



EAB

# Recruiting 'Gen P'

How the Pandemic Has Changed Students' College Search Behaviors and Mindset

## Connecting to Audio



Refer to the **webinar confirmation email** you received in your inbox.

## Asking a Question



## Brief Exit Survey



We'd appreciate your **feedback** on today's presentation.

# Today's Presenters



## Michael Koppenheffer

*Vice President  
Enroll360 Marketing and Analytics*



## Pamela Kiecker Royall, PhD

*Head of Research  
Marketing and Enrollment Solutions*



# 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.

# How have students' college search behaviors changed as a result of the pandemic?



# About Our Communication Preferences Survey



## Overview

- Survey of high school students' communication preferences and college priorities
- Data collected in March and April 2023 with responses from **20,324 participants**

## Participant Profile

High School Graduation Year	Percentage
2023 (Senior)	58%
2024 (Junior)	26%
2025 (Sophomore)	17%

Race/Ethnicity	Percentage <sup>1</sup>
White/Caucasian	52%
Hispanic or Latinx/o/a	22%
African/African American/Black	15%
Asian (Central/South/East/Southeast)	13%
Others <sup>1</sup>	5%

Gender	Percentage
Female	58%
Male	38%
Non-binary	3%
Other	1%

First-Generation Status	Percentage
First-Generation	24%
Non-First-Generation	76%

Region	Percentage
Northeast	18%
Southeast	23%
Midwest	22%
Southwest	14%
West	23%

Household Income	Percentage
\$90,000 or less	56%
\$90,001-\$200,000	33%
More than \$200,000	10%

1) Participants could select multiple options

2) Including Middle Eastern or West Asian, Native American or Alaskan Native, Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander, and other

# Roadmap: 6 Key Insights From Our Research

1. **Mental health** concerns are shaping Gen P's college search.
2. Students are **academically underprepared**.
3. **Timing** of student search behaviors is shifting.
4. Students are eager for **in-person** events and experiences.
5. Students have high standards for **digital experiences**.
6. Students are **questioning the value** of a college education.



# Mental health concerns are shaping Gen P's college search.

---

INSIGHT

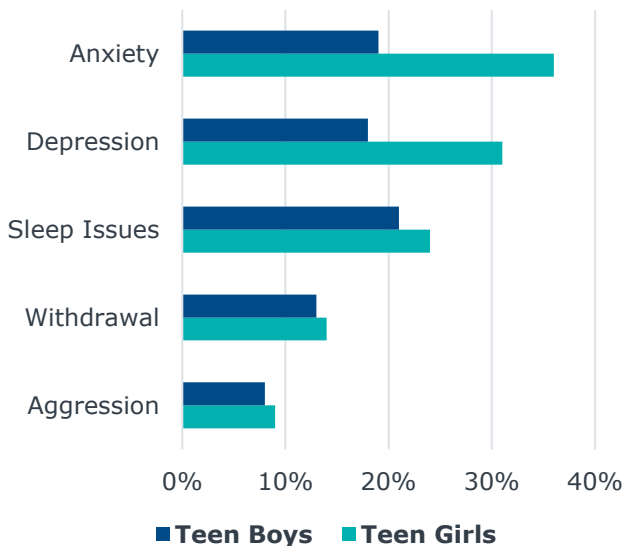
1



# Growing Mental Health Challenges from the Pandemic

## Percentage of parents reporting their child showing new or worsening symptoms of mental health concerns, 2020-21

U Michigan National Survey (2021)



## A Troubling Picture of Mental Health

17%

Increase in **diagnosis of anxiety disorders** in young people<sup>1</sup> in the last 10 years

32%

Of adolescents will meet criteria for an **anxiety disorder by the age of 18**

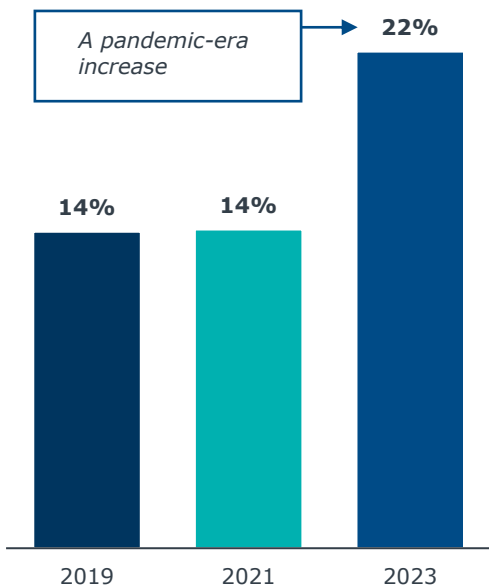
3000+

**Suicide attempts are made on average each day** by students in grades 9-12

# Mental Health Increasingly Guiding College Choices

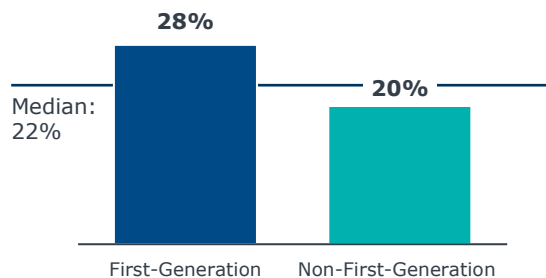
## A Growing Reason Students Are Forgoing College

Share of Students Naming “Not Mentally Ready” as Their Reason for Opting Out of College



## Concerns Are Highest Among First-Generation Students...

“I’m Not Mentally Ready” for College, by First-Generation Status



## ...And Lower-Income Students



Among students **planning to attend college**, mental health was more likely to be listed as a top college concern for lower-income than higher-income students



1

## **Prioritize Mental Health Messaging to Families**

Ensure that your marketing communications include messaging to reassure students and their parents about mental health support on your campus.

2

## **Early Outreach Remains Important**

Contacting students and parents earlier in high school can help your institution build trust and affinity, which is especially important given families' growing concerns about college.

3

## **Build Strong Relationships with Community-Based Organizations (CBOs)**

CBOs can be an especially important connecting point between colleges and high-potential under-served students.



# Students are academically underprepared.

---

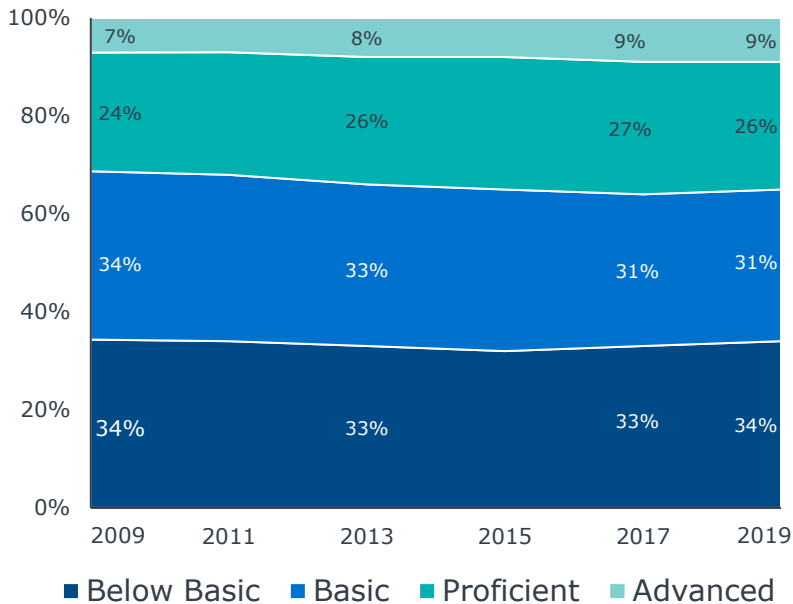
INSIGHT

2

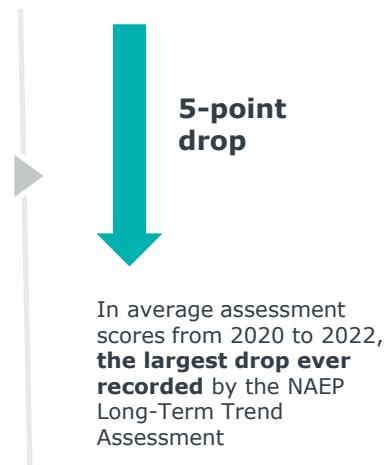
# Declines in Academic Achievement



**Proficiency Levels Have Been Consistently Low for a Decade**  
*Percent of Students Scoring at Each Achievement Level on NAEP Assessments*



**Pandemic Disruptions Put Even More Students Behind**

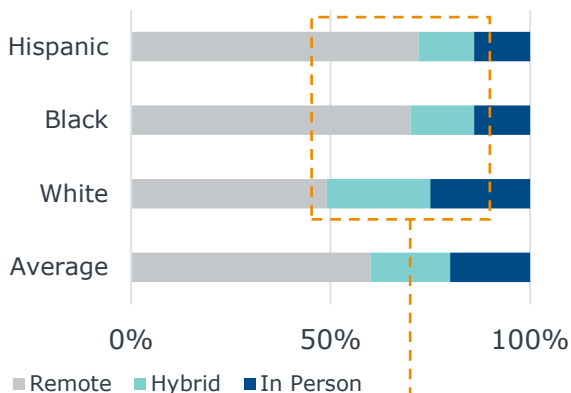


# Equity Gaps Exacerbated During COVID

## A Disparity in Access to and Trust in In-Person Learning During COVID

### Students Receiving Each Type of Instruction

September 2020



20-point gap between white and Black or Hispanic students receiving remote instruction

### K-Shaped Educational Recovery

“Students who performed well previously primarily performed slightly better than expected during Q1 of this year. In contrast, **students who were previously not performing well, performed considerably less well.**”

- *Study on Teaching and Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic, Fairfax County Public Schools*

# Potential Impacts on College Preparedness



## Students Are Concerned About Success as They Make College Choices

26%

of students surveyed by EAB selected “whether I’ll be successful in college” as a top concern about college, behind only affordability and cost considerations.

## And School Counselors Report Under-Preparation

73%

of high school counselors report the pandemic has at least moderately weakened their students’ academic preparation

## Pandemic Learning Loss Likely to Have Long-Term Effects

Students not reading proficiently by third grade are significantly less likely to...

Catch up

75%

Never reach reading proficiency in future grades

Graduate on time

4x

More likely not to graduate from high school on time

Go to college

54%

Less likely to enroll at a college or university after high school



1

## **Address Families' Academic Preparedness Concerns in Marketing**

Similar to concerns about mental health, ensure your messaging addresses families' worries about learning loss and academic preparedness.

2

## **Prioritize Building a Sense of Belonging**

Ensure that your messaging and programming throughout the funnel helps foster a sense of belonging for students who may be apprehensive about college.

3

## **Leverage CBO Relationships**

CBOs can help your college recruit and enroll students who've received extra support in high school, setting them up for success in college.





# Timing of student search behaviors is shifting.

---

INSIGHT

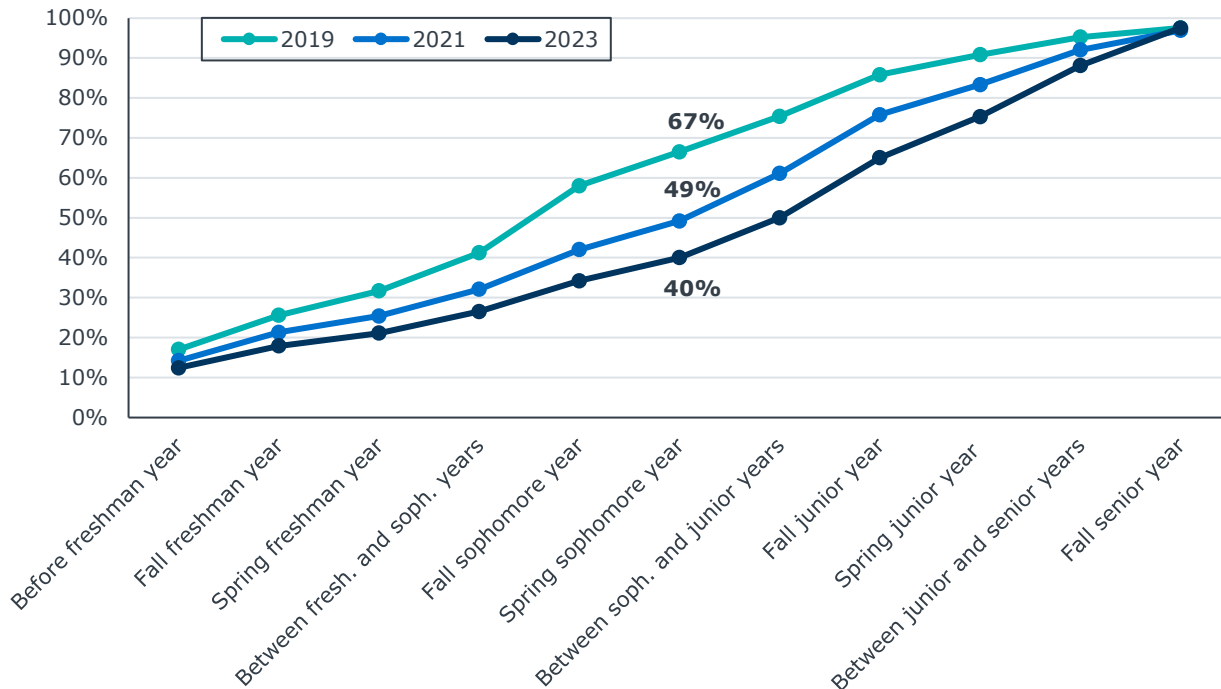
3

# Key Student Search Steps Are Occurring Later



## “When did you first start researching colleges?”

Cumulative Percentage of Students Who Had Started Researching by Time Period



# Students Often Considering More Options, for Longer

## Test-Optional and Other Factors Contributing

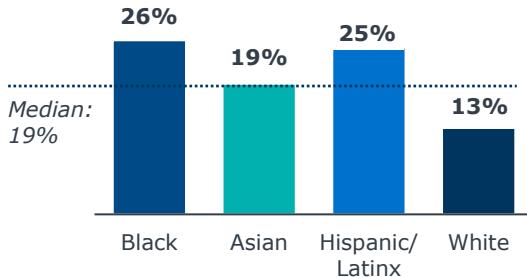
### Test-Optional as a Possible Contributor to Delayed Decision-Making

1 in 5

Students applied to a college specifically because it was test-optional

### Important Equity Benefits of Test-Optional

Students Who Applied to a College Because It Was Test-Optional, Responses by Race/Ethnicity



### Reports of Students Increasingly Comparing Competing Aid Awards



"We're seeing more families who feel like **they're in a better position to compare aid packages and shop around for the best offer**, even compared to a few years ago."

-Vice President of Enrollment Management, Private College in the Northeast



1

## **Use a Flexible, Responsive Approach to Marketing**

As the timing of students' search processes becomes less predictable, responsive and multichannel marketing can help you ensure that your outreach content, timing, and channels engage students, even as preferences vary or shift.

2

## **Test-Optional Remains Highly Appealing to Students**

Our data indicates that requiring test scores is likely to deter a significant portion of students from applying and is likely to be counterproductive to diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts.



Students are eager for  
in-person events and  
experiences.

---

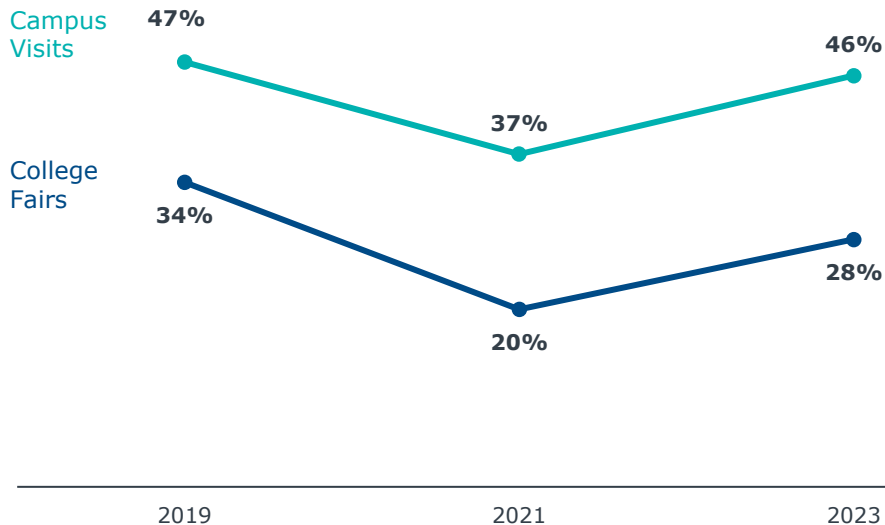
INSIGHT

4

# Campus Visits and College Fairs Have Rebounded

## Percentage of Students Participating in Campus Visits and College Fairs

2019-2023

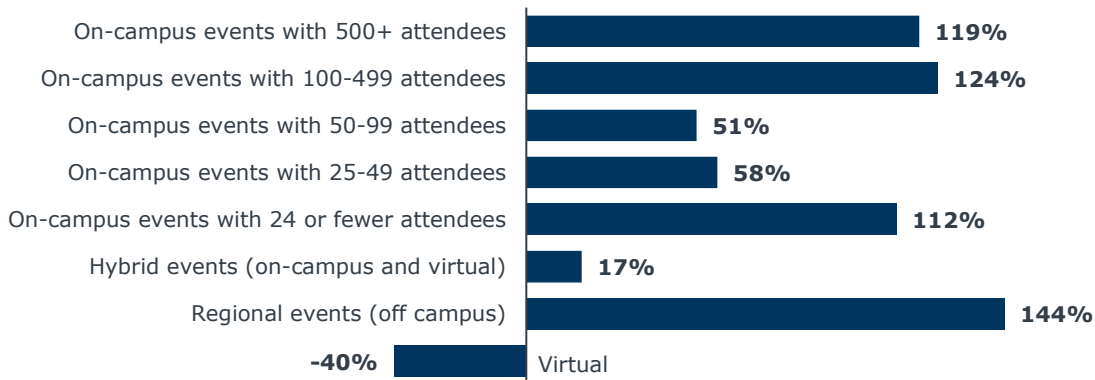


# In-Person Events Are Back



## Change in Number of Recruitment Events Colleges Hosted

EAB 2022 Enrollment Events Poll



## No-Show Rates Also Reflecting Popularity of In-Person Events

58%

of institutions report **virtual** event show rates were **down** in 2022, with another 37% reporting they were flat

38%

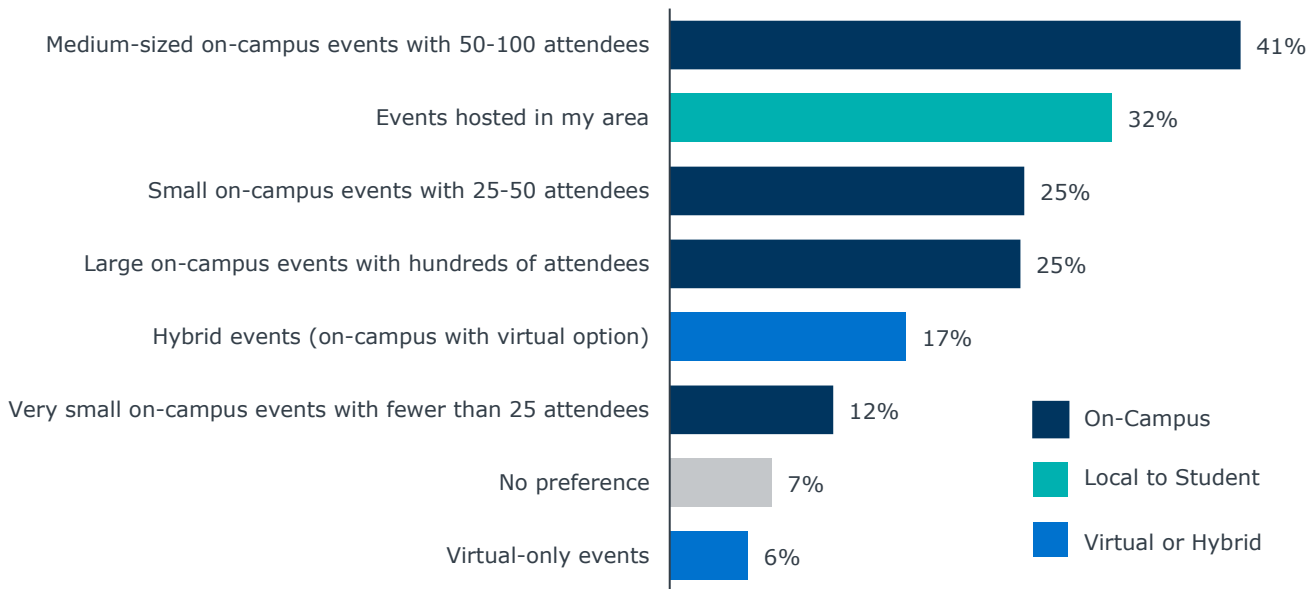
of institutions report **in-person** event show rates were **up**, with another 51% reporting they were flat

# What Types of Events Do Students Most Prefer?



## Students Are Eager for On-Campus Events, But They Appreciate a Variety of Options

*Recruitment Event Types That Most Appeal to Students, Participants Could Select Up to 2 Responses*



Source: EAB 2023 Communication Preferences Survey





1

## **A Varied Event Strategy Appeals to Students**

Given the range of student event preferences, scheduling a variety of programming can help you maximize engagement across your prospect pool.

2

## **Encourage Families to Attend Events and Visit Earlier in Their Search**

Inviting students and parents to visit earlier in high school can help you build relationships with families and potentially alleviate families' stress about the college process.

3

## **In-Person Is Back, But Don't Write Off Virtual Events**

While students are eager for in-person programming, virtual events offer several distinct benefits, including improving access and equity.



Students have high standards for digital experiences.

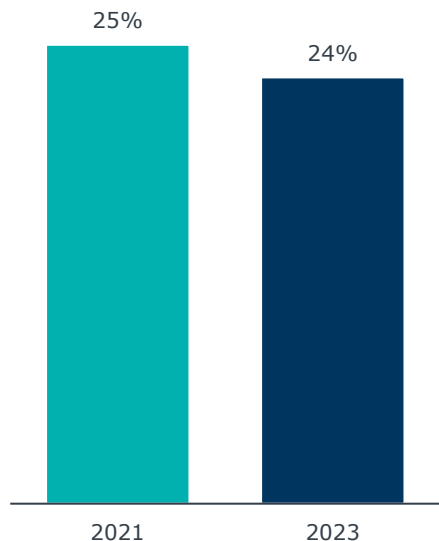
---

INSIGHT

5

## Students About as Likely to Use Virtual Tours in 2023 as in 2021

*Percentage of Students Naming Virtual Tours as a Top Source*



## Key Functions of Virtual Events and Experiences



### **Facilitate Self-Service Research**

Virtual tours and other experiences offer students a highly engaging way to research schools independently, especially early in their search.



### **Improve Access and Equity**

Virtual and hybrid options provide families with a less costly, more flexible way to attend events.



### **Provide Predictive Data**

Interactions such as virtual tour usage and event attendance can serve as key indicators of student interest.

# Social and Email Remain Important

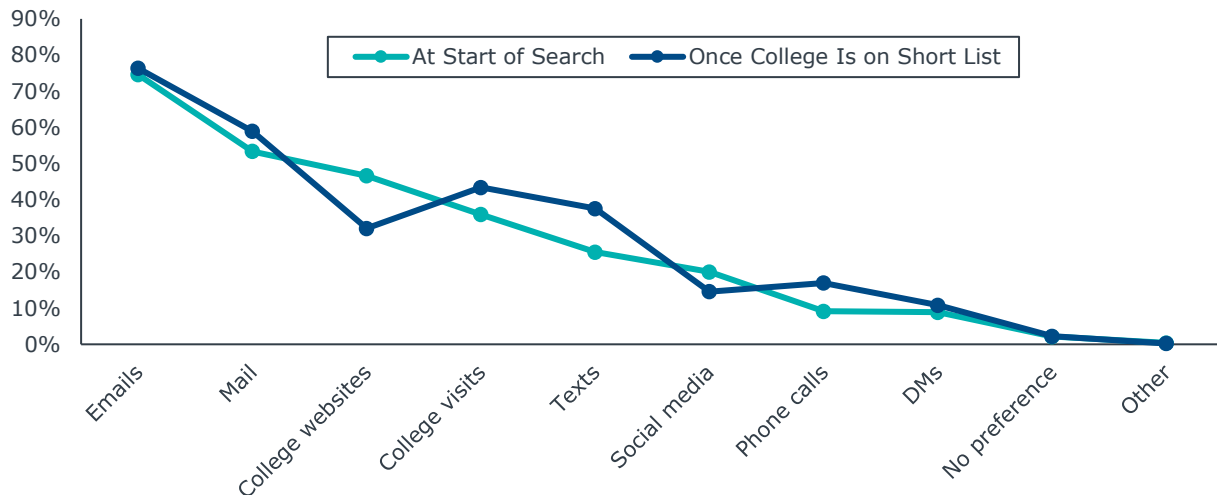
**More Students Have Interacted with Colleges on Social Media**

**74%**

Of students have interacted with a college on social media as of 2023, **up from 63% in 2021**

## Email Is Still Students' Preferred Channel for College Communications

*"How would you prefer for a school to share information with you?"*



Source: EAB 2023 Communication Preferences Survey

1

## **Virtual Tours Support Research Throughout the Funnel**

Virtual tour popularity remains high. Virtual tours offer an engaging way for students to research schools, especially early in their search.

2

## **Virtual and Multichannel Engagement Are Key Indicators of Student Interest**

Virtual engagement can shed light on student interest, especially when paired with other data points on multichannel engagement.

3

## **Website Design Is Important**

A poorly designed website lowers students' and parents' opinions of your school, while a well-designed website can have the opposite effect.

4

## **Email Remains a Primary Channel for Communications**

While multichannel outreach is essential, email remains students' preferred channel.



Students are questioning  
the value of a college  
education.

---

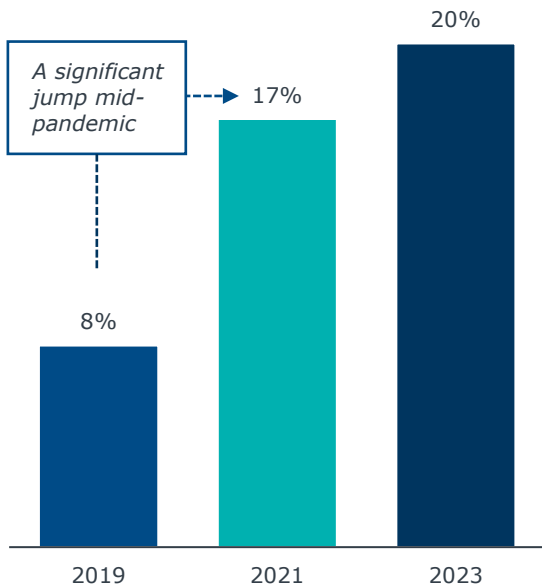
INSIGHT

6

# Students Increasingly Doubting the Value of College

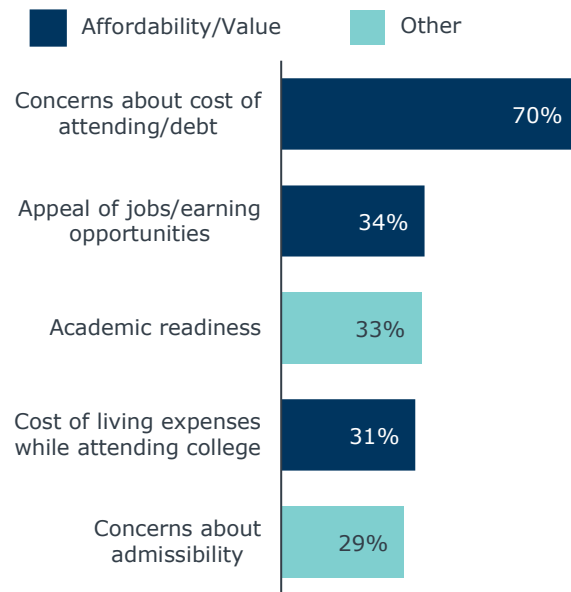
## More Students Saying "It's Not Worth It"

Students Not Pursuing College Immediately After High School, 2019-2023



## Most Common Factors That Deter Students from Attending College

EAB High School Counselor Survey, Top 5 Responses

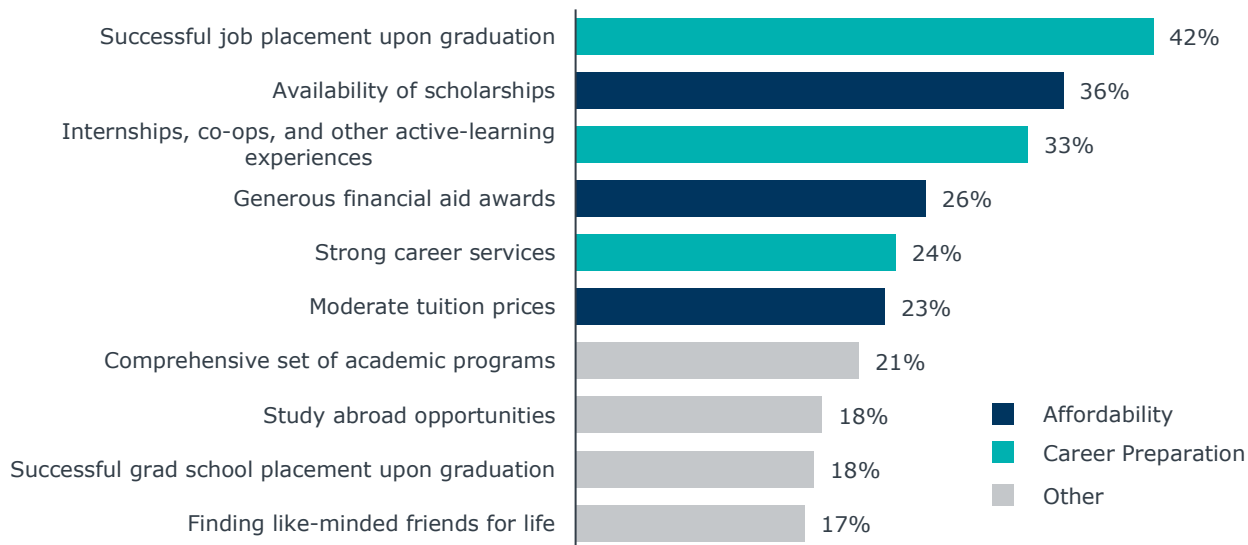


Source: EAB 2023 Communication Preferences Survey

# Comparing Colleges Based on Career Outcomes

## Students View Career Preparation as the Primary Driver of Value

*"What Best Represents Value?" Participants Could Select Up to 5*







1

## **Discuss Career Preparation Early and Persistently in Marketing**

While value messaging has long been a central area of focus for colleges, it's now more important than ever to ensure that you have a strong, multichannel communication strategy for both students and parents. Be sure to highlight features that most interest families, including information on job placement, internships, and career services.

2

## **Activate Your Young Alumni as Proof Points**

Ensure that your value messaging strategy includes success stories from young alumni from a variety of backgrounds.

# Recap

1. **Mental health** concerns are shaping Gen P's college search.
2. Students are **academically underprepared**.
3. **Timing** of student search behaviors is shifting.
4. Students are eager for **in-person** events and experiences.
5. Students have high standards for **digital experiences**.
6. Students are **questioning the value** of a college education.

# Questions?



## Michael Koppenheffer

*Vice President  
Enroll360 Marketing and Analytics  
[mkoppenheffe@eab.com](mailto:mkoppenheffe@eab.com)*



## Pamela Kiecker Royall, PhD

*Head of Research  
Marketing and Enrollment Solutions  
[pamroyall@eab.com](mailto:pamroyall@eab.com)*

# I would like to speak more about...

*Please Choose All That Apply*

1

Adjusting my recruitment communication to better resonate with "Gen P" and their unique experience

---

2

Reaching students earlier in their college-search journey to build affinity

---

3

Making my marketing campaigns more behaviorally responsive to drive deeper student engagement

---

# Please Complete the Post-Webinar Survey



**Request today's presentation.**



**Receive our new insight paper on this topic.**

**Thank you for joining us today!**



202-747-1000 | [eab.com](http://eab.com)

 [@eab](https://twitter.com/eab)  [@eab\\_](https://www.linkedin.com/company/eab_)  [@WeAreEAB](https://www.facebook.com/WeAreEAB)  [@eab.life](https://www.instagram.com/eab.life)

