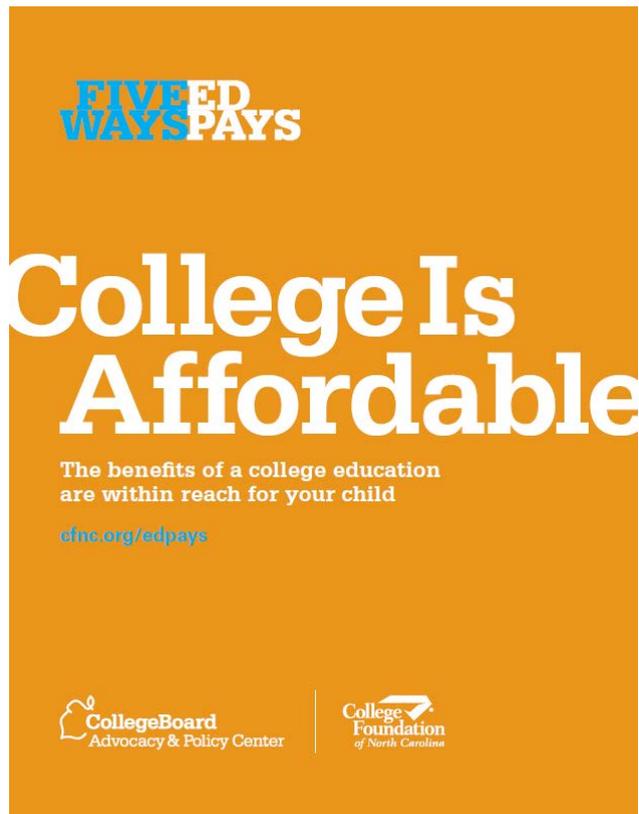


# What Students and Parents Need: Early Information about Paying for College



A Pilot Research Project by  
College Board and  
College Foundation of North Carolina

2012 CFED Assets Learning Conference  
September 20, 2012  
Steven Brooks, Executive Director  
NC State Education Assistance Authority

# Background

- Rethinking Student Aid recommendations
  - Simpler, more transparent aid system
  - More predictable aid system
  - Early communication with families and students
- Pilot Program in North Carolina
  - Experimental research
  - Determine impact of clear simple information to low-income middle school parents

# Research Overview

## Target population:

- Parents of children in grades 6-8
- With household incomes of \$30,000 or less

## Target sample size:

- 250 completed interviews in each group – test and control

## Test / control design:

- Test group was screened for qualification and pre-recruited to agree to participate, mailed a brochure and cover letter, and interviewed after stating that they had looked over the material.
- Control group was screened for qualification and interviewed in a single call

## Material Tested:

- The brochure, envelope, and cover letter were tested in focus groups and individual in-depth telephone interviews prior to finalizing the materials. Insights from these sessions were used to refine the materials prior to publication.

# The Message: College Is Affordable

- Easy to understand message repeated throughout
  - Envelope
  - Cover letter
  - Brochure
- Co-branded by trusted sources
  - College Board
  - College Foundation of North Carolina
- Specific information about prices and eligibility for grants and scholarships at four well-known example institutions

**FIVE ED  
WAYS PAYS**

# College Is Affordable

The benefits of a college education  
are within reach for your child

[cfnc.org/edpays](http://cfnc.org/edpays)

 **CollegeBoard**  
Advocacy & Policy Center

 **College  
Foundation**  
of North Carolina

**ESTUDIAR  
VALE LA PENA**

# La universidad es accesible

Los beneficios de una educación universitaria  
están al alcance de sus hijos

[cfnc.org/edpays](http://cfnc.org/edpays)

 **CollegeBoard**  
Advocacy & Policy Center

 **College  
Foundation**  
of North Carolina

# FIVEED WAYS PAYS

## A college degree can transform your child's life in five important ways.

We all want the best for our children. Talking to them about staying in school and aiming for college is a good way to help them achieve it.

Each extra year that your child stays in school will lead to higher earnings. And for most students who go to college, the increase in their lifetime earnings is far greater than the cost of their education.

But greater wealth is not the only positive outcome of a college education. College provides a path to an overall fuller life.

There are actually five ways that a college education pays:

1. More security
2. Better health
3. Closer family
4. Stronger community
5. Greater wealth

That's why we want to show you that your family really can afford your child's college education.

## How do families like yours afford college?

College is affordable because of what is known as **financial aid**. Offered by the federal and state governments, the college and other sources, it is available to everyone who needs it. Financial aid can drastically reduce the cost of college, even covering the entire cost of tuition and fees. Financial aid can also make paying for any small costs you may have to cover much easier to manage.

It is important for you to know that most students pay far less than the high prices you hear about in the news. So nobody should ever rule out going to college based just on published prices!

## There are three types of financial aid that let you reduce and manage the cost of a college education.

### Reduce the cost of college.

- 1 **Grants and scholarships** are "free" money that you don't repay. They make the real price you pay for college much lower. Most are based on your family income, not on your child's grades or athletic ability. They come from the federal or state government, the college itself, or private organizations.

### Manage the cost of college.

- 2 **Part-time work-study jobs** on campus or in the community provide good wages and flexible work hours that will fit into your child's class schedule.
- 3 **Student loans** must be repaid, but not until your child graduates from college and is working. The federal government funds most student loans.

# Think college costs too much? Think again.

The amount you will have to pay for college will be based on your family's income. You will find out exactly what it will cost when your child is a senior in high school. At that time, you and your child can fill out the a free application for financial aid.

- In general, families who make less than \$30,000 per year qualify for a lot of grants and scholarships based on family income. These families pay very little for college.
- Families with higher incomes have to pay a share of the college costs, but most still qualify for financial aid to reduce those costs to amounts they can afford.

If you find there are some small costs you need to cover, you and your child can look at other types of financial aid, like part-time work-study, to make those costs easier to manage.

The chart below shows the **grants and scholarships** that a child from a family of four with an income of \$30,000 or less would get if he or she were a college student this year. It shows examples from four North Carolina colleges. Don't forget, grants and scholarships do not have to be repaid.

As the chart shows, if your family makes \$30,000 or less, your **real cost** for tuition and fees for one year would be **ZERO!** Grants and scholarships from the state of North Carolina, the federal government and the college would cover the entire cost of your tuition and fees. The information in the chart was provided by the colleges, so you can feel sure that the numbers are right.

These colleges will also provide your child with money to help pay for food and housing and buy textbooks. Your child will only need to work part time or borrow a small student loan if he or she has higher living expenses.

## If your family income is \$30,000 or less, your actual cost for tuition and fees would be ZERO at many North Carolina colleges!

FOR THE 2011-2012 SCHOOL YEAR	NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGE	UNC AT CHAPEL HILL	N.C. A&T	DUKE
<b>Cost of tuition and fees</b>	\$2,100	\$7,008	\$4,668	\$42,410
<b>Amount you would receive in grants and scholarships</b>	\$2,100	\$7,008	\$4,668	\$42,410
<b>Your total costs for tuition and fees</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$0</b>

## Your child can also receive grants and scholarships to help reduce the cost of living expenses and textbooks.

	NORTH CAROLINA COMMUNITY COLLEGE	UNC AT CHAPEL HILL	N.C. A&T	DUKE
<b>Additional grants and scholarships for books and living expenses</b>	\$3,400	\$10,952	\$4,456	\$10,970

# There's a college that's right for your child!

It's also important to know that there are many kinds of colleges, with a wide range of costs. Every college charges tuition and fees, but they may be different for each college. There are also other costs of going to college, like housing and food as well as books and other study materials. These won't differ much from college to college. In total, North Carolina has 111 colleges.

## Community colleges

Community colleges have two kinds of programs. One type offers diplomas and certificates that can be earned in six months to two years. These show that the student has a set of skills for a job such as auto mechanics or medical technology. The other type of program offered by community colleges is for a two-year associate degree. These programs prepare students for a career, such as a dental technician or a teacher's assistant. They also prepare students for continuing their education. Many students now spend two years in an associate degree program before moving on to a four-year college.

North Carolina has **58 public community colleges** with campuses near every county. Tuition and fees are very low at these schools.

## Four-year colleges and universities

Four-year colleges and universities offer undergraduate degrees, which are also called bachelor's degrees. Students select a major in which to focus their studies and prepare for a career. Some examples of majors are history, engineering, biology, computer science and business. Students going to these four-year colleges may get a job after graduation in careers like teaching, nursing or technology. Or they might go on to a graduate school to get an advanced degree in such fields as medicine or law.

North Carolina has **16 public universities** that are part of the University of North Carolina. Examples are N.C. State, East Carolina, N.C. A&T, and UNC at Pembroke. The State of North Carolina provides funds to these schools to keep costs low for students and their families.

North Carolina has **37 private nonprofit colleges and universities**

Examples are Elon University, Bennett College for Women, Campbell University and Duke University. Published prices for tuition and fees are higher at private colleges. However, they are often more affordable than public colleges because they can give more financial aid to their students.



## North Carolina Colleges and Universities

### Public Universities

1	Appalachian State University	E
2	East Carolina University	K
3	Elizabeth City State University	L
4	Fayetteville State University	H
5	North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University	G
6	North Carolina Central University	H
7	North Carolina State University	I
8	University of North Carolina at Asheville	C
9	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	H
10	University of North Carolina at Charlotte	F
11	University of North Carolina at Greensboro	G
12	University of North Carolina at Pembroke	H
13	University of North Carolina at Wilmington	J
14	University of North Carolina School of the Arts	G
15	Western Carolina University	B
16	Winston-Salem State University	F

### Public Community Colleges

17	Alamance Community College	H
18	Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College	C
19	Beaufort County Community College	K
20	Bladen Community College	I
21	Blue Ridge Community College	C
22	Brunswick Community College	J
23	Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute	E
24	Cape Fear Community College	J
25	Carteret Community College	K
26	Catawba Valley Community College	E
27	Central Carolina Community College	H
28	Central Piedmont Community College	F
29	Cleveland Community College	E
30	Coastal Carolina Community College	J
31	College of the Albemarle	L
32	Craven Community College	K
33	Davidson County Community College	F
34	Durham Technical Community College	H

35	Edgecombe Community College	J
36	Fayetteville Technical Community College	H
37	Forsyth Technical Community College	C
38	Gaston College	G
39	Guilford Technical Community College	C
40	Halifax Community College	J
41	Haywood Community College	D
42	Isothermal Community College	C
43	James Sprunt Community College	J
44	Johnston Community College	I
45	Lenoir Community College	J
46	Martin Community College	K
47	Mayland Community College	G
48	McDowell Technical Community College	D
49	Mitchell Community College	E
50	Montgomery Community College	J
51	Nash Community College	G
52	Pamlico Community College	K
53	Piedmont Community College	H
54	Pitt Community College	J
55	Randolph Community College	G
56	Richmond Community College	C
57	Roanoke-Chowan Community College	K
58	Robeson Community College	H
59	Rockingham Community College	G
60	Rowan-Cabarrus Community College	F
61	Sampson Community College	I
62	Sandhills Community College	C
63	South Piedmont Community College	G
64	Southeastern Community College	H
65	Southwestern Community College	B
66	Stanly Community College	F
67	Surry Community College	F
68	Tri-County Community College	A
69	Watauga-Grovesville Community College	I
70	Wake Technical Community College	H
71	Wayne Community College	J
72	Western Piedmont Community College	D
73	Wilkes Community College	E
74	Wilson Community College	J

### Private Non-Profit Colleges and Universities

75	Barton College	J
76	Balmont Abbey College	E
77	Bernett College for Women	G
78	Brevard College	C
79	Cabarrus College of Health Sciences	F
80	Campbell University	H
81	Catawba College	F
82	Chowan University	K
83	Davidson College	F
84	Duke University	H
85	Elon University	E
86	Gardner-Webb University	H
87	Greensboro College	G
88	Guilford College	G
89	High Point University	E
90	Johnson & Wales University	E
91	Johnson C. Smith University	F
92	Leas-McRae College	D
93	Lenoir-Rhyne University	E
94	Livingstone College	F
95	Louisburg College	I
96	Mars Hill College	C
97	Meredith College	I
98	Methodist University	C
99	Montreat College	J
100	Mount Olive College	H
101	North Carolina Wesleyan College	J
102	Pfeiffer University	F
103	Queens University of Charlotte	F
104	St. Andrews University	H
105	St. Augustine's College	I
106	Salem College	E
107	Shaw University	I
108	Wake Forest University	C
109	Warren Wilson College	F
110	William Peace University	I
111	Wingate University	F

# Start getting ready for college now!

It's too early to fill out financial aid forms — you'll do that during your child's senior year in high school. But middle school is the best time to start your child on the path to college. Here are some things you can do:

- Let your child know that college is affordable for your family.
- Tell your child's teachers and counselors that going to college is part of your family's plan for your child's future.
- Make sure your child gets a solid base in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Start saving for college. North Carolina's 529 college savings plan requires only \$25 to start. Visit [cfnc.org/save](http://cfnc.org/save) to learn more.
- Learn more about the financial aid available to students from families like yours.
- Go to [cfnc.org/edpays](http://cfnc.org/edpays) or call 1-866-866-CFNC (2362) for more tips to help you and your child pay for college.

# The “Money” Piece was key

- Distinguished tuition/fees and other expenses
- Showed a net of ZERO tuition and fees
- Followed with additional grant aid these students would receive for books and living expenses
- Based the information on each institution’s net price calculator and confirmed in conversation with the financial aid offices involved

## Findings: *Areas we did not see impact*

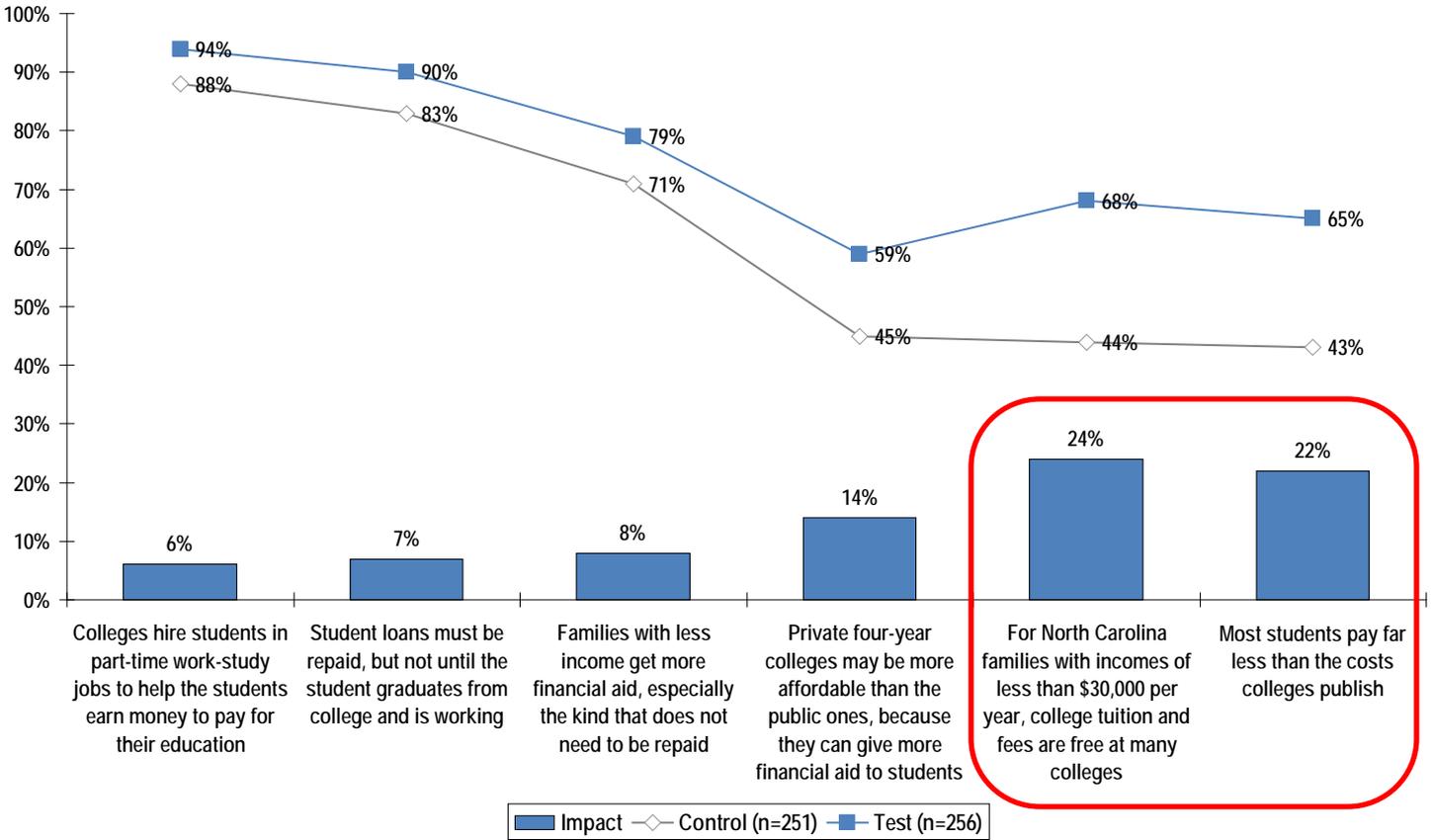
- Knowledge of and positive attitudes toward postsecondary education are widespread throughout the low-income population of North Carolina.
  - The brochure's impact was negligible in changing attitudes about the importance of education beyond high school because the control group's positive attitudes were so high that there was little room for increase.
- Low-income parents are generally aware of the financial aid system and how it works.
- Low-income parents understand that a college education provides benefits in addition to higher income.
- College is understood to be broadly accessible (not just for top students, geographically widespread).

*Infinia believes this is because of the work of CFNC and thus may be different in other states*

# Key Findings: *Areas we found impact*

- *Knowledge of college costs: +13 points*
  - Only 59% of control group respondents but 72% of test group respondents said they actually knew how much it costs to attend college in North Carolina.
- *Understanding that many students pay far less than published prices: +22 points*
  - 65% of test group respondents and only 43% of control group respondents agreed with the statement that most students pay far less than the prices colleges publish.
- *Recognition that for low-income families in North Carolina, parents pay \$0 for tuition at many in-state colleges : +24 points*
  - 68% of test group parents and 44% of control group parents agreed with the statement that college tuition and fees are free at many colleges for families with incomes less than \$30,000

# Six beliefs impacted by materials



Q20 I have a few more statements about college now. I'll ask if you agree strongly, agree only somewhat, disagree strongly, or disagree only somewhat. (% agree strongly / somewhat)  
 Total base

# Lessons Learned

- Credibility is key – CFNC and College Board were seen as valid, trusted sources of information
- Find local gaps in knowledge and tell them what they don't know (not what they do)
- Get beyond the headlines and be very specific and personal – help them see themselves in the data (case studies)
- Keep all charts and text simple and clear
- Repetition could be key

# Next Steps in North Carolina

1. Meet with middle school counselors and principals to disseminate findings and materials
2. Based on the study, there is an opportunity for CFNC to enhance their website by:
  - Providing more information about paying for college for families from different income levels.
  - Reemphasize the \$0 cost for those eligible
  - Elaborate and be more specific on a parent “to do” check list
3. Promote the study and the findings
  - Produce an op-ed signed by NC higher ed system heads
  - Work with NC press to publish findings