

# Student Perspectives of the Impact of COVID-19: A Summary of Open-Ended Responses

---

Edgar I. Sanchez, PhD

This data byte explores students' open-ended responses about how the coronavirus pandemic has impacted them academically. Students commented on the impact to their opportunities for taking the ACT® test; issues of time related to taking the test, preparing for the test, and college admissions deadlines; and the greater demands being placed on them by both school and work. This analysis provides a snapshot into students' experiences during the coronavirus pandemic in June 2020. This work compliments other ACT studies of the pandemic's impact.

## Key Findings

- Many students expressed confusion and frustration over test date cancellations.
- Students discussed disruptions to their postsecondary plans and an increase in personal anxiety.
- Many students spoke about the increased demands being placed upon them by both school and work.
- Some students reported that during the pandemic they have felt greater pressure to work to support their family.

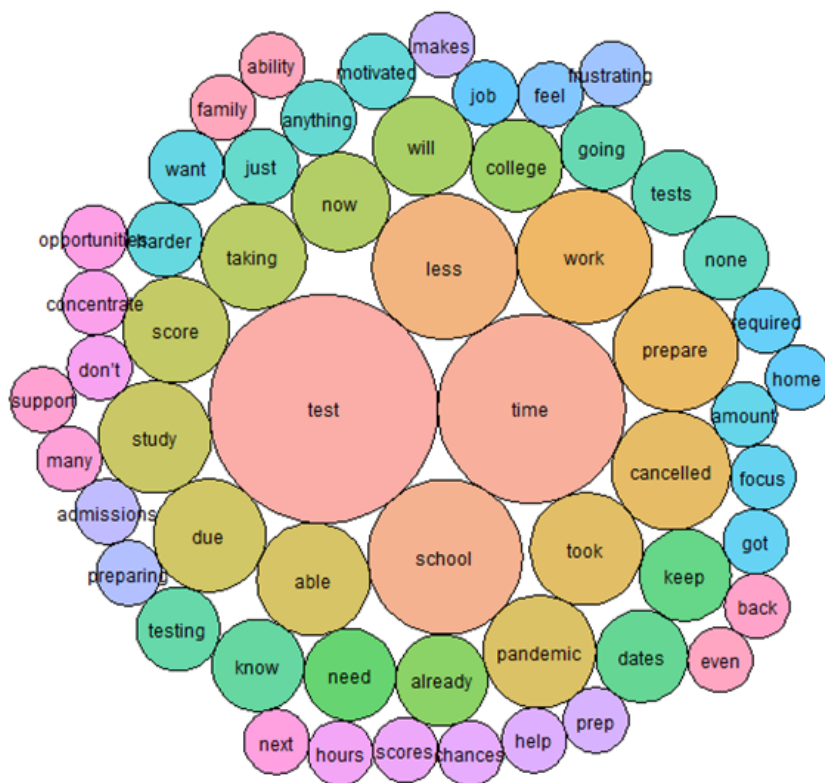
A forthcoming study by Howland, Moore, and Sanchez (2020)<sup>1</sup> illustrates how students have been impacted academically by the coronavirus pandemic. That study examined how the coronavirus has impacted their motivation and interest in preparing for the ACT and concentration on schoolwork in general. This survey, which was administered in June 2020, asked students about both their current experiences with the pandemic as well as their experiences over the past few months. It further highlighted how—despite significant upheaval due to the pandemic—many students have not changed their postsecondary plans. The pandemic has, however, had a big impact on students' ability to concentrate on school and remain motivated to prepare for the ACT. In the survey, students were also afforded the opportunity to indicate in their own words how the coronavirus pandemic has impacted them. In this paper, I explore open-ended responses that were provided by approximately 100 students.



ACT, Inc. 2020

Figure 1 shows the prevalence of the words used by students to describe how the coronavirus has impacted them.<sup>2,3</sup> The four most frequently used words to describe the impact of the coronavirus pandemic were test, time, school, and less. Student themes around these word choices are explored next.

**Figure 1.** Prevalence of Words Describing how the Pandemic has Affected Students



**Test, Time, and Less.** Many students expressed their feelings about the impact of cancelled ACT test dates, speaking about the confusion and frustration this caused for their postsecondary plans. Other students indicated that the uncertainty in being able to schedule and sit for an exam was causing increased personal anxiety. As a result of having fewer available test dates and the challenges with rescheduling test dates, students also expressed concern about having less time to prepare for the ACT and less time to take the ACT before admissions decisions are made. As one student noted, “All of my tests have been cancelled. I don’t know when I will be able to take it, and taking it is really important.”

**Time and School.** Students also responded that they had greater demands on their time from both school and work. This resulted in a situation where they had less time to study for the ACT. Some students also reported that during the pandemic they have felt greater pressure to work to support their family. As one student said, “I do not have

time to study due to always working to support my family throughout the pandemic.” Others indicated that their schoolwork was so overwhelming that they had little time left for other things: “I am extremely overwhelmed with school work, and have no free time to do anything else.”<sup>4</sup> This is consistent with other research that found that students have multiple demands placed upon them at home a result of the pandemic.<sup>5</sup> Some students went on to express their frustration with learning from home: “I concentrate more at school in person. It’s all too stressful doing school at home online and I don’t support full time distance education.”

Our understanding of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on students’ educational experiences is evolving. This analysis, in conjunction with Howland, Moore, and Sanchez (2020), provides a snapshot into students’ experiences during the coronavirus pandemic in June 2020. ACT has initiated other studies of the pandemic’s impact, covering topics such as technology access, mental health, learning loss as evidenced by lower ACT test scores, postsecondary planning, and social and emotional skill development.<sup>6,7,8,9,10,11</sup>

## Notes

1. Howland, S., Moore, R., & Sanchez, E. I. (2020). *Impacts of the Coronavirus Pandemic on Incoming High School Seniors’ Postsecondary Plans*. Iowa City, IA: ACT.
2. Figure 1 shows words that were used at least three times by respondents.
3. The prompt for this item was: “Which of the following statements apply to you because of the coronavirus pandemic?” The last option was an open-ended response option.
4. Because this response was provided in the present tense, it is possible that for this student their classes were still in session in early June.
5. Croft, M., Moore, R., Guffy, G., Hayes, S., Gragnaniello, K., & Vitale, D. (2020). *High school students’ experiences in March during the coronavirus pandemic*. Iowa City, IA: ACT.
6. Hayes, S., & Gragnaniello, K. (2020, May 5). Student voice survey series: Compounding effects of coronavirus disproportionately affect learning for students from underserved backgrounds [Blog post]. Retrieved from <https://leadershipblog.act.org/2020/05/student-voice-survey-series-compounding.html>
7. Guffy, G., & Gragnaniello, K. (2020, April 29). Student voice survey series: ‘I can’t talk to my teacher in-person, so it makes my learning harder’ [Blog post]. Retrieved from <https://leadershipblog.act.org/2020/04/student-voice-survey-series-learning-at-home.html>
8. Moore, R., & Croft, M. (2020, April 20). Inequities in technological devices and internet connection persist during the coronavirus [Blog Post]. Retrieved from <https://leadershipblog.act.org/2020/04/inequities-in-tech-coronavirus.html>

- 
9. Allen, J., Mattern, K., & Camara, W. (2020). *Predicting the impact of COVID-19 school closures on ACT test scores: Methods and considerations for states and districts*. Iowa City, IA: ACT.
  10. Walton, K., & Murano, D. (2020, May 27). What COVID-19 can teach us about social and emotional skill development [Blog post]. Retrieved from <https://www.mawilearning.com/blog/what-covid-19-can-teach-us-about-social-and-emotional-skill-development/>
  11. Murano, D., & Walton, K. (2020, May 20). COVID-19 continues: How worried are high school students? [Blog post] Retrieved from <https://www.mawilearning.com/blog/covid-19-continues-how-worried-are-high-school-students/>

---

### **Edgar I. Sanchez, PhD**

Edgar Sanchez, a senior research scientist in the Validity and Efficacy Research department at ACT, works on predictive modeling of student educational outcomes. He is currently focusing on the efficacy of test preparation programs.

### **Acknowledgement**

The author thanks Jeff Allen for feedback on prior versions.