

From: Manny Rodriguez
To: [CA Broadband Council](#)
Cc: Parshan Khosravi
Subject: Higher Education Coalition public comment for CA Broadband Plan
Date: Friday, November 20, 2020 10:02:04 AM
Attachments: image001.png
CA Broadband Council Public Comment_Higher Education Coalition_11-20-2020.pdf

Dear California Broadband Council,

On behalf of ETW, UCSA and a coalition of student groups, family groups, education equity advocates, community-based organizations and higher education partners we are submitting the attached public comment for the California Broadband Council.

This document includes an overview of our key recommendations, The Education Trust—West’s finding from our COVID-19 student survey, as well as an excerpt from the September 16th Agenda Item on UC Planning and Evaluation of COVID-19 which covers student survey results on digital divide issues.

Please feel free to reach out if we can be of any assistance moving forward.

Best,
Manny

Manny Rodriguez, MPA
Senior Legislative Associate





November 20, 2020

Amy Tong, Chair
 California Broadband Council
 1325 J Street, Suite 1600
 Sacramento, CA 95814-2941

RE: Higher Education Priorities for California’s Broadband Action Plan

Dear Chair Tong,

On behalf of the students, parents, educators, and community stakeholders, we would like to thank the California Broadband Council for its efforts to build out a statewide plan which expands broadband access for all California residents. As we continue to live with the reality of COVID-19, it is important to have the voices of students, families, education equity advocates, community-based organizations and higher education partners represented in the public comments. Without those voices, we would be leaving the most important stakeholders out of the conversation.

The digital divide was a challenge well before the COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc on millions of Californians without sufficient access to broadband or digital literacy. Today, we see how essential it is

to provide adequate broadband access to all Californians — especially rural and tribal areas, low-income communities, and historically underserved and unserved communities. With California entering a second round of stay-at-home orders, Californians depend on their internet connection to pursue their education and work, seek health information and care, and perform many other essential functions remotely. As you create the California State Broadband Action Plan, we need to reject the status quo and invest in both short-term and long-term solutions that will address the critical gaps postsecondary students experience. In order to ensure that our students have accessible, affordable, and reliable broadband connectivity that allows them to efficiently continue their studies, we respectfully submit the following recommendations for your consideration:

Access & Affordability

The development of qualifying low-income metrics for postsecondary students to enroll in reduced-cost/free broadband access programs is a critical priority to students, as their very ability to continue their studies depends on whether they can afford quality internet access. During the course of the pandemic, teleconferencing platforms have become an essential part of the educational curriculum across the K-18 pipeline, with Zoom now becoming the most common video conferencing software company used to implement remote learning for K-18 education. Given the Mbps requirements needed to utilize Zoom, multiple devices and/or multiple user households should be able to count on reliable speed, bandwidth, and capacity. The reality facing today's students is that the federal minimum standard of 25 Mbps / 3 Mbps broadband requirement is simply not sufficient enough to address the needs of our students. In order to effectively move our state towards addressing our student needs, we need the action plan to:

- Increase marketing and accessibility of reduced-cost/free broadband access programs and develop qualifying low-income metrics for postsecondary students such as Cal Grant, Pell, or CA Dream Act eligibility.
- Suspend caps on upload/download speed within reduced-cost/free broadband access programs so multiple devices or multiple user households can have reliable connectivity.
- Establish a symmetrical upload/download speed of 100 Mbps per household.

Expanding Infrastructure

Expanding access to existing internet users is only part of the solution we need in California, and it will not be enough without sufficient investments to expand infrastructure to various regions of California that currently have little to no access to any broadband services, many of whom include rural and low-income communities. To further support these historically underserved and unserved communities, it is important for the action plan to provide both intermediate and long-term strategies to bridge the digital divide:

- Expand coverage within rural, tribal, and underserved low-income communities in order to prevent digital redlining.
- Secure intermediate and on-campus public accessibility through wifi integrated parking lots or cell on wheels.

- Invest in long-term broadband connectivity solutions that build out future proof networks and infrastructure such as those proposed by Legislators during the 2020 Legislative session.

Increased Transparency

As our state's broadband action plan is being designed, it is critical to include transparency metrics in order for the state to better understand the scope of the broadband industry as well as the success of the industry in addressing the needs of our communities. To do that, the action plan must:

- Promote data transparency from internet service providers (ISPs) and broadband companies on usage and marketing of their reduced-cost/free programs as well as efforts to expand these during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Scaling Adoption

Finally, it is critical that the broadband action plan provides a roadmap that considers where California's diverse community is today and where it will be heading in the future, inclusive of the Golden State's vast gaps in access to broadband. Specifically, the action plan must:

- Take into account the need for proper devices. Most families and households that are a part of the digital divide don't have the device necessary to connect to high-speed internet. So any new infrastructure built should account for what someone would personally need in their home to connect to the internet available (router, hotspot, antenna, laptop, etc.).
- Ensure that the action plan is technology-neutral so that the plan can be adaptable to future innovations in connectivity.

According to The Education Trust—West's [higher education poll](#), 12% of students have no, limited, or sporadic access to the internet. How can this be the status quo for California — the 5th largest economy in the world and home to Silicon Valley? As a state, we should not be failing to provide our K-18 students reliable broadband access to meet their needs. We urge you to live up to California's reputation as an innovative tech-leader, reevaluate whether the state's infrastructure is equitably meeting access, affordability, and reliability principles, and question whether you're helping or hurting students as they continue their education.

We appreciate your consideration of our requests. For further questions, please contact Manny Rodriguez at [REDACTED] or Parshan Khosravi at [REDACTED]

Thank you!

CORONAVIRUS & EDUCATIONAL EQUITY

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The results of our national and statewide survey on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on college students

KEY FINDINGS

1

The coronavirus pandemic has been an extremely disruptive force in students' lives, and students of color have been disproportionately affected.

2

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3

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Students are generally supportive of their school's response to the pandemic, but they identify key areas of improvement moving forward.

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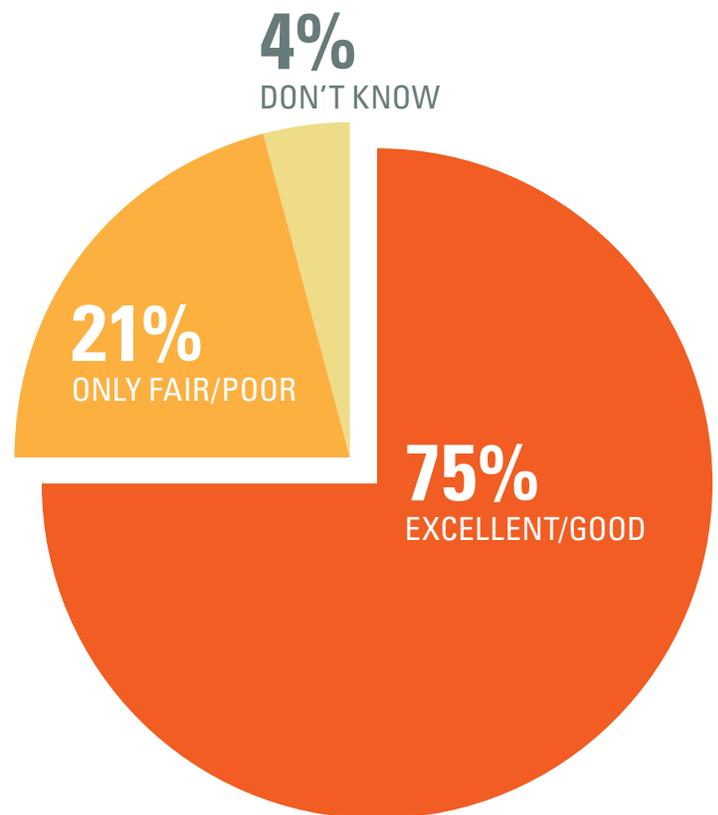
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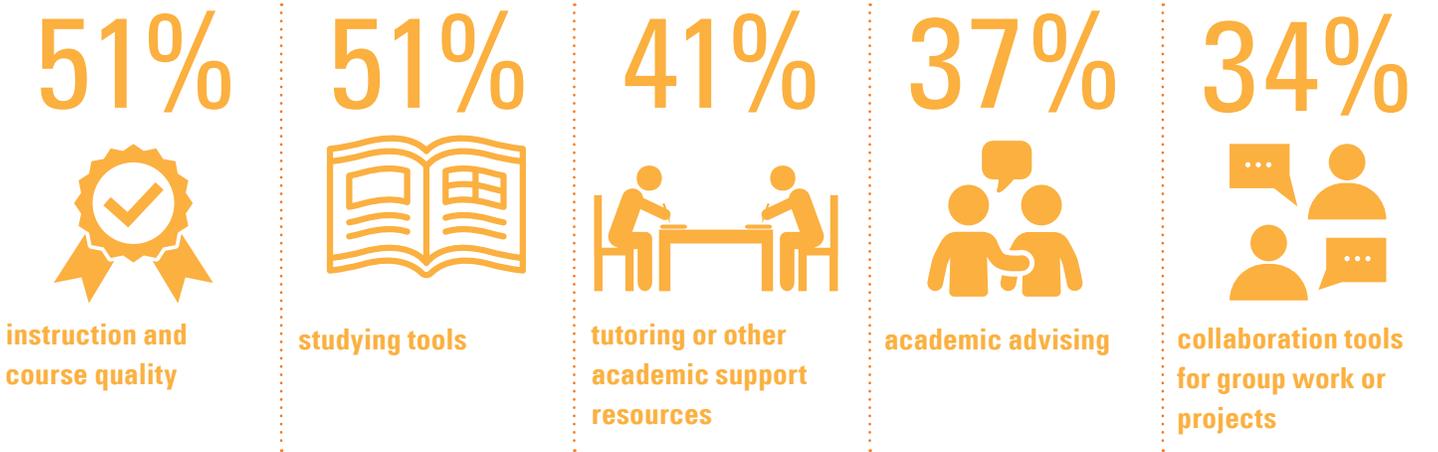
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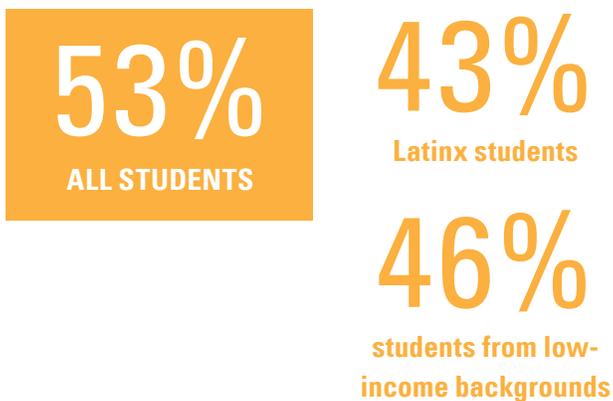
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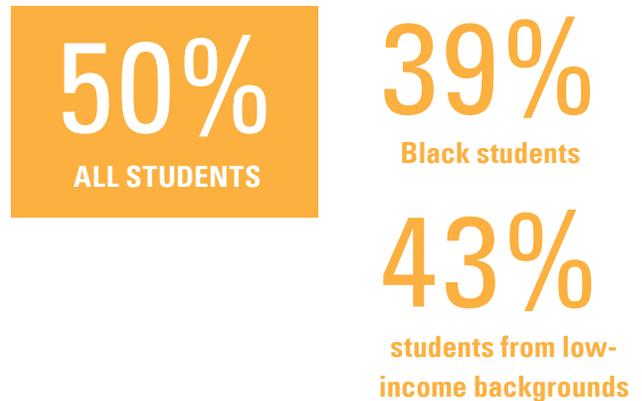


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STUDENTS REPORT FEELING DISCONNECTED FROM KEY CAMPUS SUPPORTS

Which of the following have been the most challenging aspects of being enrolled in school during the coronavirus pandemic for you personally?

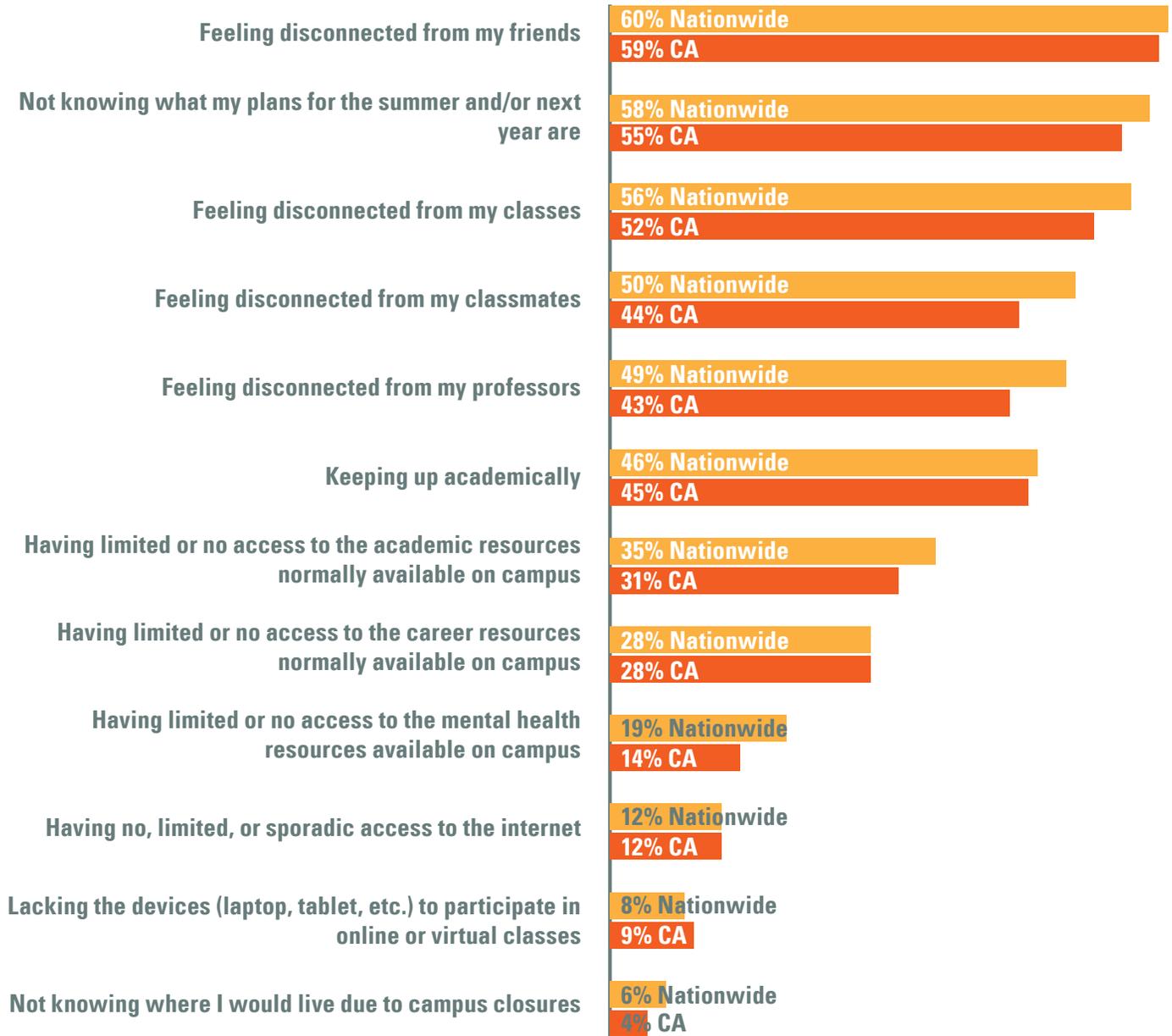
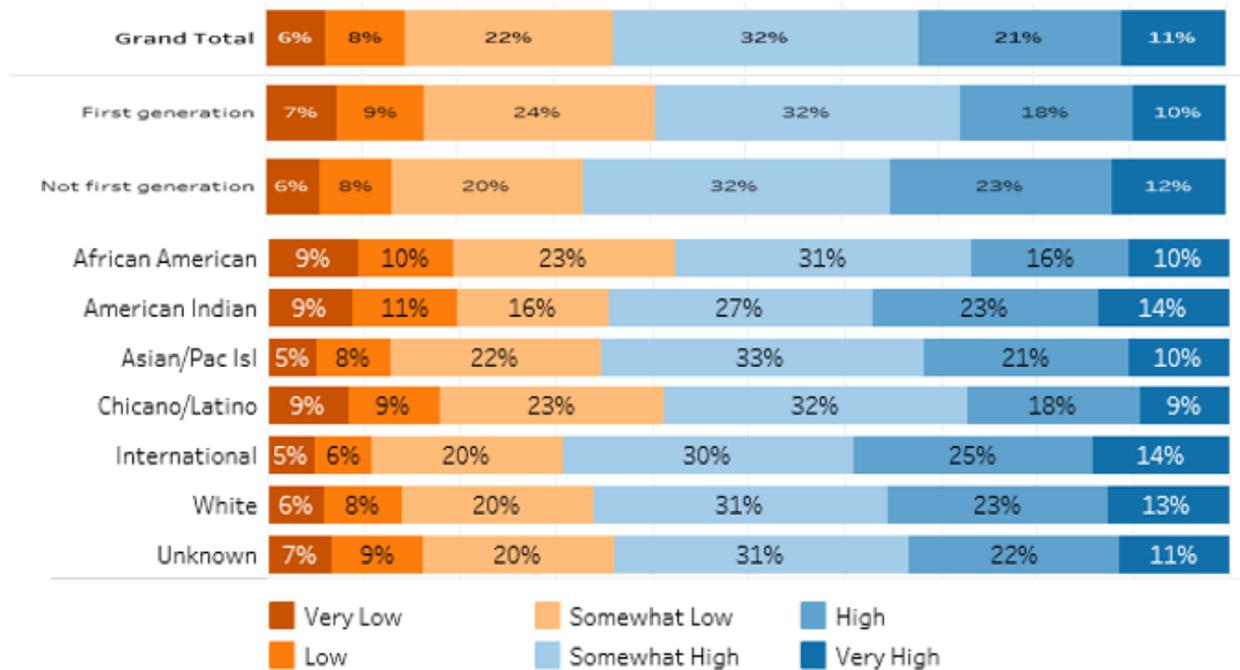


Figure 6: Spring 2020 UCUES responses to the statement “my confidence using tools for remote learning is”



This information identified where to prioritize targeted support for existing students. It also emphasized the importance of ensuring incoming students had familiarity and confidence in how to use remote instruction tools and that campus orientation sessions needed to be expanded to meet this need to ensure students had a successful start in the fall.

New generation students were more likely to lack appropriate equipment and study spaces and to have greater family responsibilities due to COVID-19

Access to technology varied in spring 2020. Some faculty purchased additional equipment, like microphones, cameras, and lighting to improve course delivery. Some campuses reported that many of the most sophisticated instructional delivery technologies—ones that required special facilities and classrooms equipped to analyze data and multimedia presentations that instructors could integrate into lectures—could not be accessed with shelter-in-place orders and were therefore not leveraged for remote instruction.

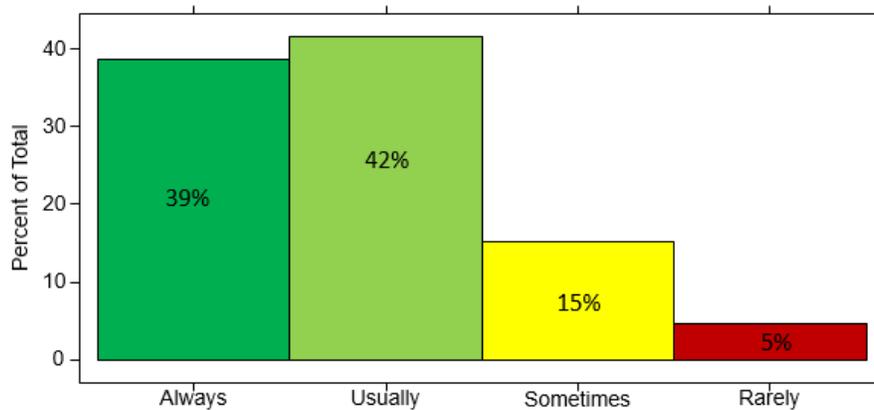
The majority of instructors relied on laptops compared to other devices, and over 85 percent indicated that their laptops, desktops, and tablets were usually or always fast. In addition, more than 80 percent of instructors responded that they always or usually had access to a quiet space to teach, with 20 percent indicating that was sometimes or rarely the case.

Table 3: Instructor Responses to Question “Is Your Device Fast Enough”

	#	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
Laptop	4,087	2%	11%	49%	37%
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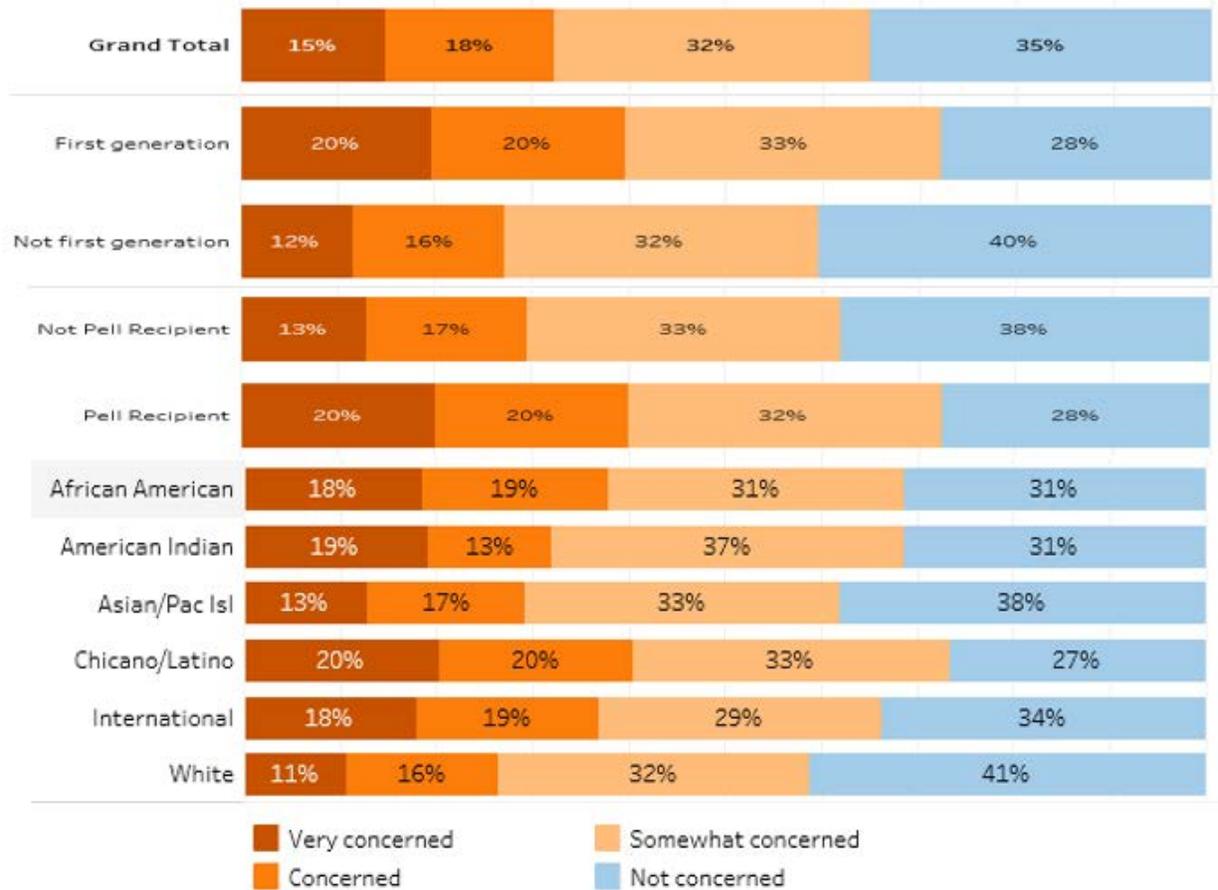
Do you have access to a quiet space to teach? (N = 4807)



With the COVID-19 pandemic, many students returned home. New generation students—first-generation, Pell grant recipients and underrepresented students— were less likely to have both adequate access to the internet and appropriate study space, making remote instruction a greater challenge when compared to peers.

Spring 2020 UCUES data shows 15 percent of undergraduates were very concerned about having reliable access to the internet, but it was five points higher for most new generation students (see figure 8).

Figure 8: Spring 2020 UCUES responses to the question “how concerned are you about the possible effects of COVID-19 on your learning by having reliable access to the internet?”



UC campuses attempted to assess and meet the technology needs of students by providing laptops and internet hotspots. For example, UC Berkeley conducted a student technology survey to estimate the funds needed to purchase laptops in its Student Technology Equity Program (STEP). Other UC campuses used a range of outreach efforts—communications with deans and department chairs, student service and advising units, and prompts on campus learning management systems—to identify students who needed technology support. Campuses quickly expanded loaner laptop programs and provided financial support to ensure students could get the necessary equipment to support their remote instruction. For graduate students, these equipment needs varied, particularly depending on their disciplinary field, research, or teaching needs.

In addition, 35 percent of all undergraduates were very concerned about having access to an appropriate study space, but it was at least ten points higher for new generation students (see figure 9). These challenges affected students’ ability to fully engage in synchronous remote instruction activities and created greater anxiety when it came to assessment, particularly proctored exams.

From: Manny Rodriguez
To: [CA Broadband Council](#)
Cc: Parshan Khosravi
Subject: RE: Higher Education Coalition public comment for CA Broadband Plan
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Hello Broadband Council,

Apologies for re-submitting our letter but we received additional sign-ons and wanted to see if we can replace our previous letter with this new version? Content remains the same, just a few extra logos.

Thanks. Apologies for any inconvenience.

Best,
Manny Rodriguez

Manny Rodriguez, MPA
Senior Legislative Associate



From: CA Broadband Council <CABroadbandCouncil@state.ca.gov>
Sent: Friday, November 20, 2020 10:52 AM
To: Manny Rodriguez [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: Higher Education Coalition public comment for CA Broadband Plan

Thank you for submitting your public comment.

It has been noted and will be posted to the [Action Plan page](#) of the [Council's web site](#) and shared with the Council



November 20, 2020

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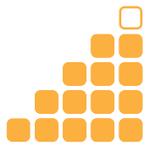
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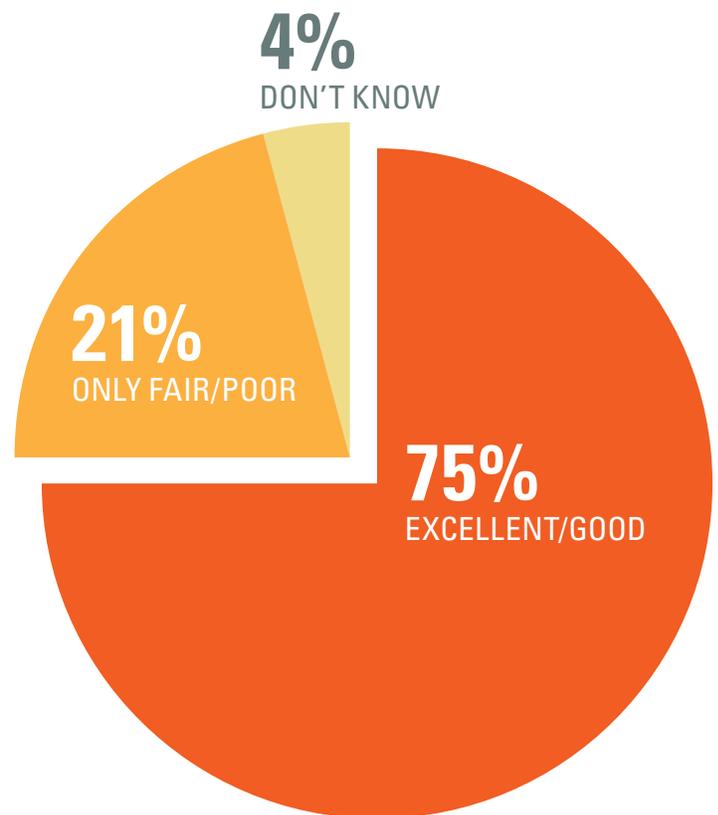
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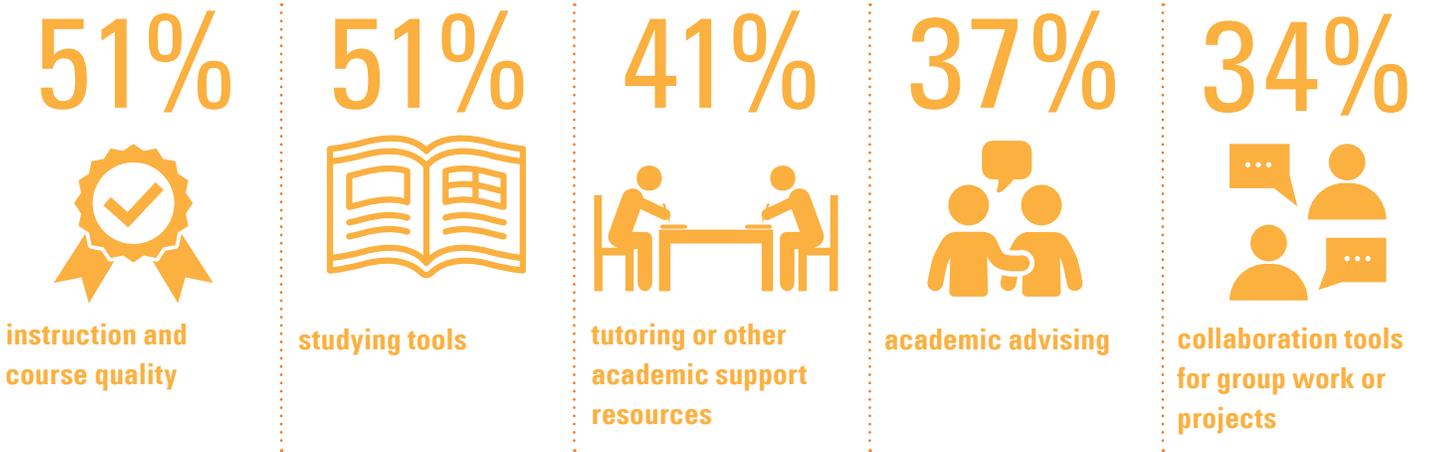
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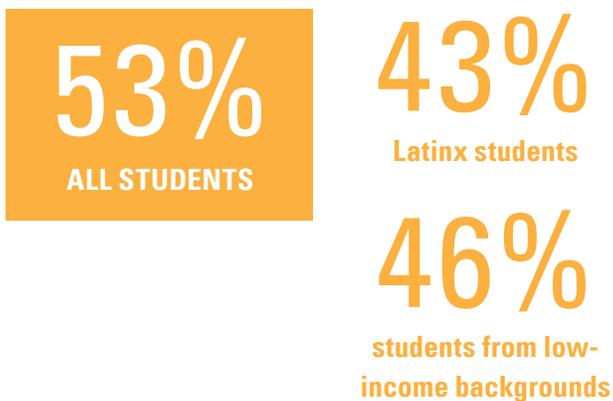
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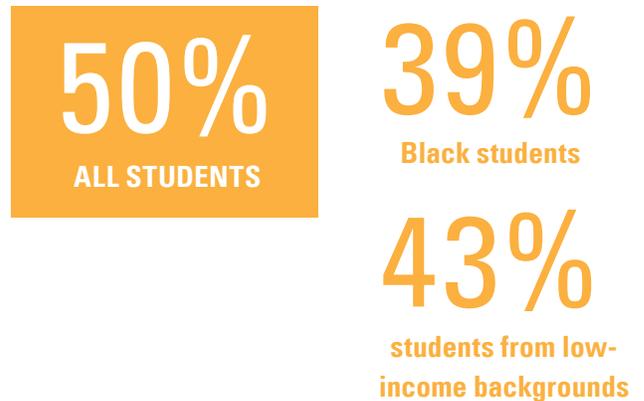


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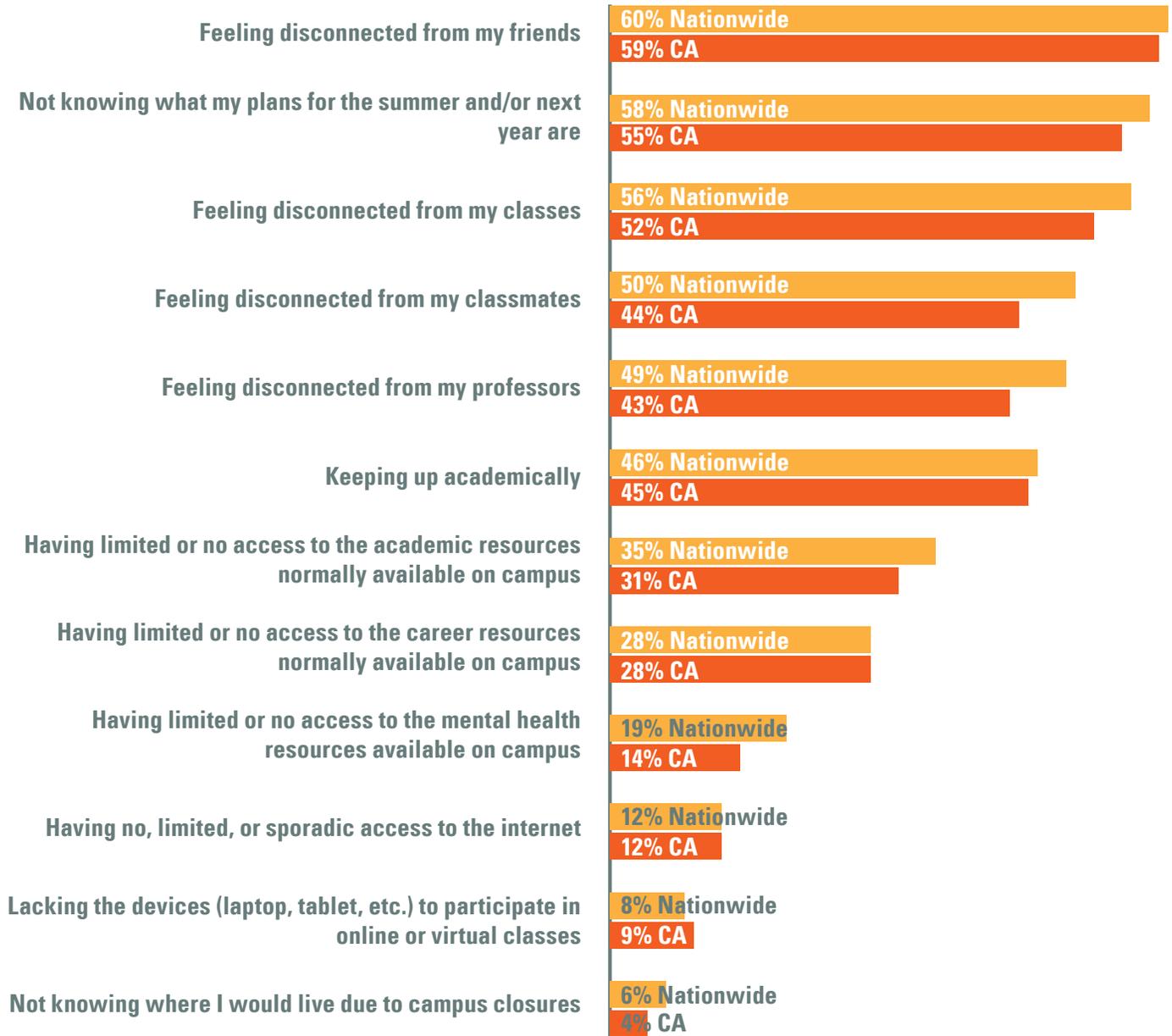
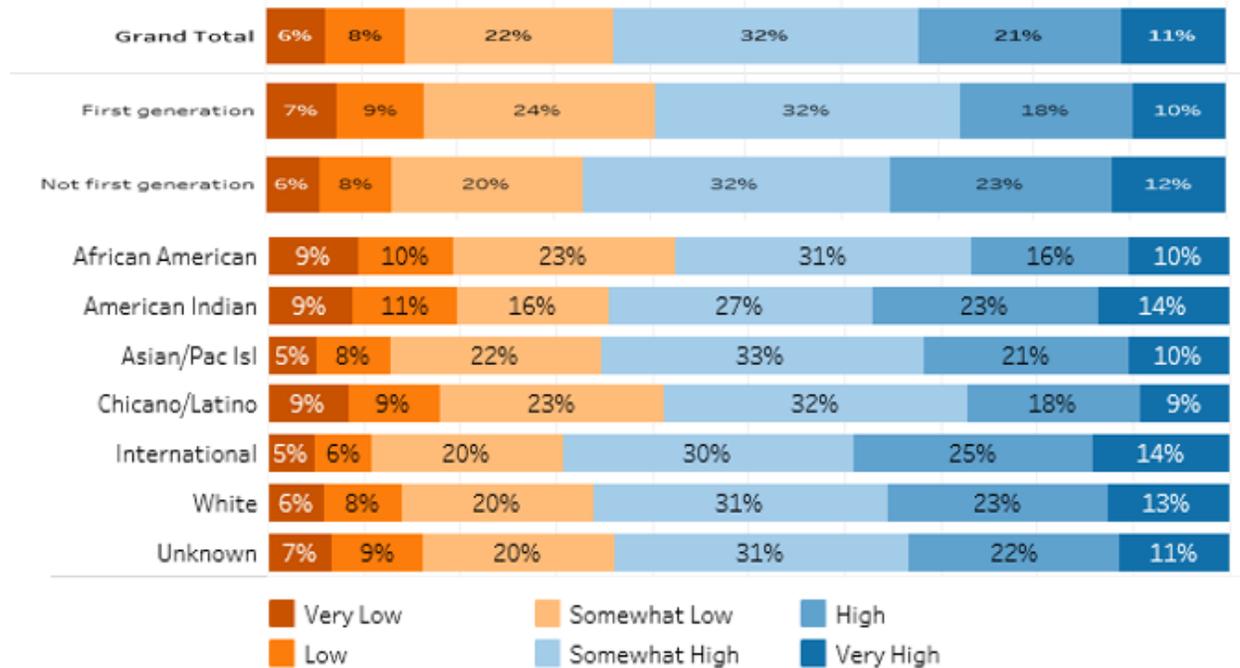


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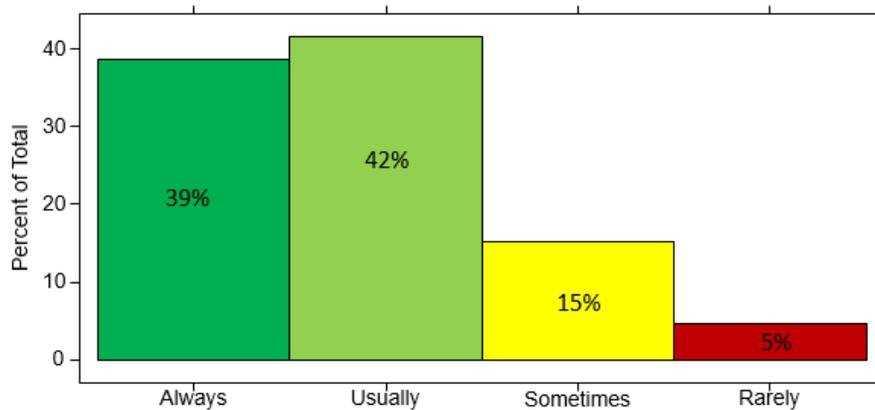
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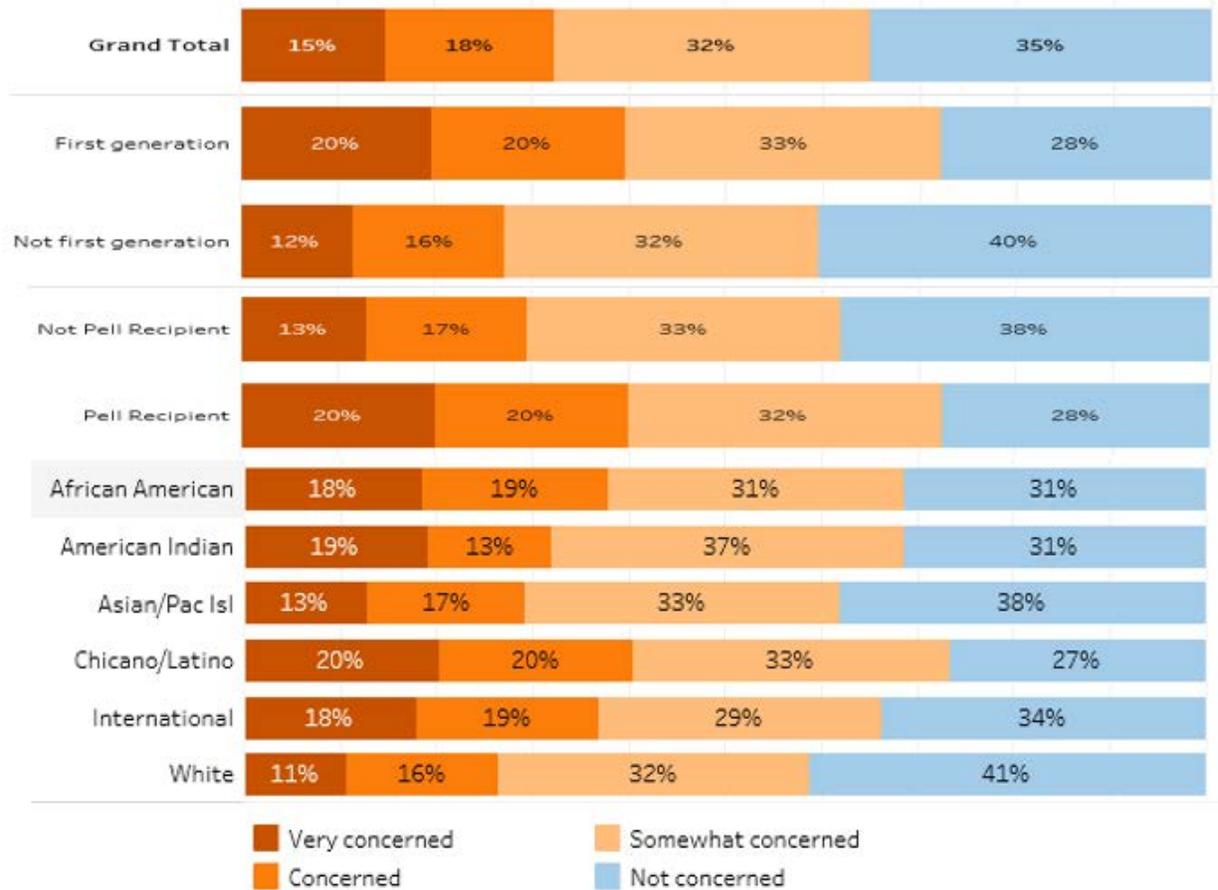
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Figure 8: Spring 2020 UCUES responses to the question “how concerned are you about the possible effects of COVID-19 on your learning by having reliable access to the internet?”



UC campuses attempted to assess and meet the technology needs of students by providing laptops and internet hotspots. For example, UC Berkeley conducted a student technology survey to estimate the funds needed to purchase laptops in its Student Technology Equity Program (STEP). Other UC campuses used a range of outreach efforts—communications with deans and department chairs, student service and advising units, and prompts on campus learning management systems—to identify students who needed technology support. Campuses quickly expanded loaner laptop programs and provided financial support to ensure students could get the necessary equipment to support their remote instruction. For graduate students, these equipment needs varied, particularly depending on their disciplinary field, research, or teaching needs.

In addition, 35 percent of all undergraduates were very concerned about having access to an appropriate study space, but it was at least ten points higher for new generation students (see figure 9). These challenges affected students’ ability to fully engage in synchronous remote instruction activities and created greater anxiety when it came to assessment, particularly proctored exams.

From: Manny Rodriguez
Sent: Friday, November 20, 2020 10:01 AM
To: CA Broadband Council <CABroadbandCouncil@state.ca.gov>
Cc: Parshan Khosravi
Subject: Higher Education Coalition public comment for CA Broadband Plan

Dear California Broadband Council,

On behalf of ETW, UCSA and a coalition of student groups, family groups, education equity advocates, community-based organizations and higher education partners we are submitting the attached public comment for the California Broadband Council.

This document includes an overview of our key recommendations, The Education Trust—West’s finding from our COVID-19 student survey, as well as an excerpt from the September 16th Agenda Item on UC Planning and Evaluation of COVID-19 which covers student survey results on digital divide issues.

Please feel free to reach out if we can be of any assistance moving forward.

Best,
Manny

Manny Rodriguez, MPA
Senior Legislative Associate
C: (760) 224-7196

