# COVID-19 and Parent/Family Engagement

## AHEPPP Partnership:

TorchStar Education conducted a survey of AHEPPP members to understand the implications of COVID-19 on parent/family engagement

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## Focus:

- Crisis Communication

- Parent/Family Programs

- Campus Partnership

- Charting the Future

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# COVID-19 Crisis Communications

# Key Findings

- Strong overall ratings for COVID campus crisis communication response despite some challenges with timeliness

- Parent/family communication rated less effective than other stakeholder messaging

- Low levels of parent/family program participation in developing messages

- In most cases, divisional vice presidents represented parent/family programs on the crisis team while AHEPPP members managed contact lists and supported communication efforts

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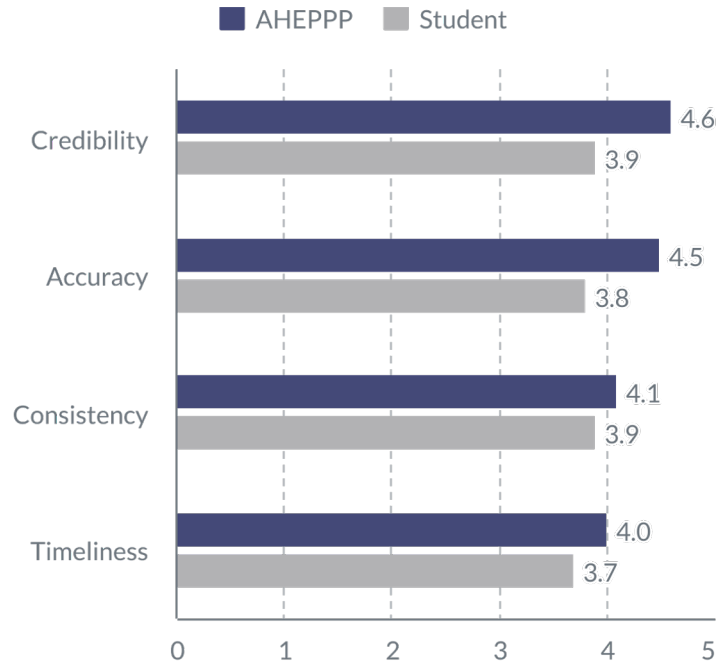
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# COVID-19 Crisis Communication

AHEPPP members viewed campus crisis communication around COVID-19 as effective.

Also shown here are responses from a national sample of students.

Students rated the overall communication from institutions lower on all aspects.
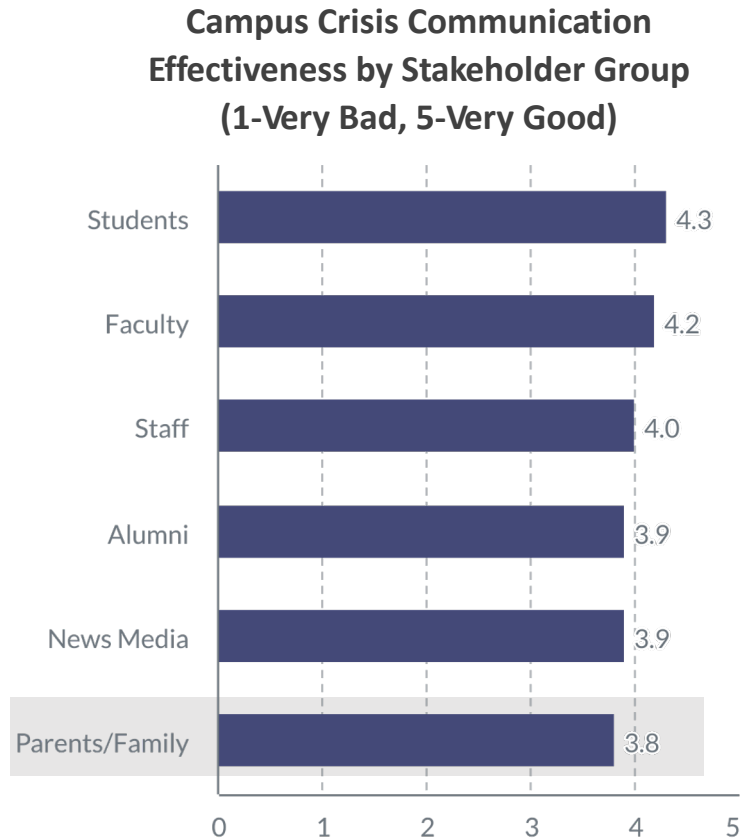
**Campus Crisis Communication**
**Overall Effectiveness**
**(1-Very Bad, 5-Very Good)**

■ AHEPPP　■ Student

| Category | AHEPPP | Student |
|----------|--------|---------|
| Credibility | 4.6 | 3.9 |
| Accuracy | 4.5 | 3.8 |
| Consistency | 4.1 | 3.9 |
| Timeliness | 4.0 | 3.7 |

*"Waiting to see what other schools are doing so we're not the first caused an increase in anxiety for families."*

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# Crisis Communication by Stakeholder

AHEPPP members rated communication to parents and families as the lowest of all stakeholder groups.

**Campus Crisis Communication Effectiveness by Stakeholder Group (1-Very Bad, 5-Very Good)**



Students — 4.3
Faculty — 4.2
Staff — 4.0
Alumni — 3.9
News Media — 3.9
Parents/Family — 3.8

*"I would like to see our president develop messaging just for families (rather than my office repackaging the student information)"*

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AHEPPP members reported very low participation in messaging across the board and varying levels of communication effectiveness by topic.

**Parent/Family Program Participation vs. Overall Effectiveness Rating (1-Low, 5-High)**

■ Participation ■ Effectiveness



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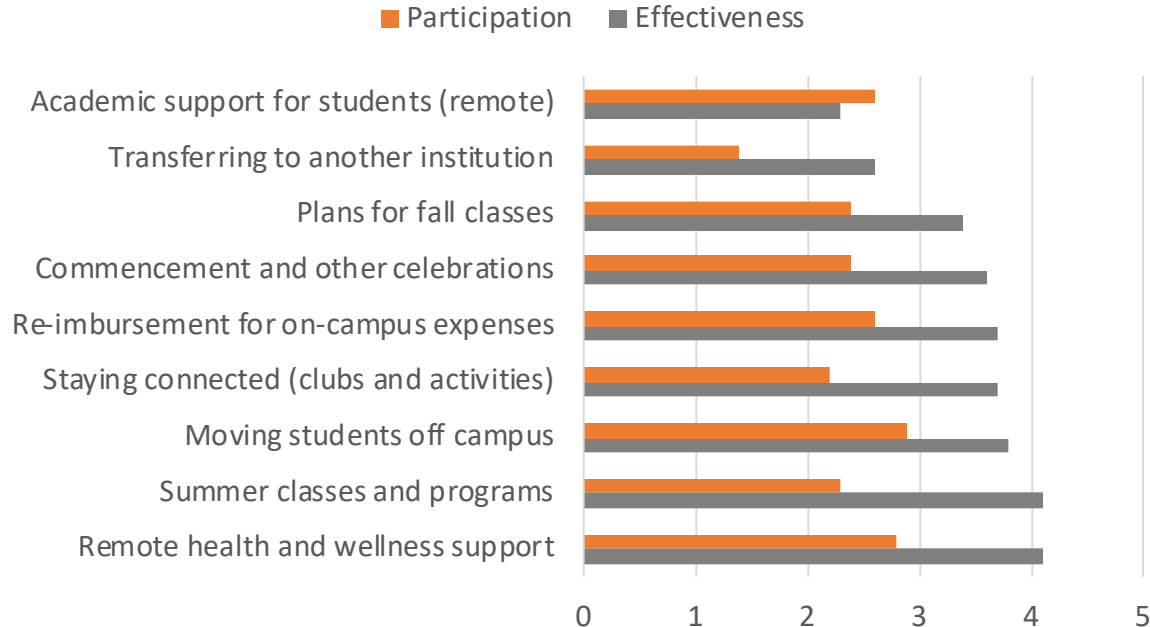
# Parent/Family Representation

Parent and family programs were largely represented through their divisional vice president in crisis planning.

**During the COVID-19 Pandemic, How was Parent/Family Office Represented in Your Institution's Crisis Planning Team?**
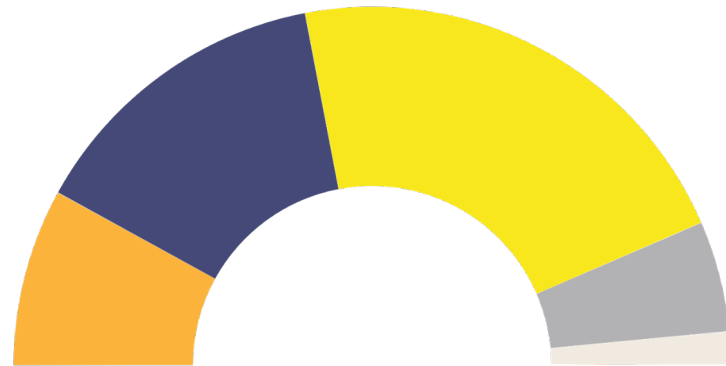


- ■ Direct Involvement (16%)
- ■ Supervisor of Parent/Family Programs (28%)
- ■ Vice President or Vice Chancellor (43%)
- ■ Not Represented (10%)
- ■ Other (3%)

*"We need a place at the table when conversations are occurring. At minimum we would like to be consulted during crisis situations to offer insight on the parent perspective."*

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# Parent/Family Messaging

Nearly 2/3 of AHEPPP members managed parent and family contact information for the university.

**Which of the Following Best Describes your Process for Managing Parent/Family Contact Information?**



■ Parent/Family Office (65%)  ■ Another Office (34%)  ☐ No One (1%)

*"While I did not help compose any messages, I was always able to quickly share what was sent to the university community to parents through my listserv."*

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# AHEPPP Member Experience

# Crisis Communication

## Successes

*"We were consistent and thoughtful in our communication.  Most communications came from the President's Office following State recommendations."*

*"We included parents and families on the students' emails and communication so that everyone was on the same page."*

*"One channel of information meant all the same info was going out to constituents.  More accurate but less timely."*

*"We have been communicating regularly with parents and families and have received lots of positive remarks and kudos from families as a result."*

*"We set up a crisis call center that has been very effective in helping families feel heard …."*

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# AHEPPP Member Experience

# Crisis Communication

## Challenges

*"No communication would have gone to family members at all if my office hasn't taken on the responsibility for forwarding …."*

*"Communication has been coming from many different offices and many times, families are second to students and therefore, the parent/ family office has to work hard to make sure families are thought about."*

*"Helping the administration understand that parent communication is a critical component of our crisis communication plan and to have us at the table during the planning phase. The way parents need information is different than just recrafting the message sent to the students even when both contain the same information."*

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# Parent/ Family Programs

# Key Findings

- Experienced significant increase in daily contact volume

- Increased use of digital communications

- Many core parent and family programs are not yet targeted for major change

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# Contact Volume

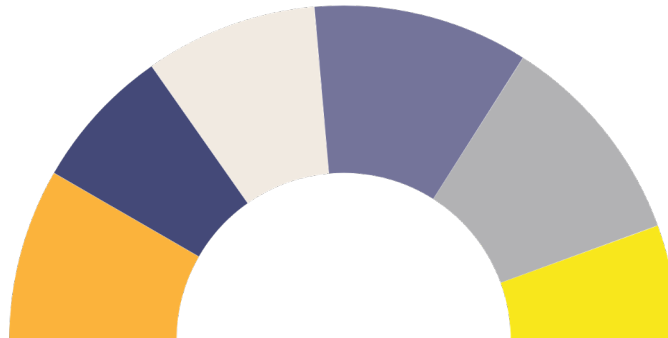Parent and family daily contact rates significantly increased post-COVID.

- Over 100 daily contacts increased from 3% to 17%.

- Between 50 and 99 contacts increased from 1% to 14%

**Parent/Family Office – Daily Contacts**
**Pre-COVID**



- 100 or more (2.78%)
- 50-99 (1.39%)
- 25-49 (5.56%)
- 10-24 (31.94%)
- Fewer than 10 (51.39%)
- No Contact (6.94%)

**Post-COVID**



- 100 or more (16.67%)
- 50-99 (13.89%)
- 25-49 (16.67%)
- 10-24 (20.83%)
- Fewer than 10 (20.83%)
- No Contact (11.11%)

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# Communication Modes

Parent and family programs increased use of digital modes. Videoconferencing increased use as a newer platform to replace in-person meetings.

**Parent/Family Programs
Modes of Communication
Pre-COVID vs. Post-COVID
(1-Low, 5-High)**



● Pre-COVID ● Post-COVID
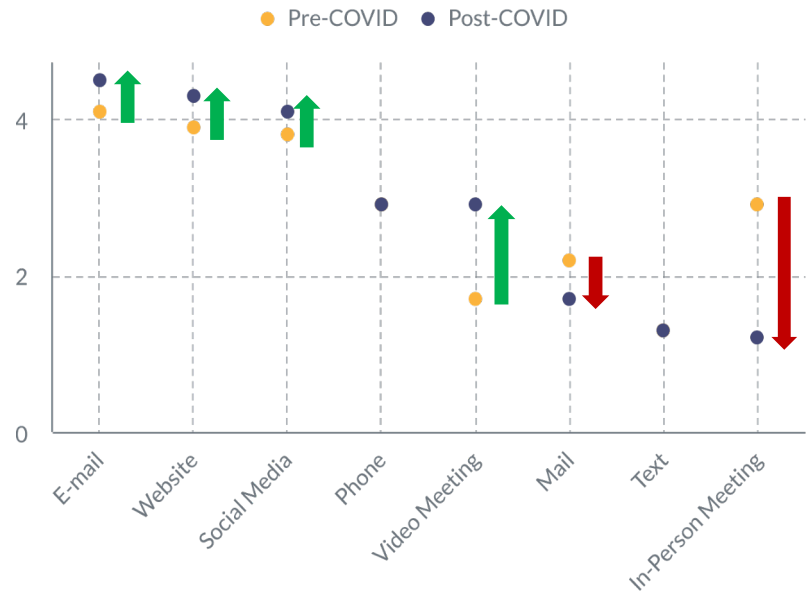
*"Email open rates continue to be high as well as social media participation."*

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# Anticipated Changes

AHEPPP members predict major changes in orientation, commencement, and move-in. Many are still evaluating changes to core parent/family programs and services (calendar, family weekend).
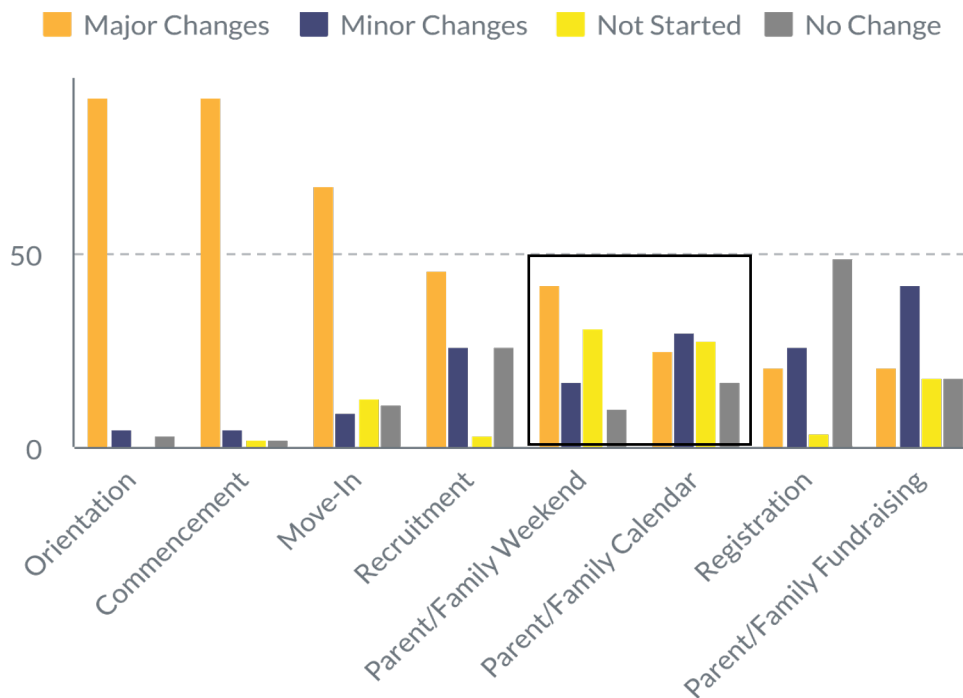
## AHEPPP Member Experience

## Programs and Practices

*"We hosted a live stream parents office hour that had 2311 families on an hour with (campus leadership)."*

*"Not enough staff support to answer questions, didn't have answers to a lot of demands we were receiving."*

*"Parent/Family orientation and a monthly newsletter are a small part of my job - there are a few other offices on campus that provide parent programming, but there isn't great coordination between all efforts. If we had an actual office/person who "owned" this work, I think coordination would improve ..."*

*"Setting a predictable schedule for community-wide messages (Mondays), mirroring content to social media. The desire to be informed has prompted more parents to sign up for newsletters, follow Facebook and open emails*

*"The institution adopted a COVID-19 Emergency Communication Hub. Volunteers of the staff were able to take those calls, alleviating our office of that additional burden."*

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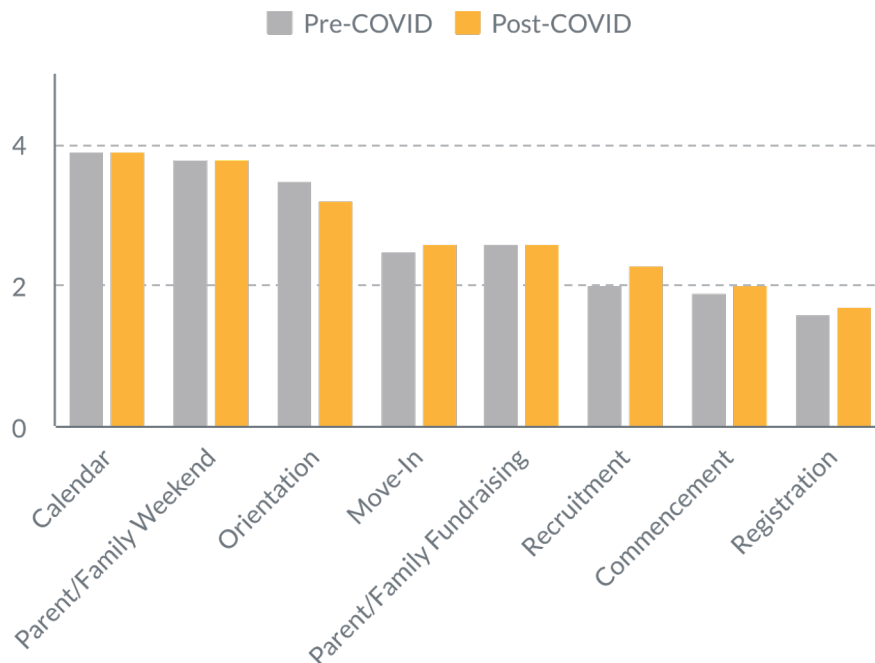# Campus Partnership

# Key Findings

- AHEPPP members focus on a narrow range of events and functions relevant to parents and families

- Crisis has led to stronger relationships with many campus partners

- Strategic planning for areas important to families is often centered outside of the parent/family office

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# Involvement by Event or Function

Other than orientation, calendar and parent/family weekend, AHEPPP members reported low-to-moderate levels of involvement (both before and after COVID 19) in events and functions relevant to parents and families.

**Level of Parent/Family Program Involvement**
**(1-Low, 5-High)**



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# Campus Partnership

Post COVID-19, AHEPPP members report strong partnerships with with campus communications, housing/dining, and admissions. While many other partnerships improved, engagement continued at moderate-to-low levels.

| | Pre-COVID (1-Low, 5- High) | Post-COVID (1- Low, 5-High) |
|---|---|---|
| Marketing and Communications | 3.5 | 4.1 |
| Housing/Dining | 3.8 | 4.1 |
| Admissions/Enrollment | 3.6 | 4.0 |
| Student Affairs | 3.8 | 3.9 |
| Campus Health and Wellness | 3.4 | 3.7 |
| Student Success | 3.6 | 3.6 |
| University Advancement | 3.4 | 3.4 |
| Academic Affairs/ Provost | 2.8 | 3.2 |
| Police/ Emergency | 2.6 | 2.9 |
| Finance and Administration | 2.6 | 2.8 |
| President/Chancellor | 2.4 | 2.8 |
| General Counsel | .9 | 1.7 |

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# Parent/Family Role in Planning

AHEPPP members report leadership roles in parent/family strategic, communication, and engagement plans but lower involvement in other key areas.

| | Leader | Team Member | Not Involved | Does Not Exist |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Parent/Family Strategic Plan** | **68%** | **5%** | **-** | **27%** |
| **Parent/Family Communication Plan** | **77%** | **10%** | **2%** | **11%** |
| **Parent/Family Recruitment Plan** | **24%** | **22%** | **14%** | **40%** |
| **Parent/Family Engagement Plan** | **79%** | **11%** | **-** | **10%** |
| **Parent/Family Philanthropy Plan** | **12%** | **59%** | **20%** | **9%** |

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# AHEPPP Member Experience

# Campus Partnership

## Successes

*"University communications engaged our office in communication strategy discussions for the first time, which was a great partnership to develop."*

*"Campus partners seemed to take our office more seriously and began consulting our office more."*

*"Many offices were helpful in providing information to share with parents. I think they finally really realized the value of having someone to communicate directly with parents and answer their questions!"*

*"Being a member of the Emergency Operations Center response and planning team gave me ground-level understanding of the pandemic and allowed me to contribute to how our institution responds, including the impact on families. It helped immensely in my ability to respond to family member inquiries with thorough, informed information. I had immediate access to administrators with information that I needed. "*

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# AHEPPP Member Experience

# Campus Partnerships

## Challenges

*"We do not have any sort of communication plan or strategy when it comes to parents/families. They are always an after thought."*

*"Sometimes university messages come out with no advanced notice. We would like to be included in the communication loop so we can better prepare our communications to families."*

*"We were so busy (and conditions changing so quickly) we could not always talk to our colleagues in other offices to give them heads up that new information was being sent out to families."*

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# Charting the Future

# Immediate Action

- Help Your Campus Understand the Current Changes and Impact on Families

- Equip Your Leadership to Plan and Communicate Effectively

- Think Strategically, Engage Digitally

- Focus Your Time and Resources with Immediate Priorities

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**Help Your Campus Understand the Current Changes and Impact on Families**

**Identify impacts on parents and families**

✓
- Track number of contacts and types of questions
- Understand implications of current events (example - safety, financial, inclusion)

**Establish your office as the primary resource for families**

✓
- Internal:  Add campus partners to your communications
- External:  Identify parent/family needs in current climate; coordinate with campus on messaging and support

**Equip Your Leadership to Plan and Communicate Effectively**

**Provide your leadership with parent/family feedback**

✓
- Summarize themes and concerns
- Organize engagement with parent/family council

**Be proactive in your re-opening plan**

✓
- Outline communications needs and concerns for parent/families; provide to campus partners
- Develop a sustainable plan to manage increased contacts

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### Think Strategically, Engage Digitally

#### Re-think programmatic approach for re-opening

✓
- Migrate to digital platforms
- Evaluate all online or hybrid options for main programs

#### Establish a connection with families

✓
- Target your messaging around the current needs and concerns of parents/families
- Customize for your campus

### Focus Your Time and Resources with Immediate Priorities

#### Evaluate your office priorities

✓
- Prioritize top concerns for fall
- Establish a concrete work plan to align with campus needs

#### Manage your time and resources

✓
- Structure your remote work methods
- Check in with your staff and colleagues
- Know when to stop; build in time for self care

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# Charting the Future

# Long-Term Transformation

Begin with Changing Student and Family Needs

Understand and Align with University Strategic Direction

Build a Team of Campus Partners to Coordinate the Parent/Family Experience and Communication Plan

Transform Messaging, Engagement, Programs, and Support Tools

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# Survey Methodology

Data were collected from May 5 -15, 2020. More than 140 members of AHEPP provided insights on communication and coordination before the COVID-19 pandemic and currently.

Institutions:

- 56% public; 44% private
- Student enrollment:
  - 20% less than 5,000
  - 17% 5,000-9,999
  - 20% 10,000-19,999
  - 12% 20,000-30,000
  - 31% More than 30,000

Parent/Family offices:

- 36% have 1 employee, 44% have 2-4 employees, 20% are staffed part time
- Most (54%) report to student life, but they also report to development (14%), enrollment management (3%) academic affairs (1%) and other offices (28%)

Additional information on methodology available upon request.

# TorchStar Education

TorchStar Education, Inc. is a consulting firm focused on higher education.  We help institutions understand stakeholder perspectives and use insights to improve student recruitment, retention, and philanthropy outcomes.

Contact TorchStar for more information on products and services related to student insights.

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