Chinese Students Studying Abroad Survey

FindingSchool

The Enrollment Management Association

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The Enrollment Management Association is committed to providing leadership and service in meeting the admission assessment and enrollment needs of schools, students, and families.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, EMA and FindingSchool (A K-12 educational company that provides a search engine covering China and neighboring countries in Asia), jointly conducted a survey to analyze the changes and trends in the willingness of young Chinese students to study abroad.

Participants

The survey was posted at FindingSchool’s official WeChat account, and in FindingSchool staff personal WeChat. WeChat is one of the most widely used social media in China. The survey window was open from May 1st through May 12, 2020. In total, we received 304 responses.

Figure 1 is a geographic breakdown of the 304 families who participated in the survey. As can be seen from Figure 1, more than half of the participants were from Beijing and Shanghai, with a percentage of 28% and 26%, respectively. The next cluster included Shenzhen and Hangzhou, each representing more than 5% of the responses. Other cities such as Nanjing, Chengdu, etc., account for less than 5% of the total response.
Results

Q1. In which of the following grades will your child be enrolled in fall 2020?

Figure 2 shows the distribution of grade enrollment in fall 2020 of students from the participating families. About one quarter of them will be enrolled in 10th grade in fall 2020, 18% will be enrolled in 9th grade, and 15% will be enrolled in 8th grade.
Q2. What is your child’s current school enrollment?

Question 2 asked about students’ current school enrollment. Respondents were asked to choose one of the following descriptions:

- Currently enrolled in a school in China and will continue to study in a school in China in fall 2020
- Currently enrolled in a school in China but has been admitted to a school overseas, or
- Already enrolled in a school overseas but currently back in China because of COVID-19
Figure 3 exhibits the responses. More than half of respondents have a child currently enrolled in a school overseas (N=156). About one third of respondents (N=102) have a child who is currently enrolled in a school in China and will continue to attend a school in China in fall 2020. Finally, a small portion of families (N=46) fell into the third category: their child is currently enrolled in a school in China but has been admitted to a school overseas for school year 2020-21.

Figure 3. Students’ current school enrollment (N=304)
Currently enrolled in a school in China; will continue to study in a school in China in fall 2020

Depending on their answers to Question 2, families were directed to different sets of follow-up questions. Questions 3-5 were for those families that have a child who is currently enrolled in a school in China and will continue to study in a school in China in fall 2020. We refer to these families as the “Application Group” for convenience of discussion. The sample size of the Application Group was 102.

- **Q3. Is your child planning to apply to a school (boarding or day school) overseas in the school year of 2020-21 or after?**
- **Q4. Yes (Please indicate all countries you may consider.)**
- **Q5. No (Please specify the reason. You can choose all choices that apply.)**

Question 3 asked if families are planning to apply to a school overseas for the school year 2021-22 or later. Those who answered “Yes” were asked to indicate all countries they might consider; those who answered “No” were asked to specify their reason(s).

Survey responses revealed that a majority of families are planning to apply to a school overseas, with 60% responding “Yes” and 40% responding “No” (Figure 4). This finding is somewhat similar to the results from another survey conducted by the Bondad International Education Media, an influential digital media platform on WeChat reporting on international schools, bilingual education, and studying abroad trends in China. The Bondad survey results showed that out of the 465 Chinese families that had plans to study abroad (at least prior to the pandemic), 70% have chosen to continue, while 30% have decided against studying abroad (Shang NancyFriends, 2020).
Indicate countries (if planning to apply).

Figure 5 displays the responses. Of the 61 families that plan to apply to a school overseas, a large majority (N=58; 97% of the respondents) indicated that the U.S. is one of the countries they are considering. Canada (29%) and the United Kingdom (23%) were on many families’ lists as well.

Specify the reason (if NOT planning to apply).

We were eager to explore why families might have decided not to apply to a school overseas, especially in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As Figure 6 shows, safety (65%) was, not surprisingly, parents’ No. 1 concern. Worries related to the political environment, such as stigma against Asians, and trends toward deglobalization, were other important factors in parents’ decisions not to send their children overseas at this point (63%). Safety concerns and worries about the political environment (e.g., students being bullied in the anti-Asians atmosphere) were often intertwined in the parents’ comments.

In addition, approximately half of respondents indicated that concerns about the relationship between China and the U.S. have played an important role in their decision making. Only 45% of respondents cited health concerns (such as risks related to COVID-19) as a reason not to apply — a lower percentage than we had expected. Other considerations, such as educational costs and ease of obtaining a visa, also factored in but did not weigh as heavily as issues like safety or political environment.

Parents who responded to the Bondad survey had very similar concerns. Even though 70% of the families chose to continue pursuing studying abroad, the majority of families (81.1%)
were thinking about delaying for a few years (e.g., originally middle school but now high school; originally high school but now college) The top three concerns included (Shang NancyFriends, 2020):

- Fear of bullying, stereotypes, and racism towards Chinese students: 66.5%
- Ongoing and aftermath of COVID-19: 61.5%, and
- Stagnant economy and personal finance: 41.9%

Shang NancyFriends (2020) concluded that “Despite the pandemic, COVID-19 is NOT the number 1 issue on many Chinese families’ minds; instead, they worry about not having a supportive, friendly, embracing environment free from racism and stereotypes.” Our survey results confirmed this finding.

![Figure 4. Plan of applying to a school overseas in 2020-21 or after (N=102)](image-url)
Figure 5. Countries considered by families that plan to apply to a school overseas (N=61)

Figure 6. Reasons families gave for not applying to a school overseas (N=41)
Currently enrolled in a school in China; but has been admitted to a school overseas

In response to Question 2, 46 families indicated that their child is currently enrolled in a school in China but has been admitted to a school overseas. We call these families the “Enrollment Group.”

The parents of the Enrollment Group were asked to answer the following questions.

- Q6. Is your child planning to enroll in a school overseas and go there to study in fall 2020 if the campus is reopened?
- Q7. Yes (Please indicate all countries you may consider.)
- Q8. No (Please specify the reason. You can choose all choices that apply.)

Of the 46 families, 43 (94%) said “Yes”—their child is planning to enroll and go to the campus if feasible. The most popular choice of a country for overseas study was the U.S. (chosen by 40 families), followed by Canada.

Already enrolled in a school overseas, but currently back in China because of COVID-19

More than half of the survey respondents (N=156) indicated that they have a child who is currently enrolled in a school overseas but back in China because of COVID-19. We call this the “Returning Group.” We asked the parents of the Returning Group the following questions.

- Q9. Is your child planning to go back to his/her school overseas in the fall if campus is reopened?
- Q10. Yes (Please indicate all countries.)
- Q11. No (Please specify the reason. You can choose all choices that apply.)
The response pattern is very similar to that of the Enrollment Group: the majority of the families (148 families out of 156, or 95%) responded “Yes,” whereas 8 families (5%) said “No.” Again, most students (142) are enrolled in a U.S. school.

In both the Enrollment Group and the Returning Group, parents cited concerns about safety and the political environment as the main reasons that their children would not attend schools overseas in the fall, but the sample size was deemed too small (3 and 8, respectively) to draw a meaningful conclusion.

Q12: If you consider sending your child to study overseas, how do you decide which country you prefer? Please rank order the importance of each of the following factors: 5 being most important, and 1 being least important. You can use the same rating on different factors.

Figure 7 presents the average rating for each factor. Again, the results clearly indicated that when considering study abroad for their children, parents regarded safety as the most important factor, giving it a rating of 4.8 (out of 5). The relationship between China and the host country was seen as the second most important factor, receiving an average rating of 4.2. With an average rating of 3.2, financial cost appears to be the least concern of Chinese families.

Recommendations

In light of the survey results, we recommend the following:

- Safety (other than COVID-19) regulation. Schools should take steps to protect Chinese students from being singled out and discriminated against when they are on campus.
COVID-19 regulation. Schools should reassure parents that they are implementing protocols and procedures designed to protect students from COVID-19. The more specific, the better.

We intend to conduct a follow-up survey to collect feedback from all international SSAT test takers in the year of 2019-2020. Stay tuned.

![Figure 7](image)

**Figure 7.** Average rating of factors when considering host country for studying abroad
Shang NancyFriends (May 2020). *To go or not to go, that is the question*.... Shang NancyFriends Dim Sum Digest.