

# 2022 CO Statewide Awareness And Sentiment Research - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY -

Prepared by Trajectory Insights

Presented: May 3, 2022



# Goals of the Project



## Primary Goals of this Project Were to Assess MSU Denver on Three Levels:

1. MSU Denver's awareness level across regions of CO compared to competitive institutions
2. Factors parents, prospects and school counselors use to evaluate colleges and universities
3. Perceptions of the MSU brand

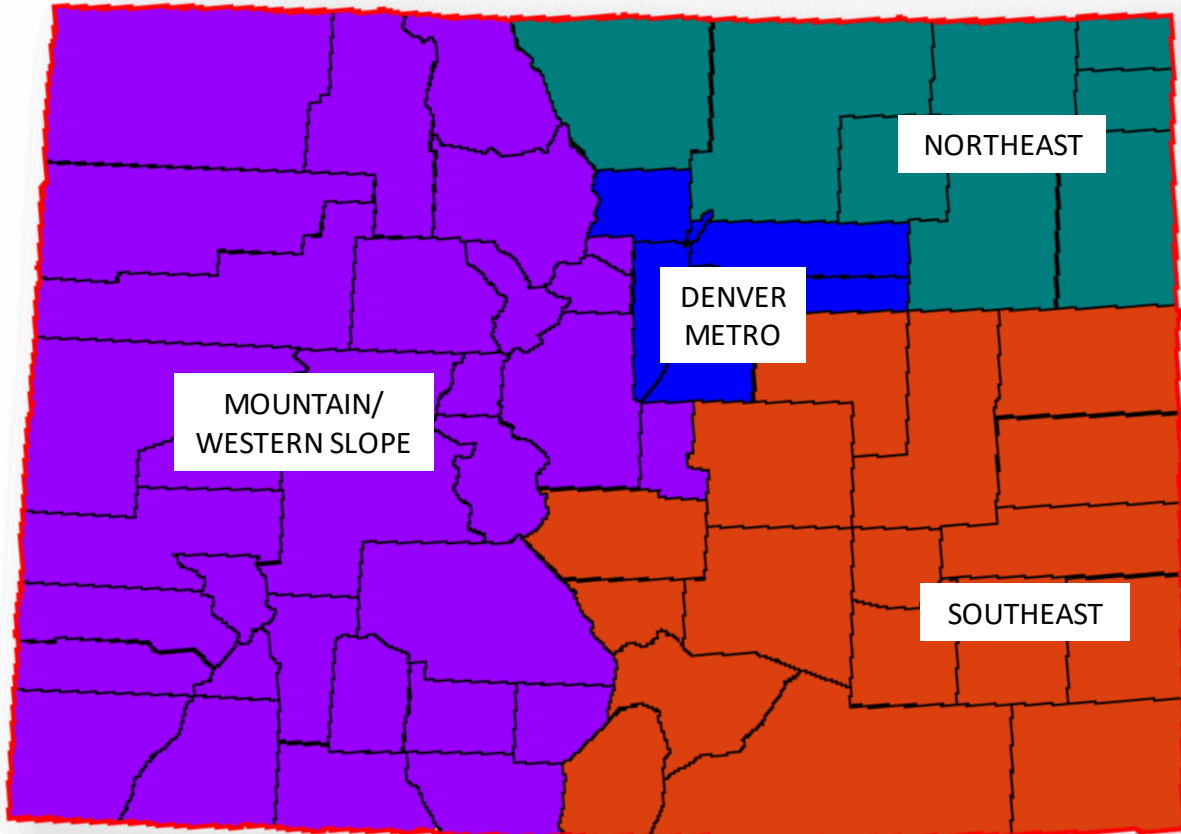
# Methodology

The MSU Denver CO Awareness & Sentiment quantitative research was conducted via an online survey fielded from 2/28/2022 to 3/15/2022 among four key groups: *adult members of an opt-in online survey panel, high school students from an opt-in online survey panel, non-enrollees from MSU Denver's database, and CO School Counselors from an MSU Denver database.*

## Key Target Audiences

- **1,133 CO Adults**: Qualified adult respondents from the **opt-in online survey panel** are:
  - Between the ages of 18 and 65
  - Currently live in CO
  - Quotas were set to obtain a population distribution representative of four CO regions' Census populations (see following slide)
- **99 CO High School Students**: CO Adults with high school aged children were asked for their child's participation
  - Current Members, Canceled Members, 5-Day Pass Trier Non-Joiners
- **149 Non-Enrollees to MSU Denver**: Email list supplied by MSU Denver of people who applied, were accepted, but chose not to enroll at MSU Denver from 2019 through 2021
- **80 High School Counselors**: Email list supplied by MSU Denver of High School counselor

# CO Region Designations



## Sample Sizes and Counties within Regions

- ✓ **650 completes from Denver Metro Counties** (traditional seven county region - (Adams, Arapahoe, Boulder, Broomfield, Denver, Douglas, and Jefferson)
- ✓ **133 completes from Northeast Counties** (Larimer, Logan, Morgan, Phillips, Sedgwick, Washington, Weld, and Yuma)
- ✓ **250 completes from Southeast Counties** (Baca, Bent, Cheyenne, Costilla, Crowley, Custer, El Paso, Elbert, Fremont, Huerfano, Kiowa, Kit Carson, Las Animas, Lincoln, Otero, Prowers, Pueblo)
- ✓ **100 completes from Mountain/Western Slope Counties** (Alamosa, Archuleta, Chaffee, Clear Creek, Conejos, Delta, Dolores, Eagle, Garfield, Gilpin, Gunnison, Hinsdale, Jackson, La Plata, Lake, Mesa, Mineral, Moffat, Montezuma, Montrose, Ouray, Park, Pitkin, Rio Blanco, Rio Grande, Routt, Saguache, San Juan, San Miguel, Summit)

Denver Metro sample size = 650

Non-Metro Regions sample size = 483

# Topline Research Findings

# Awareness

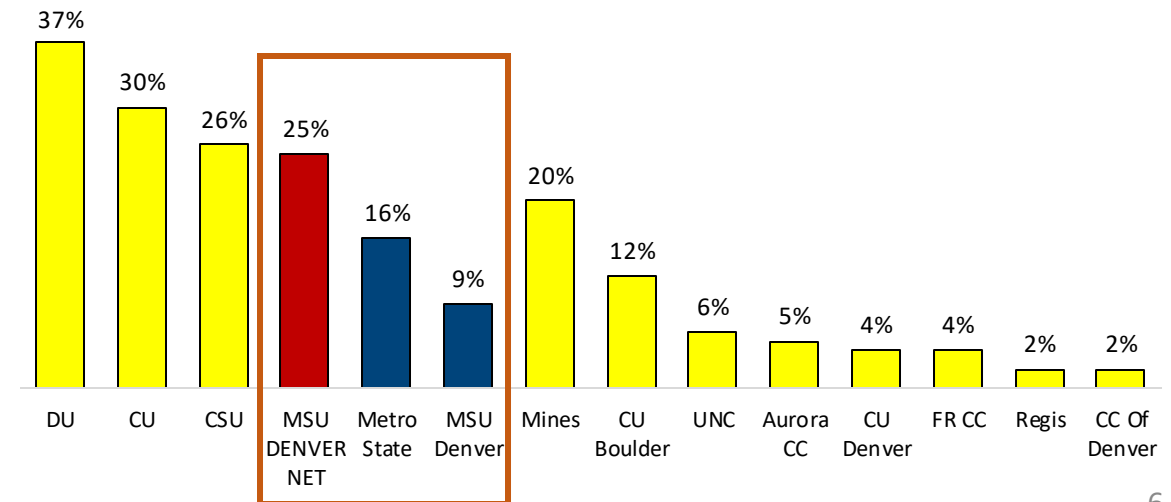
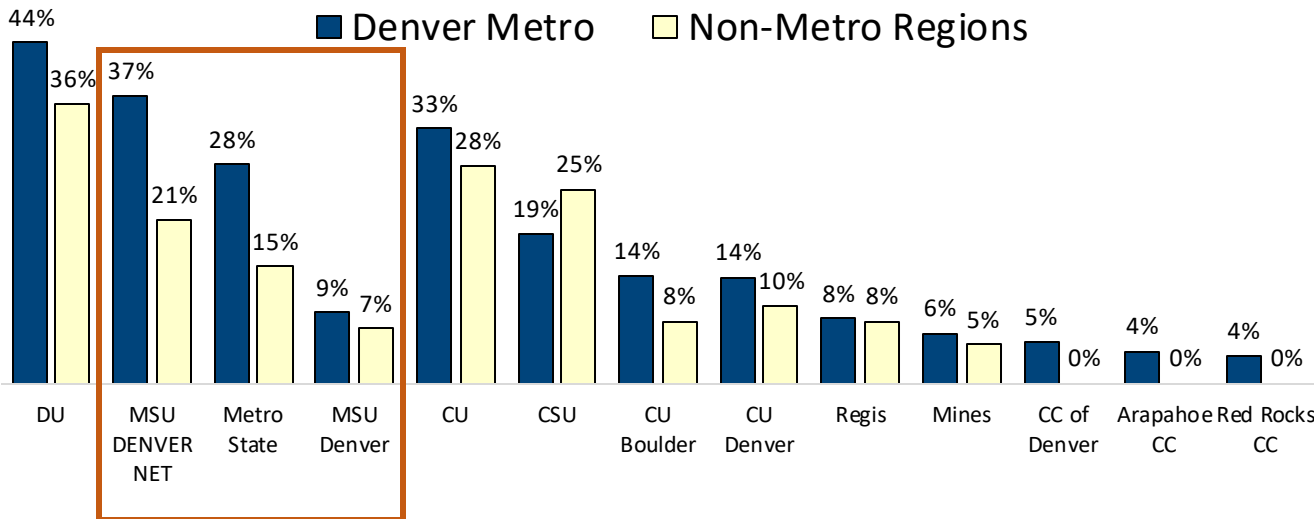


## UNAIDED AWARENESS

- **MSU Denver’s unaided awareness (30%) is on par with University of Colorado (general reference) trailing only University of Denver (40%)**
  - It is driven by references to Metro (22%) vs. MSU Denver (8%)
  - CU and CU Boulder net to 41% unaided awareness
- **Not surprisingly, unaided awareness is higher for those in the Denver Metro area (37%) than for those outside the metro area (21%)**
  - The metro (37%) and northeast (34%) regions show similar unaided awareness at twice that of the southeast (17%) and mountain/western slope regions (17%)
- Statewide, awareness among current High School students is 25% (16% mention Metro State and 9% mention MSU Denver – indicates word of mouth name reference awareness vs. awareness due to MSU Denver communications as these students would have been in pre-school/elementary school when the institution name changed)

### ADULT POPULATION

### HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS



# Awareness

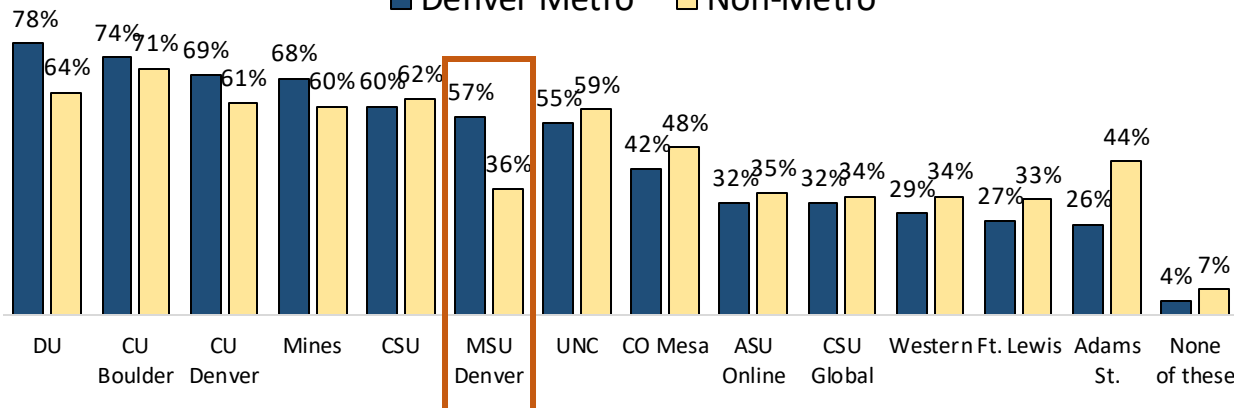


## AIDED AWARENESS

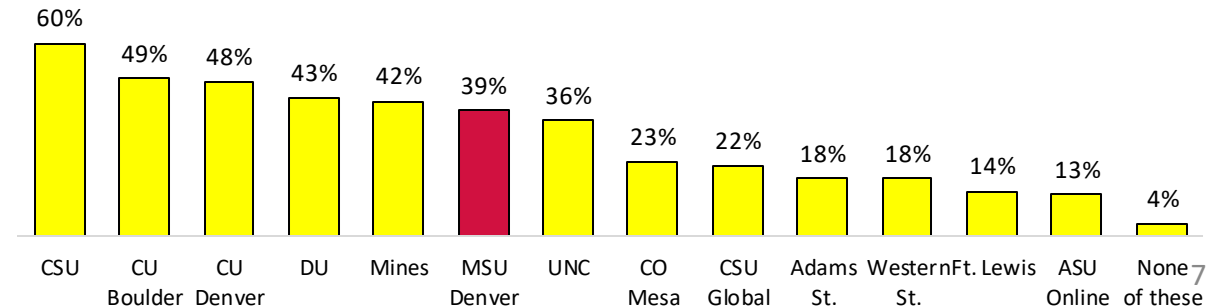
- **When provided a list of institutions, MSU Denver's awareness is 48%**
  - This trails many competitive institutions – CU Boulder (72%), University of Denver (71%), CU Denver (65%), Mines (64%), CSU (60%), and UNC (56%)
  - Schools outside the metro area and fully online institutions are less known than MSU Denver
- Awareness is stronger among those in the Metro area vs. those in the rest of the state – 57% vs. 36%
- No other competitor shows such a difference across regions
- High School students show an awareness level of 39%
  - Also driven by Metro area residents (51% vs. 24% for non-metro regions)
- Two-thirds of those with bachelor's degrees, across the state, are aware of MSU Denver
- Two-thirds of a key target audience - those with some college or an associates in the Metro area – are aware of the school
  - This awareness level drops to 31% outside of the Metro area
  - There is a similar dynamic among those who plan to go to school for an associates or bachelor's in the near future

### ADULT POPULATION

■ Denver Metro ■ Non-Metro



### HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS



# Awareness



## **AIDED AWARENESS (cont'd)**

- Demographically, older metro area residents and those who have lived in CO for over 10 years show higher awareness, but this does not hold true outside the metro area
- Those with higher household incomes (\$50,000 plus for the metro area and \$75,000 plus outside Denver Metro) also show higher awareness, likely tied to their own educational attainment

### Opportunities:

**1) Get the word out about MSU Denver outside the metro area (particularly in the southeast and mountain/western slope regions) so MSU Denver is in the consideration set more often. Build on MSU Denver's relatively strong awareness within the northeast region of the state.**

**2) As more newcomers arrive in Colorado and the Denver Metro area, stay vigilant in your awareness building and brand promotion.**

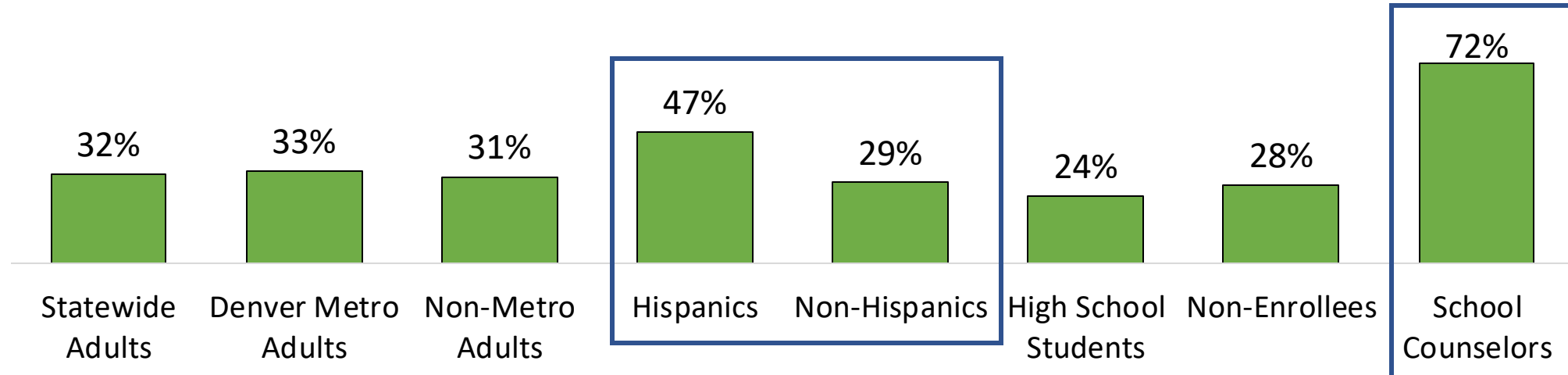
**3) Although many refer to the University as 'Metro', continue to reinforce your brand using the full name of your institution. Metro should be seen as a 'shortened reference' not the brand name of the University.**



# Awareness of HSI

## AWARENESS OF MSU DENVER AS AN HSI

- Only about one-third (32%) of adults in the state know of MSU Denver's HSI designation
  - It is similar for metro and non-metro residents
  - Hispanics are more likely to be aware of the designation – 47% vs. 29% of Non-Hispanics
- The level is lower among High School Students (only 24%)
- Even Non-Enrollees are not in the know, with only 28% being aware
- School Counselors do know - 72% say they are aware of the HSI designation



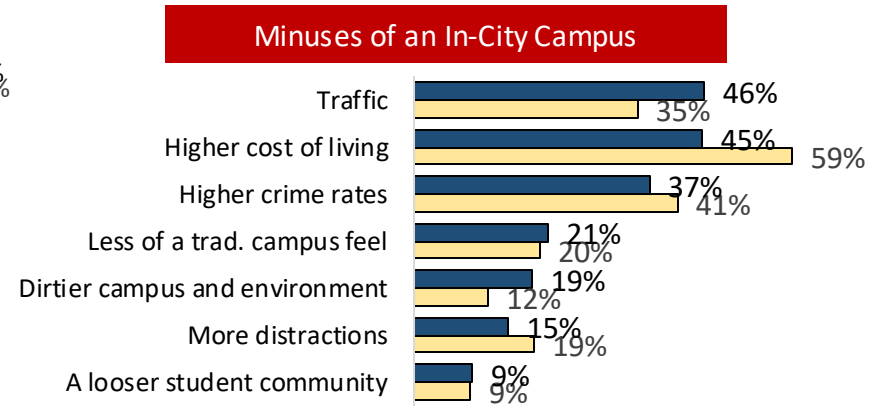
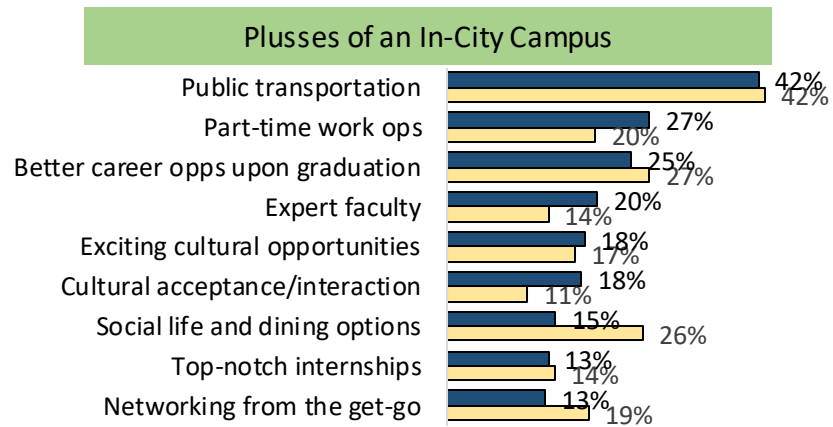
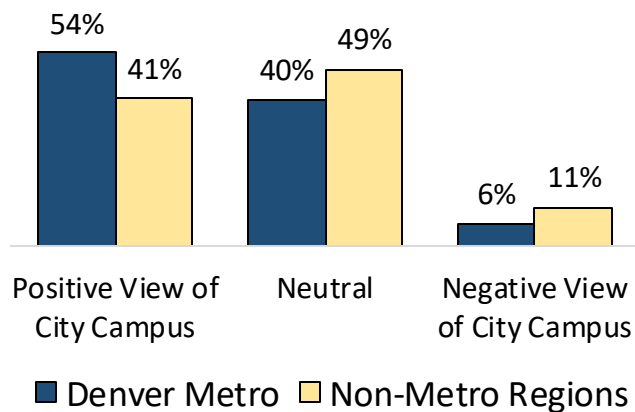
**Opportunity: There is more opportunity to position MSU Denver as a leading HSI institution statewide among Colorado students and adults, promoting the direct benefits for Hispanic students and the inclusivity benefit for all.**

# A Downtown University



## PERCEPTIONS OF A CITY CAMPUS

- Overall, Coloradans have a positive to neutral view of a city-based university – true across metro and non-metro residents (only 6% of metro-area and 11% of non-metro view a college in the city negatively)
  - This holds true for High School students and Non-Enrollees
- The benefits of an in-city campus are access to public transportation, opportunities for part-time work, better career opportunities, and for those outside the metro area a more robust social life
  - These benefits are consistent for High School students and Non-Enrollees
- The negatives surrounding an in-city campuses for those in the metro area are traffic and higher crime rates
  - For those outside Metro Denver, the higher cost of living is the biggest minus to a city campus
  - They are also concerned about higher crime rates and traffic



**Opportunity: While a small percentage have negative views of an in-city school, personalize the benefits of MSU Denver for prospects – public transportation and job prospects – both while in school and after graduation. This will be attractive to both parents and prospects. Amplifying Denver’s robust social offerings is also advised.**

# Decision Factors



## FACTOR IMPORTANCE

- The top four decision factors when evaluating a college or university are:
  - Affordable tuition (59% extremely important)**
  - Offers the program I want (58%)**
  - Campus is safe (53%)**
  - Availability of scholarships and financial aid (47%)**
- On-campus housing, fully-online learning and open enrollment are of lesser importance**
- The ranking of factors is consistent for the metro area and non-metro regions of the state
- Likewise, the top four are consistent for high school students, non-enrollees, and school counselors
- Non-enrollees who are attending other institutions also highlight program, cost (including scholarships) and close to home/location as to why they chose their current institution

Decision Factors Tested (in order of importance)
Affordable tuition
Offers the program I want
Campus is safe
Availability of scholarships and financial aid
Convenient location and surrounding area
Personal attention to students
High graduation rate
Values diversity and multiculturalism
Offers open enrollment
Offers fully online programs and classes
Vibrant campus life and culture
Availability of on campus housing
Offers a variety of clubs and organizations
Competitive intercollegiate athletic teams

### TOP DECISION FACTORS BY TARGET AUDIENCE

CO Adults	HS Students	Non-Enrollees	School Counselors
Affordable Tuition	Offers the programs I want	Affordable Tuition	Affordable Tuition
Offers the programs I want	Affordable tuition	Offers the programs I want	Availability of scholarships/financial aid
Campus is safe	Campus is safe	Availability of scholarships/financial aid	Offers the programs I want
Availability of scholarships/financial aid	Availability of scholarships/financial aid	Campus is safe	

**Opportunity: Highlight these aspects of MSU Denver in promoting the institution across the state**

# Sources of Information



## IMPORTANCE OF SOURCES

- **Two ways of learning about an institution separate from the rest among adults in the state– Campus Visits and College Websites**
  - This is true inside and outside the Denver Metro area
- High School students also value campus visits, but elevate social media and local interactions (high school visits, school counselors, and college fairs)
- Non-enrollees, having gone through the process, see interactions with admissions staff, faculty and students as important information sources
- School counselors see campus visits as the best source for prospective students, followed by high school visits, college websites, and interactions with admissions

TOP INFORMATION SOURCES BY TARGET AUDIENCE			
CO Adults	HS Students	Non-Enrollees	School Counselors
Campus visit	Campus visit	College website	Campus visit
College website	High school visits from colleges	Campus visit	High school visits from colleges
	Social media	Interactions with admissions staff	College website
			Interactions with admissions staff

**Opportunity: Optimizing campus visits (including meetings with admissions, faculty, and students) is critical to bringing the MSU Denver experience to life, however, spending time at high schools with students and school counselors would build awareness and encourage those important campus visits. Keep your social media presence strong and your website engaging and relevant to the user experience.**

# MSU Denver Sentiment



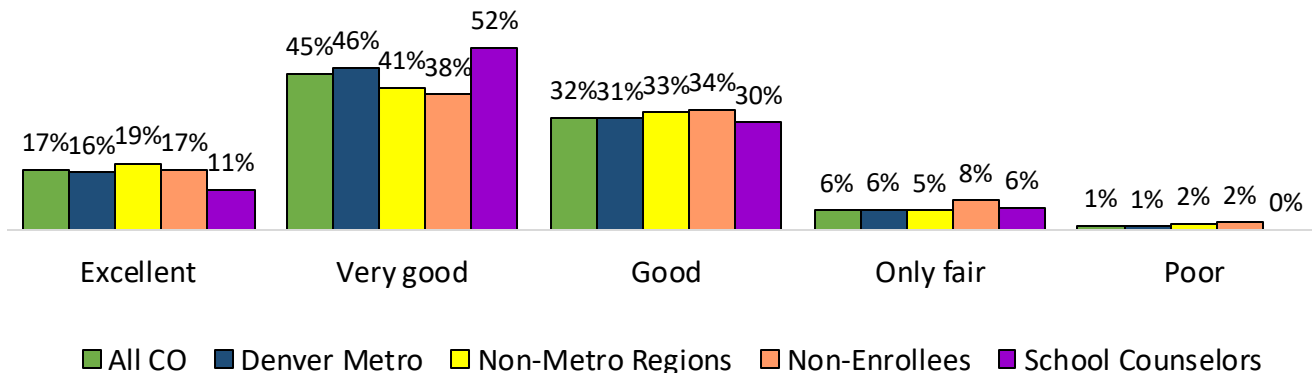
## REPUTATION

- **A majority of all target groups rate the reputation of MSU Denver as excellent or very good, with fewer than 10% rating the school as only fair or poor.**
  - School Counselors see improvements for the University's reputation, with 24% saying it has improved greatly and 54% saying it has improved somewhat over the past few years

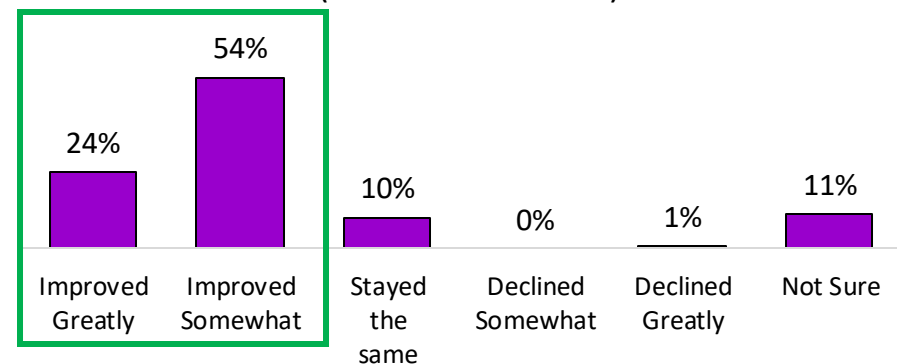
## ACADEMIC QUALITY

- **One-third of adults across the state (similar for those in the metro area and those outside it) believe MSU Denver provides high academic quality, with another 55% believing it is average**
- Very few feel the academic quality is low
- One-third of non-enrollees are not sure, which is interesting as they should have the most knowledge of the brand
- Likewise, about one in six School Counselors are also not sure of the academic quality of the institution

Overall Reputation



Change In Reputation Over Past Few Years (School Counselors)



# MSU Denver Sentiment

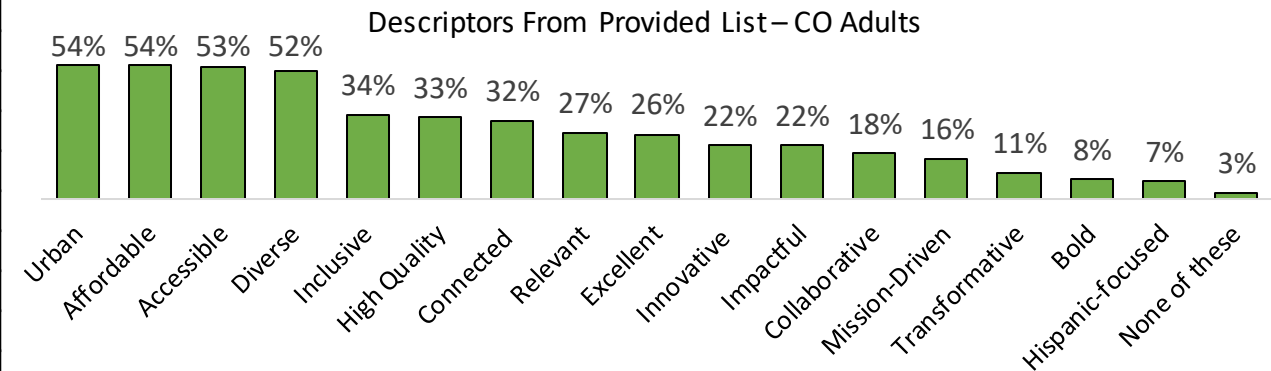
## THREE WORDS (OPEN-ENDED)

- Adults across the state view MSU Denver practically – most often citing **Affordable, Local, Convenient and Downtown**
  - Both **Diverse and Quality** are also used to describe the brand, but to a lesser extent
  - Those outside the metro area also see the school as **Big and Inclusive**
  - Non-Enrollees elevate **Affordability** above all other descriptors and also recognize the **Diversity** of the campus
  - School Counselors mostly frequently cite **Affordable, Diverse, and Urban** in describing the institution

## ADJECTIVES

- Provided with a list of adjectives, the top four descriptors of the university are **Urban, Affordable, Accessible, and Diverse**
  - This holds true for High School Students, Non-Enrollees, and School Counselors, with the latter two groups also elevating **Inclusive**
  - Fewer than one in five adults in Colorado chose **Hispanic-Focused, Transformative, Mission-Driven, or Collaborative** to describe the university
    - Only School Counselors elevate **Hispanic-Focused** as a top descriptor (selected by 34% of counselors)

Top Open-Ended: Denver Metro Region		Top Open-Ended: Non-Metro Denver Regions	
Descriptor	Mentions	Descriptor	Mentions
Affordable	22%	Affordable	18%
Local	15%	Downtown	13%
Convenient	13%	Good	8%
Close	10%	Small	8%
Downtown	10%	City	7%
Good	10%	Convenient	7%
Diverse	8%	Local	7%
Quality	6%	Urban	7%



**Opportunity:** Continue to reinforce MSU Denver’s brand quality of academic excellence while amplifying affordability and accessibility in tandem with excellence. Continue to reinforce diversity/inclusivity as unique to MSU Denver’s mission and vision and call out MSU Denver’s vibrant, urban, downtown and convenient location as a unique aspect of the MSU Denver ‘experience’.

# MSU Denver Perceptions



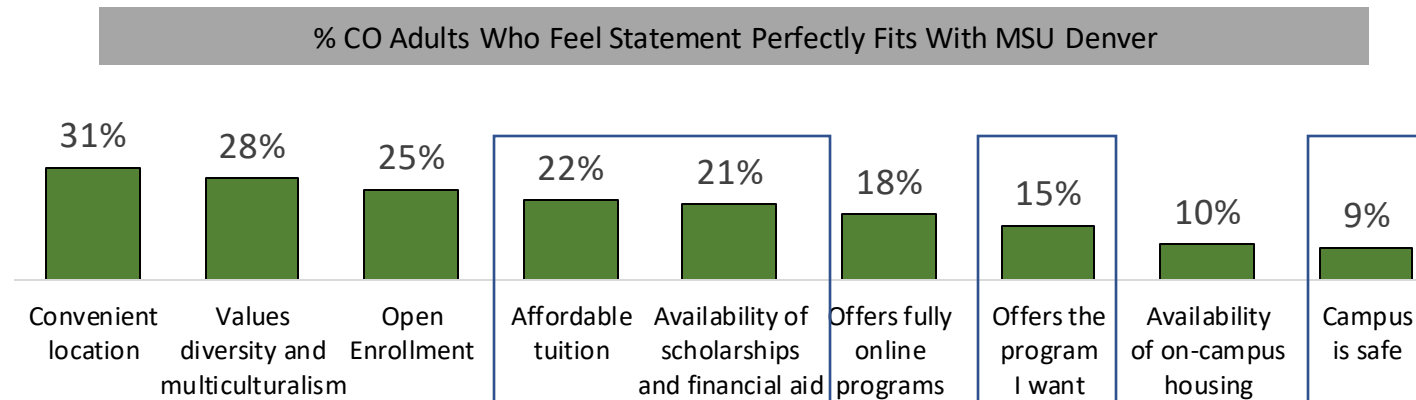
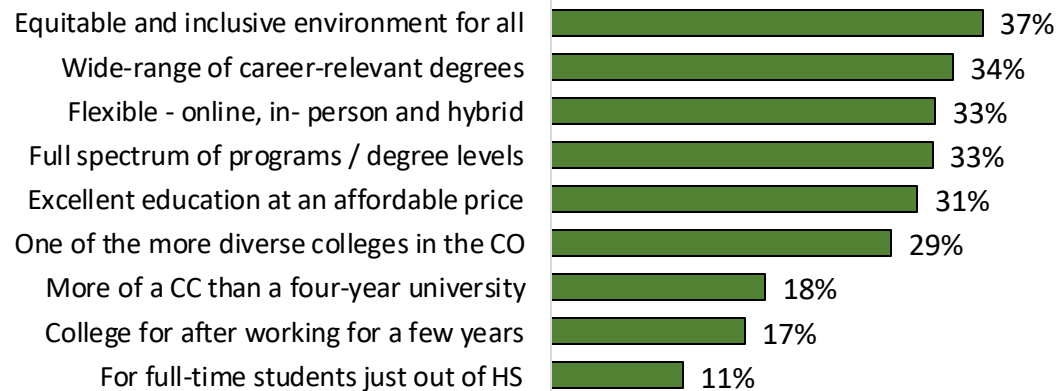
## AGREEMENT WITH STATEMENTS ABOUT MSU DENVER

- The strongest connections to the institution – *inclusiveness and diversity, wide-range of degrees, flexible learning formats, and excellent education at an affordable price* – are not very strong, with only about one-third of adults across the state strongly agreeing with that these describe MSU Denver
- Perceptions are similar for those in the metro area and those outside it, as well as among High School Students and Non-Enrollees
- School Counselors have stronger opinions (or are more likely to be “in the know”)
- None of the key groups see MSU Denver as a place for a particular type of student (just out of HS, community college-types, or those looking to get back into education after working)

## DECISION FACTORS’ FIT WITH MSU DENVER

- The strongest fits for MSU Denver are Convenience, Valuing Diversity and Open Enrollment
- While these are core elements of the brand, the aspects of a school that are most important across target audiences are **affordability** (including scholarship), **programs**, and **campus safety** have room for improvement, particularly programs and campus safety

% CO Adults Who Strongly Agree



**Opportunity:** As MSU Denver builds awareness across the state, messaging should elevate the perceptions of affordability, programs, and campus safety

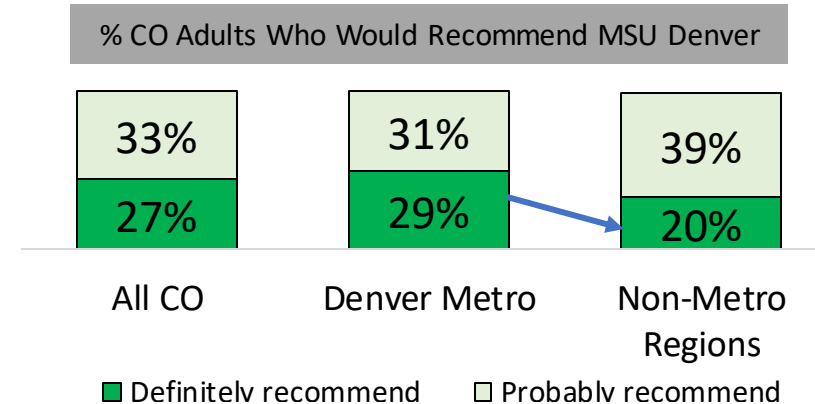
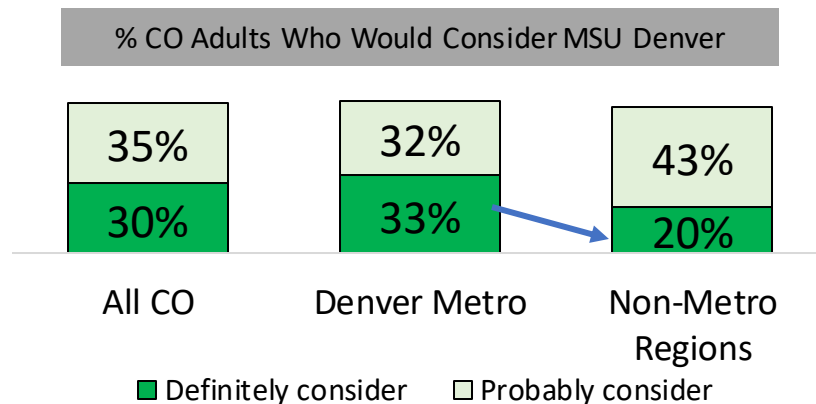
# Consider or Recommend MSU Denver

## CONSIDER ENROLLING AT MSU DENVER AMONG THOSE LIKELY TO GO TO COLLEGE

- **Two-thirds across the state say they will either definitely (30%) or probably (35%) consider MSU Denver should they go back to school**
  - Those in the metro area are more likely to consider the institution, however, 63% outside the metro area are positive
- The main reasons for being positive to the idea are *knowing students/alums, affordability, inclusiveness, and location*
- The main reasons for being negative to considering are that it seems like a young person's school, not known for their area of study, *seems "lower class," "not a real college (like UNC or community college)"*

## RECOMMEND MSU DENVER TO OTHERS IF NOT CONSIDERING GOING TO SCHOOL THEMSELVES

- Six in ten would either definitely (27%) or probably (33%) recommend MSU Denver
- The main reason for recommending include *positive personal experiences, value for the money, for all walks of life, Free App Week makes applying risk-free*
- Reasons against recommending are *expensive, poor reputation, it's a backup school, location/sharing the campus, free for Hispanics only*



**Opportunity: Some historical stigmas remain regarding open enrollment status. Continue to reinforce academic excellence, inclusiveness, achievements, combined with affordability. Word of mouth is valued. Perhaps sharing a variety of student stories from across the state on the website can show the breadth of students served – “for someone like me”.**



# Supporting School Counselors

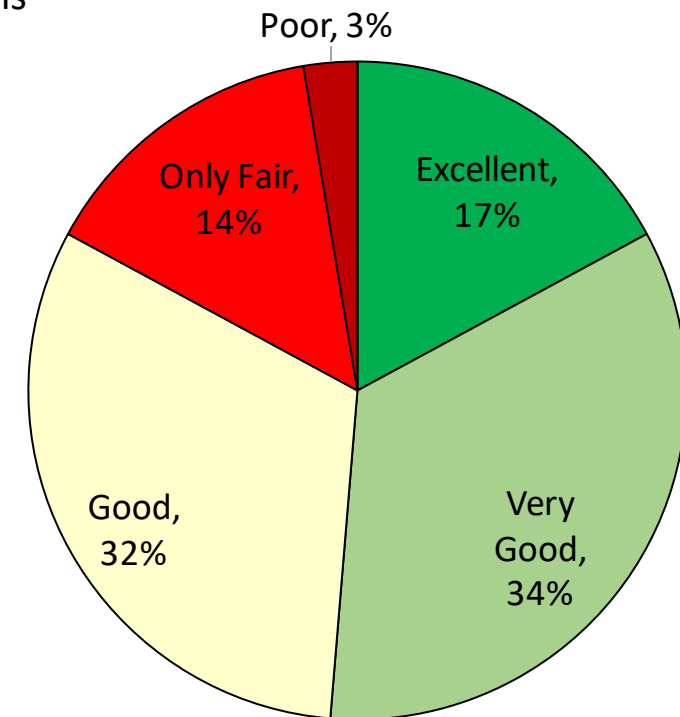
## KEEPING SCHOOL COUNSELORS UPDATED AND IN THE KNOW

- 51% of CO School Counselors say MSU Denver does an excellent (17%) or very good (34%) job keeping them updated
  - That leaves half of counselors wanting more

## WHAT WOULD BE HELPFUL

- More high school visits and visits to campus for counselors and students (including field trips)
- Consistent updates (community colleges may be doing a better job than MSU Denver)
- Interactions with Financial Aid staff on high school campuses, not just Admissions
- Specifics about academic programs
- There is some worry that the Excel program is going away

**Opportunity: Strengthen relationships with school counselors through in-person interactions. According to what is important, focus should be on affordability and academics (particularly on the wide variety of programs)**

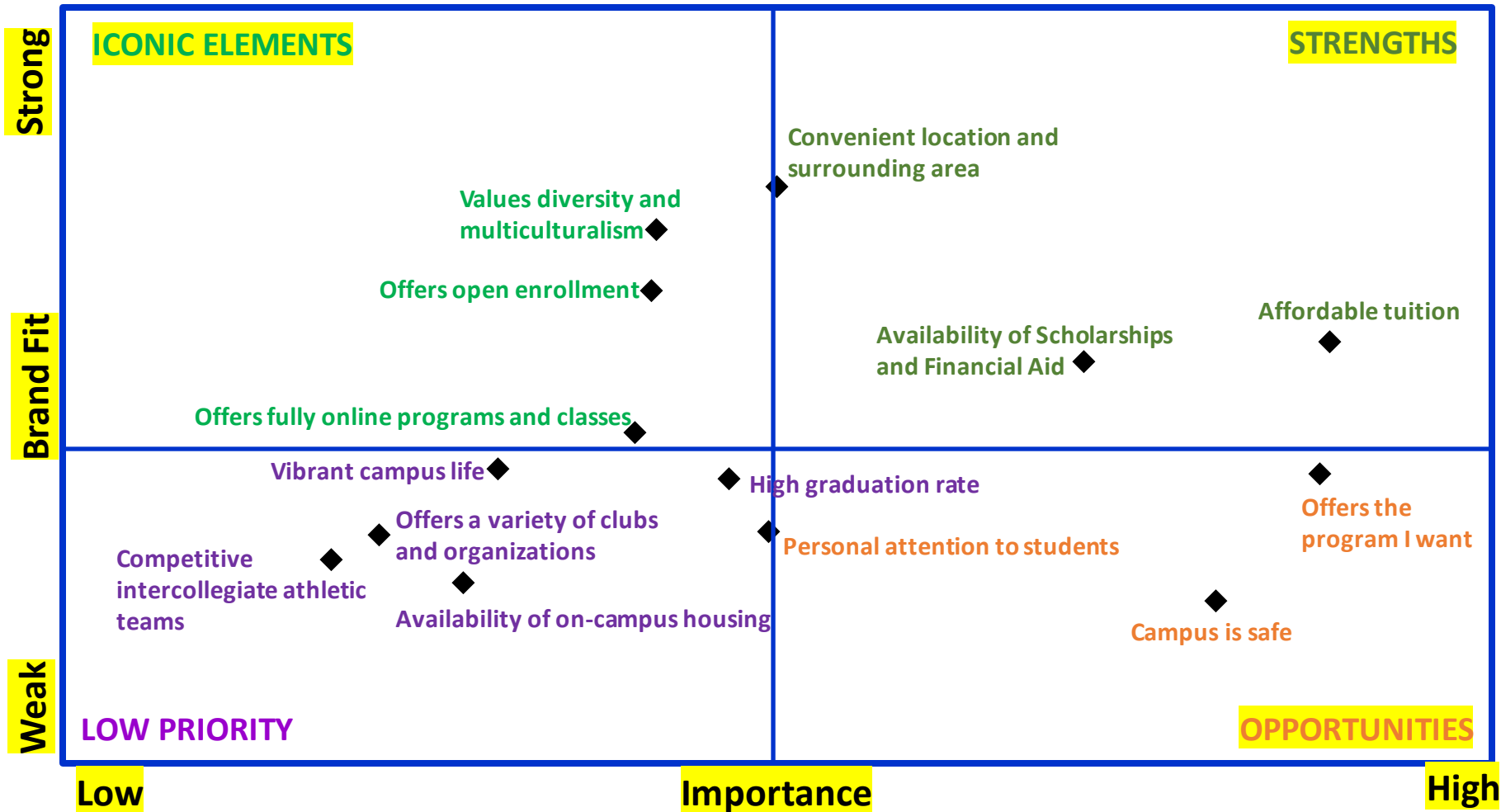


How good a job does MSU Denver do at keeping you updated on the university and what's new?

# MSU Denver Strengths and Opportunities – CO Statewide



How well do each of the following statements fit in describing MSU Denver? (% Perfectly Fits)



**STRENGTHS** (upper right quadrant): Affordable Tuition, Availability of Scholarships and Financial Aid, and Convenient Location and Surroundings)

**Opportunities** (lower right quadrant): Offer the Programs I Want, Campus is Safe, Personal Attention to Students

**Iconic Elements** (upper left quadrant): Values Diversity, Open Enrollment, Fully Online Programs

**Do Not Prioritize** (lower left quadrant): High Grad Rate, Vibrant Camps Life, On-Campus Housing, Competitive Intercollegiate Athletics

How important are each of the following factors for you when choosing a college or university? (% Extremely important)

# MSU Denver Strengths and Opportunities



## STRENGTHS AND OPPORTUNITIES GRID

- MSU Denver's strengths (important decision factors and strong brand fit) are **cost and convenience focused**. Messaging against these strengths will keep the brand focused where it matters most
- The strongest opportunities for improving perceptions of the institution come from:
  - Better informing prospects and parents on the **breadth of programs** offered so they can find the one that is their right match at MSU Denver
  - Providing a sense of comfort that the **Auraria campus is safe**
  - Showing prospects and parents that the University provides students with **personal attention**

Opportunity: Ensuring that these strengths and opportunities are woven into communications/messaging, admissions, faculty expectations/training (personal attention to students). If using the website to bring these aspects of the University to life (which is recommended), make the information easy to find in the fewest clicks.

For mission reinforcement and differentiation, be sure to have your foundational 'iconic' aspects of diversity and open enrollment woven into your messaging as underpinnings while continuing to grow awareness of your on-line programs.

# Recommendations

# Recommendations – What's In It For Me



**MSU Denver has tremendous opportunity to build awareness of the institution across the state, particularly in the Southeast and Mountain/Western Slope regions**

## **Messaging Focus**

- Promote what's important and what MSU Denver does well – **affordability, scholarships and aid, the benefits of a downtown university**
- Get the word out about the **breadth of programs** offered at MSU Denver. Having programs of interest is extremely important, but not a strong fit for the institution
- Leverage communications to improve perceptions that the **campus is safe**, and that students receive **personalized attention**
- Build stronger **relationships with School Counselors** through **personal engagements** and University **updates**
- Utilize current student/alumni **stories/testimonials** to promote the University, particularly students from non-metro regions
- While not a primary decision driver, the availability of **online and hybrid classes** and programs is also an important aspect of a college education to prospects and parents
- While not primary decision factors, continue to reinforce your unique commitment to **inclusivity** and **open enrollment** as core to the MSU Denver mission and vision to advance social mobility

# Recommendations – What's In It For Me



**Most of the sources of information prospective students and parents use to evaluate potential schools are controllable by the institution, allowing for consistent messaging across options**

## **Messaging Vehicles**

- **Train staff** (admissions and financial aid staff, on-campus tour-guides, faculty, and those responsible for interactions with School Counselors) to focus on the most important decision factors in their communications and personal interactions - affordability, scholarships and aid, the value of a downtown university, campus safety, and programs
- The **website, publications** (brochures, direct mail, catalog), and **social media** (particularly important to HS students) should be focused on these same main drivers of the brand's strengths and opportunities
- Using the most impactful messaging at **college fairs** is also an important way to **differentiate** MSU Denver when prospective students and parents are evaluating on multiple institutions at the same time
- From a messaging standpoint, **be consistent across platforms**

# Recommendations – What's In It For Me



The efforts to improve MSU Denver's reputation are bearing fruit. Not only is the University's overall reputation and academic quality viewed overwhelmingly as positive across target audiences, almost eight in 10 School Counselors say its reputation has greatly or somewhat improved over the past few years

## Continue to grow MSU Denver's standing across the state

- Perceptions of **reputation and academic quality** are driven mostly by students (current and alumni) with their first-hand knowledge. As awareness increases, these positive perceptions need to be reinforced and nurtured
  - Many who show interest in considering MSU Denver or are likely to recommend the school came to their feeling by knowing a student or former student who had a great experience
  - MSU Denver's focus on students and their success will build **word of mouth promotion**
- Since MSU Denver is underrepresented outside the metro area, the use of testimonials of the website and other marketing avenues will bring that word of mouth to places where students are not
- School Counselors already see the improvements and continued updating on what is new and innovative should continue this important trend

# THANK YOU!

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