

COVID-19: College Parents Speak Out

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As nearly all colleges and universities transitioned to remote learning during March 2020 and subsequently spent the summer planning for an uncertain fall semester, we wanted to understand how parents of college students were experiencing these decisions and transitions. We designed a study to understand the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the family's role in their students' college experiences. Specifically, we examined the effect of COVID-19 on students' ability to continue their education; parents' recommendations to their students related to continuing school; changes in family influence on such practical issues such as housing, commuting, online or alternative learning methods, transferring, and changing majors or career goals; parents' opinion of the decisions schools are making; families' satisfaction with and understanding of communications received from institutions.

Background

The transition to college is a major change that requires every family member to adjust. Parents' roles and parenting practices shift dramatically during the transition to college: parents are now parenting from a distance and students are working to become independent while remaining connected to family. Over the past decade, the closeness between millennial generation college students and parental engagement in higher education is receiving more attention from researchers; this has changed the persistently negative stereotypes of parental involvement in college education, e.g., labels like helicopter parents (Kiyama & Harper, 2018). Parents are engaged in their students' higher education experience in many different ways, including participating in college enrollment decisions, discussions related to college experience decisions, learning about college resources, financial support, and addressing mental health concerns (Carney-Hall, 2008; Kiyama et al., 2015; Nuñez & Kim, 2012). Parental engagement in these ways during the college years is critical to student success. Students are more likely to have a smoother transition to college when parental engagement is higher (Wolf, Sax, & Harper, 2009). To support student success, colleges and universities need to view parents as key stakeholders

and foster positive relationships with parents when providing student support (Ward-Roof, Heaton, & Coburn, 2008).

In 2019, a national survey of parent/family professionals revealed that 90-98% of the 277 participating institutions provided the following services to families: a parent/family website, running parent/family orientation, hosting a parent/family weekend, email newsletters, and hosting a Facebook page (Petree & Savage, 2019). However, the COVID-19 pandemic posed challenges to family engagement in higher education. Most colleges and universities moved all classes online in Spring 2020 and some decided to continue virtually in the fall semester; campus housing was closed on many university campuses and students needed to move; some students started to rethink their graduation and future career goals. More information is needed to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic is influencing parents and families and how professionals could offer different types of support and services during this time.

Our Approach

The Department of Family Social Science and Minnesota Extension at the University of Minnesota partnered with the professional organization *AHEPPP: Family Engagement in Higher Education* (AHEPPP; <https://www.aheppp.org/>) to recruit and survey parents from across the country to understand the impact that the pandemic has made on the family's role in their students' college experience.

AHEPPP is the premier national association for professionals who work with the parents and families of college students. AHEPPP provides valuable resources, networking opportunities, and education to support professionals in higher education who promote student success through informed parent and family engagement. AHEPPP has more than 200 partner colleges and universities in the United States and Canada.

AHEPPP shared a recruitment message that schools could customize; individual parent programs shared a custom message with parents of their students, both parents of returning students and parents of incoming freshmen. AHEPPP members also shared the recruitment message with some non-AHEPPP institutions who shared the survey opportunity with their families. Parents who chose to participate could click on a link to complete a 15-minute online survey (via Qualtrics). All participants had the opportunity to choose to be entered into a drawing for a chance to win one of 20 \$25 electronic gift cards.

What is important for understanding these results is that they truly capture one moment in time - parents responded to the survey between mid-June and early August. COVID-19 has created a time when higher education is constantly in flux, as new science emerges and institutions pivot, as CDC guidance changes, and unfortunately, as we see COVID-19 outbreaks on campuses as they begin to reopen for fall. The context is important; if we had surveyed parents 3 weeks later for example, their responses would likely have been different. We will be surveying parents again in early fall to learn more about how their student's experiences have played out.

Who Participated

Three thousand seven hundred and fifteen parents representing more than 75 institutions across the country participated in this study; 68.9% of students were at a public institution, and 30% were at a private institution (the remaining parents were unsure).

Parents represented all 50 states and Puerto Rico; 17 were living outside the US. Just more than one-third (34.5%) of parents reported their home was 150 miles or less from their student's institution, 22.8% reported home was 150-300 miles away, and 25.5% reported home was more than 500 miles away from their institution. In addition, 21.7% of parents had less than a 4-year degree, 42.9% had earned a Bachelor's degree, and 34.4% had a higher degree.

At the time of the survey, 36% of parents reported their student's institution would fully reopen and 51.3% reported their student's institution was planning for a partial in-person/remote opening for fall; 5.3% of institutions had not yet announced their plans. Nearly half of parents (46.6%) thought their student would be living in campus housing, 34.7% in an apartment or house near campus, and at the time of the survey, just 9.2% of parents thought their student would be living at home with family.

Families are also experiencing quite a bit of stress, 40% reported someone in their household had been laid off from employment, 44.8% of those employed in their household were essential workers, 78% reported someone in their household had been asked to work from home as a result of COVID-19, and 13% reported someone in their household became ill with COVID-19.

Key Findings

- Most families reported receiving information from their school and reported that they were confident they were receiving the information they needed. The majority of parents (83.5%) reported their student's institution was taking the right steps to handle the situation.
- Only 20% of parents reported that they would turn to the parent/family program for information about COVID-19 on campus, more parents would turn to the parent/family program for non-COVID-19 information; 24.3% of parents reported not knowing whom to contact.
- Distance learning is hard for everyone; parents reported their students preferred in-person classes and were challenged by classes with less structure. This is perhaps not surprising as all institutions reflected in this sample were primarily in-person prior to closing in response to COVID-19. However, although students would have preferred in-person courses, parents understood that the transition to online learning was necessary, the transition was made in a very short time period, and most parents felt the schools and instructors were doing their best navigating a difficult and unprecedented situation.
- Despite the challenges, over 80% of parents reported their student was still planning to return to the same institution and that their student was still on track for graduation. Many institutions changed grading options to allow students to take courses Pass/Fail, and a number of parents noted that instructors were flexible about deadlines and assignments, allowing students to stay on track for graduation.
- The 2020-21 academic year is going to be challenging for families; in addition to high rates of family members being laid off or having to work from home (which often

requires sharing space, devices, and internet access), 20% reported COVID-19 has negatively impacted family finances “a lot” or “a great deal”.

- Families are also concerned about their students: 14.3% reported their student’s overall well-being was “fair” or “poor”; 5.4% reported their student’s overall physical health was “fair” or “poor”; and 17.8% reported their student’s personal relationships with their close friends was “fair” or “poor”.

Data Summary

What year was your student during spring 2020?

	Frequency	Percent
Incoming first year for fall 2020	1051	28.3%
First year	1037	27.9%
Second year	829	22.3%
Third year	572	15.4%
Fourth year	175	4.7%
Fifth year or higher	18	0.5%
Graduate student	21	0.6%
Unsure	12	0.3%
Total	3715	100%

In other words...

	Frequency	Percent
Incoming First Year	1051	28.3%
Non-incoming First Year	2664	71.7%
Total	3715	100%

As a parent/family member, are you receiving information from your student's college/university about campus response to COVID-19, separate from notifications that your student received?

	Incoming First Year	Non-incoming First Year	Total
No	103 (9.8%)	301 (11.8%)	404 (11.2%)
Yes	946 (90.2%)	2244 (88.2%)	3190 (88.8%)
Total	1049 (100.0%)	2545 (100.0%)	3594 (100.0%)

Do you currently feel confident that you have the information you need from your student's college/university?

	Incoming First Year	Non-incoming First Year	Total
No	265 (25.3%)	679 (26.7%)	944 (26.3%)
Yes	784 (74.7%)	1866 (73.3%)	2650 (73.7%)
Total	1049 (100.0%)	2545 (100.0%)	3594 (100.0%)

Has your student's school decided on reopening for fall semester?

	Incoming First Year	Non-incoming First Year	Total
The school will fully reopen for fall semester	427 (40.7%)	868 (34.1%)	1295 (36.0%)
The school will be entirely online for fall semester	7 (0.7%)	21 (0.8%)	28 (0.8%)
The school is planning a partial opening/partial online semester for fall	518 (49.4%)	1326 (52.1%)	1844 (51.3%)
The school has not yet announced its plans for fall	31 (3.0%)	158 (6.2%)	189 (5.3%)
Other (comments)	66 (6.3%)	172 (6.8%)	238 (6.6%)
Total	1049 (100.0%)	2545 (100.0%)	3594 (100.0%)

If you have questions or concerns related to the school's decisions related to COVID-19, who are you most likely to contact?

	Incoming First Year	Non-incoming First Year	Total
Parent/Family office	237 (22.6%)	492 (19.3%)	729 (20.3%)
Residence Life office	39 (3.7%)	58 (2.3%)	97 (2.7%)
College/university main office	296 (28.2%)	739 (29.1%)	1035 (28.8%)
The school's COVID-19 email or hotline	181 (17.3%)	441 (17.3%)	622 (17.3%)
I don't know who to contact	213 (20.3%)	661 (26.0%)	874 (24.3%)
Other (comments)	81 (7.7%)	152 (6.0%)	233 (6.5%)
Total	1049 (100.0%)	2543 (100.0%)	3592 (100.0%)

How has the pandemic affected your student's college choice? (parents of incoming freshmen)

	Incoming First Year
No change	885 (84.4%)
My student selected a college closer to home	53 (5.1%)
My student selected a less expensive college	13 (1.2%)
My student changed from a four-year to a two-year school	2 (0.2%)
My student is postponing college	3 (0.3%)
Other	93 (8.9%)
Total	1049 (100.0%)

Do you feel your student's college/university has taken the right steps in handling the situation?

	Non-incoming First Year
No	418 (16.5%)
Yes	2119 (83.5%)

How was your student's housing situation affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?

	Non-incoming First Year
Campus housing was closed and they moved home	1469 (57.7%)
My student left their off-campus housing and moved home	504 (19.8%)
My student remained in off-campus housing	224 (8.8%)
My student was living at home and remained there	133 (5.2%)
My student left their housing and moved somewhere other than home	36 (1.4%)
My student remained in campus housing	38 (1.5%)
Other (comments)	142 (5.6%)
Total	2546 (100.0%)

What challenges did your student have with alternative learning? Please check all that apply.

	Non-incoming first year
No challenges--it's working fine	618 (16.4%)
My student prefers in-person learning methods	1702 (45.2%)
Internet connection is spotty where they live	361 (9.6%)
Classes are less structured now	1005 (26.7%)
My student has difficulty meeting deadlines	158 (4.2%)
My student is unable to participate in labs/studio time	576 (15.3%)
There are too many distractions at home	504 (13.4%)
Other	524 (13.9%)

What is your student's plan for Fall 2020? (parents with returning students)

	Non-incoming first year
My student will return to the same school	2137 (84.4%)
My student is transferring to a different school	36 (1.4%)
My student will take a leave of absence	10 (0.4%)
My student will not attend school in Fall 2020	10 (0.4%)
My student is graduating and will start working/graduate school	46 (1.8%)
Undecided	150 (5.9%)
Other (comments)	143 (5.6%)
Total	2532 (100.0%)

Where do you anticipate your student will live during the next academic year?

	Incoming First Year	Non-incoming First Year	Total
Campus housing	862 (82.2%)	803 (31.8%)	1665 (46.6%)
Apartment/house near campus	66 (6.3%)	1174 (46.5%)	1240 (34.7%)
Fraternity or sorority house	5 (0.5%)	121 (4.8%)	126 (3.5%)
At home with family	71 (6.8%)	257 (10.2%)	328 (9.2%)
My student graduated and will start working/graduate school	0 (0.0%)	29 (1.1%)	29 (0.8%)
Other (comments)	45 (4.3%)	141 (5.6%)	186 (5.2%)
Total	1049 (100.0%)	2525 (100.0%)	3574 (100.0%)

How do you think this year's COVID-19 experience will affect your student's time to graduation?

	Non-incoming first year
It will take longer than expected	336 (13.3%)
They will graduate sooner than expected	35 (1.4%)
My student is still on track to graduate as planned	2107 (83.5%)
My student graduated Spring 2020 as planned	44 (1.7%)
Total	2522 (100.0%)

Did this year's COVID-19 experience cause your student to rethink career goals or academic major?

	Non-incoming First Year
No	2166 (85.9%)
Yes	357 (14.1%)

Would you support your student studying abroad when COVID-19 is contained?

	Incoming First Year	Non-incoming First Year	Total
No	269 (25.6%)	878 (35.4%)	1147 (32.5%)
Yes	780 (74.4%)	1579 (63.6%)	2359 (66.8%)
My student graduated	0 (0.0%)	26 (1.0%)	26 (0.7%)
Total	1049 (100.0%)	2483 (100.0%)	3532 (100.0%)

How important do you feel the following activities are for students and family members to attend in person:

Events	Rating	Incoming First Year	Non-incoming First Year	Total
Admissions Events	Not at all	182 (17.4%)	476 (19.2%)	658 (18.7%)
	Somewhat important	325 (31.0%)	740 (29.9%)	1065 (30.2%)
	Important	277 (26.5%)	686 (27.7%)	963 (27.3%)
	Very important	263 (25.1%)	574 (23.2%)	837 (23.8%)
	Total	1047 (100.0%)	2476 (100.0%)	3523 (100.0%)
Programs and events in local communities	Not at all	308 (29.4%)	775 (31.3%)	1083 (30.7%)
	Somewhat important	423 (40.4%)	972 (39.3%)	1395 (39.6%)
	Important	179 (17.1%)	463 (18.7%)	642 (18.2%)
	Very important	137 (13.1%)	265 (10.7%)	402 (11.4%)
	Total	1047 (100.0%)	2475 (100.0%)	3522 (100.0%)
Parent/Family Orientation	Not at all	170 (16.2%)	423 (17.1%)	593 (16.8%)
	Somewhat important	296 (28.3%)	666 (26.9%)	962 (27.3%)
	Important	284 (27.1%)	672 (27.2%)	956 (27.2%)
	Very important	297 (28.4%)	712 (28.8%)	1009 (28.7%)
	Total	1047 (100.0%)	2473 (100.0%)	3520 (100.0%)
Move-in Events	Not at all	74 (7.1%)	378 (15.3%)	452 (12.8%)
	Somewhat important	156 (14.9%)	587 (23.7%)	743 (21.1%)
	Important	307 (29.3%)	739 (29.8%)	1046 (29.7%)
	Very important	510 (48.7%)	772 (31.2%)	1282 (36.4%)
	Total	1047 (100.0%)	2476 (100.0%)	3523 (100.0%)
Family Weekend	Not at all	187 (17.9%)	715 (28.9%)	902 (25.6%)
	Somewhat important	286 (27.3%)	736 (29.7%)	1022 (29.0%)
	Important	261 (24.9%)	539 (21.8%)	800 (22.7%)
	Very important	313 (29.9%)	488 (19.7%)	801 (22.7%)
	Total	1047 (100.0%)	2478 (100.0%)	3525 (100.0%)
Graduation Events	Not at all	48 (4.6%)	130 (5.2%)	178 (5.0%)
	Somewhat important	128 (12.2%)	310 (12.5%)	438 (12.4%)
	Important	311 (29.7%)	632 (25.5%)	943 (26.7%)
	Very important	559 (53.4%)	1409 (56.8%)	1968 (55.8%)
	Total	1046 (100.0%)	2481 (100.0%)	3527 (100.0%)

How likely are you to use the following types of online programming or social media if offered by your student's college/university:

	Rating	Incoming First Year	Non-incoming First Year	Total
Blogs	Not at all	363 (34.6%)	1060 (42.8%)	1423 (40.4%)
	Somewhat Likely	318 (30.3%)	707 (28.6%)	1025 (29.1%)
	Likely	233 (22.2%)	456 (18.4%)	689 (19.6%)
	Very Likely	134 (12.8%)	251 (10.1%)	385 (10.9%)
	Total	1048 (100.0%)	2474 (100.0%)	3522 (100.0%)
Online videos/webinars	Not at all	48 (4.6%)	373 (15.1%)	421 (12.0%)
	Somewhat Likely	294 (28.1%)	868 (35.1%)	1162 (33.0%)
	Likely	398 (38.0%)	805 (32.5%)	1203 (34.2%)
	Very Likely	307 (29.3%)	429 (17.3%)	736 (20.9%)
	Total	1047 (100.0%)	2475 (100.0%)	3522 (100.0%)
Online parent meetups or meetings	Not at all	141 (13.5%)	711 (28.7%)	852 (24.2%)
	Somewhat Likely	347 (33.1%)	775 (31.3%)	1122 (31.8%)
	Likely	291 (27.8%)	634 (25.6%)	925 (26.2%)
	Very Likely	268 (25.6%)	357 (14.4%)	625 (17.7%)
	Total	1047 (100.0%)	2477 (100.0%)	3524 (100.0%)
Facebook	Not at all	113 (10.8%)	482 (19.5%)	595 (16.9%)
	Somewhat Likely	133 (12.7%)	405 (16.4%)	538 (15.3%)
	Likely	298 (28.4%)	723 (29.2%)	1021 (29.0%)
	Very Likely	504 (48.1%)	863 (34.9%)	1367 (38.8%)
	Total	1048 (100.0%)	2473 (100.0%)	3521 (100.0%)
Twitter	Not at all	538 (51.4%)	1381 (55.8%)	1919 (54.5%)
	Somewhat Likely	208 (19.9%)	444 (17.9%)	652 (18.5%)
	Likely	152 (14.5%)	373 (15.1%)	525 (14.9%)
	Very Likely	148 (14.1%)	276 (11.2%)	424 (12.0%)
	Total	1046 (100.0%)	2474 (100.0%)	3520 (100.0%)
Instagram	Not at all	357 (34.1%)	999 (40.4%)	1356 (38.5%)
	Somewhat Likely	226 (21.6%)	488 (19.7%)	714 (20.3%)
	Likely	228 (21.8%)	561 (22.7%)	789 (22.4%)
	Very Likely	235 (22.5%)	427 (17.3%)	662 (18.8%)
	Total	1046 (100.0%)	2475 (100.0%)	3521 (100.0%)
Chat	Not at all	356 (34.0%)	1118 (45.2%)	1474 (41.9%)
	Somewhat Likely	363 (34.7%)	785 (31.8%)	1148 (32.6%)
	Likely	225 (21.5%)	400 (16.2%)	625 (17.8%)

	Very Likely	103 (9.8%)	169 (6.8%)	272 (7.7%)
	Total	1047 (100.0%)	2472 (100.0%)	3519 (100.0%)

If you need information from your student’s college or university about topics other than COVID-19, how likely are you to refer to the following resources:

	Rating	Incoming First Year	Non-incoming First Year	Total
Contact Parent/Family office	Not at all	69 (6.6%)	345 (13.9%)	414 (11.7%)
	Somewhat Likely	311 (29.7%)	794 (32.0%)	1105 (31.3%)
	Likely	390 (37.2%)	805 (32.5%)	1195 (33.9%)
	Very Likely	278 (26.5%)	535 (21.6%)	813 (23.1%)
	Total	1048 (100.0%)	2479 (100.0%)	3527 (100.0%)
Contact a specific office related to my question	Not at all	9 (0.9%)	104 (4.2%)	113 (3.2%)
	Somewhat Likely	136 (13.0%)	401 (16.2%)	537 (15.2%)
	Likely	398 (38.0%)	965 (39.0%)	1363 (38.7%)
	Very Likely	503 (48.1%)	1007 (40.7%)	1510 (42.9%)
	Total	1046 (100.0%)	2477 (100.0%)	3523 (100.0%)
Search the college/university website	Not at all	9 (0.9%)	38 (1.5%)	47 (1.3%)
	Somewhat Likely	74 (7.1%)	258 (10.4%)	332 (9.4%)
	Likely	318 (30.4%)	785 (31.7%)	1103 (31.3%)
	Very Likely	645 (61.7%)	1393 (56.3%)	2038 (57.9%)
	Total	1046 (100.0%)	2474 (100.0%)	3520 (100.0%)
Search the Parent/Family website	Not at all	44 (4.2%)	262 (10.6%)	306 (8.7%)
	Somewhat Likely	180 (17.2%)	590 (23.9%)	770 (21.9%)
	Likely	360 (34.4%)	814 (32.9%)	1174 (33.4%)
	Very Likely	463 (44.2%)	805 (32.6%)	1268 (36.0%)
	Total	1047 (100.0%)	2471 (100.0%)	3518 (100.0%)
Post a question on Parent/Family social media page	Not at all	245 (23.4%)	928 (37.5%)	1173 (33.3%)
	Somewhat Likely	275 (26.3%)	663 (26.8%)	938 (26.7%)
	Likely	245 (23.4%)	473 (19.1%)	718 (20.4%)
	Very Likely	281 (26.9%)	408 (16.5%)	689 (19.6%)
	Total	1046 (100.0%)	2472 (100.0%)	3518 (100.0%)
Ask other parents	Not at all	188 (18.0%)	790 (32.0%)	978 (27.8%)
	Somewhat Likely	329 (31.5%)	774 (31.3%)	1103 (31.4%)
	Likely	279 (26.7%)	525 (21.2%)	804 (22.9%)
	Very Likely	249 (23.8%)	382 (15.5%)	631 (17.9%)
	Total	1045 (100.0%)	2471 (100.0%)	3516 (100.0%)
	Not at all	96 (9.2%)	164 (6.6%)	260 (7.4%)

Ask my student to locate the information	Somewhat Likely	353 (33.7%)	629 (25.4%)	982 (27.9%)
	Likely	326 (31.2%)	854 (34.5%)	1180 (33.5%)
	Very Likely	271 (25.9%)	828 (33.5%)	1099 (31.2%)
	Total	1046 (100.0%)	2475 (100.0%)	3521 (100.0%)

Did anyone in your household become ill with COVID-19? (Check all that apply)

	Incoming First Year	Non-incoming First Year	Total
Myself	15 (1.4%)	51 (1.9%)	66 (1.8%)
My student	13 (1.2%)	45 (1.7%)	58 (1.6%)
My partner/ spouse	9 (0.9%)	33 (1.2%)	42 (1.1%)
Another family member living at home	14 (1.3%)	41 (1.5%)	55 (1.5%)
No one in my family was became ill with COVID-19	971 (92.4%)	2256 (84.7%)	3227 (86.9%)
Others	40 (3.8%)	140 (5.3%)	180 (4.8%)

Has anyone in your household been laid off from full- or part-time employment since February 1, 2020? (Check all that apply)

	Incoming First Year	Non-incoming First Year	Total
Myself	127 (12.1%)	336 (12.6%)	463 (12.5%)
My student	138 (13.1%)	375 (14.1%)	513 (13.8%)
My partner/ spouse	91 (8.7%)	219 (8.2%)	310 (8.3%)
Another member of the household	76 (7.2%)	243 (9.1%)	319 (8.6%)
No one in my family has been laid off	699 (66.5%)	1542 (57.9%)	2241 (60.3%)

Has anyone in your household been asked to work from home as a result of COVID-19? (check all that apply)

	Incoming First Year	Non-incoming First Year	Total
Myself	549 (52.2%)	1268 (47.6%)	1817 (48.9%)
My student	148 (14.1%)	451 (16.9%)	599 (16.1%)
My partner/ spouse	467 (44.4%)	1026 (38.5%)	1493 (40.2%)
Another member of the household	99 (9.4%)	295 (11.1%)	394 (10.6%)
No one in my family was working from home as a result of COVID-19	230 (21.9%)	607 (22.8%)	837 (22.5%)

How would you rate your student's ... in the past 7 days?

	Rating	Incoming First Year	Non-incoming First Year	Total
Overall physical health	Poor	3 (0.3%)	20 (0.8%)	23 (0.7%)
	Fair	41 (4.0%)	124 (5.0%)	165 (4.7%)
	Good	171 (16.6%)	553 (22.4%)	724 (20.7%)
	Very Good	363 (35.2%)	804 (32.6%)	1167 (33.4%)
	Excellent	454 (44.0%)	965 (39.1%)	1419 (40.6%)
	Total	1032 (100.0%)	2466 (100.0%)	3498 (100.0%)
Overall sense of well-being	Poor	16 (1.6%)	65 (2.6%)	81 (2.3%)
	Fair	103 (10.0%)	317 (12.9%)	420 (12.0%)
	Good	278 (26.9%)	736 (29.8%)	1014 (29.0%)
	Very Good	364 (35.3%)	748 (30.3%)	1112 (31.8%)
	Excellent	271 (26.3%)	600 (24.3%)	871 (24.9%)
	Total	1032 (100.0%)	2466 (100.0%)	3498 (100.0%)
Personal relationships with their close friends	Poor	26 (2.5%)	110 (4.5%)	136 (3.9%)
	Fair	119 (11.5%)	367 (14.9%)	486 (13.9%)
	Good	279 (27.0%)	692 (28.1%)	971 (27.8%)
	Very Good	312 (30.2%)	720 (29.2%)	1032 (29.5%)
	Excellent	296 (28.7%)	575 (23.3%)	871 (24.9%)
	Total	1032 (100.0%)	2464 (100.0%)	3496 (100.0%)

To what extent do you think that COVID-19 has negatively affected ...

	Rating	Incoming First Year	Non-incoming First Year	Total
Your student's academic experience	Not at all	66 (6.4%)	152 (6.2%)	218 (6.2%)
	A little bit	178 (17.2%)	496 (20.1%)	674 (19.3%)
	Moderate	276 (26.7%)	744 (30.1%)	1020 (29.1%)
	A lot	259 (25.1%)	581 (23.5%)	840 (24.0%)
	A great deal	254 (24.6%)	495 (20.1%)	749 (21.4%)
	Total	1033 (100.0%)	2468 (100.0%)	3501 (100.0%)
Your family's financial status	Not at all	300 (29.1%)	689 (28.0%)	989 (28.3%)
	A little bit	309 (30.0%)	661 (26.8%)	970 (27.7%)
	Moderate	230 (22.3%)	605 (24.5%)	835 (23.9%)
	A lot	104 (10.1%)	295 (12.0%)	399 (11.4%)
	A great deal	88 (8.5%)	215 (8.7%)	303 (8.7%)
	Total	1031 (100.0%)	2465 (100.0%)	3496 (100.0%)
The way you manage money now	Not at all	173 (16.8%)	485 (19.7%)	658 (18.8%)
	A little bit	286 (27.7%)	638 (25.9%)	924 (26.4%)
	Moderate	287 (27.8%)	641 (26.0%)	928 (26.5%)
	A lot	197 (19.1%)	459 (18.6%)	656 (18.8%)
	A great deal	89 (8.6%)	243 (9.9%)	332 (9.5%)
	Total	1032 (100.0%)	2466 (100.0%)	3498 (100.0%)

Communication with your college student	Not at all	465 (45.1%)	1232 (50.0%)	1697 (48.5%)
	A little bit	173 (16.8%)	418 (17.0%)	591 (16.9%)
	Moderate	190 (18.4%)	391 (15.9%)	581 (16.6%)
	A lot	131 (12.7%)	290 (11.8%)	421 (12.0%)
	A great deal	72 (7.0%)	134 (5.4%)	206 (5.9%)
	Total	1031 (100.0%)	2465 (100.0%)	3496 (100.0%)
Your overall relationship with your college student	Not at all	515 (50.0%)	1311 (53.2%)	1826 (52.2%)
	A little bit	192 (18.6%)	441 (17.9%)	633 (18.1%)
	Moderate	167 (16.2%)	354 (14.4%)	521 (14.9%)
	A lot	104 (10.1%)	212 (8.6%)	316 (9.0%)
	A great deal	53 (5.1%)	148 (6.0%)	201 (5.7%)
	Total	1031 (100.0%)	2466 (100.0%)	3497 (100.0%)

Parents also responded to a series of open-ended questions to share more about their experiences and their students' experiences.

Summary of Parents' Responses to Open-ended Questions

<i>Theme</i>	<i>Summary</i>	<i>Example Quotes</i>
Confidence in information from college/university	<p>While the majority of parents reported they did not have all the information they needed from their student's school, most of the comments parents made indicated that they understood that the college/university could not answer all their questions or provide complete information when the situation is constantly changing. While some parents were frustrated by the lack of specificity, the majority were confident they would get the information they needed as soon as the school was able to provide it.</p> <p>A few issues were raised that suggested the timing of decisions was problematic--as Fall semester approached, families needed to make decisions or define their next steps. This included things like move-in details (dates, roommate assignments, and move-process), firm details on cost and financial aid, and accommodations for students with special needs.</p>	<p>"They are trying but this is a beast and spreading faster [than] anyone can navigate."</p> <p>"We don't know where she is living, when she moves in, cost or financial aid, work study, or how classes will be conducted."</p>
College/university's steps in handling the situation	<p>Generally, parents agreed that their student's school had taken the right steps related to COVID-19, at least for the decision to close campus during spring term. Responses were mixed regarding in-person attendance for Fall. Some noted the school's careful planning and their efforts to listen and communicate. Others were worried about what happens if students are sick. The "big city" location of some institutions was a fear factor, and concerns were noted about how quarantines would be handled.</p> <p>Compounding the issue, a number of families were confused about how classes would be conducted and whether their student actually needed to be on campus.</p>	<p>"They did the only thing they could in the climate at that time."</p> <p>"Keep the students in school. That's what I paid for."</p> <p>"They said they were opening for fall but little by little all his classes are online but one and all public areas on campus are not going to open so we have no clue what's happening."</p>
Where to get answers	<p>Many parents were aware that their school had a designated parent liaison and social media specifically for parents; parents were comfortable relying on that for information. Questions that would be considered unique to a family, such as financial aid questions or services related to a disability, were more frequently directed to a specific office rather than the parent liaison. A small number of parents</p>	<p>"The school has a parent liaison who give(s) weekly updates on the parent Facebook page. She is also very responsive via email."</p>

	who were unaware of the established family resource connections expressed significant frustration.	
Rethinking choice of college/university (incoming students)	<p>Parents of first-year incoming students were asked if their student’s college/university choice had been affected by the pandemic. While the majority indicated their student’s choice of college/university was unchanged; many had second thoughts and some were still undecided. A few said their student decided on a college/university closer to home because of the uncertainty of the virus, and several were still considering whether to defer their enrollment. Doubts about how classes would be conducted left them unsure whether their student would change plans.</p> <p>In contrast, other parents indicated their student was not changing schools and expressed relief in their chosen school due to its size, location, or identity.</p>	<p>“My student originally planned a gap semester to avoid COVID and be closer to home but with the summer rates in infection in [our home state], she has chosen to go to [college] where COVID rates are lower and the state seems to have a better handle on managing this crisis.”</p> <p>“He will go elsewhere or delay school for a year if it is only online.”</p>
Rethinking major or career plan (returning students)	<p>The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a number of students to reconsider their major or their plans for a career. Several parents indicated their students were unsure whether to return to school or perhaps change their academic direction. Some were concerned that jobs may not be available in the field they had chosen, and others were wondering if they wanted to continue with college at all.</p> <p>Some students were looking at their career goals through a different lens as they watched the impact of the pandemic. Some of their experiences inspired new career directions. They were considering where work opportunities might be in the future and looking at jobs that could be performed at home or that were in health care professions.</p> <p>Challenges with online courses or lost opportunities caused by being away from campus also affected students’ plans. Students who did poorly in online classes were rethinking their majors, and loss of internships or research opportunities were also affecting students’ options.</p>	<p>“Theatre may not be viable for many years.”</p> <p>“Unsure of next steps if college will be worth it to continue.”</p> <p>“Student is rethinking to attend a trade school and discontinue Business/Finance studies.”</p> <p>“Her spring research program was cancelled due to funding so she had to rethink her major to graduate on time.”</p>
Challenges with remote learning	Although most parents supported the university’s decision to close campus for Spring semester, they expressed significant concerns about the online learning their students experienced during Spring. There was a perception that instructors were	“Professors were not prepared for online learning. My student took an online class before COVID and it was much better

	not prepared to teach virtually and some suggested that teaching staff need additional training if they were being asked to deliver their courses online.	than the haphazard approach the teacher took to the online classes they were forced into.”
<i>Challenges with courses and teaching</i>	There was a sense that while some courses transferred smoothly to an online format, the in-person experience was necessary for other classes. Online public speaking and performing arts courses were mentioned as not being as successful online as they were in-person.	<p>“My student studies film, an interactive process. Not so, online.”</p> <p>“My daughter is in the nursing program so it affected her hands on learning.”</p> <p>“I would prefer labs be in person somehow.”</p>
<i>Student experience</i>	<p>Comments on whether or not students struggled with alternative learning raised concerns about the loss of an academic community and access to instructors. Responses noted that some students did not like or respond well to online learning, and some instructors do not teach well online.</p> <p>Parents noted that the loss of in-person contact with instructors limited learning, and students missed their community of friends on campus. Support services and interactive experiences were lost in the transition to online learning.</p>	<p>“My student’s level of interest and enthusiasm dropped markedly.”</p> <p>“Professors didn’t teach, rather they simply gave assignments for students to complete and submit.”</p> <p>“My student misses the structure of in person classes as well as the opportunity for live discussions with professors.”</p> <p>“Part of the college experience is going to class and meeting people.”</p> <p>“Tutors and help sessions are online and not as helpful.”</p>
<i>Unique challenges for some students</i>	A few families noted the challenge of multiple people in the house working and studying online and the isolation of learning from a bedroom. One family noted	“My student stayed on campus due to at risk people at home

	<p>time zone differences, with a class that was held extremely early in the morning for a student on the west coast.</p> <p>For a student who was studying abroad, her coursework after returning home consisted solely of writing essays. Another student was unable to return home when campus closed. Some students simply need interactive learning; online learning does not work for them. Students with learning disabilities need face-to-face communication.</p>	<p>as well as bad internet connection, very low speed that would require new wiring but due to pandemic risks internet provider was not doing any new wiring installations.”</p> <p>“My child is a student with learning issues who receives services. It’s difficult to get services when he can’t be on campus.”</p>
<p><i>For some students, online learning worked well</i></p>	<p>A few parents noted that while the situation was not ideal, it worked. The parent of a performing arts major noted that her student’s classes worked well. Although they were not like in-person classes, a 3-hour acting class met synchronously with group work completed in breakout sessions.</p> <p>While online learning did not work for all students, there were students who easily transitioned to an online format. Unfortunately, this did not mean there were not personal circumstances that affected their learning.</p>	<p>“Preference for in person of course but given the situation it was the best option and it worked fine.”</p> <p>“My student is an athlete so they put athletes in lots of online courses regularly.”</p> <p>“It worked and overall not a bad experience but there were unforeseen problems--laptop stopped charging right before a (test), online tests taking app requires no outside noise during test taking. We have six household members and two dogs so that was interesting lol. It’s doable just different.”</p>

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