



MISSION CRITICAL

The Role of
Community Colleges
in Meeting Students'
Basic Needs



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NATIONAL
REPORT

Next Steps

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

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

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

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



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

— Student

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

Presidents and senior leaders can:

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



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

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

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

— Student

Faculty members can:

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

Trustees can:

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



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