

Pandemic Concerns Driving College-Bound High School Seniors to Attend College Closer to Home

National surveys reveal major implications of COVID-19 on 2021 college admissions

PHILADELPHIA (November 18, 2020) – A growing number of college-bound high school seniors and their parents would now prefer a college or university closer to home, according to a new report released today by [Brian Communications](#), a national strategic communications agency. National surveys commissioned by the agency show the effect of the coronavirus crisis on college decision-making and present potential opportunities for higher education institutions in large metropolitan areas.

“Students choosing to stay closer to home could be a lifeline for schools in more densely populated regions,” said Brian Tierney, CEO of Brian Communications. “For areas such as the Northeast, where there is a high concentration of colleges and universities, and not as much distance to travel, this could be a real opportunity to boost freshman enrollment by adjusting marketing and recruiting strategies. Parents seem to want their children to be able to drive home relatively quickly.”

Key findings from the surveys include:

- **49% of parents would prefer that their child attend a college or university closer to home, a nearly 25% increase from [Brian Communications' findings in the spring](#).**
- **33% of high school seniors would prefer to attend a college or university closer to home.**
- **53% of parents prefer their child to have a mix of in-person and remote learning options for freshman year of college. However, less than half (48%) are willing to pay full tuition for it.**
- **45% of high school seniors prefer a mix of in-person and remote learning options for freshman year of college. Again, less than half (45%) are willing to pay full tuition for it.**

“The debate around paying full tuition for a mix of in-person classes and remote learning boils down to value,” said David Demarest, senior advisor at Brian Communications and former vice president for public affairs at Stanford University. “The best college administrators and faculty are challenging themselves to view this period as an incredible opportunity to innovate and reinforce the potential that they promise by creating richer and more engaging experiences for students.”

According to the data, high school seniors are less certain than their parents of higher education's value. Based on their goals, five in ten high school seniors believe a college education is required for a successful career, compared to seven in ten parents.

Brian Communications commissioned the surveys in conjunction with Dynata, the world's largest first-party data and insights platform. With sample sizes of 1,005 parents of high school seniors likely to attend college and 1,023 high school seniors likely to attend college, the independent, online national surveys had a margin of error of plus or minus 3.1 percentage points at the 95% level of confidence. Research participants in each study were geographically dispersed to include all regions of the country. The survey of parents of high school seniors was conducted between October 4 and October 10, 2020. The survey of high school seniors was conducted between October 4 and October 15, 2020. For the full report, visit briancom.com/insights.

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About Brian Communications

Brian Communications is a national strategic communications agency headquartered in Philadelphia with experience working with clients such as the University of Chicago, University of Pennsylvania, Villanova University, Saint Joseph's University and Widener University. Other clients include Uber, Blue Cross Blue Shield Association, PokerStars, Penn Medicine, BELFOR Property Restoration and Independence Blue Cross. Focused on strategic ideas that advance business goals, the firm's services include strategic planning, brand positioning, reputation and crisis management, advertising, social media strategy and media relations.

The agency is led by Brian Tierney, current Chairman of the Poynter Institute Foundation. Tierney is the former publisher of the Pulitzer Prize-winning The Philadelphia Inquirer and Daily News, the former CEO and founder of a communications agency acquired by the Interpublic Group and has served on several university boards. David Demarest is a senior advisor at Brian Communications, overseeing higher education marketing efforts. Previously, Demarest was vice president for public affairs at Stanford University, where he spent more than a dozen years leading government relations, community affairs and communications.