Public Viewpoint:

Reconnecting Recent High School Grads With Their Education Aspirations

June 23, 2021
One-third of pandemic high school graduates have become *disrupted students* — choosing not to pursue their desires for more education at this time.

2020 & 2021 high school graduates

- 2020 graduates who wanted additional education but decided not to enroll right away
- 2021 expected graduates who want to get additional education but have decided not to for now
- Already have enrolled or will enroll
- Never wanted more education

BASE: The 36% shown above represents our total respondents (n=1,212). The other 64% were contacted but did not qualify for the survey for the reasons listed above.
What three words would you use to describe how you feel about getting more education in the future?
Confused, Obligated, Stressed. I’m confused as to what I want to spend the rest of my life doing and don’t want to go into debt straight out of high school for something I probably won’t end up doing. I feel obligated because the only real way to make livable money is to get a higher education after high school unless you go into trades. I’m stressed because I have no money or family to help me pay for the high cost of college and this last year I haven’t made good enough grades.

— A Class of 2021 disrupted student in West Virginia who is employed full-time and providing financial support to household. Parents who do not have a college degree.

SOURCE: Verbatim response to online survey question.
Annoyed, overwhelmed, indecisive. Post-high school education in America is very expensive, not accessible, and may not even be the right path for the lifestyle one wants. It feels as if it is the only choice but pointless at the same time. I don't want to waste all my time and money on an education that gets me a career I don't even enjoy.

— A Class of 2020 disrupted student in Arizona who is employed full-time and providing financial support to household.
Excited, hopeful, confident. These words are pretty self-explanatory, but I chose them because no matter what the future holds, I’m excited for it after all new things, even trials, sharpen you and make you better. It could be good or bad, but either way I’m going to learn and improve, even if it’s not in the way I had exactly planned it, it will still all work out for me — and I am confident in that.

— A Class of 2021 disrupted student in Iowa who is employed part-time. Parents do not have a college degree.
The three words I would use are excited, nervous, and worried. I picked excited because I am ready to start my career, and going to college is that first step. I chose nervous because I was never that good in school, and I’m nervous the experience will be difficult and stressful for me. Lastly, I picked worried because of my financial situation. I don’t have money saved up for college, and I’m worried I will be in debt with student loans for the rest of my life.

— A Class of 2020 disrupted student in North Carolina who is employed full-time and providing financial support to household. Parents do not have a college degree.
The Past
Disrupted students from the Class of 2021 disconnected earlier in the process

- Spoke to adult at high school about more education: 76% (2020), 72% (2021)
- Talked to a school or program admissions counselor on the phone, online, or in person: 56% (2020), 48% (2021)
- Applied to a college or some other program: 53% (2020), 35% (2021)
- Received an acceptance letter from a college or program: 40% (2020), 23% (2021)
- Applied for educational financial aid: 39% (2020), 29% (2021)

BASE: All respondents (n=1,212).
Disrupted Black and Latino students got further in the process before disconnecting

- Spoke to adult at high school about more education:
  - White: 75%
  - Latino: 74%
  - Black: 76%

- Talked to a school or program admissions counselor on the phone, online, or in-person:
  - White: 51%
  - Latino: 50%
  - Black: 58%

- Applied to a college or some other program:
  - White: 39%
  - Latino: 47%
  - Black: 48%

- Received an acceptance letter from a college or program:
  - White: 29%
  - Latino: 32%
  - Black: 38%

- Applied for educational financial aid:
  - White: 28%
  - Latino: 40%
  - Black: 38%

BASE: All respondents (n=1,212).
Feelings of stress, anxiety, and uncertainty are identified as the primary reason for not pursuing more education now

Largest influence on decision not to get more education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling too much stress, anxiety, or uncertainty</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial pressure on me and my family/ cannot afford education</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health risks of attending classes in person</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to care for a family member</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure if education would help me have a job or career I want</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My grades got worse</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The program or courses I want are not available</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less connection to high school counselors and teachers</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schools and programs aren't providing the kind of experience I want anymore</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't have access to the technology or internet needed for online education</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BASE: Respondents for whom at least one of these factors was an influence in their decision (n=824); 2020 disrupted students (n=448); 2021 disrupted students (n=376).
Disrupted Latino students were more likely than others to feel financial pressure, and disrupted Black students were more likely than others to be influenced by health risks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for Not Getting More Education</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>Black</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling too much stress or anxiety</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial pressure on me and my family</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health risks of attending classes in person</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to care for a family member</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BASE: All respondents (n=1,212).
The Present
Lower-income disrupted students are much more likely to say it has become more difficult to find information and guidance.

COVID-19 made it harder to …

- **Find information about my different options for education after high school**
  - Disrupted Students Who Are Not Low-Income: 41%
  - Disrupted Students Who Have Low Income: 48%

- **Find information about how I could pay for education after high school**
  - Disrupted Students Who Are Not Low-Income: 45%
  - Disrupted Students Who Have Low Income: 61%

- **Apply to a college or another education program**
  - Disrupted Students Who Are Not Low-Income: 41%
  - Disrupted Students Who Have Low Income: 50%

BASE: All respondents (n=1,212).
Only half of disrupted students feel they have the needed social capital

I know people who can help me find a way to get the education after high school that is right for me

- **52%**
- **46%**
- **56%**

**BASE:** All respondents (n=1,212).
When considering more education, the majority of disrupted students believe in its promise and in themselves—but question its value.

**It will help me get a good job**

- **Agree**: 69%
- **Disagree**: 31%
- **Unsure**: 0%

**I will be a successful student**

- **Agree**: 63%
- **Disagree**: 37%
- **Unsure**: 0%

**It will be worth the cost**

- **Agree**: 45%
- **Disagree**: 55%
- **Unsure**: 0%

BASE: All respondents (n=1,212).
Seven in ten disrupted students have changed their plans for future education

Changes in education considerations

- Less expensive program: 35%
- Closer to home: 31%
- Different major or program of study: 21%
- Shorter program: 18%
- Won't enroll in college or program: 6%
- My plans have not changed: 30%

BASE: Those likely to consider education in future (n=1,187).
Black disrupted students are most likely to have revised their postsecondary education path

Changes in education considerations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Latino</th>
<th>Black</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less expensive program</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closer to home</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BASE: Those likely to consider education in future (n=1,187).
Guidance, affordability, and connection to career are the desired resources

Most helpful items when trying to get more education

- An advisor: 11.6
- Earn and learn: 10.9
- Easier financial aid: 10.6
- Career pathways: 9.3
- Accessible schedules: 9.2
- Mentoring and support: 8.0
- Computer and internet: 7.6
- Easier to apply: 6.5
- Faster completion: 5.9
- College and program communication: 5.6
- High school counseling: 4.8
- In-person learning: 4.2
- Summer prep programs: 3.1
- Meet other students: 2.6

BASE: All respondents (n=1,212). Respondents were presented with different potential solutions and asked to rank which ones were most and least helpful. The choices were randomized and repeated in different combinations in a Max Diff exercise. The results are displayed in the chart above. The numbers are relative in that a solution ranked as an 8 would be four times more likely to be chosen than a solution ranked as a 2, for example.
A nationwide group of experts identified priorities for helping disrupted students

**Guidance**
- Clear and consistent information
- Invest in high school and college counselors
- Train and mobilize faculty

**Affordability**
- Increase financial aid access and awards
- Grow earn-as-you-learn
- Stackable credentials with immediate earning power

**Connection to Career**
- Transparent earnings information
- Map education to career paths
- Work-based and applied learning
Key Findings

• **Feelings of stress, anxiety, and uncertainty were the most influential reasons disrupted students delayed their education; financial pressures were also significant.** Black students were also more likely than others to say they did not enroll due to health concerns or needing to care for a family member at home.

• **Disrupted students from the Class of 2021 became disconnected from the college-going process at an earlier point compared to the Class of 2020.** Among disrupted students in the Class of 2020, 4 in 10 had received an acceptance letter and applied for financial aid, while among disrupted learners in the Class of 2021, only 23 percent had been accepted to a college or program.

• **The most helpful supports identified by disrupted students are:**
  - **Guidance:** Disrupted learners seek trusted advisors, yet fewer than half of Black and Latino disrupted students know someone who they feel can help them find a way to get the education that is right for them.
  - **Affordability:** Disrupted learners would benefit from opportunities to learn and earn along with easier access to financial aid.
  - **Connection to Career:** Mapping paths and plans through education to employment is vital as disrupted students believe in the possibilities but question the cost value.
Learn more at StradaInsights.org
Methodology: Disrupted Students

Strada and its research partner, Heart + Mind Strategies, conducted this survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AUDIENCE</th>
<th>Total Sample (n=1,212)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- 2020 graduates (n=626) who wanted to get additional education after high school but decided not to enroll right away.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- 2021 graduates (n=586) who wanted to get additional education after high school but decided not to for now</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MODE</th>
<th>Online Survey, 14 minutes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATES</th>
<th>April 30 – May 16, 2021</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GEOGRAPHY</th>
<th>Nationally representative sample</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Label</td>
<td>Full Text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An advisor</td>
<td>An advisor to help with financial aid, classes, and finding a career path</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earn and learn</td>
<td>How to get an education while still working and earning money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easier financial aid</td>
<td>Easier process to get financial aid to pay for school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career pathways</td>
<td>Clear information on the jobs people can get with different education options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessible schedules</td>
<td>Programs and courses that fit my schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring and support</td>
<td>Mentoring and support to help me succeed as a student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer and internet</td>
<td>Free laptop, internet, and technical support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easier to apply</td>
<td>Easier process to apply to college and other programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faster completion</td>
<td>Programs that could be completed faster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College and program communication</td>
<td>Better communication from college and other programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school counseling</td>
<td>Better information and counseling from my high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-person learning</td>
<td>All classes and learning in-person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer prep programs</td>
<td>Summer programs to help me get ready</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet other students</td>
<td>Opportunities to get to know other students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Project Reconnect

What do we know about learners whose education was disrupted by the pandemic? How can we best support them and help reconnect them with their education aspirations?

- May Public Viewpoint on disrupted learners
- Powering Purpose: how community colleges can fuel economic opportunity
- Reconnecting to College for the High School Classes of 2020, 2021: Insights from National Experts