OACC | SUCCESS CENTER FOR OHIO COMMUNITY COLLEGES

LEADERSHIP ACADEMY FOR STUDENT SUCCESS
Pathways Project Implementation Memorandum

TO: Laura Rittner, Executive Director, Success Center – OACC
FROM: Yvonne Baker, Tola Sanusi, and Andrew Stephan
RE: Creating an On-campus Food Pantry
DATE: September 2, 2020

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY/INTRODUCTION

Many of the current student success initiatives have either gained their momentum or have been created because of the American Association of Community Colleges' (AACC) report Reclaiming the American Dream: Community Colleges and the Nation's Future. The report argues that "the American Dream is imperiled," and that "upward mobility, the contract between one generation of Americans and the next, is under siege" (AACC, 2012, p.1). One of the initiatives, created by the American Association of Community Colleges, was the Pathways Project. The project "focused on building capacity for community colleges to design and implement structured academic and career pathways *at scale*, for all of their students"("AACC Pathways Project," n.d., para. 1). The Ohio Association of Community Colleges (OACC) quickly followed and developed the OACC Leadership Academy for Student Success in which "teams of fellows will spend the year working on institutional transformation projects drawing on lessons from the Pathways Project, a national initiative led by the American Association of Community Colleges to encourage community colleges to design and implement structured academic and career pathways for all students" (OACC, 2019, para. 1). Each fellow of the academy was assigned to a team based on the one of the four pillars of the Guided Pathways framework. Those pillars are "clarify the paths, help students get on a path, help students stay on their path, and ensure students are learning" (*Leadership Academy for Student Success: Pathways Project Overview,* 2019, slide 3). Team 9, consisting of Yvonne Baker, Tola Sanusi, and Andrew Stephan, were assigned to research and create procedures to identify students at risk for falling off path and protocols to provide needed supports to get them back on track. Basic needs insecurity continues to be more common among students attending community colleges compared to those attending four- your colleges. A 2020 Hope Center survey revealed that 39% of respondents were food insecure in the prior 30 days (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, & Looker, 2019, p. 2). This pathway project implementation memorandum will include relevant literature reviewed on this topic, the data examined, how to create an on-campus food pantry including implementation challenges and an expected timeline.

Definitions of food insecurity
According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), "an estimated 11.1 percent of U.S. households were food insecure at least some time during the year in 2018, meaning they lacked access to enough food for an active, healthy life for all household members. That is down from 11.8 percent in 2017 and from a peak of 14.9 percent in 2011. The prevalence of very low food security was 4.3 percent in 2018" (USDA, 2019b). The USDA describes food security and food insecurity with ranges. A person who is food secure can either be described as having high food security or marginal food security. A person with high food security has "no reported indications of food-access problems or limitations" (USDA, 2019a) while a person with marginal food security has "one or two reported indications—typically of anxiety over food sufficiency or shortage of food in the house" and "Little or no indication of changes in diets or food intake" (USDA, 2019a). A person with food insecurity, on the other hand, is described as either having low food security or very low food security. A person with low food security has "reports of reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet" and "little or no indication of reduced food intake" (USDA, 2019a) while a person with very low food security has "reports of multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake" (USDA, 2019a). The USDA further clarifies, with examples, of what households with very low food security looks like. In the USDA's annual food survey, of those households identified as having very low food security:

- 98 percent reported having worried that their food would run out before they got money to buy more.
- 97 percent reported that the food they bought just did not last, and they did not have money to get more.
- 96 percent reported that they could not afford to eat balanced meals.
- 97 percent reported that an adult had cut the size of meals or skipped meals because there was not enough money for food.
- 90 percent reported that this had occurred in 3 or more months.
- 94 percent of respondents reported that they had eaten less than they felt they should because there was not enough money for food.
- 69 percent of respondents reported that they had been hungry but did not eat because they could not afford enough food.
- 47 percent of respondents reported having lost weight because they did not have enough money for food.
- 32 percent reported that an adult did not eat for a whole day because there was not enough money for food.
- 25 percent reported that this had occurred in 3 or more months. (USDA, 2019a)

Existence of food insecurity among college students
The #RealCollege survey, created by the Hope Center for College, Community, and Justice at Temple University, is currently the largest annual assessment of basic

needs for college students. Their most recent survey, conducted in fall 2018, yielded results from roughly 86,000 students (Goldrick-Rab, S., Baker-Smith, C., Coca, V., Looker, E., and Williams, T., 2019). The survey considers basic needs for students including food and housing security and homelessness. Among the survey respondents, close to 50 percent of two-year college students report being at some level of food insecure "with 28 percent at the very low level" (Goldrick-Rab, S., Baker-Smith, C., Coca, V., Looker, E., and Williams, T., 2019, p. 5). According to the report, it is not much better at four-year institutions with 44 percent reporting food insecurity with 24 percent at the lowest level (Goldrick-Rab, S., Baker-Smith, C., Coca, V., Looker, E., and Williams, T., 2019, p. 5).

Based on the #RealCollege survey, students are experiencing food insecurity at rates that surpass the national average. Though students struggle to access resources, the increased awareness and acknowledgment of campus food insecurity has come with an increase in campus-based food security programs. These programs are created with the intent to alleviate the burden on food insecure students and provide a resource to move toward a food secure environment for all student well-being.

Disparity among food insecure students
Unfortunately, there exists a disparity in students who are food insecure among racial/ethnic lines. "For example, the overall rate of food insecurity among students identifying as African American or Black is 58 percent, which is approximately eight percentage points higher than the overall rate for Hispanic or Latinx students, and 19 percentage points higher than the overall rate for students identifying as White or Caucasian. American Indian or Alaskan Native students experience the highest rates of housing insecurity (67%) compared to their peers" (Goldrick-Rab, S., Baker-Smith, C., Coca, V., Looker, E., and Williams, T., 2019, p. 12). Other studies, such as Woods and Harris' (2018) use of the Community College Success Measure needs assessment tool, confirms this disparity with their findings that "Multiethnic students had the highest rate of reported insecurity at 16.5%, closely followed by Black students at 16.0%. These percentages fall above those reported in prior research. Asian and White students had the lowest rate at 9.2%, respectively, for both groups, slightly below that of Latino students at 10.4%" (p. 143). Food insecurity couples with poverty and racism causes an increase strain on students of color, and those in the LGBTQ community and only works to increase the equity gaps higher education is struggling to close.

Food insecurity and academics
Students are unlikely to be able to lead healthy lives and reach their full academic potential if they lack access to adequate food or are unsure of whether they can afford the foods they need. Community colleges have the potential to participate in the struggle against food insecurity by providing food pantries or linking eligible students to food assistance programs if this is an issue on their campus. Although food insecurity has been widely studied in many contexts, little research on the relationship between food insecurity, GPA, energy levels, and concentration among community college students exists to date. The #RealCollege survey does gather

information on grades and has been able to bring to light trends in this area. Not surprisingly, "students who experience basic needs insecurity are overwhelmingly part of the labor force. For example, most students who experience food insecurity (68%), housing insecurity (69%), and homelessness (67%) are employed" (Goldrick-Rab, S., Baker-Smith, C., Coca, V., Looker, E., and Williams, T., 2019, p. 19). This helps to explain the higher rates of food insecurity in community college students as they typically work at higher rates than those of four-year colleges ("Student financial", 2019, p.6). While research is still needed to determine a strong relationship between academic performance and food insecurity, in the #RealCollege survey "students who experience food insecurity or homelessness report grades of C or below at slightly higher rates than students who do not have these experiences" (Goldrick-Rab, S., Baker-Smith, C., Coca, V., Looker, E., and Williams, T., 2019, p. 20). Although a positive correlation has been established in K-12 between low academic performance and food insecurity, "minimal attention has been paid to that connection among college students" (Broton, K. et al., 2014, p. 5).

The literature reviewed in this section certainly shows the existence of food insecurity amongst college students and an increased amount of food insecurity among minority and LGBTQ groups. Further research needs to be undertaken to better understand the connection, if any, with food insecurity and academic performance.

DATA EXAMINED
The USDA reports that 11.1 percent of all households in the United States report some level of food insecurity (USDA, 2019b). For college and university students, that number is much worse with 48 percent and 41 percent of two-year college and four-year college students respectively being identified as some level of food insecure (Goldrick-Rab, S., Baker-Smith, C., Coca, V., Looker, E., and Williams, T., 2019, p. 5). Similarly, the Trellis survey indicated that over half of all community college and four-year college students reported having either food insecurity or very low food insecurity with above 40 percent in each sector having trouble with secure housing and 15 percent of all community college student respondents reporting homelessness ("Student financial," 2019, p. 8). These same students report higher rates of worrying about how they will pay for college and being unsure of how they will pay for their next semester ("Student financial," 2019, p. 26).

The disparity among levels of food insecurity amongst different groups of students only amplifies the struggles faced by students of color and LGBTQ status. Black students have a food insecurity rate of 58 percent, 50 percent of Hispanic or Latinx students show food insecurity, and American Indian or Alaskan Native students have the highest rate of food insecurity at 67 percent while LBGTQ students report rates of food insecurity, housing insecurity, and homelessness at a higher rate than those students who identify as heterosexual or male or female (Golrick-Rab et al., 2019, p. 10).

The numbers presented on basic security needs, when viewed in the context of nationwide completion goals, create a stark reality for too many higher education students, especially those at community colleges. "More than half of U.S. Hispanic and Native American undergraduate students are enrolled in community colleges, and so are more than 40% of Black students and students of Asian and Pacific Islander origin. Yet completion rates for students of color in some groups—often those students facing the greatest challenges—are disappointing in the extreme: For example, one analysis indicates that 6 years after college entry, only 30% of low-income community college students, 26% of Black students, and 26% of Hispanic students have completed either a degree or a certificate, compared with 39% and 36% of White and high-income students, respectively. These blights threaten the American future and must be addressed" (AACC, 2012, p. 14). The data certainly indicate that there is evidence to suggest that colleges must look inward to assess their own student body to determine the level of impact these issues are having on the student population.

PROPOSED CHANGES/REFORMS TO BE ADOPTED

According to the United States Department of Agriculture, a person is identified as having low food security if they report having "reduced quality, variety, or desirability of diet," and very low food security if there are "multiple indications of disrupted eating patterns and reduced food intake" (2019). As indicated in the Student Financial Wellness Survey done by the Trellis Company, which surveyed 78 institutions of which 54 were two-year institutions, "at two-year institutions, 23 percent of responders show signs of low food security and 28 percent had very low food insecurity" (2019). With close to half of community college students showing some level of food insecurity, it's worthwhile for colleges to examine the level of need in their own campus communities. With food being one of the most basic physiological needs in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1970), it's arguable that community college students with food insecurity will struggle to reach the level of self-actualization needed to give the amount of devotion needed to succeed in their studies at the same level of their peers who don't have food insecurities. Cia Verschelden (2017), in her book *Bandwidth Recovery: Helping Students Reclaim Cognitive Resource Lost to Poverty, Racism, and Social Marginalization,* states that people "living in economic poverty, a state in which people are perpetually short of the money required for the most basic needs like food and shelter, is itself a powerful stressor" (p. 12), which creates a drain on cognitive resources.

While there are many ways in local communities to address food insecurity, an increasingly popular option is to create a food bank for the use of community college students. It's beneficial for community colleges to consider pantries as "students who experience food insecurity or homelessness more often report grades of C or below, compared to students who do not face these challenges" (Goldrick-Rab, Baker-Smith, Coca, & Looker, 2019, p. 24). Pantries at colleges across the country vary greatly. They range from those that provide dry goods only to those that provide refrigerated items. Challenges associated with food pantries are addressed in the next section but

the important first step is to perform a needs-based assessment of the campus in question. If an assessment shows that a food pantry is needed, then a steering committee should be formed to develop an implementation plan. The implementation plan should include a number of factors including a timeline, whether or not the food bank will be internally supported, and the decision on whether to partner with a local food bank. Depending on the decisions, the timeline for creating a food pantry can range from as quickly as one semester to multiple semesters with the paperwork required by some external local food pantries. A good resource for the steering committee make-up and direction is The College and University Food Bank Alliance (CUFBA). This organization was "co-founded by the Michigan State Student Food Bank and the Oregon State University Food Pantry" ("Campus Food," p. 5) and is a "professional organization consisting of campus-based programs focused on alleviating food insecurity, hunger and poverty among college and university students in the United States" ("Campus Food," p. 5).

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

There are many questions that a college will have to address when starting a campus food pantry. Some of these questions include who you will serve, what is the need on your specific campus, how you will fund the pantry, what operating model you will choose, who will run it, how you will recruit and train volunteers, and what space is available to house the pantry ("Campus Food," p. 9).

The College and University Food Bank Alliance helps colleges alleviate the barriers and challenges associated with food insecurity and hunger. CUFBA provides support, training and resources to campus-based food banks and pantries. Membership is free and they provide resources on their website at www.cufba.org ("Campus Food," p. 5). To address the campus needs CUFBA recommends surveying students. This is important because creating a food program that is appropriate to the size of the need on campus is critical. CUFBA provides a sample survey provided by the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff in their toolkit ("Campus Food," pp. 29-32).

When looking for funding a good place to start is partnering with regional food banks. Keep in mind that some regional food banks require annual membership fees in addition to 501(c)(3) nonprofit status. CUFBA's toolkit provides methods you can use to obtain 501(c)(3) status. Several colleges have been successful in partnering with their university foundations to obtain the necessary 501(c)(3) profit status. If this is not the case, you could find another local nonprofit to be your sponsor or apply for 501(c)(3) status from the IRS. CUFBA provides a sample budget in their toolkit ("Campus Food," p. 39). Of course, the budget will vary depending on the student need and the size of your pantry.

There are two basic models for operating a food pantry: pre-packaged model and a shopping-style model ("Campus Food," p. 20). With the prepackaged model volunteers prepare the food boxes in advance. This model guarantees that each client receives an equal portion of food supply. The downside to this model is the lack of

client's choice and they may receive items they do not want which could ultimately result in waste. The shopping style model allows clients choice. To implement this model you allow clients to shop and select items based on categories or you can use a food request form and have volunteer prepare the bags custom for each client. CUFBA recommends there should be at least two staff or faculty members who either operate or know how to operate the pantry ("Campus Food," p. 18). Additional volunteers can come from faculty, staff and students. CUFBA provides a pantry volunteer application form that can be used in the screening and recruitment process. They also recommend developing a training and orientation manual that can be used to train new volunteers on the various tasks of the day-to-day operations.

When assessing the space to house your food pantry keep in mind that it should be in an easily accessible location and it needs to be clean, secure and provide enough space to store food based on the level of need on your campus based on the operating model you choose. Cindy Sefton, a campus pantry director we spoke to, recommended visiting local pantries to get ideas on space layouts and equipment that would be needed. Equipment needed may include shelves, collection bins, dolly, tables, and refrigerators and freezer if you plan to distribute fresh or frozen goods ("Campus Food," p. 22).

Once you have considered these questions, CUFBA recommends creating a steering committee of 5 to 8 individuals across campus that will function as founding members ("Campus Food," p. 10). A cross-functional team is important because to get the food pantry up and running you will need support of upper administration and services from various departments on campus including facilities, finance, and information technologies.

CONCLUSION

The Hope Center research shows that rates of food insecurity among students at two-year institutions range from 42% to 56% (Goldrick-Rab, S., Baker-Smith, C., Coca, V., Looker, E., and Williams, T., 2019, p. 7). In addition, students impacted by basic needs insecurity are often students who are already in greater risk categories and often attend college part-time (Goldrick-Rab, S., Baker-Smith, C., Coca, V., Looker, E., and Williams, T., 2019, p. 2). Food insecurity has been found to negatively affect the student's academic performance and hinder degree completion rates (Goldrick-Rab, Cady, & Cola, 2018, p. 2). As a result, it is imperative that community colleges perform a needs assessment on food insecurity on their campuses and develop a plan to address needs discovered. If an assessment shows that a food pantry is needed this implementation memo could be used to gain an understanding of what steps should be taken, what decisions and challenges to expect along the way and resources that will be valuable in starting a food pantry. Identifying students with food insecurity and providing them the support needed will enable these students to focus on their studies and result in higher GPA and completion rates.

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