If students are hungry, unsure of where they will sleep, or worried about paying for basic needs, they will have difficulty studying and completing credentials. According to a recent national survey, more than 40 percent of college students are food insecure, and almost half have experienced some level of housing insecurity.

JFF calls on states to adopt policies that enable community colleges to help students deal with economic insecurities. Specifically, states should offer emergency aid to help students cover unexpected life expenses. States should also help colleges develop the capacity to screen students to see if they are eligible for public assistance. States also should exercise the flexibility granted under federal policies to remove barriers to aid for students—for example, they could eliminate rules requiring students to work in order to receive aid. Additionally, states should take advantage of federal matching programs to provide low-income students with supplemental supports, such as tuition assistance or career coaching services. And because educational institutions may not be capable of providing students with non-academic services (e.g., mental health care or assistance with landlord-tenant disputes), states should give community colleges incentives to establish partnerships with community organizations that can provide such assistance.

Findings from 15-State Study

**On average**, one-third of the five recommended student financial stability policies have been adopted per state.

**Signs of progress**: About half of the states use federal funds to enhance college services for students on public assistance. Almost half of them fund emergency aid for students in crisis.

**Critical gaps**: Fewer states have enacted policies designed to break down barriers to public assistance for college students. Only one-third of them support colleges playing an expanded role in screening students for eligibility for public assistance or partnering with external providers of social services. Even fewer states are using the flexibility permitted in federal policy to increase access to public assistance for college students.

**Ahead of the curve**: Arkansas and Hawaii.
The state supports the financial stability of community college students and helps them complete a postsecondary credential.

- The state provides emergency aid to college students facing economic insecurity (e.g., food assistance, housing assistance, transportation assistance, child care, and emergency grants). **6 States**
- The state supports community colleges in screening students to determine if they are eligible for public assistance that will improve their financial stability (e.g., Affordable Care Act, child care, SNAP, TANF). **5 States**
- The state uses flexibility permitted in federal policy to increase access to public assistance (e.g., Affordable Care Act, child care, SNAP, TANF) for community college students, such as by adjusting eligibility and/or easing requirements (i.e., work). **3 States**
- The state leverages federal funding to support community colleges that serve low-income students (e.g., SNAP E&T). **7 States**
- The state supports regional partnerships among community colleges, local nonprofit organizations, and human service agencies that connect students to resources to help them persist and complete. **5 States**

State Spotlight: Hawaii

Recognizing the fact that many students face economic insecurities, Hawaii is taking a holistic approach to assessing students’ needs and providing them with supports. In collaboration with the state’s Department of Human Services, the University of Hawai‘i Community College system has set up a program called HiNet that, among other things, uses state and federal SNAP Education and Training funds to help students cover the costs of basic needs. HiNet also provides community colleges with funds to cover the cost of having a staff member to determine whether students face barriers that may hinder their ability to succeed academically. The assessments identify students who require assistance with basic needs (e.g., food, housing, or child care) or face more complex problems, such as mental health issues. To ensure that students are able to get help with non-academic challenges, colleges forge partnerships with community organizations and that can provide the appropriate services.