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Survey Highlights Strain Among High School Seniors Amid Pandemic Uncertainty

"I am losing so much interest in going to college because it became so hard. I don't have one-on-one help from anyone..." – California high school senior at the pandemic onset, Spring 2020

SACRAMENTO, Calif., Dec. 18, 2020 - As COVID-19 continues to disrupt educational experiences of students across the nation, newly analyzed survey research by the [California Education Lab at the University of California, Davis](#) details the high level of uncertainty and financial stress experienced by California high school seniors as they weighed their college plans amid an unfolding pandemic.

[College Uncertainties: California High School Seniors in Spring of 2020](#) summarizes the results from a survey commissioned by the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) that captured the perspectives of nearly 16,000 high school seniors who applied for college financial aid for the 2020-21 academic year. Researchers further analyzed the findings and released their analysis this week.

Responses to questions about shifting plans, personal and family financial status, overall well-being, and students' viewpoints on remote learning revealed that:

- Over 70% of high school seniors reported concern about their personal and family financial situations, with higher levels of concern expressed by students of color.
- 90% reported concern about personal health and well-being.
- One in three reported concern about going to college far away from home as a result of COVID-19.
- More than 80% said they were concerned about taking college courses online.
- Fewer than 10% planned to delay college enrollment altogether; Black, White, or those who had the highest levels of financial need were the most likely to say they planned to wait.

"These sobering findings highlight the ongoing pandemic's upheaval on the lives of young people who continue to express high levels of stress amid the uncertainty," said Sherrie Reed, Executive Director of the UC Davis Education Lab. "We wanted to better understand their experience, and our best approach was to ask them."

More than 9,000 open-ended written responses captured high school students' struggles amid the pandemic in their own voice. Some examples include:

- *“I am losing so much interest in going to college because it became so hard. I don’t have one-on-one help from anyone, or anyone to show me how to choose classes or do anything that is required. I’m a first-generation college student and at the moment I am lost.”*
- *“I might not have time anymore for college since my dad is not working, and my mom is receiving her paychecks two weeks after she’s supposed to. Now I have to work eight hours to support my family economically.”*
- *“I wanted to go to a four-year university, but due to COVID-19 my parents aren’t working, and I can’t afford to pay so I changed my plan to attend community college then transfer...”*

“We needed to understand how students were experiencing this extraordinary moment of uncertainty so that our state financial aid operation can properly adjust and advocate more effectively on their behalf,” said Patrick Perry, Division Chief of Policy, Research, and Data.

The survey research and analysis were supported by College Futures Foundation and the Institute for Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

As both the administrator of the state’s \$2.8 billion financial aid system and advocate for student success, CSAC is committed to understanding students' needs across California and can serve as a resource to help the state navigate financial needs for various student populations, especially during this unprecedented time.

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The California Student Aid Commission administers the state’s \$2.8 billion portfolio of student financial aid programs and services, including the Cal Grant, the Middle Class Scholarship, and the California Dream Act Application. The Commission serves as a resource for policymakers and the public on college affordability and financing issues, and advocates for policy changes to eliminate cost as a barrier to any qualified California student pursuing a higher education. Visit our website at <https://www.csac.ca.gov> or follow us on Twitter @castudentaid.