NAVIANCE
BY POWERSCHOOL

2021 Naviance Student Survey Report

Student Perspectives on College, Career, and Life Readiness

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Introduction

Over the past decade, America's high school graduation rates have risen steadily. Persistent equity gaps in high school graduation rates have also been closing as well:

80% Black students
(up from 67% in 2011)

82% Hispanic students
(up from 71% in 2011)

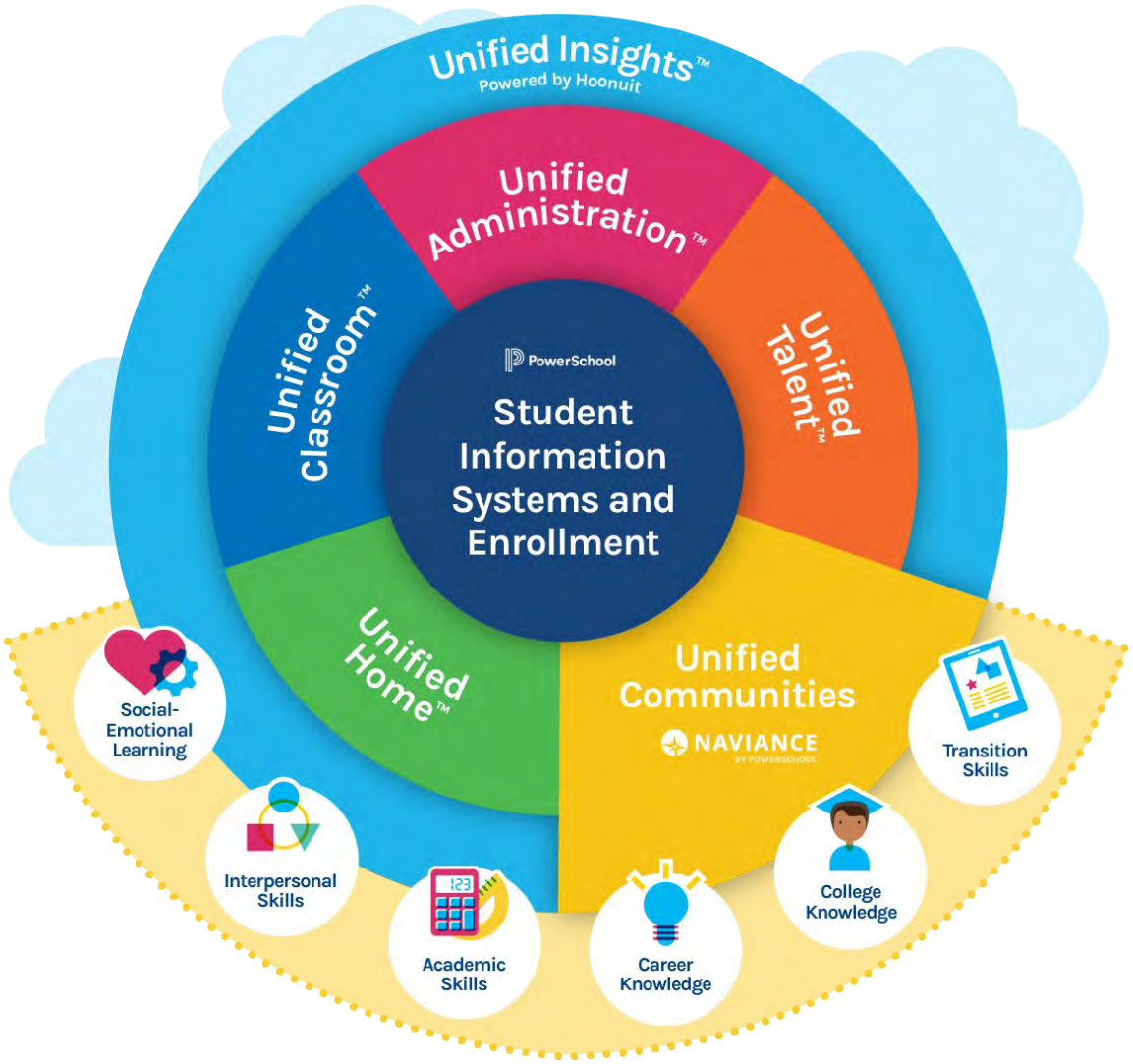
89% White students.[1,2]
(up from 84% in 2011)

Despite progress in closing some postsecondary access gaps, we still have significant work to do when it comes to postsecondary readiness and the attainment of postsecondary credentials.[3]

We know a high school diploma alone is an insufficient measure of postsecondary readiness. That's why we introduced the **Naviance College, Career, and Life Readiness (CCLR) Framework®** College, career, and life readiness requires skills, abilities, and knowledge across multiple core competencies: social emotional learning, interpersonal skills, academic skills, career knowledge, college knowledge, and transition skills.

The pandemic of this past year has accelerated the arrival of what we once called "the future of work." To remain relevant and competitive in our global economy, postsecondary education and training are more vital than ever, on both the individual and community levels.[4] The uncertainty of the past year has had major implications for the postsecondary access landscape. As graduating students and families have dealt with the economic impact of the global pandemic against a backdrop of unprecedented student loan debt, we have seen substantial changes in application and enrollment decisions for postsecondary education and training programs. Despite many states introducing and promoting tuition-free "promise programs" to support enrollment in community colleges, overall these institutions experienced a 12% decline in enrollment from 2019 to 2020.[5]

Since 2018, Naviance by PowerSchool has conducted an end-of-school year survey to learn more about students' postsecondary plans. This year, as part of the PowerSchool family, we are more focused on meeting student and school needs than ever. We know student and school success requires healthy and effective partnerships with families and others in the CCLR ecosystem. We also know that together with these partners, we can do a better job of supporting the particular needs of first-generation college students and students from different school types and communities. We are excited to share the results of this year's survey, which includes these demographic breakdowns and better identifies specific areas in which students think they could have used more support in becoming ready to live out their postsecondary plans.



Key Findings

The Naviance by PowerSchool family includes 40 percent of high school students in the United States.

Our representative sample illustrates the common types of support that students need across student groups, such as:

- **A high demand for more support exploring and identifying students' strengths and interests**
- **A need for access to career-connected learning experiences while in high school**

There are many resources and opportunities—such as virtual college visits—available to students that are currently underutilized. We provide suggestions and strategies to help fill these informational and navigational access and opportunity gaps.

We identify key student influencers when it comes to postsecondary planning and decision making. In addition to support from school counselors and teachers, students' primary influencers are their families. This report includes resources to help further your thinking and planning to ensure that key partners have up-to-date and accurate information to help drive decision making towards student success.

The 2021 Naviance Student Survey also reveals particular needs of first-generation college students, and key differences in the types of support needed by public and private school students.

Framework

We broadened our view this year. Rather than focusing narrowly on prospective college enrollment decisions and behaviors of graduating Naviance high school seniors, we 'zoomed out' to learn more about their planning and decision making processes, including how the pandemic affected their research and planning and how we can all better support their younger peers, based on feedback from the Class of 2021. To capture a holistic view of middle and high school students' needs as they prepare for their futures, the 2021 Naviance Student Survey was open to students in grades 6th-12th to participate in.

Methodology

To implement this approach, we utilized mixed methods throughout our survey design process. That is, we gathered and incorporated qualitative feedback from students in the Class of 2021 to inform our survey items and response options, and then we included free response options to relevant questions to allow students' voices to be heard loudly and clearly. This qualitative data adds important texture and context to the quantitative results we gathered from our national sample.

Who is the Naviance Student?

Naviance by PowerSchool serves more than 13,000 public and private schools, with more than 10 million students representing every region of the country.

Our diverse schools and student population reflect overall U.S. enrollment demographics.

In 2021, we received more responses to our annual Naviance Student Survey than ever before. As you can see in the three charts to the right, our respondents represent a diversity of backgrounds, comparable to the range of K-12 students nationally. More than 15,000 Naviance students completed this year's survey, representing more than a 50% increase over last year's sample. We gathered feedback from 6-12th grade students in public and private schools from around the country, with just over half of the respondents being seniors from the Class of 2021. Our respondents experienced learning in various ways over the past year, as their communities and schools made difficult decisions about whether and when to offer in-person options.

Geographic Regions of Survey Respondents

Total responses = 15,256

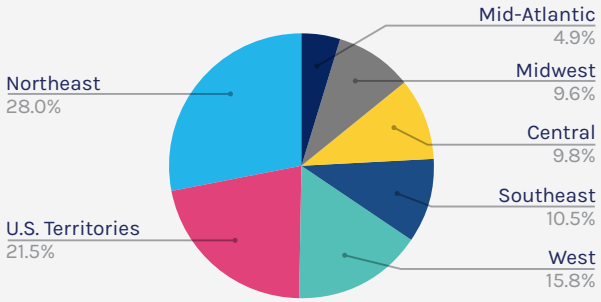


Figure 1
2021 Naviance Student Survey respondents reflect our client base.

Community Types of Student Survey Respondents

Total responses = 15,256

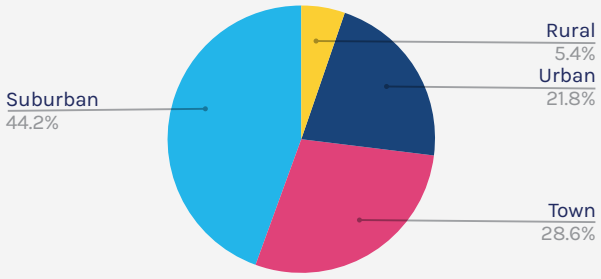


Figure 2
Our respondents largely reflected the balance of U.S. communities.[6]

First Gen Status of Survey Respondents

Total responses = 15,256

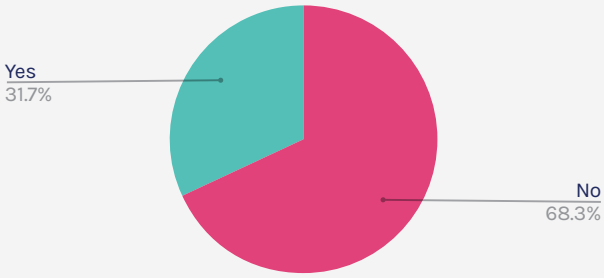


Figure 3
Our respondents also reflected the balance of students who would be the first generation in their families to attend college.[7]

With the sudden shutdown of in-person learning and support in 2020, Naviance by PowerSchool served as an even more critical resource for school counselors, students, and families than ever before. While more than a third of survey respondents returned to some in-person learning in the 2020-2021 school year, the majority affirmed their learning was all through virtual platforms.

2020-2021 Learning Environment

Total responses = 15,256

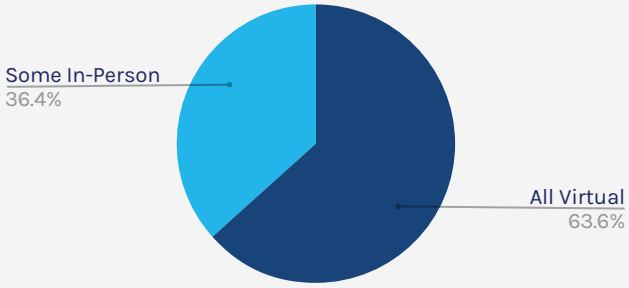


Figure 4
Our respondents affirmed that most of their learning experiences this year were virtual (online), rather than in person.

Like us all, as a result of this relative isolation, many students faced mental health challenges throughout the pandemic.[8] The toll and continued impact have been highest with lower-income households with financial hardships, and mental health recovery has been slower.[9] Our findings illustrate the related impact on families' postsecondary planning and decision making.

Overall: Applications, Experiences, and Plans

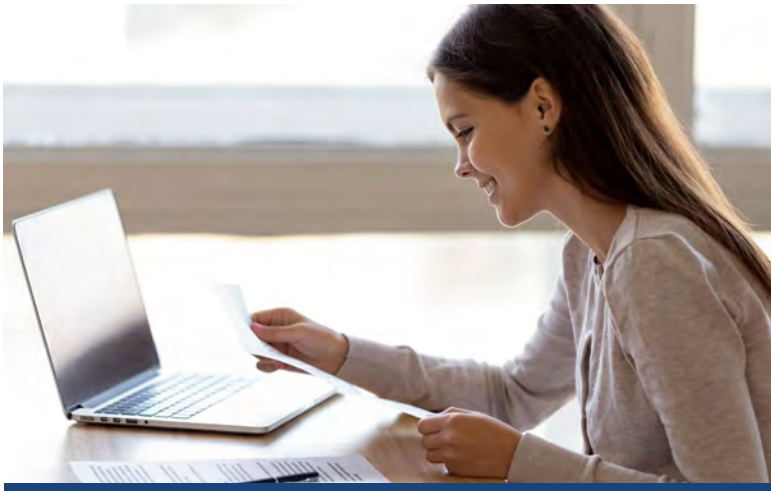
Applications are down and admit rates held steady. Enrollments and yield rates are down.

This year, despite limited access to in-person support and the changing environment of college admissions, millions of Naviance students and families maintained their commitment to navigating the options for postsecondary education and training.

Continuing to serve 1.9 million high school seniors, Naviance by PowerSchool provided critical search, application, and acceptance services for the Class of 2021. Students often apply to multiple colleges and universities as they and their families are weighing their postsecondary options.

We found several changes in key application, admissions, and decision numbers compared to last year. The Naviance Class of 2021 submitted 6.2 million applications—a decrease from last year's 6.6 million.

Naviance student acceptances decreased slightly from 2.6 million in 2020 to 2.4 million in 2021. With many colleges and universities working to maintain enrollment and providing additional, test-optional flexibility, the admit rate held steady through the pandemic at 39% from 2020 to 2021. With enrollment decisions decreasing over the last year, the yield rate also decreased by 3 percentage points (from 30% to 27%).



Admit rate remained steady at
39%

Decrease in yield rate from
30% to 27%

Year-to-year comparison of college applications submitted via Naviance and student-reported acceptances and decisions.

Class of 2021 by the Numbers

Class of 2020 by the Numbers

Figure 5

* Student reported data — underreported by up to 20-percentage points

Search: A Deeper Look at Preferences

Like we did last year, we will focus our analysis of postsecondary plans primarily on our graduating high school seniors. We received responses from 8,057 members of the Class of 2021.

After a dip in college-going plans among the Class of 2020, 83% of which reported plans to attend 2-year and 4-year colleges in the **2020 Naviance Student Survey** report (down from 88% of seniors in our 2019 survey), **87% of this year's graduating class indicated they planned to enroll in college this fall.** This year, we took a deeper dive into the other aspects of postsecondary planning, to find out what other plans students in the Class of 2021 had, including alternatives to 2-year and 4-year colleges, as well as students' thinking about whether they will work this fall. To add greater nuance to our analysis and discussion, we have broken out the responses of our public and private school students.

Our prompt inquiring about graduating students' expectations of working was revealing. The low percentage of students who reported plans to work—whether part-time or full-time while going to college, or whether they planned to enter the workforce directly after high school graduation—affirms the need for greater support with two of the other six core CCLR Framework competencies, career knowledge and transition skills. While 21% of public school students, and 14% of their private school peers, indicated they anticipated working this fall, pre-pandemic data from the Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce indicates that 70% of full-time college students are working, with more than a quarter of students working full-time. Moreover, while there was a difference based on family income levels, with low-income working students were more likely —at 26%—to work full-time, 22% of their high-income peers were still working full-time, with the majority of students across income brackets working 15-35 hours per week.[10] As additional student interest data will suggest, there are certainly implications for school counselors to consider, at both public and private schools.

Students planning to attend 2-year and 4-year colleges

88%	83%	87%
Class of 2019	Class of 2020	Class of 2021

Class of 2021: Postsecondary Plans

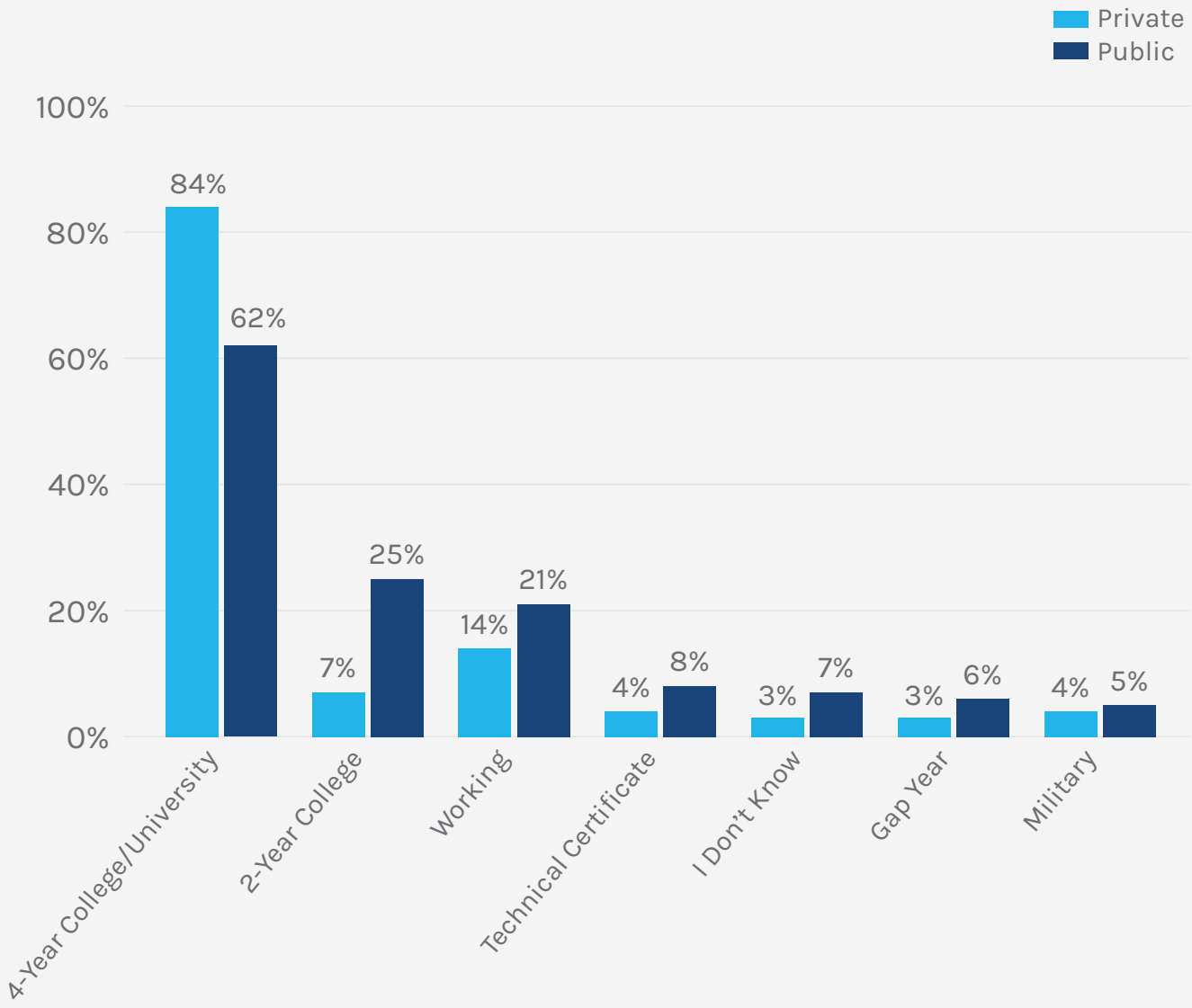


Figure 6

While some graduating seniors were still finalizing their decisions, we found students were considering a variety of postsecondary pathways.

Top Support Needs and Relevant Resources

Capturing graduating students' feedback on areas in which they wish their schools provided more support yields insights for strengthening systems for counseling, advising, and coaching their younger peers.

Given the timeliness of the specific tasks associated with finalizing postsecondary plans and funding, it is telling that schools scored high marks on those specific supports, while perhaps leaving students feeling that they could have used more help with 'the big picture': discovering their interests and strengths, exploring career options, and finding internship and work opportunities. In fact, the top 5 support needs identified by students were consistent between the Class of 2021 and our Gr. 6-11 respondents.

In Which of the Following Areas do You Wish Your School Provided More Support?

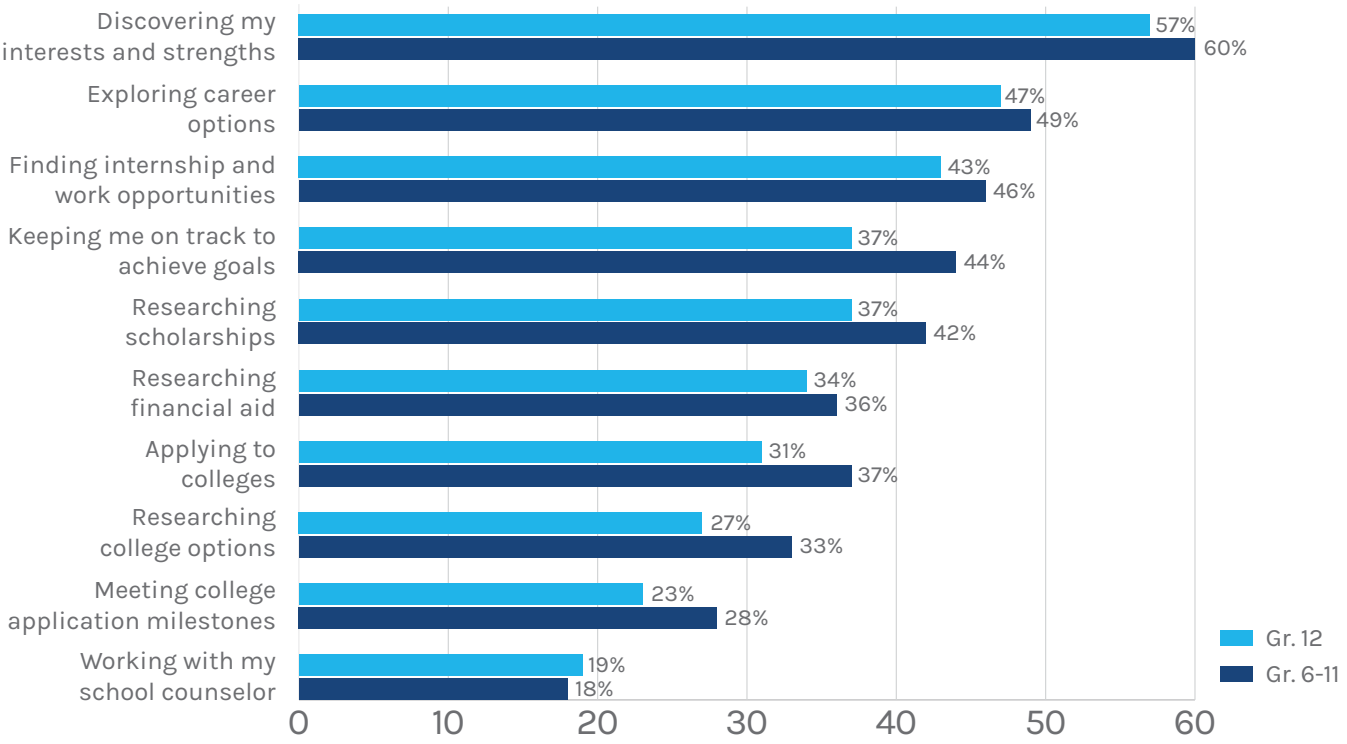


Figure 7

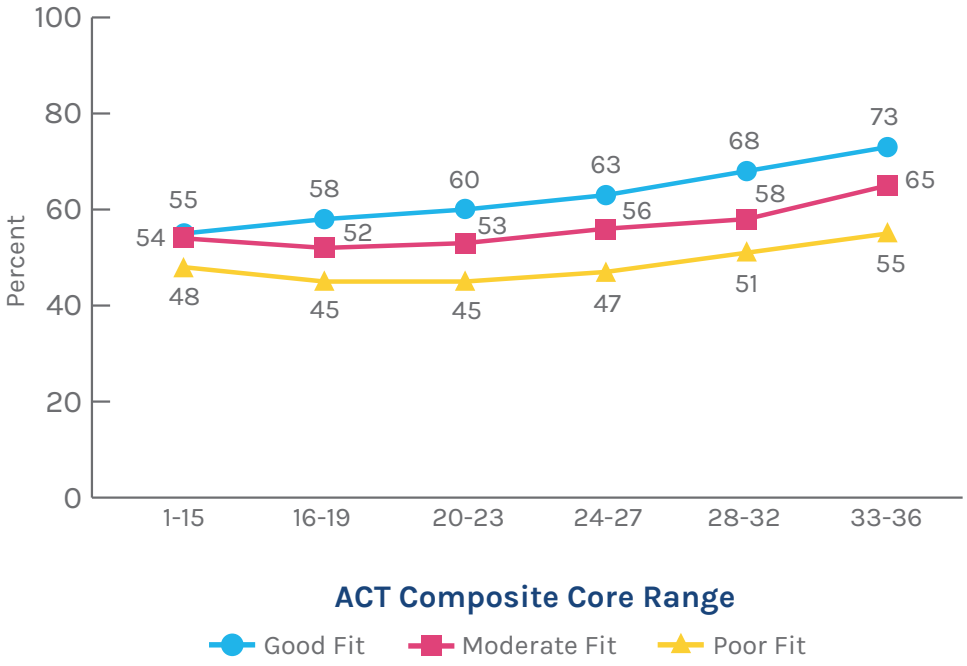
Student support needs were consistent across grade levels.

Finding Internship and Work Opportunities

High school students are right to want to better understand and plan for future careers and the educational pathways that will get them there.

Research by ACT found that students with a good interest-major fit persisted in their college major at higher rates than students with moderate and poor fit. In fact, a student with an ACT Composite score between 33 and 36 (the highest range) who had a poor fit between personal interests and college major had the same chance of persisting in the major as a student with an ACT Composite score of 15 or lower (the lowest range) with a good interest-major fit.

Persistence in Major by ACT Score Range and Interest-Major Fit



Graph reads: 58% of ACT-tested college students with an ACT Composite score between 16 and 19 and good fit with their entering college major persisted in the same college major family through the start of their third year of college.

Figure 8

Evidence of the Importance of Identifying a Good Fit Postsecondary Program

Note: Based on a sample of 62,494 ACT-tested students who entered college between 2000 and 2006 and remained enrolled in the second (2-year students) or third (four-year students) year of college. College major family represented by 2-digit CIP code. Interest-major fit ranges from 0-99 with value of 80 and higher indicating good fit, values between 60-79 indicating moderate fit, and values less than 60 indicating poor fit.

Evidence from a sample of ACT-tested college students illustrates the added value of interest-major fit in predicting student persistence within their major.

- Students with a good interest-major fit persisted in their major at higher rates than students with moderate and poor fit, with the largest difference at the upper ranges of the ACT Composite score scale.
- A student with an ACT Composite score between 33 and 36 who had a poor fit between personal interests and college major had the same chance of persisting in the major as a student with an ACT Composite score of 15 or lower with a good interest-major fit.

Apply: Concerns over Costs and Impact of COVID-19

The decline we saw in applications this year reflects the negative impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on higher education enrollment overall.

After facing difficult decisions last summer, national reports indicated the fall college going rate of incoming freshman among the Class of 2020 was down 13% compared to the Class of 2019.[11] As more families have faced economic hardships related to the pandemic, and colleges and universities have had to shift to hybrid or online teaching and learning, more students and their families are motivated to ensure they are making a wise decision and investment in their postsecondary education. As additional student interest data will suggest, there are certainly implications for school counselors to consider, at both public and private schools.

Beyond Match: More Refined Approaches to Fit Factors

One of the six core competencies in the Naviance CCLR Framework is College Knowledge. This includes knowing about postsecondary opportunities, types of colleges, and how to apply for and pay for college.

It also includes understanding college fit and match. For many years, there has been a focus on 'match,' which primarily consists of aligning a student's academic background—particularly college admissions test scores and grade point averages (GPAs)—with the typical profile of colleges and universities of interest. More recently, especially as a growing number of institutions have shifted to 'test optional' admissions, there has been greater awareness and emphasis on identifying the 'fit factors' that matter most to students and families. One framework for helping students make these determinations is the ACCESS Fit Factors from FourPoint Education Partners, adapted from **Find the Fit**. Another great resource is the free Naviance eBook **College Admissions Guide: Improving Best-Fit Outcomes for All Students**, which offers a year-by-year roadmap to lead high school counselors through the many twists and turns in the college search and admissions process.

ACCESS Fit Factors

Consider these factors and find colleges that are the right fit for you. **Each college and university is unique—like you.** Below are some questions to ask as you consider colleges.

Accessibility

CAMPUS LOCATION
Is the campus in a rural, suburban or urban setting?

CAMPUS SIZE
How many students are at this school? Do you want a small or big college?

FACULTY & STAFF
How easy and common is it to connect one-on-one with faculty and staff?

Culture/Climate

CAMPUS LIFE
What student activities are available? Is there a large proportion of minority students? Is it a minority serving institution?

TEST SCORES & GPA
How do your test scores and GPA compare to those of enrolled students?

GRADUATION & RETENTION
How do your test scores and GPA compare to those of enrolled students? Do most students graduate on time? How about students from backgrounds similar to yours?

Cost

ACTUAL COSTS
How much would you pay to go to school? Free net price calculators can help estimate financial aid you may receive.

FINANCIAL AID
Have you used the FAFSA4caster to estimate your aid? Average aid (2019-2020)*

- $13,464 to pay for college
- $5,179 of this came from grants

Employable Majors

What does the college provide in terms of programs tied to industry demands and career opportunities? Internships?

SOURCE: Four Point Education Partners

www.fourpointeducation.com

Student Support Services

How involved and supportive are alumni? What campus support services are available? Important services to consider:

- First Year Supports
- Academic Supports and Advising
- Counseling Services
- Financial Aid
- Residential Life

Target Four or More Colleges

1 or more colleges that will almost certainly admit you

1 or more colleges that are likely to admit you

1 or more colleges that will consider you and might admit you

Applying to 2 four-year-colleges instead of just 1 increases your chance of enrolling by 40%

Applying to more than 2 four-year-colleges increases your chances even more.

*https://educationdata.org/financial-aid-statistics

Once students have identified the factors that are most important to them, SuperMatch® helps students incorporate these factors into their college search and selection processes and decisions. Based partly on the strength of SuperMatch's functionality, **the Class of 2021 rated Naviance by PowerSchool as their top resource for researching colleges.** Just over 12% of seniors indicated they were not researching colleges; of the remaining 87%, these are the top rated resources for doing so.

Top 5 Resources for Researching Colleges

1. **Naviance**
2. **College Websites**
3. **Family**
4. **Emails from Colleges**
5. **School Counselors/Teachers**

In addition to researching college options, seniors in the Class of 2021 identified many ways that Naviance has been important in exploring and planning their postsecondary pathways.

62% of seniors said Naviance was important for

Exploring career options	Discovering their strengths and interests	Keeping them on track to achieve their goals	Working with their school counselor

Among seniors who would be the first generation in their family to go to college, the importance of Naviance was even more pronounced in our survey results. First Gen students were nearly 27% more likely to rate Naviance as very important to researching college options, 48% more likely to rate the platform as very important for exploring career options, 51% more likely to rate Naviance as very important for keeping them on track to achieve their goals, and 54% more likely to rate it as very important for discovering their interests and strengths.

Application and Decision Timing

Compared to prior year's survey data, we found the timing of college decisions were consistent, with the majority (61.5%) of the Class of 2021 making their decisions in the second half of 12th grade, as could be expected.

In terms of the overall process, again we dug deeper this year, asking students to think back to when they begin each of the following key steps in the postsecondary research and planning process. We found that more than half (58.6%) of the Class of 2021 waited until the second half of junior year to begin searching for colleges and similarly, 60.2% waited until that time to begin visiting colleges. Surprisingly, more than 44% of students indicated they planned to visit no more than one college campus, even including virtual visits. The late start in the college search process was especially pronounced among our First Gen respondents from the Class of 2021, 43% of which reported starting their college search in 12th grade, compared to 33% of their non-First Gen peers. Clearly, there are opportunities to begin these helpful steps earlier.

Substantial portions of the Class of 2021 indicated the pandemics of the past year influenced the college search for them and their families a lot: 40% for when the college search started, 39% for how they searched for and researched colleges, and 34% for the number of planned college applications. The impact was greatest on First Gen students, with 50.4% indicating the pandemic influenced their post-high school plans a lot, compared to 37.7% of their non-First Gen peers.

When and How Did You Start Searching for Colleges?

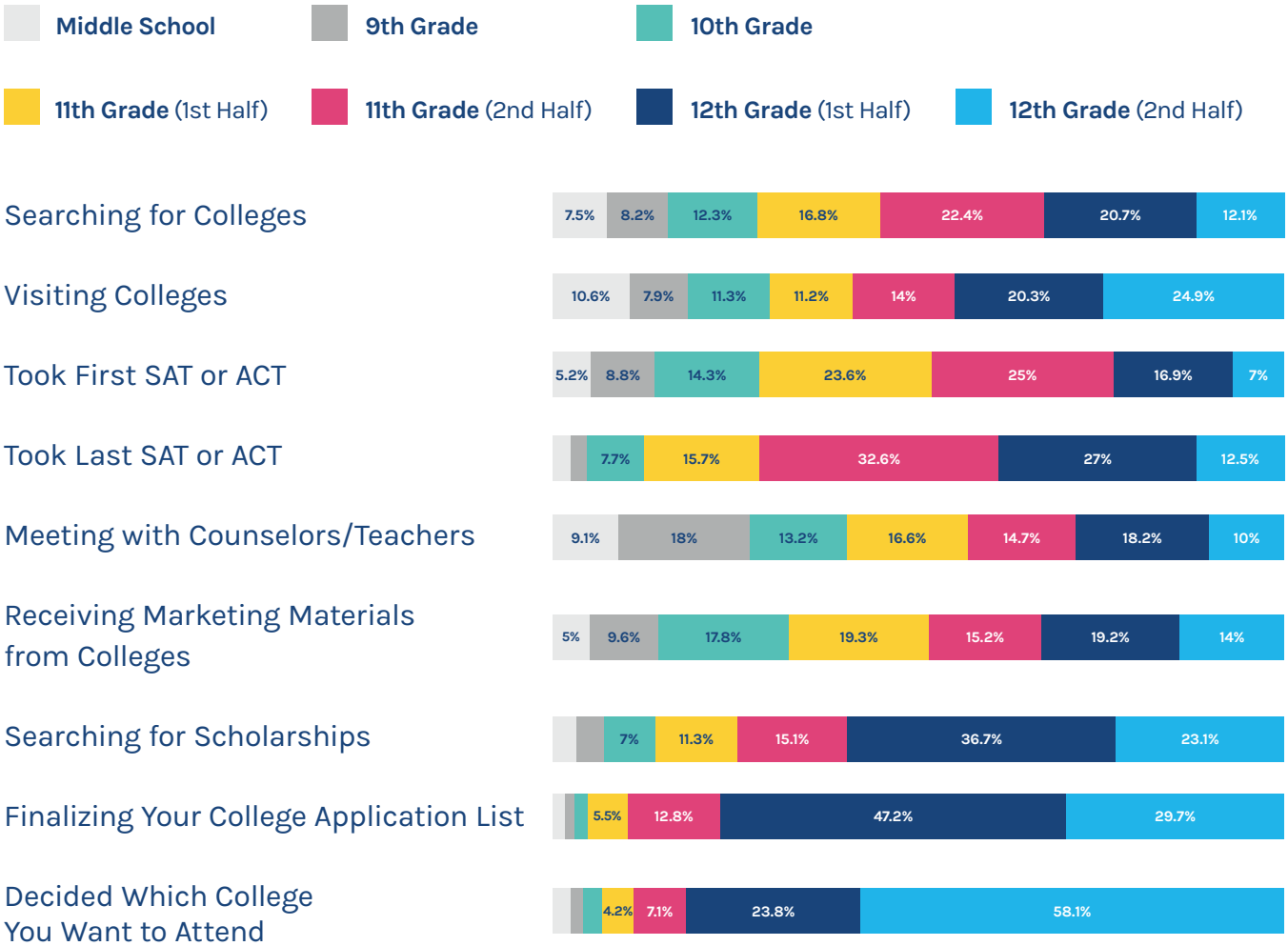


Figure 9

Class of 2021 responses indicate opportunities for earlier support.

Enroll

When it comes to postsecondary enrollment, the impact of the pandemic cannot be overstated.

Even accounting for late enrollment in the spring, a June 2021 report from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center indicated that enrollment declines were seven times worse than the year prior, with an overall undergraduate spring enrollment drop of 4.9%. Community colleges have experienced the greatest declines, with an overall drop in enrollment of 9.5%.[12]

Key Factors in High School Graduates' Postsecondary Decisions

This year, we wanted to take a more holistic view of the fit factors involved in students' and families' search and decision making processes.

In addition to our traditional set of topics, we also gave students the opportunity to indicate the importance of new factors, such as the availability of mental health and student services; the diversity of the campus; the availability of tutoring and other academic services; cultural empowerment; as well as athletics, school name recognition, and family legacy.

We found substantial shifts in traditional college search and decision priorities, with Career Options moving from the #5 slot the past two years to #1, Majors moving up from #3 to #2, and major increases in the importance of the Cost of Education and Financial Aid/Scholarships. We also found clear evidence that students are interested in understanding what college campuses have to offer in areas that are important to them, including Mental Health and Student Services, Diversity, as well as Cultural Empowerment. This provides helpful direction for school counselors and staff to help students and families identify and incorporate the fit factors most important to them into their postsecondary planning and decision making.

What Topics Are Important in Your College Search/Decision?

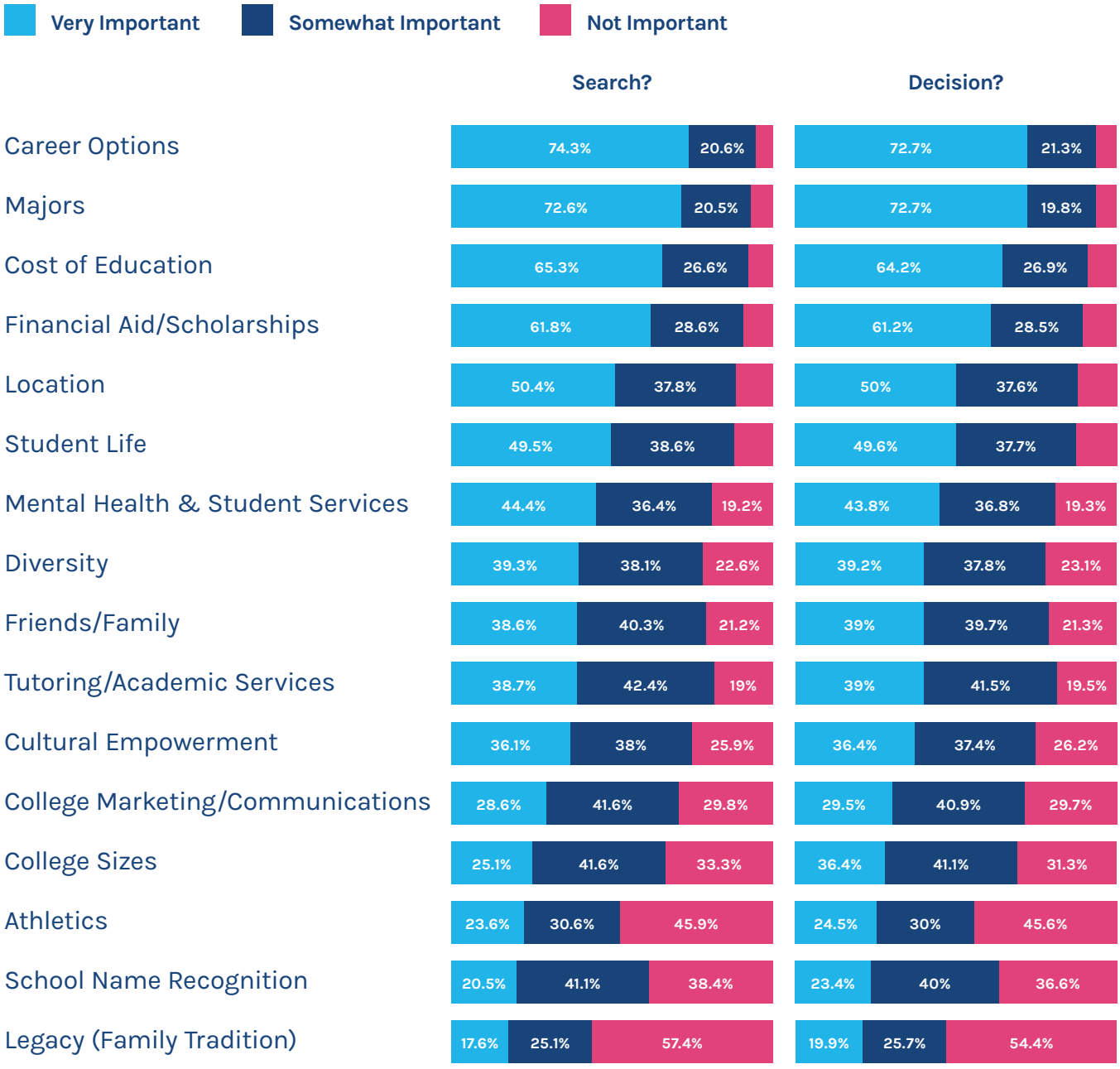


Figure 10

The Class of 2021 affirmed there were a variety of fit factors in their search and decision processes.

Conclusion

We believe the findings of the 2021 Naviance Student Survey provide actionable insights for K-12 education staff.

The many middle and high school students who responded to our survey affirmed that they value support with navigating postsecondary options and pathways, especially as the postsecondary landscape undergoes rapid changes. In particular, students need encouragement and assistance with identifying and building on their interests and strengths, throughout their secondary school experience. They need support systems—in school and at home—that can help them understand how to plan and work toward future success. Students want to know more about career pathways and are more motivated than you might realize to participate in work-based learning. They also recognize the need for support with keeping them on track to achieve their goals. For first generation students, in-school supports are an especially valued lifeline for each of these key college, career, and life readiness tasks. By providing additional guidance, support, and resources through these important stages of life, together we can ensure all students find a good fit postsecondary option and successful postsecondary outcomes.

Resources

Discovering Strengths and Interests

Middle and high school students are indicating that schools are finding creative ways for school counselors to work with students, but that they still need support to better understand their interests, strengths, and opportunities to build career readiness and achieve their goals. Social emotional learning (SEL) is one of the six Naviance CCLR Framework competencies and includes helping students identify their strengths and interests. The Naviance by PowerSchool Curriculum provides a self-paced learning experience for students in grades 6-12 that helps develop SEL skills aligned to the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) *Mindsets and Behaviors for Student Success.* In addition, through Naviance by PowerSchool's relationship with Gallup, students can complete the Gallup's Clifton StrengthsExplorer®, which assesses ten talent themes for individuals, identifying each student's three strongest emerging talents. The assessment is recommended for students in grades 6-10. Once students identify their talents, Gallup's Clifton StrengthsExplorer® presents ideas for how to highlight and apply them, so students can realize their full potential. Naviance by PowerSchool also offers the AchieveWorks® Skills assessment that helps students identify the skills needed for success in their academics and in the workplace.

Exploring Career Options

Naviance by PowerSchool has a tremendous amount of resources to help students explore careers that align with their strengths and interests.

- Through career assessments, students can learn about requirements for specific careers, explore local and national salaries, and create a plan to reach career goals. Career Key encourages exploration of a variety of occupations and accurately matches students to careers that best fit their strengths for long-term success. Career Interest Profiler helps high school students discover more than 1,000 careers and learn and identify which specific careers match their profile and interests. Additionally, the Career Cluster Finder helps students discover career clusters that are a good fit based on activities and school subjects that they like or dislike and personal qualities that they possess.
- The Roadtrip Nation Video Archive is a digital career exploration tool, consisting of more than 7,000 full-length video interviews conducted by young people, that enables students to discover new pathways, interests, and ambitions.

- Each year, Naviance by PowerSchool helps create 500,000 resumes, with step-by-step guidance for creating an effective resume that can be exported in various formats and used to apply for internships and job opportunities.
- With the career exploration and planning tools in Naviance by PowerSchool, students can gain exposure to career areas of interest and learn what is required to reach their career goals.

More high school students from all backgrounds are recognizing the importance of work-based learning (WBL). This year, to help meet this critical need, Naviance by PowerSchool introduced **Work-Based Learning**, a new functionality available for all clients to make local internships and other WBL opportunities available for students to explore and apply. We also created the **WBL Made Easy Toolkit**, which includes a variety of resources to help schools connect with businesses and other employers in the community for win-win WBL partnerships.

Exploring Colleges

We found a staggering proportion of students had minimal plans for visiting potential colleges of interest, even via virtual tours. One helpful resource to close this important knowledge and experience gap is RepVisits, which includes access to more than 12,000 college representatives from across the country. Students also indicated there are several factors they consider in determining which colleges they will apply to and attend. SuperMatch® is another resource to help students explore postsecondary education options and identify colleges and universities that meet their search criteria. One of the top priorities for many students is the importance of the cost of education when exploring colleges. Scholarships can play a central role in making college more affordable. Naviance by PowerSchool's robust scholarship search helps students identify scholarship opportunities to help make college more affordable for them and their family.

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The 2021 Naviance Student Survey report was created in partnership with FourPoint Education Partners.

PowerSchool

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PowerSchool (NYSE: PWSC) is the leading provider of cloud-based software for K-12 education. Its mission is to power the education ecosystem with unified technology that helps educators and students realize their full potential, in their way. PowerSchool connects students, teachers, administrators, and parents, with the shared goal of improving student outcomes. From the office to the classroom to the home, it helps schools and districts efficiently manage state reporting and related compliance, special education, finance, human resources, talent, registration, attendance, funding, learning, instruction, grading, assessments and analytics in one unified platform. PowerSchool supports over 45 million students globally and more than 12,000 customers, including 93 of the top 100 districts by student enrollment in the United States, and sells solutions in over 90 countries.

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