

# Student Resilience in the Face of Challenges at California's Community Colleges



In Spring 2020, the California Homeless Youth Project, an initiative of the California Research Bureau, began a study in partnership with a team of graduate students from Claremont Graduate University to better understand the intersecting challenges that community college students face, the needs and resilience strategies of these students, and what state policymakers, campus leaders, and other stakeholders can do to support their academic success.

Building on a growing body of research on food and housing insecurity in higher education, the researchers interviewed 20 students between 18 and 30 years old who were currently enrolled at a community college or had graduated or transferred from one within the past two years, and had received any kind of housing-related service while attending a community college. The experiences that these students shared are stark examples of the complexities that college students experiencing housing insecurity must navigate in order to pursue their higher education goals.

## Findings

- Community college students face many different challenges including food, housing, financial, academic, psychological, transportation, and relationship challenges—all which negatively impact their ability to reach their higher education goals.
- Students face multiple challenges at once. Oftentimes, challenges intersect and compound with one another, such as when financial challenges lead to lack of transportation access which then makes it difficult to find work and attend classes.
- Lack of awareness of resources, difficulties accessing resources, restrictive eligibility requirements, unhelpful resources, and negative experiences with resources are all barriers to students accessing needed on- and off-campus supports.
- Social support from friends, family, counselors, professors, and program staff are critical for navigating challenges and fostering resilience. These relationships provide students with tangible resources, like food, money, and a place to stay, and intangible resources, like referrals and encouragement.
- Students demonstrate resilience in the many different ways that they balance their school, work, and personal responsibilities as well as in how they navigate basic needs challenges. For example, students took intentional actions to change their perspectives, difficult situations, physical environments, and social environments in order to help themselves during, and through, difficult circumstances.

## Recommendations

At the conclusion of every interview, we asked students to reflect on their college experiences and then share what changes they would like to see that would improve the experience of pursuing a college degree. The following recommendations draw from key solutions that the students put forth, as well as solutions put forth by us, the researchers, in light of all that they shared:

- Provide more affordable housing opportunities for students who are low-income and who are experiencing housing insecurity.
- Expand resources on California Community College campuses both by providing additional funds and by using existing resources more creatively.
- Enhance awareness of existing campus resources in a way that reduces stigma.
- Make financial support more accessible and more robust to help offset the non-tuition costs of attending college.
- Foster a trauma-informed campus culture among faculty, staff, and student workers.
- Foster supportive relationships on campus that allow students to receive guidance, advice, and a sense of belonging.
- Actively support students in recognizing and appreciating their capabilities, strengths, and resilience.

**Read the entire report at: [https://cahomelessyouth.library.ca.gov/docs/pdf/Student\\_Resilience-V4a.pdf](https://cahomelessyouth.library.ca.gov/docs/pdf/Student_Resilience-V4a.pdf)**