Public Viewpoint

Listening to Recent High School Grads: ‘Be Mindful of What We Have Gone Through’

Sept. 29, 2021
Setting the Stage
Stark racial gaps in postsecondary attainment persist

**National Attainment by Race and Ethnicity 2009-2019**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>2019 Attainment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>72.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>52.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>43.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>27.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**2019 Population Statistics**

- 72.3% Asian or Pacific Islander
- 52.0% White
- 43.8% Overall
- 31.8% Black
- 27.9% Hispanic
- 21.2% American Indian or Alaska Native

More than one-third of U.S. adults changed or canceled their education plans as a result of the COVID-19 crisis

SOURCE: Strada Public Viewpoint surveys, February to April 2021. Base: nonretired adults ages 18 and older, n=2,291. *Percentages do not sum to 100 percent as respondents could identify multiple changes.
Young adults, Latinos, and Asian Americans are more likely to have had their education disrupted.

Share of adults with an education plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Changed education plans</th>
<th>Canceled education plans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-24</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 or older</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fall 2020 enrollment declines hit hardest at schools serving more lower income and people of color

OVERALL

6.8% on average

4.5x Pre-pandemic declines

Spring 2021 enrollment dropped most for 18- to 24-year-olds, especially at community colleges

% Change from Spring 2020 to Spring 2021

18 to 24 Over 24

All Sectors

18 to 24 Over 24

Public 2-year

18 to 24 Over 24

Public 4-year

- 5.0% - 1.2%

- 6.1% - 2.0%

- 13.2% - 2.7%

Disrupted learners shared their experiences

Strada and its research partner, Heart + Mind Strategies, conducted a mixed-methods study:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th>Online survey (nationally representative)</th>
<th>Online discussion board</th>
<th>1:1 interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>n=1,212</td>
<td>Online discussion board participants</td>
<td>n=17</td>
<td>n=12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class of 2020: 626 grads</td>
<td>Class of 2021: 586 grads</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disrupted students: Changed or delayed plans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MODE</th>
<th>Online survey, 14 minutes</th>
<th>Online discussion board conducted over 3 days</th>
<th>Interviews conducted over Zoom lasting 45-70 minutes</th>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>Online discussion board conducted over 3 days</td>
<td>Interviews conducted over Zoom lasting 45-70 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>April 30 – May 16, 2021</td>
<td>June 2021</td>
<td>July 2021</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Key Findings

● Students disrupted by the pandemic recognize that the world into which they’ve graduated differs dramatically from what they expected, and they question whether the education, career, and financing options that worked for other students are still relevant today.

● Despite numerous stressors fueling anxiety about the future, students remain committed to postsecondary education. They are demonstrating resilience by actively exploring different education and career options and setting new goals for themselves.

● Students need open-minded, personalized college and career guidance that gives them a window into future career options.

● Removing financial barriers is a core priority for students. The sudden disruption of the pandemic contributed to a heightened awareness of the risks associated with accruing debt and led to more loan-averse attitudes.

● Students know that connecting college and career will prepare them for an uncertain world of work. They want flexibility and career relevance infused into their educational experience so they can prepare for their intended career while being ready to pivot to other options as needed.
Listening to the High School Classes of 2020 and 2021
How are students responding to the disruption of the pandemic?

SOURCE: Based on one-on-one interviews with 12 recent high school graduates from Class of 2020 and 2021 conducted in June and July 2021. https://cci.stradaeducation.org/recentgrads/#resilience-key
What do disrupted students say they need?

SOURCE: Based on one-on-one interviews with 12 recent high school graduates from Class of 2020 and 2021 conducted in June and July 2021. [https://cci.stradaeducation.org/recentgrads/#reconnect-vid](https://cci.stradaeducation.org/recentgrads/#reconnect-vid)
What we heard: Personalize college and career guidance

What We Heard

“Be open-minded.”
- Class of 2021, California

“Focus on the students.”
- Class of 2020, Texas

“Advice from people who’ve already done it.”
- Class of 2021, Oregon

How We Can Act

• Bolster students’ capacities to discover their own learning needs and values and promote multiple pathways to postsecondary and career success.

• Invest in near-peer and whole-school models of college advising and develop partnerships especially in the summer transition between high school and college.

• Provide students with greater access to mentors, peers, and people’s stories about navigating career paths.

SOURCE: Based on one-on-one interviews with 12 recent high school graduates from Class of 2020 and 2021 conducted in June and July 2021.
## What we heard: Remove financial barriers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What We Heard</th>
<th>How We Can Act</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The main issue is finances.&quot; – Class of 2020, Ohio</td>
<td>• Increase affordability by making it easier for students to balance learning and work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I don't want to waste all my time and money.&quot; – Class of 2020, Arizona</td>
<td>• Provide financial coaching and guidance throughout the college journey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I'm worried I will be in debt.&quot; – Class of 2020, North Carolina</td>
<td>• Offer personalized assistance with scholarship and aid applications from trusted sources.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: Based on one-on-one interviews with 12 recent high school graduates from Class of 2020 and 2021 conducted in June and July 2021.
What we heard: Connect college and career

What We Heard

“If my career doesn’t work out … I still have knowledge about another career.”
– Class of 2021, Maryland

“They had gone to college, and they couldn’t find work.”
– Class of 2021, California

“Getting an edge in the labor market.”
– Class of 2021, Georgia

How We Can Act

• Integrate career navigation into advising services and coursework.

• Build partnerships with employers and align coursework and curricula with in-demand skills.

• Enhance academic programs with work-based learning and skills-based credentials.

SOURCE: Based on one-on-one interviews with 12 recent high school graduates from Class of 2020 and 2021 conducted in June and July 2021.
Success Beyond Completion
‘I’m ready for my success’
Next Steps: October Workshop on Promising Practices
Continue the conversation


Looking for a space to learn and share with colleagues on how to support students who graduated from high school during the pandemic? Join us for this workshop on steps we can take to reengage recent high school grad who changed or delayed their plans for postsecondary education. We will spend 75 minutes learning from one another, focusing our conversation on guidance, financial resources, and career preparation, and brainstorming with colleagues who are developing and implementing promising approaches in these areas. The majority of our time will be spent in facilitated small groups where you can share early learnings, problem-solve challenges, and gain insight into what other institutions are trying.

There’s nothing to prepare—just bring yourself and ideas for reengaging students. After the workshop,

https://stradaeducation.org/event/reconnecting-recent-high-school-grads-a-workshop-on-promising-practices/

Listening to Recent High School Grads — ‘Be Mindful of What We Have Gone Through’

September 28, 2021

Steep declines in undergraduate enrollment during 2020 and 2021 threaten to widen existing equity gaps in college completion and career opportunities. Reengaging students who have changed or delayed their plans for postsecondary education will require institutions to respond to the new concerns and priorities that have emerged for these young adults during the pandemic.

Drawing on a survey and interviews with 2020 and 2021 high school graduates who have delayed their education plans, we learned that while most students ultimately
ci.stradaeducation.org/recentgrads
Learn more at StradaInsights.org