



# NACAC College Admission Process Survey

August 2023

Made possible by:



Conducted by:



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# Background & Objectives

## Background

This research aims to further advance equity in college admission by collecting opinion data from under-represented students about admission to colleges and universities in the four key areas identified by the original [report](#) completed with the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA). The research, conducted by The Harris Poll, explores experiences and attitudes of young adults with various backgrounds and life experiences.

The NACAC core values of education, access and equity, professionalism, collegiality, collaboration, trust, and social responsibility were weaved throughout the research.

## Research Objectives

- Reexamine the processes associated with recruitment and application to college.
- Closely examine and question the requirements for admission.
- Consider the composition of the admission office as the face of the institution.
- Reconsider why and how institutions choose to be selective in their admission policies, particularly among public institutions.

# Notation Guide

Please refer to this slide for explanations of the various notation and formatting used throughout this deck:

- Responses may not add up to 100% due to computer rounding or the acceptance of multiple responses.
  - Similarly, when calculating Nets (e.g., slide 26), the combined percentage may be +/-1% different than individual percent ages also due to computer rounding.
- *Statistical Significance*: Percents with letter notations (e.g., 23% B) indicate a statistically significant difference between subgroups (e.g., race/ethnicity) being analyzed. Letters always appear next to the numbers that are significantly higher.
- An asterisk (\*) denotes a value less than 1% but greater than zero. A dash (-) denotes a value of zero.
- Key terms:
  - **High school counselor** - Professional counselors who assist high school students in developing their academic and social skills, as well as serve their social and emotional needs. These counselors are required to have one-on-one sessions with students who are experiencing personal problems.
  - **College admission office** - Department of an institution of higher education, designed to help prospective students in retrieving information about the college and its requirements.
  - **Standardized test** - Test that is administered and scored in a consistent, or "standard," manner. Its use here is referring to the tests taken by students as part of their college application, including the SAT and ACT.

# Subgroup Analysis Guide

This report includes some key findings among key groups of respondents. Note that due to space limitations, not every statistically significant difference among these groups of interest is displayed. Statistical significance testing was conducted at the 95% level of confidence. All comparative claims made in this report are statistically significant.

- Race/Ethnicity
  - White n=349
  - Hispanic n=203
  - Black n=203
  - Asian n=201
- Gender
  - Male n=425
  - Female n=549
- Parent College Status
  - Parent attended college n=648
  - Did not/not sure n=362
- Had/has an IEP or accommodation
  - Yes n=151
  - No, but could have been eligible n=126
  - No n=685
- Urbanicity
  - Urban n=309
  - Suburban n=532
  - Rural n=169

# Method Overview



Fieldwork Dates  
Feb. 17 -  
March 9, 2023



Total sample includes survey  
participants ages 16-22  
who are U.S. residents



Online Survey  
Avg. 15 minutes

**College Admission Survey sample  
is designed to be representative of  
U.S. General Population aged 16-22**

**Sample Size**

White (non-Hispanics)

n = 349

Hispanic

n = 203

African American/Black (non-Hispanic)

n = 203

Asian (non-Hispanic)

n = 201

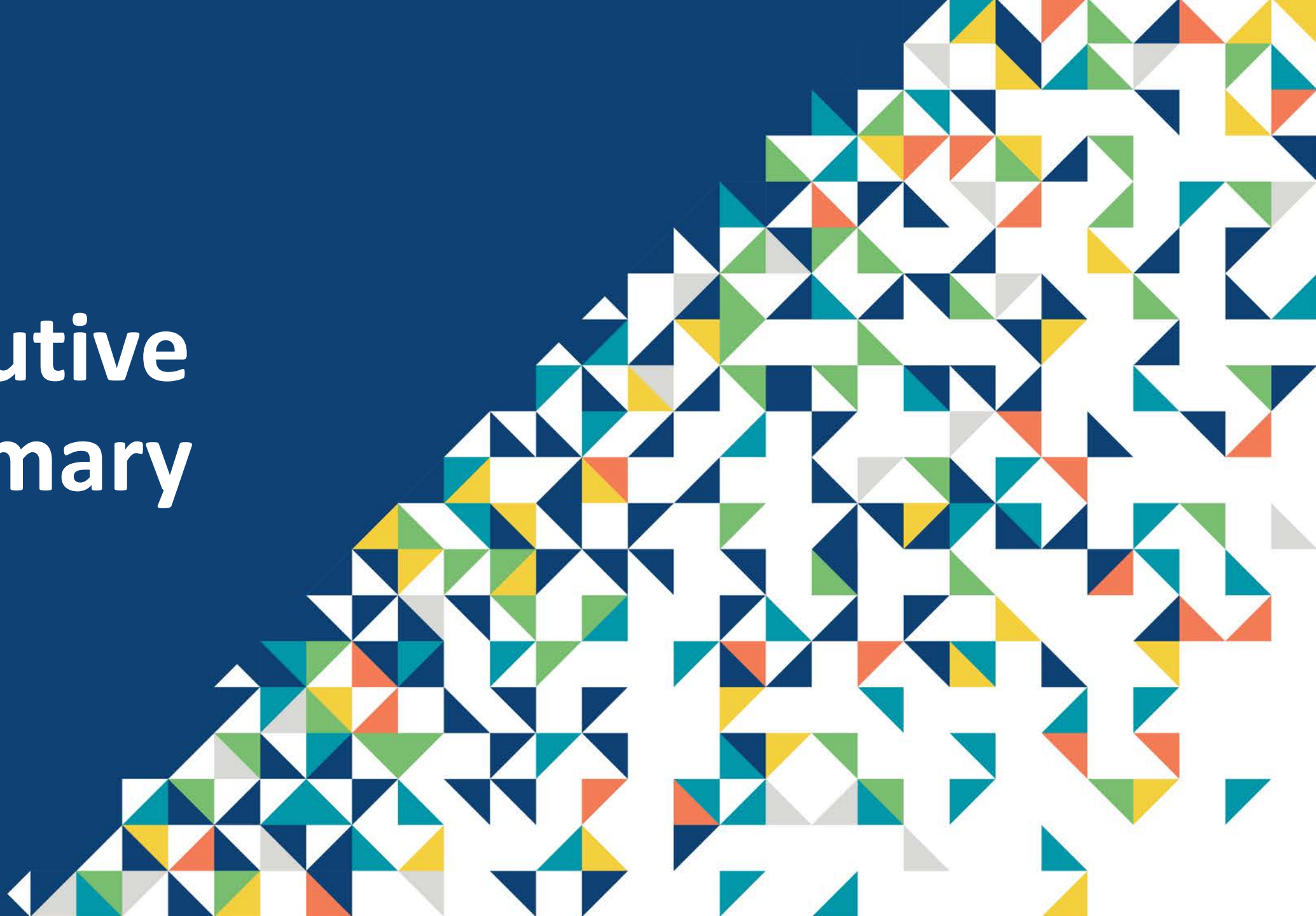
Other

n=54

**Total**

**n = 1010**

# Executive Summary



# Executive Summary

***College applications are often viewed as a pivotal aspect of academia, yielding great stress and pressures for many. The perceived challenge of the application process may outweigh actual experiences, though still expressed by a majority of those who have applied.***

- About three-quarters of those who have applied/are applying to college (76%) say completing their applications feels like such a decisive moment in their lives, with a similar proportion (73%) fearing a small mistake in their application could limit their chances of acceptance. Half (52%) say this has been more stressful than anything else they have done academically.
  - Thankfully, the majority (67%) feel they had/have what was needed to submit a competitive college application.
- Unfortunately, three in five (61%) have been overwhelmed by the advice they have been given related to applying to college.
- For about half of young adults, pressure has been felt to apply to a large number of colleges (52%) or to specific colleges they were not interested in (48%).
- More than three-quarters of young adults (77%) feel the college admission process is complex (vs. 23% feel it's fair).
- Interestingly, perceived challenges among those who have yet to apply to college (but intend to) often exceed the actual challenges experienced by those who have gone through the process, most commonly pointing to:
  - Deciding what schools would be a good fit to apply to (80% have yet to apply but plan to vs. 67% applied/applying);
  - The overall process (79% vs. 62%); and
  - Gathering necessary information (70% vs. 62%)

***Greater support in the application process is requested by most, perhaps unsurprising as nearly two-thirds describe current state of college applications as feeling like “just a number.”***

- Nearly three in five who have applied/are applying to college (59%) wish they had wish greater support in completing their applications.
- This cohort most commonly rely on parents/guardians (72%), high school counselors (49%), or high school teachers (41%) for assistance when applying to colleges.
- Nearly two-thirds of those who have applied/are applying to college (65%) have felt like just a number during the process.



# Executive Summary

***While slight majorities feel the college admission process is just, even more acknowledge a perceived level of bias involved and express difficulty finding unbiased information.***

- Slight majorities describe the admission process as fair (58% vs. 42% rigged) and feel it accounts for the most important elements of an applicant (53% vs. 47% does not).
- More than seven in 10 young adults believe there is a lot of bias involved in college admission office decisions (74%) and that the process clearly advantages the wealthy and privileged (72%).
  - Nearly seven in 10 (68%) have had difficulty finding unbiased information about colleges.

***While young adults acknowledge the helpfulness of admission offices, many wish admission officers knew how reliant potential students are on them and question if they are always putting the student first. Nearly half say improved communication with colleges during applications would have made the process easier for them.***

- Seven in 10 young adults who have applied/are applying to college (70%) feel those in the admission office really cared about their success.
  - The majority feel the admission office they interacted with performed well, particularly related to being respectful (92%), clarity on requirements and process (88%), providing helpful responses (87%), and answering in a timely manner (87%).
- Yet nearly four in five (79%) wish admission officers understood how much applicants are relying on them during the process and two-thirds (66%) often wonder if admission offices are putting the students' needs first.
- More than two in five (46%) say better communication from those involved at the colleges would make the application process easier.

# Executive Summary

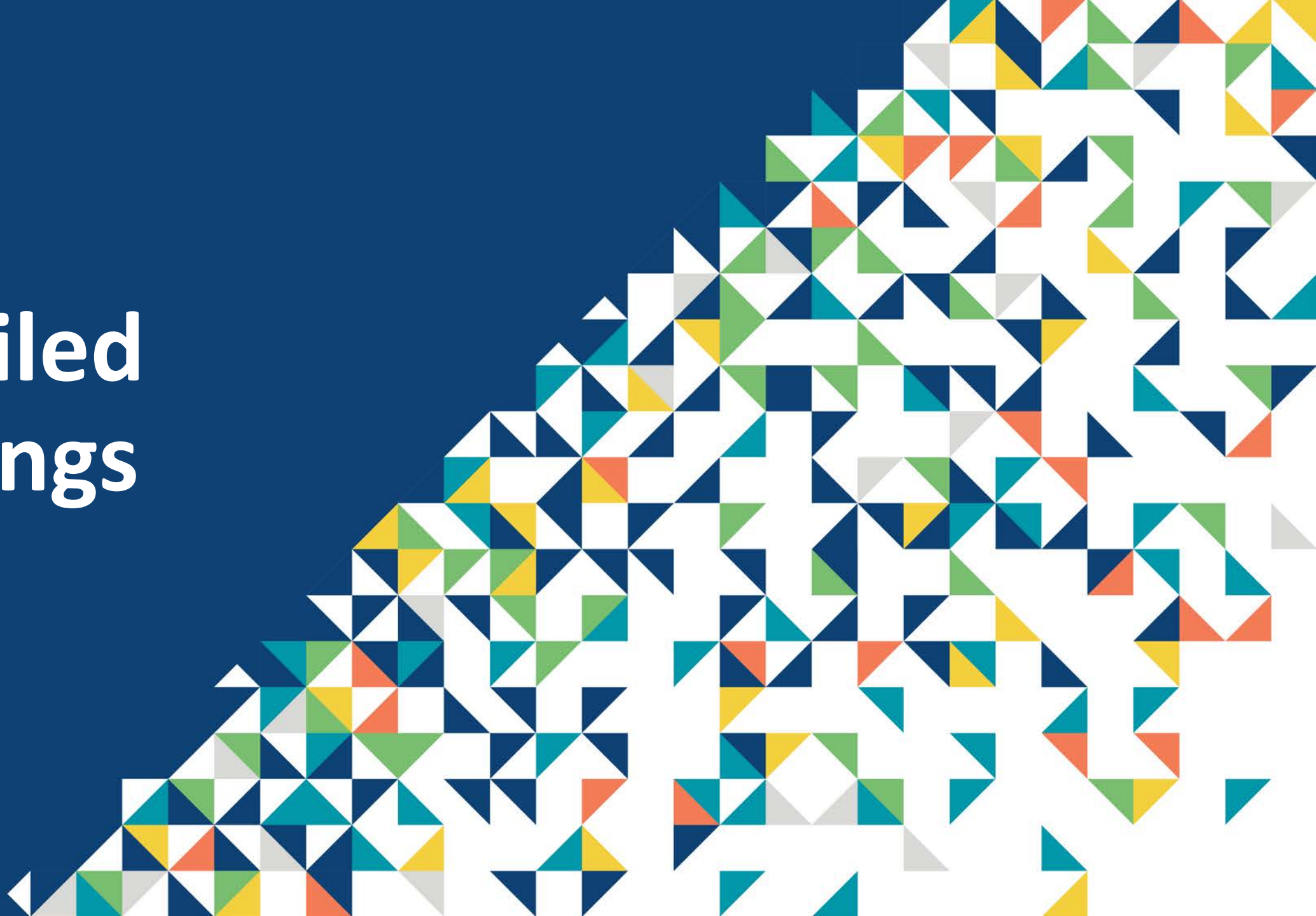
***Perceived competing priorities between prospective students and colleges may be more extreme than actual perspectives on important elements in an application. Similarly, while many react positively towards the concept of test-free admission, many still flag concerns. A majority describe diverse student bodies as essential, and nearly three in five support race-conscious admission practices.***

- Nearly seven in 10 feel the things that prospective students believe are the most important in the admission process (69%) and what is most important to being successful in college (68%) do not align with what college administrators are focused on.
- Despite this, general alignment does seem evident -- when asked what matters most to colleges when making admission decisions and what they personally feel should be important, above all other metrics, young adults point to grades in all courses (57% top-five important to colleges; 50% *should* be very important in decisions) and admission test scores (56%; 40%).
- Three-quarters of young adults (75%) believe test optional or test-free admission “levels the playing field” for students of different backgrounds and a similar proportion (77%) say this would encourage them to apply.
  - However, cynicism is evident as some would be skeptical if a college said it does not require test scores to apply (52%) and feel that schools that offer such options are not as good as schools that require test scores for their admission (45%).
- Nearly three in five young adults (58%) support race-conscious admission practices.
  - About three-quarters (76%) say it is *absolutely essential* for colleges to have a diverse student body.

***The verdict may still be out on the advantages of attending a highly selective college, as many point to both pros and cons of such institutions. At a minimum, majorities acknowledge lack of accessibility for most potential students.***

- Half or more young adults believe the “pros” of attending a highly selective college outweigh the “cons” (59%) and that the more selective the college is during admission the better the school is (50%).
  - Common advantages of attending highly selective college are viewed as better job opportunities (67%) and high-quality education (62%).
- On the other side of the coin, disadvantages of attending highly selective colleges most commonly relate to tuition costs (77%), pressure to succeed (57%), and competitive environment (48%).
- Three-quarters (76%) acknowledge that attending a highly selective college is not accessible for most potential students.

# Detailed Findings



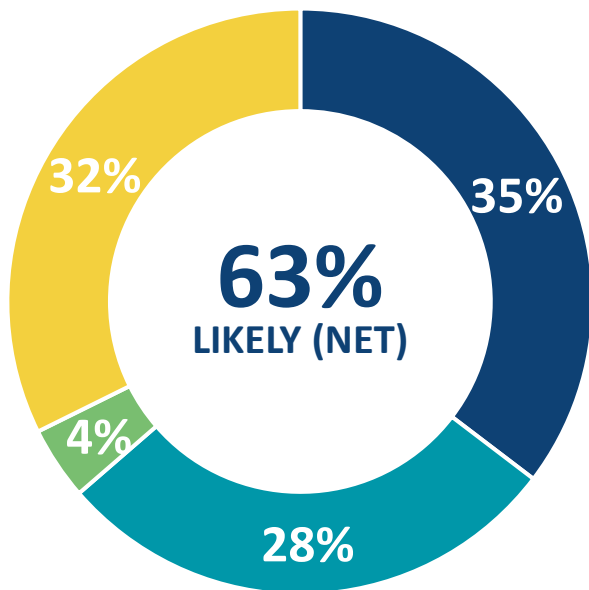
# Future Education Plans

# Nearly two-thirds of young adults are likely to attend college

Females, those whose parents attended college, and those who live in suburban areas are more likely than their respective peers to attend.

## Likelihood of Attending a Four-year College

*(among those not currently enrolled in a four-year college and with less than a college education)*



■ Very likely   ■ Somewhat likely   ■ Not very likely   ■ Not at all likely

### Significant Differences by Key Subgroups

**More likely to attend a four-year college:**

- Females (72% vs. 56% males)
- Those whose parent(s) attended college (71% vs. 53% those who did not)
- Suburban young adults (70% vs. 53% urban)



# Majorities have a clear vision for their career, but fewer say they know the best next step in their education

Asian young adults are more likely to have clarity on their careers, as well as what their next education step might be.

**“I have a clear vision of where I want my career to go.”**

*% Strongly/Somewhat agree (Net)*



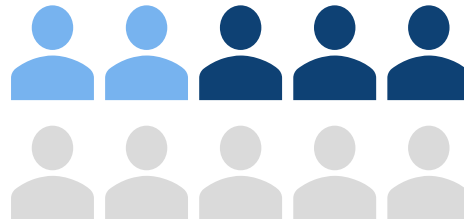
**73%**

*32% Strongly, 40% Somewhat*

But...

**“I am not sure what the best next step is for me in my education.”**

*% Strongly/Somewhat agree (Net)*



**51%**

*16% Strongly, 35% Somewhat*

## Significant Differences by Key Subgroups

**More likely to have a clear vision of where they want their career to go:**

- Asian (79% vs. 70% White)

**More likely to be unsure of their best next step in education:**

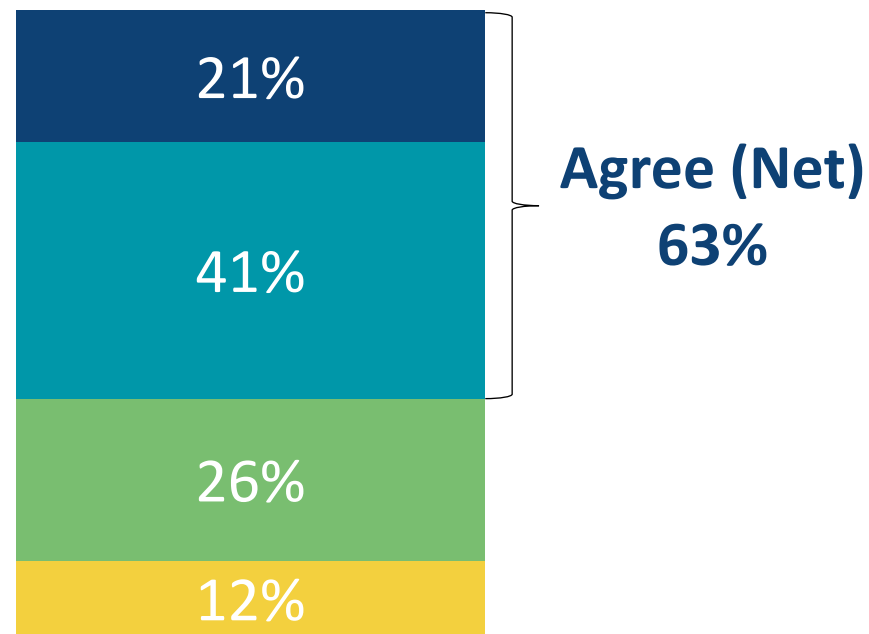
- White (53% vs. 43% Asian)
- Those whose parent(s) did not attend college (60% vs. 46% of those who did)



# More than three in five have felt like they are not the type of student colleges are looking for

This sentiment is held even more commonly among those whose parent(s) did not go to college.

**“It has felt like I am not the type of student colleges are looking for.”**  
*% Strongly/Somewhat agree (Net)*



■ Strongly disagree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Strongly agree

## Significant Differences by Key Subgroups

More likely feel like they are not the type of student colleges are looking for:

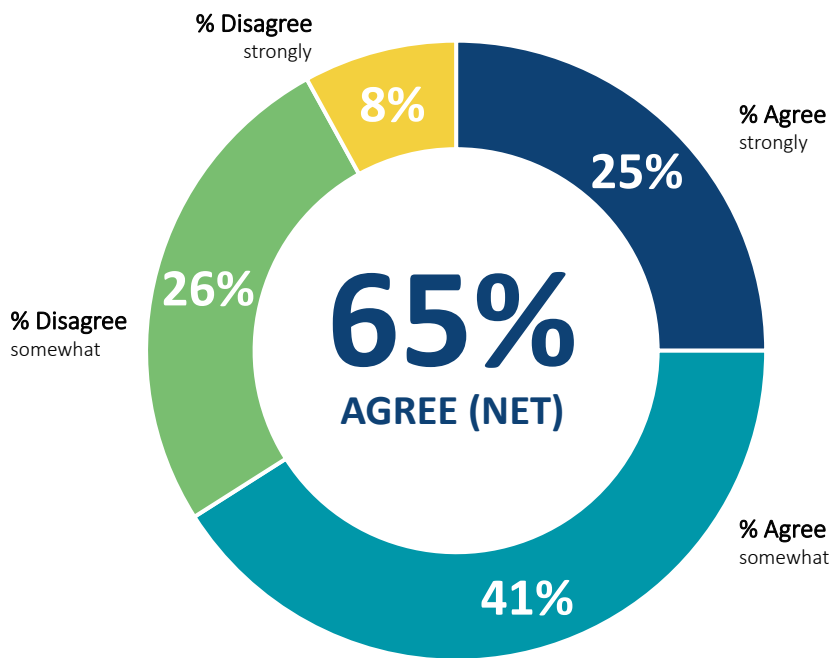
- Those whose parent(s) did not attend college (73% vs. 57% of those who did)



# Nearly two-thirds feel the cost of a college degree is worth it

Young adults whose parents did not attend college and those living in rural areas are more likely to feel it is not worth it.

**“The cost of earning a college degree is worth it.”**  
*% Strongly/Somewhat Agree (Net)*



## Significant Differences by Key Subgroups

More likely to believe the cost of earning a degree is not worth it:

- Parent(s) did not attend college (47% vs. 28% those who did)
- Rural (42% vs. 32% suburban)





# Perception of Application Process

# College applications viewed as a major moment in life and academia; luckily most feel they have what they need

For White young adults, and for those whose parent(s) did not attend college, completing college applications is *less* likely to feel like a major life moment.

**“Completing college applications feels like such a decisive moment in my life.”**

*% Strongly/Somewhat agree (Net)*



**76%**

*34% Strongly, 42% Somewhat*

And...

**“Completing my application has been more stressful than anything else I have done academically.”**

*% Strongly/Somewhat agree (Net)*

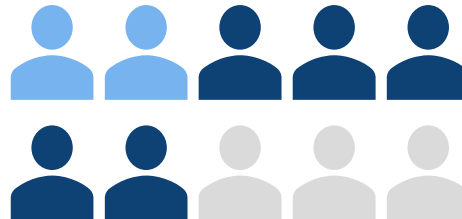


*14% Strongly, 38% Somewhat*

Thankfully...

**“I had/have what I needed to submit a competitive college application.”**

*% Strongly/Somewhat agree (Net)*



**67%**

*21% Strongly, 46% Somewhat*

## Significant Differences by Key Subgroups

**Less likely feel college applications are a decisive moment in their life:**

- White (71% vs. 82% Hispanic and 85% Asian)
- Those whose parent(s) did not attend college (69% vs. 79% of those who did)

**Less likely feel college applications have been the most stressful academic activity:**

- White (42% vs. 60% Black, 61% Hispanic, and 63% Asian)

**More likely to feel they had what they needed to apply:**

- Those whose parent(s) attended college (74% vs. 54% of those who did not)

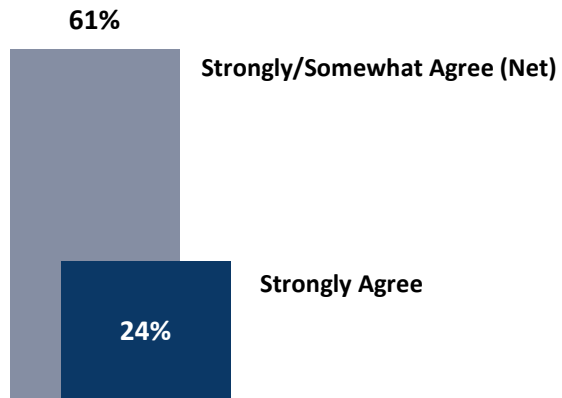


# Many have been overwhelmed by college advice

More than half say their high school counselor had strong recommendations on which classes could improve their future applications.

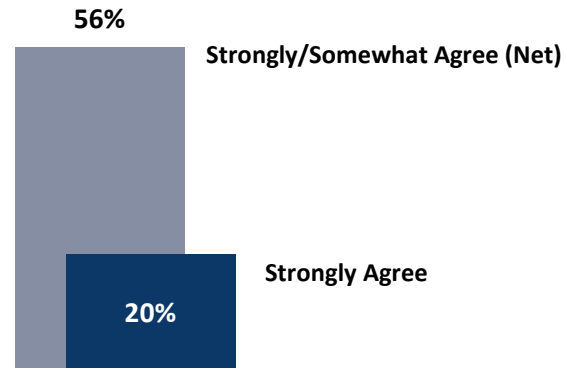
**“I have been overwhelmed by the advice I have been given related to applying to college.”**

*% Strongly/Somewhat Agree (Net)*



**“My high school counselor had strong recommendations on which courses to take during high school to improve my college applications.”**

*% Strongly/Somewhat Agree (Net)*



## Significant Differences by Key Subgroups

**More likely to have been overwhelmed by advice given:**

- Hispanic and Asian (68% and 66% vs. 52% Black)
- Females (68% vs. 51% males)
- Suburban (65% vs. 53% rural)



# About half have felt pressures to apply to many or specific schools

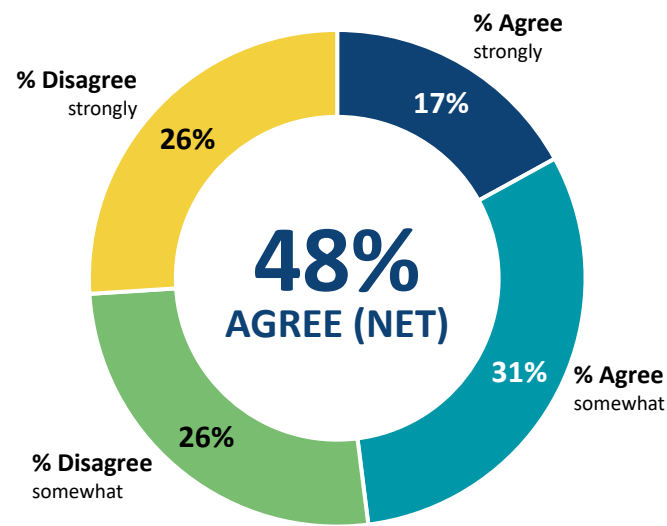
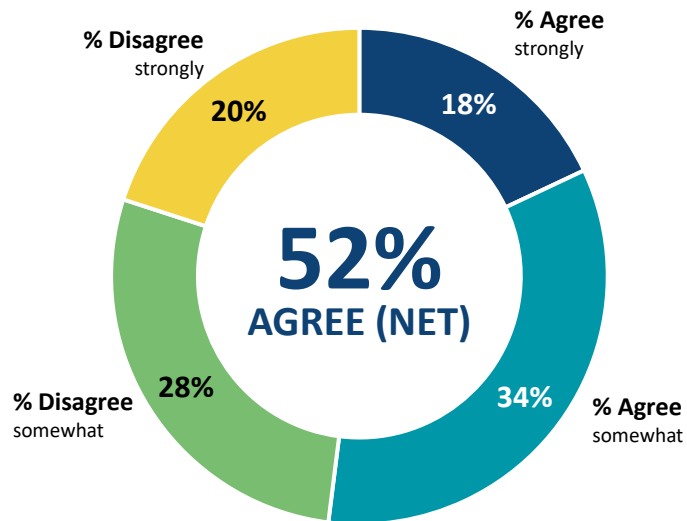
Asian young adults are most likely to have had these pressures applied.

**“I have felt pressured to apply to a large number of colleges.”**  
*% Strongly/Somewhat Agree (Net)*



And...

**“I have felt pressured to apply to specific colleges I was not interested in.”**  
*% Strongly/Somewhat Agree (Net)*


**Significant Differences by Key Subgroups**

**More likely to have felt pressure to apply to many schools:**

- Asian (59% vs. 49% White, 48% Black)

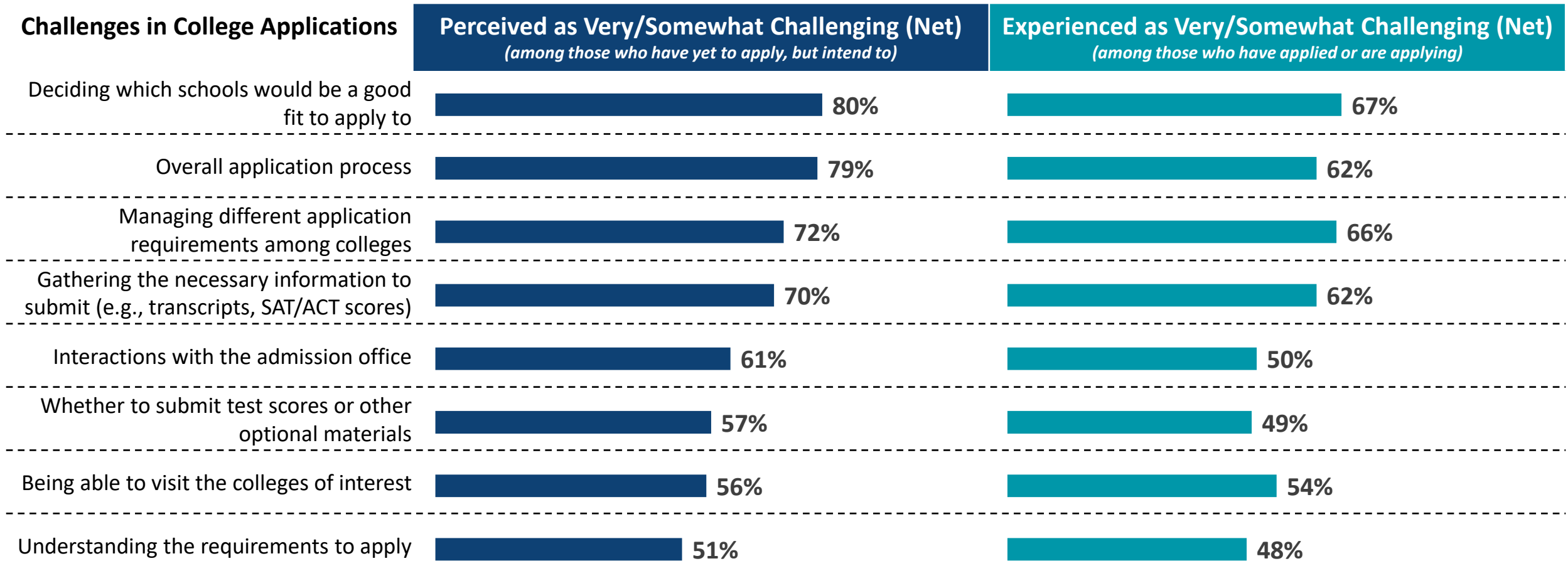
**More likely to have felt pressure to apply specific schools they were not interested in:**

- Asian (59% vs. 45% White)



# Perceived challenges in the college application process often exceed actual experiences

Common challenges (experienced and, to a greater degree, perceived) include deciding where to apply, the process overall, and managing differing requirements.



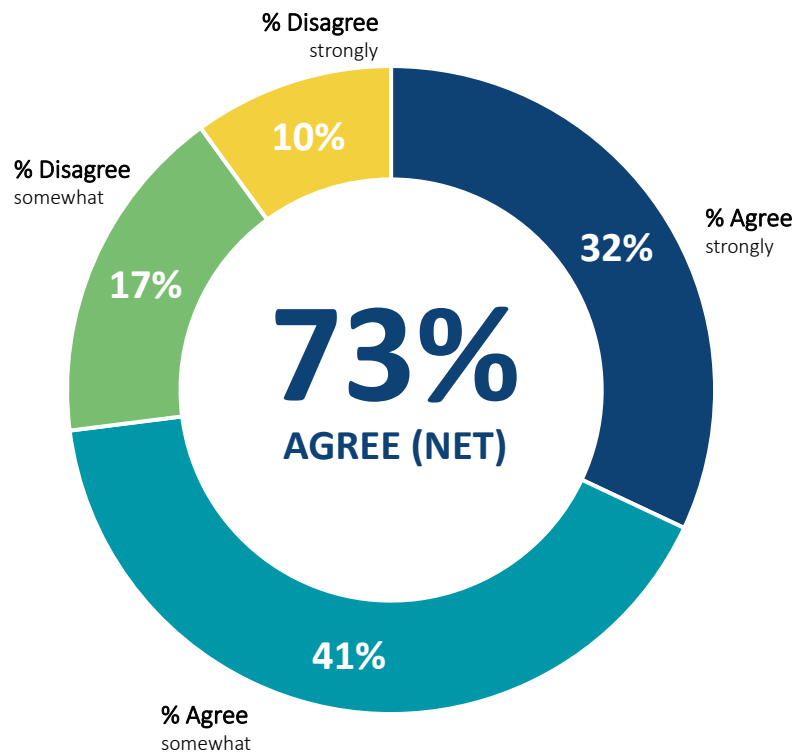
# Nearly three-quarters fear a small application mistake could impact their chances of being accepted

Those whose parents attended college are more likely to state this fear.

**“I was/am so afraid a small mistake in my college application could limit my chances of acceptance.”**

*(among those who have applied or are applying)*

*% Strongly/Somewhat Agree (Net)*



## Significant Differences by Key Subgroups

**More likely to be afraid of a small mistake limiting their chances of acceptance:**

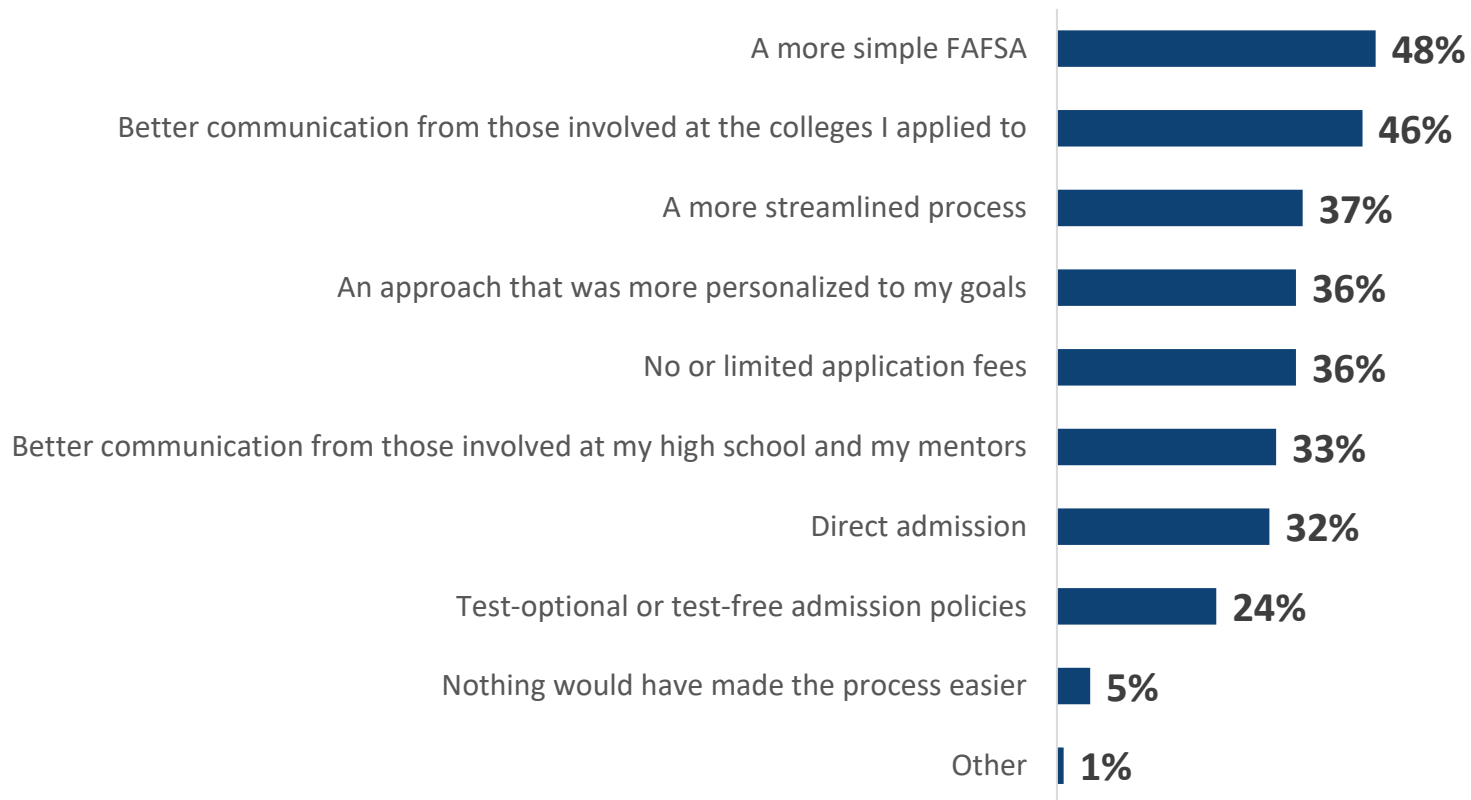
- Those whose parent(s) attended college (76% vs. 67% of those who did not)



# Key desires for an easier application process are simplified FASFA or better communication with colleges

Key differences exist across subgroups, including the call for a more personal approach among Hispanic, Asian, and young adults who could have been eligible for an IEP or accommodation.

## Aspects to Make the College Application Process Easier *(among those have applied/applying to college)*



### Significant Differences by Key Subgroups

#### Aspects to make the process easier by group

- White: no/limited application fees
- Hispanic: more simple FASFA, more personalized approach, direct admission
- Asian: streamlined process, more personalized approach, direct admission
- Could have been eligible for IEP: more personalized approach



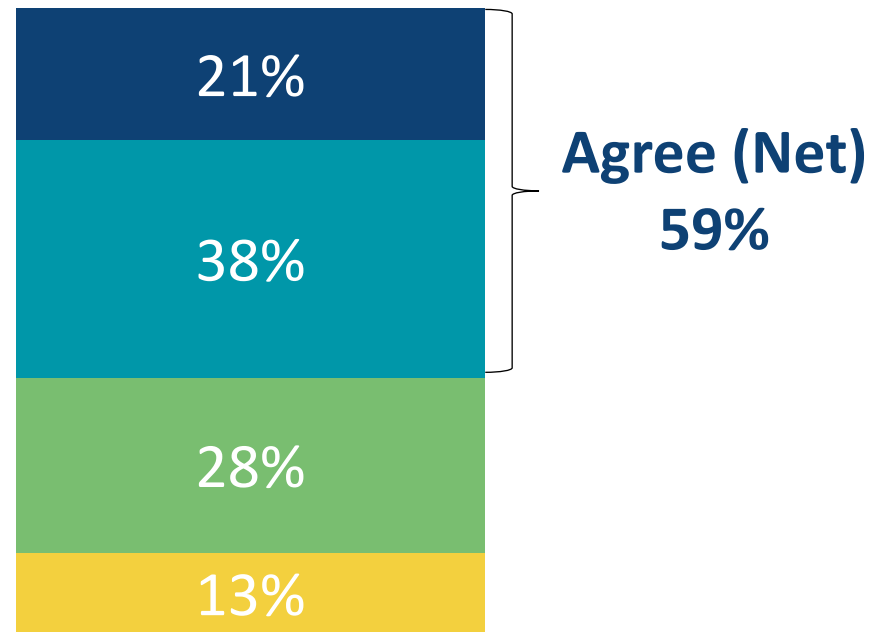
# Support in the Application Process



# Nearly three in five wish they had greater support in completing their applications

This wish is even more common among Hispanic and Black young adults.

**“I wish I had greater support in completing my college applications.”**  
*(among those have applied/applying to college)*  
*% Strongly/Somewhat agree (Net)*



■ Strongly disagree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Strongly agree

## Significant Differences by Key Subgroups

More likely to wish for greater support:

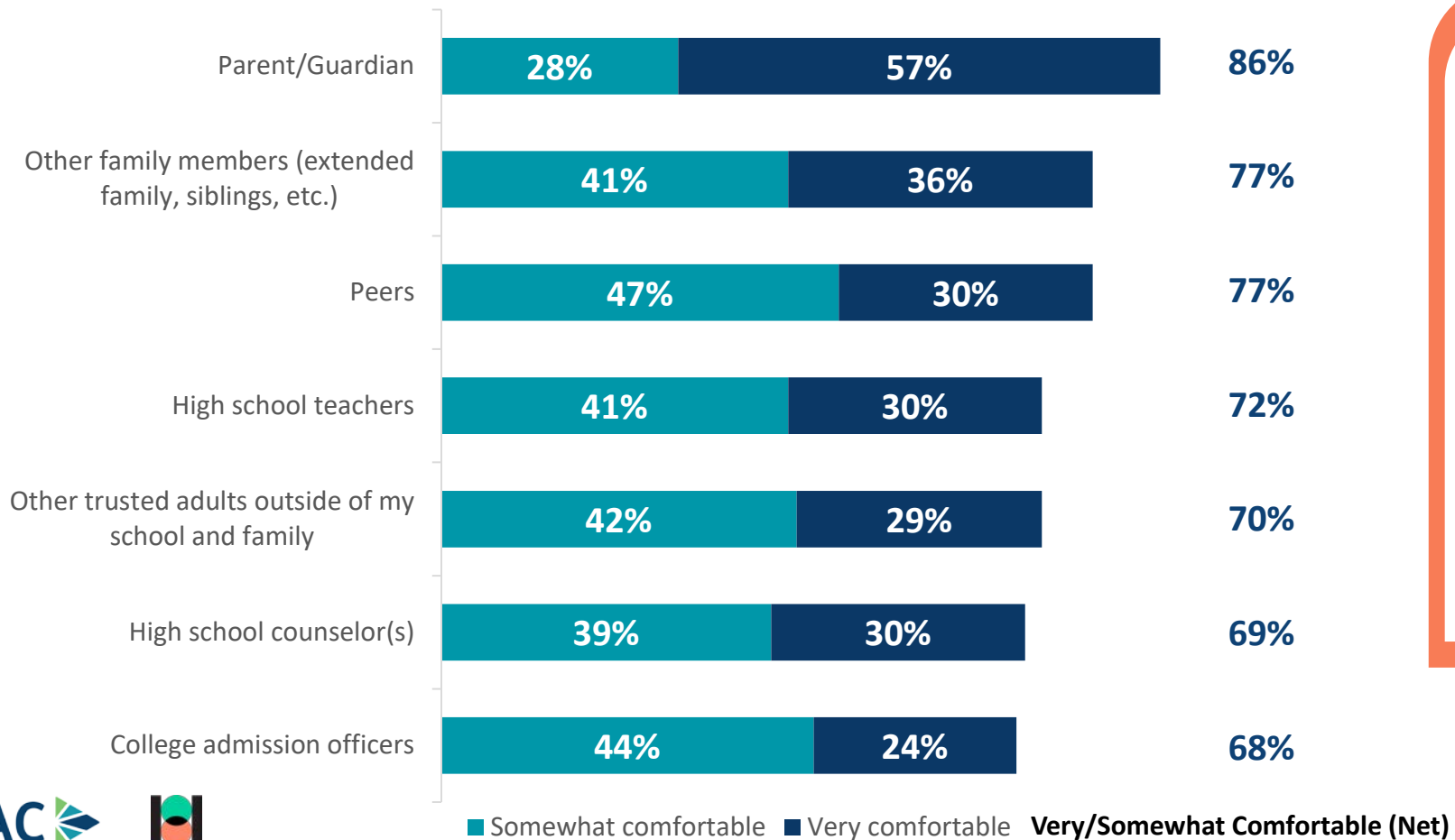
- Hispanic and Black (64% and 69% vs. 52% White)



# Highest comfort in seeking assistance during college applications is from parents, family members, or peers

Fewer young adults express similar comfort in asking college admission officers for assistance.

### Comfort in Asking for Assistance During Application Process



#### Significant Differences by Key Subgroups

Who individuals would have greater comfort talking to, by group

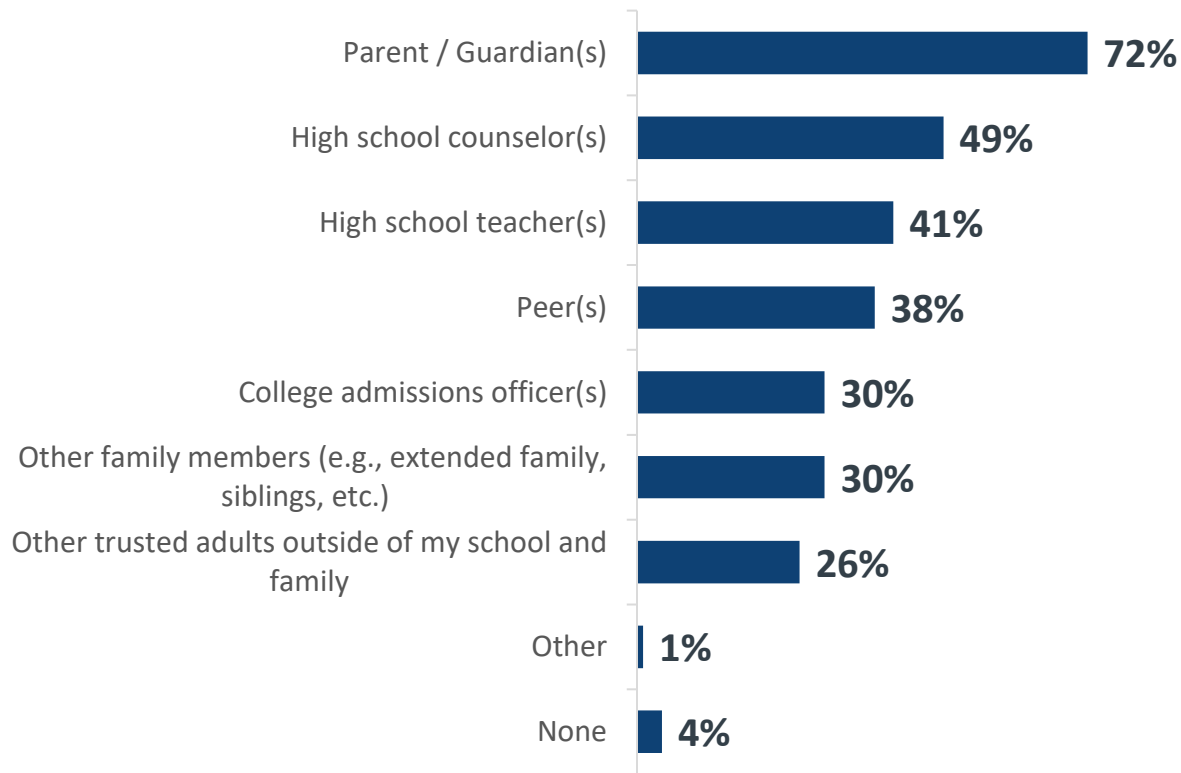
- Asian: HS counselor
- Parent(s) attended college: parents, college admins
- Did not have an IEP: parents
- Suburban: peers



# Parents are most commonly relied on for support during applications

High school counselors and teachers are also relied on, but less commonly.

**Who Relied on for Assistance During Application Process**  
*(among those have applied/applying to college)*



## Significant Differences by Key Subgroups

Individuals more likely to have relied on for assistance, by group:

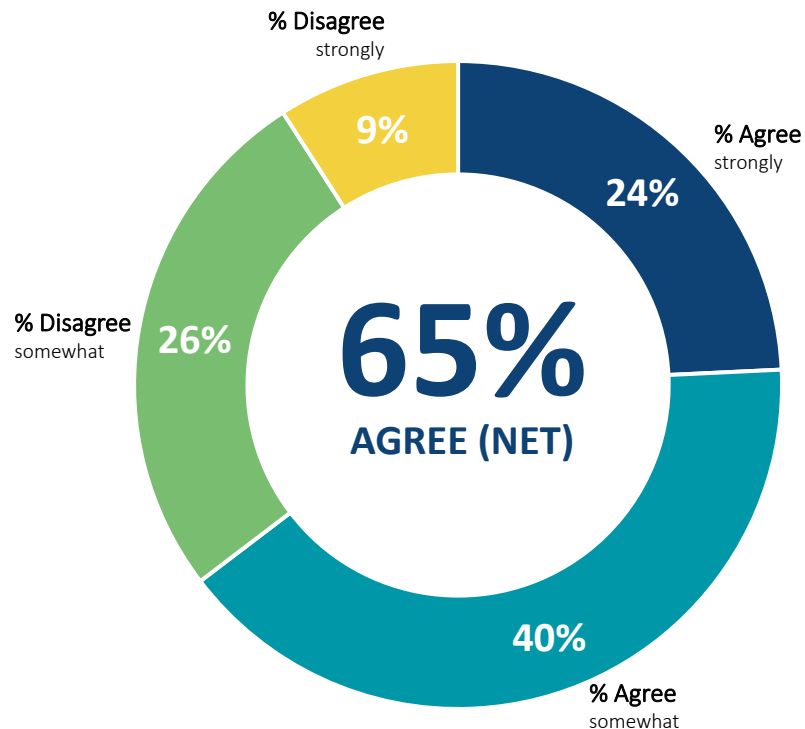
- White: parent, peers
- Asian: extended family
- Parent(s) attended college: parents
- Suburban: peers



# Nearly two-thirds have felt like just a number during the application process, a quarter *strongly* agree

Asian applicants are more likely to have felt like a number during the process.

**“I felt like just a number during the college application process.”**  
*(among those having/have applied to college)*  
*% Strongly/Somewhat Agree (Net)*



## Significant Differences by Key Subgroups

More likely to have felt like a number:

- Asian (81% vs. 66% Black, 63% White, and 61% Hispanic)



# Personal Admission Consideration

# Unbiased information on colleges may be hard to come by

Hispanic young adults appear to have a more difficult time finding such information compared to their Black peers.

**“It is difficult to find unbiased information about colleges.”**

*% Strongly/Somewhat agree (Net)*

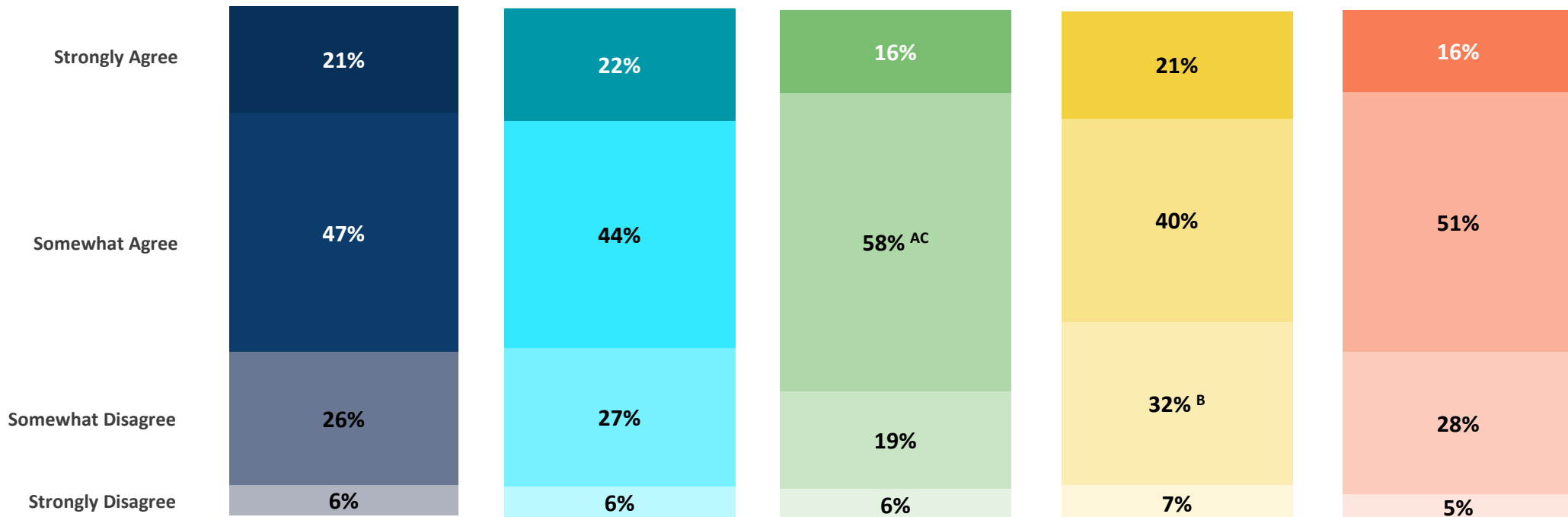
**Total**  
**68%**

**White (A)**  
**67%**

**Hispanic (B)**  
**75%<sup>C</sup>**

**Black (C)**  
**61%**

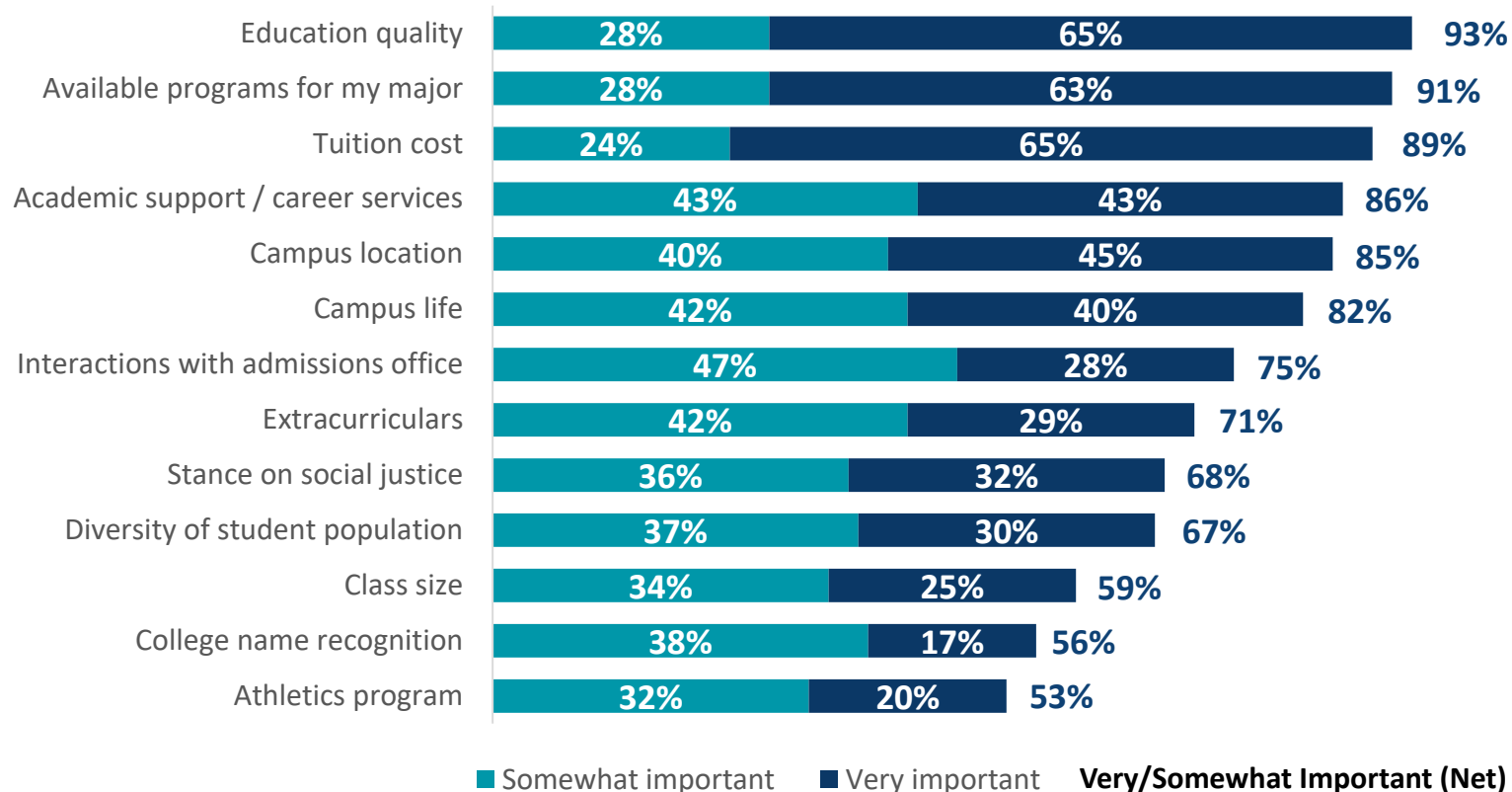
**Asian (D)**  
**67%**



# Education quality, available programs, and tuition costs are of top importance when selecting where to apply

Young adults of color are more likely to cite the importance of diversity when deciding where to apply, and Hispanic and Black young adults add the school's stance on social justice.

**Importance of Aspects When Deciding Where to Apply**  
(amongst those who have/are applying to college)



## Significant Differences by Key Subgroups

### Aspects of greater importance by race/ethnicity:

- Hispanic: interactions with admins office, stance on social justice, diversity, athletics
- Black: interactions with admins office, stance on social justice, diversity, class size, athletics
- Asian: diversity, name recognition

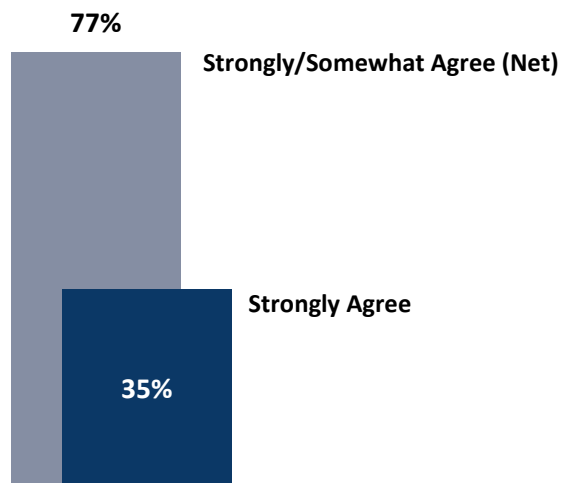


# Test-optional and holistic practices may draw applicants

Holistic practices may be more likely to encourage applications among Hispanic and Asian young adults.

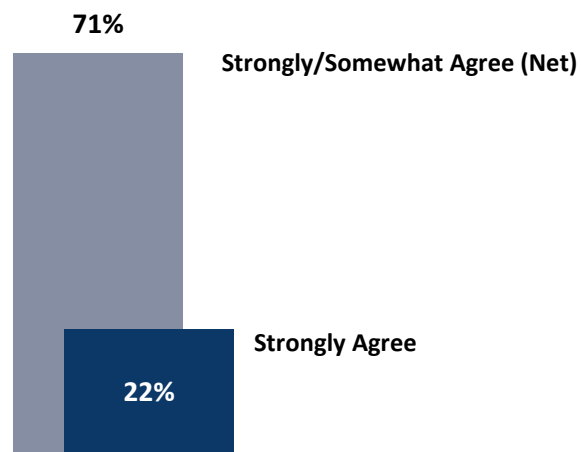
**“Having a test-optional or test-free admission policy would encourage me to apply.”**

*% Strongly/Somewhat Agree (Net)*



**“Knowing a college has a more holistic approach to their application decisions would encourage me to apply.”**

*% Strongly/Somewhat Agree (Net)*



## Significant Differences by Key Subgroups

**More likely to say a holistic approach would encourage them to apply:**

- Hispanic and Asian (77% and 81% vs. 66% White)
- Parent(s) attended college (75% vs. 64% those who did not)

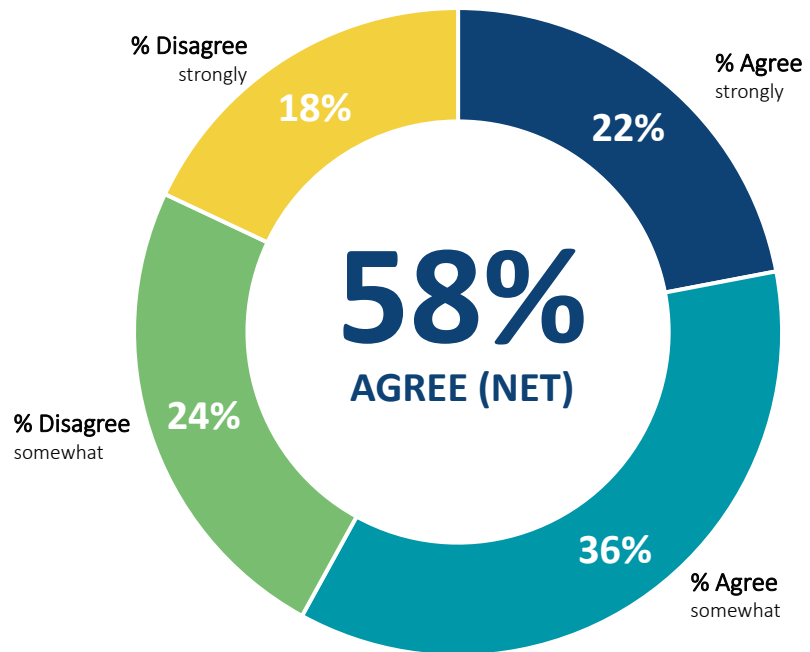




# Nearly three in five skipped applying to some of their “dream schools” because they knew they wouldn’t get in

Hispanic and Asian applicants are more likely to say they have forgone applying to their dream schools.

**“I didn’t even try applying to some of my ‘dream schools’ because I knew I wouldn’t get in.”**  
*(among those who have applied to college)*  
*% Strongly/Somewhat Agree (Net)*



## Significant Differences by Key Subgroups

More likely to say a holistic approach would encourage them to apply:

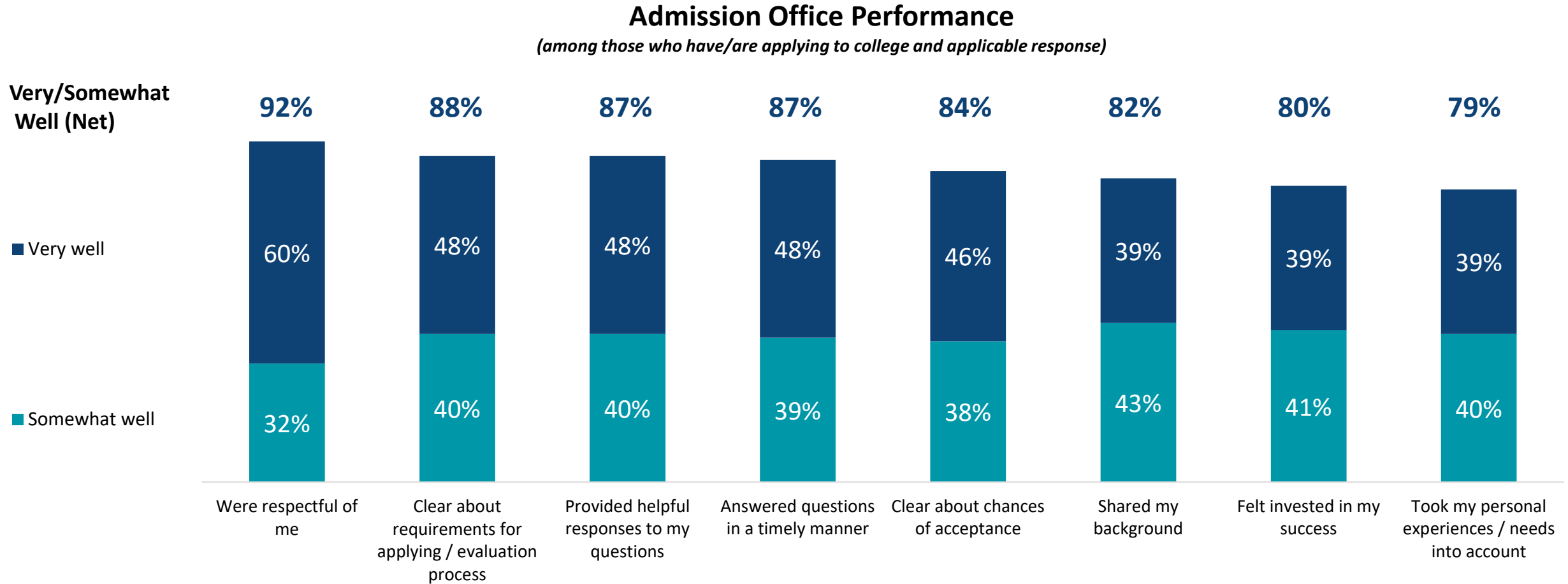
- Hispanic and Asian (64% and 73% vs. 51% White)



# Interactions with Admission Office

# Most feel admission office performed well in their interactions

Most commonly they were respectful, provided helpful answers, were clear on requirements, and answered questions in a timely manner.



# Majorities feel the admission people they worked with really cared about their success

Yet, most wish admission officers understood how reliant prospective students are on them in the process and wonder if they are always putting student needs first.

**“I feel like the people I worked with in the admission office really cared about my success.”**

*% Strongly/Somewhat agree (Net)*



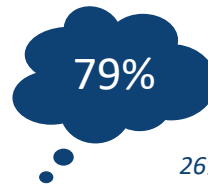
**70%**

*31% Strongly, 39% Somewhat*

Yet...

**“I wish admission officers understood how much applicants are relying on them during the process.”**

*% Strongly/Somewhat agree (Net)*



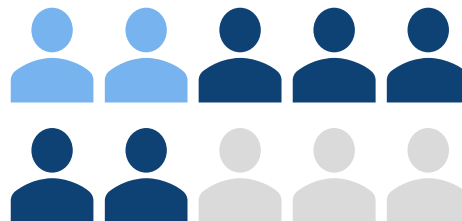
**79%**

*26% Strongly, 52% Somewhat*

And...

**“I often wonder if admission offices are putting the students’ needs first.”**

*% Strongly/Somewhat agree (Net)*



**66%**

*21% Strongly  
45% Somewhat*

## Significant Differences by Key Subgroups

**More likely to wish admission officers knew how much applicants relied on them:**

- Suburban (83% vs. 66% rural)

**More likely to wonder if offices are putting the students’ needs first:**

- Black and Asian (75% and 73% vs. 60% White)



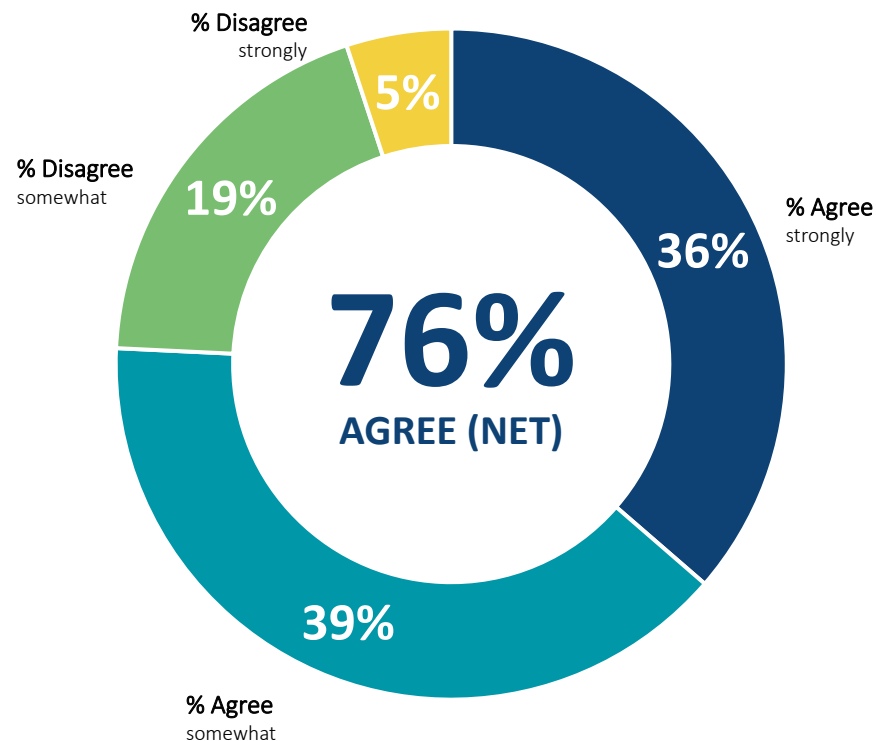
# Views Toward Admission Process

# Three-quarters of young adults feel diverse student bodies are absolutely essential

More than a third *strongly* agree.

**“It is absolutely essential for colleges to have a diverse student body.”**

*% Strongly/Somewhat Agree (Net)*



## Significant Differences by Key Subgroups

More likely to believe diverse student bodies are absolutely essential:

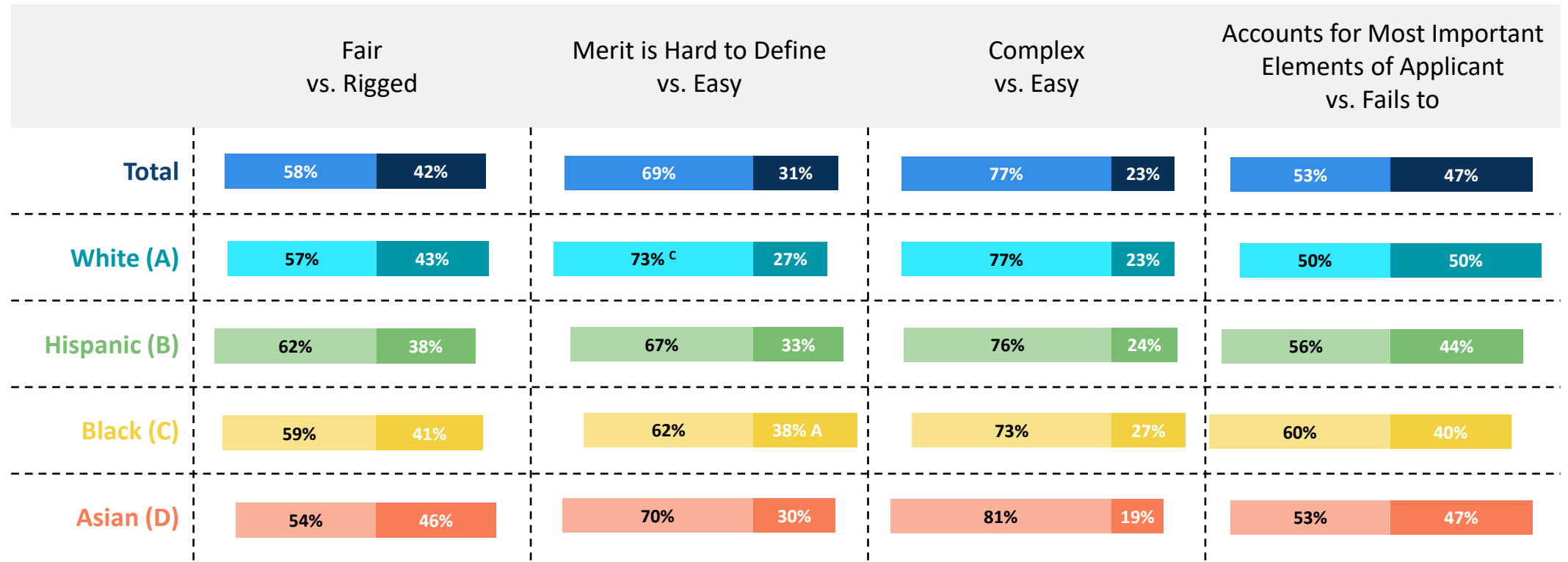
- Female (81% vs. 69% male)



# Young adults are split on if the admission process is fair or rigged and if it accounts for the most important elements of an applicant

Majorities describe merit as hard to define and the admission process as complex.

## Best Describes College Admission Process



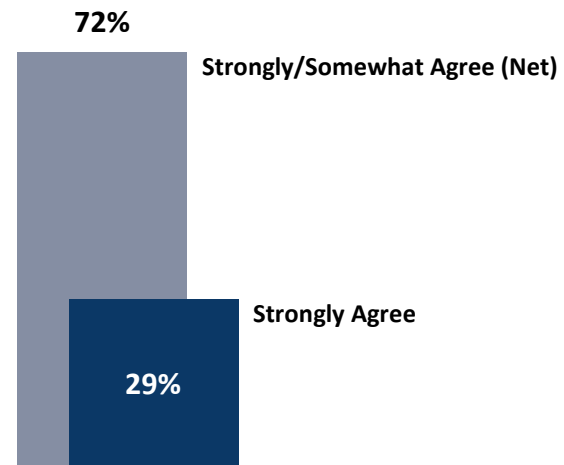
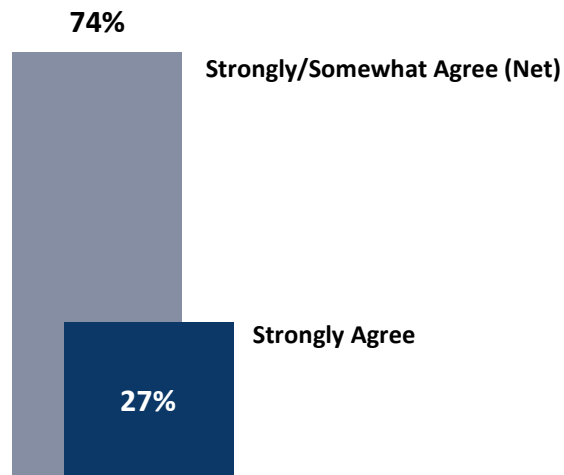
# More than seven in 10 believe there is a lot of bias involved in college admission decisions

A similar proportion feel that it advantages the wealthy and privileged.

**“There is a lot of bias involved in college admission office decisions.”**  
*% Strongly/Somewhat Agree (Net)*

*And...*  
----->

**“The college admission process clearly advantages the wealthy and privileged.”**  
*% Strongly/Somewhat Agree (Net)*





# Ideal changes young adults would want to make to how colleges make admission decisions...

"I wish it were more personalized. If someone's a strong writer, they can write an essay. If they're amazing at public speaking, they would give a speech on how they would impact the school. Everyone is unique in the matters of what they bring to the table, so admissions should focus on that."

*17 year-old Female  
White*

"I would want a more streamlined version of my college application process. One that accounts for more than just what my grades are."

*18 year-old Male  
White*

"I think it would be best to assess the students interest and passion for the school and subjects taught there rather than holistic statistics. If a student is interested in learning, despite their previous test scores, they will do well."

*16 year-old Male  
White*

"In my opinion I would want a fair shot for everyone to go to college."

*22 year-old Male  
Black*

"I would just like to feel like all my hard work has gone towards something. I feel like my high GPA and extracurriculars meant nothing."

*18 year-old Other Gender  
Filipino*

"I wish it was not so complicated and actually taught in school because I never learned how to do it so I missed out on many opportunities."

*20 year-old Female  
White*

"Access to these forms to all would be helpful. Not everyone has the needs to be able to access each of these different college applications."

*18 year-old Female  
Hispanic*

"Colleges should be 100% clear about the expectations of the college during the application process since it is so expensive and can be very difficult to achieve success as a first generation student."

*19 year-old Female  
American Indian or Alaska Native*

"It would be nice if colleges had a bit more help with communicating with potential applicants and help explain the process as well as take into consideration the types of education the said applicant was given because not every high school has the same resources when trying to teach a curriculum."

*20 year-old Male  
Hispanic*

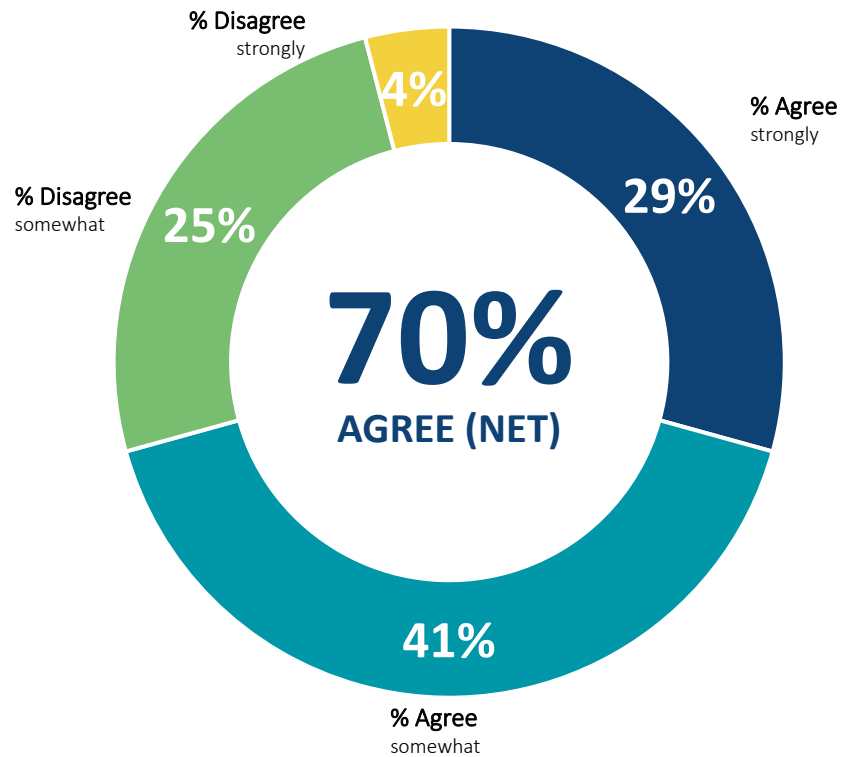


# Factors of Consideration in Admission Decisions

# Most feel they understand the importance of each step in the college admission process

Hispanic young adults are more likely to see the importance.


**“I understand why each step of the college admission process is important.”**  
*% Strongly/Somewhat Agree (Net)*



**Significant Differences by Key Subgroups**

More likely to understand the importance of steps in the admission process:

- Hispanic (77% vs. 66% White)

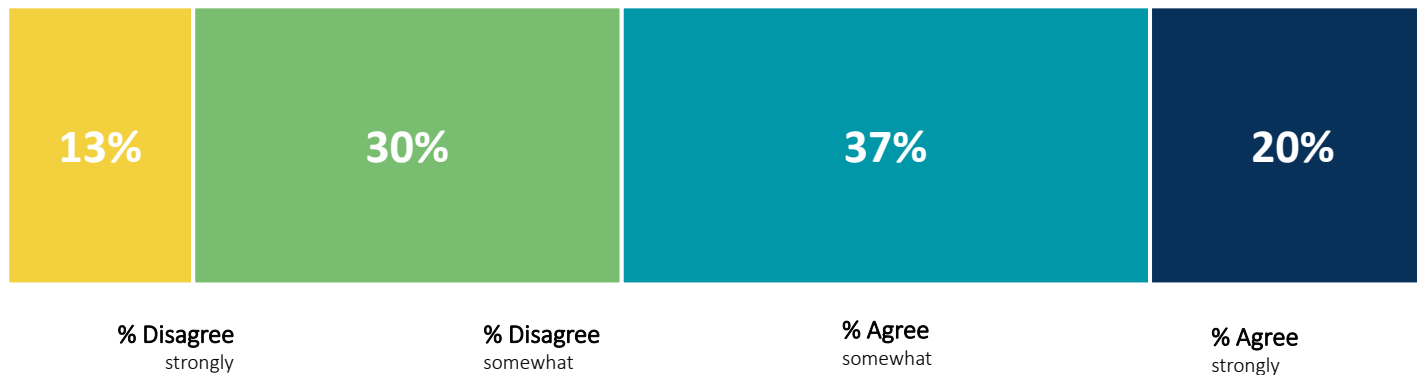
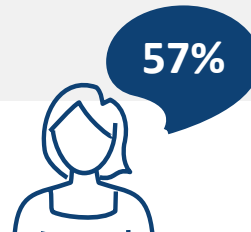


# More than half feel academics should be the only thing that matters when applying to college

Black young adults are more likely than their peers to feel academics should be of sole importance.

**“Academic performance should be the only thing that matters when applying to colleges.”**

*% Strongly/somewhat agree (Net)*



## Significant Differences by Key Subgroups

More likely to believe academics are the only thing that should matter:

- Black (68% vs. 56% White, 56% Hispanic, and 49% Asian)

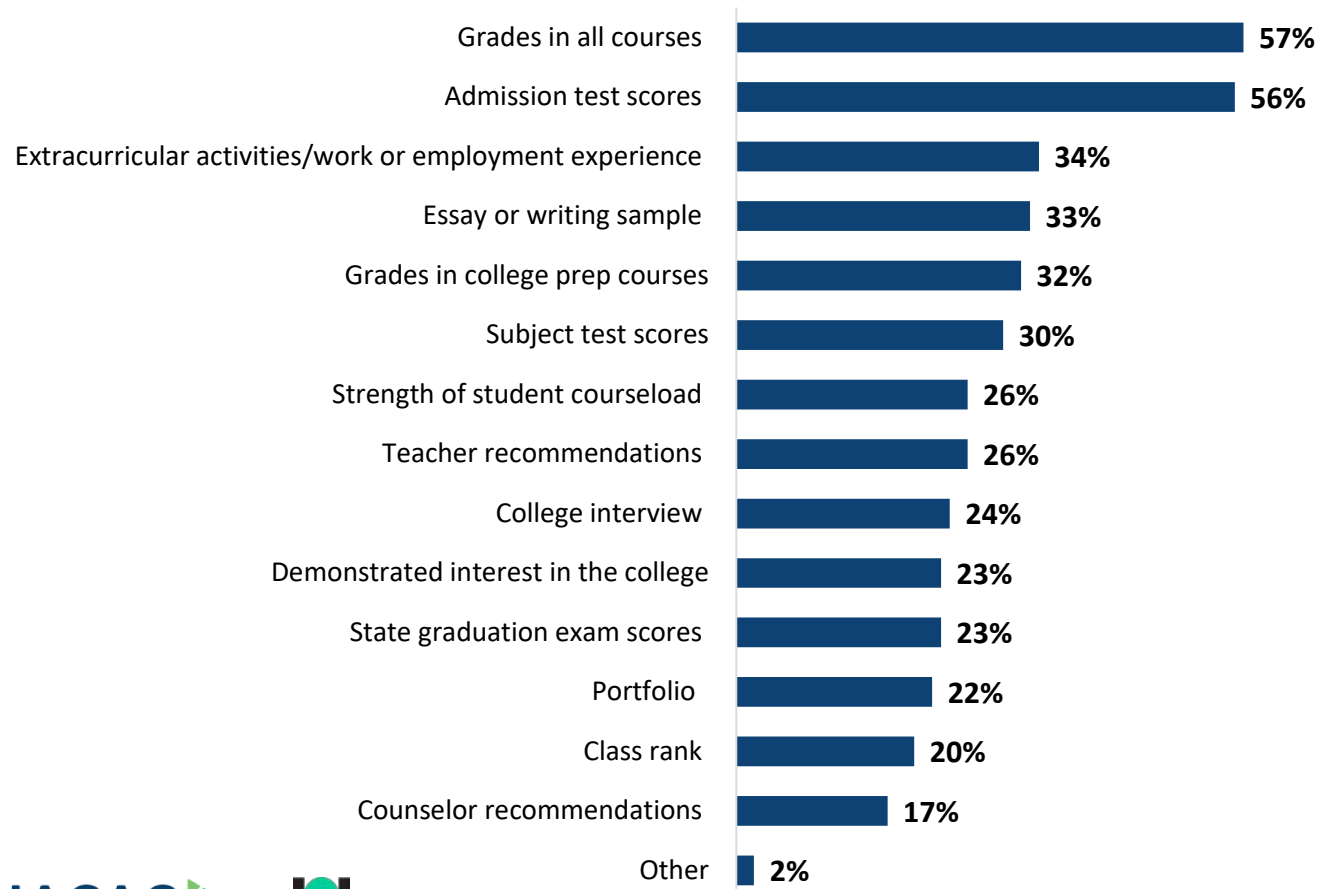


# Grades in all courses and admission test scores are most commonly viewed as most important to colleges for admission decisions

Differences in what is perceived as important do exist across race/ethnicity and gender.

## What Matters Most to Colleges when Making Admission Decisions

Select up to 5 responses



### Significant Differences by Key Subgroups

Aspects more commonly expected to matter most by key groups:

- White: grades in all courses, admission test scores, extracurriculars, state grad exam scores
- Hispanic: Portfolio
- Asian: extracurricular, essay
- Males interview
- Female: extracurriculars, essay

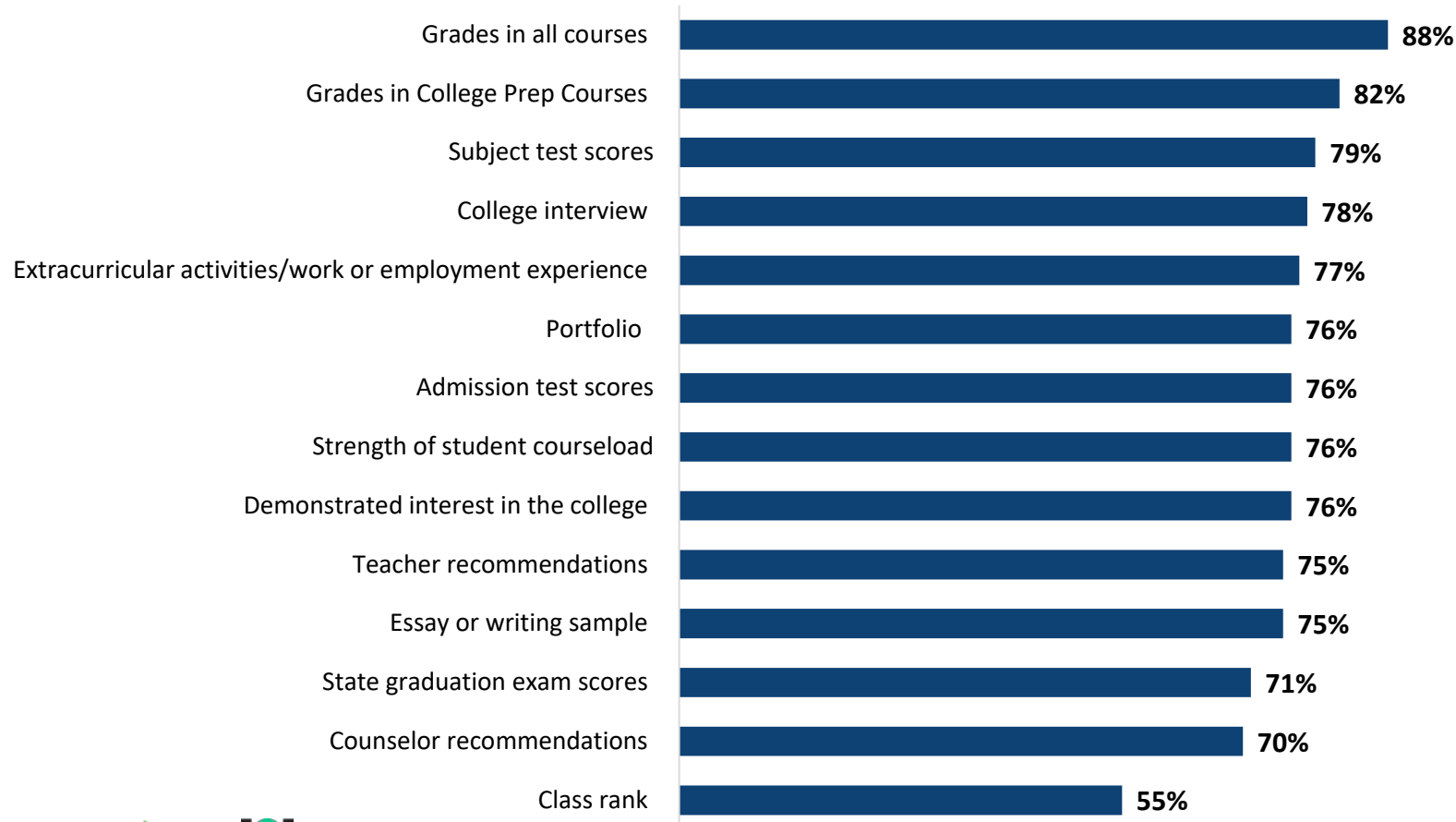


# Similarly, these items rise to the top of what young adults think should be important in admission decisions

Those with an IEP or accommodations are more likely to point to various aspects of decision making, outside of grades, that they feel should be important.

## How Important Aspects *Should* Be When Making Decisions

*% Very/ Somewhat important (Net)*



### Significant Differences by Key Subgroups

Aspects more commonly expected to matter most by key groups:

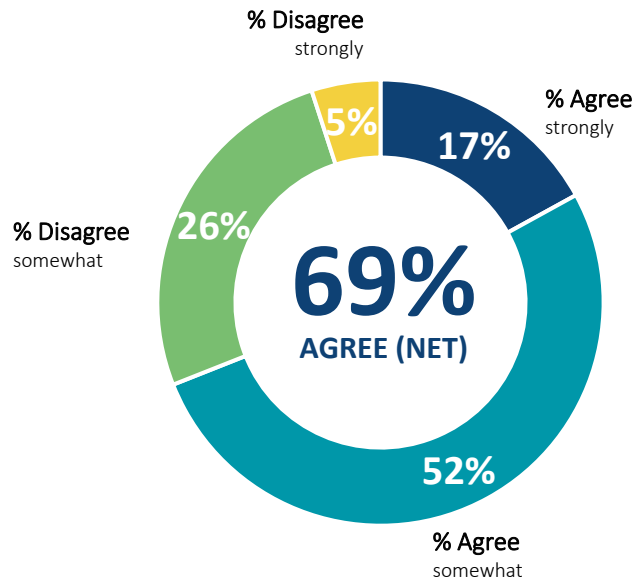
- Hispanic: state grad exam
- Black: subject test scores, state grad exam
- Asian: strength of courseload, essay
- Have (had) an IEP: interview, recommendation, demonstrated interest, essay



# Nearly seven in 10 believe there is misalignment between prospective student priorities and ultimate college success vs. administrative priorities

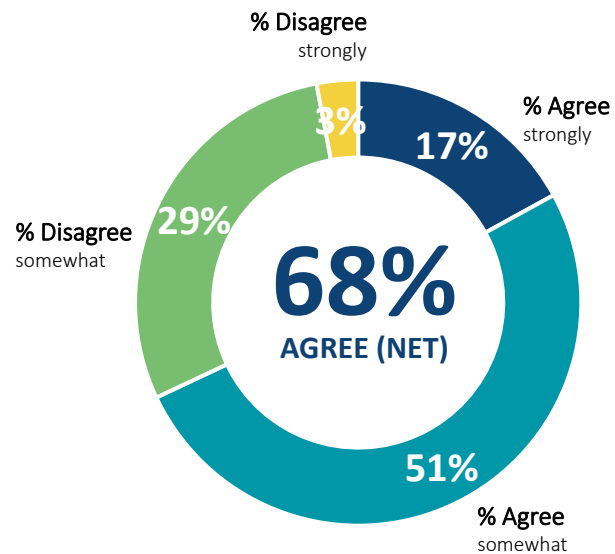
“The things that prospective students believe are the most important in the admission process do not align with what college administrators are focused on during admissions.”

*% Strongly/Somewhat Agree (Net)*



“The things that are more important to success in college do not align with what college administrators are focused on during admissions.”

*% Strongly/Somewhat Agree (Net)*



## Significant Differences by Key Subgroups

More likely to believe things important to prospective students do not align with college admins:

- Female (72% vs. 63% male)



# While many see the value of test-free admission options, there is some skepticism

Certain groups are more likely to be skeptical of such options compared to their counterparts.

**“Test optional or test-free admissions ‘levels the playing field’ for students of different backgrounds.”**

*% Strongly/Somewhat agree (Net)*



**75%**

*26% Strongly, 50% Somewhat*

But...

**“Schools that offer test optional or test-free admissions are not as good as schools that require test scores for their admissions.”**

*% Strongly/Somewhat agree (Net)*



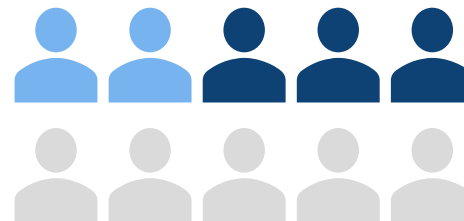
**45%**

*10% Strongly, 36% Somewhat*

And...

**“I would be skeptical if a college said it does not require test scores to apply.”**

*% Strongly/Somewhat agree (Net)*



**52%**

*17% Strongly  
35% Somewhat*

## Significant Differences by Key Subgroups

**More likely to believe test optional levels the playing field:**

- Have an IEP (81% vs. 67% could have been eligible)

**More likely to feel test optional schools are not as good:**

- Male (53% vs. 40% female)
- Urban (55% vs. 42% suburban and 39% rural)

**More likely to be skeptical of colleges that do not require test scores**

- Black (59% vs. 48% White)
- Male (57% vs. 49% female)

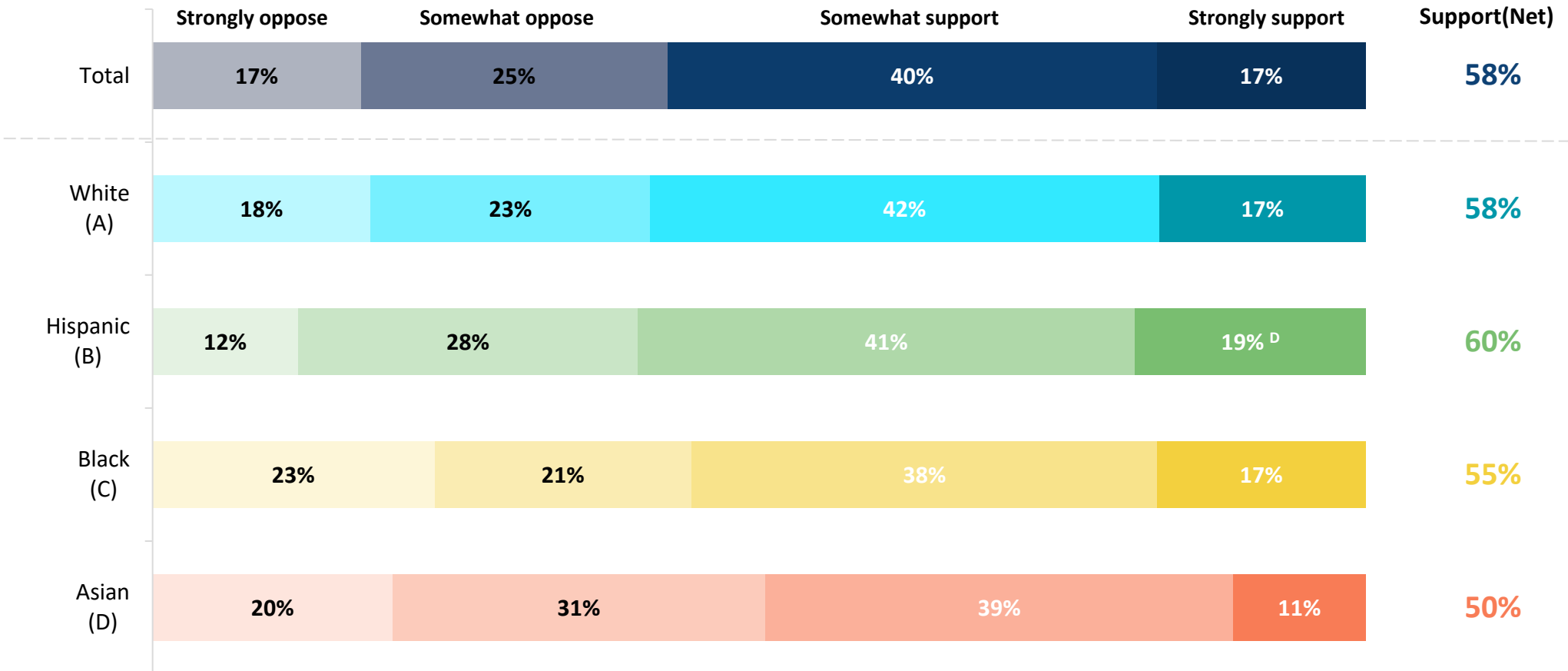




# Nearly three in five young adults support race-conscious admission practices

Hispanic young adults are more likely than Asian to *strongly* support these practices.

### Support/Oppose Race-conscious Admission Practices



# Math Requirements

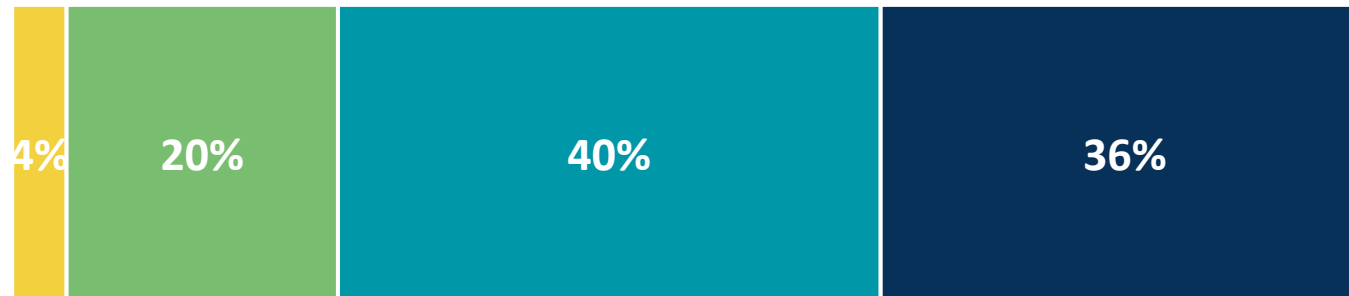
# Over three-quarters feel it is unfair to prioritize courses not offered in many high schools when making admission decisions

Women are more likely to find such prioritization unjust.

**“When making admission decisions, it is unfair for colleges to prioritize courses that are not offered in many high schools.”**

*% Strongly/Somewhat agree (Net)*

76%



% Disagree strongly

% Disagree somewhat

% Agree somewhat

% Agree strongly

## Significant Differences by Key Subgroups

More likely to feel it is unfair to prioritize courses not offered in many high schools:

- Female (80% vs. 71% male)



# Nearly three-quarters say Calculus was offered at their school, but fewer were recommended to take it

	Math Courses Offered in High School	Math Classes Recommended by HS Counselor	Math Classes Personally Taken
Calculus	74%	43%	45%
Trigonometry	56%	25%	32%
Computer Science	51%	21%	23%
Advanced Statistics	43%	18%	16%
Data Science	17%	9%	5%
Other	14%	4%	21%
None	4%	25%	12%
Not at all sure	6%	6%	

## Significant Differences by Key Subgroups

### More likely to have experience with Calculus:

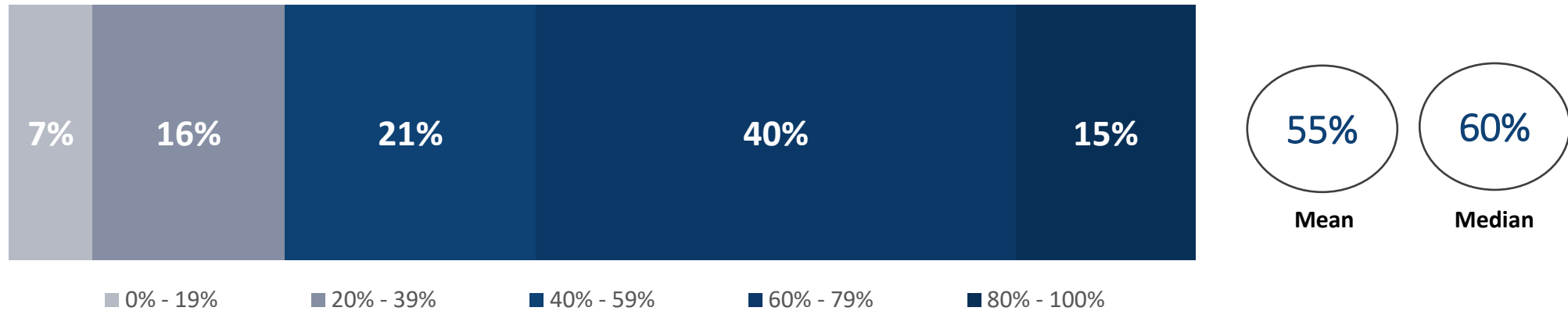
- Available at school: White (79% vs. 69% Hispanic, 68% Black)
- Recommended by HS counselor: Asian (54% vs. 42% White, 36% Black)
- Personally taken: Asian (57% vs. 42% Hispanic, 39% Black)



# College Selectivity

# Young adults estimate the average acceptance rate at a four-year college is 55%

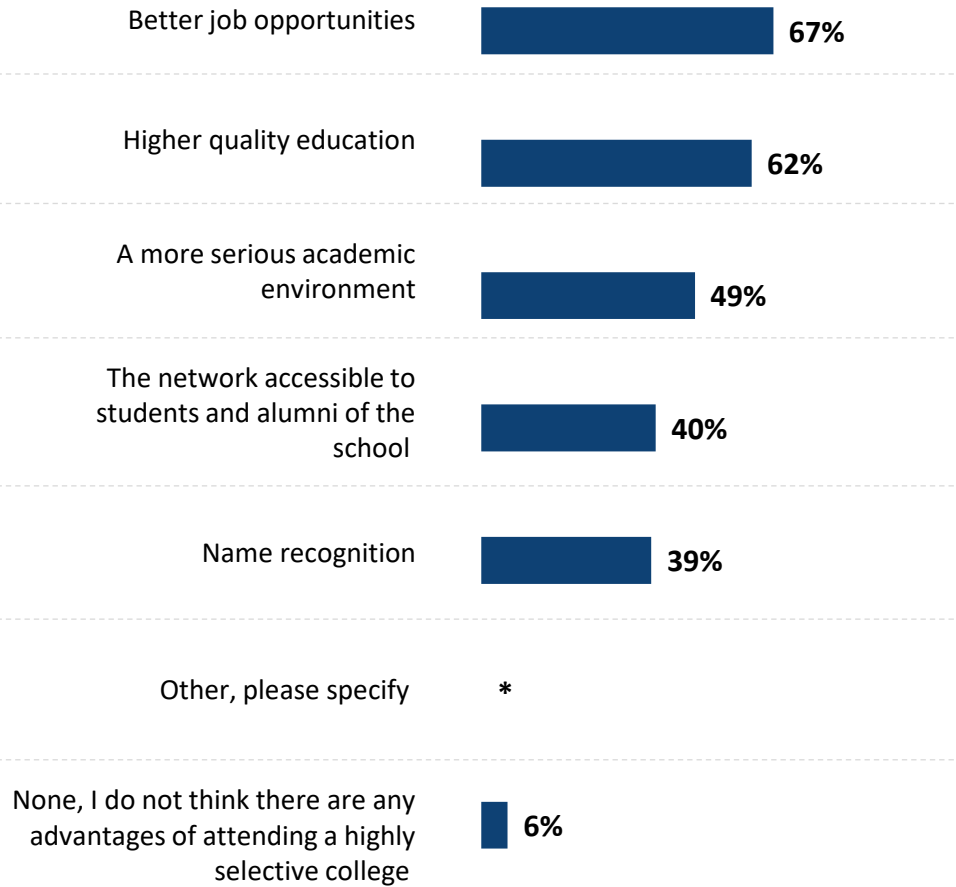
Average Acceptance Rate at a Four-year College



# Half feel the more selective the college, the better the school

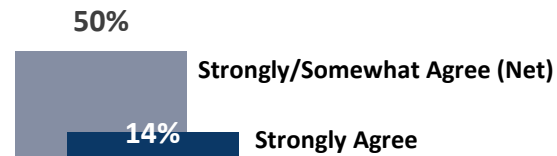
Most common advantages are viewed as better job opportunities or higher quality education.

## Advantages of Attending Highly Selective College



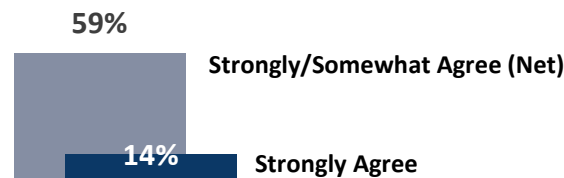
**“The more selective the college is during admissions, the better the school is.”**

*% Strongly/Somewhat Agree (Net)*



**“The pros of attending a highly selective college outweigh the cons.”**

*% Strongly/Somewhat Agree (Net)*



## Significant Differences by Key Subgroups

**More likely to believe the more selective, the better:**

- Hispanic and Asian (61% and 60% vs. 43% White)
- Urban (57% vs. 47% suburban, 45% rural)

**More likely to believe the pros outweigh the cons:**

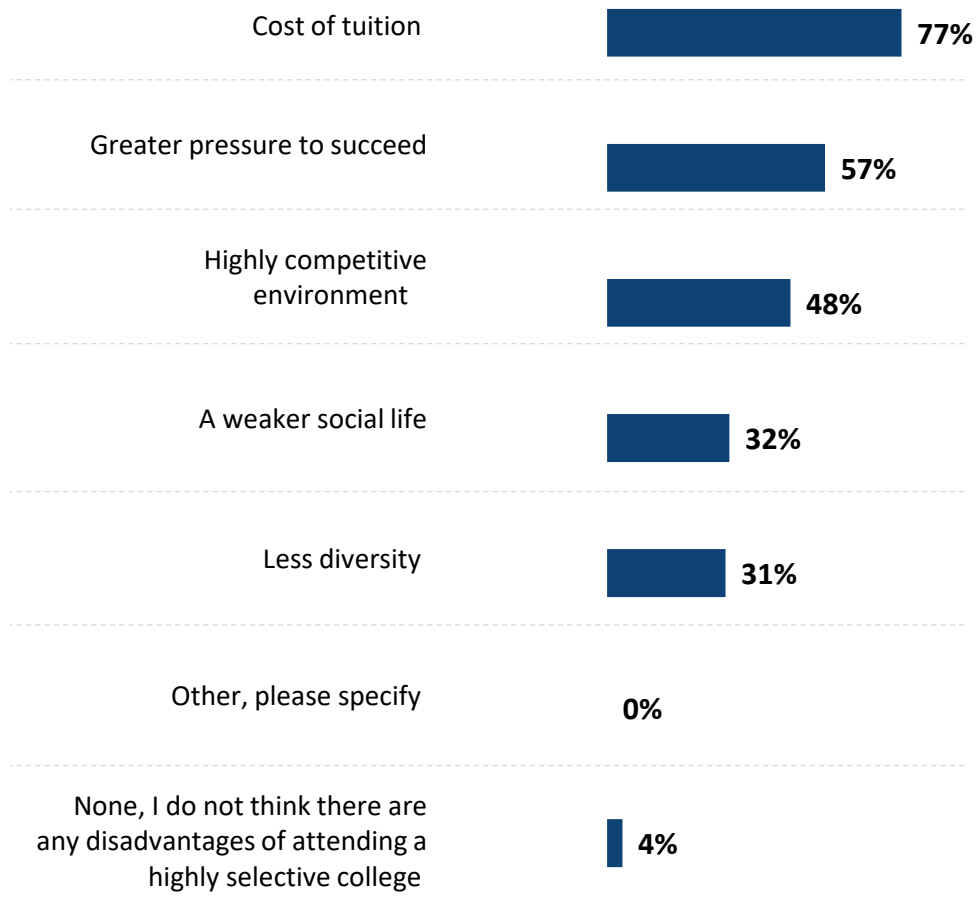
- Black (65% vs. 55% White)



# About three-quarters acknowledge attending a highly selective college is not accessible for most potential students

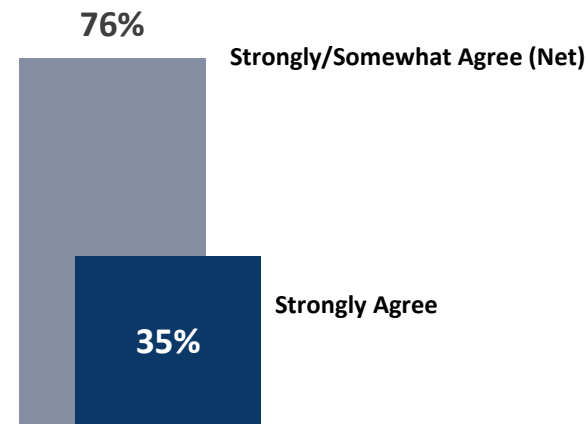
Cost and greater pressure to succeed are common disadvantages of attending such schools

## Disadvantages of Attending Highly Selective College



**“Attending a highly selective college is not accessible for most potential students.”**

*TOTAL % Strongly/Somewhat Agree (Net)*



### Significant Differences by Key Subgroups

More likely to acknowledge attending a highly selective college is not accessible for most:

- Female (79% vs. 71% male)





# Race/Ethnicity Mini Stories



# White Young Adults

***Despite having greater uncertainty in the best education path for their futures, White young adults appear to have strong support systems and availability of math courses specifically during high school. Perhaps related, they are less likely than people of color to experience great stress during the application process.***

- White young adults are more likely than their Asian peers to be uncertain of the best next step in their education (53% vs. 43%).
- White young adults are more likely to indicate their high school offered various math courses, including Calculus (79% vs. 69% Hispanic, 68% Black).
- When applying to college, they are more likely than their peers to have relied on their parents for assistance (80% vs. 64% Hispanic, 64% Black, and 64% Asian).
  - They are *less* likely than their peers to wish they had more support when applying (52% vs. 64% Hispanic and 69% Black).
- They are also *less* likely to describe completing their application as more stressful than anything else they have done academically (42% vs. 61% Hispanic, 60% Black, 63% Asian).
- White young adults were *less* likely to skip applying to dream schools because they did not feel they would get in (51% vs. 64% Hispanic and 73% Asian).

***When considering the college admission decisions, White young adults are more likely to feel merit is hard to define and point to key aspects as most important to colleges. White young adults recommend streamlined processes and limited fees as improvements to the overall process.***

- White young adults are more likely to believe merit is hard to define (vs. easy) (73% vs. 62% Black).
- When considering what application aspects matter the most to colleges, they are more likely to believe admission test scores (61% vs. 49% Hispanic), grades in all courses (59% vs. 48% Black), and extracurricular activities (38% vs. 23% Black) are important.
- When thinking about what would make the application process easier, White young adults are more likely to point to a more streamlined process (42% vs. 25% Black) or no/limited fees (40% vs. 28% Hispanic, 25% Black).

# Hispanic Young Adults

***Hispanic young adults acknowledge the importance of college applications, along with the stress, and often wish for greater support.***

- Hispanic young adults are more likely to feel like completing college applications is such a decisive moment in their life (82% vs. 71% White).
- They are also more likely to say completing their application has been more stressful than anything else they have done academically (61% vs. 42% White) and that they have been overwhelmed by the advice they have been given related to applying to college (68% vs. 52% Black).
- Hispanic young adults are more likely than their White peers to wish they had greater support in completing their applications (64% vs. 52%).

***While many Hispanic young adults understand the importance of each step in the admission process, they are still more likely to recommend various improvements and perspective on what they feel should be most important when colleges are making these decisions.***

- Hispanic young adults are more likely to say they understand why each step of the college admission process is important (77% vs. 66% White).
- Thinking of what would make the application process easier, they are more likely to point to a simpler FAFSA (52% vs. 38% Black), a more personalized approach based on student goals (42% vs. 30% White), or direct admission (39% vs. 27% White).
  - When providing their perspective on what *should* be important to colleges during admin decisions, Hispanic young adults are more likely to say counselor recommendations (77% vs. 66% White and 66% Asian).

**Highly selective colleges are often viewed as “better” by Hispanic young adults, yet many of this cohort say they didn’t apply to some of their “dream schools” because they knew they wouldn’t get in.**

- Nearly all Hispanic young adults see many advantages of attending a highly selective college (98% vs. 92% White, 93% Black) and are more likely to feel the more selective a college is during admins the better it is (61% vs. 43% White)
- Hispanic young adults are more likely to admit they didn’t even try applying to some of their “dream colleges” because they knew they wouldn’t get in (64% vs. 51% White).

# Black Young Adults

***Black young adults cite high levels of stress in applying to college and wish for greater support.***

- Three in five say completing their application was more stressful than anything else they have done academically (60% vs. 42% White).
- Black young adults are more likely than their White peers to wish they had greater support in completing their applications (69% vs. 52%).

***Black young adults often believe that academics should be of sole importance in college admission decisions and wonder if admission offices are always putting students' needs first.***

- Black young adults are more likely than their peers to say academic performance should be the only thing that matters when applying to college (68% vs. 56% White, 56% Hispanic, and 49% Asian).
- When colleges are making admission decisions, Black young adults are more likely to feel subject test scores (84% vs. 74% Asian), state graduate exam scores (79% vs. 69% White, 64% Asian), counselor recommendations (79% vs. 66% White and 66% Asian), and class rank (67% vs. 48% White) are viewed as most important.
- Yet, Black young adults are also more likely to wonder if admission offices are putting the student's needs first (75% vs. 60% White).

# Asian Young Adults

***Asian young adults appear to have a clear picture of their future careers and cite the importance of their college applications. However, they are also commonly experiencing stress and pressure regarding their decisions. Some even go as far as saying they have forgone applying to their “dream schools” under the assumption they would not get in.***

- Asian young adults are more likely than their White peers to have a clear vision of where they want their career to go (79% vs. 70%).
- They are more likely to view completing college applications as a decisive moment in their lives (85% vs. 71% White).
- However, they are more likely than their Black peers to have been overwhelmed by the advice they have been given related to applying to college (66% vs. 52%).
- Asian young adults are also more likely to have felt pressure to apply to a large number of schools (59% vs. 49% White and 48% Black) or to apply to specific colleges they were not interested in (59% vs. 45% White).
- They say completing their application has been more stressful than anything else they have done academically (63% vs. 42% White vs. 61% Hispanic, 60% Black).
- Nearly three-quarters of Asian young adults say they didn’t even try applying to some of their “dream colleges” because they knew they wouldn’t get in (73% vs. 51% White).

***Asian young adults are often left feeling like a number during the application process and wondering if the admission office is really putting students first. They also offer possible solutions to create an easier admission process.***

- Asian young adults are far more likely than their peers to have felt like a number during the application process (81% vs. 63% White, 61% Hispanic, and 66% Black).
- They often wonder if admin offices are putting the student’s needs first (73% vs. 60% White).
- Thinking of what would make the application process easier, Asian young adults are more likely to point to a more streamlined process (45% vs. 25% Black), a more personalized approach based on student goals (44% vs. 30% White), direct admission (42% vs. 27% white), or no/limited fees (39% vs. 25% Black).

# Asian Young Adults (cont.)

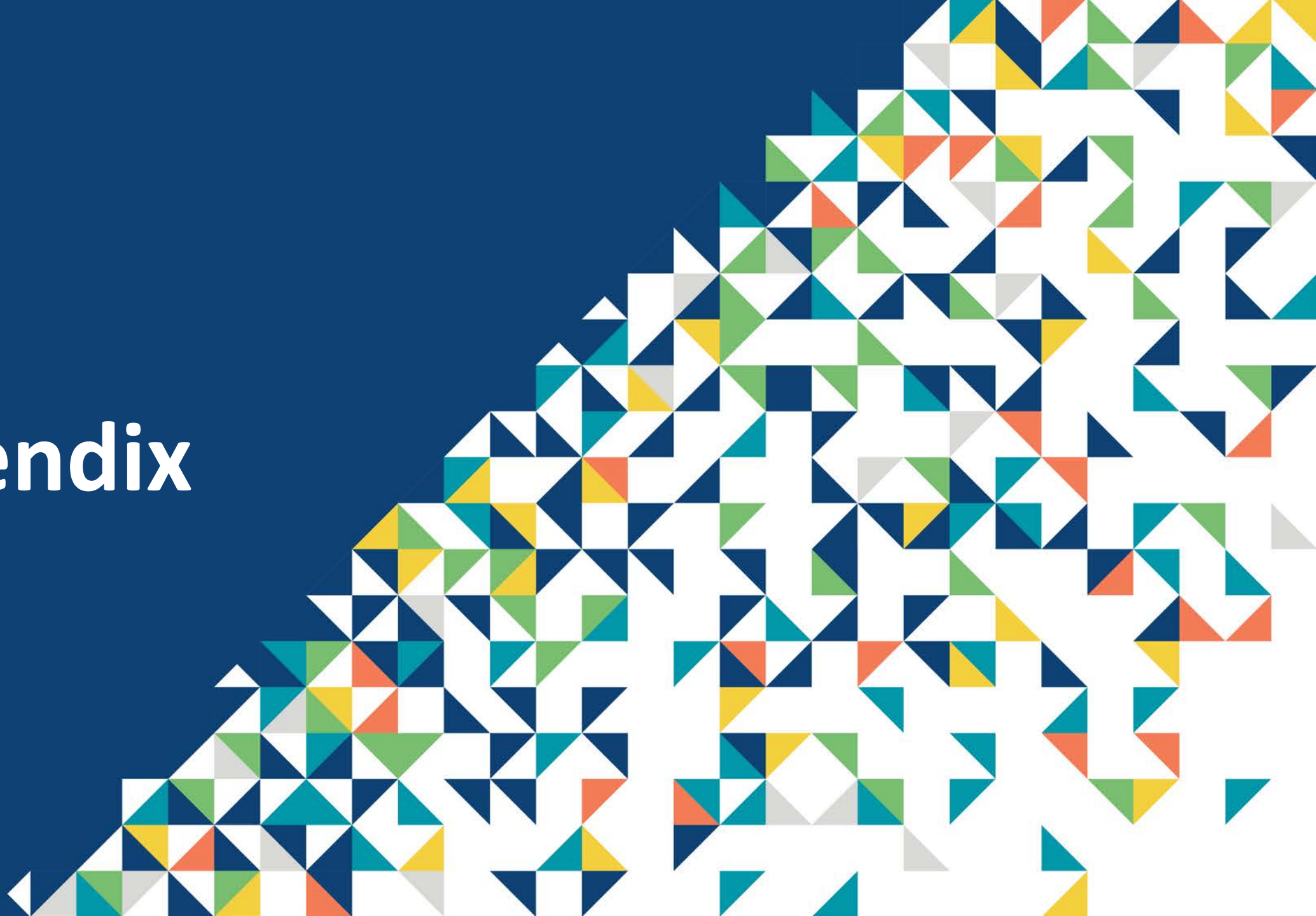
***Highly selective colleges are often viewed more positively among Asian young adults, though some concerns regarding the pressure to succeed and level of competition are evident.***

- Three in five Asian young adults agree the more selective a college is during admission process the better it is (60% vs. 43% White).
- They view name recognition as an advantage of attending a highly selective college (51% vs. 37% White, 36% Black).
  - However, Asian young adults are also more likely to see disadvantages of such colleges, including greater pressure to succeed (60% vs. 46% Black), or competitive environment (54% vs. 42% Hispanic, 41% Black).

***High school Calculus appears to be recommended more often to Asian young adults, with more than half heeding the recommendation.***

- Asian young adults are more likely than their peers to have multiple math courses offered at their high school and were more likely than their peers to have their high school counselor recommend taking Calculus (54% vs. 42% White, 36% Black)
  - More than half took Calculus (57% vs. 42% Hispanic and 39% Black).

# Appendix



# Methods (cont.)

The research was conducted online in the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of the National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC). The survey was conducted among 1,010 U.S. residents between the ages of 16-22 from February 17 to March 9, 2023.

Data is statistically weighted separately by race/ethnicity and, where necessary, by age, gender, region, education, and household size to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population as determined from U.S. Census information.

Respondents for this survey were selected from among those who have agreed to participate in our surveys. Importantly, all sample surveys and polls, whether or not they use probability (random) sampling, are subject to multiple sources of error which are most often not possible to quantify or estimate, including, but not limited to, coverage error, error associated with nonresponse, error associated with question wording and response options, and post-survey weighting and adjustments.

The sampling precision of Harris online polls is measured by using a Bayesian credible interval. For this study, the sample data is accurate to within  $\pm 4.0$  percentage points using a 95% confidence level. This credible interval will be wider among subsets of the surveyed population of interest.

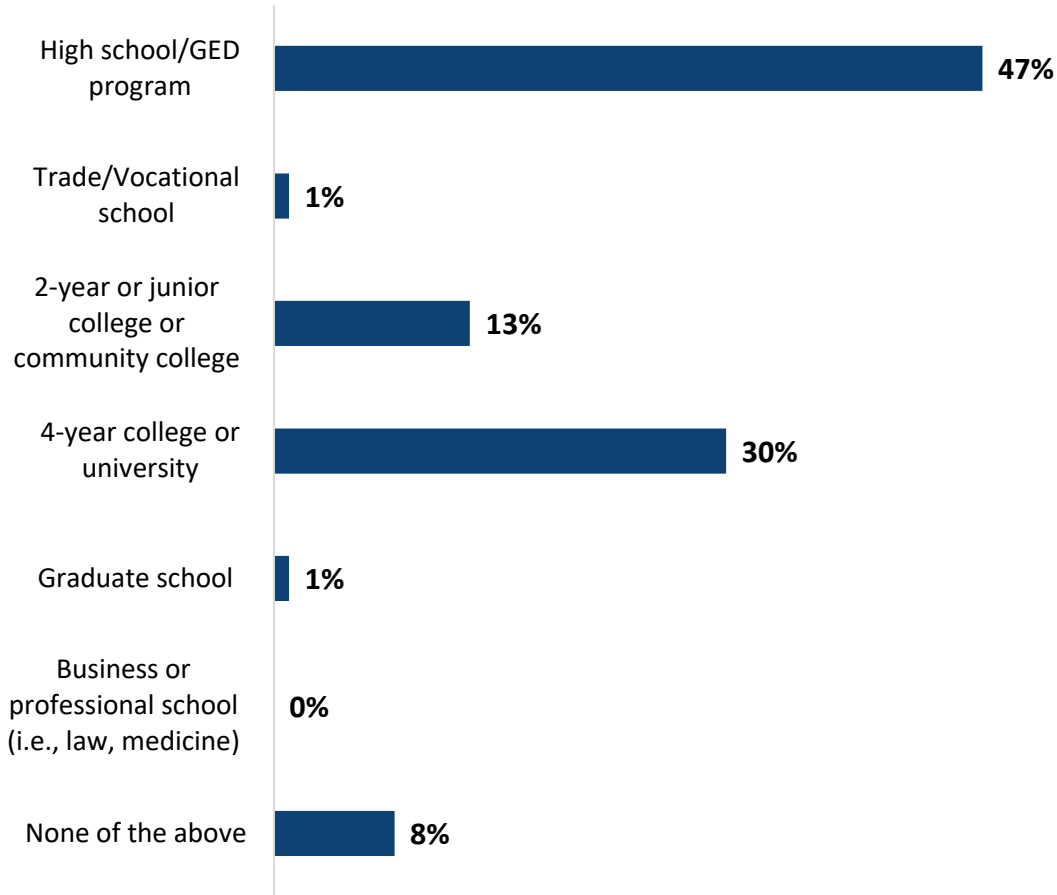


# Demographics

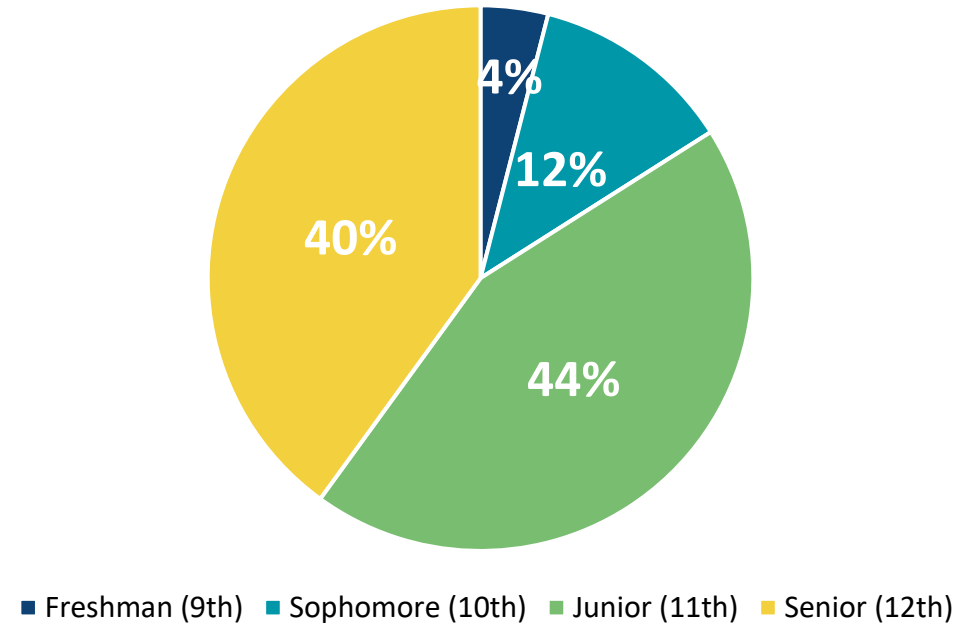


# Student Details

## Where Currently Enrolled/Taking Courses *(among students)*



## Current Grade in High School *(among HS students)*



# Family and Education Background



Did your parents go to college?	Total	White (A)	Hispanic (B)	Black (C)	Asian (D)
Yes, one	25%	23%	28%	30% <sup>D</sup>	19%
Yes, both	38%	43% <sup>BC</sup>	28%	31%	52% <sup>BC</sup>
No	31%	29%	37% <sup>D</sup>	31%	22%



Older sibling(s) go(ing) to college?	Total	White (A)	Hispanic (B)	Black (C)	Asian (D)
Yes	43%	43%	42%	46%	42%
No	57%	57%	58%	54%	58%



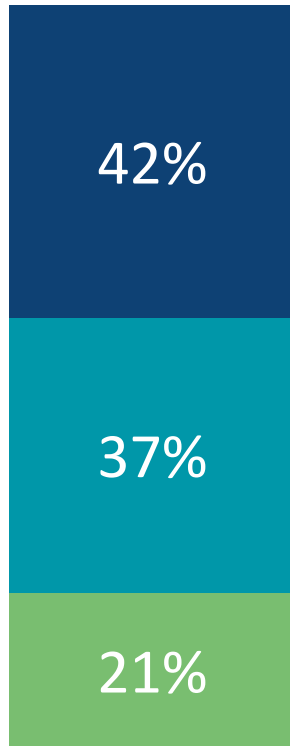
IEP or disability accommodations?	Total	White (A)	Hispanic (B)	Black (C)	Asian (D)
Yes	16%	20% <sup>D</sup>	13% <sup>D</sup>	16% <sup>D</sup>	5%
No, but I could've been eligible	12%	11%	13%	12%	6%
No	67%	63%	70%	68%	84% <sup>ABC</sup>

# College Application Experience and Intentions

**College Application Experience**  
*(among those who have not attended college)*

Status of applying to college:

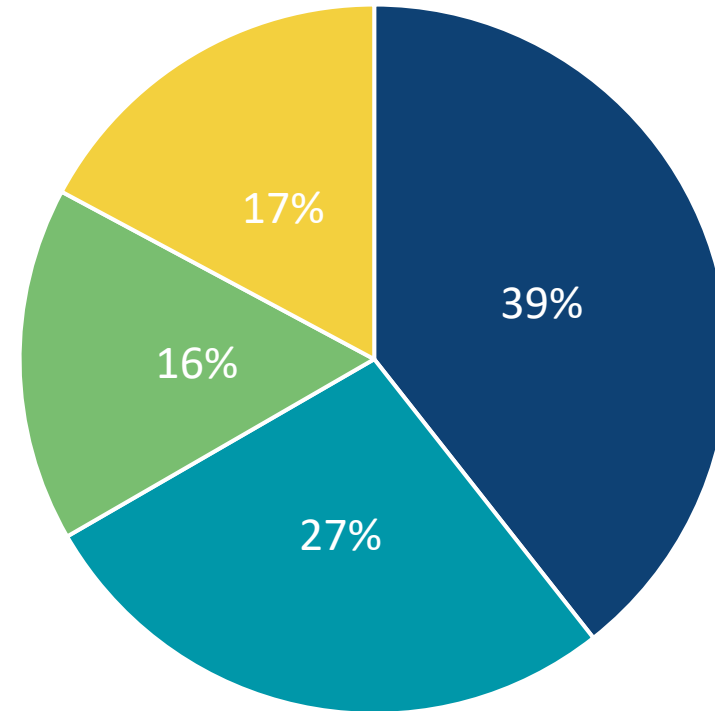
- Plan to
- Currently doing so
- Do not plan to



**Progress in Applying**  
*(among those currently applying)*

Status of application:

- Started, but have not submitted
- Submitted, but have not heard back from all colleges
- Submitted, heard back from all colleges
- Heard back from colleges, committed to one



# Demographics

## Age



	Total	White (A)	Hispanic (B)	Black (C)	Asian (D)
16-17	30%	32%	27%	31%	27%
18-19	27%	25%	29%	25%	25%
20-22	42%	43%	43%	43%	48%

## Education



	Total	White (A)	Hispanic (B)	Black (C)	Asian (D)
Less than high school	8%	12% <sup>BC</sup>	4%	4%	7%
Completed some high school	31%	30%	27%	37%	27%
High school graduate	30%	26%	40% <sup>AD</sup>	35%	26%
Job-specific training program(s) after high school	1%	2%	-	1%	1%
Some college, but no degree	21%	22%	20%	15%	26% <sup>C</sup>
Associate degree	5%	6%	5%	4%	6%
Bachelor's degree (such as B.A., B.S.)	3%	3%	3%	2%	7% <sup>AC</sup>
Some graduate school, but no degree	-	-	-	-	1%
Graduate degree (such as MBA, MS, M.D., Ph.D.)	-	-	-	1%	-

## Gender



	Total	White (A)	Hispanic (B)	Black (C)	Asian (D)
Male	47%	47%	46%	48%	51%
Female	48%	47%	50%	52%	48%
Non-binary or Gender Non-conforming	4%	5% <sup>D</sup>	5%	-	1%
Prefer not to answer	-	1%	-	-	-

# Demographics (con't)

## Region



	Total	White (A)	Hispanic (B)	Black (C)	Asian (D)
Northeast	17%	18%	13%	16%	24% <sup>B</sup>
Midwest	21%	29% <sup>BCD</sup>	10%	17%	16%
South	38%	35% <sup>D</sup>	39% <sup>D</sup>	59% <sup>ABD</sup>	20%
West	24%	18% <sup>C</sup>	38% <sup>AC</sup>	8%	41% <sup>AC</sup>

## Marital Status



	Total	White (A)	Hispanic (B)	Black (C)	Asian (D)
Married/ Living with partner	15%	16% <sup>D</sup>	14% <sup>D</sup>	14% <sup>D</sup>	5%
Never married	83%	83%	80%	84%	91% <sup>AB</sup>
Divorced/ Separated/ Widowed	3%	1%	6% <sup>A</sup>	1%	4% <sup>A</sup>

## HH Income



	Total	White (A)	Hispanic (B)	African American / Black (C)	Asian (D)
Less than \$15,000	13%	12%	14%	21% <sup>AD</sup>	10%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	9%	9%	8%	12%	10%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	11%	11%	10%	11%	13%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	13%	14%	14%	11%	9%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	15%	12%	18%	18%	15%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	13%	11%	14%	10%	14%
\$100K to \$124,999	11%	15% <sup>BC</sup>	8%	6%	9%
\$125K to \$149,999	6%	8% <sup>C</sup>	5%	3%	5%
\$150K to \$199,999	4%	4%	7%	3%	5%
\$200K to \$249,999	2%	3%	-	1%	4%
\$250,000 or more	2%	1%	3%	5% <sup>A</sup>	5% <sup>A</sup>
Decline to answer	-	-	-	-	-



# Demographics (con't)

## Household Size



	Total	White (A)	Hispanic (B)	Black (C)	Asian (D)
1-2 people	19%	20%	18%	22% <sup>D</sup>	14%
3-4 people	50%	53%	45%	47%	55% <sup>B</sup>
5+ people	31%	28%	38%	31%	31%

## Race



White	51%
Hispanic	25%
African American / Black	14%
Asian	5%

## Employment



	Total	White (A)	Hispanic (B)	Black (C)	Asian (D)
Employed full time	16%	14%	19% <sup>D</sup>	19% <sup>D</sup>	10%
Employed part time	27%	27%	34% <sup>C</sup>	21%	23%
Self-employed full time	2%	1%	3%	3%	2%
Self-employed part time	3%	2%	4% <sup>D</sup>	6% <sup>D</sup>	1%
Not employed, but looking for work	11%	12%	6%	12%	9%
Not employed and not looking for work	1%	1%	1%	2%	2%
Not employed, unable to work due to a disability or illness	1%	1%	-	1%	-
Retired	-	-	-	-	-
Student	50%	53%	42%	47%	65% <sup>ABC</sup>
Stay-at-home spouse or partner	2%	2%	1%	2%	1%

