

# MISSION CRITICAL

The Role of  
Community Colleges  
in Meeting Students'  
Basic Needs

2022  
NATIONAL  
REPORT



# Acknowledgments

While community colleges open their doors to all students, open access is just the first step toward attaining the equity ingrained in the mission of these institutions. The more significant work is meeting every student where they are and ensuring they have the support they need to succeed. Creating equitable conditions for students requires viewing them holistically, and that happens through understanding the external challenges and barriers to success they face. The mission has never been more critical than it is now.

CCCSE gratefully acknowledges ECMC Foundation and The Kresge Foundation for co-funding this project, which allowed CCCSE to build on working knowledge about food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness among community college students.

These foundations provided support for the selection of additional survey items focused on students' basic needs, which were added to the 2021 administrations of the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) and the Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE); CCCSE's interviews with students at three community colleges; and the development of this national report.

At a time when enrollments are down, achievement gaps persist, and students are in need of support in ways that were perhaps not fully realized before the COVID-19 pandemic, exploring these pressing issues at the national level and bringing further attention to the students who endure these hardships could not be more crucial.

The following advisory panel of experts provided guidance on the selection of the additional survey items:

- ▶ **Dr. Rashida Crutchfield**, Associate Professor, California State University, Long Beach
- ▶ **Dr. Melissa Richardson Curtis**, Vice President of Student Success, Howard Community College (MD)
- ▶ **Dr. Brenna Ellison**, Associate Professor and Undergraduate Program Coordinator, Agricultural Economics, Purdue University
- ▶ **Dr. Sara Goldrick-Rab**
- ▶ **Dr. Davis Jenkins**, Senior Research Scholar, Community College Research Center, Teachers College Columbia University
- ▶ **Dr. Kay McClenney**, Senior Consultant to the President and CEO of the American Association of Community Colleges; Senior Fellow, National Center for Inquiry & Improvement
- ▶ **Jeff Webster**, Director of Research, Trellis Company

We would also like to thank the participating colleges and their students for sharing their perspectives through the survey administrations and interviews. Without these voices, we would not be able to demonstrate how students are experiencing these issues at a national level.

This report is dedicated to the many students who, against all odds, continue to attend college to make better lives for themselves and their families.

---

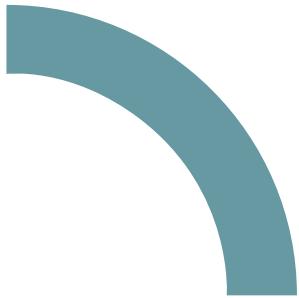
The findings and conclusions contained within are those of CCCSE and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of ECMC Foundation or The Kresge Foundation.

© 2022. Permission granted for unlimited use with appropriate citation.

Please cite this report as follows: CCCSE. (2022). *Mission critical: The role of community colleges in meeting students' basic needs*. [www.cccse.org/NR22](http://www.cccse.org/NR22)

# Contents

Too Many Students Lack Food and Housing Security	2
2021 <i>CCSSE</i> Respondents	4
Findings Related to Food Security	6
Food Security Index for Community College Students	9
Findings Related to Housing Security	11
Housing Security Index for Community College Students	14
Findings for Students With Dependent Children	16
Students With Less Food and Housing Security Are More Engaged	18
Are Colleges Doing Enough About Addressing Students' Basic Needs?	20
Methodology	23
How Colleges Are Helping Students in Need	24
Next Steps	27



# Too Many Students Lack Food and Housing Security

Throughout higher education, there is increasing concern about students who experience food insecurity, housing insecurity, and difficulty meeting other critical needs. The pandemic exacerbated these challenges and led to lower enrollment across all higher education sectors. Community colleges experienced the steepest decline, losing 15% of their students between 2019 and 2021.<sup>1</sup> This outsized impact is not surprising, given that the pandemic disproportionately affected the students community colleges are most likely to serve.

Now community colleges are redesigning their roles for the post-pandemic world. Given the pandemic's impact on both colleges and students, it only makes sense for colleges, in partnership with their communities, to more actively help students meet their basic needs. This work has become mission critical: It is essential to bringing back the students who were forced to stop out, better supporting those who stayed in college even though they were struggling, and ensuring that all students are well positioned to succeed.

Since its inception, CCCSE has helped colleges use data to better understand and engage their students. CCCSE has long called attention to the many obligations community college students negotiate in addition to their studies, including work; caring for dependents; and managing the financial demands of tuition, other college costs, and living expenses.

The 2021 Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) takes a deeper look at these challenges by exploring housing and food insecurity among community college students.

With 29% of respondents classified as food insecure and 14% classified as housing insecure, these findings shed light on the need for colleges to get involved—either by better supporting their students directly or by connecting them to relevant government and community support services.

## Some Students Run Out of Options

Many students told powerful stories in CCCSE interviews. One student sobbed while recounting a routine from before they attended college. They would regularly steal a meal at an all-you-can-eat buffet restaurant so they could eat well just once a week.

*"I used to go to Golden Corral every Sunday, and I didn't care. I didn't have a dollar. ... The reason I picked Sunday was because a lot of people go after church, so there was a crowd. ... I [would] ask [the host], 'Where's your restroom,' and then I [would] go to the restroom, and when I come out of the restroom, I fixed me a plate and sat down and ate. I used to feel so bad when I used to do that, but I was that hungry. I didn't care if I got caught. If they caught me and put me in jail, it would have been a better place than I was because I didn't know where my next meal was coming from.*

*"One day I said, 'No matter how hungry I get, I [will] never steal again,' and I meant that. I stuck to that to this day, and it's been 10 years."*



**Why should colleges devote resources to this work?** When students struggle to meet their basic needs, learning becomes more challenging, and they are less likely to complete their education. A group of public health researchers found that “food insecurity during college is a barrier to graduation and higher degree attainment, particularly for first-generation students” (p. 389).<sup>2</sup>

This reality also is consistently reflected in CCSSE data: Nearly seven in 10 (69%) 2021 CCSSE cohort respondents said a lack of finances could cause them to withdraw from college.

Moreover, helping students meet their basic needs is an equity issue. Students of color and low-income students are more likely to face not only food and housing insecurity, but also challenges accessing or paying for physical and mental health care, child care, transportation, and technology.

Students with dependent children also are more likely to face food and housing insecurity, making it harder for them to support their families now and improve their prospects for the future.

Further, CCSSE data show that students who experience the most housing and food insecurity are the most engaged. This finding underscores the potential loss—to students and their communities—if these students are forced to abandon their studies.

As data in this report show, colleges that do not actively support their students risk losing the opportunity to educate them. Moreover, the students who are most in need—the students who can benefit most from earning a credential—stand to lose the most.



“I have [slept outdoors]. … It’s not a good feeling. It really isn’t a good feeling, especially in the middle of the night when you have to go potty or something. What am I going to do?”

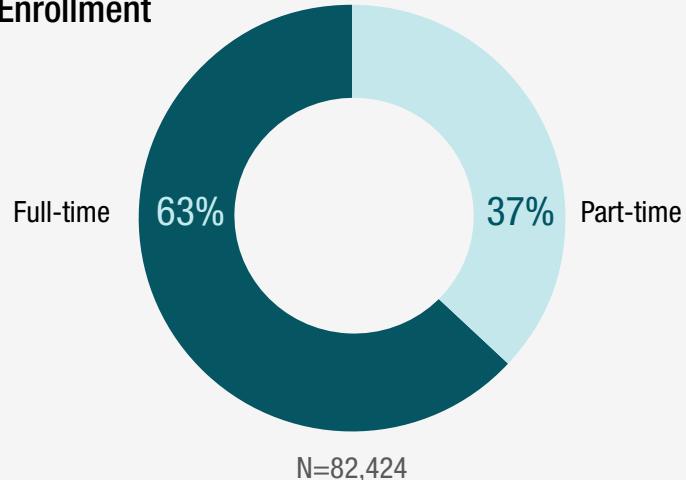
— Student

# 2021 CCSSE Respondents

The data in this report come from a Students in Need item set that was administered with CCSSE in spring 2021. Students participating in the Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE) responded to a similar item set in fall 2021. Responses to the CCSSE and SENSE Students in Need items were similar, so this report provides data from the CCSSE items only.

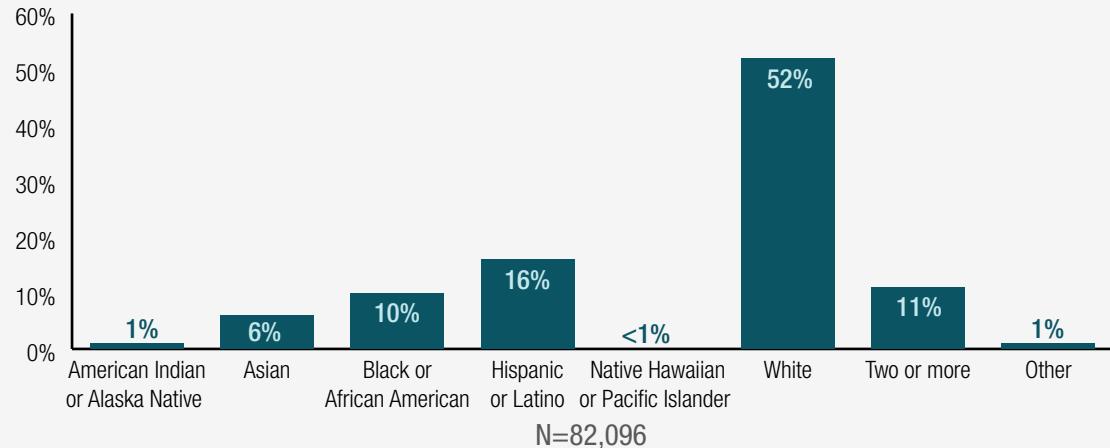
## Characteristics of 2021 CCSSE Respondents

### Enrollment



Source: CCSSE 2021 data

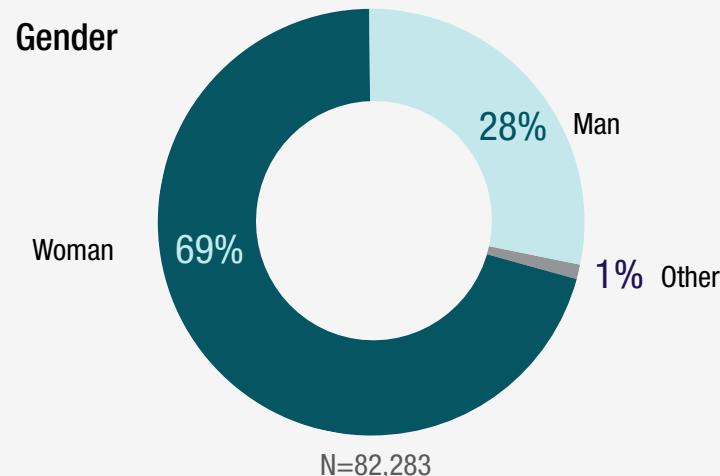
### Race/Ethnicity



Note: The 3% of students who indicated *I prefer not to respond* are not included because those responses are treated as missing data.

Source: CCSSE 2021 data

### Gender



Note: The 1% of students who indicated *I prefer not to respond* are not included because those responses are treated as missing data.

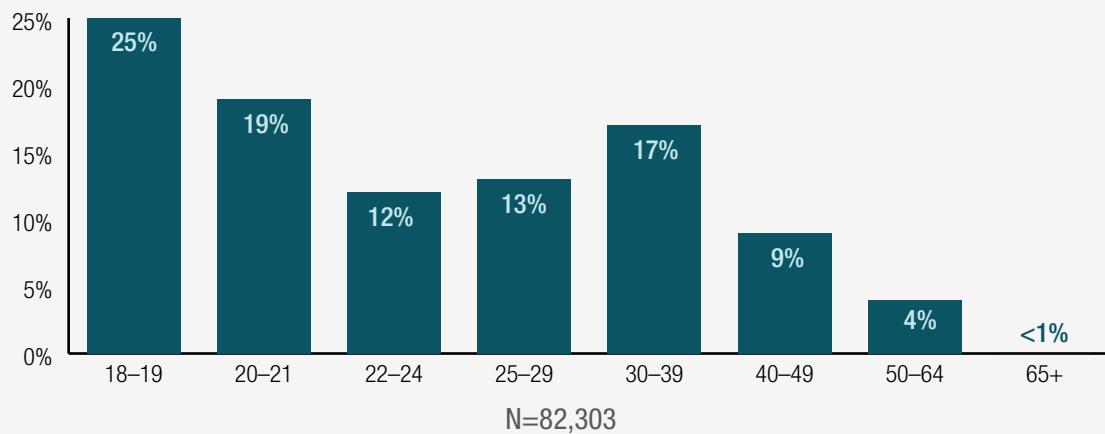
Note: Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.

Source: CCSSE 2021 data

“I have told myself, ‘This is it. I got to do it.’ It’s hard, and I’ll cry, but get back on it the next day because anything’s better ... than staying in the car and having to choose bills over food.”

—Student

## Age

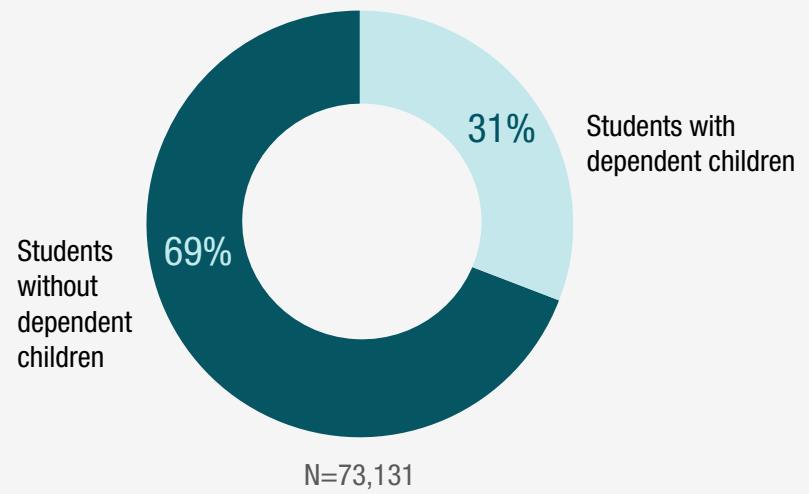


Note: Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.

Source: CCSSE 2021 data



## Dependent Children Status



Source: CCSSE 2021 data

*“I saw [the food pantry] as another way for college to be like a co-parent. I started to take advantage of it because it’s there for people like me that struggle, need a little bit o’ help every now and then.”*

—Student

# Food Security

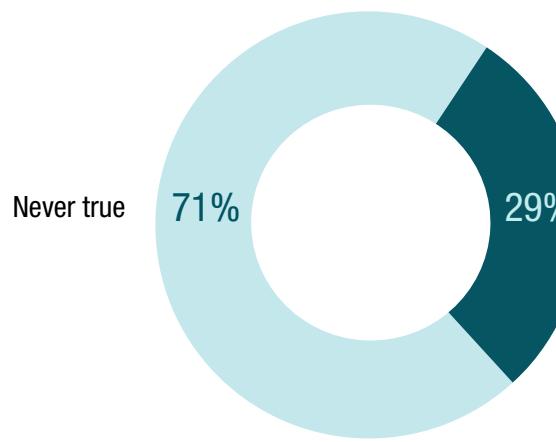
Students experience differing levels of food security. For example, some students may run out of money for food at the end of a pay period, and others may be hungry most of the time. Food security also can be jeopardized by a variety of circumstances. Some students may find that their work hours get cut or conflict with classes. Students with children might forgo food at times so their children can eat.

While the specifics vary, one element of food insecurity is consistent: It is harder to learn—and stay on track to earn a credential—while living with hunger. Students with low food security also must manage high levels of personal stress and expend energy figuring out how they will eat. A recent Trellis Company study found that students who became food secure “often reported increased sleep, reduced stress, and higher levels of energy” (p. 8).<sup>3</sup>



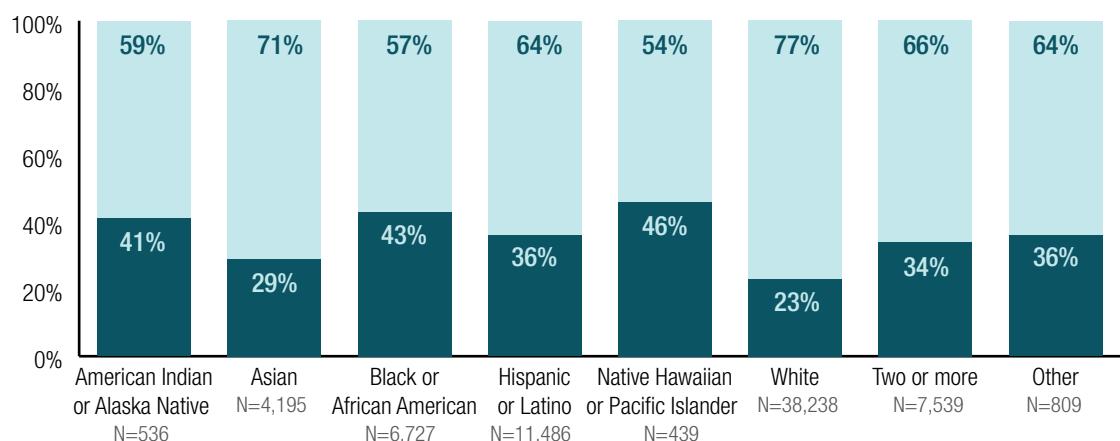
## Nearly a Third of Students Report Running Out of Food

In the last 30 days, the food that I bought just didn't last, and I didn't have money to get more.



Sometimes or  
often true

### Responses by race/ethnicity

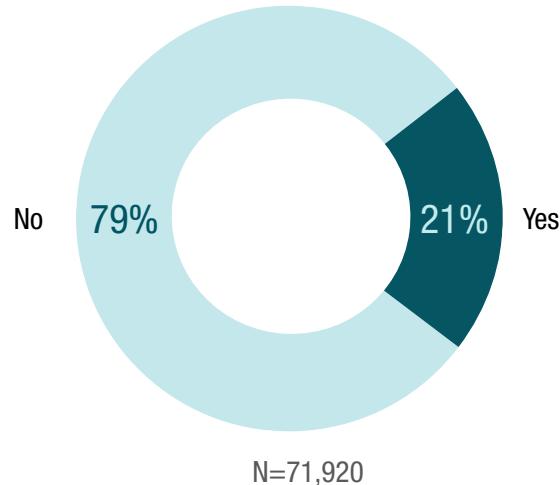


Note: Students who indicated *I prefer not to respond* are not included because those responses are treated as missing data.

Source: CCSSE 2021 data

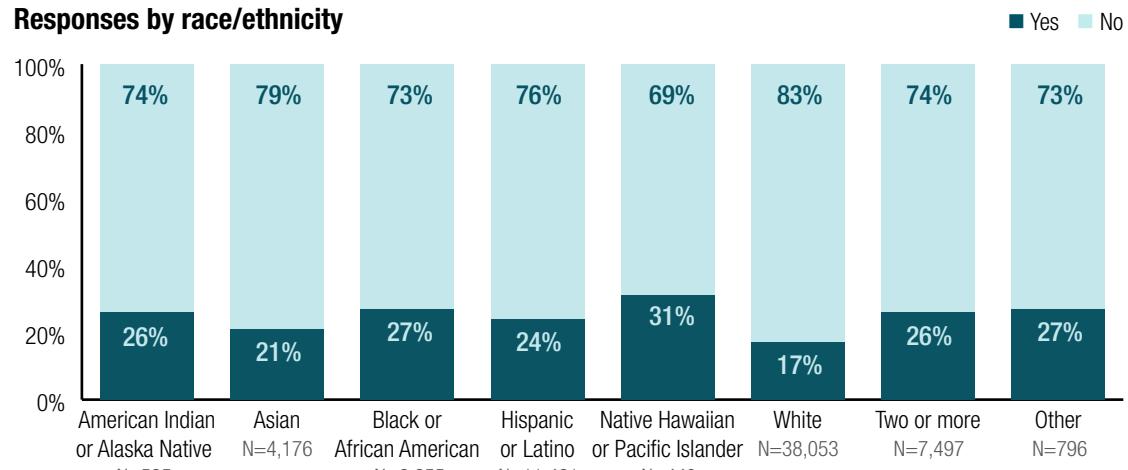
# One in Five Students Report Eating Less Because They Lacked Money for Food

In the last 30 days, did you ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?



Source: CCSSE 2021 data

## Responses by race/ethnicity



Note: Students who indicated *I prefer not to respond* are not included because those responses are treated as missing data.

Source: CCSSE 2021 data

Among students who responded Yes

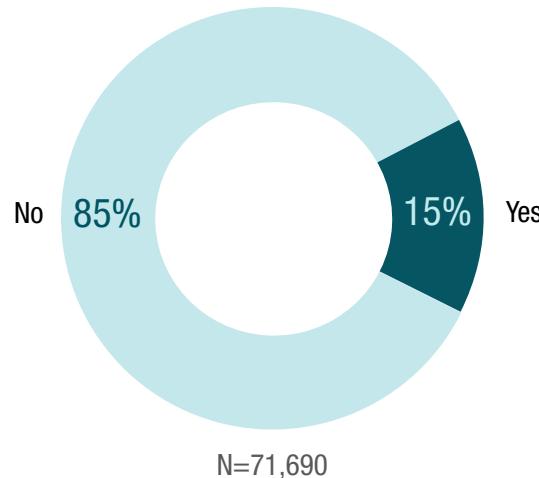


Source: CCSSE 2021 data

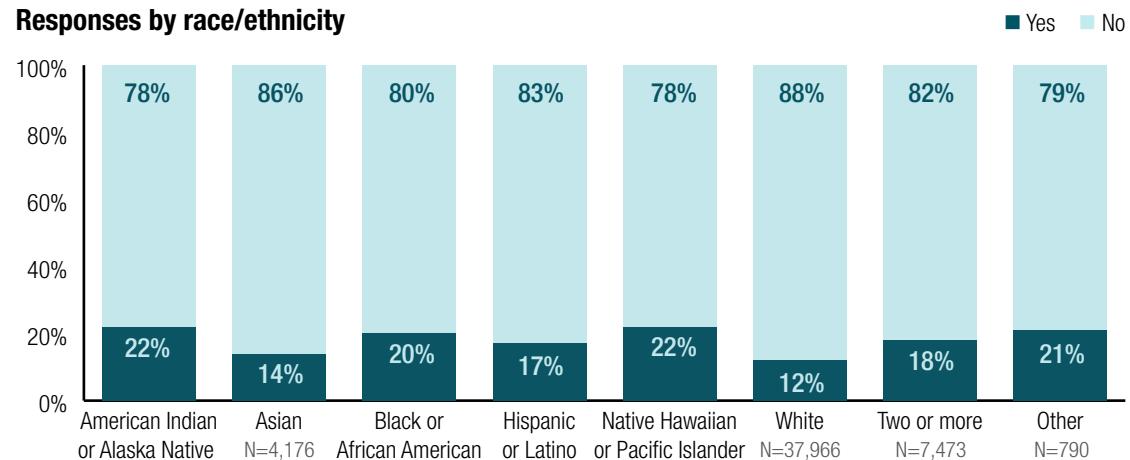


# One in Seven Students Report Not Eating Because They Lacked Money for Food

In the last 30 days, were you ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?



Source: CCSSE 2021 data



Note: Students who indicated *I prefer not to respond* are not included because those responses are treated as missing data.

Source: CCSSE 2021 data

“On the street, there’s a lot of days I didn’t eat. There’s some days I would go behind restaurants and stuff. ... They throw out an old sandwich or something.”

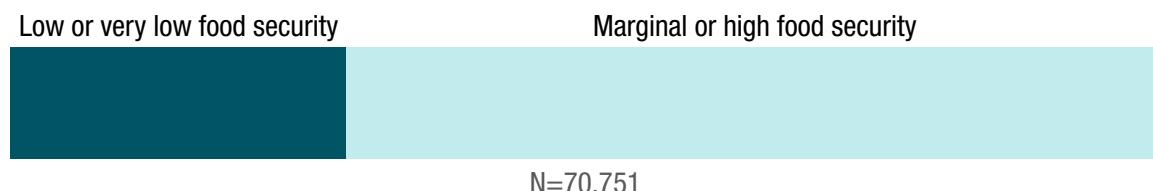
—Student



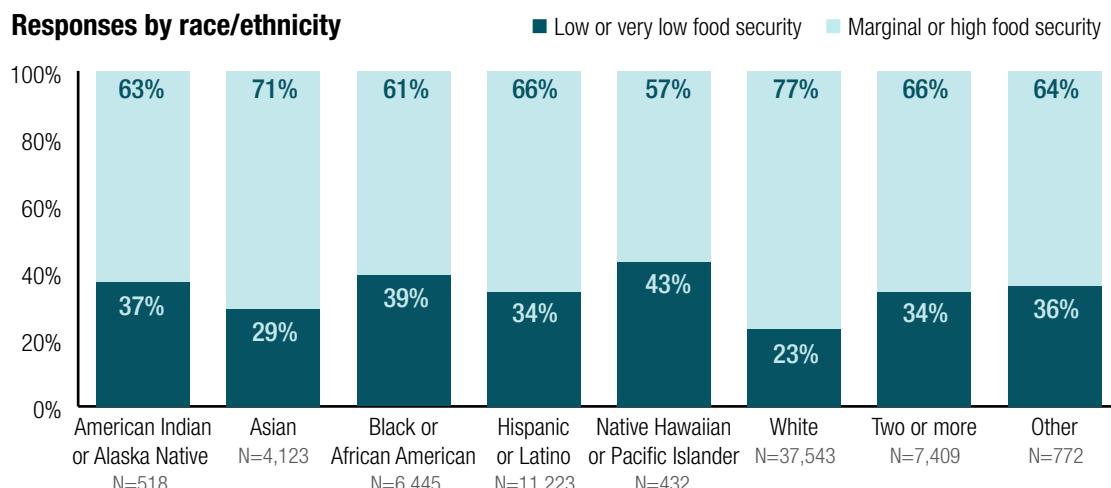
# Food Security Index FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS

This index uses six survey items to classify community college students as having *very low*, *low*, or *marginal or high* food security. CCSSE data indicate that 29% of students had *low* or *very low* food security in the 30 days prior to responding to the survey.

## Food Security Index Shows 29% of Students Are Food Insecure



Source: CCSSE 2021 data



Note: Students who indicated *I prefer not to respond* are not included because those responses are treated as missing data.

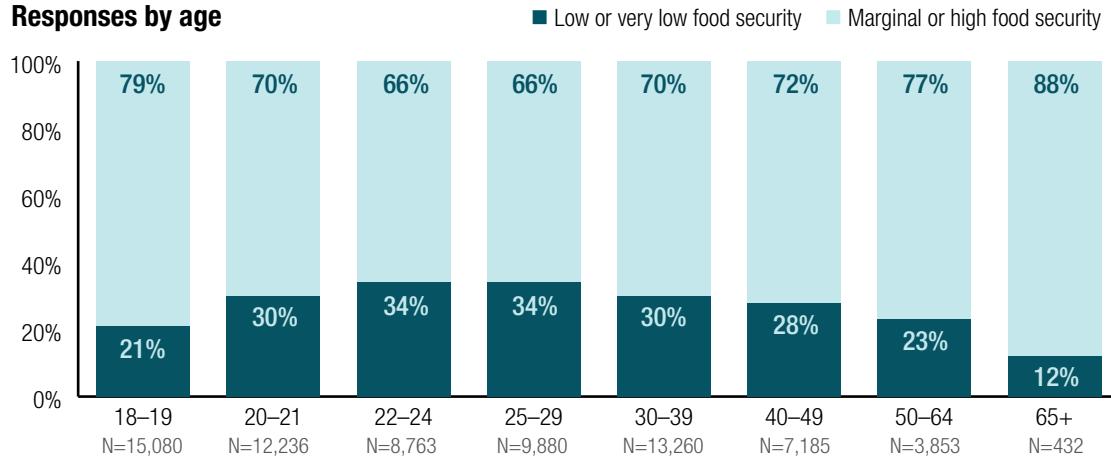
Source: CCSSE 2021 data



The six items in the food security index come from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) *U.S. Household Food Security Module: Six-Item Short Form*.<sup>4</sup> They were included in an additional item set administered with CCSSE.

- ▶ In the last 30 days, the food that I bought just didn't last, and I didn't have money to get more.
- ▶ In the last 30 days, I couldn't afford to eat balanced meals.
- ▶ In the last 30 days, did you ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?
- ▶ If, in the last 30 days, you did cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food, how often did this happen?
- ▶ In the last 30 days, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food?
- ▶ In the last 30 days, were you ever hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food?

## Responses by age



Note: Students who indicated *I prefer not to respond* are not included because those responses are treated as missing data.

Source: CCSSE 2021 data



**“I’ve  
skipped a  
lotta meals—  
a lot.”**

—Student

**“I get a few food stamps, but that’s never enough for the whole month. People don’t understand that it’s just not enough.”**

—Student

Other organizations that do vital work in this area, such as The Hope Center, have found even higher levels of food and housing insecurity among respondents. An analysis of food security studies found insecurity ranged from 10% to 75% among all postsecondary students.<sup>5</sup> Many reasons could account for these variations, including the number of survey items administered, the number of items used to create the different indices, and the number of participants in any given survey administration.

Despite these differences, all of the studies highlight the reality that too many college students lack food and housing security. Meeting their basic needs is a pressing issue that requires attention.

## FINDINGS RELATED TO

# Housing Security

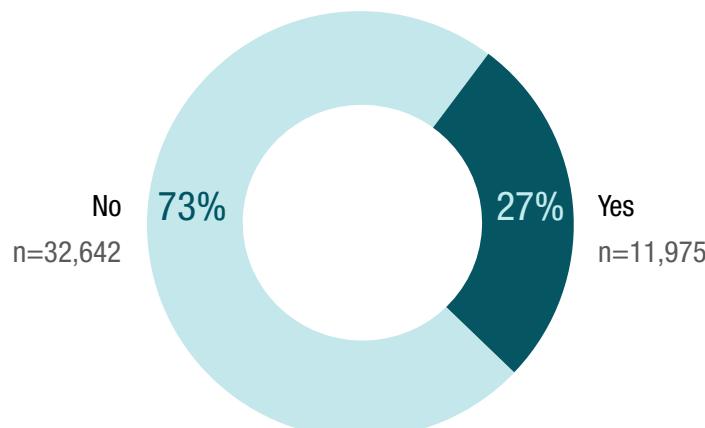
Students do not have to be sleeping outside to experience housing insecurity. Students in a range of situations—such as running out of money for rent or utilities, couch surfing, or staying in temporary housing—lack housing security.

Any student with unstable housing is experiencing uncertainty, which requires them to spend time and energy figuring out where they will sleep and how they will manage their belongings. This extra work is time consuming and exhausting. It also distracts students from their studies. Housing insecurity makes it more challenging to learn and stay on track to earn a credential.



## More Than a Quarter of Students\* Report Having Trouble Paying Their Rent or Mortgage

In the last 12 months, were you ever unable to pay your rent or mortgage payment in full?

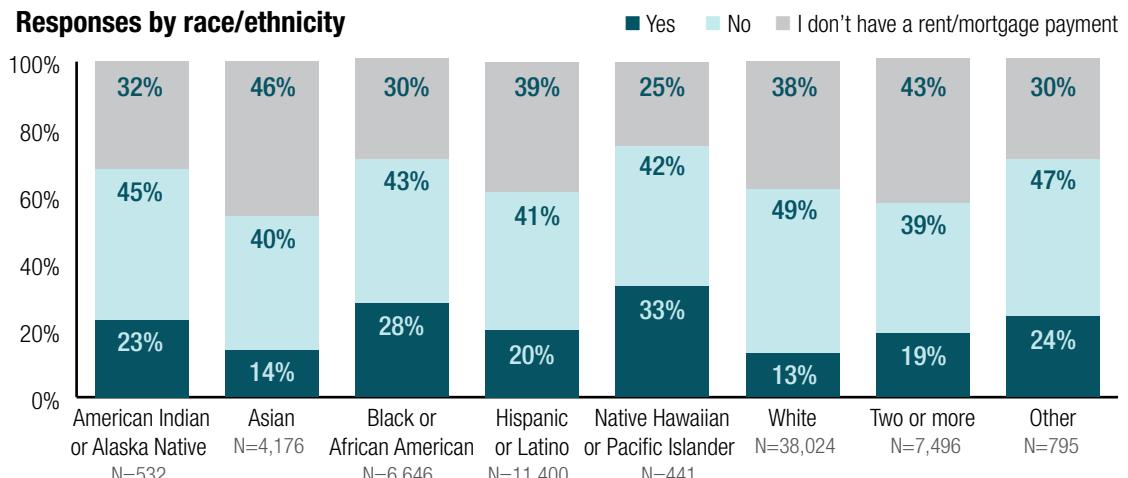


\*Responses include only the 62% of all students who report having a rent or mortgage payment.

Source: CCSSE 2021 data

**“It wasn’t our first time getting evicted, so it wasn’t a huge shocker.”**

— Student



Note: Students who indicated *I prefer not to respond* are not included because those responses are treated as missing data.

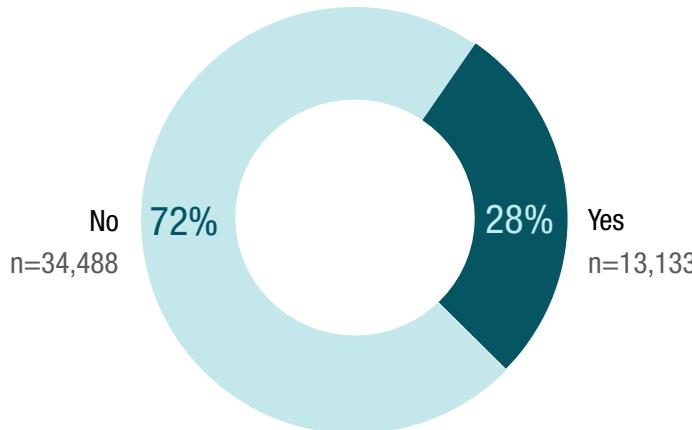
Note: Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.

Source: CCSSE 2021 data

Note: This page shows *yes/no* responses for only students who have a rent/mortgage payment and all responses for students by race/ethnicity. Complete results are included in the full methodology.

# More Than a Quarter of Students\* Report Having Trouble Paying Utility Bills

In the last 12 months, were you ever unable to pay your utility bill(s) in full?



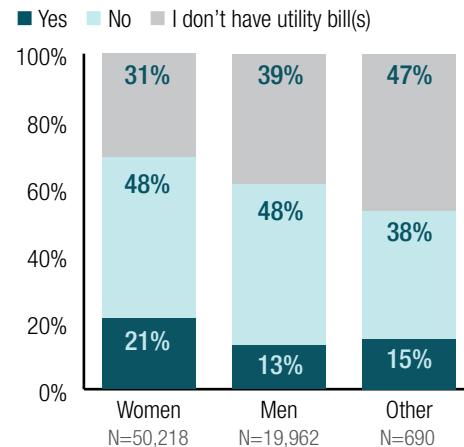
\*Responses include only the 66% of all students who report having utility bill(s).

Source: CCSSE 2021 data



Note: This page shows yes/no responses for only students who have utility bill(s) and all responses for students by gender and race/ethnicity. Complete results are included in the full methodology.

## Responses by gender



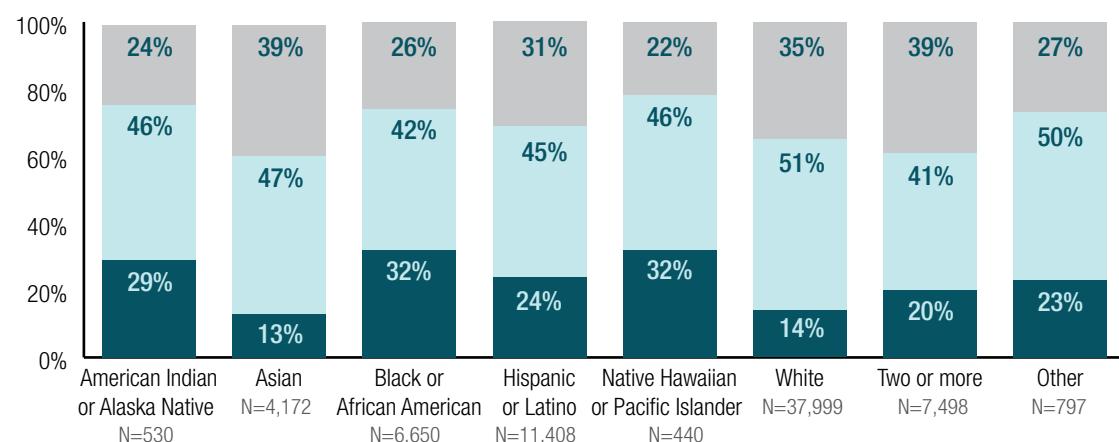
Note: Students who indicated *I prefer not to respond* are not included because those responses are treated as missing data.

Source: CCSSE 2021 data

“I've had to put myself in unsafe situations just for shelter. ... When you are a felon, they say there's all these incentives nationwide ... to get felons in the workforce, and we're even called 'returning citizens' now. Well, all the goodwill stops at housing. ... The government can't tell a property owner what to do with their properties and so, you run into the situation to where, yeah, literally nobody will rent to you.”

— Student

## Responses by race/ethnicity



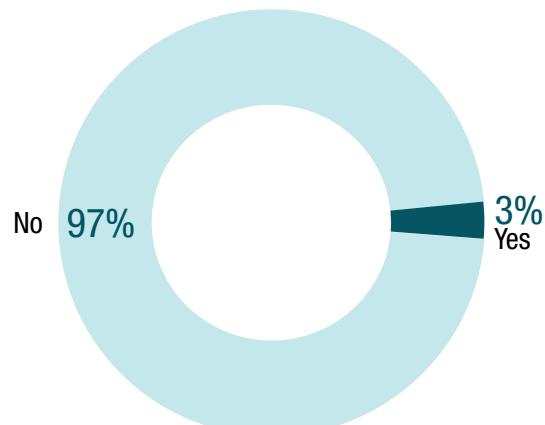
Note: Students who indicated *I prefer not to respond* are not included because those responses are treated as missing data.

Note: Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.

Source: CCSSE 2021 data

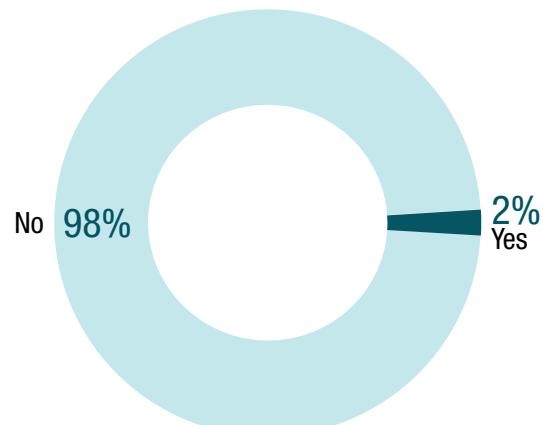
## Any Lack of Permanent Housing Is Too Much

In the last 12 months, did you ever stay in temporary housing (such as a shelter, hotel, or motel) because you had no other place to stay?



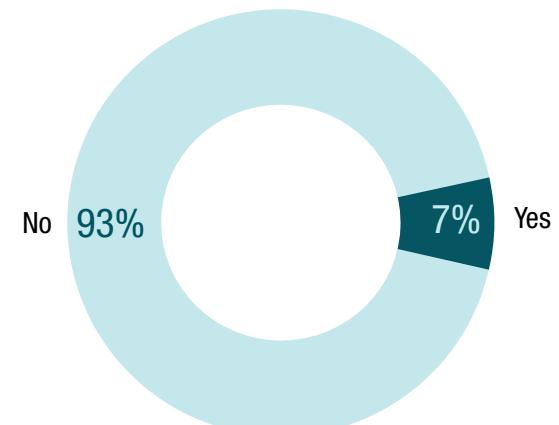
Source: CCSSE 2021 data

In the last 12 months, did you ever sleep in an outdoor location or a space not meant for human habitation (such as a car or vehicle) because you had no other place to sleep?



Source: CCSSE 2021 data

In the last 12 months, did you ever temporarily stay with a relative or friend or couch surf because you had no other place to stay?



Source: CCSSE 2021 data

“I couch surfed a couple of times. But to be honest, a person’s space is their space. As much as they could care and love you, the time is always going to be limited.”

— Student

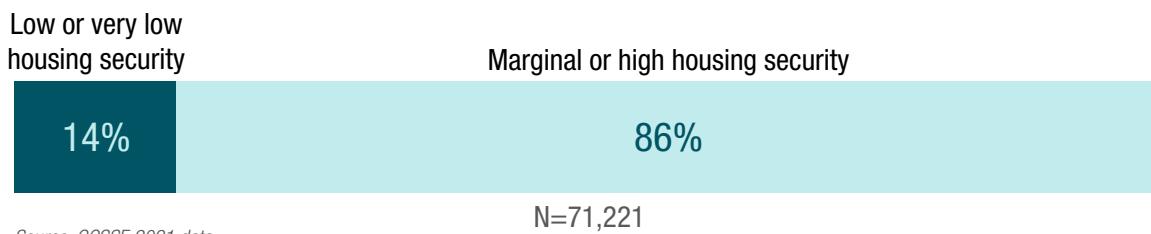
“It was a little scary trying to sleep in your car. Not being comfortable, and then making sure you don’t hear no noises around you. You don’t really get sleep. You half awake.”

— Student

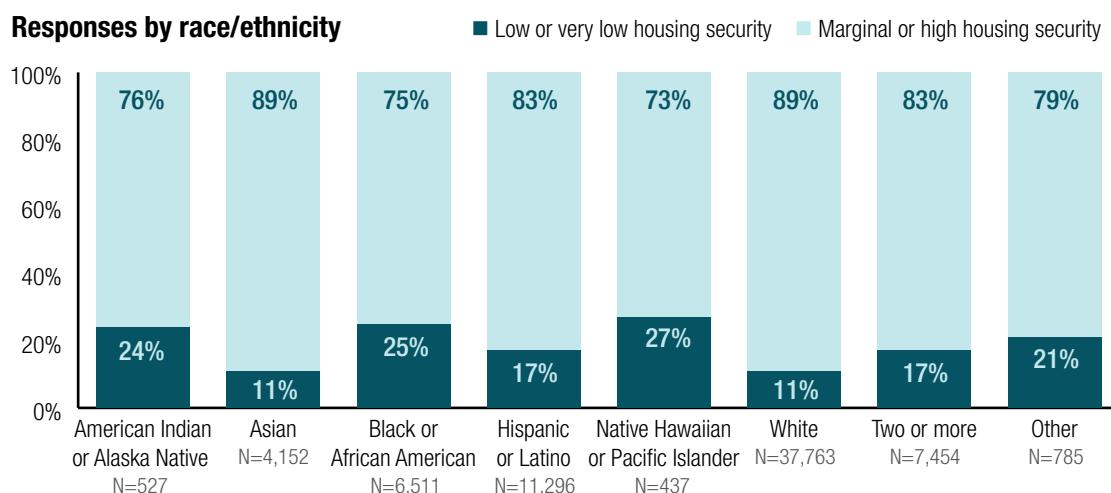
# Housing Security Index FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS

This index uses five survey items to classify students as having *very low*, *low*, or *marginal or high* housing security. CCSSE data indicate that 14% of students had *low* or *very low* housing security at some point in the 12 months prior to responding to the survey.

## Housing Security Index Shows 14% of Students Are Housing Insecure



Source: CCSSE 2021 data



Note: Students who indicated *I prefer not to respond* are not included because those responses are treated as missing data.

Source: CCSSE 2021 data

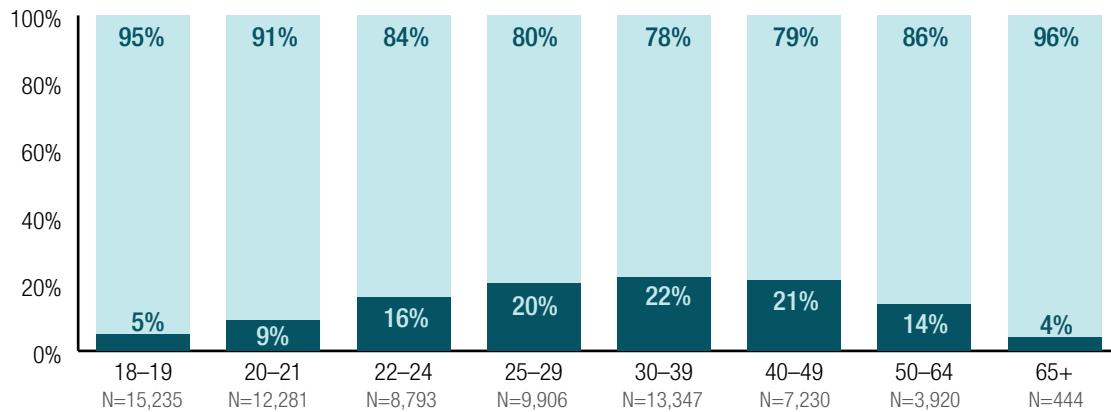


The following survey items are part of the housing security index. They were included in an additional item set administered with CCSSE.

- ▶ In the last 12 months, were you ever unable to pay your rent or mortgage payment in full?
- ▶ In the last 12 months, were you ever unable to pay your utility bill(s) in full?
- ▶ In the last 12 months, did you ever stay in temporary housing (such as a shelter, hotel, or motel) because you had no other place to stay?<sup>6</sup>
- ▶ In the last 12 months, did you ever sleep in an outdoor location or a space not meant for human habitation (such as a car or vehicle) because you had no other place to sleep?<sup>7</sup>
- ▶ In the last 12 months, did you ever temporarily stay with a relative or friend or couch surf because you had no other place to stay?<sup>8</sup>

## Responses by age

■ Low or very low housing security ■ Marginal or high housing security



Source: CCSSE 2021 data

“I just felt like [being homeless] was my own fault. I didn’t really even blame anybody else, because I made the decision to come to college. Nobody really forced me or anything. I was a bit disappointed in my parents because, to this day, nobody in my family knew or knows that I was homeless.”

— Student

“Thank God I found [an apartment] three weeks later, so I only had to endure the three weeks of hotel or staying at a friend’s house or sleeping in my car trying to make it work. It made me feel a bit lonely, a bit sad to have to struggle because I can’t get help from my parents. I can’t get help from my siblings. ... On my phone, I would look at assignments that were coming up, and I would mainly hang out at Starbucks, take my laptop there, charge it, go to find any restaurant, McDonald’s, a library, any place that I can both have the free Wi-Fi and also charge my laptop.”

— Student



# FINDINGS FOR STUDENTS WITH Dependent Children

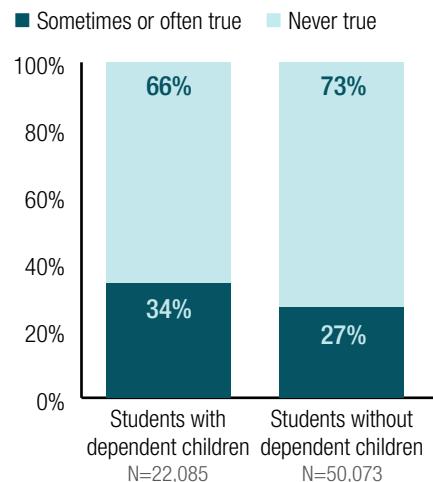
Almost a third of CCSSE respondents report living with dependent children. Findings show that these students are more likely to face challenges meeting their basic needs.

In addition, while responses show some differences between men and women—and between men and women who have dependent children—the biggest differences are between students who have dependent children and students who do not.

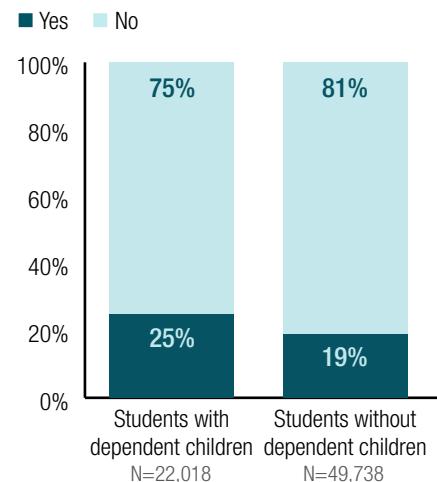


## Students With Dependent Children Report Having Less Food Security

**In the last 30 days, the food that I bought just didn't last, and I didn't have money to get more.**

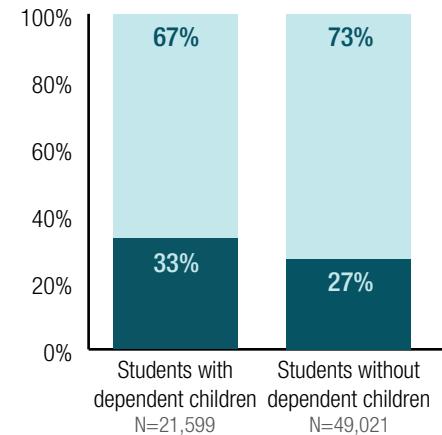


**In the last 30 days, did you ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough money for food?**



## Food Security Index for Community College Students

- Low or very low food security
- Marginal or high food security



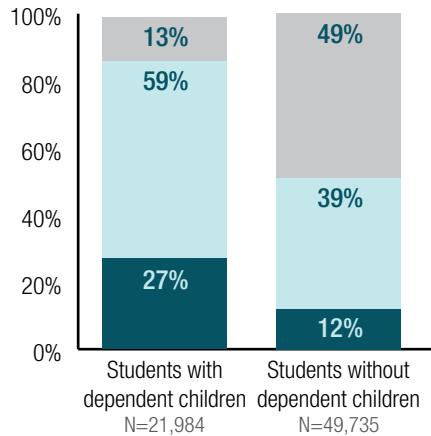
Source: CCSSE 2021 data

Source: CCSSE 2021 data

# Students With Dependent Children Report Having Less Housing Security

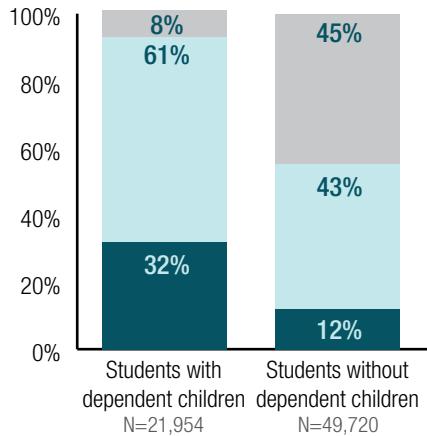
## In the last 12 months, were you ever unable to pay your rent or mortgage payment in full?

■ Yes ■ No  
■ I don't have a mortgage/rent



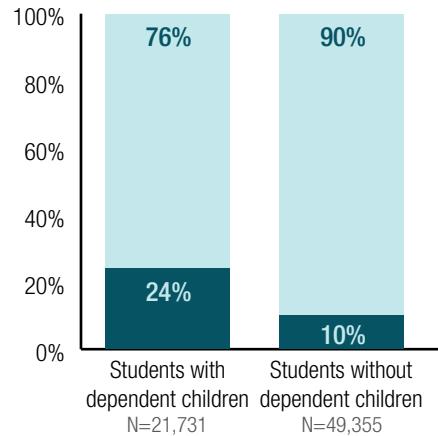
## In the last 12 months, were you ever unable to pay your utility bill(s) in full?

■ Yes ■ No  
■ I don't have utility bill(s)



## Housing Security Index for Community College Students

■ Low or very low housing security  
■ Marginal or high housing security



Note: Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.

Source: CCSSE 2021 data

Note: Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.

Source: CCSSE 2021 data

Source: CCSSE 2021 data

*"I would say I probably skip meals so that my son can eat. Yeah, I do that a lot, actually, but I'm going to start crying thinking about it."*

— Student



# STUDENTS WITH LESS FOOD AND HOUSING SECURITY ARE

# More Engaged

The students who have the least food and housing security are the most engaged. In some ways, these findings are counterintuitive. They also are reminiscent of long-standing CCSSE findings that academically underprepared students are more engaged than their better-prepared peers.

CCSSE data about academically underprepared students typically show these students to be working harder for less progress. Findings about students with the lowest food and housing security, however, may indicate that these students simply are working harder *with* less.

It is possible that respondents with less housing and food security are the students who are most determined to stay in college and therefore the most engaged. It also may be that these are the students who did not leave despite the pandemic and its attendant challenges, and being more engaged is what made it possible for them to stick with college.

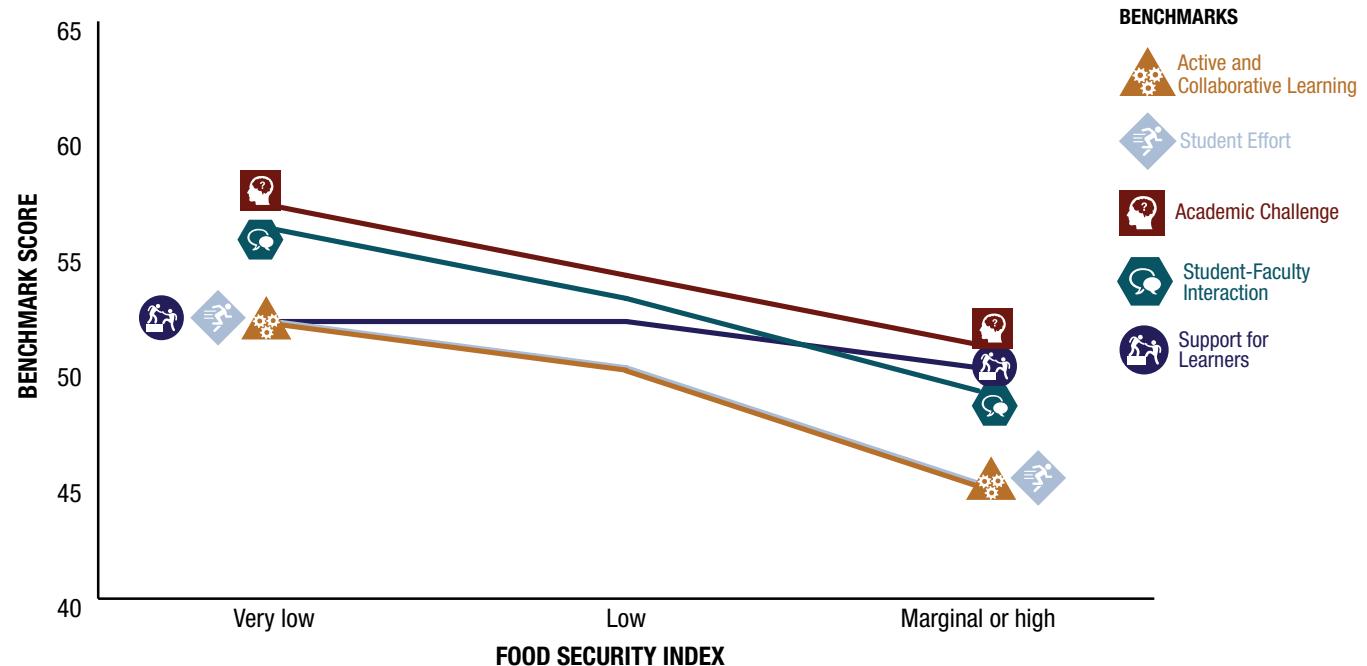
Each student has their own reasons for persisting and their own strategies for doing so. But for all of them, it is worth asking one question: **How much more successful might they be if they received adequate support for food and housing so they did not have to struggle?**



## Students With Less Food Security Have Higher CCSSE Benchmark Scores

*"I try to eat, definitely, on the days that I come to school, on Tuesdays and Thursdays. But all the time, I don't."*

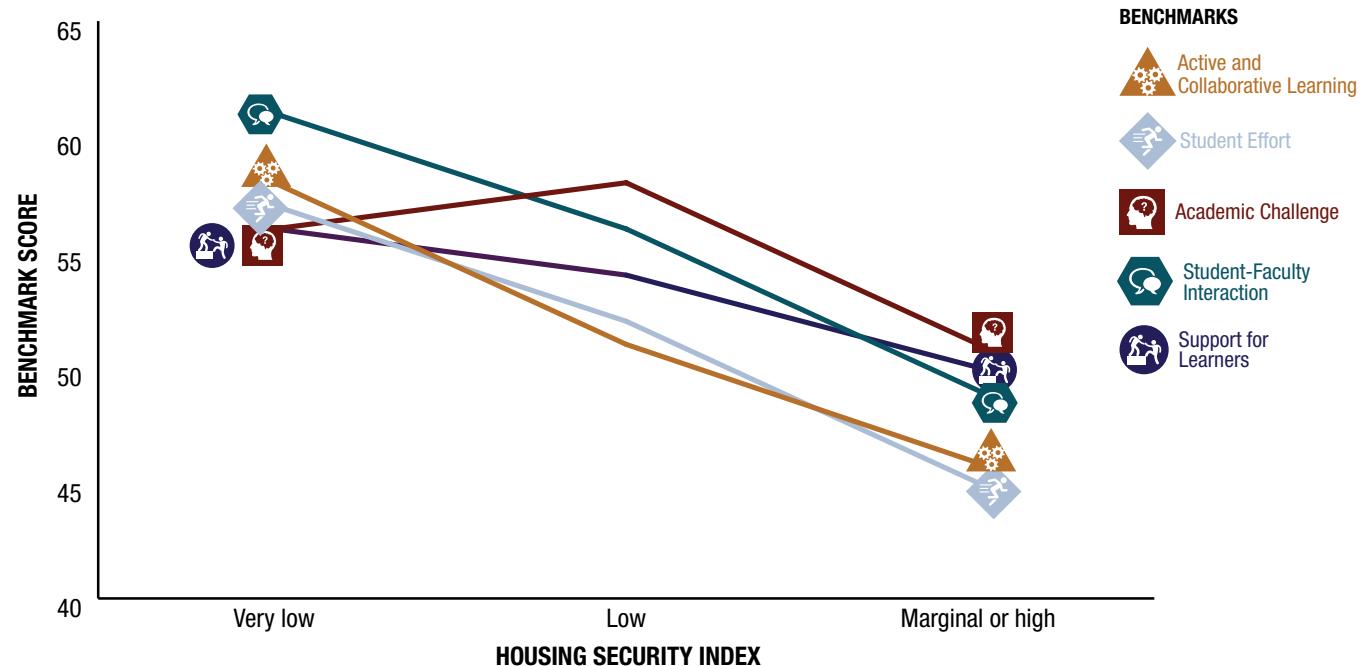
— Student



## Students With Less Housing Security Have Higher CCSSE Benchmark Scores

“A couple of times I didn’t have enough for rent, and I would have to talk to the landlord and tell them my situation and work with them to try to see what I can do. ... I felt very defeated.”

— Student

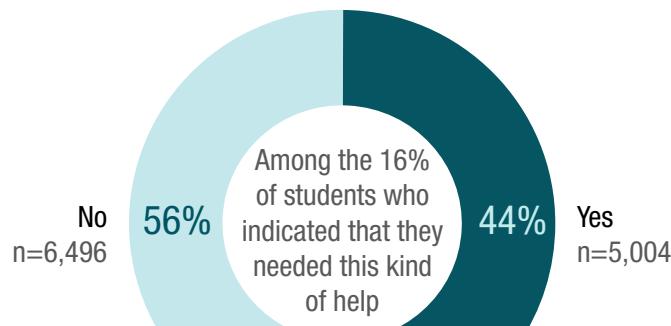


# Addressing Students' Basic Needs?

Colleges across the country are expanding emergency aid for students and building stronger partnerships with community organizations that provide food, housing, and other support. Yet the need continues to be greater than the available services. Doing this essential work well depends on being aware of students' needs, identifying or developing the necessary resources to meet those needs, and actively connecting students to services that support them.

## Less Than Half of Students Who Need Help With Food Are Getting It From Their College

In the last 30 days, did your college ever help you get food when you could not afford to purchase it?

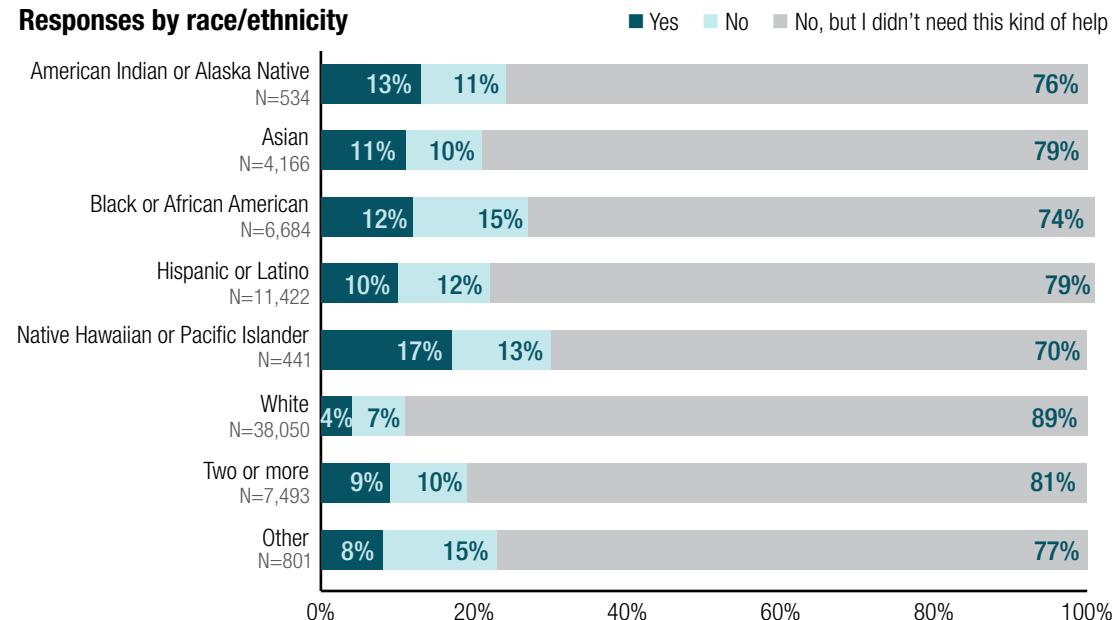


Source: CCSSE 2021 data

“If you’re falling, it catches you. ... Without the pantry, I don’t know what I’d do some days. I’m just really grateful for it.”

— Student

### Responses by race/ethnicity



Note: Students who indicated *I prefer not to respond* are not included because those responses are treated as missing data.

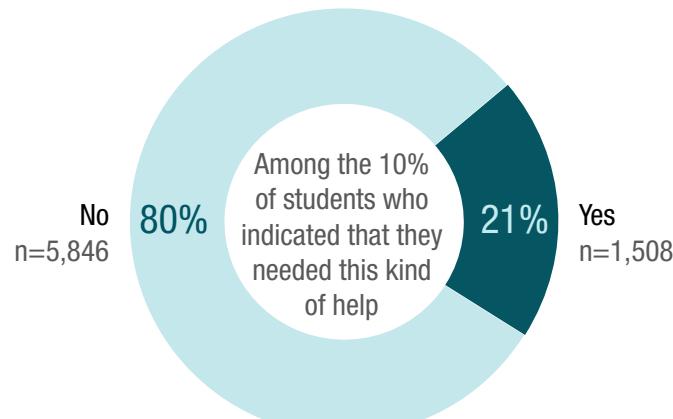
Note: Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.

Source: CCSSE 2021 data

Note: This page shows yes/no responses for only students who indicated that they needed help with food and all responses for students by race/ethnicity. Complete results are included in the full methodology.

# One-Fifth of Students Who Need Housing Help Are Getting It From Their College

In the last 12 months, did your college ever help you obtain or maintain secure and affordable housing?

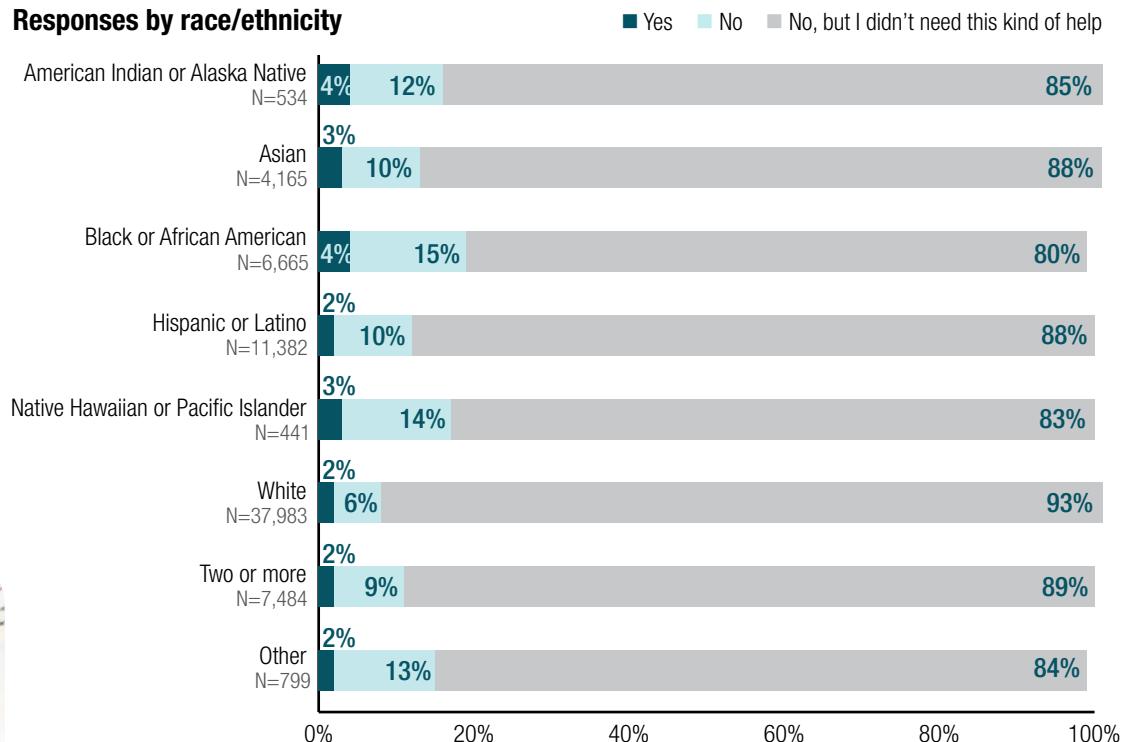


Note: Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.

Source: CCSSE 2021 data



## Responses by race/ethnicity



Note: Students who indicated *I prefer not to respond* are not included because those responses are treated as missing data.

Note: Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.

Source: CCSSE 2021 data

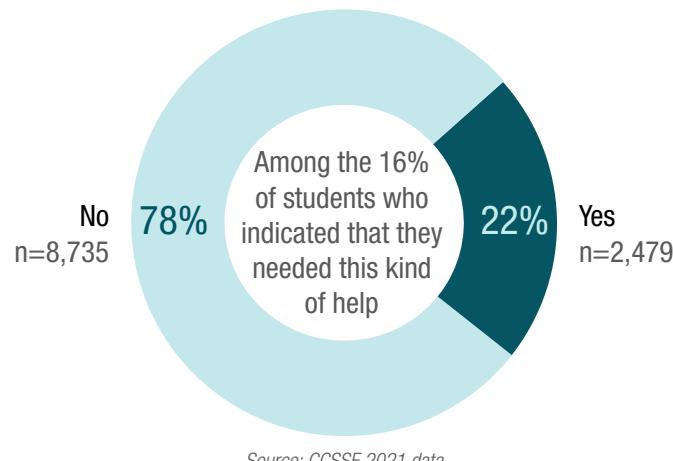
*“I have a good support network, but it’s not always available. There’s a lotta times where everybody around me has no money.”*

— Student

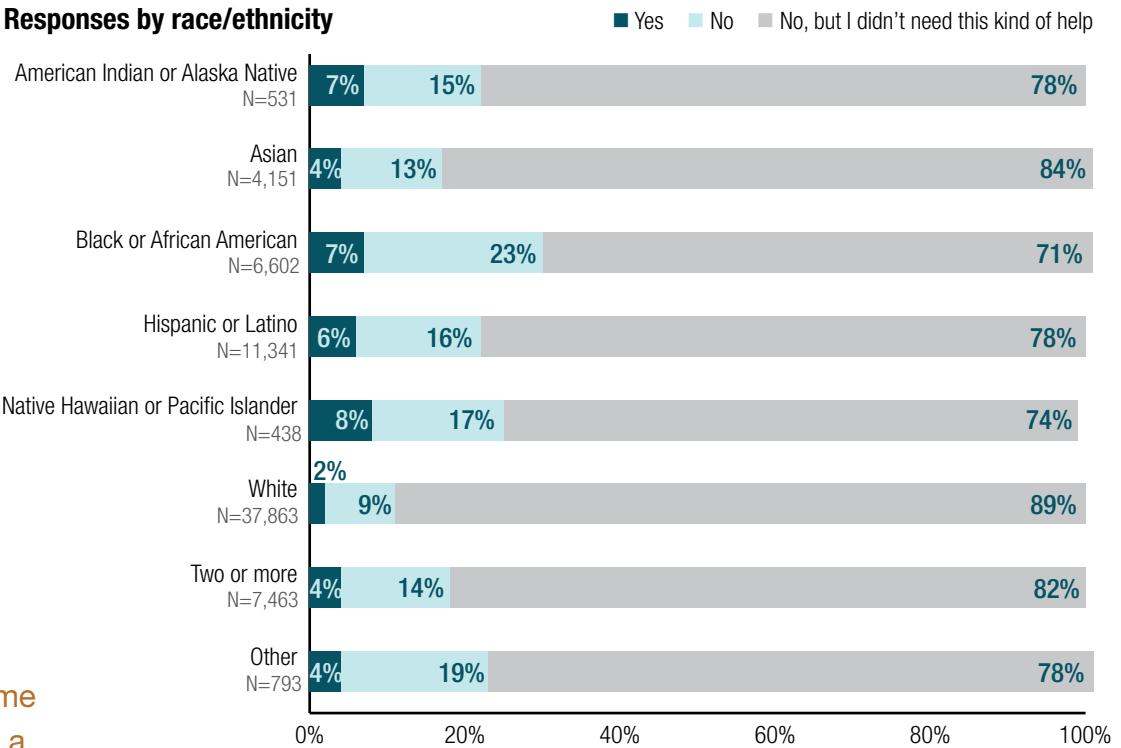
Note: This page shows yes/no responses for only students who indicated that they needed help with housing and all responses for students by race/ethnicity. Complete results are included in the full methodology.

# One-Fifth of Students Who Need Help Paying for Utilities Are Getting It From Their College

In the last 12 months, did your college ever help you pay your utility bills?



## Responses by race/ethnicity



Note: Students who indicated *I prefer not to respond* are not included because those responses are treated as missing data.

Note: Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.

Source: CCSSE 2021 data

*"I would have an unexpected bill ... come up like, 'Oh, my car died. I need to get a new car now.' That's a \$3,000 expense that you're not really planning for. Then, all of a sudden, your rent's coming up due, and you're freaking out to try to figure out how you're going to get those bills paid."*

—Student

Note: This page shows yes/no responses for only students who indicated that they needed help with utility bills and all responses for students by race/ethnicity. Complete results are included in the full methodology.

# Methodology

## FOOD SECURITY

A recent review of food security among college students found a wide range—from 10% to 75%—of prevalence estimates for *low* or *very low* food security among postsecondary students.<sup>9</sup> One of the differences among these studies is the instrument used to measure food security. Other, and possibly more critical, differences are the number and diversity of respondents across the institutions included. Many studies of food security focus on a small number of institutions, quite often a single institution from a relatively small geographic area. In addition, many of the institutions that participated in these studies include or are exclusively inclusive of students from four-year colleges and universities.

The data presented in this report are limited to community and technical college students including 82,424 students from 194 institutions across the United States. The *SENSE* results, which can be found in the online methodology supplement,<sup>10</sup> include data from 10,971 students at 65 institutions.

The data presented in this report were collected using the USDA *U.S. Household Food Security Module: Six-Item Short Form*, one of the most frequently used surveys.<sup>11</sup> CCCSE made two changes to the USDA survey.<sup>12</sup>

*Calculation of the food security scale:* USDA instructions to score the security scale indicate that if a respondent acknowledges that the item is relevant to them, the item is considered to be a positive indicator of food insecurity. The level of food insecurity is based on the number of items the respondent acknowledges. If a student acknowledges no items or one item, they are classified as having *marginal* or *high* food security. If they acknowledge two, three, or four items, they are classified as having *low* food security. Finally, if they acknowledge five or six of the items, they are classified as having *very low* food security. USDA recommends imputing missing data based on the pattern of responses to other items in the item set prior to calculating the food security index. For this report, missing data were not imputed; only students who answered all six items are included.

## HOUSING SECURITY

Crutchfield and Maguire include a list of indicators of housing insecurity and homelessness.<sup>13</sup> The reference period for these items is the past 12 months. Because of space limitations on the survey, CCCSE was able to include only three modified items in addition to two other items that CCCSE also considers to be indicators of housing insecurity.<sup>14</sup> These items asked if, at any point in the past 12 months, the student was unable to pay their rent or mortgage in full and if they had been unable to pay their utility bill(s) in full. All five items contributed to the housing insecurity index included in this report. Like the food security index, the more items the respondent acknowledged as applicable, the lower their housing security. For more details, see the online methodology supplement.<sup>15</sup>



# How Colleges Are Helping Students in Need

Colleges across the country are providing direct assistance to their students, creating partnerships, and/or connecting students with local resources. They are financing this work through grants, government programs, partnerships, and other means.

The following vignettes show a variety of creative, resourceful approaches colleges are using to meet their students' basic needs. These brief summaries are included as examples of what is possible. They do not show the full range of supports each college provides for its students.

## Examples of Providing Food Assistance

- ▶ **Madisonville Community College (KY)** has food banks on three campuses and a \$40,000 fund for student emergencies. The college also asks for and receives anonymous feedback from students and uses that feedback to make improvements.
- ▶ The **Maricopa Community Colleges (AZ)** expanded partnerships with local food banks to provide drive-up food distribution for students, their families, and the community. These partnerships also help the colleges stock their multiple food pantries. In addition, the colleges used a state grant to hire a Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) outreach staff member who connects students with resources. Some Maricopa colleges also have hired social workers for on-site student assistance. The colleges developed a Basic Needs and Community Resources website that continues to evolve as new supports are identified, and they use support from local foundations to provide gift cards to students.
- ▶ **Ozarks Technical Community College (MO)** offers free breakfast to all students five days a week when classes are in session. Students do not need to demonstrate need; the food is simply available to everyone with a valid student ID. A pilot program on one campus showed that participating students earned better grades on midterms and finals than students who did not participate. In addition, nearly 90% of students who participated in the pilot completed spring courses, compared to 83% of nonparticipants. Based on that data, the college expanded the program to all six of its campuses.
- ▶ At the food pantry of **Sinclair College (OH)**, students can shop every two weeks for hygiene products, cleaning supplies, diapers, formula, wipes, and a selection a refrigerated and frozen food items. A licensed social worker at the pantry is available to assist students with accessing community resources. The college also offers a free, no-questions-asked lunch four days a week. In addition, the Homefull mobile grocery visits campus every week and offers easy access to fresh, quality groceries for students. Homefull accepts cash, credit, and SNAP/EBT. Moreover, the college's partnership with Impact Solutions offers supports to students including legal assistance, financial counseling, medical advocacy, and family caregiving referral.
- ▶ **Tarrant County College Northwest (TX)** partners with Community Link and the Tarrant Area Food Bank to offer the Community Food Market on its campus once a month. The farmer's market-style experience offers fresh foods including meats and produce to all community members at no cost.

*"I think [my college] just cares about you as a student, and they definitely care about you as a person."*

—Student

## Examples of Providing Housing and Transportation Assistance

- **Cuyahoga Community College (OH)** recently announced plans for the Cleveland Scholar House, a new apartment complex that will provide housing for single students with minor children. The new housing will be built adjacent to the Metro Campus of Tri-C (as the college is known) and will also serve students enrolled at nearby Cleveland State University. The Cleveland Scholar House will provide wraparound services including child care, rental support, academic support, and mental health support. In addition to Tri-C and Cleveland State, partners in the project include CHN Housing Partners, the United Way of Greater Cleveland, the Cleveland Metropolitan Housing Authority, and Step Forward. The project will be funded through the Ohio Housing Finance Agency's Low-Income Housing Tax Credit, which is expected to cover about 75% of the building's \$12 million development cost.

“Transportation is a huge obstacle for me. There are times where I don’t know how I’m going to pay for parking or I don’t know how I’m going to make it to school.”

— Student

- **Long Beach City College (CA)** allows up to 15 students to sleep overnight in their cars in the campus parking garage. Students are given access to Wi-Fi, restrooms, and showers. The college also provides case management services to help the students find housing.
- **Tacoma Community College (WA)** has a program to provide students experiencing housing insecurity with long-term and short-term housing. The program is in partnership with the Tacoma Housing Authority.
- **Ventura College’s (CA)** Basic Needs Center assists students with the state’s food assistance program and helps students find housing and transportation.



“Most students ... in my situation want to keep it a secret. If they out there starving, nobody know they’re starving. ... Advisors should [ask more questions]. ... Once you’re talking to that person about your classes and stuff, that is an opportunity to ask you about your living situation, your food, your finances.”

— Student

## Examples of Providing Assistance to Address Multiple Basic Needs

- SparkPoint at **Cañada College (CA)** is a one-stop education center where students can access a full range of services that lead toward financial stability. The services include financial coaching, a food pantry, food and housing resources, access to public benefits, and a free legal clinic.
- The NTCC Care Center at **Northeast Texas Community College (TX)** is a centralized resource that includes a food pantry, mini kitchen (called a Cook Nook), and hygiene area. The NTCC Care Center also offers peer mentorship for students, face-to-face group therapy for students, and connections to resources to address a range of student needs. A weekly student-led Health & Wellness Group addresses health from head to toe. Past sessions have included a psychiatric nurse practitioner speaking about mental health and a blood pressure clinic. The Center ramps up its work during midterms and finals and offers animal therapy, 10-minute chair massages for students and faculty, and healthful snacks.
- The Student Advocacy & Resource Center at **Northwest Vista College (TX)** provides emergency student aid, help with essential needs, and individual and group mental health counseling at no cost to students. Essential needs services include The Store, where students can sign up for twice monthly curbside groceries; the GrabNGo, where students can grab a snack and a drink daily; and a Health and Wellness Station, where students can acquire personal care items.
- The Growing Together Support Program at **Rockland Community College (NY)** strives to ease struggles that single parents may encounter. The support includes connection to resources on and off campus, academic advising, application support for on-campus child care subsidies, grocery and gas assistance, bus passes, weekly workshops, and a support group for single parents.



“[My college] is like mom and pop to students. I’m an adult student, but there’s nowhere that I can’t go on this campus and receive the necessary resources to fit my needs. … [They] honor their students.”

— Student



# Next Steps

Given the levels of need among current and potential community college students, colleges have a critical role in helping students meet their basic needs. Their involvement can include direct efforts and/or partnering with community organizations and government agencies.

In addition to having a plan for connecting students with assistance, colleges must make sure students know what types of support are available both on and off campus. Some students also may need reminders or encouragement to access support. A recent Trellis Company survey found that 88% of participating colleges had at least one food pantry or food closet on campus—but only 38% of students on these campuses knew about this resource, and 42% of students who were unaware of their college's food pantry were food insecure.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, given that *SENSE* results were very similar to *CCSSE* findings, it is important to make students aware of services from their first days interacting with the college.

Students are best served when colleges talk with them rather than make assumptions about them. Colleges can ask students what challenges would keep them from completing their educational goals and then connect them to services to support gaps in meeting their basic needs.



“I haven’t always made good decisions. I ended up with some trouble and had to spend a little bit of time in prison. And in doing so, I saw that ‘Hey, maybe what I’m doing is not working, I might need to make some adjustments.’ I decided that if I could further my education, I could pursue a career that would give me some sense of fulfillment and a direction and a future.”

— Student

Finally, students need to hear the same information multiple times from multiple sources. And their circumstances may change over time. Thus, sharing information about basic needs support is an institution-wide, ongoing effort. Everyone at the college should play a role.

## Presidents and senior leaders can:

- ▶ Build partnerships with community organizations that provide critical services related to housing, food, child care, health care, etc., or delegate specific people to do so.
- ▶ Designate a person or team of people to maintain a centralized list of current services that help students meet their basic needs. Make sure everyone on campus has access to this information so they use it in their contacts with students. Include campus, community, and government resources.
- ▶ Make this work a priority for everyone at the college and make sure each person understands what their role can be, what resources they can direct students to, and the importance of encouraging students to use these resources.
- ▶ Make sure advisors’ caseloads allow for asking students about their basic needs and following up regularly.
- ▶ Encourage leaders of student government and student organizations to share information about available resources with other students.



## Advisors, counselors, and other staff who interact with students can:

- ▶ Ask every student what would prevent them from being successful. Use each student's responses to identify gaps in meeting their basic needs and then connect them to appropriate services. Revisit these questions regularly because students' circumstances can change. Follow up with students who need support.
- ▶ Consider creating a standard intake form that asks students what might prevent them from being successful this semester. Include questions about food and housing security, how many hours per week they work, whether they have dependents, and so on. The form can explain different types of support and ask students to indicate which ones can be helpful to them. Have every student complete the form.
- ▶ Share details about accessing basic needs supports as part of routine contacts with students, such as communications about registration, orientation, and billing.
- ▶ Coordinate with faculty members and make sure they have information about students' basic needs and resources they can share with students.

“When I became a parent and a husband, I was working fast food—kind of just any job that I could find to support my family. Then as my children got older and they had different needs ... I always had to dip into my savings. Then I would see my savings wiped out. It was a roller coaster thing with my financial circumstance, up and down, up and down. Finally, at 29 years old I realized, okay, I can’t do this. I can get back into school.”

— Student

## Faculty members can:

- ▶ Include information about basic needs supports in their syllabi, email signature blocks, and other regular communications with students.
- ▶ Ask students to complete a voluntary, confidential questionnaire on the first day of class and explain that this information is to help students be more successful in the class. Faculty can ask students, for example, what challenges would keep them from being successful in the class and what types of support they might find helpful. Further, faculty members can return to these questions when they meet with students who are academically underperforming in the course.
- ▶ Invite advisors or counselors into their classrooms to briefly present information about available resources to students.

## Trustees can:

- ▶ Allocate funds for emergency assistance and other types of support for meeting students' basic needs.
- ▶ Help the college identify and build partnerships with community and government organizations that will support students' basic needs.
- ▶ Raise awareness of students' needs—and the reality that many students lack food and housing security—in community leadership circles.
- ▶ Position the college as a leader in helping the community address challenges related to food and housing security as well as encouraging others to support this critical work.

# CCCSE NATIONAL ADVISORY BOARD

## **Dr. Daniel J. Phelan, Chair**

*President/CEO*

Jackson College (MI)

## **Dr. Marcia J. Ballinger**

*President*

Lorain County Community College (OH)

## **Dr. Michael A. Baston**

*President*

Cuyahoga Community College (OH)

## **Cathy Bio**

*Director of Student Success*

University of Hawaii Community College System  
Office

## **Dr. Walter G. Bumphus**

*President and CEO*

American Association of Community Colleges  
(AACC)

## **Dr. Sunita V. Cooke**

*Superintendent/President*

MiraCosta Community College District (CA)

## **Dr. Rufus Glasper**

*President and CEO*

League for Innovation in the Community College

## **Dr. Steven R. Gonzales**

*Chancellor*

Maricopa Community Colleges (AZ)

## **Dr. Leigh Goodson**

*President & CEO*

Tulsa Community College (OK)

## **Dr. Rob Johnstone**

*Founder & President*

National Center for Inquiry & Improvement (NCII)

## **Dr. Jane A. Karas**

*President*

Flathead Valley Community College (MT)

## **Dr. Jillian Kinzie**

*Interim Co-Director, National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)*

Indiana University Bloomington

## **Dr. Tyjaun A. Lee**

*President, Penn Valley Campus*

Metropolitan Community College (MO)

## **Dr. Russell Lowery-Hart**

*President*

Amarillo College (TX)

## **Dr. Phillip W. Neal**

*President and CEO*

Southcentral Kentucky Community and Technical College (KY)

## **Dr. Steven B. Robbins**

*Principal Research Scientist*

Educational Testing Service

## **Dr. John E. Roueche**

*Professor and Director, John E. Roueche Center for Community College Leadership, College of Education*  
Kansas State University

## **Dr. Joe Schaffer**

*President*

Laramie County Community College (WY)

## **Dr. Lynn Tincher-Ladner**

*President and CEO*

Phi Theta Kappa

## **Dr. Vincent Tinto**

*Distinguished University Professor Emeritus*  
Syracuse University

## **Dr. Philip Uri Treisman**

*University Distinguished Teaching Professor*  
*Executive Director, The Charles A. Dana Center*  
The University of Texas at Austin

## **Jan Yoshiwara**

*Former Executive Director*

Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

## CCCSE MEMBER COLLEGES AND CCCSE STAFF

For lists of member colleges and staff, visit [www.cccse.org](http://www.cccse.org).

## ENDNOTES

- 1 National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. *COVID-19: Stay informed with the latest enrollment information*. (2021). <https://nscresearchcenter.org/stay-informed/>
- 2 Wolfson, J.A., Insolera, N., Cohen, A., & Leung, C.W. (2021). The effect of food insecurity during college on graduation and type of degree attained: Evidence from a nationally representative longitudinal survey. *Public Health Nutrition*, 25(2), 389–397. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1368980021003104>
- 3 Fernandez, C., Webster, J., & Cornett, A. (2019). *Studying on empty: A qualitative study of low food security among college students*. Trellis Company. <https://www.trelliscompany.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Studying-on-Empty.pdf>
- 4 Bickel, G., Nord, M., Price, C., Hamilton, W., & Cook, J. (2000). *Guide to measuring household food security: Revised 2000*. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. <https://naldc.nal.usda.gov/download/38369/PDF>
- 5 Nikolaus, C.J., An, R., Ellison, B., & Nickols-Richardson, S.M. (2020). Food insecurity among college students in the United States: A scoping review. *Advances in Nutrition*, 11(2), 327–348. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/advances/nmz111>
- 6 Crutchfield, R.M. & Maguire, J. (2017). *Researching basic needs in higher education: Qualitative and quantitative instruments to explore a holistic understanding of food and housing security*. The California State University. <https://www.calstate.edu/impact-of-the-csu/student-success/basic-needs-initiative/Documents/researching-basic-needs.pdf>
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Nikolaus, C.J., An, R., Ellison, B., & Nickols-Richardson, S.M. (2020). Food insecurity among college students in the United States: A scoping review. *Advances in Nutrition*, 11(2), 327–348. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/advances/nmz111>
- 10 [https://cccse.org/sites/default/files/MissionCritical\\_Methodology.pdf](https://cccse.org/sites/default/files/MissionCritical_Methodology.pdf)
- 11 Bickel, G., Nord, M., Price, C., Hamilton, W., & Cook, J. (2000). *Guide to measuring household food security: Revised 2000*. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service. <https://naldc.nal.usda.gov/download/38369/PDF>
- 12 [https://cccse.org/sites/default/files/MissionCritical\\_Methodology.pdf](https://cccse.org/sites/default/files/MissionCritical_Methodology.pdf)
- 13 Crutchfield, R.M. & Maguire, J. (2017). *Researching basic needs in higher education: Qualitative and quantitative instruments to explore a holistic understanding of food and housing security*. The California State University. <https://www.calstate.edu/impact-of-the-csu/student-success/basic-needs-initiative/Documents/researching-basic-needs.pdf>
- 14 [https://cccse.org/sites/default/files/MissionCritical\\_Methodology.pdf](https://cccse.org/sites/default/files/MissionCritical_Methodology.pdf)
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Cornett, A. (2022). *Hungry minds: Student awareness and use of food pantries at 91 colleges and universities*. Trellis Company. [https://www.trelliscompany.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/71646-Research-Brief-MAY2022\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.trelliscompany.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/71646-Research-Brief-MAY2022_FINAL.pdf)



✉ [info@cccse.org](mailto:info@cccse.org)

↗ [www.cccse.org](http://www.cccse.org)

🐦 [@CommCollSurveys](https://twitter.com/CommCollSurveys)

► [@CCSEVideo](https://www.youtube.com/CCSEVideo)