



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

About the Survey

The [College Hopes & Worries Survey](#), now in its 23rd year, was developed by [The Princeton Review](#) in 2003 to report on the perspectives of students and their parents navigating the college application process. The company conducts the survey online between January and February and reports the findings in March. More than 235,000 respondents have participated in the survey since its inception. About 70–80% are students applying to colleges; 20–30% are parents of applicants.

The survey has 20 questions, some of which have been asked annually since the survey debuted in 2003. Among them are questions about the toughest part of the application process, levels of stress about applications and their biggest concern about their college decision. Each year's survey also includes questions on trending topics. All the questions present multiple-choice answers except one. It invites a fill-in-the-blank answer to this question: *"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 2025 survey was conducted online from January 17 to February 24. Findings are based on responses from 9,317 people: 75% (7,023) were students applying to colleges; 25% (2,294) were parents of applicants. Respondents hailed from all 50 U.S. states as well as Canada and several countries abroad. The survey was promoted via social media channels as well as among college admissions advisors and users of The Princeton Review's college-related resources. It was published in the company's guidebook, [The Best 390 Colleges](#) (August 2024). For several years, a sweepstakes cash prize has been awarded to one entrant selected at random. For the 2025 survey, that prize was \$3,500.

This report shows all the survey questions, answer choices and findings by respondents overall, students, and parents. An historical report on the survey findings back to 2003 is available on request from pressoffice@review.com.

Reporter Resources

The March 4, 2025 release on the survey findings is in the Media Center on Princeton Review.com and [here](#). Other resources include an infographic illustrating key findings, and samplers of advice from respondent students and parents for next year's college applicants and their parents. These are accessible at the [College Hopes & Worries Survey](#) hub on Princeton Review.com.

[Rob Franek](#), Editor-in-Chief of The Princeton Review, is available for interviews on the survey and on college admissions. 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 many 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 24th year, is one of the largest online tutoring services in the U.S. It comprises a community of thousands of tutors who have delivered more than 28 million 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](#)) and Instagram ([@theprincetonreview](#)).

2025 Findings

The 2025 survey questions and answer choices are below. To the left of each answer choice is the percentage of respondents overall (students plus parents) that chose the answer. To the right is the percentage of students and the percentage of parents that chose 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.

1) 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?"

This question, which has been on the survey since 2003, is the survey's only question requesting a fill-in-the-blank answer. Respondents have named several hundred colleges and universities as their "dream" colleges. Among them are highly selective schools (including all the Ivies and many other widely known private colleges), as well as flagship state universities, technology schools, nursing schools, and community colleges. Some schools were named by hundreds of respondents. Some by just one.

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

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

1/ Massachusetts Inst. of Technology, 2/ Harvard College (MA), 3/ Stanford Univ. (CA), 4/ Princeton Univ. (NJ), 5/ Yale Univ (CT), 6/ Columbia Univ. (NY), 7/ New York Univ, 8/ Univ. of Michigan–Ann Arbor, 9/ Univ. of Pennsylvania, 10/ Univ. of California–Los Angeles.

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

1/ Princeton Univ. (NJ), 2/ Massachusetts Inst. of Technology, 3/ Stanford Univ. (CA), 4/ Harvard College (MA), 5/ Yale Univ (CT), 6/ Univ. of Michigan–Ann Arbor, 7/ Columbia Univ. (NY), 8/ Duke Univ.(NC), 9/ New York Univ, 10/ Univ. of Texas--Austin.

Over the years, 22 schools have made the survey's lists of top 10 "dream colleges" once or more than once. The school that has been #1 on the student "dream colleges" list the most times (12) is Stanford University. It is also the school that has been #1 on the parent list the most times (14).

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

20% One to 4 (20% Students, 19% Parents)
39% Five to 8 (38% Students, 42% Parents)
 26% Nine to 12 (26% Students, 27% Parents)
 15% Thirteen or more (16% Students, 13% Parents)
 Combined: 41% applying to nine or more colleges.

On this question, which was added to the survey in 2007, "Five to 8" was chosen by the plurality (39%) of respondents in 2025. It has been chosen by the plurality of respondents every year since 2007. "Thirteen or more," chosen by 15% of respondents in 2025, was chosen by only 5% of respondents in 2007.

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

This question has been on the survey since 2005.

- 17% Researching colleges and deciding which to apply to (15% Students, 21% Parents)
- 32% Taking SAT, ACT, or AP exams (32% Students, 32% Parents)
- 35% Completing admission and financial aid applications (37% Students, 32% Parents)
- 16% Choosing which college to attend (16% Students, 15% Parents)

"Completing admission and financial aid applications," chosen by the plurality (35%) of respondents in 2025, was chosen by the plurality of respondents only three times in the past—in 2018 (seven years ago), 2013 and 2010. "Taking SAT®, ACT® or AP® exams," chosen by 32% of respondents in 2025, had been the answer most chosen for 18 of the past 22 years.

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

This question has been on the survey since 2020.

- 11% ACT (11% Students, 10% Parents)
- 48% SAT (47% Students, 56% Parents)
- 33% Both tests (33% Students, 29% Parents)
- Combined: 92% taking one or both tests.
- 08% Neither test (09% Students, 05% Parents)

In 2025, the majority (48%) of respondents chose the answer "SAT" (up significantly from 34% so indicating in 2020), while 11% chose "ACT", and 33% chose the answer "Both tests" (up 4% from the 29% so indicating in 2024). Overall, in 2025, 92% said they were (their child was) taking or planning to take one or both tests. Only 8% were not planning to take either test.

5) The majority of colleges are test-optional (i.e., no longer require SAT or ACT scores but will consider them). Some schools still require test scores, and others may return to requiring them. Which of the following characterizes your perspective with respect to schools' admission test policies?

This question has been on the survey since 2023.

- 17% I am (my child is) more likely to apply to a test-optional college (16% Students, 18% Parents)
- 12% I am (my child is) less likely to apply to a test-optional college (12% Students, 12% Parents)
- 71% Admission test policies don't affect my (my child's) decisions (72% Students, 70% Parents)

The majority (71%) of respondents in 2025 said college's admission test policies didn't affect their decisions about applications (up slightly from the 69% so indicating in 2023). (According to [FairTest.org](https://www.fairtest.org), about 2,100+ colleges and universities were test-optional/test free for Fall 2025.)

6) As a low percentage of colleges 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.)

This question has been on the survey since 2023.

- 33% Test scores are considered in scholarship and financial aid award decisions.
(34% Students, 29% Parents)
- 47% Test scores can distinguish applications and improve their chances of being accepted.

(48% Students, 42% Parents)

20% Test scores may be required by the colleges I am (my child is) applying to.

(18% Students, 29% Parents)

In 2025, among respondents indicating they are (their child is) taking or planning to take the SAT or ACT, nearly half (47%) chose the answer "Test scores can distinguish applications and improve their chances of being accepted." (This was a 5% increase over the 42% so reporting in 2024). A third (33%) chose the answer "Test scores are considered in scholarship and aid decisions," and 20% chose the answer "Test scores may be required by the college I am (my child is) applying to."

7) In March 2024, the SAT fully transitioned to a digital exam (i.e., taken online on a computer). In April, the "Enhanced" ACT will be offered as a digital exam. In May 2025, 28 of the AP subject tests will transition to digital exams. Which of the following characterizes your perspective with respect to this different testing experience?

This question was added to the survey in 2025.

72% I welcome this change and believe the digital versions of the tests will be an improvement.

(71% Students, 73% Parents)

28% I am not in favor of this change and would prefer to see these exams remain paper-and-pencil tests. (29% Students, 27% Parents)

8) If you (your child) expect(s) to take any of the above tests in digital (as distinguished from paper-and-pencil versions), how prepared, as of today, do you believe you (your child) will be for this different testing experience?

This question was added to the survey in 2025.

21% Extremely (22% Students, 19% Parents)

43% Very (44% Students, 38% Parents)

Combined: 64% said very or extremely (66% Students, 57% Parents).

32% Somewhat (30% Students, 37% Parents)

04% Minimally (04% Students, 06% Parents)

A majority (64%) of respondents believe they are (their child is) very or extremely prepared to take digital tests. However, a significantly higher percentage of students (66%) than parents (57%) so indicated.

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?

This question has been on the survey for 22 years, since 2004

38% More than \$150,000 (33% Students, 53% Parents)

30% \$100,000 to \$150,000 (30% Students, 29% Parents)

Combined: 68% estimated it to be more than \$100,000 (63% Students, 82% Parents)

22% \$50,000 to \$100,000 (25% Students, 13% Parents)

08% \$25,000 to \$50,000 (09% Students, 04% Parents)

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

In 2025, 38% of respondents chose the top answer choice "More than \$150,000." More parents (53%) than students (33%) chose it. Overall, 68% of respondents estimated their cost for the college degree to be more than \$100,000. More parents (82%) than students (63%) indicated this.

Over the years, parents' estimates of college costs have been higher than students' estimates. The answer choice with the highest estimate for college costs has twice been adjusted to reflect increases in college costs. In 2004, the first year this question was on the survey, the answer choice with the highest estimate was "More than \$75,000." More parents (59%) than students (42%) chose it. In 2007, the answer choice with the highest estimate was "More than \$100,000." More parents (62%) than students (41%) chose it.

10) If you are (your child is) planning to apply for financial aid—scholarships, grants or education loans—to help pay for college, how necessary will financial aid be? (Note: if not planning to apply for aid, skip this question.)

This question has been on the survey for 19 years, since 2007.

48% Extremely (49% Students, 44% Parents)
 29% Very (30% Students, 28% Parents)
 Combined 77% said Extremely or Very Necessary
 18% Somewhat (17% Students, 20% Parents)
 Combined: 95% said Extremely, Very, or Somewhat Necessary.
 05% Minimally (04% Students, 08% Parents)

On the 2025 survey, 98% of respondents answered this question (i.e., were applying for financial aid). Of that group, nearly half (48%) said aid would be "Extremely" necessary while 29% chose the answer "Very" necessary and 18% chose "Somewhat" necessary. Only 5% chose the answer "Minimally" necessary.

Every year, nine out of ten respondents (ranging from 95% to 99%) have indicated financial aid would be needed to pay for college. Among them, 77% to 90% have said financial aid would be "Extremely" or "Very" necessary.

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

This question has been on the survey since 2003.

29% Won't get into first-choice college (27% Students, 36% Parents)
 26% Will get into first-choice college, but won't be able to afford to attend (26% Students, 25% Parents)
 38% Level of debt I (my child) will take on to pay for the degree (39% Students, 32% Parents)
 07% Will attend a college I (my child) may not be happy about (08% Students, 07% Parents)

In 2025, the plurality (38%) of respondents chose the answer "Level of debt to pay for the degree." Significantly fewer (29%) chose the answer "Won't get into first-choice college" (although more parents (36%) than students (26%) chose it). About a quarter (26%) of respondents chose the answer "Will get into first-choice college but won't be able to afford to attend" and 07% chose "Will attend a college I (my child) will not be happy about."

In 2003, the survey's first year, only 06% of respondents chose "Level of debt to pay for the degree" (chosen by the plurality of 38% in 2025) while the majority (52%) selected the answer "Won't get into first-choice college" (chosen by 29% in 2025).

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

This question has been on the survey for 22 years, since 2003.

29% Very high (30% Students, 28% Parents)
 44% High (44% Students, 43% Parents)

Combined: 73% Very high or High
 25% Average (24% Students, 27% Parents)
 02% Low (02% Students, 02% Parents)
 00% Very Low (00% Students, 00% Parents)

In 2025, 73% of respondents gauged their stress level about college applications as "Very high" or "High." Slightly more students (74%) than parents (71%) so indicated. Throughout the years, students have reported higher levels of stress than parents.

In 2003, the majority (56%) of respondents reported "Very High" or "High" levels of stress. In the years since, the percent of respondents reporting such stress has increased considerably with 70% or more reporting such stress every year since 2014.

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 for students, click [here.](#))

This question was added to the survey in 2024.

13% I am excited about the ways AI is being—and can be—used. (13% Students, 11% Parents)
 32% I am concerned about the ways AI is being—and can be—used. (30% Students, 39% Parents)
49% Both of the above (51% Students, 42% Parents)
 06% Neither of the above. (06% Students, 08% Parents)

In 2025, nearly half (49%) of respondents chose the answer "Both of the above," indicating mixed views about the use of AI-based tools in college applications/admissions. Nearly a third (32%) chose the answer "I am concerned about the use of AI tools in college applications/admissions" (more parents (39%) than students (30%) selected this answer), while 13% chose the answer "I am excited about the use of AI tools in college applications/admissions" (slightly more students (13%) than parents (11%) selected this answer). Only 6% chose "Neither of the above."

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

This question has been on the survey for 19 years, since 2007.

39% Fewer than 250 miles (35% Students, 50% Parents)
 31% 250 to 500 miles (32% Students, 28% Parents)
 18% 500 to 1,000 miles (20% Students, 12% Parents)
 12% More than 1,000 miles (13% Students, 10% Parents)

In 2025, the plurality (39%) of respondents overall chose the answer "Fewer than 250 miles." Significantly more parents (50%) than students (35%) chose it. Of the remaining three answer choices (which presented various distance ranges, the farthest being "More than 1,000 miles"), 61% of respondents chose those answers with significantly more students (65%) than parents (50%) choosing them.

Since 2007, student respondents have selected answer choices that are further from home while parent respondents have selected answer choices nearer to 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?

This question has been on the survey for 21 years, since 2005.

- 10% College with best academic reputation (10% Students, 10% Parents)
- 11% College that will be the most affordable (12% Students, 08% Parents)
- 32% College with best program for my (my child's) career interests (35% Students, 24% Parents)
- 47% College that will be the best overall fit (43% Students, 58% Parents)

In 2025, nearly half (47%) of respondents chose "College that will be the best overall fit." More parents (58%) selected this answer than students (43%). Among the 32% that choose "College with best program for my (my child's) career interests," more students (35%) than parents (24%) chose this answer. Only 11% overall chose "College that will be the most affordable." Only 10% chose "College with the best academic reputation."

For 18 years (including 2025), the plurality of respondents has chosen the answer "College that will be the best overall fit." The answer "College with best program for my (my child's) career interests" was chosen by a higher percent of respondents in 2018, 2019, and 2020).

Over the years, considerably fewer respondents (about 11% on average) have chosen the answer "College that will be the most affordable." Slightly fewer still (about 10% on average) have chosen the answer "College with the best academic reputation." The latter is notable given the attention given to college rankings based on academics (which some rankers have reported for decades). Note: The Princeton Review, which reports college rankings in dozens of categories, has never ranked schools based on academics.

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

This question has been on the survey since 2008.

- 06% Strongly (06% Students, 04% Parents)
- 13% Very much (14% Students, 10% Parents)
- 37% Somewhat (39% Students, 34% Parents)
- Combined 56% Strongly, Very much, or Somewhat
- 30% Not much (29% Students, 33% Parents)
- 14% Not at all (12% Students, 19% Parents)

In 2025, 56% of respondents overall indicated such interest. Among them, 6% chose the answer "Strongly," 13% chose "Very much," and 37% chose "Somewhat." More students (59%) than parents (48%) selected these answer choices.

Historically, students' answers on this question have reflected higher levels of interest in colleges' "green" commitments than parents' answers. In 2008, 63% of respondents overall selected answer choices indicating such information would contribute "Strongly," "Very Much," or "Somewhat," to their decisions about colleges.

Note: Princeton Review's resources on this include its annual *Guide to Green Colleges*, a free downloadable resource that the company has compiled since 2009. The current edition is accessible [here](#). The Princeton Review also tallies Green Ratings (scores from 60 to 99) for more than 500 colleges. The ratings are published in the company's profiles of the schools on www.princetonreview.com and in Princeton Review college guidebooks.

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

This question has been on the survey since 2020.

13% Strongly (14% Students, 11% Parents)
 29% Very much (30% Students, 27% Parents)
39% Somewhat (39% Students, 39% Parents)
 Combined: 81% Strongly, Very much or Somewhat
 14% Not much (13% Students, 18% Parents)
 05% Not at all (04% Students, 05% Parents)

In all, 81% of respondents chose answers indicating such information would strongly, very much or somewhat contribute to their decision to apply to or attend a school. Among them 13% chose "Strongly," 29% chose "Very much," and 39% (the plurality) chose "Somewhat."

Note: The Princeton Review has several resources related to health programs and services on college campuses. In 2023-2024, in partnership with the [Ruderman Family Foundation](#), the company conducted its [Campus Mental Health Survey](#) of hundreds of institutions about their mental health offerings as well as surveys of college students about their awareness of such services on their campuses. The project enabled The Princeton Review to include mental health information on 250 of the company's school profiles and to name 16 colleges to a [2025 Campus Mental Health Services Honor Roll](#).

The Princeton Review also reports two health-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 and 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).

18) 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?

This question has been on the survey for seven years, since 2019.

26% Strongly (26% Students, 26% Parents)
41% Very much (40% Students, 41% Parents)
 Combined 67% Strongly or Very much
 28% Somewhat (27% Students, 29% Parents)
 04% Not much (06% Students, 03% Parents)
 01% Not at all (01% Students, 01% Parents)

Over the years, nine out of 10 respondents have said having information about a college's career services would contribute "Strongly," "Very much" or "Somewhat" to their decision to apply to or attend a college. Six out of 10 said such information would contribute "Strongly" or "Very Much" to their decision.

In 2025, 26% said such information would contribute "Strongly" and 41% said it would contribute "Very much" to their decision.

Note: The Princeton Review's resources on colleges' career services include school rankings and rating scores. A [Best Career Services](#) ranking list in the annual [Best Colleges](#) book reports the 25 colleges (of the nearly 400 in the book) at which students surveyed for the book most favorably rated their school's career services center.

Three categories of ranking lists in the [Best Value Colleges](#) annual project name the 20 private and 20 public colleges the company designates as best value colleges for Career Placement, Internships, and

Alumni Network. The Princeton Review's profiles of nearly more than 400 colleges include information about the schools' career services and job placement programs, graduates' employment and salaries, and ratings of the schools for ROI (Return on Investment) on a scale of 60 to 99.

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

This question has been on the survey since 2010.

25% The education (26% Students, 22% Parents)

29% The exposure to new ideas, places and people (29% Students, 29% Parents)

46% The potentially better job and higher income (45% students, 49% Parents)

"Potentially better job and higher income," chosen by nearly half (46%) of respondents in 2025, has been the answer chosen by the plurality of respondents for 14 years, since 2015, and by the majority of respondents prior to that time, back to 2010.

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

This question has been on the survey for 12 years, since 2014.

99% Yes (99% Students, 98% Parents)

01% No (01% Students, 02% Parents)

Since 2014, 99% of respondents overall have chosen the answer "Yes."

However, in 2025, 2023, and 2022, while 99% of students chose "Yes," slightly fewer parents, (98%), chose 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. About 50% of respondents say this. Samplers of best of parents' and students' advice to students are posted on The Princeton Review website [here](#).

(Optional) The Princeton Review also asked respondents what matters most in their college searches. Presented with a list of 10 topics for which The Princeton Review reports various college rankings or ratings in its annual [Best Colleges](#) book, respondents were asked to choose the five categories of lists that matter most to them.

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

1. Academics, 96% (lists based on student ratings of professors' teaching ability and accessibility)
2. Amenities, 67% (lists based on student ratings of campus facilities, dorms, food, etc.)
3. Financial Aid, 66% (list based on student reports of their satisfaction with aid awards)
4. Campus Culture, 60% (lists based on student reports of their body political leanings, sports interests, community engagement, etc.)
5. Career Services, 59% (list based on student ratings of school's career center)

The Princeton Review's 50 categories of college rankings published in its Best Colleges guidebook (and website) are tallied entirely on student survey-related data. Unlike other college rankings focusing only on academics and based only on institutional data, the Princeton Review rankings are based solely on its surveys of college students attending the schools profiled in the book. The company's 80-question

survey asks students to rate their own schools on dozens of topics and report on their campus experiences at them. Information about the methodology for the rankings is [here](#).

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