Researching Basic Needs Insecurity at Texas Community Colleges: Lessons for Leaders

JEREMY MARTIN, MPAFF

GREENBELT CONSULTING LLC

APRIL 13, 2023

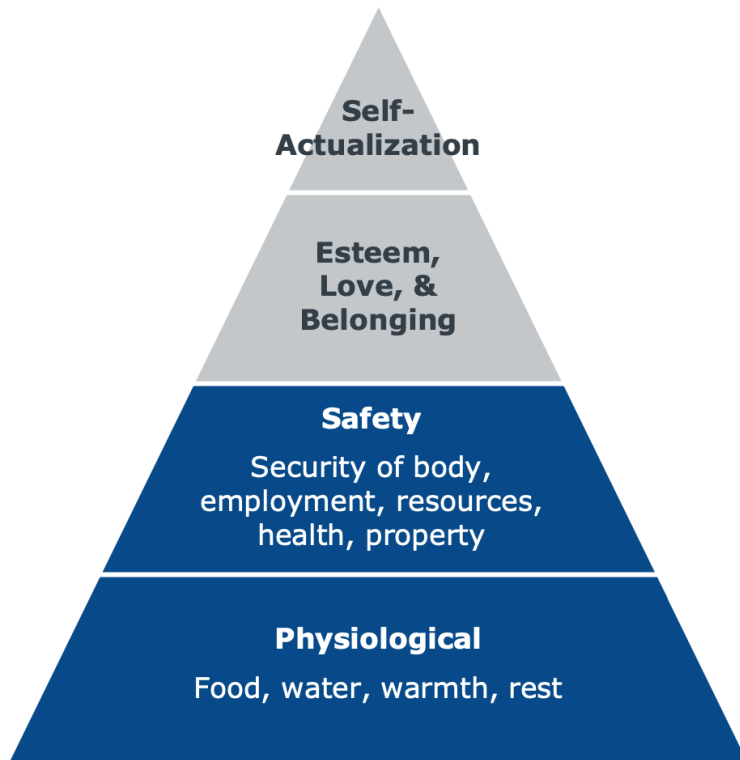TEXAS PATHWAYS INSTITUTE

Agenda

- ▶ Definitions, scope, and top-level findings from landscape analysis

- ▶ Texas Success Center's research agenda

- ▶ Preliminary survey results

- ▶ Discussion

Credit

► Crutchfield, R.M. & Maguire, J. (2017). Researching basic needs in higher education: Qualitative and quantitative instruments to explore a holistic understanding of food and housing insecurity. *The California State University Office of the Chancellor*. Retrieved from, https://www.calstate.edu/impact-of-the-csu/student-success/basic-needs-initiative/Documents/researching-basic-needs.pdf

► The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice at Temple University. https://hope.temple.edu/

► All of the social workers in my life

Definition

Self-Actualization

Esteem, Love, & Belonging

Safety
Security of body, employment, resources, health, property

Physiological
Food, water, warmth, rest

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Under-Resourced Students Face Constraints on Their Time and Focus

"When I leave the dining hall I take an apple or a banana with me. I always think ahead about food—**it never leaves my mind**."

"I'll take photos of a textbook with more than 500 pages **so I can avoid buying it**. It takes hours but you get into a rhythm."

"Trying to do homework when you **haven't eaten in 70 hours** is not going to happen."

"**I never know if I'll have quiet**, or an Internet connection at night, so I try to get as much done as I can during the day."
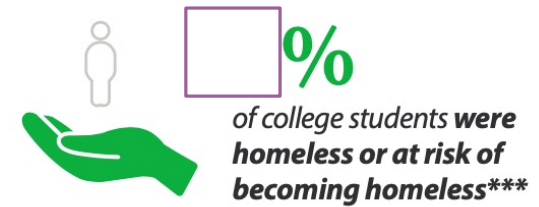
(EAB, 2018)

Scope

Basic needs insecurity among college students

Systematic reviews of existing literature show that

☐% of college students experience **food insecurity***

☐% of college students experience **housing insecurity****

Nationally, representative surveys find that

☐% of college students **were homeless or at risk of becoming homeless*****

Source: (IES, 2021)

Scope

Basic needs insecurity among college students

Systematic reviews of existing literature show that

51%
of college students experience **food insecurity***

45%
of college students experience **housing insecurity****

Nationally, representative surveys find that

9%
of college students **were homeless or at risk of becoming homeless*****

Source: (IES, 2021)

Scope

Source: (Allison, 2021)

Community college students in Texas most likely to experience basic needs insecurity

Students at two-year colleges in Texas are three percentage-points more likely to struggle with **food insecurity, housing insecurity or homelessness** in the last year than students at two-year colleges nationwide.
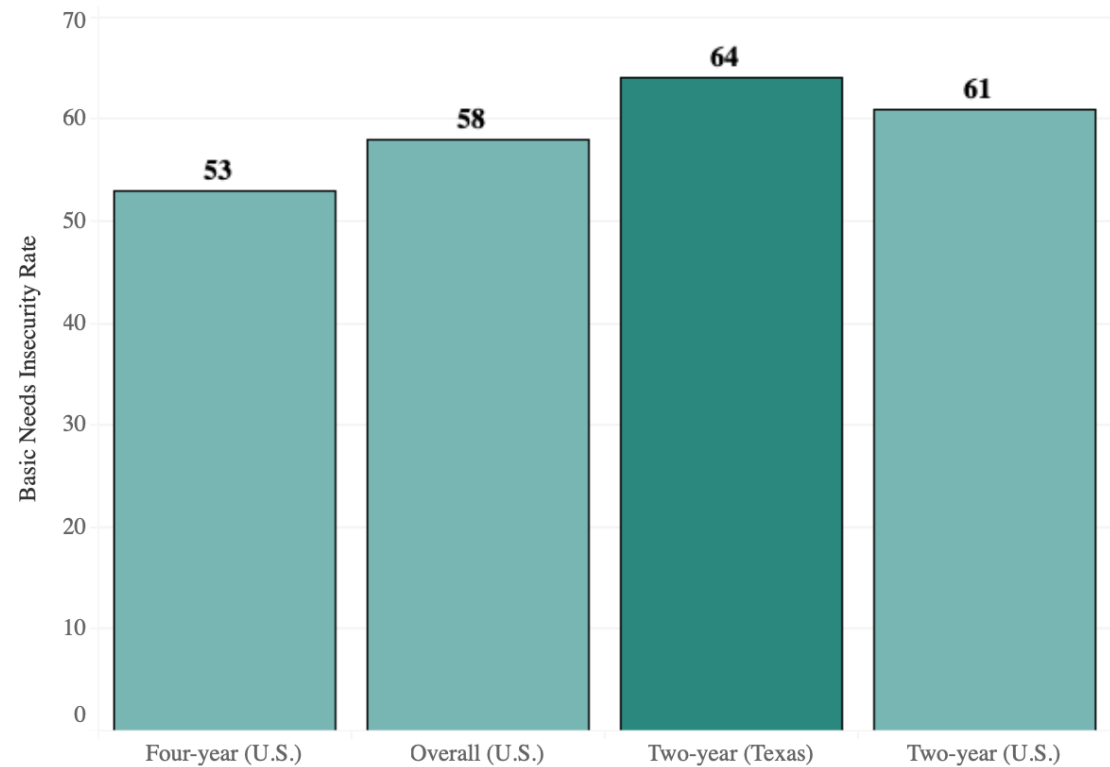
Scope

STUDENTS IN TEXAS TOLD US THAT:

65% experienced **BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY**
seven percentage points above the rate we observed nationally

43% experienced **FOOD INSECURITY**

HOUSING INSECURITY AFFECTED **55%**

HOMELESSNESS AFFECTED **16%**

THE **BLACK/WHITE GAP** IN BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY WAS **14** percentage points

MANY WERE IMPACTED BY THE PANDEMIC:

49% had a close friend or family member who was sick with **COVID-19**

while **8%** were sick with **COVID-19** themselves

18% LOST A LOVED ONE TO **COVID-19**
with Black students twice as likely as White students to lose a loved one

33% of students exhibited at least moderate anxiety

YET FEW STUDENTS EXPERIENCING BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY RECEIVED SUPPORT:

At two-year colleges, 29% received a CARES Act grant

20% received SNAP benefits

67% did not think they were eligible for campus supports

(Hope Center, 2021)

Top-level findings

- Much research has focused on documenting needs. Widespread, compelling evidence of insecurity in the following domains:
    - Housing
    - Food
    - Mental health
    - Transportation
    - Child care
    - Emergency aid
    - And more….
- Insecurity in any of these areas can negatively affect student wellbeing and academic outcomes (EAB, 2018; Goldrick-Rab, 2018).
- COVID-19 has exacerbated these issues, yet sharpened focus on addressing them (Cornett & Fletcher, 2022)

Top-level findings

- Colleges are doing tremendous work supporting students who experience basic needs insecurities. Survey results show wide array of support services.

- However, most efforts appear to lack institution-wide coordination and integration with other strategic priorities, limiting scale and impact (Black & Hernandez, 2022).

- On the college side, resources (financial and human) and siloed, ad-hoc supports appear to be key barriers (Burmicky & Duran, 2022; EAB, 2018; Hope Center, 2021).

- On the student side, social stigma and limited awareness, appear to be key barriers (Perry, 2018).

- Developing faculty, staff, and student capacity to feel comfortable identifying and intervening is essential (NASEM, 2021; Kalkbrenner & Sink, 2018).

Top-level considerations

- No one-size-fits-all approach
  - Basic needs insecurities are fluid and interconnected
  - Colleges operate in unique community, cultural, economic, and social contexts
  - Equity demands attention to these differences – prevalence varies by race, sex, gender identity, and field of study
    - Source(NASEM, 2021)

- Leadership is essential
  - Sets the culture
  - Allocates resources and establishes priorities
  - Empowers faculty and staff
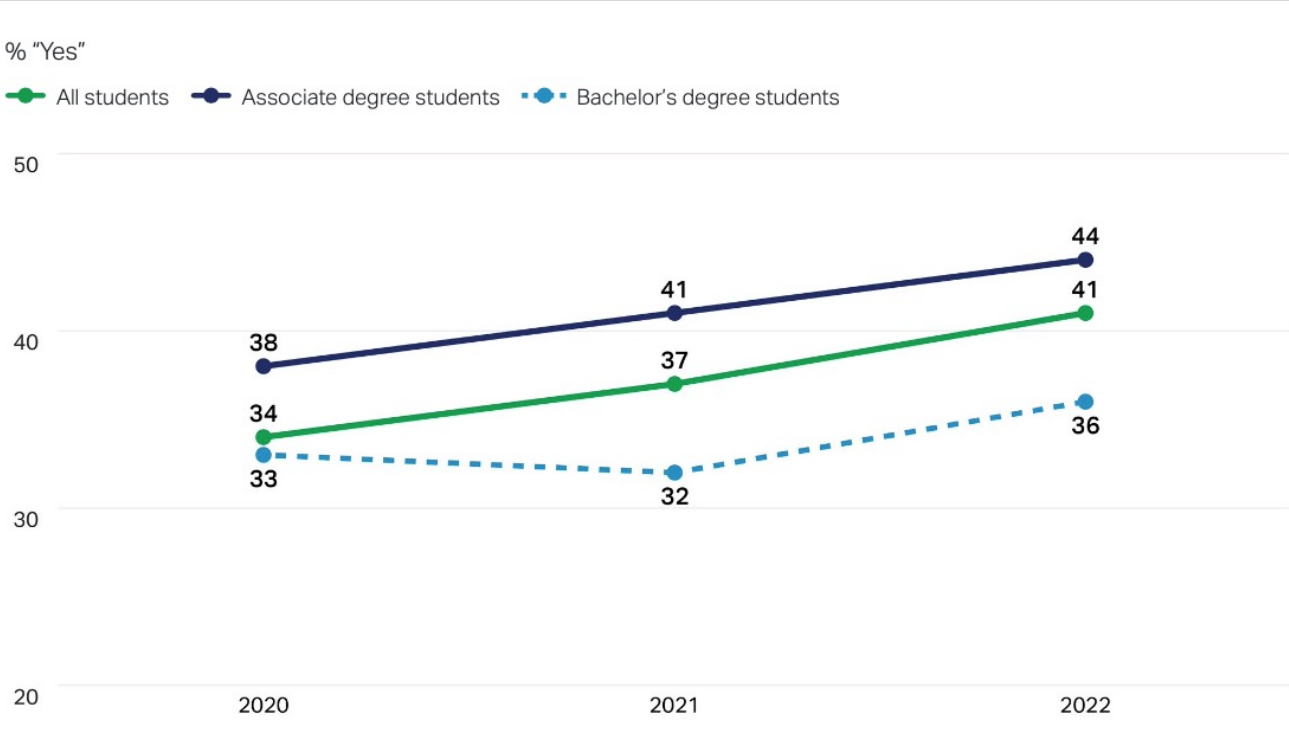   - Source: (Burmicky & Duran, 2022)

Mental health

▶ 2018 survey found ~40% report "Serious mental health problems" and ~60% "increasingly difficult time accessing mental health care."

▶ 80% of postsecondary educators believe mental health is a "very" or "extremely" important factor in student success.

▶ Dropout rates for students diagnosed with a mental health condition range from 43% to 86%.

▶ Any basic needs insecurity can negatively affect mental health and well-being
  ▶ Source: (NASEM, 2021).

Mental health

FIGURE 1

In the past six months, have you considered stopping your coursework (that is, withdrawing from the program for at least one term)?

% "Yes"

━●━ All students   ━●━ Associate degree students   ‑●‑ Bachelor's degree students

	2020	2021	2022
Associate degree students	38	41	44
All students	34	37	41
Bachelor's degree students	33	32	36

Note: "All students" reported in this chart includes students pursuing an associate degree, bachelor's degree, certificate or certification. Results for certificate or certification students not shown.
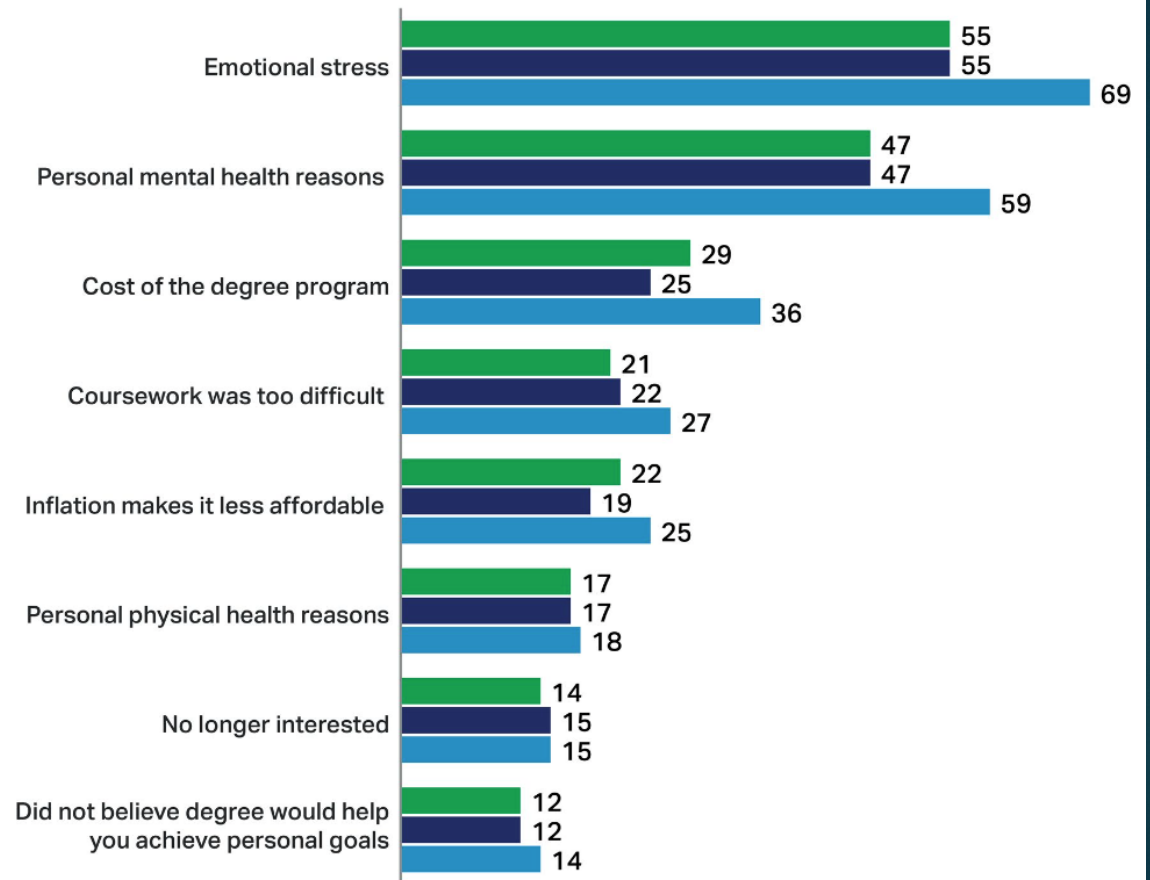
Mental health

FIGURE 3

Which of the following describes why you considered stopping your coursework?

% Most commonly cited reasons among students who say they have considered stopping out in the past six months
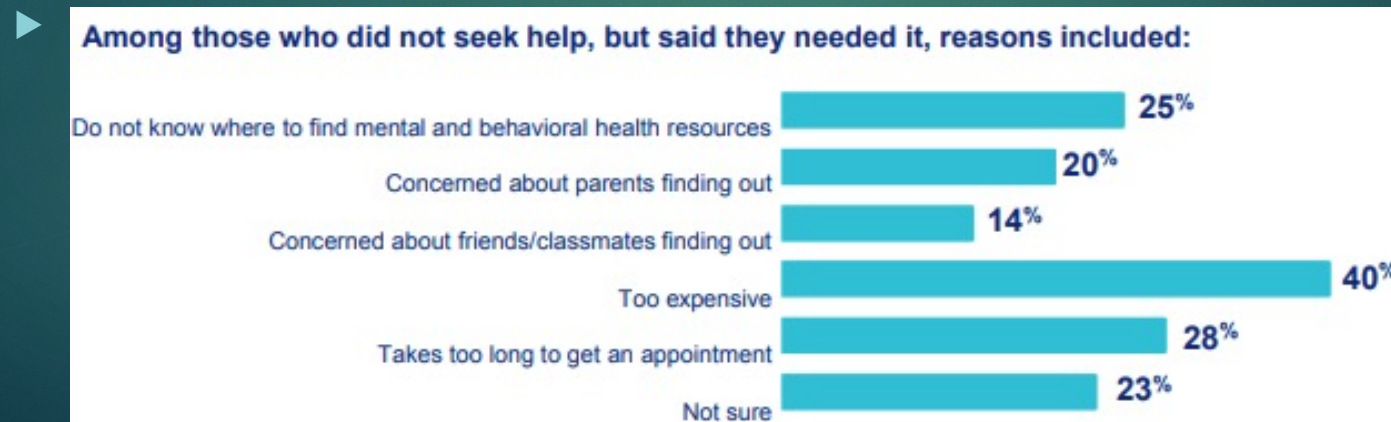
■ All students   ■ Associate degree students   ■ Bachelor's degree students

Reason	All students	Associate degree students	Bachelor's degree students
Emotional stress	55	55	69
Personal mental health reasons	47	47	59
Cost of the degree program	29	25	36
Coursework was too difficult	21	22	27
Inflation makes it less affordable	22	19	25
Personal physical health reasons	17	17	18
No longer interested	14	15	15
Did not believe degree would help you achieve personal goals	12	12	14

Mental health

▶ Practitioners also experience trauma, isolation, and stress

▶ Strong evidence-base for effective interventions, strategies, and policies. See: Abelson, Lipson, & Eisenberg. (2022). Mental Health in College Populations: A Multidisciplinary Review of What Works, Evidence Gaps, and Paths Forward. *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Practice. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-76660-3_6*

▶ Variety of communication, policy, and programmatic strategies needed to support mental health care

▶

Among those who did not seek help, but said they needed it, reasons included:

Reason	Percentage
Do not know where to find mental and behavioral health resources	25%
Concerned about parents finding out	20%
Concerned about friends/classmates finding out	14%
Too expensive	40%
Takes too long to get an appointment	28%
Not sure	23%

Source: UHC, 2022

Mental health

▶ *"Institutional leaders, starting with the president and board of trustees or regents, should articulate the importance of creating a culture of wellbeing on their campus, one that recognizes the range of individual behaviors and community norms that affect wellbeing, acknowledges the magnitude of mental health and substance use issues on campus, addresses the stigma associated with mental illness and substance use disorders, and provides a range of resources to support students with different levels of need."*

  ▶ (NASEM, 2021)

Discussion

- What are your reactions to these findings?
  - What surprises you?
  - How do they inform your priorities?

- What are some key considerations for providing basic needs supports at your institution?
  - Does your institution face unique barriers to offering basic needs supports due to cultural, institutional, or other contexts?
  - What has worked well? Are there partnerships with community organizations? Or outside resources?

- Who are the staff, faculty, and administrators across campus who encounter students in need but may not be well equipped to refer students to relevant resources?

Texas Success Center – Research Plan

- December 2022 – June 2023

- Goals:
  - Understanding the current constellation of approaches, services, and scale of existing basic needs supports at Texas community colleges.
  - Identify gaps in offerings and provide recommendations to institutional leaders to refine, integrate, and sustain highly impactful practices.

- Activities:
  - Landscape analysis and annotated bibliography
  - Statewide survey
  - Key informant interviews
  - Final report, with campus spotlights and database of research

Preliminary results from statewide survey

▶ Distributed to Pathways Leads March 13, 2023 using Qualtrics

▶ Requested response from an administrator who manages basic needs supports

▶ n = 48 (excluding ~ 40 instances of incomplete attempts)

▶ 45 of 52 campuses have at least one response

▶ Will close survey around the end of April

Anonymous link to survey:

Preliminary results from statewide survey

In your opinion, what percentage of your students are:

	homeless?	housing insecure?	food insecure?	in need mental health support?	in need transportation support?	in need of child care support?	in need of emergency financial aid?
average	12.0	31.8	37.0	45.7	31.6	29.4	41.2
max	33	60	84	100	70	62	81

Preliminary results from statewide survey

- How did you form these opinions?
  - Trellis Financial Wellness Survey
  - Hope Center surveys
  - CCSSE Surveys
  - Home-grown "needs assessment" surveys

 - Anecdotes and personal interactions (no systemic data collection)

Preliminary results from statewide survey

How does your college identify students who experience the following basic needs insecurities?
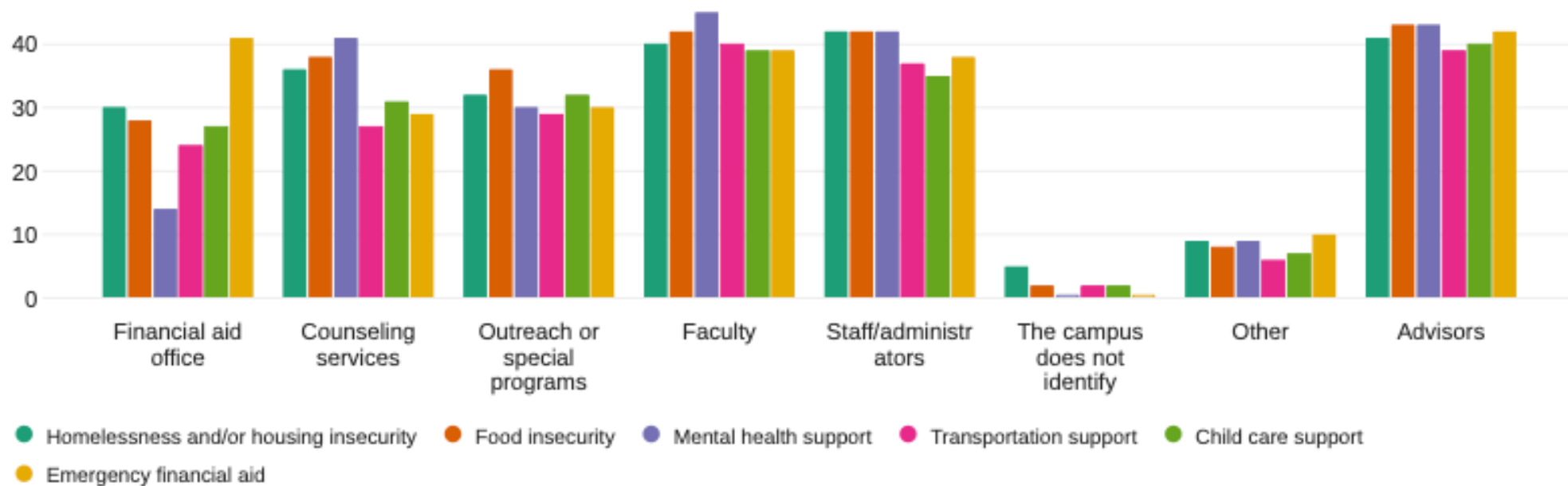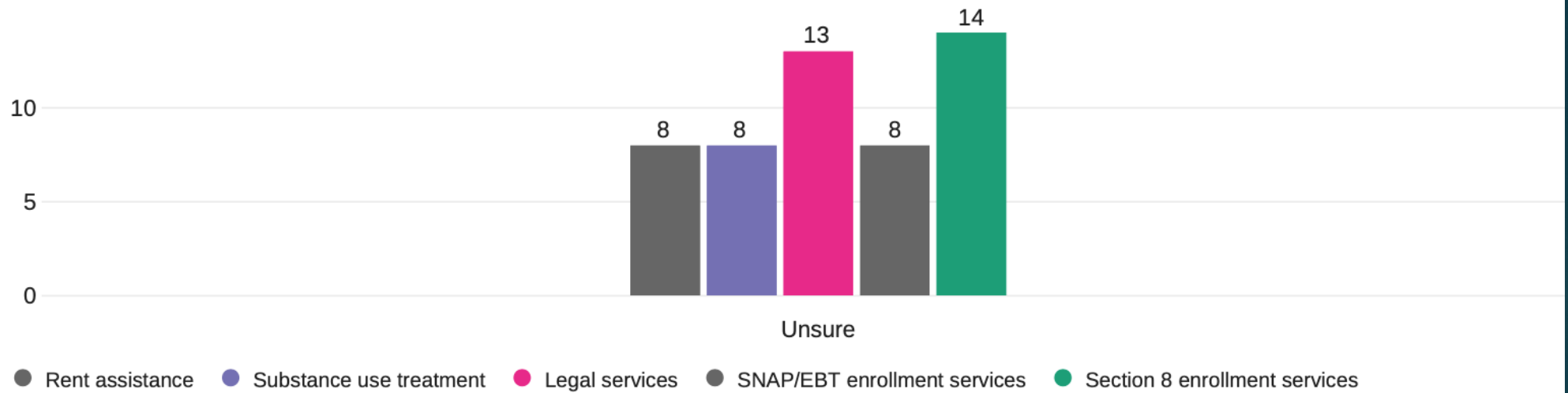
Preliminary results from statewide survey

Does your campus track the retention and graduation rates of students who are experiencing the following basic needs insecurities?
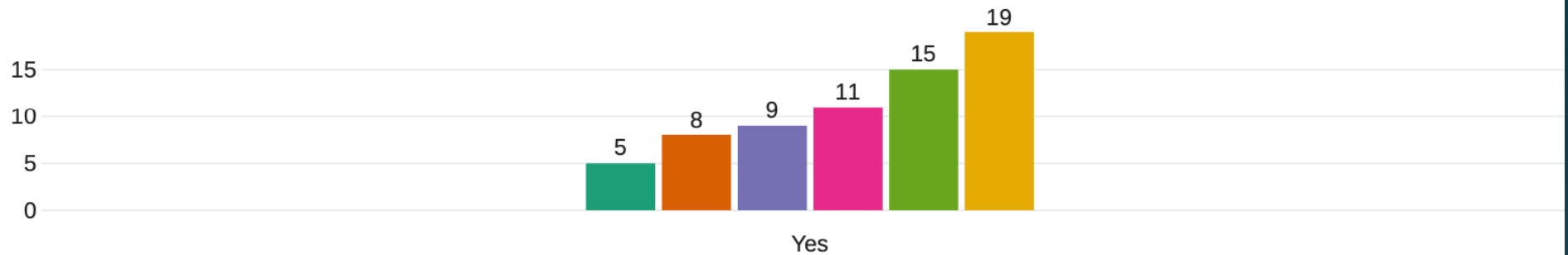
- Homelessness and/or housing insecurity
- Food insecurity
- Mental health support
- Transportation support
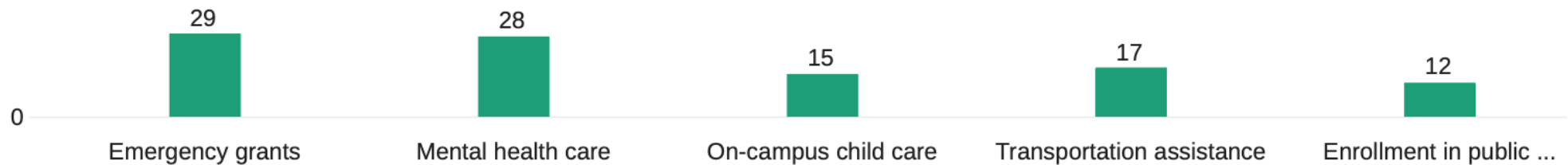- Child care support
- Emergency financial aid support

Preliminary results from statewide survey

Which of the following services exist for students at your college? Select up to 5 options. (Most frequent responses for "unsure")
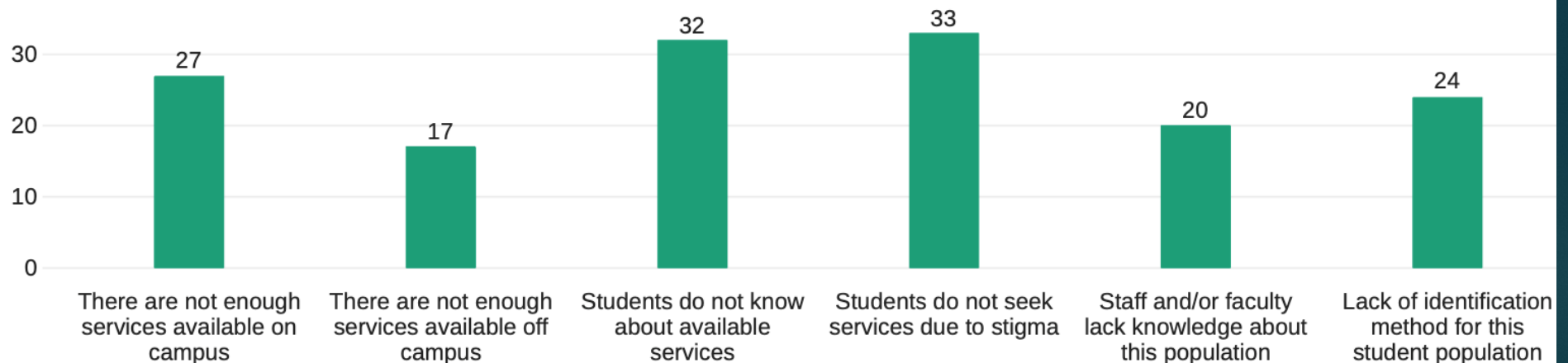
Preliminary results from statewide survey

Which of the following services does your college need more of to meet the basic needs of students? Select up to five services that are most urgently needed. (Most frequent choices)

Emergency grants	Mental health care	On-campus child care	Transportation assistance	Enrollment in public ...
29	28	15	17	12

Preliminary results from statewide survey

What do you think are the five greatest barriers in accessing on campus services to meet the basic needs of students? Select up to five responses. (Most frequent responses)

Preliminary results from statewide survey

In your opinion, is there a specific law at the state- or federal-level, or policy at your college that prevents students with basic needs insecurity from accessing services?

- 13 of 20 responses stated "no policies limits access"

- However, others did identify policy barriers
  - Immigration status and fear of interacting with state
  - Work and school eligibility requirements for public benefits
  - Medicaid access
  - Limitations for individuals who have been in criminal justice system

Preliminary results from statewide survey

Q33 - In your opinion, is there a specific practice or norm at your college that prevents students with basic needs insecurity from accessing services?

- ▶ 10 of 20 responses stated "no norms or practices prevent access"

- ▶ However, students tell us that's not the case
  - ▶ Messaging – outreach is competing with much other communication.
  - ▶ "Micro-environments" – significant institutional complexity especially in larger colleges,
  - ▶ Stigma – Multiple levels: self, group, institution, society
  - ▶ Awareness among faculty, staff, and students

Recommendations

▶ Administer a needs assessment for students. Use data to inform program design with an eye towards continuous improvement.

▶ Create a communication strategy

  ▶ Focusing on raising awareness and decreasing stigma.

  ▶ Embed everywhere – orientation, advising, syllabi, posters, texts, etc

▶ Consider a "single point of contact" model to streamline access

Recommendations

- Use trauma-informed approaches

- Focus on culture and norms

- Partner with other colleges and agencies

Thank you!

For more information, please contact:

Jeremy Martin, MPAFF

jeremy@greenbeltconsultingllc.com

www.greenbeltconsultingllc.com

Kristina Flores, PhD

kflores@tacc.org