



NEW JERSEY OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF

**HIGHER
EDUCATION**

**FROM AWARENESS TO ACTION:
Redefining How States Engage
& Activate Residents Toward
Higher Education**

Presented August 12, 2025 by Cecilia Williams, Director of Communications



Yep, that's me!



You're probably wondering how I ended up in this situation....

**The most powerful campaigns
start with listening.**

 Lumina Foundation

Crisis of confidence in U.S. higher education:

 CBS News

More Americans say college just isn't worth it, survey finds

 Forbes

Americans' Confidence In Higher Education Drops Again,
Finds Gallup

 Inside Higher Ed

Doubts About Value Are Deterring College Enrollment

 The Washington Post

A college degree isn't worth decades of debt

 Fox News


We need to have a 'day of reckoning' for higher education,
says Jason Chaffetz

 Yahoo

 CBS

More

The death of the university may soon be upon us. Good

 Business Insider

I'm a colleg
college. A c




TikTok · Charlotte Chaze

8K+ views · 1 year ago



Is college worth it? in my opinion, no.

Doubts At Most Companies Say College Isn't Worth It for Their
Employees

 Fortune

A C Mark Zuckerberg says college isn't necessary for the current
jobs market

What we're doing now isn't working.

They're tuning us out.

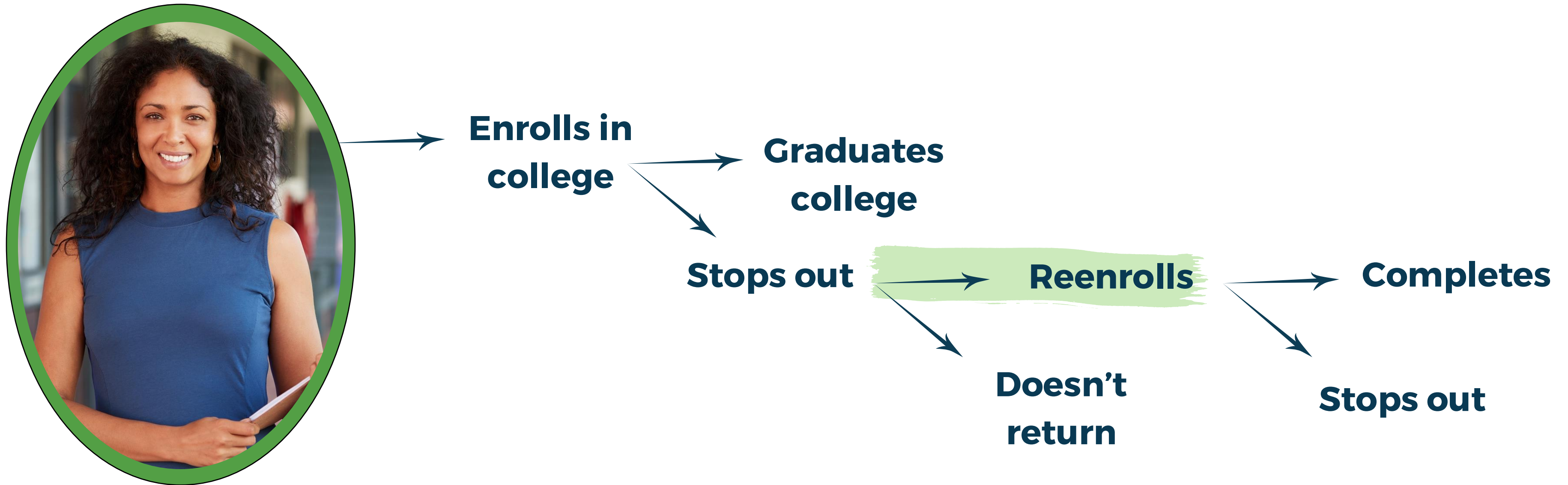
We're not talking about the right things.

We tell our audience what we think they need to know
instead of learning what they care about.

Listen first.

**This approach puts people at the
center of our communication.**

In 2022, New Jersey launched an initiative to help learners who stopped out to return, re-enroll and complete college



**We spoke to residents
with some college
credit but no degree.**

We heard about confidence.

But there was also
something different...



A man with curly hair is sitting on the floor in a dark room, looking down. A large, dark shadow of him is cast onto the wall behind him. The text "You are grieving" is overlaid in white.

“You are grieving”

The critical insight

The winning concept created positive sentiment

Belief in completing degree



Belief they will complete their undergraduate degree

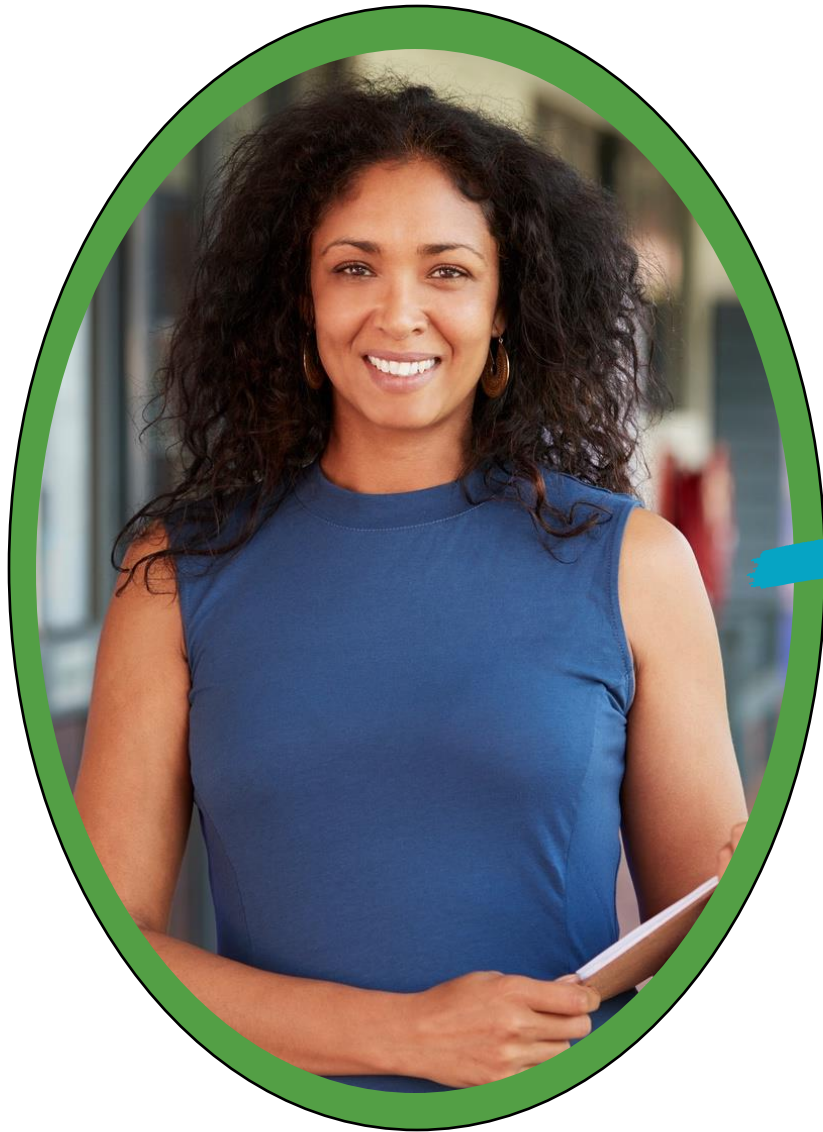
Government support



Satisfaction with the State's support to residents who left college with some credit, who may now want to return



In 2024, we scaled learnings and launched a statewide campaign to promote going to college in New Jersey



Some college,
no degree



High School
Juniors/Seniors



Adults who never
went to college



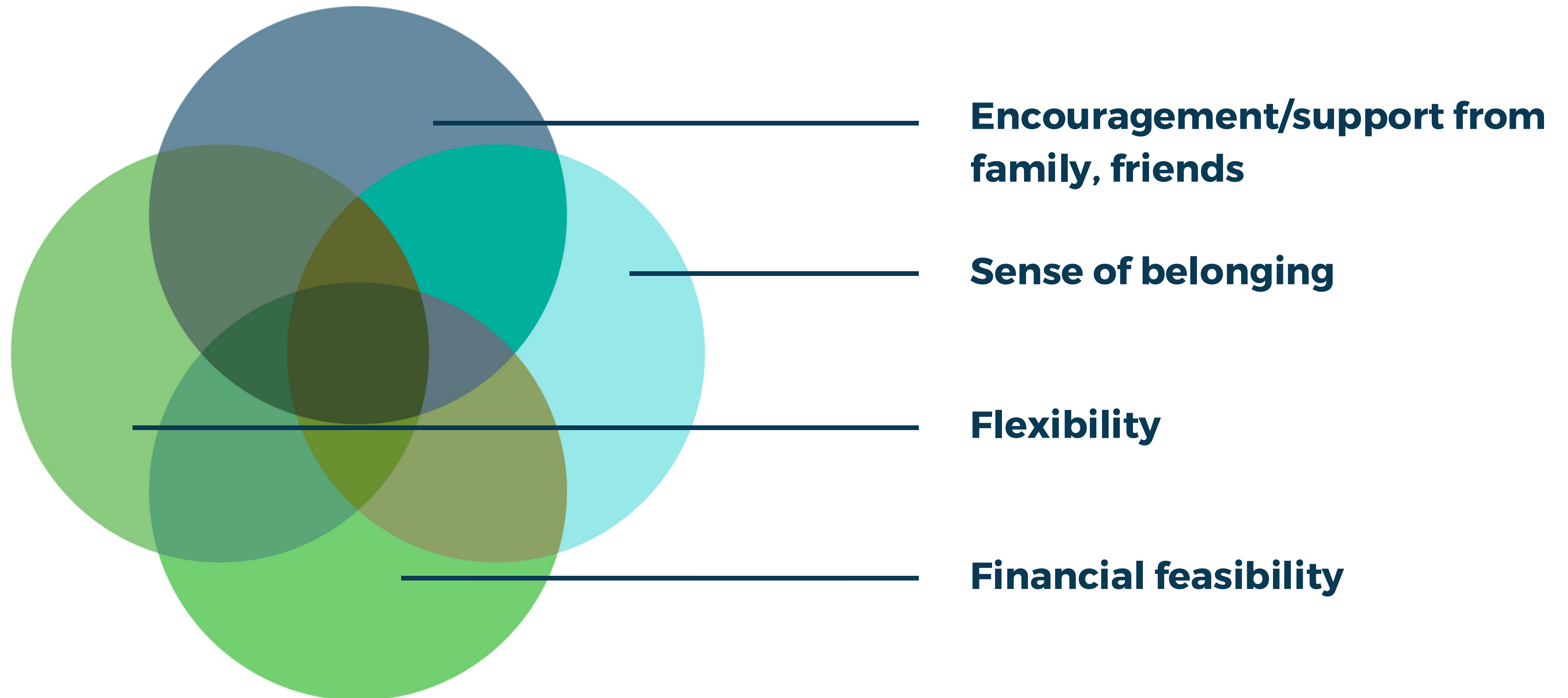
Parents/caregivers
of HS students

A woman with long, wavy, reddish-brown hair is shown from the back, looking out over a city street at night. She is wearing a light-colored, textured sweater. The background is a blurred cityscape with warm lights from buildings and streetlights, creating a bokeh effect. The overall mood is contemplative and urban.

“I want more”

The critical insight

A confluence of **factors** need to be present
to **catalyze** a student's desire to go to college



**You know what you
want to accomplish.
New Jersey colleges
help you make it
happen.**

The value proposition

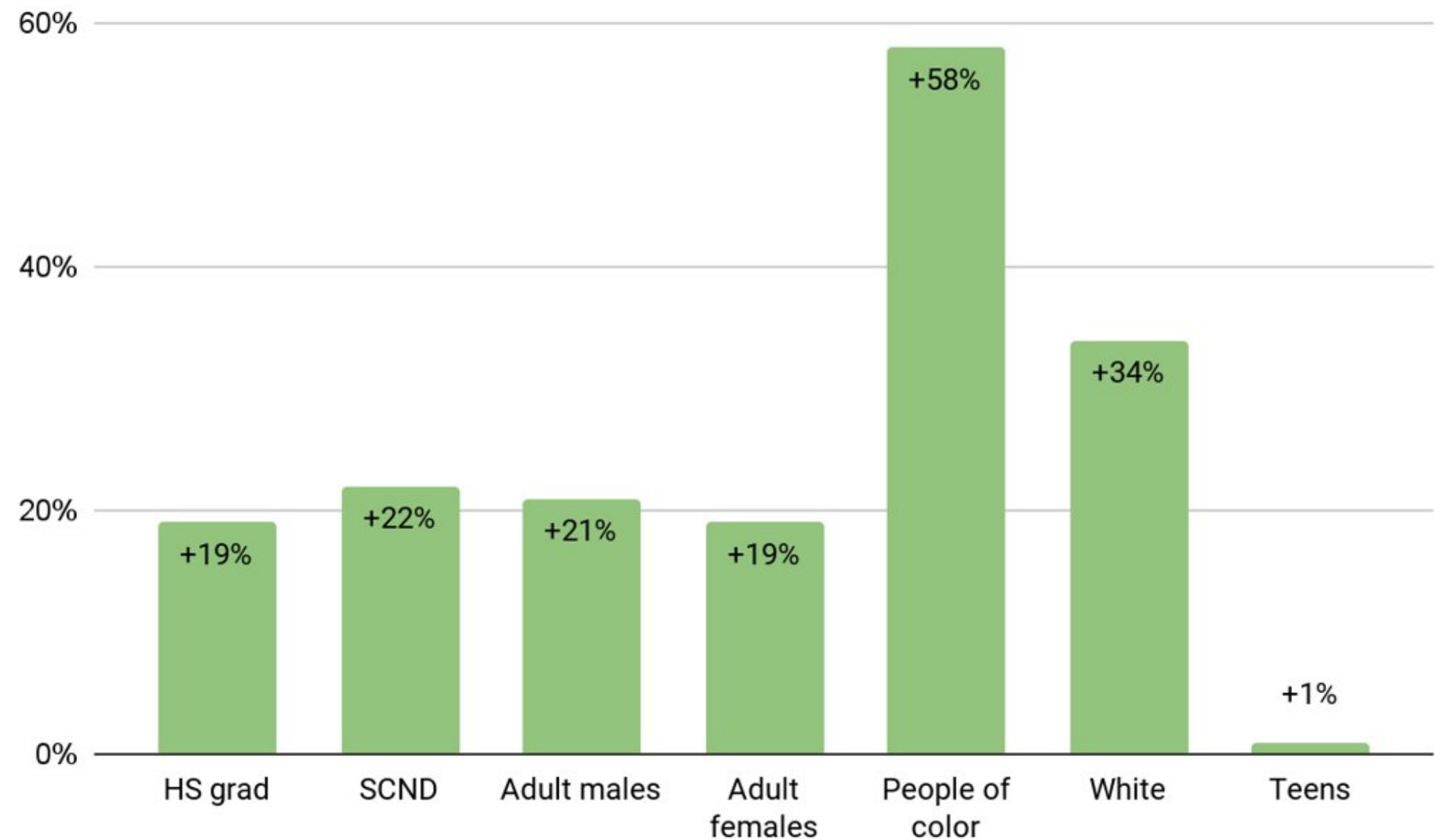
The winning concept **increased intent** and was **equitable**

**After exposure, more said they
intend to enroll in college...**



Q: I plan to enroll in a 2-year or 4-year college
(post vs pre concept exposure)

...and this increase was equitable across audiences.



The concept drove the largest increase among people of color and was the only concept saw increased intent among teens.



Free tuition for qualifying students



NJ CollegeForYou.NJ.gov

We also need to meet our audience where they are

Digital



Focused the available funding on social media and digital platforms

Video-first



Produced video ads featuring real New Jersey students as primary campaign creative

Targeted



Developed a zip code model to direct media spend in underserved communities

**Remember, it all starts
with listening.**

**A people-
centered
approach
works.**



It's **impactful**



It delivers **returns**



It's **scalable**



People-Centered Marketing Toolkit

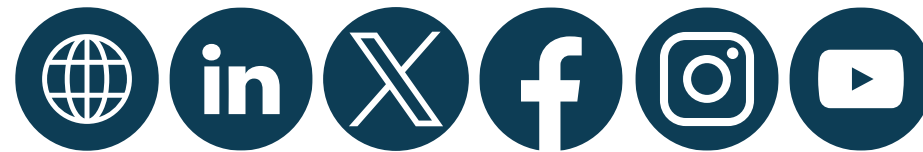
Scan the QR code

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Have questions?

Let's connect Cecilia.Williams@oshe.nj.gov