GEAR UP Starting Points Report
GEAR UP High Schools

GEAR UP
NORTH CAROLINA

EPIC EDUCATION POLICY INITIATIVE *at* CAROLINA

Education Policy Initiative at Carolina
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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The federal Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP) grant program is intended to provide support for interventions that increase college enrollment and success for low-income students. To meet the national goals, GEAR UP North Carolina aims to address six common barriers to college entry and access in North Carolina. These barriers are:

1. Achievement gaps in middle school math
2. Inadequate rates of STEM readiness
3. Inadequate levels of college readiness
4. Minimal knowledge of and access to college advising resources and financial aid information
5. Disconnect between postsecondary intention and postsecondary enrollment
6. Retention in first-year of postsecondary enrollment

This report focuses on college readiness, post-secondary intentions, and knowledge of college advising resources and financial aid information. The data in this report provides a baseline understanding of where students at GEAR UP high schools are at the beginning of the GEAR UP NC program. The purpose of this data is to assist in identifying areas of strength and weakness within the school to provide a strong base of knowledge for developing successful strategies to support students in developing the skills and knowledge to meet their post-secondary goals.

	All GEAR UP Students	Survey Respondents
Number	691	285
Male	51.2%	37.4%
White	48.5%	51.6%
Black	19.4%	14.8%
Hispanic	27.6%	27.4%

Note: Demographic data is from the 2020-21 school year.

Topics Covered in this Report

- **Attitudes and Intentions towards College**

- **Academic Readiness**

- **Knowledge of College Applications and Financing**

- **Barriers to Attending College**
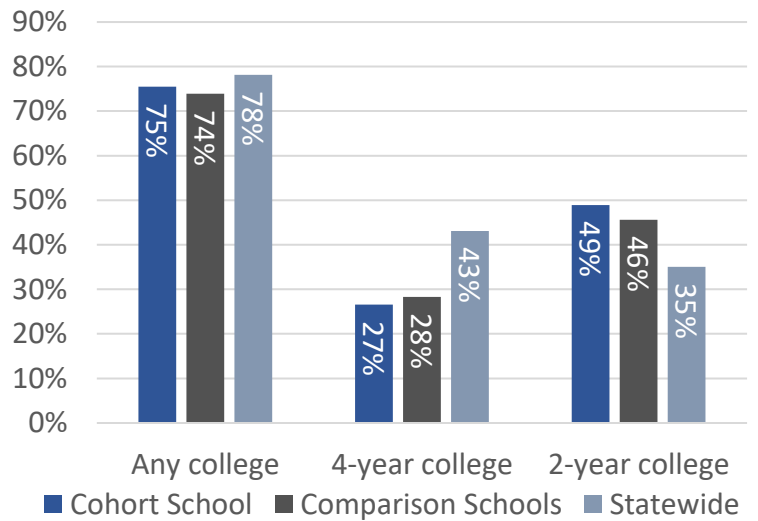
- **Supports Needed to Reach College**

Data

Surveys – This report includes data from 285 surveys of 12th graders completed during November 2020. The surveys ask students about their post-secondary intentions, knowledge around preparation for college, knowledge of the college application process, and barriers to attending college.

Administrative Data – This report also uses data from statewide tests, course taking, and course grades in the 2018-19 school year. In addition to data on students in GEAR UP high schools, this report includes data on students attending 10 comparison schools that are similar in school size, demographics, and rurality as well as data on students statewide as points of comparison.
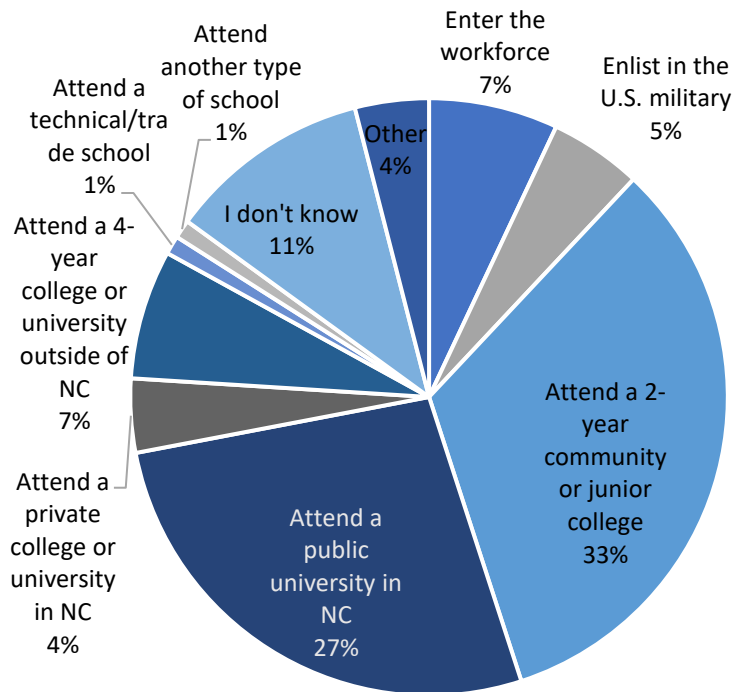
Attitudes and Intentions towards College

This section provides information on how students are thinking about post-secondary education. The figures on this page display information on college intentions, plans immediately after high school, and their expected educational attainment. Administrative data from high school exit surveys in the 2018-19 school year show the college intentions of students graduating in that year relative to comparison schools and statewide. Data drawn from survey responses show the expectations of students for their own plans immediately after high school and eventual educational attainment.
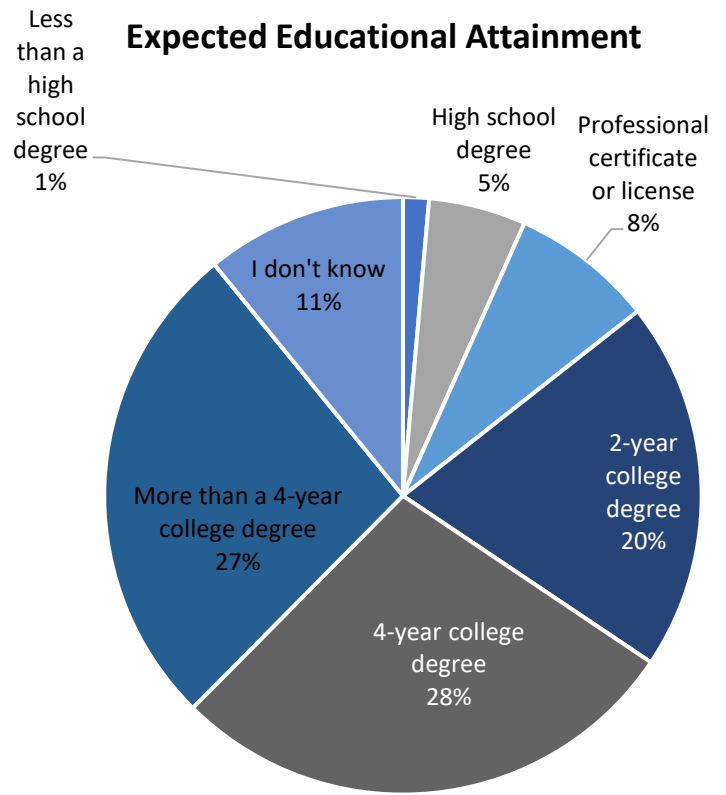
College Intentions from Exit Survey

	Any college	4-year college	2-year college
Cohort School	75%	27%	49%
Comparison Schools	74%	28%	46%
Statewide	78%	43%	35%

Note: This figure includes administrative data from the 2018-19 school year for GEAR UP high schools , matched comparison schools, and all high schools statewide. This figure represents post-secondary intentions from the statewide high school exit survey.

Plans for After High School

- Enter the workforce 7%
- Enlist in the U.S. military 5%
- Attend a 2-year community or junior college 33%
- Attend a public university in NC 27%
- Attend a private college or university in NC 4%
- Attend a 4-year college or university outside of NC 7%
- Attend a technical/trade school 1%
- Attend another type of school 1%
- I don't know 11%
- Other 4%

Note: N=284. This figure displays the responses to the survey question: "What do you intend to do in the fall following high school graduation?"

Expected Educational Attainment

- Less than a high school degree 1%
- High school degree 5%
- Professional certificate or license 8%
- 2-year college degree 20%
- 4-year college degree 28%
- More than a 4-year college degree 27%
- I don't know 11%

Note: N=283. This figure displays the responses to the survey question: "What is the highest level of education that you expect to obtain?"

Attitudes and Intentions towards College

The first figure on this page displays survey data on whether students have spoken to their parents about college and whether they plan to if they have not. The second figure displays attitudes towards college-going that students perceive from their parents and they hold themselves.
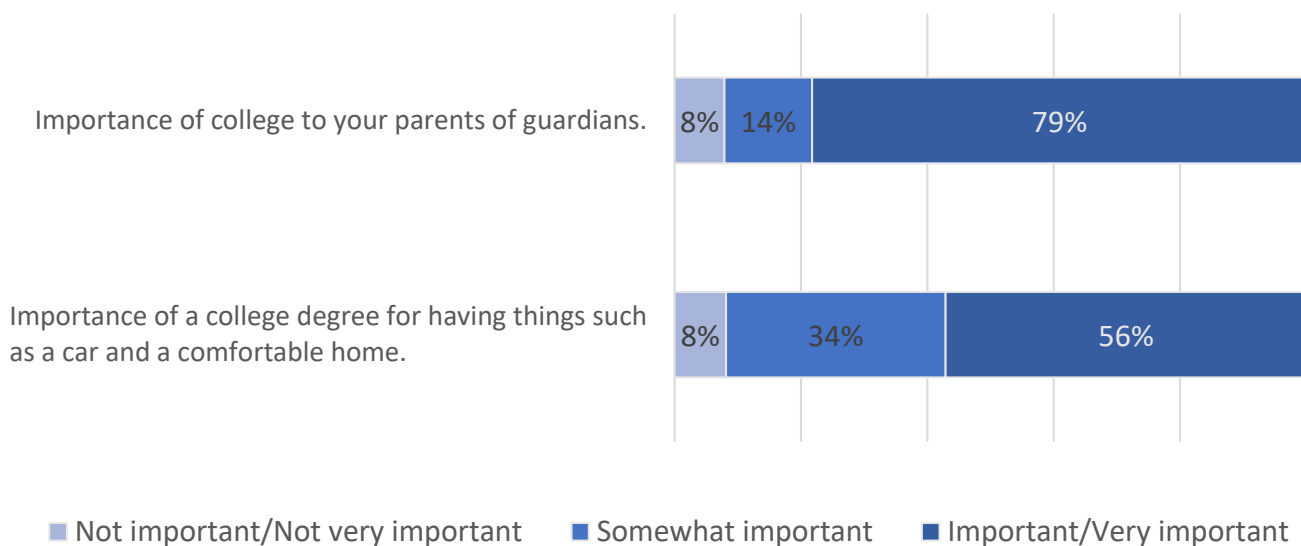
Have you talked with your parent/guardian about attending college?

- 4%
- 4%
- 92%
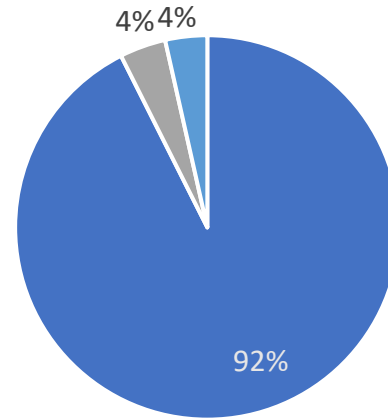
- ■ Yes, I have talked with them about attending college.
- ■ No, but I plan to talk with them about attending college.
- ■ No, and I don't plan to talk with them about attending college.

Note: N=278. This figure displays the responses to the survey question: "Have you talked with your parent/guardian about attending college?"

Attitudes towards College

Importance of college to your parents of guardians. — 8% | 14% | 79%

Importance of a college degree for having things such as a car and a comfortable home. — 8% | 34% | 56%

- ■ Not important/Not very important
- ■ Somewhat important
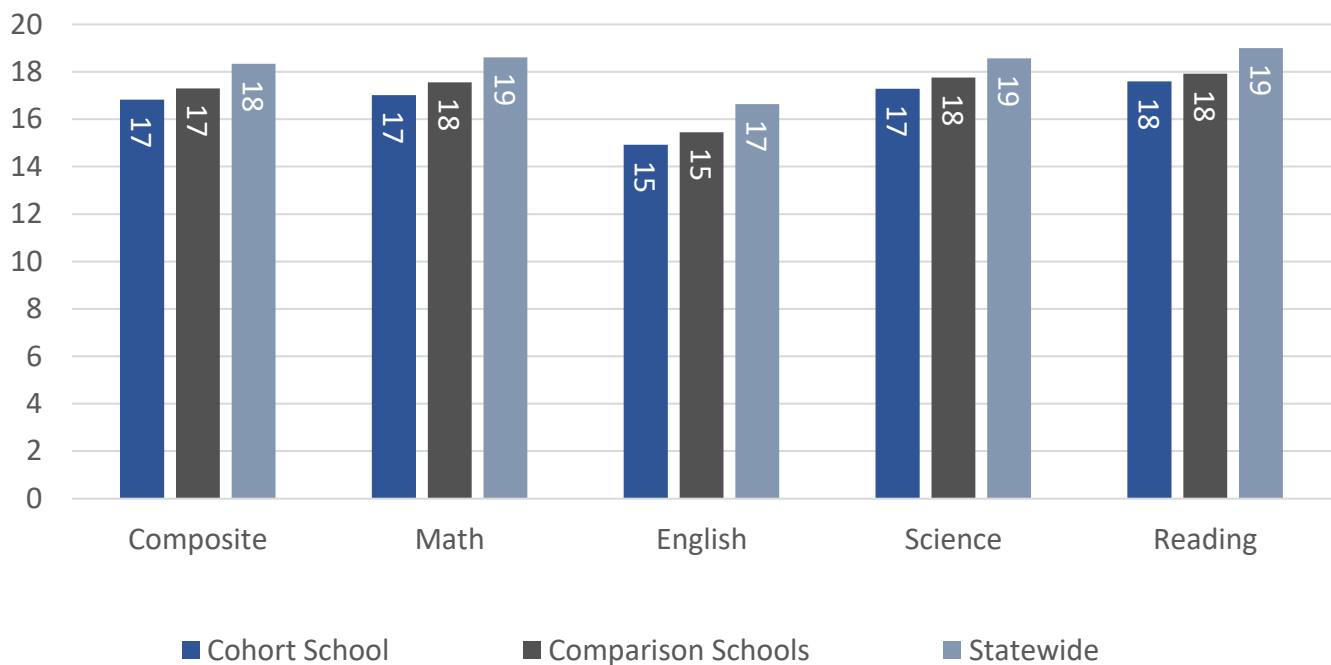- ■ Important/Very important

Note: N=282. This figure displays the responses to the survey questions: "How important to your parents or guardians is it for you to attend college?" and "How important is a college degree for having things such as a car and a comfortable

Academic Readiness

Data suggests that many students in North Carolina graduate from high school without adequate preparation to be successful in college. Recent data from the ACT show that only 18 percent of North Carolina high school graduates met all four college benchmarks in math, English, reading, and science. The purpose of this section is to provide indicators of how students are doing relative to academic preparation for college and how they feel about their preparation. The figure on this page uses administrative data from 2018-19 school year to display ACT scores in each subject area.
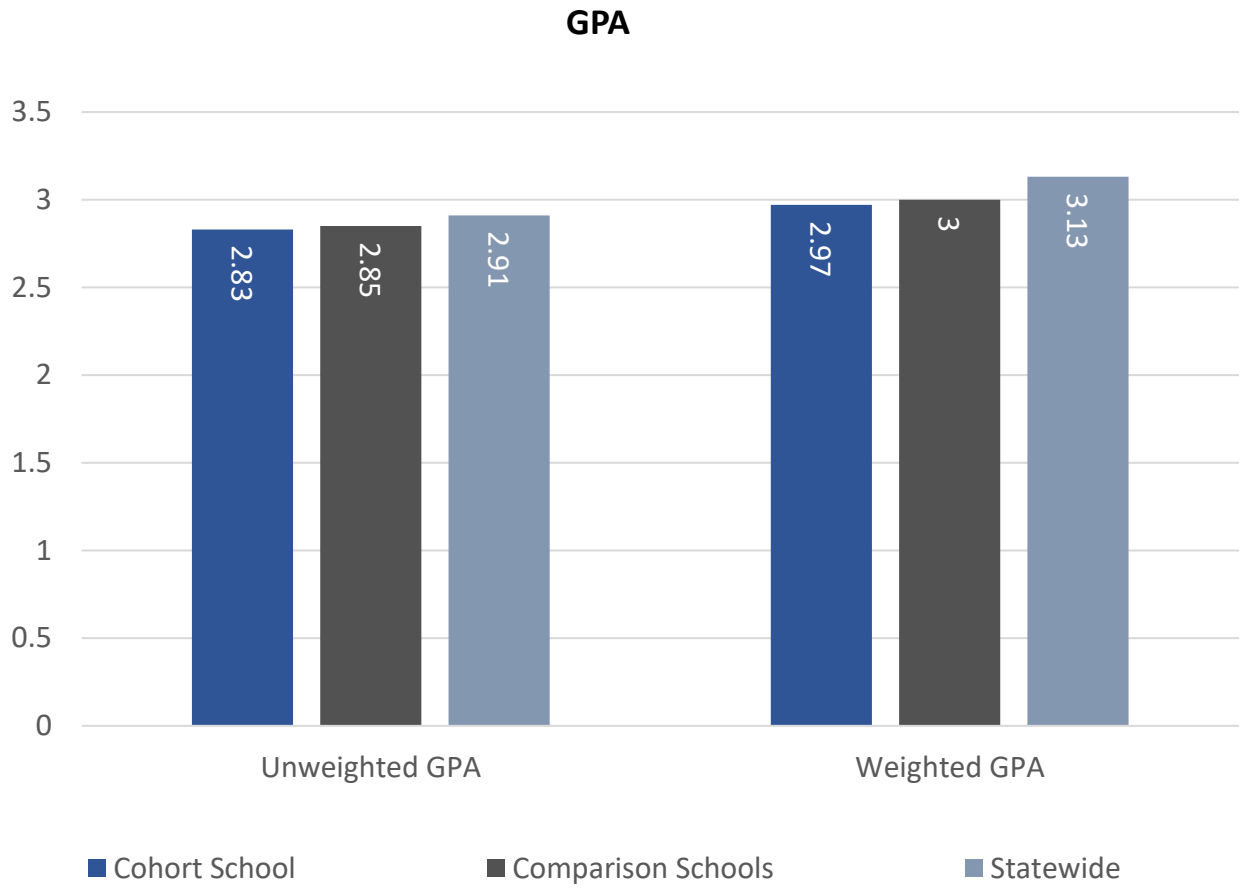
ACT Scores

	Composite	Math	English	Science	Reading
Cohort School	17	17	15	17	18
Comparison Schools	17	18	15	18	18
Statewide	18	19	17	19	19

■ Cohort School   ■ Comparison Schools   ■ Statewide

Note: This figure includes administrative data from the 2018-19 school year for GEAR UP high schools, matched comparison schools, and all high schools statewide. This figure displays ACT scores from the statewide administration of the ACT to 11th graders.

Academic Readiness

The figure on this page displays administrative data on the unweighted and weighted GPAs of students in the school relative to students in comparison schools and statewide in the 2018-19 school year.

GPA

	Unweighted GPA	Weighted GPA
Cohort School	2.83	2.97
Comparison Schools	2.85	3
Statewide	2.91	3.13

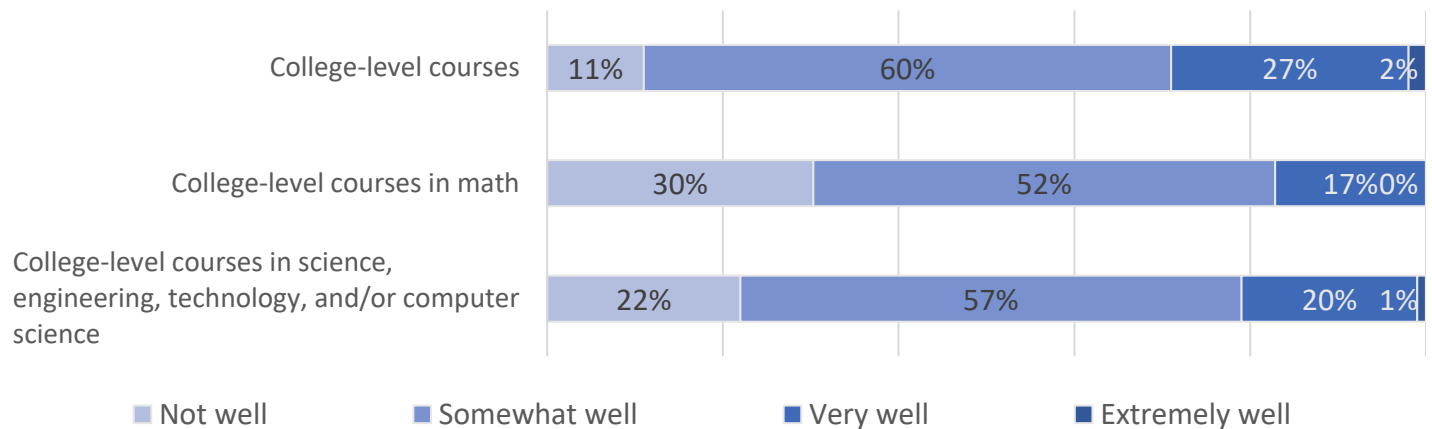■ Cohort School   ■ Comparison Schools   ■ Statewide

Note: This figure includes administrative data from the 2018-19 school year for GEAR UP high schools, 10 matched comparison schools per school, and all high schools statewide. This figure displays the unweighted 4 point GPA and weighted GPA of graduates.
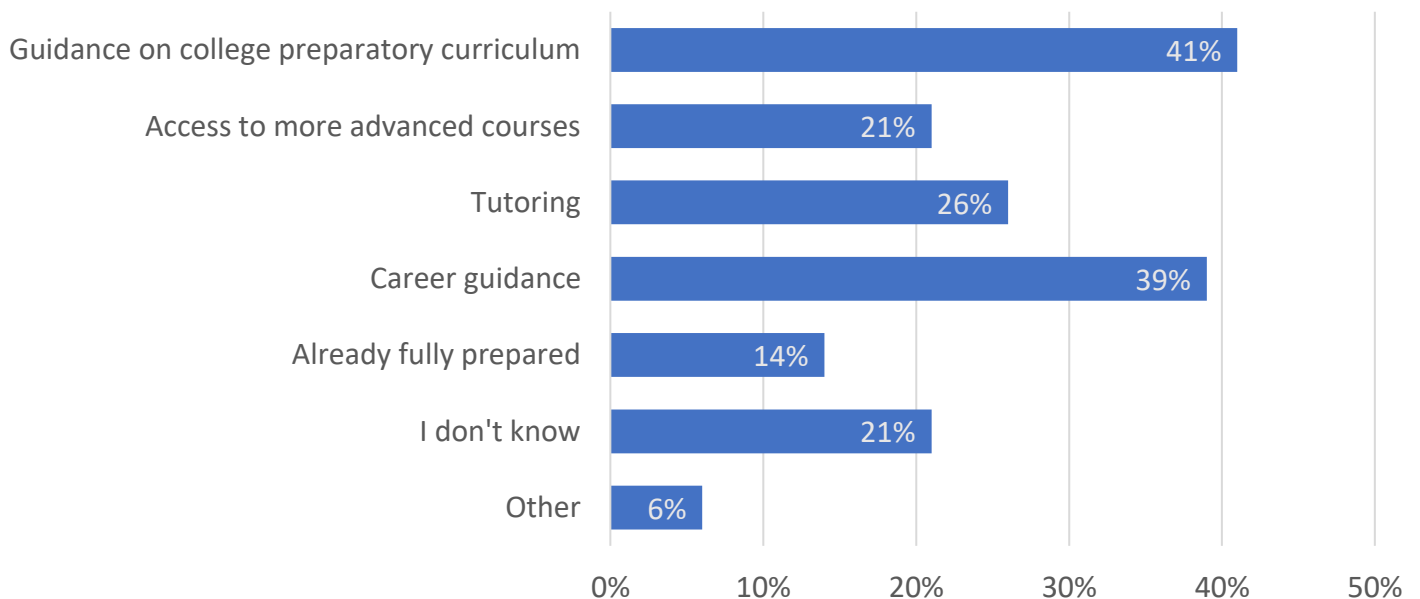
Academic Readiness

The first figure on this page uses survey data from students to understand their feelings of readiness for college-level courses, particularly courses in math and other STEM subject areas. The second figure displays data from surveys on students' feelings about the supports that they still need to be successful in college-level courses once they reach college.

Feelings of Preparation for College-Level Courses

	Not well	Somewhat well	Very well	Extremely well
College-level courses	11%	60%	27%	2%
College-level courses in math	30%	52%	17%	0%
College-level courses in science, engineering, technology, and/or computer science	22%	57%	20%	1%

Note: N=257. This figure displays the responses to the survey question: "Based on your high school experience, how prepared are you to take the following?"

Supports Still Needed to be Successful in College-level Courses

| Support	Percent
Guidance on college preparatory curriculum	41%
Access to more advanced courses	21%
Tutoring	26%
Career guidance	39%
Already fully prepared	14%
I don't know	21%
Other	6%

Note: N=285. This figure displays the responses to the survey question: "What supports do you feel you still need for you to be successful in taking college-level courses?"
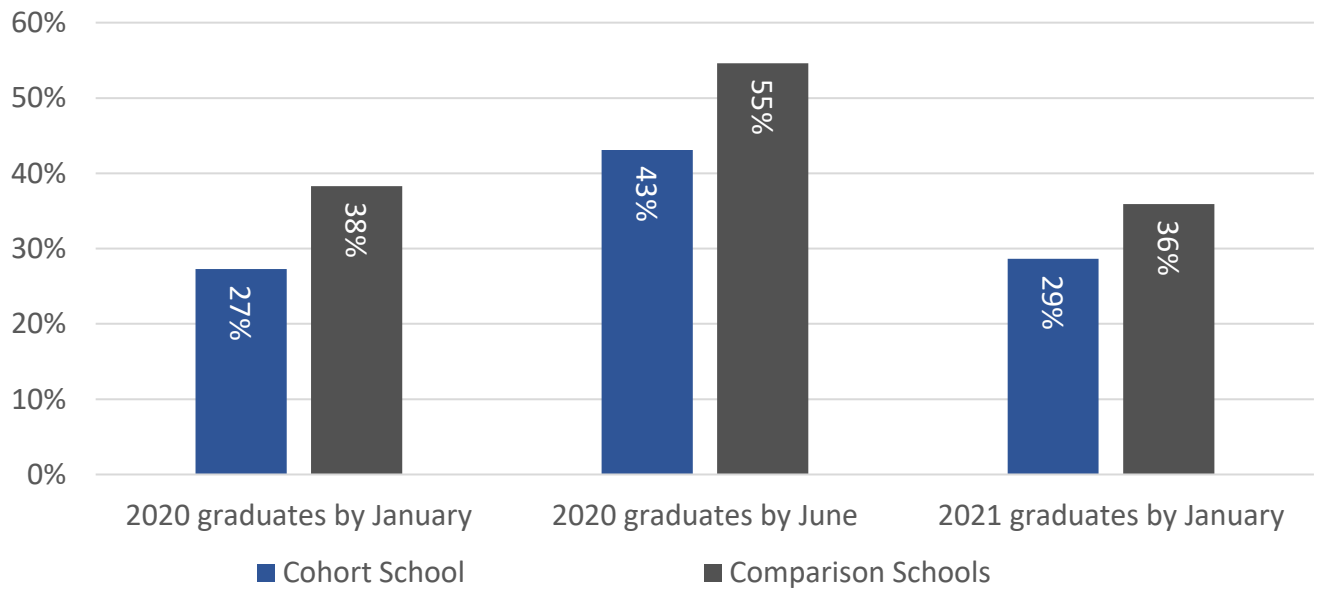
Knowledge of College Applications and Financing

This section indicates students' level of knowledge as well as actions they have already taken to reach college. The figures on this page show survey data on who students have spoken to about various topics related to reaching college as well as their own perception of their preparation for college. This page also displays school level FAFSA completion rates for the last 3 school years.

Level of Preparation for College Application Process

Very prepared 24%

Very unprepared 10%

Somewhat unprepared 19%

Somewhat prepared 47%
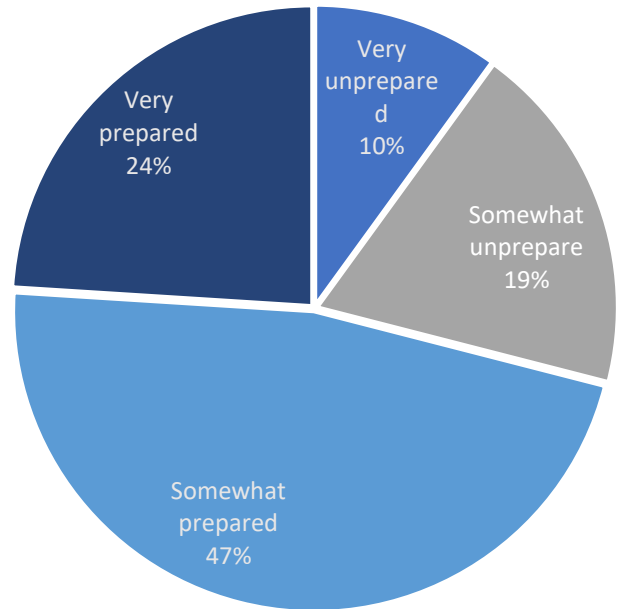
Note: N=278. This figure displays the responses to the survey question: "How prepared do you feel to complete the college application process?"

FAFSA Completion Rates

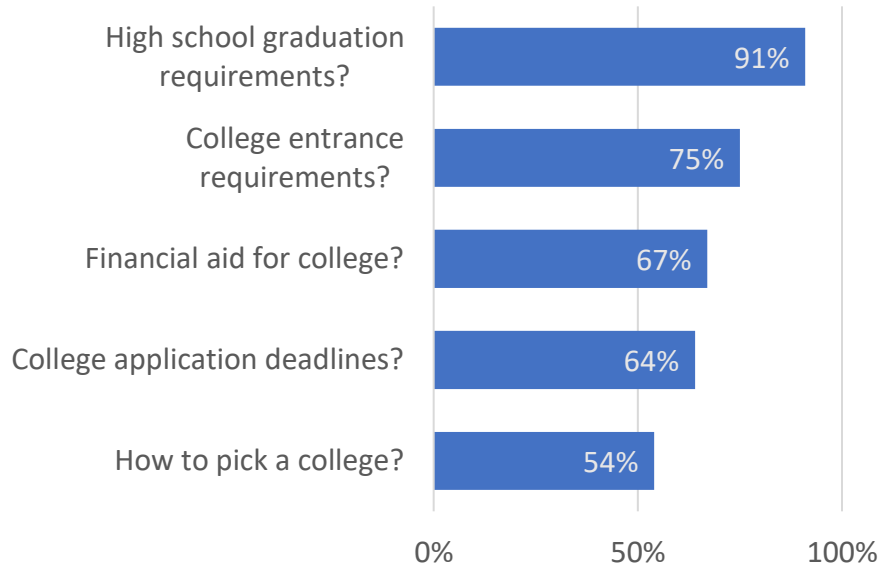|	Cohort School	Comparison Schools
2020 graduates by January	27%	38%
2020 graduates by June	43%	55%
2021 graduates by January	29%	36%

Note: This figure includes administrative data for GEAR UP high schools and all high schools statewide. This figure displays FAFSA completion data from federal school level reporting.

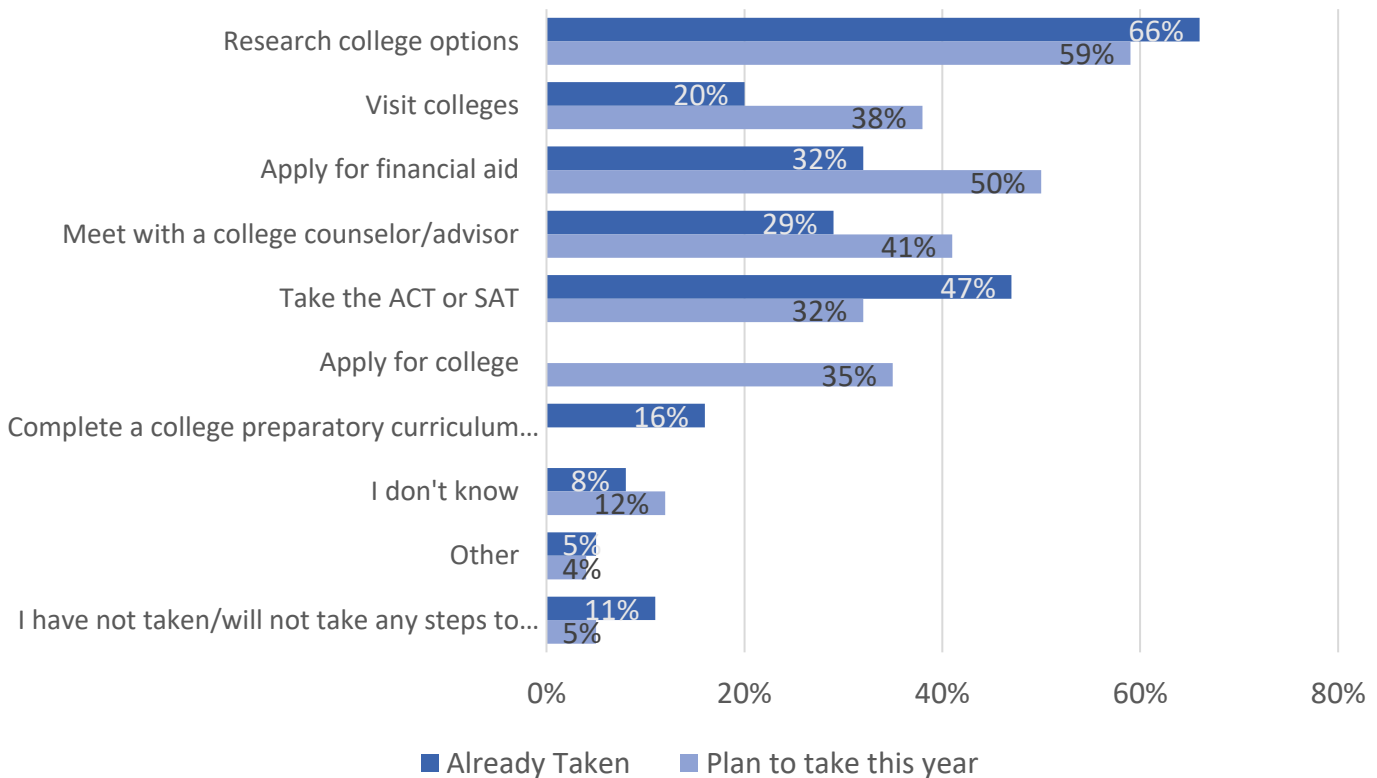# Knowledge of College Applications and Financing

The figures on this page display data from student surveys taken in November of 2020. The first figure shows the sources from which students are receiving knowledge of financial aid options for college. The second figure shows the actions students have already taken to reach college and the actions that they intend to take this school year.

Has Anyone at Your School Ever Spoken to You About…

High school graduation requirements?	91%
College entrance requirements?	75%
Financial aid for college?	67%
College application deadlines?	64%
How to pick a college?	54%

Note: N=279. This figure displays the responses to the survey question: "Has anyone from your school ever spoken with you about…."

Actions to Enroll in College

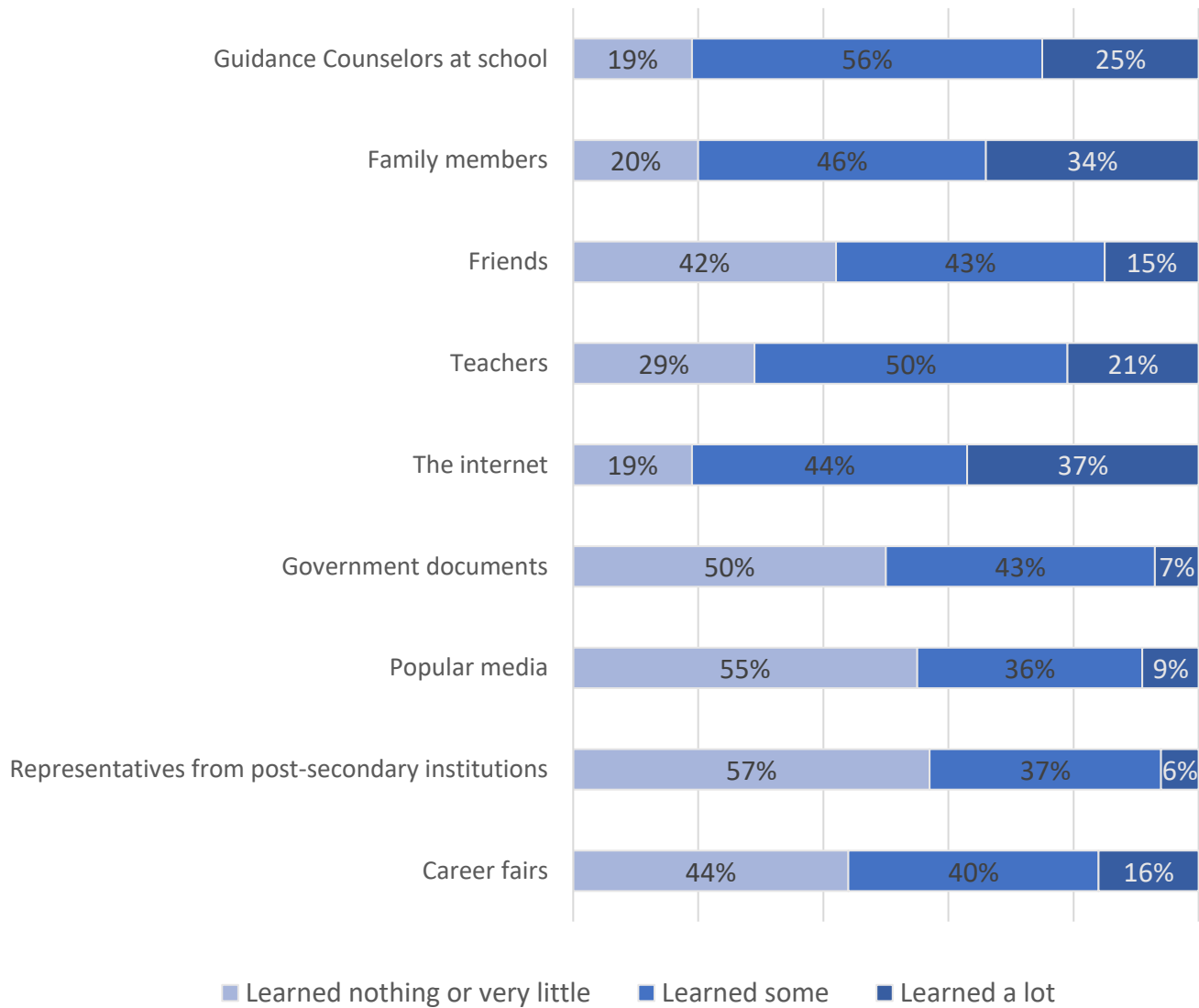|	Already Taken	Plan to take this year
Research college options	66%	59%
Visit colleges	20%	38%
Apply for financial aid	32%	50%
Meet with a college counselor/advisor	29%	41%
Take the ACT or SAT	47%	32%
Apply for college		35%
Complete a college preparatory curriculum…	16%	
I don't know	8%	12%
Other	5%	4%
I have not taken/will not take any steps to…	11%	5%

■ Already Taken ■ Plan to take this year

Note: N=285. This figure displays the responses to the survey questions: "What, if any, steps do you plan to take this year to prepare to enroll in college?" and "What, if any, steps have you already taken to prepare to enroll in college?"

Knowledge of College Applications and Financing

The figure on this page display data from student surveys taken in November of 2020. This figure shows the sources from which students are receiving knowledge of financial aid options for college.

Sources of Knowledge on Financial Aid

Source	Learned nothing or very little	Learned some	Learned a lot
Guidance Counselors at school	19%	56%	25%
Family members	20%	46%	34%
Friends	42%	43%	15%
Teachers	29%	50%	21%
The internet	19%	44%	37%
Government documents	50%	43%	7%
Popular media	55%	36%	9%
Representatives from post-secondary institutions	57%	37%	6%
Career fairs	44%	40%	16%

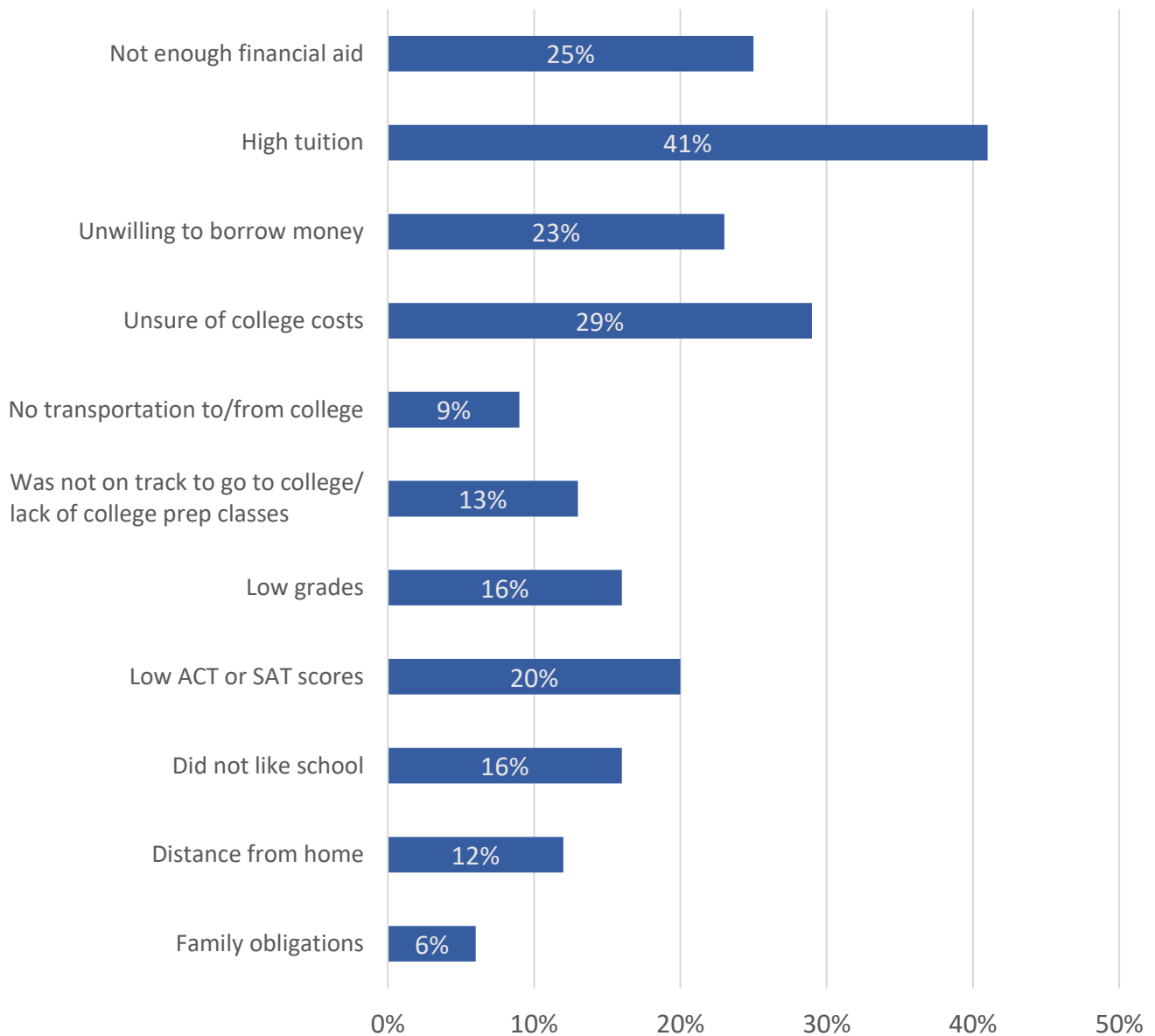■ Learned nothing or very little ■ Learned some ■ Learned a lot

Note: N=264. This figure displays the responses to the survey question: "How much have you learned from each of the following sources about the types of financial assistance available to pursue further education after high school?"

Barriers to Attending College

Students who indicate that they intend to attend college after high school often fail to actually enroll in college in the fall after their high school graduation. This section explores barriers that students believe may prevent them from continuing on to college. The figure on this page uses survey data from students to identify major and minor barriers to attending college.

Major Barriers to Continuing on to College

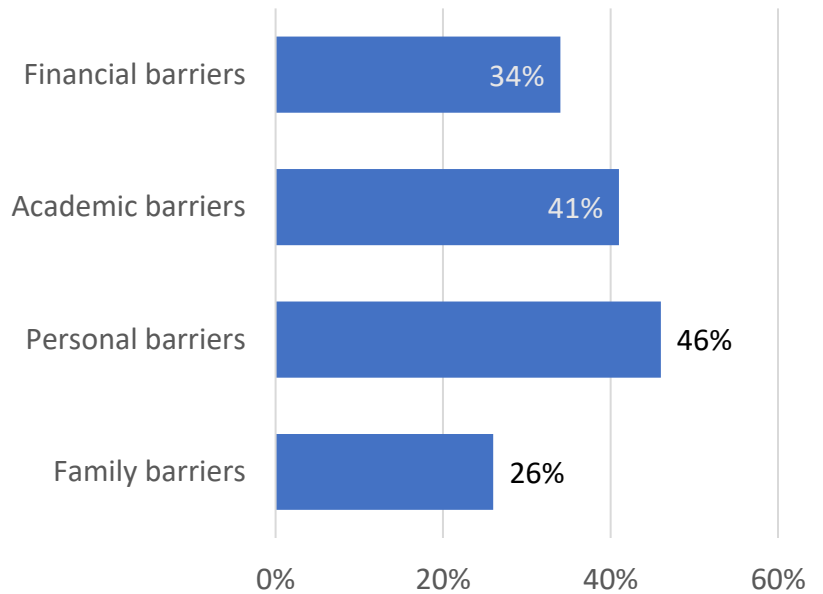| Barrier	Percentage
Not enough financial aid	25%
High tuition	41%
Unwilling to borrow money	23%
Unsure of college costs	29%
No transportation to/from college	9%
Was not on track to go to college/ lack of college prep classes	13%
Low grades	16%
Low ACT or SAT scores	20%
Did not like school	16%
Distance from home	12%
Family obligations	6%

Note: N=246. This figure displays the responses to the survey question: "To what extent are the following a barrier for you to continue on to college?"

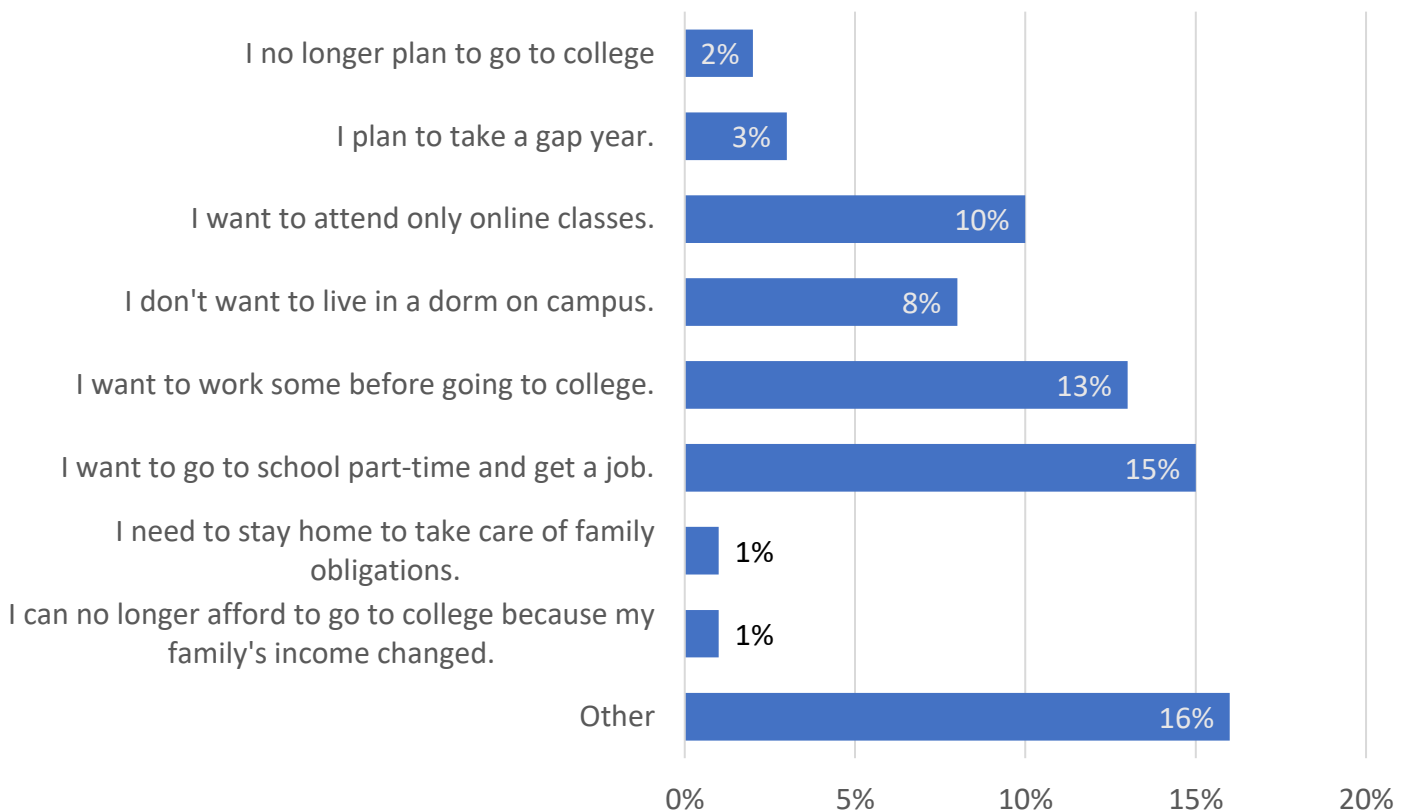# Barriers to Attending College

The figures on this page display the results of survey data on the specific role that the COVID-19 pandemic in the current school year has in creating barriers for students and in changing their plans for after high school. The first figure identifies broad categories of barriers that students identify as having increased due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The second figure shows results of a survey item that asks students how their plans for after high school have changed as a result of the pandemic.

Barriers Increased by COVID-19

Barrier	Percentage
Financial barriers	34%
Academic barriers	41%
Personal barriers	46%
Family barriers	26%

Note: N=285. This figure displays the responses to the survey question: "What barriers, if any, to college have COVID-19 increased?"

Changes to Plans after High School Due to COVID-19

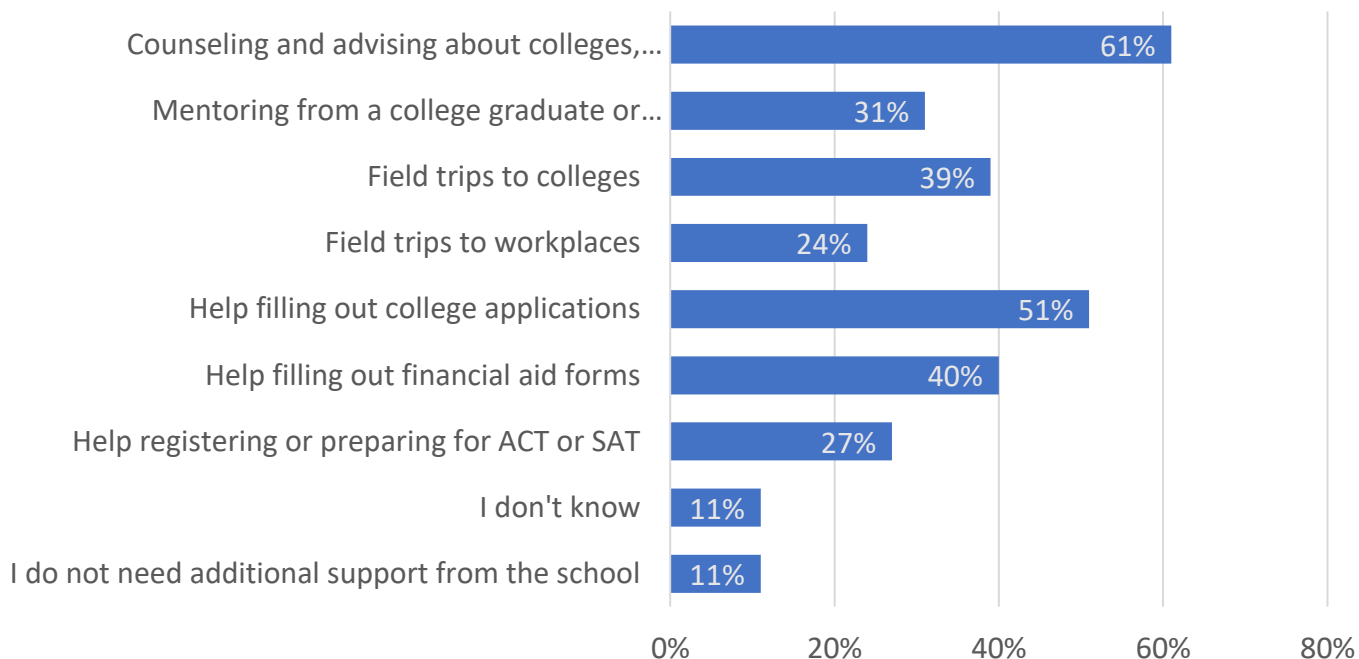| Response	Percentage
I no longer plan to go to college	2%
I plan to take a gap year.	3%
I want to attend only online classes.	10%
I don't want to live in a dorm on campus.	8%
I want to work some before going to college.	13%
I want to go to school part-time and get a job.	15%
I need to stay home to take care of family obligations.	1%
I can no longer afford to go to college because my family's income changed.	1%
Other	16%

Note: N=285. This figure displays the responses to the survey question: "How, if at all, has COVID-19 changed your plans for life after high school?"
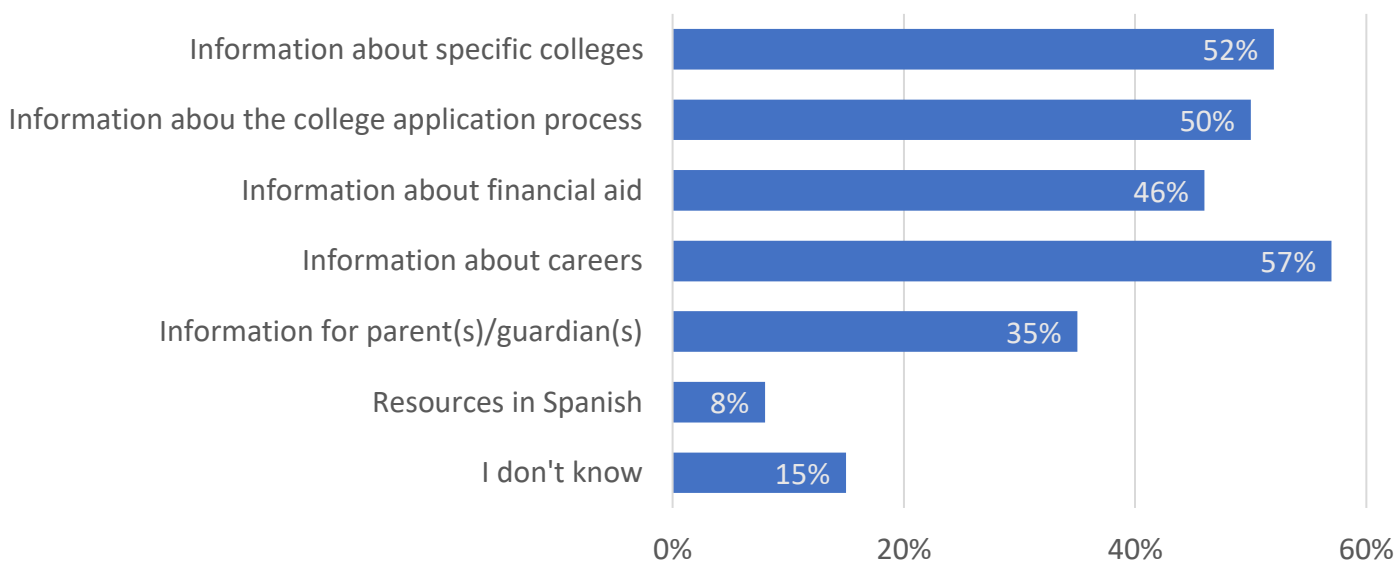
Supports Needed to Reach College

This section addresses supports and information that students feel would assist them in reaching college. The goal of this section is to identify potential opportunities for the school to provide additional assistance to students who aim to reach college. The two figures on this page identify the instrumental supports and information that students would like to receive from their school to help them reach college.

Supports Students Need from School to Reach College

Support	Percentage
Counseling and advising about colleges,…	61%
Mentoring from a college graduate or…	31%
Field trips to colleges	39%
Field trips to workplaces	24%
Help filling out college applications	51%
Help filling out financial aid forms	40%
Help registering or preparing for ACT or SAT	27%
I don't know	11%
I do not need additional support from the school	11%

Note: N=285. This figure displays the responses to the survey question: "What types of support from your school would help you reach college?"

Information Students Need to Reach College

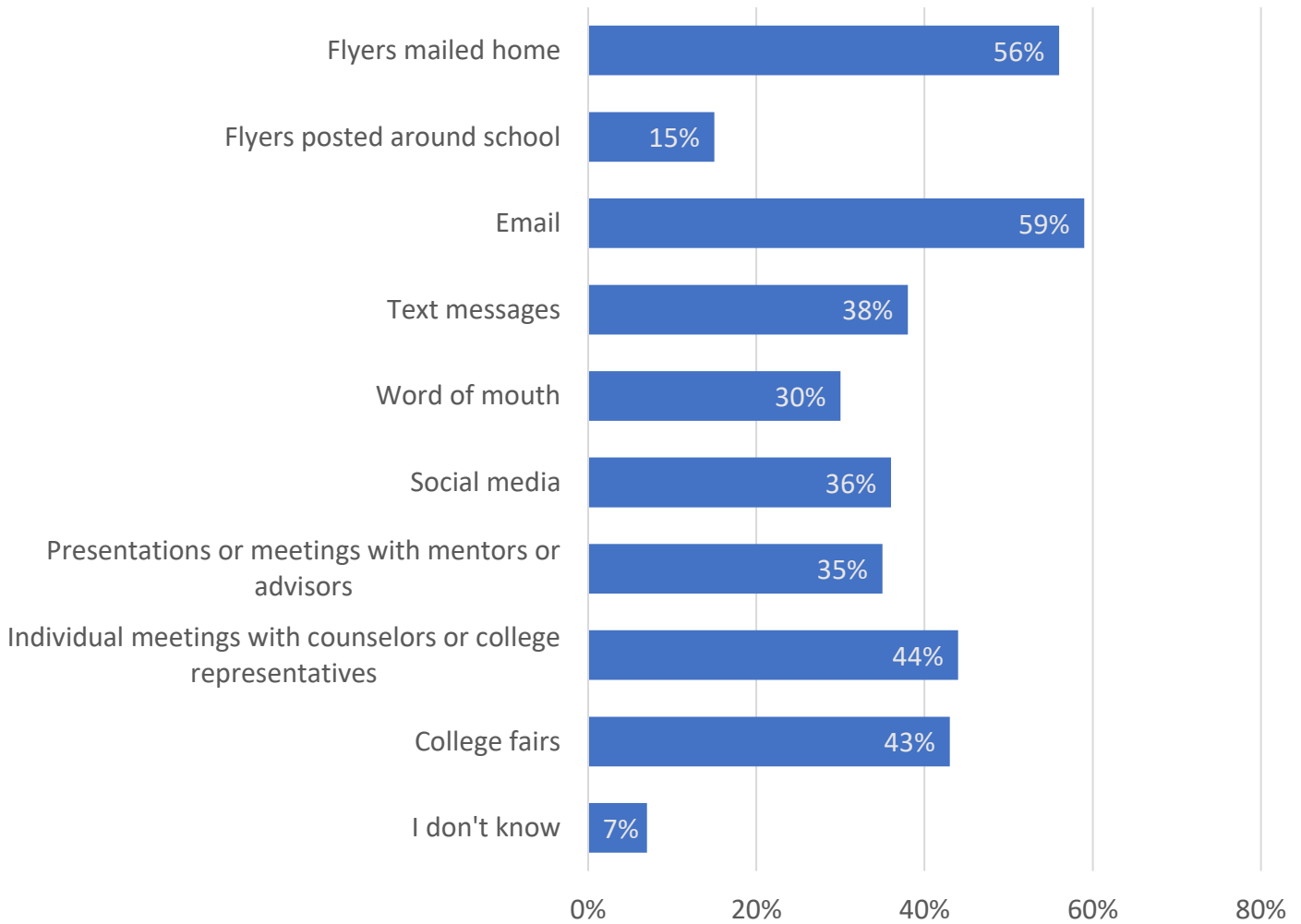| Information	Percentage
Information about specific colleges	52%
Information abou the college application process	50%
Information about financial aid	46%
Information about careers	57%
Information for parent(s)/guardian(s)	35%
Resources in Spanish	8%
I don't know	15%

Note: N=285. This figure displays the responses to the survey question: "What types of information from your school would help you reach college?"

Supports Needed to Reach College

The figure on this page displays survey responses on the ways of receiving information about college that students find most useful. This information can help the school in successfully reaching students.

Most Useful Ways to Receive Information about College

Way	Percentage
Flyers mailed home	56%
Flyers posted around school	15%
Email	59%
Text messages	38%
Word of mouth	30%
Social media	36%
Presentations or meetings with mentors or advisors	35%
Individual meetings with counselors or college representatives	44%
College fairs	43%
I don't know	7%

Note: N=285. This figure displays the responses to the survey question: "What are the most useful ways to receive information about college?"

Highlights

This section highlights particular strengths and areas of growth for GEAR UP high schools as well as key supports identified by students as helpful for their progress towards college. Strengths identify places where this school performs well and where there is a potential to build on a strong existing foundation. Areas for growth identify places where this school lags behind other similar school, and students may benefit from targeted support.

Strengths

- Students at GEAR UP high schools generally have high aspirations for college (55% expect to attain at least a bachelor's degree) and believe that college is important.
- ACT scores and GPAs of GEAR UP high school students are close to those of students at similar schools.
- Students communicate with their parents and educators at their schools about planning for college (75% report discussing college entrance requirements with someone at school).
- Most students (71%) feel at least somewhat prepared for the college application process and the majority (66%) have already researched college options.

Areas for Growth

- While college aspirations are high, college intentions at the time of the high school exit exam are somewhat lower (27% plan to enroll in a 4-year college and 49% intend to enroll in a 2-year college), suggesting that some students who aspire to college have not made plans to enroll by the end of their senior year.
- Overall, students do not feel very well prepared to take college courses (71% only somewhat prepare), although academic preparation as measured by GPAs and ACT scores are only slightly lower than statewide.
- The most common concerns for students are financially related, yet FAFSA completion rates at GEAR UP high schools lag behind other high schools in the state.
- Students who responded to the surveys identify a number of priority areas where they would benefit from additional information or assistance in preparing for and applying to college.

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