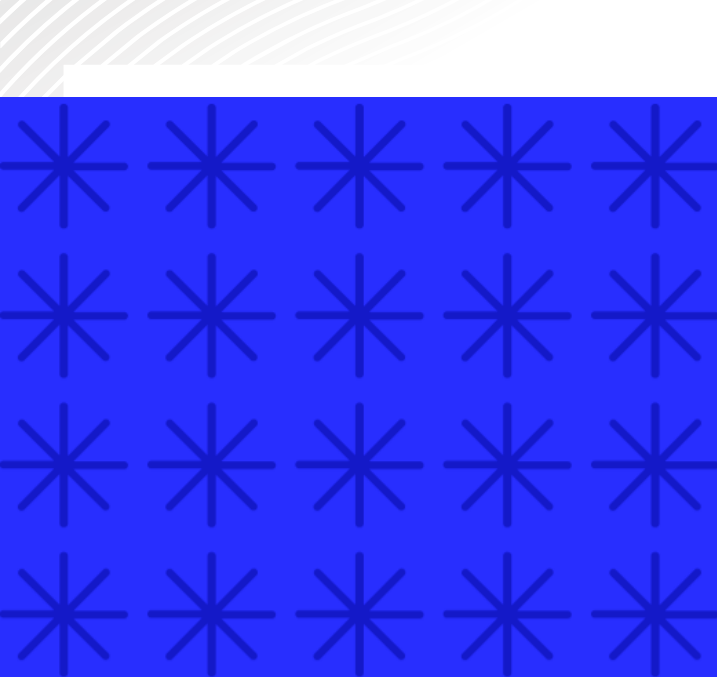




Critical Mass Insights

Helping America's
most influential voices

know what to say to America.

Community Colleges Insights

July 2026

Key highlights from study

- Today's prospective students aren't simply choosing a school - they're investing in their future. Career opportunities, earning potential, and personal growth are the top drivers of higher education, while affordability, flexibility, and outcomes are nearly as important as academic reputation. Gen Z places even greater emphasis on the financial return of higher education.
- Community colleges are widely considered, with affordability being the most compelling motivator, though concerns about academic outcomes remain a key barrier.
- Trust and reassurance are especially important for community college prospects. With ongoing concerns around academic outcomes, audio can help communicate program value, raise awareness of academic offerings, and help prospective students feel more confident in their decision.

Higher education is a pathway to personal and professional development.

Primary reasons for pursuing higher education

7 in 10

Say **career opportunities**

7 in 10

Say **personal growth**

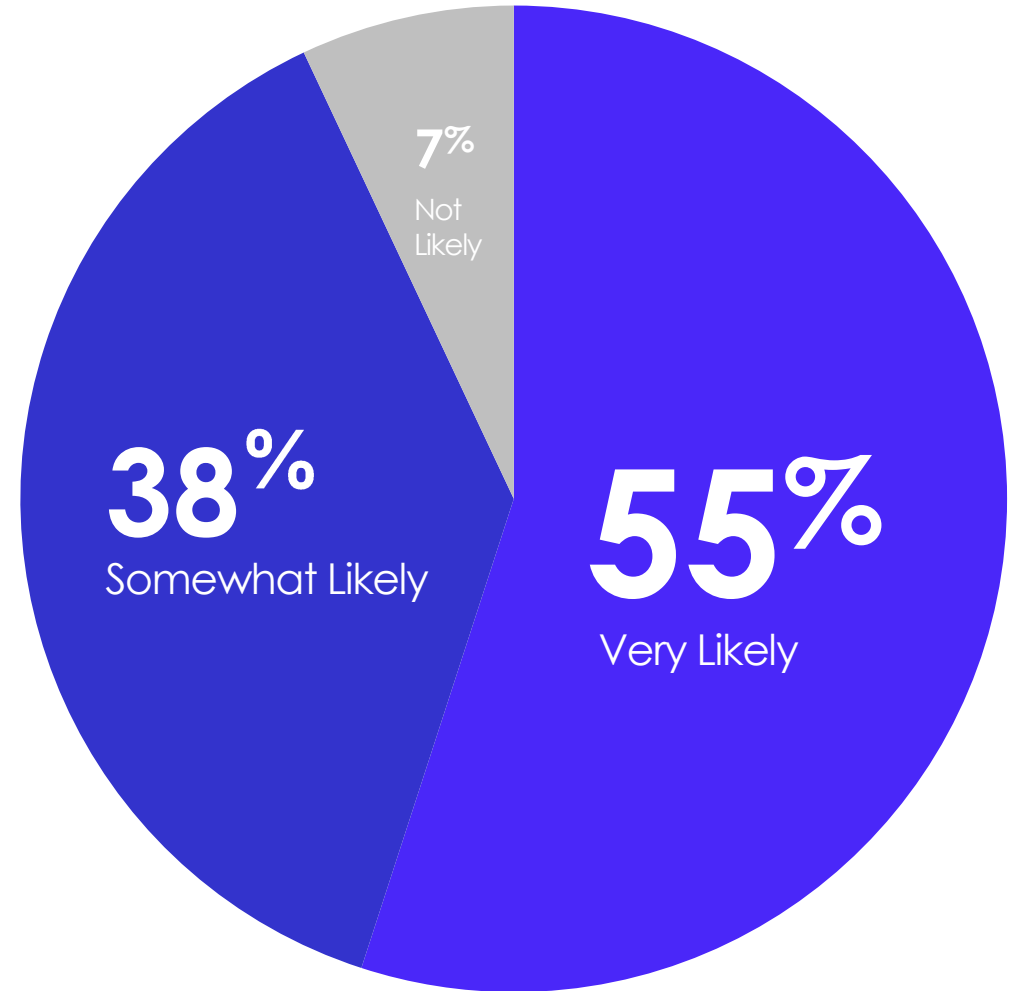
6 in 10

Say **earning potential**

Community colleges are widely considered.

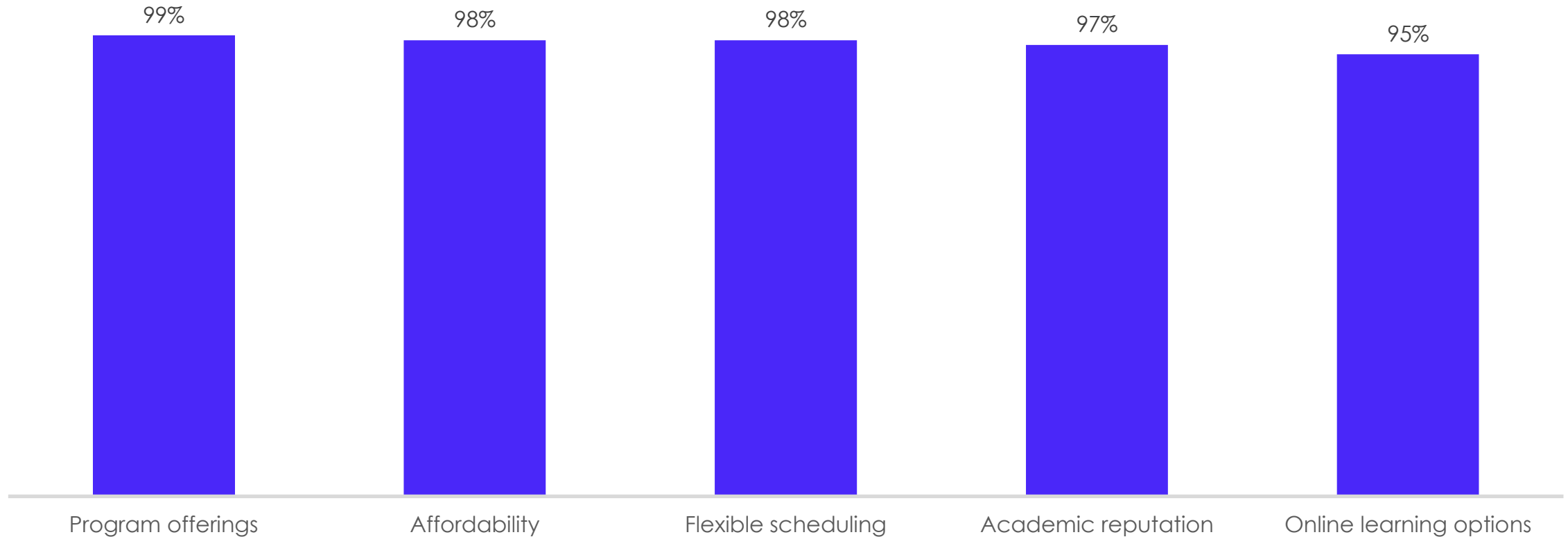
93% would be likely to consider a community college for themselves or a student in their household.

Likelihood to consider a community college



Students consider more than just academics when choosing a school.

Top 5 important factors when choosing a school
% saying somewhat or extremely important



Affordability is the most compelling driver of community college consideration.

1 in 4

selected

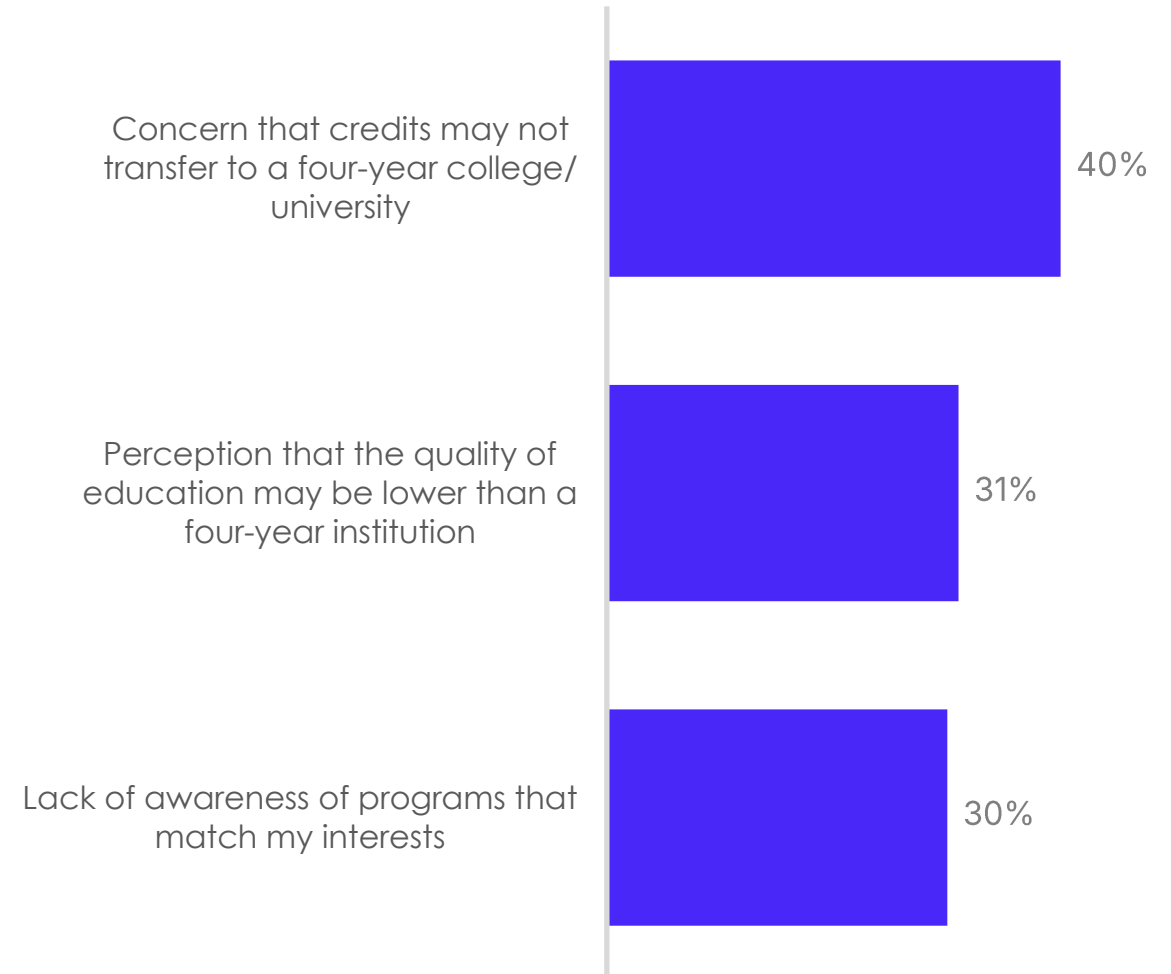
“Earn a degree for a fraction of the cost of a four-year school.”

as the most motivating message.



Concerns about academic outcomes are the leading barriers to community college consideration.

Top 3 factors that would prevent consideration of a community college



Community college prospects strongly value trusted information, and audio can help deliver it.

10%

More likely to strongly agree "I need trusted information before making a school decision"

10%

More likely to strongly agree "I need reassurance that a program will lead to meaningful outcome"

14%

More likely to strong agree "Hearing real stories helps me trust an education institution"

Audio helps prospective students discover and engage with education opportunities.

92%

Agree audio is a convenient way to learn about schools while commuting or multitasking.

9 in 10

Agree audio content helps them discover education opportunities they may not have researched on their own.

85%

Agree audio advertising can make them more likely to visit a school's website.

8 in 10

Agree podcasts provide information around education options in a way that feels authentic and trustworthy.

Trusted radio and podcast hosts can influence how prospective students perceive education options.

88%

Agree they pay attention when education topics are discussed during podcasts they enjoy.

87%

Agree they trust information about education options more when it comes from voices they regularly listen to.

72%

Agree recommendations from radio hosts or podcast personalities influence their perceptions of brands and organizations.

Radio Reaches A18-24 Planning on Attending Some College, with Rhythmic, Pop, Hip Hop Top Radio Formats and Education, Business and TV/Film Top Podcasts.

Radio Reaches Over

86%

of those planning on going
back to school to get a
degree/certificate

Top Radio Formats

Rhythmic AC (319i)

Urban Contemporary (315i)

Classic Rock (158i)

Adult Contemporary (144i)

Pop Contemporary Hit Radio (141i)

Top Podcast Topics

Education (322i)

Business (238i)

TV & Film (211i)

Technology (178i)

Health & Fitness (159i)

THANKS FOR WORKING WITH



For additional insights and information, please contact:

Lainie Fertick

President, Critical Mass Insights

| c 513-373-5113

METHODOLOGY

DATES OF FIELDING: July 2026

N = 899 Adults 18+ radio listeners who are either adult learners, community college students, graduate school prospects, high school seniors, parents/guardians of prospective college students, and are considering enrollment in a college, university, certificate, or continuing education program.