

2024

# Family Engagement Report

A survey of 20,487  
parents of current  
college students  
from 46 institutions



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# Executive Summary

**How involved are parents of current university students? How often do they want to hear from the institutions their students attend? What are their experiences, expectations, and feelings about how these institutions have engaged them?**

To answer these and other questions, CampusESP and RNL conducted a survey of more than 20,000 parents of current university students on a number of key topics. This report contains responses to the survey areas.

Looking to start or scale your family engagement strategy at your institution? Consider ways to respond to these key trends and takeaways from the study.

## **1. Most families expect communication at least weekly.**

After high-touch experiences in K-12, 70% of families expect to hear from their student's institution weekly – or more. The desire for frequent outreach is even higher for Black, Hispanic, lower income, and first-generation families. *See more on page 5.*

## **2. Email remains the preferred channel, but text messaging is an emerging communication gap.**

While nearly half of families want to receive updates via text message, only 18% of institutions offer this as a channel for families. The request for text messaging is highest among Black, Hispanic, lower income, and first-generation families. *See more on page 6.*

## **3. Families want more information about student support services.**

While 78% of families praise their institution's general communication, families express a need for improved information about academic support, housing, dining, and mental health resources. On average, first-generation families are 20% less likely to know where to find critical information. *See more on pages 7 and 11.*

## **4. Families see the ROI on paying for college, but they need more support navigating financial aid processes.**

Despite over 80% of families reporting difficulty paying for their student's education, 77% of families still say that tuition is a worthwhile investment in their student's future. However, families report difficulty finding financial aid information – over 50% of families said they had to reach out at least once for clarification on financial aid. *See more on pages 13-14.*

## **5. Families are eager to be more involved with their student's institution.**

The majority of families are satisfied with their experience... and seeking even more connection with the institution. 37% of families want more opportunities for involvement and 46% are looking for more opportunities to meet other parents. Virtual events could be a low-lift way to achieve this – over 75% of families have found value in virtual event programming. *See more on page 9.*

# Parent-Student Communication Trends

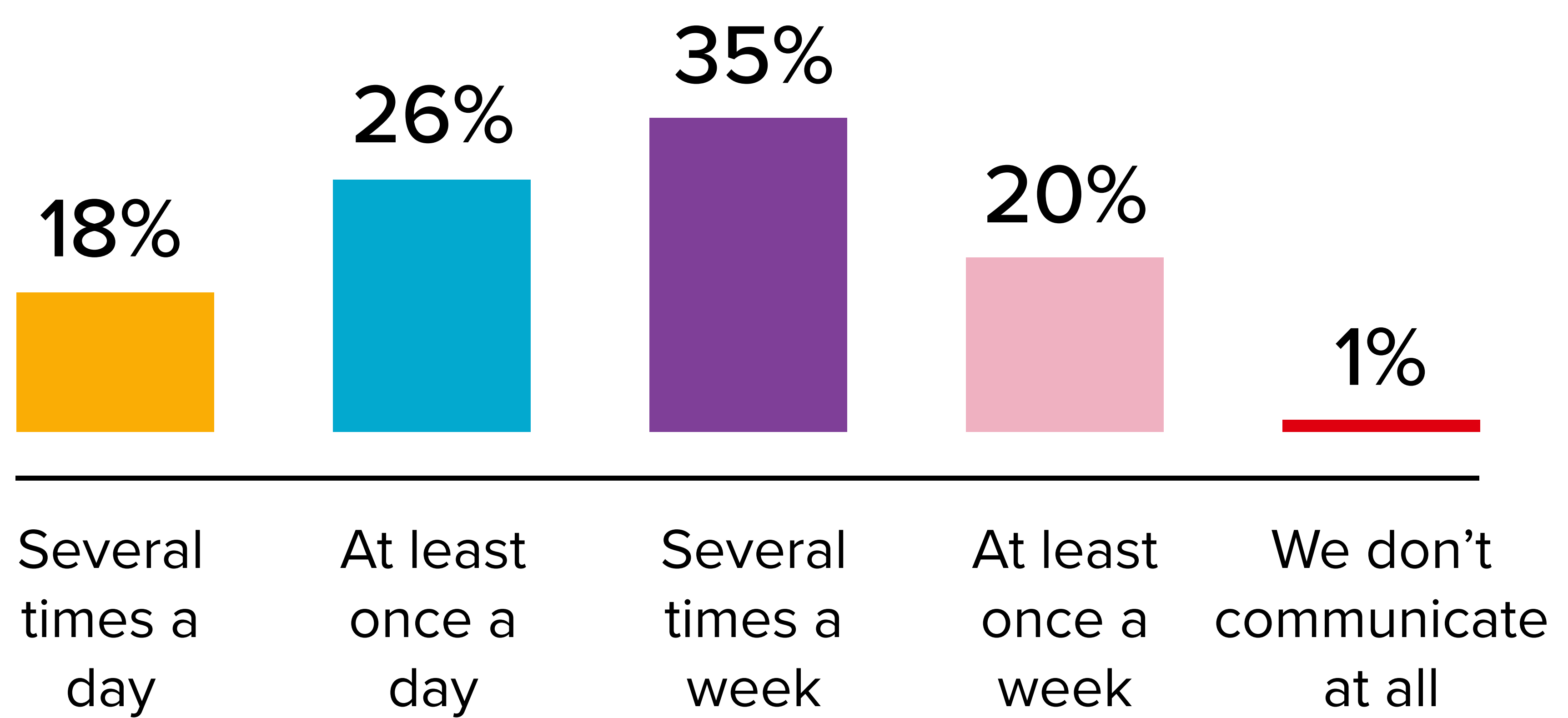
## KEY INSIGHT

### Nearly 50% of families talk to their student daily

Today's parents are an integral part of their student's lives, with 44% talking to their student daily and all connecting at least weekly. Black, Hispanic, and lower income families are even more likely to speak with their students daily.

Black and Hispanic families are 36% more likely than White families to speak with their students every day. Lower income families are 70% more likely to speak with their students daily than high income families.

## Frequency of communication between families and students



### BY ETHNICITY

	Several times a day	At least once a day	Several times a week	At least once a week	We don't communicate at all
Asian/Pacific Islander	19%	27%	27%	24%	2%
Black or African-American	32%	24%	27%	17%	1%
Hispanic or Latino	29%	29%	27%	15%	1%
White	15%	26%	36%	21%	1%
Multi-racial	21%	25%	33%	18%	4%

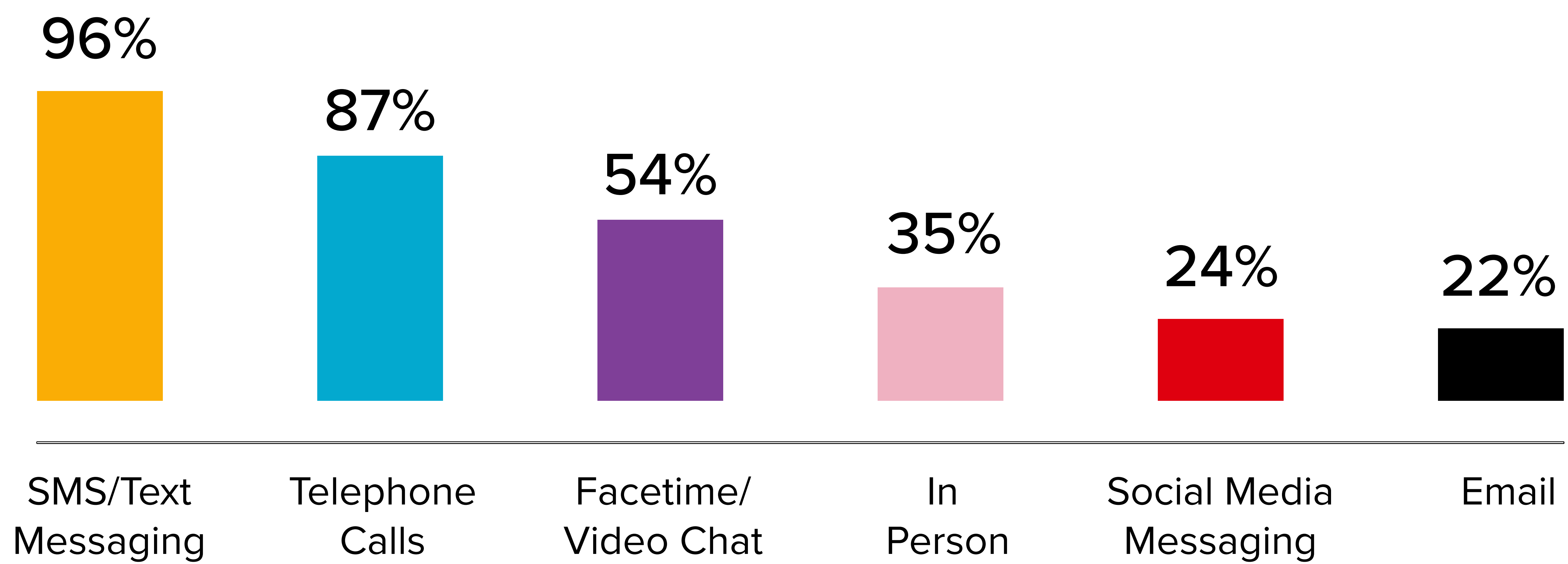
### BY INCOME

	Several times a day	At least once a day	Several times a week	At least once a week	We don't communicate at all
Less than \$30,000	38%	25%	22%	14%	1%
\$30,000 to \$59,999	25%	28%	30%	16%	1%
\$60,000 to \$99,999	21%	26%	33%	20%	1%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	16%	27%	35%	21%	0%
\$150,000 to 199,999	13%	26%	38%	23%	0%
\$200,000 to \$249,000	12%	26%	39%	23%	1%
\$250,000 or more	11%	26%	41%	23%	0%

### BY STATUS

	Several times a day	At least once a day	Several times a week	At least once a week	We don't communicate at all
First generation	29%	30%	25%	15%	1%
Continuing generation	15%	26%	37%	22%	1%

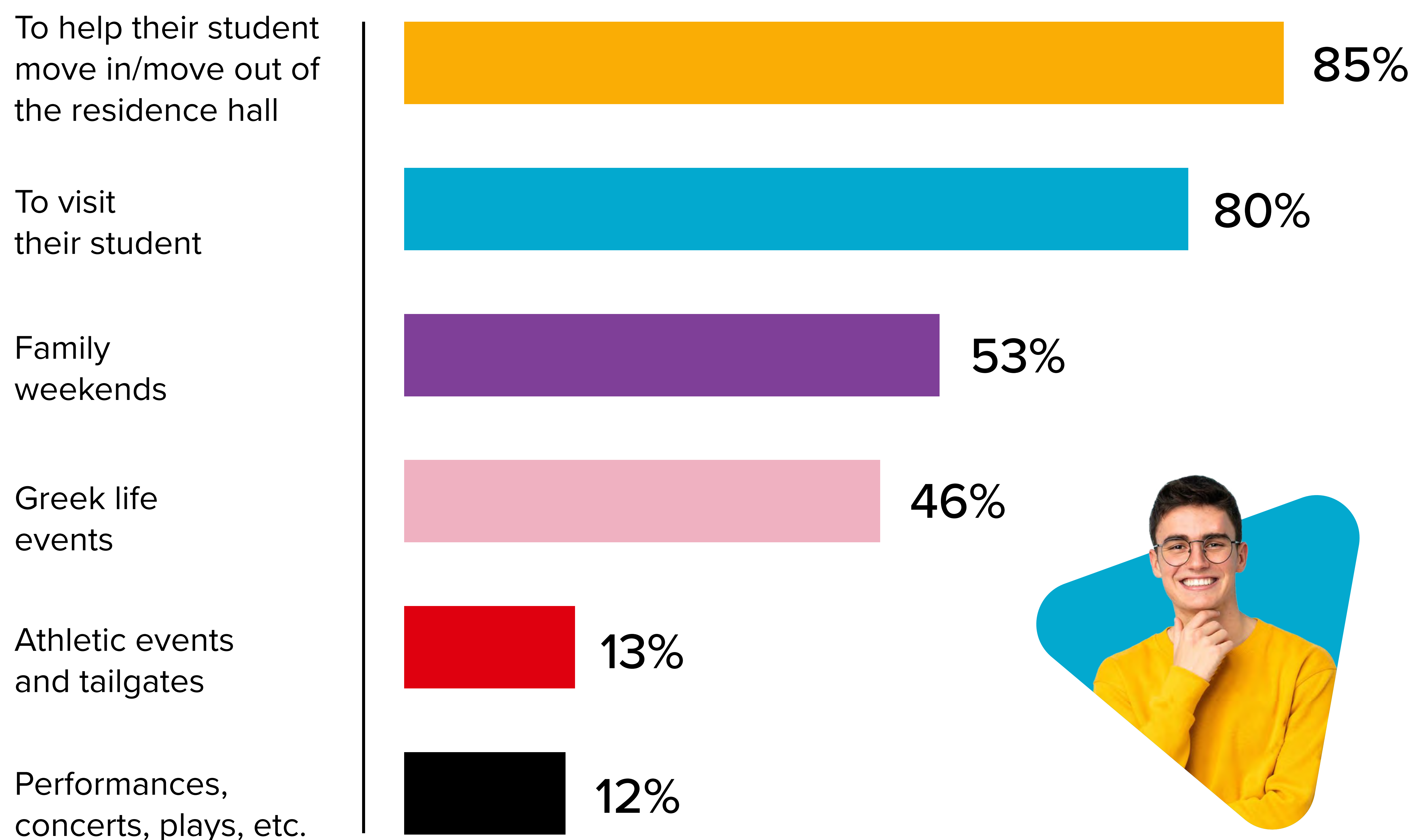
## Channels used for parent-student communication



**93%**

of parents have visited campus since their student has enrolled

## Most common reasons for parents to visit their students

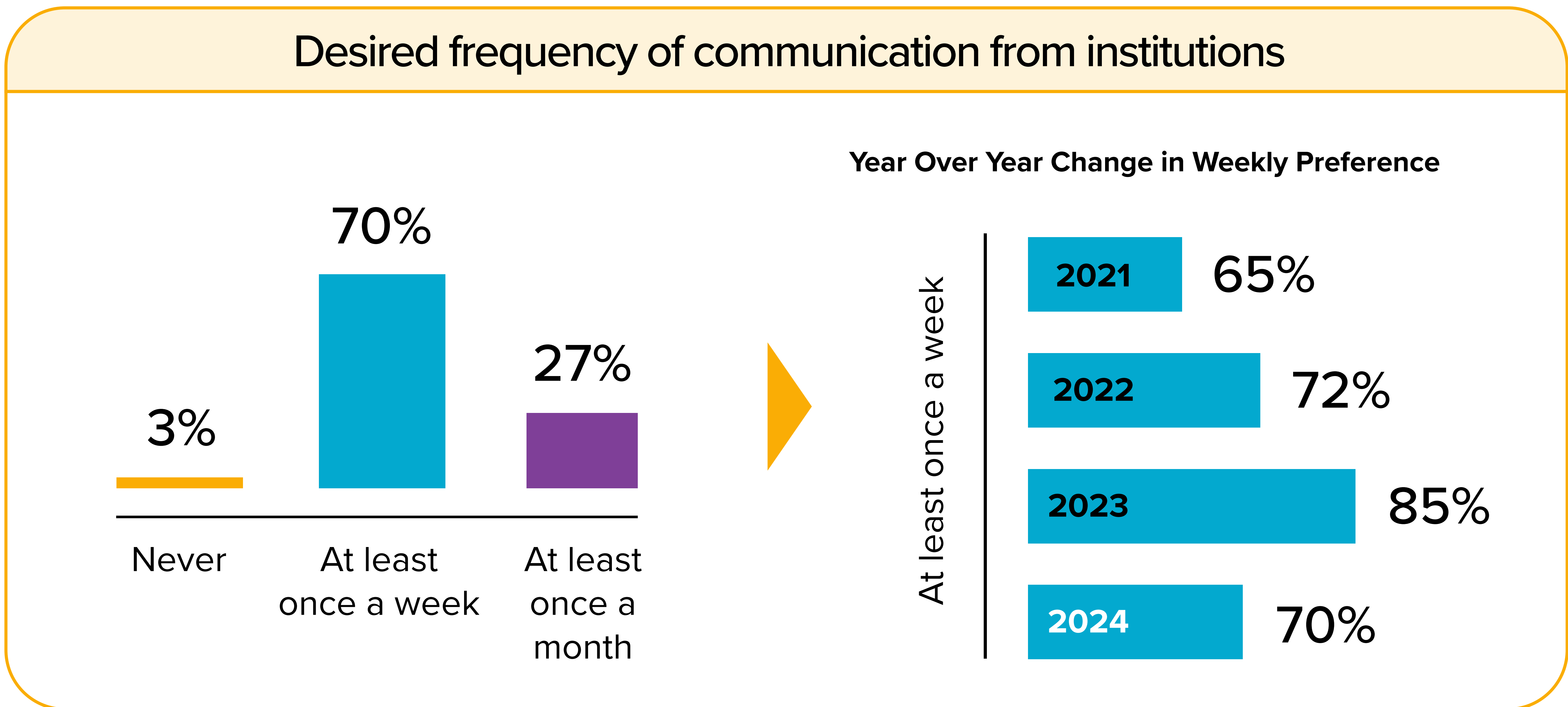


# Parent-Institution Communication Preferences

## KEY INSIGHT

### 70% of families want to hear from institutions weekly or more

After high-touch experiences in K-12, families expect to hear from institutions regularly. While we saw steadily rising expectations through COVID, the request has now plateaued at 70%.



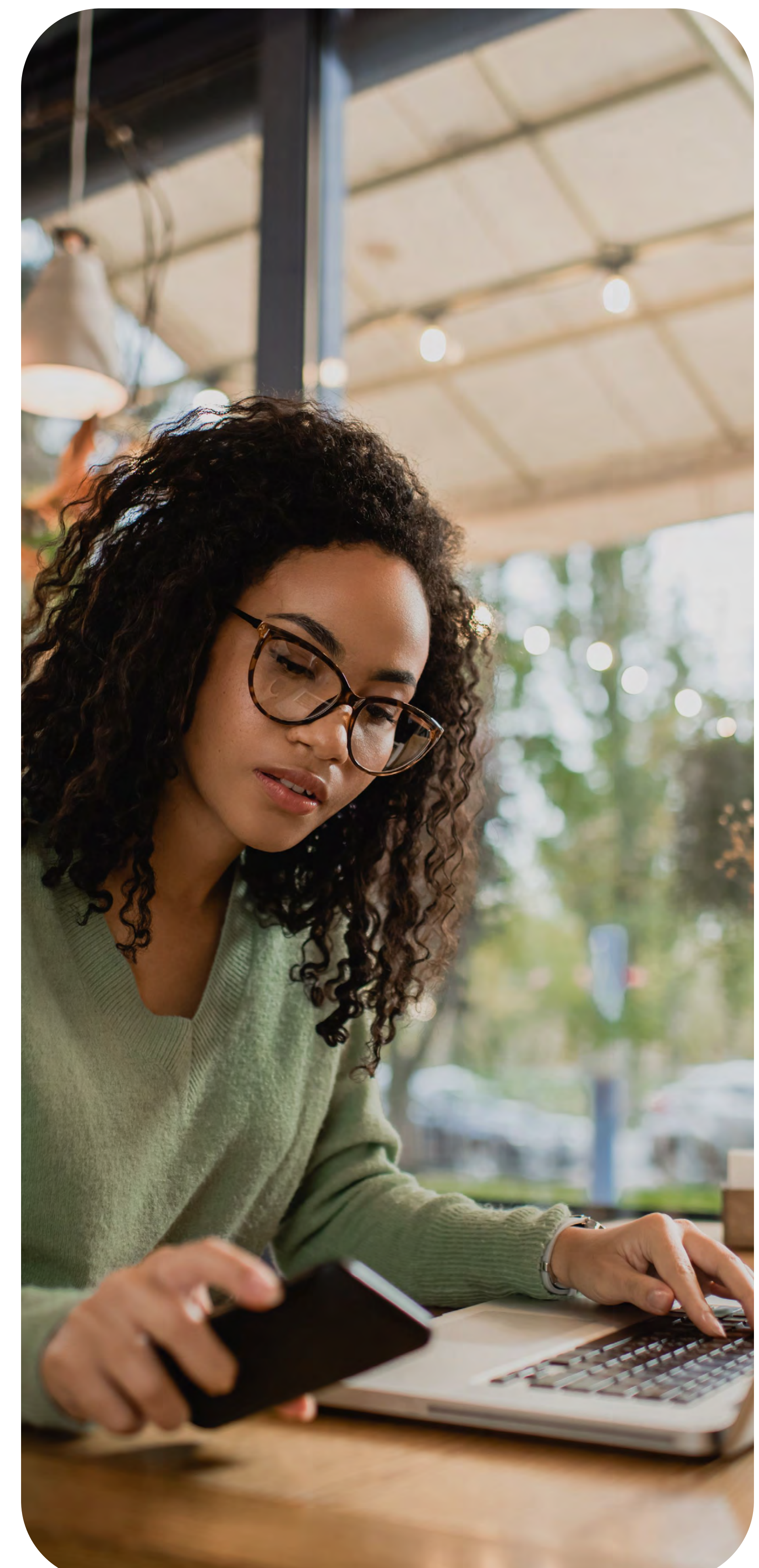
BY ETHNICITY	Never	At least once a week	At least once a month
Asian/Pacific Islander	4%	72%	24%
Black or African-American	1%	73%	26%
Hispanic or Latino	3%	72%	25%
White	3%	70%	28%
Multi-racial	2%	70%	28%

BY INCOME	Never	At least once a week	At least once a month
Less than \$30,000	2%	73%	25%
\$30,000 to \$59,999	2%	73%	25%
\$60,000 to \$99,999	3%	70%	27%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	3%	69%	28%
\$150,000 to 199,999	3%	69%	28%
\$200,000 to \$249,000	3%	69%	27%
\$250,000 or more	2%	70%	28%

BY STATUS	Never	At least once a month	At least once a week
First generation	3%	72%	25%
Continuing generation	3%	70%	28%

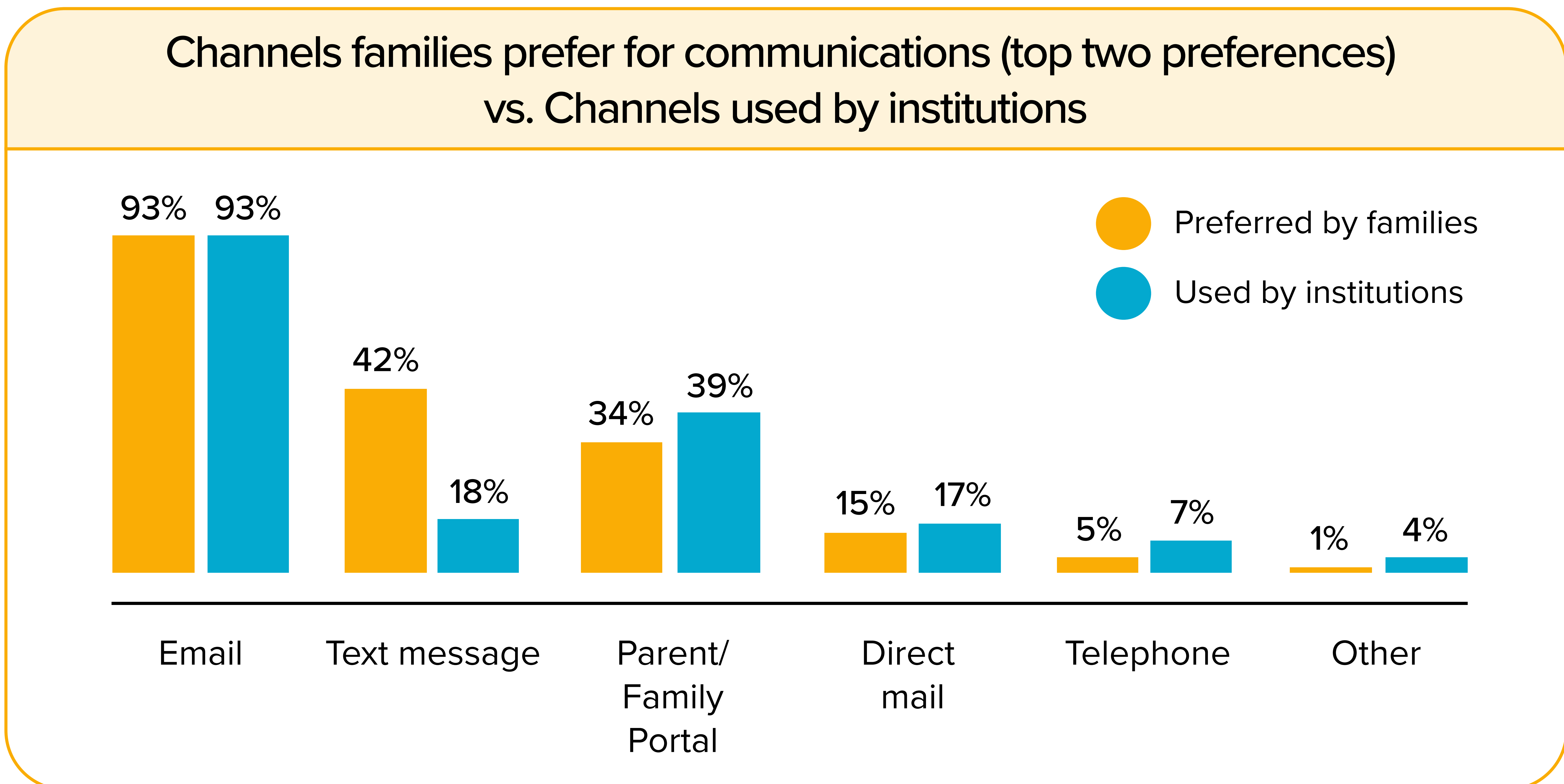


KEY INSIGHT

# Email is the top preference, but texting is a missed opportunity.

Email remains the most popular requested communication channel, but family portals and text messaging have steadily increased year over year as secondary preferences. The request for text messaging is highest among Black, Hispanic, lower income, and first-generation families.

Text messaging represents the largest disconnect between institutional practice (18%) and family preference (42%).



BY ETHNICITY	Email	Text message	Parent/ Family Portal	Direct mail	Telephone	Other
Asian/Pacific Islander	89%	44%	30%	15%	8%	2%
Black or African-American	88%	53%	28%	12%	10%	2%
Hispanic or Latino	90%	46%	29%	11%	10%	2%
White	95%	41%	36%	15%	4%	1%
Multi-racial	83%	46%	29%	14%	11%	4%

BY INCOME	Email	Text message	Parent/ Family Portal	Direct mail	Telephone	Other
Less than \$30,000	85%	50%	30%	16%	14%	2%
\$30,000 to \$59,999	95%	44%	37%	14%	13%	1%
\$60,000 to \$99,999	89%	46%	31%	14%	10%	1%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	94%	44%	32%	16%	6%	1%
\$150,000 to 199,999	95%	43%	35%	15%	4%	1%
\$200,000 to \$249,000	95%	42%	36%	14%	3%	1%
\$250,000 or more	95%	40%	38%	13%	3%	2%

BY STATUS	Email	Text message	Parent/ Family Portal	Direct mail	Telephone	Other
First generation	89%	47%	31%	13%	10%	1%
Continuing generation	95%	41%	35%	15%	4%	1%

KEY INSIGHT

# Families want clearer information on financial aid, student outcomes, and support resources

While most families aligned on the topics they considered important, many expressed difficulty finding content. In particular, first generation families were about 20% less likely to know where to find critical information.

## Importance of information shared with families by institutions

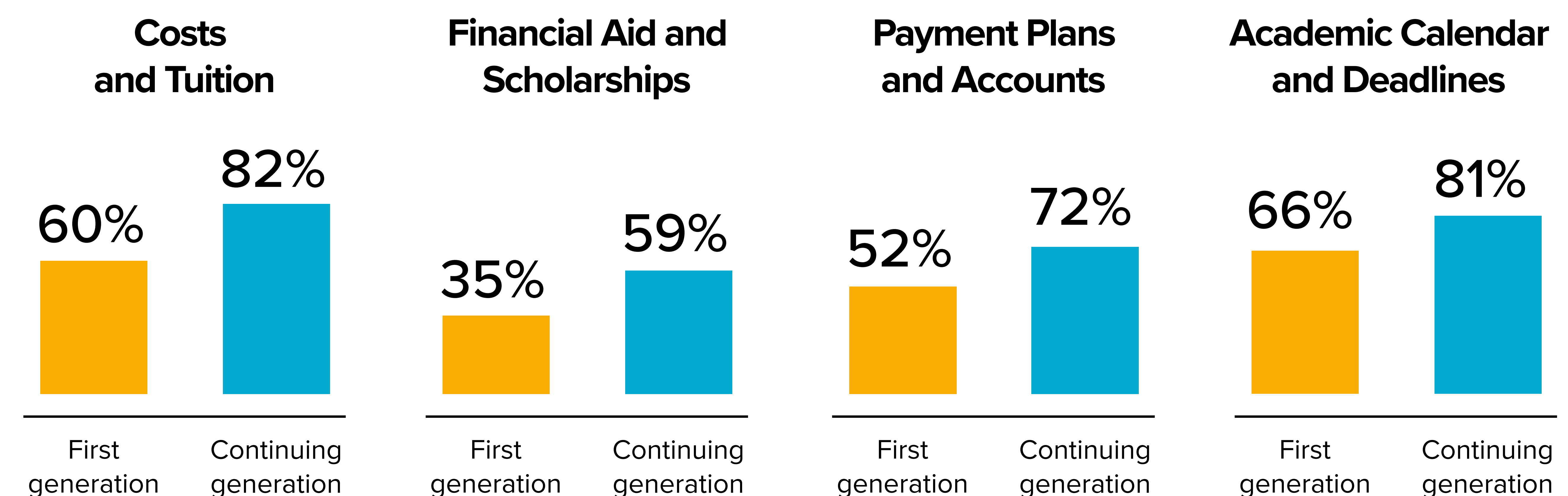
### This information is important, and families KNOW where to find it

- ✓ Athletic season
- ✓ Costs and tuition
- ✓ Account services and payment plans
- ✓ Financial aid and scholarship calculator
- ✓ Events on campus (athletics, plays, concerts etc.)
- ✓ Academic support (i.e. student disability services, tutoring, writing support)
- ✓ Academics (programs, majors, and minors)
- ✓ Parent and family-specific programs (like family weekends, welcome events, etc.)
- ✓ Residential life/housing information
- ✓ Academic calendar
- ✓ Campus safety

### This information is important, but they DON'T KNOW where to find it

- ✓ Student job placement
- ✓ Career services (assistance with resume, job search, interview skills, etc.)
- ✓ Virtual events for parents and family
- ✓ Email links to connect with administrators and faculty
- ✓ Mental health support resources
- ✓ Financial aid and scholarships

## Ability to find information independently





# Satisfaction with Student & Family Experience

## KEY INSIGHT

Families rate campus life and admissions experience highly, but see room for improvement in support services.

The highest rankings from families went to the admissions experience, leading the way at 90% satisfaction. Only 2 in 3 families were happy with the instruction and advising functions, and nearly half placed mental health resources at the bottom of their rankings.

### Satisfaction with areas of the student college experience

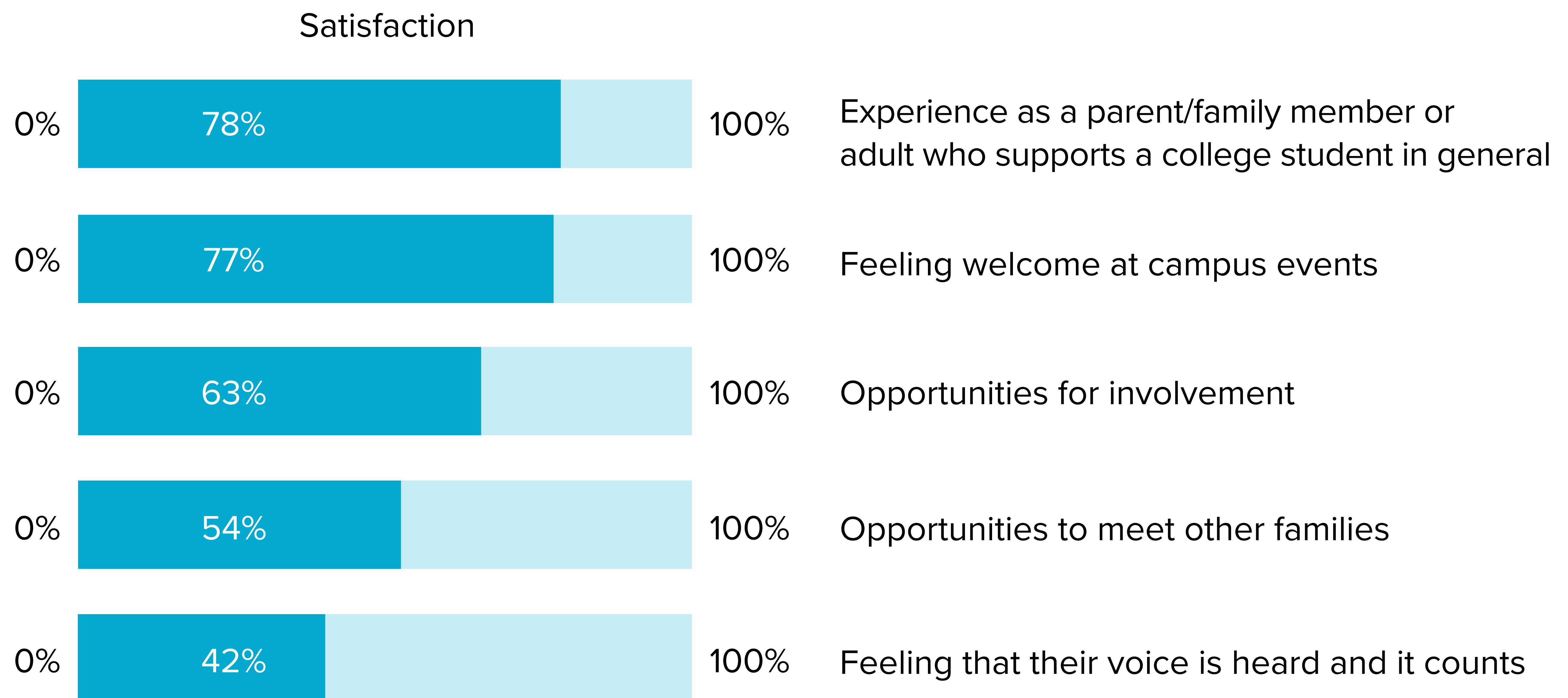


KEY INSIGHT

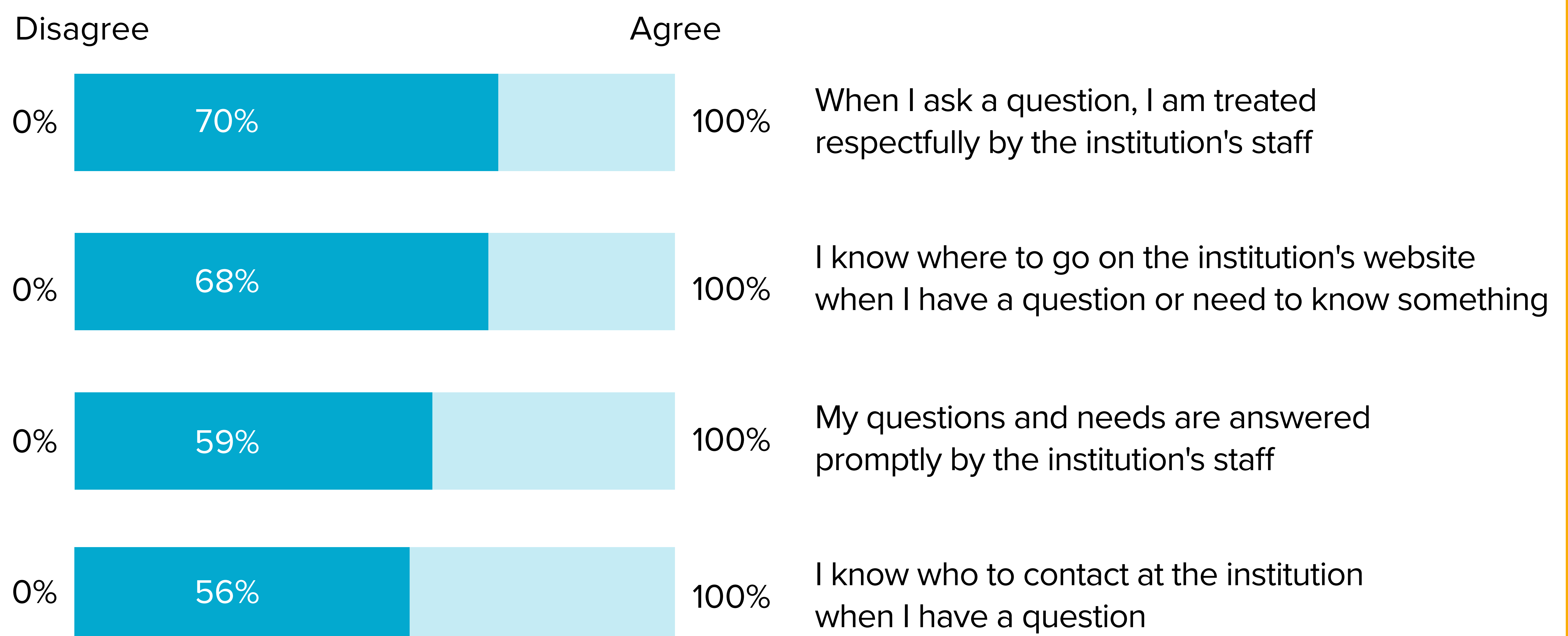
## 3 out of 4 families are satisfied with the family experience.

The majority of families surveyed were happy with the welcome their student's institution has extended. The families who were not satisfied felt unheard by the institution; providing opportunities for family feedback and contributions can go a long way in giving family members a voice.

### Satisfaction with areas of the family's experience



### Ability to obtain answers for questions from the institution.



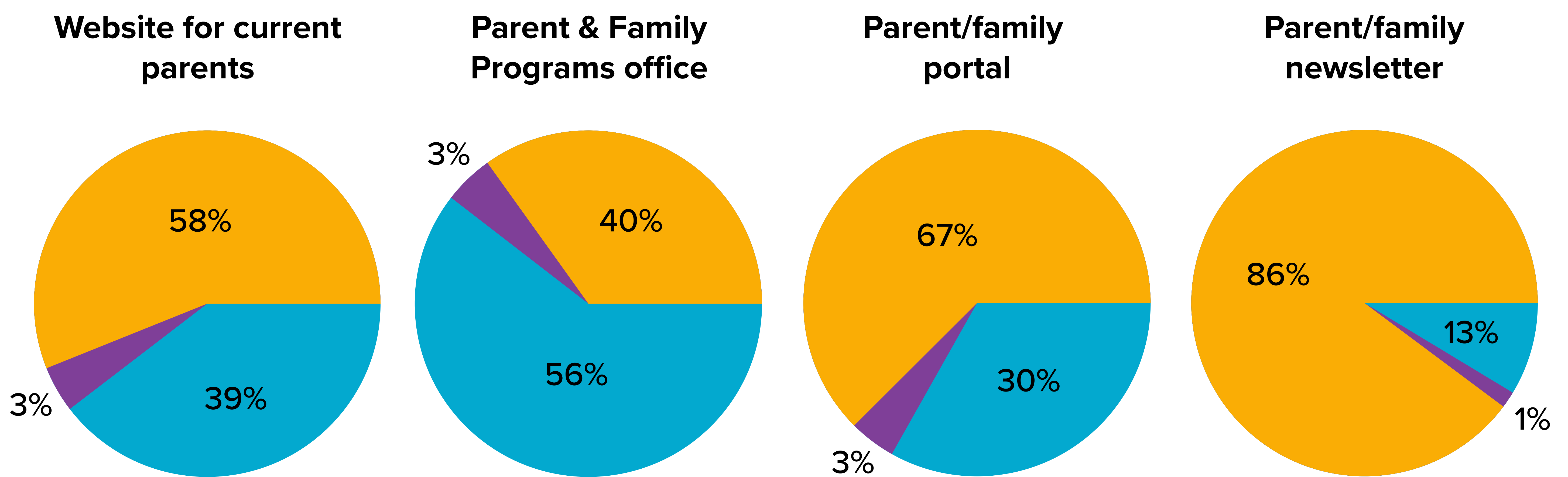
KEY INSIGHT

# Parents who use family resources are 20% more satisfied with the institution.

On the other hand, many parents weren't aware that their student's institution had resources specifically for parents and families. The families most likely to miss out on information? Hispanic, lower income, and first-generation families.

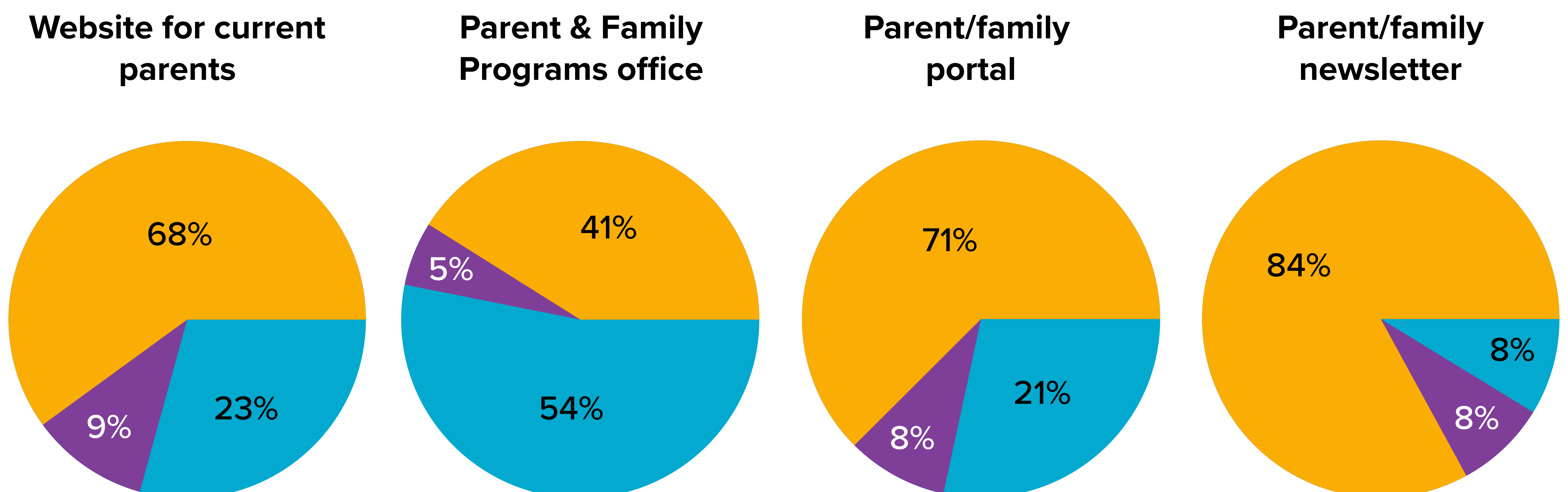
## Awareness of parent/family resources from institution

● This is available   
 ● This is NOT available   
 ● I don't know



## Usage of parent/family resources from institution

● I use it, and it's helpful   
 ● I use it, but I don't find it helpful   
 ● I don't use it

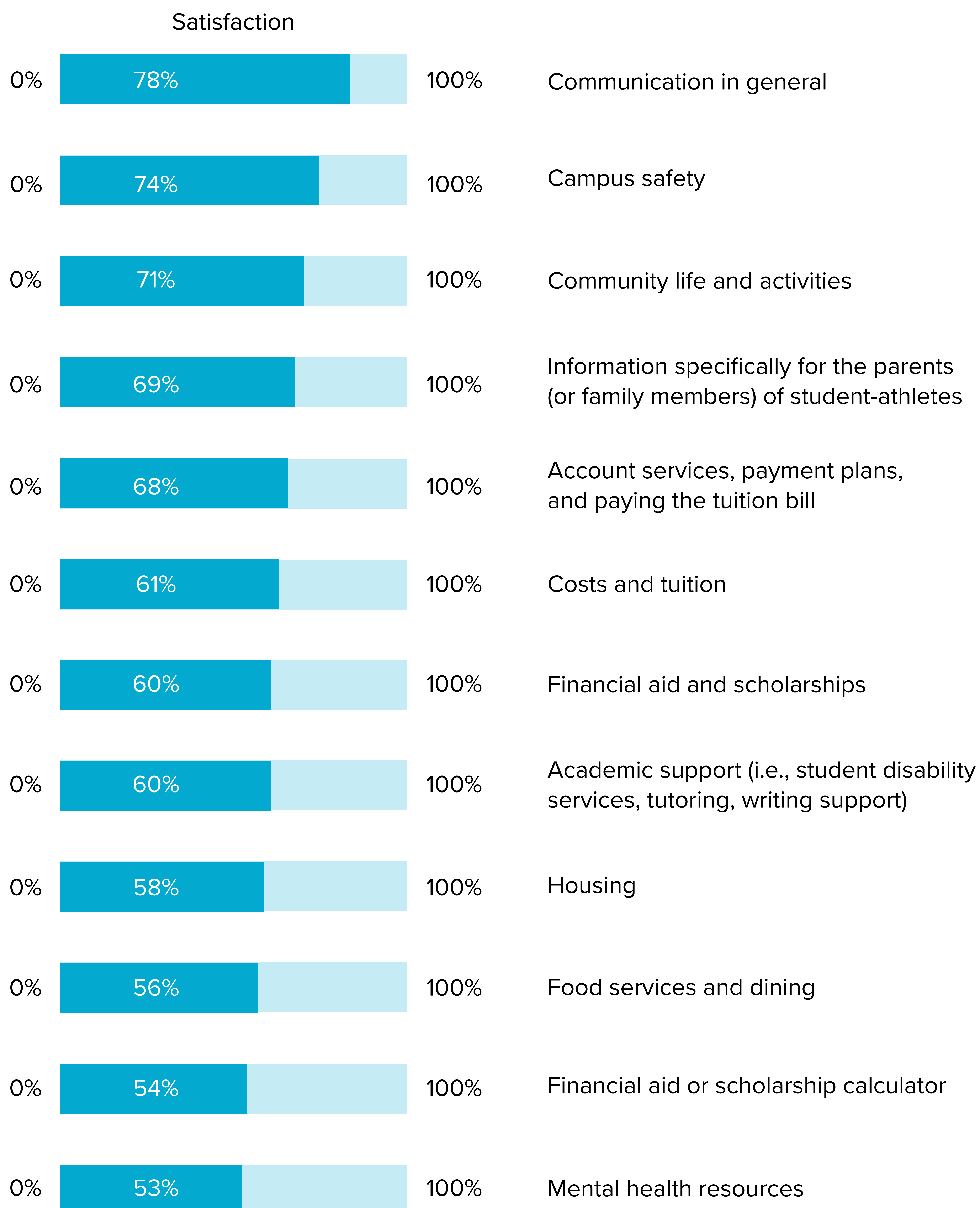


91%

of families who read the parent and family newsletter find it helpful.



### Satisfaction with information received from institution

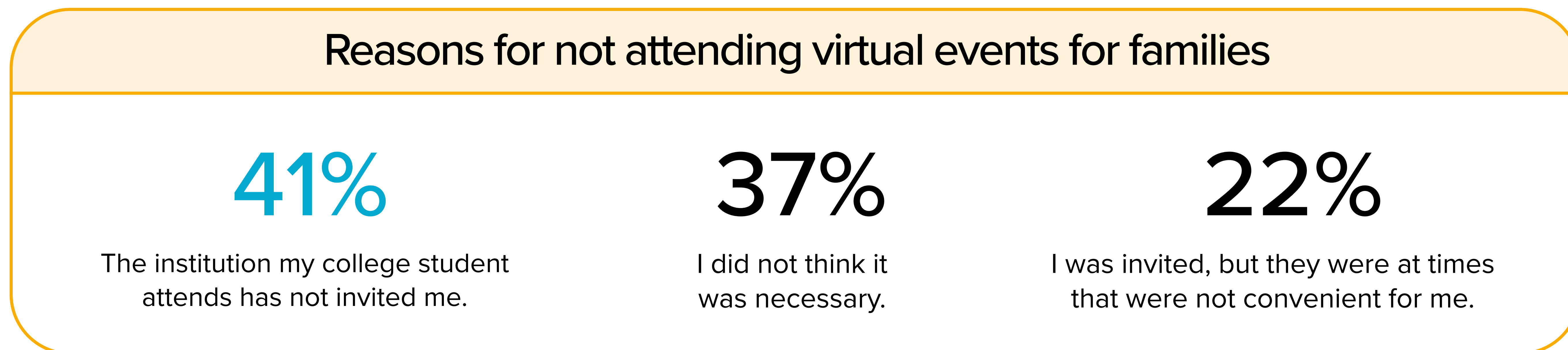
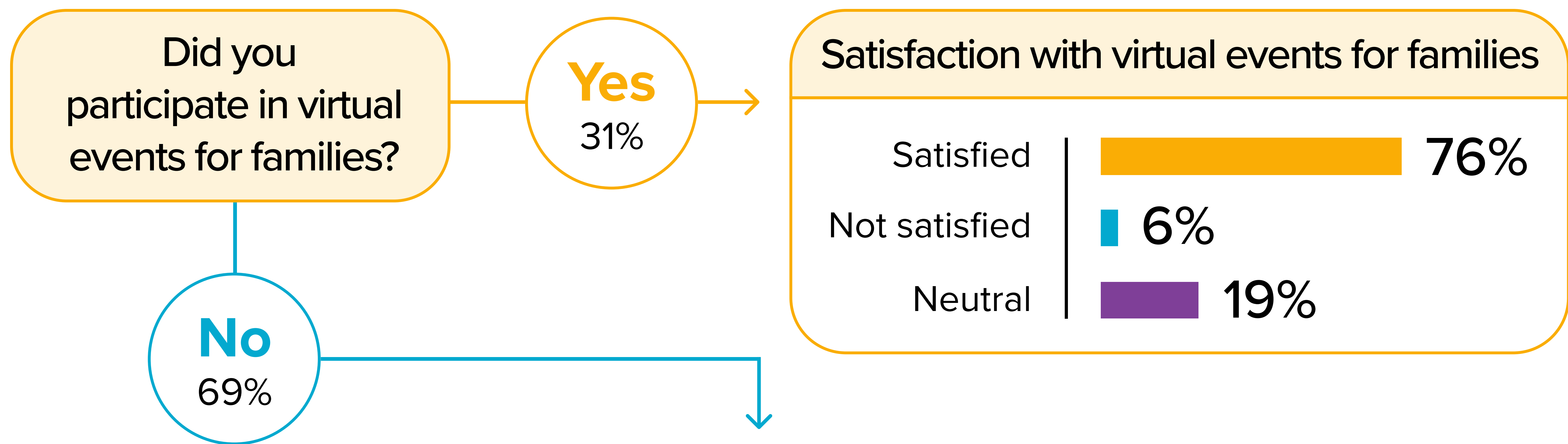


KEY INSIGHT

# Families find virtual events helpful—if you invite them.

Virtual events offer families an accessible look at campus life, but many (especially Black and lower-income families) were unable to attend at the scheduled time. 2 out of 5 families reported not being invited by the institution to attend.

Black families were most likely to miss out on virtual events due to communication, scheduling, or perceived value.



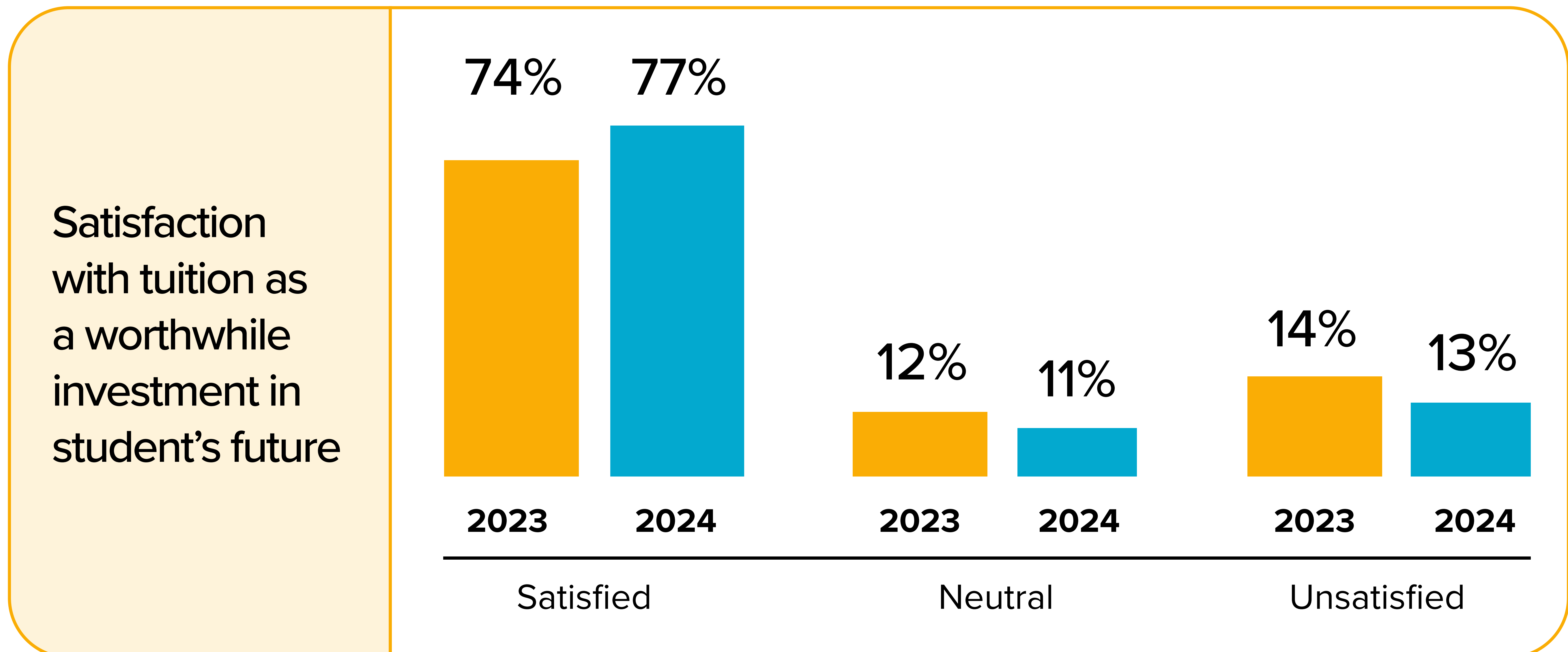
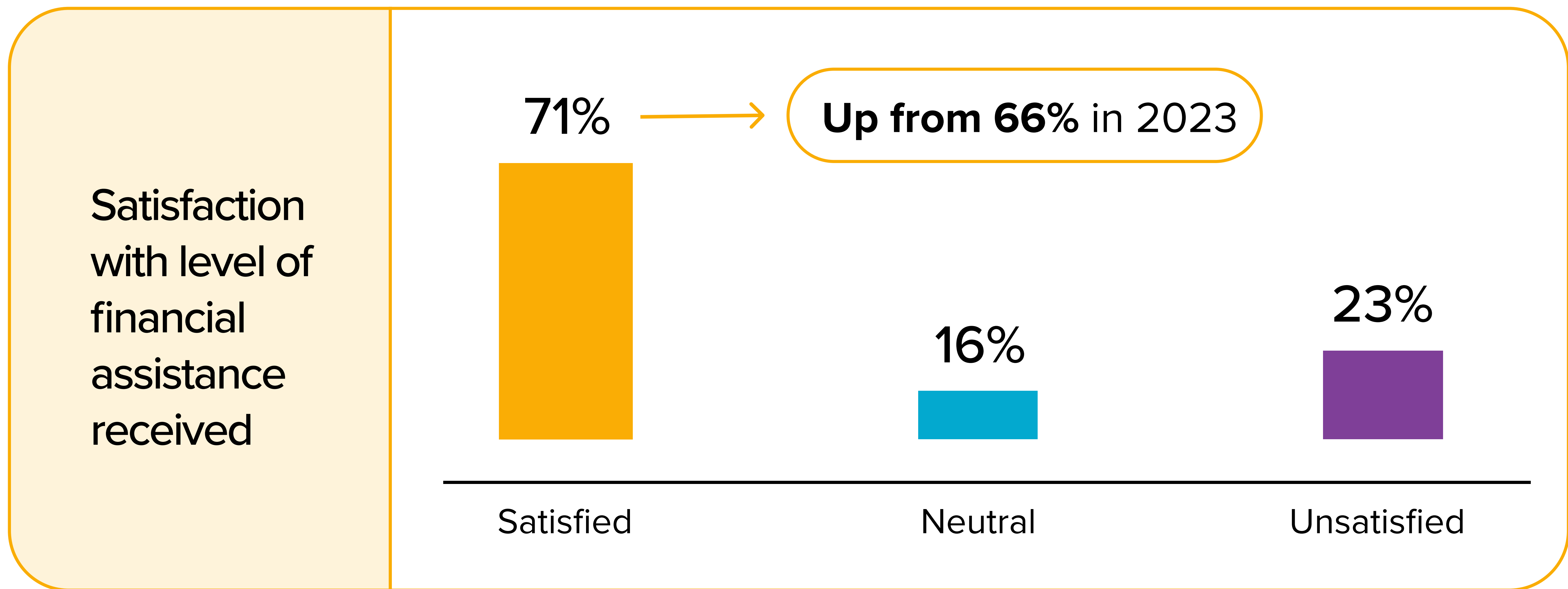
	The institution my college student attends has not invited me.	I did not think it was necessary.	I was invited, but they were at times that were not convenient for me.
<b>BY ETHNICITY</b>			
Asian/Pacific Islander	34%	30%	36%
Black or African-American	43%	15%	42%
Hispanic or Latino	40%	28%	32%
White	41%	40%	19%
Multi-racial	41%	37%	22%
<b>BY INCOME</b>			
Less than \$30,000	39%	26%	35%
\$30,000 to \$59,999	44%	26%	30%
\$60,000 to \$99,999	42%	33%	26%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	41%	38%	21%
\$150,000 to 199,999	40%	41%	19%
\$200,000 to \$249,000	41%	43%	16%
\$250,000 or more	40%	45%	15%
<b>BY STATUS</b>			
First generation	42%	28%	29%
Continuing generation	41%	39%	20%

# Financial Aid & Paying for College

## KEY INSIGHT

Families are more satisfied with financial aid received and the value of tuition as an investment.

Family satisfaction with aid packages increased 5 points over last year, and their general satisfaction with tuition as an investment rose 3 points.



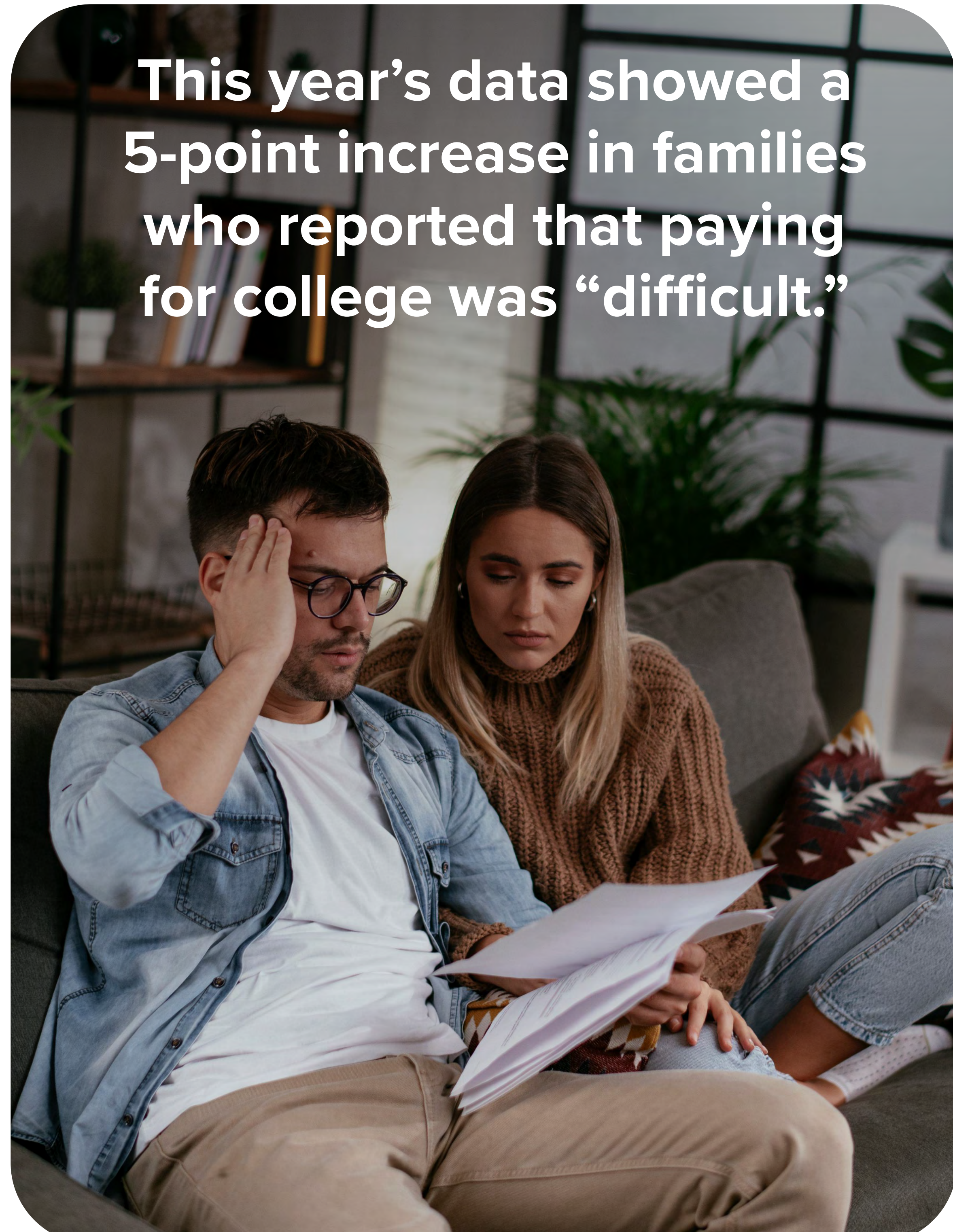
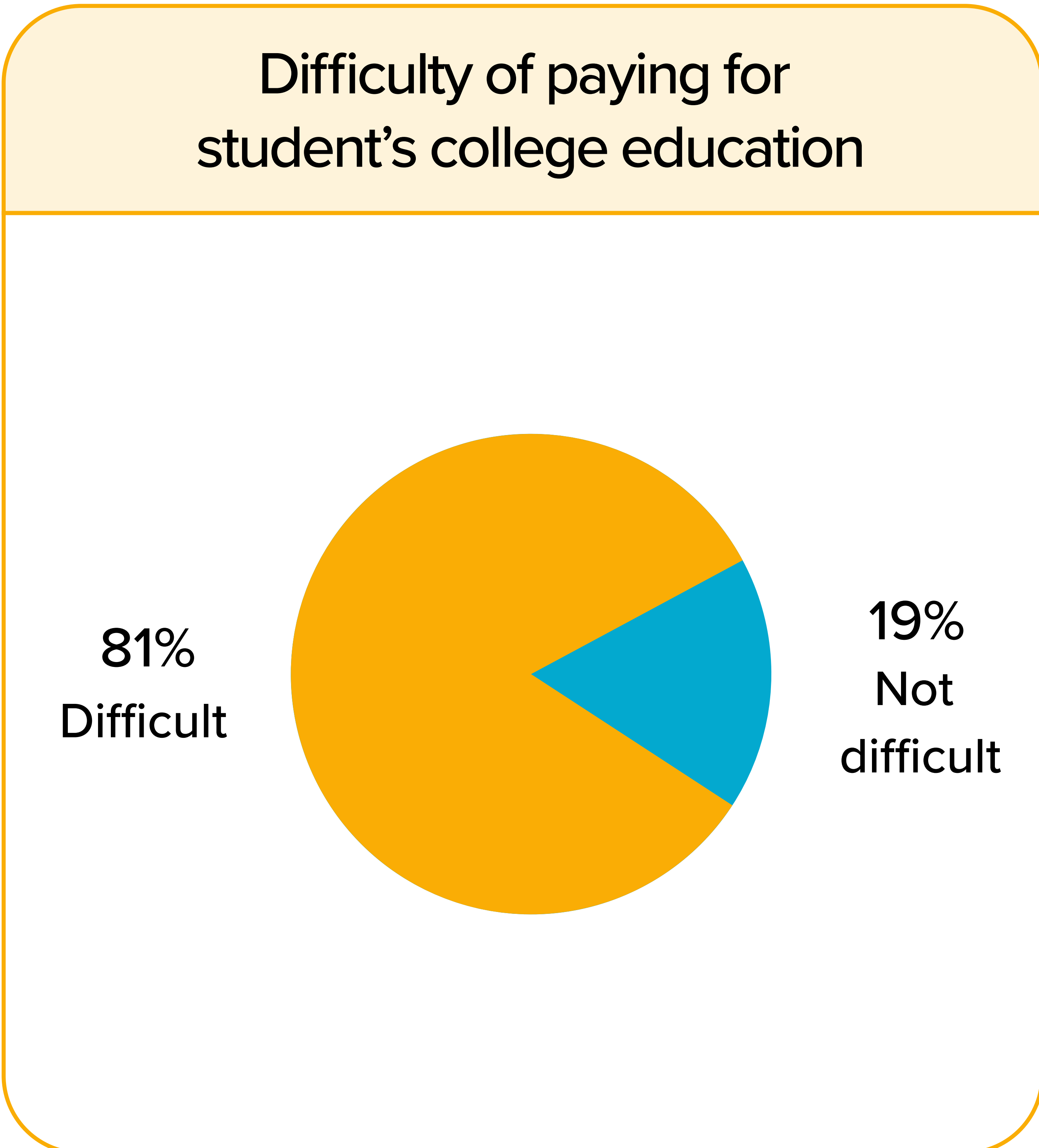
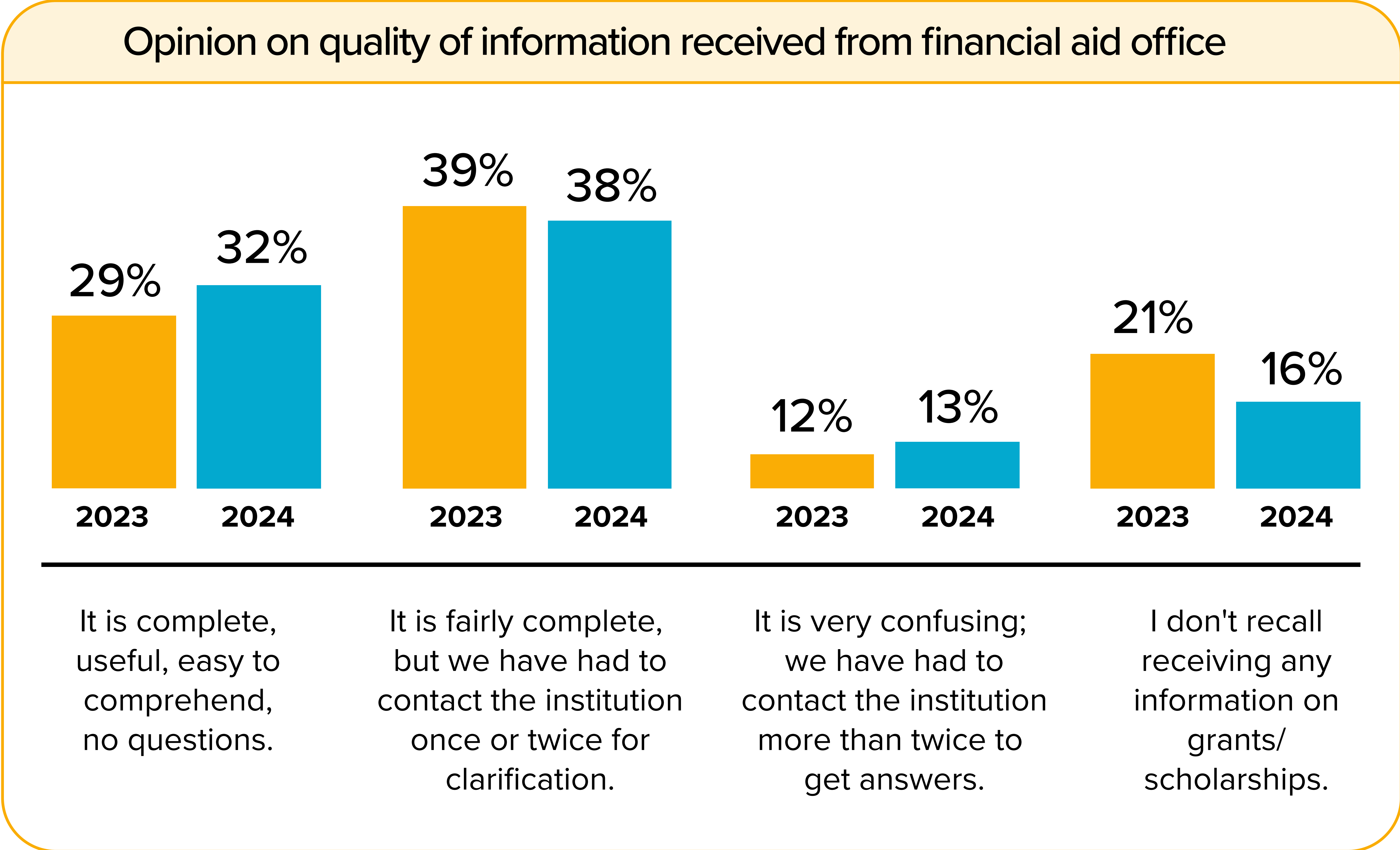
49%

of parents say financial aid and scholarships are the most important factor in helping students stay enrolled

KEY INSIGHT

# 67% of families want better information on financial aid

In addition, nearly half of families said the information they received from their institution's financial aid office required them to reach back out to the school at least once for clarification.



# About the Survey Participants

RNL and CampusESP invited families of current college students to complete an electronic survey directly through their institution's CampusESP parent portal between May and July of 2023. No personally identifiable data was collected on the survey, and all responses were anonymous.

## Demographics

INSTITUTION SIZE	
Under 5,000	23%
5,000-9,999	11%
10,000-19,999	21%
20,000+	45%

TYPE OF INSTITUTION	
Public	77%
Private	23%

STUDENT HOUSING	
On-campus housing	54%
Off-campus housing (but not at home)	38%
At home	8%

ETHNICITY	
Asian/Pacific Islander	4%
Black or African American	7%
Hispanic or Latino	9%
Middle Eastern	1%
White	69%
Multi-racial	2%
Other	2%

STUDENT'S EXPECTED GRAD. YEAR	
2024	15%
2025	20%
2026	23%
2027	41%

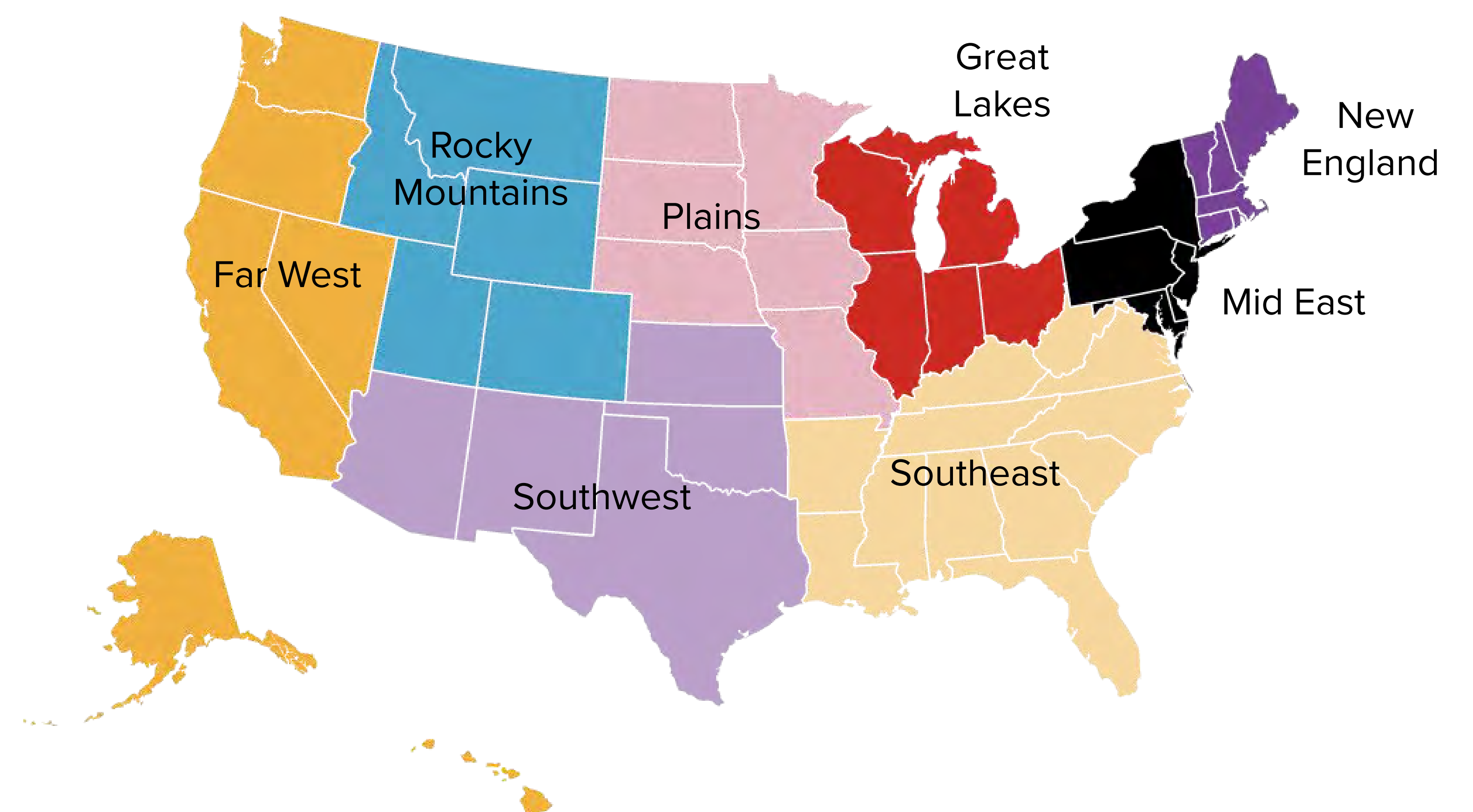
FIRST-GENERATION STATUS	
First generation	20%
Continuing generation	80%

PARENT/ADULT BIRTH YEAR	
1964 or later	15%
1965-1980	80%
1981 or later	5%

FAMILY INCOME	
Less than \$30,000	10%
\$30,000 to \$59,999	10%
\$60,000 to \$99,999	15%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	20%
\$150,000 to 199,999	15%
\$200,000 to \$249,000	15%
\$250,000 or more	15%

## Family's Region

US REGION	
● Mid East	24%
● Southeast	29%
● Southwest	21%
● Far West	5%
● Rocky Mountains	4%
● Plains	8%
● Great Lakes	7%
● New England	2%





# About the Report Sponsors



CampusESP is a strategic family engagement platform that enables institutions to inform the greatest influencers in students' lives—their parents. From impacting enrollment to student success to annual giving—keeping parents effectively engaged has proven to be critical for institutions looking to better support their institutional goals. With CampusESP, institutions can increase their numbers and satisfy the needs of parents, all while reducing administrative burden and hours on their staff.

**[Visit CampusESP.com](https://www.campusesp.com)** →



RNL is the leading provider of higher education enrollment, student success, and fundraising solutions. The firm serves more than 1,900 colleges and universities through data-driven solutions focused on the entire lifecycle of enrollment and fundraising, assuring students find the right program, graduate on time, secure their first job in their chosen field, and give back to support the next generation. With a deep knowledge of the industry, RNL provides institutions the ability to scale their efforts by tapping into a community of support and resources.

**[Visit RuffaloNL.com](https://www.ruffalonnline.com)** →

## Turn parent involvement into student success

Learn more about the impact of family engagement at [campusesp.com/family-communications](https://www.campusesp.com/family-communications)

### **How To Cite This Report**

CampusESP & RNL (2024)  
Family Engagement Report.

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