



Impacts of the Coronavirus Pandemic on Incoming High School Seniors' Postsecondary Plans

Shiloh Howland, MS, Raeal Moore, PhD, and Edgar I. Sanchez, PhD

About the Authors

Shiloh Howland, MS

Shiloh Howland was a summer intern in Research Strategy & Services in 2020 while working on her PhD at Brigham Young University.

Raeal Moore, PhD

Raeal Moore is a principal research scientist specializing in survey methodological research and research on education best practices in P-12 schools.

Edgar I. Sanchez, PhD

Edgar Sanchez, a lead research scientist in the Validity and Efficacy Research department at ACT, works on predictive modeling of student educational outcomes. He is currently focusing on test preparation programs.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Jeff Allen and Jeff Schiel for their insightful feedback to previous versions of this paper.

Conclusions

Across demographic groups, incoming seniors (class of 2021) have been affected by the coronavirus pandemic, and some have altered their college plans accordingly. Most seniors are planning to attend the same type of institution they were planning on before the pandemic, but about half are planning on a different institution, one closer to home, or one with lower tuition. Notwithstanding the dramatic changes that occurred in education this past spring, they are confident about their plans. However, they are concerned about how their academic preparation, including preparing for admissions tests like the ACT® or SAT, has been affected by the pandemic. First generation students and students in the lowest family income bracket (< \$36k) are feeling the least motivated to prepare for the ACT or SAT.

So what?

Understanding the concerns of these rising seniors and how those concerns manifest in changes to their plans will be useful for educators, guidance and admission counselors, policymakers, and other stakeholders to understand as these students go through their senior year.

Now what?

One of the students in this study told us that it was “too early to decide” how exactly they should adapt their plans for the future. With the continuing uncertainty about what education at all levels will look like in the coming school year, we understand the reluctance to make decisions. We believe that it is not too early to consider a wider range of options that students may not have previously considered.

These insights will help educators and policymakers begin to adapt their supports for this graduating class. Students will need support and guidance to feel academically prepared to go to college, and they will need information from their parents and the colleges themselves to understand the financial costs of a college education in order to make informed decisions about their future. We believe it will take the concerted, coordinated efforts of students, parents, educators, counselors, and admissions staff to meet these challenges.



ACT, Inc. 2021

Introduction

From the first cases of COVID-19 emerging in early February 2020 to the wave of school closings across the country in mid-March, the effects of the pandemic have been felt across the United States. Within a matter of weeks, schools closed and instruction moved into other formats.¹ The rapid shift to online instruction required adaptation of instruction, and students had to adjust to a new way of learning. Students graduating amid these events also had to reconsider their plans for after high school. Surveys of graduating seniors conducted by Simpson Scarborough, McKinsey & Company and Art & Science, for example, showed that anywhere from 8% to 40% of students indicated they either were no longer planning to attend college in fall 2020 or they felt that attending was at least unlikely.²

In light of these unprecedented changes, we sought to understand how high school students, specifically rising seniors, were being impacted. We wanted to understand what their concerns were, how they had changed their college search process, and how their approach to postsecondary plans had changed. In June, we reached out to rising high school seniors and received responses from 2,965 students (see Appendix A for details). We asked how the pandemic had affected them in the previous year as juniors, how it was affecting their plans for college, and how they feel it has altered their ability to be prepared for college, including preparing for the ACT test. In this paper, we share what we learned from their responses to our survey questions, including the comments they made in response to open-ended questions.

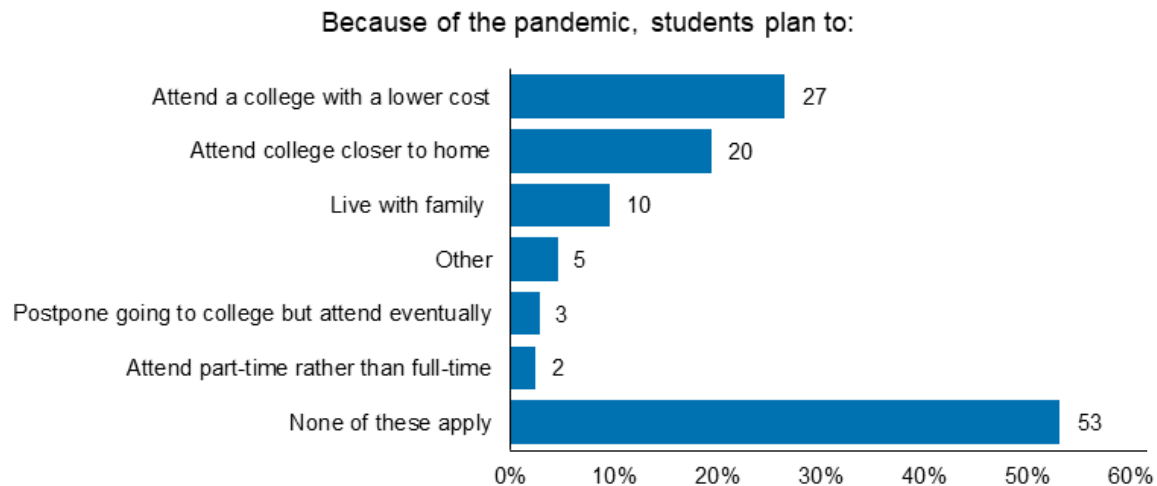
Students are Still Making Plans to Attend College Despite Changes From the Coronavirus Pandemic

With a year to go until they graduate, students are looking ahead and adjusting their college plans as they continue to react to the coronavirus pandemic. Just under half of students (47%) indicated that they intended to change their plans for college (Figure 1). These changes to their original plans included attending a less expensive college, attending a college closer to home, postponing attendance to a later time, attending part-time, or living with family rather than living alone, on campus, or with friends. This suggests that nearly half of students are determined to find a way to go to college and are already thinking about changes they may need to make to realize that goal.

In their responses to our open-ended questions,³ some students who said they had other changes in mind told us that they were adopting a wait-and-see attitude. They said, “anything could change” and that they “need more data before I make a decision.” One student said, “it’s too early to decide if the pandemic will blow over by then.” Other students noted that their decisions would be influenced by financial factors. One student said, “I plan to go to college...and it will most likely be the one I get the best

scholarships to,” while another said, “I plan to go to school where I can receive the best financial aid.” Even for students who did not expressly say that they were waiting to see what happens in the coming year, many students said they were considering changes to either a cheaper school or one closer to home, but they had not decided for certain if that was a change they wanted to make. The other 53% of respondents said that none of these changes applied to their plans.

Figure 1. Anticipated Changes to Postsecondary Plans



Note: Students were asked to select all of the college decisions that they might change because of the pandemic. For this reason, percentages do not add up to 100.

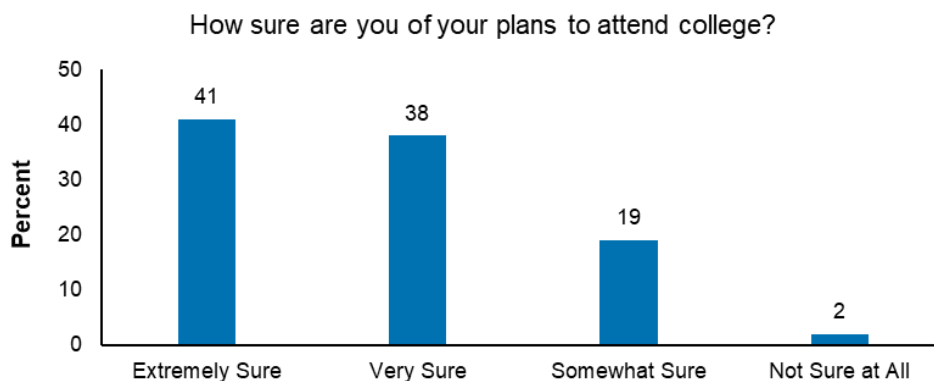
When students were asked if they were going to change the type of institution they plan to attend, the majority (90%) indicated they would still attend the same kind of college or university (e.g., 4-year private, 4-year public, 2-year public, etc.), even if it is not the same institution they thought they would attend before the pandemic.⁴ The remaining 10% plan to either attend a different kind of institution or they do not know what their postsecondary plans will be. We analyzed this result by race/ethnicity, first-generation status, and family income and found no differences between these demographic groups.⁵

It seems promising that only 3% of respondents said they anticipate postponing attending college.⁶ Their comments suggest that students are reacting flexibly to the evolving education landscape (e.g., attending a college with a lower tuition cost or finding other ways to decrease the cost of attendance), but they remain committed to their plans to attain a postsecondary education.

Students are Sure About Attending College, but They Still Have Concerns

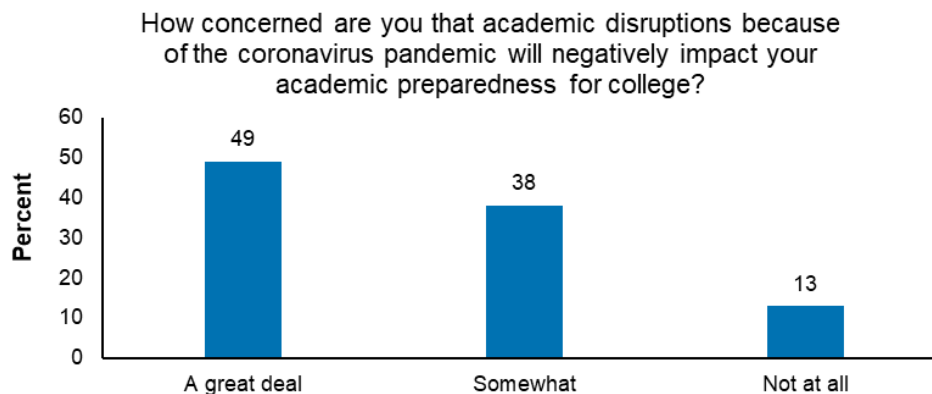
A majority of students (79%) said they were “very” or “extremely” sure about their plans to attend college, whether they have recently changed those plans or they are continuing on the path they had prior to the pandemic (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Students’ Confidence About their Plans to Attend College

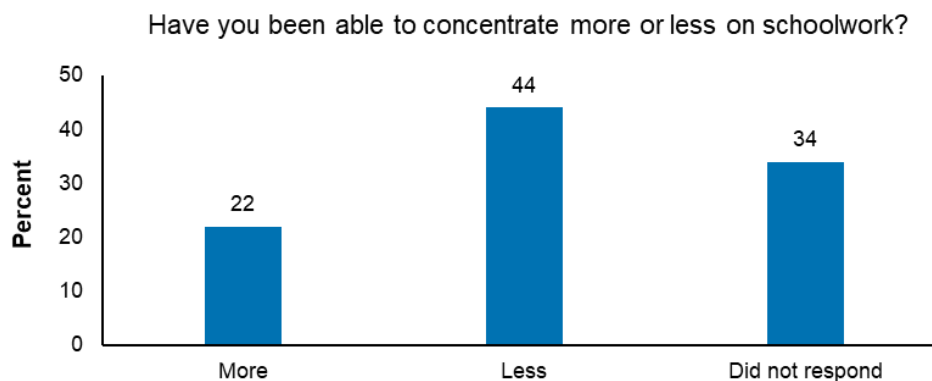


Note: Students who indicated they planned to attend a 2- or 4-year college or trade school answered this question.

That said, these students also expressed concerns about the effects the pandemic has had on them and their ability to be academically prepared for those postsecondary plans. About half of the students surveyed (49%) indicated that they were very concerned about how the disruptions to their schoolwork in spring 2020 would affect their level of college preparedness (Figure 3). Their levels of concern were similar across various demographic groups including race/ethnicity, first-generation status, and parental income levels. We asked the students to describe the challenges they were facing regarding academic preparation. Their comments often referenced a lack of time to spend on school: “I actually have less time and a more cluttered schedule.” Besides these time constraints, some students told us how decreased access to teachers affected them, saying, “I no longer have access to a teacher who could help me,” and “two of my teachers help a lot and I didn’t have school to ask questions/advice.”

Figure 3. Students' Concerns about Being Prepared for College

Their concerns about academic preparation were further highlighted when we asked students to reflect on how the pandemic had affected their ability to concentrate on schoolwork. Twice as many students (44%) indicated that they have concentrated less on their schoolwork compared to those who were able to concentrate more on their schoolwork (22%; Figure 4). This finding did not differ by subgroups.

Figure 4. Students' Perceptions of their Ability to Concentrate During the Pandemic

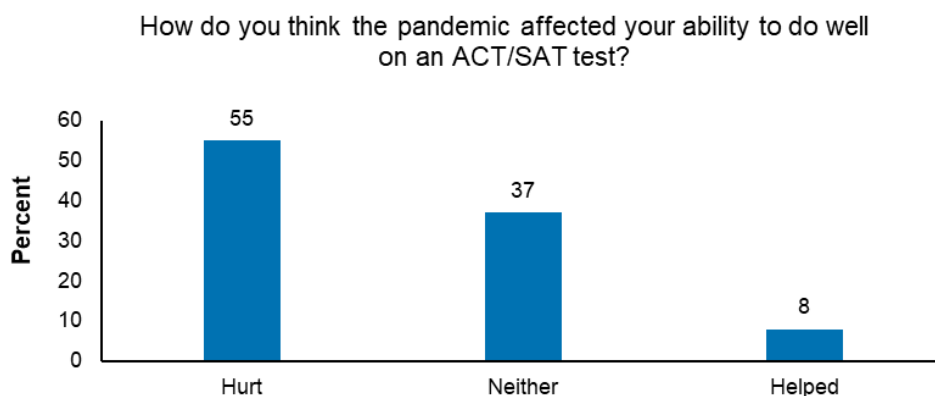
There is growing concern about the effect of the pandemic on students' academic achievement, and these results show that students themselves are worried about their preparation for postsecondary education.⁷ Research published by NWEA builds on the well-documented academic loss over summer and estimates that students returning to school in Fall 2020, having lost approximately two months of in-class time in spring 2020 due to school closures, will maintain 70% of typical gains in reading and 50% of typical gains in math.⁸ A newly published study by ACT anticipates that because students lost up to two months of instruction in spring 2020, they may gain, on average, only 0.82 points on their ACT Composite score over a 12-month period.⁹ This is less than the 1.53 ACT Composite score points that students typically gain over a 12-month period (nine months of school and three months of summer).

Effects on Test Readiness

Despite the academic disruptions that students have undergone, the fact that most remain committed to attending college implies that their preparation for college entrance exams like the ACT and SAT remain important. Though some colleges and universities have moved to test-optional admissions for the coming year, the ACT and SAT are still required for many colleges and scholarships. Moreover, because many school districts dispensed with their standard grading practices to compensate for changes in instruction wrought by the pandemic, some students may have grades that do not provide a full picture of their knowledge and abilities. With the wide variety of grading procedures implemented in spring 2020, such as pass/fail or no grades at all, a college entrance exam score may provide an objective, standardized measure of college readiness for students whose GPAs may have been affected by those grading policies.¹⁰

We saw students' concerns about academic preparation were amplified when we asked the students how they feel the pandemic has affected their ability to prepare for and do well on a test like the ACT or SAT. Just over half of respondents (55%) indicated that they believe their ability to do well on the ACT/SAT has been hurt by the pandemic (Figure 5). One student expressed concern about how reduced time in school might affect them: "I have not been able to have the school work to coincide with ACT material to cement the concepts further." This finding was similar for students regardless of first-generation status or family income level.¹¹

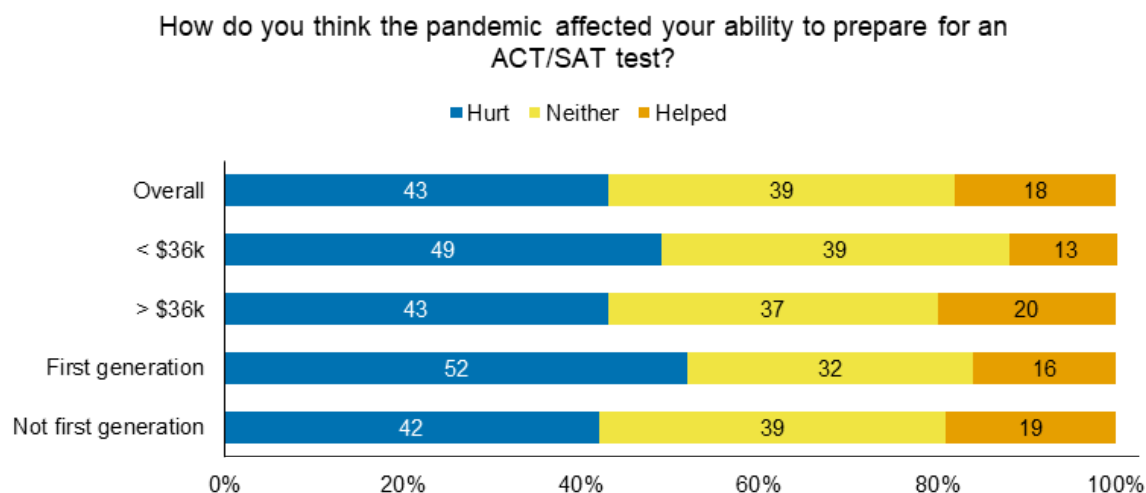
Figure 5. Students' Concern About Being Able to do Well on an Admissions Test



Clearly, students are concerned about doing their best on a college entrance test. To understand this concern further, we asked about how they felt the pandemic has affected their ability to prepare for the ACT/SAT. About 4 in 10 students (43%) felt that

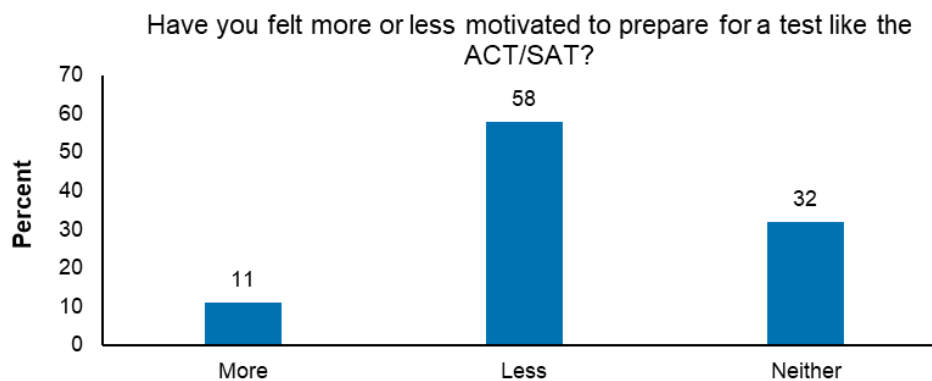
the pandemic had hurt their ability to prepare for these tests. First-generation students were more likely than non-first-generation students to indicate that the pandemic had hurt their ability to prepare (52% compared to 42%). A similar result was seen for students in the lowest family income category (less than \$36k). For students in that category, 49% said the pandemic had hurt their ability to prepare for the ACT/SAT (Figure 6).¹²

Figure 6. Effect of the Pandemic on Students' Ability to Prepare for an Admissions Test



We learned from students that there are three possible explanations for students' concerns about preparing for an admissions test: concerns about test cancellations, additional responsibilities at work or within their families (related to the pandemic), and difficulty maintaining motivation.

In another paper that used the same data, Sanchez (2020) examined student responses to open-ended questions and found that students felt confused by test cancellations, and many expressed concerns about the increased demands from school, work, and greater pressure to work to support their family.¹³ They told us, "I actually have less time to study for the SAT/ACT because of increased schoolwork" and "I have no time for ACT preparation due to my work hours." We know from research about the effects of the pandemic that first-generation students were less likely to have a parent home during the day (once schools closed in March) and nearly twice as likely to have the responsibility to take care of a family member compared to students who are not first-generation.¹⁴ Some students also mentioned concerns about being able to take admissions tests in the fall before college application deadlines. We should note that we asked these questions prior to the announcement of three additional ACT test dates in the fall. Another significant factor that emerged was that a majority of students (58%) reported feeling less motivated to study for the ACT/SAT. This finding was consistent across demographic groups (race/ethnicity, family income, and first-generation status).

Figure 7. Students' Level of Motivation to Prepare for an Admissions Test

Additionally, one-quarter of students stated that they lack the resources to prepare for the ACT/SAT and 38% of respondents felt that they had more time to study for the ACT/SAT. The fact that some students have more time may not be as positive as it seems. One student said, “I am more prepared and motivated to study due to the sudden increase of time, but there are no testing centers open for me to test.” Another told us, “I have more time, but my school briefly cancelled the tools I used to use.” We found no differences between demographic groups (race/ethnicity, first-generation status, or family income) with respect to the lack of resources or time to study.

Conclusions

We have learned from students that they are struggling. As they adapt to the changes resulting from the global coronavirus pandemic, they have become concerned about their ability to be academically prepared for college. The uncertainty experienced by teachers, students, and parents during the previous spring continued into summer, and there are indications that it will persist into the coming school year.

As these incoming seniors prepare to apply to and attend college, they will need support from teachers, counselors, and parents to feel adequately prepared to do their best in their coursework and on admission tests and to then make informed decisions about what their postsecondary plans should be. There is substantial research that supports the influential role of parents and high school counselors in guiding students in their college-going plans, particularly those that are first-generation college applicants or of lower socioeconomic status.¹⁵ In the coming year, their guidance, in matters both academic and social/emotional, will be even more crucial.¹⁶

Colleges and universities made several changes in the previous admission cycle to support students and should consider extending those measures to the class of 2021. These adaptations included allowing students to appeal financial aid decisions following changes to their family's financial situation and pushing acceptance deadlines to June 1.¹⁷ Other potential adaptations could include providing online campus tours for students who cannot attend in person, explaining the procedures students would need to complete to take a gap year, and being transparent about how alternative grades (ex. pass/fail) will be treated in the admissions process.¹⁸ These adaptations will only be helpful to students, parents, and counselors if they are easy to locate on universities' websites.¹⁹

Because students are more open to attending a less expensive college, one closer to home, or even living with family, this could be an opportunity for colleges and universities to highlight the attractive features of their schools to students in their immediate vicinity. Specifically, they could use their websites to emphasize quality programs available at a reasonable price, financial aid opportunities, and clearly explain how they are responding to the pandemic.²⁰

Appendix

A total of 70,000 incoming high school seniors (class of 2021) were randomly selected to participate in an online survey. The target population was US students who registered to take the ACT on one of the six national test dates as a junior between September 2019 and June 2020 (N=667,202). The sampling frame (n=502,955) excluded students who have opted out of ACT communications and those who have been contacted about an ACT survey in the last three months.

From the sampling frame, 70,000 students were randomly selected and invited to complete a survey online. The survey opened on June 10, 2020. Students were reminded on June 13, 2020, and the survey closed on June 16, 2020. Student race/ethnicity, gender, first-generation status, family income, and parental education level were collected at registration for the ACT.

A total of 3,648 students answered at least one question (5.4% response rate); 2,965 answered at least 80% of the survey and identified themselves as male or female, which was used as our analytical sample. We required gender to be answered so that we could appropriately weight the sample. The unweighted sample respondents were 76% female; 24% male; 60% White; 12% Hispanic; 11% Asian; 6% Black; 6% American Indian, Hawaiian Native, Alaska Native, or two or more races; and 4% did not state their race/ethnicity. Forty percent of students did not report their family's income. Of those who provided information about family income, 14% were low income (<\$36k), 14% had family incomes between \$36k and \$60k, 23% had family incomes between \$60k and \$100k, and 49% had family incomes >\$100k. Seven percent of respondents would be first-generation college students. In this study, students were identified as "first generation" if they reported that their parent(s)/guardian(s) did not graduate from college.

Each analysis was completed using normalized weights to compensate for the differences in sample size in each analysis, as well as the over-representation of both female respondents and respondents who took the ACT closer to the time the survey was sent out in June 2020. Once weights were applied, the sample respondents were 55% female and 45% male. When data were missing, the weights were adjusted accordingly.

In addition to characterizing overall changes, we also examined differences between the following demographic groups: race/ethnicity, family income, and first-generation college-bound status.

Notes

1. Education Week tracked school closures across the United States throughout March 2020. The closures began around March 9 and accelerated through the end of the month. Graphics are available at: Evie Blad, “EdWeek Graphic: Visualizing the School Shutdown Wave,” *Education Week*, March 17, 2020. <https://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2020/03/coronavirus-schools-closed-visualized.html>. Education Week reported on June 2, 2020 that 93% of teachers they surveyed were doing at least some online teaching: Kevin Bushweller, “How COVID-19 is Shaping Tech Use. What That Means When Schools Reopen,” *Education Week*, June 2, 2020. <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/06/03/how-covid-19-is-shaping-tech-use-what.html>. A poll conducted by Gallup in early April found that parents reported 83% of their children under age 18 were enrolled in online school (up from 65% in late March 2020; Megan Brennan, “Over 8 in 10 Parents Now Say Child is Learning Remotely,” *Gallup*, April 8, 2020. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/307754/parents-say-child-learning-remotely.aspx>).

2. Simpson Scarborough surveyed high school seniors in late March 2020 and found that 8% of respondents were no longer planning to attend a four-year college in Fall 2020 for reasons specifically related to the pandemic. When they were asked how likely it was that they would not enroll in college in Fall 2020 because of the pandemic, 5% stated it was “highly likely” and 15% said it was “likely.” See Simpson Scarborough, *National Student Survey* (Washington, DC: Simpson Scarborough, 2020), <https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/4254080/SimpsonScarborough%20National%20Student%20Survey%20.pdf>. A follow-up survey completed in late April 2020 showed that 10% of high school seniors no longer planned to attend a 4-year college in fall 2020; Simpson Scarborough, *April Replication: National Student Survey* (Washington, DC: Simpson Scarborough, 2020), <https://info.simpsonscarborough.com/april-replication-national-student-survey-download>. Simpson Scarborough’s most recent survey of incoming college freshman was conducted July 16-17, 2020 and was released on August 10, 2020. This third survey reported that 40% of those students considered it “likely” or “highly likely” that they will not attend college in the fall. See the full report: Simpson Scarborough, *National Student Survey, Pt. III – The Fragility of Trust* (Washington, DC: Simpson Scarborough, 2020), <https://info.simpsonscarborough.com/hubfs/SimpsonScarborough%20National%20Student%20Survey,%20Pt.%20III.pdf>.

McKinsey and Company surveyed 2,094 high school seniors in late April 2020. Of those, 8% no longer planned to enroll in a full-time bachelor's program, but also 7% had changed plans and decided to enroll in a full-time bachelor's program (they had previously planned to attend part-time enrollment or to attend a two-year college). Also, 15% of students planned to defer attendance by at least one semester. See: Hayoung Kim, Charag Krishnan, Jonathan Law, and Ted Rounsaville, "COVID-19 and US Higher Education Enrollment: Preparing Leaders for Fall," *McKinsey & Company*, May 21, 2020. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/social-sector/our-insights/covid-19-and-us-higher-education-enrollment-preparing-leaders-for-fall>.

Art & Science/College Board studentPOLL surveyed graduating in seniors in late April 2020. For the class of 2020, 12% of students who were planning to attend college in fall 2020 and had already made a deposit were, at that time, no longer planning to attend any four-year college. Art & Science Group, "Looking Ahead to Fall 2020: How COVID-19 Continues to Influence the Choice of College-Going Students," *Art & Science Group*, April 2020. <https://www.artsci.com/studentpoll-covid-19-edition-2>

3. Two items on the survey included the question "Which of the following statements apply to you as a result of the coronavirus pandemic?" relative to either changes to students' postsecondary plans or how the coronavirus pandemic affected their ability to concentrate on schoolwork, be motivated to prepare for college entrance tests, and have access to resources and time to prepare for college entrance tests. For both items, students who selected "other" from a list of options were able to respond in a text box to provide additional information. The student responses quoted in this paper come from those who answered other to one or more of those two questions and provided an answer in the respective text box.

4. Of the 90% of students planning to attend the same type of institution before and after the pandemic, 67% plan to attend a 4-year public university, 31% plan to attend 4-year private university, 2% plan to attend a 2-year college, and 1% plan to attend a vocational or technical school (because of rounding, percentages add up to 101%).

5. Our results are consistent with other research. Carnegie Dartlet's study of rising seniors (class of 2021) found student interest in a college less than 150 miles from home was unchanged from 2019 (Carnegie Darlet, *Rising Seniors: A Study on COVID-19's Impact on the Class of 2021* (Westford, MA: Carnegie Darlet, 2020), <https://www.carnegiedartlet.com/resources/rising-senior-report/>). Carnegie Dartlet's two cross-sectional studies of the class of 2020 students found college preference type unchanged between March and May 2020 (Public: 67% March 65% May; private 23% March 26% May; 2-year 10% March 9% May; Carnegie Darlet, *Senior Fall Decision: The After-May 1st COVID-19 Study* (Westford, MA: Carengie Darlet, 2020), https://www.carnegiedartlet.com/media/uploads/carnegie-dartlet_covid-19_senior-decision-study.pdf).

McKinsey found 92% of students had not changed plans. Those who did change plans looked for a college that was less expensive, closer to home, or with lower exposure to COVID. They looked at students changing from in-state/out-state public/private, but their sample was small (n=273). In general students are considering staying in state for their first choice more so now than they were before (Hayoung Kim, Charag Krishnan, Jonathan Law, and Ted Rounsaville, "COVID-19 and US Higher Education Enrollment: Preparing Leaders for Fall," <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/social-sector/our-insights/covid-19-and-us-higher-education-enrollment-preparing-leaders-for-fall>)

A post-hoc power analysis found that the power for this particular analysis was quite low at 0.14 which may explain the lack of subgroup differences.

6. This result is similar to findings published by Carnegie Dartlet who surveyed 2,800 high school seniors in May 2020 and found that 2% of respondents anticipated delaying attending college in Fall 2020. Carnegie Dartlet, *Senior Fall Decision: The After-May 1st COVID-19 Study*, https://www.carnegiedartlet.com/media/uploads/carnegie-dartlet_covid-19_senior-decision-study.pdf

7. Research conducted in late March to early April 2020 by Encoura/Eduventures Research found that 53% of high school seniors surveyed were moderately concerned about falling behind in coursework (24% were moderately concerned and 29% were extremely concerned). Encoura, *The Effects of COVID-19 on High School Experience & College Choice*, (Iowa City, IA: NRCCUA, 2020). <https://encoura.org/project/effects-of-covid-19-on-high-school-students-college-choice/>

A separate survey in early June 2020 conducted by Art & Science/College Board studentPOLL found that 43% students graduating in 2021 were concerned that the pandemic "has affected their qualifications or the strength of their application for college, financially, academically, and in other ways." Only one-third of respondents felt that their qualifications had not been affected in any way. Fifteen percent were concerned that the pandemic had compromised their grades. See: Art & Science Group, *The Impact of COVID-19 on the College Application Process for the High School Class of 2021* (Baltimore, MD: Art & Science, 2020), <https://www.artsci.com/studentpoll-covid-19-jr-edition>

McKinsey and Company, in the same survey mentioned above, found 32% of high school seniors surveyed said that the pandemic had a "strong" (24%) or "extremely strong" (8%) impact on their academic preparedness for college. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/social-sector/our-insights/covid-19-and-us-higher-education-enrollment-preparing-leaders-for-fall>

8. Megan Kuhfeld, and Beth Tarasawa, *The COVID-19 Slide: What Summer Learning Loss Can Tell us About the Potential Impact of School Closures on Student Academic Achievement* (Portland, OR: Collaborative for Student Growth, 2020), https://www.nwea.org/content/uploads/2020/05/Collaborative-Brief_Covid19-Slide-APR20.pdf

A poll conducted by Ipsos and reported on by ABC News surveyed adults in late July 2020 about the effects of the pandemic and found that 59% of them were concerned that their children were falling behind in their education; ABC News/Ipsos Poll, *A Survey of the American General Population (ages 18+)*, (Topline & Methodology, 2020). <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2020-07/topline-abc-wave16-072420.pdf>

9. These results are from an ACT report: Jeff Allen, Krista Mattern, & Wayne Camara, *Predicting the Impact of COVID-19 School Closures on ACT Test Scores: Methods and Considerations for States and Districts* (Iowa City, IA: ACT, 2020), <https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/R1828-covid-impact-2020-05.pdf>

10. There are numerous reports available detailing the changes in grading that school districts undertook to attempt to grade students fairly and equitably during spring 2020. One such article from Education Week, published on April 1, 2020 highlights the variety of grading practices that were adopted from pass/fail, credit/no-credit, no F grades, etc.; Stephen Sawchuk, “Grading Students During the Coronavirus Crisis: What’s the Right Call?” *Education Week*, April 1, 2020, <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/04/01/grading-students-during-the-coronavirus-crisis-whats.html>. ACT too conducted research on this topic. See: Michelle Croft, Raeal Moore, Gretchen Guffy, Shannon Hayes, Katie Gagnaniello, and Dan Vitale, *High School Students’ Experiences in March During the Coronavirus Pandemic*, (Iowa City, IA: ACT, 2020), <https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/R1841-covid-insights.pdf>.

11. We analyzed the data to see if we had enough people to detect differences in the outcome by first-generation status (i.e., we conducted a post-hoc power analysis). We found the power for the first-generation students compared to students who were not first-generation was 0.526. A similar analysis for the comparison between students’ income (incomes less than \$36k compared to more than \$36k) was 0.241.

12. While this sentiment was expressed by many students, Asian students were more likely to indicate that the pandemic has helped their ability to prepare for and to do well on these tests. Specifically, 25% of Asian students reported that the pandemic has helped them as they prepare for the ACT/SAT, compared to 21% of Black students, 17% of White students, 14% of Hispanic students, and 18% of students who are American Indian, natives of Alaska or Hawaii, or two or more races. Additionally, 14% of Asian students reported that they believe the pandemic has helped them to do their best on the ACT/SAT, compared to 11% of Black students, 7% of White students, 9% of Hispanic students, and 8% of students who are American Indian, natives of Alaska or Hawaii, or two or more races.

Given the broad distribution of effects of the pandemic, this result seemed rather unusual. We hesitate to offer an explanation of this finding and are especially reluctant to do so in the face of ongoing discrimination against people of Asian descent related to COVID-19. Previous research may offer some clues. Asian students have needed higher admission tests scores than White students to be accepted to highly selective universities (Espenshade & Radford, 2009) and have participated in private

test preparation courses or tutoring at a higher rate than other demographic groups (Buchmann, Condrón, & Rosigno, 2010; Alon, 2010; Byun & Park, 2012). Byun and Park (2012) noted that in their study, East Asian American students reported having fewer siblings than Black or White students (respectively, 1.82 compared to 2.57 and 2.06 siblings). As some of the respondents in our study noted, sibling care is in some cases an added draw on respondents' time. It may be that with fewer siblings to care for and more unscheduled time due to school closures, that Asian students in our sample found that they would have more time to prepare for an admissions test, perhaps with private courses or tutoring.

- Sigal Alon, "Racial Differences in Test Preparation Strategies," *Social Forces* 89, no. 2(December 2010): 463–474.
- Claudia Buchmann, Dennis J. Condrón, and Vincent J. Roscigno, "Shadow Education, American Style: Test Preparation, the SAT and College Enrollment," *Social Forces* 89, no. 2 (December 2010): 435–461.
- Soo-yong Byun and Hyunjoon Park, "The Academic Success of East Asian American Youth: The Role of Shadow Education," *Sociology of Education* 85, no. 1 (January 2012): 40–60.
- Thomas J. Espenshade and Alexandria Radford, *No Longer Separate, Not Yet Equal: Race and Class in Elite College Admission and Campus Life* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

13. Edgar I. Sanchez, *Student Perspectives on the Impact of COVID-19: A Summary of Open-Ended Responses*. (Iowa City, IA: ACT, 2020).

14. Michelle Croft, Raeal Moore, Gretchen Guffy, Shannon Hayes, Katie Gragnaniello, K., & Dan Vitale, *High School Students' Experiences in March During the Coronavirus Pandemic*. (Iowa City, IA: ACT, 2020). <https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/R1841-covid-insights.pdf>

15. Carnegie Dartlet's recent survey of high school senior parents reported that over 90% of parents said they were involved in helping their child learn about colleges (Carnegie Dartlet, *2020 Rising Senior Parent Complete Survey Questions and Responses*, (Westford, MA: Carnegie Dartlet, 2020), https://www.carnegiedartlet.com/media/uploads/file/carnegiedartlet_risingseniorparents.pdf). These are a few papers that discuss the role of high school counselors in supporting students, particularly students of lower socioeconomic status or students who would be first-generation college students:

- Andrew S. Belasco, "Creating College Opportunity: School Counselors and their Influence on Postsecondary Enrollment," *Research in Higher Education* 54, no. 7 (November 2013): 781–804.
- Alberto F. Cabrera and Steven M. La Nasa, "Understanding the College-Choice Process," *New Directions for Institutional Research* 2000, no. 107 (Fall 2000): 5–22.
- Charles G. Eberly, Richard G. Johnson, and Norman R. Stewart, "Information Sources Used by High School Seniors" (Paper presented at the Annual

Convention of the American Association for Counseling and Development, New Orleans, LA, April 21-25, 1987).

- Kassie Freeman, "Increasing African Americans' Participation in Higher Education: African American High School Students' Perspectives," *Journal of Higher Education* 68, no. 5 (September/October 1997): 523–550.
- Don Hossler and Karen S. Gallagher, "Studying College Choice: A Three-Phase Model and the Implication for Policymakers," *College & University* 62, no. 3 (Spring 1987): 207–221.
- Laura Owen, Timothy A. Poynton, and Raeal Moore, R., "Student Preferences for College and Career Information," *Journal of College Access* 5, no. 1 (January 2020): 68–100.

16. Additional research on the social/emotional needs of students is forthcoming but at publication time, there are two blog posts from Dana Murano and Kate Walton of the ACT Center for Social, Emotional, and Academic Learning that discuss preliminary findings from their research. Their findings suggest that students are maintaining and even developing social and emotional skills at this time, even as they report that they are worried about the pandemic's effect on themselves and others. See: Mawi Learning at Dana Murano and Kate Walton, "COVID-19 Continues: How Worried are High School Students?" *Mawi Learning*, May 20, 2020. <https://www.mawilearning.com/blog/covid-19-continues-how-worried-are-high-school-students/>; and Kate Walton and Dana Murano, "What COVID-19 Can Teach Us About Social and Emotional Skill Development," *Mawi Learning*, May 27, 2020. <https://www.mawilearning.com/blog/what-covid-19-can-teach-us-about-social-and-emotional-skill-development/>

17. Inside Higher Ed and the Center for American Progress both reported on the changes to the acceptance/deposit deadlines; Elizabeth Redden, "Just Another Day in May," *Inside Higher Education*, May 1, 2020. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/05/01/amid-pandemic-may-1-national-college-decision-day-means-less-ever-year>; Ashley Jeffrey and Laura Jimenez, "Ensuring Equitable Pathways for the Class of 2020 Amid the Coronavirus," *Center for American Progress*, April 30, 2020. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/news/2020/04/30/484131/ensuring-equitable-pathways-class-2020-amid-coronavirus/>

18. Encoura/Eduventures found that 45% of students were interested in a live, virtual campus visit where they could ask questions (Encoura, *Effects of COVID-19 on High School Students and College Choice*, <https://encoura.org/project/effects-of-covid-19-on-high-school-students-college-choice/>). AACRAO provides some recommendations about how to support students who need to provide high school transcripts or test scores (for the full list of recommendations, see AACRAO, "Guidance on Admissions from Novel Coronavirus COVID-19 Impacted Terms," AACRAO, April 1, 2020. <https://www.aacrao.org/resources/covid-19-crisis-practices/transfer-credit-from-covid-19-impacted-terms>)

19. Students responding to Carnegie Dartlet’s survey of rising high school seniors indicated that college websites are the most commonly used source of information about colleges with 75% of respondents saying they sought information there. Social media was only used as an information source by about 40% of respondents (Carnegie Dartlet, “Rising Seniors: A Study on COVID-19’s Impact on the Class of 2021,” <https://www.carnegiedartlet.com/resources/rising-senior-report/>).

20. Carnegie Dartlet’s survey of rising high school seniors indicated that 53% of respondents sought to attend a college in their hometown or within 150 miles of their hometown (Carnegie Dartlet, “Rising Seniors: A Study on COVID-19’s Impact on the Class of 2021,” <https://www.carnegiedartlet.com/resources/rising-senior-report/>). Their survey of parents of high school seniors found that nearly 50% of parents were “slightly more concerned” or “far more concerned” about paying for college because of effects of the pandemic and they were interested in having clear communication from colleges about how they are adapting to the pandemic (Carnegie Darlet, *2020 Rising Senior Parent Complete Survey Questions and Responses*, https://www.carnegiedartlet.com/media/uploads/file/carnegiedartlet_risingseniorparents.pdf).



About ACT's Center for Equity in Learning

ACT's Center for Equity in Learning focuses on closing gaps in equity, opportunity and achievement for underserved populations and working learners. Through purposeful investments, employee engagement, and thoughtful advocacy efforts, the Center supports innovative partnerships, actionable research, initiatives, campaigns, and programs to further ACT's mission of helping people achieve education and workplace success.

For more information, visit equityinlearning.act.org
@ACTEquity
@ACT

About ACT Research

ACT Research leads the field with authority and high-quality scientific evidence in support of education and workforce practices, solutions, and services. Our mission-driven team comprises a variety of backgrounds and disciplines and offers a wide spectrum of knowledge and skills, enabling us to deliver quality, high-impact products and services aligned to ACT's strategy and mission. Together, our research teams provide policymakers, educators, parents, and learners with research-based insights to inform their decision-making and deliver educators and workforce development professionals with tools and services needed for education and career navigation.