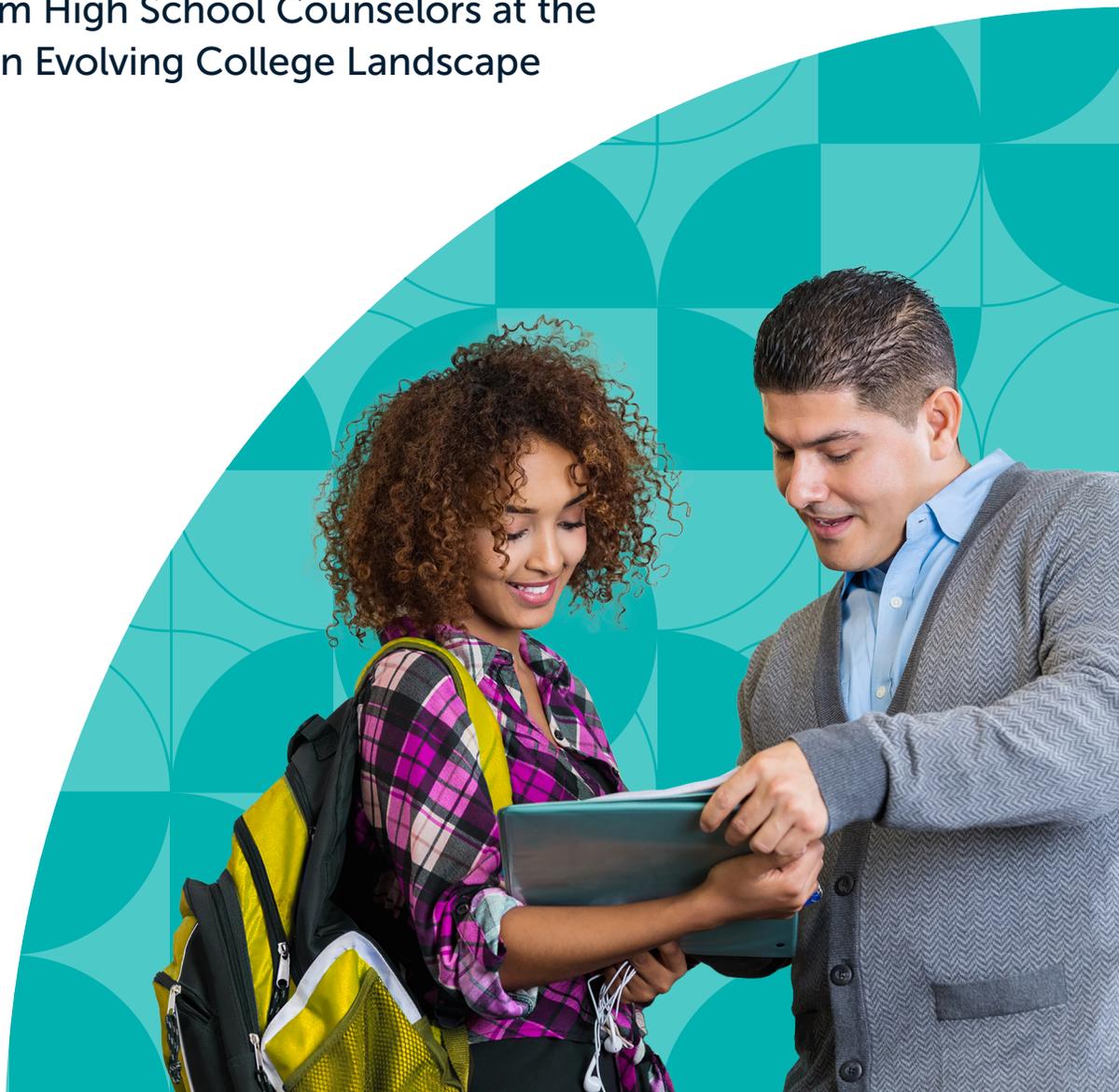
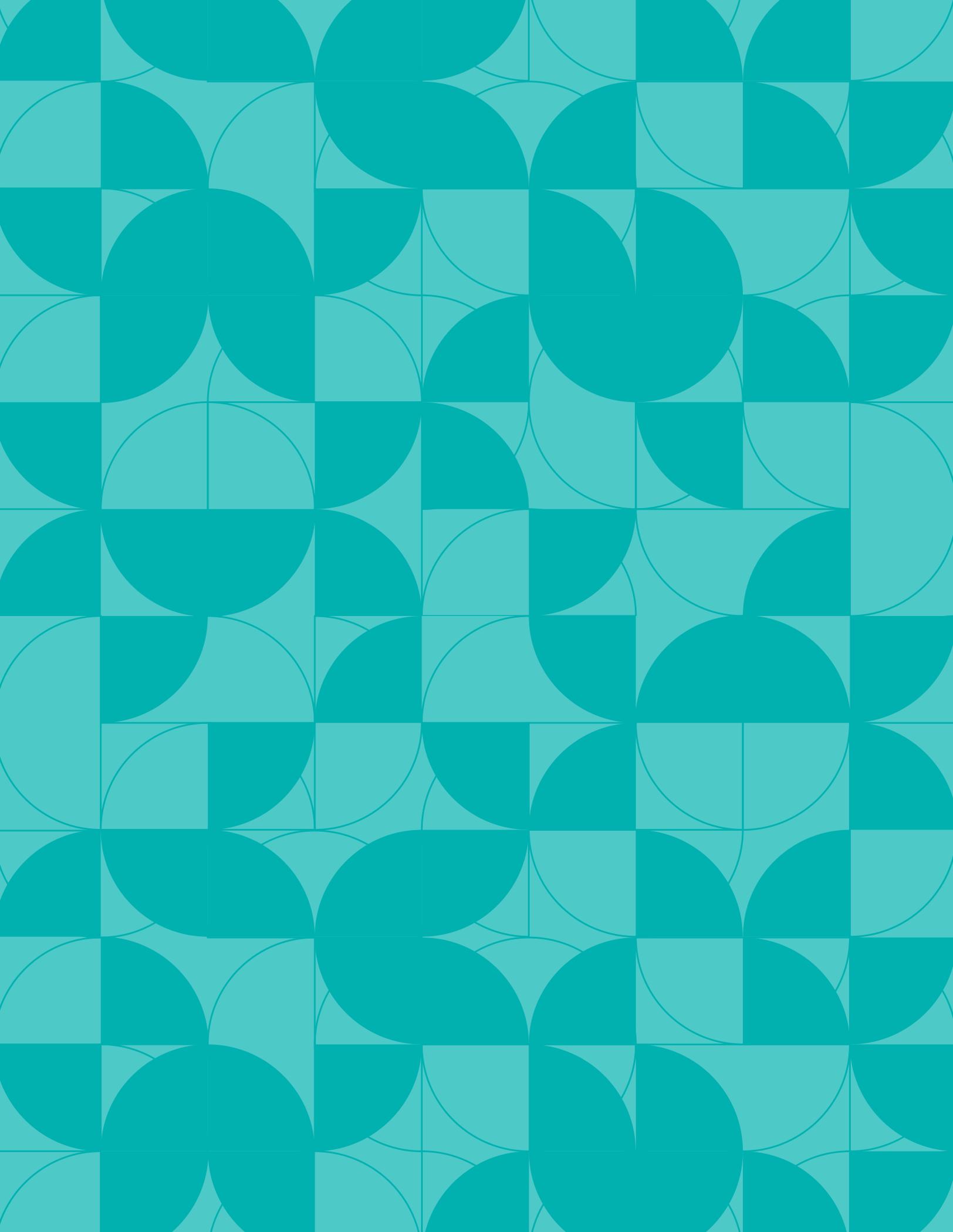


# From Burnout to Breakthroughs

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7 Findings from High School Counselors at the  
Forefront of an Evolving College Landscape





# Survey Overview

With skepticism about the value of a four-year degree growing and innovations such as generative AI and direct admissions reshaping the college process, affordability emerges as the deciding factor for many families. High school counselors are at the forefront of these shifts, guiding students through a rapidly changing college admissions landscape.

Drawing insights from counselors worldwide, this report includes seven findings collected through our first global high school counselor survey. It highlights commonalities they share regardless of time zone or demographics and isolates distinctions based on the students and communities they serve.

The data reveals that counselors are balancing numerous responsibilities while combating burnout and supporting a generation exploring a breadth of options after high school. The takeaways include resources to help counselors build capacity in their counseling practice and to safeguard their personal and professional well-being.

## ABOUT THE SURVEY

- ▶ 1,519 respondents
- ▶ 25 questions
- ▶ Data was collected from April 24, 2024, through May 29, 2024.

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

You will see four icons repeated throughout this insight paper. Each icon aligns with information based on different segments of the survey data.



**By school location**  
*US or International*



**By school type**  
*Public or Private*



**By school setting**  
*Rural, Suburban,  
or Urban*



**By caseload (students)**  
*Fewer than 29, 29–50,  
51–85, more than 85*

*Note: The school location category includes counselors of all school types, settings, and caseloads. The school type, setting, and caseload categories include both US and international counselors.*

## ABOUT APPLY

Apply.com is a comprehensive website that provides high school students with everything they need to plan, decide, and apply to college with confidence. Through Apply, students can research colleges, find and apply for scholarships, take virtual tours, access college exploration resources, and match with colleges that are interested in admitting them—no application required.

## ABOUT EAB

EAB (eab.com) is Apply’s parent company. EAB partners with more than 2,800 institutions, serving students from kindergarten through college to provide comprehensive thought leadership in areas such as access and equity, enrollment, and student success.

## FINDING 1:

# More than two-thirds of counselors have experienced burnout within the past four years.

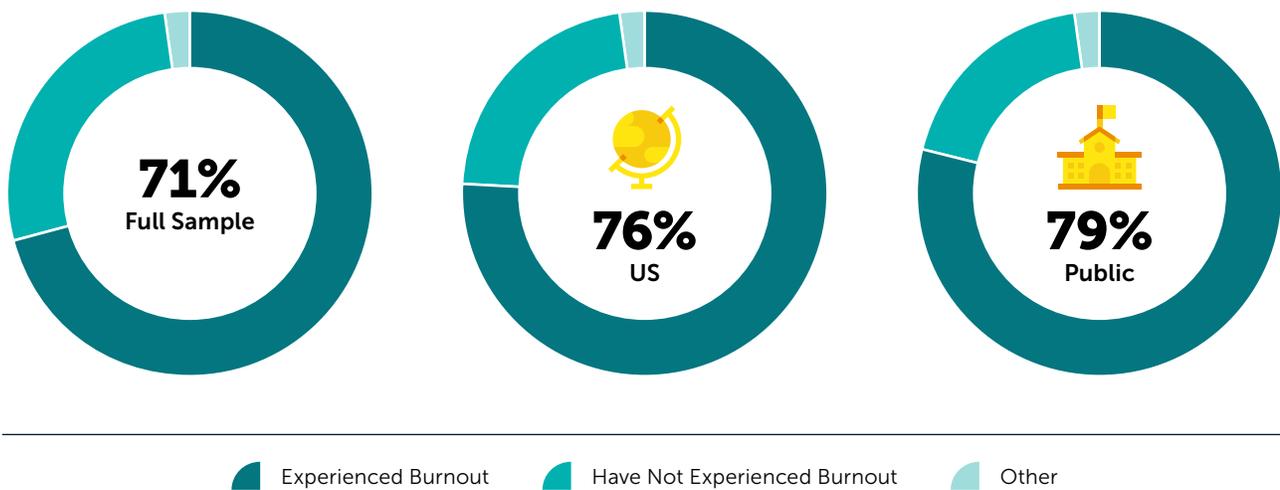
Seventy-one percent of counselors have experienced burnout within the past four years. Of those who have experienced burnout, 40% have considered or made a change, either moving to a new school or leaving the profession altogether.

Burnout increased to 76% and 79%, respectively, in the US and at public schools, where caseloads are larger.

### What is burnout?

Counselor burnout, also known as therapist burnout, can occur when practitioners experience chronic stress and lack resources, support, rest, and/or recovery time. It can involve mental, physical, and emotional symptoms.

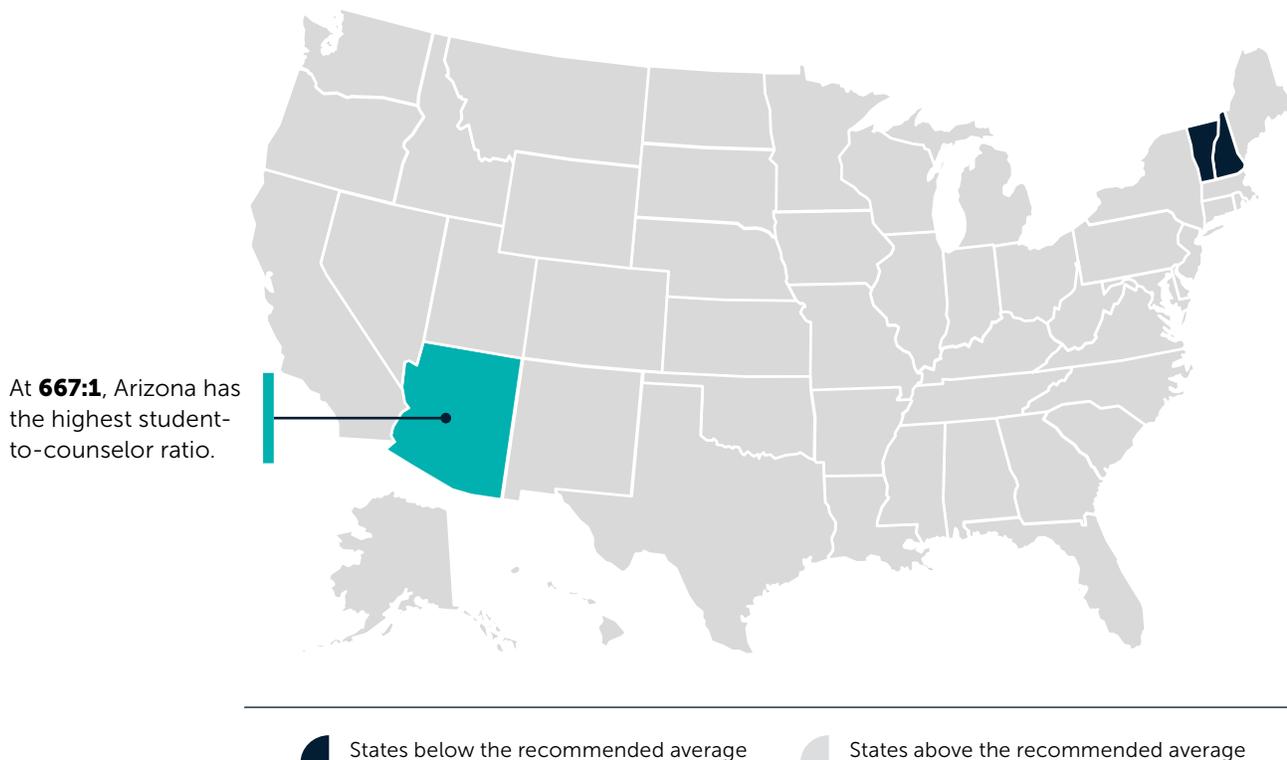
### Counselor Burnout



“ Burnout has caused several of us to become desensitized to certain situations. Being able to focus on how to help students obtain a bright future is honestly **the only reason I remain in the field.**”

The American School Counselor Association recommends a 250:1 student-to-counselor ratio, but the national average was 385:1 for the 2022–2023 school year (the most recent year for which data is available). Only two states have caseloads below the recommended average: New Hampshire (199:1) and Vermont (177:1).

### Student-to-Counselor Ratios in the US



**TAKEAWAY:** Burnout is most pervasive among counselors at public schools in the US, where average caseloads soar well beyond the recommended student-to-counselor ratio of 250:1.

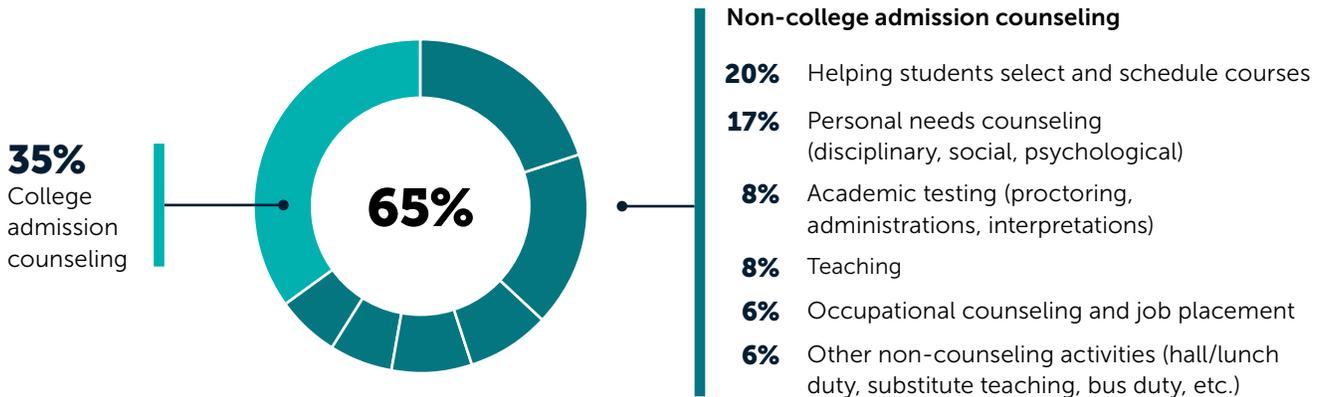
► For strategies on mitigating burnout, read our article, “3 Tips for Battling Counselor Burnout,” at [appily.com/counselor-burnout](https://appily.com/counselor-burnout).

**FINDING 2:**

## Counselors spend the majority of their time on non-college admission counseling duties.

Counselors spend 65% of their time on non-college admission counseling duties, including assisting students with course scheduling, personal needs counseling, and administrative tasks such as substitute teaching, hall monitoring, and lunch duty.

### Time Spent on Counseling Duties

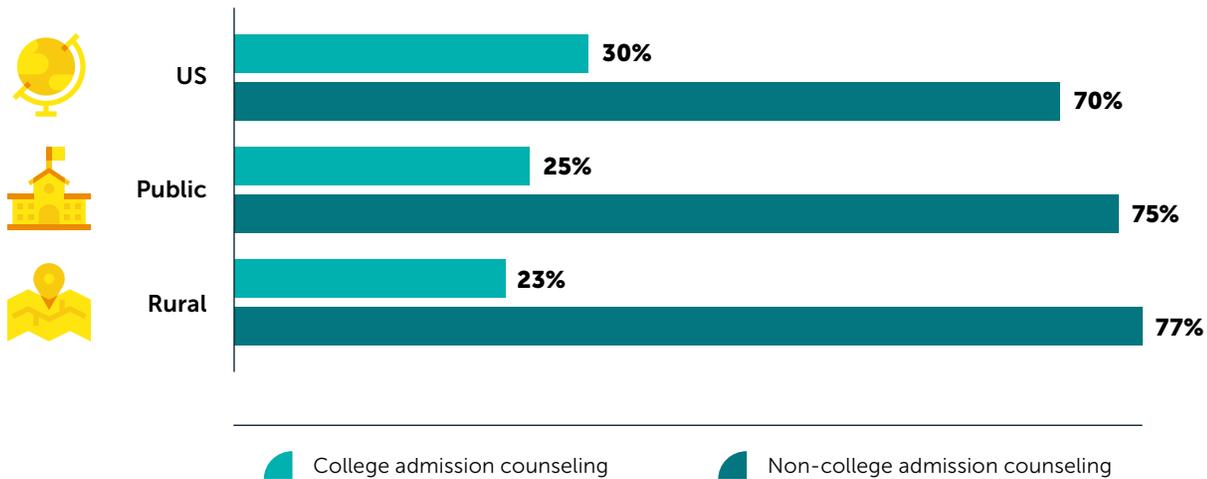


The time spent away from college admission counseling is significantly higher for counselors in the US and at public and rural schools.

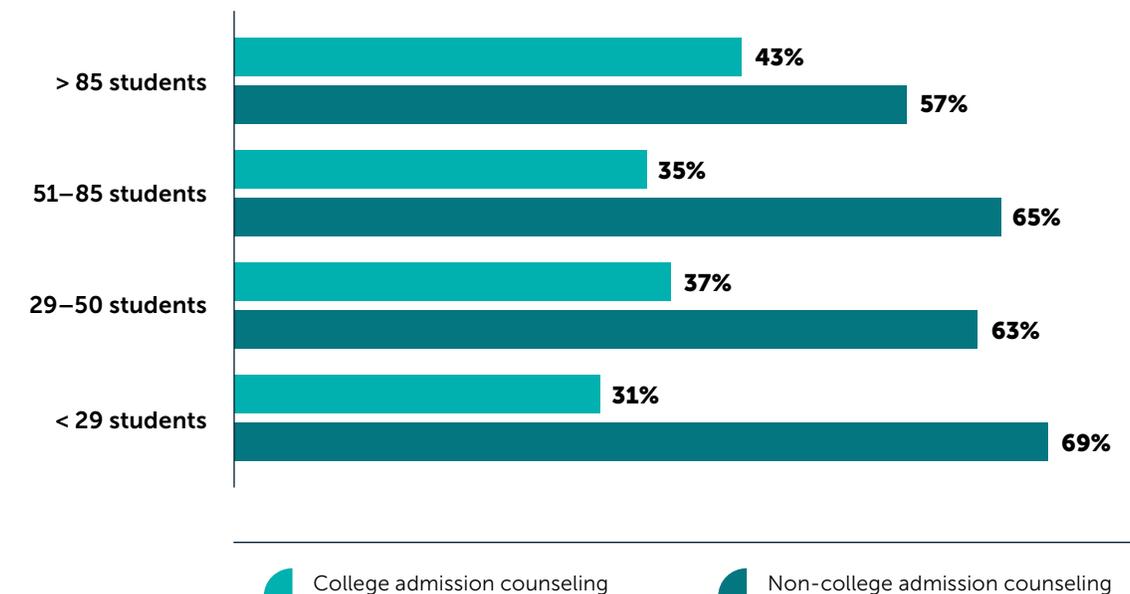
Surveyed counselors who had the largest caseloads (more than 85 students) spend the most time on college admission counseling, whereas counselors with the smallest caseloads (fewer than 29 students) spend the most time on other responsibilities.

“ If my job was only college counseling related, I would be fine. **All of the ‘other duties’ are taxing.**”

## Time Spent on College Admission Counseling vs. Non-College Admission Counseling



## Time Spent on College Admission Counseling vs. Non-College Admission Counseling



**TAKEAWAY:** Counselors are being tasked with duties beyond college admission counseling and the scope of their role. They indicate that these factors are contributing to burnout, and in some cases, leading them to explore other career opportunities (see Finding 1).

- ▶ Our Counselor and Advisor Resource Hub includes materials to help counselors increase efficiency and support their students more holistically: [appily.com/guidance/counselors](https://appily.com/guidance/counselors).

**FINDING 3:**

# The popularity of direct admissions is expanding.

Seventy-eight percent of counselors surveyed reported being extremely or very familiar with direct admissions, a testament to its growing popularity worldwide.

### What is direct admissions?

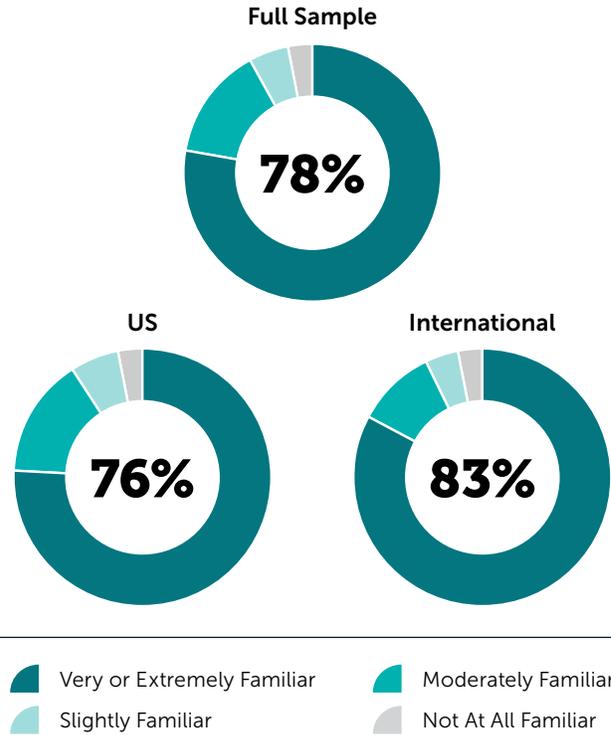
“Direct admissions” refers to institutions proactively informing students of their eligibility for admission and providing a streamlined process by which students can accept their admission offers.

Direct admissions has a long tradition abroad, which may be why familiarity is higher among international counselors. Countries such as Turkey, Brazil, and France have systems in place wherein students who meet certain requirements gain automatic admission to state or public universities.

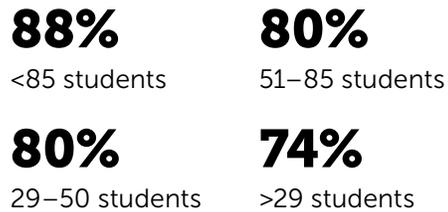
Nearly 90% of counselors with the largest caseloads (more than 85 students) describe themselves as extremely or very familiar with direct admissions. In the US, direct admissions was pioneered by a handful of higher education offices and states, such as Texas, Florida, and Idaho, that guaranteed eligible residents direct pathways to in-state public institutions. As counselors with the largest caseloads tend to be concentrated at public schools, it is unsurprising that familiarity with such initiatives is highest among these counselors.



### Familiarity with Direct Admissions



### Familiarity with Direct Admissions by Caseload



**TAKEAWAY:** With its recent adoption by many states, universities, and college-admission platforms, direct admissions may seem like a new phenomenon, but it enjoys a decades-long history in many areas across the country and around the world. For more guidance on direct admissions, read EAB’s “Guide to the Direct Admissions Landscape” at [eab.com/direct-admissions](https://eab.com/direct-admissions) or watch EAB’s webinar, “The New Frontier: How Reverse, Direct, and Guaranteed Admissions Are Reshaping the Landscape,” at [eab.com/new-frontier](https://eab.com/new-frontier).

▶ If you’re ready to bring direct admissions to your students, visit [appily.com/match](https://appily.com/match).

**FINDING 4:**

# More than half of counselors are using ChatGPT or generative AI in their counseling practice.

The most popular use of these tools is writing recommendation letters, with 35% of counselors saying they have used ChatGPT or generative AI for this purpose. Counselors also report using the technology to craft lesson plans, help students brainstorm essay ideas, and draft emails, particularly when the content of those emails is sensitive, complicated, or directed to parents.

International, private, suburban, and urban counselors are the strongest adopters. This may be because these counselors spend more time on college admissions counseling than their counterparts, which could afford them more bandwidth for AI exploration. Moreover, many international counselors work in single-person offices, making AI a valuable tool to expand their bandwidth.

Perhaps out of necessity, counselors with the largest caseloads are the most frequent users.



### ChatGPT/Generative AI Use by Caseload

**54%**

<85 students

**48%**

51–85 students

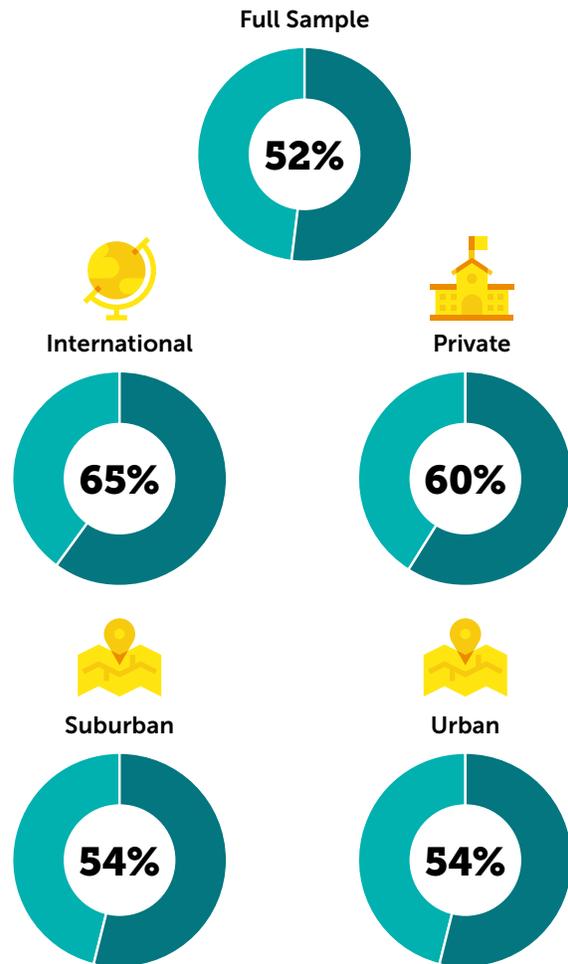
**51%**

29–50 students

**50%**

>29 students

### ChatGPT/Generative AI Use



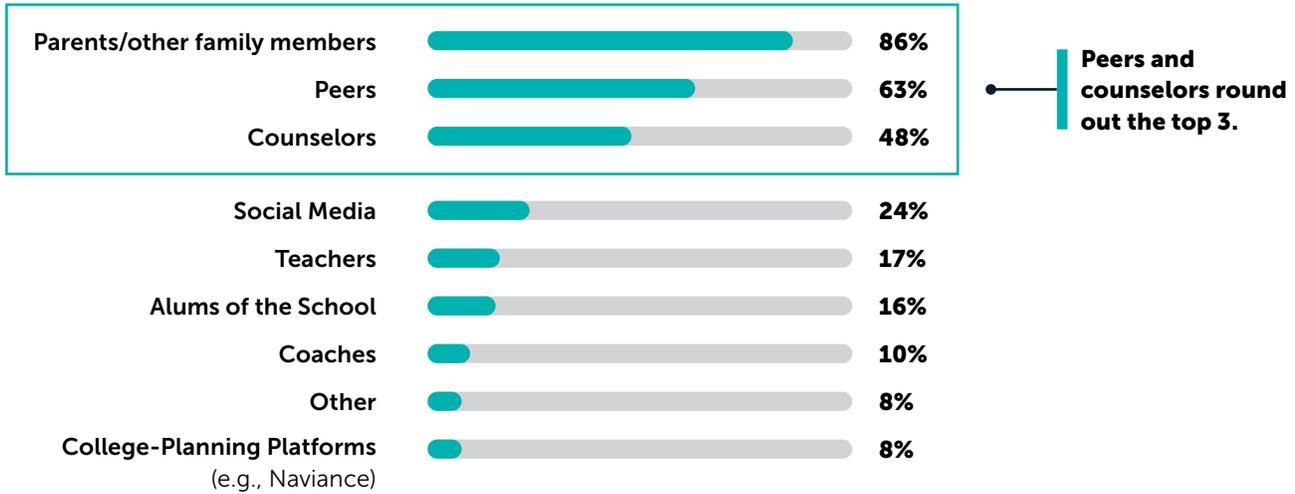
**TAKEAWAY:** Counselors are leveraging generative AI to enhance their capabilities, which is essential given the many roles they are asked to assume. By engaging AI to draft recommendation letters, write follow-up emails, and create college lists, counselors—especially those who are experiencing burnout—free up time to build relationships with students and focus on other responsibilities.

► Check out our insightful resource, “7 Prompts to Craft Compelling Recommendation Letters,” at [appily.com/7-prompts](https://appily.com/7-prompts), to begin leveraging AI in your counseling practice.

**FINDING 5:**

# Counselors view parents as students' #1 influencer.

## Biggest Influencers on Students' College Applications



Eighty-six percent of counselors surveyed view parents as the biggest influencer on where students apply. With numbers reaching 90%, parental influence at international, private, rural, and suburban schools is even stronger.

## Parental Influence on Students' College Applications



**88%**

International



**80%**

Private



**88%**

Rural



**90%**

Suburban



**My [students'] parents have exceedingly narrow definitions of 'success' and 'good.'** They are all obsessed with the same 15 or so schools, and that influences where students apply."

Counselors at international, private, and urban schools perceive themselves to have the most influence. Peers, however, rise in influence at US, public, rural, and suburban schools.

### Counselor Influence on Students' College Applications



**57%**  
International



**55%**  
Private



**57%**  
Rural

### Peer Influence on Students' College Applications



**67%**  
US



**66%**  
Public



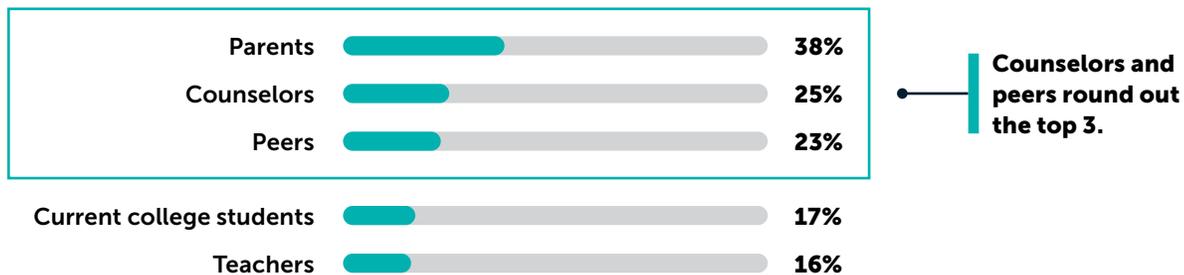
**66%**  
Rural



**69%**  
Suburban

Parental influence remains high when students make their enrollment decisions. In EAB's 2024 survey of first-year college students, parents topped the list of the most helpful influencers in a student's enrollment decision of which college to attend.

### Most Helpful Influencers on Students' Enrollment Decisions



**TAKEAWAY:** Parents reign supreme. Engaging them early and often in the college process will help counselors better educate their families and more effectively advise their students.

- ▶ Our Parent Hub provides curated resources to aid counselors in these efforts: [appily.com/guidance/parents](https://appily.com/guidance/parents).

## FINDING 6:

# Cost concerns shape students' college-going behaviors.

Nearly half (49%) of US counselors reported that an inability to afford college is the primary reason why their students choose not to attend. The number increases to 53% for public school counselors. Though the order fluctuates slightly, the top five reasons cited by these counselors are the same.

International and private school counselors also cite cost as a concern for their students, but the desire to take time off before college is the top reason why their students don't attend. The top five reasons for these groups align.

### Reasons Why Students Choose Not to Attend College

 US	 Public
49%   Unable to afford college	53%   Unable to afford college
41%   Don't think college is worth the cost	42%   Uncertain about their career path
40%   Uncertain about their career path	41%   Don't think college is worth the cost
33%   Need to work	38%   Need to work
31%   Want to take some time off before college	26%   Want to take some time off before college

 International	 Private
56%   Want to take some time off before college	54%   Want to take some time off before college
37%   Uncertain about their career path	36%   Uncertain about their career path
31%   Unable to afford college	33%   Unable to afford college
25%   Grades aren't good enough	21%   Grades aren't good enough
21%   Plan to join military	21%   Plan to join military

“**Most students want affordable schools.** Their number one concern is: How much will this cost, and can I pay it back in a few years?”

While the top reasons why rural students opt out of college all relate to affordability (unable to afford college, need to work, and not thinking college is worth the cost), suburban and urban students' concerns also include uncertainty about their career path and a desire to take time off before college.

### Reasons Why Students Choose Not to Attend College

 Rural	 Suburban	 Urban
<b>49%</b> Unable to afford college	<b>44%</b> Unable to afford college	<b>43%</b> Want to take some time off before college
<b>42%</b> Need to work	<b>43%</b> Want to take some time off before college	<b>39%</b> Unable to afford college
<b>41%</b> Don't think college is worth the cost	<b>42%</b> Uncertain about career path	<b>37%</b> Uncertain about their career path
40% Uncertain about career path	32% Don't think college is worth the cost	22% Grades aren't good enough
26% Want to take some time off before college	18% Need to work	22% Don't think college is worth the cost

Tuition cost, the cost of living while attending college, and student debt are the top three factors that dissuade most students from considering college after high school. These concerns are even more pronounced for public school students.

### Factors That Dissuade Students from Attending College

All Students	 Public
<b>68%</b> Tuition cost	<b>71%</b> Tuition cost
<b>39%</b> Cost of living expenses while attending college	<b>50%</b> Student debt
<b>36%</b> Student debt	<b>42%</b> Cost of living expenses while attending college
30% Distance from home	30% Distance from home
16% Lack of awareness/insufficient information about college	28% Lower or no college-going culture in their community

**TAKEAWAY:** Affordability concerns are broad and universal, but counselors indicate that uncertainty about a career path and the need to take a break before college are also top of mind for students.

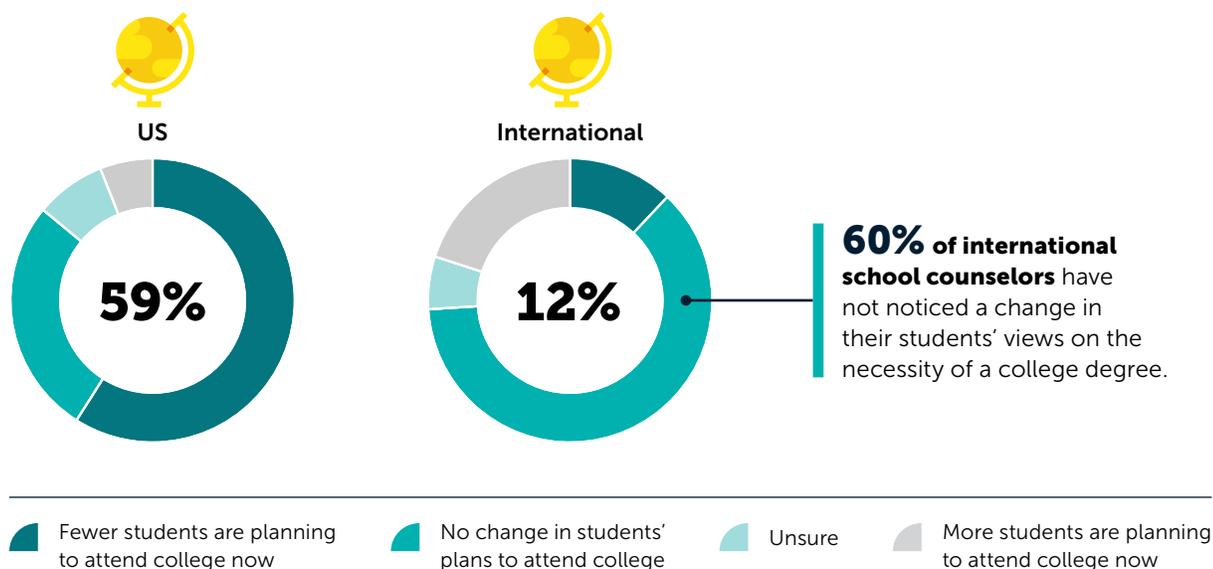
- ▶ Our FAFSA Resource Hub ([apply.com/fafsa](https://apply.com/fafsa)), college affordability materials ([apply.com/affordability](https://apply.com/affordability)), robust scholarship database ([apply.com/scholarships](https://apply.com/scholarships)), dream career discovery tools ([apply.com/dream-career](https://apply.com/dream-career)), and gap year articles ([apply.com/gap-year](https://apply.com/gap-year)) equip counselors to meet students where they are.

**FINDING 7:**

## **In the United States and at public schools, students' views on the necessity of college have fundamentally shifted since the pandemic.**

Fifty-nine percent of US counselors reported that since the pandemic, fewer of their students view a college degree as necessary to achieving their career goals. Just 12% of international counselors surveyed reported this.

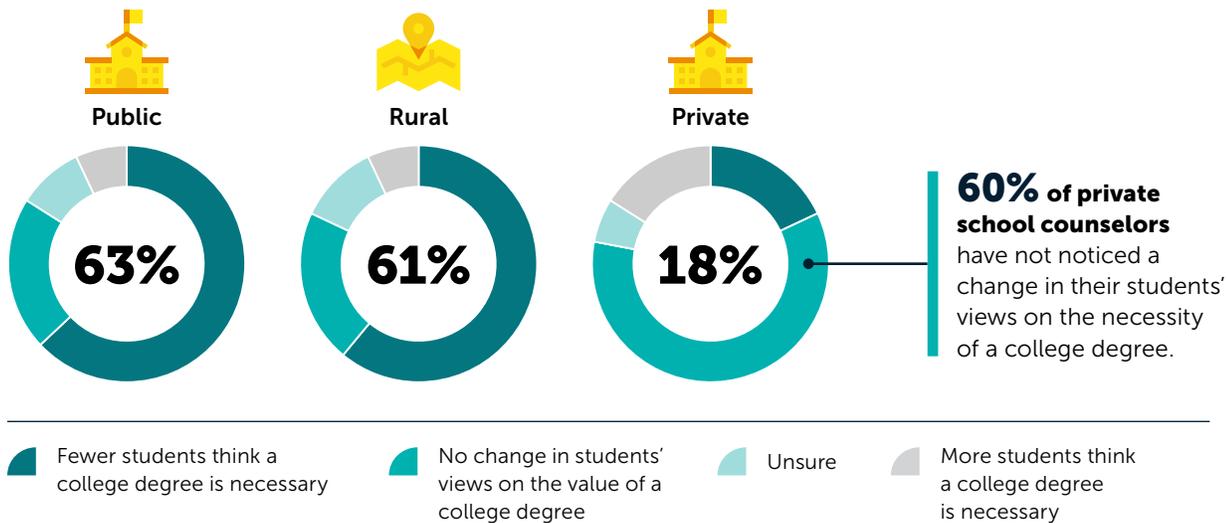
### **Student Views on the Necessity of a College Degree**



Those numbers increase to 61% and 63%, respectively, for rural and public school counselors, whereas only 18% of private school counselors noted the same change in their students' views on a college degree over the past four years.

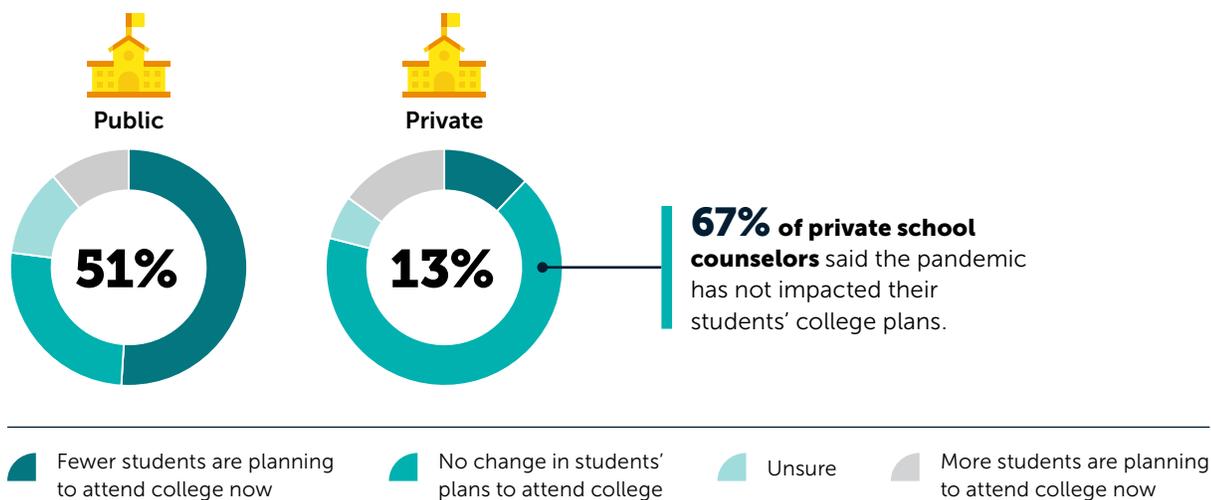
**“ For some students, college is not the best choice. Some are more suited to more practical, hands-on learning or learning on the job.”**

## Student Views on the Necessity of a College Degree



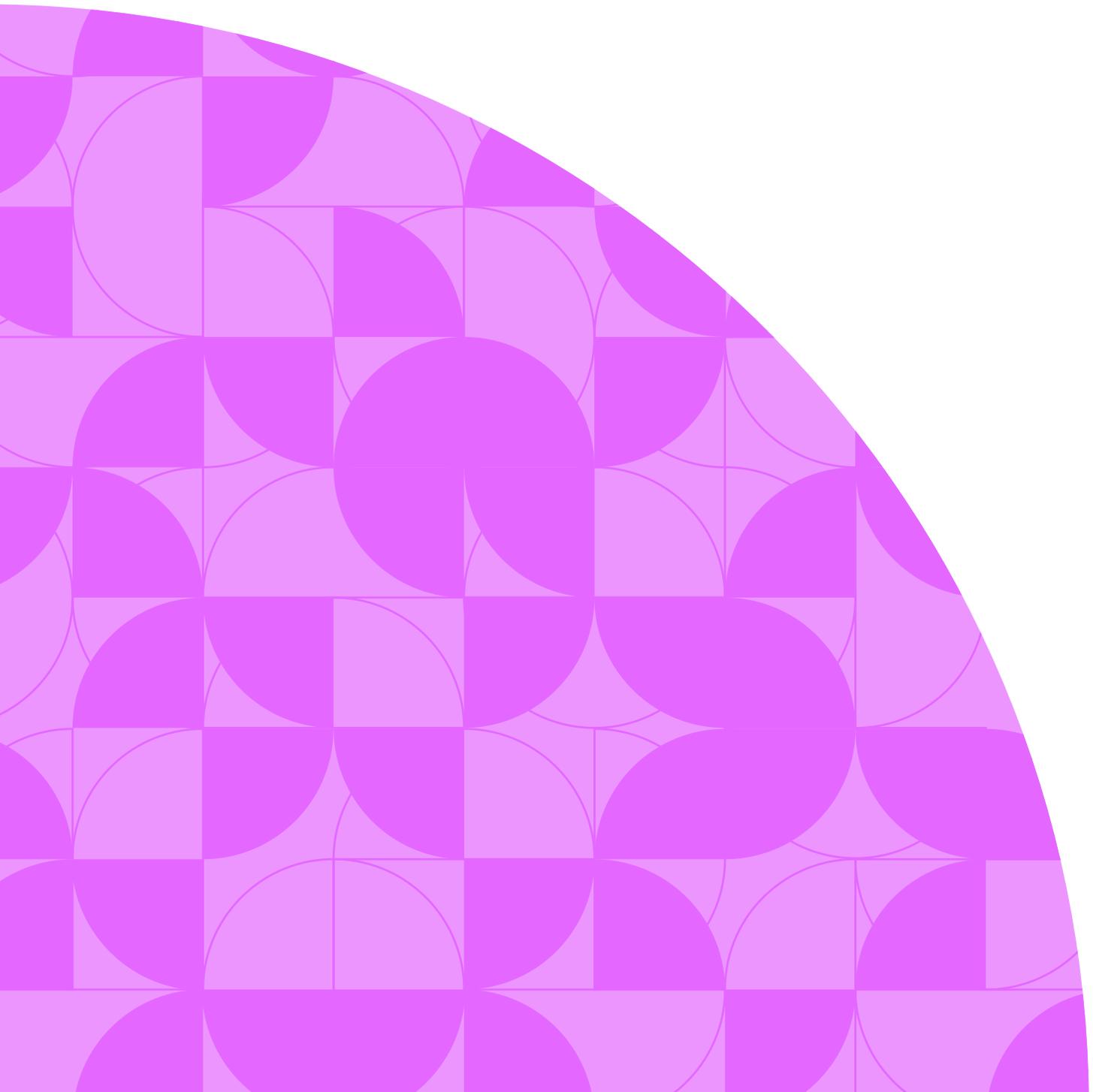
More than half (51%) of public school counselors surveyed reported that fewer students are planning to attend college now than before the pandemic. Only 13% of private school counselors noted a similar change in their students' plans.

## Students' College Attendance Plans



**TAKEAWAY:** While studies show that bachelor's degree holders earn 86% more than those with only a high school diploma, high schools worldwide are expanding their postsecondary pathways to include two-year, trade, and technical schools; military exploration; apprenticeship programs; and non-degree careers.

- Our Academics and College Readiness resources ([appily.com/readiness](https://appily.com/readiness)) can help your students find their best path.





We're awarding a \$1,000 scholarship every month to students who register with the help of their counselor.

Share this special link with your students:

**[appily.com/hello](https://appily.com/hello)**

Join our mailing list so you don't miss out on any opportunities for you or your students:

**[appily.com/join](https://appily.com/join)**

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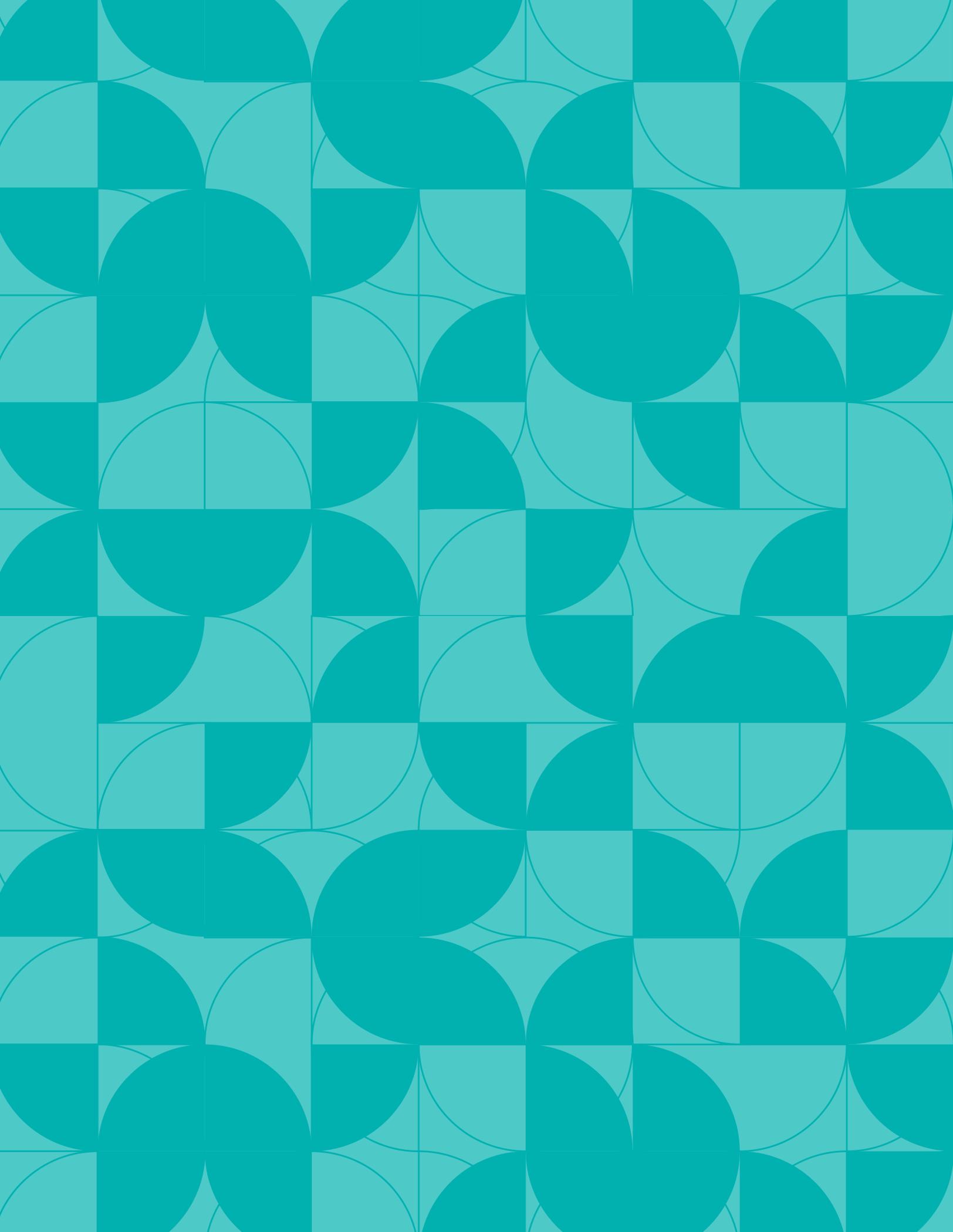
Kelsey Stoneham

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