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Report Finds Many Community College Students Lack Basic Needs

AUSTIN, TX –

A new report released by CCCSE, *Mission Critical: The Role of Community Colleges in Meeting Students' Basic Needs*, explores housing and food insecurity among community college students and highlights the struggle many students experience.

- When asked about the last 30 days, nearly a third of all respondents reported running out of food and not having money to get more. Minority students were even more likely to report this, with 46 percent of Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 43 percent of Black or African American, and 41 percent of American Indian or Alaska Native students saying they had run out of food without money to get more.
- Over a quarter of all community college respondents have low or very low food security, while 43 percent of Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, 39 percent of Black or African American, 37 percent of American Indian or Alaska Native, and 34 percent of Hispanic or Latino students fall into these categories.

- Of the nearly two-thirds of students who have a rent or mortgage payment, more than a quarter reported not always being able to pay it in full. Of the 66 percent who have utility bills, 28 percent reported not always being able to pay them in full.
- One in four students with dependent children reported cutting the size of their meals or skipping meals over the last 30 days because there wasn't enough money for food.
- Nearly a quarter of students with dependent children have low or very low housing security, compared to 10 percent of students without dependent children.

“What’s clear from our report is that some community college students are in a perilous position that may affect their ability to stay enrolled in college and complete their goals,” said Linda García, CCCSE’s Executive Director.

Colleges have a critical role in helping students meet their basic needs—and many are doing so through direct assistance to their students, creating partnerships with external organizations, and/or connecting students with local resources. Not all students’ needs are being met, however. Sixteen percent of survey respondents indicated that they needed food assistance from their college in the last 30 days, but only 44 percent of them reported receiving it. “Many colleges are doing fabulous work in supporting their students,” said García, “but more must be done to identify the students who require assistance, destigmatize the needs they have, and connect them to the services that can bolster them.”

The students who are the least food and housing secure scored the highest on CCCSE’s engagement indicators—potentially because they are the students most determined to stay in college and make a better life for themselves. “Each student has their own reasons and their own strategies for persisting” said García. “But for all of them, it is worth asking one question: How much more successful might they be if their basic needs were met?”

The data presented in this report are based on a survey administered in spring 2021 to 82,424 community college students from 194 institutions across the United States.

CCCSE is a service and research initiative in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy in the College of Education at The University of Texas at Austin.