



EDUCATION
NETWORK

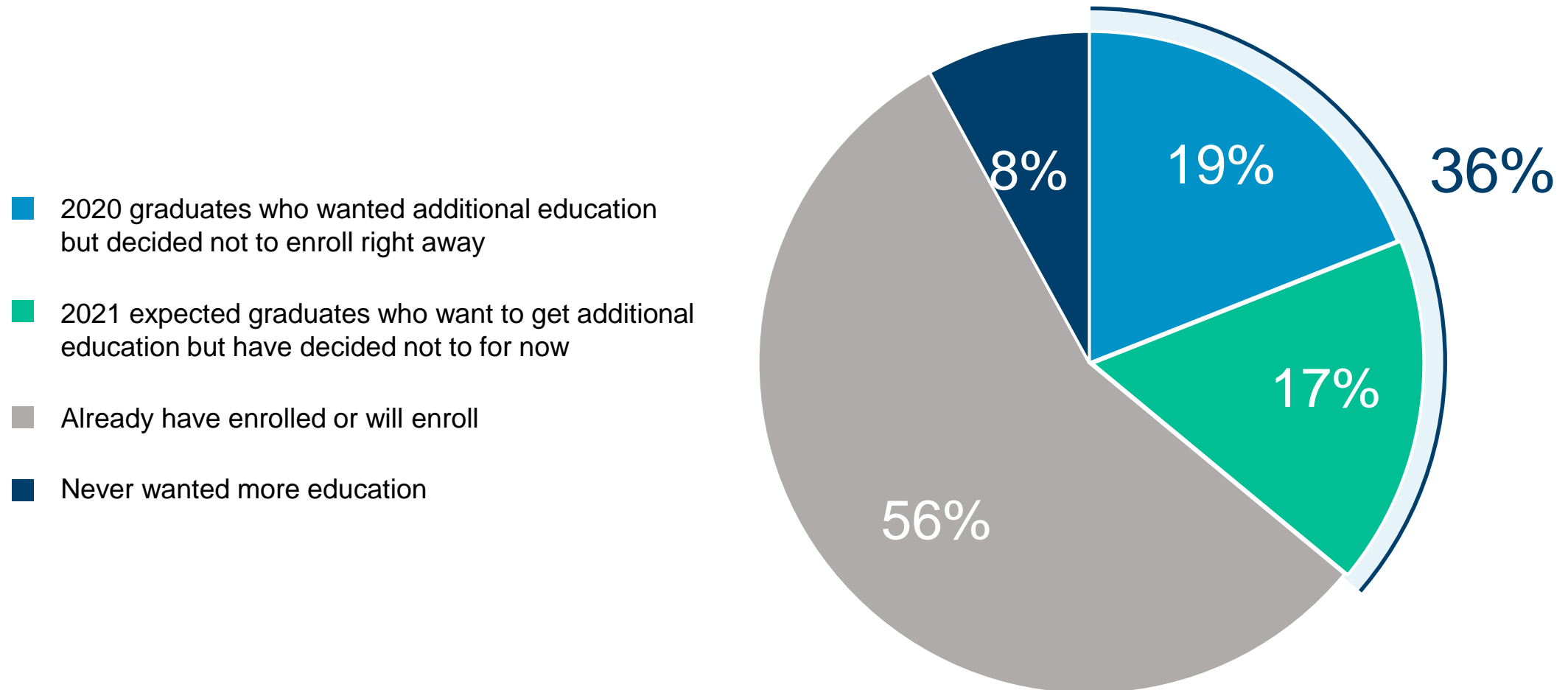
Public Viewpoint:

Reconnecting Recent High School Grads With Their Education Aspirations

June 23, 2021

One-third of pandemic high school graduates have become *disrupted students* — choosing not to pursue their desires for more education at this time.

2020 & 2021 high school graduates



2 BASE: The 36% shown above represents our total respondents (n=1,212). The other 64% were contacted but did not qualify for the survey for the reasons listed above.

Confused, Obligated, Stressed. I'm **confused** as to what I want to spend the rest of my life doing and don't want to go into **debt** straight out of high school for something I probably won't end up doing. I feel **obligated** because the **only real way to make livable money is to get a higher education** after high school unless you go into trades. I'm **stressed** because I have no money or family to help me pay for the **high cost** of college and **this last year I haven't made good enough grades.**

— A Class of 2021 disrupted student in West Virginia who is employed full-time and providing financial support to household. Parents who do not have a college degree.

Annoyed, overwhelmed, indecisive. Post-high school education in America is very expensive, not accessible, and may not even be the right path for the lifestyle one wants. It feels as if it is the only choice but pointless at the same time. I don't want to waste all my time and money on an education that gets me a career I don't even enjoy.

— A Class of 2020 disrupted student in Arizona who is employed full-time and providing financial support to household.

***Excited, hopeful, confident.* These words are pretty self-explanatory, but I chose them because no matter what the future holds, I'm excited for it after all **new things, even trials, sharpen you and make you better.** It could be good or bad, but either way **I'm going to learn and improve,** even if it's not in the way I had exactly planned it, **it will still all work out for me** — and I am confident in that.**

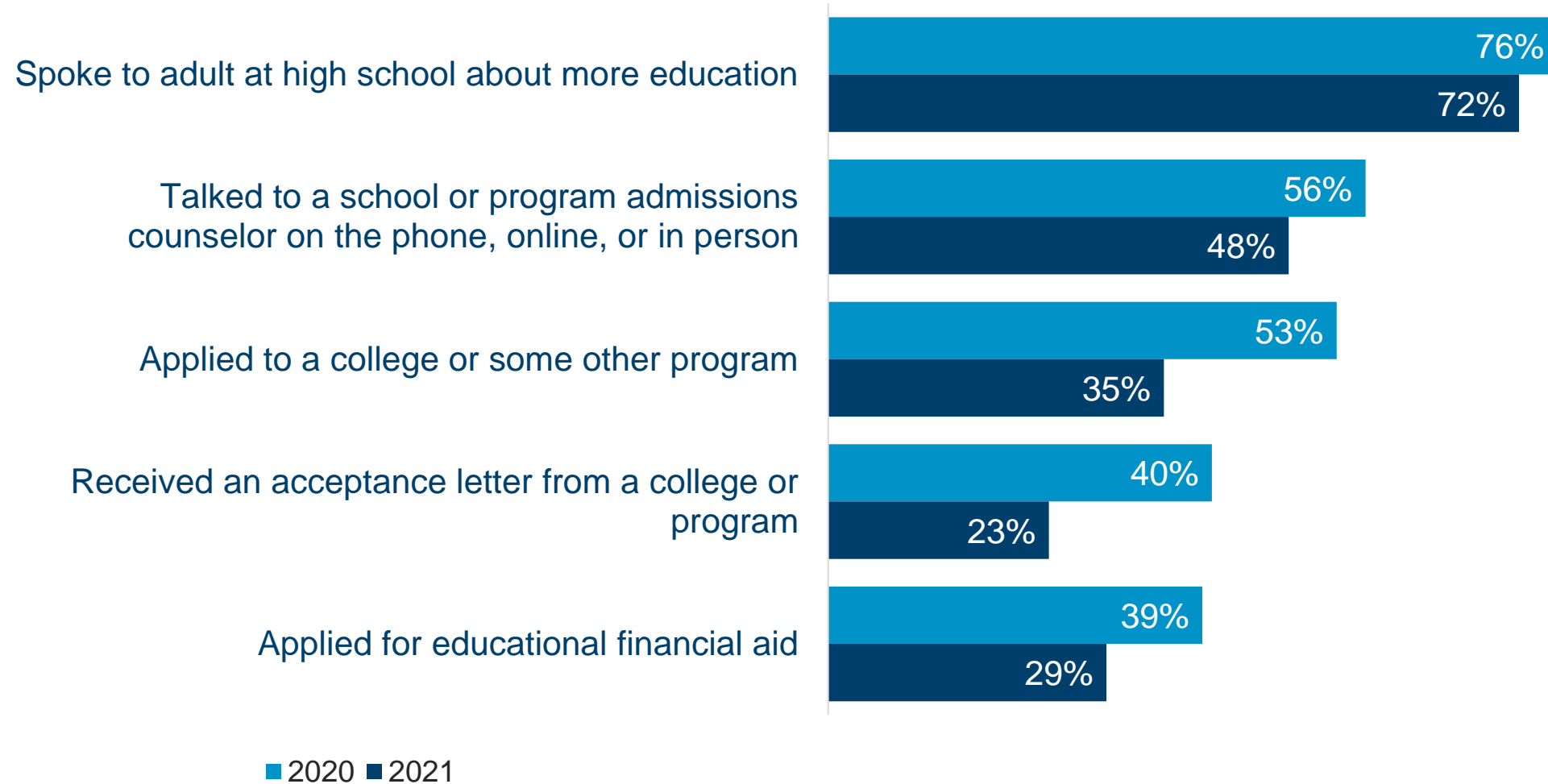
— A Class of 2021 disrupted student in Iowa who is employed part-time. Parents do not have a college degree.

*The three words I would use are **excited, nervous, and worried**. I picked excited because I am ready to start my career, and going to college is that first step. I chose nervous because **I was never that good in school**, and I'm nervous the experience will be difficult and stressful for me. Lastly, I picked worried because of my financial situation. I don't have money saved up for college, and **I'm worried I will be in debt with student loans for the rest of my life**.*

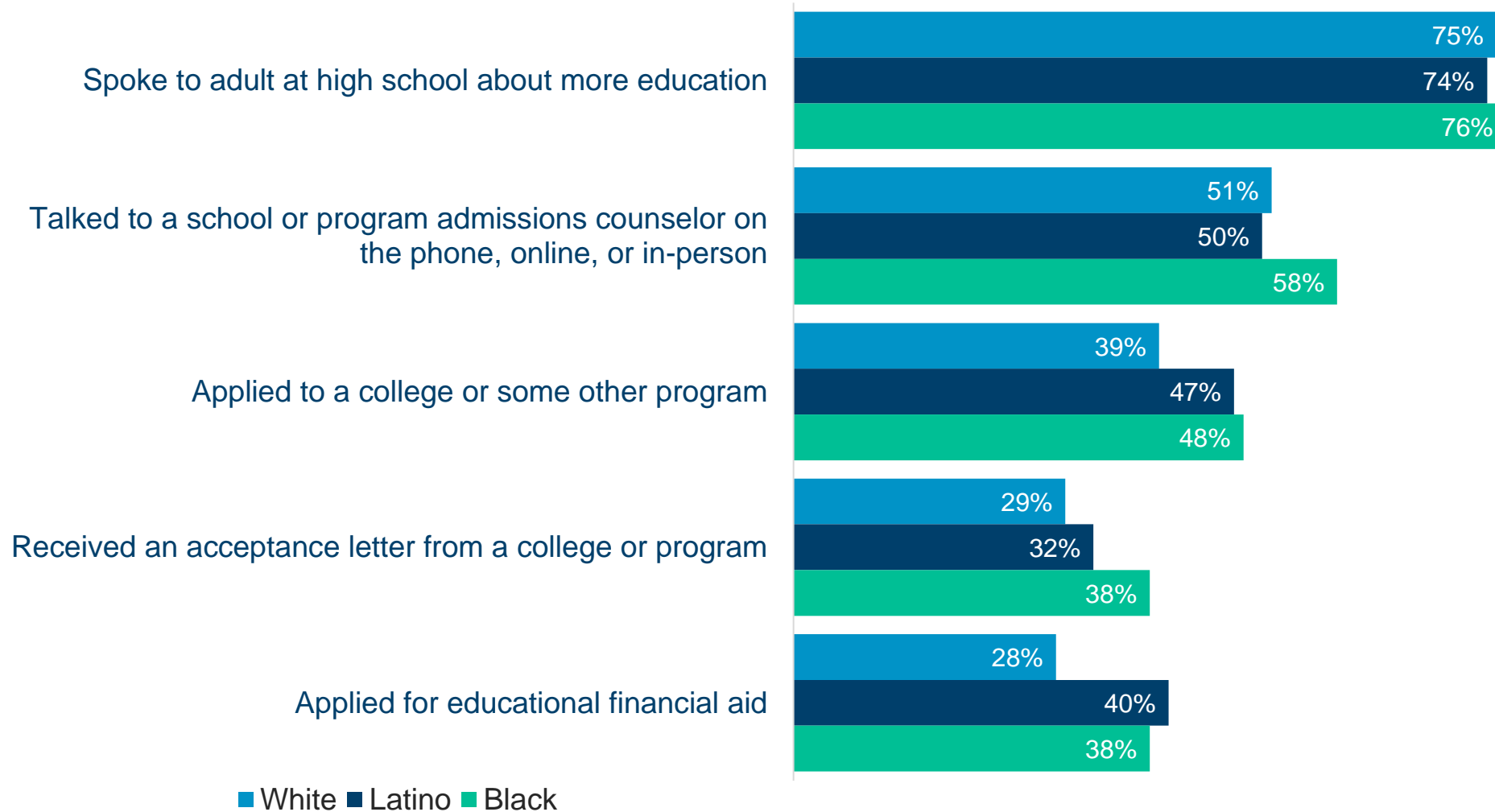
— A Class of 2020 disrupted student in North Carolina who is employed full-time and providing financial support to household. Parents do not have a college degree.

The Past

Disrupted students from the Class of 2021 disconnected earlier in the process

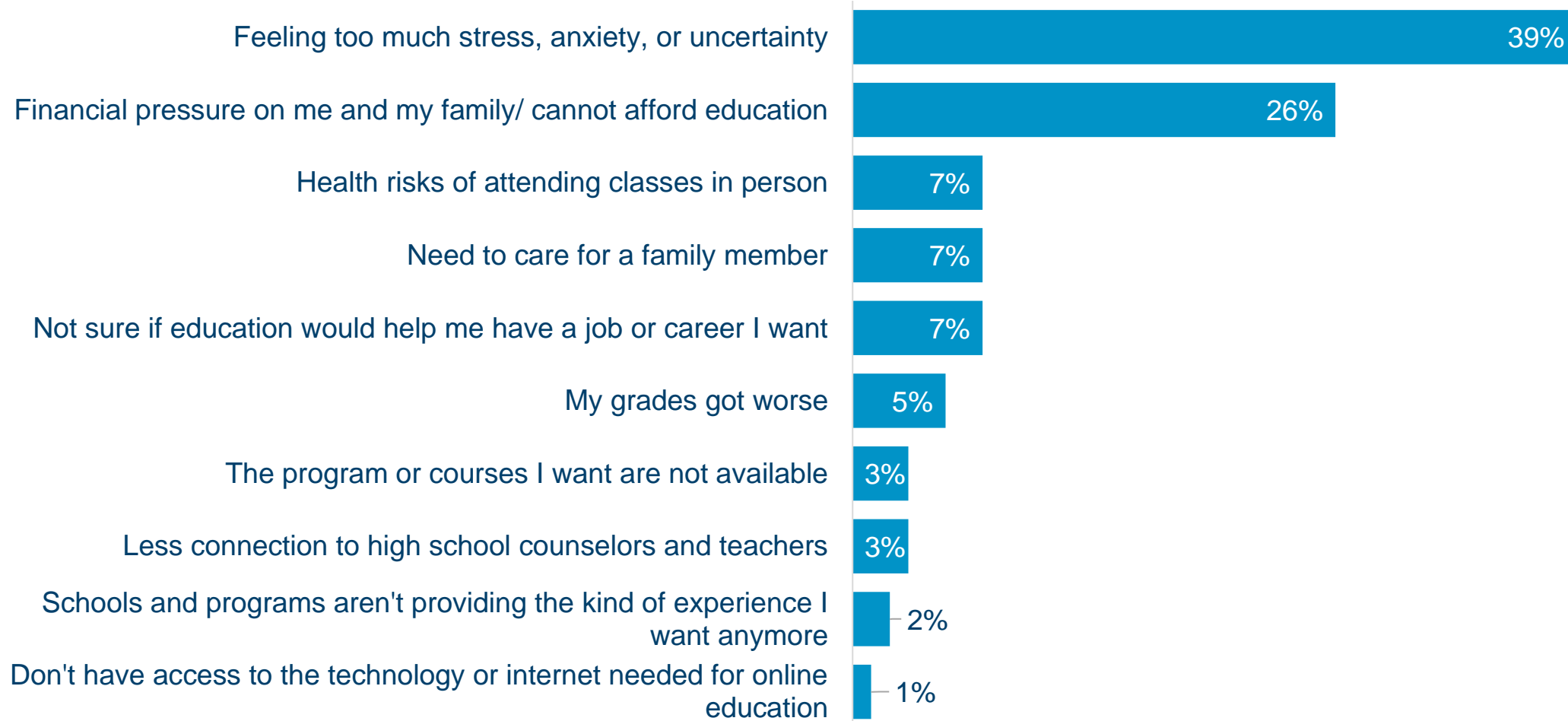


Disrupted Black and Latino students got further in the process before disconnecting



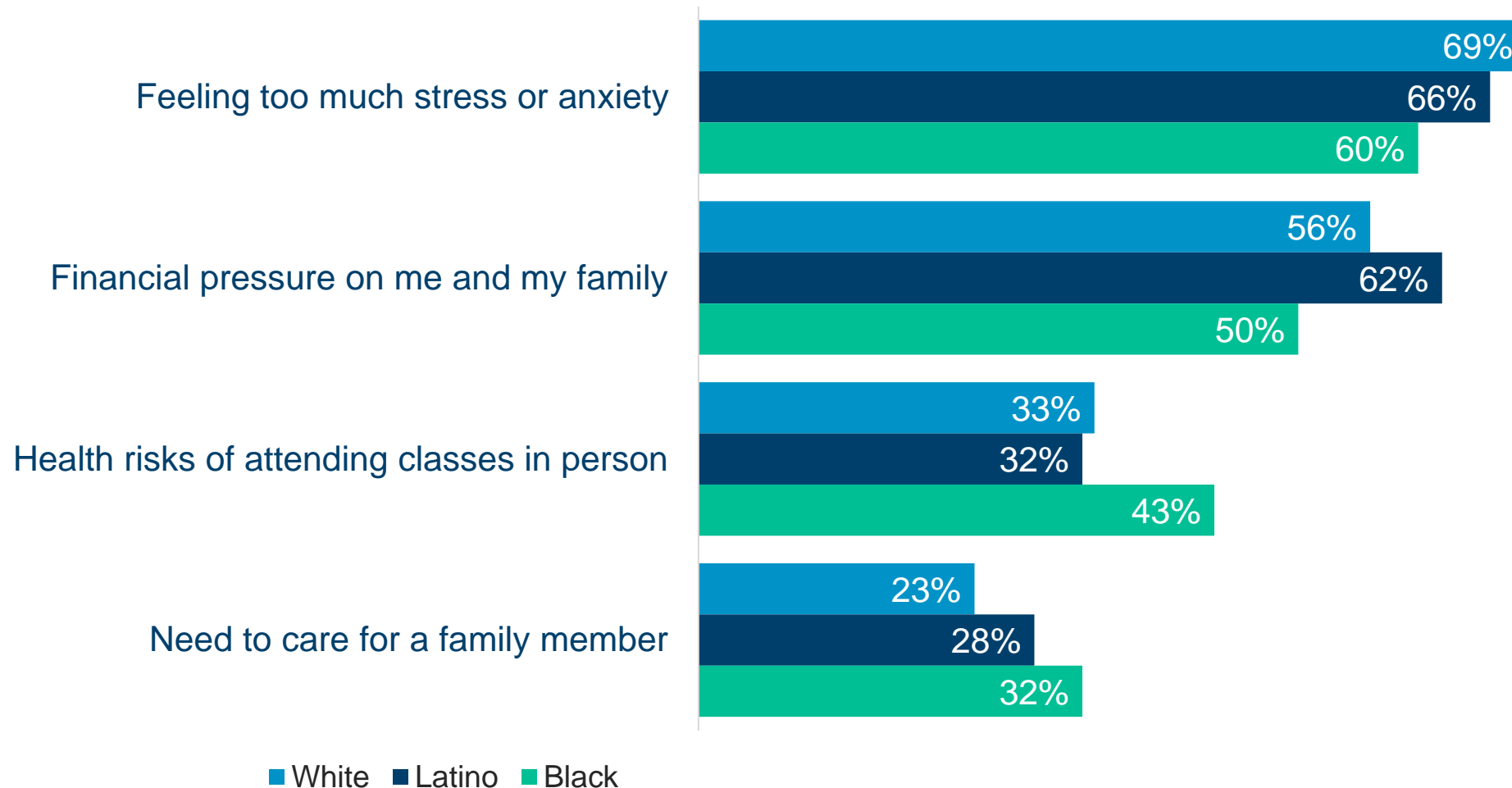
Feelings of stress, anxiety, and uncertainty are identified as the primary reason for not pursuing more education now

Largest influence on decision not to get more education



Disrupted Latino students were more likely than others to feel financial pressure, and disrupted Black students were more likely than others to be influenced by health risks

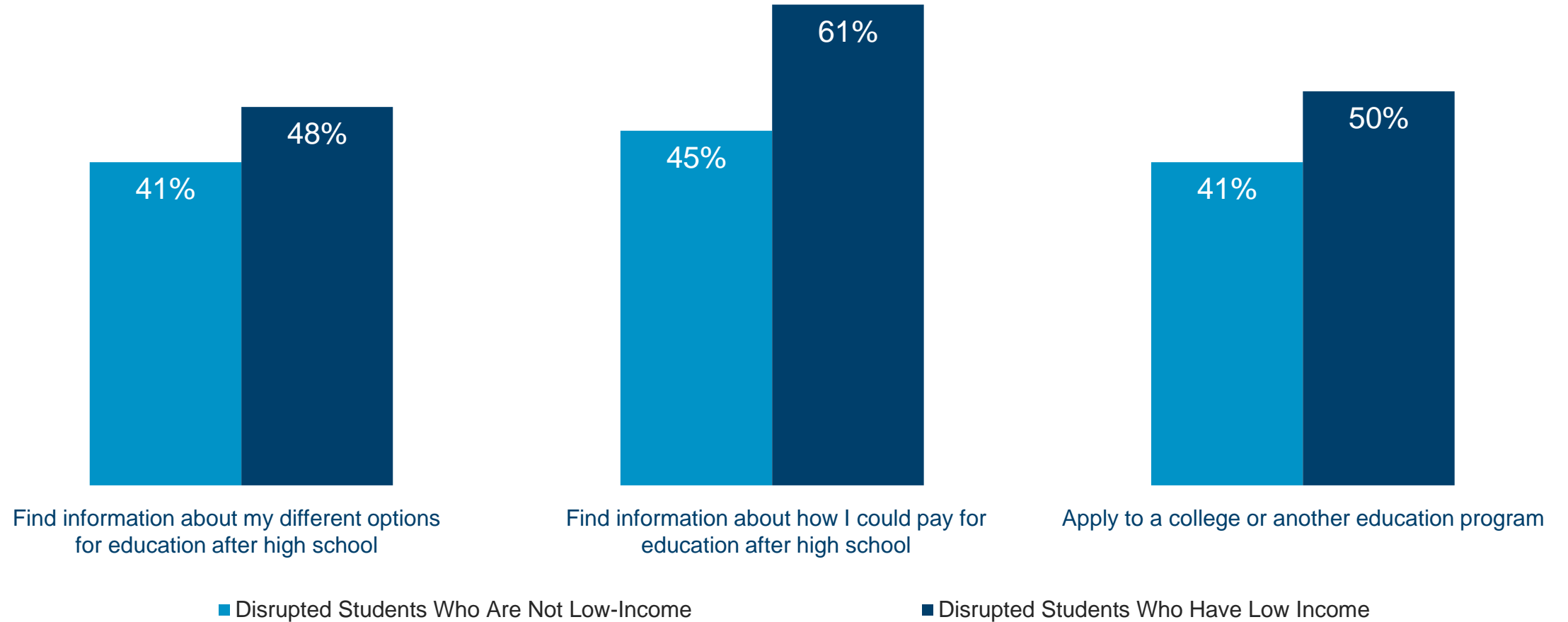
Extremely or very influential on decision not to get more education



The Present

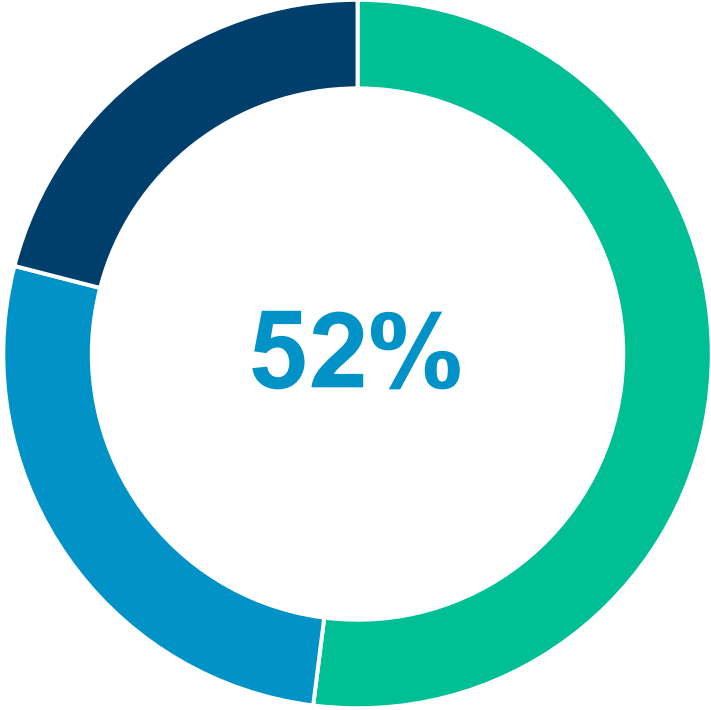
Lower-income disrupted students are much more likely to say it has become more difficult to find information and guidance

COVID-19 made it harder to ...

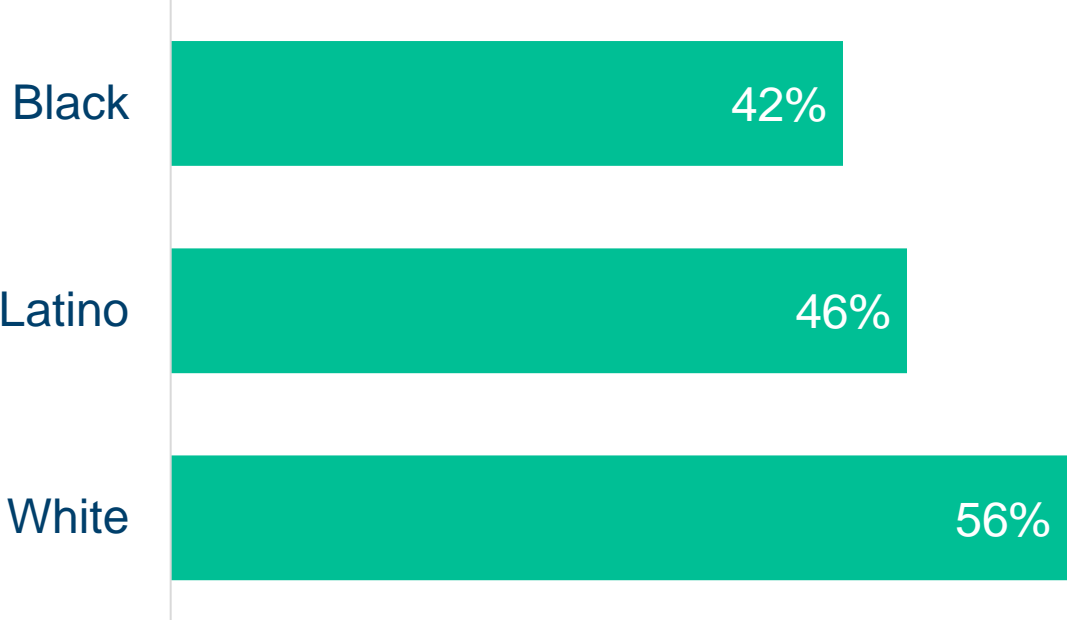


Only half of disrupted students feel they have the needed social capital

I know people who can help me find a way to get the education after high school that is right for me



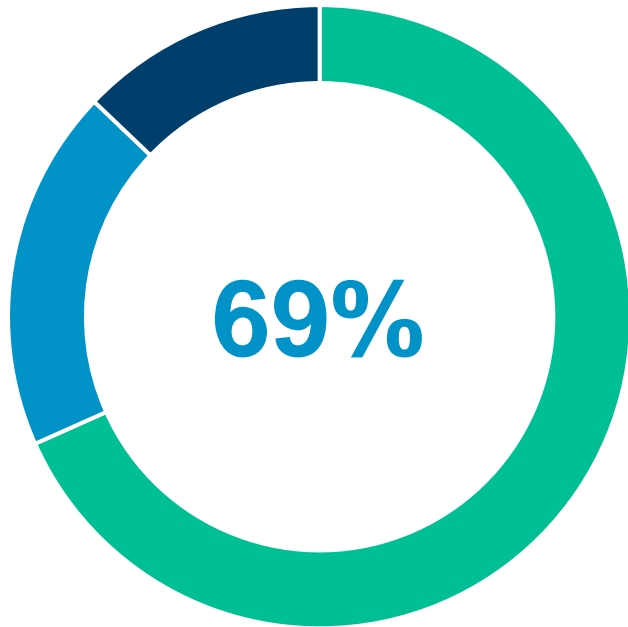
■ Disagree ■ Unsure ■ Agree



The Future

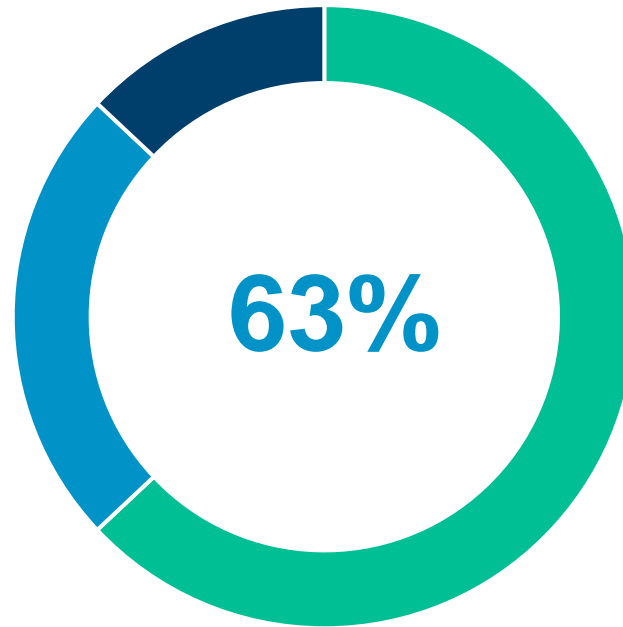
When considering more education, the majority of disrupted students believe in its promise and in themselves—but question its value

It will help me get a good job



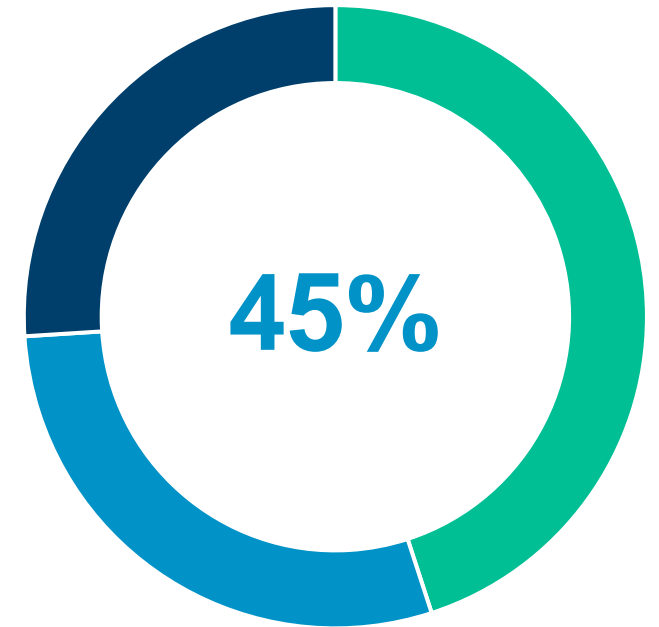
■ Disagree ■ Unsure ■ Agree

I will be a successful student



■ Disagree ■ Unsure ■ Agree

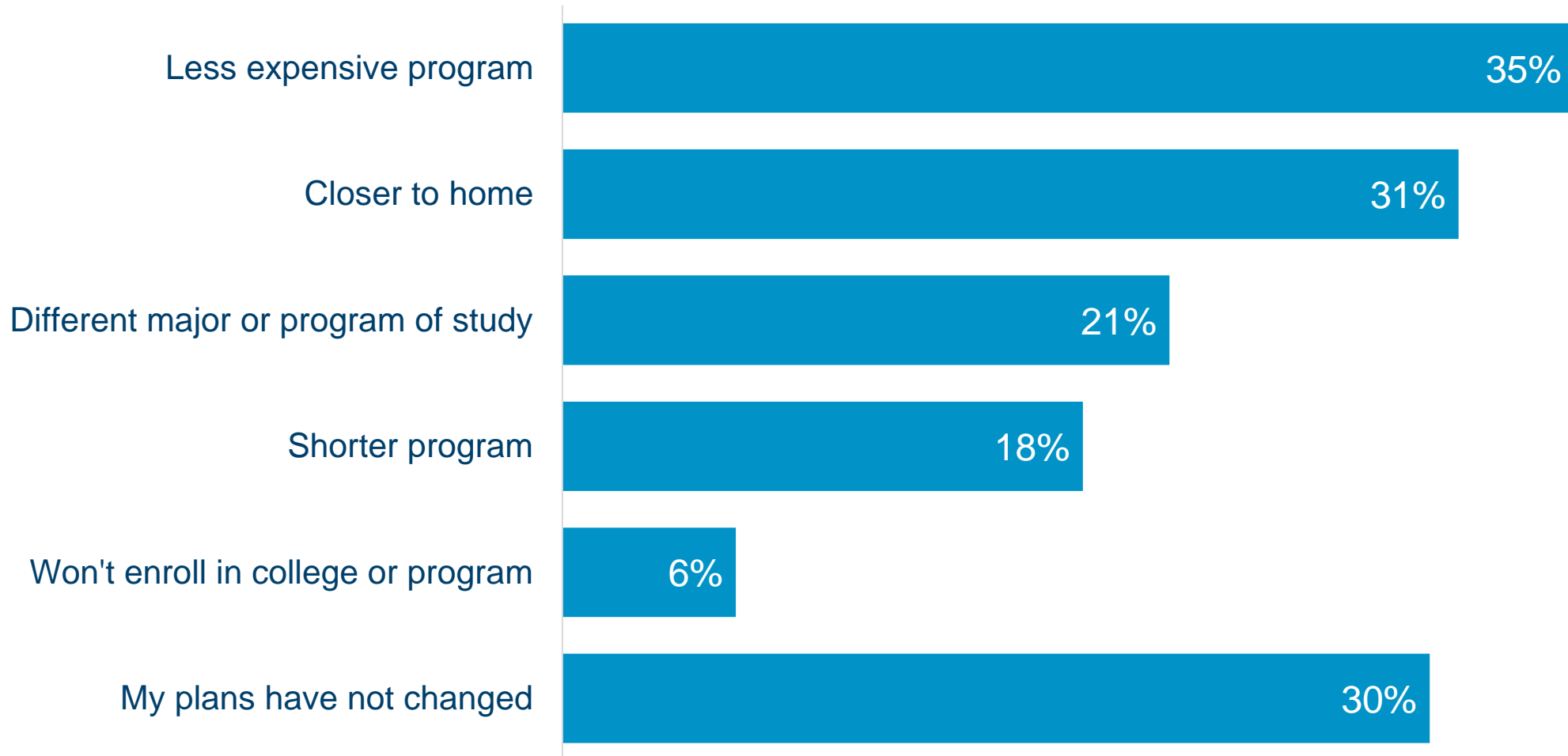
It will be worth the cost



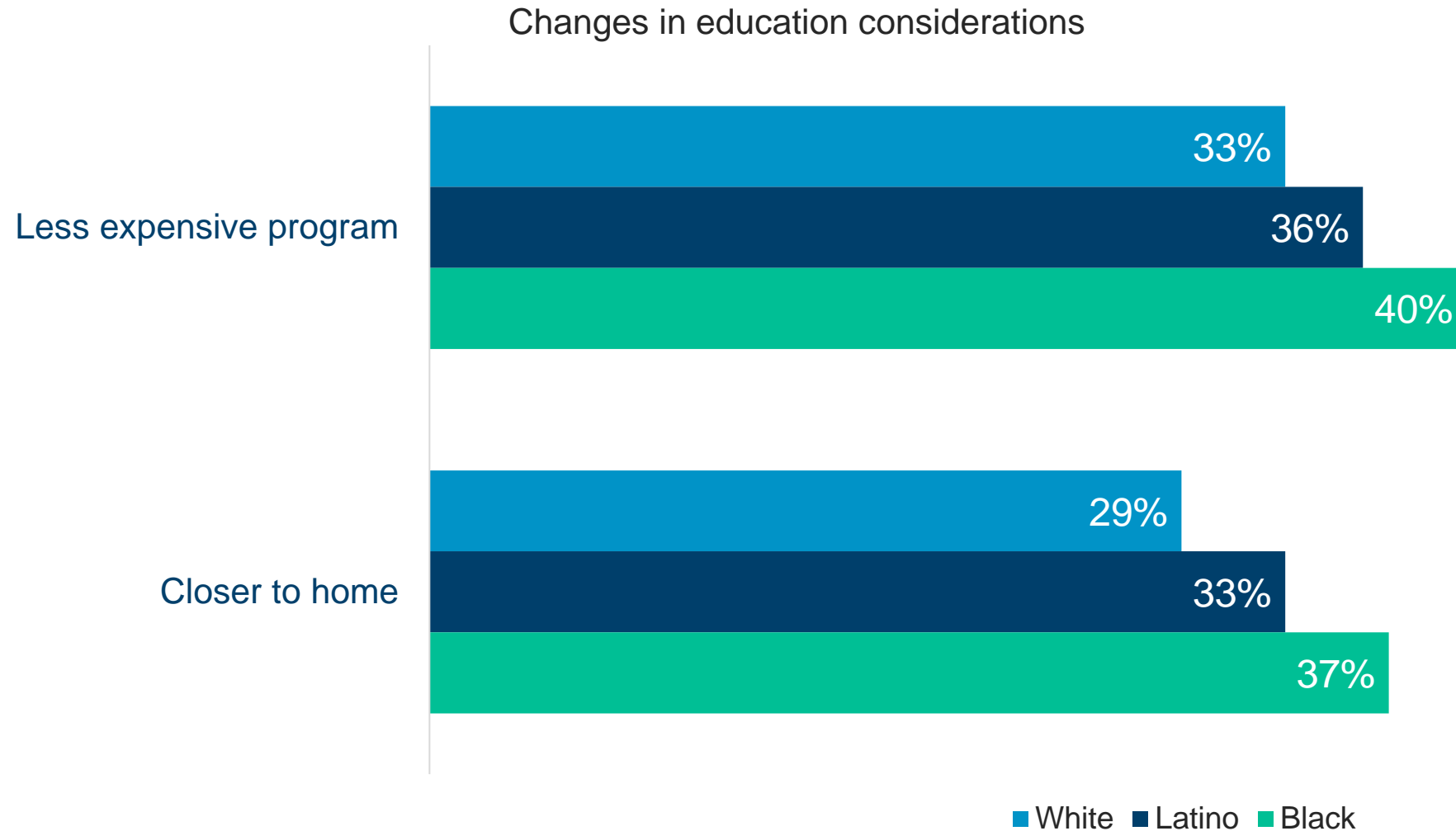
■ Disagree ■ Unsure ■ Agree

Seven in ten disrupted students have changed their plans for future education

Changes in education considerations



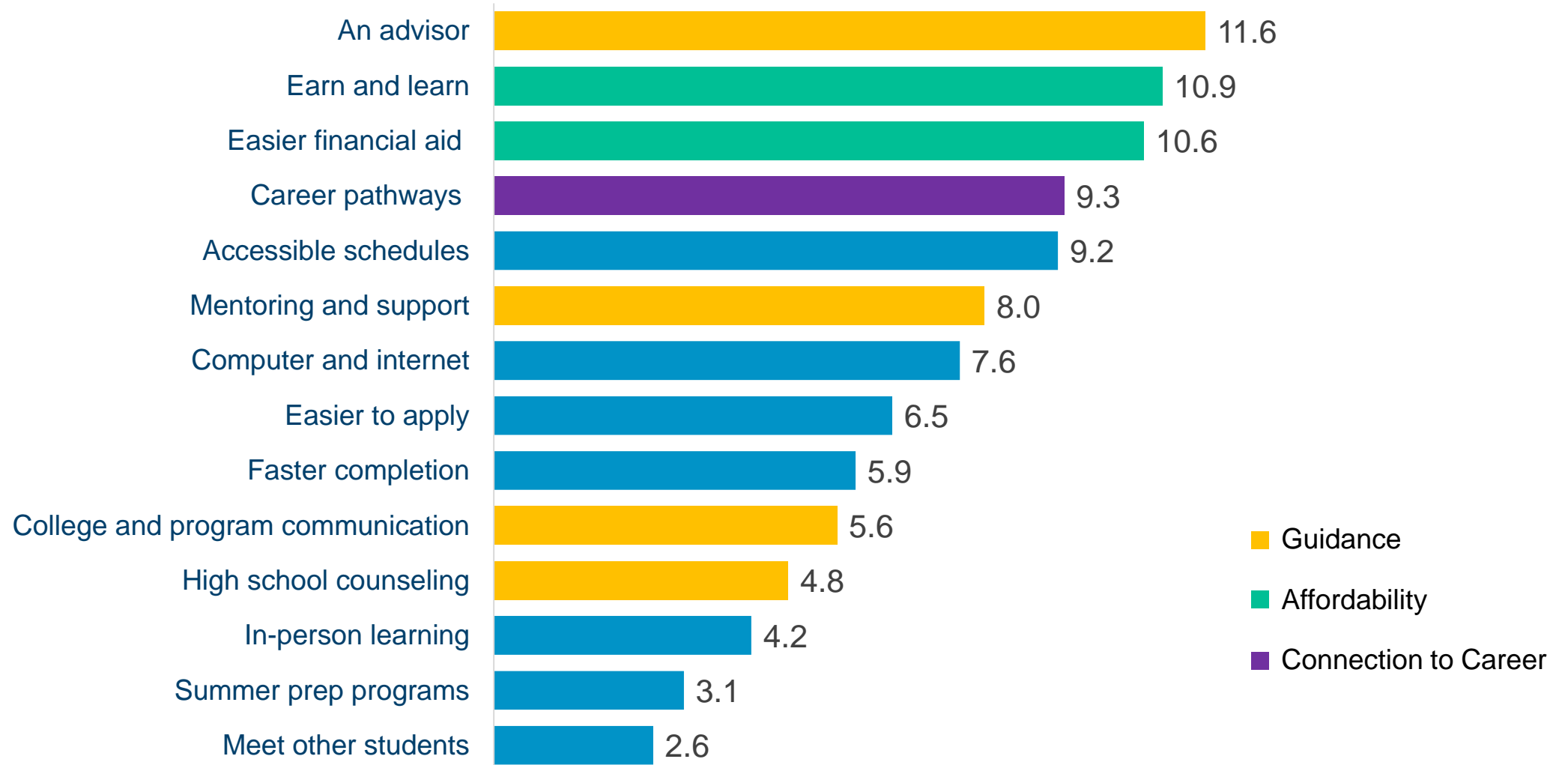
Black disrupted students are most likely to have revised their postsecondary education path



Solutions

Guidance, affordability, and connection to career are the desired resources

Most helpful items when trying to get more education



BASE: All respondents (n=1,212). Respondents were presented with different potential solutions and asked to rank which ones were most and least helpful. The choices were randomized and repeated in different combinations in a Max Diff exercise. The results are displayed in the chart above. The numbers are relative in that a solution ranked as an 8 would be four times more likely to be chosen than a solution ranked as a 2, for example.

A nationwide group of experts identified priorities for helping disrupted students

Guidance

- Clear and consistent information
- Invest in high school and college counselors
- Train and mobilize faculty

Affordability

- Increase financial aid access and awards
- Grow earn-as-you-learn
- Stackable credentials with immediate earning power

Connection to Career

- Transparent earnings information
- Map education to career paths
- Work-based and applied learning

Key Findings

- **Feelings of stress, anxiety, and uncertainty were the most influential reasons disrupted students delayed their education; financial pressures were also significant.** Black students were also more likely than others to say they did not enroll due to health concerns or needing to care for a family member at home.
- **Disrupted students from the Class of 2021 became disconnected from the college-going process at an earlier point compared to the Class of 2020.** Among disrupted students in the Class of 2020, 4 in 10 had received an acceptance letter and applied for financial aid, while among disrupted learners in the Class of 2021, only 23 percent had been accepted to a college or program.
- **The most helpful supports identified by disrupted students are:**
 - Guidance: Disrupted learners seek trusted advisors, yet fewer than half of Black and Latino disrupted students know someone who they feel can help them find a way to get the education that is right for them.
 - Affordability: Disrupted learners would benefit from opportunities to learn and earn along with easier access to financial aid.
 - Connection to Career: Mapping paths and plans through education to employment is vital as disrupted students believe in the possibilities but question the cost value.

Learn more at
StradaInsights.org

Methodology: Disrupted Students

Strada and its research partner, Heart + Mind Strategies, conducted this survey



AUDIENCE

Total Sample (n=1,212)

- 2020 graduates (n=626) who wanted to get additional education after high school but decided not to enroll right away.
- 2021 graduates (n=586) who wanted to get additional education after high school but decided not to for now



MODE

Online Survey, 14 minutes



DATES

April 30 – May 16, 2021



GEOGRAPHY

Nationally representative sample

Glossary of Terms

Label	Full Text
An advisor	An advisor to help with financial aid, classes, and finding a career path
Earn and learn	How to get an education while still working and earning money
Easier financial aid	Easier process to get financial aid to pay for school
Career pathways	Clear information on the jobs people can get with different education options
Accessible schedules	Programs and courses that fit my schedule
Mentoring and support	Mentoring and support to help me succeed as a student
Computer and internet	Free laptop, internet, and technical support
Easier to apply	Easier process to apply to college and other programs
Faster completion	Programs that could be completed faster
College and program communication	Better communication from college and other programs
High school counseling	Better information and counseling from my high school
In-person learning	All classes and learning in-person
Summer prep programs	Summer programs to help me get ready
Meet other students	Opportunities to get to know other students

Project Reconnect

What do we know about learners whose education was disrupted by the pandemic? How can we best support them and help reconnect them with their education aspirations?

- [May Public Viewpoint on disrupted learners](#)
- [Powering Purpose: how community colleges can fuel economic opportunity](#)
- [Reconnecting to College for the High School Classes of 2020, 2021: Insights from National Experts](#)