

# FOOD INSECURITY

a barrier to higher education for low-income, first-generation college-goers

Food insecurity is limited or uncertain access to adequate food. This household-level categorization is measured by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and is distinct from hunger, which is a physical sensation that may result from food insecurity. Nationally, food insecurity affects 1 in 8 Americans.<sup>1</sup>

There is growing body of national research examining food insecurity for college students. Research demonstrates that as many as two thirds of community college students are food insecure and that rural students are more likely to be food insecure than students from metropolitan areas.<sup>2</sup> Often, food insecure students face challenges meeting other basic needs such as housing.<sup>3</sup> Students who are struggling to consistently afford things like food, housing, and transportation see their college dreams derailed – they are unable to access educational opportunity that can create more financial stability because of their currently unstable circumstances.

Nationally, 56% of food insecure community college students are working.<sup>4</sup>

One-stop student resource centers on campus, which employ culturally responsive staff trained in helping students meet a wide range of academic, social, and financial needs, have been shown to increase persistence for college students by addressing needs like food insecurity. Single Stop, an intervention that seeks to provide wraparound supports to community college students, including assisting students in leveraging government and other benefits to address basic needs, were shown to boost persistence for low-income students in an independent evaluation by the RAND Corporation.<sup>5</sup>

## Why this Matters in Tennessee

Although not systematically measured, food insecurity undoubtedly affects Tennessee's college students. The Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology (TCATs) provide student supports in a similar format to Single Stop. Some regionally-based nonprofit organizations, such as the Oasis Center in Nashville and the Ayers Foundation Scholars Program in West Tennessee, operate resource centers on Tennessee community college campuses that offer similar supports to Single Stop. However, other than at the TCATs, these programs serve relatively small numbers of traditional students, or students who begin college shortly after completing high school. The majority of Tennessee college students, especially populations like adult learners, do not have access to these types of supports.

Nationally, 61% of food insecure community college students receive some form of financial aid.<sup>6</sup>

## Questions to Consider

- How can more attention and awareness be brought to the issue of food insecurity on Tennessee's college campuses?
- How could state funding of postsecondary student success initiatives at individual institutions include interventions to reduce the incidence of food insecurity?
- What opportunities exist for TCATs to share student support practices with other postsecondary institutions?

<sup>1</sup> Feeding America: Hunger & Health (2016)

<sup>2</sup> Hungry and Homeless in College: Results from a National Study of Basic Needs Security in Higher Education (2017)

<sup>3</sup> Hungry and Homeless in College: Results from a National Study of Basic Needs Security in Higher Education (2017)

<sup>4</sup> Hungry and Homeless in College: Results from a National Study of Basic Needs Security in Higher Education (2017)

<sup>5</sup> Connecting College Students to Alternative Sources of Support: The Single Stop Community College Initiative and Postsecondary Outcomes (2016)

<sup>6</sup> Hungry and Homeless in College: Results from a National Study of Basic Needs Security in Higher Education (2017)