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# Food and Housing Insecurity Among Philadelphia College Students A #RealCollegePHL Report

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## Executive Summary

Securing the basic needs of Philadelphia undergraduates is crucial to the city's efforts to boost college attainment, promote economic well-being, and improve community health. Adequate food and housing are fundamental to learning and influence graduation rates, as well as the ability to repay debt. This report examines the results of the 2019 #RealCollege survey for five Philadelphia colleges and universities. Its release is part of the Hope Center's [#RealCollegePHL initiative](#), a new Lenfest Foundation-funded effort to build higher education's capacity via community collaborations to ensure that every student pursuing a college degree has enough to eat and a safe place to sleep.

More than 5,600 students from the Community College of Philadelphia, Drexel University, La Salle University, Orleans Technical College, and Temple University responded to the survey. *More than half of respondents at the two-year institutions and around one-third of respondents at universities evidenced food and/or housing insecurity.* The rates of basic needs insecurity at Philadelphia two-year colleges mirror or exceed national estimates. Moreover, undergraduates who are non-white, female, identify as LGBTQ, and/or have experienced foster care, served in the military service or been incarcerated generally have higher rates of housing and food insecurity than their peers, with some exceptions.

These challenges existed before the COVID-19 pandemic forced the closure of college campuses in Philadelphia in March 2020, resulting in the loss of both on- and off-campus employment for many students, the shuttering of many residence halls, and the closure of cafeterias and food pantries.<sup>1</sup> Pennsylvania reported 645,000 unemployment claims in a 10-day period in March, the largest in its history and more than any other state during that same time.<sup>2</sup> It is therefore likely that rates of food and housing insecurity among Philadelphia college students have increased since they were assessed for this report. Changes to policy and practice are required to ensure these students continue to pursue their educational dreams. We urge immediate investments in emergency aid, new partnerships between colleges and community organizations, and changes designed to better connect students with public benefits programs.

As the unprecedented repercussions of the pandemic continue to evolve, the importance of accurately identifying and meeting students' basic needs is essential. We urge all Philadelphia colleges and universities to field the #RealCollege survey in fall 2020 and will support those efforts free of charge. Click [here](#) to learn more.

## Introduction

### GOING TO COLLEGE IN PHILADELPHIA

Despite recent signs of dynamism, including slow but steady population growth for more than a decade and the largest number of jobs since 1990, stubbornly high rates of poverty continue to plague Philadelphia.<sup>3</sup> More than one in four city residents still live in poverty. In fact, Philadelphia remains the poorest of the nation's 10 largest cities.<sup>4</sup> Almost half of its residents who live in poverty live in deep poverty, on incomes that are at or below half of the federal poverty line.<sup>5</sup> In addition, more than 53,000 Philadelphians in the labor force are considered “working poor,” meaning they work 27 weeks or more in a year but earn less than the poverty income level.<sup>6</sup> The rate of working poverty in Philadelphia is 46% higher than the national average and 60% of the city's working poor are women.<sup>7</sup> The situation facing children is even worse: more than one in three children in Philadelphia live in poverty.<sup>8</sup> As a result, hundreds of thousands of Philadelphians cannot fully achieve their potential, participate in the broader economy, or contribute to flourishing communities.

This report focuses on a critical aspect of poverty in Philadelphia, but one that is largely overlooked, namely basic needs insecurity among college students and its relation to degree attainment rates. Roughly half of adult residents in Boston and Washington, D.C. hold a bachelor's degree compared to just one-quarter in Philadelphia.<sup>9</sup> This puts Philadelphia at a disadvantage. A college degree is nearly essential to secure a family-sustaining job. People with postsecondary degrees or certificates create more earnings not only for themselves, but for their families as well.<sup>10</sup> They pay more taxes, depend less on government-funded programs, and are more likely to volunteer and support philanthropic and nonprofit organizations.<sup>11</sup> Engaged citizens are crucial to healthy cities. Therefore, efforts to fight poverty must include targeted interventions to grow our college-educated workforce. This requires acknowledging that the ambitious and hard-working youth and adults entering college every year in Philadelphia—with their dreams of economic self-sufficiency—need support to escape the conditions of poverty long enough to attain post-secondary credentials.

Students cannot check their economic struggles at the door when they start college. In fact, those struggles typically continue with, and for some are even exacerbated by, the additional demands of school. Even middle-class students can suffer graduation-threatening economic hardship while in college. Fortunately, Philadelphia has a robust community of higher education institutions which play an essential role in helping lift local residents out of poverty. Yet the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the depth and breadth of vulnerability at Philadelphia colleges and universities, as many students who were forced to leave campuses had nowhere to go and no resources to create safe, alternative plans.<sup>12</sup>

This report deepens the body of evidence showing that thousands of local college students struggle with food and housing insecurity (including homelessness), cannot afford childcare or transportation costs, and have difficulty meeting their mental health needs. These challenges undermine college graduation rates which, in turn, reduce the chances of escaping poverty.<sup>13</sup>



Across Philadelphia, there are more than 170,000 individuals who started, but did not finish, college.<sup>14</sup> The reasons likely include financial shortfalls and basic needs insecurity. And those who borrow for, but do not complete, their college degrees are particularly vulnerable to financial hardship as they are three times more likely to default on those loans than those who do attain a degree.<sup>15</sup>

In order to help academic and governmental leaders throughout the region to understand and address these challenges—with the long-term aim of reducing the city’s poverty and growing the economy—the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice at Temple University is launching a new initiative: [#RealCollegePHL](#). After years working with communities across the nation, we are taking key lessons on how to reduce basic needs insecurity and bringing them home. The effort begins with data. In 2018 we released a report offering an initial look at the city’s challenges, using 2016 data from Temple and the Community College of Philadelphia.<sup>16</sup> This new report represents the latest information, from a 2019 survey at five of the city’s colleges and universities. It reveals the scale and scope of the necessary work and should inform efforts to identify the most appropriate program and policy solutions to reduce basic needs insecurity and increase post-secondary degree or certificate completion rates.



## THE NEW ECONOMICS OF COLLEGE IN PHILADELPHIA

High costs for education, insufficient financial aid, inadequate employment opportunities, a diminished social safety net, and reduced resources all contribute to the “new economics of college.”<sup>17</sup> Here in Philadelphia, both the mayor’s office and the City Council recognize these and related barriers that prevent tens of thousands of residents from completing a post-secondary degree and reaching their potential.<sup>18</sup>

The infrastructure to support individuals in poverty through transitions critical to college success is inadequate, including: high school to college, foster care to independence, two-year to four-year institutions, and adult education to workforce training. Even though the School District of Philadelphia takes many steps to address students’ needs for food and housing while they are in elementary and high school, most of those efforts end abruptly with high school graduation. Yet the need for support continues, as financial aid often does not cover the cost of living and key efforts like the National School Lunch Program do not extend into higher education. Further complicating the financial lives of area college students are issues such as:

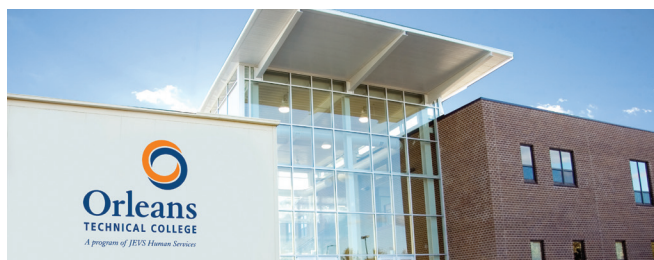
- **Lack of Affordable Housing.** The average rent for an apartment in Philadelphia has increased 20% since 2015 and a majority of Philadelphia renters report being cost-burdened.<sup>19</sup> Housing on or near a Philadelphia college campus is expensive and rarely accommodates part-time students or those who require housing in the summer months and/or during academic breaks.<sup>20</sup>
- **Expensive Public Transportation.** Philadelphians spend a greater percentage of their income on public transportation than their peers in comparable cities.<sup>21</sup> And the neighborhoods where costlier trips hit the hardest are those where incomes are low, where many households do not have cars, and where using SEPTA to get to college or work requires one or more transfers.<sup>22</sup> Most Philadelphia colleges do not participate in SEPTA’s discounted transit pass program for students, thus low-income students are often forced to allocate significant portions of their budget to transportation costs, draining resources from other essentials.<sup>23</sup>
- **Inadequate Supply of Affordable Childcare.** More than one in five college students have children, but childcare funding is generally insufficient and almost non-existent for non-custodial parents.<sup>24</sup> Nationally, the number of on-campus childcare centers has been declining.<sup>25</sup> The federal Child Care Access Means Parents in Schools (CCAMPIS) program, which supports campus-based childcare, does not come close to meeting the need: in 2019, for example, CCAMPIS was only funding up to 16 childcare slots for parenting students at Temple University.<sup>26</sup> Parents who live, work, and go to school in different neighborhoods struggle to find consistent childcare that is both affordable and convenient.<sup>27</sup>



- **Lack of Quality, Affordable Mental Health Services.** One in three first-year college students experience mental health challenges, with depression and anxiety the most common.<sup>28</sup> Eighty-three percent of these students perform lower in reading, math, and writing than students without mental health challenges.<sup>29</sup> Securing and retaining high-quality, affordable mental health services is difficult in general, and available resources are not well-integrated into Philadelphia’s network of post-secondary institutions.<sup>30</sup> Studies have shown that cost considerations present a significant barrier for students needing and seeking mental health care.<sup>31</sup>
- **Food Insecurity.** At 21%, Philadelphia’s rate of food insecurity is nearly double the national rate.<sup>32</sup> And while the national rate has declined slightly in recent years, Philadelphia’s rate of food insecurity has increased.<sup>33</sup> In North Philadelphia—the neighborhood around Temple University and the home to many Community College of Philadelphia students—30% of residents are food insecure.<sup>34</sup> Further, the majority of grocery stores in Philadelphia are clustered around areas with higher income and lower unemployment. This has given rise to food deserts in large parts of South, West, and Northeast Philadelphia.<sup>35</sup>

Philadelphia cannot afford to have the new economics of college prevent students from completing credentials. Half the available jobs in the city are considered “middle skill” or “high skill,” requiring at least some education beyond high school.<sup>36</sup> These jobs pay far more on average (\$19.43 an hour for middle skill, \$26.50 an hour for high skill) and therefore offer greater economic stability.<sup>37</sup> The wage boost is not just a result of a bachelor’s degree. Workers with associate degrees in engineering have median earnings between \$50,000 and \$60,000, and workers with certificates in engineering technologies have median earnings between \$75,001 and \$150,000.<sup>38</sup> Getting more Philadelphians ready to compete for and secure those jobs will require greater attention to and investment in resources to help students complete post-secondary training or education. These efforts are even more urgent during a time of rapid changes in the economy and workforce. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic led to record numbers of unemployment claims, the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia estimated that 18% of jobs in the Philadelphia region were at high risk of being eliminated through automation, with the projected losses falling heaviest on women, people of color, and younger workers.<sup>39</sup>

Philadelphia will not move from its position as the poorest of the nation’s 10 largest cities until—and unless—deeper, more systematic, public and private investments are made to help the city’s students afford and complete post-secondary education.



## THE #REALCOLLEGE SURVEY

Now in its fifth year, the #RealCollege survey is the nation's largest, longest-running annual assessment of basic needs insecurity among college students. In the absence of any federal data on the subject, the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice at Temple University created the survey to evaluate access to affordable food and housing among college students. Over the last five years, more than 330,000 students at 411 colleges and universities have taken the survey.<sup>40</sup>

The most recent survey was fielded in fall 2019, with students completing it in August, September, and October. Nearly 167,000 students from 171 two-year institutions and 56 four-year institutions responded.<sup>41</sup> It was sent electronically to all enrolled students, ages 18 and older, at those institutions.

The survey was distributed to more than 73,000 students at five Philadelphia colleges and universities; it was completed by more than 5,600 of those students, who attended:

- Community College of Philadelphia
- Drexel University
- La Salle University
- Orleans Technical College
- Temple University

The survey response rate was approximately 8%. When considering how representative the results are, it is important to keep in mind that because the survey was emailed to students, they needed to have electronic access to respond. The incentives provided were negligible and did not include help with their challenges. Finally, the survey was framed as being about college life, not about hunger or homelessness. We therefore suspect that students who responded to the survey were relatively advantaged, and the estimates offered are therefore conservative. For more information on how the survey was fielded, refer to the [web appendices](#).

Each institution received a report specific to their own students to help inform their work.

As noted above, this report is based on a survey conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic forced the closure of campuses in March 2020—reducing services, ending most work-study employment, shuttering student residences and dining halls—and led to massive job losses in Philadelphia.<sup>42</sup> While it is beyond the scope of this report to include updated information that quantifies changes among Philadelphia students due to the pandemic, it is reasonable to assume that rates of student basic needs insecurity in Philadelphia have only increased since we conducted this survey.

As the unprecedented repercussions of the pandemic continue to evolve, the importance of accurately identifying and meeting students' basic needs is essential. We urge all Philadelphia colleges and universities to field the #RealCollege survey in fall 2020 and will support such efforts free of charge. Click [here](#) to learn more about the #RealCollege survey.

## SECTION 1:

### Basic Needs Insecurity among Philadelphia College Students

**Food insecurity** is the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe food, or the ability to acquire such food in a socially acceptable manner. The most extreme form is often accompanied by physiological sensations of hunger. The survey assesses food security among students using the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) 18-item set of questions.<sup>43</sup>

**Housing insecurity** includes a broad set of housing challenges that prevent someone from having a safe, affordable, and consistent place to live. Housing insecurity among students was assessed with a nine-item set of questions the Hope Center developed, which looks at factors such as the ability to pay rent or utilities and the need to move frequently.

**Homelessness** means that a person does not have a fixed, regular, and adequate place to live. Students were identified as homeless if they responded affirmatively to a question asking if they had been homeless or they identified living conditions that are considered signs of homelessness. California State University researchers developed the tool used in this report to assess homelessness. Using an inclusive definition of homelessness that lets respondents self-identify both their status and living condition allows more students to receive the support they need, as well as aligning with the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.<sup>44</sup> A recent Brookings Institution study of K-12 students found that “academic outcomes for doubled-up homeless students and other homeless students are almost indistinguishable from one another.”<sup>45</sup>

*For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, refer to the [web appendices](#).*

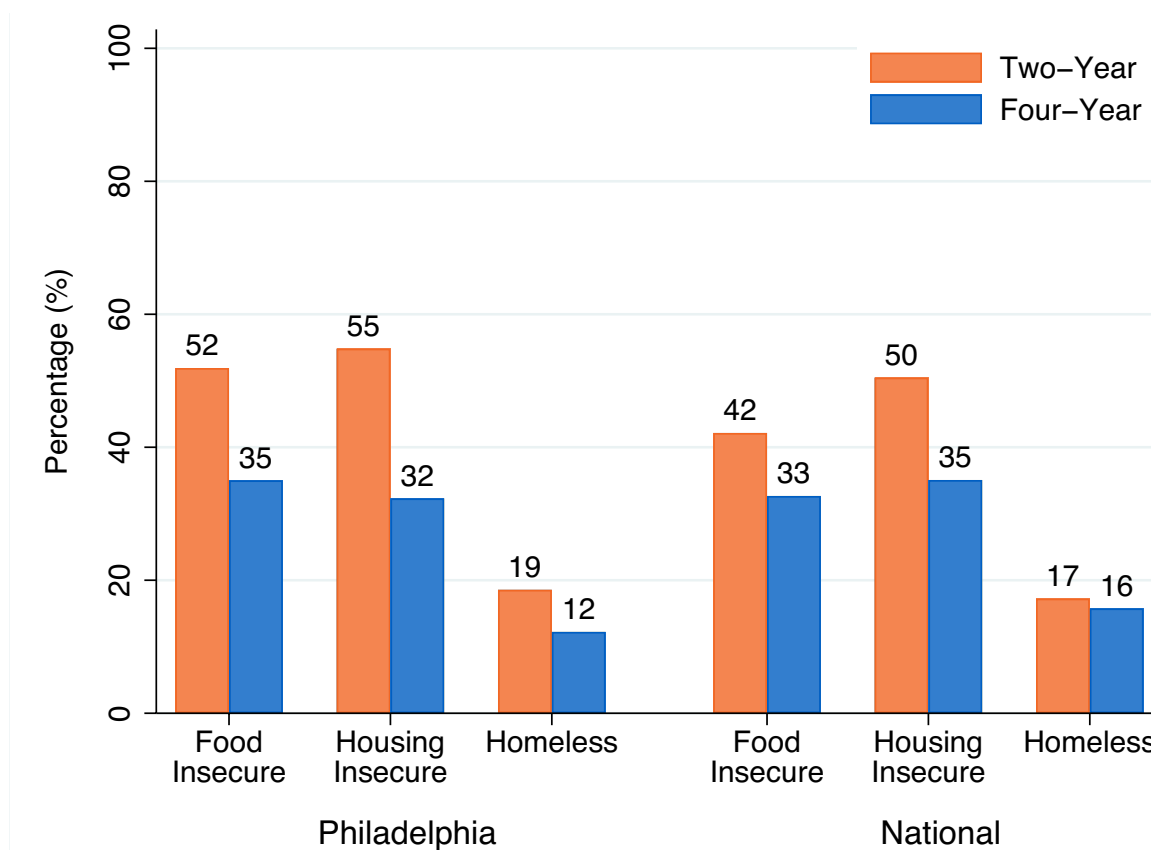




We begin by examining food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness among the two participating two-year colleges (Community College of Philadelphia and Orleans Tech) and the three participating universities (Drexel, La Salle, and Temple), as well as assessing how those Philadelphia figures compare to national rates.

Consistent with [our 2018 report](#), we find widespread basic needs insecurity among the students responding to the surveys. More than half of students at two-year institutions and approximately one-third of students at universities experience some form of food insecurity and/or housing insecurity. Rates of homelessness approach one in five students at two-year colleges and more than one in 10 at four-year universities. Basic needs insecurity at Philadelphia two-year colleges exceeds our national estimates, while rates at Philadelphia universities are very similar to the national averages, though lower when it comes to homelessness (Figure 1).

**FIGURE 1. Food Insecurity, Housing Insecurity, and Homelessness Among Philadelphia and National Survey Respondents**

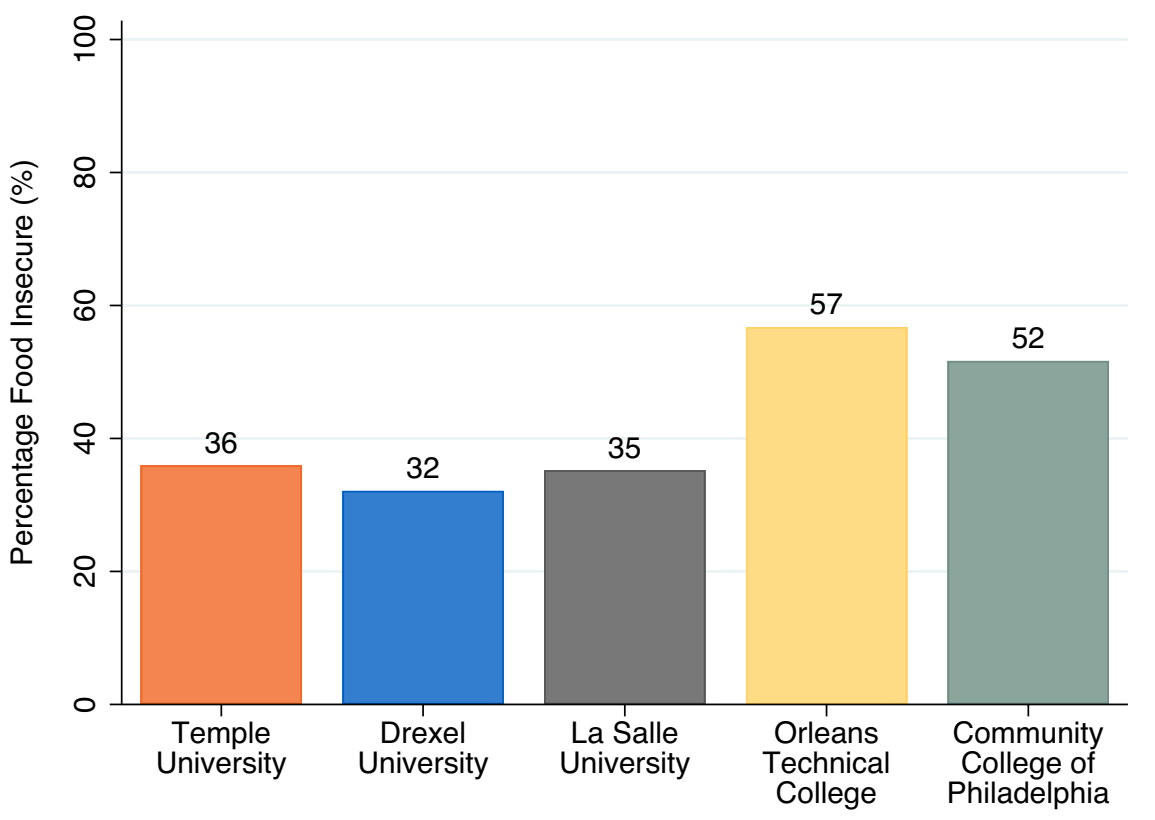


Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, refer to the [web appendices](#).

Next we examine rates of food and housing insecurity, as well as homelessness, by participating Philadelphia institution (Figures 2–4). There is remarkable consistency across the five schools, with the main difference based on whether it is a two-or four-year institution. All of the universities have food insecurity rates of 32%-36%, despite differences in student-body size, percentage of Pell Grant recipients, and survey response rates.

**FIGURE 2. Food Insecurity Among Philadelphia Survey Respondents, By Institution**

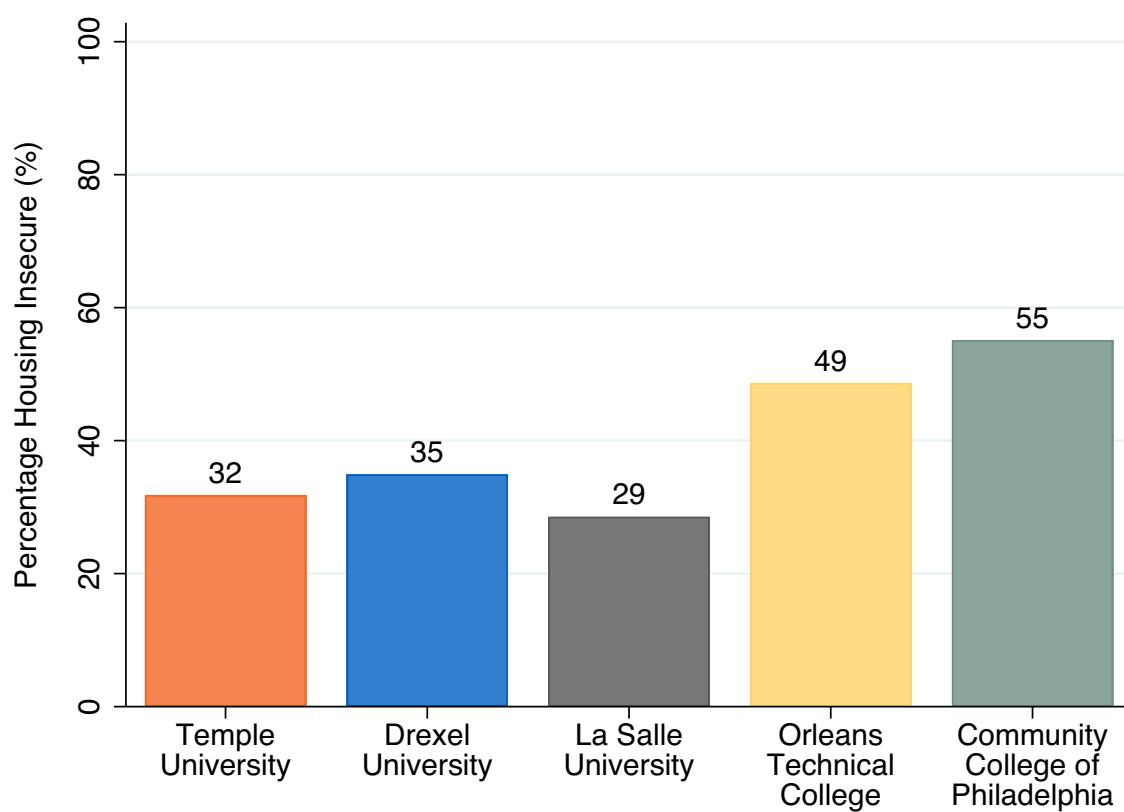


Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Drexel University had a lower response rate (4.5%) than the general response rate (8%). For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, refer to the [web appendices](#).



**FIGURE 3. Housing Insecurity Among Philadelphia Survey Respondents, By Institution**



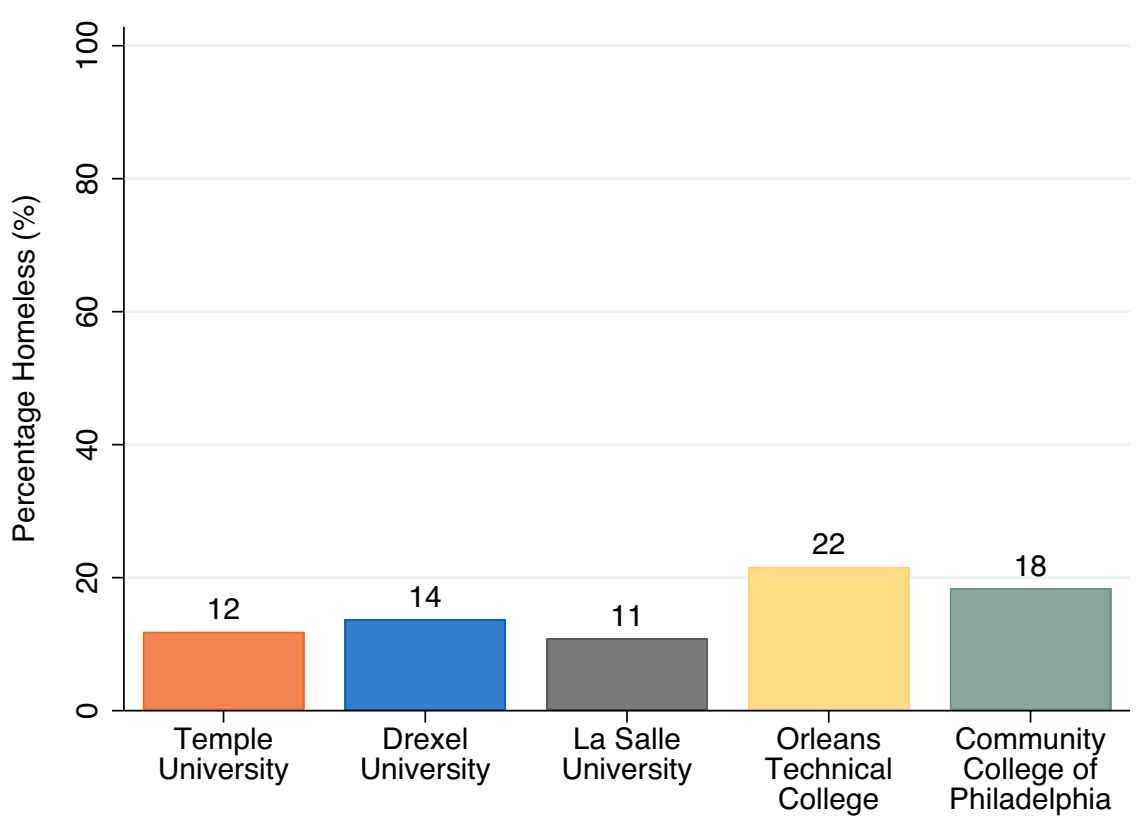
Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Drexel University had a lower response rate (4.5%) than the general response rate (8%). For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, refer to the [web appendices](#).





**FIGURE 4. Homelessness Among Philadelphia Survey Respondents, By Institution**



Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Drexel University had a lower response rate (4.5%) than the general response rate (8%). For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, refer to the [web appendices](#).

## DISPARITIES IN BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY

The Hope Center’s prior work, as well as that by other researchers, has consistently found that some students are more likely to experience basic needs insecurity than others, reflecting a wide variety of structural inequalities.<sup>46</sup> Below we highlight disparities in basic needs insecurity among respondents at Philadelphia institutions by race and ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation, and specific life circumstances.

Students often marginalized in terms of race or ethnicity are more likely to experience basic needs insecurity while attending Philadelphia colleges and universities (Table 1). A greater percentage of American Indian or Alaska Native, Indigenous, Black, and Hispanic or Latinx students face all three types of basic needs insecurity. Those identifying as Middle Eastern, North African, Arab, or Arab American experience especially high rates of homelessness. White, Southeast Asian, and Other Asian or Asian American students have the lowest rates of basic needs insecurity.

**TABLE 1. Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurities, By Race and Ethnicity Among Philadelphia Survey Respondents**

	Number of Students	Food Insecurity (%)	Housing Insecurity (%)	Homelessness (%)
<b>Racial or Ethnic Background</b>				
American Indian or Alaska Native or Indigenous	82	57	48	22
Black	834	53	49	16
Hispanic or Latinx	428	56	48	18
Indigenous	38	68	58	32
Middle Eastern or North African or Arab or Arab American	133	41	43	20
Other Asian or Asian American	507	33	26	10
Pacific Islander or Native Hawaiian	44	45	34	14
Southeast Asian	351	34	29	14
White	2,613	32	32	13
Other	134	48	46	19
Prefer not to answer	60	63	55	25

Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: The “Number of Students” column indicates the number of survey respondents to our measure of homelessness. The number of survey respondents for our measures of food insecurity and housing insecurity may vary slightly. Classifications of racial/ethnic background are not mutually exclusive. Students could self-identify with multiple classifications. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, see [web appendices](#).



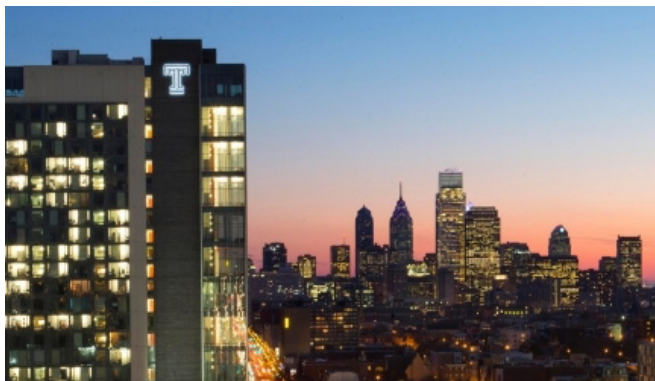
Rates of basic needs insecurity also vary with respect to students' gender identity and sexual orientation (Table 2). Food insecurity and housing insecurity are generally lowest for male students (although male students report higher rates of homelessness); while the highest rates of basic needs insecurity correspond to those who identify as transgender or non-binary, as well as those who prefer to self-describe their gender or sexual orientation.

**TABLE 2. Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurities, By Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Among Philadelphia Survey Respondents**

	Number of Students	Food Insecurity (%)	Housing Insecurity (%)	Homelessness (%)
<b>Gender Identity</b>				
Female	3,008	38	37	12
Male	1,333	33	31	16
Non-binary/Third Gender	69	55	46	22
Self-describe	19	63	47	32
Transgender	51	57	39	22
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>				
Heterosexual	3,346	34	34	12
Gay or Lesbian	203	46	41	17
Bisexual	555	46	42	15
Self-describe	165	52	44	22

Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: The “Number of Students” column indicates the number of survey respondents to our measure of homelessness. The number of survey respondents for our measures of food insecurity and housing insecurity may vary slightly. Classifications of gender identity are not mutually exclusive. Students could self-identify with multiple classifications. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, see [web appendices](#).





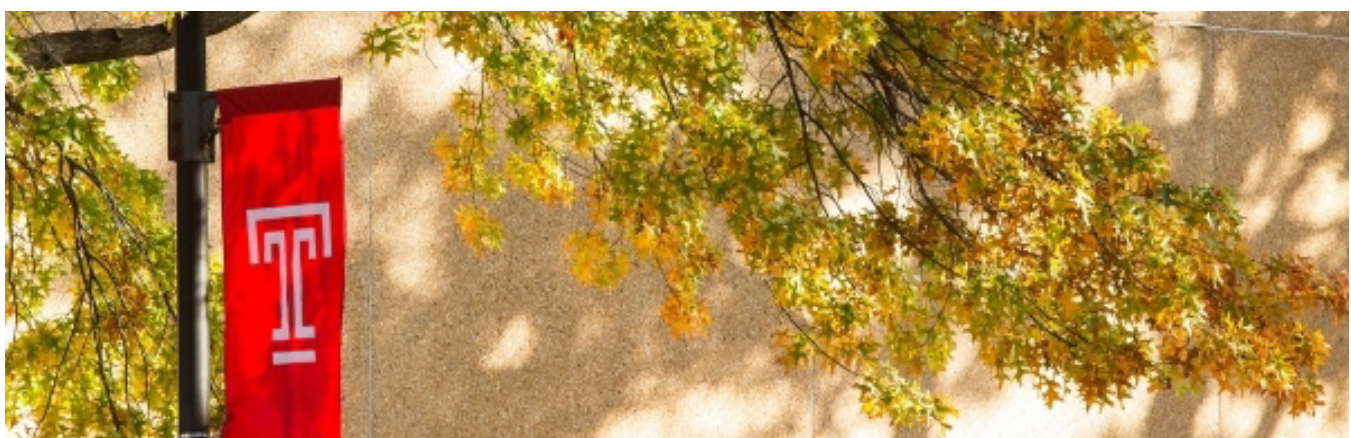
In addition, particular life circumstances are associated with higher-than-average rates of basic needs insecurity. Students who have been through systems such as foster care, the military, or the criminal legal system (i.e., “returning citizens”) are much more likely to experience basic needs insecurity than their peers (Table 3). Former foster youth experience food insecurity and homelessness at especially high rates, with their rate of food insecurity nearly double that of non-foster care students and their rate of homelessness more than triple.

**TABLE 3. Disparities in Basic Needs Insecurities, By Student Experience Among Philadelphia Survey Respondents**

	Number of Students	Food Insecurity (%)	Housing Insecurity (%)	Homelessness (%)
<b>Student has been in Foster Care</b>				
Yes	77	69	60	42
No	4,298	37	35	13
<b>Student Served in the Military</b>				
Yes	72	53	58	24
No	4,301	37	35	13
<b>Student is a Returning Citizen</b>				
Yes	76	49	59	25
No	4,481	37	35	13

Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: The “Number of Students” column indicates the number of survey respondents to our measure of homelessness. The number of survey respondents for our measures of food insecurity and housing insecurity may vary slightly. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, see [web appendices](#).



## SECTION 2:

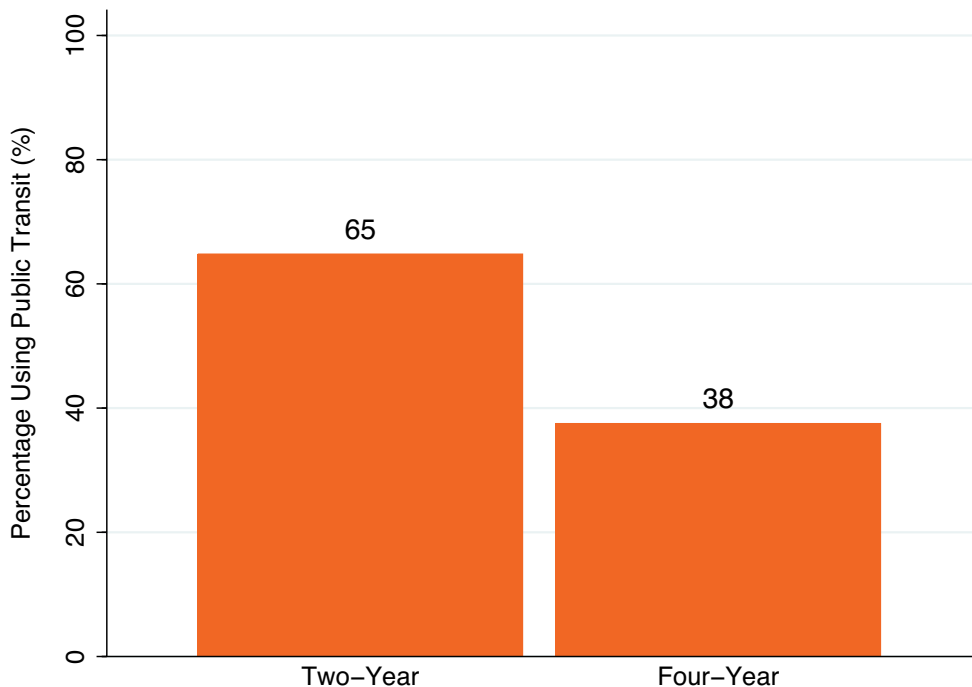
### Transportation & Childcare

#### TRANSPORTATION

Students need affordable and reliable transportation between home and their college campus in order to succeed academically. Currently, the College Board estimates that transportation costs make up approximately 17% of the budget for an average postsecondary student who commutes.<sup>47</sup> It is therefore critical to ensure that students, especially those who are already making difficult choices about how to spend their money, are able to get to campus.

Many of the Philadelphia students surveyed (42%) used public transit to commute to campus (not shown). Moreover, public transit usage was far more common among students at two-year institutions than those at four-year institutions; over six in 10 respondents at two-year institutions used public transit to get to campus, while fewer than four in ten at four-year institutions did (Figure 5). These results for four-year students are comparable to Temple University’s 2019 Transportation Survey, which found that 39% of students considered public transit their primary mode of commuting and in which 49% said they used some form of public transit to commute during a typical week.<sup>48</sup>

**FIGURE 5. Utilization of Public Transit Among Philadelphia Survey Respondents**

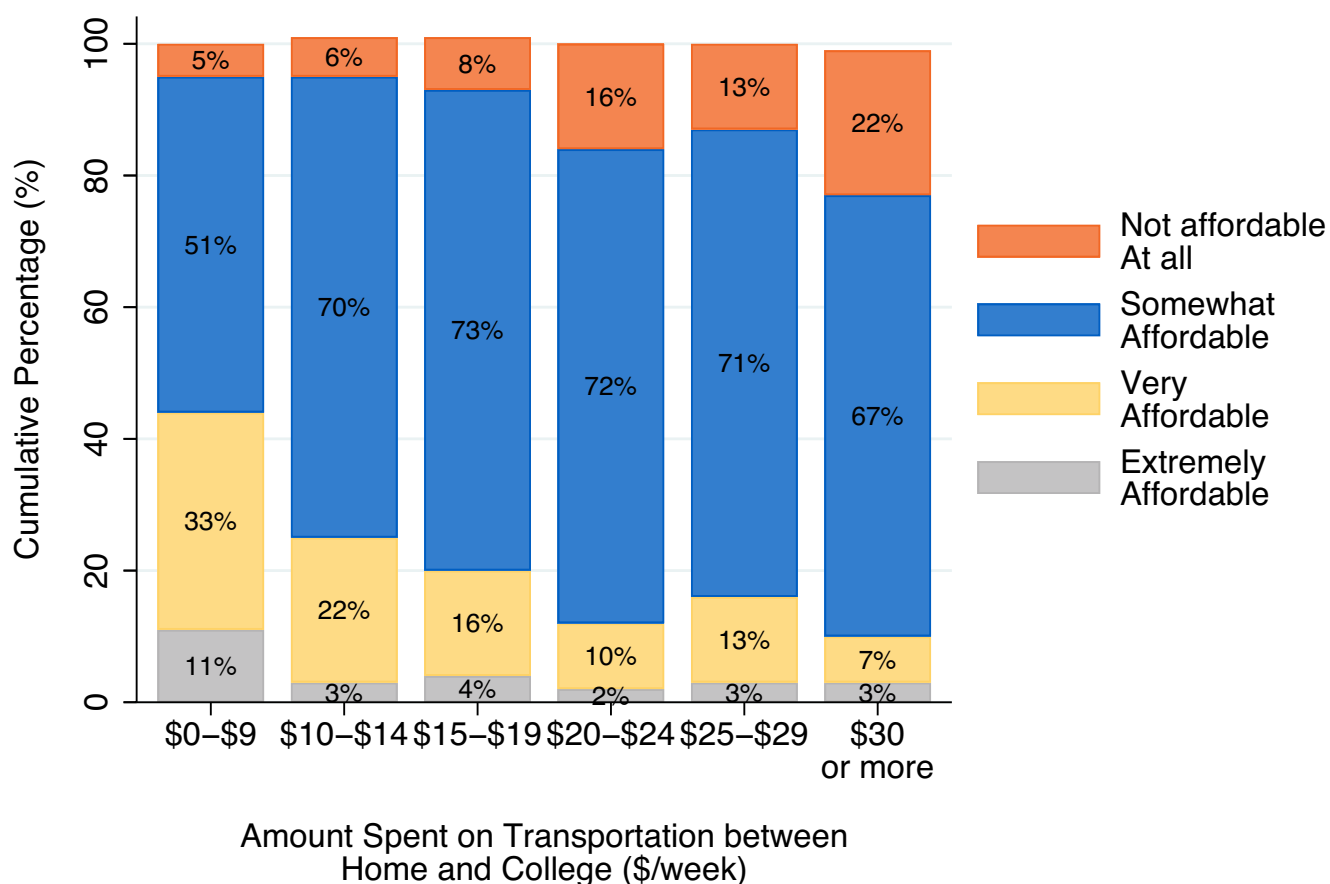


Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Survey questions about public transit usage and transportation costs were randomly administered to a subset of respondents (approximately half of all respondents in this sample).

Overall, most of the Philadelphia students we surveyed who commute to campus via public transit rated transit tickets or passes as “somewhat affordable,” meaning they could perhaps manage the expense but not without some compromise. Students who spent \$20 or more per week on transportation were more likely to rate public transit as “not affordable at all” than their peers who spent less (Figure 6). Furthermore, 34% of students in Temple’s 2019 Transportation Survey reported that they struggled to afford transportation to campus at least once in the prior year.<sup>49</sup>

**FIGURE 6. Perceptions of Affordability of Public Transit Among Philadelphia Survey Respondents Who Use Public Transit, By Amount Spent on Transportation**



Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Survey questions about public transit usage and transportation costs were randomly administered to a subset of respondents (approximately half of all respondents in this sample). Cumulative percentages may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.



#RealCollege students often confront incredibly difficult choices on how they spend their money. For instance, the students who rated public transit tickets or passes as “not affordable at all” were much more likely to experience food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness than their peers who found public transit more affordable (Table 4). Even a sizable share of students who rated tickets or passes as “somewhat affordable” experienced food or housing insecurity.

**TABLE 4. Basic Needs Insecurity According to Public Transit Affordability for Philadelphia Survey Respondents**

	Number of Students	Food Insecurity (%)	Housing Insecurity (%)	Homelessness (%)
<b>How affordable are public transit tickets or passes to you?</b>				
Not affordable at all	120	69	51	27
Somewhat affordable	643	45	44	15
Very affordable	180	28	24	8
Extremely affordable	52	20	29	12

Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Survey questions about public transit usage and transportation costs were randomly administered to a subset of respondents. The “Number of Students” column indicates the number of survey respondents to our measure of homelessness. The number of survey respondents for our measures of food insecurity and housing insecurity may vary slightly. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, see [web appendices](#).



## PARENTING STUDENTS AND CHILDCARE

In addition to covering the basic needs of food, housing, and transportation, promoting the success of #RealCollege students also means meeting the affordable childcare needs of parenting students. Parenting students make up approximately 7% of Philadelphia survey respondents overall, and approximately one in five attending two-year institutions. They face severe challenges in meeting their basic needs (Table 5). Rates of food (55%) and housing insecurity (65%) among parenting students are especially high compared with those of their non-parenting students (36% and 34%, respectively).

Moreover, 24% of parenting student who have children are food insecure.

**TABLE 5. Rates of Food Insecurity, Housing Insecurity, and Homelessness, By Whether Respondent is a Parenting Student**

	Number of Students	Food Insecurity (%)	Housing Insecurity (%)	Homelessness (%)	Food Insecurity of Children (%)
Parenting Student	307	55	65	16	24
Not a Parenting Student	4,419	36	34	13	N/A

Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

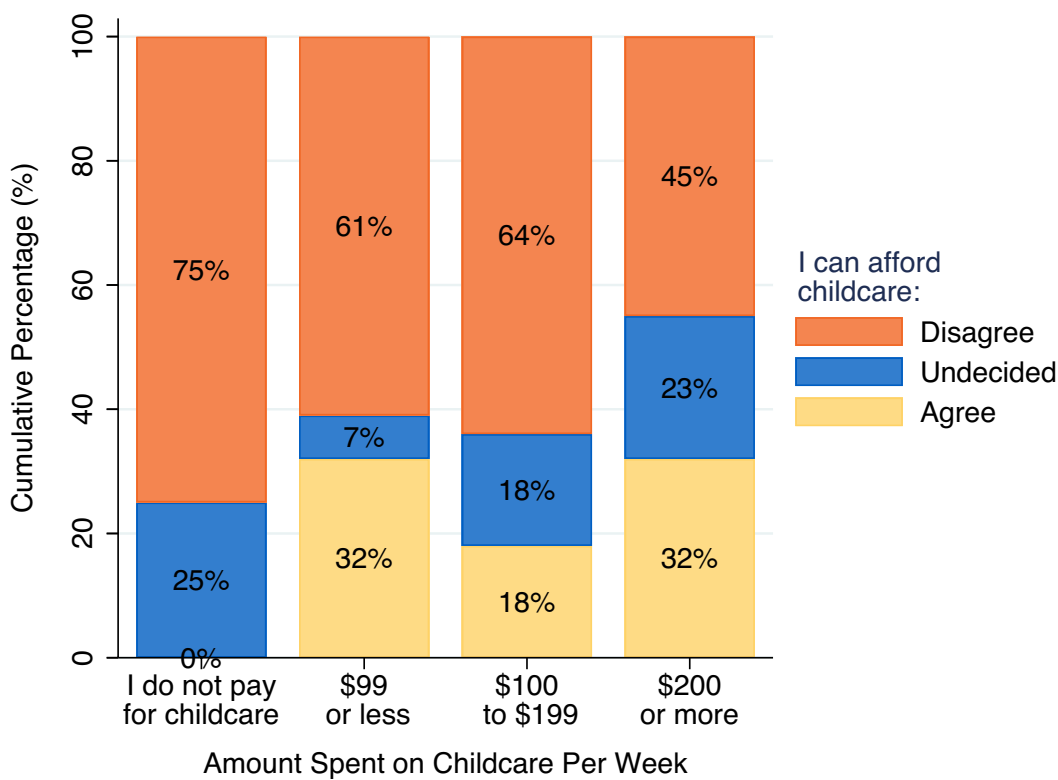
Notes: Parenting students are survey respondents who responded yes to the following question: “Are you the parent or guardian to any biological, adopted, step, or foster children who live in your household?” The “Number of Students” column indicates the number of survey respondents to our measure of homelessness. The number of survey respondents for our measures of food insecurity and housing insecurity may vary slightly. For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, see [web appendices](#).



National data show that despite the many obstacles facing parenting students, on average they earn higher grade point averages (GPAs) than students who are not parents.<sup>50</sup> Childcare, however, is critical to their ability to manage their responsibilities as students and parents so they can persist through college.<sup>51</sup> Among Philadelphia survey respondents with children, 36% reported that they used, needed, or planned to use childcare this year. Given the range of financial pressures facing students and the higher rates of basic needs insecurity among parenting students, childcare must be affordable for it to effectively allow parenting students to succeed at home and in the classroom.

Yet, of survey respondents who used or needed childcare, only 23% could afford to pay for it; most could not. Among those who pay for childcare, students paying between \$100 and \$199 per week were least often able to afford it (Figure 7). Respondents who said they did not pay for childcare stated that those expenses would not be affordable to them if they did pay. Parenting students who used or needed childcare had even higher rates of basic needs insecurity than parenting students who did not have a need for childcare.

**FIGURE 7. Affordability of Childcare Among Philadelphia Parenting Students Who Need or Use Childcare, By Amount Spent on Childcare Per Week**



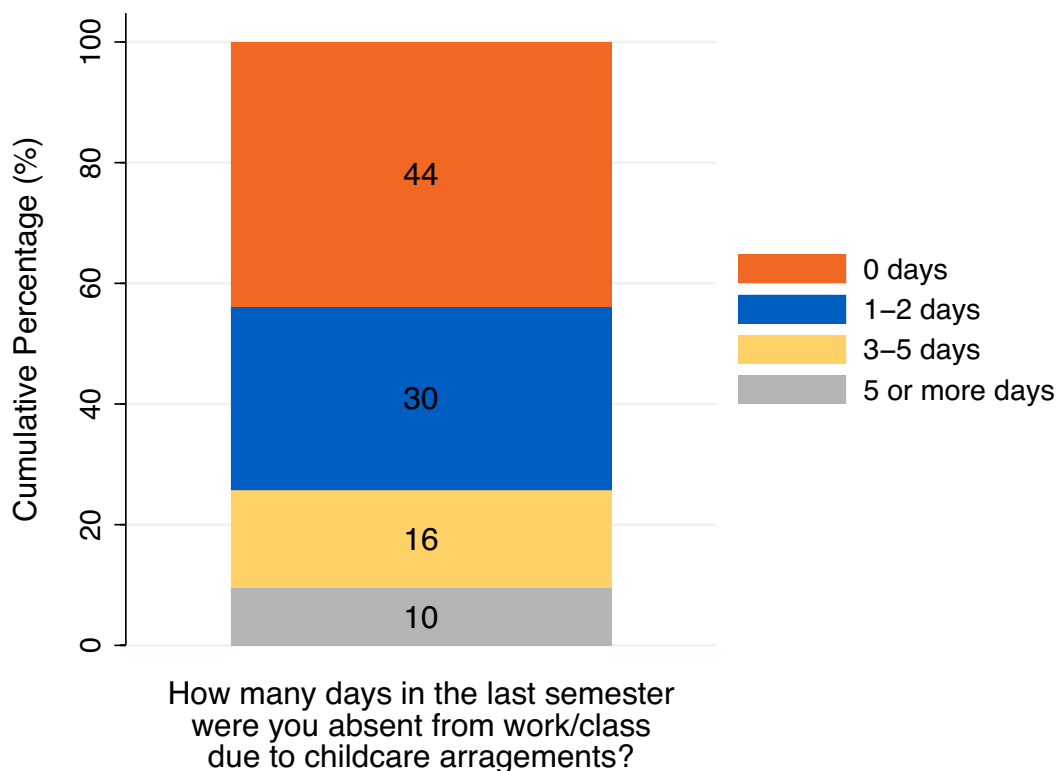
Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Questions about childcare affordability and childcare-related absences were asked only of survey responses who stated that they used or needed childcare that year. Cumulative percentages may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.



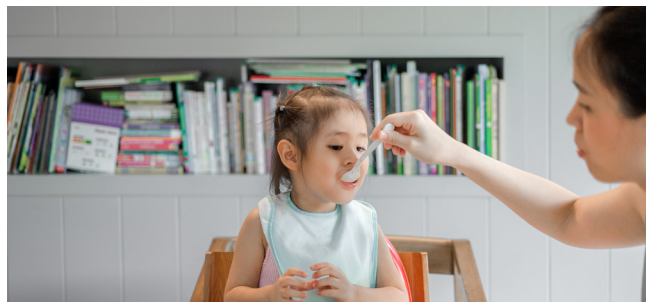
Childcare also creates scheduling and logistical problems for parenting students. Among survey respondents who used, planned to use, or needed childcare, more than half were absent from work or class at least once during the prior semester because of childcare considerations (Figure 8).

**FIGURE 8. Childcare-Related Absences Among Philadelphia Parenting Students Who Need or Use Childcare**



Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Questions about childcare affordability and childcare-related absences were asked only of survey responses who stated that they used or needed childcare this year. Cumulative percentages may not add up to 100 percent due to rounding.



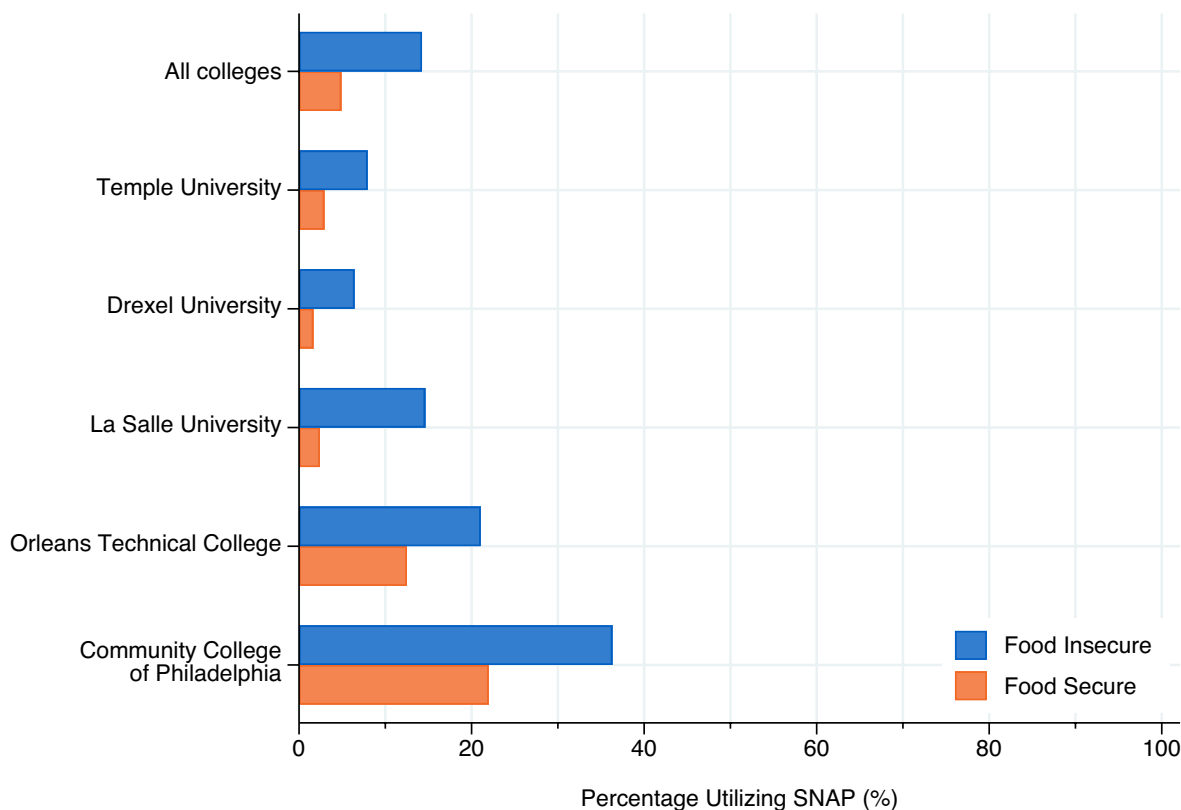
## SECTION 3:

### Utilization of Supports

While respondents from Philadelphia often accessed supports at rates comparable to their counterparts elsewhere in the country, our survey results show that many students who experience basic needs insecurity do not access them.<sup>52</sup>

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is no exception. By providing students with the resources to purchase food, SNAP can be key to alleviating food insecurity and easing other budgetary pressures that prevent fulfillment of basic needs.<sup>53</sup> Yet only 14% of food insecure respondents from Philadelphia institutions reported receiving this benefit (Figure 9).

**FIGURE 9. SNAP Usage According to Food Security Among Philadelphia Survey Respondents**

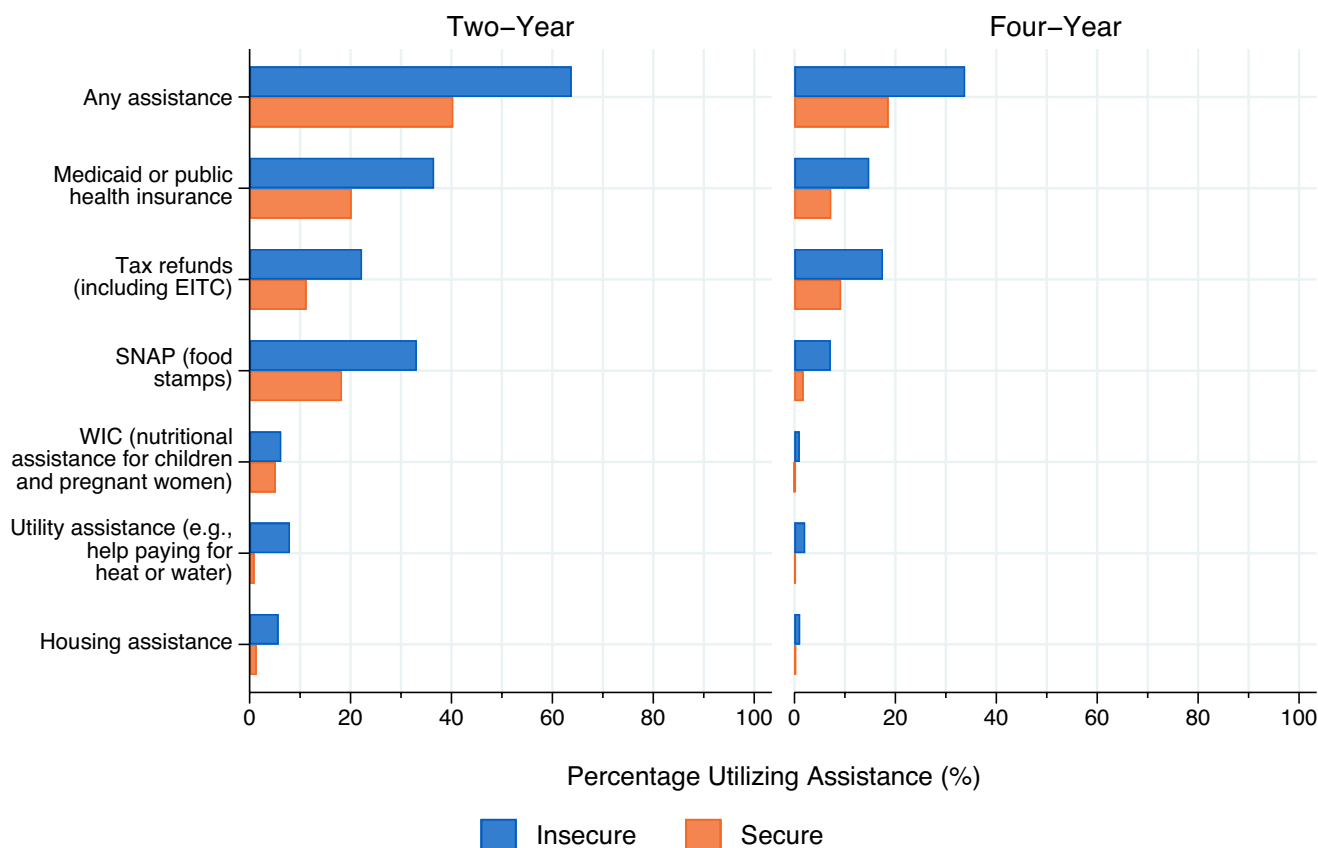


Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Drexel University had a lower response rate (4.5%) than the general response rate (8%). For more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed, refer to the [web appendices](#). Also, none of the Orleans Tech students who identified as “secure” on this question reported utilizing SNAP benefits, thus no orange bar appears for them.

Beyond SNAP, Medicaid—or other public health insurance—and tax refunds are the benefits students used most often, though rates remain quite low given the needs of students responding (Figure 10). For example, less than 10% of respondents who face one or more types of basic needs insecurity receive some form of housing assistance. Rates for childcare and transportation assistance are similarly low. It is also worth noting that students who are secure in their basic needs are still accessing public benefits, albeit at lower rates than students who are insecure.

**FIGURE 10. Use of Other Public Assistance According to Basic Needs Security Among Philadelphia Survey Respondents**

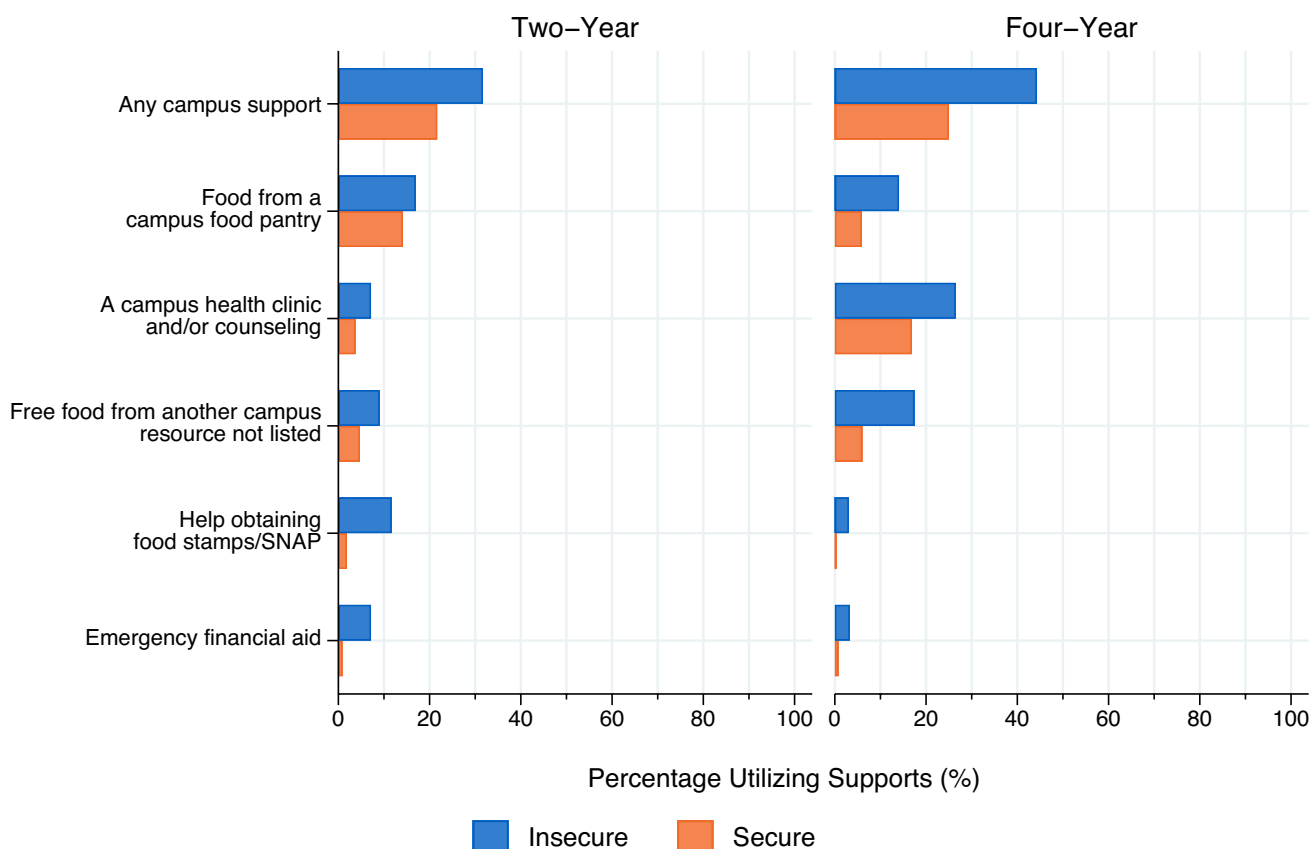


Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Not all types of public assistance are included in the figure above. See [web appendices](#) for more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed and rates of utilization for other types of public assistance.

A growing number of on-campus supports are being offered, but relatively few students who could benefit from supports are utilizing them (Figure 11). Of the students surveyed at Philadelphia universities, campus health clinics/counseling and free food from non-pantry campus resources were the most commonly used on-campus supports. Meanwhile, food from a campus food pantry was slightly more common among students at two-year colleges (both those who were insecure and secure in their basic needs). Students at two-year colleges who experience basic needs insecurity also more commonly get help obtaining SNAP and emergency financial aid at their colleges, compared to their counterparts at the universities.

**FIGURE 11. Use of On-Campus Supports According to Basic Needs Security Among Philadelphia Survey Respondents**



Source: 2019 #RealCollege Survey

Notes: Survey questions about on-campus supports were randomly administered to a subset of respondents. Not all types of on-campus supports are included in the figure above. See [web appendices](#) for more details on how each measure of basic needs insecurity was constructed and rates of utilization for other types of on-campus supports.



## SECTION 4:

### Moving Forward

Philadelphia’s undergraduates are talented and ambitious, but they will not complete their degrees if they are unable to find and afford both sufficient food to eat and a safe place to sleep. This report clarifies that they were at substantial risk of food and housing insecurity before the COVID-19 pandemic that surely placed them at even greater risk.

Fortunately, the first months of 2020 brought a growing recognition in Philadelphia that helping college students meet their basic needs is essential to boosting degree attainment rates. City leaders seem committed to tackling these issues. In January Mayor Jim Kenney stated, “[T]he evidence is clear. A post-secondary credential or degree is essential to thrive in today’s rapidly changing economy.”<sup>54</sup> Working Philadelphians with only a high school diploma have a poverty rate that is 2.5 times higher than working Philadelphians with at least a bachelor’s degree, and all but one of the jobs identified by the Philadelphia Workforce Development Board as “high priority occupations” for the year require a postsecondary degree.<sup>55</sup> Mayor Kenney further stated that “if we are serious about raising the city’s two- and four-year degree attainment rates, we must address the challenges of tuition affordability and basic needs insecurity.”<sup>56</sup> And we agree with Mayor Kenney that we must acknowledge that students of color are disproportionately impacted by these issues: they often need more time to finish degrees and frequently are burdened with more debt than their white counterparts.<sup>57</sup>

Philadelphia’s local colleges and universities can be gateways to greater economic mobility. The Community College of Philadelphia (CCP), for example, is the single largest recipient of the city’s public high school graduates, enrolling more than 1,600 annually. With this in mind, Mayor Kenney has made increasing basic needs supports for CCP and other Philadelphia college students one of his main policy goals during his second term.<sup>58</sup>



Philadelphia is not alone in its focus on students' basic needs. In December 2018, a U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report affirmed what students and higher education leaders and advocates had been saying for years: there is increasing evidence of food insecurity and its negative impact on academic success on campuses across the country.<sup>59</sup> This GAO report helped spur the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), which will, for the first time, survey students about food insecurity in a report slated to be released by 2022.<sup>60</sup> The NPSAS will question 150,000 undergraduate and graduate students, from more than 3,000 colleges and universities – a nationally representative sample – about their ability to buy food. The GAO report also estimated that as many as two million students across the country are potentially eligible for SNAP benefits but are not receiving them.<sup>61</sup> This knowledge is helping higher education administrators and hunger experts to more effectively educate students about, and connect them to, existing benefits, and to advocate for expanded SNAP eligibility for students. For example, Community Legal Services of Philadelphia and others have successfully advocated for increased SNAP eligibility for Community College of Philadelphia students.

Moreover, in 2019, Philadelphia was selected by the National League of Cities (NLC) as one of seven U.S. cities to take part in Cities Addressing Basic Needs to Promote Postsecondary and Workforce Success, an initiative aimed at supporting strategies for helping students complete college degrees. The Kresge Foundation-funded initiative will help Philadelphia increase support for postsecondary students who struggle to access housing, food, childcare, and other foundational resources critical for educational success.<sup>62</sup> The City Council of Philadelphia, in 2019, passed a resolution calling for hearings to examine services students need to complete their community college degrees.<sup>63</sup> In January 2020, a bi-partisan group of Pennsylvania state legislators co-sponsored and introduced a bill to create a "Hunger-Free Campus Grant Program" to address food insecurity on public college campuses, and formed a bipartisan "Student Debt Caucus," to examine why Pennsylvanians lead the nation in student debt load.<sup>64</sup> This report can assist the city's growing movement of higher education leaders, social service providers, policy makers, and student organizations who understand that tens of thousands of students face real barriers to degree completion and who are committed to devising creative and scalable solutions to remove those barriers.

## CALL TO ACTION

The scale of the problem of basic needs insecurity among college students—both nationally and here in Philadelphia—is substantial. Fortunately, a growing body of evidence about best practices also offers hope that we can significantly improve the lives of college students while also strengthening local economies and communities. But a decrease in basic needs insecurities among Philadelphia college students will only occur if higher education, political, community, business and philanthropic leaders act now. This is especially true in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The [#RealCollegePHL initiative](#) aims to catalyze that necessary action. Together we hope to address basic needs insecurity among college students with viable, effective, and sustainable approaches that draw on the collective resources of higher education, community partners, and government leadership. Through this initiative the Hope Center offers technical assistance and related support on students' basic needs to Philadelphia's institutional decision-makers, faculty, staff, students, policy makers (local, state, and federal), community organizations, and advocates. This work is supported by the Lenfest Foundation and is in alignment with the mayor's office and the city's National League of Cities project.

#RealCollegePHL has three key goals:

1. Increase awareness of basic needs insecurity among Philadelphia college students. Each community throughout the city has students in college and an interest in those students completing their degrees. We want the basic needs insecurity of those students to be a top priority for both residents and leaders. Our efforts to boost this awareness—for institutions, government, media, and the general public—include our #RealCollege survey of Philadelphia college students, asset mapping to identify and help coordinate student-serving resources, documenting and disseminating #RealCollege students' stories and experiences, supporting student advocates, and convening stakeholders.
2. Increase the capacity of Philadelphia colleges and universities to address student basic needs. When colleges understand the extent of students' basic needs on their campuses, they want to act. But many don't know where to begin or what works. The Hope Center is providing evidence-based tools, information, technical assistance, and training to area colleges and universities interested in reducing barriers to degree completion by addressing student basic needs. We are working with Philadelphia colleges to understand how to increase benefit access (e.g., SNAP, EITC) and set up campus-based emergency aid funds to reduce students' basic needs insecurity. We aim to help Philadelphia colleges implement new on-campus services and increase and diversify utilization of existing services.
3. Increase community capacity to harness and coordinate resources and talent to better support students. We are committed to providing research and technical expertise—as well as helping to convene key community-based partners and providers—to expand the necessary circle of supports and allies that our students can access beyond the campus or before they even enter a campus. The Hope Center is working with (1) Believe in Students and Little Giant Creative on a new affordable off-campus food hall; (2) leaders in the anti-hunger community to devise creative solutions to address food insecurity; (3) affordable housing advocates and providers to implement strategies to reduce homelessness and housing cost burdens among students; and (4) organizations that serve high school students and their families to bolster college readiness efforts. We aim to foster new relationships and collaborations, and strengthen existing ones, with a vision of a city-wide network of support for our students.

A close partnership with the Philadelphia Mayor’s Office—specifically the Office of Community Empowerment and Opportunity and the National League of Cities effort—is central to the #RealCollegePHL initiative. We are working closely with these offices to share research and resources, and to coordinate efforts aimed at convening stakeholders, marshaling resources, and supporting Philadelphia colleges to implement evidence-based services on campus. As noted, the mayor’s office and City Council are both committed to increasing resources and support for the Community College of Philadelphia. They see it as one of the most important vehicles for helping lift Philadelphians out of poverty. We share that commitment.

## HOW TO GET INVOLVED

If you are a leader in a Philadelphia community organization, college or university, private sector business, or branch of local government; if you are an advocate, social service provider, entrepreneur, policymaker, student, faculty, researcher, or administrator; if you care about students and about ending poverty in Philadelphia, we invite you to join the #RealCollegePHL coalition. Here are some helpful links to get started:

- To learn more about the #RealCollegePHL project, visit the [project page](#) on our website or email us at [realcollegemovement@temple.edu](mailto:realcollegemovement@temple.edu).
- We will host #RealCollegePHL convening this fall, and offer new opportunities for technical assistance. [Join our mailing list to get that information.](#)

Further, as the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to unfold, the importance of accurately identifying and meeting students’ basic needs is essential. We urge all Philadelphia colleges and universities to field the #RealCollege survey in fall 2020 and will support such efforts free of charge. Click [here](#) to learn more about our #RealCollege survey.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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