

IMPLEMENTING COLLEGE READINESS INITIATIVES IN TEXAS: FINDINGS FROM GEAR UP

Texas Center for Educational
Research



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Overview of the Presentation

- College Readiness Issues: nationally and in Texas
- The GEAR UP grant and Students Training for Academic Readiness (STAR) project
- Characteristics of STAR campuses
- Spring 2008 surveys of STAR parents and students
- Survey findings:
 - College expectations
 - College awareness
 - Planning and resources
- Conclusions and Recommendations

Framing the Issue:

The Importance of College Access and Readiness Initiatives

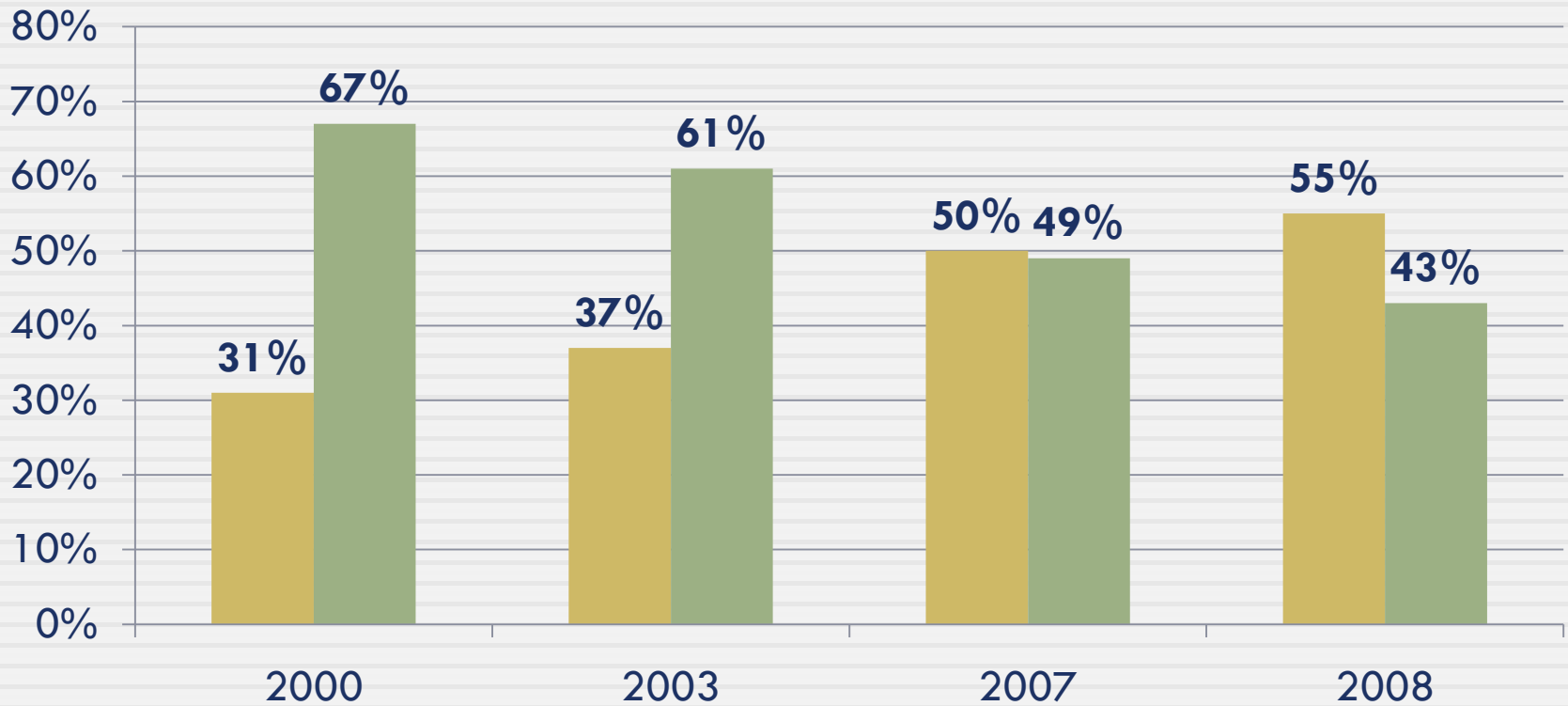
College Readiness is a National Priority

“The 21st century can be the next great American century if we make the necessary investments in our children’s education.

We will prepare the next generation for success in college and the workforce, and ensure that American children lead the world once again in creativity and achievement.”

www.barackobama.com

Percentage of Adults Who Feel...



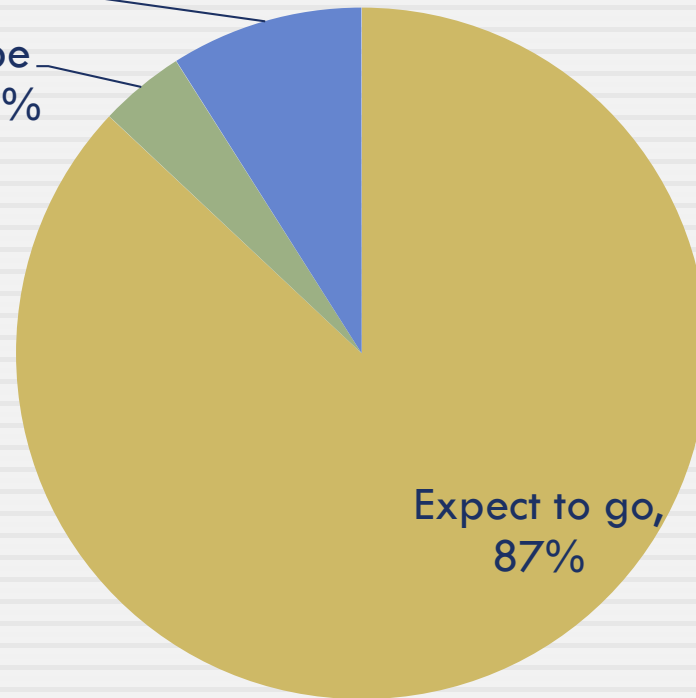
- College is Necessary for Success
- It's Possible to Succeed Without a College Degree

National Survey of Middle School Parents (2007)

Child's decision, 9%

What Are Your Thoughts About Your Child and College?

May not be possible, 4%



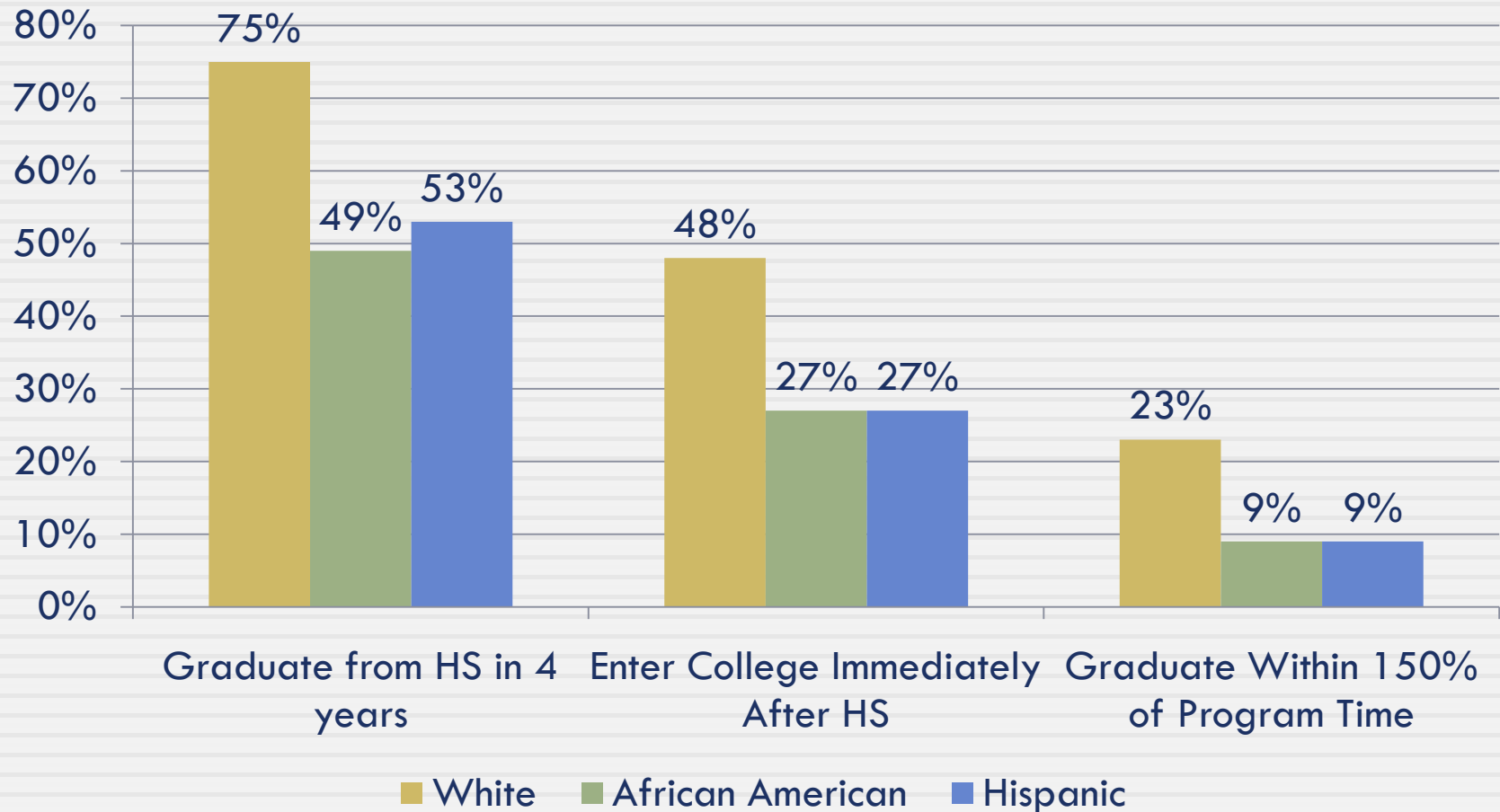
Expect to go, 87%

College Readiness Varies Across Demographic Groups

Research conducted by the Manhattan Institute (2005) found:

- 40% of White students had the skills to be successful in college
- Compared with 23% of African American students and 20% of Hispanic students

Ninth Graders (2001):



Evidence of the Lack of College Readiness

- In 2004, one-third of all college freshman enrolled in at least one remedial course.
 - 20% of students in 4-year colleges
 - 42% of students in 2-year colleges
- Participation in remedial coursework is the leading indicator that a student will not complete a degree
 - 17% of students participating in remedial education compared with 58% of those who did not completed a 4-year degree within the same time period

College Readiness in Texas

- The ACT reports that 30% of Texas' 2007 high school graduates took the ACT test.
- Of the students who tested:
 - 62% were ready for College English Composition
 - 41% were ready for College Algebra
 - 47% were ready for College Social Sciences
 - 24% were ready for College Biology
 - 19% were ready for all four subjects

GEAR UP

Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for
Undergraduate Programs

What is GEAR UP?

- GEAR UP is a federally funded program initiated as part of the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965 in 1998
- Funding levels:
 - FY 2009: \$313 million
 - FY 2008: \$303 million

GEAR UP Goals

- Increase the number of low-income students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education
- Fund college scholarships to low-income students
- Six-year grants: Provide services no later than the 7th grade and track cohort through high school

Students Training for Academic Readiness (STAR)

- Texas' state-level GEAR UP grant
- Fiscal agent is TEA
- 18 million in federal funds and 18.6 million in non-federal matching funds
 - Six years (2006-07 through 2010-11)
 - Approximately 6.1 million in funding per grant year

STAR Districts

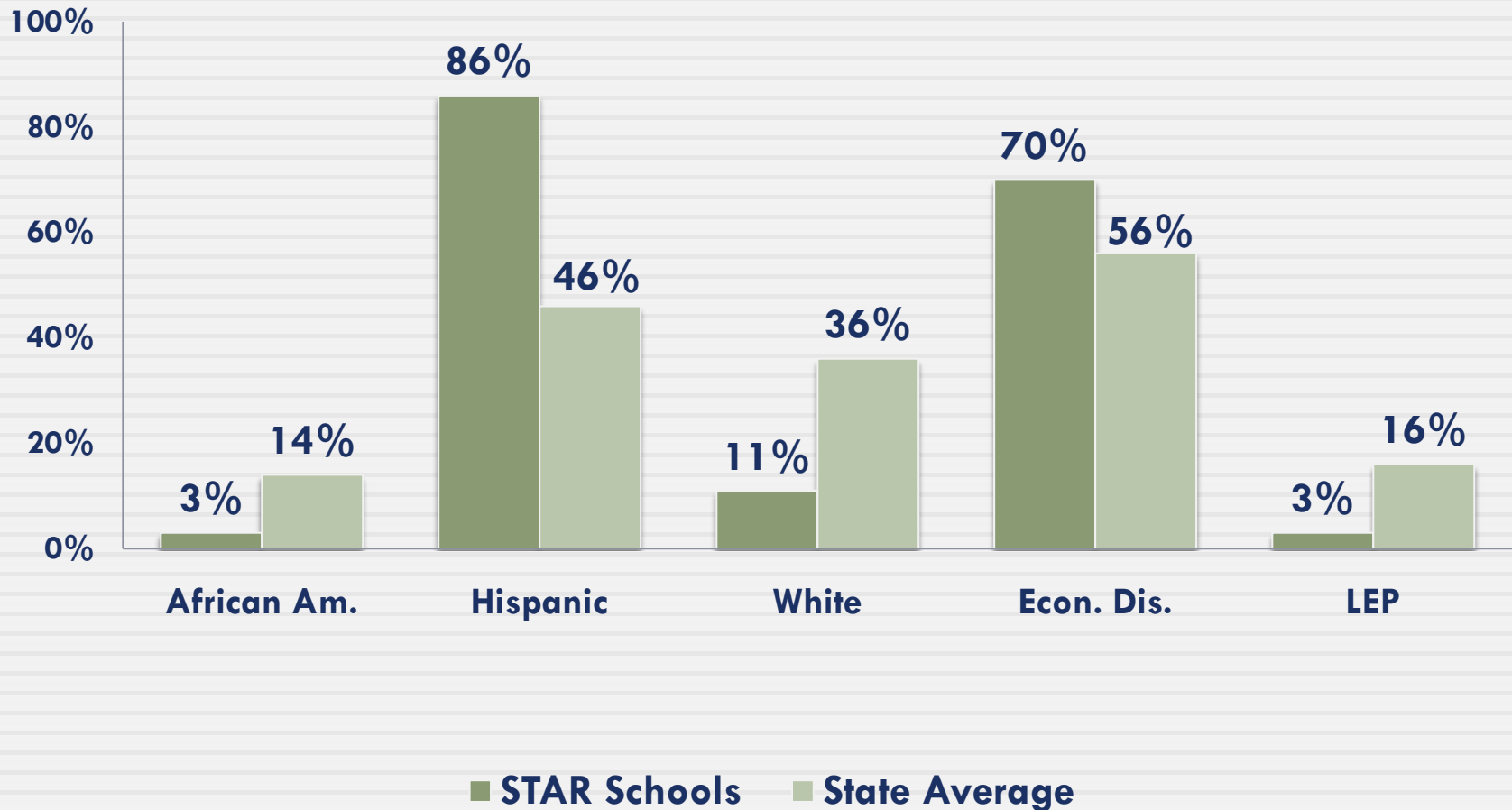
- Six districts located in the Gulf Coast region of the state
- Each district includes a high school and its associated middle school in the project
- Districts began implementing STAR in middle schools in 2006-07
- Full implementation in high schools began in 2008-09

Program Components

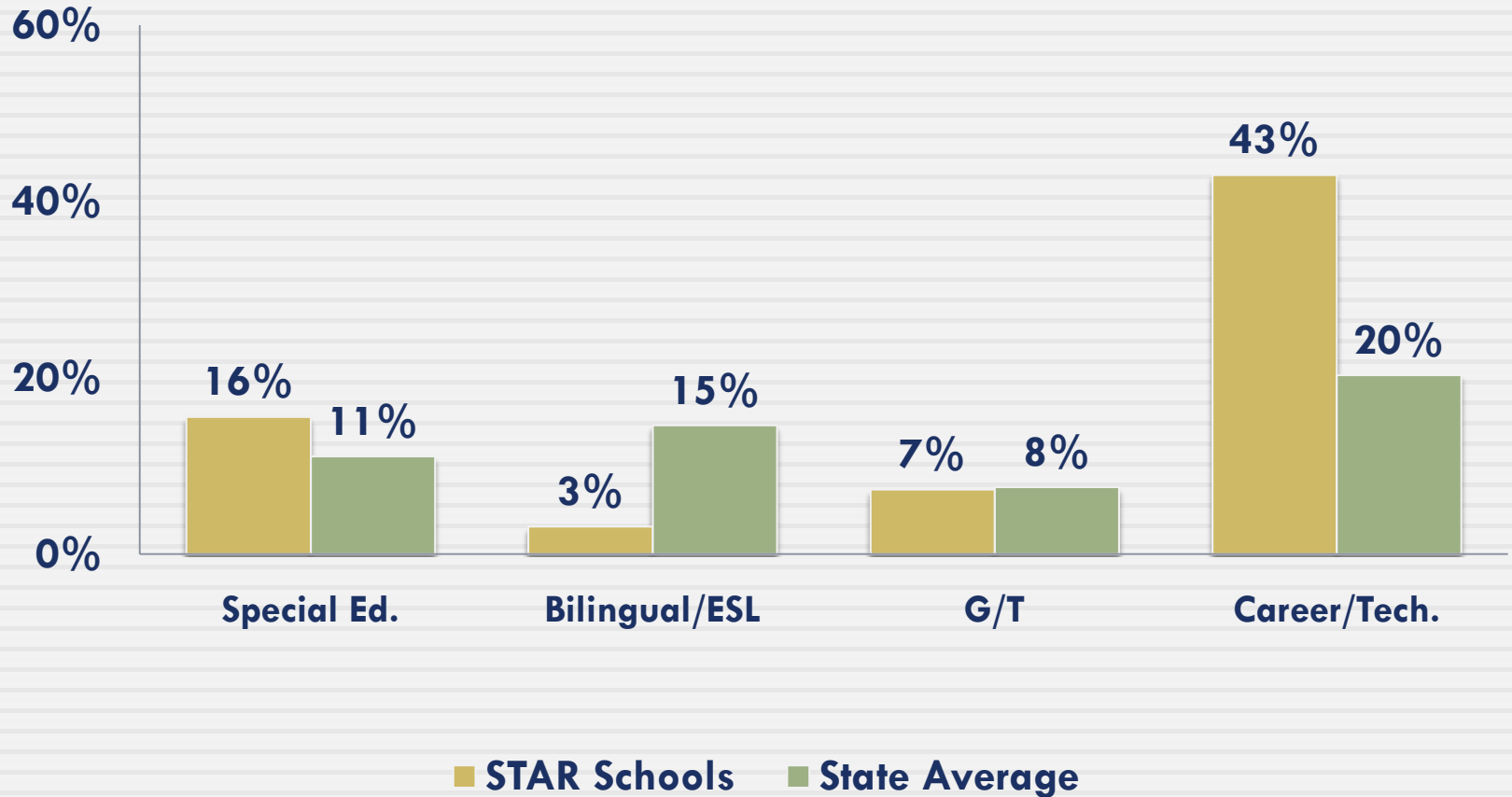
- Strengthen academic achievement
 - ▣ Vertical Teams (Gr. 6-12)
 - ▣ Increased Enrollment in AP Courses
- Professional development to improve the quality of teaching
- **Informational resources for students, families, teachers, and counselors**
- **Family and community support for college readiness**

Characteristics of STAR Campuses

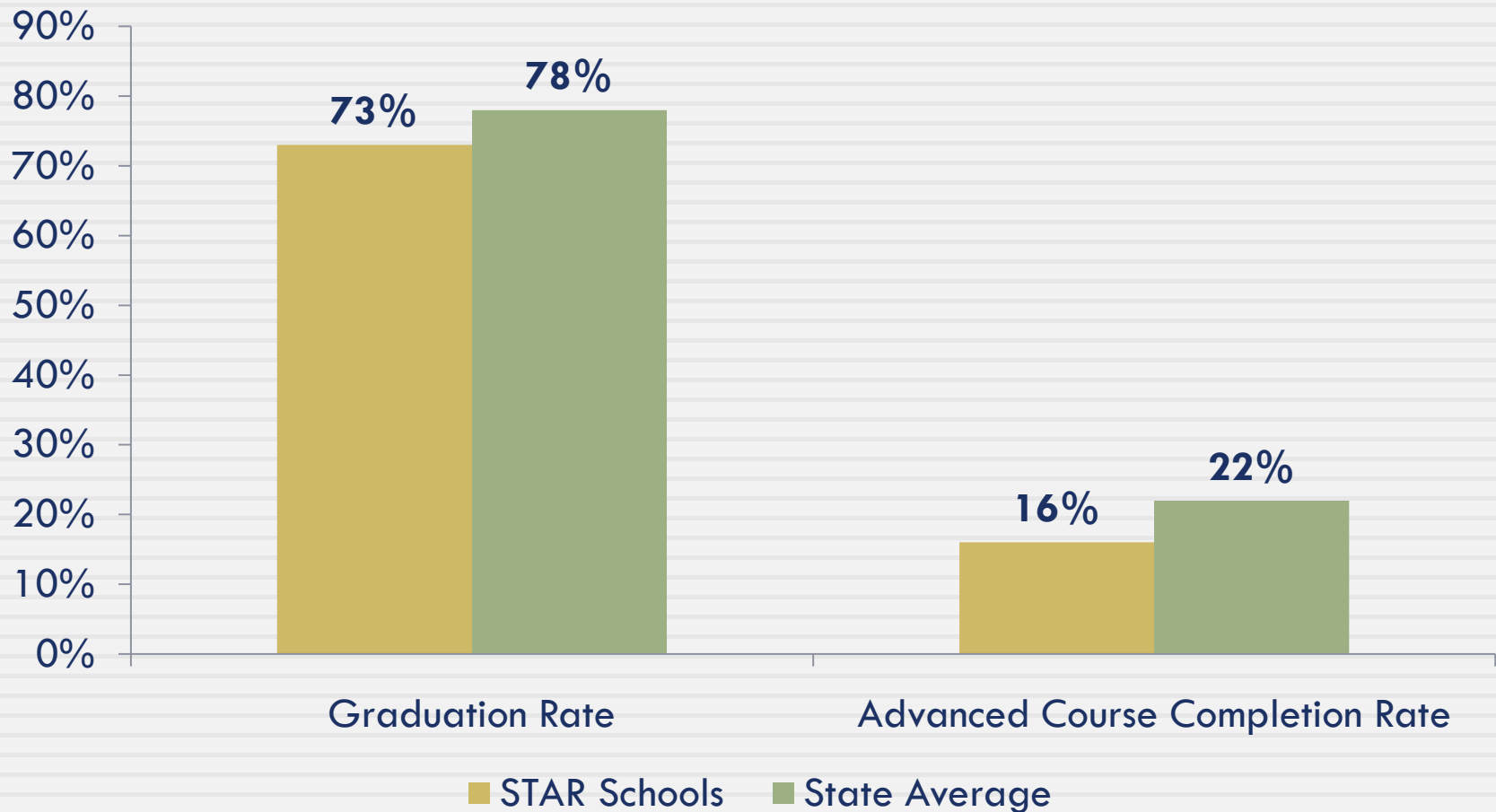
STAR Student Characteristics, Grades 7-12 (2006-07)



STAR Students Participating in Special Programs, 2006-07



Graduation and Advanced Course Completion Rates: 2006-07



STAR Parents and Students

Surveys Spring 2008

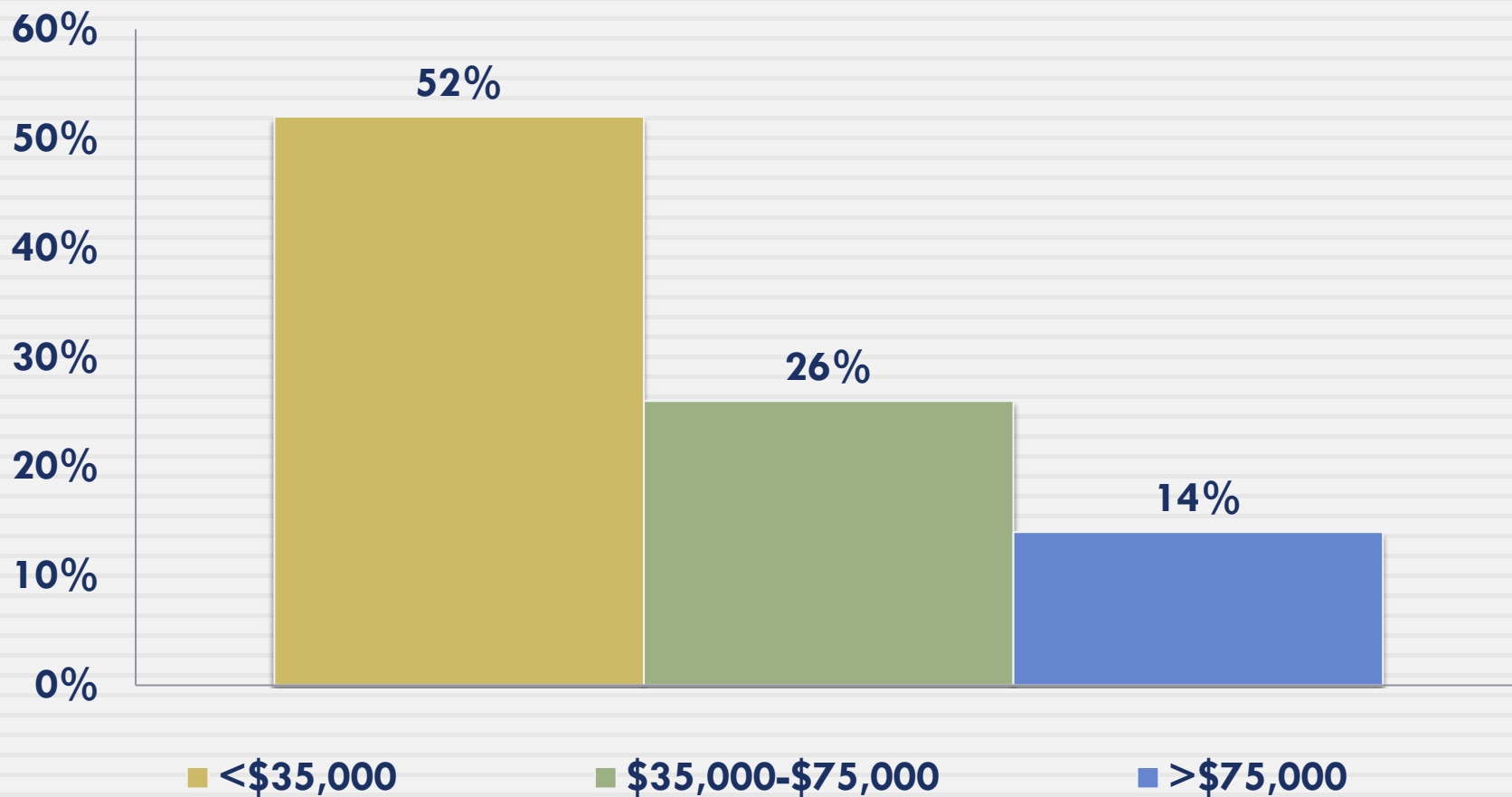
Parent Survey

- 809 randomly selected parents,
- 10% of parents at each campus (N=12), stratified by grade-level
- 281 middle school and 528 high school parents
- Telephone survey
- Spanish spoken for non-English speaking parents

Parents' Background

- 12.5 years formal schooling, on average
- 51% attended some form of college
 - 3.4 years, on average
 - Education may have been obtained outside of the U.S.
- Average of 12 years at current address
- 70% two-parent households
- 29% speak Spanish at home

Parents' Reported Income

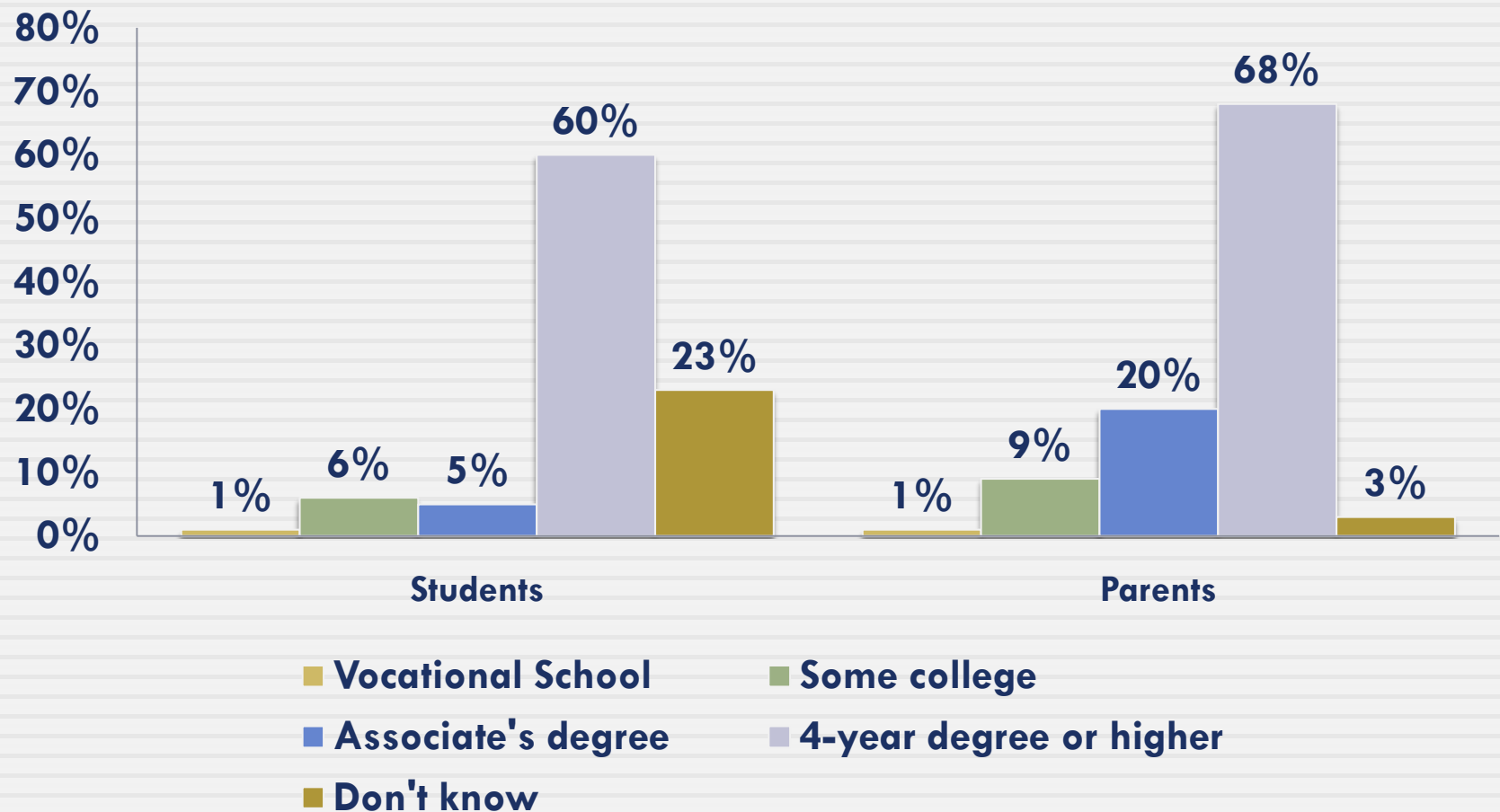


Student Survey

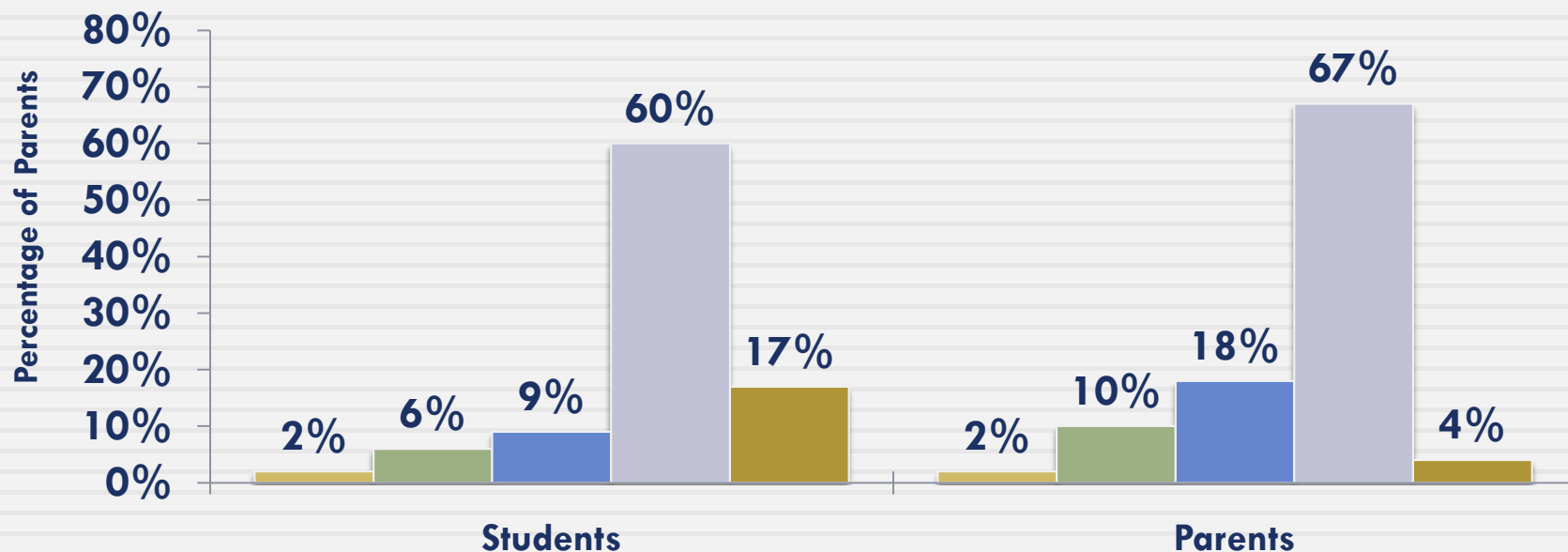
- Paper and pencil survey administered during school day
- Middle and high school student surveys
 - 69% response rate
 - Middle school = 83%; High school = 61%
- 85% Hispanic
- 9% White

Students' and Parents' Academic Expectations

Educational Expectations: Middle School Students and Parents



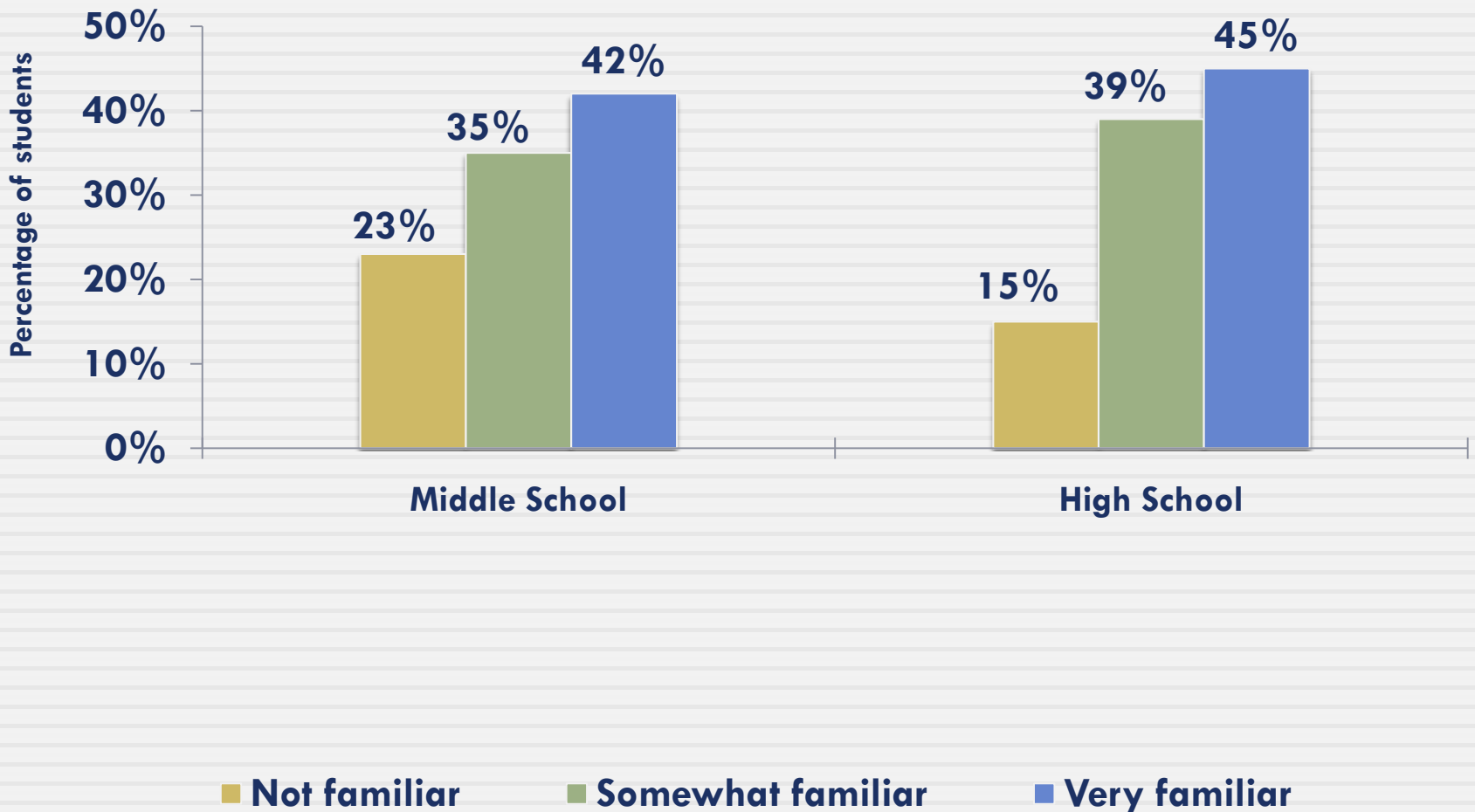
Educational Expectations: High School Students and Parents



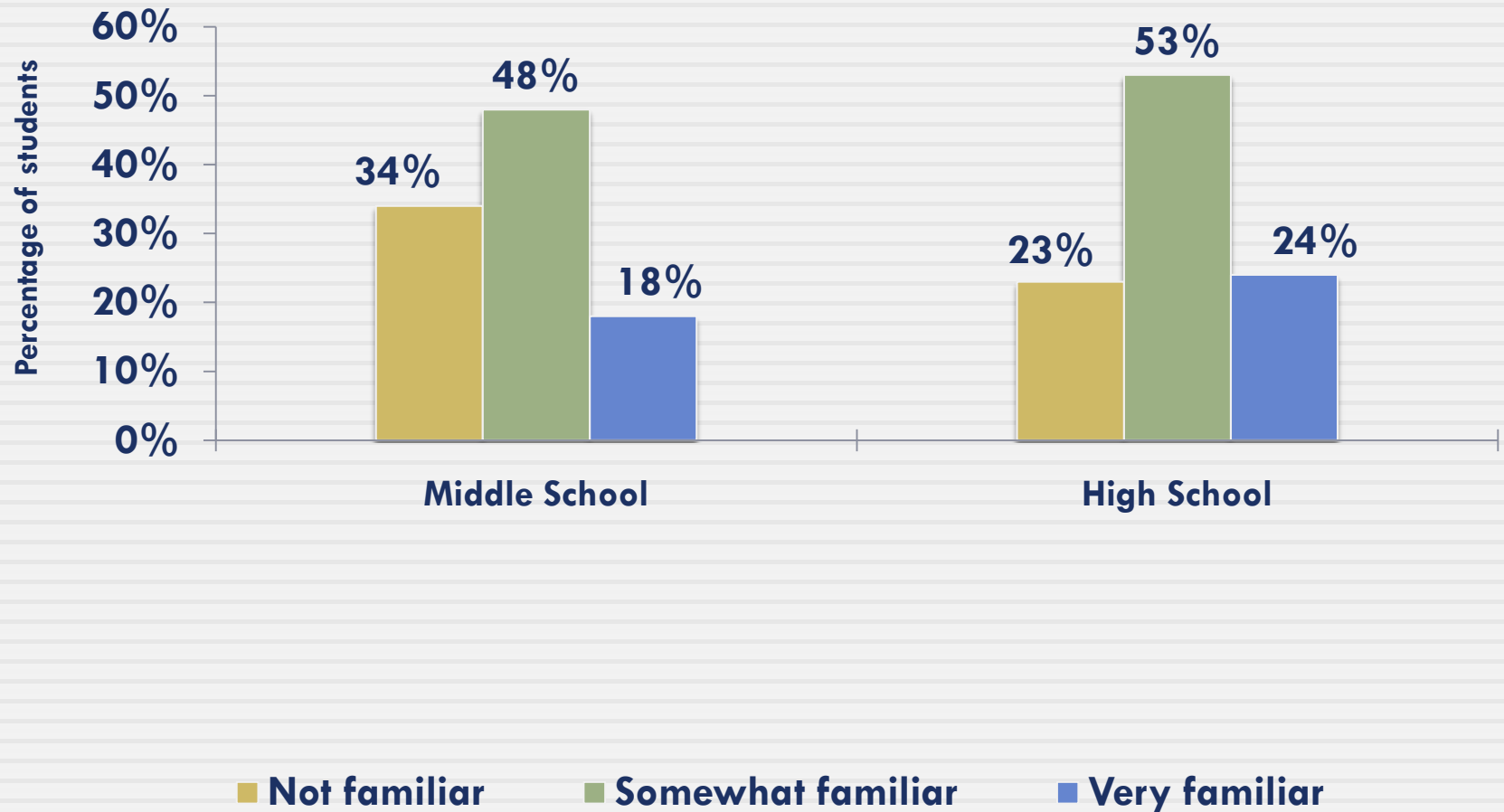
- Less than high school
- High school
- Some college
- 4-year degree or higher
- Don't know

College Awareness

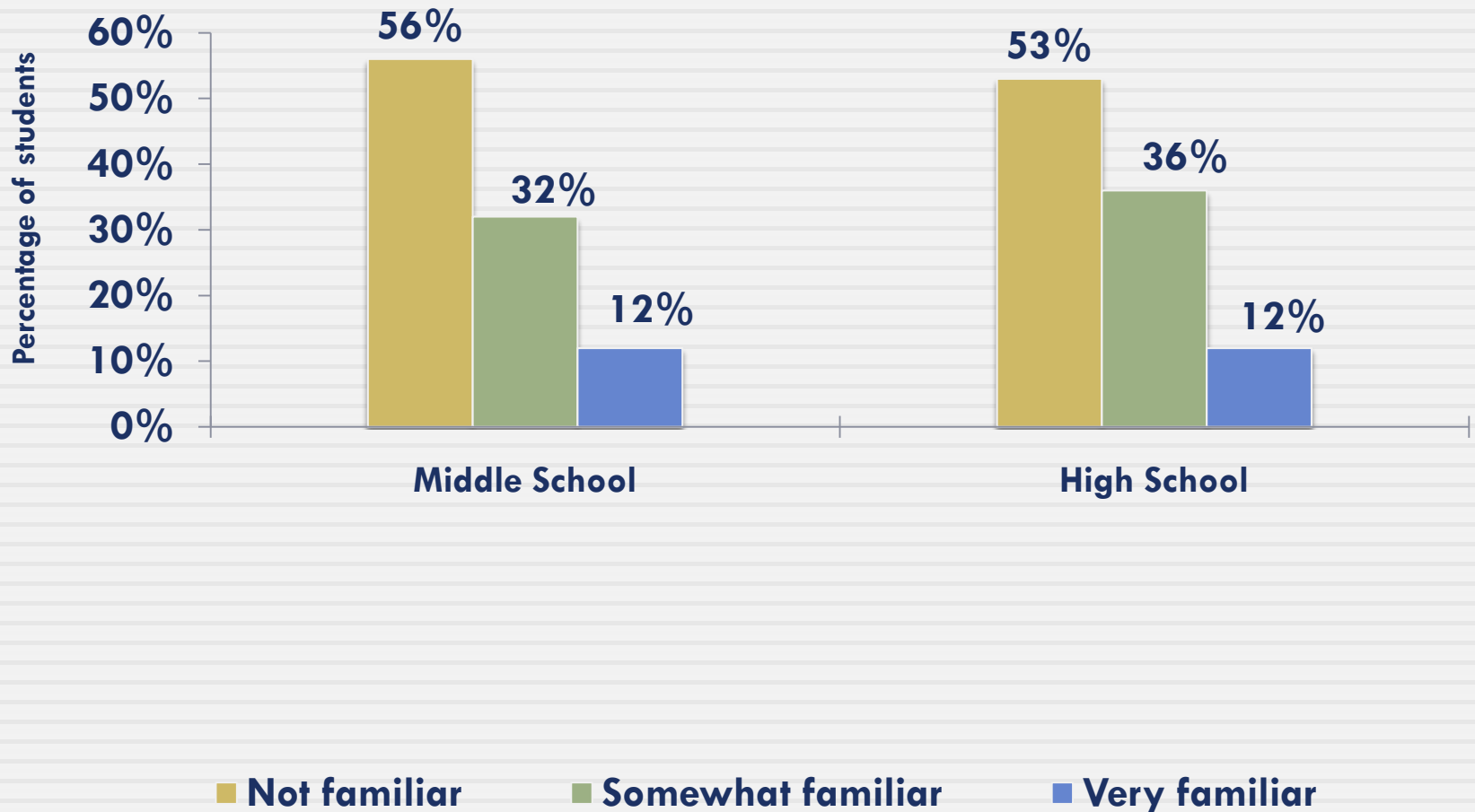
Students' Familiarity with Four-Year Colleges or Universities



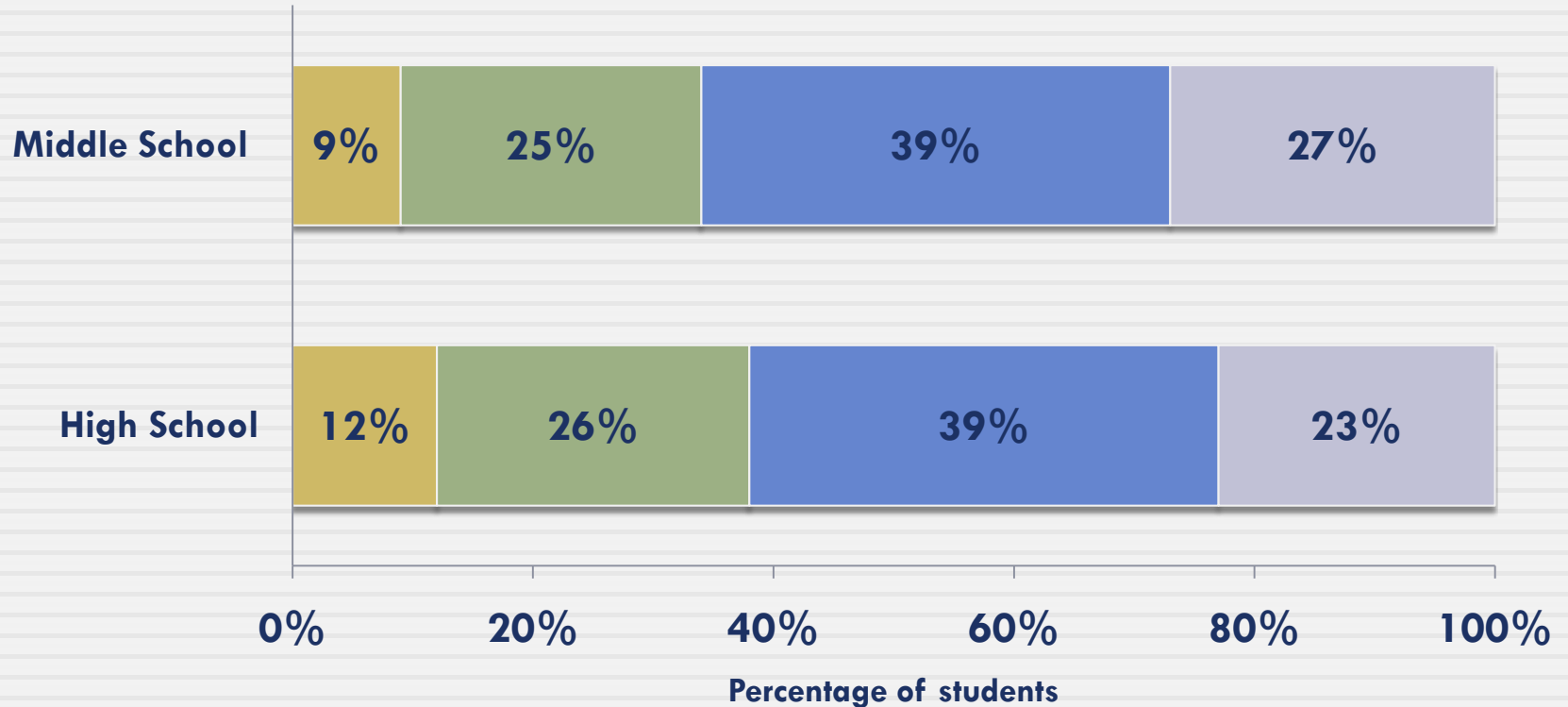
Students' Familiarity with Community or Junior Colleges



Students' Familiarity with Vocational or Technical Schools



Students' Perceptions of the Affordability of a Public Four-year College or University



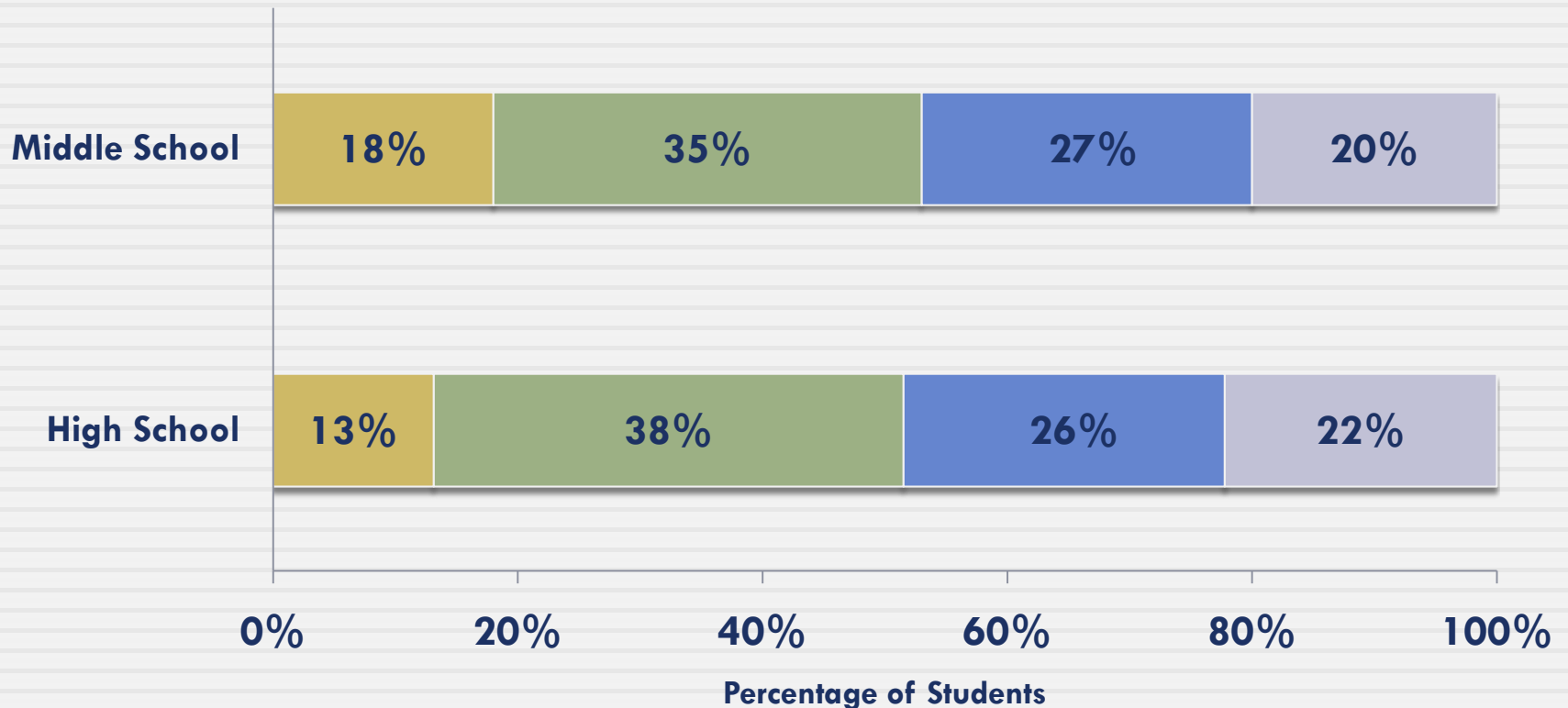
■ Probably or definitely not affordable

■ Not sure

■ Probably affordable

■ Definitely affordable

Students' Perceptions of the Affordability of a Technical or Vocational School



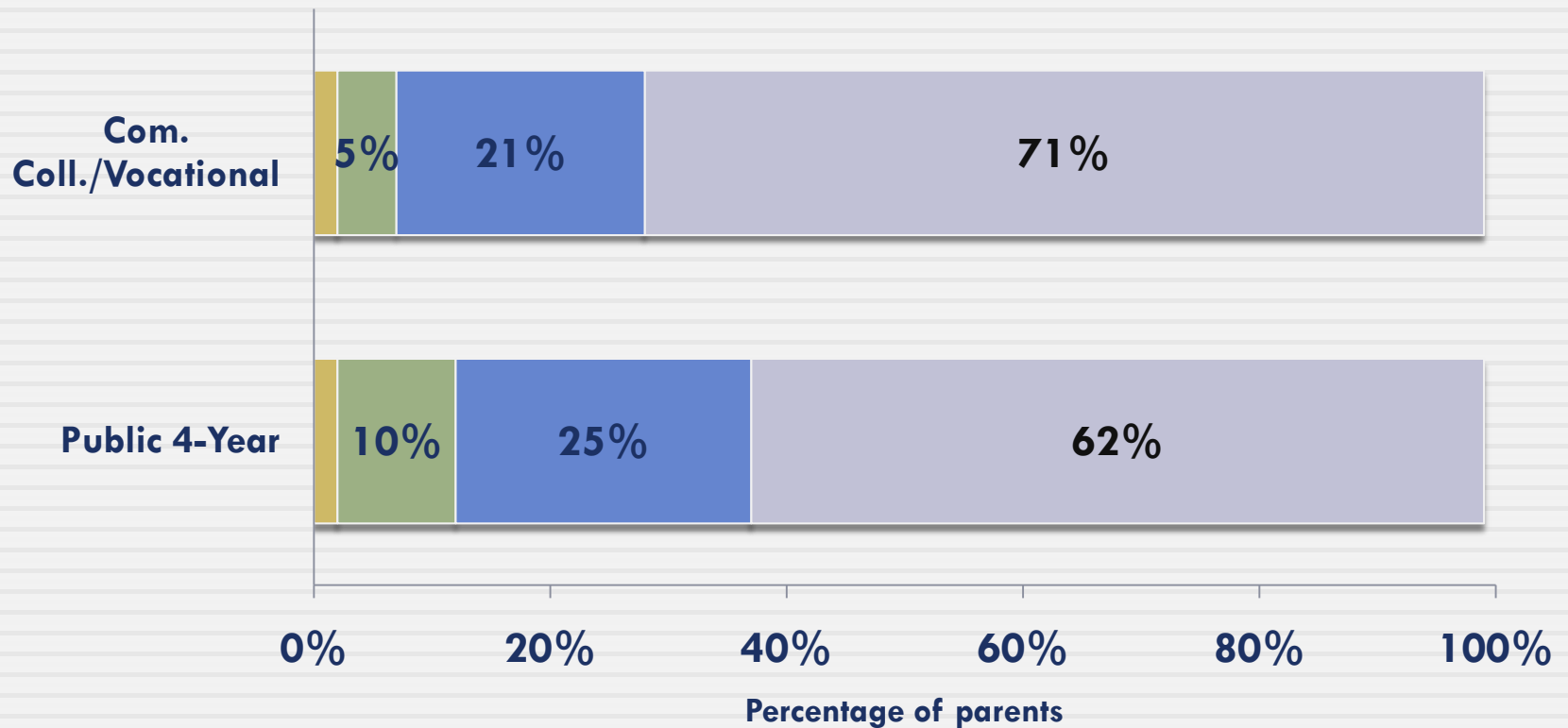
■ Probably or definitely not affordable

■ Not sure

■ Probably affordable

■ Definitely affordable

Parents' Perceptions of College Affordability, 2006-07 and 2007-08



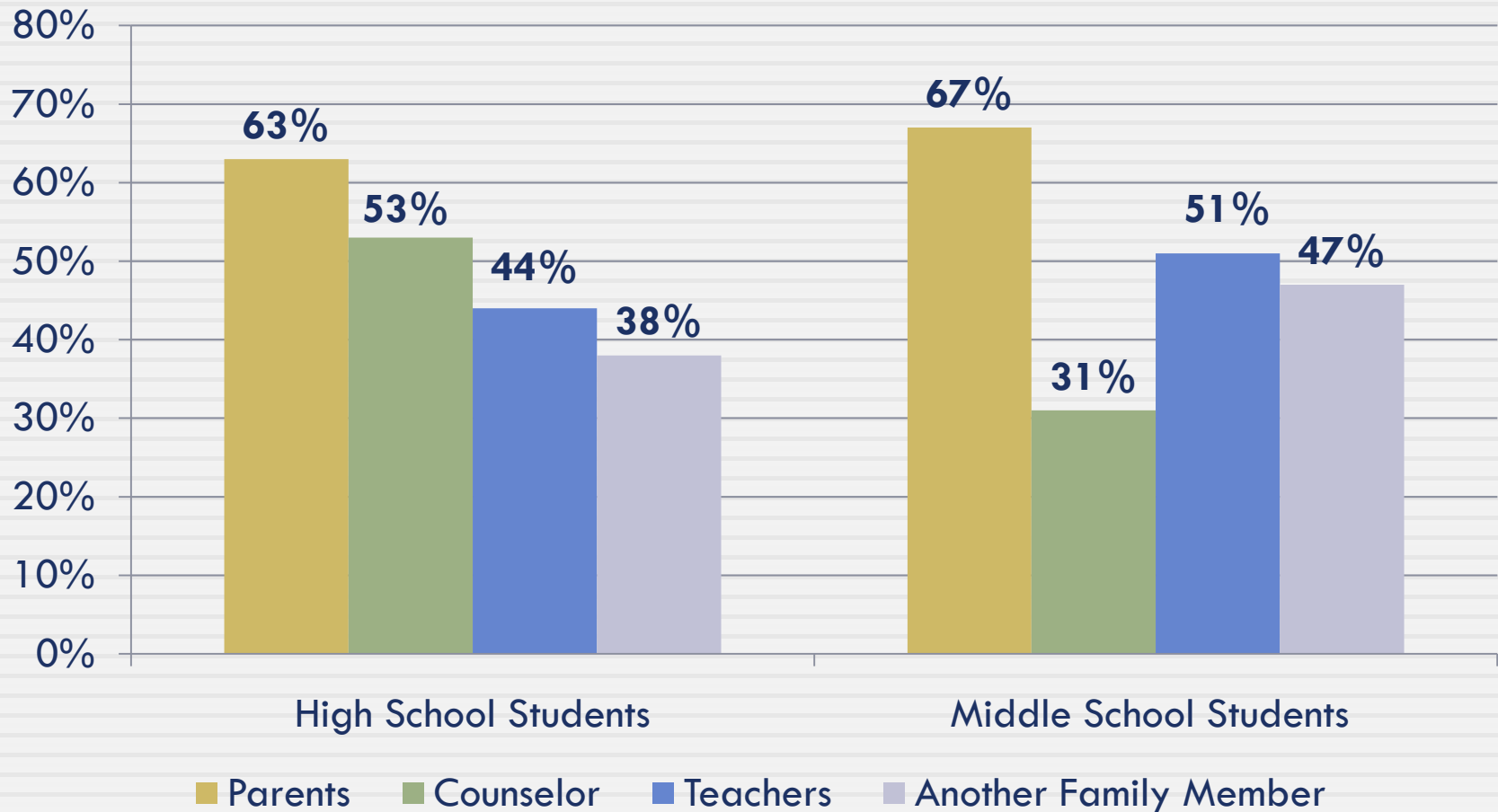
- Probably or definitely not affordable
- Not sure
- Probably affordable
- Definitely affordable

Saving for College

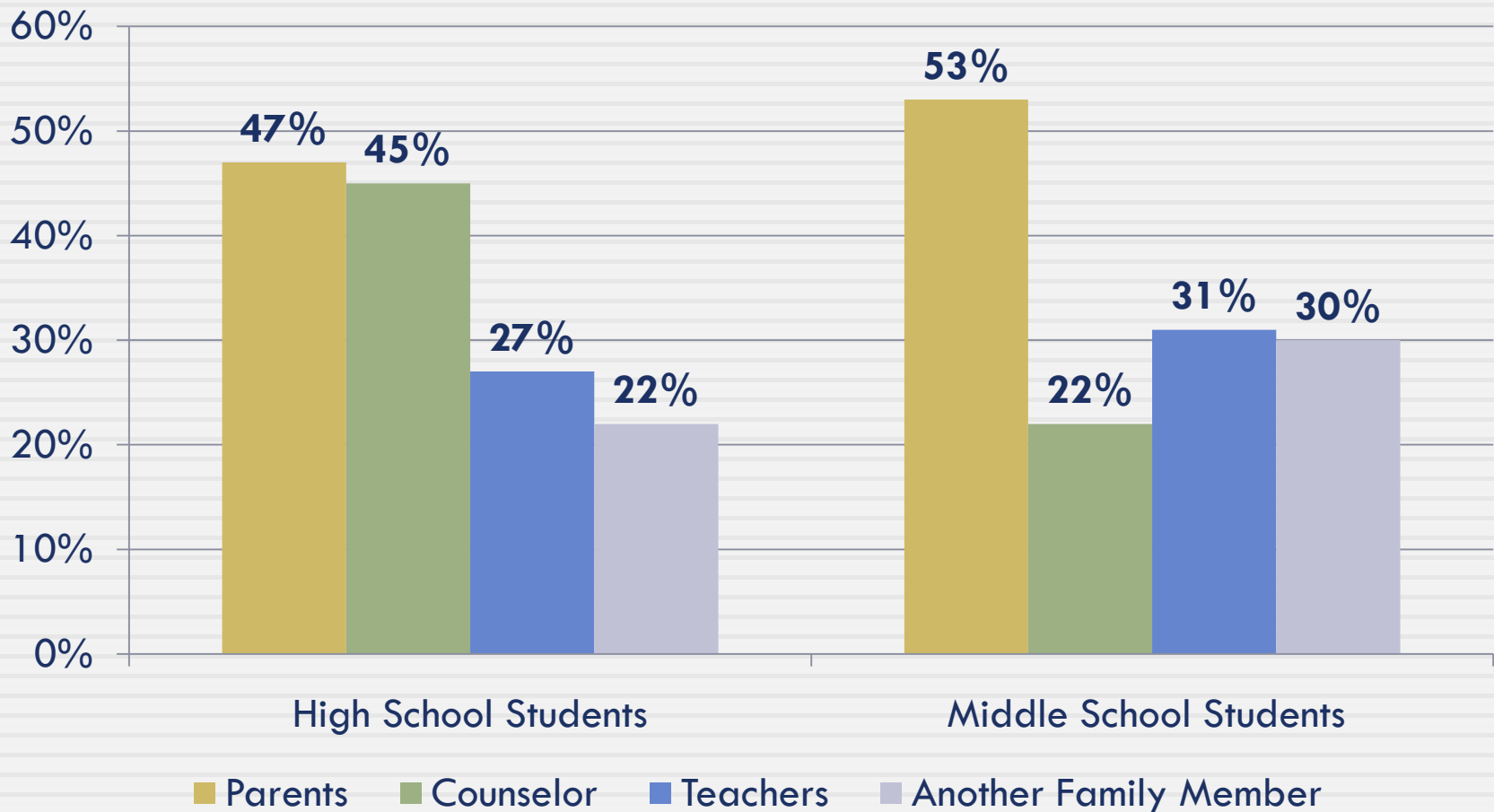
44% of surveyed high school parents and 42% of surveyed middle school parents said they had begun saving for college.

College Planning

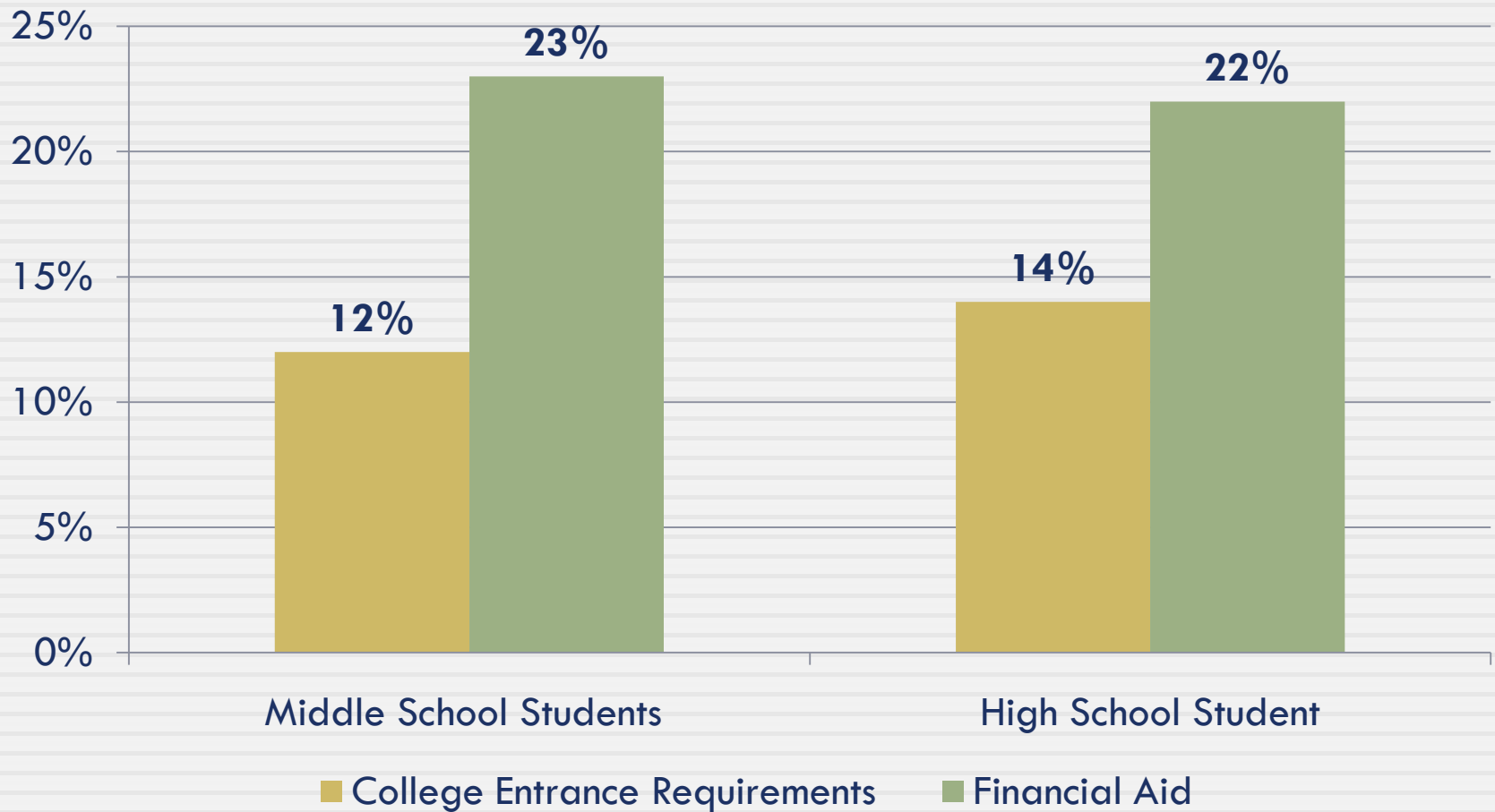
Students' Sources of Information: College Entrance Requirements



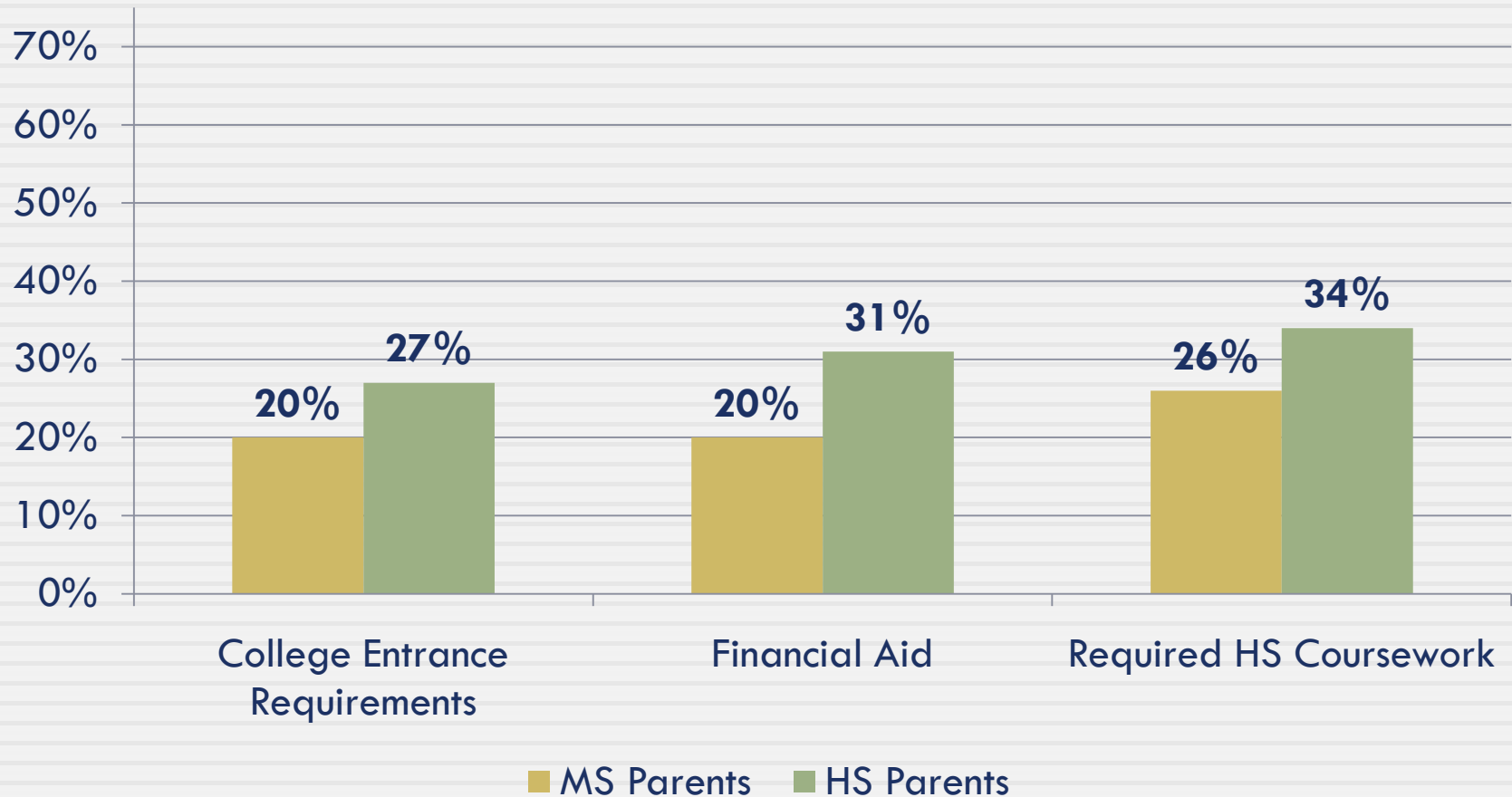
Students' Sources of Information: Financial Aid



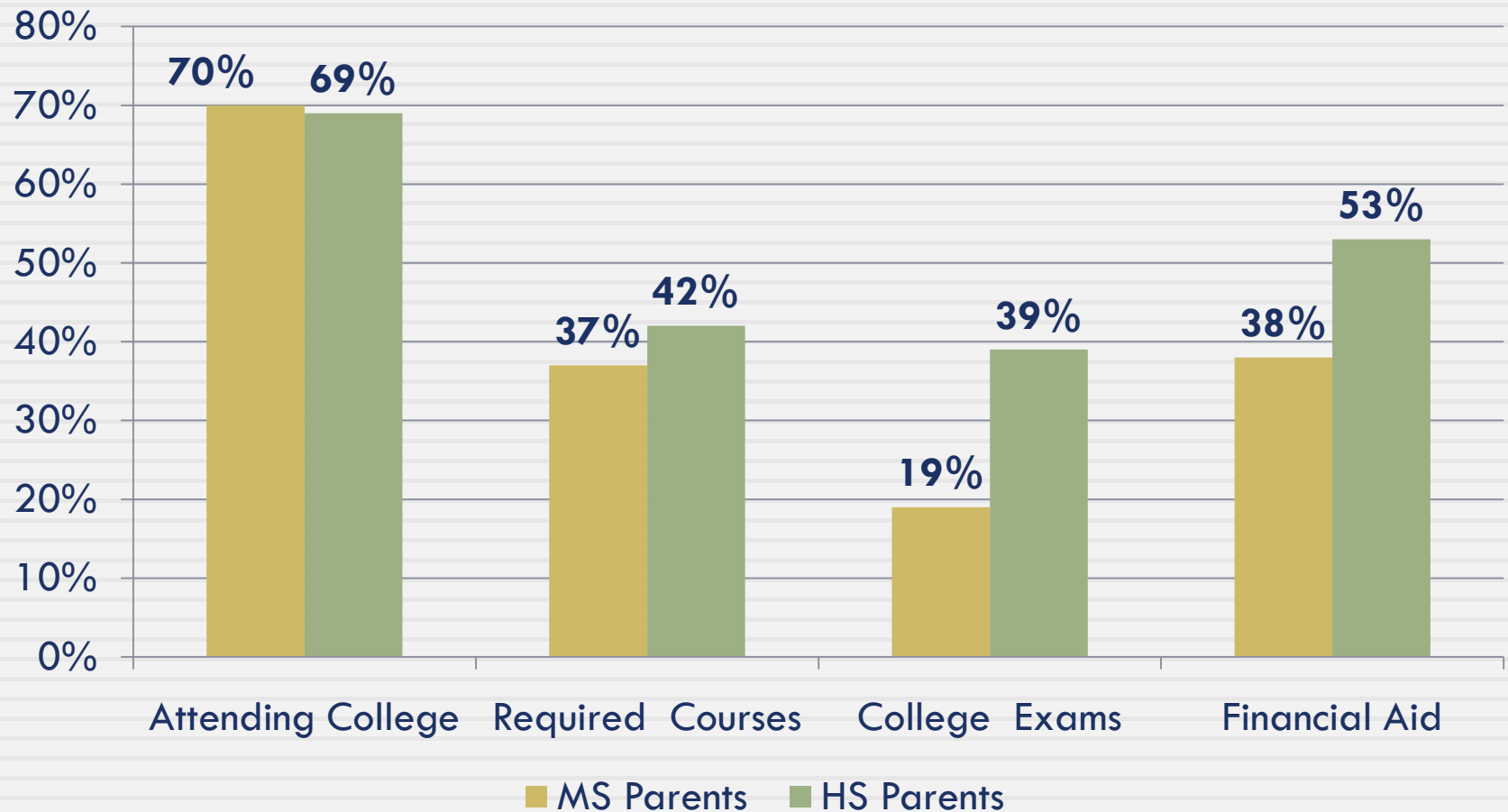
Percentage of students reporting that no one has spoken to them about...



Percentage of parents who communicated with school/district staff about...

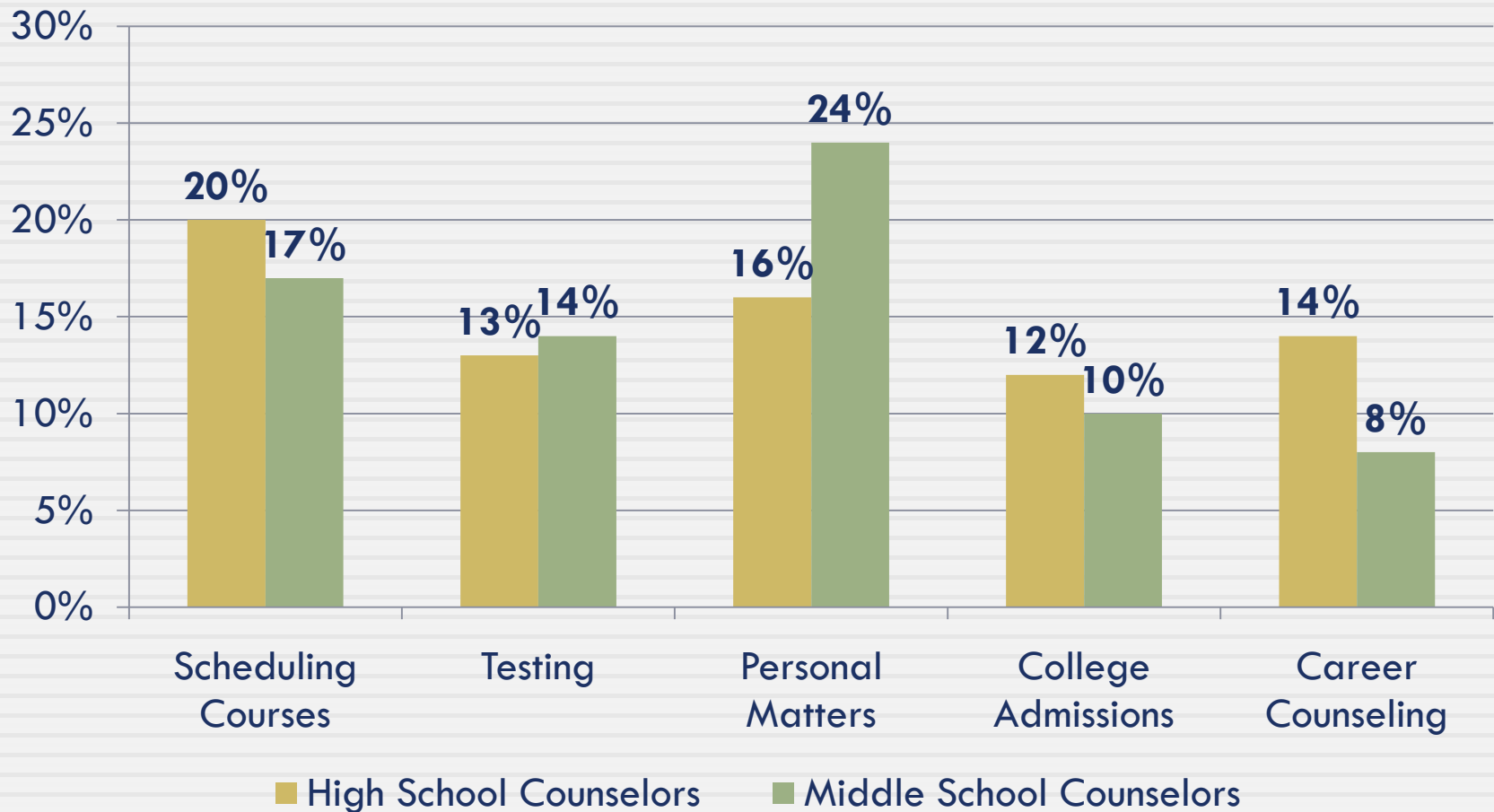


Percentage of parents who speak about college planning with students



43% of surveyed high school parents did not know their child's graduation plan in spring of 2008.

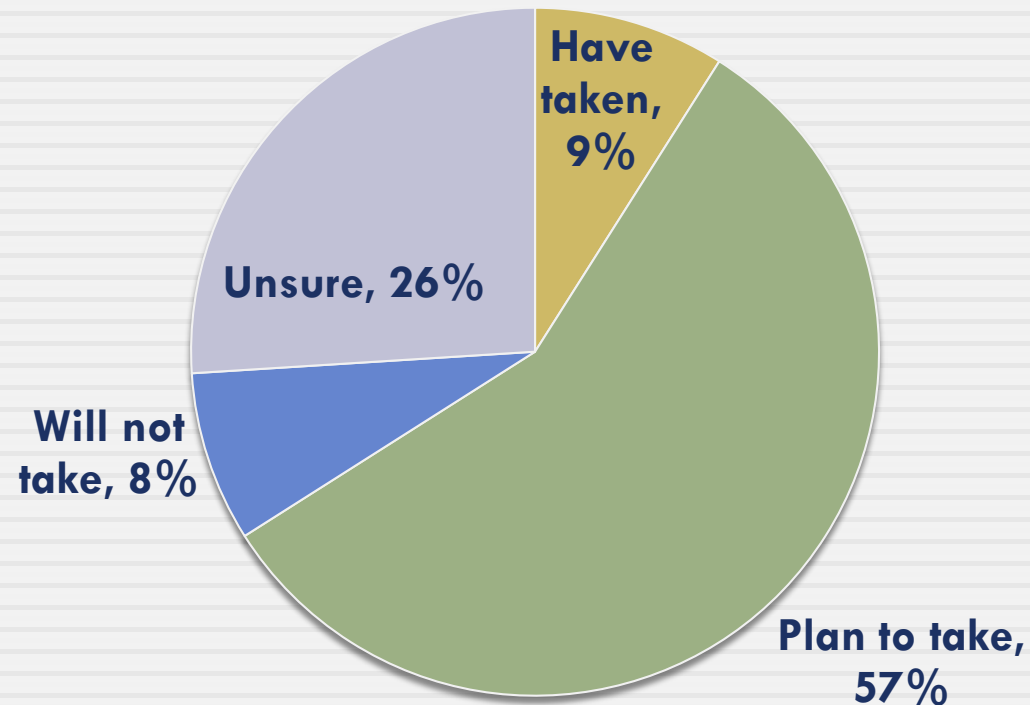
Counselor's Time



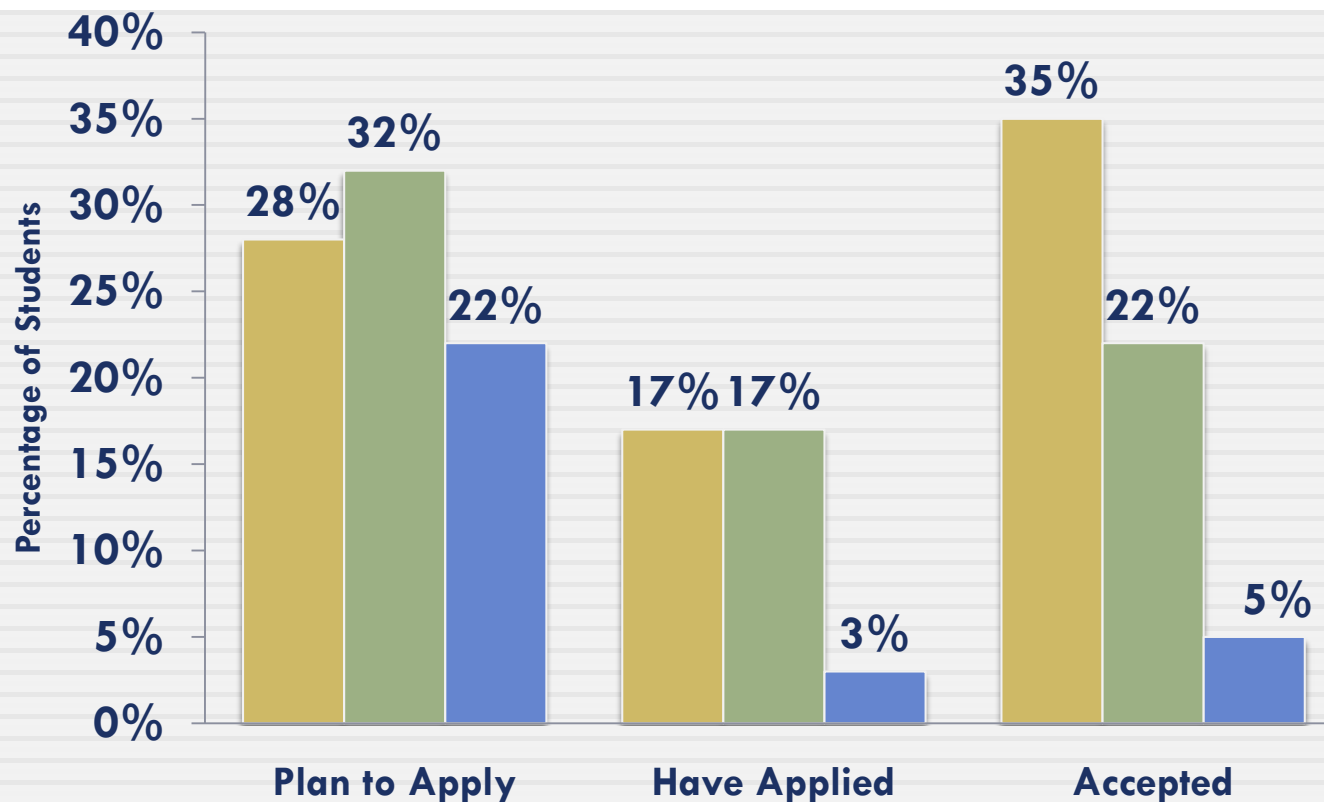
Counselors

- College counseling takes a back seat to other priorities, particularly in spring when TAKS tests are administered
- High student-counselor ratios
- The elimination of the 65% Rule from the financial accountability system (HB 3) reduces barriers to districts spending more on counseling staff

College Entrance Examination Plans of STAR Seniors: Spring 2008



College Application Plans of STAR Seniors: Spring 2008



■ 4-Year College ■ Community College ■ Technical/Vocational

Conclusions

- Parents are key sources of college information
- Parents lack critical information about college planning:
 - Courses needed
 - Financial requirements
 - Support and resources
- Many parents do not use school resources to gather information about college planning
- Many students do not use school resources to plan for college

Recommendations

Recommendations

- Early interventions:
 - Begin discussions of college preparation in elementary grades
 - Engage parents in college planning early in students' education
 - Introduce structured college counseling and planning activities in middle school
 - Survey parents and students to assess what they do and don't know about preparing for postsecondary educational opportunities

Recommendations

- Increase efforts to engage parents in discussions about schooling and college planning
- Opportunities for positive exchanges of information
 - Home visits
 - Structured workshops targeted to parents (flexible times)
 - Informal activities that include discussions of college planning (e.g., tailgate parties)

Recommendations

- Dedicated college counselor at high school level
 - ▣ Add a position
 - ▣ Consider training teachers to act as college admissions counselors
- Eliminate follow-the-cohort model of counseling
- Partner with community colleges to provide admissions and financial aid counseling to students

Recommendations

- Greater emphasis on providing information on technical and vocational postsecondary opportunities
 - Include vocational programs in college/career days
 - Plan trips to vocational programs as well as two- and four-year colleges and universities

Resources to Improve Parent/Student Awareness

- College costs and financial aid calculators:
 - www.texascollegemoney.org
- User friendly, comparable information about public colleges and universities:
 - <http://voluntarysystem.org>
- Institute for Public School Initiatives (IPSI)
 - Café con Leche (Coffee with Milk)
 - www.utsystem.edu.ipsi.org



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