

Student Financial Wellness Survey

Fall 2020 National Survey Results

Carla Fletcher, Senior Research Analyst, Trellis Company

Allyson Cornett, Research Analyst, Trellis Company



Student Financial Wellness Survey

- Survey launched on October 19, 2020
- Open for three weeks
- Sixty-two total institutions participated

Survey Metrics		
	4-year Institutions	2-year Institutions
Survey Population	96,768 students	294,972 students
Responses	10,197 students	27,739 students
Response Rate	10.5%	9.4%
Completion Rate	83%	81%
Median Time Spent	15 minutes	15 minutes

Agenda

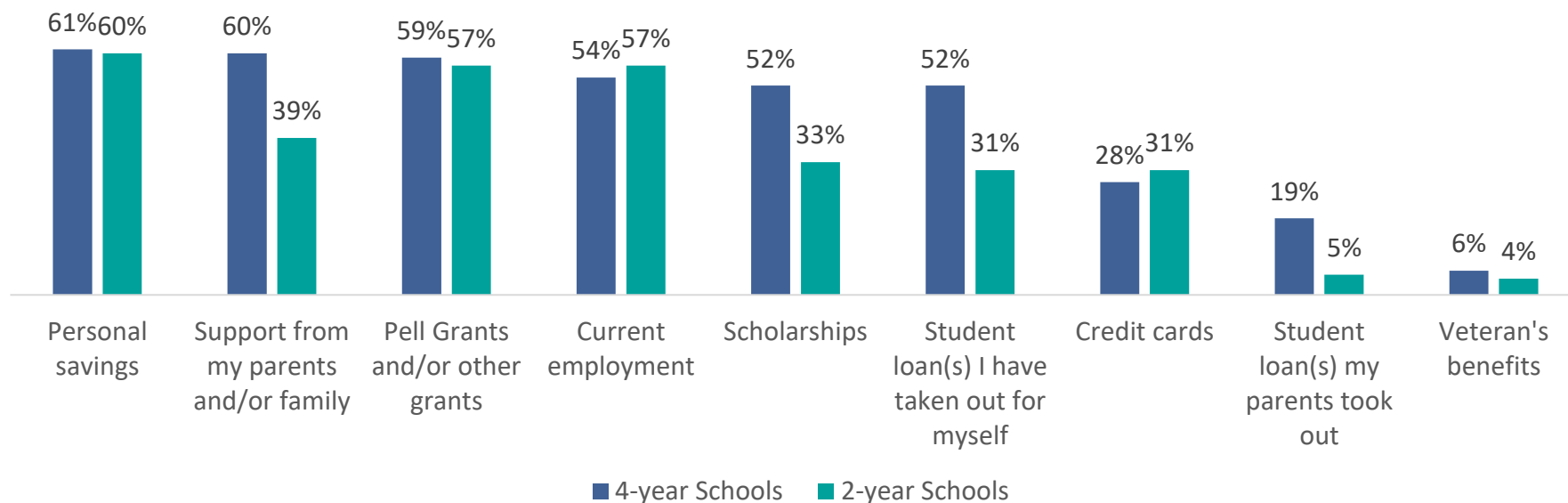
- Paying for College
- Student Debt, Credit Card Use, and Risky Borrowing
- Higher Education Financial Decision-Making Factors
- Financial Behaviors
- Student Financial Security
- Supporting Family While in College
- Basic Needs Security
- Consequences of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Paying for College



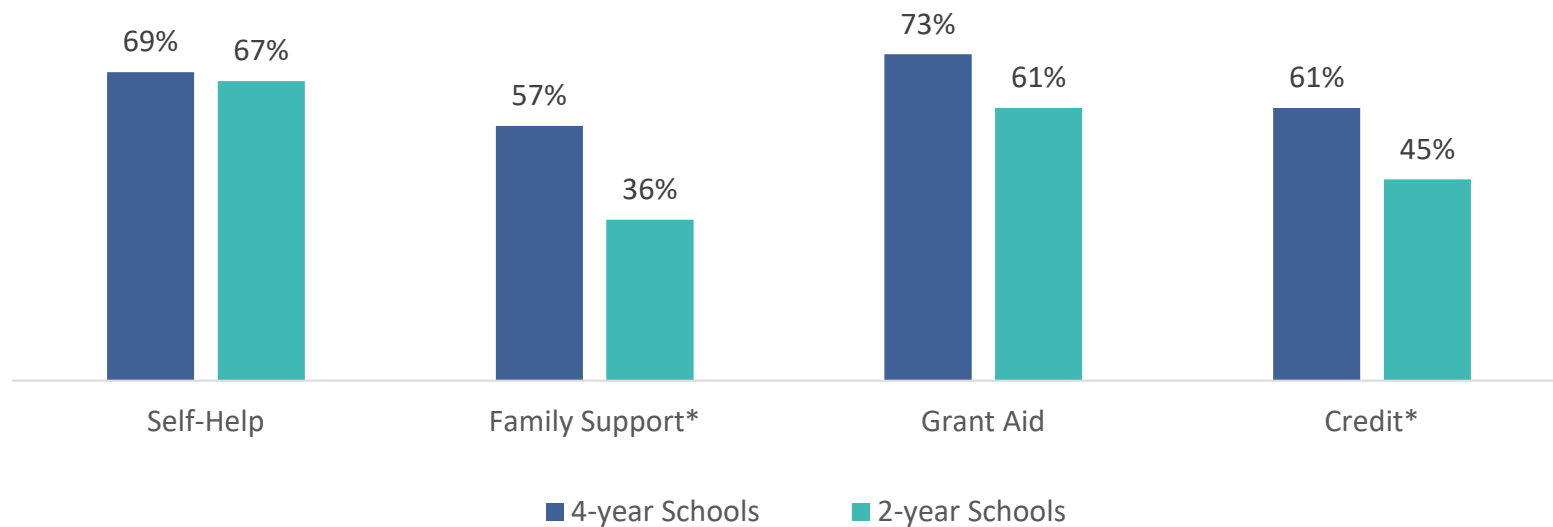
Paying for College (Q37-45)

Q37-45: Do you use any of the following methods to pay for college? Respondents who answered 'Yes'



Paying for College (Grouped)

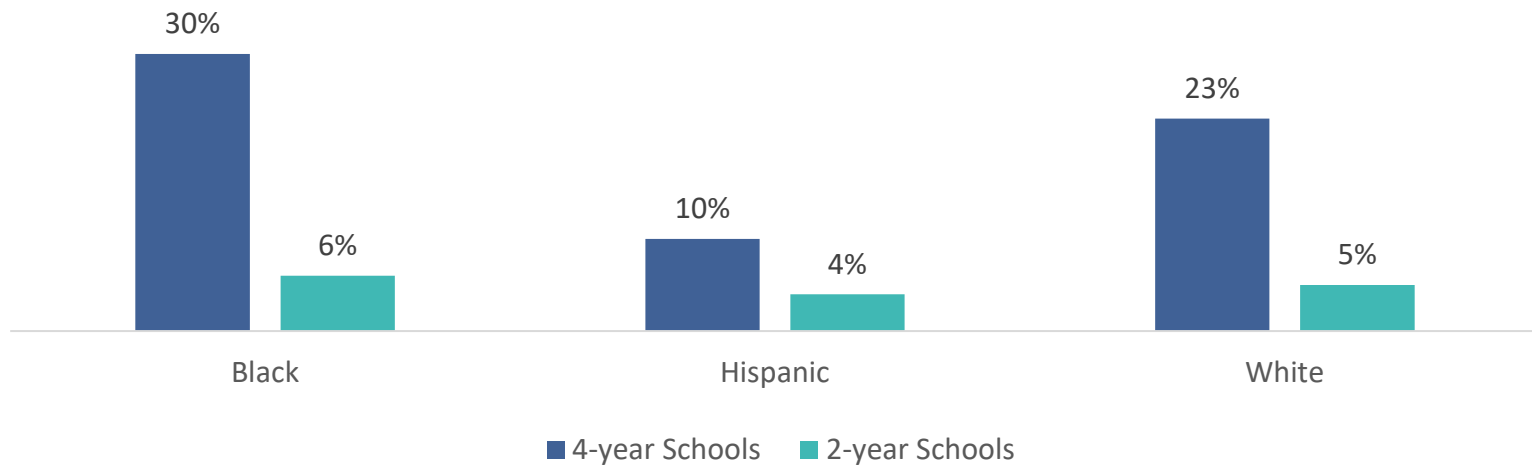
Q37-Q45: Do you use any of the following methods to pay for college? Respondents who answered 'Yes'



*"Student loan(s) my parents took out" is counted in both the Family Support and Credit categories

Paying for College (Q38)

Q38: Parent Borrowing by Race/Ethnicity



Paying for College

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

Institutions should strive to meet a student's full need.

PROBLEM

Too many students have financial aid packages that fail to meet full need, forcing students to either scramble for other sources of funding, typically from increased work hours and debt.

SOLUTION

Institutions should engage with internal and external partners to establish 'last dollar' scholarships, which work to meet a student's full need.¹ These partnerships can facilitate small dollar scholarships (\$1-500) to ensure no student's full financial need goes unmet.

PROBLEM

Students with large unmet need are less likely to stay in school.^{2,3}

SOLUTION

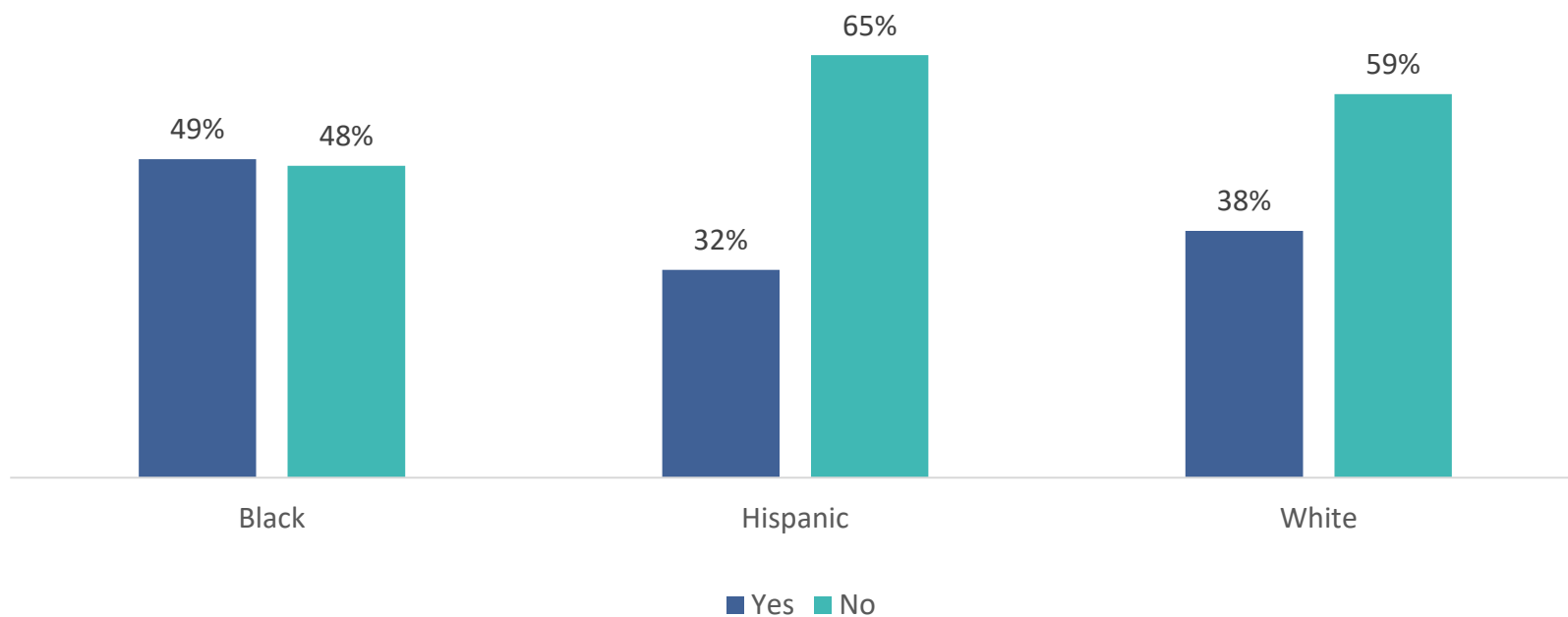
Use high unmet need as a retention risk-factor and consider unmet need levels when packaging student aid (especially if scarce resources are being diverted towards merit aid), fundraising for institutional need-based grant aid, and advocating for increased funding for state and federal student aid programs.^{4,5}

Student Debt, Credit Card Use, and Risky Borrowing



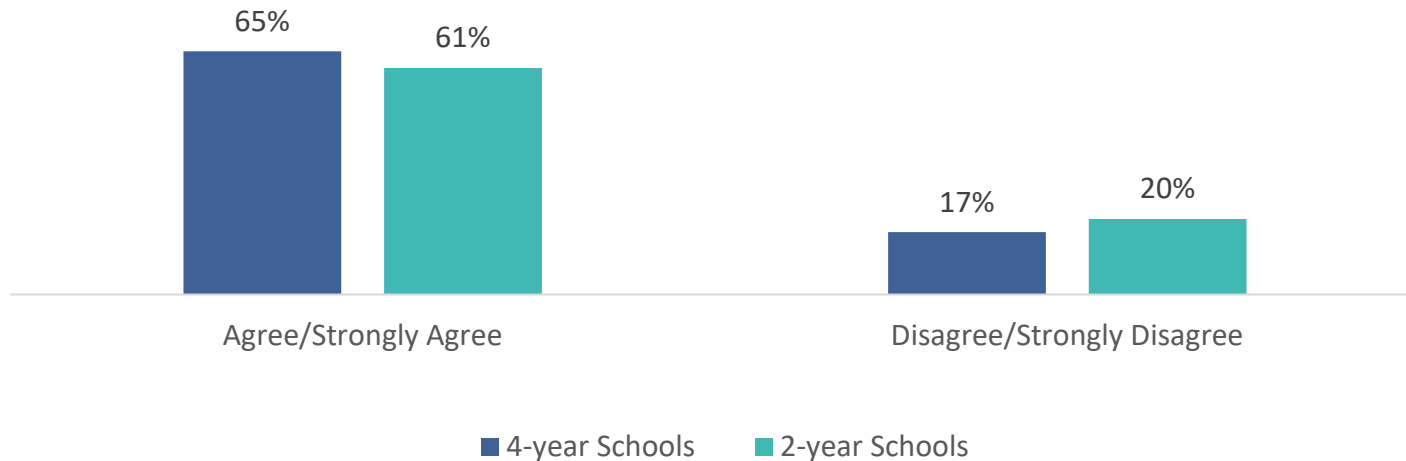
Student Debt by Race

Q37: Percentage Borrowed Student Loans, by Race/Ethnicity



Student Debt (Q85)

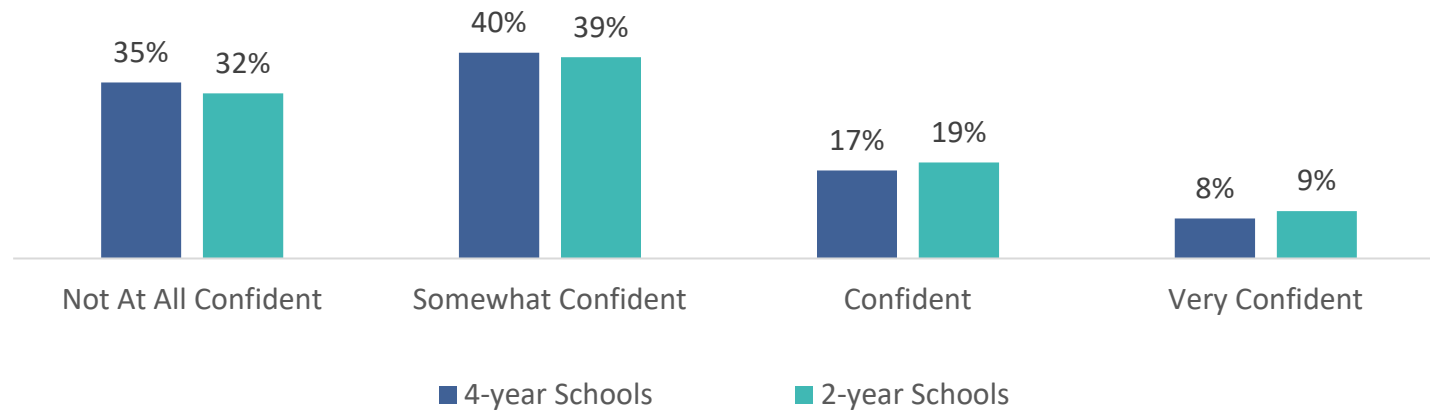
Q85: I have more student loan debt than I expected to have at this point.* (of those who indicated having a student loan they took out for themselves)



*Responses indicating 'Neutral' are not shown

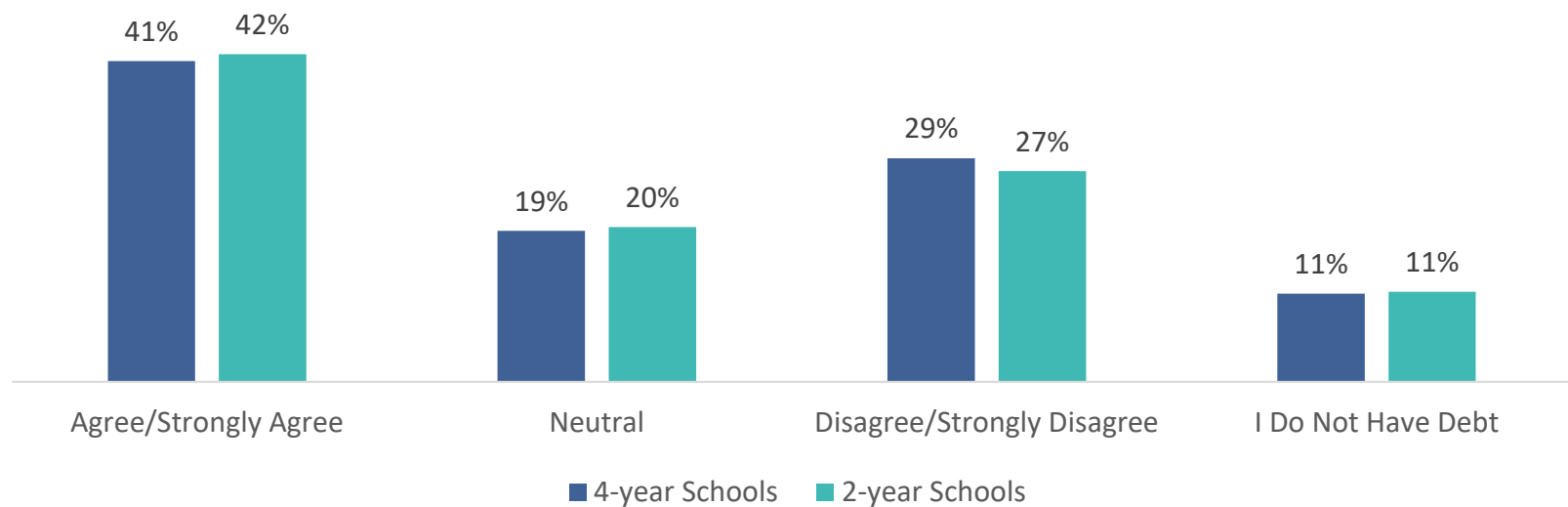
Student Debt (Q86)

Q86: How confident are you that you will be able to pay off the debt acquired while you were a student? (of those who indicated having a student loan they took out for themselves)



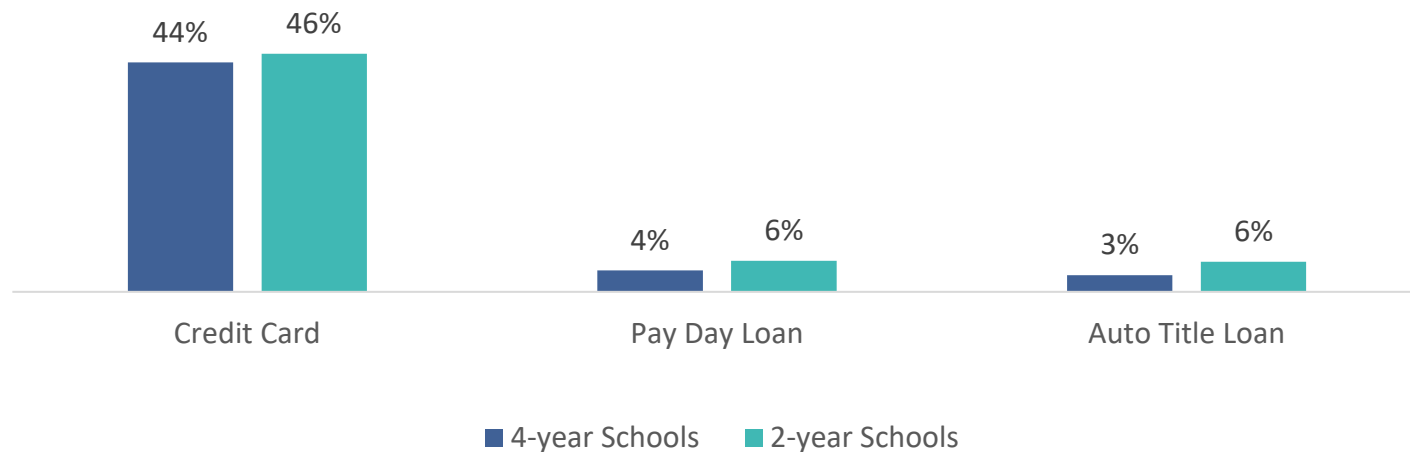
Debt (Q88)

Q88: The amount of total debt (e.g. credit card debt, car loan debt, or money owed to family or friends) I have right now is overwhelming.



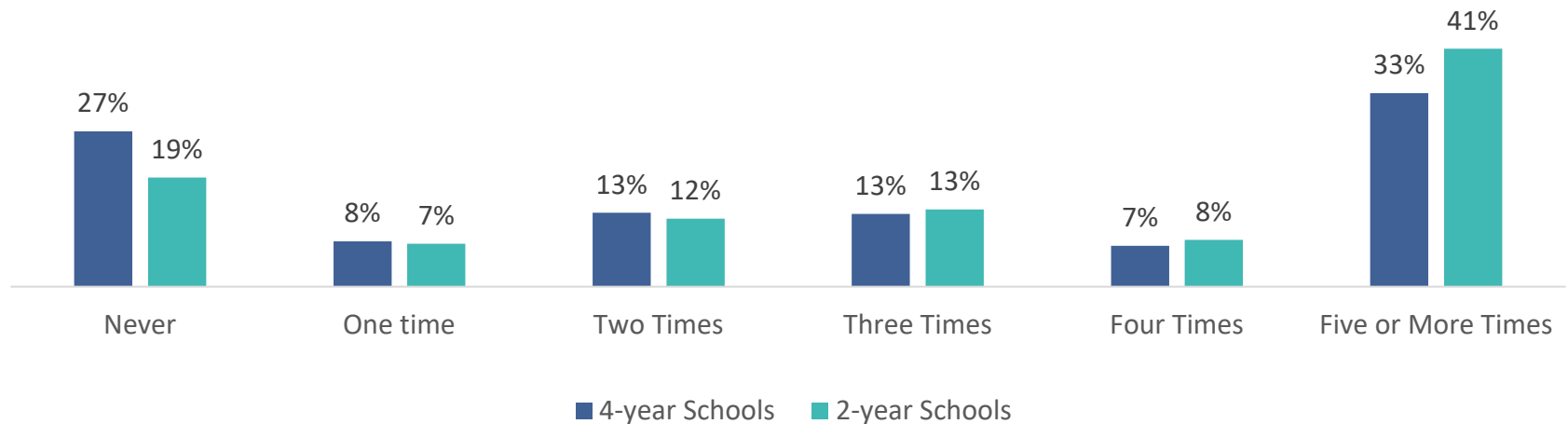
Credit Card Use and Risky Borrowing (Q67-69)

Q67-69: In the past 12 months, have you used the following borrowing sources?
Respondents who answered 'Yes'



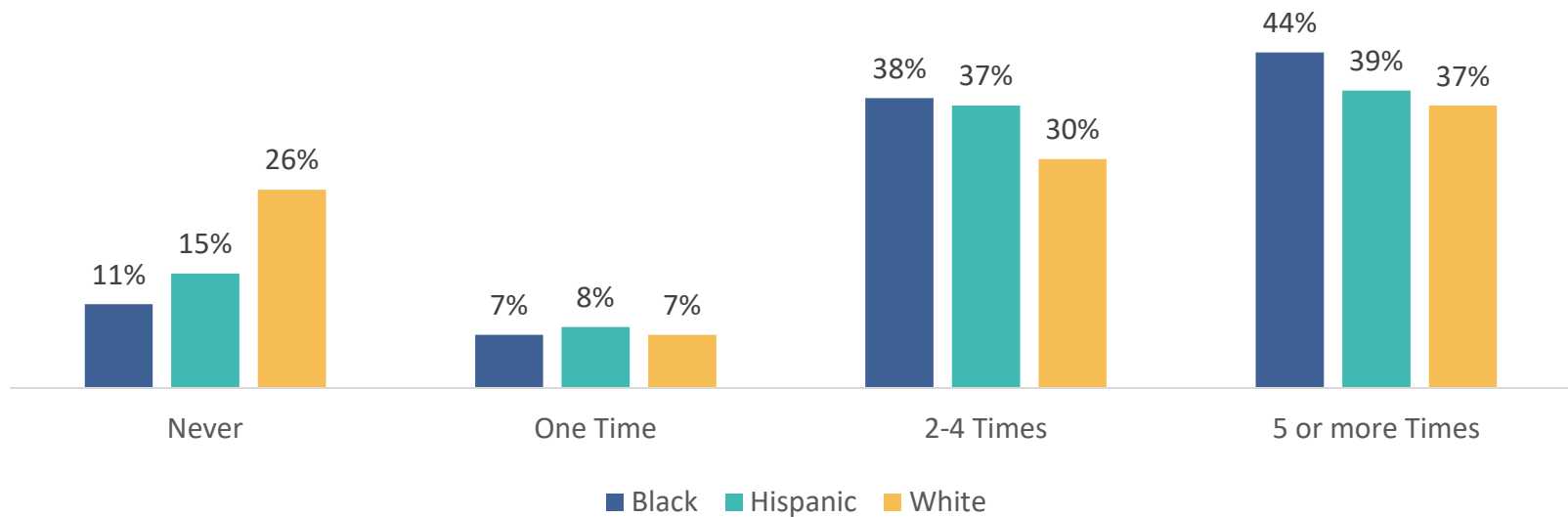
Credit Card Use (Q71)

Q71: In the past 12 months, how many times did you use a credit card for something you didn't have money for? (of those who borrowed on a credit card)



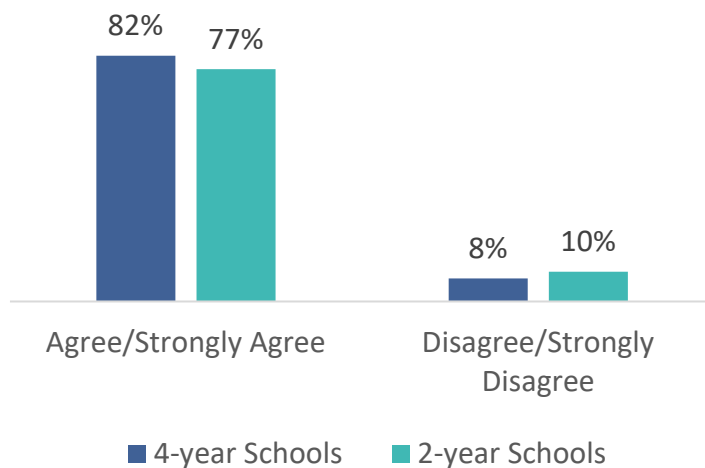
Credit Card Use (Q71 by Race)

Q71: In the past 12 months, how many times did you use a credit card for something you didn't have the money for? (of those who borrowed on a credit card)



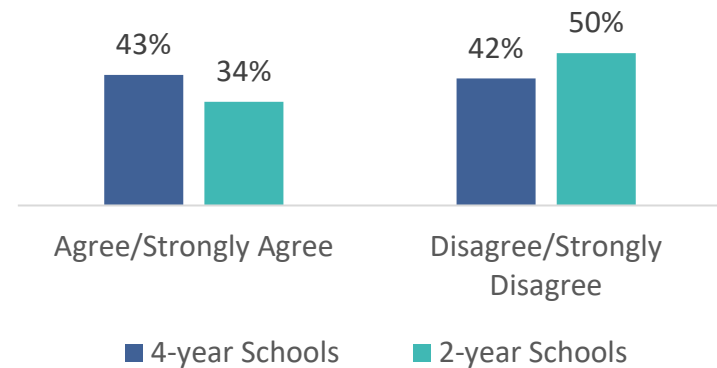
Credit Card Use (Q72-73)

Q72: I always pay my credit card bill on time.* (of those who borrowed on a credit card)



*Responses indicating 'Neutral' are not shown

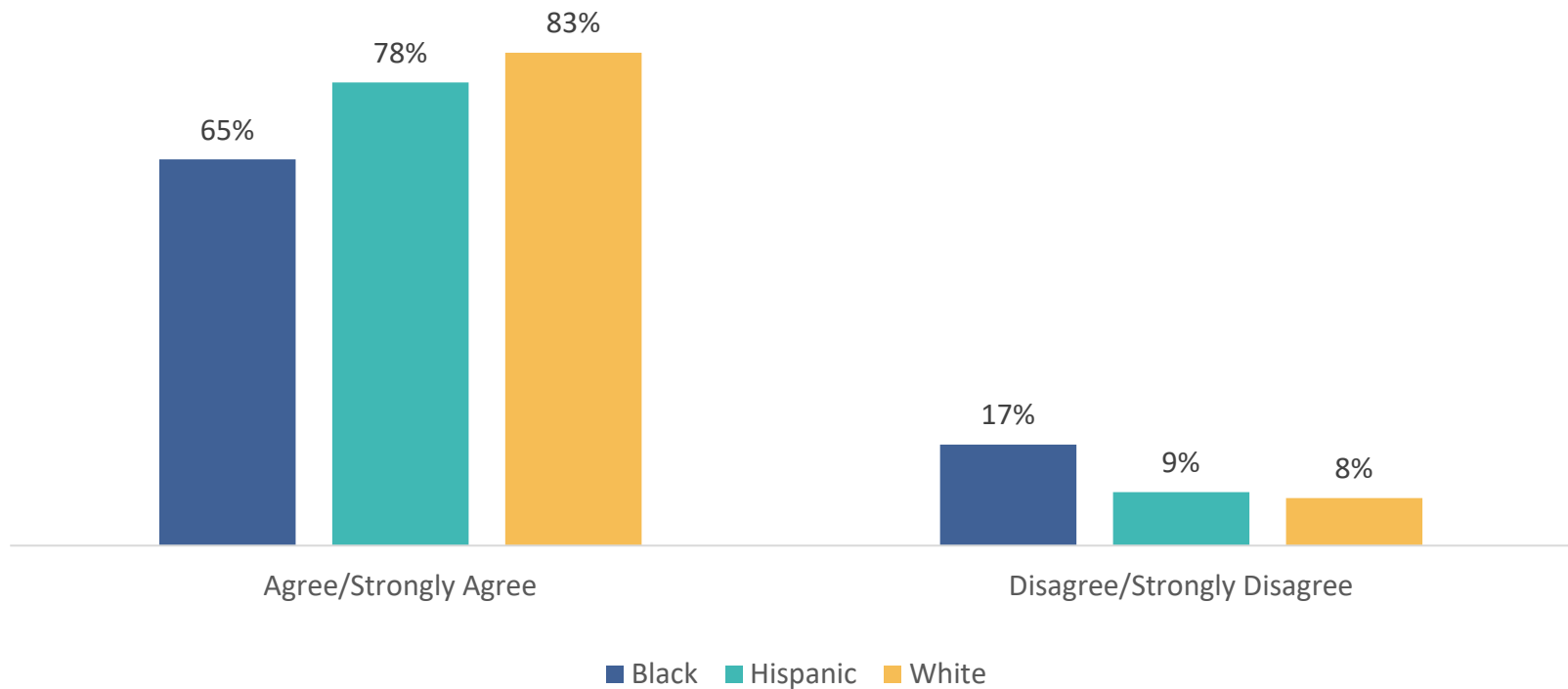
Q73: I fully pay off my credit card balance each month.* (of those who borrowed on a credit card)



*Responses indicating 'Neutral' are not shown

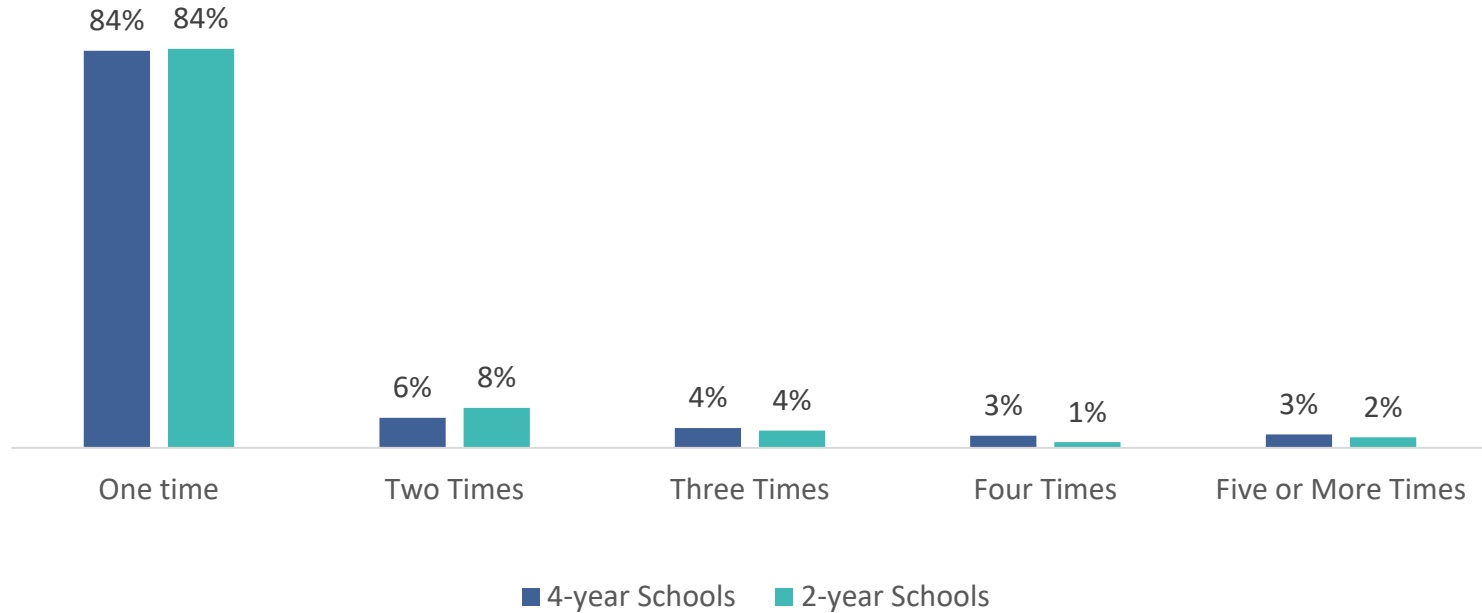
Credit Card Use (Q72 by Race)

Q72: I always pay my credit card bill on time. (of those who borrowed on a credit card)



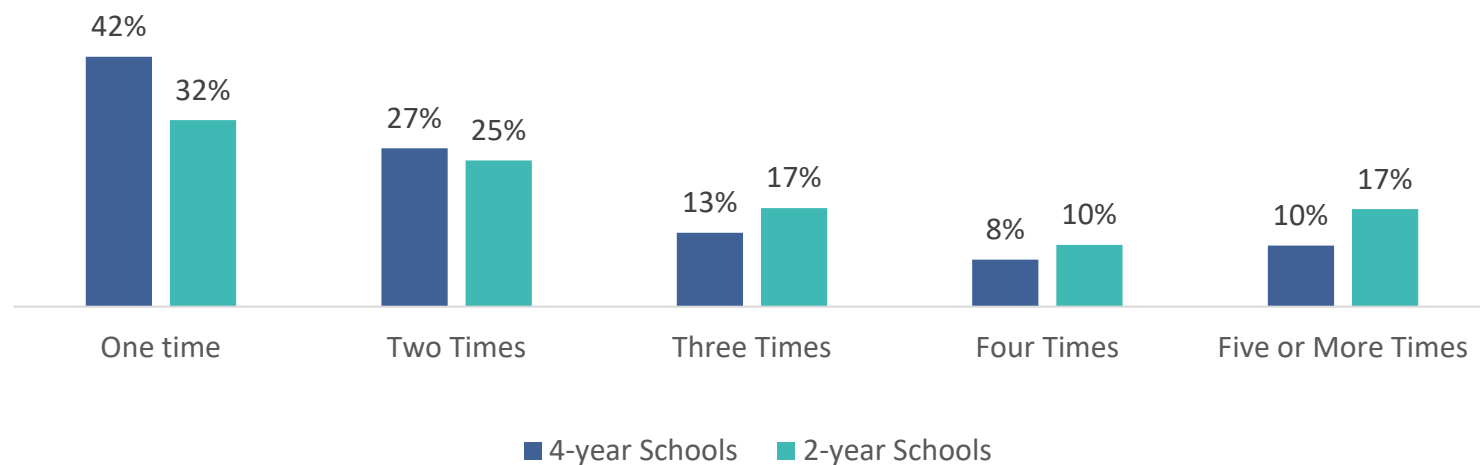
Risky Borrowing (Q75)

Q75: In the past 12 months, how many times did you borrow an auto title loan?



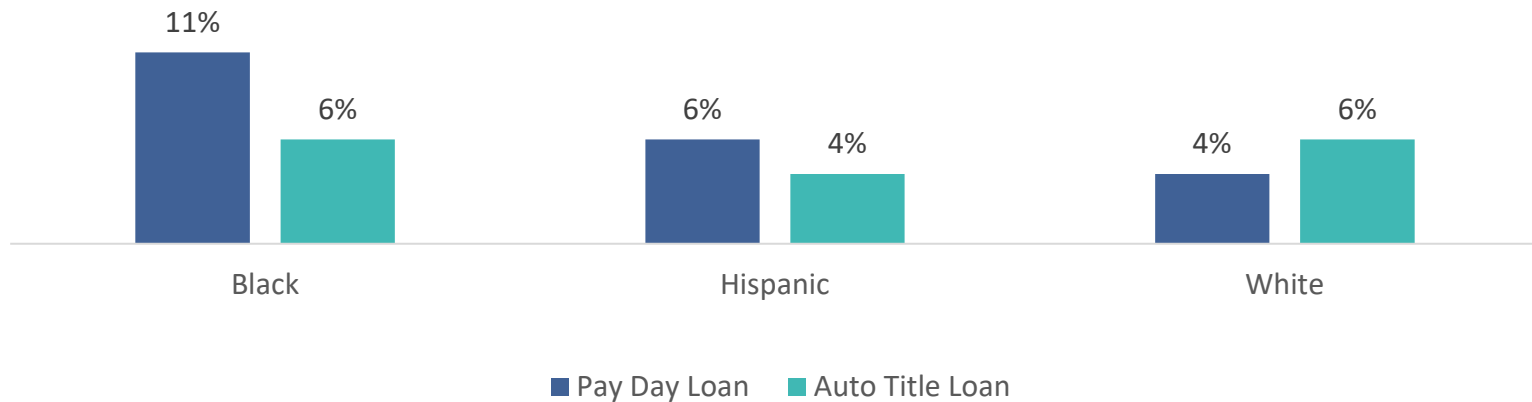
Risky Borrowing (Q74)

Q74: In the past 12 months, how many times did you borrow a pay day loan?



Risky Borrowing (Q68-69 by Race)

Q68-69: In the past 12 months, have you used the following borrowing sources?
Respondents who answered 'Yes'



Student Debt, Credit Cards, & Risky Borrowing

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

Institutions can help students financially plan for their degree.

PROBLEM

While many students plan for the classes they need to complete their degree, they often don't formulate a financial plan for their degree in the same way. Because of this, students can find themselves in difficult financial situations that could lead to stop outs or dropouts.

SOLUTION

Students would benefit from guidance on financially planning their degree. Financial plans can reduce stress, anticipate contingencies, and identify funding gaps early in the process.

Institutions can provide additional counseling and financial information to student loan borrowers. Some institutions supplement the required federal student loan counseling with one-on-one or small group sessions where students can receive more personalized information about all potential sources of aid, including public assistance. With limited resources, some institutions target specialized counseling to specific students.

Student interactions can provide opportunities to transmit helpful information to students.

PROBLEM

It can be difficult for institutions to get the attention of students when information and events are voluntary. Additionally, it can be difficult to know what would be helpful to focus on among all the potential financial education topics.

SOLUTION

Institutions can evaluate the various touch points they have with students as potential opportunities to provide additional financial literacy or loan counseling. The survey findings can also identify areas of concern that may guide the topics covered within any additional education or counseling.

Higher Education Financial Decision-Making Factors



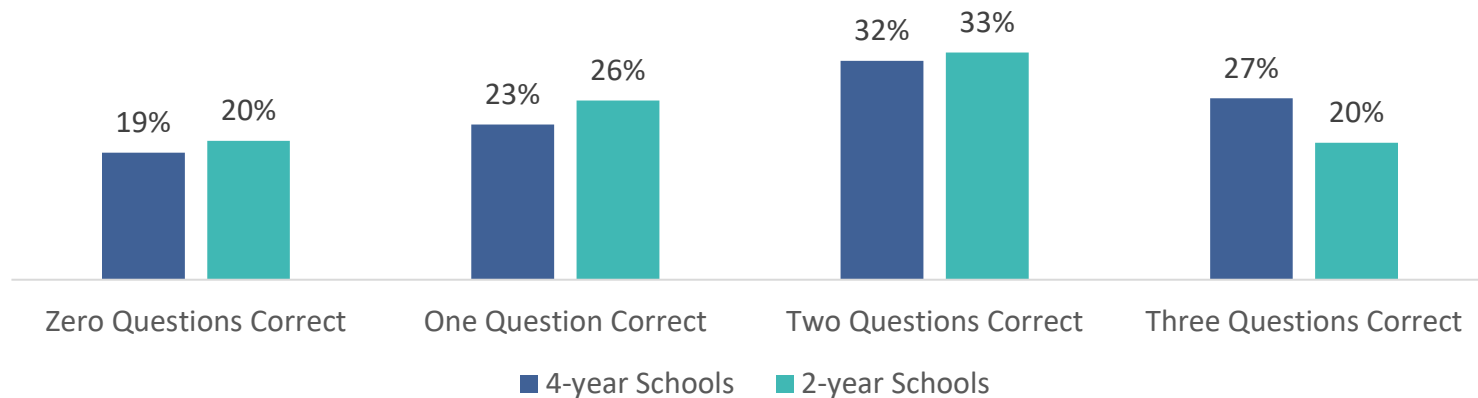
Financial Decision-Making Factors

Four factors that can promote positive financial decision-making:

- Understanding key financial concepts
- Confidence managing finances
- Openness to seeking help with financial decisions
- Feeling understood and supported by the institution

Understanding Key Financial Concepts

Q115-117: Financial Knowledge Scale

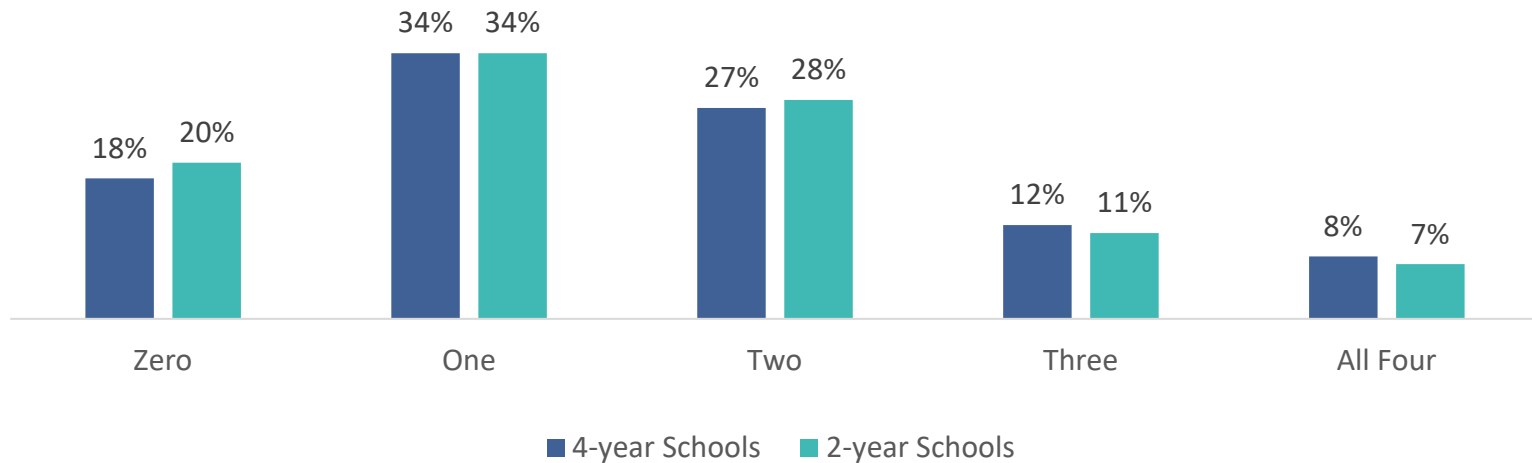


Confidence Managing Finances - Questions

- I have the ability to manage my finances well.
 - (confident=agree or strongly agree)
- I worry about being able to pay my current monthly expenses.
 - (confident=disagree or strongly disagree)
- I worry about having enough money to pay for school.
 - (confident=disagree or strongly disagree)
- I know how I will pay for college next semester.
 - (confident=agree or strongly agree)

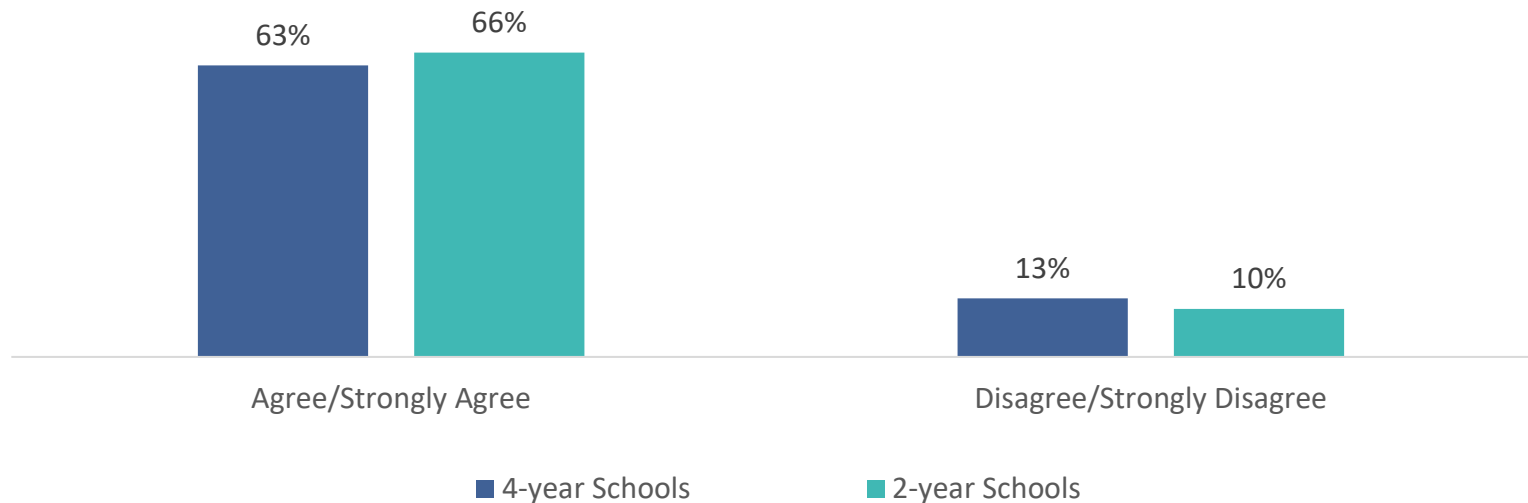
Confidence Managing Finances (Q56-59)

Q56-59: Confidence in Managing Finances - Percentage of respondents by number of questions answered as Confident



Openness to Seek Help (Q6)

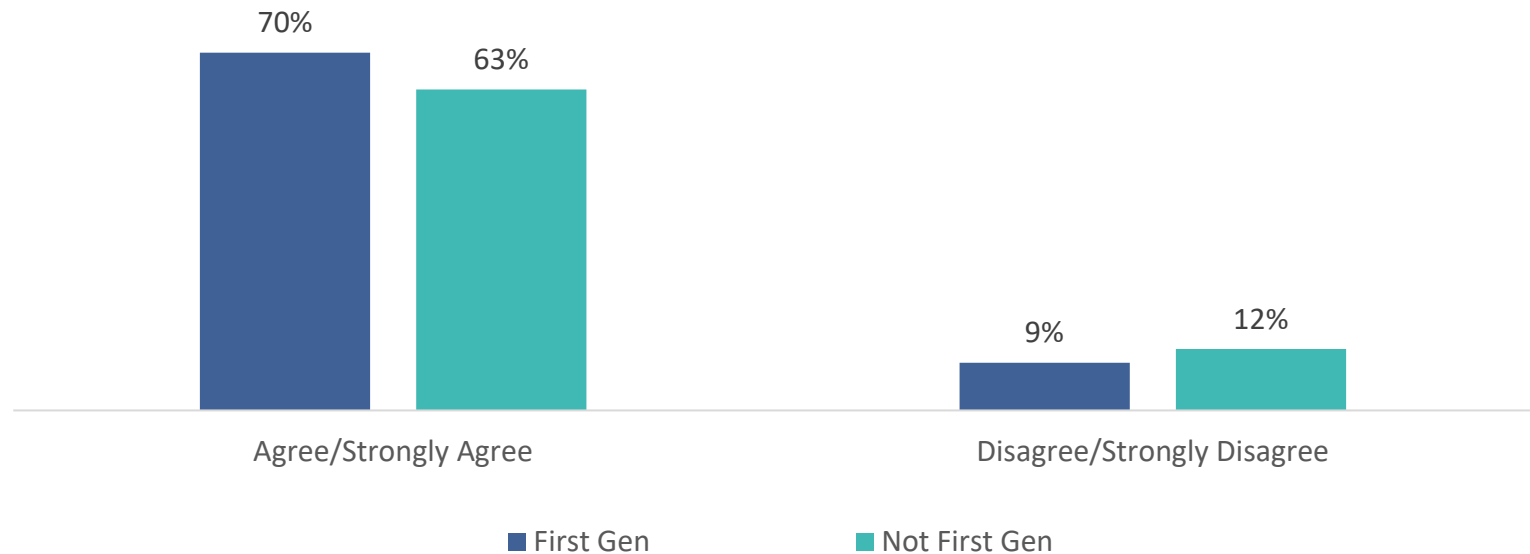
Q6: I would use financial support services (such as one-on-one coaching from a trained expert) if offered by my school.*



*Responses indicating 'Neutral' are not shown

Openness to Seek Help (Q6 by First Gen)

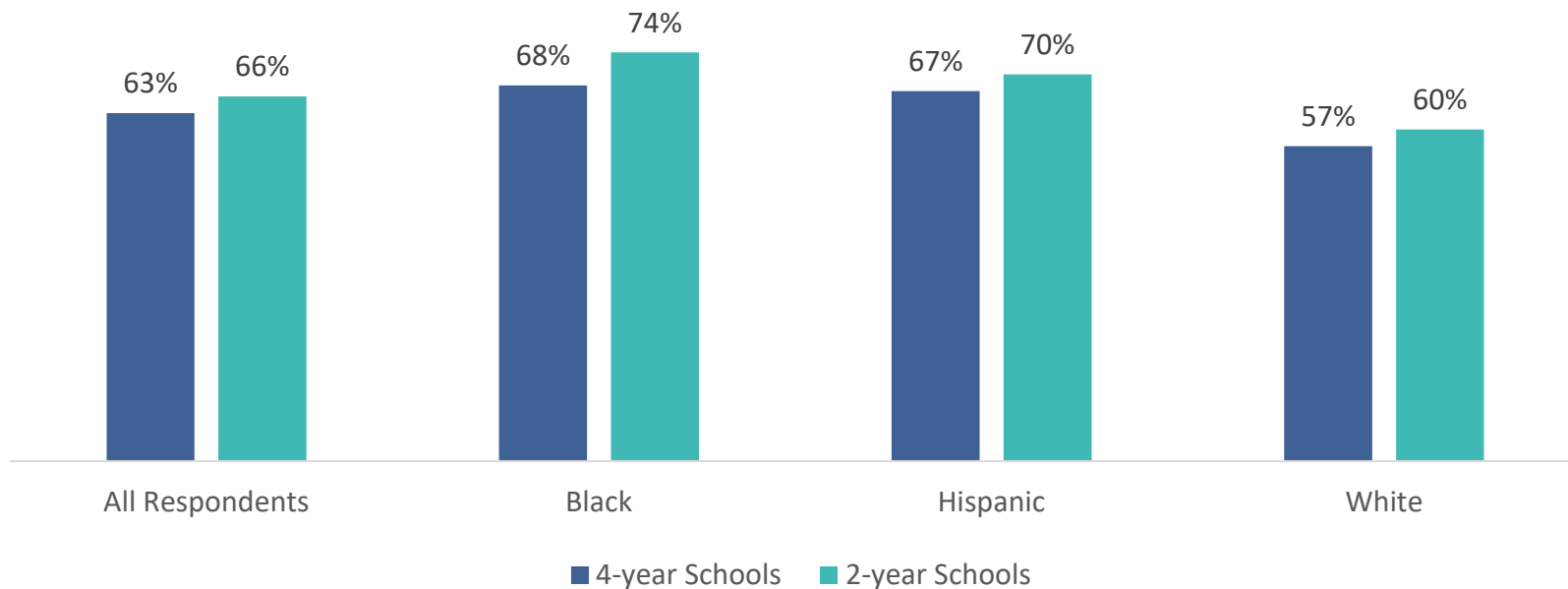
Q6: I would use financial support services (such as one-on-one coaching from a trained expert) if offered by my school.*



*Responses indicating 'Neutral' are not shown

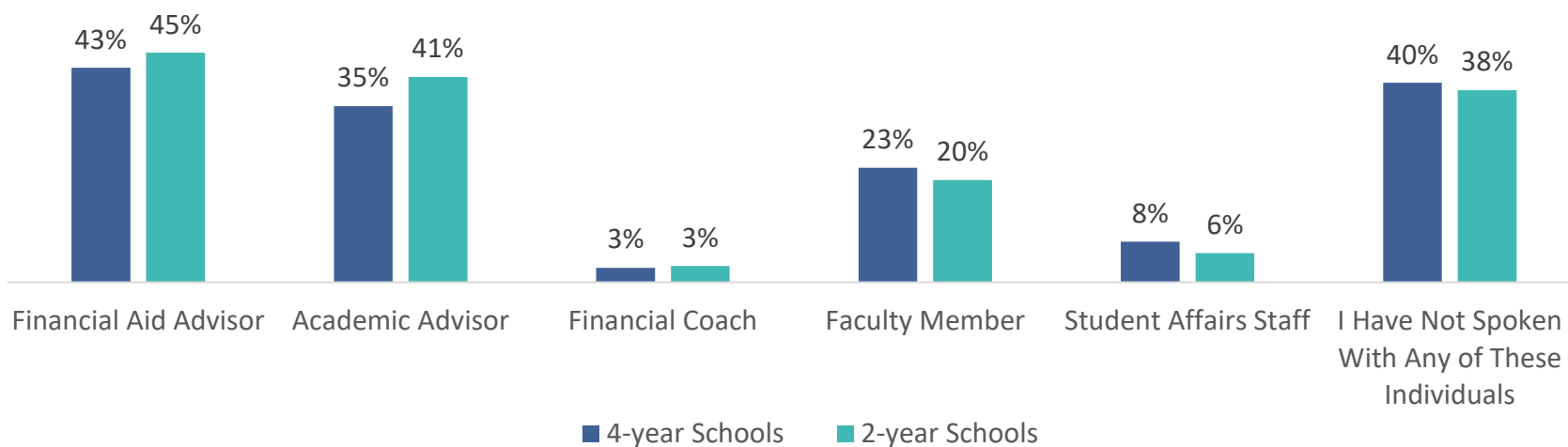
Openness to Seek Help (Q6 by Race)

Q6: I would use financial support services (such as one-on-one coaching from a trained expert) if offered by my school. (Those who responded Agree or Strongly Agree)



Openness to Seek Help (Q13-18)

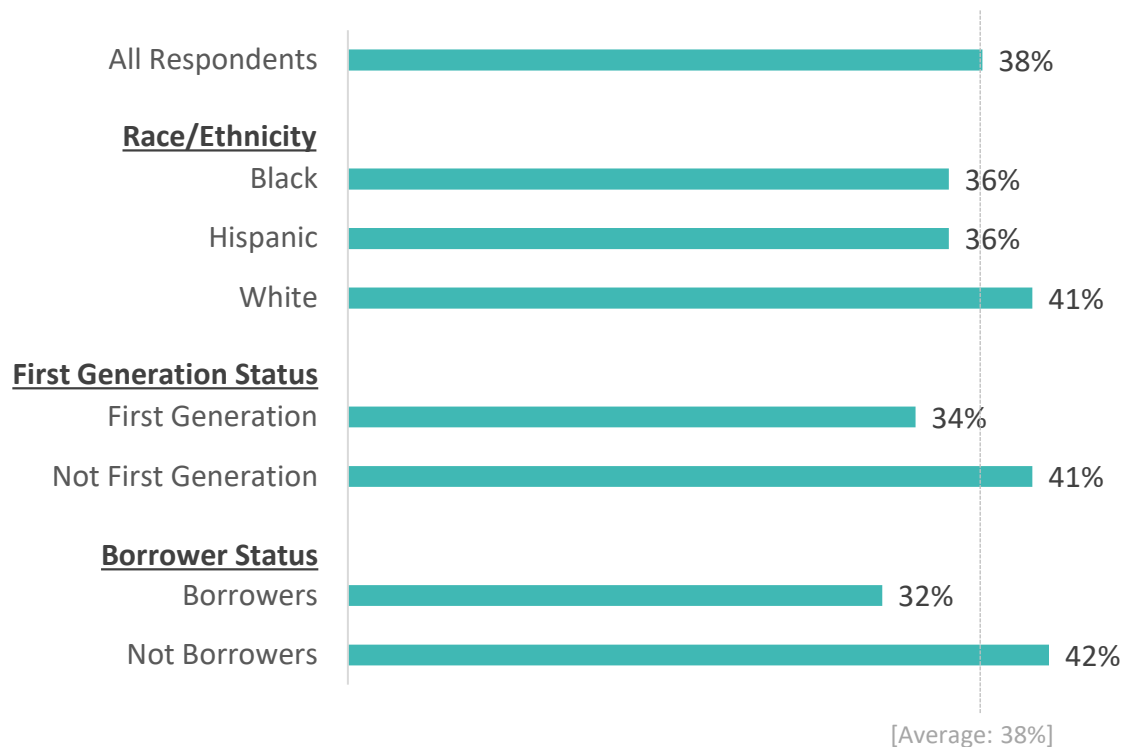
Q13-18: During my time at school, I have spoken with the following individuals about my financial struggles. (Check all that apply)*



*Percentage indicate respondents who chose at least one of the above choices

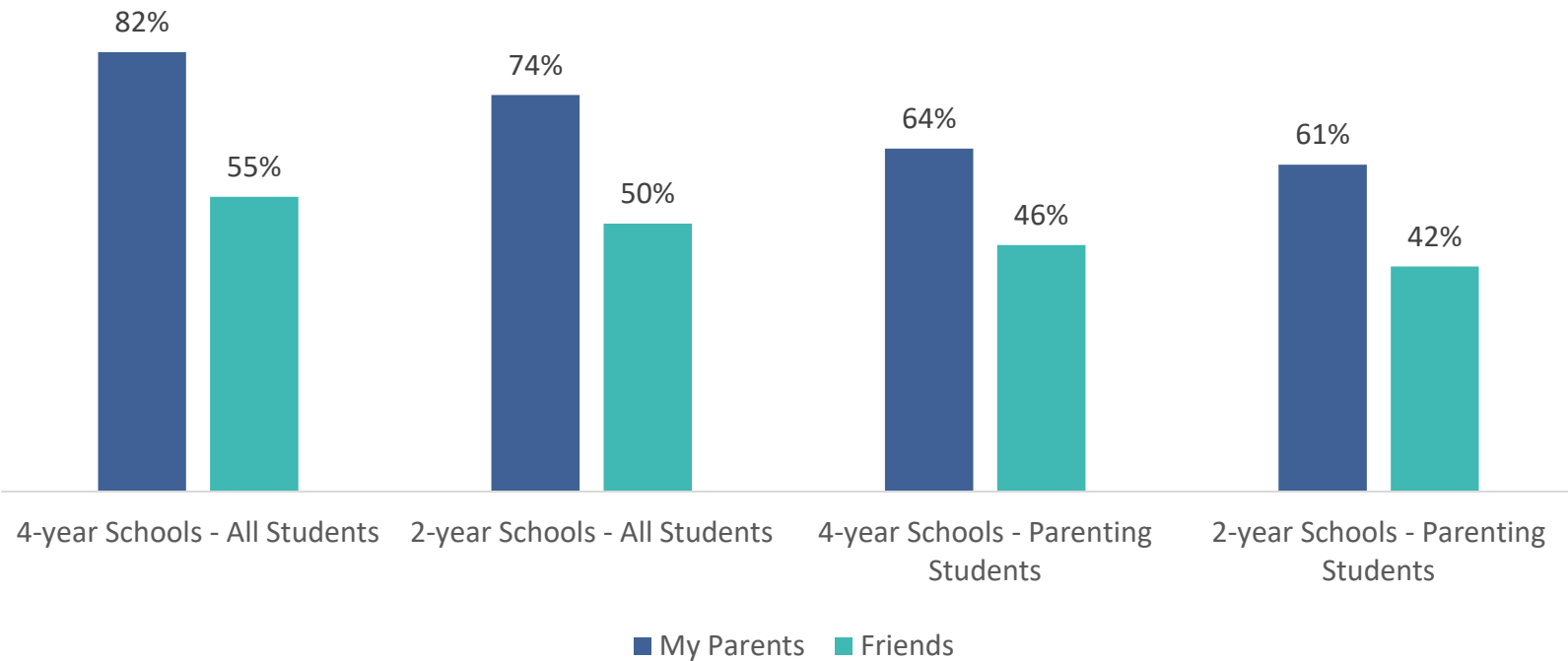
Openness to Seek Help (Q18)

Q18: I have not spoken with the following individuals about my financial struggles: Financial Aid Advisor, Academic Advisor, Financial Coach, Faculty Member, or Student Affairs Staff



Openness to Seek Help (Q19, Q21)

Q19, Q21: Respondents comfortable discussing their financial situation with Parents or Friends

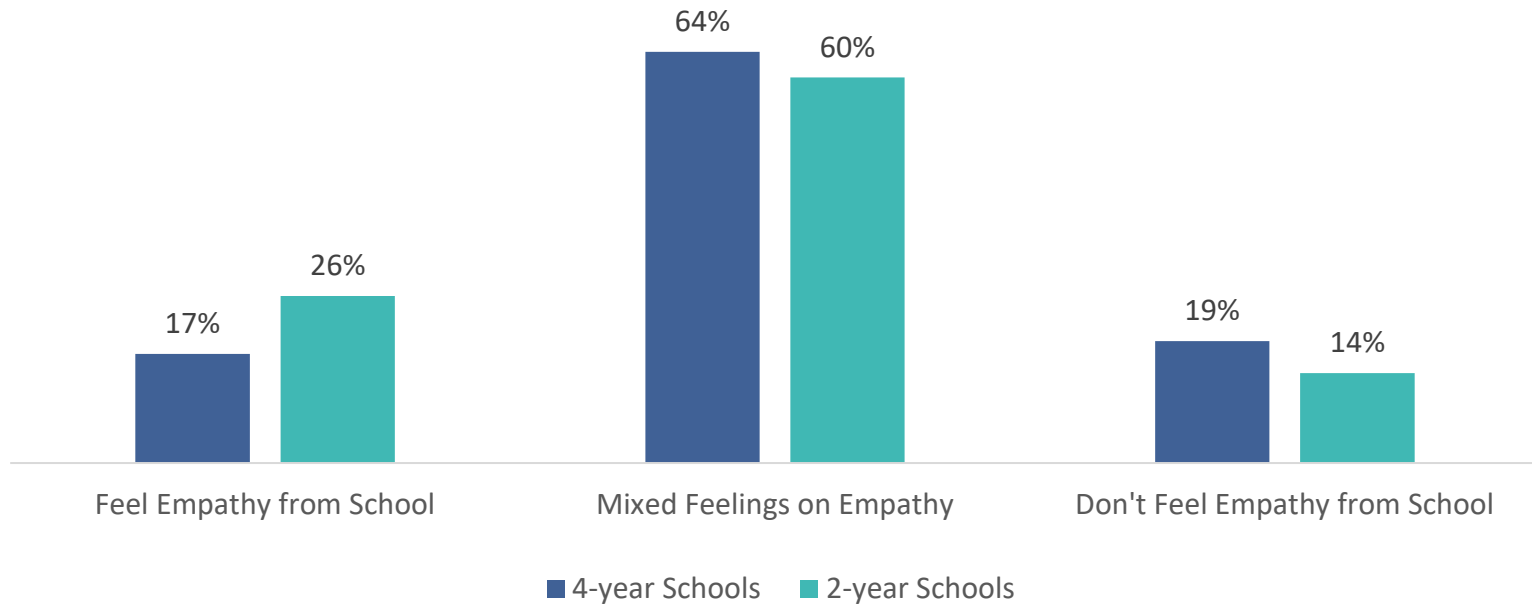


Feeling Understood and Supported - Questions

- My school is aware of the financial challenges I face.
- The faculty at my school understands my financial situation.
- My school actively works to reduce the financial challenges I face.

Feeling Understood and Supported (Q3-5)

Q3-5: Feeling Understood and Supported by their School



HE Financial Decision-Making Factors

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

Institutions need to direct students to public assistance programs for which they may be eligible.

PROBLEM

Students facing financial insecurity may not know to seek help from public assistance programs for which they may be eligible and, therefore, may endure unneeded hardships or stop out of college when assistance may be available.

SOLUTION

Institutions can direct students who may have a zero Expected Family Contribution to public assistance programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), TANF, or public housing assistance. Colleges can also help students complete these applications and answer common questions.

Students need financial plans to graduate.

PROBLEM

Many students are unprepared to address disruptions in wages and unexpected expenses. This results in preventable dropouts.

SOLUTION

Just as institutions work with students to develop academic plans for graduation, they should develop financial education programs to craft financial plans to graduate. These programs should incorporate general financial planning concepts and direct students to available resources, including emergency grant programs. While planning expenses as a college student can be challenging, a plan to graduate will help the student better anticipate potential expenses and build a reserve to better withstand unexpected costs.^{13,14}

HE Financial Decision-Making Factors, cont.

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

Students need a simple, transparent, and comprehensive location for information about available financial resources.

PROBLEM

Students struggle to find information about available financial resources and may make enrollment decisions without accessing resources available to them.

SOLUTION

Many institutions have created a one-stop resource center where students can learn about beneficial resources. This simplifies the message to students and makes it easier for college staff and faculty to refer students to support services.¹⁵

Students need clear communications uncluttered with extraneous information.

PROBLEM

Over-communication can slow comprehension and confuse students with less important information at a time when they are ill-prepared to understand its significance.¹⁶

SOLUTION

Institutions should carefully consider how much information students need, especially in a crisis. Then, staff should craft simple, short, culturally sensitive messages that can be disseminated across a wide variety of platforms in a uniform manner (social media, email, text, phone). Before sending messages, staff should check the reading level of the text using the Microsoft Word readability function.^{17,18}

Students need to find help with financial decisions with minimal shuttling between institutional offices.

PROBLEM

Students, especially those new to higher education, may not know the appropriate office to contact for advice and information. The more students are directed to different areas, the greater the likelihood the student will give up on getting support.

SOLUTION

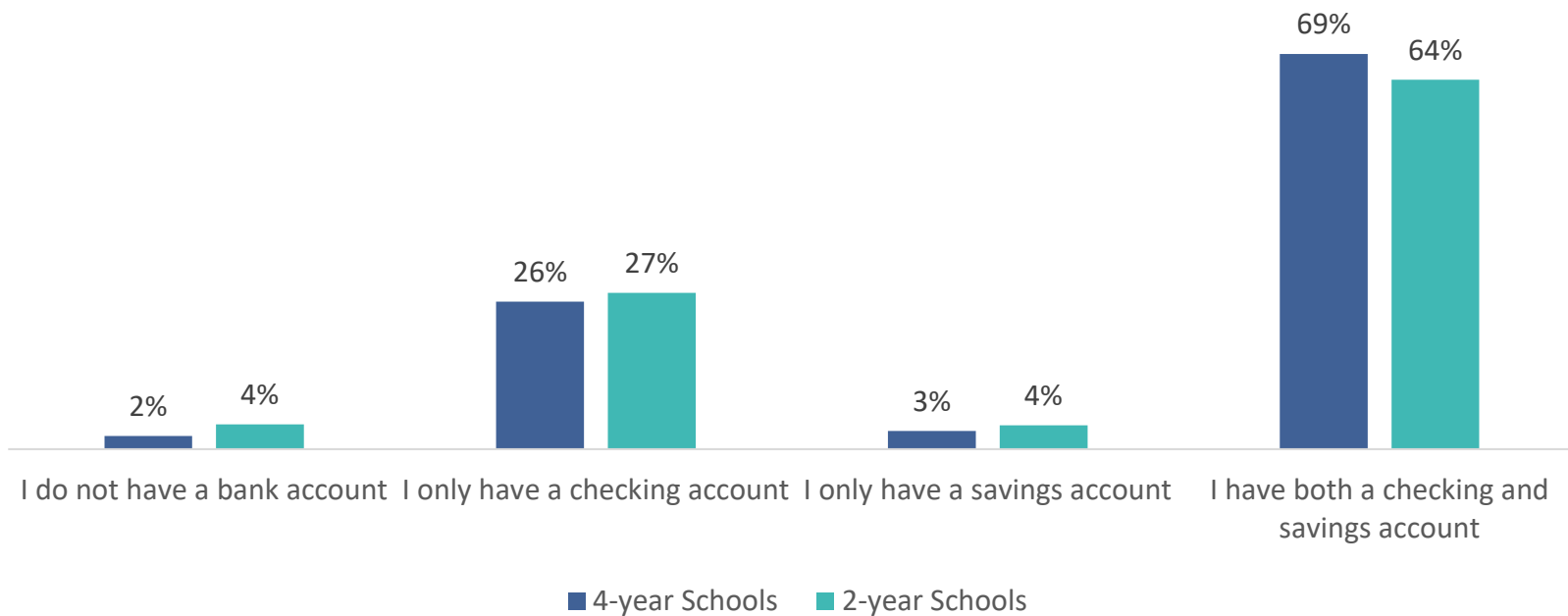
Institutions can cross-train student-facing staff so that common questions can be answered by multiple service areas. These cross-trained personnel would also be able to direct the student to the appropriate person for the more specific issues.^{19,20}

Financial Behaviors



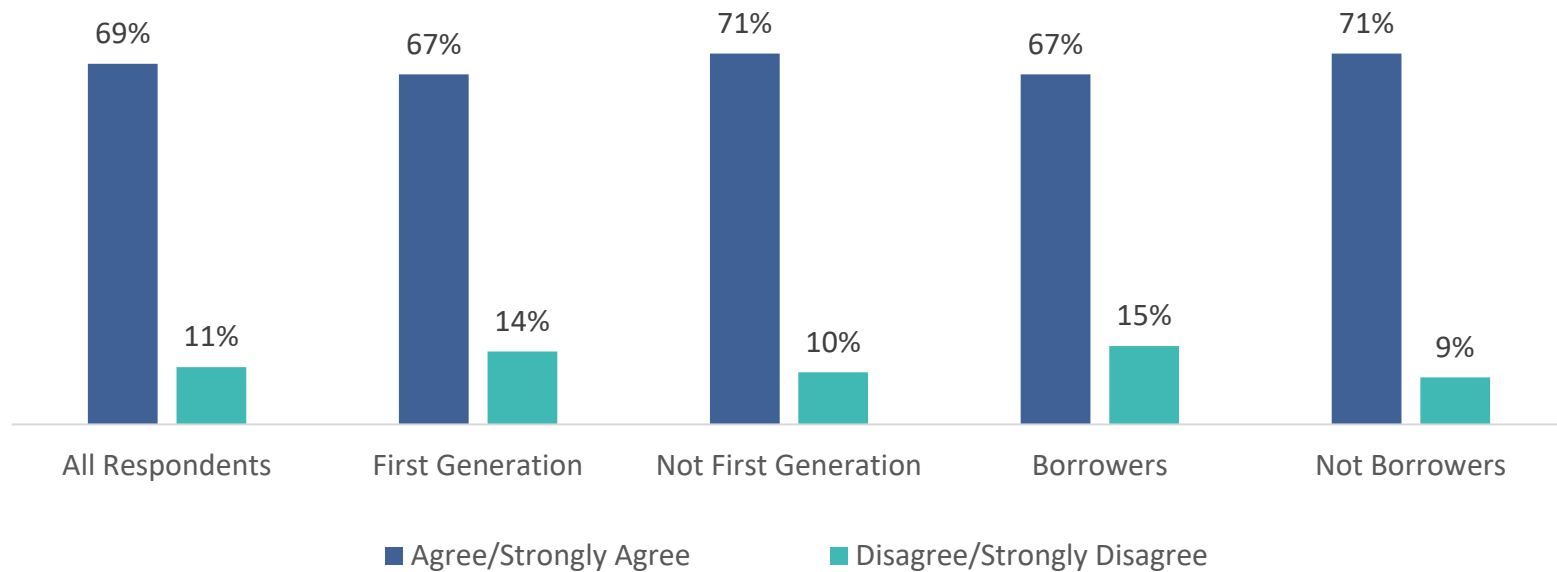
Financial Behaviors (Q70)

Q70: Do you have a bank account, and if so, which of the following applies to you?



Financial Behaviors (Q54)

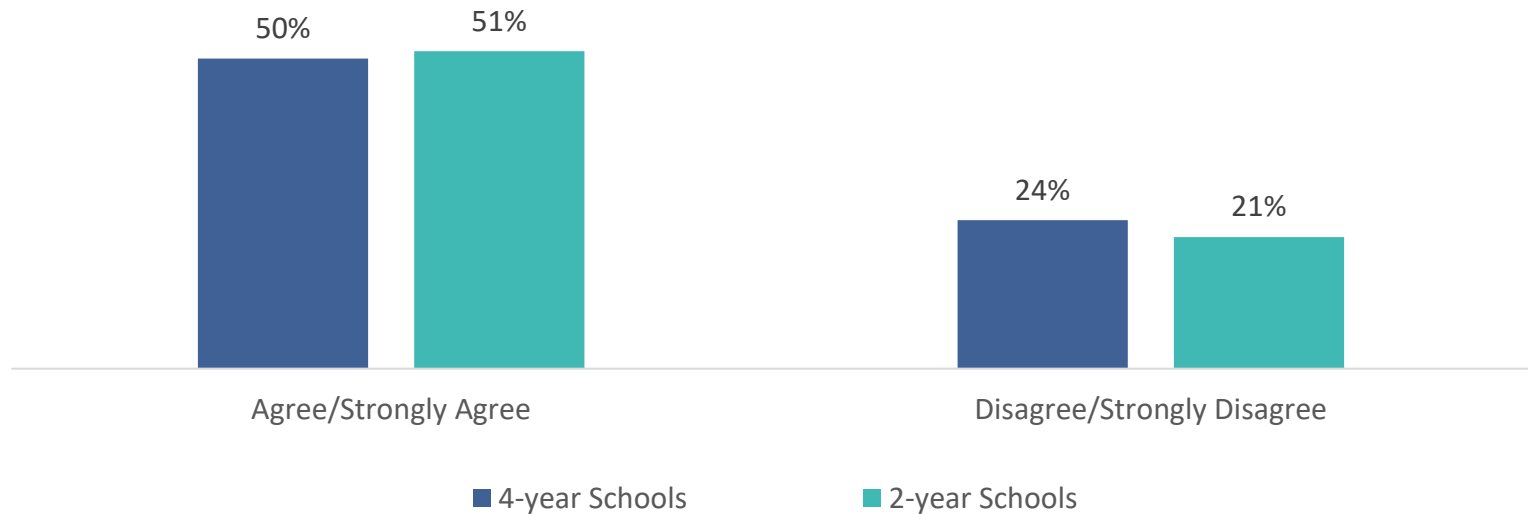
Q54: I always pay my bills on time.*



*Responses indicating 'Neutral' are not shown

Financial Behaviors (Q55)

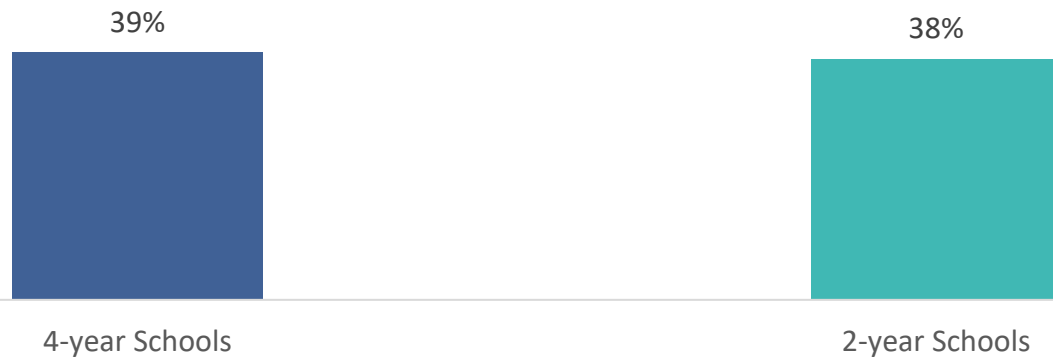
Q55: I follow a weekly or monthly budget.*



*Responses indicating 'Neutral' are not shown

Financial Behaviors (Q54-55, Q70)

Displayed All Three Positive Financial Behaviors (Q54-55, Q70)



Financial Behaviors

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

Students lacking financial security need help building savings that allow them to weather financial crises.

PROBLEM

Without adequate financial reserves, students may struggle to stay in school when confronted with even moderate financial difficulties.

SOLUTION

Support and incentivize students to become enrolled in safe financial services (such as bank accounts). Access to a checking and savings account may reduce the chance that students will use risky financial services (such as check cashing services, pay day lending, etc.).²¹ An example of incentivized saving, Austin Community College's Rainy Day Saving Program encourages students to save \$500 and partners with a local credit union to match students' savings up to \$100.²²

Students need help building their financial decision-making competencies.

PROBLEM

Higher education financing presents unique challenges to financial decision-making that are especially difficult for students who are either entering college for the first time or who are the first in their family to attend college. Students are often surprised by unexpected educational expenses like the cost of college textbooks, the price to park on campus, student fees, etc. These irregular expenses are hard to budget for without expert guidance from campus officials.

SOLUTION

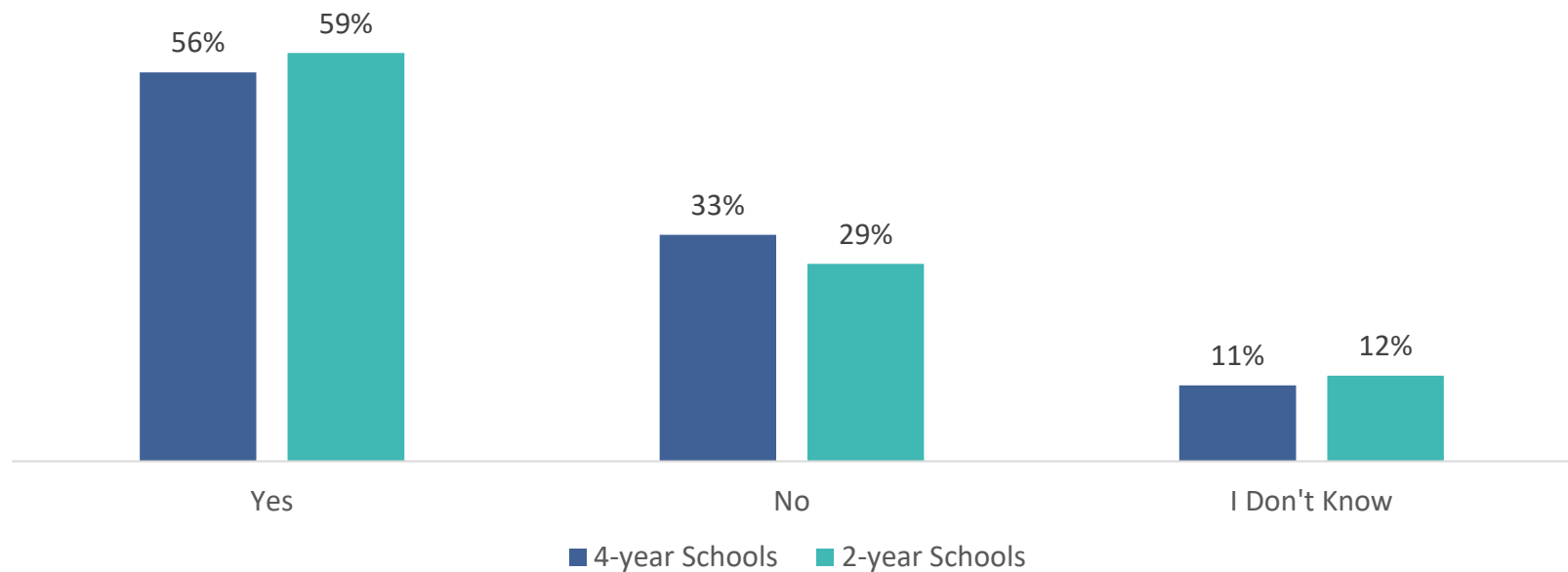
Support students with managing their cash flow challenges (particularly with financial aid recipients) and provide financial education to encourage budgeting and successful financial behaviors.^{23,24}

Student Financial Security



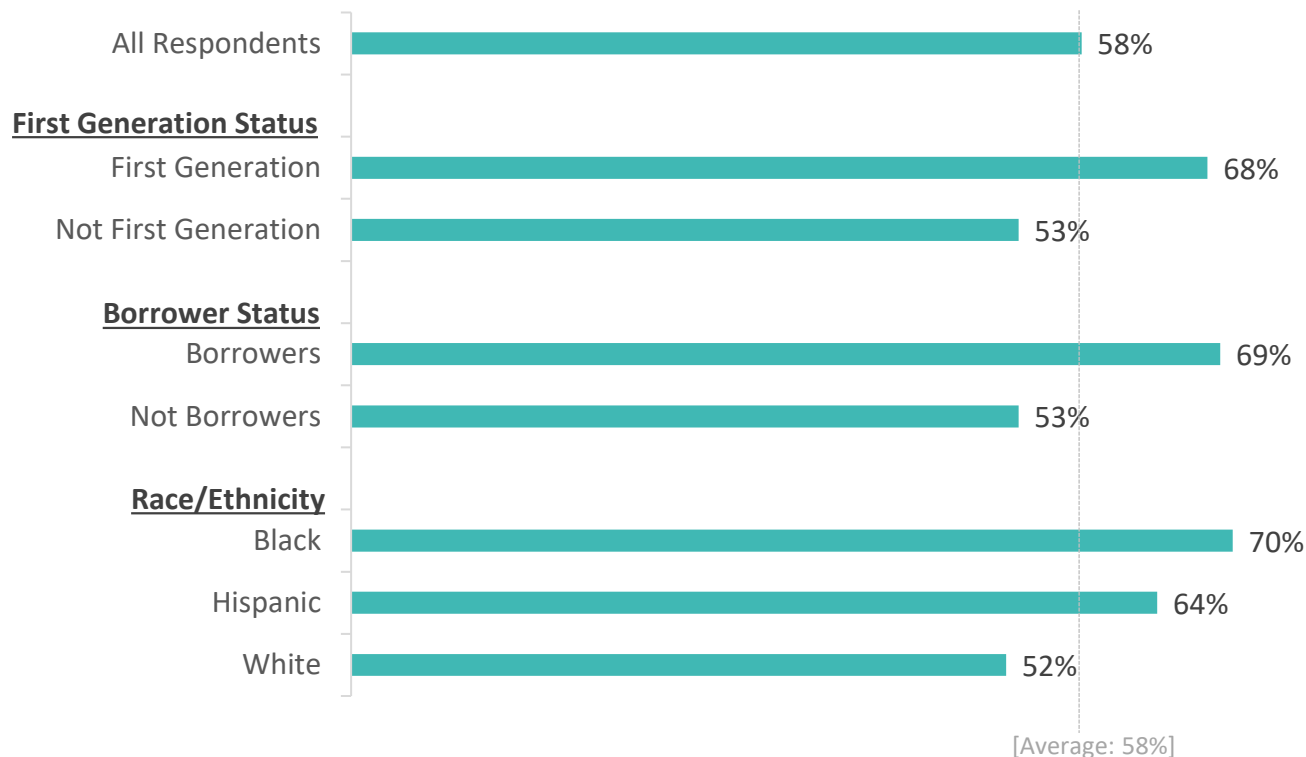
Student Financial Security (Q51)

Q51: Would you have trouble getting \$500 in cash or credit in order to meet an unexpected need within the next month?



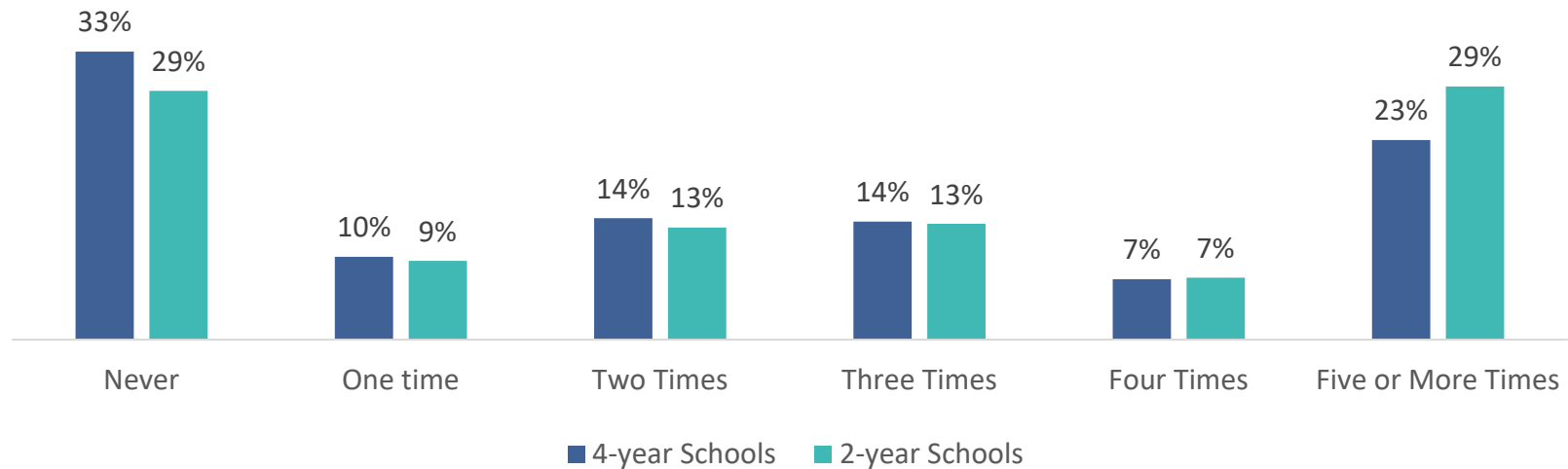
Student Financial Security (Q51)

Q51: Would you have trouble getting \$500 in cash or credit in order to meet an unexpected need within the next month? Those who responded with 'Yes'.



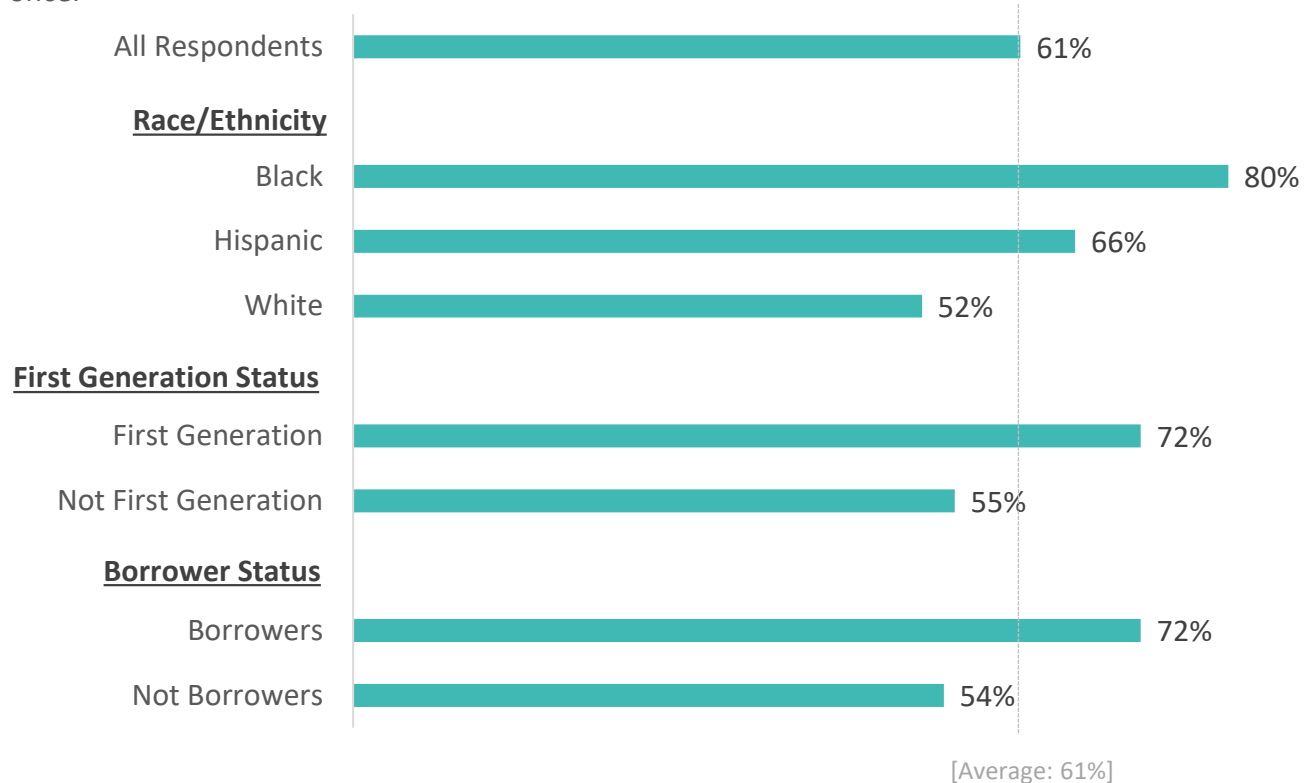
Student Financial Security (Q52)

Q52: In the past 12 months, how many times did you run out of money?



Student Financial Security (Q52 Groups)

Q52: In the past 12 months, how many times did you run out of money? Those who ran out more than once.



Student Financial Security

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

Students living on the edge financially need timely help in emergencies.

PROBLEM

Inadequate financial security can threaten continuous enrollment as students stop out to address financial crises.

SOLUTION

Implement emergency aid programs that help students overcome temporary financial obstacles (e.g., car repairs, gaps in daycare coverage, rent assistance when roommates leave, and utility bill spikes).³¹ To better support institutions that may be developing emergency aid programs, Trellis has developed a useful, step-by-step guide for delivering emergency aid programs:

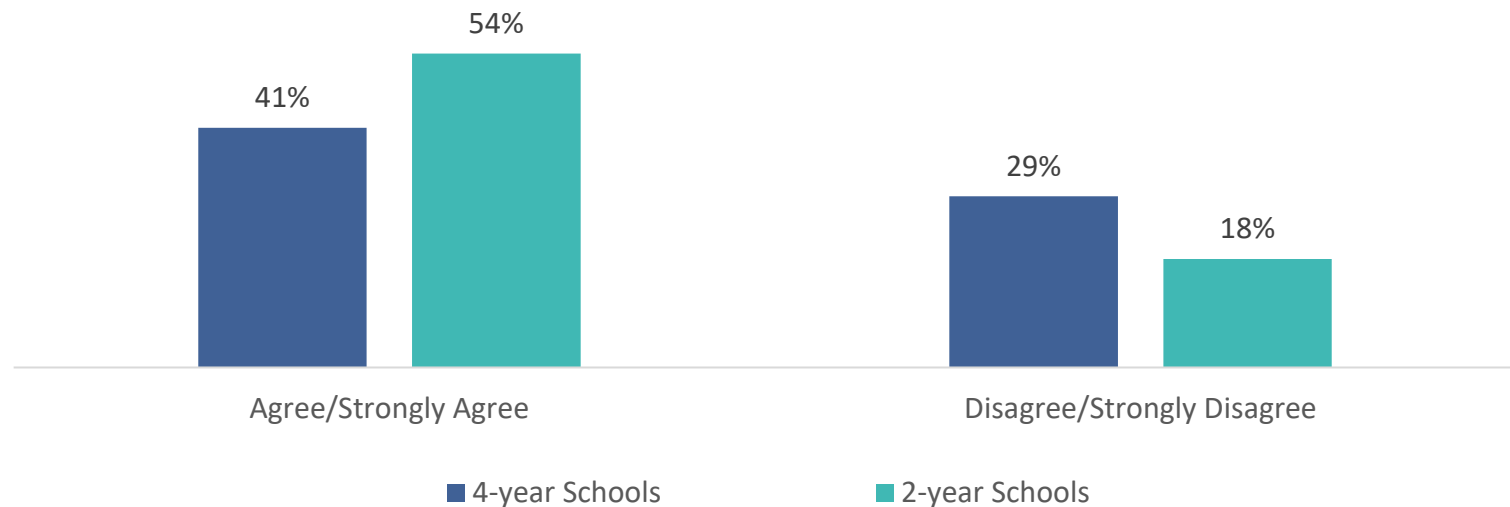
- Delivering Emergency Aid Services During COVID-19:
<https://www.trelliscompany.org/portfolio-items/delivering-emergency-aid-services-during-covid-19/>
- Trellis Company Emergency Aid Toolkit:
https://www.trelliscompany.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/70837_Emergency-Aid-Toolkit.pdf

Supporting Family While in College



Supporting Family While in College (Q60)

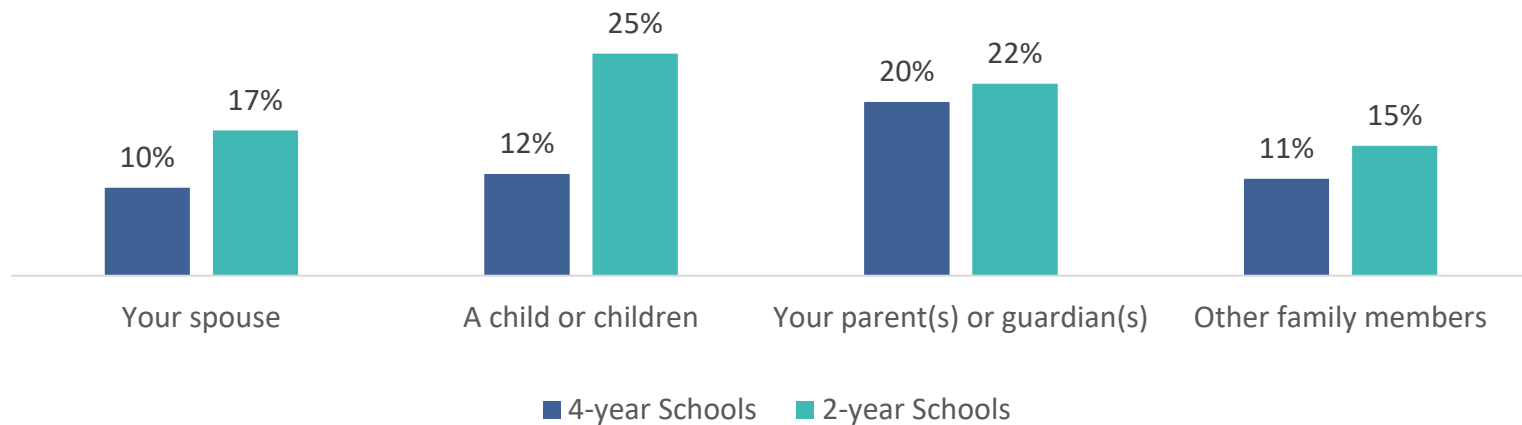
Q60: It is important that I support my family financially while in college.*



*Responses indicating 'Neutral' are not shown

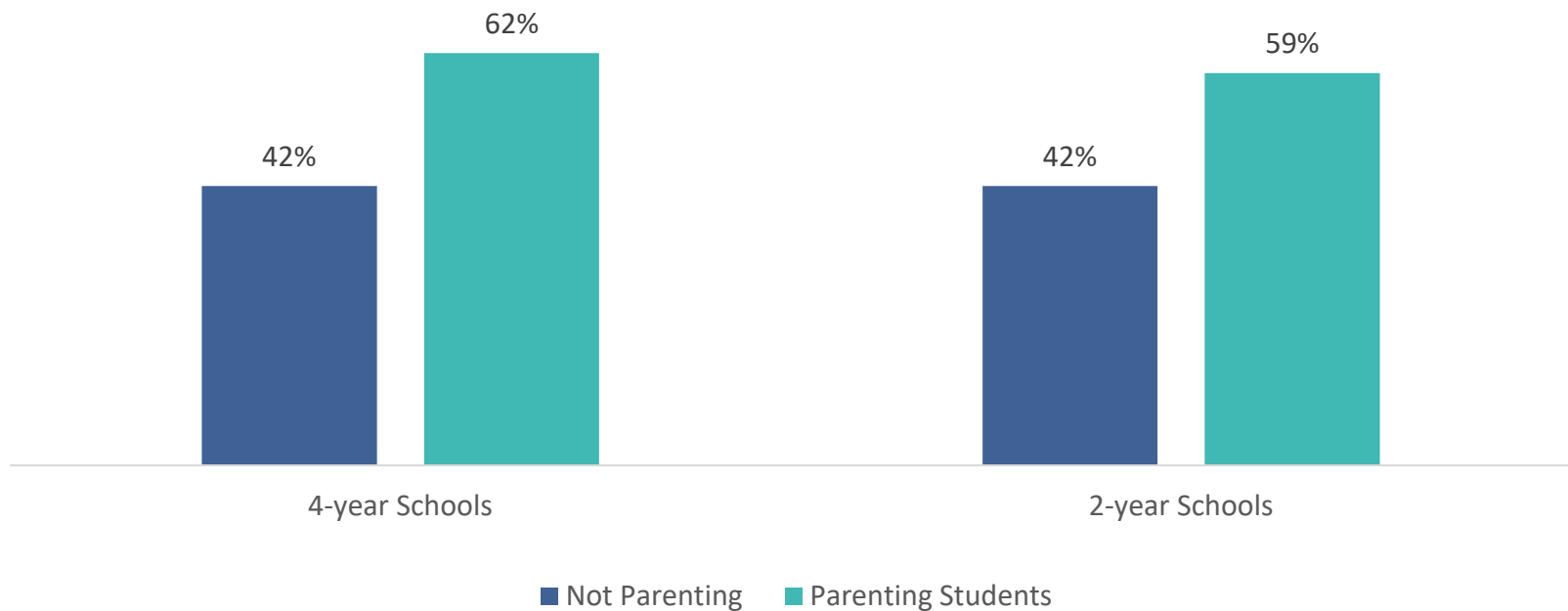
Supporting Family While in College (Q47-50)

Q47-50: Do you provide financial support for any of the following individuals?
Respondents who answered 'Yes'

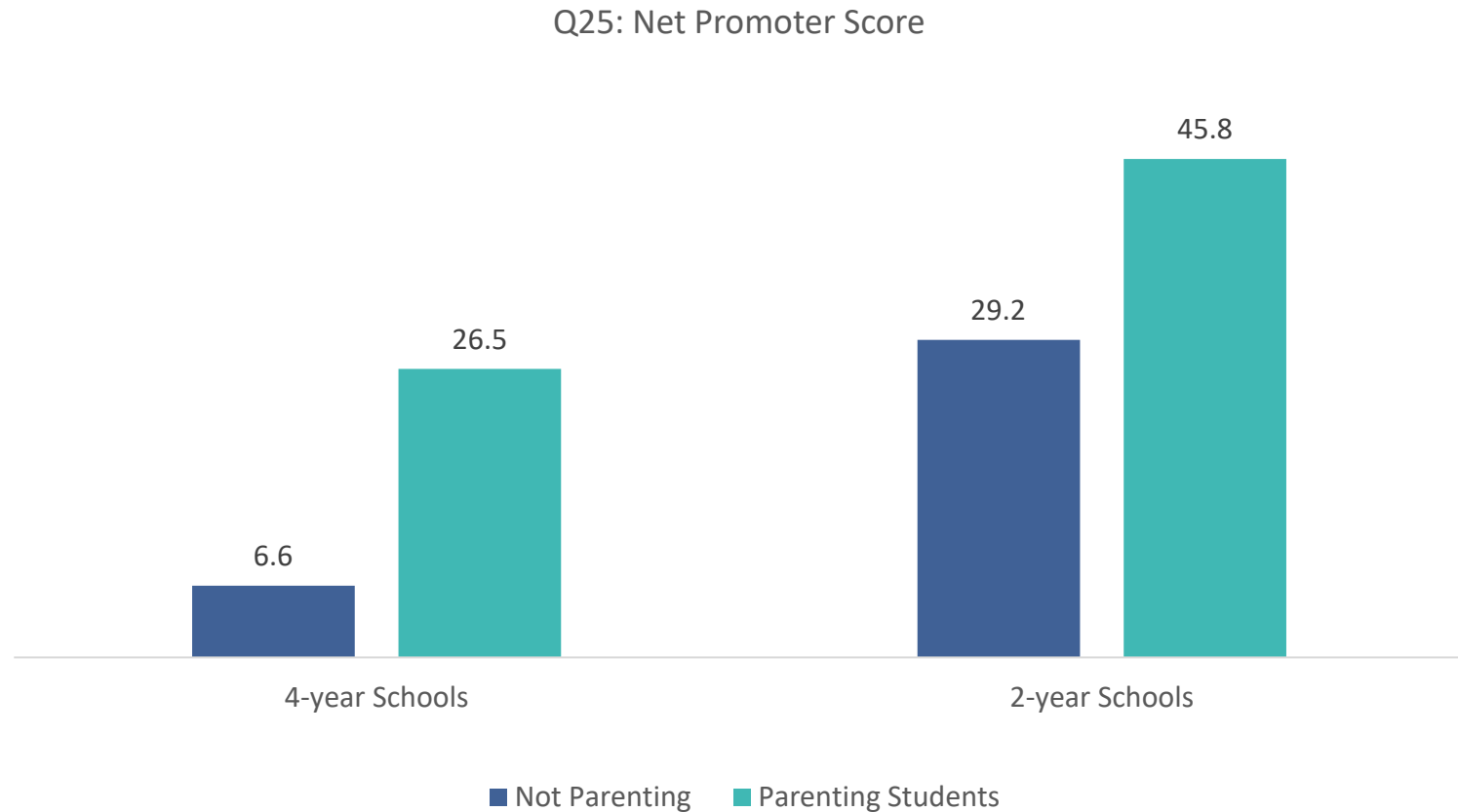


Supporting Family While in College (Q67)

Q67: Used a Credit Card in the Past 12 Months



Supporting Family While in College (Q25)



Supporting Family While in College

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

Students who support other family members while they are in college need special considerations.

PROBLEM

Students who support family members while they are in college may have narrower windows of time to interact with colleges, may lack aid packages that are sensitive to the true costs they encounter, and may become offended by the unformed assumptions they feel from staff and faculty.

SOLUTION

Train faculty, staff, and on-campus mental health providers on the unique experiences of student caregivers. Institutions can educate faculty and staff on the realities and stressors faced by parenting students during college (financial insecurity, basic needs insecurity, dependent care, etc.) to foster a culture of empathy and caring for these, and all, students. Having mental health professionals, social workers, and other staff trained and knowledgeable in trauma-informed care is also essential.⁵¹

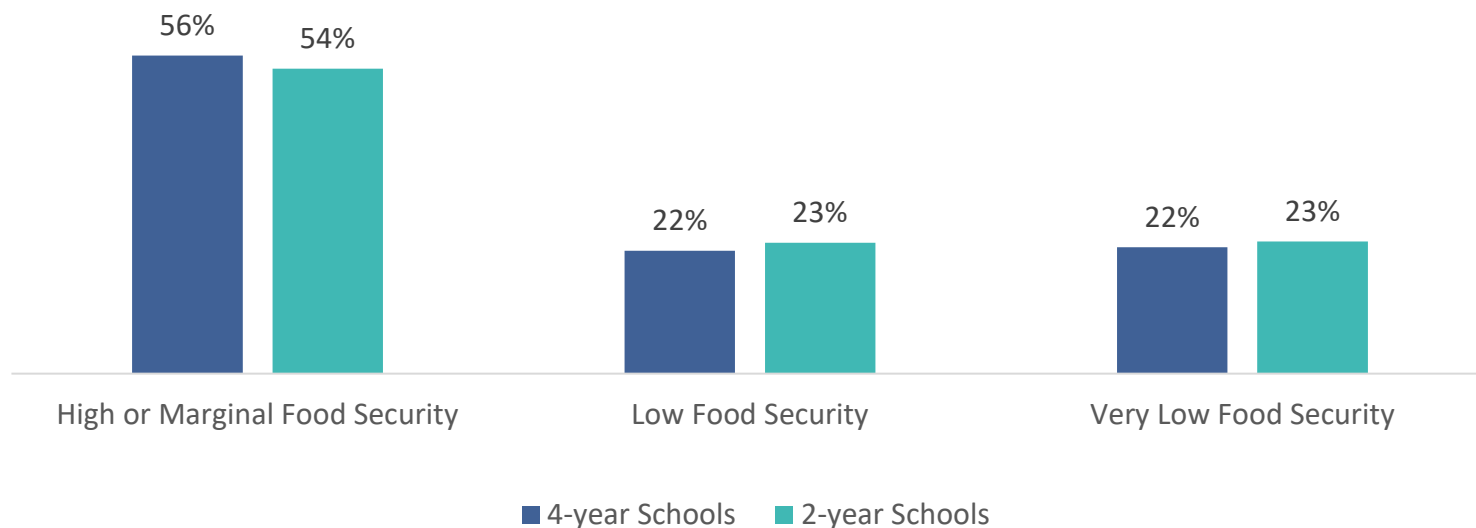
SOLUTION

Ensure parents have affordable, reliable access to childcare (on- or off-campus). At Monroe Community College in upstate New York, students with dependent children who used on-campus childcare were nearly three times more likely to graduate than student parents who did not use the center.⁵² Pre-pandemic, some institutions found success with a co-op model, where parenting students (who cannot afford the associated costs) work in the childcare center a certain number of hours a week for a discount on fees. Institutions can also assist students in locating and applying for local, state, federal, and private resources to pay for childcare.

Basic Needs Security

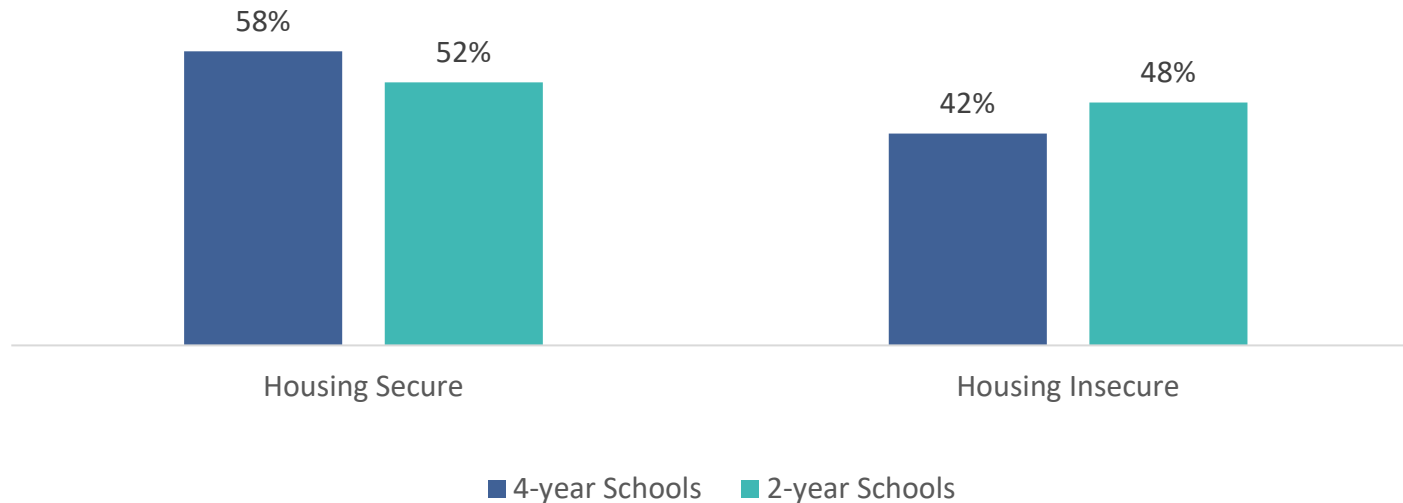
Basic Needs Security – Food Security Scale

Q89-94: USDA Food Security Scale (30-Day)



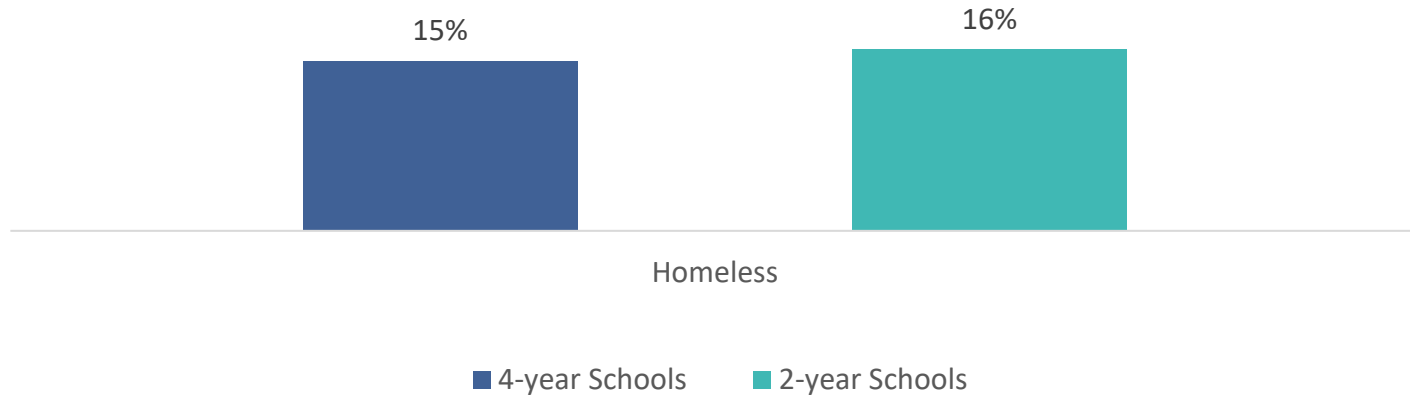
Basic Needs Security – Housing Security Scale

Q95-100: Housing Security Scale



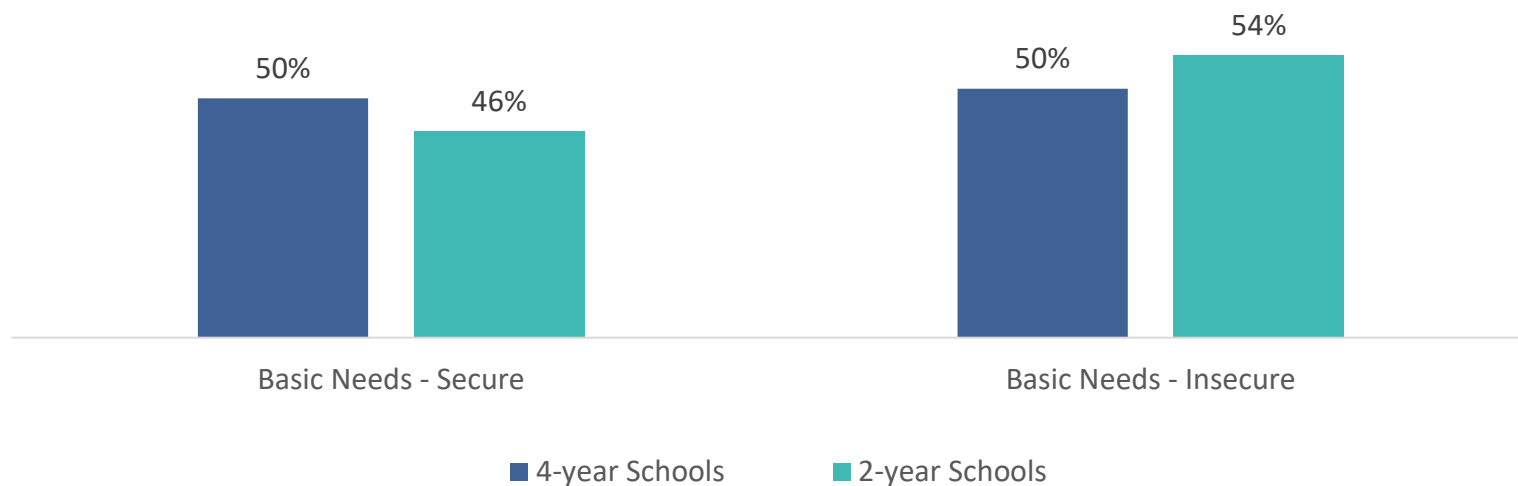
Basic Needs Security – Homelessness Scale

Q101-110: Homelessness Scale



Basic Needs Security - Overall

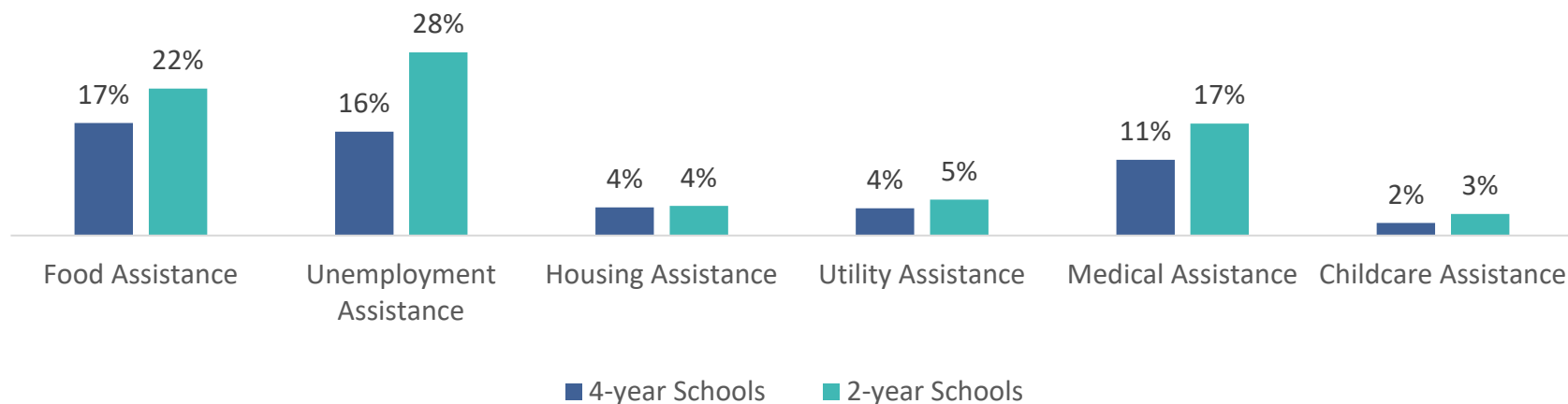
Overall Basic Needs Security*



**Provides a measurement of students experiencing one or more basic needs insecurities*

Basic Needs Security (Q61-66)

Q61-66: Percent of respondents who indicated use of public assistance, by assistance type



Basic Needs Security

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

Students need timely and holistic institutional support when they are in financial crisis.

PROBLEM

Students in financial crisis will often drop out of college unless swift, holistic institutional support is provided.

SOLUTION

Build on-campus crisis-support teams to provide case management for students having trouble with their basic needs. An excellent example of this is the S.H.A.R.E. Center at Palo Alto College in San Antonio, Texas, which provides students with a personalized assessment and customized plan to meet their academic, financial, and social needs. Services offered to students include academic peer coaching, career services, counseling services, financial wellness resources, sexual and reproductive health services, community resources, and a community garden.⁴⁶

Students with basic needs insecurity can be difficult to spot, but they need to be seen by their institution.

PROBLEM

Few college administrators are trained to identify the signs of food and housing insecurity. Unseen by their institution, these students' needs can go unmet, making student success more difficult.

SOLUTION

Offer professional development for faculty and staff to help them recognize signs of basic needs insecurity and learn how to direct students to appropriate support services on campus.⁴⁸

Basic Needs Security, cont.

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

Students need safe, reliable housing before they can reach their full academic potential.

PROBLEM

Many students have low housing security, even homelessness. The need to secure housing can conflict with their academic responsibilities.

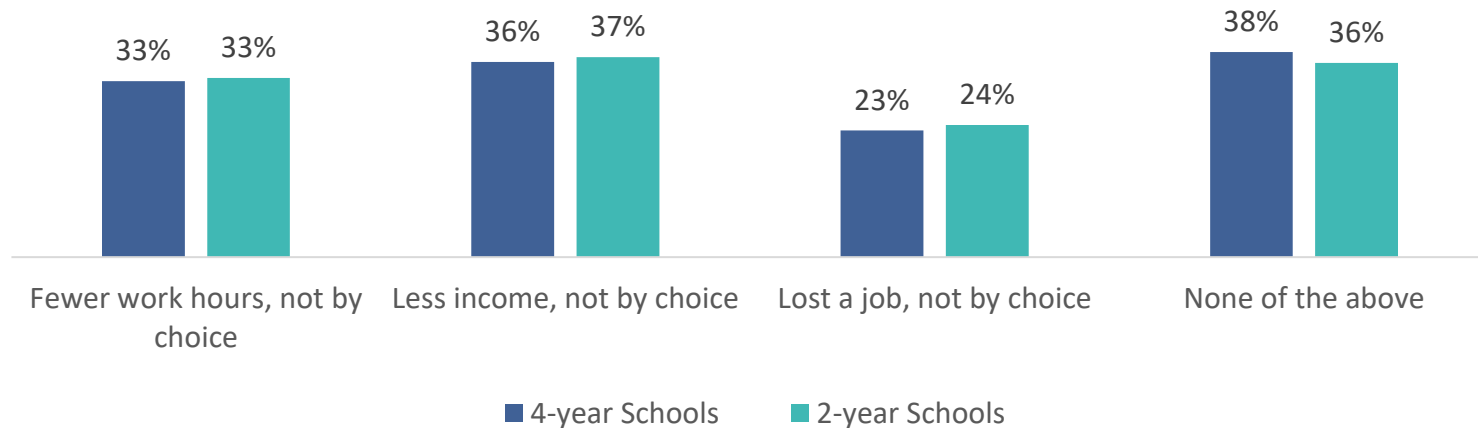
SOLUTION

Institutions can address housing insecurity and homelessness by partnering with local housing authorities to offer housing vouchers; working with community organizations to build housing; and advocating for state programs supporting these vulnerable students. The College Housing Assistance Program, or CHAP, in Tacoma, Washington, is one example of a community college partnering with a local housing authority. In this student-centric program—named one of the top 25 most innovative governmental initiatives in 2018—the Tahoma Housing Authority (THA) provides short- and long-term rental assistance and/or apartments to nearly 300 housing insecure or homeless students enrolled at the local community college or university.⁴⁷

Consequences of the COVID-19 Pandemic

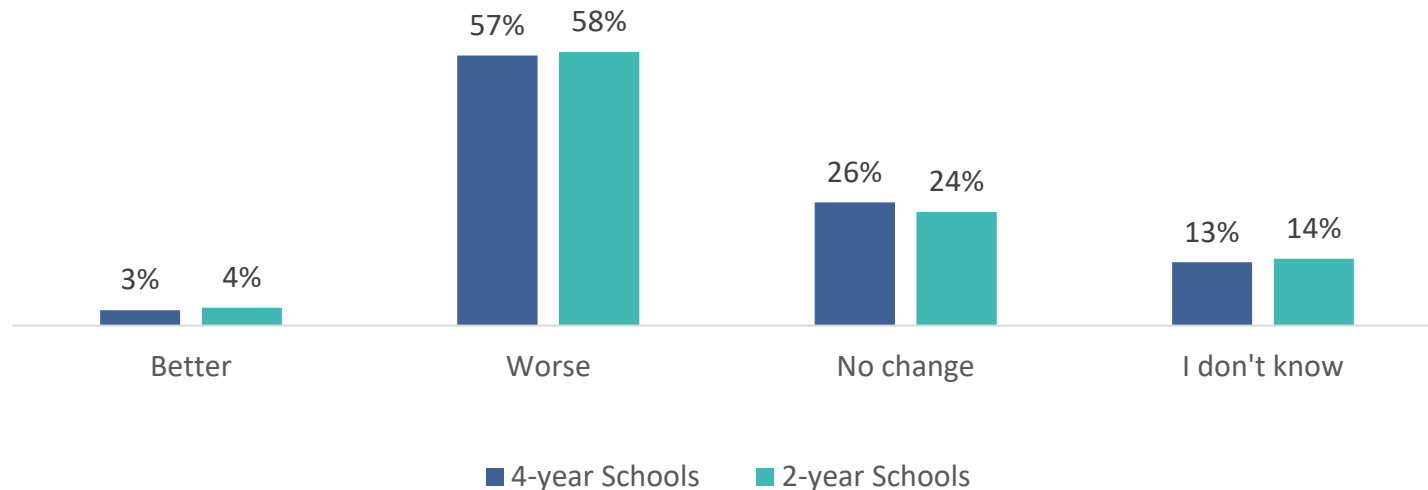
Consequences of Pandemic (Q32-35)

Q32-35: Did the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak of 2020 change your work/income situation?



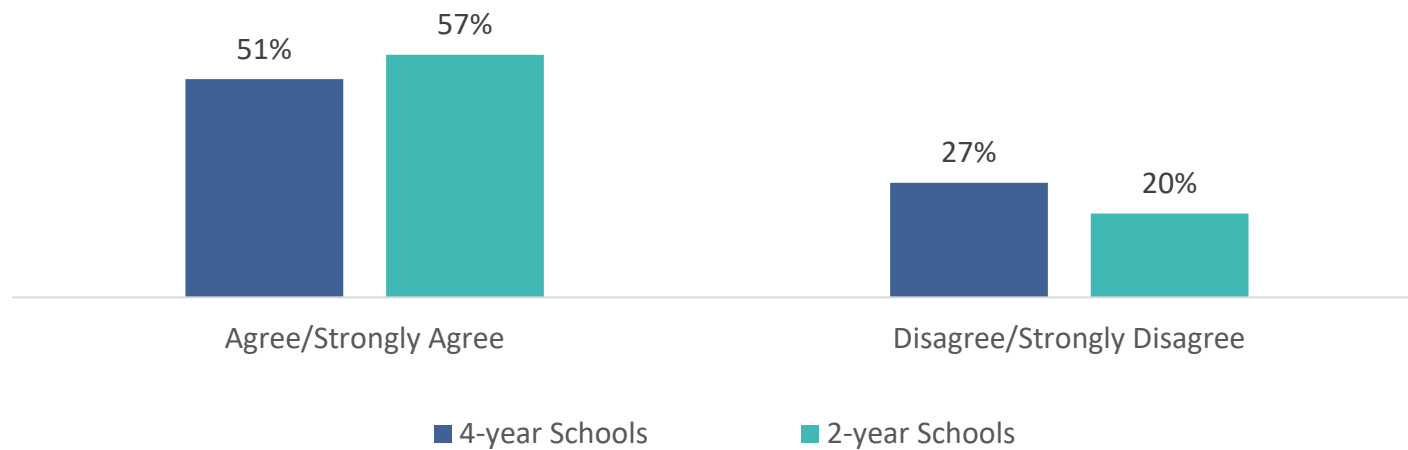
Consequences of Pandemic (Q31)

Q31: Since the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak of 2020, how would you describe your family's finances?



Consequences of Pandemic (Q30)

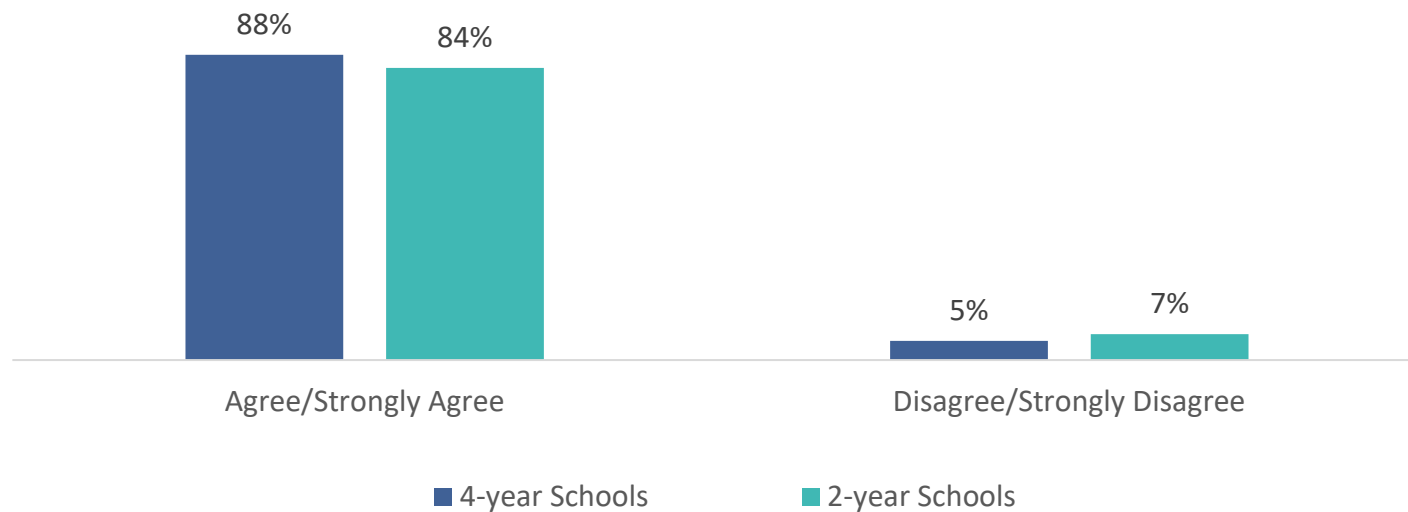
Q30: I have more of an obligation to support my family financially compared to before the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak of 2020.*



*Responses indicating 'Neutral' are not shown

Consequences of Pandemic (Q29)

Q29: The coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak of 2020 added to my level of stress, anxiety, or depression.*



*Responses indicating 'Neutral' are not shown

Consequences of Pandemic

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

Institutions can provide targeted emergency aid to students by coordinating efforts, consolidating resources, promoting the availability of aid, and addressing student needs holistically.

Without their normal social support networks available, many students struggling with stress and anxiety need access to mental health support.

PROBLEM

In addition to the normal pressure of balancing school, work, and family obligations, students struggle with keeping their focus on academics during this pandemic. Social distancing and quarantines further disrupt formerly reliable networks of support, leaving students vulnerable to mental health challenges.

SOLUTION

Institutions can provide students with mental health support, such as access to free or reduced-cost mental health services, medical counseling, mental health teleconferencing, and virtual support groups. They can enhance on-campus offerings or partner with local organizations to provide these services.

Students forced into virtual learning environments need adequate technical support.

PROBLEM

The reliance on virtual learning puts a premium on having adequate technology. But not all students will have the proper technical setup, especially students with inadequate financial means. This can lead to academic difficulties, alienation, and potentially stop-out.

SOLUTION

Institutions can use call campaigns and surveys to gauge the technological needs of their students and use innovative solutions to address those needs. Potential interventions include mailing coursework to students, renting laptops and/or wireless routers to students, and installing routers in on-campus parking lots.⁵⁹

Institutions can partner with internet service providers to help their students find low-cost options to fulfill their Internet and/or Wi-Fi needs, or offer students vouchers to cover the cost of these services. Households that meet certain criteria, including having a member receive a Federal Pell Grant during the current award year, may be eligible for discounted broadband service through the Emergency Broadband Benefit Program.⁶⁰

Consequences of Pandemic, cont.

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

During times of crisis, students need sensitive and appropriate communication with their institution.

PROBLEM

Crisis can lead to chaos without good communication. Poor communication can cause confusion and anxiety that can hinder student success.

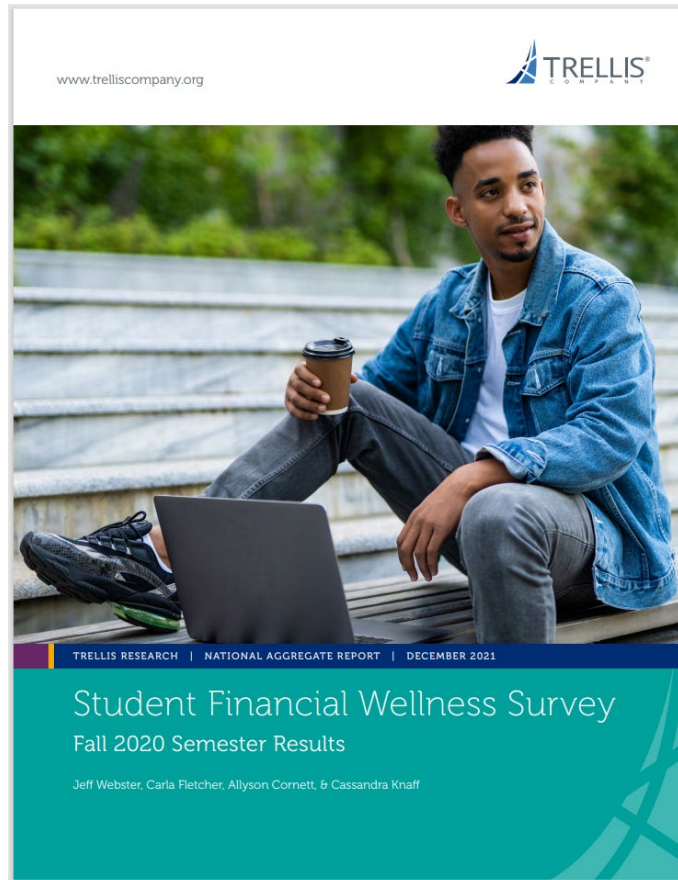
SOLUTION

During a crisis, staff should demonstrate empathy and extend expressions of care and concern. Given the amount of information students may need to process, not all messaging needs to encourage students to act. Crisis communication should be evidence-based and share information from high-quality, trusted organizations.⁶¹ During COVID-19, institutions should consider sending information sourced from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and World Health Organization. In addition, leadership should have clearly defined crisis communication roles and consistently follow those roles to maintain clear communication.⁶² Text messages should be personalized; research suggests students prefer consistent, personalized communication directly from their institution over generic communication.

Trellis Company Webinar, Delivering Emergency Aid Services During COVID-19:
<https://youtu.be/uSj3GoAFUS0>

Fall 2020 Aggregate Report

www.trelliscompany.org/SFWS-2021/



Fall 2022 Survey

- Recruitment for the Fall 2022 survey will start in the spring.
- Please let us know at any time if you are interested in participating or know anyone who would benefit from the survey!

Thank you!

Carla Fletcher, Senior Research Analyst

Carla.Fletcher@trelliscompany.org

Allyson Cornett, Research Analyst

allyson.cornett@trelliscompany.org

Follow us on Twitter: [@TrellisResearch](https://twitter.com/TrellisResearch)



Proven Services. Extraordinary Support.