Findings from EAB’s 2020 Parent Survey

New Insight on How Parents of College-Bound Students Are Evaluating Schools
Our 2020 Parent Survey in Brief

Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Total Respondents
2,530 individuals participated

Parents’ Education Level
71% of respondents have a bachelor’s degree or higher

Student’s Class Year at Time of Survey
- Freshman: 8%
- Sophomore: 30%
- Junior: 61%
- Senior: 17%

Location
- 35%
- 27%
- 29%
- 9%

Income
- Unknown: 8%
- $60K or less: 21%
- $61K to $120K: 31%
- Greater than $120K: 41%

Source: EAB research and analysis.
1. Parents and the Pandemic

2. Parents’ Perspective on Value

3. Parents’ Communication Preferences
COVID Concerns

A Majority of Parents Are Very Worried

“How concerned are you about the coronavirus affecting your family?”

Percentage of Responding Parents

More than half of parents are extremely or very concerned

Parents with estimated household income of $60K or less were 1.4x more likely be extremely concerned than those in the $120K+ band

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern Level</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extremely concerned</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very concerned</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mildly concerned</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A little concerned</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not concerned at all</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: EAB research and analysis.
## Altered Behavior

### The Pandemic Is Impacting Parents’ College-Search Approach

**“Which of the following statements regarding the impact of the pandemic accurately reflect your plans?”**

*Percentage of Responding Parents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Will limit number of campus visits</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will not consider schools outside US</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will not visit campuses in outbreak areas</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will not consider schools far from home</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will consider online programs</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A relatively small percentage of parents are crossing distant schools off their list.
Differing Responses Across Income Bands

Least-Affluent Parents Most Likely to Be Altering Their Plans

“Which of the following statements regarding the impact of the pandemic accurately reflect your plans?”

Percentage of Responding Parents, by Estimated Household Income

- We will consider online programs/degrees:
  - $120,001 or More: 7%
  - $60,001 to $120,000: 15%
  - $60,000 or Less: 20%

- We will not consider schools far from home:
  - $120,001 or More: 9%
  - $60,001 to $120,000: 18%
  - $60,000 or Less: 18%

- We will not visit campus in areas with an outbreak:
  - $120,001 or More: 7%
  - $60,001 to $120,000: 20%
  - $60,000 or Less: 28%

Source: EAB research and analysis.
Placing New Importance on Safety

Elevated Prominence Within an Otherwise Consistent Set of Priorities

“What school characteristics or outcomes would you pay more for?”

*Top Five Characteristics, Percentage of Parents Citing Each*

Parents’ top five concerns have not changed since 2018

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Rank in 2020</th>
<th>Rank vs. 2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strong student-success support</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe and secure campus environment</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>2, +3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful job placement after college</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong career preparation services</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellence in teaching</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>5, -3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Safety has risen to the #2 slot, presumably due to the pandemic.
1. Parents and the Pandemic

2. Parents’ Perspective on Value

3. Parents’ Communication Preferences
Which School Characteristics Matter Most?

Parents Differ from Students on Cost but Agree on Other Key Points

“Which of the following school characteristics are most important to you? Which are most important to your child?”

Percentage of Responding Parents
Cost Is by Far Parents’ Biggest Source of Anxiety

“What makes you most anxious about your child’s future college experience?”

Categories Cited by More Than 10% of Survey Respondents

- Cost: 48%
- Debt incurred: 34%
- Fit: 32%
- Scholarships: 30%
- Child’s health/well-being: 21%
- Child’s safety: 20%
- Employment after graduation: 15%
- Child’s success: 15%
- Financial aid: 14%
- Child’s happiness: 14%
- Admission to top-choice school: 13%

Even students’ health is not as worrying to parents as college cost—a remarkable finding in the COVID era.

Included in fewer than 10% of parents’ top concerns:
- Exposure to drugs or alcohol on campus
- Eventual admission to graduate school
- Child’s ability to make friends

Source: EAB research and analysis.
Parental Influence Focuses on Finances

Cost Tops the List of College-Related Decisions Parents Impact Most

“How much influence do you have on each of the following aspects of your child’s choice of school?”

*Source: EAB research and analysis.*

**Average Score Across Responding Parents, by Decision Category**

(1 = No Influence, 5 = A Great Deal of Influence)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial Category</th>
<th>Average Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total amount we will spend</td>
<td>3.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amount of debt we will incur</td>
<td>3.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools applied to</td>
<td>3.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of schools applied to</td>
<td>3.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major chosen</td>
<td>2.53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Financial categories are clear standouts.
Parsing Parents’ Cost Concerns

Much Parent Worry Hinges on Factors You Control

“What concerns you most about the cost of college?”

Percentage of Responding Parents

- Level of financial aid from school: 69%
- Child’s chances of getting a scholarship: 54%
- Ability to afford any college: 44%
- Affordability of top-choice school: 44%
- Qualifying for financial aid: 42%
- Post-enrollment cost increases: 29%
- Completing aid applications: 18%

Factors you control

Source: EAB research and analysis.
Increased Uncertainty

More Parents Are Less Confident When it Comes to Budgeting

Percentage of Parents Who Said They Were Unsure How Much to Spend on Their Student’s College Education

2018 Versus 2020, by Household Income, Parents of High School Seniors

Uncertainty is most widespread among lowest-income families

Uncertainty has increased across all income bands

Source: EAB research and analysis.
How Much Are Parents Willing to Pay?

More Lower-Income Parents Have a Lower Cost Ceiling in 2020

“What is the most you would pay for college annually?”

Parents of High School Seniors from Households with Income of $60K or Less; Cost Includes Tuition, Fees, Housing, and Meals

Source: EAB research and analysis.

% willing to pay >$10K

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1) Denominator excludes parents who said they were unsure how much they’d be willing to pay. For data shown in this chart, n=54 for 2018 and n=45 for 2020 (n being the total number of responding households).
How Much Are Parents Willing to Pay?

More Middle-Income Parents Have a Lower Cost Ceiling in 2020

“What is the most you would pay for college annually?”

Parents of High School Seniors from Households with Income between $60K and $120K; Cost Includes Tuition, Fees, Housing, and Meals

% willing to pay >$15K

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2018</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1) Denominator excludes parents who said they were unsure how much they’d be willing to pay. For data shown in this chart, n=125 for 2018 and n=76 for 2020 (n being the total number of responding households).

Source: EAB research and analysis.
How Much Are Parents Willing to Pay?

More High-Income Parents Have a Lower Cost Ceiling in 2020

“What is the most you would pay for college annually?”

*Parents of High School Seniors from Households with Income Greater than $120K; Cost Includes Tuition, Fees, Housing, and Meals*

1) Denominator excludes parents who said they were unsure how much they’d be willing to pay. For data shown in this chart, n=201 for 2018 and n=116 for 2020 (n being the total number of responding households).
1. Parents and the Pandemic

2. Parents’ Perspective on Value

3. Parents’ Communication Preferences
What Information Sources Do Parents Favor?

A Clear Division Within Parents’ Top 10 Sources

“Which sources were most helpful to you in your search for information about schools?”

Percentage of Parents Citing Each Source (Top Ten Sources)

- Specific college websites: 54%
- Search engines: 53%
- Campus visits: 51%
- College fairs: 27%
- High school guidance counselors: 26%
- Personal letters from colleges: 23%
- Friends and family members: 23%
- Email messages from colleges: 20%
- Teachers/Coaches: 17%
- Other parents: 16%

Not among the top 10:
- Non-school websites
- College publications
- Published college rankings
- College guidebooks

Source: EAB research and analysis.
How Do Parents Find Schools Online?

Parents Most Often Search Based on Colleges’ Academic Offerings

“When you searched for a college or university, what search criteria did you use?”

Percentage of Responding Parents

- Academic program: 76%
- Geographic region: 41%
- School’s name: 40%
- Career opportunities: 25%
- School selectivity: 17%
- Other: 8%

51% of parents discovered a school they had not previously considered as a direct result of a web search.

Source: EAB research and analysis.
Do School Websites Impact Parent Opinion?

Parents Are Looking at Your Website—and Judging You by It

**“Do you agree with the following statements regarding school websites?”**

*Percentage of Responding Parents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I make a point of visiting websites of schools that my child is considering</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A well-designed college website improves my opinion of a college</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A poorly designed website reduces my confidence in a college</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In general, it is easy to find the information I need on a college website</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I avoid college websites that are hard to use</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A college’s website helps me decide whether the school is right for my child</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All college websites are basically the same</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additionally, almost a third of parents said school websites were the **single most important information source** when it came to helping them decide whether a school is right for their child.

Source: EAB research and analysis.
What Are Parents Looking for on Your Website?

Majors and Cost Top the List of Information Parents Are Seeking

“What information are you most often seeking on college websites?”

*Percentage of Responding Parents, Topics Chosen by 10% or More Parents*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Majors/minors</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College costs</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General information about the school</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance rates/admission statistics</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus-visit information</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial aid</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student life on campus</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletic programs</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific classes offered</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topics cited by fewer than 10% of parents:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College rank and reputation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation rates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus facilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career services offered</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty profiles</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1) Survey respondents were asked to choose three topics.
Parents Want to Hear from You

Few Parents Think Schools Should Not Communicate Directly with Them

“Do you think colleges and universities should communicate directly with parents of prospective students?”

Percentage of Responding Parents

- **Yes** = 71%
  - A large majority of parents want to hear from you

- **No** = 8%
  - Very few would rather you didn’t contact them

- **Unsure** = 21%
  - A significant number aren’t sure

Give these parents reason to be grateful for hearing from you

Source: EAB research and analysis.
Parents are interested in many different aspects of prospective schools. What information would you like from schools your child is considering?”

### Percentage of Surveyed Parents, Top 20 Topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Costs (e.g., tuition, fees, housing)</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Admission requirements</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majors/minors</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree programs</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student housing options</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial aid</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Application deadlines</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location of the school and area around it</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General information about the college</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources of funds to pay for college</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus safety</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of school/number of enrolled students</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Careers related to specific majors</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job placement of graduates</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student activities</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilities on campus</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career services provided</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: EAB research and analysis.
When Do Parents Want Which Information?

Topics Parents Are Most Interested In Vary by Funnel Stage

“When would you like to receive information on specific topics?”

*By Student’s High School Year, Percentage of Responding Parents*

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**Source:** EAB research and analysis.