



2021 University Family Survey

A survey of 36,000 parents
of current college students

Research for this report
was co-sponsored by:



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INTRODUCTION

The COVID pandemic created an unprecedented crisis for students and their families. Parents saw most of their college-enrolled children switch to hybrid or fully online learning. Student and family engagement became almost exclusively electronic and online. And the economic fallout of the pandemic impacted the ability of students and families to afford college. Furthermore, even as the pandemic recedes, the impact of these changes in 2020-21 will likely reverberate for years.

To gauge the impact of these changes on families, RNL and CampusESP surveyed more than 36,000 parents of college students in spring 2021. This research summary presents their opinions and assessments of:

- The college experience
- Communication with colleges
- College financing
- Virtual events

[For the complete demographics of the parents, please see p. 10.](#)

PLANS AND OVERALL SATISFACTION

PLANS FOR 2021	ALL RESPONDENTS
I will encourage my student to continue enrollment at his/her current institution in person or online	70%
I will encourage my student to take online courses at his/her current institution	6%
I will encourage my student to transfer to a less expensive option for online courses	4%
I will encourage my student to transfer to an institution where he or she can take on-campus courses	5%
I will encourage my student to not enroll at any institution until courses are able to resume as normal	2%
I will encourage my student to defer enrollment to a later term (not to enroll anywhere for one or more semesters)	0%
I don't know yet	13%



Satisfaction with student experience

EXPERIENCE	SATISFIED	NEITHER SATISFIED NOR DISSATISFIED	DISSATISFIED
Overall learning experience	73%	9%	18%
Required courses are available for registration	70%	16%	14%
Ability to complete graduation requirements in a timely manner	63%	27%	10%
Academic advisors are knowledgeable and available	63%	19%	18%
Quality of online instruction	62%	15%	23%
Ability to communicate with faculty and staff	59%	17%	24%
Quality of services provided while remote	52%	24%	24%
Opportunities for experiential learning	37%	37%	26%
Ability to participate in co-curricular activities	37%	30%	33%

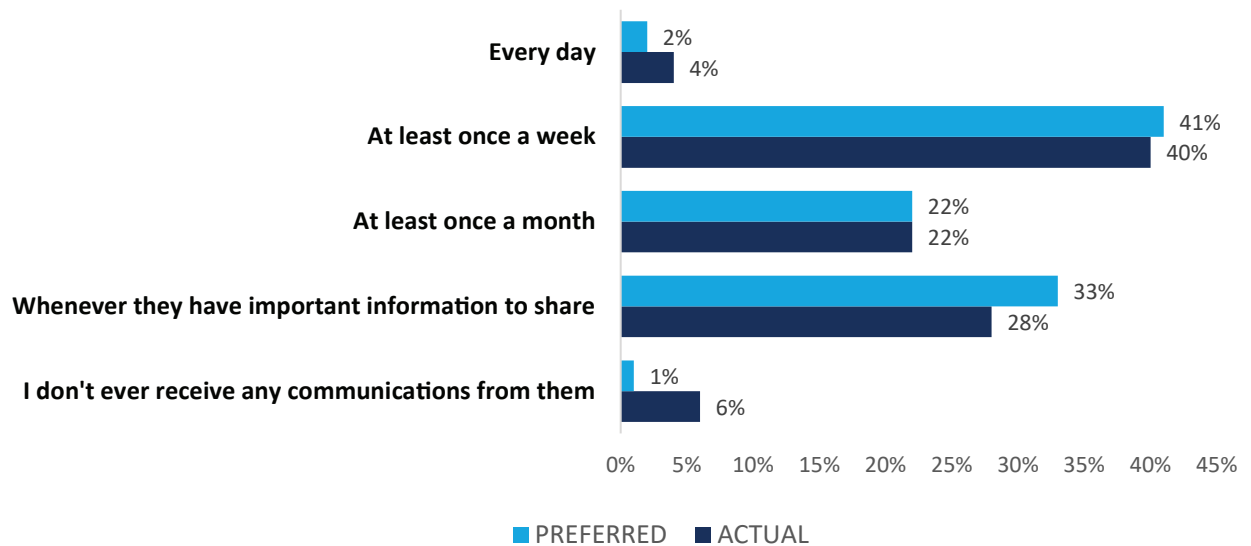
COMMUNICATION

Satisfaction with communication from institution

INFORMATION	SATISFIED	NEITHER SATISFIED NOR DISSATISFIED	DISSATISFIED
Communication about institutional guidelines for COVID-19	75%	13%	12%
Information regarding account services and paying the tuition bill	66%	17%	17%
Information regarding financial aid and scholarships	60%	18%	22%
Information regarding housing	53%	31%	16%
Information regarding food services and dining	48%	32%	19%
Information regarding community life and activities	48%	31%	22%

Frequency of communications

Parents answered how frequently they actually received communications and what their preferred frequency is. Their experience aligned pretty closely with their expectations.



Channel used to communicate

COMMUNICATION	USED BY COLLEGE	PREFERRED BY PARENTS
Via email	92%	96%
Via text message	11%	46%
Via the parent/family portal	27%	34%
Via telephone	2%	6%
Other	5%	3%

PARENTS WANT TEXT MESSAGES

Nearly half of parents said texting is a preferred communication channel, but only 1 in 10 said colleges had used text messages. Give parents the opportunity to opt-in and then use text communications to send them important information such as deadlines, relevant events, and important updates.

Communication via text message

11%
Used by college

46%
Preferred by parents

Most checked website resources for parents and families

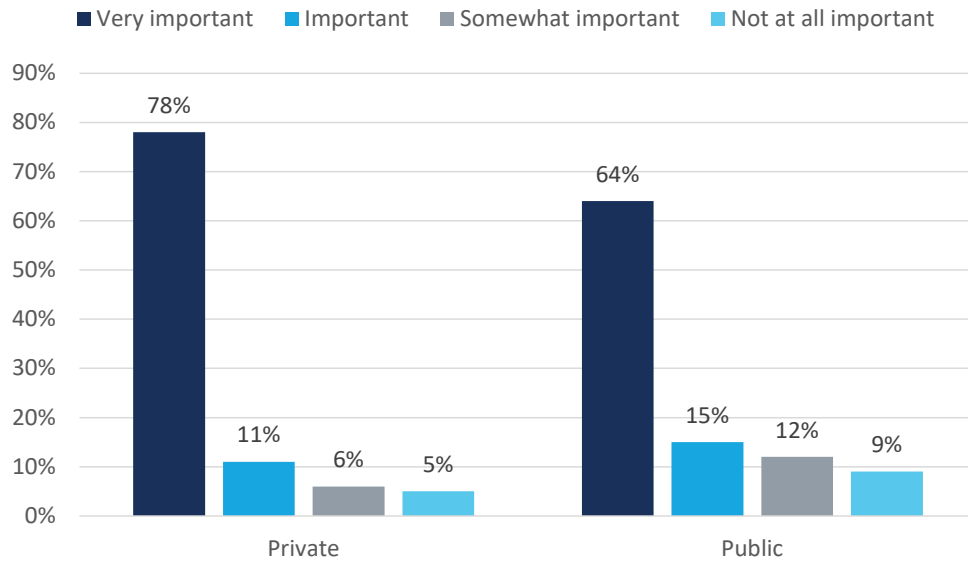
Parents shared the resources that they used the most on college websites.

Academic calendar	85%
Information about costs and tuition	83%
Information regarding account services and payment plans	81%
Parent website area/parent portal	80%
Financial aid and scholarships	78%
Information about academics	76%
Information regarding the athletic season	75%
COVID-19 dashboard	72%
Parent/family specific programs	72%
Information about events on campus	67%
Information on virtual events for parents and family	66%
Financial aid/scholarship calculator	65%

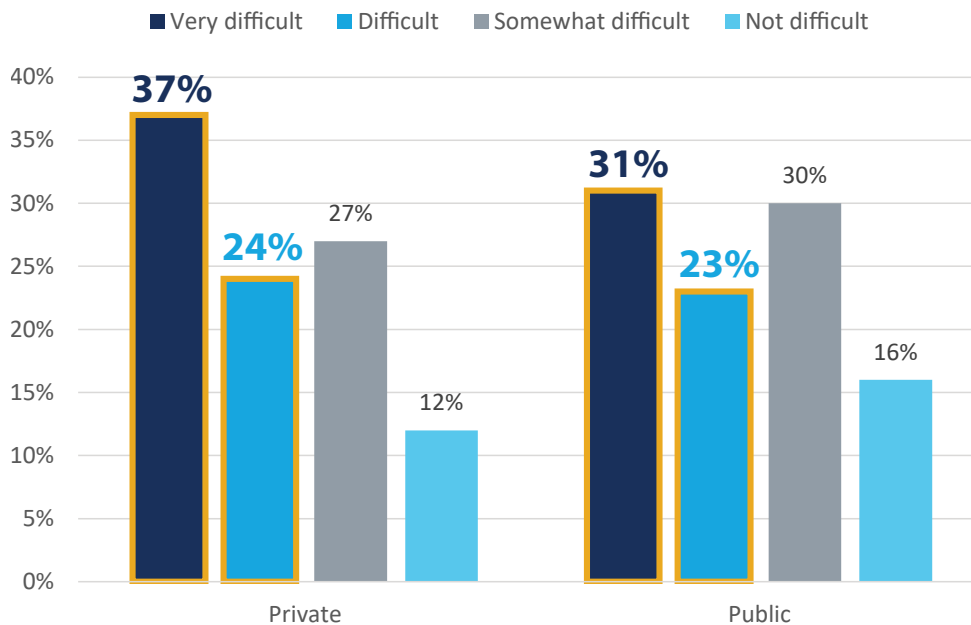
COLLEGE FINANCING

For these questions on college financing, the answers are categorized by parents with students at private institutions and those at public universities.

Importance of financial aid and scholarships



Financing difficulty



FINANCING IS DIFFICULT FOR MORE THAN HALF OF PARENTS

Six out of ten parents with students at private institutions and 54 percent at public institutions said financing would be difficult. Furthermore, approximately 85 percent of parents said they would have at least some difficulty in paying for college. This illustrates how important it is for campuses to make clear all the financial aid and financing options that families have to make college affordable.

Satisfaction with tuition as a worthwhile investment in student's future

SATISFACTION	PRIVATE	PUBLIC
Satisfied	71%	66%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	13%	13%
Dissatisfied	16%	21%

Satisfaction with tuition as an investment in a student's future was higher with families from lower income levels:

Income level and satisfaction with tuition as an investment

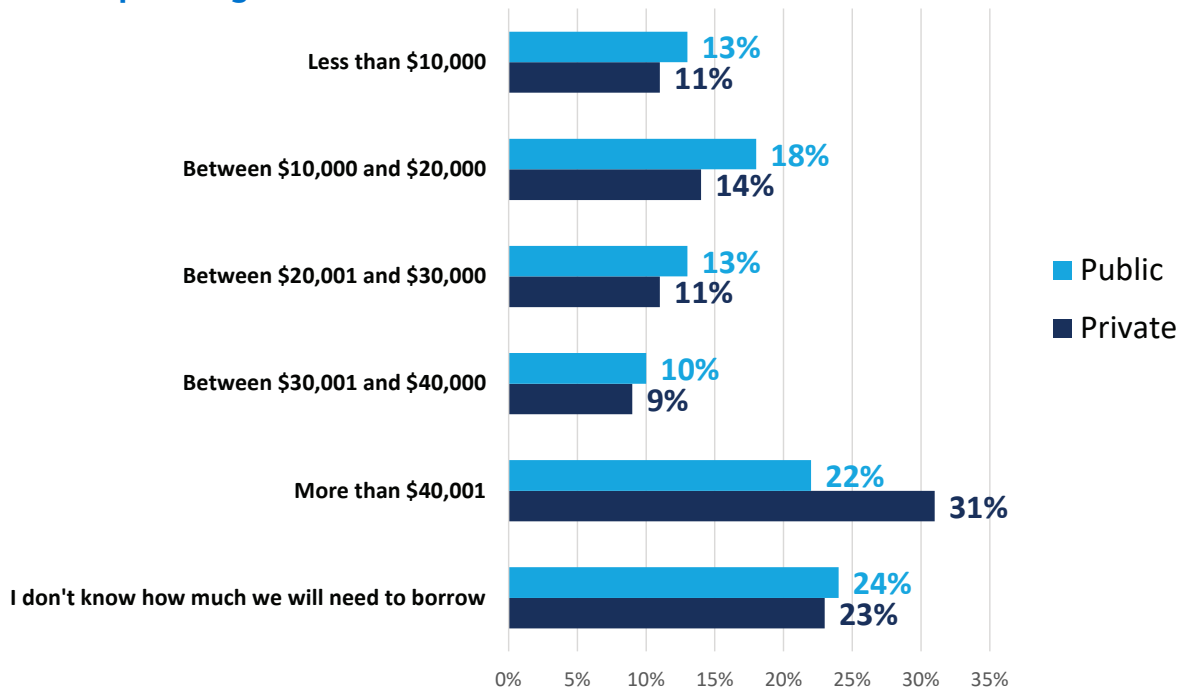


Borrowing

67% of families will borrow money to pay for student's studies

47% will borrow more than they were planning because of COVID-19

Amount planning to borrow



VIRTUAL EVENTS

Virtual events for families

36% of families have attended virtual events

Satisfaction with virtual events

Very satisfied	33%
Somewhat satisfied	35%
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	21%
Somewhat dissatisfied	8%
Very dissatisfied	3%

Reasons why families did not attend virtual events

Not invited	38%
Invited but event not at a convenient time	34%
Did not think it was necessary	28%

KEEP VIRTUAL EVENTS AS PART OF FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Even as institutions open up, virtual events will allow institutions to engage a wider range of students and families. Make sure that your virtual events are optimized for the small screen experience, interactive so that parents can have their questions answered, and available at times that are convenient for more families.



SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

Number of completed surveys: **36,400**

GRADUATING YEAR	ALL RESPONDENTS
2021	13%
2022	20%
2023	27%
2024	39%
EDUCATION MODALITY	ALL RESPONDENTS
In-person only	6%
Hybrid	56%
Online only	38%
PARENT EDUCATION	ALL RESPONDENTS
No college	21%
2-year	8%
4-year	35%
Graduate degree	35%
ETHNICITY	ALL RESPONDENTS
White	53%
Hispanic or Latino	27%
Black or African American	26%
Asian/Pacific Islander	7%
Multi-racial	4%
Native American or American Indian	2%
Middle Eastern	1%
FAMILY INCOME	ALL RESPONDENTS
Less than \$30,000	8%
\$30,000-\$59,999	16%
\$60,000-\$99,999	21%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	23%
\$150,000 or more	32%
RESIDENCE	ALL RESPONDENTS
Northeast	22%
Southeast	44%
Midwest	7%
Southwest	17%
West	9%

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CampusESP is a strategic family engagement platform that enables institutions to inform the greatest influencers in students' lives—their parents. From impacting enrollment, to student success, to annual giving—keeping parents effectively engaged has proven to be critical for institutions looking to better support their institutional goals. CampusESP supports that objective through personalized communications and parental alerts delivered via the web and straight to their smartphones.

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