

Parents turn to AI as their kids weigh college selection

[Ira Porter](#) Aug. 03, 2026, 5:41 a.m. ET



When Melissa Danielli's oldest child applied to college in 2022, her family worked with a hired college admissions counselor to find schools. For much of the public, artificial intelligence wouldn't enter their consciousness until the launch of ChatGPT that November.

"He was basing a lot of his stuff on, 'I've heard about this school. It's a good school,'" she remembers of her son. "And we're just like, 'sure, apply and if you get in we'll go visit,'" says the Seattle-area mother.

She and her husband are doing things differently for their daughter, Shiri, who will be applying to college in the fall. They divided the labor on two computers, one using the AI assistant Claude and the other ChatGPT. They created spreadsheets with tidbits of information and eliminated schools that didn't fit their criteria, or that AI concluded wouldn't be a good fit.

Why We Wrote This

Parents are finding AI's ability to distill reams of information a useful tool in the often overwhelming search for their children's best college fit.

"I think it's been great," Ms. Danielli says of using AI to pick a college. "It has its limitations. It definitely gave us some wacky ideas when we didn't give it more concrete information to build off, but we feel like it really gave us a lot of interesting ideas to look at."

According to education consulting firm EAB, Ms. Danielli is not alone in her new-found reliance on AI to help navigate the college decision process.

EAB recently conducted a [survey](#) of 2,515 parents of high school students nationwide, and found that 57% of those parents report AI gave them a better understanding of specific schools. Parents reported using the technology to evaluate which schools to choose after using prompts based on affordability, career planning, internship opportunities, and successful job placement after graduation. Additionally, 34% of parents said that AI helped them discover schools that they hadn't previously considered.

"It's one of the things that we anticipate growing, because of the fact that it's emerging as such a dominant tool for families," says Pam Royall, a researcher at EAB and one of the report's authors.

Dr. Royall says traditional methods like school websites and direct communications, which she has tracked since 2010, are still important.

"For our college and university partners, we want them to know that parents are eager to get the information," Dr. Royall says. She adds that parents see direct communication from schools as a reliable source. As far as using AI, she underscored that affordability, success outcomes, and things like safety were important to parents.

Those things all ranked highly for Ms. Danielli, but she went to AI specifically because her daughter wants to be a nurse and get direct admission to a program, as opposed to waiting to apply to one in her sophomore year. Direct admission nursing programs are competitive, so she needed to do the research.

Ms. Danielli paid \$85 to a woman who runs a Facebook moms' group about direct nursing programs, where she listed 350 schools in a spreadsheet with their requirements and information.

They whittled that list down to 50, based on locations in the South, and East and West coasts. She wanted a school that had a sizable Jewish population and a good athletic program. She used AI to compile their final list of 18 schools.

"It did so much of the work for us," says Ms. Danielli, who admits that her daughter was overwhelmed. "We sat down one evening and took a couple of hours to feed it all this information. We were bouncing things off of each other," she says.



Diane Bondareff/AP/File

Local high school students attend a HBCU College Fair hosted by Morehouse College National Alumni Association at BMCC in New York, Sept. 13, 2024.

Allen Powell II has used AI to narrow where he wanted his son Micaiah, a standout basketball player and student at a public high school in New Orleans, to attend college.

“I told it I preferred HBCUs (historically Black colleges and universities), uploaded his highlight tape and academic profile, and [AI] created a tracker, resume, and email template,” he says.

“It made Morehouse my number one school for him, although Howard [University] is his choice,” Mr. Powell says.

Mr. Powell says that Morehouse College, an all men’s school located in Atlanta, is a better fit if his son wants to play basketball and possibly get enough financial aid to attend.

Still, AI has limitations.

Ron Reed is a consultant for American College Consulting, a Toronto-based college counseling business. He specializes in helping families get their kids into highly selective schools.

“The problem is AI is a tool, and you have to have the expertise to use the tool,” Mr. Reed says. “If you’re going to cut down a tree and I hand you a chainsaw and you’ve never used a chainsaw before, I’d be concerned about that process for you.”

Mr. Reed says he uses AI, but that when he simulated doing his job, which is matching students to schools based on academics, athletics, and all their desires, the tool often misses key information, leaves out well-known quality schools or gives partial or incorrect data. He says he recognizes this because he has been consulting for years, and that a parent new to college selection wouldn’t notice it. He also says parents need to learn to rephrase questions and add more details instead of

taking the first answers that AI spits out.

“The ultimate challenge for those parents is trying to discern what is accurate and what isn’t,” he warns.