

An Independent National Survey of 405 Parents of College-Bound High School Seniors

# The Impact of COVID-19 on Higher Education

April 2020



# Introduction

**The COVID-19 crisis is changing the landscape of our nation. As a national strategic communications agency advising clients across multiple industries, Brian Communications is focused on understanding how the COVID-19 crisis will continue to affect businesses and institutions as well as our daily lives.**

**As a \$600 billion-plus industry, the higher education system is undeniably a large part of the U.S. economy.**

To dive deeper into those implications, we commissioned an independent national survey with Dynata—the world’s largest first-party data and insights platform—among parents of college-bound high school seniors to evaluate the impact of COVID-19 on decisions about their children’s academic future.

Our nationally representative survey reveals that safety, lack of communication from schools, and the proximity of schools to home are leading concerns among parents of graduating students. More than a third (40%) say the pandemic may even cause their child to delay going to college.

Parents feel ill-informed and are looking for clear communication from colleges and universities. **Six out of ten say they have not received any information on how institutions intend to ensure their child’s safety next year, and 85% say they feel they need more information on how colleges and universities are handling the crisis.**

While most (71%) students are still planning to attend their first-choice college, **almost half (40%) of parents now prefer having their child attend a university closer to home.** Two thirds responded that if their children were considering a different college due to the pandemic, they would still consider paying for them to attend their first-choice college or

university, if the academic institution had the option for students to participate in distance learning.

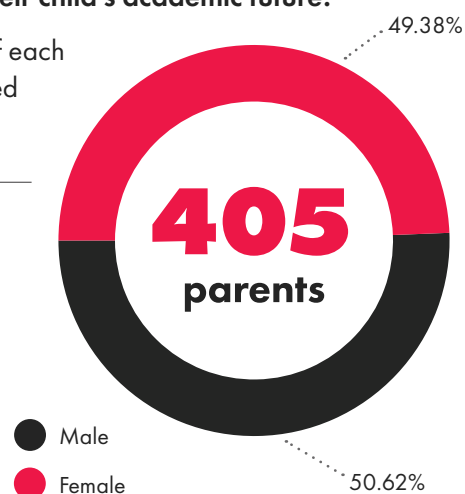
The impact on financial aid is also an understandable concern, as many families are now facing drastically different situations due to the economic consequences of the crisis. 65% of parents surveyed say the pandemic has made them more cautious about the financial impact of tuition.

In summary, these national survey findings emphasize that higher education institutions need to clearly and consistently communicate their plans for student safety. **Colleges and universities must take early and proactive action to improve communications and instill heightened confidence so that parents can make informed decisions about their child’s academic future.**

Additional details of each measure are included within this report.

## Respondent Ages

Under 35: 2.23%  
35-44: 30.20%  
45-54: 46.29%  
55-64: 19.06%  
65+: 2.23%

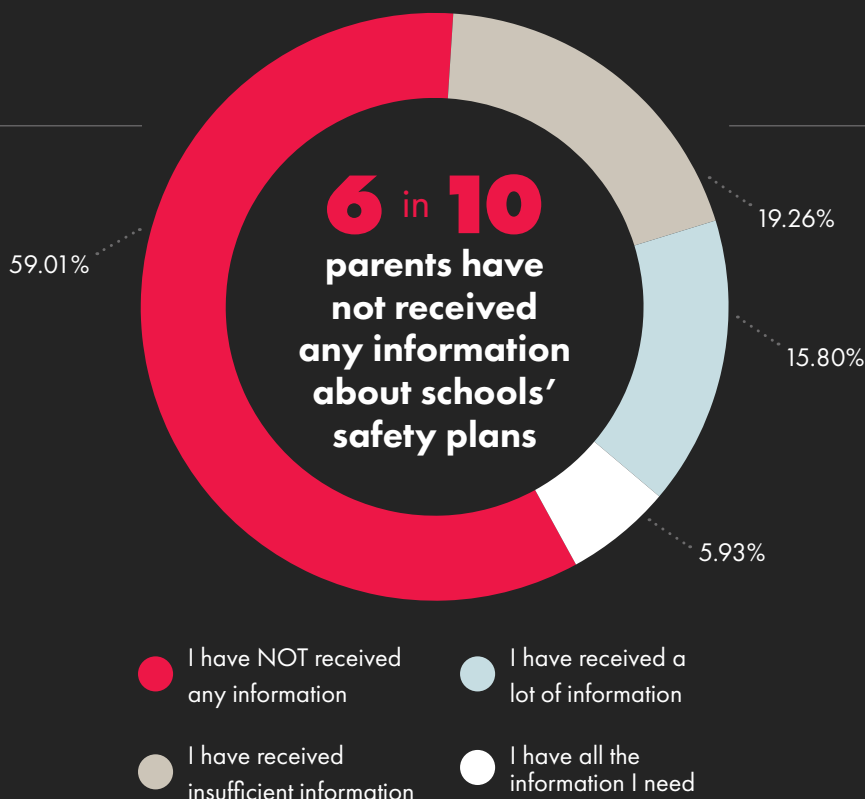


# Looking for Clear Communication

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**Provide more information about what they are planning or already doing to mitigate these circumstances.**

A parent's feelings on what colleges and universities can do to make them feel better about their child's academic future



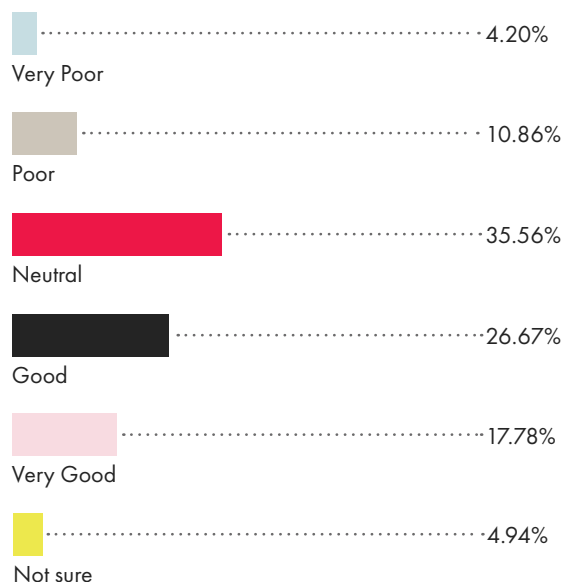
**85%**

**say colleges need to better inform parents and students of their safety plans**

**Do you feel you need more information about what colleges and universities are doing to ensure your child's safety next year?**

I do NOT need to know more: 14.32%  
 I need to know a little more: 40.74%  
 I need to know a lot more: 44.94%

**What is your opinion on academia's communication response to the coronavirus pandemic?**



# Putting Education on Hold

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...he is feeling a degree of concern about studying far from home, and doesn't want to be isolated in a different state if coronavirus reemerges later this year or next year.

A parent's feelings on how this pandemic has changed their child's enrollment decisions

**4 in 10**

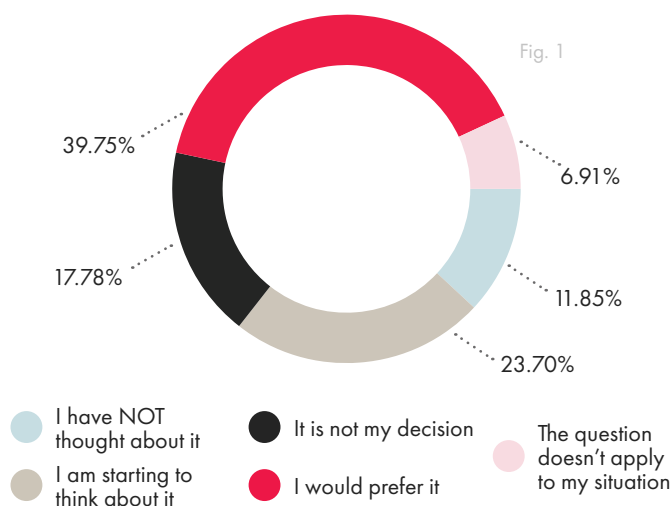
say the pandemic may cause their child to delay going to college

How likely is your child to delay going to college after high school based on the pandemic?

Very Likely: 12.10%  
Somewhat Likely: 27.90%  
Not At All Likely: 42.72%  
Not sure: 17.28%

## The Proximity to Home

**40%** would now prefer their child to attend a school closer to home



**63%** have talked or will talk to their child about attending a different school

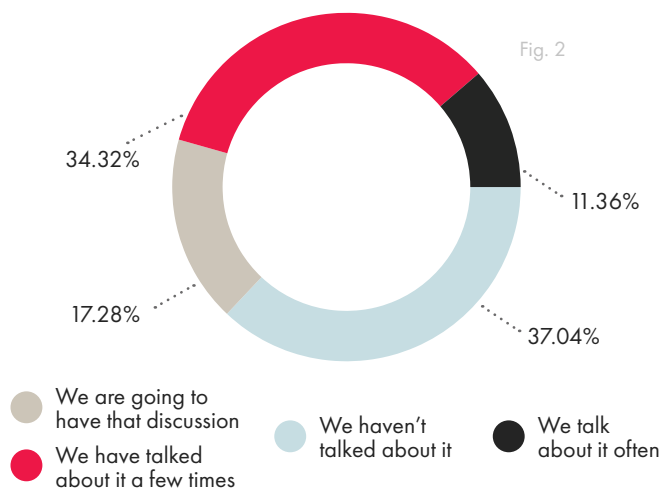
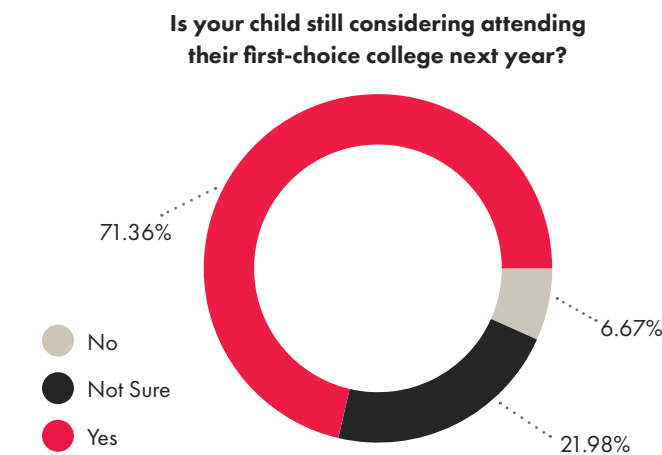


Fig. 1: Considering the current pandemic, which one of the following best describes your thoughts about having your child attend a college or university closer to home? Fig. 2: Have you talked to your child about attending a different college or university because of the pandemic?

# First Choice Complications

Most (71%) students are still planning to attend their first-choice college but almost half (40%) of parents now prefer having their child attend a university closer to home, as shown on page 4.



“Keeping my child home longer, perhaps an extra year and having my child do online learning during the first year.

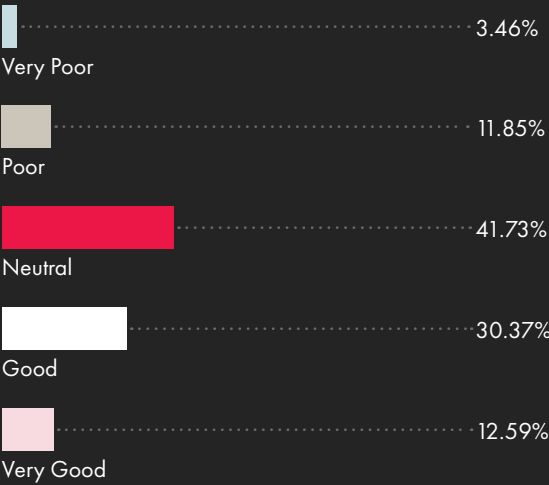
A parent’s feelings on how this pandemic has changed their child’s enrollment decisions

**MORE THAN 66%** might consider paying for their child’s first-choice school, if distance learning is an option

If your child is considering a different college or university, would you pay for your child to attend their first-choice college or university, if they had the option to participate in distance learning?

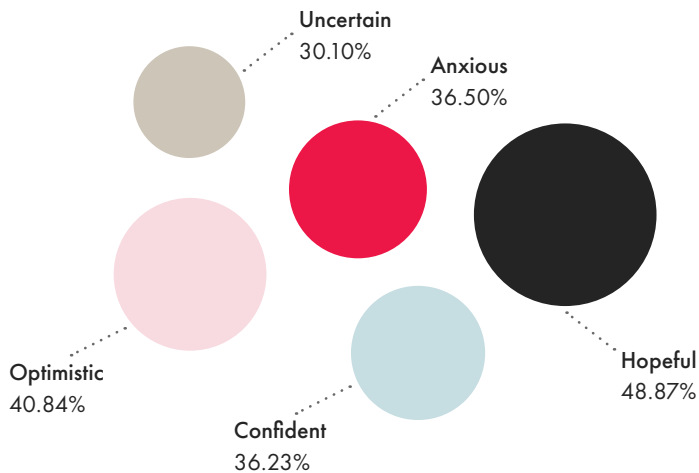
- No: 9.63%
- Maybe: 36.79%
- Yes: 29.88%
- Does not apply: 23.70%

What is your opinion of distance learning?



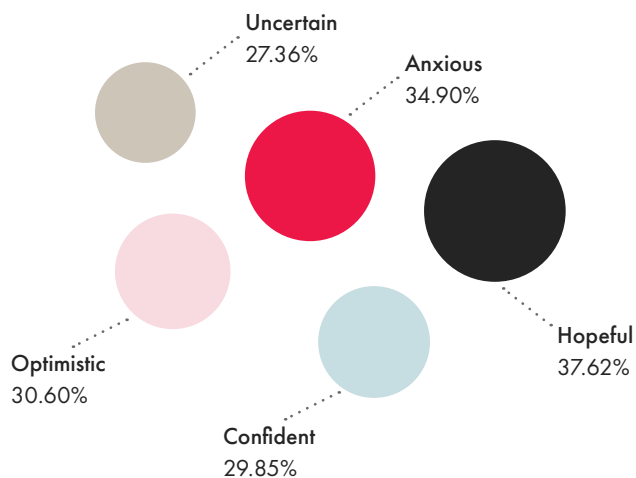
## Feeling Anxious, yet Optimistic

Which of the following describe how you are feeling about your child's academic future?



**Note:** The percentages total more than 100% because survey respondents were asked to pick one response for each feeling, between "Agree Completely," "Agree Somewhat" and "Do Not Agree At All." The above percentages represent survey respondents who selected "Agree Completely" for each feeling.

To the best of your knowledge, how would you describe how your child is feeling about their academic future?



**Note:** The percentages total more than 100% because survey respondents were asked to pick one response for each feeling, between "Agree Completely," "Agree Somewhat," "Do Not Agree At All" and "Not Sure." The above percentages represent survey respondents who selected "Agree Completely" for each feeling.

## The Financial Burden



**Our income has been severely impacted, and we may not be able to send him where he wishes to attend.**

A parent's feelings on how this pandemic has changed their child's enrollment decisions

**65%**

**say the pandemic has made them more cautious about the financial impact of tuition**

**Has the pandemic made you more cautious about the financial impact of tuition?**

No: 16.30%  
Not Sure: 18.77%  
Yes: 64.94%

# Open-ended Responses

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## In what ways, if any, has this pandemic changed your child's enrollment decisions?

"We've lost our home. I'm a single parent. Her brother is totally disabled. She's scared."

"She has considered delaying a year until the pandemic ends."

"He was originally going to Yale, but now wants to wait a year before starting up."

"Our income has been severely impacted, and we may not be able to send him where he wishes to attend."

"It has delayed it because I am unsure of what is going on with her high school graduation. Our schools have been closed for three weeks and will remain closed until at least May 15. Also, I am laid off, so my finances are much lower than usual."

"Keeping my child home longer, perhaps an extra year and having my child do online learning during the 1st year."

"Primarily he's unsure if he can even graduate to begin with, but on top of that, he is feeling a degree of concern about studying far from home, and doesn't want to be isolated in a different state if coronavirus reemerges later this year or next year."

"My child no longer considers the schools that are not in our home state."

"Starting to think of not allowing her go to a very distant place for safety reasons."

"She is also rethinking her choices of where to attend—trying to stay away from major metropolitan cities."

"Questioning safety if it's a large campus."

## What can colleges and universities do to make you feel better about your child's academic future?

"Reduce tuition and plan for online classes."

"Provide more info on their clean up and distance learning efforts."

"Show they are adjusting to what has been going on by making it easier to learn online."

"Communicate safety procedures."

"Keep us posted on what is going on through texts or email."

"Provide more information about what they are planning or already doing to mitigate these circumstances."

"Share how they plan to handle similar situations in the future."

"Keep in contact with more information."

"Lower tuition as I don't know how I am going to afford it now that I have lost my job."

"If they can, provide more financial support or at least ensure no increase in tuition in the following years."

"Possibly show us where to apply for extra grants to help and maybe delay tuition."

"Give her a chance even if we can't pay."

"Reexamine tuition costs."

"I need something that tells me what their course of action is going to be when it comes to my child."

"They need to be more proactive in paying attention to what is happening in the world outside of the campus. They need to not be afraid to make strong, informed decisions when it comes to students and faculty."

"We need to understand what they are doing to keep their students safe."

## Is there anything we did not ask that you feel is important as a parent to a senior who is considering college next year?

"Do I feel that this lack of learning will impact his abilities next year—yes, I do."

"The biggest concern we have right now is will our kids actually start school in the fall?"

"We are nervous about financing being available to students with the state of the economy."

"Will there be tuition breaks if it is more distance-based learning?"

"How can we pay for school when the stock market crash wiped us out?"

"Will this virus change the cost of going to college?"

"No high school graduation—devastating!"

"What are schools doing to ensure seniors in high school will be able to graduate?"

"What are the options for completing his final year of HS?"

## About Brian Communications

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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 and Saint Joseph's University. Other clients include Uber, the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association, PokerStars, Independence Blue Cross and AmeriHealth Caritas. 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, former publisher of the Pulitzer Prize-winning The Philadelphia Inquirer and Daily News and former CEO and founder of a communications agency acquired by the Interpublic Group.

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