

Newark Kids Count Data Snapshot



The Impact of COVID-19: College Students and COVID-19

By Alana Vega, Kids Count Coordinator and Peter Chen, Policy Counsel

● Introduction

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of remote learning on the educational and social development of children in preschool through 12th grade has been a national topic. In 2021, data releases from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, as well as the U.S. Census Bureau, have demonstrated the ways in which college students have shifted their educational plans as a result of COVID-19. This snapshot seeks to investigate these trends at a more local level by examining the experiences of Newark's 2019 and 2020 high school graduates as they navigated their freshman and sophomore years in college during a global pandemic. The high school class of 2019 was able to experience a typical fall, whether enrolled in higher education or working, but college students saw their courses drastically altered shortly into their spring semester. The class of 2020 entered their fall semester of college under completely different circumstances, often beginning their freshman year virtually. Many were unable to participate fully in some of the traditional ceremonies associated with senior year, such as prom and graduation. The experiences of these students and data trends in higher education enrollment highlight areas that may require additional support and added policy solutions to ensure that young people can thrive.

Through local, state and national data, the following trends are present:

- Postsecondary enrollment appears to have declined from Fall 2019 to Fall 2020 among Newark seniors.
- Declines in postsecondary enrollment appear to be occurring among community colleges more so than 4-year schools, when comparing enrollment data from 2016 and 2020.
- Young adults across the country are expressing feelings of anxiety and hopelessness as they navigate the pandemic.

Figure 1: 12th Grade Enrollment Totals by School Year

	2018-19	2019-20
Newark Public Schools	2,231	2,217
Newark Charter Schools	630	661
Newark Total	2,861	2,878

Source: N.J. Department of Education, October enrollment counts. Retrieved March 16, 2021 from <https://www.state.nj.us/education/data/enr/>.

● Newark's Classes of 2019 and 2020: Who Are They?

Roughly 2,800 12th grade students were enrolled in Newark's traditional public and charter schools in both the 2018-19 and 2019-20 academic years (see Figure 1). Among Newark Public School (NPS) students graduating in 2019, a little more than half enrolled in a 2-year or 4-year institution the following fall (see Figure 2). One year later, that figure declined to just under 43 percent of NPS students. In both years, a higher share of NPS students were enrolled in a 4-year institution compared to a 2-year college, with close to 75 percent of all higher-education-bound students enrolled in a 4-year college or university. Figure 2 also shows the postsecondary enrollment data broken down by different demographic categories. Postsecondary enrollment rates declined for students of all racial groups, with 2020 rates at 41.4 for Black students, 41.7 for Hispanic students and 48.1 percent for white students. English language learners had the largest percentage point difference in postsecondary enrollment from the fall of 2019 to the fall of 2020, dropping from 33.2 percent to 18.7 percent.

Additional trends emerge when examining postsecondary enrollment figures across the individual high schools in Newark (see Figure 3). Declines in enrollment were seen across the city's traditional public and charter high schools, with some schools experiencing higher drops in college enrollment than others.

Figure 2: Newark Public Schools Postsecondary Fall Enrollment Rates

	Fall 2019			Fall 2020		
	% Enrolled in Any Institution	Out of % Enrolled in Any Institution		% Enrolled in Any Institution	Out of % Enrolled in Any Institution	
		% Enrolled in 2-Year Institution	% Enrolled in 4-Year Institution		% Enrolled in 2-Year Institution	% Enrolled in 4-Year Institution
Districtwide	51.5	25.1	74.9	42.7	25.2	74.8
White	59.3	16.2	83.8	48.1	22.0	78.0
Hispanic	53.2	29.8	70.2	41.7	29.4	70.6
Black or African American	48.8	23.5	76.5	41.4	22.2	77.8
Economically Disadvantaged Students	51.4	25.4	74.6	43.3	25.2	74.8
Students with Disabilities	30.6	42.6	57.4	20.9	33.8	66.2
English Language Learners	33.2	61.3	38.7	18.7	43.9	56.1

Source: N.J. Department of Education, School Performance Reports. These data reflect the percentage of high school graduates who were enrolled in postsecondary institutions the fall after high school graduation. Data are pulled from the National Student Clearinghouse; students who enroll in institutions outside the United States are not included. Please note that for Fall 2020, caution should be used when comparing prior years due to the impact of COVID-19 on college enrollment. Data retrieved from <https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/>.

Figure 3: Newark Postsecondary Enrollment Rates by School

	Fall 2019			Fall 2020		
	% Enrolled in Any Institution	Out of % Enrolled in Any Institution		% Enrolled in Any Institution	Out of % Enrolled in Any Institution	
		% Enrolled in 2-Year Institution	% Enrolled in 4-Year Institution		% Enrolled in 2-Year Institution	% Enrolled in 4-Year Institution
American History High School	62.4	17.2	82.8	52.6	20.0	80.0
Arts High School	72.7	21.8	78.2	63.4	25.3	74.7
Bard Early College High School	76.3	12.1	87.9	69.1	4.6	95.4
Barringer High School	34.8	36.3	63.7	24.5	44.2	55.8
Central High School	41.0	33.8	66.2	26.4	37.0	63.0
Eagle Academy for Young Men of Newark	61.4	22.2	77.8	40.0	6.3	93.8
East Side High School	44.2	41.3	58.7	37.2	35.3	64.7
Great Oaks Legacy Charter School	78.6	6.1	93.9	56.5	17.9	82.1
LEAD Charter School	22.7	70.0	30.0	13.8	55.6	44.4
Malcolm X Shabazz High School	35.6	26.9	73.1	30.7	17.1	82.9
Marion P. Thomas Charter School	62.9	20.5	79.5	39.8	32.6	67.4
North Star Academy Charter School	90.5	3.7	96.3	84.4	4.3	95.7
Peoples Preparatory Charter School	55.6	5.0	95.0	45.8	2.6	97.4
Science Park High School	87.8	10.1	89.9	78.4	16.0	84.0
TEAM Academy Charter School	62.2	15.7	84.3	63.1	22.8	77.2
Technology High School	77.7	11.3	88.7	69.2	18.8	81.2
University High School	69.0	23.2	76.8	56.5	18.0	82.0
Weequahic High School	33.0	35.3	64.7	31.6	35.1	64.9
West Side High School	38.3	25.8	74.2	36.8	22.9	77.1

Source: N.J. Department of Education, School Performance Reports. These data reflect the percentage of high school graduates who were enrolled in postsecondary institutions the fall after high school graduation. Data are pulled from the National Student Clearinghouse; students who enroll in institutions outside the United States are not included. Please note that for Fall 2020, caution should be used when comparing prior years due to the impact of COVID-19 on college enrollment. Data retrieved from <https://rc.doe.state.nj.us/>.

● Listening Sessions with Recent High School Graduates

Traditionally, New Jersey Kids Count education data have focused on students in preschool through 12th grade. In order to get a better sense of the data that might best capture the experiences of college-aged youth, ACNJ, in partnership with the Abbott Leadership Institute and Center for PreCollege Programs at Rutgers University-Newark, held listening sessions with two groups of high school graduates from the greater Newark area. Members of the class of 2019 reflected on the shift to virtual instruction during the spring of their freshman year in college, while the class of 2020 shared the impact the pandemic had on both their senior year of high school as well as their transition to higher education. Some members of the high school class of 2020 spoke candidly of their decisions not to enroll in college in the fall of 2020.

Though the stories shared by young people were engaging, much of the insight provided does not translate itself directly into data. The information gleaned from these conversations was neither generalizable nor representative of all Newark youth enrolled in college; however, we wanted to summarize some of the key themes that were discussed during the sessions.

The following are some of the observations and concerns voiced by Newark youth regarding the impact of COVID-19 on their experiences after high school:

- **Increased stress, pressure and isolation since the pandemic's onset:** Students identified a number of stressors associated with the pandemic—from the transition to virtual learning, to achieving a minimum GPA to maintain a scholarship, to personal family losses due to COVID-19. The loss of social “rites of passage” like senior prom, graduation ceremonies and moving into a dorm, as well as affording course materials during a time when many families were experiencing economic challenges, were also identified by students as hardships.
- **Perceived decline in educational quality:** Many college students, regardless of the institution they attended, mentioned feeling as though the level of instruction they received did not correlate with the tuition they paid. Virtual learning was challenging for college students as well as high school students, with some students describing their high school assignments as “busy work” once the transition to virtual school began. Several students recognized the limited bandwidth and capacity of school staff and faculty (at the high school and college levels) to address the wide range of students’ needs.
- **Lack of opportunity to interact with peers:** This also relates to stress and isolation, but one clear observation was the toll that a lack of peer connections had on students. Although disenrollment is happening across the country, as the data throughout this snapshot demonstrate, several students in the listening sessions indicated that they felt a sense of relief upon hearing the experiences of others who had either not enrolled in or who had withdrawn from school. It appeared as though the lack of opportunity to connect with other young people during the pandemic caused many in the group to feel as though they were the only ones who may have been having difficulty continuing their pursuit of higher education.

● Higher Education Trends: Newark and New Jersey

According to the Newark City of Learning Collaborative’s (NCLC) 2018 report, *Post-secondary Outcomes of Newark High School Graduates*, more than 80 percent of Newark graduates attend institutions of higher learning within the state of New Jersey.¹ Preliminary data released by the New Jersey Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (see Figure 4) indicates that first-time, full-time enrollment among New Jersey’s public 4-year institutions remained consistent between 2016 and 2020, with a slight increase over time. Private, for-profit institutions (or independent, proprietary colleges) saw almost no change in first-time, full-time enrollment during the same time period. Though private, non-profit universities and colleges saw a four percent decline in enrollment, it was New Jersey’s community colleges that saw the steepest decline in first-time, full-time students enrolling in school.

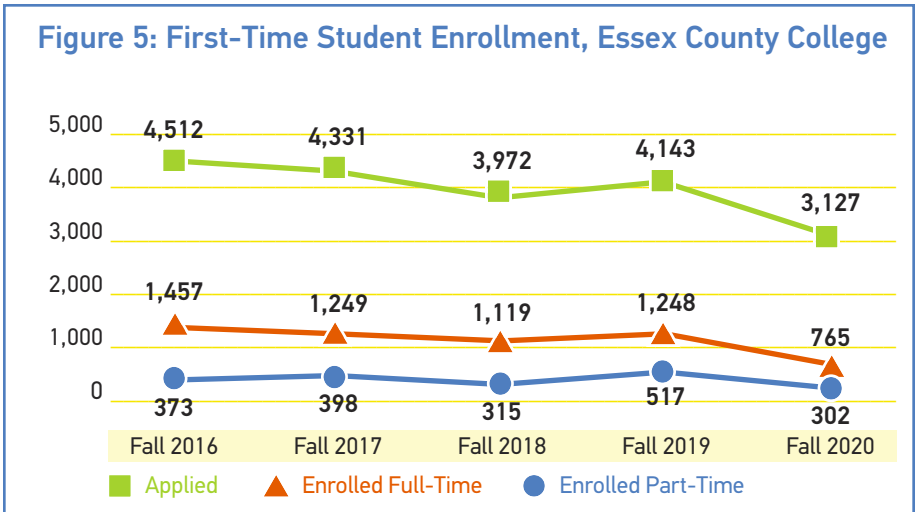
Figure 4: First-Time, Full-Time Undergraduate Enrollment at NJ-Based Institutions of Higher Learning*

	2016	2020*	% Change 16-20
4-Year Public Institutions	22,282	22,716	2
Community Colleges	23,846	17,168	-28
Independent Colleges, Public-Mission	9,172	8,799	-4
Independent Colleges, Proprietary	1,007	1,004	0

**Please note that these data are preliminary. Independent Proprietary college totals for 2020 include data for Fall of 2019 for Strayer University. Source: N.J. Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, NJ IPEDS Preliminary Fall Enrollment Survey and SURE Fall Enrollment Files. Data retrieved March 12, 2021 from <https://www.state.nj.us/highereducation/documents/pdf/statistics/fallbylevel/Enr2020.pdf>.*

These trends are reflected in the more local Essex County College (ECC) enrollment data as well (see Figure 5). Although more college-bound Newark graduates enroll in 4-year colleges than 2-year colleges, the college with the highest concentration of Newark students enrolled, according to the 2018 NCLC report, was Essex County College, with more than 33 percent of students attending.² Applications for the 2020 fall semester among first-time, full-time students fell to a five-year low of 3,127, down from 4,512 in the fall of 2016. Similarly, first-time, full-time enrollment declined by 47 percent between 2016 and 2020. It is important to note that, in both 2016 and 2020, more than 70 percent of first-time, full-time students enrolled in ECC were Black or Hispanic. Although declines in ECC’s enrollment have impacted nearly all racial and ethnic groups enrolled, Black and Hispanic students have been disproportionately impacted.

Data disaggregated by race and gender reveal another trend—male student enrollment declined at a greater rate than for female students. First-time, full-time Hispanic, Black and white male students saw a decline in enrollment of 50 percent or more between 2016 and 2020, exceeding the declines present among their female student counterparts.



Source: Essex County College, Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, & Assessment. 2020-2021 Annual Fact Book, Figure 1.1. Please note, beginning in Fall 2019, new enrollments include students who enrolled in the preceding summer semesters. Applications include associate and certificate applicants. Retrieved March 17, 2021 from <https://www.essex.edu/fact-book-fast-facts-profiles/>.

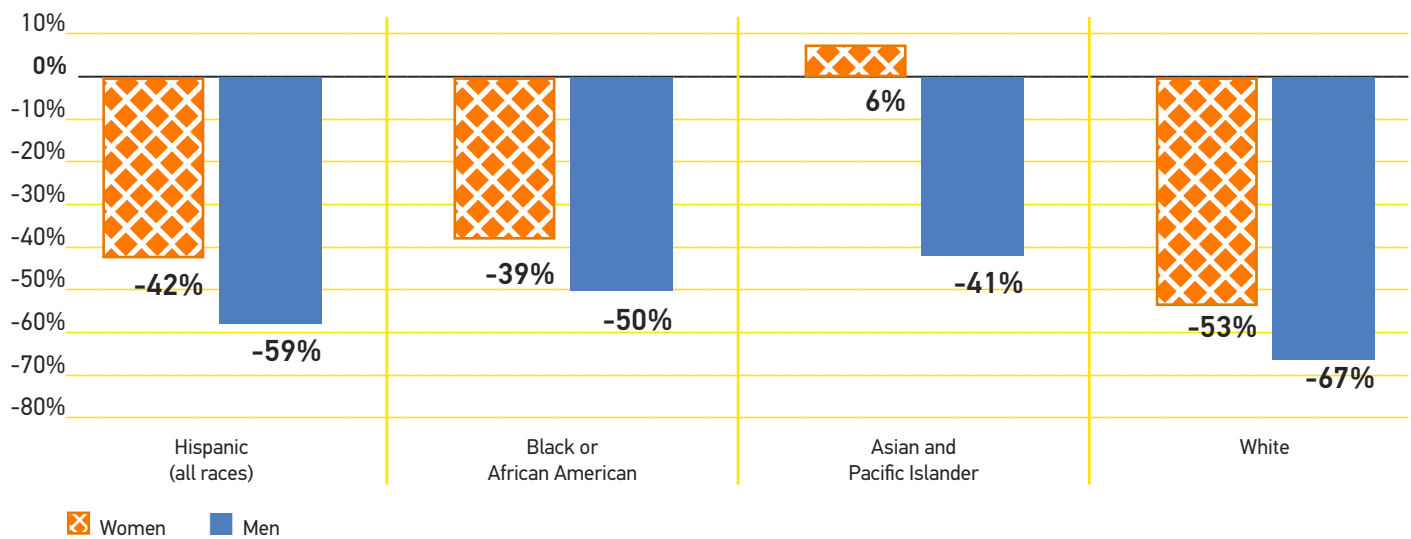
Figure 6: First-Time, Full-Time Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity, Essex County College*

	Fall 2016	Fall 2017	Fall 2018	Fall 2019	Fall 2020	5-year % change	1-year % change
Hispanic (of any race)	409	340	276	313	203	-50	-35
Black or African American	664	545	526	620	373	-44	-40
Asian and Pacific Islander	35	29	24	27	29	-17	7
White	109	88	88	78	42	-61	-46
Native American	1	3	0	3	1	0	-67
Multi-Racial	9	15	12	19	15	67	-21
Non-Resident	138	156	138	136	68	-51	-50
Unknown	92	73	55	52	34	-63	-35
Total	1,457	1,249	1,119	1,248	765	-47	-39

*Degree-seeking students.

Source: Essex County College, Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, & Assessment. 2020-2021 Annual Fact Book, Table 1.6. Please note, two separate categories—Asian and Pacific Islander—have been combined into a single category for this chart. Retrieved March 17, 2021 from <https://www.essex.edu/fact-book-fast-facts-profiles/>.

Figure 7: 5-Year Percent Change in First-Time, Full-Time Essex County College Degree Seeking Students by Race/Ethnicity and Gender, Fall 2020 and Fall 2016



Source: Essex County College, Office of Institutional Effectiveness, Planning, & Assessment. 2020-2021 Annual Fact Book, Table 1.6. Some categories are not displayed due to small numbers; non-racial or ethnic categories are not displayed. Please note, two separate categories—Asian and Pacific Islander — have been combined into a single category for this graph. Retrieved March 17, 2021 from <https://www.essex.edu/fact-book-fast-facts-profiles/>.

According to the NCLC report, the college or university with the second-highest number of Newark graduates, following Essex County College, was Rutgers-Newark.³ Data from Rutgers-Newark show more consistent enrollment numbers than Essex County College. From 2016 to 2020, enrollment among first-time, full-time students decreased slightly, by two percent. Between fall 2019 and fall 2020, enrollment declined by six percent. Continued monitoring of enrollment data will be important in the coming years, to assess the full impact of COVID-19 on student enrollment.

Figure 8: Fall First-Time, Full-Time Enrollment, Rutgers-Newark

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	% Change 16-20
Full-Time	1,337	1,319	1,318	1,398	1,314	-2

Source: Data for 2020 are as reported by Rutgers University-Newark. Data for 2016-2019 are as reported by the Institute for Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) Data Center.

● Rutgers-Newark's Assistance During the Pandemic

In the midst of the pandemic, colleges and universities across the country have worked to address the needs of students. Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, and Rutgers-Newark implemented a number of policy changes and services to better serve its community during the most recent academic year. The list below is just a few of the changes Rutgers has made. For a more complete list, visit: <https://coronavirus.rutgers.edu/faqs/>.

- **Tuition:** As of July 16, 2020, Rutgers announced that both tuition and academic fees would be frozen for the academic year, in recognition of the economic hardships caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The University also reduced campus fees, which support vital components of campus operations such as library services.
- **Academics:** Students had the option of applying to have their coursework graded on a pass/no credit scale. This option was open to students after completing the semester and up until one week after final grades were posted. The University Administration encouraged students to seek academic advisement in order to consider the impact this option could have on a timely graduation and the future pursuit of graduate studies.
- **CARES Act Funding:** Rutgers worked to distribute detailed and timely information to students regarding the application process for CARES Act funding. Eligible recipients of CARES Act funds could use the monies toward food, housing, health care and more. The average award amount was \$1,100. To learn more, visit: <https://scarlethub.rutgers.edu/financial-services/cares-act-01-31-2021/>.
- **Other aid:** In recognition of growing food insecurity among college students over the years, Rutgers-Newark has operated a food pantry, pantryRUN, which is open to students Monday, Wednesday and Friday in the Robeson Campus Center. For more information on pantryRUN hours and operations, visit: <https://myrun.newark.rutgers.edu/pantryrun>.

● Increasing Postsecondary Support for Newark Youth: The Newark Grad Center

In July of 2021, the Abbott Leadership Institute (ALI), Center for PreCollege, Rutgers University-Newark, will launch the Newark Grad Center (NGC), an initiative aimed to support Newark's youth after high school graduation and into postsecondary success. The NGC will provide tailored and individualized support to Newark high school graduates and fill a gap in critical support that is needed to ensure Newark youth make it to and through college and/or into thriving careers.

Like ALI's Youth Media Symposium (YMS) College Success Center founded in 2015, the NGC will assist Newark youth ages 18-25 with college applications, financial aid and scholarships. NGC will also serve as a hub for resources, information and opportunities targeted to support this population.

The NGC will feature professional development opportunities, mentorship and tutoring support. With the launch, the NGC, through an award from the Newark Technology Fund, will provide 15 Newark high school graduates with college technology kits inclusive of laptops, hotspots and Zoom accounts.

The Newark Grad Center is funded by the South Ward Promise Neighborhood grant initiative and will share space with the YMS College Success Center in Bradley Hall on the Rutgers-Newark Campus.

For more information, contact alicollegesuccess@rutgers.edu.

Higher Education and Young Adults: The National Context

Education and employment. These trends in higher education enrollment are occurring across the country. According to data collected from the Household Pulse Survey, over 70 percent of adults responding nationwide between March 17-March 29, 2021 indicated that postsecondary plans had been canceled or changed in some way for at least one adult in their household.⁴ The Bureau of Labor Statistics released figures indicating similar patterns as well, showing that from October 2019 to October 2020, postsecondary enrollment among 16- to 24-year-olds had dropped from 66.2 percent to 62.7 percent.⁵ The same data release also provided labor force participation rates for young people who dropped out of high school between October 2019 and October 2020. Among these recent high school dropouts ages 16-24, 47.5 percent were labor force participants, compared to 67.2 percent of recent high school graduates who were not enrolled in college.⁶

The Bureau of Labor Statistics data pointed to concerning trends regarding employment for recent college graduates. Among recent college graduates ages 20-29 with a bachelor's degree, employment rates decreased from 76.0 percent in October 2019 to 67.3 percent in October 2020 (see Figure 9). Employment rates among associate degree recipients within the same age group saw an even larger percentage point decrease, dropping by 12.1 percentage points from October 2019 to October 2020.

Figure 9: U.S. Employment Rates for Recent College Graduates/Degree Recipients Ages 20-29 (%)

	October 2019	October 2020
Associate degree	71.3	59.2
Bachelor's degree	76.0	67.3
Advanced degree*	82.3	74.7

**Advanced degree refers to a master's, professional or doctoral degree.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Economic News Release. Data refer to people who received their degree in January through October 2020. Retrieved May 6, 2021 from <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/hsqec.t03.htm> and <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/hsqec.htm>.*

Mental health. College enrollment and employment data demonstrate the economic impacts that the pandemic may be having on young people, but additional data from the Household Pulse Survey speaks to the effects COVID-19 may have on mental health. According to national data collected between March 3 and March 29, 2021, 44 percent of young people between the ages 18 to 24 years old reported feeling nervous, anxious or on-edge for nearly half the days or every day over the last week.⁷ During the same time period, 36 percent of young people reported feeling down, depressed or hopeless nearly every day or half the days of the last week.⁸ This is substantially higher than the 22 percent of U.S. adults in households with children during the same time period who indicated feeling down, depressed or hopeless.⁹ These data are not specific to Newark or New Jersey youth, but they echo the feedback that ACNJ staff heard from young people and those who serve them.

● Conclusion

As of March 17, 2021, the State of New Jersey announced that all schools would be expected to resume in-person instruction at the start of the 2021-22 academic year.¹⁰ NPS students returned to school buildings in April 2021, and Rutgers made national news when it became one of the first universities to announce a vaccination requirement for students returning to campus in the fall of 2021.¹¹ It is unclear how a return to in-person schooling at the high school and college-level might impact college enrollment rates. Ultimately, it is challenging to make any concrete conclusions based on one year's worth of enrollment data, but recent patterns in college enrollment reveal the need for additional research on COVID-19's effect on young adults in Newark and beyond. National data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics seem to indicate that the pandemic is already having an impact on the employment rates of many young graduates. Research also suggests that young people who graduate during economic downturns may be at a greater risk of lost earnings over their lifetime.¹² Discussions with young people conducted by ACNJ, though limited, also indicate the need for present interventions, in order to counteract some of the challenges experienced by young people during the pandemic. Though local data would be useful in making informed decisions, the information made available through the Household Pulse Survey shows the pandemic is impacting the mental health of young people—not just those enrolled in college—across the country. A return to in-person instruction might present an opportunity for high schools and institutions of higher learning to implement greater supportive services for students to transition back to normalcy.

● References

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- ² Ibid, p. 10, Table 2.
- ³ Ibid, p. 10, Table 2.
- ⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey Interactive Tool. Data represent the percentage of adults in households where at least one adult was planning on taking post-secondary classes this fall, but for whom those plans have either been canceled or changed in some significant way; data are for responses collected March 17-March 29, 2021 (Week 27 of data collection). Retrieved May 6, 2021 from https://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/hhp/#/?measures=SECONDED&periodSelector=27&s_state=00034.
- ⁵ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Economic News Release. (2021). College Enrollment and Work Activity of High School Graduates News Release. Retrieved May 6, 2021 from <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/hsgec.htm>.
- ⁶ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Economic News Release. (2021). Table 1. Labor force status of 2019 high school graduates and 2019-2020 high school dropouts 16 to 24 years old by school enrollment, educational attainment, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, October 2020. Retrieved May 25, 2021 from <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/hsgec.t01.htm>.
- ⁷ Adults ages 18 to 24 who felt nervous, anxious or on edge for more than half of the days or nearly every day in the past week in the United States. Data are for responses collected March 3-March 29, 2021. Retrieved May 6, 2021 from www.datacenter.kidscount.org.
- ⁸ Adults ages 18 to 24 who felt down, depressed or hopeless for more than half of the days or nearly every day for the past week in the United States. Data are for responses collected March 3-March 29, 2021. Retrieved May 6, 2021 from www.datacenter.kidscount.org.
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- ¹² Steinberg, S.A. (2013). Center for American Progress, The High Cost of Youth Unemployment. Retrieved May 19 from <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/economy/reports/2013/04/05/59428/the-high-cost-of-youth-unemployment/>.

ACNJ Staff

Cecilia Zalkind, *President & CEO*

Mary Coogan, *Vice President*

Staff contributing to this report:

Catherine Felegi, *Staff Writer*

Eloisa Hernandez-Ramos, *Outreach
and Communications Associate*

Lana Lee, *Media Relations Manager*

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Rutgers University-Newark

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THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION



Prudential
Foundation



35 Halsey Street
Newark, NJ 07102
(973) 643-3876
(973) 643-9153 (fax)

advocates@acnj.org



@ACNJForKids

