2021

Niche Senior Survey

College Search to Enrollment

NICHE®

Methodology and Respondent Demographics

This was the sixth year conducting the Niche Senior Survey, and completed responses were received from 19,277 students from the class of 2021. In total, there were 26,103 responses but students who had not made their college decision yet were disqualified since the focus is on the process of search through committed enrollment. The survey was sent to high school seniors who had registered a profile on the Niche platform. The survey was open from May 7 to June 20, 2021, to allow students time after the May 1 deadline used by some institutions.

We provided over thirty choices to self-identify for race and ethnicity. Due to space constraints in some of the charts, they will be grouped more broadly; however, in the interactive visualizations on the Niche Enrollment Insights blog, they will all be available for further exploration. In both 2020 and 2021, 33% of respondents were White or Caucasian. If a respondent identified as Asian or Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, we provided additional options to gain further insight into their ethnic identity. These options were provided based on recommendations from the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center “Everyone Deserves to Be Seen” policy brief, among other resources. In the results shown here, any Asian ethnic group that represented at least 0.5% is shown, while others are grouped as Asian - Other.

Race or Ethnicity of Respondents

AFRICAN AMERICAN OR BLACK	15%
AMERICAN INDIAN OR ALASKA NATIVE	<1%
ASIAN - BANGLADESHI	1%
ASIAN - CHINESE	4%
ASIAN - FILIPINO	1%
ASIAN - INDIAN	3%
ASIAN - KOREAN	1%
ASIAN - PAKISTANI	1%
ASIAN - VIETNAMESE	2%
ASIAN - OTHER	2%
CAUCASIAN OR WHITE	33%
HISPANIC OR LATINX	17%
MIDDLE EASTERN OR NORTH AFRICAN	1%
MULTIRACIAL	13%
NATIVE HAWAIIAN OR PACIFIC ISLANDER	<1%
I DO NOT KNOW	1%
CHOSE NOT TO RESPOND	4%

Household income quintiles from students were largely representative, with some students choosing not to respond and others not knowing their household income. Low-income respondents were more often found at urban high schools (47%) and online high schools (45%); they were the least likely to be homeschooled (20%) or attend a boarding school (24%). Almost half (46%) of respondents attending a charter school reported being low-income and over one-third (37%) of public school students reported coming from a low-income household. Over half of Bangladeshi students (62%), Hispanic or Latinx students (58%), and American Indian or Alaska Native students (52%) who responded were from low-income households.

Total Household Income

UNDER $25,000	17%
$25,000–$49,999	18%
$50,000–$79,999	16%
$80,000-$130,000	16%
ABOVE $130,000	10%
I DO NOT KNOW	19%
CHOSE NOT TO RESPOND	4%

Highest Parent/Guardian Education

LESS THAN A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA	9%
HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA	16%
SOME COLLEGE, NO DEGREE	11%
ASSOCIATE DEGREE	8%
BACHELOR'S DEGREE	25%
MASTER'S DEGREE	20%
DOCTORAL OR PROFESSIONAL DEGREE	7%
CHOSE NOT TO RESPOND	4%

Student responses about their parents' education level closely resemble the most recent US Census data: slightly more students had a parent with a master's degree and slightly fewer had a parent with only a high school diploma. Hispanic or Latinx (71%), Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (60%), and Vietnamese (54%) students were the most likely to be first-generation students; while Korean (15%), Indian (17%), and Filipino (17%) students were the least likely. By US Census Region, first-generation students were most common in the Pacific (49%), West South Central (44%), and Middle Atlantic (40%) states. First generation students were also more likely to attend public charter schools (47%) and traditional public schools (40%), and least likely to attend boarding schools (16%) and private high schools (18%). First-generation students disproportionately attend online (55%) and urban (50%) high schools.

The Modal Student

Rather than talk about the average student, we prefer to look at the modal student. The modal student is the one that you're most likely to run into on campus, not an amalgamation of averages that might not exist. We looked at a selection of demographic fields to identify the most frequent combination of gender identity, race or ethnicity, parental education level, type of high school attended, and household income. In this year's survey, the modal student was a Hispanic or Latinx woman who attended an urban public high school. She is the first in her family to attend college and is the first to graduate from high school. She comes from a household earning less than $25,000 per year.

She is much more likely than her peers to say she is not taking on a loan in her first year—in fact, she is 61% more likely. Nearly four out of five of our modal students eliminated colleges based on their published total costs, and only one-third said they would consider a college with a total cost of more than $20,000 per year. Despite all this, she is still less confident than her peers that she can afford the college at which she has chosen to enroll.

She characterizes herself as less confident in her preparation for college than her peers, a trait she shares with other low-income and first-generation students. However, she is much more likely to have a school counselor or dedicated college counselor at her school helping support her college search. Nevertheless, she reported having trouble managing application requirements and timelines, comparing colleges, and felt the deadlines were earlier than she was ready to meet.

When it came time to make her enrollment decision, she was significantly less influenced by her friends and family and significantly more influenced by her school or college counselor, as well as online reviews. Outreach from colleges was more influential across every channel (email, mail, video, text, and phone). She also found virtual events, chatbots, and college search sites (such as Niche) significantly more important in her enrollment decision.

HER PROFILE

Hispanic or Latinx, female

Urban public high school

3.5-3.9 GPA

First in family to attend college

First in family to graduate high school

Household earning less than $25k

2-year institution

Very concious about cost

Less confident about affording college than her peers

Primary college counseling from school counselor

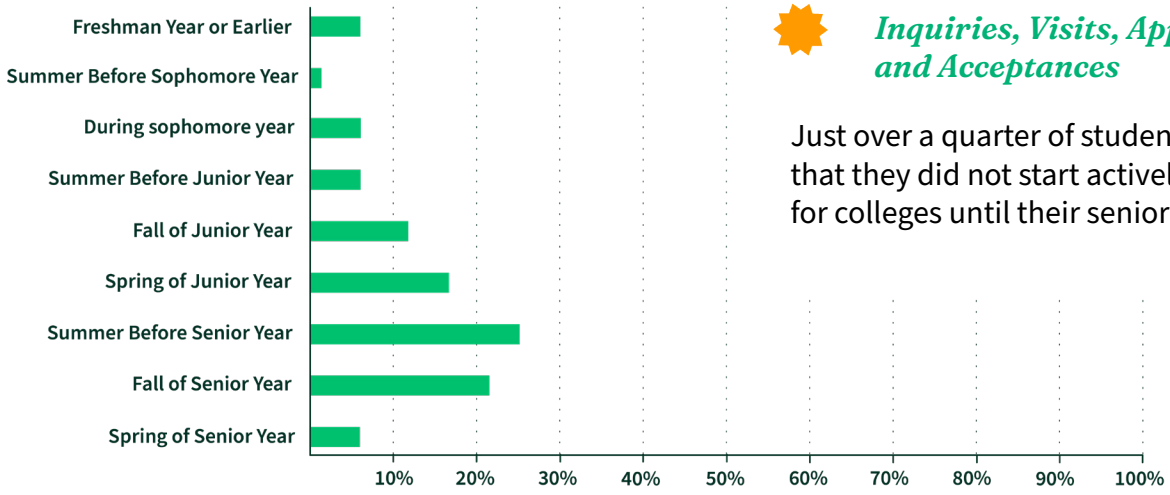
Struggles with applications and deadlines, school comparisons

Less influenced by family and friends

Influenced by school or college counselor and online reviews

Survey Results

When Students Actively Started Searching for Colleges



Inquiries, Visits, Applications, and Acceptances

Just over a quarter of students reported that they did not start actively searching for colleges until their senior year.

Inquiry Behavior

This year there was almost no difference from the prior year in how students reported engaging with inquiry forms on college websites. In both years, the median number of completed forms was three and the mode was zero.

Inquiry Forms Filled Out

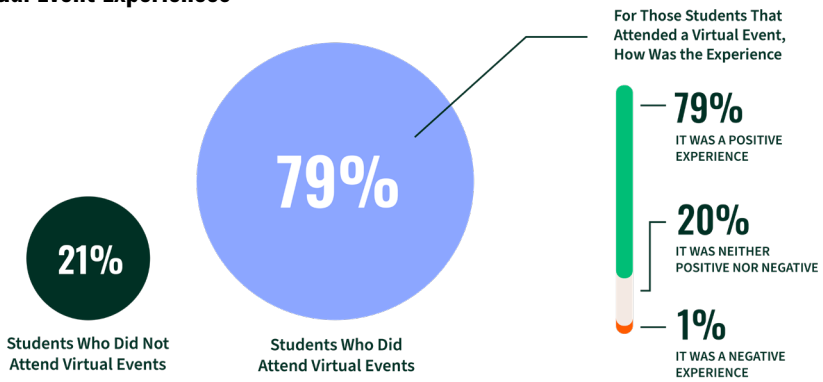
	2021	2020
0	19%	16%
1	12%	14%
2	11%	11%
3	13%	12%
4	8%	9%
5+	37%	38%

Virtual and Campus Visits

Campus visits were one of the biggest storylines of the past year and a half because of the danger posed by the pandemic. Almost as many students did not visit any campuses as visited three or more. For the first time, the modal number of visits was zero. Even before the pandemic, there had been a rising number of students not taking any college visits before enrolling. There was a small increase between 2017 and 2019, which then doubled in 2020 and nearly doubled again in 2021. When this survey started in 2016, nearly a third of students took five or more visits to get a feel for campuses and compare opportunities, but that had consistently declined and finally fell to only 12% in 2021. A bright spot: 95% of students who visited a campus this year said that they felt appropriate safety precautions were followed on campus. When it came to the virtual replacements for on-site visits, 79% of students reported that they attended a virtual visit experience held by a college—79% of those who attended said that it was a positive experience.

Did students feel safe when they were able to visit?

Virtual Event Experiences



...in 2016, nearly a third of students took five or more visits... but that had consistently declined and finally fell to only 12% in 2021.

Campus Visits Taken

	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
0	28%	15%	7%	6%	5%	5%
1	21%	18%	15%	15%	14%	15%
2	19%	20%	20%	20%	19%	19%
3	13%	16%	19%	20%	20%	18%
4	6%	9%	11%	12%	12%	12%
5+	12%	22%	27%	27%	30%	32%

Respondents identifying as female took the most visits, while those identifying as gender nonbinary or other took the fewest. Students in the highest income quintile took almost twice as many visits as those in the lowest income quintile. Caucasian and Korean students took the most visits on average, at 2.5, while Pakistani and Bangladeshi students took the fewest with only one. There was also a correlation in the number of visits by the type of high school attended. Private school and boarding school respondents averaged three visits, while public high school and homeschooled respondents averaged two. Urbanicity showed no significant difference, but students graduating from online high schools took fewer visits. New England residents also took more visits to campus than their peers, and unsurprisingly, students from US territories took significantly fewer.

Students in the highest income quintile took almost twice as many visits as those in the lowest income quintile.

Application Trends

Students applied to more colleges this year than in any of the past five years of surveying. More students applied to ten or more colleges than one or two colleges—a first for enrolling students. This year the median number of applications was five, and we saw an end to the trend of students increasingly only submitting one application. This was even more evident in New England and the Middle Atlantic, where students averaged nine applications. There was no difference in applications by income until reaching the highest quintile—these students applied to nine colleges on average, rather than the overall average of seven. Korean and Bangladeshi students both averaged eleven applications, while Caucasian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and American Indian or Alaska Native students averaged five applications. This could indicate that some groups are more likely to cast a wide net or that others are more likely to select only a few targets.

When we look to students who visited five or more colleges, the median applications rose from five to nine. There was no difference for those visiting less than five or even zero campuses—both matched the overall median of five applications. When students filled out no inquiry forms they cast a wider net of seven applications. This immediately fell to five with one or more college inquiries and four if they submitted inquiries to ten or fewer colleges.

Applications Submitted

	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
1	11%	15%	14%	14%	14%	12%
2	10%	12%	12%	13%	12%	12%
3	11%	12%	12%	13%	13%	12%
4	9%	10%	11%	12%	11%	11%
5+	59%	51%	52%	48%	50%	53%
10+	25%	20%	19%	16%	17%	20%

College Acceptances

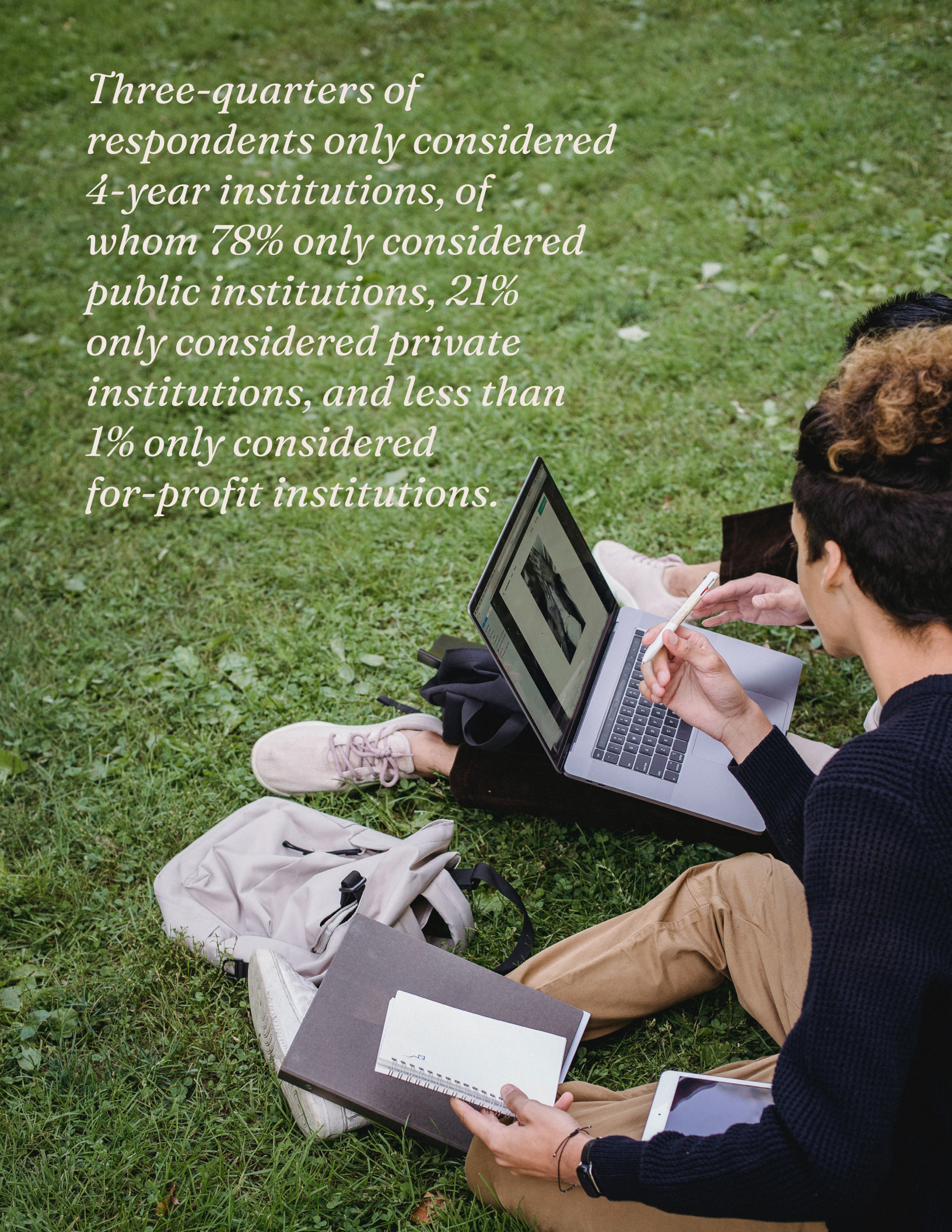
For the first time, the median number of acceptances rose to four. There is some positive news for students who are anxious about being accepted—79% of respondents who had a first-choice college reported that they were accepted to it. Almost half of students reported that they were accepted to five or more colleges. This will lead to much lower yields for colleges and lower returns on their recruiting efforts this fall. Using the student-reported data, the acceptance rate (acceptances earned/applications submitted) for students applying to two or more colleges was 70%. This fell to 68% for those who applied to five or more colleges, 64% for those applying to ten or more, and 61% for those applying to fifteen or more colleges. This seems to indicate diminishing returns: more applications do not necessarily provide more opportunities.

College Acceptances Earned

	2021	2020	2019	2018	2017	2016
1	16%	20%	19%	21%	19%	17%
2	14%	16%	16%	18%	18%	17%
3	14%	15%	15%	16%	16%	17%
4	12%	12%	12%	12%	13%	12%
5+	44%	37%	36%	31%	32%	35%

First Choice Acceptance

Were you accepted to your first choice college or university?



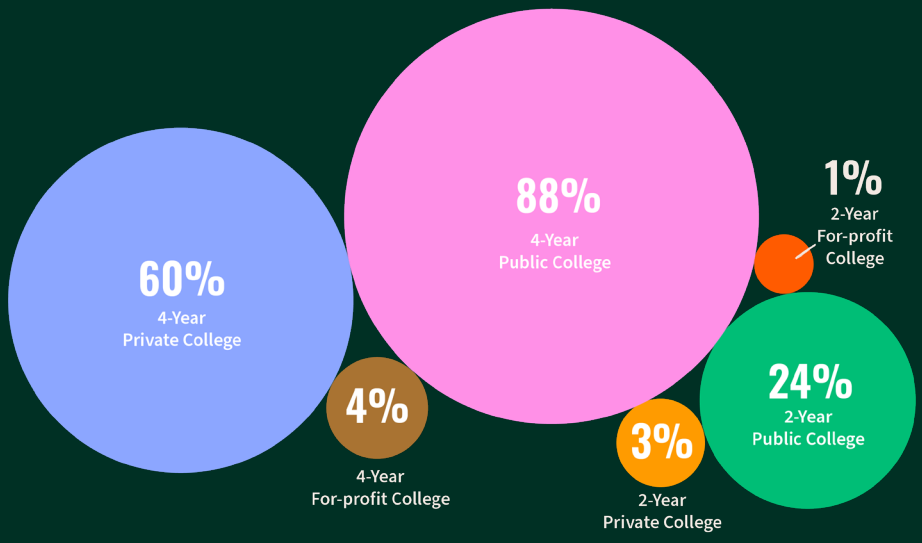
Three-quarters of respondents only considered 4-year institutions, of whom 78% only considered public institutions, 21% only considered private institutions, and less than 1% only considered for-profit institutions.

What Students are Looking For

Physical Campus Characteristics

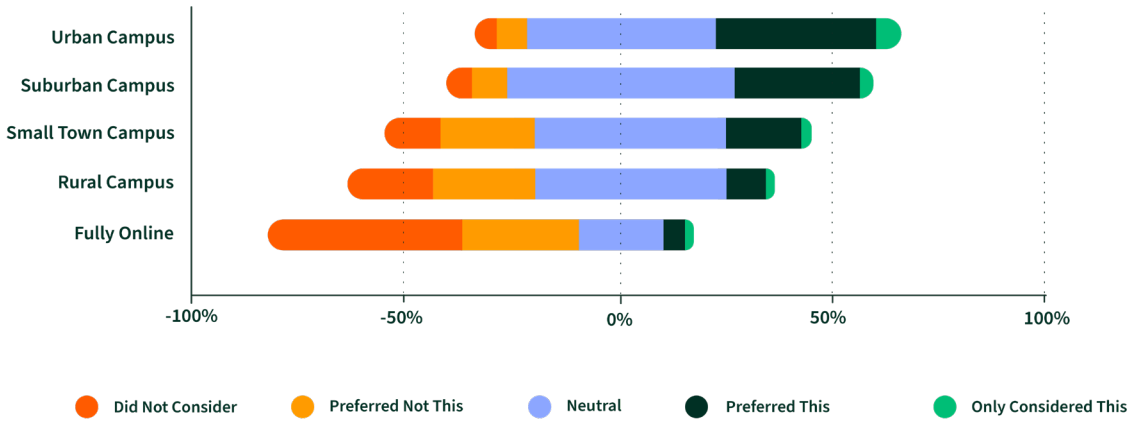
About a third of students only considered one type of college in their search. During their research, a quarter of students considered 2-year colleges, 18% of those only considered 2-year institutions. Three-quarters of respondents only considered 4-year institutions, of whom 78% only considered public institutions, 21% only considered private institutions, and less than 1% only considered for-profit institutions. Homeschooled students were the most likely to consider both 2-year and for-profit institutions. Notably, boarding school students were equally willing to consider 2-year and for-profit institutions (8%); graduates of every other type of high school were 4-6 times more likely to consider a 2-year institution. At the same time, boarding school students were the least likely to consider a 2-year institution and the most likely to consider a for-profit. Respondents who attended boarding schools, private high schools, or were homeschooled were more likely to consider private colleges, while charter school and public high school students were more likely to consider public colleges. This is an interesting split and something to watch in institutional enrollment trends.

Types of Colleges Considered



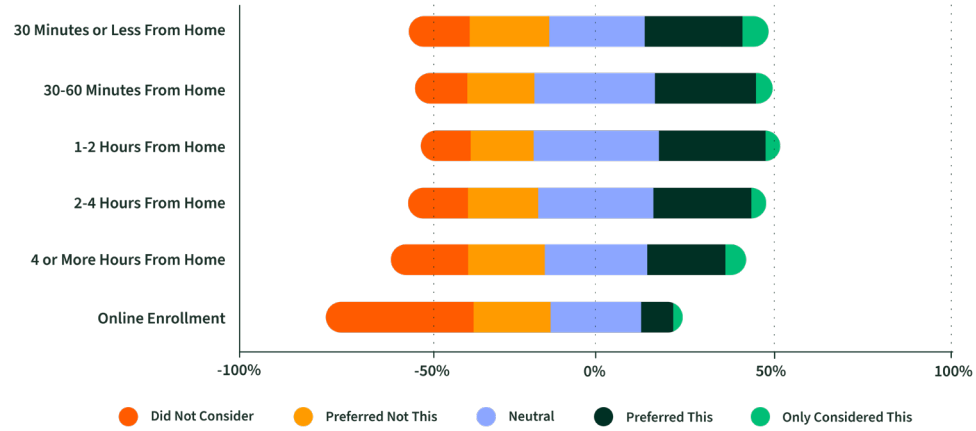
Urban and suburban campuses were heavily preferred by students. Almost half of the students were uninterested in rural campuses. Rural students were the most interested in a rural campus—19% said that they preferred or only considered rural campuses. Almost half of students also said they did not consider fully online colleges; another 28% said they preferred not to enroll at a fully online institution. Mid-sized colleges were preferable to this class when they were researching colleges. Small colleges were more appealing than large campuses as well.

Preferred Campus Setting



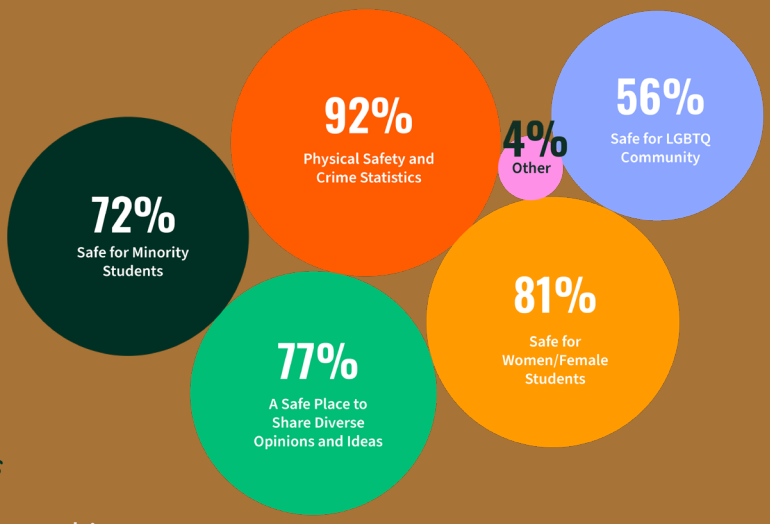
Students were equally uninterested in enrolling within 30 minutes of home as they were going 2-4 hours away. In both cases, there was more negative than positive sentiment. The most appealing option for students was going 1-2 hours from home to enroll. Very few students were interested in enrolling online, which is in line with prior surveys.

How Far Students Considered Going Away From Home



Safety is critically important to students.

How Students Evaluate Campus Safety



Campus Cultural Characteristics

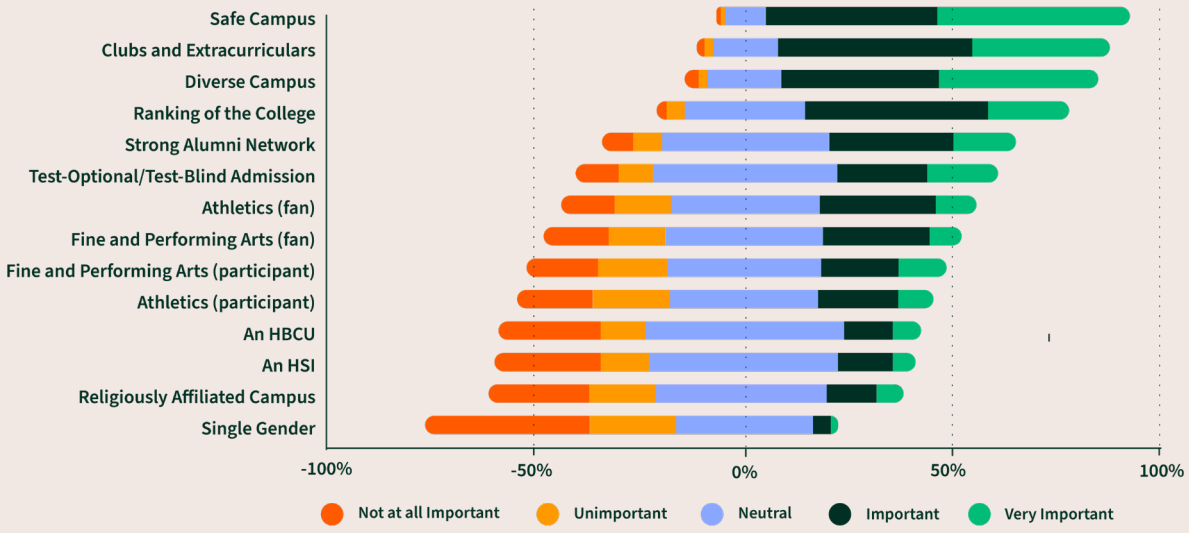
Arts and athletics were another notable story this year and one that may signal changing preferences for students. Fan experience was more important than participation, which is expected. Athletic fan experiences were slightly preferred to arts fan experiences, with 37% and 33%, respectively, saying it was important. Arts participation was more important than athletics participation though, at 29% and 26%, respectively. Most colleges lean heavily toward promoting athletics in outreach materials, but with such similar interests in the arts, success could be found in providing more resources for arts recruitment and promotion. Interest in participating in the arts decreased as GPA increased, but interest in attending fine and performing arts experiences increased. Interest in athletic participation and fan involvement both decreased as GPA increased.

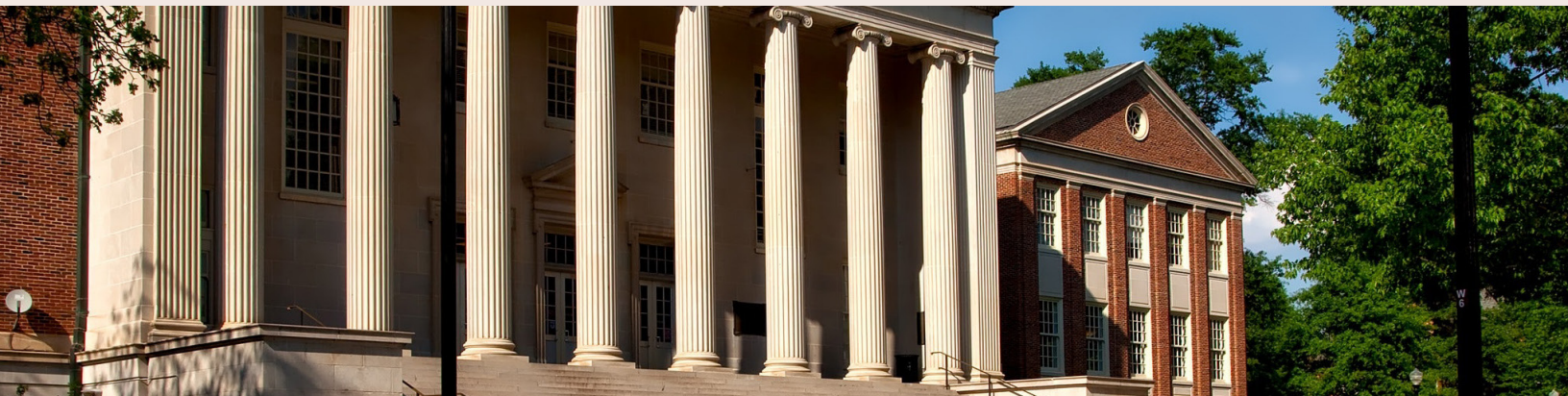
Aside from the cost, campus safety was the biggest consideration for students when deciding where to apply. Extracurricular opportunities and campus diversity were also important. Rankings were the fourth most important characteristic, after which there was a drop before the next most important—surprisingly the rarely touted alumni network at the institution. Safety is critically important to students, and the most common ways they evaluate campus safety are physical safety and whether it is safe for women/female students. Safety for women was extremely important for every gender identity except male students; only 46% of males considered that to be an important measure of campus safety compared to 92% of female respondents. Similarly, a safe environment for LGBTQ and minority students was lower for male students than for their peers. Physical safety was important for all groups with no significant differences.

There were quite a few characteristics that were detractors—factors that more students say are unimportant than important. Single-gender campuses were unimportant to the largest group of students; 40% said they were not at all important and only 6% said they were important or very important. Religiously affiliated campuses, Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs)were the others, but more evenly split. While HBCUs and HSIs were not as critically important to students in aggregate, their importance was revealed when segmenting by race or ethnicity. Nearly half of African American or Black students said that a college being an HBCU was important to them. Twenty-three percent of Hispanic or Latinx students considered HBCUs important, a significant outlier from other groups. HSI status is less well known than HBCUs in the public discourse, but 55% of Hispanic or Latinx students considered the designation important.

Nearly half of African American or Black students said that a college being an HBCU was important to them.

What Characteristics Were Important to Students When Deciding Where to Apply



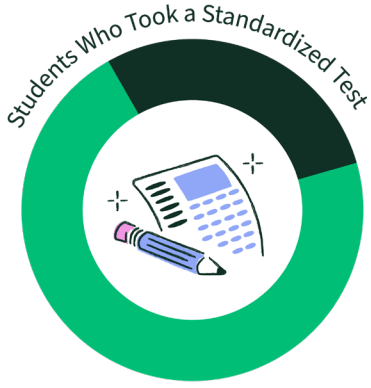


Standardized Testing

Testing was uncertain this year with more than two-thirds of colleges not requiring test scores and many students not able to safely take standardized tests. However, 71% of students reported that they had taken a standardized test at some point in the past and 55% reported that they submitted the score to at least one college when they applied. Low-income students were both the least likely to have taken a standardized test and the least likely to submit while applying. Only half of students in the lowest income quintile submitted a test score, compared to three-quarters of students in the highest incomes quintile. While charter school students were significantly less likely to have taken a standardized test, students who attended all other types of school behaved similarly to each other. Boarding school and homeschooled students were half as likely to not submit scores when applying.

Low-income students were both the least likely to have taken a standardized test and the least likely to submit while applying.

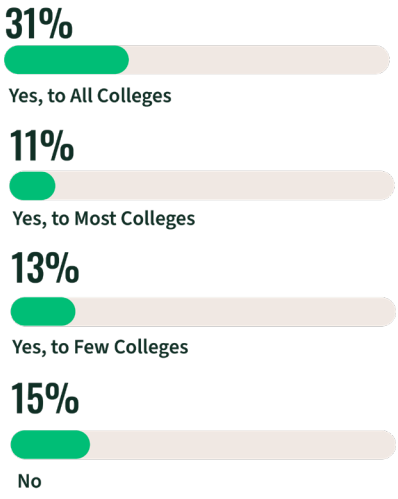
Did you take a standardized test
If so, did you submit scores?



71% Yes, Took a Standardized Test

29% No, Did Not Take a Standardized Test

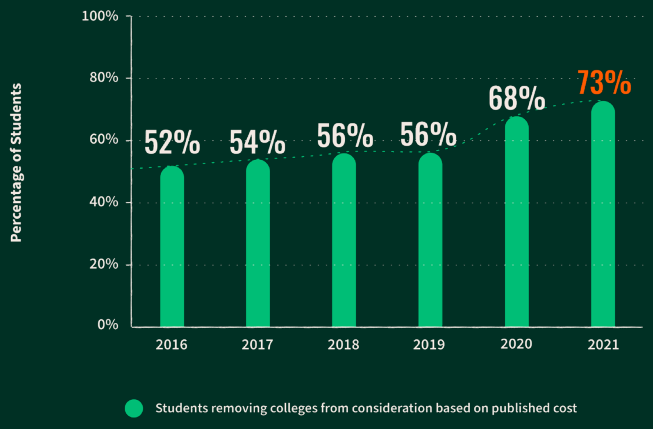
Did Students Submit Their Score?



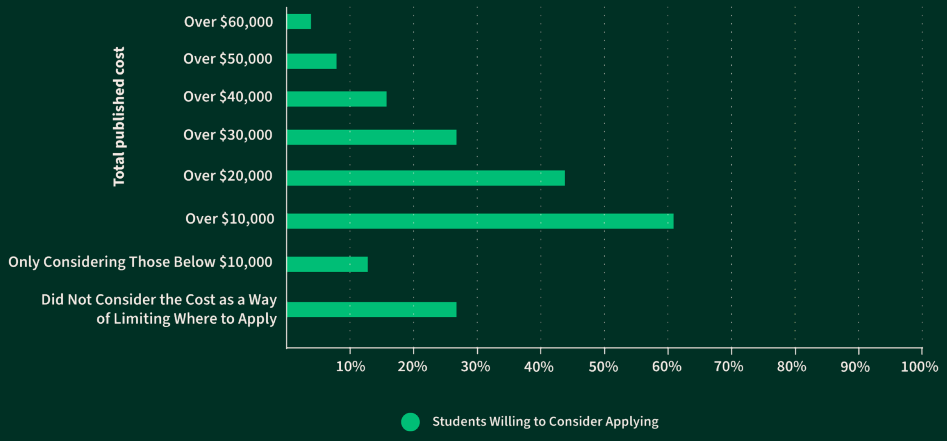
Student Price Sensitivity

The total published cost continues to be a deterrent for students. This year 73% of students eliminated colleges from consideration because of the published cost. Just over 50% of students said they would consider applying to a college with a cost over $30,000. Many campuses are very generous with the amount of financial aid they provide, significantly reducing the amount students would pay. However, if students are eliminating a campus from consideration before applying, the amount of aid is irrelevant. While the published cost was less important to boarding and private school students han students at other school types, over 59% of boarding school students and 66% of private school students still eliminated colleges based on the published cost.

College Costs and Their Effect on Student Considerations



Student Price Sensitivity



The biggest correlation to price sensitivity is household income. For the bottom four quintiles, 75-79% of students eliminated colleges based on the total cost. However, for students in the highest household income quintile, only 63% considered the cost. That is still a large majority, but a significant deviation from their peers. The cost at which the majority of students eliminated a college from consideration rose steadily as income rose. If we include those that would consider any college (did not eliminate based on cost), the 50% consideration line was between $20,000 and $30,000 for students in the bottom two income quintiles; $30,000 for those in the middle income quintile; between $30,000 and $40,000 for those in the second highest quintile; and closer to $60,000 for those in the highest quintile.

Student Price Sensitivity

	Median in-state cost	% of students who considered this type who would also consider at this cost	Median out-of-state cost	% of students who considered this type who would also consider at this cost	
2-YEAR PUBLIC	$8,010	100%	$11,669	76%	
2-YEAR PRIVATE	$20,279	61%	-	-	
2-YEAR FOR-PROFIT	$20,473	66%	-	-	
4-YEAR PUBLIC	$14,248	88%	$24,208	71%	
4-YEAR PRIVATE	$34,416	61%	-	-	
4-YEAR FOR-PROFIT	$24,514	75%	-	-	

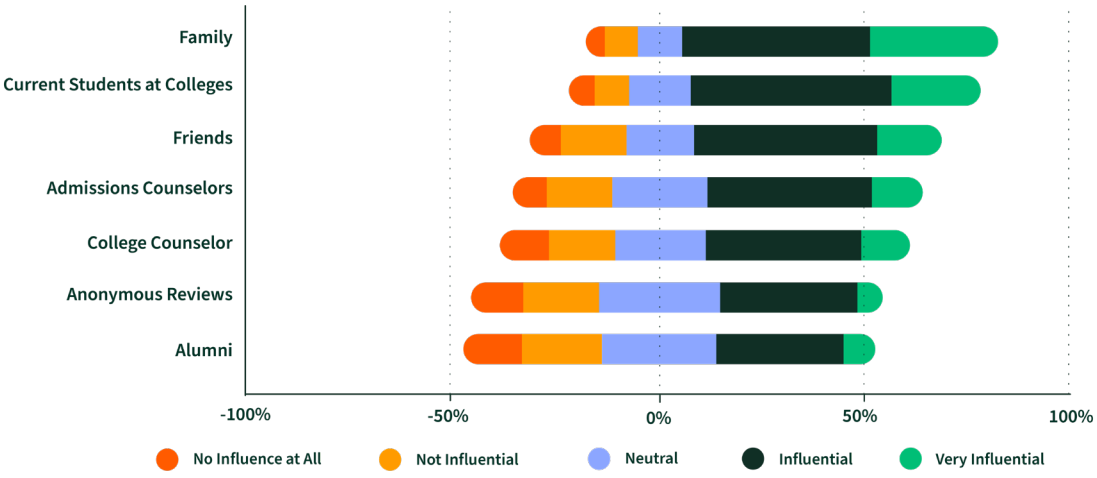
73% of students eliminated colleges from consideration because of the published cost.

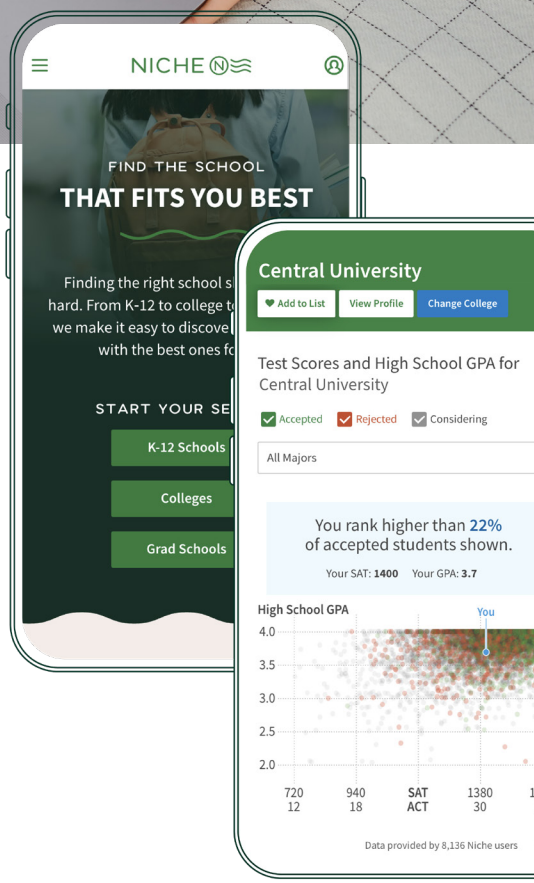
Making the Enrollment Decision

Family and currently enrolled students were the people who had the biggest influence on where a student chose to enroll, with over 70% of respondents rating them as either important or very important to making their commitment. There were only three factors that held any significant difference in the influence that family holds. Gender nonbinary and students who reported their gender identity as Other were significantly less likely to be influenced by their family: both were only 60% affirming. Students who graduated from a boarding school were more likely to be influenced by their parents: 83% said their parents influenced their decision on where to enroll. Closely related, 84% of respondents from households earning more than $130,000 were influenced by their parents. The influence that current students had was not significantly different across demographics.

College websites and net price calculators were the most influential non-human factor.

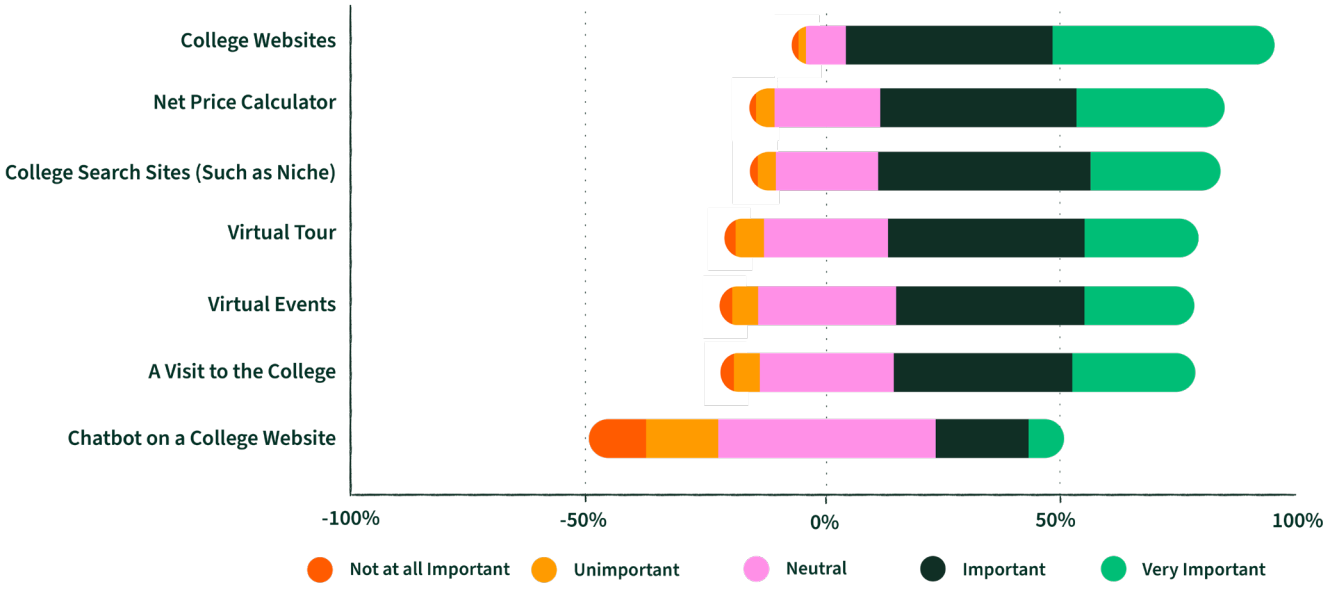
How Influential Were These People in Your Choice of Where to Enroll





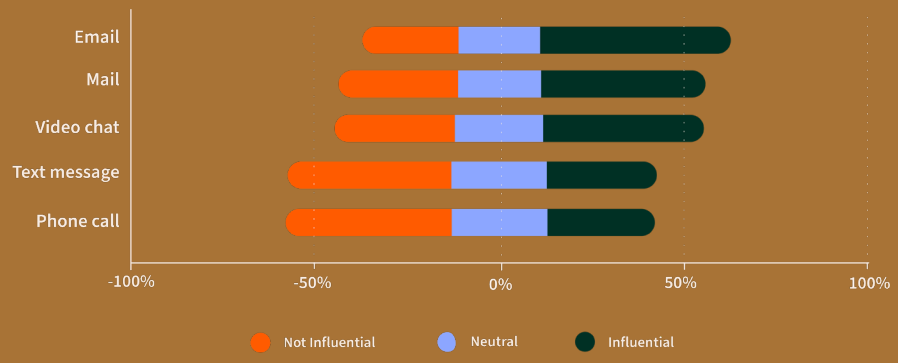
College websites and net price calculators were the most influential non-human factor in students' decisions to enroll. College websites were more impactful than any individual, which highlights the importance of a well-designed website that serves prospective students. College search platforms, such as Niche, were the third most important. Chatbots had the least influence on students.

What Impacted Students' Decision to Enroll

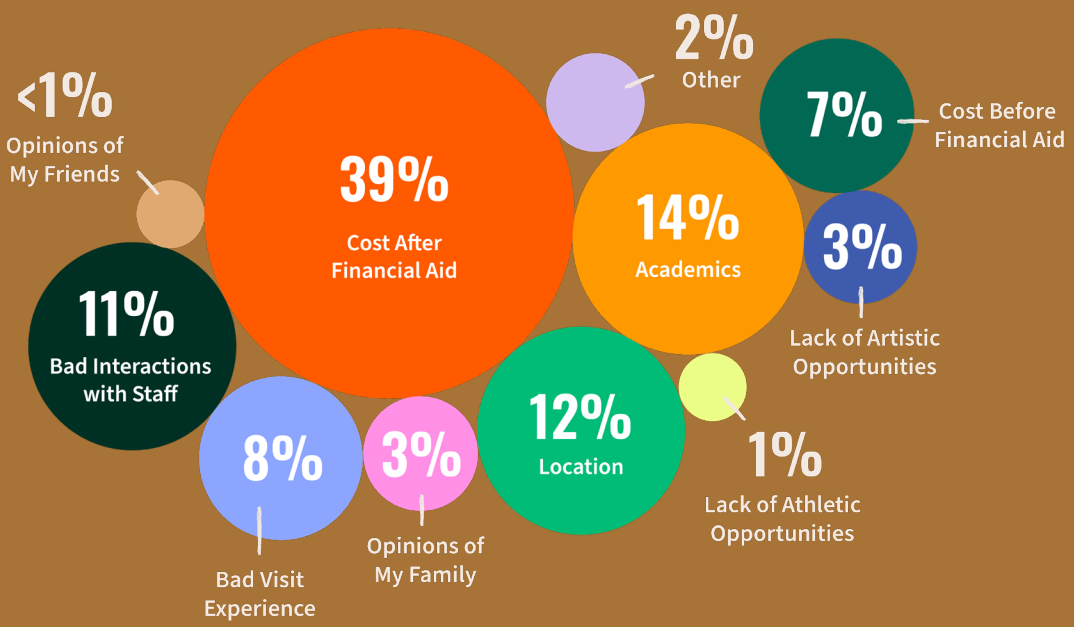


Email was the only communication method that the majority of students reported as being influential in their decision. Email was most impactful for students from US territories; almost 70% said it was influential. Students rated emails from colleges similarly influential as their school or college counselor and an admissions counselor at the college, and more influential than anonymous reviews or alumni. Phone calls and text messages were the least influential communication method. Black or African American students were the only students significantly more likely to consider texting influential. All Asian ethnicities were much less likely to consider texting influential. The influence of texting decreases with household income as well. Students in the lowest income quintile were twice as likely as those in the highest income quintile to say that texting influenced their decision; 32% versus 16%. Aside from the final cost, which was the most important deciding factor for students, academics, location, bad interactions with college staff, and negative visit experiences were the most likely reasons that students eliminated colleges from their list. Location and academics are something that enrollment professionals have no control over. However, the visitor experience and connection with staff are things they certainly do.

How Influential Were These Communication Methods in Your Search and Enrollment Process



What Was Most Likely to Make Students Remove a College from Consideration



Support in Their College Search

Students felt less supported in their college search this year than in the past, likely due to ramifications from the pandemic including a lack of school counselors seeing students in person. This year there was a 50% increase in students reporting that they received no counseling support—21% in 2021 versus 14% in 2020. At school, 61% of students reported that they had a school counselor supporting them, a decline from 73% last year. A similar number said that they had a dedicated college counselor, but the decline was driven by a drop in school counselors supporting college searches (from 47% to 38%).

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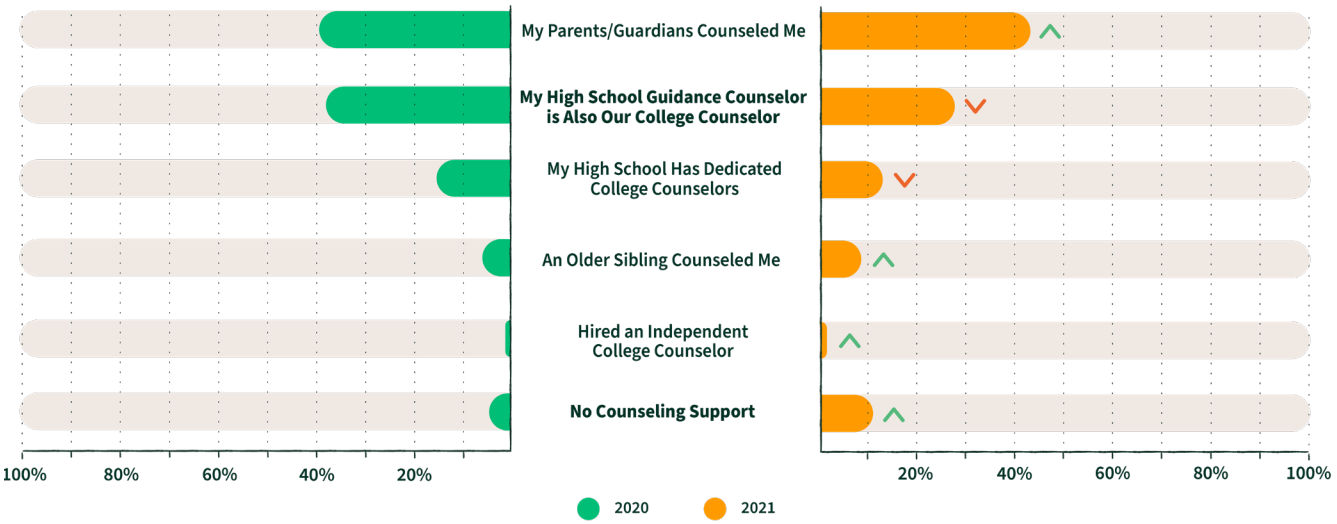
Counseling Support Students Received



The support students reported receiving varied the most by the type of high school they attended. Students at boarding schools, private schools, and charter schools were the most likely to receive support while a third of homeschooled students reported not receiving support. Access to counseling services at school—in the form of a dedicated college counselor or a school counselor—was predictably lowest among homeschooled students. Boarding schools provided the most access, while charter school students indicated slightly more access than private school students. Public school students were the least likely to report receiving counseling support at school; 38% reported support from a school counselor and 22% from a college counselor.

Students at boarding schools, private schools, and charter schools were the most likely to receive support .

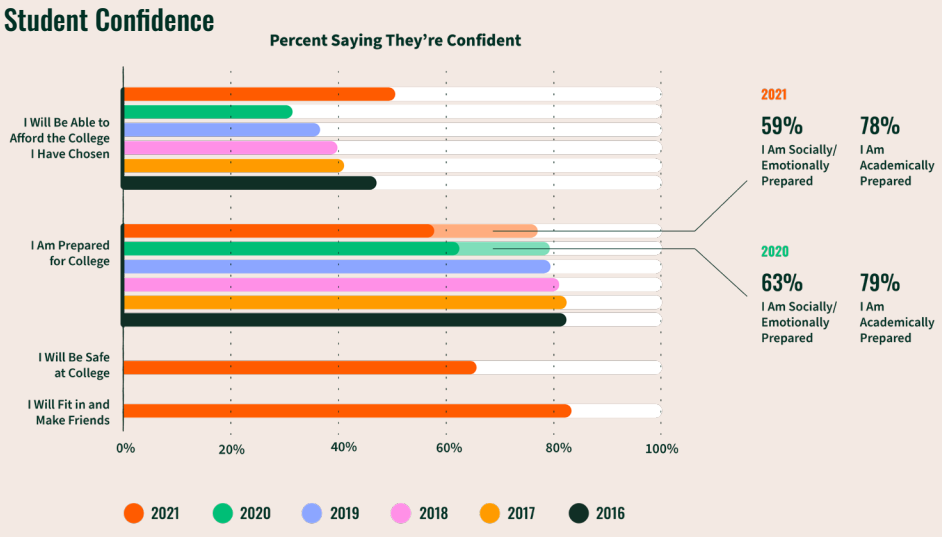
Some racial and ethnic groups were more likely to receive support than others. More than a quarter of Native American, Indian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, and Middle Eastern students reported not receiving counseling support while looking for college. This is contrasted with African American or Black students (14%), Chinese (15%), Filipino (17%), and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (17%) students who reported the most support in their search.

Student Confidence

Student confidence has been tracked since the first Niche Senior Survey in 2016. This year some of the questions for which answers have not changed over the first five years were eliminated. Each year over 90% of students reported they were confident that they would be prepared for success, and there was no trending change in sentiment. The same was true for their ability to get a job after graduation and graduate on time, both with over 80% affirming and no trends. For the class of 2021, we continued splitting the question about preparedness into academic and social/emotional preparedness. We also added questions about whether students felt confident they will be safe at their chosen college and if they feel that they will fit in and make friends at college.

A high-level positive theme this year is that overall confidence has increased among students. Academic preparedness held steady, only losing one percentage point. Slightly fewer students reported that they feel emotionally and socially prepared for college (59% this year), further emphasizing last year's call for support systems on campus to be prepared and take proactive steps to help students transition. Only 44% of respondents who identified themselves as gender nonbinary feel socially and emotionally prepared, and 42% of those identifying as other gendered do. International students were significantly more confident; 66% reported that they were confident they were socially and emotionally prepared for college.

Students were most confident that they would be safe at college, but this only tells part of the story. This drops to 81% for female students, 79% for those identifying as gender nonbinary, and 69% for those identifying as other gender. Chinese students also felt significantly less confident that they would be safe; 72% agreed with only 20% very confident.



Student behaviors in terms of loans and willingness to consider more expensive colleges have shifted, perhaps lending to the meteoric rise in confidence that they can afford the college in which they are enrolling. This year garnered the highest confidence with 52% responding that they were confident or very confident, reversing a five-year slide from 48% to 32%. Cost is still students' biggest concern, however. The next section discusses financing data.

There was a clear divide between students at public and charter schools and those who attended private institutions or were homeschooled. When we look at the average overall confidence level, three-quarters of students at private schools or who were homeschooled are confident transitioning to college and only two-thirds of public and charter school graduates are confident. Some of the biggest differences were in affordability and academic preparedness, where public and charter school respondents were ten percentage points less confident than their peers. Boarding school students were outliers in two questions; they were fifteen percentage points more confident that they would fit in and make friends, but were also the least likely to feel confident that they would be safe at college. Social and emotional preparedness was similar across enrollments, except for homeschooled students. Less than two-thirds of their peers felt confident, but 75% of homeschooled students felt that they were prepared.

The bottom three income quintiles (under $80,000 per year) all behaved similarly to each other with no significant differences in any questions. Their peers in the top income quintile bore no similarities. In some cases, there was little similarity between the top and fourth income quintiles even with the wealthiest students showing the highest confidence. They were even more confident that they would be safe at college and the wealthiest students were only marginally more confident that they were academically prepared—but still ten percentage points higher than their low-income peers. The wealthiest students were also six percentage points more confident that they were socially/emotionally prepared for college than those in the second-highest quintile and eleven percentage points more confident than the lowest three quintiles.

The biggest split, however, was in affordability. Only 48% of the lowest three quintiles were confident they could afford the college at which they were enrolling, the fourth income quintile was 54% confident. The highest quintile was 71% confident; this is coupled with the results that these students were the least likely to eliminate colleges based on cost and were the most likely to apply to the most expensive colleges.

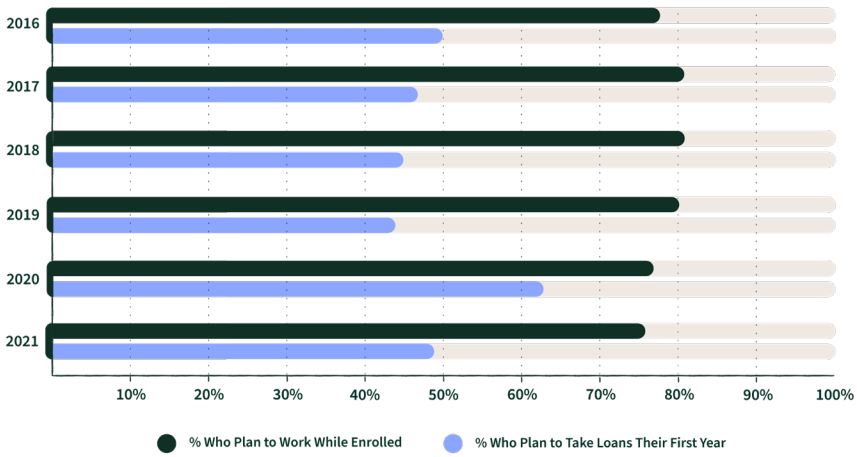
Filipino and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander students were the least confident overall. The most confident students were Native American or Alaska Natives, Indian, Pakistani, and White students. Safety ranged from 67% for Vietnamese students to 83% for Pakistani students. Academic preparation ranged from 64% for Vietnamese students to 80% for Indian and Pakistani students. Social and emotional preparation had the widest range; only 45% of Filipino students reported confidence while 64% of Indian students felt confident.

Across all five questions, students who identified as gender nonbinary or other were significantly less confident. Both identities were almost twenty percentage points less likely to feel confident that they were socially and emotionally prepared for college. In general, male students also reported higher confidence than their peers.

Financing Their Education

The share of students who say that they plan to work while enrolled continued to decline, down to 76% from a peak of 81% in 2017 and 2018. Almost all of these were students who were planning to work part-time, with only 6% planning to work full-time while enrolled. First-generation students were more likely than their peers to plan to work—80% versus 74%. Likelihood to work while enrolled decreased steadily as household income increased, starting at 81% for those in the lowest income quintile to 65% for those in the highest. Students who graduated from an online high school were unusual in that they were both the most likely to say that they plan to work full time while enrolled and the least likely to work overall. Students in rural areas were more likely than their suburban and urban peers to plan to work while enrolled.

Working and Loans



Student Plans to Take on Loans Their First Year

Year-over-year, more students had decided whether or not to take out a loan their first year, and nearly two-thirds more chose not to this year. Rural students were the most likely to plan to take on a loan in their first year, with 37% planning to. First-generation students and those from the lowest income households were the least likely to plan on taking loans their first year. The connection between household income and the likelihood of taking on a loan was unexpected. Respondents who planned to take on a loan in their first year rose steadily from 41% for the lowest income quintile to 62% for the second-highest quintile, then fell to 46% for the highest income quintile. Also of note: 39% of students who don't plan to work while in college also don't plan to take on a loan, while 54% of those who reported that they plan to work also plan to take on a loan.

Likelihood to work while enrolled decreased steadily as household income increased.

...students in the lowest income quintile, and likely in greater need of financial aid, were less likely to apply for scholarships.

Students are applying for outside scholarships and grants to help finance their education. This year 79% said that they did and 1% reported that their parents did it for them. For those who applied for scholarships and grants themselves, most started early; only 17% said that they waited until the spring of their senior year to start applying. However, one concern that should be addressed is that the students in the lowest income quintile, and likely in greater need of financial aid were less likely to apply for scholarships.

79%

Students Who Applied for Scholarships

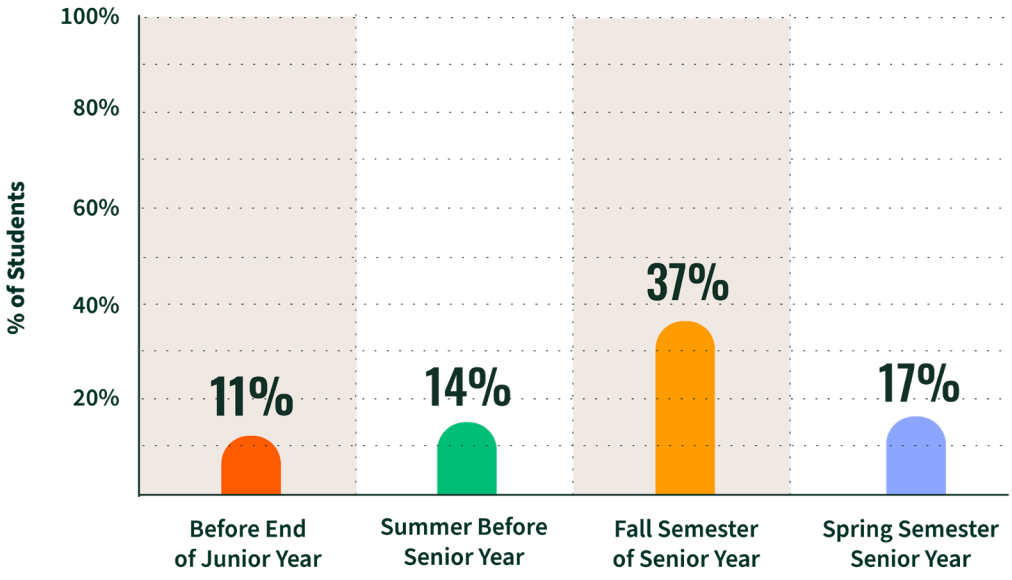
1%

Students Who Applied for Scholarships, with Help from Parents

20%

Students Who Did Not Apply for Scholarships

Scholarship Application Timeline

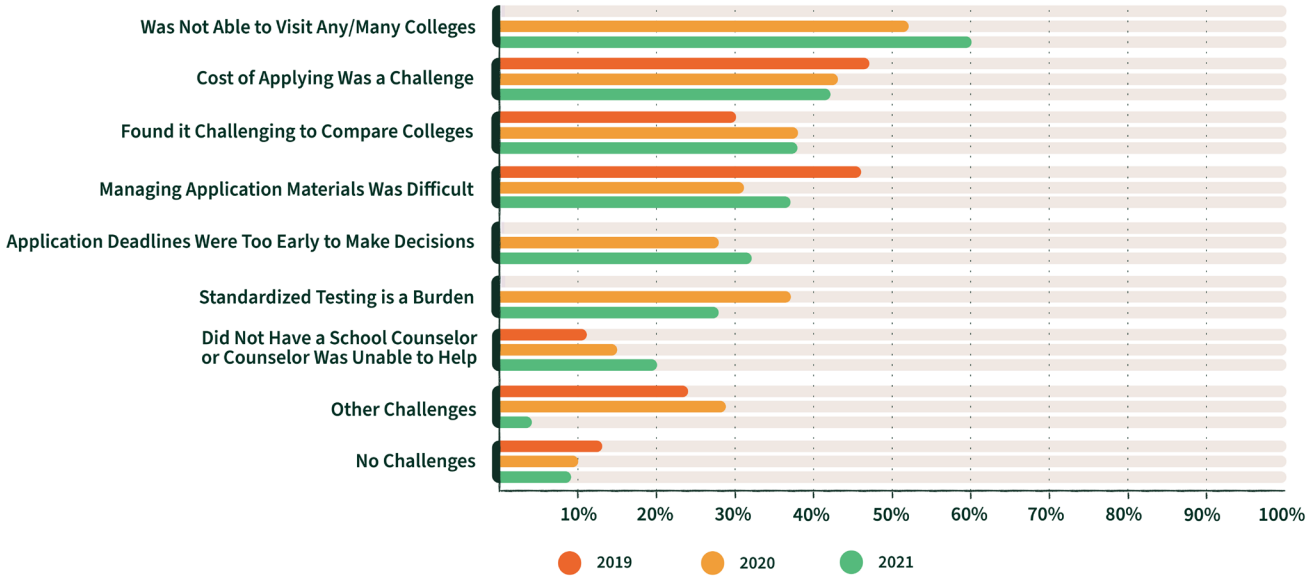


Challenges Faced by Students

The share of students reporting challenges in their college search has increased slightly from 87% in 2019 to 91% this year. The fastest-growing challenge is the lack of school counseling support. In 2019 only 11% reported this being a challenge, while this year 20% of students said that lack of a counselor was a challenge. Lack of visit opportunities was the biggest challenge that students reported; 60% reported being unable to visit any or many campuses this year, an increase from 52% last year. This was felt even more by boarding school students, where 73% said this was a challenge for them. Respondents from Middle Atlantic and New England states also felt this more acutely, as over 70% said this was an issue for them.

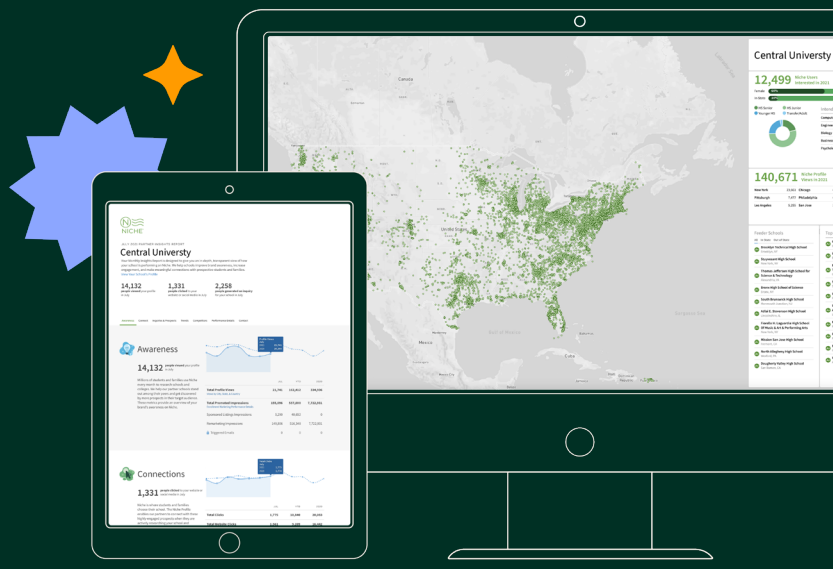
This year there was a significant drop in students reporting standardized testing as a challenge. In 2020, 37% of students said that paying for, preparing for, taking, and submitting test scores were challenges. Likely due to the majority of colleges having gone test-optional or test-blind, this year only 28% of students agreed. This was highest in the southern states and lowest on the west coast. There were two strong correlations with this challenge being felt more acutely—35% of students attending boarding schools or who did not have a counselor at their school found them to be a challenge. Only 26% of students who reported having a counselor to support them had challenges with testing, while 35% of those who did not reported challenges.

Challenges Faced by Students



NICHE

About Niche

Niche is where students choose their college. Whether a school is already on their list or the perfect fit they haven't yet discovered—Niche connects students to the colleges that are uniquely right for them. Our enrollment marketing solutions enable our 1,900 school partners to build genuine connections that nurture interest into visits, applications and enrollment. By supporting over 27 million students and families, Niche is changing how colleges and universities connect with students and build their future classes.

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