

College parents see serious problems from campus alcohol use

But they struggle to find information they want on campus drinking, intervention policies

These findings are drawn from a national survey of parents of college students, conducted by The MassINC Polling Group. The survey was completed by 1,013 parents from September 30 – October 11, 2016 and focused on issues related to alcohol use on campus. The project was commissioned by the Mary Christie Foundation and The Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation.

Introduction: Parents see impacts of alcohol use, want more information.

Parents of college students see college alcohol abuse as a problem with serious consequences for their children, according to a nationwide poll of parents of college students. About nine in ten parents call excessive drinking either a “very serious” (47 percent) or “somewhat serious” (44 percent) problem on college campuses. Parents see impacts ranging from drunk driving and sexual assault to academic problems stemming from alcohol excessive or underage drinking (Figure 1). They are aware of the long term legal and health consequences as well.

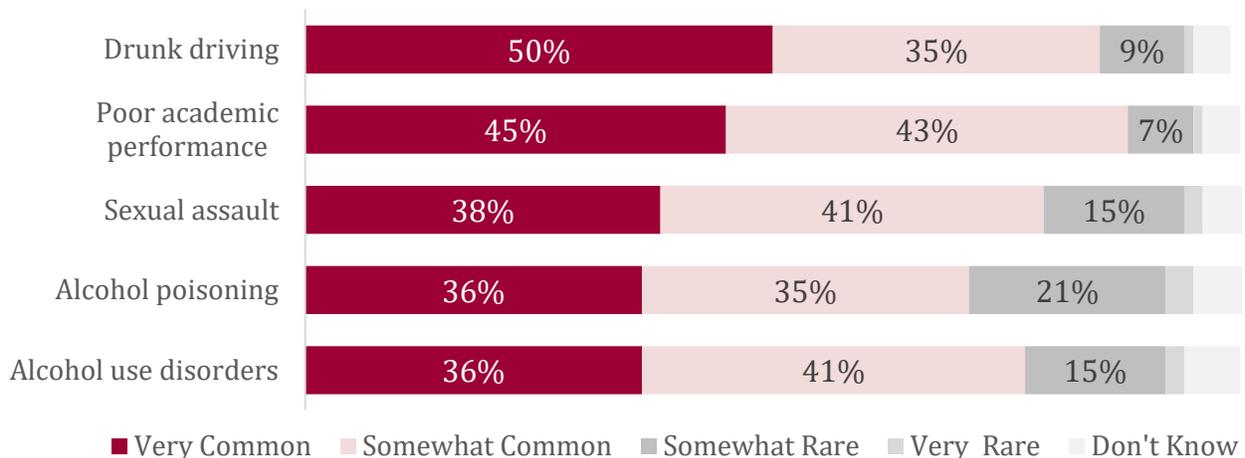
There is widespread agreement that campus alcohol policies should include real

consequences such as suspension or expulsion for more serious violations, and lesser disciplinary steps for minor offenses. Few see alcohol abuse as merely an innocent rite of passage that can or should be ignored by colleges. While drinking on campus certainly is not a new phenomenon, the survey shows parents are not willing to turn a blind eye, given the impacts and consequences they perceive as common.

Many parents want to be informed, both about the policies on campus and their child’s own activities if problems arise. But the information parents say they want on both fronts is often unavailable to them. Many parents who tried to evaluate prospective colleges based on alcohol use on campus reported difficulties in finding the information. And while parents want to be

Figure 1: Parents see negative impacts of drinking as common

To the best of your knowledge, how common are the following impacts of underage or excessive drinking among college students?



notified for a wide variety of alcohol related incidents, they overestimate how often they would hear from the college in the event of a problem.

All of this suggests that demand for information currently outpaces supply. Parents want to know what is going on both across campus and with their own child. But for now, the information they seek is often scarce and hard to find.

Parents acknowledge that alcohol leads to problems and challenges for their student

Data from the National Institute of Health shows 60 percent of college students drink in a given month, and 2 out of 3 of these engage in binge drinking. This drinking contributes to a host of related issues and challenges for the students. One in four report related academic challenges and one in five meet the criteria for alcohol use disorder. In a given year, 97,000 students report alcohol related sexual assaults, and 1,825 students die in alcohol-related incidents.

Parents are at least partially aware of these realities, even if not the precise figures. Fully half of parents (50 percent) say drunk driving is a “very common” impact of excessive or underage campus drinking and another 35 percent call it “somewhat common”. For an activity with such significant consequences and widespread stigma, these figures are notably high. And drunk driving is just one of the problems parents perceive as prevalent on their children’s campus (Figure 1). Seven in ten or more call each of four other impacts at least “somewhat common”, from alcohol use disorders (77 percent) to poor academic performance (88 percent).

These significant potential problems are likely a reason why parents think colleges should get

Parents of students of color express elevated concerns about alcohol impacts

Parents were not all equally concerned about alcohol on campus. Parents of students of color are more likely to seek information on alcohol use and policies before admission. Among parents of African American students, 69 percent said “concerns about drinking on campus” were very important in choosing a school; 63 percent of parents of Latino students said the same (Figure 2). Among white students, just 45 percent called this information very important.

Looking for information early is likely partly driven by elevated concerns about alcohol related problems. Parents of black and Latino students were also more likely than white parents to see drunk driving, sexual assault, alcohol poisoning, and other problems as very common.

This is somewhat related to differences in the types of schools. Black and Latino students in this survey were more likely to be enrolled in two-year program, and parents of black and Latino students were less likely to have finished college themselves.

Figure 2: Parents of students of color more likely to consider alcohol use, policies in college selection

How important, if at all, was _____ at your student’s school as a factor in your college selection process? (% calling each “very important” or “somewhat important” in choosing a school)

Race of student	Concerns abt drinking on campus	Alcohol intervention programming
White	58%	45%
African-American	78%	69%
Hispanic	77%	63%
Asian or Pacific Islander	76%	58%

involved in addressing the problem seriously rather than turning a blind eye. The open ended comments showed a few parents *do* feel that drinking is a rite of passage, or that colleges should focus on education rather than trying to “babysit” students. But overall, just 17 percent agree with the idea that “underage drinking is OK because it teaches students how to be responsible drinkers when they get older”; just 8 percent strongly agree (Figure 3).

On the other end of the spectrum, 90 percent or more agree with various statements supporting the idea that alcohol consumption should be taken seriously, reasons ranging from health consequences (95 percent), legal consequences (94 percent), and academic consequences (93

percent). For each of these, more than 6 in ten “strongly agree” with the statement.

Parents support strong discipline policies, but are unsure if they are in use.

Parents see serious impacts of college drinking, and favor colleges doling out severe consequences for serious violations. Of the seven alcohol related infractions tested in the survey, majorities of parents thought all seven should carry at least probation as a consequence. Parents were fairly lenient on simple underage drinking. For on campus drinking, a slight plurality (48 percent) say probation or no punishment would be appropriate. For drinking off campus, 55 percent say one of these lesser consequences is

Figure 3: Parents want alcohol abuse treated seriously, not as a rite of passage

How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

% who said they “strongly agree” with each statement

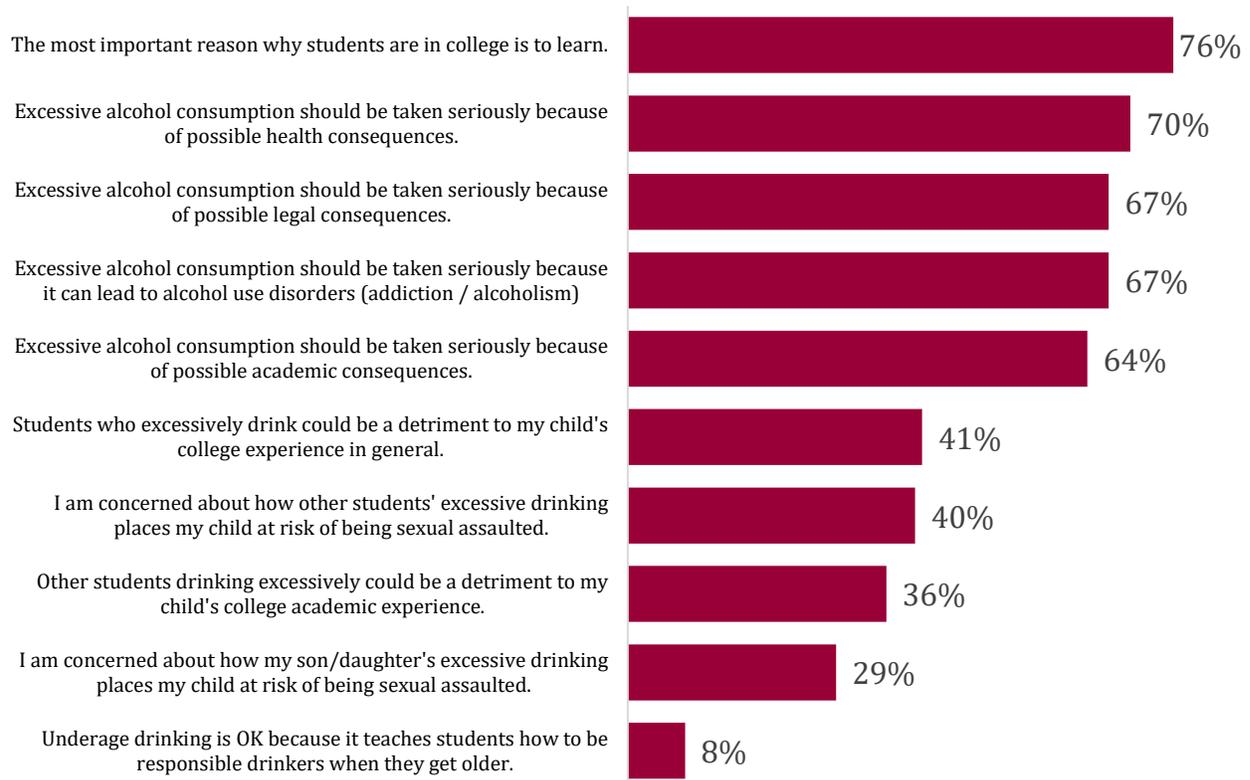
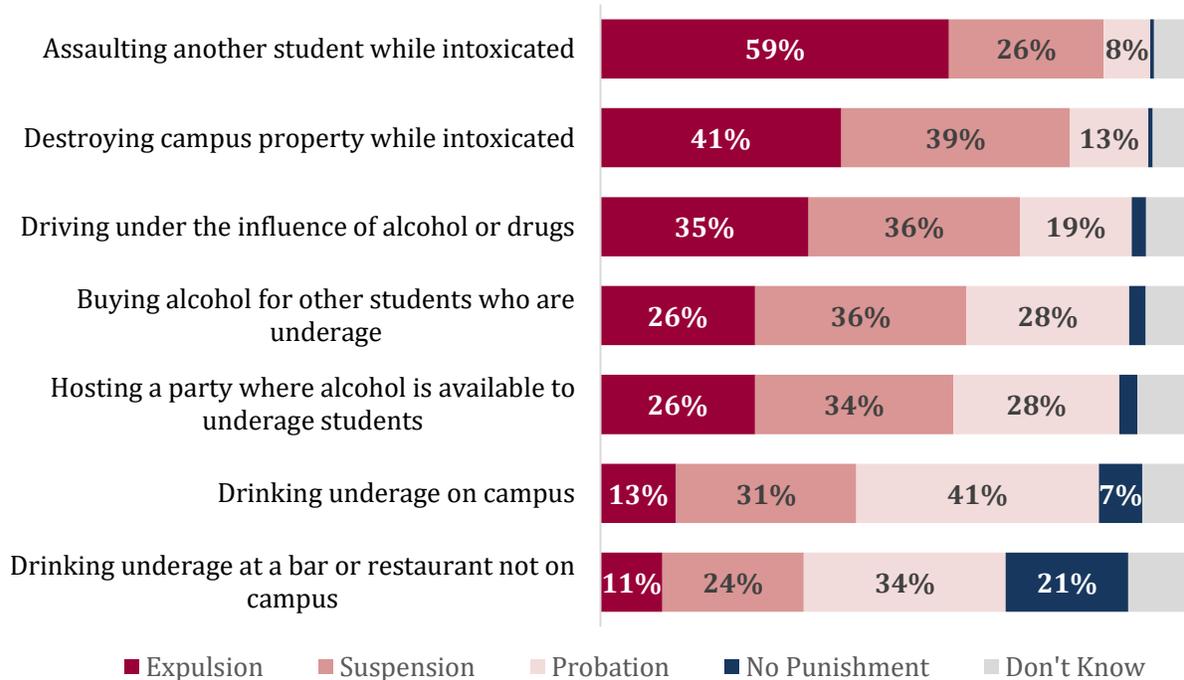


Figure 4: Parents favor suspension or expulsion for more serious incidents

Apart from any criminal or legal penalties, what, if anything, do you think is an appropriate consequence for a student found to have engaged in each of the following behaviors for the first time?



appropriate. Even here though, many favor probation rather than letting the offender off with no consequences.

Looking at more serious offenses, most parents say colleges should go straight to suspension or expulsion. Over half (59 percent) think assaulting another student while intoxicated should result in expulsion, and another 26 percent favor suspension. In fact, suspension or expulsion were favored in the five of the seven infractions, even for the first offense. Majorities of parents think even throwing a party where alcohol is available for underage students (62 percent) or buying for underage students (60 percent) should draw suspension or expulsion.

These desired responses are in keeping with the perception that alcohol can lead to serious problems. They also further illustrate the finding that just 17 percent agree that underage

drinking teaches students how to be responsible drinkers later.

Parents start looking for information early, but many cannot find it.

Despite favoring strong consequences, most parents are not sure about alcohol use or policies on campus. They *want* to know about drinking on campus and what the policies are. During the college search process, a considerable number of parents say they searched for information on college alcohol use, as well as campus policies on the issue. Two thirds (66 percent) said drinking on campus was important when choosing a college, and 52 percent said the same of alcohol intervention programming.

Among those who were looking for information, many were stymied. Among those

Figure 5: Parents want notification on a range of campus alcohol violations involving their children

Q: Do you think college administrators should notify parents if their child is involved in each of the following?

% who said “yes” to each.

An underage drinking violation resulting in medical care 92%

A sexual assault accusation related to drinking 91%

A drinking violation by someone of legal drinking age resulting in medical care 82%

An underage drinking violation 81%

Another violation related to drinking 78%

who called campus drinking important, 44 percent said finding information on the issue was “difficult”. For those parents interested in intervention programming, 47 percent said it was difficult to find the information they were after. Such information is not of interest to everyone. Some do not see it as the college’s role, and others are not concerned about their own child using alcohol for various reasons. But parents who want to be informed struggle to find the information they want.

Alcohol use on campus tops other issues as a concern for parents.

Seventy-one percent of parents say they are at least somewhat concerned about alcohol use on campus. This means concern over alcohol on campus is more common than concern for race relations and class sizes, and close to the number concerned about GPA. In short, this is a top concern for parents, not a side issue.

Even so, parents were not well informed about campus disciplinary policy. When asked about these policies, there was both ambiguity and misinformation. Between 26 percent and 45

percent did not know whether various actions were part of the policy on their own child’s campus. Although parents favor real consequences, they don’t actually know if they will happen. This was also apparent when parents were asked what other things campuses *should* do in terms of interventions. The most common response was some variation of “I don’t know”.

Though they may not know the policies, parents understand the seriousness of the types of problems alcohol can cause, and want to be notified if their child is in trouble. More than three-quarters said they wanted notification for a variety of alcohol related incidents. There is minor variation in how parents want to know about each type of infraction, but the key trend is that few believe that ignorance is bliss.

This is one of the key information disconnects in the survey, and it relates to the lack of information about the actual policies. Parents want information *and* think they will receive it—54 percent think parental notification is part of the campus disciplinary policy at their child’s school. But colleges vary considerably in the way they notify parents and what situations would definitely result in parental notification. So while parents may be expecting to hear of problems, they often will not.

Parents are not fully satisfied with campus responses, but appear unlikely to demand change.

On college drinking, few parents rate themselves as “very dissatisfied—less than 5 percent put themselves in this category on a variety of campus policies (Figure 6). Even when adding in those in the “somewhat dissatisfied” category, the share of parents

rating themselves as dissatisfied in each area remain shy of 20 percent.

That’s not to say all parents are thrilled with how things are going. Many are in the “don’t know” or “somewhat satisfied” categories. But with most parents in this gray area, change will likely have to be driven from within the campus.

This dynamic makes campus alcohol use similar to other public policy issues of the day where voters want and will accept some policy ideas, but are unlikely to demand it. For instance, in poll after poll, voters believe in climate change, are concerned about its potential impacts, and are open to various policy interventions. But in terms of problems and priorities, voters tend to rank climate change at or near the bottom of the list, no matter how the question is posed in a survey. This means any leader or group that seeks to

take on the issue and push policy change will have the tacit, if not the forceful support of many concerned citizens.

Mothers, parents of female students see alcohol-related sexual assault as more common

One of the most visible consequences of alcohol abuse in recent years has been sexual assault on campus. The issue has made the news repeatedly, both due to individual incidents as well as official responses from the campus up to the federal government level. Government figures suggest 97,000 students a year experience alcohol related sexual assault in a given year.

Parents’ fears reflect these figures. Overall, 38 percent say sexual assault is a “very common” impact of excessive drinking, with another 41 percent calling it “somewhat common”. There

Figure 6: Parents lukewarm on campus response

How satisfied would you say you are with each of the following aspects of how your child’s college handles underage drinking and alcohol misuse?

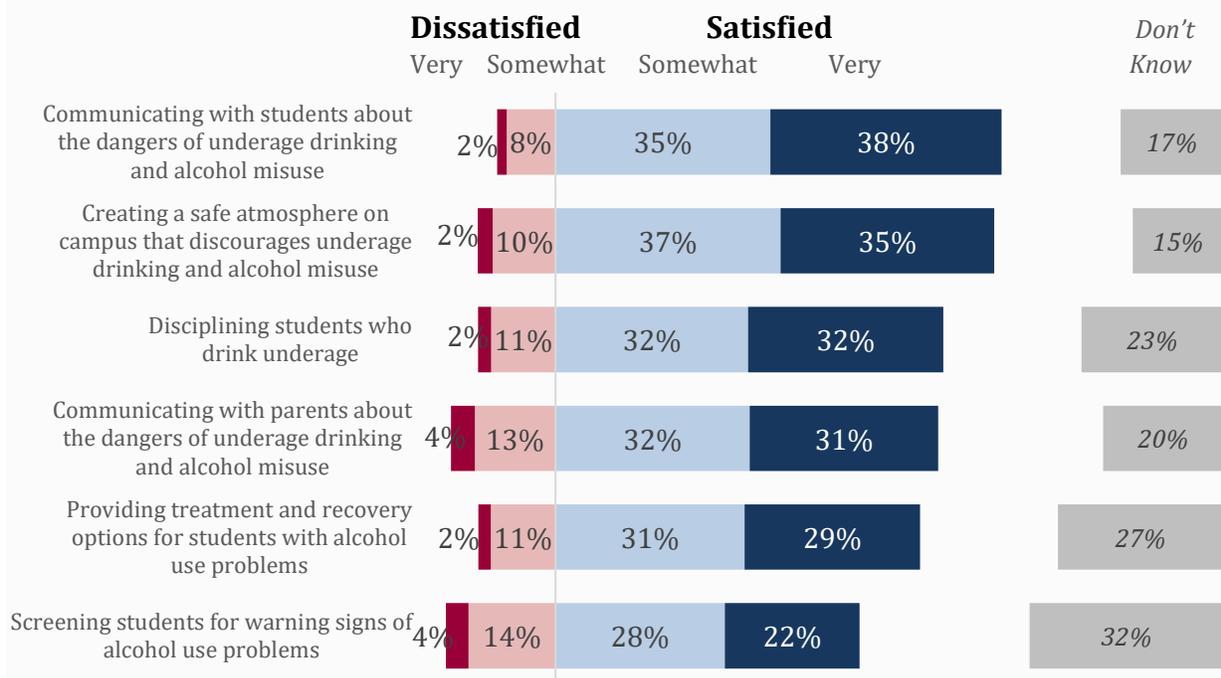
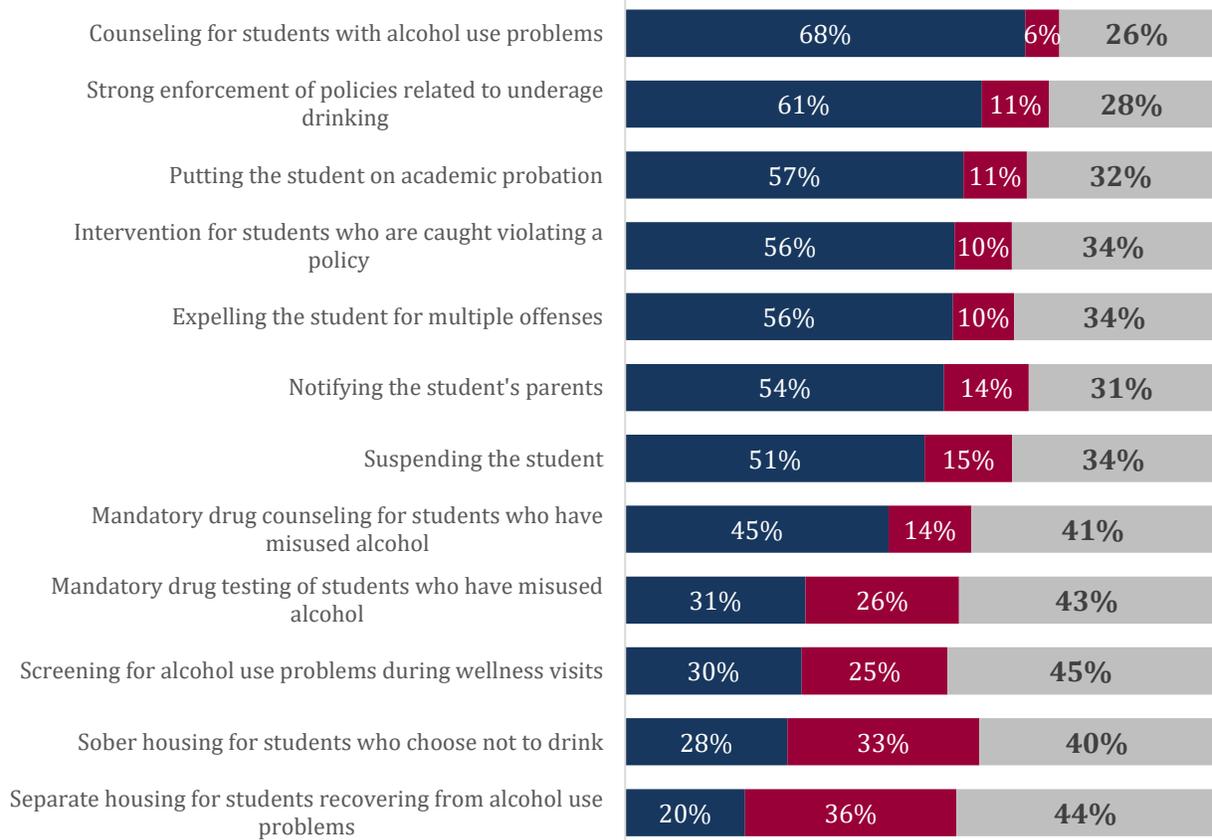


Figure 7: There’s a lot parents don’t know about campus alcohol policies

To the best of your knowledge, which of the following are part of the disciplinary policy for alcohol misuse on your child’s college campus?



■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't Know

is a gender gap on this item, both in terms of the gender of the parent and the gender of the student. Mothers and parents of female students are more likely to see sexual assault as a “very common” impact of excessive drinking.

Conclusion: What parents don’t know could hurt someone

Parents are concerned about what happens on campus, even before choosing a school for their children. There is no desire to treat alcohol abuse or underage drinking as innocent rites of passage. Parents perceive (rightly) that negative impacts of campus alcohol abuse are common.

Even so, they know relatively little about what goes on at their children’s schools (Figure 7). When choosing colleges, their search for information on alcohol use and policies is often frustrated. And once their student departs, they struggle to obtain the information they want or need to stay involved. When asked on an open ended basis about the alcohol policy on campus, one of the most common responses “I don’t know.” This lack of information showed up over and over again in questions throughout the survey.

Though parents say they would like information, colleges will likely need to act on their own if they want to make progress. Few

parents seem dissatisfied enough to demand that the fog around college drinking be cleared. Still, given the perception of common negative impacts and the lack of access to information, parents will likely welcome or not object to

steps taken towards reducing college drinking and sharing more information about the problem and its solutions.

About the Poll

These results are based on a national survey of 1,013 parents of college students living at school. The survey was conducted online between September 30 and October 11, 2016. Results were weighted to estimated demographics of the US population of parents of college students. Demographic estimates were generated using data from the Census Bureau and other publicly available sources. The poll was sponsored by The Mary Christie Foundation and The Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation.

APPENDIX – TOPLINE RESULTS

Mary Christie Foundation Poll
Topline Results
National survey of 1,013 parents of college students
Field Dates: September 30 – October 11, 2016

Do you have a child ages 18-25 who is enrolled in college?

Yes, 2-year junior or community college	18%
Yes, 4-year public college or university	53%
Yes, 4-year private college or university	29%

Where does your child live while attending school?

On-campus housing	58%
Off-campus housing	42%

In what year of college is your child currently?

First Year or Freshman	30%
Sophomore	30%
Junior	19%
Senior or higher	17%
Graduate school	4%
Don't know	1%

Approximately how many undergraduates attend your child's school?

Less than 1,000	8%
1,000 or more but fewer than 5,000	32%
5,000 or more but fewer than 10,000	21%
10,000 or more	24%
Don't know	14%

We'd like to ask you some questions about your child's college experience. If you have more than one child in school, please answer these questions based on your YOUNGEST child's college experience.

When thinking about your child's experience in college, how concerned are you about each of the following?

<i>Order rotated.</i>	Very concerned	Somewhat concerned	Not too concerned	Not at all concerned	Don't know
Alcohol use on campus	36%	35%	18%	9%	2%
Class sizes at your child's school	18%	29%	35%	17%	1%
Race relations on campus	22%	22%	33%	22%	2%
Your child getting a good GPA	48%	28%	11%	12%	1%
How much your child enjoys college	38%	33%	16%	12%	<1%

How serious a problem do you think excessive student drinking is on college campuses in America?

Very serious	47%
Somewhat serious	44%
Not very serious	6%
Not at all serious	1%
Don't know	1%

How serious a problem do you think excessive student drinking is on your child's college campus?

Very serious	23%
Somewhat serious	42%
Not very serious	24%
Not at all serious	6%
Don't know	6%

How important, if at all, were concerns about drinking on campus when choosing a college for your child?

Very important	31%
Somewhat important	35%
Not very important	23%
Not at all important	9%
Don't know	2%

How important, if at all, was the alcohol intervention programming at your student's school a factor in your college selection process?

Very important	25%
Somewhat important	27%
Not very important	23%
Not at all important	18%
Don't know	6%

How easy or difficult was it for you to evaluate colleges regarding alcohol and other substance use?

Very easy	11%
Somewhat easy	24%

Somewhat difficult	28%
Very difficult	10%
Did not evaluate schools on alcohol/substance abuse	25%
Don't know	2%

How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

<i>Order rotated.</i>	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
The most important reason why students are in college is to learn.	76%	20%	3%	1%	1%
Underage drinking is OK because it teaches students how to be responsible drinkers when they get older.	8%	9%	14%	67%	2%
Excessive alcohol consumption should be taken seriously because of possible health consequences.	70%	25%	3%	1%	1%
Excessive alcohol consumption should be taken seriously because it can lead to alcohol use disorders (addiction / alcoholism)	67%	26%	5%	1%	1%
Excessive alcohol consumption should be taken seriously because of possible legal consequences.	67%	27%	4%	1%	1%
Excessive alcohol consumption should be taken seriously because of possible academic consequences.	64%	29%	5%	1%	1%
Other students drinking excessively could be a detriment to my child's college academic experience.	36%	41%	14%	7%	1%
Students who excessively drink could be a detriment to my child's college experience in general.	41%	40%	13%	4%	2%
I am concerned about how other students' excessive drinking places my child at risk of being sexually assaulted.	40%	31%	19%	7%	2%
I am concerned about how my son/daughter's excessive drinking places my child at risk of being sexually assaulted.	29%	25%	22%	22%	2%

To the best of your knowledge, how common are the following impacts of underage or excessive drinking among college students?

<i>Order rotated.</i>	Very common	Somewhat common	Somewhat rare	Very rare	Don't know
Poor academic performance	45%	43%	7%	1%	4%
Drunk driving	50%	35%	9%	1%	4%
Sexual assault	38%	41%	15%	2%	5%
Alcohol poisoning	36%	35%	21%	3%	6%
Alcohol use disorders (addiction / alcoholism)	36%	41%	15%	2%	6%

Did you attend college?

Yes	80%
No	20%

The following two questions asked of respondents who attended college.

When you attended college, did you drink underage?

Yes	48%
No	51%
Don't know	<1%

When you attended college, how often did you drink to excess?

Weekly or more	10%
Once a week	10%
A few times a month	15%
Once a month or less	10%
Rarely	24%
Never	31%
Don't know	<1%

The following asked of respondents who drank underage and/or to excess in college.

Looking back now, do you regret drinking underage or to excess when you were in college, or not?

Yes	49%
No	45%
Don't know	6%

What is your child's college campus doing to address underage drinking and alcohol misuse among students?

Open ended. Coding to come.

To the best of your knowledge, which of the following are part of the disciplinary policy for alcohol misuse on your child's college campus?

<i>Order rotated.</i>	Yes	No	Don't know
Notifying the student's parents	54%	14%	31%
Putting the student on academic probation	57%	11%	32%
Suspending the student	51%	15%	34%
Expelling the student for multiple offenses	56%	10%	34%
Mandatory drug testing of students who have misused alcohol	31%	26%	43%
Mandatory drug counseling for students who have misused alcohol	45%	14%	41%

To the best of your knowledge, which of the following alcohol misuse treatment and prevention policies are in place on your child's college campus?

<i>Order rotated.</i>	Yes	No	Don't know
Intervention for students who are caught violating a policy	56%	10%	34%
Counseling for students with alcohol use problems	68%	6%	26%
Screening for alcohol use problems during wellness visits	30%	25%	45%
Strong enforcement of policies related to underage drinking	61%	11%	28%
Separate housing for students recovering from alcohol use problems	20%	36%	44%
Sober housing for students who choose not to drink	28%	33%	40%

How satisfied would you say you are with each of the following aspects of how your child's college handles underage drinking and alcohol misuse?

<i>Order rotated.</i>	Very satisfied	Somewhat satisfied	Somewhat dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Don't know
Disciplining students who drink underage	32%	32%	11%	2%	23%
Communicating with parents about the dangers of underage drinking and alcohol misuse	31%	32%	13%	4%	20%
Communicating with students about the dangers of underage drinking and alcohol misuse	38%	35%	8%	2%	17%
Screening students for warning signs of alcohol use problems	22%	28%	14%	4%	32%
Providing treatment and recovery options for students with alcohol use problems	29%	31%	11%	2%	27%
Creating a safe atmosphere on campus that discourages underage drinking and alcohol misuse	35%	37%	10%	2%	15%

Apart from any criminal or legal penalties, what, if anything, do you think is an appropriate consequence for a student found to have engaged in each of the following behaviors *for the first time*?

<i>Order rotated.</i>	Expulsion	Suspension	Probation	No punishment	Don't know
Drinking underage on campus	13%	31%	41%	7%	8%
Drinking underage at a bar or restaurant not on campus	11%	24%	34%	21%	10%
Buying alcohol for other students who are underage	26%	36%	28%	3%	7%
Driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs	35%	36%	19%	2%	7%
Hosting a party where alcohol is available to underage students	26%	34%	28%	3%	9%
Destroying campus property while intoxicated	41%	39%	13%	1%	6%
Assaulting another student while intoxicated	59%	26%	8%	1%	6%

Do you think college administrators should notify parents if their child is involved in each of the following?

<i>Order rotated.</i>	Yes	No	Don't know
An underage drinking violation	81%	14%	5%
An underage drinking violation resulting in medical care	92%	5%	4%
A drinking violation by someone of legal drinking age resulting in medical care	82%	12%	6%
Another violation related to drinking (<i>not shown first</i>)	78%	11%	10%
A sexual assault accusation related to drinking	91%	5%	4%

What, if anything, could your child's college be doing differently to better deal with underage and problem drinking? *Open ended. Coded responses will be delivered at a later date.*

Has your child ever gotten into trouble for underage drinking or misusing alcohol while at college?

Yes	4%
No	93%
Don't know	3%

The following asked of respondents who answered yes to the above question.

How satisfied were you with how his or her college handled the situation?

Very satisfied	49%
Somewhat satisfied	28%
Somewhat dissatisfied	6%
Very dissatisfied	14%
Don't know	3%

These last few questions are to help us analyze your answers and compare them to others. They will not be used to identify you in any way.

To the best of your knowledge, are there fraternities and sororities on your child's campus?

Yes	74%
No	15%
Don't know	10%

The following asked of respondents who answered yes to the above question.

Is your child a member of a fraternity or sorority?

Yes	20%
No	78%
Don't know	2%

With which gender does your child identify?

Male	45%
Female	55%
Other	<1%

For statistical purposes only, can you please tell me your child's race?

White / Caucasian	58%
African-American / Black	14%
Hispanic (Puerto Rican, Mexican etc)	15%
Asian or Pacific Islander	9%
Native American or Alaskan Native	1%
Mixed	2%
Middle Eastern / Arab American	<1%
Other	1%
Don't Know / Refused	<1%

DEMOGRAPHICS

Gender

Male	47%
Female	53%

Education

High School or less	13%
Some college, no degree	31%
College graduate (BA/BS)	36%
Advanced degree	20%
Don't know / Refused	<1%

Race

White / Caucasian	58%
All Others	41%
Don't Know / Refused	<1%

Region

Northeast	24%
Midwest	17%
South	33%
West	25%