



IC<sup>3</sup> INSTITUTE®



# 2023 Annual Student Quest Report

The Student Quest Survey:  
An evolving study of student  
career and college choices

In collaboration with



# About IC3 Institute

The IC3 Institute is a mission-driven non-profit that brings together high schools, colleges, and universities, and industry to ensure early access to career and college counseling, paving the path for students' college readiness, workforce preparedness, and career success. The IC3 Institute helps schools with a variety of priorities including establishing a counseling office, training human resources, and providing access to a repository of remote training and professional development resources. The IC3 Institute's initiatives have significantly advanced career and college counseling, empowering counselors so that students can make well-informed decisions about their future. The organization's emphasis on counselor training, resource library, accreditation, research, and advocacy has built a robust support system for the high school ecosystem.

# About University of Waterloo, Faculty of Mathematics

The University of Waterloo is a renowned institution known for its excellence in education and innovation. With a strong focus on research and experiential learning, the university offers a transformative academic experience for students. It is recognized for its collaborative and entrepreneurial culture, providing numerous opportunities for students to engage in cutting-edge research and industry partnerships. The University of Waterloo's commitment to academic excellence, combined with its vibrant campus community, equips students with the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in today's rapidly changing world. Waterloo is home to North America's only dedicated Faculty of Mathematics, which makes world-leading contributions in artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, big data, and fintech. Along with research in computer science, combinatorics and optimization, and applied mathematics, the Faculty of Mathematics is known for its work in fundamental research in pure mathematics and statistics and actuarial science.

# About Vijaybhoomi University

Vijaybhoomi University is a dynamic educational institution dedicated to nurturing future leaders and change-makers. Vijaybhoomi University is India's first Liberal Professional University that allows students maximum flexibility to curate learning pathways across disciplines like Management, Music, Design, Law, Science and Technology. With a focus on holistic development, the university offers a diverse range of programs that combine academic rigor with real-world experiences. Vijaybhoomi University stands out for its innovative approach to education, emphasizing entrepreneurship, leadership, and sustainability. By providing students with a supportive and inclusive learning environment, the university empowers them to make a positive impact on society. Through its unique curriculum and experiential learning opportunities, Vijaybhoomi University prepares students to face the challenges of a rapidly evolving world.

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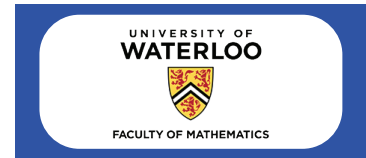
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## Disclaimer

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors.

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# Foreword

The number of students who crossed a border to pursue higher education has more than doubled since 2007, with more than 6.4 million students opting to do so in 2020 [OECD, 2022]. There are numerous factors that influence these students to study outside their home country. Researchers cite the prospect of receiving high-quality education and improved employment opportunities as two primary factors that attract students to study abroad [Bhandari, Robles, and Farrugia, 2018].

The 2023 IC3 Institute's Annual Student Quest Survey offers a broader window into the student's decision-making process across the globe. By triangulating data from students with that of parents and counselors, this global report highlights the value of a strong partnership between students, parents, and counselors in the college decision-making process, recognizing that each brings an essential and unique perspective. With this depth of information, and from an international perspective, the 2023 IC3 Institute's Annual Student Quest Report provides critical insights for higher education institutions around the world looking to understand how key stakeholders consider the university recruitment and admissions process by sharing their perceptions, priorities, and approaches to university admissions applications.

According to the report, career prospects are the number one factor students and parents from over 90 countries prioritized in selecting a higher education institution. Host country ranks further down the priority list as number four, behind college reputation and course/major area of study among students and parents alike.

The United States remains the number one destination of choice for international students, a designation it has long held. The career prospects of international students in the United States are strong due to its robust economic structure and higher education institution partnerships with employers. Since 2016, the U.S. government has expanded opportunities for students in the STEM fields to pursue employment through Optional Practical Training (OPT) following the completion of their degree. This option was leveraged by more than 180,000 international students in the 2021/22 academic year [Open Doors, 2022]. International students continue contributing to the U.S. economy long after their studies. In fact, a 2022 study by the National Foundation for American Policy highlighted the success of immigrant entrepreneurs, noting that they started more than half of the U.S. startup companies valued at \$1 billion or more.

International students in the United States further benefit from the partnerships U.S. higher education institutions have with employers to participate in internships and other activities throughout their studies. When students and their parents move down the priority checklist to explore college reputation and course of study, the United States remains at the top of their list. The United States, however, is not alone, and competition for international students is growing. Among emerging and traditional host destinations, including the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, France, and Germany, higher education programs offer strong academics, internships and post-study work opportunities, and career pathways.



The study also finds that access to counselors who can support students and parents in navigating their priority checklist in the college decision-making process and identifying the right institution and course of study is essential. Half of all students who responded to the IC3 Institute Student Quest Survey had not met a counselor. Furthermore, counselor interactions with parents were limited to only a third of parents. The IC3 Institute Student Quest Report shares evidence of the impact counselors can have on students and parents. Given parental involvement, and often financing, in this major decision in their child's life, the report suggests that counselors play a critical role in balancing parental expectations and supporting students' needs and aspirations. Counselors can be trustworthy supports to students and parents as they work on shortlisting universities and courses of study.

Understanding the "why" and "how" of the international student decision-making process will allow stakeholders across the higher education sector to understand where best to focus their priorities and resources. As the IC3 Institute Student Quest Report highlights, higher education institutions can better cater their approach to the priorities of students and parents in their outreach and selection. Student and parent perceptions may also shift over time, and adaptability, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, must be considered in future decision-making cycles. Finally, both institutions and families can consider the importance of counselors to further inform the higher education process and the positive role they can play in helping students find their most successful path of study.

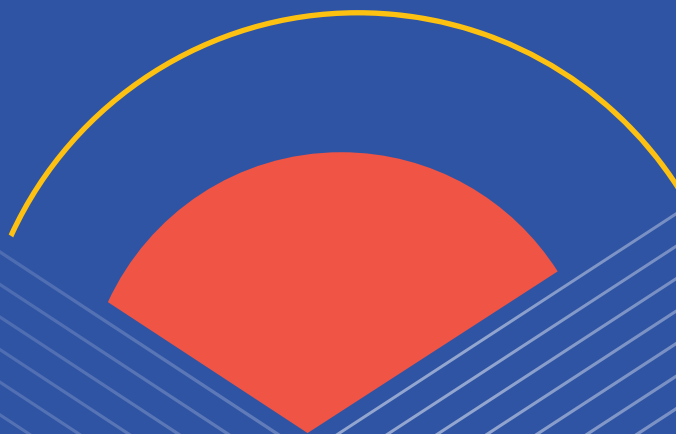


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# Introduction

The process of choosing a career and college pathway after high school is a critical decision that millions of students face worldwide. As they stand on the cusp of adulthood, this transition requires them to make informed choices that will have potential to shape their future educational, financial, and vocational prospects (Paolini, 2019). The significance of this decision lies not only in its impact on individual students but also on their families, schools, higher education institutions, industries, and economics at large. Therefore, it is crucial to explore not only the factors influencing this decision, but also the decision-making process itself.

Numerous studies have delved into the factors that play a significant role in directing students' decisions regarding higher education, such as affordability, prestige, opportunity, knowledge, location, and economy. However, few studies have thoroughly investigated the nature and impact of the decision-making process on students' academic journey and exploration of cross-impact of multiple stakeholders. Recognizing the importance of understanding this process, this study aims to bridge this gap and provide valued insights into the decision-making process of high school students.

The last few years have brought in rapid changes in the labor market, educational options, opportunities, newer formats of schools and higher education. Hence, a great amount of changes have been observed in terms of expansion of the educational landscape. It compelled all relevant stakeholders, including students, parents, career/college counselors, and educational institutions to adapt and innovate in the face of unprecedented uncertainties. The pandemic highlighted the need for comprehensive research to address the challenges and opportunities presented in a post-pandemic world.

Building upon the foundation of previous research, this report presents the findings of a survey conducted with high school students, parents (who have been surveyed for the first time in Student Quest Surveys), and career/college counselors. The survey consists of three parts, each tailored to the specific perspectives of the participants. With 8,377 student responses, 3,177 parent responses, and 793 high school counselor responses, this study provides a robust dataset for analysis.

One of the unique aspects of this survey is the inclusion of coextensive questions among the three surveys. This approach facilitates identifying trends and patterns from multiple perspectives, corroborating evidence to gain a comprehensive understanding of the decision-making process. By examining the viewpoints of students, parents, and counselors, nuances and complexities involved in choosing a career and college pathway can be explored.

The ultimate goal of this study is to offer a holistic convergence of perspectives from all stakeholders involved in the higher education decision-making process. It aims to shed light on various aspects, including information gathering, dissemination, support systems, level of influence, and stages of decision-making. By providing critical data and insights, this report aims to help create a supportive and data-driven counseling mechanism along with making data available for students for their awareness.

Given the scope of these choices and their long-term impact that students face when making such an important choice, it is imperative to investigate multiple layers and understand the intricacies involved. Therefore, the 2023 IC3 Institute Student Quest Survey took a comprehensive approach by involving school counselors, parents, and high school students. This collaborative effort enhances the credibility and corroboration of findings, allowing for a more reliable and holistic understanding of the dynamics of making choices.

In summary, this report represents a global study on the priorities and perceptions surrounding higher education choices and decisions in the current educational and vocational landscape. By examining the perspectives of high school students, parents, and career/college counselors, it provides a comprehensive analysis of the decision-making process. The report aims to equip all stakeholders with the necessary information to identify the alignments and gaps between perceptions when choosing a career and college pathway after high school.





# Methodology and Data Description

The results of this report are based on a comprehensive survey conducted in 2023, which aimed to gather responses from parents, students, and counselors regarding educational experiences and decision-making. The survey reached out to a diverse range of students, with 8,377 students in grades 9 through 12 taking part. It also received substantial participation from parents, encompassing 3,177 respondents. Furthermore, 793 high school counselors shared their perspectives and expertise in the survey. Among the counselors who participated in the survey, a focus group discussion was conducted for the first time with a small group [25] of counselors over a video conference. Inputs from this focus group were sought to better understand the observations and retrieve more meaningful insights about the patterns that emerged from the surveys.

To ensure the protection of participants' data, the data collection and analysis strictly adhered to the General Data Protection Regulation guidelines. The survey spanned across 98 countries, involving parents, students, and counselors from different educational institutions. The primary focus was on gathering information and understanding the various factors influencing educational decisions.

One of the highlights of this annual report over the [last four years](#) has been the increase in the diversity of the survey population. The Student Quest Survey's initial couple of years saw responses mostly from SAARC countries, which further spread to 70 countries in 2022 and 98 countries in 2023. Among the student respondents, 58.77% were from grades 9 and 10, while the remaining 41.23% were from grades 11 and 12. It was encouraging to see a high number of the respondents [92.17%] attempting the survey who had not attempted it last year, providing newer perspectives and covering a more varied diaspora of students. The grade 11 and 12 students were presented with a distinct set of questions tailored to their stage of decision-making. The majority of participants [79.04%] followed the national curriculum. About 12.46% of the students represented international curriculum boards such as International Baccalaureate, Cambridge Assessment International Education [CAIE]. The remaining 8.5% pursued other regional curricula.

Regarding gender representation, 54.70% of the respondents identified themselves as female, while 43.80% identified as male. The remaining 1.50% encompassed individuals who identified as non-binary, transgender, or had other gender identities.

The demographics of the parents who participated in this survey showcase a range of characteristics. In terms of age distribution, the majority of respondents fell within the 40-49 age group, accounting for 57.17% of participants. A small percentage of parents aged 60 or above, approximately 0.38%, also took part in the survey. Most parents [53.48%] currently have one child studying in grade 9 or above. Approximately 29.75% had two children in this age group, while 11.00% did not have any children studying in grade 9 or above. A smaller proportion [5.77%] had three or more children in this category.

The high school counselor survey involved 793 professionals who provided invaluable insights based on their experience and knowledge. A significant proportion of counselors [52.58%] had a minimum of three years of experience as college or career counselors, further enriching the survey findings. The majority of counselors who participated in the survey identified as female [76.92%], while 22.70% identified as male.

The survey's success was evident in the positive response from the participating counselors. More than 63% of them expressed their willingness to engage in focus group interactions, indicating their eagerness to delve deeper into the survey's outcomes. With these robust response numbers and diverse participant profiles, this survey has become a valuable resource and learning tool in the field of career and college counseling.





# Surveys at a Glance

The Student Quest Survey conducted in 2023 encompassed a wide range of geographic locations worldwide, gathering responses from students, parents and counselors across 98 different countries across six continents. With the participation of 8,377 students, 3,177 parents, and 793 high school counselors, this survey represents an endeavor aimed at comprehending the diverse perspectives surrounding decision-making for post-high school endeavors.

This section of the report presents the key data highlights and insights derived from each of the three distinct surveys conducted. Furthermore, a thorough analysis of the three surveys is presented in the thematic insights section, where the data from cross-sectional analysis has been triangulated to extract insights and provide recommendations.

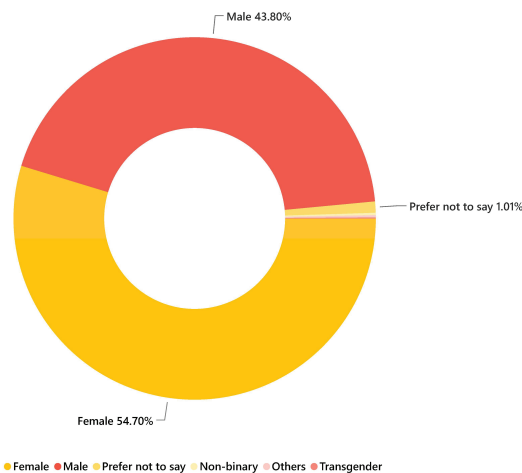
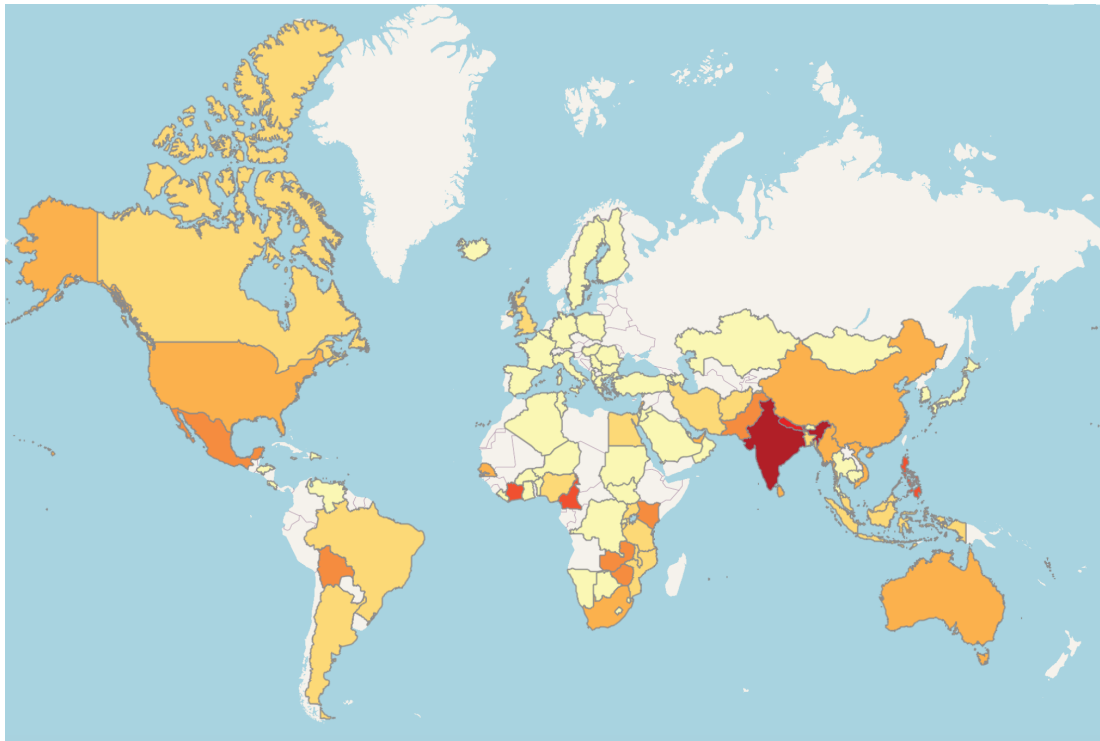
# Student Survey

This section provides an overview of the survey responses gathered from students on various topics related to education, career aspirations, destination preferences, and influence of other stakeholders. The data represents a diverse set of participants evident from the demographics and offers valuable insights on the preferences.

**Demographics:** India continues to have the biggest number of respondents in the survey, followed by Nepal, Cameroon, Maldives, and Côte D'Ivoire among the top five countries. This is a significant improvement in the direction of expanding the global reach of the survey when compared to last year.

The survey received responses with 43.80% identifying as male, 54.70% as female, 0.20% as non-binary, 0.08% as transgender, and 1.01% preferred not to disclose their gender.

**Geographical distribution of the respondents for the student survey**

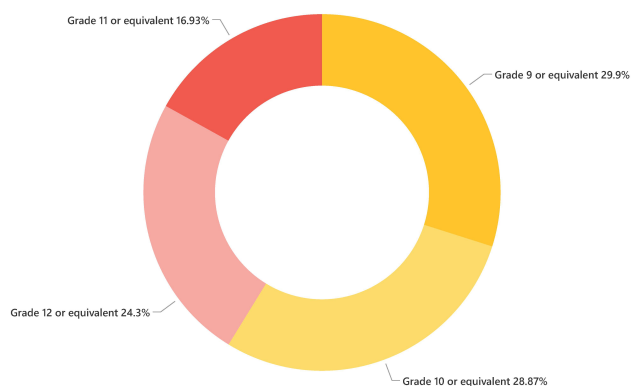
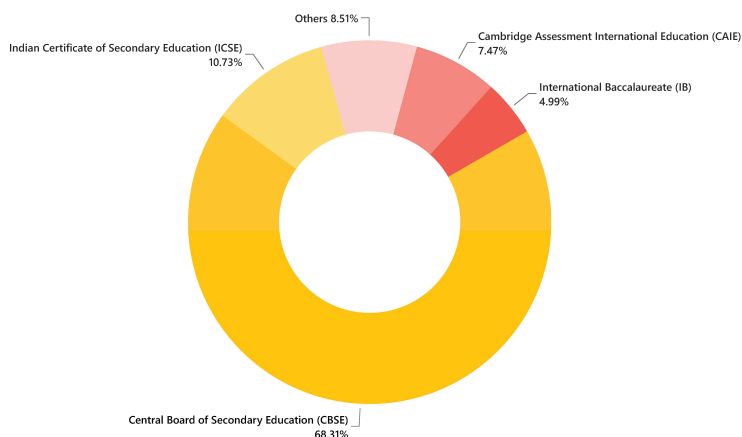


**Gender distribution of the respondents for the student survey**

The majority of participants [68.31%] followed the Central Board of Secondary Education [CBSE] curriculum. Other popular boards included the Indian Certificate of Secondary Education [ICSE] at 10.73%, Cambridge Assessment International Education [CAIE] at 7.47%, and International Baccalaureate [IB] at 4.99%. The distribution of respondents by grade/year level was as follows: 29.90% in grade 9 or equivalent, 28.87% in grade 10 or equivalent, 16.93% in grade 11 or equivalent, and 24.30% in grade 12 or equivalent.

Education boards represented in the student survey

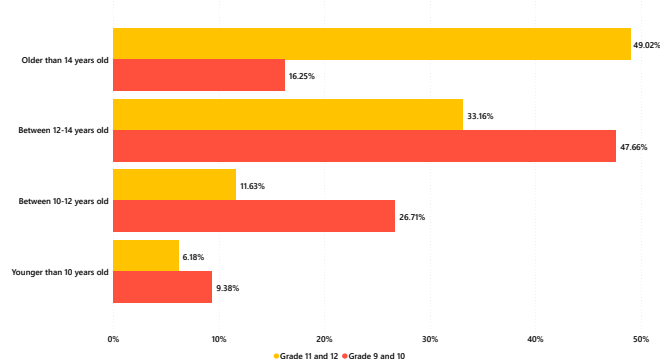
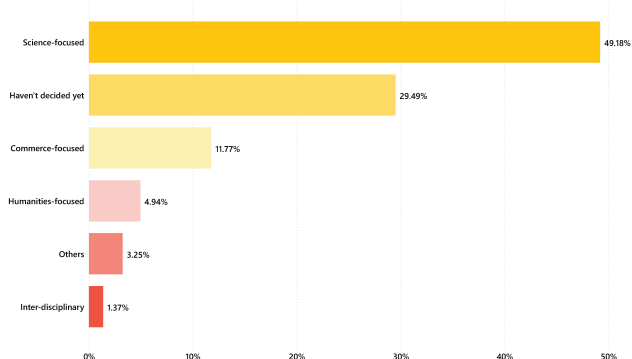
Grade distribution in the student survey



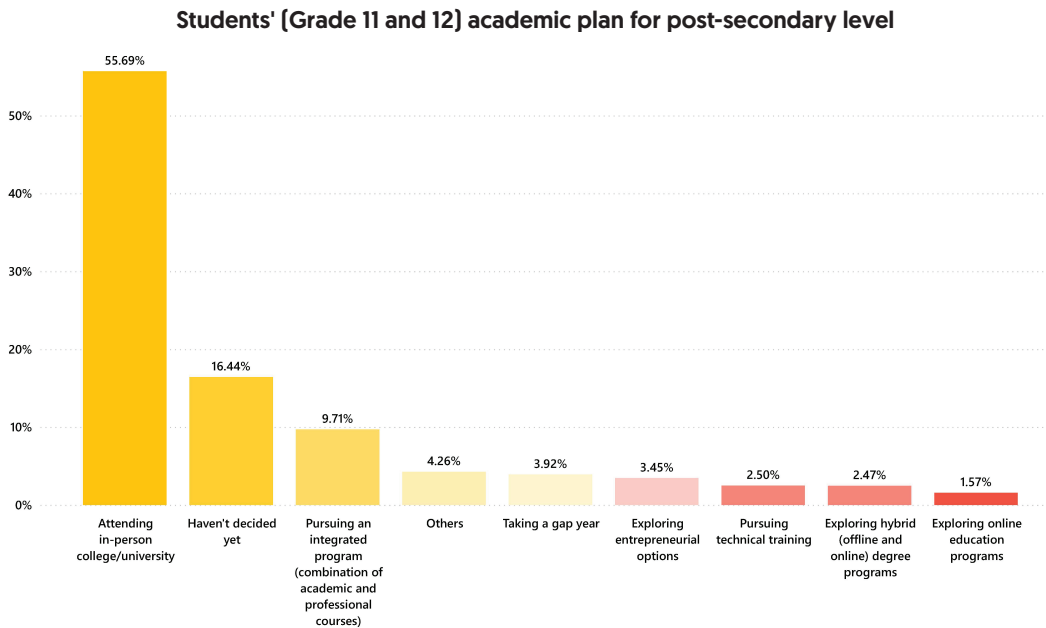
**Career Aspirations:** Among students in grade 9 and 10, 49.18% were inclined toward science-focused subjects, 11.77% toward commerce-focused subjects, 4.94% toward humanities-focused subjects, and 1.37% opted for interdisciplinary subjects. Additionally, 29.49% of students had not yet decided on their subject preferences. Studies have indicated that excessive reliance on STEM-based subjects can lead to a workforce that has a significant soft skill gap, which is steadily increasing. The data also revealed that 9.38% of respondents engaged in discussions about career aspirations and interests before the age of 10, while 26.71% engaged between the ages of 10 and 12. A significant majority [47.66%] began these discussions between the ages of 12 and 14, and 16.25% started after the age of 14.

Subject preference among the respondents for the student survey

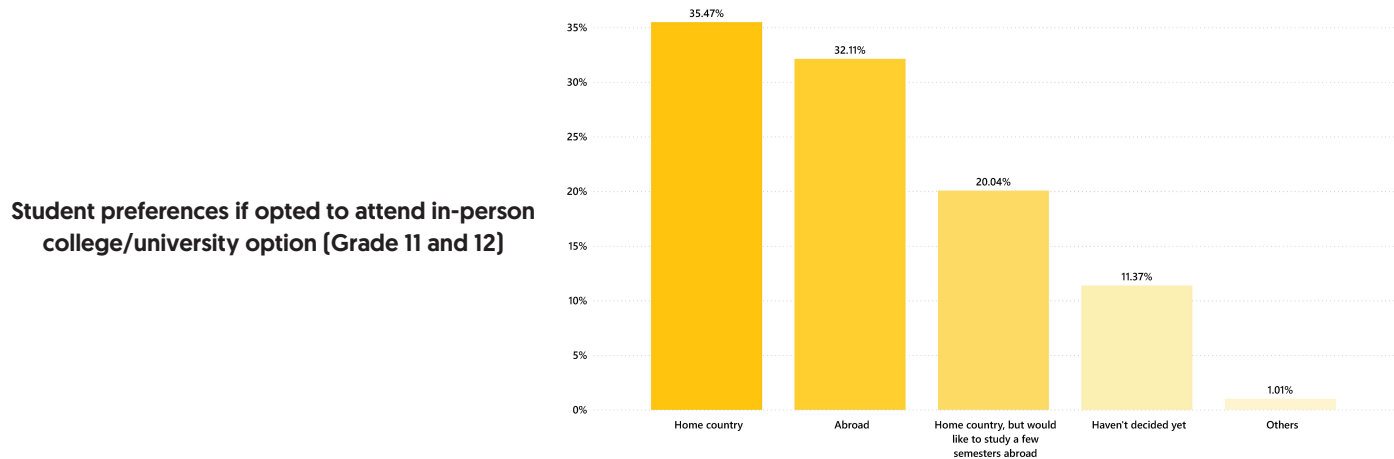
Age distribution for the first conversation regarding career choices



Among the students in grade 11 and 12, the majority of students [55.69%] planned to attend in-person college/university after high school. Other responses included integrated programs [9.71%], exploring online or hybrid degree programs, considering entrepreneurial options [3.45%], and pursuing technical training [2.50%]. Additionally, 16.44% of students had not yet decided on their post-secondary plans.



**Study Destination Preferences:** When enquired about their plans to study further, 35.47% preferred to stay in their home country, while 32.11% intended to study abroad. A variety of push and pull effects can be in play that affect students' preference to study abroad such as quality of courses, job prospects, and socio-economic factors among others. A significant number [20.04%] expressed a desire to study in their home country but also experience studying abroad for a few semesters, which is quite similar to last year's data of 21.20%. Results show that students' main motivation for leaving their home country is the goal of seeking an international experience for personal, academic, and professional development.

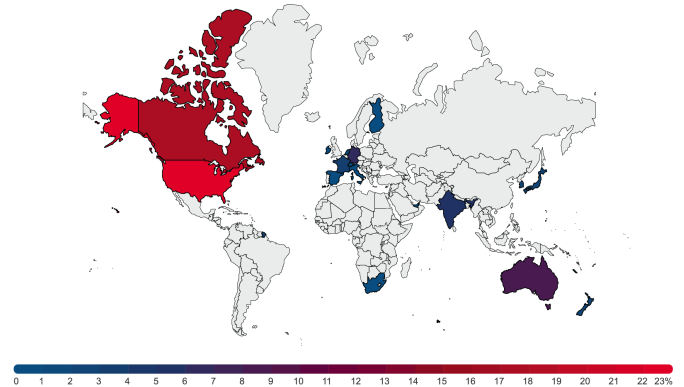
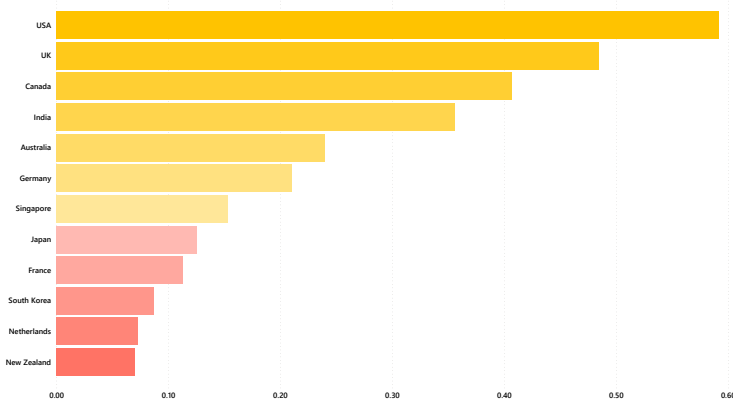


In terms of application destinations, the majority of students [59.16%] listed the United States as their top choice, followed by the United Kingdom [48.45%] and Canada [40.67%]. Other popular choices included India [35.58%], Australia [24.03%], and Germany [21.07%]. In comparison to 2022, while the United States retains the top spot among student preferences, it has however lost some popularity as it slipped approximately by 10 percent [from 69.04% to 59.16%] among students listing it in their top choices.

Similarly, both the United Kingdom and Canada retain their respective spots, but at the same time losing 8.53% and 12.72% respectively. India saw the biggest uptick with an increase of 19.21% as compared to last year, which could be attributed to larger percentage of responses from students outside of India as compared to previous years and due to more new-age and high quality institutions opening and establishing in India.

**2023 - Geographical preference of students for international higher education programs (Grade 11 and 12)**

**2022 - Geographical preference of students for international higher education programs (Grade 11 and 12)**

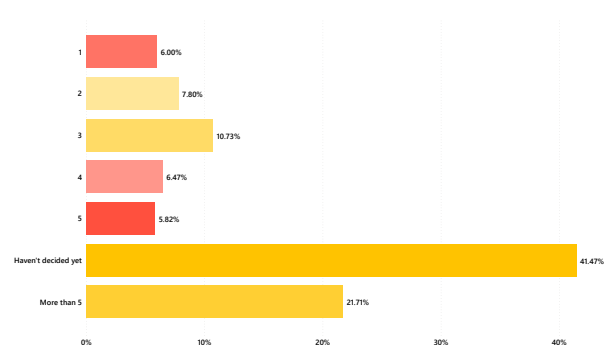
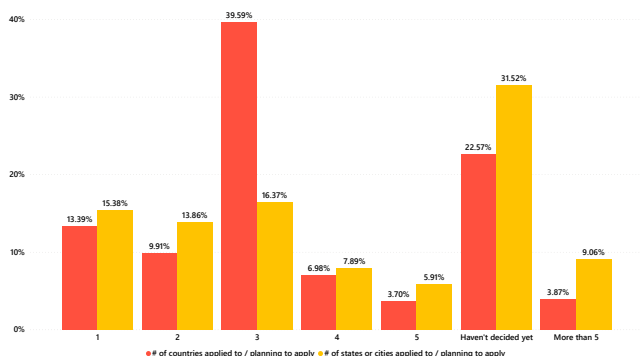


Among those who indicated that they want to study in their home country, 31.52% of students had not yet decided on the number of states or cities to include in their shortlist. The distribution was as follows: 15.38% had one location, 13.86% had two, 16.37% had three, and 31.52% had not decided on the number of cities or states yet.

Similarly 39.59% of respondents indicated having three countries on their application shortlist, making it the most common choice. A considerable percentage [22.57%] reported not having decided on the number of countries yet. Through this data, it is interesting to observe that those who are applying outside their home country have given necessary importance and thought to the number of locations they wish to apply, as compared to those who are applying to their home country. More than 21.71% of respondents have applied or intend to apply to more than five universities. A considerable portion [41.47%] reported not having decided on the number of universities yet, This is a concerning factor as not paying attention to number of applications adds to the workload of the students, additional expenses in the process and importantly the potential of compromise in the quality of the applications.

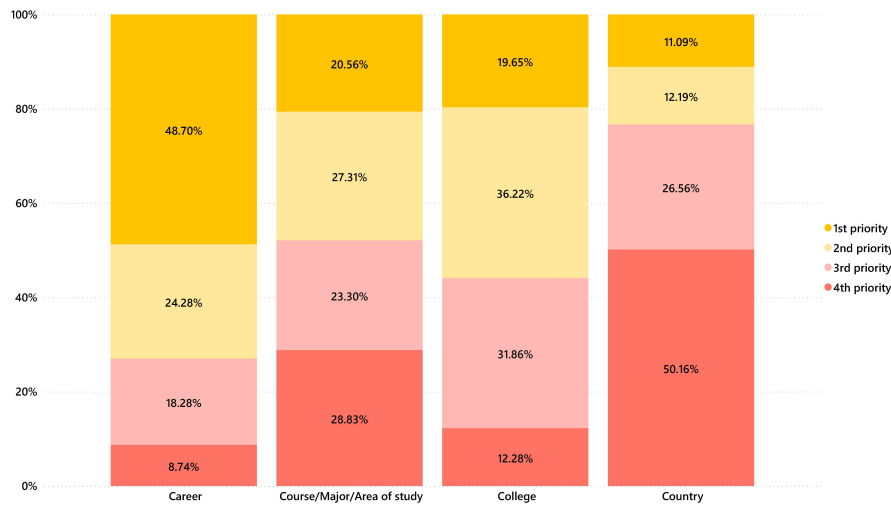
**Application statistics if opted to attend college/university option (Grade 11 and 12)**

**Number of intended applications if opted to attend college/university option (Grade 11 and 12)**



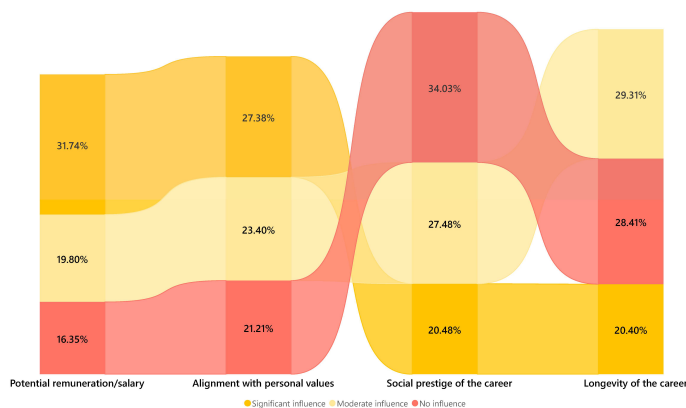
**Prioritization of Factors in Higher Education Choices:** The most prioritized factor among respondents was career prospects with a cumulative priority rating of 3.13, [on a scale of 1-4] followed by the college reputation [2.63] and course/major/area of study [2.40]. The country of study was prioritized the least [1.84] among the given factors. In comparison with the data collected in 2021 for the same question, students have retained the same priority within these four factors with similar rating levels as well. With the rapid advent of artificial intelligence and consequently altering multiple careers going forward, still prioritizing careers beckons important discussions if this would remain to be the best approach.

**Student preference among 4C options for future plans in percentage**

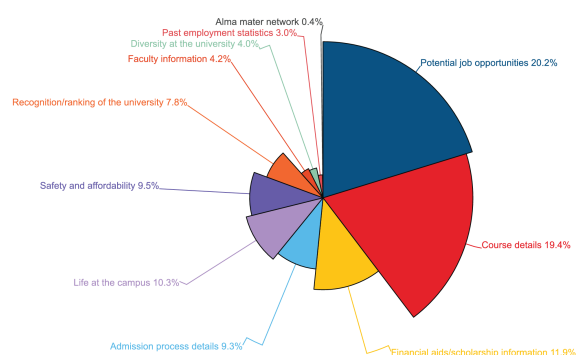


Remuneration/salary [59.84%] and alignment with personal values [51.61%] were identified as significant influences on career choices. Factors such as social prestige [38.61%] and longevity of the career [38.46%] also had substantial influences. This statistic is in alignment with last year’s study where all stakeholders unanimously agreed that financial outcomes of the program, or more so of the career, ranked highest among the various considerations in the decision-making process.

**2023 - Percentage distribution of the influence of different factors on students in career planning**



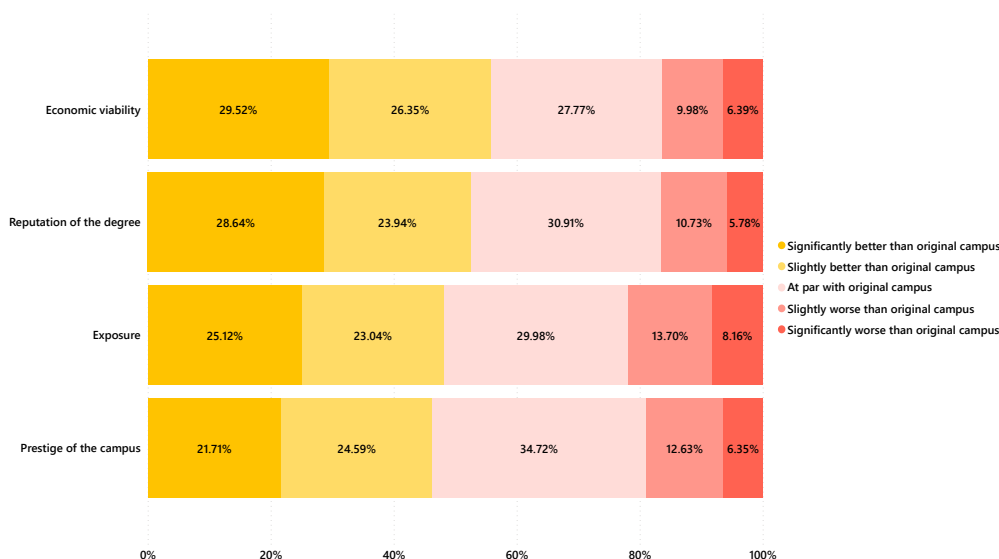
**2022 - Influence of different factors on students in career planning**





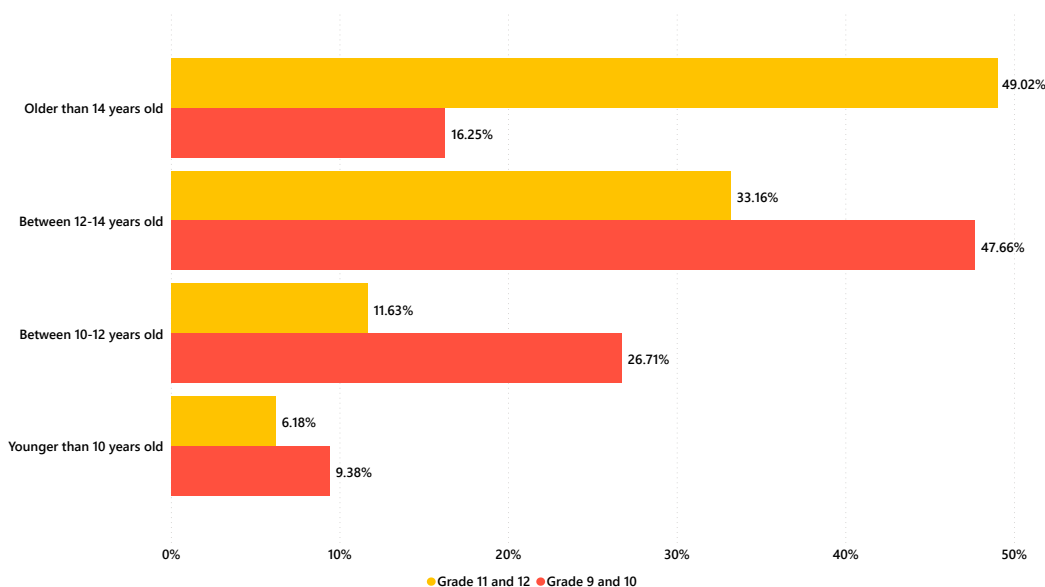
Students considered satellite campuses to be at par with or slightly better than the original/flagship campuses in terms of prestige, reputation, exposure, and economic viability. This response clearly indicates both the readiness and scope for universities to consider expanding operations.

**Perception of satellite campuses of international universities among students**



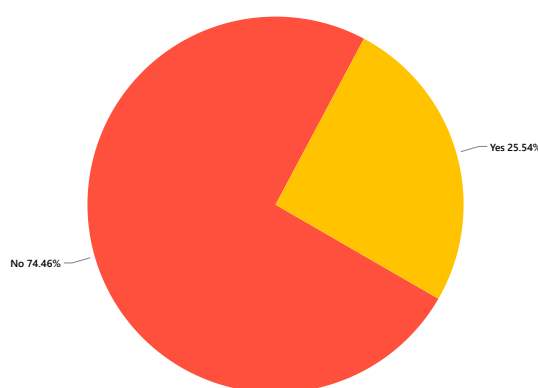
**Age of First Discussions about Higher Education or Career Aspirations:** The cumulative analysis of grade 9 to 12, it is observed that the majority of respondents [42.16%] engaged in discussions between the ages of 12-14, indicating early considerations for future education and careers. This also coincides with the age bracket where students are required to make important decisions about identity consolidation<sup>7</sup>, curriculum choices, subject choices, and preparation for entrance exams. A significant percentage [20.99%] initiated discussions during the ages of 10-12, which is encouraging to see as an early start on the process of decision making.

**Age distribution for the first conversation regarding career choices split gradewise**



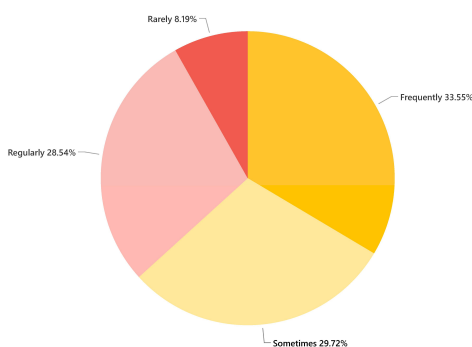
**Gender Identity and Decision-making:** According to a recent study undertaken by UNESCO<sup>8</sup>, between the time period of 2000 to 2018, male enrollment increased from 19% to 36%, while female enrollment went from 19% to 41%, making them the main beneficiaries of increased access to tertiary education worldwide. The majority of students in the 2023 Student Quest Survey (74.46%) stated that their gender identity did not influence their options and choices. However, among the remaining 25.54%, the overwhelming majority of respondents stated that they feel influenced by their peers, teachers and family members into careers that are typically associated with specific genders like engineering and sports for males and nursing, medicine, and teaching for females. Evidence for this was additionally observed at a different question in the survey, where among grade 9 and grade 10 students, 52.88% male students indicated inclination toward science-focused subjects as compared to only 46.14% female students. Similarly, 32.38% female students showed an inclination toward humanities-focused subjects as compared to only 26.13% male students.

**Influence of gender identity on college/career planning among students**

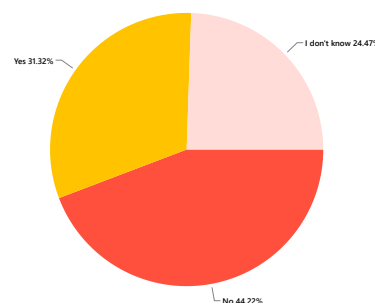


**Parental Involvement in Career and College Choices:** Results show that parents' knowledge strongly predicts educational success<sup>9</sup>, even after considering factors like parents' education, socio-demographic characteristics, and demonstrated ability. The survey revealed that parents frequently [33.55%] or regularly [28.54%] discuss career and college choices with their children. Students were given a choice between the options of “regularly,” “frequently,” “sometimes,” and “rarely” — with the “regularly” option indicating a higher frequency of discussions compared to “frequently.” Only 31.32% of students reported that their parents have met the counselor or teacher and discussed their college/career options.

**Frequency of college/career option discussions between students and parents**

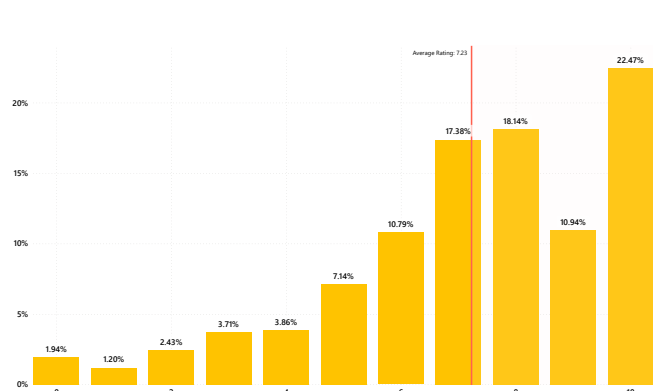


**Students responses to whether their parents have spoken to their counselors/teachers about college/career planning**

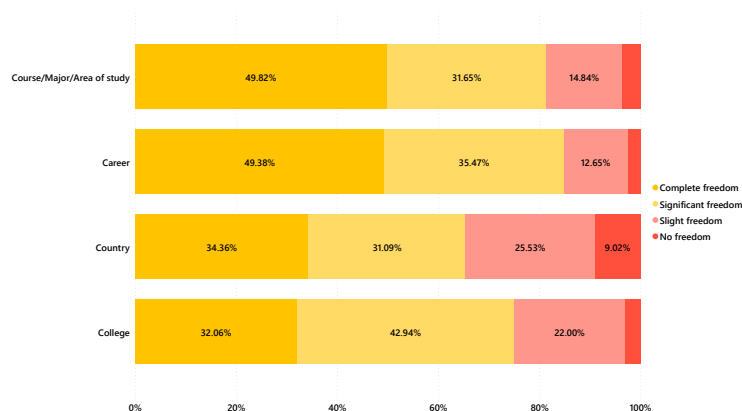


Regardless of the frequency of discussions, students reported a significantly high average rating of 7.23 (on a scale of 1-10) regarding their parents being involved in the decision-making process. Students reported varying degrees of freedom in decision-making, with the highest level of freedom experienced in choosing their career (84.85% indicating significant or complete freedom) and course/area of major (81.47% indicating significant or complete freedom). They, however, indicated that the parents are less inclined toward giving them as much freedom when it comes to decisions about the college or country, which most probably is a factor of financial viability and lack of awareness as corroborated through other questions in the student and parent survey.

**Level of parental involvement in decision-making process, as rated by students**

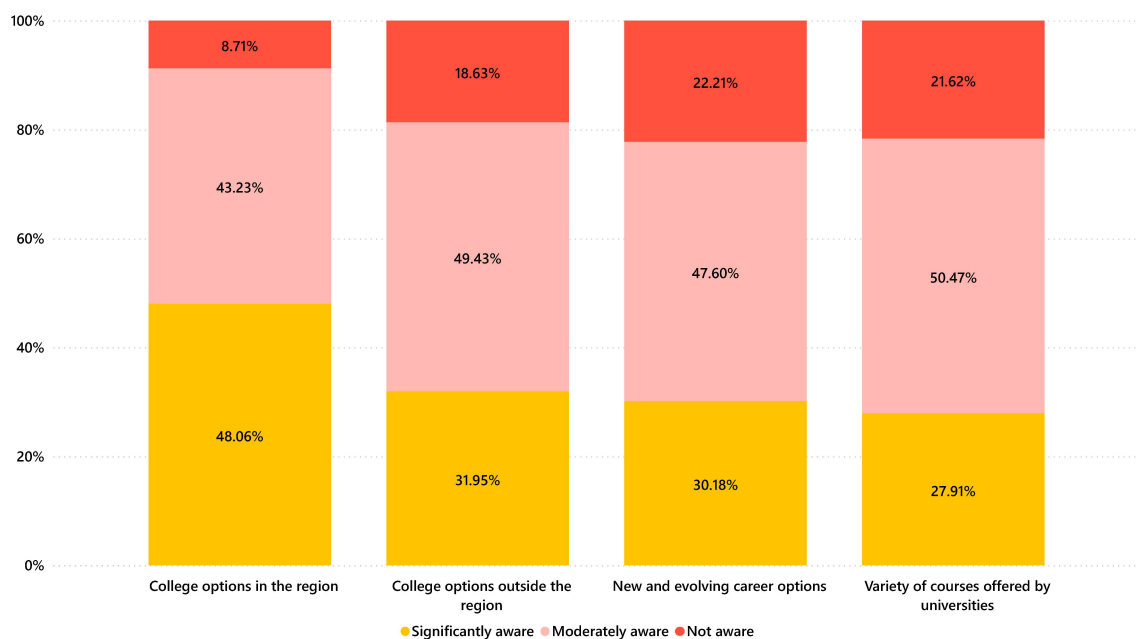


**Level of freedom extended by parents to students in choosing aspects of their educational pathway**



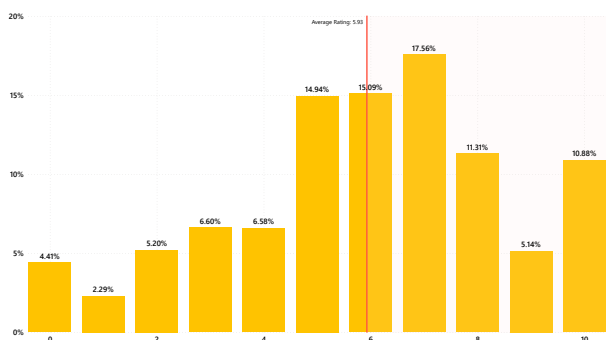
Though parents seem to exercise stronger influence on college and country, their awareness levels remained in the category of “significantly aware” about college options in the region (48.06%) and “moderately aware” outside the region (31.95%). This lack of awareness comes in the way of giving freedom to students for their college choices. A majority of students indicated that their parents weren’t significantly aware of the variety of courses offered by universities (72.09%) and/or of new and evolving career options (69.81%).

**Parental awareness regarding various information pieces, as responded by students**

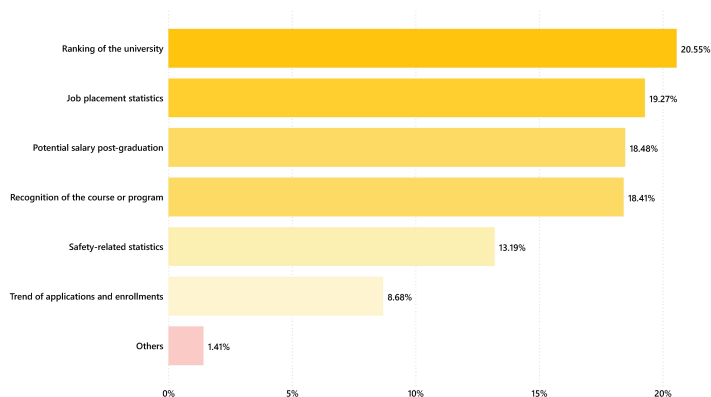


**Prominence of Data and Intuition in Decision-Making:** Approximately 60% respondents indicated that they put prominence on data or statistics-focused decision-making as compared to intuition or opinions. When seeking data or statistics, respondents indicated ranking of the university (71.13%), job placement statistics (66.70%), and potential salary post-graduation (63.94%), as the most important factors. These responses showcase that the students are inclined toward statistics that are outcome-based, rather than those which indicate student well-being, satisfaction, skills needed, or challenges in an industry or specific profession. This response further strengthens the observation that financial prospects have been triumphing over other factors when it comes to making choices about career and/or colleges.

**The prominence given to data/statistics versus opinion/intuition in the decision-making process**

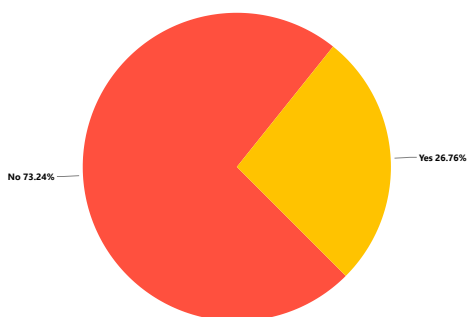


**Percentage distribution of the types of data/statistics to support college/career decisions**

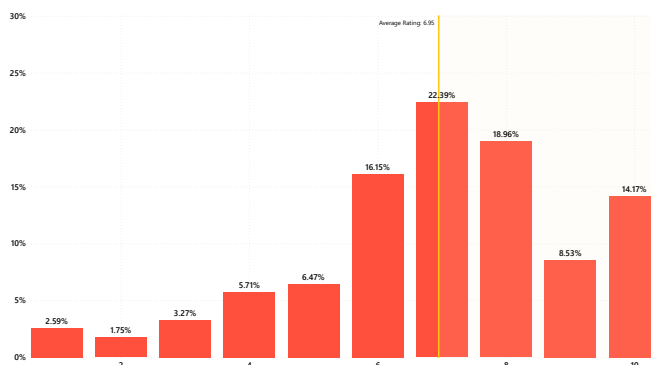


**Use of Psychometric Analysis:** Only 26.76% of respondents reported using psychometric analysis to identify optimal career or college options, while the majority (73.24%) had not used it. Among those who took the psychometric analysis, more than 80% found it helpful — rating the helpfulness of the test analysis greater than 5 on a scale of 1-10, with a high average of 6.95.

**Percentage of students using psychometric analysis to identify optimal career choices**

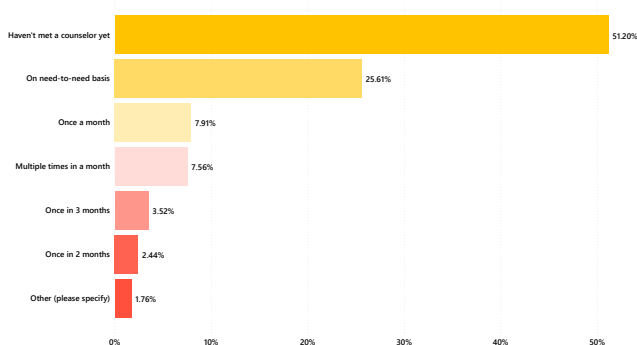


**Usefulness of psychometric analysis among the students who have used them**

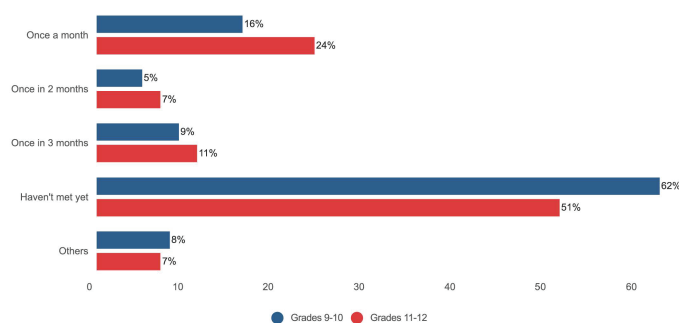


**Interactions with Career/College Counselors:** Studies have explored the necessity of incorporating regular counseling conversations with students, in order to facilitate better support for students and act as empowering institutional agents<sup>10</sup>. Expanding on the premise, the frequency of meeting with career/college counselors was explored. It varied in sync with last year’s reportage in the Student Quest Survey 2022, with the largest proportion [51.20%] indicating that they hadn’t met a counselor yet and only 7.91% of the students meeting the counselor at least once in a month. This is concerning to observe even though the presence of counselors in schools is steadily on the rise. Hence, it needs to be seen if these students have access to a counselor or not, thus allowing us to understand if it is a matter of access or choice. The silver lining of this observation, however, is that the proportion of grade 11 and 12 students who haven’t met counselors has reduced considerably to 40.52% this year from 51% in 2022.

**Actual frequency of interactions between students [cumulative of all grade levels from 9 - 12 ] and college/career counselors, as reported by students in 2023**

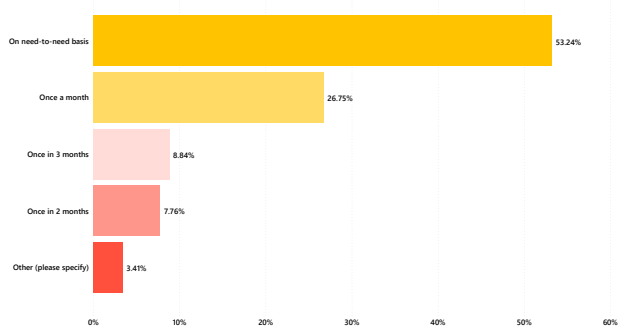


**Actual frequency of interactions between students and college/career counselors, as reported by students in 2022**

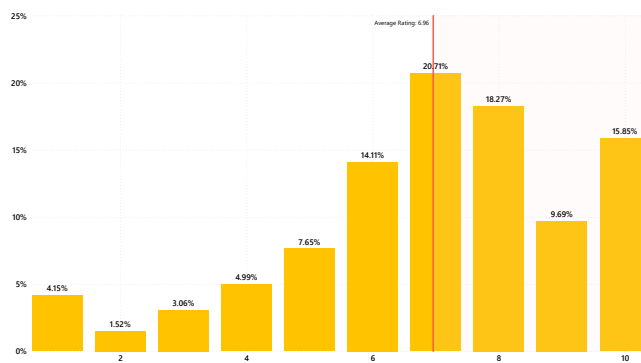


Among those who had met counselors, the preferred frequency of meetings was “need-to-need basis” [53.24%] and once a month [26.75%]. These findings suggest that individuals value flexibility in their counseling arrangements, with the need for regular meetings varying depending on their specific circumstances. Among those who have had conversations with counselors, more than 86% rated the usefulness of their conversations to be moderately or significantly useful. This indicates a consistently positive perception and impact over the years. It was, however, surprising to observe that 44.22% of students haven’t spoken to their counselors about college or career choices, as other statistics consolidate the strong influence and role the parents play but the lack of communication and consultation with counselors is a big missed opportunity in the process.

**Preferred frequency of interactions between students and college/career counselors, as reported by students**

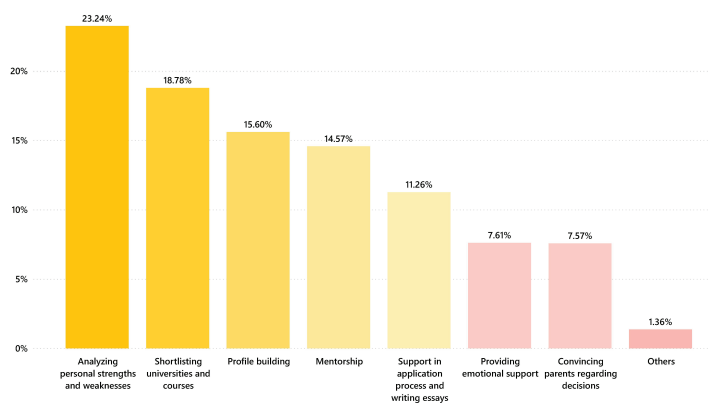


**The usefulness of conversations with college/career counselors, according to students**

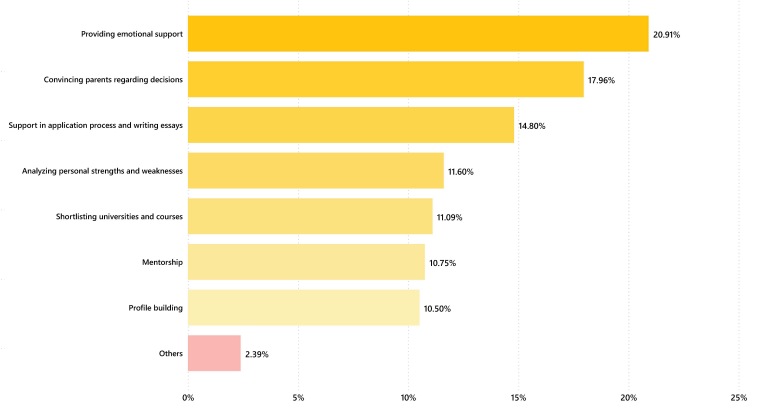


The majority of students indicated that they prioritize counselor support for identifying personal strength and weakness analysis, similar to their indication in last year’s survey. This further supports students’ alignment with personal values as an important factor, which comes as no surprise, and links closely to analyzing strengths and weaknesses through counselor support. The areas where counselors were considered most helpful were analyzing personal strengths and weaknesses (61.97%), shortlisting universities and courses (50.08%), and profile building (41.59%), concurring with the results from last year. Providing emotional support (50.63%) and convincing parents regarding decisions (43.48%) were considered the least helpful areas — indicating an increasing trend of disagreement between parents and students and its stressful impact, and the inability of counselors to extend emotional support to be able to manage conflicts, choices and navigate more smoothly. More constructively, these should inform organizations, stakeholders, and policy makers of these as areas of training for counselors-managing the emotional support and stress among students, and conflict resolution or negotiation strategies.

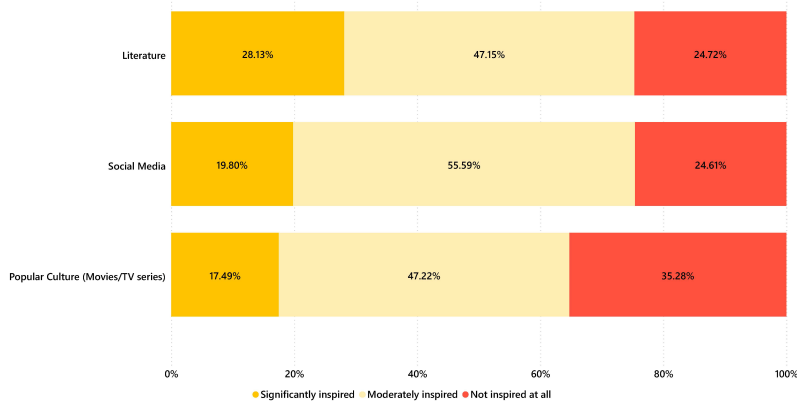
**Distribution of percentage for most helpful areas of counselor support, according to students**



**Distribution of percentage of the least helpful areas of counselor support, according to students**



Sources of inspiration for choices for students include social media [55.59%] of respondents, followed by popular culture [47.22%] and literature [47.15%].



**Level of inspiration gathered by students from different sources regarding college/career choices**

**Support for Entrepreneurial Journey:** The majority of students (71.40%) reported being supported by an enabling environment to pursue their entrepreneurial interests. Regarding exposure to multiple academic subjects or related activities, 45.34% responded positively, 22.32% had not received adequate exposure, while 32.34% indicated that they weren’t sure of the effect of the environment.

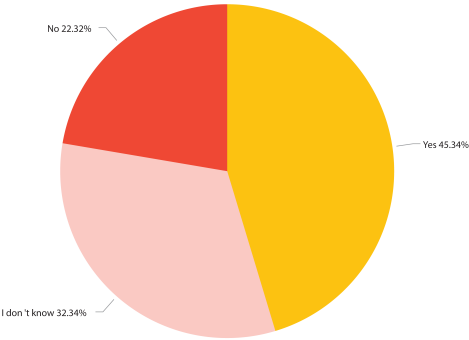
More than half of the respondents (52.48%) claimed they were able to think, plan, and deliver multidisciplinary solutions for identified problems — which is a critical skill to excel in entrepreneurial endeavors. More importantly, over 38% of students indicated that they weren’t sure or lacked awareness about their own ability in this regard. Though students may be able to think and plan, execution and simulations need to be created to test the waters. This highlights an essential need to upskill students toward soft skills essential in an entrepreneurial journey, which can be a key focus area of the school.

School and teachers received an average influence score of 6.63, indicating a moderate level of influence on students' pursuit of ventures/ideas. Parents and personal networks were attributed a higher average credit score of 7.93, indicating significant support in entrepreneurial endeavors.

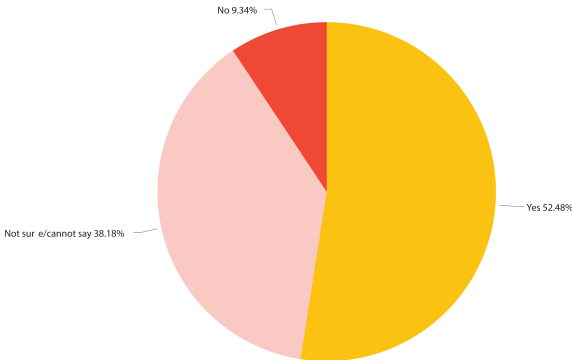
**Students supported by an enabling environment for entrepreneurship**



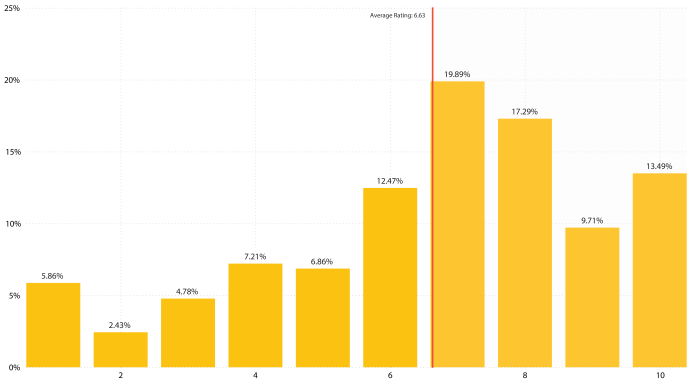
**Students experiencing adequate exposure to academic subjects or activities to support entrepreneurial interests**



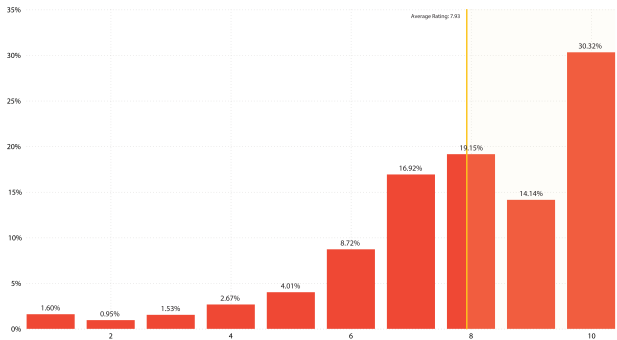
**Percentage of students that are able to use a multidisciplinary problem-solving approach**



**Attribution of credit to school and teachers for pursuing entrepreneurial venture/idea**



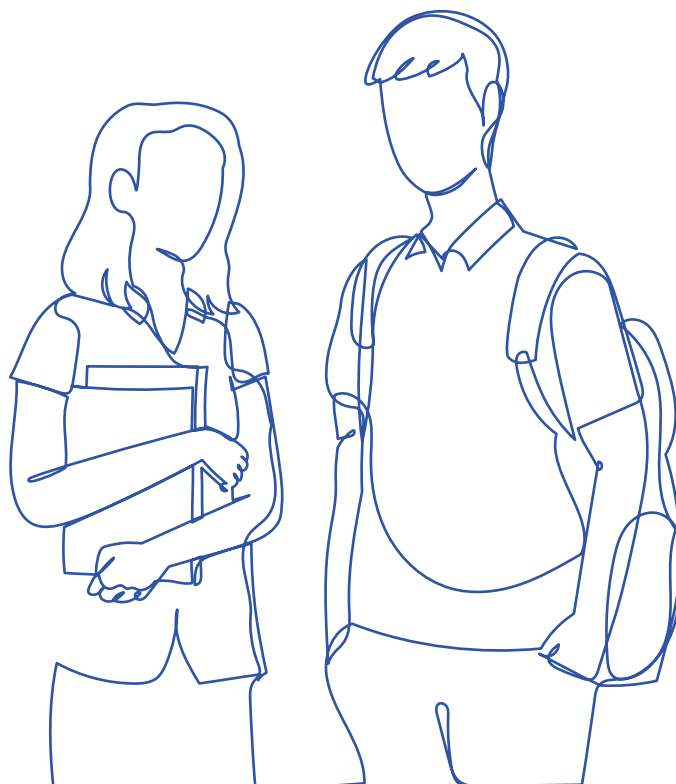
**Attribution of credit to parents for pursuing entrepreneurial venture/idea**





The section provides valuable insights into the demographics, education preferences, career aspirations, and decision-making processes of students. It highlights the importance of discussions about higher education and careers, the influence of factors such as remuneration and personal values on career choices, and the role of parents and counselors in the decision-making process. The survey also sheds light on the preference of data-driven decision-making and the low usage of psychometric analysis. Furthermore, it emphasizes the interest in profile building for college applications and the support and enabling environment for entrepreneurial journeys. These findings can inform educational institutions, counselors, and parents in effectively guiding students in their academic and career pathways with reasonable ideas of trends, choices, and mindset — ultimately contributing to their overall success and satisfaction.

In an effort to make better sense of the survey observations, a focus group discussion was conducted among a subset of counselors who participated in the survey. The discussion on study destination preferences among students and parents revealed several factors influencing decision-making. These include immigration and exposure to a global cohort, which can broaden students' perspectives on career possibilities. Additionally, concerns about student security and safety may influence the choice of study destinations. Resource constraints and parental preferences for traditional career paths can also impact the selection of study destinations. Attention or planning in terms of regions or even the number of applications is missing, which interferes with the optimization of options within the country. Considering these factors and supporting students from different backgrounds can help them navigate the process of choosing suitable study destinations. It was also highlighted by the participating counselors that students are more certain about applying abroad due to parental supervision and potential higher costs involved. This suggests that parental influence, aspirations for international education, and the perceived benefits associated with studying abroad can drive students' decisions in this regard. Understanding these dynamics can help educators and counselors create a curriculum in counseling which focuses on the impact of region on university/campus life and opportunities thereafter, with examples both from within and outside the country, encouraging the conversation around the number of applications increasing the workload on students.



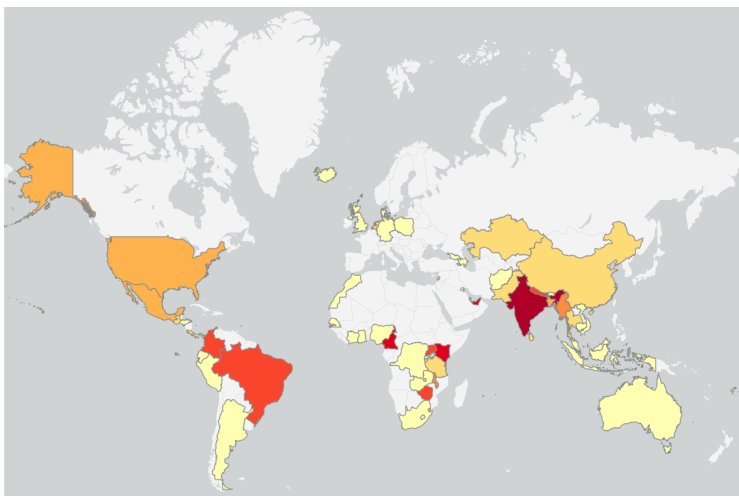
# Counselor Survey

This section provides valuable insights into the crucial role of career and college counselors in guiding and supporting high school students. The data presented was collected from a survey conducted of 793 high school counselors from various countries, representing a diverse range of high school. The aim is to shed light on the challenges and opportunities faced by counselors in their profession and provide a deeper understanding of the counseling process.

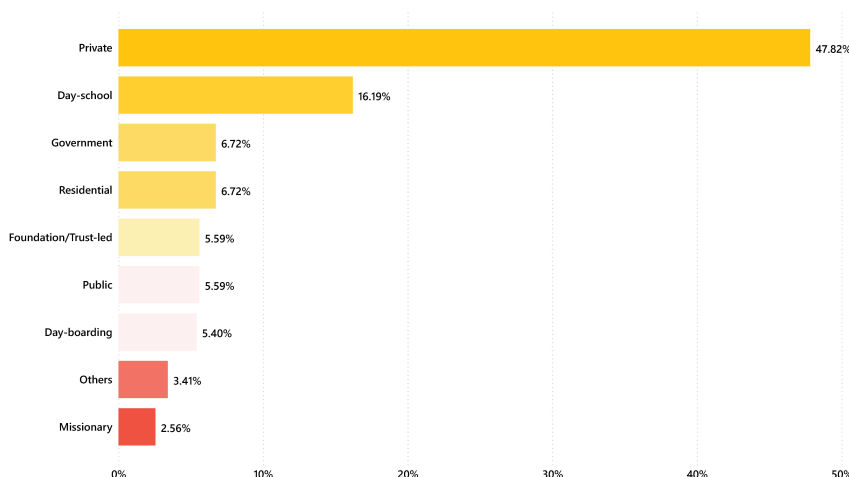
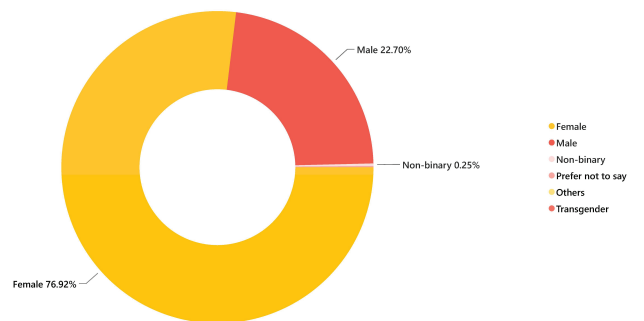
**Demographics:** The survey gathered responses from a diverse group of counselors across different countries. The majority of respondents hail from India [65.57%], followed by Latin America [3.02%], the United Arab Emirates [2.65%], Kenya [2.40%], Cameroon [2.27%], and the Maldives [2.14%]. This wide representation of countries ensures a diverse perspective on college and career counseling practices. The survey respondents predominantly identify as female [76.92%], with males accounting for 22.70% of the sample set. These figures highlight the higher representation of female counselors in the profession.

The survey captured insights from counselors working in a variety of academic institutions. The majority of respondents represent private academic institutions [63.68%], followed by day-schools [21.56%]. This distribution suggests that counseling is predominantly available in private schools.

**Geographical distribution of the respondents for the counselor survey**



**Gender distribution of the respondents for the counselor survey**

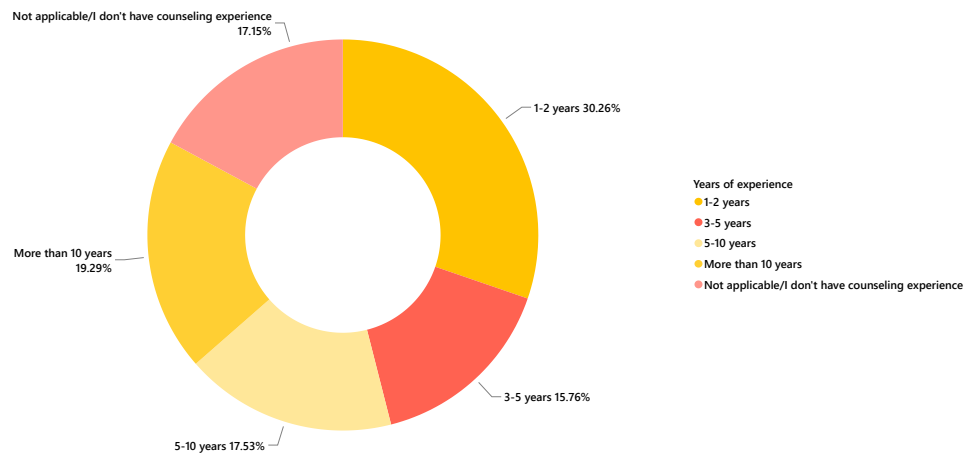


**Types of schools represented in the counselor survey**

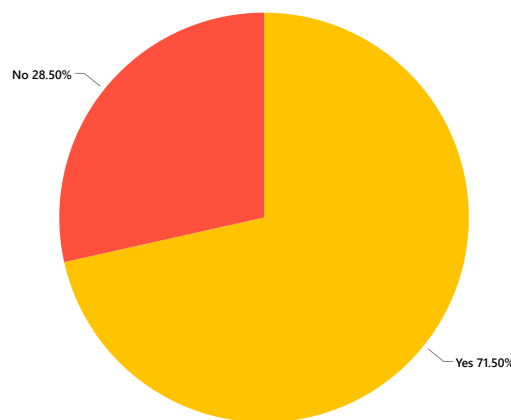
**Experience and Additional Roles:** The survey respondents exhibit varying levels of experience, with a notable proportion [47.41%] having less than 3 years of experience in the field, indicating growth of the community of counselors, and only 19.29% with professional experience of more than 10 years. This indicates both that the respondents to the survey are new to this area of work and the overall field is in it's nascent stage.

Beyond their primary role as career and/or college counselors, a significant number of respondents (71.50%) also hold additional responsibilities, with more than 80% among these holding either teaching or administrative roles within the schooling system. This finding brings critical attention to the profession of counseling, building it as a core function with dedicated experts and resources and also compromises the student-to-counselor ratio by further splitting the time of the counselor in other responsibilities.

**Distribution of experience levels among the counselors**



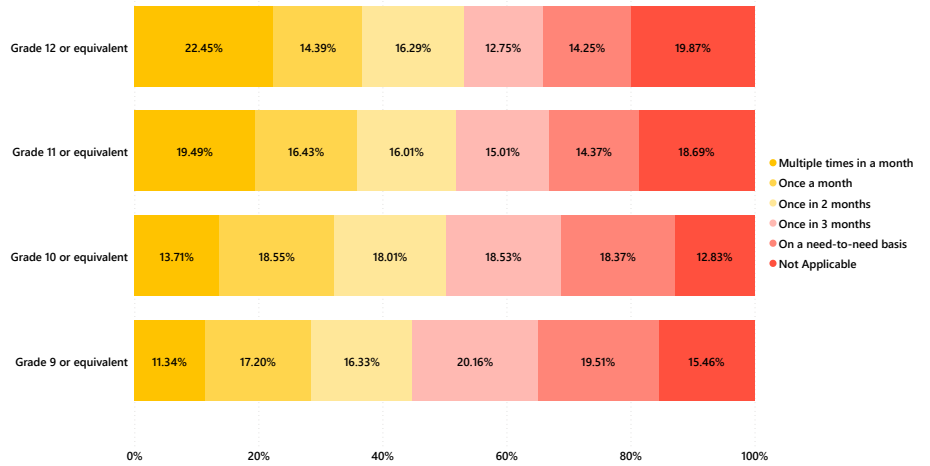
**Percentage of counselors with additional responsibilities at schools**



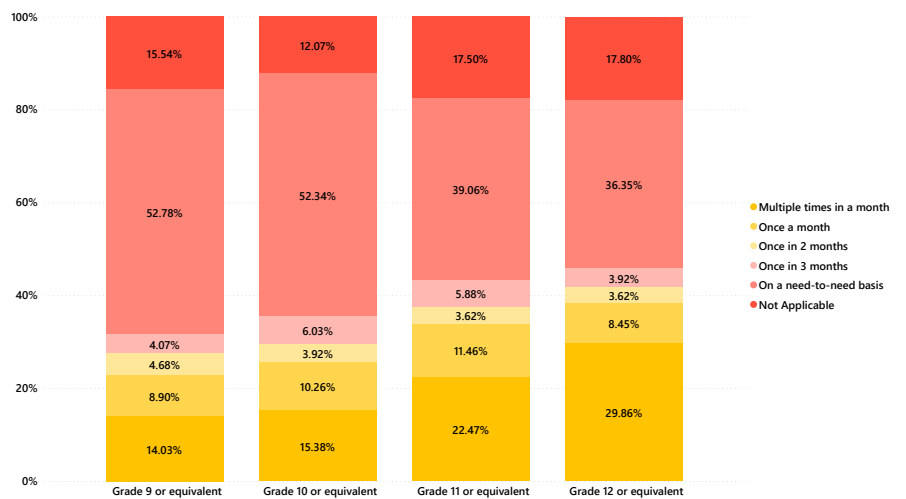
**Frequency of counseling conversations:** The survey explored the frequency of group counseling conversations across different grade levels. Group counseling format begins actively in grade 9, with counselors reporting multiple group sessions per month. Group sessions lay the foundation for creating awareness, defining stages or steps to be taken, initiating students toward the path of decision-making and providing information which can then be further explored to make personal decisions and choices. The survey also examined the frequency of one-on-one counseling conversations across different grade levels. Grade 12 exhibited the highest engagement, with 29.86% of counselors indicating that sessions occur multiple times in a month. Individual counseling allows counselors to provide tailored and time sensitive guidance required at this stage, establish strong relationships with students, address personal concerns, facilitating their growth and confidence in the decision-making process.

It was encouraging to observe that with respect to both one-on-one and group counseling sessions, the counselors methodically increased the frequency of meetings as students approached closer to making the decision at the end of their high school.

**Frequency of group counseling conversations conducted with students**



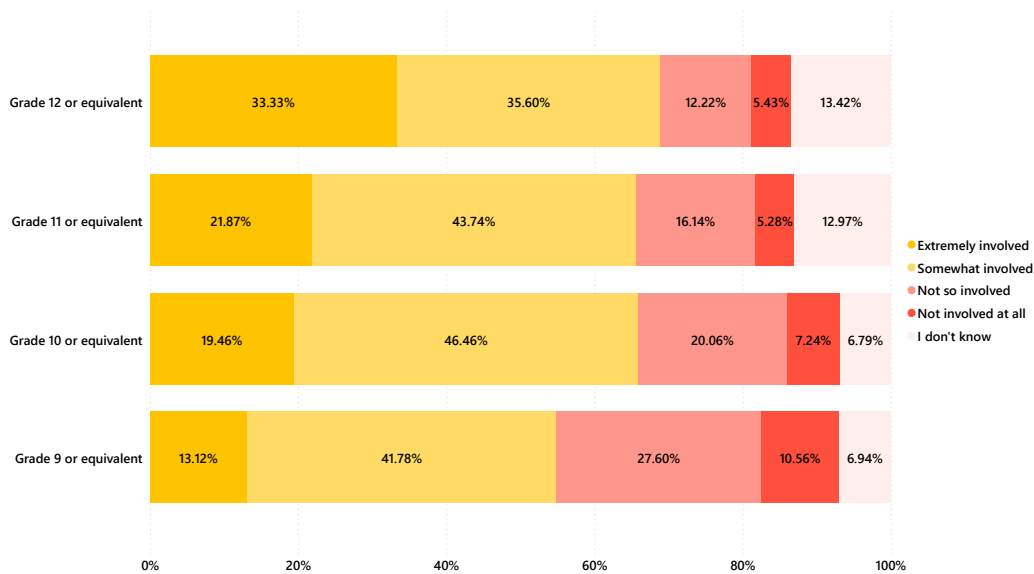
**Frequency of one-on-one counseling conversations conducted with students**



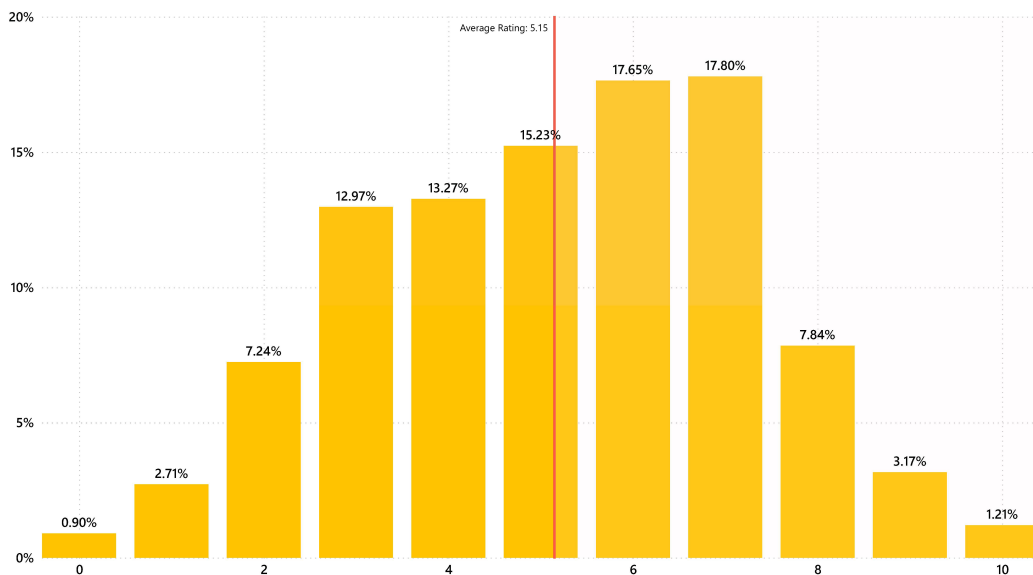
**Parent Involvement:** The survey investigated the extent of parental involvement in counseling conversations across different grade levels of students, as reported by the counselors. Grade 12 exhibited the highest level of parental involvement, with 33.33% of counselors reporting highly significant involvement of parents, and the percentages increasing steadily from grade 9 to grade 12. The degree of parental involvement underscores the importance of collaboration between counselors and parents in supporting students' career decisions and ensuring a holistic approach to their educational journey.

According to counselors' responses, parents' awareness of educational and career opportunities was rated as moderately aware with 62.90% counselors indicating an awareness rating of 5 or less, and an average rating of 5.19 out of 10. This finding suggests that there is a need for increased efforts to educate parents about the diverse range of opportunities available to their children in the near future and the evolving landscape of higher education and the fast-changing world of work.

**Involvement of parents in counseling conversations, reported by counselors**



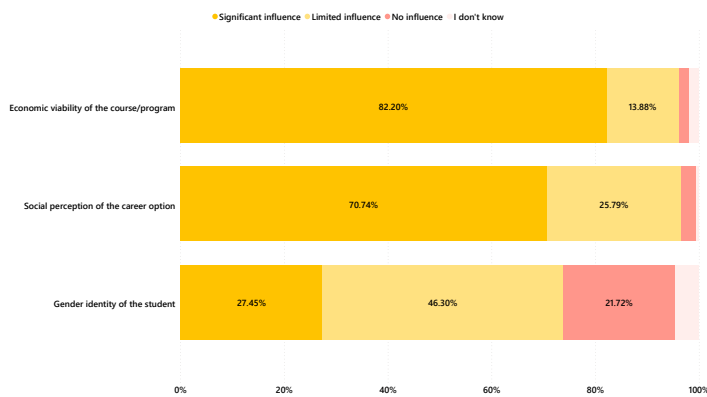
**Level of parental awareness regarding educational and career opportunities, according to parents**



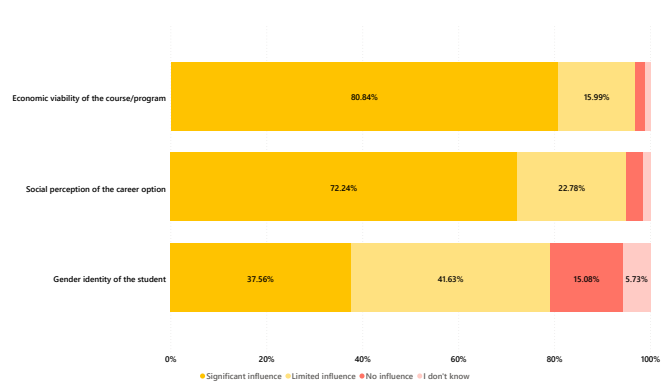
**Factors Influencing Student and Parent Choices:** According to the 96% of counselors, while considering career and higher education choices, students are strongly influenced by economic viability of the course or program and the social perception of the careers options followed by gender identity [73.75%].

This observation is in contrast to what students have self-reported, where 74.46% students don't believe that gender identity has a significant impact on career choices. One of the key reasons for this could be bias in self-reporting (social desirability), and students not being actively aware of gender identity's subconscious influence on their decision-making. With respect to the students' gender identity, the majority of counselors agreed that it influences parents' and students' decision-making (79.19% and 73.75% respectively). The focus group discussion also highlighted the role of gender in shaping career decisions. It is mentioned that girls often face concerns about the sustainability of certain careers, lifestyle induced by career choice with parental concern for safety in a new city/country. They also argued that gender stereotypes may be reinforced in certain economic groups, where the priority is economic mobility.

**Influence of various aspects on students in making career and higher education choices, according to counselors**

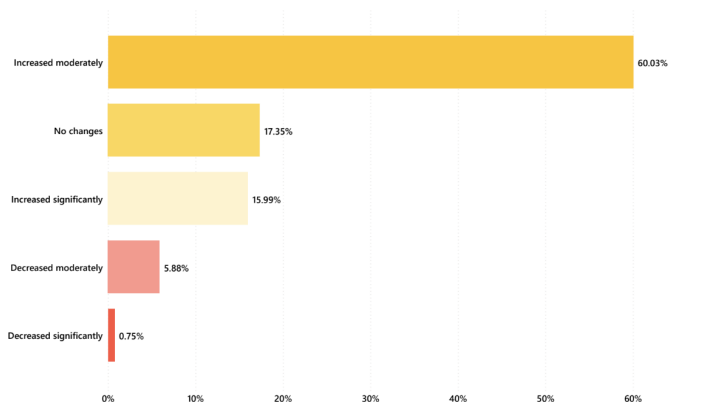


**Influence of various aspects on parents in making career and higher education choices, according to counselors**

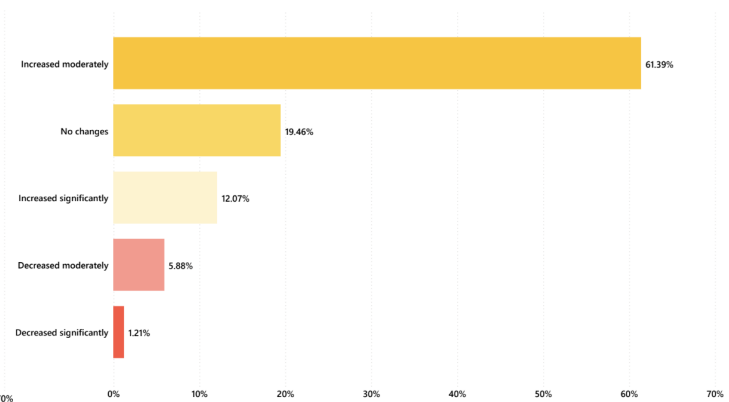


**Entrepreneurial Opportunities and Student Interest:** In the past year, according to the counselors surveyed, there has been a considerable increase (60.03%) in the number of high school students exploring entrepreneurial opportunities. This suggests a growing interest among students in dabbling entrepreneurship, and it shows alignment with their personal values as indicated in the survey. Similarly, student interest in non-traditional programs/courses has shown a significant increase (61.39%) over the past year. This indicates a willingness among students to explore alternative educational pathways beyond conventional options.

**The trend in students exploring entrepreneurial opportunities in last year, according to counselors**



**The trend in students' interest in non-traditional programs in last year, according to counselors**



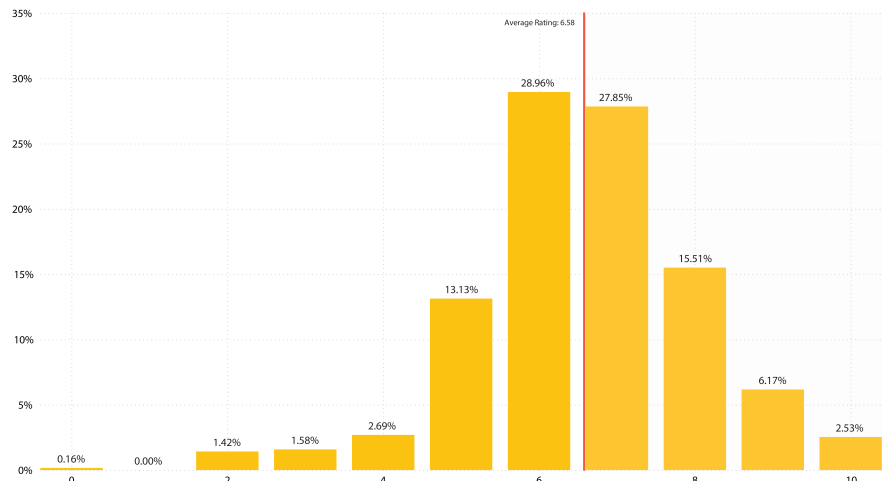
Below are some of the categories for non-traditional programs (along with their respective percentages) that students have preferred in recent years, according to surveyed counselors:

- Creative Arts and Design: 22%
- Hospitality and Tourism: 10%
- Health Sciences: 9%
- Education and Teaching: 7%
- Environmental and Sustainability Studies: 5%

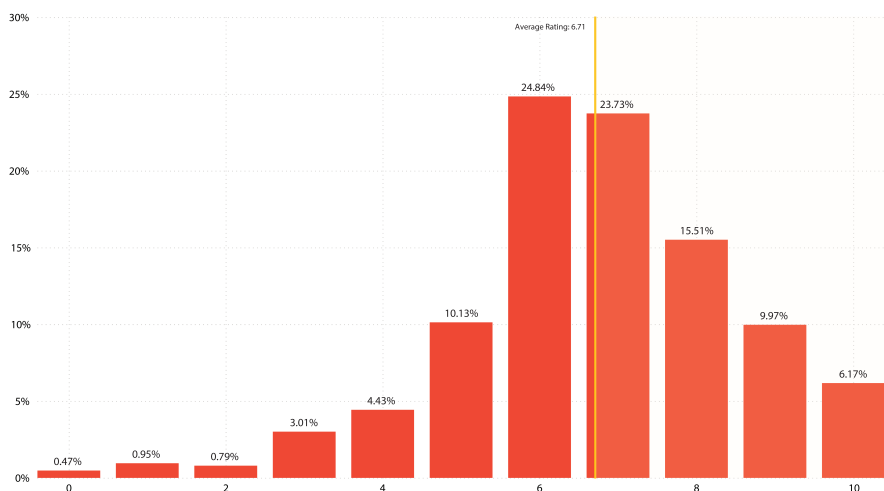
Counselors have observed an average rating of 6.58 (on a scale of 1-10) in terms of students' desires to initiate entrepreneurial ventures/activities. This demonstrates a significant level of interest and motivation among students to engage in entrepreneurial endeavors and problem-solving.

According to the surveyed counselors, schools have been moderately receptive (average rating of 6.71 on a scale of 1-10) to encourage innovation and entrepreneurship among students, indicating creation of a positive environment that fosters entrepreneurial thinking and provides support for student initiatives.

**The trend of students' desire to initiate entrepreneurial ventures as per counselors**



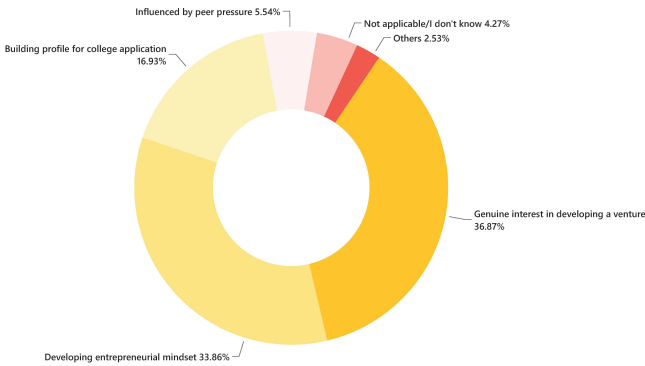
**Level of schools' receptiveness to encourage innovation and entrepreneurship among students**



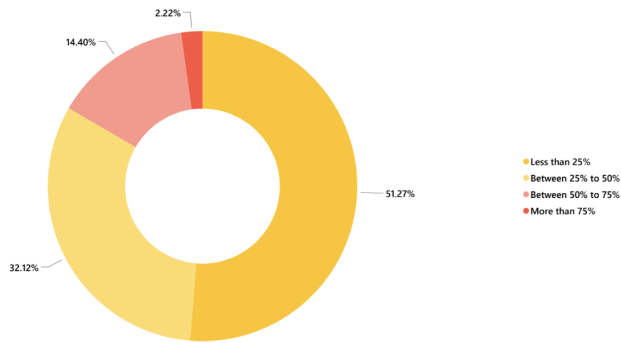


In counselors' reportage, students' motivations for pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities vary. The top three reasons identified are genuine interest in developing a venture (36.87%), developing an entrepreneurial mindset (33.86%), and building a profile for college applications (16.93%) — emphasizing that students do want to focus on developing their skills, testing the waters of entrepreneurship success/experience, and utilizing the same for their college application success. However, contrary to this observation, a majority of counselors (83.39%) indicated that less than 50% of the students actually end up continuing on their entrepreneurial path post high school. This questions the genuine interest or change in interest over time and possible lack of perseverance, failure of the ventures, or shifting priorities regarding career choices. Counselors also report that students have a moderate level of exposure (average rating of 6.37 on a scale of 1-10) to interdisciplinary learning. This suggests that students have opportunities to explore and integrate knowledge from diverse fields, promoting holistic development.

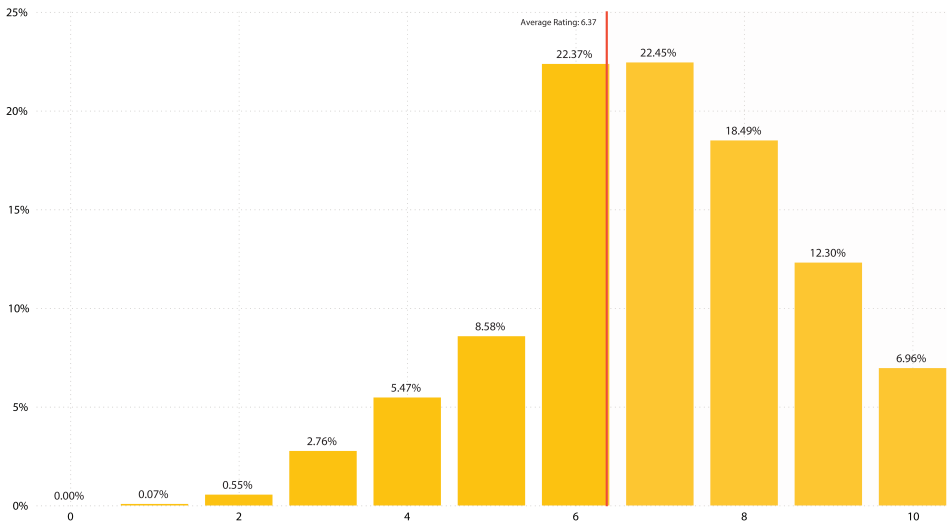
**Reasons why students opt for entrepreneurial opportunities, as reported by counselors**



**Percentage of students that continue their entrepreneurial journey post-school/college, according to counselors**

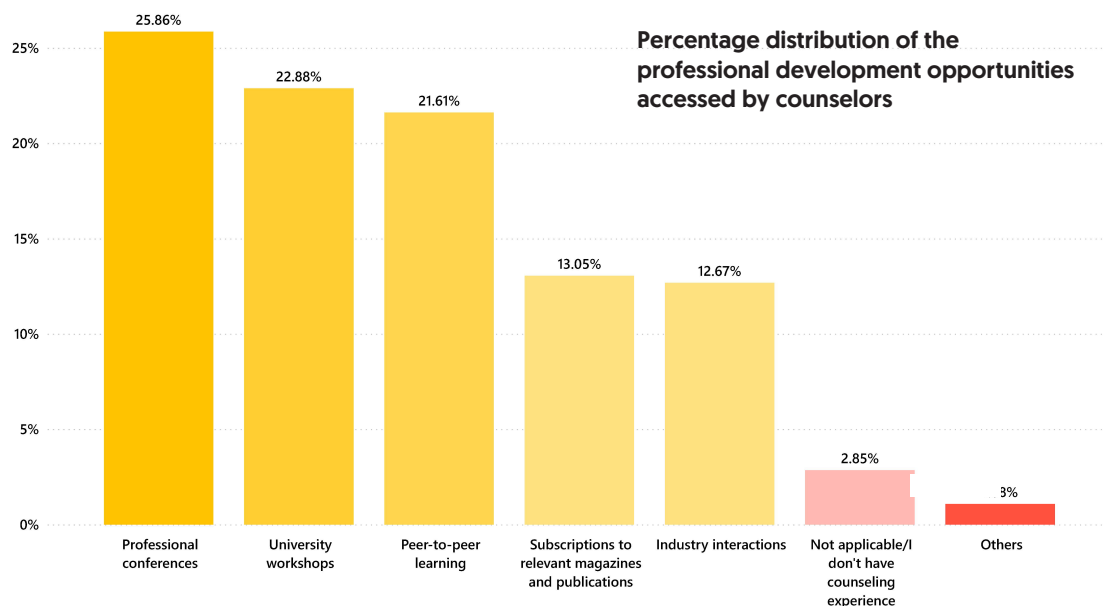
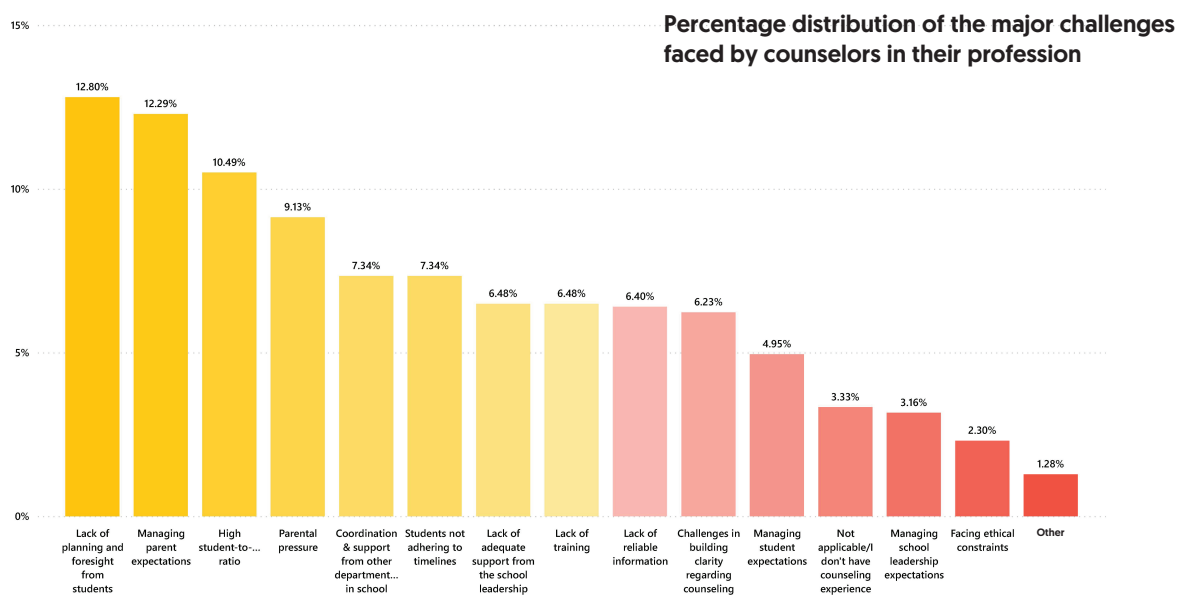


**Level of exposure among students regarding inter-disciplinary learning, as reported by counselors**



**Counseling as a Profession:** The transformed role of the school counselors shifts from viewing the student as the problem to addressing academic and institutional barriers within the school, which often impedes student success<sup>11</sup>. Top three challenges identified by counselors in the field are lack of planning and foresight from students [24.71%] and managing parent expectations [23.72%], and high student-to-counselor ratio [20.26%]. These challenges emphasize the importance of adequate resources, support, and effective communication to ensure quality counseling services. These findings are in complete unison with last year’s survey where similar challenges were highlighted by the surveyed counselors.

Counselors access various professional development opportunities to enhance their skills and stay updated. The most commonly utilized avenues include attending professional conferences [67.22%], engaging in peer-to-peer learning [56.18%], and participating in university workshops [59.47%]. These opportunities help counselors expand their knowledge base and network, enabling them to provide better guidance to students.



Looking at these data statistics and insights, it provides an overview of the state of college and career counseling in high schools, showcasing the diverse experiences and challenges faced by counselors worldwide. The findings emphasize the importance of counselor-student relationships, the need for conducive, parental involvement, and the significance of delivering personalized guidance to meet students' individual needs.

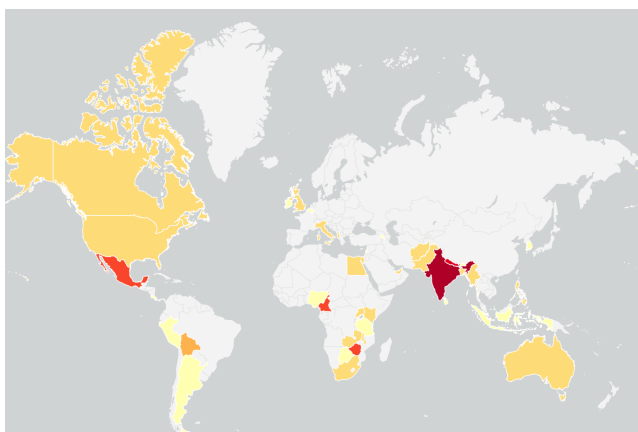


# Parent Survey

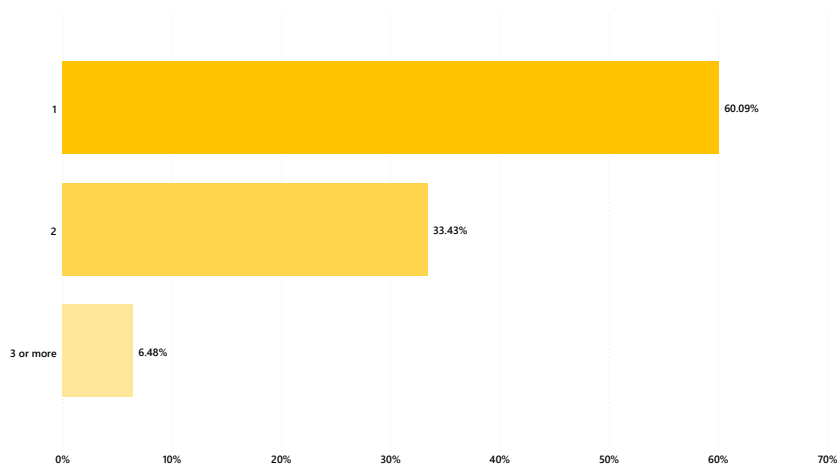
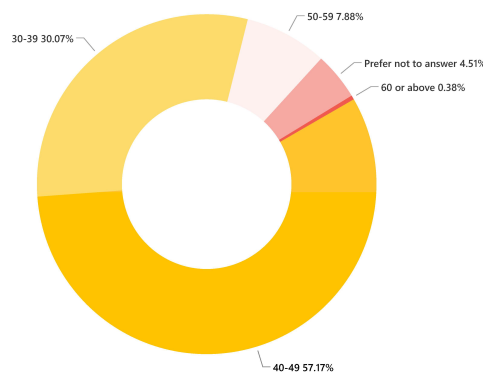
This section provides insights into the perspectives and behaviors of parents of high school students regarding their children's future education and career choices. The data collected from a survey includes information about parents' demographics, their perceptions, opinions, and various aspects related to career planning and higher education decision-making for their children.

**Demographics:** Among the respondents, 88.75% hailed from India and other countries with notable responses include Mauritius (2.14%), Maldives (2.08%), Nepal (1.61%), and Zimbabwe (0.98%). The majority of respondents belong to the age groups of 40-49 [57.17%] and 30-39 [30.07%], suggesting that parents in their thirties and forties are actively involved in their children's education and are eager to learn about options available in the current educational landscape. Most respondents [53.48%] have one child studying in grade 9 or above. The highest percentage of children are in grade 9 [28.84%] and grade 10 [26.66%], suggesting that parents' concerns about higher education and career choices begin early in high school. This agrees with the 2021 Student Quest report where it is observed that the influence and involvement of parents reduces from grades 9/10 [35%] to grades 11/12 [27%]. The survey indicates a nearly equal distribution of male [49.67%] and female [48.69%] students. Only 31.67% of parents reported that their child attempted the IC3 Institute Student Quest Survey, indicating room for increased participation in career exploration initiatives.

**Geographical distribution of the respondents for the parent survey**

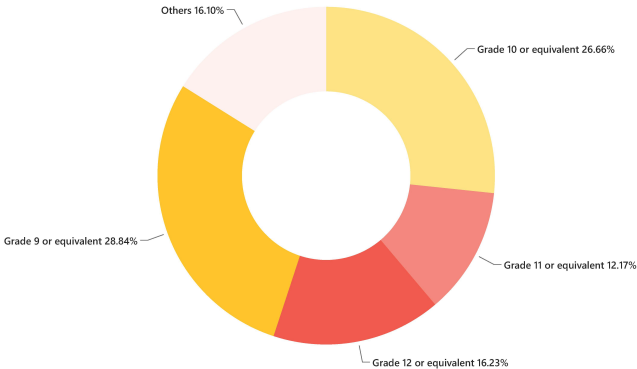


**Age distribution of the respondents for the parent survey**

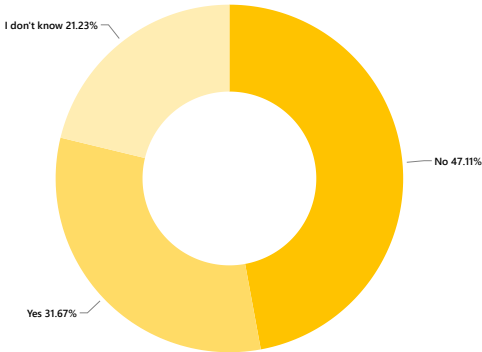


**Number of children that respondents have in grade 9 or above**

**Grade distribution of the children that respondents have**

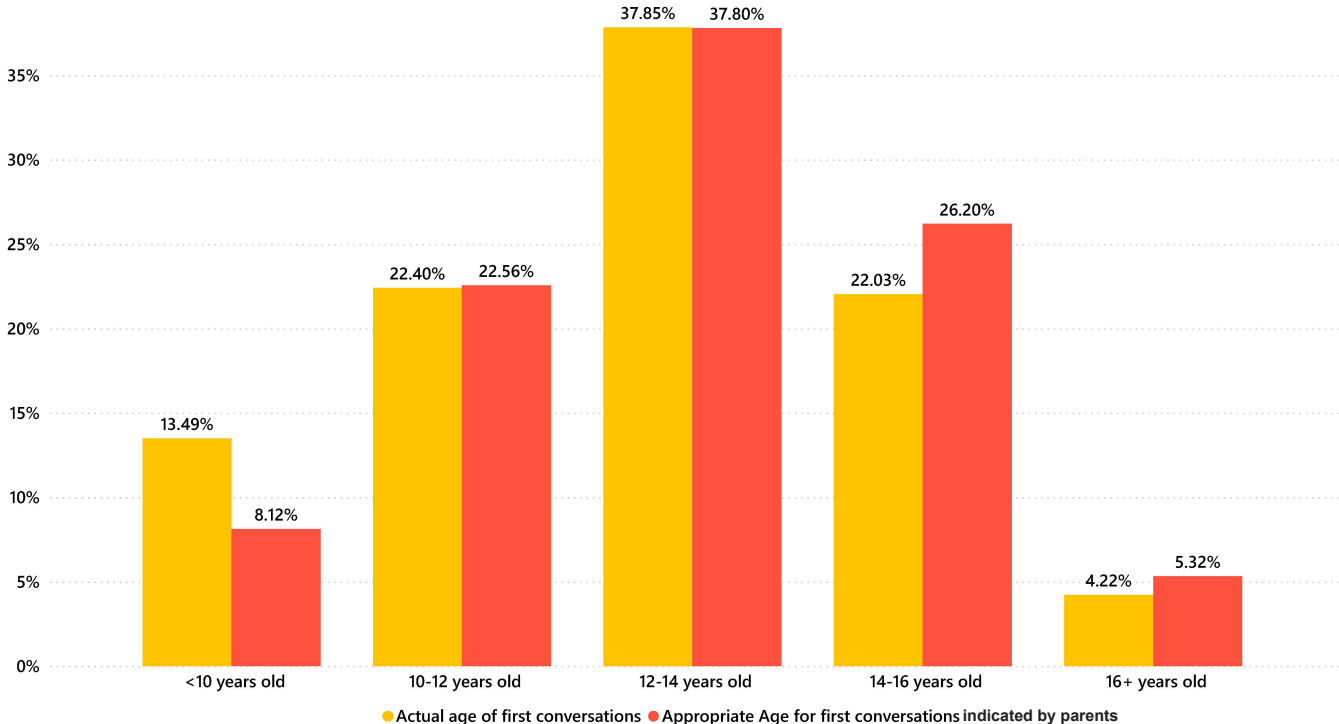


**Percentage of parents where the children also attempted the student survey**



**Parental Involvement in Career Discussions:** School counselors who are familiar with how parenting affects students' academic performances are best positioned to help students' success<sup>13</sup>. The majority of parents engaged in discussions about higher education or career aspirations when their children were between 12 and 14 years old [37.85%], emphasizing the importance of early conversations, as this is the age group when subject choices for final years of schooling are made and often have direct bearing on choice of higher education.

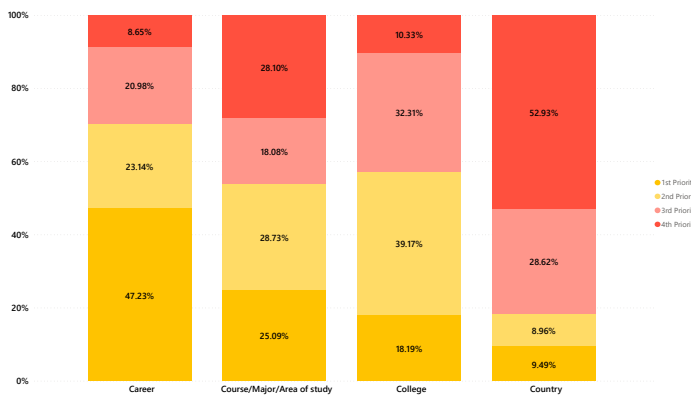
**Age distribution for the first conversation regarding career choices, according to parents**



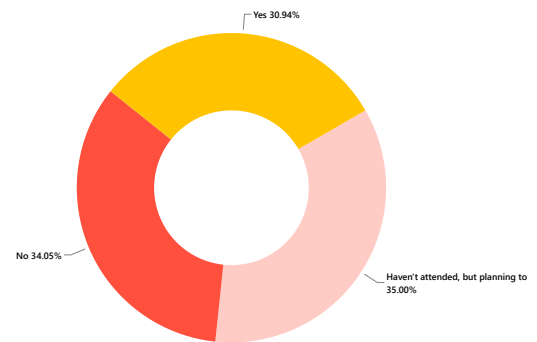
Among essential decision-influencing factors, on a scale of 1-4 parents gave higher priority to career [3.10], followed by college [2.65], course/major/area of study [2.50], and country [1.75]. This suggests that parents value future employability when considering higher education options, which aligns with students' preferences on the same question.

30.94% of parents attend information sessions organized by universities with their child. This indicates a need for increased awareness and participation in such events. The most useful information for parents in university sessions is related to course/academic program details [55.72%], potential job opportunities [46.92%], and safety [34.11%]. Universities should focus on addressing these aspects to meet parents' expectations. This aligns with the information shared by students and counselors in the 2022 Student Quest Survey.

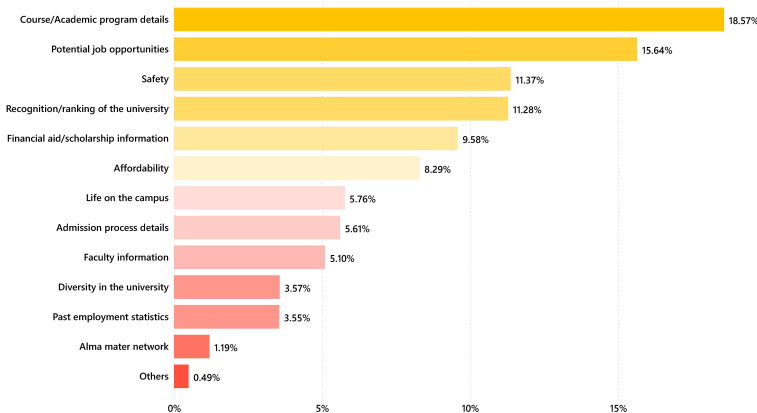
Percentage representation of parent preference among 4C options for future plans



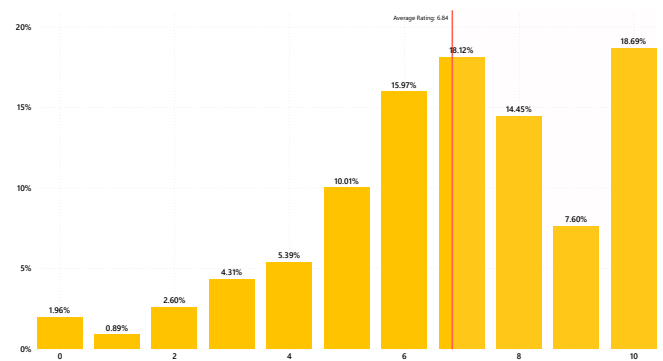
Attendance of parents in information sessions organized by universities



Percentage distribution of the information categories deemed useful by parents in university sessions

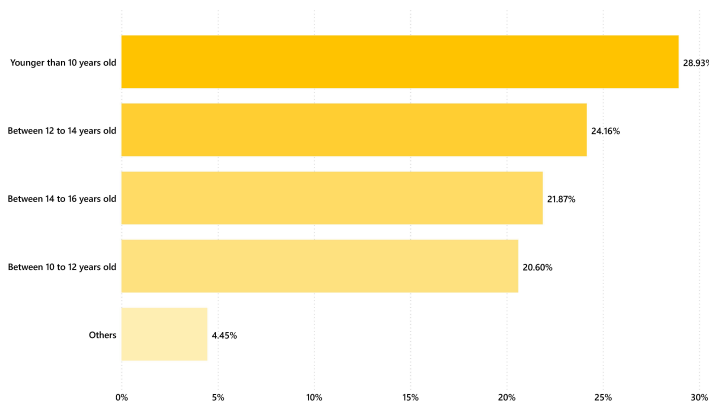


Parents self-reported preparedness in guiding their child



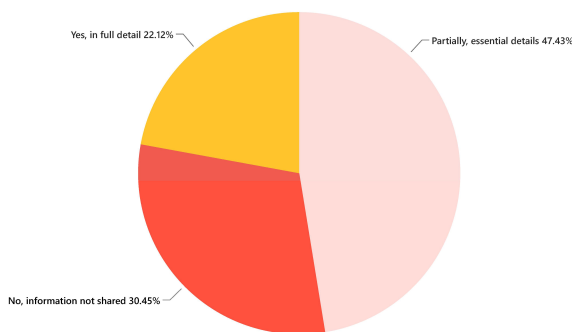
Parents generally reported feeling equipped [average rating of 6.84 on a scale of 1-10] in guiding their child throughout the educational decision-making process. This highlights their perceived ability to provide valuable advice and support to their children. Parents' confidence in guiding their child's educational choices suggests the importance, impact of their involvement, and their eagerness to be equipped in handling their children's journey.

Parents start financial planning for higher education at various stages, with a significant proportion [28.93%] beginning when their child is younger than 10 years old. While 22.12% share the financial budget in full detail with their child, 47.43% provide essential details or an overview. This is comparatively encouraging to last year, where about 43.27% of the students indicated that their parents hadn't shared any financial or budgeting information with them.

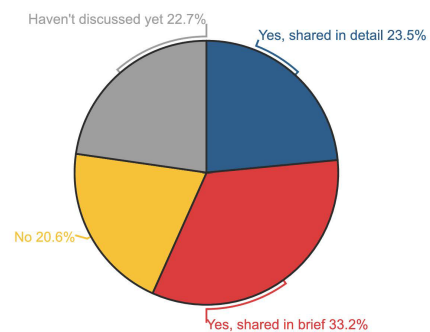


Age distribution for the first conversation regarding financial planning, according to parents

2023 - Extent of information shared about financial budgeting with children, as reported by parents

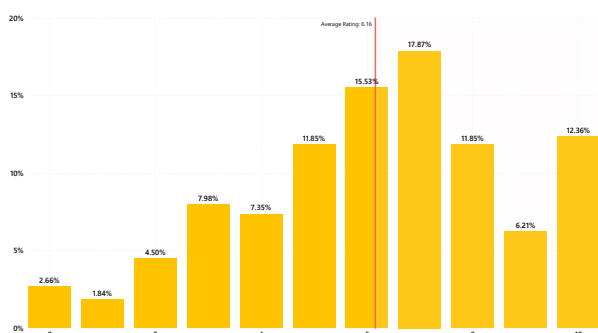


2022 - Extent of information shared about financial budgeting with children, as reported by children

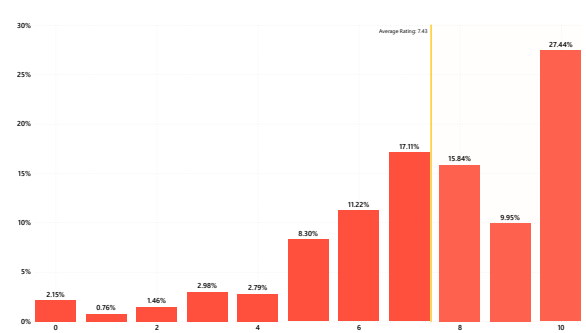


Parents rated their exposure and understanding of new-age careers and programs at an average of 6.16. This suggests a moderate level of familiarity with emerging career paths and modern educational programs, indicating their recognition of the evolving job market. The majority of parents also indicated that they consider new-age careers and programs to be better than the traditional programs in the current and future job market.

Parental exposure to and understanding of the new-age careers/programs



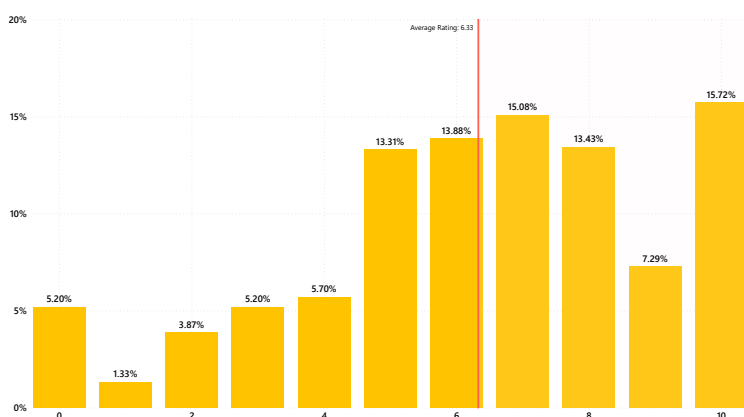
Parents' openness to the idea of their child being an entrepreneur



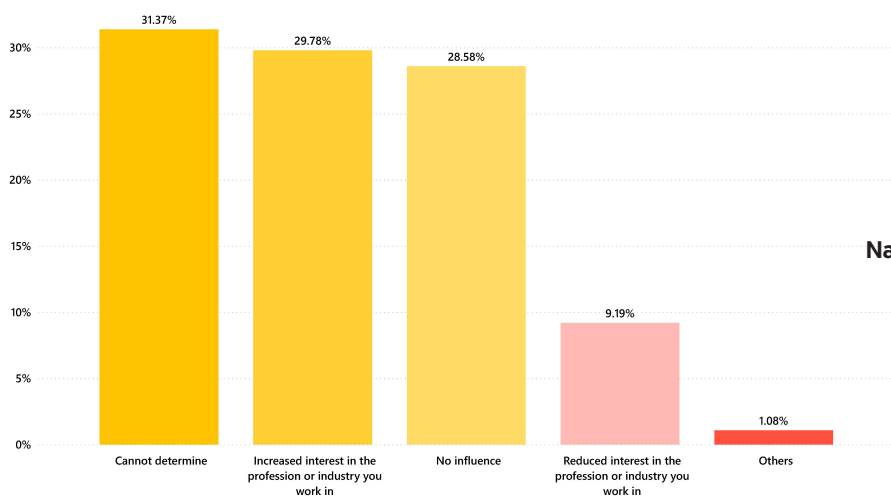
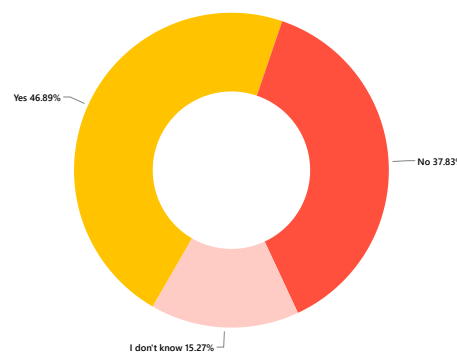
Parents reported an influence rating of 6.33 (on a scale of 1-10), suggesting a moderate level of influence on their child's educational choices. This affirms the powerful impact of parents as compared to any other stakeholder in shaping a student's educational path. A significant portion of parents [46.89%] believe that their career influences their child's decision-making about their future. On the other hand, 37.83% of parents responded that their career has no bearing on their child's decision-making. Additionally, 15.27% of parents reported that they do not see a correlation between their career and their child's career or college choices. It is evident that parents believe that their careers can play an influential role in shaping their child's career aspirations and choices, but it is not the sole determining factor. Other factors, such as personal interests and values, individual ambitions, earning potential of the career, also contribute to decision-making.

When asked about the nature of the effect of their career on their child's decision-making, the responses varied. 29.78% of parents reported an increased interest in the profession or industry they work in, indicating a positive influence. Conversely, 9.19% reported reduced interest, suggesting a potential inverse impact. Parents' careers can both inspire and discourage their children's interest in certain professions or industries. Understanding these effects can help parents provide appropriate information, context, and clarity.

Parental influence on children's educational choices



Parents' careers influencing decision making among children, as reported by parents



Nature of influence from parents' career



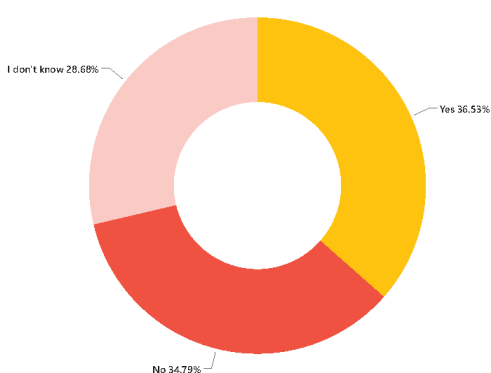
**Inclination Toward Entrepreneurship:** Parents, on average, expressed a high level of openness (average rating of 7.43 on a scale of 1-10) to the idea of their child becoming an entrepreneur after completing higher education. This signifies a positive attitude toward entrepreneurial pursuits and a willingness to support their child's ambitions. Both students as well as parents are excited and enthusiastic about entrepreneurial opportunities. 36.53% of parents reported that their child showed an inclination toward entrepreneurial ventures, highlighting the increasing importance of fostering an entrepreneurial mindset in the 21st century.

A significant majority of parents (71.55%) stated that they would encourage their child to work or pursue internships in high school for better work opportunities. Only a small percentage (6.97%) believed that it would distract from their studies, while 21.48% expressed a "maybe" response, depending on the opportunity. This observation shows that parents recognize the value of early work exposure and the experience it provides to their child, leading them to support their child's involvement in internships during high school. Some of the opportunities that parents provide in order to support the entrepreneurial bend among their children include:

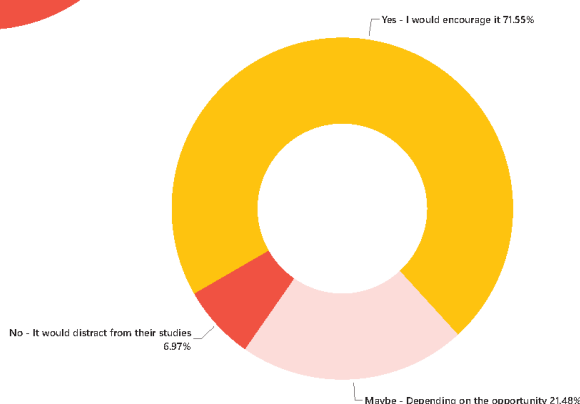
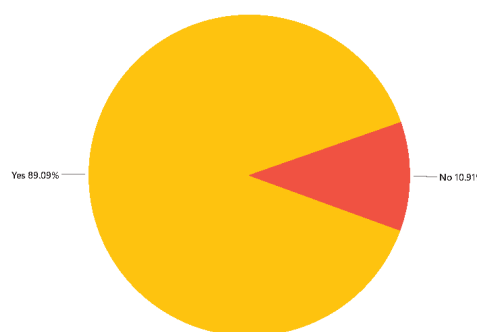
- Young CEO programs, internships, and inter-school fests are mentioned as opportunities for students to gain practical experience and develop their entrepreneurial skills.
- School programs, Tinkering Labs, and extracurricular activities such as MUN (Model United Nations), leadership courses, student council, and community service provide avenues for students to develop their leadership skills and explore their interests.
- Exposure to various industries, career counseling, and knowledge about different career opportunities are mentioned as beneficial for students' entrepreneurial development.
- Specific entrepreneurial activities such as starting a bakery, selling products, participating in competitions (e.g., Shark Tank, stock market, robotics), and attending workshops or programs related to entrepreneurship.

The importance of developing a learning mindset, creativity, problem-solving abilities, and taking risks is emphasized as essential for entrepreneurship.

**Children's inclination to entrepreneurial ventures, as reported by parents**



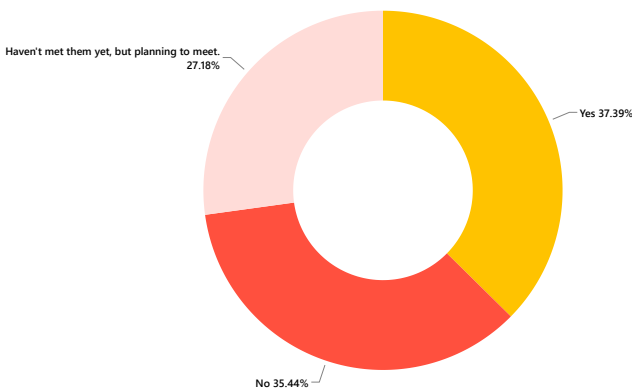
**Encouragement by parents to pursue an entrepreneurial venture**



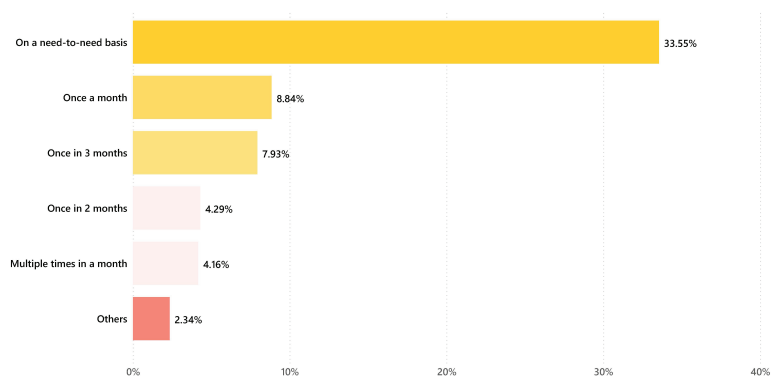
**Parents' openness to allow their child to work/intern in high school for better exposure to entrepreneurship**

**Interaction with Counselors:** Parents' interaction with their child's counselor varied. While 37.39% of parents reported having interacted, a significant proportion [35.44%] stated they had not, and 27.18% expressed their intention to meet them in the future. Parental engagement with counselors can facilitate better understanding of their child's educational choices and enable timely and informed decision-making. Among those who had, the responses ranged from multiple times in a month [4.16%] to on a need-to-need basis [33.55%]. Flexible scheduling options for appointments with counselors can accommodate varying parental needs and preferences for involvement. The participants from the focus group also emphasized that parental involvement fosters a positive attitude in students and that building rapport with parents is crucial toward enabling students' success.

**Parental interactions with the child's counselor/teacher**

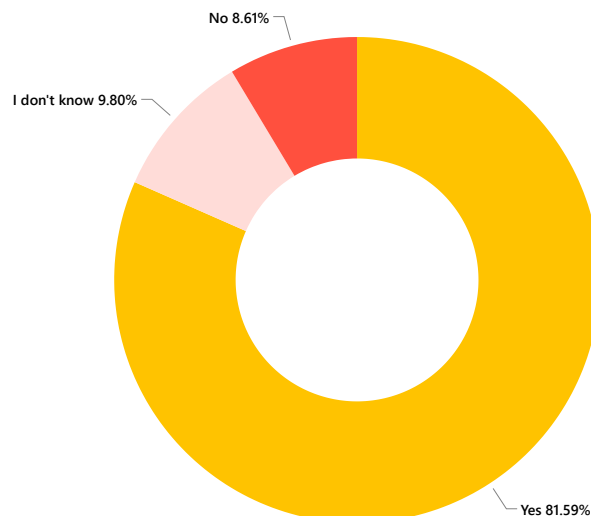


**Frequency of parental interactions with the child's counselor/teacher**



Nearly 60% of parents indicated awareness of the concept of "profile building," recognizing its growing awareness and perceived importance in student's educational success. A large majority of parents [81.59%] believed that access to professional networks and financial resources is necessary for effective profile building. A small percentage [8.61%] disagreed, while 9.80% were uncertain.

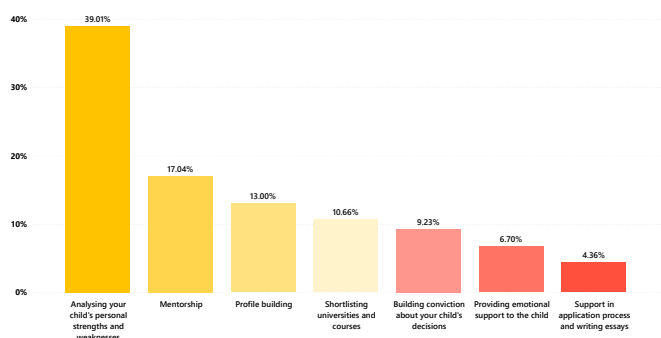
**Necessity of professional network and financial resources in profile building, as per parents**



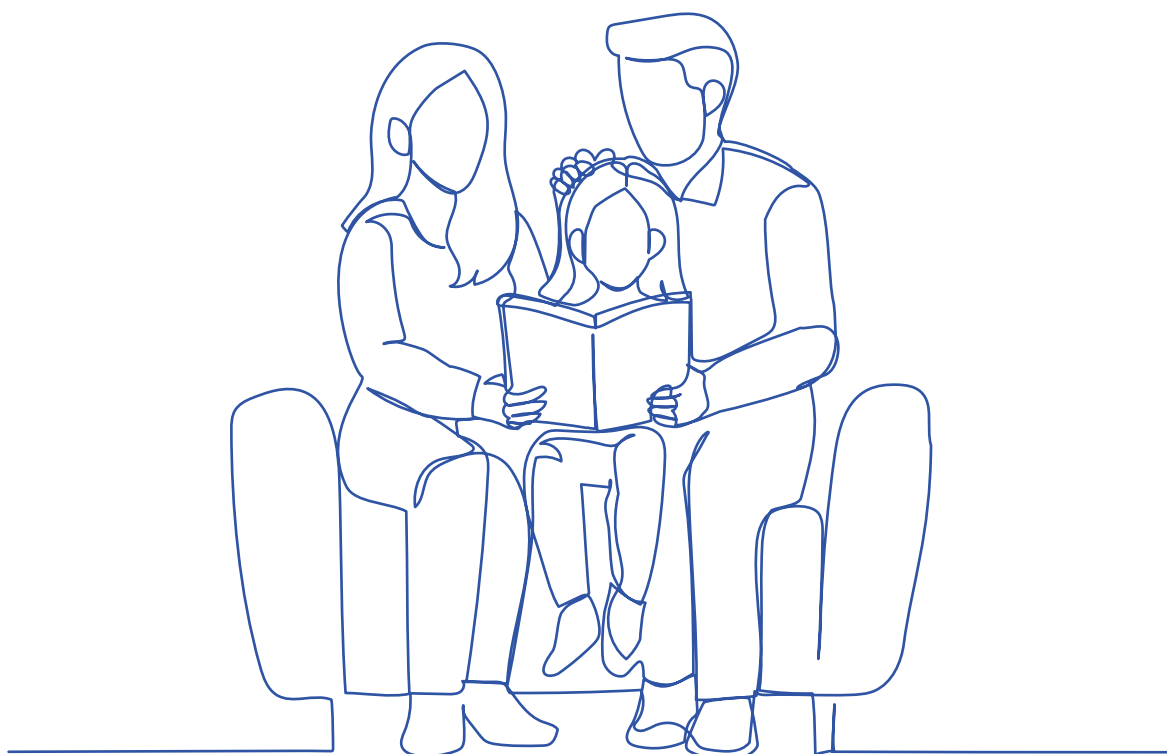
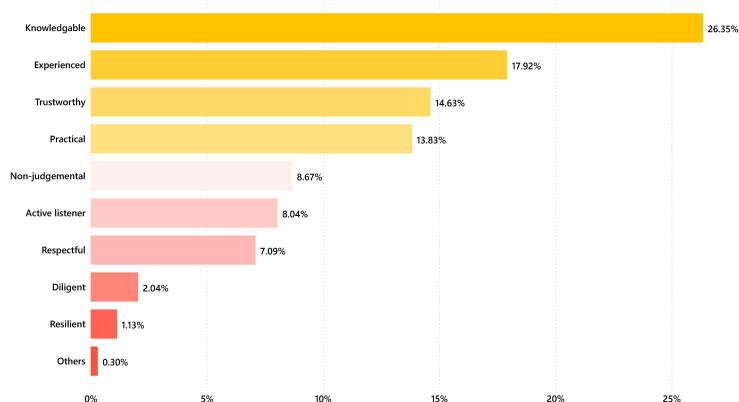
When asked about the most helpful support from the counselor, the top responses included analyzing the child's personal strengths and weaknesses [39.01%], mentorship [17.04%], profile building [13.00%] and shortlisting universities and courses [10.66%]. This is in strong alignment with students' response to the same question in last year's survey, where students valued counselor's input toward analyzing their personal strength and weaknesses.

Parents identified knowledge [79.06%], experience [53.77%], and trustworthiness [43.89%] as the top three qualities they value in a college/career counselor. Other valued qualities included being an active listener, non-judgmental, respectful, and practical. Once again, parents value the same qualities that students do in counselors, as analyzed in the 2022 Student Quest Survey.

**Areas of help from the counselor, according to parents**



**Percentage distribution of valuable qualities of college/career counselors, according to parents**



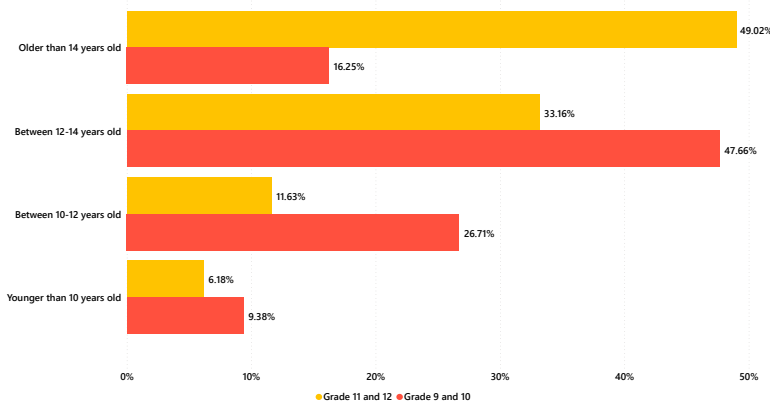
# Thematic Insights

In light of the evolving landscape of education and career decision-making, the 2023 IC3 Institute Student Quest Survey has undergone significant enhancements to provide a comprehensive analysis of emerging patterns and themes. This year's survey delves into new areas of exploration, aiming to understand the impact of the decision-making process on students, assess the varying perceptions and accessibility of counselor support from different stakeholders' perspectives, and highlight parents' perspective and support in the process. Building upon the insights gained from the multi-pronged surveys conducted in 2022 and 2023, this section of the report is divided into four major themes. By analyzing, interpreting, and cross-referencing data, the report aims to present a comprehensive picture of the dynamic counseling landscape. Through this approach, commonalities and gaps are uncovered in perception, priorities and approaches of different stakeholders, providing treasured insights for students, parents, and counselors alike.

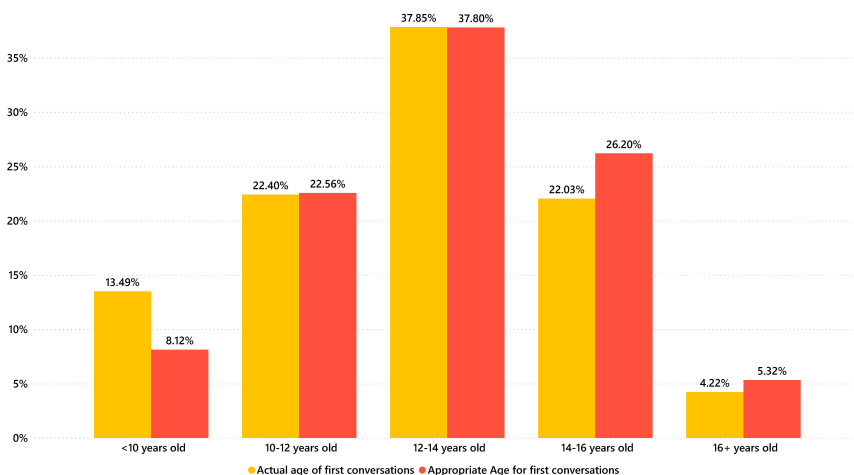
# Parental Involvement

This subsection sheds light on crucial aspects related to the parents' role in decision-making in higher education. The survey underscores the importance of early intervention and parental involvement, emphasizing the need for trust-based relationships. The findings emphasize the significance of open and ongoing communication between parents, students, and school counselors to facilitate informed decision-making and particularly address limitations in accessing parents in boarding schools. High school counselors play a crucial role in guiding students and parents, ensuring a holistic approach to decision-making. Overall, these insights highlight the importance of nurturing collaborative efforts to navigate students' educational journeys effectively.

**Age of Initiation and Frequency of Conversations:** The survey revealed that the majority of students started discussing higher education or career aspirations between the ages of 12-14, which aligns with the age of subject choice in high schools. However, a significant proportion (19.17%) engaged in these discussions between the ages of 10-12. This observation aligns with the fact that metacognition develops in this age group, allowing students to analyze their own thought process and critique their choices based on multiple different factors. It is noteworthy that 7.78% had conversations before the age of 10, indicating an early start for a small but notable segment. The focus group counselors also agree that an early intervention is needed with parental involvement, but they also emphasized that the involvement should come from a place of trust, and treating parents as equal partners. The depth of these conversations and level of engagement at different ages and stages was not delved into in this survey.



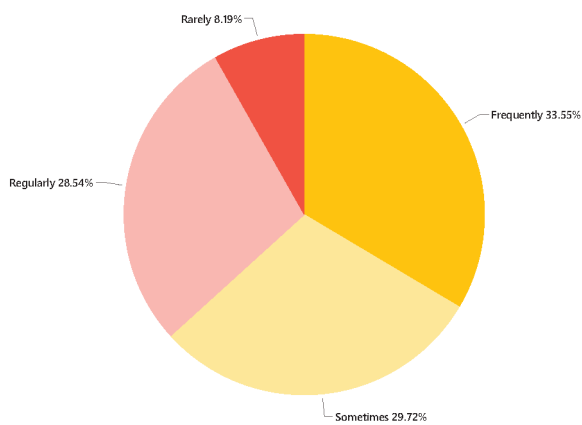
Age distribution for the first conversation regarding career choices, according to students



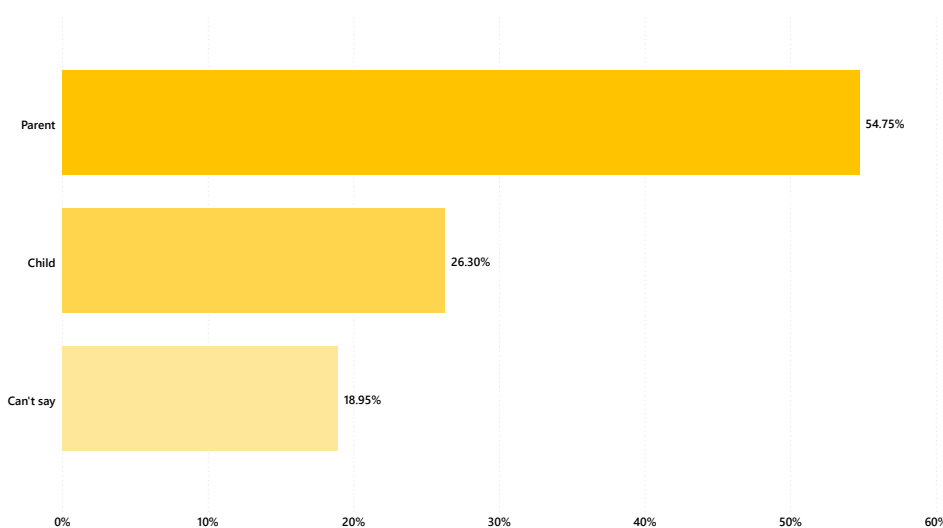
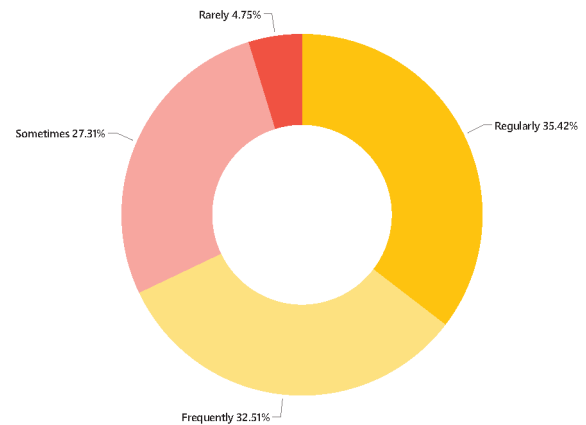
Age distribution for the first conversation regarding career choices, according to parents

Regarding the frequency of conversations, the data indicated that parents and children engage frequently [33.55%] or regularly [28.54%], suggesting an active dialogue. In contrast, a smaller percentage reported having such discussions sometimes [29.72%] or rarely [8.19%]. When enquired about who initiated the conversations, parents responded that they themselves initiated them in majority [54.75%] of the cases, while slightly over a quarter of the conversations were initiated by students [26.30%]. This indicates that for many families, these conversations are ongoing and play a significant role in shaping educational decisions over a period of time.

**Frequency of college/career option discussions between students and parents as reported by students**



**Active discussions between parents and children about college/career choices as reported by parents**

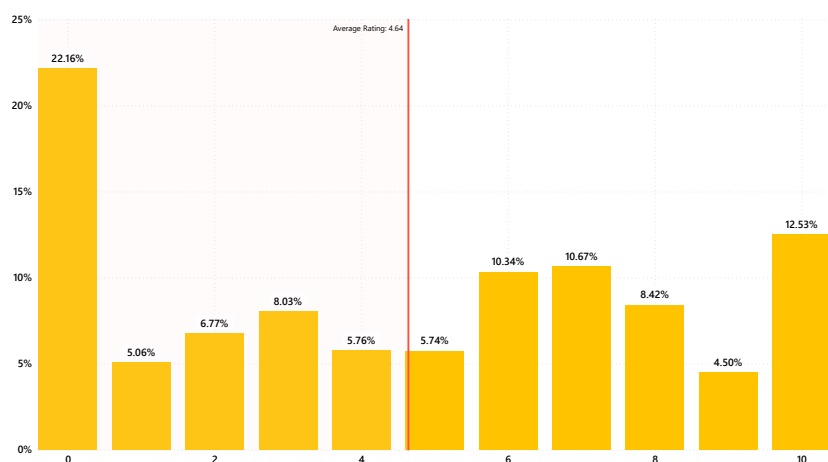
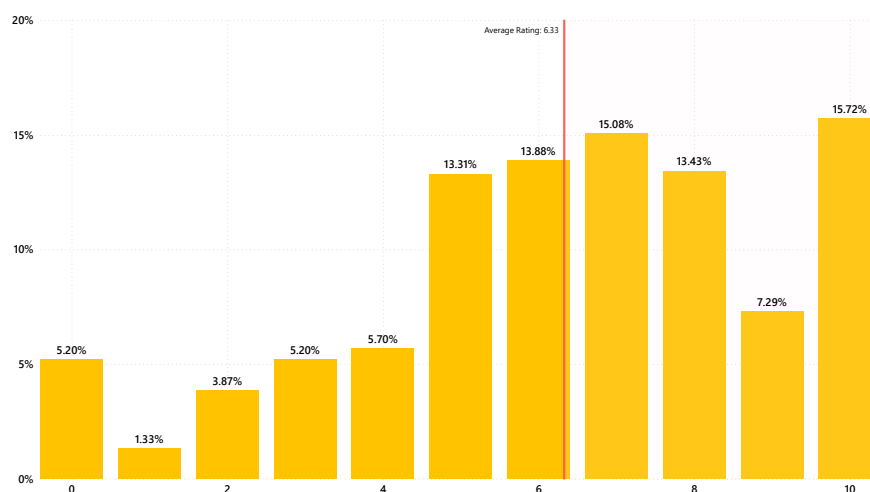


**Initiation of college/career conversations between parents and children**

**Parental Involvement and Influence:** Parents were found to play a considerable role in the process of deciding next steps in the educational journey, with parents reporting an average influence score of 6.33 out of 10. Similarly, the students reported an average influence score of 6.63 for their influence on educational choices, indicating that parents' opinions hold substantial weight in their children's decision-making process and both students and parents are fully aware of this dynamic of influence.

The data revealed that parents' careers have a moderate influence (average score of 4.64) on their children's decision-making regarding future goals. This suggests that while parents' professional paths have an impact, it is not significant and, additionally, other factors contribute toward students' choices.

**Parental influence on children's educational choices**

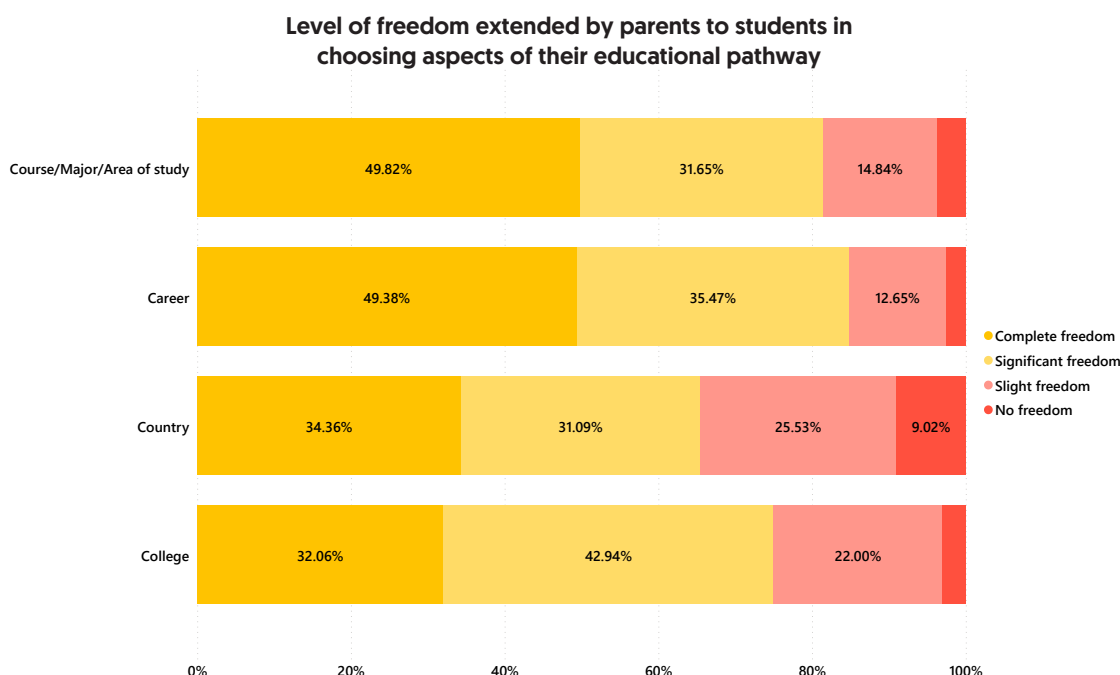


**Influence of parents' careers on educational choices, as rated by students**

Areas in which parents' awareness needs to be built were identified as: the variety of courses offered by universities [50.47%], college options in the region [48.06%], new and evolving career options [47.60%], and college options outside the region [31.95%]. Considering the parents' level of influence and their proximity to decision-making, building awareness in these areas is key to student success.

**Financial Planning and Freedom of Choice:** Financial planning for higher education was found to start at various ages, with 28.93% initiating it when their child was younger than 10 years old. How parents initiate the planning is still unknown and needs to be further understood. Regarding financial transparency, a substantial proportion of parents [47.43%] reported partially sharing essential details or an overview of the financial budget, while 22.12% shared the information in full detail. However, 30.45% stated that they did not share any financial information with their child as compared to 43.3% last year, showing an increase in transparency in this aspect.

The survey explored the extent to which students could exercise freedom of choice in different aspects of their decisions, on a rating scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being least significant and 4 being most significant. The results showed that students felt significant or complete freedom in choosing their career [2.32<sup>14</sup>] and course/major/area of study [2.28], while their freedom was relatively lower in choosing their college [2.04] and country [1.91] — suggesting that parents tend to hold significant control over students’ decisions when specific college and country decisions are concerned, most probably due to concerns regarding their safety and security. The focus group discussion also added that course alignment is absent among students, with major pushback from parents to choose non-traditional fields.



**Parental Perspectives:** Parents, in turn, provided insights into their experiences and perspectives. They reported initiating conversations about higher education and career aspirations primarily between the ages of 12-14 [37.80%] and 14-16 [26.20%]. However, 22.56% of students started these discussions as early as 10-12 years old. This indicates that parents feel the children are ready for discussions and it is their responsibility to prepare them for decision-making

When prioritizing between considerations related to higher education choices, parents placed the highest importance on their child's career [47.23%] and the college they attend [39.17%]. The choice of country [28.62%] and course/major/area of study [28.10%] were also important but received relatively less emphasis. This suggests that parents focus on final career choice the most, as that is the most long-lasting choice. Other choices of course, college and country unfold more gradually. Similarly, they prioritize college over country or course, potentially from reputation or financial point of view. Parents clearly recognise the significance of these factors, but may not prioritize them as highly as career and college choices.

The survey results indicated that parents actively discuss career and college choices with their children, with 35.42% reporting regular conversations and 32.51% engaging in frequent discussions. However, a smaller proportion stated that they only sometimes [27.31%] or rarely [4.75%] have these conversations. This suggests that active communication between parents and children about educational choices is common but may vary depending on the family.

The survey findings highlight the importance of early conversations about higher education and career aspirations, with many discussions initiated during early adolescence.



Parental involvement and influence were significant, indicating that parents play an essential role in shaping their children's decisions. However, there is room for improvement in terms of quality of conversations, financial transparency, and coordination with the school counselors. Limitations of boarding schools in accessing parents for career planning discussions due to distance and logistics, limited communications, time constraints of parents, etc. were highlighted as some of the other roadblocks that high school counselors face.

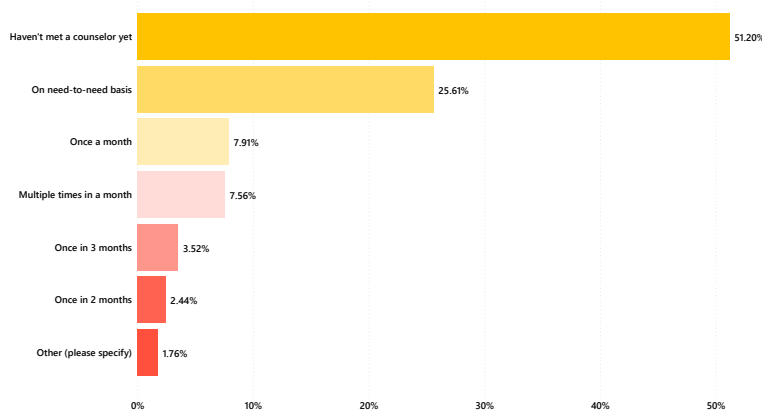
Both students and parents value open and ongoing discussions about educational choices, underscoring the need for continued communication between the two parties. Addressing these findings can support schools in playing a significant role in facilitating the exposure that can make way for careful and timely exposure as students navigate their educational journeys.

The focus group of counselors also highlighted the significance of parental involvement in career planning. Counselors opined that while it is important for parents to provide guidance and support, it is equally important for them to consider the needs and aspirations of the students. This balanced approach can help students make informed decisions and avoid the potential pitfalls of parental influence. This can include leveraging technology for virtual meetings, providing regular updates and progress reports, and facilitating open lines of communication between parents, students, and school staff. The counselor can play a vital role in questioning, challenging, or probing student and parent decisions to be more thorough and sure of the motivations and the rationale behind the choices. The focus group also agreed that involving parents in career planning is vital. They suggested various activities such as distributing brochures and flyers, and inviting parents to career fairs to improve their awareness. This indicates the importance of providing parents with relevant information about different career paths, educational opportunities, and the changing job market to help them guide their children effectively. Despite parents being open to newer professions as society integrates technological norms, parents still feel traditional fields like engineering can assure economic stability in the future for their children.

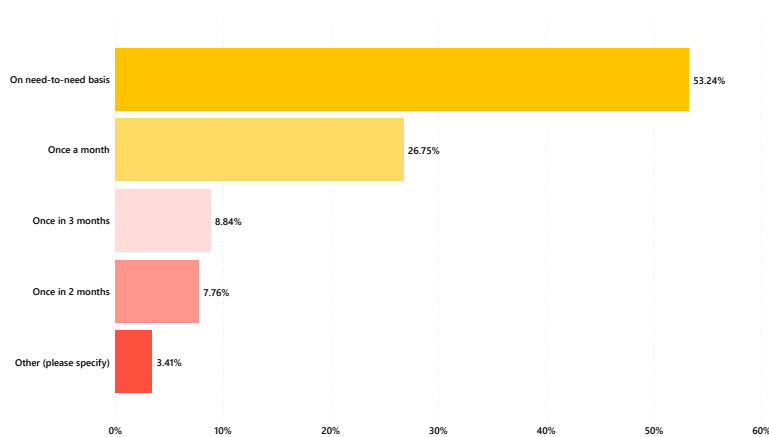
# Impact of Counseling Support

This subsection is aimed to gather insights into the experiences and perspectives of relevant stakeholders regarding career and college counseling. The survey collected data to understand students and parents' interactions with counselors, their perceived usefulness of counseling conversations, their preferred areas of counselor input, and their expectations from counselors. The results provide beneficial qualitative inputs and insights, shedding light on the frequency of counseling sessions, the value placed on counselor qualities, and the effectiveness of individual and group counseling sessions.

**Frequency of Meetings with Career/College Counselors:** The data revealed that a majority of students (51.20%) had not yet met a career or college counselor — marginally better when compared to data in 2022, where 56% students reported that they hadn't met a career or college counselor. Even with an improvement on this front, these are still disappointing numbers and the reasons for these have not been explored in this survey. Among those who had interacted with counselors, the most preferred frequency of meetings was on a need-to-need basis (25.61%). A smaller percentage reported meeting multiple times in a month (7.56%) or once a month (7.91%) — with the majority (53.33%) of these higher frequency meetings being reported by grade 10 and 12 students, as both these grades require making important choices.



The actual frequency of interactions between students and college/career counselors, as reported by students



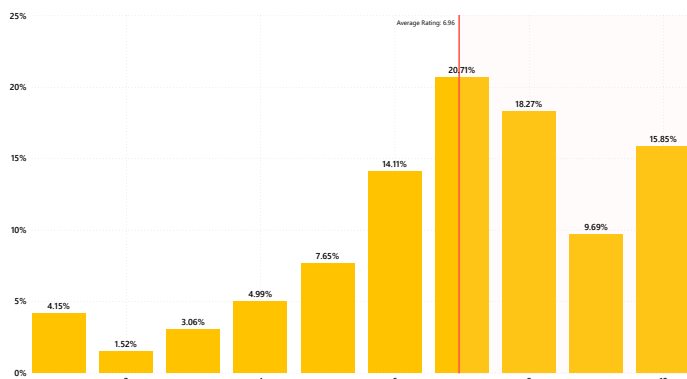
Preferred frequency of interactions between students and college/career counselors, as reported by students

**Usefulness of Conversations with Counselors:** Participants were asked to rate the usefulness of their conversations with counselors on a scale of 1-10. More than three-quarters of the students [78.63%] rated the usefulness to be higher than 5, indicating that they found the conversations useful, with a considerably high average rating of 6.96. Considering the limited contact time, it can be claimed that the value of these interactions can be enhanced or perhaps linked to regularity of interactions for improved impact.

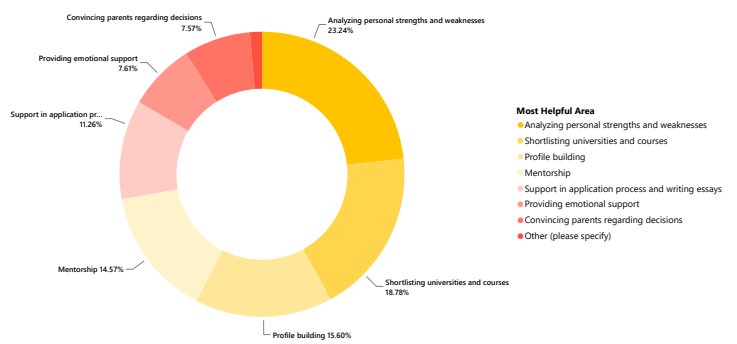
When asked about the areas where students found counselors' input most helpful, the top three emerged as: analyzing personal strengths and weaknesses [61.97%], shortlisting universities and courses [50.08%], and profile building [41.59%]. These findings highlight the significance of personalized guidance and assistance in various aspects of the educational journey.

Respondents also identified areas where they found counselors' input least helpful, with the option to select up to three choices. The most commonly selected areas were providing emotional support [50.63%], convincing parents regarding decisions [43.48%], and support in the application process and writing essays [35.83%]. These findings suggest that individuals desire more emotional support and expect a counselor's support in navigating conflicts with parents.

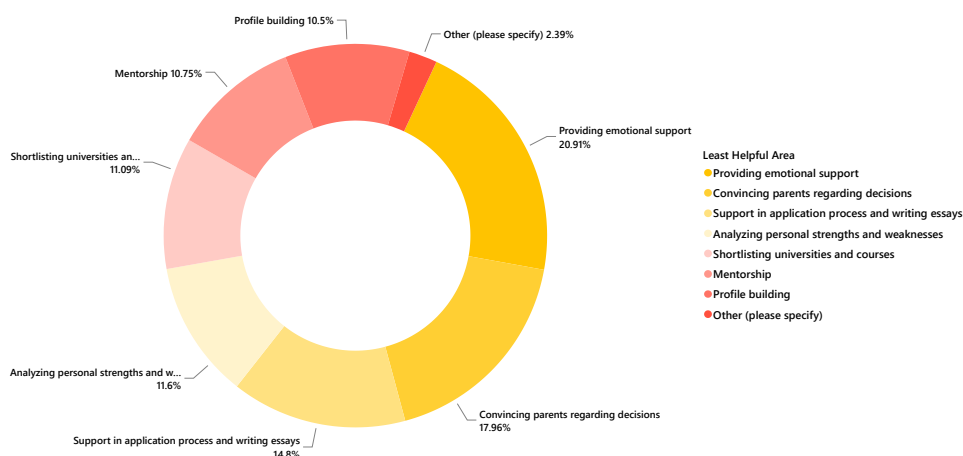
The usefulness of conversations with college/career counselors, according to students



Distribution of the most helpful areas of counselor support, according to students



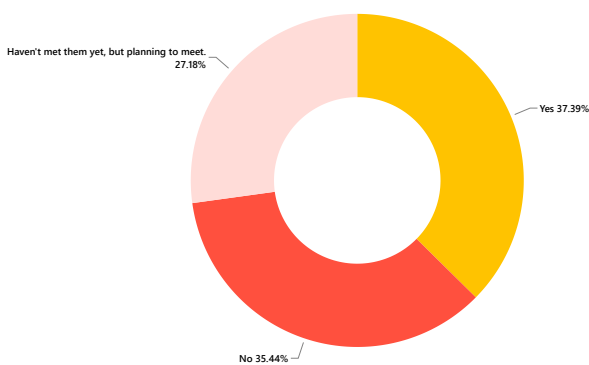
Distribution of the most helpful least helpful areas of counselor support, according to students



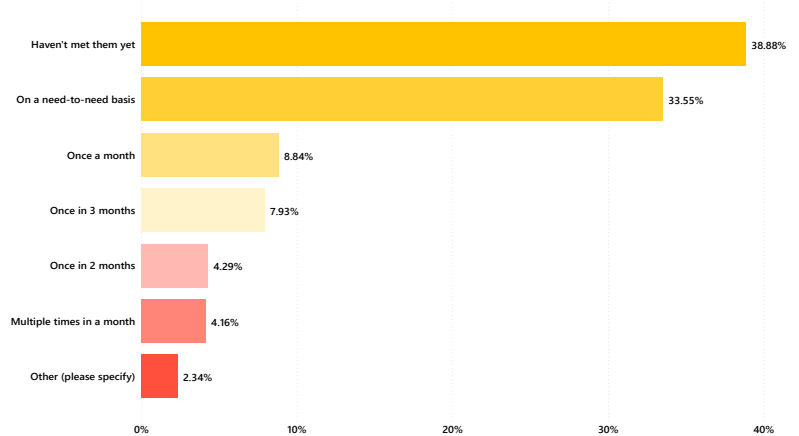
**Interactions with Counselor:** Parents were asked whether they had interacted with their child's counselor about their educational choices. The responses were divided, with 37.39% stating they had interacted, 35.44% saying they hadn't, and 27.18% indicating that they planned to meet them in the future. These results, unfortunately, do not indicate significant levels of engagement between parents and educational counselors, highlighting the need for increased communication and collaboration.

Among those who had interacted with their child's counselor, the most common frequency of appointments was on a need-to-need basis [33.55%]. A smaller percentage reported scheduling appointments once a month [8.84%], once every two months [4.29%], or once every three months [7.93%]. A significant proportion [38.88%] had not yet met with their child's counselor. These findings indicate lack of pattern in counselor meetings, and hence suggest that there is a range of approaches to scheduling appointments, and building rapport with a need for more consistent communication between parents and educational professionals.

**Parental interactions with the child's counselor/teacher**

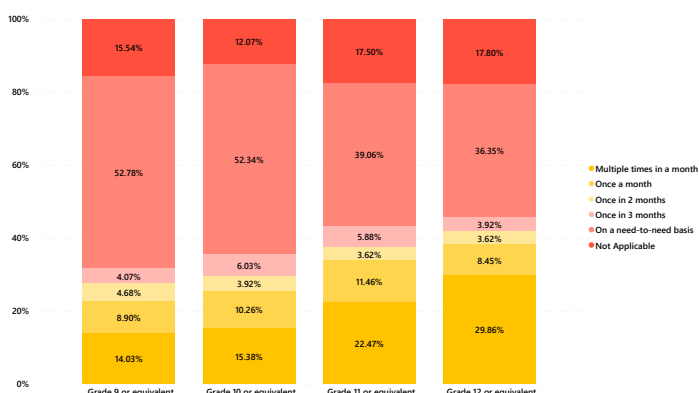


**Frequency of parental interactions with the child's counselor/teacher**

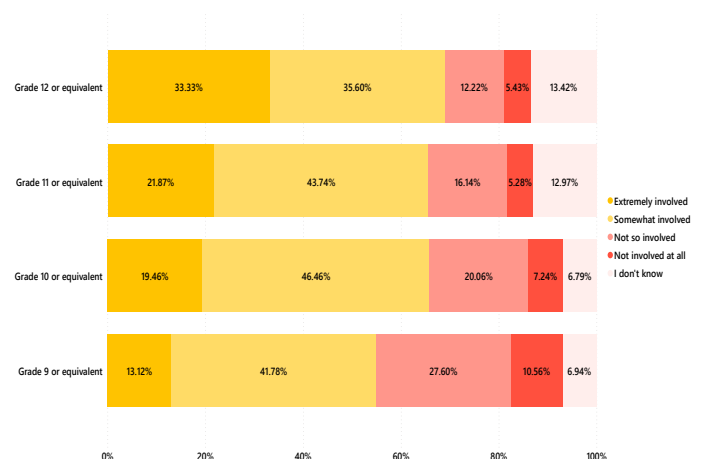


Data was collected on the frequency of one-on-one and group counseling conversations based on different grade levels. The results showed that both one-on-one and group counseling sessions are increasingly common as students advance through the grades, with one-on-one sessions increasing by 212.95% from grade 9 to grade 12 and group sessions increasing by 189.12% during the same period. These findings suggest that counseling efforts need to be well balanced across grades for adequate exploration and to avoid confusion and stress in the final years.

**Frequency of one-on-one counseling conversations conducted with students**

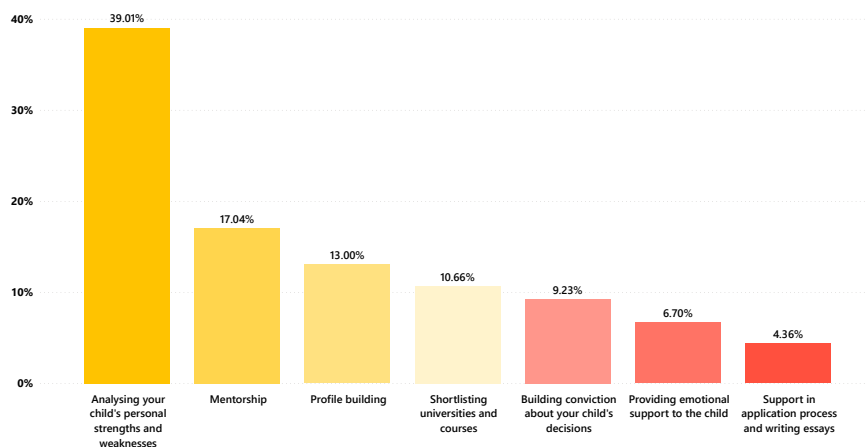


**Involvement of parents in counseling conversations, reported by counselors**



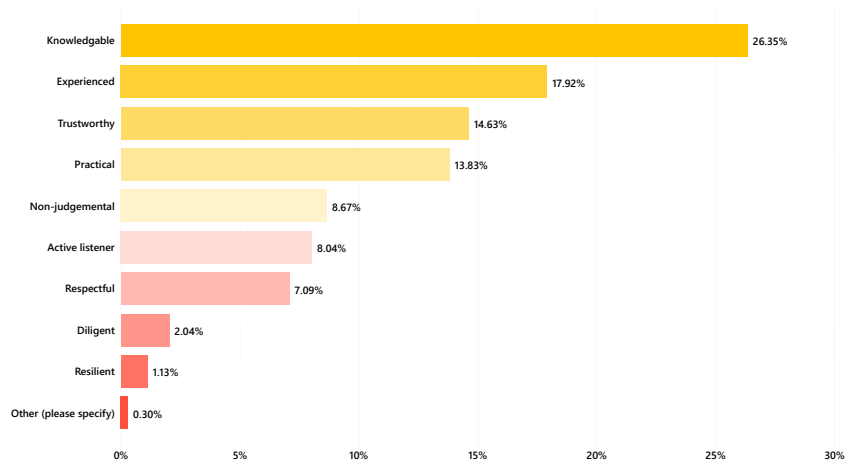
**Support Valued from Counselors:** Parents were asked about the support they found most helpful from their child's counselor. The majority valued the counselor's analysis of their child's personal strengths and weaknesses [39.01%], followed by mentorship [17.04%], and profile building [13.00%]. These findings are in alignment with what students had reported in their responses, highlighting the importance of personalized guidance and expertise in supporting students' development and decision-making processes.

Participants were asked to select the top three qualities they valued in a college/career counselor. The most commonly selected attributes were knowledge [79.06%], experience [53.77%], and trustworthiness [43.89%]. Other qualities considered important included being practical, respectful, and non-judgmental. These findings indicate that individuals prioritize expertise and trustworthiness in their counselors, emphasizing the need for knowledgeable and experienced professionals in this field.



Areas of help from the counselor, according to parents

Distribution percentage for valuable qualities of college/career counselors, according to parents



The results provide an insightful look into the perspectives and experiences of individuals regarding career and college counseling. The findings highlight the importance of personalized guidance, including analyzing personal strengths and weaknesses, shortlisting universities and courses, and providing mentorship. Emotional support and integration of parental perspectives emerged as areas that require more attention. Additionally, the results emphasize the significance of knowledgeable and experienced counselors who are perceived as trustworthy. Furthermore, the findings indicate the need for consistent communication and collaboration between parents, students, and counselors. Drawing insights from observations, educational institutions, and professionals can enhance the effectiveness of career and college counseling, leading to better-informed decisions and increased support for students in their educational journeys.

# Impetus on Entrepreneurship

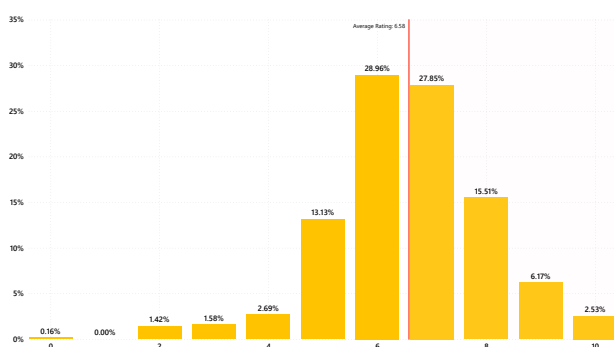
This subsection is aimed to gather insights into the receptiveness of schools toward encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship among students. The survey also explored the students' desires to initiate entrepreneurial ventures, their motivations for opting for entrepreneurial opportunities, the percentage of budding entrepreneurs who continue their journey post-school/college, the support received for pursuing entrepreneurial endeavors, exposure to entrepreneurial interests, and the role of schools, teachers, parents, and personal networks in supporting entrepreneurial aspirations. The results provide qualitative inputs and insights, shedding light on the current environment and attitudes toward fostering innovation and entrepreneurship in students.

**Changes in Students' Desire for Entrepreneurial Ventures:** Counselors were asked whether they had noticed any changes in students' desires to initiate entrepreneurial ventures or activities. The average rating received was 6.58 on the scale of 1-10. This indicates a growing interest among students in pursuing entrepreneurial paths.

Counselors were asked to select the reasons why they believe students opt for entrepreneurial opportunities. The top three motivations identified were: having a genuine interest in developing a venture (36.87%), developing an entrepreneurial mindset (33.86%), and building their profile for college applications (16.93%). A smaller percentage attributed the choice to peer pressure (5.54%). These findings emphasize the importance of intrinsic motivation and genuine interest as driving factors for students' entrepreneurial pursuits.

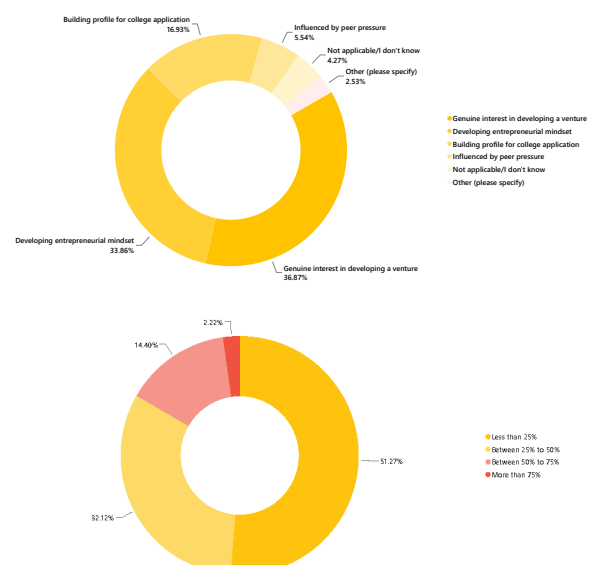
Counselors were also asked to estimate the percentage of budding entrepreneurs who continue their entrepreneurial journey after completing school or college. The majority of respondents (51.27%) believed that less than 25% of budding entrepreneurs continue their journey. A significant proportion (32.12%) estimated that between 25% to 50% continue, while smaller percentages of counselors (16.62%) believed that more than 50% continue with their journey. This observation certainly raises questions on the genuinity expressed above regarding their motivations. Having said that, the dip in continuity could be attributed to the increase in academic rigor or development of newer interests, or even the job placements. Nevertheless, these findings definitely indicate that there is a need to enhance support and resources to ensure a higher percentage of entrepreneurial ventures are sustained.

**The trend of students' desire to initiate entrepreneurial ventures as per counselors**



**Percentage of students that continue their entrepreneurial journey post-school/college, according to counselors**

**Reasons for students to opt for entrepreneurial opportunities, as reported by counselors**

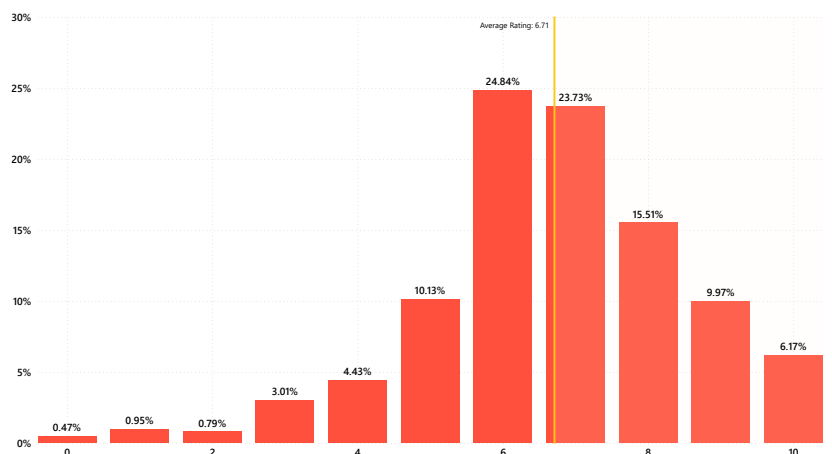


**Supportive Environment for Entrepreneurial Journey:** When asked whether students are supported by an enabling environment to pursue their entrepreneurial journey, the majority of students (71.40%) answered affirmatively. However, 28.60% students also indicated a lack of support. These results suggest scope of expanding the desirable environments that facilitate more supportive environments that facilitate and encourage entrepreneurial endeavors. Counselors were asked about the extent to which schools encourage innovation and entrepreneurship among students. The average rating received was 6.71, indicating a moderate level of receptiveness. While this suggests that schools show some degree of support, there is room for improvement in fostering an environment that nurtures entrepreneurial initiatives.



**Students supported by an enabling environment for entrepreneurship**

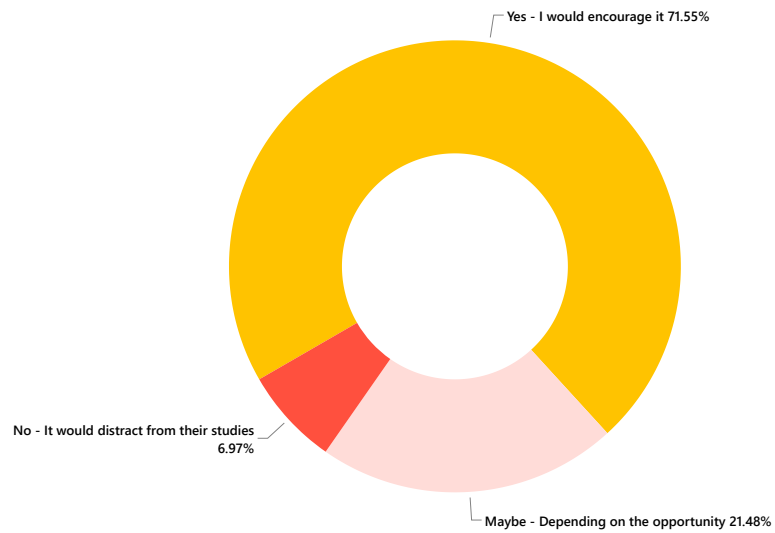
**Level of schools' receptiveness to encourage innovation and entrepreneurship among students**



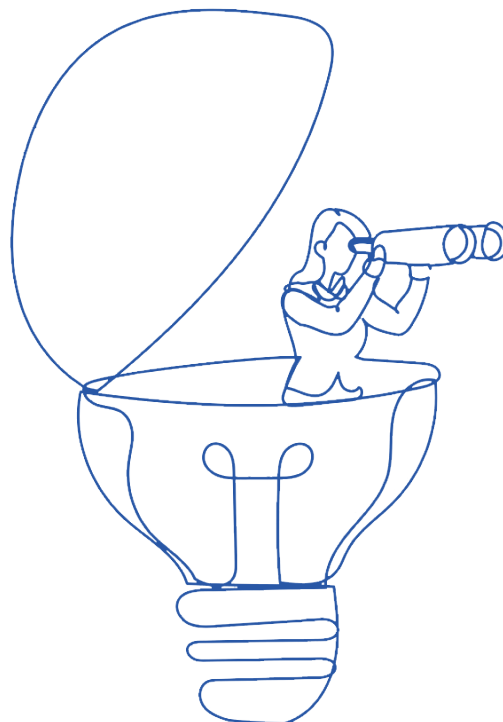
Students were enquired whether they had adequate exposure to multiple academic subjects or related activities to discover an entrepreneurial interest. While 45.34% responded positively, a notable proportion (22.32%) indicated a lack of exposure, and 32.34% responded "I don't know". It can be hypothesized that those who responded "I don't know" are unable to connect the dots or relate the academic learning to real-life problem solving. These findings highlight the importance of providing diverse opportunities and experiences to students, allowing them to explore and discover entrepreneurial interests.

Parents were asked to rate their openness to the idea of their child becoming an entrepreneur upon completion of higher education. The average rating received was 7.43, indicating a relatively high level of openness and acceptance toward entrepreneurial career paths for their children. Parents were also asked whether they are open to allowing their child to work or do internships in high school for better exposure to work opportunities. The majority (71.55%) expressed that they would encourage such opportunities, highlighting a recognition of the benefits of early exposure to real-world experiences. 21.48% responded with the option of "maybe" indicating openness depending on the specific opportunity, while a smaller percentage (6.97%) expressed concerns that it would distract from their studies.

**Parents' openness to allow their child to work/intern in high school for better exposure to entrepreneurship**



The subsection has provided relevant insights into the current state of fostering innovation and entrepreneurship in students. While schools show a moderate level of receptiveness, there is room for improvement in creating supportive environments and providing diverse experiences to help students discover entrepreneurial interests. Genuine interest, developing an entrepreneurial mindset, and building profiles for college applications were identified as key motivations for students pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities. The findings also underscore the significant role of parents, personal networks, and early exposure to work opportunities in supporting entrepreneurial aspirations. By addressing the insights and recommendations highlighted in this report, educational institutions and stakeholders can further cultivate innovation and entrepreneurship among students, equipping them with the necessary skills and support for successful entrepreneurial journeys.







# Recommendations

In this section, the report provides recommendations tailored to different stakeholders involved in the educational and career decision-making process: students, counselors, academic institutions, and advisory. These recommendations aim to empower each group with actionable strategies and insights to optimize the educational journey and enhance the alignment between students' aspirations, parental support, counseling services, and the resources offered by academic institutions. By considering these recommendations, all stakeholders can contribute to a holistic and well-informed approach that maximizes students' potential and prepares them for successful futures.

# For Schools/Counselors

- a. Access and visibility of counselors needs to be planned clearly
  - Access to counselors needs to be a combination of pre-scheduled sessions and drop-in office hours to enable more interactions; timings of the counseling office to complement the school hours for optimization
  - Visibility of counselors needs to be structured for internal and external stakeholders. Calendarized interactions with the parent community in one-to one and one-to-many settings, and streamlined interactions with the school management can make a significant difference to the quality and visibility of process and outcomes
- b. Articulating the roles and responsibilities of a counselor
  - Given that a majority of the respondents serve in more than one role, schools must look at the scope of a counselor's key result areas (KRAs) based particularly on the student-to-counselor ratio
- c. Systemic involvement of parents in the counseling and decision-making process to primarily build awareness and rapport, which can facilitate deeper engagement in a meaningful way. Areas suggested to be included in counseling curriculum for parents:
  - Financial planning for higher education
  - How to think about return on investment and broadening the scope
  - New-age careers and the changing world of work
  - Program choices available for students at an undergraduate level in today's times
  - University options outside the region
  - Parents' support and collaboration to provide accessible networks and knowledge, benefitting the larger student community at a school could be facilitated as well
- d. In the counseling curriculum for students, build topics, lesson plans, and classroom discussions that encourage:
  - Internal exploration of personal strengths, weaknesses, interests, and values — this is what students seem to derive maximum benefit and value from in the decision-making process
  - Early intervention suitably designed for gradual and graded career planning
  - Adequate exploration of career/future possibilities related to all the different subjects offered at school; link this exposure toward all subjects to build multiple skills
  - Highlighting programs and universities where admission is based on entrance tests, leaving adequate preparation time and optimization of the application process
  - Understanding of impact of location/region on university experience for both within as well as outside home country in a balanced manner
  - Active conversations around the ideal/manageable number of applications in order to optimize quality of applications and balance academic rigor of final years of schooling along with university applications
  - Building effective nudges/reminders for the timelines set by the school to manage applications-related tasks that address the demands of this process in a timely and efficient manner

- e. Build a list of verified and reliable sources of information for students and families to access that is relevant for making college and career-related decisions, to support a culture of data-driven counseling practices and decision-making
- f. Collaborating with subject teachers to build real-world associations of theoretical concepts in different careers and industries
- g. Schools should actively work with universities to deepen intellectual engagements providing a wider exposure to students and parents

## For Universities/Post-secondary Institutions

- a. Invest in expanding outreach efforts beyond the local region.
- b. Disseminate information about diverse programs and their varied outcomes to break the linear correlation between qualifications and career prospects.
- c. Explain the rationale behind rankings to understand better and prevent misuse or misconstrual of data.
- d. Integrate data points and insights of student life on campus, emphasizing its impact on well-being and opportunity utilization to present it to students and parents, encouraging a broader perspective beyond placements and rankings.
- e. Prioritize informing and fostering confidence among parents and students regarding pathways and prospects of new-age and unconventional career options.
- f. Initiate early conversations regarding budgets, financial viability, and scholarship/financing options.

## Advisory/Policy

- a. Provide some broad regulations around the student-to-counselor ratio to be prescribed to school
- b. Encourage industry to support counselor training and extend opportunities to students
- c. Enhance cooperation between tertiary institutions in the home country and abroad to broaden the offerings for students in terms of affordability of education, choice of program, and increased exposure
- d. Capacity-building for nurturing entrepreneurship at multiple levels: schools, universities, and neighborhoods to ensure sustainability and scalability of student initiatives

# Conclusion

The primary objectives of this year's IC3 Institute Student Quest Survey were to explore the influences that parents and counselors have on students' decision-making processes and to understand the extent of entrepreneurial stimulus in the current global markets, in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of these on decision making by students for their higher education. The survey aimed to uncover what factors are crucial for students and parents when making decisions, the extent of their impact on their thought process, the impact that counselors have, the level of interaction between the stakeholders and the steps that parents and counselors take to enhance visibility and accessibility in the decision-making process.

Over the years, there have been notable trends in student applications, with students more sure of the study destinations especially if they are planning to apply internationally. There is a considerable amount of influence that parents have over the students' decisions without curbing the student's freedom or neglecting their opinions. Moreover, there is a growing interest in entrepreneurship as a career option among students, with significant support and resources being extended by schools and parents for this.

The demand for counseling has been consistently rising, but there hasn't been a proportional increase in the number of counselors, which is concerning. The data supports the hypothesis that there is a shortage of quality counseling support, reflected in counselor-student ratios and training requirements. It is concerning that more than half of the surveyed students and more than quarter of the parents have not met counselors, however there is definitely a silver lining that the fraction of students meeting with counselors is on the rise with about 6% increase from last year. It is evident that counselors play a vital role in providing essential professional help, which is highly valued by students and parents alike - more than three-fourths of the students rated the counselor conversations to be useful.

Overall, the survey findings highlight the importance of collaborative efforts among stakeholders to develop a more effective, reliable, and efficient system of supporting students throughout their decision-making journey.

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