

COVID-19: College Parents Speak Out

Jodi Dworkin, Ph.D.
Katherine Vasquez, M.S.
Marjorie Savage, Education Specialist
Department of Family Social Science, University of Minnesota
February 2022

*For questions about this study, please contact:
Investigator Name: Dr. Jodi Dworkin
Departmental Affiliation: Family Social Science
Phone Number: (612) 624-3732
Email Address: jdworkin@umn.edu*

This survey was sponsored by the University of Minnesota, Department of Family Social Science, and by the national association of parent/family professionals, AHEPPP: Family Engagement in Higher Education.

Since March 2020 when nearly all colleges and universities transitioned to remote learning, COVID-19 has continued to impact families and higher education. We wanted to understand how parents of college students were experiencing the 2021-22 academic year, the third academic year families were impacted by COVID-19.

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 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. This report reflects findings from a third wave of data, from 1,770 parents, collected between October and November 2021.

The reports from the first wave of data collected June-August 2020, the second wave of data collected October-November 2020 and additional study background is available online: <https://innovation.umn.edu/college-parent/>

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 five \$100 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 October and mid-November 2021. 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 and variant outbreaks on campuses as they began 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.

Who Participated

One thousand seven hundred and seventy parents (1,770) representing more than 75 institutions across the country participated in this study; 80.4% of students were at a public institution, and 14.4% were at a private institution (the remaining parents were unsure). Parents represented all 50 states and the District of Columbia; 15 were living outside the US. About half (46.1%) of parents reported their home was 150 miles or less from their student's institution, 21% reported home was 150-300 miles away, and 18% reported home was more than 500 miles away from their institution. In addition, 23% of parents had less than a 4-year degree, 42.6% had earned a Bachelor's degree, and 34.3% had a higher degree. Families are also experiencing quite a bit of stress, 19.3% reported experiencing reduced income, 20% reported they had become ill with COVID-19, 32% reported their partner/spouse or another family member living at home had become ill with COVID-19, and 19.7% experienced the death of a family member.

Key Findings

- Overall, 72.3% of parents believed their student's school had made the right decisions regarding COVID-19 policies.
- Families matter; 67% of parents reported going to their student with questions.
- Students were using physical (17.7%) and mental health (19.3%) telehealth wellness supports.
- Students were also using college/university supports, 55.2% met virtually with an academic advisor, 14.4% received virtual tutoring or support from an instructor or TA, and 13.7% took advantage of grading base changes (switching from a letter grade to a pass/fail option for example).
- Most students (83.8%) did not change their academic plans because of COVID-19.

- The greatest concerns parents reported for their students were mental health (19.2%), health/safety (16%), and academics (10%).
- Despite these many challenges, parents also reported their students experienced positive growth because of COVID-19; 41.6% became a stronger person, 39.8% learned to deal better with their problems, and 18.7% made some new best friends.

Data Summary

What year is your student?

	Frequency	Percent
First year	639	36.1%
Second year	465	26.1%
Third year	380	21.5%
Fourth year	232	13.1%
Fifth year or higher	37	2.1%
Graduate student	14	0.8%
Unsure	3	0.2%
Total	1770	100%

In other words. . .

	Frequency	Percent
First Year	639	36.1%
Non-First Year	1131	63.9%
Total	1770	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?

	Frequency	Percent
No	246	13.9%
Yes	1521	86.1%
Total	1767	100%

As of the first day of classes this semester (Fall 2021), how were your student's classes being offered?

	Frequency	Percent
All of their classes are in-person	966	54.6%
All of their classes are online	11	0.6%
All of their classes are being taught using a hybrid model, combining online and in-person learning	93	5.3%
It's a mix, some are in-person, some are online, and some are hybrid	651	36.8%
I am unsure	27	1.5%
Other	20	1.1%
Total	1768	100%

School COVID-19 policies

	No	Yes	Total
Is your student's school requiring students to be vaccinated?	1058 (59.9%)	709 (40.1%)	1767 (100%)
Is your student vaccinated?	316 (18%)	1444 (82%)	1760 (100%)
Is your student's school requiring students to wear masks?	630 (35.6%)	1138 (64.4%)	1768 (100%)
Regardless of college/university policy, will your student wear a mask when indoors?	538 (30.5%)	1225 (69.5%)	1763 (100%)

Do you believe your student's school has made the right decisions about COVID-19 policies for Fall 2021?

	Frequency	Percent
No	293	16.6%
Yes	1280	72.3%
Other	197	11.1%
Total	1770	100%

If you have questions or concerns about your student’s college experience, who are you most likely to contact?

	Frequency	Percent
My student	1179	66.6%
Parent/Family office	134	7.6%
Residence Life office	21	1.2%
College/university main office	187	10.6%
The school’s COVID-19 email or hotline	61	3.4%
I don’t know who to contact	139	7.9%
Other	49	2.8%
Total	1770	100%

Is your student's school planning a Family Weekend during Fall semester?

	Frequency	Percent
Yes in-person, yes participate	633	35.9%
Yes in-person, no participate	902	51.2%
Yes virtual, yes participate	10	0.6%
Yes virtual, no participate	29	1.6%
I don’t know	189	10.7%
Total	1763	100%

Did your student change academic plans because of COVID-19?

	Frequency	Percent
No change	1484	83.8%
My student decided to attend a different school	45	2.5%
My student changed from a four-year to a two-year school	6	0.3%
My student decided to withdraw	7	0.4%
My student is postponing college	8	0.5%
My student changed housing plans	83	4.7%
My student changed majors to be able to graduate sooner	11	0.6%

My student changed career goals to work in healthcare because of COVID-19	4	0.2%
My student changed career goals as a result of shifting interests and values	63	3.6%
My student changed career goals for increased job security	16	0.9%
Other	116	6.6%

As this year begins, what is your greatest concern for your student?

	Frequency	Percent
None	125	7.1%
Finances	125	7.1%
Career planning	67	3.8%
Major	30	1.7%
Academics	177	10%
Time to graduation	25	1.4%
Finding a job after graduation	152	8.6%
Personal relationships	118	6.7%
Health/safety	282	16%
Mental health	339	19.2%
Time management	135	7.6%
Opportunities for involvement with campus life	86	4.9%
Other	107	6.1%
Total	1768	100%

Is your student experiencing any challenges with online learning?

	Frequency	Percent
My student doesn't have any online learning	284	16%
No challenges—it's working fine	395	22.3%
It's too soon to tell	108	6.1%
My student prefers in-person learning	925	52.3%

My student has difficulty meeting deadlines	68	3.8%
Internet connection is spotty where they live	133	7.5%
Classes lack structure	347	19.6%
My student is unable to participate in lab/studio time	337	19%
There are too many distractions when studying outside of class	345	19.5%
Other	184	10.4%

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

	Frequency	Percent
It will take longer than expected	248	14%
They will graduate sooner than expected	30	1.7%
My student is still on track to graduate as planned	1122	63.4%
I'm still not sure	303	17.1%
Unknown	67	3.8%
Total	1770	100%

Which of the following social, emotional, academic, career or experiential opportunities did your student take advantage of since March 2020? (% yes)

	Frequency	Percent
Remote internships or co-ops	107	6%
Remote employment	124	7%
Virtual mentoring programs	67	3.8%
Online career fairs	125	7.1%
Virtual meetings with a career coach	83	4.7%
Virtual meetings with an academic advisor	977	55.2%
Grading basis changes (from A-F to S/N or pass/fail)	243	13.7%
Maximizing coursework, taking more credits than normal	111	6.3%
Applying to graduate or professional school since most standardized testing requirements were waived	30	1.7%

Virtual support or tutoring from an instructor or TA	255	14.4%
Telehealth for mental health	372	21%
Telehealth for physical health	346	19.5%
None	412	23.3%
Other	64	3.6%

Did anyone in your household become ill with COVID-19?

	Frequency	Percent
Myself	354	20%
My student	429	24.2%
My partner/spouse	312	17.6%
Another family member living at home	254	14.4%
No one in my family became ill with COVID-19	1034	58.4%
Other	64	3.6%

In the **last six months**, which of these issues have you experienced?

	Frequency	Percent
Serious illness, injury, or assault	104	5.9%
Death of a close friend	197	11.1%
Death of a family member	348	19.7%
Having a close friend, neighbor, or relative deal with a serious problem	596	33.7%
Major weather/environmental events	249	14.1%
Mental health crisis	178	10.1%
Physical health crisis	112	6.3%
Separation or divorce	24	1.4%
Crime	26	1.5%
Loss of job	115	6.5%
Reduced income	341	19.3%
None	605	34.2%

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

	Rating	Frequency	Percent
Overall physical health	Poor	22	1.2%
	Fair	109	6.2%
	Good	415	23.5%
	Very Good	581	32.9%
	Excellent	641	36.3%
	Total	1768	100%
Overall sense of well-being	Poor	31	1.8%
	Fair	167	9.4%
	Good	480	27.1%
	Very Good	548	31%
	Excellent	543	30.7%
	Total	1769	100%
Personal relationships with close friends	Poor	23	1.3%
	Fair	125	7.1%
	Good	469	26.5%
	Very Good	568	32.1%
	Excellent	584	33%
	Total	1769	100%

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

	Rating	Frequency	Percent
Overall physical health	Poor	36	2%
	Fair	150	8.5%
	Good	485	27.4%
	Very Good	573	32.4%
	Excellent	525	29.7%
	Total	1769	100%
Overall sense of well-being	Poor	50	2.8%
	Fair	214	12.1%
	Good	590	33.4%
	Very Good	541	30.6%
	Excellent	374	21.1%
	Total	1769	100%
Personal relationships with close friends	Poor	43	2.4%
	Fair	176	10%
	Good	520	29.4%
	Very Good	588	33.3%
	Excellent	440	24.9%
	Total	1767	100%

In what way has COVID-19 affected...

	Rating	Frequency	Percent
...your student's academic experience	In a very positive way	41	2.3%
	In a somewhat positive way	133	7.5%
	In a neither positive or negative way	442	25%
	In a somewhat negative way	853	48.2%
	In a very negative way	300	17%
	Total	1769	100%
...your student's	In a very positive way	41	2.3%
	In a somewhat positive way	63	3.6%
	In a neither positive or negative way	426	24.1%
	In a somewhat negative way	719	40.7%
	In a very negative way	519	29.4%
	Total	1768	100%
...your family's financial status	In a very positive way	30	1.7%
	In a somewhat positive way	148	8.4%
	In a neither positive or negative way	1108	62.7%
	In a somewhat negative way	340	19.2%
	In a very negative way	141	8%
	Total	1767	100%
...the way you manage money now	In a very positive way	57	3.2%
	In a somewhat positive way	231	13.1%
	In a neither positive or negative way	1319	74.6%
	In a somewhat negative way	131	7.4%
	In a very negative way	30	1.7%
	Total	1768	100%
...communication with your college student	In a very positive way	212	12%
	In a somewhat positive way	420	23.7%
	In a neither positive or negative way	1080	61.1%
	In a somewhat negative way	51	2.9%
	In a very negative way	6	0.3%
	Total	1769	100%
...your overall relationship with your college student	In a very positive way	84	4.7%
	In a somewhat positive way	115	6.5%
	In a neither positive or negative way	750	42.4%
	In a somewhat negative way	642	36.3%
	In a very negative way	178	10.1%
	Total	1769	100%

We know COVID-19 has been really hard for families. Some families have also talked about learning and growing during COVID-19. Please share more about how COVID-19:

	Rating	Frequency	Percent
Has helped my student become a stronger person.	Strongly agree	163	9.2%
	Agree	569	32.1%
	Neither agree or disagree	680	38.5%
	Disagree	231	13.1%
	Strongly disagree	124	7%
	Total	1767	100%
Has helped my student learn who their real friends are.	Strongly agree	132	7.5%
	Agree	431	24.5%
	Neither agree or disagree	842	47.9%
	Disagree	238	13.6%
	Strongly disagree	113	6.4%
	Total	1756	100%
Has helped my student know how much they are loved.	Strongly agree	353	20.1%
	Agree	499	28.4%
	Neither agree or disagree	686	39%
	Disagree	136	7.7%
	Strongly disagree	85	4.8%
	Total	1759	100%
Has helped my student make some new best friends.	Strongly agree	82	4.7%
	Agree	247	14%
	Neither agree or disagree	741	42.1%
	Disagree	442	25.1%
	Strongly disagree	249	14.1%
	Total	1768	100%
Has helped my student learn to deal better with their problems.	Strongly agree	111	6.3%
	Agree	585	33.2%
	Neither agree or disagree	681	38.7%
	Disagree	253	14.4%
	Strongly disagree	131	7.4%
	Total	1761	100%
Has helped my student be more patient.	Strongly agree	90	5.1%
	Agree	573	32.6%
	Neither agree or disagree	685	39%
	Disagree	289	16.5%

	Strongly disagree	119	6.8%
	Total	1756	100%
Has taught my student to be more caring of others.	Strongly agree	122	6.9%
	Agree	556	31.6%
	Neither agree or disagree	795	45.1%
	Disagree	188	10.7%
	Strongly disagree	100	5.7%
	Total	1761	100%
Has brought my family closer together.	Strongly agree	289	16.4%
	Agree	646	36.7%
	Neither agree or disagree	568	32.3%
	Disagree	164	9.3%
	Strongly disagree	92	5.2%
	Total	1759	100%
Has taught my student what is really important in life.	Strongly agree	235	13.3%
	Agree	706	40%
	Neither agree or disagree	590	33.4%
	Disagree	149	8.4%
	Strongly disagree	84	4.8%
	Total	1764	100%
Has taught my student to be happy and enjoy good things when they happen.	Strongly agree	190	10.8%
	Agree	647	36.7%
	Neither agree or disagree	657	37.3%
	Disagree	183	10.4%
	Strongly disagree	85	4.8%
	Total	1762	100%

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>
College's steps in handling the situation	The majority of parents (72.3%) approved of the Covid-19 decisions being made by their students' school. This was an increase from a year earlier, but there were areas where families strongly disagreed. Mandates drew the most criticism.	<p>"As long as there are no mandates on vaccination. I'm ok with the policy."</p> <p>"I believe they are doing the best they can, under a governor who will not allow them to mandate vaccines."</p>
Where to get answers	Two-thirds of parents indicated they would contact their student if they had questions, only 7.6% said they would contact a Parent/Family office. Although social media was not one of the survey options, a number of respondents said they would seek responses from a social media page run by parents or by the school's parent/family professional.	<p>"Honestly, I wouldn't contact the school, that is my student's job. And my student is an adult."</p> <p>"I'd first post a question in the Facebook group if it was not personal."</p>
Rethinking choice of college	Fewer than 3% of parents said their student decided to attend a different school or changed from a 4-year to a 2-year school.	<p>"At the beginning of COVID she changed schools due to cost and being online."</p> <p>"My student decided to stay closer to home."</p> <p>"Plans to be an athlete were changed due to Covid, so he changed school choice."</p>
Rethinking major or career plan	While most students remained in school, their experience has changed, including career goals and time to graduation; 83.8% of parents said their students did not change their academic plans because of COVID.	"Is attending additional year due to covid impacts."

		<p>“My student changed career goals because classes were too difficult not being in person.”</p> <p>“taking a gap year between fresh & soph years”</p>
<p>Challenges with Remote Learning</p> <p><i>Challenges with courses and teaching</i></p>	<p>Just over half of respondents (52.3%) indicated their student prefers in-person learning, while nearly one quarter (22.3%) indicated that online learning works just fine. Inherent problems with online learning included spotty Internet connection (7.5%) and challenges with an online structure for labs and studio classes (19%).</p>	<p>“Performing Arts classes are difficult online.”</p> <p>“ADHD and Dyslexia are not a good fit for online learning only.”</p>
<p><i>Student Experience</i></p>	<p>In some cases, students missed out on opportunities or shifted their priorities that may alter their academic plans going forward.</p>	<p>“My student decided not to study abroad in the spring of 2022 due to COVID concerns.”</p> <p>“Changed intern plans”</p> <p>“Took less hours. Worked more.”</p>
<p><i>For some students, online learning worked well</i></p>	<p>For some students, including some home-schooled students, online learning works well.</p>	<p>“Got started in high school with it, so no trouble.”</p> <p>“Student does well with both, but is very self directed.”</p>