



Engaging Students' #1 Influencer in Recruitment

5 Actionable Insights from EAB's 2022 Parent Survey

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Engaging Today's Parents

Understanding the Mindset of a New Type of Parent

Historical trends going back several decades, in combination with the recent effects of the pandemic, have shaped the mindset of a new generation of parents. Generation X has 74% less wealth and six times more debt than their parents. They're raising families amid real and perceived threats to their children's safety and well-being, such as the pandemic, gun violence in schools, and climate change. As a result of the impact of these forces, today's K-12 parents are more transactional in mindset, more anxious, and less trusting than their predecessors, according to recent research from EAB's [Independent Executive School Forum](#).

More Transactional



More Anxious



Less Trusting



College Recruitment in the Age of Intensive Parenting

What do these trends mean for college enrollment leaders? EAB survey research has long found that parents are highly influential in students' college search and decision. With the rise of intensive parenting, parent involvement has only increased in recent years: students are more likely to rank parents as a top source in their college search and decision, and parents increasingly seek direct communication from colleges.

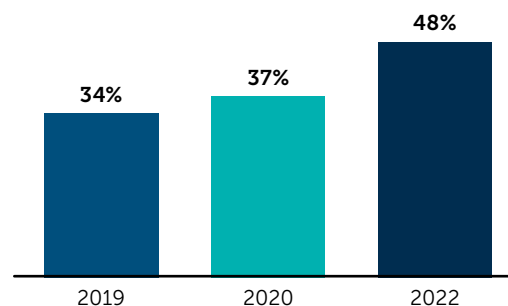
Despite the evidence that students appreciate greater parental involvement in recruitment, many enrollment leaders are uncertain about exactly how and when to best engage parents. To provide guidance on how to best communicate with this key audience, EAB has conducted parent surveys for more than 10 years. This report includes insights from our 2022 survey of more than 2,000 parents and guardians of high school students.

This report will share five takeaways:

1. Parents want direct communication from colleges.
2. Parents are highly concerned—and often uncertain—about college cost and value.
3. Parents' and students' concerns about cost become more similar later in the student journey.
4. Parents are active participants across many communication channels.
5. Parents' interests shift during the recruitment journey.

Percentage of Students Naming Parents or Guardians in Their Top Five Sources

EAB New College Freshman Survey



Source: Currier, Erin, "How Generation X Could Change the American Dream," *Pew Trend Magazine*, January 26, 2018; Van Dam, Andrew, "The Unluckiest Generation in U.S. History," *The Washington Post*, June 5, 2020; EAB interviews and analysis.



INSIGHT #1

Parents want direct communication from colleges.

Today's Parents Want to Be More Involved

Parents Are Increasingly Anxious and Hands-On

Research from EAB's [Independent School Executive Forum](#) indicates that parents' mindsets have shifted. Among today's high school parents, the norm is intensive parenting, a style characterized as "child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive, and financially expensive." For colleges, this parenting style manifests in three important characteristics: today's parents are more anxious, more transactional, and less trusting than their predecessors.

Shifting Parent Mindset Previously Observed in K-12

EAB Independent School Executive Forum Survey¹

67%

of heads of school agree that **parent anxiety** has increased

81%

of heads of school agree that **transactional attitudes** among parents have increased

63%

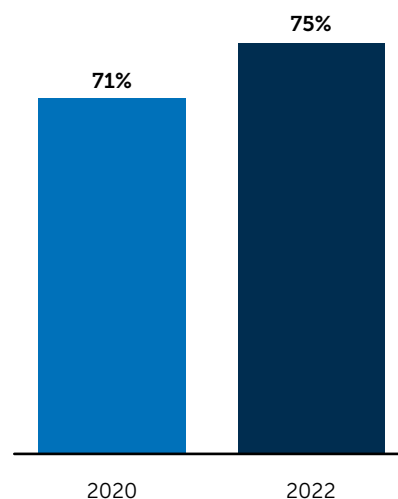
of heads agree that parents are **less trusting** today than in the past

Parents Want to Be Informed About and Involved in College Search

Given these characteristics, it's not surprising that today's parents want to be more involved in the college process. Today's parents are concerned about college cost, often uncertain about value, and anxious about their children's safety and well-being. These shifts are reflected in EAB survey research, with 75% of parents saying that colleges should communicate with them directly, a slight increase from the 71% of parents who said the same in 2020.

An Increase in Parents Interested in Communicating Directly with Colleges

Parents Indicating That Colleges Should Communicate with Them Directly, 2020–2022



⇒ TAKEAWAY

A robust parent communication strategy is essential for building trust and affinity with families.

1. N=43 heads of partner schools.

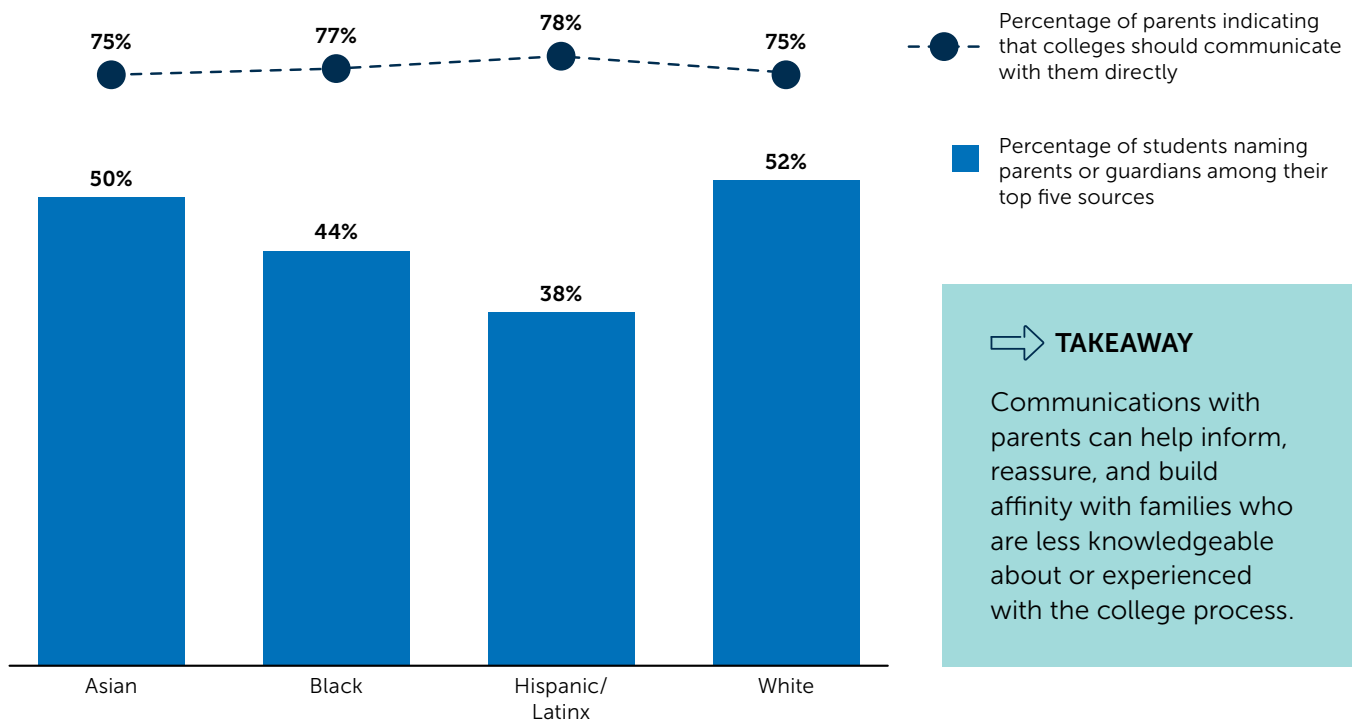
Source: Faircloth, Charlotte, "Intensive Parenting and the Expansion of Parenting," *Parenting Culture Studies*, 2014, pp. 25-50; EAB interviews and analysis, 2021-2022.

All Parents Want Communication from Colleges

Parents of Underserved Students Especially Want to Be Involved

EAB's 2022 New College Freshman Survey found that historically underserved students, including students of color and first-generation students, were less likely than their counterparts to name parents as a top source in their college decision. Our parent survey indicates that families of underserved students overwhelmingly want direct information from colleges, even though they tend to have less influence on their children's decisions.

While Parental Influence Differs According to Race/Ethnicity, Parents' Interest in Receiving Communications Does Not



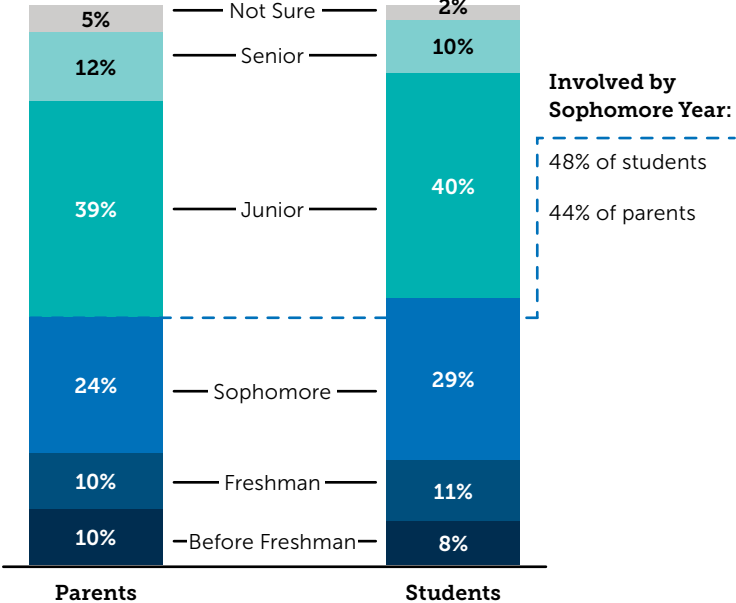
Parents Appreciate Communication at the Start of Their Student's Search

Parents Want to Be Involved at the Same Time as Their Students

For many colleges, the question is not whether, but when, to start communicating with parents. In our 2022 survey, as in previous surveys, we found that parents tend to get involved in college research around the same time as their children do. Just under 20% of families have started researching colleges by freshman year, and just under 50% have done so by the end of sophomore year. Communicating with parents early in high school caters to parents' demonstrated desire for information about colleges. It can also prompt those who had not thought to start the search process to engage earlier than they otherwise might have.

Parental Involvement Tracks Closely to Student Activity

When Students and Parents First Started Researching Colleges, by Student Year



Parents' Engagement Is a Strong Indicator of Student Behavior

50%

Increase in likelihood of a student to apply if their parent had responded to an EAB parent marketing campaign

⇒ TAKEAWAY

Many parents appreciate communication early in the college search. A multipronged approach to sourcing parents' contact information can help you maximize reach and engagement among parents.



INSIGHT #2

Parents are highly concerned—and often uncertain—about college cost and value.

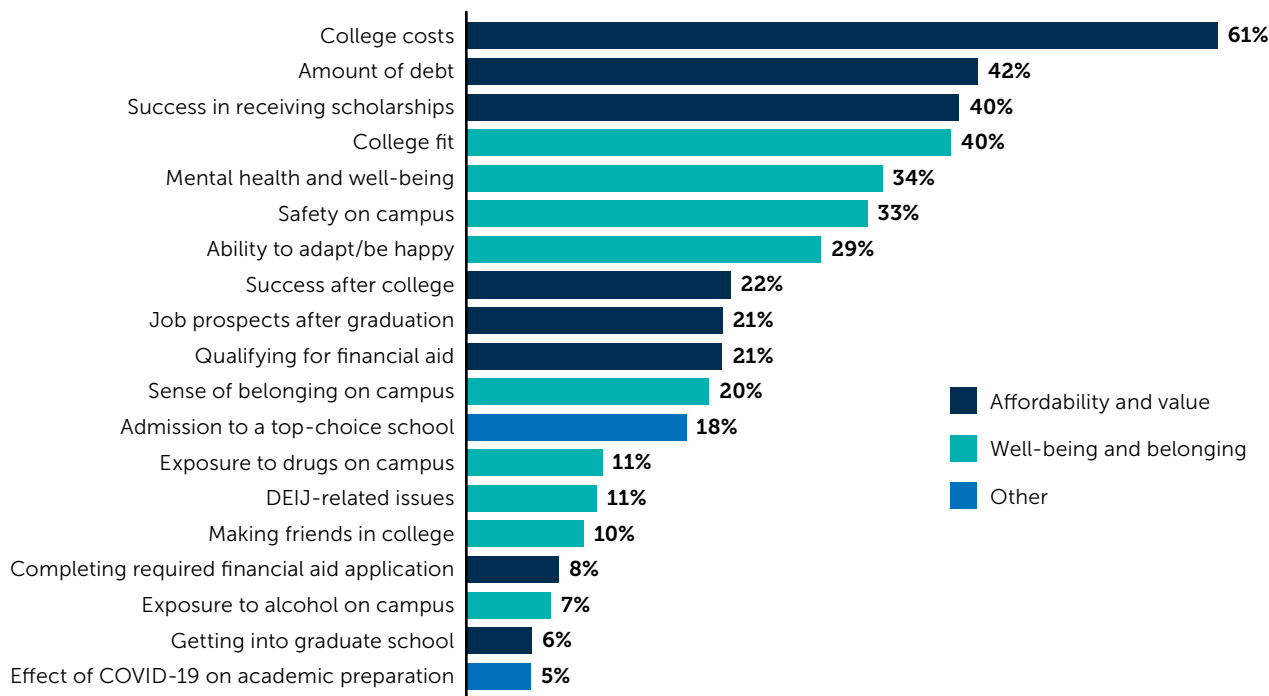
Financial Concerns Are a Top Source of Anxiety

Affordability and Value Remain Top Apprehensions

Consistent with previous EAB research, financial concerns continue to top of the list parents' sources of anxiety about college, as shown in the chart below. When we asked parents about the primary factors they consider when evaluating a college, cost came in first, ranking slightly above even "child's happiness." Cost concerns impact not only which college a student will choose but also whether they'll attend any college at all. One in three parents responded that their ability to afford any college was a top source of anxiety, with even higher rates among Black and Hispanic/Latinx families.

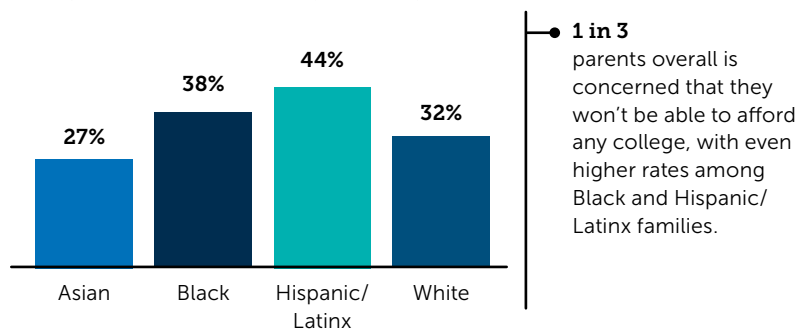
What About Your Child's College Search Makes You Most Anxious?

Participants Could Select Up to Five Responses



Many Parents Questioning Their Ability to Afford Any College

Parents Indicating That Ability to Afford Any College Is a Top Concern, by Ethnicity of Child



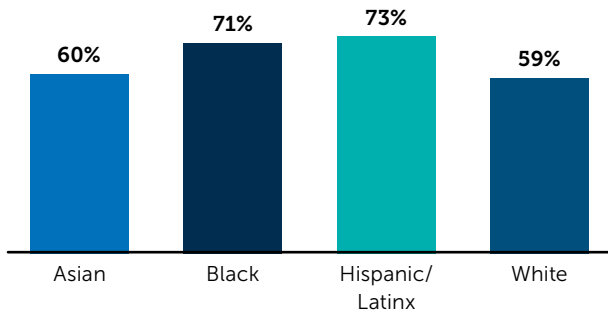
➔ TAKEAWAY

Addressing parents' concerns about cost and value should be a top goal of communications with parents.

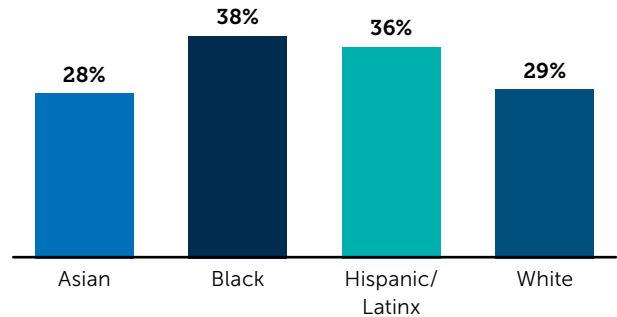
Views on Cost and Safety Vary by Race/Ethnicity

Finances Are a Greater Concern for Parents of Black and Hispanic/Latinx Students than for Parents of Asian and White Students

Financial Cost to Family

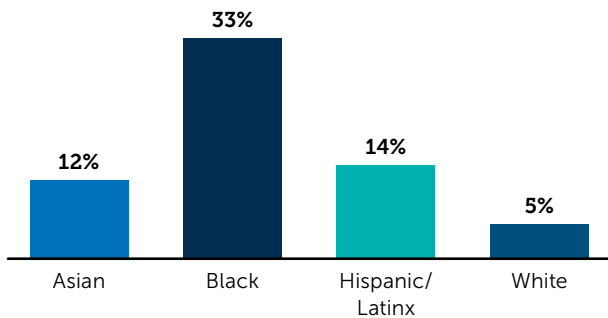


Student Loan Debt



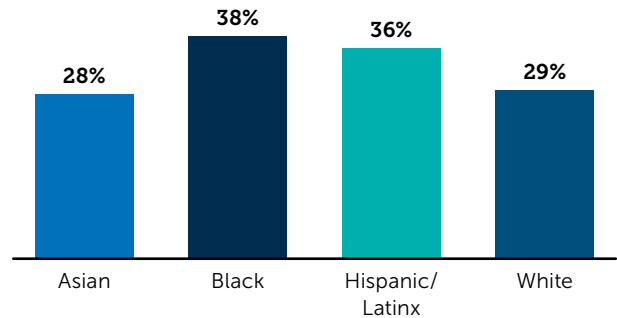
1 in 3 Parents of Black Students Says DEIJ Is a Top Factor in College Choice

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Social Justice



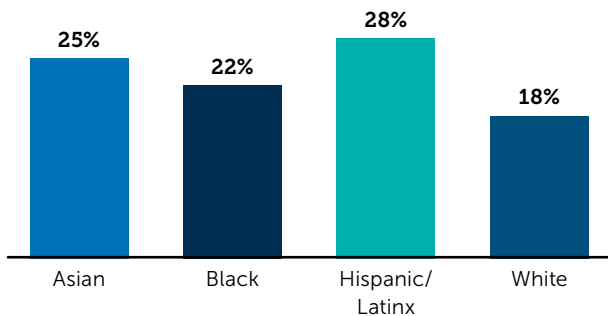
Safety Is of Greater Concern for Parents of Black and Hispanic/Latinx Students

Child's Safety



Families of Color Are More Likely to Prioritize Proximity

Proximity to Home



➡ TAKEAWAY

Help reassure families that their children will be safe and welcomed at your campus through targeted initiatives, including fly-in programs and resources in native languages, where applicable.

Uncertainty About College Costs

Knowledge Gaps in College Affordability

One major factor contributing to parents' anxiety about college costs is uncertainty about how much they'll need to pay and how much they can afford. Almost one in two parents responded that they either thought of college costs in terms of sticker price or hadn't thought about the difference between sticker price and net cost. In addition, 25% of parents responded that they didn't know the maximum amount they would be willing to pay for a college education. While this percentage remains sizable, it's down from 40% in 2020, suggesting that many parents have been forced to take a closer look at budgets during the pandemic and financial downturn. In addition, we found that lower-income families are most uncertain about both cost and their maximum budget for college.

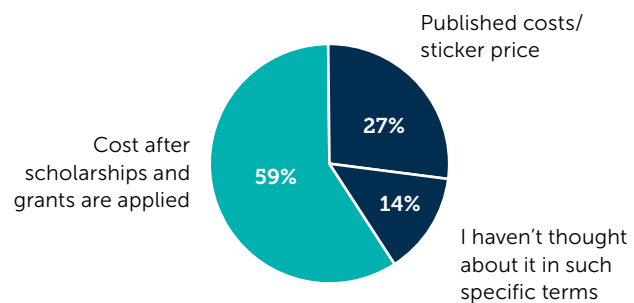
Likely Underestimating Time and Money Needed for College

87%

of parents expect their child to graduate in four years. The actual *six-year* graduation rate is 64%.

Uncertainty About the Impact College Will Have on Household Finances

When you think about how much it will cost for your child to attend college, what do you think of?



41% of parents are **not** thinking of cost after scholarships and grants

What is the maximum amount you would pay for your child's college education?

25%

of parents say they don't know the **maximum amount overall** they would be willing to pay each year for their child to attend college

42%

of parents say they don't know the maximum amount they would be **willing to borrow** each year

33%

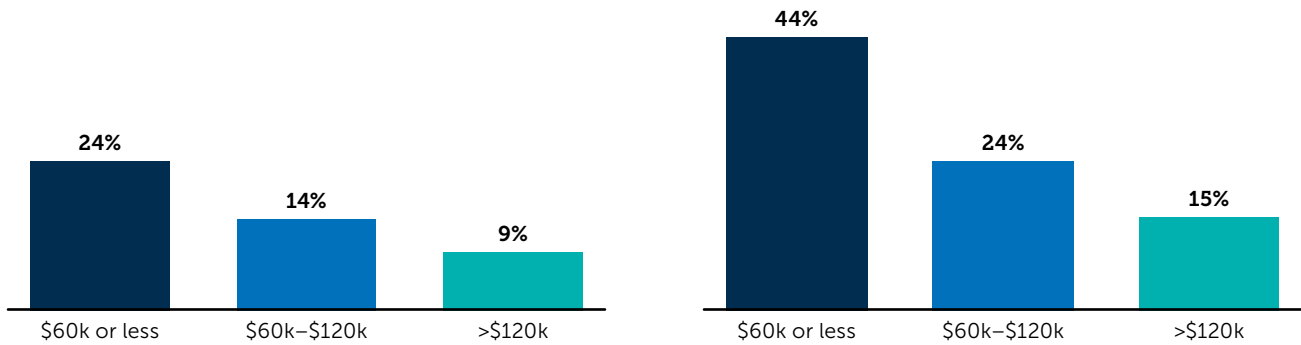
of parents say they don't know the maximum amount of **income and savings** they would be willing to spend

Source: NCES data; EAB research and analysis.

Lower-Income Families Most Uncertain About Financing an Education

"I haven't thought about sticker price vs. net cost" by income

"I'm not sure of the total amount we'd be willing to pay" by income



Career Prospects Seen as Top Indicator of Value

"What characteristics make a college most worth the cost of attending?" Parents Could Select Up to Five Responses, Responses with >20% Shown Below



⇒ TAKEAWAY

Clear, early communications about cost and financing are essential. Helping families better understand college financing not only can support application and enrollment decisions but also can mitigate melt and retention issues due to finances.

“

I had no choice in where I enrolled. My parents decided for me based on financial aid.”

CURRENT COLLEGE FRESHMAN



INSIGHT #3

Parents' and students' cost concerns become more similar later in the student journey.

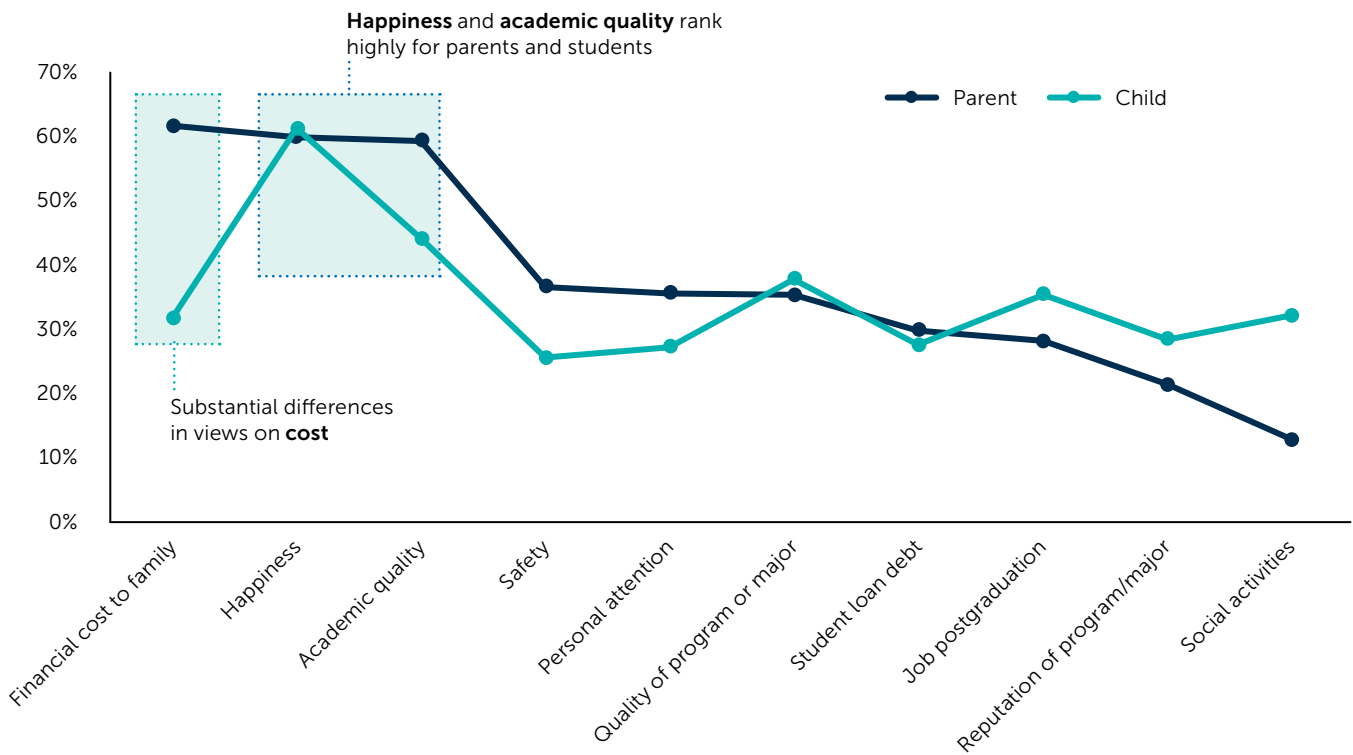
Parents' and Students' Concerns Often Differ

Parents and Students Place Different Weights on Affordability

While cost is a top concern for parents, they report that their children don't prioritize affordability as highly as they do. Sixty-two percent of parents name financial cost as a top priority in college choice, while only 32% say that their children do the same. Despite variation in cost concerns, parents and children both highly prioritize a child's happiness and a school's academic quality when evaluating schools.

Top Priorities of Parents and Students Overall

Responses with >25% for Parent or Student, Participants Could Select Up to Five



➔ TAKEAWAY

While concerns of parents and students often differ, information about academic quality, fit, and student loan debt is appreciated by both groups.

Cost Concerns Converge over Time

By Decision Time, Cost Is a Top Determining Factor for Students

While, as shown on the previous page, students across all years of high school rank cost as a lower priority than their parents do, parents typically have a large influence on how much their children will spend on college. Our research indicates that parents have the most influence on financial aspects of the college process, while they have significantly less influence on where a student applies, how many applications they submit, and what they study at college. We also see that students’ level of concern about cost increases as they progress through high school. Data from EAB’s 2022 New College Freshman Survey reinforces these findings; affordability was both the top reason students reported choosing the school where they enrolled and the number one reason students reported not attending their top choice.

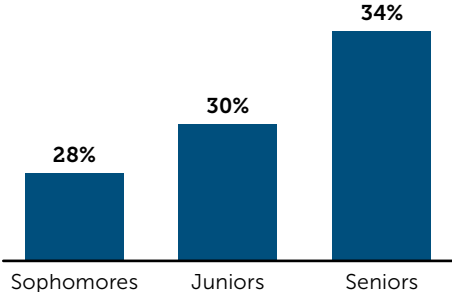
How Much Influence Do You Have on the Following Factors in Your Child’s College Choices?

Scale: 1 = none at all, 2 = a little, 3 = a moderate amount, 4 = a lot, 5 = a great deal

Factor	Mean
Total amount we will spend on my child’s college education	3.87
How much we/my child will pay/borrow for college	3.73
Amount of debt we will incur for my child’s education	3.72
Schools where my child applies	3.07
Number of applications my child submits	2.85
What my child studies in college (major)	2.54

} Financial factors score most highly

Percentage of Students for Whom Cost Is a Top Factor, by High School Year



⇒ TAKEAWAY

Value messaging can help families understand not only the cost but also the benefits students will get from attending your institution. For more resources on this topic, read our white paper at eab.com/WhyYoureWorthIt.

“

Parents want to know that their child's entire identity is going to be included, supported, and safe.”

DIRECTOR, COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATION
(CBO) AND COLLEGE GREENLIGHT PARTNER



INSIGHT #4

Parents are active participants across many communication channels.

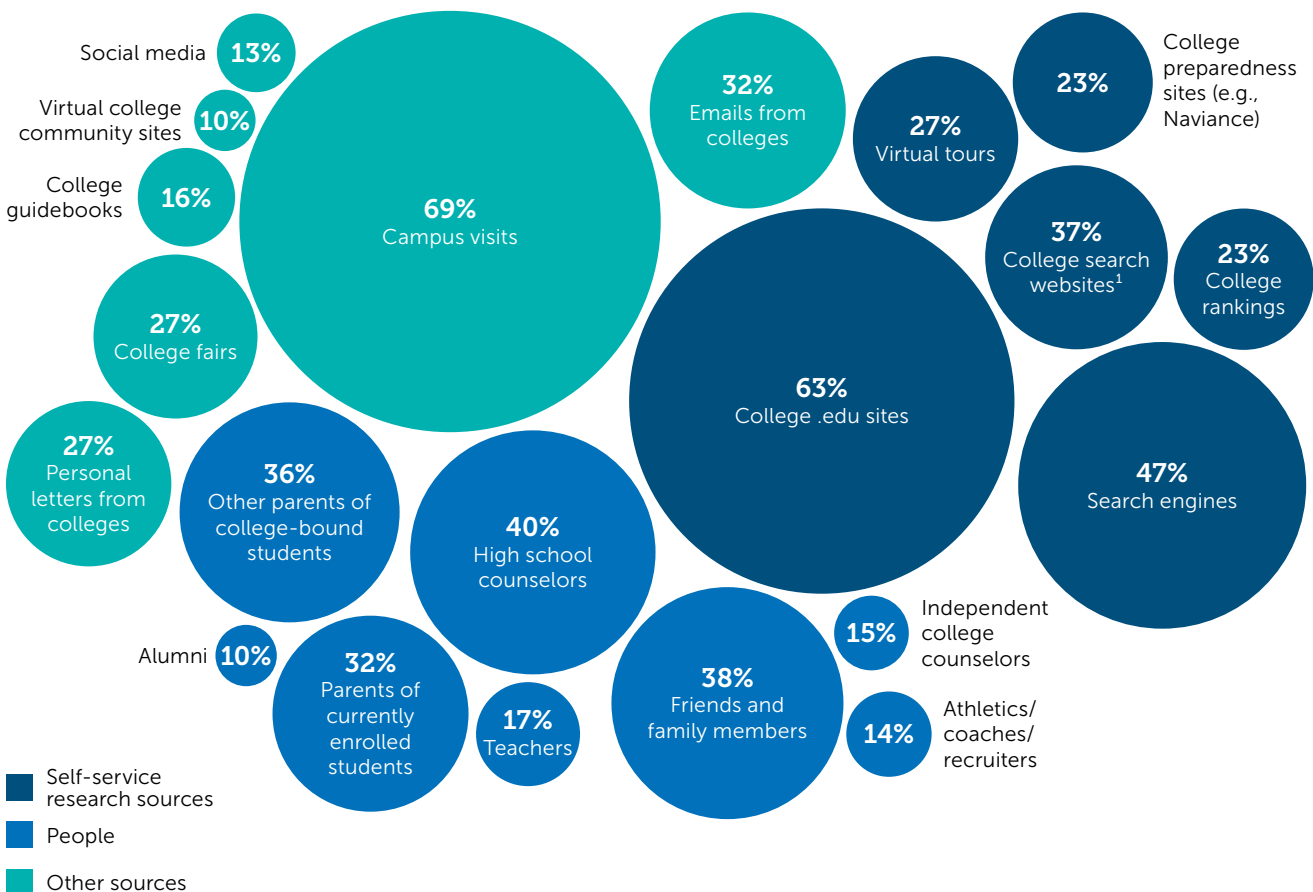
Many Sources Shape Parents' Decision-Making

Online Information and Trusted People Top Parents' List of Most Helpful Resources

EAB has been tracking the rise of self-service research resources in student decision-making for several years. Our 2022 parent survey indicates online research sources play a similarly large role for parents, with college websites and search engines ranking as #2 and #3 in their most helpful sources, behind only campus visits. In addition to digital resources, word-of-mouth sources also ranked highly, with parents naming high school counselors, friends and family, and other parents as top resources. It's important to note that your web presence can influence not only parents and students but also their top influencers, including counselors and other parents.

Sources That Parents Found Most Helpful When Learning About Colleges

Participants Could Select Up to Five



Bubble size indicates percentage.

⇒ TAKEAWAY

Create a cohesive parent journey through consistent, coordinated messaging and imagery across many different channels.

1. For example, Cappex, Niche, College Board.

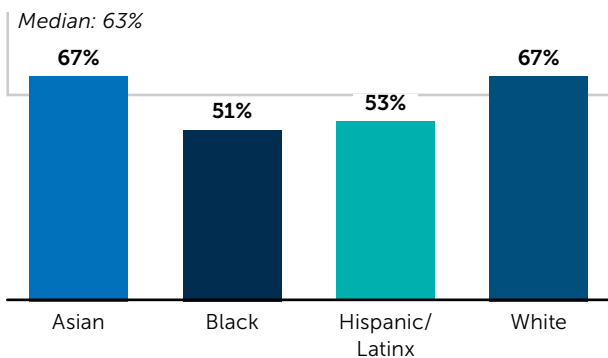
Helpfulness of Sources Differs by Demographic

A Multipronged Approach Will Help You Reach Different Types of Families

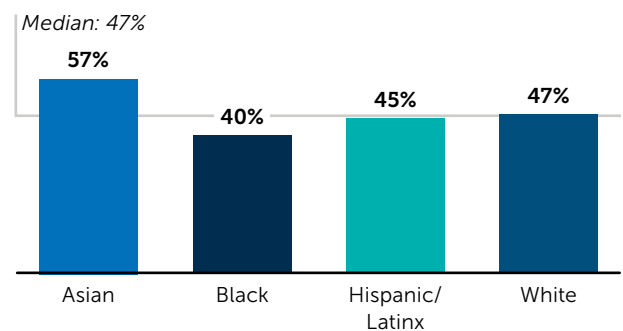
While self-service resources like websites and search engines rank as a top source regardless of family race or ethnicity, our research indicates that those resources tend to be ranked as most helpful by parents of White and Asian students. Parents of Hispanic/Latinx and Black students also tend to find direct communications from colleges and high school counselors to be more helpful than their White or Asian counterparts do. These findings indicate that, for colleges to reach many different types of students, they need to be relying on a mix of newer and more traditional sources.

Self-Service Resources, Differences by Child Race/Ethnicity

College .edu Websites

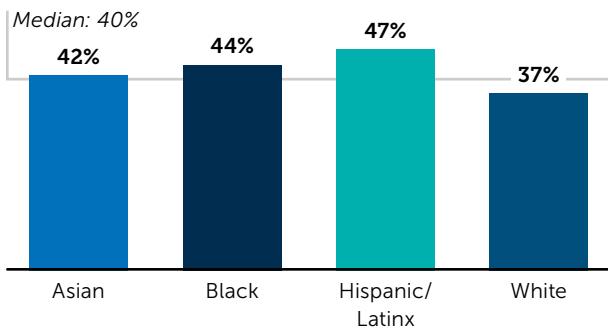


Search Engines

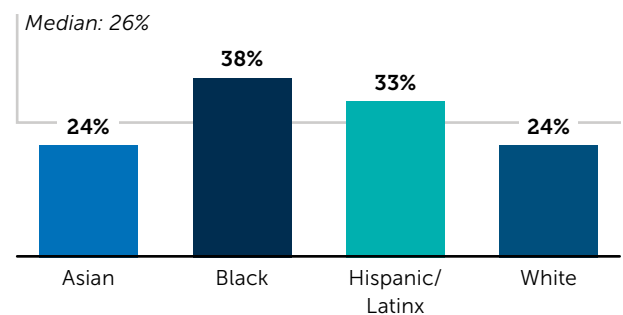


Direct Communications from Colleges and Counselors, Differences by Child Race/Ethnicity

High School Counselors



College Fairs



⇒ TAKEAWAY

A multipronged parent strategy can help you reach different populations. A strong digital strategy is essential, but don't overlook more traditional channels such as college fairs and counselor outreach.

“

Parents have become more transactional, looking for a service or outcome to be fulfilled. And we have also seen a lot of new reasons that people are anxious—they're less able to control their child's future.”

PSYCHOLOGIST AND SCHOOL CONSULTANT



INSIGHT #5

**Parents' interests
shift during the
recruitment journey.**

Parents of Students in Upper High School Years Seek a Wider Range of Information

Finances and Academics Are Always Top Interests

Similar to findings from previous EAB parent surveys, our 2022 research indicates that parents' interests evolve over the course of their student's journey through high school. Parents of freshmen are most interested in basic facts about the school, financial resources, and information about academics. Parents of older students also appreciate information on these topics, in addition to resources about student life, the application process, campus visits, and more.

Parents' Topic Preferences by Year	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior
General information about the school (e.g., location, size)	46%	57%	49%	23%
Sources of funds to pay for college (e.g., scholarships, financial aid, work study)	40%	38%	49%	35%
Academics (e.g., faculty, classrooms/labs, majors/minors)	39%	49%	61%	33%
Costs (e.g., tuition, fees, housing)	37%	38%	56%	40%
Student support services (e.g., tutoring, counseling, health and wellness options)	21%	17%	34%	39%
Student life (e.g., clubs, organizations, activities)	19%	26%	34%	27%
Residential life (e.g., housing, food services)	18%	24%	45%	44%
Campus safety (e.g., preparedness for on-campus emergencies, COVID-19 protocols, student safety)	16%	13%	25%	30%
Job readiness (e.g., job search prep, career planning, employer partnerships)	15%	14%	32%	37%
Student success (e.g., graduation rates, alumni success stories, job placement)	15%	18%	31%	26%
Athletic teams	15%	13%	11%	7%
Applications/admissions (e.g., application deadlines, admission requirements)	14%	21%	41%	29%
Campus visit (e.g., tour, open house, virtual tour)	14%	24%	45%	37%
Diversity of campus community (students, faculty, and staff)	11%	11%	15%	15%
National rankings	9%	11%	12%	8%
Experiential learning (e.g., study abroad, internships, co-ops)	8%	11%	23%	22%
Other	2%	1%	1%	1%

➔ TAKEAWAY

Focus your communications for parents of younger high school students on general information, affordability, and academics.

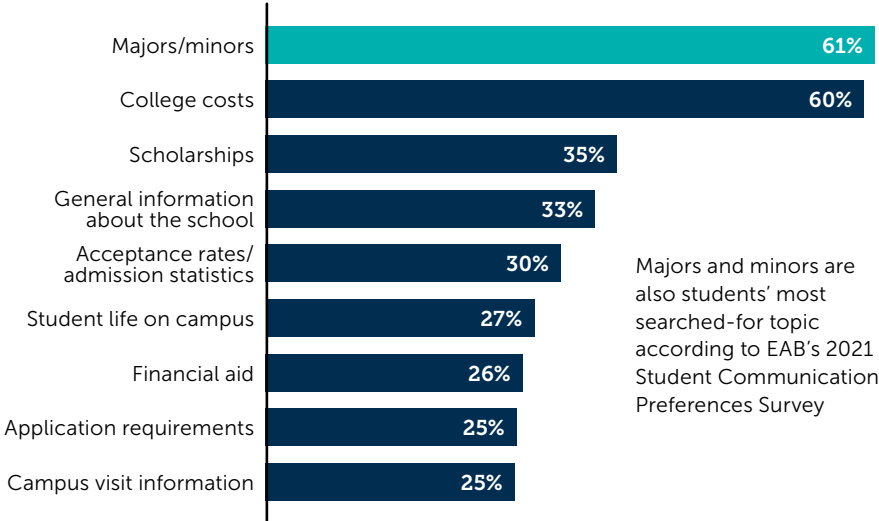
Information About Majors and Minors Is Always Appreciated

Interest in Specific Majors Grows over Time

In addition to being a shared point of interest among parents and students, area of study continues to be the topic that parents are most eager to learn about. Parents and students both report that information about majors and minors is their most sought-after information on college websites. Our research also indicates that parents' interest in specific majors grows over time from freshman year to junior year.

Parents' Most Sought-After Information on College Websites

Participants Could Pick Up to Five, Responses with >25%

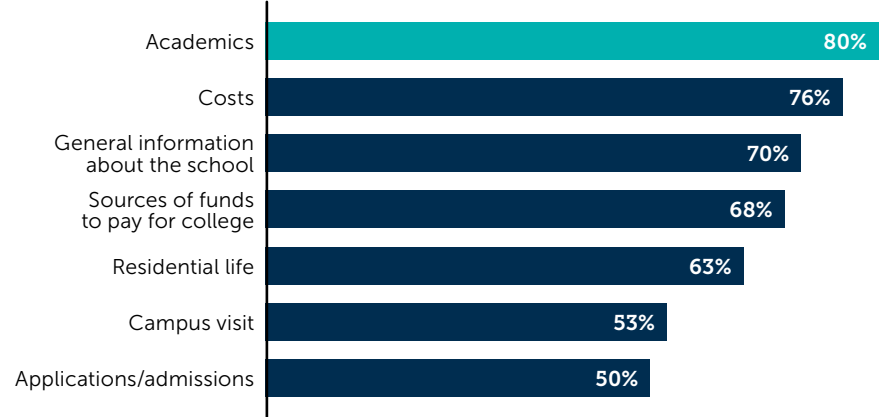


⇒ TAKEAWAY

Ensure information about majors is easily accessed on your site and search engine-optimized. Promote information about majors in emails.

Parents' Most Appreciated Information Overall

Responses with >50%



Key Takeaways for Recruitment Strategy

1

Parents appreciate direct, early communications from colleges.

Parents overwhelmingly report that they want colleges to communicate with them directly. Ensure that your institution has dedicated parent communication streams starting in sophomore year or earlier.

2

Clearly articulate your institution's cost and value.

Build a robust set of communications around affordability for parents and students. Make materials available in multiple languages when appropriate.

3

Parents want to learn about cost and finances from the start of their student's college search.

While younger students are most interested in hearing about fit and academics, parents are eager for information about finances from the start.

4

Multiple sources and channels can help you reach parents better.

Aim to collect parents' contact information several different ways to maximize your reach among parents. Create a cohesive parent journey through consistent, coordinated messaging and imagery across channels.

5

Academics remain a winning topic for communications with parents and students.

Ensure that information about majors and minors is easy to find on your website and continues to play a prominent role across communication streams.

Research Overview

Overview

EAB’s Survey Research division collected responses from parents of current high school students in April and May of 2022 to learn more about their communication preferences and priorities with respect to their child’s college search and enrollment decision. The results include responses from 2,330 participants. This report also reflects analysis and insights based on EAB’s student marketing, which includes more than 1.5 billion student interactions annually across our partner institutions.

Participant Profile

Relationship to Child		Gender of Child	
Mother or female guardian	78%	Female	62%
Father or male guardian	21%	Male	37%
Other	1%	Nonbinary or other	1%

Parent Ethnicity		Child Ethnicity	
African/African American/Black	10%	African/African American/Black	11%
Asian (Central/South/East/Southeast)	6%	Asian (Central/South/East/Southeast)	8%
Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander	1%	Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander	1%
Hispanic or Latinx	16%	Hispanic or Latinx	18%
Middle Eastern or West Asian	1%	Middle Eastern or West Asian	1%
Native American or Alaskan Native	1%	Native American or Alaskan Native	2%
White/Caucasian	68%	White/Caucasian	66%
Other	3%	Other	3%

Region		Child’s Graduation Year ¹		Household Income	
Northeast	27%	2022	50%	\$60,000 or less	15%
South	23%	2023	40%	\$60,001–\$120,000	32%
Midwest	18%	2024	20%	More than \$120,000	53%
West	32%	2025	9%		

1. Parents could select multiple years for multiple children.

Engage Families and Enroll Your Next Class with **Enroll360**

Enroll360 Solutions to Succeed at Every Stage of the Funnel

Our solutions deliver results, powered by an unrivaled recruitment ecosystem.



Cultivate



Apply



Aid



Yield

Enroll360 Products for Student and Family Engagement

Audience Generation

Build awareness and influence with the leading inquiry generation and **college exploration platforms**.



Cappex



College Greenlight



Intersect

Digital Experience

Engage Gen Z in **interactive virtual platforms** that tell your brand story and build affinity.



YouVisit Virtual Tours



Wisr Virtual Communities

Digital and Web Strategy

Optimize your website and digital strategy to engage and convert prospective students.



.EDU Content Strategy



SEO

Transfer Recruitment

Facilitate the transfer process and boost enrollment through best-in-class technology and marketing.



Transfer Portal



Transfer Marketing

What Makes Enroll360 Different

▶ Marketing Orchestration

▶ Intelligent Analytics

▶ Unrivaled Reach

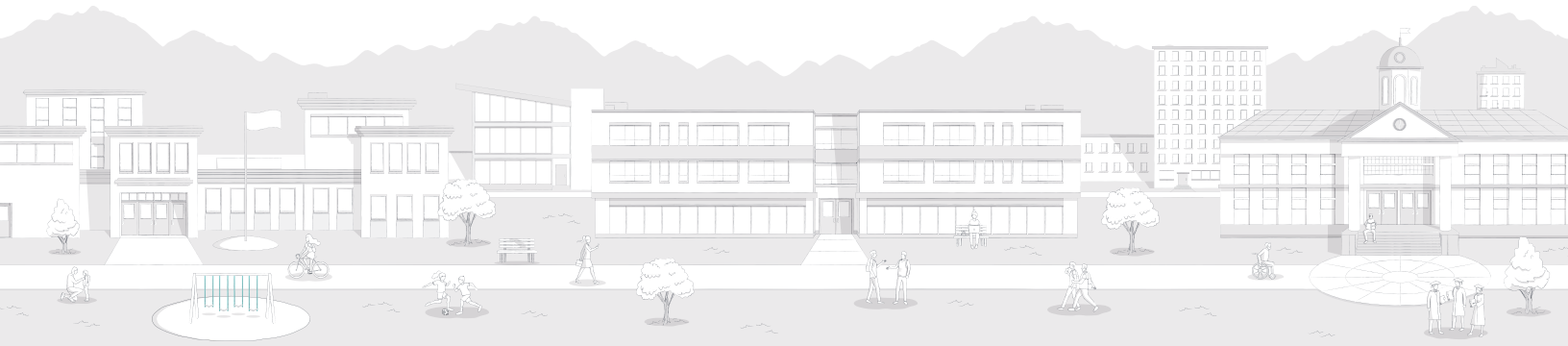
▶ Digital Immersion

To speak with an expert or schedule a diagnostic conversation, email eabenrollmentcomm@eab.com.

Learn more at eab.com/Enroll360.



Education's Trusted Partner to Help Schools and Students Thrive



Your
Imperatives
Determine
Ours

INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGY

Prepare Your Institution for the Future

Executive guidance rooted in research to support your strategic priorities

MARKETING AND ENROLLMENT

Achieve Your Enrollment and Growth Goals

Tailored partnerships powered by a recruitment ecosystem with unrivaled reach to enroll your future classes

STUDENT SUCCESS

Build a Student-Centric Campus

Technology trusted by 850 schools to retain, graduate, and empower more students

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

Advance DEI on Campus and in Your Community

Technology, research, and bold initiatives to strengthen your DEI strategy and eliminate equity gaps

DATA AND ANALYTICS

Embrace Digital Transformation

Data and analytics solutions built for higher education to guide decisions and accelerate innovation

We partner with **2,500+** institutions to accelerate progress and enable lasting change.

95%+ of our partners return to us year after year because of results we achieve, together.

Project Director

Lizzy Donaher

Contributing Consultant

Michael Koppenheffer

Survey Research Consultants

Anne Dodson

Pamela Kiecker Royall

Designer

Lauren Davis

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202.747.1000 | eab.com

 @eab  @eab_  @WeAreEAB  @eab.life

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