships | 49% | 61% | 49% | 45% |
| Understanding award letter | 28% | 27% | 15% | 12% |
| Understanding what I need to pay after all aid has been accounted for | 58% | 47% | 36% | 31% |
| Understanding payment options | 42% | 31% | 24% | 18% |
| Finding loans | 44% | 39% | 32% | 23% |

CONFUSING PORTIONS OF THE FINANCIAL AID PROCESS BY DIFFICULTY OF FINANCING COLLEGE

| ACTIVITY | VERY DIFFICULT | SOMEWHAT DIFFICULT | NOT DIFFICULT |
|---|----------------|--------------------|---------------|
| Completing the FAFSA | 43% | 40% | 34% |
| Helping my child complete an additional school-required aid application | 33% | 29% | 18% |
| Helping my child apply for other scholarships | 56% | 51% | 28% |
| Understanding award letter | 22% | 15% | 6% |
| Understanding what I need to pay after all aid has been accounted for | 49% | 38% | 21% |
| Understanding payment options | 24% | 35% | 10% |
| Finding loans | 10% | 31% | 44% |



INCREASE AWARD COMPREHENSION THROUGH VIDEO

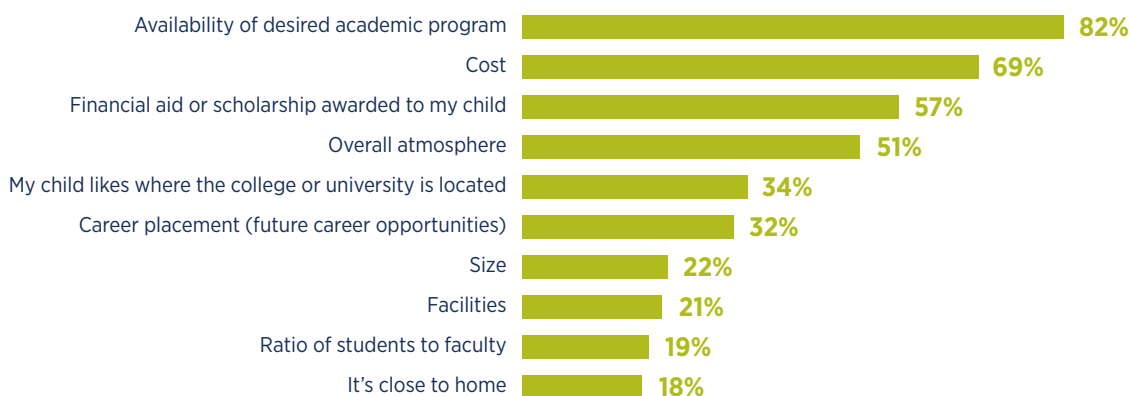
While institutions spend a great deal of resources to remain affordable, the financial aid process continues to confuse and overwhelm parents and students. Take advantage of the medium these generations spend two to three hours watching—online videos—to help them make sense of the muddled language and next steps. RNL's personalized FinAid video solution can help your school diversify and optimize your aid strategy in a clear, compelling, and relevant way.

Learn more at RuffaloNL.com/FinAidVideo

MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS IN HELPING CHILD DECIDE WHERE TO ATTEND

Which factors influence parents when it comes to helping their children choose a college? Parents picked their five most important factors, and these were the top results.

MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS IN HELPING CHILD CHOOSE A COLLEGE



CONCLUSION

As these results show, the method, timing, context, and content of how institutions communicate with parents of high school students can greatly affect the engagement and ultimately enrollment of a student. Based on these results, here are four areas institutions should prioritize to increase the impact of parent engagement on student enrollment.

- 1 Create dedicated communications for parents.** Nearly 8 out of 10 parents are very involved in their child's college planning process, but only half of parents said they received communication specifically for them from colleges. This is an opportunity to tap into testimonials, graduation statistics, financial aid data, and career outcomes to highlight the value of your institution. In addition to reaching out to students, communicate directly with parents so they can feel confident in their child's choice and future.
- 2 Start the cost conversation early.** Half of respondents say planning for college starts before sophomore year. What's more, parents are most likely very involved in the financial planning process. They want to be informed and prepared, especially as college costs continue to rise. Leverage this opportunity to start connecting with parents early and often to ensure your message is heard.
- 3 Use multiple solutions to make the financial process understandable.** The complexity of the financial aid process can be a source of great anxiety for families. Keep them moving along the enrollment process by explaining hurdles like financial aid applications and reward letters. Use scalable resources like video, AI chatbots, and email to provide personalized assistance.
- 4 Emphasize outcomes and ROI.** The final decision of what school to attend doesn't come down to just one thing—program, location, cost. It comes down to the value and ROI students and parents can expect. When considering what to communicate with parents and students, include career opportunities, cost and rewards, facilities, academic programs, student life and overall atmosphere, and student-faculty ratio. The importance of these factors varies depending on the parents' level of education, but overall, these hit close to home for all families and help them see why they should choose your institution over any other.



Ask for a **FREE CONSULTATION** with our enrollment experts

There are great opportunities to engage parents during the student recruitment process. Which methods work best for your institution?

Talk with our experts to find out how you can connect with parents at key stages of the enrollment process to increase your enrollment yields.

REQUEST YOUR CONSULTATION AT RuffaloNL.com/EnrollmentStrategies

ABOUT THE SURVEY 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.

Visit RuffaloNL.com



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. CampusESP supports that objective through personalized communications and parental alerts delivered via the web and straight to their smartphones.

Visit campusesp.com



About TeenLife

TeenLife.com is the leading platform for finding teen-centered programs and services, such as pre-college summer programs, gap programs, and college admission resources. Millions of parents, students, and counselors use TeenLife annually to find learning opportunities that help middle and high school students to succeed in college and life beyond school.

Visit TeenLife.com

Visit **RuffaloNL.com/Enrollment**
Email **ContactUs@RuffaloNL.com**
Call **800.876.1117**

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