



# Honoring Parent Communication Preferences

Five Lessons for Enrollment Leaders from Recent EAB Survey Research

# No one has more influence on students' college decisions than parents do

### Parents beat out other influencers by a wide margin

It is commonly (and correctly) assumed that parents are influential when it comes to their students' college choice. But the actual degree of their influence is worth underscoring. As shown in the chart at right, students cite parents as key influencers at least three times more often than they cite any other individual.

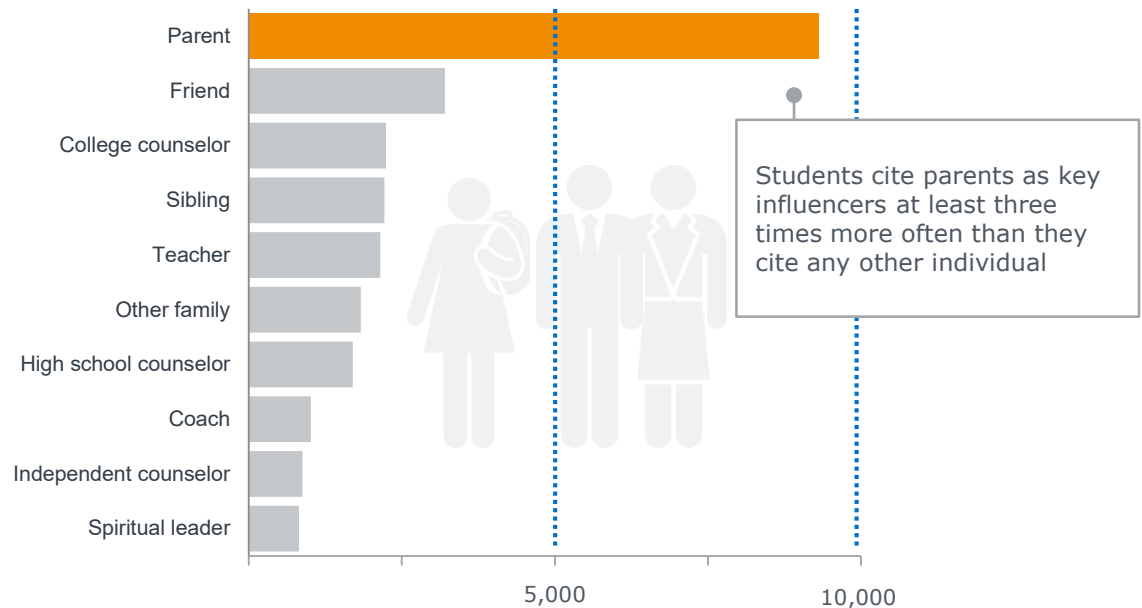
### Engaging parents is an opportunity and a challenge

This fact represents an important opportunity for colleges and universities, insofar as it gives enrollment leaders another channel through which to influence students. When correctly engaged, parents become a powerful ally in a school's effort to win over prospective students.

That said, along with that opportunity comes a challenge. As discussed across the coming pages, effectively engaging parents depends, among other things, on a deep understanding and mastery of the communication channels used to reach them.

### Number of Students Identifying Individuals as "Highly Influential"

EAB Survey Research



Source: EAB research and analysis.

# Marketing outreach to parents influences student behavior

## Influencing the influencers

As described on the preceding page, students rank parents as the primary influencers of their college choice, by a wide margin. The corresponding opportunity for enrollment leaders is that of “influencing the influencers,” enlisting parents as allies in the recruitment effort.

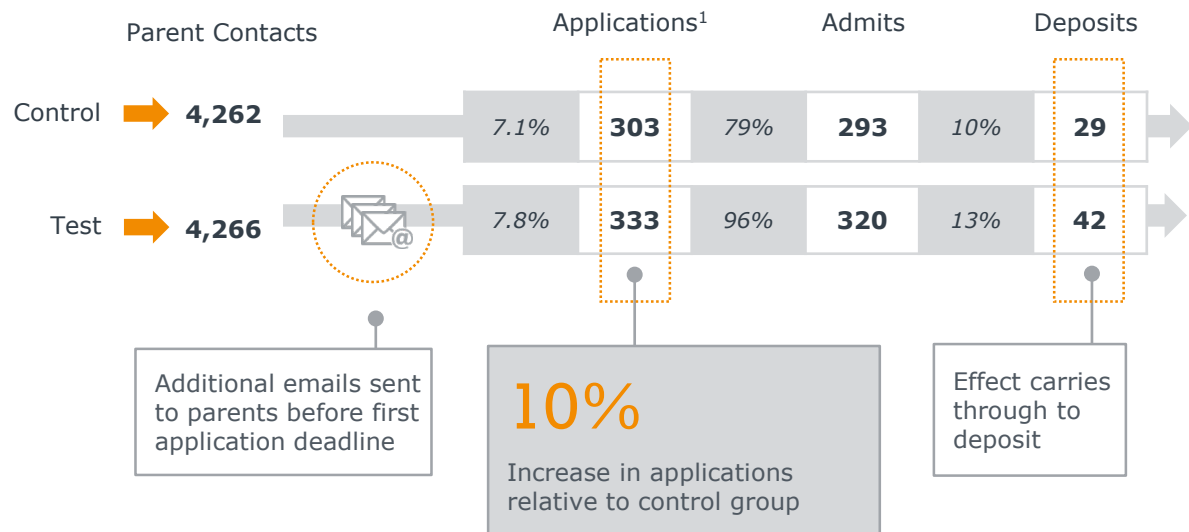
## Parents pass on your influence to their students

EAB testing has demonstrated that recruitment-marketing outreach to parents can have significant downstream impact on student behavior. The material at right, which shows results from an EAB test of email contact with parents, offers a case in point. As indicated, the intervention produced a 10% increase in application rate, an effect that carried through to deposit.

This finding echoes results seen across a broader range of EAB’s recruitment-marketing campaign work, which has consistently shown strong positive correlation between parent involvement and downstream enrollment results.

### Case in Point: Increased Email Intensity Boosts Application Rate

*Findings from EAB Testing*



1) Completed applications.

Source: EAB research and analysis.

## This report shares highlights from EAB's most recent parent survey

### Findings from a large national survey of parents

The material in this report is based on a large-scale EAB survey of parents of college-bound students.

National in scope, the survey included participants from all regions of the United States. It also included parents of students in different high school years and covered a demographically diverse set of households.

### Noteworthy features of the survey

The features of the survey mentioned above offer several valuable perspectives on how parent audiences might be better engaged via recruitment marketing.

Since it included parents of students in various high school years, the survey illuminates how parent concerns change as their student progresses through high school.

Furthermore, because the survey included a demographically diverse set of parents, it offers a granular understanding of how parent concerns vary by income level, ethnicity, and other factors.

### EAB's Parent Survey in Brief

#### Total Respondents

1,566

households participated

#### Parents' Education Level

78%

of respondents have a bachelor's degree or higher

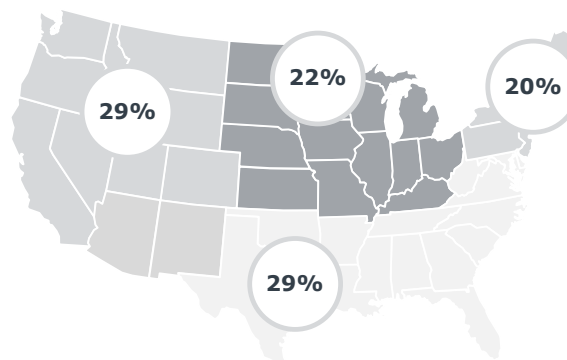
#### Student's Current Class Year

18% Freshman

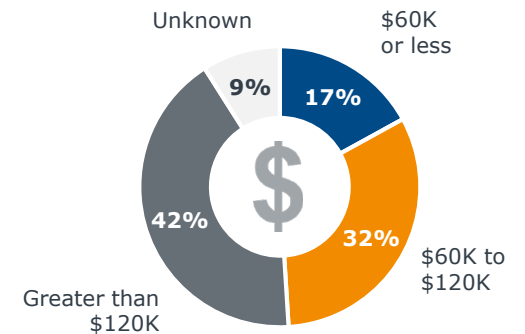
40% Sophomore

40% Junior

#### Location



#### Income



Source: EAB research and analysis.

## Make the Most of Channels You Control

### School websites and visits top the list of sources parents rely on most

#### There are two clear winners among information sources parents rely on

Among the many sources parents use to learn about colleges, they value two above all others: school websites and campus visits.

This is good news, for two reasons. First, unlike many other sources parents report using, school websites and campus visits are under the school's direct control. Second, these same sources also rank among students' top picks.

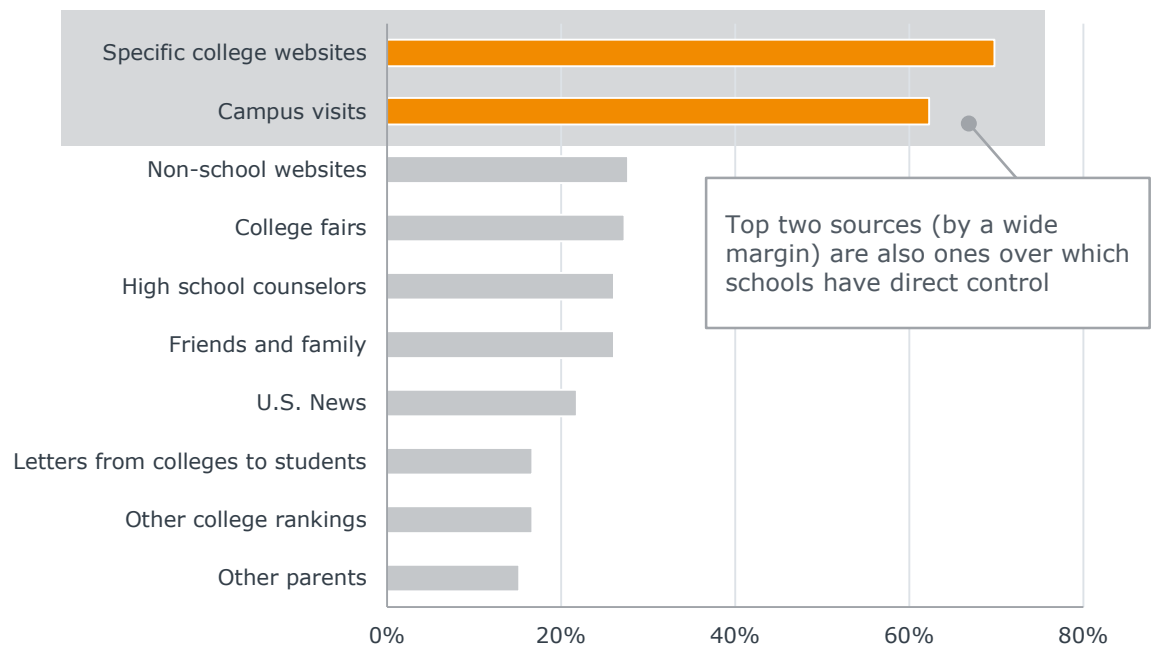
#### Email as an under-leveraged opportunity for parent engagement

One additional information source that merits special mention is email communication from schools.

In contrast with students, who cite emails from schools they're considering as the number one most helpful source of information, parents rank them eleventh. This suggests an opportunity for schools to develop email communication streams with greater relevance for parents.

#### What Information Sources Do Parents Rely on Most?

Percentage of Responding Parents, Ten Most Frequently Cited Sources



Source: EAB research and analysis.

## Leverage Parents' Responsiveness to Digital Ads

### Parents click on schools' digital ads more than students do

#### Parents are online at least as much as students are

While intensive engagement with digital media is often talked about as a young person's phenomenon, it should come as no surprise that adults—including parents—spend a lot of time online. In fact, there's strong evidence parents spend *more* time online than students do.<sup>1</sup>

#### Parent response to digital ads exceeds that of students

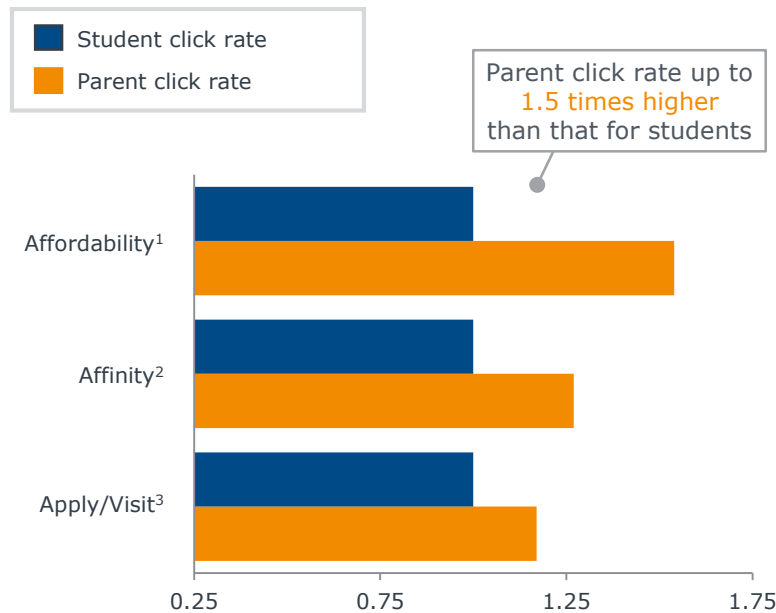
Evidence from EAB's own recruitment campaigns reinforces this picture of parents' high level of online engagement. Shown at right is just one of many related examples from EAB testing.

The bar chart compares parent and student response to digital recruitment marketing ads served to both audiences over Facebook, with parent click rate indexed to the student rate. As indicated, for all ad variants tested, parent response exceeds student response.

1. Lauricella, A. R., D. P. Cingel, L. Beaudoin-Ryan, M. B. Robb, M. Saphir, and E. A. Wartella. 2016. "The Common Sense Census: Plugged-In Parents of Tweens and Teens." San Francisco. Common Sense Media; Felt, L. J. and M. B. Robb. 2016. "Technology Addiction: Concern, Controversy, and Finding Balance." San Francisco. Common Sense Media.

#### Click Rate, Students Versus Parents

*Indexed to Student Response Rate, Facebook Ads by Theme, EAB Enrollment Services Partner Institutions*



1) Call to action: "learn more."  
 2) Call to action: "learn more."  
 3) Call to action: "apply now" (students), "sign up" (parents).

**24%**

of parents click on ads sometimes, often, or always

**31%**

of parents never or rarely hide digital ads on Facebook

**68%**

of parents do not use ad blockers on social media

Source: EAB research and analysis.

Understand Varying Engagement Profiles Across Social Media

# Parents behave differently on different social networks

### Social media content investments are a cost of doing business

EAB survey research has found that most students expect colleges and universities to maintain a presence on social media.

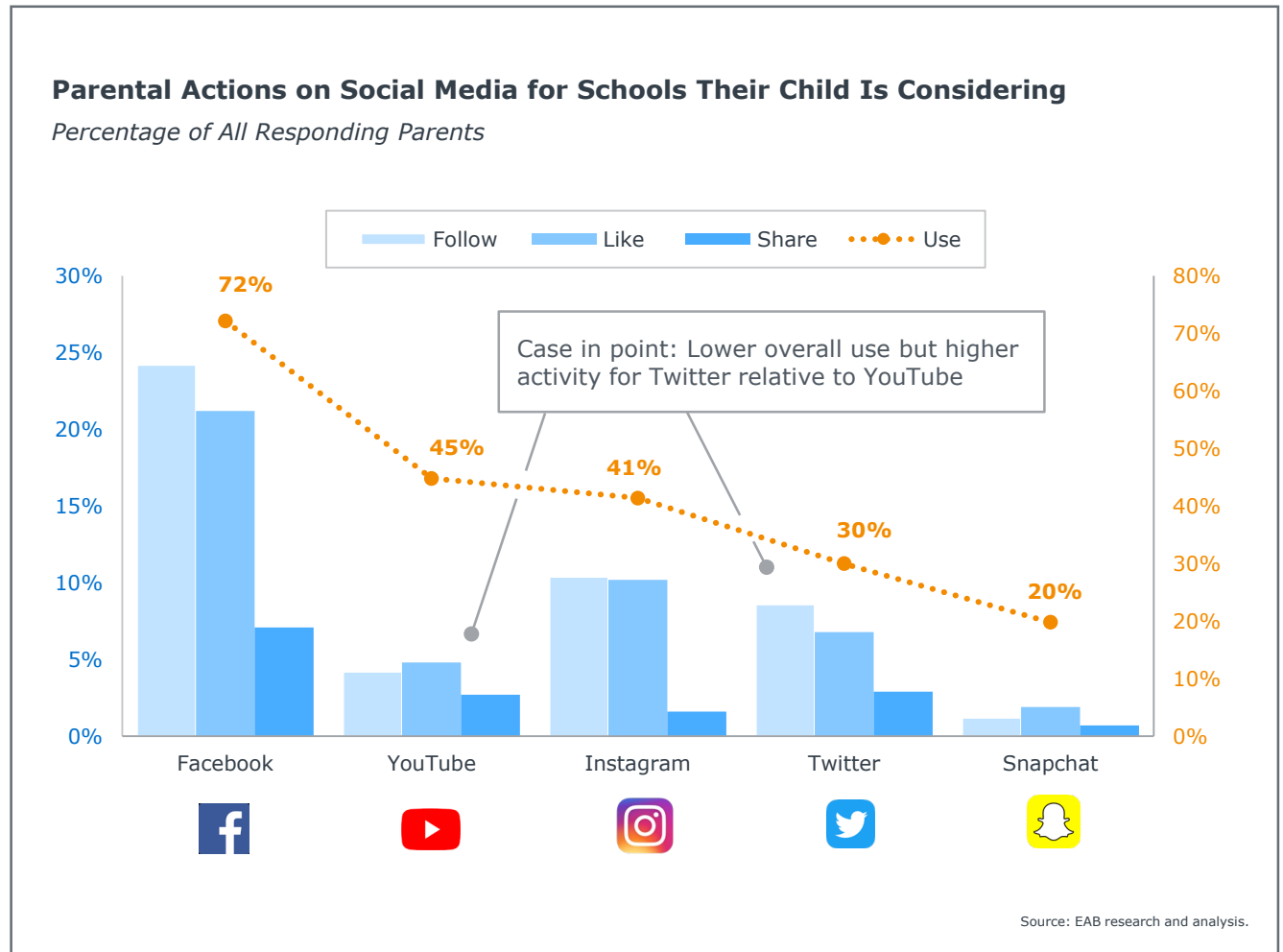
Most schools, having reached the same conclusion, invest significant resources in related efforts, including the development and hosting of “unpaid” content on a variety of platforms.

### Parents interact differently with different social networks

This being the case, it’s helpful to understand how parents behave across different social networks.

As shown at right, each network has a distinctive profile. Comparing YouTube and Twitter, for example, shows how a network with lower overall user numbers (Twitter) can actually generate more activity, as measured by follows, shares, and likes.

Enrollment teams will want to factor these different interaction profiles into their recruitment-marketing media strategy and campaign design.



Track with Parents' Changing Communication Preferences

# How parents want to hear from you is continuously evolving

## A longitudinal look at parents' media habits

EAB's most recent parent survey, as well as an earlier iteration from 2012, included questions regarding parents' preferred means of receiving information about specific topics. Responses to these questions are summarized in the chart at right.

## Parents are engaging with a wider range of channels

Three trends stand out.

The first is that parents consider certain channels more appropriate for specific types of information than others, e.g., they regard the school's website as the best channel for sharing information about majors and minors but not scholarships.

Second is that parents' opinions regarding which channels are best suited to which types of information has changed in recent years, and not always in intuitive ways.

The third and final trend to note is that parents have become open to receiving information through a wider range of channels.

**Parents' Preferred Communication Channels, by Topic**  
2012 Versus 2018

	Email	Web	Mail
Costs	✓	✓	✓✓
Scholarships	✓		✓✓
Admission requirements	✓	✓✓	✓✓
Majors/minors		✓✓	
Degree programs		✓✓	✓
Financial aid	✓✓		✓✓
Application deadlines	✓		✓
Student housing options		✓✓	
Sources of funds to pay	✓	✓	✓✓
General information		✓	✓

Cited by parents in:

- ✓✓ 2012 and 2018
- ✓ 2012 only
- ✓ 2018 only

An expanding role for digital channels...

...and lasting relevance for paper

Source: EAB research and analysis.



## Lesson 5

### Consider Channel Preference if You're Segmenting

# Case in point: Differing response to push communications by income

#### Segmentation versus segment-awareness

EAB testing has consistently shown that segmentation in recruitment marketing outreach, even when painstakingly executed, tends to produce mixed results, sometimes increasing response rate and sometimes decreasing it.

That said, a basic awareness of the variety of opinions and preferences in your parent audience can help inform important decisions about channel selection.

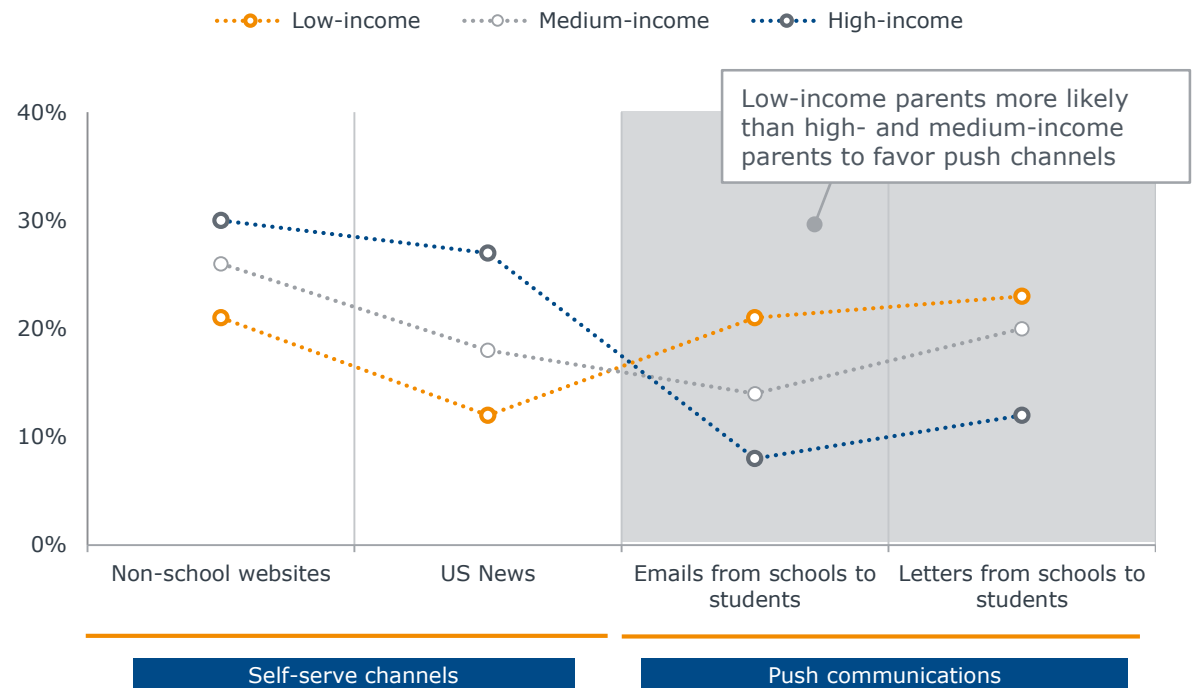
#### Channel preferences reflect demographic differences

EAB's parent survey found markedly different opinions on communication channels across different demographic segments.

Shown at right is a case in point. As indicated in the chart, low- and high-income families have opposite preferences when it comes to research-based self-serve content versus push communications, with low-income families showing a stronger affinity for the latter.

#### What Information Sources Do Parents Find Most Helpful?

Percentage of Parents, by Household Income



Source: EAB research and analysis.

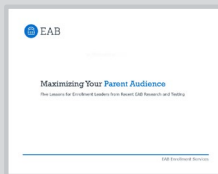
# Related Resources

## Learn More About Engaging Parents of Prospective Students

Related resources

This document

### Maximizing Your Parent Audience



Key questions addressed

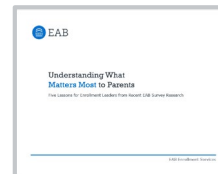
What strategies can enrollment leaders use to achieve earlier and more complete capture of parent contact information?

Sources



Findings from pilot **testing** of “parent-first” search with EAB partner institutions

### Understanding What Matters Most to Parents



What topics can enrollment leaders address in their communications with parents to ensure maximum interest and engagement?

### Honoring Parent Communication Preferences



What channel mix should enrollment leaders use to ensure they’re reaching as much of their intended parent audience as possible?



Findings from an EAB **survey** of parents from more than 1,500 households nationwide



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