



For College, Community, and Justice

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#RealCollege 2021: Basic Needs Insecurity Among Los Angeles Community College Students During the Ongoing Pandemic

A #RealCollegeCalifornia Report

June 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Entering fall 2020, the Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD) was grappling with the effects of the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. The district struggled with how to reopen, if at all; enrollment dropped; and COVID-19 infection rates surged throughout the state, with Los Angeles County registering the highest total cases and deaths in the country.¹ At the same time, LACCD received an unprecedented federal investment in student emergency aid via the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.²

This report examines the pandemic's impact on LACCD students who were able to continue their education in this trying environment. Using our sixth-annual #RealCollege Survey, we assessed LACCD students' basic needs security and their well-being, as indicated by employment status, academic engagement, and mental health.

Across LACCD's nine colleges, the survey was distributed to more than 96,900 students and taken by 7,259 of them, yielding an estimated response rate of 7%. The survey was fielded from September to November 2020.

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LACCD STUDENTS TOLD US THAT:

64%
experienced
basic needs insecurity
2 percentage points
above the rate
we observed at
comparable
two-year colleges



40% experienced
food insecurity



55% experienced
housing insecurity



13% experienced
homelessness

**THE
BLACK/WHITE GAP
IN BASIC NEEDS
INSECURITY WAS
18** percentage
points

MANY WERE IMPACTED BY THE PANDEMIC:

6%
were sick with
COVID-19
themselves

40%
had a close friend or
family member who was
sick with **COVID-19**

18% LOST A LOVED ONE TO COVID-19
with Indigenous students more than twice as
likely as White students to lose a loved one



34% of students exhibited at least
moderate anxiety

Yet few students
FACING BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY,
received supports:

RECEIVED A CARES ACT GRANT 8%

RECEIVED CALFRESH BENEFITS 28%



**DID NOT APPLY FOR
SUPPORTS** because they
did not know how

While vaccines offer hope for fall 2021, the impact of the pandemic will reverberate for years. Providing students with the supports they need is the best way to ensure students can complete degrees—and the City of Los Angeles can achieve its higher education goals.

By continuing to raise students' awareness of existing supports, distributing those supports efficiently and equitably, and distributing as much federal financial relief as possible to students, LACCD can help ensure students' basic needs are being met. California can also do its part by building upon its Hunger-Free Campus legislation, investing in emergency aid, and expanding access to CalFresh, the state's version of the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). These steps are vital to increasing Los Angeles' college completion rate and ensuring the city's long-term health and prosperity.



INTRODUCTION

LACCD's ambitious five-year plan, which began in 2018, commits the district to "improving the social welfare of the region, closing persistent equity gaps, and preparing future community leaders."³ To achieve these goals, the plan aims to increase completion rates by 10%, increase fall-to-spring term student persistence to 90%, and decrease achievement gaps—by gender, age, and ethnicity—by 40%.⁴ Successfully meeting these targets is key to Los Angeles' economic well-being and its citizens' social, economic, and health outcomes.⁵

But none of these goals can be met without securing students' basic needs. In 2016, two-thirds of LACCD students experienced food insecurity and more than half faced housing insecurity.⁶ Without having these basic needs secured, earning a college degree is difficult—if not impossible. Studies indicate that students facing food or housing insecurity have lower grade point averages, poorer health, and higher rates of depression and anxiety.⁷

4 | In 2020, the pandemic magnified the importance of addressing students' basic needs. As LACCD wrapped up its fall 2020 term, more than 8,000 Angelenos had died from COVID-19.⁸ The pandemic also closed campuses. In March 2020, LACCD's courses, counseling, and support services all became remote—and continued remotely through the fall term.⁹ There were economic challenges too. Between September 2019 and September 2020, nonfarm jobs in Los Angeles County declined 9.6%.¹⁰ Enrollment data also suggested that those students most likely to experience basic needs insecurity may not have taken classes in fall 2020. At LACCD colleges, enrollment was down by as much as 13%, with Los Angeles Valley College cancelling 75 classes because of the decline.¹¹

While LACCD worked to adapt to the pandemic—implementing new strategies, adjusting existing supports, and distributing millions in emergency aid—their efforts faced numerous hurdles. Nationally, as of May 2020, emergency aid grants from the CARES Act had still not reached all students in need.¹² Many didn't even know emergency aid existed, including 40% of students at California Community Colleges (CCC), a group which includes LACCD, according to a spring survey.¹³ Guidance from the federal government on who was eligible for CARES Act funds was unclear, and CCC sued the Department of Education over restrictions that disqualified as many as 800,000 community college students.¹⁴ Students who were claimed as dependents were also ineligible for CARES Act stimulus checks, even if they earned income and filed a tax return.¹⁵

Nevertheless, LACCD made strides to support students' academic and non-academic needs. Students were given laptops, textbooks, Wi-Fi, clothing, and food; referred to social services; granted access to showers at the colleges' gyms; and provided gift cards and vouchers for food, housing, transportation, childcare, and healthcare expenses.¹⁶ Additionally, those who were experiencing homelessness were given shelter.¹⁷ Moreover, the CCC asked students what they needed, and in response prioritized connection, communication, and compassion.¹⁸

California colleges also benefitted from anti-hunger legislation. The state’s pioneering 2017 [Hunger-Free Campus bill](#) awarded \$2.5 million to CCC to create food pantries, assist students enrolling in CalFresh, and develop Swipe Out Hunger programs, which allow students with extra meal swipes or dining dollars to donate them to their peers.¹⁹ As a result, CCC was perhaps better prepared for the pandemic and its students more accustomed to seeking support. According to Swipe Out Hunger’s founder, Rachel Sumekh, students felt less stigmatized when seeking out and utilizing anti-hunger supports following the passing of the bill.²⁰

This report sheds light on how LACCD’s students and colleges fared given the extraordinary circumstances of fall 2020. Specifically, we present LACCD’s aggregate results from the 2020 #RealCollege Survey. The report is part of our [#RealCollegeCalifornia](#) coalition efforts, which aim to support colleges in implementing innovative practices and building capacity to help students meet their basic needs. We also build on our other work in California, including a 2016 [report](#) on the security of LACCD students’ basic needs, a 2019 [report](#) on CCC students’ basic needs, and a forthcoming [analysis](#) of California students’ access to public transit. In addition, this report complements a spring 2020 [survey](#)—designed by the nonprofit RP Group with support from The Hope Center—on the impacts of COVID-19 on CCC students and employees.²¹

WHAT IS THE #REALCOLLEGE SURVEY?

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Established in 2015, the #RealCollege Survey is the nation’s largest annual assessment of students’ basic needs. Since 2015, the survey has been fielded at more than 530 colleges and universities and taken by more than 550,000 students. Between 2016 and 2020, 66 California colleges fielded the #RealCollege Survey. LACCD fielded the survey at all nine of their colleges in 2016 and two of their colleges in 2018.²² Where appropriate, we compare results from the 2016 survey to results from the 2020 survey.²³

The #RealCollege Survey measures food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness, as well as challenges affording childcare and other living expenses. It also documents students’ use of on- and off-campus supports to address these challenges. The survey was created in the absence of national data on students’ basic needs. While the National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey recently added questions regarding food and housing insecurity, data will not be available until 2022, and no government agency currently reports on the security of students’ basic needs.²⁴

The primary goal of the #RealCollege Survey is to equip participating colleges with actionable information to support their students. Each participating college receives an institution-specific report, and many use those results to secure philanthropic dollars, advocate for students, and direct scarce resources more equitably and efficiently. The Hope Center also leverages #RealCollege Survey results to advocate for policy and systemic changes that improve students’ basic needs security and college completion rates.²⁵

To review national results from the 2020 #RealCollege Survey, read our report [#RealCollege 2021: Basic Needs Insecurity During the Ongoing Pandemic](#).

WHAT IS #REALCOLLEGECALIFORNIA?

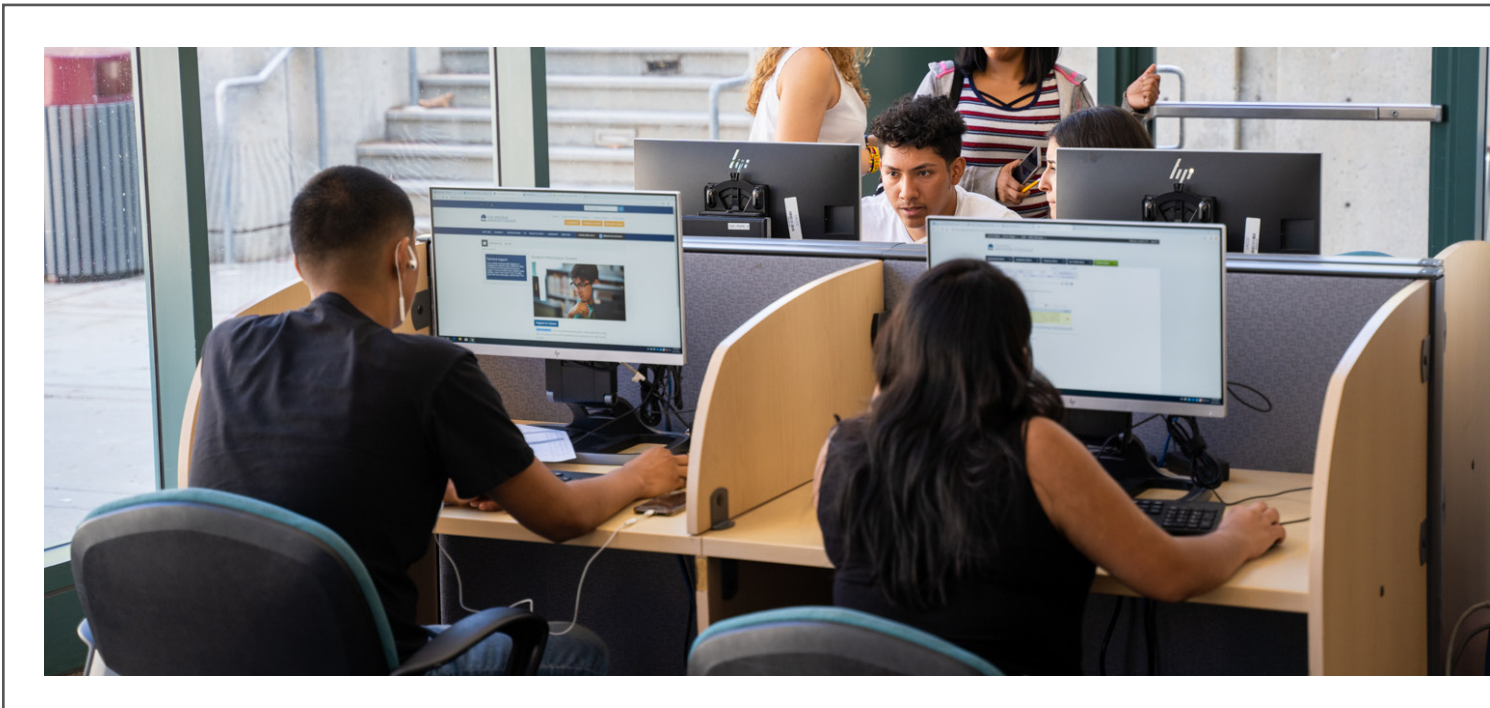
Launched in 2019, [#RealCollegeCalifornia](#) is a coalition of California colleges invested in securing students' basic needs. Member colleges are changing the landscape of higher education by illuminating the struggles, triumphs, and realities of what it means to be a college student today.

The inaugural #RealCollegeCalifornia coalition was initiated by the CEOs of the CCC Affordability, Food & Housing Access Taskforce. Currently in its second year, participating institutions have access to ongoing programming and technical assistance, which aims to:

- Create an institutional culture that recognizes that access to food and housing is essential to students' academic success and should be treated as an educational priority.
- Increase institutions' ability to advance basic needs work by integrating best-practice evidence with hands-on guidance.
- Build institutions' capacity to implement and advocate for policy change.

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LACCD joined #RealCollegeCalifornia in 2020, and several LACCD colleges have actively engaged with and contributed to the coalition. For more information about #RealCollegeCalifornia, visit hope4college.com/realcollege/realcollegecalifornia/.



DEFINING BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY

Students' basic needs include access to nutritious and sufficient food; safe, secure, and adequate housing—to sleep, study, cook, and shower; healthcare to promote sustained mental and physical well-being; affordable technology and transportation; resources for personal hygiene; and childcare and related needs.²⁶

Basic needs security means that there is an ecosystem in place to ensure that students' basic needs are met. **Basic needs insecurity** refers to the experience of not having access to the necessities listed above. Basic needs insecurity is considered a structural problem, not an individual flaw; it means that there is not an ecosystem in place to ensure that students' basic needs are being met.

The 2020 #RealCollege Survey measured three primary types of basic needs insecurity:



Food insecurity is the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe food, or the ability to acquire such food in a socially acceptable manner.²⁷ The most extreme form is often accompanied by physiological sensations of hunger. The 2020 #RealCollege Survey assessed food security using the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) 18-item set of questions.²⁸



Housing insecurity encompasses a broad set of challenges that prevent someone from having a safe, affordable, and consistent place to live.²⁹ The 2020 #RealCollege Survey measured housing insecurity using a nine-item set of questions developed by our team at The Hope Center. It looks at factors such as the ability to pay rent and the need to move frequently.



Homelessness means that a person does not have a fixed, regular, and adequate place to live. In alignment with the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, students are considered homeless if they identified as experiencing homelessness or signs of homelessness (for instance, living in a shelter, temporarily with a relative, or in a space not meant for human habitation).³⁰ We use this inclusive definition of homelessness because students who are experiencing homelessness and signs of homelessness face comparable challenges.³¹

Later in the report, we present rates for students experiencing “any basic needs insecurity (BNI),” which means the student was experiencing at least one of the following: food insecurity, housing insecurity, or homelessness.

Additionally, while our measures of basic needs insecurity assess students' needs during distinct periods—the prior month for food insecurity and the prior year for housing insecurity and homelessness—basic needs insecurity is fluid, and students' experiences with basic needs may change over time.

THE FALL 2020 DATA

LACCD comprises nine two-year colleges, all of which sent the #RealCollege Survey to all enrolled students between September and November 2020:

1. East Los Angeles College
2. Los Angeles City College
3. Los Angeles Harbor College
4. Los Angeles Mission College
5. Los Angeles Southwest College
6. Los Angeles Trade–Technical College
7. Los Angeles Valley College
8. Pierce College
9. West Los Angeles College

In total, the survey was distributed to more than 96,900 enrolled LACCD students and taken by 7,259 of them, yielding an estimated response rate of 7%. While lower than the response rate we observed nationally (11%), this response rate is comparable to other online surveys in higher education.³² The overall size of the sample also allows for considerable analysis by characteristics like gender, parenting status, and race/ethnicity. To shed light on what it's like to experience basic needs insecurity and attend college during a pandemic, we also include quotes from LACCD students throughout the report.

8 | Later in the report, we compare LACCD's data to aggregate data from 81 two-year colleges in cities and large suburbs, settings similar to those of LACCD colleges. We do not compare LACCD to all 130 two-year colleges in our national survey sample because institutional context—setting, region, and resources—can impact students' needs.

To understand the challenges that undocumented students faced in fall 2020, we also present data according to citizenship status. While we do not know for certain if students who are not U.S. citizens are undocumented—they could have a student visa (1% of LACCD students) or a green card (7% of LACCD students), for instance—this data offers some insight into the unique challenges faced by students who are not U.S. citizens.³³

UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS IN CALIFORNIA: UNIQUE CHALLENGES

According to some estimates, about 7% of LACCD students are undocumented.³⁴ These students face unique challenges. They are not eligible for federal financial aid, cannot access unemployment compensation, and were ineligible for federal stimulus funds and emergency aid under the CARES Act.³⁵ The expansion of the public charge rule by the Trump Administration also deterred immigrant and undocumented families from seeking public assistance.³⁶ Given these challenges, The Hope Center believes that it is especially important that colleges work to acknowledge and address undocumented students' needs.

WHO IS MISSING FROM THE DATA?

The #RealCollege Survey is taken by current college students who choose to respond and who attend institutions that opted-in to the survey. We are unable to report on students who never enrolled in college; stopped out of college; attend colleges that do not field the survey; or simply did not respond to the survey, despite being invited to do so. As a result, the estimates presented here may overstate or understate the true rates of basic needs insecurity in higher education.³⁷

We are particularly concerned that the rates observed in fall 2020 are too low. Compared to prior years, students at the most risk of basic needs insecurity were much less likely to enroll in college. In California, undergraduate enrollment dropped 6.1% from fall 2019 to fall 2020, and at public two-year colleges, it declined 11.7%.³⁸ Nationally, declines in enrollment were especially pronounced for those at greater risk of basic needs insecurity, namely students at two-year institutions as well as Black and Native American students.³⁹

At the same time, rates of basic needs insecurity have increased among the general population. In December 2020, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that 44.7% of adults in the Los Angeles–Long Beach–Anaheim metro area experienced difficulty covering usual expenses, and 15.7% did not have enough to eat.⁴⁰ Among high school seniors in California, Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion rates were down 10% in January 2021 compared to the previous year, suggesting intention to enroll in college was dropping as well.⁴¹ As a result, college enrollment rates could remain low for several years.⁴²

Despite these risks, there is ample evidence that the #RealCollege Survey is reliable. Several other major surveys of basic needs yield similar rates via different methods, and across six years and hundreds of colleges, #RealCollege Survey results remain fairly consistent.

”

“I am almost done with college, but there are too many things going on in my life, which means I will not be able to continue school for the time being.

– LACCD student

GOING TO COLLEGE DURING A PANDEMIC

Students and families have struggled with the new economics of college for the past 20 years.⁴³ Stagnant incomes, declining state support for higher education, tuition that strains the finances of all but the top earners, rising wealth and income inequality, and a threadbare social safety net have all made a college degree less attainable.⁴⁴ In 2020, the pandemic-induced recession exacerbated these issues, pushing Americans who were already on the edge firmly off the cliff.⁴⁵

This section looks at how the pandemic impacted students and colleges in five areas: health, enrollment, employment, families, and institution budgets.

HEALTH

This section includes references to suicide. Students experiencing more than minimal symptoms of depression were referred to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

As COVID-19 cases in the United States fluctuated throughout 2020, students' health suffered, and their anxiety levels rose. The Hope Center's #RealCollege Survey During the Pandemic, conducted in spring 2020, found that over half of respondents exhibited at least moderate anxiety.⁴⁶ A study of CCC students showed similar results, with over 40% of students experiencing at least moderate anxiety.⁴⁷ Additional studies indicated that students were struggling to concentrate, worried about their academic performance, concerned about their mental and physical health, and afraid for the health of their friends and families.⁴⁸ Most worryingly, suicidal ideation increased, particularly among younger adults. Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) from June 2020 showed that more than 25% of 18- to 24-year-olds had considered suicide in the prior 30 days.⁴⁹

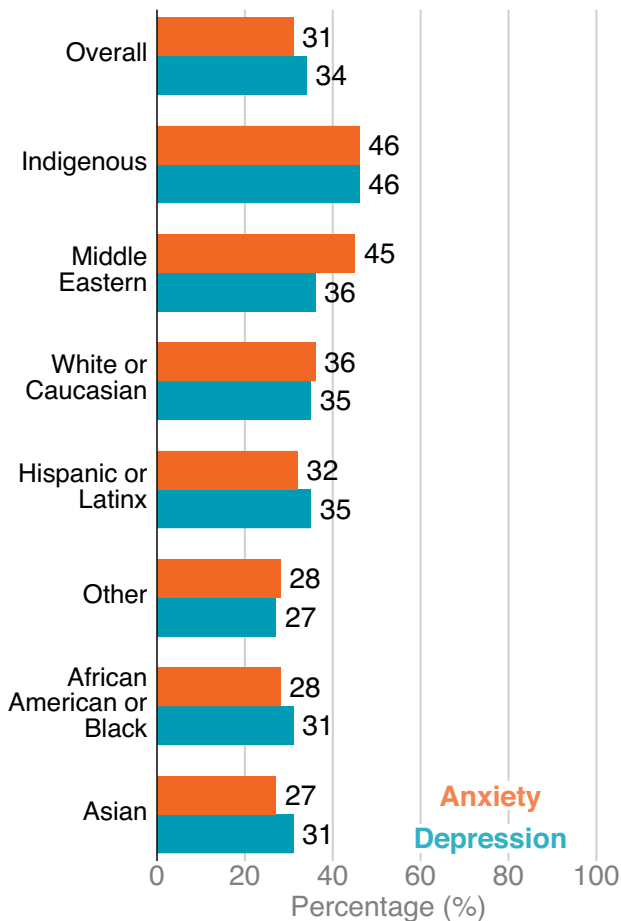
”

“[College right now] is extremely hard mentally. It is troublesome trying to be in class and pay attention throughout the entire lecture without a distraction, whether it comes from something inside the home, or outside, but also internally in my brain. It's made me feel like I have a learning problem, which may or may not be true, I cannot find out unless I were to get tested. But it definitely has challenged me to extreme measures and pushed me to my limits.

– LACCD student

Among surveyed LACCD students, more than one-third experienced depression (Figure 1). Rates of anxiety were slightly lower. Across race and ethnicity, Indigenous students were the most likely to experience both anxiety and depression; more than two in five Indigenous students experienced anxiety and/or depression. Forty-five percent of Middle Eastern students experienced anxiety. These rates are comparable to the rates we observed at other two-year colleges in cities and large suburbs (not shown; see [web appendices](#)).

FIGURE 1 | PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITH ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION AMONG LACCD SURVEY RESPONDENTS, BY RACE/ETHNICITY



SOURCE | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

NOTES | Students “experienced anxiety” if they experienced moderate to severe levels of anxiety in the last two weeks; while students “experienced depression” if they experienced moderate, moderately severe, or severe levels of depression in the last two weeks. For more details on the measures of anxiety and depression used in this report, refer to the [web appendices](#). Respondents could self-identify with multiple racial or ethnic classifications.



I had an anxiety attack this weekend and ended up in the hospital due to the anxiety of the workload in two of my classes. More emotional counselors should be available at this time for ‘free’ for students... Professors should not give so much ‘work’ just to keep us busy, more work does not mean we will learn more.”

– LACCD student



I’m so anxious and tired, and it feels like I spend all of my time teaching myself, but learning nothing. I feel awful.”

– LACCD student



“I was scared to go back to work in fear of bringing COVID-19 home to my elderly parents. It’s been extremely stressful, and I wish I had some kind of community college grant to help me move out.

– LACCD student

[College right now] is hard...I lost my mom this summer due to COVID-19, and managing classes while dealing with grief and depression has been hard.”

– LACCD student

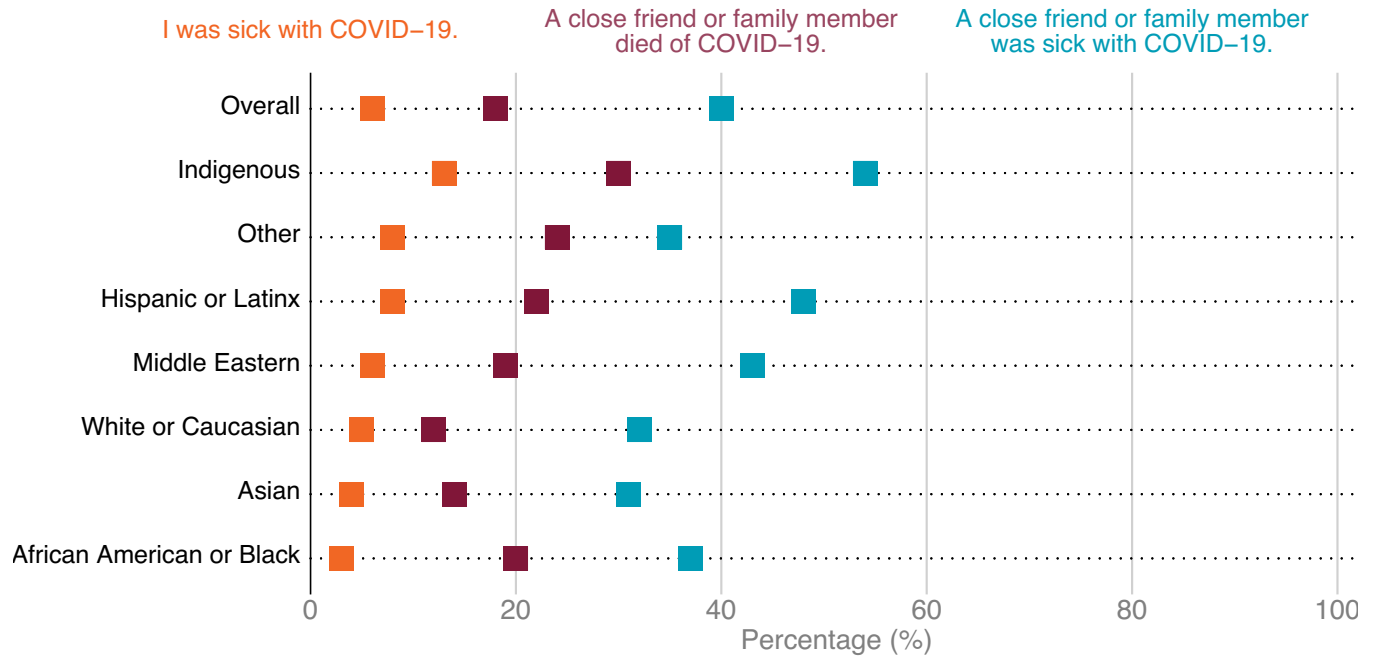


The pandemic has also affected many on a personal level. A nationally representative survey indicated that by November 2020, more than half of all Americans knew someone who had been hospitalized with or had died from COVID-19, up from 39% in August.⁵⁰ As of September 2020, one in five Californians knew someone who had died from COVID-19, and LACCD reported 131 confirmed COVID-19 cases and one fatality.⁵¹

Among students surveyed at LACCD colleges, 6% contracted COVID-19, and nearly two in five had a close friend or family member who had been sick (Figure 2). Nearly one in five (18%) had a close friend or family member die of COVID-19. Despite Los Angeles' high rate of COVID-19 infections (as compared to the rest of the country), LACCD students were about as likely as those at other two-year city and suburban colleges to have personal experiences with COVID-19 (not shown; see [web appendices](#)).

There were however disparities in the impacts of COVID-19 across race and ethnicity. Experiences with COVID-19 were common among Indigenous students, with 13% contracting the virus and more than half having a friend or family member sick with COVID-19. Meanwhile, LACCD's Latinx students were 16 percentage points more likely than White students to have a loved one contract COVID-19, and Black students were eight percentage points more likely than White students to lose a loved one to the disease.

FIGURE 2 | PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITH COVID-19 AMONG LACCD SURVEY RESPONDENTS, BY RACE/ETHNICITY



SOURCE | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

NOTES | Some students may have more than one personal experience with COVID-19. Respondents could self-identify with multiple racial or ethnic classifications.

ENROLLMENT

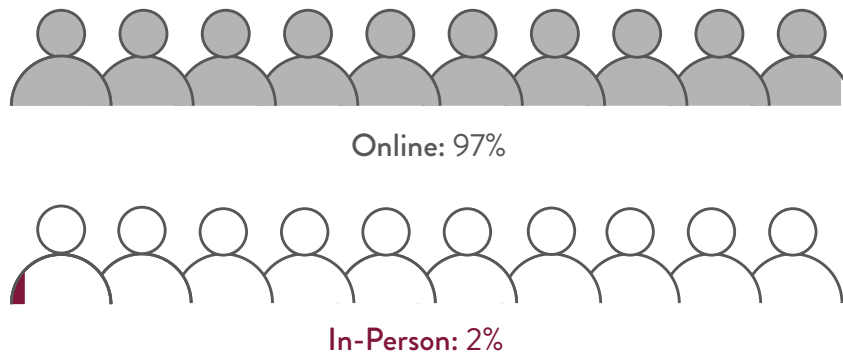
During the Great Recession in 2008, enrollment in higher education increased.⁵² But throughout the pandemic, enrollment has fallen.⁵³ Students are choosing—or being forced—to postpone college, and workers are not enrolling in college despite increases in unemployment. LACCD saw enrollment drop 13% overall in fall 2020, although individual colleges experienced declines ranging from 4.9% to 29.1%.⁵⁴ Across the entire CCC system, enrollment declined 12% in fall 2020, meaning the system lost over 186,000 students.⁵⁵ It also appears enrollment will not quickly bounce back; as of February 2021, LACCD predicted that enrollment would still be down 7% at the end of the spring term.⁵⁶

The causes of declining enrollment are complex, with the move to online classes, the desire for safety during a rampant health crisis, the high price of college during an economic downturn, and the need to support family all playing roles.⁵⁷ Among these factors, the shift to online education had an outsized effect; data suggest that over a third of students planning to attend a community college decided not to attend in 2020 because the mode of instruction changed.⁵⁸ Given that LACCD classes have remained almost completely remote throughout the pandemic, it is likely that this affected enrollment. Indeed, 52% of CCC students prefer face-to-face interaction, and as of spring 2020, 55% found it harder to learn at home.⁵⁹ Concerns about COVID-19 and affordability also played a role. Among two-year students in California who cancelled their fall 2020 enrollment plans, 35% cited COVID-19 concerns, and 29% cited affordability concerns.⁶⁰

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Among LACCD students who responded to the 2020 #RealCollege Survey, nearly all (97%) took online-only classes in fall 2020 (Figure 3). By comparison, at other urban and suburban two-year colleges in our sample, 84% took their fall 2020 courses entirely online (not shown; see [web appendices](#)).

FIGURE 3 | ONLINE VERSUS IN-PERSON CLASSES AMONG LACCD SURVEY RESPONDENTS

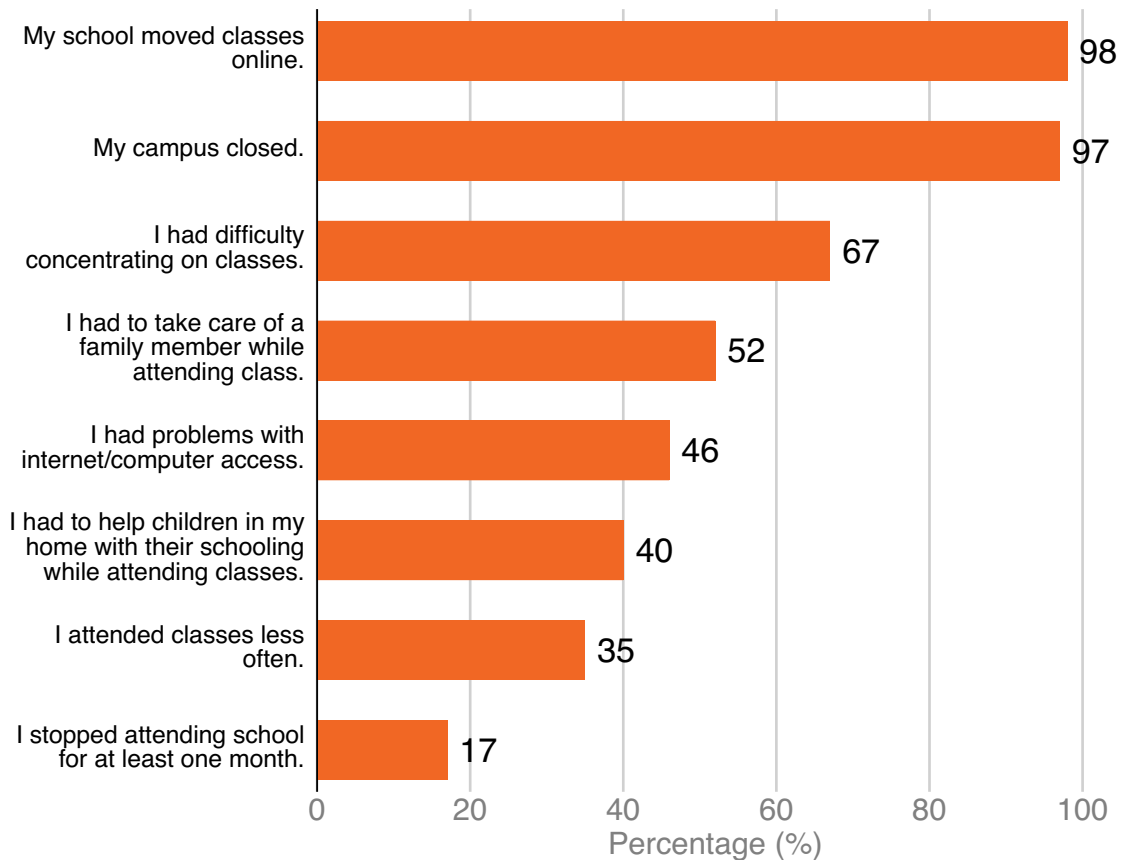


SOURCE | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

NOTES | Rates above do not include students who did not know how they would be taking classes in the fall.

Many LACCD students also experienced challenges in spring 2020 at the outset of the pandemic. Among survey respondents who were enrolled during that term, over two-thirds had difficulty concentrating on classes, and over half took care of a family member while attending class (Figure 4). Forty-six percent had problems with internet or computer access, six percentage points above the rate observed at other urban and suburban two-year colleges (not shown; see [web appendices](#)).

FIGURE 4 | OTHER CHALLENGES FACED BY LACCD SURVEY RESPONDENTS IN SPRING 2020



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SOURCE | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

NOTES | Results above are limited to students who were also enrolled in college in spring 2020. Some students may have experienced more than one of the challenges listed above.



I get anxiety way more often doing online [classes]. I sometimes get burnout and give up easily. For a first-year college student [classes are] confusing to do online.”

– LACCD student



During COVID-19, it has been stressful, since it feels you are mostly on your own in regards to learning the different subjects. Also, you are at the expense of the resources you got, hoping they don't fail, like the internet. I prefer in-person classes.”

– LACCD student

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At the beginning of the semester I was fully responsible for my grandmother's health such as: taking her to her appointments, administering her medication, feeding her, bathing her, etc. Now that she's currently in Mexico with my mother, I'm fully responsible for my three younger siblings. They are 14, 10, and 8 years of age. I help them with their assignments, feed them, bathe them, etc.”

– LACCD student

EMPLOYMENT

The pandemic shuttered businesses and led to widespread furloughs and layoffs.⁶¹ While unemployment in California dipped slightly to 8.7% in November 2020 (when colleges finished fielding the #RealCollege Survey), it was still more than four percentage points above pre-pandemic levels, and well above the national rate of 6.7%.⁶² Nationally, many simply stopped looking for work, with 2.2 million individuals giving up on finding a job—despite wanting one—from February to December 2020.⁶³

Women and workers of color were especially impacted. As of September 2020, the unemployment rate was 10.3% among White residents, compared to 11.8% among Asian American and Pacific Islander residents; 13% among Hispanic residents; and 14.7% among Black residents.⁶⁴ There were also disparities in job loss by gender: from February to September 2020, women suffered more than half of the states’ job losses, despite representing only 45% of the workforce.⁶⁵ Across gender and race, women of color were disproportionately affected. Nationally, Black, Latinx, and Asian women accounted for all of the jobs lost by women in December, and Black and Latinx women were approximately three percentage points more likely than White women to be unemployed.⁶⁶

Students were also affected. The spring 2020 #RealCollege During the Pandemic Survey suggested about one in three students who were employed prior to the pandemic lost their job.⁶⁷ Across CCC, 22% of students had been laid off or furloughed, and one in five had experienced a reduction in hours.⁶⁸ Additionally, while “young workers” does not correlate directly to college students—many enroll in college later in life and not all young people attend college—workers ages 18–26 were roughly six percentage points more likely than those 27 and older to have experienced a layoff as of September 2020.⁶⁹

Campus closures, lost work-study opportunities, and shuttered or scaled-back leisure and hospitality businesses—where younger, economically disadvantaged students are more likely to work—all contributed to students’ job losses.⁷⁰ These factors could keep students underemployed for years to come. Industries like the leisure and hospitality service sector may not recover any time soon, and once jobs return, students will be competing against large numbers of displaced workers, many with more experience and less restricted schedules.⁷¹

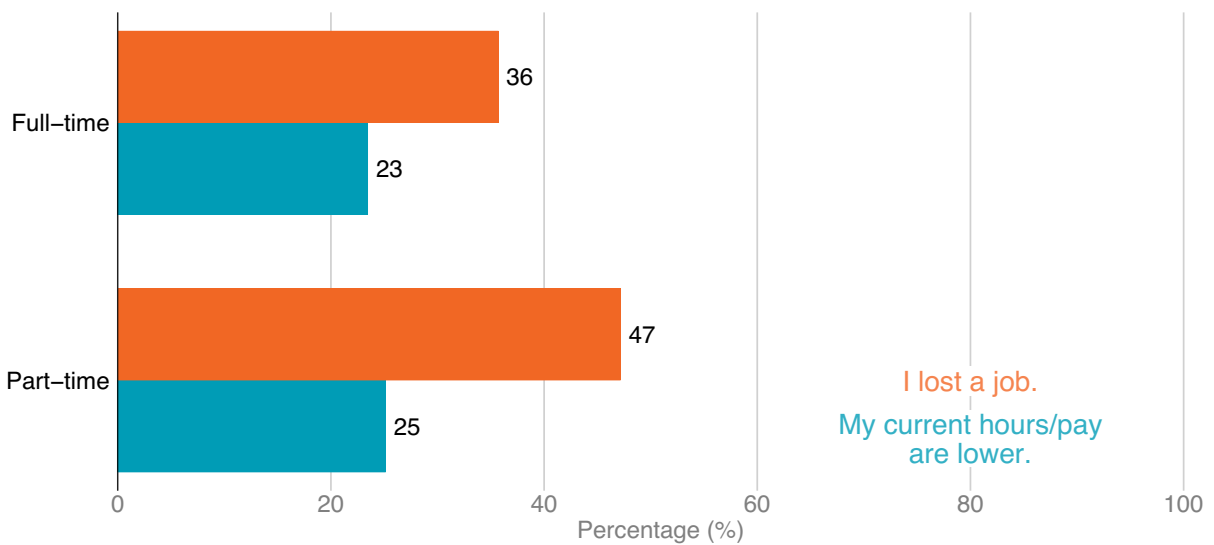


Being recently married and having both my husband and I lose our jobs at the beginning of the pandemic has been stressful, and I have worried about making ends meet. So far we have been lucky and haven’t missed any payments, but there is the constant fear of once this month’s bills are paid, how do I pay for next month?”

– LACCD student

Among LACCD students who had a part-time job before the pandemic, 47% lost that job, and a quarter lost hours or pay at that job (Figure 5). Among students who had a full-time job prior to the pandemic, 36% lost that position, and just under a quarter lost hours or pay at that job. Compared to their peers in the rest of the country, LACCD students were four percentage points more likely to lose a job that they had before the pandemic, but two percentage points less likely to have their hours or pay cut (not shown; see [web appendices](#)).

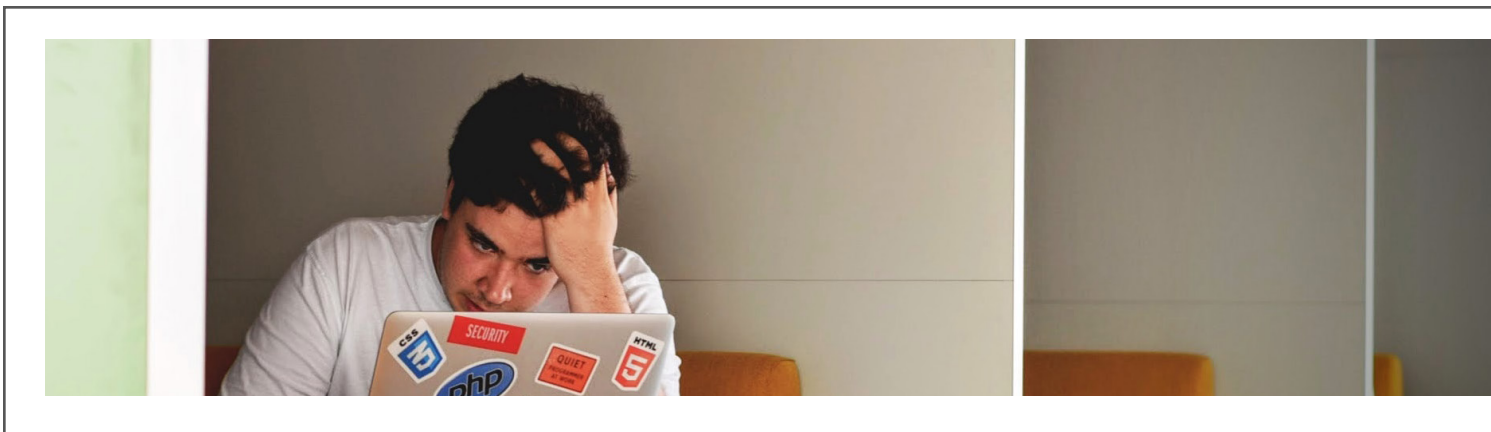
FIGURE 5 | JOB LOSSES OR REDUCTION IN PAY OR HOURS AMONG LACCD SURVEY RESPONDENTS, BY JOB STATUS



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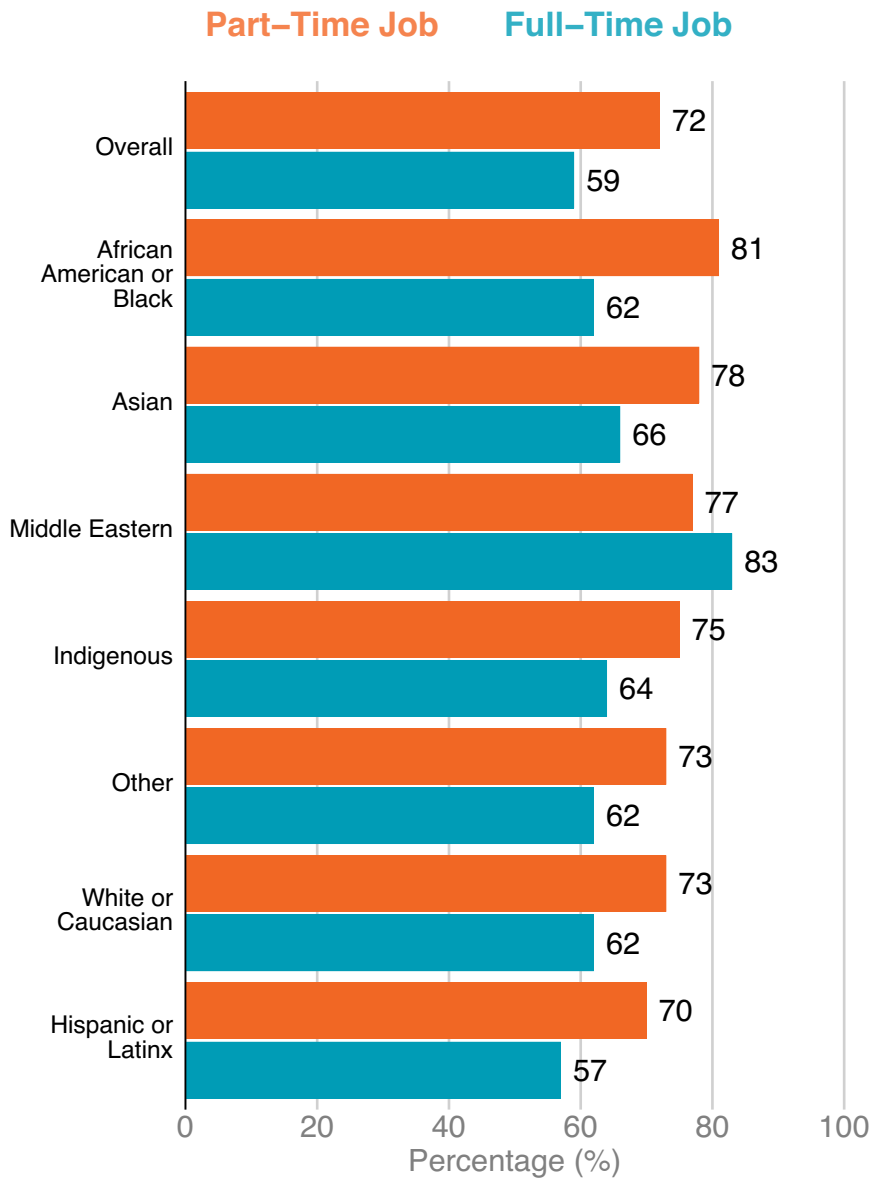
SOURCE | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

NOTES | Results are among students who were also enrolled in college in spring 2020 and had at least one job before the pandemic. Those with a full-time job worked 35 hours or more a week, whereas those with a part-time job worked less than 35 hours a week.



There were also disparities in which students lost work according to race and ethnicity, mirroring patterns of job loss across the state and nation. Among Middle Eastern students who had a full-time job before the pandemic, 83% lost that position or had their hours or pay cut (Figure 6). By comparison, the rate was 62% for White students and 57% for Latinx students. Meanwhile, 81% of Black students with a part-time job prior to the pandemic lost work or pay.

FIGURE 6 | JOB LOSS OR REDUCTION IN HOURS OR PAY AMONG LACCD SURVEY RESPONDENTS, BY RACE/ETHNICITY AND JOB STATUS



SOURCE | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

NOTES | Results above are limited to students who were enrolled in college in spring 2020 and had at least one job before the pandemic. Those with a full-time job worked 35 or more hours a week, whereas those with a part-time job worked less than 35 hours a week. Respondents could self-identify with multiple racial or ethnic classifications.



“As a single mother, working a full-time job, commuting through traffic, and having to do schoolwork during this pandemic has been the most difficult time of my life.

– LACCD student



“College is harder than it has ever been for me as a father of two. From trying to be a full-time father [and] worker, and attend school full-time, it’s difficult. I have goals to reach, and I try my best to keep pushing. College at this time is continuing to look for the light at the end of the tunnel.

– LACCD student

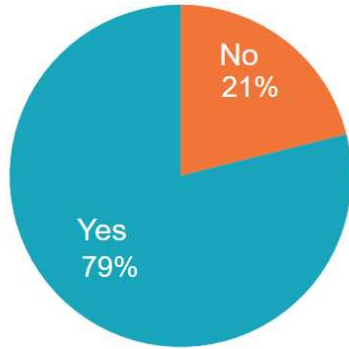
FAMILIES

As the pandemic dragged on, schools and daycare centers closed. As a result, many parents—especially mothers—spent more time on childcare.⁷² In the summer of 2020, women ages 25–44 were nearly three times more likely than men to be unemployed due to childcare demands.⁷³ At the same time, parents—although again, particularly mothers—faced declines in employment.⁷⁴ As of May 2020, Californians with kids were 15 percentage points more likely than those without kids to have lost work or pay.⁷⁵ If there was a good sign, it was that as of spring 2020, CCC parenting students were as likely as non-parenting students to plan to re-enroll in the fall—though it is not yet clear if this was borne out.⁷⁶

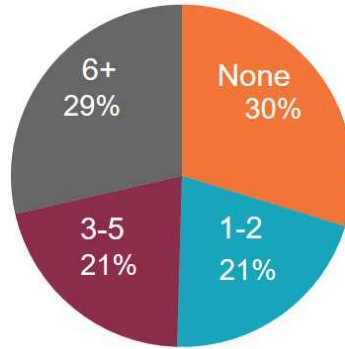
Of the more than 1,500 parenting LACCD students who participated in the 2020 #RealCollege Survey, many struggled. Seventy-nine percent of those who were enrolled in spring 2020 had to help their children with schooling while attending classes themselves (Figure 7). Missing class or work because of childcare arrangements in spring 2020 was also common; half missed three or more days of class or work due to childcare arrangements. As the pandemic continued into fall 2020, 84% of parenting students had their children at home at least part-time.

FIGURE 7 | CHALLENGES FACED BY LACCD PARENTING STUDENT RESPONDENTS DUE TO THE PANDEMIC

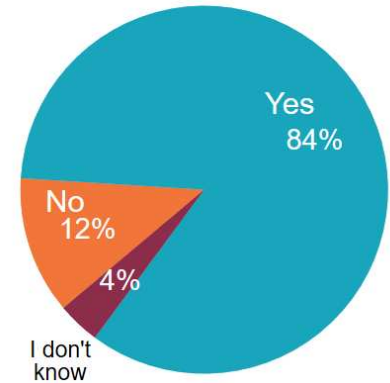
In spring 2020, I had to help children in my home with their schooling while attending classes.



Approximately how many days in spring 2020 did you miss work/class because of childcare arrangements?



Will your child(ren) be home at least part-time due to COVID-19 this fall?



SOURCE | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

NOTES | Results to questions about spring 2020 are limited to parenting students who were enrolled in that term. A parenting student is a parent, primary caregiver, or guardian (legal or informal) of any children in or outside their household.



How is a parent supposed to continue their education while taking care of children at home? As a mother of a three-year-old boy, I can say that it is difficult to focus on school when my child's focus is on me. I find myself having to choose between my school and my son."

- LACCD student



[College right now is] difficult as a parent of three kids. My two oldest have distance learning via Zoom, and I have to bounce back and forth between their lectures, meanwhile my toddler is being ignored. Then I have to get lunch/dinner ready until my spouse gets home. Then I do my homework and reading in the evening until 1 or 2 a.m. Finally, on the weekends, when my wife is home, I work the night shift at a burger chain (Friday, Saturday, and Sunday nights) and don't fall asleep until 3:30 in the morning.

- LACCD student

INSTITUTION BUDGETS

Many colleges were strapped for funds prior to the pandemic. In the vast majority of states, public higher education budgets never fully recovered from cuts imposed during the Great Recession. California is one of a handful of states that continued investing in higher education, with per student funding for the community college system increasing steadily over the past decade.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, the pandemic decimated the state's higher education budget, turning a \$5.6 billion surplus into a projected deficit of \$54 billion.⁷⁸ While LACCD does not face immediate budget cuts, future investment in student supports may depend on the state's financial recovery.⁷⁹



BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY DURING THE PANDEMIC

Entering fall 2020, it was unclear how students' basic needs would be affected by the pandemic. While nearly two-thirds of LACCD students faced food insecurity and more than half faced housing insecurity in 2016, fall 2020 was unique.⁸⁰ Enrollment declined, particularly among those most vulnerable to basic needs insecurity. Students lost work, lost friends and family to COVID-19, and saw their campuses close. At the same time, thanks to a \$43 million investment from the CARES Act, LACCD distributed an unprecedented amount of emergency aid.⁸¹ Colleges also adapted, using internal and external partnerships to support students in an ever-evolving situation. For instance, LACCD established partnerships with two nonprofits—Shower of Hope and Los Angeles Room & Board (LARNB)—to provide transitional housing, meals, and other essential supports to students experiencing homelessness.⁸²

This section presents rates of basic needs insecurity among LACCD's 2020 #RealCollege Survey respondents. While basic needs insecurity goes beyond food and housing insecurity—transportation, healthcare, childcare, and more are also vital to students' success—this section defines experiencing “any BNI” as experiencing food insecurity, housing insecurity, or homelessness.



“College is hard right now. Depending on your circumstances, with money and even food being something that might not be guaranteed next month, it makes everything scary.

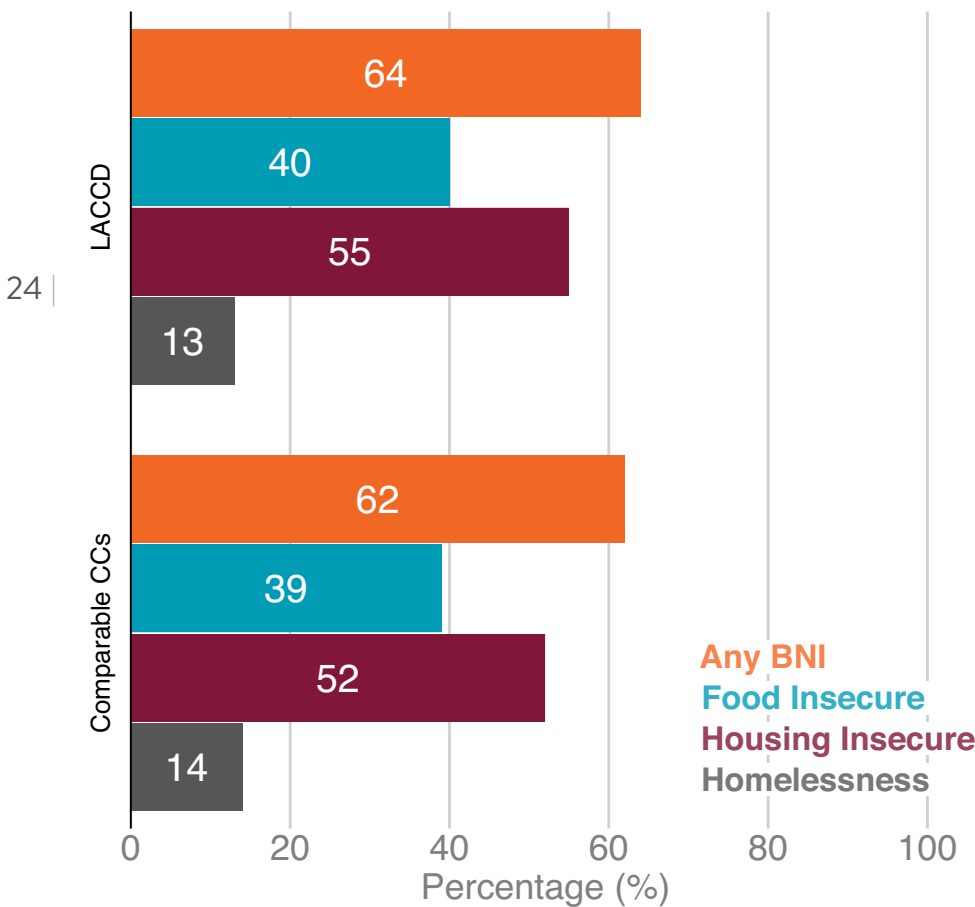
– LACCD student



BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY

Among the more than 7,200 LACCD students who took the 2020 #RealCollege Survey, nearly two-thirds experienced food insecurity, housing insecurity, and/or homelessness (Figure 8). Housing insecurity was the most common challenge, confronting more than half (55%) of students, while two in five (40%) experienced food insecurity. Rates of basic needs insecurity at LACCD were comparable to those observed at other two-year colleges in urban and large suburban areas.

FIGURE 8 | BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY RATES AMONG LACCD SURVEY RESPONDENTS AND ALL OTHER COMPARABLE TWO-YEAR COLLEGES



SOURCE | 2020 #RealCollege Survey
 NOTES | “Any BNI” includes students who experienced food insecurity in the past 30 days, or housing insecurity or homelessness within the last year. “Comparable CCs” includes 81 two-year colleges located in large cities or large suburbs. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was created, refer to the [web appendices](#).



My financial aid [was] significantly reduced, and I’m left to work two jobs to keep up with bills, food, and education.”

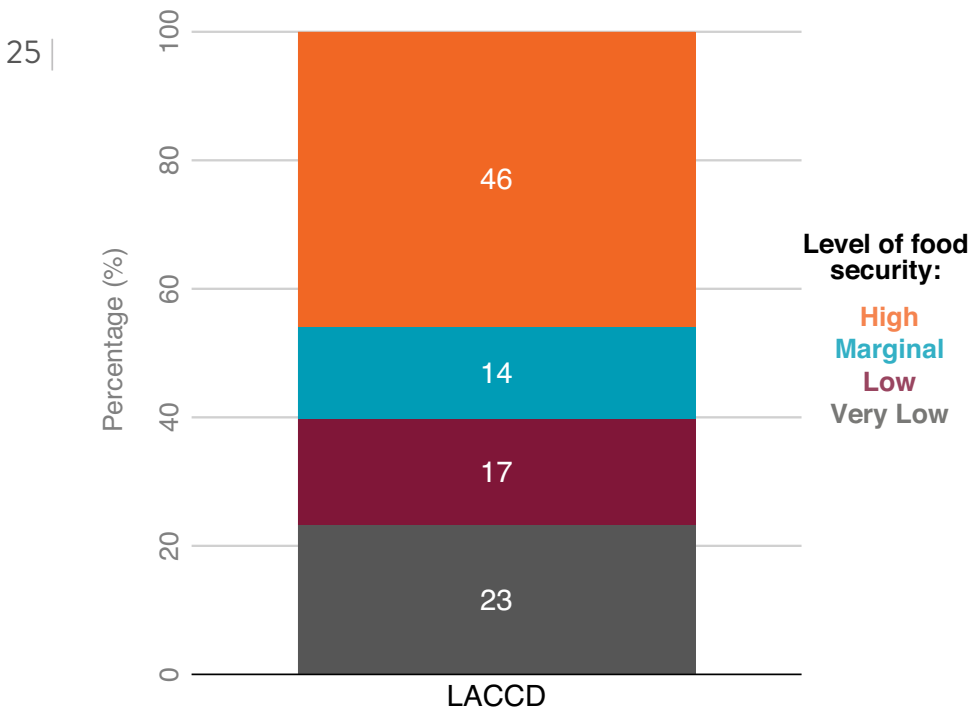
– LACCD student

FOOD INSECURITY

Within the USDA’s 18-question framework for food security, respondents are considered food insecure if they have low or very low levels of food security. Among LACCD survey respondents, 40% experienced food insecurity in the 30 days prior to the survey, with 23% experiencing very low food security and 17% experiencing low food security (Figure 9). Rates of food insecurity in 2020 were substantially lower than those observed among LACCD students in 2016, when 62% of students were food insecure. The rates of food insecurity observed at LACCD were similar to those observed at other urban and suburban two-year colleges (not shown; see [web appendices](#)).

In fall 2020, 40% of LACCD survey respondents experienced food insecurity, compared to 62% in 2016.⁸³

FIGURE 9 | LEVEL OF FOOD SECURITY AMONG LACCD SURVEY RESPONDENTS



SOURCE | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

NOTES | According to the USDA, students at either low or very low levels of food security are termed “food insecure.” Cumulative percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding. For more details on how we measure food security, refer to the [web appendices](#).



I’m a disabled veteran (chronic pain, PTSD), and it can be a struggle staying ‘grounded’ and not stressing. Food and paying the rent is a daily worry.”

– LACCD student

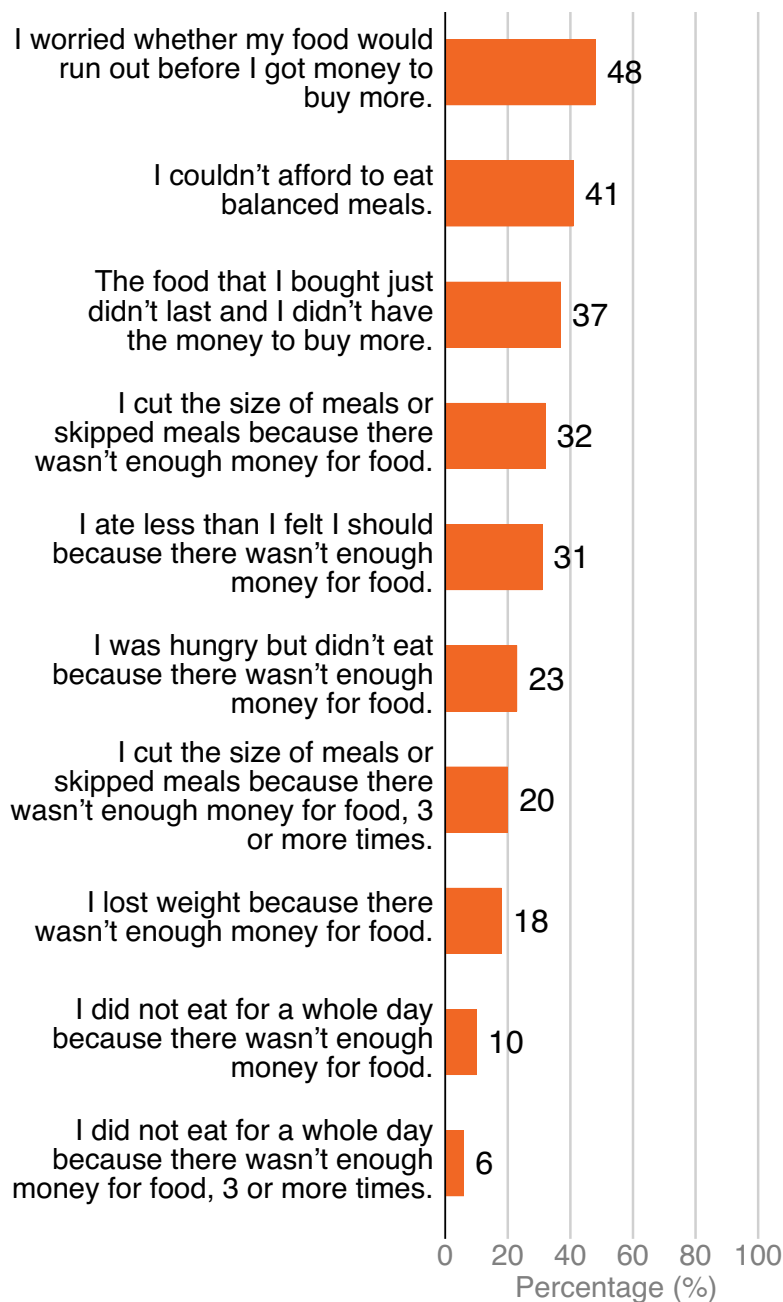


If I’m not worried about my studies, I’m worried about making ends meet, eating, or paying bills.”

– LACCD student

The USDA survey items used to measure food security range from nutrition (“I could not afford to eat balanced meals”) to hunger (“I went hungry but didn’t eat because there wasn’t enough money for food”).⁸⁴ LACCD students were most likely to worry about running out of food before they got money to buy more (Figure 10). In the 30 days preceding the survey, just under a third cut the size of or skipped meals because they did not have enough money for food, with 20% doing so three or more times. Meanwhile, one in 10 did not eat for a whole day because they did not have enough money for food.

FIGURE 10 | FOOD SECURITY QUESTIONS AMONG LACCD SURVEY RESPONDENTS



26 |

SOURCE | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

NOTES | Some students may have experienced more than one of the circumstances listed above.



[College right now] is very difficult. As a low-income college student, I hope that all of our voices will be heard. I hope that we can receive more help from our own colleges. It is much more complicated to excel at school when personal factors are involved, such as the stress of work, personal family matters, anxiety, and concerns about what is currently going on in the world. I hope that the college system can step it up and try to be more understanding of the students who are currently attending or about to enroll in college. Because it is simply not the same. And people are struggling to simply survive.”

– LACCD student

27 |

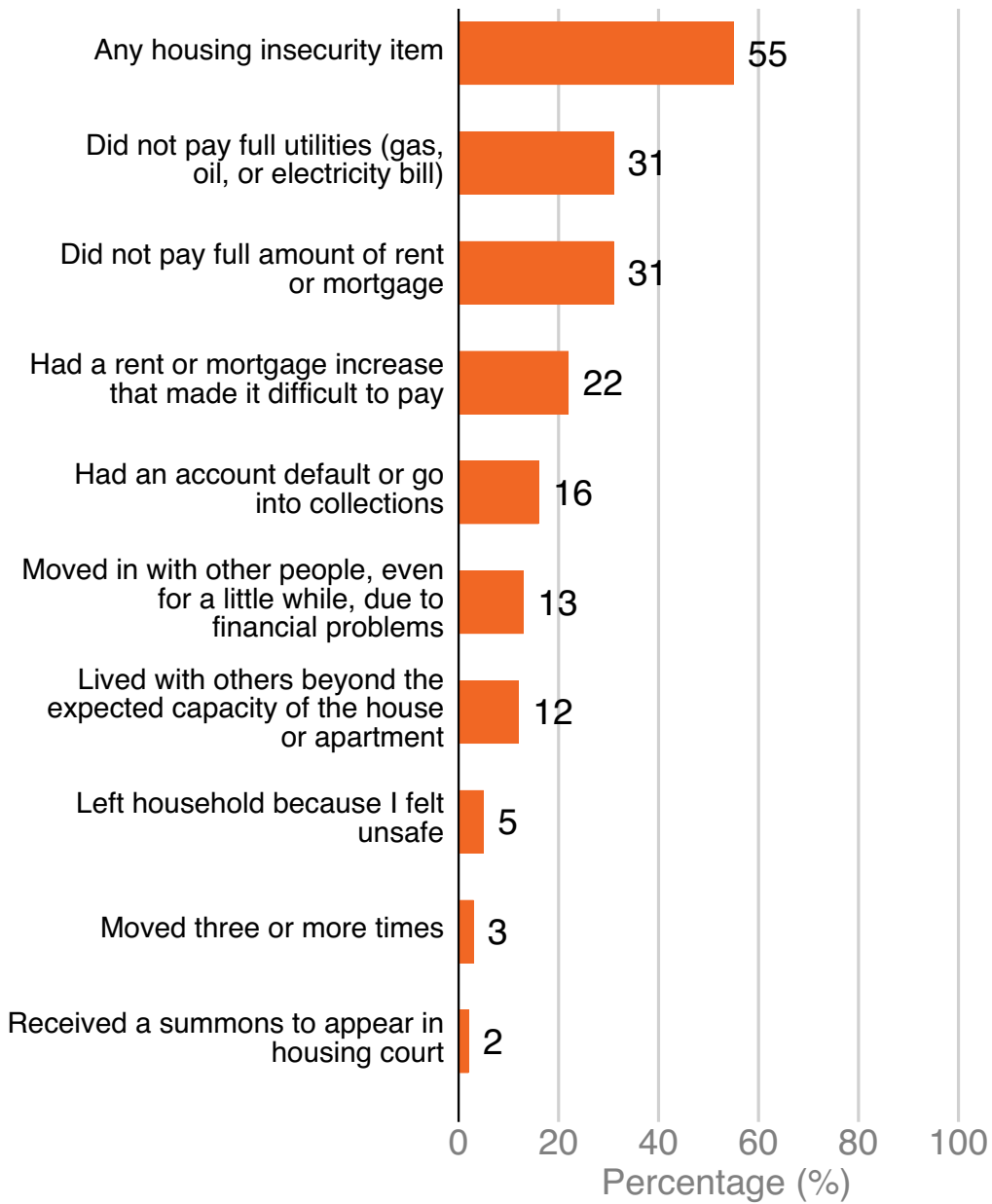


HOUSING INSECURITY

To assess housing insecurity, we ask students nine questions regarding their housing situations over the past year, ranging from questions about moving (“I moved in with other people, even for a little while, due to financial problems”) to safety (“I left a household because I felt unsafe”). Among these, LACCD students were most likely to report not paying a full utility bill or their full rent or mortgage, with 31% of students experiencing these challenges (Figure 11).⁸⁵ Five percent of LACCD students left a household because it felt unsafe.

Compared to LACCD students surveyed in 2016, the housing insecurity rate remained unchanged, but the percentage of students that could not pay their full rent or mortgage increased by eight percentage points.⁸⁶ Not paying the full amount for rent or a mortgage was also four percentage points more common at LACCD than it was at other urban and suburban two-year colleges (not shown; see [web appendices](#)).

FIGURE 11 | HOUSING INSECURITY AMONG LACCD SURVEY RESPONDENTS



28 |

SOURCE | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

NOTES | Some students may have experienced more than one of the circumstances listed above. For more details on how we measure housing insecurity, refer to the [web appendices](#).



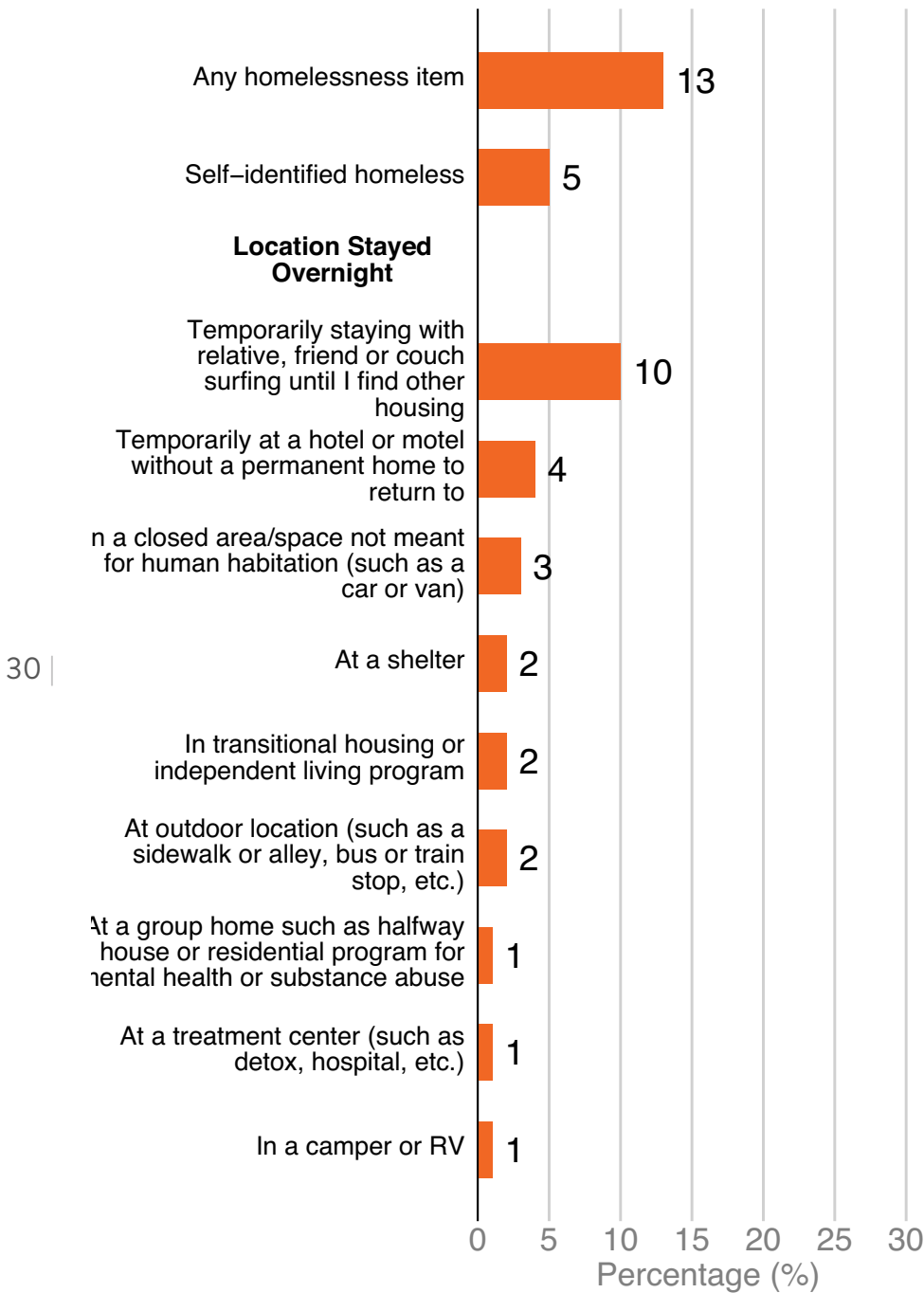
HOMELESSNESS

In the 12 months prior to the survey, 13% of LACCD students experienced homelessness (Figure 12). More students experienced the conditions of homelessness than self-identified as homeless. Most respondents experiencing homelessness—and one in 10 LACCD respondents overall—stayed in temporary accommodations or couch surfed in the past year, 4% lived at a hotel or motel without a permanent home to return to, and 3% lived in a closed area not meant for human habitation.

Fifty-six students, or about 1%, slept in a camper or RV. In 2019, California Assemblyman Marc Berman introduced a bill that would require CCC to provide safe campus parking lots, allowing homeless students to sleep in their vehicles.⁸⁷ The bill was opposed by more than 40 community colleges and districts and did not pass.⁸⁸

The rate of homelessness for LACCD students was six percentage points lower in 2020 than it was in 2016.⁸⁹ Compared to students at other urban and suburban two-year colleges, LACCD students were about as likely to experience homelessness, but three percentage points more likely to self-identify as homeless (not shown; see [web appendices](#)).

FIGURE 12 | HOMELESSNESS AMONG LACCD SURVEY RESPONDENTS



For someone who was homeless prior to the coronavirus pandemic, I relied on using my campus for more than just obtaining an education; it was helping me live. Now it is ten times more difficult.”

- LACCD student

SOURCE | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

NOTES | Some students may have experienced more than one of the circumstances listed above. For more details on how we measure homelessness, refer to the [web appendices](#). Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.

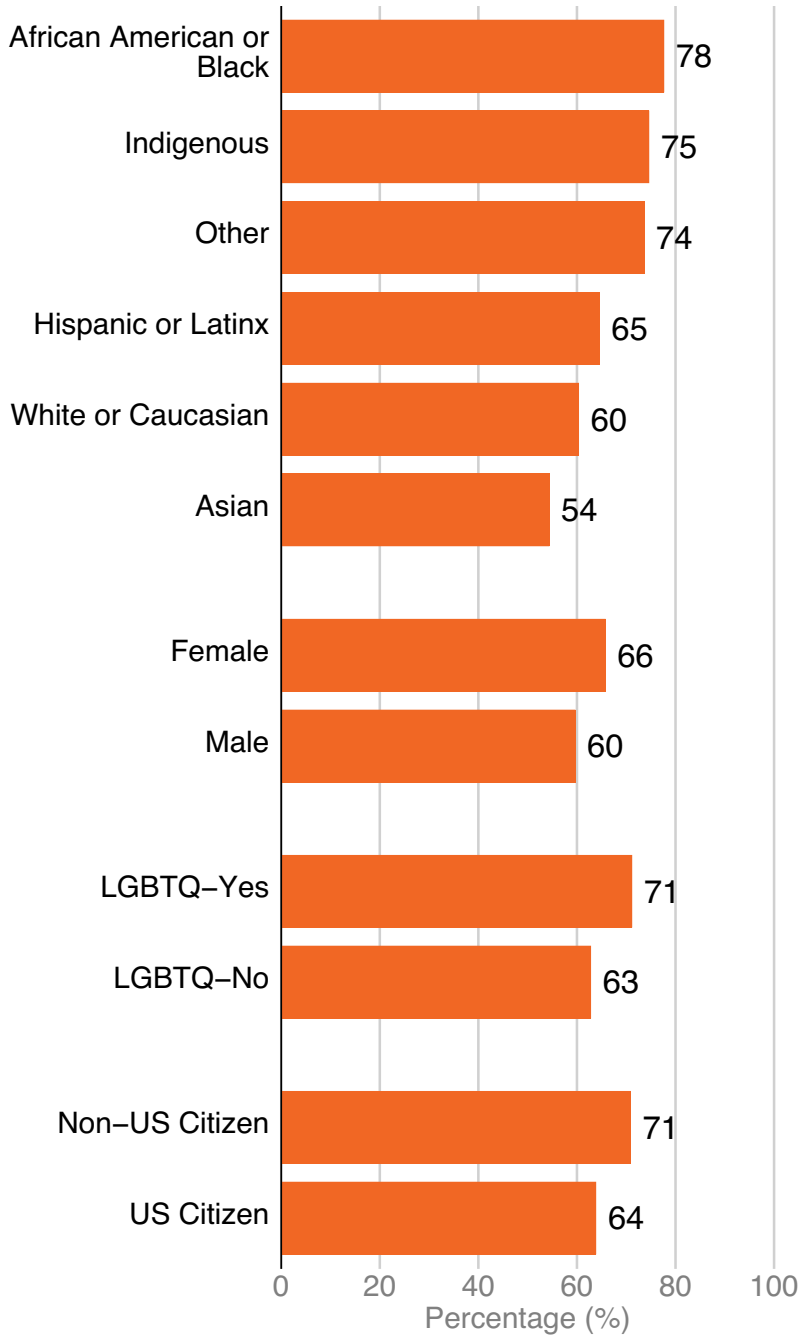


DISPARITIES IN BASIC NEEDS INSECURITIES

Research has consistently found that risk of basic needs insecurity is not evenly distributed. Black and Latinx students are at particularly high risk, as are economically disadvantaged students and parenting students.⁹⁰ Given that the burdens of the pandemic were not shared equally—Black and Latinx Americans were more likely to die, and people of color, women, and parents were more likely to lose work—disparities in basic needs insecurity are also likely to have grown since March 2020.

Non-White LACCD students were disproportionately impacted by basic needs insecurity. Black students were 18 percentage points more likely than their White peers to experience basic needs insecurity, while Indigenous students were 15 percentage points more likely than White students to have need (Figure 13). Across gender identities, two-thirds of female students at LACCD experienced basic needs insecurity, compared with 60% of male students. We also observed an eight-percentage point gap in LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ students’ basic needs. Meanwhile, the rate of basic needs insecurity among non-U.S. citizens was seven percentage points higher than the rate among citizens.

FIGURE 13 | DISPARITIES IN BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY AMONG LACCD SURVEY RESPONDENTS, BY RACE/ ETHNICITY IDENTITY, GENDER IDENTITY, LGBTQ STATUS, AND CITIZENSHIP STATUS



32 |



Please prepare more financial [help] for immigrant homeless students like me. I like education, but I'm not in a normal situation. Please help me."

– LACCD student



I'm mixed, half Black, and I think for a lot of us Black people going through collective trauma right now—witnessing the killings of our people, the protests, and dealing with racist commentary everywhere in the media and online—productivity is especially difficult. College feels insignificant compared to the weight of the world."

– LACCD student

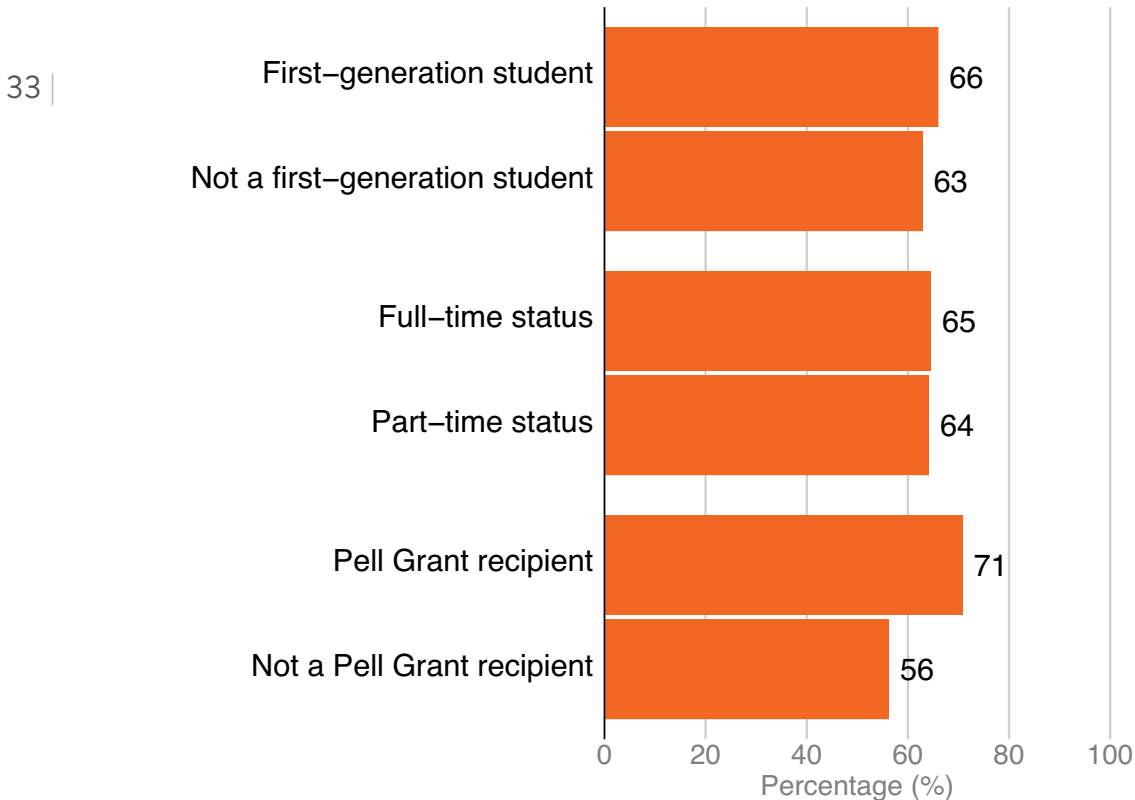
SOURCE | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

NOTES | Classifications of gender identity and racial/ethnic background are not mutually exclusive. Students could self-identify with multiple classifications. For more detail on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, refer to the [web appendices](#).

First-generation college students and Pell Grant recipients were also more likely to experience basic needs insecurity than their counterparts (Figure 14). The rate of basic needs insecurity was especially high (71%) among Pell Grant recipients when compared to the rate (56%) among students who were not Pell Grant recipients. Nevertheless, the rate of basic needs insecurity among students who were not Pell Grant recipients was still substantial, especially given that these students often do not have equitable access—or any access—to supports like emergency aid.⁹¹

The difference in students’ rate of basic needs insecurity according to enrollment status was marginal, indicating part-time students are just as in need of resources as those who are enrolled full-time. Unfortunately current funding formulas do not allocate student support services dollars equally for full-time and part-time students.⁹²

FIGURE 14 | DISPARITIES IN BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY AMONG LACCD SURVEY RESPONDENTS, BY FIRST-GENERATION STATUS, ENROLLMENT STATUS, AND PELL GRANT STATUS



SOURCE | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

NOTES | First-generation status is determined by whether a student’s parents’ highest level of education completed is a high school diploma or GED. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, refer to the [web appendices](#).

UTILIZATION OF SUPPORTS

The March 2020 enactment of the CARES Act provided institutions and students with some much-needed financial relief.⁹³ In total, California institutions of higher education received \$1.8 billion from the CARES Act, of which \$806 million went to students.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, the bill had shortfalls, starting with its funding formula, which deprived community colleges of their fair share despite their key role in educating historically underserved students.⁹⁵ Students claimed as dependents were ineligible for CARES Act stimulus checks, even if they earned income and filed a tax return.⁹⁶

Some college students were also deemed ineligible for existing public supports. For instance, the USDA denied multiple requests by states to waive requirements for college students applying for SNAP benefits.⁹⁷ Mixed signals from the U.S. Department of Education led to confusion over emergency aid eligibility requirements, and as of May 2020, few students had accessed available CARES supports.⁹⁸ At the end of July 2020, the federal government also failed to extend pandemic unemployment insurance, causing nearly 30 million Americans—some of them students—to lose \$600 per week.⁹⁹

34 | Despite the challenges they faced, LACCD's colleges adapted quickly to maintain support for their students. Los Angeles Harbor College stepped up its student support by opening the Maslow Center for Basic Needs in spring 2020.¹⁰⁰ Located in the same suite as the Life Skills Center, the Maslow Center addresses housing insecurity, food insecurity, and clothing needs among students. Meanwhile, Los Angeles City College used trained navigators to help students experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness.¹⁰¹ At Los Angeles Mission College, students received a \$100 gift card for completing their FAFSA and/or Dream Act application.¹⁰² Similarly, in December 2020, after fall term finished, LACCD received \$1 million to offer parenting students \$100 gift cards to local grocery stores.¹⁰³ These innovative efforts can provide valuable models for addressing the continued effects of the pandemic.

”

“America does not care about young people, especially now during COVID.

– LACCD student

While not available in fall 2020—when the #RealCollege Survey was fielded—the federal government also provided colleges additional relief in December 2020 and March 2021. Over \$2.3 billion went to California students and institutions via the Consolidated Appropriations Act, passed in December 2020, and \$5 billion was allocated to higher education in the state under the American Rescue Plan (ARP), enacted in March 2021.¹⁰⁴ Thanks to these two relief packages and the CARES Act, LACCD received just over \$349 million in federal relief.¹⁰⁵ Consolidated Appropriations Act and ARP funds have more flexibility in how they can be spent, and we highly encourage institutions to use these funds to build capacity to meet students’ basic needs not only during the remainder of the pandemic but beyond.¹⁰⁶ The Consolidated Appropriations Act also temporarily expanded SNAP eligibility for college students, a change we encourage the federal government to make permanent and states to build upon after the pandemic ends.¹⁰⁷

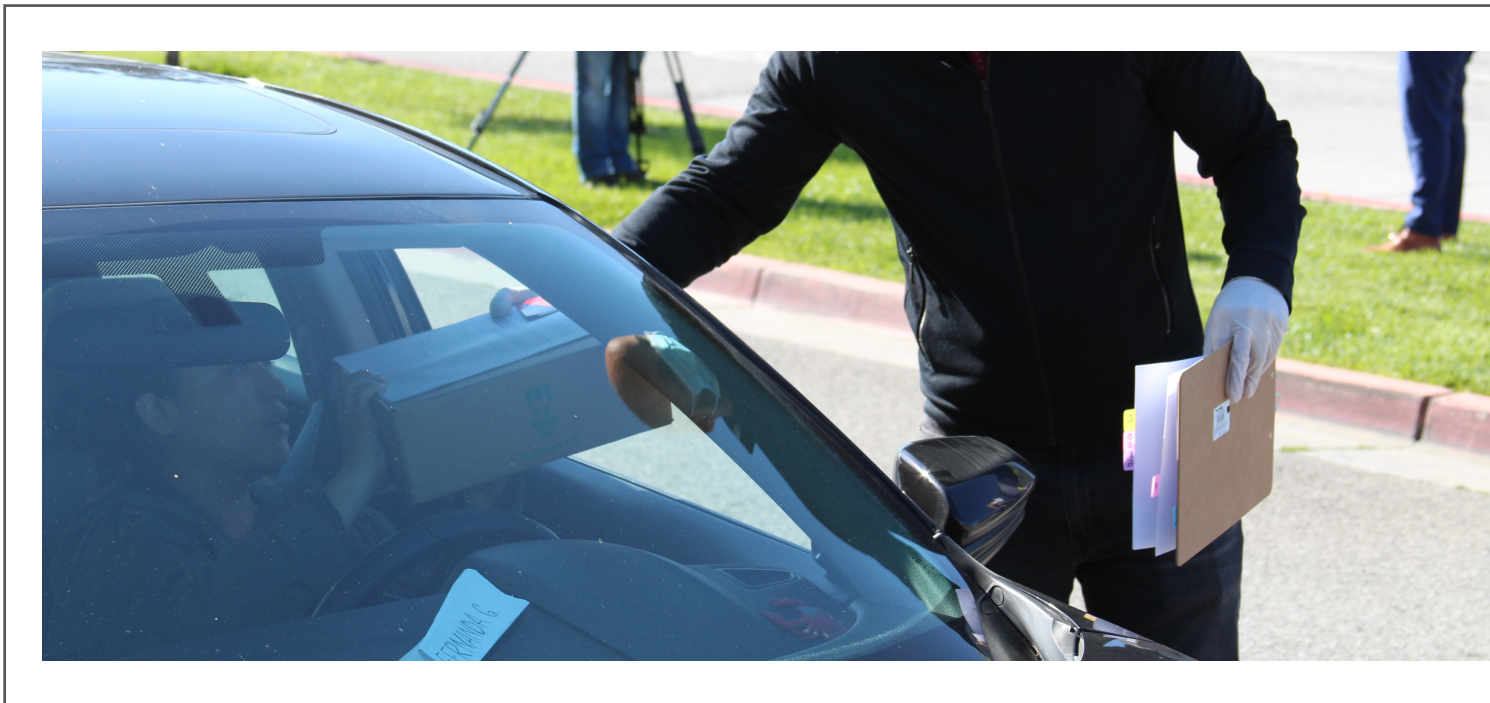
This section further examines the supports available to LACCD students in fall 2020.



35 |

Luckily, I feel like my college (LACCD) has been very informative and helpful with students through this time. Whether that was helping them get free internet, loanable laptops to complete schoolwork, online tutors, etc. to make this better for [students] and help [students] have the best chance to be successful.”

– LACCD student

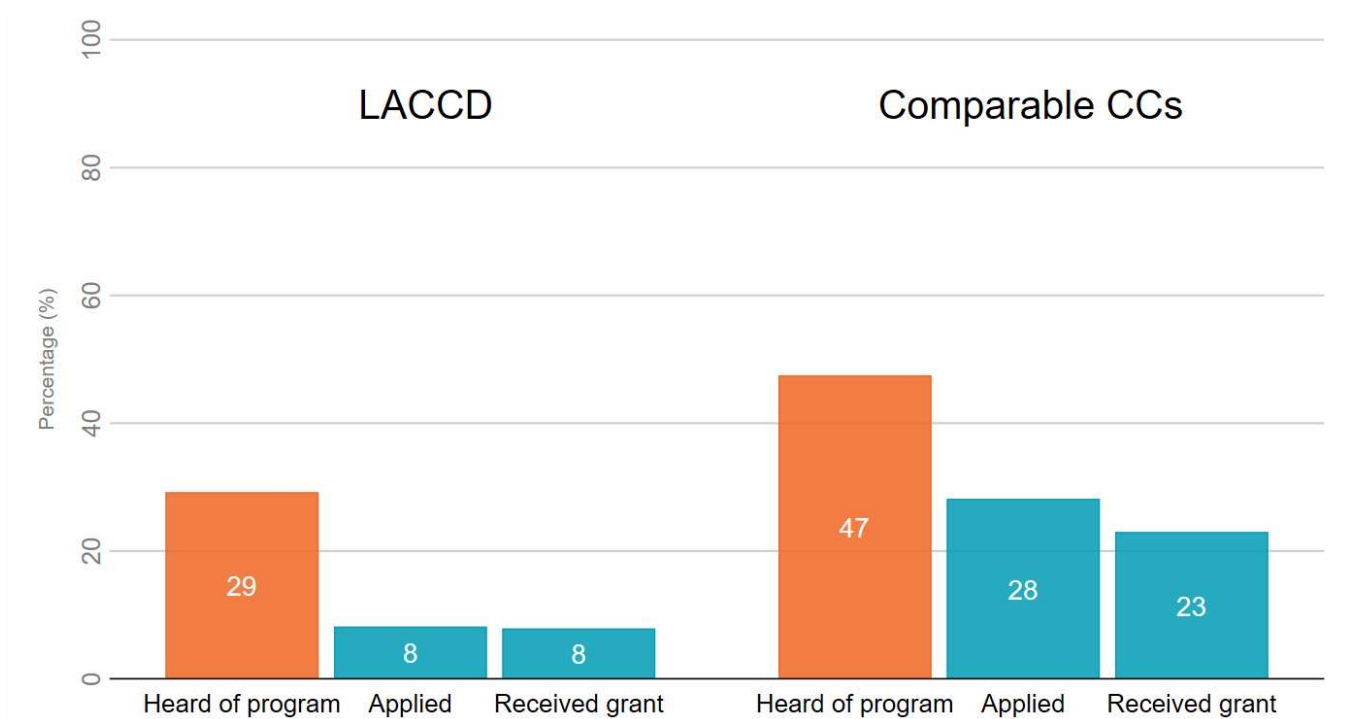


EMERGENCY AID

Emergency aid commonly takes the form of small grants provided to students for immediate expenses like rent and food. Because the emergency aid landscape changed drastically as a result of the CARES Act, survey respondents were asked both about emergency aid programs that were in place prior to the pandemic and about CARES Act grants.¹⁰⁸

Twenty-nine percent of LACCD respondents experiencing basic needs insecurity were aware of CARES Act grant programs, and 8% received one (Figure 15). Knowledge and receipt of CARES Act grants was considerably higher at other urban and large suburban two-year colleges, where 47% of students with need had heard of CARES, and 23% received a CARES Act grant.

FIGURE 15 | KNOWLEDGE OF, APPLICATION FOR, AND RECEIPT OF CARES ACT GRANTS AMONG LACCD SURVEY RESPONDENTS AND COMPARABLE SURVEY RESPONDENTS EXPERIENCING BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY



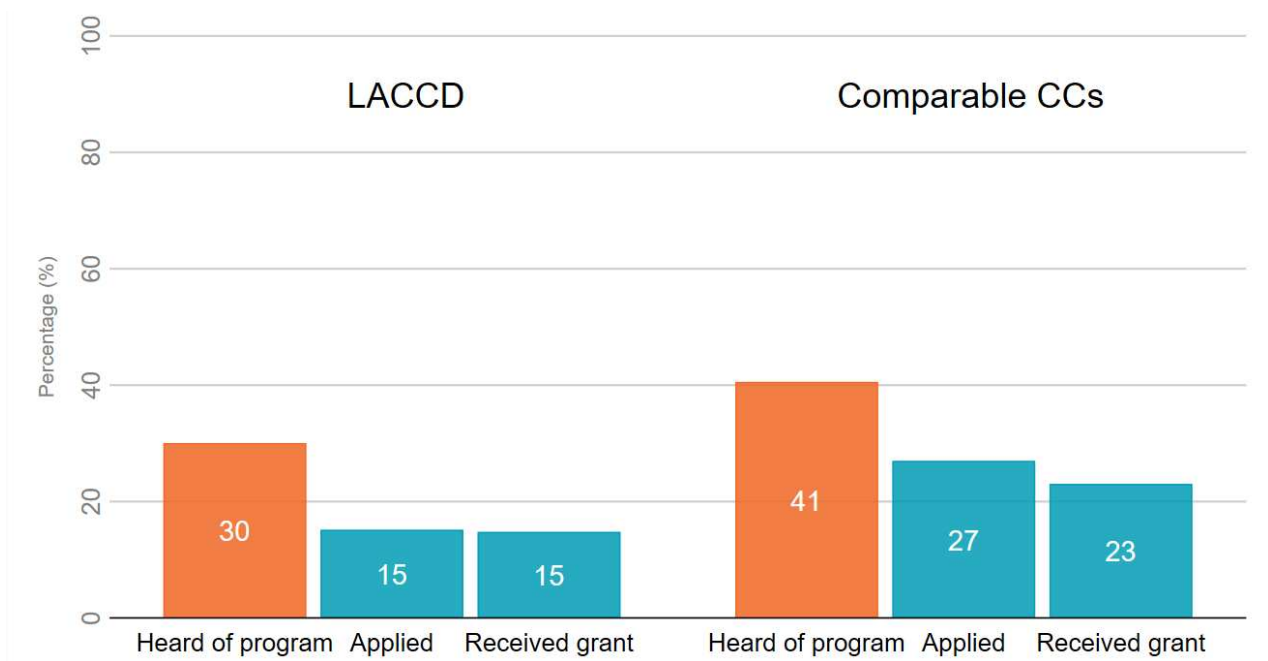
36 |

SOURCE | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

NOTES | Because of different systems for the distribution of CARES Act grants across institutions, some students may have received CARES Act grant dollars but did not have to apply for them. “Comparable CCs” includes 81 two-year colleges located in large cities or large suburbs.

Compared to the CARES Act emergency aid, more LACCD students (15%) experiencing basic needs insecurity received non-CARES emergency aid (Figure 16). However, knowledge of emergency aid among students with need was still low, with fewer than a third (30%) aware of such programs. LACCD students with need were also nine percentage points less likely than their peers at other two-year urban and suburban colleges to know about non-CARES emergency aid.

FIGURE 16 | KNOWLEDGE OF, APPLICATION FOR, AND RECEIPT OF EMERGENCY AID AMONG LACCD SURVEY RESPONDENTS AND COMPARABLE SURVEY RESPONDENTS EXPERIENCING BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY



37 |

SOURCE | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

NOTES | Because of different systems for the distribution of emergency aid across institutions, some students may have received emergency grant dollars but did not have to formally apply for them. “Comparable CCs” includes 81 two-year colleges located in large cities or large suburbs.

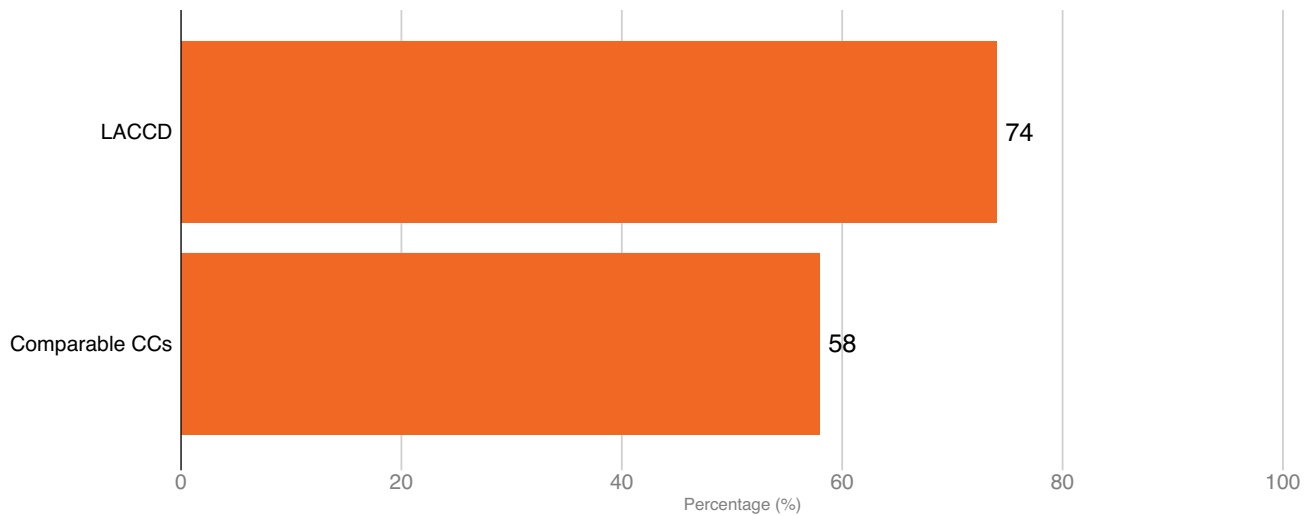


“[College] hasn’t changed much for me, as I am disabled and always have done online classes. I wish I was able to receive the CARES grant, but because I am an online student, I was not eligible.

– LACCD student

Seeking emergency aid was also stressful for some students. Among LACCD students already facing the strain of basic needs insecurity, 74% said seeking financial relief was stressful (Figure 17). This rate was also 16 percentage points higher than the rate at comparable two-year colleges.

FIGURE 17 | LACCD SURVEY RESPONDENTS AND COMPARABLE SURVEY RESPONDENTS EXPERIENCING BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY AND ANY LEVEL OF STRESS WHEN SEEKING EMERGENCY AID



38 |

SOURCE | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

NOTES | Rates are for students who applied for a CARES Act grant or an emergency aid grant this year and were experiencing basic needs insecurity. “Comparable CCs” includes 81 two-year colleges located in large cities or large suburbs. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was created, refer to the [web appendices](#).



Sometimes I do not know where my next meal will be coming from. Very anxious time for me, stressing over this pandemic, school, and life in general...Resources are hard to come by in my opinion, and it is extremely hard to get assistance or emergency grants.”

– LACCD student



The money I received from the emergency grant helped get food and pay for school supplies that I needed for the new semester. My college has given me all the information I needed to keep me on track in these uncertain times.”

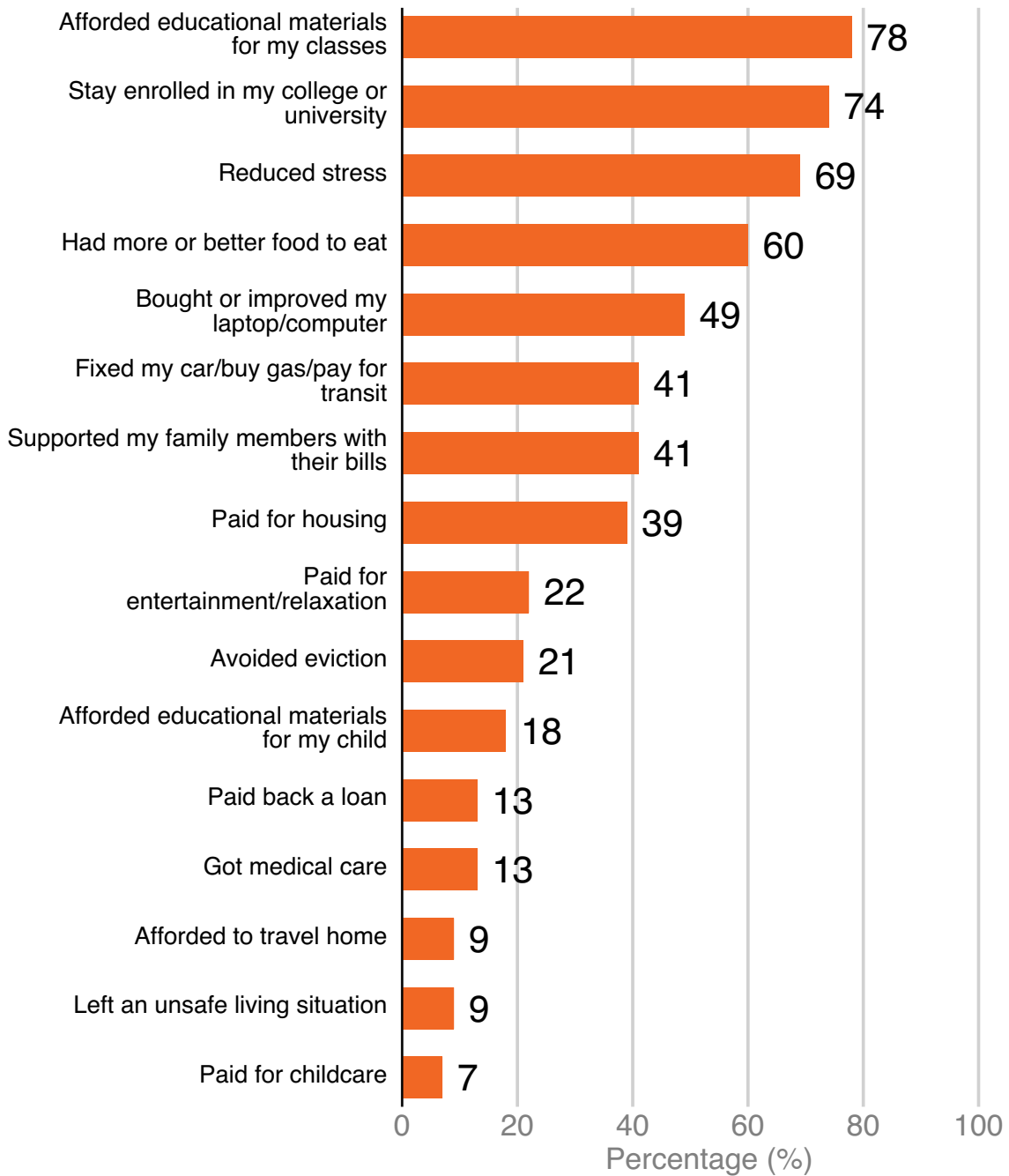
– LACCD student

39 |



For LACCD students who did receive emergency aid, the extra, flexible funds were critical. Just under eight in 10 indicated emergency aid helped them afford educational materials, and 74% used the funds to stay enrolled (Figure 18). Similarly, the funds reduced stress for 69%, helped 60% access food, and allowed nearly half to buy or improve their computer. Compared to students at two-year colleges in the rest of the country, LACCD students were six percentage points more likely to use emergency aid to buy or improve their computer, and though transportation was still needed during the pandemic, 14 percentage points less likely to use the funds on transportation (not shown; see [web appendices](#)).

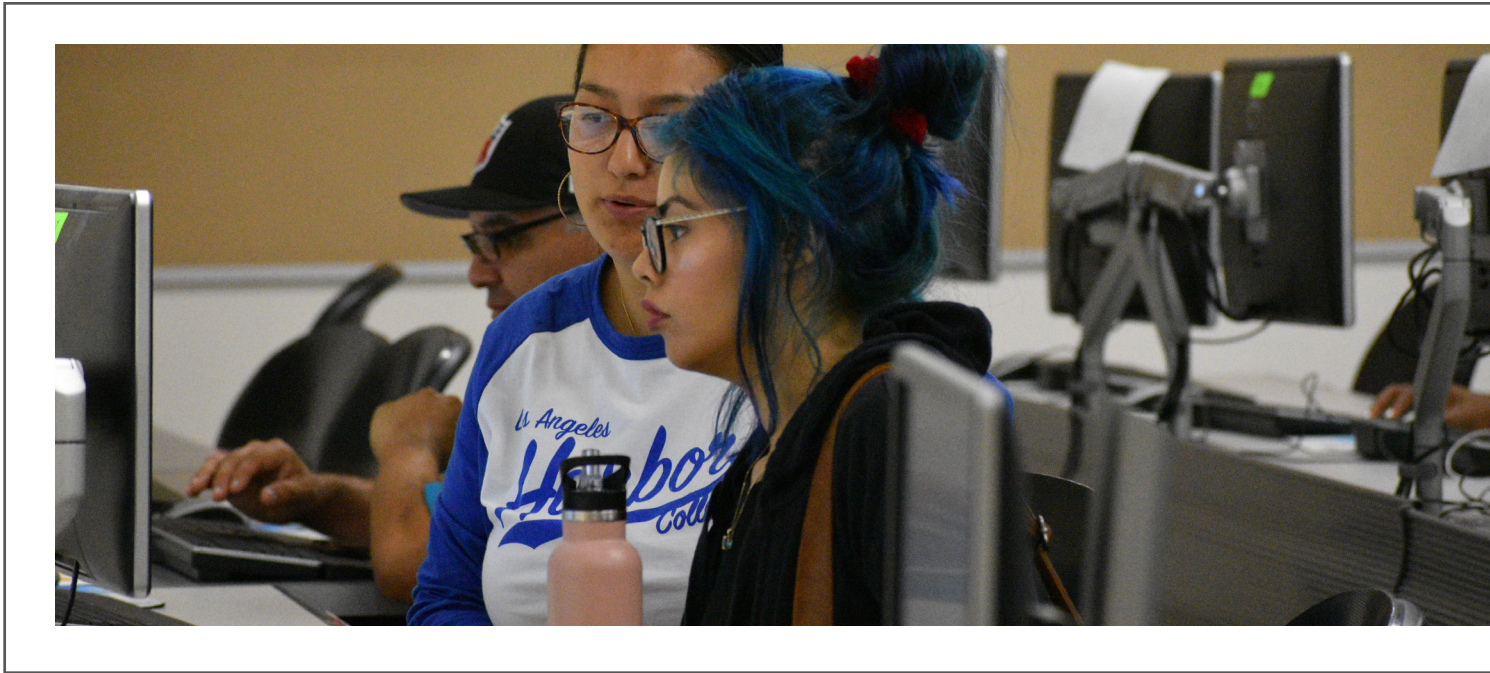
FIGURE 18 | TOP USES OF EMERGENCY AID FUNDING AMONG LACCD SURVEY RESPONDENTS



40 |

SOURCE | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

NOTES | “Any BNI” includes students who experienced food insecurity in the past 30 days, or housing insecurity or homelessness within the last year. “No BNI” includes students who did not experience food insecurity, housing insecurity, or homelessness. Students may select more than one use of emergency aid funding. Numbers at end of bars are rounded to the nearest whole number. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was created, refer to the [web appendices](#).



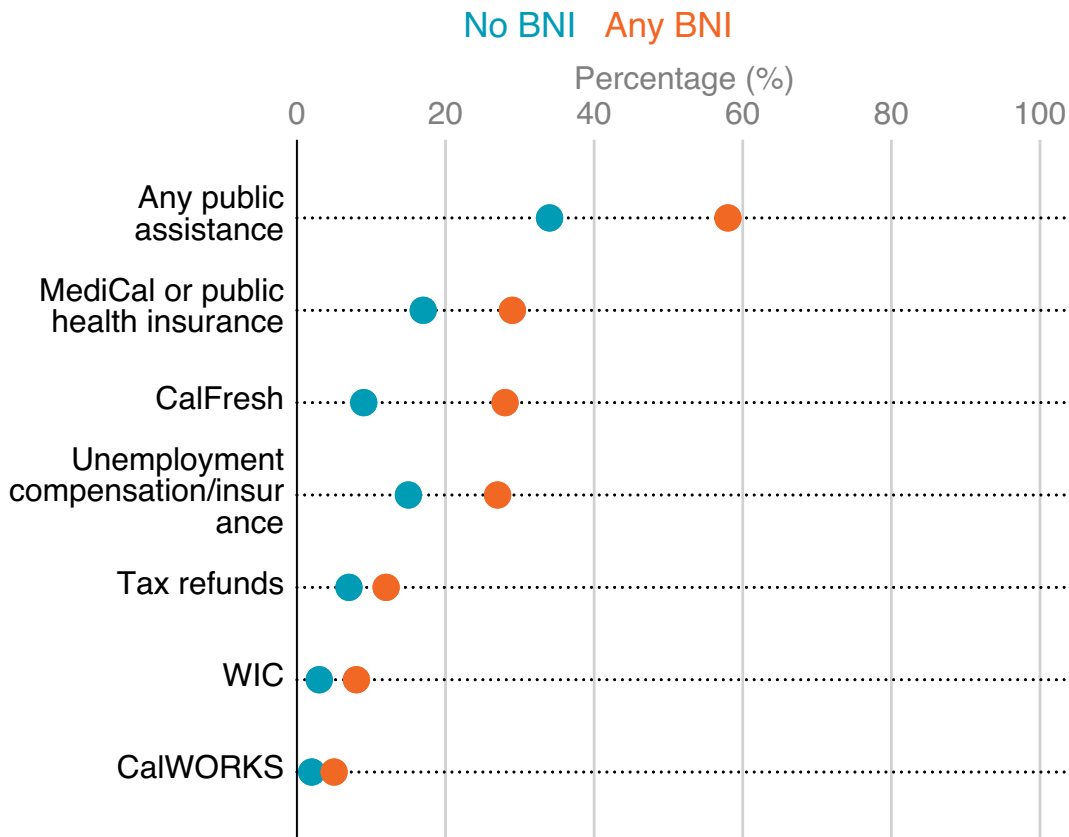
41 | PUBLIC BENEFITS

Public benefits in the United States are generally funded by the federal government, part of the “safety net” broadly intended to ensure those experiencing financial hardship can cover their basic needs. But most of these programs have strict eligibility criteria that often unfairly limit access, and many are broadly unavailable to undergraduates due to complex rules and strict work requirements.¹⁰⁹ In 2019, just under a quarter of families living in poverty received Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits, with particularly low access among Black families.¹¹⁰ In California, these rates are much better, reaching seven of every 10 California families living in poverty, but many eligible families are still not connected to available services.¹¹¹ In 2017, California also ranked 46th nationally in SNAP utilization among eligible individuals, with just 71% of the state’s eligible people using the benefit (nationally, the rate was 84%).¹¹²

Among LACCD students who were experiencing basic needs insecurity, 58% received some form of public assistance in the 12 months preceding the survey (Figure 19). The most utilized form of public assistance was Medicaid or public health insurance, followed closely by CalFresh and unemployment compensation or insurance. Fewer than a third of students utilized any single public benefit. Among LACCD students not experiencing basic needs insecurity, 34% utilized public assistance.

Utilization of supports among LACCD students were similar in 2016 and 2020. In 2016, 29% of food insecure students and 33% of homeless or housing insecure students used CalFresh. However, LACCD students facing basic needs insecurity in 2020 were six percentage points more likely than students at comparable two-year colleges to access public benefits (not shown; see [web appendices](#)).

FIGURE 19 | USE OF PUBLIC BENEFITS AMONG LACCD AND ALL OTHER TWO-YEAR COLLEGE SURVEY RESPONDENTS EXPERIENCING BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY



42 |

SOURCE | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

NOTES | MediCal is California’s Medicaid program. CalFresh is California’s version of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). WIC is the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children. CalWORKS is California’s version of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). “Any BNI” includes students who experienced food insecurity in the past 30 days, or housing insecurity or homelessness within the last year. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, along with details on specific supports included in this analysis, refer to the [web appendices](#).



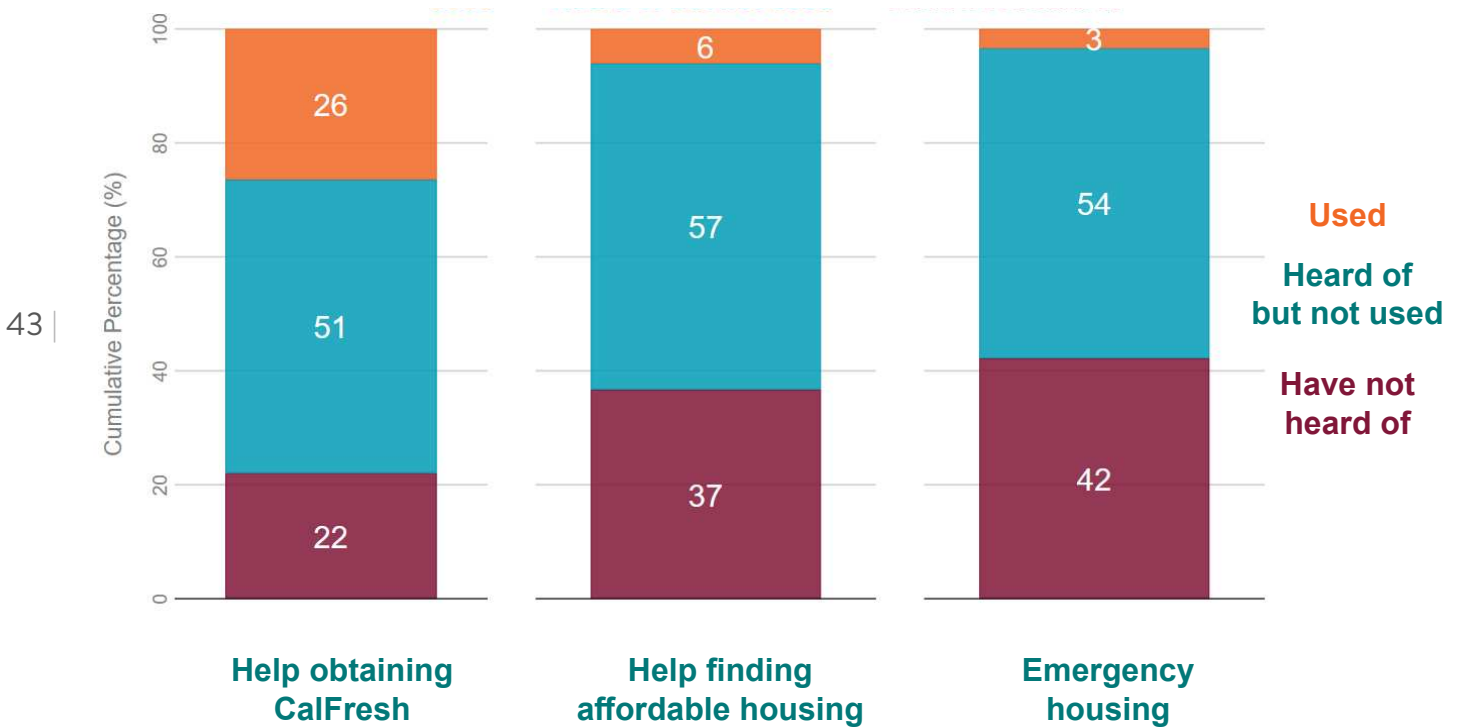
“I have received a Cal Grant, but have not received an offer from the school on how to get that money, and I need it desperately. I just want to work hard, study hard, and do as much as I can to obtain upward mobility. Please someone help me cover the cost of tuition.

– LACCD student

OTHER CAMPUS SUPPORTS

Among students experiencing basic needs insecurity, utilization of campus supports was relatively uncommon. LACCD students were most likely to receive help obtaining CalFresh benefits; 26% of students received this support (Figure 20). Just 6% of students experiencing basic needs insecurity received help finding affordable housing. Thirty-seven percent of students with need did not realize this support existed.

FIGURE 20 | USE OF CAMPUS SUPPORTS AMONG LACCD SURVEY RESPONDENTS EXPERIENCING BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY



SOURCE | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

NOTES | CalFresh is California’s version of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Rates above are among students who experienced any basic needs insecurity. Some students may have used or heard of multiple campus supports. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, refer to the [web appendices](#).

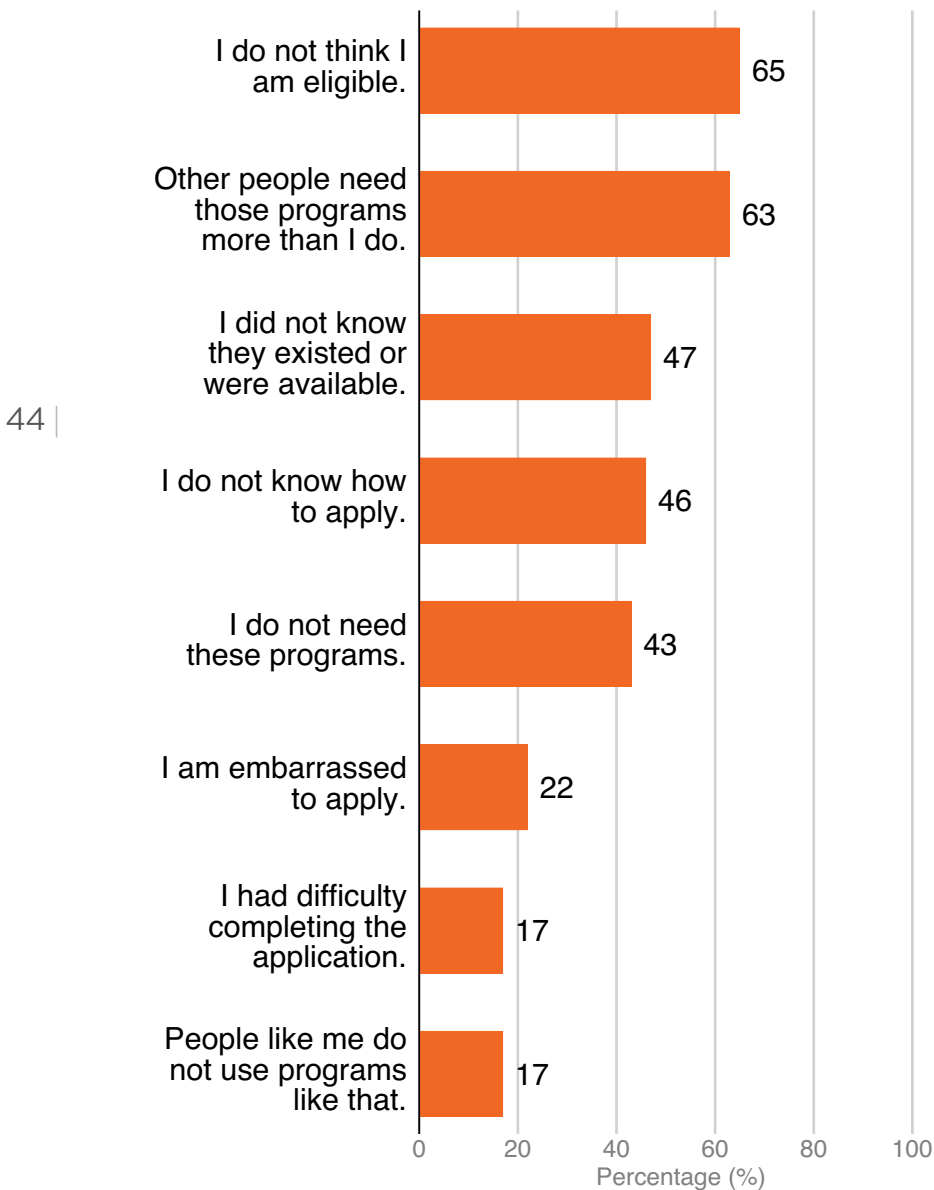


I don’t think I qualify for grants. This is why I never continued my education...I do not want to be in debt.”

– LACCD student

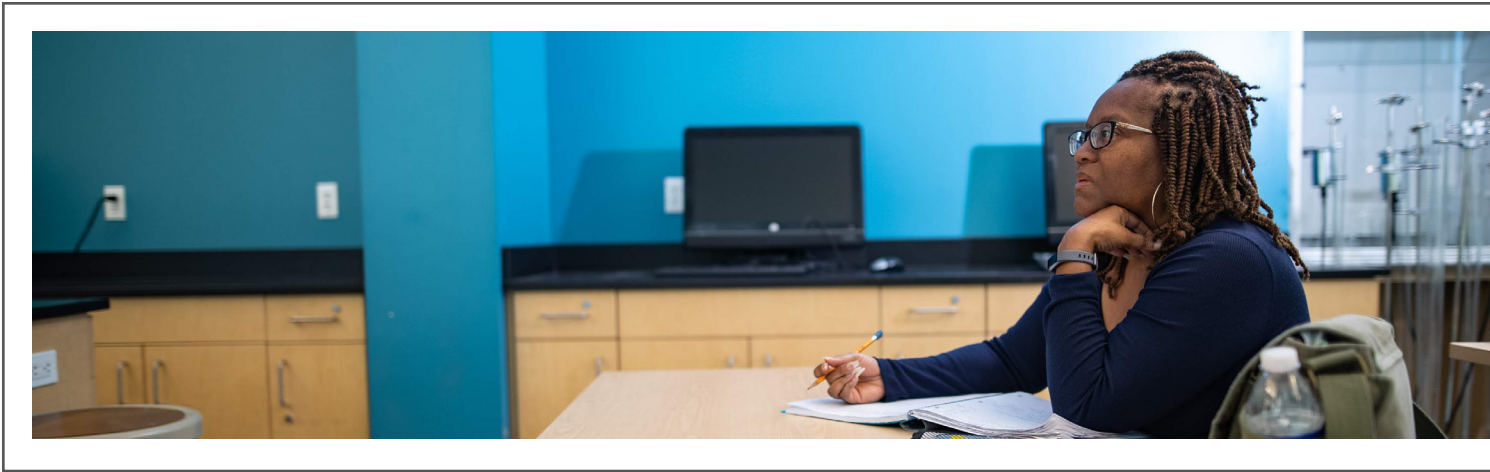
Among students who did not seek out campus supports, 65% believed they were ineligible, and 63% believed other students needed the resources more (Figure 21). Additionally, more than two in five did not know the programs existed, did not know how to apply, or did not think they needed the program. Stigma was a less common barrier, with 22% of students embarrassed to apply for help.

FIGURE 21 | REASONS WHY LACCD SURVEY RESPONDENTS EXPERIENCING BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY DID NOT USE CAMPUS SUPPORTS



SOURCE | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

NOTES | Some students may have had multiple reasons for why they did not use campus supports. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, refer to the [web appendices](#).



DISPARITIES IN USE OF SUPPORT

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Issues like administrative burden, stigma, and shame can cause inequitable access to campus and public supports.¹¹³ As such, we explore disparities in usage of supports next. These disparities could either be explained by greater need—non-White students experience greater rates of basic needs insecurity, for instance—or by greater access to campus supports. College staff should avoid assuming that their programs are sufficiently accessible simply because minoritized groups use them. Rates of access to supports are far lower than rates of need.

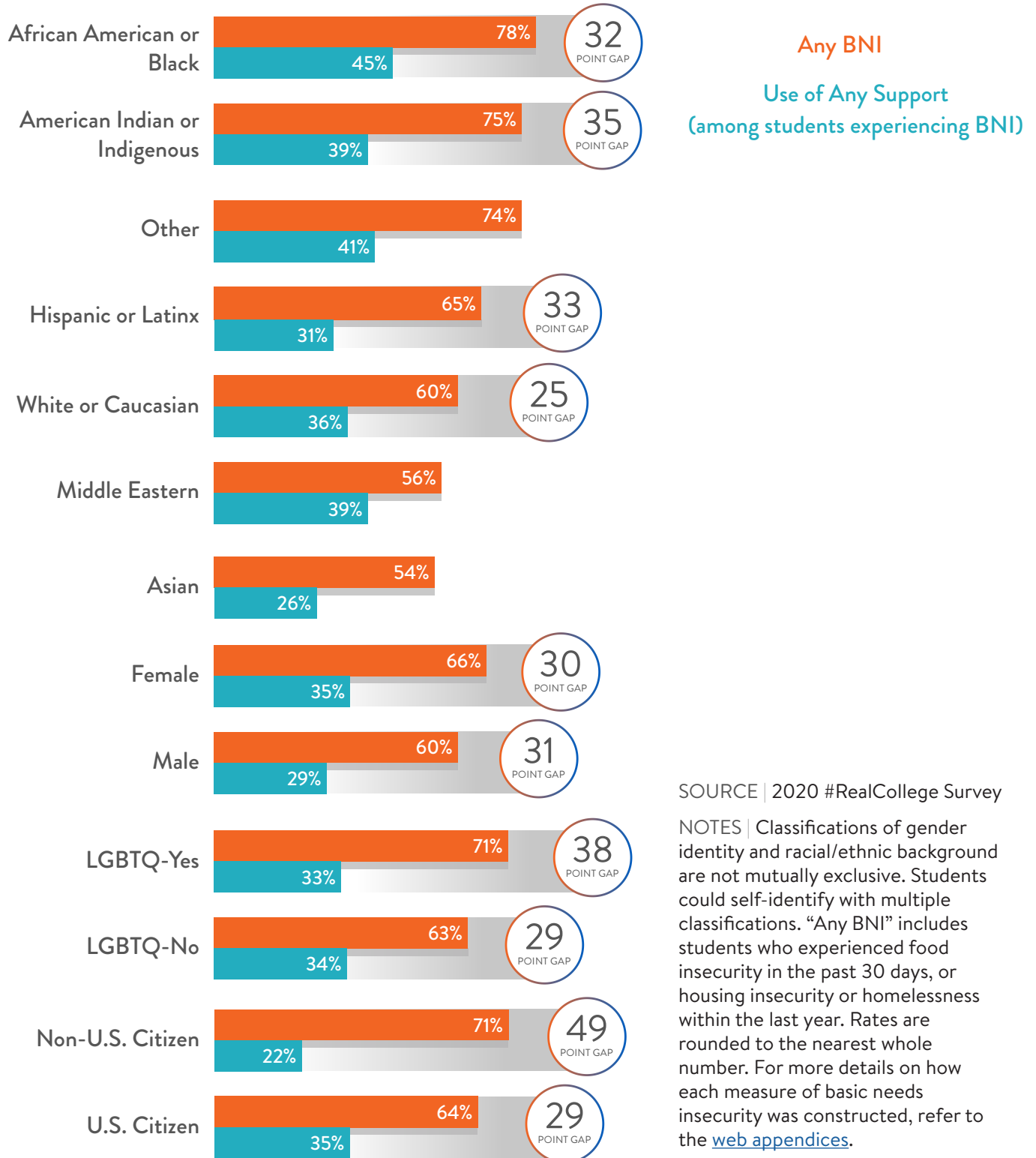
Indigenous, Latinx, Black, and Asian students attending LACCD were less likely to access campus supports than White students conditional on need. While 75% of Indigenous students experienced basic needs insecurity, only 39% of Indigenous students with need utilized campus supports, meaning the gap between need and use of supports was 35 percentage points (Figure 22). Among Latinx, Black, and Asian students, the gaps between need and use of support were 33, 32, and 29 percentage points, respectively. By comparison, the gap among LACCD’s White students was 25 percentage points.

LACCD’s LGBTQ students also had less access to supports conditional on need. The gap between their rate of need (71%) and use of support (33%) was 38 percentage points. Among non-LGBTQ students, this gap was 29 percentage points.

The largest gap between need and use of supports was among non-U.S. citizens. While 71% of non-U.S. citizens experienced basic needs insecurity, only 22% accessed campus supports, meaning the gap between need and use of supports was 49 percentage points. Among U.S. citizens, this gap was 29 percentage students.

Female and male LACCD students had similar access to campus supports conditional on need. For male students, the gap between the rate of basic needs insecurity (60%) and use of support (29%) among those experiencing basic needs insecurity was 31 percentage points. For female students, a 30-percentage point gap was observed.

FIGURE 22 | DISPARITIES IN GAPS BETWEEN BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY AND USE OF ANY CAMPUS SUPPORTS AMONG LACCD SURVEY RESPONDENTS, BY RACE/ETHNICITY, GENDER IDENTITY, LGBTQ STATUS, AND CITIZENSHIP STATUS



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SOURCE | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

NOTES | Classifications of gender identity and racial/ethnic background are not mutually exclusive. Students could self-identify with multiple classifications. “Any BNI” includes students who experienced food insecurity in the past 30 days, or housing insecurity or homelessness within the last year. Rates are rounded to the nearest whole number. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, refer to the [web appendices](#).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

LACCD is key to Los Angeles' continued prosperity. Ever more jobs in the region require at least an associate's degree.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, Angelenos pursuing higher education face significant challenges. Food and housing insecurity continue to present obstacles for LACCD students. Almost two-thirds of surveyed LACCD students experienced food insecurity, housing insecurity, and/or homelessness. In fall 2020, students faced the added challenges of a pandemic. About a third experienced depression or anxiety, nearly one in five lost a loved one to COVID-19, and among students with a part-time job, nearly half lost that job.

These data represent thousands of individual crises happening every day. When students face basic needs insecurity, they are less likely to succeed in their classes. Students who have to spend energy on finding their next meal or place to sleep are not spending time studying. They are more likely leave higher education.

LACCD has already put in place significant supports for students. Enrollment assistance for CalFresh, basic needs centers, childcare support services, and partnerships with local social service organizations all represent crucial work to support students in need. There is still more work to be done though. Included below are some strategies to consider.

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“The world needs to know that college is hard during this pandemic. These are times of uncertainty and a lot of adjustment—not only for us as students, but also for our professors and staff members in our schools. Yet, we all are fighting this battle by showing up and doing the best we can regardless of the circumstances. We refuse to lose hope that someday we will go back to what our world was like before this virus happened. We will become strong, resilient, and appreciate the little things in life that make our sacrifices in school and life worth living for. One day we will have the privilege to tell our stories to younger generations and prove to them that defying all odds, we got our higher learning with courage and will power to move forward with our lives.

– LACCD student

DISTRICT AND INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGIES:

- **Allocate additional federal funds to emergency aid:** LACCD received approximately \$306 million from the Consolidated Appropriations Act and the American Rescue Plan, about half of which must be allocated to students as emergency aid.¹¹⁵ Investing even more of these funds in emergency aid will help curb falling enrollment and retention. Parenting and part-time students could especially benefit from additional emergency aid.
- **Allocate emergency aid to students excluded from previous relief packages:** Thanks to recent guidance from the U.S. Department of Education, LACCD can now allocate federal funds to students who were excluded from previous relief packages, including students who are enrolled in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, undocumented students, international students, students who left college during the pandemic, and students who are enrolled in dual-enrollment or non-degree programs.¹¹⁶ We encourage colleges to distribute funds to these students, as a student's immigration status, degree program, and enrollment status do not reflect their need.
- **Make existing emergency aid programs more accessible:** Many students remain unaware of existing [emergency aid](#) sources. LACCD can take the most [direct steps](#) to remedy that problem by clearly advertising existing aid programs, ensuring aid application processes are free of stress and stigma, and getting funds to students fast. Funds should not just be limited to currently enrolled students; they can also help students re-enroll if they have stopped out.
- **Set the stage for sustained levels of expanded emergency aid:** Students will likely continue to have significant need even after the pandemic ends. As such, LACCD should invest in its emergency aid programs, both by building internal capacity and seeking additional financial support (federal, state, or private) for emergency aid.
- **Discuss basic needs during enrollment, orientation, registration, and other key moments of students' experiences:** LACCD should proactively let potential and current students know that it has a culture of caring and supports basic needs. They should use this culture as a selling point. Providing information about existing supports from day one will help students feel welcome, destigmatize the use of public benefits, and empower students to seek out support when and if they need it.
- **Increase student awareness of public benefit programs and campus supports:** While LACCD has already taken helpful steps to increase students' awareness of supports like CalFresh, many students remain unaware that these supports exist. LACCD colleges can continue to increase knowledge of supports by adding a statement of care on [class syllabi](#), posting about available supports on their webpages and student portals, creating a distinct basic needs webpage, and collaborating with student organizations to promote basic needs supports and a message of caring.

- **Clearly and quickly communicate changes in program eligibility:** The Consolidated Appropriations Act temporarily expanded (through the end of the pandemic) SNAP eligibility to college students with an Expected Family Contribution of \$0 and to those eligible for federal work study.¹¹⁷ LACCD can ensure students who are eligible access this support by clearly communicating the change and providing guidance on how to apply.
- **Continue gathering data on basic needs:** Monitoring students’ needs, access to supports, and use of supports helps colleges better allocate resources, fundraise, and engage policymakers. Colleges should also use data to identify and target outreach to students who may be eligible for benefits. LACCD has already taken strides by twice fielding the #RealCollege Survey at its nine colleges.
- **Streamline student supports:** LACCD can make seeking out help as stress-free as possible for students by ensuring they can access all resources—public benefits, campus supports, etc.—from a “single stop” on campus. This will require collaboration between front-line staff and college leadership. It may also require establishing external partnerships with community-based organizations, community health centers, and government agencies, all of which can provide non-academic supports that institutions struggle to provide on their own. Such programs have [shown promising results](#) at other colleges.



STATE STRATEGIES:

- **Support permanent changes to CalFresh eligibility so education and work are treated equally:** Allowing all CCC certificate and degree programs to qualify as local programs that increase employability presents a huge opportunity to increase the number of California students eligible for CalFresh.¹¹⁸
- **Coordinate federal and state benefit programs:** When education, workforce, and human service agencies come together, the economic mobility of state residents improves. Decision-makers from across these agencies should identify opportunities for alignment toward shared goals. Louisiana’s cross-agency, public and private education and workforce development [task force](#) provides a great example.
- **Support emergency aid grants:** Making small grants available to students in a time of crisis can make the difference between students staying in college or stopping out. Privately funded emergency aid grants have already demonstrated [impressive results](#) at several colleges and universities, and grants funded by the federal CARES Act provided essential support for students. The time is right to establish a reliable funding source and disbursement strategy for institutions across California.
- 50 | • **Provide clear information about benefits eligibility:** While California has expanded students’ eligibility to CalFresh, the state can do more to connect students with CalFresh and other benefit programs.¹¹⁹ Convening students or other benefit recipients to glean a better understanding of what information may be unclear or inaccessible and adjusting accordingly is an important step, as is providing institutions of higher education with clear guidance on benefit programs’ eligibility rules and application processes.
- **Build on [Hunger-Free Campus legislation](#):** Thanks to this legislation—which California passed in 2017—colleges in the state are required to help students enroll in CalFresh, and some created food pantries and meal credit sharing programs.¹²⁰ The state can build upon this work by designating a new round of funding to secure students’ basic needs.



FEDERAL STRATEGIES:

- **Treat the pursuit of a postsecondary credential as equivalent to compensated labor:** The federal government should consider postsecondary education a qualified activity for meeting any compliance, work participation, and/or core activity requirements for public benefit programs. It should remove mandates to combine work with education, meet time restrictions, and enroll in certain degree and certificate programs.
- **Expand the National School Lunch Program to higher education:** Short of a full expansion, Congress should establish a pilot program that allows community colleges to provide meals and snacks to eligible students.
- **Expand SNAP eligibility and extend the SNAP benefit increase:** The Hope Center applauds the temporary expansion in SNAP eligibility to college students and encourages the federal government to make the expansion permanent. The Enhance Access to SNAP (EATS) Act would also go a long way in expanding SNAP eligibility.¹²¹
- **Make federal emergency aid for students permanent:** Emergency aid is a critical student support and should be made permanent by expanding the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund beyond the pandemic. This includes passing the [Emergency Grant Aid for College Students Act](#), which would establish a permanent emergency grant program for students facing unanticipated expenses. The federal government should also ensure all students who are not currently eligible to receive federal financial aid are eligible to apply for and receive emergency grants.
- **Fully fund federal childcare programs to meet the needs of eligible populations:** Congress should increase investment in and access to childcare subsidies and support through the Child Care and Development Block Grant, Child Care Access Means Parents in School, Head Start, and Early Head Start programs.
- **Create affordable housing programs for students:** The federal government can take several steps to ensure students experiencing homelessness have access to housing. For instance, it can ensure full-time college students can access the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program; increase funding and eligibility for Homeless Assistance Grants; and remove student restrictions in public housing programs. Establishing relationships with colleges and universities to identify shared goals is also an important step.

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For information on national policy recommendations, read The Hope Center's [policy priorities](#). For further details on several of the recommendations above, see the [Resources section](#) of our website.

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- **Research and writing:** Christy Baker-Smith, Stephanie Brescia, Nick Carmack, Vanessa Coca, Eddy V. Conroy, Japbir Gill, Sara Goldrick-Rab, Mark Huelsman, Jennifer King, Elizabeth Looker, Sarah Magnelia, Cyndee Mays, and Paula Umaña
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About The Hope Center

The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice at Temple University is redefining what it means to be a student-ready college, with a national movement centering #RealCollege students' basic needs. Food, affordable housing, transportation, childcare, and mental health are central conditions for learning. Without those needs being met, too many students leave college in debt and/or without a degree.

To learn more about the report authors, visit hope4college.com/team/. For information about our technical assistance services, visit hope4college.com/realcollege-technical-assistance/.

For media inquiries, contact Director of Communications Deirdre Childress Hopkins, at deirdre.hopkins@temple.edu.

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⁸³ In 2016, we measured food insecurity using a six-item set of questions from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). In 2020, we used the USDA's 18-item measure. The measures are comparable and have been shown to give similar results. For 2016 results and measures, see: Goldrick-Rab, S., Richardson, J., & Hernandez, A. (2017). [Hungry and homeless in college: Results from a national study of basic needs insecurity in higher education](#). The Wisconsin HOPE Lab. For more information on comparing food insecurity measures, see: Blumberg, S. J., Bialostosky, K., Hamilton, W. L., & Briefel, R. R. (1999). [The effectiveness of a short form of the household food security scale](#). *American Journal of Public Health*, 89, 1231-1234

⁸⁴ U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, 2012.

⁸⁵ The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice, 2021.

⁸⁶ In 2016, we used fewer questions to measure housing insecurity. As such, our 2016 measures may have understated housing insecurity in LACCD. For 2016 measures, see: Goldrick-Rab, Richardson, & Hernandez, 2017. For 2016 LACCD results, see: The Wisconsin HOPE Lab, 2017.

⁸⁷ Mello, F. (2019, September 5). [Parking lots stay off-limits overnight for homeless community college students](#). *CalMatters*.

⁸⁸ Mello, 2019; Woudenberg, C. (2019, August 30). [San Jose community colleges oppose bill to provide safe parking for homeless students](#). *San Jose Spotlight*.

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⁹⁰ Baker-Smith, Coca, Goldrick-Rab, Looker, Richardson, & Williams, 2020; Goldrick-Rab, Coca, Kienzl, Welton, Dahl, & Magnelia, 2020; The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice, 2021; Martinez, Webb, Frongillo, & Ritchie, 2018.

⁹¹ The CARES Act allocated 75% on the enrollment of full-time equivalent (FTE) for Pell Grant recipients, and 25% on enrollment of FTE for non-Pell Grant recipients. For more on HEERF funding allocations, see: National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators. (2021, March). [Higher Education Emergency Relief Funds comparison chart](#).

⁹² Government support for higher education is usually allocated via a full-time equivalent (FTE) formula. This method is centered on classroom or credit hours; students are not considered “whole” unless they take 30 credit hours over the academic year. California recently moved to a “Student Centered Funding Formula” to increase equity in higher education funding. The new formula provides additional funding to colleges and districts that enroll high numbers of economically disadvantaged students. Additional funding is also provided to colleges with higher rates of retention, completion, and transfer to four-year institutions. While these are positive changes, 70% of the new funding formula is still based on FTE. For more on funding formulas in higher education, see: Welton, C.R., Goldrick-Rab, S., & Carlson, A. (2020). [Resourcing the part-time student: Rethinking the use of FTEs in higher education budgets](#). The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice. For more on California’s Student Centered Funding Formula, see: California Community Colleges. (2020). [Non-technical Student Centered Funding Formula frequently asked questions](#).

⁹³ While the Consolidated Appropriations Act also included more than \$22 billion in pandemic relief funding for higher education, it was not passed until December 2020, and therefore did not benefit students attending college in fall 2020 when the #RealCollege Survey was fielded. For more about the CARES Act, see: [Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act or the CARES Act](#), 15 U.S.C. (2020). For more about the Consolidated Appropriations Act, see: Goldrick-Rab, S., & Welton, C.R. (2021, January 4). [#RealCollege statement on the Consolidated Appropriations Act](#). The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice.

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⁹⁶ Goldrick-Rab, S., & Welton, C.R. (2020, April 6). [#RealCollege recommendations to Congress regarding the fourth COVID-19 stimulus bill](#). The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice.

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⁹⁹ Rosenberg, E., Werner, E., & Stein, J. (2020, August 13). [30 million unemployed lose extra jobless benefits, as talks between Congress and the White House are at an impasse](#). *The Washington Post*.

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