

Here and Now:

In a world changed by COVID-19, many young people forge ahead on education and career goals

Introduction

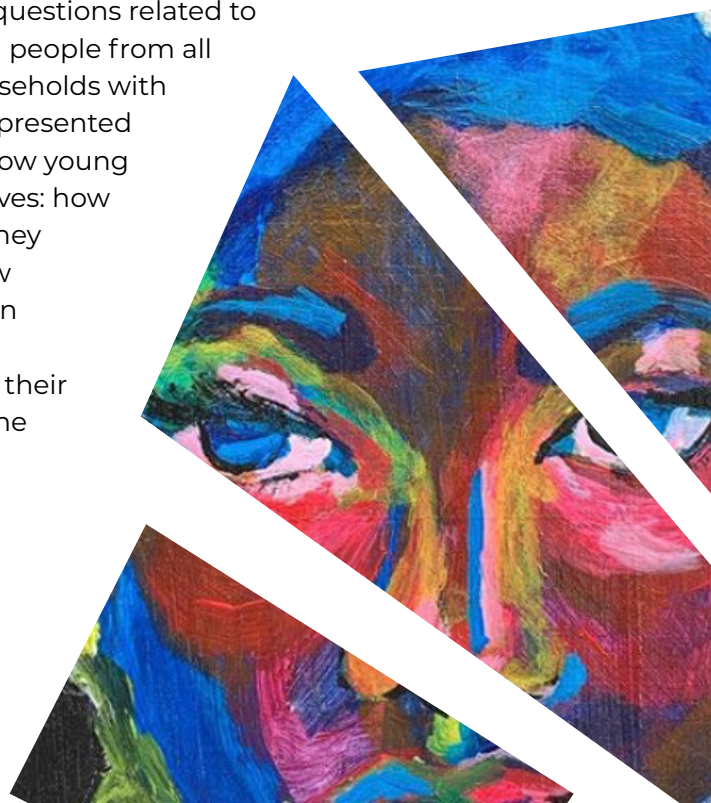
The United States, along with the rest of the world, is coming up on one year of experiencing a global pandemic that has profoundly disrupted life for people of all ages and of all racial and ethnic backgrounds. The evidence is now overwhelming that the pandemic has made racial, ethnic, and gender disparities, especially with respect to health care and economic opportunities, even worse than they were pre-pandemic. On top of the pandemic and an uncoordinated response to the crisis, Americans in 2020 experienced other upheavals and shifts in national conversations, including heightened conversations and activism about racial justice and police brutality.

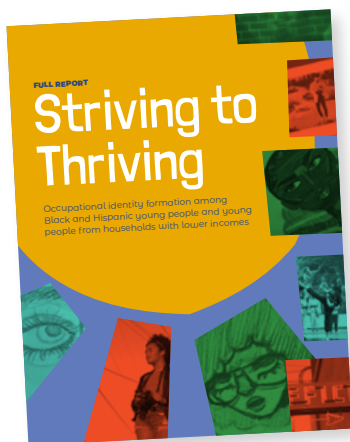
In this brief, we discuss some of the latest research from Equitable Futures, a project of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which seeks to build stronger connections and alignment between K-12 schools and education, post-secondary institutions, and employers to improve labor market outcomes and promote paths to upward mobility and economic opportunity for Black and Latino young people of all incomes and young people experiencing poverty. A vital component of this effort is a structured research program that engaged directly with young people to assess how occupational identity is developed and how that identity informs young people's thinking about life goals and career aspirations.

One of the major components of the research effort explores questions related to occupational identity specifically with Black and Latino young people from all income backgrounds as well as white young people from households with lower incomes. This research, the major findings of which are presented in a report titled [Striving to Thriving](#), paints a vivid picture of how young people see themselves in their journeys towards their future lives: how they view themselves as their own best change agents, how they carve out pathways to their future lives, and whether they view their identities as assets. Many of these insights have now been transformed into [tools and resources](#) intended to help adults supporting young people in their career pathways to advance their efforts to center the voices and identities of young people in the work that they do.

**equitable
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Since the *Striving to Thriving* report was released, the surrounding social and economic context for supporting young people has continued to change. Over the course of 2020 and into 2021, educational and employment institutions and systems have been forced to radically adapt to the realities of the pandemic. Schools shifted to online learning or hybrid approaches; many young people have lost their jobs as workplaces closed down, while others working as essential workers in service industries have continued to work throughout the pandemic.

The central questions of *Striving to Thriving*, about how Black and Latino young people and white young people from households with lower incomes think about their futures and their career pathways, seemed especially critical to examine within the context of the extraordinary year that was 2020. In August 2020, the same researchers who conducted the *Striving to Thriving* research,

Goodwin Simon Strategic Research (GSSR), launched the first of four waves of the Equitable Futures National Youth Poll to examine how young people are faring under the impact of COVID-19 and other major, potentially life-altering events. Wave 2 of the poll took place in September 2020, Wave 3 in December 2020, and Wave 4 is scheduled to be completed in May 2021.

Previous research briefs from the first wave of the poll focused on specific findings, such as the greater uncertainty young people are feeling about their futures, their experiences with online learning, and their views of and involvement in conversations about social change topics, especially racial justice. With this brief, we are attempting to share specific findings within a larger context: the context of the *Striving to Thriving* research that has gone on before and the context of where young people are at right now in their lives. A more in-depth review of key survey findings from Waves [2](#) and [3](#) can be found on the [poll landing page](#).

With Waves 1, 2, and 3 of the poll completed, not only is the picture clearer about how young people are impacted by COVID-19 and other events in thinking about their futures, it is now possible to start seeing connections between the insights from young people who participated in the *Striving to Thriving* research and the insights from the most recent youth poll with similar groups of young people.

What are those connections? While the impacts of COVID-19 on young people are concerning, especially with respect to what we know about exacerbating effects on disparities that existed pre-pandemic, **many young people are still actively creating their own pathways to their future lives**. Although many of them are taking on additional responsibilities in their households, they are still pursuing educational and employment opportunities. Whether the latter is prompted by increased economic necessity or for exploration and development, the experiences still inform or influence young people's decision-making or occupational identity in that they are gaining clarity about what they do or don't want from their future careers.

For all those who support young people—educators, program designers, direct service providers, policymakers, advocates, and funders—the findings from this latest youth poll are important for three reasons: 1) they paint a nuanced and compelling picture of how different groups of young people are affected by COVID-19, as heard directly from young people themselves; 2) they provide ample justification for the urgency of adapting educational and employment programs to reach many young people where they are at now to help these young people navigate through the immediate uncertainties of these times and still gain valuable skills and experiences to help shape their occupational identities; and 3) as with the *Striving to Thriving* research, the National Youth Poll findings make the case for why more youth-serving professionals need to listen to young people when figuring out how best to support them. Many young people's continued optimism in the face of increasing adversity, and their belief in the opportunities presented by social change upheaval and activism, call for renewed energy and creativity in how adults supporting young people can still reach them during these challenging times to help them set and achieve their career and life goals.

Key Findings: How Young People are Doing during the Covid-19 Pandemic



Photography by Brittany Ahn, age group 18–21

HIGHLIGHTED FINDING



The pandemic is impacting the financial circumstances of many young people in multiple ways, like working more than one job or being unable to work for pay because they are caring for a family member at home.

Getting work experience or exposure to different career pathways at an early stage is critical for young people, both to explore different types of work experiences and to learn soft skills related to succeeding in work environments. While it is clear that some young people are working during the pandemic, it is less clear whether they are able to get the type of work experience they value for their future careers. An international economic development organization found that young people with less employment experience were more likely to face fewer opportunities for career development and higher-paying jobs. In addition, young people were more likely to work part time or in temporary jobs and have fewer accumulated financial resources, leaving them especially vulnerable to disruptions like the 2008 global financial crisis or the current global pandemic.¹

In the most recent wave of the National Youth Poll in December (Wave 3), just under half of the young people (46%) reported that they are working for pay, including working full time (17%); part time (24%); or through a paid internship, apprenticeship, or similar program (5%). The December timeframe of the survey likely bumped up these numbers: one-quarter of the respondents (26%) from the December survey reported that their work is seasonal or only during the holidays and not year-round. Black (28%) and Hispanic (29%) young people were more likely to report this than white young people from households with lower incomes (20%).

Over the course of Waves 1, 2 and 3, the overall proportion of respondents who reported they are working more than one job has trended upward, from 33 percent in Wave 1 to 38 percent in Wave 2 to 42 percent in Wave 3—all of which are notably higher than the 2019 survey (23%). Notably, in the December poll, more than half of Black respondents (52%)—including a majority of Black female respondents (56%)—reported they are working more than one job for pay, while about one-third of white respondents (34%) reported this is the case. By comparison, in 2019, 26 percent of Black respondents—including 24 percent of Black female and 30 percent of Black male respondents—reported working more than one job.

While working for pay is not, by itself, an indicator that young people are struggling more financially during the pandemic, the upward trend of working more than one job, suggests that working for pay has become more of an economic necessity for some young people than it has for others. Overall, the trend seems to indicate that young people are juggling more responsibilities than they were pre-pandemic.

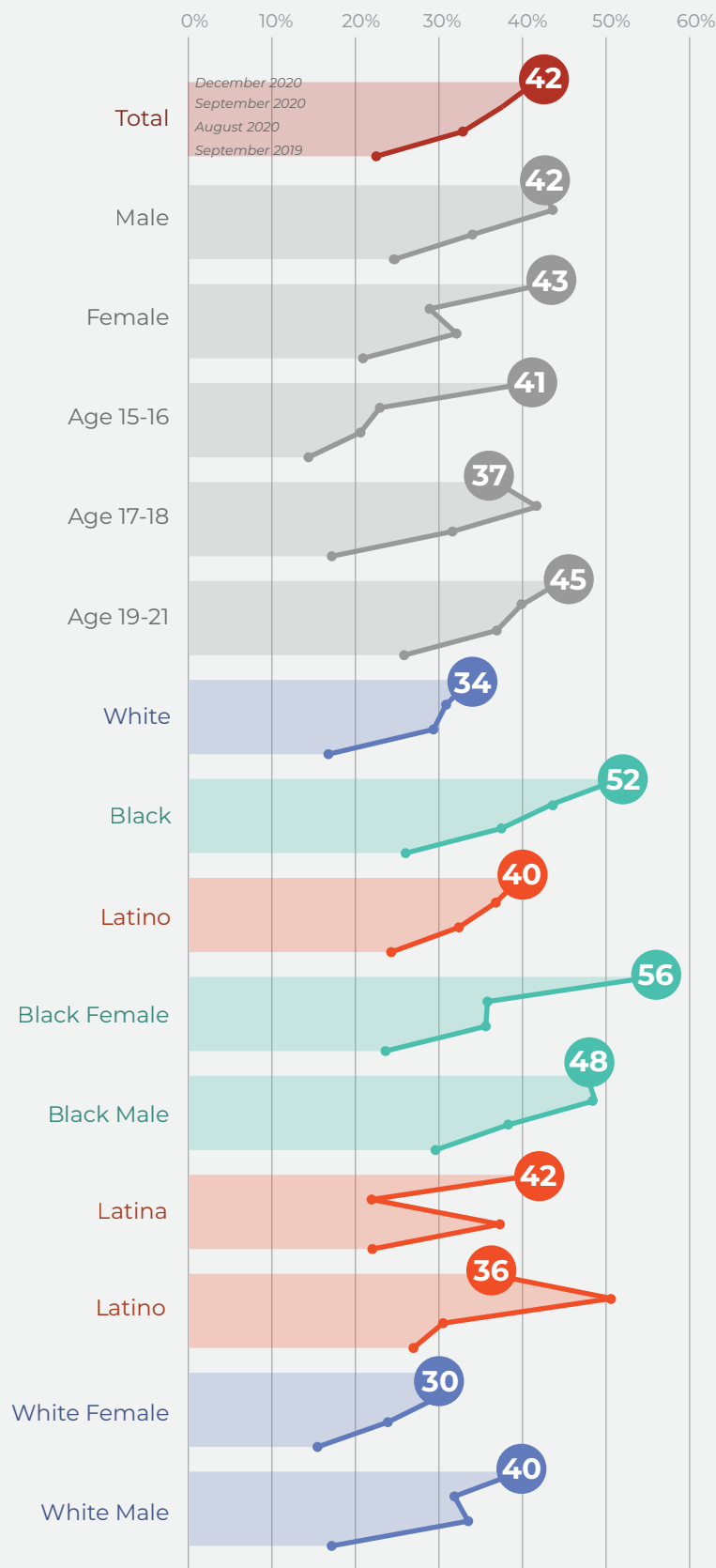
One of the responsibilities added to young people's plates is that more of them are reported that they are caring for a member of their household, although some differences by gender show up in whether these responsibilities were taken on because of the pandemic. In the December 2020 wave, 41 percent of young people reported that they are providing care for others in their home. The majority of respondents (78%) providing care reported they were providing this care before COVID-19, but male respondents (23%) were more likely than female respondents (12%) to report that they had started to give care during COVID-19.

Many young people (41%) in the December 2020 survey reported they are providing care for someone younger than them in their household (33%), someone older than them in their household (12%), or both (4%). The responsibility of caregiving for family members is falling more heavily on the shoulders of Black (44%) and Latino (44%) respondents than it is on white respondents (35%).

Providing care for others is also impacting many young people's ability to work for pay, with almost four-in-ten (39%) reporting they cannot work (12%), or that it is extremely (13%) or very (15%) difficult to

Are you currently earning income from more than one job, internship, apprenticeship, or similar paid work?

Those answering: Yes



work, because of their caregiving responsibilities. Black (14%) and white (13%) respondents are twice as likely to feel they cannot work due to caregiving responsibilities than are their Latino (7%) peers. While one-third (34%) of respondents reported their caregiving responsibilities are not affecting their ability to work for pay, Latino respondents (42%) are the most likely to report these responsibilities are not affecting their ability to work for pay, while Black male respondents (28%) are the least likely.

Caregiving is also impacting respondents' ability to pursue their education, and the impact is felt especially strongly among Black respondents. Among Wave 3 respondents who are providing care for others, many (32%) reported it is extremely (17%) or very (15%) difficult to go to school or engage in online/distance learning because of these responsibilities, with 12 percent reporting they cannot go to school or engage in online/distance learning at all because of this. Black respondents (41%) are significantly more likely to report these responsibilities make it difficult to continue their education than are their Latino (27%) or white (26%) peers.

Notably, Black male respondents who are providing care for others in their home are the most likely to report these responsibilities are negatively impacting their ability to go to school (68%) or to work for pay (66%). Due to the coronavirus outbreak, caregiving responsibilities are new for one-quarter (24%) of Black male respondents, which may be connected to the level of difficulty they are experiencing with these new responsibilities alongside their education and work endeavors.

HIGHLIGHTED FINDING



While many young people remain committed to continuing their education, the impacts of COVID-19 are causing others to reconsider, change, or delay their plans in some way.

"I want my job to be essential. As unfairly as the essential workers were treated and the risks they endured, at least they had jobs. Computer science I can do from home too if COVID lasts forever."

– WHITE FEMALE SURVEY RESPONDENT, AGE 17, LOWER INCOME

"Everything has changed. Even the way business is conducted. I think I'll have a better career if I change my goal."

– LATINO SURVEY RESPONDENT, AGE 15, LOWER INCOME

Across all three waves of the National Youth Poll so far, a majority of young people reported that they plan to continue their education in the coming years. In Wave 3, conducted in December 2020, 68 percent of respondents said they would continue their education, with almost half (46%) saying that they plan to attend a four-year college. However, a majority of young people in Wave 3 (52%) said that their education plans have either definitely changed or are likely to change because of the coronavirus.

Concerns about safety, a desire to be close to home or family, and financial considerations loom large for many young people when considering their possible future education plans. Four-in-ten (41%) Wave 3 respondents reported that concerns about the safety of in-person learning amid the coronavirus is a strong reason for them to consider changing their future education plans. Additionally, almost four-in-ten (37%) also report wanting or needing to be closer to home or family as a strong reason to consider changing their future education plans, while the same proportion (37%) reported that cheaper options available

online are a strong reason to consider changing their future education plans. Finally, almost one-third of respondents reported that they are concerned about the affordability of more education because of changes in their (31%) or their family's (31%) financial situation, and that their concern is prompting them to consider changing their future education plans.

The impacts of COVID-19 are also having an impact on how some young people feel about college overall as a worthwhile investment in their journeys towards their future careers and lives. A majority of respondents (63%) across all three waves of the 2020 survey—and at least 60 percent of respondents in every race and gender subgroup—reported they feel college is or would be worth it for them personally. Many young people's continued belief in the value of college is encouraging given the strong evidence linking college degrees to higher salaries and employment opportunities.² However, the 2020 results represent a significant decrease from the proportion of young people who responded to a 2019 survey conducted as part of *Striving to Thriving* about whether college was worth it for them. In 2019, 71 percent of respondents reported that college was worth it, with the largest decline from 2019 to 2020 among Black female respondents (from 78% to 63%) and white female respondents (from 75% to 61%).

Black (33%) and Latino (32%) respondents are more likely than white respondents (27%) to report

they no longer think college is worth it

for them, personally, after previously thinking it would be.

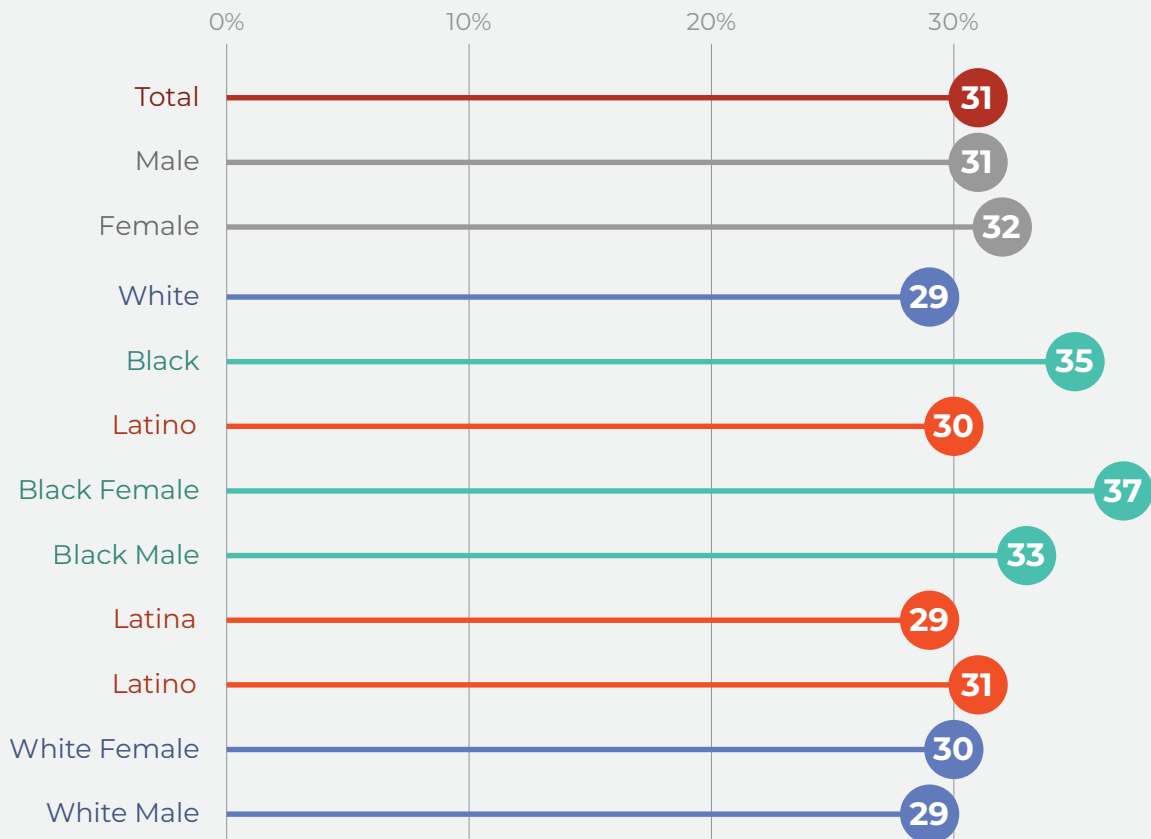


Illustration by Ladasia Bryant, age 19

The coronavirus outbreak is clearly impacting how some young people feel about college. Almost one-in-five (19%) 2020 respondents reported they are unsure whether college would be worth it for them (in 2019 this figure was 12%). A majority (52%) reported they are thinking about college differently now than before the coronavirus outbreak. Notably, this change has been in both directions—some respondents who used to think college would be worth it no longer feel that is the case (30%), while others who used to think college would not be worth it now think it would be (22%). However, Black (33%) and Latino (32%) respondents are more likely than white respondents (27%) to report they **no longer think college is worth it** for them, personally, after previously thinking it would be.

Do you think differently about college being worth it for you personally now than you did before the coronavirus outbreak?

Those answering: Yes, I used to think college is/would be worth it for me but now I think it is/would not be worth it



Financial pressures in general—whether related to the pandemic or not—are still showing up in some young people’s perceptions of whether college is worth it, although fewer respondents in 2020 (across all three waves) are reporting feeling weighed down by college debt when compared to survey results from 2019. In 2019, 62% of respondents reported feeling weighed down a huge or fair amount). Across all three waves of the survey in 2020, many (45%) still report they are extremely (26%) or very (19%) concerned about having college debt, and more than one-third (35%) of respondents report they are **more concerned** about college debt now than before the coronavirus. Almost one-in-three (29%) respondents report they are just as concerned now as before the outbreak, and one-fifth (19%) report they are less concerned (17% are unsure). The increased level of concern is especially significant among Latina respondents, 41 percent of whom report they are more concerned about college debt now than they were before the coronavirus.

Despite their heightened concern about where and when to continue their education, many young people, as they have throughout the youth-centered research conducted for Equitable Futures, continue to seek out opportunities to develop new skills for their future careers. Almost half of Wave 3 survey respondents (44%) say they are taking (16%), planning to take (13%), or thinking about taking (16%) an online training program, such as a “boot camp,” an upskilling course, or a certification program, to develop new skills for their career. Black male respondents (21%) are more likely than respondents from other subgroups to report they are currently taking such a program. Notably, the majority of respondents (63%) who are or may be taking an online program report they plan to do this **in addition** to getting a college degree. While some (24%) reported this program will be instead of a college degree, for most respondents these types of classes appear to represent an upskilling opportunity rather than a substitute for formal higher education, as the following respondent quotes illustrate.

“While I study at a university I can specialize in another subject or study.”

– LATINO SURVEY RESPONDENT, AGE 16, LOWER INCOME

“Having new skills increases my chances of getting a good job sooner than if I learned them after school.”

– WHITE MALE SURVEY RESPONDENT, AGE 18, LOWER INCOME

“Certain skill sets would be nice to have with my major of linguistics.”

– BLACK FEMALE SURVEY RESPONDENT, AGE 18, LOWER INCOME



Illustration by Ladasia Bryant, age 19

Key Findings: How Young People Think about Their Future Lives, Then and Now



Illustration by Brenda Rivera, age group 15–17

The *Striving to Thriving* research from Equitable Futures captured the many nuances in how many Black and Latino young people and white youth from households with lower incomes think about their futures. The findings—based on the words and voices of thousands of young people—showed how many young people see themselves as their own best change agents; envision themselves thriving, yet express mixed confidence about how to achieve their job and career goals; and yearn to be exposed to a wide range of career options.

All three waves of the National Youth Poll completed so far have captured impacts from the pandemic on many young people, particularly their increasing levels of uncertainty about their educational and career choices and the financial pressures of the economic downturn. At the same time, all three waves of the survey suggest re-visiting some of the key insights from *Striving to Thriving* and using this context to gain a deeper understanding of both the optimism and resilience of many Black and Latino young people white young people from households with lower incomes **and** of how best to support them during these challenging times.

It feels important to note that revisiting the key insights of *Striving to Thriving* and looking at them side-by-side with the results of the 2020 waves of the National Youth Poll is not intended to be an apples-to-apples comparison—the National Youth Poll asked new questions because of the changed context in which many young people are now pursuing their educations and early careers. The following points are only meant to illuminate what might possibly be perceptions of some young people about their identities, choices, and careers that persist despite the vastly changed context—and how adults supporting young people could use these perceptions and insights to inform their work.



KEY INSIGHT: STRIVING TO THRIVING

Many young people see themselves as their own best change agents. They are optimistic, capable, and resourceful and value career exploration, while parents, guardians, and other family expect a linear pathway.

KEY FINDING: EQUITABLE FUTURES NATIONAL YOUTH POLL (WAVES 1, 2, AND 3)

Young people still feel a strong sense of agency, and at the same time know that seeking career advice and mentorship is important, although lower numbers reported that they have access to a mentor. At the same time young people are having conversations about their life goals with their parents, family members and other adults and they feel these conversations are valuable.

The issue of young people's agency, and how empowered they feel to create their future lives, shows up very strongly in the *Striving to Thriving* research. In the *Striving to Thriving* research, Black and Latino young people of all income levels and white young people from households with lower incomes are resourceful and positive and they recognize that they might need support, relationships, and connections with adults outside of their own families along the way to open up opportunities and help them explore different career options.

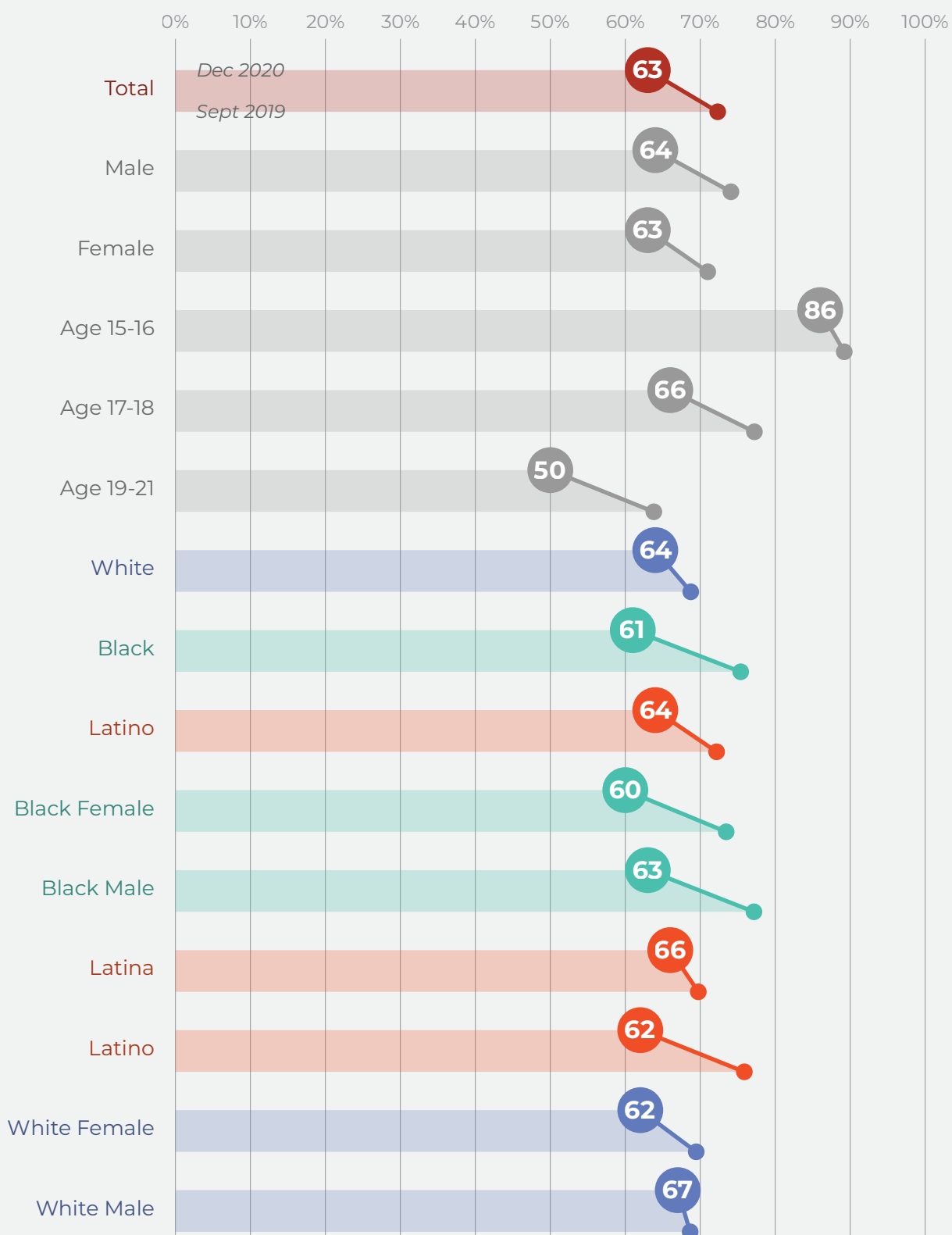
Many young people during COVID-19, however, are experiencing altered life circumstances. They are staying close to home and often helping out with financial or childcare support for their households. Although many still believe they are the most important architects of their future lives, during the pandemic, they are also accessing sources of support, like parents and adult family members within their own households.

How some young people are exercising their own sense of agency to achieve their future lives feels as if it's in flux during the pandemic. The survey results show some of this fluctuation, but don't speak to the question of whether most young people are still feeling a positive sense of resourcefulness and agency when thinking about their futures or whether they are, out of necessity, relying on resources and support closer to home because other resources are less available to them. Across all three waves of the poll about half of respondents (48%) reported feeling it will be mostly up to them to achieve the kind of job or career they want, a level that is slightly lower than in the 2019 survey (54%). In 2020, Black male respondents (42%) were the least likely to report they feel it will be mostly up to them, similar to 2019 when they (48%) were also the least likely subgroup to report it would be mostly up to them. While the proportion of young people who reported they feel they will get help to achieve the kind of career they want has remained fairly level from 2019 (34%) to 2020 (27%), the proportion of respondents who were unsure about whether it will be mostly up to them or whether they will get help from others has doubled from 2019 (6%) to 2020 (13%). In fact, increased uncertainty on a wide range of measures has been one of the hallmarks of the youth poll conducted during COVID-19 compared to 2019.

Many 2020 respondents talk to someone about their life goals, including a parent or guardian (46%); a friend (26%); another family member around their age (17%); a partner, spouse, or significant other (12%); or another adult family member (12%). While the *Striving to Thriving* research shows that many young people feel their parents' advice is overly limiting with respect to their career pathways, the constraints of COVID-19 could potentially be causing young people to rely on their parents and close family members more, although none of the survey results support this hypothesis. The majority (63%) of respondents in 2020 reported their parents do (or did) regularly talk to them about the next steps after high school. A plurality (41%) of respondents who have (or had) these conversations reported the conversations involved both parents and that they and their parents or guardian talk (or talked) about the same amount, although white male (33%) and Black male (34%) respondents are the least likely to report this is the case.

Does/did your parent or guardian regularly talk to you about your next steps after high school?

Those answering: Yes



Most young people (70%) who have had these conversations reported they were about going to college or getting more education, while almost half (49%) reported they talk to their parent or guardian about getting a job, and many (47%) reported the conversations include talking about finding a career. White male (60%) and Black male (61%) respondents are less likely than other race and gender subgroups to report these conversations are about going to college or continuing their education. Black male respondents (40%) are also less likely than other subgroups to report these conversations are about getting a job.

The vast majority of respondents, both overall and by race and gender subgroups, reported they find these conversations helpful: fully 80 percent of respondents reported these conversations are very (48%) or somewhat (32%) helpful for them personally. By contrast, only a few respondents (5%) reported these conversations are not helpful at all.

Fewer respondents are looking for job, work, or career advice during the pandemic than did before it. Specifically, there is a 13-percentage point drop in the proportion of respondents who said they have looked for information or advice about a job, work, or career in the 2020 survey compared to the 2019 survey (75% to 62%). There has been a double-digit decline among all subgroups, other than white males (a still-notable 6-point decline).



KEY INSIGHT, STRIVING TO THRIVING

Many young people are empowered by connections. They know they need support, but don't know where to find that support. They are proud of their ability to find information and resources on their own and in their own communities.

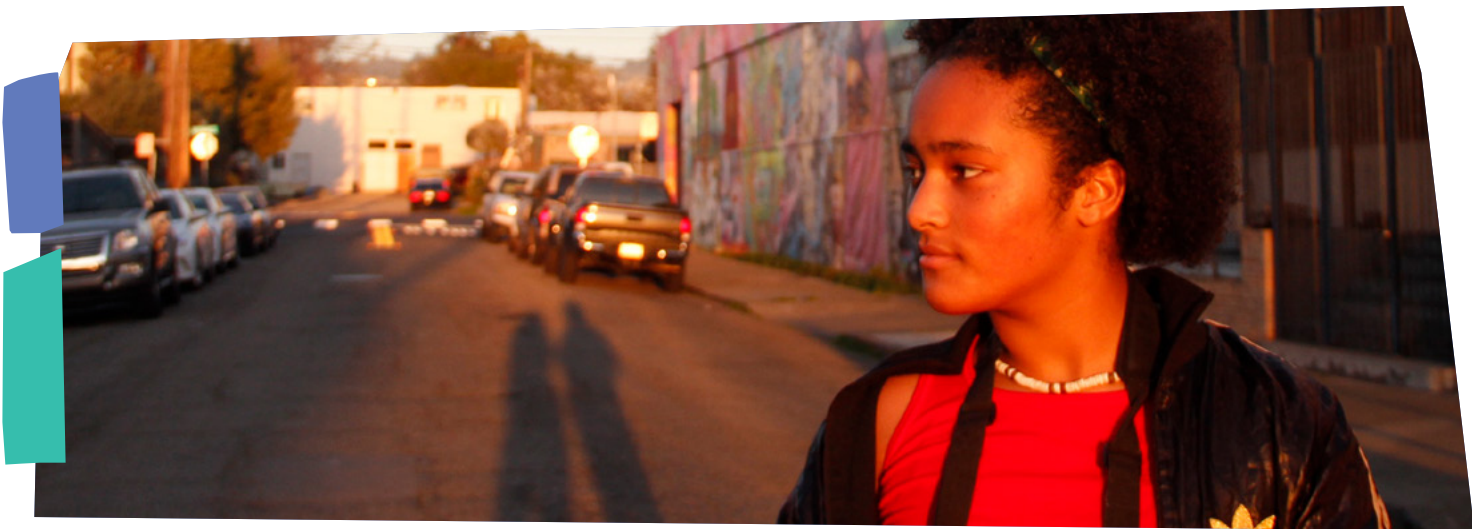
KEY FINDING, EQUITABLE FUTURES NATIONAL YOUTH POLL (WAVES 1, 2, AND 3)

Many young people feel that interpersonal relationships are important, report knowing people who have the kind of career or do the kind of work they are interested in, and feel like they could ask for advice from these people.

As shown in both *Striving to Thriving* and the 2020 waves of the National Youth Poll, many young people understand the value of connections and relationships throughout their journeys to achieve their future lives and careers. Research consistently shows that many young people of color and young people from households with lower incomes experience forms of adult support such as expressions of care and being challenged to grow or meet high expectations, and are less likely to experience adults and peers providing support that expands their possibilities in life.³ Understanding which types of connection young people are and aren't able to experience may be even more critical as we emerge from the restrictions imposed by the pandemic.

Most respondents across the National Youth Poll (Waves 1, 2, and 3) reported feeling that interpersonal relationships are important to their future career. Specifically, majorities say the following are important for their future career: connections (63%), knowing people like me who have that kind of job, work, or career (59%), relationship (59%), networks (55%), and mentors (55%).

In addition to feeling like these interpersonal relationships are important, more than four-in-ten (43%) respondents also reported that they know someone who has the kind of career or does the kind of work they are interested in, and a majority (83%) of these respondents feel they would be able to ask for advice from this person.



Photograph by Annabelle Armstrong–Temple, age 12



KEY INSIGHT, STRIVING TO THRIVING

Many young people try on their futures and yearn to be exposed to and explore a broad range of career and job possibilities.

KEY FINDING, EQUITABLE FUTURES NATIONAL YOUTH POLL (WAVES 1, 2, AND 3)

Job experience and career exploration continue to be important for many young people during COVID-19, and, for some, their current job is helpful to learn more about what they do—and do not—want to do for their future career.

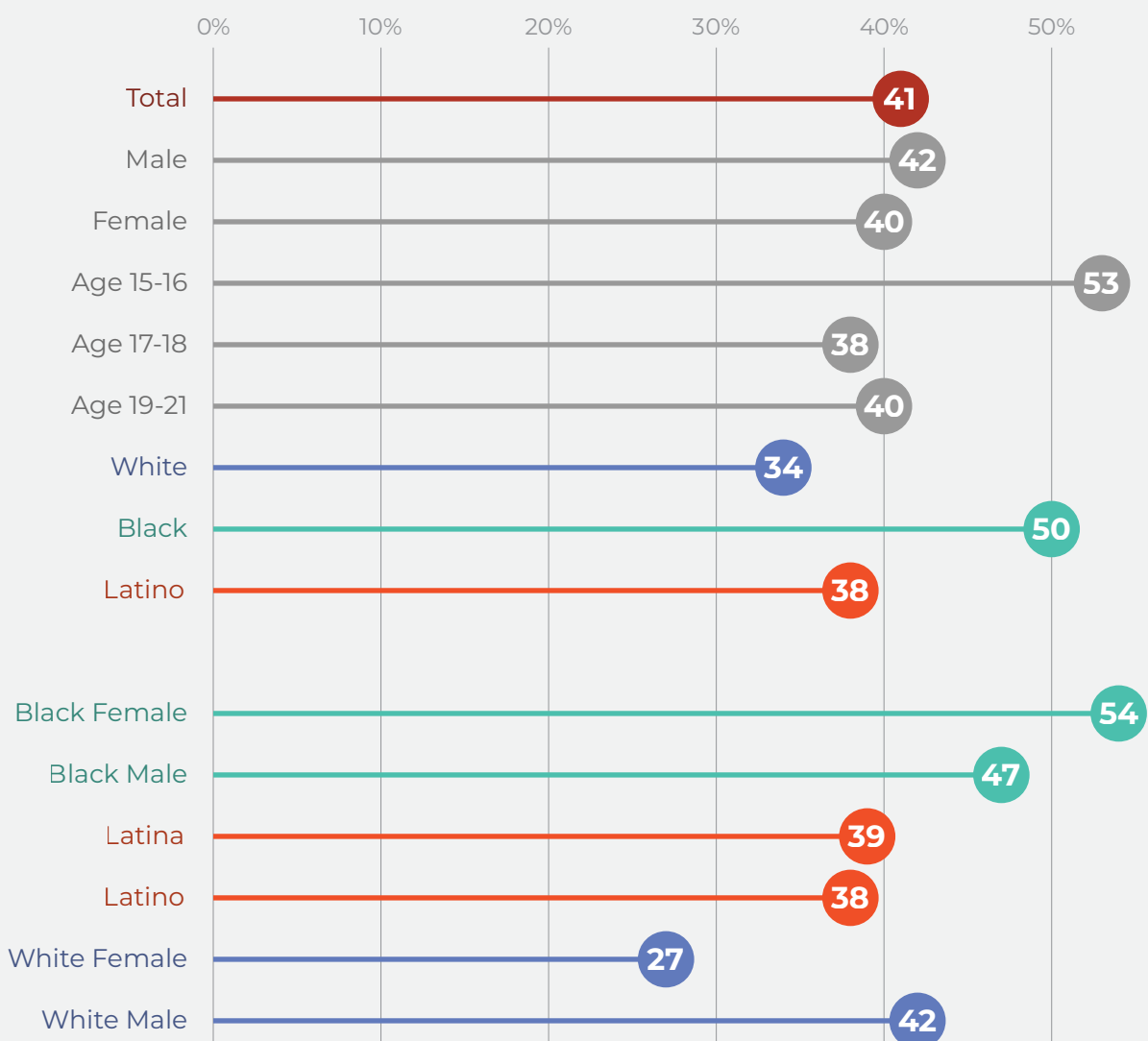
The settings and the relationships that comprise our daily existence have shrunk dramatically because of the pandemic, with many people physically occupying a much smaller space. Yet many young people are still working, even while juggling additional household responsibilities, whether it be from economic necessity or as part of a continuing effort to pursue their life goals and learn more about themselves and the career pathways that appeal to them. While career-related opportunities may have shrunk during the pandemic, work experience in general appears to be a valuable decision aid for young people in exploring career pathways.

In the 2020 waves of the National Youth Poll, four-in-ten (41%) respondents who are currently working reported their job is related to their chosen career pathway. Black female respondents (54%) are the most likely to report they are currently working in a job related to their career pathway, while white female respondents (27%) are the least likely. At the same time, half of respondents (50%) reported they are currently working in a job that is **not** related to their career pathway.

Work experience and job exploration continue to be important for many respondents, helping to clarify, refine, or eliminate possible career options. Among respondents who currently **are** working in a job related to their pathway, more than six-in-ten (63%) chose the job because they knew it was related to their career path, while about one-third (35%) reported that working in that job has helped them decide that they want to pursue a career in their current field. Almost half (49%) of the respondents who are currently working in a job **not** related to their career pathway knew this was the case when they took the job, and an additional one quarter of respondents (25%) reported they needed a job, and it did not matter if it was along their pathway or not.

Thinking about your current job, do you feel that:

Those answering: My current job is part of my chosen career track/career pathway



However, a sizable proportion of respondents (24%) took the job believing it would be part of their pathway, but then they realized they **did not want** to pursue that kind of career. Additionally, a majority of respondents (60%) who currently have or previously had a job reported that their jobs have provided a great deal of help (29%) or have somewhat helped (31%) them make decisions about their career pathways.

Half of 2020 poll respondents (50%) reported that their high school has (or had) career, vocational, technical, or internship programs that offer hands-on experience in different jobs. Most respondents (53%) who go (or went) to a high school where these programs are available reported that they have participated in them. Latina respondents (59%) are the most likely to report participating in these programs, and white female respondents (47%) are the least likely.

The vast majority of 2020 poll respondents (79%) who have participated in one of these programs reported they find the experience extremely (45%) or very (33%) helpful in learning more about careers they would or would not want to pursue, similar to 2019 (when 81% of respondents reported finding these programs helpful). Latino respondents in 2020 (71%) are somewhat less likely to report finding these programs helpful than are respondents of other race and gender subgroups.

Most (60%) respondents who currently have or previously had a job reported that their jobs have provided a great deal of help (29%) or have somewhat helped (31%) them make decisions about their career pathways. White respondents (24%)—and especially white female respondents (22%)—are noticeably **less** likely to report their previous work experience has helped them a great deal. Respondents who are extremely (46%) or very optimistic (29%) about achieving the kind of life they want in the future or feel their future career goals are very (41%) or somewhat (30%) clear are also noticeably more likely to report their previous job experience has helped them make decisions about their career track.

What the 2020 poll findings show is that, regardless of the impetus and despite the constraints of additional financial and other pressures from COVID-19, work experience can be highly valuable for many young people in clarifying what they want—or do not want—to do in their future careers. In addition, the 2020 findings are a strong reinforcement of the *Striving to Thriving* insight about many young people wanting to try on their futures—when they have the space, opportunity, and support to do so.

Conclusion and Suggestions

Overall, the picture of Black and Latino young people and white young people from households with lower incomes is yielding numerous insights about how many of these young people think about their future lives and careers both before and during the pandemic. Many of their perceptions are consistent despite the vastly different landscape. Given the severe and disparate impacts of COVID-19 on communities of color and communities experiencing poverty, this consistency underlines the central question of *Equitable Futures*: how to support *more* young people in their career pathways—especially during challenging times—with greater creativity and urgency.

Given the thru-lines between the key insights from *Striving to Thriving* and findings from the first three waves of the National Youth Poll some possible opportunities suggest themselves for adults working to support young people on their career pathways, such as:

- **Creating** opportunities for short-term paid work experiences (like internships) that expose young people to different career pathways and enable them to clarify their career interests. Of the young people in the Wave 3 survey who reported they are working, only five percent say they are working in an internship type of experience, suggesting that much more could be done for Black and Latino young people and white young people from households with lower incomes.
- **Designing** programs to support young people with more flexibility around participation to allow for young people's competing priorities and responsibilities.
- **Understanding** which racial, gender, and income subgroups are experiencing the heightened uncertainty around future educational or career goals and adjusting outreach and support services accordingly.
- **Innovating** on ways to allow young people to develop connections and relationships important to their future career interests, even during this period of enforced isolation and virtual connection.

Endnotes

- 1 OECD Youth and COVID-19: Response, Recovery, and Resilience, 11 June 2020, <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/youth-and-covid-19-response-recovery-and-resilience-c40e61c6/>
- 2 <https://www.aplu.org/projects-and-initiatives/college-costs-tuition-and-financial-aid/publicvalues/employment-earnings.html>
- 3 Search Institute, Defining and Measuring Social Capital for Young People: <https://www.search-institute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/SOCAP-Lit-Review.pdf>

Data visualization by Andrew Garcia Phillips