



Contact: Jeanne Krier, Publicist for The Princeton Review, pressoffice@review.com

About the Survey

Now in its 22nd year, the [College Hopes & Worries Survey](#) was developed by [The Princeton Review](#) in 2003 to report insights into the perspectives of college applicants and their parents navigating the process of applying to colleges. The company conducts the survey online from January to February and reports the findings in March. More than 226,000 respondents have participated in the survey since its inception. Each year about 70-80% of the respondents have been students applying to colleges: 20-30% have been parents of applicants.

The survey has 20 questions, most of which are asked annually. Respondents are asked about the number of colleges to which the student is applying, their estimates of college costs and need of financial aid, what will matter most in their choice of the college they (their child) will attend, and more. Each year's survey also includes questions inviting their opinions on trending topics. Nearly all the questions have multiple-choice answers. One question invites a fill-in-the-blank answer. It asks *"What would be your (your child's) 'dream' college? What college would you most like to attend (or see your child attend) if chance of being accepted or cost were not an issue?"*

The survey is promoted among users of college-related resources of The Princeton Review as well as via the company's social media channels. It is also published in the company's annual [Best Colleges](#) guidebook. A survey sweepstakes prize of \$3,500 is awarded to one survey participant selected at random.

A report on the 2024 survey questions, answer choices, and findings follows. A report on the survey findings from 2003 to 2024 is available on request from Jeanne Krier, Publicist for The Princeton Review, pressoffice@review.com.

Reporter Resources

A release on the findings, an infographic depicting key findings, and samplers of surveyed students' and parents' advice for next year's applicants and parents are downloadable at the College Hopes & Worries Survey hub at <https://www.princetonreview.com/college-rankings/college-hopes-worries>

[Rob Franek](#), Editor-in-Chief of The Princeton Review, is available for interviews on the survey. A former college admissions administrator, he is author of four books including The Princeton Review's annual [Best Colleges](#) guidebook and *College Admissions 101*.

About The Princeton Review

[The Princeton Review](#) is a leading tutoring, test prep, and college admissions services company. Every year, it helps millions of college- and graduate school-bound students as well as working professionals achieve their education and career goals through its education services and products. These include online and in-person courses delivered by a network of more than 4,000 teachers and tutors; online resources; a [line](#) of more than 150 print and digital books published by Penguin Random House; and dozens of categories of school rankings. The company's [Tutor.com](#) brand, now in its 23rd year, is one of the largest online tutoring services in the US. It comprises a community of thousands of tutors who have delivered more than 25 million one-to-one tutoring sessions. The Princeton Review, headquartered in New York, NY, is not affiliated with Princeton University. For more information, visit PrincetonReview.com and the company's [Media Center](#). Follow the company on X (formerly Twitter) ([@ThePrincetonRev](https://twitter.com/ThePrincetonRev)) and Instagram ([@theprincetonreview](https://www.instagram.com/theprincetonreview)).

2024 Survey Findings

The 2024 survey was conducted from January 15 to February 20. Of the 10,867 respondents, 73% (7,935) were students applying to colleges and 27% (2,932) were parents of applicants. Respondents hailed from all 50 states and DC as well as from many countries abroad.

The questions and answer choices are below. To the left of each answer choice is the percentage of respondents overall (students plus parents) choosing the answer. To the right is the percentage of students and the percentage of parents choosing the answer. Answers chosen by the highest percentage of respondents overall are underlined as are answers chosen by the highest percentage of student respondents, and the highest percentage of parent respondents (the latter two of which sometimes differ).

1) What would be your "dream" college? What college would you most like to attend (or see your child attend) if chance of being accepted or cost were not an issue?"

To this, the survey's only question inviting a fill-in-the-blank answer, respondents entered in the names of several hundred colleges and universities as their "dream" colleges. Among them were flagship state universities, community colleges, technology and nursing schools and private universities including all of the Ivies. Some schools were named by hundreds of respondents. Some by just one.

The Princeton Review tallies two top 10 lists of the "dream" colleges in rank order. One reports the schools named by the highest number of student respondents. The other shows the schools named by the highest number of parent respondents.

The 10 schools most named by students as their "dream" college were:

1/ Harvard College (MA), 2/ Massachusetts Inst. of Technology, 3/ Princeton Univ. (NJ), 4/ Stanford Univ. (CA), 5/ Univ. of Michigan, 5/ Yale Univ (CT), 7/ Univ. of Texas--Austin, 8/ Columbia Univ. (NY), 9/ New York Univ., 10/ Brown Univ. (RI).

The 10 schools most named by parents as their "dream" college for their child were:

1/ Massachusetts Inst. of Technology, 2/ Princeton Univ. (NJ), 3/ Harvard College (MA), 4/ Stanford Univ. (CA), 5/ Duke Univ. (NC), 6/ Univ. of Michigan, 7/ Yale Univ. (CT), 8/ New York Univ., 9/ Cornell Univ. (NY), 10/ Brown Univ. (RI).

In 2023, #1 school on the students "dream" colleges list was the Massachusetts Inst. of Technology and the #1 school on the parents "dream" college list was Princeton Univ.

2) How many colleges will you (your child) apply to?

23% 1 to 4 (24% Students, 18% Parents)
37% 5 to 8 (35% Students, 42% Parents)
25% 9 to 12 (25% Students, 27% Parents)
15% 13 or more (16% Students, 13% Parents)
Combined: 40% applying to 9 or more.

The answer "5 to 8," chosen by the plurality (37%) of respondents, has been chosen by the plurality of respondents since 2007 when the question was added to the survey 17 years ago.

However, the answer "13 or more," chosen by 15% of respondents was chosen by only 5% of respondents in 2007.

3) Which of the following do you think will be the most important part of your (your child's) college application?

02% Class rank (02% Students, 02% Parents)
53% High school transcript, grades, and GPA (51% Students, 56% Parents)
13% SAT® / ACT® scores (11% Students, 18% Parents)
14% Extracurriculars (17% Students, 09% Parents)
16% Essay (17% Students, 13% Parents)
02% Recommendations (02% Students, 02% Parents)

While the majority (53%) of respondents chose the answer "High school transcript, grades, and GPA," more parents (56%) than students (51%) chose it. Similarly, more parents (18%) than students (11%) chose the answer "SAT/ACT scores," while more students (17%) than parents (9%) chose the answer "Extracurriculars."

In 2020, when this question was added to the survey, 45% of respondents chose "High school transcript, grades, and GPA" (8% fewer than the 53% who chose it in 2024), while 22% chose "SAT / ACT scores" (9% more than the 13% who chose it in 2024).

4) Which of the following will be the toughest part of your (your child's) college application?

10% Researching colleges (09% Students, 11% Parents)
32% Taking SAT, ACT, or AP® exams (30% Students, 36% Parents)
31% Completing admission and financial aid applications (33% Students, 27% Parents)
27% Waiting for college acceptance letters and choosing which college to attend (28% Students, 26% Parents)

The answer "Taking SAT, ACT or AP® exams," chosen by the plurality (32%) of respondents, has been the answer chosen by the plurality of respondents for 18 of the past 22 years.

Nearly as many respondents (31%) chose "Completing applications for admission and financial aid." In 2010, 2013 and 2018, it was the answer the plurality of respondents chose.

5) Which college admission exam(s) have you (has your child) taken or plan to take?

14% ACT (15% Students, 12% Parents)
49% SAT (47% Students, 54% Parents)
29% Both tests (29% Students, 29% Parents)
Combined: 92% taking one or both tests.
08% Neither test (09% Students, 05% Parents)

The plurality (49%) of respondents chose the answer "SAT"; 14% chose "ACT", and 29% chose "Both tests." Overall, 92% indicated they were (their child was) taking or planning to take one or both tests. Only 8% were not planning to take either test.

6) Many colleges have gone test-optional (i.e., no longer require SAT or ACT scores), while some still require these scores, and others may return to requiring them. Which of the following characterizes your perspective on the test-optional movement?

69% Admission test policies don't affect my (my child's) decisions (69% Students, 70% Parents)
21% More likely to apply to a test-optional college (22% Students, 20% Parents)
10% Less likely to apply to a test-optional college (09% Students, 10% Parents)

Though 2,000 colleges and universities were test-optional for fall 2024 according to Fairtest.org, the majority (69%) of respondents said test-optional policies were not affecting their decisions about applying to the schools.

7) As only a low percentage are “test blind” (i.e., won’t consider SAT or ACT scores), are you (your child) still planning to take the SAT or ACT? If so, what is the key reason? (Note: if you aren’t (your child isn’t) planning to take either test, skip this question.)

36% Test scores are considered in scholarship and financial aid award decisions.
(38% Students, 31% Parents)

42% Test scores can distinguish applications and improve their chances of being accepted.
(43% Students, 41% Parents)

22% Having test scores on hand will help should they be important for an application.
(19% Students, 28% Parents)

Among respondents indicating they (their child) are (is) taking or planning to take the SAT or ACT, the plurality (42%) said the main reason for doing so was to distinguish the student’s applications and improve their chances of being accepted to the schools.

8) The SAT became the Digital SAT, a computer adaptive test, in spring 2023 at international test centers. In U.S. test centers, the first administration of the test will be in March 2024. What is your opinion of this big change in the SAT? (For info on the Digital SAT, click here.)

50% I think the Digital SAT be a better test. (49% Students, 53% Parents)

25% I think the Digital SAT may be a more difficult test. (24% Students, 27% Parents)

15% I (my child) will likely take the paper-and-pencil ACT instead. (17% Students, 12% Parents)

10% I (my child) will likely not take either the SAT or ACT. (10% Students, 08% Parents)

The plurality (50%) of respondents said they think the Digital SAT will be a better test. (This is an increase of 8% from the plurality (42%) of respondents so indicating on the 2023 survey.) More parents (53%) than students (49%) held this opinion. However, 25% of respondents said they think the Digital SAT will be a more difficult test. (This is the same percentage so indicating on the 2023 survey.)

Just 15% of respondents said they (their child) will take the paper and pencil ACT instead. (Significantly more respondents (24%) chose this answer in the 2023 survey.) Only 10% said they would likely not take either test.

9) What do you estimate your (or your child's) college degree will cost, including four years of tuition, room & board, fees, books, and other expenses?

46% More than \$100,000 (38% Students, 67% Parents)

26% \$75,000 to \$100,000 (28% Students, 19% Parents)

Combined: 71% estimated it to be more than \$75,000

17% \$50,000 to 75,000 (20% Students, 09% Parents)

09% \$25,000 to \$50,000 (11% Students, 04% Parents)

02% Less than \$25,000 (03% Students, 01% Parents)

The plurality (46%) chose the answer "More than \$100,000," but significantly more parents (67%) than students (38%) chose this answer. In the 20 years that this question has been on the survey, parents' estimates of college costs have always been higher than students' estimates, and in some years about twice as high. Overall, seven out of 10 respondents (72%) estimated their cost for the college degree to be "More than \$75,000."

10) How necessary will financial aid—education loans, scholarships, or grants—be to pay for your (your child's) college education?

55% Extremely (55% Students, 56% Parents)

27% Very (29% Students, 23% Parents)

Combined 82% said Extremely or Very Necessary

16% Somewhat (15% Students, 18% Parents)

Combined: 98% said Extremely, Very, or Somewhat Necessary.

02% Not at all (01% Students, 03% Parents)

Nearly all respondents (98%) said *some* form of financial aid would be necessary to pay for college. Among answer choices indicating their level of need, the majority (55%) chose the answer "Extremely"; 27% chose "Very" and 16% chose "Somewhat." Only 2% said aid would not at all be necessary.

For the past 14 years, since 2010 when this question was first asked on the survey, about 8 out of 10 respondents have said financial aid would be "Extremely" or "Very" necessary to pay for college.

11) What's your biggest concern about your (your child's) college applications?

24% Won't get into first-choice college (21% Students, 32% Parents)

27% Will get into first-choice college, but won't be able to afford to attend
(27% Students, 27% Parents)

41% Level of debt I (my child) will take on to pay for the degree (44% Students, 35% Parents)

08% Will attend a college I (my child) may not be happy about (08% Students, 06% Parents)

The plurality (41%) of respondents chose the answer "Level of debt...to pay for the degree." (It has been the answer chosen by the plurality of respondents since 2013.) Significantly fewer respondents (27%) chose "Will get into first-choice college but won't be able to afford to attend." While fewer respondents still (24%) chose "Won't get into first-choice college" notably more parents (32%) than students (21%) chose this answer.

Twenty-one years ago, in 2003, the survey's initial year, the majority (52%) of respondents chose the answer "Won't get into first-choice college" while "Level of debt to pay for the degree" (the answer *most chosen* by respondents in 2024) was chosen by just 8% of respondents.

12) How would you gauge your stress level about the college application process?

28% Very high (28% Students, 29% Parents)

45% High (45% Students, 41% Parents)

Combined: 73% Very high or High

25% Average (24% Students, 28% Parents)

02% Low (03% Students, 02% Parents)

00% Very Low (00% Students, 00% Parents)

A solid majority (73%) of respondents gauged their stress level about the college application process as "Very high" or "High." Slightly more students (73%) than parents (70%) chose these answers.

Twenty-one years ago, in 2003, the survey's initial year, only 56% of respondents reported having "Very High" or "High" levels of stress -- 17% fewer than the 73% so indicating in 2024.

13) How do you feel about the use of AI (Artificial Intelligence)-based tools by students and by admissions staff in the college application and admission process? (For info on The Princeton Review's AI tools, [click here.](#))

13% I am excited about the ways AI is being—and can be—used. (14% Students, 10% Parents)

34% I am concerned about the ways AI is being—and can be—used. (31% Students, 42% Parents)

45% Both of the above (47% Students, 39% Parents)

08% Neither of the above. (08% Students, 09% Parents)

The plurality of respondents (45%) chose the answer "Both of the above," indicating they had mixed opinions ("concerned" and "excited") about the use of AI-based tools in college applications/admissions. However significantly more respondents (34%) chose the answer "I am concerned about the use of AI tools in college applications/admissions" than the 13% that chose the answer "I am excited..." (about it). Also notable: more parents (42%) than students (31%) chose the answer "I am concerned..." about the use of AI-based tools.

14) Ideally, how far from home would you like the college you (your child) attend(s) to be?

- 40% Fewer than 250 miles (37% Students, 48% Parents)
- 31% 250 to 500 miles (31% Students, 30% Parents)
- 18% 500 to 1,000 miles (19% Students, 14% Parents)
- 11% More than 1,000 miles (13% Students, 08% Parents)

Asked how far from home their (their child's) "ideal" college would be, the plurality (40%) of respondents chose the answer "Fewer than 250 miles," However significantly more parents (48%) chose this answer than students (37%). While 11% of respondents selected the answer "More than 1,000 miles," significantly more students (13%) than parents (8%) chose it.

For 17 years, since 2007 when this question was added to the survey, parents' and students' druthers about ideal college-to-home distances have differed. Parents have selected answer choices closer to home while students have selected answer choices farther from home.

15) When it comes to choosing the college you (or your child) will attend, which of the following do you think it is most likely to be?

- 11% College with best academic reputation (11% Students, 13% Parents)
- 09% College that will be the most affordable (10% Students, 06% Parents)
- 36% College with best program for my (my child's) career interests (37% Students, 32% Parents)
- 44% College that will be the best overall fit (42% Students, 49% Parents)

The plurality (44%) of respondents chose "College that will be the best overall fit." However, 36% choose "College with best program for my (my child's) career interests." Only 11% said they'd choose the college with the "best academic reputation" (despite the attention given to college rankings based on academic criteria). Only 9% said they'd choose the "most affordable" college (despite respondents' concerns about the level of debt they may incur to pay for college).

For 19 years, since 2005, the percent of respondents selecting either "academic reputation" or "affordability" as the key factor driving the choice of college they (their child) would attend has been low. It has ranged from 6% to 13% while the percent of respondents selecting "best fit" and "career interests" has been high (ranging from 36% to 44%).

16) If you (your child) had a way to compare colleges based on their career center services (e.g., career counseling, employment fairs, job search guidance and [placement]) how much would this contribute to your (your child's) decision to apply to or attend a school?

- 22% Strongly (22% Students, 23% Parents)
- 40% Very much (39% Students, 41% Parents)
- Combined 62% Strongly or Very much
- 32% Somewhat (33% Students, 30% Parents)
- 05% Not much (05% Students, 05% Parents)
- 01% Not at all (01% Students, 01% Parents)

A solid majority (62%) of respondents said having information about a school's career services would contribute "Strongly" or "Very much" to their decision to apply to or attend the college and 32% said such information would "Somewhat" contribute to their decision. In all, 94% of respondents said information about colleges' career center services would contribute to their decisions about the colleges.

Since this question was added to the survey in 2019, more than 60% of respondents have said having information about colleges' career services would "Strongly" or "Very much" contribute to their decision to apply to or attend a college.

Note: The Princeton Review's resources on colleges' career services include school rankings and rating scores. A ranking list category "Best Career Services" in the annual *Best Colleges* book reports the 25 colleges (of the nearly 400 in the book) based on the company's student survey for the book (students were asked to rate their school's career services centers). Three ranking lists in the *Best Value Colleges* annual project name the 25 colleges (out of the 200 schools The Princeton Review designates as "best

value colleges" in this project) for "Best Career Placement," "Best Schools for Internships," and "Best Alumni Network." The Princeton Review's profiles of colleges include information about the schools' career services and job placement programs, graduates' employment and salaries, and ROI (Return on Investment) ratings of the schools on a scale of 60 to 99.

17) If you (your child) had a way to compare colleges based on their "green" commitment (e.g., practices concerning energy use, recycling and sustainability, availability of "green" majors and course offerings), how much would this contribute to your (your child's) decision to apply to or attend a school?

06% Strongly (06% Students, 05% Parents)
14% Very much (15% Students, 10% Parents)
39% Somewhat (40% Students, 37% Parents)
 Combined 59% Somewhat, Very much, or Strongly
30% Not much (29% Students, 32% Parents)
11% Not at all (10% Students, 16% Parents)

The majority (59%) of respondents chose answers indicating that information about a college's commitment to the environment *would* contribute to their decision to apply to or attend the school. Within that cohort, 20% said such information would contribute "Strongly" or "Very much" while 39% said "Somewhat." More students (61%) than parents (52%) chose these answers.

Historically, student respondents' answers to this question have reflected higher levels of interest in college commitments to the environment than those of parent respondents.

Note: Princeton Review's resources on this include an annual "Guide to Green Colleges," a free downloadable resource that the company has curated since 2009. The current edition is accessible [here](#). The Princeton Review also tallies Green Ratings (scores from 60 to 99) for nearly 700 colleges. They are published in the company's school profiles of the schools on www.princetonreview.com and in various Princeton Review college guidebooks.

18) If you (your child) had a way to compare colleges based on their services dedicated to students' physical health, mental health, and wellness, how much would this contribute to your (your child's) decision to apply to or attend a school?

18% Strongly (18% Students, 15% Parents)
35% Very much (35% Students, 34% Parents)
 Combined: 53% Very much or Strongly
36% Somewhat (36% Students, 38% Parents)
09% Not much (09% Students, 11% Parents)
02% Not at all (02% Students, 02% Parents)

The majority (53%) of respondents selected answer choices indicating information about a college's health-related services (including physical health, mental health, and wellness center services) would contribute "Strongly" or "Very much" to their decision to apply to or attend a school. Overall, 89% of respondents would find such information useful.

This is the first year this question was included on the survey.

Note: The Princeton Review reports two health services-related ranking lists in its annual *Best Colleges* guide. They name the top 25 schools (of those in the book) at which students most highly rated their school's Health Center services and their school's Mental Health Counseling Center services. The Princeton Review has also published *The College Wellness Guide: A Student's Guide to Managing Mental, Physical, and Social Health on Campus* (Penguin Random House, 2021).

19) What will be the biggest benefit to you (your child) from earning a college degree?

23% The education (25% Students, 20% Parents)
33% The exposure to new ideas (33% Students, 32% Parents)
44% The potentially better job and higher income (42% students, 48% Parents)

"Potentially better job and higher income," chosen by the plurality (44%) of respondents, has been the answer chosen by the plurality of respondents for 14 years, since 2010 when the question was added to the survey.

20) On the whole, do you believe college will be "worth it"?

99% Yes (99% Students, 99% Parents)
01% No (01% Students, 01% Parents)

For 10 years, since 2014, when this question was added to the survey, respondents have consistently and overwhelmingly viewed college as "worth it."

(Optional) What advice would you give to college applicants or parents of applicants going through this experience next year?

On this fill-in-the-blank question, "Start early" has been the advice most given by respondents (students and parents alike) every year. Samplers of best of parents' and students' advice to students are posted on The Princeton Review website [here](#).

On the 2024 survey, The Princeton Review also invited respondents to weigh in on what matters most in their college searches, inviting them to rank the company's categories of college rankings that it tallies and reports in its annual [Best Colleges](#) book.

The five categories most chosen, the percent of respondents choosing them, and some of the ranking lists that The Princeton Review reports within those categories are:

1. Academics, 96% (lists based on ratings of professors' teaching ability and accessibility)
2. Amenities, 70% (lists rating campus facilities, dorms, food, etc.)
3. Financial Aid, 69% (list based on student satisfaction with aid awards)
4. Campus Culture, 60% (lists based on student body political leanings, sports interests, community engagement, etc.)
5. Career Services, 58% (list based on ratings of school's career center)

The Princeton Review's college rankings, now in their 33rd year, are tallied in multiple categories. Unlike other college rankings—focusing only on academics and based only on institutional data—the company's 50 categories of college rankings are based entirely on its surveys of more than 165,000 college students attending the schools profiled in the book. The project's 80-question survey asks students to rate their own schools on dozens of topics and report on their campus experiences at them.

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