2026

College Savings Indicator Study

This summary presents information from Fidelity Investments' latest College Savings Indicator study, which has been conducted on a regular basis since 2007. The study is designed to measure parents' college savings behaviors, attitudes, and expectations among those with children they intend to send to college.

Key findings

74% of parents say college is one of their top savings priorities, yet families are only on track to cover 53% of their college funding goal.

70% of parents who plan to pay for at least some of their children's education have a financial plan in place to help them reach their savings goal.

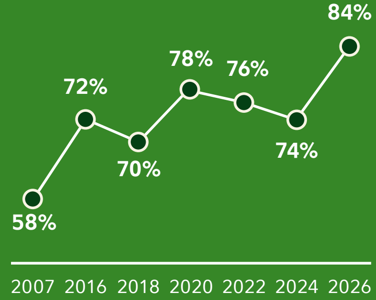
73% of parents say AI will influence what major their child chooses for college.

81% of parents agree the value of a college education is worth the cost.

Savings for college is a top priority

The number of parents saving for college has reached an all-time high. **84% of parents are currently saving,** compared to 58% in 2007, when the study was first conducted.

Number of parents saving for their child's education



41% of parents plan to cover the full cost of their children's college education, up from 37% in 2024.

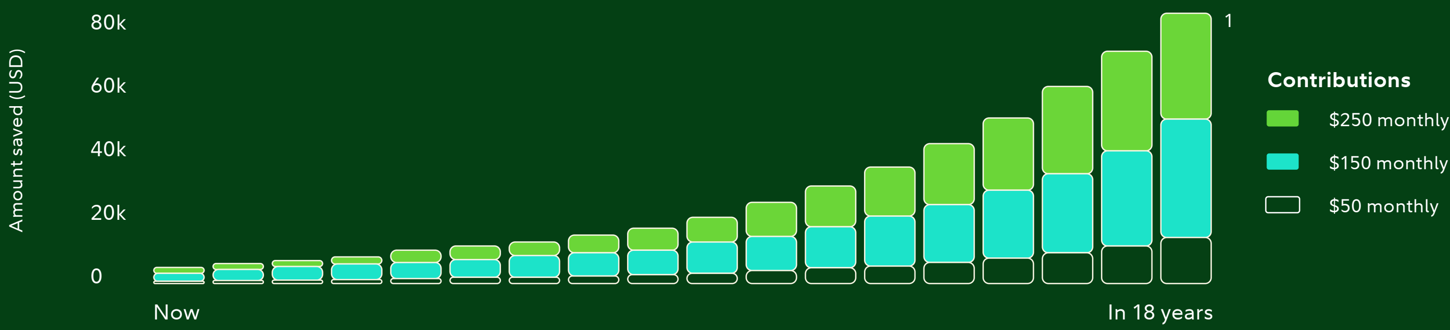
Parents' top 3 savings priorities

74% — Saving for my children's education

61% — Saving for retirement

59% — Saving for an emergency fund

88% of parents say they'll either continue their regular college savings contributions or even increase the amount of their regular contributions for the remainder of the year. Here's a hypothetical example of how that could add up over time.



[1]This hypothetical example illustrates the potential value of different regular monthly investments for different periods of time and assumes an average annual return of 4.5% rounded to the nearest $50. Contributions to a 529 plan account must be made with after-tax dollars. This does not reflect an actual investment and does not reflect any taxes, fees, expenses, or inflation. If it did, results would be lower. Returns will vary, and different investments may perform better or worse than this example. Periodic investment plans do not ensure a profit and do not protect against loss in a declining market. Past performance is no guarantee of future results.

AI's impact on college plans

As artificial intelligence (AI) continues to develop, many parents are wondering how this technology might impact their child's education choices, career opportunities, and the value of a college degree.

73% say AI will influence what major their child chooses for college

49% say AI will make some jobs obsolete or more difficult to get

59% still feel a four-year college degree is worth the cost despite the impact of AI on entry-level jobs

The cost of college

The cost of college is at an all-time high and yet...

81% of parents agree the value of a college education is worth the cost

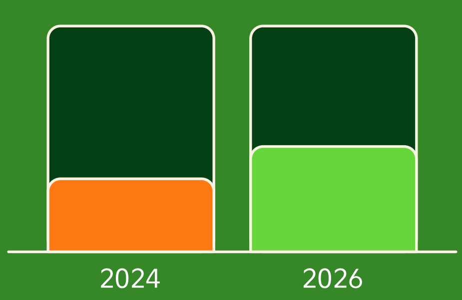
However...

24% of parents are "not sure" what college will cost by the time their child enrolls

57% of parents use "their own best guess" to estimate college costs

52% of parents whose children are nearing college age admit their child will have fewer options due to costs

529 Plans help parents get a step ahead



45% of families have opened a 529

up from 39% in 2024

Not only do those families have higher expectations for how much they plan to save for their child's education, but they're also more likely to meet those savings goals:

- Parents who have opened a 529 have nearly **2X saved on average** vs those without:
  - $45,752 vs $24,387
- Parents saving in a 529 are on track to **achieve 57% of their savings goal**. Those who aren't are only on track to achieve 48%.
- **87% of 529 owners** intending to pay for at least a portion of their child's education have a plan in place to meet their college goals vs. 55% who do not have a 529.

2026 College Savings Indicator

The 2026 CSI takes into account the portion of costs parents plan to pay and calculates how prepared parents are to achieve that funding goal.

Parents are continuously increasing the amount they plan to contribute as college costs continue to rise

Parents plan to cover an average of **72%** of the total cost of college, up from **67%** in 2024 and 69% in 2022.

Parents are on track to **achieve 53% of their college funding goal**. This is an improvement from 30% in 2024 and 27% in 2022.

What does all this mean?

A CSI score of 53% means that overall, the typical American family who plans to cover 72% of college costs (including tuition, fees, room and board, and other costs) is on track to reach only 53% of that funding goal by the time their child is ready to enter college. To make up the difference, parents will rely on contributions from their children, grants, scholarships, student loans, gifts from grandparents, and other sources.

Parents have expectations about paying for college but...

Parents expect their children to have saved around $18,000 toward college costs by the time they graduate from high school. Even so, 35% have not yet talked to their children about how they will contribute to paying for college.

30% of parents admit their high schooler doesn't know what college costs or how much student loan debt they may incur

Parents have expectations about paying for college but...

Parents who have talked to their child about the total cost of college and post-graduate implications are more likely to:

College Savings Preparedness Indicators	Have talked to their child	Have not talked to their child
Have a good understanding of the best accounts for college savings	58%	46%
Have started saving	90%	74%
Have opened a 529 account	52%	34%
Have saved more already	$39,946	$28,407

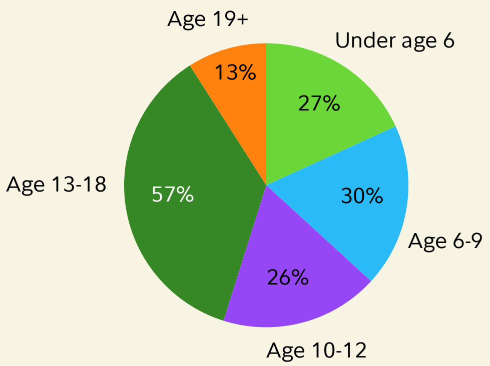
Appendix

Respondent profile:

- $110,000 Average household income
- 57% Married couples
- 50% Graduated from college
- 78% Completed at least some college coursework

Households had an average of 2 children of the following ages:

Age range	Percentage
Under age 6	27%
6-9	30%
10-12	26%
13-18	57%
19+	13%



Study methodology and indicator calculator:

The College Savings Indicator was calculated by Fidelity Personal and Workplace Advisors LLC in collaboration with Fidelity Investments Research and Analysis. Big Village, an independent research firm, conducted the online study on behalf of Fidelity Investments from May 4 – 15, 2026.

As part of the study, Fidelity conducted a survey of parents with college-bound children of all ages. Parents provided data on their current and projected household asset levels including college savings, use of an investment advisor and general expectations and attitudes toward financing their children's college education. Using Fidelity's proprietary asset-liability modeling engine, the company was able to calculate future college savings levels per household against anticipated college costs. The results provided insight into the financial challenges parents face in saving for college. Data for the Indicator (number of children in household, time to matriculation, school type, current savings and expected future contributions) was collected by Big Village, an independent research firm, through an online survey from May 4-15, 2026, of 2,081 families nationwide with children aged 18 and younger who are expected to attend college. The survey respondents had household incomes of at least $30,000 a year or more and were the financial decision makers in their household. College costs were sourced from the College Board's Trends in College Pricing 2025. Projected college savings available at the assumed college start date per household were computed by Fidelity Personal and Workplace Advisors LLC (FPWA), a registered investment adviser and a Fidelity Investments company. Within Fidelity's asset-liability model, Monte Carlo simulations were used to project assets in the future at a 75 percent confidence level. The results of the College Savings Indicator may not be representative of all parents and students meeting the same criteria as those surveyed for the study.

TTo compute the Readiness Indicator per respondent, Financial Solutions determined each child's coverage for their anticipated expenses. The Readiness Indicator for each child equals the total estimated assets accumulated for the child at the assumed college start date divided by the total expected cost of college for the child that the parent plans to cover. The Indicator was then averaged among all children mentioned by the respondent and who meet the inclusion criteria based on their current age. All households were capped at 100% readiness. The median was then found for the cohort of all participating respondents. Since 2007, Fidelity has calculated the College Savings Indicator to show how prepared the typical American family with a college-bound child is to cover all 100% of projected college costs. (In 2012, this metric was updated to take into account the portion of total college costs families intend to pay, if not the full 100%.)

College costs

- The growth time horizon until college expenses commence was determined using each child's age and the time span until they turn age 19 (typical college start age). The child's actual grade was not taken into account.
- The type of education institution and intended years of attendance, as indicated by the respondent, were factored into the Cost of Attendance estimates. If respondents were unsure of either, then median costs across education institutions and intended years of attendance served as proxies.
- An inflation rate of 5.0% was used to determine college costs in the future.

College savings

- Variables for current savings, expected future contributions and expected annual gifts were used to determine the future value of total savings.
- Contributions growth was based on respondent-provided data and an assumed wage growth rate (1.5% merit increase over a general inflation of 2.5%) annually.
- Savings and contributions are split into equal segments among the total number of pre-college aged children.
- Current college savings and expected future contributions are projected to the child's assumed college start date using growth factors based on the household's reported investment allocation. The model does not project savings growth or withdrawals during the college attendance period.
- Growth of assets was computed using a stochastic 75% confidence level and the asset mix defining each respondent's estimate of the percentage of assets held in stocks or stock mutual funds.

Readiness indicator

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- All households were capped at 100% readiness.
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The results of Fidelity's 2026 College Savings Indicator Study may not be representative of all parents meeting the same criteria as those surveyed for this study.

Please carefully consider the plan's investment objectives, risks, charges, and expenses before investing. For this and other information on any 529 college savings plan managed by Fidelity, contact Fidelity for a free Fact Kit, or view one online. Read it carefully before you invest or send money.

Units of the portfolios are municipal securities and may be subject to market volatility and fluctuation. If you or the designated beneficiary are not a resident of the state sponsoring the 529 college savings plan, you may want to consider, before investing, whether your home state or the designated beneficiary's home state offers its residents a plan with alternate state tax advantages or other benefits.

Keep in mind that investing involves risk. The value of your investment will fluctuate over time, and you may gain or lose money.

Big Village is not affiliated with Fidelity Investments.

About Fidelity Investments

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