

For College, Community, and Justice

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#REALCOLLEGE 2021: BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY DURING THE ONGOING PANDEMIC

REPORT FOR SAN DIEGO COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

A Hope Center Publication
June 2021

2020 #REALCOLLEGE SURVEY RESULTS

SYSTEM REPORT FOR SAN DIEGO COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

Prepared by
The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice
at Temple University

June 2021

OVERVIEW

Invitations to complete the questionnaire were sent by email to 59,671 students from the San Diego Community College District and 10,596 students participated. Thus, the estimated response rate is 17.8%.

Students in the San Diego Community College District told us that...

- 68% experienced at least one form of basic needs insecurity, including
 - 43% who experienced food insecurity in the prior 30 days,
 - 59% who experienced housing insecurity in the previous year, and
 - 18% who experienced homelessness in the previous year.

We also learned that...

- 41% had a close friend or family member who was sick with COVID-19, while 6% were sick with COVID-19 themselves.
- 36% of students exhibited at least moderate anxiety.
- 13% of students who experienced basic needs insecurity used emergency aid, but 44% had not heard of emergency aid programs on campus.
- 55% of students experiencing basic needs insecurity did not apply for campus supports because they did not know how.
- 57% of students experiencing basic needs insecurity received some form of public assistance.

For more information on the research methodology and survey participants, please refer to the [online appendices](#) for the #RealCollege 2021: Basic Needs Insecurity During the Ongoing Pandemic report (available at www.hope4college.com).

INTRODUCTION

Fall 2020 was an extraordinary time for colleges in San Diego as the city continued to deal with the effects of the pandemic. Courses, counseling, and support services had all gone remote in the San Diego Community College District back in March, and they continued that way in the new term (SDCCDa, 2020). Across the district, enrollment declined 9.4%, leading to the cancellation of nearly 900 classes in an attempt at budget reconciliation (SDCCDb, 2020). National enrollment data for this period shows that those students who were less likely to enroll in the fall term were the ones already at the greatest risk of experiencing basic needs insecurity.

The pandemic has magnified the importance of addressing students' basic needs, and yet a survey of community college students in California found that two in five did not know emergency aid was available to them (California Community Colleges, 2020). The San Diego Community College District took several steps to support students in need, including providing free food via drive-through markets; helping with enrollment in CalFresh, the state's version of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); offering free or reduced-price internet and phone access; and connecting interested students to additional public benefits and community resources (SDCCDc, n.d.).

This report sheds a light on how students attending community colleges in San Diego fared given the extraordinary circumstances of fall 2020. As the repercussions of the pandemic continue, support for students' basic needs should remain a key piece of strategic planning.



NEW ECONOMICS OF COLLEGE DURING THE PANDEMIC

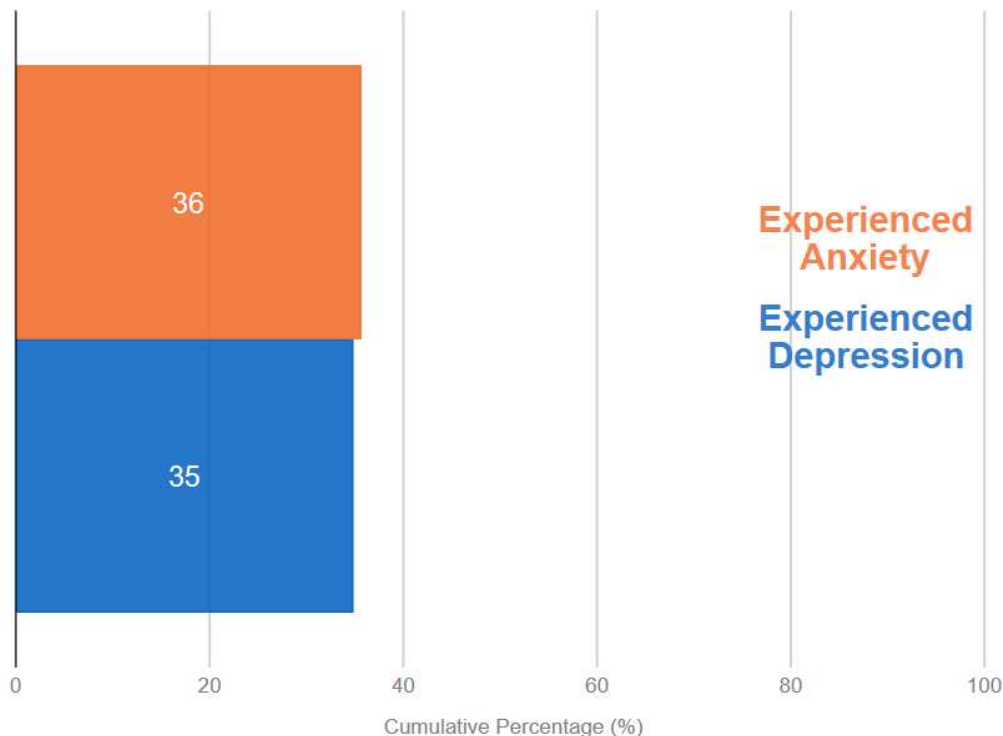
Students and families have struggled with the new economics of college for the past 20 years. Stagnant incomes, declining state support for higher education, college prices that stretch the budgets of all but the top earners, rising wealth and income inequality, and a threadbare social safety net have made a college degree less attainable.

In 2020, a pandemic-induced recession exacerbated these issues. This section explores how the pandemic affected students, looking at three areas: health, employment, and families.

HEALTH

As COVID-19 cases in the U.S. increased throughout the spring and fall of 2020, students' health suffered. Approximately 36% of students in the San Diego Community College District reported experiencing at least moderate anxiety, while 35% reported experiencing at least moderate depression.

FIGURE 1. PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITH ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION IN THE SAN DIEGO COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

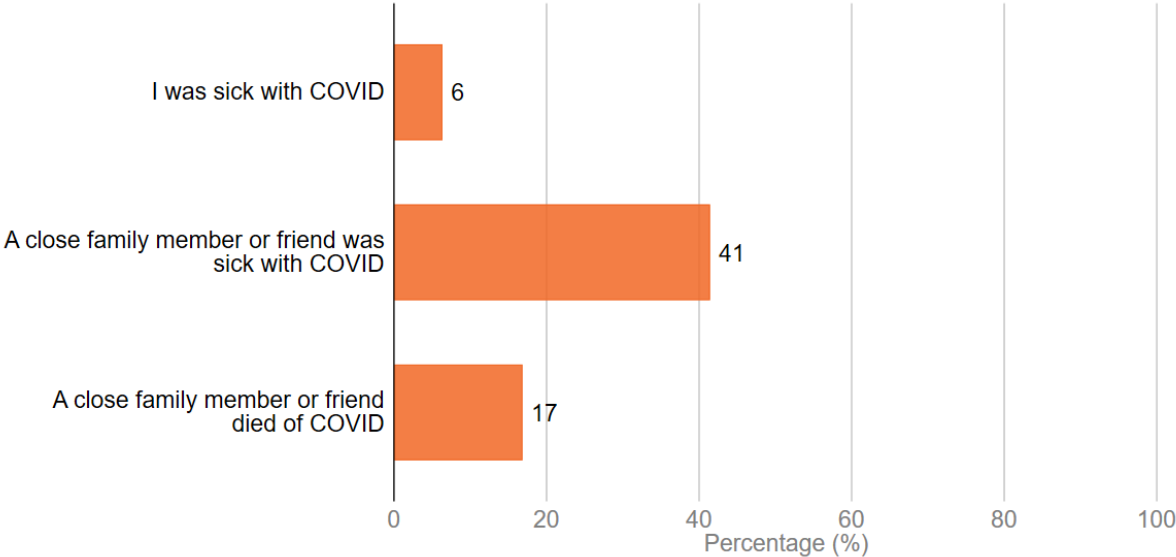


Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

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 measures of anxiety and depression used in this report refer to the [online appendices](#) for the #RealCollege 2021 report. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Personal experiences with COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus, were also common. In the San Diego Community College District, 41% of students had a close friend or family member who was sick with COVID-19, while 6% were sick with COVID-19 themselves.

FIGURE 2. PERSONAL EXPERIENCES WITH COVID-19 IN THE SAN DIEGO COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

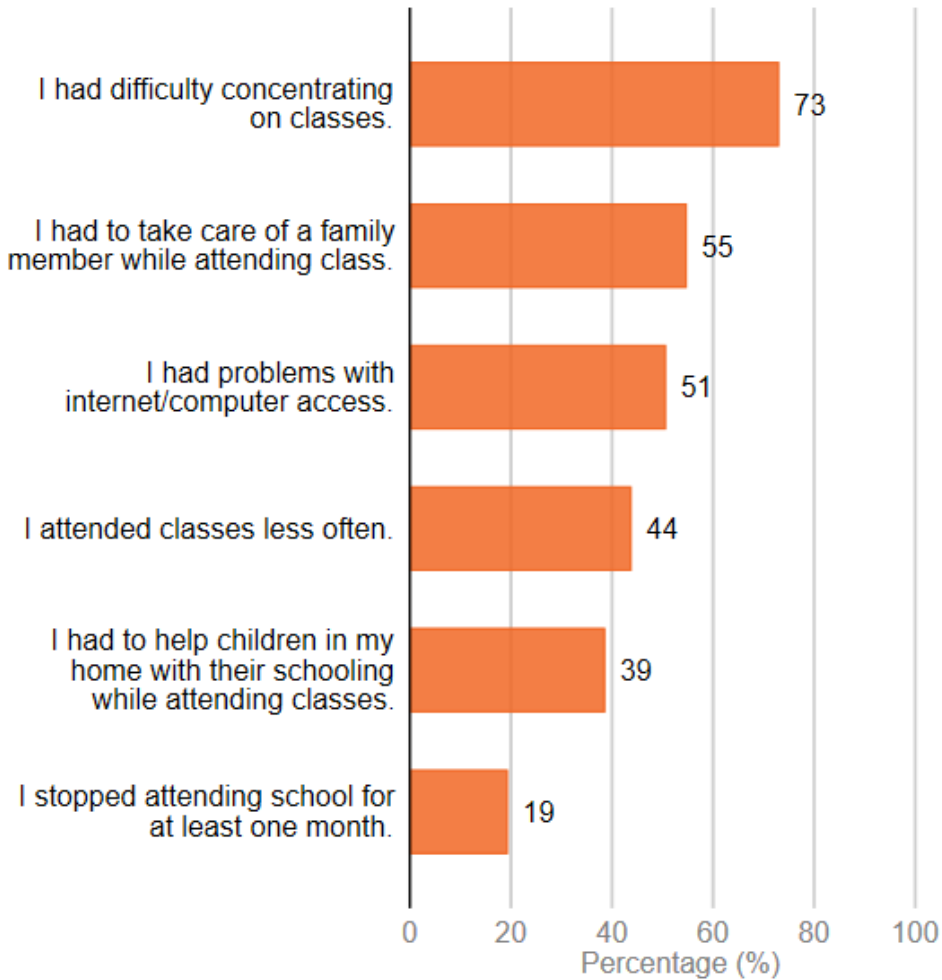


Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey
Notes: Some students may have more than one personal experience with COVID-19. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.



Students in the San Diego Community College District reported numerous challenges when asked to reflect on their experiences during the pandemic. As Figure 3 shows, 73% had difficulty concentrating in classes and 51% had problems with internet or computer access since the spring of 2020.

FIGURE 3. OTHER CHALLENGES FACED SINCE SPRING 2020 DUE TO THE PANDEMIC IN THE SAN DIEGO COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT



Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

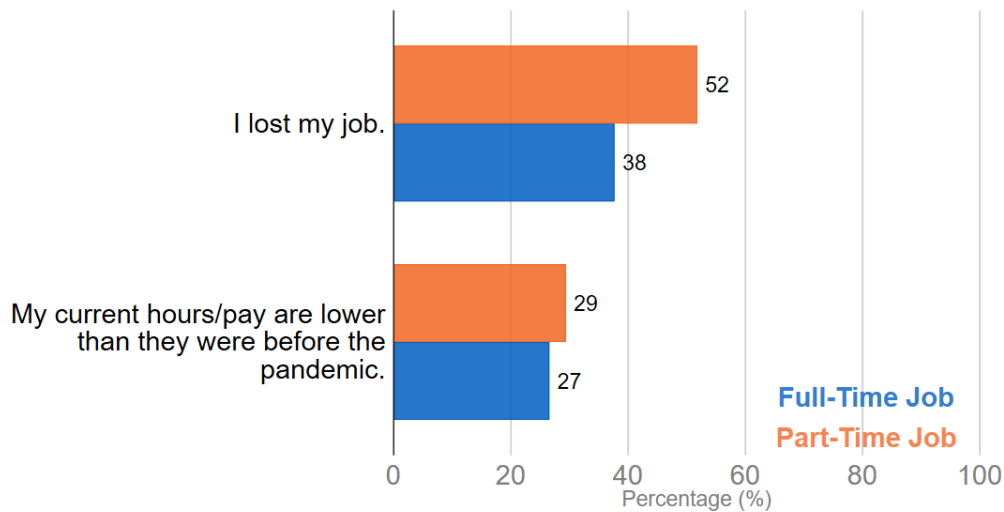
Notes: Results above are limited to students who were also enrolled in college in spring 2020. Some students may have experienced more than one of the challenges listed above. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.

EMPLOYMENT

The pandemic shuttered businesses and led to widespread furloughs, layoffs, and reductions in hours and pay. While the causes for job losses among college students are complex, campus closures, the loss of work-study opportunities, and job losses in the leisure and hospitality sector—in which younger, economically disadvantaged students are likely to work—certainly contributed.

Figure 4 shows that 52% of students with part-time jobs in the San Diego Community College District lost their jobs.

FIGURE 4. JOB LOSS OR REDUCTION IN PAY OR HOURS, BY PRE-PANDEMIC JOB STATUS IN THE SAN DIEGO COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT



Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

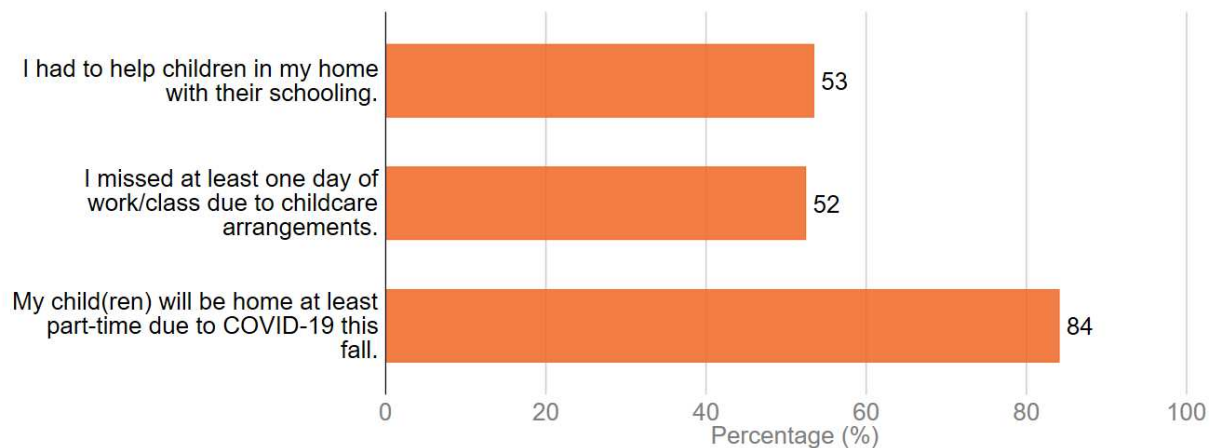
Notes: Results are among students who were also enrolled in college in spring 2020 and had at least one job before the pandemic. Those with a full-time job worked 35 hours or more a week, whereas those with a part-time job worked less than 35 hours a week. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.



FAMILIES

As the pandemic continued, schools and daycare centers closed. As a result, many parents—especially mothers—spent more time on childcare. In the San Diego Community College District, 2,348 parenting students participated in the survey. When asked about their experiences during the spring 2020 term, 53% of parenting students reported helping their children with schooling while attending classes and 52% missed work or class due to childcare arrangements. During the fall 2020 term, 84% had children home from school at least part-time (Figure 5).

FIGURE 5. CHALLENGES FACED BY PARENTING STUDENTS DUE TO THE PANDEMIC IN THE SAN DIEGO COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT



Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Results to questions about spring 2020 term are limited to 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. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.



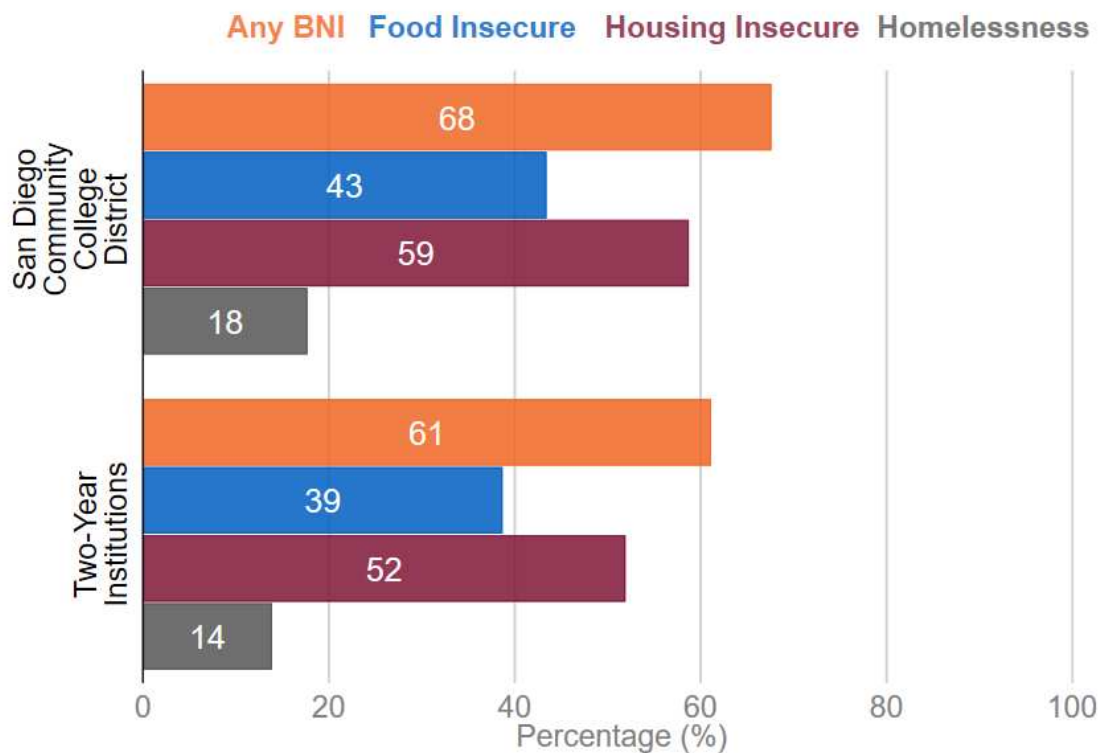
BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY DURING THE PANDEMIC

Going into the fall 2020 term, it was unclear how students' rates of basic needs insecurity (BNI) would be affected by the pandemic. Students faced a myriad of challenges, including rising unemployment and campus closures, that could increase their basic needs insecurity.

Students experiencing any basic needs insecurity includes those who experienced food insecurity, housing insecurity, or homelessness. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was created, refer to the [web appendices](#) in our #RealCollege 2021 report.

Among survey respondents in the San Diego Community College District, 68% of students experienced some form of basic needs insecurity. Students in the San Diego Community College District were more likely to experience any BNI compared to students at two-year colleges nationwide (Figure 6).

FIGURE 6. COMPARISON OF BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY RATES



Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: "Any BNI" includes students who experienced food insecurity, housing insecurity, or homelessness within the last year. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was created, refer to the [online appendices](#) for the #RealCollege 2021 report. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.

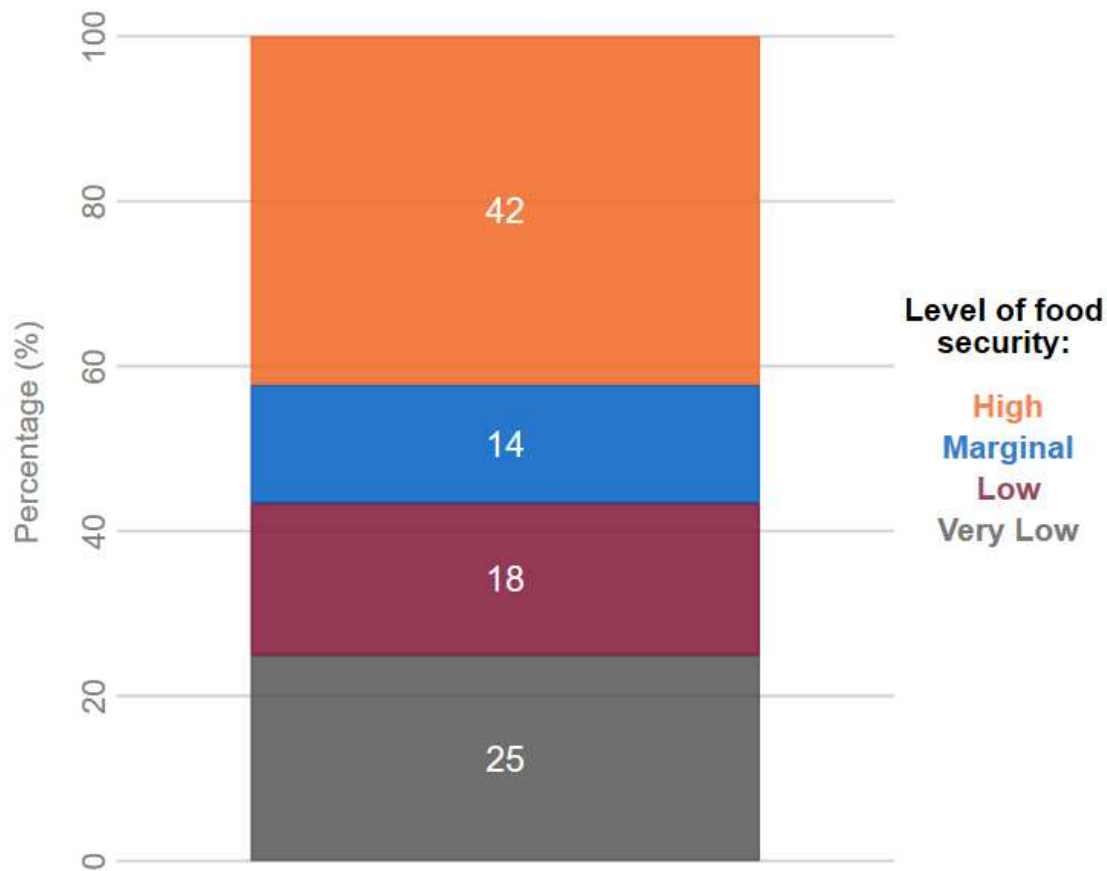
FOOD INSECURITY

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. The most extreme form is often accompanied by physiological sensations of hunger. We assessed food security among students using the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) 18-item set of questions.

During the 30 days preceding the survey, approximately 43% of survey respondents in the San Diego Community College District experienced low or very low levels of food security (Figure 7).

Moreover, 44% of survey respondents could not afford to eat balanced meals and 50% worried about running out of food before they had money to buy more (Figure 8).

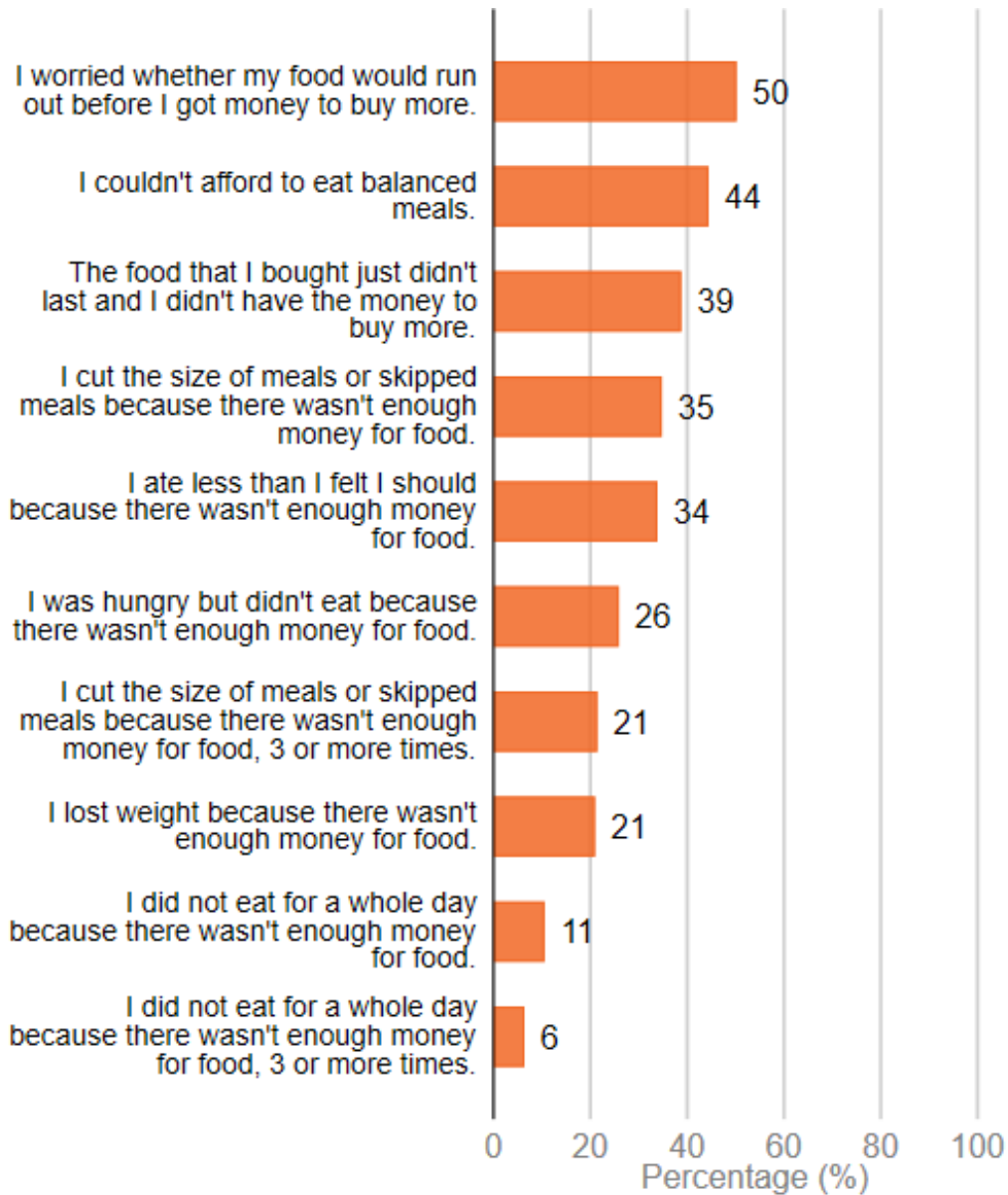
FIGURE 7. LEVEL OF FOOD SECURITY AMONG SURVEY RESPONDENTS IN THE SAN DIEGO COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT



Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: According to the USDA, students at either low or very low food security are termed "food insecure." Cumulative percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding. For more details on the food security module used in this report, refer to the [online appendices](#) for the #RealCollege 2021 report.

FIGURE 8. FOOD SECURITY QUESTIONS AMONG SURVEY RESPONDENTS IN THE SAN DIEGO COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT



Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

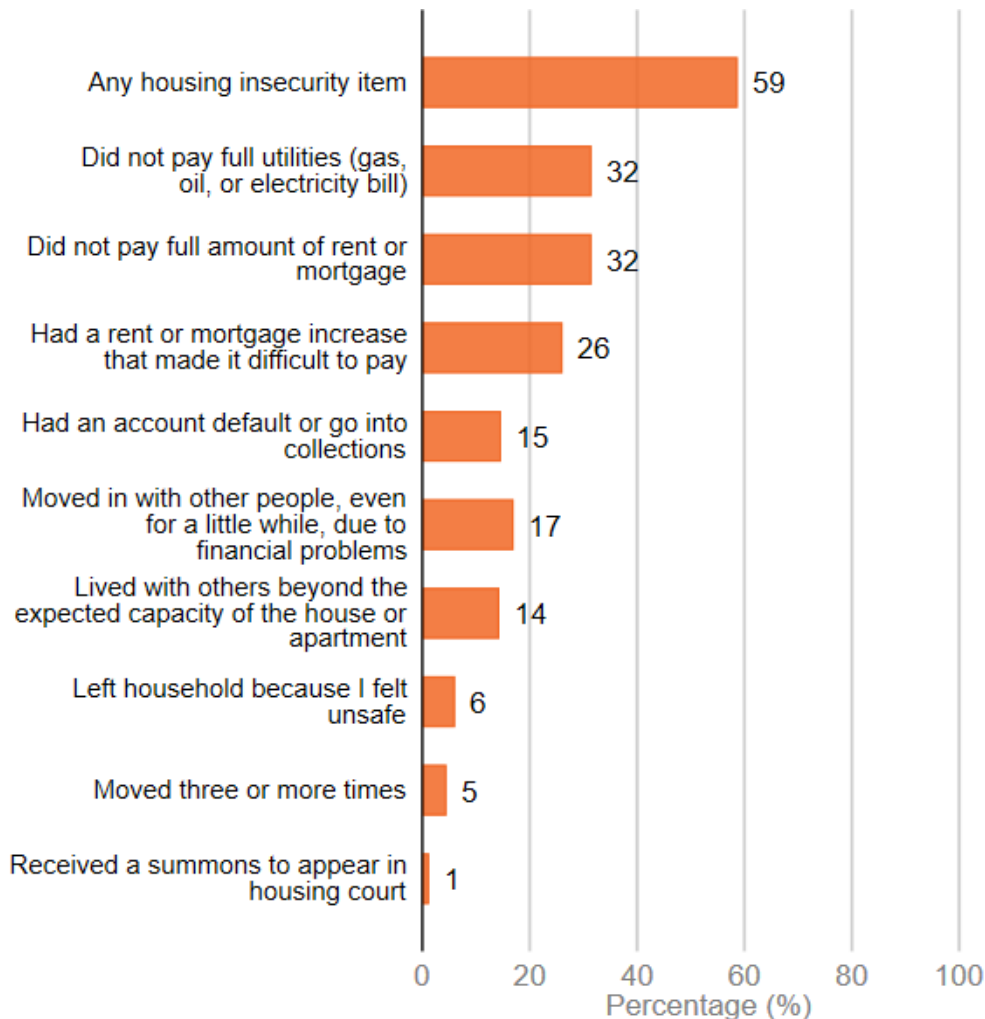
Notes: Some students may have experienced more than one of the circumstances listed above. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.

HOUSING INSECURITY

Housing insecurity encompasses a broad set of challenges that prevent someone from having a safe, affordable, and consistent place to live. 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 in the previous year.

How prevalent is housing insecurity in the San Diego Community College District? As displayed below, 59% of survey respondents experienced housing insecurity (Figure 9).

FIGURE 9. HOUSING INSECURITY AMONG SURVEY RESPONDENTS IN THE SAN DIEGO COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT



Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

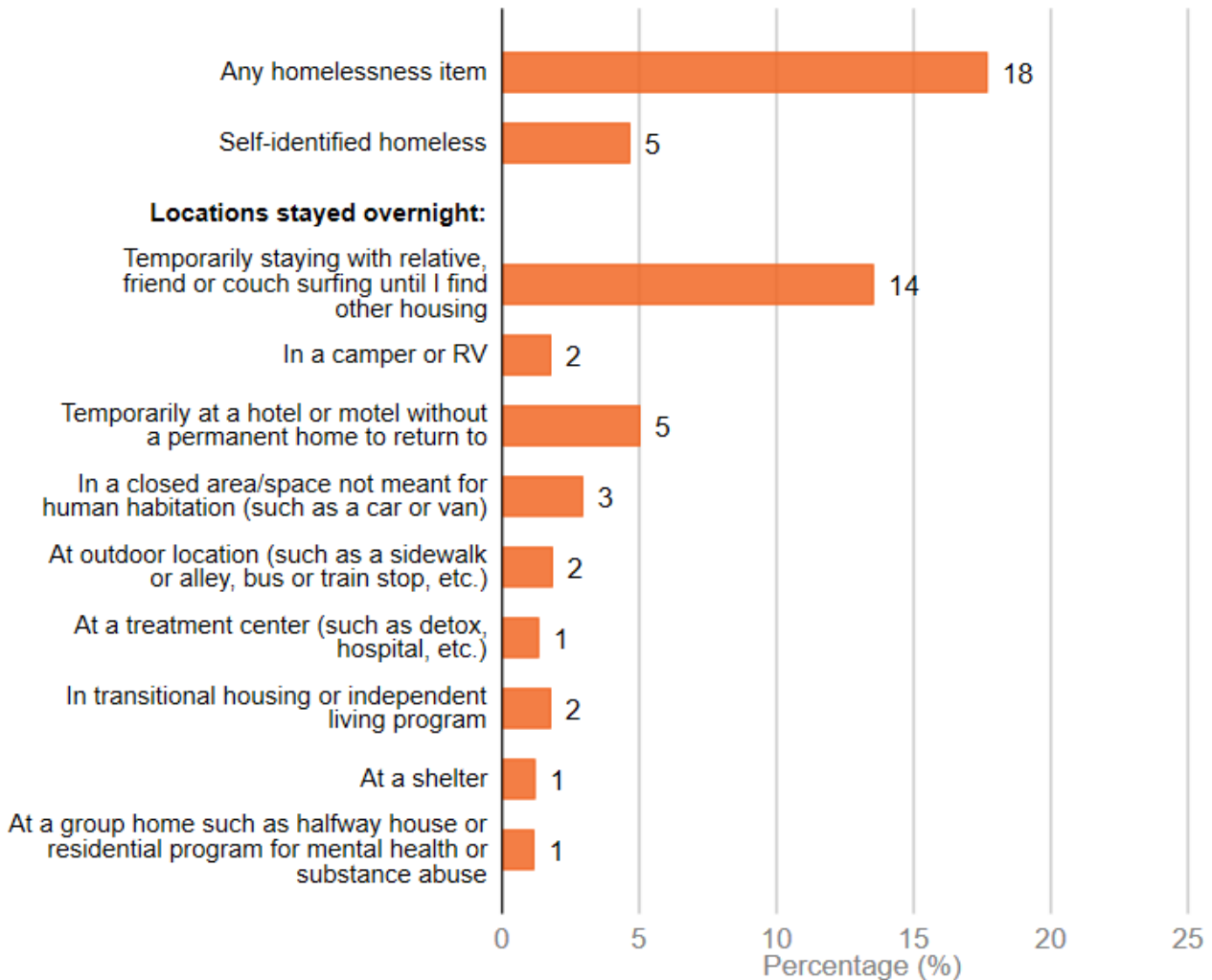
Notes: Some students may have experienced more than one of the circumstances listed above. For more details on how we measure housing insecurity, refer to the [online appendices](#) of the #RealCollege 2021 report. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.

HOMELESSNESS

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). We use this inclusive definition of homelessness because students who are experiencing homelessness and signs of homelessness face comparable challenges.

In the 12 months prior to the survey, 18% of survey respondents in the San Diego Community College District reported experiencing homelessness or the conditions of homelessness (Figure 10).

FIGURE 10. EXPERIENCES WITH HOMELESSNESS AMONG SURVEY RESPONDENTS IN THE SAN DIEGO COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT



Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

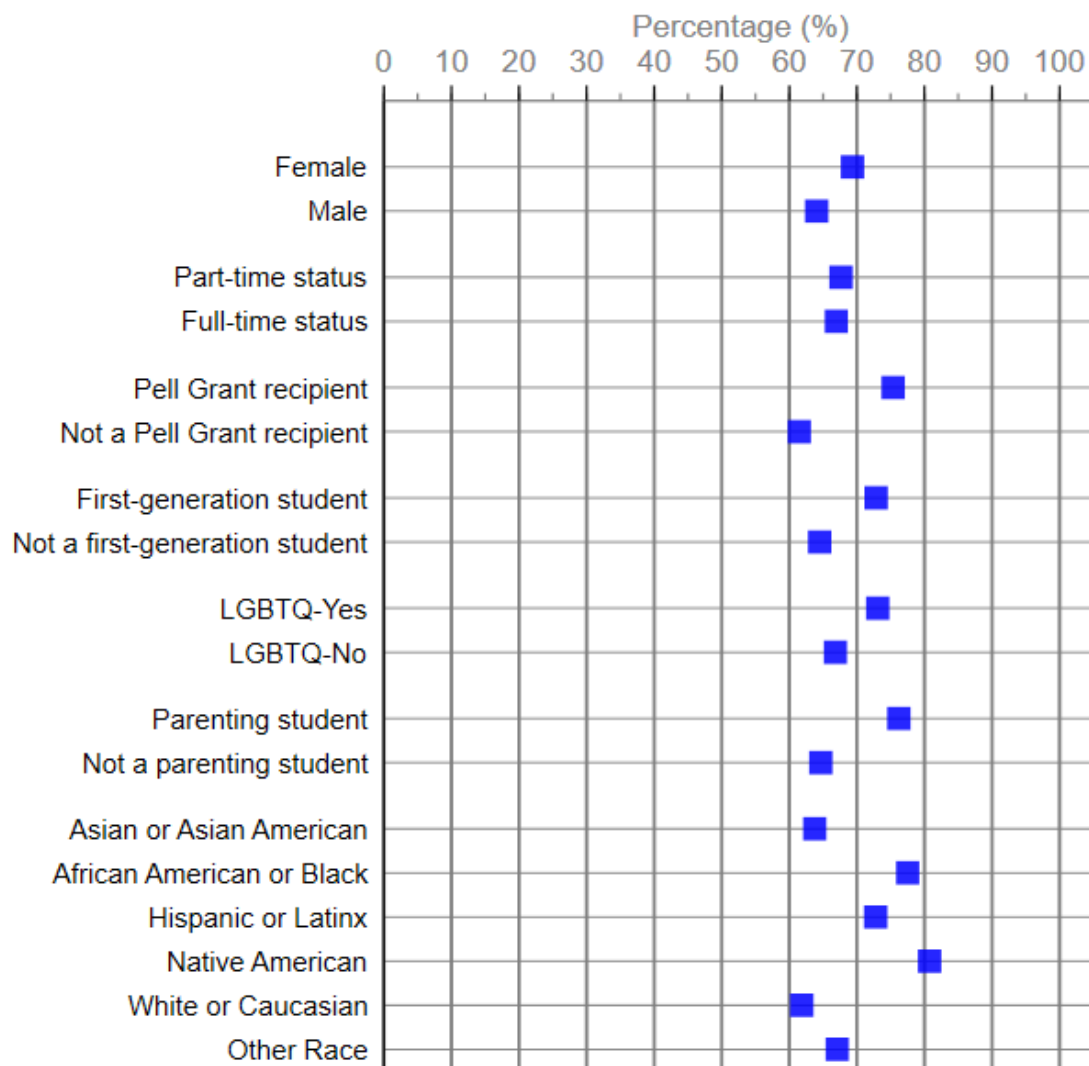
Notes: Some students may have experienced more than one of the circumstances listed above. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.

DISPARITIES IN BASIC NEEDS INSECURITIES

Some students are at higher risk of basic needs insecurity.

Figure 11 shows disparities in rates of experiencing any form of basic needs insecurity according to students' demographic, academic, and economic circumstances, as well as other life circumstances. Pell grant recipients were more likely to experience basic needs insecurity compared to non-Pell grant recipients. Parenting students were more likely to experience basic needs insecurity compared to non-parenting students. Native American and Black students were more likely to experience basic needs insecurity compared to other racial/ethnic groups.

FIGURE 11. DISPARITIES IN BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY IN THE SAN DIEGO COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT



Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Classifications of gender identity and racial/ethnic background are not mutually exclusive. Students could self-identify with multiple classifications. First-generation students are defined as students whose parents' highest level of education completed is a high school diploma or GED. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.

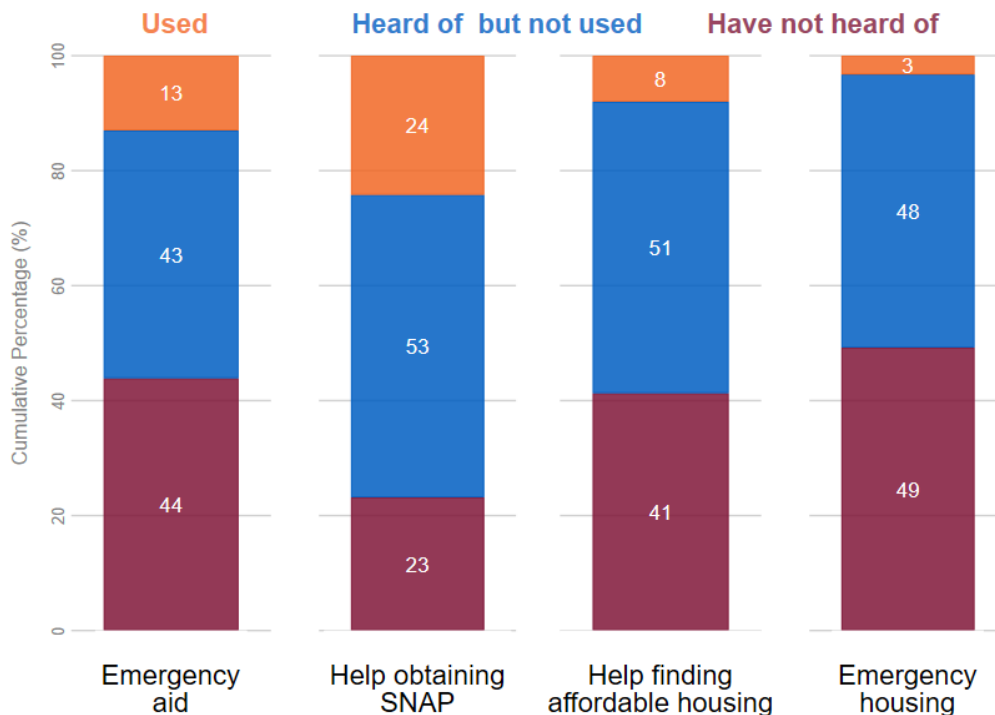
UTILIZATION OF SUPPORTS

In late March 2020, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act became law. The bill offered students and colleges financial relief, particularly in the form of emergency aid. Nevertheless, students who were claimed as dependents were ineligible for CARES stimulus checks, even if they earned income and filed a tax return. In addition, there was considerable confusion over CARES Act eligibility requirements, and in April and May 2020, few students reported accessing available CARES supports. This section examines supports available to students and the utilization of these supports in the fall 2020 term.

CAMPUS SUPPORTS

Among students experiencing basic needs insecurity in the San Diego Community College District, utilization of campus supports was generally uncommon. Only 13% of students experiencing basic needs insecurity used emergency financial aid and 24% received help in obtaining SNAP benefits (Figure 12).

FIGURE 12. USE OF CAMPUS SUPPORTS AMONG STUDENTS WHO EXPERIENCED BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY IN THE SAN DIEGO COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

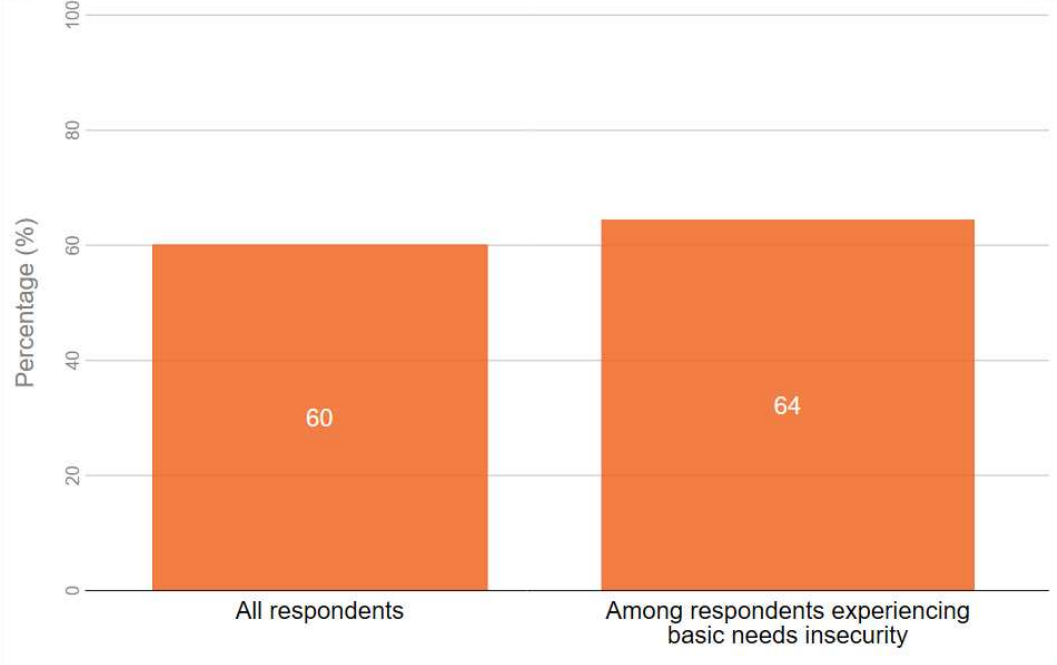


Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Some students may have used or heard of multiple campus supports. Cumulative percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Seeking emergency aid, however, was stressful for some students. Among those who applied for emergency aid, including CARES Act grants, 64% indicated that their experience was stressful (Figure 13).

FIGURE 13. STRESS WHEN SEEKING EMERGENCY AID, BY BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY STATUS IN THE SAN DIEGO COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT



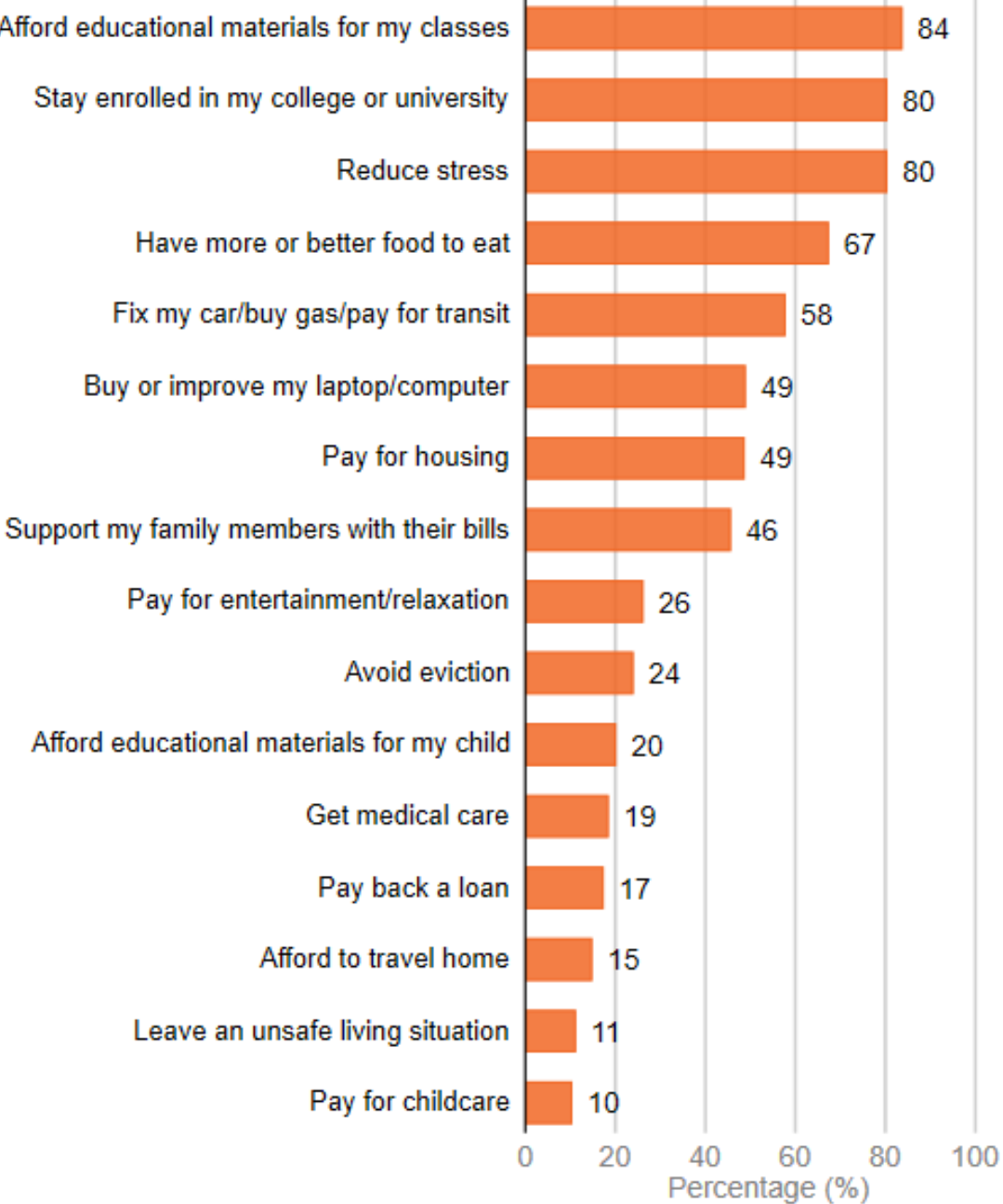
Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Rates above are among students who applied for CARES or non-CARES emergency aid funding this year. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.



For students who did receive emergency aid, the extra, flexible funds were critical. Many students in the San Diego Community College District used funds to stay enrolled, afford educational materials, and reduce stress (Figure 14).

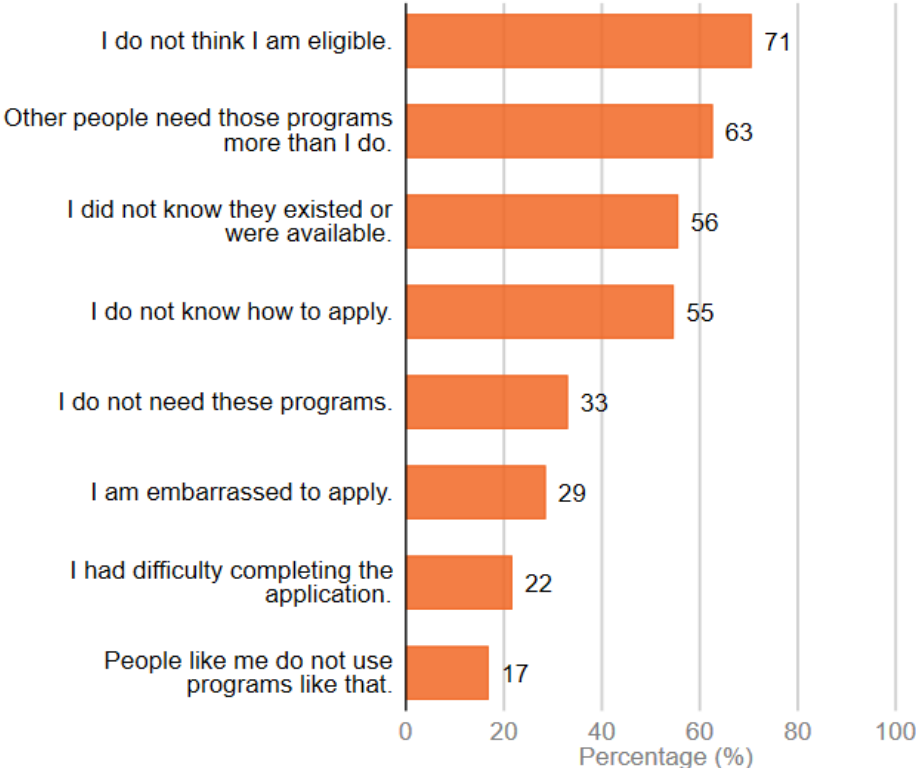
FIGURE 14. TOP USES OF EMERGENCY AID FUNDING IN THE SAN DIEGO COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT



Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey
 Notes: Rates above are among students who received CARES or non-CARES emergency aid funding. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Among those students who did not seek out campus supports, 55% did not know how to apply and 63% thought other students needed the resources more (Figure 15).

FIGURE 15. REASONS WHY STUDENTS EXPERIENCING BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY DID NOT USE CAMPUS SUPPORTS IN THE SAN DIEGO COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

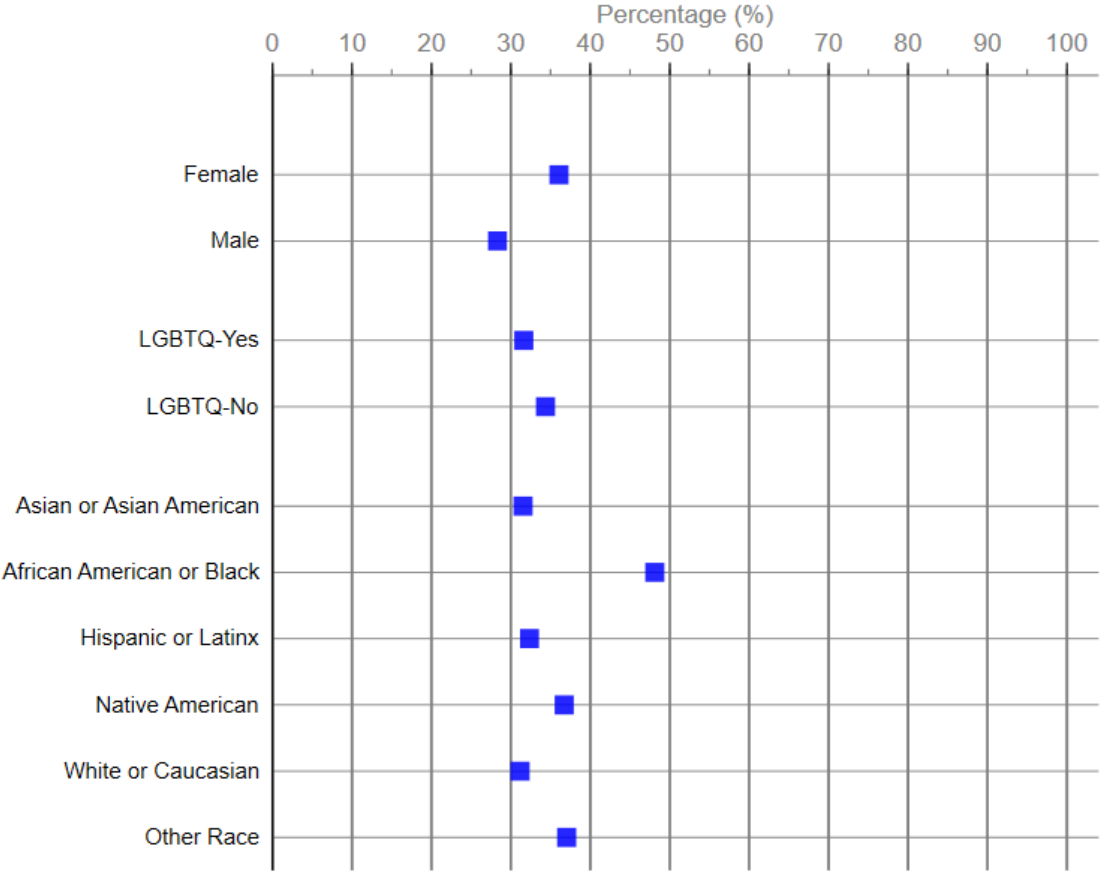


Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Some students may have reported multiple reasons for why they did not use campus supports. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Issues like administrative burden, stigma, and shame can cause inequitable access to campus supports. Figure 16 shows gaps in the use of campus supports. Female and Black students were more likely to use campus supports compared to their peers.

FIGURE 16. GAPS IN THE USE OF CAMPUS SUPPORTS AMONG STUDENTS IN THE SAN DIEGO COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT WHO EXPERIENCED ANY BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY



Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

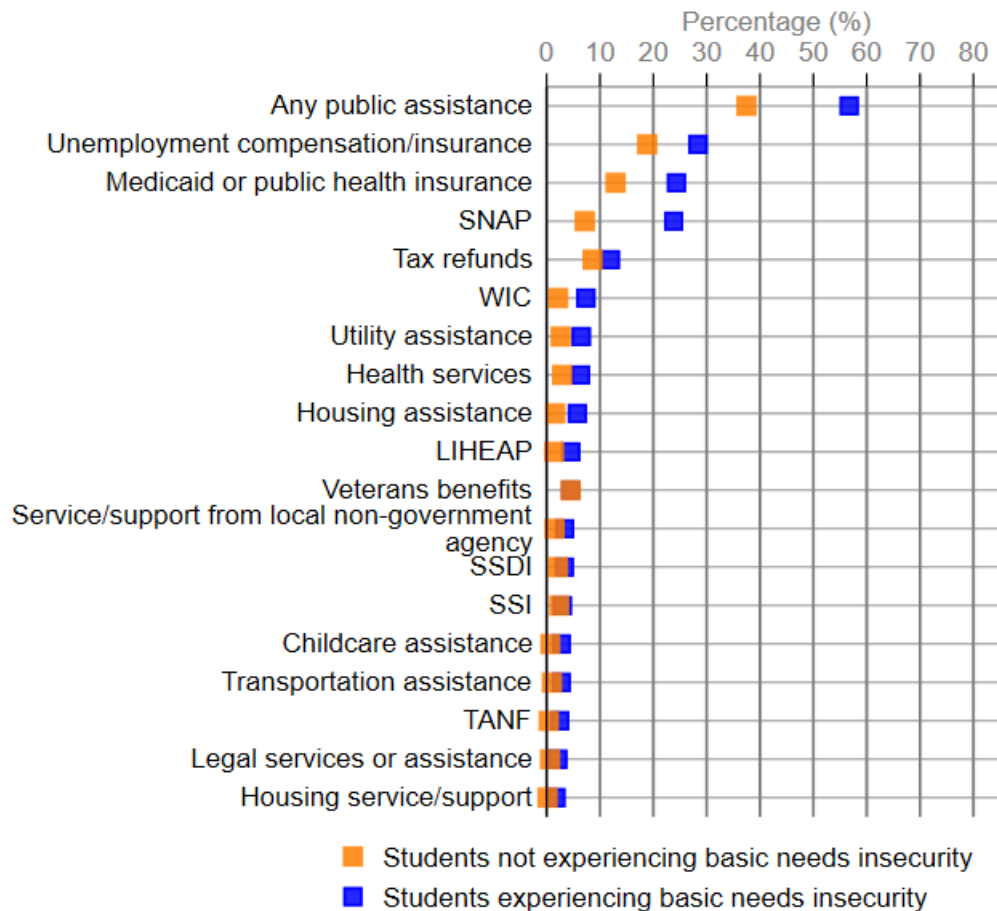
Notes: Classifications of gender identity and racial/ethnic background are not mutually exclusive. Students could self-identify with multiple classifications. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.

PUBLIC BENEFITS

Broadly, public benefits ensure people experiencing financial hardship can cover their basic needs—they are a government-provided “safety net.” For example, the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program provides a minimal amount of cash assistance to families with the lowest incomes. Similarly, the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) is meant for workers with the lowest incomes. To qualify for SNAP, students must meet income and asset criteria.

Among 2020 #RealCollege Survey respondents who were experiencing basic needs insecurity, 57% received some form of public assistance in the 12 months preceding the survey (Figure 17).

FIGURE 17. USE OF PUBLIC BENEFITS, BY BASIC NEEDS SECURITY STATUS AT THE SAN DIEGO COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT



Source: 2020 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: SNAP = Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, WIC = nutritional assistance for pregnant women and children, TANF = Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, SSI = supplemental security income, SSDI = social security disability income, and LIHEAP = Low Income Housing Energy Assistance Program. Health services include income-based health services. Housing assistance includes services such as housing choice vouchers, subsidized site-based housing, public- or nonprofit owned housing, income-based housing or rent, and rental or homeowners assistance. Veterans benefits include Veterans Affairs benefits for a service member's, widow's, or survivor's pension; service disability; or the GI Bill. Numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

While vaccines offer hope for fall 2021, the impact of the pandemic will reverberate for years. Providing students the supports they need—including for their basic needs—is the best way to ensure they can complete degrees and certificates. Colleges can directly support students in a number of ways, including:

- Creating new, expanding, and enhancing existing emergency aid programs.
- Normalizing the conversation about basic needs by discussing it at various points during the advising and counseling process, as well as during enrollment and in the classroom. By providing students with information about existing supports from day one and on an ongoing bases, they will feel more empowered to seek support when and if they need it.
- Lifting benefits access beyond CalFresh (CalWORKS, WIC, Medi-Cal, unemployment, utility assistance programs, childcare subsidies, etc.) and providing assistance with the application process so students can focus on learning while they get the assistance they need.
- Increase student supports utilization by increasing student awareness. This can be done by engaging and educating faculty, staff, administrators, and student leaders to disseminate the information.
- Centralizing student support services through the implementation of a one-stop center. This simplifies how students access the assistance available and makes referrals easier and more effective, allowing faculty and staff to focus on doing their job.
- Activating student involvement through the implementation of benefit navigators/advocates, or peer-to-peer programs.
- Providing professional development and engaging the basic needs task force in a community of practitioners through the #RealCollegeCalifornia coalition.

REFERENCES

California Community Colleges. (2020). [*Statewide COVID-19 impact surveys of students and employees: Spring 2020 results.*](#)

SDCCDa. (2020, March 17). [*District closes campuses and begins remote operations starting March 23.*](#)

SDCCDb. (2020, October 30). [*Struggling through the pandem *g*.*](#)

SDCCDc. (n.d.). [*Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) information for the SDCCD*](#)

ABOUT US

The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice is redefining what it means to be a student-ready college with a national movement centering #RealCollege students' basic needs. In order to advance the necessary systemic changes to support those needs, our work includes four pillars: action research, engagement and communication, advocacy, and sustainability. For more information, visit www.hope4college.com.

APPENDIX

TABLE A. CHARACTERISTICS OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS IN THE SAN DIEGO COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

		NUMBER OF STUDENTS	PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS
GENDER IDENTITY	Male	2,524	30
	Female	5,846	69
	Valid Responses	8,494	100
SEXUAL ORIENTATION	Is LGBTQ	1,473	17
	Is not LGBTQ	7,142	83
	Valid Responses	8,615	100
RACE & ETHNICITY	Asian or Asian American	1,860	22
	African American or Black	865	10
	Hispanic or Latinx	3,595	43
	Native American	317	4
	White or Caucasian	2,784	33
	Other	623	7
	Valid Responses	8,457	100
AGE	18 to 20	2,205	26
	21 to 25	1,897	23
	26 and older	4,233	51
	Valid Responses	8,358	100
ENROLLMENT STATUS	Full-time	3,681	39
	Part-time	5,830	61
	Valid Responses	9,511	100
YEARS IN COLLEGE	Less than 1	2,257	22
	1 to 2	3,421	33
	3 or more	4,594	45
	Valid Responses	10,272	100
RECEIVES PELL GRANT	Yes	4,143	43
	No	5,433	57
	Valid Responses	9,576	100

Notes: Classifications of gender identity and racial/ethnic background are not mutually exclusive. Students could self-identify with multiple classifications.

PARTICIPATING COLLEGES

San Diego City College

San Diego College of Continuing Education

San Diego Mesa College

San Diego Miramar College