

# Black Student Equity

## Overcoming Barriers and Providing Support

SAN DIEGO-IMPERIAL

MAY 2023



**C.O.E.** CENTERS OF EXCELLENCE  
For Labor Market Research

**COMMUNITY COLLEGES**  
SAN DIEGO & IMPERIAL COUNTIES  
**CAREER EDUCATION**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research suggests that Black students have lower completion rates (i.e., certificate or degree) than any other racial or ethnic group due to psychological, physical, and financial barriers.<sup>1</sup> To better understand Black students' experiences with community colleges in the region, the San Diego and Imperial Counties Community Colleges Center of Excellence (COE) and Regional Consortium commissioned the San Diego Workforce Partnership to conduct research with current and former Black students.<sup>2</sup> Between March and September 2022, 200 students participated in qualitative focus groups (n=46) or a quantitative survey (n=154) to help the COE answer the following research questions:

- What should each of the region's community colleges provide in the classroom and on campus to retain Black students?
- What barriers prevent Black students from completing community college programs or courses?

Analyses revealed six key barriers that Black students experience: 1) finances, 2) caregiving, 3) residual impacts of COVID-19, 4) microaggressions, 5) fatigue and mental health challenges, and 6) lack of guidance. Two factors that mitigated some of these barriers for students were: 1) supportive instructors and 2) student support services (Umoja in particular).<sup>3</sup> Consequently, this study identified three main student needs and research-backed strategies to address them:

1. Students need colleges to foster inclusive learning environments, promote equity-mindedness and data literacy, develop inclusive curriculum and pedagogy/andragogy, and increase diverse representation among faculty and staff.
2. Students, particularly adult learners, need flexible course schedules that colleges could achieve by optimizing Career Education program paths and local scheduling practices.
3. Students need transformative employment opportunities. Colleges can support these efforts by educating industry and employer partners, empowering race conscious and equity-mindedness in these partnerships, and developing measurable diversity and inclusion goals.

By providing insights about equity gaps<sup>4</sup> and student experiences, the COE and Regional Consortium hope that the San Diego and Imperial Counties Community Colleges can better support the retention and completion of Black students.

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<sup>1</sup> "The State of Higher Education," Lumina Foundation. [luminafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/gallup-lumina-state-of-higher-education-2022-report.pdf](https://luminafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/gallup-lumina-state-of-higher-education-2022-report.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Black students who enrolled in one of the 10 regional colleges in the last three academic years were included in this study.

<sup>3</sup> Umoja is a student services organization devoted to the "focused on the transfer success, cultural and academic development of African American students" as described by MiraCosta College.

<sup>4</sup> The recommendations from the "Equity Gaps in Priority Jobs and Programs" study suggested consulting specific student groups directly; therefore, we included focus groups in this study. [coecc.net/san-diego-imperial/2023/02/equity-gaps-in-priority-jobs-and-programs/](https://coecc.net/san-diego-imperial/2023/02/equity-gaps-in-priority-jobs-and-programs/)

# INTRODUCTION

Prior studies identified that Black students have lower certificate or degree program completion rates than any other racial or ethnic group due to psychological, physical, and financial barriers.<sup>5</sup> To better understand their community college experiences in the region, the San Diego and Imperial Counties Community Colleges Center of Excellence (COE) and Regional Consortium commissioned the San Diego Workforce Partnership (SDWP) to conduct focus groups and surveys with current and former Black students who enrolled in one of the 10 regional colleges within the last three academic years (2017-18 through 2020-21). Between March and September 2022, 46 and 154 Black students participated in focus groups and responded to the survey, respectively. SDWP facilitated focus groups and developed the survey around the following themes.

## FOCUS GROUP THEMES

- Motivations for returning to school and selecting community college
- Challenges that added friction to community college experiences
- Strategies used to manage that friction
- Experiences unique to Black community college students

## SURVEY THEMES

- Reasons for delays in goal attainment
- Methods of paying for college expenses
- Time management per week during the semester
- Stressors experienced
- Treatment from faculty and peers
- Strategies that supported retention and completion

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<sup>5</sup> "The State of Higher Education," Lumina Foundation. [luminafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/gallup-lumina-state-of-higher-education-2022-report.pdf](https://luminafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/gallup-lumina-state-of-higher-education-2022-report.pdf)



# PARTICIPANT OVERVIEW

A total of 200 former and current Black community college students participated in this study. Forty-six participated in focus groups and 154 responded to a quantitative survey.<sup>6</sup> Of the focus group participants, 74 percent were women and 23 percent were younger than 25 years old (Exhibit 1).

**Exhibit 1. Demographic Information of Focus Group Participants**

46 Focus Group Participants		Age	
			%
		Younger than 25	23%
		25-34	29%
		35-44	23%
		45-54	23%
		55+	3%
Gender	%		
Women	74%		
Men	26%		
Non-binary or Other	0%		

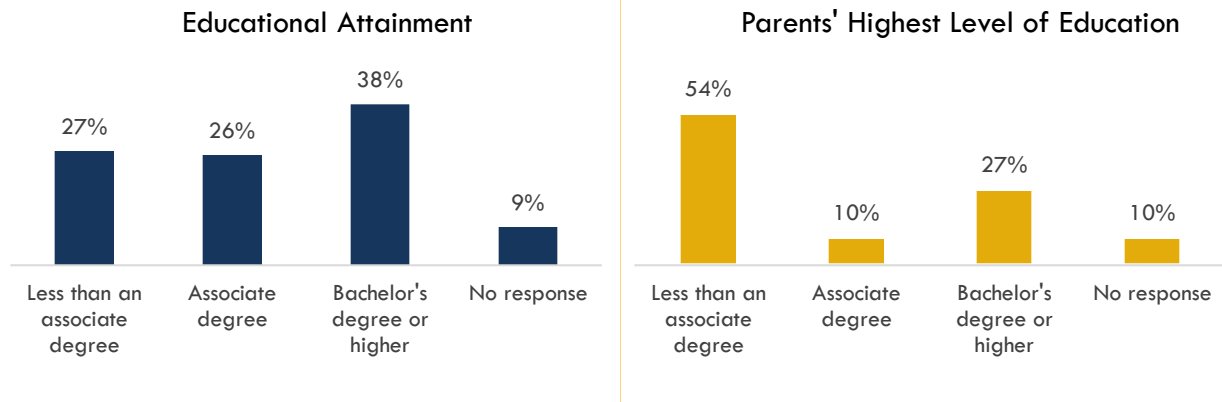
Of the 154 Black community college students who responded to the survey, 64 percent were female, 8 percent were younger than 25 years old, 38 percent had a bachelor’s degree or higher, and 54 percent reported that their parents’ highest level of education was less than an associate degree (Exhibit 2 and Exhibit 3).

**Exhibit 2. Demographic Information of Survey Participants**

154 Survey Participants		Age	
			%
		Younger than 25	8%
		25-34	47%
		35-44	25%
		45-54	0%
		55+	12%
Gender	%		
Women	64%		
Men	27%		
Non-binary, No response or Other	8%		

<sup>6</sup> For details about the methodology see Appendix: Methodology.

### Exhibit 3. Demographic Information of Survey Participants



The following sections examine quantitative and qualitative data from these survey respondents and focus group participants, and aim to answer two key research questions:

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1)

What should each of the region's community colleges provide in the classroom and on campus to retain Black students?

2)

What barriers prevent Black students from completing community college programs or courses?

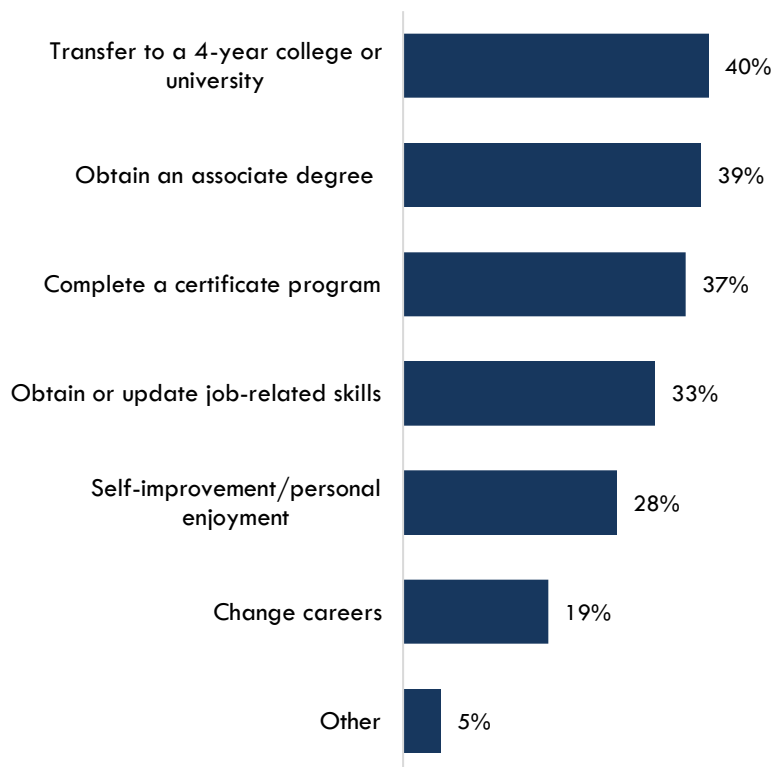
# STUDENT MOTIVATIONS AND GOALS

The survey asked students about their motivations for attending community college.<sup>7</sup> On average, survey respondents rated achievement of personal/intellectual development, monetary reasons (e.g., affordability), and humanitarian goals among the highest reasons for obtaining a community college education.

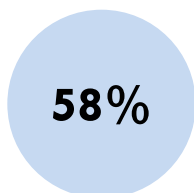
Survey respondents' top three goals for attending community college were to transfer to a four-year college or university, obtain an associate degree, and complete a certificate program (Exhibit 4).

At the time of the survey, 42 percent of survey respondents reported that they did not obtain a certificate/degree, attained apprenticeship journey-level status, or transferred to a four-year university from a regional community college (Exhibit 5).

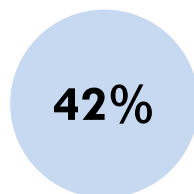
**Exhibit 4. Goals for Enrolling in Most Recent Semester in Community College (n=154)<sup>8</sup>**



**Exhibit 5. Earned a Certificate/Degree, Attained Journey-level Status, or Transferred (n=154)**



Earned a Degree/Certificate, Journey-Level Status, or Transferred



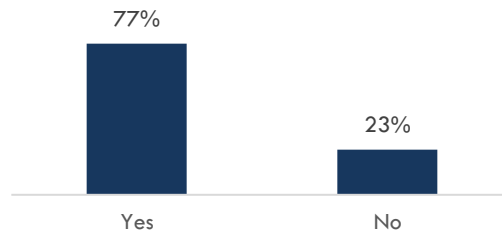
Did Not Earn a Degree/Certificate, Journey-Level Status, or Transferred

<sup>7</sup> To assess motivations, SDWP used a modified version of the Student Motivation for Attending University (SMAU) - Revised Scale and factor analyzed the data.

<sup>8</sup> Categories are not mutually exclusive. Totals sum to greater than 100 percent.

However, when asked if they had met or were on track to meet their educational goals, 77 percent of students reported “yes” (Exhibit 6).

**Exhibit 6. On Track to Meet or Met Educational Goals (n=154)**



For focus group participants, the dominant driver of selecting community college was affordability. Relatively low cost compared to other training options allowed students to pursue a target career or explore options with less pressure. While several participants noted that choosing community college gave them more time to develop or clarify their goals without the financial pressure of university, this uncertainty around goals was also a barrier for completion (see “[Barriers](#)”). Other motivators for choosing community college included flexibility for full-time workers, convenient campuses, and financial assistance with books, food, and transportation.

Participants who returned to school to switch careers after spending time in the workforce reported hope that a new career would lead to financial stability, a second step after retirement, or a career doing something they cared about. Students often changed their minds about their goals and frequently mentioned that they went to community college to learn new things (Exhibit 7).

**“Community college was more affordable than just going straight to a Cal State. So it just gave me more time to figure out what I wanted to do exactly. And what field I wanted to get into.”**



## Exhibit 7. Participant Quotes Describing Goals and Motivations to Attend Community College

- *“Got a job and worked that job for almost 10 years at one of the casinos and decided this is not gonna cut it. So I went back. And I went to Cuyamaca. I got my associate’s degree in Paralegal Studies, and got a job at a law firm working as a paralegal.”*
- *“I had a special needs child. And I figured I would go to college and try to learn the social work field, so I can be her advocate.”*
- *“I found myself out of the workforce for a while. I had worked in a career over 20 years. So I had went to City College, so I decided to go back but for something different.”*
- *“Initially, it was exercise and nutrition. And then I changed it to nursing. Then I changed it to audio production. And now, recently I’ve changed it back to nursing and I’m sticking with that that’s going to be my degree.”*

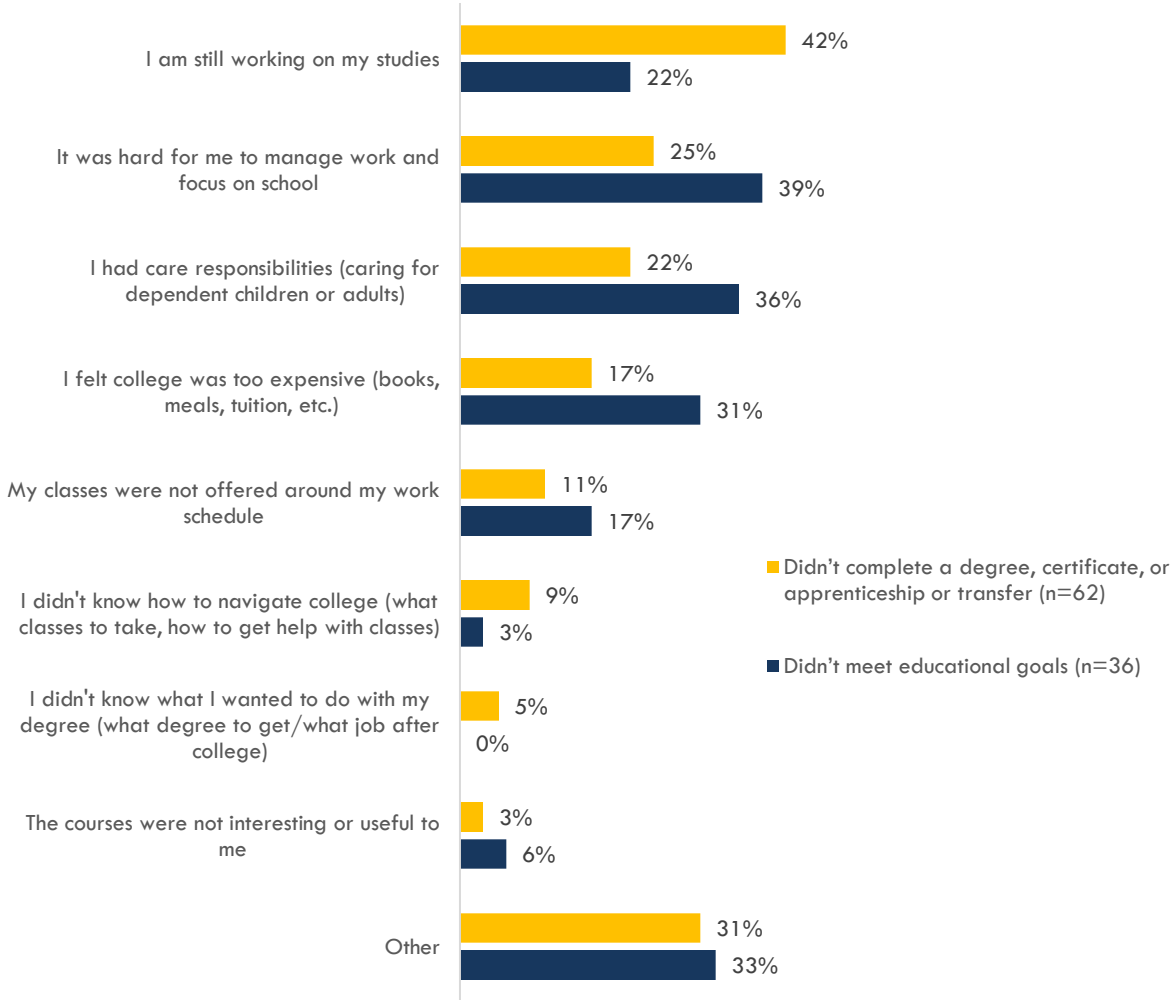


**“With the Black experience and stuff, for me, it seemed like just a necessity. I can’t just be a high school graduate and seek out life in that way. There was no doubt about it, that we were going to college from the get-go.”**

# BARRIERS

One of the goals of this study was to identify the barriers Black students faced in their community college experiences. Of the survey respondents who did not complete a certificate/degree/apprenticeship or transferred, many reported that they were still working on their studies (42 percent), it was hard to manage work and focus on school (25 percent), and they had caregiving responsibilities (22 percent). Of those who did not meet their educational goals, their top three reasons included difficulty managing work and school (39 percent), caregiving responsibilities (36 percent), and expensive education costs (31 percent).

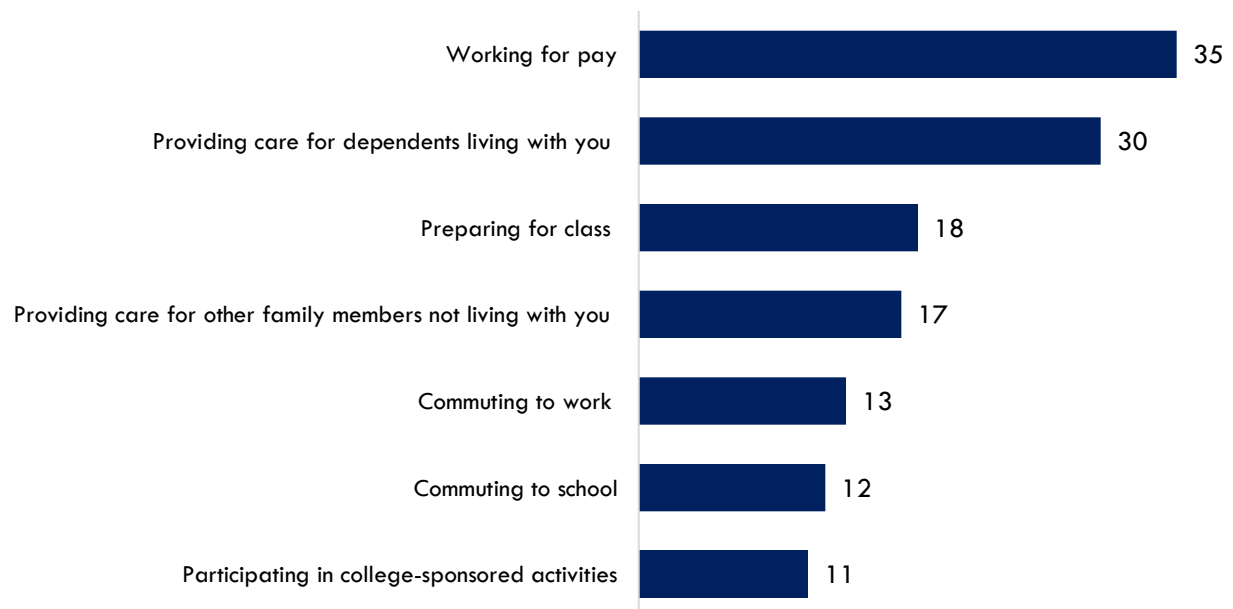
**Exhibit 8. Reasons for Delays in Goal Attainment (n=98)**





Similarly, focus group participants frequently shared frustration about navigating unfamiliar systems, internal struggles such as feeling uncomfortable asking for assistance, and stress associated with managing multiple priorities such as working multiple jobs, going to school, and caring for dependents.<sup>9</sup> When asked about the amount of time spent on tasks in a typical week in the most recent semester they were enrolled, survey respondents reported spending the most amount of time working for pay (average = 34.7 hours per week) and providing care for dependents living with them (average = 29.8 hours per week). Respondents also reported spending more than 15 hours a week on average both preparing for class and providing care for family members not living with them, and more than 10 hours per week on average commuting to work, commuting to school, and participating in college-sponsored activities (Exhibit 9).

**Exhibit 9. Time Spent (Average Hours) per Week During Semester (n=151)<sup>10</sup>**



Overall, survey respondents and focus group participants cited 1) finances, 2) caregiving, 3) COVID-19, 4) microaggressions, 5) fatigue and mental health, and 6) lack of guidance as barriers to their education. The following sections further explore these six barriers and how they affect Black students' community college experiences.

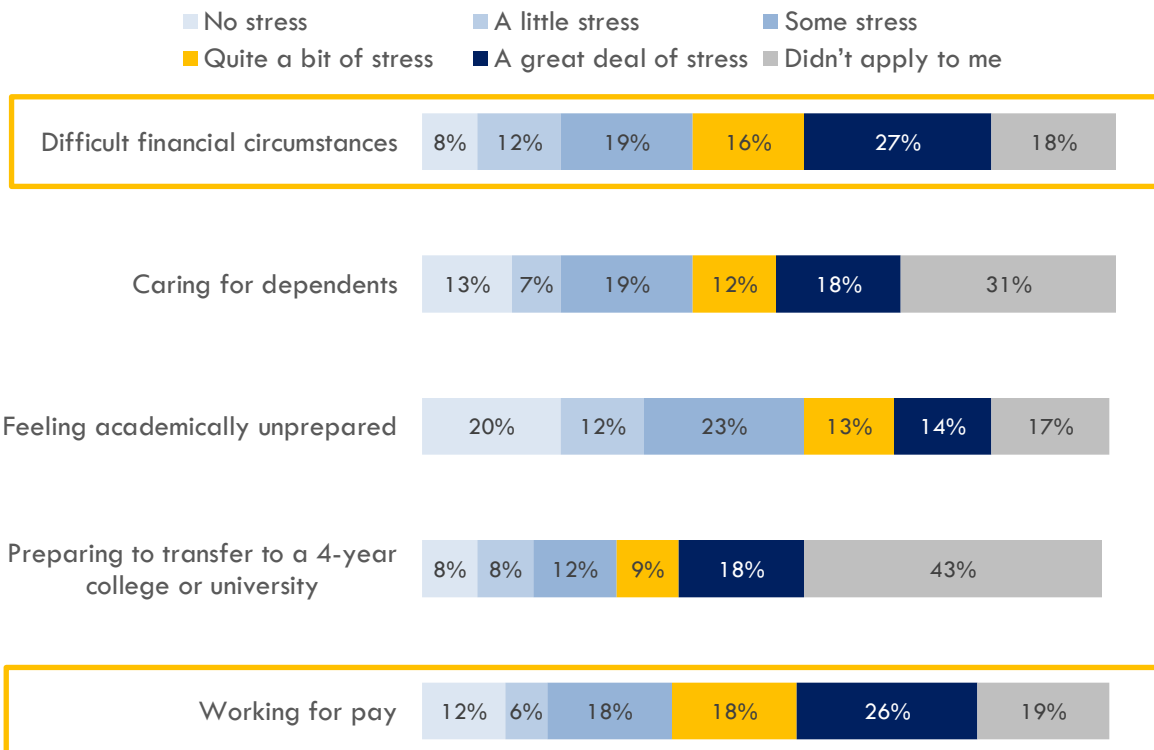
<sup>9</sup> First, SDWP created a list of items that either came up in the focus groups as something a participant had struggled with (e.g., feeling uncomfortable raising their hand in class) or that the authors found to be helpful in their capacity as former students or professors and asked participants how comfortable they were with each of the activities. Response options included "very uncomfortable" (coded 1), "uncomfortable" (coded 2), "comfortable" (coded 3), "very comfortable" (coded 4) as well as "didn't apply to me" and "didn't know this was an option."

<sup>10</sup> Three respondents marked "NA."

## Barrier #1: Finances

When asked to rate the greatest stressors in their community college experience, focus group participants selected “difficult financial circumstances” as the primary stressor. Survey respondents echoed these sentiments and reported that “difficult financial circumstances” and “working for pay” were the two top stressors in their most recent semester (Exhibit 10).

**Exhibit 10. Stressors in Most Recent Semester (n=148)**



Focus group participants explained that training for a higher-paying career at a low cost was a major driver for choosing community college. However, students with financial difficulties continued to experience financial stress after entering college, which commonly led students to complete their programs at a slower pace, take breaks, or abandon them in favor of other, faster paths to employment. Participants identified books, transportation, living expenses, and food as significant financial burdens. While financial aid was a

crucial support, participants struggled to navigate the system and understand the features of loan instruments.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, balancing schoolwork with paid work was a recurring challenge.

While the community colleges offered flexible schedules and aid for school-related expenses, participants often prioritized paid work over schoolwork to cover housing, food, transportation, dependent support, and other living expenses. Taking on more paid work meant taking on more stress, as constricted schedules left little time for classes and assignments. Stressors related to finances (e.g., losing financial aid, struggling to work while going to school) led to burnout and ultimately temporary or permanent dropouts (Exhibit 11).

### Exhibit 11. Participant Quotes Describing Financial Barriers

- *“So just all the money involved. It is really challenging, paying for classes, paying for food, paying for gas, paying for books? The books are ridiculous.”*
- *“The food pantry at [college name], my gosh, so many days where I came to campus, I had no lunch, no breakfast, and I, you know, I had classes for the rest of the day. So that was a lifesaver as well.”*
- *I think before they think about enrolling or more after they enroll, to discuss financial aid. I feel like a lot of times, you get all this money thrown at you. And you don’t really understand the process of a loan and how it works.”*

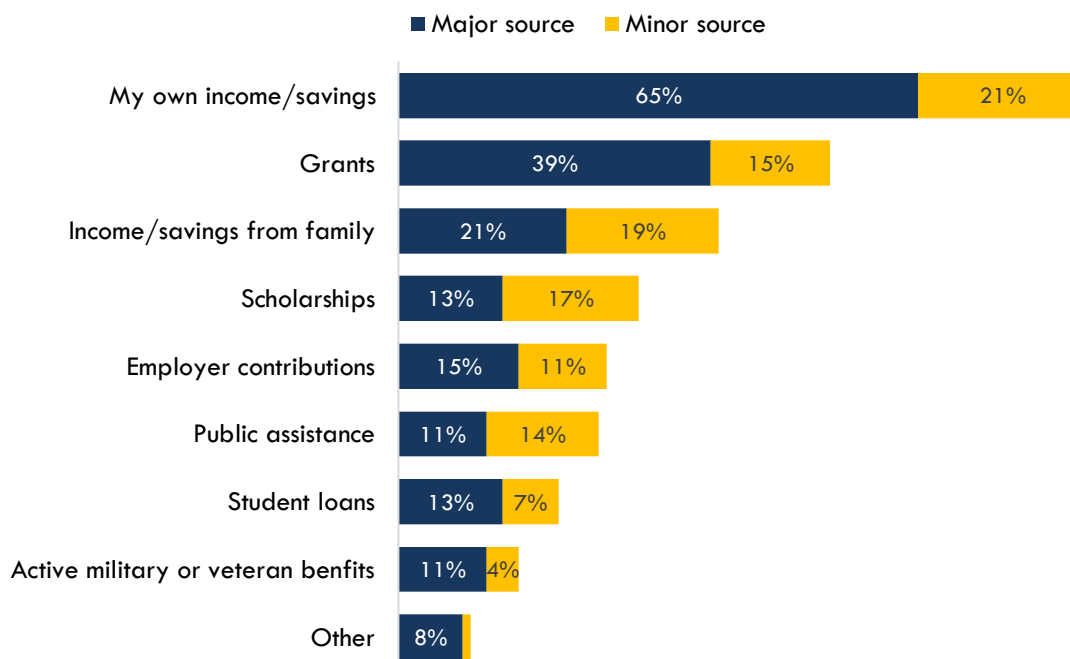
**“What really made me make that decision [to drop out] is that I lost my aid. So I had to pay for classes, which was like another thing plus work at the same time.”**

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<sup>11</sup> It's important to communicate this information in a way that does not imply that the student will not be able to pay it back, cannot understand loan terms, or is not a safe "bet" compared to their colleagues who are taking out loans.

The three largest major sources of income survey respondents reported using to pay for college were own income/savings (65 percent), grants (39 percent), and family income/savings (21 percent) as shown in the Exhibit 12. Only 20 percent of survey respondents said they took out student loans. Of the survey respondents who provided information about their student loan amounts, the average initial balance was \$20,574 (range = \$0 - \$175,000).

**Exhibit 12: Major and Minor Sources of Income for College Expenses (n=147)**



Most survey respondents (64 percent) reported that they did not receive any financial support from their parents or caregivers in their most recent semester. Twenty-one percent of respondents reported living with their parents or caregivers, approximately 12 percent reported being on their parents' health insurance, and fewer than 10 percent reported that their parents pay for their phones, cars, books, etc. (Exhibit 13).

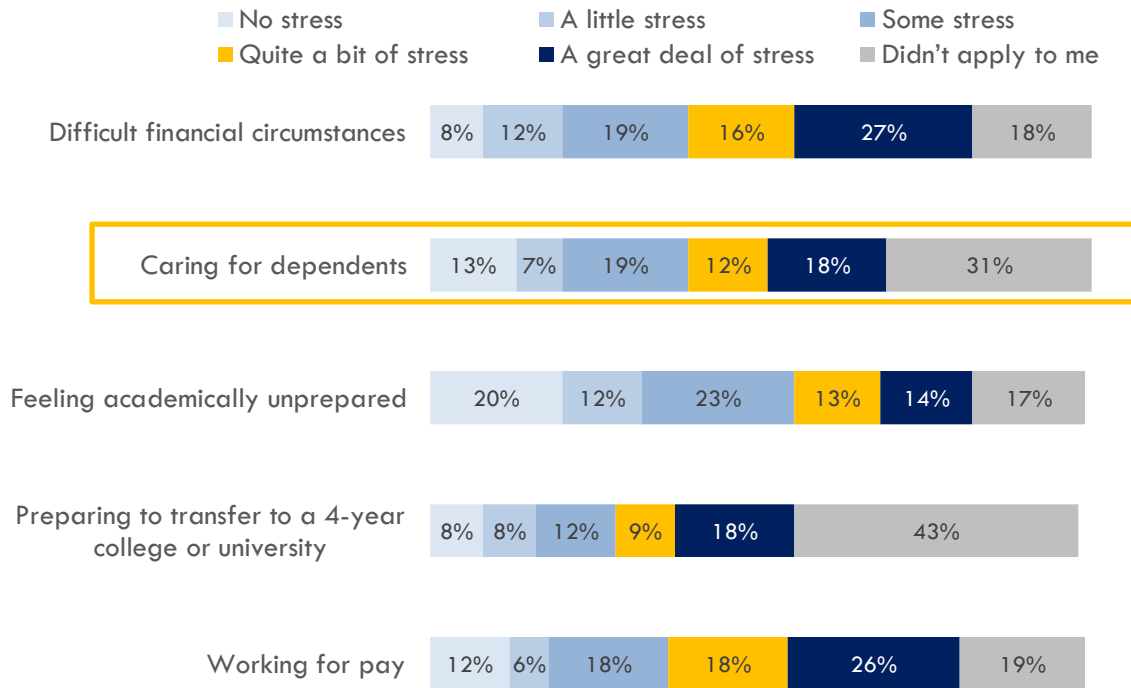
**Exhibit 13. Financial Support from Parents/Caregivers (n=145)**

Statement	%	Statement	%
Did not receive support	64%	Paid for car/car insurance	7%
Lived with them	21%	Paid for books/supplies	7%
On health insurance	12%	Gave me dollar amount	5%
Paid for phone/incidentals	9%	Paid for tuition	4%

## Barrier #2: Caregiving

In addition to financial stressors, survey respondents shared concerns about balancing coursework with caregiving responsibilities. “Caring for dependents” was among the top five stressors, with 19 percent of students indicating “some stress,” 12 percent indicating “quite a bit of stress,” and 18 percent indicating “a great deal of stress” (Exhibit 14).

**Exhibit 14. Stressors in Most Recent Semester (n=148)**



Focus group participants also reported experiencing significant challenges when caring for dependents, including giving birth, disruptions to childcare plans, and providing care for aging or ill family members. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these difficulties, as participants faced school and daycare closures that added additional stress and disrupted their education (Exhibit 15).

#### **Exhibit 15. Participant Quotes Describing Caregiving Challenges**

- *“Who’s going to pick up my child for daycare who’s gonna watch my child after you know, three o’clock from eight o’clock while I study or, that was a huge barrier.”*
- *“A lot of the reason for me not being able to complete certain classes or programs throughout my years is caregiving for a family member. . .”*
- *“I feel as though I’m the oldest and I took over that responsibility of caring for my parents and my. . . that was definitely a challenge and, and then abruptly, just having to take care of my mom from having cancer.”*
- *“I’m still working a full-time job and most of the time I work two jobs. I can’t make that class ...and I really, really need that class to move on.”*
- *“Sometimes it gets kind of hectic when you work and trying to be a mom and trying to finish school. So I took a couple of breaks.”*
- *“I remember being that single mom . . . daycare and after school programs and going to school at night and trying to get my kid to karate practice in the day after school and sitting in the car trying to do homework.”*

**“It’s hard to go to school and work full time, especially if you have kids and a family to take care of.”**

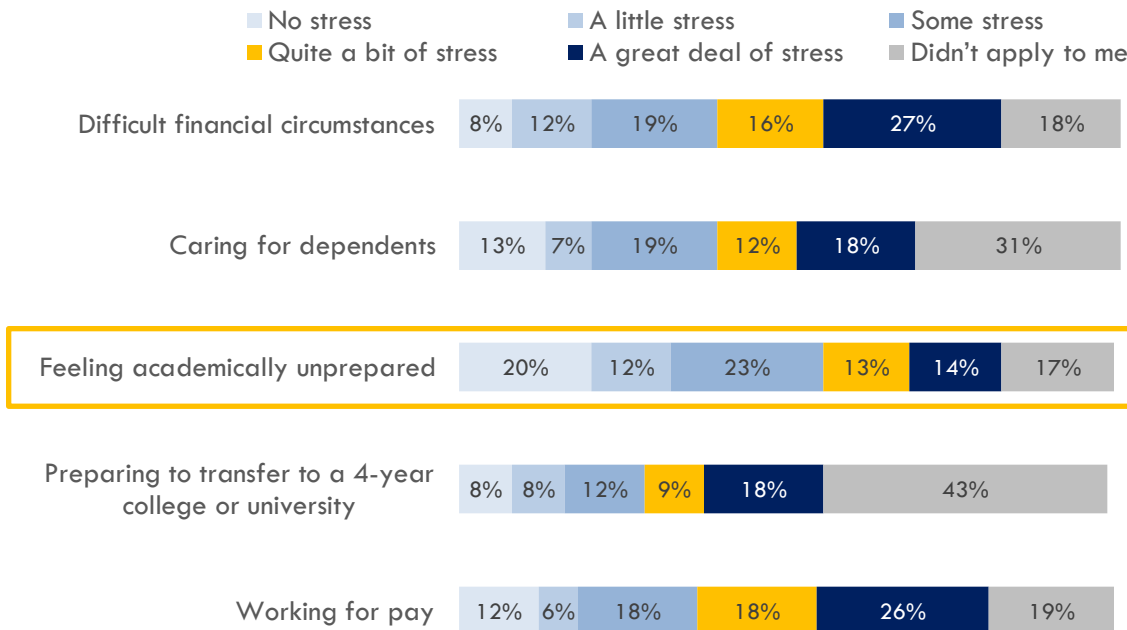




### Barrier #3: COVID-19

Survey respondents indicated that “feeling academically unprepared” was a major stressor in their most recent semester (Exhibit 16). For many focus group participants, the COVID-19 pandemic was a major stressor that contributed to academic challenges. They reported having difficulty abruptly shifting to an online-only environment and missing the hands-on experience needed to get a job or to be better prepared academically (Exhibit 17).

**Exhibit 16. Stressors in Most Recent Semester (n=148)**



**Exhibit 17. Participant Quotes Describing the Impact of COVID-19**

- *“I just prefer the in person set up over the online for community college.”*
- *“I felt like I lost a lot of exposure, by not being able to have access to quality labs ... trying to apply for jobs, it is very difficult for me to go on a job interview and speak with a potential employer and not have physical hands-on experience that I can relate to.”*
- *“Currently forced to take what like what’s referred to as a one-off semester ... I was basically forced to, because of the whole no vaccination thing. I assumed that I was you know exempt from the vaccination, or that it wasn’t even necessary.”*

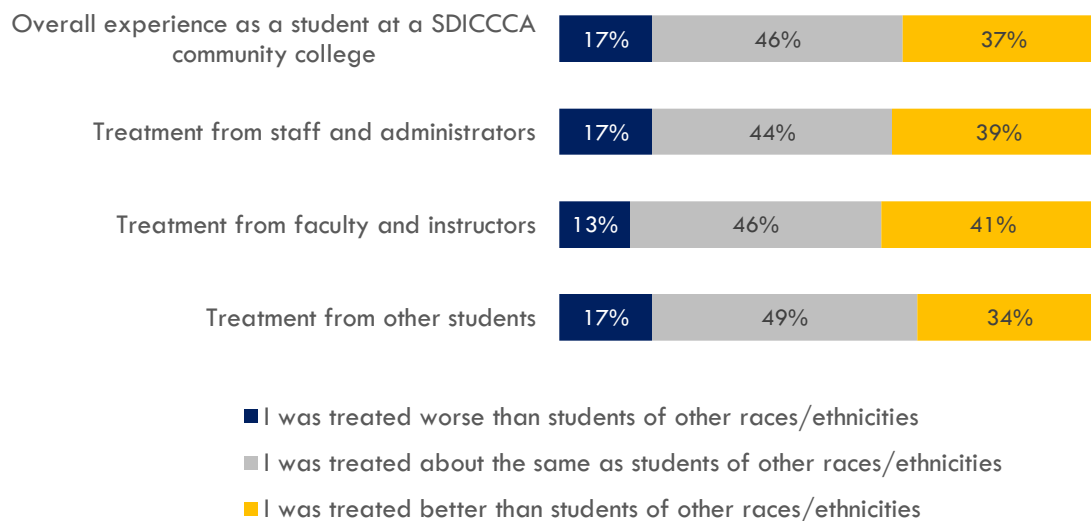


**“[I] still have those challenges with the teachers and with the coursework and trying to, you know, prioritize time to make for that. And also with my personal life, and dealing with mental health, and just learning, [all] while trying to socialize with people again after COVID.”**

## Barrier #4: Microaggressions

The survey asked respondents to share their experiences with racism in the community college system in comparison to students of other races/ethnicities.<sup>12</sup> On average, participants rated their treatment from other students, faculty and instructors, staff and administrators, and their overall experience as being about the same or slightly better than students of other races/ethnicities than their own (Exhibit 18).

**Exhibit 18. Black Students' Perception of Treatment Compared with Other Races/Ethnicities<sup>13</sup> (n=154)**



Focus group participants shared how racial tensions in the news had a negative impact on their experiences in the classroom (Exhibit 19). Some participants felt singled out by racist classmates, while others noted how curricula often focused solely on content created by white scholars or artists, leaving out the contributions of other groups. Students also reported feeling called upon more frequently and sometimes being asked to represent all Black people in class discussions. Participants also reported experiences of microaggressions in the classroom, a term defined by the Harvard Business Review as “verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group.”<sup>14</sup> These challenges highlight the need for more inclusive and diverse learning environments that prioritize the needs of all students.

<sup>12</sup> Students were asked to rank their experience on a ten-point scale, with “0” meaning they were treated much worse than students of other races; “5” meaning they were treated the same; and “10” meaning they were treated much better than students of other races and ethnicities.

<sup>13</sup> The first category (treated worse) includes rankings 0-4; the second category (treated the same) includes ranking 5; the third category (treated better) includes rankings 6-10.

<sup>14</sup> “When and How to Respond to Microaggressions,” Harvard Business Review. [hbr.org/2020/07/when-and-how-to-respond-to-microaggressions](https://hbr.org/2020/07/when-and-how-to-respond-to-microaggressions)

### Exhibit 19. Participant Quotes Describing Microaggressions

- *“When there was more racial tension, I had more problems focusing on my courses, because mentally I was being affected. I had this stressor on me ... being like, the only Black person and being the ambassador, or the one who speaks for all Black people. . . they look at me, like, ‘what are your thoughts?’ But I’m like, ‘Why? Why do I have to say anything?’ ... I love being Black. But to be singled out because I’m Black. Not because you actually care about what I’m saying. But because I’m Black ... I felt alienated and stressed, as if I was walking was a walking target for the racists on campus to express their negative thoughts.”*
- *“They do care about like Black Lives Matter ... but not really having that in their curriculum of writing. The material that they did have was mainly like white writers ... [my college] needs to do more of connecting that more into like the coursework.”*
- *“I was often the only, obviously, Black person in the class ... I was asked questions more than others. And I had to, often I would say, give my perspective as if I was speaking for all Black people. So that was pretty annoying.”*
- *“And then when the teacher is constantly coming at you with questions, you feel like you’re a target in a sense ... when you’re the only Black there, you have that tendency to feel like maybe you’re getting picked on when you have another 20 or 30 students in the classroom and you get least about 30 to 40 percent of the questions.”*
- *“I did not feel very welcomed by my professors. . .One of the reasons I left was because I was feeling so much negativity there, versus where I was at the university ... I try not to always go straight to be like, Is this because I’m Black? ... maybe it’s because I’m young, or maybe it’s because I’m a woman, or maybe because I don’t have enough experience. But when I felt like, Okay, this is because I’m Black, then I just try to advocate for myself or remove myself from the situation.”*
- *“I was in a subset of the cosmetology program, it said at [name of] College ... talking about beauty stuff and hair stuff and skin stuff, there was a lot of ignorant questions. There were a lot of and the teachers to their credit, they did try to combat any of that ... but it was still there.”*
- *“I was the only Black female in the class. So it was predominantly white male, in the class, and when we did a lot of the group [projects], I kind of felt like they tried to silence me a little bit like and not hear my perspective.”*
- *“I guess I think it’s a bit harder for the Black students given the blanket of racism and colonization in the United States. You can feel lonely, you can feel alienated. You know, you can sense some micro-aggressions, and then you battle with yourself wondering if you’re just making a big deal, or if it’s just you ... ”*



**“I was usually the only Black student in my class. I took a lot of art classes, and I felt like with the art classes, they didn’t really have enough diversity in the kinds of art that they talked about. Except there was one professor who specifically made sure that she included like different cultures and stuff.”**

## Barrier #5: Fatigue and Mental Health

Several focus group participants mentioned mental health as a challenge to their focus, availability, and stress levels. Participants reported dealing with grief, burnout, losing hope, and feeling disconnected, unseen, isolated, or inadequate. They discussed problems stemming from financial pressure, abusive relationships, toxic workplaces, family, job loss, and illness, loss of childcare, COVID-19, and racial tensions in the news. Several students mentioned wanting mental health services. Students mentioned counseling services, peer support, DSPS, EOPS, Career Development, student groups (especially Umoja), and supportive instructors as helping their mental health.

### Exhibit 20. Participant Quotes About Fatigue and Mental Health Challenges

- *“And I think for me, my mental health issues have been a really big issue for me to overcome. So getting connected with health services, having the Black student support group available. I never even knew that they got free counseling sessions ... Until I had a meltdown.”*
- *“I finished but it took me four years to get the associate degree and another probably about five or six to get the bachelors. It just seems so challenging, you know, what the homework, the load and everything that I didn’t expect.”*

**“I just found with going to work eight hours a day [and] being on a computer, thinking [about] doing it online would help a little bit... [But] it became a little bit of an overload... I kind of had to make a decision for myself and for my mental health: do I continue to do this and be completely burnt out? Or do I kind of scale back and take a break, [and] reevaluate maybe a year or so later?”**



## Barrier #6: Lack of Guidance

Many participants in the focus groups shared that they were initially drawn to community colleges due to the opportunity they provided to explore different options before deciding on a particular academic or career path. However, these students also highlighted the challenges that can arise with this uncertainty, including attrition, dissatisfaction, and feeling lost if they encounter financial stress or academic delays. Colleges can address these challenges by helping students navigate these difficulties and clarify their goals. However, several focus group participants reported negative experiences with academic and career guidance.

Students described feeling unsupported, getting inaccurate advice, and encountering counselors with limited availability. Poor counseling experiences exacerbated difficulties navigating services and led to students to feel that they have wasted time and money taking unnecessary classes. This is particularly problematic for students without parents who have college experience to provide guidance. Students desired both accurate instrumental guidance and high-level coaching.

Participants also faced difficulty navigating the system. They struggled with course availability, course timing, registration, and a lack of clarity about whether classes could transfer or not. Having to balance school with work and childcare exacerbated this problem. Some students also mentioned being hesitant to ask for help. While some students were satisfied with their experiences, the quality of academic and career guidance varied across colleges. A few focus group participants described helpful counselors, but significantly more participants described negative experiences (Exhibit 21).

### Exhibit 21. Participant Quotes About Lack of Guidance

- *“I wasn’t really guided in the right direction. So I took many classes that I didn’t need to take. So I think ultimately, that’s why I quit going because it was just I felt like I was spinning in circles and getting nowhere.”*
- *“It’s not something you go there to figure something out, because they don’t help you.”*
- *“I can’t remember anybody who actually asked me, like, if this is what I really wanted, and like how I came to this decision, so that they can kind of help to guide us ... but there isn’t anybody there [that] asks you the harder questions.”*
- *“And the family I was saying was like you have to enroll in school. So I enrolled at [college name] to get started and I just like really had no idea what I wanted to do and I was starting as an out of state student so . . . classes were really expensive and I had to start working and get my own place. So work ended up overshadowing school and I ended up like taking a good amount of time off from [college name].”*

- *“So I started going to community college fresh out of high school. I don’t recommend going there until you kind of like a set plan. It’s not something you go there to figure something out, because they don’t help you.”*
- *“I didn’t take the time to speak with a counselor initially, when I first started going ... when I got serious, it was like ‘oh, no, now you have to go and petition and do all this other stuff.’ Because you’ve wasted time, basically. So not speaking with a counselor initially and just jumping in was my challenge.”*
- *“I just felt like the they just don’t care, or they don’t care enough to streamline the process ... And ultimately, the reason I didn’t end up taking the class was because it was so laborious to just try to become a student.”*
- *“I’m trying to do these classes so that I can get a job and improve financially ... But, [if] I can’t get the classes that I need or that I want, and have to wait until the next semester, then that was a really big impact on my ability to move forward.”*
- *“So trying to schedule things around kids and a full-time job, and just really, really wanting to get more education. And so that was a challenge ... I want this class, but it’s only available on this date this time”*
- *“I think it was more finding the resources and making sure that you had everything you needed, and the tools that you needed in order to succeed ... Maybe it’s a little bit of shame that of asking for help, or needing to.”*

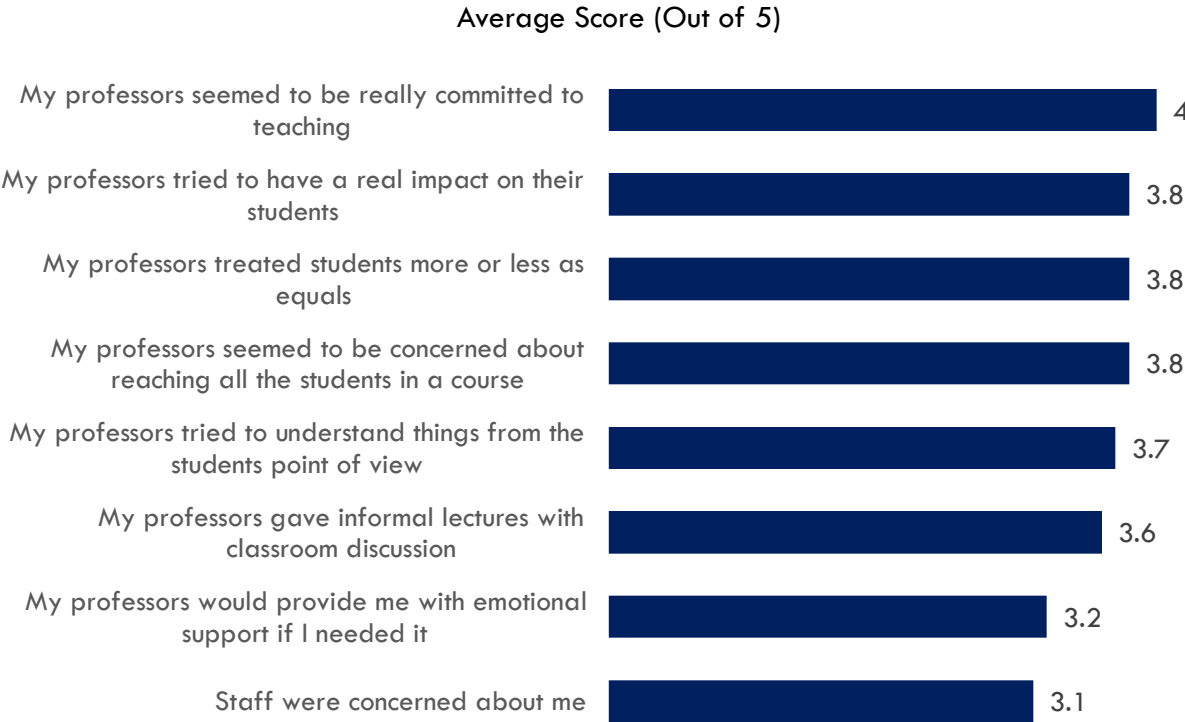
# SUPPORTS

Despite facing learning barriers, Black students identified meaningful supports that aided their educational experience. The two most common themes students shared were encouraging instructors and student support services.

## Support #1: Encouraging Instructors

The survey asked respondents to rate their experiences with instructors on a scale of 1 to 5 (1=none of my professors; 2= a few of my professors; 3=about half of my professors; 4=many of my professors; and 5=all of my professors). Most of the statements averaged close to a 4, which suggests that survey respondents perceived many of their professors to be nurturant (Exhibit 22). The top two rated statements were “My professors seemed to be really committed to teaching” and “My professors treated students more or less as equals.”

**Exhibit 22. Nurturant Learning Environment (n=154)**



Focus group participants also reported positive experiences with instructors (Exhibit 23). They expressed appreciation for professors who provided resources, helped them navigate college systems, gave them personalized learning tools, checked in with them, demonstrated understanding when they missed classes, and offered encouragement. Every focus group participant who mentioned a Black Studies Department described a positive experience; they praised the teachers, instructional approach, interactivity, and content.

### **Exhibit 23. Participant Quotes About Supportive Instructors**

- *“I was active-duty military in the Navy and so having to only take like night classes like I couldn’t take classes during the daytime . . . And so just having that support from my professors and them being understanding with that.”*
- *“There were some classes like pharmacology was really hard, the language is hard. And my professor said, I’m not going to ask you to drop out, this is what I’m going to suggest for you take these cards... And she was always able to say, write this down, put this on index cards. I was at a D in that class. I graduated when I finished that class, I was at a B because of her help with that.”*
- *“I had one instructor, her name was [professor’s name]. She was an African American teacher. And she was in the Child Development department. Just the way she related to you and she you know some teachers like to tiptoe around the fact that you’re Black and you know, you are underserved. And she didn’t do that.”*
- *“I had an English teacher, that she just like, went above and beyond her job, she was a teacher and she gave us resources in class and like even to this day, I still get emails from her about resources that could benefit me.”*
- *“I really found my belonging when I stepped onto the campus of [college name], into their Black Studies Department. And there I met [professor], [professor], [professor], and I was in heaven. I was able to relate everything to the experiences that I was having as a Black student... So I started taking all these things from the Black perspective. And they made so much sense to me, so and I ended up getting the associates in Black studies as well.”*

## Support #2: Student Support Services

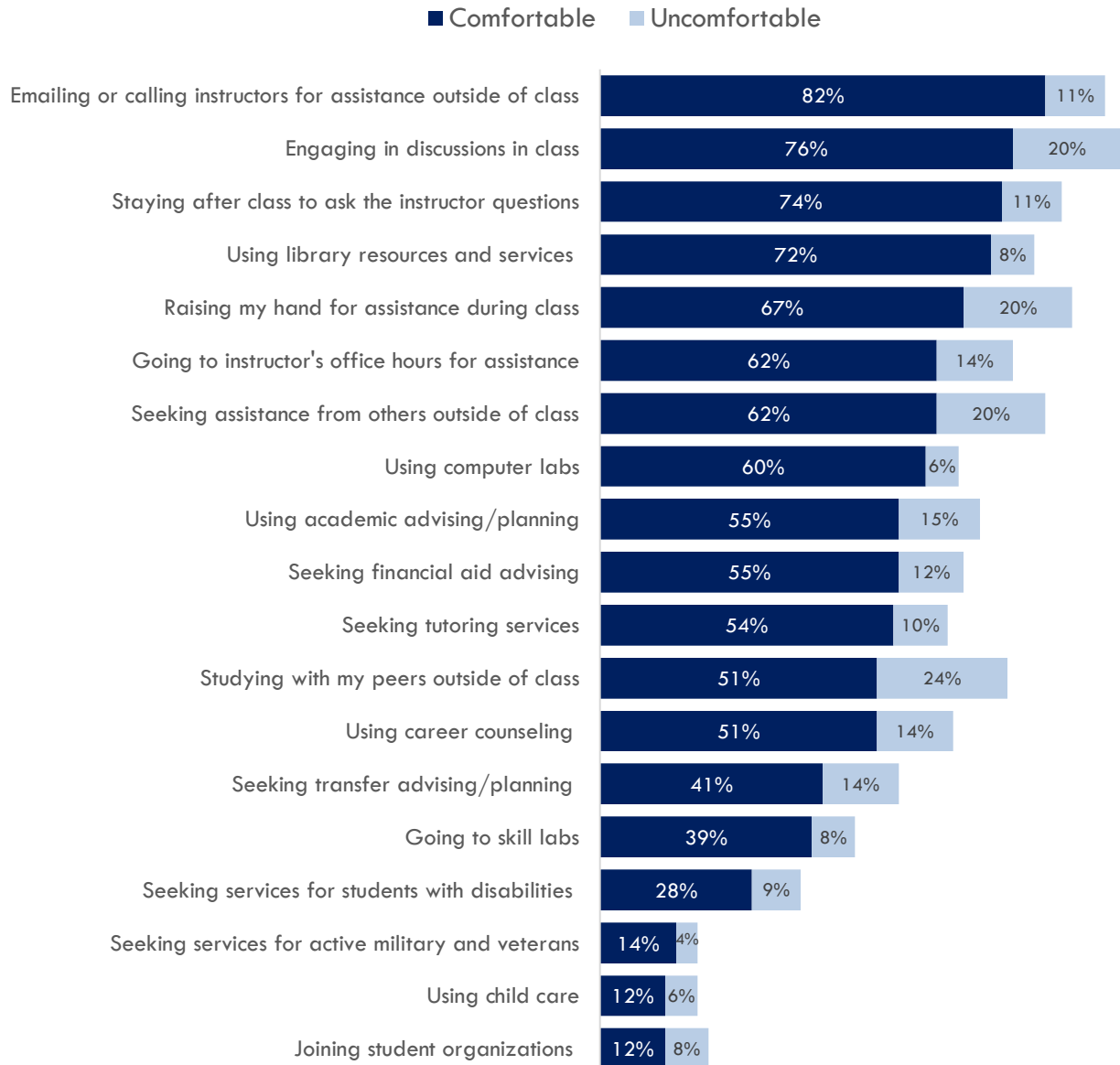
Most focus group participants who accessed student support services (i.e., services and programs that focus on student success and growth) from their college expressed satisfaction with the services. Among the student support services offered, participants mentioned accessing Umoja, EOPS, DSPS, Cal-Works, Health Services, tutoring, and financial aid. However, the focus groups revealed that many participants were unaware of the services available to support their success.

### Exhibit 24. Participant Quotes Discussing Quality Student Services Experiences

- *“They have the CalWORKs office on campus. So they had gotten me a job on campus— I was working at the Career Center, which has helped tremendously...”*
- *“EOPS was an awesome little program that they are that provides us with a lot of them information in things that were available to the students.”*
- *“Umoja has reached out to me countless times when I’ve gone ghost on communication, the Umoja community has suffered because of lack of resources. . .I’m so thankful for Umoja on campus and even the EOPS program because I’ve had to lean on them.”*
- *“I actually had a good experience at [college name]. It’s been great. And the times that I did disappear when just life in general got too much, I did have my counselor reach out to me because I was a part of Umoja.”*
- *“DSPS departments at each of the three colleges were, they were just fantastic ... they were able to get me there and make sure that I graduated.”*
- *“A service that helped me a lot was tutoring. That helped me a lot I probably would have failed some of my classes if I didn’t go to those.”*
- *“I did have a good connection with the Black staff on campus.”*
- *“I have dealt with imposter syndrome where I really felt I didn’t belong in certain classes, when I got into like my biology lab class. And the UMOJA program, my connections through that were able to kind of help me talk through it.”*
- *“[College name] without fail reaches out to the Black students and financially, it has made the difference between to allow me to stay in school.”*
- *“If there was any type of different treatment, it came from the peers. It didn’t come from the college. . .I had a great connection with a lot of the Black staff. And they were able to meticulously guide me and give me advice on how to be successful.”*

When asked about their level of comfort with accessing student support services (1=very uncomfortable to 5=very comfortable), about half of 19 items had an average score above a three, which suggests that survey respondents were comfortable accessing those services (Exhibit 25). Twenty-six percent of respondents felt that academic advising/planning did not apply to them, and nine percent of students did not know that joining student organizations was an option.

**Exhibit 25. Respondents' Level of Comfort with Accessing Student Support Services (n=153)<sup>15</sup>**



<sup>15</sup> Each amount does not add up to 100 percent, because a percentage of respondents chose "Did not apply to me" for each option. One respondent put "Did not apply to me" for every option.



## INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To mitigate the barriers to Black student learning identified in this study (finances, caregiving, microaggressions, fatigue, and lack of guidance) the Regional Consortium and COE for the San Diego and Imperial Counties Community Colleges recommend three main interventions: 1) developing inclusive and anti-racist learning environments, 2) developing flexible course schedules, and 3) creating transformative employment opportunities. Embedded in each of these strategies are several action items described below.

### Insight #1: Students Need Inclusive Learning Environments.

To better support our students, the community colleges must develop inclusive environments by promoting equity-mindedness and data literacy, inclusive curriculum and pedagogy/andragogy, and representation among faculty/staff:

- **Increase equity-mindedness and data literacy** by having faculty, staff, and administrators participate in professional development aimed at creating an inclusive environment through the college. A few examples are the Strong Workforce Faculty Institute, Counselor Institute, and Inclusive Teaching for Equitable Learning (ITEL), a professional development program offered by the Association of College and University Educators (ACUE). The Strong Workforce Faculty Institute—aimed at instructional faculty—and the Counselor Institute—for counseling faculty and counselors—provide cohort-based, data-influenced curriculum that built bridges between faculty and Institutional Research that impact student outcomes. The Inclusive Teaching for Equitable Learning (ITEL) is a microcredential that offered guided faculty through pedagogy related to:
  - 1) Managing the impact of biases,
  - 2) Reducing microaggressions in learning environments,
  - 3) Addressing imposter phenomenon and stereotype threat,
  - 4) Creating inclusive learning environments, and
  - 5) Designing equity-centered courses.<sup>16</sup>
- **Colleges should support local integration of the Faculty Institute** into the college’s professional development programs and recruit faculty members who have low enrollment among Black students. Colleges should also support the integration of the Counselor Institute, which guides counselors in examining student counseling data and finding equity gaps that impact Black and other minoritized students. Through this reflective process, counselors create action plans aimed at improving student outcomes.

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<sup>16</sup> “ACUE Inclusive Teaching for Equitable Learning,” ACUE. acue.org

- **Create inclusive curriculum** by supporting race-conscious and equity-minded reviews of Career Education curriculum. Included in this initiative would be a development of race-conscious, equity-minded open educational resources, like those found in the Center for Urban Education’s Racial Equity Tools, which feature four phases that ground each faculty member in a racial equity mindset—1) Laying the Groundwork, 2) Defining the Problem, 3) Creating Solutions Through Inquiry, and 4) Sustaining and Scaling the Work.<sup>17</sup>
- **Cultivate inclusive pedagogy/andragogy** by identifying inclusive teaching and learning professional development already occurring and developing an intensive professional development activity around inclusive and equity-minded teaching and learning practices.
- **Increase representation in the classroom** through reviewing hiring practices and recruiting diverse faculty from the industry. Colleges should develop a regional industry speaker’s bureau with collaborators and mentors consisting of diverse and representative industry professionals. This entails removing systemic barriers in hiring processes, including long delays for diverse faculty applicants.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- How could colleges provide space for industry and employer partners to participate in race-conscious, equity-minded curriculum review and open educational resource creation?
- What events and professional development opportunities could colleges expand access to that would help increase inclusive and anti-racist learning environments?
- What would it look like for colleges to integrate work experience, apprenticeships, internships, mentorships, and other work-based learning through a lens of inclusion and equity-mindedness?

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<sup>17</sup> “Racial Equity Tools,” Center for Urban Education (CUE). [cue-tools.usc.edu/](http://cue-tools.usc.edu/)

## Insight #2: Students Need Flexible Course Schedules for Adult Learners.

Our region’s community colleges must develop flexible schedules for adult learners by optimizing Career Education program paths and local scheduling practices:

- **Review local Career Education program paths** by evaluating college strategic enrollment plans and how they connect to Career Education programs. Colleges could create templates for Career Education program mapping in addition to supporting the mapping of Career Education programs for full-time and part-time day, night, and online students to identify scheduling barriers. Colleges need to identify maps that support developing student cohorts through guidance on career outcomes, discipline, and course taking. One example comes from San Jacinto College, which creates career pathways aligned with educational plans. Career conversations at San Jacinto College are not siloed in any one department—from outreach to admissions to campus tours, educational planning, first semester instruction and career services, incoming students have mandatory career advising and intentional career programming alongside their first semester student success courses.<sup>18</sup>
- **Review local scheduling practices** by identifying gaps in department scheduling and course offerings that disproportionately harm Black scholars who are among the currently employed students, caregivers, parents, or low-income students. Identify underlying reasons for those gaps (availability of faculty, low enrollment, professional development needs, etc.) and support development and implementation of strategies to address those underlying reasons.

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What barriers exist that prevent flexible scheduling for CE programs? How might a college coordinate with its faculty to overcome these barriers in support of their students?
- What strategies would need to be developed to reimagine course scheduling on behalf of Black students? Which stakeholders would need input?

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<sup>18</sup> “Transforming Advising to Incorporate Career Conversations”, Dr. Laurel Williamson and Dr. Joanna Zimmermann, San Jacinto College

### Insight #3: Students Need Transformative Employment Opportunities.

The San Diego and Imperial Counties Community Colleges should create transformative employment opportunities by educating industry and employer partners, empowering race conscious and equity-mindedness in these partnerships, and developing measurable diversity and inclusion goals:

- **Educate industry and employer partners** by developing free or low cost short-term, noncredit, community education programs for managers, supervisors, and HR professionals around race conscious/equity-minded hiring and talent management practices.
- **Empower race conscious and equity-minded industry and employer partners** by creating a community of practice within the workforce development framework for these partners to address systemic barriers to employment. This effort should build on the enhanced coordination with external stakeholders recommended in the COE's Perkins V Comprehensive Regional Needs Assessment (CRNA) which was targeted at special populations, which had the goal of sustaining beyond grant cycles.<sup>19</sup> The infrastructure created for transformative employment should similarly not be dependent on a specific funding timeline.
- **Develop measurable diversity and inclusion goals** by producing a regional dashboard that identifies occupational gaps and targets for employment and wage equity.

#### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- If you had access to race/ethnicity, gender, and age targets on the Center of Excellence's labor market briefs, how would your college use this information to create transformative employment opportunities?
- How could the colleges develop shared strategies that identify and recruit race conscious and equity-minded industry/employer partners who pursue equitable hiring and talent management?
- How could colleges establish an ecosystem of employers and external workforce development stakeholders that would be sustainable?

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<sup>19</sup> [myworkforceconnection.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Perkins-V-CRNA\\_2022-02-16.pdf](https://myworkforceconnection.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Perkins-V-CRNA_2022-02-16.pdf)

## Conclusion

With information from this report and the Equity Gaps in Priority Jobs and Programs<sup>20</sup> study, the Regional Consortium and COE encourage the San Diego and Imperial Counties Community Colleges to consider the findings in improving retention and completion of Black students and other students from marginalized communities in our system. The Chancellor's Office call to action<sup>21</sup> in June 2020 set the stage for colleges to recenter their equity work around racial justice. This report contains clear, tangible strategies that colleges can begin using immediately to remedy ongoing equity gaps in student progression and outcomes.



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<sup>20</sup> "Equity Gaps in Priority Jobs and Programs," Center of Excellence for the San Diego and Imperial Counties Community Colleges. [coecc.net/san-diego-imperial/2023/02/equity-gaps-in-priority-jobs-and-programs](https://coecc.net/san-diego-imperial/2023/02/equity-gaps-in-priority-jobs-and-programs)

<sup>21</sup> "Letter to California Community Colleges, June 5." [cccoco.edu/-/media/CCCCO-Website/Files/Communications/vision-for-success/1-letter-to-california-community-colleges-family.pdf?la=en&hash=2291351CABDAFEA2DBA9BC210B335CC4C38AD8A5](https://cccoco.edu/-/media/CCCCO-Website/Files/Communications/vision-for-success/1-letter-to-california-community-colleges-family.pdf?la=en&hash=2291351CABDAFEA2DBA9BC210B335CC4C38AD8A5)

## APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

The San Diego Workforce Partnership (SDWP) used a mixed-method design for this study that included qualitative and quantitative data.<sup>22</sup> Specifically, SDWP used an exploratory sequential design<sup>23</sup> in which qualitative data was collected first through focus groups, and then those insights were used to inform the development of the quantitative survey instrument. An online survey was used to collect quantitative data and those results were interpreted in light of the qualitative findings. Exploratory sequential designs are grounded accounting for the target population's perspective throughout the research process.<sup>24,25</sup>

### Focus Groups

The first step was collecting qualitative data from current and former Black students in a series of focus groups. In the winter of 2021-22, Benjamin Gamboa, Associate Dean of Career Education at MiraCosta College, requested contact information from each of the region's colleges on three populations:

1. Black students who earned a career technical education (CTE) award within the last three academic years;
2. Black students with a CTE goal/program who attempted at least one CTE course within the last three academic years, but did not earn an award; and
3. Black students who began matriculation processes within the last three academic years, but did not enroll.<sup>26</sup>

Representatives at the colleges created spreadsheets with names and email addresses for current and former Black students meeting the qualifications listed above and files were sent to SDWP. Between March 10 and March 22, 2022, email invitations were sent to approximately 2,000 individuals explaining the purpose of the study and offering a \$75 stipend in the form of a prepaid Visa gift card for participation. Forty-six individuals participated in eight focus groups that lasted approximately 90 minutes each. A Black woman community college alumna currently working as a program specialist at SDWP conducted the focus groups to ensure that researchers directly responsible for the project did not bias results.<sup>27</sup> The focus group interview schedules were semi-structured, with a predetermined format that allowed for emergent discussions between participants. All participants were asked:

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<sup>22</sup> Creswell, J. W., & Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed-methods research*, Third edition. Sage.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Harper, S. R. (2007). Using qualitative methods to assess student trajectories a Matriculation is defined as completing an application identifying a CTE goal or program plus completion of one additional matriculation process such as financial aid, orientation, or assessment and college impact. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 136, 55–68. doi.org/10.1002/ir.231

<sup>26</sup> Matriculation is defined as completing an application identifying a CTE goal or program plus completion of one additional matriculation process such as financial aid, orientation, or assessment.

<sup>27</sup> Bourke, B. (2014). Positionality: Reflecting on the research process. *The Qualitative Report*, 19, 1-9. doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2014.1026

1. General questions about their experiences in the region;
2. Challenges they faced to their learning experiences;
3. What influenced their decision to leave if they had not completed a degree or certificate;
4. Whether there were any programs at the colleges that were particularly beneficial; and
5. Suggestions for things the colleges, faculty, or staff could do to help people succeed.

After the first two focus groups were complete and in discussion with the moderator, the research team decided to add more specific questions about being a Black student:

- “As a Black scholar, how did you feel about your community college experience?”
- “Do you feel that you were ever treated differently than non-Black students? If so, how?”
- “Were there any particular challenges that you faced as a Black scholar? What were they?”
- “Do you have any suggestions for things the colleges, faculty, or staff could do to specifically help Black students succeed in college?”

These more specific questions (or a variation thereof) were asked of the majority ( $n = 36$ ) of the participants. Focus groups took place between March 21 and April 18, 2022. To analyze these results, researchers read through each of the transcripts separately and used an open coding procedure in which they highlighted and tagged sections of text that corresponded with the research questions.<sup>28</sup> They read through the transcripts a second time to ensure all codes identified later in the process were tagged in earlier transcripts. Researchers discussed the meaning of the codes they had created, while one researcher combined all of the highlighted text and relevant tags into a single running document, and another researcher reduced the tags into themes.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Taguette was used to tag and identify themes.

<sup>29</sup> Guest and colleagues (2017) reported that two to three focus groups with six to eight participants yielded 80 percent of all themes, and three to six focus group yielded 90 percent of all themes. Guest, G., Namey, E., & McKenna, K. (2017). How many focus groups are enough? Building an evidence base for nonprobability sample sizes. *Field Methods*, 29(1), 3–22. doi.org/10.1177/1525822X16639015

## Online Survey

The research team took the information learned from the focus groups and combined it with a review of Tinto's<sup>30</sup> conceptual model of student attrition to create a quantitative survey.<sup>31</sup> On June 8, 2022, the first email invitation was sent to 2,765 email addresses provided by the colleges. An email was addressed to each student and offered entry into a raffle for one of ten \$250 pre-paid Visa gift cards for participation and contained personalized links to take the survey. Approximately five percent (n=151) of emails were undeliverable. SDWP sent several reminder emails between June 15<sup>th</sup> and July 11<sup>th</sup> and received 215 responses by September 9, 2022. The survey had 11 categories of questions: 1) Motivations & Goals, 2) Experiences with Instructors,<sup>32</sup> 3) Support & integration, 4) Stress, 5) Time Spent on Activities, 6) College Navigation, 7) Participation in Student Life, 8) Educational Attainment, 9) Experiences of Racism, 10) Finances, and 11) Test Scores. SDWP analyzed all data using R.

**Exhibit 26. Description of Survey Respondents**

Category		Sample Size (Range)	Percent (Mean)
Race/Ethnicity	Black or African American	154	100%
	American Indian or Alaska Native	5	3%
	Asian	0	0%
	Hispanic or Latinx/o/a	5	3%
	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0	0%
	Middle Eastern or North African	0	0%
	White	11	7%
	A race not listed here	3	2%
Gender	Woman	99	69%
	Man	42	29%
	Non-binary	1	1%
	A gender not listed here	1	1%
Age	Age	(18-75)	(38.82)

<sup>30</sup> Tinto, V. (1993). *Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition*, 2nd edition. The University of Chicago Press.

<sup>31</sup> The survey was created and deployed in Qualtrics.

<sup>32</sup> SDWP used the Nurturant Learning Environment Scale (NLES)—developed by Côté and Levine (1997)—to measure student experience with instructors.



Category		Sample Size (Range)	Percent (Mean)
Educational Attainment	Some primary or secondary school, no diploma or GED	2	1%
	High school diploma or GED	6	4%
	Some college, no degree	33	24%
	Associate degree	40	29%
	Bachelor's degree	30	21%
	Some graduate school	7	5%
	Graduate certificate	6	4%
	Master's degree	14	10%
	J.D., Ph.D., Psy.D., M.D., or some other doctoral degree	2	1%
Parental Education	Some primary or secondary school, no diploma or GED	16	12%
	High school diploma or GED	33	24%
	Some college, no degree	33	24%
	Associate degree	16	12%
	Bachelor's degree	18	13%
	Some graduate school	0	0%
	Graduate certificate	3	2%
	Master's degree	13	9%
J.D., Ph.D., Psy.D., M.D., or some other doctoral degree	7	5%	

## Motivation to Attend Community College

The survey asked participants about student motivations to attend community college. Phinney and colleagues<sup>33</sup> created the Student Motivations to Attend University-Revised scale specifically to measure motivations to attend college among ethnic minority students. The authors conducted focus groups with students and added items to the original SMAU scale based on those discussions, then tested the revised

<sup>33</sup> Phinney, J. S., Dennis, J., & Osorio, S. (2006). Reasons to attend college among ethnically diverse college students. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 12*(2), 347–366. doi.org/10.1037/1099-9809.12.2.347.

33-item scale using principle-components analysis with a Promax Rotation.<sup>34</sup> In the current sample, the average rating for encouragement was high, but the standard deviation was also large, indicating a high degree of variability between respondents. The three motivations: lack of other options, prove worth, and family assistance and expectations, were rated lower on average and displayed a high degree of variability. For the current study, SDWP used a maximum-likelihood factor analysis with a promax rotation and requested a seven-factor solution.

Results indicated that a seven-factor solution was sufficient ( $p < .001$ ), but of note, results differed substantially from Phinney and colleagues. Phinney et al. (2006) identified ten correlated items they titled “Career/personal” motivations, those same items loaded on three separate factors in our data. We have labelled these “Career/personal – personal/intellectual growth” (factor 3), “Career/personal – material” (factor 5), and “Lack of other options” (factor 7). Another difference in the present data was that the items intended to measure helping family and expectations, as well as one measure from the original “default” motivations (“I had no choice but to go to college”) loaded together, perhaps suggesting that helping family members was linked to family expectations and a feeling of not having any other choice. The “humanitarian,” “prove worth,” and “encouragement” subscales were not changed from the SMAU-Revised scale.

**Exhibit 27. Top Motivations for Attending Community College Scales**

Motivation	Number of scale items	Mean	SD	Range
Career/personal- personal/intellectual growth	7	39	7	7-49
Career/personal- material	3	16	4	3-21
Humanitarian	4	20	6	4-28
Encouragement	3	14	5	3-21
Lack of other options	1	4	2	1-7
Prove worth	2	7	4	2-14
Family assistance & expectations	5	17	8	5-35

All statements are listed in Exhibit 28 below. Three items (indicated with strikethrough text in Exhibit 28) were removed due to a combination of low factor loadings and not fitting with the other items in the scales. Cronbach’s alpha indicated all scales had a moderate to high degree of reliability ( $.89 \leq \alpha \leq .73$ ).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

**Exhibit 28. All Motivations for Attending Community College**

Statement	Factor						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My parents/family would be very disappointed if I did not attend	0.70						
I owe it to my parents/family to do well in college	0.81						
There were pressures on me from parents/family	0.70						
I had no choice but to go to college	0.67						
I would let my parents/family down if I didn't succeed	1.04						
To help people who are less fortunate		0.61					
To contribute to the welfare of others		0.84					
To contribute to the improvement of the human condition		1.05					
To make meaningful changes to the "system"		0.74					
To get into an interesting and satisfying career			0.57				
It was better than the alternatives			0.54				0.40
To understand the complexities of life		0.31	0.52				
To achieve personal success			0.58				
To develop myself personally			0.71				
To prove wrong those who thought I was not "college material"				1.00			
To prove wrong those who expected me to fail				0.95			
<del>To prove to others that I could succeed in college</del>				<del>0.59</del>			
To obtain the "finer things in life"					0.53		
To help me earn more money					0.52		
To achieve a position of higher status in society					0.89		
I was encouraged by a mentor or role model						0.53	
There was someone who believed I could succeed						0.64	
Someone I admired or respected encouraged me						0.71	
There were few other options							0.91
<del>It gave me the opportunity to study and learn</del>				<del>0.37</del>			

Statement	Factor						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
To get an education in order to help my parents/family financially	0.31	0.33					
To improve my intellectual capacity			0.50				
To understand the complexities of the modern world	0.32		0.47				
Cronbach's alpha (standardized) =	0.87	0.88	0.77	0.89	0.73	0.78	-

## Support and Integration

To measure participant experiences of support and integration into college life, SDWP used three scales: Milem and Berger's<sup>35</sup> Perceived Peer Support scale, Berger and Milem's<sup>36</sup> Social Integration and Academic Integration scales, and Robins and colleagues'<sup>37</sup> Single Item Self-Esteem Scale. Due to the relevance of these topics, scale items were expected to be correlated and SDWP factor analyzed all four scales together using maximum-likelihood factor analysis with a direct oblimin rotation and a four-factor solution. Results indicated the four-factor solution was sufficient ( $p < .001$ ), but the factor structure was not as expected. The first factor combined all four items from the original peer support scale and four items from the social integration scale:

- “My relationships yielded strong intellectual growth”
- “I developed close relationships”
- “My relationships yielded positive personal growth”
- “It was difficult for me to make friends” (reverse coded)<sup>38</sup>

The second factor included the remainder of items from the original social integration scale that each measured interactions with faculty members. Factors three and four separated the original academic integration scale into two subscales, one of which seems to measure academic growth and the other

<sup>35</sup> Milem, J. F., & Berger, J. B. (1997). A modified model of college student persistence: Exploring the relationship between Astin's theory of involvement and Tinto's theory of student departure. *Journal of College Student Development*, 38(4), 387–400.

<sup>36</sup> Berger, J. B., & Milem, J. F. (1999). The role of student involvement and perceptions of integration in a causal model of student persistence. *Research in Higher Education*, 40(6), 641–664.

<sup>37</sup> Robins, R. W., Hendin, H. M., & Trzesniewski, K. H. (2001). Measuring global self-esteem: Construct validation of a single-item measure and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*.

<sup>38</sup> One additional item “fit” in the first factor but had a low factor loading and removing it significantly increased the scale reliability. This item is indicated with strikethrough text in

Exhibit 30.

measuring the impact of relationships on personal and intellectual growth. Unsurprisingly, the single-item self-esteem scale did not load with any of the other scales.

**Exhibit 29. Support and Integration (n=154)<sup>39</sup>**

Motivation	Number of scale items	Mean	SD	Range
Academic growth	4	22.41	5.29	4-28
Impact of relationships on personal and intellectual growth	2	9.63	3.45	2-14
Social integration & support from faculty	5	23.84	7.72	5-35
Social integration & support from peers	8	36.08	12.29	8-56

**Exhibit 30. Factor Analysis of Survey Respondents' Experiences of College Life**

Statement	Factor			
	1	2	3	4
Peers in whom I confided	0.77			
Peers with whom I felt comfortable	0.89			
Peers who shared my views and beliefs	0.87			-0.14
Opportunities to develop friendships	0.73			0.19
My relationships yielded strong intellectual growth	0.58		0.12	0.14
I developed close relationships	0.48			0.36
My relationships yielded positive personal growth	0.56		0.10	0.24
It was difficult to make friends	0.50			0.24
Few would listen and help if I had a problem	0.44	0.17	-0.12	-0.10
I was satisfied with opportunities to interact with faculty	0.18	0.26	0.51	
I developed close relationships with faculty			0.70	
My interactions with faculty yielded positive intellectual growth			0.93	
My interactions with faculty yielded positive personal growth			0.96	

<sup>39</sup> Respondents who answered at least one of the Support and Integration questions (Q18, Q19, Q27) were included in this metric, even if they did not respond to all three questions.

Statement	Factor			
	1	2	3	4
My interactions with faculty had a positive impact on my career choice		0.15	0.61	0.13
I had high self-esteem	0.20	0.25		
I was satisfied with my academic experience		0.86		
I was satisfied with the extent of my intellectual development		0.92		
My interest in ideas and intellectual matters increased		0.86		
My academic experience had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interest in ideas		0.79		0.17
My relationships with other students had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interest in ideas	0.13		0.14	0.74
My relationships with other students had a positive influence on my personal growth, values, and attitudes		0.12		0.86
Cronbach's alpha (standardized) =	0.93	0.93	0.92	0.93

## APPENDIX B: FACULTY & STAFF INTERVIEWS

In addition to the student focus groups, SDWP also interviewed current faculty and staff at the colleges: three counselors, one professor, and one administrator of an academic support department.<sup>40</sup> Interviews were semi-structured, with each participant asked the following:

1. Role at the college
2. Patterns of challenges they see Black students face
3. How their department specifically supports Black students
4. Anything else they wanted to add

Most of the individuals contacted were either specifically named by focus group participants or belonged to colleges or support departments that were mentioned as having been particularly helpful to them during their time at the colleges.<sup>41</sup> The requests for interviews went out in May and June 2022; however, responses were affected by the timing being at the end of the semester. In total, five current community college employees were interviewed.

Given their varying roles at the colleges, respondents' answers regarding student challenges were very similar to one another and aligned with what emerged during the focus groups. Black students face the same challenges navigating higher education systems that other racial and ethnic groups do—with financial, family obligations, and psychological issues listed as top concerns.

Two interviewees brought up the specific challenges associated with being first-generation students and not knowing how to navigate college systems or who to reach for support. Relatedly, four interviewees talked about a sense of disconnection.<sup>42</sup> One participant described how the African tradition is a relational culture and being at a Primarily White Institution (PWI) immediately sets Black students up to be less integrated into the institution. Another said it was disheartening because things hadn't changed in the 40 years since they started in school, with Black students still feeling invisible, as if their challenges are not seen and heard.

When asked about what their respective departments do to support Black students, all five mentioned engaging in at least one proactive outreach movement on behalf of their department, whether that be to get students in to counseling appointments, inviting them to Black student group events or making extra time to be available to students outside of normal office hours.

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<sup>40</sup> We requested interviews from people who were either specifically named by focus group participants as being particularly helpful during their educational journeys or who worked in support departments mentioned as being helpful by focus group participants. Additional details withheld to preserve participant anonymity.

<sup>41</sup> We also reached out to a handful of other faculty and staff members recommended to us by those we initially interviewed.

<sup>42</sup> The focus group moderator also spoke to Alicia about the sense of disconnection she was feeling from many of the focus group participants.

Most of the interviewees also mentioned participating in extra ad-hoc working groups and committees to support minoritized students (that were often faculty-led and unfunded). Finally, two of the interviewees that were highly regarded by focus group participants mentioned the importance of showing up as their authentic selves for their students, allowing the students to do the same. Only two of the interviewees said they had more to add after the questions we'd already covered, and both indicated they wanted to be doing more. One specifically said they needed more proactive ways of reaching out to students and the other said the counseling center is short-staffed leading to counselor burnt-out, and students are suffering because of it. These results highlight the importance of focusing attention on ways to better support the retention and completion of Black students and other students from marginalized communities in our system.



## APPENDIX C: STUDENT SUGGESTIONS

Although not a specific focus of the research questions, students were asked about what changes could be made within the community college system to help support future Black scholars. The quotes below highlight suggestions from focus group participants (Exhibit 31). They suggested that mental health services and peer mentoring or support groups could help Black students reduce friction. They suggested career services could do more to promote partnerships with Black-owned business and inform prospective students about trade programs. Participants emphasized the importance of individual attention and personalized help.

### **Exhibit 31. Participant Quotes Describing Suggestions for the Community Colleges**

- *“For me, I think one of the cracks is the recognition of the additional stress that is on African American students when they’re going into these spaces where oftentimes there’s not faculty or other students that look like you or have your shared experience. So I’m a big advocate now for mental health services on campus and making sure students understand and know that it’s available.”*
- *“Black-owned businesses should be recruiting students from community colleges, there should be a lot more job fairs. And because that’s the whole reason that people are at school to get jobs.”*
- *“When they go to these college fairs and things for that to be discussed... they could still get a degree but in a trade.”*
- *“All these Black student unions are great, but I just think that also doesn’t count anymore...I wish more effort would be put in into making a bit [stronger] community, rather than just what seems like positive segregation”*
- *“One Black student’s struggle is not the same as another: understanding that a little bit more might be helpful in terms of how they approach a particular student and what they need... But then taking a step back, and then just kind of looking at the big picture of what Black people and Black students struggle with, overall, may also help in terms of just understanding the general approach to the plight of Black students.”*

# APPENDIX D: RECRUITMENT & RETENTION INDICES

In developing any type of metric to measure equity, it is important to consider what the comparison set is. In other words, the population of interest is equal to what? It is important to measure any population of interest against the population *available* to engage in the activity of interest. So, for example, to create a recruitment index we would not want to measure the number of students enrolled by race to the racial breakdown of the entire county population because children under the age of 16 are highly unlikely to enroll in college and may have different demographic characteristics due to changing population dynamics.

SDWP used data from the American Community Survey and limited each county's population to the ages most likely to enroll in college – those between the ages of 16 and 64 – in order to define the population from which students were most likely to be drawn. SDWP compared the percentage of first-time enrollments in each college by race/ethnicity to the percentage of individuals aged 16 to 64 years in the county to estimate an index of recruitment equity, or how closely new enrollments mirror the county college-aged population. Formally, this is calculated as:

$$\frac{n \text{ first time enrollments by group} / T \text{ first time enrollments}}{n \text{ population by group} / T \text{ population}}$$

Values of one are indicative that first-time enrollments are in perfect proportion to the college-aged population of that group, values less than one indicate under-enrollment of that demographic group and values over one indicate over-enrollment of that demographic group. To establish a baseline, the 2019 San Diego County population (aged 16 to 64) and the first-time enrollments in Fall 2019 by college are included below.<sup>43</sup>

**Exhibit 32. San Diego Population and First-Time Enrollments (2019)**

	San Diego Population Ages 16-64	First-Time Enrollments, Fall 2019						
		Cuyamaca	Grossmont	MiraCosta	Palomar	SD	Mesa	Miramar
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,218,944</b>	<b>766</b>	<b>1,846</b>	<b>3,242</b>	<b>4,629</b>	<b>830</b>	<b>972</b>	<b>762</b>
African-American	113,017	45	144	105	165	96	47	15
American-Indian/Alaskan Native	8,865	6	14	19	20	6	3	3

<sup>43</sup> Except San Diego College of Continuing Education, which had no first-time enrollments in Fall 2019.

	San Diego Population Ages 16-64	First-Time Enrollments, Fall 2019						
		Cuyamaca	Grossmont	MiraCosta	Palomar	SD	Mesa	Miramar
Asian	165,528	17	118	145	173	27	87	85
Filipino	110,795	22	81	99	95	21	26	51
Hispanic	710,781	335	770	1,244	2,307	458	440	226
Multi-Ethnicity	124,837	19	62	184	275	35	68	62
Pacific Islander	9,168	7	19	28	21	4	2	2
Unknown	4,251	174	387	289	223	43	62	51
White, Non-Hispanic	971,702	141	251	1,129	1,350	140	237	267

Exhibit 33 presents the results of the enrollment equity index for each racial/ethnic group as collected by the community college system. This data shows that Black students enroll in Cuyamaca College, Grossmont College, and San Diego City College at a substantially higher rate than their proportion of the San Diego County population. In comparison, the enrollment index for San Diego Miramar College for this same group is fairly low, and for MiraCosta and Palomar Colleges the index is slightly low. At .95, the enrollment index indicates that the Black student population approximates the Black college-aged population in the County. For recruitment, comparing the number of students retained by demographic group to the number of students available to re-enroll – that is, the number of students enrolled who did not earn a degree, certificate, or attain apprenticeship journey-level status.

### Exhibit 33. Enrollment Equity Index

	Cuyamaca College	Grossmont College	MiraCosta College	Palomar College	City College	Mesa College	Miramar College
African-American	1.15	1.53	0.64	0.70	2.27	0.95	0.39
American-Indian/Alaskan Native	< .00	< .00	< .00	< .00	< .00	< .00	< .00
Asian	< .00	< .00	< .00	< .00	< .00	< .00	< .00
Filipino	0.58	0.88	0.61	0.41	0.51	0.54	1.34
Hispanic	1.37	1.30	1.20	1.56	1.72	1.41	0.93
Multi-Ethnicity	< .00	< .00	< .00	< .00	< .00	< .00	< .00
Pacific Islander	2.21	2.49	2.09	1.10	1.17	0.50	0.64
White, Non-Hispanic	0.42	0.31	0.80	0.67	0.39	0.56	0.80

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- Alicia L. Jurek, Ph.D.
- Karen L. Boyd, Ph.D.
- Gabriela Gonzalez Martinez
- Daniel Enemark, Ph.D.

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<sup>44</sup> [myworkforceconnection.org/about-us](https://myworkforceconnection.org/about-us)

<sup>45</sup> [workforce.org](https://workforce.org)