

RISING SENIORS AND THEIR PARENTS



COVID-19 has sent shockwaves through the higher education industry. Campus closures in the spring forced students out of dormitories, canceled campus tours and events, and more. Three in five rising seniors said an in-person experience with a prospective school has “a lot of” or “critical” importance. Less than 5% said it plays no role at all. Along with prospective college students, their parents, guardians, and families also have concerns about what college in the time of coronavirus will bring. In other words—if you’re consumed by thoughts of COVID-19 and college, you’re not alone.

CollegeXpress and Carnegie Dartlet, the agency that houses CollegeXpress, have conducted multiple surveys to better understand where these rising seniors and their families land on topics ranging from choosing a college to learning remotely. In this report, we’ve combined the two data sets to bring you a holistic view of the possible scenarios—and all of the potential challenges that come with them.

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TOURS, EVENTS, ETC.

Campus tours are often viewed as a crucial element to getting to know a college. Though virtual tours have become more commonplace in recent years, the impact of an in-person experience can not be overstated.

STUDENTS

- 60% of rising seniors indicated an in-person campus visit experience is **critical** to them despite the pandemic.
- 40% of students reported having participated in a virtual tour and/or information session but were largely dissatisfied, citing that virtual experiences **"all felt the same."**
- The majority of students felt the loss of an in-person experience.

PARENTS

- Nearly 70% of parents surveyed cited in-person events as being **"very important"** or **"absolutely critical,"** with only 14% stating these in-person experiences were only "slightly" or "not at all important."
- Both parents and students want live and interactive tours and events with the ability to ask current students and admission counselors questions in real time.

EARLY ACTION AND EARLY DECISION

Many schools are offering an early application in November—which means that rising seniors may be making college choices within the 2020 calendar year. But their inability to attend on-campus events (and the general uncertainty about what challenges the school year will bring) has prompted some consideration of adjusting the November dates. Current confidence from students suggests that may not be necessary, and with only about one in five students typically applying early, these numbers give no cause for concern.

STUDENTS

- Only one in five students has no confidence to make their decision by then at all, and more than a third are **somewhat confident.**
- Over 50% of students stated that they're **comfortable** making this decision.

PARENTS

- Only 35% of parents cited being **uncomfortable** with their child applying Early Action or Early Decision.

COLLEGE SEARCH AND INFORMATION SEEKING

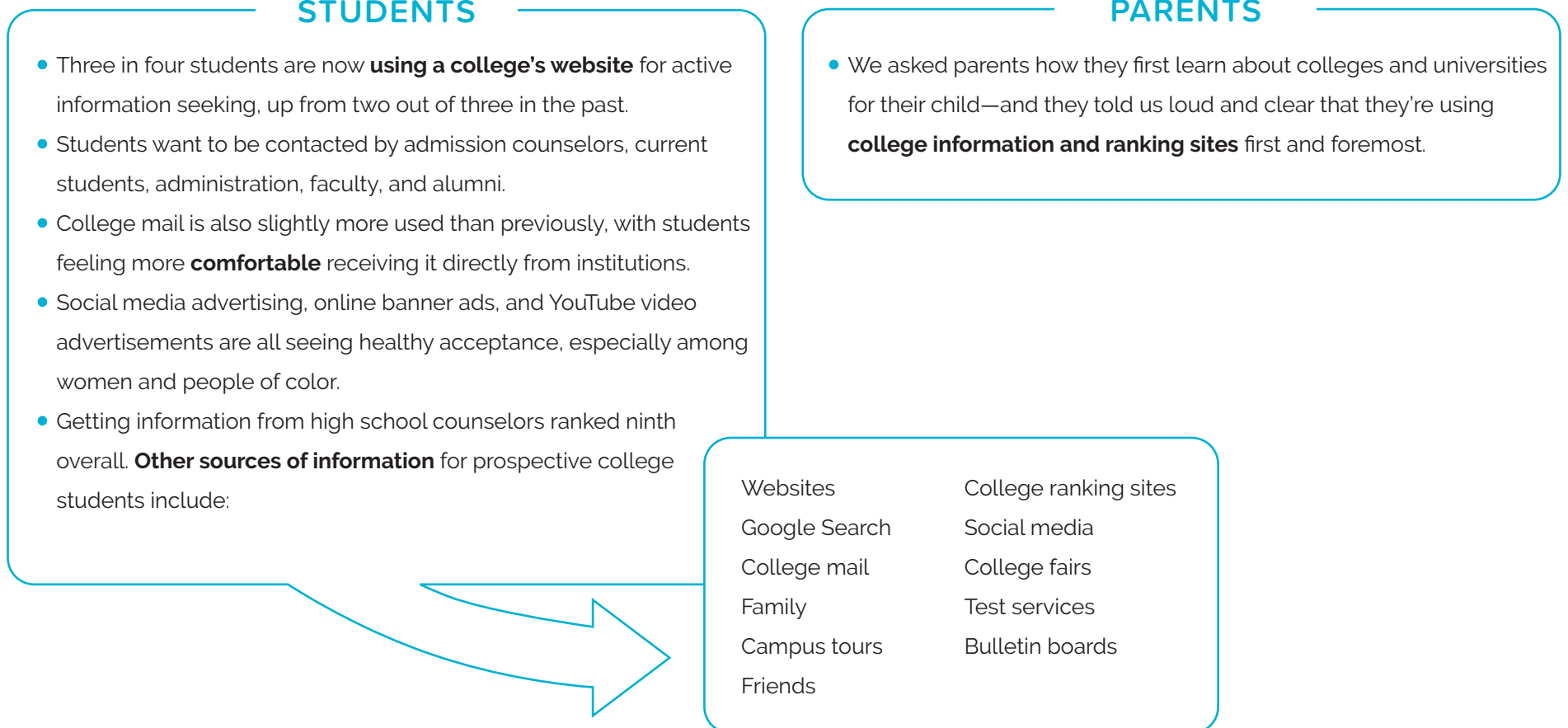
Though much of their college search process had already occurred online prior to COVID-19, the students we surveyed reported using more sources to actively seek out information and have gone to digital offerings with greater regularity.

STUDENTS

- Three in four students are now **using a college's website** for active information seeking, up from two out of three in the past.
- Students want to be contacted by admission counselors, current students, administration, faculty, and alumni.
- College mail is also slightly more used than previously, with students feeling more **comfortable** receiving it directly from institutions.
- Social media advertising, online banner ads, and YouTube video advertisements are all seeing healthy acceptance, especially among women and people of color.
- Getting information from high school counselors ranked ninth overall. **Other sources of information** for prospective college students include:

PARENTS

- We asked parents how they first learn about colleges and universities for their child—and they told us loud and clear that they're using **college information and ranking sites** first and foremost.



Websites	College ranking sites
Google Search	Social media
College mail	College fairs
Family	Test services
Campus tours	Bulletin boards
Friends	

COLLEGE APPLICATIONS AND DECISIONS

In a pre-COVID-19 world, many rising seniors would have already toured campuses, taken standardized tests, and formulated a list of colleges they wish to apply to by July. Now, new considerations (and worries) are at play.

STUDENTS

- Distance from home measures in college choice have returned to pre-COVID-19 levels.
- Most students said the ideal institution would be **in their hometown or within about 150 miles of home.**
- About 18% want to go **beyond their immediate region**, including one in 10 who wish to go out of state or far away from home.
- COVID-19 **has not significantly impacted** students' willingness to live on campus, to travel for education, or their preference on the size of the school they want to attend.

PARENTS

- Parent data shows that by mid-June, only 25% of students had made their final decision on which colleges to apply to, with 30% of parents citing that their child "**mostly**" knew where they wanted to apply.
- Both email and direct mail were ranked high as information sources for parents, so these more traditional methods are still resonating with them.
- 96% of parents responded that **they are involved** in their child's discovery and exploration of colleges.

TESTS, EXAMS, AND EVALUATIONS

With many students having never taken an exam online before, the shift to an entirely virtual learning model has been challenging for some. Distractions, lack of focus, and technical problems were concerns for most, though some said they simply had no way to take a test outside of the classroom setting.

STUDENTS

- For every student who has **low confidence** about taking a test at home, there is one who is **confident**.
- To date, more than half of the respondents (55%) said they **have already** taken a college entrance exam. In addition, 72% said they **will definitely** take a first/additional entrance exam in the future, with 22% saying they **might** take one.
- "Test-optional" schools were seen as slightly positive in attracting rising seniors. Among the respondents, 42% were **more likely** to apply to a test-optional school, while 48% said it **makes no difference** to them. Only one in 10 students would be **less likely** to apply to a school that is test-optional.

PARENTS

- 73% of parents reported that their child was **still planning** to take a standardized test in the coming months.
- Qualitative responses indicated concern for testing at home as an alternative, but the data shows that some parents are **open to home testing** as an option.

PAYING FOR COLLEGE

The changing economy will most certainly affect this rising senior class. More than half of the survey respondents stated they are more worried about paying for school since the onset of the pandemic. The other half is mostly made up of those who see their concern as “about the same.” Just 5% said they are in a better place to afford college.

STUDENTS

- 52% said they are **more concerned** about paying for college since the outbreak.
- One in four rising senior prospects has had a parent laid off, either permanently or temporarily, and nearly the same number has lost their own employment.

PARENTS

- Almost 95% of parents expressed **equal or greater concern**, which was also echoed and heightened among minority students when we asked a similar question to students directly.

ONLINE LEARNING AND SCREEN TIME

In March, our research suggested that students in the Class of 2020 had more interest in online classes than ever before. However, it seems that rising seniors have very little interest in completing coursework online in a more permanent or long-term format.

STUDENTS

- 28% of student respondents **will not consider** online education at all.
- 11% are strongly considering or prefer online courses.

PARENTS

- 82% of parents reported their child was **online significantly more** now than before the outbreak of COVID-19.
- 60% stated their child was online more than **three additional hours**.
- Less than 20% reported that their child was online for about the same amount of time.

TAKEAWAYS AND RESOURCES

COVID-19 has introduced many novel elements (and difficulties) to the college search and application process. Each student and family will need to make their college decisions based on their own unique circumstances, but because it is unlikely that these considerations will fall away in the near future, we should embrace this “new normal” as a time to put the health and safety of our families and communities above all else. Fortunately, the options are nearly endless when it comes to higher education—students may not have the college experience they imagined, but it will certainly be an experience nonetheless.

CollegeXpress is here to help you navigate the uncharted waters of college and COVID-19; please don't hesitate to [contact us](#) to let us know how we can better serve you.

RESOURCES

These CollegeXpress blogs are sure to clarify some of your most pressing questions and concerns:

[Planning for College During COVID-19: Counselor Q&A](#)

[COVID-19 and Virtual Campus Tours](#)

[The Future of the SAT and ACT During COVID-19](#)

[4 Ways to Pay for College in the Face of COVID-19](#)

To see the entirety of the survey data, view or download the [Rising Senior Report \(PDF\)](#) and [Rising Senior Parent Report \(PDF\)](#) now.