



**COMMUNITY AND
TECHNICAL COLLEGES**
Washington State Board



Adult Basic Education
Washington Statewide Surveys
June - August, 2020

Overview of Research

- ▶ EMC Research conducted two complementary surveys to understand barriers to completing a high school diploma or GED and identify key messaging themes to encourage further education:
 - A multi-modal survey of 61 low-income Washington residents ages 24-44 who had not received a high school diploma or GED
 - An online survey of 207 current community and technical college (CTC) and community-based organization (CBO) students who indicated they had not previously graduated from high school or received a GED

- ▶ *Note: EMC conducted a parallel survey of low-income residents ages 24-44 with a high school diploma or GED but no higher education degree. Findings from that College-Going Culture research are not included in this report, but conclusions and messaging recommendations were similar between the two populations.*

Overall Key Findings

- ▶ Respondents in both Adult Basic Education survey populations – non-students and current CTC and CBO students – report similar barriers to pursuing further education including uncertainty about eligibility, concern about cost, and concerns about balancing school with their other obligations and responsibilities.
- ▶ Both students and non-students are motivated by growing as a person and setting a good example for their kids. Earning more money is also a top motivator, particularly among non-students.
- ▶ Among current students, flexibility and robust support emerged as key factors both in what helped them finally decide to return to the classroom and what they need to keep moving forward with their education.
- ▶ Communicating that adult learners have higher education options that are both open to those without a diploma or GED and offer pathways to earn one, along with messaging that addresses cost concerns and the confusion/lack of knowledge about available financial aid is compelling to both groups.



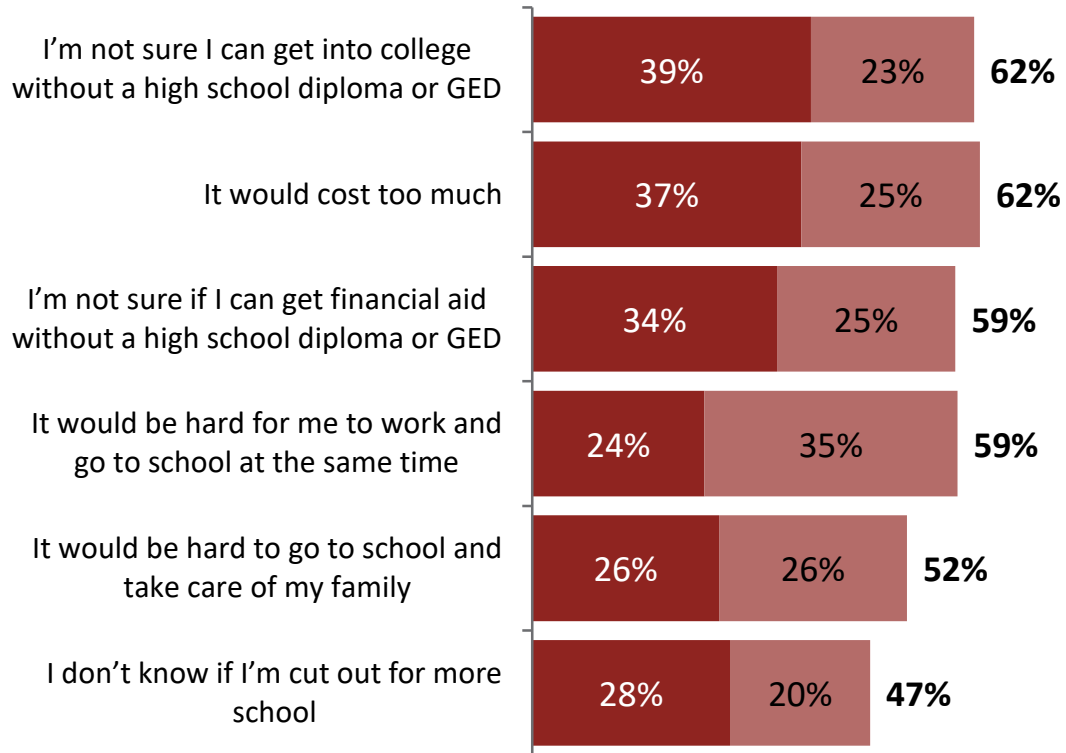
Barriers & Motivations

Top Barriers

A number of barriers were seen as significant by both students and non-students. For non-students, eligibility and cost concerns are top barriers. For current students, balancing school with other obligations was the top concern, while concerns about cost and eligibility generated significant intensity of concern.

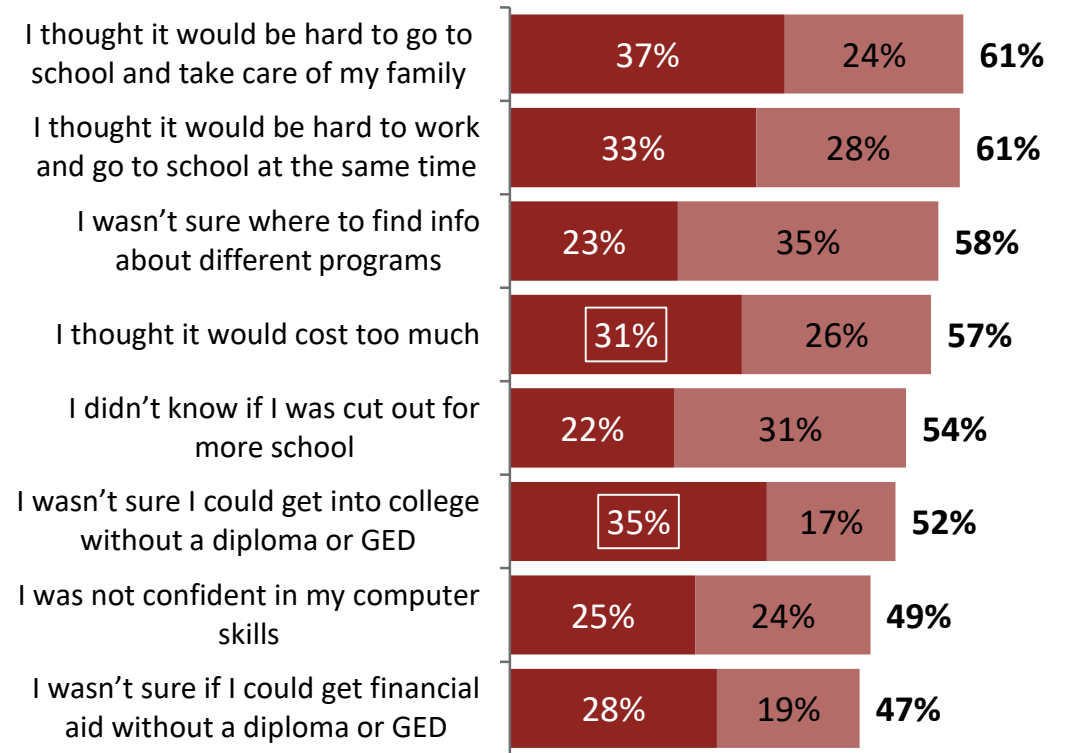
Non-Student Residents

■ Strongly Agree ■ Somewhat Agree



Current Students

■ Strongly Agree ■ Somewhat Agree

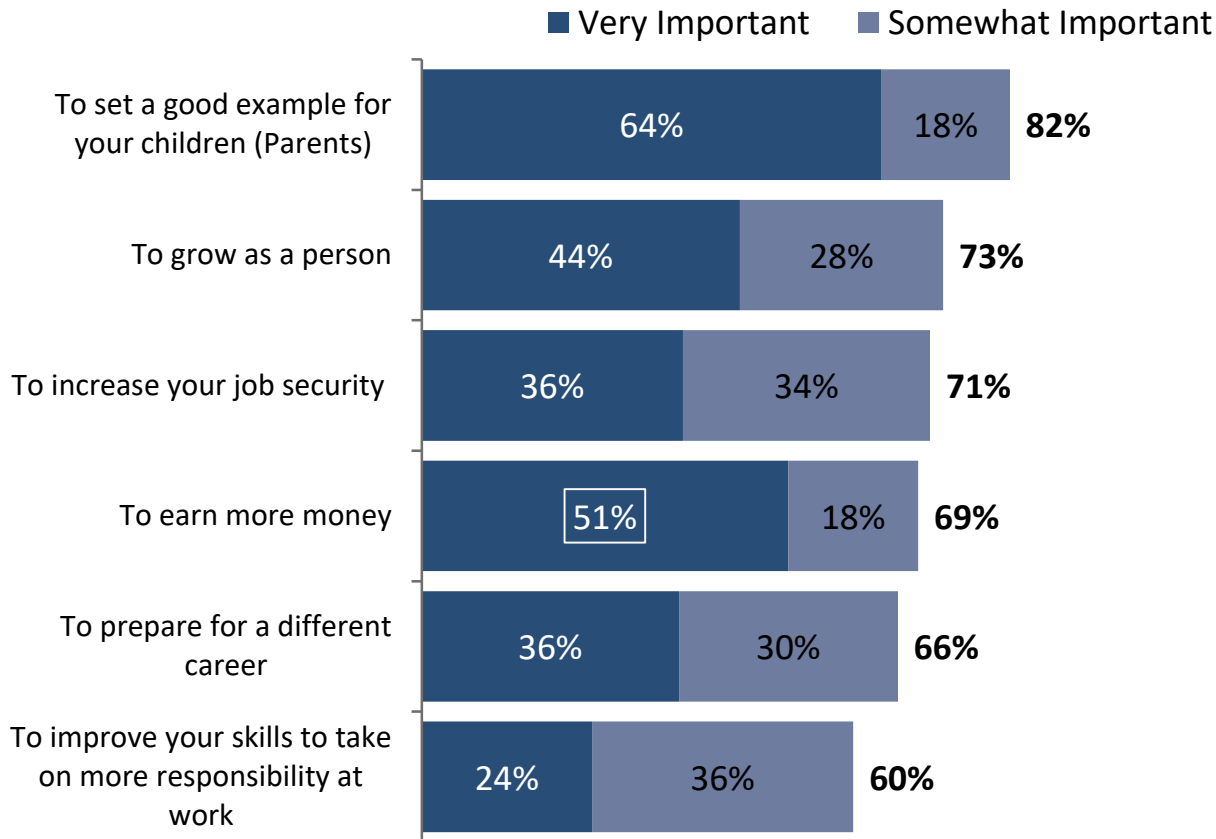


Q22-31. Many things impact whether people can go back to school and continue their education. Thinking about the things that impact whether you personally can go back to school, please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree that the following statements are true for you.

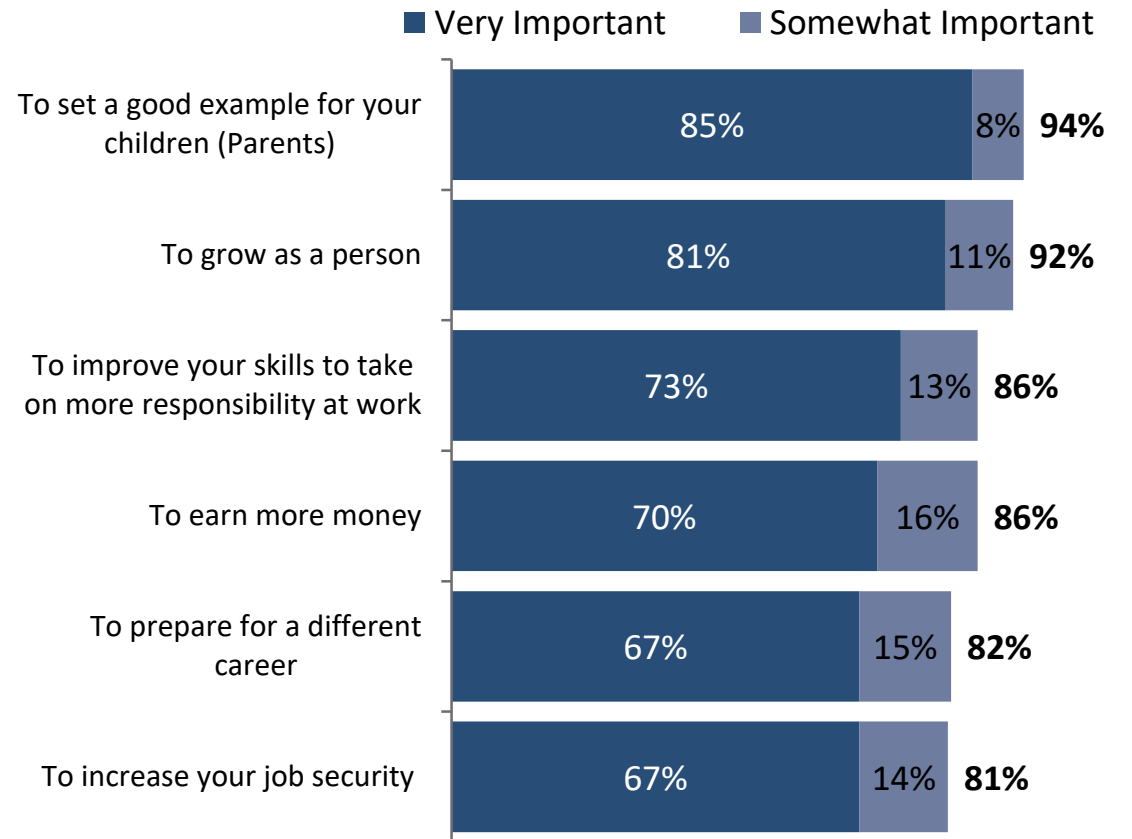
Top Motivations

All the factors tested were important to students and non-students as reasons for them to go back to school. Aspirational goals—setting a good example for your kids and growing as a person—were strong motivators in both groups. Non-students also see earning more money as a top motivator. Among students, learning/improving their English was another key factor that came up in a separate question.

Non-Student Residents



Current Students

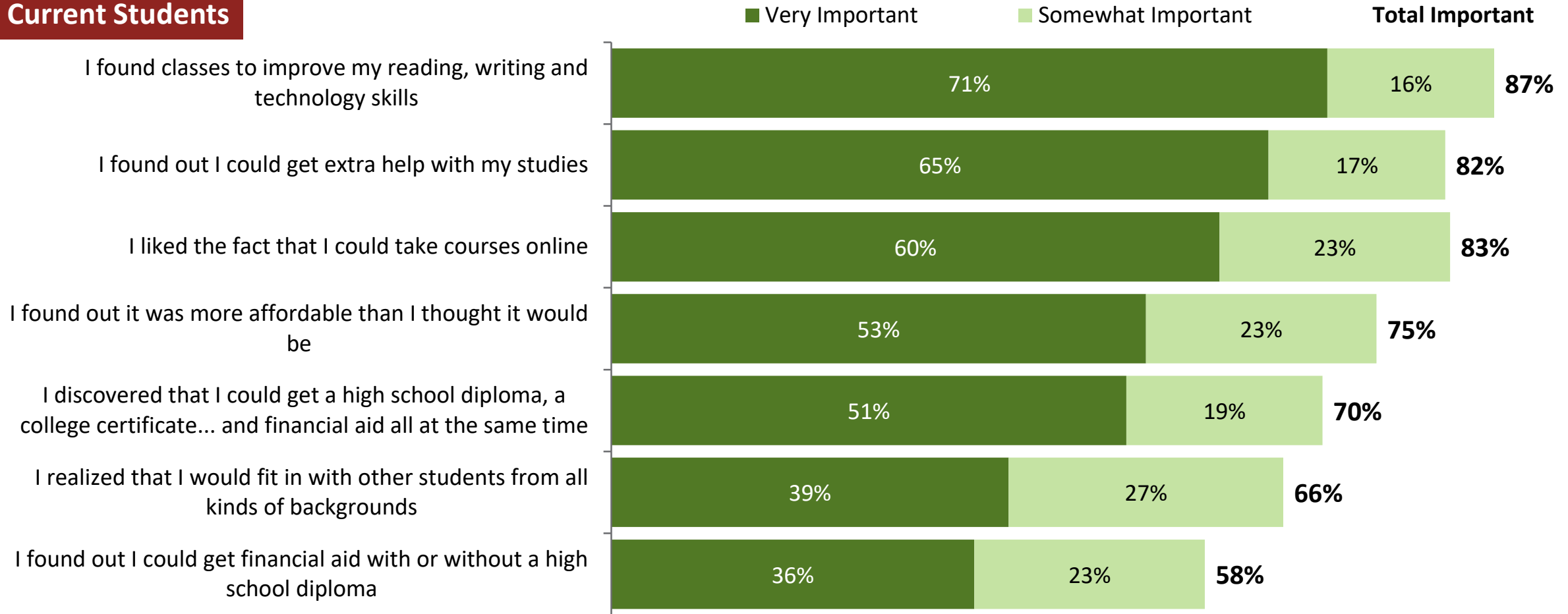


Q16-21. People may decide to continue their education for many reasons. How important are each of the following to you, personally, as reasons to go back to school - very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important?

Deciding Factors for Current Students

Among current CTC and CBO students, once they were considering going back to school, the availability of classes to improve basic skills, academic support, and online classes were key deciding factors which is consistent with their strong concern with being able to balance school and other obligations. Addressing affordability concerns was also important to most current students.

Current Students

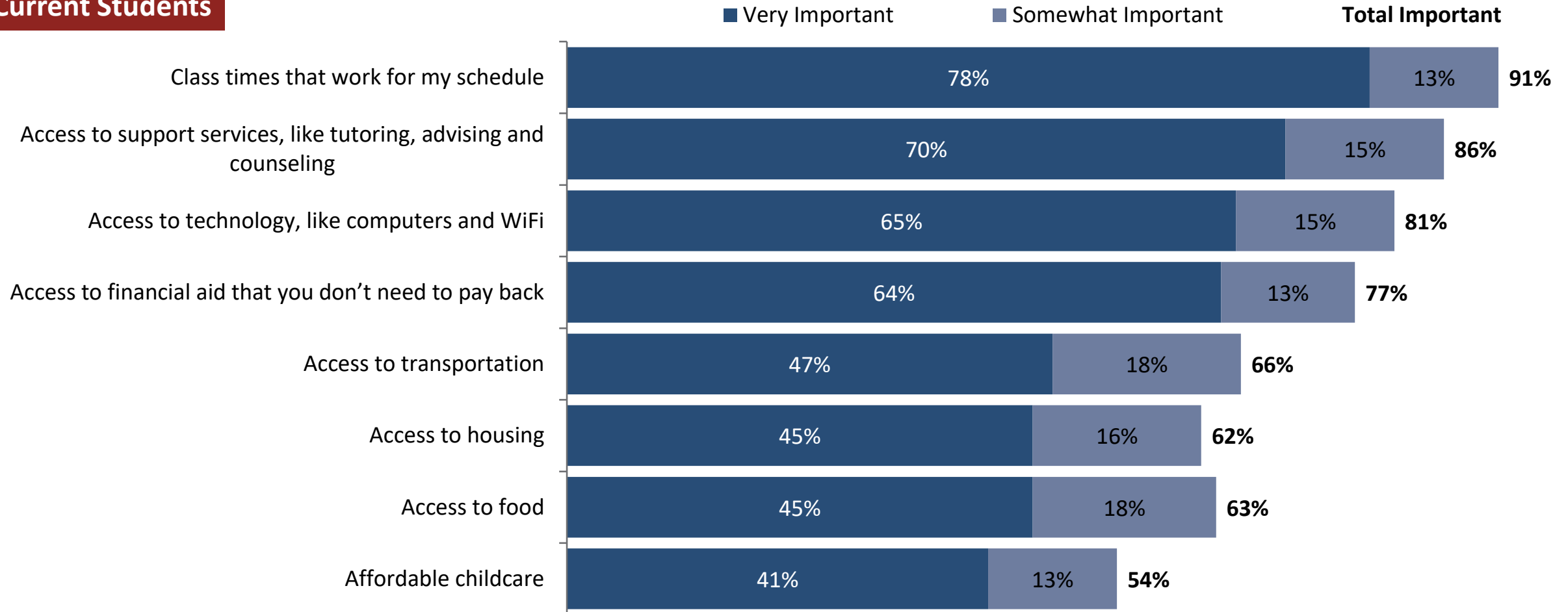


Q27-33. Now that we know what worried you about going back to school, we'd like to learn what convinced you to make the big decision to enroll with us. Below is a list of reasons why you might have decided to enroll. Please choose how important each of these reasons was in your decision.

Factors Critical to Students' Success

Current students see convenient class times and access to robust support services, along with access to technology and financial aid as key in allowing them to continue pursuing their education goals.

Current Students

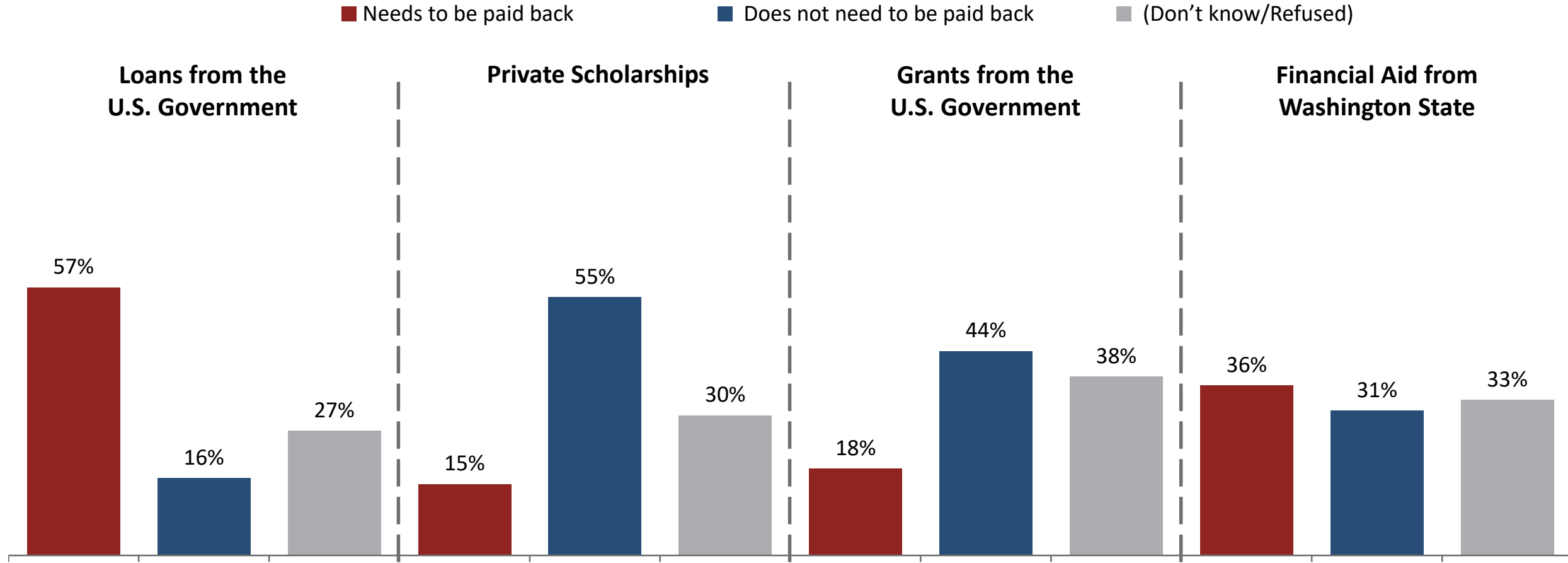


Q36-43. We want students to move up in their studies until they reach their ultimate goal, whether that means earning a college certificate or a degree. Thinking about what you need to continue moving upward with your education, how important are each of the following?

Knowledge about Financial Aid

There is a substantial amount of uncertainty and misinformation about different types of financial aid.

Non-Students



Q41-44. Next, I'm going to ask you about a few ways that students can get money for college. For each type of funding, please tell me whether, to your knowledge, it needs to be paid back or not.



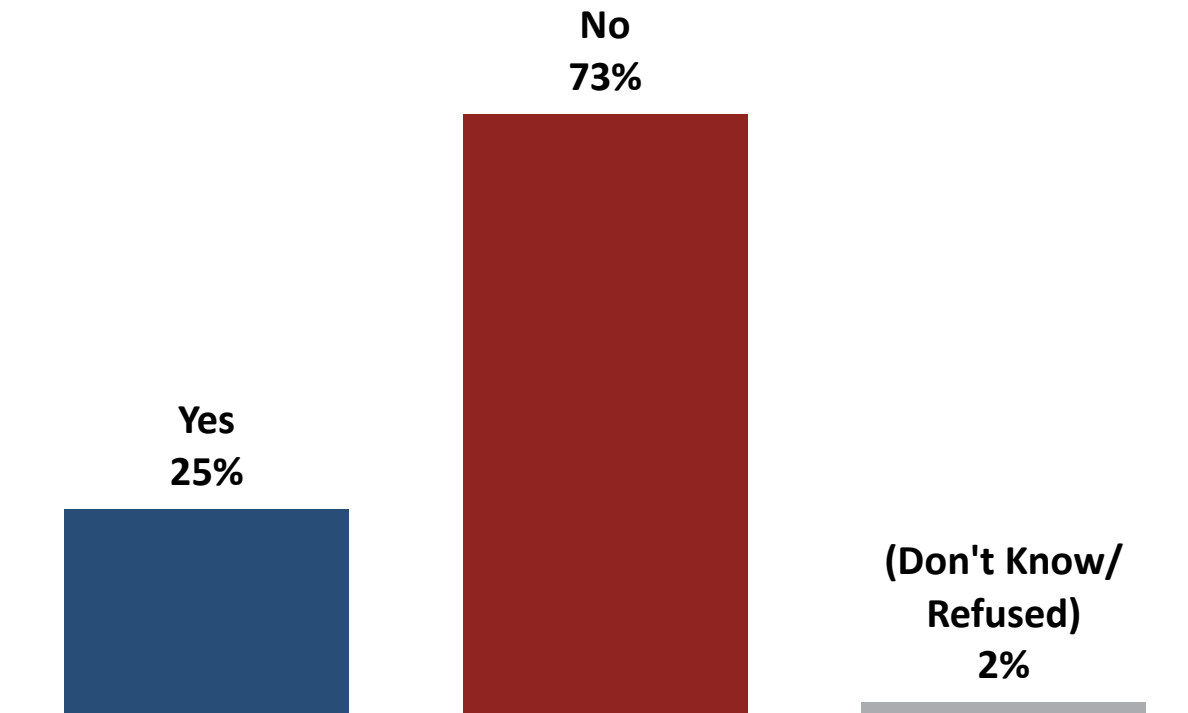
**Higher Education Experience
and Knowledge**

GED and Higher Education Experience

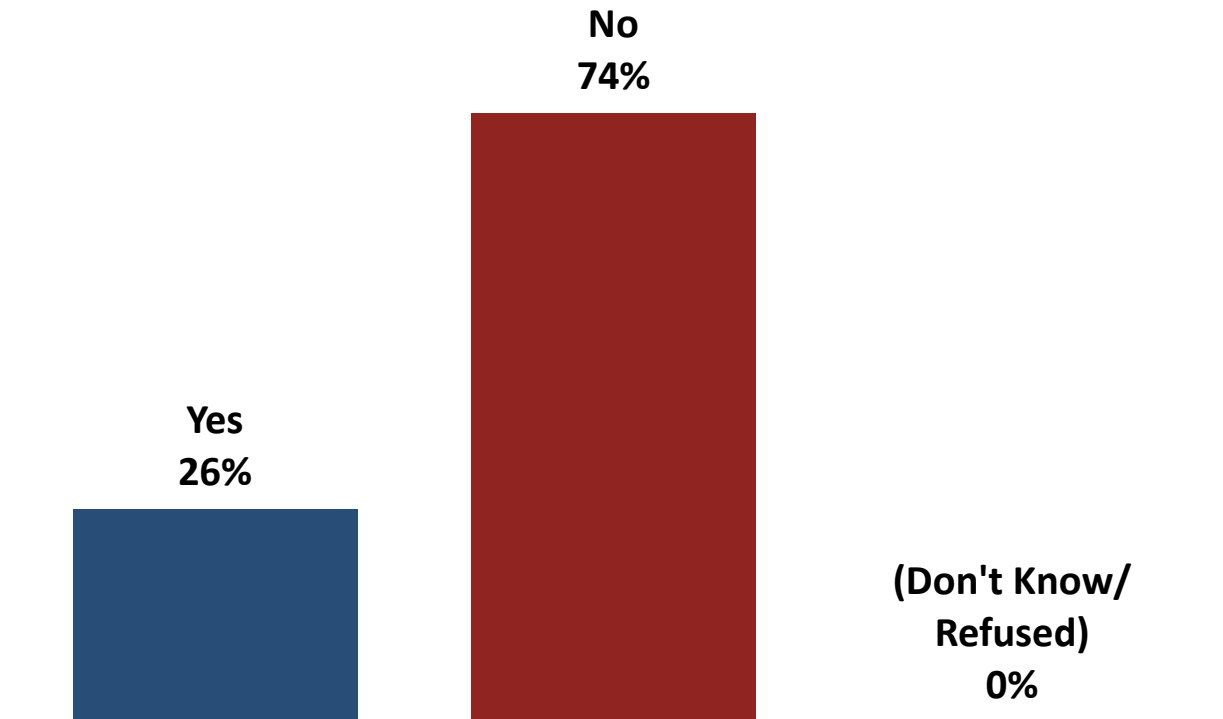
Most of the non-students do not have any experience with the GED or with a degree program.

Non-Students

Have you ever taken the GED exam?



Have you ever begun a college or other educational degree program that you left without finishing?



CTC Awareness/Rating

CTCs are not very well known among non-student residents.

Non-Students

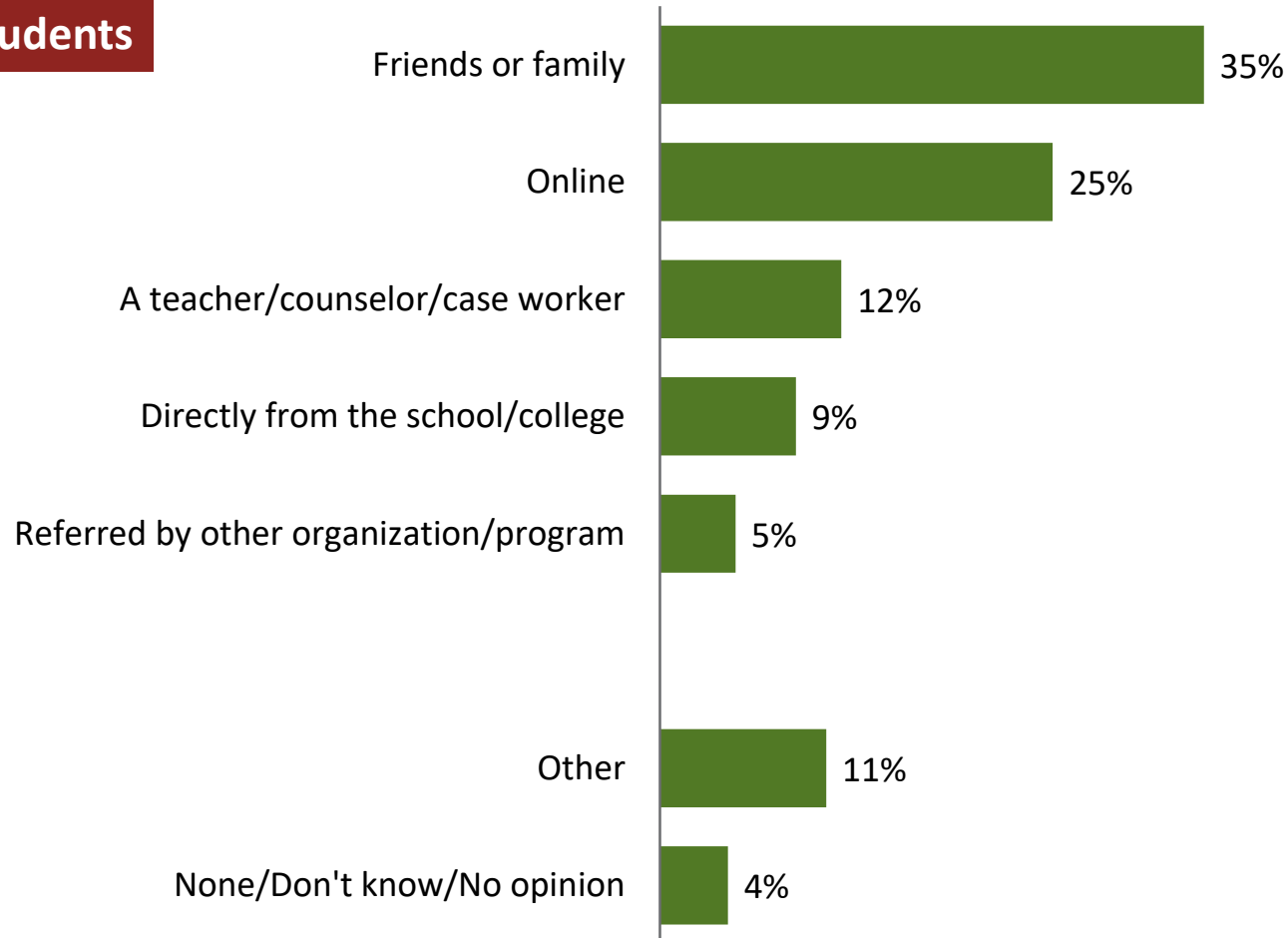


Q49. Do you have a strongly favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or strongly unfavorable opinion of Washington State Community and Technical Colleges?

How Learned of Program

Over a third of current students say they heard about their current program through friends or family. A quarter found out about the program online.

Current Students





Messaging

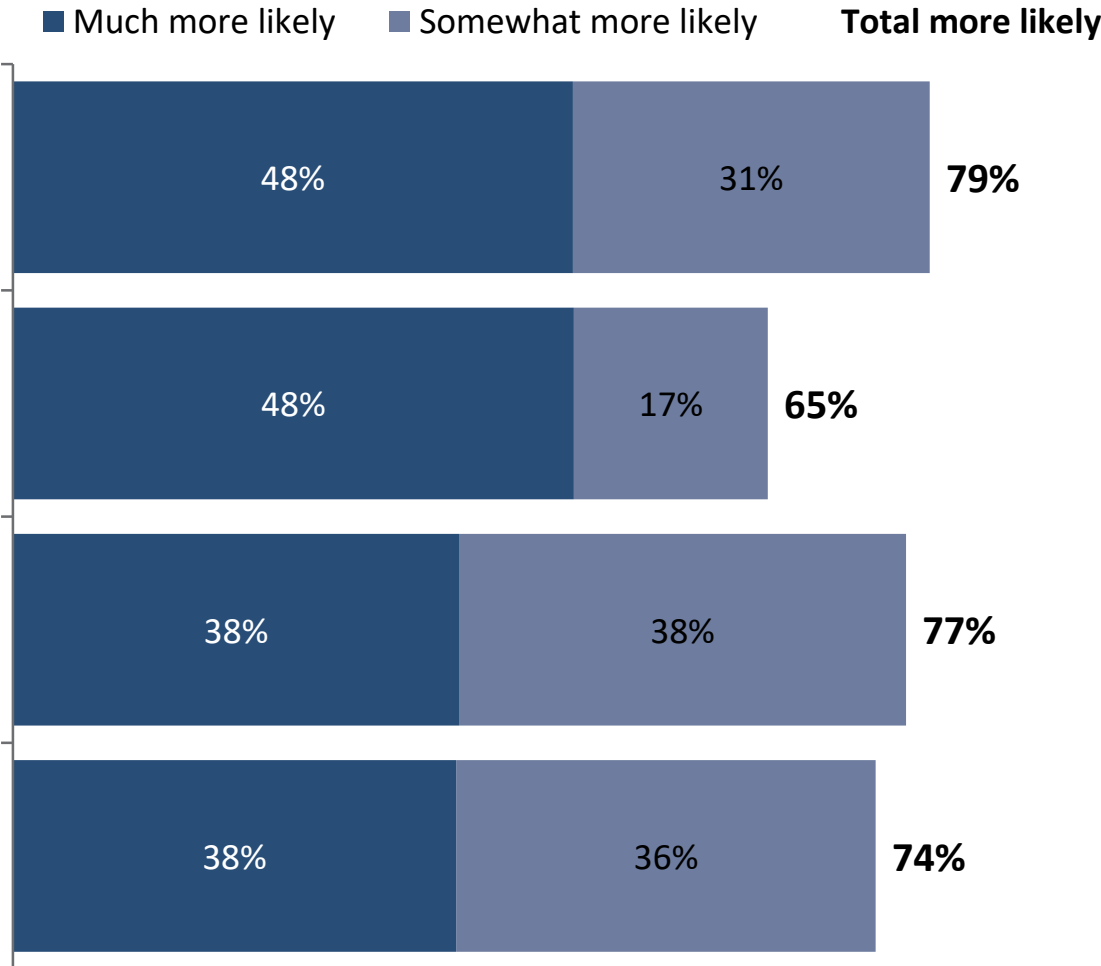
Top Messages - Non-Student Residents Likely to Go Back to School



For non-students who agree they're likely to go back to school, the messages with the most intensity ("much more likely to consider going back") are about eligibility and cost, which are also non-students' top barriers to going back to school.

Non-Students

It's never too late to get your high school diploma. At community and technical colleges, you can take classes to earn a high school diploma recognized by the state of Washington or to prepare for GED tests.



Washington State community and technical colleges offer basic education classes in math, reading, writing, and other skills that can help you transition into college or a career for just \$25 per quarter. Many colleges waive that fee completely for students who are unable to pay.

We don't yet know what the economy and workforce will look like after the Coronavirus crisis, but going back to school to improve basic skills, develop new ones, or train for a different career can help prepare students for that uncertain future.

Washington's community and technical colleges welcome students of all ages, races, and backgrounds, regardless of where they were born or their immigration status. Students from a variety of backgrounds and different stages in their lives learn side by side, from a worker training for a new career, to a recent high school graduate, to a fifty-year old refugee.

Q50-57. Next, I am going to read you some statements. After each one, please tell me if that information makes you much more likely to consider going back to school, somewhat more likely to consider going back to school, or if it makes no difference.

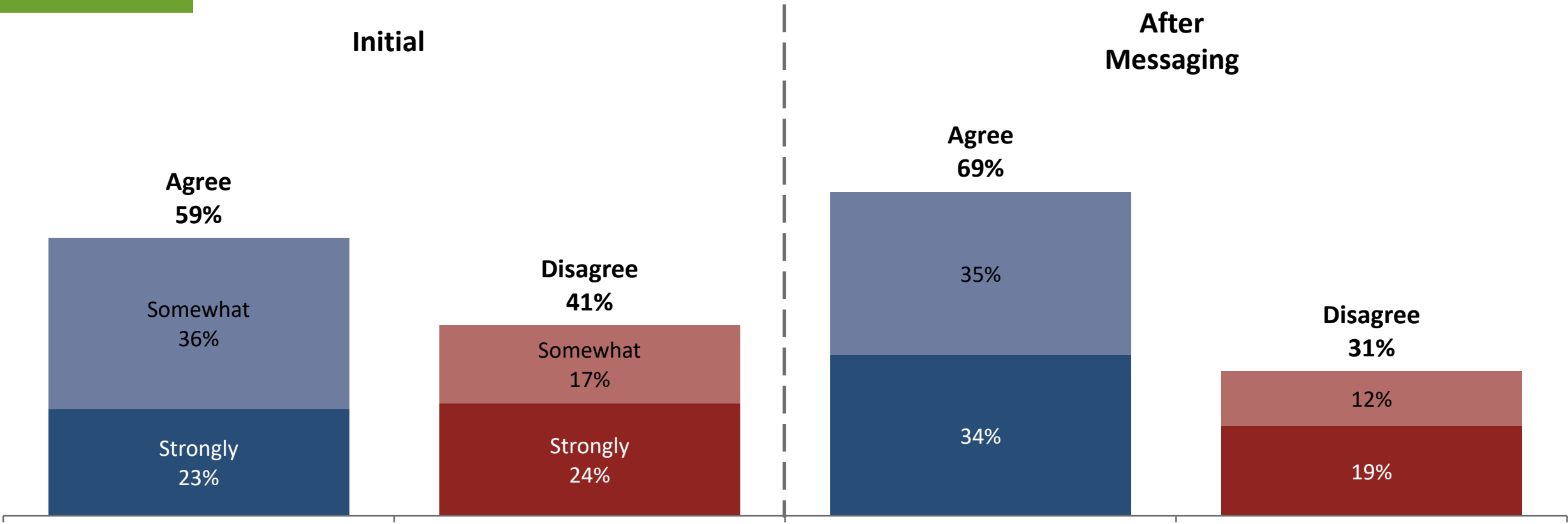
Likelihood to Go Back to School: Before & After Messaging

Among non-students, messaging about how going back to school can be attainable and affordable increased overall interest and intensity of interest in going back to school in the next few years.

Non-Students

Initial

After Messaging



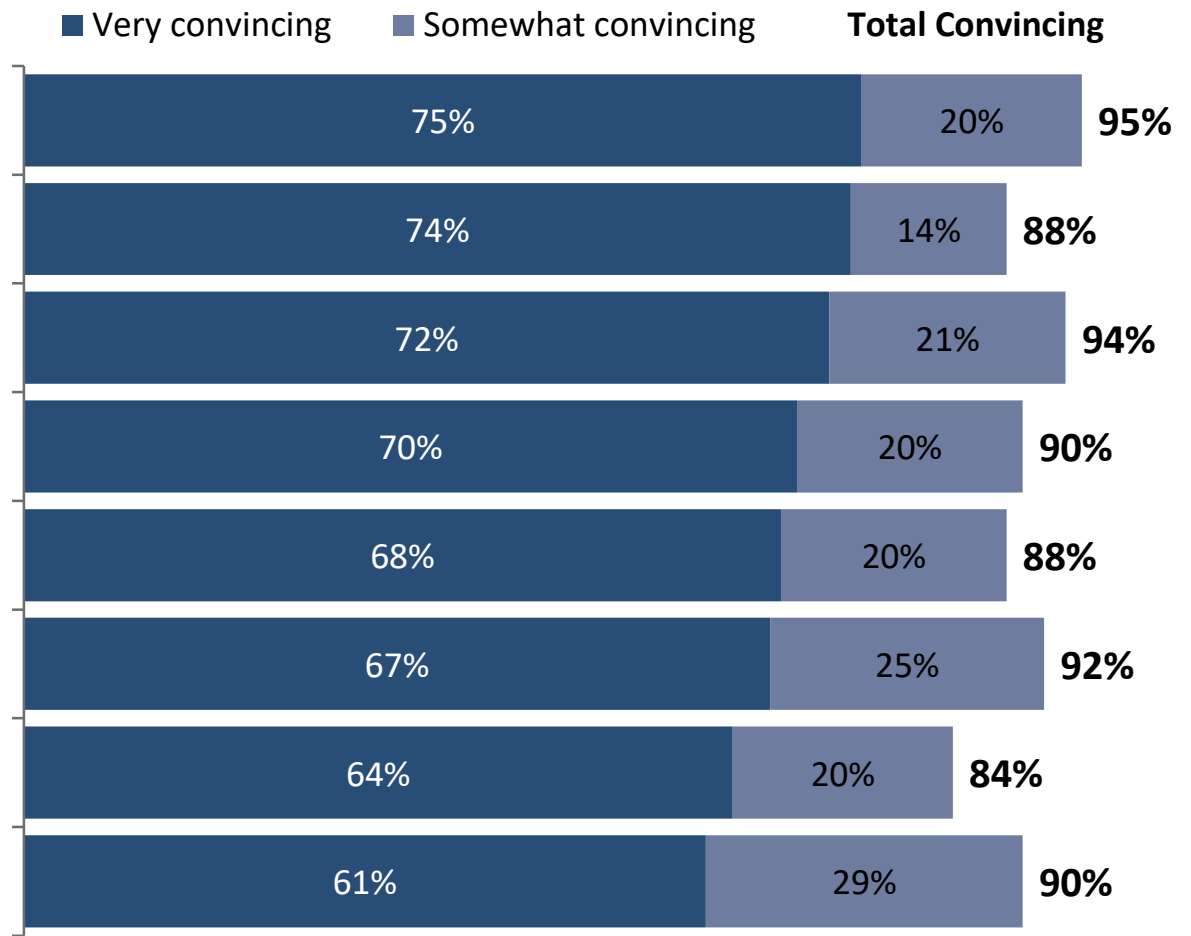
Q12. Please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statement: I could see myself going back to school in the next few years.
Q66. After everything that you've heard, please tell me whether you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statement: I could see myself going back to school in the next few years.

Messages – Current Students

Current students see all of the messages tested as convincing in persuading students like them to enroll. Building job skills/earning more and a combo message addressing eligibility, job training, and financial aid generate the most intensity.

Current Students

- When you enroll at our colleges, you can learn the skills you need to get a better job and earn more money.
- You don't need a high school diploma to enroll in our college. Come to us and you can get your diploma or GED, qualify for financial aid and train for a job – all at the same time.
- You can take classes online, making it easier to balance school with family and work.
- You can go to our college to earn a high school diploma recognized by the state of Washington or to prepare to take the GED test.
- By going back to school, you will make your family proud and set a good example for other people who are close to you.
- You have what it takes to go back to school; we'll help you succeed and complete your studies.
- A new financial aid program in Washington will pay the entire cost of tuition at a community or technical college for students from a family of 4 that makes about \$53,000 or less per year...
- You'll learn in a welcoming environment along with other students of all ages, races and backgrounds who want to learn new things, just like you.



Q44-51. We'd like to figure out how to persuade more students like you to enroll at a community or technical college. Please let us know how convincing you think the following statements would be to other people like you.

Messaging Framework



Standout Lessons From Research

▶ **Students are facing real barriers**

- Cost still perceived as top barrier
- Concerns about balancing work, family and school time are also widespread
- Lack of confidence in abilities or qualifications (ABE)

▶ **They don't know how we can help**

- Tuition relief (financial aid) is available
- There are many other supports for students
- There are education and training options that don't require a high school diploma

Main Message And Supporting Pillars

You know that finishing a degree or certificate will help you get a better job, but you're worried about requirements, cost, and time. We can help.

1. You don't need a high school diploma to enroll in our college.
2. If you make less than \$55,000, you won't pay anything in tuition.
3. We have practical ways to make it easier to add school to your already-busy life.
4. Just because COVID has you stuck at home or work doesn't mean you're stuck in life.

You know that finishing a degree or certificate will help you get a better job, but you're worried about requirements, cost, and time. We can help.

1. You don't need a high school diploma to enroll in our college.
 - *You can get your diploma or GED, qualify for financial aid and train for a new job, all at the same time.*
2. If you make less than \$55,000, you won't pay anything in tuition.
 - *Even families who make up to \$97,000 will get assistance, and state financial aid does not need to be paid back.*
3. We have practical ways to make it easier to add school to your already-busy life.
 - *Most of our classes have online options (especially during COVID), and we have student resource guides who can help with other challenges, including childcare.*
4. Just because COVID has you stuck at home or work doesn't mean you're stuck in life.
 - *Reach out to your local community or technical college or community-based organization for help with the next steps.*

Message Delivery

- ▶ The message is clear, practical and actionable
- ▶ Statewide messaging
 - Availability of free tuition and other manageable financing options
 - Ease of filling out WASFA/FAFSA
- ▶ Local messaging
 - Supportive resources available
 - How to access us
 - With partners
- ▶ Social Media

With State and Local Partners

- ▶ People can be hard to reach – general, public messaging not enough
- ▶ Partners can help spread the message
- ▶ The work of community-based organizations at the local level is especially important
- ▶ Statewide partners include:
 - Washington Student Achievement Council
 - College Promise Coalition
 - Employment Security Department
 - Workforce Training Board
 - Career Connect Washington



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Methodology: Non-Student Resident Survey

- ▶ Multi-modal survey of Washington residents including telephone, email-to-web, and text-to web
- ▶ Survey conducted June 7th – July 8th, 2020
- ▶ 61 completed interviews
- ▶ Telephone interviews were conducted in English by trained, professional interviewers; landlines and mobile phones included
- ▶ Note that given the extreme difficulty of finding qualified ABE participants, the resulting small sample size, and the multiple methods employed to recruit respondents, caution should be taken when projecting this data to the larger survey universe
- ▶ Adult Basic Education participants had to meet the following criteria:
 - Between ages 24 and 44
 - Not currently a student
 - Had not received a high school diploma or GED
 - Income level approximately 55% or less of the median family income based on household size

Please note that due to rounding, some percentages may not add up to exactly 100%.

Methodology: Current Student Survey

- ▶ Anonymous online survey of current CTC and CBO students who indicated they had not previously graduated from high school or received a GED
- ▶ Program enrollment (note that respondents could select more than one):
 - High school completion program: 45% of respondents
 - English as a Second Language: 46%
 - Adult Basic Education classes: 16%
 - I-BEST: 5%
- ▶ Survey links distributed by administrators and teachers
- ▶ Survey conducted August 7th – August 24th, 2020
- ▶ 207 completed interviews
- ▶ Note that given the non-random sampling methodology, caution should be taken when projecting this data to the larger survey universe

Please note that due to rounding, some percentages may not add up to exactly 100%.