

# How Americans Feel about Higher Education

As states around the country begin to grapple with the economic effects of COVID-19, discussions about value, funding, and accountability in higher education will be front and center.

**The Varying Degrees Survey**, which seeks to understand how Americans view higher education, was fielded in February 11–24, 2020, before the full force of the pandemic hit the U.S. What was learned will provide an important baseline to help measure how perceptions change over the course of this public health and economic crisis, while informing policy decisions in a post-pandemic world.



## → It creates opportunity.

Americans still believe in the value of higher education.



**4 out of 5**

Americans believe it brings more job opportunities.



**Nearly 80%**

feel it's a good return on investment.



**92%**

say it creates upward mobility.



**Only 17%**

would feel comfortable if their children or close family members did not pursue higher education.

## → Cost is a problem.

Most Americans feel that higher education is unaffordable for most people.



**Only 1 in 3**

believe higher education is fine the way it is.



**63%**

feel government should be responsible for funding higher education because it's good for society.

versus



**Only 35%**

feel it should be funded by students because they personally benefit.

## → Accountability is key.

An overwhelming majority of Americans believe institutions should be held accountable for their educational outcomes.

**90% of Americans** believe that colleges and universities should be transparent about these important indicators of quality:

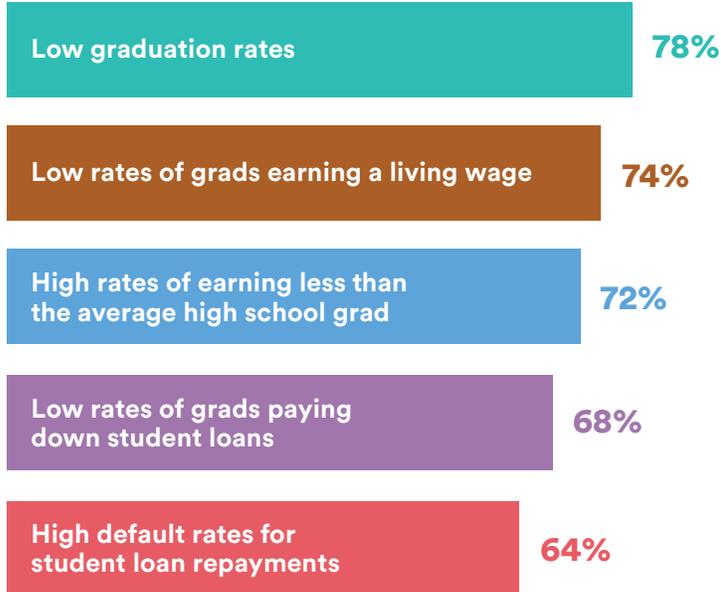


Graduation rates



Employment outcomes

### When should a school lose taxpayer money?

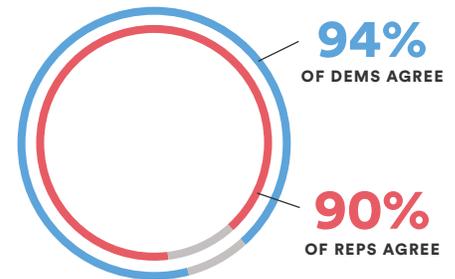


## ★ ACROSS POLITICAL LINES

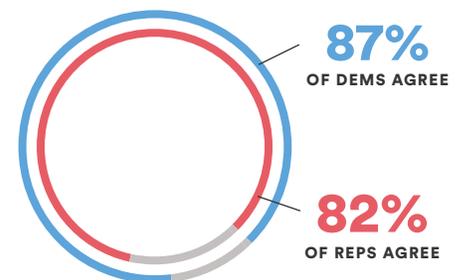


Democrats and Republicans both see the value of higher education.

### Creates upward economic mobility



### Increases job opportunities



They differ on who should be more responsible for funding higher education.



**Democrats believe government should be a primary funder, because it is good for society.**



**Republicans believe students and parents should be responsible, because they personally benefit.**