



# Findings from EAB's 2020 **Parent Survey**

New Insight on How Parents of College-Bound Students Are  
Evaluating Schools

# Today's Speakers



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# Key Considerations

## Three Main Questions Framing Today's Discussion

1

### **How did the pandemic impact families' college search?**

What impact did the COVID crisis have on how parents and students evaluated prospective schools?

2

### **How do parents think about cost?**

How do parents view the investment they are being asked to make in their student's education? How has this changed in the past two years?

3

### **What is the best way to engage parents?**

What information do parents want to receive from you, at what point in their student's college search, and through which channels?

# 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

West: **35%**  
South: **29%**  
Midwest: **27%**  
Northeast: **9%**

### Ethnicity

Black: **11%**  
Asian<sup>1</sup>: **7%**  
Hispanic/Latinx: **14%**  
Native American: **1%**  
White: **69%**  
Other: **3%**

### Household Income

\$60K or less: **21%**  
\$61K-\$120K: **31%**  
>\$120K: **41%**  
Unknown: **8%**

1) Includes Pacific Islanders.

# Participant Poll

## Are You Proactively Reaching Out to Parents?

*Choose all that apply*



Which parents, if any, are included in your **recruitment-marketing** outreach?

Parents of **freshmen**

Parents of **sophomores**

Parents of **juniors**

Parents of **seniors**

None of the above



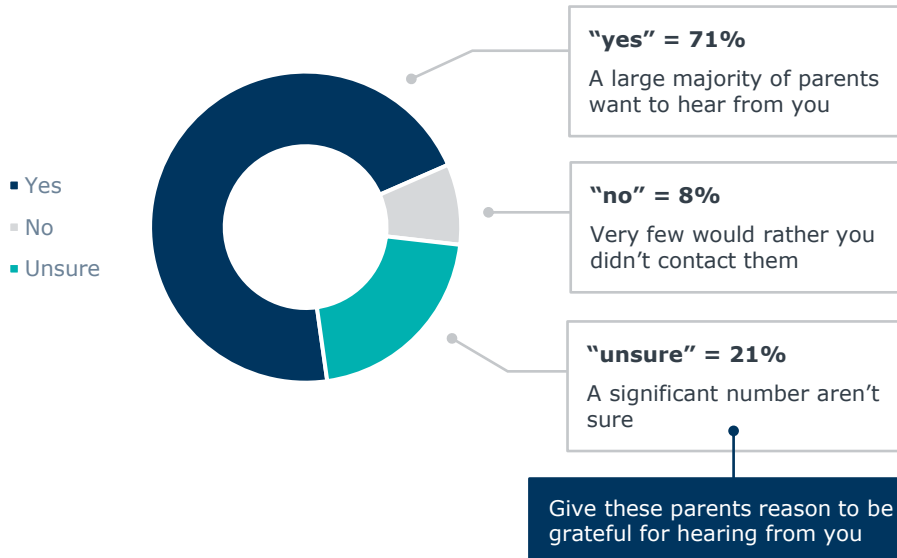
# Parents Want to Hear from You



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*



- 1 Parents on the Pandemic
- 2 Parents on the Cost of College
- 3 Parents' Communication Preferences

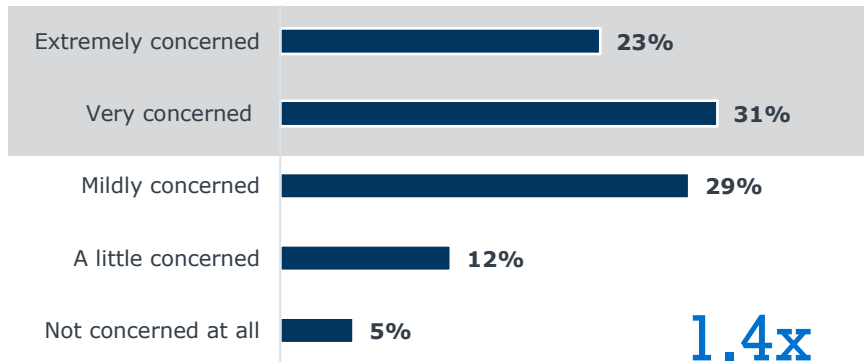
# COVID Concerns

## 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



**1.4x**

more lower-income parents said they were extremely concerned (relative to households earning more than \$120K)



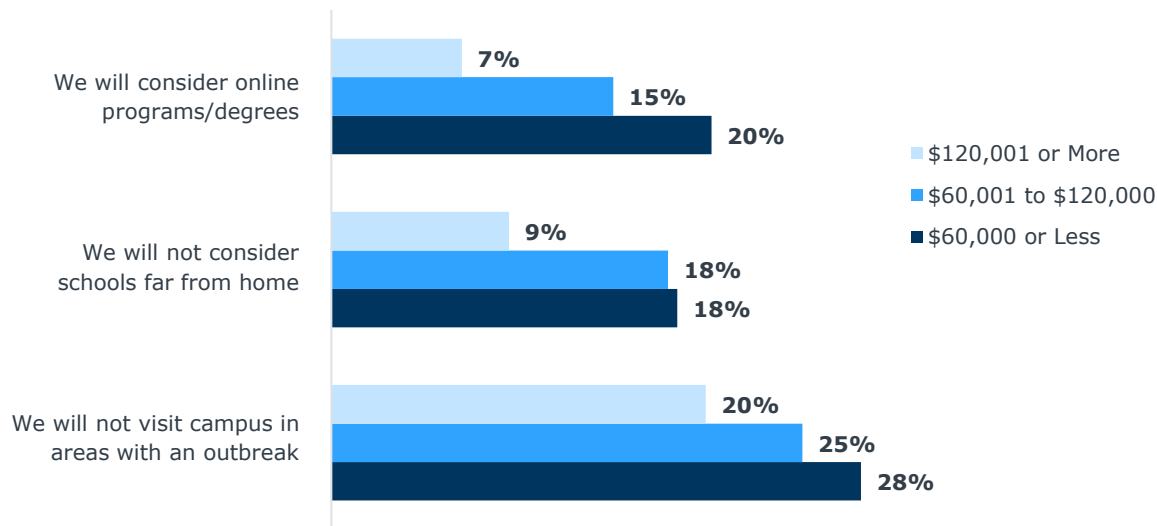
# Differing Responses Across Income Bands



## 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*



# 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

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

Safety has risen to the #2 slot, presumably due to the pandemic

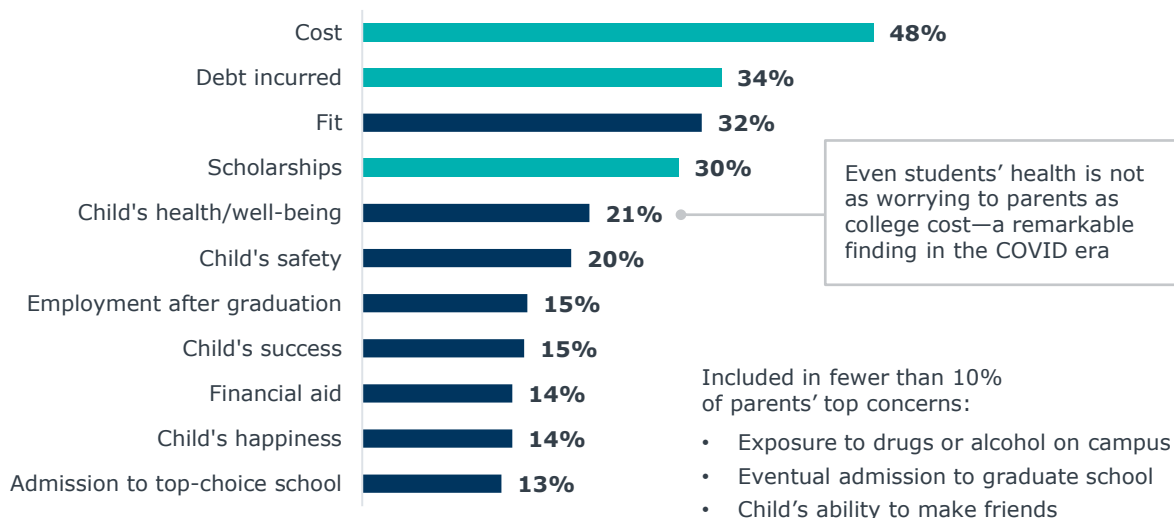
- 1 Parents on the Pandemic
- 2 Parents on the Cost of College
- 3 Parents' Communication Preferences

# Affordability Tops Parents' List of Concerns

## 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<sup>1</sup>



1) Parents were asked to select their top three concerns.

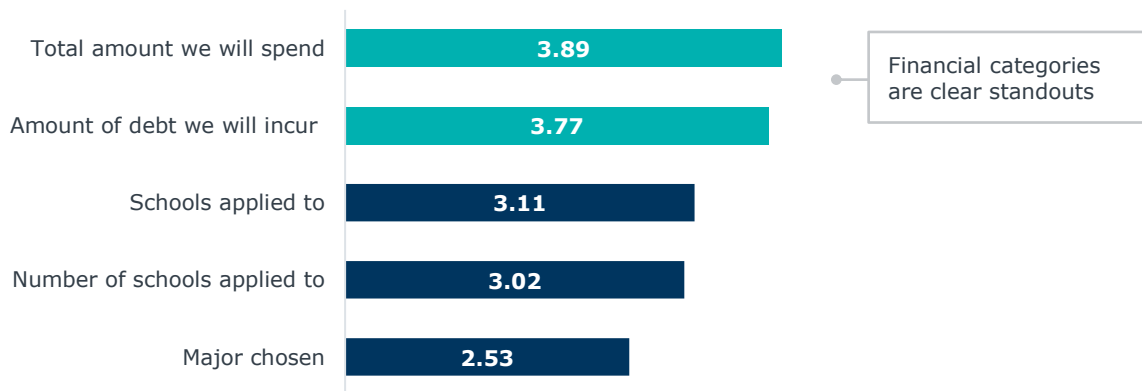
# Parental Influence Focuses on Finances



## 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?”

*Average Score Across Responding Parents, by Decision Category  
(1 = No Influence, 5 = A Great Deal of Influence)*

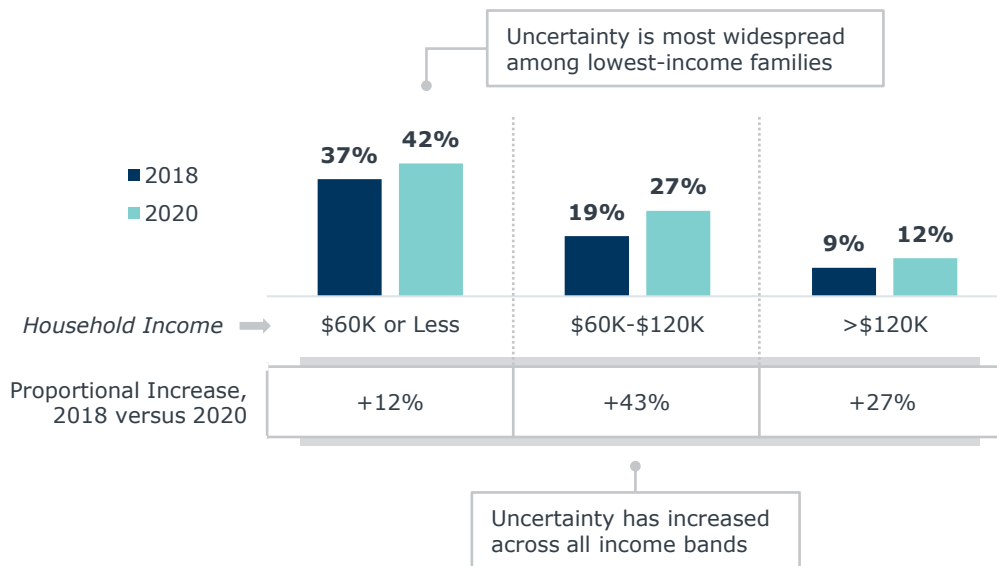


# Increased Uncertainty

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

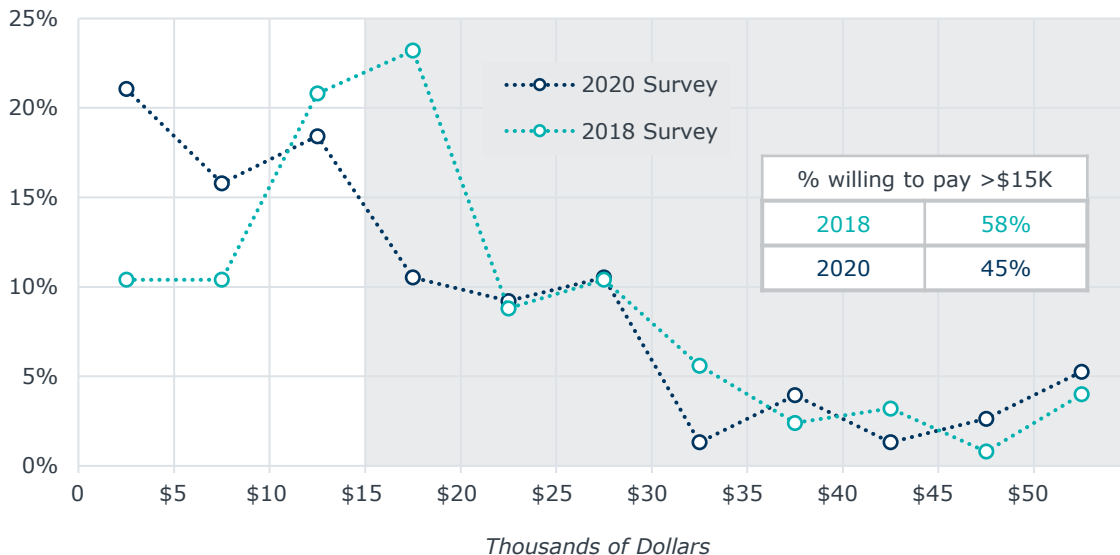


# How Much Are Parents Willing to Pay?

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<sup>1</sup>



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 across all income bands).

- 1 Parents on the Pandemic
- 2 Parents on the Cost of College
- 3 **Parents' Communication Preferences**



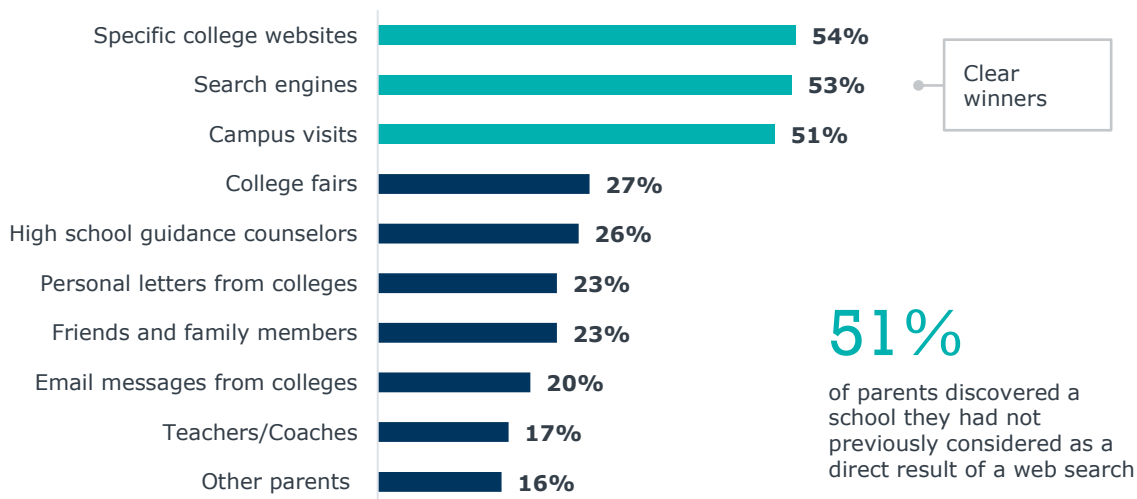
# What Information Sources Do Parents Favor?



## 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)*



# 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*

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

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

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Download our new white paper on .edu optimization from EAB.com  
<https://pages.eab.com/EnrollmentOptimizedWebsite.html>

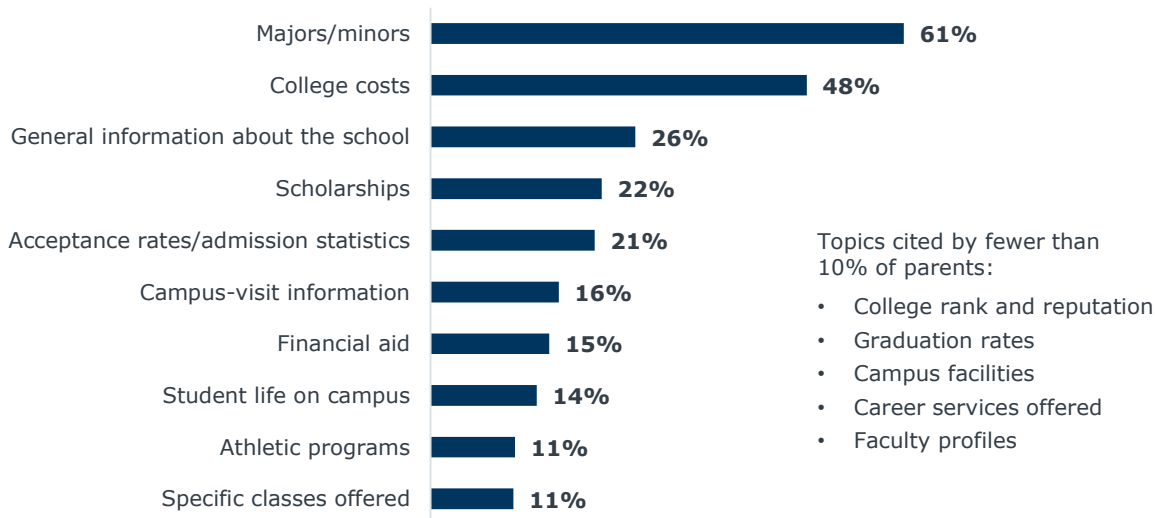
# What Are Parents Looking for on Your Website?



## 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<sup>1</sup>*



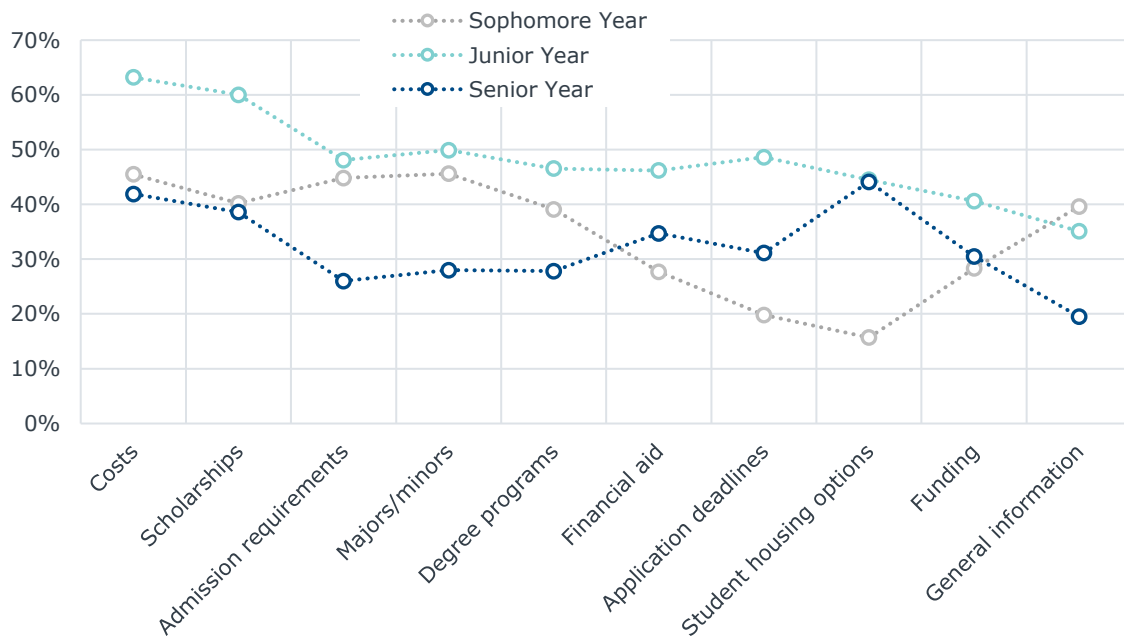
1) Survey respondents were asked to choose three topics.

# 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*



# Recap

## Three Key Takeaways on Engaging Parents in the COVID Era and Beyond

1

### **Understand your changing audience**

Insofar as it has reduced the income of many households, the pandemic foreshadows college-bound demographics of the near future. Understanding the needs of the changing population you serve will be increasingly important to recruitment success moving forward.

2

### **Prove you're worth it**

The amount that families are willing to pay has dropped significantly—a state of affairs that may outlast the pandemic. Moving forward, you will need to be even more creative about how you're making college affordable for all students and helping them understand the value of their investment in you.

3

### **Be fully present on all channels parents favor**

Parents increasingly rely on self-service channels—school websites especially—to learn about colleges. At the same time, they welcome and expect direct contact from you. Successful recruitment marketing depends on your ability to engage parents across the full spectrum of channels they use.



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# 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<sup>1</sup>



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 across all income bands).

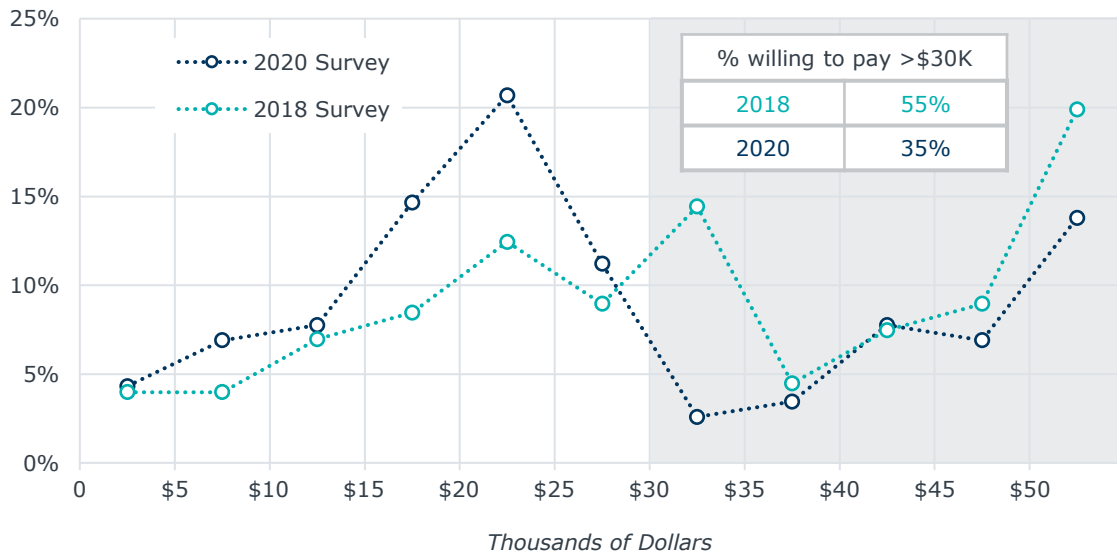


# How Much Are Parents Willing to Pay?

## 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<sup>1</sup>



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 across all income bands).

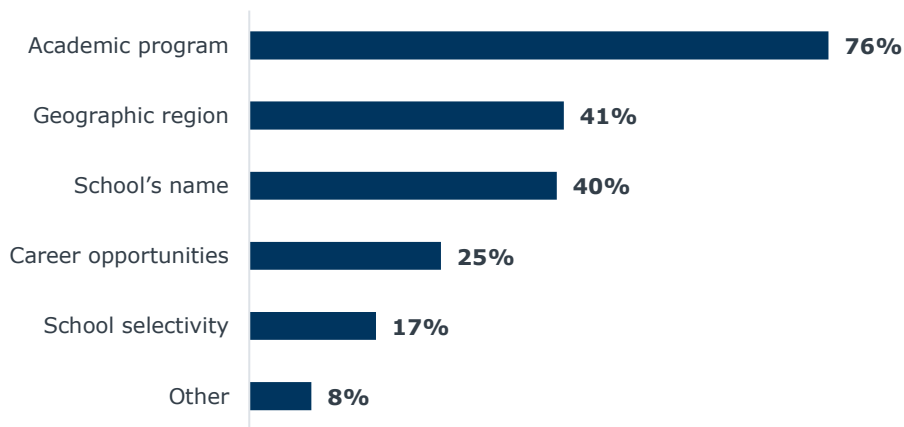
# How Do Parents Find Schools Online?



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*



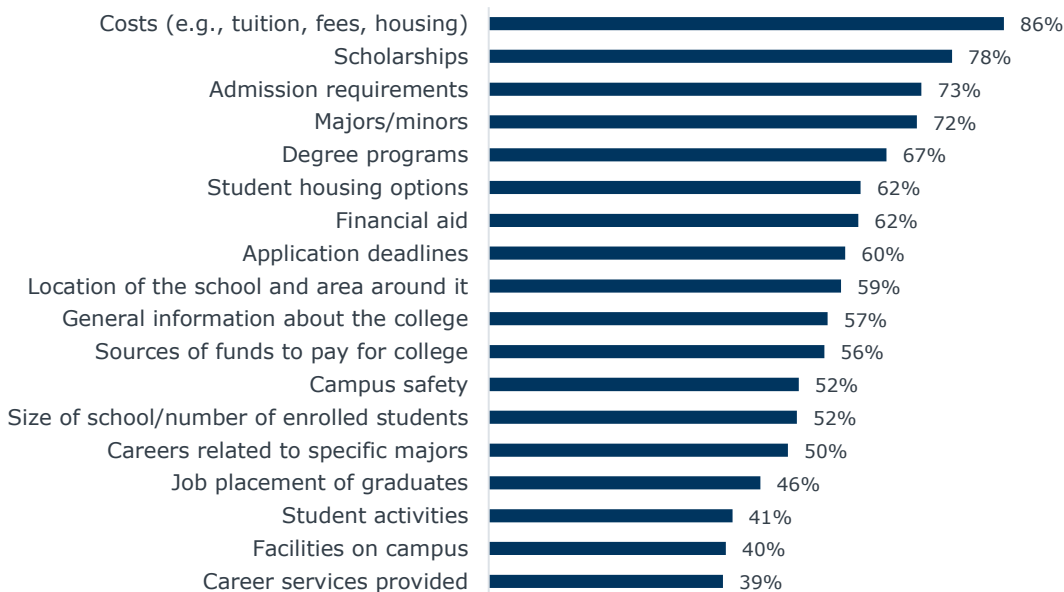
# What Information Do Parents Want from You?



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*





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