



The Prichard Committee

Building a Groundswell for a Big Bold Future

Coping with **COVID**

Postsecondary Student Impact Study

A study of the pandemic's impact on higher education. Captured by an intergenerational research team.

March 2021





Who We Are

Over the last year, the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence has been [gathering data and telling stories](#) about the impact of COVID-19 on students, families, and educators – from early childhood through postsecondary education.

The Coping with COVID Kentucky Postsecondary Student Impact Survey – represents our continued effort to use an approach combining survey data and interviews guided by a multi-generational team of students, adult allies, and education professionals. Our team consisted of 5 currently or recently enrolled postsecondary students and 5 education professionals engaged in postsecondary administration or advocacy with a simple charge – to elevate stories and statistics about how COVID-19 has impacted the plans and experiences of current and prospective postsecondary students across institutions in Kentucky.

The Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence is an independent statewide, nonpartisan, nonprofit that has been mobilizing citizens around Kentucky public education since 1983.

What We Did

The Coping with COVID Kentucky Postsecondary Student Impact Survey is the fifth in a [survey series](#) begun in 2020 to gather information about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students, families, and educators – from early childhood through postsecondary education.

From February 8th through March 8th, 2021, we asked current and prospective Kentucky postsecondary students to share how the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted their education plans and experiences. We were asked of high school seniors, currently or recently enrolled college students, and adults not currently enrolled in postsecondary education. Nearly 1,000 responded in total. The survey was also provided in a Spanish translation.

Additionally, our intergenerational research team conducted 11 interviews with target respondents to better understand key challenges and sentiments and ensure we fully captured the student experience. A short survey was also sent to both Kentucky public and private, non-profit colleges and universities to better understand campus perspectives on the impact of COVID-19. Thirteen campuses responded with representation from 2-year and 4-year public institutions, as well as 4-year private, non-profit institutions.

Our survey is divided into three student profiles - high school seniors, currently and/or recently enrolled college students, and adults not currently enrolled in postsecondary education - and covers these core issue areas: an individual's plans for postsecondary education, basic needs and finances, mental health and personal well-being, as well as access to technology and the teaching and learning environment. We have selected data for this report that we believe provide a valid representation of the responses received and that have implications for improving education policy and practice.

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Why We Did It

Kentucky has set an ambitious education attainment goal of 60% of working age adults with postsecondary degree or credential by 2030. The Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education's [recent progress report](#) indicated the state is on track to meet that goal.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic represents perhaps the most disruptive moment for postsecondary education in recent memory. Students, families, and institutions are faced with difficult choices about how to learn and how to address what students need to be successful. COVID-19 will surely have an impact on this trajectory.

Challenges are emerging with [declining enrollments](#) overall at Kentucky's public colleges and universities. In-state college-going of recent high school graduates [continues a multi-year decline](#) – for all students, low-income and minority populations - coupled with declines in [adult enrollment](#).

Other data add to these concerns. Applications for federal student aid (FAFSA) are [down significantly](#) compared to last year indicating the difficulties faced by current and prospective students when making education plans. [The U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey](#) indicates that COVID-19 has impacted the postsecondary education plans of nearly 70% of individuals planning on taking classes. Data from the [Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#) indicates that 75% of 18-24 year olds have had an increase in adverse mental health conditions due to COVID-19.

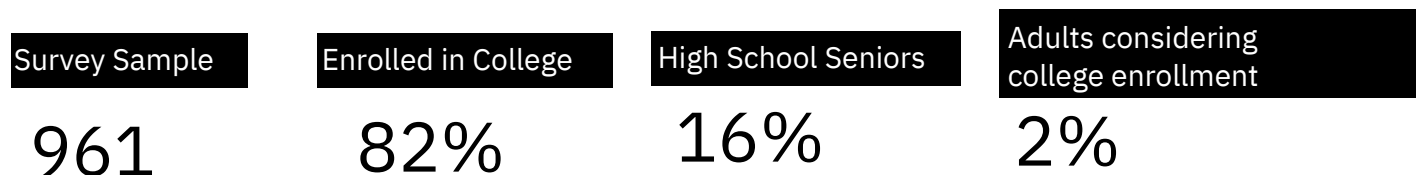
The past year has been challenging for everyone - including college students and those considering going to college. Colleges and universities have faced the demands of responding to an ever-shifting public health crisis, just as students' and families' life, work and financial situations have changed.

Kentucky must continue to break down barriers to college access and ensure higher education remains accessible and affordable – especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. The [importance of increasing our educational attainment](#) cannot be overstated – higher wages, better employment, reduced poverty, better health and Kentucky's overall quality of life.

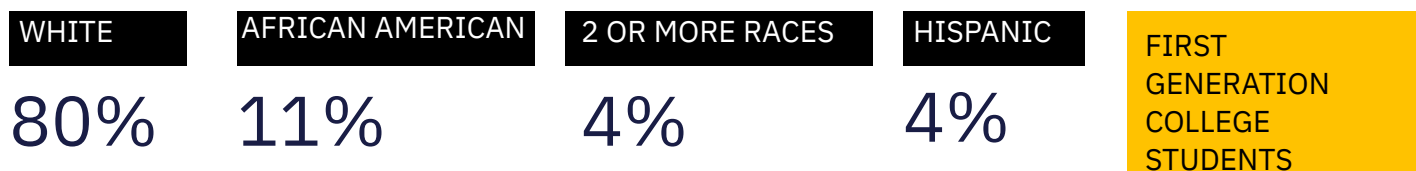
We hope the experience of students revealed in this survey and interviews will be useful in efforts to build policies and practices necessary for students to thrive and succeed - ultimately increasing Kentucky's postsecondary attainment and closing attainment gaps. A deeper understanding of the barriers, both new and persistent will allow us to design more adequate supports for students, especially those traditionally underserved.

Survey Reach

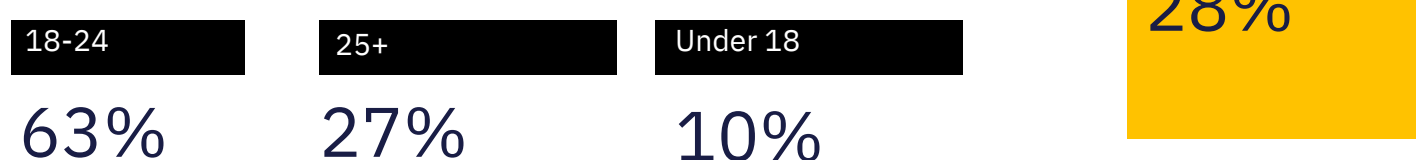
89 OUT OF 120 KENTUCKY COUNTIES REPRESENTED



Racial Demographics



Age Demographics



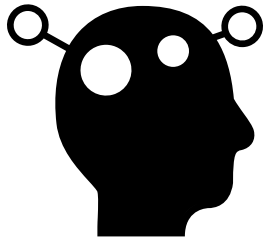
Currently & Recently Enrolled Students

Respondents came from across Kentucky's postsecondary education landscape - 57% from public 4-year institutions, 21% from public 2-year community or technical colleges, and 20% from private 4-year campuses. COVID-19 has had an undeniable impact across the spectrum of issues that impact students' ability to be successful. Responses to open-ended questions about what their institutions have done well or could have done better reveal common challenges around communications and levels of student supports. But also how varied the experience has been for so many students. While the full force of these challenges is likely just emerging, the responses and stories here offer revealing insight into how Kentucky can focus efforts to ensure students persevere and achieve success through this difficult period.

Student Profiles



Finding 1: Mental health needs have soared.



74%
said they have felt an increase of mental or emotional exhaustion due to COVID-19.

- 47% of respondents reported they are much more concerned about their personal health and well-being compared to before the pandemic
- 45% said they have felt increases in depression that interfered with daily functioning.
- 57% said they have felt an increase in anxiety that interfered with daily functioning.
- 46% said they have felt an increase in loneliness.
- 17% reported having increases in thoughts of suicide.

Despite respondents reporting increasing mental health issues, more (12%) indicated accessing mental health service less frequently than more frequently (8%) compared to before COVID-19.

- 13% reported they were not at all aware of mental health resources offered by their institution.
- 11% reported they had trouble accessing services.



Student Voices

“Mentally, I feel like it's affected me more. Coming in, my advisor really tried to emphasize that if we do need anything, or just struggle with anything in any way, to come to him. So, we really never hesitated to go get help. We've gotten a lot of help here.”

-Gabriel, Lindsey Wilson College Freshman

“I resumed taking medicine for anxiety at the start of the pandemic when I had just gotten off it. I am autistic and making friends is hard. I was just starting to get a little bit comfortable at my college. Change is hard for me.”

-Coping with COVID Survey respondent

CAMPUS VIEW

These findings mirror and amplify concerns expressed by Kentucky campuses about student well-being. In our survey of institutions, 92% said they are somewhat to very concerned about the mental health of their students due to COVID-19. Additionally, 90% of campuses said utilization of student mental health services increased due to COVID-19.

The good news is that Kentucky postsecondary leaders recognize the need to support students health and well-being. As an example, the Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education (CPE) announced in March 2021 [\\$1.5 million in grants](#) to campuses to expand and improve student mental health services.

Student Voices (Continued)

“ I started the semester ready to go. I started my on campus job and classes were great. When the weather changed in late October, I started feeling lonely. Everywhere I am allowed to go (which is not very many places) everyone has masks on and people are scared to talk to someone they don't already know. I am alone in my dorm room, I have glass between me and everyone else at work, most of my classes are on Zoom. I became depressed and had to go see a doctor. I am now on three different medications and was reluctant to move back into my dorm room. I failed two classes last semester due to anxiety and depression.”

-Coping with COVID Survey respondent

“ I would say my quality of life, at least coming from back at home was pretty affected because my mom is at risk of developing COVID and so I had to be very careful in the way that I lived when I was at home. I had to isolate myself a lot and that very much affected my mental health in pretty bad ways.”

- Chase, Berea College Freshman

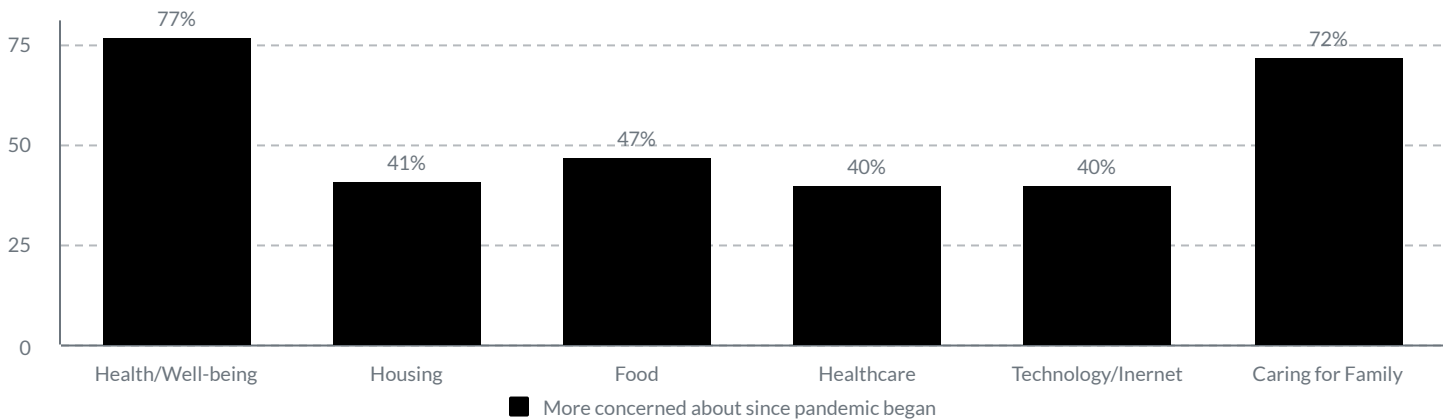
“ I would like to say that I think an important thing would be to understand where students are right now and to understand that we are in a very difficult time, facing a very difficult situation socially and mentally, and that this patience is something that a lot of people need.”

-Coping with COVID Survey respondent



Finding 2:

Concerns about basic needs have intensified.



CAMPUS VIEW

These findings mirror those that Kentucky institutions have found in their own [surveys of students](#) and amplify overall concerns about student enrollment and persistence. In our survey of institutions, 75% said they are somewhat to very concerned about enrollment due to COVID-19.

The good news is that Kentucky has received and stands to receive additional assistance for postsecondary education from federal COVID-19 stimulus packages. These funds, in large part, are to support students with financial and basic needs. Kentucky is [estimated to receive \\$459 million](#) for higher education from the American Rescue Plan enacted by Congress in March of 2021. This is in addition to [approximately \\$451.7 million](#) allocated for Kentucky higher education from the CARES Act and Consolidated Appropriations Act passed in March and December of 2020, respectively. All campuses responding to our survey said they have provided emergency aid to students with federal stimulus funds.

36%
students reported that their school helped them with additional aid during the COVID-19 pandemic to help with tuition, fees, housing, food, technology or other expenses.



Student Voices

“ It gets super tough to work, homeschool kids, do college yourself, all while having to do it on hotspot because of where I live, and most times hotspot isn't cutting it. But also, weather and work puts a damper on getting out to free wifi spots around town with kiddos. It's just been super rough for a while now.”

-Coping with COVID Survey respondent

“ It's been extremely difficult to manage my school along with my kids' school work. Financially, the stimulus checks from covid provided enough support for us to keep our heads above water. We have been students, teachers, employees, along with our duties as parents, housekeeping, paying bills. Covid has prevented me from being on campus for my hands on education in the nursing program which is extremely important to have because we're supposed to learn skills and management of care. I feel like my education has suffered because of the combination of demands that increased at home, financially, as well as the decreased time I had at school.”

-Coping with COVID Survey respondent

“ During the time of COVID, when I did have a job, it was really hard to get hours. And it was really hard to be able to sustain a good flow for insurance and whatnot. And having parents that aren't able to support as much because of COVID-19 and the way that things are right now, I can't really rely on them to have as much financial support. Food has somewhat been a struggle sometimes here and there. During the peak of the pandemic, it was somewhat difficult to acquire food. It's gotten a lot easier from the help of others. We're surviving.”

-George, Paris High School Senior

“ I have missed work due to my daughter being high-risk for COVID. I am a single mom with two kids. Their dads are not consistent with child support. I have missed days due to babysitter issues. I have missed class due to the same problem. I have early mornings and late nights. I have currently missed almost three weeks of work due to my car breaking down and no money to fix it or a ride. I do not know how I am going to pay my bills.”

-Coping with COVID Survey respondent

“ I am a single parent, who had only two of her kids living with her at the time of the Covid. Two of my kids had to move back in for a time because of their loss of jobs. One of my kids suffered from a mental illness during the outbreak. It is taking a toll on me because I have my own mental illness. My bills are much higher and I have had my water turned off as well as my lights because I live paycheck to paycheck and lost some income from not being able to work like I did before. I home school (VAL) my grade school kids, so I cannot go back to work like normal this year.

I'm always thinking about me failing my kids because their grades are not good and personal issues in my home are messing with all our emotions. I eat way less so I don't run out of food. Kids are always eating. At this point I think they suffer from less interaction with friends and people. I am thankful to get food stamps, but it's just for me and my two boys not for my older kids who are back and forth from my home.

-Coping with COVID Survey respondent



Finding 3:

More students are struggling to afford college.

According to survey results, 41% of respondents report they are currently living with family. While that can ease financial pressures for younger students, that is not the case for too many Kentucky postsecondary students who are taking care of children of their own

Additionally, while a majority of respondents indicate financial aid and family financial support have stayed relatively stable, 21% say their expenses have increased a lot, 17% say their income has decreased a lot, and 14% say their debt has increased a lot.

21%
respondents said they are much more concerned now than before the pandemic about paying for tuition



Student Voices

“Financially, the biggest impact has been not being paid for the 2 weeks I had to be off due to having COVID. Another big financial burden has been our 4 kids staying home, this has increased the gas and lights bill and grocery bill. The kids being home and having to do NTI has made everything a lot more difficult. Before school for me wasn't too bad, but now I have had to manage a full time job, full-part time school schedule for myself and now helping 3 kids in school as well.”

-Coping with COVID Survey respondent

“I've had to significantly cut back my working hours since both of my children are at home now. I relish the extra time I get with my family, but making less money has definitely had an impact on our ability to pay off debts or plan for the future.”

-Coping with COVID Survey respondent

“Whenever I am not in class, I am working, and vice versa. My job pays less than \$10 an hour, but my bills from school have stayed the same. I'm still being charged \$300 extra for a meal plan when I only have class on campus once every other week for less than an hour. This is the 3rd semester in a row that this is the case, and I haven't received a refund.”

-Coping with COVID Survey respondent

“My main concern is with finances. I am currently about \$11,000 in debt, and it's starting to take a toll on my well-being. I have a scholarship that I can only keep with good grades, and while it doesn't fully cover the entire cost, I can't afford to lose it. Being in school in the middle of a pandemic just sucks. I have two jobs plus a mentorship program I have to partake in for my major, and I don't know how much of it I can take anymore. I really want to take a gap semester because I don't think this is going well for me and I think it would be best for me, but I don't think I could recover financially from it.”

-Coping with COVID Survey respondent

“I put all the blame on the administration staff taking advantage of the students at this school. They increased our tuition by a thousand dollars then attached a "covid safety" fee of 2,000 dollars. There was no aid to help this either and as a commuter I got nothing but a cheap folding chair and a mask. I want out of this place so bad, but I'm already so financially invested that I'd be even more ruined leaving.”

-Coping with COVID Survey respondent



Finding 4:

Learning virtually has yielded mixed results.

In the survey, 10% of respondents reported that they do not have access to adequate internet to fully participate in school and complete their coursework.

Approximately 53% said staying motivated to do well in school during virtual courses has been a moderate or serious problem, with 47% reporting the same about the ability to interact with classmates.

72% reported that adequate communication with their professors was not a problem at all or only a minor one.

58%

said live sessions are preferred most during online classes, and a similar number also prefer recorded lectures.



Student Voices

“ I have seizures and they come on from blue lights or being online too much. So it's just been really hard having most of my classes online. I've had a big increase in seizures.”

-Rashana, Berea College Freshman

“ It's really hard not being able to study with other people because that's what I'm used to doing, and just being trapped inside is not the best.”

-Sarah, University of Kentucky Freshman

“ I don't really like being online because I can't learn staring at a computer screen. I have to physically be in a room with people and a professor, interacting with everybody and just being there because it just helps me learn better. And I know that most research has said that students learn better in a classroom with actual people in there with them. I've gotten really lonely and it's honestly brought on a lot of depression and anxiety.”

-Aaron, Campbellsville University Junior

“ I like when teachers have courses all open, and you can work ahead. I go to school online because I have a career and family I have to work around. When I notice I have a week full of meetings and appointments I like the ability to work on it during the week before so I don't feel rushed on top of life.”

-Coping with COVID Survey respondent

“ I was working part-time when I returned to school after a 10 year break. But I got promoted to a better full-time job at the end of the first semester back. The stress of the school and job were bad enough before I got COVID. Afterwards I considered dropping out again. If not for online classes I probably wouldn't graduate”

-Coping with COVID Survey respondent

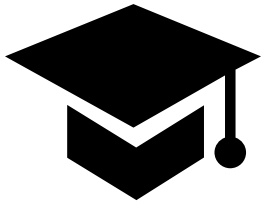
“ I don't think COVID has impacted my education that much. I think it has helped me, because I do better online. Before COVID I was getting really bad grades, but this year, the lowest grade I have is a C. And my last progress report was four A's, one C and one B. I think it's because when I'm at school, I worry about the drama and what people think of me. But when I'm at home and online, I feel like I can do and achieve anything.”

-Coping with COVID Survey respondent



Finding 5:

Amid uncertainty, college plans have changed.



48%

say they feel worse about their long term plans compared to before COVID-19.

13% said they have already or plan to change schools or leave altogether due to COVID-19.

Among the reasons given for changing plans for school:

- 42% indicate the need to work more
- 46% indicate uncertainty about the quality of instruction in on-line versus in-person classes
- 36% indicate concerns about the health and safety of family members



Student Voices

“ I will not be changing schools because I have already put two years of work and money into my current college, but at the same time, I do wish I could work more then I do now and I am very concerned about the quality of instruction. Half of the classes that are online can't be taught correctly due to the professors not being properly taught how to use the online system.”

-Coping with COVID Survey respondent

“ The way that I always thought of it is by the time I graduate college, I am hoping that I will be somewhat out of debt and that I can try to get a house. And I was going to get enough rooms where it could be like one of the rooms would be my office room. But now, I'm like, should I trust that with the pandemic? ”

-Alicia, Martha Layne Collins High School Senior

“ During this final semester. I have had to deal with one COVID related death. And another family member on life support due to COVID 19. I also was diagnosed with a pulmonary issue as well. I am due to graduate this summer. I was supposed to start Murray State University to complete my bachelors degree but due to the stress and pressure with my family and my own health issues, I am having to postpone my start date.”

-Coping with COVID Survey respondent

“ For me, online learning here has taken a negative impact on me academically. It has given me many thoughts of consideration of a break from school, possibly attending a community college and/or trade school.”

-Coping with COVID Survey respondent

“ I'm going to be honest, I'm just trying to survive. I think we all are during this time.

-Nicholas, Somerset Community College Freshman

“ COVID has definitely changed what I want to do with my degree after college. Because of the pandemic, an internship that I got has changed immensely, and I feel like that's definitely going to change the way my future is going to look. I always, even before COVID, thought of myself as an engineer. That's what I wanted to do. But COVID has definitely changed my outlook on life as a whole and how we conduct things.”

-Leah, Western Kentucky University Freshman

High School Seniors

From the responses received in our survey, it appears much more can be done to communicate with high school students about the value of postsecondary education, financial assistance available, and the changing learning environment – especially in light of COVID-19.

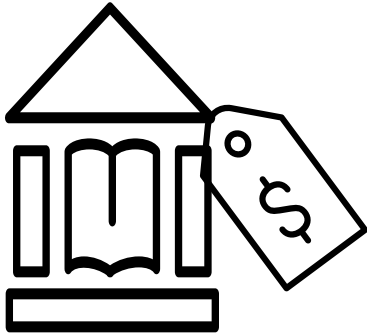
1st GENERATION
COLLEGE
STUDENTS

23%



Finding 1:

Students conflicted about the perceived value of college.



Despite the belief among some students that a college education is not required for a successful career, 80% of respondents said that their preference after high school is to pursue a college degree or certification. And a majority of these indicate a preference to attend a 4-year college or university.

47.5%

Do not believe some level of college education is required for a successful career. Another 10% are unsure.



Student Voices

“ [COVID-19] really hasn't changed my decision making as much as it has changed the process of applying. Changed how I look at the role of postsecondary and what it means for me. I still want to learn, but I'm more willing to learn in my own way rather than take the path I've been taught to take throughout my K-12 education.

College is more than a degree to me. I hate that we live in a society that is money driven, but COVID has shown that anything can happen. The future isn't ever guaranteed, and I'd rather make every day fulfilling right now. The traditional college system is broken in so many ways and doesn't really help students retain content, find a passion for learning, or help them grow as a whole person.”

-Coping with COVID Survey respondent

“ I, along with many other seniors, feel as though we are behind and unaware of many opportunities. I can't help but feel paranoid of missing a deadline because I don't really have any instruction on what to do.”

-Coping with COVID Survey respondent

“ I have to let myself develop and see where my career lies, so I'm trying to figure out where things are going to go. Growing up as an immigrant, I think that it was kind of difficult to try and find... It was difficult to not see the value in education from such a young age because that's where all the money was, and that's what I didn't have as much as a kid. And so seeing the difference in my friends' life versus my life impacted me.”

-Coping with COVID Survey respondent



Finding 2:

The ability to pay for school is a top concern.

Of those surveyed, 23% are moderately to very strongly considering attending a different college or university due to COVID-19 impacts on their financial circumstances. Additionally, only 58% of high school seniors indicate they understand well or very well the financial aid, scholarships, or loans available to them.

COST OF TUITION
MOST IMPACTS
COLLEGE DECISIONS

42%



Student Voices

“Communication is huge. Both high school counselors and colleges have not been able to help us through the process as much and that has been really hard on both the parents and students because we can be lost on money things.”

-Coping with COVID Survey respondent



Finding 3:

COVID-19 has impacted anxiety levels & how prospective students view the learning environment.

A majority -56% - of high school seniors are feeling more or much more anxious about their future plans after high school than they did a year ago. Nearly half of respondents - 47% - indicate that because of COVID-19 they prefer a school that offers a mix of in-person and virtual learning.

HIGH SCHOOL
SENIORS FEELING
MORE ANXIOUS

56%



Student Voices

“I’m really hoping they will look more at my grades before the pandemic. Last semester was very rough for me due to both personal reasons and the pandemic. My grades suffered a little. I am usually a very good student. I was just caught a little off guard last semester.”

-Coping with COVID Survey respondent

“I have considered taking a gap year just to see how everything pans out in the future. I have looked at colleges closer to home as well. I was originally looking at colleges far away from my home, but now I do not want to move that far away to a big city that has so many people. It is scary to move away, but with COVID-19 it is even scarier.”

-Coping with COVID Survey respondent

“Virtual learning is hard, so I’ve considered taking a year off. However, nobody knows when things will return to “normal” so I could potentially lose interest in going to college in the long run.”

-Coping with COVID Survey respondent

Adults Not Enrolled

While we had a limited number of adult students who are not currently enrolled but considering enrolling respond (<20), the insights provided are still valuable and helpful in thinking about ways to engage this critical student population. The majority of adults responding had some postsecondary experience - 36% reported having some college but no credential, and 45% said they had a bachelor's degree or higher. Over three-quarters reported being employed at the time of taking the survey.

ADULTS SURVEYED WITH SOME COLLEGE EXPERIENCE

36%

From the responses received in our survey, it appears that many understand how postsecondary education can impact their lives. But flexibility in the types of learning opportunities are necessary as well as increased communication about financial assistance available to pay for the cost of school.



Finding 1: The value of pursuing higher education is clear to most.

50% of respondents indicated their education goals were either to prepare for or advance in a job/career, and 71% said a college education is required for a successful career.



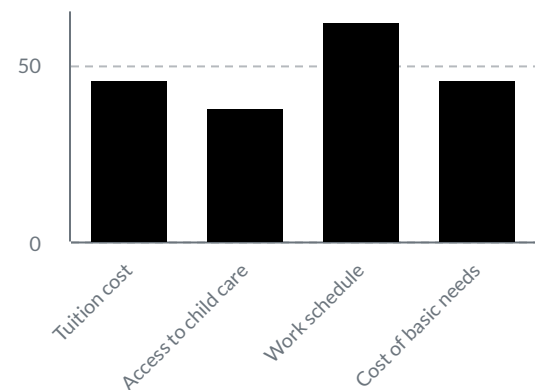
Finding 3: The ability to pay for school remains a top concern.

64% of respondents indicated they would require financial assistance in the form of scholarships, loans or other aid in order to attend school. And only 43% indicate that they understand well or very well the types of financial aid, scholarships, or loans available to them.



Finding 2: Interest & focus has shifted.

43% of respondents indicate they are less/much less likely to enroll in postsecondary education due to COVID-19, while 21% indicate they are more likely to enroll.



Prospective Student Voices

“The reason why I'm starting to look into schools is to get promoted at work. That is the main reason why. I've always been like oh, I want to do this, I want to do that but never a hundred percent sure on what to do. So, I actually genuinely started applying and looking and going to different schools about three weeks ago.”

Drew, UPS Employee

“[COVID-19] has made me doubt that I can sustain classes, work and home life with two school age kids that also require help with their online work.”

-Coping with COVID Survey respondent

“COVID has made me see that going back is essential and that I need to make more money. COVID scared me. I need better health insurance, lots of things to take care of my family.”

-Coping with COVID Survey respondent

“[COVID-19] has put enrolling more in the forefront of my mind, but made me question the viability of the cost in terms of both time and financial investment.”

-Coping with COVID Survey respondent

Intergenerational Research Team

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What We Learned

MARIE: I really started dealing with mental health issues my senior year of high school. The Common App and all of these things are so difficult for people whose parents don't understand the American college system. And that's not just immigrants, that's just anyone.

NICOLE: I very much agree with what Marie said. The only additional thing that I really wanted to add was that the financial affordability of college also can cause a lot of anxiety and stress on students and families in general and I think that goes hand-in-hand with the mental health problems that we're having.

LINDSEY: That does hit me because I think of all the people who are already struggling and all of their mental health issues have just been compounded and intensified now due to COVID. Reading these stories gave me such a palpable feel of the quantitative data, and I love that we included all those stories and have integrated them throughout the report.

CAMERON: I would say that what stood out to me is that not a single student said that it was easy to access mental health resources on their campus. Every student who answered our open response question around mental health resources said that they had some form of difficulty accessing these critical resources. As a student who has utilized these resources, I know how difficult they are to access. At the same time, as a student who lost a friend to the suicide epidemic that is sweeping through college campuses, I know how important these resources are. COVID-19 did not cause these problems but only exacerbated them further.

What We Learned

BRYAN: One thing that did strike me that's a little bit different is the virtual aspect of learning in terms of classes. 53% said staying motivated to do well in school and their virtual courses has been moderate or a serious problem, and then 47% reported the same about the ability to interact with classmates. That resonates with my own personal experience. It has been difficult for me to find, as one of my professors would say, a wolf pack to stick with together. Because if you don't find someone to stick with for a certain class, you are certainly preparing yourself for failure, especially for Chemistry. For about four weeks, I was alone in that class completely. I completely had to rely on myself. And it is really difficult to navigate, trying to pass without having a helping hand. It makes me lose motivation because why do I need to try if there is no one else to support me through this, if it's completely online?

KIM: I'm glad you said that, Bryan, because that's something we at GEAR UP Kentucky have been hearing a lot, just the inability to have that conversation before class, and then be able to have someone to study with and say, "What the heck did that professor mean?" You don't have that. I guess I should be used to these numbers by now, but the numbers around basic needs really broke my heart because we can't get to any of the education when we're not meeting those.

PERRY: I'm an advocate for education in my current job and hearing all your stories takes me back to my own college self. It makes me think about my own mental health issues in college and increases my sensitivity to that issue, and it makes me a better advocate. I can't tell you how helpful and how much gratitude I have for being able to hear your stories and hear you all interpret other people's stories being on the ground. For me, that is one of the best things about this project.

TERRY: I've served on a lot of different work groups and task groups over the years, but for the most part, the people in them had either very similar career experience, or training backgrounds or professional levels, things along those lines. But with this group, having the variety of both life experiences, and professional levels and different views made us really think about the questions we were asking from a different perspective, and it gave us a broader, richer approach to the work.

CAMERON: I think that this project was critically important to really finding the gaps where students in Kentucky are suffering. By utilizing this intergenerational citizen research team, we were able to really utilize our own skills, areas of interest, and personal networks to identify the problems that are plaguing college campuses throughout the Commonwealth.

MARIE: Something that I learned from this project is, without the physical environment of campus, college can be a very lonely process. I've learned that we're really not listening as much as we could be. And that's something that really worried me because I feel like I know a lot about postsecondary education and this data really, really shocked me.

BRYAN: For me, being a first-year student at Berea College, I learned that with the postsecondary research, there is an intersectionality. I think that's how you pronounce it. When you have one problem with this, you will always have another problem that's connected to this. And especially looking at the statistical data, there are numbers that go with these and stories behind all of these numbers, and they all just interconnect and intertwine with each other. And it just amazes me.

LINDSEY: I hope this becomes a best practice, easily replicated by other organizations, because no one cares more about the data than the people who are actually part of it. That is why this is so radical and so necessary. I feel this group is so special because we have that amazing intergenerational element. At every meeting, we have really honored the students and given them the voice as the primary stakeholder in every piece of this.

NICOLE: I agree. I think letting everyone know that this isn't just students that are coming up with the questions and finding the data, and it's not just older adults.

MARIE: I think these qualitative responses, these stories, are super, super important because while there are so many challenges for our postsecondary institutions, we can't really get to the root of the problem without letting students tell their stories.

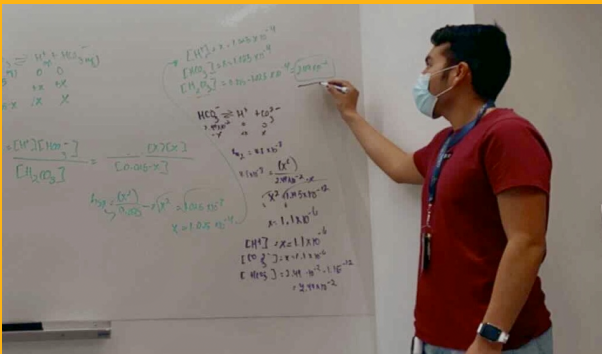
BRYAN: And adding to what Marie said, even though, yes, there is this statistic in front of us, those numbers are made up of people.

RACHEL: From designing, disseminating, and analyzing the survey to conducting the outreach interviews, and from thinking through the report to conceptualizing how and why we need to share this study with the world, this team exemplifies the promise of intergenerational, participatory-action education research. It is my greatest hope that with this approach, we can further bridge education policy and practice in Kentucky.



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Since 1983, the Prichard Committee has worked to study priority issues, inform the public and policy makers about best practices, and engage citizens, business leaders, families, students, and other stakeholders in a shared mission to move Kentucky to the top tier of states for education excellence and equity for all children, from their earliest years through postsecondary education.



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