

# How Community Colleges Spent Pandemic Relief Funds and What's Next

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**CCRC** COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
RESEARCH CENTER  
Teachers College, Columbia University



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REPORT · MAY 2024

## How Did Pandemic Recovery Funding Support California Community Colleges?

ARCC  
Network  
Report

## Pandemic Relief Spending and Recovery Strategies: Findings From a Survey of Community Colleges in Six States

June 2024



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**ARCCNETWORK**  
ACCELERATING RECOVERY IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

**CCRC** COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
RESEARCH CENTER  
Teachers College, Columbia University

# Agenda

- 1) National survey overview
- 2) California survey findings
- 3) Moderated discussion with panelists
- 4) Open Q&A with panelists and research team

# Presenters and Panelists



**Serena  
Klempin,**  
*Research  
Associate,  
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Rodriguez,**  
*Director, Higher  
Education  
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**Edward  
Bush,**  
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Community  
College*



**Lynda  
Villanueva,**  
*President, Lee  
College*

# **Pandemic Relief Spending and Recovery Strategies: Findings from a Survey of Community Colleges in Six States**

Serena Klempin

# Overview of the Higher Education Emergency Relief (HEER) Fund

- ❑ *Direct.* Funds went directly to colleges - no proposals or applications.
- ❑ *Formula-based* . Amounts of aid were determined by a formula primarily based on enrollment.
- ❑ *Few strings.* Roughly half of the money was intended for **institutions** and half for **students**, with few restrictions.
- ❑ *An opportunity and a challenge.* While colleges had a great deal of autonomy, the lack of guidance may have created some challenges knowing how to use funds.

# Purpose of the Survey



Gain deeper insight into an unprecedented investment of federal dollars in higher education

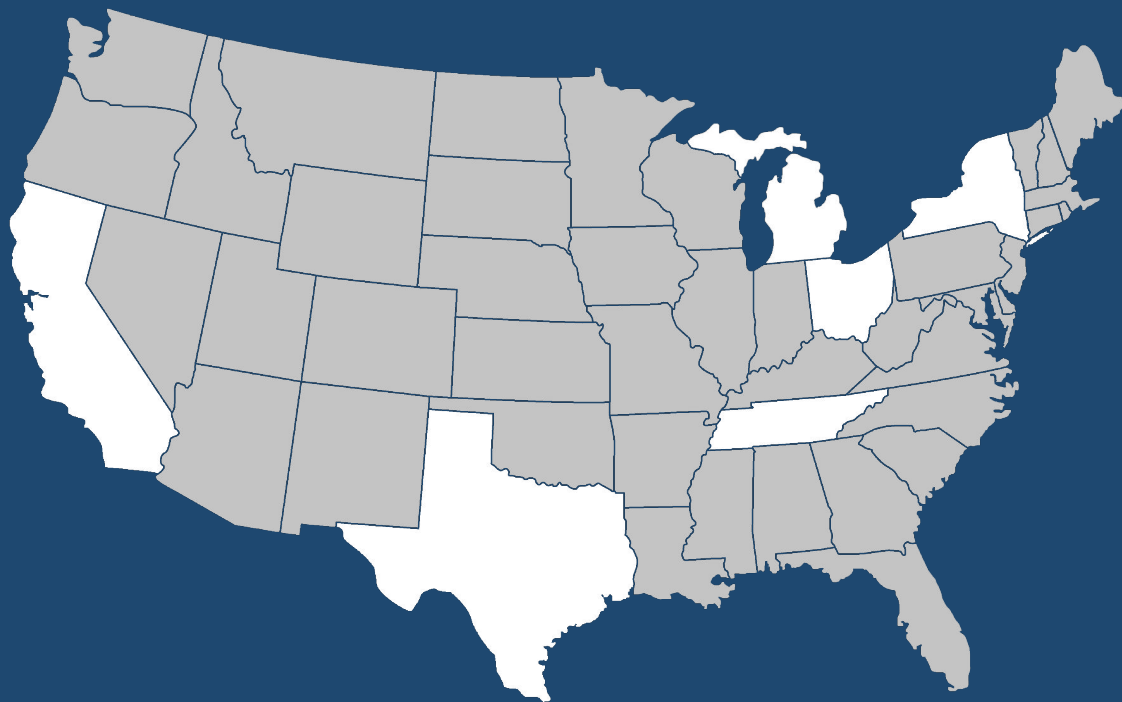


Offer colleges an opportunity to identify priorities and share challenges



Provide timely feedback to federal and state policymakers

# Survey States



**The participating community college systems in these six states serve approximately 2.4 million students.**



# State Partners



# 170 colleges

Overall response rate: 64%

# Main Topics

1. Use of HEER Funds
2. Student Populations
3. Changes Over Time
4. Successes
5. Concerns

# 1. How did colleges use HEER student and institutional aid?

Colleges spent nearly all of the HEER funds they received.

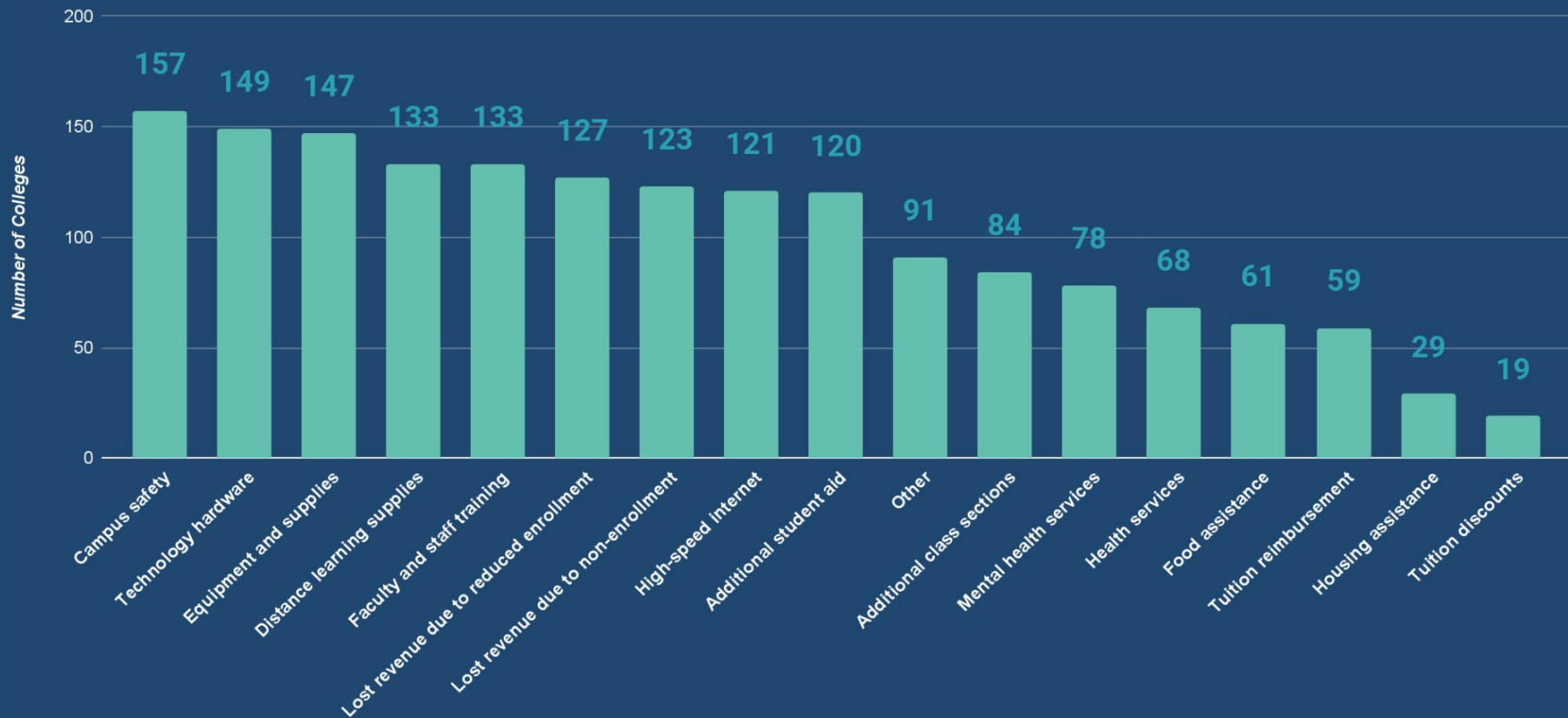
96.5%

Student Aid

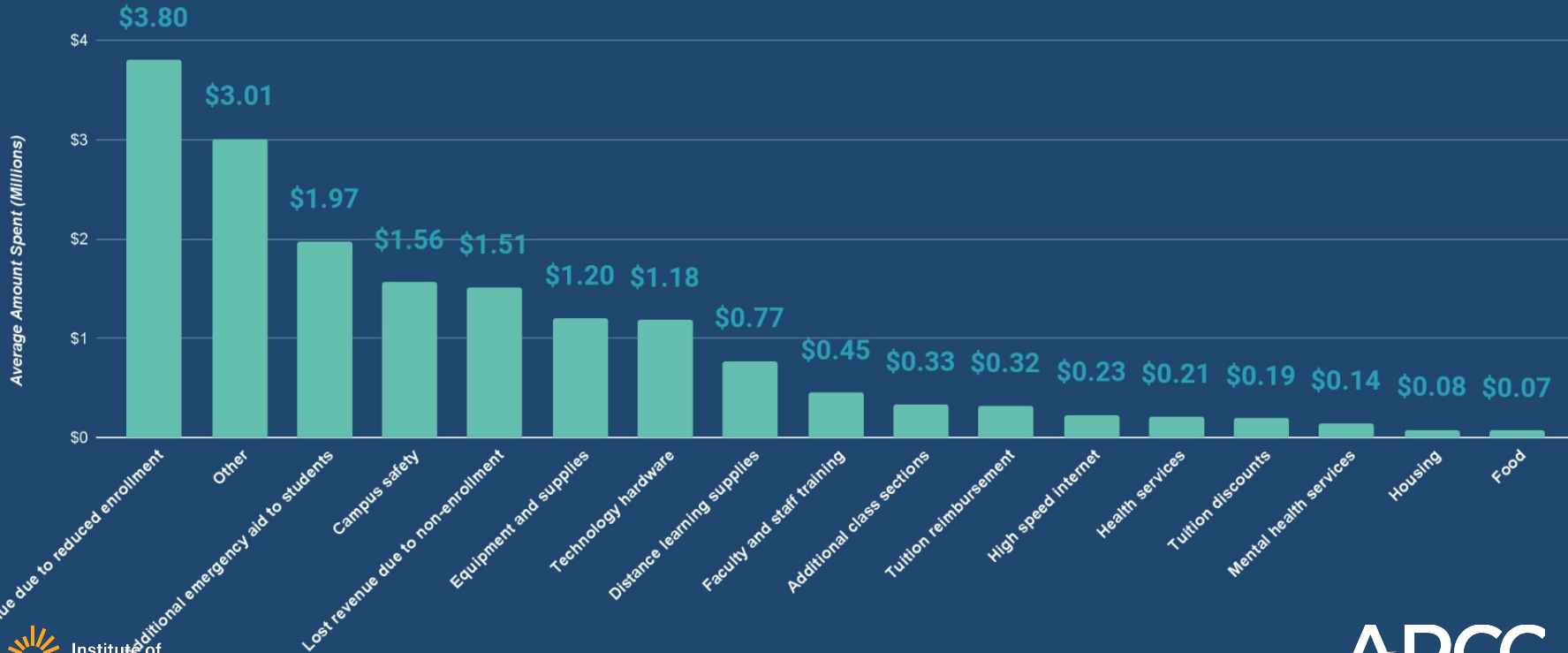
84.1%

Institutional Aid

# Colleges spent institutional funds to keep institutions running and support students



# Colleges spent institutional funds to keep institutions running and support students.



## **2. How did colleges target specific populations for HEER-funded student supports?**



# Colleges were most concerned about targeting support to students with financial needs and those experiencing basic needs insecurity.

- **89%** of colleges at least *partially varied* the amount of emergency aid they gave to students
- **43%** of colleges reported *targeting general pandemic supports* to certain groups of students
  - Students experiencing homelessness (51%)
  - Students experiencing food insecurity (46%)
  - Students with migrant status (45%)

### **3. What do expenditure patterns reveal about how student and institutional needs changed over time?**

# Institutional aid had the biggest impact on the provision of internet and technology hardware.

	# PRE-PANDEMIC	# POST-PANDEMIC	% CHANGE
High Speed Internet	31	76	145%
Technology Hardware	50	112	124%
Housing Assistance	55	85	54%
Other Food Assistance	76	102	34%
Childcare	79	98	24%
Additional Emergency Aid	121	145	20%
Health Services	102	118	16%
Mental Health Services	138	159	15%
Food Pantry	141	150	6%

# 4. How successful did colleges perceive HEER funds to be in meeting student and institutional needs during the pandemic?

Colleges reported  
some **challenges** in  
using HEER funds,  
but...

46% reported at least  
some challenges due to  
**supply chain issues**

38% reported at least  
some challenges due to  
**lack of student response**

**Student Aid was  
successful at helping  
students weather the  
pandemic**

The *most successful*  
use of student aid was  
helping students cover  
their expenses related  
to disruptions caused  
by the pandemic

# Institutional Aid was successful at covering the costs of switching to remote learning and improving in-person safety

79% say *very successful* at covering costs related to instructional delivery changes

78% say *very successful* at increasing efficiency through technology

74% say *very successful* at improving campus health and well-being

# 5. What do colleges' concerns about the end of HEER funds reveal about how to prioritize future funding efforts?



**89% of colleges are  
concerned about the  
end of HEER funds**

**75% say it will limit ability  
to support students during  
emergencies**

**55% say it will reduce  
non-academic supports**

# Top priorities for colleges if they were to receive additional emergency aid

- (1) Student Aid (71%)
- (2) Mental Health (49%)
- (3) Technology (35%)

# How Did Pandemic Recovery Funding Support California Community Colleges?

Olga Rodriguez

# Investments perceived to be most successful helped make college more affordable

“Our single greatest success for enrollment involves **direct aid for students**. We could run campaigns around **financial aid, debt forgiveness, food insecurity, computer/technology assistance, and student housing assistance**. These types of assistance were not available prior to the pandemic, and they significantly impacted student enrollment.”

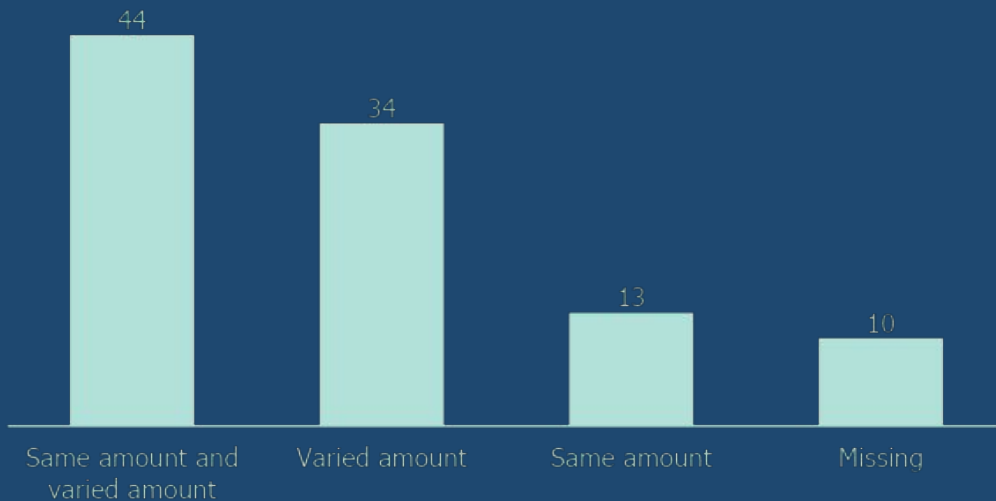
College in LA/Orange County

“The single most successful student success strategy the college employed was providing aid to students in order for them to remain enrolled. The pandemic recovery funding supported these efforts by allowing the district to **provide direct aid to students** and by **relieving students of their student debt**.”

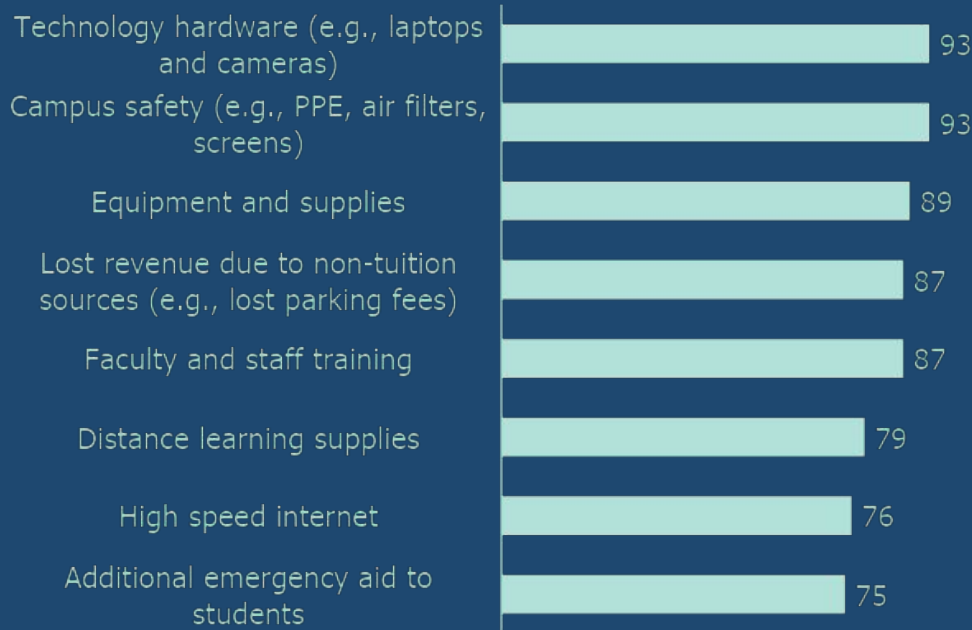
College in the Inland Empire

# Equity was a more important factor than equality when determining amount of emergency aid

- Most colleges reported that they provided an amount that varied based on students' needs and circumstances, as opposed to offering the same amount to all eligible students.
  - Full-time Pell: \$1,400
  - Full-time non-Pell \$1,200



# Most colleges used institutional funding to help cover students' costs of staying enrolled



## The online transition:

"[HEERF] supported these efforts by covering the cost of providing additional technology to students, providing high speed internet, and purchasing equipment and software to enable distance learning."

College in the Inland Empire

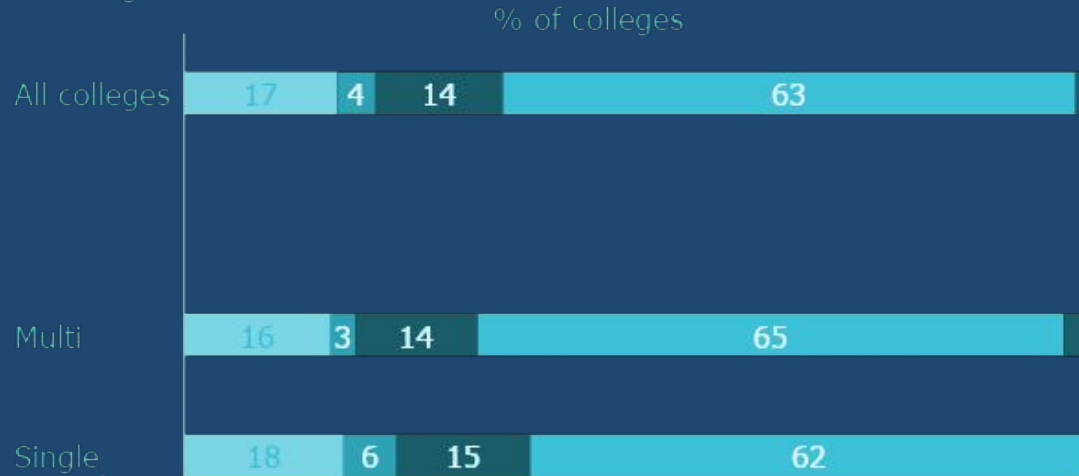
## The return to in-person learning:

"This was made feasible by significant efforts in air purification and ventilation. HEERF funding was extensively used for this."

College in the Bay Area

# Most colleges used pandemic recovery funds to discharge unpaid student fees

- No, we did not use HEERF
- Yes, we used Emergency Aid
- Yes, we used Emergency and Institutional Aid
- Yes, we used Institutional Aid
- Missing



“The single most successful strategy to increase student enrollment during the pandemic was allocating institutional HEERF funds to cover balances for students who had withdrawn ... We personally notified students that we would be **covering their past-due balances** and invited them back”

College in Northern CA

# Looking Ahead

- ◎ A majority of colleges expect to offer over 40% of courses online
  - Yet, over a quarter will no longer offer free or reduced price internet
- ◎ Most colleges expect supports addressing food insecurity and mental health to continue
  - About 20% of colleges expect to do so at an expanded level
  - State or local government is reported to be the primary funding source
- ◎ A majority of colleges expect to continue offering emergency aid
  - Nearly two-thirds expect to do so at a reduced level
  - Colleges foundations are expected to be the most common funding source



# Conclusion and Recommendations

- ◎ Prioritize investments that address affordability and access
- ◎ Ensure ongoing investments support equitable access and success in online courses
- ◎ Evaluate the effects of the investments

# Panel Discussion

# Q & A

# Thanks!

Please email Serena Klempin if you have any questions.

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The research reported here was supported by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, through Grants R305X220022 and R305B200017 to Teachers College, Columbia University. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent views of the Institute or the U.S. Department of Education.