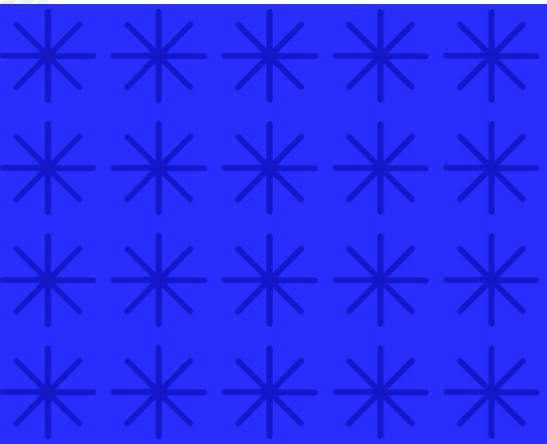




Critical Mass Insights

Helping America's
most influential voices

know what to say to America.

Higher Education 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. Colleges that clearly communicate value will win consideration.
- Gen Z views higher education through a financial ROI lens. Job placement outcomes (98%), financial aid availability (97%), tuition costs, and concerns about student debt heavily influence enrollment decisions.
- Trust is the ultimate differentiator. 87% trust education information more when it comes from voices they regularly listen to.

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

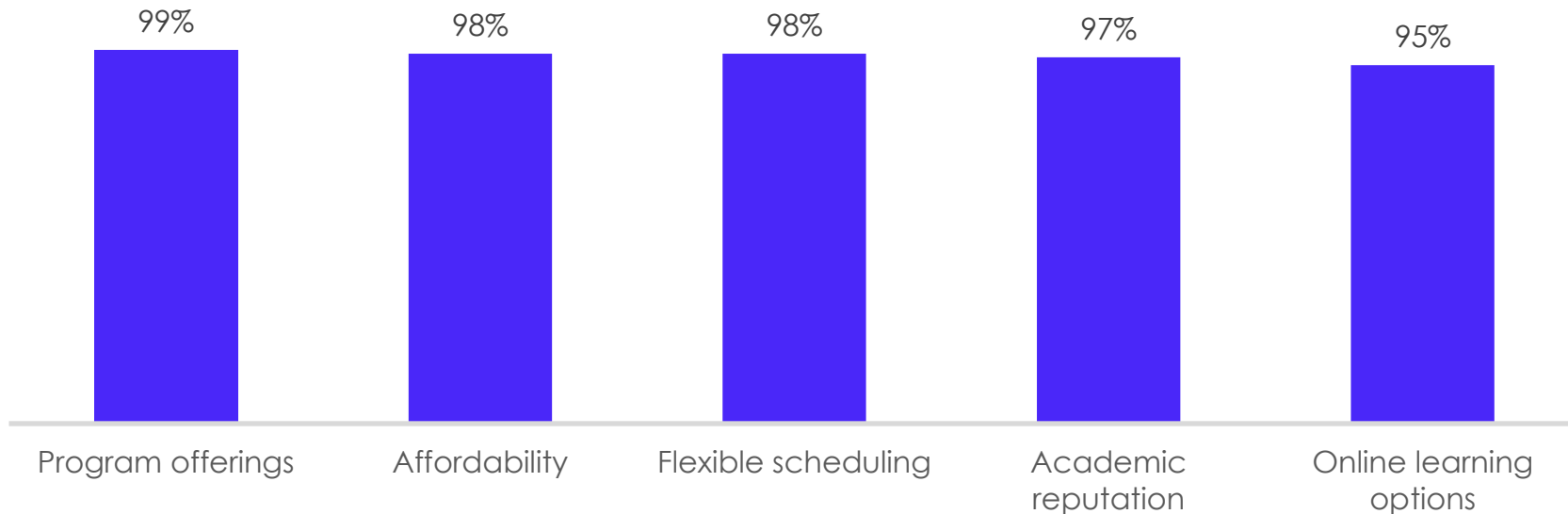
Say **personal growth**

6 in 10

Say **earning potential**

Students consider more than just academics when choosing a school.

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



Gen Z over-indexes on most financial and career-related factors when considering higher education.



7 in 10

Are most concerned about **cost/tuition**.



27%

More likely to be concerned about **student debt**.



98%

Say **job placement outcome** is important; **71%** say it is "**extremely important**."



97%

Say **financial aid availability** is important; **74%** say it is "**extremely important**."

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:

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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.