



# **RECRUITING STUDENTS OF COLOR INTO RUNNING START: COMMUNICATIONS PLAN**

***SBCTC COMMUNICATIONS***

# Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	1
Acknowledgements.....	2
Communications Plan Summary.....	3
Objectives and Desired Outcomes.....	4
Adapting to the post-COVID world.....	4
Research.....	4
Who is Gen Z?.....	5
Personal Connections Matter Most.....	6
Students are most influenced by parents, guardians and friends.....	7
Strategy.....	14
Concurrent effort: Outreach to middle and high schools.....	14
Concurrent effort: Outreach to prospective students.....	16
Audiences.....	16
Key Messages.....	17
Gen Z message considerations.....	17
Parents and guardians message considerations.....	20
Tools.....	21
Obtaining contact information.....	21
Parents and Guardians.....	21
Peer influencers.....	21
School teachers, counselors, and administrators.....	22
Community based organizations.....	22
Email.....	22
Texting.....	22
Peachjar.....	22
Information in schools.....	23
Information sessions.....	23
Create a college class.....	23
College website.....	23
Social media.....	23
Key Dates.....	24
Prospective students.....	24
Middle and high schools.....	24

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# Communications Plan Summary

When Washington state recorded its first cases of COVID-19 in late February 2020, no one knew the extent to which the virus and the response to it would impact everyone's lives. Case counts started small but did not stay that way. To try to slow the spread, Gov. Jay Inslee ordered K-12 schools in King, Pierce, and Snohomish counties closed in mid-March. The closure was supposed to last five weeks. Two weeks after Gov. Inslee ordered those schools shut and with virus case counts spiking, he ordered all schools throughout the state closed for the rest of the school year. Seniors in good standing and on track to graduate, the governor reassured, would receive their diploma.<sup>1</sup> What, though, about seniors who had fallen behind?

With K-12 schools closed, one option for seniors to pursue their final credits was Running Start, a tuition-free program for high school juniors and seniors to earn high school and college credits by taking college classes. In fact, enrollment in Running Start jumped 4% from fall 2019 to fall 2020 to a total of nearly 31,000 students.

Running Start enrollment increases were a cause for celebration, especially as most other enrollment areas saw drops in the 2019-20 school year. But disaggregated enrollment data showed that students of color and students from low-income families were less likely to enroll in Running Start than white students.

These racial and income inequalities in Running Start enrollments are not new problems. The COVID-19 pandemic's disproportionate impact on students of color exacerbated those problems. Students of color may have been exposed to negative messages that downplay their abilities to perform well in college, leading to a belief that "college isn't for them." Some are not prepared for college-level classes due to their K-12 experiences. Others may not have heard about Running Start or can't get information about it. Some think they can't afford the books, fees and transportation costs<sup>2</sup>. Students who count on their high schools for free and reduced price lunch programs may have problems getting meals from their high schools.

The Recruiting Students of Color into Running Start Communications Plan, coupled with initiatives to address policies, beliefs, and structures, consists of two parts.

- First, it seeks to spread the word to middle and high school teachers, counselors, and administrators about the benefits of Running Start.
- Second, it provides suggested messaging and tactics for community and technical colleges to employ to reach prospective Running Start students of color and their families.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.kuow.org/stories/governor-inslee-closes-k-12-schools-through-june>

<sup>2</sup> For students using the free and reduced priced lunch program, many colleges waive fees, cover the cost of course materials, and provide transportation. Students and their families, however, may not know this is a possibility.

# Objectives and Desired Outcomes

The Recruiting Students of Color into Running Start Communications Plan is designed to increase enrollment in Running Start among students of color as well as students from low-income families. This will be accomplished through an indirect effort – reaching out to middle and high school teachers, counselors, and administrators – and through a direct effort – contact to students and their families.

This plan provides research into the target audiences, a communications strategy, and suggested messaging and tools. With this information, the State Board, in consultation with community and technical colleges, will build a toolkit of examples of work already underway as well as suggestions of customizable materials. Colleges will need to execute their own communications and outreach plan based on their district's unique characteristics.

## Adapting to the post-COVID world

As COVID vaccines roll out and we look to the eventual end of the COVID-19 pandemic, the tactics and messages in the Running Start Communications Plan will need to adjust accordingly. The plan will note areas for change, but will reserve recommendations for a future date when more is known about what the post-COVID environment looks like.

## Research

Many K-12 schools and colleges already advertise Running Start to prospective students and their families, and it is, largely, received. After all, enrollment in the program continues to grow, with almost 15% of Washington's public high school students participating.<sup>3</sup> But the message isn't being received or acted upon by all potential students, especially students of color and students from low-income families. There's a disconnect between the message – or who is delivering the message – and the students we want to reach. How do we make sure we're saying the "right" thing, and how do we be sure that it's coming from the "right" source? How also do we ensure our communities of color and low-income students receive information about Running Start in multiple ways and from multiple sources? This section will discuss research for each of this communications plan's target audiences, including motivating beliefs and ways to reach them.

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<sup>3</sup> DuPree, D. (2018, March 6). Running Start Participation and Success. Retrieved May 9, 2018, <https://www.sbctc.edu/resources/documents/colleges-staff/research/research-briefs/running-start-participation-success-research-brief-18-1.pdf>

## Who is Gen Z?

Generation Z, people born after 1996, are coming of age in an uncertain world. The oldest “Gen Zers” — people in their early and mid-20s — face uncertain job prospects because of the recession caused by COVID-19. In fact, 28% of people aged 16 to 24 — or about 10.3 million people — reported summer 2020 of being out of school or work, the highest rate since 1989.<sup>4</sup> About half of those aged 18 to 23 reported in March 2020 that they or someone in their household had lost a job or taken a pay cut because of COVID-19.<sup>5</sup>

Gen Z is more ethnically diverse than previous generations. Just over half (52%) identify as white. They’re also on track to be the most highly educated generation yet, and they’re more likely to live with a parent who has at least a bachelor’s degree.<sup>6</sup>

Members of Gen Z believe government should play a larger role in society. Over half believe climate change is caused by humans. Two-thirds believe that Black people are treated less fairly than white people. They also support societal changes. Just under half believe same-sex marriage is a good thing (36% say it doesn’t make a difference, and just 15% say it’s a bad thing). They’re also more likely to know someone who uses gender-neutral pronouns (35%) and more likely to say forms should offer options other than “man” and “woman” (59%).<sup>7</sup>

The oldest members of Gen Z are early in their careers. Others are just beginning to think about life after high school or college. As we begin to see more members of Gen Z enter the workforce, we need to look at what motivates them in their careers. Understandably, the tumultuous events they’ve grown up in and their beliefs about the role of government and society will influence their beliefs about careers. High numbers want to create social impact (29%) and maintain a work-life balance (24%). After a big gap, money comes as the third highest motivating factor (15%), followed closely by the social aspects of work like teamwork (12%), and travel (10%). A small percentage look for power and influence (3%) in their careers.<sup>8</sup>

When looking at their careers, close to half (47%) want to go into visual-based professions like the arts, design, entertainment, sports, and media. Health care professions ranked a distant second (15%), interest in which may be tied to the COVID-19 pandemic. Tied for third were influencer and community and social service (12% each), and fourth was business and finance (10%).

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<sup>4</sup> Fry, R. & Barroso, A. (2020, July 29). Amid coronavirus outbreak, nearly three-in-ten young people are neither working nor in school. Retrieved Feb. 3, 2021 from Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/07/29/amid-coronavirus-outbreak-nearly-three-in-ten-young-people-are-neither-working-nor-in-school/>

<sup>5</sup> Parker, K. & Igielink, R. (2020, May 14). On the Cusp of Adulthood and Facing an Uncertain Future: What We Know about Gen Z So Far. Retrieved Feb. 3, 2021 from Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/essay/on-the-cusp-of-adulthood-and-facing-an-uncertain-future-what-we-know-about-gen-z-so-far/>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

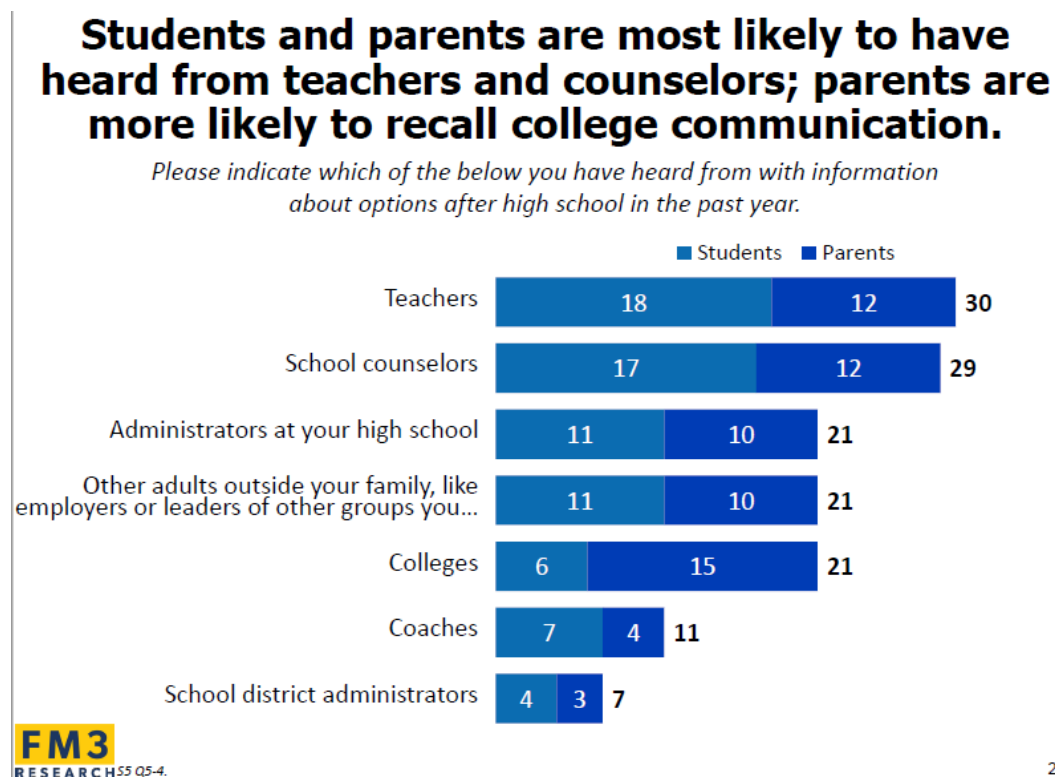
<sup>8</sup> Diteljan, M., De Luca, M., Neal, J. (2021). Zero in on High School Prospects Without Wasting Your Precious Marketing Dollars. Glacier, Interact Communications, Community College of Baltimore County.

## Personal Connections Matter Most

### Parents and students hear most from teachers and counselors

Polling conducted by FM3 Research in April 2020<sup>9</sup> tells us that parents and students get most of their information about post high school options from teachers and school counselors. Information from colleges ranked lower in the list, and parents were more likely than students to say they heard from a college. This was true both before and after the pandemic hit and schools moved online. (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Post-high school options sources of information



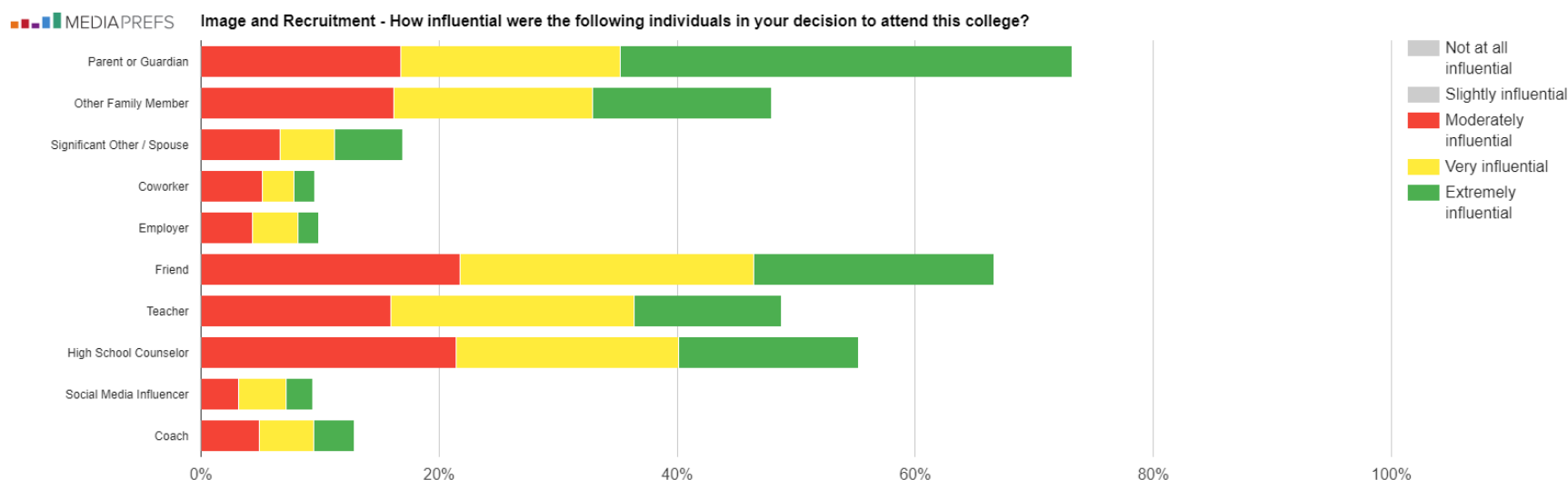
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<sup>9</sup> FM3 Research. (2020). Planning for Life After High School During the COVID-19 Pandemic. Oakland: FM3 Research.

## Students are most influenced by parents, guardians and friends

A survey of students at Washington community and technical colleges showed that parents and guardians were, by far, the most influential in students' decision to attend their college. Friends also played a significant role in students' decision, followed by high school counselors, other family members, and teachers (Figure 2). Facilitated by Interact Communications, they survey received responses from 3,780 students enrolled in 20 colleges<sup>10</sup> during a survey window of Sept. 21 through Nov. 15, 2020.<sup>11</sup>

Figure 2: Image and Recruitment-How influential were the following individuals in your decision to attend this college?



**We can conclude from Figures 1 and 2 that any effort to successfully reach and enroll prospective Running Start students of color must prioritize outreach to parents and guardians, peers, and high school teachers and counselors.**

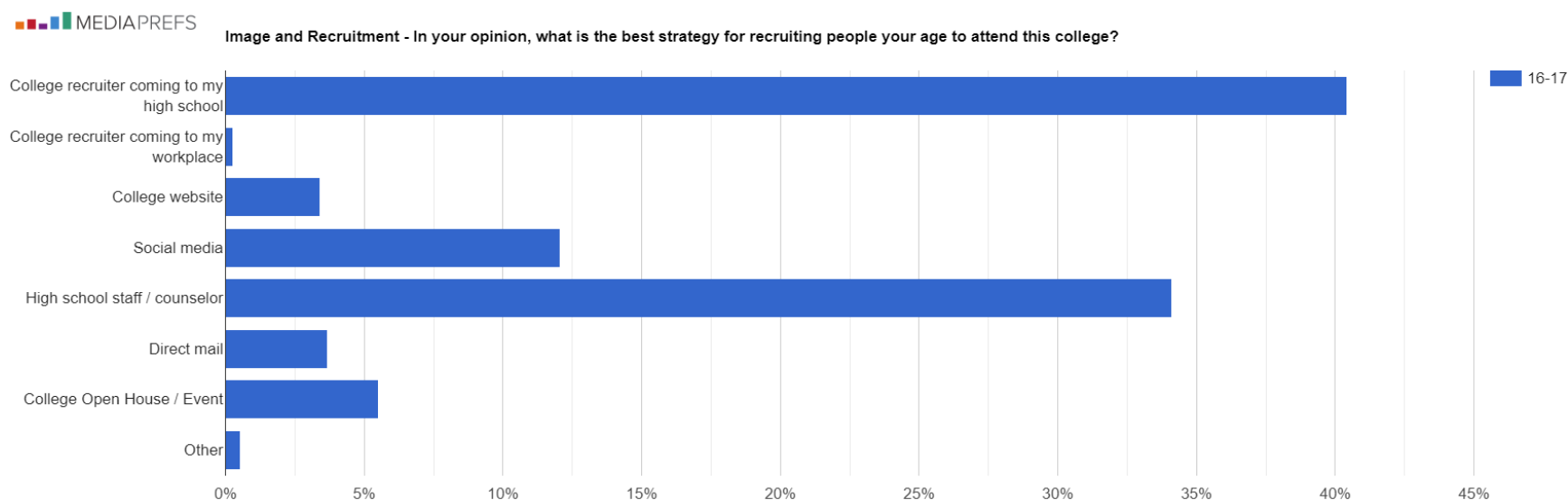
<sup>10</sup> Participating colleges: Bates Technical College, Bellevue College, Cascadia College, Centralia College, Edmonds College, Grays Harbor College, Green River College, Highline College, Lower Columbia College, North Seattle College, Peninsula College, Pierce College, Shoreline Community College, Skagit Valley College, South Puget Sound Community College, South Seattle College, Spokane Community College, Spokane Falls Community College, Walla Walla Community College, Wenatchee Valley College, Whatcom Community College.

<sup>11</sup> Except when otherwise noted, the Media Preferences Survey charts show responses from students aged 16-17 who identified as Black/African American, Hispanic/Latinx/Spanish origin, Asian, American Indian/Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, and other. They also include students who preferred not to answer. Charts showed little to no difference when students who identified as white were included.



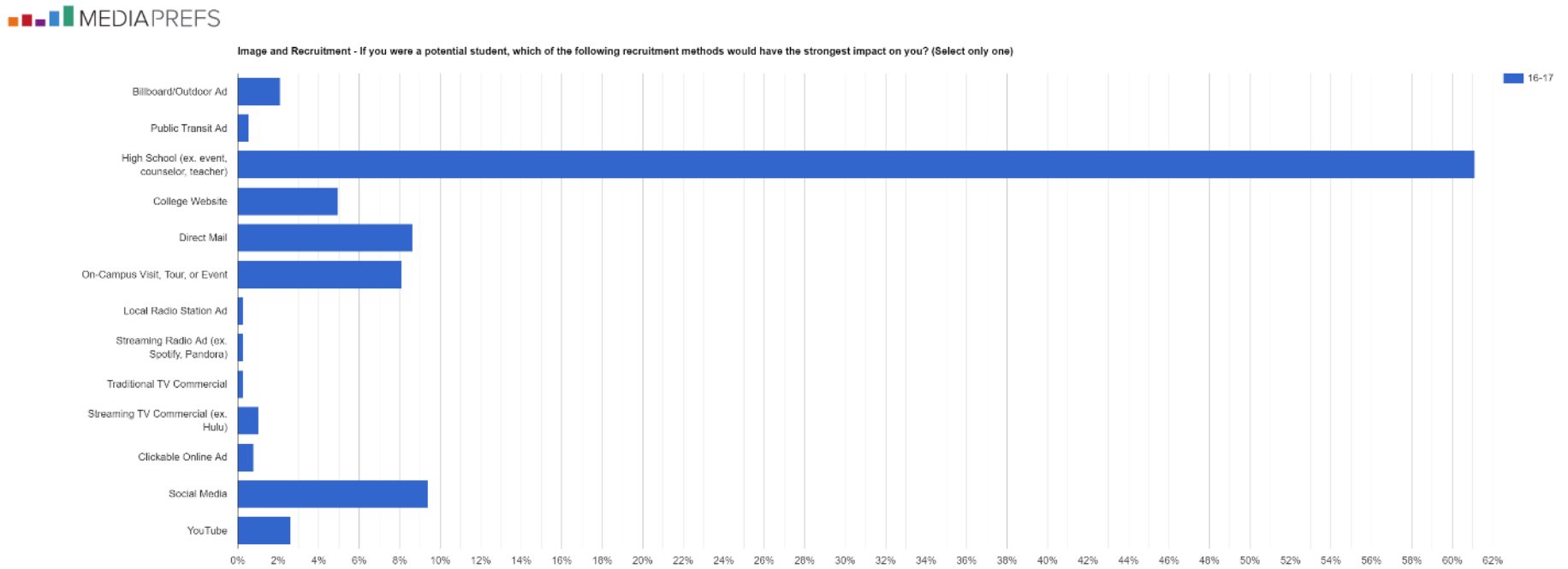
## Social media should enhance, not take the place of, personal connections

We understand the familial, peer, and high school influence on students' college-going decisions, but what about social media? The Interact Communications survey asked currently enrolled students what they saw as a college's best recruiting strategy for students their age (Figure 3). (Note that this Interact Communications question focused on recruitment strategies, as opposed to the FM3 research in Figure 1 that focused on from whom students heard the most about postsecondary education options.) A college recruiter visiting the high school scored as the best strategy. Note though, that the FM3 research showed students did not rank this tactic as a strong source of information about post-high school options (Figure 1). Behind a college recruiter, students ranked high school staff/counselor as the second best tactic. Social media ranked as the third best strategy, the first tactic that did not involve direct contact from a person. Figure 3: Image and Recruitment-In your opinion, what is the best strategy for recruiting people your age to attend this college?



In a similar question, the Media Preferences Survey asked students what they believed would be a college's best method of influencing them, personally, if they were a prospective student. Again, a high school source (e.g. an event, teacher, or counselor) ranked the highest, by far. Social media, direct mail, and on-campus visit, tour, or event ranked as the next highest strategies, but far distant from the high school source.

Figure 4: Image and Recruitment-If you were a potential student, which of the following recruitment methods would have the strongest impact on you? (Select only one.)



Figures 3 and 4 strengthen the case that Running Start enrollment efforts should focus on in-person connections and that social media advertising is a good way to augment those efforts.

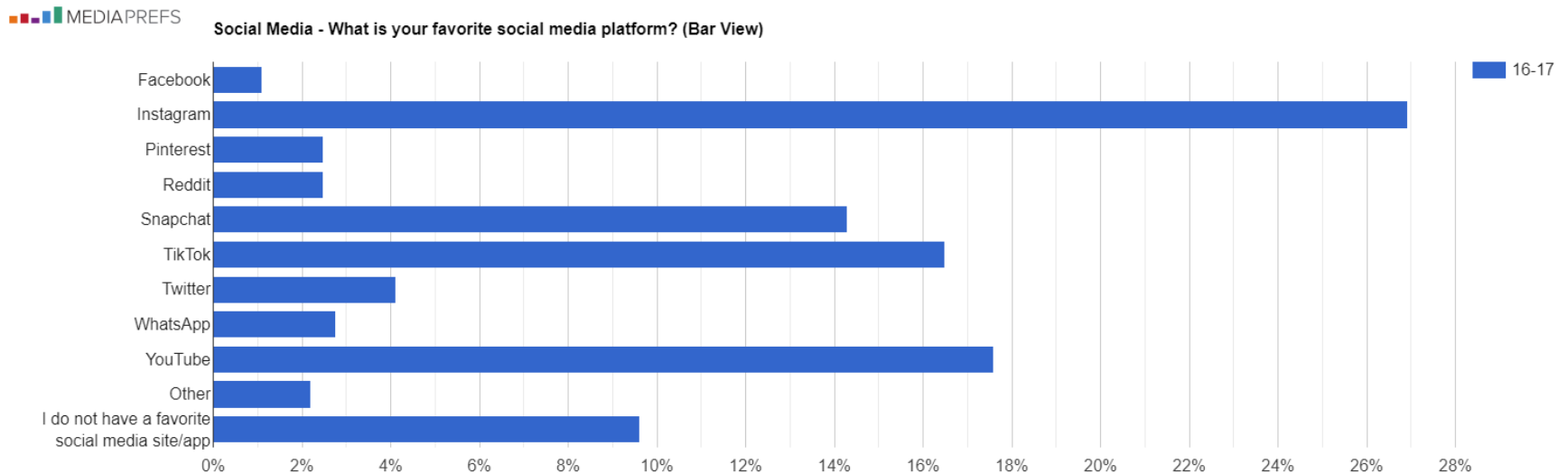
### Social media preferences

Social media is a relatively inexpensive way to reach prospective students and their families. Messages can be customized for each college and content targeted by platform, demographics, and geography. Social media, additionally, may be used to reach students’ parents and guardians as well as high school teachers and counselors, both of whom, we know, play a significant role in students’ college-going decisions. This section will discuss social media platform preferences and frequency of use for Gen Z as well as adults aged 41-50.

## Gen Z's social media preferences

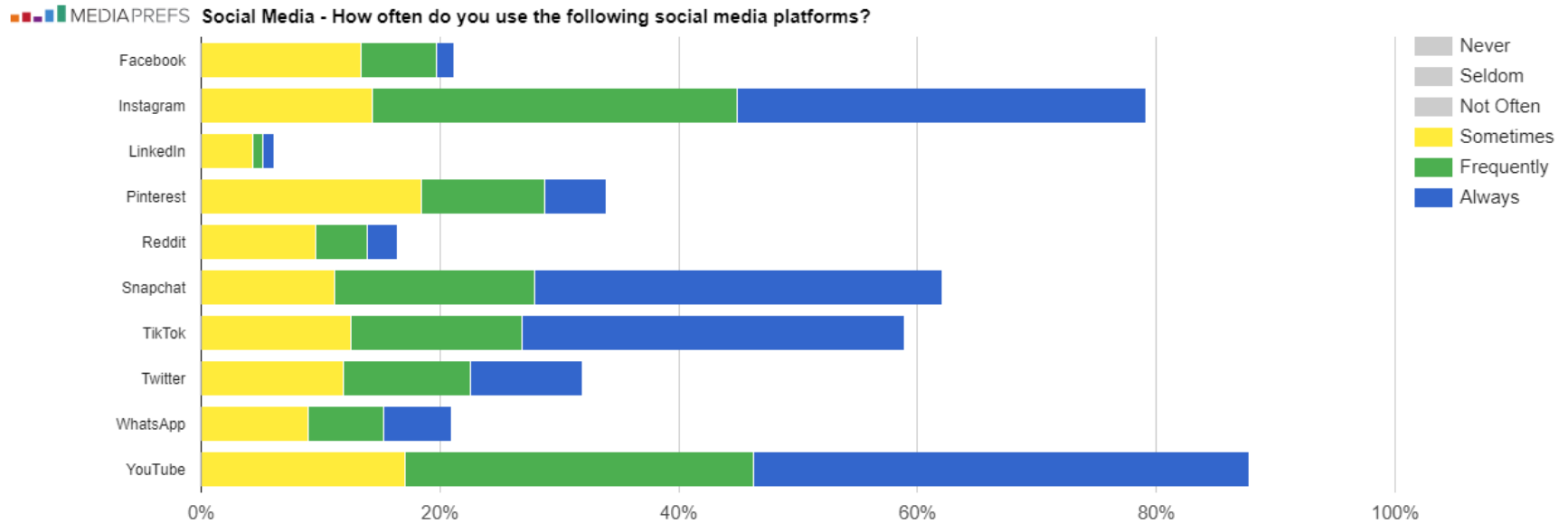
Gen Z prefers visual storytelling and communication social media platforms. Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and Snapchat stand out as Gen Z's preferred platforms. Social media that relies on text — like Facebook and Twitter — are significantly less popular (Figure 6).

Figure 5: Social Media-What is your favorite social media platform? (16-17 year olds)



Gen Z's preference for the more visual-based platforms is reinforced by looking at the frequency to which they use each outlet. Students reported using YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok sometimes, frequently, or always, with YouTube and Instagram standing out with the most use (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Social Media-How often do you use the following social media platforms? (16-17 year olds)



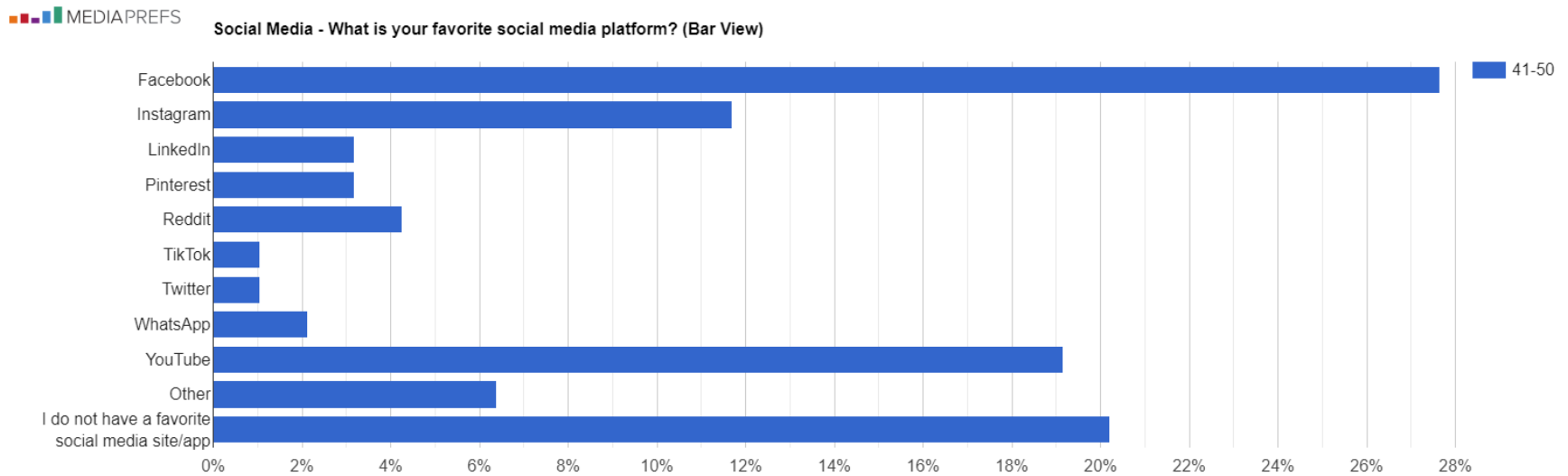
While we will see more frequent social media use on platforms overall, we see a significant gap in use between TikTok, at just under 60%, and Pinterest, the next most frequently used at about 36%. As we see in the next section on adults' social media preferences, the frequency of use of platforms like Pinterest, Twitter, and WhatsApp are similar between the two generations. However, we shouldn't rely on those lesser used platforms as our primary way of reaching for Gen Z.

## Adults' social media preferences

Unlike Gen Z, social media is a relatively new construct for adults — they did not grow up with it an integral part of their lives. We see, therefore, that while Gen Z is on several social media platforms throughout the day, adults are less likely to rely on social media at all.

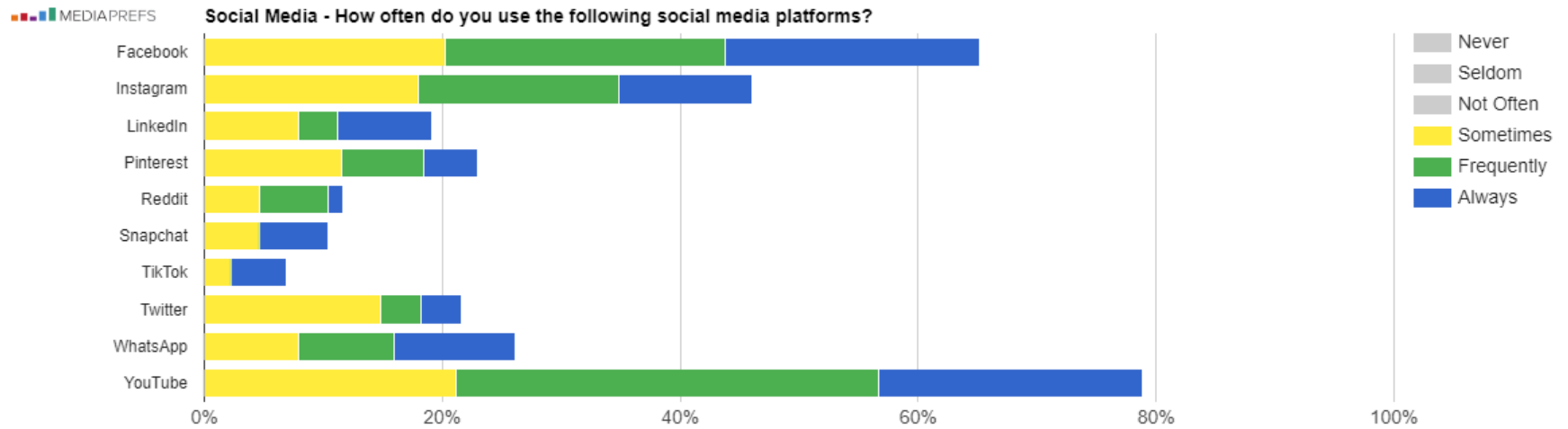
For adults, Facebook is by far the most popular social media platform, with close to 28% calling it their favorite. YouTube comes in as the second most popular platform, followed by Instagram, both of which are also popular among 16-17 year olds (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Social Media: What is your favorite social media platform (41-50 year olds)



Looking at frequency of use, while adults report Facebook as their favorite social media platform, YouTube is more frequently used, with close to 80% of people accessing it sometimes, frequently, or always. Next most frequently used is Facebook, followed by Instagram. Over 20% of adults report using WhatsApp, Pinterest, and Twitter sometimes, frequently, or always. This is similar to Gen Z, but, again, simply more Gen Zers integrate social media into their daily lives (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Social Media-How often do you use the following social media platforms? (41-50 year olds)



Advertising and outreach efforts on the platforms that overlap in generational usage may see some messaging intended for one audience reaching the other. Messages with cross-generational appeal and consistent branding will be important here.

# Strategy

Now that we understand where members of Gen Z get information to make decisions about the next steps for their education, we can shape our strategy for reaching them to encourage enrolling in Running Start. We also have an understanding of where adults get their information about students' post-high school plans, helping us communicate with them about the program.

This section will outline two concurrent communications efforts with the goal of increasing Running Start participation among students of color as well as students from low-income families.

## Concurrent effort: Outreach to middle and high schools

As we saw in our research, in deciding what to do after high school, students place heavy emphasis on the opinions and advice of trusted adults in their lives. This includes their teachers and counselors, and to a lesser extent, school administrators. Parents and guardians, too, heard the advice of their student's teachers, counselors, and administrators. A well-rounded Running Start campaign, therefore, will need to include this audience.

The outreach to middle and high schools effort is intended to promote Running Start in middle and high schools. While there will be some audience overlap with any public advertising effort, this outreach campaign is not intended for students or their parents and guardians. It is intended to create a "home environment" favorable to Running Start.

### Step 1: Schools with high numbers of students of color and/or students from low-income families

The objective of this communications plan is to serve as a key way to help increase enrollment in Running Start among students of color and students from low-income families. As colleges develop school or district-specific communications plans, they should start with schools with high numbers of students of color. They should also start with schools with high numbers of students from low-income families. Once those schools are identified, colleges should then look at the school's attitude toward Running Start – positive, indifferent, or negative – to tailor messages specific to those student, parent and guardian, teacher, counselor, and administrator audiences.

**The State Board will work with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction to identify middle and high schools for targeted outreach.**

### Step 2: Identifying middle and high schools

For a communications strategy to be most effective, we need to take into account the school environment students in the target audience experience. Is the school favorable to Running Start? Indifferent? Unfavorable? Once schools with high numbers of students of color as well as schools with high numbers of students from low-income families are identified, we will need to classify high schools based on their view of Running Start. Messages and tools will change according to that classification.

**The State Board will work with the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction to identify middle and high schools for targeted outreach.**

Middle and high schools may be grouped into three categories:

- Strong Running Start culture and participation
- Indifferent Running Start culture and participation
- Negative Running Start culture and participation

## Messages to middle and high schools

Based on the information gleaned during the middle and high school identification process, we will know which schools have a positive, indifferent, or negative view of Running Start. Messages to those schools should be tailored in one of two ways:

- “Get out the Registration”
- Persuasion

### “Get out the Registration”

Modeled after a “Get Out the Vote” campaign, this effort is designed to promote Running Start in already “friendly” middle and high schools. This is primarily an education campaign designed to remind and spur teachers, counselors, and administrators into talking about and encouraging Running Start among their students. Ideally, the identified schools and colleges are partners in this outreach effort.

Messages developed here should target the schools identified as having:

- Strong Running Start culture and participation
- Indifferent Running Start culture and participation

Schools with a strong Running Start culture and campaign will need the least amount of effort from a college. It might be as simple as checking in with school officials to maintain an existing relationship. The second – schools with an indifferent Running Start culture and participation – will require more effort with education about Running Start and its benefits. This may require more relationship building and attention in order to create a strong Running Start culture, moving the school from “indifferent” to “strong”.

### Persuasion

The Persuasion effort targets middle and high school administrators, teachers, and counselors who are opposed to Running Start. This effort will take longer and be more challenging than the “Get Out the Registration” campaign. Colleges first have to overcome negative biases and, second, encourage school officials to promote, or at least not stand in the way of information about, Running Start among their student body.

Messages developed here should target the schools identified as having:

- Negative Running Start culture and participation

The Persuasion effort will be an uphill climb. Colleges should consider its tactics, including its message and messenger, before undertaking a persuasion campaign. The Office of Superintendent



of Public Instruction, for example, may serve as a strong messenger to counter potential animosity toward colleges and the college system.

**Working with colleges and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, the State Board will develop messages and materials that can be used by college Running Start coordinators and other college outreach staff in the middle and high school outreach campaign.**

**The State Board will also conduct a targeted social media campaign intended to reach middle and high school teachers, counselors, and administrators. Discussion of those messages, tools, and the social media campaign are provided in their respective sections below. These activities by the State Board are subject to funding.**

## **Concurrent effort: Outreach to prospective students**

Colleges know their communities, and they are trusted. They are well versed in speaking to and working with prospective students. An outreach effort to prospective students and their parents and guardians, therefore, should come from a college familiar to those audiences, rather than an unfamiliar or unknown state agency like the State Board or the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. With an understanding of the school environment prospective students are coming from, colleges can conduct well-informed outreach to students and their parents and guardians. The effort in this communications plan is intended to supplement outreach work already underway, providing ideas for messages and tools. It is not intended to replace or supplant any effort.

**Messaging considerations and tools are provided in the respective sections below. If funded, the State Board will develop a toolbox of examples of work already underway at colleges and original material that colleges can customize for their own audiences.**

## **Audiences**

The Running Start Communications Plan addresses three main audiences:

- Prospective students of color in middle and high schools.
- Prospective students from low-income families.
- Parents and guardians of students of color in middle and high schools.
- Parents and guardians of students from low-income families in middle and high schools.
- Middle and high school teachers, counselors, and administrators from identified schools.

Messages will need to be tailored accordingly, but we will naturally see some overlap with the adult audiences.

# Key Messages

The Key Messages section will address messaging considerations for each of the five audiences — prospective students, parents and guardians of those students, and middle and high school teachers, counselors, and administrators. This section will also provide examples of umbrella messages that may be adopted in an outreach effort. **Any campaign should include materials translated into a college service area's major languages.**

## Gen Z message considerations

Gen Z faces a lot of uncertainty, but they think big. They want to change the world and believe society has a collective responsibility to make the world a better place for everyone. That said, Gen Z is growing up facing and being shaped by social, environmental, economic, and political crises. Mental health is declining, with more people feeling the effects of anxiety and depression. The COVID-19 pandemic is only exacerbating the situation.

Students of color and students from low-income families are more likely to feel stress and pressure. In 2020 alone, students of color were disproportionately impacted by multiple crises. The deaths of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd in 2020 alone, compounded by countless others in years before, brought racial reckoning to the forefront in this country. Through the COVID-19 pandemic, students saw sickness, lost lives, lost jobs, and reduced work hours. They saw their grades drop, and they changed their education plans as they took care of their families. Even before 2020, though, students of color and students from low-income families were less likely to see college as a possibility, and, once there, more likely to take on debt to finance their education. Messages and message development need to acknowledge this impact.

Members of Gen Z are excited about their next steps, but apprehensive about the world they're entering into. Messages to Gen Z, therefore, need to meet them where they are. Think about messages that are:

- welcoming and encouraging that create a sense of belonging
- sensitive and understanding where they can learn to trust your brand
- inclusive

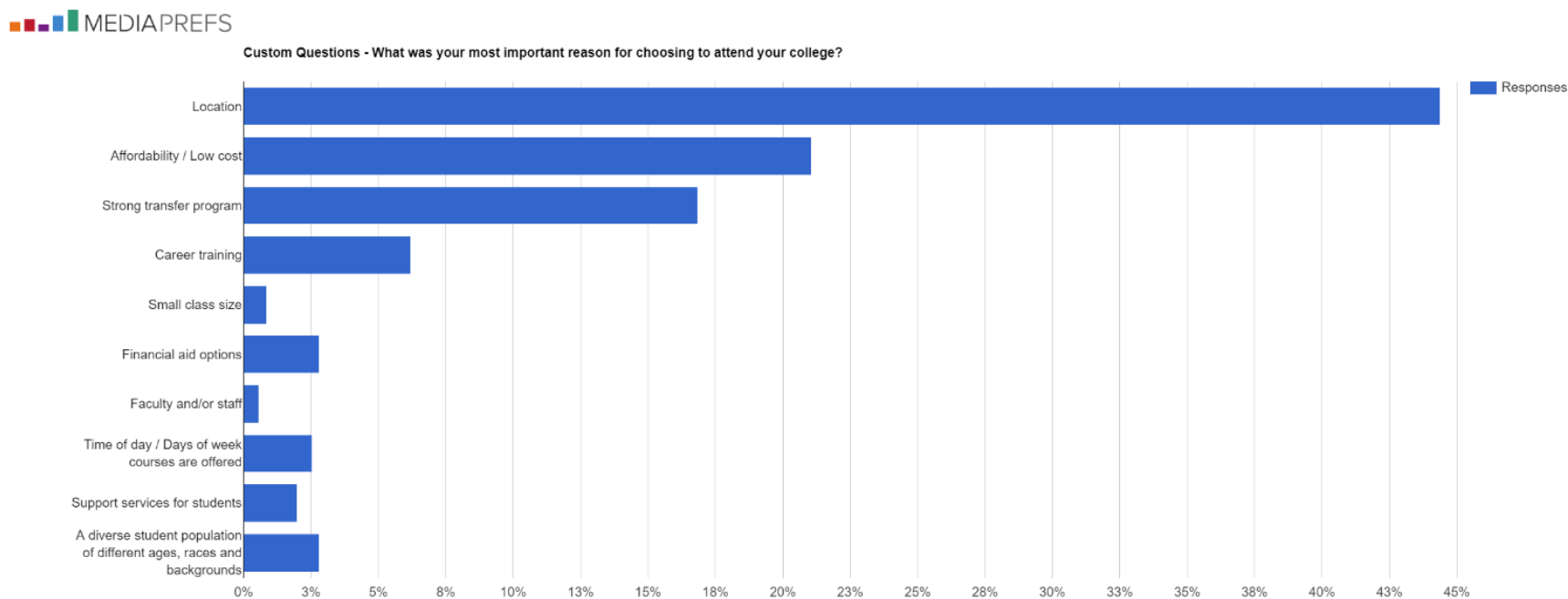
Also remember Gen Z tend toward visual-based social media platforms with short messages. Therefore, messages should show, not just tell; “less is more”. Messages need to maintain a sense of authenticity over one that's highly produced.

## Running Start message development

When developing Running Start-specific messages for Gen Z, include practical, specific information — not general information — that's geared specifically toward them. Messages should relay how they can overcome the fears of uncertainty and speak to their aspirations by showing them how college will positively impact their lives.

For 16-17 year olds, location ranked highest as the reason they chose the college they're attending (Figure 9). This is especially marked among those students enrolled in Washington's community and technical colleges. Cost of attending and quality programs also ranked high as reasons for attending. While Running Start is tuition-free, students may still incur some expense from fees, course materials, and transportation. For students in the Free and Reduced Price Lunch program, ensure they know they have food options while attending college classes.<sup>12</sup>

Figure 9: Custom Questions-What was your most important reason for choosing to attend your college?



The above chart shows responses from 16-17 year olds attending Washington's community and technical colleges. Note the distinction between "Strong Transfer Program" and "Career training," ranked fourth and fifth. We see that distinction again among high school students not necessarily enrolled in a college program, as well as the interest in the cost of attendance (Figure 10).<sup>13</sup>

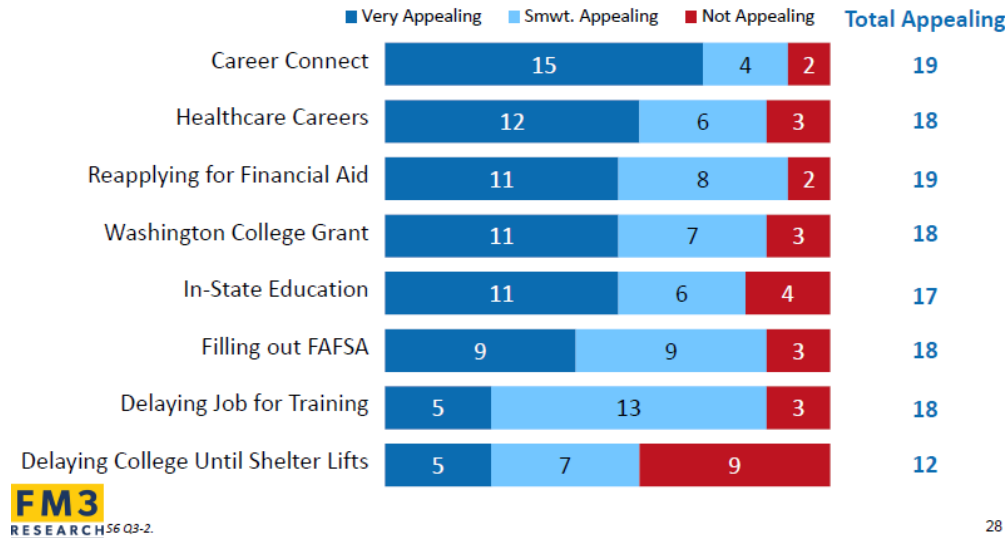
<sup>12</sup> Food options for students in the Free and Reduced Price Lunch program is an institutional decision. The college needs to determine and establish these options before a marketing or outreach campaign can address the topic.

<sup>13</sup> FM3 Research. (2020). Planning for Life After High School During the COVID-19 Pandemic. Oakland: FM3 Research.

Figure 10: Career Connect programs stood out as particularly appealing to students

## Career Connect programs stood out as particularly appealing to students.

What follows are some ideas that young people are considering pursuing. Please indicate whether this sounds very appealing, somewhat appealing, or not appealing to you – and explain a little bit about why.



Including messages about professional-technical programs in addition to academic-based programs will help speak to a broader range of students. Again, it will be important to continue connecting messages to the practical outcomes of participating in Running Start.

A national survey of high schoolers attending colleges and universities showed a difference between why students decided on their institution and the content they wanted to see. While that survey showed location, quality of teaching, and cost of attending as the top three reasons for why students chose their institution, they reported wanting to see content on:

- program details (e.g. admission requirements, specializations, work experience) (82%)
- information about costs (e.g. tuition, scholarships, financial aid) (72%)
- important dates and deadlines (e.g. application deadline) (67%)

About half of students ranked content on “getting a feel for the school,” campus life, and details about events to learn more about the school as important (53% for the first two, 47% for the third).<sup>14</sup>

### Key message topics

- You are college material.
- Whatever you want to be – a doctor, a mechanic, a counselor, an artist, an entrepreneur – community and technical colleges can get you started.
- Earn high school and college credit: close to home and tuition free.

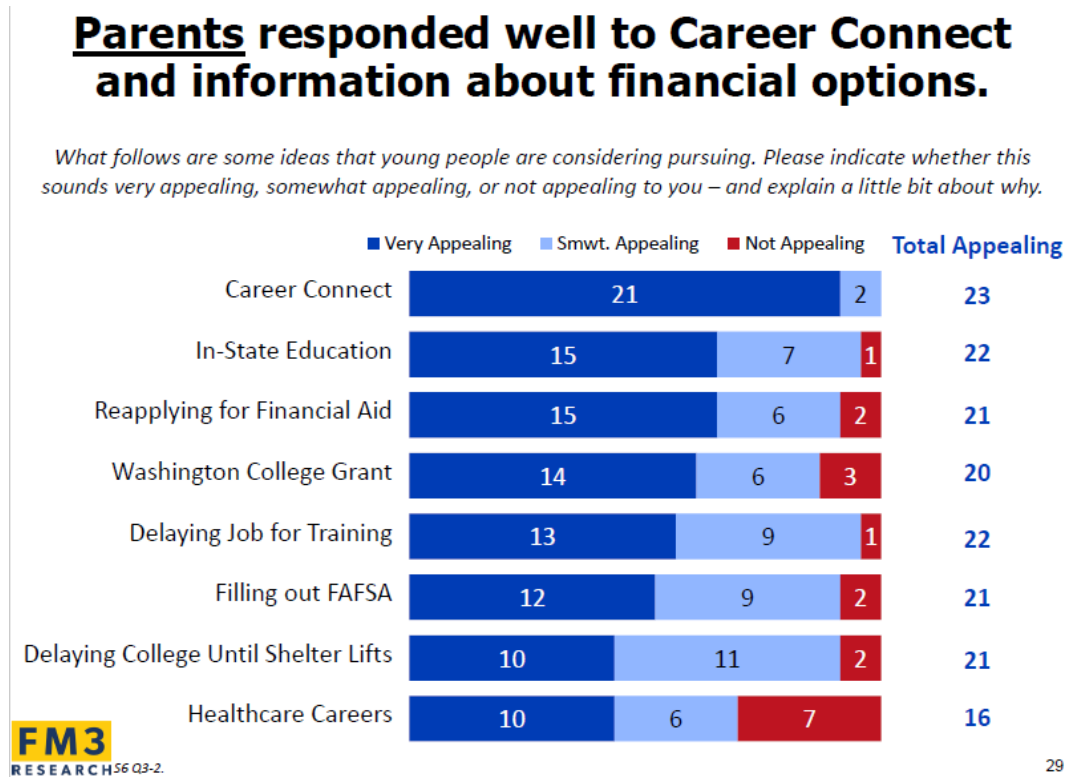
<sup>14</sup> Glacier and Academica Group. (2020). *2020 Gen Z Media Report – The State of Postsecondary Marketing to High School Students*. Calgary. Glacier.

- College provides a diverse student experience while learning independence.

## Parents and guardians message considerations

Parents and guardians want the best for their children. They also worry about their children. Like students, parents and guardians want to see the return on their child’s investment of time and expenses outside of tuition.<sup>15</sup>

Figure 2: Parents responded well to Career Connect and information about financial options



Messages to parents and guardians should show not only the aspirational aspects of going to college, but also the practical outcomes of what their child will receive from Running Start.

Unlike communications to Gen Z, though, messages to their parents and guardians can be longer and more text-based.

### Key message topics

- Your child is college material.
- Whatever your child wants to be – a doctor, a mechanic, a counselor, an artist, an entrepreneur – community and technical colleges can get them started.
- Your child can earn high school and college credit: close to home and tuition free.
- Your child can learn the skills they’ll need as an adult with the safety net they have at home.

<sup>15</sup> FM3 Research. (2020). Planning for Life After High School During the COVID-19 Pandemic. Oakland: FM3 Research.

# Tools

We know from our research that Gen Z is tech savvy — they don't know a world without smartphones and social media plays a big role in their everyday lives — but don't assume they want all of their communication to be digital. Printed viewbooks and brochures, for example, ranked as one of the top ways for high schoolers to get information about colleges.<sup>16</sup>

As we discussed in the research section, colleges must be ready to respond and assist prospective Gen Z students. Just as messages need to meet them where they are, showing an inclusive, welcoming, and encouraging environment, the colleges' actions in creating the student experience need to reflect the same.

The tools listed in this section serves as a menu of options for colleges to use in their outreach efforts. Colleges can choose from this list of tools based on their district's unique needs, budgets, and availability.

## Obtaining contact information

Direct contact tools like email and texting only work if colleges have that contact information. One way for colleges to collect student information is through a tool like a CRM. That, though, requires the student to initiate contact. For other students, though, consider the following options:

- Colleges, preferably presidents, can contact middle and high school principals to create data sharing agreements to include students' and parents and guardians' contact information, including address, email, and phone number. This will likely only be an option among middle and high schools that, one, have an established relationship with the college, and, two, have a positive or indifferent view of Running Start.
- For middle and high schools unwilling or unable to establish a data sharing agreement, colleges can consider using the College Bound enrollment roster. Regional rosters are available through the Washington Student Achievement Council. Contact [collegebound@wsac.wa.gov](mailto:collegebound@wsac.wa.gov) for more information.

## Parents and Guardians

We know from our research that parents and guardians serve as the strongest influence on their child's post-high school decisions. We can infer that they would play the same role in decisions about Running Start.

## Peer influencers

Like parents and guardians, similar aged peers play a strong role in students' decisions. Peer influencers can be current Running Start students or recent alumni. Consider hiring or paying a stipend to peer influencers who identify as students of color to help spread the word about Running Start among their circles.

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<sup>16</sup> Diteljan, M., De Luca, M., Neal, J. (2021). Zero in on High School Prospects Without Wasting Your Precious Marketing Dollars. Glacier, Interact Communications, Community College of Baltimore County.

## School teachers, counselors, and administrators

Research tells us of the strong influence students' teachers and counselors, and, to a lesser extent, administrators have on decisions about school. While we classified schools as having positive, indifferent, or negative views toward Running Start, that doesn't mean every teacher, counselor, and administrator in that school shares that view. When developing school- or district-specific communications and outreach plans, consider that school's attitude, but don't discount all employees. Someone there may, in fact, help spread the word about Running Start. In particular, teachers, counselors, and administrators of color could be good messengers to help spread the word about Running Start at their schools.

## Community based organizations

The opinions of other adults in students' lives ranked as a strong influence in their decisions. Community based organizations like places of worship, libraries, and social and cultural organizations often serve as important and trusted places of contact for students and their families. Colleges should consider developing and fostering relationships with its service area community based organizations to encourage Running Start participation and general college-going culture.

For a list of trusted community messengers, see the Washington State Department of Commerce's "[Technical assistance from trusted community messengers](#)" list.

## Email

Email is a very accepted form of communicating with high school students, especially among older students (79% among seniors; 66% among sophomores and juniors).<sup>17</sup> If available, use email as a means of communication and follow-up, but be ready with staff time if students have questions.

## Texting

Texting is an accepted form of communication, especially among younger high school students (34% among seniors; 42% among sophomores and juniors).<sup>18</sup> Like email, use texting, if available, as a means of communication and follow-up, but be ready with staff time if students have questions.

## Peachjar

[Peachjar](#) is a messaging service used by schools to communicate with students and parents and guardians. Not all schools and districts use Peachjar, though, so this tool may not be an option. Colleges purchase credits through Peachjar to send information like flyers and emails, but the school ultimately approves the message. This tool, therefore, may only be an option for the middle and high schools that have a positive or indifferent view of Running Start.

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<sup>17</sup> Glacier and Academica Group. (2020). *2020 Gen Z Media Report – The State of Postsecondary Marketing to High School Students*. Calgary. Glacier.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.



## Information in schools

Displaying information in schools ranks as a strong way to reach students. With in-person instruction slowly returning during COVID, colleges have more opportunities here. Information in schools can include passive techniques like posters and more active methods like college and career fairs. This tool can reach students enrolled in positive, indifferent, and negative Running Start schools since Running Start can be embedded in larger messaging about the college itself. Creative material should reflect racial diversity.

## Information sessions

Information sessions, tours, and other traditional recruiting tools may be on hold because of COVID, but virtual can still be a strong option. Remote platforms like Zoom, virtual tours, or live social media events can serve as a way to spark ideas and remind people of the college and the education it provides. Information sessions can be used to reach out to prospective students as well as a way to develop relationships among middle and high school teachers, counselors, and administrators. Consider holding information sessions for specific groups like young men of color, young women of color, or teachers and counselors of color. Peer influencers can help spread the word about the sessions and share their experiences. Also consider providing participation incentives like gift certificates to the bookstore or to local restaurants.

## Create a college class

Think about working with instruction to create a class geared to middle and high school students of color to give students an idea of what college looks and feels like. The class could be a one-day lecture as part of an information session discussed above. For high school students, the class could be expanded into a quarter-long class enrolling only juniors and seniors of color. Consider involving student support programs like GEAR UP and AVID.

## College website

Students also looked to college websites to learn more about what the college has to offer (25% for seniors; 31% for sophomores and juniors).<sup>19</sup> Again, make sure messages on college websites reflect Gen Z — target those perspective students specifically, meeting them where they are. Images should reflect racial diversity.

## Social media

Ads targeted toward the identified audiences can help raise awareness and influence Running Start culture. Target messages to each group using the preferred platforms described in the research section above. Any images should reflect racial diversity.

## Social media campaign

To help support the Running Start communications effort, the State Board will, dependent on funding, conduct a pilot social media campaign targeted toward middle and high school teachers, counselors, and administrators. The goal of this campaign will be to help raise awareness and persuade school officials to promote Running Start as an option among their student bodies.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.



## Key Dates

Much of this communications plan has discussed relationship building with middle and high schools, peers, and community based organizations. This plan, therefore, will not outline specific dates for activities to be completed but provide considerations for the development of specific plans.

## Prospective students

Communicating about Running Start presents an extra set of challenges because college outreach and communications staffs need to consider the high school calendar in addition to their own. Build communications and outreach plans with consideration to:

- middle and high school advising days
- when students have to decide on their classes for the next semester

## Middle and high schools

While events leading to a strong, healthy relationship may happen on specific days, relationship building is done over the long term. Again looking at middle and high school calendars, create communication and outreach plans based on those key dates. Targeted social media campaigns can be completed in the days and weeks before advising days and class registration deadlines.



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Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges