

# Five Lessons for Supporting Parenting Students with Emergency Aid During the Pandemic

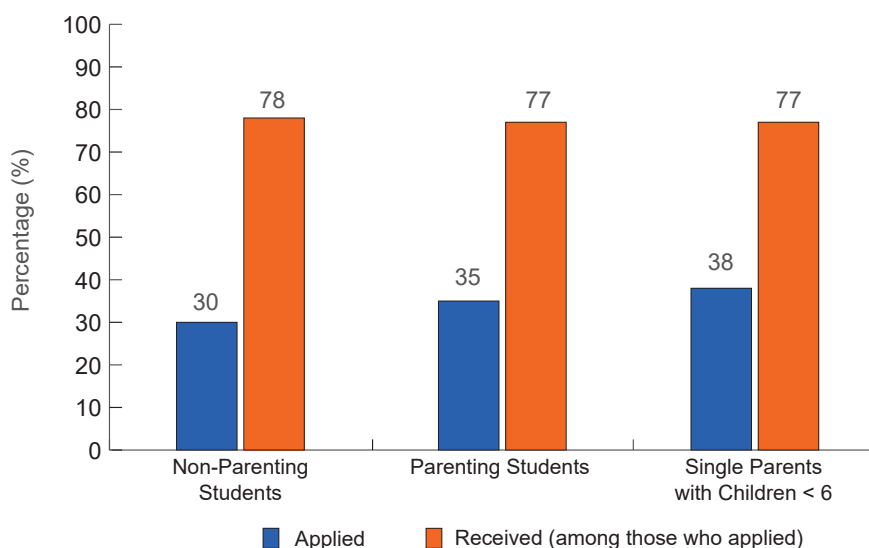
Parenting while attending college is challenging in the best of times, and the pandemic is making it even more difficult. Yet more than one in five college students, including disproportionately large numbers of Black, Latinx, and Indigenous individuals, tried to make it work.<sup>1</sup> In fall 2020, many endured high rates of both financial and time poverty. We estimate that 70% of parenting students experienced basic needs insecurity, including insufficient access to affordable food and/or housing.<sup>2</sup> However higher rates of need do not always result in higher levels of support.

Emergency aid in the form of fast, flexible dollars delivered just in time can be a critical means of support to help parenting students and their children survive.<sup>3</sup> Since the onset of the pandemic, Congress has given colleges and universities from coast to coast nearly \$70 billion in relief, over \$30 billion of which must be spent on emergency aid.<sup>4</sup> This brief examines parenting students' access to and use of that support during fall 2020. We draw on results from a survey that reached more than 195,000 students at 202 colleges and universities, including 32,000 parenting students who were parenting, offering primary care to, or acting as a guardian for at least one child.

## LESSON #1: Parenting students are more likely to apply for emergency aid and should be prioritized when awarding support.

Across all students surveyed, over two-thirds who needed support did not receive it.<sup>5</sup> However, parenting students who needed support were more likely than other students to apply for emergency aid (Figure 1). But those applicants were not more likely than other students to receive support. In other words, parenting students were not consistently prioritized for emergency aid. Among parenting students, single parents with children younger than six were more likely to apply for support than all parenting students. Due to their additional expenses and the fact that support benefits both recipients and their children, parenting students should be prioritized in the future.

**FIGURE 1 | EMERGENCY AID APPLICATION AND RECEIPT RATES, BY PARENTING STATUS**

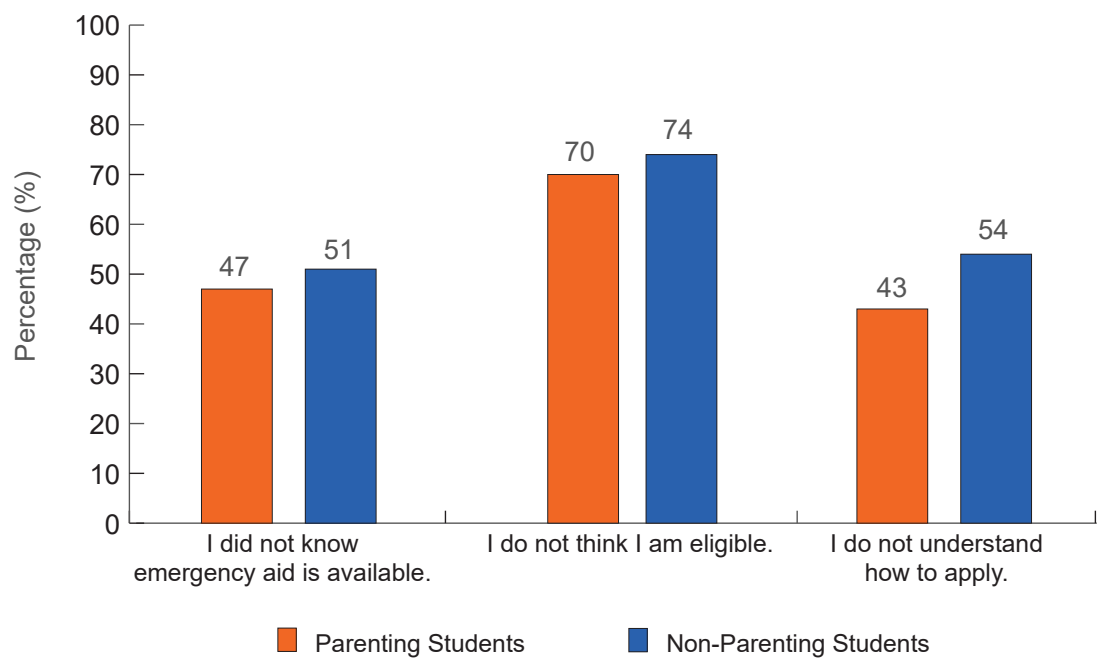


SOURCE | 2020 #RealCollege Survey  
 NOTES | Sample includes all students experiencing basic needs insecurity. A parenting student is a parent, primary caregiver, or guardian (legal or informal) of any children in or outside their household. Received rates are among those that applied for aid. For more information on our measure of basic needs insecurity, see The Hope Center's report [#RealCollege 2021: Basic Needs Insecurity During the Ongoing Pandemic](#).

## LESSON #2: Parenting students are generally more aware of emergency aid and a bit more comfortable applying for it, but there is room for improvement.

Insufficient information is a common reason students do not seek out supports like emergency aid.<sup>6</sup> Among students with need who do not apply for emergency aid, parenting students have greater awareness of emergency aid programs than their peers. They are also more likely to perceive themselves as eligible for aid and understand how to apply. This good news is likely reflective of intentional outreach by programs serving parenting students. However, among those students with need who do not apply, almost half of parenting students remain unaware that emergency aid is available (Figure 2). About 70% do not believe they are eligible, and more than 40% do not know how to apply. Thus, there is a great deal of room to improve access to emergency aid through the communications of information about aid.<sup>7</sup>

**FIGURE 2 | REASONS WHY STUDENTS EXPERIENCING BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY DO NOT UTILIZE EMERGENCY AID, BY PARENTING STATUS**

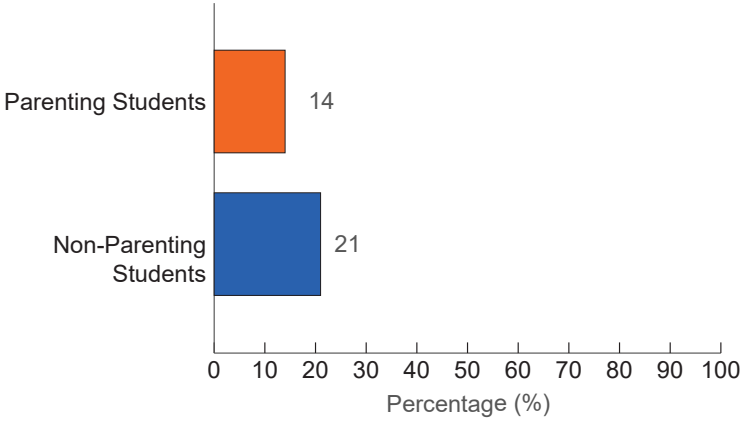


SOURCE | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

NOTES | Sample includes all students experiencing basic needs insecurity who did not apply for emergency aid. A parenting student is a parent, primary caregiver, or guardian (legal or informal) of any children in or outside their household. Some students may have reported multiple reasons for why they did not use emergency aid programs. For more information on our measure of basic needs insecurity, see *The Hope Center's report #RealCollege 2021: Basic Needs Insecurity During the Ongoing Pandemic*.

Stigma tied to poverty as well as a perception that accepting support will deprive others from receiving support are stubborn barriers to emergency aid utilization, though these issues appear less common among parenting students. We find parenting students were less likely than other students to feel that “people like me don’t use programs like that” (Figure 3). However, one in four students overall—parenting and non-parenting—were embarrassed to apply for supports like emergency aid.<sup>8</sup> Thus, steps should be taken to reduce stigma among all students, including emphasizing that emergency aid can be a critical tool for obtaining degrees.

**FIGURE 3 | AGREEMENT WITH “PEOPLE LIKE ME DO NOT USE PROGRAMS LIKE THAT,” BY PARENTING STATUS**

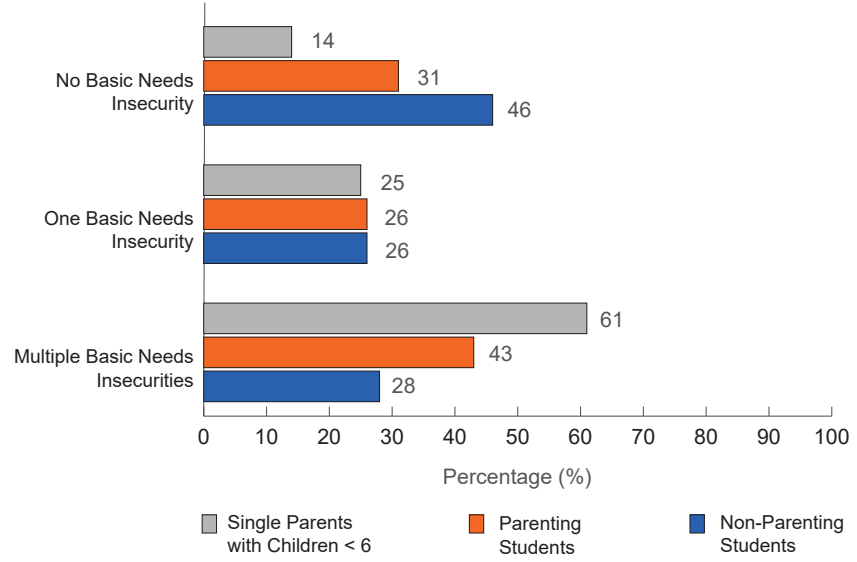


SOURCE | 2020 #RealCollege Survey  
 NOTES | Sample includes all students experiencing basic needs insecurity who did not apply for emergency aid. A parenting student is a parent, primary caregiver, or guardian (legal or informal) of any children in or outside their household. For more information on our measure of basic needs insecurity, see [The Hope Center’s report #RealCollege 2021: Basic Needs Insecurity During the Ongoing Pandemic](#).

**LESSON #3: Parenting students are more likely to require emergency aid to address multiple challenges and thus may need larger awards.**

While emergency aid can be used for food, housing, childcare, and other necessities, parenting students had to try and make their grants stretch further than other students. This frugality is dictated by the number of challenges parenting students experienced. Fully 43% of parenting students—and 61% of single parents with young children—faced multiple basic needs insecurities, compared to just 28% of non-parenting students (Figure 4).

**FIGURE 4 | BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY, BY PARENTING STATUS**



SOURCE | 2020 #RealCollege Survey  
 NOTES | Sample includes all students experiencing basic needs insecurity. A parenting student is a parent, primary caregiver, or guardian (legal or informal) of any children in or outside their household. For more information on our measure of basic needs insecurity, see [The Hope Center’s report #RealCollege 2021: Basic Needs Insecurity During the Ongoing Pandemic](#).

## LESSON #4: Parenting students use emergency aid for situations that other students are less likely to encounter, or that are less onerous for students without children.

Students facing basic needs insecurity, regardless of whether they have children, find that emergency aid helps them meet their needs and reduce stress.<sup>9</sup> But emergency aid also helped parenting students cover specific costs that can weigh heavily on them, including:

- Educational materials for children (46%)
- Transportation (46%)
- Back rent or anti-eviction measures (32%)
- Childcare (29%)
- Finding alternatives to unsafe living situations (11%)

## LESSON #5: Parenting students would benefit from additional emergency aid.

Even after receiving emergency aid, large numbers of parenting students still faced financial challenges. It is likely that payments were not substantial enough, did not arrive often enough, or both. Four in five parenting students who received emergency aid still did not have their basic needs met, compared with two-thirds of non-parenting students (Figure 5). It is likely that parenting students would be interested in and willing to apply for additional support, if it were available.

**FIGURE 5 | 82% OF PARENTING STUDENTS WHO RECEIVED EMERGENCY AID EXPERIENCED BASIC NEEDS INSECURITY**



SOURCE | 2020 #RealCollege Survey

NOTES | Sample includes all parenting students who received emergency aid either by applying for it or being auto-awarded. A parenting student is a parent, primary caregiver, or guardian (legal or informal) of any children in or outside their household. For more information on our measure of basic needs insecurity, see [The Hope Center's report #RealCollege 2021: Basic Needs Insecurity During the Ongoing Pandemic.](#)

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Many Hope Center staff contributed to this report including Sara Goldrick-Rab, Christine Baker-Smith, Gregory Kienzl, Vanessa Coca, Sahar Siddiqi, Joshua Rudolph, Sarah Magnelia, Melissa Paone, and Deirdre Childress Hopkins.

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## FUNDER DISCLOSURE

The findings and conclusions contained within are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect positions or policies of our funders.



## About The Hope Center

The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice at Temple University is redefining what it means to be a student-ready college, with a national movement centering #RealCollege students' basic needs. Food, affordable housing, transportation, childcare, and mental health are central conditions for learning. Without those needs being met, too many students leave college in debt and/or without a degree.

To learn more about the report's authors, visit [hope4college.com/team/](https://hope4college.com/team/). For information about our technical assistance services, visit [hope4college.com/realcollege-technical-assistance/](https://hope4college.com/realcollege-technical-assistance/).

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## NOTES AND REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> Reichlin Cruse, L., Contreras Mendez, S., & Holtzman, T. (2020, April). [\*Student parents in the COVID-19 pandemic: Heightened need and the imperative for strengthened support\*](#). Institute for Women's Policy Research.
- <sup>2</sup> The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice. (2021). [\*#RealCollege 2021: Basic needs insecurity during the ongoing pandemic\*](#). Philadelphia, PA.
- <sup>3</sup> Anderson, D. (2021, February). [\*Edquity grantees cross the finish line at Compton College\*](#). Edquity; Evans, W.N., Kearney, M.S., Perry, B.C., & Sullivan, J.X. (2017). [\*Increasing community college completion rates among low-income students: Evidence from a randomized controlled trial evaluation of a case management intervention\*](#). NBER Working Paper Series.
- <sup>4</sup> In total, Congress has allocated \$68 billion to institutions of higher education through the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund, or HEERF. HEERF directs aid to colleges and students in two portions: a “student portion” and an “institutional portion.” The student portion, which totals just over \$30 billion, must be distributed by colleges to students as emergency aid. Institutions have more discretion over how they use the institutional portion funds; they may use them on additional emergency aid payments to students, but they are not required to do so. See: U.S. Department of Education. (2021). [\*Education stabilization fund\*](#).
- <sup>5</sup> The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice, 2021.
- <sup>6</sup> The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice, 2021.
- <sup>7</sup> Goldrick-Rab, S., Hacker, N. L., Kienzl, G., Price, D. V., & Curtis, D. (2021, October). *When care isn't enough: Scaling emergency aid during the pandemic*. The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice.
- <sup>8</sup> The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice, 2021.
- <sup>9</sup> The Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice, 2021.



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