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To better understand the challenges facing Virginia Community College System (VCCS) students in fall 2020, we administered our well-established #RealCollege Survey at the system’s 23 colleges from September to November. The survey assessed students’ basic needs security and their well-being, as indicated by employment status, academic engagement, and mental health.

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#RealCollege: Basic Needs Insecurity During the Ongoing Pandemic
Virginia Community College System Preliminary Results

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THE SURVEY REVEALS

- 42% of respondents were **HOUSING INSECURE** in the prior 12 months
- 10% of respondents experienced **HOMELESSNESS** in the prior 12 months
- 32% of respondents were **FOOD INSECURE** in the prior 30 days

**Housing insecurity** encompasses a broad set of challenges that prevent someone from having a safe, affordable, and consistent place to live including the inability to pay rent or move frequently.¹

**Homelessness** means that a person does not have a fixed, regular, and adequate place to live. Students are considered homeless if they identified as experiencing homelessness or signs of homelessness (for instance, living in a shelter, temporarily with a relative, or in a space not meant for human habitation).

**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.

Using the 18-item U.S. Department of Agriculture scale to assess food security, we found:

- 18% of respondents experienced **VERY LOW** food security
- 13% of respondents experienced **LOW** food security
- 11% of respondents experienced **MARGINAL** food security
- 57% of respondents experienced **HIGH** food security²

¹ To learn more about the #RealCollege Survey research methodology and how you could field the survey at your institution, see The Hope Center’s Guide to Accessing Basic Needs Insecurity in Higher Education.
² Numbers above are rounded to the nearest whole number and may not add to 100 due to rounding error.