OUR TURN

POWER
TO THE
YOUNG
PEOPLE

COVID-19
STUDENT
IMPACT REPORT

May 2020

It's making it harder for me to learn, causing me to have anxieties about whether or not I'll pass my classes.

- 19, Hispanic Female College Student, California

OUR TURN, A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION FOCUSED ON ELEVATING STUDENT VOICES IN EDUCATION DIALOGUES AND DECISION-MAKING, CONDUCTED A SURVEY OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN APRIL 2020 TO UNDERSTAND HOW THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC IS IMPACTING THEM AND THEIR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES.

We know that inequities in our society have always existed in education, yet recent events have exacerbated these inequities in countless ways. Young people are being dramatically impacted by the effects of COVID-19, yet are not asked about their experiences or what they need in order to ensure that they are able to learn effectively and continue with their education. In many cases, the challenges they are now facing in these circumstances are making learning nearly impossible - in particular young people of color and students who are coming from low-income backgrounds - further widening existing opportunity gaps. Student experiences during this time are vast and complex, with varying degrees of support from educators and schools.

Given these experiences, the challenges that students will face over the summer and into the fall require us to take a deep look and listen to their recommendations for help and support. Only when we begin to listen to and understand their experiences, can we then come together to start to reimagine and rebuild our education system so that it will work for all students - especially those who have been left behind during this pandemic.

More than 235 responses were received from young people across **13 different states.** Our respondents are **82% people of color**, and a majority are - or will be - the first in their family to go to college.

DEMOGRAPHICS

RACE + ETHNICITY

48.9% **HISPANIC OR LATINX**

26.3% **AFRICAN-AMERICAN**

17.8% **WHITE, NON-HISPANIC**

8.9% **ASIAN-AMERICAN**

2.5% **NATIVE AMERICAN**

0   10   20   30   40   50   60

PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS SURVEYED
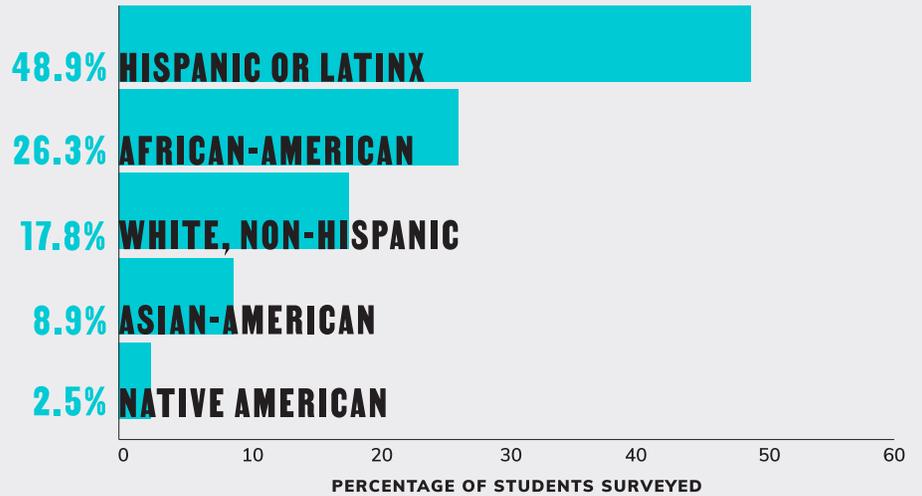
Note: Race and Ethnicity were asked as separate questions, so the total is greater than 100% (e.g., some students identified as LatinX and African-American)

GENDER

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary

AGE

- Under 18
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23+

EDUCATION

16.1% *Other*

39.0% *Currently in High School*

44.9% *Currently in College*
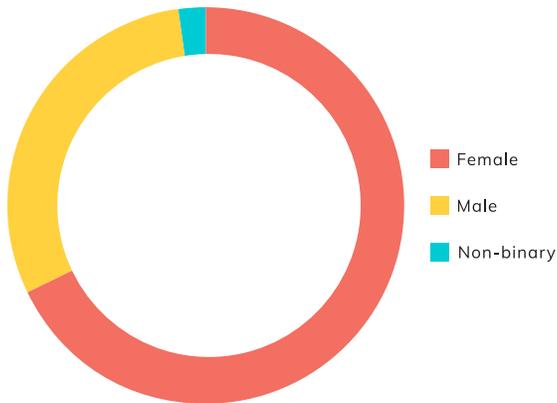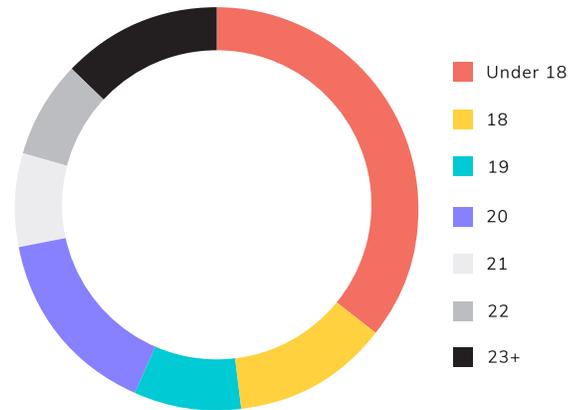
71%
OF COLLEGE STUDENTS SURVEYED ARE FIRST-GENERATION

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SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

1.) Mental health for students has become a major problem, with limited support. The majority of students - 65% - state that their mental health has worsened, and 56% are concerned about their mental health in both the short- and long-term. While some schools and universities are offering mental health support and counseling, most are not, and students are citing it as a prioritized need. 28% stated that their physical health has also worsened during this time.

2.) Many individuals state that they are facing serious challenges due to their personal situation at home. This includes financial insecurity in their family (38%), and students citing additional responsibilities that they have had to take on at home (37%), including caring for younger siblings or taking on additional work. 11% cited that their family is facing food insecurity, and 9% are housing insecure.

3.) The shift to digital learning has proven to be a challenging methodology for many young people. Quality of e-learning is adversely impacted by a host of issues, including delivery models that insufficiently meet students' learning needs; limited opportunities to build communities and networks of support with other students; and a pronounced digital divide facing communities of color. These barriers have resulted in the inability to successfully engage in online learning.

4.) Young people identified a wide variance of support and communication from teachers and professors, and varying degrees of work assigned. Some students cited no contact from teachers, and others stated that the workload assigned was even more than prior to school closure. 55% cited that they are concerned about a loss of learning.

5.) Students are very worried about their ability to continue their education, and are concerned about any needed requirements to continue. Due to the additional challenges that many are facing, some have had to drop classes, and some students stated that they have already had to drop out of school completely. 47% say the changes in learning have also impacted their academic goals.

6.) A major need identified for young people was connectivity with others and community. 64% cited that they were concerned about missing major milestones (like prom, graduation, etc.).

7.) Students have many identified needs and concerns that they would like to voice. 76% were not consulted prior to their school or campus closing.

8.) Despite all of these challenges, the majority of respondents remain committed and motivated to learn and improve their communities, and are optimistic about the future.

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MENTAL HEALTH

Mental Health has been an ongoing issue for many students even prior to the pandemic, in particular for those who are facing additional challenges and responsibilities outside of school. Many schools in underserved areas have historically not provided the supports that students need, and the current pandemic is only making the situation worse, with 65% of students surveyed reporting that their mental health has deteriorated, resulting in serious consequences for students' educational outcomes.

"*"I used to be a good student. I had a bunch of motivation to move on. I had a job. After this whole pandemic thing went down, I started getting off track with school. My mental health has been really bad. I've been unmotivated.*"

- Under 18, Hispanic Female High School Student, Minnesota

"*My mental health is a disaster and my fellow college friends are feeling the same amount of distress.*"

- 20, Asian-American Female College Student, Georgia

"*My anxiety has increased a lot because internet access is unsteady and I am struggling to stay connected.*"

- Under 18, White High School Student, Colorado

"*[Teachers need to give us] understanding that I'm not not doing the work because I'm lazy, but because my mental health is slipping.*"

- Under 18, White Female High School Student, Minnesota

"*We need mental health checks. No one is genuinely asking how we are, just saying they hope we'll be physically healthy, which is nice and all, but the pandemic is also having a serious effect on the mental health of teenagers.*"

- 18, Hispanic Female High School Student, New York

"*Quarantine affected my mental health so much that I had to drop out of college.*"

- 20, Native American Non-binary Student, Illinois
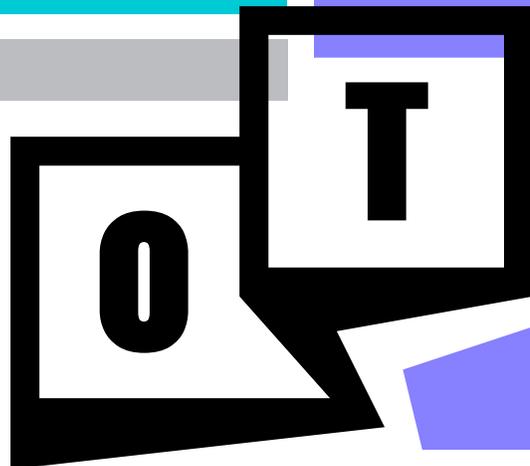
PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND CHALLENGES AT HOME

Many students surveyed highlighted that they had additional responsibilities at home (37%), and several are facing financial insecurity along with food and housing insecurity. While many of these concerns existed prior to COVID-19, the pandemic has created an additional burden for students who are struggling to meet academic requirements when in many cases, their basic needs are not being met as they have greater concerns than their schooling.

> "I am the only person in my home to still have a job, so I have to pick up additional hours."
>
> Under 18, African-American Female High School Student, North Carolina

"It feels as though we are expected too much to be doing assignments all week and all day long without accounting for our circumstances and that some of us must still work. The amount of anxiety and stress I am feeling is too much and I feel as though I may be forced to withdraw a course or two."

- 20, Asian-American and Hispanic Female College Student, Georgia

"I take care of my three little sisters while my mom goes to work at a hospital (where she is working with infected patients nearly everyday). I also take care of my grandmother and am the one that goes on all errands for the family."

- 21, Hispanic Female College Student, California

"My parents are sick so I'm the one cooking and cleaning and taking care of my sick parents."

- 20, Hispanic Female College Student, Colorado

"Many people in my community have lost their jobs and are suffering. Most are unaware of the resources available to them."

- Under 18, Hispanic Female High School Student, New York

"I need [professors] to speak out for us to get resources in order to complete coursework, be flexible with times and due dates because thinking about survival compared to thinking about an A is a choice that I have to make where I need to put BASIC needs first."

- 18, Hispanic Female College Student, California

"I wish [professors] had more grace to students. I want to learn but I also don't need to have more work then I had before, since I still work and have other responsibilities outside school."

–19, Asian-American Female College Student, Minnesota

"I now have childcare, chores, taking care of the household as additional responsibilities."

- 20, Hispanic Female College Student, California

"I have to babysit my baby sister."

- Under 18, African-American Female High School Student, North Carolina

"There are a lack of funds available to undocumented people in our communities."

- 20, Hispanic Male College Student, California

"Minorities... are HIT IN EVERY POSSIBLE WAY OF LIVING because of the virus. This is not just a health issue and because of the current administration the majority who have no resources will suffer for a long time because decisions weren't made in the beginning [by politicians]. Making it seem that their MINIMAL support is enough and accessible when it's not - and for the most part require documentation. ICE agents are arresting people at high rates and adding on to spread of the pandemic."

- 18, Hispanic Female College Student, California
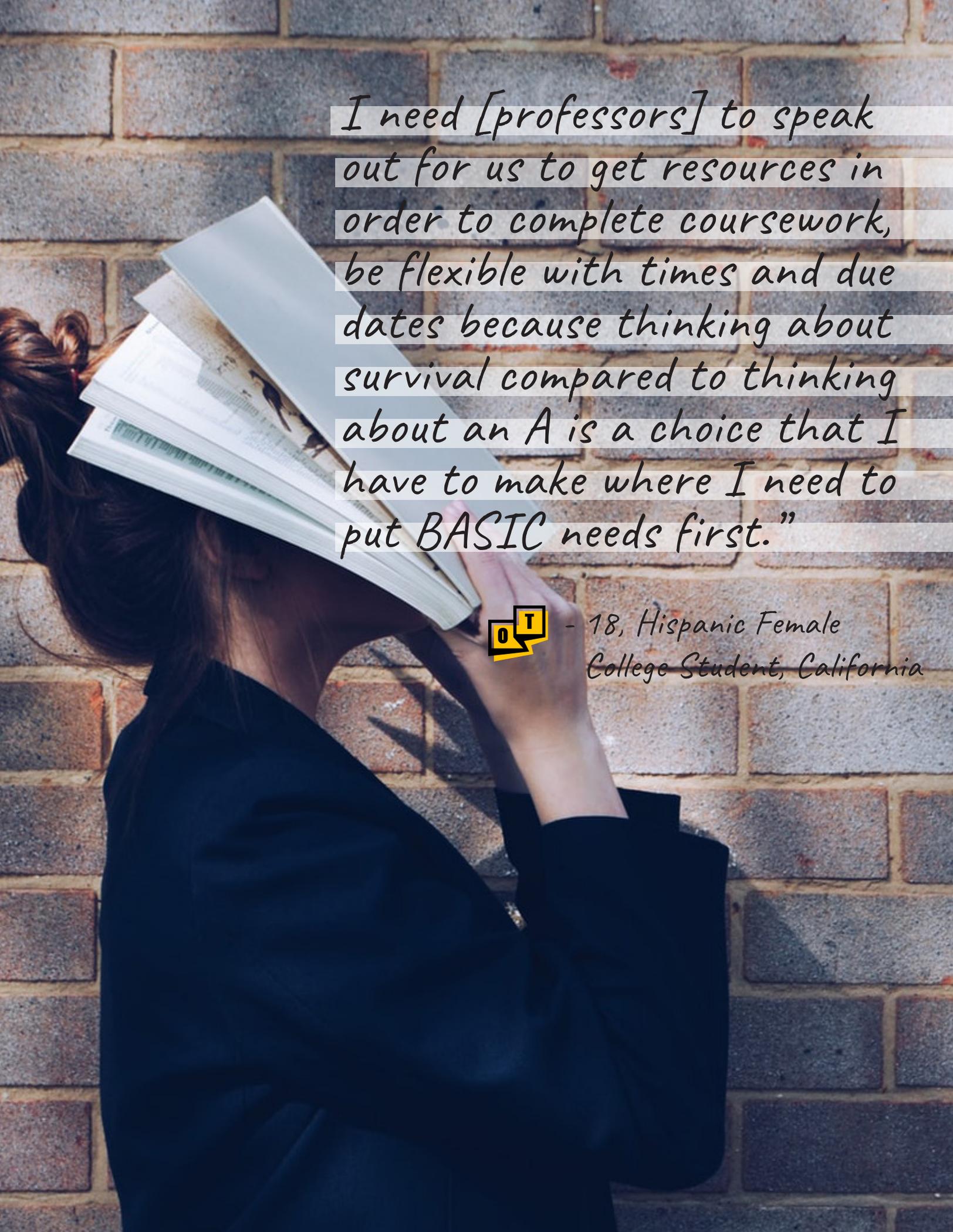
"I need [professors] to speak out for us to get resources in order to complete coursework, be flexible with times and due dates because thinking about survival compared to thinking about an A is a choice that I have to make where I need to put BASIC needs first."

– 18, Hispanic Female
College Student, California

CHALLENGES WITH E-LEARNING

Technology and remote learning is a challenge with tangible consequences for individuals and families. While the digital divide has always been an issue, there are some measures in place to help bridge the lack of device and internet access in low-income communities. Still, online learning has become more challenging for many students who are finding it more difficult to learn without direct teacher interaction and instruction, in particular those who may have previously relied on additional support from teachers. An unintended consequence of the shift to e-learning has been the fracturing of socialization and communities, further plunging students into feelings of isolation during the COVID-19 era.

"Internet is something that my family didn't have and are now paying for and that is an expense that can hinder other things we need to buy."

-18, Hispanic Female High School Student, North Carolina

"My grades are lower since I did not have internet at the beginning of social distancing."

-18 year old, Hispanic Female High School Student, North Carolina

"Learning has become more difficult because us students aren't able to get the help we need from our teachers the same we would in class."

- Under 18, Asian-American Male High School Student, Minnesota

"I do not do well learning online. I am nervous about passing my classes and being able to graduate."

- 22, Hispanic Female, College Student, Colorado

"We work on a platform that crashed and malfunctions quite frequently and the workload can be overwhelming to do on top of other priorities and in such a stressful situation."

- Under 18, White Non-binary High School Student, Colorado

"I've had to order WiFi and it's free for two months which is good but I don't know what to do when summer begins and I have to pay for WiFi. I am not working and I don't know how I'm going to make ends meet."

- 18, Hispanic Female College Student, California

"I can't attend in person office hours that helped me understand more."

- 18, Hispanic Male College Student, California

"I'm a visual, hands on learner - it's harder for me to grasp the information from just hearing an audio file; struggling with time management now that I've lost the structure of classes."

- 20, Hispanic Female College Student, North Carolina

"It's just harder without a teacher in front of you."

-Under 18, African-American Male High School Student, Minnesota

"I can't get wifi into my home."

- 22, Hispanic Male College Student, California

"I'm not retaining/learning any of the information, and I'm frustrated all the time because I don't understand a lot of the stuff. I no longer have the class discussions and teacher interaction, which is how I learn the most."

- 20, Hispanic/White Female College Student, Colorado

"It's making it harder for me to learn, causing me to have anxieties about whether or not I'll pass my classes."

- 19, Hispanic Female College Student, California

"I can no longer learn effectively, and my concentration has depleted. My eyes are also poor, so staring at a computer all day has worsened my eyesight."

- 20, Hispanic Male College Student, California

IMPACTS - SELF

64.8%	MENTAL HEALTH WORSENED
37.3%	HAD TO TAKE ON ADDED RESPONSIBILITIES
30.5%	WORRY ABOUT BEING ABLE TO CONTINUE EDUCATION
28.3%	FACING FINANCIAL INSECURITY
27.9%	PHYSICAL HEALTH WORSENED
21.0%	LOST JOB
8.2%	FACING FOOD INSECURITY
6.4%	FACING HOUSING INSECURITY
4.3%	HAD TO WITHDRAW FROM SCHOOL

IMPACTS-FAMILY

39.5%	PHYSICAL HEALTH WORSENED
37.8%	FACING FINANCIAL INSECURITY
26.6%	JOB LOSS
22.7%	PHYSICAL HEALTH WORSENED
10.7%	FACING FOOD INSECURITY
9.4%	FACING HOUSING INSECURITY

CONCERNS (SHORT/LONG-TERM)

64.0%	MISSING MAJOR MILESTONES
55.5%	MENTAL HEALTH
55.1%	LOSS OF LEARNING
42.4%	PHYSICAL HEALTH
33.1%	NOT BEING ABLE TO FIND A JOB
29.7%	NOT BEING ABLE TO MEET REQUIREMENTS
24.6%	NOT BEING ABLE TO CONTINUE EDUCATION
24.6%	NOT BEING ABLE TO GO TO COLLEGE
10.6%	LACK OF FOOD ACCESS
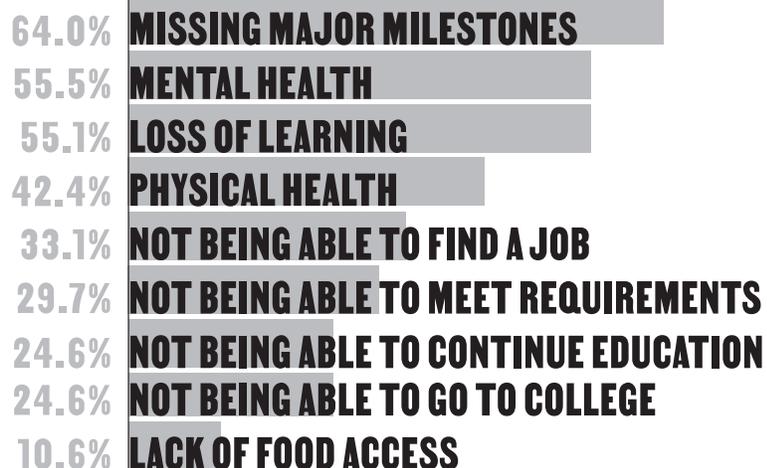
VAST DIFFERENCES IN TEACHER ENGAGEMENT AND INSTRUCTION

The level of interaction, communication, and support from schools and teachers is extremely varied, with some students stating that their teachers have been empathetic and helpful, and others stating that their teachers are not teaching or communicating much, or are not understanding the challenges that many students are facing at home. Varying degrees of work have been assigned to students; some students state that they've been receiving more work since online learning started, without understanding how the workload will affect their academic trajectories.

"I don't expect school to be canceled and also do not feel entitled to getting all remaining work done away with. But 3/4 of my professors have made zero changes to the syllabus. One of my professors used "imagine you are a low income college student in South Central" as a prompt for one of her assignments. I have one professor who has actually added to the syllabus since online learning started. It's just the complete lack of empathy."

- 21, Hispanic Female College Student, California

"It's been very overwhelming because professors have assigned too much work and have high expectations for students that are currently being negatively affected by the virus."

-20, Hispanic Female College Student, California

"I'm no longer learning but simply doing busy work. If teachers assign new content, I often learn via khan academy or YouTube because I receive practically no direct instructions, save for two classes. Teachers have office hours but aren't holding actual class."

Under 18, White Female High School Student, Colorado

"Teachers need to become more accessible. School has become more difficult with teachers online."

- 22, Hispanic Male College Student, Texas

"They [professors] don't take into account that low-income students have so much more to deal with because of COVID-19."

- 18, Hispanic Male College Student, California

"They email me everyday and ask how I'm doing. They have also come out with detailed plans as to how we will conduct the rest of the school year."

- Under 18, African-American Female High School Student, North Carolina

"We need answers and a response from [teachers]. Some students have tried to reach out but they do not take our issues seriously."

- Under 18, Hispanic Female High School Student, California

"We have a daily wellness check and the teachers are always willing to listen if you reach out."

- Under 18, White Non-Binary High School Student, Colorado

"One professor reduced the coursework."

- 22, Hispanic Female College Student, California

"Teachers are reaching out to students that need additional help"

- Under 18, Asian-American Female High School Student, Minnesota
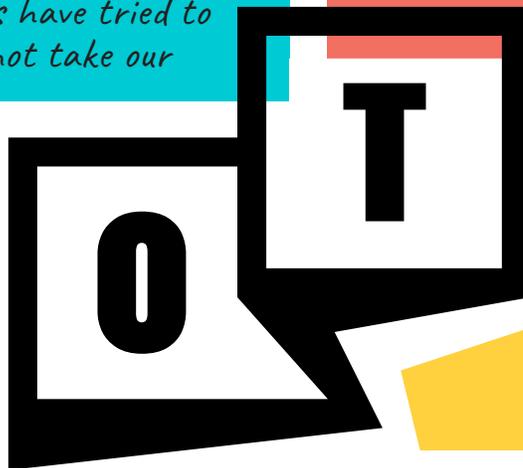
MAJOR CONCERNS AROUND ABILITY TO CONTINUE EDUCATION

Students are worried about continuing their education, and many are falling behind because of their inability to fully commit to all of the requirements and time for online learning with added responsibilities and stress. This has resulted in a loss of learning as a major concern for students, many of whom are falling further behind and having to re-evaluate their educational goals and plans. Students planning on or currently attending college are concerned about their financial aid and what is needed to continue their education. Sadly, this has already resulted in a number of students stating that they have had to withdraw from school.

"I have been at community college for three years. I'm not sure if I'm doing what is necessary to remain admitted. I am undocumented so there is extra paperwork that needs to be filled out. Since my DACA application is on hold, I'm not sure what is going to happen... I [was planning] to transfer from community college to UCLA and I am a first generation student. I don't know how to read a financial aid packet so I'm not sure if UCLA is the best choice given that most of my family lost their jobs, additional debt is not what we need."

- 21, Hispanic Female College Student, California

"I had to drop a class to be able to balance everything out."

-20, Hispanic Male College Student, California

"I lost hands-on learning for my plant science lab. There are some things that are not easy to explain digitally."

-23, Hispanic Female College Student, California

"It feels as though I am not on track to possibly start my program and that I may have to put it on hold to finish the prerequisites by repeating them to get a better grade and GPA. However, I don't think I will withdraw since that would affect my financial aid. Without the help of financial aid, I could not possibly afford college on my own. I am the only one paying for my college so there is always the worry of not being able to finish and afford it."

-20, Asian American and Hispanic Female College Student, Georgia

"I do not do well learning online. I am nervous about passing my classes and being able to graduate."

-22, Hispanic Female College Student, Colorado

47%
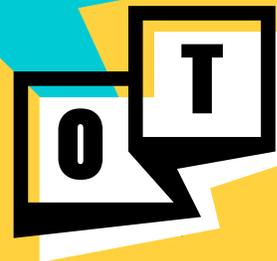
"I don't know where I stand honestly at this point in my academics. I wanted to have a strong semester, but this whole situation just took a toll on everyone that no one expected. No one thought they'd have to be home 24/7 with the same standard of an in person class. Resources and accessibility is scarce now more than ever, and having to manage an online course alongside newfound day to day expectations seems impossible."

-20, Hispanic and White Male College Student, California

"I had to withdraw from a college course because it was difficult to do online."

-Under 18, African-American Female High School Student, North Carolina

"As a person with currently unmedicated ADHD, digital learning has been a very difficult shift. Teachers expect students to sit down and watch 20-30 minute screencasts and take notes at the same time which is something that I cannot do even in a classroom setting. I often feel hopeless because it seems like I'm always behind on the assigned work and can never quite catch up. I switched from a charter school to a [traditional] public school 6 months ago and my transcript never recovered. I worry everyday about being able to go to college and follow my dreams to go to school on the West Coast."

-Under 18, White Female High School Student, Minnesota

"I had to withdraw."

- 18, Asian-American Male College Student, California

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"I am not getting the same quality of education and my internet does not always work."

— 20, African-American and White Female College Student, Minnesota

NEED FOR COMMUNITY

A major need identified for young people was an increase in connectivity with others and community. 64% cited that they were concerned about missing major milestones (like prom, graduation, etc.).

"All of us need to work together to survive."

- Under 18, African-American Male High School Student, Minnesota

"It's made me feel unmotivated to do my work without my major events to look forward to like prom or graduation. It's also just different learning in my home environment versus a classroom, there's no distinction of a 'learning zone'."

-18, Hispanic Female High School Student, New York

"The lack of motivation that I have been having and the fact I have really no communication with a lot of people [has affected me]. I'm just not the same without being in school and social. I'm not getting the same opportunities as if I'm in school."

- Under 18, African-American Female High School Student, Minnesota

STUDENT VOICES NEED TO BE HEARD

Historically, many of our most marginalized communities have had their voices silenced, and students - although the beneficiaries of our educational system - are rarely asked for their input and opinions on issues that are directly impacting them. With the sudden changes in learning, few students were consulted or asked for their input as COVID-19 was upending their education. 76% of our respondents were not consulted prior to their school or campus closing. Students have many identified needs and concerns that they would like to voice, yet the current state of affairs places us at risk of perpetuating the silencing of voices that leads to educational inequity.

"They do not have a clue in the slightest what it means to be home. Yes, they gave us refund checks, but they are not representative of what we have to sacrifice for a check that doesn't match what the university would be paying if we stayed. They are restricting the resources that are needed in a time of a PANDEMIC. They are making course work harder thinking that our reality is just staying home with no implications. They have no regard what problems they are arising in the way they keep giving us normal coursework as if we were still at [our university setting.]"

-18, Hispanic Female College Student, California

"I would've liked if the student population [was] able to have some input."

-20, Hispanic Male College Student, California

"[We should have] universal pass/fail."

-19, Hispanic Female College Student, California

"It would have been reassuring to understand what happens with loans."

-25, Hispanic Male College Graduate, California

"I wanted a refund from the resources I won't use."

-20, Hispanic Male College Student, California

"It's a change impacting our learning and lives, but we were not consulted in any of it."

-Under 18, African-American Female High School Student, Colorado

"Yes, I think my school has done a very poor job at communicating and has overall been unhelpful in answering questions. I also think tuition should be decreased, since I am not learning at the same quality as before."

-20, Hispanic Female College Student, Colorado

"I believe our communities are resilient and will overcome this"

- 20, Hispanic and White Female College Student, California

Despite all that they are facing, students remain committed to their education. While there is much skepticism, the majority surveyed are optimistic about the future but realistic about the challenges ahead. They identified critical needs for themselves and for our communities, and are hopeful that changes can be made to address systemic inequities in our society and specifically in our educational system.

"I think we all will have something to learn from this experience."

-19, Asian-American Female College Student, Minnesota

"I feel that the economic and public health ramifications of this pandemic will be felt for a very long time."

- Under 18, Hispanic Female High School Student, North Carolina

"My hopes are that together we can overcome this crisis."

- 20, Hispanic Female College Student, North Carolina

"There is a lack of accountability and true desire to protect the citizens of our nation. These politicians all too well are aware of the effects it will have on those coming from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and will choose to completely disregard that."

- 20, Hispanic and White Male College Student, California

"While the pandemic is obviously devastating, it has also had some good effects, most notably on climate change, and I hope elected officials will see that there is a different way of living and use this time as an example."

- Under 18, White High School Student, Minnesota

"Though our nation will by deeply impacted by the pandemic, a lot of inequities and lack of preparedness will be brought to attention and I hope there's change for the better."

- 20, Hispanic Female College Student, North Carolina

There are several recommendations that students shared to ensure that schools are able to support all students.

COVID-19 has exposed a wide range of structural deficiencies within the public education system. However, the pandemic has also presented an opportunity to reimagine schools with an equity lens, ensuring that every student has the opportunities they deserve to succeed. Our Turn collaborated with The Education Justice Collective, a coalition of youth-driven organizations, to develop a set of recommendations to move schools forward. These recommendations outline key principles for the future of education and serve as starting points for future campaigns and conversations at national and local levels.

OUR VISION:

1.) **Students must have a voice that shapes their education.** For schools to serve the diverse interests of students authentically, young people must have a meaningful seat at the table to use their lived experiences and opinions to affect change. As the education system changes rapidly as a result of COVID-19, students must be partners in the decision-making process at the school, district and state levels. Students must be included in fall semester planning.

2.) **A just response to COVID-19 must prioritize comprehensive support for marginalized students.** Historically, marginalized communities have disproportionately carried the burden of inequitable resources and budget cuts. Especially as they are disproportionately affected by the health and economic effects of COVID-19, prioritizing underserved students - including Black, Latinx and indigenous communities, undocumented students, immigrant students, LGBTQ+ students, students with learning differences and students experiencing poverty, homelessness or foster care - requires providing all students with the resources they need to effectively learn.

3.) **Students' basic needs must be completely met.** To begin to participate in learning, students must be guaranteed access to the critical supports they require during this time, including food and water, a safe home, physical and mental health care and more. Schools must recognize the changing financial circumstances of their students as a result of COVID-19 and play a fundamental role in meeting students' basic needs through free school lunches, tutoring, family supports, health and social services, and youth development.

4.) **Schools, the public sector and the private sector must collaborate to close the digital divide.** To mitigate the worst inequities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, students must be guaranteed access to the technology they need to participate in distance learning, including internet, digital devices and headphones. We cannot continue to neglect both rural and urban communities who have lacked access to these essential resources, which must be publicly available for all.

5.) We need to replace one-size-fits-all education with differentiated learning models. Nothing about education is normal right now, so our curricula, evaluation, and grading systems cannot continue as usual. Especially during the COVID-19 crisis, we must take a student's context into account to understand their holistic interests and create individualized approaches to maximize their growth.

6.) Creating positive and nurturing school climates must be prioritized. Through digital connection, students and educators should collaborate to develop strong, reciprocal working relationships. Whether online or in-person, safe school environments, social-emotional learning, and access to mental health supports must be at the forefront, with increased funding for school counselors, trauma-informed teaching and ending the school-to-prison pipeline as priorities. Schools should look to the restorative justice model as a way to prioritize students' physical, mental and emotional needs.

7.) Teachers and all school staff should be fully supported to advance educational equity. Especially during a time of unprecedented economic uncertainty, school staff must not be laid off, furloughed, or made to take pay cuts and receive salaries that align with their cost of living. For the educational system to retain effective educators, teachers must have a voice in decisions about how the educational system is moving forward at the school, district and state levels. Teacher workforces should be representative of the diversity of their students and receive professional development that enables them to foster equity in education and close the opportunity gap.

8.) Schools must be funded equitably and adequately. Public schools are an essential public good because they are a direct investment into the lives of children. It must, therefore, be a priority of both the federal government and individual state governments to ensure that public school funding is maintained at levels that protect a student's access to a free and high-quality public education. Further, funding should be strategically allocated to protect the access of children who are in especially precarious situations because of the COVID-19 crisis, e.g., students who are food insecure, homeless, lack access to technology, have a disability, and/or are an emerging bilingual.

9.) Students must be equipped to take civic action in this critical moment. As incubators of democracy, schools must prioritize preparing students to be active participants in their communities by providing them with the resources and knowledge to engage directly in action, registering and pre-registering eligible students to vote and informing students about how COVID-19 has impacted the voting process. Especially in this turning point in history, for students to address the effects of COVID-19, schools must provide students the full and complete version of US history.

10.) To move schools forward, we must invest in community partnerships. Local communities are experiencing unprecedented uncertainty during the COVID-19 pandemic. For schools to be just social institutions, they must be bolstered by robust social infrastructures in their surrounding communities. Community Schools offer a strategy for how schools can prioritize comprehensive supports for students, engage parents and families, and respond to local needs and strengths for enriched learning possibilities.

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