

A photograph of a classroom with rows of wooden desks and maroon chairs. A whiteboard is visible in the background, and a fluorescent light fixture hangs from the ceiling.

AUGUST 2020

**COVID-19 and Its Impacts:  
Adolescent Perspectives on the  
Pandemic and Its Effects on Their  
Lives and Communities**

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# About the Study

## Mission

The aims of this research were to collect adolescents' voices and thoughts on COVID-19 and its impact on their lives and communities. We gathered their perspectives through an online survey in an attempt to better understand what they are going through and help schools in their efforts to support students.

## Areas of Focus

The survey was intended for middle and high school students and asked about:

- Impacts and challenges they are experiencing in relation to COVID-19
- Their thinking about themselves and their places in society during this moment
- Their thinking about their future trajectories and opportunities
- Their trust in different institutions and groups in their society

## Privacy

Anonymity of participants was maintained in strict compliance with FERPA standards and Marquette's Institutional Review Board.

## Details

- Online survey of 20-25 minutes
- 21 Close-ended questions measuring civic efficacy, social responsibility, future mindedness & trust
- 11 open-ended questions asking about participants' emotions, as well as challenges and impacts related to COVID-19
- Resources were provided for individuals coping with the current situation

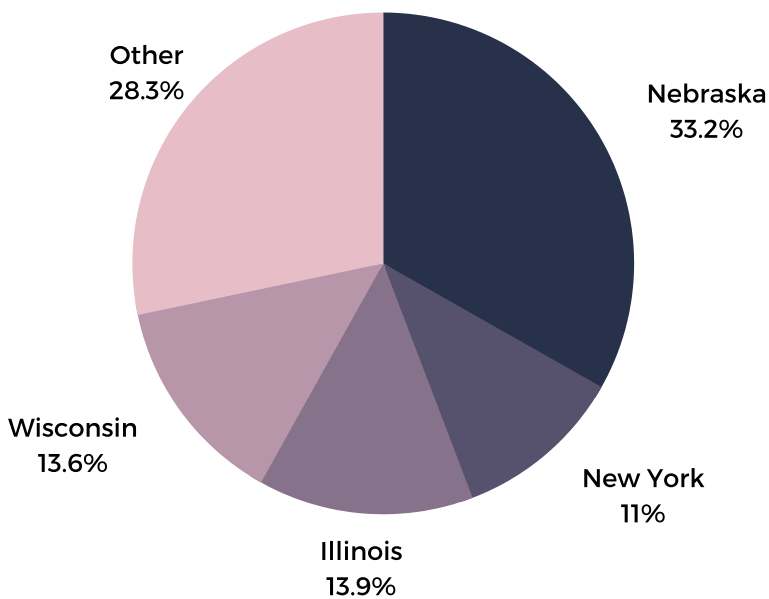
## Contact

If you have any questions or for further details, please contact Gabriel Velez at: [gabriel.velez@marquette.edu](mailto:gabriel.velez@marquette.edu)

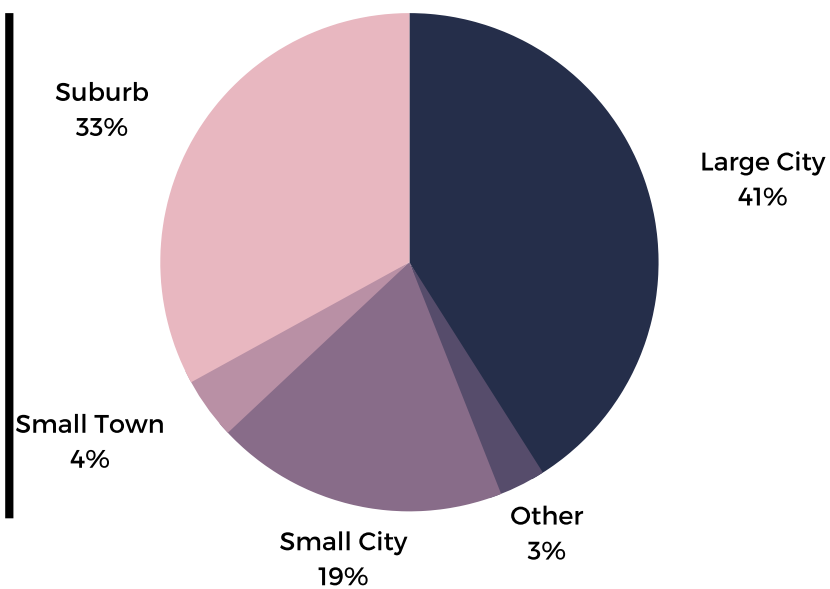
# Sample

A BREAKDOWN OF STUDENTS SURVEYED

## Location



## Geography



The large number of students from Nebraska was due to the strong participation from one school in Omaha. Other states with sizable representation were Hawaii, Missouri, California, and New Jersey. 32 respondents were from Canada.

**1124**

Took our survey

**816**

Answered the close and open ended questions

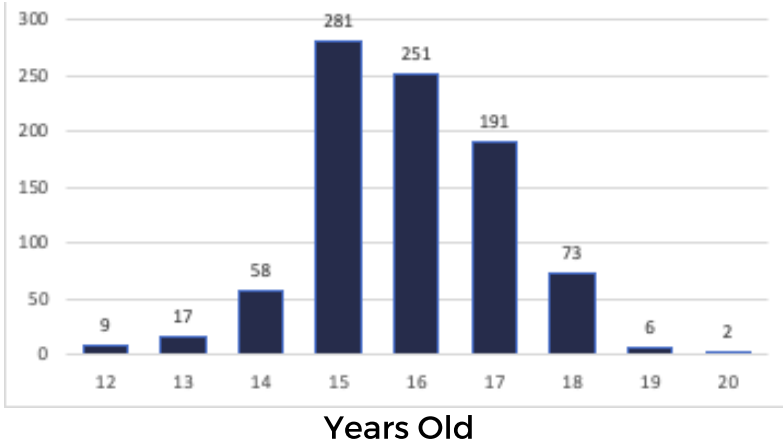
**791**

Provided an answer for all of the questions in the survey

# Sample

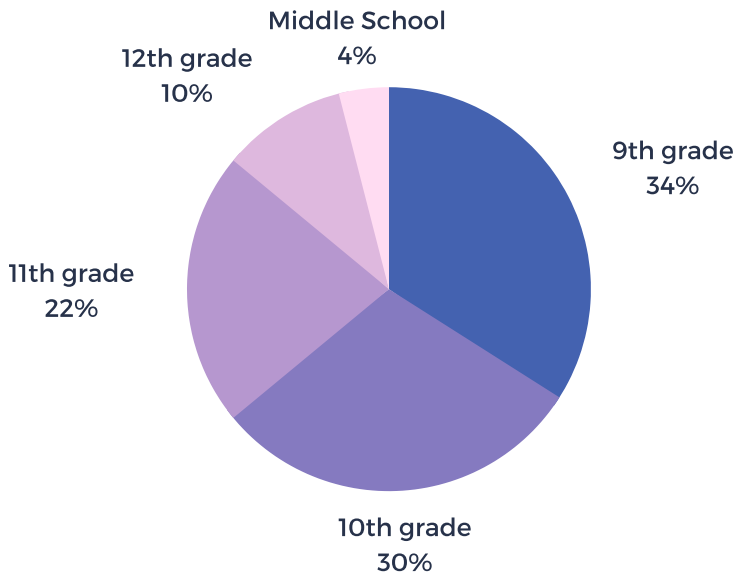
## A BREAKDOWN OF STUDENTS SURVEYED

### Age

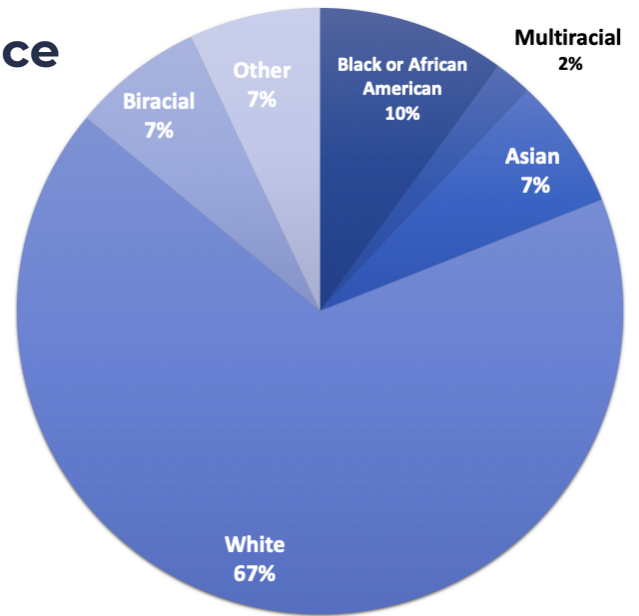


The mean age was 15.86 years old.

### Grade Breakdown



### Race



The participants predominately identified as White. 68 students identified both as White and Latinx.

Other includes small numbers of American Native or Alaskan Native and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.

**23%**

Identified as female

**73%**

Identified as male

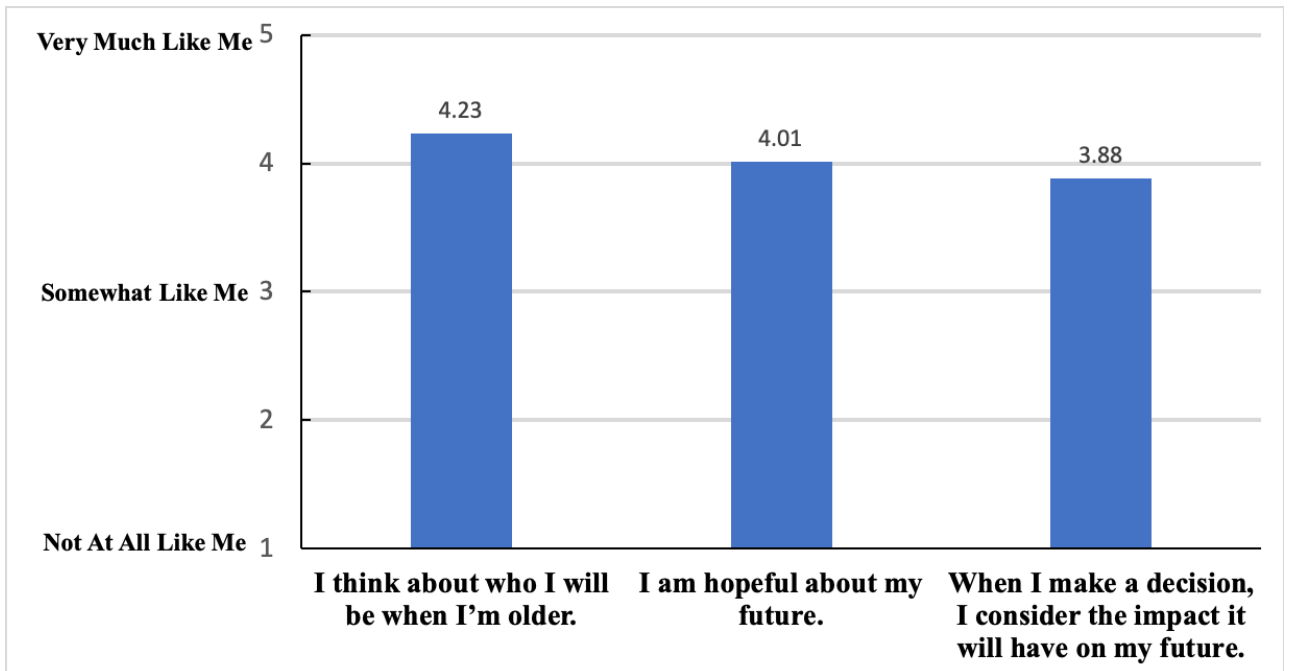
**2%**

Identified as nonbinary or other

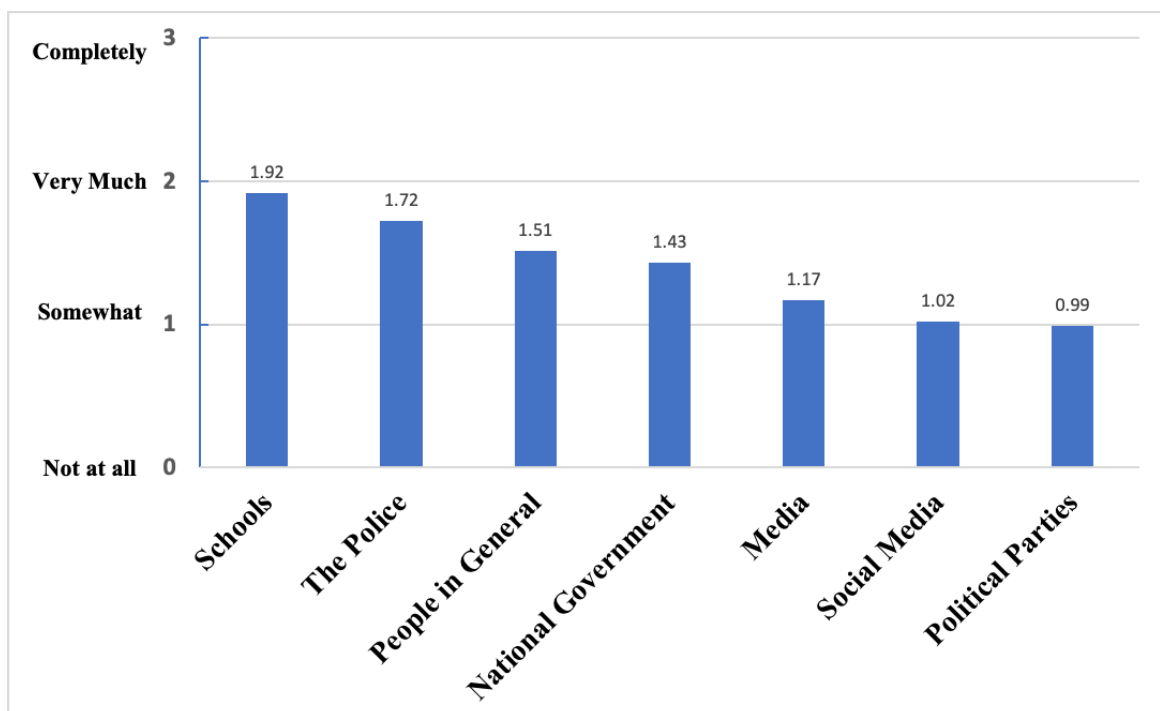


# CIVIC ATTITUDES

## Future Mindedness



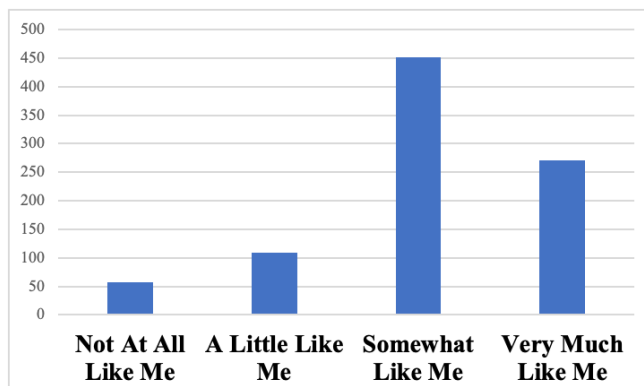
## Levels of Trust



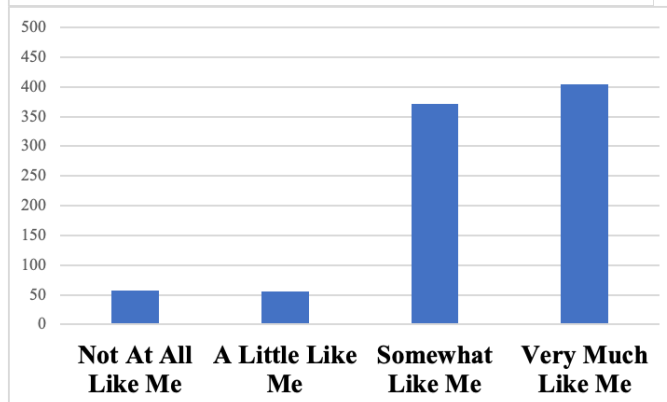
# CIVIC ATTITUDES: CIVIC EFFICACY AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY



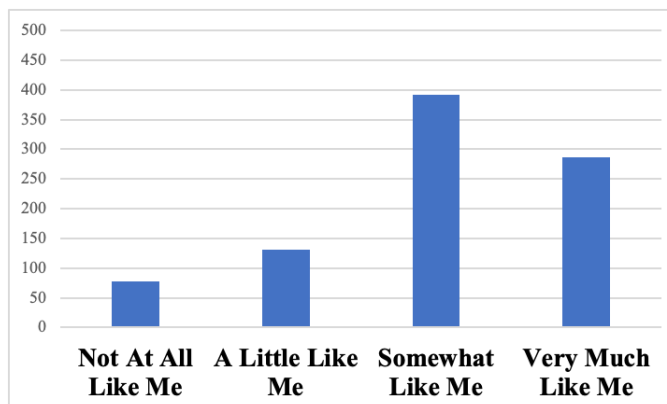
**I can make a positive difference in my community**



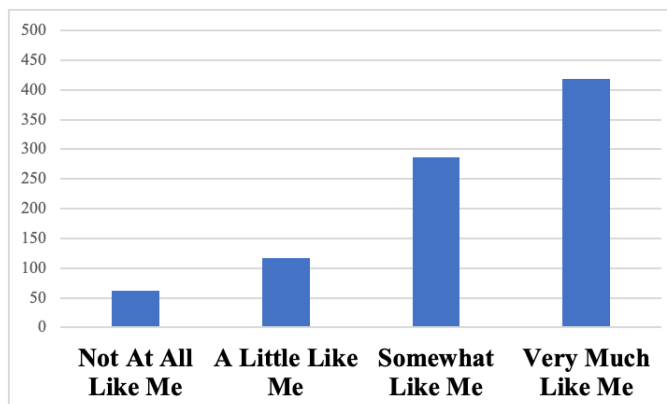
**Even though I am a teenager, there are ways for me to get involved in my community.**



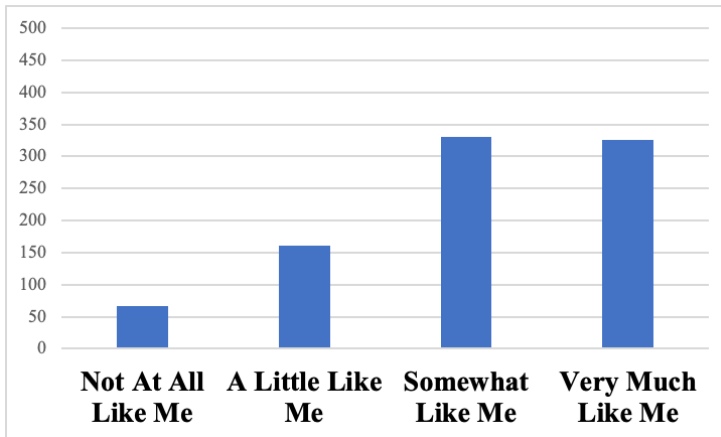
**I can use what I know to solve “real-life” problems in my community.**



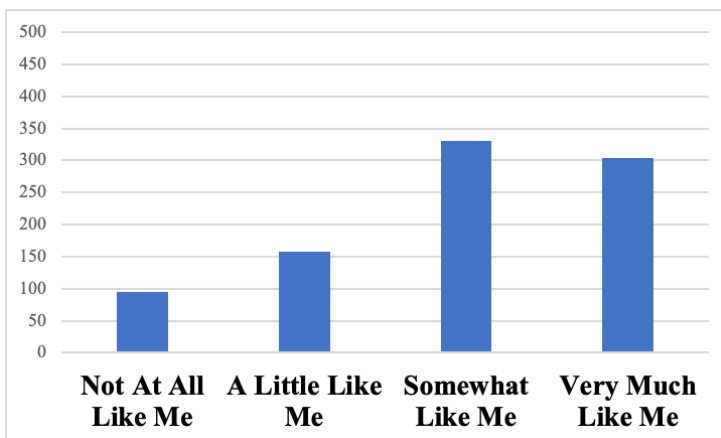
**I am responsible for protecting our planet.**



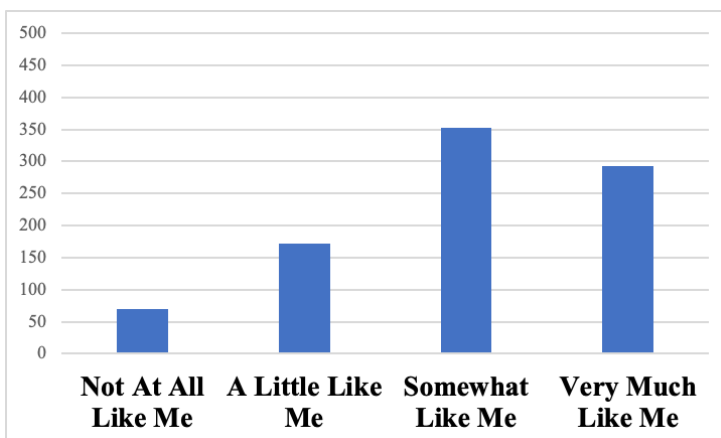
# CIVIC ATTITUDES: CIVIC EFFICACY AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY



**I have a responsibility to improve my community.**



**I often think about ways that I can make the world a better place.**

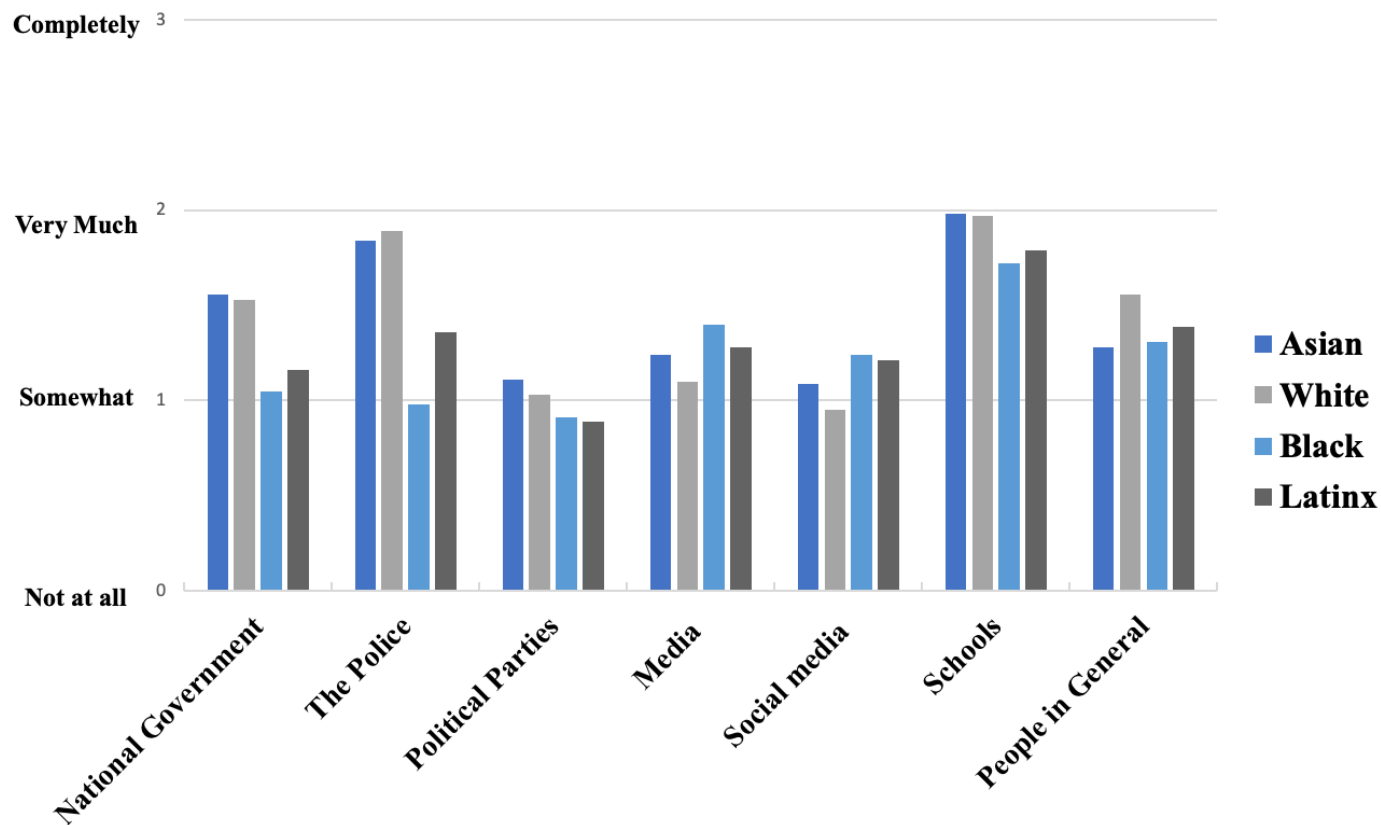


**I have a responsibility to help others in my neighborhood.**



# DIFFERENCES BY RACE & ETHNICITY

## Levels of Trust



### IN OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

- Latinx participants were more likely to mention academics, with a focus on impacts on grades and moving online, but did often mention college or changes related to the college search process
- Latinx participants were more likely to mention mental health challenges, and less likely to note social isolation
- Latinx participants were more likely to mention family and particularly financial challenges at higher rates
- White participants tend to focus on social isolation and extracurricular activities as impacts they are facing

# KEY TAKEAWAYS

## Key Takeaway #1: Not all are impacted, and some have opportunities for growth

- 10% of participants said the pandemic did not change or had not really impacted their lives, while others spoke to positive effects
- For what changes it will cause in their short-term futures
  - 9% said "none" or that life will return back to normal
  - 11% described positive impacts (such as better hygiene, or greater appreciation of friends)

### In Their Own Words: Takeaway #1

*"It has affected my life, but a lot of my normal things still get done. It gave me an opportunity to do some stuff on my own time and get some different things done."*


*"Yeah, somewhat. I'm obviously confined to my house, but other than that I don't mind much. Not much else has changed."*

### **Key Takeaway #2: School changes matter, but for a host of reasons**

- Around a fourth mentioned school in reference to challenges due to COVID-19 and changes in their lives that they foresee in the near future
- Motivation and focus in the online format were the most significant challenges
- In describing changes COVID-19 will cause in their future, many participants did not specifically mention learning or grades, but rather that there was much uncertainty about short-term future with schooling
- Participants often referred to college (either preparation, like visiting, classes being online, lack of access to SAT/ACT prep, and changed experiences, including the prospect of not going to college at all)

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### In Their Own Words: Takeaway #2



*"It will determine my college future and whether or not I'm able to go off to college like a normal freshman."*

*"Staying motivated in school is my biggest challenge. Everything has been turned topsy-turvy, just as I was assimilating to Freshman year at a new high school. In addition, I work in my bedroom which was previously associated in my mind with relaxation, so switching into work-mode was difficult."*



### **Key Takeaway #3: Online communication is not sufficient for social needs**

- This is a generation that is connected, but the online formats and social media are not sufficient for many of them during this time
- Online social connections and social media have always been supplemental, but now have become the central and in many cases only form of interaction
- Participants note missing hanging out with their friends, but also the face-to-face, hallway, lunch, and extracurricular interactions

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### **In Their Own Words: Takeaway #3**

***"I'm being confined in my house struggling more in school, and experiencing more problems than normal. Lack of friendship makes it only worse. Social media can't make up talking to a person face to face and in their presence."***


***"The most meaningful impact of COVID-19 on me is the change in my social life. I am a very social person, so being locked up at home severely limits my interactions with friends. I do talk to them over video games and stuff, but in general not seeing, talking to, or hearing people makes me feel lonely and bored. I am rarely ever sad during the school year, and if I am, it doesn't last more than a few hours. Nowadays, I feel sad quite often, maybe even depressed."***

### **Key Takeaway #4: A sense of missing out**

- Participants described feeling like there were key parts of their lives that they were missing out on
- Some connected this directly to their futures
  - For example, struggles or changes in schooling affecting grades, not being able to visit colleges or prepare adequately for the ACT/SAT
- For others, these were experiences that mark adolescence socially and are things they looked forward to and expected
  - These included proms, hanging out with friends, summer jobs, graduation, and first semesters of college on campus

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### In Their Own Words: Takeaway #4



*"I spent my sixteenth birthday (my sweet sixteenth) in quarantine and I didn't even get to have dinner with either sets of my grandparents or have a sleepover with even just one friend. I wasn't even allowed to get a cake from the grocery store because we didn't know enough about the virus at the time to trust that it was not airborne and we didn't have social distancing guidelines in place yet. My family and I were also supposed to go on a cruise to Europe this summer and it was my first cruise, my first time to Europe, and my dream vacation."*

*"I am worried about the possibility of touring colleges and ultimately going to college in general. While I still have two years before I go to college, I am already interested in thinking about my future and I know that touring colleges is the best way to get a feel for what the school is like....I think traveling is going to be really difficult and expensive as a result of this virus, which is a big concern for me."*



### **Key Takeaway #5: Daily routines, social life, and mental health are interconnected**


- Individually, these areas of life were some of the most salient in participants' responses about the challenges they were facing
- For some participants who elaborated, it was clear that there were connections between these areas
- Their daily life, school, social interactions, and mental health are not just isolated domains where adolescents are experiencing challenges —e.g., grades and learning for some, restriction of going places for others, and seeing friends for others
- All of these challenges were interwoven as the very fabric of their lives was disrupted





## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### In Their Own Words: Takeaway #5



*"Socially, this current situation has me feeling isolated and alone. My mental health has definitely taken a toll, and depressive, harmful thoughts have measurably increased. My grades have plummeted."*

*"Of course it's affecting my life all the time. I miss my friends, I miss school, I miss the gym, I just want to go out and I absolutely hate losing touch with all of that. Especially because I was on a good path right before we all had to go into quarantine. I was socializing well, I was living life, I was happy, and I was becoming more confident as I continued working out at the gym. Coronavirus took all of that from me, and so many other kids like me."*

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## #1: CREATE VIRTUAL SPACES FOR SOCIAL INTERACTION

- Adolescents are missing the everyday routines and interactions, in addition to outside school times to hang out or be involved in extracurriculars
- The virtual formats for connection in the spring (both through schools and social media platforms) were not fulfilling these needs
- For schools, academics matter and are an important challenge during this time. It is also worthwhile to think beyond to the psychosocial roles of schools
- Possible ideas for remote learning include
  - Virtual homerooms
  - Virtual lunch meetings
  - Extracurricular virtual accountability/meetings (e.g., running clubs, virtual BBQs, etc.)
- For hybrid or in-person schooling, this could entail making sure to provide informal spaces to interact, even while socially distancing
- For both, creating virtual connections across schools and geographical areas can offer students opportunities to share, meet new people, and normalize their struggles



## #2: REIMAGINE MILESTONES

- Participants mentioned feeling like they were missing out on key events and memories
- Considering virtual or social distancing formats for these experiences may also be important
- They can be supported in feeling connected and fostering a sense of agency amid much uncertainty and change that is out of their control through
  - Allowing students to have a voice in shaping these adapted events and experiences
  - Allowing students to create new traditions
- Possible examples include
  - Virtual proms, graduations, pep rallies
  - Student committees to create new events

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### #3: PROVIDE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS THROUGH REFRAMING

- While only some participants described feeling extreme mental health impacts (i.e., depression), many noted issues with motivation, frustration at the situation or other people's behaviors, sadness, or struggles coping with being homebound and limited in their interactions
- These challenges are real and can be acknowledged, but schools can also provide spaces to reimagine and reframe the current moment
- Some participants mentioned positives, such as more free time to learn new things, increased time with family, or greater appreciation for what they had
- This may not be possible or necessary for all adolescents—particularly given differential impacts of COVID-19—but they could be encouraged to reflect with a focus on coping, resilience, and growth amid the challenges
- Possibilities could include
  - Individual and group reflections on COVID-19 and changes in their lives
  - Sharing with each other positive experiences or coping strategies they have done with their families, friends, or themselves



### #4: SUPPORT EXTERNAL PROCESSING OF NEW TRAJECTORIES

- Participants described many impacts on short-term and long-term futures
- Many of them probably spent considerable time imagining certain trajectories (whether summer plans, work schedules, social development, college search processes and experiences, or career arcs) that now have been interrupted or made uncertain
- Schools have the ability to provide structured and supportive spaces (through homeroom, college counseling, etc.) for these adolescents to talk about what has changed in their hopes and dreams for the future or to reimagine these futures
- In order to help young people address the uncertainty and significant disruptions in their imagined futures, schools can guide them in concretely thinking through options, challenges and new environments or opportunities



# LIMITATIONS AND POINTS OF CLARIFICATION

## THE SAMPLE

- The sample is not representative. It offers insights into patterns in thinking, but is not all-inclusive
- At a school level, since some students did not choose to participate. It is likely that there may have been patterns among those non-participants' thinking and experience that is not reflected in this data
- Not all respondents who started the survey completed it. Of more than 1,000 respondents who began, 913 completed the closed-ended questions and 813 responded to at least some open-ended questions

## ANALYSES BY DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

- The broad analyses across the whole sample, due to the types of schools with the most responses, over-represent the perspective of White, male participants from urban cities
- Analyses were broken down by certain demographic characteristics (race/ethnicity and gender) and the report includes notes of where key differences were identified
- For more detail, please contact the researchers

## TIMING OF STUDY

- The study was conducted primarily In April and May of 2020, during the height of quarantines and before the death of George Floyd (May 25, 2020) and the protests that followed
- Participants were responding to fairly immediate perceived impacts of COVID-19, but their responses do not engage with issues that have risen to the forefront of national discourse since then (including Black Lives Matter, whether schools should be remote, and other noteworthy developments interwoven with the pandemic's impact)