



# *2023 Gen Z* **MEDIA REPORT**

WHAT'S GUIDING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' HIGHER  
EDUCATION DECISION MAKING PROCESS

# INTRODUCTION

For the last four years, Academica Group and Glacier have annually surveyed high school students in Canada to better understand their postsecondary decision making and perceptions of marketing and branding. In 2023, 1,083 high school students considering attending postsecondary education (PSE) shared their perspective. Data was obtained via Glacier's influencer and high school network.



# Gen Z's

## HIGHER EDUCATION PLANS

Most of the high school students we surveyed were considering attending university (81%), and almost one-third were considering college or a polytechnic (30%). Where they were in their postsecondary decision process varied by grade, but almost all had started thinking about the specific postsecondary institutions they wanted to apply to.

While this would be expected of grade 12s, even three-quarters of grade 10s said they were already considering where they would apply and had chosen a program or narrowed their program choices. By grade 11, one-third felt they knew what program they wanted to take in postsecondary, and more than half had narrowed their options.

University **82%**



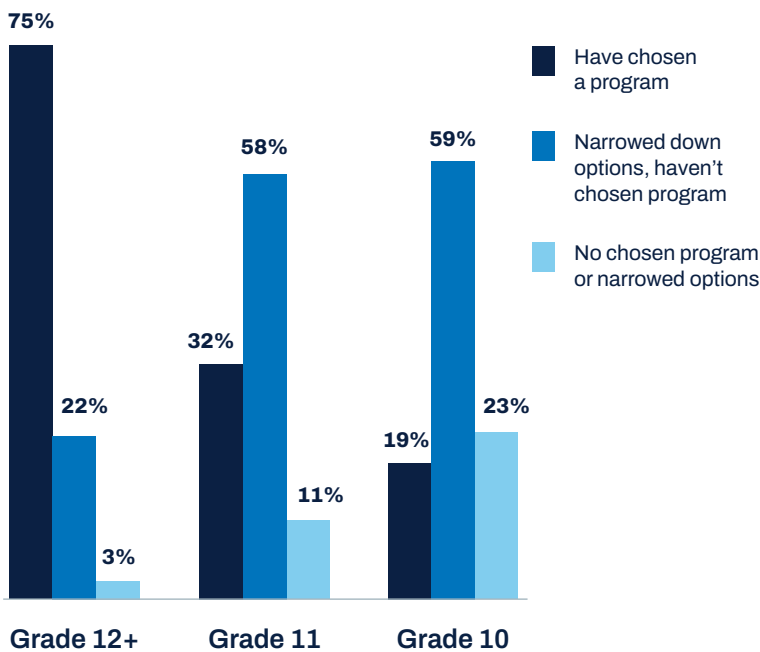
College/Polytechnic **30%**



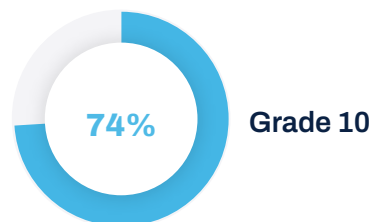
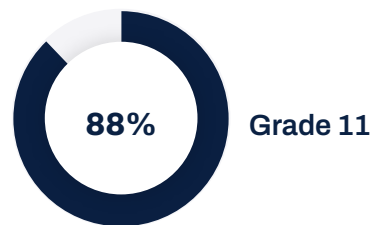
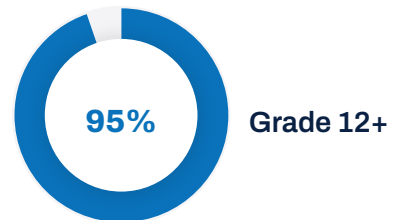
Other Institution Type **3%**



Unsure **6%**

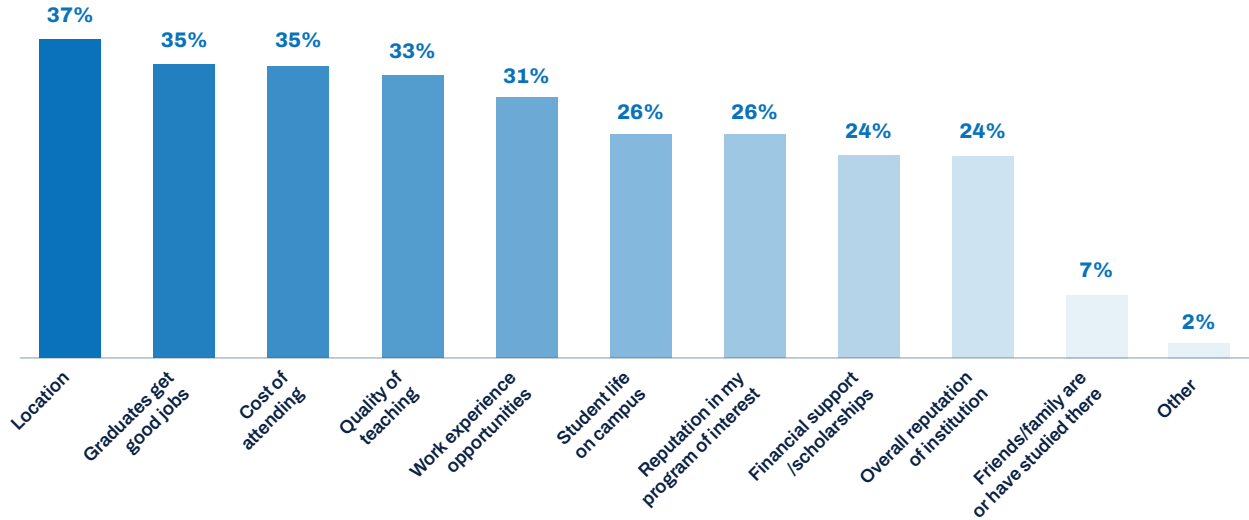


Started thinking about postsecondary institution to apply to by grade



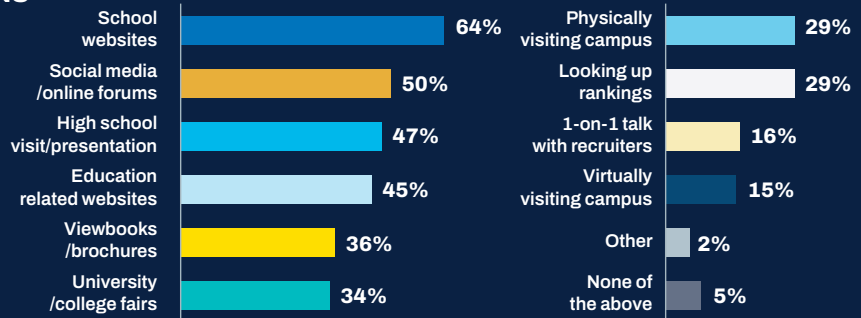
# RESEARCHING INSTITUTIONS

When asked to select up to three factors that were most important when deciding what institutions to apply to, no one factor emerged as universally important to students. Location (37%), graduate career outcomes (35%), and the costs of attending (35%) were the three most common, but quality of teaching (33%) and work experience opportunities (31%) were close behind demonstrating the wide range of factors that students consider.

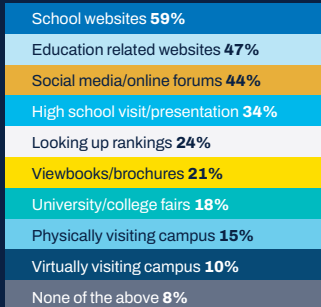


## SOURCES USED TO LEARN ABOUT POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTIONS

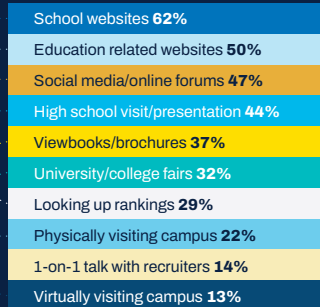
To learn more about postsecondary institutions, students have primarily used school websites (64%), social media/online forums (50%), high school visits/presentations (47%), or other education related websites (45%). Among grade 12s, more than two-fifths have visited a university/college fair (45%), viewed viewbooks/brochures (43%), or physically visited campus (42%).



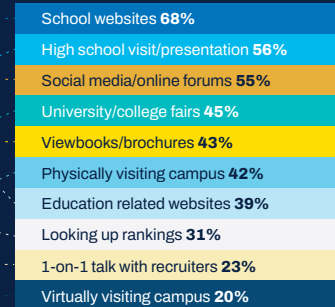
### Grade 10

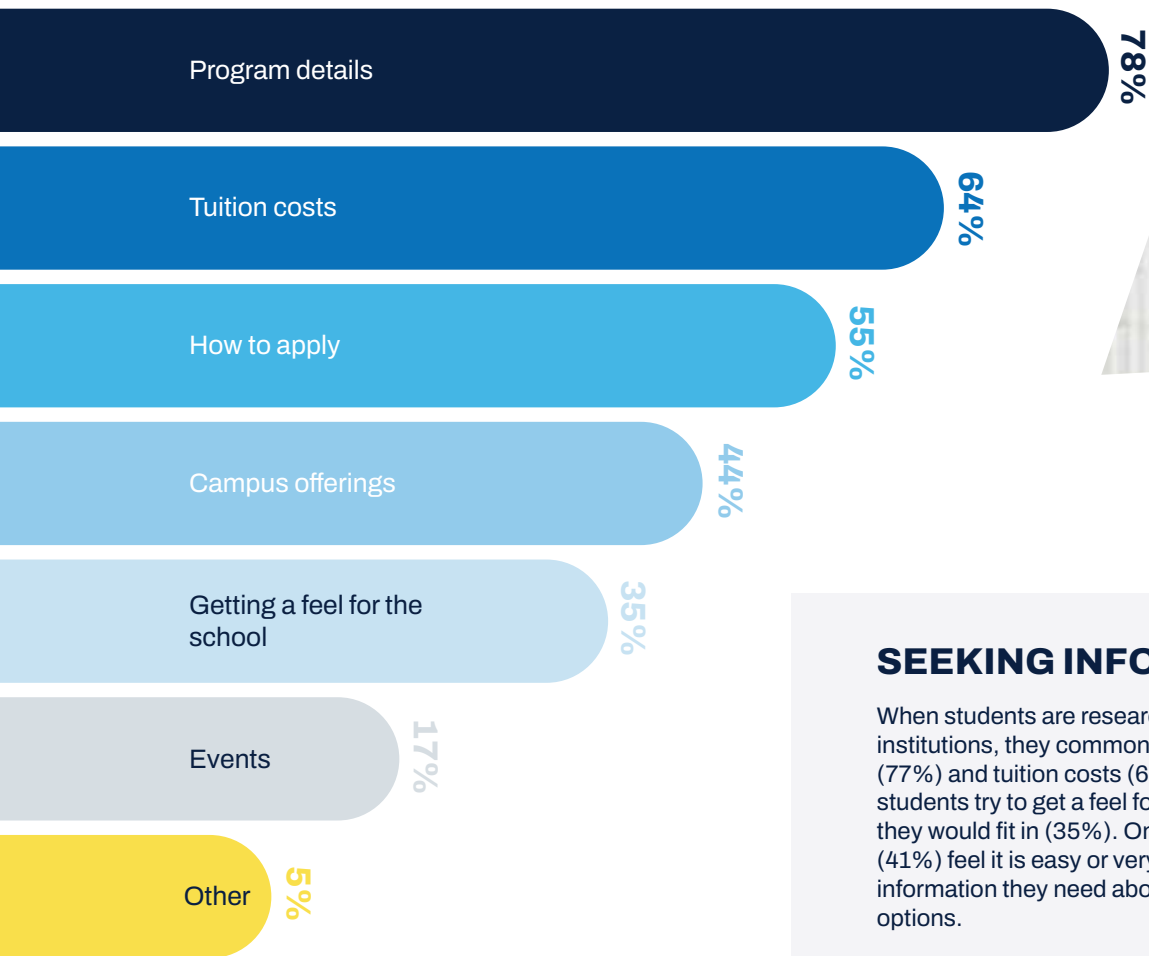


### Grade 11



### Grade 12+





## SEEKING INFORMATION

When students are researching postsecondary institutions, they commonly look for program details (77%) and tuition costs (64%). About one-third of students try to get a feel for the school and whether they would fit in (35%). Only two-fifths of students (41%) feel it is easy or very easy to find the information they need about their postsecondary options.

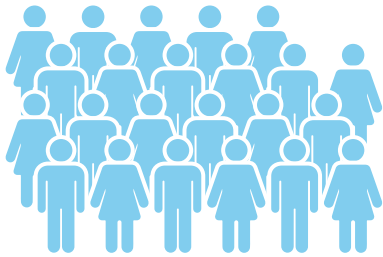
## SPEAKING TO OTHERS

Family members (84%) and friends (76%) are by far the most common people that high school students talk to about their postsecondary options. About half also say they talk to teachers or guidance counsellors, and about one-third talk to postsecondary students or graduates.

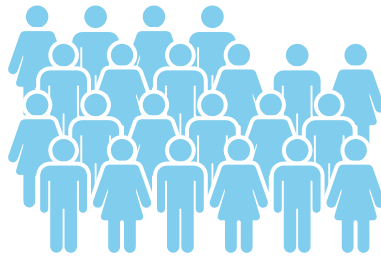


## CONCERNS ABOUT APPLYING TO POSTSECONDARY

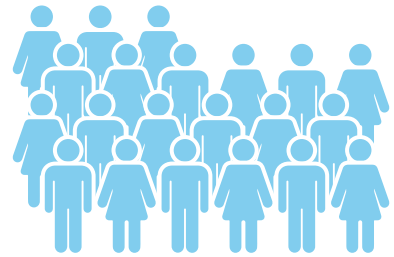
Almost all students had at least one concern about attending postsecondary. The most common concerns are the cost of tuition (57%), getting the necessary grades (54%), and uncertainty about the future (52%).



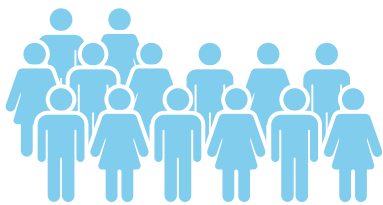
**57%**  
Cost of tuition



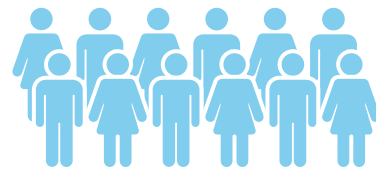
**54%**  
Getting the necessary grades



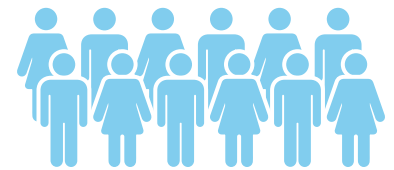
**52%**  
Uncertainty about the future



**36%**  
Deciding which school would be a good fit for me



**30%**  
Cost of application



**30%**  
Choosing a program



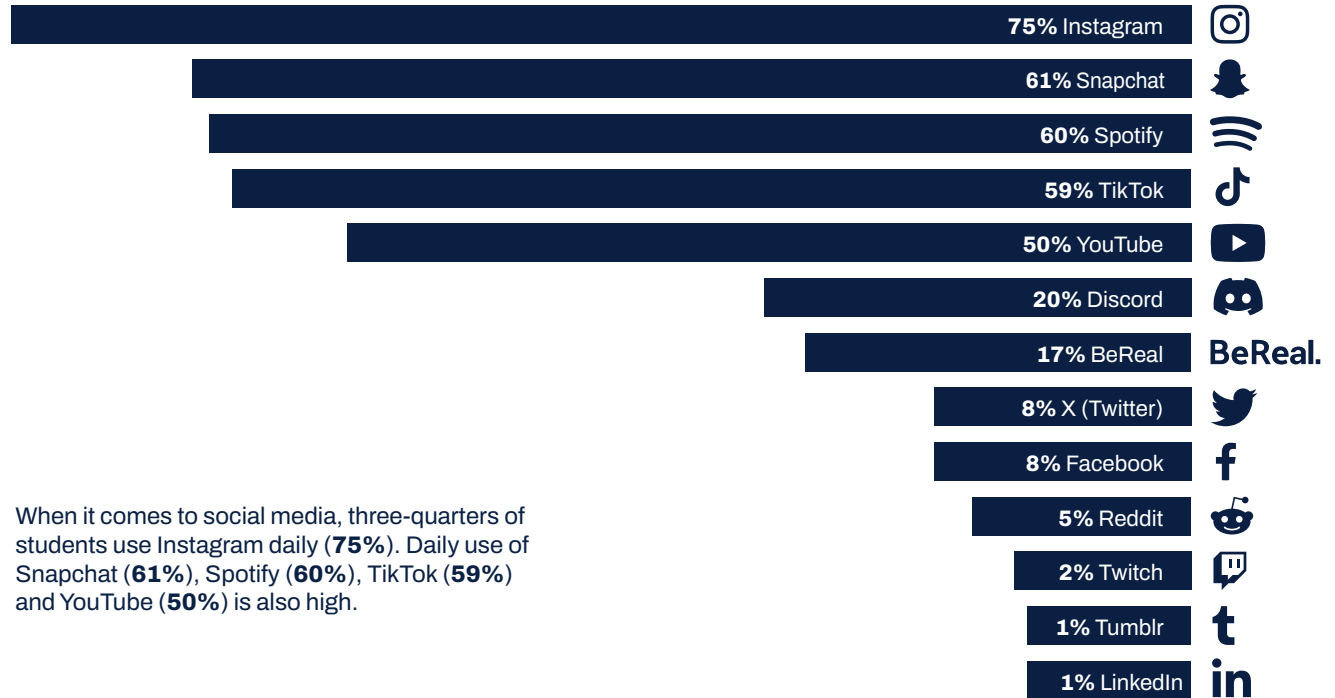
**2%**  
Other



**5%**  
No concerns



## SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE & HIGHER ED



When it comes to social media, three-quarters of students use Instagram daily (**75%**). Daily use of Snapchat (**61%**), Spotify (**60%**), TikTok (**59%**) and YouTube (**50%**) is also high.

Social media/online forums used to learn more about postsecondary institutions



Platforms for following postsecondary institutions



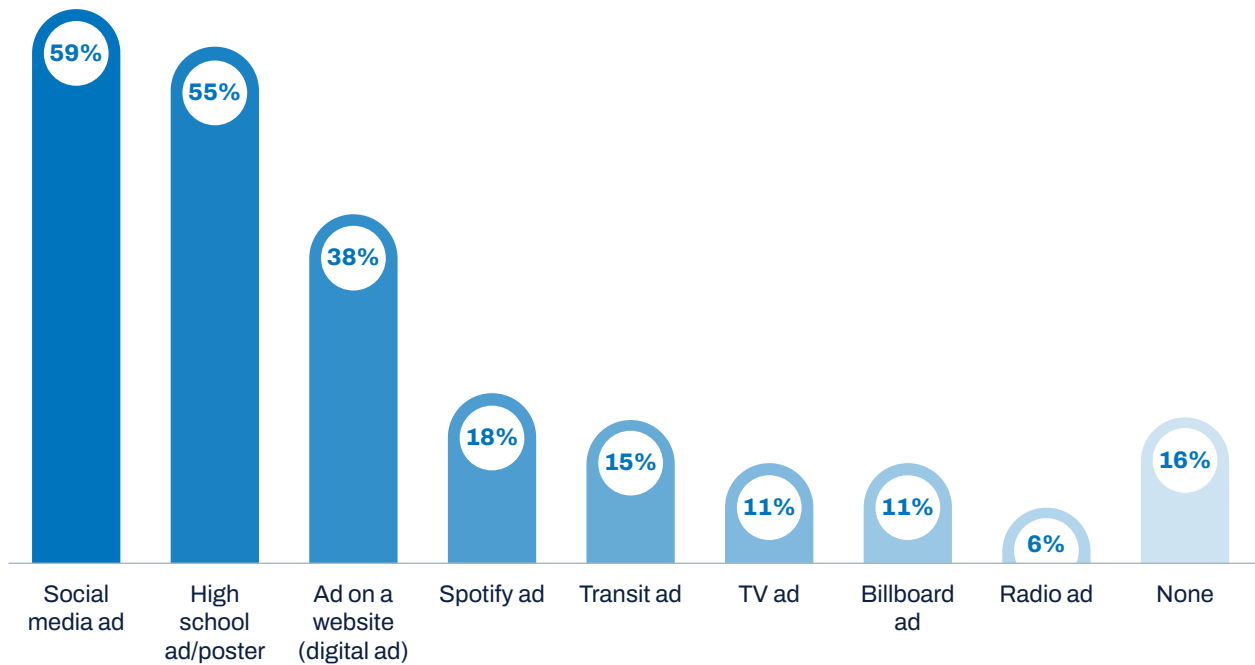
## USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO LEARN ABOUT INSTITUTIONS

More than two-thirds of students use social media to learn about postsecondary institutions, with Instagram being the most common (47%), followed by YouTube (31%), and TikTok (26%). Significantly fewer actually follow postsecondary institutions on social media (35%), almost all of which follow an institution on Instagram (32%). Only 6% follow an institution on TikTok.

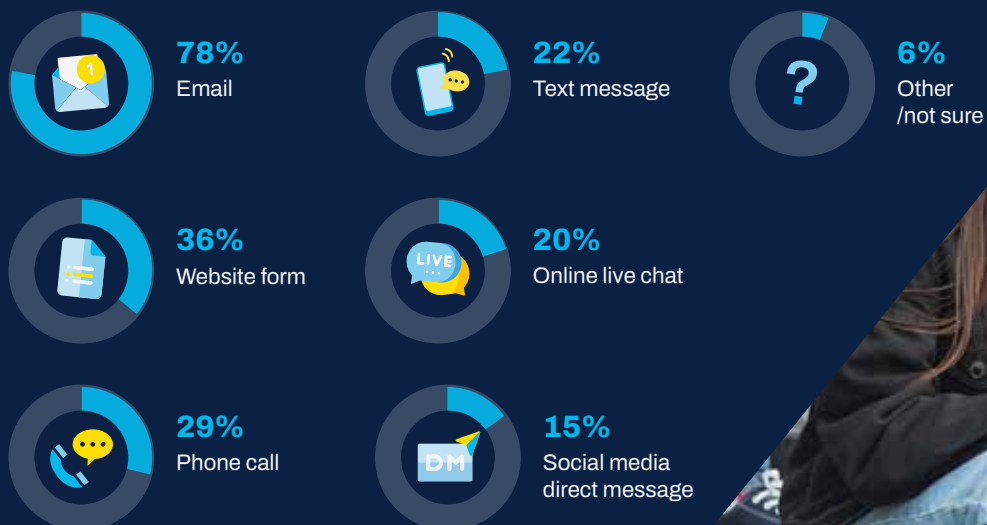
## POSTSECONDARY ADS & COMMUNICATION

Students most commonly report encountering a social media ad (59%) or high school ad/poster (55%) from a postsecondary institution. For communication methods, most students prefer using email to get in touch with a postsecondary institution (78%) if they have a question. About one-third prefer a website form, and 30% would prefer to call the institution.

Encountered any of the following from a postsecondary institution



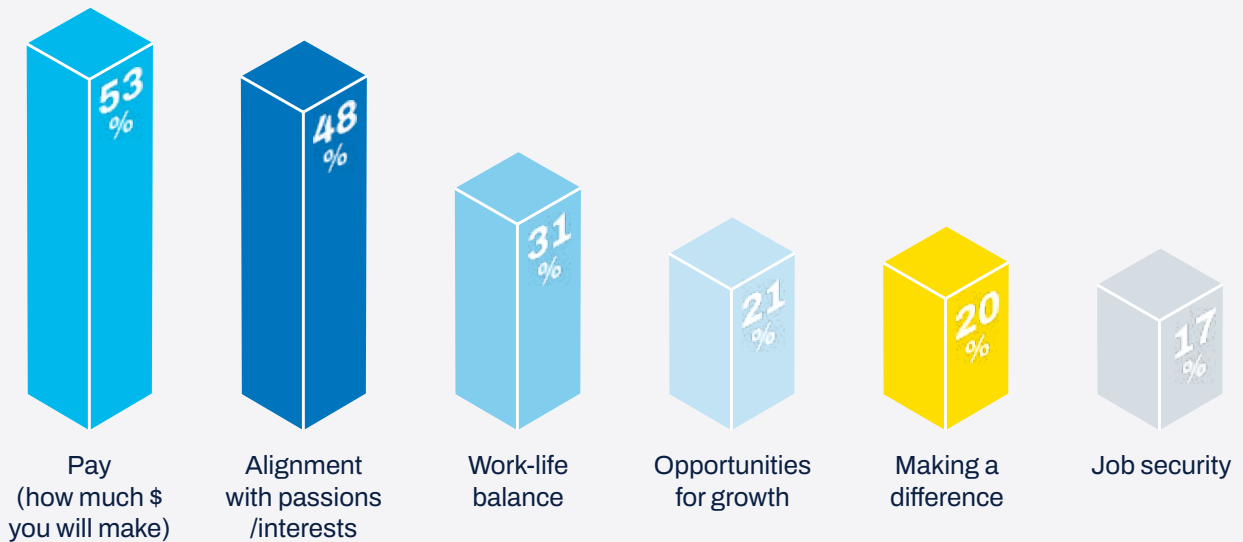
### PREFERRED METHOD OF GETTING IN TOUCH WITH A POSTSECONDARY INSTITUTION





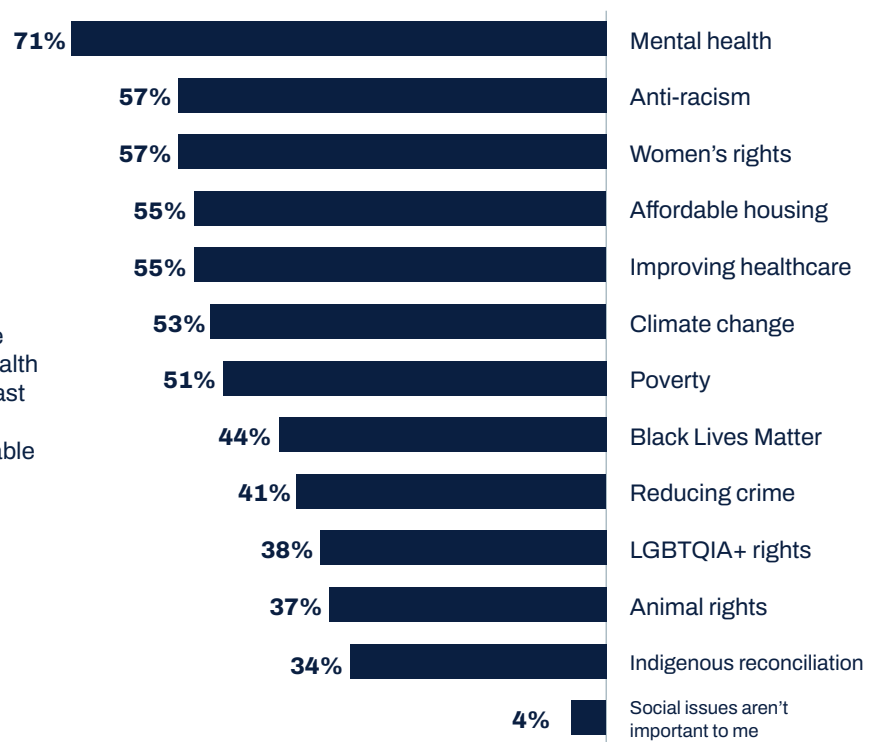
## STUDENT PLANS & BELIEFS

When students are deciding on a career, the most important factors they are considering are pay (53%) and alignment with passions/interests (48%).



## IMPORTANT SOCIAL ISSUES

Students are passionate about a wide range of social issues, with mental health being the most common (71%). At least half of students state that anti-racism (57%), women's rights (57%), affordable housing (55%), improving healthcare (55%), climate change (53%), and poverty (51%) are important to them.



# CONCLUSION

The year 2023 has seen a return to the most 'normal' recruitment cycle experienced since pre-pandemic, yet marketing and recruitment professionals at postsecondary institutions across Canada tell us that recruitment has fundamentally changed and is becoming harder to predict.

With this report, we provide a glimpse into the decision-making process of grade 10, 11, and 12 students in Canada. These students start thinking about their postsecondary options early, visiting websites and social media, considering factors such as the location, graduate career outcomes, costs, teaching quality, and work experience opportunities. They are passionate about a wide range of social issues that institutions regularly engage with, such as mental health, climate change, and equity. Parents remain an important influencer in high school students' lives, demonstrating the importance of viewing parents as an audience, and many speak to current postsecondary students or recent graduates, showing that student satisfaction and alumni connections are an important part of recruitment.

While the postsecondary application process is an exciting time for students, it can also be stressful and almost all students have some concerns. One of the more alarming findings is that less than half of students feel it is easy to find the information they need to make their postsecondary decisions. To act on these findings, marketing and recruitment professionals will want to review their postsecondary materials to ensure that they are clear, easily accessible, and distributed through the appropriate channels. Communications should take an empathetic tone when they speak to students' apprehension around costs, grades, and the future and reflect the institution's work in areas that students care about, such as mental health, climate change, and Indigenous reconciliation. In navigating the evolving landscape of student recruitment, we expect it will become increasingly important for postsecondary institutions to embrace proactive strategies that foster transparent, empathetic communication while aligning with students' values and aspirations.

## COLLECTION METHOD

The survey instrument was co-developed by Academica Group and Glacier. The survey was in-field between February 23 to March 20, 2023. Glacier recruited high school students via Glacier's influencer and high school network. A total of 1,083 high school students completed the survey.

The findings of this survey primarily reflect the perspectives of Grade 10, 11 and 12 students from British Columbia, Ontario, Alberta, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia.



# GET IN TOUCH

If you have any questions or feedback about our report, we would love to hear from you!

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