



Student Basic Needs Annual Report

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About the Office of Higher Education

The Minnesota Office of Higher Education is a cabinet-level state agency providing students with financial aid programs and information to help them gain access to postsecondary education. The agency also serves as the state's clearinghouse for data, research and analysis on postsecondary enrollment, financial aid, finance and trends.

The Minnesota State Grant Program is the largest financial aid program administered by the Office of Higher Education, awarding up to \$207 million in need-based grants to Minnesota residents attending eligible colleges, universities and career schools in Minnesota. The agency oversees other state scholarship programs, tuition reciprocity programs, a student loan program, Minnesota's 529 College Savings Plan, licensing and early college awareness programs for youth.

About This Report

This is a legislative-mandated report. As requested by Minnesota Statutes, section 3.197, this report cost approximately \$ \$6,336.99 to prepare, including staff time.

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Executive Summary

Nearly 40% of Minnesota's undergraduate students experience basic needs insecurity (characterized by a lack of access to, or ability to afford, resources like sufficient food, stable housing, reliable transportation, affordable and accessible mental and physical healthcare) that jeopardizes their ability to be academically successful, to reach their educational goals, and to increase their ability to earn a family sustaining wage. While many of Minnesota's colleges and universities, as well as student advocacy groups, community organizations, and state agencies, have implemented strategies to address basic needs insecurity, too many students continue to struggle with persistent financial and basic needs insecurity. This report, created through the collaborative efforts of a legislatively mandated working group, identifies 32 recommendations across eight basic needs domains that, as well as identifying areas for future research or discussion. This combination of both standalone and overlapping strategies for continued state investment reflects the reality that ending basic needs insecurity will require sustained and collaborative efforts from college and universities, the state of Minnesota, and community and industry stakeholders as well.

Introduction

Earning a postsecondary credential can be a powerfully transformative experience for individual students, their families, and their communities. Minnesota residents who have a college degree are more likely to vote (Burden, 2009), less likely to be living in poverty (Minnesota State Demographic Center, 2023), more likely to be employed and earn a family sustaining wage (Office of Higher Education, 2024), and to even report higher levels of physical and mental health (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2024) over the course of their lifetimes. The state of Minnesota also benefits from increasing the number of adults with a college degree increases the state's economic vitality and is correlated with positive community benefits like decreased crime rates and increased civic engagement (Office of Higher Education, 2021).

While the state of Minnesota and its public, private, and tribal colleges and universities have a variety of programs and initiatives designed to encourage prospective students to apply and enroll in postsecondary education, simply attempting to improve access is not enough to increase the number of Minnesotans who earn a postsecondary credential. Increasing the number of students who complete their college degree is a critical step in closing Minnesota's pernicious attainment gap. Realizing Minnesota's attainment goal of seeing 70% of Minnesotans ages 25 to 44 earn a postsecondary certificate or degree (Office of Higher Education, 2024) will require ongoing efforts to ensure that college is accessible, affordable, and that students have the holistic supports needed to be successful.

Students have both academic and personal goals and needs. The ability to be academically successful in college is possible when students are able to meet their basic needs, including having stable housing, reliable transportation, and secure access to food, health care, childcare, and mental health supports as needed. Lack of access to any of these basic needs can increase the likelihood that a student will withdraw prior to earning a degree, often with student loan debt incurred, leaving them more economically vulnerable than they may have been before (Balzer Carr and London, 2020; Maslow, 1943).

According to recent estimates (Office of Higher Education, 2022), nearly 40% of Minnesota's college students struggle to meet at least one of their basic needs on a consistent basis. In light of this data, many of Minnesota's colleges and universities have begun or expanded basic needs supports available to students. These existing supports include resources provided by the 21 colleges that have already earned the Hunger Free Campus Designation¹, the state's investment in the Emergency Assistance for Postsecondary (EAPS) Grant program, and the expansion of mental health supports through Minnesota State's Social Determinants of Student Success and Wellness Program.

While existing efforts represent steps in the right direction, there continue to be unmet basic needs for Minnesota's college and university students. This report satisfies the reporting requirement included in the state appropriation language, as follows:

¹ <https://www.leadmn.org/hungerfreecampus>

Sec. 33. POSTSECONDARY STUDENT BASIC NEEDS WORKING GROUP; REPORT².

Subdivision 1. Direction. By September 1, 2023, the commissioner of the Office of Higher Education shall convene a working group on postsecondary student basic needs. The commissioner shall invite representatives from Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, the University of Minnesota, nonprofit private colleges, Tribal colleges and universities, student organizations, faculty and staff bargaining units, state agencies, and other interested parties as determined by the commissioner to participate in the working group. The working group sunsets on September 1, 2026.

Subd. 2. Duties. The working group must review, assess, and make specific recommendations on strategies to meet the basic needs of higher education students. The report must include a comprehensive plan on how to identify, assess, and support students who are experiencing housing and food insecurity. The report may also include proposals for substantive and technical amendments to Minnesota Statutes, chapters 135A to 137, and any other laws that relate to higher education. The working group may also make specific recommendations with regard to policy changes for the Office of Higher Education and postsecondary institutions.

Subd. 3. Report to legislature. The commissioner of higher education shall submit a report detailing the working group's findings and recommendations to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees having jurisdiction over higher education policy and finance by September 1, 2024.

² [https://www.revisor.mn.gov/laws/2023/0/Session+Law/Chapter/41/2023-08-07 11:22:17+00:00/pdf](https://www.revisor.mn.gov/laws/2023/0/Session+Law/Chapter/41/2023-08-07%2011:22:17+00:00/pdf)

Overview of Student Basic Needs Working Group and Process

Pursuant to H.F. No. 2073 the Minnesota Office of Higher Education (OHE) established a Student Basic Needs Working Group consisting of current college and university students, staff and faculty from Minnesota's public, private, and tribal colleges and universities, members of key community stakeholder groups, and representatives from the Minnesota State College and University system office as well as the Office of Higher Education. Please see Appendix 1 for a full roster of Student Basic Needs Working Group (SBNWG) members. OHE would especially like to thank the student participants for sharing their lived experiences as well as identifying the challenges they see on their campuses.

The SBNWG was charged with reviewing the current landscape of basic need initiatives, identifying areas of unmet or not fully met student needs, and proposing ideas that will help Minnesota implement, sustain, scale, or grow programs to better meet the basic needs of college students across the state. The work of the group was designed to be both generative (identifying a wealth of possible solutions, including examining existing models in other states) and critical (evaluating and prioritizing the ideas that have the highest potential for impact and/or are the most feasible for implementation in Minnesota). Fully developing program proposals or creating budget narratives for identified opportunities was beyond the scope of this group; several of the ideas proposed will require additional working groups of subject matter experts to determine if implementation is viable and at what timeline and with what budget constraints.

The SBNWG met monthly from September 2023 through May 2024, with additional meetings attended by committee members who volunteered to serve on subgroups designed to research specific basic needs areas. Those subgroup areas, identified by members of the working group, included housing, childcare, transportation, healthcare, mental healthcare, food insecurity, and financial stability. The group met asynchronously from May 2024 to August 2024 to finalize recommendations and draft this report.

While the report will be organized around the identified subgroup themes, the SBNWG recognizes that basic needs insecurity is a complex topic and that some students may have overlapping needs in multiple areas, so some proposed recommendations will have an impact in multiple basic needs categories. The group also acknowledges that some populations of students (including students with disabilities, students who have experienced sexual or intimate partner violence, students who are transgender or gender nonconforming, and students who are parenting dependent children) are at higher risk for facing basic needs insecurity. The group also identified a need to develop a statewide basic needs infrastructure in addition to specific basic needs areas described throughout the report. The group was charged to think holistically about needs all students may face, but also to identify where some strategies might have a particular impact on an identified community or population (for example: rural students, students with dependent children, or disabled students). Where possible and applicable, special population impact will be noted in the overview for highlighted proposals, but should not be considered an exhaustive list.

This report will include brief descriptions of all ideas considered and more in-depth overviews of the possible strategies identified by the SBNWG members as being the most relevant to the needs and challenges of Minnesota students.

Building a Basic Needs Infrastructure

With over 425,000 students enrolled in postsecondary education annually in Minnesota, determining the extent of basic needs insecurity, which kinds of basic needs supports students most need, and the scope, scale, and assessment of possible interventions and strategies must be considered long-term work for the state and our higher education systems and institutions.

The SBNWG urges the state to consider adopting a social determinants of educational success model, which is an "upstream approach to cultivate an environment in which fewer students are experiencing basic needs insecurities to begin with, rather than only addressing a student's basic needs when it reaches a crisis point" (California Community Colleges, 2022, p. 11). This kind of approach requires identifying systemic barriers and addressing macro-level factors (such as state financial aid policy, existing structures for accessing public benefit programs, and availability of needed resources in particular communities or geographic areas) to, in the long-term, reduce individual level needs. A social determinants approach to understanding student basic needs also requires the state to recognize the ways that social, cultural, and environmental factors shape how individuals, particularly those from historically and currently excluded or marginalized groups, are impacted by systems. As the state continues to work toward ensuring that basic needs don't stand in the way of earning a college credential, special attention must be paid to populations at higher risk for experiencing financial instability or poverty, including those formerly or currently in foster care, students who are parenting dependent age children, students who were or are experiencing incarceration, students with disabilities, students who identify as LGBTQ, and students from communities with higher levels of unemployment.

To ensure continued progress in understanding what students need, and developing systems and structures to ensure students across the state can access the support to assist them in meeting their basic needs while continuing to make progress on their academic goals, the SBNWG recommends the following strategies.

1. Develop a Basic Needs Survey Instrument and/or Standard Questions for Use by Postsecondary Institutions

Recommendation: Create a student basic needs survey and develop a standard set of questions to assess student food and housing insecurity and monitor trends in student basic needs insecurity across Minnesota's institutions of higher education over time.

New or pilot program: Yes

Program expansion: No

Statutory change required: Possibly, if annual or bi-annual use of the survey is mandated.

Legislative funding required: Yes, would require dedicated OHE staff time for development, implementation, and assessment of survey findings for institutions and an overall state report.

Timeline:

- Develop and test survey instrument and determine implementation plan in consultation with higher education partners: 2025-2026 academic year
- Implement survey and assess findings: 2026-2027 academic year

Rationale: In order to understand the basic needs challenges faced by Minnesota students, we have accurate, timely, and consistent data. In the past, higher education institutions have taken a variety of approaches to getting this data, including creating their own surveys, adding a few basic needs questions to existing surveys, using external tools like the Hope Center's Student Basic Needs Survey or the University of Minnesota's Health's College Student Health survey, or through tracking use of campus resources like food pantries. Creating a survey instrument and an inventory of standard questions that can be embedded in existing surveys will allow for regular collection of consistent data as well as the creation of both local and statewide reports, critical to assessing both current student needs and the success of ongoing efforts to reduce basic needs insecurity.

2. Create and Fund Basic Needs Staff Position Housed at the Office of Higher Education

Recommendation: Create and fund a 1.0 FTE position to coordinate and oversee ongoing basic needs work, including convening cross agency and cross sector working groups, collecting and analyzing data and outcomes for basic needs initiatives, and identifying additional opportunities for programming and policies to reduce student basic needs insecurity.

New or pilot program: Yes

Program expansion: No

Statutory change required: No

Legislative funding required: Yes, would require funding 1.0 FTE role housed at the Office of Higher Education

Timeline:

- July – October 2025: Develop position description, post position, and begin hiring process
- Winter 2025-2026: On-board position

Rationale: Many of the recommendations in this report, if implemented, will require significant staff capacity and project management skills. This position would be housed at the Office of Higher Education in order to be best situated to convene and lead cross agency and cross sector working groups, to identify and pursue external grant opportunities related to basic needs work, to lead assessment of basic needs programs, and to collaborate with partners nationwide engaged in ongoing basic needs and economic justice work.

3. Create Working Group to Develop Plan for Streamlining Student Access to Public Benefits Programs

Recommendation: Issue a legislative mandate to require the development of a plan increase access of public benefits programs by college students to help alleviate basic needs insecurity.

New or pilot program: No

Program expansion: Yes, expansion of Minn. Stat. 136F.202

Statutory change required: Yes

Legislative funding required: Yes, to support working group convening and support for OHE Basic Needs staff person.

Timeline:

- Implement working group in spring 2026, pending hire of basic needs staff member
- Working group convening spring 2026-summer 2027
- Report to Legislature with recommendations for state action by summer 2027

Rationale: According to the federal government (Government Accountability Office, 2024), there is a significant population of low-income college students who are eligible to access means tested public benefits programs like SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), WIC (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children), and other programs designed to provide income assistance, housing, or childcare support. Nationally over 2 million students do not access the benefits they are eligible for, leaving over \$3 billion in benefits unclaimed (Higher Learning Advocates, 2024). This working group, led by the OHE Basic Needs staff member (requested above) would be tasked with:

- identifying ways to increase student awareness of existing programs they are already eligible for
- identifying ways colleges can use FAFSA data to proactively inform students of benefits eligibility
- exploring ways to use FAFSA data to streamline access to state benefits programs
- identify barriers to accessing public benefits programs for college students as well as opportunities for flexibility within existing processes that would promote student access.

Increasing student use of financial supports already available through state and federal programs will allow for students to make more efficient use of their financial aid, reduce student loan debt, and potentially reduce demand for basic needs supports on campuses.

4. Fund Creation of Basic Needs Toolkit for Developing Robust Campus Basic Needs Infrastructure

Recommendation: Using the California Community Colleges Toolkit³, New Jersey Basic Needs Playbook⁴ and Basic Needs Programs & Services CAS Standards⁵ as references, convene a working group to create and maintain a Minnesota specific toolkit and guide that centralizes existing research, identifies current in-state models and

³ https://www.cccstudentmentalhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Basic-Needs-Toolkit-2022_0606-1.pdf

⁴ nj.gov/highereducation/documents/pdf/NJ_Students_Basic_Needs_Support_Playbook_Feb_2022.pdf

⁵ <https://store.cas.edu/basic-needs-programs-and-services/>

programs, and lays out a roadmap toward a future state where every campus has a robust one-stop model for basic needs supports.

New or pilot program: Yes

Program expansion: No

Statutory change required: Yes

Legislative funding required: Yes, will require funds to support OHE staff time and fund working group expenses.

Timeline:

- Implement working group in spring 2026
- Working group convening spring 2026-summer 2027
- Report to Legislature with recommendations for state action by summer 2027

Rationale: Using a social determinants of educational success framework requires long-term, intentional planning to address systemic issues that cause basic needs insecurity. These challenges cannot be fully addressed without developing a statewide infrastructure to support the development of comprehensive, statewide strategies based in research and building on existing programs with demonstrated success. This toolkit will also detail steps necessary to achieve a future state where every campus has a one-stop model for ensuring that students can access the supports they need without institutional barriers.

5. Create a Statewide Benefits/Basic Needs Navigators Specifically for College Students

Recommendation: Using existing models in states including California⁶, Oregon⁷, Washington⁸, and Illinois⁹ as examples, create and fund benefits and basic needs navigator positions to assist, in collaboration with campus-based staff, college students across the state with accessing state benefit programs, on-campus support programs, and community resources.

New or pilot program: Yes

Program expansion: No

Statutory change required: Yes

Legislative funding required: Yes

⁶ https://www.cccstudentmentalhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Basic-Needs-Toolkit-2022_0606-1.pdf

⁷ [HB2835 2021 Regular Session - Oregon Legislative Information System \(oregonlegislature.gov\)](#)

⁸ [1559-S2.SL.pdf \(wa.gov\)](#)

⁹ [Benefits Navigators – Illinois Community College Board \(iccb.org\)](#)

Timeline:

- July 2025-December 2025: create position descriptions and post positions
- Spring 2026: hire positions and on-board
- Summer- fall 2026: establish and promote services

Rationale: College students currently underutilize state and federal benefits programs like SNAP, WIC, and other programs that provide fiscal assistance for low-income individuals (Government Accountability Office, 2024). Students may also underutilize campus and community resources due to a lack of knowledge of available resources, uncertainty about how to access those resources, or uncertainty if they qualify. A benefits/basic needs navigator would be available virtually to assist students with finding support in their area as well, using an approach similar to the existing Basic Needs Resource Hub model available to Minnesota State students.

These recommendations will contribute to creating statewide systems and strategies to address basic needs broadly. The SBNWG also has focused suggestions related to specific need categories. Those categories are: financial stability, food insecurity, housing, child care, transportation, healthcare, and mental healthcare.

Basic Needs Area: Financial Security

Basic needs insecurity is, at the most basic level, fundamentally tied to a lack of sufficient financial resources. Thus, any interventions that increase a student's level of financial resources will directly reduce their likelihood of experiencing the basic needs insecurity and needing ongoing campus support. College students face unique financial challenges that impact their overall financial stability and ability to consistently meet their basic needs. This is due to the combination of increasing costs for tuition and fees, decreased efficacy of federal financial aid programs to adequately cover college costs, decreased earning potential due to the time constraints of being a student, and the need to still cover other life expenses like housing, food, and transportation. The stereotype of the "broke college student" isn't a myth, with some 73% of students reporting experiencing financial difficulty while pursuing their degrees (Fletcher, Cornett, & Ashton, 2024). According to the national 2023 Student Financial Wellness Survey, 53% of college students indicate on-going worry about meeting monthly expenses, despite the fact that the majority of students are employed (with 41% reporting that they work 40 hours a week or more). The majority of college students (56%) report that, in an emergency, they would have difficulty obtaining \$500 in either cash or credit to meet an unexpected expense (Fletcher, Cornett, & Ashton, 2024).

The SBNWG believes that identifying ways to increase overall levels of financial security and stability for students is a critical component of helping reduce basic needs barriers that stand in the way of students completing their credentials and increasing their future earning potential. These recommendations, which include modifications to existing state financial aid programs, would help increase financial stability by making the cost of attending a college or university in Minnesota more affordable.

1. Create Plan to Increase FAFSA Completion Rates

Recommendation: Convene a cross functional working group, including representatives from K-12, higher education, community outreach groups, and OHE staff, to create a statewide plan to increase FAFSA completion rates for graduating high school seniors, returning or continuing college students, and adult learners to ensure students are fully accessing available federal and state aid programs.

New or pilot program: Yes

Program expansion: No

Statutory change required: Yes

Legislative funding required: Yes, for staff time to coordinate working group, stipends to support student participation, and developing communication resources.

Timeline:

- Summer-fall 2025: Identify working group lead and working group members
- Academic year 2025-2026: Working group convenes
- Academic year 2026-2027: Create report for best practices and strategies, implement communication campaign

Rationale: According to the National College Attainment Network, Minnesota's high school graduates who don't complete the FAFSA are leaving over \$50 million in federal Pell Grant dollars unclaimed every year (Woodhouse & Debaun, 2024). Students, including adult learners and current or returning college students, who don't complete the FAFSA are also not accessing state financial aid dollars for which they may be eligible. Given the significant challenges with FAFSA during the 2023-2024 academic year, the current uncertainty about the 2025-2026 FAFSA release date, and the resulting negative public perceptions of the financial aid process, it is critical for the state to develop a comprehensive plan to increase knowledge of and confidence in the FAFSA process, as well as to better promote existing state financial aid programs. Increasing FAFSA completion and financial aid participation is an important first step for financial stability, especially for low-income students. While there are existing goals and efforts around FAFSA completion, there is not yet a fully developed, state wide plan that addresses the needs and barriers of both adult learners and recent high school graduates, both groups that are critical to the state's ability to meet our college completion goals.

2. Modify Current Eligibility Guidelines for the North Star Promise Program to Better Serve Low to Moderate Income Families and Increase College Completion

Recommendation: The existing North Star Promise Program offers a tuition and fee free pathway for students attending public colleges or universities and whose families have an adjusted gross income of \$80,000 or less. The SBNWG recommends several modifications to the existing program eligibility guidelines to better address student financial need and to promote college completion:

- Adjust eligibility for program to account for family size
- Increase the minimum credits required for participation to at least six per semester
- Explore viability of making North Star Promise a "first state dollar" financial aid program to create increased capacity for the State Grant program to serve students who are not North Star eligible

New or pilot program: No

Program expansion: Yes

Statutory change required: Yes

Legislative funding required: Likely yes, but OHE would need to run financial aid models to determine impact on funding, particularly as this would intersect with State Grant budgets as well.

Timeline: Implement for 2026-2027 academic year as this will require time to make adjustments to current awarding processes.

Rationale: These proposed changes are based on the following rationale:

- Adjust eligibility for program to account for family size: Under the current North Star Promise guidelines, the \$80,000 AGI is a hard line that results in a scenario where, for example, a single 25 year old with an AGI of \$79,000 would qualify, but a family of six with multiple children in college and an AGI of \$81,000 would not, even though it is highly likely that the dependent students in this scenario have a higher level of financial need. We recommend creating a graduated eligibility table that accounts for family size as well as number of children currently enrolled in Minnesota colleges and universities. Practically speaking, this would likely lower the AGI threshold for single, independent students and increase the

AGI threshold for dependent students, especially those in larger families or with multiple children in college.

- Increase the minimum credits required for participation to at least six per semester: Research shows that students are more likely to persist to graduation when they are enrolled full-time than part-time and when they take more than 12 credits per semester (Attewell & Monaghan, 2016). The current North Star Promise allows students to access this program while being enrolled in as little as one credit hour per semester. This does not incentivize students to have the academic momentum that increases their likelihood of success. It also means that, for the low credit momentum students that do persist, the state, and students, will pay more for the total cost of their degree, as tuition and fee costs increase regularly. Increasing the minimum number of credit hours per semester need to be eligible for the program will incentivize students to consider increasing their academic momentum and their chances for completing a degree. Adoption of this requirement should be made only after determining if there are any possible unintended consequences related to credit hour requirements for participation in other state benefit programs.
- Explore a model of North Star Promise as a "first state dollar" (with Pell and other federal dollars applied first) financial aid program to create increased capacity for the State Grant program to serve students who are not current North Star eligible: The North Star Promise program is currently a "last dollar" program, which means that it covers tuition and fees after other forms of financial aid, including Pell Grants and Minnesota State Grants, are applied. In practice, this means some students get both North Star Promise and State Grant and some will get funds from one program and not the other, depending on institutional type, students SAI, and institutional costs. OHE could explore if there would be advantages to a model where North Star Promise is applied first and State Grant is primarily reserved for students who are not North Star eligible, with the hope of increasing State Grant capacity to better serve middle income students and families.

3. Modify State Grant Formula to Increase Aid for Students who are Not Pell Grant or North Star Promise Eligible

Recommendation: Modify the existing State Grant formula to increase aid eligibility for moderate to middle income students who are not currently eligible for federal Pell Grant or Minnesota State Grant dollars.

New or pilot program: No

Program expansion: Yes

Statutory change required: Yes

Legislative funding required: Yes, OHE would have to run models to determine level of additional funding required.

Timeline: Implementation for 2026-2027 academic year

Rationale: The current North Star Promise and Minnesota State Grant programs provide critical support for students with high levels of financial need but do not adequately meet the needs of Minnesotans whose families are at or just above the state's median income. Annual tuition and fees for these students may be the equivalent of 20% or more of their family net income, requiring students to rely on student loans, work increased hours, or reduce available resources for things like housing, transportation, and food to address educational costs. The

state could begin to address the needs for students not currently receiving grant funds through an expansion of eligibility limits within the State Grant program.

4. Convene a Working group to Explore Improving Opportunities for State Funded Work Study Programs and Other Financial Aid Programs

Recommendation: Convene a working group of subject matter experts, students with lived experience, and campus stakeholders to assess current outcomes for student employment programs and identify ways to increase student participation in work study and other campus employment opportunities.

New or pilot program: Yes

Program expansion: No

Statutory change required: Yes

Legislative funding required: Yes, for OHE staff time to lead group, stipends for student participants, and other expenses incurred for convening working group.

Timeline:

- July 2025- December 2025: Set up working group, identifying members and leader
- January 2026- August 2026: Working group convenes
- October 2026: Legislative report with recommendations

Rationale: Having an on-campus job is associated with higher levels of campus engagement and integration, which leads to higher levels of persistence and graduation, particularly for lower-income students (Scott-Clayton, 2021). However, work study jobs may not be equitably available on all campuses and some campuses struggle to fill work study positions because their hiring processes are cumbersome and wages may not be competitive with off-campus jobs, despite recent increases in the minimum wage in some areas. Working group would be tasked with developing recommendations for improving student access to on-campus employment that pays a competitive wage.

5. Develop a Pilot Program to Provide Basic Monthly Income Support Payments to Student with Significant Financial Challenges and Workforce Barriers

Recommendation: Develop a pilot program (potentially based on California's Hire UP model) to provide regular monthly cash payments to students from populations that face significant barriers to employment and financial stability. Monthly payments would be in addition to need based financial aid programs the student may already participate in.

New or pilot program: Yes

Program expansion: No

Statutory change required: Yes

Legislative funding required: Yes, would require funding to support 1.0 FTE position housed at OHE to develop, administer, and assess the program as well as funding for monthly payments upon implementation of the program.

Timeline:

- Academic year 2025-2026: Hiring staff person, program development
- Pilot year #1 academic year 2026-2027
- Pilot year #2 academic year 2027-2028
- Report on outcomes: Fall 2028

Rationale: Students who face significant barriers to employment, including current or former foster youth, students with disabilities, single parents, homeless students, and formerly incarcerated or justice involved youth, are at increased risk of facing basic need instability and with failing to persist to graduation. Early findings from monthly income support programs in other states demonstrates that providing a monthly cash stipend in addition to other financial aid supports can be effective in addressing housing, food, and other basic needs while also incentivizing students to maintain full-time enrollment and persist to graduation (Coccia, 2023). Programs like this may result in improved economic and employment outcomes for these students, which can result in a decrease in the need to access public benefits programs in the future, suggesting this could be a pragmatic investment for the state. Minnesota could pilot a model with a cohort of students from both the Twin Cities metro area and greater Minnesota to measure impact and possibilities for longer term funding in the 2029 Legislative session.

Basic Needs Area: Food Insecurity

The ability to access affordable, healthy, and culturally appropriate food is essential for basic survival and academic success. Unfortunately, many students are struggling with food insecurity due to financial instability, rising food costs, and lack of access to food resources.

This is both a national and state level problem. According to the most recent report from the Government Accountability Office (GAO), 23% of undergraduate students and 12% of graduate students experience food insecurity, a rate that is more than double the food insecurity rate for all American households (Government Accountability Office, 2024). Of those students reporting food insecurity, the majority were classified as having very low levels of food security characterized by multiple instances of skipping meals because they could not afford food. Unfortunately, due to existing eligibility requirements, many food insecure students (less than two in five, per the GAO) met the criteria for SNAP eligibility and the majority of those that were eligible (59%) did not access those benefits.

Rates of food insecurity are highest among students who attend community colleges and for-profit colleges, but food insecure students can be found in all of Minnesota's higher education institutions, including private colleges. Food insecurity is most prevalent for students who are parenting (28.7%), those who identify as Black or African American (34.6%) or American Indian (32.6%), students with disabilities (36%), and those who are Pell Grant recipients (31.1%). Food insecurity can take the form of skipping meals, not having access to meals that meet daily nutrition or calorie requirements, eating less than desired to limited food availability and/or a desire to feed other family members first, and having uncertainty about how they will secure their next meal. Students who are experiencing hunger and food insecurity are more likely to report higher levels of stress and depression and have difficulty with attention, attendance, and other academic indicators that predict success (McCoy, et al., 2022).

While many campuses have implemented food pantries or pursued funding through Minnesota's Hunger Free Campus Grant, these services may have inconsistent on-going funding or availability of healthy, culturally relevant food options. Federal data indicates that college students underutilize public benefits programs like SNAP and WIC that they are eligible for, likely due to lack of awareness of programs, uncertainty about their eligibility, or challenges navigating the enrollment process (Government Accountability Office, 2018; Government Accountability Office, 2024). Student also typically underutilize off-campus community resources, like food shelves, due to factors including lack of awareness, stigma around needing food resources, or lack of transportation.

Addressing food insecurity at the campus level makes it easier for students to get the help that they need to meet this critical basic need. The state can provide additional support in this area through the implementation of the following recommendations.

1. Expand Hunger Free Campus Program Funding

Recommendation: Increase funding available through the Hunger Free Campus program to improve and extend existing food pantry services on campuses, including implementing requirements for refrigeration options and resources for students with food allergies and cultural/religious nutrition requirements.

New or pilot program: No

Program expansion: Yes

Statutory change required: Yes

Legislative funding required: Yes

Timeline: Implementation could begin in 2025-2026 academic year

Rationale: Campus food resources, including food pantries/food shelves, are an important way to meet immediate needs for student facing food insecurity. However, campuses that lack refrigeration are limited in their ability to provide fresh fruits, vegetables, and meats that are part of a health promoting balanced diet. Additionally, some students require specific foods, which may not be consistently available, to address dietary restrictions due to allergies, health conditions, and/or religious and cultural beliefs. Expansion of the funding will allow campuses to better meet these needs.

2. Create Pilot Program to Offering Food Vouchers for Off Campus Food Access Food Vouchers

Recommendation: Create a competitive grant program to test impact and viability of program to provide food vouchers for off-campus food options to better meet the needs of students who may not be able to access on-campus food pantries due to limits of time, transportation, or geography.

New or pilot program: Yes

Program expansion: No

Statutory change required: Yes

Legislative funding required: Yes

Timeline:

- Academic year 2025-2026: Program design, request for proposals, awarding of grant funds
- Academic year 2026-2027: Pilot year and initial assessment of program use

Rationale: While many campuses may offer on-campus food shelves or options for students to access some immediate food resources, these resources may not be available to all students in an equitable way or throughout the calendar year. These options may also be limited to shelf stable goods that may not meet the needs of students with food allergies or religious or cultural restrictions. Access to on-campus resources may be limited for students who attend classes online, students who attend in the evening, students who lack transportation or the ability to transport food home. Students may also not be able to access resources between semesters or during campus closures on the weekend and holiday breaks. This pilot would support campuses in developing a process for offering meal vouchers for off-campus food options including convenience stores, grocery stores, and other geographically and culturally appropriate options for students with barriers to accessing on-campus resources.

3. Create Working Group to Develop Strategies for Increasing Student Access to Public Benefit Programs

Recommendation: Create a cross-agency working group to identify strategies to increase the enrollment of eligible students in public benefit programs that address food insecurity like SNAP and WIC. Group should consider existing models in other states as well the intersections between financial aid eligibility, enrollment status, and benefits eligibility.

New or pilot program: Yes

Program expansion: No

Statutory change required: Yes

Legislative funding required: Yes, to support staff time and provide stipends to student participants

Timeline:

- Academic year 2025-2026: Establish and convene working group
- October 2026: Report due with recommendations

Rationale: Increasing the use of existing public benefits programs by students who are eligible but not currently participating will help address on-going food insecurity and provide additional support beyond what campuses may be able to provide, giving students a larger safety net. This can be especially critical for students with dependent children, students at campuses without robust food resource programs, and students who may be enrolled less than fulltime. Recently released federal guidance (Federal Student Aid, 2024) on using FAFSA data to increase targeted outreach to eligible students may allow for new innovations and collaboration in this area but may not be implemented consistently statewide, so a working group approach to identify best practices will be useful.

4. Provide Support for Development of Campus-Based Comprehensive Resource Hubs

Recommendation: Using existing models, including SparkPoint at Skyline College¹⁰, support the expansion of current campus-based food pantries into comprehensive resource hubs that will address multiple basic needs while encouraging students to persist to graduation.

New or pilot program: Yes

Program expansion: No

Statutory change required: Yes

¹⁰ <https://skylinecollege.edu/sparkpoint/about/index.php>

Legislative funding required: Yes, could be funded as a competitive grant program, pilot program with a direct appropriation, or as an on-going appropriation

Timeline: Will vary, depending on model of funding chosen

Rationale: Students who are food insecure are likely to have broader financial needs than just food. By creating a dedicated space on campus (with accompanying virtual resources as possible) for students to access food and other supports including financial counseling, assistance with navigating public benefits, support for parenting students, and other relevant services, campuses can holistic support that helps students meet their basic needs and educational goals.

Other ideas:

- Fund online navigator to connect students to community-based resources
- Working group to improve data collection around food insecurity
- Fund pilot for on-campus meal vouchers or expansion of Swipe Out Hunger¹¹ models
- Expand North Star Promise to include stipend for food for students with lower AGI
- Establish minimum food services requirements for campuses
- Fund competitive grant pilot to provide culturally relevant and allergy friendly food options for increasingly diverse student population
- Funding to assist schools to become SNAP E&T service sites and/or SNAP State Outreach Plan Partners

¹¹ <https://www.swipehunger.org/campus-partners/>

Basic Need Area: Housing

Students who lack access to safe, affordable, and consistently available housing or who are experiencing homelessness face significant barriers to achieving their academic goals and earning a college credential. Housing insecurity is broadly defined as not having access to adequate housing and/or having housing costs that take up the majority of an individual's income. Nationally, 8% of undergraduate students report experiencing homelessness in the last 30 days, with the highest rates experienced by students who identify as American Indian or Alaska Native (15%), Black or African American (12%) or those who are gender nonconforming or genderqueer (12.9%) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). Research indicates that as many as 42% of undergraduate students report insecure access to affordable housing and 44% of all undergraduate students worry about their ability to access affordable housing (Fletcher, Cornett, & Ashton, 2024). Given that both housing costs and tuition costs have increased steadily in recent years, even students who qualify for significant amounts of federal and state financial aid may have limited resources to put toward securing safe housing.

Access to safe and reliable housing is particularly challenging for some populations of students, including students who attend community, technical and tribal colleges that don't offer on-campus housing options; students with dependent children who attend institutions that do not offer family housing options; low income students with adverse rental histories; formerly incarcerated students; students who identify as LGBTQ; and students in rural areas that may have a limited supply of available housing.

Addressing housing insecurity is a challenging area for most campuses, as building new on-campus housing requires significant funding and staffing resources and there have been, heretofore, limited options for making it easier and more affordable for students to access off-campus housing.

While there are interesting examples of innovative solutions that have been piloted in other states, it should be noted that the SBNWG was unable to find examples of "quick fixes" in this basic need area. Meaningful progress in addressing housing insecurity will require considering longer term solutions.

1. Create a working group to develop a partnership model for developing low-cost housing on or near campuses

Recommendation: Create cross-functional working group consisting of representatives from OHE, postsecondary institutions, students with lived experience of housing insecurity and/or caring for dependent children, state housing authority and other subject matter experts to propose viable models for collaborating with non-profit organizations and housing developer to create a model and implementation plan for building low cost housing on or near campus with a high need for additional housing.

New or pilot program: Yes

Program expansion: No

Statutory change required: No

Legislative funding required: Yes, support for staffing to facilitate the working group as well as stipends for student participants

Timeline:

- Spring 2025-spring 2026: Convene working group
- Summer 2026: Submit report to Legislature on feasibility of creating additional housing options for low-income students based on partnership model with community organizations and housing developers using low-income housing tax credits as a funding source

Rationale: Using "The Huddle" housing model from California¹² (a collaboration between the Raise the Barr Foundation, Brinshore Development, and Yolo County Housing) or the College Housing Northwest ARCS¹³ as example programs, this working group would work toward developing a model that expands opportunities for the expansion of on or near campus housing opportunities, with a particular focus on housing options for students with dependent children, that will not require a prohibitive investment from campuses or educational systems.

2. Create Housing Grants for Students with High Financial Need

Recommendation: Create a financial aid program to offer need-based grants to help defray the cost of on or off-campus housing for students with high financial need or who are facing precarious housing access or homelessness.

New or pilot program: Yes

Program expansion: No

Statutory change required: Yes, creation of new financial aid program

Legislative funding required: Yes, funding for grants and administrative cost for OHE staffing to develop and implement the program

Timeline:

- 2025-2026 academic year: Program design, development, and planning
- 2026-2027 academic year: Grants become available

Rationale: Students who have high financial need may still have unmet financial need when the cost of on-campus or comparable off-campus housing are considered. This grant program would help support the cost of housing, which will encourage students to work less so they can be enrolled full-time, which has been demonstrated to increase a student's potential for graduating. This grant would supplement existing state financial aid programs like the North Star Promise and State Grant. This recommendation would be especially useful for students with dependent children who require appropriate housing for their family and may have limited on campus housing options.

¹² <https://www.raisethebarr.org/thehuddle>

¹³ <https://chnw.org/arcs/>

3. Increase Funding Levels for Emergency Grant Program to Increase Grant Awards to Reflect Real Housing Costs

Recommendation: Increase funding for the Emergency Assistance for Postsecondary Students (EAPS) grant program to allow for participating campuses to offer larger awards that will more adequately meet a student's needs during a housing crisis.

New or pilot program: No

Program expansion: Yes

Statutory change required: No

Legislative funding required: Yes

Timeline: With funding, could be implemented in Fall 2025

Rationale: Many campuses have emergency grant programs that are designed to help a student meet an immediate need or crisis related to basic needs, including housing. Too often the size of the available emergency grant (award maximums generally range from \$500 to \$1000) is not sufficient to help meet a student's housing need, given that the average cost for a one-bedroom apartment in Minnesota is now well over \$1000 in the state's metro areas (Rent Data, 2024) with single family homes over \$2000 per month in the Twin Cities and surrounding suburbs. Increased funding will allow campuses to increase their maximum emergency grant award to better meet a student's real housing need, thus preventing eviction and reducing homelessness.

The SBNWG also discussed other possible solutions for future exploration. This list includes:

- Creating a statewide resource (e.g. website, resource guide, dedicated staff person, training program) for providing students with legal support for housing issues
- Exploring the development of a Twin Cities metro area housing option for community and technical college students (centrally located and open to any student enrolled in a Minnesota State community or technical college)
- Funding development of program to educate students on housing issues, tenant's rights, preventing eviction and homelessness, along with funding to encourage students to participate
- Creation of microgrant program to assist students with security deposits
- Development of housing support model for students attending rural campuses with limited housing availability
- Increase the living and miscellaneous expense allowance for recipients of the Minnesota State Grant program from current level of 115% of federal poverty guidelines

Basic Needs Area: Childcare

According to recent research, approximately 22% of college students are caregivers for dependent children (Reichlin Cruse L. H., 2019). Students who are also parents may face significant barriers to completing their college degree due to the financial challenges associated with paying for childcare as well as increased costs for everything from housing to groceries to transportation. Childcare costs are high and incomes are often low; Minnesota has the fourth highest cost for infant care in the nation and families spend upwards of 20% of their annual income on care for one infant (Williams, et al., 2022). In recent years, more than 50% of single student parents who applied for state financial aid had annual incomes under \$20,000 (Whelan, 2021) and of the students who received SNAP benefits between Sept-Dec 2021, 39% reported having a child at home¹⁴.

Parenting students may also have additional constraints on their time and ability to access campus resources as they must balance their own academic schedule along with the demands of family life. According to recent research by the Education Trust, parenting students must work nearly 50 hours every week in order to cover tuition and childcare costs, leaving little time for completing assignments and studying. Ensuring that parenting students can complete their postsecondary credential and enjoy the increased earning potential that comes with a college degree is beneficial for the student, their family, and the state, as those students and their children are then less likely to need to access public benefits programs (Reichlin Cruse, et al., 2019).

Parenting students frequently cite both cost of childcare and childcare availability as critical concerns as they pursue their college degree (Reichlin Cruse, Gault, Suh, & De Mario, 2018). Minnesota's childcare costs are high compared to other states, especially the cost of care for those under two years of age (The Education Trust, 2022). With the number of campus based childcare centers on the decline, only 19 of 79 campuses in Minnesota that award associate's degrees or higher offer childcare on campus. Most students will need to look to family or community based childcare options, which may not be readily available, affordable, or accessible, particularly for students in rural areas. While mandating that campuses offer on-campus childcare options is likely not feasible due to costs and space constraints, the SBNWG does support the following recommendations for consideration:

1. Create and Fund Grant Program to Cover Tuition and Fees for Early Childhood Education Students

Recommendation: Create tuition and fee free pathway for students in early childhood education or child development programs to better meet labor market demands

New or pilot program: Yes

Program expansion: No

Statutory change required: Yes

¹⁴ Unpublished data provided by the Minnesota Department of Human Resources on March 3, 2022

Legislative funding required: Yes

Timeline:

- 2025-2026 academic year to design, plan, and stand up program
- 2026-2027 academic year funding available for students

Rationale: According to research from the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis (Tran, 2023), Minnesota's child care capacity levels have been steadily declining in the last decade. The number of available spots for infants and children have declined over 5% statewide, with greater capacity declines noted in Greater Minnesota than the Twin Cities metro area. While the pandemic negatively impacted the childcare industry and led to the closure of hundreds of home-based child care programs, the industry continues to struggle with meeting demand due in part to challenges with hiring qualified child care staff and early childhood educators. This program would help attract more students to help build a stronger pipeline of qualified educators to increase the capacity of the state's child care centers and home-based care options. Early childhood education and child development programs are currently available at approximately 30 institutions across Minnesota and there is capacity for the likely increased enrollment in these programs following increased financial aid availability.

2. Increase Funding for the Postsecondary Child Care Grant Program

Recommendation: Increase funding for the state's existing Postsecondary Child Care Grant program to serve more students and to better address the real costs of infant and child care across the state.

New or pilot program: No

Program expansion: Yes

Statutory change required: No

Legislative funding required: Yes

Timeline: Could be implemented in the 2025-2026 academic year

Rationale: The current level of funding for the Postsecondary Child Care grant program is insufficient to meet demand and has award levels capped lower than average child care costs across the state. Participating campuses regularly exhaust funds and are forced to put students on waitlists or to deny their requests. Additionally, the Postsecondary Child Care grant program has an average award of \$5381 with a maximum award at \$6500 per academic year, but average childcare costs in Minnesota range from \$7904 to \$20,124 (Child Care Aware of Minnesota, 2024) depending on the age of the child and region of the state where care is provided. Award levels should be increased, particularly for students who need infant care, which is more expensive than care for older children.

3. Create a Working Group to Simplify Access to Existing State Programs to Subsidize Child Care Costs

Recommendation: Create a cross agency working group to identify ways to help clarify program requirements and simplify access to existing state programs that support low-income student parents in accessing child care subsidies. Collaborate with existing MN SPA group to ensure representation of student voices.

New or pilot program: Yes

Program expansion: No

Statutory change required: Yes

Legislative funding required: Yes, to support stipends for student participants in working group.

Timeline:

- Convene in academic year 2025-2026
- Recommendation report by October 1, 2026

Rationale: Parenting students report multiple challenges with accessing existing the Child Care Assistance Program, including lack of clarity about program eligibility (particularly for students who might also be accessing other public benefits programs), overly long wait times for approval that may mean they lose their spot in their chosen childcare center or have to delay their enrollment in a postsecondary program, and cumbersome and confusing requirements for maintaining their eligibility for subsidies. This group would be tasked with consulting with current parenting students to fully identify challenges and barriers to access and then to create a report for the Legislature with recommendations to improve access and increase the number of parents able to use existing supports to support their postsecondary enrollment.

4. Fund Free Universal Childcare for Ages 0-5

Recommendation: Become the first state in the nation to implement a free universal childcare program that provides access to high quality early childhood care and education for all Minnesota families.

New or pilot program: Yes

Program expansion: No

Statutory change required: Yes

Legislative funding required: Yes

Timeline: Extended as it would require several years to plan, build program capacity, and fully implement.

Rationale: Access to high quality early childcare and education programs is good for children, their families and the state. Children who have access to high quality programs are better prepared for k-12 education and parents who have low or no cost access to these programs are more able to participate in the labor market, to pay off debts including student loans, and to make progress toward meeting other long-term financial goals (like home

ownership) that contribute to the economic vitality of the state. Minnesota's childcare costs are some of the highest in the nation and existing subsidies are not enough to meet the needs of most Minnesota families. Minnesota could lead the nation by developing a free (or nearly free) model for universal access to care for children ages 0-5, which would incentivize current residents to remain in the state, attract new residents, and strengthen the state's labor pool, all of which will have long-term positive economic impacts for local communities and the state as whole.

Addressing the childcare needs of parenting students is not something that colleges and universities can do alone and any solutions will require state investment to help make care more affordable and accessible. Recommendations are aimed at simplifying students' access to needed educational and childcare supports to save them money and decrease their time to earn a degree. The SBNWG also considered the following additional recommendations which could be included in a comprehensive plan:

- Fund microgrant program for emergency parenting-specific supplies (e.g. diapers, formula), which could be made available through existing campus food pantries, parenting student support offices, or campus healthcare centers.
- Create cross agency task force to identify solutions to increase childcare resources and capacity statewide.
- Research impact of priority class registration options for parenting students and parenting student course taking patterns to determine ways to increase success and retention.
- Fund pilot for on-campus summer camp programs for children to align with summer classes for parenting students
- Funding to support creation of child-friendly spaces on campuses
- Funding for dedicated parenting student advisors for all campuses
- Create pilot to develop and implement college student specific affordable or free parenting classes (lactation, time management, legal protections, healthy relationships)
- Create pilot to develop and fund offering ECFC programs on college campuses

Basic Needs Area: Transportation

Access to safe, reliable, and affordable transportation can present a challenging barrier to college access and success. According to the national 2023 Student Financial Wellness survey (Fletcher, Cornett, & Ashton, 2024), 13% of undergraduates report missing multiple classes due to unreliable transportation. This is particularly true for low-income students, students in rural and suburban areas, students with disabilities, students who have dependent children or other care-giving responsibilities, and students who attend non-residential campuses. In a recent survey from LeadMN (LeadMN, 2021), roughly 10% of community college students reported experiencing transportation challenges. While the increased availability on online classes (at some institutions) is likely to have helped trim transportation costs for some students, full participation in campus life, plus the ability to access student supports like food pantries, counseling, health services, and academic advising, means that a student must be able to make it to campus when their academic and social needs require it.

The SBNWG identified several common transportation challenges faced by students across the state:

- Lack of public transportation options in some regions, including limited service lines and times, as well as campuses not located on or near an existing transportation line. This is an especially pronounced need for students with disabilities who may require adaptive transportation options.
- Increasing costs for fuel, maintenance, and insurance for students with personal vehicles
- Lack of infrastructure at some campuses to support alternative forms of transportation like e-bikes, short term rental scooters and bikes, and other micro transportation options.

In order to address these challenges, the SBNWG has identified several potential options for consideration.

1. Increased Funding for Emergency Grant Programs

Recommendation: Increase funding for the Emergency Assistance for Postsecondary Students (EAPS) grant program to allow for participating campuses to offer larger awards that will more adequately meet a student's needs for transportation related expenses (e.g. repair of personal vehicle) and will allow for more students to request emergency grants.

New or pilot program: No

Program expansion: Yes

Statutory change required: No

Legislative funding required: Yes

Timeline: With funding, could be implemented in Fall 2025

Rationale: An unexpected vehicle repair can represent a significant financial challenge for many students, due both to the actual expense incurred to get the vehicle fixed and the potential for lost wages (if they are unable to get to work) or additional expenses (ride share, taxi, or public transportation costs) to get to work and school while the vehicle is not operational. According to the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis (Chinander & Garcia

Luna, 2023), costs for routine car vehicle repairs have risen significantly since 2020, up 17% in the last four years, making unexpected car repairs the most common financial concern in a recent survey.

As noted in the section on housing recommendations, many campuses have emergency grant programs funded (all or in part) through the Emergency Assistance for Postsecondary Students (EAPS). Transportation emergencies are generally an allowable request for funds but existing caps on size of emergency grant awards (which can be as low as \$500) may mean that students aren't able to fully meet the need for a more expensive repair. Limited emergency grants funds also means that institutions may exhaust available resources early in the academic year and may not have any emergency grants available for some portions of the year. We recommend increasing funding for the EAPS program to allow for higher awards (with appropriate documentation) and for more students to be funded. This recommendation is especially important for schools with large populations of commuter students and schools where public transportation options are not readily available or convenient for student users.

2. Allocate Funding to Subsidize Public Transportation for College Students

Recommendation: Create funding model to subsidize public transportation passes for students enrolled in any college or university participating in state financial aid programs.

New or pilot program: Yes

Program expansion: No

Statutory change required: Yes

Legislative funding required: Yes

Timeline: Could be implemented during the 2025-2026 academic year

Rationale: Eliminating the cost of public transportation will eliminate one financial barrier for students, particularly those who do not have consistent access to personal vehicles or for whom the cost of on or near campus parking is an additional barrier. This recommendation would likely have the most benefit for students in urban areas where there is a great density of public transportation options.

3. Allocate Funding for Same Day Micro-Grants Related to Emergency Transportation Needs

Recommendation: Allocate funding to allow campuses to offer microgrants (grants under \$50) to assist students with addressing same day transportation barriers that might prevent them from getting to class.

New or pilot program: Possibly, depending on model

Program expansion: Possibly, depending on model

Statutory change required: Maybe

Legislative funding required: Yes

Timeline: With funding, could be implemented in academic year 2025-2026

Rationale: This program would provide same-day support for students to get assistance with dealing with an emergent barrier to getting to class (examples could include being out of gas, having a flat tire, having a car that won't start, or missed a bus). Micro-grants to cover the cost of a gas card, a ride share app, or other one time use transportation option would assist students with meeting an immediate need while not counting against their future use of emergency grant funds (for schools that limit a student to a certain number of emergency grant requests per semester or over life time enrollment) and without the 24-48 hour processing time many emergency grant programs require to process requests and issue funds to the student. Program model would be designed in collaboration with campus subject matter experts to determine how to best issue microgrants in a way that allows for verification of need as well as a quick turnaround time and then follow up with students to connect them to services to best address their long-term transportation needs. This idea could be built into the existing EAPS program or as a standalone program. This recommendation could be tested as a pilot program or offered as a competitive grant opportunity to test program design options.

4. Create Transportation Best Practices Working Group with Particular Emphasis on Rural and Suburban Transportation Eco-systems

Recommendation: Create a cross functional working group consisting of campus representatives, community partners, students, and other stakeholders to identify effective strategies for improving the transportation eco-system and access to transportation options for postsecondary students, particularly those in rural or suburban areas.

New or pilot program: Yes

Program expansion: No

Statutory change required: Yes

Legislative funding required: Yes, support for staff time for convening and facilitating working group, stipends for student participants, and other costs associated with meeting working group deliverables.

Timeline:

- Implement working group in 2025-2026 academic year
- Report and best practices guide completed by December 2026

Rationale: Addressing the transportation needs of students, particularly those in rural and suburban areas without easily accessible public transportation options, is an on-going challenge for many campuses. Improving local transportation eco-systems requires collaboration with city and county transportation experts/providers and must be grounded in a deep understanding of student needs, barriers, and existing options that may be under resourced or underutilized. This group would be tasked with identifying options to improve safe and reliable transportation options for students, with a particular emphasis on the needs of students without private vehicles and campuses that are not currently easily accessible by existing public transportation options. The deliverables for this group would include a summary report with recommendations and the creation of a best practices and/or transportation planning document for campus use.

The SBNWG recognizes that the transportation basic needs category is complex to address, given that a student's needs may be highly individualized due to their location, their ability to access public transportation or

a private vehicle, and whether they may have limitations due to physical disabilities or their own ability to drive. We also recognize that some of these barriers are beyond the capacity of a campus to address on their own and will likely require significant collaboration with local municipal entities and other transportation services providers. The group also discussed the following topics/recommendations that could be part of a comprehensive response to meeting transportation needs:

- Providing state or campus funding to support adult driver's education programs, particularly for students who may have language barriers or lack access to a personal vehicle.
- Updating the funding model for PSEO transportation to provide more equity and to increase access to PSEO opportunities
- Funding to support student's purchase or long-term rental of personal mobility devices (bikes, e-bikes, scooters)
- Funding for micro mobility infrastructure and last-mile access to campus, which could include partnerships with companies that rent bikes or scooters or potentially the creation of campus owned bike or scooter fleets for student usage.
- Research to identify needs, barriers, and subsidy options for students with disabilities to access affordable and available transportation
- Funding to support student-driven solutions, such as community carpooling, proposed by student groups, possibly through a competitive grant or pilot program approach to identify viable options.

Basic Needs Area: Healthcare

College students have a variety of healthcare needs that, if unmet, are likely to negatively impact their ability to attend classes and make academic progress. Students need affordable, culturally appropriate, and accessible options to: treat acute illnesses and injuries, manage chronic health conditions and medication needs, and complete screenings to ensure sexual health and wellness. The college student population is diverse and includes young adults who are living on their own and managing their own healthcare needs for the first time, students who are uninsured or uncertain how to access or use insurance coverage, students who are dealing with chronic or pre-existing health conditions, students who are pregnant or students who are actively trying to prevent pregnancy, students dealing with substance use disorders, and students who just want to access routine health care services to prevent illness or disease. On-campus health care services vary widely within the state, with some smaller campus currently unable to provide regular access to physicians or medical screenings. Some students may face difficulty accessing health care services in their community due to a lack of care providers, or challenges with transportation, insurance, or other financial resources.

In order to help address the healthcare needs of Minnesota's college students, the SBNWG supports the following recommendations:

1. Funding to improve collection and assessment of student health data statewide to identify trends, student needs, and student usage of on-campus health resources

Recommendation: Create a data collection and assessment process to gather statewide data on college student health needs, including mental health concerns and substance use behaviors, to identify trends, unmet needs, and how students currently access on-campus, virtual, and community health resources.

New or pilot program: Yes

Program expansion: No

Statutory change required: Yes

Legislative funding required: Yes

Timeline:

- 2025-2026 academic year to develop data collection tool and process, in collaboration with campus stakeholders
- 2026-2027 academic year to collect and assess data

Rationale: While individual campuses have conducted health surveys of their students, there is currently a lack of statewide data related to college student health trends and needs. Collecting statewide data is critical to building a more robust healthcare ecosystem for college students and to better inform campus, community, and state agencies about the particular needs of this population.

2. Create and fund a statewide 24/7 nurse line for college students

Recommendation: Create a free 24/7 nurse care line available for any postsecondary student in Minnesota, regardless of institution or insurance coverage, for students to get advice on addressing emergent health concerns.

New or pilot program: Yes

Program expansion: Yes

Statutory change required: Yes

Legislative funding required: Yes

Timeline: Unsure, more information will be required to develop timeline and to determine lead agency to implement

Rationale: Students, especially those who are living away from home for the first time or who do not have an established care provider in their area, need a resource to get immediate assistance when dealing with an emerging health concern. Even students who have on-campus health care options may not be able to access those options in the evening, on weekends, or during campus breaks. A nursing line can be a first step for students to determine if they need immediate medical care or if they can self-treat (and how to do so). The nursing line can also provide information on community health care options or suggestions for follow up care.

3. Create cross agency working group top focus on expanding telehealth access for students

Recommendation: Create a multi-agency working group (including Minnesota Department of Health, Office of Higher Education, Department of Human Services, and college/university partners) to identify solutions to expand availability of free or low-cost telehealth options for both mental and physical healthcare for college students.

New or pilot program: Yes

Program expansion: No

Statutory change required: Yes

Legislative funding required: Yes

Timeline:

- Fall 2025: Identify working group leader and members
- Spring 2026- fall 2026: Convene working group
- Early 2027: Report due to Legislature

Rationale: Telehealth services can be a useful way to increase healthcare access, particularly for students in rural areas, students with disabilities, students with transportation challenges, online students, and students who are parenting. This working group would be tasked with identifying current barriers to telehealth access,

opportunities to better meet college student needs, and how to integrate telehealth options with existing or expanded campus-based services.

4. Provide funding for campuses to offer no-cost safer sex supplies, STI screenings, and pregnancy tests.

Recommendation: Provide funding for campuses to increase student access to culturally responsive and gender affirming reproductive health care and pregnancy/STI prevention services and resources.

New or pilot program: Possibly

Program expansion: Could be an expansion of existing legislation related to campus provisions for menstrual care products or a stand-alone program.

Statutory change required: Yes

Legislative funding required: Yes

Timeline: Begin implementation in the 2025-2026 academic year

Rationale: Research findings indicate that the majority of college students report having been sexually active since enrolling in postsecondary education and that a significant percentage of sexually active college students do not consistently practice safer sex methods (Caico, 2014). College age students are at a significantly higher risk for contracting sexually transmitted infections than the general population (Pflieger, Cook, Niccolai, & Connell, 2013), and may go without regular gynecological care (Lindley, et al., 2009) or STI screenings. Providing no-cost access to safer sex supplies, STI screenings, and pregnancy tests can help lower students' risk for unintended pregnancy, reduce the spread of STIs, and ensure that students are given appropriate referrals as needed for follow up care.

Other ideas discussed by the SBNWG include:

- Creating a state funded position for an online medical system navigator to assist students with insurance questions, locating appropriate care, and giving resources for handling medical debt.
- Develop a working group to define best practices and minimum requirements for campus-based healthcare services
- Fund program to support students in substance use recovery, potentially based on current [Collegiate Recovery Program](#) model at Minneapolis College or [Step-Up Program](#) at Augsburg
- Fund and require all campus to make fentanyl test strips and overdose intervention resources available and accessible.
- Explore adopting Express Lane Eligibility for Medicaid enrollment model

Basic Needs Area: Mental Healthcare

Compared to the general adult population in the US, college students are at higher risk for experiencing mental health challenges (Alonso, 2023) including loneliness, suicidal ideation, the emergence of chronic mental health conditions, and problems associated with binge drinking behavior (College Drinking Prevention, 2024). The need

for increased campus support for students dealing with emergent or chronic mental health concerns has been an area of concern for campus practitioners, faculty, administrators as well as statewide student groups since before the 2020 onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic, however, has exacerbated these challenges, with more students reporting experiences with social isolation, depression, anxiety and other mental health challenges (Chawla, 2024). According to the national Healthy Minds survey of college students, over 40% of college students report symptoms of depression, 36% have an anxiety disorder, 29% have engaged in self-harm, 14% have eating disorders, and 14% have experienced suicidal ideation in the previous year (Eisenberg, Lipson, Heinze, & Zhou, 2022). Within Minnesota, a survey from LeadMN in 2021 found that, of students who'd considered dropping out within the six months prior to the survey, the primary reason list was "emotional stress" which was a driving factor for 33% of respondents, ranking even higher than "financial pressure" (18%) (LeadMN, 2021). Among University of Minnesota Twin Cities students who report having a mental health issue, 58.7% say that the issue impacts their academics (University of Minnesota Boynton Health , 2021).

.College students need access to affordable, culturally relevant, and trauma-informed mental health services including options for counseling, crisis intervention, medicine management, and other supports to ensure their mental and emotional wellness while they pursue their academic and career goals. Access to these supports can vary widely by campus and geographic area of the state and many campuses do not have the current capacity to meet student demand for services.

The SBNWG recognizes that increasing capacity will require extended planning, funding, and collaboration between campuses, the state, and community providers, as well as exploring virtual options to extend resources to smaller institutions and rural areas.

1. Dedicate Funding to Increase Mental Healthcare Capacity on Campuses

Recommendation: Allocated funding specifically for campus mental health supports, potentially through direct appropriation or a competitive grant opportunity that provides on-going funding.

New or pilot program: Yes

Program expansion: No

Statutory change required: Yes

Legislative funding required: Yes

Timeline: Depends on funding model.

Rationale: Increasing the availability of mental healthcare services on campuses is necessary but challenging in an era where many institutions face significant budgetary constraints. Given the rising demand for mental health supports, existing mental healthcare services do not meet current demand levels and campuses need additional funding to determine how to best scale existing services and implement new approaches.

2. Funding to Increase Telehealth and Virtual Counseling Access for Students

Recommendation: Dedicate funding to increase student access to mental health services, including telepsychiatric support, via telehealth and counseling platforms.

New or pilot program: No

Program expansion: Yes

Statutory change required:

Legislative funding required: Yes

Timeline: To be determined

Rationale: Telehealth and virtual counseling services can help fill critical gaps for students in rural areas, students on campuses without a dedicated counseling center and/or available capacity to serve more students, student who have disabilities, students who have transportation challenges, and students who are primarily online students. Funding to increase capacity, perhaps through new and existing partnerships with service providers in this space, will allow for more student to get timely access to necessary mental healthcare supports.

3. Funding to Create or Expand Early Alert Systems to Identify Students in Crisis

Recommendation: Dedicate funding to support implementation and/or expansion of early alert systems that allow campuses to more quickly identify when students are in crisis and may become a threat to themselves or others, with consideration for increasing campus support for follow-up and intervention with identified students.

New or pilot program: Yes

Program expansion: No

Statutory change required: Yes

Legislative funding required: Yes

Timeline: Planning, funding, and implementation work could begin during the 2025-2026 academic year

Rationale: Early alert and early intervention systems are currently in use by some, but not all, campuses in Minnesota. These systems allow for institutions to respond more quickly when concerns are raised by faculty, staff, other students, or administrators about a student who may be in crisis and may represent a threat to themselves or others. Early intervention can be critical to helping ensure a student stays safe and gets the help that they may need to address a mental health crisis, with the long-term goal of allowing the student to continue to make academic and personal progress once they have stabilized. This funding would support implementation of early alert systems for campuses that do not currently have them or expansion of these systems, if needed, at campuses where they are already in place. Effective implementation of early alert systems also requires consideration for campus capacity for providing follow-up services and ensuring resources needed to identify appropriate level of intervention required.

Other recommendations discussed by the SBNWG include:

- Funding to increase pay and/or provide financial incentives to retain current practitioners which could include loan forgiveness programs. This would help address shortages in the mental healthcare provider

labor pool and could potentially be target to prioritize practitioners serving in high need areas of the state.

- Create a working group to create best practices guide and tool kit for campus faculty, non-counseling staff, and administration on responding to and supporting students with mental health concerns. Training and best practices guide should include strategies for online students, how to respond to students in crisis, and understanding common mental health concerns for college students.
- Fund competitive grant opportunities to address suicide prevention and intervention measures including funded treatment programs for students in crisis and at high risk.

Conclusion

Basic need insecurity in the college student population is a complex problem with multiple root causes, often outside the control of individual students. Creating an ecosystem where all college students are able to reach their educational goals without the distress and derailment that comes with basic needs insecurity will require ongoing investment of state resources as well as collaboration beyond campuses and systems to fully implement solutions.

The recommendations supplied in this report represent opportunities for the state to make strategic, pragmatic investments to ensure that our college students will be able to earn a family sustaining wage and contribute to the economic vitality of the state of Minnesota.

Appendix A: Student Basic Needs Working Group Participants

Note: Title and institutional affiliations may have changed since initial convening of working group; not all participants were able to participate for the full year.

Name	Title	Affiliation	Represents
Adrienne Conley	Associate Director, Residence Life	University of Minnesota, Morris	Public university
Aiyana Donley	Student	North Hennepin Community College	Students
Alex Kylander	Public Policy Aid	Minnesota Council on Disability	Community stakeholder
Alison Groebner	Director of Government and Community Relations	Minnesota Private College Council	Private college
Anne Fischhaber	Equity and Inclusion Co-Coordinator	Inter Faculty Organization (IFO)	Bargaining Unit
Asmita KC	Student Activities and Living Learning Community Coordinator	University of Minnesota, Rochester	Public university
Brooke Swanson	Student	University of Minnesota, Duluth	Students
Catherine Paro	Financial Aid Coordinator	Pine Technical and Community College	Public college
Chris Ehrhart	Director of Diversity, Equity, and Belonging	University of Minnesota, Crookston	Public university
Christine Kim Park	Student Health and Safety Research Analyst	Office of Higher Education	State agency
Clarice Rheault	Student	Inver Hills Community College	Students
Clement Loo	Assistant Professor	University of Minnesota, Morris	Public university
David Thompson	Practitioner-Researcher	The Hope Center for Student Basic Needs	Advocacy organization
Elma Osmanovic	Outreach Coordinator	Minneapolis College	Public college
Emily Heying	Associate Professor of Nutrition	College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University	Private college
Emma Gabbert	Graduate Assistant for the Office of Equity and Inclusion	Metro State	Students
Heidi Rogers	Assistant Dean of Students	Concordia College	Private college
Jennifer Rothke	Community member		Community member

Name	Title	Affiliation	Represents
Jorge Mendoza	Dean of Student Services	Leech Lake Tribal College	Tribal college
Josiah Litant	Executive Director, Minnesota P-20 Education Partnership	Office of Higher Education	State agency
Julie Selander	Director, One Stop	University of Minnesota, Twin Cities	Public university
Karina Villeda	Student	Inver Hills Community College	Student
Kate Noelke	Director of Student Mental Health and Wellness	Minnesota State System Office	Higher education system
Kati Auger	Case Manager	University of Minnesota, Crookston	Public university
Lori Barr	Co-Founder & CEO	Raise the Barr	Advocacy organization
Meg Bartlett-Chase	Director of Student Leadership & Equity	Students United	Advocacy organization
Michelle Trumpy	Director of Public Health, Boynton Health	University of Minnesota, Twin Cities	Public university
Miriam Cullimore	Student Parent & Whole Family Coordinator	Office of Higher Education	State agency
Missy Watschke	Title IX Training Administrator	Office of Higher Education	State agency
Nate Peterson	Director of Student Finance	University of Minnesota, Twin Cities	Public university
Nicole Bietz	Faculty Counselor	MSCF	Bargaining unit
Patty Janassen	Executive Director	Jerimiah Program	Community stakeholder
Rebecca Peine	Assistant Dean of Students	St. Cloud State	Public university
Remi Foust	Student	University of Minnesota, Duluth	Students
Shawn Anderson	Interim System Director for Student Development and Success	Minnesota State System Office	Higher education system
Siya Sakhardande	Student	University of Minnesota, Twin Cities	Students
Stacy Voeller	Professor, Director of University Writing & Student Success Librarian	Inter Faculty Organization (IFO)	Bargaining unit
Stephanie Sandler	Strategic Consultant	Raise the Barr	Advocacy organization
Tracy Rahim	Student Life Coordinator/Basic Needs Coordinator	Minnesota State College Southeast	Public college

Name	Title	Affiliation	Represents
Travis Matthews	Student	Hamline University	Students
Trevor Turner	Public Policy Director	Minnesota Council on Disability	Community stakeholder
Wendy Robinson	Assistant Commissioner, Programs, Policy, and Grants	Office of Higher Education	State agency
Zeke Jackson	Executive Director	People for PSEO	Community stakeholder

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