



August 2026

Unmet Needs, Unfinished Degrees

Basic Needs Insecurity Among
Latinos in Higher Education



“

**It's either food or school,
so my priority is food.”**

— California, Four-Year Public University,
General Group

”

“

**Services don't necessarily
advertise as much. You kind
of have to dig, or go and ask
somebody, or actually tell
someone that you're struggling
— and maybe that person
knows where to send you.”**

— Texas, Four-Year Private University,
Caregiving Group

”

Executive Summary

Today, 3.9 million Latino students are enrolled in postsecondary education, comprising 1 in 5 college students nationwide.

Rooted in *familismo*, a cultural orientation emphasizing collective responsibility and family obligation, many Latino students view completing a college degree as a shared investment and a pathway to economic mobility for themselves and their families.

Despite this ambition and growing enrollment, Latinos' degree completion rate trails their white peers by 18.5 percentage points, a gap that cannot be explained by academic preparation or motivation alone. In a 2024 survey of 3,000 Latino college students, UnidosUS found that two-thirds of respondents reported considering leaving school, and one-third had paused their studies at least once. Mental health and emotional stress emerged as the most significant driver of noncompletion, while 85% of respondents reported lacking consistent access to affordable, healthy food. These challenges were even more pronounced among LGBTQ+, caregiving and working Latino students.

Since that survey, the strain on student supports within colleges and universities and across the broader social safety net has only deepened. Recent policy changes by the Trump administration have reduced access to food assistance, health coverage and institutional funding, widening the gap between what Latino students need to persist and what public systems provide. Meanwhile, college has never been more expensive. Tuition, housing, food and healthcare costs have risen faster than wages and financial aid, and many Latino students and families cannot keep up.

To better understand how these pressures operate in students' daily lives and to identify targeted solutions, UnidosUS conducted focus groups in March 2026 with 18 Latino college students across seven states (refer to [Appendix 1: Methodology](#)). What emerged from students' stories are compounding barriers: Each unmet need reduces the student's resources available to meet the next need. These barriers are met with an uneven and insufficient response by institutions and accelerated by a policy environment increasingly hostile to Latino students.

These experiences were not isolated. Across the focus groups, five findings emerged:

1. **Basic need deficits are interconnected and compounding.** Latino students experience food insecurity, housing instability, transportation barriers and financial strain simultaneously. These challenges reinforce one another, creating a cycle in which each unmet need leaves students with fewer resources to meet the next.
2. **Family responsibilities are a hidden cost affecting Latino student persistence.** Cultural values of *familismo* and collective responsibility can motivate Latino students to pursue and persist in higher education, as family can serve as an important source of emotional support. At the same time, family expectations can place competing demands on students' time and financial resources. Caregiving responsibilities and financial contributions to household expenses are not fully captured by financial aid systems.
3. **Mental health and emotional stress emerge as both a consequence and driver of basic needs insecurity.** As financial, academic and family pressures converge, mental health is often deprioritized, demoralizing students and weakening their ability to persist. Students who feel they do not belong are less likely to seek out support, and when mental health services fail to reflect students' backgrounds and lived experiences, students disengage and the resources that could have helped go unused.
4. **Recent federal policy changes have resulted in material harms.** Immigration enforcement, threats to public benefits and the rollback of culturally responsive campus support have resulted in tangible disruptions to students' financial stability, academic engagement and access to resources. For Latino students, policy decisions are not abstract; they directly shape their ability to stay enrolled.
5. **Services available to support students are often insufficient, fragmented and siloed.** While students' needs are interconnected, campus supports remain insufficient and poorly coordinated. Students discover resources only after they need them most. Students rely on peer networks, student organizations, community-based organizations and cultural centers to fill gaps.

These problems Latino students face cannot be solved by any single institution or agency alone. Indeed, students' unmet basic needs reflect failures across a social safety net beyond higher education. As such, tackling students' unmet basic needs and closing the Latino degree completion gap requires a coordinated response across federal, state and institutional levels, with all partners contributing to a shared wraparound model of support for students.

Students' responses demonstrate that federal policymakers must strengthen financial aid, expand access to basic needs supports and emergency aid, and remove barriers to public benefits. States must sustain higher education funding and protect culturally responsive programs.

At the same time, higher education institutions should be positioned as coordinating hubs that bring culturally responsive support systems together for students. Campuses are where students live, learn and interact on a daily basis. This proximity enables higher education institutions to recognize emerging student needs quickly and serve as coordinating points for connecting students to essential supports more efficiently than distant systems can. To do this, colleges must invest in dedicated resource coordination, staff who reflect and understand the communities they serve and services that integrate with public assistance systems and are anchored in the real lives of Latino students. **Latino students have done the work of believing in higher education; now, higher education and policymakers must do the work of believing in them.**

A Wraparound Model of Support for Latino College Students

Shared responsibility across federal, state and institutional systems to address basic needs insecurity.

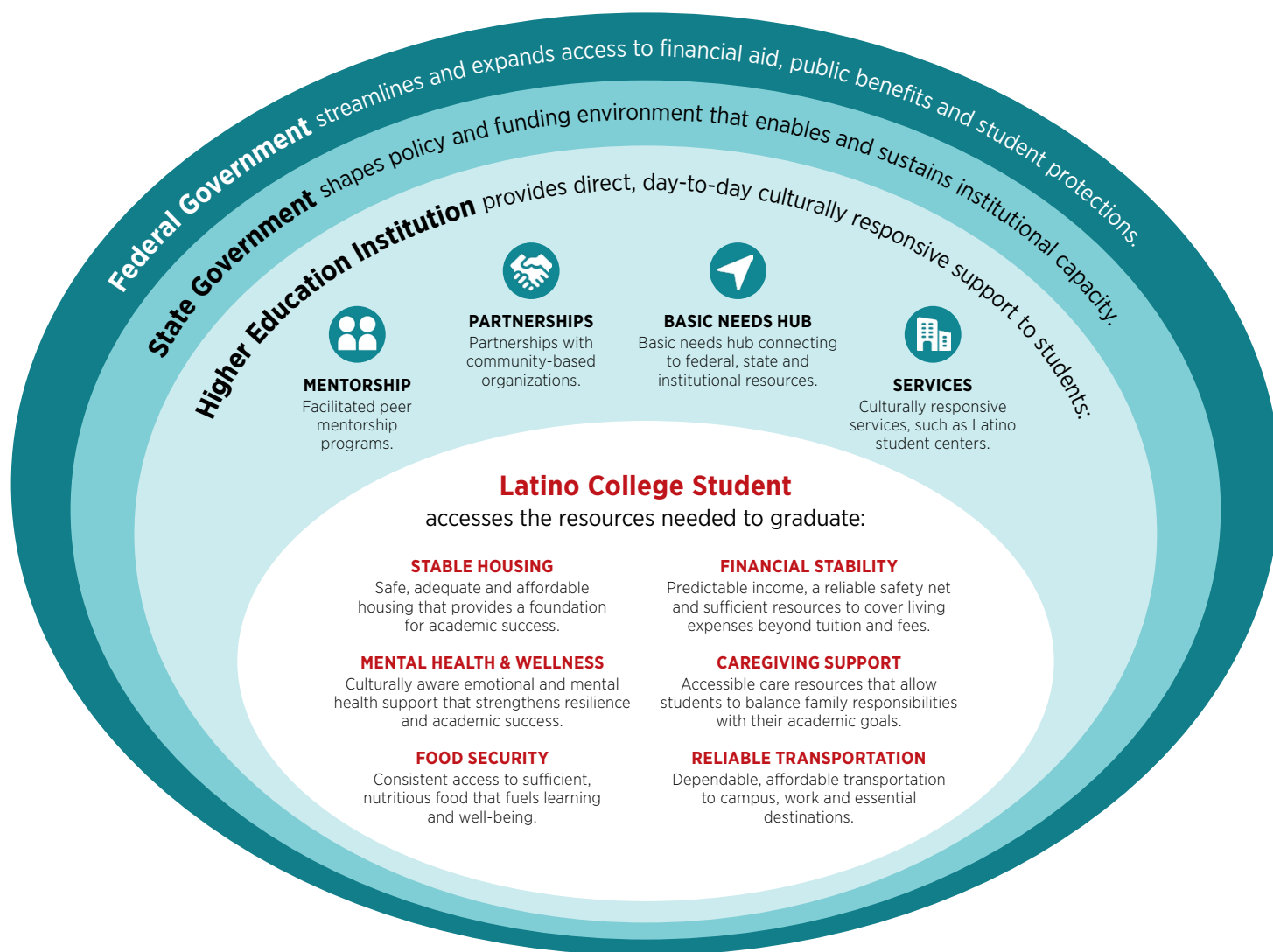


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Introduction

Latinos are a growing presence in higher education.^a

Today, 3.9 million Latinos are enrolled in postsecondary education, comprising 1 in 5 college students nationwide. Latino students are disproportionately low-income and first-generation.¹

Grounded in *familismo*,^b many Latino students see earning a college degree as a shared investment that extends to both themselves and their families. Indeed, a 2024 UnidosUS survey found that Latino students identified well-paying jobs and the prospect of providing a better life for their families as their top reasons to pursue higher education.²

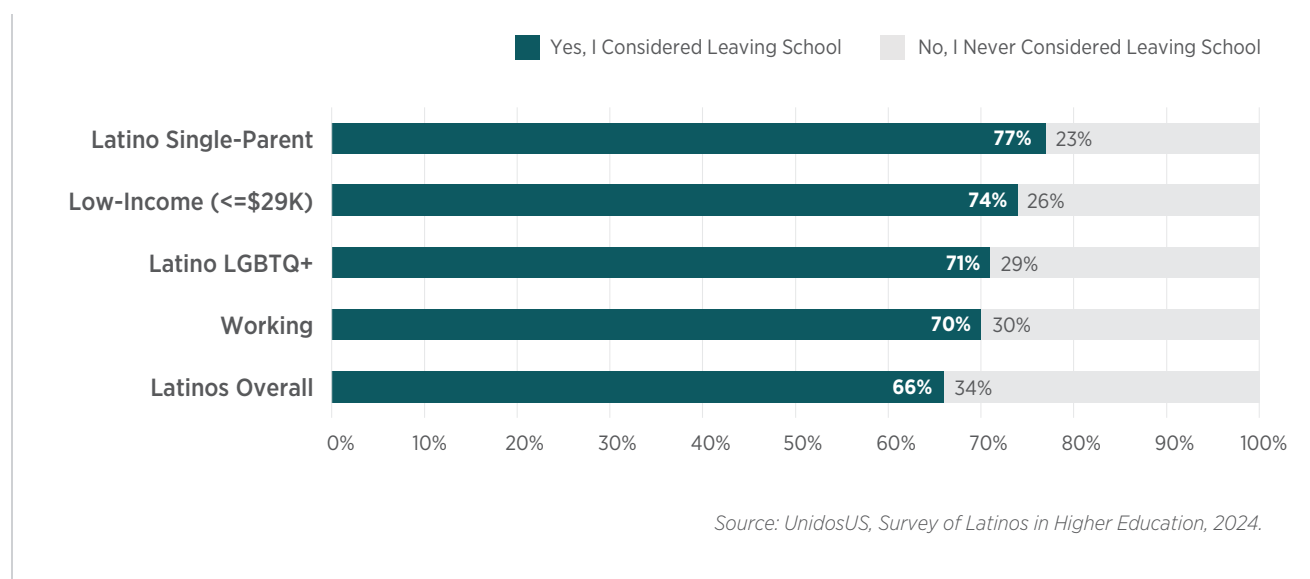
Despite growing enrollment, Latino students' aspirations have not matched their outcomes. Latino college enrollment among 18- to 24-year-olds trails that of white students by 7.9 percentage points (32.8% vs. 40.7%), and six-year completion rates lag by 18.5 percentage points (50.5% vs. 69.0%).³ The 2024 UnidosUS survey also found that two-thirds

of respondents reported considering leaving school, and one-third had paused their studies at least once. Mental health and emotional stress emerged as the most significant driver of noncompletion, while 85% of respondents reported lacking consistent access to affordable, healthy food. These challenges were even more pronounced among LGBTQ+, caregiving and working Latino students.

The economic consequences of starting but not completing college can be devastating; student loan borrowers who did not complete their degree were 40 percentage points less likely to be able to cover an unexpected \$400 expense.⁴ Noncompleters are left with debt, but without the higher earnings and upward economic mobility that a degree provides.

Since that survey, the strain on student supports within colleges and universities and across the broader social safety net has only deepened. Recent

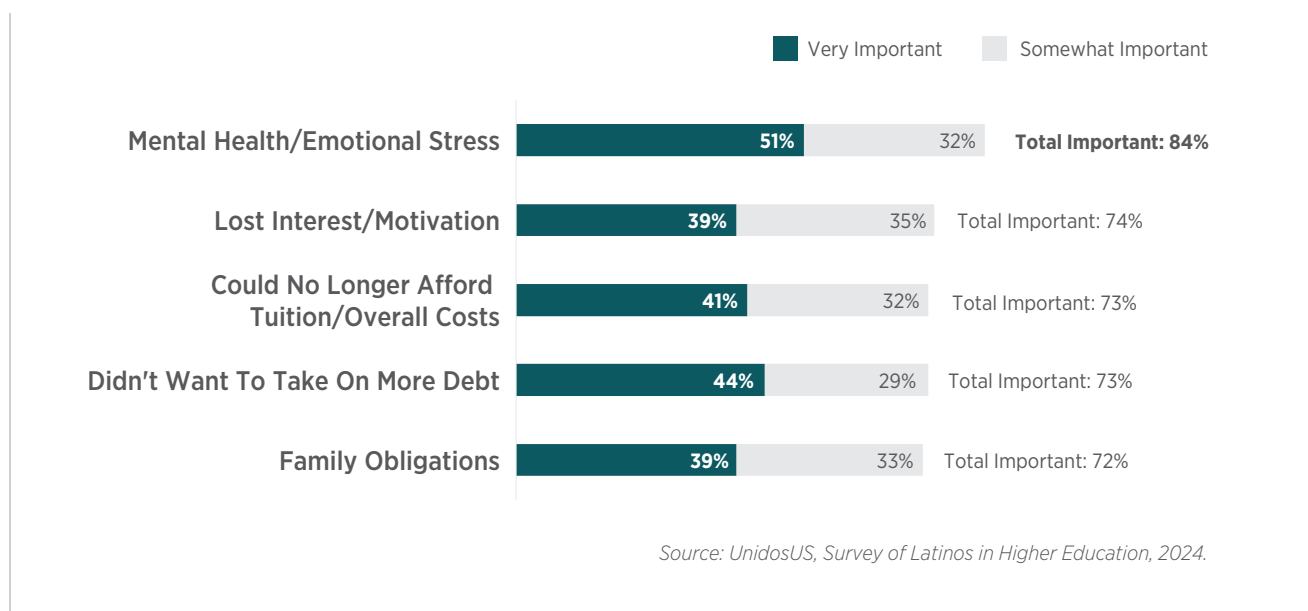
Figure 1. Share of Latino College Students Who Considered Leaving School, by Subgroup



^a The terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race.

^b *Familismo* is a cultural orientation common in Latino communities, emphasizing deep loyalty, reciprocity and solidarity with family. It is reflected in interdependence, obligations to support family members and the central role of family in decision-making.

Figure 2: Top Five Factors Driving Latinos to Consider Leaving School



policy changes by the Trump administration have reduced access to food assistance, health coverage and institutional funding, widening the gap between what Latino students need to persist and what public systems provide.⁵ Meanwhile, college has never been more expensive. Tuition, housing, food and healthcare costs have risen faster than wages and financial aid, and many Latino students and families cannot keep up.

To better understand how these pressures operate in students' daily lives and to identify targeted solutions, UnidosUS conducted focus groups in March 2026 with 18 Latino college students across seven states (refer to [Appendix 1: Methodology](#)). What emerged from students' stories are compounding barriers: Each unmet need reduces the student's resources available to meet the next need. These barriers are met with an uneven and insufficient response by institutions and accelerated by a policy environment increasingly hostile to Latino students.

To better understand these barriers and the factors driving them, UnidosUS conducted four focus groups with 18 Latino college students across the country: one with Latino students generally, and three with subgroups at elevated risk of stopping out — LGBTQ+ students, caregiving students and working students.

This report begins with an analysis of how rising college costs and a shrinking social safety net are pushing Latino students out of higher education. It then presents findings from those focus groups,

examining how compounding barriers to basic needs operate in students' daily lives and why existing support systems so often fail to reach them. Lastly, the recommendations that follow are rooted in Latino students' experiences and aimed at the policymakers and institutional leaders positioned to act on them.



The Affordability and Basic Needs Crisis in Latino Higher Education

The Price of College Is Rising and Safety Nets Are Fraying

The cost of obtaining a college degree has increased dramatically. Adjusting for inflation, the average published tuition and fees at a public four-year institution doubled over the last 30 years, far outpacing the 39% increase in median family income over the same period.⁶ While grants can reduce what the student ultimately pays as the “net price,” tuition is only part of the picture. For example, for community college students, food and housing alone account for over half of their costs.⁷

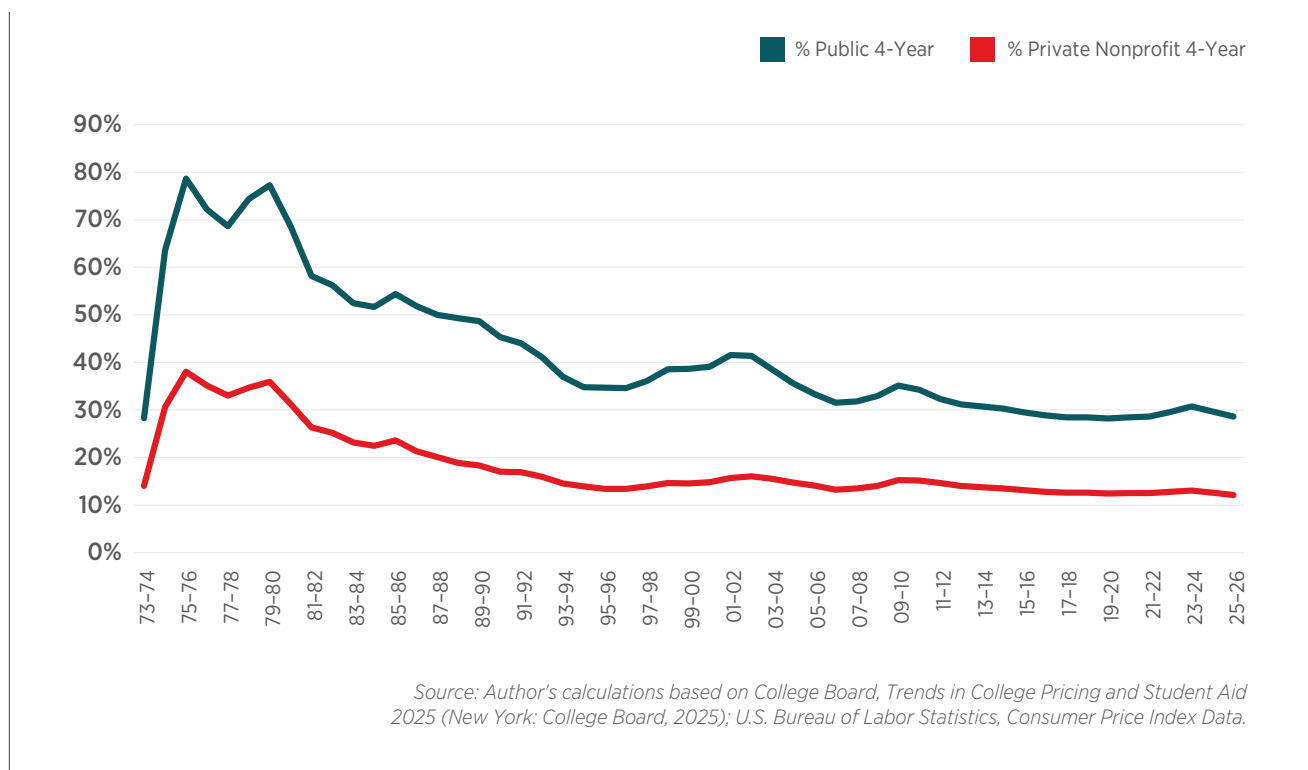
Today, the average full-time undergraduate is expected to budget between \$21,320 and \$50,920 for the total cost of attendance at community col-

leges and out-of-state public four-year institutions, respectively.

For Latinos, the burden is higher. The median Latino household earned \$77,420, compared to \$120,300 by white, non-Hispanic households.⁸ At the same time, the cost of basic necessities — such as food, housing and healthcare — has risen steadily, leaving Latino families with shrinking margins to absorb the growing cost of college.⁹

Federal financial support once covered a much larger share of college costs. The value of the Pell Grant, the primary federal source of grant aid, covers 58% of the

Figure 3: Percentage of Maximum Pell Grant of Average Tuition, Fees, Housing and Food Costs, 1973–2025



cost of attendance at a public two-year institution and just 31% at a four-year institution.¹⁰ This is particularly devastating for Latinos, who receive Pell Grants at a higher rate: Nearly half of Latino undergraduates receive Pell Grants compared to 40% of their peers.¹¹

Since the 1980s, insufficient growth in state education appropriations has led to a nearly doubling of reliance on student tuition and fees as a share of total education revenue at public institutions.¹² One analysis finds that 24 states allocated less funding per student in 2025 than they did at the onset of the Great Recession in 2008.¹³

Against this backdrop of rising costs and shrinking public investment, Latino students have few places to turn. 80% of Latino college students work full- or part-time while enrolled, regardless of income level or school type.¹⁴ For many, taking on additional debt is not a viable alternative — 73% of students who considered leaving school cited not wanting to take on more debt. Yet working does not necessarily cover all expenses incurred by students.



Basic Needs Insecurity Is Pushing Students Out of College

As the cost of college soars, it is no surprise that so little remains in students' budgets for food, rent or other basic needs. Basic needs security, as defined by The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs at Temple University (Hope Center), a leading research and advocacy organization, refers to the "consistent ability to access fundamental requirements to function physically, emotionally, and socially," including food, housing, transportation, mental healthcare and other essential resources (refer to **Box A: Four Types of Basic Needs Insecurities**).¹⁵ Students' ability to complete their degrees extends beyond their textbooks; they must also have the necessities to survive.

Yet, for too many students, basic needs remain unmet. Research links basic needs insecurities to negative impacts on physical and mental health, lower GPAs, and a higher likelihood of stopping out before completing a degree.¹⁶

Furthermore, when expenses suddenly arise, most students are unable to pay for them. One national survey found that 54% of college students reported struggling to access \$500 in cash or credit for an unexpected expense, and 65% reported having run out of money since the start of the school year.¹⁷

Critically, these burdens tend to compound, as students experiencing one type of basic needs insecurity are likely to face another. For example, 78% of students experiencing food insecurity in one survey were also found to experience housing insecurity or homelessness.¹⁸ Access to relief is further hindered by administrative burdens, including the learning, psychological and compliance costs of navigating public benefit systems.¹⁹ Students must navigate multiple applications with varying eligibility requirements while overcoming the social stigma of seeking assistance — barriers that compound the very hardships these programs are meant to address.

Comprehensive research on Latino students' experiences with basic needs insecurity remains sparse. This gap is significant, given that culturally specific barriers such as immigration, family obligations and experiences of discrimination can shape how Latino students experience, prioritize and seek support for unmet basic needs. Research on immigration-impacted Latino college students finds that family legal vulnerability creates barriers to accessing basic needs services, as students eligible for support are less likely to seek it out of fear of immigration enforcement.²⁰

Box A: Four Types of Basic Needs Insecurities

Food Insecurity

Food insecurity, or the inability to acquire adequate food, is among the most well-documented basic needs challenges. According to a Hope Center analysis of the 2020 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:20), a nationally representative federal study, an estimated 23% of college students (3.8 million) experience food insecurity.²¹ The majority reported multiple instances of skipping meals or consuming less because they could not afford more food.²²

National surveys using standard food insecurity measures find that 43% of Latino college students experience food insecurity, compared to 36% of their white peers.²³ However, in UnidosUS research, when asked more broadly about their ability to consistently access affordable, healthy food, the number rises to 85%, capturing a broader challenge in food access and nutritional quality. These rates increase for LGBTQ+ (88%), working (88%) and single-parent Latino students (91%).

Exacerbating the food insecurity crisis is the inaccessibility to federal resources for college students. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the primary federal resource for food-insecure individuals, features unique barriers limiting access for college students. Students must not only fall below the standard SNAP income limit, generally less than 130% of the federal poverty level, but also meet a narrow list of eligibility requirements that do not apply to any other groups.²⁴ Most commonly, students must work “a minimum of 20 hours per week in paid employment” to become eligible for SNAP. Yet research links higher-intensity employment to an increased likelihood of not completing a degree.²⁵

As a result, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) has found that two-thirds of students likely eligible for SNAP, and 6 in 10 students who were both food-insecure and likely eligible for SNAP, did not report receiving SNAP benefits.²⁶ Concerns with immigration-related implications further deter Latino students from accessing SNAP, given the Trump administration’s attempts of holding public benefits use against green card applicants and their demands for states to hand over benefit enrollment data for immigration enforcement purposes.²⁷

Table 1: College Student Exemptions for SNAP Eligibility

- Younger than age 18 or age 50 or older
- A parent caring for a child under age 6
- A parent who is caring for a child age 6 to 11 and is unable to obtain childcare to attend school and work
- A single parent enrolled full-time caring for a child under age 12
- Working a minimum of 20 hours per week at paid employment
- Participating in a state- or federally-funded work-study program
- Receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits
- Not physically or mentally fit (e.g., have a disability)
- Enrolled in certain programs for the purpose of employment and training

Source: U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Estimated Eligibility and Receipt among Food Insecure College Students* (Washington, DC: GAO, 2024).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress temporarily expanded SNAP eligibility to college students eligible for federal work-study or with an expected family contribution of \$0.²⁸ An estimated 3 million previously ineligible low-income students temporarily became eligible for benefits.²⁹ Although the provisions expired in June 2023, the expansion demonstrated the scale of unmet need among college students.

Housing Insecurity

Housing insecurity, defined by the Hope Center as “challenges preventing someone from having a safe, affordable, and consistent place to live,” affects 51% of Latino college students, compared to 44% of white students.³⁰ Not limited to homelessness, experiences with housing insecurity include difficulty in paying rent and utilities.³¹

Housing, alongside food costs, can be one of the largest expenses for some students, accounting for as much as 51% of the average community college student’s estimated budget.³² Demand for student housing has driven record-high occupancy rates and rent growth, even as new student housing capacity fell by 42% in 2025.³³ As a result, only approximately 18% of undergraduates live in on-campus housing, leading to a flood of students in local housing markets.³⁴

Research shows that students experiencing housing insecurity have been found to be at higher risk for other unmet basic needs and less likely to complete their degree.³⁵ Yet, many low-income students remain ineligible for housing choice vouchers or the low-income housing tax credit (LIHTC) to defray housing costs.³⁶

Transportation

Transportation insecurity, encompassing barriers students face in reliably and affordably getting to campus, is particularly relevant for Latino students. A 2021 UnidosUS and University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill study found that Latinos were 19% more likely to report transportation problems as a barrier to college completion than their non-Latino peers.³⁷

Among community college students, who are disproportionately Latino and low-income, many exclusively commute to classes, and many spend an average of \$1,840 per year on transportation, which is not always fully accounted for in financial aid packages.³⁸ Transportation issues can significantly hamper students, with 1 in 8 students reporting missing class due to transportation problems.³⁹

Although lacking a federal intervention, state and local efforts have shown that transit interventions can improve student persistence. A study at Rio Hondo College, a Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) in California, found that providing discounted transit benefits increased persistence among participating students.⁴⁰

Mental Health and Emotional Stress

Mental health challenges are both a driver and a consequence of basic needs insecurity. Students who cannot afford food, stable housing or reliable transportation experience heightened stress and anxiety, which in turn undermines their academic performance and persistence.⁴¹

For Latino students, this burden is particularly acute. UnidosUS research found 84% of Latino students who considered leaving school cited mental health and emotional stress as an important factor in their consideration, making it the single highest-ranked driver of noncompletion in the survey.⁴² These rates were even higher among LGBTQ+ Latino students (89%), who must navigate the added pressure of balancing cultural and gender identity expectations both on campus and within their families.⁴³

Parenting or caregiving students face a similar compounding burden, having to manage both their own mental and emotional stress, academic responsibilities, and caregiving responsibilities. One study found that 75% of Texas community college parenting students reported being unable to cover a \$500 emergency with cash or credit, compared to 50% of nonparents.⁴⁴ Such burdens lead to increased emotional stress, with one study finding that 45% of parenting students felt overwhelmed often or all the time, and 38% considered leaving school altogether.⁴⁵

Beyond structural barriers to accessing services, the mental health burden is further shaped by cultural norms that discourage seeking help. Latino college students are less likely to seek professional mental health services than their white peers, citing stigma, cultural mistrust and a lack of culturally responsive providers.⁴⁶

Basic Need Centers and Other Models of Support

Recognizing the interdependent nature of basic needs insecurities, some colleges and states have invested in basic needs centers, hubs and navigators.⁴⁷ Such initiatives combine direct support services, informational outreach, federal benefits facilitation and campus advocacy efforts.

Rather than requiring students to navigate resources like food pantries, benefit application assistance or childcare separately, these centers offer a “one-stop” shop location. For example, students facing an urgent financial need could access emergency aid such as an emergency loan or grants from such a center, while being directed to additional community resources.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many of these centers were further supported through the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF), where students had access to additional federal funding. One analysis found that 73% of Pell-eligible emergency grant recipients graduated or remained enrolled, compared to a 59% retention rate across all community colleges.⁴⁸ Among students who received HEERF funds, the majority used them to cover basic needs such as food, housing and transportation.⁴⁹ Congress did not extend this resource after the pandemic.

The basic needs center model aligns with the community school model in K-12 education, where schools and local agencies partner to provide integrated student support, expanded learning opportunities, collaborative leadership and family engagement.⁵⁰ Under both models, evidence-based strategies are used to support the whole student in their academic and nonacademic needs.

One study at Amarillo College, a Hispanic-serving institution (HSI), found that a comprehensive anti-poverty initiative that included a basic needs center nearly doubled three-year completion rates for first-time students.⁵¹

Despite such promise, establishing resources can be difficult for under-resourced colleges. One survey of community college provosts found that a lack of funding and staffing capacity limits the ability to collect the data required to support basic needs outreach.⁵² Furthermore, studies find that students continually underutilize such centers, impacting their effectiveness.⁵³ A national survey found that among students who experienced at least one type of basic needs insecurity, 48% reported not being aware of the relevant campus supports.⁵⁴

Combating this at the state level, California, Oregon, Washington and Illinois require basic needs navigators on their campuses, and Kentucky has provided funding for voluntary implementation.⁵⁵ At the federal level, Congress has invested \$10 million annually to support colleges taking comprehensive approaches to basic needs, including hubs and navigators, through the Basic Needs for Postsecondary Students Program (Basic Needs Grants).⁵⁶ Legislative efforts such as the *BASIC Act* aim to provide \$1 billion to support basic needs infrastructure, data collection and evaluation needs, but this bill has yet to pass Congress.⁵⁷

Family Obligation and the Hidden Costs Latino Students Carry

For Latino students, financial insecurity is often not solely a function of college costs. Research on Latino family economic behavior documents the prevalence of financial transfers from adult children to parents and extended family, including remittances to relatives abroad. One study found that 1 in 4 Latino children of immigrants with two immigrant parents were more likely to report providing monetary support to their parents, compared to 1 in 13 white young adults with U.S.-born parents.⁵⁸ These obligations reflect the “giving back” culture and sense of duty among Latino children toward their immigrant parents.

Relatedly, scholarship across Latino communities has documented *familismo*, a cultural orientation emphasizing deep loyalty, reciprocity and solidarity with family that is reflected in interdependence, obliga-

tions to support family members and the central role of family in decision-making.⁵⁹ This framework helps contextualize how some students allocate their time, money and energy, creating tension in how Latino students balance family responsibilities with individualistic expectations of higher education.⁶⁰ In part, this explains research that shows Latino high school graduates are more likely to report that it is very important to live at home during college than their peers, due to socioeconomic constraints.⁶¹

Family interdependence can bring real benefits, such as family encouragement and reduced housing costs. However, for many, family can also constitute an additional set of demands that higher education institutions are not designed to support.

Worsening Policy Environment

The federal policy environment has only worsened over the past year for low-income students and Latinos. The July 2025 reconciliation legislation, commonly referred to as the “One Big Beautiful Bill Act” (OBBBA), slashed \$1 trillion from Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act, as well as \$187 billion from SNAP, resulting in one of the largest cuts to healthcare and anti-hunger programs in U.S. history.⁶² These cuts are expected to reduce state higher education spending as states absorb increased cost-sharing for food and healthcare coverage.⁶³

One analysis found that state funding cuts for full-time students following the Great Recession led to an 18% increase in average tuition, after adjusting for inflation.⁶⁴ Furthermore, federal funding cuts disproportionately impact community colleges, which are key access points for the low-income and first-generation students who make up the majority of Latino postsecondary enrollees.

Simultaneously, the Trump administration has sought to restrict institutional-strengthening grant funding for HSIs, which enroll over two-thirds of Latino undergraduates, and redirected the \$10 million Basic Needs Grants toward other priorities.⁶⁵ At least 25 of the 42 Basic Needs Grant grantees were HSIs.⁶⁶

These federal Basic Needs Grants provide campuses with funding to develop systematic, evidence-based

approaches, often in partnership with public agencies, to coordinate and address basic needs insecurity. One such grantee, Normandale Community College in Minnesota, received funding to build institutional capacity and to train basic-needs staff to support student outreach. As a result, students served by the grant had a completion rate 6 percentage points higher than those not served by the grant.⁶⁷ These cuts exacerbate the affordability and basic needs insecurity crisis facing Latino students, underscoring the urgency for policymakers to act.

Taken together, the evidence points to something more than a set of parallel hardships. Food insecurity, housing instability, transportation barriers and mental health strain do not arrive separately or get resolved independently. For many Latino college students, it’s a pile-on effect, and the weight on their shoulders can be overwhelming.

Our 2024 *Survey of Latinos in Higher Education* documented the scope of that weight but does not fully capture the entire picture of how these compounding barriers show up in students’ daily lives, why existing support systems fail to intercept them, and what it would take to dismantle them. To better understand these dynamics, UnidosUS conducted focus groups with Latino college students across the country. Their experiences are documented in the findings below.

“Everything Stacks Up”

Findings from Latino College Students on Basic Needs Insecurity

In March 2026, UnidosUS held four focus groups with a total of 18 Latino college students to understand how basic needs insecurities impact Latino college completion.

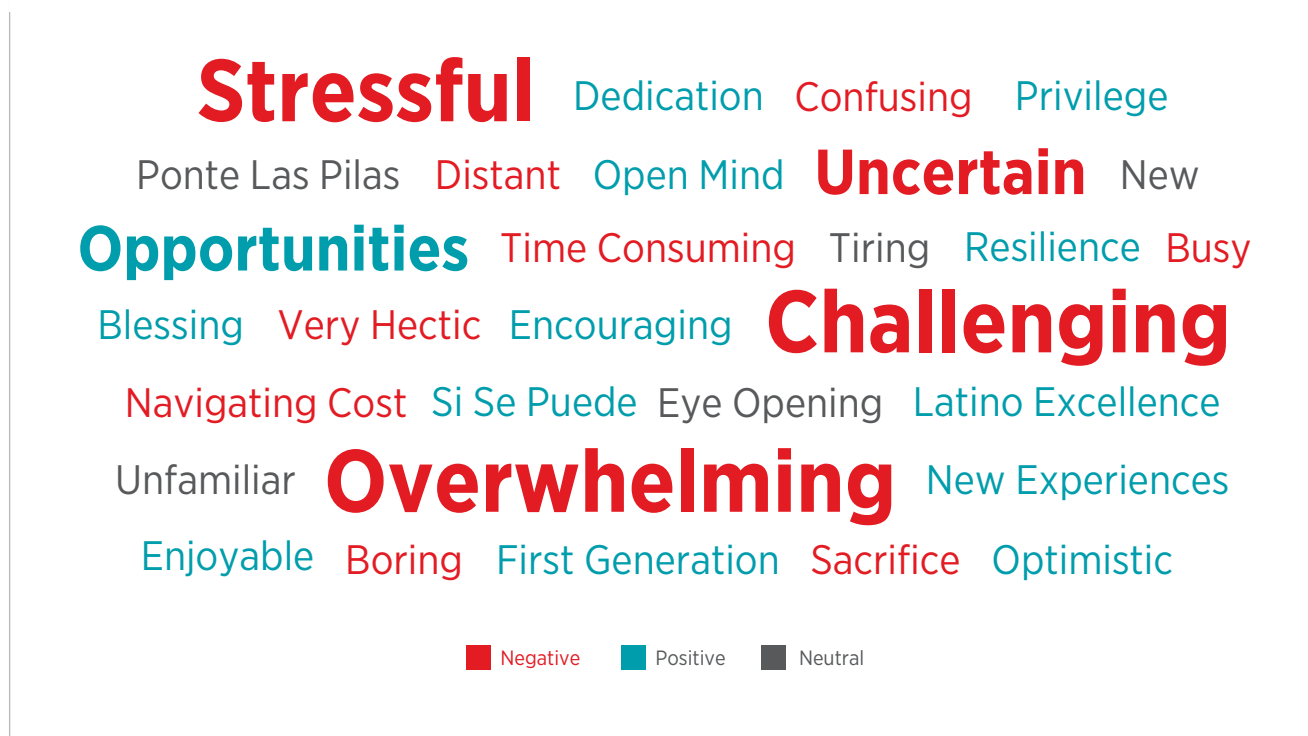
One focus group was held with Latino students generally, and three with subgroups at elevated risk of stopping out: LGBTQ+ students, students with caregiving obligations and working students. All sessions were transcribed and coded for thematic analysis; full methodology and participant demographics are available in [Appendix 1](#). Quotations from participants are identified by their state, institutional type, and focus group.

Asked to describe what it feels like to be a college student right now, participants in every session described college as a pathway to well-paying jobs

and a better life for their families. They spoke about honoring their parents’ sacrifices as immigrants, becoming the first in their families to earn a degree, and building careers that uplift their households.

Yet those aspirations collided with basic needs insecurities around food, transportation, housing and mental health. What emerged across all focus groups were not isolated hardships, but a system of compounding barriers where financial instability, family obligation, belonging and political instability reinforce basic needs insecurity and push Latinos out of college.

Figure 4: Words and Phrases Participants Used to Describe Being a College Student Right Now



Finding 1: Basic Need Deficits Are Interconnected and Compounding



Everything stacks up.”

— Florida, Community College, Caregiving Group

Cascading Effect

Latino college students do not experience food insecurity, transportation barriers or financial insecurity in isolation. When a student cannot afford gas, they must decide between getting to class or going to get groceries for the week. The defining feature of basic needs insecurity for Latino college students is the cascading effect one deprivation triggers across others.

“I would not pump my full gas tank. I would limit that until I was able to get more money. And I think that took a toll a lot mentally, and I did see that in my grades.”

— Texas, Four-Year Public University, General Group

“It’s either food or school, so my priority is food.”

— California, Four-Year Public University, General Group

Monthly Financial Cycle

Across all four groups, students described a monthly financial cycle in which every expense competes for the same limited funds. Tuition, rent, food, gas, books and the cost of staying socially present on campus all draw from the same account. The end of the month emerged as a predictable crisis point across groups: the moment when rent, car payments and bills converge, and students are forced into choices with no good options.

“The end of the month is coming up — rent is due, and I already have the bill for the summer classes.”

— Florida, Community College, Caregiving Group

Food Insecurity

Food insecurity does not just leave Latino students hungry; it directly impacts their classroom performance and increases their stop-out risk. One student described witnessing classmates pass out from lack of food and personally knowing students who eat only once a day.

“At midterms, I felt very sleepy and upset because I hadn’t eaten enough. Without eating, I don’t focus enough on school.”

— California, Community College, General Group

Transportation Issues

Transportation issues intensify the problem. Students without cars describe walking to grocery stores, depending on family members for rides and missing campus resources because offices close before they can reach them. Commuter students described the commute itself as consuming time and financial resources that could otherwise go towards studies, meals or rest. Each unmet need produces the next.

“I had to leave at 5 in the morning, and I would sleep in my car until it was time for class.”

— Virginia, Community College, LGBTQ+ Group

Housing Costs

Housing costs further complicate Latino students' decision-making. Most participants lived off campus, either with parents or in nearby apartments — not by preference, but because of the high costs of campus housing. One student left the dorms after a single year because they had depleted their savings. Students trade housing costs for a daily commute that cuts into sleep, meals and time on campus. Another student described a peer who left college entirely because of an inability to find housing.

“The cost of living at the dorms was too much, and it was eating into my savings.”

— California, Four-Year Public University, LGBTQ+ Group

“Financial aid doesn’t cover housing [enough], and that’s really expensive. Sometimes people experience homelessness.”

— California, Community College, General Group

Finding 2: Family Responsibilities Are Hidden Costs Affecting Latino Student Persistence



Not living at home, but you still have all those responsibilities from home.”

— Texas, Four-Year Private University, Caregiving Group

Parental Sacrifices

For many Latino students, family is the reason they are in college at all. Parents work multiple jobs, sacrificing so their children can have opportunities they did not have.

“My parents are doing so much. I really have to make it all worth it.”

— Ohio, Four-Year Public University, Working Group

Students in the caregiving group described assuming substantial responsibility for siblings, younger family members, and — in some cases — their parents, while carrying a full academic load. Those obligations did not stay at home. For Latino students rooted in *familismo*, these responsibilities are not a distraction from college; they are inseparable from it. They follow students into their academic decisions, driving absences from campus, delays in coursework, and serious consideration of shifting to online enrollment — not out of academic preference, but out of family necessity.

Competing Obligations

Yet the same family connection generates competing obligations that draw from the same reserves of time, money and energy that degree completion requires. Caregiving for siblings, financial contributions toward family expenses and managing family labor largely go unrecognized by higher education institutions.

“Being tight-knit with family is a great blessing, but am I kind of holding myself back by doing these things? It’s just very hard to balance.”

— Texas, Four-Year Private University, Caregiving Group

“I was thinking of taking a semester online just because I feel like my parents need me here all the time.”

— Kentucky, Four-Year Public University, Caregiving Group

Supporting family

Working students described a related pattern: directing wages not only toward tuition but toward household bills and family expenses. This pattern of working to give back is common in low-income immigrant Latino families and does not disappear when a family member enrolls in college.

“The hardest point in the month is the end, because that’s where I’m trying to save up a lot more money to help out my dad.”

— Ohio, Four-Year Public University, Working Group



The result is a retention risk that campus systems are not built to detect. When family obligations pull a student away from their coursework, such responsibilities do not appear in any institutional data. It is, for many Latino students, simply the cost of being in college.

Spotlight: The Compounding Cost — Caregiving and Immigration Enforcement

One participant, a first-year nursing student at a Florida community college, described how the line between student and head of household blurred completely. Following a family separation, she assumed a near-parental role for her twin siblings. She would manage their schoolwork, show up when they got in trouble and contribute financially. She currently earns more than their mother, who is a farmworker.

“My mom tells me I’m a second mother,” she said. “And I’m like, I try”.

Shortly before the focus group, her stepfather was detained by immigration authorities. The same day, she learned her biological father was experiencing health issues. She had also begun managing her own health needs without insurance after losing Medicaid at 18. In a single week, she absorbed three simultaneous shocks to her household’s stability, threatening her ability to continue school.

“It all just piles up,” she said. “The government has all this money to invest outside, but they can’t invest it here.”

Finding 3: Mental Health and Emotional Stress Emerge as Both a Consequence and Driver of Basic Needs Insecurity



Am I not made for this? Am I not supposed to be here?"

— Ohio, Four-Year Public University, General Group

Mental Health and Emotional Stress

Mental health and emotional stress were the most frequently discussed basic need barrier across all four groups. Rather than emerging as a standalone clinical concern, mental health surfaced as the first thing students sacrifice when everything else demands their attention. When financial pressure, caregiving responsibilities and academic demands compete for limited bandwidth, mental health loses. When mental health deteriorates, academic performance follows, making it both a consequence of basic needs insecurity and a cause of dropping out.

"My mental health — that's the first thing that goes."

— California, Four-Year Private University, Working Group

Student Belongingness

For first-generation Latino students, especially those at predominantly white institutions (PWIs), the psychological burden of college is felt heavily. Students describe a persistent sense that they did not belong, questioning whether they're smart enough, comparing themselves to peers who appeared to have more resources.

"I think something for me has been self-doubt and the feeling of imposter syndrome. I feel like I didn't know anything at [all] — feeling like I belong."

— California, Four-Year Private University, Working Group

Provider Challenges

This doubt does not resolve itself. It does so through connecting with someone who understands the cultural context that produced it. Yet students who sought mental health support described difficulty finding a Latino provider who could speak to the specific pressures of being first-generation in a predominantly non-Latino environment.

"I was told by my [Latino] professor that it's just not like people that look like me to continue on, and that I should just drop out. I actually did contemplate dropping out."

— California, Four-Year Private University, Working Group

Cultural Responsiveness

Students do not necessarily need a Latino mental health provider, but they do need one who understands the cultural context of their stressors. That one student experienced harm from a Latino professor underscores that cultural responsiveness is not about identity alone. It requires training, accountability and an institutional climate that affirms Latino students belong.

"It was kind of hard to find someone who could relate. Someone who's also Latino or first-generation. It was hard to find a provider."

— California, Four-Year Private University, Working Group

The gap between the mental health needs these students carry and what campuses offer is not incidental. It reflects a structural failing that leaves students who already question whether they belong without the culturally responsive support that would affirm their place on campus. This same sense of not belonging shapes how students engage with mental health campus resources — leaving students feeling unseen and less likely to seek out support and worsening the needs that go unaddressed.

Finding 4: Recent Federal Policy Changes Have Resulted in Material Harms



People are looking at Latinos like we are less than.”

— *California, Four-Year Public University, Working Group*

Current Political Environment

The current political environment appeared in every group not only as a source of grievance, but of specific, concrete economic and academic disruptions — accelerating the compounding crisis documented above. Students described job losses, household income shocks, reduced campus resources and academic disengagement, all directly traceable to immigration enforcement activities; diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) rollbacks; and uncertainty generated by proposed federal cuts to financial aid and nutrition assistance.

Immigration enforcement produced the most immediate material consequences. One student lost work hours after her clients, Latino adults attending English classes, stopped coming out of fear of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) patrols. Another student described mentally checking out of school during a period of heavy enforcement activity in Los Angeles, not because she was personally at risk, but because her community was.

“ICE was all over the roads, and people just stopped going to classes. And obviously, if there are no people who want to go to the classes, you’re not going to have hours, you’re not going to have a job.”

— *Texas, Four-Year Private University, Caregiving Group*

“The ICE raids really did affect how I approached school and my focus. There were times I did check out of school, like mentally — trying to get deadlines met but still trying to meet folks where they were at in the community.”

— *California, Four-Year Public University, LGBTQ+ Group*

Benefit Disruptions

The disruptions extend beyond immigration enforcement. One student preemptively disenrolled from SNAP in anticipation of federal funding cuts, calculating that relying on a benefit under active political threat was no longer worth the risk of a sudden loss of access. Without institutional guidance on complex and shifting policies, students are left to make consequential decisions about which benefits they can count on.

“At the time when SNAP benefits were being cut by a lot, I opted out of having food stamps. I do know [now] that at times I skip a meal or just forget to eat.”

— *California, Four-Year Public University, LGBTQ+ Group*

DEI Rollbacks

DEI rollbacks and the elimination of identity-based campus infrastructure, coupled with proposed cuts to financial aid, are generating uncertainty that students cannot plan around. Together, these changes remove the resource gateways and belonging spaces that, as Finding 5 illustrates, Latino students trust most and rely upon to persist.

“Taking away the whole DEI thing, taking away a whole bunch of grants, the whole Big Beautiful Bill thing — it puts a lot of uncertainty on people who want higher education. I don’t think they’re really thinking too well about how this is affecting the normal population.”

— Texas, Four-Year Private University, Caregiving Group



For Latino students, policy decisions are not abstract. They produce real consequences: lost wages, foregone benefits and dismantled spaces, compounding and accelerating every barrier that stands in the way of reaching their goal — completing college.

Finding 5: Services Available To Support Students Are Often Insufficient, Fragmented and Siloed



I wish I knew all this stuff freshman year.”

— Texas, Four-Year Private University, Caregiving Group

Unmet Basic Needs

The level of unmet basic needs reflects failures across a safety net not designed for Latino college students. Despite being uniquely positioned to coordinate support for students navigating these gaps, institutional response is uneven.

“There are golf carts that could take me around campus, and that’s really helped me a lot. I don’t want to stop going to school, and little things like this helped me motivate myself to continue.”

— California, Four-Year Public University, General Group

Institutional Supports

When institutional supports reach students, the impact is real. One student who sustained mobility limitations after a car accident credited campus golf cart access with keeping her enrolled. At another institution, students benefited from discounted ridesharing during late-night hours, reducing transportation costs and safety concerns for those returning from late-night studying or work shifts. These supports worked because they addressed specific barriers students faced by providing coordinated wraparound supports.

“We get discounted [rideshare rides] for certain hours — if I know I have to get somewhere important, I [can] schedule a ride during those times.”

— Ohio, Four-Year Public University, Working Group

Out of Reach Supports

For other students, supports like these remained out of reach, not because they did not exist, but because discovery was slow, word-of-mouth and dependent on having already found a trusted community that shared information. Scattered resources, unclear eligibility and enrollment processes, and a lack of coordination leave students with a consistent gap between what their campuses offer and what they can access.

“A lot of word of mouth — meeting other students who have similar challenges and can share resources.”

— California, Four-Year Public University, General Group

“Services don’t necessarily advertise as much. You kind of have to dig, or go and ask somebody, or actually tell someone that you’re struggling — and maybe that person knows where to send you.”

— Texas, Four-Year Private University, Caregiving Group



Trust, Not Outreach

Students routinely learned about food pantries, emergency aid, mental health accommodations and peer support in their junior or senior year, well after the semesters when they needed them the most. Their primary discovery channel was not administrative outreach; instead, it was other Latino students. Trust, not outreach, was the deciding factor. Students gravitated toward support from people who understood where they came from.

“If it weren’t for that [Latino mentorship] program, I probably would have failed a lot in different semesters. They helped me get connected to mental health accommodations and having a group of peers who came from similar backgrounds really inspired me to continue.”

— California, Four-Year Public University, General Group

Staying Enrolled

Student organizations, cultural centers and peer mentorship programs are not just gateways to resources; they are the primary reason many Latino students stayed enrolled. One student described nearly not enrolling after learning the Latino Student Success Center had been eliminated before she arrived.

“I found out our Latino Student Success Center was removed. That ultimately made me feel like — am I not wanted here? I was originally telling my mom I don’t think I’m going to come here.”

— Ohio, Four-Year Public University, General Group

Supporting Each Other

When these spaces of belonging are arbitrarily shut down, students lose the mechanism they most trust for finding the resources they need. Latino students supporting each other is a testament to their resilience. It is students who pay the price and bear the burden when institutions overcorrect in response to scare-tactic policies.

“There are people [Avanzando Through College] there that are willing to help me, and they are trying to make a change and make sure that we feel wanted throughout every step of the way.”

— Ohio, Four-Year Public University, General Group

An example: Many of the participants were in UnidosUS’ Avanzando Through College, which partners with higher education institutions to equip Latino students with navigation skills, peer connections and academic support, demonstrating what intentionally building peer infrastructure can look like for Latino students.

Policy Recommendations

The compounding effect that students described in every focus group session, in which financial strain amplifies food, transportation and housing insecurity, reflects failures across a social safety net beyond higher education.

As such, the solutions must match the scale and interconnected nature of what students are experiencing.

Closing the safety net gaps requires a coordinated approach across federal, state and institutional levels.

For their part, federal policymakers must strengthen financial aid, expand access to basic needs support and emergency aid, and remove barriers to public benefits. States must sustain higher education funding and protect culturally responsive programs.

At the same time, higher education institutions should be positioned as coordinating hubs that bring together culturally responsive services through a wraparound model of support for students (refer to [Graphic A](#)).

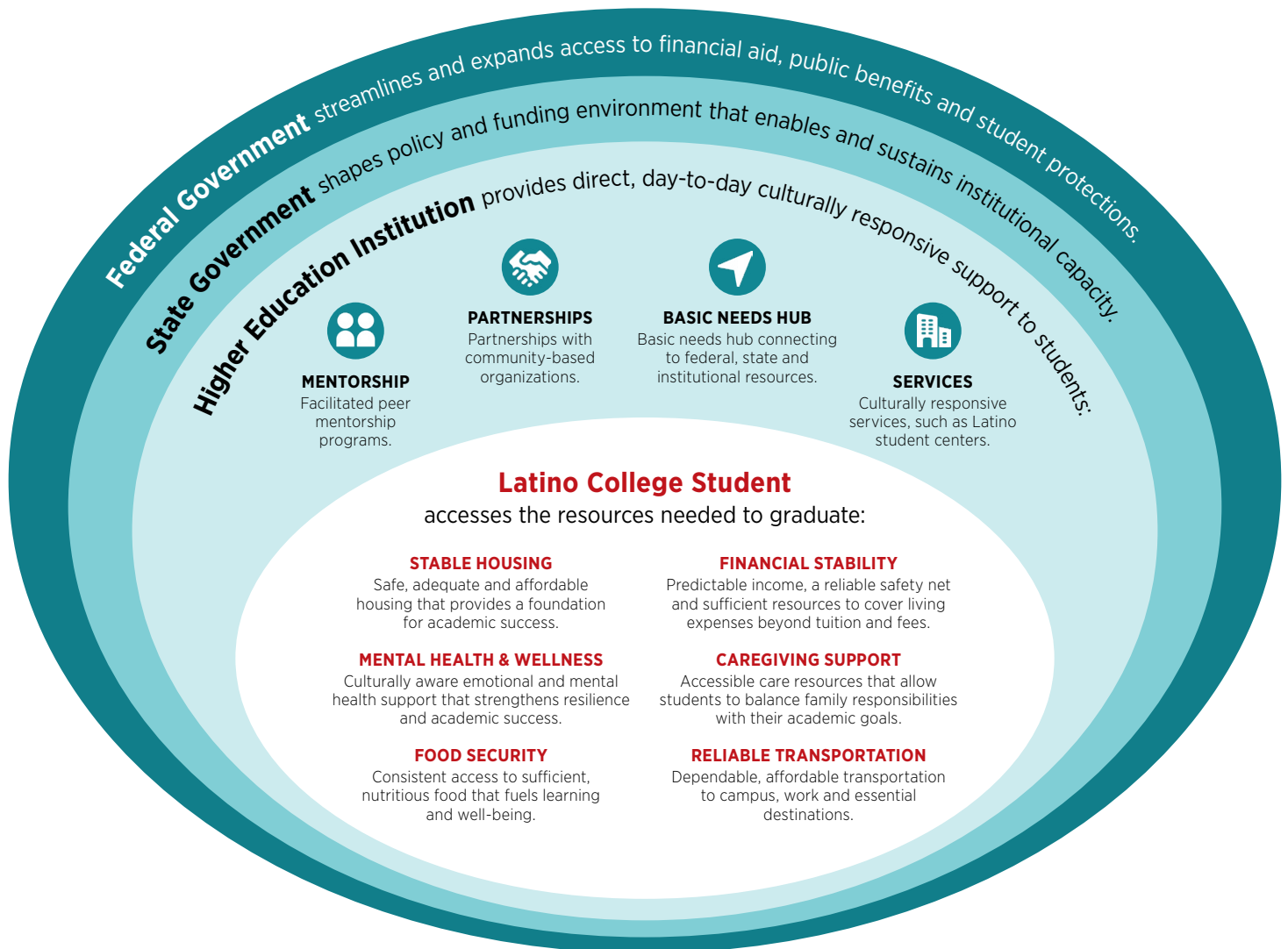
Campuses are where students live, learn and interact on a daily basis. This proximity enables higher education institutions to recognize emerging student needs quickly and serve as coordinating points for connecting students to essential supports more effi-

ciently than distant systems can. To do this, colleges must invest in dedicated resource coordination, staff who reflect and understand the communities they serve, and services that integrate with public assistance systems and are anchored in the lived realities of Latino students.



Graphic A: A Wraparound Model of Support for Latino College Students

Shared responsibility across federal, state and institutional systems to address basic needs insecurity.



Federal Recommendations

1. Protect and expand the Pell Grant.

Congress must fully fund the Pell Grant through mandatory funding and index the maximum award to inflation.

2. Fund basic needs hubs.

Congress should restore, expand and permanently authorize the Basic Needs Grant and the *BASIC Act* to enable campuses to develop hubs for basic needs coordination and outreach. The Department of Education should follow the law and release funding for the Basic Needs Grant as required by Congress.

3. Better connect students with available public benefits.

The Department of Education should fully implement the FAFSA Simplification Act to connect federal financial aid applications with public benefits, such as SNAP; the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC); and TANF. For example, students should automatically receive follow-up information if they qualify for such benefits based on the information they report.

4. Expand SNAP eligibility for college students.

Congress must repeal harmful SNAP provisions enacted in the July 2025 budget reconciliation bill and streamline eligibility by treating postsecondary enrollment as satisfying activity requirements for income-eligible students.

5. Extend federal financial aid and college support services eligibility regardless of immigration status.

Congress must extend Pell Grants and federal loan eligibility to all students, regardless of immigration status. The Department of Education should ensure access to college preparatory and success programs, such as the Federal TRIO Programs, regardless of immigration status.

6. Expand access to emergency aid.

Congress should establish a fund for unexpected expenses, such as restoring COVID-19-era emergency aid investments modeled after the Higher Education Emergency Relief (HEEF) and expanded Supplemental Education Opportunity Grant (SEOG) spending flexibilities.

7. Reduce barriers to housing assistance for college students.

Congress should remove outdated eligibility restrictions utilized by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), such as for the low-income housing tax credit (LIHTC) programs that effectively prevent low-income college students from accessing housing assistance and exclude federal financial aid from being counted as income in determining eligibility for housing support and tax purposes.

8. Invest in student mental and physical health.

Congress should reverse Medicaid cuts enacted in the July 2025 budget reconciliation bill and expand grant funding for campus-based mental health services. The Department of Education should require institutions to inform students of available campus resources, including mental and physical health services upon enrollment.

9. Invest in the unique needs of parenting and caregiving students.

Congress should expand funding for the Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS)

program and extend eligibility to students who carry caregiving responsibilities for siblings or other family members, including those assuming such roles as a result of immigration enforcement activities. Likewise, Congress should expand the child tax credit (CTC) and make it fully refundable and accessible to every child, regardless of immigration status.

10. Require federal data collection on basic needs insecurity by race and ethnicity.

Congress should require the Department of Education to collect from institutions and publicly report data on basic needs insecurity, including food, housing, transportation, mental health and financial instability, disaggregated by race and ethnicity. Data collection efforts should include explicit protection ensuring that students' immigration status cannot be disclosed to or accessed by immigration enforcement agencies.

11. Prohibit the use of public benefits and financial aid data for immigration enforcement.

Congress should ban data collected when students or their families apply for or receive public benefit services — including SNAP, Medicaid and the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) — from being shared with immigration enforcement agencies.



State Recommendations

1. Preserve and expand state-based funding for higher education.

States should at least maintain, and work toward increasing, per-student funding for public institutions and establish dedicated appropriations for basic needs support programs, student success initiatives, emergency aid and culturally responsive services that federal disinvestment has left at risk.

2. Establish or expand state basic needs grant programs.

States should establish dedicated funding streams for basic needs support at public colleges and universities, similar to California's Basic Needs Initiative model, ensuring students have access to food, mental health and emergency financial assistance regardless of federal funding levels.

3. Protect in-state tuition equity.

States must protect or expand access to in-state tuition and state financial aid regardless of the immigration status of students or their parents.

4. Expand proactive benefits outreach and enrollment assistance.

States should automatically enroll college students for federal and state benefit programs (including SNAP and Medicaid), fund dedicated enrollment assistance programs at public institutions, and connect state data systems to streamline eligibility verification across programs.

5. Reaffirm commitment to culturally responsive support infrastructure.

States should preserve and expand funding for peer mentorship programs, cultural centers and student services at public institutions and resist legislative efforts to eliminate or defund such offerings under DEI rollback measures.

6. Reform campus-area zoning to expand affordable housing supply.

States and local governments should collaborate to reform zoning laws around public colleges to allow higher-density housing, reducing barriers to housing supply growth and lowering costs for students living off campus.

Institutional Recommendations

1. Invest in one-stop basic needs centers.

Institutions should create a single, visible and trusted hub where students can access food assistance, housing support, emergency aid and benefits screening without being bounced from office to office. These centers should coordinate with Latino and other cultural resource centers on campus to ensure that outreach reaches students who may otherwise disengage from or distrust institutional support.

2. Invest in culturally responsive support infrastructure.

Institutions must protect and expand resources that serve Latino students — such as peer mentorship programs, cultural centers and culturally responsive advising — and resist political pressure to preemptively eliminate these offerings.



3. Expand access to existing basic support services, such as for commuting students.

Institutions should offer extended evening and weekend hours to food pantries, childcare and mental health providers and collaborate with service providers at off-campus community-based organizations.

4. Build campus mental health capacity.

Institutions should expand telehealth and community-based mental health options to reach commuter and part-time students and train peer mentors, faculty and staff to identify and refer students in distress through trusted relationships that Latino students rely on the most.

5. Address transportation as a basic needs barrier.

Institutions should provide subsidized transit passes, expand reliable campus shuttle services and account for transportation costs within institutional grant aid programs.

6. Expand on-campus housing supply and develop emergency housing protocols.

Institutions should invest in creating affordable, multiunit dormitories to reduce housing costs for students and establish emergency housing protocols for students facing displacement.

Conclusion

The basic needs crisis facing Latino students is not a consequence of insufficient motivation or resilience.

Rather, this report's central finding is that Latino students are being pushed out by systems that treat food, housing, transportation, caregiving and mental health as separate problems when students experience them as one compounding crisis.

Each unmet need reduces the time, money and emotional capacity available to manage the next, turning each cost into a direct threat to persistence and completion. Latino college students have stretched their limited resources across competing demands; built peer networks to fill institutional gaps; and enrolled through financial, family and political pressures that threaten their educational journey.

Closing the Latino degree completion gap will require systems that reflect students' experiences of these

barriers through coordination, cultural responsiveness and preemptive measures to address basic needs before they push students out of college.

Latino students deserve a higher education system that accounts for the true cost of college today — not just tuition but also gas, groceries, family caregiving, cultural navigation and the weight of belonging to a community under political attack while trying to complete a degree.

If higher education is to deliver on its promise of economic mobility, policymakers and institutions must build systems that prevent these pressures from compounding in the first place. Latino students have already shown they believe in higher education; now, higher education must show that it believes in them.



People are looking at Latinos like we are less than, and they are treating us the same way. These things won't change from one day to the next, but we can do something about it — and the true answer is through education."

— California, Four-Year Private University, Working Group

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About UnidosUS

UnidosUS is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that serves as the nation’s largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization. Since 1968, we have built a stronger America by creating opportunities for Latinos and breaking down barriers to expand economic and social progress for all. UnidosUS partners with an Affiliate Network of nearly 300 community-based organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico. For more information on UnidosUS, visit unidosus.org or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Threads](#) and [X](#).

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore how basic needs insecurity affects the college persistence of Latino postsecondary students, building upon the quantitative “2024 *Survey of Latinos in Higher Education*” to surface themes that survey data alone could not fully capture. Using inductive and deductive strategies, qualitative coding included descriptive, procedure and in vivo coding to explore and discover themes and findings.

UnidosUS held four focus groups in March 2026: a general comparison group and three subgroup-specific sessions targeting LGBTQ+ identifying Latino students, Latino students with caregiving obligations, and Latino students who are employed part- or full-time while enrolled. The general group served as a baseline against which subgroup-specific themes were compared. Sessions were held virtually on Zoom, lasted approximately one hour and were limited to three to six participants to facilitate open dialogue. Participants received a \$100 gift card upon completion.

Participants were recruited through UnidosUS Education Program sites via an interest intake form. Eligibility was limited to current students and recent graduates within the past two years. Self-identified subgroup members were assigned to their respective session; remaining participants were randomly assigned to the general group. All sessions were transcribed and coded for thematic analysis. Participants were assured anonymity; no individuals are identified by name in published materials, though anonymized quotes and themes may appear in future publications. Refer to [Appendix 2](#) for group demographics.

Limitations

Findings should be interpreted with several limitations in mind. Recruitment through UnidosUS Education Program sites introduces self-selection bias — participants may have greater personal familiarity with basic needs insecurity than the broader Latino student population and may have benefited from programming not available at other institutions, both of which limit generalizability.

The sample size, intentionally small to support depth of discussion, is not statistically representative and should be understood as exploratory, complementing rather than replacing large-scale quantitative research. Likewise, none of the students reported part-time enrollment, nor had any stopped out. Finally, the working students group included both part-time and full-time employed students, which may obscure variation in experience across employment intensity levels.

Appendix 2: Focus Group Participant Profile

The following table summarizes demographic characteristics of the 18 Latino college students who participated in the four March 2026 UnidosUS focus groups.

Focus Group		Employment Status	
General (March 12)	6	Full-time job (35+ hours/week)	2
Caregiving (March 19)	4	Part-time job (1-34 hours/week)	8
LGBTQ+ (March 23)	3	Not currently working	8
Working Students (March 24)	5	Identifies As LGBTQ+	
State		Yes	4
Alabama	1	No	14
California	6	Enrollment Status	
Florida	1	Full-time	18
Kentucky	1	Part-time	0
Ohio	4		
Texas	3		
Virginia	2		
Institution Type			
Four-year college or university	13		
Community college / Two-year	5		
Year In School			
First year	8		
Second year	2		
Third year	4		
Fourth year	3		
Recently graduated ^a	1		
Race / Ethnicity			
Hispanic / Latino	18		
First-Generation Student			
Yes	18		
No	0		
Pell Grant Recipient			
Yes	15		
No	2		
Unsure	1		

^a Recently graduated defined as having completed a degree within two years of participation.

Appendix 3: Select Findings from the “2024 Survey of Latinos in Higher Education”

BSP Research was commissioned by UnidosUS in 2024 to field a study of Latinos ages 18-35 who are current or recent college graduates. The study included oversamples in four states: California, Florida, Texas and Arizona. The survey was conducted between Aug. 16 and Sept. 25, 2024. All respondents completed the survey online and it was available in English or Spanish, according to respondents' preference. The margin of error for this study was +/- 1.8%.

	Total	LGBTQ+	Parents/ Caregivers	Worked
Respondents N=	3,000	595	891	2,418

Q1: What are the most important reasons you decided to go to college? Reason ranked 1st, most important (sorted highest to lowest)

To get a well-paying job	50%	54%	46%	50%
To have greater job security	40%	33%	46%	40%
To gain new knowledge and skills	37%	35%	37%	37%
For my personal sense of achievement	36%	37%	36%	35%
To prepare for a specific field of study or career	30%	31%	29%	30%
To provide a better life for my family	30%	33%	24%	29%
To make a difference in my community	28%	30%	27%	27%
To pursue a more fulfilling career	14%	14%	15%	14%
Out of intellectual curiosity	10%	12%	10%	11%
Other reason	6%	6%	6%	6%

Q18: At any time that you were enrolled in college, did you have a job?

Yes, I had a full time job	26%	25%	38%	32%
Yes, I had a part time job	49%	48%	44%	62%
Yes, I had both full time and part time jobs	5%	5%	7%	6%
No, did not work while enrolled in college	20%	22%	11%	0%

Q20: During your time in college, how often are/were you unable to get affordable and nutritious food?

Daily	19%	17%	20%	19%
A few times a week	31%	32%	35%	33%
A few times a month	15%	18%	17%	16%
Rarely, but it did happen a few times	20%	21%	15%	20%
Never	15%	12%	12%	12%

Respondents N=

Total
3,000

LGBTQ+
595

**Parents/
Caregivers**
891

Worked
2,418

Q26: Have you/did you ever consider temporarily or permanently leaving school before completing your degree?

Yes, I considered it, but stayed in school	32%	33%	33%	35%
Yes, I temporarily left, and returned to school full-time	13%	14%	18%	15%
Yes, I temporarily left, and returned to school part-time	10%	10%	14%	10%
Yes, I left and have not yet returned	11%	14%	13%	10%
No, I never considered leaving school	34%	29%	23%	30%

Q27: [If considered or left school] How important were each of the following reasons to you leaving, or considering leaving, school? [Respondents provided how important each individual reasoning was, with total importance provided]

	Total	LGBTQ+	Parents/ Caregivers	Worked
Respondents N=	1,965	429	685	1,691
I could no longer afford tuition and overall cost to attend college	73%	71%	74%	74%
I did not want to take on more debt	73%	71%	72%	75%
Lack of academic support or guidance	70%	65%	71%	71%
Experiences with discrimination, harassment, or bias	57%	55%	62%	59%
Mental health or emotional stress	84%	89%	84%	83%
Physical health reasons	64%	63%	69%	65%
Needed child care	52%	42%	69%	54%
No reliable transportation	64%	63%	67%	64%
Lack of remote learning options	63%	62%	67%	64%
Lack of flexible course schedules	70%	67%	72%	72%
Did not have reliable or stable housing	64%	61%	68%	65%
Work obligations	70%	64%	78%	74%
It would take too long to finish my degree or program	62%	56%	65%	63%
Family emergency or crisis	70%	64%	75%	72%
Family obligations or caregiving responsibility	72%	69%	80%	73%
Lost interest or motivation	74%	76%	71%	74%
My career goals changed and I felt I did not need a college degree or certification	66%	61%	68%	68%
COVID	63%	62%	66%	64%

Endnotes

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