

THE PATH TO POSTSECONDARY OPPORTUNITY

Access, affordability, and outcomes are key higher education concerns among young people in New York City



A high-quality postsecondary degree or credential can be the key to putting New Yorkers on the path to earning a family-sustaining wage and participating in the workforce.

Yet our new poll of New York City young people found that at all levels – from high schools to colleges to city, state, and federal governments – there is still much to be done to support New Yorkers on their path to and through the higher education system.

Access to financial aid and resources to prepare them for their higher education were among the top issues young people identified in the poll, particularly among young people who have been historically underserved by our education system.

The poll findings underscore the critical need for city and state leaders and policymakers to prioritize policies and investments that make higher education more affordable and accessible, as well as those that will drive better outcomes, particularly for students of color, young people from working class backgrounds, and young people from immigrant families. *(See footnote for definitions).*

Now is the time for New York to make a commitment to its young people. Our future depends on it.

KEY POLL FINDINGS

- 1 A majority of respondents indicated that both New York State and New York City could be doing more to help students be successful in higher education.
- 2 The cost of college and rising student loan debt are key concerns for young people in New York City, particularly among Black and Latinx respondents and those from working class backgrounds.
- 3 Respondents indicated strong support for grant programs that would make higher education more affordable and reduce the amount of student loan debt students incur, as well as a streamlined system that would make financial aid more accessible.
- 4 A majority of respondents across all racial groups agreed that being successful in higher education means graduating with a degree, a sentiment that was particularly strong among Black respondents. Asian, Black, and Latinx respondents who did not have a certificate or degree were also most likely to indicate they have had a difficult time finding work because they don't have a training certificate or college degree.
- 5 Respondents overwhelmingly indicated that the pandemic has made it more difficult for students to prepare for and succeed in college and the workforce.
- 6 While respondents indicated that a number of resources are important for high school students to have to prepare for college, most did not have access to them.
- 7 Young people overwhelmingly support lawmakers prioritizing policies that make higher education more affordable and that lead to increased graduation rates and better outcomes, particularly for students of color and students from low-income households.

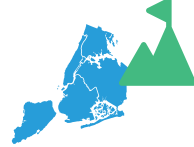
FINDING 1: A majority of respondents indicated that both New York State and New York City could be doing more to help students be successful in higher education.

70%



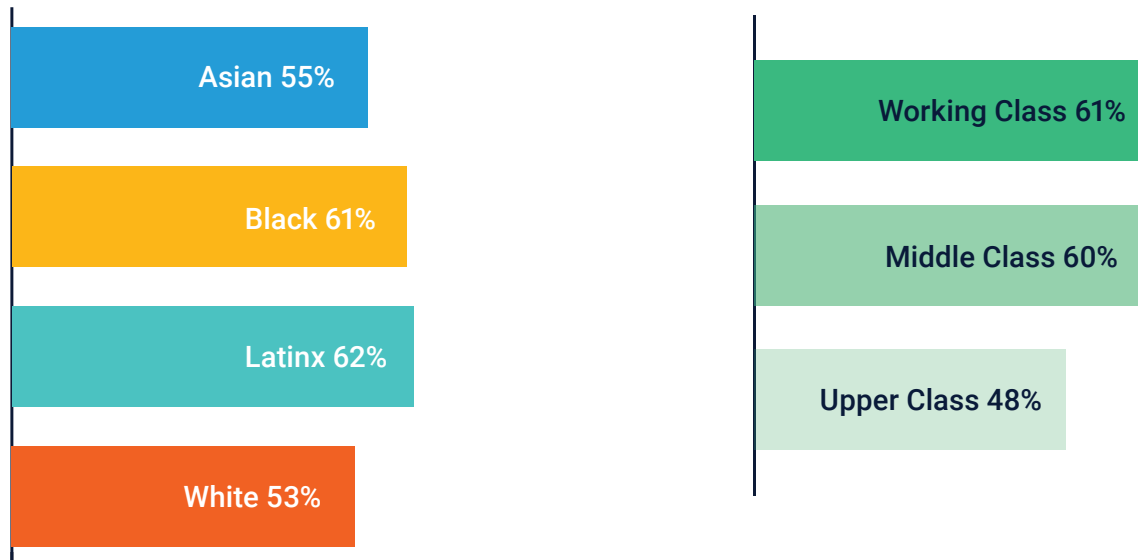
Respondents who indicated the **New York State** government could do more to make sure students succeed in higher education

70%



Respondents who indicated the **New York City** government could do more to make sure students succeed in higher education

At the same time, Black and Latinx respondents, immigrants, respondents from immigrant families, and respondents from working and middle class backgrounds were most likely to indicate that the higher education system is failing people from their communities.



65%

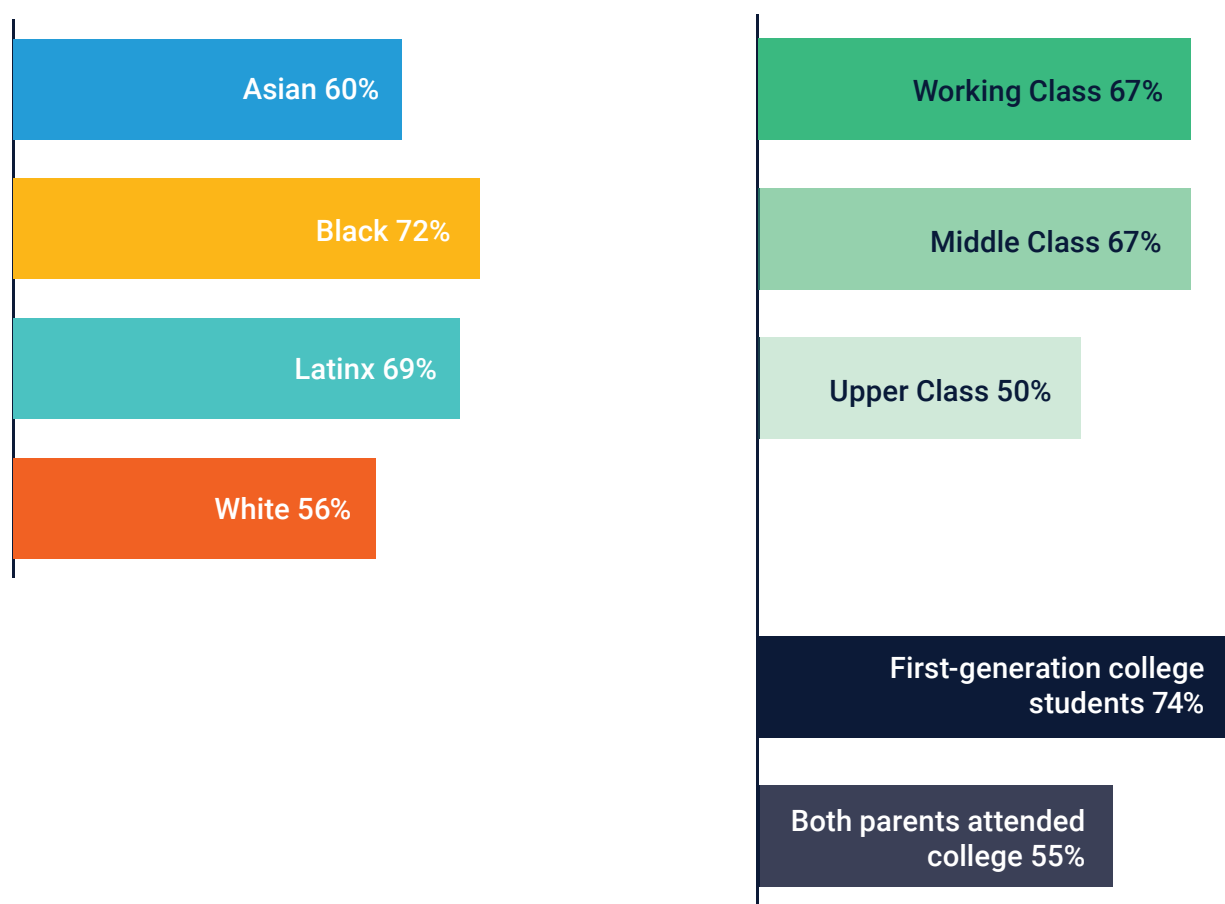


Nearly two out of three respondents who identified as an immigrant or from an immigrant family indicated that the **higher education system is failing people from their community.**

The survey had a confidence interval of +/-4.9%. All interviews were conducted a phone survey. Care has been taken to ensure the geographic and demographic diversity of New York City residents between the ages of 18 and 24 is properly represented. For the purposes of this research, respondents identified which class best reflected the household they grew up in. Immigrants and those from immigrant families are defined as those who reported that they, their parents, and/or their grandparents were born in another country. First-generation is defined as a respondent who is the first in their family to attend college.

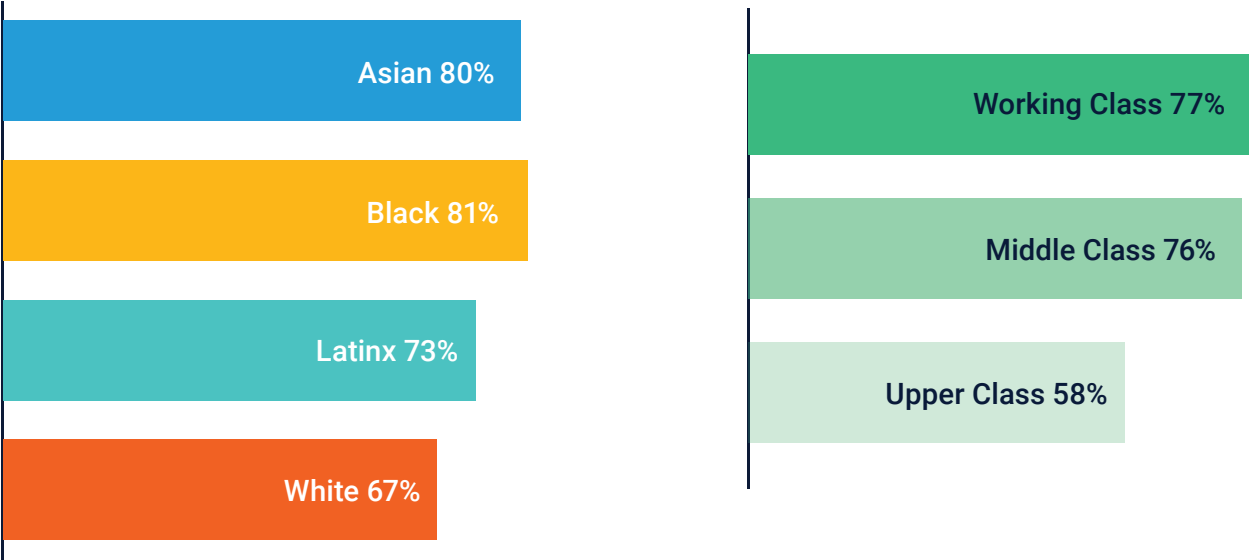
FINDING 2: The cost of college and rising student loan debt are key concerns for young people in New York City, particularly among Black and Latinx respondents and those from working and middle class backgrounds.

Black and Latinx respondents, respondents from working and middle class backgrounds, and first-generation college students were more likely to agree that rising student loan debt has made them worry that higher education is not worth the investment.

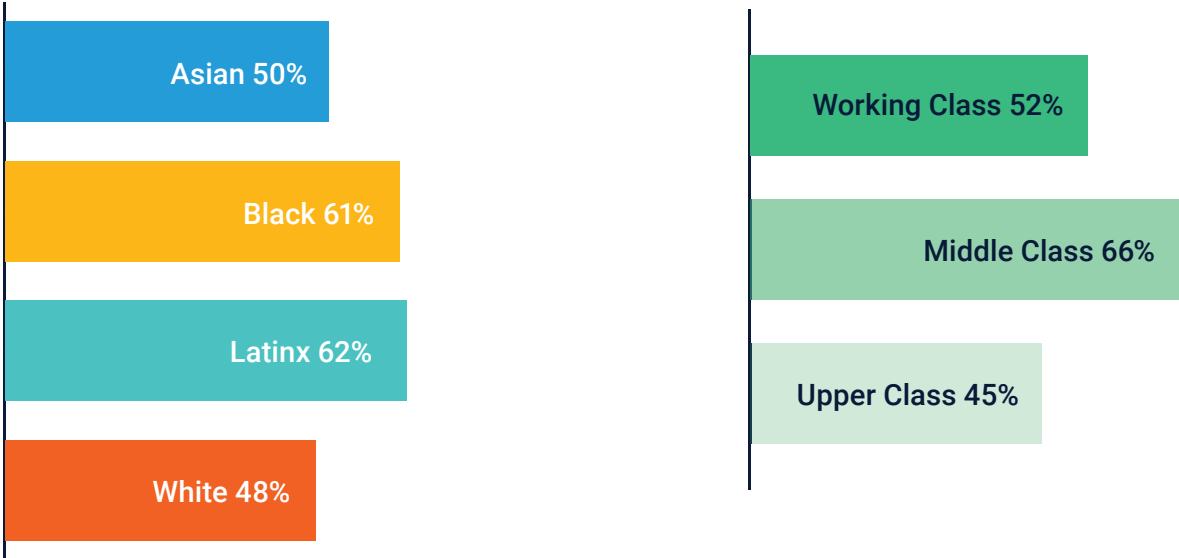



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Asian, Black, and Latinx respondents and those from working and middle class backgrounds were also more likely to support increasing guardrails to protect students from institutions that leave students with too much debt. They ranked this as a top/major priority for lawmakers in Albany.



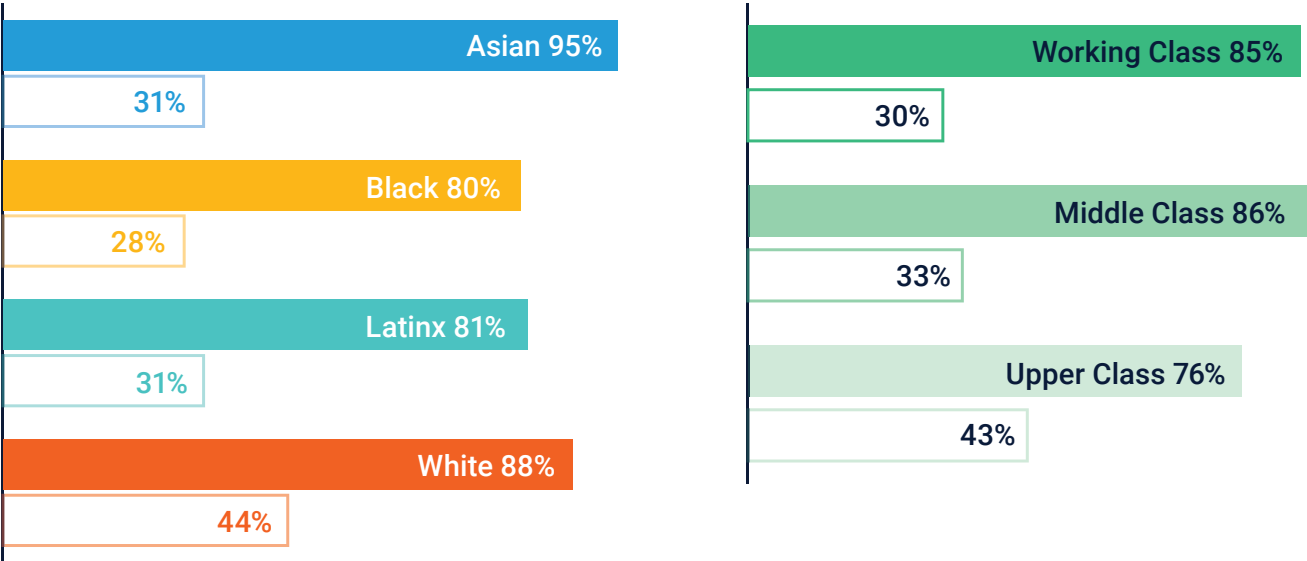
Out of respondents whose highest level of education was high school, Black and Latinx respondents and respondents from working and middle class backgrounds were most likely to agree that cost was a factor in their decision to not go to college.



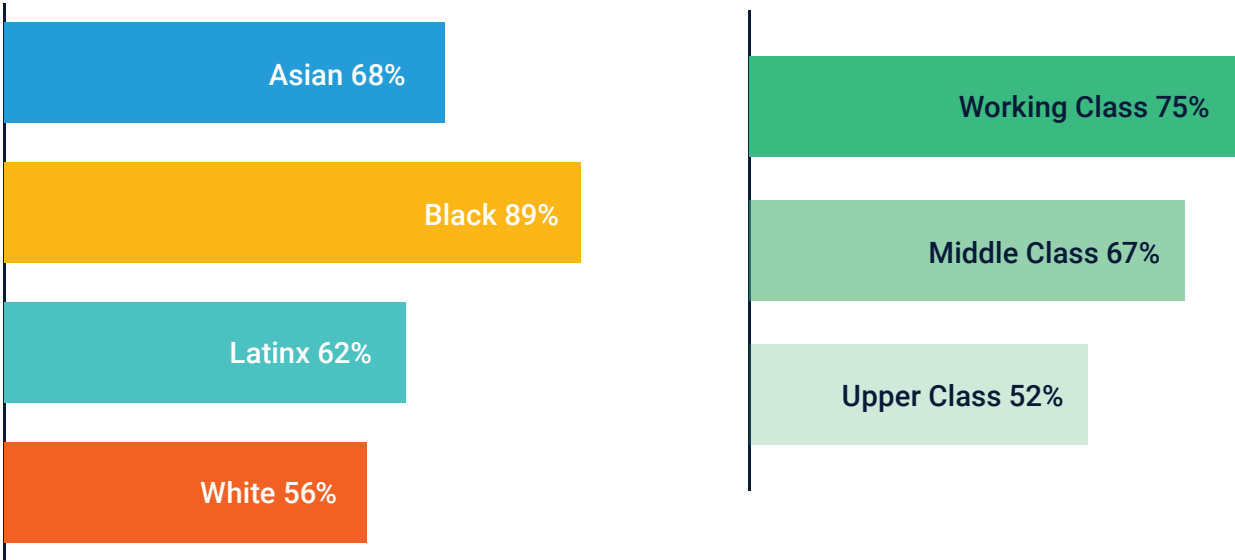
65%  Nearly two out of three respondents who identified as an immigrant or from an immigrant family agreed that **cost was a factor in their decision to not go to college.**

Although respondents from all racial groups and economic backgrounds indicated that access to scholarships is very important, Asian, Black, and Latinx respondents and those from middle and working class backgrounds were far less likely to have access to them.

Indicated access to scholarships is important / had access to scholarships



Asian, Black, and Latinx respondents and respondents from working class backgrounds were most likely to indicate they experienced challenges applying for and being admitted to college.



FINDING 3: Respondents indicated strong support for grant programs that make higher education more affordable, reduce the amount of student loan debt students occur, and make financial aid more accessible.

Establishing a grant program that provides additional resources to higher education institutions dedicated to improving outcomes among low-income students and students of color

76%



Increasing investment in grant programs, that provide resources students will not have to pay back, so that more low- and moderate-income students have the financial resources to enter and complete college

75%



Eliminating tuition at all SUNY colleges and universities to help more students gain access to a college degree



66%

Creating a single streamlined process to qualify for and receive financial aid



72%

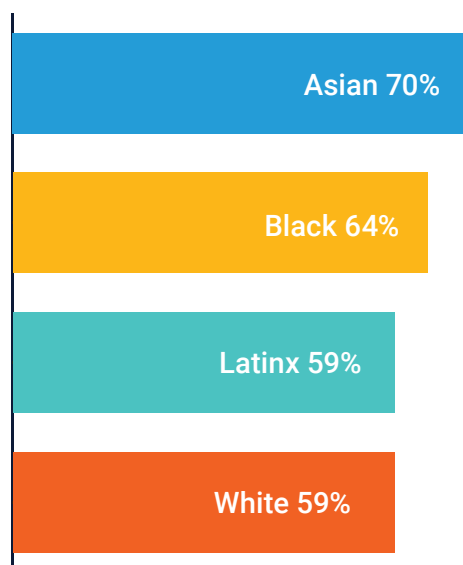


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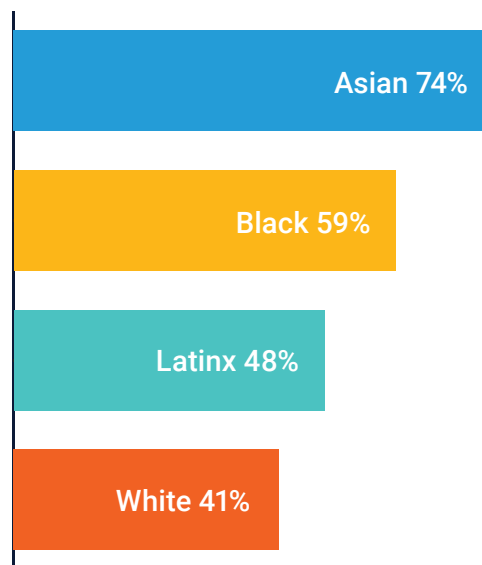
FINDING 4: Across all racial groups, most respondents agreed that being successful in higher education means graduating with a degree, a sentiment that was particularly strong among Black respondents. Asian, Black, and Latinx respondents who did not have a certificate or degree were most likely to report that this led to difficulty finding work.



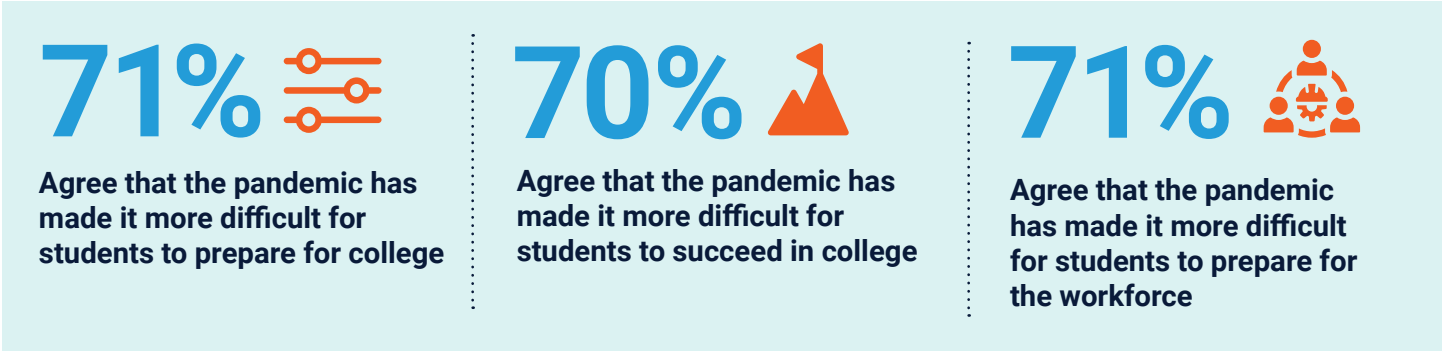
Agreed that being successful in higher education means graduating with a degree



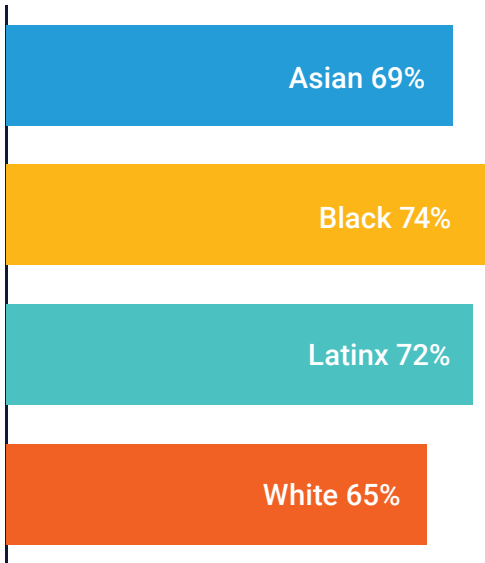
Have had a difficult time finding work because they don't have a training certificate or degree (among respondents who did not attend college or another higher education program)



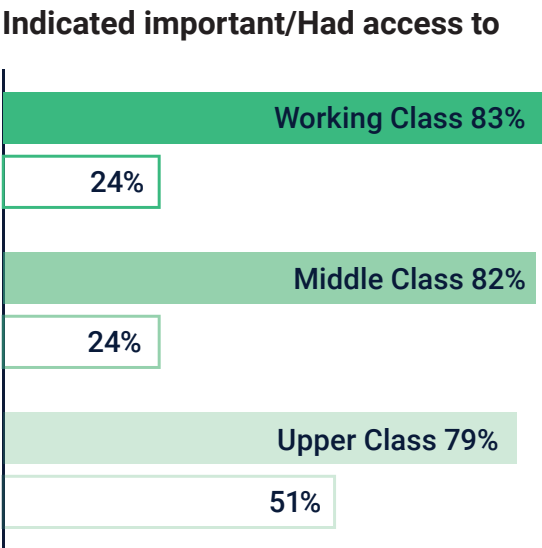
FINDING 5: Respondents overwhelmingly indicated that the pandemic has made it more difficult for students to prepare for and succeed in college and the workforce.



Respondents of color were more likely to indicate that the pandemic has made it more difficult for students to succeed in college.



Although respondents from working and middle class backgrounds were more likely to say mental health supports were important, they were far less likely to have access to those supports.



FINDING 6: While respondents indicated that a number of resources are important for high school students to have to prepare for college, they by and large did not have access to them.



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FINDING 7: Young people overwhelmingly support lawmakers prioritizing policies that make higher education more affordable and that lead to increased graduation rates and better outcomes, particularly for students of color and students from low-income households.

	% Support
Reducing student debt	78%
Improving outcomes for low-income students	78%
Ensuring higher education institutions are preparing students for in-demand jobs and upwardly mobile careers	76%
Addressing the cost of higher education	75%
Increasing graduation rates	75%
Improving outcomes for students of color	75%
Increasing guardrails to protect students from schools that leave students with too much debt	74%
Streamlining financial aid application processes	74%
Making college application processes easier	72%
Recruiting and supporting top faculty and staff	72%
Increasing college enrollment	72%
Improving outcomes for first-generation college students	71%
Recruiting and supporting faculty and staff that reflect the diversity of New York State	67%
Simplifying the SUNY transfer process	66%

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WHAT THEY WISH THEY KNEW ...



During a series of focus groups across the state, we asked young people to write a letter to their 17-year-old selves about their higher education experience. Here’s what they had to say:

“I would advise myself to definitely explore all options other than college and make sure to understand that although this might seem like an easy decision, it does play into the next chapter of my life. I would say to reach out to teachers and family friends who have been down the same crossroads that I’m in and see what they have to say. I feel like if I would’ve known about other routes than college, I might have been better off.”

.....

“I think the biggest advice I would give my 17-year-old self would be to focus on what I valued, and explore my interests, rather than focus on what interests the school had for me, or what my guidance counselor wanted me to do.”

“APPLY APPLY APPLY for those scholarships. College is very expensive not even SUNY is free.”

.....

“You should talk to people who are professionals to understand what they are doing and what they like. You can discover what you like and what you need to pursue a career in through that. To be successful, you need to focus on what you are good at and what you enjoy. Be open to making incorrect decisions and taking risks will go a long way. You have enough time to learn from your mistakes.”

.....

“I do wish that I focused on going into a community college from the start and not aim for a ‘big’ college. What would have eased my experience in transitioning into college would be not having to stress about money and paying my tuition.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

These data make it clear that respondents are interested in pursuing postsecondary opportunities, but there are significant barriers to entry and completion, especially for historically marginalized groups. It is time that education leaders and members of government prioritize supporting students to and through postsecondary opportunities.

Here's how:

- 1 Invest in a government-wide commitment to expanding access to college counselors and other transitional supports including financial literacy training for students and families. This work should be done in partnership between the state, districts, and higher education.
- 2 Invest in academic and career supports, and resources that support students' holistic development.
- 3 Expand capacity of financial aid offices, hire additional financial aid counselors, and increase supports for FAFSA completion and renewal.
- 4 Provide students with opportunities to explore careers early and throughout their high school and college experiences by partnering with local business partners, drawing from alumni networks, and/or hosting internship/career fairs.
- 5 Encourage students to accumulate college credits as early as possible and make general education course credits easily transferrable across SUNY and CUNY campuses.
- 6 Create a system of wraparound services that support students' mental and physical health, while addressing issues with temporary housing and/or food insecurity.



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