



The Continued Impact of COVID-19 on Community College Students

Acknowledgments

CCCSE gratefully acknowledges the Trellis Foundation for funding this study exploring the continued impact of COVID-19 on community college students.

CCCSE is grateful for all community colleges across the nation working daily to help their students find success, even during the most challenging of times.

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. By delivering “aha” moments about the student experience based on insights that matter, CCCSE assists institutions and policymakers in using information to promote improvements in student learning, persistence, and attainment.

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To understand the prolonged impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on community college students, CCCSE added a special-focus module to the 2021 administration of the Community College Survey of Student Engagement. In March 2021, CCCSE released a report highlighting the impact of the pandemic on entering students at community colleges during fall 2020. The more recently collected data reveal that many students are still struggling as a result of COVID-19, and as with the data collected last fall, some groups of students continue to be more impacted than others.

Respondents

The COVID-19 Impact five-item special-focus module was administered in spring 2021 to 120,833 students across 273 colleges. Twenty colleges administered the survey in person, and 253 colleges administered the survey online.



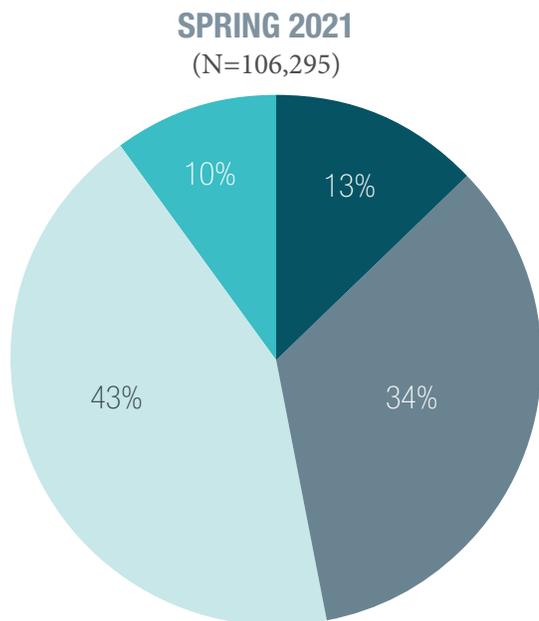


The Continued Financial Impact of COVID-19 on Community College Students

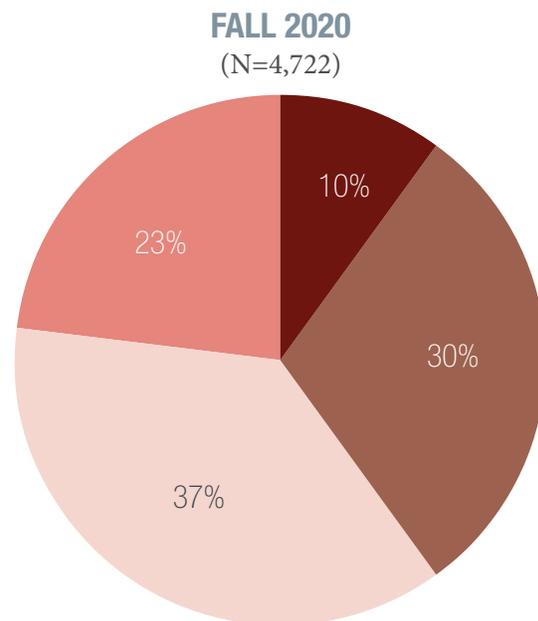
Over one-third (34%) of spring 2021 respondents described their personal financial situation as worse than it was before the pandemic. Similarly, 30% (n=1,433) of fall 2020 respondents said this. However, a much larger percentage of fall 2020 respondents indicated not being sure of how to describe their financial situation than did spring 2021 respondents—possibly demonstrating that when students were surveyed last fall, it was still too early for them to know what impact the pandemic would have on their finances.

Full-time students were more likely than part-time students to describe their financial situation as worse than before the pandemic (37% [n= 24,538] vs. 32% [n=12,779]), and nontraditional-age students (25+) were more likely than traditional-age students to report their situation as worse (36% [n=18,942] vs. 31% [n=16,803]).

How would you describe your current personal financial situation?



Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.
Source: 2021 Community College Survey of Student Engagement data



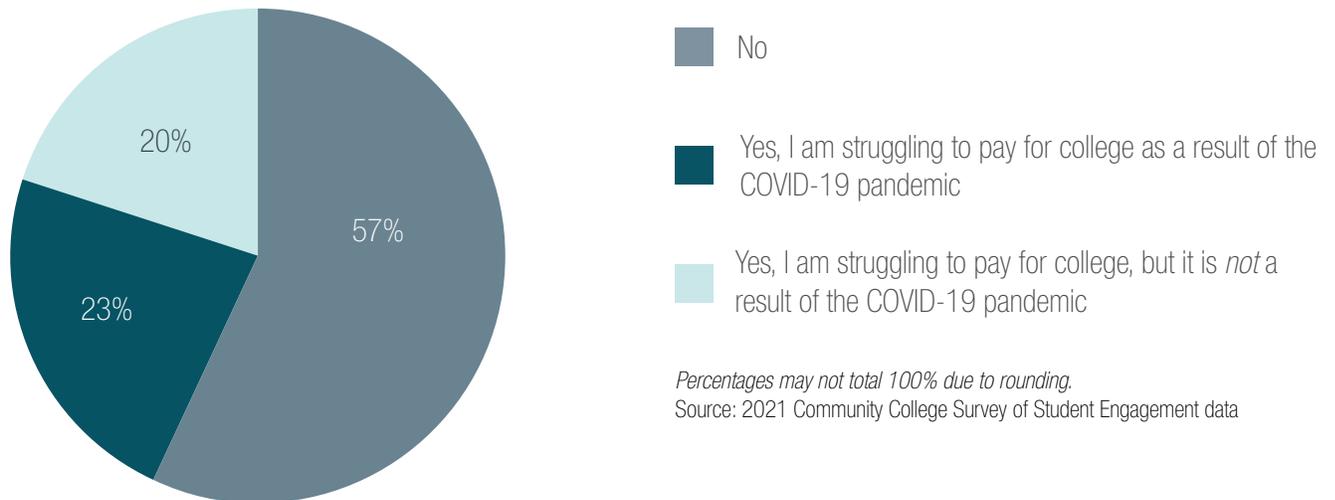
Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.
Source: 2020 Survey of Entering Student Engagement data

- It is *better* than it was before the COVID-19 pandemic
- It is *worse* than it was before the COVID-19 pandemic
- It is *about the same* as it was before the COVID-19 pandemic
- I am not sure

When asked if they were struggling to pay for college, almost one-quarter (23%) of spring 2021 respondents said they were struggling to pay for college as a result of COVID-19. An additional 20% of students said paying for college was a struggle, but it was not due to the pandemic.

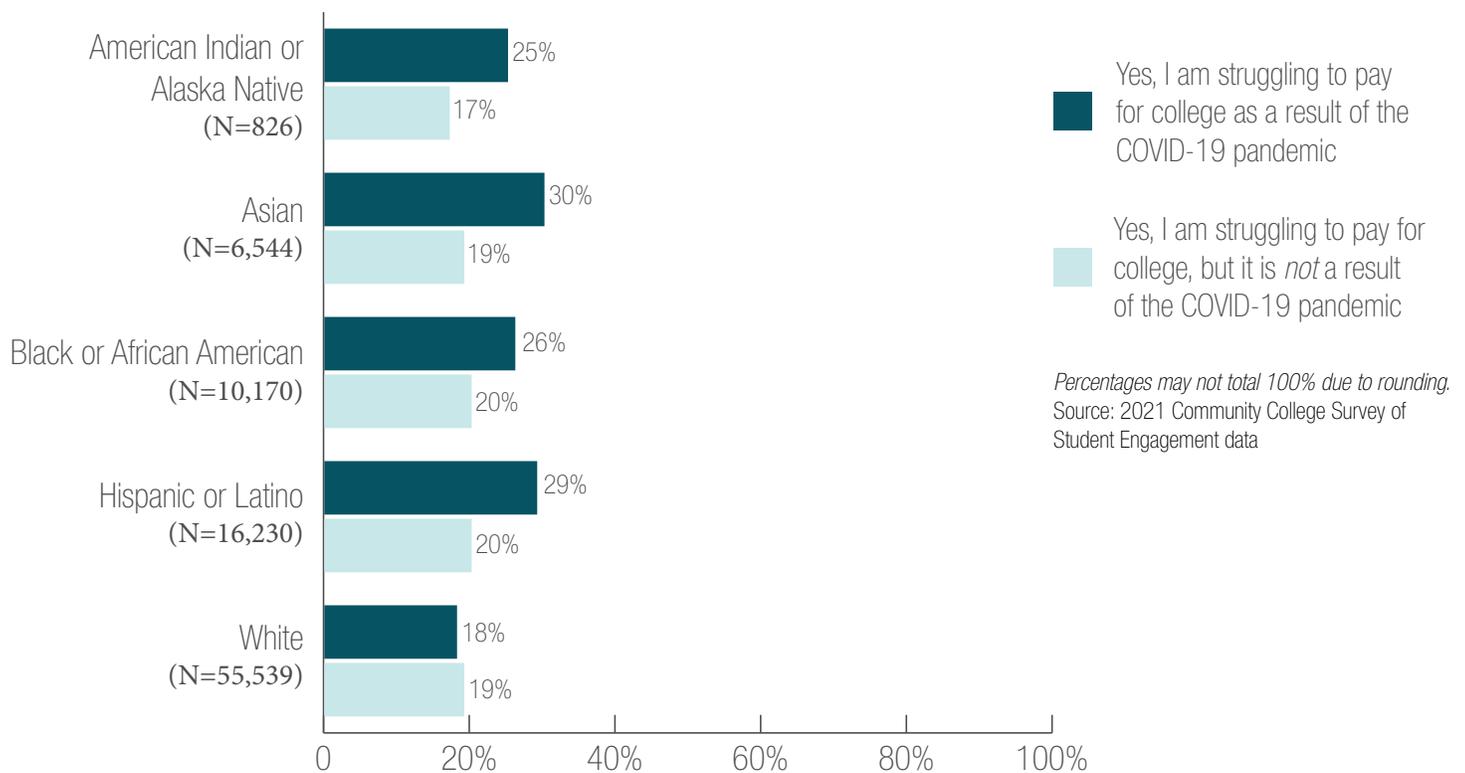
Are you struggling to pay for college?

(N=105,043)



When broken out by race/ethnicity, it becomes clear that COVID-19 seems to have amplified the struggle to pay for college for several student groups.

Are you struggling to pay for college?





The Continued Impact of COVID-19 on Students' Feelings of Safety and Support

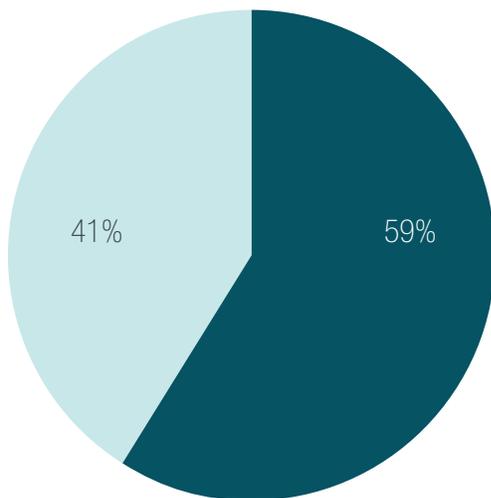
As with students who were surveyed in fall 2020, spring 2021 survey respondents who attended classes in person (N=6,722 from 20 colleges) reported varying levels of comfort with being on campus. Overall, 59% of these respondents agreed that they tried to avoid situations on campus in which they were unable to stay six feet away from others.

Nontraditional-age students reported being more likely to avoid situations of close personal contact than traditional-age students. Similarly, women said they were more likely to try and avoid being less than six feet away from others than men were.

Among racial groups, those most negatively impacted overall by the pandemic were the most likely to try to avoid situations in which they were unable to socially distance from others.*

Since the beginning of this academic term at this college, I have tried to avoid situations on campus in which I am unable to stay six feet away from another person.

(N=6,185)

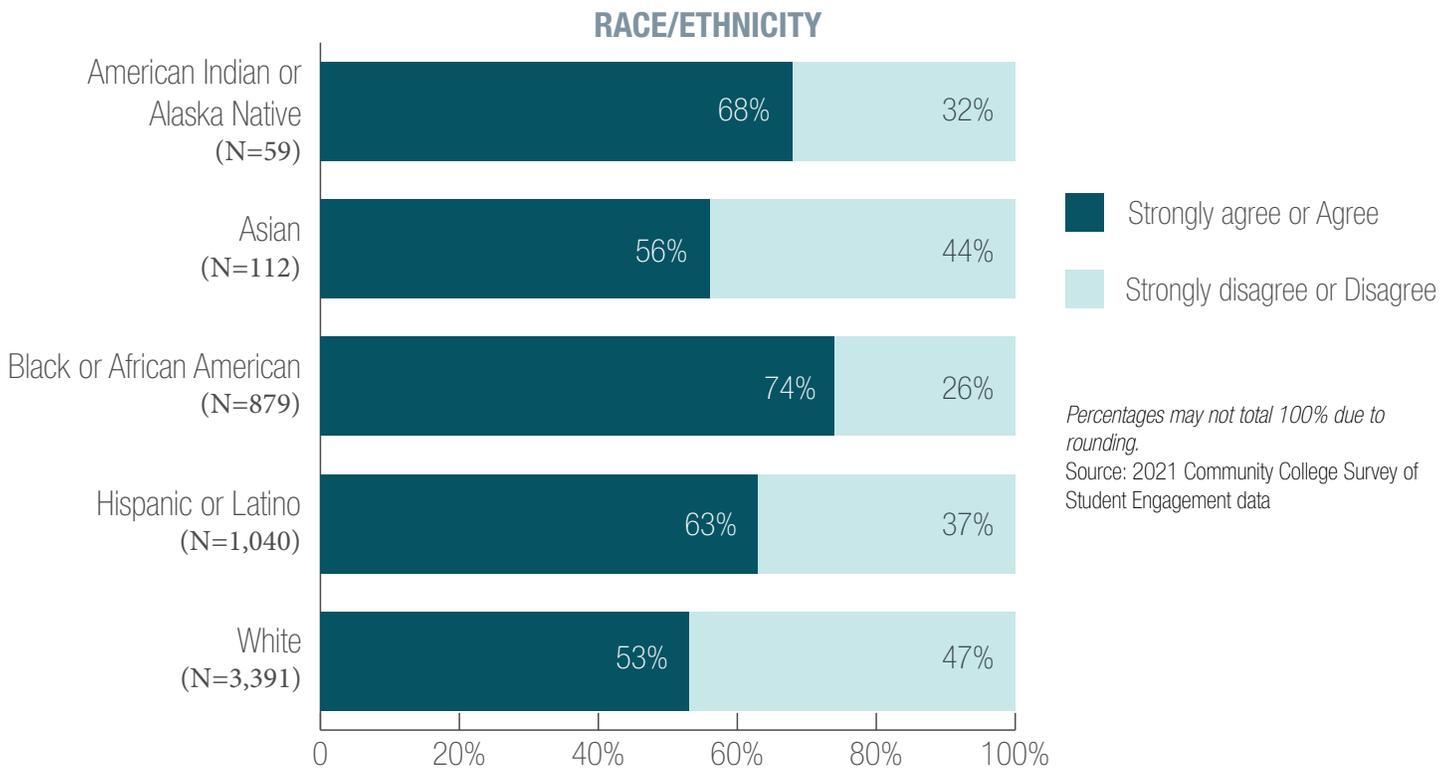
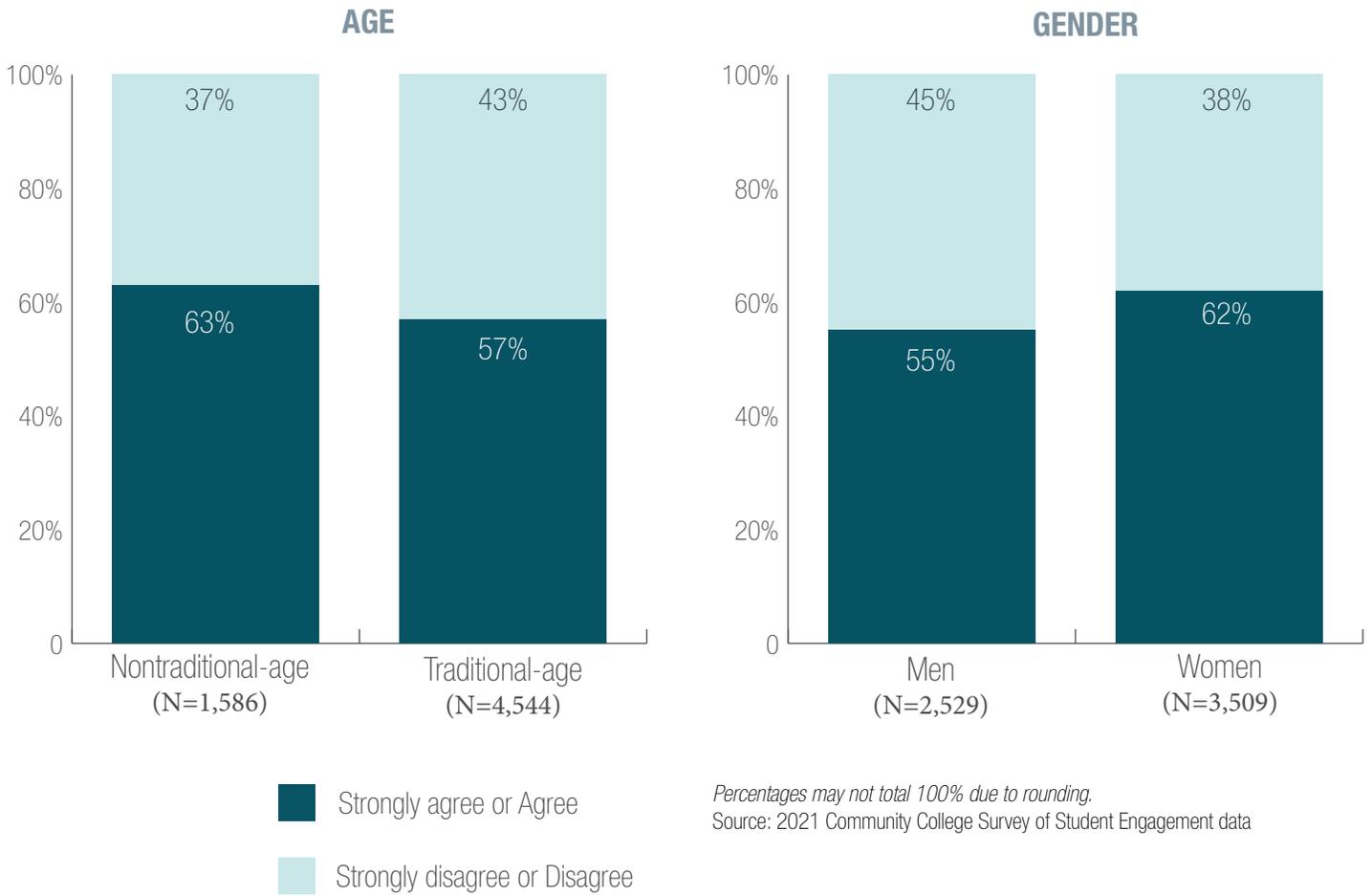


- Strongly agree or Agree
- Strongly disagree or Disagree

Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.
Source: 2021 Community College Survey of Student Engagement data



Since the beginning of this academic term at this college, I have tried to avoid situations on campus in which I am unable to stay six feet away from another person.

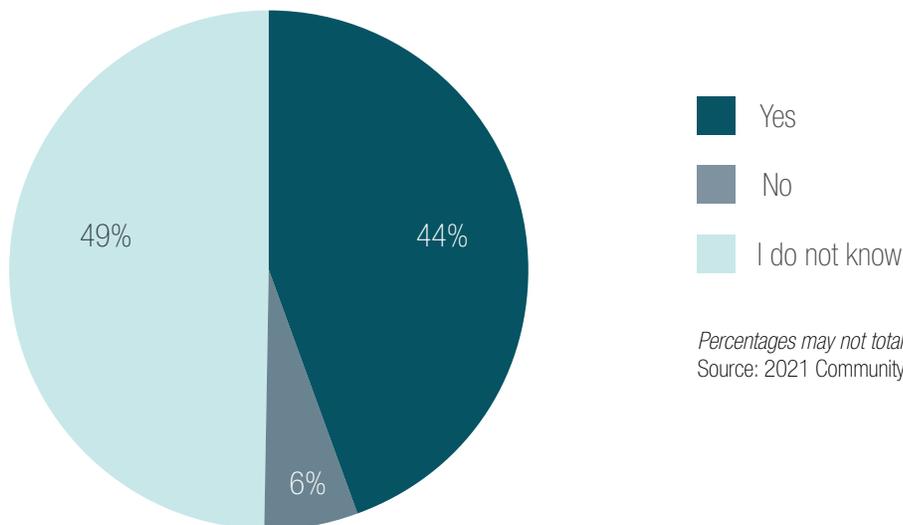




When fall 2020 respondents were asked if their college had support services to help them cope with stress related to the COVID-19 pandemic, 57% said that they didn't know. Forty-nine percent of spring 2021 respondents said *I do not know*, suggesting that more students have become aware of services their colleges are offering in this area.

Does this college have support services to help students cope with stress related to the COVID-19 pandemic?

(N=105,838)

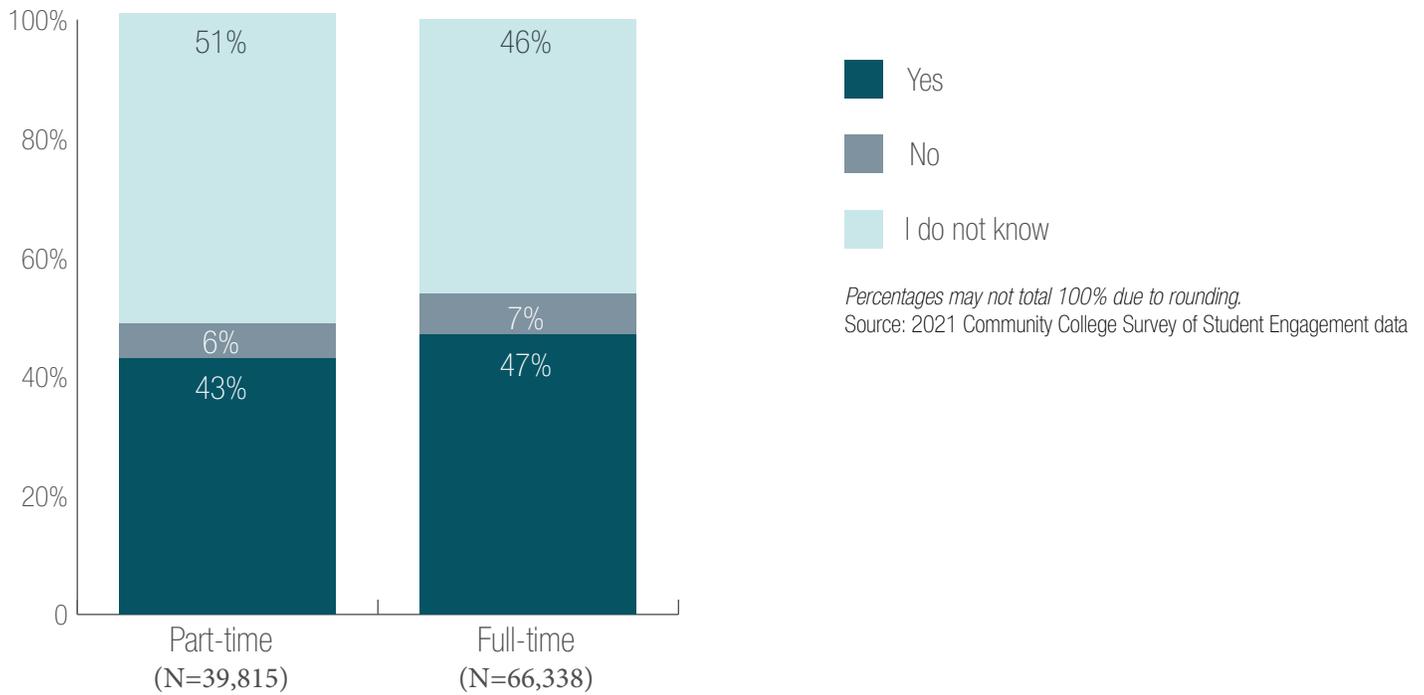


Percentages may not total 100% due to rounding.
Source: 2021 Community College Survey of Student Engagement data

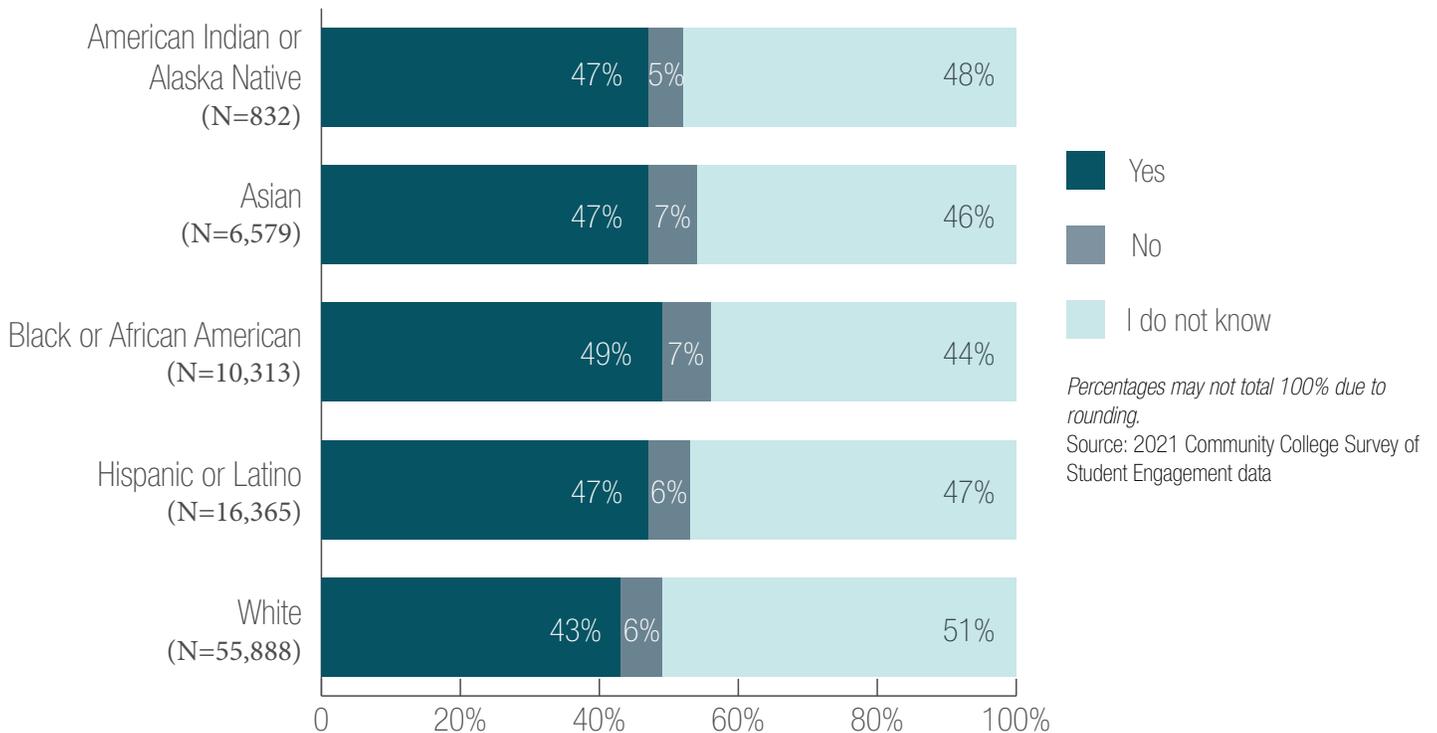
Not surprisingly, full-time students were more likely to respond that they knew of support services related to pandemic stressors than were part-time students. And when disaggregated by race/ethnicity, White students were less likely than other student groups to be aware of these types of support services.

Does this college have support services to help students cope with stress related to the COVID-19 pandemic?

ENROLLMENT



RACE/ETHNICITY

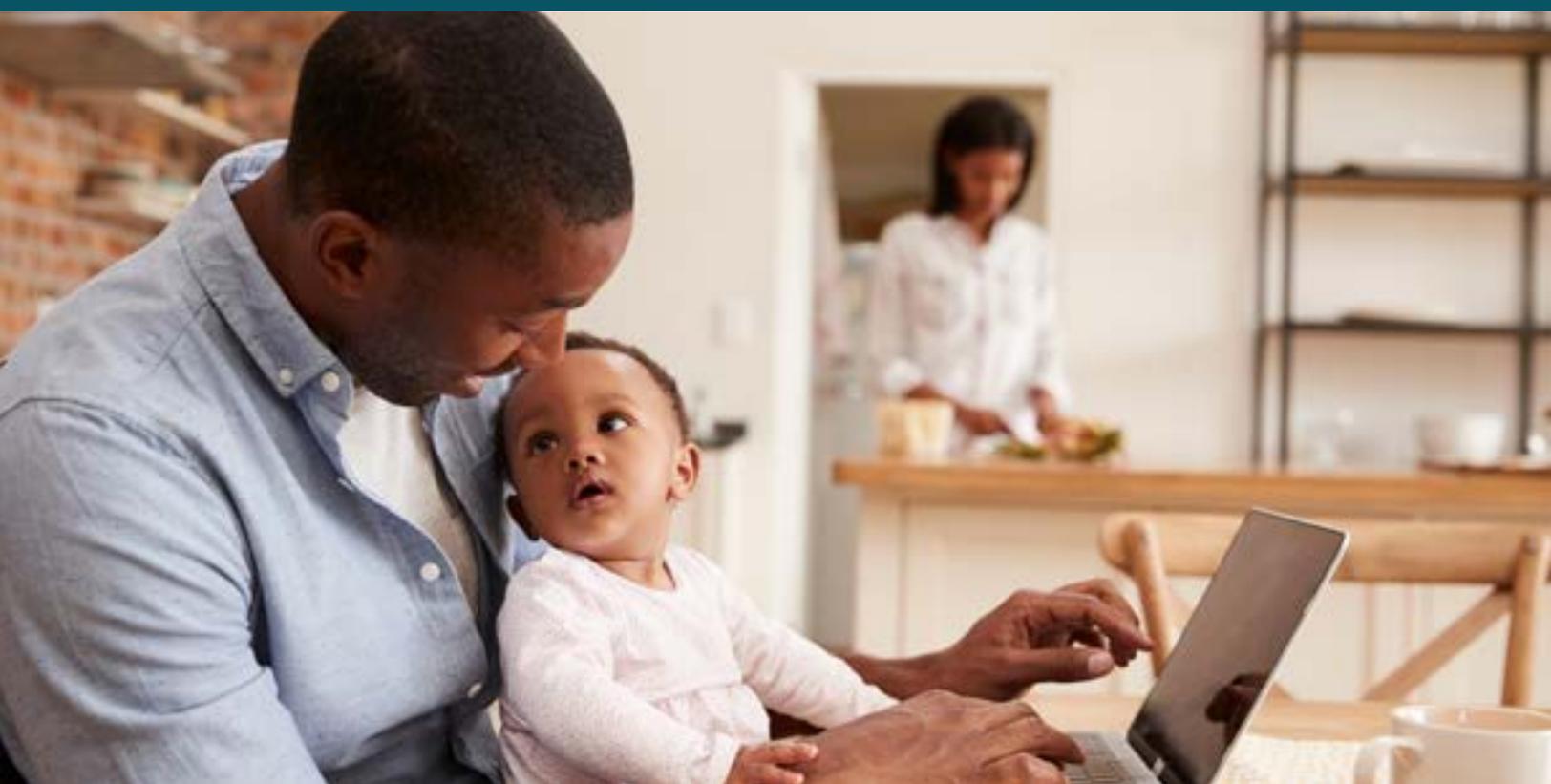


WHAT COMES NEXT

A recent scan of news articles focused on community colleges illustrates that many institutions across the country used emergency relief funding to help students stay enrolled during the 2020–2021 academic year. The literature also suggests that many students were not aware of available financial supports.**

While students now seem to be more aware than they were last fall of support services their colleges offer to help with stress related to the pandemic, almost half still report not knowing such services exist.

There is no magical antidote that will solve students' financial issues or provide relief from anxieties brought about by the pandemic. But as we work to reflect on what we've learned about COVID-19's impact and incorporate those lessons into policies, procedures, and student supports, we should not discount that knowledge is power. If we equip and engage students with information about available supports, the likelihood of them persisting and succeeding will grow.



Endnotes

*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021, September 9). *Risk for COVID-19 infection, hospitalization, and death by race/ethnicity*. <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/covid-data/investigations-discovery/hospitalization-death-by-race-ethnicity.html>

**The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice. (2021). *#RealCollege 2021: Basic Needs Insecurity During the Ongoing Pandemic*. Philadelphia, PA.



Questions for Consideration

The data in this report illustrate that some students need more assistance than they are receiving. Colleges can use the questions below to spur conversations among administrators, faculty, and staff about what is and what is not working regarding available student supports and the messaging around their availability.

FINANCIAL HEALTH

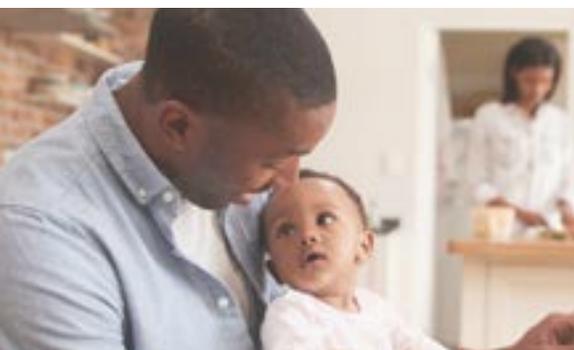
- As a campus community, how are we engaging in conversations about student financial health?
- How do we train faculty and staff to respond to students who are having financial difficulties?
- Is there a notification system for faculty and staff to inform financial support services staff about a student's financial need?
- Do we have a designated person who is a resource for students experiencing financial difficulties? If not, then what plan do we have in place to help students who experience financial difficulties?
- How can we strengthen our partnerships with community organizations, religious organizations, social service agencies, workforce development agencies, or private foundations to help students access additional financial support services?

SAFETY

- As a campus community, how are we engaging in conversations about students' feelings of well-being?
- How do we seek feedback from students regarding their current concerns with social distancing and other COVID-19 precautions when on campus?
- Do our students know where to turn if they need mental health services, either at our college or through partners in the community?
- Do we assign someone to serve as a primary contact for each new student each term (e.g., another student, advisor, success coach, mentor, etc.)?

COMMUNICATION

- What is not working in our communication efforts with students? Are we exhausting all of our options when it comes to communicating about available supports with our students, both those who are on campus and those who are online?
- Do we share information with students about available supports throughout the academic year or just at the beginning of the academic year?
- How do we disseminate information about student supports to all faculty (full-time, part-time, face-to-face, and online), so they can share that information with their students?
- How do we train and encourage faculty to inquire about the supports their students need in order to be successful in their courses?



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