WELCOME TO THE ERA OF THE PARENT

Let's take a look inside the minds (and households) of those raising Gen Alpha

ologie®



Wondering who will be the next big influencer in the higher education market?

HINT: IT'S NOT THE ONES ACTUALLY LOOKING TO ENROLL.

This influencer is one you'll need to reach early, often, and in a way that helps them do what they do best: be a great parent.

The parents of Gen Alpha are raising their children in a way that we haven't seen before. They are adaptive and open-protecting their children, yet preparing them for a shifting, confusing world well beyond their control.

Inside the household, things aren't what you might assume. Gen Alpha is growing up with agency. Kids as young as two have a voice and a vote in family matters. Even with many quick answers within shouting distance of a smart speaker, and younger generations' knack

for technology, these parents are still the go-to resource for questions.

Although their opinion isn't the be-all-end-all, they take their role as consultants very seriously. They take great pride in being informed. Especially when it comes to major life decisions: like where and if their children want to go to college.

The values they instill and how they support their kids will not only shape the trajectory of their children's futures and the rising expectations of learning environments—it will also drastically shift how the college admissions decision process unfolds from here on out.

Want to know how to get Alphas interested in your college? You'll need to pull up a seat to the family table, because this is a household matter.

Welcome to the Era of the Parent.

About the Study

Ologie set out to understand more about how parents of Generation Alpha are thinking and feeling about higher education.

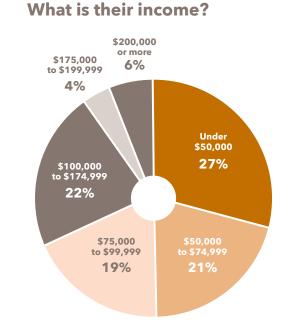
For this study, we used both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

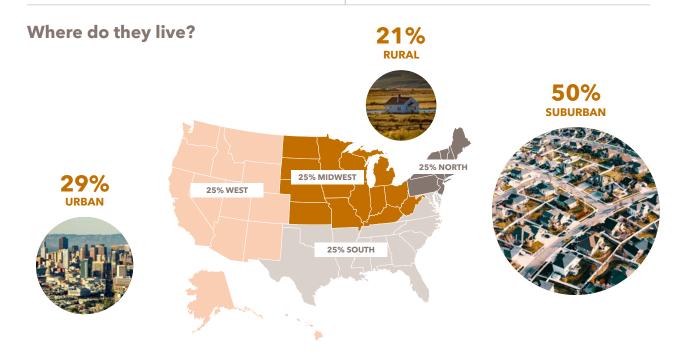
First, we executed an online survey which was in the field from January 16 through January 22, 2024. To obtain our sample, we targeted a consumer panel that reflected U.S. Census data according to gender, geography, race, and income. Participants had to have at least one child aged 0 to 14 in order to qualify. We acquired 812 completed surveys.

While our study was in the market, we also conducted six one-on-one interviews with a random sample of parents of Gen Alpha kids.

What races and ethnicities do they identify as?

- 1% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- 2% American Indian or Alaska Native
- **4%** Two or more races
- 6% Asian
- 10% Hispanic or Latino or Spanish origin of any race
- 17% Black or African American
- 60% White





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AGGRESSIVE AND DOMINANT ATTITUDE

COMPLETE
CONFIDENCE
IN EVERYTHING
THEY DO

ALMIGHTY AND AUTHORITATIVE MINDSET

When you think of an "alpha" personality, most of the traits that come to mind don't apply here.

"LONE WOLF"
STYLE OF
WORKING

TOP DOG MEMIALITY



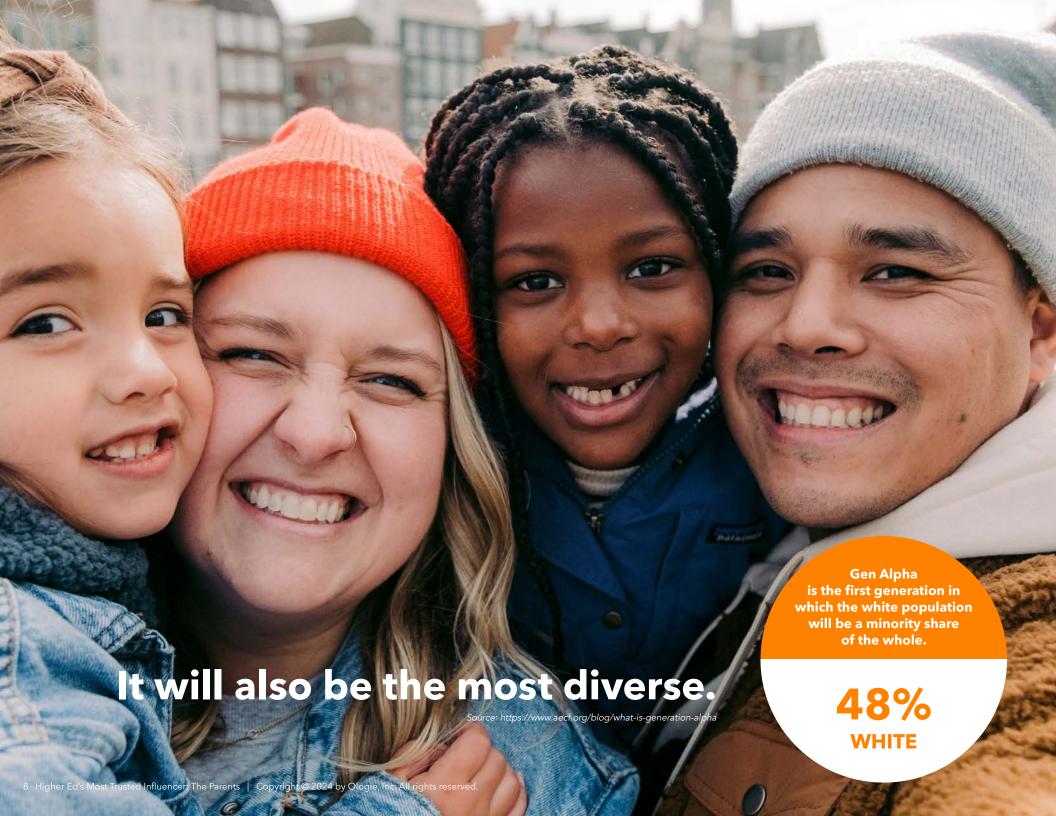
So if it's not that, where does the "Alpha" label come from?

Generation Alpha was named by restarting the alphabet after Gen Z—and because they're also the first cohort to be born entirely in the 21st century and the third millennium.

Born between 2010 and 2024.

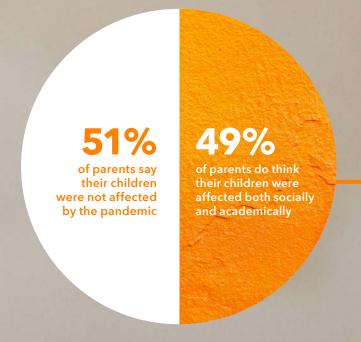
Seen as a landmark generation, Gen Alpha is expected to be the largest in history at more than 2 billion people.

- Mark McCrindle, a social researcher who coined the name and determined its bounds

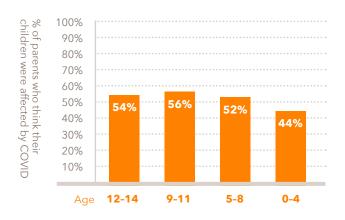


Their childhood was interrupted by the pandemic. Wondering how it might influence them long term?

Parents are divided on how much it affected their children.



By age group, older Alphas were affected more.



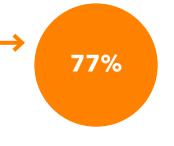
"I don't think my son and his friends were affected socially. It opened their minds a little bit to having digital engagements, like watching a movie via Zoom together."

—John, whose child is 14

Among the 49% of parents who think their children were affected, 77% of them say their kids were affected socially, and 60% say they were affected academically. Encouragingly, parents think the effects aren't long lasting. Only 18% of them think their child's college readiness was affected, because their children caught up once they returned to school.

"Once they went back, they got used to being around people they didn't know and making friends. I feel like some kids might be affected long term. Mine, personally, no."

—Lesha, whose children are 3.7. and 10



said that
SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT
WAS AFFECTED



said that
EDUCATIONAL
DEVELOPMENT
WAS AFFECTED



said that COLLEGE READINESS WAS AFFECTED

What do Alphas want to be when they grow up?

Well, according to their parents:

1. DOCTOR

2. ENGINEER

3. POLICE OFFICER

4. TEACHER

5. PROFESSIONAL ATHLETE

Note: These are pretty common and align with previous generations.

Setting the right expectations.

Many of these professions require more than four-year degree. Being a doctor, teacher, or police officer requires further specialized training. If we let these students start college thinking that they'll enter these professions at the other end of a bachelor's degree, we're doing a disservice to them, their families, and our industry.

We also asked the parents:

What areas or subjects would be most important for children to study in college?

The top responses:

TECHNOLOGY
 ENGINEERING

Note: Humanities was at the bottom.

Which made us wonder:

With the advancement of generative Al at lightning speed, will engineering and technology still be safe bets by the time the oldest Alphas enter the workforce 10 years from now?

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR COMMUNICATORS?

We'll need to change the narrative that college is a single-track step to a specific job – especially when (1) that job may cease to exist and (2) the career may require further training.

Not around too many Alphas? Here's a quick snapshot of a few.

JOSIE, AGE 8

Wants to be a cheerleader when she grows up.

Parents are divorced. Has a 10-year-old brother and two cats.

Likes to make movie storyboards with her cousins online and does gymnastics once a week at the city community center. Goes thrifting (at the "treasure stores") for cool clothes with her mom and frequently asks Alexa to play Taylor Swift. CHASE, AGE 13

Lives with his 16-year-old brother and his parents.

Wants to be a basketball or football player when he grows up.

Competes in Youth Olympic nationals with his brother.
Often has the musical artist Lil Baby blaring in his headphones as he shoots hoops in the driveway.
Occasionally likes to build sculptures and prefers to watch YouTube over TV.

MILA, AGE 14

Lives with her mom, younger brother, two dogs, and seven cats

Wants to be a tattoo artist when she grows up. Loves to do her makeup, crafting, and any kind of art.

Would prefer to have music on 24/7, but puts it on pause during school hours. Looks forward to going out with her friends on the weekends and holds very tight to her iPhone wherever she goes. **ROMEO, AGE 5**

Single child of high school sweethearts.

Will cite the TV show *Bluey* and elements of the periodic table in the same sentence.

Loves to make train designs and wants to build the first magnetic maglev train to space. Purple is his favorite color. Can multiply faster than his mom, but still asks for her help to put on his socks.











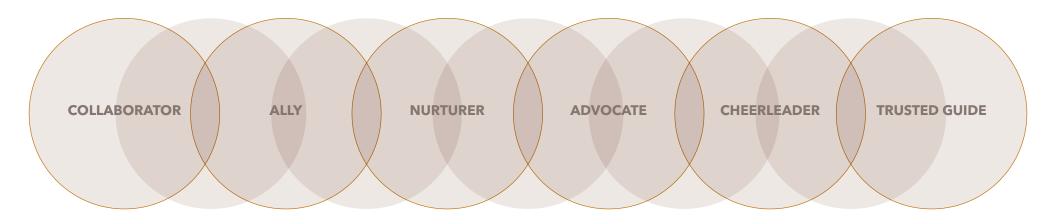
KEY TAKEAWAYS

in the middle of some years, most parents said that its effects weren't long-lasting, and that their kids will still be college-ready.

The answers to "What do you want to be when you grow up?" are pretty universities, we need to educate families about what the paths to those careers actually look like, and to help them consider that those jobs might not be there at all.



Highly involved. Highly informed. Highly supportive.



These parents play many roles.

Parents are used to shifting their approach when new information presents itself. That's not to mention the rapidly changing world they navigate. Add in working from home, maintaining the household, relationships, health and wellness, and—well, there's a lot on their shoulders.

During COVID-19, parents were everything: teachers, caregivers, coaches, classmates, friends. By now, they may think the effects of the pandemic are gone, but this "parents are everything" dynamic is not.

What generations are the parents of Gen Alpha?



Although the majority of these parents are Millennials, they're also Gen X-ers, Gen Z-ers, and even Boomers. So we must be careful not to assume that all parents of Alphas are Millennials.

This also means that there will be subtle differences across the generations in parenting styles, likely due to age differences and the parenting styles they grew up with themselves.



How are they raising their kids?

Thoughtfully, lovingly, and collectively.



Parents of Alphas give their children a lot of agency in their own upbringing.



They offer their children a voice and a vote in personal and family decisions. And as a result, they are closer emotionally than previous generations have been.



The parenting relationship is more like a partnership than a dictatorship. Think more "Let me explain why," and less "Because I said so."



JEN, 48

Double degree holder who lives with her husband and two teenage sons (who are 13 and 16). She's a full-time account director and works from home. She loves to do anything sports-related with her kids-especially watching them compete. She also enjoys cooking, traveling, exercising, and watching Survivor as a family. Jen is working on managing screen time with her sons and making sure they have an environment where they can truly thrive. Her day begins by making her sons breakfast and cutting up plenty of fruit for them to use to pack their own lunches. Then it's off to work, after-school sports events, and catching up on emails before bedtime.

ERIN, 42

Double degree holder. Full-time research director. LGBTQ+ and single parent. Erin grew up Irish dancing with her family and went on to study dance in college. Now, her 10-year-old son and 8-year-old daughter select "their animals" on the zoo map to chart the afternoon's course. She mixes up community center sports offerings to see what they like most. And she allows them to "decompress" from school with an hour of uninterrupted screen time in their individual bedrooms. She's working through the fact that her son doesn't love school and her daughter feels bored quickly.



A quick glance at a few of these parents.

CHRIS, 42

Stay-at-home parent who doesn't hold a college degree. Chris lives with his husband and their 4-year-old son. As a family, they love to spend time outside gardening and exploring. Every week during the summer, they have adventure days with the cousins, where they pick where they would like to go and explore. He also loves doing science experiments with his son and watching him discover new things. As a full-time dad, Chris sometimes feels like he loses a sense of who he is as an individual – as he prioritizes his young child's needs and growth. Once their son gets a little older, Chris hopes to return to some of his own passions.

WYATT, 27

Lives with his wife and three young children (5, 3, and 2 years old). He opted out of the traditional college degree, instead choosing five years of experience leading global teams in mission work. He also proudly holds several financial planning accreditations. Wyatt starts his day at 6:45 with a cold plunge, then has morning time with the kids before going to work at a familyowned financial planning business. Once he's home, it's welcome hugs from the kiddos, family dinner at the table, then heading outside to play. He wraps the day with his wife, chatting about the week, reading a devotional, then off to bed.

BRUNO, 38

Immigrant with a bachelor's in mathematics and a doctorate in economics. He lives with his wife (also an immigrant and double degree holder) and 5-year-old son – and loves to do everything with his son (reading, playing, learning), especially building trains and teaching math. Bruno loves to draw and is teaching himself guitar. He incorporates an educational activity with family breakfast every day. After school, his son can pick what he wants to play, and then they do something as a family (movie night, video games, swim or music lessons). After his son is put to bed, Bruno and his wife watch TV to wind down.



KEY TAKEAWAY

The parents of Gen Alpha tend to give their children a voice and a vote in personal and family decisions—creating a sense of agency and collaboration. As a result, Alphas are emotionally closer to their parents than previous generations have been.



The home itself? A carefully curated, welcoming, and communal space. Born out of the pandemic and evolved by the working parent.

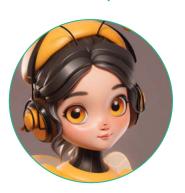


Coexisting has a whole new meaning. While Alphas are at the table eating dinner with their parents, their gaming character is patiently waiting for their return in the other room. Parents seem to have fully embraced digital content as a natural part of the day-to-day-for both themselves and their children. These parents know the online world will be always accessible, and often helpful. (In fact, this idea was normalized further during the pandemic). So they feel like it's better to integrate it than to outlaw it.

CONVERSATIONS TO GAMING PLATFORMS TO TEXT MESSAGES.

FROM **AFTER-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES TO** WEEKEND **ADVENTURES.**

FROM EARLY MORNINGS TO PLANNING DINNER PREP.



65% of the activities in the household are digitally based.



A majority of Gen Alpha kids spend at least 2 hours every day consuming content, and they do so mostly on a TV or smartphone.

About a guarter of them spend over 4 hours daily using technology at home.

48% are consuming content for 2 to 3 hours

21% are over 4 hours



What devices are they using?



69% are regularly watching TV



66% view content on a smartphone



57% view content on a tablet

But screen time isn't the whole story.

Outdoor activities, the arts, and sports aren't far behind.



50%
are interested in outdoor activities and playtime.



47% are interested in the arts and sports



Invest in your campus's tech resources, sure. But the arts and other non-digital activities matter big time too. Students will be looking for various options in both categories.

Who is the trusted source of information in the household?

Surprisingly, it's not Siri.

Despite all the immediate access to media and technology, the majority of 12- to 14-year-olds still go to their parents first when they want to know something.



What values are important to the household?



The most common listed by parents are:

RESPECT KINDNESS HONESTY

Outside the household, parents see an extremely polarized world with lots of conflict. So within the household, they're doing their best to teach their children how to be compassionate, empathetic adults who lead with kindness and integrity.

Many parents emphasize the importance of hard work, education, and self-reliance. Some families approach this from a spiritual or religious point of view, but not all do.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR COMMUNICATORS?

What are the values of your institution? How do they come to life for students? Reinforcing these values can help students (and parents) pick a community that aligns with what matters most.

THINK AGAIN What concerns about higher education are also important to the household? Political agendas. Human rights. Gun safety, climate change, freedom of speech, and more. For many families, these aren't just topics. These issues directly affect their identities and lived experiences. These are households where 84% parents don't shield their children from reality; the issues are of parents discussed carefully and openly. are concerned about safety And in some cases, they take action together. Think of the whole family attending a local sustainability are concerned about accessibility march, a citywide Pride parade, and individualized a meeting of the county board education resources of elections, or a Sunday church service. 76% of parents are concerned about political influence on education 25 Higher Ed's Newest Influencer: The Parents | Copyright © 2024 by Ologie, Inc. All rights reserved.

How can parents keep their children safe without shielding them from reality completely?



College is the place in a young adult's life where they become exposed to different points of view and to people different from themselves. As a natural consequence, their ideologies evolve, their tolerances expand, their minds are changed. It's a core part of the value of higher education.

Here's the tricky balance: Today, some parents may keep their children from some higher education institutions because they fear that their own point of view won't be tolerated.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR COMMUNICATORS?

Certain things are clearly unacceptable: harming others and attacking human rights. But in order for a mind to be changed, it has to be heard. Can we use our campuses as havens for dialogue and seeds for common ground, so that our students can go into society to do the same? How can we lead by example, from the idea that disagreement in good faith is the way to living better together? How will college campuses evolve their own beliefs to engage and not dismiss the growing, vocal generation to come?



Is college being discussed at home?

How many parents have already started talking to their children about college?



And those who haven't said that it's because they believe their children are too young.

Thinking back to that list of what do Alphas want to be when they grow up – here's what their parents want them to study:

- Engineering and technology rose to the top.
- Humanities fell to the bottom.

However, when parents were asked to rank what their children want to be when they grow up – a different story emerged:

- Artist outranked lawyer.
- Game designer outranked astronaut.

Which made us wonder:

It will be interesting to see whether the perceived value of different majors changes as generative AI, remote working, automated experiences, and the like become even more prevalent. Will Gen Alpha dissolve the "eitheror" situation regarding AI, and instead finally fuse together the engineering and arts? Or technology and human touch? We hope so.



KEY TAKEAWAY

Parents are the first resource that Gen Alpha kids go to for answers and information. This puts them in a pivotal position as students look ahead to big college decisions. Although their opinions aren't the be-all-end-all, these parents could be your most valuable recruiters on the front lines, if you prepare them.

The parents and higher education



You better believe parents have some thoughts.

How much debt will our family take on? Is a public or private college better? Will my kid fit in there? Is that really a good school? What if they don't want to go?

Parents have always played an interesting role in the big college decision. And for good reason: they're deeply invested in where their kids start their lives as adults. For the parents of Gen Alpha, we know that their perceptions of higher education are formed by several factors that can tell us more. Consider their own education experiences and identities, what they learn from their research, and what they've heard from peers – not to mention hot buttons like the admissions scandals and loan forgiveness debates that regularly play out in the media and at backyard barbecues.

So what factors into these parents' view of the value of higher education?









What do parents think of the price tag today?

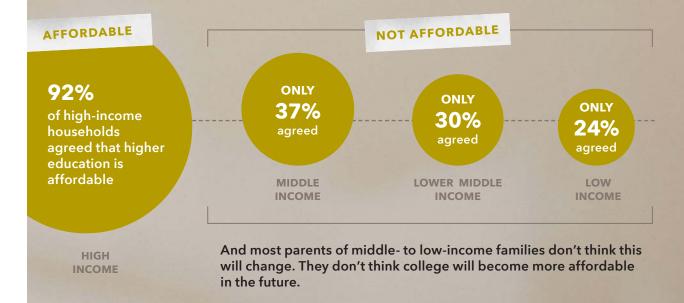
Whether or not parents think college is affordable, they rank cost and financial aid as the top two things they're most concerned about. But their level of concern and their idea of affordability looks different based on household income.

What influences their perception of cost?

Not shockingly, high-income families find higher education more affordable. By contrast, only 24% of low-income families think college is affordable, along with just 30% of lower-middle-income families and 37% of middle-income families.

We asked parents if they agreed that a college education can be affordable today.

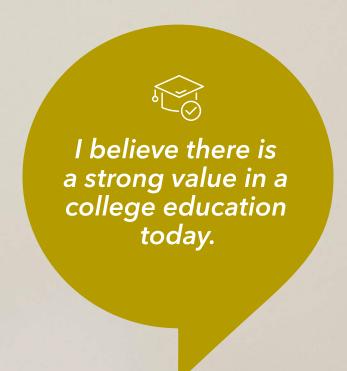
Here's how they responded:





Do parents still believe in higher education?

You might think that parents have lost faith in education—especially Millennials, who might still be struggling with their own college debt. However, the data proved the opposite. Parents overwhelmingly said that they value higher education and believe in its importance for their children's success.



SURVEY SAYS:

Parents from historically marginalized communities

75% AGREE

42% STRONGLY AGREE

33% SOMEWHAT AGREE

White parents

65% AGREE

35% STRONGLY AGREE

30% SOMEWHAT AGREE

SURVEY SAYS:

Parents from historically marginalized communities

84% AGREE

56% STRONGLY AGREE 28% SOMEWHAT AGREE

White parents

83% AGREE

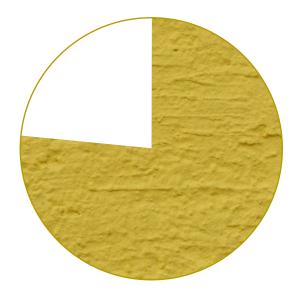
47% STRONGLY AGREE 36% SOMEWHAT AGREE



I have benefited greatly from receiving a college education.



Do parents think a college education is necessary?



74%

of parents say they will let their child ultimately decide.





KEY TAKEAWAY

A majority of Gen Alpha's parents still believe in higher education and think their children would benefit from a college degree. However, they don't all think it's necessary, and most will ultimately let their child decide. This means it's even more important for institutions to make a solid case for "why." It's clear that these parents aren't strong-arming their children into attending college.



Connect early, intentionally, and efficiently.

These parents don't have a lot of time, and there are a lot of offers out there. So if they give you their attention, make the most of each interaction.

The more you can arm parents with information that's transparent, accessible, and helpful, the more likely they are to engage with your institution. And of course, they'll be inclined to share that information with their child as they navigate the admissions process together.

So how can you effectively reach these parents?

- Use email first, but be sure to stand out in a crowded (but organized) inbox.
- Offer in-person events to connect.
- Lean into your social media channels for sharing valuable information.

Note: That does not mean emailing them multiple times a day. (No one wants that.)

65%

OF PARENTS PREFERREI
TO BE REACHED
VIA EMAIL.

55%
OF PARENTS CHECK
THEIR EMAIL MULTIPLE
TIMES A DAY.



A single email can't do everything.

But a thoughtful email strategy can do a lot.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR COMMUNICATORS?

Devote a significant amount of time to your parent emails. Rather than CC-ing them on general communications or student emails, try crafting thoughtful, informative, and organized content that's specifically for them. How can you make them feel seen, understood, and supported in their unique role in the process? How can you learn more about them to tailor your message in ways that resonate?

Tips for your parent emails

TO: Enrollment marketers everywhere

Cc Bcc 24

Tips for your parent emails

Dear enrollment marketer,

Consider these tips as you develop communications just for parents in future cycles:

- Address their worries and concerns.
- Use a personal tone that's warm and welcoming.
- Stand out as a refreshing, helpful read in their (very full) inboxes.
- Summarize complicated information for them.
- Make them feel like they can answer their children's questions about college.

Remember: Preparing the parents is your first step to recruiting their children. What would you tell them if they were an extension of your recruitment team? Go there.



Learn more about how to effectively use email here.

However, nothing replaces a face-to-face connection.

In fact, direct mail and in-person events came in second place when we asked parents how they prefer to be contacted.



Create events or micro-events specifically for parents – even before their children are in the funnel. And at these events, get their contact information. Send mail to the home, addressed to the parents. Mail is especially important in rural regions, where the internet may not be as dependable and in-person visits can be more complicated to plan.



What parents are concerned about (in order of where the most concern lies)		What they need to know (with full honesty and transparency)
FINANCES	Are we going to be able to afford this? What about expenses and debt? What if we have trouble paying for books and supplies?	Total cost of attendance: tuition, fees, books, everything. Financial aid options, including grants and scholarships. Break down any acronyms here, and don't assume folks know all the terminology.
SAFETY	How far are they going to be from home? What if my kid is bullied, or gets swept up in party culture? What about substance abuse, negative peer influences, and crime?	Campus safety measures, security protocols, and other actions taken to ensure a safe learning environment. What do you do to combat these very real dangers? What does it look like if and when these things happen? What are the layers of support?
ACADEMICS	What can they study? Will my kid be accepted into a program? Will they be able to adjust to college life? How do we choose the right program and school? Will their chosen major set them up for long-term success?	Subjects offered, curricula, majors, courses, and academic quality. Job placement rates, internship opportunities, career counseling, and the potential for success in their chosen field after graduation.
WELL-BEING	How will their mental health fare? Will they be able to find friends and belonging on campus?	Information about the campus community, social activities, diversity, health services, clubs, and organizations.
SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS	What different ideals and political views will my kid be exposed to? What if their teachers are biased? Who else might influence them?	Education beyond academics, including life skills, career preparation, and practical knowledge for adulthood.
SPECIFIC NEEDS	How will this school support my child with disabilities? What resources are available for my child on the autism spectrum? How will they adjust without me as their primary caregiver? Who will fill in the gaps?	Availability of resources such as tutoring, counseling, and physical and mental health services.

Can you catch them on the socials?

Even though only 23% of parents chose social media as the preferred channel they want to be reached—that doesn't mean this avenue isn't ripe for awareness and education.



WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR COMMUNICATORS?

Don't forget to engage with parents where they're already asking questions.



This is why your child lies to you.

...& how to make it stop.

@KIDTALK.CO

87%

of parents spend at least one hour per day consuming personal and leisure content online.

79% (7

of parents are using Facebook actively, and Facebook hosts one of the most popular college-related parent groups out there: Paying for College 101, with over 230K members.

75% use YouTube 60% use Instagram 53% use TikTok





KEY TAKEAWAY

The majority of parents check their email multiple times a day and prefer that channel as the primary method of communication. So colleges must invest in an intentional, personalized email strategy that equips these parents with the right information, so they can be a trusted source for their child.



Help them be the great parents they already are.

KEY TAKEAWAY 1

Don't sell them short.

These kids are surprising and resilient (as are their parents).

- Gen Alpha wasn't as permanently affected by the pandemic as one might assume.
- Although they're a landmark generation, Alphas are still interested in careers that align with the dreams of previous generations at their age (professional athlete, police officer, doctor, and so on).
- They will be the most diverse generation yet.

KEY TAKEAWAY 2

These parents wear all the hats.

Whether they're acting as coach or playmate, their parenting style is informed and adaptable.

- During the worst of COVID, parents became everything: teacher, coach, teammate, playmate, friend, ally, and more. In many ways, they're still fulfilling these roles.
- Parents of Gen Alpha tend to give their children a voice and a vote in personal and family decisions.

KEY TAKEAWAY 3

Parents are the primary resource, but what they say is not the be-all and end-all.

These households are not "because I said so" kind of spaces.

- Inside the home you'll find a carefully curated, welcoming, communal space that bridges the digital and physical worlds.
- Even with all the Alexas, Siris, and search engines, parents are still the go-to when Alphas want to know something.
- Respect, kindness, and honesty are the most important values to the household.

KEY TAKEAWAY 4

Parents still believe in the value of higher education.

They just don't all think it's necessary for their child to be successful.

- 92% of high-income households think that higher education is affordable.
 Only a third of middle- to low-income households think it's affordable.
- This means it's even more important for institutions to make the case for "why." It's clear these parents aren't pressuring their children that they have to attend college.
- 74% of parents say they'll let their child decide whether (and where) they would like to go to college.

KEY TAKEAWAY 5

A little customization goes a long way in connecting with parents.

Think twice before you simply copy a parent on a prospective student email.

- 55% of these parents check their email multiple times a day. 65% of them prefer email as their primary way to get your communications.
- However, direct mail and in-person events are still something parents are very interested in – especially those that are customized to their unique role as a parent.
- Inform the informer. The more you can equip these parents with the right information, the easier it will be for them to champion your institution when their children come asking.





Ologie is a branding and marketing agency focused on education. We help organizations build their reputations, recruit new students, and gain philanthropic support. By building distinctive brands and campaigns, we create breakthrough work that moves people to take action.

ologie

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