

INSIGHT PAPER

Understanding the High School Counselor Perspective

Insights for Enrollment Leaders from EAB's 2024 Survey of High School Counselors



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Executive Overview

▶ College Search Insights from the Counselor Perspective



High school counselors have unique insight into and influence on students' college search. Amid students' rising mental health challenges, shifting demographics, and growing doubts about the value of college, counselors offer colleges a valuable perspective on shifting student behaviors. In addition, by partnering better with counselors, colleges can improve engagement with the students counselors serve.

To better understand how colleges can best work with counselors and to glean insights from their unique perspective on the college search, EAB conducts an annual survey of high school counselors. This report shares top findings from our 2024 survey.

Read this report for key findings on counselors' work processes and insights into students' shifting college search behavior.

About the 2024 High School Counselor Survey



926

Counselors surveyed

25

Questions asked

Questions Explored:

- How are counselors balancing admissions duties with other responsibilities?
- How have student attitudes toward college changed since the pandemic?
- What do counselors see as students' top priorities and challenges in college search?

For more details about the survey and participant profile, refer to p.16 of this report.



Counselor Workload and Well-Being

PART

1

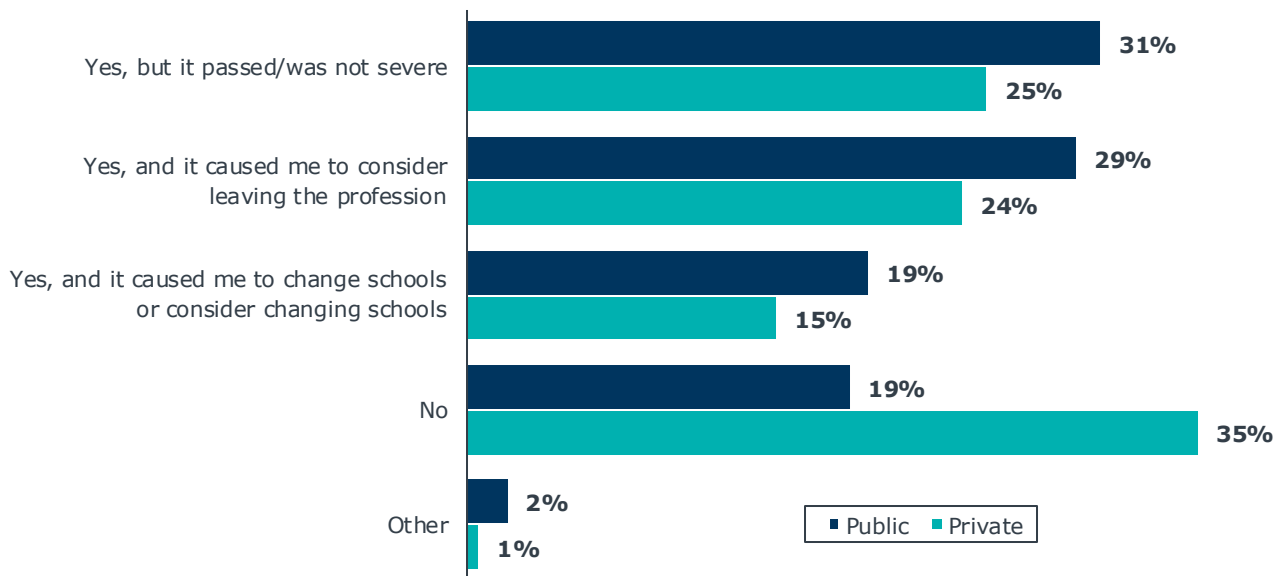
Three in Four Counselors Have Experienced Burnout

Counselors Are Experiencing High Rates of Chronic Workplace Stress

Seventy-five percent of counselors reported experiencing professional burnout in the past four years. Almost 50% reported their burnout was severe enough to make them change schools, consider changing schools, or consider leaving the profession. As shown below, burnout was more common at public schools, where it was reported by 80% of counselors, compared to 64% at private schools. As discussed on the following page, public school counselors are especially likely to manage a wide variety of responsibilities beyond college advising, which likely contributes to their higher burnout rates.

Q: Have you experienced professional burnout in your counseling role within the past four years?

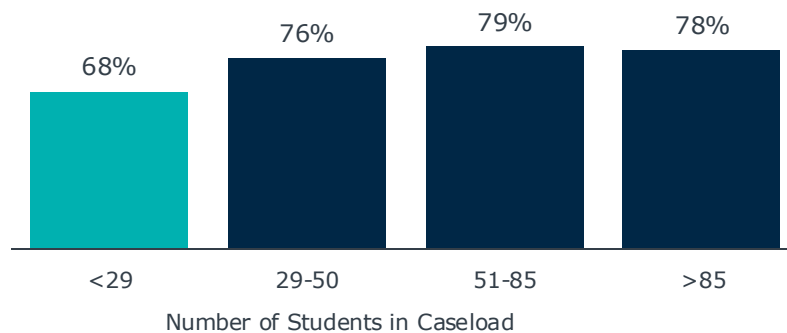
Public vs. Private High Schools



Burnout Is Common Even Among Counselors with Light Caseloads

Unsurprisingly, burnout rates were correlated with the number of students in a counselor's caseload, with counselors with under 29 students reporting lower rates of burnout compared to those with larger caseloads. However, it's important to note that burnout remains widespread even among counselors with smaller caseloads—more than two-thirds of those with fewer than 29 students have experienced it.

Share of Counselors Who Have Experienced Burnout Within the Past Four Years by Caseload



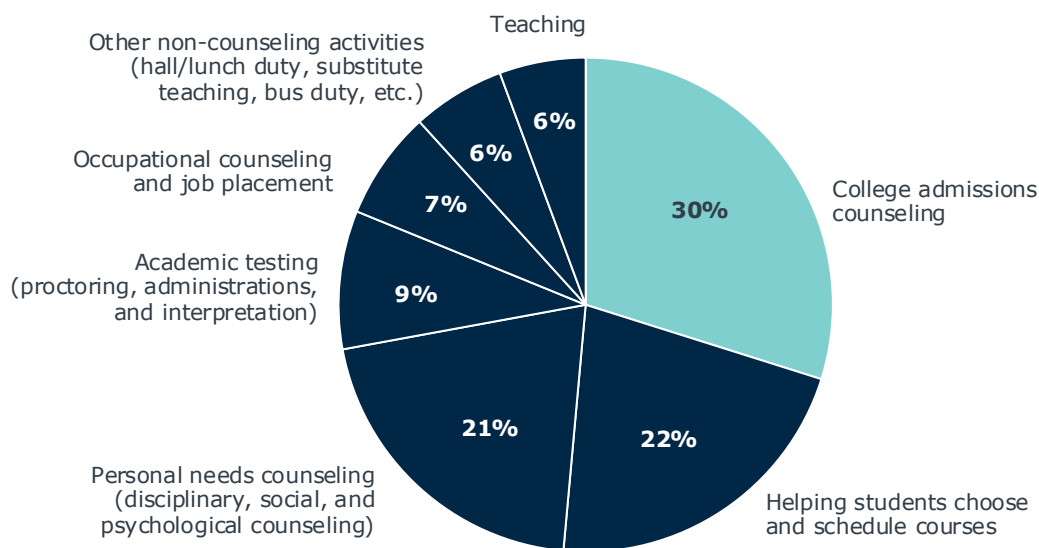
Source: EAB research and analysis.

Counselors Are Balancing Many Duties

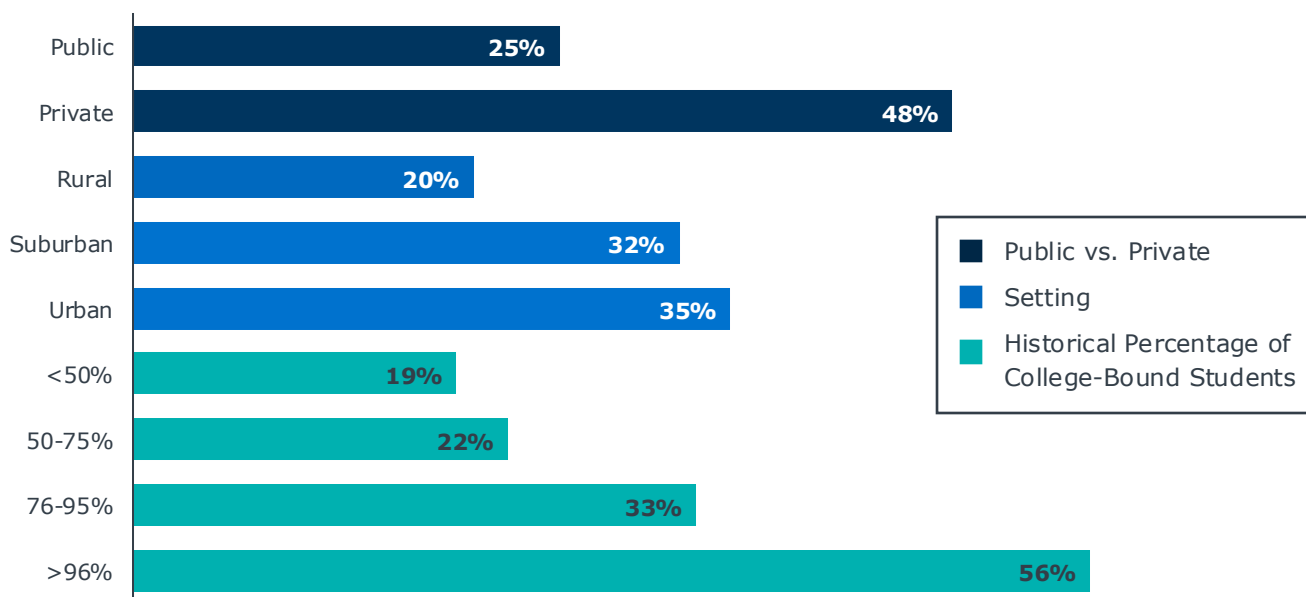
Counselors Spend 70% of Their Time on Non-Admissions-Related Work

One factor that helps explain high burnout rates is the large number of responsibilities that counselors are juggling in addition to their college advising duties. On average, counselors dedicate 70% of their time to non-college-advising tasks. Although college admissions counseling takes up the largest portion of their time, significant time is also spent on course scheduling, personal needs counseling, and academic testing, among other duties. The chart at the bottom of the page illustrates the wide variation in time allocated to admissions counseling across different school segments. Counselors at public schools, rural schools, and schools with low percentages of college-bound students report having the least time for admissions counseling.

Q: Estimate the percentage of time spent on the following activities, on average.



Mean Percentage of Time Spent on Admissions Duties by Segment



Source: EAB research and analysis.

About Half of Counselors Are Using ChatGPT

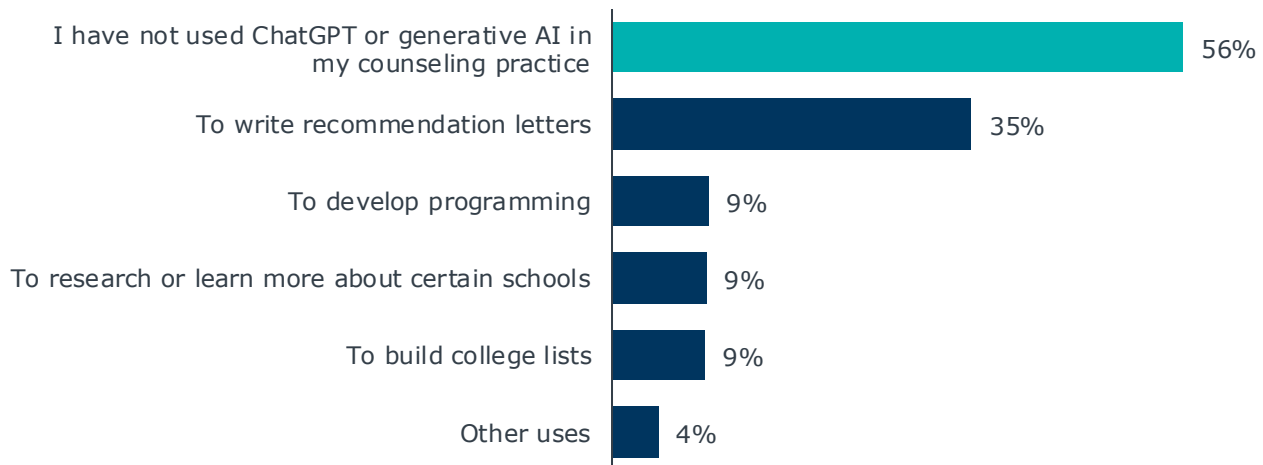
Writing Admissions Letters Is the Top Use of ChatGPT

Given counselors' large and varied workloads, it's not surprising that many of them are turning to ChatGPT or generative AI for efficiency. Nearly half reported using these tools, primarily for writing admissions letters, with counselors who handle more than 85 students being the most likely to do so. Other uses included developing programming, researching specific colleges, and creating college lists.

With the rise in AI-generated letters, college enrollment leaders should reassess the value of recommendation letters. Since these letters can be a barrier in the application process for students, we recommend that enrollment leaders perform a careful cost-benefit analysis to determine their role in admissions.

Q: How have you used ChatGPT or generative AI in your counseling practice?

Counselors could select all that apply



How Are Counselors Using Chat GPT?



Free Responses

"I used it twice to **draft polite emails to parents** who were being beyond reasonable."

"I have had a play with it for references but found it was **better to write myself to get a more authentic picture of the student.**"

"I have used it to **develop outlines** for personal statements."

"I used it to help write sensitive emails, **detect bias** in my letters, and see how my letters might be perceived."

Source: EAB research and analysis.



Students' College Search

PART

2

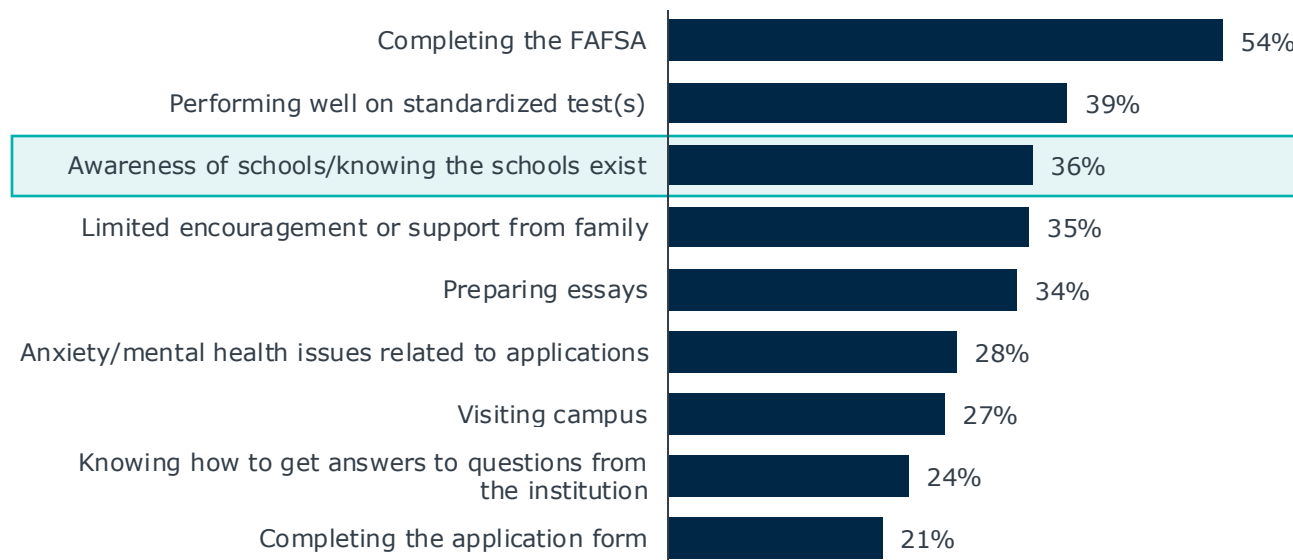
College Awareness Is a Challenge

Awareness of Schools Is a Common Issue for Students During the Application Process

We asked counselors for their insight into top challenges students face during the application process. Thirty-six percent of counselors reported awareness of schools or knowing schools exist as a top concern. To help improve awareness of your school, we recommend that colleges reach students early in high school career with responsive, multichannel marketing campaigns.

Q: What are the challenges your students face when applying to colleges and universities?

Counselors could select up to 5 responses; Responses with >20% shown

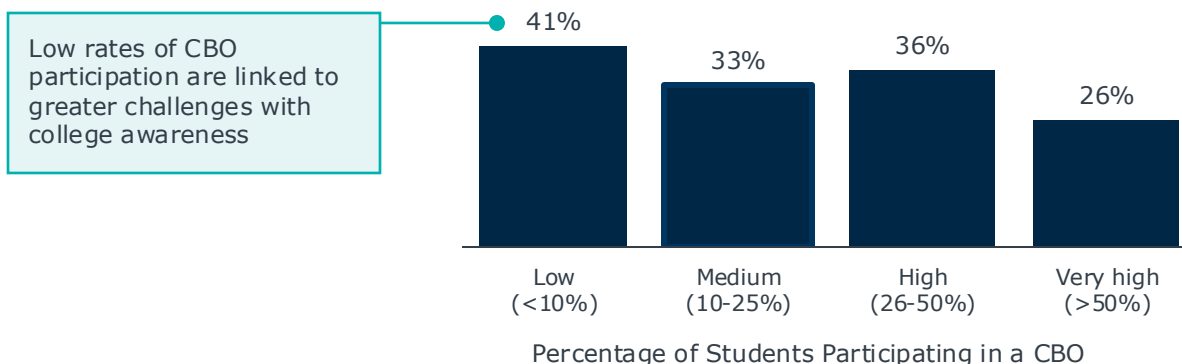


Schools with High Rates of CBO Participation Have Improved College Awareness

Counselors at schools with a large percentage of students participating in community-based organizations (CBOs) were less likely to report awareness of colleges as a challenge for students. This data suggests that fostering strong relationships with CBOs can help colleges boost their visibility among prospective students.

Share of Counselors Reporting School Awareness as a Challenge

By Percentage of Students Participating in a CBO



Source: EAB research and analysis.

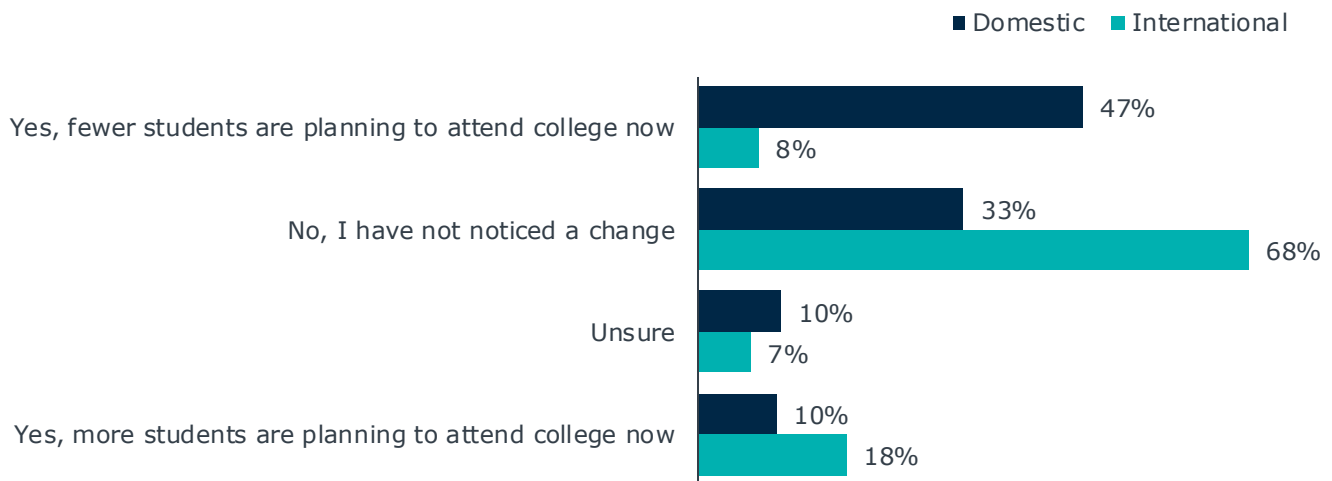
Fewer Students Plan to Attend College

A Drop in Domestic Students Planning to Attend College Compared to Pre-Pandemic

About half (47%) of counselors in US-based schools reported that fewer students are planning to attend college now compared to before the pandemic. By contrast, in our survey of international counselors, only 8% of counselors reported the same. This data aligns with other EAB research on the increase in students opting out of college and rising doubts about the value of a college education. For more on this phenomenon, download our 2024 First-Year Experience Survey insight paper at eab.com/FYEsurvey.

Q: Have you noticed a change in the number of students planning to attend college compared with before the pandemic?

Responses from Domestic and International Counselors

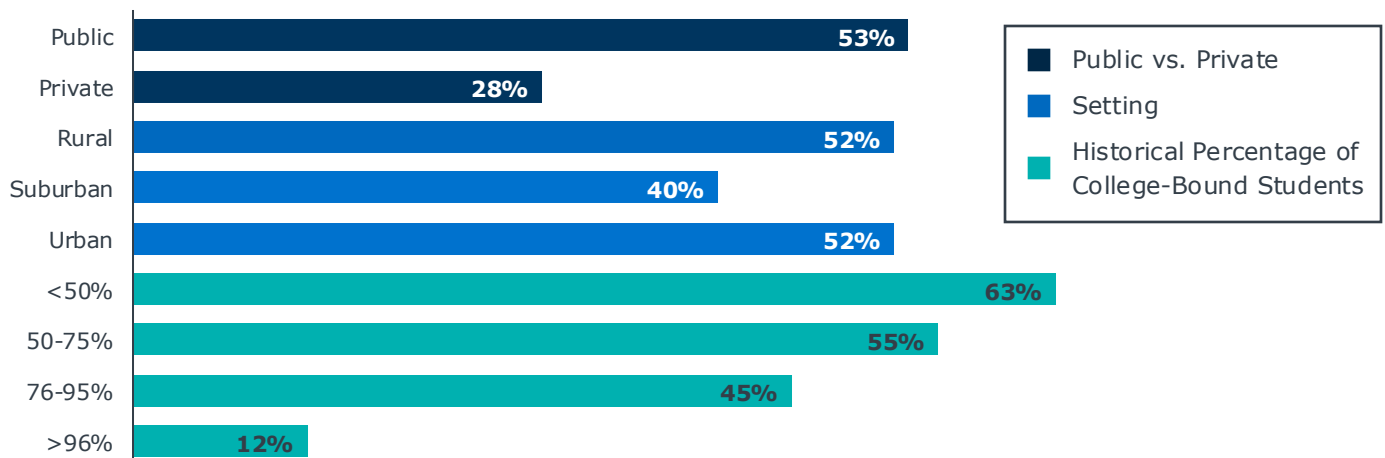


Differences by School Characteristics

Within the United States, counselors from public, rural, and urban schools were most likely to report decreases in the share of students planning to attend college post-pandemic. Unsurprisingly, schools with large historical percentages of college-bound students were least likely to report changes in students' likelihood to attend college.

Percentage of Domestic Counselors Reporting That Fewer Students Are Planning to Attend College Since the Pandemic

By School Characteristics



Source: EAB research and analysis.

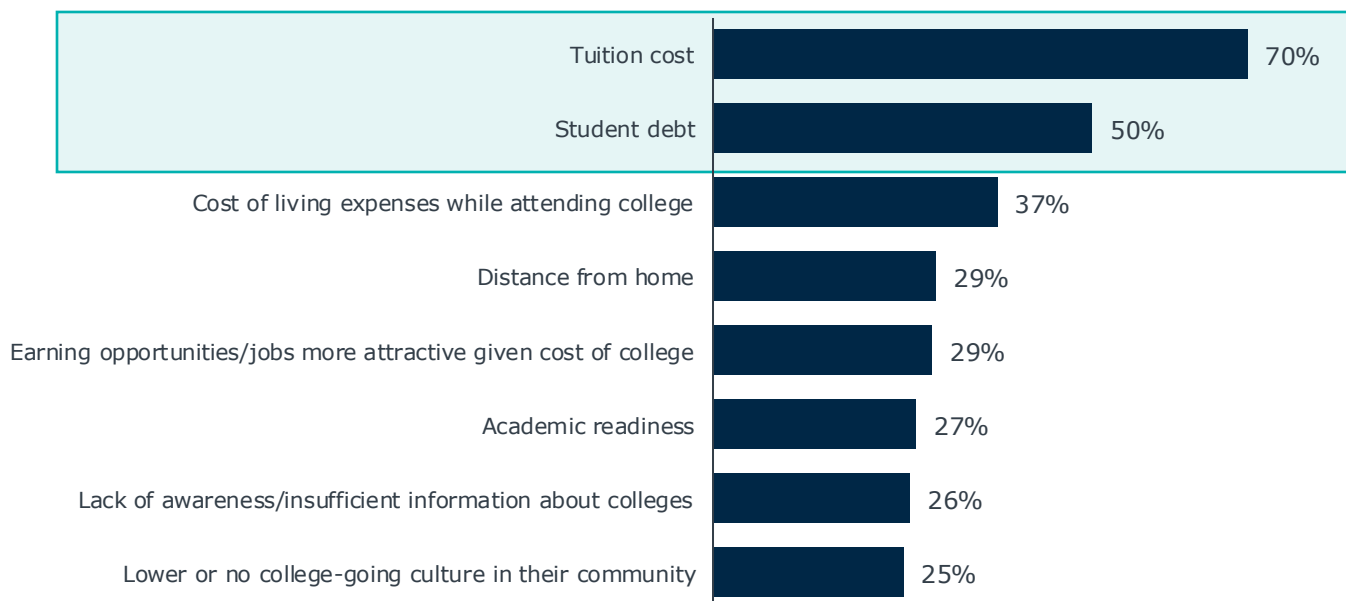
Cost Remains a Top Factor in Students' Decisions

Cost and Debt Continue to Be Top Challenges

As EAB has consistently found in our student and parent surveys, financial factors remain students' top concern when choosing a college. Tuition cost, student debt, and cost of living were the top factors counselors named that dissuaded students from attending a college. Cost and debt were also students' most-frequently-voiced concerns about colleges. For more on how to address families' rising cost concerns, download our 2024 Parent Survey insight paper at eab.com/parents24.

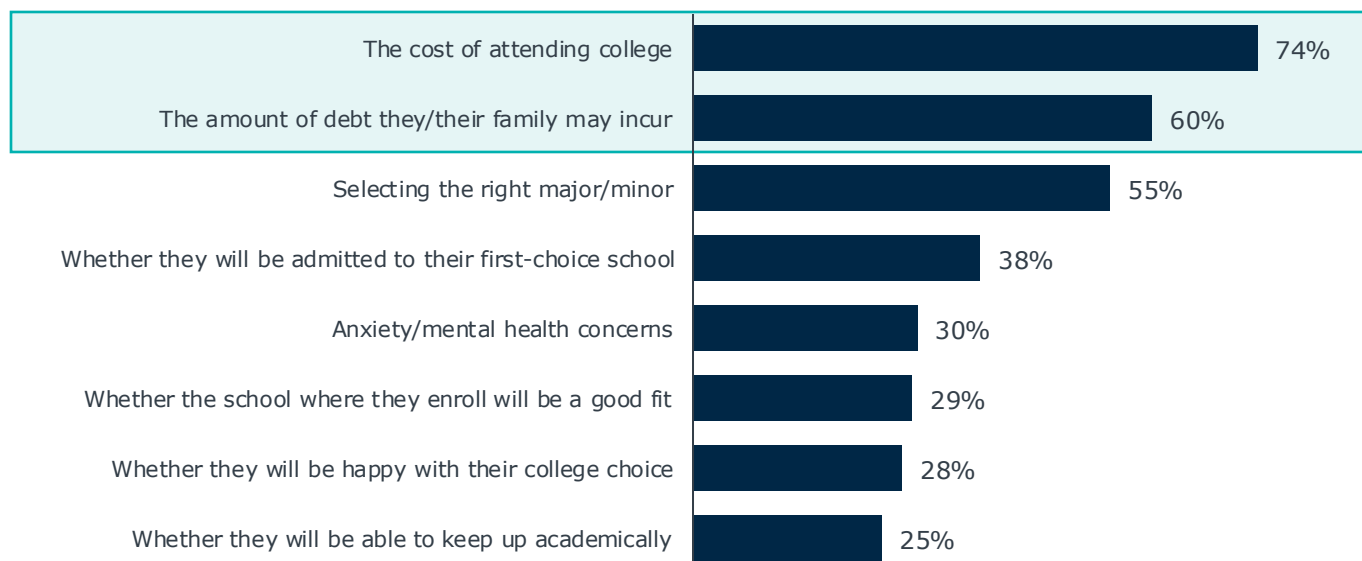
Q: Indicate the most common factors that dissuade your students from considering college after high school/secondary school.

Responses with $\geq 25\%$ shown; Counselors could select up to five responses



Q: As you counsel students about college, what are their most frequently voiced concerns?

Responses with $> 20\%$ shown; Counselors could select up to 4 responses



Source: EAB research and analysis.

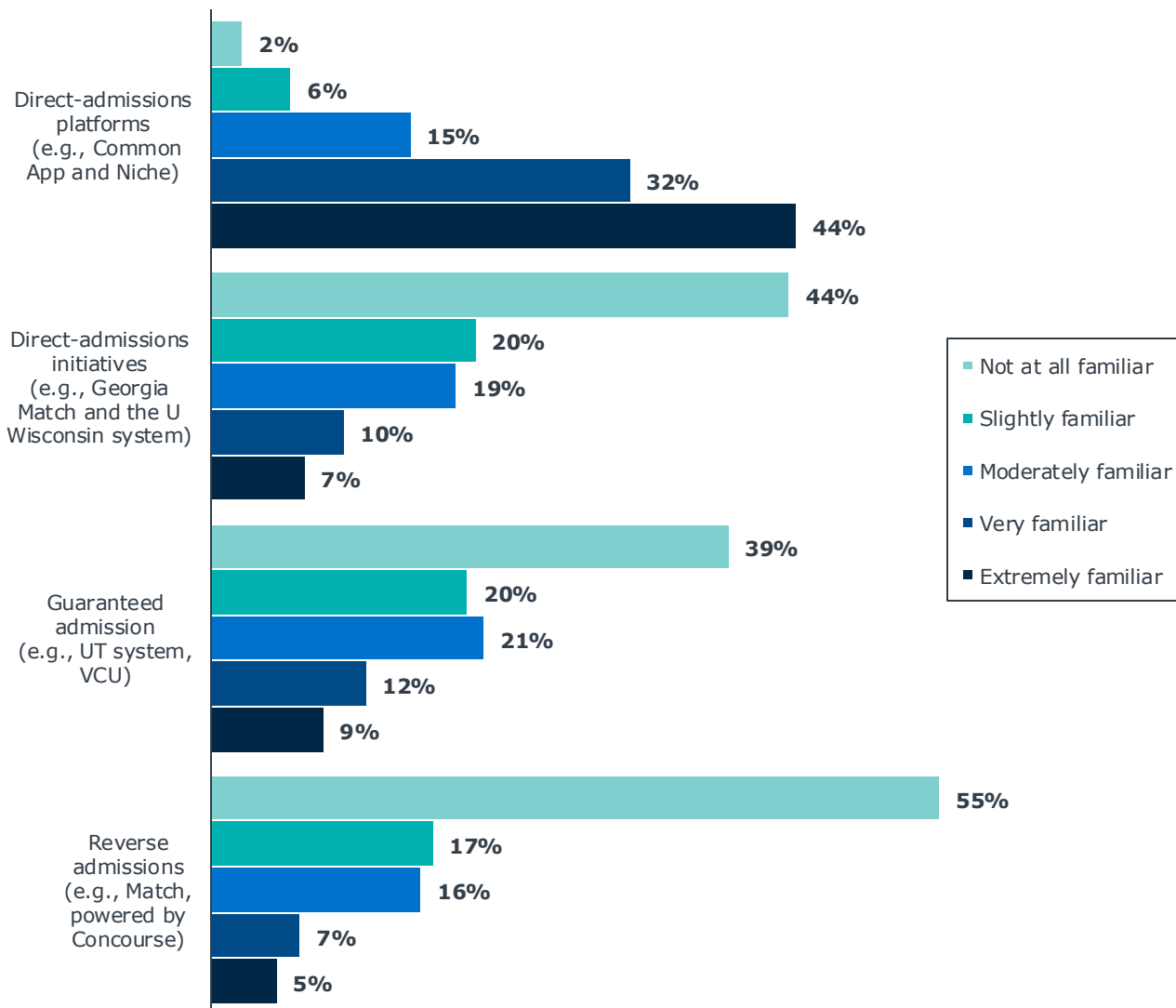
Direct Admissions Is Gaining in Popularity

A Growing Variety of Admissions Pathways Offer More Opportunities

With the expansion of new admissions pathways in recent years, we asked counselors about their familiarity with direct admissions platforms, direct admissions initiatives, guaranteed admissions, and reverse admissions. Of those new pathways, counselors were most familiar with direct admissions platforms, which is likely due to the popularity of the Common App. Counselors with larger caseloads were most likely to be familiar with direct, guaranteed, and reverse admissions.

Amid students' increasing doubts about the value of college, these new admissions pathways can encourage students who are hesitant about attending college. By eliminating barriers in the college process, direct and reverse admissions can build momentum toward college attendance among students who may be on the fence.

Q: How familiar are you with the following application methods and platforms?



Source: EAB research and analysis.



Key Takeaways and Additional Resources



Key Takeaways and Recommendations

1

Promote strong two-way communication with counselors.

Given high school counselors' large workloads and high burnout rates, we recommend meeting counselors with empathy and offering them avenues to share their concerns with you. Clear, streamlined communications and counselor appreciation programs can also promote strong relationships with busy counselors.

2

Reassess the value of your required application materials.

Application materials like letters of recommendation can create barriers for students and contribute to counselors' already heavy workloads. With the rise in AI-generated letters, we recommend reassessing the costs and benefits of recommendation letters to determine their value within the admissions process.

3

Reach students early.

It's more important than ever to connect with students early to increase awareness of your school, address cost concerns, and foster affinity—especially among students who are unsure about the value of college. Search platforms like Apply.com and strong relationships with community-based organizations can support this effort.

4

Foster student affinity with responsive, multichannel campaigns.

After your institution has identified and reached students, it's critical to build affinity with them. With coordinated, multichannel marketing that is responsive to student behavior, you can deepen engagement, increase awareness, articulate your school's value proposition, and encourage students who are still uncertain about attending college.

Research Overview

About the 2024 High School Counselor Survey

EAB's University Research Partners collected responses from high school counselors in April and May of 2024. The goal of this research was to learn more about counselors' workloads and priorities, along with shifts in student college search behaviors. The results reported in this insight paper include responses from 926 participants at US-based high schools.

Participant Profile

High School Type	Percentage
Public	80%
Private	20%

Location of High School	Percentage
Rural	28%
Suburban	39%
Urban	33%

Counseling Load	Percentage
<29	23%
29-50	30%
51-85	24%
86-139	12%
>139	11%

Years of Experience	Percentage
<5	27%
5-7	26%
8-14	23%
15+	23%

Percentage of College-Bound Students	Percentage
<50	24%
50-75	32%
76-95	27%
96+	16%

Percentage of Students Participating in CBOs ¹	Percentage
<10%	51%
10-25%	22%
26-50%	13
>50%	14%

1) Community-based organizations

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Apply



Aid



Yield

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Tours

Engage Gen Z in immersive virtual tours that tell your brand story and build affinity.

Match

Enroll students from all backgrounds with our unique "reverse admissions" model.

Transfer

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

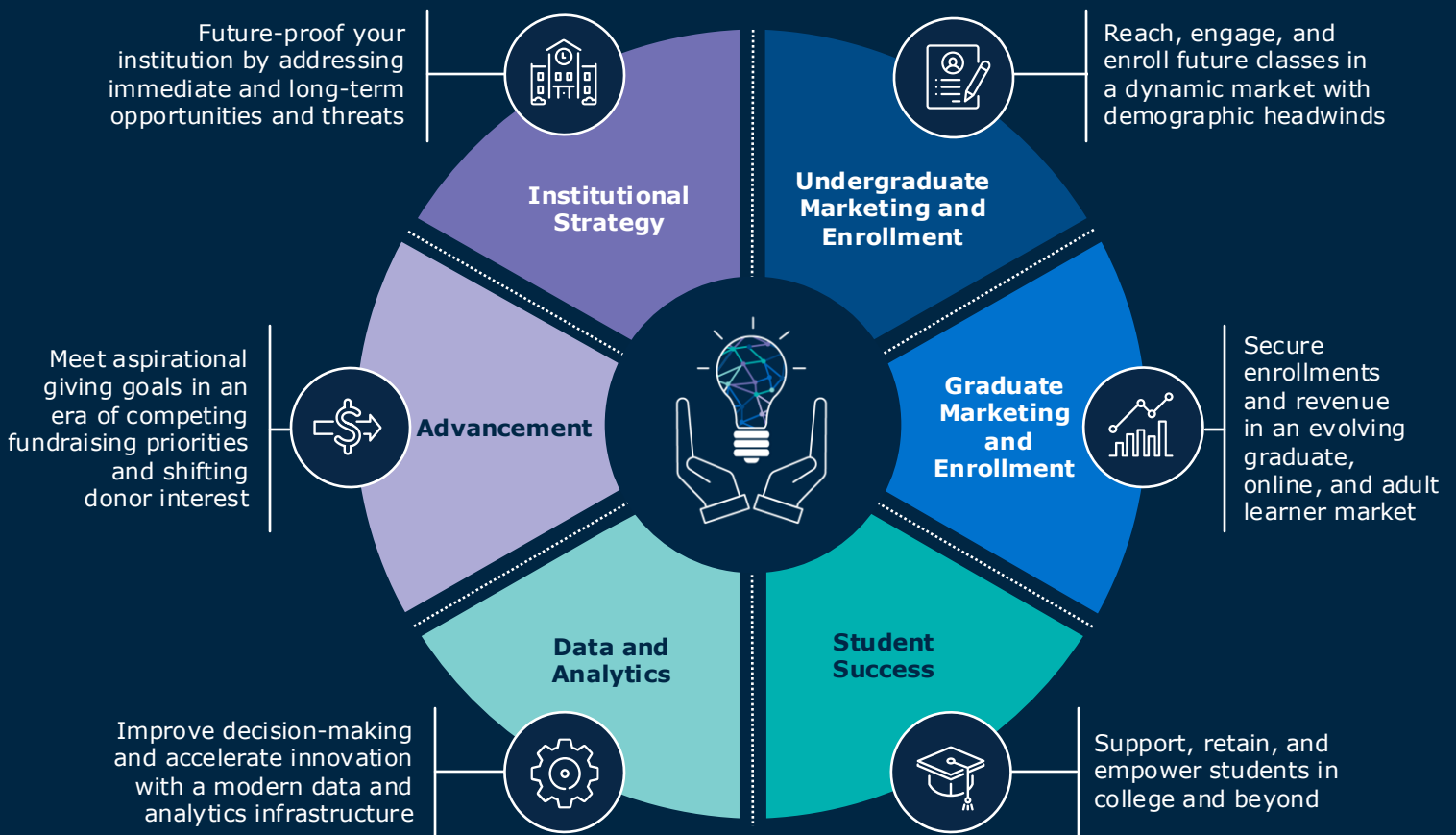
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