

# INDIANA'S EDUCATION VALUE MOVEMENT

**RESEARCH FINDINGS & MESSAGING STRATEGY**

*SHEEO Policy Conference*

*August 10, 2022*

# INTRODUCTION

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## WHO WE ARE

### Indiana Commission for Higher Education

coordinating body for seven public postsecondary institutions

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## WHAT WE'RE DOING

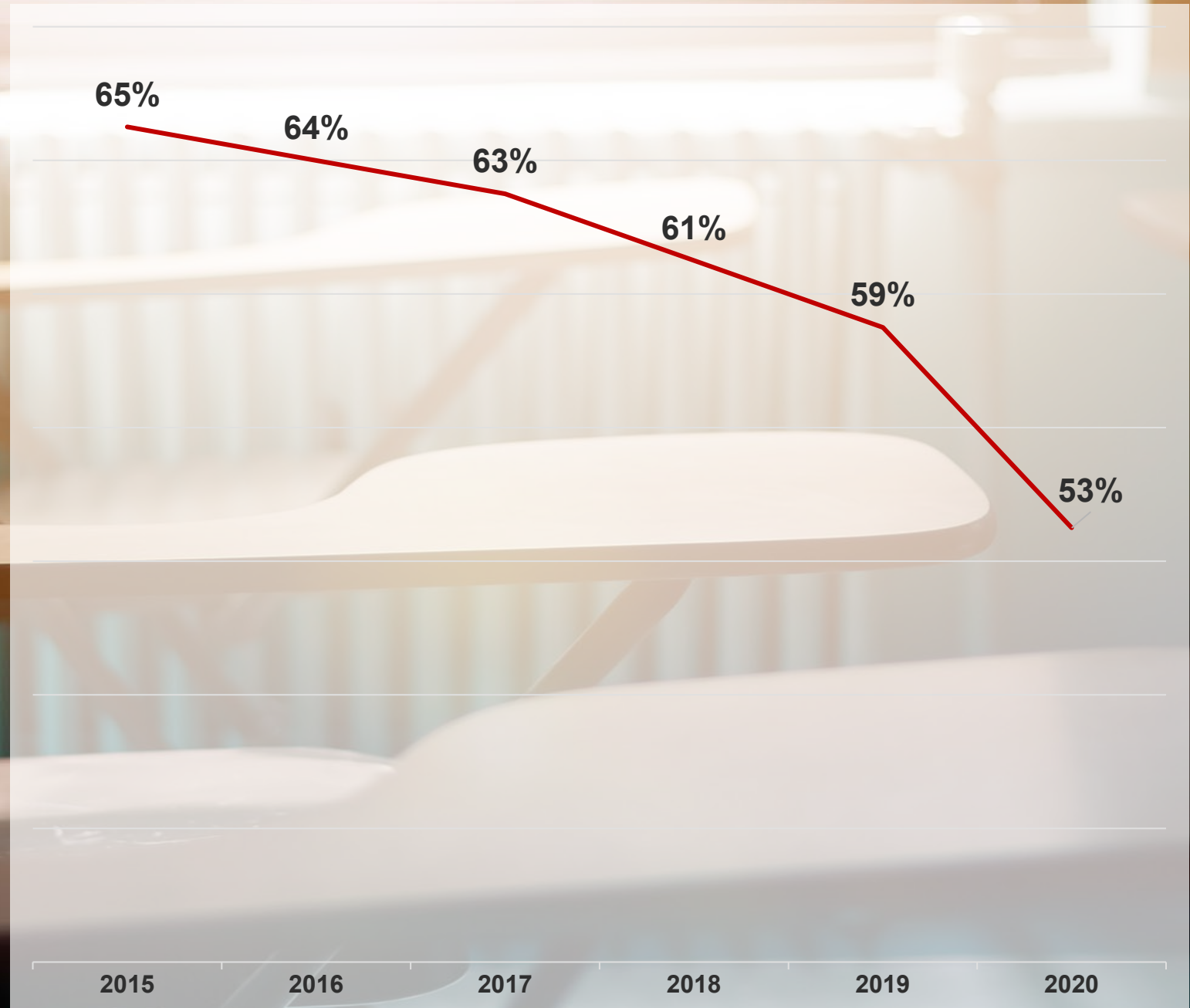
Developing a behavior change campaign to drive enrollment in education and training beyond high school in Indiana



**INDIANA COMMISSION** *for*  
HIGHER EDUCATION

# THE CHALLENGE

HIGHER  
EDUCATION  
ENROLLMENT IS  
DECLINING



# OUR RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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## **Answer the questions:**

“What attitudes do Hoosiers hold about higher education?”

“Why are/aren’t people in Indiana enrolling or promoting college?”

## OUR OBJECTIVE

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Through **messaging and communications**, help most high school students and adult learners see that post-high-school education ***is worth it and accessible*** to them to ***drive consideration and enrollment***.

# A MULTI-STAGE RESEARCH PROCESS

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**RESEARCH:** Interviews, focus groups, survey

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**PLANNING:** Determined message to test

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**TESTING:** 40 participants via focus groups,  
plus a survey of over 1,200 Hoosiers

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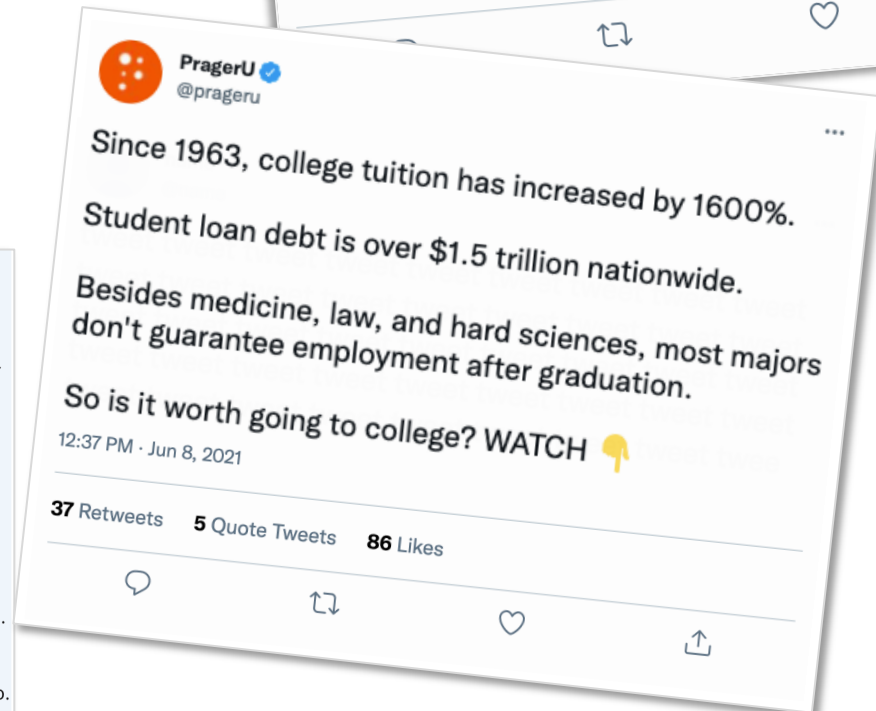
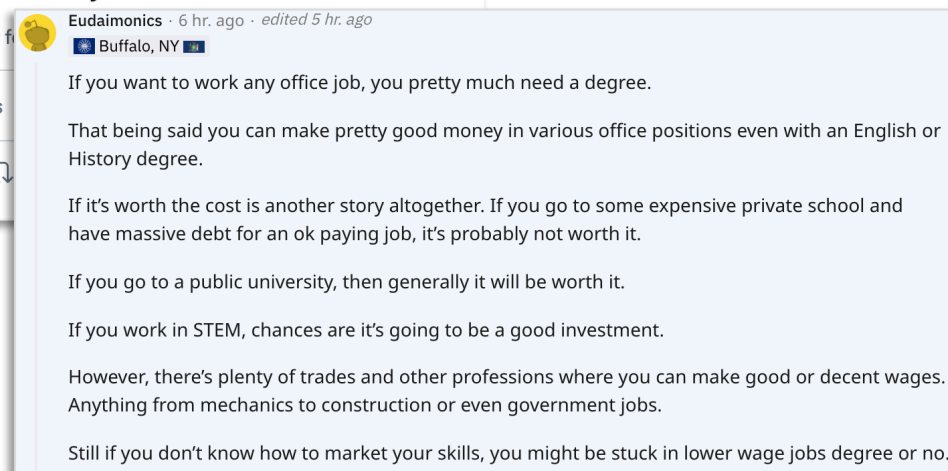
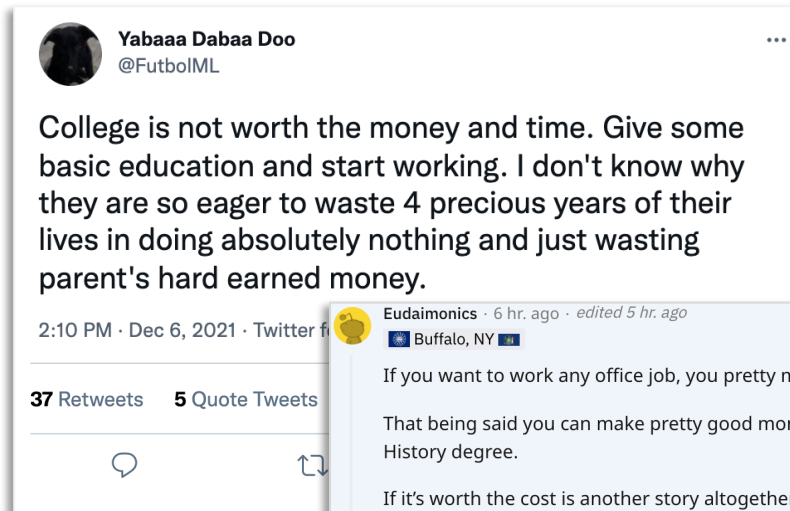


**DELIVERING A COMMON MESSAGE**

# RESEARCH: WHAT WE'RE UP AGAINST

**The tone of discussion around whether college is “worth it” has grown more negative in the last two years.**

The volume of these conversations has grown, with heavy focus on costs, value and the perceived decline in the standard of higher education.



# RESEARCH: INTERVIEW FINDINGS

## College is too expensive

*“As soon as they can start working and making money, they’re going to go that route. Our kids start doing that stuff — and they think they’ve got the world by the neck. They can start saving money and when they get their driver’s license, they can buy a pickup.”*

*Teacher*

*“Cost is a big concern, and probably rightfully so. I feel the media blows it up too. Teenagers pay attention to the news, and are coming in worried about a lot of things.”*

*Teacher*

*“College is ridiculously expensive and there aren’t enough options. It’s a way to keep poor people poor.”*

*Adult Learner*

## College isn’t necessary

*“I look at my friend that’s mega thousands in debt. She got another degree thinking it would help her in her job, money-wise, and it didn’t do anything.”*

*Adult Learner*

*“You can do a lot of careers and not go to college. Sometimes it’s worth it, but for what I want to do, it isn’t.”*

*High School Student*

*“Again, I do not feel that college or universities have an educational curriculum that can benefit me in ways to justify the significant number of years I would then be in debt paying off that education. Simply put, in today’s society, there are a multitude of ways to bring in decent income that in no way rely on traditional education.”*

*Adult Learner*



# PLANNING: MESSAGES TO TEST

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## **Our theory:**

A different message and language strategy about higher education can influence Hoosiers to change their behavior – from one of not going to college to one of going to college.

## TESTING: FOCUS GROUPS & SURVEY

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**Qualitative data:** Focus groups with 40 participants (high school students, adult learners and parents); Interviews with educators

**Quantitative data:** Survey of 1,254 Indiana residents (fall 2021)

# WHO DID WE SURVEY?

We captured representation across demographics like age, ethnicity, and political affiliation to accurately reflect Indiana's population.

## Gen pop



- Indiana resident
- Between 18-65 years old
- No specifications about pre-existing college views

## Adult learners



- Indiana resident
- Between 18-65 years old
- Completed high school but no further education

## Parents



- Indiana resident
- Between 18-65 years old
- Has a child / children between the ages of 16-18 living at home
- Mix of postsecondary graduates and non-graduates

## Students



- Indiana resident
- Between 16-18 years old
- Currently in high school

# WHAT WE HEARD

# THE HEADLINES: COST AND VALUE

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**84%**

“College is too expensive”

**60%**

“A degree doesn’t mean as much as it used to”





# RUGGED INDIVIDUALISM

Hoosiers balk at the idea of being told what to do by out of touch elites who don't know them.

They fundamentally distrust the people tasked with delivering the message. That means that activating an army of advocates is critical – particularly parents, who are most trusted and our strongest pro-college advocates.



*"Indiana can make this statement and feel better but the state doesn't actually have to do anything. They aren't saying they will help pay for college or books or childcare."*

*Adult Learner*

*"College itself is just a way to keep poor people from getting an education. That's why it's gotten so expensive. It's a form of gatekeeping, whereas trade schools and credential programs allow people that wouldn't have access to those types of programs to have access."*

*Adult Learner*

# MESSENGERS MATTER

Please indicate how trustworthy you believe each of the following people/institutions are when it comes to providing guidance, advice, and resources about education beyond high school.(Top 2 box: trustworthy and extremely trustworthy)	
Federal government	22%
The state government	27%
My local government	27%
Representatives from colleges and universities	44%
Community organizations/non-profits	58%
School counselors/teachers	66%
My friends	70%
My family	77%

Note: Democrats expressed more trustworthiness in institutions like federal (31% vs. 16%), local (34% vs. 24%), and state (33% vs. 26%) government than Republicans.

# POTENTIAL MESSENGERS STILL OPEN TO ENROLLMENT

Adult Learners	27%	Would probably/definitely consider enrolling in a 4-year Bachelor's degree at some point in the future
Students	50%	
Parents	71%	Would probably/definitely consider recommending that their child/someone enroll in a 4-year Bachelor's degree at some point in the future
Gen Pop	73%	

And most Hoosiers still feel favorable toward college

	Total
Higher education	82%
College	78%
Trade school / vocational program	78%
Certificate / credential program	69%



**HOW DO WE MOVE THE NEEDLE  
AND INCREASE  
POSTSECONDARY ATTAINMENT?**

## WHY THIS STRATEGY

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The current conversation around education beyond high school isn't moving the needle – particularly among skeptics. To resonate and break through, ***we need to change the conversation.***

**It starts with meeting our audiences where they are today.**

Acknowledging and recognizing their beliefs is critical to ***getting them to listen and engage*** in the first place.

# WHERE WE ARE TODAY

Most Hoosiers **say** they feel “**favorable**” toward college and that they’ll be better off if they pursue education after high school.

But we often present the facts as if we’re entering a college debate. This causes our audiences to shut down.

Instead, we need to connect with them on an emotional level. Think dinner party over college debate.



# **NARRATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS**

# Pillars:

**Relevant** Valuable Accessible

# SUPPORT THEIR FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF IN INDIVIDUALISM AND CHOICE

If you say	They react	Instead say	Why it works	
<div>×</div> <div>No matter what your life plans and goals are, higher education is the one thing that can give you the power to accomplish whatever you set out to do.</div>	<div><i>“Seems like a 100% guaranteed thing and it’s not. For half the people I know, it did not. They aren’t even working in the field they went to school for. <b>Their lives are a mess.</b>”</i></div> <div>- Adult Learner</div> <div><i>“I didn’t like that you need a college degree to get a better job. <b>No, you don’t.</b>”</i></div> <div>- Adult Learner</div>	<div>✓ <b>Wherever you want to go, there’s no one way to get there.</b></div> <div>✓ <b>No one’s journey is the same.</b></div> <div>✓ <b>After high school, you decide what comes next, and there are endless paths you could take.</b></div>	<div><i>“<b>I like the emphasis on how many options you have</b>, how many different routes college can be – it can be a trade school or online courses.”</i></div> <div>- High School Student</div> <div><i>“<b>It struck my interest to know there are different routes I can take.</b>”</i></div> <div>- Adult Learner</div>	<div>87%</div> <div>Believe “education is a personal choice that looks different for everyone.”</div>



# BROADEN THE CONVERSATION BEYOND JUST COLLEGE

If you say	They hear	Instead say	Then they hear
✗ Higher education	<p><b><i>“College is what you think of when you hear ‘higher education.’</i></b></p> <p>- Adult Learner</p> <p><i>“High school kids think of it as college – they don’t necessarily think about trade school or other options.”</i></p> <p>- Teacher</p>	✓ <b>Education opportunities beyond high school</b>	<p><i>“You <b>always</b> have other options – you don’t have to go to college.”</i></p> <p>- High School Student</p> <p><i>“Sounds like <b>they</b> want to give everybody the opportunity.”</i></p> <p>- Parent</p>
✗ [if you focus on just college degrees]	<p><b><i>“I don’t think it has to be college. Clear it up to say extra training rather than just college.”</i></b></p> <p>- High School Student</p> <p><i>“A lot of major companies said they aren’t looking for college stuff anymore. People can add worth to their company but couldn’t afford college. They just want people that are going to better their company.”</i></p> <p>-Adult Learner</p>	✓ <b>You can choose from options like career certifications, trade school, a 2-year associate degree, or 4-year Bachelor's degree</b>	<p><i>“So there are other forms of higher education that are <b>more easily obtainable</b>. They’re <b>more affordable</b> and <b>don’t take as much time</b>. They’re more <b>flexible</b>.”</i></p> <p>- Adult Learner</p> <p><i>“Trade schools and certification programs <b>allow people to have access to them</b>.”</i></p> <p>- Adult Learner</p>

# DISPEL THE “COLLEGE = 4 YEARS, \$200+K” MYTH

Because they say	Language to use	Why it works
<p><i>“College to me was just an elite platform – if you could even get there.”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Adult Learner</li></ul> <p><i>“When I think of college, I think of going off to school, staying there for 4 years. If that’s not a big time commitment, then I don’t know what is.”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Student</li></ul> <p><i>“College has been ridiculously expensive. <b>There aren’t enough options</b> and if you do go, you’re in debt for the rest of your life.”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Adult Learner</li></ul> <p><i>“A lot of kids think it’s the kind of schedule where you have to be there at the same time every day. They don’t know you can pick your schedule and have a job.”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Teacher</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ While a 4-year, in-person may be right for some, others are looking for something <b>faster and more flexible.</b></li><li>✓ Opportunities meet the needs of people at all stages of their lives – including <b>short-term, online, and part-time options.</b></li></ul>	<p><i>“It’s very positive that there are options for everyone. <b>It doesn’t have to be 4-years or a huge financial commitment.</b>”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Teacher</li></ul> <p><i>“I liked hearing the different options. My family and I always talked about the value of work, so it was hard to grasp the idea of taking time off work to go to college. <b>A little bit of school every week would have been better for me.</b>”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Adult Learner</li></ul> <p><i>“I liked the emphasis on how many <b>different routes college can be.</b>”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- High School Student</li></ul> <p><i>“I do plan to do an online business degree later. <b>I don’t need to go to a brick-and-mortar building.</b>”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- High School Student</li></ul>



# Pillars:

Relevant **Valuable** Accessible

# THEY DISMISS THE HARD SELL ON WHY COLLEGE MATTERS

Audiences get emotional when we focus on the data.

If you say	They respond
× People with a college degree make about 1 million dollars more over the course of their lifetime than someone without one	<i>"I know what I want to do and I'm going to make more money and I don't need an entire education to do it."</i> - High School Student
× ...and have 50% increase in job security than those with a high school diploma	<i>"I don't like that you need a college degree to get a better job. No, you don't need college."</i> - Adult Learner
× In 2020, 60% of jobs required education beyond high school	<i>"You don't need a college degree to get a good job. I know someone who didn't go to college making the same as someone who did."</i> - Parent

The facts won't set us free.

They don't believe that college is the only way to achieve better outcomes.

*"I know an adult who invested in college, and they have a ton of student loans and can't do anything different with their life."*  
Parent

*"There are lots of jobs that provide health insurance that you don't need a degree for. Walmart does. Like, really, any warehouse does."*  
Adult Learner

*"I have a lot of friends that went to college and can't afford a house."*  
Adult Learner

# A HARD SELL ON EDUCATION'S LONG-TERM VALUE INVITES PUSHBACK

They are ready with **anecdotes** of people they know or have heard of who've achieved these same metrics without a formal education.

If you suggest education leads to ...	With language like ...	They push back
<i>A higher earning potential</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>× It can mean a higher earning potential.</li><li>× People with a college degree make about 1 million dollars more over the course of their lifetime than someone without one.</li><li>× A career path with higher pay and benefits</li></ul>	<p><i>"You don't have to have a degree to make that kind of money. I mean there's other trades out there that people do and people on social media make millions and a lot of them didn't even finish school."</i></p> <p>- Adult Learner</p>
<i>Job security</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>× ...and have 50% increase in job security than those with a high school diploma</li><li>× Future-proof your job prospects</li></ul>	<p><i>"There's a lot of cases that you graduate college and don't get into the career field you want, and you don't have astounding success."</i></p> <p>- High School Student</p> <p><i>"High school students don't care as much about that."</i></p> <p>- Teacher</p>
<i>Stability (a safety net, benefits, etc.)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>× It can also mean more stability</li><li>× Roles that require education beyond high school also tend to be ones with benefits beyond a salary, like health insurance and paid time off.</li><li>× ...comfortably pay for expenses</li></ul>	<p><i>"There are a whole lot of jobs that offer paid time off that don't require college."</i></p> <p>- Parent</p> <p><i>"Benefits like paid time off – I'm not sure that's something they're [my students] thinking about right now."</i></p> <p>- Teacher</p>

# A SOFTER PITCH ABOUT FUTURE “OPPORTUNITIES” FALLS FLAT TOO

They appreciate the **positivity** and **less hardline approach** that speaking definitively about higher earning potential or quality of life, but language like “opportunities will await you” is hard to grasp. They don’t see how they’ll get to that future state in the first place.

If you say	They react
× That means no matter who you are, there are <b>opportunities awaiting you</b>	<p><i>“Opportunities aren’t a sure thing. Vague – too far in the future <b>Yeah there’s a future, but I need to know what I’m looking at now.</b>”</i></p> <p>- Adult Learner</p> <p><i>“If you say expand opportunities, <b>it’s like great, but how do I do that?</b>”</i></p> <p>- Adult Learner</p>

# FOR AUDIENCES, IT’S ABOUT GETTING THEIR “FOOT IN THE DOOR”

For an audience that feels like many opportunities are closed to them, the idea of education “opening doors” is immensely resonant.

Language to use	In their own words
<div>✓ No matter what you pick, you’re becoming a stronger candidate for what’s next, helping <b>get your foot in the door</b> to the career – and life – you want</div> <div>✓ Education beyond high school can help <b>open doors</b></div> <div>✓ Education after high school <b>expands what you’re eligible for in the first place</b></div>	<div><i>“Getting your foot in the door is step 1.”</i> - Parent</div> <div><i>“Opening doors is like something that’s encouraging me to walk through and for me to have an opportunity.”</i> - Teacher</div> <div><i>“It opens doors. My college degree opened doors to bigger better opportunities. It provides different avenues to different careers.”</i> - Parent</div> <div><i>“Once you get your foot in the door, you can keep going and move up.”</i> - Adult Learner</div> <div><i>“I like that it opens doors. Opens doors to more options.”</i> - Teacher</div> <div><i>“The more skills you have, the more doors you can knock on.”</i> - Adult Learner</div>

# SHOW THE DOORS WILL STAY OPEN, PROVIDING LONG-TERM FLEXIBILITY

What resonates across the board is the **promise of flexibility** and having the option to change your mind in the future. In other words, **education beyond high school gives you more control over your future.**

Language to use	In their own words
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Education can help open doors, and leave them open, providing you with <b>flexibility and control</b>, now and into the future.</li><li>✓ You learn not just how to do one job, but how to apply a skillset to many jobs. That gives you the <b>flexibility to make a change</b> if you want down the line.</li></ul>	<p><i>“I talk a lot about this with my students. Just because you make a decision now doesn’t mean it’s what 30-year-old you wants. But you want to make sure you have lot of options.”</i></p> <p>- Teacher</p> <p><i>“It’s true – the more skills you have, the more attractive you are to prospective employers. You can’t ever have too many skills.”</i></p> <p>- Adult Learner</p> <p><i>“I like that they talked about flexibility and training to prepare students to go down one path and if they realize that’s not right for them, they have the flexibility to change.”</i></p> <p>- Teacher</p>

# Pillars:

Relevant Valuable **Accessible**

# AUDIENCES DON'T KNOW HOW TO USE THE RESOURCES

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When it comes to **state financial aid programs...**

About  
**3 out of 4**

believe “it’s overwhelming trying to  
sort through all the different options.”  
(72%)

Not quite  
**1 in 3**

believe “these programs are easy to  
find and apply for.” (31%)

Fewer than half (47%) of people believe “these programs are within reach” for people like me  
– 37% for adult learners

**The majority believe “more support is needed to help people navigate different options.” (78%)**



# HIGHLIGHTING RESOURCES IS A GOOD START TO THE COST CONVERSATION

With cost as the primary barrier to enrollment, any opportunity to **raise awareness** of available “scholarships, grants, and aid” is helpful.

**Lexicon Spotlight:**  
“Manageable” feels more credible than “affordable.”

If you say	They react	Instead say	Why it works
✗ Scholarships, grants, and aid can make the cost of your education in Indiana more <b>affordable</b> .	<i>“What’s affordable for me is not affordable for other people.”</i> - Adult Learner	✓ Scholarships, grants, and aid can make the cost of your education in Indiana more <b>manageable</b> .	<i>“I’m not sure it can be affordable, so manageable feels better.”</i> - High School Student  <i>“If it’s more manageable then it’s less of a weight you have to pay off.”</i> - High School Student

# IT'S NOT ENOUGH TO JUST SAY SCHOLARSHIPS EXIST

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People recognize that scholarships and aid exist, but they are not sure how to make those resources work for them. Many brought up tedious application processes, confusion over what scholarships they're eligible for, and difficulty filling out the FAFSA.

*"I applied to 82 scholarships – and nothing."  
Adult Learner*

*"My first thought was if they offer assistance, how can I get it? It's not easy to get."  
Adult Learner*

*"Having someone to help you and display your options for you would be nice"  
Student*

*"Scholarships are only meant for special people."  
Adult Learner*

# HIGHLIGHT THERE’S SOMEONE TO HELP NAVIGATE THE PROCESS

All agree there’s a general lack of support in navigating the process. There’s also high enthusiasm about the idea of **more support from mentors and counselors**.

Language to use	In their own words
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ But making education a reality also means having the support to get started – and along the way.</li><li>✓ From finding programs that will help lead to the career you want to connecting you with the right financial assistance opportunities, there are mentors, counselors, and people who’ve been there before, who can help you navigate the process.</li></ul>	<p><i>“Having a counselor or somebody helping you display options for you would be nice. I could always talk to somebody about something like that.”</i></p> <p>- High School Student</p> <p><i>“We never learned about anything about important things like this. It would have been helpful learning about it in high school or maybe if a teacher had talked about it.”</i></p> <p>- Adult Learner</p>



# BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

The What, Why and How

# WHAT

*We need to make it feel...*

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## RELEVANT

*“You’re talking to someone like me.”*

*What it looks like...*

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- Focus on “many paths,” not just college
- Emphasize individualism and choice
- Expand the definition of “college”

# WHY

*We need to make it feel...*

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## VALUABLE

*“I’ll gain something from putting in the work; it’s worth it.”*

*What it looks like...*

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- Emphasize near-term benefits before long-term ones
- Focus on access to opportunity and flexibility (e.g., “getting your foot in the door.”)

# HOW

*We need to make it feel...*

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## ACCESSIBLE

*“I have the support I need to make my plans a reality.”*

*What it looks like...*

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- Create a loud, consistent drumbeat around the range of aid/scholarship/grant opportunities.
- Emphasize mentorship, tools and resources.

# ELEVATOR PITCH

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## Option 1:

After high school, *you decide what comes next* – and there are endless paths you can take. But whatever you want to pursue, *education can help open doors and expand options*, today and tomorrow.

## Option 2:

Wherever you want to go, *there's no one way to get there*. Education can *help open doors*, and leave them open, providing you with flexibility and control now and in the future.



# THE THREE O'S OF TONE

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## ***Be outright***

Acknowledge skepticism, tell it like it is.

## ***Be optimistic***

Positive framing works in our favor.

## ***Be open-minded***

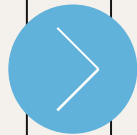
Avoid judgment of any path.

# WHAT ARE WE DOING?

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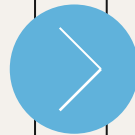
## Trainings

**Live and virtual, on-demand sessions** to be delivered to higher education marketing & admissions leaders; community/ grassroots partners; business leaders; and policy influencers.



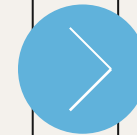
## Playbook

Developed **playbook with talking points and FAQ** as a practical and how-to guide for messengers.



## Campaigns

Working on **campaign concepts** to engage employers and other key messengers to disseminate the new framework.



## Measure

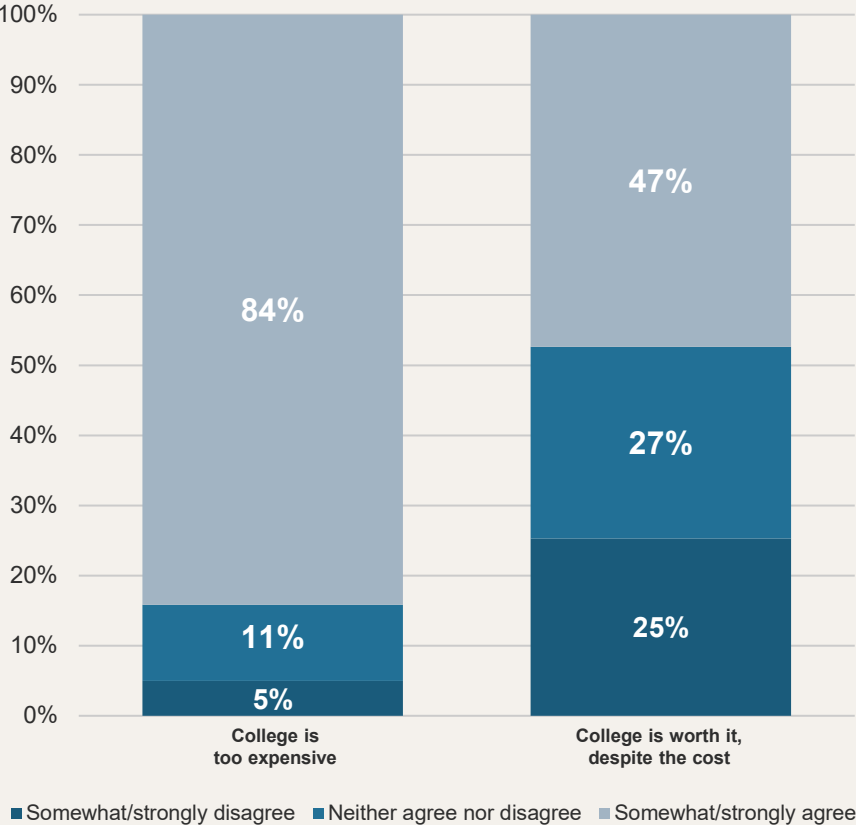
We'll track results over time to **measure movement in belief** and enrollment pattern changes.

# QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

# APPENDIX

# BELIEF IN THE VALUE OF COLLEGE IS ON THE DECLINE

“College is too expensive.”



“College value is declining.”

