



Membership matters.

## Effects of COVID-19 on High School Students & College Choice

*Seven ways you can help students and your institution in the coming months*



# About the Research

This report is designed to help institutions understand the immediate reaction students are having to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is based on Eduventures COVID-19 Senior Impact Research, a national online survey sent to high school students between March 27 and April 5, 2020. This sample of high school seniors includes:

- 7,117 college-bound high school students responded
- 93% respondents had been admitted to at least one college
- 7% still awaiting acceptance

This research addresses the following key questions:

- What are students' top concerns as they finish their final year of high school?
- How likely will the COVID-19 pandemic influence college choice or delay enrollment?
- What types of students are most likely to be considering other options?
- How important will virtual campus visit become in the current environment?
- How many students intend to double deposit?

# About the Sample

## Key demographics and segmentations

### Student Demographics

First Generation College	57%
less than \$50K	22%
\$50K - \$100K	36%
\$101K - \$150K	24%
> \$150K	18%
Non-White	47%
White	53%

### Likely Student Enrollment Choice

Community College/Vocational Technical	13%
In-State Public	44%
Out-of-State Public	11%
Private	33%

### SEVERITY OF COVID-19

Most Affected States	44%
Moderately Affected States	26%
Least Affected States	30%

### 2016 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION COUNTY VOTING

Lean Republican	26%
Balanced	52%
Lean Democratic	22%

Categorized at time of survey

- Most affected states: CA, FL, IL, LA, MA, MI, NJ, NY, PA, WA
- Moderately affected states: AK, CO, CT, GA, IN, MD, NC, OH, SD, TN, TX, WY
- Least affected states: AL, AR, AZ, DC, DE, HI, IA, ID, KS, KY, ME, MN, MO, MS, MT, ND, NE, NH, NM, NV, OK, OR, RI, SC, UT, VA, VT, WI, WV

# Why is this Important Now?

College-bound high school students are experiencing enormous disruption in their daily lives and in their transition to college in the age of the COVID-19 pandemic. As colleges work through an extremely uncertain yield season to make their classes, they must understand the current dynamics for students and families in order to best support decisions in this rapidly changing environment.

Certainly, what students tell us today is a bellwether of how they are feeling in the moment. The circumstances around the pandemic will change: may become more serious, or they may ease up. Either way, this information can help institutions see the terrain in which they are operating and develop the right communication strategies for the communities of students they serve.

We hope this initial Eduventures research into the COVID-19 crisis will allow institutions to both take immediate action and better prepare for scenarios that may develop in the coming months.

# Executive Summary



# Seven Ways You Can Help Students and Your Institution in the Coming Months

## 1. Concern is Evident, Be a Calming Voice for Families

**A barometer of the current climate shows that students are worried, but not necessarily panicking**

The communication style that institutions adopt is critical. Chief among considerations is that institutions offer a steady and calming source of support and information for students as they transition from high school to college.

## 2. Put Students First

**Students are enduring significant loss in their high school lives; colleges must place themselves in this context**

Additionally, a critical component of communication is for institutions to acknowledge the loss that students are feeling as they go through this difficult time. But do so within context. By this, we mean that colleges should make a concerted effort not to place their needs above those of students.

## 3. Stay the Course on Message

**Students worry about paying for college or delaying enrollment, but changing their choice is not in the cards for many**

The most pressing concern for students is whether or not they will have to delay their enrollment, either by their own volition or because of circumstances beyond their control. Then there are those who are worried they may have to actually change their choice. So this is no time to change your tune. Reinforce the strong value proposition that brought students to this point to choose your institution. Strengthen an already strong bond first. If you sense a student has deep concerns then address those issues.

# Seven Ways You Can Help Students and Your Institution in the Coming Months

## 4. Be Virtual Far Beyond the Visit

### **Prioritize your virtual opportunities for students to get to know your institution**

Students want to understand the curriculum and learn student life, financial aid, and career outcomes most of all. They want to do so with varying degree of interactivity. Your virtual campus visit is not top-of-mind content as they think about assessing fit. As you build out virtual opportunities for students to assess fit, keep in mind these most important needs.

## 5. Supercharge Your Melt Strategies – Students Who Wouldn't Normally Melt Will

### **The risk of melt is from delayed enrollment more so than currently changing choice; but this could still change**

Students have a high level of concern that their enrollment may be delayed. If that delay is realized—either because the student cannot afford to attend immediately or institutions cannot bring students to campus in the fall—we will see more students considering a change of enrollment choice. Institutions elevate melt strategies to be in rich communication with deposited students. Institutions should know where deposited students stand in terms family situation. Institutions should provide transparent, timely, and supportive information to students in the transition from decision to enrollment.

# Seven Ways You Can Help Students and Your Institution in the Coming Months

## **6. Strike the Right Tone – Communicate with Your Communities in Appropriate Ways** **Reaction to COVID-19 involves a complex interplay of regional infection severity and socio-political affiliations**

The reaction to COVID-19 as an influence on college choice is as complex as everything we read in the news every day. Consider the students, families, and communities you serve. How might they be reacting to COVID-19? And how might that response change in the future? The answers to these questions should inform your communications strategy.

## **7. Develop Financial Aid Strategies for Students who have Experienced Economic Loss** **Students who have already experienced job loss have a high expectation of delaying their college enrollment**

The special segment of student who have already experienced economic loss due to COVID-19 requires specific outreach. What financial aid resources has your institution identified to help these students? How can you make sure that students in difficult circumstances are aware of the resources available to help them? Additionally, in the instance that a student may not be able to enroll, what kind of counseling are you able to provide to help them find the right enrollment opportunity for the moment or to continue the relationship in the future?

# Findings

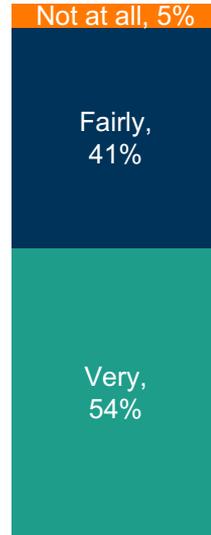
# 1. Concern is Evident, Be a Calming Voice for Families

**A barometer of the current climate shows that students are worried, but not necessarily panicking**

Has your likely college choice been influenced by the COVID-19 crisis?



How confident are you that [your choice] is the right choice for you?



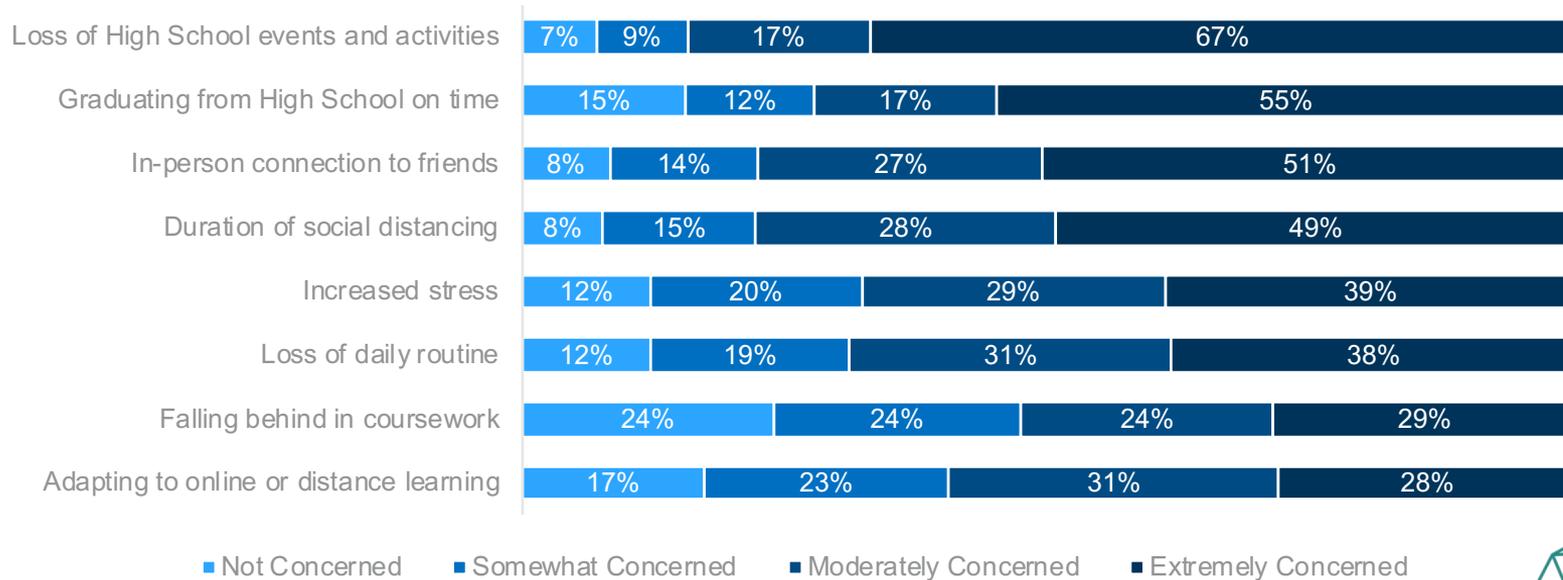
How likely are you to send a deposit to more than one school?



## 2. Put Students First

Students are enduring significant loss in their high school lives; college's must place themselves in this context

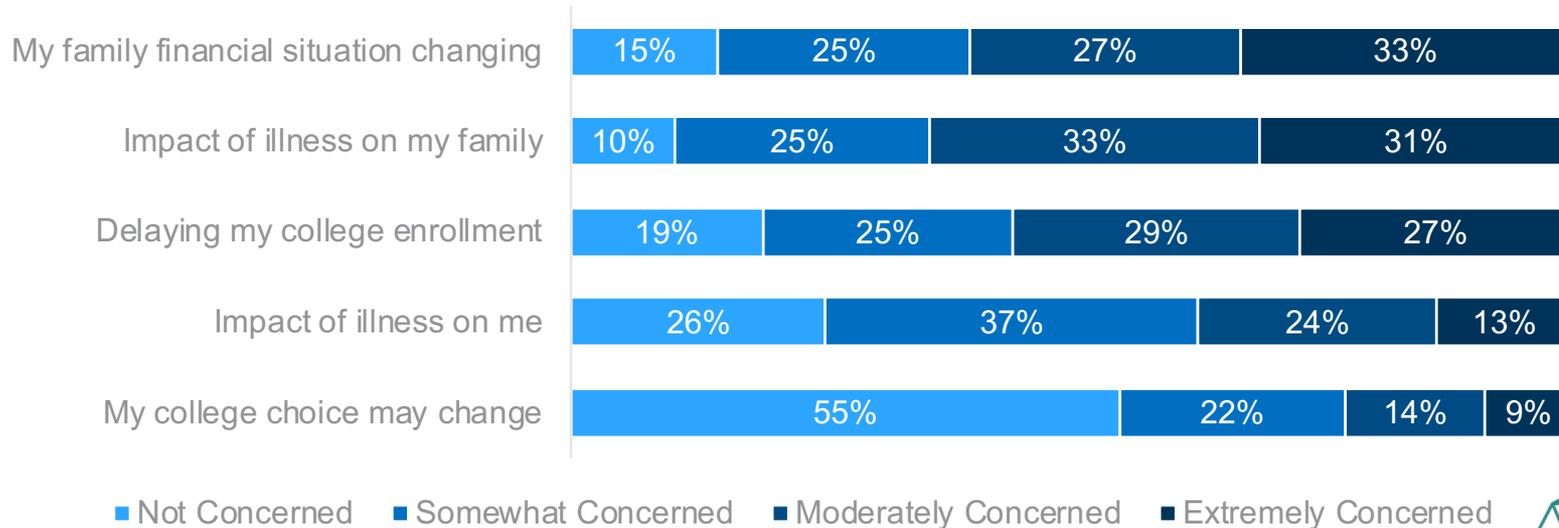
As you think about your current high school experience, what are you concerned about?



### 3. Stay the Course on Message

Students worry about paying for college, or delaying enrollment, but changing their choice is not in the cards for many

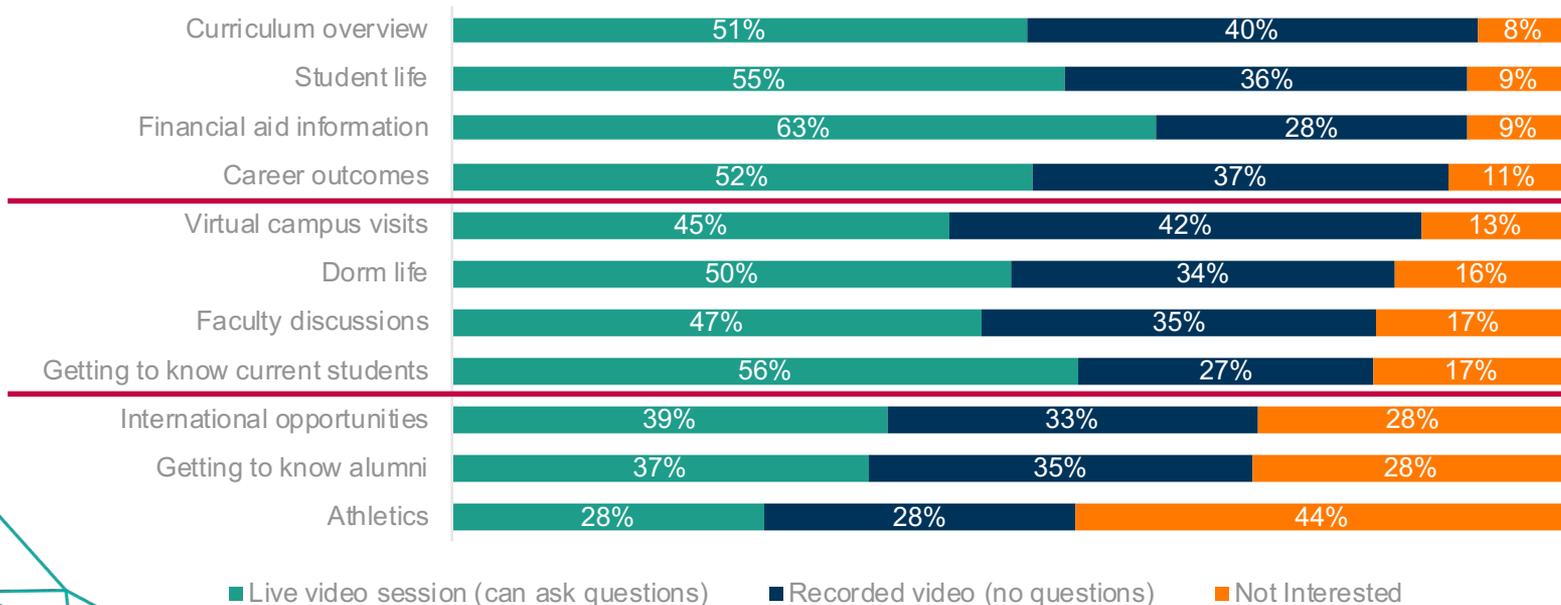
As you think about your college choice during this uncertain time, which of the following are you concerned about?



# 4. Be Virtual Far Beyond the Visit

**Prioritize your virtual opportunities for students to get to know your institution based on the information that students say is most valuable to them**

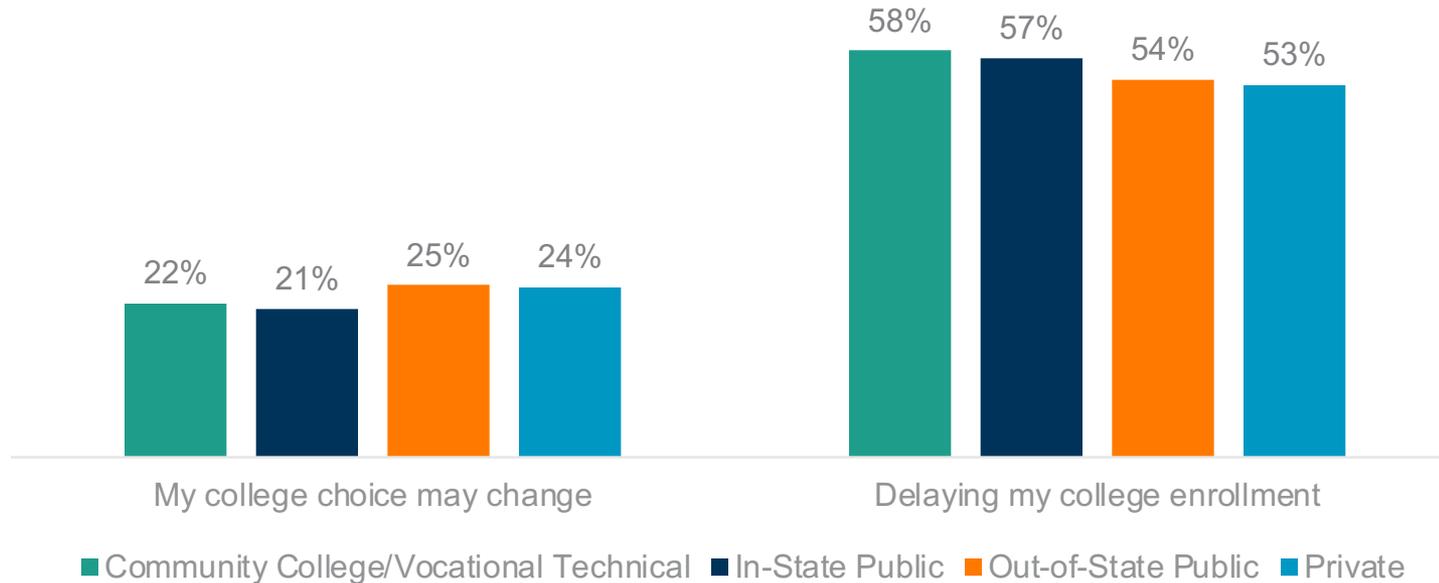
In the absence of campus visit/in-person opportunities, how would you prefer to get to know whether a school is a good fit for you



# 5. Supercharge Your Melt Strategies – Students Who Wouldn't Normally Melt Will

The risk of melt is from delayed enrollment more so than changing college choice, but this may change

As you think about your college choice during this uncertain time, which of the following are you concerned about? By Type of College Attending



\* Percent Very and Extremely Concerned

# 6. Strike the Right Tone – Communicate with Your Communities in Appropriate Ways

Reaction to COVID-19 involves a complex interplay of regional infection severity and socio-political affiliations

**Likelihood of COVID-19 Influencing College Choice by Affected Region and 2016 Presidential Election County Leaning\***

	Republican Leaning	Balanced	Democratic Leaning
Most Affected	33%	39%	45%
Moderately Affected	35%	39%	39%
Least Affected	31%	34%	36%

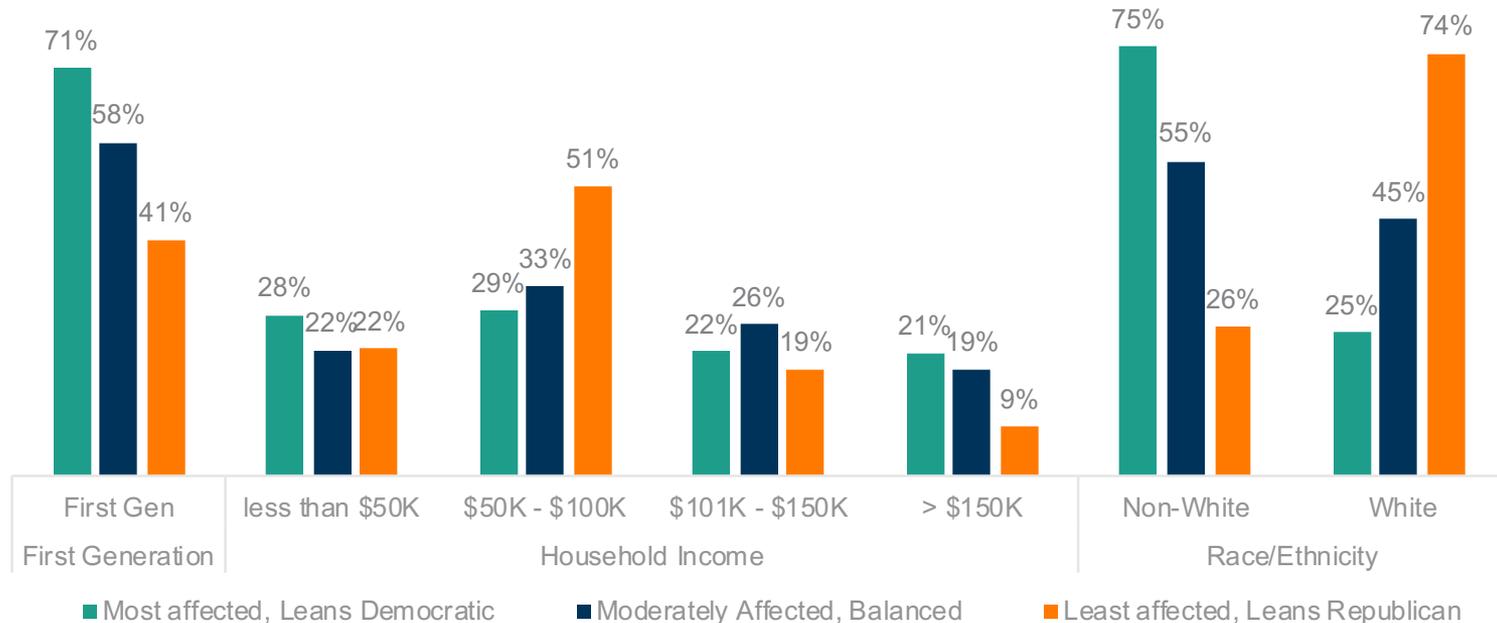
- Student region alone cannot account for the level of concern about COVID-19
- In fact, much of the concern is associated by political leaning of the community in which the student is located
- Regional severity and political leaning together mark the ends of the spectrum of concern about COVID-19
- The variation in concern may change as we move forward in time
- For now, it is particularly important for institutions to understand their students and the communities they serve in order to understand the level of concern that students might have

\*County-level voting percentage in the 2016 presidential election recoded to reflect whether the students community leans Republican, is relatively balanced, or leans Democratic.

# 6. Cont. – Knowing Who Your Students are Matters more than Ever

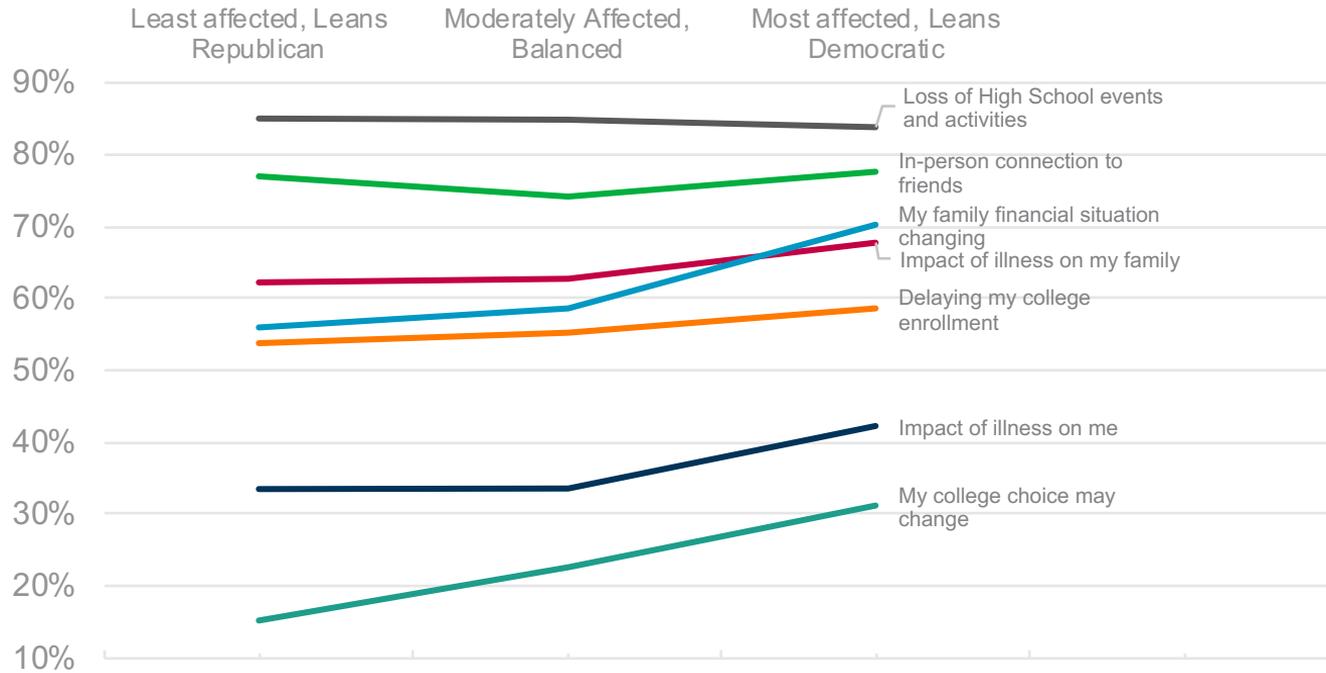
Across the geographic/socio-political spectrum, students demographics are quite different

Demographics across the COVID-19 Concern Spectrum



# 6. Cont. – High School Concerns Similar; Others Quite Different

**Worries about college choice, enrollment delays, finances, and the impact of the illness on family are highest among students in the most affected, democratic leaning counties**



\*Percent very and extremely concerned

# 7. Develop Financial Aid Strategies for Students who have Experienced Economic Loss

**Students who have already experienced job loss have a high expectation of delaying their college enrollment or changing their college choice**

- 34% of all respondents report some lost family income
- Among these students, 64% believe they may experience a delay in college enrollment
- Nearly a third are concerned they may change their choice (30%)
- If enrollment is delayed, they are largely (85%) unsure of how long the delay will be
- Income loss is a regional factor; 49% of students with lost income reside in heavily affected states
- These students are modestly more likely to be first-generation, low-income, and under-represented minority students

# What will be Important Later?

At this moment, the COVID-19 crisis has no clear resolution in sight. With states deciding to close schools for the rest of the school year and colleges considering their options for the summer or fall, uncertainty remains high.

The greatest certainty, however, is that families are experiencing, and will continue to experience, financial instability. While we may see some families rebound from initial losses, we will see others endure financial loss as layoffs move deeper into the economy. The economic impact will likely last years and have as yet unknown effects on college enrollment. These shifts in enrollment are something we will be following closely in the coming months.

We feel that institutions must be prepared for scenarios that include increased financial pressure on families. This means moving beyond the immediate communication and yield efforts into discussions of sustainable financial aid and pricing strategies that will assist families in the difficult time ahead.

At Eduventures, our next opportunity to hear from students will be in our Admitted Student Research in June. This research will gather further insight into the impact of COVID-19 on student enrollment decisions. Comparisons to prior year data will reveal changes in student behavior. Additional special topic questions will explore how students have reacted to the pressure on their decision. We invite you to share your thoughts, questions, and concerns with us as we develop the research.

Contact us

800.862.7759

[contact@nrccua.org](mailto:contact@nrccua.org)

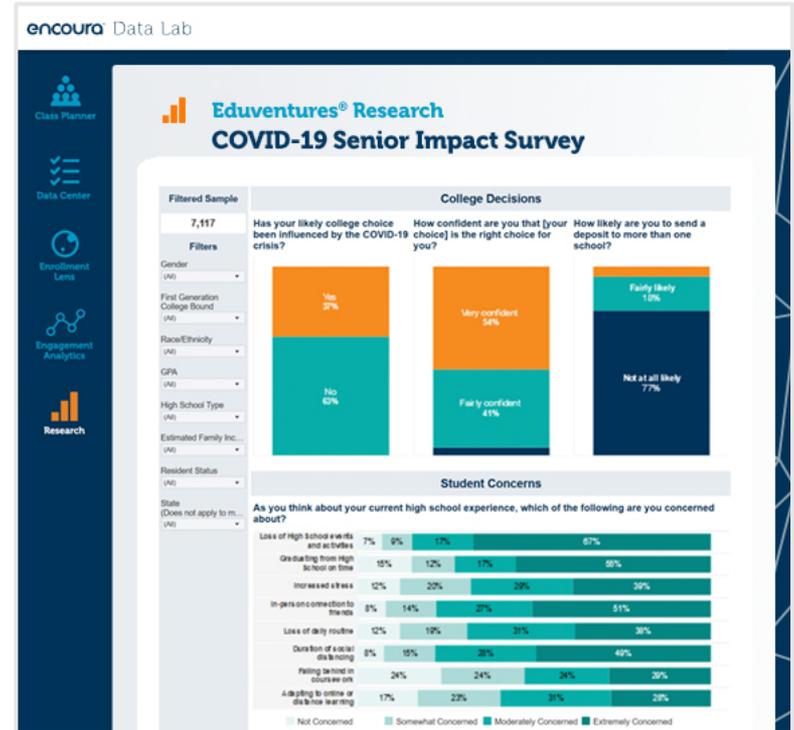
# Data Will be Available in Encoura Data Lab for Further Segmentation

## Great Outcomes Start with Data-Driven Decisions

Encoura Data Lab is an enrollment management technology platform that combines student intelligence data, advanced analytics, and education-specific research so institutions can make informed decisions that optimize fit and create the highest probability of success. Be more strategic with actionable insights that help you evolve your enrollment office and meet or exceed your recruiting goals. Encoura Data Lab is only available to schools that are members of ACT | NRCCUA.

## COVID-19 Senior Impact Survey Featured Segmentations

- Gender
- Race/ethnicity
- First-generation status
- Estimated annual household income
- State
- Census division and region
- Regional severity of COVID-19
- High school GPA
- High school type
- Characteristics of college likely to attend





# Thank you.

**ANY QUESTIONS?**

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